

## Vail Resorts is expanding its personalized customer service capabilities through multi-channel communications enabled by Avaya Interaction Center



### Challenge:

Vail Resorts takes an extremely proactive approach to establishing a state-of-the-art contact center and online reservations service, to meet the expectations of their customers and provide the personalized experience they value. The initial challenges were to simplify prompting choices for incoming calls and to streamline routing of calls to appropriate agents. The company wanted to consolidate the communications system to leverage contact center functionality across most of their customer service facilities. They also needed the ability to monitor the effectiveness of marketing campaigns for various 800-number targets. Overall, they wanted to increase the productivity and job satisfaction of their agents and deliver a consistent branded customer experience.

The company's expansion into the international travel arena and the growing expectations of all their customers have created new challenges that call for a multi-channel approach to customer service, in order to address all future trends among consumers.

### Solution:

Vail runs Avaya Communication Manager and Interaction Center 7.1 with three Avaya S-Series Media Servers and an Avaya G700 Gateway. They utilize Avaya Call Management System (CMS) and Avaya INTUITY™ AUDIX® Voice Messaging.

Avaya Interaction Center implementations were performed by Avaya Professional Services, with subsequent support from Avaya Global Services.

### Value Created:

- Elimination of a high abandon rate (40%) by customers who want to use Web chat but were unable to because of browser incompatibilities
- 25% sales conversion rate on Web chats—which increases overall sales figures and improves individual agents' conversion to sale ratios
- Improvement of agents' productivity and job satisfaction
- Expansion of customer service options, especially to help increase the international business
- Savings in overall cost of ownership, and specifically in extending contact center functionality to remote locations outside of the primary mountain resort region (estimated start-up and annual costs savings of \$50,000 per location)
- Capability to easily add unified e-mail and other types of channels in the future to achieve "anywhere/any channel" access
- Proven technology and reliability that facilitate growth
- Simplified prompting and routing that increases first call resolution and improves customer satisfaction
- Balanced workload among contact center staff
- Capability to closely monitor activity on several 800 numbers to assist sales/marketing in evaluating the success of specific promotional initiatives
- Management flexibility to develop a robust future vision for their communications strategies



## Extraordinary resorts. Exceptional experiences.

This is the promise that Vail Resorts makes to its customers. The organization's commitment to excellence has resulted in Vail Resorts becoming both a market share leader and a quality leader in the mountain resort industry. Their Breckenridge, Vail, and Keystone resorts are the three most visited ski resorts in the United States, and their Heavenly and Beaver Creek resorts also are in the top ten. All five resorts are among the top 20 *SKI Magazine* rankings. The company believes that their quality rankings and fiscal success are testaments to their passionate employee base, who create the top-notch service levels their guests enjoy, together with the iconic nature of the resorts themselves.

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— Jennifer Pierson,  
IT/Telecommunications Manager,  
Vail Resorts

## Customer service: top differentiator in the luxury travel business

How does a company that has gained such a high level of recognition and success approach customer service? Very seriously. Jen Pierson, IT/Telecommunications Manager, explained, “Customer service is now the top differentiator among organizations in the luxury travel business. Our goal is to provide customers with a consistent, high-quality communications experience that enables them to communicate with us the way they want to and to feel pleased and satisfied with the transaction.”

In support of this goal, Vail Resorts has taken a proactive approach to establishing a state-of-the-art contact center that is based on a solid, reliable, flexible, and scalable platform that enables them to expand capabilities to meet the high expectations of their customers.

The primary challenges have been to:

- Streamline routing and simplify prompting to deliver each caller to the right agent efficiently... and to ensure that each call results in a satisfying personalized experience that meets the needs and expectations of the caller
- Consolidate the communications system to leverage contact center functionality across most of their customer service facilities
- Gain the ability to ascertain the effectiveness of marketing campaigns for various 800-number targets
- Achieve better agent utilization and productivity while improving agents' job satisfaction

- Establish a world-class reservation system that supports increased use of the Internet, enhances customer service offerings, and serves international as well as domestic visitors
- Overall, to deliver a consistent branded customer experience that is on par with the excellence of their luxury facilities and desirable locations

The company's expansion into the international travel arena and the growing expectations of all their customers have created new challenges that call for a **multi-channel approach** to customer service.

“In today's marketplace, it isn't enough to provide high-quality service on the voice channel,” Pierson commented. “While voice still represents the large percentage of our customer contacts, we have to continually ask, ‘How do our customers want to do business with us?’ Increasingly, particularly among our international travelers, Web chat is emerging as a desirable option. It is also projected that e-mail and other channels will gain ground as a medium of choice among our customer base.”

Pierson added, “We found that our customers in Europe and other international locations are especially interested in using the text chat function. They are even willing to make their reservations on a chat basis, which is not usually the case with our domestic customers. We felt it was essential and urgent for us to develop a strong Web chat capability within our reservation and customer service platform.”

Pierson has also studied research trends that clearly point toward customers' expectations

of “anywhere/any mode” multi-channel access — with functions such as Web chat, e-mail, and others — assuming greater importance in the future (even though telephone voice contact is projected to remain the top preference). Research also indicates that it is important to create a consistency across all of the access channels, and to provide interest-specific flows, flexible and contextual help, and a truly personalized service experience.

Of course, the “flip side” of the customer services coin is what the enterprise needs to gain from their advanced customer service applications. These include reduced complexity; easy integration; up-sell and cross-sell effectiveness; drill-down analytics and actionable usage analytics; and dynamic process updates.

## Establishing a world-class customer service platform

Vail Resorts has built a robust, reliable, and flexible contact center platform based on the Avaya Communication Manager running on S-Series servers at three locations, with Avaya Media Gateways, Call Management System, Interaction Center, and INTUITY™ AUDIX® Voice Messaging.

*“Our evolutionary approach has been more than five years in the making,” commented Pierson. “During this time we have consolidated communications systems, originally for having one call management reporting platform across Colorado, and ultimately for leveraging our contact center solution across the country and world. Because of our rapid growth, we have needed a highly scalable system that allows for*

*expanding channels and making seasonal adjustments quite easily. This flexibility enables us to focus on customers’ needs and to foster a customer service approach in which we can provide our customers with the perfect vacation that fulfills their desires.”*

## Multi-channel functionality and blended agent capabilities

Recently, Vail Resorts worked closely with an Avaya services and integration team to expand their multi-channel functionality, primarily through an upgrade to Avaya Interaction Center 7.1. The first goal was to achieve efficient text chat functionality.

The upgrade process included:

- Conducting a system-wide audit before any additional capabilities were implemented
- Optimizing system functionality
- Installing the Interaction Center 7.1 platform
- Training agents to handle both voice and chat interactions with customers

*“The implementation team for Interaction Center 7.1 worked tirelessly to make sure that everything was working to our satisfaction,” Pierson commented. “I can’t compliment them enough on their dedication and service. They were simply terrific.”*

Virtually all of Vail Resorts’ 120 main contact center agents are now voice- and chat-enabled. The system chooses the best agent in terms of availability and skill to function easily and instantaneously across multiple channels.

Successful deployment of Web chat is eliminating a high abandon rate by

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customers who want to use this type of communications channel (e.g., 50% of European customers want to use Web chat). According to Pierson, *“Before the successful introduction of the chat functionality, Vail Resorts estimated that we had a 40% abandon rate among customers who wanted to use chat, but were unable to do so because a previous Web chat trial encountered browser compatibility issues. All of those attempted contacts can now be captured via the chat function. Currently 25% of chats convert to a sale, and this improves overall sales and the agents’ conversion-to-sale ratio. We see this as an important factor in expanding our international business.”*

Vail is also planning to establish a team of voice and e-mail blended agents in the future.

Through a useful ROI analysis process, Avaya makes it possible to estimate how the blending of voice and Web chat functions and/or e-mail functions can increase agents’

productivity, provide cost savings to the organization, and optimize utilization of the contact center. For more information, please see your Avaya Client Executive or Avaya Authorized BusinessPartner.

## A platform that enables an aggressive future vision

Through the overall Avaya solution, Vail Resorts has reduced hardware and overall costs, simplified routing, and balanced the workload among contact agent staff more effectively – improving sales and customer satisfaction in the process. With Interaction Center 7.1, they can accommodate multiple channels of communication. The ongoing consolidation of communications technology enables the company to extend their contact center functionality beyond the Western U.S. mountain centers to warm-weather resorts. Through the consolidation, they experience savings in overall cost of ownership and on start-ups of new locations. For example, they estimate that they will save over \$50,000.00 by extending their contact center functionality to a Caribbean location via VPN, rather than establishing a standalone system there.

The management flexibility that is inherent to the solution enables the Vail team to continue to develop a robust future vision for their communications strategies. *“We always have an eye on the future, and our goal is to provide the means for our customers to communicate with us in the way that they choose,”* Pierson said. *“With our Avaya contact center solutions we have established an extremely stable platform to handle volume increases. It will also facilitate our future plans to stay ahead of the curve in providing excellent customer service through an international, multi-channel strategy.”*

## Learn More

For more information on how Avaya Intelligent Communications can take your enterprise from where it is to where it needs to be, contact your Avaya Client Executive or a member of the Avaya Authorized BusinessPartner program, or visit **“Do Your Research”** at [www.avaya.com](http://www.avaya.com).

All statements in this Case Study were made by Jennifer Pierson, IT/Telecommunications Manager, Vail Resorts.

## APPLICATIONS, SYSTEMS, AND SERVICES

- Avaya Communication Manager
- Avaya S8300 Server and Avaya G700 Media Gateway (Broomfield contact center and corporate headquarters)
- Dual Avaya S8700 Servers (Eagle County and Keystone)
- Extended Port Networks
- Avaya Interaction Center 7.1
- Avaya Call Management System
- Avaya Operational Analyst
- Avaya External Call Handling
- Avaya INTUITY™ AUDIX® Voice Messaging
- Avaya Professional Services

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## ABOUT VAIL RESORTS

Vail Resorts, headquartered in Broomfield, Colorado, is one of the world’s premier mountain resorts companies and a leader in luxury, destination-based travel. It consists of five year-round resorts in Colorado, California, and Nevada; luxury hotels, condominiums, destination resorts, and award-winning golf courses; and real estate in or near Vail resort communities. For more information, visit [www.vailresorts.com](http://www.vailresorts.com).

## ABOUT AVAYA

Avaya is a global leader in enterprise communications systems. The company provides unified communications, contact centers, and related services directly and through its channel partners to leading businesses and organizations around the world. Enterprises of all sizes depend on Avaya for state-of-the-art communications that improve efficiency, collaboration, customer service and competitiveness.

For more information please visit [www.avaya.com](http://www.avaya.com).