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## Interior Concepts: Equipping the NEXT-GEN Contact Center

### Also In This Issue:

- Employing CRM
- Dialing in Conferencing
- TMC Labs Innovations Awards Part II

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Rich Tehrani, CEO, TMC



## Keeping Up With The Vigilante Consumer

I came across this piece of editorial that I thought is worth sharing. It is written by Patricia Fripp, who is an executive speech coach, sales presentation trainer and keynote speaker on sales, customer service and promoting business and communication skills. She is the author of *Make It, So You Don't Have to Fake It!*

Fripp points to what futurist Faith Popcorn has coined the "Vigilante Consumer" —who want value, service, convenience, choice and lots of attention--and she offers several suggestions to keep up with them.

TMC has published Fripp editorial as a guest column on TMCnet.com. Here are the highlights:

- Start at the beginning

"What is your philosophy, your vision for doing business? "We treat you right." "Solutions, not problems." Think it through carefully and, when you've decided, design your business operations and activities to support that vision.

"Now, state your product or service in one simple, short sentence that everyone will get. For example: "We sell stuff with your name on it." That's the statement of Jonathan Stone's specialty advertising firm, Another Dancing Bear Production.

"People do business with people they know because they've heard about them from a friend or read about them in a magazine. So your job is to make yourself known to prospective customers.

"What you need is an unfair advantage. This isn't about lying or cheating. Exactly the opposite. An unfair advantage is doing every tiny little thing better than your competition. In this instance, your competition can be your best teacher.

- Who knows what your customers want?

"Think about whom in your business knows what your customers want. Is there a service that provides you and your competitors something that might just provide you with an effective, economical market sample?

- Don't overlook opportunities close to home

"In your role as an unrelenting self-promoter, start off in your own backyard. How many people in your office building know you and what your business is all about? Introduce yourself to people in the hall, in the elevator of your building. Let everyone in the immediate vicinity of your office know who you are and what product or service you offer. Tell them about your superb product

or service and how you do things differently than your competitors and you're right there five minutes from their doorsteps.

- What can you do to make your vigilante consumers feel special and appreciated?

"We know now, great customer service is no longer good enough. We have to exceed the vigilante consumers' expectations.

- Build relationships with your customers

"There are really only two types of customers: those who know and love you, and those who never heard of you. All businesses spend relative fortunes trying to get new customers and that will always remain important. But don't spend the entire fortune on just attracting new customers. Spend some of those dollars keeping in touch with existing customers because you want to keep them.

"One of the goals in growing your business should be that the same person you sold to today will still be spending money with you ten years from now. So don't celebrate the close of a sale. Celebrate the beginning of a long relationship. People want to do business with people who appreciate them and look out for them.

- Seek strategic alliances

"Strategic alliance is a relatively new term for something that has been practiced for years -- developing "professional friends." A fine clothing store can give out coupons for neighborhood dry cleaner. An advertising firm promotes the services of a print shop. And, of course, the dry cleaner and print shop refer their customers back.

"These are a few suggestions to help you in building your business into a prospering dynamo. You can gather even more tips and techniques, by going to conferences, seminars and by listening to competitors, customers, neighbors, friends. You can learn from everyone. Even if you think a technique won't work for you, twist and turn it, see if you can put an adaptation of it to work for you." **CIS**

To read Patricia Fripp's complete column on TMCnet here is the URL <http://tmcnet.com/45671.1>

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## IN EVERY ISSUE

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>1 Publisher's Outlook</b><br/>By Richard Tehrani, CEO, TMC</p> <p><b>4 High Priority!</b><br/>By Erik Linask,<br/>Group Editorial Director, TMC</p> <p><b>20 Ask the Experts</b><br/>By Lori Bocklund, President, Strategic Contact and Rachel Wentink, Senior Director of Product Management, Interactive Intelligence, Inc.</p> | <p><b>22 Customer Interaction News™</b></p> <p><b>38 The Integrated Marketplace™</b></p> <p><b>38 Advertising Index</b></p> <p><b>40 Logout</b><br/>By Brendan Read,<br/>Senior Contributing Editor</p> |
|---|---|

## OTHER ITEMS

- 24 Case Study**  
Making Multimedia Work

## What's on the Cover



**Interior Concepts Equips The Next-Gen Contact Center**

pg **6**

## CALL CENTER TECHNOLOGY

- 10 Dialing In Conferencing**  
By Brendan Read, Senior Contributing Editor

## CRM, BPO & TELESERVICES

- 16 Employing CRM**  
By Brendan Read, Senior Contributing Editor

## OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

- 26 Designing the Next-Gen Contact Center**  
By Brendan Read, Senior Contributing Editor

## AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- 34 2010 TMC Labs Innovation Award Winners Part II**

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*



## Interactive Intelligence's Vertical Ascent

If you were fortunate to have been able to join us in Los Angeles for ITEXPO West, you already know many of the exciting events that took place, including the highly successful inaugural Social CRM Expo, which was keynoted by two exceptional presenters bookending its opening day, Nimble CEO Jon Ferrara and Interactive Intelligence Chief Marketing Officer Joe Staples.

Ferrara's company is a relationship management platform that enables users to integrate what he calls "the three Cs" – contacts, calendar, and communication – so that, regardless of customers' preferred means of communication, users are able to receive and respond to communication in one place. This includes communication between users and their customers, those customers and others in the users' organization, as well as tracking what your customers are saying about you in social forums. Ferrara is solidly in the center of the social media explosion and provided an exciting opening to one of TMC's new collocated events. Check out comments from Ferrara at <http://tmcnet.com/48951.1>.

Closing out Day One was Staples, whose company recently announced a partnership with social media firm Buzzient, allowing customers to integrate Interactive Intelligence's multichannel contact center applications with Buzzient's social media monitoring and analysis capabilities. The move plays into Interactive Intelligence's model of offering a complete communications solution for handling today's multichannel customer interaction environments, including contact center and business process automation, content management, and enterprise IP telephony.

But, while Interactive Intelligence has added a social media element to its communications platform, it's all-in-one approach also lends itself well to integrating its capabilities with vertical market applications, such as the insurance industry, exemplified by its acquisition of AcroSoft Corporation in May, 2009.

Now, it has added to its vertically oriented expertise with the acquisition of Latitude Software, which provides software applications to the debt collection market. Staples spoke with TMC about the deal at ITEXPO; watch that interview at <http://tmcnet.com/48952.1>.

"It's part of our strategic direction toward vertical markets," says Staples. "We already have the infrastructure layer, and are now looking for vertically focused solutions at the application layer, with a tight integration with our underlying platform."

Interactive Intelligence already has enjoyed a level of success in the debt collection space, and Staples says there are a number of synergies and cross-selling opportunities within the Latitude deal. In fact, a number of companies in the debt collection industry, including several Latitude customers, are already using Interactive Intelligence's IVR and dialer solutions, combining them with the workflow components, tracking and management of debt, and telephony platform integration Latitude provides.

"The underlying predictive dialing solution is a key component of providing solutions to the debt collection industry," says Staples. "But, the domain expertise we gain through the acquisition – the customers, the recognition, the relationships – may be as valuable as the Latitude technology itself."

Anyone who knows Staples knows he is as big a proponent of all-in-one communications solutions as anyone. In the August 2010 issue of *Customer Interaction Solutions*, he notes, "There are so many reasons why it makes 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."

Given this belief, the company's strategy of integrating vertically oriented applications to more deeply engage markets in which it has already enjoyed a level of success is entirely logical. As for the timeless buy vs. build question, the company has the cash on hand for the strategic acquisitions and, considering Staples' suggestion that the value of an established brand in these vertical markets is at least as valuable as the solutions themselves, the \$14 million Interactive Intelligence paid for Latitude may turn into quite a bargain.

The question that remains is, what's next for Interactive Intelligence? Though he wouldn't give an indication of what vertical might be next, Staples did suggest that Interactive Intelligence would continue its strategy of seeking out synergistic applications in different vertical markets. **CIS**



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# Interior Concepts Equips The Next-Gen Contact Center

**T**he next-gen contact center is one that is multichannel and multi-media, flexible, cost-effective and focused on ensuring performance through effective, work-enabling design.

Interior Concepts ([www.interiorconcepts.com](http://www.interiorconcepts.com)) is ready to equip the next-gen contact center. The company's design team works with contact centers every day and therefore knows the specific design requirements needed to create productive and functional spaces. For example its workstation systems uses one-inch thick panels that saves space compared to others with unnecessarily wide panels. Wider panels it says could mean fewer seats, and less revenue, depending on floor space.

Interior Concepts' lines are easily and readily customizable for each center. The firm uses ICE software that automatically engineers the furniture, determines material needs, and generates paperwork and computer code to facilitate the manufacturing process. The results are reduced quoting and engineering time, and improved project presentation via animated virtual tours. Thanks in large part to ICE Interior Concepts received a 2010 TMC Labs Innovation Award, as reported in the September issue.

Interior Concepts also offers a wide and contact-center-intended line of task seating, training tables and ergonomic appliances including adjustable keyboard trays and task lighting. For example earlier this year it introduced the cool-running/energy saving Huron task lights.

Customer Interaction Solutions recently interviewed Interior Concepts president David Kendrick on a wide range of design issues. Here are the highlights of the conversation:

**CIS:** What trends are you seeing in the marketplace for contact center furniture and appliances?

**DK:** Although gradual, domestic centers are increasing the size of the typical agent station and seeking furniture designs and floor layouts that avoid the repetitious "cookie cutter" look. This is balanced by the need for density and maximizing the use of space, particularly given our economy. A competing trend, however, is more paperless work being performed from the centers, reducing the work area required per agent. Equipment such as flat screen monitor arms utilize less desk space and ergonomically correct keyboards can be incorporated in a manner that does not increase the overall footprints. Companies are also more willing to invest



in the proper ergonomics equipment and training, recognizing that the cost of the equipment pales in comparison to the costs of carpal tunnel injuries; employee lost time; and increased workers' compensation premiums. These competing trends allow our customers to invest in higher quality furniture solutions while maximizing the use of their space.

**CIS:** Contact centers are being buffeted by the rise of IVR/ Web self-service, nearshoring/offshoring and home-based agents. The economic downturn have left many vacant centers, and with this availability of used furniture. Please discuss these developments, what impact they have had on Interior Concepts and how have you responded.

**DK:** Our response to the economic downturn, and the results such as the availability of used and refurbished furniture, is to increase our investment in technology and how we serve our customers. For example, we were recognized nationally this year by both Managing Automation Media as the Progressive Manufacturer of the Year for a Small Company and by this magazine with a 2010 TMC Labs Innovation Award. These awards were based on our use of technology that allows us to provide virtual tours to our customers, with this same technology integrating throughout our manufacturing process. As a result our capture rate has increased dramatically, allowing us to more than compensate for business potentially lost due to negative business conditions. We also serve the Caribbean and Central/ South America, so we are positively affected by providing furniture to many of these nearshore locations.





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We typically serve our call [contact] center customers directly with the customer benefitting from the direct sales relationship, so our pricing is very competitive. It will certainly make sense in some cases for a customer to purchase an occupancy ready facility with existing furniture, or to purchase used or refurbished furniture. However, we find that most customers like the ability to create their own culture, including the furniture design and color schemes. With our direct selling and price competitiveness, we have not considered getting into the furniture refurbishing business; in a sense, we would be competing against ourselves.

With our heavy gauge structural steel frame, our furniture can be considered industrial strength; consequently we do not currently plan to address the home agent market. While this market will grow, it is really more of a RTA (Ready to Assemble) furniture solution with many very low cost furniture providers already serving that market. Our furniture is designed for, and our market is, the high demand 24/7 call [contact] center environment.

**CIS:** Wireless LANs and VoIP are being deployed in workplaces including contact centers. What impacts if any do they have on furniture design?

**DK:** The Interior Concepts furniture system is MAS Certified Green in compliance with BIFMA X7.1 Furniture Emission Standards. Our furniture system undergoes rigorous annual testing to maintain compliance. We meet LEED indoor air quality standards and based on the fact that we are green certified, contribute points to an overall building or facility being LEED eligible.

**CIS:** What you are seeing in the way of ergonomics? What are the quantifiable benefits of ergonomically sound designs? What are you seeing from your contact center customers in the way of workstations, chairs and appliances to assist their employees?

**DK:** There is a trend, albeit slowly, for centers to invest in the proper ergonomic equipment. Namely this equipment would include an adjustable keyboard, adjustable monitor platform, and of course seating.

We do tell our customers that the proper equipment is half the battle; the second half is continuously training employees on the proper usage of the equipment. Statistics indicate that an average case of carpal tunnel syndrome has a lifetime cost of \$30,000 including medical bills and employee lost time. Assuming an adjustable chair is a given, an agent station can be equipped with an ergonomically

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Assuming an adjustable chair is a given, an agent station can be equipped with an ergonomically correct keyboard and monitor platform for an average of \$300 per station. In doing the easy math, a 100-seat center could ergonomically equip the stations for the cost of one avoided case of carpal tunnel this is quite a return on the investment."

– David Kendrick, president, Interior Concepts

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**DK:** One of our competitive advantages is that we offer custom furniture solutions; we do not sell standard sizes. We design and manufacture what the customer needs. Given this approach, it is easy for us to adapt to the needs of each individual call center. For example, if a customer needs more or less cable capacity, it can be easily accommodated without having to redesign a product offering. With our manufacturing abilities, wireless LANs and the use of VoIP have so far had a minor effect on our furniture business.

A more limiting affect on such things as furniture flexibility and mobility is electrical service to the stations. Even with wireless LAN usage, the stations, or runs of stations, are still tethered together to benefit from electrical service, thereby limiting the mobility of individual stations. As supervision and visibility is still a critical component of most centers, station mobility on the call floor still isn't a factor in most centers. Again, our custom approach allows us to adapt easily to the needs of individual centers.

**CIS:** There is a greater emphasis in organizations ongoing green: in direct energy i.e. lighting, power and indirect i.e. heating/cooling consumption and in the use of recyclable materials. How have you responded?

correct keyboard and monitor platform for an average of \$300 per station. In doing the easy math, a 100-seat center could ergonomically equip the stations for the cost of one avoided case of carpal tunnel this is quite a return on the investment. Obviously the center would not be paying the initial medical expenses as that would be handled through employer-provided insurance or other means; however, with employee lost time/productivity and increases in worker's comp. premiums, it is costly for the center.

An interesting case study is that we installed a floor of ergonomically correct furniture for a customer while existing furniture remained on a second floor that did not have the ergonomic features. Over a one-year period there were 15 cases of reportable repetitive motion injuries from the floor with the existing furniture with only one case being reported from the floor with the newer ergonomically correct furniture. It was also noted that the one case was an employee that had previously worked at the existing furniture.

The ergonomic issue is truly a "pay less now" or "pay much more later" scenario. As an added note, in addition to the proper equipment and training, there are many more injury prevention measures that can be taken, including daily stretching exercises. **CIS**



# Helping Customers Get Answers

## Multi-Channel Self-Service



**web** answers



**agent** answers



**social** answers



**mobile** answers

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## Dialing In Conferencing

**A**udio, video and Web conferencing solutions have many powerful uses. They include: initial and refresher agent and supervisor training; team collaboration; information on new client programs; product, service and issues updates; on new solutions being deployed; and corporate meetings.

Conferencing tools make home-based and mobile working and utilizing informal agents such as subject matter experts feasible by permitting such personnel to participate in this knowledge imparting from anywhere, aided by expanding broadband networks which enable high quality experiences.

The conferencing ROIs are enhanced performance through increased knowledge and reduced costs and improved productivity by cutting back travel: whose pollution leads to healthcare costs and contributes to global warming.

Here are several insights on using and new developments in enabling conferencing solutions:

### AT&T on Conferencing

AT&T's AT&T Connect provides integrated audio/web/video conferencing for internal and external collaboration and delivered via AT&T's global platform. AT&T spokesperson Jenny Bridges offers the firm's insights on a range of questions and issues:

- The benefits of different conferencing modes and how they are and can being used by contact centers

"Contact centers are primarily utilizing audio capabilities via toll-free numbers," says Bridges. "Web and video conferencing are growing in popularity for training purposes. They may become more prevalent as the ability to communicate and annotate documents becomes more commonplace with integrated conferencing solutions. A web conferencing solution would allow contact center agents to communicate and collaborate on documents. An example would be a contact center agent reviewing directions for use of a product. The agent can also draw diagrams on the whiteboard for an in-depth explanation."

- Are there tasks that conferencing can perform but contact centers are missing out on and if so which ones and why?

"Integrated audio and Web conferencing would provide the strongest benefits to contact centers," responds Bridges. "It will provide contact center agents greater flexibility to resolves



issues with customers. Agents will have the ability to view, edit and collaborate on documents with customers, and also access websites that contain pertinent information.

"Video conferencing will be a future component that may be valuable for those centers that have a need to offer product demonstrations and develop a more personal face to face interaction with customers."

- Will unified communications (UC) supplant audio conferencing?

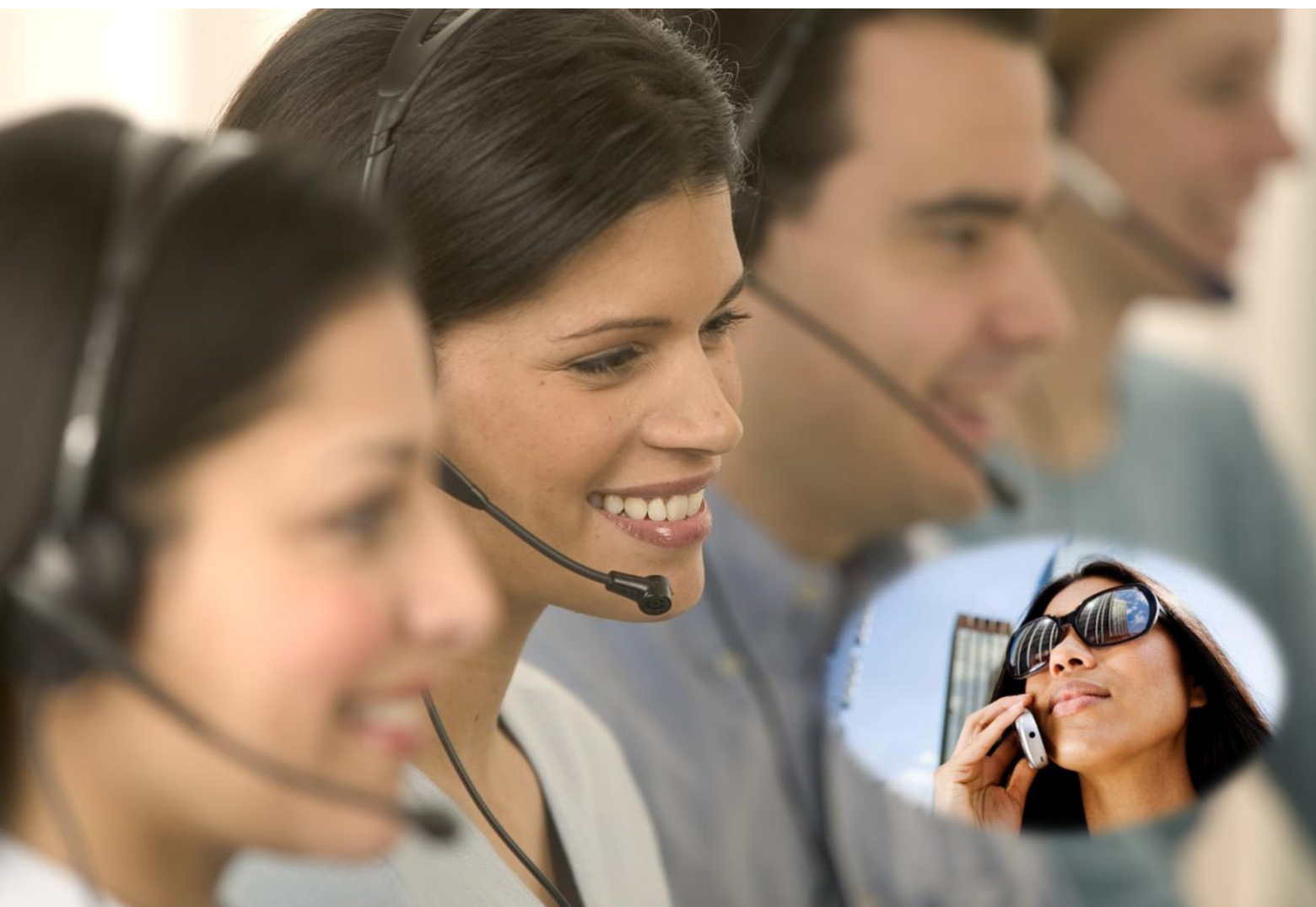
"It's premature to say that UC will displace audio conferencing," states Bridges. "Presence functionality is at the forefront of demand for UC."

### Polycom expands telepresence capabilities, bolsters video solution security

Telepresence systems are high-end video or more accurately visual communications products that give 3-D like sense of interaction with others. Polycom has been increasing the capabilities, affordability and security of its telepresence tools.

- Release of the Open Telepresence Experience (OTX) 300 which delivers full 1080p video at up to half the bandwidth the firm says of comparable systems by implementing H.264 High Profile, a new standards-based video compression technology. The

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interactions are protected with Polycom's Lost Packet Recovery technology that provides a consistent, high-quality experience over "real-world" IP networks. The OTX 300 also offers it says the lowest total cost of ownership of products in its class.

- Future Polycom solutions will feature McAfee threat protection, which will shield users from potential and increasingly sophisticated security threats while making it easier to comply with privacy and confidentiality mandates

### BrightCom Telepresence Supports Multiple Audio Options

BrightCom has enhanced and expanded the audio option in its Lumina Telepresence and ClearView Video Conferencing solutions with three options:

### Cisco Delivers Telepresence Interoperability, Bolsters Video Reliability

Cisco has made several key improvements to its videoconferencing technologies that make them more customer/user-friendly:

- Enabled increased interoperability between different vendors' telepresence products by supporting the open-source Telepresence Interoperability Protocol (TIP) in the Cisco's Tandberg TelePresence Server
- Combined three components – Cisco TelePresence Manager, Cisco TelePresence Multipoint Switch and Cisco TelePresence Recording Server – onto one server, the Cisco TelePresence Commercial Express to enable easier deployment, simpler licensing and a faster realization of productivity benefits.

**"Contact centers are primarily utilizing audio capabilities via toll-free numbers. Web and video conferencing are growing in popularity for training purposes. They may become more prevalent as the ability to communicate and annotate documents becomes more commonplace with integrated conferencing solutions."**

– Jenny Bridges, AT&T.

- The audio-only experience, which replaces relying on telephone and separate conference call phone lines with the remote control or touch screen technology, thereby allowing users to dial and answer calls via their room or mobile cart conference codecs. BrightCom supports multi-microphone inputs and outputs.
- Data/video by which participants with online access via remote desktop, laptop or web cameras may use BrightCom solutions to display high definition or standard definition video and/or data while using a regular audio phone and conference call lines. The BrightCom Visual Collaboration System (VCS) can display documents, PDFs, high resolution images or video clips and broadcast high definition or standard definition video in real time simultaneously side by side.
- Audio/data/video conferencing combination in either a video conference or telepresence environment connecting BrightCom endpoints. The VCS also provides meeting recording and archiving for all three modes.

### CoroWare Upgrades CoroColl HD Video-conferencing Service

CoroCall 2.0, from CoroWare Technologies offers improved audio and video quality including improved echo cancellation and device integration and full 720p30 video encoding for desktop and laptop systems.

CoroCall 2.0 also provides enhanced H.239 application sharing that is interoperable with traditional videoconferencing vendors such as Polycom and Cisco Systems. It also works optimally with Vidyos VidyosConferencing product line. Vidyos solutions enable high-quality video to desktops and room conferencing systems via broadband.

- Making video to home-based agents and others on networks not designed for it feasible by introducing ClearPath, which improves video quality by minimizing the effects of packet loss on networks. Also, improvements to its Movi solution for Macs and PCs via ICE protocol support that increases call capacity outside the firewall, which is critical it says for large-scale installations of home and remote workers.

### InterCall Offers Video Streaming

Conferencing solution firm InterCall now offers streaming video that features technology and tools that permit streaming events to be more interactive, flexible and mobile. The key functionalities include:

- Screen broadcast. Presenters can broadcast their desktop, all Flash-based, without any installation required for those viewing.
- Integrated video encoding. Presenters can achieve top quality VP6 or H.264 video encoding all within the application without additional steps.
- SMS poll voting. This allows users to vote on polls using a standard text message and is aimed at hybrid meetings or other meetings where the webcast is displayed on a projector or LCD, permitting participants to vote without being in front of their own computers.
- Videos in PowerPoint presentations will be automatically encoded and streamed during webcasts.
- Slide and screen broadcast zooming and panning.
- Integrated Twitter feed. Participants can log in to their Twitter accounts from the application's module navigator and tweet





about the event or follow the conversation; the Twitter hashtag is automatically inserted in their tweets.

### Enabling Attractive Webcasting

Webcasting can be an excellent tool with which to communicate with contact center agents and managers. Unfortunately webcasts are too often boring, with presenters seen in tiny poor-resolution images, poor A/V and limited interactivity. There is rarely any on-screen means for users to take notes, forcing them to alt-tabbing to Word documents on screen or jotting them a piece of paper: which cannot be readily shared with others, both of which takes them away from the sessions. These tools are also often a time-consuming multi-step hassle to get into and use.

These factors have caused, says Michael Fitzpatrick, co-founder and CEO, ConnectSolutions “attendees to lean back, check their e-mail or grab a cup of their favorite beverage instead of leaning forward, paying attention and getting involved with webcast sessions.”

ConnectSolutions has in response to these issues devised Podium 2, the latest version of his firm’s Webcast solution. Podium 2 provides full screen video, ability to stream across multiple platforms including Facebook and Apple idevices, user announcements, information about who is speaking, time-stamped on-screen note taking whose

information can be shared with others and offline session reuse. Podium 2’s browser-based delivery enables access in seconds rather than minutes; users do not have to install Java or download any apps.

“The solutions out there have focused on the presenters and/or producers experience in managing the event and very few had spent any time on optimizing the viewer experience,” explains Fitzpatrick. “We have turned this focus around to the viewers because if the firms who are paying for webcasting want to achieve ROI from these sessions then it must be presented in a way to encourage users to lean forward to obtain value from them.” **CIS**

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

**AT&T**  
www.att.com

**BrightCom**  
www.brightcom.com

**Cisco**  
www.cisco.com

**ConnectSolutions**  
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## Does your multichannel marketing campaign lack a meaningful online component?

Communication is changing right before our eyes. A number of personalized exchanges that once required a phone call can now be accomplished via mail, email, text message and Web (think Facebook). Where there was previously one central channel for communication (phone), there are now multiple channels positioned side by side.

For companies attempting to connect with customers, this shift has posed challenges (discovering how different audiences prefer to be reached, for one); but it also has created opportunities. More channels mean more ways to reach more people. That's why, now more than ever, it's so important for companies to stay abreast of evolving technology and provide customers as many as options as possible for sending and receiving information.

### **Integrate a Web portal that directly supports your campaign**

While most businesses are versed in using the phone and mail together to bolster a marketing campaign, figuring out how to properly incorporate the Web into the equation can be baffling task. Sure, you have your company website – but that doesn't necessarily tie in directly with a specific marketing campaign. And that's what you want: an online presence that expressly supports the action you're prompting through phone calls and mailings.

When integrating an online component, there's a couple goals you should keep in mind. The first is how it will function with the other channels in the marketing campaign. Think of it like a jigsaw puzzle. Each piece is different, but they all fit together to advance a bigger picture. Your online component should work with your phone and mail components in the same way. Second, incorporate as much flexibility as possible to make your tool future-ready. That way, you can customize it for different marketing campaigns targeted at different audiences without starting from scratch every time.



**By Ken Dawson,**  
*Chief Marketing Officer*  
*InfoCision Management Corporation*

### **Boost your campaign's bottom line with an engaging online presence**

At [InfoCision](#), we spent over a year building a customizable online campaign system to compliment our call center and direct mail services. We designed this system to give our clients a simple way to connect with their customers online, and – equally important in the Web 2.0 era – provide their customers a way to connect with their friends and family on the organization's behalf. Through implementation of this system, we've seen firsthand how a meaningful and relevant online component can enhance a marketing campaign. Here are some key benefits:

#### **Meet online demand – it's out there**

Customers are not only becoming more comfortable with conducting business and transactions online, but many actually demand it now. As more and more people become accustomed to using the Web for everything from paying bills to chatting with friends, it is also becoming a preferred method of interacting with businesses and organiza-

tions. Whether you recognize it or not, on-line demand exists for your product.

Some companies tend to place lesser emphasis on the online aspect of their marketing campaign because they believe it doesn't fit their demographic. That line of thinking is inherently flawed. Even if only a small number of people take advantage of the online component of your campaign, those who do are interacting with your organization more. That increased participation translates into superior results (more buying, greater brand recognition).

### **Make connections... and watch them multiply**

The beauty of the Web right now is that it's all about user interaction. Facebook is the definitive example. Facebook provides the shell and users create the content. Users tell friends about Facebook then they sign on and tell their friends. It's a continuous cycle and it illustrates the snowball effect a website can have when it's properly designed and executed.

By building such capabilities into the online component of your marketing campaign, you can let your customers spread the word for you. Find creative ways to leverage the people who love your product or service to bring more people on board. It's a convenient and cost-effective means of customer acquisition. You provide the initial content about your product or organization and rely on the individual to become the voice. And just like any online community, one voice can quickly become many.

### **Reach new (and younger) audiences**

Having a relevant and engaging online portal to complement your marketing campaign opens up a low-cost channel that can help you acquire new customers in difficult-to-reach demographics. While Web use among older demographics is on the rise, the real opportunity online marketing integration affords is increased interaction with

**"The beauty of the Web right now is that it's all about user interaction. Facebook is the definitive example...Users tell friends about Facebook then they sign on and tell their friends...By building such capabilities into the online component of your marketing campaign, you can let your customers spread the word for you."**

**– Ken Dawson, Chief Marketing Officer,  
InfoCision Management Corporation**

young consumers. The Internet puts this elusive audience at your fingertips.

These are customers who may not have home phones or give mail a second look. But they are computer savvy. Younger generations have strong ties to the

Web; they are more apt to shop online and participate in social networking sites. And if you can engage them, they can actively help you connect with a wider audience. With proper integration, an online component can help you meet new, younger audiences on their own turf.

### **Maximize ROI with a multichannel approach**

One of the more surprising results we uncovered while testing our online campaign system was that, even when consumers weren't interacting online, mention of a campaign-specific website in mailings or on the phone increased the overall results of the campaign. As a piece of the larger whole, the online component was constantly feeding the bottom line. That's a prime example of the added value generated by a truly integrated multichannel campaign.

As I mentioned previously, these days, marketing success requires giving your audience as many choices as possible. It's not about phone, mail or Web individually. The key is to make phone, print and Web interaction seamless; to use technology to integrate – not isolate – these channels. By tying relevant online communications in with the phone and mail aspects of your campaign, you can reach more people, drive better results and maximize ROI. **CIS**

*Ken Dawson is the chief marketing officer of InfoCision Management Corporation. Reach him at [ken.dawson@infocision.com](mailto:ken.dawson@infocision.com). In business since 1982, InfoCision is the second-largest privately held teleservices company and a leading provider of customer care services, commercial sales and marketing for a variety of Fortune 100 companies and small businesses. Along with call center solutions, InfoCision offers business intelligence, digital printing, direct mail, and interactive services. For more information, visit [www.infocision.com](http://www.infocision.com).*





## Employing CRM

Small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) have to work smarter, not harder than their peer-level and enterprise-scaled competition to survive and grow in today's and tomorrow's economy. For that reason they are seeking effective, versatile and affordable methods that can uncover new revenue opportunities while enhancing existing customer relationships and at the same time saving them time and money to be more profitably used elsewhere. And that means they are employing CRM solutions for selling to businesses (B2B) and increasingly to consumers (B2C).

Customer Interaction Solutions interviewed several leading firms about CRM for SMBs. Questions were asked on:

- New and ongoing trends
- CRM expansion from B2B to B2C applications
- Social CRM

### **Avidian Technologies ([www.avidian.com](http://www.avidian.com))** **James Wong, CEO**

By far the most impactful trend that continues to weigh on the minds of our SMB customers is the poor economic climate. With that in mind, what they continue to want is a way to make every customer contact more meaningful and especially more profitable. They're not necessarily looking for something that will be a magic wand and turn every sales pitch into gold, but they want to increase sales effectiveness any way they can. They're looking for a solution with a low barrier to entry, including in terms of cost and usability, and that will create an immediate ROI.

The basic underlying principles of CRM – improving customer relationships, increasing customer retention and improving sales – all still apply in the B2C world just as they do in the B2B world.

A lot of SMB B2C companies have used the standard business productivity software to manage customers, namely Microsoft's Office products such as Excel, Word, Outlook or Access, perhaps even some simple home grown database tools. The primary flaw with tools such as these when used to help manage customer relationships is that they weren't necessarily designed for the specific tasks associated with relationship management, especially the collabora-



tion necessary. They're great for storing information, but they don't have the built-in functionality to manage and monitor the customer interactions and sales pipeline that CRM solutions do. They also don't make communication with customers a fluid process.

Some specific benefits of CRM for SMB B2C firms are having a consolidated and centralized set of contacts, having logs of when you talked to customers last and what was discussed. Other benefits include being able to categorize the contacts by group and then reaching out to those groups with customized marketing. Finally, it enables employees using the CRM tool to communicate more efficiently with each other knowing what each other has done with each particular customer.

Any business, whether large or small, cannot afford to ignore social media as a method of connecting with customers and potential customers. As consumer and business customers grow more accustomed to using social media for everything from entertainment to communication, they are expecting to be able to connect with the companies they do business with in the same way.

This [social media] is actually an area where SMBs can get a leg up on many of their larger competitors who might have bureaucratic red tape to work through in order to get a strong social media program for customer engagement off the ground. If you're an SMB,



it's pretty simple as there are a lot fewer levels to work through before you can convince the key decision maker, such as a director of marketing or the CEO, that social media has to be a priority.

The real question is, however, are SMBs actually taking advantage of this opportunity? For the most part, I would say about half of the SMBs we work with are indeed utilizing social media in some way to connect with customers. That means about half are not, though. Many of these companies are held back in this regard simply because they don't know what social media channels are out there to engage with customers through. They don't know where their customers are at online. I think once they figure this out, it's actually pretty easy to develop a strategy.

#### **Intelstream ([www.intelstream.net](http://www.intelstream.net))**

##### **Ray Stoeckicht, Vice President of Consulting Services**

More SMBs are looking at and deploying CRM solutions and moving away from pen and paper, Excel, ACT and Goldmine. CRM tools enable them to manage contacts, customer records, alerts, and run reports based on key performance indicators inside a single integrated system accessible by all employees, anytime, anywhere. They can help firms determine customer value and permit them to make offers and present terms that reflect this to maximize lifetime profitability. It gives them insights into their sales pipelines so that they can better plan their operations in anticipation of increased inventory or service demand.

Many CRM providers have recognized this trend and have developed a B2C paradigm as an additional CRM functionality. Working with many firms such as mortgage brokers, financial advisors and realtors, who sell to end consumers, CRM application have been modified to fit alternative selling methods, which centers on consumers rather than businesses.

There is a challenge in employing CRM tools for B2C in that those aimed for that purpose have been written and priced for enterprises while the solutions scaled for SMBs have not been traditionally been architected for that purpose; responding to market needs they have been geared instead for B2B. There are several key differences between B2B and B2C applications. For example there is no little or no need in many B2C deployments for accounts functionality and reports. Yet outside of Intelstream, there are few B2C-gear CRM products in the marketplace, which means there has to be a lot of customization enables the same successful B2B paradigm with CRM in B2C.

If B2C SMBs have been behind those selling B2B on embracing social channel they are leaders in social media. People sell to consumers are starting to use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to market their wares. For example real estate agents are using YouTube to show properties to prospective buyers. B2C SMBs have the social paradigm in their grasp a lot easier because they are selling to consumers and that is what social CRM is catered to: people rather in organizations.

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**– Ray Stoeckicht, Vice President of Consulting services, Intelstream**

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SMBs are trying to streamline their business and that's a good thing; they realize that multiple databases with the same contact information in many different places are inefficient. They are also realizing they need to focus on keeping existing customers, which is much less expensive than prospecting for new ones and to base business decisions on data not historical record and gut feels. CRM permits firms to get to a single point of truth and use a single, centralized database as a centerpiece of the customer experience while tying in all departments such as marketing, sales, operations, and customer service.

When SMBs have employed CRM systems, it has been the firms that sell B2B and typically for sales force automation tasks. This is now changing as those who sell to consumers realize that CRM tools can enable them to extract more value out of their customer relationships.

#### **Maximizer Software ([www.maximizer.com](http://www.maximizer.com))**

##### **Vivek Thomas, President**

SMBs are now looking to their CRM systems for enterprise-quality capabilities like robust business intelligence: including clear visibility on projected revenues and ideal sales resource allocation. Besides the centralized contact database and repository of basic customer data and communication, there is a growing desire to track lead flow – from creation to close, opportunity nurturing and proactive customer service. SMBs are also realizing that CRM offers a window into areas for improvement throughout the customer interaction lifecycle via dashboards. SMBs' CRM investment means a lot more now as they are leveraging it for other key business insights that enable informed – and often critical – business decisions.

While SMBs have traditionally been heavier users of CRM for B2B the number of companies using it for B2C is growing. We've seen consumer-focused financial services busi-



nesses relying heavily on CRM to manage their customer interactions and leads, as well as for regulatory tracking of transaction requests. And while many other types of SMBs on the B2C side have often used POS systems to track basic customer information, they are now recognizing the value of CRM and adoption is on the rise.

As social media has become more mainstream it provides another avenue for SMBs in both B2B and B2C segments to gather and utilize key customer/prospect information, which can then be combined with existing data in their CRM systems for the most complete customer profile possible. Also, social media has changed the way people research technology-sourcing options in the B2B space – making the process more like B2C – as they can easily research online commentary before making decisions.

SMBs recognize that social media is more strongly aligned with B2C but that the B2B component is continuing to gain momentum. Yet the main stumbling block for social media is the lack of a proven ROI, which is holding them back from fully embracing it.

**Microsoft Dynamics (<http://crm.dynamics.com>)**  
**Bill Patterson, Director, Product Management, Microsoft Dynamics CRM**

We see organizations today that are still challenged to maximize their business productivity using CRM systems. Even if they had deployed a CRM system to centralize data input or standardize data capture, their CRM systems previously used were heavily favored toward management, rather than helping an individual sell to or serve their customers better.

We also see CRM emerging into a broader category solution. It used to be that CRM focused entirely on the notion of (1) sales automation, (2) marketing automation or (3) customer service enablement, but with organizations large and small now focusing on maximizing the value of every relationship, we are beginning to witness CRM branch out beyond those three core lines of business. As a result, we are supporting organizations as they optimize engagements and establish across all lines of business within an organization.

What we feel is driving this change to B2C is the emergence of the consumer as holding their own destiny. If we think about it for a moment, 10 years ago, when most businesses were preparing for Y2K, consumers were pretty locked-in to where they shopped, consumed the same products and services, and paid the same prices for what they consumed. Today, with the Web becoming the way in which we do business, we can now use mobile devices to find the best price and nearest location open, or engage with others who have made similar decisions to be sure that is the right product or service for me. The

shift toward convenience over conventional relationships is something that an SMB must respond to and CRM is a key asset that can ensure an SMB is responding to the needs of their customers.

Consumers are certainly rising to the occasion when it comes to engaging on social networks. A simple search for “bad service” on Twitter returns feedback about some of the biggest brands – and yes, even small businesses. The question thus becomes, are businesses listening? More often than not, we see SMBs intrigued by the idea of social, but are not yet social themselves. They have yet to establish an identity, incorporate social into their businesses processes, especially customer service, or use social networks and influence networks to increase brand awareness.

**Sage North America ([www.sagenorthamerica.com](http://www.sagenorthamerica.com))**  
**Larry Ritter, Senior Vice President and General Manager, Sage CRM Solutions**

We are seeing SMBs begin to use cloud-based connected services to supplement their existing CRM systems. Examples include subscription list building and e-mail

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marketing services that integrate with a company's CRM system. Connected services such as these can be available at a moment's notice to help SMBs identify new sales prospects and market to them.

These services are easy to switch on to enable rapid use. Businesses that use a steady regimen of these services find it affordable to keep the services switched on for the team members who need them most. If there are seasonal spikes to address, more users can be added temporarily and affordably.

We are also seeing SMBs continuing to evaluate and implement cloud computing and (SaaS)-based CRM systems. Cloud deployments are ideal for businesses seeking a highly adaptable CRM experience with no capital outlay or IT burden and subscription options that allow them to pay as they go.

SMBs are revealing [in the process] their top concerns, some of which are not what you would expect or what some vendors would suggest is important. Traditional SaaS vendors push debate over architecture (single- or multi-tenant) and while each has its benefits SMBs are saying architecture type is of little concern compared to their true needs which are data security, workflow, customization and mobile device support. Saugatuck Technology's latest SaaS research surveyed SMBs and found that just eight percent specified a multi-tenant architecture as important.

SMBs' CRM focus may have traditionally been focused on B2B due to CRM's high costs of entry in terms of deployment costs, system flexibility and customization. Systems today are easier to use and rapidly deployed, lowering the time and out of pocket costs for SMBs to serve broader interaction models with their customers. With the advent of very affordable cloud CRM and connected service options, plus the continuing evolution of mobile CRM applications, it is quite reasonable for SMBs to acquire and use CRM tools to support their sales efforts regardless of the target audience is, business or consumer.

SMBs are still trying to figure out the impact of social media on CRM. There is a lot of great work by industry influencers and observers to help guide SMBs along this path, and some of the more proactive entrepreneurs and small businesses are achieving success with social media, yet most are still trying to

determine what additional context from the social web is valuable to pull into their CRM systems. As vendors we're building in capabilities to monitor social media at the company and contact levels within CRM and bring the relevant data inside the systems for firsthand use. As SMBs identify what additional information helps them sell, they'll be able to map how much revenue was achieved with the assistance of social media and these aspects that pull their weight will remain while other shiny social media tools may fall away.

SMBs should consider while evaluating social media to define what they are trying to accomplish, start simple and think bigger as they progress through testing and applying different social tools and walk the talk by using social media to learn more about social media, and improve customer relationships in the process.

**Salesforce.com ([www.salesforce.com](http://www.salesforce.com))**

**Scott Holden, Director, Product Marketing**

Cloud computing continues to be a big hit with companies of all sizes, including small businesses, offering ease-of-use, security, flexibility, ease-of-upgrade, low overhead and low costs. We believe that mobility and social media are the future of business applications. Businesses want mobility because employees often do their job best when they're not tied to a desk. This is arguably even truer in small businesses where flexibility is often in the job description. Mobility is becoming an expectation, which is why all of our CRM products include a mobile version.

As an external marketing channel, social media is very promising for small businesses. Much like a good website, social media can help build presence and credibility. In addition, it allows brands to proactively listen and respond to their audience.

Done correctly, social media can be a very powerful way for small companies to have a strong brand presence and build a loyal following. However, done wrong it's ineffective or can even have negative effects. Social media marketing is still very much an emerging practice and it requires a fair amount of savvy to understand and engage with audiences on Facebook and Twitter effectively. While small businesses should consider the opportunities, the path to success isn't always clear. **CIS**

## CRM For As Low As \$10 a Month?

One of the big reasons stopping many SMBs from considering CRM systems are high costs: installation, access and support.

Illuminetic ([www.illuminetic.com](http://www.illuminetic.com)) and crm-now have partnered to make the crm-now/PS cloud-based CRM solution (offered to European SMBs since 2004) available to American SMBs through an exclusive agreement between Illuminetic and crm-now for as low as \$10

per month per user. The crm-now/PS solution includes U.S.-based customer support, training, and services to help existing CRM users migrate from their current CRM system to the crm-now/PS platform.

"Most of our customers are using CRM systems for the first time," points out Illuminetic President Alan Kobran. "Especially with small companies, they are looking for ways organize their contacts, leads, and interactions with these people."

## Optimizing Agent Performance in a Real-time World

**T**he tools and processes to optimize agent performance are multifaceted — addressing the desktop to handle the contact, and performance tools to measure and monitor. The desktop includes knowledge management and scripting, as well as agent assistance tools. A performance tools suite includes quality monitoring, workforce management (WFM), customer feedback, and coaching tools. Another key ingredient is a strong feedback loop that uses those performance tools to drive actions that the individual and team can pursue for overall optimization.

Lori Bocklund, President of Strategic Contact, and Rachel Wentink, Senior Director of Product Management for Interactive Intelligence, collectively possess more than 40 years of contact center experience. Recently they sat down together to respond to common questions on how to improve agent performance in a contact center environment. Here are a few of their summarized responses... although you can read everything Lori and Rachel have to say in their new whitepaper, “Optimizing Agent Performance in a Real-time World.”

**Q:** How does a center get the most out of its agents in today’s complex, demanding world, without risking burnout and turnover?

**Bocklund:** My experience is that most agents really want to do a good job and succeed in serving their customers — even with the increasing demands placed on them. So the first thing centers need to do is provide the tools to help agents succeed. Knowledge management is a proven tool, for instance, as is the ability for agents to seek assistance using other tools such as internal chat to peers, unified communication functionality for presence and instant messaging to find experts, and even whisper coaching that lets a supervisor or QA person provide agents with information that they can then convey to the customer.

One other thing centers must do better is assign ample time for supervisors to coach individual agents, and provide coaching tools to ensure it gets done effectively — things like QM scores, scorecards and dashboards that help an agent see how they’re doing and where they can target certain improvement actions. Then, centers need to reinforce performance through rewards tied to their metrics.

**Wentink:** An agent’s job can be incredibly stressful. You can reduce the stress by empowering agents to play more of a subject matter expert role with proactive mentoring and, as Lori noted, with the right tools at hand. The benefit is that providing these tools reduces agent turnover, which in turn helps prevent potential damage to a company’s brand from unprepared agents interacting directly with customers.

**Q:** Many centers measure internal views of performance but fail to look at the customer view. How does a center balance agent performance optimization with customer experience optimization?

**Bocklund:** Centers need to have a balanced set of metrics. That means having a mechanism for customer feedback and comparing those results to internal QM scores and other performance indicators such as service level. For example, a customer can get an email with a link to a web survey, or go straight to an IVR after a call. Centers then need to execute consistent processes to assess performance across these balanced metrics and identify actionable improvements.

**Wentink:** It’s also important to respond as quickly as possible to optimize performance and customer experience. If an issue requires repairing a damaged relationship, it might mean having a supervisor call a valued customer back that same day, and that requires having configurable alerts that come in as soon as the customer survey is completed. It’s equally important to apply rules on how often to offer surveys, and best practices in how you construct the survey so that it isn’t too long. Otherwise surveys can seem like harassment.

**Bocklund:** Another “hot” metric that reflects the customer experience is First Contact Resolution, or FCR. We mentioned some things already that help improve FCR — like knowledge management and agent assistance — and centers need to define a clear way to measure FCR and consistently

track and report on it. FCR is truly a balanced metric because it optimizes both the customer experience and agent and center performance.

**Q:** Most centers today are asked to ramp up quickly to support new products and services. How do we help them consistently perform in this constantly changing world?

**Wentink:** Today's all-in-one systems make configuration and updates to data such as agent skills less onerous. Correct configuration is essential for proper scheduling to ensure that the right people and skills are available when the interaction arrives. Today's technology is also in a much better position to track demand and skills needed across different interaction channels, including tracking customer satisfaction ratings.

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**“My experience is that most agents really want to do a good job and succeed in serving their customers — even with the increasing demands placed on them. So the first thing centers need to do is provide the tools to help agents succeed.”**

– Lori Bocklund, President, Strategic Contact

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**Bocklund:** One of the first places to look is self-service. If a company does self-service well — using IVR and the web — they can offload significant workload from agents. That benefits the center both during “business as usual” times and changes or events that throw curve balls at them. Self-service technology also helps to optimize contacts. A couple examples: A call transferred out of IVR can arrive with all the pertinent information already gathered. Or a customer on a web site seeking assistance can get it through text chat, web calls and collaboration. These kinds of scenarios can deliver a stellar customer experience while shortening handle times and letting the agent focus on the customer's real need.

**Wentink:** Content can additionally be made available for agents internally, via a knowledge management solution or a scripting application, and even for customers externally, via the KM application. This can encourage self-service and reduce overall contact center costs.

**Q:** Centers still face the age-old problem of putting the right number of people with the right skills in place at the right time to handle the workload. What can centers do differently and better with today's technology?

With seasonal peaks or new product/service launches, for instance, consider combining specific IVR prompts or DNIS to separate out certain types of interactions, then assign skills to cover the topics and add detailed KM content.

**Q:** A variety of industries face increasing regulatory pressures and challenges such as protecting personal information. What tools can help optimize performance in these areas?

**Wentink:** The most important thing any management team can do is ensure that agents have current information on what they are allowed to do, and on what is forbidden and why. A scripting interface or KM “canned” responses can be enlisted to guide agents with up-to-date information on procedural questions, and to help ensure that agents use the right phrases and avoid the wrong ones. It's equally important to include compliance in quality scoring and mentoring processes. If you can demonstrate a solid track record of scoring, mentoring, and rewarding agents for compliance, it will put your organization in a better position should any infractions be discovered. eLearning modules or instructor-led training should also be supplied for complex compliance areas to give agents the necessary knowledge to comply. **CIS**



**AppTek ([www.apptek.com](http://www.apptek.com))** has made its automated speech recognition (ASR) engine available in Spanish. The enhanced ASR engine also processes several other key languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Farsi and Urdu. It is compatible for use with machine translation, providing a complete solution for commercial customers and to the U.S. government through AppTek's GSA schedule without integration costs or complex development.

The PlainSpeech Spanish telephony engine from AppTek is a unique offering in the language technologies market because it is specifically engineered for what the firm says is challenging content of unscripted natural language, dialect, slang, noise and other aspects of non-broadcast environments. AppTek's PlainSpeech telephony engine is unlike AppTek's broadcast audio version in that it is designed for different quality levels and also the challenges posed by unpredictable speech that is neither edited, rehearsed, or uniform.

**Aurix ([www.aurix.com](http://www.aurix.com))** speech analytics solution has been selected to become part of Coordinated Systems ([www.csiworld.com](http://www.csiworld.com)) Virtual Observer call recording and quality monitoring solution. The Virtual Observer Call Insight Speech Analytics phonetically indexes all recorded calls, enabling critical searches and automating time-consuming quality processes, performed at 80 times real time and is completed as soon as calls are recorded. Indexing is only required once, so there is no need to re-index recordings.

**Aurix** has also launched gopher-it 1.1 which gathers business intelligence to target customer contact efficiency, regulatory and business development challenges. Gopher-it 1.1 efficiently and effectively identifies valuable intelligence from within call recordings.

**Chrysalis Software (<http://chrysalis.net>)** now offers cloud or premise-based multimedia information delivery service that manages outbound notifications for contact centers. The Chrysalis Notification Service delivers information quickly via a variety of media such as voice, text message, e-mail or Twitter. Messages can be sent on a one-by-one basis, or broadcast to tens of thousands of recipients.

The Chrysalis Notification Service uses a campaign manager to manage a list of contacts and a set of rules for how recipients should be contacted. The rules include the media to be used, the specific media parameters for example Twitter login credentials, and any restrictions on the way the messages should be handled. Using the web service interface built into the Chrysalis Notification Service, new or updated contacts can be inserted into the campaign list at any time and the notification will be queued for launch. Campaigns can be configured to limit the hours during which dialing occurs, to make sure that calls are not launched too early or late in the day. For nationwide campaigns, the Chrysalis Notification Service can examine the time zone of each contact to be sure that time restrictions are respected in the recipient's time zone.

**Cincom Systems ([www.cincom.com](http://www.cincom.com))** is collaborating with **IBM** Business Analytics and Optimization to leverage IBM's Real-Time Analytics Matching Platform (RAMP) and to improve customer experience in contact centers by matching customers with agents that have the best possibilities for

delivering valued conversations. RAMP offers sophisticated applied analytics connects the right customer to the right agent. Cincom Synchrony guides that agent to deliver the designed experience for the best performance and outcomes.

**Noble Systems ([www.noblesys.com](http://www.noblesys.com))** has come out with Noble Composer 9.2 Web Agent, which enables creating web-based contact center agent desktops. It offers intuitive desktop design tools in a point-and-click environment that allows users to develop customized workflows without programming knowledge or expensive technical assistance. It has flexible agent desktop screens that enable users to allow agent access to tools by campaign for point-and-click navigation. It supplies Web-based support for Noble Mimic, an agent desktop management portal that utilizes common interfaces for multiple data sources, workflow automation, call scripts and tools for communicating with customers.

The new Noble solution also has Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) support to avoid the confusion of multiple agent login IDs. LDAP and Microsoft Active Directory service integration allow simplified user administration including addition and deletion of users, management of user permissions and user authentication. Included in the product is enhanced support for Noble Composer Debtor Contact Management System or DCMS, a customizable workspace that empowers account recovery agents to move seamlessly between predictive, preview and "push-to-connect" dialing.

**RightAnswers ([www.rightanswers.com](http://www.rightanswers.com))** has devised the RightAnswers Unified Knowledge Suite (UKS) which allows enterprises to extend existing customer support operations and/or create a fully customized self-service portal. RightAnswers can capture knowledge and segment it based on taxonomy to deliver targeted categories, or search zones, allowing customers to easily find information they are looking for. Content that is authored and maintained in UKS for Customer Service can be easily accessed by an array of customer service and self-help operations. These include the RightAnswers' customized self-service portal, search engines, automated e-mail knowledge response and Web snippets, which enables inserting fully-functional search capabilities within existing websites.

**Selligent ([www.selligent.com](http://www.selligent.com))**'s new Selligent Interactive Marketing version 3 has a marketing pressure management tool that enables marketers to set a wide variety of rules on different levels regarding outbound communication: frequency, timeframe, channels, target group and priority. It also has an eForm module that automatically manages subscription processes, gather customer data and set up surveys.

**Voxeo ([www.voxeo.com](http://www.voxeo.com))** has released its Prophecy 10 IVR and unified self-service platform. It can support over 6,000 concurrent calls per server – more than 10-times the performance it says of other standards-based IVR platforms. It simplifies deployments by reducing server counts to one-tenth of prior requirements, which shrinks configuration planning, equipment ordering and server installation time and maintenance costs. An improved Prophecy 10 Commander management user interface also enables significantly reduces software installation time.



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## Making Multimedia Work

**M**ultichannel and multimedia contact handling has long been prophesized, advocated and products created to support it. Yet in practice it has been given lip service as most customer contacts have been via live agent voice.

This is now changing thanks to a wide ray of factors including broadband to homes and mobile devices that are making chat, e-mail and SMS popular and the need to seamlessly integrate self-service with live agent interactions to deliver high quality customer-retaining experiences.

These two examples illustrate how firms are making multi-channel/multimedia work in their centers.

### Superior Service/Support, Lower Costs

Esri, based in Redlands, Calif., makes GIS mapping software that is sold in every major country; it has over a million users of their software in all 50 U.S. states, as well as in U.S. federal agencies, local government, and county health departments alone. Customer support is provided through four contact centers: at its headquarters and in Charlotte, N.C., Mumbai, India and Manila, Philippines) as well as a network of 100 international distributors and over 2,000 business partners.

Facing increased demand from a growing customer base and with this rising call volume and resulting higher costs, in 2007 Esri decided to expand from handling mostly voice-only interactions to efficiently intake e-mail and chat channels and provide Web self-service. It beefed up its PBX with a Genesys ([www.genesyslabs.com](http://www.genesyslabs.com)), an Alcatel-Lucent company Customer Interaction Management (CIM) platform solution to automate its call answering and routing, installed with the switch in its Redlands, California location. Esri liked the Genesys software, citing its robustness, extensibility and that it had the scalability it needed. The Genesys software incorporated an IVR system to handle simple self-service interactions, efficiently route voice calls, integrated routing for e-mail and chat inquiries to the best available agents and integrated callback into the queues. It also applied business intelligence rules to trouble tickets.

Michael Kim, Esri director of support services, says that the firm already been using e-mail and the phone to engage with their customers, but most of it was off-line. Their customer support staff would call back rather than engage customers



directly. E-mail requests were handled by either sending a reply e-mail or by phone call back.

“We had incorporated automated-routing and event management capabilities into our customer support organization, but we realized that we needed to take a multimedia approach since many customers were demanding different options for receiving support,” explains Kim.

Esri began installing the Genesys software in late 2008 with the work including testing and debugging fully completed a year later for the e-mail channel and in June 2010 for the chat channel. The work took place in phases: the first: where it implemented the IVR, routing, and seamless integration into its CRM system took 10 months, while the second: to deploy multimedia, chat and customer Web-based systems was accomplished over four months. Both required some desktop development which was simplified by using the Genesys SDK (software development kit).

Esri’s greatest challenge with the installation was integrating into the CRM. It simplified the tasks by using the SDK platforms jointly developed with and provided by Genesys. Esri’s goal was



to decouple available agents from any particular channel so that they could make ready to take e-mail, phone, or chat as the situation demanded. In turn customers have many options, allowing them to contact Esri by the channel of their choice; they can initiate a session by chat, by phone call or e-mail.

This amount of flexibility required a lot of testing and debugging, but Kim estimates that even with all of the customization, the project was completed within 10 percent of its budgeted timeline.

The Genesys solution has paid off dramatically. Agent/rep productivity increased by 150 percent: through closing that many more cases per employee and by using chat that enable them to engage more than one customer at a time.

Permitting trouble tickets to be closed rapidly and implementing chat drove customer service scores up by over 50 percent and net promoter scores by over 200 percent. The data showed that customer satisfaction is 15 to 20 percent higher with chat.

Esri also implemented the Genesys Web-based portal as a medium to communicate with their international distributors, allowing them to get updates via a Web portal and to take feedback. That worked so well, reports Kim that after a year of use by the distributors, the platform has now been extended to all customers worldwide.

More interaction methods are in the works. The firm is planning to deploy an outbound callback service, plus concierge and rendezvous functions. A Web-based calendar function for scheduling is also on the calendar as well as implementation of virtual hold.

"Although some of the satisfaction may be assigned to the excitement of a new communication method, many are pleased with the capabilities a chat channel now provides them," explains Kim. "There are many situations where the chat sessions must support large files transfers and long conversations that could last several hours, not just minutes.

"Customers appreciate the ability to stay online for these long periods of time, enabling them to complete an activity in less time because it is not dragged out over weeks of slow and intermittent communications associated with pure e-mail channels."

### **Small Center, Big Needs**

Summit Credit Union is one of the largest credit unions in Wisconsin with \$1.5 billion in assets. It has one contact center located in Madison, Wis., with 35 seats. Up until 2005 it had been using a multimedia, advanced contact center system from a startup company. Unfortunately the vendor ran into financial problems and went out of business.

That situation put Summit in a bind. Since it was used to using multimedia capabilities in the contact center, staff had to find a new voice vendor that offered the same.

Fortunately Summit had a solution readily at hand. In 2003 it had installed a ShoreTel ([www.shoretel.com](http://www.shoretel.com)) business phone system at all of its offices that had been functioning very well. After contacting the supplier's reseller, Transcend United, it selected the **ShoreTel** Enterprise Contact Center (ECC) system. Transcend customized several apps for Summit to duplicate some functionality that it had with their old system and completed the work in four to six months; cutover successfully took place in July 2006.

"It made sense to Summit to move to ShoreTel ECC and get a contact center system from the same vendor as phone system; especially as we wanted a connection between the two important functions: phone and contact center capabilities," explains Lisa Hayes, assistant vice president, Call Center. "We saw the value in not having to work with two separate companies."

ShoreTel ECC offers text chat, e-mail, and callback features, which is what their agents were using before on the old system, but provides them more seamlessly and with greater productivity. To be efficient, voice calls come first as a priority, and are delivered first to the agents, and then text chat and then e-mail is last.

The Summit system has call back feature where credit union members can go to its website to schedule a call by going online and completing a small form; plugging in when they want to be called; the ShoreTel ECC system dials out at that time for the agents. Members calling in can also leave a message and hang up and leave the queue, but the message stays in the queue, so the agent hears the message in the order that the call was received. Faxes that they send in now arrive on agents' desktops as e-mails: which avoids leaving their workstations to go to a fax machine.

"The ShoreTel ECC coordinates all of these different types of communications which gives managers time to coach and give feedback rather than spending time moving people around," says Hayes. "This is a much better use of the manager's time."

Summit is now planning to upgrade the ShoreTel installation to a new version of ECC in sometime in 2011. The new application will allow agents to have lot more knowledge of what is going on in the queues, rather than just supervisors having this information. The newest version of ShoreTel Agent Manager will also permit agents to know so much more about queues and make good business decisions on how to use their time.

"Multimedia allows members to gain access to their money and services in whatever way they want to communicate and from any location," explains Hayes. "Members can be very sensitive about getting help, so Summit wants to deliver excellent service, however suits them best. Summit agents are all on one system, rather than having to get off the phone to e-mail and communicate with members in other ways." **CIS**





# Designing the Next-Gen Contact Center

**T**here is a next generation of contact centers that is emerging, one with employer-provided facilities supplemented by home-based agents and by informal agents such as subject matter experts linked via unified communications.

The next-gen centers will have facilities that will be professional-appearing, versatile, smarter-built, energy- and ergonomically-focused and cost-effective, fitted to serve agents communicating with customers via text as well as voice, as firms seek to attract and retain quality agents to serve more demanding customers while controlling expenses.

The next-gen center will utilize software that can show them what their new environments will be like, which will give them an opportunity to suggest changes that can be then incorporated instantly to portray what it would look like instead.

To that end Interior Concepts uses ICE software to create an interactive quoting and design program that presents customized and modifiable contact center furniture and layouts. The firm utilizes web conferencing to connect its design engineers and its customers, who can view the furniture on their screens and request the engineers to make changes on the fly that it found makes the order process go much faster because customers see the furniture as they are making changes.

The next-gen center focuses on branding to develop and reinforce employee identification, loyalty and performance for their employers. HLW remodeled Barnes and Noble's 30,000 square foot, 140-workstation contact center, located in Lyndhurst, N.J. completed in May 2009. The center's break room has the feeling of a retail store including books and warm finishes and a variety of seating options from lounge seating to bar stools. Colorful graphics from the retail store are applied to the back of the offices on the floor and act as a backdrop.

"We often discover through our unique interactive workshops with focus groups of call centers that there is a lack of a connection to the business or brand of the company they are supporting," says Kimberly Sacramone, principal and director of design. "It is with this insight that we strive to incorporate the 'essence' of the company."

## Performance is Key

Kingsland Scott Bauer Associates (KSBA) has had a next-gen approach long before the term came to be applied to contact centers. In 1998 KSBA developed a process called "Performance Design" to connect design solutions to profitability via decreased



capital, energy and healthcare costs and increased productivity. It promotes efficient wiring and air delivery systems through access floors: raised floors where voice, data, power supply and optionally heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) run underneath. It focuses on ergonomics that zero in on employee health and productivity that are reflected in deploying adjustable-height keyboard trays, monitor heights and seat heights and at installing indirect lighting and putting in exercise/game room spaces.

The performance design methodology is most practical inside completely new buildings or top-to-bottom renovations of existing structures, such as vacant big-box stores. Elements of it, such as sound masking and furniture can be retrofitted in partial renovations though the full benefits will not be achieved.

KSBA managing partner Roger Kingsland admits that with the current economy his firm's business is a little slow, but his clients are interested in the next-gen performance design approach. For example his firm has been working on a 90,000 sq. ft. 600-employee contact center for VistaPrint in Montego Bay, Jamaica, scheduled to be completed in August 2011. Its features include outdoor views from the workstations, adjustable keyboard trays, modular cabling, solar hot water, a 250,000 gallon rainwater harvesting/reuse system, employee-controlled HVAC, exercise and game rooms, child care, a soccer field and food service.

"The firms who see value in tying design to user performance are continuing to specify a performance design approach," says Kingsland. "It isn't costly and it has a positive ROI when it is done right."

HLW International calls its next-gen design philosophy "Better Performance by Design." It focuses on reducing turnover by changing environmental factors: noise, lighting and movement while keeping costs low. The method stresses the right use of colors for paint and carpet and careful lighting fixtures to provide indirect light that can

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prevent eyestrain while natural light has significant positive effects on employee morale. It emphasizes careful space planning and strategically considering the adjacencies of the various required spaces such as for help desks, supervisors, break room, restrooms and training rooms to improve productivity by shortening access times.

"Our mantra is that smart design, especially for contact centers where the nature of the business is notoriously stressful causing tremendous turnover should be taken very seriously for companies that want to attract and retain the best talent, improve productivity and increase their bottom lines," explains Sacramone.

### Fitting Out the Multichannel Center

The next-gen contact center will be multi-channel: with text-based communications sharing close to if not equal billing with voice and have to be designed accordingly. KSBA's Kingsland reports that noise from conversations must be suppressed or masked more in a multichannel center or section than in a traditional voice-only or in a text-only facility or department to enable agents who are answering text communication to concentrate over the din of chatter.

If one is on the phone wearing headsets they do not notice the effects of their talking but it becomes apparent when they stop and have their sets off, he points out. Yet there will always been some sound even with the best of approaches and systems.

"You can eliminate noise to a certain extent," explains Kingsland. "The solutions are good sound masking and lots of absorptive surfaces such as ceiling panels to reduce reverberation and thick carpeting on the floor to suck the sound up. But still if you have a lot of people in small workstations near each other's you are going to hear stuff."

### Liberation From (or Likely Less) Wiring

New technologies such as wireless LANs and voice over IP (VoIP) can deliver cost savings in wiring and in flexibility by making it easier and less expensive to build and alter floor layouts. Wireless LANs avoid communications cabling altogether; VoIP eliminates separate voice lines.

KSBA's Kingsland is not seeing much use of wireless LANs in contact centers or

in other high-tech buildings. Instead they have been employed in limited controlled environments such as meeting spaces and there only as backups to wired LANs.

IT personnel are concerned, he explains, about building material such as concrete and steel and floor layouts affecting signal

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strength resulting in varying bandwidth that could reduce data speeds (quality-sensitive applications such as VoIP and IP video may also be affected -ed).

In contrast he is seeing VoIP almost exclusively with very few separate-wired new TDM installations. This shift cuts the number of cable "drops" (from ceilings or from underfloors) from three: phone, computer and backup to the last two.

KSBA says access floor goes one better by enabling firms to use just one communications cable. It also permits faster and less costly workstation addition, alteration, removal and layout changes than above-floor cabling.

"The only reason to have a backup cable is that it is there if the problem is difficult and time consuming to fix," explains Kingsland. "But with access floor or any other access system it is so easy to change out a cable so that if you have a problem you can change it out in no time, so why double your cabling cost?"

Interior Concepts has simplified wiring even further for training rooms and making their layouts even more flexible with tables powered by its Connect2 power system. The Connect2 is "plug and play" which means that the tables are powered simply by plugging them into a wall; no electrician is required.

### Going Dumb is Smart

The smartest computing is making terminals dumb. Computer/desktop virtualization i.e. cutting down on the tasks performed by, or eliminating individual workstation PCs reduces hardware and support costs.

This method can also slice facilities expenses by shrinking power consumption both directly through efficiency gains and indirectly by axing the amount of heat generated on the floors

that must be removed. That in turn can slice capital costs by permitting smaller HVAC units.

nComputing says its solutions enable energy demand reductions as much as 90 percent per user. RingCube estimates that its vDesk virtualization solution results in power costs that are 10 times less than conventional PCs.

KSBA's Kingsland reports that the savings from heat reduction can be significant. A PC generates as much heat as a human body he points out. In hot summer climates a low-density (sq.ft./ton) office would need 300 square feet to 350 square feet per ton of BTU in HVAC capacity but in high-density contact centers that efficiency drops to 200 sq. ft. /ton BTU, with a corresponding and costly HVAC unit size and power load increase. With virtualization the lessened air conditioning need can bring that ratio to 250 to 275 square feet /ton BTU, resulting in capital and operating cost savings.

"With computer virtualization what you are doing is transferring the HVAC load from the work environment where it adds unnecessary heat and noise and put it into the computer room where it is designed to handle it more efficiently as it is concentrated and can be cooled with cooler air," explains Kingsland.

### Going Green

The next-gen center is greener. That means natural lighting; indirect and direct, provided that the latter is facing away from the sun to avoid adding to heat load, to reduce the power draw by artificial lights and it means sourcing EnergyStar-rated appliances.

Green also means in the materials. HLW incorporated in the Barnes and Noble center certified- carbon-neutral carpeting that contains 24 percent post industrial recycled content. Also the acoustical ceiling tile used for the majority of the job is made from 70 to 75 percent re-

## The Pros and Cons of Plug-and-Play

A combination of a continuing challenging economy, shifts to self-service and to homes have left many vacant contact centers across the U.S. and Canada, often with switches, workstations and furniture intact, thereby creating ready "plug-and-play" facilities for firms looking to open new centers. While in the past these shuttered premises have too often been located in poor labor markets, this is less of a case today as many of them are in prime communities.

Not surprisingly contact centers, especially BPOs have been selecting plug-and-play sites which if designed and located right can save them money while slicing go-to live times over the other space options.

"We find little interest in Class A office space largely due to the limited amount of parking in most office buildings or office parks," explains Susan Arledge, president and CEO, Arledge Partners Real Estate Group. "There is a huge amount of vacant and/or surplus retail as a result of the economic recession;

however, the costs to convert these shells into a call center can be very time consuming, as well as expensive."

Yet plug-and-play centers could cost more than a completely new or extensively remodeled facilities created on next-gen lines. Roger Kingsland, managing partner, Kingsland Scott Bauer Associates (KSBA) ended up overhauling a so-called plug-and-play center for an unnamed outsourcer in an old bank building for \$55 a square foot. The center needed a new HVAC system, cabling and finishes.

He recommends in selecting such centers to look for comfortable workstations, preferably bordered by low panels with glass tops for increased light and air flow, adjustable chairs in good condition and confirm that the cabling technology will be adequate for the use.

"The outsourcer client was aghast that it would cost that much for what they were told was plug and play," recounts Kingsland.





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### Focus on Ergonomics

The next-gen center is about ensuring safe and healthy, and leading to cost saving performance and that means a focus on ergonomics. Strong cases can be made for adjustable chairs, monitor heights and lighting. They are also easy for agents to change for their own settings.

Yet other ergonomic tools may be difficult to successfully implement and/or justify.

Adjustable-height keyboard trays enable agents and supervisors to set and maintain individually comfortable angles for their wrists. The concern is not whether they will work but if the agents will actually use the height-changing features, which if not could waste the investments. The barriers are a general lack of education on the trays' benefits and having to convince agents to use these features voluntarily reports KSBA's Kingsland.

"Contact centers still primarily deal with calls with minimal keyboarding, which means neither the agents, supervisors or HR staff perceives the actual cause-and-effect advantages of these trays," explains Kingsland. "I suppose with the growth in nonverbal responses that will change."

Sit/stand workstations, which contact center agents to modify the height of their work surface throughout the day, may reduce discomfort and improve work performance. An Interior Concepts white paper "Call Center Ergonomics: I Can't Stand to Sit" points out that frequent position changes can help to prevent work-related, repetitive stress injuries.

### Enabling Security With Design

To safeguard data and applications requires attention to contact center design. Novo 1 has done just that in its new 37,000 sq. ft. contact center in Holland, Mich. that opened in September 2010. The BPO firm employed these security layers in its sensitive areas:

- Data cables running from its network systems equipment to the center's computers that are buried in a concrete floor in underfloor conduit to thwart hacking and slicing
- Electrical receptacles are secured to prevent uninterrupted power supply overload
- Customized workstations that feature a locking chase system created by Interior Concepts that physically secures agents' computers that prevents access by anyone other than designated IT personnel. No CD, DVD, media or USB thumb drive intrusion is permitted

Roger Kingsland thinks there is only a limited benefit of sit/stand work stations and they cost an extra \$800 over conventional workstations. While the theory is that sit/stand stations would translate into fewer break times, the reality he says is that in tightly managed contact centers the staff have set and scheduled break periods, regardless of whether the work station is flexible.

Interior Concepts may have an alternative approach. It recently launched an updated workstation with sit-to-stand functionality for contact centers that improves ergonomics while reducing costs over older variations. These use adjustable keyboards and monitor arms with enough adjustment to be used while in sitting or standing positions. In contrast, traditional sit-to-stand stations involved having the entire desktop move up and down either by hand crank or power, which added to the price. The Interior Concepts sit-to-stand accessories add approximately \$300 per workstation compared to manual sit-to-stand mechanisms that can run over \$600 and electric mechanisms that can run \$1,000 or higher.

### Attractive/Effective Amenities

Contact centers are high-stress environments, which mean its employees need places to unwind. The basics are break areas and in the larger centers cafeterias, and increasingly, quiet lounges, fitness centers to work it off and stay healthy, and Internet cafes. This last one pays off by giving staff an outlet to access their e-mail and surf online: without using their employers' machines. In the Barnes and Noble center HLW installed an Internet café in the break room that also included vending machines, flat screen TVs, and a variety of seating types including banquettes.

At the other end of the health scale is managing smokers; contact centers appear to attract many such employees. KSBA advises creating two separate outdoor patios, the farther apart the better, for smokers and the other employees.

Locating the amenities is just as important as their features. HLW's Sacramone recommends having break rooms located directly adjacent or having visual access through glass fronted office to supervisor for quick and immediate support on calls that decreases the amount of time agents must take to arrive back at their workstations.

KSBA's Kingsland advises placing break areas in the core of the contact centers. In this fashion they become the central foci for employees which then builds he says "a sense of community" as well as offering quick access to the call floors that maximizes both needed downtime and productivity. **CIS**

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

**Arledge Partners Real Estate**  
[www.arledgepartners.com](http://www.arledgepartners.com)

**HLW**  
[www.hlw.com](http://www.hlw.com)

**Interior Concepts**  
[www.interiorconcepts.com](http://www.interiorconcepts.com)

**Kingsland Scott Bauer Associates**  
[www.ksba.com](http://www.ksba.com)

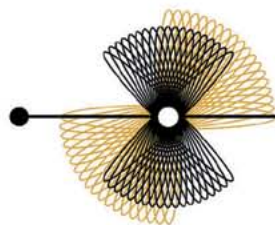
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# 2010 TMC Labs Innovation Award Winners – Part II

**T**wo-thousand and ten marks the 11th anniversary for the prestigious TMC Labs Innovation Awards, where TMC Labs reviews dozens of applicants and chooses the most unique and innovative products and services.



Reflecting the high level of innovation we are seeing, we have nearly doubled the number of winners to a total of 19 in 2010 from 10 in 2009. The awards are broken into two parts to fit the highlighted write-ups. The first part (September issue) started with Amdocs and ended with Interior Concepts. The second half (this issue) will start with Knoa and end with VanillaSoft. Here are the highlights of our Part II winners:

## **Knoa Software**

Knoa Global End-User Monitor (GEM)  
[www.knoa.com](http://www.knoa.com)

**Knoa** Global End-User Monitor (GEM) enables organizations to monitor end-user experience and interaction for all desktop and web-based applications running on users' desktops, which makes it innovative. The product collects comprehensive, global metrics on software utilization, application health, application responsiveness, user behavior, user experience and desktop performance. Knoa GEM is unique because of its ability to collect a broad range of metrics across all applications that a company runs without any configuration, instrumentation, scripting or templates. Knoa GEM provides out-of-box monitoring coverage of end-user behavior and experience for more than 25 enterprise applications including SAP, Oracle E-Business Suite, Oracle Siebel CRM, JD Edwards, PeopleSoft Enterprise Suite, Amdocs, as well as other business applications.

## **NICE Systems**

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

NICE SmartCenter has unique capabilities for capturing customer and business intent, analyzing interactions and transactions for insight, and generating impact on the interaction and the business. It offers advanced cross-

channel analytics to enable organizations to identify and analyze customer behavior patterns across a broad variety of available contact channels, from chat and e-mail to voice and social media.

NICE SmartCenter includes pre-packaged business solutions that address specific business issues, including call recording, quality management, workforce management, cross-channel interaction analytics, including speech analytics, real-time guidance, and performance management. These solutions can be deployed on premise, in a hosted model, or via a managed service, and can be implemented stand-alone or fully integrated with customer relationship management and business intelligence solutions.

## **OAISYS**

Tracer  
[www.oaisys.com](http://www.oaisys.com)

Tracer is a call recording and interaction management software solution that utilizes **OAISYS** Portable Voice Document (PVD) technology to capture telephone-based interactions as digital call recordings, or voice documents, that are available to store, organize, play back, annotate and share with others as needed. This core PVD functionality is paired with Tracer's advanced contact center management features, including employee performance evaluations, the ability to live and auto monitor calls, integrated instant messaging for coaching purposes, quality and resource utilization reporting and synchronized desktop video recording capabilities.

One unique feature of Tracer is that select portions of a call can be exclusively shared and access to the encrypted file can be granted via a secure link. Security concerns are addressed since the file itself never leaves the central repository on which it is stored, and access permissions can be set to expire after an identified time period. Permissions are granted or restricted to determine whether recipients can further annotate or share the access.





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OAISYS	<a href="http://www.oaisys.com">www.oaisys.com</a>	OAISYS Tracer
Pegasystems	<a href="http://www.pegasystems.com">www.pegasystems.com</a>	Customer Process Manager (CPM)
Presence Technology	<a href="http://www.presenceco.com">www.presenceco.com</a>	Presence Social Media
Primas	<a href="http://www.primas.net">www.primas.net</a>	Evolution FCR
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VanillaSoft	<a href="http://www.vanillasoft.com">www.vanillasoft.com</a>	VanillaSoft

### Pegasystems

Customer Process Manager (CPM)  
[www.pegasystems.com](http://www.pegasystems.com)

Pegasystems' Customer Process Manager (CPM) is designed to help contact center agents resolve the most service requests at the first point of customer contact, optimizing their work and eliminating the need for further contact in the back-office. The CPM integrates with centers' policy administration and technology systems, allowing companies to leverage existing investments and simplify complex interactions that formerly required access to multiple systems.

Pegasystems' CPM enables call centers to establish best practices for interacting with customers and various issues that arise with different customers and have all agents follow the best practices. Based on customers' profile and reason for calling, intent-driven processing prompts call center agents with suggested processes. A simple layout provides scripting, service options, and a consolidated view of customers.

### Presence Technology

Presence Social Media  
[www.presenceco.com](http://www.presenceco.com)

Presence Social Media enables the contact center to tweet, post messages, answer messages and even to manage messaging in real time with the traditional channels in Presence Suite. Presence Social Media integrates--via a single interface--a variety of tasks, such as blending, automation, sorting, management, interactions, back-office task control and reporting, as well as any communication through social networks.

### Primas

Evolution FCR  
[www.primas.net](http://www.primas.net)

Evolution FCR identifies repeat callers by constantly polling the IVR for repeat ANIs and then automatically provides a different experience when these repeat customers are identified in the IVR. When a repeat ANI is discovered, it eliminates the IVR menus from the repeat caller's initial experience i.e. user definable and transfers them directly to either the agent or the department they selected on the first, or last time they called. Basic customer data can be collected via the IVR system each time a customer calls in, plus more detailed customer data can be extracted from the CRM system or other database. This can also include the last agent contacted and the nature of that contact. Therefore each time a customer calls in, agents are better prepared to deliver fast customer service and resolve customers' issues quickly.

### RingCube Technologies

RingCube vDesk  
[www.ringcube.com](http://www.ringcube.com)

RingCube offers vDesk, an innovative desktop virtualization solution. Its unique Virtual Workspace technology separates the user's desktop environment including applications, data and settings from the operating system and encapsulates it into a secure container while automatically backing up every virtual desktop to a centralized server. Users can run their vDesk workspace at the office or on unmanaged PCs -- at home, or at disaster recovery site. When users start their vDesk workspace, it transforms any Windows PC into their own familiar corporate workspace where users can access their files, applications, settings and entire desktop, just as



if they were on their own business PC whether online or offline from the network.

vDesk supports virtual networking, called vDeskNet, which allows the virtual workspace to separate and isolate network traffic from the host PC including VPN clients running within the virtual workspace. Additionally, it supports virtual user management to allow the virtual workspace to have a unique set of user accounts separate from the host PC. It also has the Virtual Security Store, which provides a separate protected storage area within the virtual workspace where items like certificates are kept isolated from the host PC.

### **Salesforce.com**

Salesforce Chatter

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

Salesforce Chatter is a cloud-based enterprise social collaboration application and platform that employees can use for powerful social media-based collaboration. It uses social features popularized by consumer social networking sites, like profiles, status updates and real-time feeds. Employees can follow people, business processes and application data. With Chatter, employees and teams get immediate insight into their company's programs, projects, people, customers, cases, documents and business data that is pushed to them, delivering new levels of social intelligence. Chatter offers Profiles that enable employees to get to know their colleagues and share their expertise. Another component is Groups, which are specific collections of Chatter employees that help teams get organized, share information, collaborate on documents and work more productively. Employees can also set up private groups to work privately on sensitive projects with specific colleagues. Chatter also features real-time feeds.

### **ShoreTel**

ShoreTel 11

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

ShoreTel 11 is a comprehensive unified communications solution, consisting of IP based telephony switches, telephones, as well as powerful desktop and mobile applications. ShoreTel is the first solution in the UC industry that leverages virtualization with VMware ESX, but without the complexity found in other UC systems. All primary server resources are fully enabled, including unified messaging, administration, call center, reporting and management.

ShoreTel 11 sports some powerful mobility features. As of the v11 release, the ShoreTel Communicator client is now available for the Web and for the iPhone, allowing users to manage communications from Macintosh computers and iPhones, along with BlackBerry and other popular devices. It has many UC features, one notable example of which is the easy-to-use interface called ShoreTel Converged Conferencing which unifies Web conferencing, audio conferencing, desktop/application sharing, instant messaging (IM), virtual meeting rooms, online presentations, and multimedia recording.

### **VanillaSoft**

VanillaSoft (SaaS offering)

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

VanillaSoft's is lead management software focused on outbound-based inside sales teams. The platform supports multiple users and multiple campaigns each with a unique set up including but not limited to; scripting, unlimited custom fields, integrated e-mail, blast e-mail, auto import of web or trigger leads with a 2.6 second delivery time, live dashboard and powerful web based reporting. VanillaSoft has engineered its platform to dial over the chosen PBX or VoIP of its customers so they can keep what they have and not spend on additional telecom costs.

One key feature is what VanillaSoft calls "Next Best Lead Routing". This allows management the unique ability to deploy the company's best practices and lead routing based on results or preferences. Instead of having agents pick through leads, VanillaSoft uses predefined logic and pushes the next best lead or call to the rep, dials the phone and tracks the lead and agent from cradle to grave. It can also record all calls and stream them to their data center for retrieval and play. **CIS**

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<i>http://call-center-software.tmcnet.com</i>	
Contact Center Solutions Community .....	33
<i>http://callcenterinfo.tmcnet.com</i>	
CosmoCom.....	37
<i>www.cosmocom.com</i>	
Higher Ground .....	13
<i>www.higherground.com</i>	
InContact.....	5, Cover 3
<i>www.incontact.com</i>	
Infocision .....	Cover 2
<i>www.infocision.com</i>	
IntelliResponse .....	9
<i>www.intelliresponse.com</i>	
Interactive Intelligence .....	Cover 4
<i>www.inin.com</i>	
ITEXPO East.....	29
<i>www.itexpo.com</i>	

OpenSpan .....	3
<i>www.openspan.com</i>	
Outbound Call Center Community.....	35
<i>http://outbound-call-center.tmcnet.com</i>	
Promero .....	28
<i>www.promero.com</i>	
R.L. Bencin & Associates .....	18
<i>www.rlbencin.com</i>	
Satmap .....	11
<i>www.satmaptrg.com</i>	
SocialCRM Expo 2011 .....	39
<i>www.scrmexpo.com</i>	
Thomas L. Cardella Associates .....	38
<i>www.tlcassociates.com</i>	
VXi .....	23
<i>www.vxicorp.com</i>	
VoIP Call Recording Community .....	27
<i>http://www.tmcnet.com/channels/voip-call-recording/</i>	

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## Is the U.S. Finally Competitive With India?

**T**here is growing evidence showing that when all costs are considered having contacts handled in the U.S. may be finally competitive with offshore outsourcing, most notably to India.

BPO outsourcer [Genpact](#) president and CEO Pramod Bhasin was reported in Hindu Business Line saying that his firm is doubling its U.S. workforce to 2,000 in the next two to three years to provide BPO, help desk and other services.

"The unemployment level in the U.S. has created a situation where you can hire good professionals, cheaper," Bhasin was reported to have said.

Site selectors report that India has been moving to saturation levels for high offshore quality (well-educated, superb English-language skills) contact center workers as it climbs up the IT chain, resulting in higher turnover and increased wage pressure. Serving North American and U.K. customers is less desirable in India than at home because the agents and supervisors there have to work graveyard shifts to take/make these contacts what with time zone differences.

The real kicker is a deteriorated customer experience. The fourth annual Contact Center Satisfaction Index from CFI Group reveal that offshore contact centers score 27 percent lower in customer satisfaction than those based in the U.S. Meanwhile American agents are 34 percent more likely to resolve problems on the first call than those handled offshore. Offshore agents' soft skills i.e. courtesy, empathy are relatively close though to their domestic counterparts.

"If a customer hangs up mad, it isn't the agent they are going to blame, it's the company that put them in that position to save a buck by sending their call overseas," warns CFI Group CEO Sheri Teodoru.

At the same time steadily improving voice (IVR, speech recognition) and web self-service are reportedly capturing an increasing proportion of calls once offshored. The flip side is that the ones requiring live agent attention are the most difficult: from upset customers who went through the automated solutions. There is no room for the cultural-difference-driven misunderstandings and repeat questions that happens all too often with foreign agents. Not when with a few clicks annoyed buyers can carve virtual fresh orifices out of firms via social media, which means potential lost sales from others who read and sympathized with their stories.

Does this mean happy days for American contact centers? Only if companies tell their senior managers and management consultants who have been recommending axing front-line staff, slicing wages, cutting hours and benefits to lay these hacks off and not renew their contracts instead.

Johann Hari, a columnist for the Independent, wrote in the Huffington Post points to the folly of what he calls people off payroll or POP snake oil that these consultants have been peddling.

"Professor Wayne Cascio of the University of Colorado has studied the relative costs and benefits of POPing your workforce [and] has shown that, most of the time, the costs outweigh the gains. Obviously, you have to immediately find large amounts of redundancy and severance pay...Your workforce becomes very nervous - and a nervous workforce is dramatically less productive and less innovative. The best people leave. The service to the customer deteriorates - so they abandon you even more."

Companies are risking with these strategies higher customer churn that drives up marketing and acquisition expenses. Why stay loyal when the customer service choices are computer-delivered voices or poor quality offshore or domestic live agents? With self-service being less expensive than even offshore it doesn't take a Ph.D. to figure out what will happen next to live agent centers.

There is another option: having customer-focused high-productivity contact centers. The formula has been mentioned frequently in this page: shifting to work-at-home from expensive employer-subsidized premises, selecting and training the right people and treating them right. It also making available other employees as informal contact center agents and tapping them as experts via unified communications.

How about instead we give these concepts a real try now that we have the golden opportunity to do so? Before we lose contact centers and the opportunities for customers, workers and suppliers they provide for good... **CIS**





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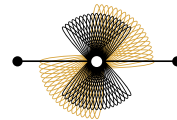
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