



Case Study



HouseValues Realizes Significant Productivity Increase with VPI's Real-time Performance Management Software

Business Profile

HouseValues understands the needs of real estate and mortgage professionals and provides them with market-leading systems and tools to grow their business, make more money, and enjoy more time with their families.

Business Challenge

HouseValue's biggest obstacle hindering call center productivity was the difficulty in generating timely and comprehensive reports.

Solution Overview

HouseValues selected VPI's Activ! Intelligence performance management software, which gives agents the information they need to measure their own performance against set targets and make immediate self-improvements.

Significant Benefits

- Added three percent to annual revenue.
- Substantial improvements in the time it required to prepare reports and in call center effectiveness.
- Agent morale visibly picked up as agents now had the tools and information to increase their incentive earnings.

About HouseValues

The Internet has done wonders to make home buying easier. Prospective home buyers can search for the home of their dreams, at a price they can afford, in the neighborhood, they want, with just a few clicks of the mouse. They can research schools, commuting times and distances, public services, and just about everything they need to understand the new community. According to the National Association of Realtors®, 74 percent of consumers start their real estate search online. While the Internet has done wonders for home buyers, what about the people in the middle – the agents, lenders, and others that are an essential part of the process?

Seattle-based HouseValues does exactly that. Founded in 1999 by Mark Powell, a second-generation real estate agent, the company understands the needs of real estate and mortgage professionals and provides them with market-leading systems and tools to grow their business, make more money, and enjoy more time with their families. Publicly traded HouseValues, Inc. has grown rapidly. Sales in 2006 were nearly \$100 million and the company was named one of the ten fastest growing in the state of Washington.

The most popular service for real estate agents is a lead referral program that guarantees a certain number of monthly sales leads, depending on the program agents subscribe to. HouseValues conducts extensive national advertising, inviting potential home sellers to check the value of their home from the HouseValues Web site. These queries are directed to local agent-subscribers who respond directly to the consumer. Agents can become a Certified HouseValues Agent by demonstrating mastery of HouseValues CRM software and maintaining targeted consumer response times.

HouseValues generates 100 percent of its revenues through telephone contact. The primary call center is located at the head office in Kirkland, WA (suburb of Seattle) with a satellite center in Yakima, WA. Account Executives (AEs) make outbound calls to sell agents on HouseValues services. After the prospect has signed up, the AE no longer has any interaction with the subscriber. Customer Success Coaches take over and guide the new subscriber in setting up the software and learning how to gain maximum rewards from the service. Customer Service Coaches handle both inbound and outbound calls. Both classes of agents have the opportunity to earn incentive compensation based on results.

Challenges

Eighty percent of HouseValues' personnel are employed in the call center, which is clearly the heart of the company. Bruce Allison, Call Center Operations Manager, was brought on board with the mission of making the HouseValues call centers the most efficient and productive in their industry.

Allison determined that a major obstacle hindering call center productivity was the inability to generate timely and comprehensive reports. Creating performance reports and calculating incentive earnings often

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-Bruce Allison
Call Center Operations Manager

meant hours downloading call statistics into Excel then sorting and reformatting the information – a lot of work to get the reports they needed. ACD was manually merged with data from the sales automation system and payroll to figure out how much revenue each agent was generating so incentive payments could be accurately calculated.

Management wanted a one-stop way to get the reports needed by both executives and the call center and much of the data had to come from outside the ACD. The solution had to work with HouseValues' existing Avaya Call Management System (CMS). Allison also wanted the AEs and Customer Success Coaches to be able to self-manage their responsibilities as much as possible.

To do this, they needed to be able to access real time information from multiple sources without having to waste time logging in and out of lot of multiple applications. "We needed to get the right information to the right people at the right time," said Allison.

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-Bruce Allison
Call Center Operations Manager

Solution - Activ! Intelligence from VPI

Allison had heard some good things about VPI, (Voice Print International) a provider of integrated interaction recording and workforce optimization solutions for enterprises and government organizations, and a dedicated Avaya DevConnect Gold Partner. VPI provides **Activ! Performance Suite™**, a comprehensive, tightly integrated suite of contact center solutions. One of the modular solutions – **Activ! Intelligence** – provides many of the features of analytics, performance management, CRM and messaging.

VPI's **Activ! Intelligence** software gives employees the information they need to measure their own performance against set targets and make immediate improvements. The performance analytics module takes key performance indicators (KPIs) and makes them timely and relevant to call center personnel in three ways; a customizable dashboard, consolidated reports and scorecards. The messaging module promotes efficient communications across the call center through personalized messages displayed on dashboards.

In early 2005, after talking to some very satisfied VPI customers, Allison and his management team decided to proceed with a pilot test. In addition to seamless integration with HouseValues' Avaya CMS, Allison and his team were impressed with how VPI's implementation team was able to work with the software to deliver the precise reports that management needed. The solution provided each agent with real time dashboard visibility into their performance metrics. They no longer had to spend valuable time figuring out where they stood and were better equipped to self-manage their own performance improvements. Allison noted, "Before VPI we had agents with calculators on their desk and little mini-spread sheets they would build where they would go into their phone stats and try to plug in data to calculate where they were at. It was a very manual process."

Other pieces to the VPI solution included:

- Daily agent scorecards to the desktop
- Consolidated manager and executive reports
- Secure internal-only messaging systems for real-time communication

Results

HouseValues piloted the VPI solution for four months. At the conclusion of the trial they observed substantial improvements in the time it required to prepare reports and in call center effectiveness:

Productivity Gains

- Savings of nine hours per month in preparing manual reports
- Savings of 15 hours per month in verifying time sheets
- Savings of 15.5 hours per month in reporting tracked sales leads to Account Executives
- Savings of six hours per month in preparing special sales reports for marketing department

Financial Gains

- Account executives gained an additional 40 minutes per day to spend generating new business – and they used it well
- For one of the test teams revenue climbed 22 percent over the control group
- 13 percent gain in certification sales reported by one of two teams
- Helped reduce abandoned calls by 50 percent, Collections were up substantially due largely to the 50 percent drop in abandonment

After assessing all the data, management concluded that the VPI solution would add three percent to annual revenue. From a financial perspective the project made tremendous sense. HouseValues went ahead with the full-scale rollout. In addition to direct improvements in cost savings, revenue growth, and KPI performance, Allison noticed some other wins. Agent morale visibly picked up as they now had the tools and information to increase their incentive earnings. The built-in messaging system led to more timely communications between supervisors and agents. "We use this to alert people to meetings or immediate incentives," explained Allison. "The message pops on the screen immediately. The real time messaging has been a huge win for us."

As agents and executives found new uses for the technology the VPI team worked hand-in-hand to build these special applications. One area that needed attention was collections. If an agent behind in his subscription accounts returns a collection call, then goes into queue with a long wait period he will likely drop out and not call back. Prior to the implementation of the VPI solution, collection agents had no visibility about how many calls were in holding in queue. With Activ! Intelligence, agents get a dashboard view of calls in queue, but Allison also wanted the agents to know how many agents were currently available to take the calls. VPI added this data point and also configured this number to change from yellow to flashing red when agent availability drops to zero, signaling a high probability of abandonment. This prompts agents who are doing other things, like email and wrap-up, to jump on the phone to make sure that all of calls are answered. Allison remarked, "I don't know of any other product that can real time kick an agent in the butt and say hey, we need you on the phone."

About VPI

VPI (Voice Print International, Inc.) is a leading innovator and provider of integrated interaction recording and workforce optimization solutions for enterprises, trading floors, government agencies, and first responders. Through its award-winning suite of solutions, VPI empowers organizations to proactively improve the customer experience, increase workforce performance, ensure compliance, and align tactical and strategic objectives across the enterprise. With the power to be proactive, organizations are equipped to actively identify and maximize opportunities and minimize risk. For more than a decade, VPI has been providing proven technology and superior service to more than 1,000 customers in over 40 countries. This dedication and commitment to excellence has resulted in an unmatched customer loyalty rate of over 90 percent.