

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview on behalf of Qwest

Tim Betz

Filltek

Director of Client Services / Customer

Last updated: 2009 Apr 02



Product(s): Toll-Free Service
Industry: Call Center

1. Business need

"The need that we had business-wise was brought to our attention when we had an outside vendor come to us that told us they could reduce our long-distance service cost. And then as we started looking at that and reviewing our contracts with our current vendor, we noticed some other pieces in regards to account management and contract management that made us very eager to reevaluate our service offerings that we had from our current vendor."

2. Evaluation & selection

"Our selection criteria, since we're a third-party fulfillment center that handles many different clients, we felt it important to stay with a well-branded service provider, so we looked at what we felt was the top service providers in the area and got in contact with them and put the RFP out, and then the service offerings in regards to being able to handle the quantity of calls that we take; we have five T-1 lines that come in and we handle 46 different 800 numbers.

Service reliability, network reliability, and some of those features that the service providers had, they had to have some baseline features for us to put them in the pool for the RFP, and most of the top providers had that. Service providers we looked at were Verizon, Time Warner, AT&T, and of course Qwest.

Once we received the RFP proposals back, we compared pricing, compared service offerings, compared service offerings that we weren't using today that we thought might be something down the road that we wanted to utilize, and then we ranked them to see which provider had the best service offerings.

And then a piece that came in at this point was account management. And it was really a matter of which provider was able to get us the responses as quick as we wanted.

Our process was shortened--we wanted this to go along very smoothly and very quickly, so the vendors that we were able to, you know, ask a question about pricing or ask a question about a different service offering and get a response back promptly within one or two days--you know, we had some vendors that took two, three weeks to put together a pricing proposal whereas Qwest, you know, we talked on one day and I want to say three days later we had a pricing proposal back. So the responsiveness was definitely something that kept Qwest in kind of the high point of the RFP process."

3. Why Qwest?

"There was really three main reasons that Qwest was chosen. The first was probably the account management, meaning that we felt that the team that Qwest brought to the table in regard to putting the proposal together and then any questions we had about the proposal, we were getting immediate responses with technicians on the phones.

If we had a question about how a billing process may go in the future or we had a question about how a line would be installed, very shortly after those questions were posed we were on the phone with the appropriate people at Qwest getting those questions answered, and getting a lot of senior people at Qwest--a lot of people at the director and VP level kind of coming in and helping assist on those questions. So it made us feel like they were very eager to win our business and we were a very important client to them.

And then price--unfortunately, in today's world price is always a factor. We felt the pricing that Qwest came back

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with was very competitive.

And then looking at some future processes that they have, our business wants to do more in the international market and we felt the Qwest network was very strong in the international market, specifically because they have a lot of their own cable that they run across versus leasing or piggybacking on someone else's."

4. The implementation/installation

"The scope for us was removing existing T-1s and bringing in five new T-1s, so we brought in five T-1s and we transferred 46 800 numbers over and switched all of our clients who were putting advertisement out and getting a lot of activity on those numbers, and to have that all happen seamlessly where the other T-1s showed up, the other T-1s got hot so we could ping them and test them and then start rolling the 800 numbers over and not a single client--all of our clients knew we were doing the switchover and some of them were pretty nervous, but none of them saw a single hiccup in the process; no dropped calls.

So the scope was, for us, a pretty big deal just because of the size of the project. But the implementation went very, very smooth."

5. Overview of solution

"The toll-free services we use from Qwest, we currently do the dedicated toll-free numbers--we have 46 dedicated toll-free numbers in our one location. The peak minutes for us in 2008 was over a million minutes in a month; we normally hit about 250,000 to 300,000 minutes a month, so we have a lot of minutes.

We use the toll-free service--we have five T-1s, so we have a SuperTrunk and we're using the SuperTrunk services. We do the end-switch overflow and when we are in season, we do some percent-call routing to not a facility that's part of our organization, but another third-party facility that we do route calls to, and we only use those services for about two months out of the year.

The other non-toll-free services that we currently utilize--we are on the Qwest Conferencing Services and also the Web Conferencing services. We've been utilizing those for a couple of months. The Conferencing Services have gone very well for us; extremely easy to use. We haven't gotten that involved in some of the Web Conferencing, though that's one of the things that we're looking to move forward with."

6. Customer service

"The Qwest customer service has gone very well. The account management side has been very good for us. We feel like we get extremely quick response rates. When we make a call to our account manager from Qwest, we really almost get the impression, you know, 'Geez, we're the only customer they have.' I mean, they treat us very well; they answer questions very quickly; they're very prompt on keeping us in the follow-up and in the loop of where the question is.

The questions that we run into--you know, we have some billing questions that come up at times mainly due to the fact that long-distance bills can be pretty lengthy with all the different calls and numbers that come in and whether the call comes in switched or dedicated or inbound/outbound, so there're some questions that have come up on that; we've been able to go back through our bills with our account management team and determine that we'd had, at original implementation, a service or two added to an 800 number that we weren't utilizing and we've been able to go in and due to the recommendation of the Qwest account management team, they said 'Well geez, you're not utilizing these services; we should remove them.'



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And we thought that was pretty nice because not everybody's willing to remove services that you're not utilizing if you don't even know you're not utilizing them. So that's gone very well for us.

The only real communication we've had with any of the technical staff or the engineering staff has been at implementation, and since then I guess the best news is we just don't have any issues.

The calls come in, the system runs, the network's been very reliable for us, and we just haven't had any issues on the networking side that we've had to look at. The only thing that we've done since implementation is installed an additional 800 number, and all that has gone very well."

7. Experience with Qwest Control®

"The Qwest Control features are much more robust than what we utilize.

Our Qwest Control experience has been using e-bill mainly to save trees and forests so we don't get a 1,500-page bill. We do run a report sometimes in regards to a trunk line to make sure that, you know, we're having no routing issues.

And then for us, November and December at peak season, we may have a third-party provider that assists us with some call volumes and we do some percent-routing of calls, and we do that through Qwest Control. We don't do it where it's doing any time-of-day or auto-routing because we're very flexible with our third-party provider, and this gives us the ability to really manage the calls down to, you know, a minute-by-minute relationship if we need to route calls to them.

A lot of the other features that Qwest Control has in regard to implementing trouble tickets or tracking tickets, we have not used those features--and again, I guess that's good news because we haven't had a lot of trouble."

8. Non-financial benefits

"Since we've moved to Qwest, some of the benefits that we've seen have been around the account management. Our previous provider, we got the impression at times that we were just kind of a number to them. The account management experience is 180 degrees different with Qwest.

Our Qwest representative is very communicative, stays on top of any of the issues that we have but still stays in contact maybe with a quick e-mail or a quick phone call every couple of weeks to just make sure things are running smooth.

We receive our billing through Qwest Control, so we get the e-bill, so that's a benefit for us because it does speed up that process where we're not waiting on the mail and we're able to print off only the pertinent pages that we need, but we also can download it and file it electronically.

The process is sped up because we're able to pull the bill down at that appropriate time and then can review it, where we used to get a hard-copy bill from our other provider, and sometimes that bill would come in and it'd be the 10th of the month and the bill's due on the 15th; now we're getting the e-bill on the 2nd and it's due on the 15th. The benefit for us: Having more time to read bills, check for accuracy, and make sure that services and the pricing that we have contractually is all set up and working.

The bills can be kind of complicated with the different types of calls and the different rates assigned to each one of those calls, so it gives us a little bit better opportunity to evaluate those and was one of the pieces that allowed us to catch a couple of services that we had that we realized we weren't utilizing which we probably had with our previous provider for years and never utilized but just didn't know.

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When you look at call quality or line quality or network reliability, in all honesty it's been perfect with Qwest."

9. Measurable benefits

"The first and foremost is just cost reduction. We've seen a 20 percent savings in just direct minute-to-minute expenses, so it's been a huge savings for us. When you have months that can hit a million minutes and you have off-peak months that are a quarter-million minutes, that adds up very quickly.

In our savings that we have, we have direct minute-to-minute savings; we also have savings in regards to monthly fees for T-1 lines, so our T-1 monthly fees are recurring charges on those types of services for having lines in and having different services. We've reduced those anywhere from 40 to 50 percent on a monthly basis, so all of that has definitely benefited us from the ROI standpoint.

The staff utilization and efficiencies--we're not spending a lot of time going back and trying to follow up [with our vendor] on questions and having to continually reach out with the same question multiple times. Now our ability to call, you know, a point of contact [at Qwest] and receive an answer quickly and correctly saves [our] staffing times where people can then go in and do other tasks and other roles . "

10. Areas for improvement

"Our experience with Qwest has been refreshing, to say the least. You know, very responsive account management team; very detailed billing; we get the ability to review the bills and questions that we ask are explained in full; network timeframes have been good.

We have not had any issues that have popped up in the implementation, in the whole process of going with Qwest that to me would be Qwest-related issues that they did or did not respond to. I mean, every challenge we've tossed at them, whether it be the speed of implementation and trying to take a normal 60-day implementation schedule and whittle it down to 45 days with some extreme deadlines on it and to just have all of those met--if anything, we've probably caused Qwest more grief than Qwest has caused us."

11. Future plans

"We've had a very aggressive growth rate in the last eight years where we've had 30 to 40 percent growth a year. We're still anticipating large growth in 2009 where we believe that we're gonna be adding several additional clients to our basis, which will expand the total toll-free minutes and the number of 800 numbers that we're servicing; could possibly even mean having more T-1s than the five that we currently have. We may have to bring in additional T-1s in 2009 .

The other piece that we're looking at--we have a very aggressive international marketing piece that we're hoping to provide. Several of our clients are in the European markets and in the Asian markets and we're hoping that we'll have some expansion in those areas as well.

And then some of the other benefits are Qwest has some strategic partners and we have recently found out that some of the other vendors that we use are some of Qwest's strategic partners and that by being affiliated with Qwest, some of those strategic partners may have the ability to offer us some better services or rates and things like that."

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12. Recommendations and advice

"My first and foremost piece of advice: Don't stay with [the] status quo. We got caught up in that where we had so many irons in the fire that we really didn't realize the opportunity that we had with the amount of volume that we service, having months that we do 200,000 minutes and months where we do a million minutes, and when we started the process, we realized that there was a lot of improvement to be had both rate-wise and also just account-management wise.

The other piece of advice I would have is if you have a provider today where you're asking questions and you've become accustomed to waiting one or two weeks to get answers back, or your answers to your questions are answered with more questions, there are providers out there that when you ask a question that will get you in touch with the right people in the organization and you'll get answers, and you'll get answers quickly--and you'll find that refreshing.

In regards to 'gotchas' and things to look for, making sure you get very clear definitions on all the terms; when you're dealing with 800 numbers and toll-free services, understanding when is it a switched call? When is it a dedicated call? Those type [of] things really matter because some of the pricing structures can really change based upon that.

So for us, it became important when we utilize a third-party call center to assist us in calls and they are not on the Qwest network--that if we transfer calls to them, those calls become switched calls versus dedicated calls, and really understanding those differences in those rates and really understanding--and knowing that as you're going through the process so that you can make sure that those are points in the contract or points in your agreement that you're actually working through.

The other piece is timing. You know, you want to make sure that the timeframe that you have is something that's achievable. We were extremely happy because we felt like we shortened the timeframe, but we went into the process of evaluating Qwest with one of the prime directives being that this is the install date and we have to hit this date--period.

And all through the process, that was something that stayed right in front. And if you have a date that you need to have an install done by, I wouldn't go into the RFP process and not get that date out in front of somebody because it's not fair to a vendor if all of a sudden you get an agreement signed and then they're not able to hit that date. So keeping those dates in front of them and just being open in that communication."