



For Immediate Release

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ICMI AND APEX COVANTAGE PARTNER TO TAKE OFFSHORE AGENT TRAINING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Innovative New Training Program Emphasizes North American Cultural Norms And Expectations

HERNDON, VIRGINIA – August 26, 2003 Apex CoVantage, a leading American provider of Global Customer Care services, in conjunction with the Incoming Calls Management Institute (ICMI), a leader in call center management consulting, announced today the launch of an innovative offshore agent training program. The program substantially raises agent effectiveness and efficiency by addressing topics often overlooked or underemphasized by standard offshore agent training programs. These topics were identified by Apex and ICMI after a review of available third-party training programs for offshore agents, as well as an assessment of how agent training affects agent performance. A major finding of this research was that standard offshore agent training programs do not adequately emphasize or convey North American cultural norms and expectations, and that poor agent understanding of North American culture was the top factor limiting agent efficiency and the leading cause of customer dissatisfaction. As a result, the new ICMI / Apex CoVantage training program places as much emphasis on North American cultural comprehension as on traditional call center skills development.

“Our research showed that offshore agents were quick to understand and develop traditional call center skills, such as accurate problem identification and resolution,” said Adam Booth, Training Director at Apex CoVantage. “Where they struggled was in cultural comprehension, things like recognizing regional North American accents, understanding common North American names, understanding North American attitudes towards time and money, and understanding that North Americans will quickly change vendors if they don’t receive the service that they expect.”

The new training program is believed to be the first offshore agent training program to adopt a holistic approach to cultural comprehension. The approach has strongly influenced the overall design of the program as well as nearly every individual training module. For example, while standard offshore training programs limit accent training to neutralizing agent accents, this new program places equal emphasis on accent recognition. Offshore agents are taught to quickly understand and recognize accents specific to different regions of North America, as well as accents common among larger North American ethnic groups, such as Hispanic Americans.

“Teaching agent skills in the abstract, without regard to the specific cultural environment where those skills will be applied, is ultimately ineffective,” said Shashikant Gupta, President of Apex CoVantage. “We think it is always essential to integrate cultural awareness with core skills development. That’s how we approach offshore agent training, and the results to date have been fantastic.

“This new program provides offshore agents with all the tools and skills that they require to effectively serve North American callers,” added Alex Besterman, Vice President at Apex CoVantage. “The program demonstrates that Apex CoVantage is dedicated to providing the highest quality experience to our North American callers, and by extension, to our North American clients.”

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Apex CoVantage

Apex CoVantage (www.apexcovantage.com) is a leading provider of Global Process Outsourcing services to Fortune 1000 companies in the United States, Europe, and the Pacific Rim. The company is headquartered in Herndon, VA, and is affiliated with Apex. Founded in 1988, Apex is an innovative and fast-growing provider of IT-enabled services to businesses, governments and educational institutions. The company’s ePublishing business unit transforms archives, special collections, and other source materials into high-value, high-impact digital assets. The company’s GeoSpatial business unit provides geospatial data migration and maintenance services for GIS and other information management systems. A separate Apex subsidiary, LinearVision, provides rapid, precise and customized visual data solutions for linear asset owners, such as utilities and railroads.

Incoming Calls Management Institute

Established in 1985, Incoming Calls Management Institute (ICMI) is recognized as the premier resource on call center management products and services. Based in Annapolis, MD, ICMI was the first company in the world to offer training seminars on call center management and operations, including "Essential Skills and Knowledge for Effective Incoming Call Center Management," attended by more than 55,000 call center professionals. ICMI has consulted to organizations in more than 20 countries, offering applied business expertise based on "real-life" hands-on experience of the company’s executive team. With global membership reaching over 40 countries, ICMI Membership provides unparalleled support in helping call center managers improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their operations. For more information call 800-672-6177 or visit www.incoming.com.