

Announcer ([00:03](#)):

You are listening to The Safety Moment Podcast by Utility Safety Partners. Safety is always a good conversation and it's a click away. Here's your host, Mike Sullivan.

([00:03](#)):

Mike Sullivan ([00:20](#)):

Thank You for calling Utility Safety Partners. My name is Mike. You'll hear that. How many times a day do we say that? Quite a few times a day when we have locate requests that are being called into our contact center. Now, most don't, we do have, the vast majority are going online, but today we're talking about the contact center, the notification center, the one call center, which is not really a center anymore. My guests today are Mr. Josef Rosenberg, our contact centre manager, and Ms. Sher Kirk, the director of Operations for Utility Safety Partners.

([01:00](#)):

We are talking about the contact centre today and tails from the contact centre, but the word centre creates a bit of a picture in our minds of a nucleus, a hub, and physically we're not anymore. We've changed a lot over the last number of years. It was a gradual change and then they brought on by the global pandemic. It was an abrupt change. And I want to be talking a little bit about that today with Joe and Sher and how that's changed, how we work, how it's changed, how we manage, and what the future might look like there. And then we're going to talk a little bit about where we are right now with the contact center and what with the unification, post unification, what are we doing different today? And I also want to talk about, well, just the lighter side of the contact center. When you get a lot of people working with the public and a service industry like us, we hear some interesting tales. We're going to be talking a little bit about that. Welcome to the podcast, Josef and Sher.

Sher Kirk ([02:06](#)):

Yeah, thanks for having me.

Josef Rosenberg ([02:07](#)):

Oh, thank you for having me on.

Mike Sullivan ([02:09](#)):

Yeah, this should be fun. So as I was just saying, our little intro that this has been, we've seen some big changes over the last number of years, but before that, this is going to be, we're in our 39th year of operations and we are about to embark on our 40th anniversary next year. It's going to be a year long affair, but not really, but 40 years. It's a milestone. It's a big milestone. And we've seen a lot of changes in the contact center beginning with our very first locate request back in October, 1984 by Hanson Plumbing, which is still operating in Calgary today. And it's one of our latest articles in our newsletter showed we reached out to Hanson Plumbing and they're still in operation and they were flabbergasted that they were the first locate requests. And here we are. I believe, Sher, you recently provided that we have surpassed over 10 million locate requests. Is that true?

Sher Kirk ([03:09](#)):

Yeah, that's right. Earlier this year we passed the 10 million mark and we hunted down that locate request too. So I hope we can get those two together. The first and the 10 millionth.

Mike Sullivan ([03:21](#)):

That was a member, I believe.

Sher Kirk ([03:23](#)):

I think it was actually.

Mike Sullivan ([03:25](#)):

Yeah. Well, considering when you look at the number of locate requests we process, it's getting close to 500,000 every year. It's a pretty constant number between four 50 and 460,000 every year just for Alberta. And then the notifications would go out, it's about 1.6 million every year. That 10 million locate requests, I mean, how many notifications are we looking at? On average? About 50 million or 40 million.

Sher Kirk ([03:55](#)):

Yeah, it's got to be close to 50 million. We used to be a lot more notifications per request. We used to be up around five and now we're closer to three.

Mike Sullivan ([04:06](#)):

And that's just with data getting better and better.

Sher Kirk ([04:09](#)):

Yeah, for sure.

Mike Sullivan ([04:11](#)):

So the contact center, this is, we're not a centre. We are completely remote now and we were moving that way for a while probably, I'm going to say maybe five years ago. Would that be about right?

Sher Kirk ([04:27](#)):

Yeah, I think seven or eight. Yep.

Mike Sullivan ([04:30](#)):

Well, that long has, it's been

Josef Rosenberg ([04:31](#)):

About probably seven or eight. And I think everything kind of dovetailed off of the 2013 floods when we basically lost the ability for half of our staff to be able to get into the office to work. And we said there's got to be a better way. And that's when we started researching voiceover IP, contact centre, I V R solutions and things like that. And I think we rolled out with our current solution, it would've been about seven, seven and a half years ago full on virtual. So that's when things started going I guess full tilt.

Mike Sullivan ([05:07](#)):

Well, yeah. And when we started that there were some metrics we put in place. I remember that the agents had to have, I think it was like 90% or 95% average score in order to work from home. Was that not the case? Something like that?

Sher Kirk ([05:22](#)):

Yeah, the original work at home program was started years ago and that was just a small number of employees that we decided to have be permanent employees that worked at their houses. And it was a completely different setup. Everything was still very much analog, not virtual. So we had full setups and wiring and just moved like mini offices into their houses. And in those days we had to do full home inspection, make sure that they met all the safety criteria that we needed for the house and the space they were working in. We provided the internet because we couldn't trust them to have good internet at home. We do now quarterly site people. It was very different setup. And yes, they had to meet very high criteria to be one of the chosen ones because they were permanent employees. And that was more part of our contingency plan really to have a backup system that didn't run off one hub. So it was kind of like a geo-redundant system really. It was like, we'll put these 13 people at home and then if something happens to our main contact centre, we still have 13 working agents at any given time.

Josef Rosenberg ([06:31](#)):

Early decentralization.

Sher Kirk ([06:33](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

Mike Sullivan ([06:35](#)):

Was that common in the industry or was Alberta one call one of the first to do that?

Sher Kirk ([06:41](#)):

Well, I know they're the first one call that I know of that did it, but I'm not sure how many other, in the context, any industry, were making that decision. Honestly, that happened before me and I've been here for more than half of our 40 years. Crazy to think of that, but it's true. Yeah,

Mike Sullivan ([07:00](#)):

It is crazy to think that I've been here for 12 and I don't know where the time has gone, but we've seen a lot of changes and that's one of the reasons why I wanted to have this chat with you guys today is because there have been so many changes when we're here every day, it just seems like, well, it's a natural ebb, the natural flow of work, but there have been more changes in the last 12 years of my working life and outside influences on it than I think the previous 25. And that's not just us, that's everybody. That's everybody. And of course the global pandemic really did that. And that's probably a good segue into where we're at today. I mean, we had the work at home program going back many years and over time, as Joe said, the 2013 floods was perhaps the first catalyst to push us towards a decentralized model or remote working model. And when I first came to Alberta one call, we had this massive contact center in the back of the office, and I believe we had five or six bays of eight or 10 people. They weren't all filled, but there was at least 50 agents working back there and only for Alberta and five team leaders. And today we have, at the height of our operations today, I think we're at 32 agents, I think

Josef Rosenberg ([08:26](#)):

Currently sitting, I believe at 32. Yeah, we started the year of 35 and there's generalized attrition and all that.

Mike Sullivan ([08:33](#)):

And so 32 agents, but the work has changed dramatically. And that's not just for Alberta. We're providing services for Saskatchewan and Manitoba as well. We have been from Manitoba since, I think it's 2013 or so. But the work has changed going back 40 years or even going back 15 years or even 10 years, predominantly it was all locate requests by phone that the agents were handling. And that has changed a lot and it's probably changing the way we hire people. We look at their skills and experience to be hired. What are we looking for today in an agent that we weren't looking for before?

Josef Rosenberg ([09:12](#)):

So when I started, and this is what my 16th year or something like that, when I first started and I went through the hiring process, I felt like a lot of the hiring focused around customer service, you had good speaking mannerisms and you were able to articulate yourself well. And I feel like that was vast majority of where hiring was coming from. I think over time we've really evolved to give a greater focus on technology skills, people's ability to type, people's ability to critically think and reason their way through programs and user interfaces and things like that because these things all translate into the meat and potatoes of what agents are doing now. Now, that isn't to say that agents aren't mainly focusing on voice calls. In fact, most if not all of them, what they come out of the gate are only doing voice calls. But because of the other facets of the business such as our email support and our chat support and troubleshooting webinar processes, et cetera, agents definitely excel and have significant variety of tasks relative to what they used to have available to them should they possess the skills in those technology fronts.

Mike Sullivan ([10:30](#)):

So how is that different today? I mean, so an agent today, if they are helping or they're helping manage our chat function, how many chats are they managing at once?

Josef Rosenberg ([10:40](#)):

We have a cap I think right now of five, but typically it's interesting because chat volume does tend to fluctuate, but you don't usually see their simultaneous chats go over two or three for the most part. Occasionally they may go up to five and frankly some handle it better than others. I think there's definitely a specific aptitude when it comes to handling chats to be able to juggle five different chat conversations at once. But our turnaround on chat is actually fairly quick relative to most companies I've looked at. There's industry published metrics and things like that for chat groups, and some companies have chats that last upwards of 30 to 40 minutes. Our average chat time generally clocks in around eight to 10. So that does allow us to, we have pretty quick turnover and we are processing speed for chat makes it so that there's not a lot of simultaneous chat bumping up against one another.

Mike Sullivan ([11:42](#)):

What's a typical chat request? What are we seeing that is more common than anything else and who are they coming from? Is it the digging community or homeowners?

Josef Rosenberg ([11:55](#)):

For the most part, I'd say it's about 50 50. Probably about 50% contractors, 50% homeowners. But that's more proportional to the fact that there are more contractors than homeowners that use the service. So a greater portion of homeowners utilize the chat, but overall it's about 50 50. Generally they're looking for help with the website. One of the great advantages of having a chat widget follow you around the site is that you can have an ongoing conversation with an agent as you navigate different pages and try to suss your way through the online web submission portal. And having that agent available to them from what we gather and the feedback we receive is extremely helpful for those who are, I guess less technologically inclined.

Sher Kirk ([12:44](#)):

It's definitely one of the advantages of chat when we put it in was when we were really focusing on keeping people online. So we didn't want people to, we can only make the website so easy for the layman because there are certain things you have to map a ticket that's always going to be complicated for people. That's not something you normally have to do online is to map a day site on a ticket. So one of the things we wanted to make sure is that we had the resources available to people to keep them online rather than have them get stuck and then have to go pick up the phone anyway and talk to a person on the phone. So Chat has been great for us that way.

Mike Sullivan ([13:24](#)):

What are we looking at now in terms of metrics? I mean, and this is probably more a question for you share is when we were a call center, more of a call center than what we are today, how is our performance metrics and how are we tracking that differently today?

Sher Kirk ([13:41](#)):

Well, I'd say some of the old metrics, most contexts or metrics across the industry are the same. You track how quickly you're answering a call, how long the agents are going to be on a call, so you can adjust to how many people you need at any given time because how many calls are coming in and how long each call will take. But most of the metrics were around really around speed and efficiency and less around customer service than they are now because it was really just a business of get them in, get them off the phone, not in our business necessarily, but in the contact centre business that is the measurement. Either you're selling a widget and you want to know how many widgets they sold and how quickly they sold them. And for us it was more of a yes. We had to make sure that we had that efficiency there so we could track and have the right number of people on the phone was really the most important thing.

([14:41](#)):

And now the metrics are really changing. We still have all those old metrics, they're still important, but you're talking about maybe eight to 10% of our business as opposed to the rest of our business, which is chat and support and email and all the other functions that we do to really inform and advocate and educate. Those are becoming bigger and bigger pieces of what we do. So in order to accommodate that, we had to make sure that those metrics weren't focusing in on the efficiency like they used to be. We don't want to push people in and push people out. We want more of a first call resolution where people can call in if they are, for example, excuse me, a homeowner who's contacting us for the very first time, they have no idea how this process works. They've heard about it, they know they have to contact us.

([15:35](#)):

So our job is really to make sure that they understand the process from start to finish before they leave us. When they get off that call, they know what to expect next, what the road pitfalls might be for them. Most homeowners, for example, don't understand that their private lines won't be located. And before that used to be in the old days when we were focused on efficiency, there was probably about, I don't know, Joe, you might remember better than me, about there was just a paragraph or two of statements that you just blasted at the customer before you let them go. And it included everything from the liability statements saying, you're responsible for this, this is how they're going to respond. Your water and sewer won't be marked. If there's anyone else in the property, you have to. And it just all came in this big chunk at the end of a call and we would consistently have those calls come back to us over and over and over again.

[\(16:35\)](#):

Because once they left us, they got, okay, I got a ticket number, I think that's what I need. And then they realized as they went forward in the process, they didn't really know what to expect, where's this locator coming? When's he coming? Why didn't he mark my water and sewer? So we want to educate people more on the process now when we have them on the phones. So we like to take a little more time to make sure that if they have questions, that we can take those questions. And the big difference is we email that ticket to them now, so at the end of a call, they have a paper copy to look at, so to speak, an electronic statement that tells them everything that they need to know, refers 'em to here's where the information is on the website, but really gives them something to look at and say, oh, when did they say they were coming?

[\(17:20\)](#):

Oh, it says right here. Oh, what do I have to do? Oh, it says right here. So that's a nice difference. And people have a lot more resources to understand the process. And back to metrics, that means for us, we need to relax a little bit on how quickly, I mean, we still need our agents to be efficient, otherwise we'd have 60 agents on the phone all the time. So they still be efficient in giving the information, but we want them to be open to giving information and taking questions and not that pressure of, oh, don't ask me any more questions. I have to get off the phone. So yeah, the metrics are more around a lot of things. It's like how well you educated the customer, how safe are your tickets or the information on the tickets accurate. That was always there, but now it's a bigger chunk of what we do as opposed to everything's equal. Yes, you have to have an accurate ticket, but you also have to meet this time deadline and that's very different than what it was even five years ago, I would say.

Josef Rosenberg [\(18:18\)](#):

Yeah, the last three years in particular, the focused on keeping things away from speed metrics has been pretty much priority number one, getting everything back to quality and customer service has been a huge focus in the contact center, and we're definitely seeing it pay dividends in the kind of output we're seeing from agents.

Mike Sullivan [\(18:38\)](#):

We become more of a help center almost than just a contact center.

Josef Rosenberg [\(18:42\)](#):

Oh, a hundred percent.

Sher Kirk [\(18:43\)](#):

Yeah. We used to be, I mean the whole purpose of the contact center at the beginning was just get those tickets in process tickets, process tickets, process tickets. That's what we did. But like you say, it's more of a help center. It's definitely a resource for everyone in the industry to contact us and be that hub that we used to talk about. Wouldn't it be nice if there was a hub where people could go and ask questions about damage prevention and what does that mean? And we can point them to resources now, like our ambassadors and education pieces and Oh, you want a training seminar? We can set that up for you. And all that stuff filters through the contact center now as opposed to every single call is going to be take information, get it onto a ticket, get it out the door.

Mike Sullivan ([19:28](#)):

And we look at the unification recently between Alberta One Call Alberta Common Ground Alliance and the Where's line campaign into Utility Safety Partners, which is really designed to be a service to the industry and to Albertans on communication and getting the word out, using our services, improving the process, the entire damage prevention process, working on legislation. It all comes under this one big hub now of utility safety partners and that outreach, it has a much broader potential than it ever did before when it was just Alberta One Call. Now I know we just recently did a survey, Joe, because let me back up a little bit before we go to the survey. And I touched on this at the beginning of our chat. Today was a couple of years back and we've had a podcast dedicated to this. We mandated web locate requests for our members and contractors. And just to make that conversation real simple, we did it because it's better, it results in less damages. Homeowners are roughly about 50% now online and they dig maybe once every five or 10 years, maybe once in a lifetime. That's a pretty good metric right there that 50% of are online. But this recently, just last week or two weeks ago, I guess now, we did a survey and we were asking some questions more so to homeowners about the experience in the web and can you provide some feedback on that?

Josef Rosenberg ([21:15](#)):

Yeah, I mean survey was really interesting to put out. It took a little bit of forethought I guess to kind of determine what kind of information we wanted. We started with a pretty good premise as you mentioned. Why do homeowners choose to call in or why are we only seeing a 50% usage from homeowners versus contractors who are above 90% and members who are close to a hundred percent? So why is there such a massive gap between homeowner usage of the website and our contractor groups? So you've touched on a good point. First at the outset is they just simply don't use the service as much. So there may be an awareness issue, there may be those other things. So we wanted to see are you actually aware that we have an online service? And we found out subsequently, no, 40% of the people who responded to the survey did not know that we had an online service.

([22:18](#)):

They were not aware that they could go online and put their ticket on there without needing to speak to an agent. The other 60% had various reasons. Most of them just chose to call in. Some of them disliked using the website, and some of them had a ticket of some degree of complexity that they'd like to sort out one-on-one with the agent, which is fully reasonable. The vast majority of them didn't have any specified reason. They just preferred to do it on the phone with the remainder questions. We looked at things such as, sorry, I'm just pulling it up on my computer, my downstairs computer, so I don't have that immediately in front of me. So we asked them when they were using the website previously, of course. So this is anyone who said that they didn't know we had a website, we actually just gave them a free pass and allowed them to go on with their day because that's all the questions we could really ask



them about the website at that point. But those who have used the website before, we said, okay, so where have you encountered issues?

[\(23:25\)](#):

Vast majority of them said that they just ran into roadblocks when they were trying to create the account. The account creation process was too complicated. They were too much information that they weren't sure about what to fill in certain things. And there's various help modules throughout the website. When you click on boxes, it populates a little information box that tells you what's supposed to go in it, but it's possible that these things just aren't as visible or it's potential that they're using. Our mobile website, which I do know has more lacking contextual boxes only so much you can fit on a phone screen or a tablet screen, and that seems to be about 52% of respondents had issues there. So that became a huge roadblock for them. Other places, of course, we saw 20% had issues with the mapping as shared mentioned earlier, mapping can be quite complicated for the layman because not everybody's ever worked with G I S systems or understands how a top-down satellite view works and how that relates to their work site, which is perfectly reasonable. And then of course, some folks just had issues finding their site, entering their location or their address. And lastly of course, we asked if they've used the website before, what would make you more likely to use it? Because at the end of the day, that's our ultimate goal is getting more people to adopt that online usage. And at the end of it, the vast majority of users, 40% of them said he's your account creation.

[\(25:00\)](#):

A lot of them wanted to see better, more accurate mapping information and tools, which there are various ways that we can go about that, which are unfortunately not quick solutions. Things like base layers and lot layers and things like that. And of course, a faster ticket creation process, which is something we actually are looking into. In the past we had homeowner specific submission portals, which were more streamlined, didn't include quite as many questions as the contractor and member portals. And we're looking into hopefully getting something like that rolling out again in the near future. But 29 or 30% of them said they wanted to see all three of those options included, which basically means that we kind of touched just in the process of building out this survey, I think we kind of identified where our three main pinch points are. Yeah, exactly. And because 30% of the

Mike Sullivan [\(26:01\)](#):

Respondents we

Josef Rosenberg [\(26:01\)](#):

Almost knew really already right

Mike Sullivan [\(26:03\)](#):

Now, we

Josef Rosenberg [\(26:03\)](#):

Know for sure on all three of those things being a necessary need. People don't always listen to full surveys. This was the last question. They have to listen verbally to all these questions being rattled off and they listened to all of them and they said, yeah, all of those are my problem, and 30% of them actually did that. You can actually identify that. That is pretty significant statistically that we definitely kind of nailed it in where we saw those issues and what we need to focus on in the future.



Mike Sullivan ([26:34](#)):

You have a month, maybe a little bit more of those dog days of summer left, how many things are left on your honey do list if you're going to be excavating, if you're going to be digging, please click before you dig. One click cost you nothing. Not clicking could cost you everything.

([26:52](#)):

So our sample size, was it close to 1900 people, right? Took this survey?

Josef Rosenberg ([26:56](#)):

No. Well, the survey was I think 849 was our total.

Mike Sullivan ([27:01](#)):

Oh, I don't know why. I'm thinking 1900. Okay, a little bit off,

Josef Rosenberg ([27:05](#)):

But that's still quite significant. It was about over a two week period and there were 1,624 eligible homeowner calls, which means that over 52% of those who were eligible actually took the survey, which is extremely statistically significant. Great number.

Mike Sullivan ([27:24](#)):

Well, I mean they could win a big screen tv, which was nice. That's true.

Josef Rosenberg ([27:27](#)):

That's a good carrot.

Mike Sullivan ([27:29](#)):

And we did have a winner and we're very happy that this person won. But when you look at, I know it's okay, well 50% or 30% didn't know. 40% didn't know we had a website they could go and do this on. And yet our monthly stats tell us roughly 50% of all the locate requests from homeowners are online. And of those surveyed, 40% or 60% knew there was a website, but they just didn't use it for a variety of reasons as you've already mentioned. So the majority of the public knows we have a website close to the majority or about half will actually use it. But now we've identified probably the biggest reason why they don't use it. And I think we knew that and now we know it. We for sure know it. And hopefully we can make these changes with our software provider, which will benefit not just Alberta, but anybody who uses in Canada or elsewhere the same services, the same software.

([28:36](#)):

So hopefully that'll bring us there. But it's changed a lot. It's changed considerably over the years and moving that needle towards the web. I think when we, just before we first introduced the click before you dig call to action, we were less than 30% online and shortly thereafter we went over 65%. And now in total, we are 85% online I think as of last month. And that should pretty much hold true or maybe even more for the entirety of the year, which is really amazing, especially when we know, and thanks to you Joe, for doing that analysis, that locate requests online are less likely to result in damage. And that's a big thing and so much so that it needs to be a best practice. Do you think the day will ever come when locate requests must be online full stop?

Josef Rosenberg ([29:39](#)):

It's hard to say. I mean, we've in other jurisdictions, they've been able to pull off something that's approximating that, but I wouldn't say is absolutist to that because even in those places where they have online locate mandates, they're still seeing like a small 2% or so of their requests coming through by phone. And there are folks unfortunately who simply just don't have access to technology or have chosen not to have access to technology, and there always has to be some accommodation for them. Alberta, for better or worse, is a fairly rural province. Ditto for Saskatchewan and Manitoba. I mean it's Canada. You can drive an hour in any direction and not pass a town larger than 10 people in some cases. We have a very large, large province in total land area and not a lot of people in it. So I think there's always going to be some edge cases where you have folks who just don't have access to a computer or have limited access to technology, and they're going to need some way to be able to identify those lines because while they may be in far-flung places, they exist buried utilities in far-flung places, and we want to ensure that they're safe.

Mike Sullivan ([31:00](#)):

Sure. And we identify every month the number of low-key requests from rural areas as well as what the percentage of calls and webs are. And it's always leaning well over into the web side of locate requests. So the rural areas do have access, not maybe the access that the major urban centers do, but it's improving and we are seeing those

Josef Rosenberg ([31:27](#)):

Results. I went camping this weekend at Beaver Mines Lake and I did not have cell service for two days. So there are definitely

Mike Sullivan ([31:38](#)):

Was that intentional though? You wanted to find a place that was

Josef Rosenberg ([31:40](#)):

Like that? No, no. My sister booked it. You can thank the mountains for that. My sister booked it. But in the town of Beaver Mines, which is about 15 minutes north of the lake, they do have cell service, and that's a town of about, I think 80 to a hundred people. But there are residential areas between the town site and the lake site, and there's other things, castle Falls and things like that in the area. And none of those places have cell service. So there are people living in portions of Alberta that quite simply just don't have cell service. Now. There are options. As Mike mentioned, we are entering the future starlink and there's another startup coming up soon, offer satellite internet, which is more available. But those are, well, frankly, expensive and a lot of still only have beta availability, so they're not immediately available to a lot of these folks. But eventually I'd say ask me again in five years and maybe I'll be taking a different too.

Mike Sullivan ([32:45](#)):

Oh, in five years I think we'll see a different uptick again. Yeah, for sure. Getting to perhaps the lighter side of the contact center, we're dealing with the public every day, whether it's contractors members or homeowners, government officials, you name it. Podcasters, we are dealing with a lot of different people today. And what are we seeing in terms of, or some of the lighter side, what are some of the more unique discussions we may have had or heard from the public?

Sher Kirk ([33:20](#)):

Well, definitely one of the most common, I don't know how humor it is, but certainly one of the misconceptions out there from the beginning when we used to call when Alberta one call came into the world, it was Alberta first call when it changed to Alberta one call, a lot of people thought, okay, first of all, they think we're a government agency because we have Alberta in our name

([33:44](#)):

And we have one call in our name. So they think, oh, this is the place you call for all information on all things. They don't relate it to damage prevention. They relate it to like a 4 1 1 for everything. So we used to get all kinds of calls asking us for, I need the number for Joe and Blairmore, can you look that up for me? And we used to have some agents who would sit on calls with people who would refuse to believe that we weren't some kind of directory service, and they would look up numbers for them online and give them the information over the phone just because they couldn't convince them otherwise. That was definitely one of the more popular ones. You hear about contact center stories. You can go online and find contact center stories anywhere in particular, tech support is always good for a humorous because people who don't understand their computer or call in for support are usually pretty funny calls from time to time. People think they're CD ROM drives. Were coffee holders in the old days, things like that. Or holding their pages up to their screen, trying to scan their, can you see this? Can you see me now? Kind of questions.

Mike Sullivan ([34:59](#)):

Well, the big joke was always in the early days, somebody doing a correction of their document, they had white out on their screen.

Sher Kirk ([35:05](#)):

That's right. That's right. I mean, I think we're well past those kind of days now for the most part, but I always found that those kind of stories, I guess I don't really like mocking people for their ignorance. It's kind of how it feels. Sometimes. People call in, they need help. They're not always going to know everything. And certainly in our industry, they have no idea what we do. And so some of the funnier stories are just coming from people who just don't understand and we find it humorous because we're in the know, right?

Mike Sullivan ([35:43](#)):

Oh yeah. To us it's commonly.

Sher Kirk ([35:44](#)):

Yeah, exactly. So the things I find humorous were always what was going on in the background, the invisible contact center to people. I can recall days where we used to have a group of women who worked for the contact center when we were in a contact center proper who had this knitting bee thing going on, and there would be all these women sitting around knitting and when they had to organize their wool, there would be yarns stretched across the aisles of the contact center that people had to work their way through to get from one side to the other because these women would be making these yarn balls across the contact center trapped. It was

Mike Sullivan ([36:30](#)):

Like a big, it was like a trap

Sher Kirk ([36:33](#)):

Of work your way to the lunchroom. Yeah, it's weird. Things happen inside contact centres. They're definitely a different kind of community of people in a contact centre, a unique bunch.

Mike Sullivan ([36:47](#)):

It is unique. I agree. It is a unique element to the contact centre. And probably still today, although we just don't see it because we're all remote and we try to do events to keep people together now that the pandemic is in the rear view mirror, we do try to have events and bring people together, but it's not like it used to be. We used to have our stampede event and Christmas and Thanksgiving and lunch and learns in the office, but we still managed to do some of that remotely. And that's a good thing. But it's interesting to see how quickly that has changed and become accepted. And even bringing people together for a social event is not as easy as it once was. People are like, oh no, we're good. We're good. Not everybody needs it. And as much as we try, we're just not seeing that. And I hope that, well, I know we're going to keep trying. I know we're going to keep doing whatever we can to make that human connection, which is important. And that human connection is something that for a contact center we have to keep doing as well. And one last question, I guess in terms of where we're at today, how big a role do you think social media is playing in our existence today? I mean, it's been around for a while now, but how big a role do you think that's playing in our existence?

Sher Kirk ([38:19](#)):

I think we're in an interesting point in social media right now. Right now, I think we're at some kind of a tipping point where when it first came out, social media really was that it was for social interactions. It was you together with your group of people and you talked online. It became a nice way. Things like Facebook became a nice way to keep in contact with people that you've known for years that don't live around you and things like that. But we are seeing, I think especially with changes, big changes like Twitter and everyone being concerned about the conversation and the divisiveness and the misinformation that can be so easily spread over social media. I think social media is at a point right now where we're seeing it fracture in so many different ways that it's going to morph into something new. It's not going to be what it was where there was these three main, there's always been Facebook and there's always been Instagram and there's always been LinkedIn and Twitter, and now there's so many different apps and ways that people can connect with each other. It's really going to start to be more of a pick and choose, and we're going to lose, I think even more of that getting outside your echo chamber that we used to have. And I think that's disappointing. I think it's important that those conversations across different viewpoints continue and different interests, and you should be able to learn something new when you're online now you just get reinforced in what you already think, and I think that's sad.

Josef Rosenberg ([40:05](#)):

Well, I think it's kind of funny because you mentioned how social media started, and in a way I feel it's kind of regressing back to that where you're seeing more individualized communities pop up as a result of all the larger groups. There's a technology blogger named Adam Fisher. He actually posited this last year. It's the idea of the Trust thermo clean. Thermo clean is like an ocean phenomena where you'll suddenly go below a certain depth in the ocean and the temperature of the ocean just drops. The Trust Therma clean as he posits it is effectively when a company or companies push the margins of trust with their users more and more and more and more until they hit a breaking point where the users just lose all trust in the company. And you see a massive drop up in both usage of customers and trust in the information that's being pervaded on their platform.

[\(41:05\)](#):

We've already seen it with Facebook. We currently see it occurring with Twitter right now, or X I guess. And it's curious that the more companies drop off the trust Therma clean, the more we see users, again, like you said, kind of enclaving themselves in more individualized or echo chamber type communities because the public square guess has kind of been eroded to the point that nobody really trusts if they're talking to real people or if they're being AstroTurf by governments or special interest groups or corporations or things like that. So they remove themselves to these insular communities that may or may not have similar issues, but they're not as obvious, I guess

Sher Kirk [\(41:58\)](#):

I was just going to say, which over time really impacts how a business would use social media. Whereas before we could reach huge, large swaths of people by being on what was a trusted social media site. And now with people insulating themselves, as you said, Joe, into these smaller communities, it's harder for us. It will become harder for us as a company to reach larger groups of people. It may come to choosing, trying to find your right demographic of people across social media, whereas before it was less about that. It was more of a blast across the radio waves. Now it's less about, if you think about radio stations, there was radio and then there was people who would pick and choose their radio stations. It's going to be the same across social media where we're going to have to find the stations that matter to us as a company or the way the people that we're trying to reach are, and then we're going to have to be on those platforms. So there's a lot more research that's going to have to go into it and a lot more awareness about what new platforms are popping up and where people are going and what people are going there. So it's losing its effectiveness as an advertising tool, I suppose, which not necessarily a bad thing, but from a business point of view, it just makes it harder to reach your audience because people are online and that's where we have to reach them.

Mike Sullivan [\(43:28\)](#):

Well, and people online today, unfortunately, we have to play in an advertising perspective. We have to play to the least common denominator. That's the person's existing scrolling, scrolling, scrolling. And we still need to try and reach those people. And our advertising is getting tighter and tighter and tighter, and it has to have a visual movement to catch the person's attention. It has to have sound, it has to have captions, and yet it has to be done in about seven seconds. It used to be 15 and before that it was 20. Now we're probably down to more like seven. And it's really hard to get your advertising, your message out in that tight little space that bundle, and it's getting tougher and tougher. But I agree that social media, people call it anti-social media, it has that unfortunate drawback and we're trying to promote a very simple message of this is what you need to do to stay safe. And amongst a sea of disinformation, we've never had so much information before at our fingertips, and yet we've never been in a position before in time that we can't trust anything. That's why I'm feeling that.

Sher Kirk [\(44:42\)](#):

I'm looking out that makes it even harder to reach people and have them trust you. Building trust as a business, I mean, we've been around 40 years. There's a lot of people who trust us. How do we maintain that trust? How do we not break that trust? How do we not get painted with what they call cancel culture, a brush somewhere where we make the wrong move or we do something that offends a certain group of people and suddenly we've lost a group of people's trust and it's impossible. It's hard to get back. It's almost like advertising's not going to be enough. It's like you have to get engaged in the

conversations. You have to have a presence and a trusted presence. So how do you become that trusted presence across multiple platforms? That's going to be the key.

Mike Sullivan ([45:29](#)):

It was interesting before we close out here, I was looking at, we had a notification that somebody commented on one of our ads on Facebook and just this morning, and the person was commenting about private locates and private utilities that they aren't marked or they aren't part of Utility safety partners membership and registration and that we're spreading disinformation. And I look at the ad again and it's like, no, we're not, but if you want to be picky about it, yes, you're right. Private lines are not part of what our members will locate. It was more for agriculture and farming, and there's a lot of transmission pipelines out there, and maybe that's what the ad should be talking about, perhaps a little bit more. But if a person wants to pick, go through and pick the fly shit out of the pepper, that's my predecessor used to say they can and they can do with anything.

([46:31](#)):

Unfortunately that happens. But at the same token, by the same token, it opens a door for us utility safety partners to engage in a conversation with that person and say, you're right. Our members will not locate private utilities. Here's why. But here's what we will do. And to promote that damage prevention message. And that's really what it's all about. If we can engage in a conversation that's meaningful, that provides information that's real, that's trusted, then we've done our job. And thanks for doing your job. This is not an easy task. Providing these services to the public and being the answer to all their questions and their queries and be able to respond on all platforms on which they wish to interact with us. So thanks for being on the podcast with me today. I appreciate it.

Sher Kirk ([47:28](#)):

Yeah, thanks,

([47:29](#)):

Anytime.

Mike Sullivan ([47:32](#)):

That's going to wrap things up on The Safety Moment podcast. I want to thank our producers Stories and Strategies, and I hope you choose to follow this podcast on any directory you're listening on. Please do leave a rating. You can follow us on Twitter at Utility Safety, and we're also on Instagram and Facebook. If you'd like to send us a note, maybe you have an episode idea, email us at [info@utilitysafety.ca](mailto:info@utilitysafety.ca), input podcast in the subject header. I'm Mike Sullivan, the president of Utility Safety Partners. Click to know what's above and below. One click costs you nothing. Not clicking could cost you everything.