

AnswerPlus Inc.: The customer comes third

Why an award-winning call centre worries more about its employees than its clients

By **Jack Kohane**

PROFIT-X

In Paul Lloyd's business, clients don't come first. "Actually they come third," says Lloyd, president and CEO of Toronto-based AnswerPlus Inc., one of the country's leading inbound call-centre providers. "The first priority is our voice."

Lloyd has grown his company, which recently won the Call Centre Award of Excellence awarded by the Canadian Call Management Association, by identifying a niche in the call-centre market — emergency response for the medical community — then hiring the very best representatives to staff AnswerPlus call centres. "We look for vocal clarity, crispness, and an ability to exude lots of positive energy," explains Lloyd. "The voice has to project a sense that each call is the most important one they've had all day."

Staff is also trained extensively to handle the specific demands of the callers. "Callers have a medical problem that must be addressed within minutes," Lloyd says. "We know who to call, where to call, and how to get results as quickly as possible for that caller."

If the representatives impress callers, then Answer Plus' clients — which include the Hamilton Regional Cancer Centre — are happy. Lloyd measures his success by the response time, attitude, accuracy, and overall service representatives provide to callers. "If they're satisfied with our service then our clients are satisfied, too," he says. "It's our operations staff that keep us alive and well."

Patrick Baldwin, IT manager for the Hamilton Regional Cancer Center, says AnswerPlus helps ensure the Centre's lines of communications between patients and physicians are always open. "Our callers need to speak to a person, not a machine. AnswerPlus is there for them 24/7," he says. "It can be a matter of life and death for cancer patients, and AnswerPlus, which has a branch office in Hamilton, has been invaluable in enhancing our ability to deliver the level of service required rapidly and effectively."