

Enabling the Agile Contact Center

Dynamic Customer Service Made Possible With
Cloud-based CCI Solutions

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The Future of Dynamic Customer Service

A foundational element for delivering excellence in customer service operations starts with a well thought out service process. Surprisingly, this author has found few companies have really developed a company-wide targeted customer experience across the customer lifecycle, which is then translated to a company-wide customer service strategy and process. However, most companies do have customer service strategies and processes at the functional level e.g. help desks, customer service lines, sales support and such. Quite often the contact center is at the epicenter of customer service delivery and therefore a focus of this whitepaper. This paper will also focus on the need for customer service Agility!

Agility: The Power of Moving Quickly and Easily - dictionary.com

Assuming the existence of a well thought out customer service strategy and process, what then tends to get in the way of good customer service execution is the ability (or lack thereof) to quickly adapt to rapidly changing customer service needs, and, reliably dedicate time to development of a dynamic customer service process! What do we mean by 'dynamic customer service'? *Wikipedia defines an emerging theory of 'Customer dynamics' described as customer-business relationships comprised of the ongoing interchange of information and transactions between customers and organizations.* These exchanges occur over a wide range of communication channels, such as phone, email, web and text, including those outside of your organizational control like social media.

The 'exchanges' defined above are typical functions of today's contact centers. What is needed to deliver these exchanges is an efficient, flexible and dynamic system that adapts to the context of each customer while accommodating unique circumstances that each customer interaction presents. Therefore, by design a dynamic customer service process must be able to:

- Allow rapid access to customer information and customer service history
- Facilitate rapid change to customer service processes and call flows
- Be supported by scalable and reliable technology 24x7

In other words, the ability to be Agile is fundamental to creating and executing a dynamic customer service process.

Customer Centricity and Adopting a 'Shift-left' Strategy

Fundamental to a sound dynamic customer service strategy is gaining an understanding of the changing nature of customer service demands in the industry today. Fifteen years ago, the contact center industry was racing to move contact center resources 'offshore' chasing lower labor costs. In the industry's haste, consumers of this new offshore customer service capacity were widely unhappy with issues surrounding call quality (technical issues), language barriers, and cultural gaps. Contact center operators turned to expensive upgrades in voice quality technology, language neutralization training for agents, cultural training and more.

The above described strategy worked for a while, but over time other changing customer demands moved the goal posts again. For example, as users of contact center services continue to shift to a younger generation more adept and comfortable with using technology and social media tools, multi-channel capabilities more tuned to the user preferences for flexible service modes have exploded. In the past 5 years alone, user preferences for automated self-service doubled to 55%, and Gartner predicts that by 2020 customers will manage 85% of the relationship free of any human interaction at all. According to Forrester, 95% of customers use more than one channel to communicate with companies. We call this trend to serve the customer in the manner they want to be served 'Customer Centricity'.

On balance, this trend to more self-service (non-voice) channels is a good news story for companies prepared to take advantage of the trend. Customer preferences shifting to self-service for contact center providers means acceptance and accommodation of users for efficient service delivery. And what about the voice channel with live agents? The voice channel remains important to many, and remains important as a channel for frustrated customers to turn when other service channels do not solve their needs. The key given the above scenario is how to optimize your channels and take advantage of lower cost ways to serve the client. We describe that as a 'Shift-left' strategy.

Shift to the Left is about moving high cost services delivery channels to lower cost delivery channels. Once an idea to simply gain efficiency, Shift-left also embraces the idea of Customer Centricity – the key is balancing how the customer wants to be served with the need to quality customer service efficiently. Figure 1 on the next page is an example from a field services environment (break-fix work), but the concept of moving from high cost to lower cost modalities is the same for any customer service business.

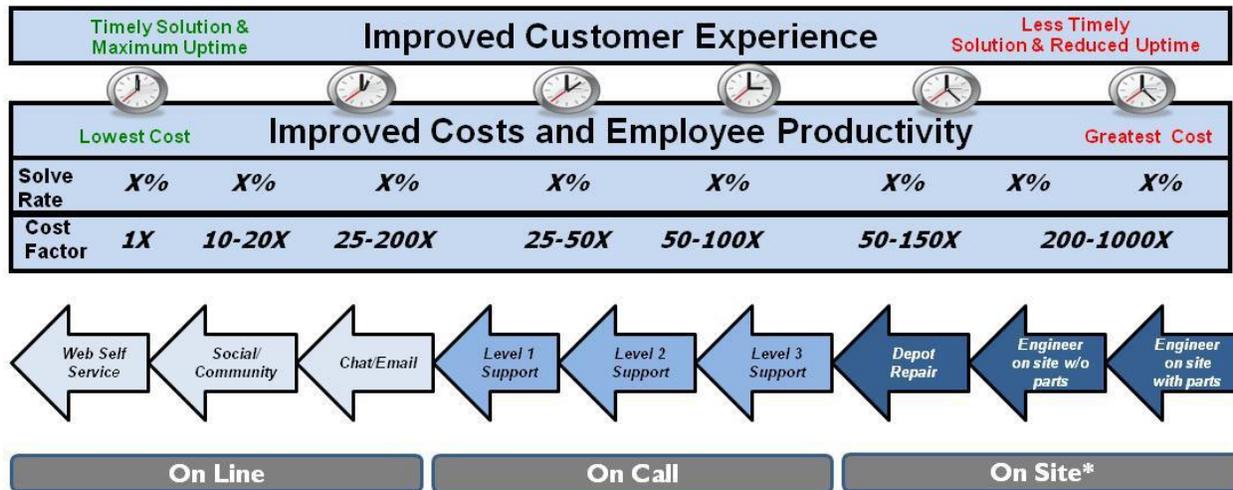


Figure 1

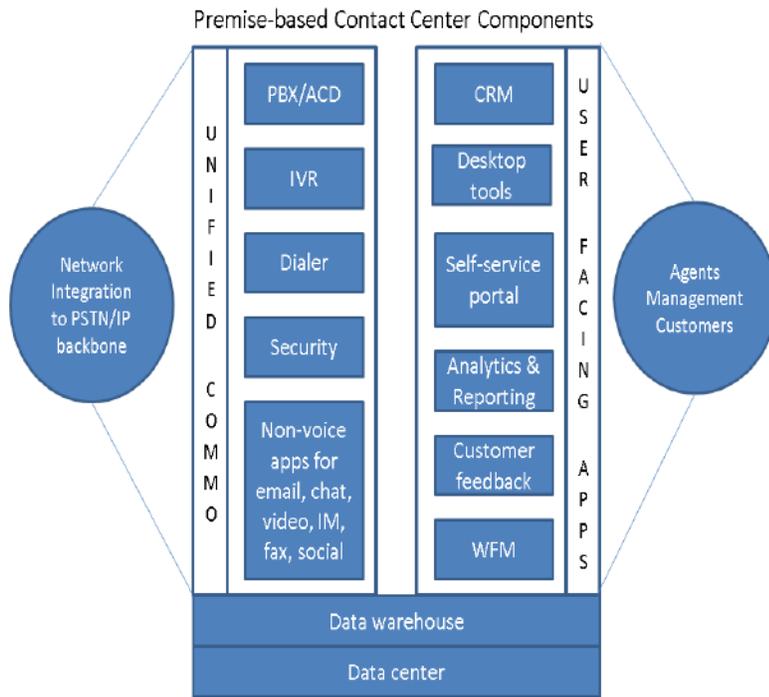
The challenge for customer service teams is how do companies manage to respond to rapidly changing customer service demands given the limitations of today’s contact center solutions? The answer is implementing the right cloud-based CCI solution which will help you by delivering three important operational elements:

- **Time** (bandwidth) to devote to customer service vs. managing the contact center infrastructure
- **Data** (information) which can provide management information on changing user preferences
- **Speed** to be able to proactively adapt your customer service tactics via more dynamic balancing of customer service channels

Cloud CCI – Enabling Dynamic Customer Service

Implementing dynamic customer service means fluidly making changes to access a variety of support channels while rapidly modifying call flows to address changing customer needs/demands. With a premise based solution, this means diverting management time to address the complex relationship of technology components, applications and people which will need to be frequently re-adjusted to what are naturally becoming constantly shifting user demands for these services.

True integrated cloud-based solutions make data-based dynamic channel optimization possible by diverting management time once devoted to technology management, to better focus on contact center workflow, call handling and the overall customer experience.



To make it easier to understand the dramatic contrast of the 'old way (premise-based)' vs. the 'new way (cloud-based)', the following diagrams hopefully capture the essence of why Cloud CCI is the future for enablement of dynamic customer service.

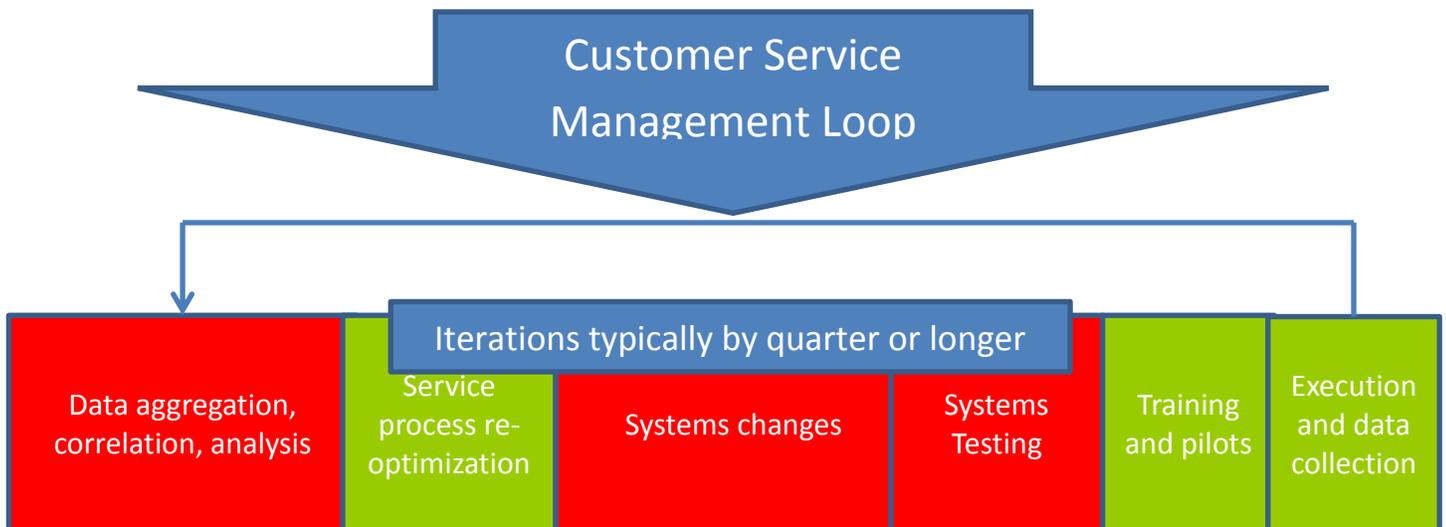
The Old Way

Time – management of the many independent components and vendors can be time consuming.

Data – collecting, correlating, and analyzing information from these components about a customer or a specific service request is inherently complex.

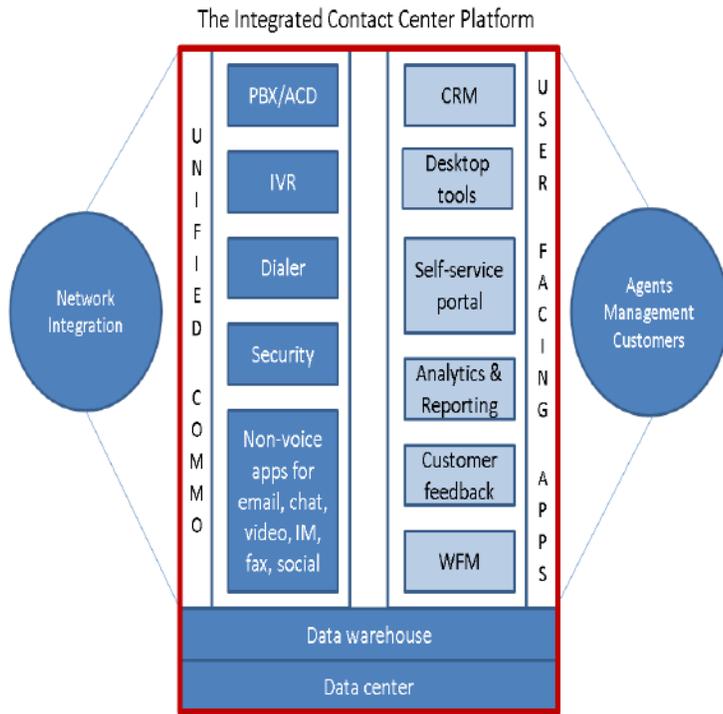
Speed – Coordination of changes affecting one or more components requires careful planning, preparation and testing of call flow, configuration changes and related impacts on systems capacity (scale considerations)

Figure 2



Waterfall Style – Planning 'phases', component coordination, time consuming!

Figure 3



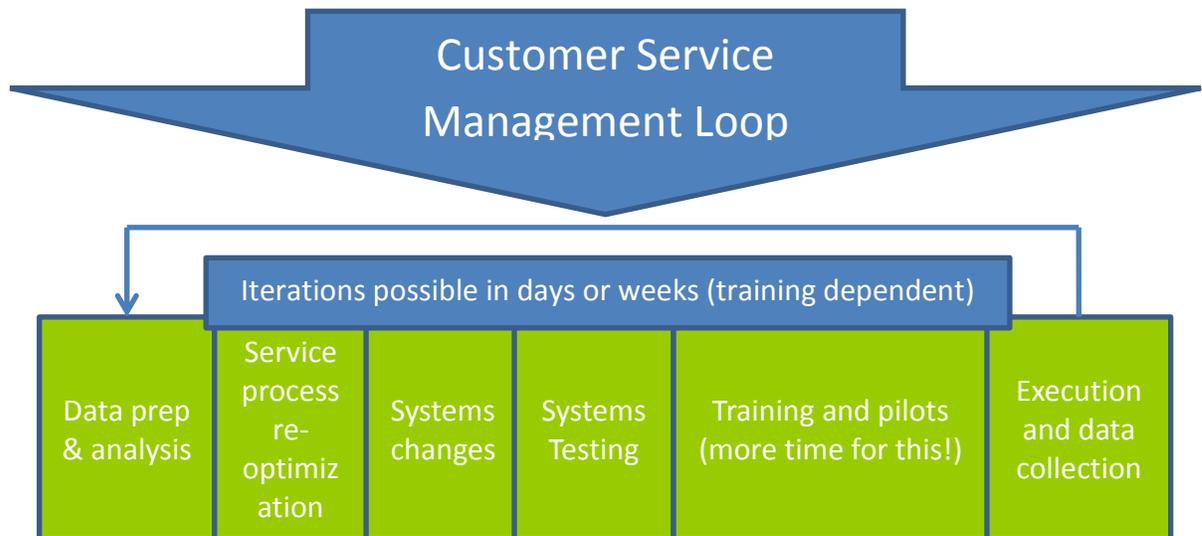
The New Way

Time – management time (bandwidth) is spent making decisions with better more timely information leading to improved channel optimization.

Data – collecting, correlating, and analyzing information from these components is inherently easier.

Speed – Changes affecting one or more channels are more easily made via a unified system view allowing quick modifications to channel access, call flows, configurations and systems scale needs.

Figure 4



Agile Style – More iterative, responsive, fast!

Figure 5

Opportunities and Benefits

The contrast presented of the ‘old way’ and the ‘new way’ make it clear that the very nature of running a customer experience focused contact center changes radically in the cloud. Time, data, and speed are no longer inhibitors – rather they become enablers for the business executive to rethink how to use this new capability.

If you believe delivering a better customer experience will be important to your competitive position and business performance, then dynamic customer service is imperative. The opportunity is for companies to turn what for too long had been thought of as ‘necessary customer support functions’ (contact centers), into proactive value-add brand differentiators. By necessity this shifts the decision about ‘technology’ from a technical one to a business decision.

After a customer buys your product or service, most often their next interaction with your company comes in the form of an engagement with your customer support function. A first call resolution usually produces a favorable brand impression, and failure to do so produces the opposite. Enabling first call resolution means putting actionable information in the hands of agents, or your customer if using a self-service mode. This assemblage of information may include relevant customer information such as service history, contacts, contracts, SLAs and more. It may also include or require information on other interactions with the customer on this particular inquiry or incident, data from a knowledge base, or more. Hopefully it’s intuitively clear that the integration of the contact center components makes facilitating the aggregation of actionable information infinitely easier.

The benefit for your company in all this is provisioning time (bandwidth), data (information) and speed of access to this and ultimately a happy customer.

Critical Success Factors and Best Practices

Perhaps most important to my arguments for cloud CCI in this paper is the simple fact that time, data and speed are necessary for an Agile contact center solution. There are three high priority considerations when making a buying decision:

1. Process will be king – you might be surprised I did not lead with technology here – but the reality is that your business process for delivering an exceptional CX must be a highly customer focused PROCESS. Think through the various support scenarios customers seem to prefer (see #2 below) and flow chart how each scenario will be serviced. Do this iteratively/often as a continuous improvement process.
2. Implement good customer feedback mechanisms to drive future channel optimization and service improvement needed – with rapidly changing customer demands and

demographics, you need a steady stream of feedback to drive your continuous re-optimization strategy. Know how you will collect the data, aggregate and correlate information on each customer, and how you will analyze that data to make it useful to your decision-making processes.

3. Making technology your friend vs. an inhibitor will be mission critical – don't spend time with a litany of tech vendors pointing fingers about interoperability issues or downtime resolution complicated by integration of multiple hardware and software vendor technology. Turn the problem over to a single vendor responsible for providing a 24x7 multi-channel contact center solution. Move to the cloud with a proven vendor and let them manage the technical complexity and reliability issues!

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 Agility is imperative to consistently delivering such a customer experience. Cloud CCI solutions can deliver that Agility to the business owners in the customer service function.

The next whitepaper in our series will focus on the power of data for continuous improvement of customer service processes.

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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