

Merchants launches second Vodacom customer service centre

With the opening of its Vodacom contact centre in Cape Town, leading South African BPO provider, Merchants, can now claim the title of longest standing partner and largest contact centre provider in South Africa. With the addition of this centre, Merchants is now accountable for operating the prepaid, postpaid and enterprise customer services for Vodacom out of both their Johannesburg and Cape Town centres doubling the total staff compliment to around 1 000 people.

Launched at the beginning of the year, the Cape Town contact centre staff compliment initially consisted of 300 people, but according to Haroon Cassim, general manager of the Vodacom account at Merchants, more growth has taken place. “The Johannesburg site grew from 500 to 900 seats and I expect the Cape Town site to be the same size by the end of this year,” he says.

Merchants has been running Vodacom’s prepaid customer service for the past ten years, and recently expanded its offering to cover other areas of the business as well. “We will still be offering the same services, just on a larger scale,” says Cassim.

“Vodacom outsources to several partners of which Merchants is one and as a result of the significant improvement in our performance, Vodacom has decided to outsource a larger portion of their customer service to Merchants. This is a very big win for us.”

He adds that outside of the commercial value of the deal, this growth comes with tremendous opportunities for the team. “There will be more opportunities for people to grow organically and people are transferring to Cape Town - it is such an exciting journey to be on with our team, watching them grow and be rewarded for the hard work they have put into the account.”

During the launch, Merchants exercised a great deal of care in ensuring that areas affected did not impact peoples’ jobs. As a responsible employer, and in line with the company’s focus on putting people and customers first, 300 jobs were transferred to Merchants during this period

of exceptional growth.

“The key aspect here is that we are really strong in our performance and that is driven by a number of factors. Merchants, in its vision of putting people first, controls its attrition a lot better than many other organisations,” says Cassim, “our attrition, or agent turnover rate, is currently sitting at 4 percent while our competitors are tracking at about 18 to 20 percent. This means that they are constantly bringing in new people and trying to upskill them, where we have a more consistent approach. By investing in people and creating the right working environment, you reap huge rewards down the line as you have a consistent workforce that is able to consistently deliver exceptional customer experiences,” he adds.

“Partnering with a provider who puts its employees first and who has a clear focus on the customer was a key consideration for us, and therefore extending and expanding our relationship with Merchants was a fairly relaxed decision,” says Ugestra Alwar, Managing Executive: Customer Care at Vodacom.

“As South Africa’s leading mobile network, being flexible in meeting our customers’ needs is key to our success and Merchants’ ability to execute on our ambitions and contribute towards the improvement of our service, has strengthened our relationship.

“Our clients demand that the services we provide function as they are supposed to, and when they require our support, that our engagement is easily accessible, friendly and that we resolve the customers issue on first attempt. Partnering with Merchants has certainly been a step forward to providing our customers with the best service available in South Africa,” he adds.

Getting the Cape Town site ready for launch has been an experience in itself. “We made the site ready in a record 45 days, where sites of this nature usually take about 6 months before they can go live. That in itself is a major achievement and proves what can be achieved when everyone gets involved and works towards a common goal,” says Cassim. “To be able to run Vodacom’s customer service out of Johannesburg and Cape

Town is, strategically, exactly what we wanted and that fulfils or own growth plans for Merchants,” he concludes.