



# The College Network

## Consona Customer Management

### The College Network Doubles Call Center Productivity and Streamlines Marketing Programs With the Help of Consona CRM

*Foundation now in place for a complete online customer portal, where learners can do everything from register for courses, manage their account, and request assistance as needed*

#### Making Higher Education Accessible

Typically, when striving for college credits, you'd have to worry about finding the closest university with the courses and competencies you require. In the case of The College Network (TCN), physical location really doesn't matter. TCN offers Internet-based, college-level courses that yield transferable credits accepted by institutions such as Regis University, Indiana State University, and George Washington University. Through TCN's university partners, adult learners can earn an accredited associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree or a professional certificate across several areas of study including, business administration, healthcare, marketing, nursing, finance, and criminal justice.

#### Beyond the Limits

Imagine managing a virtual environment with 150,000 learners, making 400 to 600 phone calls every day, and addressing more than 20,000 to 25,000 inquiries per month. Now imagine doing all that with only Microsoft Access-based applications and a SQL server environment with a minimal 'front-end' processor. That was the situation at TCN in 2004 when the company decided that it would be unable to properly serve its market and fulfill its plans for growth without better systems support. The existing systems lacked structure, could not provide the underlying controls needed to properly serve customers and prospects, and simply did not offer the foundation to keep the business moving forward.

But TCN also realized that it could not afford to get locked into a system that only served current needs. "The business is constantly changing and growing," TCN Chief Information Officer Ryan Sallee said. "Whatever system we picked would have to be flexible enough to grow and change as our business grows and changes."

#### A Team Effort

TCN assembled a CRM steering committee with team leaders and power users from every area of the company. The team spent about six months learning about CRM and surveying the market for both packaged products and custom-developed solutions. The end result was a decision to implement Consona Customer Management (formerly Onyx), a Consona CRM solution, to manage prospects and learners initially, and later to become the foundation on which to build the company's central repository and control center for all its information and operations.

The implementation went smoothly, with the help of consultants from Crowe Chizek, Consona CRM Professional Services and a dedicated effort by the TCN project team. The initial goal was to simply continue business as usual with the new system before reaching ahead to new capabilities. "The biggest challenge, quite frankly, was defining the business rules," Sallee said. "Because we had no real systems before, and little structure, our people had no experience defining what they did, how they did it, and how all the



#### Return on Investment at a Glance:

The College Network, a provider of collegiate-level online education, implemented Consona Customer Management and yielded the following results:

- Developed proactive and personalized marketing by profiling, tracking, and evaluating prospective learner information.
- Integrated with web forms to achieve a typical five minute turnaround time on requests for information.
- Gained a complete view of the learner's lifecycle—from first contact through program completion.
- Provided contact center personnel with visibility into real-time customer course progress through integration with a Learning Content Management System.
- Doubled contact center productivity.
- Established the foundation for building a complete online customer portal, where learners can do everything from register for courses, manage their account, and request assistance as needed.

*“The business has changed a lot in the few years since we first installed it, and we anticipate that it will continue to change. There’s no reason to think that Onyx won’t continue to be able to support us as we grow.”*

— **Ryan Sallee**, Chief Information Officer, The College Network

pieces fit together.” As a result, a big part of the initial implementation effort was spent walking through procedures and building the processes into the system’s work flow so that they could be carried out efficiently, completely, and consistently. The other big challenge was validation and matching the new system’s results to what was needed and expected. “We had to be sure that we got the right results and that nothing was lost in the new processes,” Sallee said.

### **New Capabilities and Results**

“This was by far the largest systems project that the company had ever taken on,” said Sallee, “and it has provided us with capabilities we never had before.” First among those new capabilities was visibility into the learner lifecycle—from first contact through program completion. In addition, TCN gained the ability to track lead flow, call volume, and call efficiency. “We used to do seminars,” Sallee explained, “We would do a direct mail piece, and then we’d wait for the people to call and register for the event. With the information collected in Consona Customer Management, we began to understand that this marketing strategy didn’t make sense for our business. Now, instead of waiting for them to come to us, we reach out to them. We simply didn’t know how effective or ineffective our efforts were before. Now we track everything and we can clearly see what’s happening.” TCN also has built an extensive lead generation system, centered around online Web forms. The call center typically initiates a phone contact within five minutes of when an interested party clicks the “Submit” button on a form.

According to Sallee, TCN is very happy with the level of flexibility in Consona Customer Management. “The business has changed a lot in the few years since we first installed it,” Sallee said, “and we anticipate that it will continue to change. There’s no reason to think that Consona CRM won’t continue to be able to support us as we grow.”

What kind of changes are ahead? “Well, we want to be able to market better, to sell smarter,” he said. “CRM is certainly a big part

of that.” In the near future, TCN will begin to build a customer portal where its learners can manage their accounts, request products, and make payments—an all-in-one customer experience, according to Sallee. TCN has already begun to move its product information online, where customers can view and study modules through a Learning Content Management System (LCMS). Content center personnel working in Consona Customer Management can view the customers’ progress, ensuring ongoing awareness and outstanding customer service.

TCN has taken significant strides toward building its “all-in-one system.” As well as being integrated with its content management system, a ‘Click to Dial’ CTI integration with the Consona system allows contact center personnel to simply click a phone number on their screen and connect to a learner. This feature alone has doubled the contact center’s productivity rates. TCN’s internal sales team also takes advantage of CTI integration within the Consona system by using a predictive dialer to allow them to join a phone campaign, as well as log the sales opportunity upon completion of the call. Another integration underway is the roll-out of the Cognos analytical tool set to provide an executive dashboard measurement system and in-depth information access and reporting. TCN plans to expand reporting and analysis capabilities beyond the Consona system data to provide comprehensive customer views and improve decision-making.

Consona Customer Management has been a key part of TCN’s focus on customer service and has provided a foundation for more effective marketing and selling. In the future, TCN will continue to build on this success by expanding its implementation to become the collection point for all customer interactions and business operations. For reliability, flexibility, and functionality, Consona CRM has proven to be the right choice for this fast-growing, dynamic business.

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Chief Information Officer,  
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