

# Strategic Priority 6

An Organisation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – becoming flexible, lean, innovative and participatory



The World Organization of the Scout Movement



## The Scout Information Centre

### The Results

#### Benefits to The Scout Association's Members / Customers

The Information Centre has improved the support available to members and specific feedback received from customers tells us that they:-

- receive quicker, more accurate and more effective responses to enquiries,
- spend more on products that they feel are suited to their needs,
- value the direct, rapid access to HQ services rather than having to go through traditional and slow cascade methods of accessing services,
- appreciate the friendly and helpful Centre staff.



The Centre is located in a purpose built office

The service also frees up of staff in other departments from dealing with regular enquiries which has allowed the Association to re-deploy these resources to carry out much needed developmental work such as a complete revision of youth programme, adult training and the public image of the Association. Customers now spend less time getting the information and resources they need and they get the resources and information at a lower cost.

#### Benefits to the Headquarters

Specialist departments can now attend to their development work & projects in a focused manner, directly resulting in:

- Skilled staff offering an improved service.

- A reduction of four staff across the Association, saving the Association and its members £120,000 per annum.

Profits from sales of materials have grown substantially, e.g. profits from sales in 1998 (the last year of operation of the mail order publications team) was £99,635. In 2001 profits have grown to £155,646.

The creation of new products such as CD-ROM containing over 500 factsheets and forms, recruitment material and training sessions.

Reaching new markets with existing products not previously touched. Support material has now been sold to Scout Associations in New Zealand, Australia, Thailand, South Africa, and Mexico.

Feedback from the customer satisfaction surveys, sent to one in ten contacts, indicates that customers particularly value getting quicker, more accurate responses to enquiries without experiencing transfers, and that they appreciate the accessibility of the Information Centre out of office hours.

The Information Centre achieved (indeed exceeded) its purpose, as defined by The Scout Association's Committee of the Council, within its first six months of operation. In last years round of priority setting and resource planning, the Information Centre was the only department not to have its resources significantly cut.



United Kingdom: The Scout Association

PROMISING PRACTICES

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## The Reasons

Before the creation of the Information Centre, the Scout Association provided advisory and professional support services to its 150,000 adult volunteer members from three UK headquarters' locations. The access points for information and materials were diverse and disjointed. A membership-wide customer survey found it was not always clear to the volunteers where they should go for a particular piece of advice or support.

This wasted the time of both volunteers and professional staff and resulted in unhappy customers and unproductive activity for the Association. The service was also only available during normal office hours, which was inconvenient for many volunteers.

For example, the Association's largest service department, comprising 47 staff, logged an average of 220 enquiry calls for information and materials each day. This number does not include calls made to named personnel on specific headquarters business. The majority of these calls needed to be transferred to other departments. This amounted to thirty hours each working day being devoted to unsolicited general, often repetitive, enquiries. Effectively the equivalent of four staff was employed just to deal with this work.

The vast majority of the wide range of publications produced by the Association (over 500) were only available from a mail order publications department that had no knowledge of the content of the material that they sold and how it could be used to help leaders do their job better.

The team recruited to staff the "Scout Information Centre" were recruited from three separate sources. There were staff re-deployed from the existing mail order publications department. Following the opening of the Information Centre this operation was closed.

Staff new to the Association were recruited. Also staff with Scout Association experience but no customer service experience were recruited. Together they formed the new staff team. This new team was charged with ensuring that the Information Centre was able to:

- Provide a quicker, more accurate and more effective support to customers.



Staff members use modern tools and up-to-date technology to provide the service

- Allow staff in other departments to concentrate on development projects.
- Increase revenue from sales, to pay for the increased costs arising from the improved service.

The consistent attainment of these objectives over time would be a measure of the success of the operation.

A long-term training and development plan was drawn up to meet the staff training needs. This plan was devised to be capable of meeting short-term training needs as well as long term developmental needs. The short-term technical training needs were in the areas of:

1. developing a set of shared common goals and values,
2. improving and developing their customer service team working and communication skills.

The longer term training needs were identified as helping this team develop

self-sustaining ways of using team skills, strengths and problem-solving skills to help solve business issues which may arise in the next two or three years.

It was identified that if this plan was successfully implemented then the volunteers who used the centre would receive a positive customer service experience that would meet their needs as customers, e.g. receiving the necessary information, in a suitable format and in an acceptable timescale.

It was further identified that it would be unrealistic for a new team delivering a new front-line service to the Association to be left to "get on with it". Providing short-term training as well as the long-term training and development was considered to be essential. Without this training programme the risk of failure for the whole service was high.

## The Methods

A training programme was devised that supported the set-up of this new service. It has lasted from December 7<sup>th</sup> 1998 to May 2001. All 13 staff employed in the Information Centre took part in the programme. The programme is still ongoing. The training programme was delivered using different methods, in different contexts and in various different locations.

The training programme has been divided into two phases. Phase one was focused on activities undertaken before the Information Centre opened and was aimed at preparing staff for delivering the new service. Phase two was designed to maintain effectiveness and improve performance over time and has been ongoing since the Information Centre opened in April 1999.

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## Phase 1 – Pre opening

The training employed at this stage used the following delivery methods:

- Formal course-based learning - software training;
- Residential experiences - form/share group goals and working practices and devise a mission statement;
- One to one coaching - improving telephone manner;
- Individual project work - learning key policies and rules relevant to the operation;
- Shadowing field workers/staff - understanding issues and concerns of customers working in other offices.

To ensure that maximum flexibility was built into the process, three online reviews of the programme were made. These took place in early January 1999, mid February 1999 and mid March 1999. These reviews gave an opportunity to fine-tune the programme in response to observation and declared needs. The review processes were carried out by having 1:1 discussions with each staff member who were encouraged to identify their own training needs. Opportunities were also taken for staff to observe the operating methods of other colleagues and gain feedback from colleagues in other departments. This helped further training needs to be identified.

The review processes were arranged to coincide with:

- The staff residential: This experience helped the team develop shared goals, a mission statement and working methods.
- A formal youth work course: This was carried out with volunteer workers from around the UK and gave staff a deeper understanding of their customers.

Test week: During this week all customer service systems were tested in an integrated manner by arranging for the service to deal with many hundreds of test calls. Customers making these calls were briefed to ask a variety of difficult questions. They collected data on how their enquiries were dealt with. This approach provided material on performance that could be feedback to individual staff members and the management team to ensure that final learning needs and system procedures could be addressed before the system went live. The team indicated that this particular activity significantly improved their preparedness to deal with real customers when the Information Centre opened. These fixed points served as focal points for staff who had been working at different HQ sites around the UK and with field workers to share experiences and knowledge.

The reviews told us that as a staff team we needed further training to help us deal with issues like:

- How to deal with difficult customers?
- How to better use software packages such as Word and the call logging software HEAT?
- Taking customer orders and processing these orders using the accounting package.

Time was then built into the training programme to ensure the training needs identified could be met.

## Phase 2 – In service

As the department has developed and new staff have joined over the last eighteen months, the training support offered to staff has become focused on:

- The formal course-based learning - e.g. telephone training.
- One to one briefings/support - to maintain product knowledge.

- NVQ building - generating and capturing examples of good practice.
- Individual project work - learning key policies and rules relevant to the operation.
- 3 monthly "shadowing-of-field" workers/staff - understanding issues and concerns of customers.
- Attendance at specialist conferences - maintaining product knowledge and staying in touch with the customer.
- Monthly team reviews - measuring performance against business goals and integrating new team members.
- Yearly team reviews of effectiveness (Aug 2000) - checking clarity of shared goals.
- Planned team review Aug 2001 - measuring performance against business goals.

The maintenance of the phase two training strategies has often been



difficult to sustain. It is sometimes difficult to maintain commitment to staff training, which if carried out effectively, often means time away from the office making sure staff are up to speed on new developments and ways of working.

For example a new national youth programme is being launched by The Scout Association in 2002 and the Information Centre is dealing with all customer enquiries on this topic so it is essential the team is familiar with all aspects of this product. The alternative to not engaging in this training is the degradation of product knowledge and the consequent drop in the quality of the service provided.

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Team members have indicated that they value the continued in-service training and indicate they want this approach maintained. Feedback at monthly team meetings indicates that this approach is essential to maintaining a good quality service. The attendance by all IC staff at new programme briefings has increased considerably the ability of staff to deliver effective customer service. Staff report much greater confidence and improved customer satisfaction in responding to new programme enquiries following these briefings.

The training programme was recognised nationally by receiving a National Training Award.

## Our Learning

We learned that... all staff need clear goals and a shared vision of their purpose. This sense of ownership has created unusual and exciting opportunities for involving staff in the development of the team and its service. Specifically, team members support and train each other, regularly use a quality review process (learned during the training) without management having to initiate this, which means that staff identify their own training and development needs.

More and more people want to use the service each month. This allows core specialist staff more time to concentrate on key development issues. At the time of writing, enquiries are still growing at a rate of 1.5% to 2% a month.

The training programme has been a positive and enjoyable experience to take part in which has boosted staff moral.

To summarise, the Scout Information Centre has helped The Scout Association provide a key service in a period of changing customer expectations. It turned around an existing operation that was underperforming. It created a new high performing team from diverse individuals with different skills, experiences and attitudes. It has created a positive response from its customer base at a time

when many of those same customers express frustration with other call centres operations. It has paid for itself and generated increased income and new business opportunities for The Scout Association. The way in which the programme was designed has created a successful model not only for the establishment of new operations but also for effective team development.

## Our Future Plans

Our plans for the future are to:

- Ensure the quality of the service is maintained while the use of the service grows.
- Add value by introducing new Internet based services over time.
- Regularly review performance and plan to improve the service year on year.

For further information on any aspect of the Scout Information Centre contact Simon Carter at: [info.centre@scout.org.uk](mailto:info.centre@scout.org.uk)



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Organisation Mondiale du Mouvement Scout



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