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Corporate America Begins to Get the Message: U.S. Consumers Do Not Like Dealing with Foreign Telephone Agents, Says CFI Group

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (August 25, 2010) – The percentage of consumers being funneled to call centers located in a foreign country declined for the second straight year, according to CFI Group’s latest Call Center Satisfaction Index report. This year, only 9% of consumers reported that their most recent call center experience was handled by an offshore agent, down from 15% in 2008 – a drop by nearly half in only two years.

“The decline in offshore call centers shouldn’t come as a surprise,” states Sheri Teodoru, CFI Group’s CEO. “Offshore agents not only serve as fodder for late night comedy sketches, they’re a painful reminder that American jobs continue to be outsourced during a period of high unemployment.”

Showing support for the American worker is only one reason why companies should consider bringing their call centers back to American shores. The biggest argument for repatriating a call center is the almost unprecedented level of dissatisfaction associated with offshore agents. The study finds that call center satisfaction is only 58 out of 100 when the call is handled by an offshore agent, compared to 79 for U.S.-based agents. To put a score of 58 in perspective, satisfaction with the IRS is about the same, with a score of 55.

Teodoru points out that for many large corporations, the call center agent serves as their customers’ only personal touch point to the company. “If a customer hangs up mad, it isn’t the agent they are going to blame, it’s the company that put them in that position in order to save a buck by sending their call overseas,” warns Teodoru.

The study reviewed a dozen different elements of call center satisfaction and found that the biggest frustration simply comes down to the inability to understand the foreign agent on the other end of the call. This may help account for the fact that U.S. agents are 34% more likely to resolve the problem on the first call than those handled offshore. In terms of “soft side” skills such as courtesy and showing a genuine interest to resolve the problem, foreign agents perform relatively closely to their U.S. counterparts.

Teodoru advises companies to consider two factors when weighing the cost savings of operating an offshore call center. The first is how often customers will need to use the call center, and the second is the level of stress likely to be involved in the call. She notes, “It’s one thing to go offshore to handle simple balance inquiries, but it’s quite another when success or failure in solving a software problem determines if your customer is able to meet the deadline for a proposal or get a term paper in on time.”

The full report is available for download at www.cfigroup.com.

About CFI Group (www.cfigroup.com)

CFI Group is a global leader in customer satisfaction measurement and management. Founded in 1988 by University of Michigan professor Claes Fornell, CFI Group brings the precision and accuracy of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) methodology to its clients, applying the science of satisfaction to drive loyalty, word of mouth, revenue, and shareholder value.