



Keeping You “In the Know...” 1/27/17

CSC and Infocision Partnership Featured in Crain's:

- The partnership between CSC's Call Center and Infocision, along with the growth of the Call Center, was featured in an article this week in Crain's. Here is the full article.

Partnership evolves to bring more work to visually impaired

By JUDY STRINGER

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When InfoCision Management Corp. chief of staff Steve Brubaker pledged to hire 25 vision-impaired people to work for the Akron-based telemarketer in 2012, not even he had the foresight to imagine how a unique partnership with the Cleveland Sight Center would grow.

Today, the nonprofit sight center owns and operates a call center at its University Circle base, where 60 employees, using InfoCision's contact software platform, answer incoming calls or reach out to Ohio residents on behalf of local and state agencies. Customers include Cuyahoga County, TourismOhio, the state's education and health departments, and Secretary of State Jon Husted's office. Call center director Jassen Tawil estimates his employees, most of them blind, managed \$2 million worth of government contracts in 2016.

"In the beginning, (the sight center was) supporting InfoCision employees who had vision disabilities and training people, and InfoCision was hiring lots of them," Tawil said. "Over the last five years, it really transformed into more of a social enterprise business right here at the sight center."

Part of the transformation is courtesy of the niche role the sight center

can play in contracting certain call center projects. Nonprofits employing people with disabilities — like women-owned or minority-owned businesses — often get preferential treatment in bids for state projects.

"These are contracts that InfoCision likely would not qualify for on our own," Brubaker said. "The fact that we have this joint venture enables the sight center to acquire the contract, and then we can work in partnership to deliver the services."

When, for instance, the sight center needed 500 people on the phones for a few days in November to handle voter calls for Husted's office, it subcontracted with InfoCision, which has nearly 3,000 call center "communicators" in 12 locations, to manage the volume.

"The calls are handled in the same manner, with Cleveland Sight Center taking ultimate responsibility for the call," Tawil said. "We then pay InfoCision for the calls they handle."

Along with the ongoing B2B partnership, it was InfoCision's investment and expertise that helped create a site capable of competing for and fulfilling state contracts, according to Tawil. Just before Brubaker and InfoCision announced plans to hire 25 call center employees with visual impairments, the Akron company donated about \$50,000 to buy office furniture and computer equipment to expand call center operations at the sight center.

"The same technology we use in our call centers is provided to the call center in the sight center, and we support that through our technology team," Brubaker said.

Prior to the updates — which occurred alongside a major renovation effort at the sight center's 60-year-old headquarters — the organization had a smaller and less sophisticated call center that was used primarily to train clients so they could land jobs and become more self-sufficient. Tawil said about 70% of people with disabilities are unemployed. He estimates close to 200 visually impaired people have gotten a job as a result of the five-year partnership. InfoCision itself has hired 35.

"If more companies did what InfoCision did, we could really make a dent in that 70%," Tawil said, "and more people who want to work could find jobs."

If you ask Tawil, he would likely say motivation is the final ingredient in the partnership's success formula. People with visual challenges tend to be highly motivated when it comes to employment opportunities, he said.

That work ethic, combined with InfoCision's technology, often means the sight center can deliver "measurably better results" when compared to agency-based call centers, Tawil said.

After Husted moved incoming calls from the secretary of state's office to the sight center in January 2016, the average hold time fell from more than 10 minutes to 54 seconds, and the center's reps answered 20% more calls than the agency, according to Joshua Eck, a spokesman for the secretary. He said that once the books are closed on 2016, the secretary's office expects to save "several hundred thousand" dollars by contracting the call services.

From InfoCision's perspective, the center's success is a happy outgrowth of its own mission to make the workplace friendlier for people with disabilities.

Engaging the Community and Strengthening Partnerships:

- Camp Manager Lindsay Svarovsky and Therapeutic Recreation Specialist Mollie Evans attend the annual Ohio American Camp Association conference on Ohio State University's campus on Thursday, January 19th. They attend sessions focused on camp leadership, self-disclosure in groups, camp literacy and STEM programming, staff appreciation and engaging the resistant camper. In addition, they heard from keynote speaker Ken Babby, owner of the Akron Rubber Ducks minor league baseball team. Registration for the 2017 camp season at Highbrook Lodge is coming soon!

- Lisa Cellura welcomed the Orlando Dangond from Dealer Tire and Joann Cornell from Kendal at Home in Oberlin to CSC this week for tours and to learn more about the agency. Mr. Dangond is interested in working with CSC on some IT-related projects and Ms. Cornell is facilitating a group event at CSC in March which will bring in all community-based in-home care managers who serve patients in the Oberlin area to learn about the Aging Eyes program and how CSC's programs and services are beneficial to seniors in need.
- Scott Williams-Riseng presents "Orientation, Mobility, and You" at the Brooklyn Branch of the Cuyahoga Public Library on Saturday, February 11th. The program is from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and is part of the Foundation Fighting Blindness Cleveland Chapter Speaker Series. Attendance is free but RSVPs are required. Contact John Naples (x7424) for additional information.

Positively Impacting CSC Clients:

- CSC hosted 20 clients, employees and volunteers for the weekly Latin Dance class, taught by the Viva Dance Studio, on Tuesday, January 24th. Participants reviewed the steps that comprise merengue and bachata dances and learned the basics of salsa. The class has been so popular that four additional classes have been added, running through February 21st! For more information on how to join, contact Mollie Evans (216-791-8118).



Participants practice their merengue moves

- Also this week, the Recreation Department welcomed representatives from the Diabetes Partnership of Cleveland to Workout Wednesday. Participants were led through an intense half hour fitness class by Desmond Kennedy. After the workout, the Diabetes Partnership made smoothies for everyone in the class, providing recipes and step-by-step instructions as they prepared the snack. Be on the lookout for their return in March!
- Students in Bright Futures Preschool enjoyed a field trip to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History on Thursday, January 25th where they learned all about birds. The group visited bird exhibits, listened to the chirping of different types of birds and explored eggs, nests and feathers. They made an owl craft and visited the newest outdoor Wildlife Center & Woods Garden. After a long day, they came back very tired but very happy!



Gabriel checks out the bird exhibit



Payton explores an ostrich egg

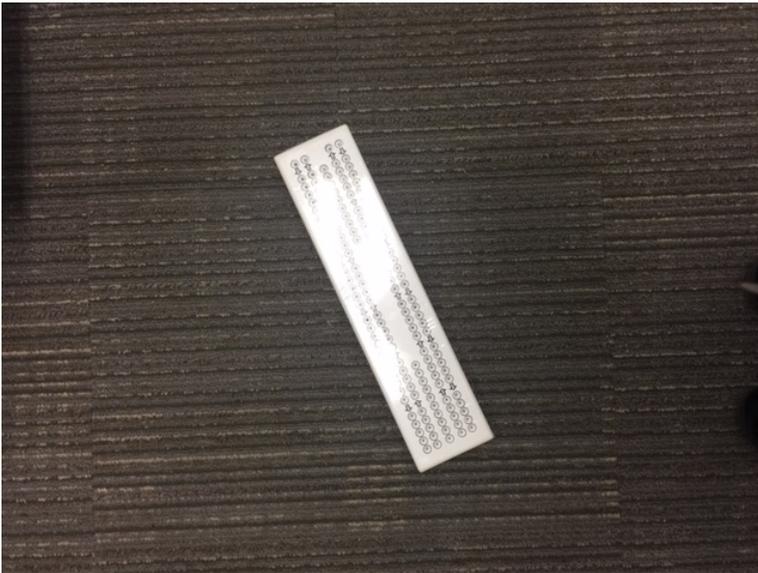


Students learn about the nest

- Erin St. Denis worked with a client who recently received a CCTV through the Empowerment Fund and shared these comments. “Before I got my CCTV, my world was closing in, I couldn’t read anything anymore. Since I got my CCTV, I got new life! I use it every day and tell everyone about how wonderful Cleveland Sight Center is, the wonderful services they have and the wonderful people that work there!” The client is again able to read her Bible, daily word, residence calendar of events, birthday cards and complete word find puzzles.
- A family member of two past clients again contacted CSC about assistive technology options for another family member who lives in Nahariyya Israel and has macular degeneration. Tom Sawyer contacted the family member and provided some suggestions to explore. Here is an excerpt of a recent email from the family member. “I called the place in Tel Aviv yesterday; the man I spoke to said they have a variety of instruments; they are open five days a week from 9 to 5, and there is another employee there who deals specifically with music and note reading problems!!! We will now have to get David’s mother to Tel Aviv to see if they can help her. I am infinitely grateful to you. I also asked him about the dancing dots NuEyes product; he knew of it. I was not clear if they have it, but he was aware of it. We will see. Thank you so very much for your help. She was ecstatic at the thought that she might be able to again read music.”

Eyedeas Shop's Featured Product of the Week:

- An enlarged cribbage board is the newest item at the Eyedeas Shop. It requires a deck of cards to play but you probably already own those at home or can pick them up in the store too. Cribbage, or crib, is a card game traditionally for two players, but commonly played with three, four or more, that involves playing and grouping cards in combinations which gain points. Another great game for those cold weather months. The board measures 16" x 3.5" x 3/4" and price is \$32.00. So try something new and learn a great new game and have fun!



Cribbage board

- A reminder the Eyedeas Shop also has handmade lanyards featuring several designs including Valentine's Day. Lanyards are \$2.00 each through February 14th and proceeds benefit the CYAS department.
- Can't make it to the Eyedeas Shop at CSC? Then check out the product offerings online at www.eyedeashop.com and purchase items from the comfort of wherever you may be!

Coming Soon to CSC:

- Want to know about 2017 cost of living changes for your Social Security benefits? Still feel unsure about SSI, SSDI or how working

may affect your benefits? Come to February's Job Club meeting when CSC welcomes Brandon Smith, Cleveland Public Affairs Specialist for the Social Security Administration. The group will meet on Thursday, February 16th at 10:00 a.m. in CSC's Clyde E. Williams, Jr. Auditorium. For more information, contact Nicole Kahn (x4686).

- A reminder Winter Weekend will take place at Highbrook Lodge the weekend of February 24th – 26th. Cost of the weekend is \$60/camper. Transportation to/from CSC is provided for an additional \$15/camper. To register please call the Camp Department (216-791-8118).
- Save the Dates for these CYAS summer programs. Contact Sylvia Snyder (216-791-8118) for additional information.
 - Bright Futures Preschool Day Camp for children with vision impairment/blindness entering or returning to preschool. Camp begins June 12th and ends July 14th; held at CSC Monday through Thursday from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
 - ABCs Day Camp for children ages 5-8 with vision impairment/blindness. Camp begins July 18th and ends August 5th; held at CSC Monday through Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Items of Note:

- Save the Date....Delta Gamma Cleveland East's Night at the Races returns to CSC's Clyde E. Williams, Jr. Auditorium on Saturday, April 29th. Proceeds will benefit CSC and more information about tickets and sponsorships coming soon.
- A new restaurant will be opening in the coming weeks at the Innova building across East 101st Street. pHuel Café will offer soups, french bread pizzas, sandwiches, noodle and rice bowls, crepes and a variety of drinks including coffees, teas and smoothies.

Did You Know?

- Delaware was the first of the United States, gaining entry into the union on December 7, 1787. Ohio, the 17th state admitted to the Union, gained statehood on March 1, 1803. Alaska (49th state) and Hawaii (50th state) were added in 1959.