

CALL CENTER BEGINNINGS

WHO'S CALLING?



PRESENTATION COMPANION DOCUMENT



GT Hall of Fame

Membership in the Engineering Hall of Fame is reserved for individuals holding an engineering degree or honorary degree from Georgia Tech. Those selected have made meritorious engineering or managerial contributions during their careers.



About the Presenter

Aleksander Szlam is a Georgia Tech alumnus who has been a part of the Yellow Jackets community for all of his adult life, recently inducted into the Georgia Tech Engineering Hall of Fame.

Alek and his wife, Halina, founded Melita International, Inc., in 1983. Together, they evolved it into a NASDAQ debt-free global leader. The company's innovative solutions laid the foundation for the call center industry with installations in 45 countries.

His honors include induction into the "Call Center Hall of Fame" by Call Centers Magazine, Inc. Magazine's "Entrepreneur of the Year," "Pioneer in the Industry" by Call Centers Magazine, and a lifetime achievement award by TMC and Customer Interaction Solutions publications. Additionally, Melita International ascended Atlanta's "Fast Tech 50" list of fastest growing, profitable companies.

Alek and Halina, are ardent supporters of ECE scholarship programs, fellowship endowments, and The Hive Makerspace. Alek remains active with the School's advisory board, lecturing, Mentor Jackets, 7apstone and CreateX design programs.

Alek and Halina live in Alpharetta, Georgia, and have two children and four grandchildren.



First Call Center?

According to most sources, the first call center was established in the United Kingdom, specifically at the Birmingham Press and Mail, which installed a Private Automated Business Exchange (PABX) system in the 1960s, allowing them to manage customer calls through a centralized system of agents.

Location: Birmingham, United Kingdom

Company: Birmingham Press and Mail

Technology: Private Automated Business Exchange (PABX)

Era: 1960s



Overview

Why a Companion Document?

This document provides a more in-depth look into the topics covered in “Call Center Beginnings | Who’s Calling?(CallerID).” All of the stories Alek would love to share just can’t fit into the time allotted for his presentation, so he encourages you to read this companion document in hopes that you will be inspired by his life’s work and journey... at a time when you begin your own journey at Georgia Tech.

GA Tech ECE Presentation and Companion document prepared by Jim Owen, former Product Strategist with Melita International Inc.

Presentation Outline

Coming to America | Miracles Do Happen

Alek shares his early years, meeting his wife, Halina and emigrating to America. Hear the amazing story of how he got into Georgia Tech - a story of personal miracles and ultimately the American dream.

Life After Georgia Tech

Alek recounts the few years after graduating from GA Tech, the itch to build on his education in ECE, and the job that started his journey of innovation and invention.

So What is a Call Center? | Call Center Beginnings

Taking a brief pause in his personal story, Alek will provide a snapshot of early call centers, how they were used, early technology, and the challenges businesses faced at that time. You might see artifacts from that time you’ve never seen before!

The Challenge That Started it All

A friend from the past challenges Alek to enhance a device that is not capable of doing the things he asks. As it turns out, this request ignites Alek’s incredible journey in the call center industry.

Unexpected Opportunity

What if you were asked to engineer something that others told you couldn’t be done? Get inspired by Alek’s compassion for helping others.



Early Call Centers

A call center is a centralized department within a company where employees, called call center agents, handle incoming and outgoing phone calls from customers, primarily to provide customer service, answer questions, resolve issues, or conduct sales activities; essentially, it's a dedicated office where a large volume of customer phone calls are managed.

Function

Primarily focused on phone communication with customers, handling inquiries, complaints, and providing support.

Types of calls

Can handle both inbound calls (from customers reaching out) and outbound calls (initiated by the call center agent, like sales calls).

Agent role

Call center agents are responsible for interacting with customers over the phone, addressing their concerns, and providing information.

Technology usage

Often utilize customer relationship management (CRM) software to access customer data and streamline interactions.

Unexpected Results

Sometimes things don't work out as planned. Do you have what it takes to persevere and rebound?

Failure Teaches You Everything

Watch how Alek turns failure into success through innovation and invention.

Incredible Discovery | Who's Calling?

Call it luck, call it chance, or call it fate, this unexpected discovery changes the call center landscape for ever.

The Impact of CallerID on Future Call Centers

Alek describes the impact the discovery of the calling party's phone number had on launching the call center industry. How it changed the way businesses interact with customers, increasing efficiency while enhancing the customer experience.

A Stream of Business Solutions

Melita International launched a steady stream of product solutions over the years, building on their technology while continuing to put the customers first. Alek will share some of the products and how they incrementally added value to call centers around the globe.

Melita International

Not only was Alek and his team at Melita International experts in call center technology, Alek and Halina were shrewd and principled business people who knew how to grow the company. In 1995, a 110,000 ft. corporate headquarters was built in Norcross, Georgia to accommodate the growth.

Achievements

Alek and Halina, along with their Melita International family have a long list of accomplishments, too many to list during the presentation. This document will provide a more complete description of their achievements.

For the Future Entrepreneurs Here Today

Alek, as the founder and former CEO of Melita International, shares key concepts that helped them to succeed as the business grew. You don't want to miss this!

Note: This "companion document" attempts to follow the chronological events, the inventions and the product solutions Alek contributed as they occurred over time, sticking as close as practical to the slides presented during his presentation..

The Polish-Jewish Emigration

In the late 1960s, Polish Jews faced a wave of state-sanctioned oppression, primarily through an "Anti-Zionist" campaign that resulted in widespread discrimination, harassment, job losses, and forced emigration, effectively pushing many Polish Jews to leave the country due to the intense social and political pressure against them.



Between 1961 and 1967, the average rate of Jewish emigration from Poland was 500–900 persons per year. In 1968, a total of 3,900 Jews applied to leave the country. Between January and August 1969, the number of emigrating Jews was almost 7,300, all according to records of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.



Halina Alek 1965 summer camp

Coming to America | Miracles Do Happen

Aleksander (Alek) Szlam has a life story that would make a great Hollywood screen play—part coming to America, part love story, part rags to riches. Intermingled with it all is the tenacity, creativity, and intellect that perfectly illustrates what it means to be a Ramblin' Wreck.

Born in 1951, Szlam grew up in a city called Wroclaw in southwest Poland. His parents were Holocaust survivors. His mother was among the 5% of Romanian Jews who survived the Transnistria Ghetto, one of the largest Jewish ghettos in the world. Their experience impacted the way they viewed the world thereafter.

"My parents' survival was a miracle and they were grateful. They showed this through their deeds. I grew up experiencing the empathy and caring they had for their community and understood the calling," said Alek.

Alek grew up during a time of political strife and economic depression as Soviet Communism moved into Poland after World War II. Despite social unrest and continued anti-Semitism, life went on more or less normally for Alek. He developed a passion for composing music and playing guitar in a local pop group, which left little time for study. He attended school, squeezing by with average grades.

When he was 14 years old, he went to a Jewish summer camp where he met a cheerful, brown-eyed girl named Halina Ajlen. They became good friends and corresponded for a couple of years, even visiting each other's towns. Eventually, they lost touch.

Rising anti-Semitism in 1960s communist Poland eventually culminated in a mass emigration of Polish Jews. The government encouraged Jews to leave while taking away their valuables, diplomas, and even their citizenship. Alek and his entire extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins left Poland for Vienna, Austria in 1969 hoping for a better life. It was in Vienna that they were connected to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid



HIAS is the world's oldest refugee agency. Though the organization was formally incorporated as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in 1903, that founding moment represented a continuation of several predecessor organizations that had worked through the 1880s and 1890s to assist Jews fleeing pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe. While those arriving in the United States at that time were refugees, the world did not yet have a legal concept for people who needed safe refuge outside their homelands.

Emigration from Poland

[After the Anschluss, Vienna, Austria became the focal point of Jewish emigration from Poland.]

After arriving in Vienna, Alek and Halina's families met representatives of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS).

Alek and Halina reunited in Vienna on a train platform. Both of their families were heading to Rome, Italy. At the time, Rome's embassy had the largest Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS).

After several months of vetting and waiting on documentation in Rome, they got word of their immigration clearance to enter the United States. They were headed to America to establish a new home.

Society (HIAS) and given options for a new country to call home. Alek's family decided on the United States. HIAS made all the travel and living arrangements for them as well as locating sponsors from the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta who assisted with their immigration.

Before arriving in the US, the family traveled to Rome, Italy where they waited several months for proper vetting, entry documentation, and visas.

Miracle #1

It was on a train platform in Vienna that Alek and Halina reunited. Halina's family was also going to America and ended up on the same train destined for Rome. Throughout the journey, Halina and Alek reflected on their lives in Poland and wondered about the uncertainties that lay ahead.

In Rome, Alek and Halina became inseparable. They skipped their English classes and explored the city. "We had no money, so we just walked and walked for miles and miles. If we did get some pocket change, we spent it on a cappuccino or maybe went to the movies to see an American western," said Alek.

It was during this time that they began to fall in love.

Miracle #2

In April 1970, both families received immigration documents at the same time and boarded the same flight to New York.

"So we were sitting next to each other on the plane," reminisces Alek, "And we were wondering aloud – 'Wow, America—what will it be like?' We were leaving the gray and black world of Communism forever." In New York, the families parted ways—Halina's family went to Pittsburgh to settle and Alek's family went to Atlanta. But this time they wouldn't lose touch.

Upon their arrival in Atlanta, Alek and his family were immediately connected to members of the Jewish community in Atlanta. One of the family's sponsors was



Clara Eisenstein
1915 - 2016



ECE's undergraduate and graduate programs are ranked Top 5 in the nation, and the School is one of the largest producers of electrical engineers and computer engineers in the country. The rigorous and innovative programs offered allow for a thoroughly enriching educational journey within a supportive community that places a high value on student support. Alek chose the school of ECE because of his interest in electronics while playing in a band with his cousins.

Mrs. Clara Eisenstein, who like his parents, was a Holocaust survivor from Poland. Alek found work as a draftsman and estimator in an industrial engineering firm. Mrs. Eisenstein saw Alek's potential, so she took him to visit Jim Dull, the dean of students at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Miracle #3

"She took me to Tech Tower and she was speaking to Dean Dull for a long time," said Alek. "I couldn't understand any of the conversation and then she started to cry. She turned to me with mascara running down her face, pulled me to the side, and said in Polish, 'You're being admitted on probation—so you better study hard or else!'"

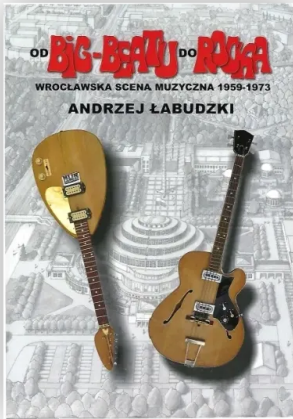
With no high school diploma, no SAT scores, and only the most rudimentary command of English, Alek began his studies in the spring of 1971.

Alek, who says it was a "different time" and acknowledges that it takes far more than a persuasive Jewish lady to get into Georgia Tech these days, appreciates the chance he was given. "Right away I had a connection to Tech that goes beyond most. It was really special," said Alek.

Due to his experience playing in bands and tinkering with equipment like amplifiers and speakers, he decided to major in electrical engineering. He knew he had to do well, so he hit the books learning English while also studying math, physics, circuit design, digital signal processing, and computer programming.

Miracle #4

It was during this time that Alek met John Lucas, a Georgia Tech professor that spoke Polish. John helped Alek and his cousins, who had formed a band, get "gigs" to make extra money. John Lucas returns later in



Alek and his cousins had a band while in Poland, playing rhythm guitar and singing. The band got back together after immigrating to America. John Lucas, a professor at Georgia Tech, would help the band secure 'gigs' to earn extra money. John Lucas also plays a part later in Alek's journey.

Call Center Beginnings

An early 1980s call center was a bustling environment filled with the sounds of ringing phones, clacking keyboards, and the murmur of agents handling customer inquiries. These centers were typically large, open-plan offices with rows of cubicles or long desks where agents worked with landline telephones and paper-based customer records.

Technology and Equipment

Most call center agents used corded landline phones with either rotary dials or early push-button keypads. Headsets were not yet common, so agents often cradled the phone between their ear and shoulder while writing notes.

Alek's story with a challenge that would set him on a trajectory, changing his life. More about that later.

Life After Georgia Tech

Alek finished his bachelor's degree in 11 quarters with high honors and matriculated in March 1974. One quarter before graduating, Alek and Halina were married.

His first job was with an industrial engineering firm that built paper mills. He ended up hating it. As he became proficient in the daily tasks, he realized the work had little to do with the electronics and software concepts he learned at Georgia Tech.

Alek, who calls himself "impatient," went through a series of jobs that he quickly mastered and then almost as quickly got bored with, some lasting only a few months. A job at NCR in Columbia, South Carolina introduced him to applied electronics and microprocessor design, but it wasn't until he landed at Solid State Systems in Marietta, Georgia, in 1978 that he found the right balance between challenging work, creativity and design, and enough time to spend with his growing family (daughter Juliette was born in 1976 and son David was born in 1979).

Back to Alek's story after a brief pause to talk about what a Call Center is and its early challenges...

Call Center Beginnings | Early Challenges

Technology Limitations

Manual Call Routing - Early call centers relied on Private Branch Exchange (PBX) systems, which required manual routing by switchboard operators or basic automatic distribution that lacked sophistication. There was no Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system to help

Instead of computer databases, customer information was often stored in physical files, binders, or Rolodexes. Agents manually wrote down notes on call logs.

Some more advanced call centers had monochrome CRT (cathode ray tube) computer monitors connected to mainframe systems for basic data retrieval.

Calls were often routed through Private Branch Exchange (PBX) systems managed by operators.

Work Environment

Without modern noise-canceling technology, the environment was loud, with constant ringing phones and conversations happening simultaneously.

Agents followed written scripts and were trained to handle calls in a structured manner, with little flexibility.

There were no interactive voice response (IVR) systems, so every call was handled manually by an agent.

Employees were often required to keep calls brief and efficient, as productivity was measured by the number of calls completed.

Culture & Work Conditions

Call centers were highly regulated workplaces with strict schedules and quotas for handling customer inquiries.

Many offices had dedicated break rooms where employees could smoke, drink coffee, and chat between shifts.

Due to the repetitive nature of the job, call centers often experienced high employee turnover.

sort customer inquiries, meaning all calls had to be answered by a live agent, creating long wait times.

Paper-Based Record-Keeping - Customer information, orders, and complaints were stored in filing cabinets, binders, or Rolodexes, making it difficult for agents to quickly retrieve or update customer data. This increased errors, miscommunication, and inconsistencies in customer service.

Limited Computer Technology - Early computer systems were slow, bulky, and expensive, with limited connectivity to other databases. Many call centers lacked real-time access to customer accounts, forcing agents to rely on handwritten notes or internal memos to track issues. If computers were available, they were mainframe-based with green-screen interfaces, requiring agents to enter commands manually.

No Call Monitoring or Analytics - Companies had no real-time data on call durations, hold times, or customer satisfaction. Supervisors relied on manual observation and paper-based tracking to assess agent performance, making quality control inconsistent.

Operational Inefficiencies

High Call Volumes & Long Wait Times - With no automated systems, customers had to wait long periods for an available agent. During peak hours, overwhelmed agents struggled to manage queues, leading to dropped calls and frustrated customers.

Lack of Call Prioritization - Calls were answered on a first-come, first-served basis, meaning urgent issues weren't prioritized over general inquiries. VIP or high-value customers had no priority routing, which impacted loyalty and satisfaction.

Inconsistent Information & Training - Without centralized databases, agents relied on printed scripts and manuals, which could be outdated. Training new

While call centers in the early '80s lacked the advanced technology of today, they laid the foundation for modern customer service operations, relying heavily on manual processes, basic telephony, and human interaction.



Alek is a prominent figure in the development of predictive dialing technology. He was the founder of Melita International, a company that pioneered early predictive dialing solutions.



employees took longer, as senior agents had to guide them manually.

Workforce Management Issues

High Turnover & Employee Burnout - The work was highly repetitive and stressful, with agents handling angry customers, repetitive calls, and strict quotas. Limited career advancement opportunities led to high employee turnover, forcing companies to constantly hire and train new staff.

Limited Breaks & Poor Work Conditions - Many call centers had rigid break schedules, and employees often weren't allowed to leave their desks unless on a scheduled break. Smoking was common indoors, leading to unhealthy work environments in offices without proper ventilation.

Lack of Performance Tracking & Motivation - Companies had few ways to reward or recognize high-performing agents, leading to low morale. Without call monitoring or quality assurance programs, companies struggled to provide constructive feedback.

Customer Experience Issues

Frustration Over Repeated Information - Without digital records, customers often had to repeat their issue multiple times if transferred between departments. Follow-ups were difficult, as previous interactions weren't documented centrally.

Limited Support Hours - Most call centers operated on strict 9-to-5 schedules, meaning customers couldn't get help after business hours or on weekends. This was especially frustrating for international customers dealing with time zone differences.

No Multichannel Support - Customers had only one way to contact support: the phone. There was no email, chat, or self-service options. Long hold times and busy signals often discouraged customers from seeking help.

Alek is credited with advancing predictive dialing in the late 1980s and early 1990s. His company developed the first commercially viable predictive dialers, integrating advanced algorithms to optimize agent efficiency and reduce idle time.

Alek was awarded U.S. Patent No. 4,825,193 (April 25, 1989), titled "Method and Apparatus for Placing Telephone Calls". This patent outlines key methods used in predictive dialing systems, such as dynamically adjusting the dialing rate based on agent availability and call outcomes.

Under Alek's leadership, Melita International became the leader in predictive dialing technology, providing solutions to call centers for telemarketing, collections, and customer service. Melita's systems were the first to incorporate real-time call analysis and dynamic pacing, revolutionizing outbound call operations.



Predictive Dialing, especially combined with Inbound/Outbound call blending, provided the most significant savings and operational efficiencies compared to any other call center telephony innovations during the late 1980s and early 1990s..

Cost and Scalability Issues

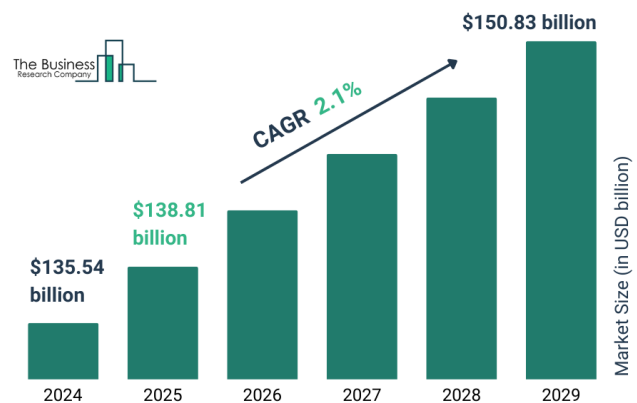
Expensive Infrastructure - Setting up a call center required physical office space, phone lines, switchboards, and large mainframe computers—all of which were costly. Expanding operations meant purchasing more landline phones and hiring more agents, which wasn't always sustainable.

Global Expansion Challenges - Companies with international customers had difficulty managing language barriers and time zones. Without digital communication channels, they had to set up physical call centers in different countries, which was expensive and inefficient.

Conclusion

Despite these challenges, early call centers paved the way for modern customer service operations. The 1980s were a time of trial and error, leading to technological advancements like automated call distribution, predictive dialing, interactive voice response, and customer relationship management systems in the following decades. Call Centers Market continues to grow.

Telephone Call Centers Global Market Report 2025



Early US Patents

A more comprehensive list of patents are provided as an addendum to this document

US Patent 4477698

Apparatus for detecting pick-up at a remote telephone set

An improved combination of a hardware and digital signal processing filter for detecting pick-up of a telephone call, solely through audio information on the telephone line.

US Patent 4540855

Detecting signals within a passband on a telephone line

An improved combination of a hardware and digital signal processing filter for detecting pick-up of a telephone call, solely through audio information on the telephone line.

US Patent 4720853

Ring signal discriminator

An improvement to automatic answering and call forwarding features used in telephone communications which allows a user to remotely activate, modify, and deactivate these features. The improvement describes a transformer-less means for coupling signals to and from the telephone line without compromising the operation of the telephone line.

Now back to Alek's story...

The Challenge That Started It All

In a curious twist of fate, 1979 saw John Lucas, the professor that helped Alek and his cousins find music gigs, introducing an answering machine into Alek's household, with an intriguing request: a modification that would enable outgoing calls. What ensued was nothing short of innovative brilliance. Alek's ingenuity transcended mere modifications, giving rise to an entirely novel system, intelligent telephone call processing solutions, and, the birth of the Call Centers Industry.

Unexpected Opportunity

At Solid State Systems, Alek designed Private Branch Exchange (PBX) telephone systems. One client was Wisconsin Public Service, Power, and Gas. They needed a computerized system that would dispatch maintenance crews around the clock in emergency situations. A new solution would ideally replace the current method in which multiple dispatchers manually dial from a calling tree, with an intelligent, automated system. Solid State Systems rejected the project on the grounds that it couldn't be done, but Alek was determined to figure out how to automate emergency dispatching, so he took it on in his spare time.

Unexpected Results

Once he came up with a design and built the hardware and software, he had the system repeatedly call Halina and their neighbors as a test. Then there was the moment of truth. He installed what he called his "Telecomputer" at the client site. During the first test, the Telecomputer dialed out correctly, but when a person answered, the system did not recognize it,

US Patent 4742538

Current source and off-hook detector

The invention relates to circuitry for providing and monitoring the status of telephones, especially those used in conjunction with advanced telephone answering machines, such as is also disclosed herein. The voltage on the extension line leading to the telephone set (termination device) is monitored to determine whether the telephone set is on-hook or off-hook. Also, a tone decoder monitors DTMF signals on the extension line. The telephone set, when off-hook, is normally connected to the subscriber line. However, if a predetermined digit is keyed into the telephone set, the telephone set will be disconnected from the subscriber telephone line and connected to a selectively actuatable current source. The telephone set, being powered by the current source and being disconnected from the subscriber line, can then be used for the control and monitoring of the telephone answering machine. Also, the current source is protected against the application of the subscriber line voltage.



Early Bell Operating Company CallerID used by customers before telephones had displays

therefore, it was unable to play the emergency voice message.

Failure Teaches You Everything

“Failure teaches you everything. I was furious [that it didn’t work]. I apologized profusely and changed the software so that the system would work manually. On the flight home, it suddenly all became clear. I realized what went wrong. There on the plane, I invented ‘Answer Detection’.”

Once back home, Alek designed and built filter circuitry for each telephone line, wrote real-time signal analysis code, and modified the system’s software to process outgoing phone calls. Ringing patterns were captured, saved, and analyzed and this became known as “*Answer Detection*”.

Incredible Discovery | *Who’s Calling?*

Back in Wisconsin with his new and improved invention, something fortuitous happened. While testing outbound calls, Alek heard the telephone next to him ringing. The line was connected to an oscilloscope and he saw a series of modulated waves. Using his newly installed circuit and firmware, he discovered that the waves represented the phone number of the caller.

“That’s how what is now known as *CallerID* was born,” said Alek. He later developed and patented a process that uses the phone number to look up a person’s information and display it on an agent’s terminal.

The Impact of CallerID on Future Call Centers

Enhanced Customer Experience

CallerID significantly impacted the early call center industry by allowing agents to identify incoming callers before picking up the phone, enabling them to access customer information on their screens instantly, leading

US Patent 4797911

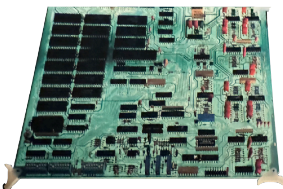
Customer account online servicing system

A method and an apparatus for direct and immediate updating of customer account information, handling inquiries, and initiating communications.

US Patent 5675637

Method for automatically obtaining and presenting data from multiple data sources

A method for automatically obtaining, consolidating and displaying the information from a plurality of information sources. An agent workstation receives the initial information item and then sends this information item to the sources specified, receives additional information items from these sources, and displays or presents the information items received. If the initial information item is not adequate to obtain all of the information items desired then the information items received from one source are also used to obtain other information items from other sources so that all of the desired information items are obtained.



The original Expedialer control board was enhanced over time to serve many of the Melita solutions including PhoneFrame®

to more personalized service, improved call routing strategies, and a more efficient overall customer experience; essentially transforming the call center from a reactive to a proactive environment.

Improved Efficiency

By knowing who was calling before answering, agents could prepare for the conversation, reducing the need to ask repetitive questions and improving call resolution times

Proactive Engagement

Relying on a purely reactive approach is the hallmark of an inbound call center. Blending outbound calling into call center strategies can grow conversion rates. Proactive engagement ensures you reach out to customers while their interest is still fresh, to improve chances of resolving requests or closing a deal.

Analytics and Reporting

Caller ID significantly impacted the early call center industry by enabling detailed call reporting and analytics, allowing businesses to track call volumes, identify caller information, and analyze agent performance with much greater precision than previously possible, leading to improved customer service strategies and operational efficiency.

A Stream of Business Solutions

With a promising new technology and several patents, Alek decided it was time to start his own company. Melita International, which is named after his sister, was founded in 1983. It employed one software engineer, in addition to Alek and Halina. Halina, whose career began in medical research, quickly jumped into multiple roles for the fledgling company including operations, human resources, accounting and price negotiations, system assembly, and facility management.

Impact of Melita's Innovations

Commercial Success of Melita International

By the mid-1990s, Melita International's predictive dialing systems were used in a wide range of industries, including telemarketing, collections, and customer service.

Melita's innovations positioned the company as the dominant player in the call center technology market.

Shaping the Industry

Melita's work set the standard for predictive dialing, influencing competitors and driving innovation in outbound calling technology.

Many modern predictive dialers, including cloud-based systems by companies like Five9, Genesys, and NICE, build on principles introduced by Alek and his Melita team of visionaries.

Efficiency Gains in Call Centers

Predictive dialing *dramatically improved agent utilization, increasing call volumes nearly **400%*** compared to manual dialing.

Melita's systems also enhanced customer satisfaction by reducing the likelihood of abandoned calls and ensuring quicker connections.

The company's first product was a semi-automated outbound and inbound call processing system, initially called the Expedialer and later fully automated and renamed and marketed as Sprintel. Some of Sprintel's first customers were school systems that used it to notify parents when students were absent.

Achievements

As the company and its technologies matured, Alek filed dozens of patents and drove the call center and customer interaction management industry by establishing standards including answer detection, predictive dialing, call blending, screen pops/CallerID, intelligent "on hold" management with call routing, Computer Telephony Integrations (CTI), and more. Today, CallerID is used by hundreds of millions of people around the globe for SMS/texting and a multitude of mobile communications services.

Melita International

Halina continued her leadership in business operations for the company as it grew to 500+ employees. Melita went public on NASDAQ in 1997.

Debt-Free Growth | Strong Team | Strong Partners

Growth and profits were phenomenal with Melita's innovative technologies supporting call centers in 45 different countries. After a brief merger in 2001 and further acquisition in 2003, Melita employees and operations are now housed under Aspect Software, Inc. Today, most of the world's contact centers are built on Melita's technologies, providing employment to millions of people across the globe. These innovations help mobile users interact, assist charities with collecting donations, alert communities during emergencies, and provide superior customer services for big and small companies.

The Melita Legacy

Visionary Status

Aleksander Szlam is widely regarded as a key innovator in call center technology, having transformed the efficiency of outbound calling and set the stage for subsequent advancements in customer interaction platforms.

Enduring Influence

Alek's contributions laid the foundation for modern predictive dialing systems, and his patents remain cornerstones of the technology.

Melita International's Transformation

In September of 1999, Melita International acquired eShare Technologies and expanded into multi-channel communications.

*Follow the links below
for more information*



These days, Alek and Halina are enjoying time spent with their children Juliette and David, and their four grandchildren. They support various charities and philanthropic projects, particularly those promoting education and the abolishment of anti-Semitism. Alek is a board member for his alma mater, Georgia Tech's School of Electrical and Computer Engineering; the Chopin Society of Atlanta; and Conexx, an organization that connects Americans and Israelis via business.

Giving Back

Both Alek and Halina are avid supporters of Georgia Tech scholarship programs, the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, and Temima High School, among others.

Halina and Alek have remained connected to Ga Tech from the day he graduated. They have created scholarship programs for undergraduate and graduate students starting in 1997. Alek joined ECE Advisory Board and remained active for over 15 years. He also joined Yellow Jackets Mentoring program, judging at Capstone innovations.

While Alek is now technically retired, he's still innovating and dabbling in patents. But the bulk of his time is spent mentoring students and entrepreneurs and working with organizations that "focus on shaping a safer, more tolerant, and more peaceful world."

When asked what advice he would give a current Georgia Tech engineering student, he said, "Think 20+ years into the future of what our world may need the most. Document your ideas. Start designing, prototyping, and validating them now at Tech's multidisciplinary makerspace labs. Worry less about obtaining the highest grades. Enjoy campus. Interact and collaborate with other students. Spend some time just relaxing! And keep on smiling...."

Melita First to Market Innovations

Accurate 'Answer Detection'

Accurate 'Answer Detection' on analog telephone lines of a person answering incoming telephone call.

Receiving and identifying incoming telephone calls

Receiving and identifying incoming caller's number and name, became known as 'CallerID'. The very first customer identified by name took place at the American Express support center around 1985/86, where account information was displayed on the agent's terminal screen. Telephones had no displays.

Detection of various telephone call processing conditions

Detection of many telephone call processing conditions (invented algorithm called 'Cadence' - Call Progress Detection) such as: busy rings, no answers, changed or disconnected numbers, answering machines, etc.

Designed and deployed IBM mainframe interface in 1980

Designed and deployed an IBM mainframe to Melita's Compudialer interface for extracting customer and employee data used for emergency outbound calling. Used existing printer interface to send 'mimicked' printer requests for 'fake' printing of specific reports, capturing data, analyzing and extracting telephone numbers for specific service individuals to be dispatched.

Multi-line emergency telephone call notification and dispatching system

Multi-line emergency telephone call notification and dispatching system used by: Utilities, Chemical Plants, Nuclear Plants, Critical Weather systems, Blood Banks, etc.

Multi-line Sprintel™ notification system

Multi-line Sprintel™ notification system used by: schools for tracking absent students, police searching for missing persons, scheduling deliveries, and other types of time critical conditions.

Introduced Sprintel™ Truant call notification solution delivering messages

Introduced Sprintel™ Truant call notification solution to schools, including LA Unified School District in 1984 where, using pre-recorded notification messages, system was capable of "speaking" in 40 different languages using analog audio cassettes. Digital voice recordings were not available and or not cost effective at the time.

Compudialer™ automated outbound

Compudialer™ automated outbound telephone call processing system for solicitations of political constituents.

Intelligent Telephone “Call Pacing”

Intelligent Telephone “Call Pacing” algorithm in support of ‘Predictive Dialing’ - reducing personnel/agent requirements by 67+%.

Published in 1996 ‘Predictive Dialing Fundamentals’

Published in 1996 ‘Predictive Dialing Fundamentals’, was the only book on massive productivity increase technology within the Call Centers/ Customer Interaction Management industries.

Multiline, multi agents automated telephone call

Multiline, multi-agents automated telephone call processing system named PhoneFrame™ supporting a variety of desktop terminal types (black/green screens), interfaced with IBM proprietary controllers, IBM mainframes, IBM minicomputer, and other computing platforms.

Introduced personal computers (PCs) as intelligent desktop terminals

Introduced personal computers (PCs) as intelligent desktop terminals in 1987 even at a super steep cost. Proficiency, quality of interactions, accuracy, customer satisfaction, and agent skills increased exponentially, erasing high costs by delivering enormous profits.

Introduced PC based desktops with direct interfaces

Introduced PC-based desktops with direct interfaces to IBM proprietary computing networks transforming ‘dumb’ terminals into intelligent desktops with guidance while extracting key customer information in the background, presenting such in an interactive

colorful way - dramatically reducing agent's typing and the overall customer handling time.

Introduced intelligent, guided interactive scripting

Introduced intelligent, guided interactive scripting at PC desktops based on customer real-time conversations, historical data, and other information previously saved in the customer database(s).

Guiding agents while on call with customers

Guiding agents while on a call with customers using dynamic color indicators displaying real-time averages of typing time, talk time, and wrap-up time while providing alerts and suggestions for completing existing calls - delivering a high level of customer satisfaction.

Introduced first ever Computer Telephony Interface (CTI)

Introduced first ever Computer Telephony Interface (CTI) between Melita's Conversations® predictive dialer and Marietta GA-based Solid State Systems Private Branch Exchange (PBX SR224) phone system. PBX was used for switching/connecting agents to customers while Melita's software analyzed and processed outgoing and incoming phone calls using its proprietary designs and algorithms.

Introduced first ever dynamic Inbound/Outbound 'Call Blending'

Introduced first ever dynamic Inbound/Outbound 'Call Blending' process where agents are intelligently switched between servicing outgoing calls to servicing incoming calls (and vice versa) based on call volume demands and other user set parameters.

Introduced the very first, secure and intelligent Inbound 'Call Routing'

Introduced the very first, secure and intelligent Inbound 'Call Routing' based on caller's telephone number (later named CallerID) which is used to extract: customer's preferred language, past interactions with specific agent(s), previously unresolved issue(s) from database(s) and or process various customer's information requests via touch-tone entries. Majority of callers no longer need to identify themselves if their phone number and related data is saved.

Introduced ‘Predictive Hold’ announcements

Introduced ‘Predictive Hold’ announcements providing incoming callers with choices: holding for an agent for announced ‘predicted time’, receiving a call back in ‘predicted time’, receiving a call back at the same or alternate number and or specific day and time.

Introduced ‘Cancel Dial’ algorithm

Introduced ‘Cancel Dial’ algorithm ensuring outgoing calls when answered would always have a ‘live’ agent ready to speak without delays (many ‘copycat’ solutions fail to address it).

Introduced seamlessly integrated ‘Predictive Inbound/Outbound Call Blending

Introduced seamlessly integrated ‘Predictive Inbound/Outbound Call Blending’ solutions using Computer Telephony Interfaces (CTIs) with a variety of PBX telephone systems (as switching speeds got under 200ms) utilizing their telephony hardware and eliminating Melita’s proprietary switching platform.

Introduced “Live Agent” voice support

Introduced “Live Agent” voice support for users browsing Internet pages as the algorithm detected confusion, mistakes, pausing, delays, etc. Melita software offered a ‘pop-up’ icon letting consumers connect and speak with call center agents in real-time.

Invented, patented yet to be introduced to markets

Cloud Based, fully interactive, predictive call blending solution for integrating multiple types of call processing systems to interoperate as a ‘Single Virtual Orbit™’. Such implementation allows online agents anywhere in the world to support customers from across the globe, based on agents’: individual skills (frequently validated via online interactive courses and tests), preferred language(s), individual schedules and availability, desire to work for multitude of businesses...

US Patents Awarded to Aleksander Szlam

The complete text for all patents are available on the ppubs.uspto.gov website.

US-8402070

Training, certifying, assigning and collaborating agents among multiple users

Published 2013-03-19

US-7324528

Remote access, emulation, and control of office equipment

Published 2008-01-29

US-7080321

Dynamic help option for internet customers

Published 2006-07-18

US-6925607

Method for consolidation of multiple data sources

Published 2005-08-02

US-6868395

Business transactions using the internet

Published 2005-03-15

US-6362838

Method for consolidation of multiple data sources

Published 2002-03-26

US-6359892

Remote access, emulation, and control of office equipment, devices and services

Published 2002-03-19

US-6314089

Creating and using an adaptable multiple-contact transaction object

Published 2001-11-06

US-RE36416-E

Method and apparatus for dynamic and interdependent processing of inbound calls and outbound calls

Published 1999-11-30

US-5963635

Method and apparatus for providing result-oriented customer service

Published 1999-10-05

US-5828731

Method and apparatus for non-offensive termination of an outbound call and for detection of an answer of an outbound call by an answering machine

Published 1998-10-27

US-5675637

Method for automatically obtaining and presenting data from multiple data sources

Published 1997-10-07

US-5594791

Method and apparatus for providing result-oriented customer service

Published 1997-01-14

US-5581602

Non-offensive termination of a call detection of an answering machine

Published 1996-12-03

US-5511112

Automated voice system for improving agent efficiency and improving service to parties on hold

Published 1996-04-23

US-5309505

Automated voice system for improving agent efficiency and improving service to parties on hold

Published 1994-05-03

US-5214688

Method and apparatus for dynamic and interdependent processing of inbound calls and outbound calls

Published 1993-05-25

US-5070525

Method for avoiding call blocking.

Published 1991-12-03

US-4894857

Method and apparatus for customer account servicing

Published 1990-01-16

US-4797911

Customer account online servicing system

Published 1989-01-10

US-4782510

Telephone answering machine with digital storage of announcements and messages

Published 1988-11-01

US-4742539

Telephone loop current modulator

Published 1988-05-03

US-4742538

Current source and off-hook detector

Published 1988-05-03

US-4720853

Ring signal discriminator

Published 1988-01-19

US-4677663

Telephone answering and call forwarding improvement

Published 1987-06-30

US-4540855

Detecting signals within a passband on a telephone line

Published 1985-09-10

US-4477698

Apparatus for detecting pick-up at a remote telephone set

Published 1984-10-16

US-4392129

Multiplexed liquid crystal display

Published 1983-07-05

US-4286118

Data distribution system for private automatic branch exchange

Published 1981-08-25

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