

IRSTODAY

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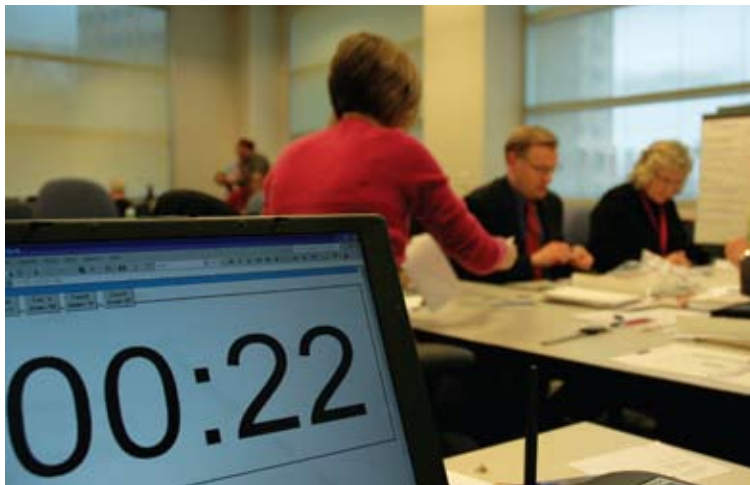
IRS “delivers” something to sink your teeth into

By Jaqi Ross, C&L

As a timer on the wall begins counting down, the room explodes in a sudden flurry of activity. Everyone from the baker to the billing coordinator has 20 minutes to deliver as many pizzas as they can. But since when do IRS employees hustle to deliver pizzas?

Order up

Commissioner Doug Shulman called in a “special order” in July 2008 when he asked Jodi Patterson to take a look at the way IRS communicates with taxpayers. His idea to improve the communication process struck a chord with Jodi, who created the Taxpayer Communications Taskgroup (TACT) to improve both the communication process and the products we send to taxpayers.



Workers scramble to process pizza orders as the clock counts down.



Charlotte Kieliszek rushes to deliver pizza orders at the TACT simulation.

“We hear from employees, practitioners and taxpayers all the time with ideas for improving our notices and other products,” Jodi commented between bites of—what else?—pizza during a break in the group’s recent event.

“I’m excited that the commissioner asked us to make this happen,” she said.

One bite at a time

Taking on every piece of taxpayer communications at once could be intimidating, but the group has found that taking things one bite at a time is the key to success. Early on, TACT divided into teams that focus members’ efforts and will deliver meaningful results. There is one key skill that everyone’s expected to master, and that’s where the pizza comes in.

At first glance, a pizza joint doesn’t seem to have a lot in common with the IRS. Take a second look, though, and you’ll notice some similarities. In both businesses, there’s a lot going on behind the scenes. Whether the final product is a piping hot and tasty pizza or a well-written and error-free tax notice, it takes a lot of coordination to get it out the door. TACT members simulated a pizza business to hone the skills they’ll use to improve the way IRS creates and delivers tax communications.

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OUR MISSION

What we do in our own way, every day

Provide America's taxpayers top quality service by helping them understand and meet their tax responsibilities and by applying the tax law with integrity and fairness to all.



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Partners in primetime: SB/SE and SBTV

By Barbara Varma, SB/SE

SB/SE executives and program managers have been spotted on the Internet, making their flash video debuts *not* on "TMZ" (thank goodness) but on "SBTV.com," a Web-based television site that reaches nearly 100,000 viewers daily.

In accordance with the IRS/SBTV partnership, SB/SE provides the online Small Business Television network with tax tips, story ideas and videos of IRS spokespersons spreading the good words about small business taxes. SBTV features a daily newscast and other resources for businesses, in addition to bringing the IRS presenters and their taped messages to a large virtual audience.

"We've delivered footage for several news stories featuring our executives and other IRS employees," said Jean Wetzler, communications analyst and liaison to SBTV. "SBTV pulls sound bites from our tape for their daily news stories, and we feature the full interviews on IRS.gov—search 'small business video' to find the page." IRS also has a partner page on SBTV's site under 'Organizations' with links to more video and tax-related information.

Wetzler says that while small businesses have many options to gain the resources they need to effectively run their shops, SBTV.com provides a new and efficient way for the IRS to reach a vast expanse of customers in the small biz community. Because their service is supported by sales sponsors, there is no cost to IRS beyond the in-house fees for producing the videos.

"The video topics support our key messages and other hot-ticket items relevant to our strategic plan," Wetzler says. "It's been working well but there's always room for new ideas."

SB/SE Communications is the IRS's group-of-contact for SBTV but if other operating divisions have video to broadcast to a large small-business audience, they can contact Communications for guidance. The program's run of topics are influenced by timeliness and interest, but the programming is relatively generic, providing an evergreen array of subject matter that can be used for several newscasts over time.

On a recent SBTV video, Communications, Liaison and Disclosure Director Rob Wilkerson welcomed online viewers to the SBTV/IRS partner page and encouraged them to use the Small Business Television Network to their businesses' benefit.

Considering SBTV's ability to broadcast IRS messages instantly to millions of taxpayers, Wetzler says, "In many ways, the benefit is ours."

Intranet links: <http://mysbse.web.irs.gov/CLD/Communications/Products/SBTV/7063.aspx>
<http://www.sbtv.com/>



Coming to a DVD near you...in your language

By Digna Davila, W&I

Imagine being a recent immigrant to this country. Your English is limited. You might know that you have tax responsibilities but are unsure where to begin. Now imagine that you get your hands on a DVD that explains the tax process to you and it's in your language.

That's exactly what IRS has provided to our LEP (Limited English Proficient) population who speak Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Russian. The Multilingual Initiative Strategy Office developed these DVDs to highlight the roles and responsibilities of new filers, the benefits of paying taxes and the consequences of non-compliance.

How does IRS create such a product?

Choosing the languages

W&I Research uses U.S. Census data to determine the top LEP languages and where the LEP population is located. They use other external demographic data to identify the number and proportion of individuals who indicated that they speak English not well or not at all. Other characteristic data, such as socioeconomic status, were employed to draw a more complete picture of the LEP taxpayer.

Hiring the talent

Actors were used for each of the DVDs. The best actors were chosen from a public audition for the various roles that needed to be played. The contractor made a selection of the best actors from this audition and the list was given to

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Simulate to stimulate

In the real world, “lean” and “pizza” don’t often appear in the same sentence. With the help of private firm Citizant, leaders in Lean Six Sigma (LSS), however, it makes perfect sense.

“It’s all about looking at a process from the customer’s point of view, and taking out all the different kinds of waste so we get more value with less work,” explains Robyn McGrath, an LSS expert with Citizant. She used a simulated pizza business to show TACT how easy it can be to use Lean Six Sigma to improve any process. Team members were given instructions about how to perform their jobs in the pizza business—“bakers” made “pizzas” with metal washers, and quality assurance staff measured the thickness of the “pies” to evaluate quality, while the rest of the workers took care of pricing, delivery and customer satisfaction. After a quick explanation, Robyn started a timer and challenged the team to produce as many pizzas as they could in twenty minutes.

Denise Fayne, TACT project advisor, laughs as she recalls, “The first time through, we couldn’t change anything. It was crazy!” Team members “inherited” their roles, reminding some of the way employees inherit procedures and systems that have sometimes gone unchecked for years. As the seconds ticked away, everyone scrambled to get his or her work done. When it was all over, the results were dismal. Frazzled pizza employees: 21. Fresh, tasty pizza orders delivered on time: 0 out of 80. Everyone saw plenty of room for improvement.

The sky’s the limit

Once briefed on the basics of Lean Six Sigma, the team began looking for ways to remove busy work and streamline handoffs. After only two more timed trials, the chaos of the first run-through was a distant memory. Team members sat side by side at a single table, easily processing pizza orders as a streamlined cross-functional team. Floor managers shouted out orders—just like in a real restaurant—opening up the lines of communication across the whole team. Entire steps in the process had been removed to speed things along, and the work flow had been organized so that no employee was over- or under-worked. The final results: 21 highly engaged and productive workers, 72 out of 80 pizza orders delivered on time, one streamlined process and one inspired TACT.

Fists pumped the air as the final results were announced—the team improved the process dramatically, delivering high quality pizzas in two minutes (compared with 14 minutes in the first attempt). Better yet, they also reduced errors in other parts of the business, like pricing and delivery.

“Our job is to improve the notices and other communications we send to taxpayers, but it’s so much more than that,” TACT member Tammy Cleveland says. The commissioner and the IRS are proud of TACT’s commitment to improving the way the agency communicates with taxpayers by addressing each part of the process.

To learn more about TACT, visit them on the IRWeb at <http://irweb.irs.gov/AboutIRS/co/tact/default.aspx>

Key LSS Concepts

Fewer hand-offs Less space required Cross-functional teams Fewer system requirements

the IRS. We coordinated with employee groups HIRE and Asian Pacific Internal Revenue Employees and consulted a Russian-American employee for final selections. These fully bilingual IRS employees made the final selection among the list of actors and roles which best suited them based on cultural and regional accents for each particular role.

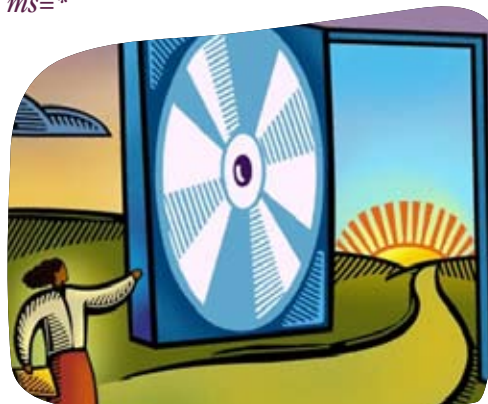
Producing the DVDs

The DVDs were professionally produced and edited. MLI used bilingual IRS employees to review and critique filming and first cuts to prevent any cultural or tax-related errors. Each of these DVDs took two to three months to be produced.

MLI plans to have these “Basic Tax Responsibility” DVDs in all five languages—Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Russian—at all 2009 Tax

Forums and the National Distribution Center. MLI is proud to offer these products to assist the LEP taxpayers in complying with their tax obligations.

Intranet link: http://publish.no.irs.gov/cat12.cgi?request=CAT2&itemtyp=P&itemb=4580&itemms=*



Diversity – the F.A.I.R. approach to a better workplace

By Bill Hoover, CI

What is diversity? The answers often include everything from “EEO” to “Isn’t that all about being nice to one another?” The IRS-Criminal Investigation (CI) Diversity Council is addressing Diversity issues within the workplace by exploring cultural issues and influences that go far beyond race and gender. This outreach program includes the presentation of a practical approach to Diversity in the workplace titled, “Just Be F.A.I.R.” This training emphasizes the value of Feedback, Assistance, Inclusion and Respect in building relationships, developing better solutions and increasing productivity. Practicing the F.A.I.R. approach, in turn, benefits the organization by increasing employee retention; improving service and bottom-line performance; and creating an environment that makes the IRS, and CI, an employer of choice.

The F.A.I.R. approach explores the importance of cultural understanding in the workplace. With the evolution of a global economy, criminal activity has become more culturally diverse. Thus, today, it is especially important that the CI workforce is representative of the community and cultures we serve.

CI is also educating its managers through this process. We want them to learn, for example, how working with a generation of employees who have always known the Internet, cell phones and mass media affects investigative techniques and interaction, as well as workplace ideas and attitudes. Additional learning opportunities include a list of ELMS diversity courses and presentation materials on understanding the multi-generational workplace. In addition to helping managers understand why diversity matters, these courses provide simulated workplace scenarios that guide managers in building a workplace that recognizes, and capitalizes on, cultural differences.

The CI Diversity Council is also working with our EEO and Recruiting Offices to create a work environment that values our differences and is reflective of the public we serve. The Council is even participating in the IRS strategic plan and has posted their ‘I will’ statement to the IRWeb: “The CI Diversity Council will serve as diversity advocates by promoting a work environment that includes the F.A.I.R. principles of Feedback, Assistance, Inclusion and Respect at all levels within the CI Community.” In short, we’re actually using diversity to achieve our organizational goals, and we’re excited about the fact that we’re doing it the FAIR way. ■

PEOPLE FIRST

We spend a great deal of time with each other professionally but do we know about our co-workers' lives outside of work? With an organization of 100K plus employees, we're certain there are many individuals with interesting and unique lives outside our careers, which means there's a story to be told. This section is dedicated to sharing those stories to hopefully capture the special and diverse members who make up this organization.

Has your 15 minutes of fame come and gone?

What constitutes a person's "15 minutes of fame?" Certainly, it can be argued that the fame must be broad enough that practically everyone is talking about it. However, fame can also be narrow—it's highly subjective to the person who experienced it. We found that many IRS employees have had brushes with fame, some bigger than others, yes, but still we found them to range from:

The heroic...

Like **Danielle Behler (SB/SE)**, who was a hero in her town in 1995. Then only 13, she was babysitting for five young boys (ages several months to 6 years) when a fire broke out in the mobile home. The fire quickly spread, engulfing the home in flames. Quick-thinking Danielle took all the boys outside and made sure no doors or windows remained open. Firefighters credit her with not only saving the kids but also ensuring that the fire didn't spread. Danielle enjoyed lots of local fame, receiving several awards and being asked to appear at fire safety events.

...to the philosophical...

Such as **John Brennan (HCO)** who relates that on Father's Day 1949, he was the focus of attention by a team of doctors and nurses who guided his mother through her 27-hour labor. His arrival brought forth great joy and celebration among the staff and his parents, and for a time he was the newest baby in the hospital, visited by many who wandered into the maternity ward that night. His brush with fame was soon over as other babies were born who then became the center of attention throughout the hospital. Fame has unfortunately eluded his grasp since that time, but it was an experience that helped him understand that fame is fleeting. Alas, he relates that the experience has prepared him well for the annual evaluation process.

...to joyous...

Including **Robin Plitt (W&I)**, who, during the first season the Florida Marlins were a major league baseball team, wanted nothing more than to sing the National Anthem at one of the games. Robin traveled from West Palm Beach to Miami for the audition and was thrilled to have been selected. Robin remembers several things about being on the field in front of 40,000 spectators: he didn't want to step on the baseline (bad luck!) and when he stepped to the microphone, he had an instant where he didn't think his voice would work. He reports that he couldn't get to his seat

until the third inning as people kept stopping to congratulate him.

...to touching...

Like **Kathi Morris (SB/SE)**, who shares that her brush with fame started in 1968 and whose ramifications continue to this day. You see, Kathi was one of the "10 Morris Orphans" whose parents were killed by a drunk driver. As the oldest, at 17, Kathi remembers the national spotlight that came from television reports and newspaper journalists, but sadly, mostly she remembers the "trained professionals" whose judgments were clouded by ineptitude, selfishness and callousness.

...to somber...

Like **Phillip Symon (TE/GE)**, who was interviewed for the book, *Never Without Heroes*. It was a history of the Third Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division in Vietnam. Why was he interviewed? He was one of the surviving team members of a team that experienced 100% casualties, one of whom won the Medal of Honor posthumously.

...to humbling...

Such as when **Steve Baum (W&I)**, a self-described "rank amateur" among entertainment industry pros, worked with the Branson, Mo., Chamber of Commerce in 1995, they managed to get Bob Hope to come to the "Festival of Lights" on Veterans Day. Steve got to ride with Bob in a golf cart in the parade and later got to have dinner with him. Steve reports that even at 90+, Bob knew when the lights were on and when to entertain.

...to intimidating...

Like **Kerry Beech (W&I)**, who was prodded to start modeling by a co-worker. When Kerry finally did audition for a print ad in a major national magazine—joining other professional models in the audition that Kerry recognized—he was selected! He felt "in over his head and just wanted to sneak out the back door" but persevered, and was rewarded by having his pictures appear in

Ebony, Jet and Black Enterprises magazines, on billboards all over Atlanta and in some Black Entertainment Television commercials.

...to taking a gamble...

Like **Christin Shimonis (SB/SE)** whose job prior to working for the IRS was at Taj Mahal Casino and Resort in Atlantic City as a poker dealer. While there, Christin was chosen to deal in the 2005 U.S. Poker Championship. She can still be seen dealing some of the hands during this tournament as it is occasionally re-broadcast on ESPN Classic.

...to even the non-human...

No, it wasn't **Laurie Herbst (SB/SE)** who had 15 minutes of fame, but her dog, Ojo. From more than 47,000 entries, Ojo won the "Make Your Dog Famous" Milk-Bone contest, and had her picture on thousands of boxes of Milk-Bone dog biscuits! This peppy Jack Russell terrier even got to be on the Today show!

Do you have a unique hobby, talent or sports activity - or do you donate time to help others through public service or are a volunteer in your community? Then, send your story to: CL.IRSToday@irs.gov or by fax at (202) 622-9875.

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