What End Users Want From Their Cloud-Based Contact Center Infrastructure Vendor

March 2017

2017

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Introduction

The benefits of using a cloud-based contact center solution, like an automatic call distributor (ACD), interactive voice response (IVR) or dialer, are well known. On the financial front, cloud-based solutions are generally "pay-as-you go," allowing companies to pay for these applications out of their operating budget instead of having to get approval for a possibly major capital investment. When it comes to the implementation, companies only need to take care of their instance of the software and leave the hardware to the vendor. Since the provider is responsible for maintaining the platform on which the system runs, companies require fewer IT resources to support their contact center environment, and the vendor is readily available to provide domain expertise, which can be expensive, particularly for small and mid-size organizations.

Many companies adopting cloud-based contact center infrastructure systems are transitioning from an on-premise solution. They know what they don't want, based on their prior experience, and are hoping for something different and better. They are looking for a vendor who is easy to work with so that they can spend their time using their contact center solution instead of negotiating with the vendor or trying to work through a complex and time-consuming provisioning process. They want a solution that is easy to scale up and down when their business requirements change, and to pay only for what they use. They want a vendor partner who delivers product innovation and upgrades continuously, so that their operating environment remains current and they have access to new features as they are released.

The cloud-based contact center infrastructure market, which is already in its third generation, has matured quickly in 20 years. And the pace of innovation in this highly dynamic IT sector is increasing as adoption of these solutions grows. The cloud-based contact center infrastructure vendors deliver the standard benefits from this implementation and financing model, and the more innovative providers are differentiating themselves and their offerings by giving end users what they want most. Read this white paper to learn what that is.

One Throat to Choke and Ease of Doing Business

Enterprise managers are driven by the need to deliver a consistently outstanding experience to their customers and prospects. As a result, IT managers are responsible for making sure that all enterprise and servicing systems, whether based in-house or in the cloud, are fully operational so that business managers can meet customer expectations. Enterprise and IT managers want to keep it simple. When they have a question or an operational problem comes up, they want to reach out to one person, number, website or help desk, and know that their issue is being addressed and how long it will take to be resolved.

Since contact centers are highly complex and can use more than 45 different systems and applications, it takes a lot to keep everything working properly. For years companies had to purchase most of their contact center systems and applications from various vendors and integrate them, which is time consuming, expensive and risky. When something did not work properly, the complexity of the operating environment often made it difficult to troubleshoot and resolve the issue, because there were so many systems and vendors involved.

This is one of the leading reasons why companies are moving to cloud-based contact center infrastructure solutions. The more innovative vendors offer feature-rich solutions that include many of the core systems and applications that are needed by most contact centers, including ACD, dialing, IVR, computer telephony integration (CTI), universal queue, reporting, recording (voice and screen), quality assurance, and workforce management. See Figure 1. By acting as a general contractor, these vendors are delivering on a few of the top benefits of cloud-based contact center infrastructure vendors; they are making it easy for their enterprises to acquire the applications they need, integrating them, and taking full responsibility for all aspects of the applications and integrations, essentially giving their customers a single point of contact.

Figure 1: Cloud-Based Contact Center Infrastructure Block Diagram
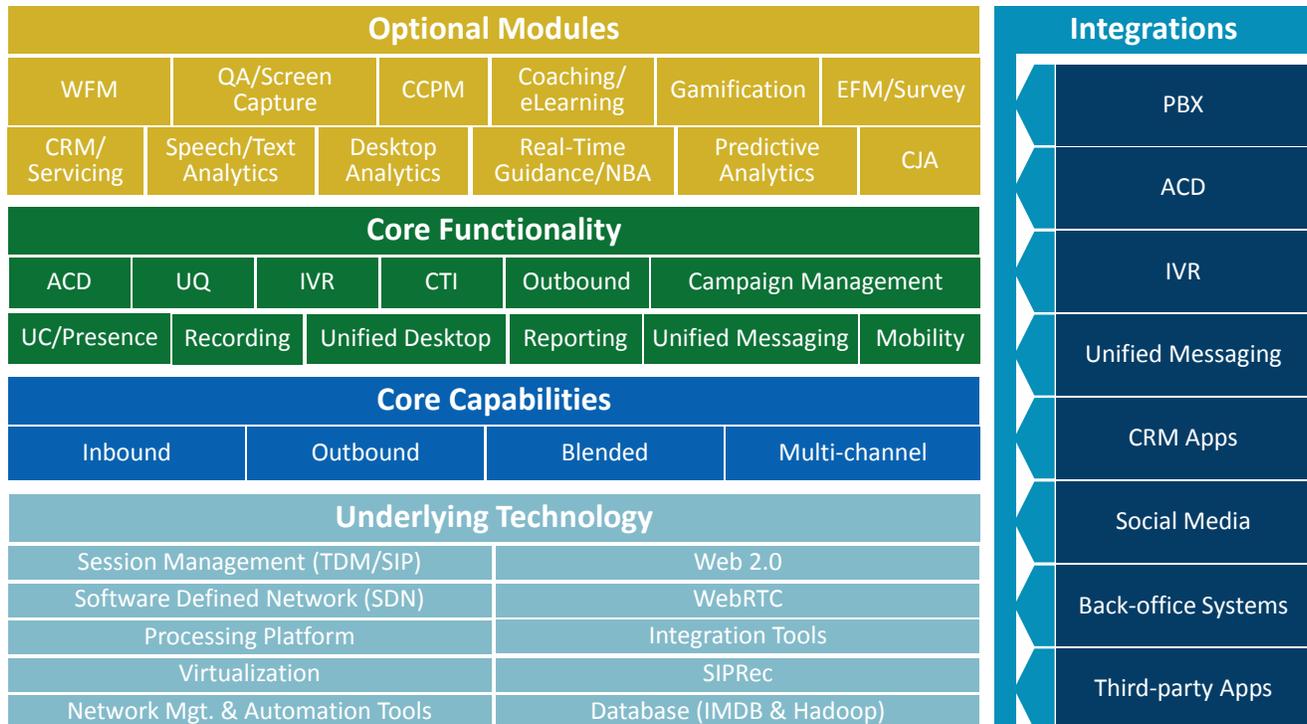
Source: DMG Consulting LLC, March 2017

Highly Reliable System Performance

System reliability is not something to be taken for granted. End users want cloud-based contact center solutions that are more reliable than their current on-premise systems; it's often the primary justification for a move to the cloud. Enterprises want their cloud-based contact center infrastructure solution provider to deliver the following:

- A service level of 99.99% – this means that the system is almost never down, and surely not during the business day when a company is at its busiest

- An active/active architecture – designed to keep processing under all circumstances, except during a catastrophic event

- Complete redundancy for all system components – keeps all systems and applications fully functioning at all times

- Advance notice when there is a need to take the system down – allows IT to plan for system outages

End users expect a cloud-based contact center infrastructure provider to improve their operating environment, not just to replace their existing infrastructure.

Contact Center Expertise

Supporting contact center systems and applications has posed a challenge to IT for years. One of IT's goals is to standardize enterprise systems and applications to reduce operating costs. This is the opposite of what contact center managers typically want and need; managers desire flexible and differentiated contact center systems and capabilities so that they can come up with creative approaches to helping their customers. A constant source of dissatisfaction for business managers is finding themselves buried in IT paperwork just to request a simple move/add/change (MAC), and then having to wait days, if not weeks, to get the fix done. For many contact centers, by the time IT gets around to the change it is no longer necessary.

The perspective from IT is no better. IT groups are under great pressure to reduce their operating costs. To optimize their tight budgets and scarce resources, they often ask their business partners to plan out their activities so that they can hire and allocate the appropriate resources to each job. While contact centers can plan for some of their activities, like staffing up during a busy period, much of what happens cannot be anticipated, such as an unexpectedly large rate of agent attrition or a new marketing program that requires a change to

an IVR. As a result, many IT groups have tried to move away from supporting their contact centers, claiming an inability to be responsive.

This is where cloud-based contact center infrastructure vendors fit nicely. Leading providers of these solutions offer a variety of contact center experts to ensure clients are positioned to meet their business needs, whether the activities are planned or unexpected. Here are the types of expertise end users should expect to receive from their cloud-based contact center infrastructure vendor:

- 24 x 7 support from experts who know their systems and operating environment and can make changes right away, if necessary

- Technology and systems experts who know how to get the most out of the systems and applications that are being used in their department – the ACD, IVR, recording, workforce management (WFM), or other

- Operational experts who understand vertical and business requirements so they can make recommendations that allow users to improve their performance

This is in addition to the implementation and integration experts who ensure the system roll-out goes smoothly. Leading cloud-based contact center infrastructure providers are offering standard and enhanced service offerings to deliver the support that customers need. While end users have to pay for these high-end services, they don't need to find and hire the resources and are no longer dependent on their internal IT group, which may not have necessary expertise or bandwidth to support them.

Ongoing Innovation

For end users, few things are more frustrating than installing a new system, only to learn that what they installed in out-of-date and will have to be upgraded within 12 – 24 months. This is status quo when it comes to many on-premise ACDs. The cloud takes care of this issue by allowing vendors to continuously deliver innovation to their enterprise clients, who can elect to use the new capabilities without disruption in service or requiring a system implementation. However, it presents a new challenge to contact center managers, who need to plan out their pace of adoption.

The benefits can be significant if you pick the right vendor. In the days of old, when an end-user organization wanted a product enhancement, they had to pay for it and then wait for the feature to be delivered. If a system change is desired by many cloud-based users, the cost of innovation will either be absorbed by the vendor or shared with multiple companies, all of whom will benefit from the enhancement. The "crowdsourcing" concept is alive and well in the world of

cloud-based contact center infrastructure, and this is reducing the cost and speeding up the pace of innovation.

However, we must point out that leading cloud-based contact center infrastructure vendors are willing to do true customizations for clients if they are willing to pay. These vendors have the resources to get the work down on a timely basis, which is not always the case for on-premise providers these days. Most of the innovation in the contact center infrastructure market is coming from the cloud-based providers. DMG encourages end users to share their needs and opportunities with their cloud-based vendors and treat them as if they are a highly responsive IT group who are fully dedicated to their clients' ongoing success. The location of the resources and innovation has changed, as they are no longer on-site, but the vendors' capabilities have improved, which means that in many cases, companies can get the innovation they need more quickly and cost effectively.

Disaster Recovery (DR)/Business Continuity (BC)

DR/BC has been an important driver of adoption of cloud-based contact center infrastructure functionality ever since these solutions were first introduced to the market. Providing a fully redundant contact center environment is very expensive, as it essentially requires a company to build out two full systems. While some of the larger companies can afford this cost, many small and mid-size organizations cannot, as their customers are fully aware.

One of the earlier uses of cloud-based contact center infrastructure was to be the back-up environment for an on-premise installation. Many companies are still doing this because it's relatively easy to route calls to a cloud-based contact center infrastructure solution when there is an unexpected failure in an on-premise system. Agents have to be trained to use the cloud-based contact center solution, but this ramp-up time is quick, and many of these solutions come with agent softphones that are easy to use.

Even better, the new generation of cloud-based contact center infrastructure solutions is built with an active/active architecture. This means that the systems are designed to automatically failover when a situation arises that forces the primary server to go down. It could also mean that the cloud environment is architected to process a client's activity in two data centers (which are hopefully geographically dispersed), both of which are configured to handle 100% of the activity. Either way, this is the way to go, as it eliminates the need for organizations to buy and configure a separate system for back-up purposes, and leaves the handling of the hardware and architecture to vendors who do this for a living.

Cloud-Based Contact Center Infrastructure Vendor Checklist

Below is a checklist to help prospects find the right cloud-based contact center infrastructure vendor for their organization. This checklist can be used to determine if a vendor is well-positioned to meet an organization's current and future contact center infrastructure needs.

Ideal Vendor Checklist

Feature/Functionality
☐ Feature-rich solution
☐ Excellent user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) for agents, managers and administrators
☐ A broad suite of fully integrated contact center applications
☐ Out-of-the-box application programming interfaces (APIs)

Reliability, Performance, Implementation and Support
☐ Has a highly reliable platform
☐ Provides geographic redundancy
☐ Delivers well-planned, clean and rapid implementations
☐ Takes responsibility for success
☐ Comes with highly experienced professional services and integration resources
☐ Provides easy and cost-effective access to contact center technical and operational experts
☐ Offers excellent training

Relationship and Innovation
☐ Meets and exceeds SLAs
☐ Competitive and simple-to-understand pricing
☐ Makes it easy to provision new capabilities
☐ Makes it easy to scale up and down
☐ Is easy to use and comes with informative help capabilities
☐ Has a reputation as an excellent partner to end users and other technology providers
☐ Delivers a constant flow of innovation to the market
☐ Shows willingness to customize the solution at a reasonable cost
☐ Has a large research and development (R&D) budget
☐ Is known to be a financially stable company

Source: DMG Consulting LLC, March 2017

Final Thoughts

Enterprises want to find vendors who are committed to their success. It's understood and accepted that both the enterprise and vendor are going to negotiate the best possible deal, but after the service level agreements and contract are finalized, it's time to work together. Cloud-based contact center infrastructure vendors have to earn their clients' satisfaction on an ongoing basis, even when there is a long-term contract. This is a very positive situation for the contact center industry and for consumers (and B2B partners) around the world, as it is a strong incentive for the vendors to work together with their clients to ensure that service meets or exceeds expectations, which are increasingly high. Prospects should seek out vendors who "get it" and demonstrate their commitment to winning their business on a daily basis.

About Serenova

Serenova simplifies every aspect of the customer experience, from front office to back, to make life easier for you, your customers and your employees. The world's most passionate, customer-focused brands achieve brighter interactions, deeper insights, and more meaningful outcomes with Serenova's always-on, highly secure, true multi-tenant and instantly scalable Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) platform, CxEngage. Headquartered in Austin, Texas, Serenova has operations in California, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia/New Zealand. Learn more at www.serenova.com. For live updates follow @serenovashine.

About DMG Consulting LLC

DMG Consulting LLC is a leading independent research, advisory and consulting firm specializing in contact centers, back-office and real-time analytics. DMG provides insight and strategic guidance and tactical advice to end users, vendors and the financial community. Each year, DMG devotes more than 10,000 hours to producing primary research on IT sectors, including workforce optimization (quality management/liability recording), workforce management, performance management, speech analytics, desktop analytics, text analytics, customer journey analytics, surveying/voice of the customer, voice biometrics, cloud-based contact center infrastructure, dialing, interactive voice response systems and proactive customer care. Our actionable solutions are proven to deliver a lasting competitive advantage, and often pay for themselves in as little as three months. Learn more at www.dmgconsult.com.