

Young and Bullish

The 20-something president and CEO of ContactCenter.com is an optimist

BY LYNDA C. CORPUZ

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CONTACTCENTER.COM

EXPENSIVE labor was one reason that made 23-year-old Deepak Agarwal of Florida set his sights beyond the West.

It eventually led him to the Philippines when he learned that it was a fast-growing business process outsourcing (BPO) destination, and the third largest English-speaking nation globally.

"From the language standpoint, the Filipinos have a neutral accent. They're also attuned to the Western culture and more able to communicate well with the Westerners," Deepak says.

Setting up

Deepak's entry into the industry started when he set up Offshoring, Inc., an offshore staff leasing company engaged in programming, web designing, and data entry.

"When I started, I only hired staff for myself," he shares. "We later thought of including Filipino staff and expanding our service from customer service to a whole portfolio of offers we have now. Offshoring, Inc. was born in the Philippines." Currently it employs close to 500 employees.

The influx of additional and bigger clients from the call center market soon required telemarketing, outbound, and inbound customer services. It triggered the move of separating the call center from the offshoring side of the business and gave birth to ContactCenter.com in 2006. "That's why we branched out ContactCenter.com to be solely focused on the call center industry," Deepak says.

Setting up businesses in the Philippines was not a breeze; the bureaucratic red tape was particularly difficult. "Such were the birthing pains we encountered," he says. "But at the end of the day, the talented and competitive labor that we found here was what mattered the most."



ContactCenter.com founder Deepak Agarwal



Shift in focus

ContactCenter.com aims to be a world-renowned company of choice in service delivery in the BPO segment. It achieves and maintains outstanding quality service by selecting, recruiting, and training the finest agents. It provides cost-effectiveness by

reducing clients' overhead and operational cost through its contact center telephony and software, and offers customized business by giving total solutions to their clients through various outsourcing services to tailor-fit their needs.

ContactCenter.com has started provid-

ing outbound services and is gearing itself to focus on inbound services. "By nature, we find that Filipinos are more reserved, shy, customer-service-oriented, compared to the aggressive, more outgoing, outspoken Indians who are mostly employed as outbound telemarketers, and that suits the market better," Deepak notes. He adds that inbound servicing is a lot more stable than outbound, another reason for the shift.

Currently, ContactCenter.com offers customer support 24/7 through the following: live chat support (e-mail support, telephone support using also toll-free numbers, technical and non-technical support, order processing, claims processing, complaint reception and registrations) and outbound call center services (sales generation services, appointment setting, telemarketing, lead generation services, debt, collection services, market survey services, and back-office processing like data entry, billing, collections, and third-party research).

ContactCenter.com, which started with 10 employees and one account, has grown to 260 agents in only two years. Now housed in the former Merchant Bank Center building in 117 Torresillas St., Makati, it has a total seating capacity of

1,500 and caters to various US, Canadian, European, and Australian clients.

Remaining bullish

True to form, the present global financial crisis is not deterring Deepak. "I believe we're in a recession-proof industry," he points out. "Businesses that are now affected by the crisis are considering cutting down their overhead. Offshoring is an option for them, with the continuance of their businesses at a fraction of a cost. The crisis is, in a way, helping more than hurting us."

At the same time, Deepak clarifies that ContactCenter.com or the call center industry in general is not bullet proof. Taking in the right clients, catering to niche markets, providing unique services and innovative products, offering strategic deals, and getting more involved in the back office work, are the strategies Deepak and his able team implement to ensure continuous growth.

"Offshoring is not a luxury to some North American companies, but has become a necessity for them. We certainly plan to



ContactCenter.com's Philippine team members are "good and competent," says their youthful boss Deepak. One reason that the company set up in the country is the Filipinos' natural linguistic ability.

leverage on that by recruiting good and talented people who share our core values and our culture of merit," Deepak points out.

Deepak is also keen to strengthen their company as a brand. "We're certainly going for the 'global brand approach.' We're really keen to have ContactCenter.com become a well-known and respected company in the industry," he says.

At the helm

Being a youthful boss, Deepak says he's lucky to have good and competent people helping him with his businesses, as he is often traveling in search of more opportunities.

He acknowledges dealing with some of the stereotype images attached to age. He says, "It's difficult to overcome but at the end of the day, as a young boss, you





put in the right people and believe in, develop them, and grow with them. And when you're flexible, humble, and not stubborn in your ways, age wouldn't really be an issue."

Deepak admits that his frequent travels cost him opportunities to get to know well his ContactCenter.com staff. "When I'm in town, I try to bond with my employees. But for the past three months,

I've been slacking lately. I haven't bonded with them as much as I needed to," he laments.

What he does not miss out on is teaching his equally young staff the principles he learned from his father who taught the young Deepak his first ropes in business. "I'd like to help them for themselves and their families as well," he says.

Seeing his father go out of business when he was just 10 or 11 years old made Deepak realize the significance of failure and the hard lessons he can learn from it. He acknowledges, "It opened my eyes and showed me how to take precautions in making decisions, especially when it comes to my businesses."

His optimism still balances his natural caution, however. At the moment, Deepak is tapping a possible venture in Canada. He says, "By synergy, our businesses are linked all the way from customer acquisition through leveraging resources and lowering overhead. This business we're exploring in Canada will definitely benefit our companies in the Philippines."

He continues to be bullish about ContactCenter.com. "We have a very solid team. Our environment is conducive for our staff's growth. We help make our employees' dream turn into reality," he enthuses.

"We invite anyone who's interested to be part of the call center industry to work and grow with ContactCenter.com," he ends the interview enthusiastically. ■



Deepak says he'd love to bond with the ContactCenter.com staff more often. A hard worker early on, he wants to pass to his employees the entrepreneurial lessons he learned from his father.