



September 2014

US\$7.00

E X P E R T S E R I E S

Moving Your Contact Center to the Cloud

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There is no more important tool in communicating with your customers and prospects than the contact center. With the growth in cloud-based services, it is not surprising that the idea of moving the contact center into the cloud is now coming to the fore. While you may be hesitant to transfer such a vital customer service asset outside of the corporate headquarters, there are many factors that argue for a cloud-based contact center solution.

When we talk about a contact center today, it is far more than the “automatic call distributor” of years gone by. These systems no longer blindly deal calls to agents, but are part of a highly complex configuration that interfaces with numerous computer systems and peripheral devices to provide interactive voice prompts, speech recognition and other services to deliver a highly configurable user experience.

Further, the contact center manager must have access to meaningful reports that track the overall performance of the center, the level of service that is being provided for different classes of calls and callers, and highlights problem areas that need to be addressed. In larger contact centers, even the task of scheduling agents can be a major undertaking.

Probably the single biggest development in the contact center has been the explosion of media types that now must be serviced. While some customers still will want to talk to a live agent, the more mobile-oriented and computer-savvy want to be able to connect with the company over live chat, email or social media.

Meeting the challenges of operating a modern contact center can make outsourcing to a cloud provider all the more appealing. This Expert Series Report will cover the considerations that you need to make as well as some tips for successfully migrating your contact center to the cloud.

Laying the Groundwork

Given the contact center’s overall importance in supporting customers and building brand loyalty, you should consider the decision to move yours to the cloud carefully.

First, you need to determine what functionality a cloud-based offering will need to provide in order to emulate the capabilities you currently provide to your customers. These may include:

- IVR functions, speech recognition, data collection, intelligent call routing, etc. It might also include the capabilities to interact with customers through live chat, email, social media and possibly video

- The ability to record interactions with customers either for regulatory and compliance reasons or for agent monitoring and coaching
- The ability to collect the required key performance indicators (KPIs) managers use to monitor the center's performance
- Tools for training, monitoring and coaching to ensure constant improvement in servicing customers

Next, you must outline the various call-routing paths so they can be recreated on the new platform. Your contact center may be fielding dozens of different call types and using IVR prompts and either DTMF inputs or speech recognition to sort calls and route them efficiently to the correct agent on the first try.

Note that while your goal typically is to emulate the caller experience that has been provided by the premises-based platform, you may use the conversion to cloud as an opportunity to rethink your service process and implement new ones.

Once you confirm that a cloud platform can meet your company's requirements, then it's time to determine whether cloud is truly the best choice. Today the decision to go to the cloud is as much a policy decision as it is economic, as more and more companies are deciding what functions they really need to control in-house.

Making the Case for Cloud

As long as there are no regulatory or compliance obstacles, there can be benefits to a cloud contact center deployment, including the following:

Reliability. In a cloud environment, your essential systems can be housed in a secure facility, professionally managed and protected with several layers of backup. That backup normally takes the form of redundant, geographically dispersed data centers, all with backup power and redundant network connections. Many also will have international operations allowing you to have a 24/7 "follow the sun" capability. All of this adds up to a highly reliable infrastructure providing you ensure that the facilities where your agents are housed is similarly protected.

Virtual Agents. The other layer of protection is the fact that virtually all cloud providers support work-from-home capabilities. In that case if there is a disaster that impacts the entire agent facility, the contact center essentially can "go virtual" with all of the agents working from home, provided they have PCs and broadband Internet connections. The support for work-from-home agents also allows for access to a larger pool of potential agents and more flexibility to add additional agent capacity to address unexpected peaks in demand.

Continual Updates. The other major advantage of a cloud solution is faster access to new technology. With a dedicated professional staff, cloud providers will be able to implement the newer software releases and newer generation capabilities more quickly as they won't be delayed for "other projects," given that the contact center service is their only "project."



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Flexibility/Scalability. From a business standpoint, probably the biggest advantage of a cloud-based solution is flexibility and growth potential. Assuming that the contract terms are favorable, you can increase or decrease the number of agent seats to fit changing or seasonal business conditions. Further, there is no practical limit to how far you can grow the installation, so you won't be faced with a "dump or duplicate" decision some years down the road.

Low Overhead. In this highly competitive business world, companies need to have access to these business-critical technologies but without the staff and facility ownership overhead that is needed for a premises-based contact center. The road to success today comes by way of flexibility and agility, and a "by-the-seat" pricing model offers that needed flexibility. However, it is important that you approach it in a planned and organized fashion.

Evaluating Cloud Providers

The first step in a contact center cloud migration is to assemble a cross-functional team to drive the effort. That team will include representatives from contact center management, contact center operations, IT systems, networking, security, finance, and potentially others. The team should be diligent in assessing the cloud providers' relative capabilities. That investigation should be particularly rigorous in the areas of:

- Backup and redundancy plans
- Outage history in terms of frequency, severity and duration
- Security including encryption of all traffic sent between the agent site(s) and the cloud provider and between the cloud provider's data centers
- Commitment to upgrade the platform to the latest releases in a timely fashion
- Compliance to any regulatory mandates that are required (e.g., HIPAA, SSAE 16/ ISAE 3402, PCI-DSS, etc.)
- Level of support provided in recreating call routing rules
- Flexibility in contract terms

Making the Move to Cloud

Once the preliminary decision to go cloud with a particular provider has been made, don't attempt to implement business-critical applications out of the gate. Your plan should be to start small and expand, beginning with application that are not mission-critical. Management and operations staff in both the contact center and IT departments will have to become familiar with the platform, the provider, their procedures and support capabilities before moving on to those business-critical applications.

Overall performance metrics should be agreed upon prior to the migration, and the level of achievement in each of those areas should be monitored throughout the project. At the conclusion of each phase of the implementation, the cross-functional team should convene to assess:



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- the overall level of success
- problems and challenges encountered
- support response by the provider
- tactical adjustments for the next phase

A cloud-based contact center solution can offer your company increased reliability, flexibility, growth potential and faster access to new technology, but only if your project team thinks through the details and works effectively with the provider's personnel. With a well-conceived plan, a thorough vetting of the alternatives and a conservative "walk before you run" implementation plan, a cloud-based contact center can be a major win for an organization.

About

Business Value Toolbox

Channel Partners' Business Value Toolbox is designed to help solutions providers position their telecom and IT solutions as ways to create business value for their customers. This unique resource offers market information and marketing tools that agents, VARs, MSPs and systems integrators can use in their own go-to-market conversations and presentations. The [Business Value Toolbox](#) includes slides, infographics, videos, reports, calculators and more. toolbox.channelpartneronline.com