

Saks Incorporated

Carrying a tradition of excellent service into the electronic age



Mention the name "Saks," and most people think of the renowned specialty store on Upper Fifth Avenue in New York, which has long been an icon for quality and extraordinary customer service. But today, Saks Incorporated encompasses much more than the chain of retail stores that bears the Saks name. Now the company operates more than 350 stores organized under 10 different brand names. Operating such a vast enterprise and still maintaining the standard that built the reputation of the original store is a challenge—one that Saks is meeting with Aspect eCRM solutions.

Customer relationship management (CRM) is particularly important to Saks. Since Saks Fifth Avenue opened its doors in 1924, the company's reputation has been built on creating a positive experience that brings customers back again and again.

But retaining customers and nurturing loyalty in the electronic age requires a new, more comprehensive CRM strategy. "Customers today want more from their interactions with business," says Warren Haslauer, vice president of Credit Operations. "They want, and expect, premium service, personalized attention, and the convenience of online service. Most importantly, they want businesses to remember them, whether the transaction was in person, via phone, e-mail, or on the Web."

Putting contact center technology at the heart of eCRM

To deliver on these evolving customer expectations, Saks Incorporated is turning their three call centers—in Mississippi, Illinois, and Maryland—into a single virtual contact center by means of Aspect eCRM solutions. Aspect® Network InterQueue™ software and Aspect Call Center software link the three mirrored sites for intelligent call routing and load balancing. Enterprise reporting makes it possible to manage the three locations as a single resource for optimum efficiency and productivity.

But the beating heart of the comprehensive eCRM solution is the Aspect Customer Relationship Portal. The Aspect Portal is a contact server that uses CMI™ software, business-rules-based eFlow routing, and real-time data access to make the contact center the crucial component in an effective customer relationship management strategy.

Offering the best customers the best service

With the first phase of the eCRM implementation complete, Saks Incorporated is already getting value from its investment.

The first step was updating the company's Credit Operations center in Jackson, Mississippi, where 200 trained associates handle transactions such as new accounts, authorizations, customer service, and collections for five of the Saks divisions. Until recently, the center relied on a PBX to route customer contacts. But dramatic growth over the last three years made the PBX functionality obsolete. So Saks Incorporated replaced it with the Aspect Portal contact server and Aspect Call Center.

Two features of the Aspect solution—skills-based routing and data-directed routing—enable Saks to personalize service for its "gold" customers, identifying them by DNIS to put them at the head of the call queue and route their calls to a special group of agents.

"Productivity increased by 40%, saving Saks more than \$1 million in payroll costs."



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A newsletter for Aspect business partners

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Aria Sells Solutions

Bell Canada wanted to upgrade from TCS 4.4 to Aspect eWorkforce Management v.6.0 to forecast contact center volumes and efficiently schedule the staff to handle customer traffic. The unfavorable exchange rate with the U.S. dollar and high travel costs, using a U.S.-based consultant was going to be expensive. Joe Roy, Aspect's sales rep in Montreal, addressed bringing in Canadian partners to help Bell Canada with the upgrade. Not only did the process go smoothly, but also the partners were able to sell more Aspect products along with their own services.

Parlez-vous Aspect?

The upgrade from TCS 4.4 to Aspect eWorkforce Management 6.0 is most often done remotely. But Bell Canada needed onsite help with other parts of the upgrade, such as installing new hardware, upgrading operating systems, and so on. Since most of the staff at Bell Canada speak French, the partners needed training on the new product to be conducted in French.

At Aspect's recommendation, Patrick Bouchard, Call Center Organization Supervisor for Bell Canada, decided to investigate using an Aspect partner to perform the upgrade—something that had not been attempted.

Entrez Aria Solutions

Bell Canada decided to hire Aria Solutions, an Aspect systems integration partner, headquartered in Montreal. Aria Solutions was highly recommended by Joe Roy. Aria Solutions, which focuses primarily on the financial, telecom, and energy sectors, put the project scope and plan together. Two of its people completed the upgrade in two weeks. Says Roy, "They delivered much more than just an upgrade. They exceeded our expectations by integrating the system with the existing LAN, installing a new CPE, and migrating data to it, and tuning system performance. Even though they went beyond the scope of the project, it was still completed within budget."

Aria Solutions brought in Syrius, an Aspect-certified training partner, to train the staff on the upgrade. Syrius, located in Montreal, conducted the training in French, making it very convenient for the customer. According to Bouchard, "Although we do speak English, it is much easier for us to communicate in French. Having the training in French saved us lots of time."

Because of Aspect's focus on building successful partner businesses, Bell Canada received the necessary support. Aria Solutions provides technical support and consulting; Syrius provides conceptual information in French. For other support issues, Bell Canada contacts Aspect directly.

Syrius customized the training based on the culture, operational structure, and specific business objectives of Bell Canada. Many of the Syrius training professionals had experience with contact centers, such as forecasting and scheduling, which enabled Syrius to provide a unique, custom approach to the training curriculum.

Solutions selling

Aria Solutions analyzed and understood Bell Canada's need to more accurately forecast contact center volumes and schedule staff more efficiently. As a result, Bell Canada was able to justify buying more Aspect products and services.

La difference

How does the customer feel about the upgrade and working with an Aspect partner? According to Patrick Bouchard, "Aspect eWorkforce Management 6.0, with its open Oracle database, has made it easier for our staff to request and access the tools they need to do their jobs effectively. We are able to efficiently schedule the staff to handle customer traffic. Aria Solutions always went out of their way to help us and as a result, we're very pleased with the upgrade."

Benefits of partnering with Aspect

According to Joe Roy, "Systems integration and training activities definitely create opportunities for partners to sell and upsell. In many ways, partners are better positioned than we are at Aspect to provide consultative selling. Partners are much closer to the customer and know their needs."

John Liethhead, director of Business Development at Aria Solutions says, "I'm betting my company's future on Aspect."