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The Data-Driven Contact Center

Integrated Data Collection + Analytics Lead to Better First Contact Resolution and Customer Experience

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Introduction

Information is power! Ever hear that expression? Some things really don't change. But today that expression is more relevant than ever before. Data is the driving force behind emerging business strategies and tactics in virtually every industry.

In my last whitepaper of this series, I stated that a foundational element for delivering excellence in customer service operations starts with a well thought out customer service process. I also said that few companies have really developed a company-wide targeted customer experience (CX) across the customer lifecycle, which is then translated to a company-wide customer service strategy and process. A leading reason for not having an enterprise wide CX strategy is because these entities lack the information necessary which would lead them to a fact-based strategy and ultimately a better customer experience strategy. The same can be said about having (or not having) the data necessary to drive daily operations and necessary adjustments or optimizations to adapt to changing conditions and customer preferences. How do we address first call resolution (FCR) when we don't have the underlying data to know what is getting in the way? Thus, this whitepaper will focus on the data-driven Contact Center.

> **Data-driven**: Progress in an activity is compelled by data, rather than by intuition or personal experience. It is often labeled as business jargon for what scientists call evidence-based decision making.

Data Data Everywhere But What Does It Mean?

Every day our contact centers have tons of data come through them. Call data, IVR interactions, emails, chats, CRM and customer support engagement notes, and more! What a shame if we are unable to capture, aggregate, correlate, analyze and put all that information to work in the name of strategic advantage, achieving that often elusive first call resolution and delivering a continuously improving customer experience.

We (RTMC) work with many contact centers every year and a common theme we see are centers focused squarely on running a high-quality operation with a daily operations focus. Those centers which are well run have lots of data on average handle time, average speed of answer, first call resolution, and other measures of efficiency. Don't get me wrong these types of metrics are quite important, but from my perspective are just table stakes for a contact center today. The key question is how much time is spent on making the contact center a strategic tool for the company, exceeding customer expectations with every interaction and building deeper

relationships by delivering increasingly better service and value? The sad truth is the strategic stuff is most often an aspiration which all too often loses to putting out those daily fires.

Certainly many companies conduct market research, customer feedback programs, peer benchmarking exercises and more to help direct some of their improvement initiatives – these are all good things. But too often <u>some of the best information we need to serve customers is going through our contact centers every day, but no mechanism is employed to capture and put the data to work</u>. Using an example of a cloud based Contact Center Infrastructure (CCI) and related customer interaction elements, we highlight the many potential sources of data we can draw from for further use, both tactical and strategic.
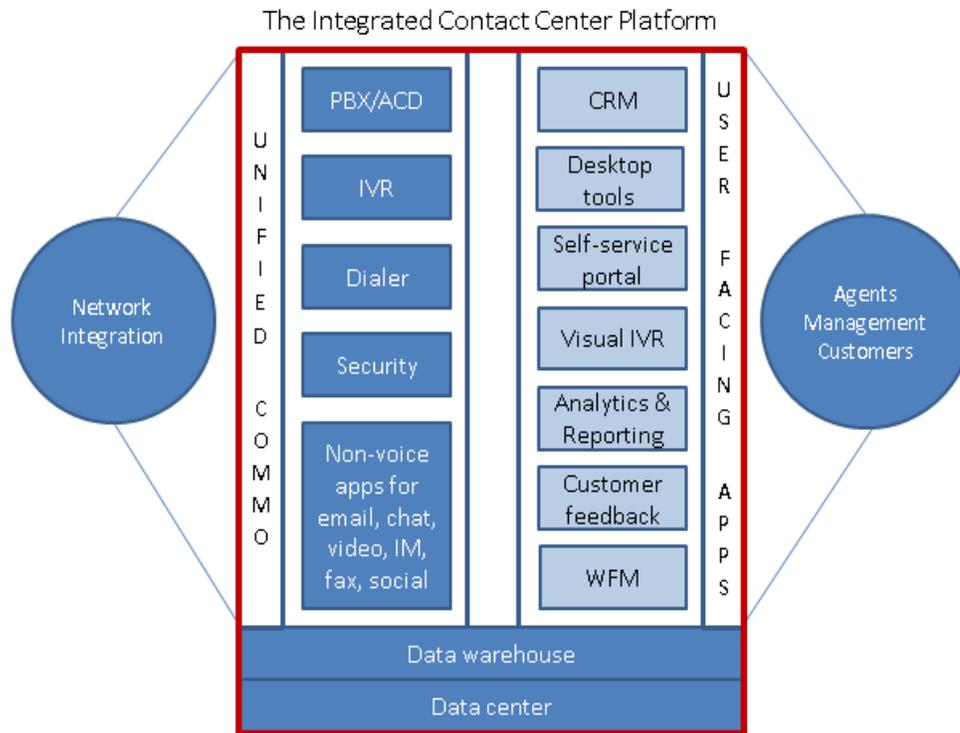
The Integrated Contact Center Platform

Figure 1

Interestingly, one of the oldest challenges our early contact centers faced when the age of the multi-channel service organization began, was the frustrated customer who called an agent after a bad experience with some other self-service channel, or worst yet another agent that they were unhappy with. And then only to be told please explain it all over again as that center did not have the ability to correlate prior interactions and present them to the agent for use. Yet I can say this very situation still happens to me in my personal life with many consumer companies from which I have purchased products or services from.

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Many businesses we help have still not figured out exactly how to correlate two or more separate interactions into a seamless engagement with a customer. I have used the phrase 'to capture, aggregate, correlate, and analyze' in this whitepaper series and want to define these as they form the foundation for building your data-driven contact center.

Capture: the process of collecting data from each customer interaction source you have

Aggregate: the process of putting the data together from each disparate channel – the storage of this data can be logical or physical

Correlate: examining the relationship between interactions with clients and combining like events for future action

Analyze: a methodical examination of the data to produce some basis for making informed decisions

Making Your Data Actionable

In the last whitepaper I wrote in this series (Enabling the Agile Contact Center) I discussed how access to better data in decision making form enables a more agile approach to customer service. In this section I want to share some ideas on how you can make your data more actionable. I like to think about actionable data in three distinct buckets:

1. Operations (daily, weekly, monthly) support
2. Customer specific
3. Strategic – trending e.g. market based needs and customer preferences

Making your data more actionable is important to the success of a data-driven contact center.

Operations Data: Most contact centers are first and foremost focused on data needed to run daily operations such as average speed of answer (ASA), average handle time (AHT), abandoned call rates, first call resolution (FCR) and more to help us keep a close pulse on tactical operations. Clearly any operations environment will benefit from a robust dashboard. Your contact center infrastructure should make access to this information real-time and easily accessible.

A gap we frequently observe in contact centers where the above described tactical ops data is captured, is lack of a disciplined root cause analysis process. It's not enough to know what's driving any level of performance – the data becomes actionable when we also understand what's behind the data. Why is our ASA rising? Why did our AHT drop last week? How do we interpret a rise in our abandoned call rate, and does that have relevance to changes in ASA? What were the leading causes of needing a second call to resolve the customer need/request? The list goes on. There are many ways to analyze your data, but often the answer is found in

the correlation of metrics - for example your ASA peaks while abandoned calls are spiking – people hanging up in frustration! An easy way to get underneath these types of issues is to observe the effect of recent changes in your operating environment. Did we interject a new IT application or technology? Did we reconfigure our systems? What about the network? Often what we considered to be a benign change had unintended consequences. Did we introduce a new product line driving more support traffic?

A proven way to make your data actionable and attack those persistent problem metrics is to introduce lean techniques into your analysis processes. We help clients with building 'variability reduction' techniques into their operations to identify variability between groupings of center support units by category to include comparing shifts, geo based centers, product or service lines, and more. Such analyses nearly always produce actionable examples of variability in operating performance by identifying both the laggards and the leaders. Armed with this information, we can focus on the laggards and learn from the leaders.

Customer Specific Data:

Most companies have a customer base which reflects the 80/20 rule meaning 80% of our business comes from 20% of our customers. That makes it good sense to treat services support differently for your larger customers. Typically these customers have more stringent SLAs associated with them further adding to the need for closer management of those customers.

Your ability to support these high volume customers by aggregation of support events, correlating the data, and then analyzing to drive support decisions is critical. Building your CCI to enable a customer specific service approach is powerful. In the past many contact centers grouped (and still do) their operations for large customers into 'programs' which were primarily physically grouped and managed. Today's technology provides more ability to create 'logical' grouping introducing more flexibility for rapid shifting of resources to high return customers, and the ability to incorporate alternate workforce strategies to include home and part-time agents.

Strategic Data: Think of this bucket of information as that information that informs you of longer-term trends of your operations, customer preferences and more. Building your capacity to analyze mounds of ongoing operational data translates to competitive advantage – lower cost services, more differentiated services, and operating efficiencies. A good example of trends that really change how we think about support are the changing demographics of our users such as a growing preference for automated support and social media channels by younger and more technically savvy users.

Capturing data, aggregating, correlating, analyzing and interpreting what it all means in strategic terms is important to making better CCI optimization choices. A shortfall we often observe is the adoption of a narrow view of what the strategic relevance is of this data. Not surprising, our contact centers are typically run by good operators, but not marketing specialists. Yet much of

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what we are learning every day in our contact centers are trends that can lead us to better service offers which can differentiate your company and open up new revenue opportunities.

Actionable from a strategic point of view means the data can be used to support:

- Development of differentiated service offers – customer wants and needs may be fulfilled with fee or free services.
- Channel optimization – changing demographics long term means that channel preferences will change, and thus the opportunity to 'shift-left' as we discussed in the last whitepaper of this series.
- Contact center optimization – how can we overall find further efficiencies by how we configure our support environment (people, process and technology)? What are the changes we need to enable FCR long term?

The answers to how to drive competitive advantage from contact center support operations is in the data!

Enabling the Data-driven Contact Center

Two must dos in my mind are needed to achieve a true data-driven contact center. First, from the first two whitepapers in this series I shared my obvious (and fact based) bias toward cloud CCI. Eliminating the time-consuming and cost intensive premise based technology limitations opens up management time to focus on what we should be doing, and less on what we have been doing.

Second, investment in a support operations capability to make 'data-driven' come to life. The discipline of the data scientist is growing in every industry. Real intensive data analysis must be considered a table stakes investment and not overhead when we are driven to cut costs. This operations team must be closely tied not only to contact center operations, but also to marketing and sales decisions, particularly offer development for services. The support operations team is responsible for driving the agile customer service loop described in the last whitepaper of this series as depicted below.
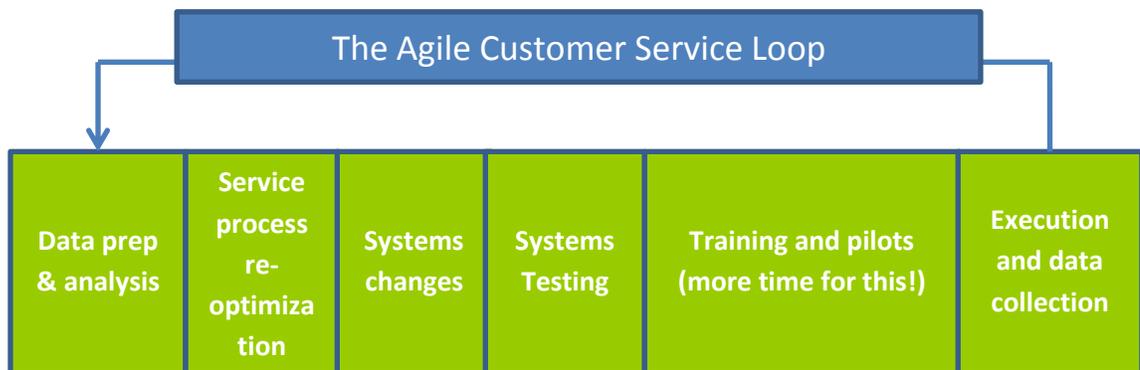
The Agile Customer Service Loop					
Data prep & analysis	Service process re-optimization	Systems changes	Systems Testing	Training and pilots (more time for this!)	Execution and data collection

Figure 2

Critical Success Factors and Best Practices

Becoming a true data-driven contact center is more of a journey than an event. It begins with a mindset around a past and familiar saying that "information is power". If you really value how information can be harnessed to provide competitive advantage, then putting in place the mechanisms to achieve your desired end state is really a matter of good planning and preparation. Some keys to success include:

1. The data-driven contact center should be treated as a strategic asset of the company. Marketing, sales and support teams should do group-think about this, how it will be configured, all supported by cross-functional processes to achieve agreed target objectives.
2. Know what information you could capture, aggregate, correlate and analyze from your systems as they exist. Don't boil the ocean – go after the high-value data first.
3. Know what decisions you would like to be able to make based on available data.
4. Build a cross-functional <u>process</u> that better incorporates your ongoing data analyses.
5. Remember customer centricity! It's not just about efficiency – sometimes more support cost is a good thing if it produces a better customer experience and more revenue.
6. Pilot everything! Well most things anyway. What looks good on paper does not always work out the way we want.

Closing comments

Rapidly changing customer service demands driven by new products, industry innovation, and changing demographics of buyers will only accelerate from here. Technology should support these trends, not inhibit your ability to adapt to them. The business owner responsible for delivering an exceptional customer experience should be at the front of the line when it comes to determining a contact center solution as cloud solutions have removed many of the factors which previously required our IT staffs to drive. The evidence is clear that the need for developing a data-driven support operation is imperative to consistently delivering a superior customer experience. Cloud CCI solutions provide a better framework to support the business owners in the customer service function.

About the Author

With nearly 40 years of IT experiences including 18 years with IBM serving IT departments, and 7 years at Convergys, one of the world's largest call center outsourcing companies, Randy Mysliviec now leads RTM Consulting and the Resource Management Institute. Acknowledged by industry sources as an expert in Global Resource Management (GRM) and author of the Just-in-Time Resourcing® brand of solutions, Randy advises multi-national companies with the complex challenge of operating IT services teams serving the global market.

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