

Unleash Your Contact Center's Potential

The Cloud as Catalyst for Operational Transformation

By Lori Bocklund, President - Strategic Contact, Inc.

Sponsored by  Serenova®

 STRATEGIC CONTACT



DON'T MISS OUT ON YOUR OPPORTUNITIES!

Imagine a contact center operating at the top of its game. New media options for self-service and assisted service deliver cost savings and customer satisfaction. Performance management optimizes center operations while streamlining end-to-end workflows. Alternative workplace models provide new ways to attract and retain the most talented employees. Instead of a tightly wound coil nearing its break point, the center uses its energy to spring into action no matter what management, customers, or competitors might throw at them.

With the right tools and accompanying operational plan, this vision isn't far-fetched. Cloud-based contact center technology solutions can unleash the center's potential and harness the power of the people and processes in new ways. It brings exciting new possibilities to the day-to-day operations, enabling frontline staff and support resources to optimize the customer experience at the same time they achieve internal business goals.

Get Real About Stress Factors

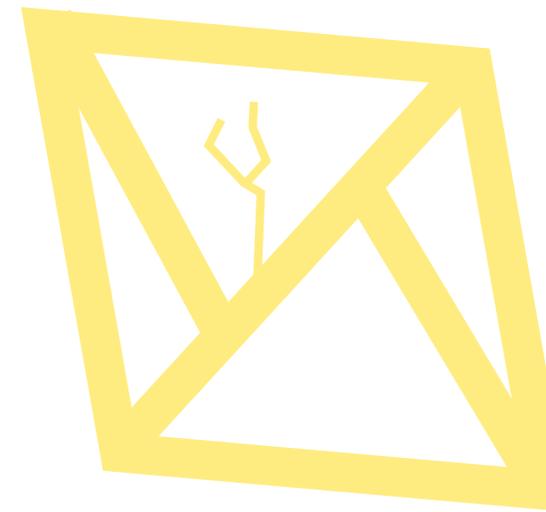
There's plenty of strain on contact centers. Executives think the center costs too much and is too dependent on labor, that most expensive element of the cost pie. When customer care doesn't measure up to their grand vision, they're loathe to hire more staff or invest in the ones they have. Rather, they wonder: Should we outsource? Should we invest in new technology? Can we use self-service or other channels to divert contacts and drive out costs?

Those agents and supervisors bear the burden (and stress) of leadership's desire to curtail their ranks. They have the flip side of management's view. They have a finger on the pulse of the customer experience and know it can fall short when they don't have the support they need. Lacking resources to meet defined goals and the agility to respond to ever-changing business demands, they're fighting fires instead of making strategic contributions. Each day brings the real possibility of sub-par performance and the threat of losing skilled agents who weary of the day-to-day demands.

Support resources try to improve conditions with planning and scheduling, reporting and analysis, quality review, and real-time command center response. But they may offer too little, too late without the proper tools, training, processes, and bandwidth.

All of these factors adversely impact the customers' experience when they reach for the phone, launch an email, or otherwise seek to connect. They might try to self-serve, but that tactic can easily backfire if their needs are complex, the application is poorly designed, or they just don't like those darn systems. When human contact is needed, they fasten their seatbelts and get ready for a bumpy ride.

Legacy premise-based solutions may be the straw that breaks the center's back. Lacking money, resources, and time to replace aging solutions at or near end of life, some centers struggle with downtime, functional gaps, and an inability to move forward. Others opt for a "quick and dirty" approach by spinning up cloud solutions within hours or days. In the process, they too may wind up with downtime and functional gaps while learning the hard way that speed is not enough.

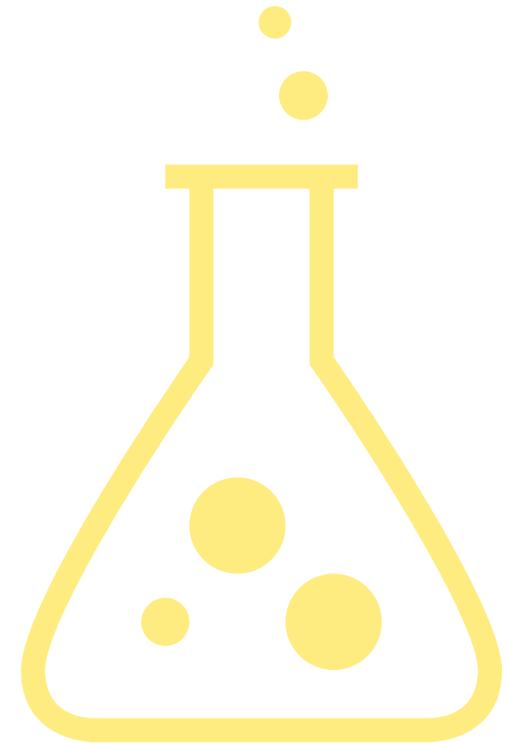


Now is the
time to do
different
things, and
do things
differently!

Catalyze Change

Cloud solutions are a catalyst for centers to do things differently, do things they've never done before, and do things better and faster (but not too fast!). They equip centers to apply the latest technology to their operations without having to wait on IT and/or a lengthy vendor implementation process. Easier interfaces at the agent and supervisor desktops and wide-ranging analyst tools (reporting, analysis, dashboards, Quality Monitoring, Workforce Management) create an environment of empowerment, which today's contact center leaders want and need.

The center isn't the only beneficiary of the changes cloud solutions offer. IT can get relief from the burden of responsibility for networks, integration, servers, and data centers (depending on the solution purchased). Procurement and finance can have easier contracts, less negotiation, the assurances of Service Level Agreements (SLAs), and easy termination to hold vendors accountable. Cloud solutions continue to evolve without big decisions around upgrades and the associated resource, time, and investment demands, again making it easier for all involved.



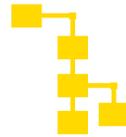
Cloud solutions are a catalyst for centers to do things differently, do things they've never done before, and do things better and faster (but not too fast!).

To unleash your center's potential, create disruptive operational changes through disruptive technology change. Start with the "sacred cows" and create new ways to deliver value. Here are some examples:



Better self-service – when it's a fit:

Imagine an IVR that assists rather than aggravates because it considers the customer situation and what is happening right now, and offers options and answers accordingly. Done right, smart IVR can improve self-service rates as well as the customer experience, whether they self-serve or go to assisted service.



Improved skills and menu structure:

Get smart again with simplified routing menus that leverage information about the customer and deliver it to the right agent with the context they need. Maybe that information includes input from a mobile app and/or visual IVR that deems the customer already authenticated, removing one of the great burdens to a good customer experience. Shorter handle times and fewer transfers could accompany that better customer experience. Bonus: with simplified skills, it's easier to manage things like the command center, forecasting, and scheduling, too!



New/different metrics strategy:

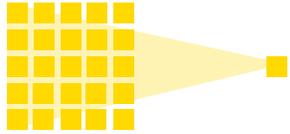
Here's the dream for frontline staff: dashboards and scorecards with limited, targeted, balanced metrics, across media, visually represented. No more exports to Excel and manipulation into reports only the producer understands and nobody else reads, much less absorbs. Everyone (agents, supervisors, execs) gets the outcome in a nice visual presentation of individual, team, and center performance. Use them for real-time decision making, for trending and development, and to analyze, gain insights, and drive actions for continuous improvement. In this dream, centers will finally manage all media effectively and drive outcomes from metrics, not just create reports.



Better knowledge at the desktop:

A better desktop can take various forms, including information about the customer, scripts that guide the next step or compliance, and even integration into tools such as CRM and KM. Many of those are cloud-based as well and part of the "new thinking" to change how things are done. Easier to manage business rules and content means they are up to date, trusted, and used.

If those examples aren't enough to convince you, ponder these:



Omni-channel - really:

The promise of omni-channel is to route and manage all channels (voice, email, chat, text/SMS, etc.) through a common or integrated routing and reporting engine, creating a “seamless” customer experience across channels. Even if a center doesn't “blend” agents, having a tool with single administration and single sign-on makes management easier and more consistent across channels. That's better for all users – frontline agents, supervisors, analysts, and administrators. The outcome will be better day-to-day management of these channels and the resources handling them, as well as ongoing planning and optimization.

Many leaders like to say their company delivers “world class” or “best-in-class” service, with nothing to back it up. They make assumptions about what constitutes even “good” service, while quickly answering the phone masks high transfer rates or long hold times, quantity of self-service options overshadows quality, or reports pass as analysis. Armed with the knowledge of the possibilities outlined above, bold leaders will take a fresh look, observing contact handling, talking to customers and agents, and sitting down with managers, supervisors, and analysts and asking what prevents them from delivering great service. Then they will redefine what will differentiate their center and pursue the enabling technology and operational transformation to make it a reality.



QM and WFM that use the tool, rather than Excel:

As noted, it's time for centers to start fresh and dump the Excel spreadsheets that only the “gurus” know how to use. This vision applies to QM and WFM, too. Easy to use interfaces again make it better for all users – at initial use and ongoing as resources change and the center matures. Proper use of these tools clearly aligns with optimizing the customer experience and cost structures, remembering that labor cost is the biggie! And providing these fundamental performance tasks across media (not just voice!) supports the omnichannel vision.



Overcome Your Fears

Even bold, smart leaders can struggle with a potent combination of fears (see Figure 1). It's also well known that people struggle with change, even in the face of tantalizing opportunities. The fear of change manifests itself in "loss aversion," leading people to stick with the devil they know and retreat to the comfort of the current way of doing things instead of taking a risk on something new. Those with premise-based technology may dawdle even though the signals are strong that their solution is slow and expensive to change, leaving it too often unchanged (in upgrades, adding new capabilities, or replacing it). Existing processes and roles endure in spite of all the strains I described earlier being all too evident.

When direct competitors and others change customer expectations, centers experience a "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) and don't want to be left behind. And it's not just the new functionality – the fundamentals like security and reliability may provide a level of assurance centers can't get from busy IT and traditional platforms. The need for certified compliance with regulations (e.g., PCI, HIPAA) and committed SLAs also reveal opportunities that could be missed for those afraid to change.

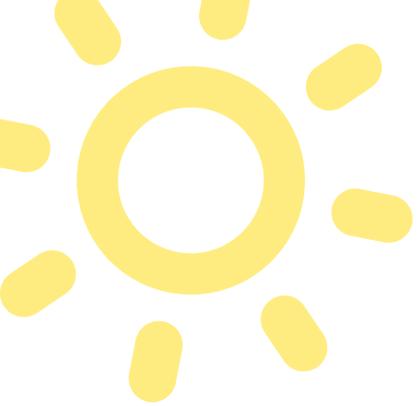
Centers must be willing to let go of the past and take a bold, new approach – with technology as well as processes and roles. FOMO and the lure of opportunity can overpower the fear of change and drive people to act.

Centers must be willing to let go of the past and take a bold, new approach – with technology as well as processes and roles. FOMO and the lure of opportunity can overpower the fear of change and drive people to act.

Figure 1: Shifting Gears, Addressing Fears

While many have feared the change from Premise to Cloud Solutions, centers increasingly recognize traditional models hold them back and the cloud opens up opportunities.





Shine Brightly

Use the cloud to drive change and put a new shine on your center. Address the perspectives and pain points across the board – from executives to frontline, and for each customer interaction. Start fresh with new technology, leveraging the potential of cloud solutions to address a variety of channels, creatively use information, and present outcomes in ways that lead to greater optimization of your operation and customer experience. Build on what you create in an environment of proactive innovation and responsive optimization.

With the right solution and partner managing it, you can rest in the knowledge your solution is secure and reliable, agile and flexible, ready to do the next thing as your center grows and matures.

TIME FOR A NEW TRADITION

As centers contemplate moving to the cloud, it's fair to ask, "What's so bad about traditional approaches?"

For some, legacy solutions don't fit with the energy and excitement around optimizing customer experience. It's like wanting a new car for all the smart new built-in features like Bluetooth but being told you can keep your 10-year-old car and get an audio cable to use with the aux port. "Making do" and bolting on other options is a far cry from purchasing an omni-channel ready solution. It's all the more deflating when you layer on the complexity, dependence on IT, cost and cost structure (including upgrades/additions), difficulty purchasing and implementing the next thing, and too many piece-parts and players with a lack of integration. The biggest buzz-kill may be the lack of control in business user hands to do what they need to do, when they need to do it.

But while the bells may be tolling, premise solutions aren't dead yet. Many companies have legacy solutions they will use for years to come, and some will still install them new, often for enterprise telephony. Centers can line their business needs up next to corporate and IT pillars like security and reliability and find a cloud solution can work alongside a premise solution and/or replace elements of it, such as the contact center functionality.

It's time to drive new thinking from everyone involved in the center's success and create a new tradition based on simpler, more agile, flexible solutions that respond to today's needs, while providing a solid foundation. This new tradition can appeal to both the head and the heart. Intellectually, do the right things with processes and technology while also finding ways to bring more passion to service and sales delivery.





ABOUT SERENOVA

Serenova simplifies every aspect of the customer experience to make life easier for contact center executives, their customers and employees. The world's most passionate, customer-focused brands achieve better interactions, deeper insights, and more meaningful outcomes with Serenova's contact center solutions. Headquartered in Austin, Texas, Serenova has operations in California, Canada, the UK and Australia. [Learn more at serenova.com](http://serenova.com)



ABOUT STRATEGIC CONTACT

Strategic Contact is an independent consulting firm that helps companies optimize the value of their customer contact technology and operations. Strategic Contact helps companies develop and execute plans tied to business goals, conduct assessments and build roadmaps, develop technology requirements, select appropriate solutions, and manage projects to successful implementation. [Learn more at strategiccontact.com](http://strategiccontact.com)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lori Bocklund is President of Strategic Contact and a widely recognized and respected expert with over 29 years of experience in contact center strategy, technology and operations. Lori has written dozens of articles for industry publications and has presented at conferences around the globe. In 2015, she received ICMI's Lifetime Achievement Award for her contributions to the contact center industry.