

# Finding the Right Business

By Gary Pudles

I've been asked a number of times how I got into the telephone answering service and call center business. Most people are surprised to learn that I had little significant call center experience when I bought my first telephone answering service in July 1998. In fact, other than going through Sprint Spectrum's agent training with the start-up wireless company I worked for, I had never worked in a call center.

In 1997 and 1998, I decided that I



wanted to run my own business. Over the first ten years of my career, I had worked for other people and knew that I was ready to forge a path of my own. My first thought was that I would have to start something from scratch, to come up with some great idea that was new or better than businesses that were out there. Every week, I would meet with my friend Leslie at a coffee shop in Manyunk (a part of Philadelphia), and we would brainstorm about ideas that we thought could be big.

At one of those meetings, I confessed that I was worried about starting my own business because I had a family to feed, and I wasn't sure I had enough money to support them while I built my business big enough to create a salary for myself. As a result of those discussions, I realized that I would either have to start a business that could get early investment (venture capital) or that I would have to purchase an existing business with strong cash flows that would be strong enough to turn my savings into current income.

With this realization, I went on the Internet to find an existing business to buy. I was immediately overwhelmed by the sheer number of opportunities. Restaurants, retail, cleaning, franchises, and so forth –

the list and types of opportunities were staggering. Plus, there were hundreds of Websites dedicated to business opportunities and businesses for sale.

This is when I had my brainstorm. I listed everything I might want in a business. I liked

businesses with recurring revenue, heavy in communications technology (particularly telecom), where I could manage people, and where the company focused on selling its services to other businesses.

I also wrote down the kinds of businesses

Connections Magazine Presents

The TAStrader logo is presented in a large speech bubble. The word 'TAS' is in a dark, bold font, and 'trader' is in a yellow, cursive font. To the right of the speech bubble is a yellow callout box with the text 'By the TAS Industry For the TAS Industry'. Below the speech bubble are four yellow buttons with black text: 'Buy', 'Sell', 'Learn', and 'Succeed'.

The advertisement for ATSI features a large, stylized 'ATSI' logo in blue and purple, with a globe to the right. Below the logo is the text 'Association of TeleServices International'. A list of three bullet points follows: 'The industry has changed', 'The world has changed', and 'ATSI has changed'. Below the list is the text 'Take a look at us now! It isn't your parent's ATSI! Make ATSI your New Year's Resolution! Visit our website or contact our Headquarters for more information.' In the bottom right corner, the contact information is listed: 'ATSI 866-896-ATSI www.atsi.org admin@atsi.org'. The background of the advertisement shows a rotary phone and a globe.

Finding the Right Business

I didn't like. I didn't want to own a restaurant because it is hard to do well in that industry. Owning a retail shop wasn't in the cards because of the risk involved in picking the right inventory. In addition, my father-in-law at the time was a retailer, and he continually told me how tough it was to be successful. There were other things on the list, but I think you get the point.

With these lists in hand, I went back to the Internet and matched the businesses for sale with my list, eventually concluding that the telephone answering service and call center business was for me. Today, because of my small amount of preplanning, I now own and operate a business that I really enjoy and which continues to interest me every day. ☞

## MOVIE REVIEW: The Bells Are Ringing

By Peter DeHaan

Although I frequently write movie reviews, this is the first to appear in a trade publication. However, given that the setting for this Broadway musical-turned-movie is a telephone answering service, the justification can be easily made.

In *The Bells Are Ringing*, Judy Holliday reprises her Tony Award-winning role as Ella Peterson, a telephone answering service operator, in Vincente Minnelli's musical comedy. Ella can't keep from eavesdropping

on her client's calls, compulsively going overboard to help them out. She does this by sharing tidbits of information she hears from other clients. Initially everybody benefits, so her involvement doesn't cause too much of a problem, but when she goes incognito to meet and help her problem-plagued clients, things begin to go awry.

One of them, playwright Jeffrey Moss (Dean Martin), becomes enamored when he actually meets Elle (who adopts a concocted



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alias), and she falls in love with him. Unfortunately, Jeffery doesn't realize who she is, since when she calls him from the answering service, she adopts the voice of an old woman so she can mother him. He buys into the ruse completely by affectionately calling her "Mom."

Holliday and Martin have great on-screen chemistry, the musical score is superb, and the dancing enjoyable. The production is so delightful that the fact it is a musical (which I generally don't care for) doesn't get in the way or detract in the least.

Jean Stapleton (aka "Edith Bunker") plays the role of Sue, the owner of the answering service, which is cleverly called "Susansaphone." The answering service has a diverse group of clients, one of which is actually a bookie whose messages are coded

to sound like record orders. Of course, the police, who also suspect Susansaphone of being a front for another age-old profession, aren't far behind this enterprising crook.

The movie begins and ends with creative and compelling commercials for Susansaphone. Sadly, this was the final film appearance of the talented Judy Holliday before her premature death.

Although released in 1960, the movie still has great appeal to anyone working in the telephone answering service industry – even more so if they used or remember the quintessential cord board. ☛

*If you have a movie, play, novel, or book about telephone answering services that you would like to share with us, please email Peter@TAStrader.com.*

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**ATSI Award of Excellence**

Leading the list of answering services that earned the 2009 ATSI Award of Excellence are Michigan Message Center (Kalamazoo, Michigan) and Rochester Telemessaging Center (Rochester Hills, Michigan), both having the distinction of a thirteen-year streak. For a complete list, go to [www.connectionsmagazine.com/articles/9/044.html](http://www.connectionsmagazine.com/articles/9/044.html). Registration forms for the ATSI 2010 Award of Excellence program are available on the ATSI Web site.

**Recertification for Answer 1 and Cosmo Med**

Answer 1 Communications (Mary

Jones, president) requalified for the ATSI Gold 24/7 Call Center Certification Award. They also have earned six consecutive years of the ATSI awards: The Award of Excellence and the Award of Distinction, plus the CAM-X Award of Distinction and the Award of Excellence.

Cosmopolitan Medical Communications (Margo Weiss, president) requalified for the Gold 24/7 Call Center Certification Award. Additionally, they have been recognized as one of the "Best Places to Work," earned the ATSI Award of Excellence for three consecutive years, and received the Alfred P. Sloan Award for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility.

**Call Experts Recognized for Making Work "Work" in Today's Economy**

Call Experts (Michael Leibowitz, owner) is a winner of the 2009 Alfred P. Sloan Award for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility, distinguishing it as a leading practitioner of workplace flexibility and effectiveness in Charleston and across the nation. Call Experts has been awarded this honor for their employee-friendly and flexible work environment. They employ 70 employees in Charleston and 120 nationwide. Open 24/7, Call Experts considers the individual employee in all staffing decisions, emphasizing a positive business culture to ensure a productive and cheerful work environment.

**Startel Receives ATSI Switch Certification**

Startel has been awarded the ATSI Industry Standards Switch Certification. "We are extremely excited to receive this certification," stated Dan Feis, Startel director of sales and marketing. "The ATSI Industry Standards Switch Certification validates the accuracy of the statistics and reports provided by our technology. It also provides credibility and a differentiator for our clients when they are selling their services."

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### Hudson Valley Answering Service and Answerphone of Jacksonville Sold

TAS Marketing announced the sale of two answering services: Hudson Valley Answering Service (Dominic and Sharon Gallo, Poughkeepsie, New York) was sold to Dick Gore and Julie Mooney with Berkshire Communications (Pittsfield, Massachusetts), and Answerphone, Inc. (Vicki Leonard, Jacksonville, Florida) was sold to Peter and Andy Gross of Sunshine Communication Services, Inc. (Coral Gables, Florida).

### Medical Call Center Newsletter

Medical Call Center News is an e-newsletter for medical call centers. It is available at no cost to anyone in the medical call center and telehealth industry. Interested individuals may subscribe to receive future issues and view the current issue at [www.medicalcallcenternews.com](http://www.medicalcallcenternews.com).

### Sharing Is Caring

Share your TAS news and articles for the next issue of TAS Trader. Email them to [Peter@TAStrader.com](mailto:Peter@TAStrader.com) by October 1 to be included in the next issue.

**Outsource Call Centers:** Personalized Communications, providing call center outsourcing services to other answering services, contact Stan Gardner at 800-232-3321, [sgardner@per-com.com](mailto:sgardner@per-com.com), or [www.per-com.com](http://www.per-com.com).

**Seeking Acquisitions:** A fair offer by an established, reputable company for your commercial or medical answering service (with or without equipment). Contact Ron toll-free at 866-388-0772 or [ron@doctors-exchange.net](mailto:ron@doctors-exchange.net).

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## Garage Sale

TAS Trader is providing this "garage sale" listing section to help you find a home for old and obsolete, but still working equipment. This will also free up storage space and keep harmful electronics out of the landfill.

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Amtelco EVE Genesis 7.5 mainframe, 2 Maxtor disk drives, 9 replacement boards for CDU and switch, 4 power supplies, 6 monitors, 5 Amtelco keyboards, Panasonic 1080i printer. Call MDXchange for prices: 915-407-7500.

To list your old equipment for sale there is a \$50 onetime fee. If you are willing to give it away, then your ad will be free. Go to [www.tastrader.com/secure/index.html](http://www.tastrader.com/secure/index.html) and place your ad today for our next issue.

## Coming Events

**September 9-11, 2009**

TUNE Fall Annual Meeting  
AmeriStar Hotel & Casino, St. Louis, MO  
Contact Dan L'Heureux at 763-473-0210 or [Dan@CallConsult.net](mailto:Dan@CallConsult.net)

**September 13-15, 2009**

WSTA Fall Annual Meeting  
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**September 22-25, 2009**

CAM-X 45th Annual Convention & Trade Show  
Grand Okanagan Resort, Kelowna, BC  
Contact Linda at 800-896-1054, [linda@camx.ca](mailto:linda@camx.ca), or [www.camx.ca](http://www.camx.ca)

**October 14-16, 2009**

ASTAA Fall Annual Conference  
Loews Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA  
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**October 26-28, 2009**

GLTSA Fall Sales and Marketing & Supervisors too!  
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**November 6-9, 2009**

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**February 2-4, 2010**

OEO Partnership Annual Meeting  
Gaylord Texan – Dallas TX  
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**February 28-March 3, 2010**

TeamSNUG Annual Meeting  
L'Auberge Hotel – Del Mar, CA  
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**March 14-17, 2010**

PINetwork Annual Meeting  
Scottsdale Cottonwood Resort- Scottsdale, AZ  
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**May 12-15, 2010**

ATSI Annual Convention and Expo  
Westin GasLamp Quarter, San Diego  
For more information: 866-896-2874 or [www.atso.org](http://www.atso.org)

### TAStrader

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