

Unifying the 21st Century Contact Center

Advanced cloud contact center platforms enable companies to fuse standalone systems, provide agents with a single view of each customer, and improve satisfaction and business outcomes.

Just the Facts: Providing customers with consistent support experiences across a variety of different channels is essential for companies. Today's social/mobile customer has come to expect high-quality service experiences and has little patience for slow or inadequate problem resolution. Meanwhile, intensifying global competition has made it increasingly difficult for businesses to differentiate themselves by product or price, since rivals can quickly replicate products or undercut a company's position.

However, customer service represents a domain in which companies *can* distinguish themselves and strengthen relationships with customers. Research has shown that consistency with service experiences plays an integral role in cementing customer trust and loyalty. According to a 2012 J.D. Power & Associates study of hundreds of thousands of consumers who do business with more than 800 companies, brands such as Amazon, JetBlue, and The Ritz-Carlton, that provide exceptional customer service, tend to demonstrate similar key traits. These include an ability to provide customers with consistent service experiences, particularly

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Chief Marketing Officer,
inContact*

across various channels and touchpoints.

The ability to deliver consistent cross-channel customer support is dramatically compromised when organizations are dependent upon a hodgepodge of standalone contact center systems that make it difficult for agents and other employees to extract relevant customer information. This siloed landscape is due, in part, to technologies used to support voice, mobile, IVR, email, chat, and social support that have either been internally developed or assembled over time through mergers and acquisitions. “This makes it extremely difficult for agents and contact center leaders to follow a customer's journey from one channel to the next and provide them with timely and knowledgeable service,” says Mariann McDonagh, cmo at inContact.

In reality, the sizable investments that many companies have placed in legacy contact center systems make it impractical to rip and replace these systems without a great deal of cost and disruption. The same economic logic applies to the outlays required to integrate various contact center and CRM systems.

Justifying the Unified Contact Center

Centralizing customer support activities can deliver a variety of business and operational benefits to companies. Agents who are more efficient are able to improve first-call resolution rates by having a more complete view of customer information. Meanwhile, contact center leaders are able to manage, monitor, and measure the performance of the contact center using standard reporting metrics across channels.

Greater agility in responding to and meeting the needs of customers helps strengthen the customer experience. “When the customer experience improves, this ultimately strengthens satisfaction, loyalty, and customer lifetime value,” says Kristyn Emenecker, vice president of product marketing at inContact. When companies can effortlessly assist customers, whether a person calls a company to order a product, or sends a text to inquire about a product issue they're encountering, the interaction can be handled seamlessly and the work that goes on behind the scenes is invisible to the customer. Just as it should be.

Embracing the Unified, Digital Contact Center Hub

By deploying a cloud contact center platform, organizations can overlay existing legacy systems and pull vital customer information together that can make agents more productive while creating opportunities for adding new functionality easily and seamlessly. Using a flexible and agile digital contact center hub enables service teams to deliver more relevant and satisfying support experiences for customers. Meanwhile, productivity improves by placing customer data in a centralized location so that agents aren't forced to toggle back and forth between systems in search of information and waste time while a customer is waiting to resolve an issue.

Customers who receive consistent service experiences are more likely to remain loyal and extend their relationships with a company. By using a unified, digital contact center hub, companies operate more efficiently and customers are happier.

“When agents are able to access a full range of information about customers quickly—including the nature of their most recent service interactions, as well as their transaction history and the products they own—this can enable agents to deliver prompt and highly personalized service experiences that can drive better business outcomes,” says Martha Rogers, Ph.D., founding partner at Peppers & Rogers Group.

5 Steps to Creating a Unified, Digital Contact Center Hub



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Before organizations transition to a digital contact center hub, it’s important to evaluate the current state of maturity for customer service and its future goals to map out an effective strategy and select the right platform. Here are five recommendations for building a successful plan.

1. Determine your organization’s current and future state. Every company’s contact center operates at different levels of maturity. Each contact center also uses different operating models (e.g., inbound/outbound, insourced/outsourced, geographically-dispersed contact centers, at-home agents, etc.). It’s important for organizational leaders to understand that the level of the customer service function is in their journey, including the skills held by agents to support customers across different channels, as well as the processes that are in place and those that stand to be improved upon. By determining the contact center’s state of readiness, decision-makers will be better prepared to identify and select a cloud contact center platform that is best suited to meet the organization’s current needs and desired future state.

2. Identify customer preferences. In order to select the right platform, companies need to determine the channels that customers are using to reach out for support. Contact center leaders can use analytics to help evaluate channel usage by customer segment,

time of day that channel traffic is busiest, the types of customers who are using different channels to satisfy specific needs, as well as devices or channels of which customers would like to use that the organization doesn’t currently support. These insights can help guide organizational leaders to select a cloud contact center platform that is best suited for meeting customers’ current and anticipated needs.

3. Access to customer data. Cloud contact center platforms are clearly designed to provide companies with the type of customer data mashup that’s required between CRM and various customer support systems. Advanced platforms provide companies with the ability to overlay existing PBX, CRM, automatic call distribution (ACD) and other systems to pull customer data into one place. Before selecting a platform, determine the systems and sources from which agents and other customer-facing employees need to access customer data. Doing so in advance can help smooth the implementation and deployment of the platform and ensure that staff has the most accurate information available to meet customers’ needs.

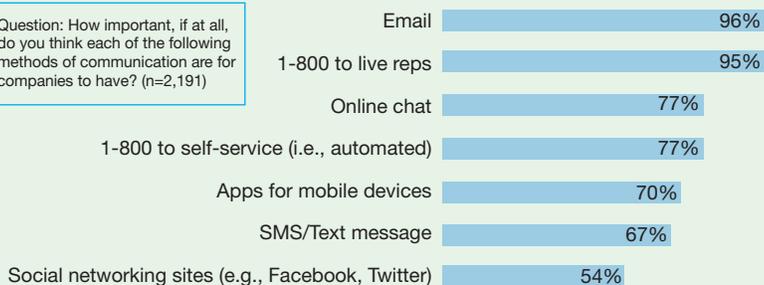
4. Ability to support existing equipment. The right cloud contact center platform enables companies to preserve existing investments in phone systems (e.g., Nortel) and other equipment without having to replace those technologies. Evaluate whether, and to what extent, platforms are equipment-agnostic to help get the best bang for your buck. “Cloud contact center platforms also offer organizations opportunities to leapfrog over other steps that might otherwise be required as part of a traditional systems upgrade, such as plans for upgrading equipment,” says Sheila McGee-Smith, president and principal analyst of McGee-Smith Analytics, LLC.

5. Evaluate and select the cloud platform that’s best suited for your company and your customers. When assessing cloud contact center platforms, consider the reliability and scalability of each offering. Is there a published uptime guarantee? What are the failover and redundancy features in place? Does the platform provide the type of channel usage and support sought by your customers? Can workforce optimization applications be easily integrated into the platform? Knowing what each platform has to offer, including its strengths and weaknesses, will enable your organization to make the most informed decision.

Today’s Customers Value Multichannel Communications

In a 2013 Harris Interactive study commissioned by inContact, 63 percent of U.S. adults agreed that “brands that don’t offer options other than 1-800 numbers seem outdated or old fashioned.” The following chart from the study ranks the importance of each method of communication to respondents.

Question: How important, if at all, do you think each of the following methods of communication are for companies to have? (n=2,191)



Source: 2013 Multichannel Customer Service Preferences, a Harris Interactive® Study, Commissioned by inContact. Sample of 2,191 U.S. adults aged 18 years and older. March 2013.

Providing Patients Better, More Personalized Care

“When the customer experience improves, this ultimately strengthens satisfaction, loyalty, and customer lifetime value.”

—Kristyn Emenecker,
Vice President of Product Marketing, inContact

WellStar Health System is a five-hospital healthcare system in northwest metropolitan Atlanta that serves a population of more than one million people. When WellStar decided to insource its contact center operations for patient billing in 2010, the organization sought a contact center platform that could provide skills-based routing and help connect patients with agents who are able to address certain needs. This includes helping patients who need financial assistance, as well as those who need to set up scheduled bill payment programs.

WellStar also sought a dialer solution that offers both predictive and blast capabilities. Overall, the company needed a contact center platform that met these and other needs while requiring minimal IT involvement for implementation, maintenance, or upgrades.

“We felt we could do a better job of handling accounts receivables with our inhouse employees so long as we had the right platform to meet our needs,” says Alan Clayton, director of the account management department at WellStar.

Since WellStar implemented inContact’s cloud contact center platform in late 2010, the company has been

able to fine-tune its support offerings to patients. For instance, by using the skills-based routing tools provided through inContact, Clayton and his team have been able to create a Spanish language queue. In addition, the team has been able to adjust its collection strategy and ensure that it’s calling the right patients and not reach out to those who don’t necessarily need to be contacted (e.g., patients who qualify for indigent care). Meanwhile, the company has been able to add a call-back feature for patients when the wait time in the queue exceeds two minutes.

The cloud contact center platform is providing WellStar and its patients with a wide range of new flexibility. The company is working with inContact to develop an IVR solution and create two additional skills-based queues that will help the company to better serve patients as it migrates to a new patient management system. By adding this new functionality, WellStar will be able to consolidate four small contact centers into one, thus driving greater internal efficiencies and better patient experiences, says Clayton.

WellStar has also been able to add a post-call survey tool that has enabled it to evaluate agent performance while helping the company to gain valuable feedback from its patients. “Every day we’re learning and making improvements, including identifying the types of questions not to ask patients,” says Clayton.

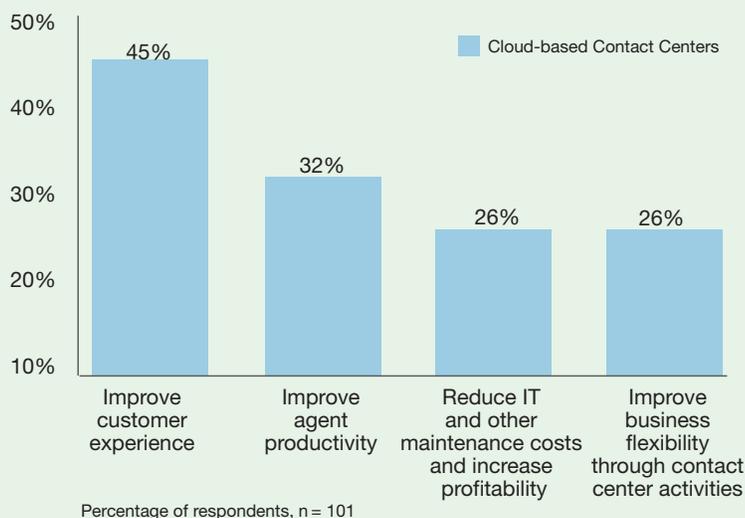
Thanks to the use of the cloud contact center platform, WellStar now has a truly blended inbound/outbound contact center that’s helping it drive higher patient satisfaction month over month while enabling the company to handle larger call volumes. First-call resolution rates jumped 7 points within the first year of using the cloud contact center platform while collection rates are also up. Because it is using a hosted solution, the company is now able to offer a telecommuting option to its agents, thus helping to strengthen agent engagement and availability.

Although WellStar is using the cloud contact center platform to solely provide voice support at the moment, the company is looking to add email, direct mail, and fax in the future.

The business benefits from using the cloud platform have also generated impressive results for WellStar. “We are able to contact more patients in a cost-effective manner than we were able to before,” says Clayton. “Plus, we were able to install the platform in under 45 days compared to a traditional system deployment that would’ve taken six to nine months.”

Customer Experience Drives Cloud Deployments

Cloud contact centers provide organizations a number of operational and business benefits. Here are the top drivers for companies that moved to a cloud contact center, according to a recent Aberdeen Group study.



Source: Aberdeen Group, December 2012

Getting Started



By the Numbers

Annual cost of customer turnover:
Cloud contact centers: \$112,500

Annual cost of customer turnover:
Traditional internal contact centers:
\$155,000

First contact resolution rate:
Cloud contact centers: 51 percent

First contact resolution rate:
Traditional internal contact
centers: 30 percent

Average year-over-year improve-
ment in company revenue: Cloud
contact centers: 13.1 percent

Average year-over-year
improvement in company revenue:
Traditional internal contact centers:
4.0 percent

Source: Aberdeen Group, "The Hidden
ROI of a Cloud-based Contact Center,"
January 2013.

As we mentioned earlier, before an organization transitions to a digital contact center hub, it's useful to gain a clear idea of how the company currently handles customer service, to identify any gaps in the strategy, including channel support that's missing, and look ahead to the organization's desired future state.

This "future state" should include a vision for where company leaders see the customer service function five or ten years from now. Just as customer needs and preferences continue to shift, the contact center itself is changing. "For many companies, the traditional brick-and-mortar contact center that contains rows of agents is transitioning to a considerably more virtual environment," says McDonagh. In order to recruit and retain agents with specific skills, a growing number of companies will rely more extensively on the use of at-home and geographically-dispersed agents. Indeed, the at-home agent workforce is expected to gain momentum as more high-quality agents either choose to work from home or are forced to due to family dynamics. In fact, Frost & Sullivan projects that the at-home agent market will grow by 40 percent annually.

Because of this cultural shift, a digital contact center hub offers a perfect fit for virtual customer service teams that aren't dependent upon using premise-based software in a specific location.

Transitioning to a digital contact center hub also allows organizations to set up more dynamic and effective workflows so the right customers are being directed to the right agents with the right skills. "Meanwhile, agents are able to access customer information more easily and manage their work in a more flexible manner that's more conducive to their individual work style," says Emenecker.

By relying on a single platform that can centralize support across the full spectrum of channels that customers use – including voice, IVR, email, chat, mobile, and social – this provides contact center leaders and other decision-makers with greater consistency in their ability to monitor, manage, and measure call handling, blockage, abandon rates, and other performance gauges. "When customer service leaders are able to track these metrics more consistently across different channels, they're better positioned to provide agents with more tangible advice that agents can act on, and ultimately help improve the customer experience and drive optimal business outcomes," says Rogers.

Today's customer – and tomorrow's customer – is mobile, multichannel, and empowered. To support them properly, companies need digital contact center hubs that are agile and flexible enough to meet the needs of customers as well as agents and the organization.

inContact helps contact centers around the globe create profitable customer experiences through its powerful portfolio of cloud-based contact center software solutions. The company's services and solutions enable contact centers to operate more efficiently, optimize the cost and quality of every customer interaction, create new pathways to profit, and ensure ongoing customer-centric business improvement and growth.

For more information please visit www.inContact.com

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