Speech-Enabled Virtual Call Centre a First for Australian Tourism Industry

In a first for the Australian Tourism industry, SpeechWorks International, Inc. (Nasdaq: SPWX) and Western Australian partner, Telads, in conjunction with the Western Australian Tourism Commission (WATC), today launched a speech-enabled Virtual Call Centre providing over-the-phone tourist information on more than 4,500 destinations in Western Australia. Callers in Australia can reach the Virtual Call Centre by dialling 1300 361 351. Callers outside Australia should dial + 61 893471944.The new service, which is designed provide information on Western Australias towns, regions and individual tourism attractions, is powered by state of the art, automated speech recognition technology developed by SpeechWorks International, a global leader in network-based speech technologies and solutions.In launching the initiative, WA Tourism Minister, The Hon. Clive Brown, said the Virtual Call Centre will help increase visitation to Western Australia by providing customer service which is unparalleled in Australias tourism industry.Latest figures show that 6. 8 million visitors spent more than $4.1 billion in Western Australia during 1999-2000, with most visitors originating from the United Kingdom, Germany, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and from within Australia. (Estimates based on Bureau of Tourism Research figures).The Virtual Call Centre will help WA to consistently deliver world-class customer service. By connecting callers to local experts we will be able to provide top class information and visitor servicing, Mr. Brown said.Callers to the service receive an automated voice prompt asking them to state their destination of interest and are then automatically switched through to a local expert at a Visitor Centre in Western Australia. The computer advises the local operator of the nature of the enquiry so that local staff can prepare for the call. The beauty of this system is that callers wont have to repeat their enquiry several times to different operators, acting Chief Executive Officer of the WA Tourism Commission, Richard Muirhead, said.For example, a caller can dial the Virtual Call Centre and ask for Dog Rock. The system then responds with the message: Great choice, Im connecting you through to the Albany Visitor Centre, and automatically transfers the call. At the other end, the visitor centre staff receives the message Network call for Dog Rock, so the staff can answer the call with a suitable greeting such as: Good morning, how can I help you with your enquiry for Dog Rock? Once the caller is routed to the local visitor centre, the local staff are able to provide details including local weather conditions and the best fishing spots information that would not be readily available to a central visitors centre hundreds of kilometres away in Perth.Virtual Call Centre TechnologyThe virtual call centre is operated by specialist call centre outsourcer, Telads of Perth, which developed the application in conjunction with computer telephony integrator, Telemanagement Australia, using SpeechWorks natural language speech recognition software.Peter Chidiac, Australia and New Zealand Country Manager for SpeechWorks International, said the speech-enabled virtual call centre attendant understands 4,600 regional destinations in the computers vocabulary. The system is able to handle literally thousands more choices than a touch-tone interactive voice response (IVR) system and is faster than a traditional call centre during peak periods.Previously the Perth Visitor Centre would be inundated trying to handle calls asking about destinations from Broome to Albany and beyond, Telads General Manager, Alan Sharpe said. Instead of building a bigger call centre and handling more and more traffic at a central location, the virtual call centre now distributes the calls to experts at local visitor centres without leaving callers waiting in a telephone queue or encountering several IVR prompts.Sharpe said the virtual call centre also offered an attractive return on investment - effectively minimising the governments investment in call centre infrastructure while better utilising the knowledge of local tourism staff at popular tourist destinations. The result is an informative and friendly caller experience that also reduces call centre and telephony charges.About SpeechWorks InternationalThrough the power of SpeechWorks technologies, the human voice is all a caller needs to access instant information and conduct transactions from any landline or wireless phone. Around the world, customer service innovators such as Credit Union Australia, MasterLink Securities, TD Waterhouse and United Airlines are realizing returns on SpeechWorks applications that consistently delight and serve customers 24 hours a day. With over 100 partners, SpeechWorks delivers natural language speech recognition and text-to-speech (TTS) to leading corporations, telecommunications providers and government organisations worldwide. For a description of our products, services and unique customer programs such as the SpeechWorks Here Guarantee, call 617.428.4444 or visit orks.com.SpeechWorks is headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts and has offices in Asia, Australia and around the world. For additional information, contact Kristi Fitzpatrick at (+65) 337-1234. SpeechWorks and SpeechWorks Here are trademarks or registered trademarks of SpeechWorks International, Inc. in the United States and other countries. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.About TeladsTelads Communications is one of Australia's largest 190 Infocall Service Providers, with offices in all states and platforms in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. Telads was the Service Provider selected by Telstra to participate in a joint pilot on Infocall before its introduction in Australia. Telads Bureau Services provide solutions to High Volume call handling, information distribution and collection. It is the only Service Bureau in Australia offering true third party billing to the telephone account.Through Interactive Voice Response (IVR) equipment interconnected to Infocall 190, 1800, 13, 1300 and standard in-dial telephone numbers, Telads are geared to handle more than 400 simultaneous telephone calls. Thats like having 400 operators taking your calls; be they one or all of the following operations:LIVE ANSWER RECORDED INFORMATION FAX ON DEMAND FAX BACK FAX RECEIVE INFOCALL PLUS DATA ACCESS - PC TO PC COLLECTION OF CALLER INFORMATION INBOUND TELEMARKETINGEASYCHARGEFurther information on speech recognition is available by phoning Telads on (08) 9221 8000 or visiting Telemanagement Australias website at: www.Teleman.com.au