



CONTACT CENTERS

Mississippi is Your Best Call

As technology evolves and customer expectations change, the customer management industry continues to grow and expand. Contact centers, or customer interaction centers, serve as the central point through which all customer contacts are managed. The state of Mississippi understands the unique needs of these enterprises. In fact, it is home not only to a number of customer contact centers, but also to the National Association of Call Centers based in Hattiesburg. Companies like BellSouth, SkyTel, Waste Management and Comcast are among the more than 25 call centers already located in Mississippi.

An Industry Overview

Customer contact centers located in Mississippi have ready access to the Hattiesburg-based **National Association of Call Centers**, which serves as a repository of valuable information and a voice for the industry.

A recent study revealed that customer management spending is expected to continue to increase as companies seek to provide their customers with the best service possible. Whether a center provides business-to-business or business-to-consumer support, Mississippi is prepared to meet your expanding contact center needs.

Fast Fact: Mississippi has more than 340,000 miles of fiber optics in place. The ratio of mileage to population is among the highest in the nation.

A Qualified Workforce

A well-qualified and affordable workforce is an essential element to operating a successful customer contact center.

Mississippi's labor force of 1.3 million workers is very reliable, with a low three percent absenteeism rate and only a five percent turnover rate. This reliability and stability help ensure the success of office sector operations located in the state. In addition, labor costs in Mississippi are among the lowest in the nation, which helps hold down the overall cost of doing business in the state.

With eight public universities, 13 private colleges and universities, and 15 community colleges, Mississippi graduates nearly 20,000 students each year. These graduates are well-trained to meet the needs of today's technology-based customer contact centers. In addition, the **Call Center Research Laboratory** at the University of Southern Mississippi is a research facility dedicated to working with businesses in the call center industry. The laboratory's work focuses on using research-based scientific discovery, technology development and education to produce value-added products and services to assist call centers. There is no other research facility of this kind in the United States.





An Advanced Infrastructure Network

Mississippi demonstrated its commitment to improving telecommunications infrastructure with the passage of the **Mississippi Broadband Technology Development Act** in 2003. This act provided incentives to telecommunications businesses to upgrade the state's telecom infrastructure. Since its passage, BellSouth has made significant improvements to create a far-reaching and sophisticated network throughout the state.

This telecom incentive program has encouraged development of the state's technology infrastructure in all parts of the state, but particularly in rural areas. For example, BellSouth has deployed DSL in 87 offices that had not previously been scheduled for DSL service.

BellSouth's fiber network in Mississippi has grown to include 203 central office switches with more than 341,000 miles of fiber in fiber optic cables and more than 8,300 route miles of fiber. DSL technology is provided in 99 percent of BellSouth's central offices and in 500 remote sites throughout the state. The company's self-healing interoffice network now serves in excess of one million lines, with all central offices in the state being 100 percent SONET capable.

A Supportive Business Climate

Mississippi offers a strong, supportive business climate, where the cost of doing business is low and many other tools are available to help your contact center compete in today's

economy. Locations within Mississippi can offer companies substantial savings compared with many other parts of the U.S.

As previously mentioned, Mississippi provides customer contact centers with tax credits and other incentives under the **Mississippi Broadband Technology Development Act**. This act offers larger economic incentives to companies that deploy broadband in sparsely populated areas and a smaller, but still significant, incentive for deploying broadband in urban areas in the state. Specifically, it provides reimbursement of equipment costs for providing broadband services through an income tax credit. There are also income tax credits available for job creation and retraining of employees.

The **Mississippi Advantage Jobs Incentive Program** provides quarterly incentive payments based on a percentage of withholding to qualifying companies for up to 10 years, which provides an important cash benefit to new companies locating in the state. Some local property tax and certain sales and use tax exemptions may also be available under the act.

The **Tort Reform Act of 2004** is another important element of the business climate in Mississippi. This act ensures fairness in the courtroom for Mississippi businesses, with provisions that address joinder and venue; innocent seller protection; and non-economic damages caps.

In addition, the state offers a variety of training programs through the **community/junior college system** to assist companies in preparing workers for new job opportunities within the customer contact industry.

Companies seeking new sites for contact centers will find an abundance of land available, including locations in technology parks. Many communities have sites available that are controlled by local government or economic development organizations, which allows for fast and easy real estate purchases.

The **National Association of Call Centers**, located in Hattiesburg, is another invaluable resource to contact centers located in Mississippi. This trade organization provides valuable information, research and products, which allow its members to make effective and well-informed business decisions.

Your best call is in Mississippi. To learn more, call the Mississippi Development Authority at 1.800.360.3323 or visit our website at www.mississippi.org.