



Customer Service Is Number One Through Three Generations *“Guaranteed Satisfaction Since 1886”*

Case Study: Tipton & Hurst Florist



Issues

- ◆ Hardware obsolescence
- ◆ Rising personnel costs
- ◆ Staffing for peak seasons

Solution

- ◆ IP-PBX
- ◆ Central call center integrating 5 locations
- ◆ Delivery Status Notification
- ◆ Queue Chime application

Results

- ◆ \$20K to \$30K annual savings in personnel
- ◆ Staffing flexibility for peak seasons
- ◆ Increased responsiveness to callers on hold
- ◆ Future savings anticipated through reduction in phone line costs

Customer service is priority one at Tipton & Hurst, a third-generation retail florist that rules the Little Rock, AK market. The company motto, “Guaranteed satisfaction since 1886,” is the backbone of their business. And, local citizens recognize the florist’s commitment to customer service, having voted the company Best Florist in the Arkansas Times and Arkansas Democrat-Gazette for over ten consecutive years.

In order to maintain a cutting-edge approach to customer service, this florist enlisted help from Raleigh, N.C.-based Alternate Access®, a solution provider with expertise in providing comprehensive call center solutions to help customers better manage high volume and complex call handling requirements. Alternate Access is an Elite Solution provider of the Vertical TeleVantage™ IP-PBX system which it uses to develop customized solutions for florists nationwide.

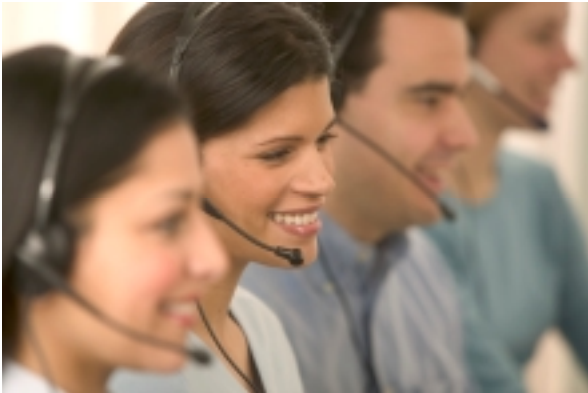
By combining the power of a desktop computer and point of sale databases with the most advanced communications technology available, Alternate Access creates innovative phone system solutions that help increase productivity while decreasing labor and infrastructure costs.

After meeting with Hurst and analyzing his business needs, Alternate Access provided a customized solution for the Tipton & Hurst phone system. “It was not exactly the same way other florists were setting up their phone systems, but it is the way I wanted it done and they were able to do that,” Hurst commented.

Immediate Return on Investment

With five locations serving a three-county delivery area, Tipton & Hurst receives 200 phone orders per day in off-season and orders surge to 1,200 to 1,500 per day during peak seasons, such as Valentine's Day. In the floral industry, a lost call can equal a lost customer.

To raise customer service to the next level, the large florist needed to seamlessly link all five retail locations. Alternate Access provided a cost-effective way to achieve that with TeleVantage.



Hurst explained, "Branch stores can log into the call center, giving the appearance of one central call center. That immediately saved us at least one person, which equaled a cost saving of \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year. So, that immediately paid for the system."

The call center in the main store has a designated staff of four to five people year round, and three other employees are logged in to the system as back-up. Four more phones at the other stores provide additional back-up when needed.

"So, in essence, at any one time we might have 12 people available to take a call," added Hurst. "And we have the caller Queue Chime feature that alerts our staff if more representatives need to log in to queues for waiting callers." A "ding" sound through the over-head paging system indicates an incoming call when all call center agents are busy. The system then announces the number of calls waiting and how many seconds the longest call has been on hold.

When calling Tipton & Hurst, a customer will hear a standard ring within a fraction of a second, and then a 'thank you for calling' greeting. Meanwhile, the Alternate Access call center solution routes the call to the next available agent, integrates the caller information with their RTI point of sale system, and displays a screen-pop of the order entry screen filled in with customer information for the call center agent. Even before taking the call, the agent is prepared with the caller's account information, prior order history, and preferences to more accurately and quickly complete the customer transaction. The goal is to answer calls by a live person within three rings, at least 95% of the time during normal business operations.

Delivery Status Notification™

Alternate Access also provides a specialized Delivery Status Notification™ application using Interactive Voice Response capability.

"It allows us to interact with our computer system through our phone system, which provides better customer service," claimed Hurst. A driver can use a cell phone to easily confirm delivery by punching one or two buttons. The system recognizes the driver's caller id, and thus knows the driver and the route. The driver enters a code to indicate the delivery completion status. The IVR application then automatically updates the Point-of-Sale database and also triggers an automated delivery confirmation to the customer.



All The Bells and Whistles

Even the most tech-savvy TeleVantage users are often surprised by the number of features the program offers. "There are so many bells and whistles and things here and there," said Hurst. "It allows us to do a whole lot of stuff that we couldn't do otherwise."



"Tipton & Hurst is a florist that understands that leveraging technology provides a sustainable competitive advantage. Their management staff is forward thinking, demanding and goes all out to provide their customers a world class buying and customer service experience," states Kelly Lumpkin, CEO of Alternate Access.

When a Tipton & Hurst employee traveled to China on a buying trip and needed to frequently call back to headquarters, Tipton & Hurst was able to quickly configure a VoIP soft-phone on his laptop, integrated with TeleVantage. While on the road, the buyer was able to use his laptop and a headset to place or receive calls, access voicemail, and transfer calls as easily as he does from his office. "He had VoIP. He had his laptop. He could get Internet access, and we could talk back and forth over the Internet. And it cost us nothing," stated Hurst.

Keeping Your Edge

Tipton & Hurst provides its employees with quality equipment so they can provide quality customer service. Widescreen monitors allow call-center agents to easily view TeleVantage and other software via split screens. Voicemail messages can be accessed via e-mail. With customer information literally at their fingertips, orders are managed more efficiently.

"The phone sets are really not important now; it's the telephone applications running on the computer," said Hurst, who hopes to expand cost savings from TeleVantage to include his monthly phone bill. Once good Internet connections are available, Tipton & Hurst will eliminate all phone lines at the branch stores, adding approximately \$3,600 per year in savings.

Being tech-savvy, Hurst liked that Alternate Access' solution offered a software-driven interface instead of a hardware-driven solution, as well as the ability to change and adjust the features in the program. "It offers flexibility. So many phone systems are hardware-driven. Hardware is out of date as soon as you buy it."

Hurst values the Alternate Access support contract and TeleVantage software subscription that provides him software upgrades as they become available. "You just can't afford to have your phone system down," said Hurst. "And it just gets better, smoother – more robust."

For more information on how Alternate Access solutions can benefit florist business, visit www.FloralProfitCenter.com or call 866-831-9277.



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