CCIQ
Igniting Customer Centricity

Executive Report on
Contact Center Technology

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Contact Center Technology

Technology is the lifeblood of the contact center. From fundamental telephony, automated call distribution and customer relationship management systems to innovative solutions for gamification, omni-channel communication and customer insight management, technological systems are the framework on which the customer experience is built.

Front-line employees may be the face of the business, but it is technology that enables them to present that face to customers. It is technology that enables them to engage.

Technology is also an instrument for change. Businesses seeking to optimize their contact center operations – and boost efficiency while driving greater levels of customer satisfaction, resolution, and interaction quality – will rely on innovative solutions to achieve their objectives. These innovative solutions are what enable businesses to transform aspirations into action.

As businesses universally adopt customer centric philosophies and pursue better customer experiences, they must consequently devote considerable attention to contact center technology. It is in accordance with this need that Call Center IQ presents its 2016 Executive Report on Contact Center Technology.

Thanks to a combination of proprietary market research and expert commentary, the report evaluates how contact center technology is effecting and being affected by change in the customer experience landscape. It pays specific mind to the rise of cloud-based technology.

The report answers a full array of questions, including those regarding how the atmosphere is driving acceptance of and investment into certain cloud-based contact center technologies, who is responsible for leading such investments, what matters when making technology investments, what matters when evaluating technology investments, how existing and new solutions are performing against that criteria, and which types of technology solutions will represent priorities in the coming years.

The included practicality guide, meanwhile, provides a more in-depth investigation into the contact center technology landscape. It also provides specific courses of action, all of which are supported by real-world case examples.

Contact center technology represents a high-priority investment area, but it need not be costly for your business. This report provides what you need to understand the marketplace, identify key challenges, benchmark against your peers, and determine which solutions you should pursue.

Key Findings:

Decisions about contact center technology are most commonly made by C-level executives and IT departments. The contact center/CX team guides these decisions in only 26% of organizations.

Businesses are increasingly relying on multi-site contact center operations.

Businesses are increasingly allowing agents to "work from home."

Today's organizations are indeed moving to the cloud: twelve months ago, 80% primarily housed their contact center technology on premises. That number is down to 58% in the present, and it will fall to just 44% in the next twelve months.

When buying technology, uptime/reliability, value for the end-user customer, and data security represent the greatest priorities.

When assessing the performance of technology, improvements in operational efficiency, improvements in customer-oriented metrics (CSAT, NPS) and improvements in agent performance represent the greatest focuses.

Existing technology is not bad for business; the overwhelming majority of organizations say their current systems have helped to either maintain or improve performance against all metrics.

New technology is better for business, however. Companies attribute widespread performance increases to their new solutions.

Customer analytics, dashboard, and performance measurement and monitoring tools represent the greatest technology priorities for the next 6 months.

Predictive analytics, reporting tools, and business intelligence/forecasting tools will become comparatively great priorities in 6-12 months.

Virtual agents, live chat, and self-service will take center stage in 12-24 months.

Methodology and Demographics

To collect data for the 2016 Executive Report on Contact Center Technology, Call Center IQ issued a survey to contact center, information technology, operations, marketing, sales, and similarly focused executives. The survey was conducted in February and March 2016.

Call Center IQ derived supplemental data from an attendee survey being completed in conjunction with the 2016 CCW event.

Collectively, CCIQ reached an audience that encompasses numerous seniority levels (ranging from managers to C-suite executives) and organizations and contact centers of all sizes.

Decisions, Decisions

For today's businesses, interest in contact center technology is not restricted to contact center professionals.

Contact center leaders are not even the most notable decision-makers when it comes to purchasing such technology.

According to respondents, leaders from the contact center or customer experience team play a key decision-making role in only 26% of organizations. The involvement level may not be insignificant, but it pales in comparison to that for the C-level and information technology teams.

51% of respondents note that the C-level plays a vital decision-making role when it comes to contact center technology investments. 49% of businesses heavily involve the IT department in the investment process.

The operations team is also more commonly involved than the contact center or CX team. 28% of organizations grant operations a prominent voice when sourcing contact center technology.

While disillusioning – nearly three-quarters of organizations do not empower contact center leaders to make decisions about the technology their own department will be using – the statistic is not necessarily problematic.
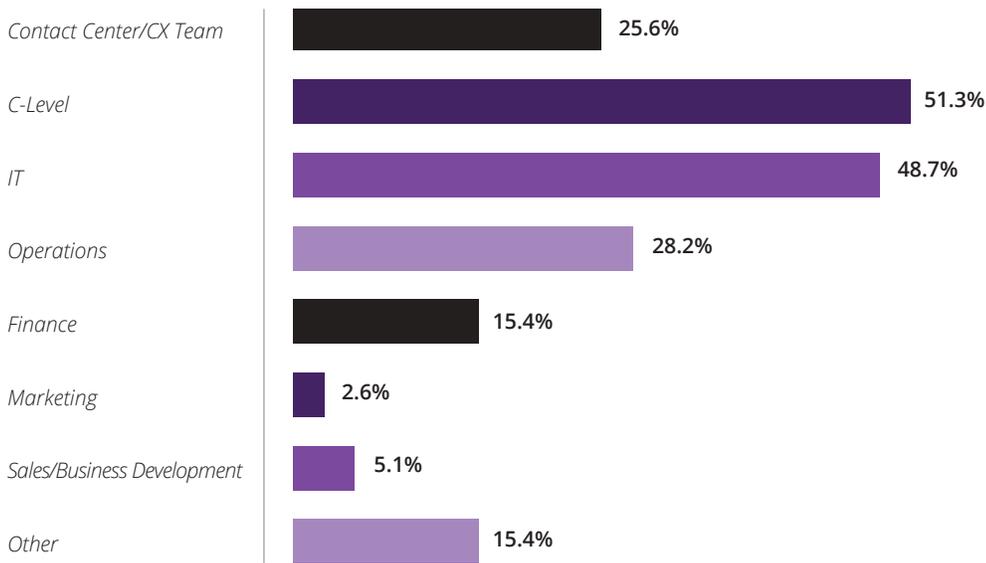
Per respondents, the contact center and IT departments generally maintain a strong working relationship. 85% label the relationship "good" or "excellent." Only 3% deem it weak, and none calls it terrible.

Call Center IQ's past several surveys, moreover, confirm that the customer experience represents a key priority for the entire business.

The lack of involvement is certainly not ideal; it is hard to logically justify why the department that cares the most and knows the most about the technology – let alone the one that will be actually using the technology – is not the driving force behind its sourcing. Without direct involvement in the process, there is no way contact center leaders can ensure the selected technology is best suited for its agents, customers, and general customer experience operation.

The data, nonetheless, should alleviate the fear historically associated with "siloes" and fragmented decision-making. Since the IT-contact center relationship is strong and since the C-level values the customer experience, there is no reason to inherently assume their technology decisions will be a direct affront or contradiction to what the contact center and customer experience teams value.

Who makes decisions regarding contact center technology/cloud investments?

Role	Percentage
Contact Center/CX Team	25.6%
C-Level	51.3%
IT	48.7%
Operations	28.2%
Finance	15.4%
Marketing	2.6%
Sales/Business Development	5.1%
Other	15.4%

Sites are Growing, Walls are Falling

Before investigating the technological architecture of today's contact centers, it is important to look at the composition of them.

Specifically, are businesses relying on single sites or multiple sites for their customer engagement initiatives? Are they housing all their agents within the center or are they making use of "work from home?"

In the former case, the trend is toward the plural: businesses are increasingly engaging customers through multiple contact center locations.

In the latter, the trend is toward a less rigid definition of "center." Businesses are increasingly enabling agents to work remotely.

Twelve months ago, 53% of respondents managed customer engagement through one or zero contact centers. That number has fallen to 51% in the present, and it will shrink to 39% in twelve months.

It is important to note, however, that the preference toward multiple contact center sites comes in accordance with an aversion to too many locations.

While 16% had more than 5 locations twelve months ago, that number is only 14% in the present. It will slip to 13% in twelve months.

The sweet spot therefore appears to be in the 2-5 range.

The "work from home" trend reflects a somewhat similar mindset. Businesses are indeed increasing their reliance on a remote workforce, but they are not becoming overly reliant on the model.
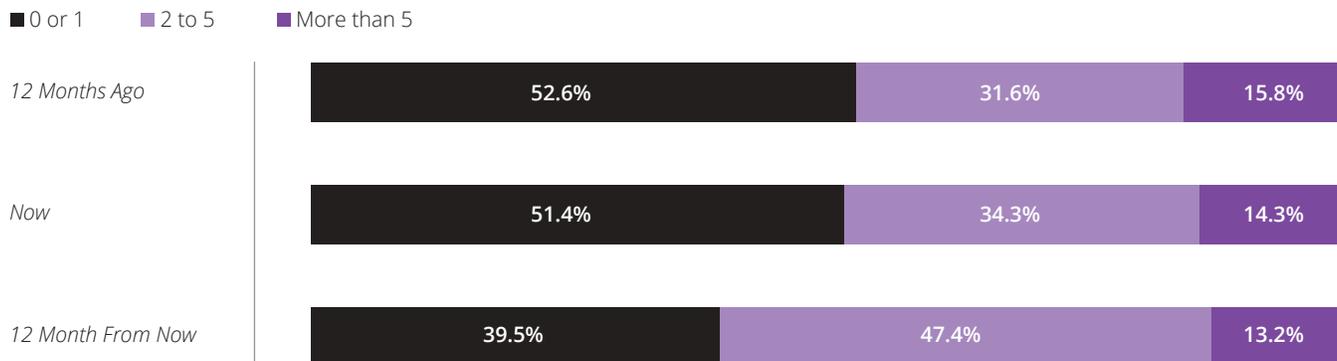
One year ago, 89% of respondent organizations employed 20% or less of their workforce in a remote context. That number slipped slightly to 86% in the present, and it will endure another fall throughout the year. In twelve months, only 72% will position such a low percentage of agents outside the contact center walls, which means more than a quarter of businesses will be employing a substantial number of at-home agents.
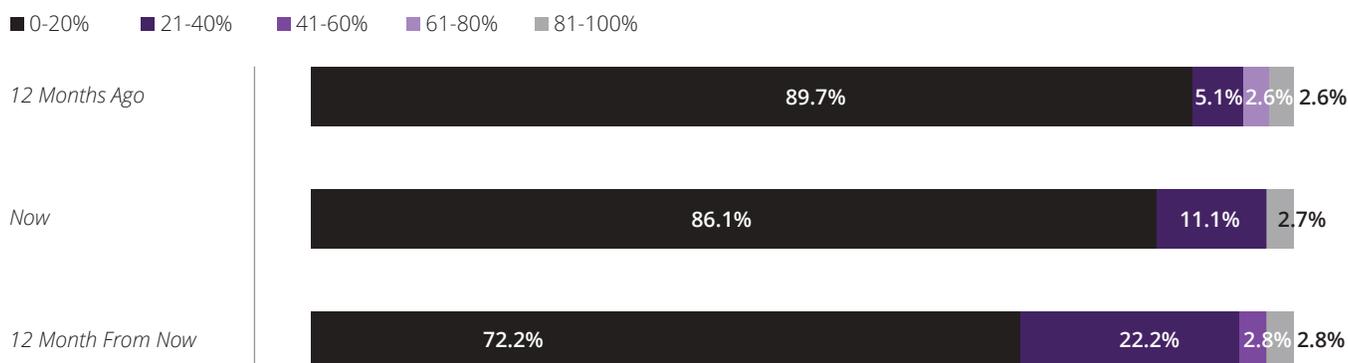
That number will not be too substantial, however. Even amid the apparent trend toward a less rigid definition of the contact center, only 5% of businesses will allow more than 40% of their agent workforce to connect remotely. The majority of agents, therefore, will remain in house.

Businesses are clearly adhering to limits when it comes to adding contact center locations and utilizing the "work from home" concept. Still, the fact that they are increasingly doing both reflects a new mindset toward the contact center. That new mindset, in theory, creates a demand for technological architecture more accommodating of a multi-site, softer-walled contact center.

Did/Does/Will your organization have multiple contact center sites?

■ 0 or 1   ■ 2 to 5   ■ More than 5

	0 or 1	2 to 5	More than 5
12 Months Ago	52.6%	31.6%	15.8%
Now	51.4%	34.3%	14.3%
12 Month From Now	39.5%	47.4%	13.2%

What percentage of your agents did/are/will "work from home?"

■ 0-20%   ■ 21-40%   ■ 41-60%   ■ 61-80%   ■ 81-100%

	0-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%
12 Months Ago	89.7%	5.1%	2.6%		2.6%
Now	86.1%	11.1%			2.7%
12 Month From Now	72.2%	22.2%	2.8%		2.8%

Forecast Calls For Cloud (Technology)

Numerous trends support cloud contact center technology. Organizations are embracing a multi-site, soft-walled conception of the contact center. Decision-makers within the C-level and IT departments are taking a more vested, strategic interest in customer experience strategy. Customers are demanding a more versatile, omni-channel approach to engagement. Concerns over data security and stability are being directly addressed by industry vendors.

But does the data actually support a trend toward cloud contact center solutions? And if it does, does it demonstrate enthusiasm over a hybrid model or a completely cloud-based contact center architecture?

Survey respondents provided an affirmative answer to both, although the level of enthusiasm is clearly greater for the former than it is the latter.

Twelve months ago, 80% said their contact center technology was either entirely or primarily located on premises. That shrank substantially to 58% last year, and it will fall to just 44% in twelve months.

Only 19% say their contact centers will be completely without cloud technology in the early part of 2017.

In confirming that the majority of businesses will meaningfully utilize cloud technology, the data officially puts to bed

any notions of "fad" or "hype." Cloud technology is not simply a hollow vendor creation. It is not even an interesting "bonus" option. It is a crucial part of the contact center mix.

And while organizations are not yet willing to situate the lion's share of their contact center applications in the cloud, they are showing an increased acceptance of that option.

Last year, only 15% of organizations relied primarily or entirely on cloud-based contact center technology. That number increased to 19% in the present, and it will reach 28% at the end of the next year.

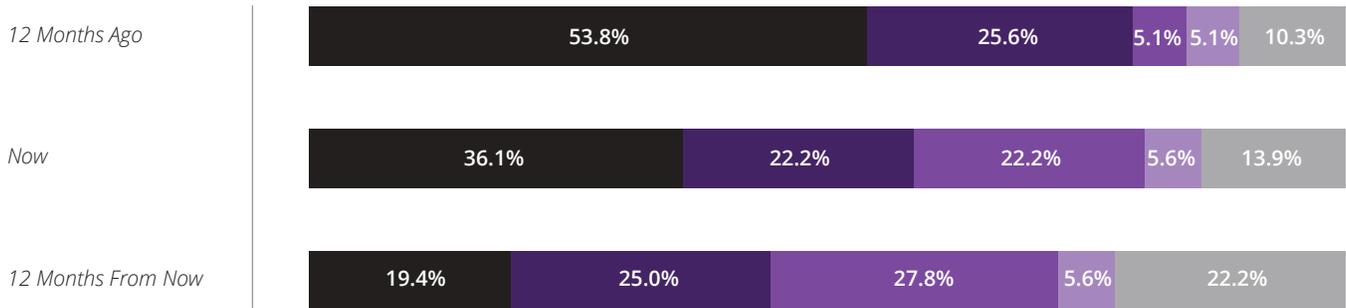22% outright declare the entirety of their contact center technology will be cloud-based in twelve months.

The trend is undeniable: cloud technology is on the radar for nearly all businesses. Cloud solutions will soon at least partially power contact center operations for more than four-fifths of businesses. They will form the entirety of the contact center architecture for more than one-fifth.

The bigger question, therefore, is not whether contact centers are turning to cloud contact center technologies but to what extent they will be turning to those solutions.

Which best described your contact center architecture 12 months ago? What describes it right now? What will in 12 months?

■ Entirely on-premises ■ Primarily on-premises ■ Hybrid on-premises & hosted/cloud ■ Primarily hosted/cloud ■ Primarily hosted/cloud

	Entirely on-premises	Primarily on-premises	Hybrid on-premises & hosted/cloud	Primarily hosted/cloud	Primarily hosted/cloud
12 Months Ago	53.8%	25.6%	5.1%	5.1%	10.3%
Now	36.1%	22.2%	22.2%	5.6%	13.9%
12 Months From Now	19.4%	25.0%	27.8%	5.6%	22.2%

Technology Buyer's Checklist

Marketplace data clearly confirms a trend toward cloud-based contact center technology. It clearly demonstrates that businesses will be opening their minds – and their checkbooks – to upgrade, replace, or introduce contact center solutions.

All contact center technology is not created equal, however. And insofar as it generally comes at a very high price point and requires a meaningful implementation commitment from the business and its employees, the room for error is minimal. Random, extemporaneous purchasing decisions are not recommended.

The importance of making the right cloud contact center technology decisions – the first time – cannot be understated.

So what do today's leaders believe constitutes the right decision? What factors do today's businesses most notably consider when sourcing technology?

Asked to specifically weigh the factors they consider when purchasing, respondents declared the technology's promised uptime/reliability to represent the most important factor. They rated its importance 4.21/5.

Ease of use and value for the customer – and decidedly customer centric factor – is the next-most important concern. It received a score of 4.16/5.

Other key factors include the promised degree of data security and risk management (4.13/5), the subscription (or otherwise recurring) costs (4.13/5), and anticipated maintenance costs (4.10/5).

The hierarchy is quite all-encompassing, reflecting a high degree of consideration for reliability, customer centricity, and cost.

Reliability and cost represent traditional, conventional options. Solutions have always been expected to perform competently from a technological standpoint. If they cannot stay online, operate securely or achieve their central functions, they are obviously worthless to a business (they may, in fact, substantially hurt the business).

Cost, meanwhile, is a pivotal part of any purchasing decision. There are obviously different lenses and contexts through which to evaluate cost, but at the end of the day, it is nearly impossible to invest money without considering the price of the investment.

Customer centricity, however, speaks to the increasing convergence between priorities for executives, customer management leaders, and IT departments. Call Center IQ's last several executive

research reports confirm the customer experience as a pivotal business focus, and this year's technology survey reveals strong relationships between contact center and IT professionals. The customer matters to all business stakeholders, and that naturally means the customer must matter when making decisions about technology.

The precise impact of customer-oriented factors will still hinge on the specific executive responsible for making the purchase, but it is clear that those factors carry a universal importance. The situation is not a binary one in which customer-facing executives focus exclusively on customer centricity and IT executives completely ignore it; it drives the decision no matter who is making it.

Comparatively unimportant factors include the IT team's familiarity with the product (2.64/5), reviews and word-of-mouth (3.05/5), integration with other systems being considered (3.23/5), ease of installation (3.26/5), and ease of training staff on the product (3.62/5).

The comparatively small importance placed on the IT team's familiarity with the product corresponds with the rise of customer centric-thinking and the ascent of cloud technology. The IT team's comfort no longer represents a priority; what matters is whether the technology does its job, provides value for customers, and makes financial sense for businesses.

More importantly, the IT team's familiarity with the product no longer *needs* to represent a priority. As businesses turn to cloud-based technology, the day-to-day maintenance and operational responsibilities shift to third parties. The IT department's attention shifts to coordinating strategy and liaising with the vendor, neither of which requires in-depth, second-nature familiarity of the product.

Such familiarity helps – which is why the score is not 0 – but a lack thereof is not an absolute deal breaker.

In scoring above a 3.0/5, it is clear the other factors do matter to technology decision-makers. They simply matter less than factors like uptime, maintenance costs and customer centricity.

Given the B2B context, it is predictable that reviews and word-of-mouth land near the bottom of the totem pole. Real world case experience is certainly valuable, but the customized nature of the solutions and lack of an unbiased critical community collectively serve to limit the importance. It is difficult to evaluate such costly, nuanced technology on a general basis; many will need to know how it will specifically meet their needs and address their challenges. For many forms of contact center technology, reviews and word-of-mouth are not the best means of painting that picture.

Amid the omni-channel revolution, integration woes have actually been an impetus for technology investment. Some organizations are pursuing new, cloud-based technology precisely because their existing systems cannot be integrated and thus cannot create seamless, consistent experiences across touch points.

It may, consequently, seem surprising that "integration with other systems you are evaluating" is a comparatively low-priority consideration.
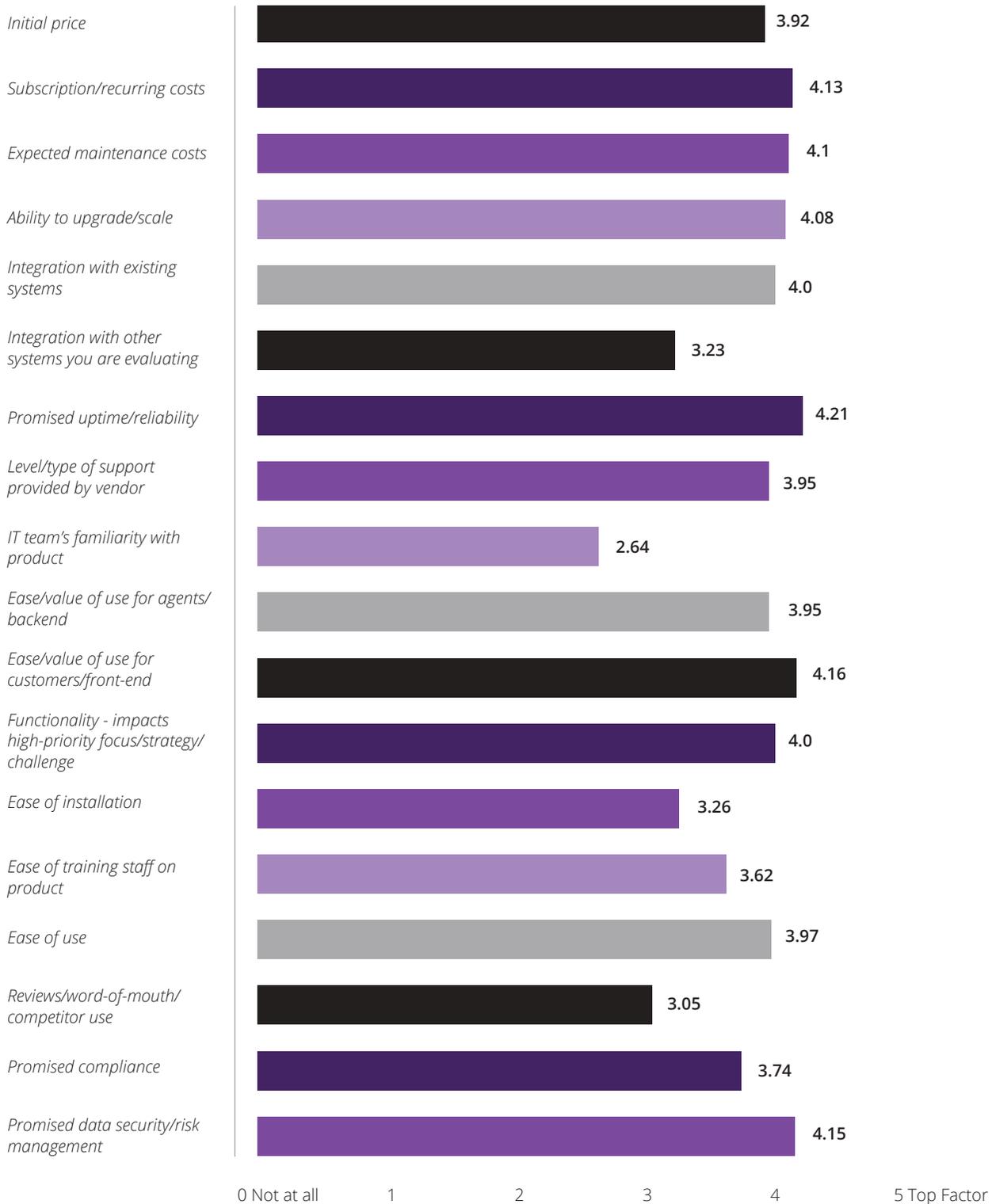
The explanation is in the qualifier: "other systems you are evaluating." While it may not be the most advisable strategy, businesses seem more concerned with the specific value of a piece of technology they are considering than with its potential to communicate with solutions they may later buy.

When evaluating a solution's integration capability, businesses are much more concerned with its ability to integrate with existing systems. Those systems are definitely in place – they are not prospective solutions that may come into play at a later date – so a new solution should be able to integrate with them.

Businesses accordingly rate integration with existing systems at a comparatively high 4.00/5.

The scores for ease of installation and ease of staff training are not low in absolute terms, but they rank comparatively low due to the fact that they do not represent fundamental business priorities. A business would obviously like its technology to be as easy to install and use as possible, but it would rather implement systems that are easy for the customer to use.

To what extent do the following matter when evaluating/purchasing CC technology?

Factor	Rating
Initial price	3.92
Subscription/recurring costs	4.13
Expected maintenance costs	4.1
Ability to upgrade/scale	4.08
Integration with existing systems	4.0
Integration with other systems you are evaluating	3.23
Promised uptime/reliability	4.21
Level/type of support provided by vendor	3.95
IT team's familiarity with product	2.64
Ease/value of use for agents/backend	3.95
Ease/value of use for customers/front-end	4.16
Functionality - impacts high-priority focus/strategy/challenge	4.0
Ease of installation	3.26
Ease of training staff on product	3.62
Ease of use	3.97
Reviews/word-of-mouth/competitor use	3.05
Promised compliance	3.74
Promised data security/risk management	4.15

0 Not at all   1   2   3   4   5 Top Factor

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Technology Owner's Scorecard

There is only so much a decision-maker can determine about a solution prior to purchasing. He can use a variety of factors – such as those highlighted in the previous section – as proxies for making the decision, but he will not be able to know precisely how the technology will perform in his precise contact center environment.

The obstruction is removed from the view once the technology is purchased and implemented. Suddenly, the business is no longer forced to evaluate using hypotheticals and marketing promises; it can rely on real-world data, both of the qualitative and quantitative variety.

The question of what matters when evaluating technology's performance is therefore a vastly different question than the one concerning what one considers when purchasing technology.

For today's businesses, the most notable answer is "improvements in operational efficiency."

Respondents scored its importance at a 4.38/5.

Paramount emphasis on operational efficiency does not, however, mean businesses are dismissing the importance of customer centricity.

Given a score of 4.31/5, improvement in customer metrics like CSAT and NPS represents the next-biggest focus during evaluation. Agent performance takes third with a score of 4.23/5, while improvements in resolution metrics (4.13/5) and improvements in interaction quality (4.08/5).

Collectively, the high priority evaluation points reflect a demand that technology improve the totality of the customer experience operation. The operation must run more smoothly and productively while simultaneously yielding higher quality interactions, quicker and more valuable resolutions and,

ultimately, greater customer satisfaction. Technology is not being implemented for technology's sake; it is being implemented as an instrument of creating a better, more efficient, more productive, more customer-centric contact center.

All factors – to an even greater extent than they do when purchasing – are important when assessing performance. Not one factor presented to respondents received a score below 3.67/5.

Some are, however, comparatively less important than the aforementioned efficiency, productivity, and customer centricity concerns. They include reduction in IT support costs (3.67/5), the simplification of processes (3.84/5), improvements in front-end utilization (3.85/5), agent satisfaction (3.90/5), and improvements in accessibility (3.97/5).

When it comes to factors like IT support costs and process simplification, it is clear businesses do not feel such considerations should outweigh end objectives like customer satisfaction and interaction quality. New, cloud-based technology should, in theory, reduce IT support costs, but cost reduction alone does not make a purchase worthwhile. New cloud-based technology should, in theory, remove complication from processes, but simplification is not enough to deem a technology successful. The reduction in costs should come as a product of quicker resolution, lesser downtime, and more efficient operations. The simplified processes should come in conjunction with better customer experiences; on simplicity is not, itself, a high-priority result.

Some evaluate the success of their self-service technology in terms of utilization rate, but that goal is still secondary to the broader aim for customer satisfaction. An increase in self-service interactions, after all, does not guarantee an increase in the experience associated with those interactions. Successful technology must generate a broader sense of value for the customer and business.

Agent satisfaction is fairly important in absolute terms, but it comparatively takes a backseat to agent productivity and customer satisfaction. The hierarchy makes sense; "happy agents = happy customers" is espoused not for the purpose of declaring happy agents the end but the means. Happier agents perform better and lead to happier customers. The performance and the happy customers are more valuable to the business.

It certainly seems unintuitive that accessibility, as defined by uptime and reliability, would be a comparatively unimportant performance evaluation metric when it is the leading consideration at the time of purchasing. The explanation presumably comes from the fact that it is perceived as a requirement rather than a competitive advantage.
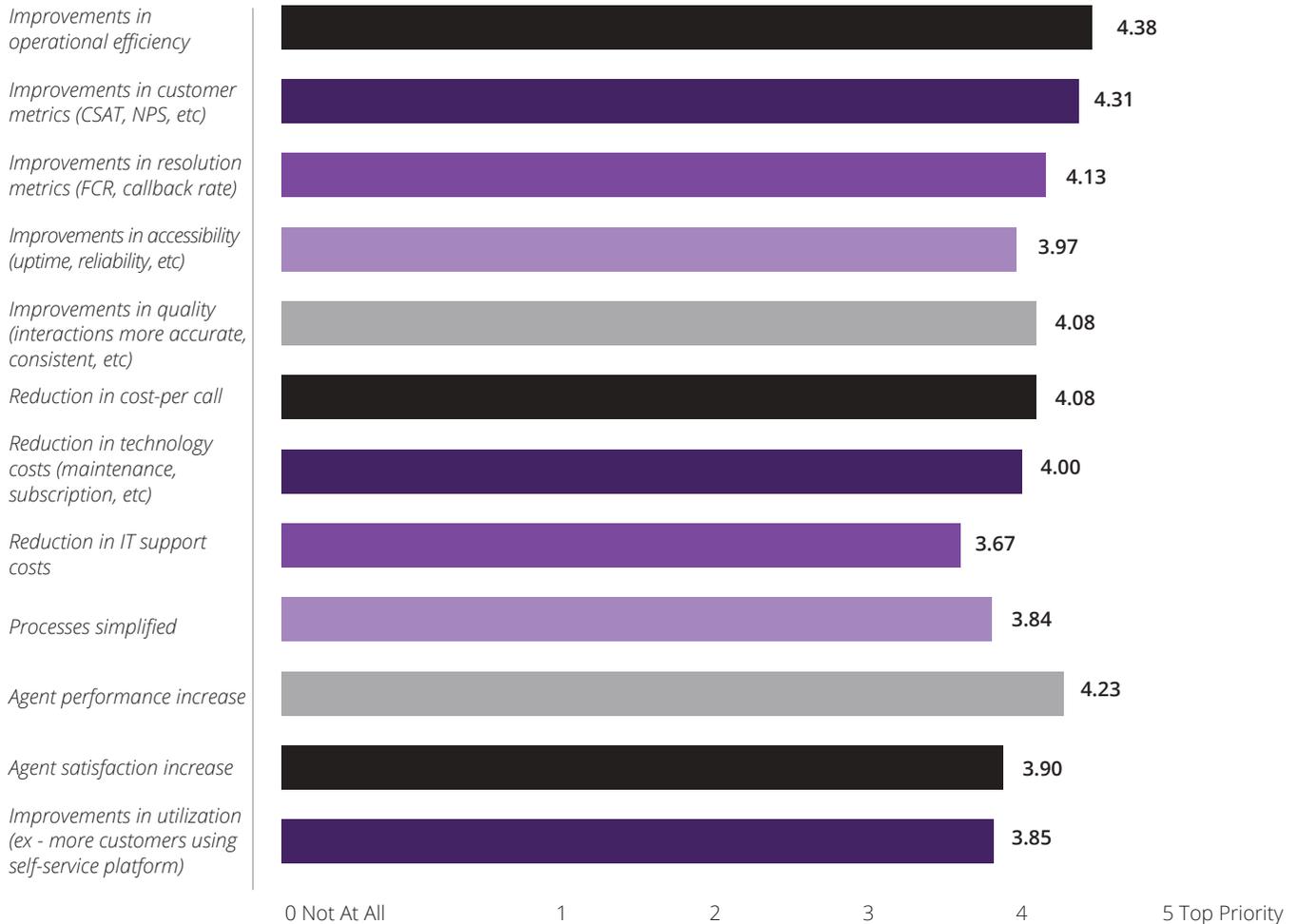
Technology is categorically unacceptable if it cannot meet a certain accessibility threshold, which is why uptime is a pivotal consideration at the time of purchase. Since all of the best technology should, however, provide uptime of effectively 100%, it is doubtful a new technology will deliver enough improvement that accessibility alone defends the purchase.

Uptime, moreover, is effectively embedded in statistics for customer satisfaction and quality. If customer satisfaction and quality scores are increasing, it is likely that uptime is either increasing or at least holding at an acceptable level.

Simply increasing uptime does not, however, ensure a better customer experience.

It consequently makes more sense to evaluate technology based on the end goal rather than something that contributes to that end goal.

How important are the following when evaluating the performance of contact center technology?

Metric	Score
Improvements in operational efficiency	4.38
Improvements in customer metrics (CSAT, NPS, etc)	4.31
Improvements in resolution metrics (FCR, callback rate)	4.13
Improvements in accessibility (uptime, reliability, etc)	3.97
Improvements in quality (interactions more accurate, consistent, etc)	4.08
Reduction in cost-per call	4.08
Reduction in technology costs (maintenance, subscription, etc)	4.00
Reduction in IT support costs	3.67
Processes simplified	3.84
Agent performance increase	4.23
Agent satisfaction increase	3.90
Improvements in utilization (ex - more customers using self-service platform)	3.85

0 Not At All   1   2   3   4   5 Top Priority

Existing Technology Does Not Hurt, But New Technology Helps

When advocating for new technology investment, one would obviously benefit from data confirming that existing technology is performing poorly. One able to demonstrate that current systems are creating operational inefficiencies, hurting agent productivity, and reducing customer satisfaction would have a decidedly easier time pitching his fellow stakeholders on investment into new solutions.

The data from Call Center IQ's 2016 survey does not provide that form of ammunition. It reveals that existing systems have generally either maintained or improved their performance levels over the past year.

Consider cost-per-call, which is the metric against which existing systems have caused the greatest instances of performance declines. Only 16% say cost-per-call has increased over the

past year; 27%, meanwhile, say it has decreased, while 57% say it has held steady.

Existing systems have, meanwhile, proven particularly helpful in improving operational efficiency. 51% credit their existing technology with boosting efficiency over the past year; 44% say it has held steady, and only 5% cite a downturn in performance.

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The pattern holds true across the board. No matter the metric against which one is evaluating performance, existing technology is simply not a problem for the majority of today's organizations.

That does not, however, mean today's businesses do not have an incentive to invest in new technology.

The data indeed confirms that existing systems are not bad, but it also reveals that new solutions are better. It reveals that new solutions drive higher levels of performance increases for all metrics.

Asked to assess how new technologies have impacted a myriad of performance metrics, respondents provided very reassuring results.

72%, for instance, credit new systems for improving operational efficiency. 44% say the impact has been more than slight, with 16% calling the increase "significant."

64% say agent performance has increased, while 63% tout an increase in performance against resolution metrics. Simplification of processes (62%) and agent satisfaction (59%) have also greatly benefited from new technology purchases.

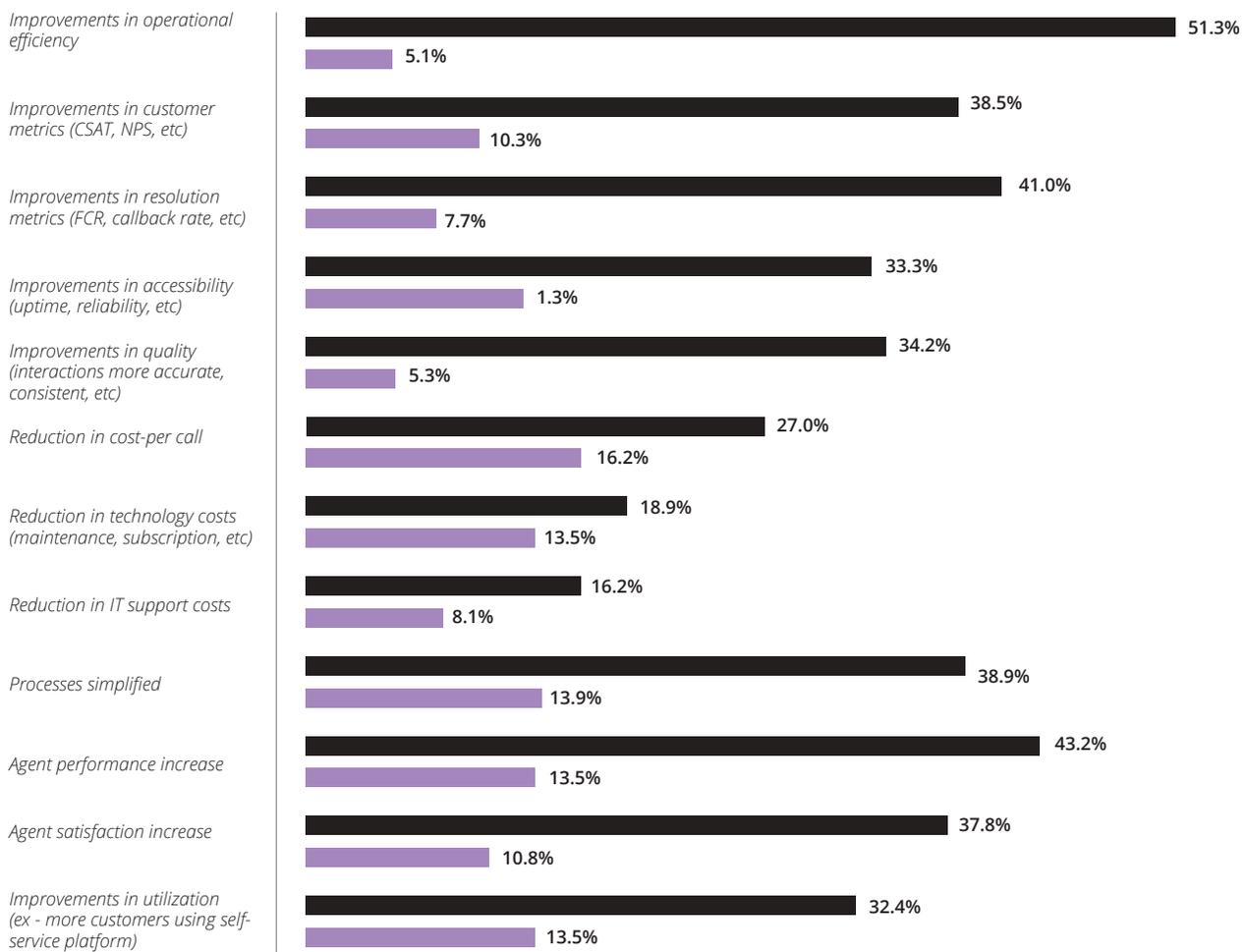While the positive impact has not been quite as widespread for reduction in IT support costs (41% cite improvement), improvements in quality (44%), reduction in cost-per-call (44%), and reduction in overall technology costs (44%), a great deal of organizations have benefited.

The percentage of organizations that have achieved an increase in performance for those metrics, moreover, greatly exceeds the percentage that have suffered a decrease.

The conclusion is clear: existing technology is not necessarily making things bad, but new technology generally makes things better. Organizations therefore have a clear incentive to source, purchase, and implement new solutions.
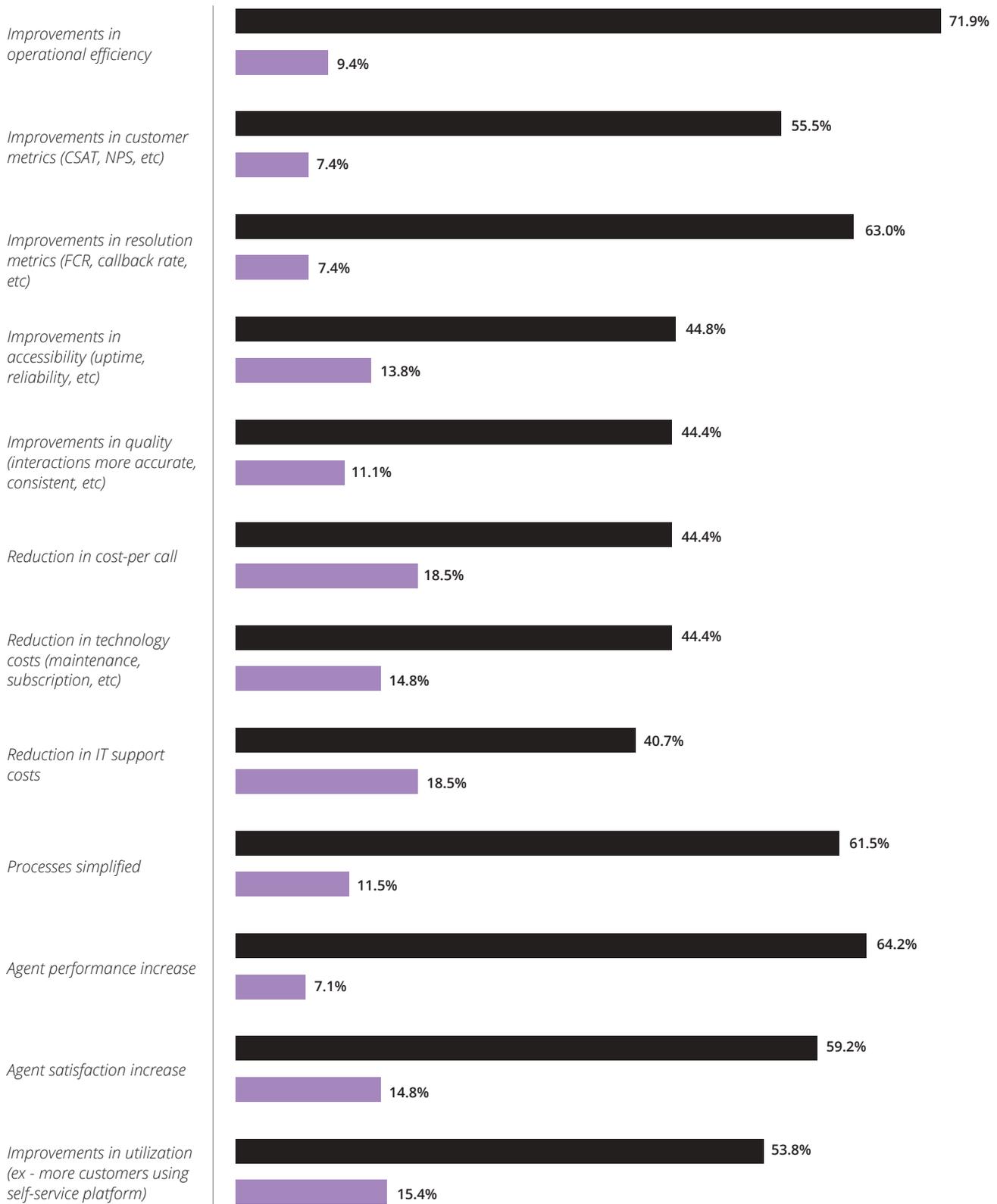
How have your technology solutions (in general) performed against these over the past year?

■ Increase over last year   ■ Decrease over last year

Improvements in operational efficiency
51.3%
5.1%

Improvements in customer metrics (CSAT, NPS, etc)
38.5%
10.3%

Improvements in resolution metrics (FCR, callback rate, etc)
41.0%
7.7%

Improvements in accessibility (uptime, reliability, etc)
33.3%
1.3%

Improvements in quality (interactions more accurate, consistent, etc)
34.2%
5.3%

Reduction in cost-per call
27.0%
16.2%

Reduction in technology costs (maintenance, subscription, etc)
18.9%
13.5%

Reduction in IT support costs
16.2%
8.1%

Processes simplified
38.9%
13.9%

Agent performance increase
43.2%
13.5%

Agent satisfaction increase
37.8%
10.8%

Improvements in utilization (ex - more customers using self-service platform)
32.4%
13.5%

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How have new/upgraded technologies, specifically, performed?

■ Some increase over last year   ■ Decrease versus last year

Improvements in operational efficiency
- 71.9%
- 9.4%

Improvements in customer metrics (CSAT, NPS, etc)
- 55.5%
- 7.4%

Improvements in resolution metrics (FCR, callback rate, etc)
- 63.0%
- 7.4%

Improvements in accessibility (uptime, reliability, etc)
- 44.8%
- 13.8%

Improvements in quality (interactions more accurate, consistent, etc)
- 44.4%
- 11.1%

Reduction in cost-per call
- 44.4%
- 18.5%

Reduction in technology costs (maintenance, subscription, etc)
- 44.4%
- 14.8%

Reduction in IT support costs
- 40.7%
- 18.5%

Processes simplified
- 61.5%
- 11.5%

Agent performance increase
- 64.2%
- 7.1%

Agent satisfaction increase
- 59.2%
- 14.8%

Improvements in utilization (ex - more customers using self-service platform)
- 53.8%
- 15.4%

Technology Wish List

Their current systems may not be crippling performance, but new technology will enable them to improve their customer experiences. That promise of optimization combined with the desire to establish cloud-based, multi-site, remote agent-friendly contact centers will surely drive investment into new technology.

What will that investment strategy entail?

There are two dimensions through which businesses will answer that question. They will decide which specific types of technologies they need and when they need those solutions.

Some technology purchases represent urgent priorities. Others will command attention in the near and distant future.

To assess this duality, survey participants were presented with a lengthy list of possible technology investment areas. They were asked to classify each option as an immediate priority, a priority for the next 6-12 months, a priority for the next 12-24 months, or a non-focus.

Urgent Priorities

Demonstrating a commitment to understanding their customers, respondents define customer analytics/insights as their most urgent focus. 38% say the category represents a priority within the next six months.

Other top focuses in the immediate term will include dashboards (37%), performance measurement and monitoring tools (36%), real-time feedback solutions (36%), and workforce management tools (34%).

The solutions deemed most urgent should each impact the factors deemed

most essential when evaluating technology.

Customer analytics and insight solutions, for instance, should enable businesses to improve customer satisfaction and resolution. Improved dashboards will positively contribute to those areas as well as to interaction quality, while performance measurement and monitoring speaks directly to operational efficiency. Real-time feedback also addresses customer-oriented concerns, while workforce management should markedly boost agent performance.

Comparatively less urgent priorities include WebRTC (3%), language services (11%), unified communications (13%), speech analytics (16%), and virtual agents (17%).

WebRTC and virtual agent technologies may represent "nice to have" solutions rather than "need to have" solutions, which would explain their comparatively low positioning on the urgent totem pole in the near term.

The low score for language services is likely a product of two factors: the niche nature of the product (not all

organizations need language services solutions) and the fact that those who do rely on such technology may already have a satisfactory solution.

Given the hype surrounding an "omni-channel revolution," the lack of urgency associated with unified communications is less intuitive. The low score may simply be a consequence of aversion to or

unfamiliarity with the specific buzzword. Like the language services score, it may also reflect comfort with the existing infrastructure; businesses perhaps see their future omni-channel challenges as those related to strategy rather than technology.

The comparatively light urgency for speech analytics is even less intuitive

as it seems to directly contradict the enthusiasm for customer analytics/insight solutions. One potential explanation is that the omni-channel revolution is weakening the excitement for speech-specific analytics; businesses are seeking a broader, multi-channel approach to customer analytics.

Near-Term Priorities

Recent Call Center IQ research has uncovered an interest in providing predictive, proactive care. Predictive analytics solutions, accordingly, will become the leading priority in 6-12 months.

31% of businesses say they plan to make predictive analytics their focus in that near-term period.

Other solution categories set to become high ranking priorities later in the year include reporting tools (27%), business intelligence/forecasting tools (26%), agent analytics and monitoring (25%), and knowledge management (23%).

Three of the priorities – reporting tools, business intelligence tools, and agent analytics and monitoring – represent a thirst for better insight into existing operations. Businesses evidently feel their visibility into performance is suboptimal, and they want to remedy that problem by the end of the year.

Businesses are not, however, simply looking to gain a passive understanding of their operations. All such data-oriented solutions, and particularly the forecasting and predictive analytics ones, will enable businesses to put insights into action. They will be able to identify and plug gaps in performance, ensuring their aim of an efficient, customer-centric, productive, high-quality contact center operation can be realized.

Obviously connected to the demand for data, knowledge management has specific ramifications for agent performance and interaction quality.

Items low on the late-term totem pole include WebRTC (6%), unified communications (12%), language services (12%), live chat (14%), and text analytics (16%).

By again placing WebRTC, unified communications, and language services at the bottom, businesses are making it

clear that the issue is not simply a lack of immediate demand. These areas are simply not priorities for the next year.

While live chat is a low ranking priority for the latter half of the year, it is a comparatively high ranking one in the immediate term (28% plan to address it urgently). The conclusion is simple: the majority of businesses who plan to address live chat this year do not even want to wait six months. They want results now.

The comparatively light interest in text analytics likely mirrors the light immediate term interest in speech analytics: businesses are presumably more interested in pursuing *all-encompassing* analytics solutions than they are in communication-specific technologies.

Next Year's Priorities

Virtual agent technology, a comparatively low-ranking focus in the immediate term, is the highest-ranking focus for next year.

18% of businesses say they intend to make virtual agents a priority within 12-24 months.

Indicated by the low absolute score (18%), the positioning is a consequence of the fact that businesses plan to address their most immediate performance and reporting priorities in the current year.

Still, the fact that virtual agent technology appears at the top of the list means there is an undeniable degree of interest. The technology clearly has more interest than WebRTC and language services solutions, which rank as comparatively low or

modest priorities for the immediate, near, and long terms.

Other top focuses for next year will include live chat (17%), self-service (17%), mobile solutions (16%), and multi-channel integration (16%).

Live chat, as noted, is also a comparatively high ranking priority for the immediate term (but will be a low ranking one later in the year). Live chat is important; the only question is whether its importance resonates as an urgent concern as a longer-term, more aspirational focus.

The dynamic is similar for self-service, with the exception being that it ranks comparatively higher in the intermediate term. The perceived importance of self-service is thus even more universal.

High ranking priorities for the long-term, mobile and multi-channel integration solutions represent moderate ones for the immediate and intermediate terms. They are clearly on the radar but are not the most urgent concerns. Once businesses tackle their most pressing priorities, they will become comparatively greater focuses.

Solutions low on the long-term totem pole include call monitoring (7%), reporting tools (8%), call recording (8%), routing solutions (9%), and agent analytics and monitoring (9%).

Two of the options –reporting, and agent analytics – are hoisted by their own petard. Because so many businesses will have already addressed these in the current year, they inevitably rank at the bottom of the 12-24 month hierarchy.

The same is true – but to a slightly lesser degree – of monitoring and routing solutions.

Call recording is also a reasonably high ranking priority in the current year, but it commands a lower overall interest level than the other solutions. Whereas the majority of businesses plan to address the other four categories within the next two years, only 49% plan to tackle call recording.

Non-Priorities

WebRTC is not simply absent from the short-term radar. For the overwhelming majority of businesses, it is completely off the grid.

80% of businesses have no plans to address issues related to WebRTC over the next two years. Four-fifths of businesses are either already completely content with their WebRTC solutions or have no intention of pursuing a WebRTC solution.

65% confirm an absence of plans to address the language services category, while 64% will refrain from pursuing improvement in their unified communications tools

CRM solutions (54%) and speech analytics (52%) are also non-focuses for a comparatively great number of businesses.

Recent Call Center IQ data confirms that CRM remains a pivotal strategic focus for businesses; the aforementioned
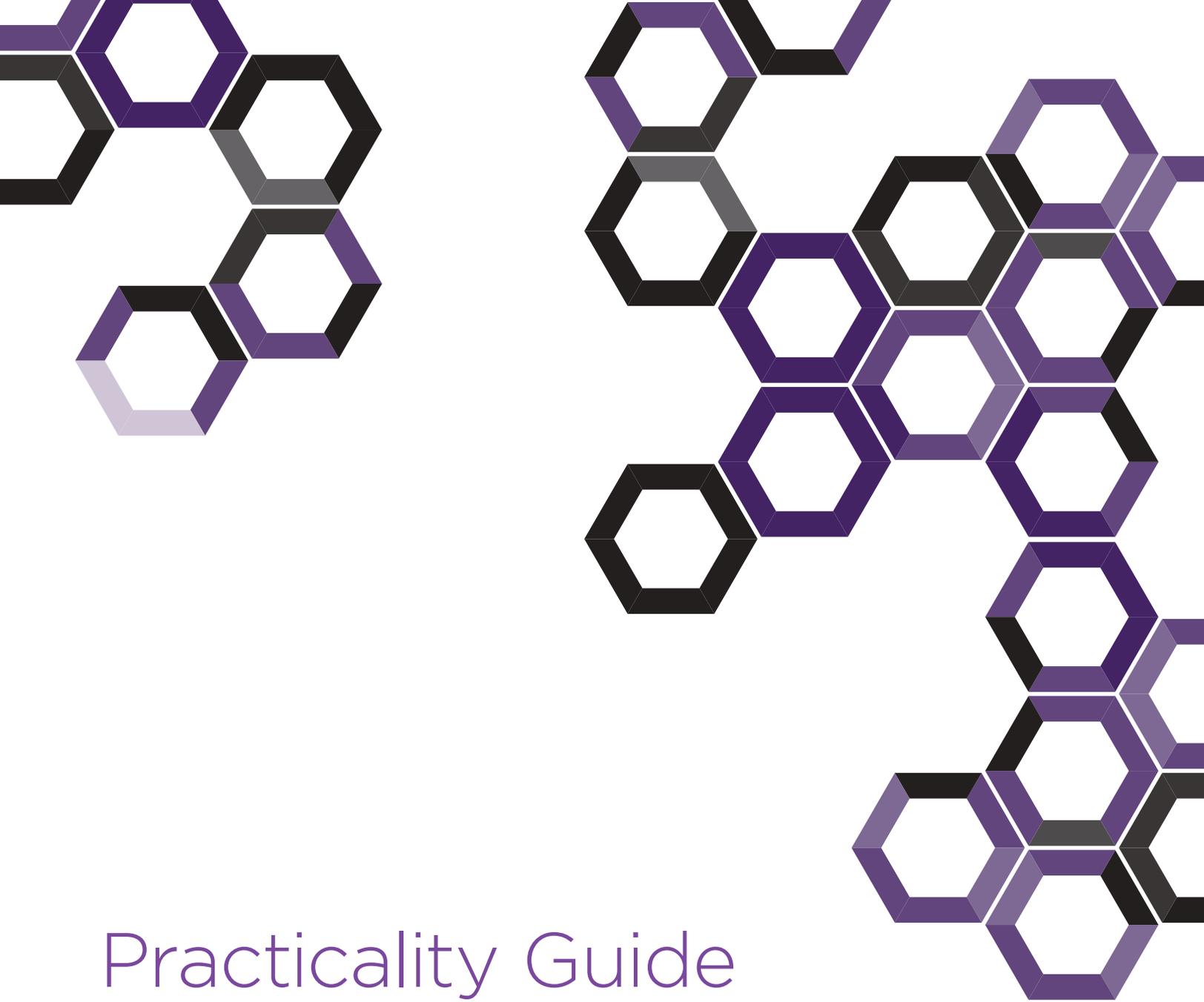
positioning is likely a consequence of contentedness with existing solutions.

The presumed sources of disinterest in improving language services (niche product, contentedness with existing solution), unified communications (potential objection to terminology/solution category, contentedness with existing solution) and speech analytics (emphasis on more all-encompassing analytics solutions) were previously addressed.

CALL CENTER IQ

When, if at all, will these technology categories represent priorities for your business?

Legend: ■ Urgent Priority ■ Priority in 6-12 months ■ Priority in 12-24 months ■ Not a priority

Technology Category	Urgent Priority	Priority in 6-12 months	Priority in 12-24 months	Not a priority
Customer Analytics/Insight	38.4%	21.6%	10.8%	29.3%
Real-time Feedback	35.7%	22.1%	10.4%	31.7%
Dashboards	37.1%	20.7%	10.3%	31.9%
Predictive Analytics	21.1%	31.2%	15.6%	32.1%
Reporting Tools	33.0%	26.5%	7.8%	32.6%
Performance Measurement and Monitoring	36.1%	17.6%	13.0%	33.2%
Knowledge Management	32.5%	23.2%	10.5%	33.8%
Self-Service	30.7%	18.5%	16.8%	34.0%
Business Intelligence Tools – Forecasting/Reporting	23.0%	25.6%	15.0%	36.3%
Agent Analytics and Monitoring	28.4%	25.0%	9.4%	37.1
Workforce Management	33.8%	16.0%	12.5%	37.7%
Live Chat	27.9%	14.2%	17.3%	40.7%
Call Monitoring	30.3%	19.0%	7.4%	43.3%
Multi-channel Integration	21.3%	17.6%	16.3%	44.8%
Mobile Solutions/Services	20.9%	16.4%	16.4%	46.4%
Social Media Service Management	18.3%	19.2%	16.1%	46.4%
Call/Skills-based Routing	24.9%	19.5%	9.0%	46.6%
Data Visualization	23.2%	17.7%	11.8%	47.2%
Gamification	20.0%	20.0%	11.2%	48.8%
Virtual Agents	16.6%	16.1%	17.5%	49.8%
IVR/Speech Recognition	17.3%	17.7%	15.1%	49.8%
Data Management	17.9%	17.9%	13.6%	50.4%
Call Recording	24.3%	15.9%	8.4%	51.3%
Text Analytics	17.6%	15.7%	14.4%	52.3%
Speech Analytics	16.3%	16.7%	14.5%	52.4%
CRM Solutions	17.7%	16.4%	12.1%	53.9%
Unified Communications	12.9%	12.0%	11.1%	63.9%
Language Services	11.4%	12.3%	11.4%	64.9%
WebRTC	2.9%	5.8%	11.1%	80.1%

Practicality Guide

The survey data illuminates the contact center technology landscape. It reveals who makes contact center technology decisions, which types of solutions those individuals plan to pursue, when those investments will be made, what matters when sourcing those investments, and what matters when assessing the purchases.

An important line of questioning still remains: how can success be achieved?

Consisting of three perspectives, the practicality guide focuses on the answer to that question.

After providing a detailed investigation of the context for contact center technology investments – the objectives businesses are pursuing and the challenges they are facing – each section provides a blueprint for action. It reveals specific solutions that can help businesses conquer challenges and achieve objectives; it supports its claims with actual case study insight.

Genesys®

Technology: The Customer-Centric Approach

They say beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Customer management technology's value, similarly, has long been in the eye of the decision maker.

Technology has historically meant different things to different departments, and sourcing strategy and performance evaluation have accordingly hinged on which of those departments made the decision. One concerned strictly with functionality and efficiency from a backend perspective – such as a traditional information technology executive – may naturally approach technology differently than those aiming to create the best front-end experiences for employees or customers.

Those married to financial considerations, moreover, may approach technology differently than those who directly evaluate performance from operational or customer-oriented standpoints.

These walls have not completely vanished. They have, however, begun to shrink. The reason is simple; businesses are increasing aligning around a singular objective: improving the customer experience.

While some data has varied from survey to survey, this notion of a customer experience-oriented business has been reflected consistently throughout Call Center IQ's reports. It is not simply a priority for the contact center or customer service team; it is becoming

a driving force for all key business stakeholders.

As their focus becomes consistent, so too does the lens through which the various departments evaluate their technology. A growing number of companies are forming a consensus around the idea that technology is a vessel for achieving key customer-related objectives.

It is a mechanism for customer centricity.

Embrace Strategy. Embrace Customer Centricity. Embrace Change

Designed amid this era of customer centricity, leading cloud solutions serve to directly empower stronger customer experiences. They are developed, marketed and sold based on their ability to mitigate pressing customer experience challenges and achieve pivotal customer experience goals.

Unsurprisingly, cloud adoption rates tend to be greatest among organizations that have made the customer experience a central business focus.

"There seems to be a correlation between emphasis on the customer experience and cloud adoption," says Kelly Weinhold of Genesys. "If the C-level owns or is heavily involved in CX strategy, it is more likely the organization views cloud technology as an option or even as a priority."

Organizations with a more fragmented approach to the customer experience, on the other hand, tend to be more resistant, especially if technology decisions rest with the IT department.

In addition to viewing technology through a different lens than customer-facing departments, IT has historically viewed its role as an operational one. It does not simply select the systems; it runs the systems.

Cloud-based technology removes – or at least limits – the day-to-day component of technology administration. In cloud-based environments, corporate IT departments may still be overseeing the purchasing, still serving as the liaison between user and technology vendor and still developing custom add-ons and codes for the contact center and customer service infrastructure, but they are entrusting much of the application management and development to third parties. Relinquishing that ownership is the type of paradigm shift that sparks fear and hesitation.

IT departments more accepting of their role as a strategic partner are typically more accepting of change.

If they view their objective as empowering organizations to deliver the best, most efficient, most effective customer experience and measure performance in customer-centric or business-centric terms, they will not view cloud-based technology through a stigmatized lens. They may ultimately choose to keep some (if not all) systems in house, but they will not be doing so out of fear of losing control. Their decision will be based on what is best for the customer – and for the business' ability to fruitfully deliver for the customer.

Call Center IQ's 2016 survey confirms a warm relationship between the customer experience and IT functions. With business-wide emphasis on the customer experience also growing, it is conceivable that IT executives will become more customer-centric and more comfortable in their roles as strategists rather than administrators.

The net result is that cloud support – and adoption – will grow even among organizations that grant IT the authority to make decisions. Organizations that situate customer experience technology decisions with the C-level or customer-facing teams are likely already ahead of the curve.

Embrace Integration. Embrace Relationships. Embrace Change.

There are many ways to demonstrate customer centricity. A particularly fundamental one includes fostering integrated, relationship-oriented customer experiences.

The pursuit of greater alignment across channels, agents, and sites and more relationship-oriented interactions is further contributing to the rise of cloud technology.

Connectivity and scalability are key selling points of cloud technology; as businesses seek to not only expand into new contact center locations or new channels – trends confirmed by Call Center IQ's research data – but integrate the touch points, cloud solutions emerge as particularly attractive options.

The rise of cloud-based CRM systems, meanwhile, is driving a corresponding rise in cloud-based customer engagement technology.

"As companies are moving to this model for their CRM, they are quickly realizing that pushing over their customer engagement platforms to more seamlessly integrate with the CRM is a smart move," says Genesys. "Plus this enables them to start constructing and pursuing an omnichannel engagement strategy by leveraging customer data at all times through any channel."

New Approach, New Rubric

The customer-centric approach to technology involves a revamped approach to both sourcing and performance measurement. Systems befitting a customer-centric organization must result in a better customer experience – and in improved scores for the metrics that define the customer experience.

Operational features, cost considerations, integration capabilities and maintenance requirements obviously still matter to technology decision-makers – it would be impractical and unrealistic to argue otherwise – but their impact is assessed against the customer-oriented objectives. An exciting feature is decidedly more exciting if it improves personalization or reduces customer effort. A costly piece of technology becomes an attractive investment if it drives marked increases in customer loyalty.

Everything, ultimately, comes back to the business' core customer experience objectives.

Provide consistent, omnichannel experiences: Customers are not simply demanding interactions in multiple media; they are demanding consistent experiences across all channels.

Specific considerations:

- The customer has the ability to seamlessly shift between channels during an interaction.
- The customer's issue is recognized by the receiving agent or system when they move to a new channel.
- The business can deliver a personalized experience in all channels.
- The business can properly monitor and manage resource usage across all channels.

Organizations that fail in these regards endure poor customer satisfaction scores and high customer churn rates. They often cede advantages and market share to their competitors.

Provide first contact resolution: Time is money. Quality is money. An excellent customer experience optimizes both; it provides high-quality information or resolutions without requiring lengthy, let alone multiple, calls from customers.

Specific considerations:

- The business has a vivid window into customer history; it can properly determine whether (and when) the customer's issue was actually resolved.
- The organization's self-service technology is designed to resolve transactional matters and optimally route higher-touch engagements; it is predicated on facilitating resolution rather than delaying or deflecting calls.
- The business can properly manage contact volume; it can anticipate surges and leverage alternative channels to combat an increasing load.

Agents and systems have instant access to data about all relevant customers; they also have instant access to all relevant knowledge for resolving problems.

Customers with complex or nuanced issues are routed to agents with the personality, knowledge, and training best suited for resolving those issues.

Improve Customer Satisfaction and Net Promoter scores: Measuring performance against operational metrics is important, but managing against customer-oriented metrics is pivotal. Today's contact center and customer experience functions define success in terms of metrics like Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) and Net Promoter Score (NPS). So, too, does one evaluating contact center technology from a customer-centric vantage point.

Specific considerations:

The business has clear insight into the connection between operational performance and customer-oriented metrics.

The company provides personalized, customer-centric self-service options.

Agents and systems have omnichannel perspectives into behavioral and "voice of the customer" insights; the business always knows exactly how customers feel and exactly what is driving that sentiment.

The organization optimally routes customers to the best possible channel and/or best possible agent for their issues.

Leaders are able to evaluate and improve performance across all channels; process improvement does not happen in siloes.

All channels are capable of meeting service level agreements and key performance expectations.

The organization can anticipate – and proactively address – customer needs.

Cloud IVR: A Gateway To Customer Centricity

The customer-centric approach to technology mandates an alignment between the business' strategic objectives and the solutions used to achieve those objectives.

It drives the business to source, implement, and optimize tools for the purpose of creating consistent interactions across channels, all the while driving first contact resolution and improving CSAT and NPS.

Numerous cloud solutions offer this capability. For organizations looking to capitalize on the customer-centric capabilities of cloud, IVR technology represents a "great stepping stone."

"They can connect a cloud IVR application to an on-premises contact center solution," says Genesys of a hybrid model that will simultaneously begin the journey toward customer-centricity and put change-averse minds at ease. "Alternatively, a company could select a hybrid solution where the voice infrastructure management is hosted and managed by the cloud vendor and the company retains control over the VXML, speech grammars, and middle ware to database connections that make up the IVR application."

Expertly integrating the engagement platform and CRM provides numerous benefits, all of which directly align with the core objectives of a customer-centric organization.

Additional benefits emerge when the IVR technology is combined with CTI, routing, and agent desktop solutions.

Greater Customer Preference for IVR: Self-service presents obvious cost and resource benefits for contact centers; the key is ensuring it is designed to help – rather than stall – the customer. Appropriately integrated with CRM, the Genesys IVR platform enables businesses to deliver more meaningful, user-friendly, personalized experiences that either deliver exactly what the customer wants or route the customer exactly where he needs to go. As a result, customers enjoy their IVR experience – usage improves by 23%, resulting in greater efficiency and ultimately greater satisfaction.

Greater Personalization: To satisfy your customers, you must know your customers. The combination of an IVR that can acquire and collect valuable customer analytics and an agent desktop that can instantly report such data across channels ensures agents will know the customers to whom they are speaking. From there, they can craft personalized, yet efficient experiences. The end result is more customer satisfaction.

Improved First Contact Resolution: A more customer-centric IVR can directly resolve more issues. It also captures and aggregates the information other agents and systems can use to resolve more issues. In both cases, first contact center resolution improves. A fundamental objective is achieved.

Optimized Routing: How do you squander the talent of your agents? Pair them with the wrong customers. Suboptimal routing is a major pain point for today's customers who are looking to receive a quick, yet personalized

experience regardless of channel or issue. The Genesys technology is predicated on qualifying the customer in the IVR and then directing him to the agent best suited for the circumstance. Workflow is optimized on two fronts; agents are playing to their strengths and thus making the most of their time interacting with customers. Since these issues end up reaching resolution more rapidly, more resources become available. The business runs more smoothly and the customers walk away more satisfied.

More Efficient Support, More Satisfied Customers: "Efficiency" metrics are not the same as customer-oriented metrics, but the two sets are correlated. When a company can provide a quick, low-effort pathway to resolution, it stands a greater chance of earning the customer's satisfaction. With Genesys IVR, agent desktop, CTI , and routing platforms are synergized to create this more efficient experience; on average, clients report a 30-second reduction in average handle time. Interactions are more efficient, resources are less taxed, and customers are more satisfied.

Customer Centricity in Practice: AstraZeneca Achieves the Desired Dose Of Success

Customer centricity is a great buzz word, but it ultimately must manifest in action. A business cannot simply say it cares about the customer; it must prove it.

A customer-centric approach to technology is a novel marketing hook, but it ultimately must produce results. A technology vendor cannot simply say its product creates better outcomes for customers; it must actually deliver those outcomes.

Through its work with AstraZeneca, Genesys proves the multi-faceted impact of its cloud-based IVR.

Challenges

IVR had low containment rates: The IVR was not achieving its purpose – higher levels of automated service.

Lack of Scalability: Each modification came with a significant cost, inhibiting the business' ability to make changes that would result in more efficient, more effective experiences for customers.

Cost Burden: The deterrent effect of the modification cost was not the only challenge facing the organization. Higher costs – and less efficient experiences – resulted in fewer funds and resources for truly optimizing the customer experience over the long term.

Limited Customer View: Data being collected in the IVR was neither readily visible to the organization nor properly integrated with other systems. Its potential for impact on the customer experience was not being realized.

Solution

Genesys IVR: Genesys crafted a customized IVR solution that would alleviate many of the existing challenges.The suite would later grow to include integrated SMS, click-to-call, live chat, and mobile applications.

Results

Higher containment rate, greater satisfaction: The IVR began to serve its purpose – providing automated, low-touch service to customers. Over two years, containment rates would grow by 40-80%, indicating greater success within the IVR and the availability of more resources to create satisfaction outside the IVR.

Savings In Action: The cost savings resulted in re-investment opportunities; AstraZeneca had opportunities to engage focus groups and make recommended improvements. It also integrated a post-call survey tool to gain an even greater degree of insights, all of which would help optimize the experience at the interaction and big picture levels.

Holistic View: The integrated Genesys platform creates visibility across channels and brands. The wealth of customer and operational insights enable the business to make improvements that simultaneously boost efficiency and satisfaction.

CALABRIO

Empower Agents, Satisfy Customers

Some refer to contact center agents as the gateway to a great customer experience. Others tout phrases like "happy agents equal happy customers."

The underlying philosophy is simple: agents play a pivotal role in driving customer satisfaction and loyalty. The best, most customer-centric technology, therefore, must be designed with agent empowerment in mind.

"We think of agents as the engine that drives the contact center," says Brad Snedeker of Calabrio. "Being able to engage and empower agents is really important to us – and to our solutions."

Call Center IQ's technology survey provides both direct and indirect support for this mindset. It identifies operational efficiency and agent performance as two of the most valuable lenses through which today's businesses evaluate their contact center technology. Solutions are, quite simply, not optimal if they do not yield more productive agents.

It, moreover, identifies customer satisfaction, resolution, and quality as key priorities. All three are consequences of a more empowered, more productive, more engaged workforce. When agents have access to the right training, the right interfaces, and the right customer data, they are able to deliver the right service. They are able to create the kind of experience that establishes a competitive advantage while dramatically building customer loyalty.

Today's organizations are actively pursuing more efficient, cloud-based contact center technologies. They are also pursuing stronger, more satisfying, more customer-centric engagement experiences.

By focusing on solutions that empower agents, they will successfully accomplish both goals. They will improve the technological framework on which their contact centers operate and improve the experiences they deliver from within those contact centers. Agent performance will be stronger, customers will be happier, and the business will be better.

Three Forms of Empowerment

The notion of empowering agents is an exciting, heartwarming one. Today's professional community applauds organizations that create "great places to work." It congratulates leaders who foster a harmonious, agent-centric culture.

Agent empowerment is not, however, a mere idea. It is not simply a rhetorical concept designed to produce exciting sound bites and generate positive press. It is also a practical vehicle for creating a more valuable, more productive workforce.

The need to put agent empowerment into practice is particularly important within the context of contact center technology. For starters, contact center technology represents an investment; if the money spent does not yield a measureable, visible return, the investment is a failure.

The contact center, moreover, plays a central role in driving the customer experience, which plays a central role in the competitive differentiation and, quite frankly, success of the business. If "empowerment" initiatives do not truly enable agents to deliver an improved experience, they are worthless endeavors.

But what does this practical iteration of empowerment mean when it comes to contact center technology? How can an organization leverage technology to transition from articulating its desire to empower agents to actually empowering them?

The line of questioning warrants a three-pronged answer.

Intuitive, Functional Systems: The survey data may confirm that usability on the front end takes precedence over usability on the back end, but that does not mean it is meaningless on the back end. Empowering technology helps rather than hinders; agents must be able to smoothly operate and navigate the systems they employ when engaging customers.

Contact centers are best served by devoting training time to the strategy of engaging customers. The process of leveraging technology to facilitate that engagement should not present a steep learning curve or convoluted inefficiencies; it should be quick, obvious, intuitive, and seamless.

This need is especially important amid the transition to the cloud. Introducing cloud-based technology is supposed to improve performance and usability; it should not come with convoluted systems or strict learning curves.

Technology that empowers is technology that readily does what it promises. It allows the agent to focus on the challenge of satisfying the customer rather than on the challenge of being able to properly connect with the customer.

Personalized Agent Experience: Mindful that all customers are not created equal, customer management thought leaders have been recommending a personalized approach to customer care. Scripts and procedures should serve as a guide when engaging customers, but the ultimate experience must still be tailored to the customer's unique personality and unique needs.

The same logic applies on the backend; systems and processes must be personalized for the unique agents. Different agents – whether due to differences in personalities, professional background or demographics – have different demands, expectations, and needs when it comes to contact center technology. Instead of ignoring these differences and imposing blanket, generic interfaces on these agents, empowering technology respects and embraces these differences. It adapts to the needs of the specific workforce – on aggregate and individualized levels – thus creating an environment that works for each agent.

Personalization can span all facets of the technology journey. It can include the specific interfaces. It can include the specific training and learning associated with those interfaces. It can include the manner in which performance is reported. It can include experiential add-ons like gamification.

Quite simply, it understands that agents perform best – and best serve customers – when they can play to their specific strengths.

View of the Customer: Agents are not performing in a vacuum. They are not simply completing background tasks. They are directly engaging customers.

The best contact center technology is appreciative of this reality.

It recognizes that agents cannot begin to satisfy customers without instant, vivid access to internal knowledge and customer data.

Empowering contact center technology accordingly provides agents with an array of robust insights. They know who the customer is, what the customer wants, how the customer feels, and how the customer has previously interacted. Aware of the full context behind the customer's journey, they are able to most intelligently, efficiently, and effectively provide service. They can provide the information the customer needs and the resolution the customer desires.

Elements Of Empowering Contact Center Technology

When contact center technology is intuitive, agent-centric and rich with customer analytics and business insights, it fosters an environment of empowerment. Agents have the tools they need in order to deliver successful customer experiences.

In pursuit of solutions that create such an environment of empowerment, different businesses will naturally gravitate toward different solutions. Their contact centers will have different needs, agents, and customers, and all impact the type of investment decisions that make sense at a given time.

Despite their differences, optimal solutions will nonetheless possess some common elements. They will offer some fundamental functionalities and features.

They track the customer journey: To serve customers, the agents must know customers. They must also know the context in which those customers have

been engaging and plan to continue engaging with the business. Robust visibility into the customer journey is essential. No matter the specific channel or circumstance in which the agent is engaging the customer, the agent should know exactly what has brought the customer to that interaction and where the customer will optimally go next. Empowered agents are not asked to serve customers blindly or robotically; they tailor service to the situation.

They foster an omni-channel environment: Different businesses and different customers carry different expectations and values regarding specific contact channels. In today's contact center environment, all, however, recognize the importance of an omni-channel approach: when the customer engages with a business, he should not encounter cracks or seams. He should encounter a singular, seamless, consistent experience across channels.

To create such an experience, technology must seamlessly connect agents and channels on the backend. Agents require instant visibility into what is going on within each channel so that they can provide the best possible experience in all channels. The customer experience is a business-wide, channel-wide endeavor; empowering technology ensures there are no blind spots.

They are predicated on personalized engagement: The best technology does not simply provide agents with a toolkit for doing their jobs. It actively engages them, creating opportunities to understand what the business wants, what customers want, and how they can properly bridge the gaps. It is built with cognizance of agents' individual quirks, preferences, and learning styles. It grants agents access to performance data (as well as accompanying incentives) and support from their supervisors and colleagues. It operates as if the agent

– not the system – is the fundamental component of the business.

They reduce effort: High customer effort is negatively correlated with high customer satisfaction. High agent effort is positively correlated with inefficiency, which is negatively correlated with high customer satisfaction. Empowering technology, therefore, reduces effort on the back and front ends.

For agents, the aim is quick, intuitive access to the necessary tools. Agents additionally benefit when customers have quick, intuitive access to necessary interfaces. By making life easier for customers, the business ensures that those customers who do end up reaching agents have not been subject to the frustration of convoluted, unintuitive systems. The inquiries they communicate to agents will thus be pointed (about the real issue rather than a complaint about the system) and from a more peaceful, contented mindset.

They optimize – and retain – the workforce: Many of the aforementioned examples focus on each agent's individual experience with the technology. It is also important to take a macroscopic view; how does technology impact the workforce at large?

Truly empowering technology optimizes workforce management. It encourages stronger interaction routing, stronger scheduling, and better training, coaching and collaboration from leadership. It gives business leaders full visibility into what is going on with agents so that potential issues can be proactively remedied.

When businesses are able to create a better, more optimized workforce environment, they retain agents. Agent retention is a product of agent happiness; it is also a cause of agent knowledge retention. These happier, more knowledgeable agents deliver better customer experiences.

The Power of Empowerment

Agent empowerment is a paramount business focus, but it is ultimately a means to an end. Its value is that it represents a pathway to a stronger customer experience.

Metrics related to agent satisfaction and performance, therefore, represent intermediate indicators of success rather than final confirmation of that success.

Agent empowerment may, consequently, represent a chief consideration when businesses are sourcing contact center technology. The impact of that technology will ultimately, therefore, be demonstrated by the impact on the customer.

Key metrics include first contact resolution, customer effort score, and CSAT score. Collectively, they paint a picture of what the customer is experiencing.

They paint a picture of whether the effort to empower agents is having the desired effect on the overall business.

Success in Practice

The notion of empowering agents is not a pipe dream; it is an idea that can be truly realized with the right technology.

The notion of those empowered agents fueling improved customer experiences is similarly realistic. If agents are placed in the right environment and given the right tools, they can drive the types of experiences that customers truly value. When customers receive that value, they become more satisfied, more supportive, and more loyal.

Various real-world examples demonstrate how Calabrio's technology, which is built on the ideas of agent engagement and empowerment, achieve meaningful results.

Polaris

Challenge: The company lacked visibility into the multi-channel interactions that were taking place across its 1,800 dealers. Lacking that data, processes and performance could not be standardized, and agents were unable to deliver an optimal, consistent experience for customers.

Solution: Calabrio ONE provided agents with consistent access to data from across channels. It also enabled the business to introduce consistent evaluation metrics across channels, while also integrating website support features with the rest of the contact center. Calabrio Quality Management also helped integrate cases from the "Ask Polaris" self-service feature into the call center system.

Result: With better visibility into interactions across the business, agents were more efficient and more confident. Quite simply, they were more empowered. Agent satisfaction and, more importantly, customer service quality both improved.

Republic Services

Challenge: The organization fields more than 14 million customer service inquiries from across 2,800 US cities, and it takes a localized approach to doing so. The strategy is customer-centric in theory but also comes with challenges from a workforce management standpoint; how can it monitor and maintain consistency of performance across so many disparate channels? Indeed, data integration, quality management, and operational efficiency were challenges.

Solution: An integrated combination of Calabrio ONE, including Calabrio Workforce Management and Calabrio Quality Management empowered the organization to overcome its challenges. It was able to score multichannel customer interactions on a consistent basis, while maintaining full scalability in the event of growth – either into new markets or new channels. The workforce management solution also improved contact center staffing.

Result: The solution helped close gaps in the service delivery process, empowering agents to deliver better experiences. Quality scores – and sales and revenue – went up. That potent combination led to more agent engagement; with greater visibility into and excitement over their performances, agents became more satisfied within the organization and more excited to explore longer tenures. Customer satisfaction and loyalty also improved.

Beverage Manufacturer

Challenge: The good news is that agents were empowered to issue free coupons to dissatisfied customers. The bad news is that the organization had limited visibility into why these coupons were being offered. It did not know what was causing the complaint or whether the complaint warranted the "make good" from the agent.

Solution: The organization had already been using Calabrio ONE; the solution was to incorporate Calabrio Analytics into the mix. The tool gave the organization the ability to listen to 100% of calls, in turn providing context for what was happening with customers and useful insight for improving training and operations moving forward.

Result: With the additional insight, the business was able to preemptively address many of the issues that were yielding complaints. This improved the agent experience, as they were not dealing with as many disgruntled customers. The insight was also used to improve training; managers could provide agents with more valuable guidance on how to resolve customer issues and when to offer the compensatory coupons. The net results were a more skilled, engaged class of agents and more satisfied customers.

Forget About Trade-Offs: Customer Experience Technology Is Right For Your Business – And For Your Customer

Efficiency vs. Efficacy. Customer centricity vs. Business centricity.

Both cases suggest the need for a trade-off when designing customer experience strategy. They argue that a business must determine whether its contact center operation will be as efficient as possible or as effective as possible; it cannot be both. They argue that initiatives that cater to the customer will inevitably come at the expense of the bottom line; there is no way to satisfy both interests.

In truth, no such trade-off is required. More importantly, no such trade-off can be tolerated.

Today's customers are demanding quicker, more efficient service experiences. The hoops and hurdles they once endured on the road to resolution are no longer acceptable; they expect the business to act right away.

They also, however, expect the business to deliver optimal value. They expect the experiences to be effortless, personalized, and accommodating of newfound channel preferences. They desire resolution that is creative, valuable, and in full compliance with their stated demands.

They are not simply looking for the right experience. They are not simply looking to receive service right away. They are looking to receive the right experience right away. It must be as efficient as it is effective.

With the customer experience meanwhile representing an increasingly potent competitive differentiator, it is also essential to begin viewing customer centricity as a pathway to rather than as an opponent of business centricity. The notion that "what is good for the customer is what is good for the business" cannot be dismissed as hollow rhetoric; it must represent a way of life for today's contact center operations.

By creating an experience that, by virtue of its alignment with customer demands and superiority over that offered by the competition, drives customer satisfaction and loyalty, the business will ultimately achieve desirable financial results. An ineffective customer experience, similarly, will harm the bottom line.

Customer service practices, strategies and solutions cannot be perceived as costs; they must instead be viewed as investments capable of deriving meaningful returns for the business.

Embracing efficiency and efficacy and business centricity and customer centricity as complements rather than substitutes is, of course, easier said than done. It is, in fact, very much because of the difficulty satisfying both sides that businesses began perceiving them as oppositional.

It nonetheless needs to be done. And with the right combination of strategy and technology, it absolutely can be done.

More Demanding Customer Demands

Today's customers are demanding better, more consistent, lower effort, more personalized experiences, and they are expecting them to happen more quickly and across new, non-verbal channels.

Quite simply, they want their experiences to be more effective and more efficient.

Businesses, therefore, face immense pressure to perform. They cannot simply remedy certain ailments or close certain gaps in their organization; they must ensure operations are meeting – and exceeding – these heightened demands from customers. Only then will they be able to deliver the kind of customer experience that yields a competitive advantage (and thus favorable results) for the greater business.

While customer experience improvement jointly requires attention to people and processes, optimized technology can itself play a particularly vital role in driving success. Technology issues, after all, represent one of the biggest pre-existing inhibitors to both customer-centric and business-centric engagement.

Many organizations are handicapped by aging, costly infrastructure. This aging infrastructure is a double whammy: it bottlenecks the business' ability to satisfy customers while simultaneously creating a greater cost footprint for the business. It is no wonder so many worry about the possibility of jointly improving efficiency and efficacy or jointly generating customer centric and business centric results; current technology makes it

difficult to do either.

Naturally, businesses want new choices that are less costly and easier to implement.

Given the specific experiential demands being introduced by customers, those new choices must also meet certain core criteria. They must behave in accordance with the new customer experience normal.

They must deliver multimodal experiences: Central to the customer demand for omni-channel engagement is a demand for seamless, consistent, unified experiences across all channels. Customers do not view channel experiences in individual terms but in collective ones; they expect different media to converge to create the best possible outcomes.

If that is the demand on the front end, it must also be the demand on the backend. The best technology, accordingly, removes "siloes" between different channels, systems, and applications. All are fully integrated and connected.

Platforms built with appreciation for the multimodal experience simultaneously satisfy the need for efficiency and efficacy, for business centricity and customer centricity. They remove information gaps that spur delays and hold times while simultaneously providing a more delightful, personalized, customer-accommodating experience.

They build connections: An extension of the omni-channel movement is a desire to integrate live customer interactions with connected devices. By connecting traditional channels to the "Internet Of Things," the business creates a differentiated, omni-channel, empowering experience for customers. It, moreover, yields a more robust array of customer data, which can in turn drive even greater improvement over the long-term.

The journey-oriented customer experience is a focal point for today's businesses. By forging connections between traditional channels, new engagement channels, and internet-connected devices, the business doubles down on the journey model. It removes the seams that create both inefficiencies and dissatisfaction, in the process producing better visibility into the customer base and better customer relationships.

They enable personalization: It is not enough to deliver a great experience; today's businesses must deliver the right experience for the given customer. For that to happen, businesses, systems, and agents need instant, all-encompassing access to relevant analytics. They need to know who customers are, how they feel, how they have been interacting, and what specific resolution they seek.

Personalization achieves a multi-faceted set of rewards. It leads to better outcomes for customers; they

feel more valued and receive the information or resolution that make the most sense. It leads to more productive agent performance; instead of combing through various, disjointed data sets or attempting to apply generic, scripted resolutions, agents can zero in on the course of action that makes the most sense in context. It also provides long-term value for the business; analytics help organizations built the best possible journeys for each customer. Such insights also enable the business to make longer-term, more overarching improvement to their products and the sales, marketing, and service strategies that accompany them.

They automate mundane processes: In an era of personalized, customer-centric care, some naturally view "automation" as a dirty word. That stigma needs to end.

Many customers are engaging with regard to simple, transactional matters; in such cases, the most customer-centric thing a business can do is to provide a simplified means for attaining results.

In the right context, an automated self-service tool is not a sign that the business is trying to deflect a call from its contact center. It is a sign that the business is empowering the customer to get the quickest, most relevant resolution.

Automation is also valuable from an internal perspective; it ensures consistency of processes, leading to higher interaction quality and better customer experiences.

The best contact center technology, therefore, automates processes. Upon doing so, it improves efficiency, improves quality, and ultimately improves satisfaction for customers and agents.

They are scalable: Trends like the push toward omni-channel and personalized care are not simply demands being placed on businesses. They are also reminders: the marketplace is constantly changing. So, too, are customer expectations.

One of the biggest challenges associated with existing technology is its lack of

scalability. Existing systems cannot be upgraded to account for changes in interaction volume. They cannot be connected to platforms that address different functions or different channels. This lack of flexibility spurs the kinds of inefficiencies that cripple internal processes, resulting in cost increases and satisfaction decreases.

In selecting new technology, businesses must make scalability a paramount concern. Doing so will ensure the business is equipped to always do best for the customer rather than simply equipped to do best for the customer at this specific moment in time. This need for scalability is one of the driving forces behind the push toward cloud contact center technology; systems that are not only capable of upgrades but are constantly upgraded in accordance with crowd-sourced expertise are ones that satisfy business and customer needs.

Good for the Customer and Good for the Business

As businesses pursue concurrent increases in efficiency and efficacy and pursue initiatives that are business centric by virtue of being customer centric, they should demand results that support all mindsets.

Increases in efficiency and reductions in cost need to correspond with increases in customer satisfaction and growth in revenue.

When sourcing and evaluating contact center technology, there is no need to settle for some of the above. The best solutions drive growth on all fronts.

Increased customer satisfaction: Interactive intelligence has seen a particularly strong correlation between multimodal engagement products and increases in CSAT and NPS. When the business can seamlessly and consistently engage the customer in his preferred channel; satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy result.

Increased upsell/cross-sell revenue: Through integrated cloud engagement and CRM platforms, businesses have a better sense of their customers. They have a better sense of how to act on that insight. They, consequently, can provide the best service while also uncovering opportunities to drive

more revenue. The contact center indeed becomes a profit center.

Increased operational efficiency and reduced costs: Through automated business processes and scalable technology, cloud solutions result in a more streamlined operation. Cost savings result.

Those savings do not, however, lead to bargain bin care for customers. The opposite is actually true. By eliminating the inefficiencies and gaps that plagued the contact center operation, the technology actually renders businesses and agents more capable of satisfying customers – the way they deserve to be satisfied.

Results in Real Life

Idealistic? Yes. Attainable? Absolutely.

New innovations in contact center technology enable businesses to achieve the full gamut of results; ones that matter to customers and ones that matter most to business stakeholders. Trade-offs and quests for "buy-in" are a thing of the past; contact center technology can and is empowering businesses to become more efficient and effective.

Whirlpool

Initiative: Positioned as a service center, the contact center function was viewed as a net cost to the business. It was positioned as a requirement rather than an investment worth celebrating.

Value: Interactive Intelligence provided the contact center with more robust, integrated access to data and insights. Agents simultaneously had a better view into their customers and a better sense of the business they were representing.

Impact: The contact center transformed into a value center. Agents were not only better equipped to satisfy customers on the support front but also able to drive additional revenue. $55 million in new upsell/cross-sell revenue is directly attributable to the contact center.

Intuit

Initiative: Cases were not being resolved fast enough, and operations were being directly bottlenecked. This was particularly difficult during tax season; the business had millions upon millions of customers to support and returns to file, and it was not in position to optimally do so.

Value: Interactive Intelligence's tools directly addressed bottlenecks in the case resolution process. The aim was to improve efficiency so that the business could handle more customers – and do so more effectively.

Impact: Case resolution time was reduced by 66%, which enabled the business to dramatically increase the number of returns it could process. Costs went down and revenue went up.

ABC Financial

Initiative: One facet of the company's business involves processing memberships for a health club. These requests came through disparate channels, which limited the business' ability to standardize and automate workflow. Agents were addressing the issues randomly and not always prepared for the intricacies of each case, with produced inconsistency and inefficiency.

Value: Through a combination of Interactive Intelligence's Customer Interaction Center and Interaction Process Automation tools, the organization was able to greatly improve its routing process (effectively turning the cumbersome requests into normal contact center interactions) while also ensuring each engagement was customer-centric and of a high quality.

Impact: By eliminating the process gaps, the tools greatly improved workflow, leading to more efficient request handling. The process was simpler, handle time fell, the backlog was reduced, and the contact center was functioning better. The value being provided to customers was also more significant.

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