More staff on the way following revamp for call centre

AS PART of the company's five-year plan, the LateRooms call centre is to hire at least 20 more language speakers by next summer for its call centre.

At present it has 190 staff, mostly full time, who occupy one floor of a landmark 12-storey building in Manchester called The Peninsula. Three more floors are occupied by other staff in the company.

The head of call centre operations is Jo Helire-Glynn. She said: "The business five-year plan is to grow the LateRooms group five-fold in five years.

"The immediate plans are global growth, starting with developing our existing European sites, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The plans see us requiring at least a further 20 language speakers by summer 2012."

LateRooms established its call centre in Manchester when the company opened for business in 1999. First Choice Holidays bought the company for £108m in December 2006 and in September of the following year First Choice merged with TUI Travel. Last year, LateRooms moved to its present home, along with sister companies AsiaRooms and Hotels-London.co.uk.

Now, the call centre handles about 900,000 calls each year. There are seasonal variations, but the average is 21,000 per week. In addition, agents deal with about 4,700 emails per week.

In a major investment, LateRooms commissioned Siemens Enterprise Communications to overhaul its systems.

Siemens installed its OpenSpace Contact Center, Call Director with integrated IVR, Verint's Impact 360 workforce management software and Siemens' IP system, HiPath 4000.

As a result, says Siemens, LateRooms has:

- Increased the call-to-booking ratio by more than 50 per cent, mainly by routing calls to agents with the appropriate skills so preventing repeat calls
- Cut the number of calls, again by using call routing, by 35 per cent, despite a year-on-year increase of 50 per cent in bookings.
- Saved about £2m in staff costs with improved planning and workforce management.
- Increased first call resolution.

All in all, says Siemens, the overall cost per sales has dropped by 50 per cent and the cost of the contract was paid back in 12 months.

The changes took just over a year. The call centre director, Kaye Robertson, said: "We did everything at once. It would have been nice to spread it out, but we needed a 'big bang' approach."

LateRooms finds possible recruits through its own web site, job sites and recruitment fairs. In a recently reviewed induction process, those hired have two weeks of training and sales and four weeks for service.

Other senior people at the call centre include: Henry Cassin, sales manager; Karen Hyland, customer experience manager; Donna Carr, resource and planning manager; and Carrie Forshaw, training and recruitment manager.

LateRooms' head of call centre operations, Jo Helire-Glynn

LateRooms fact file

Number of agents: 190-plus at peak (80pc full time)

Call volumes: 4,000 per day/21,000 per week (average)

Emails handled: 4,700 per week

Service level target: 80pc of calls answered within 20 secs/60pc of emails handled within four hours

Average length of calls: inbound, six minutes/outbound, one minute

The LateRooms call centre is in The Peninsula, a landmark building in Manchester. Picture courtesy of CEM Systems which provided an access control system for the building

LateRooms' offices were designed and fitted out by TSK, based in nearby Salford Quays. TSK's contact centre specialist, Darren Woolstencroft, said: "Every contact centre is a community in its own right, and as such, communal areas have an important role to play.

Be it a kitchen or fully functioning cafe, these spaces draw in people from disparate areas of an organisation and bring them together to encourage valuable face-to-face communication and interaction.

"All of this helps to erode silo mentalities and improve the flow of knowledge and information within a business, allowing best practice to be shared and encouraging intra-team motivation.

"To achieve this, we designed a large communal area with a Mediterranean piazza theme. While reflecting its brand aesthetic, the piazza has also become the beating heart of LateRooms' offices, allowing social networks to flourish and maximising the potential for the cross-pollination of ideas between people, teams and departments."