

## **10 things you must do when outsourcing call center activity to Asia**

- 1. Probe.** The vendors with the most call-center seats are the ones with the best sales efforts as opposed to the best ability to deliver good quality service. I have seen or come across examples where companies have been about to have their networks ripped out because they hadn't paid and they had run out of money. I also know of an example of a guy who is the main funding behind a major provider of call center services who (is quite blatantly a crook). He owns the government of the country he lives in and it is well known there that he is a crony. Whenever a new vendor sets up, we generally see them quite early on and I know which ones will do well. Not because. Unfortunately, the quality of the people during the sales process is generally far higher than the quality of the people responsible for delivering the projects. The difficulty is that access to impartial information is limited.
- 2. Big is not always beautiful** There is a definite comfort factor when choosing a vendor with one or more very large call centers but almost always this is the wrong move. This is true in the UK but even more true in Asia. There is a huge difference in the world between the best people (who own the company) and the people below them. They don't have the drive, education and ability of the owners and as soon as the influence of the owner is dissipated, then the worse the quality. I would never
- 3. Because they have a UK office, doesn't mean UK standard.** Most of the major players in the off-shore call-center market have or are setting up a UK office. I have yet to see a single example of the UK office actually adding any value to the overall campaign. They generally act as a smoke-screen to hide poor performance and cloud the actual facts. The UK office is generally the marketing and/or account management office. The idea is that you have someone to shout at if things go wrong. Whilst I recognize the need to have accountability within arm's reach, this doesn't replace the ability to deliver on the ground. The latest trend seems to be for Asian vendors to partner with brokers or other companies in the U.K. These companies can be training companies, operational consultancies. I have yet to see how many of these companies can truly add value to the. I worked for an outsourcer in The Philippines and they wanted to get resellers of their services in the U.K.
- 4. Always make sure it is a win-win.** If a UK outsourcer finds they simply can't make your business work for them, they will generally tell you and arrange an alternative plan of action. The Asian way is to generally never accept "defeat". The Chinese call it "saving face" but it is something which crosses all Asian borders. If a project could simply not be profitable

5. **One Step at a Time.** Don't try to everything all at once. Outsourcing to Asia is more complex than outsourcing to the U.K. We always recommend to companies that they control potential risks at every step. Having a roll out plan makes it
6. **Expect the unexpected.** I have worked in the outsourced call center industry for many years and still expect to be surprised. Things which you take for granted in dealing with your normal suppliers doesn't work the same way. Remember that the reason the cost of employing people is so much cheaper is because these are third world countries. Every morning, I wake up and expect to be amazed. I work 70-80 hours a week to look at every possible implication of every project but am still prepared
7. **Manage very tightly.** During my many years of working in the call center industry in the U.K., I noticed one thing above any other. The clients who were best at outsourcing achieved the best results. This might seem quite obvious but the disparity was huge. In Asia, these differences are even greater but is potentially harder to do because of cultural differences. Don't expect vendors to use a western form of initiative. Some may in some circumstances but when we manage projects, we manage them very tightly. We have clearly defined KPI's and we check, scrutinize and probe all the time. If there are problems, they are very good at hiding them and working on regardless. Asian people are generally resourceful and because they are used to having to make do with things not being quite right, they often accept this.
8. **Have at least 2 vendors where possible.** Unless the work you are outsourcing is very small, always have 2 vendors. It will be easier to see when one clearly isn't performing and will be
9. **Outsource the function, not the project.** The best vendors of call center services in the UK manage the account well, give advice on improvement etc. Whilst Asian vendors always they do this, examples of this actually happening are very limited.
10. **Always have a contingency plan.** Things go wrong and in Asia, they can go wrong very quickly. When a relationship between a vendor and a client comes close to ending, the Asian way is to generally be uncooperative. Always be prepared for things such as power failures, telecommunications failures or providers simply going bankrupt