

21st Century Communication with the Human Touch

By ComXo

Every new wave of technological development brings another change to the way we work. From the introduction of large-scale machinery during the industrial revolution to today's clouds, apps and virtual offices, business practices are ever-evolving.

This is especially evident in communications and, specifically, the role that telephony and switchboards play in large corporates. In the early days, calls were routed through local exchanges and were manually connected by 'telephone girls'. They were eloquent, well spoken and trained to answer calls politely and efficiently. In 1954, a booklet was given out to every switchboard operator which stated that "the aim and purpose of the telephone service is not only to serve, but to please the customers"; the role of personal service was born.

"The modern switchboard operator is engaged with the objectives of the business and, above all embodies the culture through their role as the voice of the brand."

The law firm telephonist of the 20th century not only answered the phone, she was also the gatekeeper to the fee earners and senior personnel and enabled them to focus on the job in hand. She assisted clients with their navigation to the firm, made taxi reservations, booked meeting rooms, liaised with hospitality to ensure



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that partner lunches were catered for and took care of administrative tasks on behalf of the whole staff. She was usually seated in the entrance foyer and her role was all-encompassing.

As firms grew and technology advanced, many of these tasks became automated. The widespread adoption of direct dials, voicemail and IVR in the 1980s and '90s

meant that callers could get through to the person they needed without having to go via a switchboard. The role of the switchboard operator therefore, although still in place, got reduced to simple telephone answering. The skill set and location of the team was also altered and, in many firms, got located to a small backroom. The switchboard lost its glamour.