

# The Work-at-Home Agent: The Model of the Future?

Virtual call centers are changing how and who works the phones. Through print — and sound — we investigate organizations at the forefront of the work-at-home agent revolution.

How do you like to receive information? Do you prefer exercising your eyes while processing words and sentences, or do you like voices and ideas to enter your consciousness aurally? This month at *CMI*, we give your eyes a rest by offering what is the first of many audio articles — information conveyed to you from the actual voices of the people we interview via, appropriately, the telephone.

The work-at-home agent model is a forward-thinking construct within the call center industry so we found it only fitting to choose the topic to debut our new medium for disseminating information to you.

## THE AT-HOME AGENT MODEL IS SPREADING ACROSS SECTORS

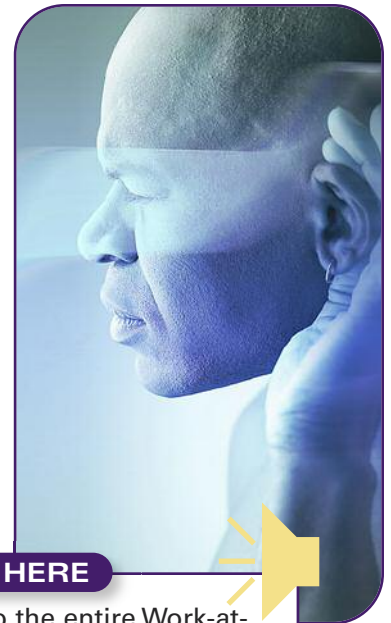
JetBlue Airways is among the numerous companies that have successfully adopted work-at-home agent programs. Since its inception in 2000, JetBlue's reservation crewmembers have exclusively used at-home agents. According to Sebastian White, a spokesman for JetBlue Airways, the company currently has 1,500 reservation crewmembers, all of whom are based in Salt Lake City. JetBlue Airways also provides its crewmembers with an actual physical space, the Salt Lake Support Center, in the event agents experience technical difficulties.

"The reservations center is also a great resource, say, for crewmembers who experience technical issues while on their shift," explains White. "Instead of throwing their hands up in the air, they can actually head into a real office to complete their shift!"

White expresses that the company has found a productive and motivated agent workforce in Salt Lake City. JetBlue's centrally located at-home agent model serves as a contrast to the geographically dispersed workers that characterize many work-at-home programs.

Michael DeSalles, strategic analyst, contact centers for Frost and Sullivan, points out that, about five years ago, the at-home agent model was a nascent idea in the marketplace and essentially played well in niche verticals like travel and retail. Now, says DeSalles, due in part to market acceptance and increasing publicity, more companies are implementing the model.

DeSalles believes that the work-at-home structure is



**CLICK HERE**

Listen to the entire Work-at-Home Agent audio program (approximately 41 minutes).

## ▶ At-Home Agent Sources

<b>FROST AND SULLIVAN</b>	<a href="http://www.frost.com">www.frost.com</a>
<b>LIVEOPS</b>	<a href="http://www.liveops.com">www.liveops.com</a>
<b>DR. M.J. WILLARD</b>	<a href="mailto:mjwillard@nti.org">mjwillard@nti.org</a>
<b>EXCLUSIVELY RNS</b>	<a href="http://www.exclusivelyrns.com">www.exclusivelyrns.com</a>
<b>NTI</b>	<a href="http://www.nticentral.org">www.nticentral.org</a>

the agent model of the future. One of the main advantages he cites is the ability for the contact center to pool workers from virtually anywhere in the world, thus enabling a company or organization to hire the most skilled and qualified agents for a particular job. "Now with that larger pool, contact centers are no longer tied to a 60-mile radius in which to draw agents," he says.



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## At-home Agent Audio Interviews

Lloyd Tabb, chief technical officer at LiveOps, calls the ability to narrow in on at-home agents with specific skills and training "affinity sourcing." Palo Alto, Calif.-based LiveOps develops contact center technology and is the largest outsourcer of at-home agents who operate as independent contractors. Listen for more insights from Lloyd Tabb in our audio article.

**CLICK HERE**

Listen to a selection of Lloyd Tabb's comments from the program.



When Anne Afshari, RN BSN, and Laura Hagler, RN BSN, started their OB/GYN telephone triage Exclusively RNs in 2002, they affinity-sourced and implemented the at-home agent model in order to hire the most qualified nurses from across the United States. You can hear their remarkable story in our audio program.

Anne Afshari, RN BSN (left), and Laura Hagler, RN BSN, founders of the virtual call center Exclusively RNs.

**CLICK HERE**

Listen to a selection of the interview with Anne Afshari and Laura Hagler.



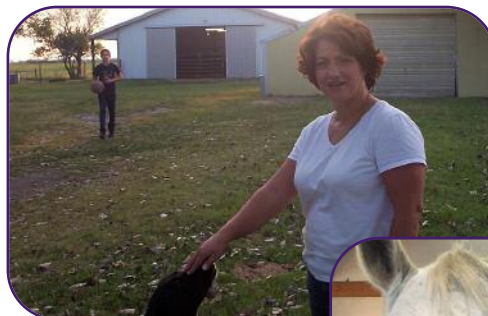
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Listen to a selection of M.J. Willard's views on employing physically challenged workers.



You'll also hear a conversation with M.J. Willard, Ed.D, founder and executive director of National Telecommuting Institute, Inc. NTI is a virtual staffing agency for call centers. NTI employs physically challenged workers from 47 states and Puerto Rico. We learn about Dr. Willard's pioneering work, and she discusses, among other issues, how the government financially assists call centers that employ physically challenged individuals.

In our audio article, we even communicate with agents themselves speaking from, well, their homes. Lisa Hammond lives on a farm in Goessel, Kan., with her husband and three sons. She began contracting with LiveOps because working from home provides her with an income and, most importantly, more time with her family. You'll hear her story as well. It's one of many to come. We hope you enjoy the show.



**CLICK HERE**

Listen to a selection of Lisa Hammond's thoughts on working from home.



Lisa works as a contractor with LiveOps which allows her more time to spend with her family on their farm in Goessel, Kan.