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B.C. benefits when U.S. firms 'near-shore' call centres to Canada

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B.C.'s call-centre industry is a powerhouse within a powerhouse.

The province has the country's second-highest percentage of call-centre workers, at 15.3 per cent, after Ontario's 36.6 per cent, a new study from University of B.C.'s Sauder business school says.

Canada ranks third after India and Ireland in terms of the work it receives from international customers, the study said.

"Everyone's talking India, India, India," said UBC business professor and study co-author Danielle van Jaarsveld.

"But this phenomenon of U.S. firms near-shoring customer service to Canada hasn't received a lot of attention."

Seventy-three per cent of call centres in India serve international customers, 37 per cent in Ireland and 35 per cent in Canada, according to a global study of which the UBC study forms part.

Of the 406 Canadian call centres studied by the researchers, 30 per cent mainly handled calls with U.S. customers.

"Neiman Marcus doesn't have a physical store in Canada but their customer-service contact centre is here," van Jaarsveld said.

"We were surprised by how many contact centres located in Canada are dedicated to serving a U.S. customer base." The UBC study, done with the University of Western Ontario, found that women comprise 69.1 per cent of the call-centre workforce.

Call-centre workers, on average, earn \$31,468 a year.

Managers, excluding supervisors and team leaders, earn an average of \$59,017, the study said.

Unionized employees -- 19.9 per cent of centres are unionized -- earn 36 per cent more than non-union workers, the study said.

On average, workers speak with 100 customers a day. An average call lasts 5.5 minutes.

Sixty-two per cent of Canada's call centres are in-house operations serving a firm's own customers.

Based on separate research, it's estimated that 500,000 people work in about 11,000 call centres across the country.

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