

St. Louis at Work, a 24-Hour Snapshot





2:00 AM

Internet troubleshooter counsels a client

Whether he is working late at night, at the office or at home, Raul Cortes staffs the front line of computer support for guests at hotels and resorts across the country.

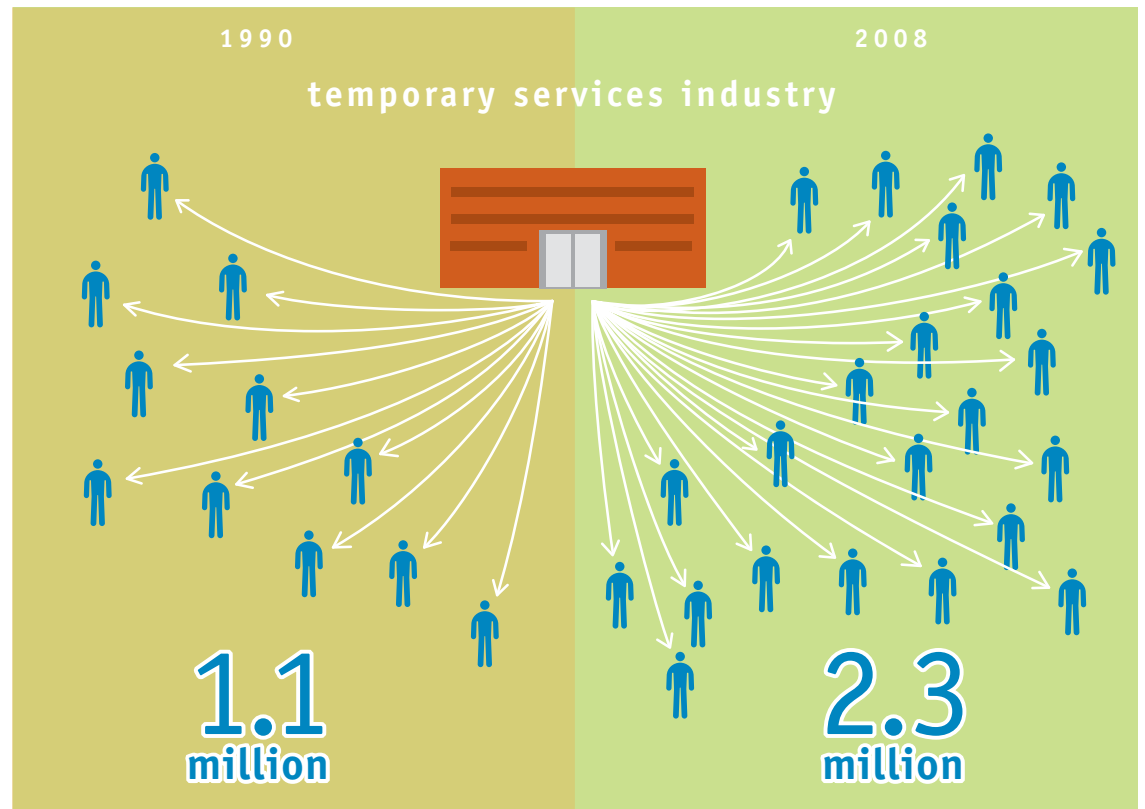
Cortes is a call center specialist with Customer Direct. The native of Santiago, Chile, didn't speak more than classroom English when he came here in 2008 with his wife, who is from St. Louis. But his Spanish was needed and his intellect so sharp that he found a job within a few months at the Chesterfield company.

"My English was so broken when I got here. I was scared but I just said, 'I have to do this,'" Cortes says. "Little by little I started catching more and more until I felt really prepared to handle any call."

Cortes receives calls from hotels in the U.S. and a few resorts in Mexico. His task is to help guests overcome problems with logging onto and using the hotels' Internet services. In some cases, he takes on higher level troubleshooting calls from the hotels themselves. If a property's Internet crashes, the pressure is on for Cortes to get them back online.

Because he earned a bachelor's degree in computer science from a university in Chile, Cortes has been using his information technology skills from day one at Customer Direct. His employers didn't immediately realize he had those skills until he showed them that he could build the scripts that help desk representatives use to work through issues with hotel guests.

Between 1990–2008, national employment in the temporary services industry more than doubled, from 1.1 million to 2.3 million, and included a larger share of workers in high-skill occupations than ever before.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

While he has been promoted to deal with higher level trouble calls, his bilingualism is so valuable that the company hasn't wanted to lose him on the phones. So now he writes scripts and takes calls.

When he received a contract job offer from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cortes asked Customer Direct if he could work part time. His boss said yes. Then he asked if he could work from home. Because his skills are so needed, the company said yes again. For six months, Cortes worked 70-hour weeks at both positions as well as a restaurant job.

Now he is back to just Customer Direct, but Cortes has plans to add more skills to his repertoire. He wants to learn French as well as computer programming. He may also seek a programming certification.

"It is something that I want to do more of," he says. "I've been working here for three years, and I really like the company. I'm thankful for them giving me the opportunity to work here and be part of what they do. I'm happy to be here." ☒



Raul Cortes parlayed his bachelor's degree in computer science and his bilingualism into a dual job writing scripts for help desk personnel and handling domestic and international calls at Customer Direct in Chesterfield.