



## Call center to add 400 jobs

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An additional 400 call-center jobs are headed to Joplin, according to Joplin Area Chamber of Commerce officials Wednesday.

NCO Group Inc. is expanding its partnership with Best Buy and its Geek Squad services to bring the new jobs to its Joplin location in the former Wal-Mart building at 1717 W. Seventh St. The company will make an announcement about the jobs at 10:30 a.m. today at the Joplin NCO offices.

NCO acquired Joplin's Systems and Services Technologies call center in January and laid off several employees. But since then, the call center has grown. In May, the company announced that it was hiring 350 people in 2008 and could add 300 more jobs in 2009 because of its new Best Buy contract. It received \$1.3 million in state tax credits through the enhanced enterprise zone program.

NCO already has hired more than 500 employees to date, according to company officials.

Chris Autry, general manager of NCO's Joplin location, said the additional 400 jobs are to satisfy the increasing customer-service needs of the company's existing contract with Best Buy. Since that original contract, Autry said, the company has expanded its services to not only customer service, but also some sales and technical assistance.

"It's still taking care of customers," Autry said. "We're not telemarketers here. We don't interrupt people during dinner to sell them something."

The 400 new jobs include a wide range of positions, from Best Buy sales agents, customer-service agents and technical-support agents, to support and management positions, including quality coaches, trainers, supervisors and managers.

"We need all of that infrastructure to take care of more customers," Autry said.

The customer-service and sales agents will start at \$10 an hour, depending on experience, plus additional performance incentives. Other jobs will range from \$11.50 an hour to \$22 an hour.

NCO offers a benefits package that includes medical and dental insurance, life insurance, short- and long-term disability, paid time off, holidays, a 401(k) plan, and an employee assistance program.

Kirstie Smith, communications coordinator with the Joplin chamber, said NCO officials cited the area's high-quality work force and work ethic as reasons they decided to add the jobs in Joplin.

"The people here want to work; they are happy to work," Smith said. "These are highly trained folks. They deal with complicated issues, and the potential exists for them to make significant money."

And Autry said the company isn't the only one in the workplace relationship that seems to be happy with the current situation. He said 25 percent of his hires come from employee referrals of friends and family members.

"That's high, and it shows people like what they're doing here," he said.

NCO will conduct a job fair for the new positions from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at the Joplin NCO offices. Company officials will offer more information about the specific jobs, take applications and do some interviews.

**Global company**

NCO Group Inc. is a global provider of business outsourcing services, primarily focused on accounts-receivable management and customer-relationship management. NCO employs more than 33,000 people worldwide, and provides services to more than 22,300 clients through 125 offices in the United States, Canada, Mexico, the Philippines, Panama, the Caribbean, India, the United Kingdom and Australia.

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