

A Dozen New Call Centers Flock to Wasatch Front

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The Insurance Information Institute may be based in New York City, but those who call its help line get their insurance questions answered by representatives in Salt Lake City.

The institute's Salt Lake City call center, managed by **Target TeleServices**, is one of more than a dozen new customer-service centers that have opened along the Wasatch Front this year.

Despite Utah's low unemployment rate -- which can make it difficult to recruit and retain workers the state continues to be one of the most popular sites in the nation for call centers, especially a new breed that offers better-paying and more challenging work.

The number of inquiries from companies interested in locating call centers in Utah remains high, said Chris Roybal of The Economic Development Corp. of Utah, which recruits new employers to Utah. Companies are attracted by the state's young work force and its reputation as a place where finding multilingual workers is easier.

Utah already is home to call centers operated by companies such as Convergys, Fidelity Investments, Discover Card, J.C. Penney, AT&T, Packard Bell and First Security Bank, which combined employ about 10,000 people. Dozens of smaller call centers collectively employ thousands more.

Many call centers still pay starting wages of \$8 to \$10 an hour, but pay in general is rising as companies compete for workers.

Benefits also are proliferating. In some centers, workers are offered childcare, subsidized meals and transportation allowances.

The level of work performed is changing as well.

Target TeleServices, for example, helps companies coordinate its Internet and telephone customer-service inquiries. Customers may click on an icon on a company's Web page and chat online with a customer-service operator.

"We weren't interested in an old-fashioned call center," said Jeanne Salvatore of the Insurance Information Institute, a **Target TeleServices** client.

At Internet auctioneer eBay Inc.'s new Draper call center, operators answer questions about selling and buying items online using e-mail. The company's Web site lists more than 1.8 million items that can be purchased through a bidding process that operates around the clock.

Lynn Hardin, eBay director of customer support, said the San Jose based company has received more than 5,000 calls from people interested in jobs at the Draper center, which start at \$11.33. eBay, which opened the center in June, employs 200 people and plans to grow to 575 by the end of next year.

