

# Developments

Helping Employers Retain & Create Quality Jobs Rockford, Illinois USA

## HELLO! Great Career Opportunities in Region's Business Process Outsourcing Industry

When the manager of a busy back-office call center in the Rockford area says "the sky's the limit," she means the excellent job and advancement opportunities for area high school graduates.

As the work performed in call centers has evolved, the industry moniker has changed to better reflect the change. Call centers are now often called business process outsourcing (BPO) locations. Here are some local companies in the BPO industry that are **expanding aggressively**. They say the area is a good, competitive source for workforce talent and they like the lower-than-industry turnover rate they find in the Rockford area.

### Thermo Fisher Scientific, Protein Biology Business

thermofisher.com

3747 North Meridian Road, Rockford, Illinois

#### Technical Support For College Students to R & D Scientists

Thermo Fisher Scientific represents the **most skilled level of technical support in the Rockford region's BPO industry**. Of their 300 local employees, nine are full-time technical support scientists who assist with the company's more than 30,000 protein biology products.

Qualifications for these jobs include a master's or doctorate degree in a discipline related to life science or protein biology. These scientists handle calls from university-level students using their product to assist a research scientist doing drug discovery research in a biotech lab. The unique nature of each call means that it takes time to determine the best answer and requires a highly specialized skill set. The company has hired some local support scientists but most relocated from outside the area.

Thermo Fisher Scientific is a global company serving science with 39,000 employees.



APAC runs two shifts, seven days a week.

### APAC Customer Service, Inc.

apaccustomerservices.com

7180 Spring Brook Road, Rockford, Illinois

#### 700-Employee Firm Will Grow by 300 More in 2014

The company began in Rockford as MCI in 2000 and is now known as APAC Customer Services, Inc. The facility has **two shifts, seven days a week**.

Human Resource Manager Andrelle Cosby says, "We're **very pleased with Rockford** as a source for workforce talent. In the last few months we've hired about 100 employees and they've been good, talented people with customer service experience. We just added a new telecommunications client so before spring of 2014 we will need 300 more employees to handle inbound calls. We're also **hiring, managers, trainers and supervisors** to support this growth."

The 300 positions require a high school diploma or six months of customer service or sales experience. The salary range is \$10 to \$11.50 per hour with full benefits and 401(k).



Biochemist at the Thermo Fisher Scientific facility in Rockford.



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### Practice Velocity

practicevelocity.com

10100 Forest Hills Road, Machesney Park, Illinois

### Medical Software Firm Stays Here to Expand, Adds 75 Jobs

Practice Velocity represents a **different level of business process outsourcing skills**. About 25 percent of their employees handle inbound phone calls for a proprietary electronic medical records software program (EMR) they provide to urgent care centers or to support patients with medical billing questions.

Dr. David Stern, chief executive officer, is a physician who worked at Physicians Immediate Care in the Rockford area. In 2002 he and fellow physicians formed Practice Velocity and designed EMR software to better handle their needs for electronic medical records, practice management, billing, contracting and credentialing services. Since then, the company's software has been installed in urgent care centers in all 50 states.



Dr. David Stern, founder of Practice Velocity.

"At Practice Velocity, we don't focus on degrees," said Dr. Stern. "**For our support personnel, we look for people who have very good software skills.** They're the ones their friends know are the 'go to' folks for computer issues. These employees have good reasoning skills and can connect things together to solve problems."

The other 75 percent of employees work on the software programming teams and the billing teams that process medical claims. Stern noted, "Software programmers need education and experience, but they're in short supply locally. **Schools should emphasize programming in middle school, and not wait for the high school years.** There are tremendous job opportunities in the software industry. These jobs are not going away in our lifetime. Somebody's always going to be writing software for manufacturing, for machines and many other applications," he stated.

**After considering a move to Wisconsin, the company decided to stay in the Rockford area.** Their new 63,000-square-foot building at Machesney Park Mall will be completed in July 2014. With the 75 new jobs, the company will have more than 300 employees. Practice Velocity was named to Inc.'s 500/5000 list as one of the nation's fastest growing, privately held companies in 2012 and 2013.



Jerry Bowers, unit manager for Vision Financial/CustomerSpeak.

### Vision Financial

visionfinancialcorp.com

5301 East State Street, Rockford, Illinois

### Expansion Adds 100 Jobs

The latest BPO company to announce an expansion is Vision Financial, an accounts- receivable collection company. It co-located to a new facility at 5301 East State Street with its sister company, CustomerSpeak, a market research contact center. The move is part of an expansion that will add more than 100 employees for a total workforce in Rockford of 350.

Patrick Kelly, senior vice president of the Rockford facility said, "When our lease expired at our previous location, we looked at moving to the Chicago area, but we think **the talent pool is here.** We owed it to the community to stay here. Vision Financial is proud to be part of this community and to continue to stimulate the region's economy."

While the entry-level jobs require a high school diploma or equivalent, there are plentiful advancement opportunities. "As our company grows, **we will need more first-level managers.** We routinely promote from within," said Kelly.

### Rockford Region BPO Industry Snapshot

- At least 14 BPO operations
- More than 2,500 employees
- Most entry-level positions pay \$10 to \$12 an hour
- Most BPOs offer incentives and benefits package, paid time off and 401(k) plan.
- BPOs interviewed stressed excellent advancement opportunities.

### RAEDC'S TARGETED INDUSTRIES

Aerospace Production

Industrial Machine Manufacturing

Alternative Energy

Logistics

Aviation Services

Metals Manufacturing

Business Process Outsourcing

On- and Off-Road Vehicle Manufacturing

Chemical Manufacturing

Professional Business Services

Food Processing

Rail-Related Manufacturing

Health Care

The primary role of the Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC) is to collaboratively enhance wealth creation in the Rockford Region by helping employers retain and create quality jobs. The RAEDC works closely with many partners to learn what existing and new employers need to grow, and to serve as a one-stop resource for clients. The RAEDC seeks to improve the competitiveness of the region by taking what it learns from the region's employers, and engaging the community in the daily work of economic development.

For more information on RAEDC programs or services, please call 815.987.8118, e-mail [information@rockfordill.com](mailto:information@rockfordill.com) or visit [www.rockfordill.com](http://www.rockfordill.com).

Please forward to others who share your interest in our region's economic development. Be "green."

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