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 **Letter From the Editor****Author:** [John Dickson](#), [Denim Group](#)

- A network technology consulting company calls to refer a software project...
- A local CIO sits at Denim Group's table at the Distinguished Technology Speakers Series luncheon, and in the course of the luncheon reveals interest in having an outside party assist his company to better secure its web applications...
- A technology committee member introduces me to a potential channel partner in Houston ...
- A manager of a local technology training company suggests that Denim Group collaborate with them on a series of marketing seminars...

Yes, all these scenarios did occur over the past two years of my involvement with the North Chamber and its Tech Council. My participation has directly benefited Denim Group and it can also help the bottom line of your business.

Before coming on the North Chamber's Board of Directors, I had lunch with the incoming North Chamber Chairman. He told me that his public relations company had received several large projects as a direct result of his involvement with the North Chamber. I was somewhat skeptical at the time, but I've come to understand over the past two years that the North Chamber can provide tangible returns on the time members invest in participating.

Perhaps more than any other business organization or chamber of commerce in our region, the North Chamber focuses on helping its members bring in more revenue. The Tech Council has created several venues that I strongly feel will put you in a position to be successful. Our first meeting of the year is Friday, January 13 th . If you are in tech business, the IT department of any business, or want to further

your business interest, please consider joining us to learn how you can unlock value of the North Chamber membership.

Other items of interest:

- For those that didn't catch it, Information Week magazine recently recognized Congressman Lamar Smith (R, San Antonio) as a “2005 Lone Star Reformer” for his work to revamp the patent approval process. If you to attend last year's Distinguished Technology Speakers Series at which Congressman Smith spoke, you'd have an understanding how much time he has invested reworking our patent laws that are so important to tech innovators.
- The Defense Technology Cluster, under the leadership of Scott Gray, continues to work to prepare participating companies for contract awards from the National Sustainment Technology Center . The North Chamber will host and sponsor the DTC in 2006 in order to help them be successful in bring more Federal dollars to San Antonio in 2006.
- Tom Llewellyn and Broadway Bank is sponsoring the 2006 CIO breakfast event and bringing renewed vigor to this dynamic group. Look to an expended set of regular contributors as well as more interesting topics to tackle.

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Portals: The right place and time

Author: [Joel Patterson](#), [Computer Solutions](#)

When you hear the stunning statistics of time savings and increased productivity from banks and airports, hospitals and manufacturers alike, you'll find portal technology is the common denominator. It's time to sit up and take notice. Many companies in San Antonio already are.

They're finding fewer bottlenecks and delays when they move to the more flexible, less formal means of collaboration and communication that integrated portal technologies offer. Increased productivity and time savings, across the board, go straight to the bottom line. Improved job satisfaction, though less measurable, is another big benefit. Microsoft's portal technologies integrate existing Microsoft office tools that users are already familiar with – Outlook, Excel, Word and Power Point – as well as non-Microsoft business applications. This integration enables enterprises to leverage existing technology investments while improving information worker efficiency and productivity.

Audience specific dashboards, key performance indicators (KPIs), and scorecards give targeted information to management quickly and efficiently so you and your customers can make informed decisions rapidly. Time-to-market can be improved and revenue-stream development increased because of business process automation and a single portal view of data across the enterprise.

For example, a law firm with 130 people in two offices found it difficult to maintain control of the many documents supporting their clients' cases using their current information system. Also, their current

system required substantial amounts of training for the lawyers and staff to use it effectively. By moving to a system based on Microsoft .NET and portal technologies, they were able to take advantage of built-in XML making the retrieval of information light years faster. They were also able to use the “smart document” system to automatically enter repetitive data. Another plus – when billing time rolled around, there was no need to manually retrieve data from multiple systems or line of business applications. The information they needed was already consolidated and available through one common user interface. The firm's managing partner estimates a 20 percent boost in the firm's productivity simply because everyone could find and use information more quickly. The beauty of portal technology is that it makes good use of existing investments in line-of-business applications and office tools.

Global collaboration is another major benefit of integrated portal technology. “Anywhere, any time, using any device” is the mantra. .Net applications and portal technologies can integrate even the most disparate computing environments, freeing organizations from the confines of proprietary technology. From remote locations, states or countries apart, employees can use Web-enabled applications and work together in a whole new way. Sharing information and documents cuts travel time significantly, as well as the stress of working in unfamiliar environments.

Microsoft portal technologies are clearly the way of the future, empowering people – your employees, your partners and your customers – and allowing organizations to have new levels of collaboration and productivity.

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Best Practices for the Customer Service Center

Author: [Mel Indyk](#), Mel Indyk & Associates

Customer Service remains one of the few areas where a company can assert its superiority. Maintaining such an assertion requires integrated efforts in all areas of the company not just in the service center. To create or maintain service as a differentiator, companies should:

- Benchmark operations against practices, processes, and procedures that have emerged as proven models for a majority of organizations
- examine customer service in terms of people, processes, and technologies
- create priorities for change

Service is the only remaining way for companies to offer a differentiated advantage. In telecommunications, you can buy the same mobile phone and the same call plan from multiple vendors. PC's and peripherals from a variety of vendors offer the same features, and similar prices. Consumer banking companies offer the same interest rate and basic account plans. Customer service, then, offers one of the only ways a company can make a name for itself and attempt to show clear value compared with other players in the market.

Unfortunately, according to conversations with service management across industries, cost containment continues to be the sole measurement by which many customer organizations are judged. Why does this matter? Because: customer loyalty is low with similar products and services making the barrier to change providers even lower. A poor service experience may be all it takes for a customer to decide to go elsewhere.

Cost containment can actually hurt customer profitability. Too much of a focus on cost cutting can negatively affect the customer experience and the bottom line. A major US airline found that trying to save money by incenting agents to limit average talk time in hope of boosting productivity and service levels, backfired when agents disconnected calls before hitting call maximum time without booking reservations or transferring the call.

Best Practices for a Customer-Oriented Organization

1. Embrace Customer Service As A Business Strategy

Especially in markets with very tight price bands, such as telecom, or in markets where in differentiating among products is difficult for most consumers, such as consumer electronics and financial services, cutover service can be the main differentiator among companies. While service management cannot drive corporate strategy, it can work to build bridges with other groups across the enterprise. Service management should establish dialogues and forge relationships with other departments.

2. Understand The Business Impact Of Customer Satisfaction

"Improve customer satisfaction" is an oft-stated goal for many organizations. However, is this a true goal, or means to another goal? For example, if customer satisfaction increases, perhaps as measured by the percentage of customers responding "4" or "5," on a survey, how does this translate to business results? What is the impact on the bottom line? Working backwards, the organization's true goal is often to "increase profitability." A potential strategy to achieve this goal would be to "decrease customer churn," as retaining customers is a more profitable strategy than acquiring new customers. This new goal would be linked to a substrategy of "improving customer satisfaction." Now a company can establish meaningful metrics and attempt the specific tactics for achieving this strategy.

3. Emphasize Customer Service At A Corporate Level

Customer service is not limited to the customer service center. It must permeate all aspects of a company's policies, actions, and compensation. Organizational structure, training, communication hierarchies, recognition programs, and employee reviews should all be implemented with the impact of customer service in mind. An organization that treats the concept of customer service as noncritical cannot expect the customer service center to do more.

4. Define Escalation Paths Clearly

Know when and to whom customers and customer issues should be escalated. Clearly document and train customer service reps on escalation rules and procedures. Use what knowledge you have about previous customer interactions to develop scenarios and map the appropriate behavior to them. Review the scenarios and escalations on a regular basis to make sure that they are still relevant and the escalation path is still valid (e.g., everyone on the escalation path is still in the same role and at the same phone extension).

5. Perfect Your Service Recovery Processes

Errors will happen. However, differences in the way the organization reacts to errors can make or break the customer relationship. Companies should predefine error scenarios not being overly rigid but clearly describing the steps for immediate remediating the situation with a person or group that was affected by the service lapse. One company who is an electronics retailer understands the recovery process. It acknowledges no matter how good the planning, a small fraction of customers will be on the receiving end of a service problem. These customers automatically receive a call from the president of the company and are given his direct phone number, the instruction to call him in advance when planning a purchase, and his commitment to personally shepherd the future orders through the system.

6. Train Agents On An Ongoing Basis

In the past few years, there has been a gradual change in the fundamental way organizations do business with their customers, the focus shifting from getting the bulk of the profits from the original sale to one of lifetime customer value. This has changed the perceived value of the call center agents. Rather than seeing call center agents as cogs in a machine requiring low investment in training because of the high turnover, forward looking executives are realizing the call center agents are the company's most visible link in maintaining those continuing customer relationships. The better trained the agents are, the better equipped they are to use the systems that tell them about the customers (the "360 degree views of the customer"), the better the relationship companies can cultivate with their customers to retain them as valued consumers. This can significantly affect an organization's bottom line. Effective learning for customer service representatives (CSR's) or contact center agents requires ongoing training with agent desktop tools such as customer relationship management (CRM), knowledge bases, billing systems, and customer service skills. Without established processes, cause and effect cannot be linked, metrics are meaningless, and modifications to improve service are hit or miss. Inconsistent or poorly documented business processes are a fertile field for cultivating customer service problems. Document your service processes and understand all of the stakeholders in the process and instrument the outcome.

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 **Google Facts & Fiction**

Contributed by : [John Moore](#), [The Montopolis Group](#)

Google Facts & Fiction

Fiction: Advertising on Google affects my rankings in the search results.

Fact: Advertising with Google neither helps nor hurts a site's rankings in Google.

Fiction: Joining a link exchange or "free-for-all" link program will boost my rankings.

Fact: Linking schemes will often do a site more harm than good. Many sites that advertise link-sharing programs not only offer little value, but will distribute your email address without your permission, resulting in an increased volume of unwanted mail.

Fiction: Automated "rank checking" programs are a good way for webmasters to save time and measure their online presence.

Fact: Automated rank checking programs violate Google's [Terms of Service](#). They use server resources that should be spent on answering user requests. We strongly request that you not use rank checking programs to check your position on Google.

Fiction: A competitor can ruin a site's ranking somehow or have another site removed from Google's index.

Fact: There's almost nothing a competitor can do to harm your ranking or have your site removed from our index. Your rank and your inclusion are dependent on factors under your control as a webmaster, including content choices and site design.

Fiction: A website will be removed from Google's index if it's "over-submitted."

Fact: We don't require submission nor do we penalize sites for "over-submission." You're free to submit as often as you wish. However, given the nature of our inclusion process, your time is better spent improving the content and links of your site.

Fiction: Sites aren't included in Google's index if they use ASP (or some other non-html file type.)

Fact: At Google, we're able to index most types of pages and files with very few exceptions. A sampling of the file extensions we're able to index includes: pdf, asp, jsp, html, shtml, xml, doc, xls, ppt, rtf, wks, lwp, wri, swf, cfm, and php.

Fiction: Using a particular type of web server such as Apache or IIS will benefit a site's rankings.

Fact: Google does not distinguish between different web server types in our rankings; use whatever type of web server is best for your situation.

Fiction: If my pages load slowly, that will hurt my site's rankings.

Fact: How fast a page loads does not affect its ranking. However, if your web server or connection is down or causes a page fetch to fail, that page won't be indexed.

(Information available from Google.)

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Local News - Items of Interest

Free half-day Microsoft Seminars

Join Computer Solutions as they partner with Microsoft in their *Microsoft Across America* tour. Visitors can explore, at no cost, a state-of-the-art truck for live product demonstrations. Representatives from Computer Solutions, Microsoft, Cisco and HP will be on hand to offer one-one-one advice and answer questions.

Date: Week of January 18th

Location: 814 Arion Drive, Suite 101 (Computer Solutions)

Time: 8am - 4pm (throughout the week)

To register or for more information, contact:

Kara Buchanan at Computer Solutions at 210-369-0348, or kbuchanan@comsoltx.com.

2006 CIO Panel

It's almost time!!! The 2006 CIO Panel is just around the corner! If you haven't purchased your table or individual tickets - do so now before the early bird discounts expire!

The 3rd Annual CIO Panel is being held Feb. 22, 2006 at the Norris Conference Center. Listen to top CIO's discuss the **Business of IT**.

"Is IT a business? Can it be run like one? Should it be?"

Hear their thoughts and proven strategies over a great lunch! Q&A session will follow. [More Event Information.](#)

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Need More Information?

If you would like more information on any of the articles in this newsletter the following options are recommended;

- Discuss the article with your IT professional.
- Contact the Author of the article (contact info is available within the article)
- [Contact us](#) and we will help you find the resources you need.

If you would like information on a topic not included in the eNewsletter - please let us know and we'll do our best to find the information you need and have it included in the next eNewsletter!

This newsletter is a combined effort of the North Chamber Tech Committee and The Montopolis Group. All input is provided by Chamber members. [Top](#)

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