



## **1.0 The contact centre**

Founded in 2000, specialist outsourcer, Echo Managed Services (Echo) – [www.echo-ms.com](http://www.echo-ms.com) - provides complex multi-channel customer contact services; combining best practice technology and processes with highly skilled and knowledgeable people to provide public and private sector organisations with end-to-end customer contact capabilities.

The business' outsourced customer contact centre division specialises in delivering exceptional customer contact and engagement on behalf of its clients. Echo operates contact centres from five sites in the UK (its biggest being in Bristol) and has a number of longstanding clients across many sectors including media, public sector, retail and utilities. Key clients – past and present – include: The RAF, The Financial Times, Dog's Trust, The Standards and Testing Agency, Barchester Care Homes and The Electoral Commission. Echo Bristol is a member of the Institute of Customer Service and is Investors In People, ISO 27001 and ISO 9001 accredited.

## **2.0 A decade-long partnership with the Financial Times**

### The partnership

Echo has worked with global newspaper publishing company, the Financial Times (FT), since 2006, and throughout that period has been responsible for the management of its UK print subscriber base. The account is managed out of our Bristol contact centre and our responsibilities include the management of all subscriber data and associated processes, as well as the deployment of customer service operations to support FT subscribers across multiple contact channels. This customer support covers handling enquiries relating to contracts, payments, vouchers and deliveries, and also the proactive delivery of customer service, primarily through strategic outbound calling.

### Helping the FT adopt new, digital methods

Over the course of our 10-year partnership we've worked on a number of campaigns, most recently one which set to move the FT's subscriber base towards using digital vouchers to acquire their copy of the newspaper from retailers, rather than relying on traditional paper vouchers. Through i-movo, (the industry-leading secure digital vouchering solution) FT's subscribers have been issued with paperless vouchers in the form of a credit card sized branded card, with which they can redeem their newspaper using systems already installed by retailers, such as credit card terminals, electronic point of sales systems and mobile phone top up payment terminals.



## Delivery of the project and added value

Echo played an instrumental part in supporting this transition, and introducing the new concept to the FT's customers. Echo's dedicated FT account management team facilitates transparency and effective information sharing between the customer services operation and the FT, whilst ensuring that their wide ranging experience supports the FT's drive for customer service excellence for all customers.

Echo's FT customer services team, through a combination of inbound multi-channel contact handling and proactive customer service calls, have been able to identify, recommend and help implement a number of further improvements to the digital vouchering service, including:

- Developing the service to allow batch redemption by retailers, rather than daily redemption, and more closely mirroring the redemption method that customers and retailers are used to, but via an easier and more efficient mechanism (digital card).
- Using redemption data on a segment of customers newly migrated to the digital vouchering programme, Echo's FT Customer Services Team was able to identify a step in the customer redemption process that was proving unclear to some customers and retailers, resulting in improvements to streamline the registration process, as well as adjustments to customer and retailer written communications.
- Echo also made suggestions for customers who wanted to gain the time saving benefits of the retailer batch redemption development but that also wanted to be able to use their digital card to redeem from a different retailer at weekends. Echo's developers were able to design and implement a Commuter Scheme to enable this type of customer behaviour to be supported.
- Identified inactive users and then made suggestions on how to engage them, undertaking digital card specific outbound calls to establish reasons for inactivity and removing any perceived barriers.

## Two-way communication

The design, implementation and incremental improvement stages associated with the project involved a number of stakeholders. Communication between Echo's front line advisors and FT decision makers was crucial in the project, with Echo's dedicated team of 17 advisors acting as the eyes and ears of the project; they were able to make a number of recommendations for improvements. The team used conversations with and feedback from customers about the challenges they'd faced to make a number of operational improvements (as above). The team went above



and beyond the initial scope of the project, making a number of improvements that had not initially been discussed.

## Results

- Uptake of the scheme – 75% of all paper voucher subscribers to whom it was offered, took up the digital scheme
- Cancellation levels – looking much improved versus paper vouchers
- Voucher redemption levels – which are at least equitable to the paper voucher scheme
- The FT (with Echo's help) was able to gather richer customer data, as well as increasing the number of people opting to collect their paper using this method.
- Significant cost savings achieved through operational cost reductions due to the reduced production and redemption costs associated with paper booklets and from the elimination of bad debt associated with issuing paper voucher booklets never paid for.
- Much of the fraud associated with paper vouchers has been avoided, and therefore this scheme has proved financially sound to date.
- The scheme that has resulted from this collaboration has not only proven cost effective but has also been widely accepted (and praised) by readers and is beginning to show signs of improved retention of subscribers versus the legacy paper voucher scheme it looks to replace.
- Significantly improved operational delivery expectation (ODE) scores. The operation is targeted with achieving a minimum 85% overall composite score each month. For the Financial times account a score of 94% on average over the past six months has been achieved, improving from 90% in the previous six months and 89% and 83% previously. Whilst always within our tolerable threshold, we've put structures in place to improve the service to the client further with particular work in developing Client Satisfaction scores and quality metrics.

### **3.0 A trusted partner to the public sector**

Echo has long held strong relationships with clients in the public sector. Perhaps most notably over the past 12 months, the business has formed a partnership with the Department for Education's 'Standards and Testing Agency' (STA).



## Applying an agile operating model

Echo, having won a competitive bid, is currently providing a helpline service for STA, stretching across the whole of England, which provides targeted support and advice on tests and assessments across the national curriculum, from early years foundation stage, up to key stage 3. The team is currently handling enquiries from schools, local authorities and parents around a number of topics throughout the year relating to STA's remit.

STA required Echo to respond quickly and with agility to its request and the helpline was set up in the space of just 14 days from the initial request from STA coming in. Echo also applied a flexible working model, deploying a core team to meet regular demand, and supplementing with up to 40 additional advisors to meet surges in demand, around key test times or during periods of policy or legislation change.

Echo also had to carefully consider the challenges with continuity that arose when those operating the helpline changed suddenly. To overcome these, the team ensured a robust project plan and undertook an accelerated "train the trainer" session at the client's premises.

## A strong partnership

Over the past few months, Echo has worked closely with decision makers at STA to ensure the project runs smoothly. Both teams work closely together and key STA team members are often at Echo's headquarters, working directly with the team, in a strategic partnership, rather than a tactical one.

## Outcomes

Although the project is in its early stages, there have been a number of early achievements recognised, including the successful rapid deployment of the helpline.

Echo has added further value by making a number of other suggestions, outside of SLAs, to make the project even more successful, including:

- The implementation of a live chat facility so the primary schools and local authorities are able to engage with the organisation in more ways than just by telephone.
- Customer satisfaction surveying – Echo has implemented a new system (Bright Navigator) to accurately monitor and act on customer satisfaction scores based on a number of key metrics, with results for the STA campaign detailed below:

Clarity – 95% (compared to a UK average of 87%)

General satisfaction – 92% (compared to a UK average of 85%)



Knowledge – 92% (compared to a UK average of 86%)

Professionalism – 97% (compared to a UK average of 88%)

Understanding – 95% (compared to a UK average of 83%)

## **4.0 A winning team**

In order to serve its diverse range of 26 clients – each who has very specific, individual requirements – Echo invests heavily in the training and development of its people. A key challenge is around structuring the team to support an ever changing client base and developments as clients grow. Because the team covers a range of services, from pure contact centre services, right through to stand alone database and fulfilment services, the balance of the team also needs to be managed in this context and skills honed accordingly.

A number of training and development initiatives have been implemented at Echo's Bristol contact centre within the last twelve months, including the new Agent Development Roadmap and an e-Learning platform (EPOD) which 100% of Echo's permanent and agency staff have accessed. The annual attrition rate for permanent staff was just 3% in the last financial year - low for a contact centre, particularly one with an ever changing and evolving client base.

Many of the senior team are award winners in their own right. Karen Banfield, Bristol's contact centre director, won a leadership award at the Bristol and Bath Women in Business Awards this year, whilst head of client delivery, Nathan Barton was named in Call Centre Helper's Most Respected list. Head of contact centre, Robert Carter-Edwards was listed in the 2016 Directors' Club UK Contact Centre leadership list.

## **5.0 Future growth**

Echo is currently in a period of sustained growth, with group turnover for the last financial year (2014/15) at £32million, up from £29million the year before (2013/14).

Whilst many client contracts are temporary and campaign-based, close client relationships mean many come back year after year, and often give Echo the first opportunity to pitch for business. The business will continue to capitalise on its existing relationships, and forge new ones. Knowing it can't rest on its laurels, the business also consistently strives to provide added-value to clients and implement new ways of working to provide excellent results, continuing to fulfill its vision and mission whilst truly embodying our key values – integrity, collaboration, empowerment, agility and respect – in all that we do.

**Ends.**