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## **Amdocs' 4-1-1 on Communications Service Providers**

Rebecca Prudhomme, Amdocs' vice president,  
product and solutions marketing

### **Also In This Issue:**

- Performance Analytics For Tough Crowd
- Contact Center Business Continuity Planning
- Speech Technology Awards



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## Speech Technology Thriving and Evolving

I recently visited the SpeechTek 2010 show in New York, where I met with a number of vendors focused on improving state-of-the-art technology. Most memorable, by far, was Microsoft, because they showed me deep speech integration into the operating systems of both the Windows 7 phone and Xbox. In addition, they showed me Xbox Kinect, which is a \$150 device that plugs into the gaming console and, once connected, allows your body gestures to control games. The system uses cameras and is very accurate. I would suggest the word “revolutionary” was coined to describe what it does to computer interfaces.

Getting back to speech, Jeff Schlueter, vice president of marketing and business development, at speech analytics provider [Nexidia](#) explained how contact centers consist of more than 50 percent of the company's growth, and banking, cable and healthcare companies, along with government regulators, are proving to be strong customers as well.

One way the company helps call centers is with its language assessor prescreening tool, which evaluates new call center hires via phone before they are hired. The company recently renamed and repackaged its products into the following buckets: Discovery Edition, Analysis Edition, Quality Management Edition and the Enterprise Management Edition, with the goal being to more seamlessly connect customers with appropriate solutions, based on their size and requirements.

Moreover, they are working on productizing multichannel analytics, which will allow companies to better determine what customers are thinking by trolling their Web and speech interactions. The company raised \$1.5 million in financing recently and no doubt some of the proceeds are being used to further this cause.

Schlueter has interesting insight on why speech is a better gauge than text for gauging customer perceptions. He believes it is easy for someone to flame a company quickly online, but says it is pretty easy to analyze such content, since it is text-based. Speech, on the other hand, is more accurate, he believes, as people tell you more about their true feelings in a conversation. The challenge, of course, is deciphering content. That is where their company comes in, and we can look forward to a new product from them at some point in the future.

You really can't mention speech technology without mentioning [Nuance](#). The trio of Dena Skrbina, Laura Marino and Andrea Mocherman told me how the vendor has evolved from a speech company to a full provider of customer care, including cloud-based solutions. Nuance is working on improving customer interaction with automated systems and, to that end, they are happy to be improving the comfort level of speech interaction with their recently released Dragon 11 Dictation Engine, they say is the most accurate product in the series.

An interesting part of the dialogue was that comfort with speech will soon approach our comfort with search engines like [Google](#). The idea is that, when users are confronted with speech systems, they typically utter one-word answers (as they have been trained to do).

Similarly, users were once used to putting single words into search engines but, over time, became accustomed to long tail queries.

Nuance believes the world of speech callers will become more comfortable uttering phrases like, “Why is my bill so much larger than last month?”

Another area of focus for the company is outbound notifications, where it is powering services for Canada's ScotiaBank, allowing customers to set InfoAlerts when their bank accounts hit certain thresholds. In all, there are 15 possible alerts (security alerts are free) and 90 percent of customers are using these services and paying for them. Perhaps one of the reasons Canadian banks made it through the housing crisis unscathed was they were focusing on tech solutions to help customers and boost revenue, instead of packaging and repackaging soon-to-be-worthless documents that represented risky mortgage bets.

Another area of focus for the company is the smart grid, where the company is working with utilities to notify customers of lower electricity rates.

But, perhaps most interesting is the company's integration into smartphones, where it is working with carriers to place apps on phones that are activated when certain calls are placed. For example, when you call your mobile provider, a menu pops on your cell phone allowing you to quickly navigate to a page where you can add a second line or pay your bill.

So, while computer speech generation won't yet pass for human interaction, we are getting close and, as technology continues to improve, it will allow more innovative services and better service levels, while allowing regulators to more accurately monitor companies' activities.

Overall, I would say the speech technology market is fairly healthy at this point, introducing new opportunities for companies to shift calls from live agents to automated systems to save money and expedite resolution. Perhaps more importantly, though, speech analytics capabilities have advanced to the point where they enable businesses to effectively mine live and recorded calls and leverage that data to define and execute their corporate BI strategies. **CIS**

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*



## Back to the CRM Basics

One of the hottest terms in the communications space of late has been “Customer Experience.” The question is, what does customer experience mean? Having discussed it with a number of vendors, I’m convinced there are as many definitions as there are players in the CRM space.

They may be right; they may be wrong. It doesn’t really matter. What matters is the customer’s definition and how well the customer perceives a business to have achieved an acceptable level of satisfaction.

“It’s about the customer’s expectation and experience, not the company’s expectation for the customer experience,” remarked Dr. Volker Hildebrand, vice president, CRM Solution Management at SAP in a conversation at SpeechTek. “It’s about reliability and delivery on promises, and it’s about convenience.”

Indeed, reliability, delivery, and convenience go a long way in achieving satisfaction at the customer level and are all attributable to what Hildebrand refers to as the three pillars of successful CRM: operational excellence, interaction excellence, and decision excellence.

In fact, it’s that three-pronged holistic approach to CRM, rather than a focus on purely the front office, which provides SAP’s key value proposition – and has contributed to its growth over the past three years, when its products underwent a major overhaul.

Prior to that, SAP had largely neglected the relationship between the front office and the rest of the supply chain, including the user environment. A new state of the art user interface, in fact, has helped deliver what Hildebrand calls the “New SAP CRM,” which has an increased focus on usability, ease of deployment, and continuity of information across the enterprise.

In fact, Hildebrand notes there is significant value in having the CRM system tied to the rest of the enterprise, allowing the entire business to benefit, and helping solve the overall CRM picture and creating a more efficient end-to-end process. After all, customer relationship management neither begins nor ends with the CSR – it flows from the top levels of an organization all the way down.

The successful business will be the one that recognizes the totality of the customer relationship can leverage solutions enterprise-wide, rather than merely providing point solutions for the contact center. The success of companies like SAP and Interactive Intelligence bear that out.

When it comes to ease of deployment, few technologies have played a greater role than the cloud. Of course, the hosted model has existed for years, but its legitimacy is only now being widely accepted by larger enterprises. The cloud/hosted alternative, for instance, allows new reps to be up and running on their CRM systems in minutes without any IT involvement and, in doing so, provides remarkable flexibility to businesses,

allowing them to react faster than ever to customer trends, bringing on additional support almost on a real-time basis.

SAP, in fact, has begun building a new on-demand solution, which is now in testing and planned for rollout next year, and is also looking at developing on-demand add-ons to its existing CRM core, enabling it to further extend its value proposition by developing purpose-built extensions for specific markets and businesses.

Its biggest on-demand investment thus far has been SAP Business ByDesign product, which provides large enterprise CRM features for the SMB market (a familiar rationale for developing on-demand solutions in both the contact center and VoIP industries).

But, Hildebrand suggests that while on-demand will continue to be strong in the SMB space and enterprises are also beginning to adopt cloud-based services, the dominant model going forward will be a hybrid one, which is why SAP is not putting all its eggs in either basket, but is eager to develop on-premises and on-demand solutions that can be cross-deployed.

And as for social media – the other supremely hot topic in the CRM space – it’s not something businesses control. Rather, they must seek ways to harness its power and insert themselves into its interactions.

SAP should have a leg up on many of its competition: it has built its own community network of more than 2.5 million members that includes discussion forums, blogs, and more. It’s benefit? Increased customer satisfaction and reduced support costs.

“We found that support costs went down because users were helping solve each others’ questions and issues, and their response times are often much faster often SAP’s could be,” says Hildebrand. “It’s very powerful.”

Rick Fleischman, senior director, CRM Solution Marketing, adds that, “Social media is magnifying the things that used to be secret, those things that used to be able to be covered up.”

The key to making social media work for your business is making it actionable, linking it to business practices and getting relevant social conversations in front of reps. But, while SAP is embedding social tools into its products, it does not position itself as a social CRM solution. Rather, it is holding to its holistic approach, built on the fundamental philosophy, as Fleischman notes, that, the best way to drive success, including responding to social media, is to do a better job with the basics of customer service. **CIS**



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## Amdocs' 4-1-1 on Communications Service Providers



**C**ommunications service providers (CSPs) or service providers – local and long-distance carriers, SIP trunking firms, wireless providers, cable companies and satellite firms – are the lifelines of contact centers, connecting customers, suppliers and employees with organizations. CSPs also depend on contact centers, both internal and outsourced, to attract, retain, serve and bill their customers.

**Amdocs** ([www.amdocs.com](http://www.amdocs.com)) provides business- and operational-support systems (BSS and OSS), including billing, customer care, and support, along with a comprehensive portfolio of consulting, systems integration and managed services for CSPs domestically and globally. It is well situated to see what is happening inside this vital and vibrant industry.

To get a handle on CSP trends and issues, Customer Interaction Solutions recently interviewed Rebecca Prudhomme, vice president, product and solutions marketing at Amdocs.

**CIS:** Outline the emerging CSP marketplace. What will this industry look like five years from now compared with today?

**RP:** We are at the threshold of the connected world – an always-on world, with anytime, anywhere, any-device connectivity. It is predicted that, by the year 2015, there will be upwards of a trillions of devices, most of them not phones, connected to the network, affecting every aspect of our lives. Already today, connected devices and applications are commonplace and we believe this trend will only gain ground.

Amdocs has identified three emerging business models for service providers, each with its own growth potential:

1. The experience model, where service providers seamlessly deliver a highly personalized experience to end users across all screens, wherever they may be
2. The vertical model, where service providers focus on delivering end-to-end solutions to a specific market vertical, such as healthcare, financial or automotive
3. The partner enabler model, where service providers focus on delivering infrastructure and back-end capabilities in wholesale mode to enrich partner services

The connected world constitutes both a challenge and an opportunity for service providers to drive new revenue streams, expand their reach across new verticals, and provide completely new customer experiences. To succeed in the connected world, we believe they will need to expand quicker, drive the customer experience and run leaner operations.

**CIS:** What are the key challenges facing CSPs and how do you think they are going to or should meet them?

**RP:** While every industry is facing challenges, we believe service providers have ample opportunities to evolve their models to compete with the likes of [Google](#) and [Skype](#). A recent Amdocs and Economist Intelligence Unit report looked at service provider competition with “over-the-top” Internet players, such as Google and Skype. The report concluded that service providers’ unique assets, such as their existing relationships with customers and their ability to deploy services over multiple technology platforms, provide competitive advantages and better partnering opportunities with large Internet players.

In addition, service providers are focused heavily on how they are going to meet the demand for increased capacity while increasing profits. Based on a recent survey with analyst firm Analysys Mason, service providers have a strong desire for a planning tool that will give them a consolidated timeline, along with ‘what-ifs’ and the effect of change on key performance indicators. This would allow network planners to adjust their plans to accommodate rapidly occurring changes to the network when needed. Furthermore, through FTTx networks, service providers have the opportunity to deploy high-speed, high-bandwidth broadband access, which will enable them to deliver converged next generation services with differentiated levels of quality.





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**CIS:** Poor customer service and high churn have long affected CSPs. Customers have great freedom to shift, and poor service has been cited as one of the reasons. Can you discuss how service providers can reverse this trend?

**RP:** Service providers continue to focus on how they can differentiate and innovate to provide better service to avoid churn. We see service providers focusing on these key areas:

- Flexible pricing models

Not all customers have the same needs, and personalization of specific plans is vital to keeping customers satisfied. Adoption of new pricing models that better reflect actual network usage, such as pricing models based on time-of-day usage and speed, will safeguard profitability for service providers, reducing churn in the process.

- Creating an integrated customer experience through both the online and retail channels

Sales success is driven by how successfully one can get customers interested in learning about, shopping for, and purchasing the entire range of product offerings. Yet, too often CSPs have disconnected shopping and purchasing processes. The Amdocs Universal Storefront enables service providers to offer, sell and service their physical, network, and value-added services with one back-end architecture in a Web 2.0 portal framework, thereby creating a consistent experience across all channels.

According to industry statistics, one out of four consumers who walk into a service provider's retail store intending to make a purchase, leaves without doing so, which represents approximately \$2.5 billion in lost annual revenue for device sales in the U.S. alone. The primary reason is the poor experience that customers often receive, and can be attributed to the complexity of systems and processes with which store representatives have to cope. Amdocs Retail Experience is a new solution that empowers service providers' retail sales associates to seize every revenue opportunity in their stores while delivering a differentiated brand experience.

- Focusing on outsourcing core operations

We also see CSPs focusing on outsourcing core operations to enable them to focus on bringing new services to market and enhancing the customer experience. They have a dual challenge. One is cutting costs; the other is focused on innovating and bringing new services to market quickly and lucratively.

**CIS:** Provide a picture of the business services, in particular to high-volume users, such as contact centers, offered by CSPs. What does it look like now and how do you envision it five years hence?


**RP:** For service providers, the call center is the primary channel for handling customers' purchase, technical and billing issues. Other channels (e.g., retail, dealers, field service) also depend on the call center for assistance to complete their busi-

ness processes, which further increases the call center workload.

As a result, most service providers face high operational costs in their call center, and most are launching various programs to reduce these costs (e.g., training and tutorial tools, employee incentive plans, outsourcing and telecommuting). However, some of these programs focus on operational metrics, like average handling time, and often end up impacting the customer experience. And although more customers prefer to use the Internet to serve themselves, most CSPs' current online environment is not sufficient and, therefore, these customers continue to call.

The connected world will further intensify this situation, as customers will have to face an even broader portfolio of connected products and services they could purchase and use and, as a result, will require more assistance.

To address this new world in a cost effective manner, service providers need to invest in enhancing all their sales and support channels, making purchase and service transactions more simple and consistent. This can only be achieved by harnessing all the channels to work together to provide a superior multi-channel customer experience.



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This includes empowering first-line agents to resolve issues without escalation, streamlining systems and processes for other channels so they become more self-sufficient, ensuring consistent and accurate customer and product information across all channels. It also entails facilitating the transition of purchase and service transactions between the channels (e.g., transition the customer's online shopping cart to be picked up in a store).

Finally, service providers must drive self service adoption by making it simpler and more intuitive, as well as by providing incentives for every assisted channel to train and encourage customers to use self service. Only with a holistic multichannel approach can service providers drive growth from the connected world, contain their operational costs and ensure a delightful customer experience.

**CIS:** What is new and coming down the pike from Amdocs to meet CSPs' needs?

**RP:** Based on our vision of the connected world, Amdocs recently introduced its Amdocs CES 8 Portfolio, which allows service providers to improve the customer experience by better integrating end-to-end business, operation support systems, and delivery of services.

CES 8 is designed to help service providers expand more quickly by realizing connected-world opportunities and turning possibilities into profits; exposing existing network, IT and data assets to innovate and profit; and rapidly defining and launching complex products while reducing time to value. CES 8 enables CSPs to differentiate themselves through a unique, real-time customer experience across touch points, personalize and monetize customer interactions and build customer loyalty and competitive advantage. CES 8 permits them to run leaner by such as by maximizing network and IT utilization and improve operational performance and lower costs.

The business imperative to do more in the connected world may seem daunting, especially when today's challenges – fast-growing capacity demand, insufficient ARPU, aggressive competi-

tors and more – are taking the bulk of resources. But, by leveraging their unique assets and core capabilities, service providers can succeed in today's world and thrive in a network-connected future. Amdocs will continue to invest in the CES 8 Portfolio to enable service providers to thrive in the connected world. **CIS**

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# Managing Through Disasters

Disasters of all kinds can strike at any time, any where. As contact centers become increasingly invaluable to their organizations, they need methods and solutions that can enable them to manage through these events. That includes avoiding, or if that is not possible, preparing for and staying in operation during them, or if the worst happens, orderly shut down and quick recovery.



Dick Csaplar is senior research analyst, virtualization and storage, [Aberdeen](#) Group, a Harte-Hanks Company. In his report, “Disaster Downtime – How Much Does It Cost?” ([www.tmcnet.com/32801.1](http://www.tmcnet.com/32801.1)) companies reported that downtime can cost as much as \$1 million - \$3 million per hour.

What type of downtime disasters are most likely to occur? Csaplar says “micro events,” meaning the loss of a power supply, disk drive crash, hacker, virus or accidental data deletion, are much more common disasters impacting contact centers than “macro events,” like blackouts, floods, terrorist attacks, hurricanes, earthquakes or tornadoes.

Even a small disaster can leave an unprepared facility crippled. Bill Durr, principal global solutions consultant, [Verint](#) Witness Actionable Solutions, pointed to a water main break that caused six feet of water to fill the basement of the Dallas County Records building, shutting down the county’s computer system for nearly a week. Many of the county’s departments were impacted by the disaster, as access to data was limited and computers were rendered useless.

To minimize the harm from micro and macro events, the Aberdeen Group researcher points to a series of best-in-class (BiC) practices in another report, “Disaster Avoidance and Disaster Recovery: Making your Datacenter Disaster Resilient” ([www.tmcnet.com/32802.1](http://www.tmcnet.com/32802.1)).

These include creating formal and regularly updated business continuity/disaster recovery (BC/DR) plans, tracking DR events and reporting them against the plans, having a senior manager responsible for DR performance and regular testing of them.

In putting together a BC/DR plan, a major philosophy of disaster avoidance is to eliminate any single point of failure, Csaplar points out. Spreading assets across electrical grids, climate zones and storm paths can greatly reduce the effect of a macro event. However introducing more computers, networks and phone lines into the equation increases the likelihood of micro events. Contact centers are dependent on technologies that can and do fail.

“You have to look at all contingencies and measure the potential impacts,” recommends Csaplar. “That way you can have an intelligent conversation about the amount of downtime you can afford versus the amount of investment to ensure against it. In our research, we found that 33 percent of BiC organizations know their hourly cost of downtime and use it for planning and investment purposes.”

## The Hosted Solutions Option

To survive macro events/disasters, contact centers need to back up applications and data off site. Employing hosted solutions, such as routing and dialing, recording, scheduling, and e-screening/training, is one strategy to avoid losing valuable software while enabling seamless service to customers from staffers’ homes and from temporary locations. Hosting can also limit micro events and prompt urgent recovery for IT reliability, as support is not the tremendous cost it can be, but is, in fact, a key selling and client retention point for providers. It also avoids potential compatibility issues that may arise if firms use live agent outsourcers as backups.

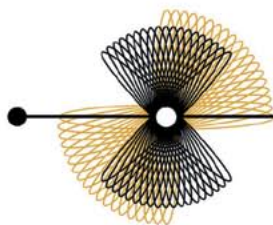
Jeremy King, executive vice president, technology and products, [LiveOps](#), points out that not all contact centers have or can justify backup power. His firm protects its servers with battery-energized



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UPS system and generator backups, along with multiple data centers to enable applications to function if there is a major outage. Also, most contact centers do not have dual Internet connectivity or immediate access to a range of carriers that can be switched at a moment's notice, which LiveOps provides to protect against what he says are "fairly common" Internet or telephony outages.

inContact has built in BC/DR from the ground up. Its applications are housed on servers connected to network points of presence that are located in two facilities, in Dallas, Tex. and Los Angeles Calif. These centers are supported and monitored by a 24/7 carrier-grade Network Operations Center (NOC) located at its corporate headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah. In the event of failure, the NOC can operate remotely.

The Dallas and Los Angeles sites lie in different climatic and geologic zones, meaning if one facility is knocked out, it is highly unlikely the other will also collapse. Each center features earthquake- and explosion-resistant construction. They have redundant servers and cooling with mirrored data backup between centers via leased lines. By the same token, Salt Lake City is in a separate zone from the two server locations.

InContact has generator-backed-up UPS systems, fault tolerance, redundant network components and redundant ISP connections and RAID technology. There is database and logged calls replication. Voice/data connectivity is provided by multicarrier routing agreements with Tier 1 providers. This ensures that, even when there are widespread outages on one carrier, service continues on the others.

The company also has hardened phone and data networks in its corporate offices and automated inbound office call handling. It can use home agents, technicians and other professionals to support critical customer care and operational functions, should the corporate building become compromised.

Contactual's Advanced Virtual Tenant Architecture provides a multi-platform, fully redundant architecture that is deployed in five data centers worldwide. Tenants are virtualized, so they are not tied to any particular server. If there is a need to switch platforms, recovery time is less than one minute and customers' configuration data, prompts, recording, historical data and all other aspects are preserved.

Contactual's solution makes it easy for contact center agents to work from any location. Its Agent Desktop is 100 percent Web-based and firewall friendly, with no plug-ins or downloads to configure and no special equipment required at the agents' locations.

"On-premises solutions are extremely costly and time-consuming to duplicate and maintain, and typically require specialized hardware and software to support agents working remotely," explains Kimberly Odom, senior director of marketing at Contactual. "While organizations may have a back-up call center provided by an outsourcer that can be utilized in case of a disaster, the interaction flows and systems being used are different, which hampers recovery efforts."

## Alerting and Staying in Touch with Employees, Customers

The often literally life-and-death key to coping with disasters is instructing and drilling employees on disaster plans, so they can be executed safely and effectively. This requires methods and tools that rapidly and clearly alert and inform and enable communication with staff.

Electronic reporting, such as readerboards, wall displays and desktop software that deliver operational and performance metrics are a great means of communicating impending or current disasters and what steps to take. Agents and supervisors already know to glance at these screens and lines and, in emergencies, IMs or audible alarms can be used to drive attention to them.

LCD screens are becoming a popular electronic reporting mechanism. Spectrum's VectraView software can drive disaster drill and actual event information to strategically placed units wherever they are, whether on call floors, in break, conference and training rooms and in reception areas. They can also deliver live media, such as weather warnings and news about accidents, derailments, fires and floods or other events that may impede employees' commutes.

Disaster alerts and updates via electronic reporting can also be delivered to agents and supervisors at home or remotely or in temporary locations. Inova Solutions' Desktop Presenter solution is preconfigured for easy deployment on desktops and laptops alike, with no on-site IT staff assistance needed. All out-of-center staff have to do is load the applications into their computers and they can connect to Inova's LightLink middleware, which manages the reporting when they first log in; they will need to be given permission including password access beforehand.

Automated hosted outbound notification solutions can instantly alert, inform and ensure continued communication between agents, supervisors and customers, and are accessible through most any device. They can supply key numbers to call and employee or supplier identifiers, websites to log into or, when delivered by e-mail, attachments or links to documents and resources.

These tools are becoming increasingly effective. MIR 3's notification platform, inEnterprise version 2.19, provides increased robustness and power for tighter integration with leading business continuity and IT applications via expanded API functionality. There are also improved workflow capabilities for enhanced ease of use and intuitive operations. The solution also enables call bridging into contact centers, emergency lines and conference calls.

Varolii recently introduced a comprehensive workforce continuity suite with four distinct offerings:

- Varolii First Responder quickly notifies response team members and executives of incidents, fosters cooperation with real-time status, and then effectively communicates when the incidents have subsided. Administrators can generate an immediate message and then automatically escalate





to an alternative communication channel if the first try doesn't get through.

- Varolii Enterprise Business Continuity rapidly expands communication from the first response team to a worldwide workforce, accomplishing this in minutes, compared to hours for typical manual phone-tree emergency communications.
- Varolii Employee Accountability combines outbound notifications with inbound messaging capabilities so companies can keep employees informed, collect and act upon real-time information about employees' status, determine where assistance is needed and minimizes downtime by gaining a clear picture of staff availability.
- Varolii Pandemic Planning notifies employees of their company's pandemic plan, supports telecommuting and other HR procedures, communicates healthcare-related information and gathers status from individual employees.

The key to effective notifications is finding and using available communications paths to personnel wherever they are – in the centers, at home or in mobile environments – and to suppliers and key customers. This requires dynamic switching to alternate routes. Equally critical is having the messages prepared ahead of time based on all possible scenarios. When these events about to or have occurred is not when one should try to compose what to say to others.

The **Zeacom** Communications Center (ZCC) Executive Mobile feature has a web based module, which allows telephony control

and access to presence from a web based GUI which users could log into from their homes. Staff can set current "location" to "home" which essentially redirects all extension calls to home or mobile numbers. ZCC conferencing functionality allows organizations to remain connected with their staff and teams, enabling them to collaborate with each other no matter their location. ZCC also provides outbound IVR alerts and notifications.

The Everbridge emergency notification system (ENS) helps organizations quickly and reliably communicate across multiple contact channels, including mobile phones, landlines, smartphones, wireless PDAs, e-mail, and text messaging, in the order specified by individual preference, until messages are delivered and confirmed by recipients. The Everbridge ENS leverages an intelligent communication platform spanning message delivery across 30-plus different contact paths. Integration between Everbridge's Aware ENS application and iView Systems incident management and reporting product enables firms to seamlessly collect all information related to incidents in real time and trigger mass notifications based on predefined criteria. They can quickly and easily ensure that all necessary individuals are notified and aware of serious events without wasting time toggling between multiple applications.

"Because the average person experiences an 80 percent reduction in their ability to process information when a disaster strikes, we provide a message repository and scenario management capability so organizations can prepare message libraries and message maps in advance," says Marc Ladin, vice president of global marketing at Everbridge.

## Lessons Learned From Hurricane Katrina

August 2010 marks the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, which was one of the most devastating storms to have hit the United States. According to Wikipedia, at least 1,836 people lost their lives in the actual hurricane and in the subsequent floods, with total property damage estimated at over \$90 billion. While such events will continue to happen, what is important is what can be learned to avoid, or at least minimize, the effects and recover rapidly from them.

Sitel is a leading BPO firm with contact centers worldwide, including in the stricken states. That includes in Bogalusa, La., which had been severely hit, but which survived the infamous storm.

Kathleen Banashak, senior vice president, operations support, Enterprise PMO at Sitel, reports that the most important lesson her firm learned is that disaster communications must occur at the proper time and to the right audience.

Sitel has a communication strategy and plan that enables it to assemble a core response team within minutes of receiving alerts. All first-line managers know to immediately reach out and verify the status of every employee. Client

services team members engage and alert others through mobile phones and text messaging, "which have improved our ability to do so quickly and efficiently," says Banashak.

Sitel can also send broadcast messages to mobile phone numbers. Its IT department has set up a satellite phone solution for sites in high-risk areas to enable communication with the leadership team in an at-risk area, in the event that mobile phone services are overwhelmed.

The firm has a communications team that is not part of the recovery team, which facilitates all elements of communication. This allows the operations team to focus on response and recovery.

Sitel BC/DR plans include preparation activities, response activities and recovery activities. All leaders are trained and knowledgeable about the elements of the plan and the importance.

"In the five years since Katrina, Sitel has been able to successfully apply lessons learned to such disasters as the U.S. Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, along with the Typhoon Ondoy and Cyclone Parma that hit the Philippines and, most recently, in response to the earthquake in Chile," says Banashak.



## Managing Dispersed Workforces

When disasters loom or strike, knowing and tracking where your agents and supervisors are and being able to schedule them appropriately becomes critical to ensuring effective response and recovery. Counting heads is no longer an option when facilities have to be evacuated and staff dispersed to temporary locations, while other centers' employees have to be called in to handle the extra load.

Having an integrated workforce optimization (WFO) suite is vital in these circumstances, says Verint's Durr. WFO suite solutions offer Web-based portals, such as an agent portal where frontline workers can view their schedules, access scorecards, connect with supervisors and review performance, among other day-to-day functions. These types of unified solutions help ensure the proper management of a dispersed workforce in an emergency.

"When a crisis unfolds, multiple facilities and at-home agents must function as a single, seamless entity," Durr points out.

At-home working is a proven BC/DR solution. Distributing workforces minimizes loss of life and injuries, and severed and shrunk revenues and service from localized or regional disasters. It also provides protection from massive power outages. Yet even at-home solutions can be disrupted by events.

Alpine Access, an exclusively home-agent BPO firm, minimizes these possibilities by implementing multiple remote server access for its home agents' Windows-based applications. Its architecture has fast application deployment, implementation and restoration to a client's network in the event of failure. When a disrupting event is forecast or identified, the clients' databases can be moved to a secondary server out of harm's way and the workload transferred to remote agents who are already on the clients' secure network to continue business as usual.

TeleTech offers home agents as part of a comprehensive array on domestic, nearshore and offshore bricks-and-mortar contact center services. It recently expanded its TeleTech@Home service to provide technology and BC/DR solutions.

Todd Stott, TeleTech executive director converged communication says if home agents are geographically dispersed from the brick and mortar centers they support, as his firm recommends, they typically are not faced with the same disaster situations. For the rare occurrences they are, there should be advance planning and, if need be, investments.

Firms should encourage employees to monitor local news and weather information so that they can remain abreast of crucial evacuation or safety information, and share any emergency response information the companies receive. They should also account for all home/remote employees following disasters and provide emergency support, if needed. Home agents may also require UPS systems and wireless telephone access.

"Companies should devise a formal communications plan and utilizing alternative contact methods if traditional communications fail," recommends Stott. **CIS**

### The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

**Alpine Access**  
[www.alpineaccess.com](http://www.alpineaccess.com)

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[www.contactual.com](http://www.contactual.com)

**Everbridge**  
[www.everbridge.com](http://www.everbridge.com)

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## Multilingual Communications During Disasters

The United States is becoming a multilingual country: English and principally Spanish, but also Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese and Korean, which means needing to have people who can speak these languages to connect with customers. When disasters threaten or strike, these employees may disperse to their homes or evacuation centers with their colleagues, resulting in the loss of that key capability at a time when calls flood in from victims, including those whose native language is not English.

One way to ensure language continuity is to consider partnering with a language service provider (LSP) for interpretation and

translation support. LSPs have a network of highly qualified linguists located globally, in different climatic and geological zones (i.e., out of harms way), ready to take critical calls on demand.

Language Services Associates (LSA) is a large and growing LSP with 5,000 global linguists who interpret and translate, in over 200 language offerings, for more than 2,000 clients worldwide across all industry segments, including contact centers. Its services can be set up very quickly and its implementation process includes various forms of user training, from how to use dual handset telephones to tips for working with interpreters.



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## Changing Needs, Changing Carriers

A decade or so ago, contact centers' carrier needs and purchases were fairly simple. They sought – and carriers focused on – delivering predominantly voice traffic, with a small amount of e-mail, at low volume rates from regional or nationwide carriers for single or networked multiple locations. The calls mostly terminated and originated at ACDs and predictive dialers housed on switches and boards at formal employer-owned facilities. Work-at-home for agents was in its very early days.



Today, contact center environments and needs are much more complex. Chat, e-mail, SMS/text, IVR/speech recognition, and video just over the horizon, driven by wireless devices and social media are adding to the complexity and are slowly supplanting live agent voice. Agents and supervisors are working from home and remotely, connected via landlines and/or mobile phones. There are now many more choices and options available to contact centers for carrier services.

### The IP Shift

One of most important communications options for contact centers is whether to go with VoIP through SIP trunking and away from circuit-switched TDM (a.k.a. PSTN or POTS). SIP is being offered by specialized carriers, such as [AireSpring](#), Broadvox, and Cbeyond, and by established carriers, like AT&T, PAETEC and Sprint. SIP carriers are hungry and are competitive.

Peter Radizeski, founder and CEO, RAD-INFO, a telecommunications consulting firm, sees three key drivers to IP/SIP. The first is that with SIP, contact centers can buy “all-they-can-eat” plans, meaning they can oversubscribe on the numbers of lines they need, giving them cost-effective flexibility to handle call spikes and limited-length inbound and outbound programs. In contrast, they have to purchase TDM-based PRI circuits, one line or bundle of lines at a time.

The second push is cutting outbound predictive-dialed calling costs prompted by when established carriers began assessing surcharges for attempted but abandoned calls. There are reports that carriers are experiencing traffic congestion as a result of them but, because they fell below the standard six-second billing increments, this led to lost revenues. Contact centers,

on the other hand, saw these fees as added costs for uncompleted calls from which they derived no benefit.

“Carriers like [Qwest](#) cared about call completion because they were missing out on revenues, but SIP carriers like [AireSpring](#) didn't care about that,” says Radizeski.

The last key motivator is that SIP/IP gives contact centers more flexibility, both cost-and- rate-wise, in supporting home-based agents and satellite offices than TDM. Contact centers incur long distance charges on TDM when inbound calls are routed to home agents outside of local calling areas from the switches, and outbound calls made manually or by hosted dialers.

AT&T sees significant adoption of SIP trunking into contact centers using its IP toll-free services, reports spokesperson Jenny Bridges. This is driven by them wanting to converge voice and data traffic over a single network, and also to support home and small offices at a reasonable cost, versus doing so in a TDM environment. Also, the common denominator of the SIP protocol opens the door to many applications that may have been prohibitively complex and/or expensive in a TDM world to another tier of users that may have not have the staff or expertise to deploy those applications in a TDM environment.

SIP trunking is also becoming more versatile. Verizon's IP Trunking is now qualified for Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2. Businesses employing Microsoft unified communications (UC) software can now combine its capabilities with [Verizon](#) VoIP, achieving cost savings and improved IT telephony resource management.

“By using our WAN and Verizon SIP Trunking capabilities integrated with [Microsoft](#) Office Communications Server 2007 R2,



we have reduced telephony circuit costs by more than \$350,000 per year,” reports Jamie Ryan, chief information officer at [Aspect](#).

So is there any reason for contact centers to buy TDM as opposed to SIP trunking? Only in environments where there is a need for consistently very high call quality and where the callers expect it and the consequences are lost revenues and customers, such as direct response infomercials and high-end sales, says Radizeski. Even then, TDM/PRI can be a backup to SIP trunks or vice versa.

### Carrier-Hosted Contact Center Services

There is a big shift underway to move contact center applications, including inbound and outbound routing, IVR, dialing, workforce optimization and e-learning/training, to the cloud. While most carriers have tended to shy away from app hosting – Radizeski explains their culture is to sell their traditional services rather than new software that must be supported – those that offer them are boosting their offerings and are demonstrating their worth.

Qwest, which has been acquired by CenturyLink, recently added Qwest iQ On Demand IVR service to its Qwest iQ Contact Center suite. The solution, powered Angel.com’s core technology, includes IVR enhanced with voice mail, speech rec, call recording, and reporting and analytics. With Qwest iQ On Demand IVR, contact centers can deploy fast, affordable and customizable automated voice applications on a pay-per-use model.

AT&T’s Hosted Integrated Contact Services includes the flexibility to design, deploy and change speech applications and routing plans through a simple Web-based customer interaction portal. It also allows customers to add more agents or phone ports on demand, and it can automatically increase capacity up to 20 percent above installed levels to handle unexpected bursts of traffic.

Telus provides a comprehensive array of hosted contact center applications, along with voice, data, conferencing and business continuity services. It also provides home-agent/teleworking and UC solutions.

Telus has firsthand knowledge of what goes into a successful home agent program. It supports teleworkers corporate-wide, including its contact centers, following a stunningly successful pilot. In it, attrition rates dropped by 20 percent and 82 percent of participants said teleworking had an impact on their desire to stay with the firm. Teleworking enhanced agent productivity by 25 percent and lowered absenteeism by 60 percent, while saving agents 13,865 hours of commute time and \$125,000 in fuel and car maintenance costs. The program also cut CO2 by emissions by 127 tons and air pollutants by over four tons. Many of Telus’ Vancouver, B.C., Canada staff worked from home during the 2010 Winter Olympics held in that city.

### Are Toll-Free Numbers Going Away?

In 2008, New Jersey Transit (NJ Transit), the third-largest transit agency in the U.S., disconnected its toll-free customer service numbers, except for TTY access. It, like many public agencies and private companies, has been diverting calls away from live agents

through the Internet, including a mobile-enabled site, and with proactive means such as automated outbound text alerts.

New Jersey residents, like many others across North America, have been switching from TDM to VoIP, making long-distance charges irrelevant. Also, North Americans are becoming used to paying per contact, as their counterparts in other parts of the world have long done, through their text messaging rates.

As with many private firms, NJ Transit is cash-strapped, and needs to devote its limited resources to maintaining product quality. Yet, firms need to balance costs with attracting and retaining customers.

Moreover some of benefits of toll-free numbers are being offered by lower-cost alternatives. Verizon Business has bolstered its IP capabilities with a new local origination feature, which enables businesses using local telephone numbers to benefit from the same intelligent routing and call management capabilities traditionally available only with toll-free numbers.

Does this mean the end of the line for toll-free? Not yet. Few organizations have followed NJ Transit’s lead.

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Peter Radizeski thinks there is still a clear path ahead for toll-free services for cultural and practical reasons. Customers expect no-charge calling. Toll-free numbers are also effectively used in business-driving branding, such as 1-800-FLOWERS.

"Companies no longer have to have toll-free numbers, but they are not going to get rid of them and they are not going to miss an opportunity to grow and retain customers," says Radizeski.

Mike Giulivo, InfoCision's supervisor, I3 Support Call Center Technologies, is not seeing any fading away of toll-free numbers, at least not yet. If anything, his firm is managing an ever-growing list of numbers as clients use toll-free numbers to track responses to and effectiveness of particular advertising.

"However, as the use of other media expands, such as the Internet and company websites, as well as applications such as text, chat and e-mail, the ability to manage these contact streams becomes

important for a company like ours," says Giulivo. "As the use of cell phones expands and more people abandon their home landlines, we may see the toll-free number become extinct when making a call to any number anywhere does not have an added cost to the caller. Then the use of toll free numbers becomes irrelevant." **CIS**

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## InfoCision on Carrier Services

The best source for insight on carrier services and contact centers is arguably the contact centers. InfoCision Management Corporation has 32 centers at 12 locations plus home-based agents. Here are the highlights of our interview with Mike Giulivo, InfoCision's Supervisor, I3 Support Call Center Technologies:

**CIS:** Outline the services carriers provide for InfoCision

**MG:** InfoCision uses a number of carriers for different services and for different reasons. For instance, for inbound calls, we have dedicated circuits from four carriers (Verizon, AT&T, Qwest, and Global Crossing). For outbound calls, we primarily use Global Crossing. These carriers also provide other services, such as MPLS (Global Crossing and Verizon) and point-to-point circuits (AT&T, Qwest and Level 3).

Cost and service are the drivers for the selection of services. Carriers typically have different cost structures based on geographic locations and we try to use carriers that will offer the best overall cost for a particular service. Naturally, the service provided has to work well and have features that further our goals. Customer support is very big, especially when there are outages. Our company lives by the delivery of carrier services and, if there are problems, the carrier we use must have an easy way to report those problems, provide timely updates on the issues and have competent technicians to work with us through any resolution process.

**CIS:** Outline how InfoCision manages its carrier relationships. What are the typical issues that crop up and how do you handle them?

**MG:** All of our carriers have a local presence and a team of people dedicated to serve our account. These people know us, our business and our needs. They are aware of the critical role their services play in our business and are ready to do whatever they can to support us. We work together as partners and they are available to help us plan and deploy new services. They are

very aware of the competitive situation and that they may or may not get specific business from us. But, even when business is won or lost, we strive to maintain our relationships because needs change and new opportunities arise all the time, and they could be the winner or loser the next time around.

We usually meet with our carrier teams in person or via conference call at least once per week to keep track of any outstanding orders or issues. With our diverse client base, there is always some request for some service or routing that one or another carrier may be able to deliver. They all have particular strengths and unique services that we try to leverage to enhance the services we can deliver to our clients.

Sometimes our clients will drive us to use specific carriers as well. If the client uses a particular carrier and would like to overflow calls to us or have us as one of their routing options, it makes sense for us to utilize that carrier too.

**CIS:** Is InfoCision switching to VoIP for call handling and if so, why?

**MG:** We do some VoIP today, but will be expanding that as we upgrade some of our systems. We will use VoIP or SIP to process calls from the delivery point from the carrier through to the workstation of the Communicator. At this point, inbound and outbound calls will be delivered in the traditional way, TDM via DS3 and PRIs and connected to gateways to be converted to IP. We will likely be converting the inbound traffic from the carriers to IP in the near future as well. This seems to be a stable offering and has additional routing features we find desirable. Using IP trunks for predictive dialing is not a service that most carriers can support today. The high number of call initiations per second (50 or more) usually outstrips the capacity of the carrier hardware currently in place. Using IP trunks for predictive dialing is not a service that most carriers can support today.



## Back to Basics: All-in-One versus Individual Best-of-Breed Solutions

For years, companies have debated the trade-offs between all-in-one communications solutions and best-of-breed or point solutions. Each has its advantages, but recently, the trend has shifted toward the all-in-one model.

Don Van Doren, president of Vanguard Communications and Joe Staples, chief marketing officer for Interactive Intelligence, recently sat down to discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of each. The following are excerpts from their conversation. Download the full white paper at [www.inin.com/whitepapers](http://www.inin.com/whitepapers).

**All-in-one can't really mean "All" in one. What applications can a customer reasonably expect from a single vendor?**

Van Doren: "All" refers to the range of applications needed to support a specified business activity, and becomes more comprehensive over time. A decade ago, all-in-one call centers would build on basic PBX functionality to include ACD, IVR, quality monitoring, and WFM. Today, an ACD has to route, manage, monitor, and report on multiple channels, not just telephones, to get more information to agents and other specialists inside and outside the center.

Staples: That's the same trend we're seeing. Many contact centers are also now looking for capabilities such as post-interaction satisfaction surveys, content management, and speech analytics.

Van Doren: Another important distinction lies in the origin of an all-in-one solution's capabilities. Are they all developed by the vendor or are some components OEMed from other suppliers or products of acquisition? There are potential implications for how well

the components work together in the contact center environment.

Staples: Just because the sales person sells all the items doesn't mean it's an all-in-one platform. A single company may offer a solution that includes ACD, outbound dialing, IP PBX and IVR, but unless each application was developed on the same underlying platform, the customer could still be strapped with multiple administrative interfaces, costly integration projects and a lack of functionality.

**Are there other savings from an all-in-one solution vs. point systems?**

Staples: Along with lower integration costs, reduced administrative overhead is a major all-in-one cost saver. A study by [BenchmarkPortal](#) showed that, on average, an all-in-one contact center of roughly 200 agents requires one-fourth the administrative resources of multipoint systems. The study also showed the total annualized technology cost per agent in an all-in-one environment is less than half that of a multipoint offering.

**Should customers worry about decreased functionality if they move away from best-of-breed multipoint offerings?**

Van Doren: Decreased functionality is something to consider. However, an enterprise must understand its source of competitive differentiation, and whether specialized capabilities in the contact center will contribute to that. We've seen situations where specific

functionality was needed to provide unique, differentiating services. In those cases, a more standard solution may not be the answer, even if part of an efficient all-in-one suite.

**Is it necessary for a customer to throw out everything in which they have already invested?**

Staples: All-in-one doesn't mean all-at-once. A good all-in-one platform will still have certified integrations to third-party CRM systems, call recording systems, workforce management applications, and other PBX or IP PBX platforms. A customer can choose to keep those other products or, over time, migrate away from them as they continue to deploy the added functionality from the all-in-one platform.

**Any last comments?**

Van Doren: I mentioned architecture several times. Architecture is destiny. By that, I mean the capabilities you will be able to deploy in the future will be built on the architectures of the solutions you purchase today. You have to get under the covers to really understand how these are put together and how they will work in your environment. Be sure that you are getting the platforms you need now to support your vision for your customer interaction strategy of the future.

Staples: I clearly fall into the all-in-one camp. There are so many reasons why it makes better sense. From the cost reductions around administration and integration, to the ease of deployment, to the benefits of dealing with one vendor, it all adds up to a cleaner, more streamlined approach. For the most part, all-in-one offerings have matured to the point that they have the level of functionality that customers require. **CIS**



**Convergys ([www.convergys.com](http://www.convergys.com))** is now making multi-channel interaction management easier, more deployable, flexible and affordable with the 5.0 release of its Dynamic Decisioning Solution. The offering codifies, centralizes and uses real-time business rules and policy management driven by customer data. While previous versions required data and event access behind the firewall, Dynamic Decisioning Solution 5.0 is deployable completely in the cloud. This feature effectively eliminates operational differences between implementing Dynamic Decisioning Solution locally versus remotely in an on-demand mode.

**Gryphon Networks ([www.gryphonnetworks.com](http://www.gryphonnetworks.com))** has updated its PrivacyAdvisor solution to deliver guaranteed compliance and preference management directly integrated with Salesforce CRM into that software's lead, contact and account screens. It is reportedly the first tool to use an easily understood traffic light metaphor to simplify compliance, with green signaling "Ok to Contact" and red warning "Not Ok to Contact." Features include exemption management to preserve leads and prevent over-suppression, opt-outs that can be added or removed by customer preference, bulk certification of hundreds of thousands of records and installation via web link for off-the-shelf simplicity.

**Interactive Intelligence ([www.inin.com](http://www.inin.com))** is working with an unidentified social media analytics firm to provide an application that would enable customers to capture any mention of them or their products/services on the social Web, including sites such as [Facebook](#), Twitter, YouTube blogs and forums. These mentions would then be e-mailed back to the most appropriate representative or department using the Interactive Intelligence software's multi-channel queuing and routing capability based on business rules such as key words or phrases. Interactive Intelligence is also working with its reseller channel to develop integrated social media applications.

**Lithium Technologies ([www.lithium.com](http://www.lithium.com))** has made its social CRM application available on the Facebook Platform, which it says for the first time combines the focus, expertise, and engagement of customer communities with the broad reach of Facebook. Lithium Community for Facebook instantly transforms a Facebook page into a peer-to-peer support channel where customers can ask questions and get answers from experts who are active in a company's online community. Existing Lithium customers can manage and leverage the best content in their communities and deliver support through Facebook right away. New customers can develop and enhance their customer networks with the aid of Facebook's reach.

**MarketLive ([www.marketlive.com](http://www.marketlive.com))** will be helping companies meet the needs of demanding customers, in turn winning their loyalty and referrals with its new [MarketLive](#) Customer Care and Order Management (CCOM) solution. The solution is designed for and integrated with the latest version of the MarketLive Intelligent Commerce Platform. CCOM gives contact center agents the tools and information they need to provide high quality customer service. Through a complete view of customer history, order status, and account information, agents can easily answer questions, track shipments, place orders, check inventory and process returns and exchanges. In addition, access to complete product catalogs, pricing, and promotions enables

them to up-sell and cross-sell with every customer interaction.

**Maximizer Software ([www.maximizer.com](http://www.maximizer.com))** has come out with the Maximizer CRM 11 Team Edition and enhanced CRM 11 Entrepreneur Edition. The Entrepreneur Edition is tailored for organizations with individual users or as many as five networked users that primarily need contact management functionality. The new Team Edition is designed for organizations with five to 50 networked users that demand more advanced sales opportunity management and collaboration. It offers advanced sales opportunity management, which enables companies to create sales teams within the system with time zone support built into related appointments and tasks. Sales team members can quickly merge customer information with professional HTML e-mail templates for timely sales outreach and follow-up activities.

**NetProspex ([www.netprospex.com](http://www.netprospex.com))** has launched NetProspex Social Step, which integrates comprehensive social media data attached to verified business contact information. The existing NetProspex database spans more than 150 industries and 70 job titles. NetProspex Social Media Intelligence platform include instant access to social media profiles, direct links to social media profiles of target contacts, including Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook, among others. There is social CRM fulfillment; data includes direct social media URLs and social influence. NetProspex clients can gain instant access to the social profiles of their customers and prospects directly from a CRM platform.

**PBworks ([www.pbworks.com](http://www.pbworks.com))** has come out with the PBworks Customer Relationship Edition, which extends CRM solutions, such as Salesforce.com, by offering shared online workspaces for collaborating with customers and prospects throughout the entire customer lifecycle. The new product offers a shared collateral library, advanced activity tracking and connectors with CRM platforms that will allow one-click creation of new prospect and client workspaces, starting with Salesforce.com. It includes all of the functionality in the company's Business Edition, such as unlimited storage for documents and files, full-text search of document content, Mobile Edition access via [BlackBerry](#) and iPhone, and 24/7 customer service.

**VXi Corporation ([www.vxicorp.com](http://www.vxicorp.com))** has released the VXi X100 and X200 USB adapters, designed specifically for applications where voice quality is of the utmost importance, such as contact centers, delivering superior wideband call quality on computers that sounds the same or better than traditional phone systems.

The VXi X100 USB adapter allows users to connect to their existing installed base of VXi, [Plantronics](#) or GN Netcom headsets when migrating to softphone applications. Features include inline mute and volume controls for quick and easy call adjustments with a single touch, wideband audio for rich, natural sounding conversations, a small footprint and lightweight coil cord design that allows end users to switch easily between a laptop and a desktop computer.

The X200 USB adapter is optimized for unified communications and incorporates all the X100's functionality, as well as advanced features, including echo cancellation and digital signal processing – essential attributes in eliminating some of the most persistent issues that can affect voice quality when using VoIP. One-touch answer/end call capabilities greatly improve user performance.

## HD Voice: What's Not To Like?

In his **Industry Insight** blog, Jim Machi, senior vice president, marketing, Dialogic writes:

I [have written] about the growth path of HD voice and how some people think it's growing faster than expected, and some people think it's growing slower than expected. There is definitely a lot of hype about HD voice, which leads me to believe it is growing pretty fast.

Orange UK recently announced that they will be trialing HD voice across several major U.K. cities. Their initial trials, which were done in Moldova, had positive feedback. People claimed that the new HD service was

clearer, eliminating background noise and making voices more distinct and more natural sounding - like being in the same room as the person you're on the phone with!

I can only imagine how HD voice will improve business processes. It will be great for long conference calls, and for calls that have several participants with different accents. I'm sure we've all been on calls where we have to struggle to understand what's being said... hopefully HD voice will solve

these kinds of problems, making communication smoother and increasing productivity!

At any rate, it will be interesting to see what the results are of the HD voice trials in the U.K. If they're positive, Orange plans to go ahead with a U.K.-wide deployment before the end of the summer. I have a feeling people will be really happy with HD voice and the growth path will continue upward. Once I get my HD-capable phone at work, I'll let you know how it works for me.

Visit Jim's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/industry-insight>

## InContact

In his "First Coffee" blog, TMCnet's David Sims writes:

InContact has released an 'eBook' including five IVR best practices. Here's a quick summary:

**The IVR Road Map:** One Internet service provider had big plans for their IVR. Instead of tackling everything at once, they prioritized what things could help them the most and tackled them one at a time. They started by implementing a simple IVR process that informed customers when there was an outage in their zip code. With that little piece of functionality, callers could quickly determine whether they simply needed to wait for a regional issue to be resolved or had a service issue that needed to be proactively addressed.

**Keep it Simple:** One inbound sales contact center tried to put their entire product inventory in their IVR system. They went to a lot of trouble, and actually got it working. However, after all that work, they discovered that the number of products and required IVR choices were very frustrating to callers. Without an agent to help, callers abandoned the effort and sales were lost.

**The Right Way to Use Self-Service:** As we all know, given the choice, customers like

to talk to real people. When it comes to setting up an IVR, help them get to the right person as fast as possible. Over-automated systems frustrate customers and affect their desire to do business with you.

**Make Sure IVR Aligns With Current Processes:** One company implemented a new IVR payment system that utilized a unique integration to their customer accounting system. Although it worked, payments didn't post along the same timeline. When customer's checked to see that the payment had posted online, they panicked because of the time delay in posting. This caused confusion and call volumes to escalate.

**Use a SaaS IVR:** While we may be biased towards InContact, it doesn't change the facts. The facts are that traditional, premise-based IVR solutions involve a significant upfront capital expense, aren't nearly as easy to develop or operate, and are dependent on a technical staff to run. As if that weren't bad enough, every few years they "expire," requiring expensive upgrades to keep running.

Visit David's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/telecom-crm>

## How You Know Amazon Has Made It

In his "Communications and Technology" Blog, Rich Tehrani writes:

Amazon doesn't need me to tell them they have "made it" and with a market cap of \$56B they are obviously doing a lot of things right. Still, this morning I saw my house absolutely littered with new boxes from the company and realized I didn't know what most of the items in the boxes were. [It] seems to me that a company becomes indispensable when they start to deliver products in virtually all the categories of your shopping list from clothes to toiletries.

Visit Rich's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/blog/rich-tehrani>





## ITEXPO West 2010: Meeting New Challenges and Opportunities

**T**here is now the perfect confluence of challenges facing contact centers. Among them are cost-effectively retaining and attracting customers and managing rapidly popular social media and mobile communications. There are also opportunities including cloud computing, unified communications (UC), social media tools and methods and wireless best practices.



**ITEXPO** West, which takes place Oct. 4-6 at the Los Angeles Convention Center, offers the best opportunity to get a full view of what is happening to successfully navigate these challenges, with guidance from experts, suppliers and colleagues.

**TMC** is introducing several new and features key returning subconferences at ITEXPO West 2010 that focus on hot issues. Among those of special interest to contact centers are:

- **SocialCRM Expo**

TMC is offering a unique new opportunity to learn about implementing the social channel in concert with others both live agents and IVR/speech recognition with the Social CRM Expo. Social CRM Expo is the venue to find out more about and to discuss issues such as managing the media and what skills, training and tools are needed and have proven to enable successful use of this channel.

- **Cloud Communications Summit**

The Cloud Communications Summit addresses a growing need of businesses (including contact centers) to integrate and leverage cloud-based communications applications, process enhancement techniques, and network based communications interfaces and architectures. Attendees will learn the fundamentals of cloud-based communications business models, market trends and current large efforts and deployments.

- **SIP Tutorial at ITEXPO**

The SIP Tutorial is a full day training program that will focus on SIP technology. It covers SIP messaging, through server types to security, firewall and NAT operation, SIP trunking, troubleshooting and SIP in unified communications.

As always, there are also several content-specific tracks, enriched for this year's conference. They include:

- **Business solutions**

This track provides an in-depth look at business technology tools. These sessions cover SIP Trunking, HD handsets, presence, hosted versus premise VoIP and bringing social software into the enterprise.

- **Conferencing and collaboration**

Conferencing and collaboration are becoming important tools for contact centers as they enable richer customer interactions while enabling teams in multiple centers and home agents to work closer together. Sessions cover topics including IP-based conferencing, videoconferencing and telepresence.

- **Mobile communications**

More customers and employees are leveraging mobile technologies in their daily work, including in their interactions with customers. Speakers at these sessions will examine this trend, exploring issues such as fixed-mobile convergence, HD voice over smartphones and wireless working from home.

- **Unified communications (UC)**

Unified communications are the virtual meeting floors where customers interact with organizations via live agents and with experts who can help them, wherever they are located through the channels of customers' choosing. These sessions explore multi-supplier integration strategies, security and total cost of ownership

The ITEXPO West show floor is the best opportunity there is to get one-on-one with leading-edge firms who have the solutions. See the demos. Ask probing questions. Come away informed, enlightened and ready to take the next step in obtaining the applications that will make a difference in customer interactions, and relations. Check them out at [insert show URL] as well as the show.

*"As the communications landscape gets more sophisticated, it is imperative you come to conferences to experience everything there is to learn. ITEXPO is the World's Communications Conference. When you leave the show, you will be better equipped in your current job and will have an easier time making the correct decisions on what you need to purchase and how to get the job done correctly."*

*-- Rich Tehrani, CEO, ITEXPO Conference Chairman*

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## VXI's 'Young' (Literally) and Successful Contact Center

**W**here to locate contact centers is one of the most critical and costliest investments an organization can make. The selected community can make or break labor costs, including both wages and churn, and employee skills and quality will impact service and sales. With renovations and outfitting costs running into the millions of dollars and with leases running three to five or more years, this is a decision that has to be made very carefully.



With the economy beginning to turn around, choosing the right sites is becoming even more important, as other employers begin to hire and often draw from the same labor pool. Contact centers need to be in the best communities to meet their needs today and into the future.

Many of the best locales for contact centers are mid-sized industrial cities throughout the Northeast and Midwest United States. They have an attractive combination of an available, educated labor force with a strong work ethic, excellent facilities and voice/data and power connectivity and eager local governments.

VXI Global Solutions, a BPO firm has discovered that one such city, Youngstown, Ohio, has proven such an excellent site that it is expanding there. The firm has 12 contact centers in the U.S. and others in China and the Philippines.

VXI has tripled in business recent years, growing from \$34 million in 2006 to more than \$100 million in 2009. VXI is ranked in Customer Interaction Solutions Top 50 Teleservices Agency in the Top 10 for inbound and in the Top 30 for outbound.

Such strong growth led VXI to approach Susan Arledge and Jeff Pappas of Arledge Partners Real Estate Group ([www.arledgepartners.com](http://www.arledgepartners.com)) in early 2009 to find a 500-seat site that it could move into quickly with the workstations and wiring intact (i.e., a plug-and-play expansion). They visited the

area initially early that year, but there were no such available facilities.

"We looked at a lot of properties throughout the area, including Pittsburgh, Pa. that could be converted for their use, but it wasn't resonating," says Arledge.

Then, when InfoCision moved its contact center from the city-owned former Phar-Mor building at 20 Federal Place in downtown Youngstown to the suburbs that year, the opportunity opened up that Arledge Partners and VXI were looking for on the structure's fourth floor, with the option to expand on the fifth. That meant there was plug-and-play space immediately available.

To seal the deal, Arledge Partners and VXI secured from Youngstown City Council a \$600,000 Community Development Block Grant from funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The city also approved a competitively-priced five-year lease for the company at the building, with a five-year option. The deal included free parking in the downtown area near the building. In turn VXI would pour \$4 million to modify the space for its needs.

VXI signed the agreement in August, 2009. The plan was to ramp up to 500 employees by fall 2010. Renovations started immediately and the center opened on October 1, 2009. To move into the fifth floor, VXI would need an additional 300 to 500 employees.

Just over two months after the opening on December 7, the [Youngstown] Business Journal reported, "the company is moving faster than it had projected and should reach 500 employees by the end of first quarter 2010," said T. Sharon Woodberry city economic development director."

"We were trying to be conservative," Nick Covelli, VXI senior vice president, sales and marketing told the newspaper. "We were aware that demand possibly would be higher."

"The rapid employee growth is being driven by a number of components. [These included] increased demand from existing clients, support for new clients, and the work force in the Mahoning Valley [Youngstown area]," Covelli told the paper. "Comments have been positive on the part of the management team regarding the quality and work ethic of the workers, and the attitude they bring to the job."

The VXI executive's words were prescient. The Business Journal reported on June 17, 2010 that City Council had approved enabling legislation that would allow the city to enter into a \$2 million float-loan agreement with VXI to help it expand to and take over the entire fifth floor.

"Incentives from the city and the support of council are critical so the company can make a decision on where to expand its operations, she [Woodberry] explained", reported the newspaper. **CIS**



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**Rob Lynch**  
CEO, VSP Global<sup>SM</sup>

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## How Brand Ambassadors Can Strengthen Your Message and Build Customer Loyalty

In this day and age, every company should recognize that having a strong brand is essential to success. But, recognition alone doesn't necessarily translate into effective practice. Brand isn't just a logo, or a letterhead, or your corporate identity. It's not even the product you make. Your brand is how an individual feels about your company – not the way you want them to feel, but how they actually feel.

While you can't completely control individual feelings, you can certainly influence them by properly communicating the qualities that make your brand unique. Consumers need to know who you are, what you do, and why they want your service. They need to have a clear sense of your identity and what makes you stand out. This knowledge gives customers confidence, motivates buying and helps cement loyalty.

Unfortunately, often times, branding – the cornerstone of all marketing efforts – can get lost in call centers (both in-house and outsourced). The reason is simple: call centers are primarily task-oriented. Representatives concentrate on completing specific tasks – taking orders, providing customer service – rather than fortifying your brand. As a result, you miss out on a golden opportunity (one-to-one contact) to bolster brand perception.

But a new approach to taking calls – one that concentrates as much on brand reinforcement as it does on task resolution – has been gaining steam. By employing "Brand Ambassadors" on the phones rather than traditional agents, companies can enhance their brand value with each and every call. The end results not only improve your bottom line in the here and now, but also benefit your organization as it moves into the future.

### What are Brand Ambassadors?

Much like diplomatic ambassadors act as spokespeople for their nations in foreign lands, Brand Ambassadors are



**By Pamela Hamor,**  
*Director of Client Services*  
*InfoCision Management Corporation*

delegates for your company on the phone. They give voice to your brand, speaking on your behalf and conveying the characteristics that define your organization. Brand Ambassadors not only help customers accomplish goals, they reinforce your brand identity – who you are, what you do, and why they need your service.

Brand Ambassadors differ from typical call center representatives in that they are trained to be extremely knowledgeable of your company and your products – not just the specific task in front of them. With Brand Ambassadors, there is a shift from an "order taker" mentality. The focus isn't just on getting the sale - it is also to ensure there is a positive customer experience and the customer leaves the call with a product that meets their needs. They become an integral part of your overall sales and customer lifecycle.

### How do Brand Ambassadors add value?

For Brand Ambassadors, training is typically more in-depth and individuals are educated on all aspects of a product or company. For example, even if the individuals

on the phones are only taking calls for one specific product, they still need to be knowledgeable about complementary products and the role customer service plays after the product is in hand. This inspires confidence and underscores your brand message in the consumer's mind.

As I mentioned previously, the focus of the Brand Ambassador is to ensure that the end result of every call is a positive customer experience. The customer should leave the call with a better understanding of why they need the product. After all, that's what branding is: a promise of value to your customers. Brand Ambassadors reiterate that promise. They also educate the customer on how to resolve any issues in the future (when applicable) and give them an overall positive feeling regarding their purchase or experience.

#### **How can Brand Ambassadors benefit your company?**

Brand Ambassadors offer companies benefits that are both immediate and enduring. The more comprehensive training and education Brand Ambassadors receive (versus standard agents) produces benefits that are instantly evident on the phones. Since Brand Ambassadors are truly schooled in the tenets and specifics of your company, they are much more confident in their interactions with

customers. The confidence of the Brand Ambassador is directly transferred to the customer through the call – producing a positive and rewarding experience that enhances brand value.

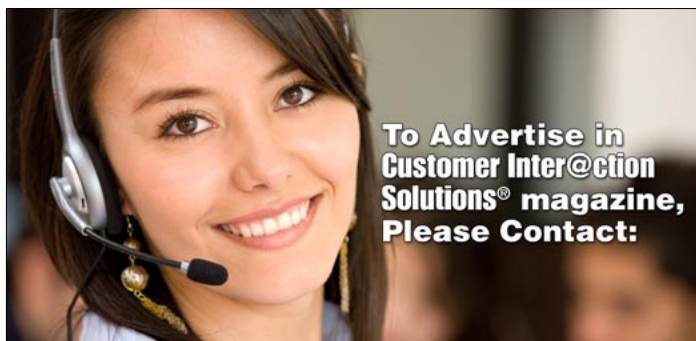
While Brand Ambassadors require more training time up front, they generate results that ultimately produce a higher return on investment (ROI). Their expansive

knowledge base enables them to answer questions more quickly and satisfactorily, streamlining calls and, because they work to make sure customers are fully educated on the product or service of interest, they also cut down on returns and cancellations. Perhaps most importantly, by providing positive experiences and inspiring confidence, Brand Ambassadors

build customer loyalty, cultivate repeat business and lay the foundation for future success. **CIS**

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# Performing Analytics for a Tough Crowd

**C**ontact centers face a tough crowd: customers and executives who are watching their wallets as the economy struggles to expand. Performance analytics solutions can help win them over indirectly and directly, by providing invaluable and timely information to help cut expenses, increase agent effectiveness and output, retain customers, and attract others through referrals (especially via social media), and save sales and grow revenues.

Customer Interaction Solutions contacted a select group of performance analytics professionals to get their insights into the role these solutions play. We asked them questions on:

- General trends and drivers
- Impacts from wireless and social media use as well as speech and text analytics
- New features added to performance analytics solutions and benefits, and
- Solution costs.

The following are comments from these industry thought leaders.

## **Enkata ([www.enkata.com](http://www.enkata.com))**

Ron Hildebrandt, Founder and Senior Vice President of Marketing

There is an emerging need and interest Enkata sees on the part of customers to build a comprehensive analytics plan for the contact center that includes performance analytics and speech, text and desktop analytics. Speech and text analytics will continue to receive a great deal of attention, but confusion arises as to the role they play in operational performance versus voice of the customer or customer sentiment insights. Performance analytics that correlates data from multiple sources will continue to drive KPI and operational improvements. An emerging new category, desktop analytics, will provide an additional, net new data set for performance improvements tied to desktop efficiencies and skills.

There does seem to be a renewed emphasis on understanding and improving the customer experience. But as always, cost and ROI are key drivers in any decision. We see three trends:



1. Companies need a total view of the customer experience that crosses all channels, including voice and Web self-service and live assistance models.
2. First call resolution (FCR) is emerging as the metric of choice to improve the customer experience (customer satisfaction) while reducing costs by eliminating repeat calls.
3. There continues to be growing deployment and reliance on analytics applications that provide insights into the customer experience, but that also correlate data to outcomes with an operational impact on agent performance, processes and continuous improvement

There's clearly a growing use of performance analytics to understand the total customer experience and, particularly, the self-service experience and, as importantly, the experience when moving from self-service to live assistance and visa versa. Unlike speech or text analytics, performance analytics can correlate data from multiple sources, including voice and Web self-service applications. This total view supports operational changes across channels and across the self-service/live assistance experience and identifies where breakdowns in customer service occur – systems, processes, or human resources?

Ironically, self-service applications have placed higher demands on agent skills and performance by virtue of the higher saturation of the complex, more challenging calls they now support. Higher skill requirements place added demands and dependencies on quality monitoring processes and agent development programs such as coaching, training, and self-improvement.

Both of these techniques, speech and text analytics, combined still only provide a limited view of the customer experience focused on voice of the customer issues and customer sentiment. Speech and text analytics are restricted to specific channels,



which is why there is a need for integration of speech for voice channels and text for e-mail and chat.

The integration of data from multiple sources and these multiple analytics applications is a demanding, new requirement to create a total view of the customer experience. Those applications, such as performance analytics that can consolidate data from multiple enterprise and channel sources and distill information from 100 percent of calls, will likely emerge as the core analytics platforms moving forward.

The most important development is the emergence of a new category of performance analytics, desktop analytics. This capability monitors agent desktop activity much in the same way that call recording monitors agent and customer voice calls for quality purposes.

In the case of desktop analytics, the goal is to understand agent behaviors when using the desktop, including application usage, navigation efficiencies, compliance issues, workflow efficiencies, for the purpose of identifying areas for coaching and improvement and for identifying best practices for broader application.

This is a new and exciting area for performance analytics. Today, contact center managers have zero visibility into how agents perform using desktop tools and practices. It is a huge opportunity to dramatically impact average handle times and reduce costs. Enkata's research and feedback from customers indicates that 20 percent to 30 percent of call time is wasted performing non-productive desktop tasks. Consistently, contact center managers ranked inefficient use of knowledge management systems as their highest priority to understand and improve.

High costs in the past were primarily associated with implementation costs due to data source integration requirements. A major new development in this area has been the ability to capture much of the customer transaction data directly from an agent's desktop. In the past, the requirement was to pull data from multiple, disparate data sources throughout the enterprise. That meant higher implementation costs but also longer time to results, sometimes as much as nine months, creating a major barrier to adoption. By pulling data directly from the agent desktops for every customer transaction, the need to integrate with disparate, multiple data sources is all but eliminated. The same projects that took multiple quarters to complete are now able to be completed in one to two months. Enkata believes that this one development will dramatically shift the adoption rates for performance management applications driven by lower cost and faster time to results.

#### **NICE ([www.nice.com](http://www.nice.com))**

Udi Ziv, Chief Product Officer and President of Enterprise Products Group

Performance analytics continues to be a key component in driving the success of an enterprise. Perhaps now more than ever, the focus is on analyzing data to uncover performance issues and increase the effectiveness of performance, especially in the areas that contribute to cost control or cost reduction. Another driver of analytics is cost avoidance, which can be achieved through initiatives that reduce customer churn or increase the handling of more diverse and complex tasks with the same, but better skilled, resources.

As expected, continuing economic challenges tend to put more

pressure on cost than satisfaction. However, the more visionary enterprises are able to correlate satisfaction to costs and address both simultaneously. Performance analytics is a primary tool used to identify and exploit the correlation. The use of analytics to identify topics or issues that can be handled through self service or alternative media instead of calls is not new, but may be seeing a resurgence as companies look for methods to reduce costs.

Further, optimizing customer dynamics is the key to maximizing customer experience while containing costs and streamlining operations. The ability to capture and understand customer intent, analyze that intent to gain insight and use that insight to impact the entire organization is a powerful differentiator for companies in any economy. Optimizing customer dynamics also delivers value across a wide range of business imperatives. These benefits include managing the risks associated with compliance and fraud and streamlining operations to run efficiently and effectively. They provide a customer experience that sets a company apart from its competition and expands value beyond the contact center into sales and marketing organizations, the back office and, ultimately, the entire enterprise.

Customer dynamics optimization includes capturing and understanding customer intent across all channels, including social media. As social networking continues to grow as a result of new services, new media, and a new demographic of users, the ability to monitor and analyze what customers are doing or saying indirectly across multiple channels can create a differentiator for a company. When interactions occur in the form of unstructured data, such as free-form text messaging, tools are needed to mine those interactions for insight. The challenge is determining how to gain access to the interactions and develop an understanding of trends, rather than simply responding to individual issues. Without a dialogue to evaluate, analyzing text out of context on social media may lead to false findings or assumptions.

Integrating business intelligence and analytics with quality, workforce and performance management tools has become an essential step, as has the incorporation of back office management into the performance analytics data set. Extending data capture and analysis to the desktop is a new domain for performance analytics solutions. Capturing desktop application usage, monitoring a process end to end and attaching metadata to enhance the analysis will soon be considered must-have features for quality management, workforce management and performance management. These tools apply to the inbound, outbound, back office environments, and basically anywhere there is a customer transaction or supporting transaction. Applying proven performance analytics processes to this new data set from the desktop will uncover significant opportunities to increase customer satisfaction, improve both employee and customer retention, and reduce costs.

Historically, vendors delivered performance analytics through third-party business intelligence solutions that were sold separately. These solutions tended to be quite expensive as well as only lightly integrated with the vendor systems. A significant shift has taken place whereby vendors can tightly integrate performance analytics solutions in order to greatly increase the value and benefit delivered. In addition to the analytics tool set, vendors are providing extensive metadata definitions. This greatly reduces the time and effort a contact center user expends in exploiting the wealth of data to affect performance in





their organization. The integrated solution approach has also greatly reduced the initial investment and ongoing cost of ownership.

### Panorama Software ([www.panorama.com](http://www.panorama.com))

Rony Ross, Co-founder and CTO  
Contact center managers are realizing more and more that there is a need to define and use KPIs to evaluate employee performance and customer satisfaction. We believe that there is a shift from cost control to improved customer satisfaction, and we see more usage of speech recognition system directed in identifying customer dissatisfaction.

There is a trend to have data at agents' fingertips to help increase customer satisfaction and close calls quicker. It is interesting to see that the contact centers managers prefer to push analytics and KPIs down to the agent level. As customers prefer to have their issues solve in shorter time, and it is a mutual interest also for the contact centers, to ensure that the relevant data is available for the agents. Pushing data in real time to the agent is [therefore] becoming more critical.

Empowering the agents to conduct self-service analytics is another huge trend we are seeing. As contact centers, managers and agents become more sophisticated, the need for self-service analytics, without involving IT is growing. Most of the cases contact centers need to conduct fast analytics on a specific issue and deal with it quickly. Waiting for IT to create views and reports for them, isn't an option any more.

Social intelligence is going to be the fastest growth area in contact centers. Agent will save and share intelligence processes, discuss them in real-time and collaborate with other agents "following the sun". The new systems, like Panorama, have social intelligence embedded in them. These practically bring together the best of the analytics processes among all the group members, sharing best practices within the systems.

A new big area of growth that we see is collaboration between the contact centers and the callers (the customers). Contact centers now allow the callers to conduct their own analytics on bill, products, warranties, allowing more self-service for the callers and quicker resolution time.

We see a growing need for analysis that combines analytics of various sources, for example: quantitative and textual. We see a growing trend to do speech search or text search in analytical data.

We actually see the cost of analytical systems decrease and quite a few vendors

can really show much lower total cost of ownership (TCO) than before. The prevalence of analytical infrastructure systems that utilize industry standards (such as Microsoft's) and that are open for integration with common environments (like Office) makes the TCO paradigm much more affordable. **CIS**

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Soffront Software Inc., a pioneer in the CRM market since 1992, offers an end-to-end CRM solution, spanning sales, marketing, customer service, helpdesk and issue tracking. Soffront CRM solution is truly different and particularly attractive to small and mid-size businesses. The Soffront solution is fully web-based, is built to adapt and can be deployed quickly. Soffront launched its first customer service application in 1993. Soffront customers include small to mid-sized corporations across all industries and divisions of Fortune 500 companies.

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### Awards & Recognition

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- Awarded 2010 CRM Excellence Award from TMC's Customer Interaction Solutions Magazine for helping clients improve their Business Process.
- Received 2005 Entrepreneurial Company of the year Award from Frost & Sullivan for providing affordable end-to-end CRM solutions.

### Testimonials

**Diefendorf Capital Planning Associates:** "We selected Soffront because it gave us the biggest bang for the buck. Using Soffront, we produced a CRM solution on steroids. We are more productive in every area of our business and have increased revenues by 300%" -**Monroe Diefendorf, CEO of DCPA.**

**Edgewood Partners Insurance:** "We are impressed with the software's ease of use and ease of customization, using Soffront's automated tools; we can also more efficiently forecast our sales and predict revenues. Soffront CRM is an affordable, yet robust solution. Additionally, Soffront's technical team is very knowledgeable and willing to help customers." -**Brian Talebzadeh, EPIC's Information Technology Managing Partner**

# The Next-Generation Impact 360® Workforce Optimization Suite



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## THE IMPACT 360 SUITE

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- Discover the root cause of customer and employee behavior.
- Gauge business process effectiveness.
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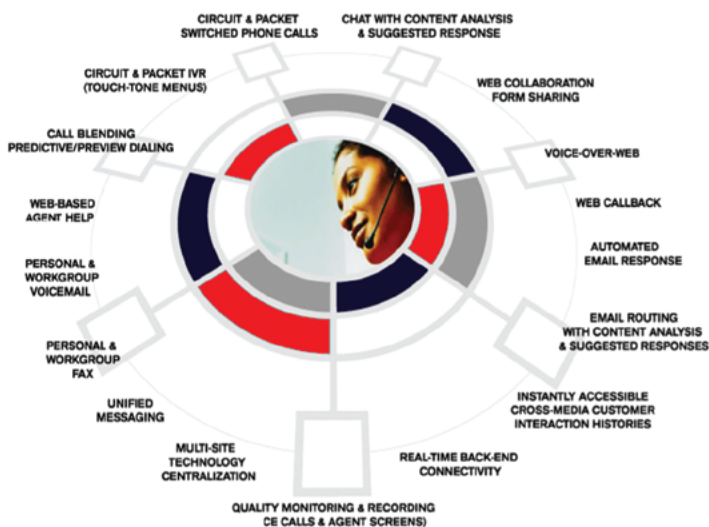
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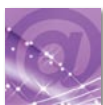
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# 2010 Speech Technology Excellence Awards

Speech technology is becoming a prominent voice in customer interactions. Customers are increasingly having “conversations” with computers via their landlines and, in even more rapidly increasing fashion, through their wireless devices, both inbound and outbound, through more powerful, functional and user-friendly speech recognition interfaces. This new breed of speech technology is becoming gradually more affordable, adaptable, flexible and versatile and easier to install, customize, deploy, upgrade, sustain and support with each new solution and version. The successful applications and products are those that attract and keep calls automated, thereby saving huge sums in labor and related facilities costs while providing superior customer-retaining service, and in doing so deliver best-in-class ROI.

At the same time, speech analytics software is enabling organizations to obtain vital intelligence from customers via call recordings. This information is being used by them to boost agent and system performance, prompt greater customer satisfaction and gain new insights into customer behavior that can lead to higher sales, lowered costs and greater net returns. The successful solutions are those that deliver the greatest value for money.

It is one of the key missions of Customer Interaction Solutions to encourage technology innovation and, in doing so, enabling organizations to become successful, which, in turn, will boost our economy and our quality of life. To that end, we present the 2010 Speech Technology Excellence Awards, recognizing companies that have made significant contributions towards improving speech applications for their clients. Here are this year's winners:



Vendor	Website	Product
Angel.com	<a href="http://www.angel.com">www.angel.com</a>	Caller First Analytics
Autonomy	<a href="http://www.autonomy.com">www.autonomy.com</a>	Autonomy Explore
Avaya	<a href="http://www.avaya.com">www.avaya.com</a>	Avaya Proactive Outreach Manager
Convergys	<a href="http://www.convergys.com">www.convergys.com</a>	Convergys Intelligent Self-Service Solution
Five9	<a href="http://www.five9.com">www.five9.com</a>	Five9 IVR with Speech Recognition
Fonality	<a href="http://www.fonality.com">www.fonality.com</a>	Fonality Connect
Loquendo	<a href="http://www.loquendo.com">www.loquendo.com</a>	Loquendo Speech Engine
NICE Systems	<a href="http://www.nice.com">www.nice.com</a>	NICE Interaction Analytics
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Sennheiser	<a href="http://www.sennheiser.com">www.sennheiser.com</a>	DW Office
SpeechCycle	<a href="http://www.speechcycle.com">www.speechcycle.com</a>	RPA Express
Syntellect	<a href="http://www.syntellect.com">www.syntellect.com</a>	Syntellect Communications Portal
Varolli Corporation	<a href="http://varolli.com">varolli.com</a>	Varolli Smart Solutions
Verint Witness Actionable Solutions	<a href="http://www.verint.com">www.verint.com</a>	Impact 360® Speech Analytics
Vocal Laboratories	<a href="http://www.vocalabs.com">www.vocalabs.com</a>	Usability Survey



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- Social Challenges
- Integrating Social With Other Channels
- Enabling At-Home Agents
- Automating Customer Interactions
- IVVR and the Video-Enabled Contact Center
- The Work at Home Model for Customer Contacts
- Speech Analytics Trends in Contact Centers
- Hosted Contact Center Solutions

## Who Will Attend?

- Enterprise Contact Center Management Across All Vertical Markets
- Outsourced Contact Center Management
- Influential Marketing Executives
- Resellers and VARs



For more information,  
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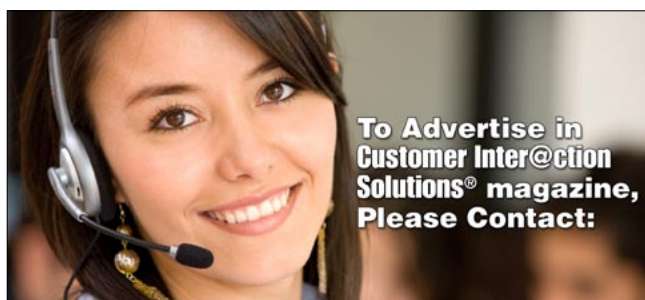
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## Making the IVR Ogre Customer-Friendly

Fans of the movie series Shrek have seen how a mean and destructive ogre becomes warm and friendly, and a force for good, wrapped in an arch and sometimes pointed sense of humor.

Are we at last seeing a similar evolution with inbound and outbound IVR systems?

IVRs – speech recognition systems as well as DTMF (i.e., touchtone) – are the undisputed ogres of customer service. If customers fail to fall into the elite 20 percent that produce 80 percent of profits – the infamous “Pareto Principle” – that makes them worthy enough to be given the attention of a live agent jammed inside a cube somewhere in the world, they are tossed into the realm of these virtual creatures. Once caught by them, buyers and prospects are beaten by nightmarish menus, limited libraries and bad grammars. If they wriggle free, they frantically search for agent opt-outs to get into the castle but, too often, they don’t exist.

Speech rec has often made IVR more customer-friendly yet, at considerable expense and lead time. These applications are still far from perfect. They are also creepy when they are personalized, like Amtrak’s “Julie,” because they lull you to think you are interacting with a person, when you are really chatting to a programmed chip housed on a server in a climate-controlled room somewhere in the universe.

On the outbound side, well if you think agents spitting off scripts, driven by predictive dialers that spin up their output like feeding caffeine-laced pellets and water to hamsters in cages, it can be worse: it can be the machines that are robo-calling you at dinner time.

Too often, the corporate message is this: We welcome your business but don’t bug us.

There appears then to be a rough correlation between the advent of IVR, and CRM systems that have ruthlessly applied the former tools, and what appears to be increased customer dissatisfaction and annoyance. Is this trend just coincidence? Is it the result of the downturn that makes individuals edgy or an increased impatience by the populace? Or is it the logical consequence of corporate actions like employing irritating IVR systems?

One of the shining silver linings from the economic slump is it forced companies to quit taking customers

for granted. For if these outfits tick buyers off, they will go elsewhere, tell the world about it via social media, resulting in fewer others that will be suckered in to replace that lost business.

Smart companies understand that revenue losses exceed cost savings from overeager IVR deployments. They and their suppliers are turning their attention to their systems by making them into constructive tools that can actually improve customer service and retention as well as lower expenses and boost productivity.

As revealed in recent TMCnet.com stories, in the CIS March article on speech, and in the July feature on IVR/IVVR, suppliers such as Angel.com, [Avaya](#), Convergy, CosmoCom, Nuance and Voxeo (to name a few) and their customers are designing better inbound applications including improved workflows, routing and grammar. They are employing analytics tools to understand where the sticking points are in automated interactions and finding solutions to them.

At the same time, outbound IVR is rapidly becoming a customer friend, rather than a foe, by being repurposed by firms from thankfully lawfully restricted marketing purposes to into invaluable alerting tools, such as credit card balance exceeds and potential fraud, flight delays and opt-in special offers. Outbound IVR, when so employed, is multi-win by delivering improved service while cutting costs through avoiding inbound calls.

There is also a growing understanding by suppliers and buyers of the functions each of these tools – DTMF and speech rec, automated voice, text and Web, live agents and soon video – can do best and are deploying them accordingly. No one channel or solution fits all customer interactions.

Customers may not exactly be a fan of IVR systems but, if they are programmed right, with their needs in mind, they can actually do some good by enabling them to get the services and items they need with minimal wait times... and aggravation. **CIS**

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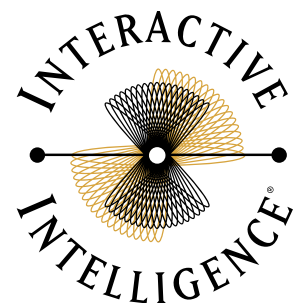


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