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HigherGround provides call recording and monitoring solutions for many industry-leading businesses. We are proud to partner with organizations that are so highly recognizable and respected in their particular industries, and we are pleased to share their good news when they receive positive press.

Following is an article about our customer Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) that was published in the April 2003 issue of 1to1 Magazine. HigherGround is delighted to have orchestrated the interview that led to such a positive article. Our congratulations to both BNSF and 1to1 Magazine for a job well done.

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Unified View Puts Burlington Northern on Customer-Focused Track

by Marji McClure

as trucking company JB Hunt fights to maintain and grow its customer share, so too do the railroads, which compete directly with over-the-road shippers in the cargo delivery business. In fact, The Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Co. (BNSF) is struggling with many of the same customer-relationship and customer-share issues as the trucking firm you read about on pg. 10.

To maintain its competitive edge against such ground transporters as JB Hunt, as well as other railroads, the Fort Worth, Texas-based organization wanted to elevate the level of service it provided to both new and existing customers. The firm—which operates in 28 states in the western two-thirds of the U.S. and in two Canadian provinces—endured an eight-month evaluation of Customer Relationship Management software products before

deciding on Siebel 6.5, which Burlington Northern branded Zephyr internally. (Siebel competes with Genesys, Witness Systems, LADS and Avaya.)

When it launched Zephyr more than a year ago, the main objective of the initiative was to make doing business with the railway easier for the customer. BNSF didn't have an effective way to share information about customers among departments, so the first step was to integrate its operations to present one face to the customer and feed information back to the enterprise.

"Our challenge was being sure that we captured customer communications from all the different venues [in one location]," says Jody Hutchison, director of customer solutions. "We needed to be able to link communications between customers and operations with marketing and customer service," she says. "It was going to be a common platform for all the different BNSF departments, to make them aware of everything that was going on with a given customer."

Customer inquiries typically range from simple phone requests from people seeking an update on the arrival time of a shipment, to calls involving more detailed requests—for instance, asking for more personalized service, such as a special train for a customer's cargo.

When customers called in, regardless of the nature of their problem or concern, contact center representatives had to access several different systems to address their issues. "There were three or four major systems on the analyst's desktop that were always up and running," recalls Hutchison. "For each customer issue, they had to go into each individual system and store the data in different ways. That's one of the big things that Zephyr accomplished for us. We now have a unified system with everything that relates to the customer in one place." Now, for example, members of the marketing staff can easily track the issues currently affecting customers, and when a customer mentions a new business opportunity, that data is routed to the marketing department for action.

PIN technology provides that view

Simultaneously, the railway also put in place a personal identification numbering (PIN) system that helps the technology pull up a customer's name, address, phone number, email address and a record of previous phone interactions. Customers who call BNSF are issued the PINs, which also serve as a safe guarding measure against releasing shipment information to the wrong caller.

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Burlington Northern Railroad was able to reduce outbound calls to its field locations by 40 percent by tying its CRM solution to its operating performance system. And, contact-center agents now see a full customer history as soon as they pick up a customer call. **roi**

The railroad currently has no data that reflects an increase in customer satisfaction since the PIN application was introduced. "We just know that our customers have really expressed appreciation that they no longer have to sit and wait for the analyst to find their

records and pull them up,” Hutchison says. “The [information is available] as soon as a person says hello.”

However, according to Russ Smitley, assistant VP of customer solutions, 91 percent of inbound calls come in with a PIN. The team of 15 customer-solutions agents who answer inbound calls handles about 600,000 calls a year (96 percent of which are answered with in 15 seconds), while BNSF makes just over 400,000 outbound calls a year.

Being proactive, not reactive

One of the firm’s goals is to be more proactive. “We’re trying to take the issues that our customers identify daily, analyze and mine that data and turn it back into actionable information,” Smitley says, “or at least create visibility with it within the company so that the departments can look at different initiatives relative to their budgets and objectives.”

By tying its CRM solution to its operating performance system (called TSS—for transportation support system)—Burlington Northern reduced its outbound calls to field locations by 40 percent. Employees are now able to learn about issues more quickly, and respond to them with minimal disruption to everyday tasks.

“When you get all that call volume out of your shop in terms of having to follow up [again and again], you’re now managing systems instead of events,” says Smitley. “That allows the reps responding to those requests to focus on the [most important part of] their job, which is delivering the product or service to the customer.”

The railroad has plans in place to improve its Web-based capabilities, as well. Through iPower, a set of tools on the company’s Web site, bnsf.com, customers can schedule shipments, trace their progress and even pay their bills. A planned Siebel system upgrade “would give us more integration with our iPower tools and would probably open the door for us to give customers more visibility as to where things stand on their service request,” says Smitley.

The agent-turnover rate in the contact center is only 5 percent annually, due in part to advancement opportunities available throughout the organization. Even so, plans are in the works for implementing technology that qualifies call-center agents for employment across a broad range of skill sets, which will also help the firm fit the right agent to the right responsibilities.

“We end up being the training ground for many of the marketing and sales organizations and some of the other functional parts of BNSF,” says Smitley. “What we want to do is make sure that our training programs really position people not only to go other places within Burlington Northern, but also to grow and be more effective in their role in customer solutions”