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Nadji Tehrani, Chairman and Founder, Technology Marketing Corp.

Do You Have a Sales Prevention Department in Your Company? Part I

Back in the February 1994 issue of *Telemarketing* magazine (the parent publication of this magazine), I wrote an editorial with the above title. Since then, I have received several inquiries about this very important topic. In fact, as recently as last week, we had yet another request for a copy of this editorial, so I decided to revisit it.

Most Companies Have One, But They Don't Know They Do

Many companies actually have a sales prevention department, but they are completely unaware of this fact. When I say "sales prevention department," I don't mean that these companies literally have a separate department with that title. However, the regular violations of certain important rules actually constitute a cancerous problem within many companies. To succeed in business, you need to understand your customers' needs as well as their customers' needs.

Sales and Marketing are Everything In Every Company

As you may know, I have been a student of marketing for the last 25 years. In fact, we do have a marketing test at TMC that 99 percent of the marketing managers who have taken it failed. In my view, the test is a simple one and contains the basic knowledge that every true marketing manager must possess. There is no point in hiring a marketing manager who cannot even define marketing.

In many companies, the sales department is regarded as the most important department in the company. Of course, here at TMC, we do not subscribe to this thinking, because we feel every department is equally important. Having said that, my frequent associations with many CEOs within our industry and elsewhere have led me to believe that most companies, in fact, consider the sales department one of the most the important, if not *the* most important department.

In my way of thinking, this is not true. I feel that if you are going to rank the departments, marketing should come ahead of the sales department. Here is why.

All Sales Begin with A Sales Lead

Among the paramount responsibilities of the marketing department are to create awareness about the company, articulate the benefits of dealing with the company and highlight the company's differentiation from its competitors. The cumulative results of the above mentioned marketing functions eventually lead to the all-important lead generation that is vital to any company's growth and prosperity. In other words, the sales department will be crippled if the marketing department does not generate a stream of continuous, qualified sales leads for the sales department.

Sales Prevention Diagnostics

Having stated the importance of the sales and marketing departments, there are many details that need to be addressed

if sales prevention is to be avoided. Here are the areas that are most likely to contribute to sales prevention:

1. Ignoring the golden rule of integrated marketing and, most importantly, ignoring the golden triangle. When a company ignores the rules of integrated marketing and the golden triangle, which includes print, online and event marketing, the company has, in fact, prevented maximum lead generation for the sales department.
2. Ignoring marketing completely. Believe it or not, many companies give lip service to marketing and, as far as I have been able to study, such companies either go under or, if they exist at all, they really don't get anywhere. I recall a pair of companies that started out in the Chicago area at the same time. Company A was a master marketer and Company B did not care about marketing at all. To make a very long story short, the owner of Company A is a billionaire today while Company B is still struggling and has gotten nowhere in the same period of time!
3. Wasting sales leads. Many companies spend a tremendous amount of money every year attending trade shows or advertising in print and online and generating a considerable amount of leads. However, research indicates that as many as 70 to 80 percent of sales leads generated are either ignored completely or followed up too late to be of any use. Indeed, this is one of the leading causes of sales prevention.
4. Ignoring your customers' needs and, most importantly, ignore your customers' customers' needs. In this highly competitive business environment, the companies that go beyond the call of duty are those that will survive. Once again, as mentioned in many previous editorials, to succeed in business, you need to understand your customers' needs as well as your customers' customers' needs. Let us remember that customer care is the only sustainable competitive advantage.
5. Ignoring sales training. Many companies, particularly the entrepreneurial small and medium-sized companies, have a tendency to ignore sales training. This is practically unthinkable. How can anyone expect a sales person to sell anything without knowing the benefits and features of the products or service they are expected to sell? Believe it or not, this problem continues to exist. To read on about sales prevention, check out our November issue for Part 2 about this very important topic. **CS**

As always, I welcome your comments. Please email them to me at nadjitehrani@tmcnet.com.

IN EVERY ISSUE

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Publisher's Outlook
By Nadji Tehrani, Chairman and Founder, Technology Marketing Corp. | 22 Ask the Experts
By Tim Passios, Interactive Intelligence |
| 4 High Priority!
By Rich Tehrani, CEO, Technology Marketing Corp. | 26 On The Line
By Tim Searcy |
| 8 Headset
By Keith Dawson | 31 The Integrated Marketplace |
| 14 Customer Interaction News | 31 Advertising Index |
| | 32 Logout
By Brendan Read, Senior Contributing Editor |

What's on the Cover



Zeacom's Unified Communications Strategy

pg **16**

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FROM THE TELESERVICES EXPERTS

- 6 Infocision: Marketing Today**
By Chris Wagner, VP of Commercial Services InfoCision Management Corporation

CALL CENTER TECHNOLOGY

- 10 Planning For Action**
By Brendan Read, Senior Contributing Editor

WORKFORCE OPTIMIZATION

- 18 Managing Workforce Needs**
By Brendan Read, Senior Contributing Editor

CRM, BPO & TELESERVICES

- 24 Moving Your Contact Center Forwards**
By Brendan Read, Senior Contributing Editor

Special Focus

- 28 IT EXPO West: A Retrospective**

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- 30 TMC Labs CIS Innovation Awards, Part II**

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Rich Tehrani, CEO, Technology Marketing Corp.



Broadsoft: The 800-Pound Call Center Gorilla

In the year 2000 when society was in the midst of realizing how technology and the Internet in particular was going to change the world, I noticed there was a need by companies and carriers to better understand the hosted communications space. There were a number of companies with very compelling business models being launched such as Congruency, the early pioneer and leader of the communication ASP movement.

Shortly after realizing the need for education in the market, TMC launched a magazine titled *Communications ASP*. The magazine was a hit with advertisers and readers for about six months until the VC community and the tech market as a whole seemed to turn on the term “ASP” I haven’t a clue to this day why the acronym wasn’t accepted but it seemed to get lumped in with other technologies which were left for dead but emerged later – like “ecommerce,” “VoIP” and others.

Suffice it say this publication and dozens of companies in the space were sentenced to death when funding was cut off by investors. I credit Marc Benioff, the founder of Salesforce.com, for defying gravity and keeping his ASP and the entire movement going.

This leading hosted CRM company showed Wall Street that the ASP model was a good one and now we take for granted that hosted communications and hosted everything else is something the market needs – especially in a slow economy. But now we call it “cloud-based” computing or “hosted” or “on-demand” or whatever seems to be trendy at the moment.

I was thinking about the history of ASPs during a meeting with Evolve IP’s Scott Kinka, the senior vice president of network services. Kinka’s company supplies hosted voice, security, UC and messaging services to companies in the U.S. During our conversation he kept mentioning call center wins and how companies are embracing hosted contact center solutions.

He in turn referenced Paul Adams, the director of product management for enhanced services at Broadsoft, the company supplying Evolve IP with equipment which allows their company to in turn provide services to their SMB, enterprise and call center customers.

I know Broadsoft very well as a major player in IP communications – their BroadWorks platform is a vital cog in the carrier machine of providing services for customers.

During a recent conversation with Adams, I asked about the company’s call center strategy and he explained that they added

contact center functionality about three to four years ago, and since that time they have been adding features, allowing the product to support more formal and larger centers.

Recently BroadWorks 16 expanded contact center functionality even more with the above trend being adhered to. I asked him how his company’s products compare to premise or CPE equipment and he explained they are competitive with many hosted solutions but aren’t focusing on the high-end centers where their needs to be a focus on blending (inbound and outbound agents coordinating calls) and multichannel routing. Interestingly, Kinka goes into the sales process explaining this limitation upfront and it hasn’t been a barrier to winning large deals, which he says are in the 400- to 500-seat range.

One of the advantages Broadsoft brings to the table is its integration with UC solutions and FMC. You see, Broadsoft’s end-customers get to take advantage of the latest in numerous technologies and they get it all integrated into their contact center solution.

And as agents become more informal and mobile, the company’s ability to track calls while they are connected, including hold times, etc. mean that reporting becomes more accurate and call center management becomes more detailed and effective.

BroadWorks 17 is the next version in the pipeline and we can expect it to have enhanced reporting and ACD functions. A while back, Broadsoft purchased competitor Sylantro to pretty much become the 800-pound gorilla in the space. As the company continues to innovate and roll out new products, it can instantaneously upgrade the world’s hosted contact center solutions provided by carriers. This is great for customers and yet another challenge for CPE vendors. But it seems there is still room to innovate on the high-end where Broadworks is not looking to compete – at least for now.

Wishing you continued success. **CIS**

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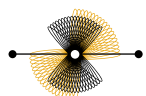
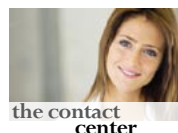
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Marketing Today

In our unpredictable economy, a focused marketing plan is more important than ever. Usually, a small to mid-level business won't have its own marketing department, because it's just not the company's core business. When partnering with a direct marketer, your business gains marketing experience that extends far beyond your product. A good direct marketer will have experience with countless clients in a variety of markets and will be on the cutting edge of technology. By partnering with a direct marketer, your company will improve scalability, flexibility and productivity. They also know the laws concerning marketing. Many times when a company does its own marketing, it violates laws, simply because it isn't aware of the federal and state regulatory compliance that is critical in many industries.



*By Chris Wagner,
VP of Commercial Services
InfoCision Management Corporation*

Outsourcing Your Marketing Efforts

Consumers are extremely careful with where and on what they spend their money, so your marketing efforts have to be exceedingly effective. Many companies are trying to create their marketing strategies in-house, but they have businesses to run. If you don't have the time, expertise or patience to create a marketing plan, it's a good idea to partner with a direct marketing specialist. Not only will you be provided with professional marketing expertise, but they will save you more than it will cost you. There is a renewed focus on using channels that are measurable and finding customers that are profitable and they can instantly provide measurable results for both.

The Process of Outsourcing

Once you partner with a direct marketer, you'll work together to decide the best way to add the most value to your company. This is typically done by completing an extensive questionnaire regarding your current marketing efforts. The survey considers the product you're offering, the audience, the price point, and the marketing channels you're currently using. From there, they will generate several solutions and channels that can deliver you the highest possible ROI.

You can decide at any stage of the customer life cycle to hire a direct marketer. They will provide you with a full range of services to support new customer acquisition; existing customer retention, including customer care and technical support; existing customer share with upgrades, cross-sells and frequency increase; customer save strategy and customer win-back initiatives. They will also offer several different functional channels, such as inbound teleservices, which support television, newspaper, direct mail and Internet marketing efforts; and outbound teleservices, which can be used to contact prospective and existing customers over the phone.

You should partner with a direct marketer that has a world-class fulfillment center that can perform many functions, from direct-mail programs to product delivery and everything in between. It should also have an in-house creative team that can design everything from logos to direct mail pieces to catalogs, as well as a business intelligence group that has a database comprised of hundreds of millions of people nationwide. You also want a company that has access to business databases, such as Dun and Bradstreet, InfoUSA and Equifax, that can help you target audiences for acquisition programs and identify attributes of your existing customers.

Changing Marketing Strategies

Everything has changed because of this difficult economic climate. The changes have been significant for marketing strategies, overall, but not as much as they have been to direct marketing. Direct marketing leads to peace of mind during tough economic times. With branding programs and general mass marketing, it may take months to know whether or not they are working, whereas the effect of a direct marketing program is known instantly. This allows you to make strategic decisions regarding audience, offer and channel much more quickly, and have the assurance that your dollars will be invested in high-return strategies. The demand for one-on-one direct marketing is increasing when it comes to finding profitable customers.

During tough economic times, it comes down to quality over quantity. A mass acquisition program, where the entire database is marketed the same way, is no longer a sustainable strategy for customer acquisition and retention. The services you receive from a direct marketer delivers a targeted approach to customers that will be the most responsive to a certain product, as well as integrating a modeled approach to the net value of that customer over an entire life cycle. **CIS**



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Keith Dawson, Senior Analyst, Frost & Sullivan



One Year After the Meltdown: Lessons Learned for Call Centers

A year ago, prospects for a bright 2009 in contact centers were looking pretty bleak, let alone a happy 2010. In retrospect, there were a lot of good reasons to be fearful, but it does look like the customer service industry has dodged a bullet. There were not mass layoffs, centers closing or a retreat from the need to deliver consistent good quality service to customers.

Companies still answered the phones, and emails, chats and web contacts. They still hired CSRs, trained them and fought turnover. They did these things with leaner budgets, but they still invested in their people and their technologies, which is a heartening sign. Though things did not turn out to be a catastrophe for most contact centers, we still learned quite a bit about how to survive a retrenchment and prepare for leaner times.

One of the lessons learned from what we've gone through over the last year is that it makes sense to speak up for the value of the center. Many of the managers I've spoken too in recent months have cited strong pressure from their corporate execs to revert to a traditional cost-cutting mode. Pressures have been placed on budgets for headcount, recruitment and technology investment. It's been hard for many long-time managers to revisit the days when contact centers were primarily seen as a necessary evil, a cost to be controlled.

But today's corporate execs have been conditioned to understand that there is value in improving the customer experience – the trick is showing them where that value lies, and how to measure it effectively. So we've seen savvy contact center pros going along with the flow to reduce costs, but also presenting alternative scenarios that emphasize opportunities to grow revenue using those same resources. For example, using training to find agents who have sales skills, and then deploying them in cross-sell and up-sell opportunities. The key is to be able to quantify what the contact center does for the organization, and express it in dollars and cents.

The second thing that's happened is that people who run centers are looking at their technology spending with a much more skeptical eye. Always a conservative group, they are now looking harder at how tools generate ROI, and where that return is going to be felt. We're seeing, for example, continued growth in such tools as workforce management software. That's understandable, when you consider that in a recession you need to make the most effective resource allocation decisions possible. Workforce management is truly one of those low-hanging-fruit systems that shows immediate gains, especially if you're one of the many centers that are still using spreadsheets of other home-grown scheduling methods. The benefits from tracking adherence alone can often justify the switch.

Vendors have seen this trend, too. They are definitely aware that most typical contact centers are not in the mood to spend scarce funds on technology that's designed to dazzle. Instead, the dominant trend in some sectors has been to refocus development efforts on boosting the effectiveness of existing classes of tools. Speech analytics is a good example – we've seen several major suppliers ratchet down the hype about how transformative that technology is going to be, and start offering more accessible, more cost-effective versions. And vendors are making the case for it using real (rather than hypothetical) use cases and metrics that are important to multiple constituents within an organization.

This is a very useful trend, one that hopefully will continue beyond the current downturn. Contact centers need to insist that vendors provide serious value for their technology spends; so far vendors appear to be hearing that message and responding positively.

Another lesson learned is that you should never waste a crisis. In other words, when bad times come, you are allowed (and sometimes even encouraged) to blow up existing processes. The downturn gave many innovative companies cover to make hard structural changes in processes, policies and workflows that would have been painful or culturally impossible other times. This is the time to itemize and attack the business practices that may once have made sense but don't any longer.

One aspect of this is to engage customers much more forcefully with the argument that self-service works in their favor: it is convenient and it keeps costs down, allowing companies to offer really excellent personal service when it counts. We've seen significant efforts, for example, to turn customers towards less expensive and labor-intensive modes of communication, like email or chat. Or, to begin using proactive automated outbound notification calls – or SMS messages – to customers to head off informational inbound calls. This has had an effect on costs, without harming customer satisfaction. In some cases satisfaction actually improves.

It is always important to remember that economies move in cycles. The bottom of the cycle may be difficult and unpleasant, but it contains within it the seeds of the next upswing. And the primary lesson learned from this downturn is that you need to be able to communicate how valuable the center's role is in ensuring company health. Those that honed that message during this downturn will be the ones roaring back fastest. **CIS**

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Planning for Action

When many businesses are struggling to survive, there may be irony in investing in truly effective business continuity also known as disaster response planning, tools and testing. Yet without them if or more likely when a disaster strikes organizations risk being pushed further to the brink, if not over the edge.

Ed Minyard, partner with [Accenture Technology Consulting](#), reports that even in this more austere time, BC budgets and investments rose in 2009. Yet testing of these plans did not rise to the same extent.

More disturbingly, about half of businesses including centers have robust plans. And most of them are not testing them on a regular basis, citing resource availability and disruption on employees and customers, and because they do not have the budgets for it. Many companies that do not have plans have instead plans to plan.

"BC planning has generally been acts of compliance with regulations; if the firms are not mitigating all the risks in a public company the officers are liable, so having plans keep them happy," explains Minyard. "The problem is that not enough businesses are looking at their plans as living, breathing documents that can save lives, reduce injuries, and protect properties and investment and enable businesses to survive."

To illustrate the difference between an actionable program and one on paper Minyard gives the example of one that requires in a major disaster a contact center to be shut down and calls rerouted to another site in a different

geologic/climate zone. Yet has anyone vetted that plan with the carrier to make sure that those lines can be switched? Is there a succession plan and delegation of authority that will allow the telco to take those orders from someone who may not normally be responsible for that area? And has this plan been tested?

"In disasters you can't always count on people that are at the top of your org chart being there," Minyard points out. "You need to test and drill so that when these events happen the plans are launched effectively."

Technology Benefits and Issues

There continues to be more technologies that can enable cost-effective BC. For example [Allworx](#) has come out with advanced multisite functionality on its phone solutions aimed at small-mid-sized businesses. The call routes can be defined to include handsets at other sites. The system "learns" the multi-site topology, requiring limited manual entry of site settings. Handset status can be monitored remotely.

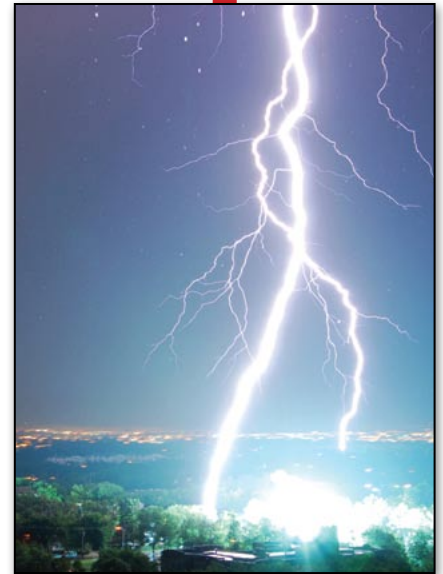
Bob Mellinger, president and CEO of BC-planning firm Attainium, sees social media such as [Facebook](#) and Twitter being valuable in disaster communication as they deliver short and interactive audience-customizable messages to em-

ployees and suppliers hosted via the Web. Staff and firms can acknowledge or reply without eating up landline or wireless bandwidth that is often scarce in major disasters. To make these methods work, though, there needs to be succession planning and failovers to other techniques such as phone and text trees in case there is no Internet access, or power.

SIP/VoIP can help firms survive disasters by enabling calls to be more readily and routed to other locations such as home agents, temporary sites, and satellite offices compared with PSTN explains Alla Reznik, director of VoIP product marketing, [Verizon Business](#). In a VoIP network, calls can be automatically re-routed based on conditions such as a reachable IP address associated with a customer's premise equipment. In contrast TDM-based solutions typically consist of manually invoking call forwarding of individual telephone numbers to redundant TDM facilities.

"[With VoIP] traditional data load-balancing options can now be applied to voice service applications," adds Reznik. "This cuts costs associated with maintaining temporary redundant facilities typically associated with TDM disaster backup plans."

VoIP is becoming more reliable for more users. Ecessa's ClariLink is





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The one downside to VoIP and consequently an upside to PSTN is that the older technology is not as reliant on the utility grid as taps DC power from batteries backed up by powerful generators at COs. In response organizations that go to IP and need to stay live should consider deploying and ensuring backup generators with enough capacity to run their voice systems. If their at-home agents use VoIP they should be generator-equipped too, adds Minyard.

Onsite generation solutions are becoming more versatile and location-friendly. Generac's new Generac QuietSource units feature specially designed engines that run quieter at lower engine speeds, producing power from 22 to 60 kilowatts, with lower noise and longer life. Offering a choice of cleaner liquid propane or natural gas they have fewer emissions and no odor compared with diesel. They can be installed with a choice of several different switches, including for automatic load-shedding to meet virtually any local code requirements.

Hosted applications provide added resiliency because they can't be lost if the users' locations and servers are destroyed. They can also be accessed and managed from alternative sites. Alteva,

which provides hosted VoIP, adds that with its call controls located in the cloud it allows for telecom restoration plans not to be limited by what happens on site.

"If there is an interruption at the contact center's location which prevents on-premise TDM PBX to communicate with the carrier switch, all calls get fast-busy signals," explains Alteva CEO William Bumbernick. "But with hosted VoIP this is no longer the case."

Hosted solutions are only as robust as the hosting firm's network, and their own BC plans. inContact, which provides hosted contact center services, has a highly resilient network thanks to utilizing and load-shifting on more than one carrier. If one supplier's lines are cut, the traffic will be moved to another vendor. If multiple lines are severed, agreements may be made with vendors not currently utilized to restore service. inContact may also use SIP/VoIP to restore services.

inContact relies on two Intelligent Network Server Centers, which are widely dispersed: in Dallas, Texas and Los Angeles, Calif. Its databases are each backed up in both INSC locations, ensuring that if one were to fail at one site it would failover to the other location, explains Chief Operating Officer Scott Welch.

Imaginative Disaster Response Solutions

There are other new and continually refined solutions that enable organizations to respond to and recover from disasters of many kinds and scale. Some of these are built into other related functionalities while others are standalone.

Veolia's new hosted Varolii Contact Center Agent automatically outbound-notifies agents to ensure staffing requirements are met, even if unexpected events disrupt operations. For example, in a hurricane warning an organization could use Varolii Contact Center Agent to send messages instructing agents in the affected area to stay home, while asking additional agents in another region to report for work to handle the overflow.

Nirix Technology is rolling out Hosted Backup, Enterprise Edition, a customer-premises-located BC appliance and service. The unit, owned by Nirix, enables businesses to quickly replicate the entire server OS, data and installed applications including sophisticated solutions such as analytics, CRM, CTI, routing and workforce management.

Full system and/or mission critical/archival data recovery can now take place in minutes or hours instead of days or weeks. Firms do not have to scurry around for tapes, software license keys, or try to remember how the applications and its associated security settings were originally configured.

Hosted Backup, Enterprise Edition can also replicate another copy of the backed up servers to a highly secured CICA5970/

Wireless in Disasters?

Wireless cellular communications appears to be an ideal tool to stay in touch during disasters in that they are not dependent on central office, power grids and vulnerable overhead wires. Yet it is the riskiest as emergency responders take priority; their call volumes are so great it leaves little bandwidth for anyone else.

"What happens in disasters is that communications demand increases to the point where cells get saturated and your capacity gets eaten up in a hurry," explains Minyard. "If the utility grids are down the cell systems rely on backup generators whose fuel sources are limited and can run down if they are not replenished."

Bob Mellinger, president and CEO of BC-planning firm Attainium sees SMS/texting as one solution in wireless as it uses very little bandwidth and power.

"A text message or blast is more likely to get through than voice calls regardless of channel if the wires are down," says Mellinger.



SAS70 Type II compliant data center managed by Nirix Technology. This protects in solutions and data should a disaster completely destroys the buildings where the production servers and the appliance reside.

Nirix on-premise appliance presently works only with **Microsoft** Windows-based servers. Upcoming versions to be released within the next several months will work also with Linux/Unix-based servers.

“Most of today’s backup solutions back up the data, but what good is that from the disaster recovery perspective if the applications that they run on aren’t backed up as well?” asked Nirix Technology President and CEO Steven Hsu. “You can’t read the data without the respective application. It is like giving a Microsoft Word document without having Microsoft Word software installed on your desktop.”

Matching BC/DR Investments and Needs

Many of the tools required to launch an actionable plan can be expensive, and will require time to install, and test. Onsite generators may run thousands of dollars depending on the kilowatts required. There are often lease and property issues and zoning restrictions that affect whether and how they can be situated. Home agent strategies will demand network changes, setup and management.

Yet other solutions can be as simple as employee education (i.e. wash your hands) and if sick employees don’t come in to work. Global BPO firm Sitel is using these methods, bolstered with additional hand cleaners, in response to the feared H1N1 pandemic and the fall flu season.

To ensure that you have an actionable BC plan that is not budgetary overkill Minyard recommends that you engage your BC planners and executives in analyzing all potential threats, risks and impacts from what might happen to the unthinkable. With this involvement they will know what is at stake and can decide on the best program for your organization. Then carefully examine the costs of being down, including legal/regulatory liability and for how long versus the costs of the options available.

“Take a look at your risk, potential what is your appetite for that risk, and then make a decision based on that not based on the economy,” says Minyard.

Jim Koniecki, unified communications solutions manager for Dimension Data, advises finding out the disaster impact of your systems to a dollar/hour ratio. This is the ratio you should use when determining whether budget should be investigated for providing disaster recovery solutions and to what extent it should be applied. This dollar figure will also help achieve those budgets when money is tight.

“A disaster or pandemic might decrease the demand for your products or services, but remember that it could also potentially increase demand to unsustainable levels,” says Koniecki.

Verizon is one of the disaster-experienced carriers in the U.S. and arguably the world. It has had to respond to and recover both its operations and those of its customers from horrific events including the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina.

Capitalizing and utilizing its proven capabilities Verizon Business now offers several new BC services. An application infrastructure deployment review assesses current application and infrastructure deployment to determine if the deployment – including the application and operating system, as well as patching – it is up to date. Business continuity compliance service reviews existing business continuity strategies to determine whether it meets compliance requirements; it also includes gap identification. A business continuity/disaster recovery testing support program develops strategies and plans for business continuity testing. It also offers BC/DR training.

Included in the BC suite are virtual file-sharing, storage replication and restoration services and a full complement of managed information technology services to help enhance enterprise resilience. For example, Verizon Notification Services helps enterprises automate the delivery of time-sensitive information via cell phone, pager, fax or home phone.

“Our consultants meet with key stakeholders to gain important insights into current capabilities and critical business issues, enabling organizations to identify and measure higher-impact risks and concentrate on the systems necessary to maintain critical operations and activities,” explains Robert Clark, Verizon Business director of business continuity. “From there, a plan containing key findings and recommendations is developed and delivered to the organization for continued discussion and implementation.” **CIS**

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

Accenture
www.accenture.com

Allworx
www.allworx.com

Alteva
www.altevatel.com

Attainium
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Dimension Data
www.dimensiondata.com

Ecessa
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Generac
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inContact
www.incontact.com

Nirix Technology
www.nirix.com

Sitel
www.sitel.com

Varolli
www.varolli.com

Verizon Business
www.verizonbusiness.com



- **Convergys** (www.convergys.com) has launched two new inbound and outbound IVR solutions. The Intelligent Self-Service is unique in that unlike other inbound products that use intelligence to simply route customers to the appropriate agents it follows them through their entire interaction experiences. Intelligent Self-Service can also improve the ability to identify callers and capture profile information. The Intelligent Notification solution permits outbound notifications to be personalized. It provides a tighter integration with current business systems, including CRM, billing, and legacy systems to enable seamless communications.
- **Interactive Intelligence** (www.inin.com) has made audio conferencing such as between contact centers and with key customers and suppliers much easier. It has added call scheduling, recording, and reporting to its Interaction Conference 3.0 solution. The tool eliminates per-minute charges, enables scheduling conference calls 24/7, and simplifies use through the automatic generation of bridge numbers and PINs from within Outlook meeting requests. Interaction Conference permits users to schedule and record one-time or recurring calls without specialty hardware, software, or integration. It gives users complete participant control, including putting participants on hold and muting and disconnecting them.
- **Inteq** (www.inteqnet.com) has upgraded its InfraDesk help/service desk solution. It has enhanced the product's service level management functionality to automatically recognize the severity of a ticket based on its content and follow the service level agreement in place. It has simplified the end users' self-service screen views and submittal process and the functionality of the service catalog to encourage end users to search for and resolve their issues. In addition, employees and customers can update the status of their tickets by responding to the tickets through e-mail or the portal and notify the service desks.
- **Noble Systems Corporation** (www.noblesys.com)'s new Noble SIPhony, the firm's newest generation SIP platform enables TDM and hardware-based telephony platforms to smoothly migrate to a SIP environment altogether or in part. This server-based solution supports contact center environments regardless of their telephony infrastructure, including pure native-SIP, traditional TDM, or a hybrid of the two. SIPhony can be used as a highly flexible cloud-based contact routing platform for companies looking to centralize their resources, with support for the agent network, wherever the agents may be located.
- **Nuance Communications** (www.nuance.com) has introduced Nuance Vocalizer 5, a next-generation text-to-speech engine. It delivers enhanced accuracy and reliability by blending TTS with pre-recorded audio for seamless conversations with callers. Nuance Vocalizer 5 also simplifies application development by putting the tools for tuning and voice sculpting in the hands of developers. It manages the static prompts, carrier prompts, and computer-generated speech through one unified interface to deliver a seamless flow of speech, free from clicks and latencies that can hinder the user experience. Nuance also offers Vocalizer 5 Basic, a cost-effective solution that requires only limited, small-set vocabularies, such as currency, date and time, and telephone numbers.
- **Smoothstone IP Communications** (www.smoothstone.com) new Intelligent Call Center Hosted Contact Center Solution Version 3.2 is equipped with access to real-time queue/call statistics, taskbar alerts and the ability to change status on the fly. It also includes full-featured chat applications and screen-pop functionality based on client-customized URLs. There is advanced routing and refined real-time reporting.



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By Erin E. Harrison

Speech Analytics, Audio Software Vendors Gaining Traction

Speech analytics and software vendors are seeing an uptick in adoption, which many industry leaders attribute to the economic fallout, calling for companies to become more cognizant of expense management and consequently search for the best ways to tune in to their customer base.

ClickFox was among the exhibitors at a recent industry conference that showed off its latest and greatest products and services: CEA for Operational Efficiency, CEA for Customer Satisfaction and CEA for Customer Retention.

ClickFox officials say they developed the new line to better serve the customer experience management market. The CEA solution ostensibly enables companies first to understand every customer interaction across and within all touch points, and then take action to improve the customer experience while significantly lowering operating costs and improving profitability.

The company sees, citing cost savings and economic pressures a “growing need and desire” for analytics, reports Anna Convery, the company’s chief marketing officer.

Government agencies are also realizing the benefits of audio software to gain greater insight into commercial activities. Nexidia announced that the Federal Trade Commission purchased multiple licenses of Nexidia’s AudioFinder software to review audio content produced in its investigations.

While verbal communications have become increasingly important for transacting business, particularly in regulated industries and contact center operations, the capabilities for storing audio content for longer periods have improved. Audio is subject to the same requirements for compliance and production as other forms of electronic data, Nexidia officials say.

Jeff Schlueter, vice president of marketing and business development at Nexidia say the company’s next generation of contact center software – ESI 8.0 – allows users to leverage information and provide “deep insight into the most critical metric impacting operations costs and customer experience. This insight is key to improving operational efficiency, decreasing churn and increasing customer loyalty.

Schlueter explained most “first go” resolutions provide a decent picture of what is driving repeat calls however, that insight is not good enough to truly remain competitive in the market place. “It can measure the ‘what,’ but it can’t measure the ‘why,’” Schlueter said. Some of the key features of Nexidia ESI 8.0 include enhanced FCR analysis, expanded scalability and speaker-separated analysis.

In July, the company rolled out Nexidia ESP, a feature that automatically identifies important events occurring within a contact center, such as those that lead to increased call volume or call handle times, Schlueter explains. Each company has its own unique language and phraseology, which can include product names, marketing promotions and other industry terminology that customers and call center agents use when in conversation. And since the system is totally automated, it works “right out of the box” with no advanced set-up or analysis required.

Like many of its competitors, NICE Systems is pushing through the slumping global economy and is winning business. It recently announced that it won a mega security contract from a government agency, which will be implementing NICE’s NiceTrack technology, for advanced telecom interception.

In July, the company announced non-GAAP revenue for the second quarter was \$140.5 million, which was 9.6 percent down from \$155.3 million in the second quarter last year. At the same time however, this revenue was up 0.9 percent from \$139.2 million in the first quarter.

“Looking ahead, we believe that these trends and the strong pipeline of large security projects will translate into top and bottom line growth in the second half of 2009, compared to the first half of the year,” says NICE CEO Haim Shani.

As reported by TMC’s Brendan Read, for too long the adoption rate for speech analytics has been low, according to Jim Shulkin, director of marketing at Envision Telephony, because current offerings are mired in complex and underutilized functionality and require specialized resources to use.

In response Envision devised and released a new, timely, and what it calls “right-sized” speech analytics product, Envision InteractionIQ, which simplifies speech data processing, search, and reporting from within audio recordings.

“The primary barriers to speech analytics adoption in contact centers have been consistently cited by our customers and the market for many years,” says Rodney Kuhn, Envision’s CEO. “Those same barriers provided the motivation behind our developing Envision InteractionIQ.” **CIS**



Zeacom's Unified Communications Strategy

Ernie Wallerstein, Zeacom's president, Americas, has been taking into the corporate, analyst, and media streets a very simple message about unified communications: It is neither a technology nor a bundle of technologies, but rather a strategy.



Ernie Wallerstein Jr., President, Americas, Zeacom

And in Zeacom's (www.zeacom.com) case this approach of delivering strategic UC solutions has proven to be very successful for its customers and in turn for itself. While other firms struggled Zeacom grew by 11 percent last year.

"We've done a good job of delivering on what the market is looking for and now we are going to insure we have even more people evangelizing UC in general and Zeacom specifically," reports Wallerstein.

In a meeting with TMC at ITEXPO West 2009 in Los Angeles, Wallerstein defined UC as a strategy that maximizes communications efficiencies for organizations, whether involving voice, e-mail/SMS, chat, fax, and/or video, delivered to office, mobile, and/or home employees. This communications maximization enables greater enterprise-wide productivity, cost savings, improved customer satisfaction and retention through connecting team members quickly and effectively.

Accommodating differences in organizations' function, size and terminology is vital for successful UC applications, he points out. In a typical doctor's office, the communication traffic centers on one location. In a brokerage house, you typically have a much more mobile and multi-location environment. Both of these organizations use voice, e-mail and Web applications, but their needs from a UC strategy are different. Doctors' offices focus on appointments and billing efficiencies whereas brokerage houses care about priority clients and providing their brokers with the most efficient way of managing the communications with these buyers.

"To say that one specific technology or a combination of technologies is unified communications is to sell UC short," says Wallerstein.

Zeacom has, and will continue to focus on the small/mid-sized business market because that is where both the greatest need for UC is and where the uptake is the strongest. SMBs lack enterprises' IT support infrastructure that can manage multiple applications to meet UC needs. SMBs need one application that provides multiple technologies, like the Zeacom Communications Center platform.

"SMBs need UC to maximize communications effectively to stay productive and competitive," explains Wallerstein. "And because they are geared to multitask without silos, they are culturally attuned to utilizing the tools inherent in UC solutions. That communications maximization via UC is a direct benefit of new, powerful applications and the proper services to implement those solutions."

Zeacom has introduced what he identifies as 'activity presence'. With this resource, a senior manager could see if an inside sales rep is busy and simply send them a text message, or have the ZCC system let them know when the sales rep is going to be available through integration with their Outlook or Lotus. Zeacom also now permits employees to put tweets under their presence so to notify peers what's going on "right now." There is integration with Microsoft OCS, which permits phone control, without having to buy separate Microsoft gateways.

Seeing the growing prominence of high-bandwidth wireless, Zeacom has extended corporate directories to mobile devices, which allows users to single-click and dial. This simplicity in use avoids setting up and maintaining separate contact lists, which can easily go out of date. Zeacom has also developed IVR solutions and Web-based applications to let field sales reps and technicians to click or call that they are on their way to their next appointment – functionality which automatically updates the presence and customer relationship management tools – thereby saving time over manual data entry.

Zeacom's existing and new UC products and services have been built with ROI in mind. Their team has developed an ROI Calculator across the different solution sets within UC, including IVR, routing, presence, mobility and conferencing.

"The true ROI from UC comes from connecting technology with customer information by implementing business process automation via professional services," explains Wallerstein. "Companies can discern the value of individual customers to their business and respond effectively – no matter what channel they prefer. In that way, UC is linked to CRM as it enables enterprises to maximize the customer relationship." **CIS**



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Managing Workforce Needs

If your contact center does not yet have a workforce optimization solution, whether a pre-packaged or integrated suite from a single or partner consortium of suppliers, hosted by suppliers or by third-party providers, or one integrated from best of breed products, do so.

WFO, which is comprised of call recording, quality monitoring, workforce management, e-learning, and increasingly speech analytics is one of the best investments you can make. That is because WFO enables you to get the most out of your labor resources, which can represent 70 percent of your costs, by efficiently managing them via versatile and easy to use applications.

These automated solutions are far quicker to use and allows you to do more than old-fashioned spreadsheets and pad-and-paper. They are much more adept at complex tasks such managing agents with different skillsets such as Spanish and French fluency and in written communications: e-mail, SMS/text, social media like Facebook and Twitter and web chat.

"As the contact center environment gets more complex, the need for automated tools increases, and Excel-based scheduling and home grown forecasting don't cut it in a multi-skill, multi-site, multi-center environment," points out Keith Dawson, senior analyst, Frost and Sullivan.

New and Down The Road Capabilities

WFO suppliers and component makers have been devising enhancements to their solutions. [ASC Telecom](#) will launch its new version of INSPIRATIONpro 9.0 quality management product later this year. The firm recently won a contract for Europe's largest QM deployment with Deutsche Telekom, involving 33 contact centers with more 10,000 agents.

Recognizing that security and resiliency are top of mind, CyberTech's new CyberTech 5.3 recording solution contains "Eraser", a new application that lets you completely remove data from hard drives. There is also a second CTI server on the recording system, which will take over whenever the primary CTI server fails.

Rugged forecasting and scheduling functionality is being extended to more tools. For example [Telrex](#) has integrated its CallRex WFM software and Fonality's PBXtra Call Center solution that enables CallRex to capture real-time call queue

information. CallRex Workforce Management software builds a historical database of workload and work time statistics collected from the [Fonality](#) product.

There are many variables in workforce planning include employee, especially union agreements and labor laws. InVision Enterprise WFM, version 4.7 contains 40 new functions for integrated time management that help users save time and calculate working times correctly. It also has enhanced staff planning functionality. The new Absence Planner feature provides a clear overview of all scheduled absences in the selected monthly view of a given planning unit and an annual overview of the scheduled absences of an individual employee.

Marrying Speech With WFO

One of the biggest developments in WFO is the advent of versatile and affordable speech analytics either as part of or readily integrated with the rest of the solutions. These new tools, driven by powerful audio keyword search engines, enable organizations to quickly and automatically identify performance matters including cancellations, commendations, and complaints. It also detects emotions indicating annoyance or satisfaction. It can boost WFO by providing intelligence to help supervisors see opportunities to make calls shorter and more effective, thereby improving staff utilization and performance.

"Supervisors have traditionally randomly picked calls but they have to go through which ones to pick, which takes a lot of time," explains Jim Davies, research director, [Gartner](#). "Speech analytics gives them great calls to evaluate based on any criteria they wish to select."

Earlier this year Envision Telephony released Envision InteractionIQ, which simplifies speech data processing, search, and reporting. Integrated with the Envision Centricity WFO





platform, InteractionIQ accomplishes this with tools such as filters that focus processing power on the most pertinent and relevant interactions, and enabling only filtered delivered to an inbox to expedite review.

Several speech analytics tools are now deploy phonetic audio search and recognition engines. TelStrat's new Engage Analyze uses it in place of older and what it says is less efficient large vocabulary speech recognition speech-to-text applications because is not dependent on finite dictionary and grammar models which require constant maintenance as in LVCSR. This makes it easy to accurately search for new competitors, product names, slang, and other dynamically changing terms.

The technology in Engage Analyze's makes it possible to audio mine up to 100 percent of calls, in real time if desired compared with three to five percent of calls with LVCSR without the massive computing power in the older systems. That is because such speech-to-text systems rely on limited, statistical sampling of calls due to cost and complexity.

CallCopy has new phonetic-based speech analytics solution that promises to cut total cost ownership via an intuitive front-end that eliminates the consultant/systems integrator/dedicated analyst staff infrastructure; it is fully integrated with the firm's CallCopy's CC: Discover suite. Confidence scoring in the solution improves accuracy and minimizes false positives by assigning probability scores to results; scores below a user-definable threshold are automatically filtered out. CC: Discover also has the new CC: Insight Platform, a real-time performance management system that delivers comprehensive reporting and dashboards to track performance from single and multiple centers and home agents all the way down to individual staffers.

Meanwhile **Verint's** new Impact 360 Advanced Speech Analytics for enterprises and the Impact 360 Speech Analytics Essentials solution designed for small and medium-sized contact centers uses both LVCSR and phonetics recognition. This is the best combination it says of both speed and accuracy, adding meaning and context to every interaction.

"The 'Essentials' software brings speech analytics technology into mainstream contact center operations – enabling them to experience benefits previously out of reach, all without costly setup overhead, lengthy consulting engagements and the need for interpretation by separate analyst staff," explains Ryan Hollenbeck, senior vce president, global marketing, Verint.

Multichannel Optimization

When looking at WFO components or suites consider ensuring that they are optimized for multichannel communications. More interactions are happening by e-mail, SMS/text, Web chat and by social channels such as Facebook and Twitter. For all but the most sophisticated operations, which requires and can afford highly literate agents who are adept at both speaking and writing, that generally means two separate agent groups. That is because most agents who excel at voice are poor in text.

By the same token those agents who are superb at written communication are often not as effective with verbal interactions.

Managers have to therefore carefully plan agent deployment and quality management around these new channels and perform analysis on these interactions. There subsequently needs to be training and coaching on these new media.

"It is not easy to find people who excel at both sets of skills and who are willing to work in contact centers," reports Davies.

Most WFO tools can schedule agents to handle written communications. The challenge is in integrating speech and text analysis because the way people express themselves by writing is very different compared with talking. There are specialist text analytics vendors just as there are speech analytics suppliers.

To bridge that divide speech analytics suppliers are working on programs that can handle both oral and written communications. Davies expects to see these solutions to appear next year.

"The vendors we're talking about in WFO all of their background is in audio," explains Davies. "They have to extensively modify their technology. Consequently they can't apply the knowledge they've got from the speech engines. They have to use different engines, algorithms, models, and business rules."

Suites Versus Integrated Solutions

There has been an ongoing trend to place WFO components into suites from single or consortium of vendors, driven business

Field Service WFO

Field service WFO can get challenging because there are many unique variables that have to be monitored and adjusted such as job complexity, unexpected problems and glitches, and traffic. Suppliers are responding with more value-rich solutions:

- Click Software is putting the finishing touches upon version 8 of its Service Optimization Suite. Version 8 will include the next generation of its ClickRoster shift scheduling and optimization solution, ClickRoster, which goes beyond the firm's traditional field service market to support many other areas of workforce management and optimization.
- CSG Systems has introduced automated dispatch functionality into its Workforce Express suite. It monitors technician and job status in real-time, and makes the necessary adjustments to job assignments. It also automatically re-optimizes technicians' work plans for the current day, ensuring the most efficient route possible. The end result is less down time for the technician and a more productive day for both techs and dispatchers, who can focus on more value-added functions than monitoring techs and job statuses.



opportunities. The suites approach has several key benefits: among them improved performance, economies of scale, reduced IT costs, one-stop or easier support from these pieces being pre-fit together.

"Companies are increasingly demanding integrated, single source technology solutions," reports Verint's Hollenbeck. "As a result, we're seeing a frequent shift among our customer base as they continue to invest in a unified, analytics-driven workforce optimization suite from one technology provider."

"Though the marketplace has consolidated around several large players that have the majority of the market share in WFO, the fact is that end users still have a significant amount of leeway to put their tools together as a patchwork of different vendors' offerings."

The downsides are that you may not get the WFO solution that optimally performs for your specific environment. Also you may end up spending money for components that you do not need either for function or because you have that functionality already and they work fine. There are plenty of standalone tools out there to craft the WFO process you need.

"Though the marketplace has consolidated around several large players that have the majority of the market share in WFO, the fact is that end users still have a significant amount of leeway to put their tools together as a patchwork of different vendors' offerings," explains Dawson. "This is true even if they are inclined towards suites, because of the many integration and partnership agreements that cover the vendor landscape."

The makeup of and the names behind those WFO suites may be changing though. Infrastructure suppliers who presently offer WFO solutions, such as [Aspect](#) and Interactive Intelligence could be joined by their competition. Jim Davies, research director, Gartner seeing more interest by the infrastructure vendors, which adds further breadth to the single contact center offering concept.

Yet Davies also sees the potential and value of CRM vendors to connect into WFO tools. For example, automatically aligning things like the launch of a marketing campaign to agent staffing volumes, training and performance measures would help the contact center be more efficient and effective.

At the same time there are more hosted contact center platform suppliers who also offer WFO. Firms such as [inContact](#) and [LiveOps](#) provide it to their clientele.

"With a combined infrastructure and WFO suite you can have your ACD, dialer, campaign planner, call recording, workforce management in the same environment," says Davies. "And there's going to be more firms both premises solutions and hosted who will offer it."

Yet Davies also sees the potential and value of CRM vendors to connect into WFO tools. For example, automatically aligning functions and programs like the launch of a marketing campaign to agent staffing volumes, training and performance measures would help contact centers become more efficient and effective.

Whether by the WFO suite suppliers, infrastructure firms, CRM outfits or hosted platform providers he sees up the pipeline that more WFO solutions will be hosted in line with [SaaS](#) adoption in general.

There are handful of best of breed hosted in call recording and workforce management but as of yet nothing from the mainstream WFO vendors who offer best of breed hosted.

"They are all looking and monitoring and currently use partners but will maybe offer directly later on," says Davies.

In making your decisions in what you want in WFO and how you want it delivered, map those features out with your supplier. GMT's approach is to conduct value discovery and document the customer's business drivers in a benefits measurement plan early in the sales and implementation process. This acts as the guide, explains GMT CEO Simon Angrove, by which his firm and his customers will define project success, which helps to ensure that all stakeholders are keenly aware of the value drivers for the project and by which success will be measured.

"The road to workforce optimization is littered with the bones of failed projects either product capabilities fall short of customers' expectations or those customers are unable, for whatever reason, to get the desired business value out of their investment," explains Angrove. "This is sometimes attributable to product features but, more often than not, it has to do with ensuring that the customer can most effectively use the product in their operational environment." **CS**

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

ASC Telecom
www.asctelecom.com

CallCopy
www.callcopy.com

Click Software
www.clicksoftware.com

CSG Systems
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CyberTech
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Leveraging Technology to Expand Your Agent Pool



By Tim Passios,
Director of Product Management

In last month's Ask the Experts column, we discussed best practices for routing calls in order to maintain customer satisfaction. We talked a little about LIFO vs. FIFO and touched on the value of making customers happy so they'll continue to come back. This month, I'd like to focus a bit on the agent, another important part of the contact center that management also hopes is happy and will continue to come back, daily.

In tough economic times you would think most contact centers could easily hold on to key employees, with jobs being tight, and opportunities slim. That's not the case everywhere. We've been engaged with an ever increasing number of contact center managers, looking to install options to support remote/work at home agents – not to address an operations need, but to offer a benefit to agents that competitors might be using to entice defection. In fact, the ability to work remotely is starting to become common in contact center employment ads, right beside traditional stalwarts, such as salary and health benefits.

Three recent interactions I've had with contact center managers drove this point home. The first was a company that mentioned it had no agent turnover in 24 months. Yikes! Most contact centers fall into the 40 percentage annual turnover range. Another center was showing strong growth in its agent base, and when asked where all its quality candidates are coming from, the response was, "everywhere." The last discussion was with a manager who was having problems keeping his staff levels where he needed them because his agents were leaving for a competitor.


In all cases, one of the main driving factors was using technology that allowed agents to work remotely. In an industry that used to treat working from home as a benefit reserved for only key agents, today's contact centers are using it more and more as part of normal operations.

The contact center with low turnover lays out its schedule for how many agents are needed for each shift, just like any other contact center. It still maintains a headquarters building and hires from a single metropolitan area, just like any other contact center. The difference is it doesn't matter where the agents are when they log in for a shift – at home, in the office, or on a boat – as long as they have the correct staff logged in and taking calls. Productivity is up, revenue is up, and turnover is gone.

The contact center that is aggressively growing a base of agents has a different approach. It doesn't maintain a traditional headquarters building. All of its agents work remotely. What does this do for the quality of the agent pool? Agents are hired from all over the country, not one geographic region. This offers an ability to pick from a larger group of agents versus a contact center that is forced to hire from a single metro area. Think about staffing a contact center with no geographic boundaries. If contact center A has to fill 10 seats and has a pool of 100 to choose from, and contact center B has to fill 10 seats and has a pool of 1,000 to choose from, which do you think will have the 10 best qualified agents. This contact center's metrics show its agents are older and more experienced than what the industry typically is seeing.

The third contact center is on the losing end of the remote agent issue and has been losing agents to a direct competitor. The competing companies are actually headquartered at opposite ends of the country and, up until last year, they staffed their respective contact centers from candidates in their own metro areas. That was until one of them upgraded its technology to allow for the support of full remote agents. At that point, when the company with newly acquired the remote agent ability needed to hire a new agent, its pool of candidates now included its competitor's agents. We all know how it works – once one employee from the competitor came over, word of mouth between agents started to spread about all the benefits of working remotely.

The technology has been around for a while and it's evolving daily, with more and more features to make supporting remote workers viable for all organizations. If you don't think you're quite ready to send everyone out to work in the remote world, you probably should at least be in the planning stages. Unless you run a business that has no competitors, you might find your agents are already planning this for you. **CIS**



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Moving Your Contact Center Forward

Customer care can be compared to a vehicle. If so then customer relationship management is analogous to the engine, routing to the transmission, differential, and axles, and customer interaction management to the wheels. If customer care is to run smoothly all of these components must be integrated so that they work together automatically and in response to driver actions.

Unfortunately the vehicle has not been running as well as it can be. There is poor integration at the routing or infrastructure level between voice and multichannel agents and between the CIM and CRM, reports Johan Jacobs, Gartner CRM eServices analyst.

There is also a lack of connectivity between knowledge management systems and customer interaction histories for self service and live agent service. This often results in customers receiving inaccurate and sometimes contradictory information and agents asking callers to explain what they did in self service.

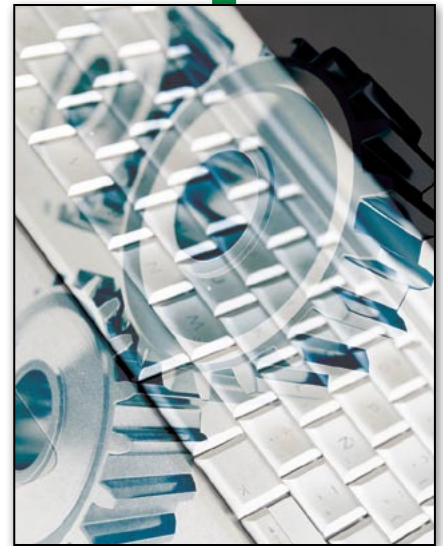
The price for this lack of integration from existing solutions is steep. Longer and unnecessary agent calls drive up expenses while firms risk losing revenues from annoyed customers. Jacobs estimates that to achieve effective contact center multichannel deployment, firms must pay up to 45 percent extra in consulting and custom application costs on top of the hardware and software license and standard installation expenses.

Adding to the hassles each new product comes with their own CIM databases. You end up with multiple databases across the suite making analytics and interaction management extremely difficult.

"If we lift the screen on some of the CRM systems' multichannel functionality out there it is actually very poor," says Jacobs. "The same goes for some of infrastructure vendors, some of whom still do not have chat/co-browse products while others do not have consolidated messaging for multichannel. There are only a few products out there that have an integrated multichannel suite to enable a true 360-degree view of the customers."

Chris Mills, general manager of Servion, sees faint signs that this integration could happen. This is being driven by savvy, top-echelon enterprises who realize customers' behavior is affected by their interaction experiences and are investing in projects that show consumer behavior, drive higher loyalty, and increased wallet share.

"The enlightened practitioners are now beginning to understand and believe that the power of each is enhanced by the other," says Mills. "For the simple reason that the only way a consumer experiences a vendor organization's CRM practice at the touch points is through the CIM layer. Once this understanding proliferates and acquires urgency we will see more and more intensity and effort being put into the integration."



Ready for Multichannel?

More customer interactions are being driven by written communications i.e. e-mail/SMS, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter and web chat. Yet most contact centers do not have agents who have the skills to handle written and voice interactions well, observes Gartner's Jacobs. Quality, response rates, and customer satisfaction becomes very poor. He recommends hiring and assigning separate written channel agents instead.

"Companies need to get it right on multichannel because customers expect it," says Jacobs. "If firms do not provide a positive experience the quality drops and the customers will leave not only the channels but could well go to competitors."

Also, utilizing social networking requires a strong level of management control. While these media present unprecedented opportunities to listen to and gain feedback from and respond to customers, the ROI from investing time and resources in these applications has still not been universally proven. Also the comments made could be inaccurate but take on the sheen of truth if the tellers are believed, which could damage corporations' reputations.

nGenera is developing responsive social media capabilities for its next



release, nGen CIM 9.0. With it businesses will regulate the extent of community involvement and participation externally as well as internally, enabling easier adoption and access. It will mesh the social concepts of community, wiki, content, and user reputation modeling with nGenera's existing knowledge management and customer interaction management tools.

"Businesses are wary of embracing the power of social networking for fear of the loss of control and the lack of a hard ROI," explains Tara Sporrer, vice president of marketing and sales operations of nGenera Customer Interaction Management. "Our next release is a step toward our vision to marry the positive concepts of social networking with the business requirements of the enterprise, specifically with the contact center and support space."

To make contact center/CRM integration happen requires seamlessly meshing in self-service channels. eGain has done just that with eGain IVR that it says enables superior phone self-service experiences by adding intelligence to IVR and unifying it with other interaction channels, including web self-service.

eGain IVR uses case-based reasoning technology to capture agent expertise in the knowledge base and prompt customers with appropriate questions in a way that the best agents would, until an answer or the "next best step" is found. Interactions are flexible and efficient, avoiding the rigid and long paths that are so common in traditional IVR scripts. The solution also offers context-aware escalation to multiple channels, including live agent channels such as phone and chat, and asynchronous agent channels such as e-mail.

"When IVR customer service is part of a unified customer interaction hub, businesses are able to offer exceptional IVR and cross-channel customer experiences in a cost-effective manner," says eGain Chairman and CEO Ashu Roy.

Integration Solutions

The first step in getting your customer service to run smooth is to look at your needs. You should examine your customer base and how they communicate. Just like when you decide to buy or upgrade to a vehicle you examine the types of driving you will be doing and the numbers of passengers and amount of payload you will be carrying.

CIM tools are becoming more versatile. For example Syntellect's CIM version 7.0 includes more than two dozen enhancements, including to agent applications, interaction management lifecycle reporting, and outbound application integration.

Gartner's Jacobs recommends that you take a hard look at your existing CIM, CRM, or infrastructure routing solutions and see which ones have the untapped features that can give you that seamless multichannel functionality you require. Use as much what is there as opposed to buying new multiple point solutions and trying to make these talk to one another. He has found that about 60 to 70 percent of his contact center clients already have products that have some form of multichannel capability.

"Your customer service management solutions are your crown jewels," explains Jacobs. "You need them in a single repository to give you a comprehensive view of customer across all voice and non voice channels."

Suppliers can do much more to make integration happen. Servion's Mills believes the answer to this is to train a completely new breed of sales staff who understand and position CIM solutions correctly.

Servion's consulting practice calls for an integrated approach to designing and deploying a CIM solution/strategy that brings together all stakeholders within the buying organization into the creation process. This approach also then ensures that the CIM solution is designed around the existing CRM practice for maximum impact.

"Our belief is that once the CIM strategy is seen as an extension of brand strategy, it will force the integration of the CRM strategy (which is also an extension of brand strategy) as well into the big picture, and ultimately the integration of the CIM and CRM practice," says Mills.

nGenera says its CIM solved this issue in its 8.3 release by supporting a vast library of connectors as a result of its partnership with integration provider, Cast Iron. It offers customers seamless, low cost integrations of the nGen CIM Suite with existing applications such as from SAP, Oracle, Microsoft, BMC Remedy, and Salesforce.com

"nGenera CIM has always offered this integration; however in the past it has involved professional services and development resources which has been costly and has distracted us from our core competency," explains Sporrer. **CIS**

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

eGain
www.egain.com

nGenera
www.ngenera.com

Servion
www.servion.com

Syntellect
www.syntellect.com

By Tim Searcy



How Will the Healthcare Debate Impact Contact Centers?

Between the approximately 86 percent of the contact center work that is done in-house and the rising tide within the outsourcer market, health benefits are being offered to the vast majority of contact center employees and at least in part, are paid for by employers. The debate continues to rage in Washington, D.C. and at dinner tables about the course of action the government will take concerning expanding healthcare coverage. I am not an expert on this topic, but it is clear that everyone has an opinion. Let's take a look at how potential healthcare changes can impact different aspects of the contact center space.

Although outsourcers make up a smaller portion of the total pool, they will be the focus of much of the discussion. Because labor makes up the lion's share of expense, and because they have no other offsetting revenue streams, outsourcers are a pure play for cost consideration. Additionally, because outsourcers have a large portion of variable costs located in fixed components like salary and benefits, it is much easier to analyze solutions they would have to employ. The choice of healthcare solution is less important than the mandate. If employers must pick up some or all of healthcare costs, or if they have option to be rid of those costs, their options are very similar. Three groups deserve closer consideration including employers, business strategists and entrepreneurs.

Employers – This group will not have an unlimited number of choices. If they offer health insurance now, should they continue? If the quality of their benefits was attractive in a competitive labor environment, what will they have to offer once everyone can receive some level of coverage? For many employers it will make little or no difference that healthcare is going to be offered. However, the issue is not going to be the offer of healthcare. The issue will be the indirect increase in "tax" like expenses to pay for the health care. Nobody can see far enough out to figure out what this will mean. However, one thing is for certain, wage increases in any form make the domestic option for contact center operations less attractive.

Business Strategists – So as a strategist, you have to determine where your tipping point is. Do cost increases associated with either payment for or mandated provision of health insurance cause you as a firm to make a decision to go overseas? This equation is not as straightforward as it used to be. Consider all the variables that are now part of the dialog:

Wage increases are obvious as a cause to go overseas.

The strength of the dollar has varied by market dramatically over the last year or so, and some overseas locations are not as attractive as they once were. For this reason, currency exchange rates have to be factored into the thought process.

Future regulations are most certainly going to attempt to increase the attractiveness of being onshore versus offshore. There could be tax incentives or penalties, or possibly new

location disclosure language that is dictated for inbound calls. Additionally, as the government takes a more obvious hand in the economy through ownership of failed assets and funding, the likelihood exists for "buy American" provisions to be included in their corporate mandates.

Consumer sentiment has certainly focused on a U.S. contact center solution as a simple knee jerk reaction to inconsistent international experiences.

Although "card check" is dead for the time being, unions are certainly going to be focused on revitalizing a pro union stance in the contact center space. With their efforts comes renewed interest on work rules such as silent monitoring.

Entrepreneurs – One of the most interesting possibilities for the teleservices professional is the potential for business that new health care regulations may create. I envision the possible repeal of the McCarran Ferguson Act of 1945 that left the regulation of the business of insurance to the states. For any of the proposed options for national health insurance to work, the Act would have to be repealed to make it possible for firms to compete nationally. Right now, insurance companies have to manage to a hodge-podge of state rules, guidelines, registration rules, and other guidelines. Because of this, companies are not able to compete across state lines. These restrictions on competition have been debated almost since the Act was first put into place. However if it were repealed, competition would not rely as heavily on employer sponsorship, and for the uninsured, it is easy to see a world like the property casualty insurance environment. In this situation, although firms are subject to rules dictated by states, there appears to be a more open market of ideas and commerce. Think about the possibility of direct sales by all direct channels to millions of consumers. This could be the next boon to the industry in terms of all types of teleservices traffic.

There is a lot to think about, and without a doubt, my e-mail box will fill with opinions. The point is that healthcare is going to drive change in our business, and we will be changing as a result of it. Until next time, I am on the line. **CIS**



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by Erik Linask

IT EXPO West: A Retrospective

Speakers, exhibitors, and attendees at ITEXPO West, held Sept. 1 to 3, 2009 in Los Angeles proved once again why this event, with ITEXPO East planned for Jan. 20 to 22 in Miami, are the pre-eminent venues to learn about the latest in communications technology.

Avaya: The Future is Social Networking

Avaya set the tone for where communications is going in a brilliant opening talk on social media. Paul Dunay, Avaya global managing director of services and social marketing, said that the social media space is growing daily. Facebook alone has more than 250 million users; it has 10 million videos and 1 billion photos uploaded; it hosts 4 billion status updates monthly and 2.5 million events every month.

Each day, 5 billion minutes are spent Facebooking, making it the third largest site in the world, leading Dunay, reported TMC's Group Editorial Director Erik Linask, to call it not a social networking site, but a communications platform.

Dunay asked how Facebook will enable commerce and how will support manifest itself on the Facebook platform? After all, if he is correct, how can business ignore a once in a lifetime opportunity?

Dunay looked ahead at 11 ways Facebook can be integrated into common activities and interests to create not only a better overall user experience, but the potential for revenue as well. Here are just three of them: <http://tmcnet.com/17012.1>

Key Points from Keynotes

Here are just some of the highlights from the array of keynote speakers, whose audiences lined the walls and floors of the halls:

- Mike Regan, vice president of unified IP development at Aspect, said that unified communications use in the contact center especially has been shown to yield cost-related benefits, among others.



And that's partly because the consumers with whom many contact center agents interact themselves are familiar with "presence" technologies such as IM and chat, and their patience has dried up accordingly. UC itself is production-ready and businesses are missing out on a huge opportunity if they're failing to embrace the technology, he pointed out.

"Consumers are becoming very demanding and if they have a bad experience, they will let others know about it," Regan said.

Aspect, which has a strong relationship with Microsoft and leverages the software giant's OCS R2, found a way to blur the traditional contact center barriers by using UC. Regan cited a survey which found that more than 10 percent of calls into contact centers required expertise from someone outside the center itself.

But how to effectively – and quickly – route that call to the appropriate person? For Aspect, the answer is in UC applications. The company, Regan said, used a tightly integrated platform with various Microsoft technologies to leverage what he called "rich presence."

- Dr. Don Brown, co-founder of Interactive Intelligence, stressed that the enterprise as a whole could learn a lot from the contact center.

"Contact centers are unbelievable, and we know what everybody is doing in them," said Brown. "How many other places in the organization do we have that kind of discipline and that kind of flexibility? Not very many."

As Paula Bernier, executive editor of TMC's IP communications magazines reported, Brown aims to change that: "At



SPECIAL

FOCUS



Interactive Intelligence we want to use communications technology to build all-in-one process automation platform.”

That entails creating process and bringing communications into the mix so work is done more efficiently, he said. The value in communications is in getting more work done with fewer people, he continued. “To me this has to be the goal of any revolution in technology.”

• **ShoreTel** CEO John Combs crystallized several emerging trends in IP communications when he described the attraction of communications tools in terms of their ease of use, including going so far as to describe ShoreTel as a communications, not a phone, company.

What keeps ShoreTel in business aren't the features and capabilities of its UC system, Combs said, according to TMC's Group Editorial Director Erik Linask.

“Rather, it's the ‘brilliant simplicity,’ as he calls it, of the system,” Linask reported. “In order for a solution to be successful today, it must be both easy to use and easy to install and manage – and it has to be available anywhere, anytime (that's why the mobility component is critical).” **CIS**

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2009 TMC Labs Innovation Award Winners, Part II



Last month we listed the winners of the prestigious TMC Labs Innovation Awards. Here are the summaries on these unique and meritorious products and services. The complete article can be found at: <http://tmcnet.com/17174.1>.

Angel.com

**Angel.com SupportbyFone with
Salesforce CTI**
www.angel.com

SupportbyFone with Salesforce CTI combines Angel.com's IVR and call center solutions delivered via state-of-the-art SaaS with Salesforce.com's CRM platform. This marriage provides a powerful CRM-enabled IVR/ACD solution which can be quickly deployed and easily managed from a browser.

Aplicor

Aplicor Enterprise
www.aplicor.com

The Aplicor Enterprise CRM application was the first on-demand solution to offer an isolated tenancy hosting model. The company's hosted business applications are innovative because they provide fully integrated, enterprise-wide business systems and not silo-based applications that must be integrated.

Contact Center Compliance

SmartBlock
www.dnc.com

SmartBlock is a new product that offers "click to call" with integrated real-time scrubbing and blocking. Agents or employees can use an icon on their desktops to place a call that is then automatically checked against DNC rules that will then regulate whether the call is placed or blocked.

Cypress Communications

C4 IP ACD
www.cypresscom.net

The C4 IP product now has ACD functionality that with results in a unique solution because ACD users can utilize the array of C4 IP unified communications capabilities. Cypress C4 IP ACD users also benefit from a fully redundant network that provides failover in the event of a network outage or local disaster.

Epicor

Epicor 9
www.epicor.com

Epicor 9 is an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution that combines Web 2.0 with Epicor True SOA, which is a unique technology that stores all user interface attributes as XML metadata. This permits Epicor applications to run as smart clients or Web clients or on mobile devices, all from the same source code. It allows customization and user personalization with any user interface.

NICE Systems

IEX TotalView Version 4
www.nice.com/iex

The IEX TotalView Version 4 workforce management (WFM) solution offers the new feature of Blended, Multimedia and Multiple ACD Adherence. This enables centers to use TotalView Real-time Schedule Adherence technology to give visibility to agents handling multiple channels i.e. voice, chat, e-mail, fax, and voicemail, and switching between inbound and outbound calls.

Noble Systems Corporation

Noble SIPhony
www.noblesys.com

Noble SIPhony provides a total SIP solution for agent audio and PSTN connectivity. SIPhony operates on standard servers with no specialized hardware components and runs on a Linux-based operating system. SIPhony allows existing customers an easy path to a software-only platform or to allow hybrid applications that unify TDM and software-only SIP environments.

Pegasystems Inc.

Pegasystems Customer Process Manager (CPM)
www.pegas.com

Pegasystems Customer Process Manager (CPM) has several innovative features over traditional CRM functionality. In-

cluding the ability to orchestrate customer processes step-by-step and end-to-end instead of making users guess the best course of action. It also empowers business users to drive business change instead of requiring IT to re-code systems.

Transverse

Business Logic Execution Environment Platform – a.k.a. bleep
www.gotransverse.com

The Business Logic Execution Environment and Platform, or bleep, is a portfolio of telecom BSS and OSS solutions and services that is constructed using the latest open technologies (SOA, Web services, cloud computing). It adapts the best open source projects to the telecom domain, creating a carrier-grade solution that is easy to use and inexpensive to own and operate.

Upstream Works Software Ltd.

UpTake
www.upstreamworks.com

UpTake's family of performance management and analytics solutions enable customers to identify agents with poor call resolution on a specific call type and coach them to improve, get the true cost of customer resolution across channels, and identify and recover customers at risk. It can also identify poor business processes that result in repeat contacts or poor satisfaction surveys.

UTOPY

UTOPY SpeechMiner
www.utopy.com

UTOPY's flagship product, SpeechMiner, analyzes recorded telephone conversations and automatically recognizes key business topics and events within these conversations. SpeechMiner can also extract data from external systems (such as customer survey scores or CRM information) and link them directly with the respective calls, then correlate its unique speech metrics with these external metrics. **CIS**

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Prescriptions, Not Rhetoric, to Improve Healthcare

Bring money and mortality together and you have an unstable mix. The more important these values and issues are in a society the greater the likelihood the discussions and debates blow up in the smoke and fire of self-interest.

That is the sad sum and outcome of the U.S.'s healthcare 'debate'. A conversation over proposals aimed at helping the less fortunate has become twisted by those who profit from the status quo who have abetted ideological warfare alongside the true believers in the long and dishonorable tradition of willful ignorance. Much like what has happened to peace plans in other troubled parts of the world. That millions suffer through being uninsured or underinsured in the U.S. and poverty in others is just collateral damage.

Unfortunately the refrain from the business community – the one constituency that could bang heads to work this out – has been “we don't want any pay more either in premiums or taxes or put up with what we fear is more red tape”. Yet is this attitude and approach really in their best interests, let alone the nation's?

Have businesses especially really taken a hard look of what the total costs of the healthcare crisis inflicts on their bottom lines? How can their books benefit when staff comes in injured or sick to work when they can't afford to get adequate treatment? When staff benefit-shop: jumping from company to company to stay alive and well? When individuals leave flexible part-time jobs or independent contractor work for benefit-paying full time employment?

Is it in the employers' best interests to collectively pay huge sums for administration, back office, and overhead, including marketing, customer care, and billing/collections contact centers and their underlying technologies? Dollars shelled out by them and their employees that could have gone instead to keeping employees and families well and keeping their costs down? Shouldn't they be demanding streamlining of the present bloated industry?

Shouldn't businesses also be demanding increased effectiveness of medical services delivery by demanding a nationwide standardized intermediate caregiver level, between M.D.s and R.N.s, who can make diagnoses and prescribe and administer treatments now carried out ad hoc by P.A.s, nurse practitioners, and in emergencies, by

highly-trained paramedics? Would this not save huge sums while providing more immediate and widespread higher quality of care?

Moreover shouldn't those also who underwrite health costs be asking where is the bottom-line value in having huge resources going into prolonging the lives of those terminally ill by another six to eight months to live, in subsidizing doctors and their attendant infrastructure? When those resources can be used more effectively with more caring and less suffering through palliative care and in enabling others to get well better, quicker, back to work, happy, and productive? *As the World According to Garp* author John Irving put it: “we are all terminal cases.”

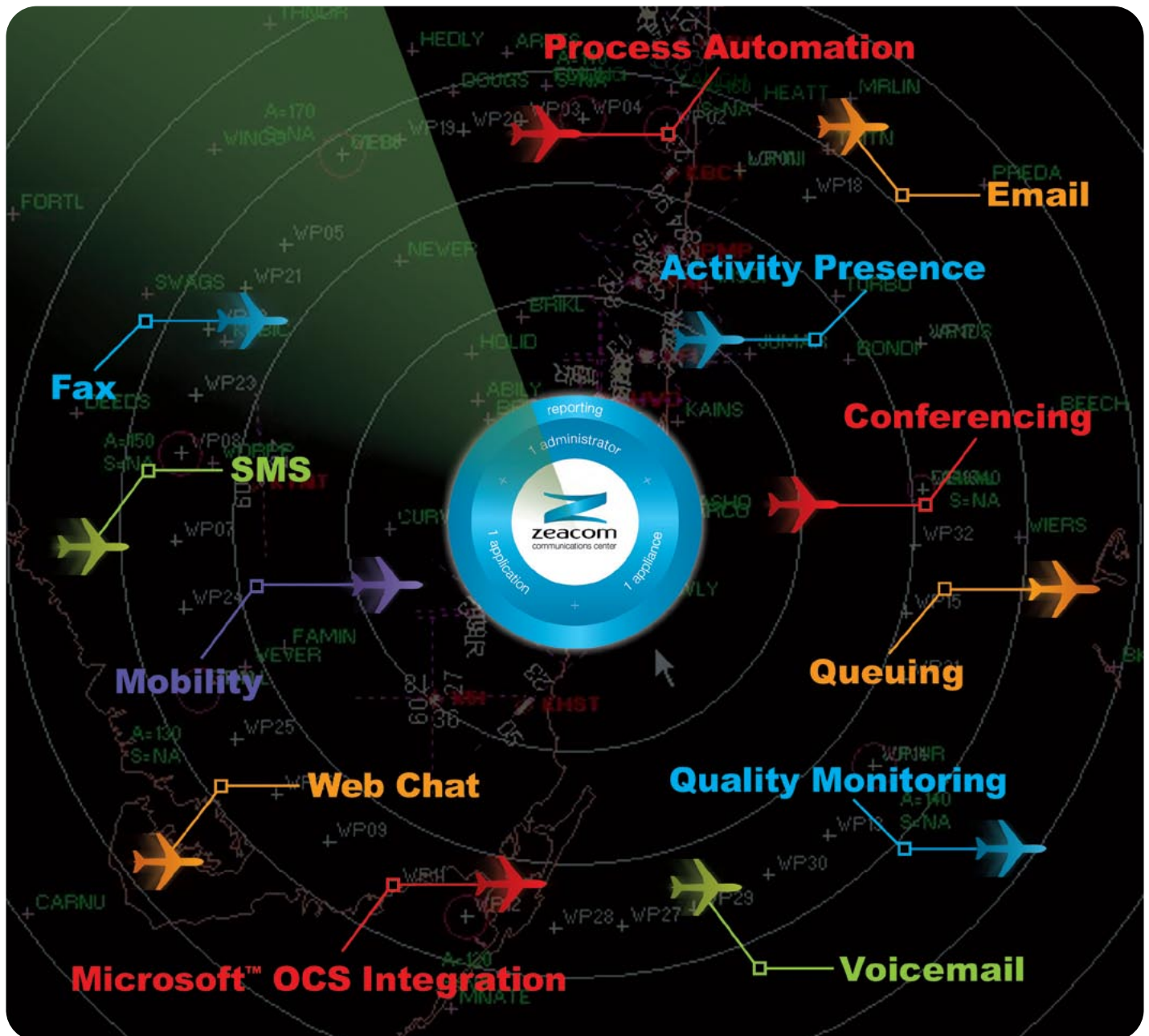
Contact centers, and contact-center-dependent organizations especially ought to take a hard look at whether the existing system works for them. They are the ones who get hit the most on turnover, sick days, and high healthcare costs.

Not that the U.S. is alone in facing healthcare issues. Other countries have been debating how to manage rising costs amidst aging populations, with matters such as physician shortages and wait times. There is ongoing fighting between established medical interests and with other spending and fiscal priorities, with no quick fixes. There too the business communities have washed their hands even though their firms as a whole are impacted.

There needs to leadership in both the U.S. and in other countries to triage such debates, to look beyond their constrictively-defined self-interests to where their goods and society's meet, and engage in truly rational discussions about what is best for their societies. In this process there needs to be second and third opinions, and compromises and consensus.

Only in this fashion will there be courses of treatment fashioned for the healthcare systems that may not be ideal and will require some effort on the patients' parts but which are best prescriptions for their, and society's long-term survivability. **CIS**

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