

## Contact Centres Important Part Of New Brunswick Economy - Business New Brunswick Minister Victor Boudreau By Joan LeBlanc

The contact centre industry contributes \$1.5 billion annually to the economy of New Brunswick. Currently almost 19,000 men and women are employed in contact centers located throughout the province, many of them in professional positions.

"The contact centre industry is a very important industry for our province. The tourism industry represents about \$1 billion annually so at \$1.5 billion, the contact centre industry makes a significant contribution," says Minister of Business New Brunswick Victor Boudreau.

He added that the provincial government has been able to partner with many big name companies over the past 15-20 years and has continued to make strategic investments to ensure that the infrastructure throughout the province is conducive to attracting many more.

"I think of the recent partnership that the province has signed with Barrett Xplore to expand broadband coverage to 100 per cent of the province. More and more we're seeing contact centre employees working from home and in a jurisdiction such as New Brunswick it makes it that much easier for this industry to continue to grow. Having this extensive broadband coverage is vital in attracting even more contact industry businesses to the province," Boudreau explains.

He recalls that it was the vision of former NB premier Frank McKenna to transform the province into a modern, technology-driven powerhouse. The province connected with NB Tel and

began building the first-of-its-kind telecommunications system that would be a conduit for growth in the customer service and other knowledge-based industries.

"His plan worked and since that time we've seen many blue-chip companies bring their contact centres here where they provide many excellent job opportunities for New Brunswickers," he explains.

Boudreau noted that it's very important for New Brunswick to continue to grow and expand its population base in the future.

"We need to continue to encourage our residents to remain in New Brunswick and to attract others to the region. Prior to 2007 New Brunswick's population was on a steady decline. But since our province introduced the Population Growth Secretariat in 2007 we've actually had three straight years of steady growth in our population. More New Brunswickers are coming back home, we're attracting more immigrants; we're growing our population. And that's going to help not only the contact centre industry to grow, but every other industry in the province as well," he adds.

He noted that the growth within the contact centre industry has also contributed to the growth of other sectors as well.

"There are about 10,000 people working within our information technology sector today, it's an industry that contributes about \$1 billion to the provincial economy annually. These two sectors

often cross paths because contact centers use state-of-the-art technology and software and they compliment each other very well," he adds.

But it is not only the IT sector that benefits from the growth of the contact sector industry.

"There are many other sectors which benefit from the success of our contact centres such as education, finance, housing and so on," he notes.

New Brunswick has always taken pride in its provision of high quality products and services and the contact centre industry is continuing in that tradition.

Boudreau adds that there was a time when a lot of these products and services were being produced in other areas but New Brunswick has since become a player on the world stage and through that continues to grow and expand its industries.

"Our premier Shawn Graham once said, 'the middle of nowhere no longer exists', and I think that just about says it all. Technology now allows business to take place in even the most rural areas. As a government we recognize this and we're working to attract even more businesses such as contact centers, to New Brunswick. Our Maritime culture of going the extra mile to help a friend, a customer, a coworker, has built New Brunswick's reputation for excellence in industry around the world," Boudreau says. ■

## Expanding To Meet Market Demands: Delta Hotels & Resorts Global Reservation Services, Fredericton By Joan LeBlanc

What began just 15 years ago as a small centre taking basic hotel reservations has expanded into a successful 24/7 business employing 150 individuals.

Delta Hotels & Resorts Global Reservation Services (GRS), located in Fredericton, provides not only a host of services for its customers, but also a wealth of benefits for its employees.

The focus of contact centres today is much different than that of only 10 to 15 years ago, says Perry Kendall, Director of Delta Hotels & Resorts contact centre in Fredericton.

"Our centre opened in 1995 with 25 people taking basic reservations for a chain of about 30 hotels. However, today Delta's GRS provides Reservations, Database, Marketing Support, and Technical Support Services for all of our 44 hotels and resorts across Canada," he said.

Kendall notes that the GRS has recently added technology support services for all of its employees and in-room guests in our locations across Canada as well as providing one-third of the companies' web development and maintenance team for Deltahotels.com web site.

The expansion of the facility has led to a steady growth of its work force. The flexibility, benefits, competitive wages, combined with the opportunity for job advancement ensure that the centre is staffed by skilled, professional employees.

"Delta Hotels & Resorts is flexible with regards to work schedules and works hard to accommodate employees' personal life schedules whether it be with compressed work weeks or establishing work schedules that serve both the needs of the company as well as the employee," Kendall adds.

In addition to competitive wages, Delta offers a performance based incentive program, discounted rates at all of its hotels and resorts, competitive medical and dental health care plans in addition to retirement and savings programs.

"But the cornerstone of the reasons why we want to encourage employees to remain with us is the opportunity for career advancement. This in itself has given many employees an important reason to remain in New Brunswick to live and work. In fact, we have had people leave, but return to work with us again a couple of years later. With the skills gained as part of their work with us, some of our employees have also left to take up government positions or roles in their field of university study," he adds.

The creation of home-based jobs within the operation has also proven to be a good step to retaining employees in spite of the current transient job marketplace. Delta's GRS currently has 20 employees working successfully from home-based offices in various regions around the province.

"This initiative has continued to be an absolutely wonderful experience for all concerned and has proven to be an incredible tool for retaining team members. Individuals working from home enjoy all of the same benefits as their on-site colleagues, including job advancement. In fact, two of our at-home people are part of the leadership group and are very effective in carrying out their responsibilities despite being located off-site," he explains.

Delta Hotels & Resorts Global Reservation Services takes its role as a corporate citizen seriously, both as a company as well as within its work force. Each year team members in Fredericton



organize a major fundraiser called 'Operation Raise the Roof', in support of Delta's national charity partner, Habitat for Humanity. In addition many team members also take part in fund-raising initiatives in support of various charitable organizations including the Fredericton Food Bank and Community Kitchen, the Canadian AIDS Society, the Brain Tumour Foundation and Muscular Dystrophy Canada.

"I'm proud of the team we have; many of whom have been with us 10-15 years. We are fortunate to have a team of talented and skilled individuals. As our company continues to grow it is mindful of the explosion of the technology available today and always has an eye on strategic growth of GRS," Kendall adds. ■



# New Brunswick's Contact Centre Industry We're more than you think!

## From Call Centres to Contact Centres ContactNB Executive Director Mike Bacon

If you were to visit the website of ContactNB, the association representing the contact centre industry in New Brunswick, you will notice that the word 'call centre' is nowhere to be found. This is not just a marketing strategy to help overcome the negative perception that may exist with regards to the work we do, but a reflection of the changing role of our centers and their employees.

In the mid 1990's, announcements of new 'call centres' were a regular occurrence as part of the McKenna government's strategy for dealing with New Brunswick's high unemployment rate. Companies across North America were consolidating numerous smaller centers into larger centralized facilities and our province was very successful in luring big-name companies to a large rural province made much smaller by new telecommunications technology. Businesses were establishing sales and service support lines at an astonishing rate and thousands of New Brunswickers were beginning to acquire jobs that offered much higher wage and benefit



packages than the traditional service sectors.

At that time the headset was the standard tool for the front-line agent, along with a desktop computer boasting less computing power of most cell phones today. Contact personnel at some centers were processing more than 100 calls per day booking services such as hotel reservations, arranging courier pick-ups and deliveries, placing catalogue orders, offering technical support and service dispatch for consumer products, not to mention the bold new service available from some of the major financial institutions - telephone banking. The Internet was still in its infancy and company web pages often provided little more than a photo of head office and a phone number to call for more information.

Today companies offer existing and potential customers an ever-growing array of options for sales or service support. Many companies offer a self-serve option or FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) on their website and if you're still unable to find the answer you're looking for, chances are you'll also have the option of either sending an email or opening up a web chat window which will allow you to actually talk to a customer service representative. The explosion of the use of mobile Smartphones has added texting and social media like Facebook and Twitter to the list of options - the choice is totally up to the customer and you'll find those options listed on virtually any company's contact page.

What has not changed is the need for real people, still located here in New Brunswick, to respond to those many customer contacts through various media. The industry employs over close to 19,000 people in every



corner of the province, contributing about \$1.5 billion to the provincial economy. The average entry-level wage is over \$12/hour and many employees enjoy satisfying and progressive careers with well-established companies and job advancement initiatives allow many to continually grow and improve professionally.

The strength of our industry in New Brunswick continues to be our people. Companies that came here in the 1990s for our plentiful and inexpensive labour force have remained because of the quality of our workforce and the existing progressive business climate.

ContactNB was formed to represent the contact centre industry and to help our member employers stay on top of the latest trends in our ever-evolving sector. Our organization provides training, education and networking opportunities throughout the year, including our annual conference, Contact Atlantic, which this year will be held on October 19-20 in Moncton. We are the members of New Brunswick's contact centre community, and so much more than ever before.

**For more information about ContactNB, visit our website at [www.contactnb.ca](http://www.contactnb.ca).**

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