

# AUSTAR

## Improving Customer Service and Operations

### Customer Profile

AUSTAR United Communications Limited (AUSTAR) is a leading provider of subscription television services in regional and rural Australia, with more than 700,000 customers enjoying principally satellite digital television services. Established in 1995, this publicly traded company also provides mobile telephony and Internet services. Since it began, it has invested over \$1 billion to establish its technology platforms and a state-of-the-art customer service centre.

AUSTAR is also a significant provider of programming in the Australian television market through its 50% owned joint venture, XYZnetworks, which owns and/or distributes Nickelodeon, Nick Jr, Discovery Channel, Channel [V], Club [V], MAX, Arena, The Lifestyle Channel, Lifestyle Food, CountryMusic Channel and The Weather Channel.

### Challenge: A Fragmented Knowledge Base and Unstable Staffing Levels

AUSTAR was facing two separate challenges. First, customer service and sales staff were struggling to keep up with changes in service bundles, new communications systems and customer handling procedures. One issue was a knowledge base distributed over several different platforms. There were Lotus Notes databases, printed manuals, emails, and an intranet site where AUSTAR posted weekly updates known as 'briefs'. Since there was no one version of the truth, frontline staff ran the risk of operating under outmoded procedures and giving outdated information to customers.

Second, managers had difficulty forecasting staff requirements. Long training times were a bottleneck for the number of productive new employees that could be deployed at any one time. Customer service representatives (CSR's) took a month of class training, with about 30% failing to meet company standards afterwards, and then went on to 4 months of supervised on-the-job training. Half of all

agents were failing the probation period. Time out for training on new products, procedures and policies added to unstable staffing levels and lower performance levels.

### The Solution: "Central Know-How" and Training with SupportPoint

To address both challenges, AUSTAR decided to build a centralized knowledge base, dubbed "Central Know-How". The knowledge management team strategically linked "Central Know-How" with the Customer Service Excellence program. Launching a single vehicle for workplace change created the business buy-in that allowed "Central Know-How" to succeed.

Content developers gained a sense of ownership and pride in maintaining high documentation standards. Employee feedback on "Central Know-How" got a response on the same day. The knowledge team adjusted the writing styles for on-line documents to fit different audiences. After rolling out "Central

Know-How", according to Glen Duggan, Business Process and Knowledge Manager "We replaced multiple sources with one source of the truth". For sales and service, he says "It has become the company bible for all customer facing employees."

To stabilize staffing levels, AUSTAR implemented several changes to realize shorter training periods and better outcomes. Applying the 80:20 rule, training focused on the 20% of situations that staff would typically encounter 80% of the time. Training sessions were broken out into modules so that trainees would spend smaller chunks of time away from the phone. Going forward, the information on systems and processes for all new projects would be incorporated in the knowledge base to reduce the need for additional classroom time.

After researching knowledge management systems, AUSTAR decided on SupportPoint's

*"We replaced multiple sources with one source of the truth"*

*Glen Duggan, Business Process and Knowledge Manager*

business process guidance system as the platform for “Central Know-How”. SupportPoint delivers on-the-job, relevant and actionable information on specific systems, processes, policies, tasks, and products. SupportPoint’s ability to provide rapid access to structured on-line documentation dovetailed with the front-line training and performance support AUSTAR needed. Using SupportPoint’s authoring and content management system, as well as user feedback mechanisms, the knowledge team could publish up-to-date, reliable and accurate documents instantly. To supplement training, employees could assess their skills with SupportPoint’s online training paths and learning module.

#### **The Results: More Customers, Better Service at Lower Operating Costs**

As of August of 2008, all Austar employees can search more than 2,000 documents for product and process knowledge, and the most popular document, internal phone numbers for inquiry transfers, gets accessed over 8,500 times a month. “Central Know-How” has a core user base of 320 employees, including:

- Sales, inbound and outbound
- Service, billing and technical Help
- Internet services
- Mobile telephone services

Even with a 50% increase in customer base from 2002 to 2007 AUSTAR was able to achieve a substantial decrease in costs over the same period.

#### **The Results: Reduced Training Time**

Before “Central Know-How”, induction or classroom training for customer and sales support took approximately 1 month, with a heavy focus on procedural details. As agents no longer need to be trained on exceptions, class time has been cut down by 20%, with a 90% graduation rate, up from 70%. Trainers now take one to two days to prepare for classes, down from one to two weeks.

Back-office and operations employees have also benefited from reduced training times. When AUSTAR rolled out Sarbanes-Oxley policy training, prior to SupportPoint it would have required the HR/Training department 6 months elapsed time to deliver face-to-face training. Instead, with just one resource, training was prepared and delivered in 3 weeks using Central Know-How.

#### **The Future: Continuous Improvement**

With complete buy-in for “Central Know-How” across AUSTAR, SupportPoint now drives a content management process, where content developers regularly update and improve the knowledge base, with the assistance of employees who contribute anywhere from 5 to 30 suggestions a day. According to Glen Duggan, these suggestions, which peak right after training, “absolutely improve the quality of the documentation.”

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*“SupportPoint has been a key contributor to the reduction in operational expenditure”*

*Glen Duggan, Business Process and Knowledge Manager*

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Change processes are now supported at the operational level through SupportPoint’s Bulletin screen in its Viewer, or client. Dubbed the Splash screen by AUSTAR, it announces any changes to procedures, processes or systems at the start of each day.

To keep “Central Know-How” up to date on new systems, support content delivery is built into AUSTAR’s software development lifecycle for all new projects. For example, IVR training for 250 customer service specialists was reduced from 4 hours (1 hour overview / 2 hours role play / 1 hour revision) to 25 minutes on-line, with re-usable content.

Going forward, SupportPoint is helping AUSTAR adapt to changes in business process, products and even regulatory changes.

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Panviva’s business process guidance system – SupportPoint, acts like a GPS for the desktop, guiding your employees step-by-step through policies and procedures in real time.

To learn more, call (+61 3) 9882-0555 (Australia) or (+1) 866-7PANVIVA (USA).