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*Mark Rutowski, vice president
National Air of Texas
Houston, Texas*

Over the last three years, Air-Call Communication Inc. has bought air/vacuum machines from five different companies. We feel that ARV Inc. is producing the best machine on the market, and we are very satisfied with their customer service. In fact, ARV helped us land a 27-store chain. Since 2010, our company has bought more than 150 machines. We've been very successful in adding air/vac routes to our business.

*John Hofmann, owner
Air-Call Communication
Oak Island, N.C.*

ARV is a very people-oriented company with incredible strengths in manufacturing and sales. I have a very good working relationship with them. The president is both a perfectionist and a professional, and he does what he says he'll do. He has actually flown in to meet with several of my larger customers, and he's very persuasive. ARV is there for the long haul in all aspects of the business.

*Dan Vargo, owner
Vac-Air Vargo
Pompano Beach, Fla.*



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dbobert@airarv.com
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perspectives

on public communication

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Q&A

PSPs reflect on maintenance, repair issues

by Flori Meeks



When it comes to business, it always helps to share ideas with colleagues in your industry. And it can be comforting to know we're not alone in some of our gripes. We recently asked a group of payphone service providers (PSPs) to describe their repair and maintenance practices. In some cases, they share similar routines and experiences. Other times, not so much. In any case, each has ideas worth noting.

Our panel this month includes:

- Thomas "Tom" G. Rose, CPMC, Louisville, Ky.; 5,000 payphones; 26 years in the business
- Michael Skarzynski, Intera Group Inc., Pleasanton, Calif.; extra large PSP in 38 states; 26 years in the business
- Gregg Waldhauser, G.A. Waldhauser and Co., Richmond, Va.; 190 payphones; 16 years in the business
- Robert Wellings, R.L. Communications, Phoenix, Ariz.; 430 payphones; 25 years in the business

“The most common issues are coin jams, failed relays, handset replacements and coin slot debris removal.”

— Michael Skarzynski, Intera Group Inc.

1. What is the average amount you spend per phone per year on repairs? (Some interpreted as money spent; others responded to their investment in time).

Rose: Parts expense runs on average of \$18 per phone per year in parts and approximately \$192 per phone per year in tech and truck expense.

Skarzynski: On average, our technicians make a repair and service visit to each phone eight times a year. They spend about 10 minutes to collect coins, clean the phone, move debris out of the slot, repair coin jams and conduct minor repairs. A major repair would take longer. Sometimes it's easier to replace the phone and take it to the repair center.

Waldhauser: My repairs aren't as plentiful as they used to be, and that's because I don't have as many phones. Vandalism is rare, probably because they are used less. We stop by the phones every month to clean them and test them.

Wellings: It's quite a lot. I have one service technician — he has a vehicle and worker's compensation — and he spends 70 percent of his time fixing those things. It comes to about \$60,000 a year for 430 phones.

2. What is the most common repair issue?

Rose: Coin jams still seem to be the most prominent problem. Mechanical coin mechanisms jam faster, but electronic coin mechanisms are harder to clean, and the parts are not readily available.

Skarzynski: The most common issues are coin jams, failed relays, handset replacements and coin slot debris removal.

Waldhauser: I find it's either a handset that goes bad or a coin jam.

Wellings: Coin jams followed by handset failure, then random acts. The roofers might damage them. One man in California hit the pillar of a building, and it went down on a phone. The phone proved to be very hardy and survived just fine. However, 20 years ago, a car (driven by someone who did not pass a sobriety test) hit a wooden power pole, which fell on my phone and booth and knocked them both down.

3. Once a phone is programmed initially, how often do you verify that the programming is correct? What type of calls do you verify?

Rose: Techs perform a nickel test each time they are in front of the phone for any reason. The nickel test verifies that the long distance carrier is working, and it also verifies the correct operation of the keypad, coin mech and relay. In addition, we verify with programming and dispatch anytime there is a customer complaint about local or long distance service not working.

Skarzynski: Every service visit. Every time a technician collects a phone, our procedures call for a FLEX ANI, local, long distance and operator services test call to be placed.

Waldhauser: Probably not as often as I should. We check the call records. When we've used Payphone 211 service, it checks for problems. You can just call the number and run tests while you're on the phone with the computer. You can make sure the handset is working so we can take incoming calls. It's pretty efficient.

Wellings: Every time we go to a phone we do a long distance call — we don't complete it. We put in a nickel, a dime and a quarter. It should ask for 60 cents. We call the zero plus ten to make sure it goes to operator service. Those are two tests done at the phone. We also look at call records. With Protel phones it's very easy. If someone did five 800 calls, good, someone's doing something. If you see a strange pattern of calls being made, and no money taken in, no minutes, it could be a coin jam. We use our brains to figure out what to do with the information given.

4. What reports do you use from the APCC Services Web site?

Rose: We use all the reports in the current report folder. We use these to merge our data into MIST, to resolve our disputes, to determine what carriers are not paying us and to compare to our CDR data. We use reports in the advanced folder for analysis purposes and trends.

Skarzynski: We use the quarterly reports to load the

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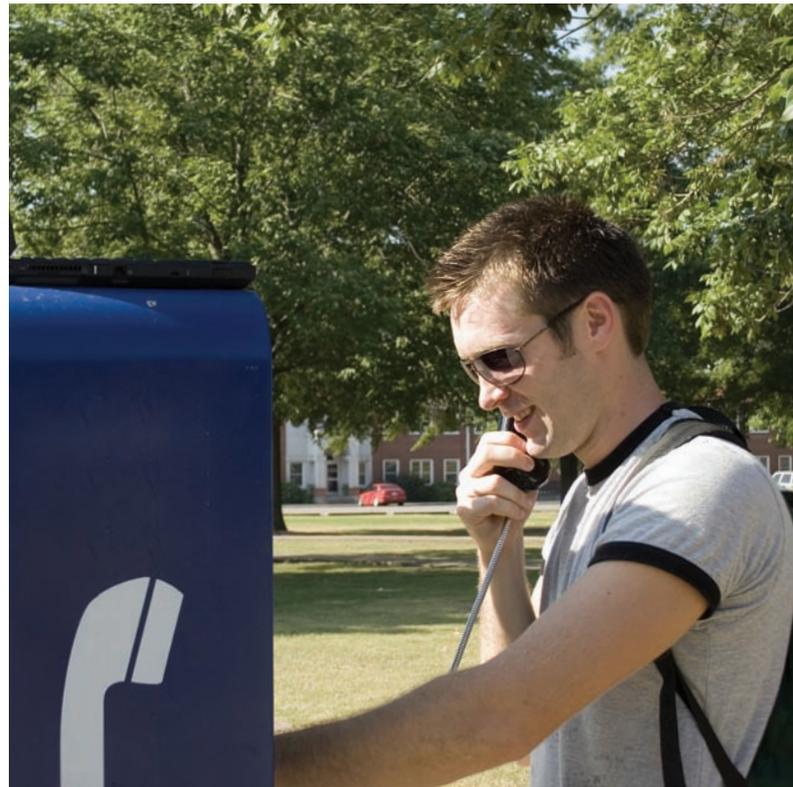
revenue received, work through disputes and resolve local exchange carrier (LEC) issues. Having the revenue available at the ANI level allows us to allocate our revenue correctly. The dispute reports identify where we might have data issues with our carriers that we need to address.

Waldhauser: I look at the 800 report and revenues per phone and per ANI. I try to do a profile loss on each of my phones. I break it down to a monthly basis.

Wellings: The dial-around. This is vital. You could have a month doing just over the bill in coin calls, but you could be doing \$128 in dial-around. We use the reports for commissions and to assess the value of the phones.

5. Do you ever speak to the people who are using your phones? If so, what do they say?

Rose: Usually we are only speaking with patrons when they are experiencing a problem and have called into the office. As far as location owners are concerned,



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“We use all the reports in the current report folder on the APCC Services Web site.”

— Tom Rose, CPMC

they like the fact that we have a timely response time to repairing their phones.

Skarzynski: On some occasions, callers ask for refunds, but we direct these calls to our operator services provider. There is an option on our phones listed on our placard to dial 611 for refunds/repair service at no charge.

Waldhauser: Not very often, no. Occasionally at a location someone will come up and say they use the phone all of the time or tell me if they had a problem. One common complaint is when a person has trouble making local calls. When new cell phone exchanges are not loaded in the payphone as a local number, then it won't place the call. On our Protel board, it says Error 13. If someone tells me that, I'll tell them it will work

tomorrow. I will load it as soon as I get home. Some people say they lost a bunch of money. I refer them to the refund/repair number on the phone.

Wellings: Yes, but some of them are rude, coarse and abrasive. They haven't learned you can get more with a little bit of honey than vinegar. One of the key phrases I hear is, 'It took my money; it's a really urgent call.' We know they're lying. They want a free call. Just occasionally I believe them, and then I will send them the money. ■

Flori Meeks is a Houston-based freelance writer and editor with 24 years of experience. She has been writing for *Perspectives* for 14 years.

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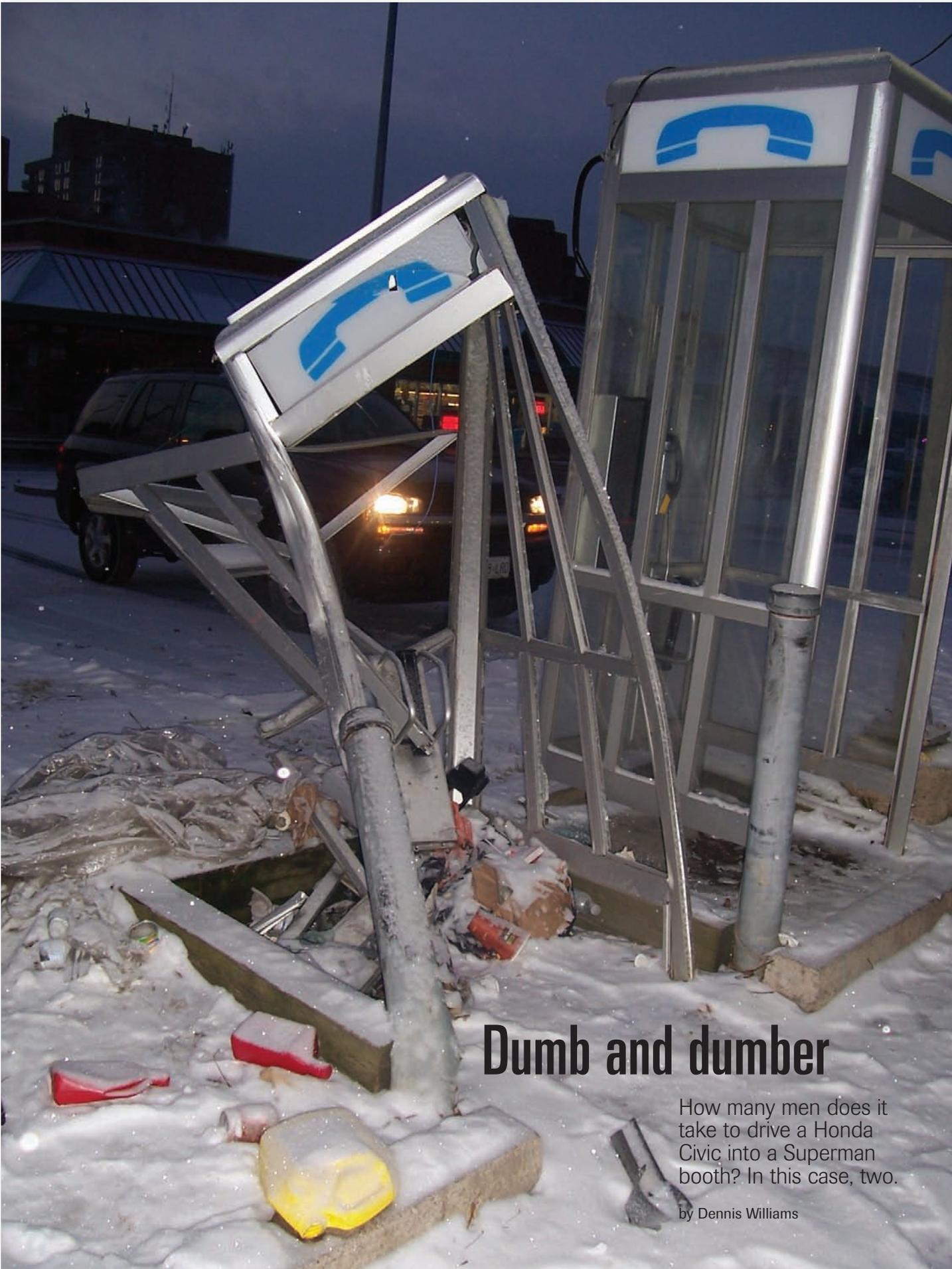
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*THERE IS **NOTHING** THIS MAN CAN'T DO.*



Dumb and dumber

How many men does it take to drive a Honda Civic into a Superman booth? In this case, two.

by Dennis Williams

Just when you think you have seen it all, i.e. everything the payphone industry has to offer, along comes something so ridiculous and unbelievable that all you can do is shake your head and laugh.

Many of you may not know that springtime weather in Toronto, Canada is as unpredictable as a groundhog's shadow actually informing us when spring will arrive. Honest to goodness, the temperatures are always fluctuating between "icy" and "not icy." But many people, no matter how long they live in this area, will never understand it.

Ice, ice baby

Just last week, I received a phone call that one of our booths was struck by a car. As many payphone service providers (PSPs) know firsthand, this is not what makes the story unique. You would think cars would not hit payphones, but as we all know, ineptitude of the highest level is commonplace behind the wheel of a car. This is true no matter where you live, but when you add ice to the picture, it does tend to make things worse.

So the car in this case is a little Honda Civic that has more accessories than Kellogg's has Corn Flakes. In the case of a Civic vs. a Superman booth, who do you think wins? The answer, of course, depends on many variables; things like speed and velocity, for example. And the Driver's IQ. But I digress.

Because of the icy conditions and a little bit of snow, the car could not make a simple left turn. As it was gaining speed, it hit the concrete post that was protecting the booth. And, like a rock thrown by a kid skimming over water, it careened directly into the front of the booth. The concrete post buckled like a cardboard cylinder, and the booth turned into a piece of art that looked like something created by Picasso.

The car continued in the air and landed in the parking lot behind the booth. Fortunately for the driver, it did land right-side up, although perhaps it might have been better had the driver taken a good lump to the head. At any rate, the Civic's undercarriage was damaged, so it was not operational.

And here's where the story gets good. Apparently another vehicle drove up next to the damaged Civic, and both drivers walked (and I use that term loosely) over to the crumbled booth. They then picked up the payphone and drove away, leaving the Civic and the crumpled booth behind. At this point I have to mention that there was another booth next to the damaged

one, but it was unharmed in the so-called "accident."

Oops! I missed.

Can you guess why I used the term "so-called?" Oh yes, the entire incident was planned by two highly intelligent thieves. The driver was supposed to hit both booths so that he and his equally bright accomplice could steal both payphones. Apparently, he miscalculated his approach. Perhaps he should go back to Driver's Ed.

I'm sure you've guessed by now that the Civic had been stolen. I'm relatively certain the owner was not pleased when he found out what happened.

As for me, I wasn't either. The, um, gentlemen were not caught and we're out \$5,000 in damage. The only bright side, if you can call it that, is that it makes for a funny story. ■

Dennis Williams has 13 years of experience in the payphone industry and currently owns RMS Consulting, which is based in Tampa, Fla. And indeed he, like Alan Rothenstreich before him, enjoyed interviewing himself for this article. He can be reached at (813) 455-7639 or via email at dennis.williams24@verizon.net.

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