

CUSTOMER SERVICE » PRINT AUDIT

The customer is all right

Its unique tech support garners this Calgary company awards year after year ... and zero support staff turnover

BY NICOLE DUNSDON

Imagine saving 90,000 trees worldwide in just one year. Or, helping companies recapture more than \$81-million in printing and photocopying expenses.

Not many businesses can boast both of those achievements, but Calgary-based Print Audit – a fast-growing, print management software company – is winning awards for these and other successes.

Established in 1999, Print Audit enables its 5,000 customers worldwide to lower the cost and environmental impact of printing and photocopying, says company president and chief executive officer John MacInnes.

Surprisingly, it's not Print Audit's environmental achievements – such as preventing 75,000 ink cartridges from entering the world's landfills in 2007 – that are getting attention, but its customer service and technical support.

Not only did the company receive the National Quality Institute's (NQI) Canada Award of Excellence for Quality in 2004, but it also received the Gold Customer Service Award for Small Business in 2005 and 2008.

"It is the highest level of award recognition in the country, is very prestigious and not easy to get," says Allan Ebedes, president and CEO of NQI and Canada Awards for Excellence. "The award is given out under the patronage of the Governor-General of Canada."

So what's Print Audit's secret? Well, a live person answers the phone.

With close to one million workstations worldwide with Print Audit installed on them, the company's unique technical support is essential to its success.

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CEO John MacInnes on Print Audit's corporate values: family first, fun, growth, integrity and respect. JEFF MCINTOSH FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Mr. MacInnes describes Print Audit's five corporate values as: family first, fun, growth, integrity and respect. "Nowhere in our values does it say, 'Get them off the phone,' he says. "It comes down to respect. These people have paid us money that they've worked hard for and it is our job to make sure they are satisfied with what they've bought from us."

On Print Audit's website, positive testimonials abound – and nearly all of them mention technical support.

Brian Ford, a hardware/software consultant at Harvard

University, writes: "I called tech support to ask a compatibility question, and I was amazed to find that I wasn't bothered by any phone automation, I was not placed on hold, and my question was completely answered within a minute or two."

Paul Heemeryck, Print Audit's chief technology officer, started working with Mr. MacInnes from the outset.

"Anyone who has dealt with tech support from other companies has been trained to expect pain," says Mr. Heemeryck. "When first-time customers call, they may start out defensive, but as soon as you ask them intelligent questions, and they realize you're

trying to get to the heart of

the matter, they are actually pleasant."

Mr. MacInnes credits his CTO with developing a successful technical support method. "He's developed an incredible way to interact with the customer that asks the right questions, is efficient and is friendly."

Print Audit contacts customers 15 and 45 days after they purchase products and services, as well as regularly surveying all customers to collect feedback and further align its software with their needs.

Both Print Audit executives say the company is not out to make money on its technical support, but rather that the customer service they offer is as much about public relations

and marketing as anything else.

With offices in the U.K., Brazil, South Africa, Australia and the United States, Print Audit's software helps companies analyze their printing practices and evaluate the costs, then decide what to do about it.

With an annual increase of paper use in North America of 10 per cent a year, Mr. MacInnes says printing and copying costs are "the last bastion of uncontrolled expenses in an organization."

Print Audit's software tracks every print job from every person in an organization. "Then a company can decide to go one of two ways: cost recovery ... or environmental reduction," says Mr. MacInnes.

While cost recovery is a way for an organization to bill its customers for printing and paper expenses, environmental reduction establishes a set of rules that reduce printing costs – such as printing only double-sided when printing from Outlook, never sending black and white pages to a colour printer, and moving print volumes to less expensive printers.

Along with customer service practices and policies, testimonials and surveys, NQI also bases its award on a company's culture. Mr. Ebedes says NQI was impressed with this fun and profitable company's vision statement: "To have fun, build great products and 'wow' the customer." He also made note of how Print Audit motivates and engages its employees.

"If a support person is mentioned in a testimonial or feedback e-mail, we give that person \$50 in cash," says Mr. MacInnes. "We have zero turnover in our support people. When they start, they stay, because our technical support practices are less stressful and they get rewarded when people provide positive feedback about them."

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