

CONSULTING MATTERS

A publication of the Delaware Valley Chapter of the Independent Computer Consultants Association
www.iccadelval.org

February 2006

From The President...



John Erthal
Alphalon Business Solutions, Inc.
President
ICCA/Delaware Valley

The Elections are Coming!

This time of year brings us Valentines Day, the President's Day holiday (for some), usually snow (but not this year) and ICCA Elections! National election results are concluded and will be announced soon. But, our very own local elections for the Delaware Valley Chapter are coming up. The positions that are up for election are: Vice President, Treasurer and two openings for Director. We have incumbents (Keith Mast and Mike Searer) willing to stand for re-election for the first two posts, and we have available slots for the two director posts. Anyone who would like to get more involved

in the internal workings of your Delaware Valley Chapter should try to seek me out or one of the other officers, so we can get your names on the ballot. I've heard several people say that Directorship of ICCA looks great on the resumes, profiles and bio's!

Special Location, Special Event - Exciting Next Meeting!

We met once last year at the conveniently located Towne House in Media, so we decided to do it again on February 9th. This month's meeting will be a great one for anyone wishing to become involved with or know more about Government Contracts. Our speaker will be Varma Mitchell, who was very well received when she spoke before us a few years ago on a different subject. Be sure to come on down; these meetings are for you! The commute should be easy with all this mild weather we've been having. Check the website for directions.

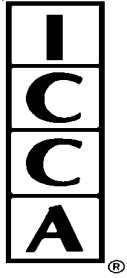
In this issue.....

<i>From the President.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Meeting information.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Customer Service Is Not Customer Serve Us.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Upcoming meeting dates.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Delaware Valley Tech Calendar.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Board of Directors.....</i>	<i>6</i>

The ICCA Wants You!

February is elections for the Delaware Valley Chapter Officers and Board of Directors

If you are interested or know someone interested in getting involved and helping grow the Del Val Chapter, please contact one of the board members on the last page of the newsletter.



**Meeting
Information
610-394-9090**

**info@iccadelval.org
www.iccadelval.org**

**TOP TOPICS @
ICCA DeVal
2005-2006**

by Kathleen Conti, WebSquared, LLC

6:00 P.M. Networking & Cash Bar
7:00 P.M. Dinner
8:15 P.M. Meeting & Program

Entire Evening Prepaid	\$30 Members	\$40 Guest
Entire Evening at Door	\$40 Members	\$45 Guest
Networking/Speaker	Free Members	\$5 Guest

First time guests pay member rates. Prepayment must be received and cancellations for refunds must be made by Monday before meeting. Credit Cards accepted (MC, Visa, Discover). If there is more than one person in your party, we request that you pre-pay. Note that making a reservation is a promise to pay. "No-Shows" will be billed.

Mail Check Payable to:
ICCA Delaware Valley
125 N. Highland Avenue
Lansdowne, PA 19050

Join the ICCA!

Become a part of the region's premier association for Independent Computer Consultants.

Membership rates are:

- * \$100 Local Chapter Dues
- * \$175 National dues for 1 person firm
- * \$225 National dues for 2-9 person firm
- * \$275 National dues for 10+ person firm
- * \$25 National Processing fee
(1st time only)

This Translates to:

- * \$300 for a first-time 1 person firm
- * \$275 subsequent years for 1 person firm

Call **610-394-9090** to request an application, or fill out membership application on line at **www.icca.org**

Our January meeting was a panel discussion, a format we don't use very often in our meetings. Unfortunately I was unable to attend the meeting, but other board members said that it was an interesting meeting with lots of good information. I need to thank Skip Shuda from Team and a Dream; Lee Devin from Dramaturg; Jennifer Guinan, President of Sage Strategic Marketing; Andrea Michalek, Managing director of Unit of 1 and David Newman, Founder of UNCONSULTING for their help in making this such a successful meeting.

If you can only attend one meeting a year I suggest it be the February meeting! Varma Mitchell will be presenting on government contracts. Varma will give you all the inside information on how to get contracts with the government and how to market yourself to different government departments. This meeting will be held at the Town House in Media. After a successful (and yummy) meeting at this location last year, we have decided to keep it on the schedule.

Our March meeting will be our yearly joint meeting with TEMPO. Probably one of our more social meetings each year, it will be held in Plymouth Meeting at the Doubletree Hotel. The topic will be: Best Practices in Developing Valid Assessments which will be presented by Steven Just from Pedagogue Solutions.

We are still looking for enthusiastic members who would like to help out with the programs for the 2006-2007 season. We will most likely be breaking this position up into smaller more manageable pieces rather than just having one person do all the work. We are also now looking for speakers for our upcoming meetings. If you can help out in any way don't hesitate to contact me kconti@websquared.com. Thank you and I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming meeting.

Customer Service Is Not Customer Serve Us

Making customer care a top priority will give your business a solid foundation for growth

By **Dan Goldberg**
SBN Philadelphia, September 2000

All businesses need customers. Sometimes they're called clients or patients. Whatever term you use for the folks, or companies who keep the revenue flowing into your enterprise they all need one very important thing, care.

Years ago I insisted that the people who worked for my company know a basic philosophical tenet. One that the company was founded on and one that could not be strayed from, "People Before Profits" was something that was extremely important to me, and the basis of what we, as an organization stood for.

The customer came first, period. They were the ones who told others how well we treated them. They were the ones who would come back, time and time again to buy from us. They were the ones who helped us expand and who monitored our service. They were they ones who wore our products and premiums. They were the ones who paid our salaries, rents, utilities, and enabled us to buy more products to sell them. And without them there would be no business.

To often in today's society we find that customer service, relations and care has evaporated like water that sits in a glass for days without anyone paying attention to it.

And that analogy is what causes customers to run to competitors.

How often have you walked into a department store, supermarket, boutique, law firm, accounting firm, insurance or doctor's office only to find that there's no one available to help you. You wait, scream out for help and still not a soul comes forward or worse, when they do, it's with an attitude that you're interrupting their activities, personal phone conversation, water cooler gossip or whatever. You finally evaporate from the premises. A customer just waiting to hand over your hard earned money but frustrated when you realize that no one wants to take it. And the amazing fact is that all of us, even the employees who ignore you at their establishments, hate it when it's done to them!

The problem really gets bizarre when you discover that the competition isn't any better. In fact they pull off the coup de grace. They see you coming and walk in the back or pick up the phone make a call and when you ask a question they hold up a finger letting you know that you have to wait.

HELP!

How do we avoid sending our hard fought for patrons from bolting out of sight.

First. Acknowledge people. And never, ever, ever say, "Can I help you"? especially if you're in retail. Why? Because you already know what the answer is going to be ninety-five percent of the time. "No thanks, just looking". So why ask it?

The fact is we're almost culturally programmed for that response. Instead, I suggest you start by greeting people with, "Hi, have you visited us before"? Of course that's only if you don't recognize them. If you do then "Hi Pat, (or whatever their name is) glad to see you again" is a great why to acknowledge someone. We all like to be remembered by name and I urge you to learn how to remember your customers' names. Just that one element begins to build that all-important rapport.

If the customer is new and the response to your greeting is no, then you may want to say, "Welcome, thanks for stopping in, I'm Dan, what's your name"?. Making someone feel like a guest in your establishment is very comforting.

Customers buy and carry on business relationships with people they like and feel care about them.

Keep a list of pertinent facts about each customer. Their spouse's name, kids names, likes, dislikes, birthdays, etc. Then you can start to do and say those little things that help build a solid relationship.

We have another major problem in our business world today, voice mail!

When a customer leaves you a voice mail, please make sure you get back to them quickly, even if you don't have an

Consulting Matters always welcomes newsletter article submissions. If you have an article that would be of interest to the computer consulting community, send your article to:

newsletter@iccadelval.org.

MS-Word or plain text is preferred. Article submission deadline for the November Issue of *Consulting Matters* is **November 25rd**.

answer to their question or the information they requested. Call them and tell them that. Being in voice mail hell is one of the most frustrating aspects of business today.

If you can, have a person answer your phones.

Always put yourself in the customers' place and ask yourself how you would like to be treated. The golden rule really is golden when it comes to business.

When you show respect for your customers it comes back many times over. It's easier to harvest existing customers that it is to get new ones. And when you're really good at treating your current customers right, they'll help you get new ones!

Now that we've got acknowledgement and respect in order, we have to make sure that we listen to our customers. Asking them probing questions and allowing them to respond or giving them the opportunity to "vent" and/or tell us what's on their mind without interrupting enables us to understand their needs and react favorably to them.

Once you understand their needs and wants then you must follow-up on their requests efficiently and effectively.

A timely response is worth a thousand phone calls. Because that's what it will seem like you're getting from your frustrated customer. Again, respond to them even if you don't have all the information. We all know what it's like to wait for a response that seems like it takes forever.

Show reliability in what you do. If you can't be reliable for your customers then it won't be long before you won't have to be, because you won't have any customers left!

Not that long ago I was reading a survey that listed the reasons why customers defected. The list was extremely revealing.

- 3% relocated
- 5% developed new relationships (i.e. my brother-in-law just became a CPA and if I don't use him there'll be big problems)
- 9% defect for competitive reasons (i.e. I have to rearrange my finances and the store across town is less expensive)
- 14% are unhappy with the product, service or location (i.e. it didn't work for me and besides there's another office much closer to my home now)
- 68% defect because of a negative attitude or apathy by the store or office employees, including management and ownership

SIXTY-EIGHT PERCENT. That's appalling!

That means that over two-thirds of customers can be saved

from defection with some empathy, care, consideration, help, listening ability and timely effective resolution.

How much money and time is wasted looking for new customers that could be saved by just holding on to old ones.

Another amazing thing to me is that these defections don't happen over night. There is almost always a frustrating build-up and warning signs. The complaining begins and no one addresses the need. The customer's shipment comes in wrong and the manufacturer's office doesn't respond quickly enough. The patient needs care and the doctor makes them wait forever. The claim needs to be filed and nobody returns the client's call.

A call, an e-mail, a fax is all it takes at the beginning. Just a response.

Then begin to figure out what it's going to take to turn the customer around and make them happy and start to do it.

Of course if keeping customers happy is what you do as a matter of policy, then you won't have to turn too many customers around because they'll already be facing in the right direction.

It's also important that you fully understand what the problem really is. Never make assumptions.

And when it comes to rectifying the situation you may want to respond by asking the customer, "If you were me what would you do"? And guess what, they'll tell you. Of course there may be some extenuating circumstances that won't allow you to do what they've requested but at least you have a started point that will enable you to satisfy the customer. You can follow their response with, "You've made some good points and I'll do the best I can to fulfill your requests, however in the case of A our policy won't enable me to do that but what I can do is X, Y, or Z. Now let's suppose you could pick one of those options which one would it be"? Obviously these are just suggestions that would be put into your situation, but they give you some dialogue to start with.

The customer will be more than happy to guide you along! And you can even begin to calm down the irate ones.

The goal of course is to never get to that point.

If you can be proactive rather than reactive you can also save a lot of problems. If you know that a shipment will be late, then call the customer first. If you have an overflow of patients call those scheduled or tell those in the waiting room that it may be a bit longer wait but you'll do the best that you can. You the doctor should do that and not the staff. Anything that will help them feel more comfortable.

Continued on page 6

ICCA Upcoming Dinner Meetings

February 9, 2006

Topic: Government Marketing
Location: Towne House, Media, PA
Speaker: Varma Mitchell

Each year the Federal Government spends over \$200 billion to purchase goods and services from business across the United States. Some of these funds are earmarked for doing business with small businesses. States and local governments also spend billions of dollars to purchase goods and services of all kinds.

Marketing to the government can be daunting to small businesses because of the strict process the business must adhere to. Knowing how to prepare to do business with the government, and understanding the requirements will make the process much easier.

This presentation will review key contracting codes, how to navigate internet sites such as CCR, PRO-NET, some of the certifications provided by the SBA, rules one must follow to be successful (FAR, CFAR, DFAR) the golden rule of contracting with the government, where to find opportunities, important informational sites on the internet and how the Pennsylvania Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) at Temple University can assist you to successfully market with the government.

If you have never done business with the government and interested in doing so, or if you are seeking to expand your marketing activities with the government, this presentation will provide you with the tools to do so.

ICCA Upcoming Dinner Meetings

March 9, 2006

Topic: Best Practices in Developing Valid Assessments
Location: Doubletree Guest Suites, Plymouth Meeting, PA
Speaker: Steven Just, Pedagogue Solutions

Joint Meeting: Joint Meeting with TEMPO

As training departments increasingly use examinations to ensure required levels of subject mastery by their employees it becomes critically important to guarantee that the exams are properly constructed. Properly constructed exams ensure valid and defensible measures of student performance.

Unfortunately, many training departments treat question writing, exam construction, and data analysis as afterthoughts. Inexperienced employees and vendors are often called upon to write questions, and the rich database of exam history is left unanalyzed. This presentation covers basic testing principles that will help organizations ensure that their assessments are valid and legally defensible.

Meeting Locations:

(Please call the hotel for directions.)

Philadelphia Airport Hilton

215-365-4150
4509 Island Avenue
Philadelphia, PA

DoubleTree Guest Suites

610-834-8300
640 W. Germantown Pike
Plymouth Meeting, PA

The Towne House Restaurant

610-566-6141
117 Veterans Square
Media, PA

Clairon Hotel

856-428-2300
Route 70 & I-295
Cherry Hill, NJ

Holiday Inn Select

302-792-2700
630 Naamans Road
Claymont, DE

In addition it is important to keep your customers informed about new procedures, inventory, services, etc. This doesn't mean that you only send them a newsletter once a month. Call them and tell them what's going on. If you're into serving them then do it! Let them know that you're aware of their desires (i.e. the customer who likes to buy the latest items should be called when a shipment comes in, the one who could benefit from a change in a legal code should be updated, etc.).

Quality customer service has another major factor. More than anything it's about how you view yourself. Do you take pride in what you do? Do you have self-respect? Do you care about people and how what you do affects them. Are you secure enough to admit your own mistakes and shortcomings and do something about them? Do you realize that what you do reflects positively or negatively on you? Customer service is as much about you and your organization as it is about your customers.

Let's review the points of quality customer service:

- The customer comes first
- Acknowledge every customer and/or prospect
- Show respect
- Listen
- Follow-up effectively and efficiently
- Respond in a timely manner
- Be reliable
- Keep your customers informed
- Take pride in what you do

In today's environment with the "new" economy intermingling with the "old" it becomes more and more apparent that quality customer service is vitally important.

The e-business "boom" has illustrated new wrinkles to old problems. Buying and selling over the web has created new and uneasy situations and frustrations. As the world navigates through pages and pages of business it has become evident that the lack of personal interaction can devastate these new ventures.

For many of these e-businesses to succeed they may have to revert to an old way of doing business. The telephone. How many individuals have run into problems on the web and become exasperated trying to figure out how to get something done. If only there was a phone number that could be called that was readily available and/or didn't have a maze of voice mail instructions that have you pulling the last vestiges of hair out of your head before giving up.

If your business is e-business make it easy for your customers to find you and when necessary get help in a quick and concise manner without them needing something to calm them down.

Nothing will ever replace personal interaction.

At the beginning of this article I mentioned a phrase that has been a part of my business philosophy from my first day in business, "People Before Profits". It may sound like a contradiction in terms in this capitalist "make lots of money fast" environment, however I've found it to be just the opposite.

If you put "People Before Profits" it won't be long before you start seeing more and more business. And with that business, more and more profit.

Quality customer service is more than three little words. It's a credo that should lead your business into the world of growth and prosperity.

Dan Goldberg Consulting, L.L.C.
Guidance for Growth
240 Arlingham Road - Flourtown, PA 19031
(215) 233-5352 - Fax (215) 836-2002
Email - [Click Here](#)

ICCA Delaware Valley Shirts

\$25 per shirt. Various colors available.

Size	S	M	L	XL	XXL
Color	Green	Ecu	White	Navy	

Qty _____ Total Enclosed: _____

Name _____

Address _____

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Send this form with check payable to:

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Lansdowne, PA 19050

Or call/email your VISA/MC/Discover card number, expiration date, and total dollar amount of order to

610-394-9090

iccadelval@rcn.com

Shirts/mugs will be ready for pickup by the following meeting.

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If you hear of an event that would be of interest to our members, send the meeting notice to newsletter@iccadelval.org