



Wave IP helps California automotive giant capture more customers...and sales



Customer Snapshot

PUTNAM AUTOMOTIVE



Major Northern California
automotive company
with

14 dealerships,
250 employees and
one centralized
Client Care Center

Any car dealer knows that happy customers equal higher CSI scores – and that means more sales.

In the automotive industry, customer service can be the difference between a failing business model and a respected reputation that leads to repeat sales and long-term relationships that span generations of vehicle owners. When Joe Putnam partnered with his first dealership in 1958, taking care of the customer was a cornerstone of his business, and it helped his company grow into 14 Northern California dealerships for 16 brands, including Buick, Lexus and Cadillac.

That customer-centered approach hasn't changed, but with a growing market, large customer base and specialized sales and maintenance staff working in various locations, connecting people quickly to get customers the answers they need had become a challenge. Add to that a dated phone system that could only service a small amount of calls at once, and Putnam Automotive was at risk of losing business.

“We had six phone lines; a seventh caller would go to voice mail. There was no queue and no way to determine the number of incoming calls. That’s a formula for lost business,” said Michael Malekos, Putnam Automotive Client Care Center Manager.

To stem the loss of calls and potential sales they represented, in the spring of 2014, Putnam installed four new Vertical Wave IP 2500 unified communications systems with 200 digital phones, to replace its old phone system. Making the new investment even more cost-effective was the fact that it was also able to still use and integrate its existing Spectralink wireless phones with the new Wave. Now Putnam can handle calls from all 14 of its individual dealerships through one central customer service center staffed six days a week by nine service coordinators. In just a few short months, the company saw a dramatic increase in the number of customers serviced over the phone, as well as a significant decrease in the call abandon rate—reduced from a double-digit percentage down to 3.2 percent and steadily declining.

“With the Vertical Wave IP system, things have been like night and day,” Malekos said, adding that the system allows them to now make callers aware of how long their wait time will be—which is never long. Even during peak service hours, customer calls are normally handled within minutes. “Our callers are less anxious, which leads to a much better customer experience. It has been an invaluable tool to enhance our ability to service customers overall.”

Real-Time Data = Higher Satisfaction & Sales

For Malekos, one of the greatest features of the Wave IP system is the ability to instantly access and export business data. Using the system’s real-time call reporting capabilities, Malekos is able to map peak and low call volume times, then schedule and adjust staffing accordingly to ensure customer calls are always covered and that his staff is operating at maximum productivity.

“As a manager, to be able to pull data timely, that’s essential in this business,” Malekos said. “The system is easy to control and allows me to go in and retrieve whatever data I need. I can trend the days, months, hours and seasons of our call volume and maximize our employees’ time. What other product lets you do that?”

On average, a Putnam Client Care Center employee answers 131 calls a day. Being able to move through those calls quickly and efficiently is essential to keep things running smoothly. Malekos said his ability to monitor and record calls through the Wave IP system also is critical to maintaining a steady workflow.

“The call recording feature allows me to coach employees in an effort to improve service,” Malekos said. “I can address issues immediately, so small problems don’t become big problems.”

“Before I assist an agent with a challenging call, I can determine what’s taken place and understand the customer’s issue before I get on the phone. This allows me to prevent problems from escalating. Having that ability...that’s state-of-the-art.”

Michael Malekos
Client Care Center Manager

A big help in that regard, Malekos said, is the Wave IP’s capability to track a call from inception through every transfer, so there is an accurate account of what a customer has experienced.

“Before I step in to assist an agent with a challenging call, I can determine what’s taken place and understand the customer’s issue before I get on the phone with them. This allows me to become involved early and prevent problems from escalating,” Malekos said. “Having that ability, knowing it’s there—that’s state-of-the-art.”

The Human Connection

Part of Putnam’s streamlined customer experience is also due to an improved ability to locate the right individual to quickly address a customer’s needs. Using the Wave IP’s built-in ViewPoint desktop call management software, customer service agents have immediate visibility and access to available sales team members and service department staff. From a single screen in ViewPoint’s Call Monitor view, with the click of a button they can connect quickly to or transparently instant message co-workers through an easy-to-use directory to get the answers a customer needs – without ever losing contact with them. A core application included in every Vertical Wave IP system, ViewPoint also allows agents to designate the most important calls for VIP service.

“There’s no guessing,” Malekos said. “It enables us to make what we call a ‘warm transfer.’ We can visually see who is available and make the connection.”

The Wave IP system has also enabled Putnam to eliminate the use—and expense—of 800 numbers, giving customers a sense of comfort that their call is being handled locally by the dealership they have formed a relationship with. With the centralized Client Care Center, customers are able to easily connect with “their” service adviser, regardless of which dealership they work at. And being able to integrate its existing Spectralink phones into the system has made it even easier for service team members to send and receive customer calls while working.

In fact, Putnam's experience with the Wave IP system and its new Client Care Center approach has been so positive, Malekos said, that the company has a second Client Care Center under development—this one focused on sales.

"We're replicating everything we did with Vertical in our Service Client Care Center. This product is literally growing with our business," Malekos said. "We know that one thing we won't have to worry about is how our phones operate."

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