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## New Call Center Study Portrays Optimistic View of the Future

A few months ago in preparation for a pre-conference session at the Fifteenth National Conference for Physician Referral and Telephone Triage Call Centers, the East Greenwich, Rhode Island-based Corporate Health Group and the Chattanooga, Tennessee-based Daniel+Douglas+Norcross in cooperation with *Physician Referral and Telephone Triage Times* put together an in-depth study of medical call centers.

The study was designed to be a comprehensive assessment of management, marketing and technology issues facing call centers in healthcare organizations today.

The results are now in and call center managers have a lot to be optimistic about. For example, 68.1 percent of respondents indicated that over the next two years, the call center will be more important to their organization. 27.8 percent said it would stay the same and only 4.2 percent indicated it would be less important.

Additionally, fully 74.0 percent of respondents said that they would be adding services over the next two years. 17.8 percent said they would be staying the same and only 8.2 percent said they believed their service offerings would decrease over the next two years.

Budget and staffing for the next two years were also positive. Only 13.7 percent of respondents reported that they could see their budget reduced during that time frame. 39.7 percent said that they saw their budgets being increased while 46.6 percent said they foresaw their budgets staying the same.

Similarly, only 10.0 percent felt their staff would decrease and 37.1 percent felt it would increase. 52.9 percent said it would stay the same.

Interestingly, in some cases, this could mean call centers are going to be adding services while keeping their budgets and staffing the same.

The above results are all projections on what call center managers feel will be the case over the next two years. What is going on right now? For some insight we look to one question on the survey that asked the respondent to rate “the strategic importance of the call center to senior management within your organization” and to rate “the strategic importance of the call center to your organization.” The rating scale was 1-7 with 7 being the highest and 1 being the lowest.

The results are pretty strong. On “the strategic importance of the call center to senior management within your organization” only 27 percent of respondents said it was 1, 2, or 3; 20 percent answered 4 and 53 percent answered 5, 6, or 7. The overall average for this was 4.58. The results are even better for “the strategic importance of the call center to your organization.” For that, only 17 percent answered 1, 2, or 3, 12 percent answered 4, and 70 percent answered 5, 6 or 7. The overall average was 5.15.

All this good news doesn't mean there aren't challenges. Respondents were asked to rank both management and marketing challenges on a scale of 1 to 5 for management and 1 to 6 for marketing with the most challenging being number 1. The most challenging management area was “resources—human, capital or funds” at a 2.44 average. Interestingly, the least challenging

**68.1%** Feel that the Call Center will be more important to their organization.

**27.8%** Said it would stay the same.

**4.2%** Indicated it would be less important.

were “lack of strategy” at 3.41 and “senior level commitment” at 3.57.

The most challenging marketing area was “coordination with service lines or clinical services” at 2.73 while the least challenging area was “communication with the marketing department” at 4.28.

### Other Information Too

There were a number of other questions on the survey that reveal important information about the call center profession. 56.0 percent of respondents said they had a business plan and, of those who said they did have such plan, 60 percent reported that it was prepared by themselves or otherwise internally. And they don’t sit on the shelf as many business plans often do. 78.4 percent of respondents who have a business plan said they use the plan for implementation.

71.6 percent of respondents indicated they measured ROI for the call center. Of the ones who said yes, 55.6 percent of them track actual revenue cost savings from patient records (revenue reconciliation), 18.5 percent estimate revenue cost savings generated based on call volume/type and 25.9 percent track call volume and/or caller satisfaction only.

The survey had 97 total respondents. Those responding were either subscribers of *Physician Referral & Telephone Triage Times* and/or clients of freestanding offsite call centers. At least one major offsite vendor sent an e-mail to all its clients asking them to consider participating in the study. Not all questions were answered by all respondents.

Therefore, the study itself may not be a statistical cross-section of the industry, but may be close. With that said, let’s look at some other indicators from the survey that describe the nature of the call center industry as it exists today.

Of those responding, 58.9 percent said the call center was managed in-house, 17.9 percent said it was a combination of in-house and outsource and 23.2 percent said it was all outsourced.

30.4 percent of the responding call centers received 2,500 to 7,500 inbound calls per month; 19.0 percent receive 500 to 2,500 per month and 15.2 percent received less than 500. 13.9 percent received 7,500 to 10,000 while 21.5 percent received 10,000 plus.

30.1 percent of respondents had 10-20 FTE’s, 21.9 percent had 1 to 3, 16.4 percent had 4 to 6, 15.1 percent had 7-10 and 16.4 percent had 20 plus.

82.3 percent did physician referral; 62.0 percent had nurse triage as part of their service, 70.9 percent did health information, 35.4 percent did physician-to-physician referral and 45.6 percent had a scheduling component.

49.4 percent of respondents reported to the marketing department, 6.3 percent to physician services, 10.1 percent to nursing and 0 percent reported to the medical staff department.

The remaining respondents (34.2 percent) reported to a variety of different departments. The majority of call centers responding to the survey were quite mature. Indeed, 50.6 percent of them have been in operation over eight years with an additional 22.8 percent in operation from 5 to 8 years. Only 11.4 percent of call center respondents are in the 0 to 3 years old category.

35.9 percent of respondents have no Internet involvement while 59.0 percent support email. 17.9 percent have a call back link to their web site and 6.4 percent can do a live text chat online.

Salaries for call center managers are widely spread from a low of 4.3 percent of respondents in the \$25,000 to \$35,000 category to a high of 1.4 percent in \$106,000 plus. However, the bulk of salaries are right in the middle. 17.1 percent are in the \$35,000 to \$45,000 category, 20 percent are in the \$46,000 to \$55,000 category, 17.1 percent are in the \$56,000 to \$65,000 category and 15.7 percent are in the \$66,000 to \$75,000 range. 15.7 percent receive \$76,000 to \$85,000 in compensation.

Additional results from the study will be in next month’s issue. ■

**74.0%** Said they would be adding services over the next two years.

**17.8%** Said their service offerings would decrease over the next two years.

**17.8%** Said they would stay the same.