Quality, Integrity, Reliability and Family

An Interview with Yoni Epstein, Executive Chairman, itelbpo

EDITORS' NOTE *Yoni Epstein is a leading authority on outsourcing in the Caribbean. He is also the former President of the Business Process Industry Association of Jamaica (BPIAJ). He was recently named Chairman of CarRental8.com, a firm based in Tampa, Florida that provides a rental car booking service that manages over 200,000 bookings per year and has supply agreements with all of the major car rental brands globally. Epstein is the Chairman of Alpha Angels, an angel investment group made up of entrepreneurs in Montego Bay, Jamaica, who invest in startups. He has over 18 years of professional experience in the contact center industry and was recently named 2016 Entrepreneur of the Year by Nearshore Americas. Epstein was also ranked one of the 50 most influential executives in Nearshore Outsourcing in Latin America and the Caribbean.*

Yoni Epstein

COMPANY BRIEF *Itelbpo (itelbpo.com) provides contact center management and business process outsourcing services. Founded in 2012 in Montego Bay, Jamaica, itelbpo is now a global business and the region's largest home-grown BPO. With five facilities in four onshore and ultra-nearshore locations and a robust network of U.S.-based work-from-home experts, itelbpo has an optimized workforce that delivers customized solutions for clients across numerous industries including travel and tourism, healthcare, financial services, insurance, telecoms, utilities, automobile, online retail and lead generation. Itelbpo has been awarded Employer of the Year in 2013-2015 by the Montego Bay Free Zone Company.*

Will you discuss the history and heritage of itelbpo and how the business has evolved?

I ran contact centers for resorts for many years. In 2012, I left the company I had been working for after having grown a significant contact center for them in Jamaica between 2004 and 2012.

After seeing how that contact center grew in Jamaica, I felt that when I was ready to step out on my own, we could certainly create other contact centers here that would surpass the expectations of our customers.

In 2012, we started the business with seven employees and have grown significantly over the past six years. We now have over 1,500 employees working for us. The company is headquartered in Montego Bay, Jamaica, and is backed by Jamaicans who have invested in other companies and areas within the near shore that continue to support our customers.

We now have two large facilities in Kingston and in Montego Bay, Jamaica, as well as agents working for us from home coast to coast in the United States. We also have facilities in Freeport, Grand Bahamas and in Mexico.

When you started itelbpo, was the industry already well established in Jamaica?

The industry was already on its feet, so I would not consider myself a pioneer. There were 12,500 employees in the industry at that time.

We took a chance on this industry and on Jamaica but believed in the abilities we felt our people had. Today, the business landscape is even more competitive and the industry now has more than 30,000 employees. However, our competition is not as much on the business front as it is on the human capital front.

We started the business with a strong family-related culture and we have expanded the business under that same culture. We have a mission and vision that are about quality, integrity, reliability and family.

What industries does itelbpo focus on and how large is the market?

The market is huge and we focus on several different industries. We are relatively large in the travel and tourism industries, where we do work with companies on reservations for hotels, cars, and airlines. We also work with the U.S. property and casualty insurance business and the automotive industry from a customer care perspective. In the healthcare industry, we are helping hospitals and treatment centers with their billing and their receivables management. Additionally, we work with financial services companies by providing customer service relating to loans to individuals. We also do some work within the utilities industry for oil companies and telecommunications companies.

What do you see as the strengths of the Jamaican workforce?

In Jamaica, there is a cultural affinity to North America. There are three million Jamaicans that live in Jamaica and another three million that live across America, the U.K., and Europe. This gives us access to the American culture and to its customers, which helps make the job easier.

When companies are looking to outsource, they often look to India, the Philippines, or other similar areas. However, in those regions, they have to teach their workers about the culture and how to build rapport.

Since Jamaicans already know this, we don't have to spend time teaching these things. We can concentrate on teaching just the specific customer information, systems and product knowledge. This significantly cuts down on the time it takes to get an agent up to speed and also cuts down on the costs for the company.

How critical is innovation for itelbpo and where is innovation taking place for the company?

Outside of human capital, this business is driven by technology, so we need to be innovative and constantly looking at next generation technology. As a business, we have taken the initiative and are already doing many things to be ready for the future of our business.

When we started the business, we developed an in-house client that manages our HR, payroll, and CRMs for our customers, as well as the ACDs for our PBXs. The next generation of innovation will be taking all of that and putting it on the web.

Since we have agents working both on premise and at home, we need to be very dynamic in how we deliver services to customers. We're also developing our own virtual desktop to replace the third-party solutions we had been using to support our employees who work from home.

We're exploring machine learning capabilities related to quality assurance. We have finalized a proof of concept for a process for scoring 100 percent of our phone calls as opposed to the 2 percent we can score manually today.

We are also working on chat bots enhancements that will allow us to speak to more customers on the website and identify more quality leads to push to the agents so they can close sales and increase conversions.

While robots aren't taking over the business, they are making things more efficient for the agents.

These are some of the technologies we're embedding into our business and we continue to have teams looking for what to add to our next generation. ●