

# How to Transform Your Call Center to Meet the Demands of Mobile

## A NAVIS White Paper

An analysis of what hotels and resorts can do to stay relevant and successful in the mobile age.





## How Call Centers Can Transform to Meet the Demands of the Mobile Age

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Remember the prediction in the early days of e-commerce that online shopping would make brick and mortar stores extinct? That didn't happen. Brick and mortar stores are still an important part of a retail company's sales and marketing mix. Why? Shoppers want to see, touch, and try on items before they buy. They value being able to go to a store to pick up or return merchandise purchased online. A combination of online/offline presence is proven to work best.

The same predictions occurred in hospitality regarding online room reservations in the early 2000's and more recently surrounding the use of mobile devices for reservation booking. Multiple online sources are important components of a hotel's distribution channel and marketing mix, and mobile is rapidly grabbing a larger share. A 2013 PhoCusWright study found that mobile will account for 18% of the global online travel market in 2014. An eMarketer mobile report estimates mobile travel sales will total nearly \$50 billion by 2017, and account for almost 30% of all digital travel sales. However, NAVIS client data indicates that 83% of Search Engine Marketing results will come from the voice channel. With this explosive growth of smartphone usage, experts forecasted that call centers would face extinction in the digital era. In fact, the opposite is true.

Alongside the explosion of mobile in the hospitality industry, hoteliers are seeing substantial growth in voice channel reservations. Instead of declining, the voice channel is growing in relevance, effectiveness and value. Starwood Hotels understands this and recently expanded its call center in to a new location adding 600 seats. Savvy marketers find they can boost mobile advertising click-through rates and revenue, by inserting a click-to-call option to increase call center activity and its potential to upsell. Some call it the "Revenge of the Call Center."

This white paper is one in a series exploring the trend toward voice channel growth—why it's happening, and how operators optimize it to increase bookings and revenue, drive more demand through their direct channel, and reduce their dependence on OTAs. In particular, we will analyze how one multi-property resort company boosted its revenue dramatically by leveraging the mobile trend. The company added a prominent 'click to call' option on its mobile site to increase voice traffic to its reservation team and consolidated individual property call centers into one central reservation voice sales center. The company also



implemented leading-edge call data technology and applied professional sales training to boost its conversion success. We will describe the processes this company took to transform the traditionally passive voice channel reservation staff into professional, proactive sales teams that close business at a time when mobile and online use is rapidly expanding.

### **Major Operators Leverage Mobile Growth to Increase Voice Reservations**

In 2013, Wyndham Hotel Group reported that for every booking via its mobile website, three are converted after a voice call. In response to this finding, Wyndham changed its mobile website design to make it easier for mobile customers to call by adding a “tap to call” option. Wyndham’s experience is just one example that demonstrates that the voice channel is increasing in value, despite the buzz about digital and online reservation growth.

The voice channel’s strength is particularly apparent in the resort segment. Recent metrics show that more than 40% of a resort hotel’s revenue is the product of rooms booked direct through the voice channel. Consumers spend considerable time on mobile devices to research travel options, but demonstrate a clear preference to complete high-spend stay transactions by calling a reservation agent. A complex, multi-amenity \$4,500 family vacation requires a high degree of confidence in the choice made. In these cases a professionally sales-trained reservation agent is especially valuable – and welcome by the shopper. Data shows that reservation agents have higher conversion ratios, and higher customer satisfaction scores, when they are professionally trained in communication and closing skills. Their conversion rate improves further when they have access to technology that identifies a caller’s origin, past-stay, demographic, and socioeconomic data and guest history before and during the call to strengthen the caller relationship.

Nevertheless, many traditional reservation offices operate with low expectations without conversion goals or the means to measure them. Hotels often hire reservation staff for their polite manners and view them primarily as customer service order takers, not as part of the sales team responsible for a large percentage of property revenue. Operators report a significant revenue increase when the reservation staff is given professional sales training and converted to conversion-focused team that is motivated by performance bonuses and invested in the property’s success.

Top performing hotel companies are rapidly changing to capitalize on the growth of mobile use and its impact on voice channel expansion. Vacation Myrtle Beach (VMB) is one of



these companies. In 2013, the company developed new centralized, sales-focused call center facilities and processes that capitalized on voice calls generated by its mobile website's click-to-call capability.

### **How Do You Generate \$1 Million in New Revenue in 10 Months? Ask Vacation Myrtle Beach**

A division of Legacy Business Solutions LLC, Vacation Myrtle Beach (VMB) is a cooperative group formed in 2009 that now operates 14 resorts in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Until its formation Vacation Myrtle Beach resort operations were handled independently at the resort level, including a separate reservations department at each resort. The leadership of Vacation Myrtle Beach understood that some changes needed to be made to improve the efficiency of its resorts service levels by consolidating certain processes under one roof. In 2013 Vacation Myrtle Beach opened Shine Studios to centralize all of its property reservations departments, and just one year later is setting a new standard for cutting edge call center performance.

While it's clear that inbound revenue grew substantially in just one year, the specific revenue growth is difficult to quantify due to inconsistencies in reservation processes prior to Shine Studios' launch in early 2013. In its first ten months at the new facility VMB's call center team generated \$1 million solely in measurable new outbound revenue. It also increased conversions 25% thanks to highly effective sales processes and systems. Here's how they accomplished such growth:

- **High-energy 'Rock Stars', not order takers** VMB tapped resort professional Kelly Simmons to build a motivated reservation sales team and create an energized call center environment light years ahead of the traditional ho-hum cubicle design. The company purchased a building for its new call center operation and remodeled it to Simmons' vision. Rather than institutional colors and a rigid business-casual dress code, VMB's team performs its reservations services in colorful surroundings with rock and roll posters and comes to work in jeans. When Ms. Simmons went to her first career fair to hire a team, she told applicants, "I don't want reservation agents – I'm looking for high-performance rock stars."

"Myrtle Beach is a competitive labor market. It is tough to find qualified people and inspire staff loyalty," said Kelly Simmons, reservations sales director for Shine Studios. "We wanted to be the top place to work in Myrtle Beach. To achieve this we built a culture



that attracts good people and gives them exciting work in a high-energy environment where they make a difference.”

VMB's executive management listened to Ms. Simmons' ideas for an “outside the box” approach, and shared her enthusiasm for the Shine Studios project. “They handed me the keys to the door and trusted me to build a team,” she said. “Our owners are fully invested in our culture and work environment because it pays off. The proof is that we generated \$1M in 10 months that we never had before, and we expect to increase this in the coming year.”

- **Sales training, call tracking technology pump up conversions to meet growing call pace**

VMB worked with leading sales and marketing solutions company NAVIS to help develop the team and implement advanced voice channel technology that displays and records every call's source data. Shine Studios' technology delivers real-time caller information to each agent's desktop screen. The “rock stars” see each caller's phone number, geographic location, past stay and previous call history, as well as the caller's demographic and socioeconomic data. Industry data shows that reservation agents consistently convert more calls when they have access to caller ID and historical information and are trained in solid communication and closing skills.

Shine Studios' “rock star” training program takes four weeks. Week 1 focuses on how to use the call center sales system. Week 2 consists of property tours, where newcomers get to experience the amenities offered by VMB's resorts. After the tours, the team meets for discussions to perfect their knowledge. Week 3 features property management system training, and Week 4 focuses on sales techniques and overcoming objections, with the “rock stars” actually making live calls with seasoned agents who mentor them. The Shine Studios technology from NAVIS also records all calls and provides accurate performance tracking to quantify goal setting.

- **Mobile ‘Click to Call’ website button brings shoppers to the call center to convert**

Vacation Myrtle Beach's innovations included updating each property's website to include a clearly visible “Click to Call” button. By tapping the button, smartphone users can instantly talk to a “rock star” reservation agent for more information about a property, availability, or amenities. “We want to encourage smartphone users who ‘surf’



our sites for vacation options to call Shine Studios. Each of our “rock stars” is a consultative sales person who is ready to answer questions,” Simmons said. “Plus, we record all of our inbound calls for future outbound marketing. We are leveraging the growth in mobile to generate more voice channel revenue.”

Shine Studios’ voice center system also logs abandoned-call information. When a “rock star” finds themselves in a quiet period, he or she follows up on abandoned calls. The system records the phone number of every caller, whether they’re calling from a mobile phone or a landline, and shows their history so VMB’s team can offer more personalized assistance. Simmons said, “We keep our team employed year round by giving them phone numbers to call during the winter season to market to people who called us and were turned down for some reason. We know the dates they requested and their stay history, so we can offer informed assistance. Our follow-up marketing calls alone will result in over a million dollars in 2014.”

VMB also uses NAVIS’ systems to instantly generate a unique toll-free number and coded hyperlink for each of its marketing initiatives. When a call comes to Shine Studios in response to a specific marketing campaign, the agent’s screen displays the name of the campaign that generated the call. This enables the “rock star” to answer questions intelligently and quickly to convert more calls. The unique toll-free campaign number also tracks marketing-generated calls and their revenue. This process is effective for search engine marketing, PPC, paid-link marketing, direct mail, or the latest email blast. For the first time, marketing executives can measure precisely which marketing investments are delivering results (both online and offline revenue) and put their ad budget where it makes the most sense ... and the most money.

- **Steadily growing ‘Rock Star’ team sells excitement** Shine Studios opened in 2013 with 25 “rock stars” and quickly grew to 60 agents and 10 supervisors. Ms. Simmons expanded VMB’s operation to more than 100 agents and a dozen supervisors in 2014. She attributes the explosive growth to the company’s effective training program that creates proactive salespeople that professionally sell the excitement of the VMB resorts. “The passive ‘reservation taker’ call center employee mentality does not work here,” Simmons said.
- **‘Phenomenal’ potential for continued growth** “We are continually monitoring our performance,” said Simmons. “Our voice center system records all agent calls, so we can



monitor and improve performance every month. We keep on track with weekly NAVIS KPI calls that dig into data about individual and team performance. We use it to track all activity, so our agents never have to wonder how they are doing. They also know where they stand in relation to each other. I can see which ones are the best at getting e-mail addresses, for example, and we send others to learn from them. This enables our team to grow together. We have a fully engaged, happy staff that loves working at Shine Studios. And the money we generate is impressive." With 13 months on the books at Shine Studios, Simmons is now able to track year-over-year figures. The numbers are impressive. In the first month of its second year, Shine Studios increased total revenue by a remarkable 38.5% over the first full month of operation and Shine's "rock stars" increased outbound revenue by a substantial 62.3%.

### **About NAVIS**

Vacation Myrtle Beach uses technology and services from NAVIS to optimize its property reservation performance. Based in Bend, Oregon, NAVIS has 25 years' experience optimizing call center performance and increasing revenue for the hospitality and vacation rental industries.

[NAVIS](#) is a software company focusing on reservation sales and marketing systems. NAVIS' [voice](#), [sales](#), [CRM](#), [database](#), and [email marketing solutions](#) increase bottom-line revenue for resort, hotel, and vacation rental companies. [NAVIS](#) provides proven systems, services, database tools, and creates processes that enable clients to strengthen reservation sales and build marketing campaigns based on accurate, real-time data. [NAVIS](#) uncovers previously hidden revenue sources and shows operators 100% of the revenue generated by every marketing campaign, not just online and social media bookings. [NAVIS' technology](#) allows the operator to implement powerful outbound leisure sales strategies and accurately measures marketing ROI for each online and offline campaign. [NAVIS](#) captures guest and prospect data for future marketing campaigns and provides 24/7 reservation call center services to help operators increase occupancy and ADR, and close more leisure business.

**Want to know more about how [NAVIS solutions](#) support the strategies discussed in this paper and increase revenue for hotels and resorts? Contact [info@theNAVISway.com](mailto:info@theNAVISway.com).**



**Premier hotels, resorts, and vacation rental companies across North America use NAVIS solutions to drive revenue from the voice channel.**

The NAVIS Reservation Sales System includes multiple products and services, all designed to help your company optimize sales productivity and increase leisure revenue.

**NAVIS Narrowcast**

Captures and reports data about your callers, your agents, your marketing and your business.

**NAVIS RezForce**

After-hours and overflow professional call center booking services.

**NAVIS RezCast**

Marketing tracking and professional call center services.

**NAVIS RezForce LUX**

5-Star/5-Diamond professional call center services.

The NAVIS Data Marketing System includes multiple products and services, all designed to help your company optimize marketing productivity and increase leisure revenue.

**NAVIS REACH**

Guest-centric marketing system using actionable, targeted lists.

**NAVIS Data Mining**

Powerful data mining and segmentation.