



The Aggressive Advocate

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Steve McKinney, former **Uniden** Customer Service Manager

Aggressive advocacy is an essential part of any executive's DNA, whether in working through an existing problem or ridding one's company of that problem through a drastic solution. By choosing the latter option, former Uniden customer service manager Steve McKinney affirmed his reputation as one of the industry's bona fide call center gurus.

The companies running Uniden's call center and e-mail management operations weren't doing anything obviously wrong. Still, costs had been running higher than expected, and senior management believed that outsourcers might not have the same commitment to customer satisfaction as an internal entity would. Hoping for more control and accountability, Uniden execs decided to bring the company's call center and e-mail management in house.

McKinney, the project leader, saw a handful of immediate benefits. Given that Uniden was starting from scratch, he wouldn't have to deal with the headache of leveraging or migrating legacy systems. He also realized that an in-house unit would service customers faster and better—and considerably cheaper, even when the added wages and benefits were factored into the equation.

On the other hand, the process had to proceed quickly, and that was before Uniden higher-ups insisted on a formal, rigorous vendor review. "There wasn't a lot to work with," he recalls. "Until that point, it was 'here's our phone number' and worry about the costs later. I had to be aggressive in the way I led this thing."

Uniden settled on RightNow's Service tool, which provided most of the basics: incident tracking across all channels, reporting tools, and more. McKinney admired the product's relative

simplicity, as it took only a handful of training sessions for internal staffers to get the hang of customizing and administering it. The system also proved easy to get up and running, a huge benefit given Uniden's timing issues: the process took a mere two weeks.

Nine months after McKinney started the push behind the new call center and e-mail management processes, Uniden has seen results. E-mail and call volume plunged by 2,600 missives and 3,000 calls per month, respectively, while the average call duration was trimmed by approximately 30 seconds.

On the volume reductions alone, Uniden stood to save more than \$230,000 in the first year using the new system, which represented complete payback on the company's investment, and then some. Even after Uniden showcased its inventiveness by rolling out a host of new products in 2004—each of which was plastered with a sticker relaying both a phone number and the support site URL—volume levels remained manageable.

Looking back on the implementation, McKinney is astonished he didn't experience more problems. While he is quick to credit his team and Uniden execs for the project's success, he acknowledges that his oversight helped quite a bit. "Before this, Uniden had purchased a marketing software product that failed. One of the reasons for that was that it didn't have a true champion behind it, which is essential whenever you embark on something like this," he says.

His aggressive leadership didn't go unnoticed. Shortly after the project was completed, RightNow hired him away from Uniden. He now serves as a consultant for similar—and not-so-similar—call center implementations. □