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# Peek

at the

# NEW

# Customer Interaction Center

(CIC) Version 4.0

## Also In This Issue:

- Anytime, Anywhere  
Any Channel Support
- The IP Switch
- Finding Productivity Opportunities



**Lisa.**

Not so big on piña coladas or getting caught in the rain.

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Rich Tehrani, CEO, TMC



## Will Contact Centers Boost U.S. Employment Again?

**I**t was 1991. The U.S. was in the midst of a recession and economic development agencies worldwide started to court the editors of this publication to write articles about their locations as attractive places to start a new center. In that year, my first article-writing assignment outside the U.S., in fact, was to attend an IDA Ireland event in Dublin. At the time, call centers were seen as the perfect job creators, as the skills needed to work in them were limited. Moreover, they didn't require massive amounts of water or electricity like the manufacturing space. You could drop them anywhere and they would just create jobs – sometimes by the thousands per center.

The one-two punch of IP communications followed by do-not-call regulations really killed employment in the space, as tens of millions of jobs flowed from the U.S. to the Philippines, India, Vietnam, South Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere. In the case of the do-not-call list – millions of jobs were killed overnight, but the problem was masked temporarily by a housing bubble fueled by the same government – assuring systemic unemployment once the housing and credit bubbles burst.

Now, with the U.S. in one of its deepest employment slumps in half a century, there may be a bit of good employment news as it relates to contact centers. You see, although contact centers are hiring at a nice clip worldwide – especially in India – in many parts of the world, the career path does not have the luster it once had.

In the U.S., a contact center job may be considered a few notches above being a cashier but, a decade or so ago in other countries, a call center job was something great to have and it was a fantastic career. What a difference a decade makes. With time zone issues – having to work nights to cover U.S. daytime callers and the challenges of communicating with a different language utilizing different slang and growing hostility regarding India call center agents – it seems working in a contact center is no longer the prized job it once was.

In a recent video interview, Dan Boehm, VP of Sales & Marketing at Spectrum Corp., told me Indian contact center costs are skyrocketing and attrition is very high. He just returned from the country before our interview and quoted attrition rates as high as 60 percent and wage inflation on a yearly basis as high as 20 percent. These challenges are obviously affecting profitability and Spectrum is using this opportunity to sell more of its agent efficiency tools to Indian and other contact centers so they can remain viable entities. He mentioned that his business is also growing in Singapore and the Philippines because contact centers are looking for new low-cost countries to expand into.

In another video interview, Mary Murcott, CEO of Novo 1 Contact Centers, a call center outsourcer with 1,600 U.S. based agents, said her business is to bring outsourced jobs from other countries back to the U.S. with a claimed cost savings of 15 percent over India or the Philippines. Murcott says she has seen attrition rates of 140-150 percent as agents would go across the street for a dime more.

She went on to say that customer satisfaction rates and first call resolution rates are up to 20 points lower in India than the U.S. because, just as domestic callers have a tough time understanding agents, agents, too, have a tough time understanding us.

Ten years ago, I started a website called [lostamericanjobs.com](http://lostamericanjobs.com) because I wanted the government to put a stop to the flood of jobs leaving the U.S. I soon realized I was extremely naïve and, if U.S. companies didn't use cheaper labor, companies from other countries would and, in doing so, would wipe out the American companies that would not be able to compete. Instead, I realized the global standard of living needed to increase for it to become less attractive to send jobs outside the U.S.

The good news is the process is well underway and, not only is free market capitalism helping to make the tide rise around the globe, over time it is building future generations of middle-class families who, in turn, will buy more products – whether they be movies from Hollywood, wine made in France, iPads, or cars made by Ford.

A decade ago, I was certainly concerned about the future of the U.S. contact center market. While it is early to predict a massive influx of new U.S. jobs in the sector, global wages are beginning to increase to a point where it is starting to make sense to not only keep the call center jobs in the U.S., but it may make sense to bring many of them back to where they began. **CIS**

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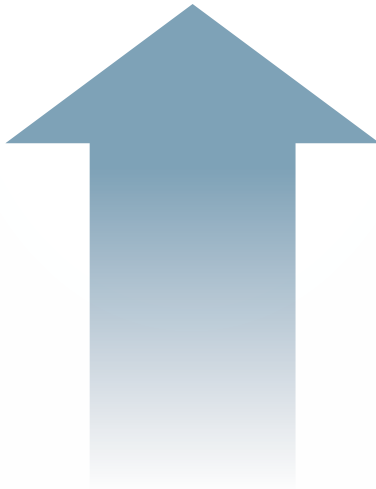
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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*



## Tweeting Isn't Just for Birds

One hundred and forty characters. One tweet. Such a small space, yet one that has become powerful beyond its size. What can you accomplish in just a few words?

Just got a new Verizon iPhone – the monthly plan is a ripoff. It should be illegal. (83 characters)

Called Cablevision about a bad STB – they had a tech out in 3 hours. Awesome service! (85 characters)

Twins had their first baseball game. Caught their first ABs on my BlackBerry. Terrible video quality. Should have gotten the Evo. (129 characters)

Dinner at SUSHISAMBA Miami Beach. Best meal I've had in a long time. El Topo roll is amazing! Can't wait to go to the one in Vegas! (131 characters)

Whether positive or negative, one tweet can say a lot about customers' experiences with products and services. Social media has transformed how we interact with our friends and families – as well as our colleagues in many cases. For the hundreds of millions of social media users, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other social tools are a way of life, largely because they are able to easily communicate their thoughts to large groups of friends and followers in seconds, from wherever they are, thanks to the availability and ease of use of these services on mobile devices.

Most users don't necessarily see their social media activities as a feedback mechanism for businesses – they are merely looking to share their experiences with their contacts. But, because of the inherent pack mentality that pervades human decision making, social media has the potential to be the most significant tool for influencing behavior we have experienced.

As such, every business must develop a social media strategy for discovering customer sentiment as it is spread through cyberspace – and for reacting, when appropriate, to develop appropriate action plans and leverage experiences to provide better overall service, especially where they see trends building.

The great thing about social media is it's a two-way channel. When a business recognizes negative sentiment, it can engage customers directly to begin a resolution process. Likewise, when customers exhibit satisfaction, their experiences can be leveraged to determine more specifically what created their heightened level of satisfaction to deliver that same experience to others.

TMC's Brendan Read recently interviewed Vinay Iyer, vice president, CRM Marketing at SAP, who noted that, "140 characters are not always enough to resolve a problem. The response – using the customers' preferred channel – is only the first step towards the resolution of the problem. The solution might be achieved through various conversations with the customers, via phone, chat and appointments." (Read the full interview on TMCnet: [www.tmcnet.com/58900.1](http://www.tmcnet.com/58900.1)).

Verizon could quickly contact its customer to ask if she would like to speak to an agent to see if there is a more cost effective plan that would accommodate her needs.

Cablevision could ask for more detail on the service call to help determine which of its crews might be used as training examples.

Sprint could respond to its subscriber with an offer to upgrade to a new device.

Likewise, RIM might be able to suggest alternative BlackBerry devices that are more suitable for the user's needs (before it loses more of its market share to Apple and Android).

SUSHISAMBA could offer a coupon to help ensure its Miami guest actually does visit its Las Vegas location. It can also use similar comments to determine which menu items to keep and which to replace.

The key, regardless of the nature of the business, is to develop social CRM strategies that include monitoring, analysis, and customer engagement – and the technology to implement those strategies and integrate them into their traditional CRM systems and activities.

There are many factors that play into how businesses should introduce social media into their environments, including an understanding of customer behavior, knowing what tools are available for monitoring and analysis, integration into existing workflows, and best practices for building communities of customers and social media marketing.

All of these will be key topics of discussion at ITEXPO West in Austin, Texas, September 13-15, when the thought leaders in social media and social CRM convene to help business leaders understand the social media phenomenon and how they can put the consumer trend of providing instant feedback to work for their businesses.

Find more information at [www.itexpo.com](http://www.itexpo.com), and make your plans now to turn your customers' insatiable thirst for sharing experiences into a revenue generating opportunity. **CIS**





## Call Center Software Online Community

<http://call-center-software.tmcnet.com>

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# A Peek at the New Customer Interaction Center (CIC) Version 4.0

**C**ontact centers are looking for ways to better serve their customers over multiple channels while increasing productivity without high costs.

Later this summer Interactive Intelligence ([www.inin.com](http://www.inin.com)) will release a new version of its unified IP business communications software suite for contact centers and enterprises, Customer Interaction Center (CIC) 4.0, that will offer enhanced features to help managers meet those

goals. Full details will be reported on TMCnet.com and explored at length in an upcoming Customer Interaction Solutions issue.

Over 300 top-drawer Interactive Intelligence customers across industry verticals, along with leading analysts, got a sneak peek at CIC 4.0 at the company's users' conference, "Interactions 2011," which was held in Indianapolis, Ind. May 24-26.

This latest product version provides new tools that help contact center managers better understand what to focus on so they can most effectively impact agent productivity and cus-





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customer service. It also offers increased scalability and reliability, thus pushing CIC's applicability in the largest enterprises and contact centers even further.

CIC 4.0 appears to offer many other enhancements as well, including broader multichannel customer service options, more flexible cloud-based deployment models and simplified processes for monitoring, compliance and reporting.

"We believe these enhancements will build on CIC's unique architecture, which was designed to offer multichannel application processing - from calls, faxes, and e-mails, to Web chats, SMS, and social media - minus the cost and complexity introduced by multipoint products," said Joe Staples, Interactive Intelligence chief marketing officer.

CIC 4.0 is expected to boost Interactive Intelligence's already fine performance, having posted a whopping 36 percent revenue increase in the first quarter of 2011 (Q1 2011) over revenues in the same quarter last year, with total orders up 55 percent.

"CIC 4.0's increased scalability, reliability, and numerous other feature enhancements puts the wind at our backs as we continue our move up-market to meet and exceed the requirements of the largest global enterprises," said Interactive Intelligence founder and CEO, Dr. Donald E. Brown.

The company reported revenues of \$47.7 million in Q1 2011 as compared with \$35 million in Q1 2010. Product revenues increased by 32 percent while those from recurring climbed 30 percent and those from services rose by 88 percent, period to period.

"We again saw strong year-over-year order increases across all major geographies and product groups," said Dr. Brown. "We're executing well on our sales and marketing plans and are benefiting from an increase in new opportunities as a result of our relationships with key strategic partners."

### CIC Popularity and Results

The CIC solution continues to grow in popularity. Several member companies of The Co-operators Group Ltd., a Canadian insurance company recently selected the product to consolidate multiple communications technology systems across several coast-to-coast locations.

"Many of our existing systems were nearing their end of life," explained The Co-operators executive VP and CIO, Hugh Cumming. "In addition, these multi-vendor systems made it challenging for our physically disparate member companies to effectively communicate with one another and with clients across multiple lines of business."

The Co-operators selected CIC over competitive products after the Interactive Intelligence solution scored the highest overall based on an extensive set of evaluation criteria. The insurance group also purchased add-on applications for multichannel recording and scoring, outbound dialing, and customer feedback surveys.

The Co-operators is anticipating benefits from the CIC deployment among them: reduced costs by eliminating long distance charges, simplifying system management and consolidating technology redundancies across locations. It plans to realize increased efficiencies by improving member-to-member communications and improved service via the ability to better monitor interactions, engage in proactive customer contact and obtain real-time customer feedback.

"CIC's unique open, single-platform software architecture with a broad range of multichannel applications best met our requirements, particularly our need to simplify administration, reduce costs and enhance customer experiences," said Cumming. "Having a common dialing plan and being able to do things like route, queue, and report on multichannel interactions across locations will also enable us to increase productivity and better integrate service channels for our clients."

CIC has long generated strong results. For example, ABC Financial, which provides software and payment processing solutions to the fitness industry, reported reduced costs thanks to CIC's blended dialing, IVR and workforce management applications. It uses CIC to process about 135,000 inbound calls and more than 720,000 outbound calls each month.

"CIC's blended dialing has saved us money by ensuring our agents don't sit idle waiting for the next call to come in," said Jill Dozier, ABC Financial's chief operating officer. "We've also been able to save money using CIC's IVR, which today handles more than 12,000 calls each month. We no longer estimate our hiring needs. Using Interaction Optimizer, CIC's add-on application, we now have an accurate and detailed view of current and projected service levels, which is enabling us to cost-effectively grow while actually improving customer service."

### CIC 3.0 JITC-Certified

CIC version 3.0 is now Joint Interoperability Test Command (JITC)-certified, which makes it compliant with information assurance and interoperability requirements for the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Private Branch Exchange 2 classification. DoD customers using the JITC-certified CIC software suite benefit from pre-integration with Active Directory, and PKI and Common Access Cards (CAC) for single sign-on to the desktop and telephony services.

"CIC's unique architecture, particularly its deep integration to Microsoft components, means reduced integration and simplified management for federal government customers," said Joe Brookman, CEO of BROOKMAN LLC, a government technology services provider that led the Interactive Intelligence certification effort.

"This certification demonstrates our continued commitment to meet and exceed DoD information assurance and interoperability requirements, which began in 2008 with our first JITC certification," said Dr. Brown. "Combined with our dedicated government sales team and long track record of successful government deployments, we offer agencies a deep understanding of their unique technology needs and issues." **CIS**



**“With inContact, we don’t have to worry about the technology and can focus on providing our customers with superior sales and service.”**

**Chris Spear, Extra Space Storage**

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## Knowlagent on Productivity

Contact centers are under the gun in today's slow economy to do more/with less and boost productivity. Matt McConnell, president and CEO of Knowlagent ([www.knowlagent.com](http://www.knowlagent.com)) had these questions posed to him on contact center productivity trends, issues and solutions:

### Q: How do customer service expectations impact contact center productivity?

**McC:** Consumers expect more when it comes to personal service. They're accustomed to resolving most of their simple issues quickly through channels such as web forms. And when they have a complex issue and need a live person to assist them, they expect a high degree of effective personal service. To that point, when was the last time you heard someone rave about an IVR interaction? Churn risk is on the rise, and generally speaking, the risk of customers leaving is higher than in the past.

In response to this risk, contact centers are investing in customer experience. Net Promoter Scores are becoming more important in call centers — as well as first-call resolution. Senior executives in the call center want to invest more in customer relationships, but they want to keep costs low.

Thus, the "do more with less" mentality still holds true. However, the focus isn't "do more calls with less." Instead, the focus is on effective customer service, resolving the issue during the first call and improving customer retention. In sum, there is an increasing emphasis on being effective as opposed to just being efficient today, but call centers are still expected to do it inexpensively.

### Q: What other trends impact productivity?

**McC:** The call center agent population is increasingly transient and diverse with a multi-sourced workforce from all over the world. Multi-sourcing is a real mix of people—including insourced, outsourced, on-shore, offshore, at-home, in-center, part-time, full-time and tem-

porary agents — who serve a company's customers, but don't necessarily have the company's name on their paycheck. With a multi-sourced workforce, it has become increasingly difficult to deliver a consistent message and level of service.

Also, call centers have always had good information on the customer from CRM systems and call volumes from historical "traffic," but we now have rich information about the agent. As a result, call center managers can make better decisions on agent segmentation and customer queues and routing.

### Q: Please explain how Knowlagent's solutions directly boost contact center productivity. What is the payback period? Do you have illustrative case studies?

**McC:** Knowlagent increases productivity by deploying activities that normally contribute to shrinkage (i.e. social learning, coaching, communications or training) during idle time, creating active wait. As a result, more labor hours are spent handling calls, and shrinkage activities occur in between handling calls.

Statistics show that agents spend 11 percent of their day in wait mode, or, an average of 16 hours per month. They also have about 19 hours of scheduled off-phone activities. Of the 16 available hours per month of wait/idle time, creating one hour of active wait per agent per month pays for the Knowlagent solution, and as an annual SaaS subscription, the solution is paid off within 12 months. Two hours per month is a six-month payback. Three hours per month results in a four-month payback.

Clearly, the more active wait delivered, the higher you can drive productivity.

Another way to use productivity gains is by investing in agents. One company with a multi-sourced workforce (insourced and outsourced agents), invested in Knowlagent's RightTime technology, so its call center agents could deliver consistent service and solve customer issues effectively and efficiently—the first time. To learn more about the impact of Knowlagent, visit <http://www.knowlagent.com/resources/webinar-sprint-fcr.aspx>

### Q: What other types of off-phone activities contribute to shrinkage?

**McC:** Knowlagent conducted the Contact Center Shrinkage Survey, which revealed that a number of different activities contributed to shrinkage: must-read emails, projects, call follow-up, and coaching, as well as a significant amount of time in training and communications.

While training and coaching make up a large percentage of off-phone work in call centers, they're not the only activities. Based on this research and requests from our clients to deliver more activities and applications, we introduced RightTime 8.5, which allowed us to deliver any off-phone activity, such as back office, social learning, call research and knowledgebase reviews, to active wait.

### About Knowlagent

Knowlagent provides the only call center software that increases agent utilization by delivering shrinkage activities during idle time. Knowlagent creates active wait time through dynamically delivered sessions for common shrinkage activities between customer interactions. Knowlagent's solutions are on-demand, easy to use and require no capital expenditures. Over 300,000 agents and managers around the world use Knowlagent's solutions every day. For more information, call 888-566-9457 or visit us online at [www.knowlagent.com](http://www.knowlagent.com). **CIS**



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Two leading suppliers, **SugarCRM** ([www.sugarcrm.com](http://www.sugarcrm.com)) and **Syntellect** ([www.syntellect.com](http://www.syntellect.com)) have been growing their offerings in three dimensions – product enhancements, acquisitions and partnerships.

SugarCRM rolled its developments out at its SugarCon users' conference in April 2011. Here are the highlights:

- Upgrades to the Sugar 6 platform and features. There is integration with web meeting tools including Cisco WebEx Meeting Center and Citrix-GoToMeeting. Also, Sugar 6 users can upload, manage and share Google Docs right inside the Sugar 6 user interface. The Sugar Activity Streams collaboration tool now permits replying to individual posts, view user profile photos within posts, integrate Sugar users' Facebook news feeds and integrate the Twitter streams.

The Sugar product now supports 22 languages, including those that are right-to-left. The platform is also easier for administrators to set which included languages are available to users.

There is now support for the Oracle 11g Database and greater support for IBM system-i users. And Sugar 6 is now part of the solutions included in BitNami Cloud Hosting, which simplifies running applications on Amazon Web Services platform.

- SugarCRM acquired iExtensions CRM from iEnterprises, Inc. for an undisclosed sum. The newly acquired functionality adds enhanced support for IBM collaboration tools inside Sugar 6. The added features include native Notes support as well as Notes e-mail and calendar plugins, and a connector to the IBM Domino product line.
- Added support for the Android mobile OS, the Blackberry platform, native iPad support, offline synchronization capabilities and a new HTML5-based charting engine.
- There are two new SugarCRM partnerships: **GoodData** ([www.gooddata.com](http://www.gooddata.com)) has come out with GoodData Sales Analytics for SugarCRM and **Infratel** ([www.infratel.com](http://www.infratel.com)) permits small and mid-size businesses to cost effectively add telephony solutions to their CRM platform, including social media.

Syntellect has come out with Syntellect Customer Interaction Management (CIM) version 8 which includes several enhancements. These include a new auditing feature, integration with the Syntellect Communications Portal, partitioned interaction views that ensure that agents only have visibility to the appropriate data and more flexible reports and desktop integrations.

More enhancements are on their way later in 2011. These include inbound and outbound SMS message support through

native interfaces as well as third-party aggregators, client user interface overhaul using thin client technologies, supervisor/agent messaging enhancements and support for VMware ESXi.

- Syntellect, or more accurately its parent firm, Enghouse Systems, has expanded its product portfolio through acquiring CosmoCom for approximately \$20 million. The purchase adds CosmoCom's IP-from-the-ground-up routing solutions to Syntellect's CIM products, complementing each other for both premises and cloud-based deployments.
- Syntellect has partnered with **Oracle** ([www.oracle.com](http://www.oracle.com)) to build and certify the adapter between the latest releases of Syntellect's CT Connect and Oracle E-Business Suite. Oracle already provides a pre-built and tested adapter for integrating the Oracle E-Business Suite R12 and Syntellect's CT Connect 6.1 product line.



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## In Brief...

**Acqueon Technologies ([www.acqueon.com](http://www.acqueon.com))** has come out with a new communications and notifications management application, ProActive Reach, which enables tailored messaging, specialized account messaging and disseminating emergency information.

**CallMiner ([www.callminer.com](http://www.callminer.com))** and **Enkata ([www.enkata.com](http://www.enkata.com))** are jointly bringing to market a workforce optimization solution that extends Enkata's Workforce Analytics Suite to include CallMiner's Eureka 7.2 speech analytics.

**Cincom ([www.cincom.com](http://www.cincom.com))** Acquire knowledge-based selling platform has been integrated with Microsoft Dynamics CRM 2011 and Microsoft Dynamics CRM Online.

**Consona ([www.consona.com](http://www.consona.com))** has rolled out Customer Management Version 7.1 which incorporates new features, among them are enhanced search and work management, quick actions and inline editing, social network links, cache flushing and e-mail address collection. It released Consona Knowledge Management Version 8.0, which supports new client and server environments, has CRM, self-service and logging and system monitoring tool improvements and improved internationalization.

**Drishti-Soft ([www.drishti-soft.com](http://www.drishti-soft.com))** has launched its Parallel Predictive Dialing (PPD) solution which permits highly personalized outbound dialing to pre-defined call management parameters.

**Indosoft ([www.indosoft.com](http://www.indosoft.com))** has enhanced the customer retention feature sets for its Asterisk-based contact center software, including list management options, the ability to store and call multiple phone contacts per customer account and list penetration.

**IVR Technology Group ([www.ivrtechgroup.com](http://www.ivrtechgroup.com))** has totally revamped its hosted iCall automated outbound solution to provide both self service and full service options for users.

**Maximizer Software ([www.maximizer.com](http://www.maximizer.com))** has expanded its CRM offering to the cloud with Maximizer CRM Live with the same benefits as Maximizer CRM's on-premise solution.

**M5 Networks ([www.m5.net](http://www.m5.net))** has acquired Callfinity, which will enable it to offer mid-size business clients access to advanced hosted-delivered IP contact center technologies.

**Mindshare Technologies ([www.mshare.net](http://www.mshare.net))** will release Mindshare Speech-to-Text this summer, which it says will be the world's first in-house speech-to-text analytics enterprise feedback management system.

**West ([www.west.com](http://www.west.com))** has acquired Smoothstone IP Communications, adding to West's expanding unified communications business, which includes InterCall.

**Xorcom ([www.xorcom.com](http://www.xorcom.com))** is now supplying a hardware echo canceller module for its award-winning Astribank telephony interfaces and Asterisk-based IP-PBX appliances.

**Zylog Systems Ltd. ([www.zsl.com](http://www.zsl.com))** has developed new social enterprise and mobile enablement add-on solutions for Microsoft Dynamics CRM, Microsoft Dynamics ERP and Microsoft Dynamics RMS products running on Windows Azure.

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# Does Your Customer Service Need an Upgrade?

How innovative technology and training can help you exceed customer expectations

Every time a person receives outstanding customer service, their threshold for anything less becomes smaller. A hundred years of “the customer is always right” has slowly but steadily raised expectations for customer service, and it is our job as professionals to see that those expectations are met or even exceeded. Our goal should be to create a top-notch customer experience that is consistent across every single interaction.

However, creating a totally consistent experience has become a much more difficult task with the advent of countless new channels for customer interaction. And with Internet and mobile technologies providing instant access to products, services and information, consumers have come to expect instant gratification. So the solution to customer issues not only needs to be right; it needs to be right now.

While providing a timely and satisfying experience for customers might seem like a daunting task given these conditions, it is actually a very exciting time to be in the customer service industry. Technology, like data analytics and real-time scoring, accelerated lead conversion and integrated multimedia communication, can help you exceed even the loftiest customer expectations. In addition, enhanced training methods can transform your traditional agents into more effective “Brand Ambassadors”. Implementing each of these CRM strategies can

make a drastic difference in your customer service capabilities.

## Data Analytics and Real-Time Scoring

There have been great advances in the way consumer information is collected and applied, especially in the contact center environment. Every time a customer contacts you, makes a purchase or responds to a direct mail campaign, they are telling you something. Through data acquisition, you have the unique opportunity to listen to them. The more data you collect, the better you can pinpoint customer need and use it to enhance the customer experience.

On the phone, using data and technology to determine service level differentiations and boost conversion rates, improve customer service, and customize call center scripts will increase customer value and drive long-term growth. In direct mail, you can use



**By Dana Allender,**  
*Vice President of New Business Development*  
*InfoCision Management Corporation*

data to create customized messages that speak directly to the individual. Online, you can generate personalized URLs so every customer receives a one-to-one Web experience. The opportunities to positively enhance the consumer experience by leveraging data are endless.

## Accelerated Lead Conversion

As more and more people adopt the Internet as a standard method of communication, organizations are seeing web-generated leads double or even triple. That's good news. The problem arises when companies lack the capac-

by Dana Allender, Vice President of New Business Development, InfoCision Management Corporation

ity or strategy to effectively respond to increasing online lead intake. This can be a critical oversight. A lot of people use the Internet to make initial contact with an organization. This is their first impression of the organization, and the speed of your response can make all the difference.

We're not talking hours here; the expectation is minutes – maybe even seconds. By waiting a day or more to contact a web-generated lead, you essentially negate your chances of qualifying or converting them. And even if you contact a lead instantly, it will only be effective if the right person makes the call – someone who is knowledgeable about the program/service/product and the organization. The focus cannot just be getting a sale today; you need to ensure a positive customer experience, leading to a long-term relationship.

## Employing Brand Ambassadors

All the above tactics are aimed at putting your customer service agents in the best position to provide outstanding experiences for your customers. But you should also focus on the agents themselves. Branding, the cornerstone of all marketing efforts, often gets lost in contact centers because representatives concentrate on specific tasks rather than fortifying brand. As a result, you can miss out on golden opportunities to bolster brand perception.

By employing “Brand Ambassadors” on the phones rather than traditional agents, you can enhance your brand value with every call. Brand Ambassadors differ from typical call center representatives in that they are trained to be extremely knowledgeable of your company and your products – not just the specific task in front of them. Their

# By employing “Brand Ambassadors” on the phones rather than traditional agents, you can enhance your brand value with every call.

## Integrated Multichannel Communication

These days, many consumers are using communication channels interchangeably – email, text, phone, online. This can pose a challenge for marketers because you want to ensure a consistent brand experience no matter what the channel. But marketers must be careful not to pigeon-hole consumers into one channel. People flow between channels and having the flexibility to customize solutions is key; one size does not fit all anymore.

We've reached an age where technology can actually bring businesses and customers closer together. All the available channels – teleservices, direct mail, Web – can be used as part of a multichannel effort to meet the diverse needs of your customers. This requires leveraging collected data to ensure you are meeting your customers' communication habits and preferences. By improving the quality of their experience, customers will form a stronger bond with an organization and, as a result, increase their profit potential.

overall focus is to ensure a positive customer experience that will be tied to your brand. Brand Ambassadors build customer loyalty, cultivate repeat business and lay the foundation for long-term relationships.

The bottom line is that customer service will continue to expand in scope and grow more challenging as we move into the future. Companies need to take steps now to meet rising customer expectations. By integrating innovative technology and training practices, you can build outstanding interactions that will enhance your brand value and keep your customers coming back. **CIS**

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# Anytime, Anywhere Any Channel Support

**O**rganizations and their employees are rapidly moving away from the traditional fixed, employer-provided working environment connected by typically just three channels: voice, e-mail and IM. They are increasingly instead carrying out their tasks anytime from anywhere over a widening array of other media, most notably the social channel.

IT support has had to adapt to this anytime, anywhere, any channel reality. The days of sending over the support or help desk rep to sit down at a staffer's terminal is fading, when that person could be at their home or in airport and on a wireless device using Facebook.

And while IT support has traditionally been seen by organizations as cost centers – they do not generate revenue through sales or customer retention – the smart outfits are gradually getting it that without support performance, productivity and profits suffer. The

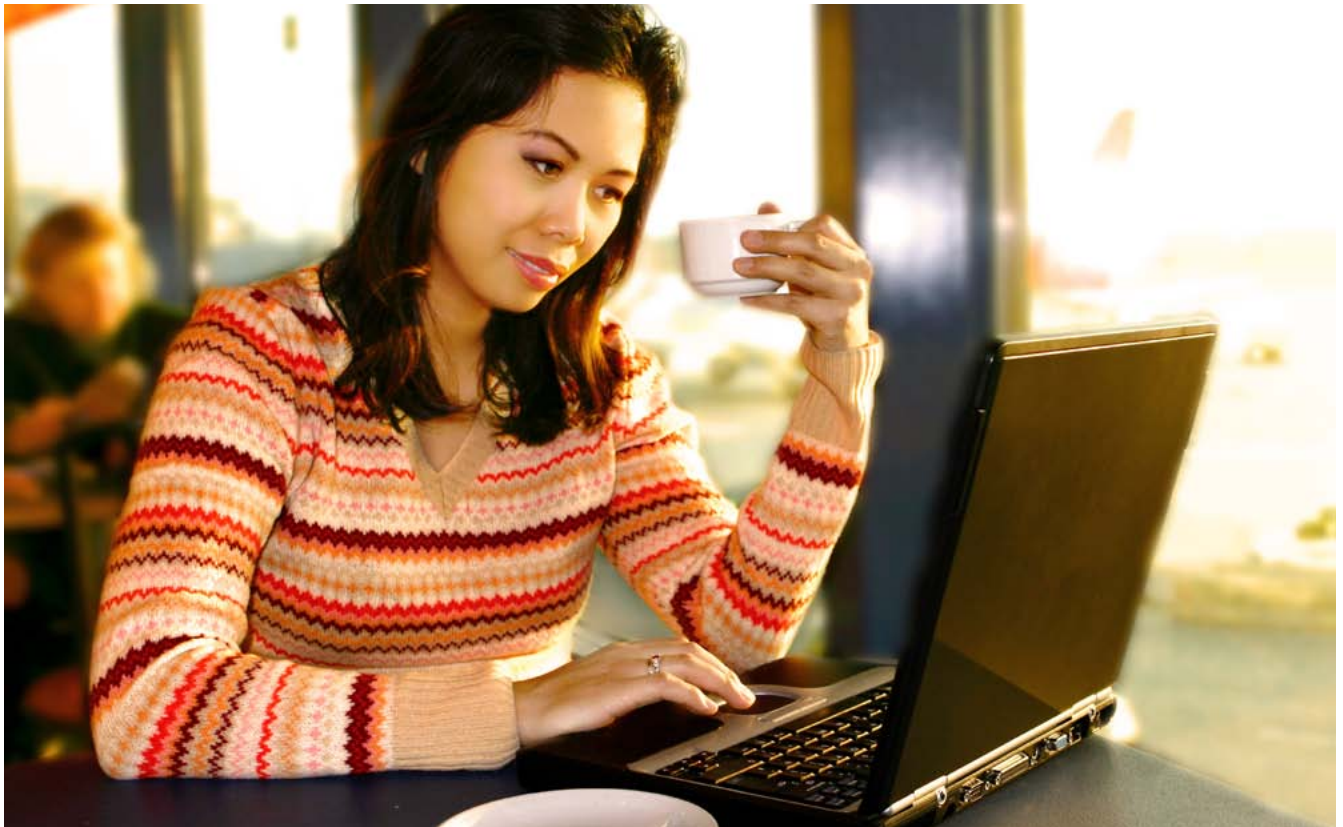
receipt of this message is timely because today's new work environment will require investment in the right support tools.

Elisabeth Cullivan, product marketing manager of Numara Software is seeing that most organizations are trying to move IT away from being cost centers. To enable this movement they are also purchasing ITSM (IT Service Management)-focused software; ITSM processes stress focus on the users rather than on the technology.

"IT support really does have a place in an organization and without IT support productivity would certainly drop and the organization as a whole would suffer," says Cullivan. "It's up to the IT organization to demonstrate the value of the services they offer and how they align with the goals of the business."

## The Anywhere Revolution

The rapidly accelerating wireless revolution has IT support benefits and challenges. On the plus side, smartphones' architecture and operating systems and their networks' bandwidth enable field reps to diagnose and fix more problems faster on the spot. Field reps now or will have equivalent or near-equivalent access to the same information that is available on desktops. And should field reps need help that can collaborate with second level engineers, Oded Moshe, director of







product management at SysAid Technologies points out, "Collaboration translates to better service quality and higher efficiency."

There are potential obstacles with supporting anywhere users though. The IT support team must be on top of mobile technology to provide service and stay relevant to the organization, says Moshe. Also, the solutions must be network-reliable.

Bomgar has come out with one such solution: a remote support representative console designed for the iPad. The Bomgar iPad Representative (Rep) Console allows reps to access, view and to fix remote computers or mobile devices directly from their iPad or iPad 2.

Moreover there is the trend of users rather than IT choosing their devices i.e. laptops, tablets as well as cellphones. This poses a major technological challenge for support/help desks Moshe points out, as they need to support most any device, such as helping users define their e-mail settings without ever holding it.

SysAid offers an array of help desk applications that operate on four leading smartphone platforms: Windows Phone 7, iPhone, BlackBerry and Android. These tools allow support managers to portably view all service requests assigned to their teams; filter help desk and asset lists per field and update the status, priority, due date and other fields. These professionals can also create new requests, as well as update asset names, locations, owners and other fields.

Moshe recommends support/help desks run periodical training sessions about the common devices used in their firm, create quick guides with screenshots and to check online guides, which are available for all devices. An internal forum/community should be set up to permit users to share solutions and thoughts.

As a last resort, and if practical support desk staff can ask users to stop by ask if they can play with sample devices to familiarize themselves with them. Once done with a single device, one should be set with the others of the same kind and capability, says Moshe.

To make working from anywhere, anytime practical requires effective self-service support tools. They can solve many of the most common problems, thus avoiding calls or field visits. Self-service also saves money and decreases downtime in any environment.

IT solutions suppliers are continually upgrading their self-support tools. For example SysAid is now adding a Reset Password tool to its self-service portal.

Another critical issue with supporting anywhere work is obtaining access to users' assets to diagnose and repair problems and perform software updates. Oftentimes mobile/home these workers do not have access to VPNs (virtual private networks) to solve these issues and manage the equipment and applications. That is because VPNs are usually provided only to full-time employees for security reasons, leaving part-time and contract staff off these networks.

Numara Software's Numara Asset Management Platform (NAMP) version 10 includes Service Anywhere, which is secure on-demand remote service management obviates this issue by running over the public Internet. This feature permits IT to securely take inventory, push critical patches and deploy software to those users, allowing providing a consistent level of support and service to them anywhere.

"There will definitely be more remote handling of issues with the increase in a remote workforce and telecommuting opportunities," explains Cullivan. "The need for remote desktop management solutions is going to be huge in the coming years. Lower level IT support reps are going to be required to handle those remote issues and that is going to require more integrated ITSM and desktop management tools."

## Social Media and Support

There has been a long tradition of peer support in IT at the higher end usually amongst engineers, developers and programmers, such as through bulletin board posts. Social media has now greatly expanded this practice, which provides the near-immediacy of self-service while providing "on the fly" human assistance.

Ensuring accuracy and consistency across channels can be an issue with peer support. Well-intentioned but poor advice can turn make bad problems worse.

"Today, when users need information they first turn to Google, then they check it out on Facebook and only afterwards do

## Keeping Knowledge Management Knowledgeable

IT help desk support has long relied on knowledge bases for both the reps and for self-service. Yet as information and knowledge change rapidly how effective are they? What must service organizations do to keep knowledge accurate and current?

Organizations should make it a policy to constantly document incidents so that the knowledge base remains relevant, accurate and insightful, recommends Oded Moshe, director, product management, SysAid Technologies. Although it requires administrators' time to update, if done properly and consistently, the knowledge base remains

an efficient tool which can decrease resolution time. Also, make sure you enable users to see the most viewed topics.

SysAid has an automatic mechanism that after the resolution of an incident suggests to the administrator to add the solution to the knowledge base.

"A good practice would be to bring topics to life by encouraging user discussions around the subjects," recommends Moshe. "A community is also a powerful driving force in keeping information up-to-date, as it enables different users to have access to relevant and useful information."



## M2M and IT Support

One emerging area that could help firms resolve equipment support issues faster – while cutting costs – is by employing machine-to-machine (M2M) technologies.

An outgrowth of remote and automated computer hardware and software diagnostics and repair, M2M uses wireless to connect equipment and their applications to help desk servers and staff via chipsets and modems implanted inside the devices. When activated they can transmit status, usage and performance data and can be programmed to perform self-diagnostics and software upgrades, explains Tom Nelson, group manager of Sprint's Emerging Solutions Group.

"Before a human would typically call in a trouble ticket, driving additional care and support costs," says Nelson. "Now machines will be talking to machines, proactively addressing before issues even arise."

These features will help determine whether there are potential problems that can be resolved remotely. With that information, field reps need only be sent out when required and proactive measures can be implemented before the devices and machinery breaks down, prompting help desk calls. The M2M units also can track and send asset locations, which saves time and money finding them, shortening downtime.

Together the M2M applications save on labor costs, vehicle wear-and-tear and fuel. With the rising fuel and labor costs, this drives savings to the bottom line; sending out a field tech or "truck roll" can range from \$75 to well over \$100 based on the labor, vehicle and location/proximity.

"Companies are asking themselves 'How can I prepare for the growth of M2M technology and what can I do to avoid my service calls including field support truck rolls?'" says Nelson. "Sprint and our broad ecosystem of M2M partners can offer enterprise and their supporting organizations, the information they need to make that call."

they turn to IT reps for help," observes Moshe. "The challenge is to make the best out of both worlds."

Hornbill Service Management offers Supportworks ITSM Enterprise v.3.2, which integrates Twitter and smartphone-based support with the help desk. Supportworks ITSM Enterprise v.3.2 enables help/support desk staff to search, save and run Tweets. It tracks what followers are 'tweeting' and enable immediate access to them and can broadcast service updates. The software can reply to a tweet from within Supportworks or raise an incident or service request directly from it. There is an auditable record of these interactions in the Supportworks database.

"Having the ability to proactively address support issues is an ongoing challenge for IT," says Patrick Bolger, Hornbill chief evangelist. "We are increasingly seeing examples where users air their frustra-

tions via social media channels long before contacting the service desk. In these instances IT is the last to know, which not only let issues fester but can damage the reputation of support teams."

## ITIL Benefits and Challenges

One trend is using the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL), which provides a logical, systematic and sophisticated framework of best practices to manage IT operations and services: including support. ITIL says Wikipedia "gives detailed descriptions of a number of important IT practices and provides comprehensive checklists, tasks and procedures that any IT organization can tailor to its needs."

There are ITIL training and certification courses available. One of the most comprehensive is offered by the RCCSP Professional Education Alliance. The courses cover foundation certification; release, control, and validation; operational support and analysis; planning, protection and optimization; service offerings and agreements; service design, operation, strategy and transition; and continual service improvements. There is also a session on managing across the lifecycle.

Global BPO firm Sitel is an ITIL shop. It has 600 employees operating from help desks in the U.S., the Philippines, India, Germany, Morocco and Columbia, supporting more than 60,000 and handling approximately 20,000 service request interactions monthly.

Change management is a big component of Sitel's ITIL framework. And the firm has extended its change management process to tie into those of several of its global clients.

"These extensions helps increase our success rate of changes and drives availability improvements on service level agreements," explains Anthony Crutcher, senior vice president of global Infrastructure, operations and shared services. "All of this ties back into the ITIL process."

The challenge with ITIL reports Numara Software's Cullivan is that it is not always easy to understand. ITIL provides organizations with guidelines when they may not have a clue as to how to organize or begin to improve their service management. Some organizations are overwhelmed because there is a lot to ITIL and it doesn't clearly define how you do things.

The software gives customers the path to implement ITIL without the complex administration or lengthy professional service engagements required with other tools in the market. Numara FootPrints delivers highly integrated, comprehensive service management capabilities that work together and are designed for easier administration, extensive configuration without programming and faster implementation.

"What needs to be understood is that you don't have to do it all," recommends Cullivan. "Pick and choose the pieces that work for you. ITIL is there to help IT deliver services that align with business requirements, ultimately improving services."

## Supporting the Cloud

More applications are going to the cloud both OEM- and third party-hosted and in-house virtualization. FoxIT, a subsidiary of U.K.-based 365 iT, has a blurb from Gartner on its site that



says “within five years one out of five companies will have 100 percent Cloud-based IT infrastructures”.

FoxIT has created ITSM 2.0 a framework that has been designed to help organizations manage their IT functions in this shift, covering and integrating both on-premise and cloud infrastructures. ITSM 2.0, which is free to access online, is based on VMware’s virtualization and cloud solutions and is enabled by frameworks such as ITIL and Cobit.

The cloud trend decreases IT demand and with it the need for IT support. On the other hand it introduces, when it is outside-hosted a new management challenge: managing services and suppliers. SysAid’s Moshe recommends creating a new policies and procedures or adapts current ones to the cloud.

“If companies haven’t managed SLA (Service Level Agreements) properly, now is a great time to start,” advises Moshe. “It’s the right time to track and monitor services and to use the five nines (99.999 percent) your vendors promised to deliver.”

ShoreTel supports its contact center customers both directly and indirectly through its channel partners. It has been

seeing virtual server technologies, such as Citrix, Hyper-V and VMWare, becoming more popular. It is responding by introducing client and server software tested and certified to run on these devices.

“We believe this growth will actually drive down the overall IT support cost for our customers as system management can be more centralized and standardized,” says Mark Haynes, director of technical services. **CIS**

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

**Bomgar**  
www.bomgar.com

**FoxIT**  
www.foxit.net

**Hornbill Service Management**  
www.hornbill.com

**Numara Software**  
www.numarasoftware.com

**RCCSP Professional Education Alliance**  
www.the-resource-center.com

**Sprint**  
www.sprint.com/M2M

**SysAid**  
www.sysaid.com

## Supporting the Agents

Contact centers depend on able and responsive IT support. Here’s how one firm, InfoCision, which has 32 contact centers in 12 locations plus home-based agents and totaling over 5,000 employees provides it.

- InfoCision has a dedicated IT Support Services team, which includes a nine-rep help desk located at its Akron, Ohio corporate headquarters. It also offers troubleshooting tips and tools on a specialized support Web site
- If an employee is experiencing a technical issue, they may submit their support request via a call or through a web portal utilizing the Cherwell incident management software. InfoCision uses Cherwell to document support issues, track troubleshooting steps taken, along with what was ultimately done to restore service for the end user and for hardware and software requests
- The firm uses Microsoft’s System Center Configuration Manager to manage/remotely control its computer systems. The solution’s robust reporting allows it to keep up with licensing, overall desktop counts and track changes to its environment
- The firm also uses Microsoft SharePoint for its internal intranet, client extranets, learning Management System, workflows and for document management and collaboration
- 75 percent of incidents are handled within the Support Services team. The other 25 percent are escalated such as to database administrators, data communications and software development

- One of the biggest challenges InfoCision’s Support Services team is facing is supporting its growing constellation of home-based agents: given their remote and varied hardware and software environments. It continues to look at new ways to improve its support website through such tools as detailed walkthroughs, troubleshooting tips and tools, as well as updated/centralized documentation. The support team regularly meets with the InfoCision Work At Home management staff to ensure we are meeting their needs. Its internal Work At Home Support Specialists also use call metrics and trend analysis to provide the highest level of support for staff

- InfoCision’s Support Services team is well-trained and qualified and team members maintain their proficiency. The firm requires a minimum associate degree or equivalent from a two-year college or technical school; or minimum of two years working in an IT help desk and/or training; or equivalent combination of education and experience. The majority of IT staff members hold bachelor’s degrees or higher

There is continued education through an internal training center, InfoCision Management Corporate University (IMCU). Classes taught include time management, project management, conflict resolution and motivating a workforce. IMCU also offers technical classes such as SQL and Microsoft Office Suite products.

All IMCU classes are offered free of charge and on company time to enable it to stay ahead of the competition “and continue to deliver top notch service to our clients,” reports Greg Swaino, manager of support services at InfoCision.





# The IP Switch

In buying voice services contact centers are gradually switching from PSTN/TDM to Internet Protocol (IP), most commonly using session initiation protocol (SIP) or SIP trunking. The day that PSTN's copper-intensive hardware will join cordboards and electro-mechanical switches as museum pieces is not too distant.

The key reasons for the IP switch are cost savings and increased flexibility such as ease of on-the-fly routing and supporting home agents. IP quality and reliability has been improving – though still not yet at the same “five nines” level as PSTN – as technologies develop.

Many contact centers use QoS (quality of service) voice traffic prioritization on MPLS (multiprotocol label switching) networks. Yet others are comfortable with using lower-priced if lesser quality open Internet for IP; the argument has been made that growing cellphone use has created a degree of tolerance for unclear calls, at least until HD Voice becomes widespread.

The carrier marketplace is responding. There are SIP trunking providers and traditional local and long distance firms that are competing intensively for this business with a widening array of competitively-priced services.

Jim Koniecki, technical consultant of unified communications and collaboration for Dimension Data, predicts that by 2015, 60 to 70 percent of contact centers will use SIP trunking versus traditional TDM circuits.

“There will be pressure by the carriers even the incumbents to move customers like contact centers from TDM to SIP,” says Koniecki. “This is due to the higher costs of carrier and customer maintenance for these legacy TDM systems, for which less equipment is being developed, manufactured and supported.”

Andy Bird, inContact senior solutions manager, reports that his firm is seeing additional requests for VoIP/SIP. The smaller contact centers were the early adopters, he points out, but now there are some of the largest companies that are considering employing these solutions.

“The market is clearly demanding more SIP and VoIP connectivity due to the need for reducing costs and increasing functionality,” says Bird. “Although QoS is still a dominant requirement, we are seeing that the market also wants a non-QoS open Internet VoIP option. This has been increasing over



the last few years. Customers are willing to give up quality for an Internet-based solution.”

## The IP/SIP Drivers

The big move to IP/SIP is its appeal of cost savings, flexibility and its openness. While PSTN rates have plummeted principally from IP/SIP competition there are still expense reductions to be had. SIP-based VoIP is considered a data service, reports Dimension Data, and is not subject to the same tariffs, fees and taxes as traditional PSTN and is largely unregulated at this time.

Lawrence Imeish, principal consultant at Dimension Data says with SIP – and unlike with PSTN – one can pool inbound and outbound in minutes, regardless of geography or even country one expects to buy, especially if the traffic is being handled by one national SIP carrier. This method drives down per-minute costs substantially.

Another savings source is DID (direct inward dial) line management self-service that is practical only with IP/SIP. Contact centers can port or migrate DID lines between different carriers or move between offices, between agents and sometimes back and forth between SIP and PSTN links – when supported by the carriers – instantly. In contrast, during the PSTN-only days, contact centers had to have the carriers provision them to readily interface with the CO switches which would take up to 30 days.

IP/SIP also offers improved and more cost effective routing between multiple contact centers by enabling managers to quickly and easily pre-route incoming calls. With PSTN firms have (or had) to buy separate circuits from the individual incumbent local exchange carriers in the areas where their contact centers are located. That meant getting them to talk to each other to balance the loads. Pre-routing PSTN calls is usually done by carriers, although at considerable expense.

The savings from these moves can be significant. One of Dimension Data's clients, a large southern U.S.-based bank,



had several different local and long distance carriers. They then consolidated to a single SIP/IP carrier, resulting in a nearly \$1 million per year savings, along with a 25 percent drop in voice costs over what they had been paying in PSTN circuits.

“You can still do this PSTN but you’re paying your carriers a fair amount of money to bring this traffic across whereas now one SIP provider can do this all seamlessly,” says Imeish.

IP/SIP also permits more cost effective home agent support than PSTN; with it, long distance charges are minimal and there is no need for costly added pipes. For example, this flexibility allows cost-effective deployment of seasonally-needed home agents.

8x8, in partnership with Contactual, enables its clients to turn on services for specific periods of time. 8x8 provides the entire service, including call routing and access to the contact center platform. Contact centers pay a significantly reduced fee when the service is not being used while still maintaining its tenant specific configuration and phone numbers so that it can be reinitiated at a moment’s notice with no startup costs.

Another driver to IP/SIP is that it enables contact centers to provide increased integrated and seamless multichannel chat, e-mail, IM, SMS/text and video as well as voice collaboration with customers and colleagues. Unified communications that relies on IP permits agents to bring on board subject matter experts – who can be located anywhere – into customer interactions.

“PSTN is a static service,” says Jeff Bettaker, COO of One Source Networks. “It doesn’t offer companies the flexibility and cost-savings let alone feature-rich services that a SIP platform enables.”

### IP Quality and Redundancy

Most contact centers are still on PSTN as they are concerned about IP voice quality, an issue inContact’s Bird says is compounded when calls go overseas. Longer calls, because agents and callers not understanding each other, and dropped calls cost centers money both directly through added interaction lengths and indirectly via annoyed customers and potential missed sales.

“Open internet VoIP is still an issue,” says Bird. “The best practices still require a router at the customer’s site for best effort routing.”

Many contact centers are instead provisioning dedicated voice MPLS circuits to transport SIP calls, report Imeish and Koniecki. These circuits connect them to their SIP providers directly for the highest possible quality and lowest latency.

SIP over the public Internet is possible but more bandwidth is recommended since QoS mechanisms is best effort; VPNs or session border controllers (SBCs) should be used to encrypt the traffic. While using a dedicated MPLS network provides the same quality and resiliency of traditional of PSTN networks it also increases costs. To offset, larger contact centers can have the cost of their voice MPLS connectivity bundled into their SIP providers’ monthly bills, says Koniecki.

To enable QoS 8x8 employs a variety of methods. These range from simple mechanisms such as Class of Service (CoS) tagging on the LAN – which it says solves most issues for smaller

## Home QoS issues

There can still be potential IP/SIP quality issues when connecting with home-based agents, though these are lessening as both bandwidth and availability increase as carriers compete intensively for residential and small office/home office customers including for IPTV.

Yet the contention point is not much on the residential street pipes whether cable or DSL or wireless anymore but inside the agents’ premises. Jim Koniecki, technical consultant of unified communications and collaboration for Dimension Data, points out agents may purchase bare minimum bandwidth without taking into account other users.

He and his colleague Lawrence Imeish, principal consultant at Dimension Data, advise that contact centers require – and enforce – an acceptable use policy and monitor their home agents to obtain high bandwidth connections and separate IP (or PSTN) lines. Or employ routers that segregate business from recreation traffic.

One Source Networks often recommends that the home agents utilize a secure tunnel from the users’ PC back to the carriers’ routers that allows a consistent flow of data, regardless of peering points and type of IP connections.

“Preservation of quality for remote and home workers that utilize consumer-grade Internet is a constant challenge,” says Jeff Bettaker, COO of One Source Networks.

contact centers – to provisioning private or MPLS broadband connections to guarantee end-to-end QoS. Availability – which is related to quality – is also guaranteed by 8x8; the use of redundant data centers provides even small contact centers with a highly reliable service at minimal cost without the need for IT support from the contact center customer.

M5 only provisions its primary customer locations using private line “on net” connectivity. There is no public Internet VoIP, with no opportunity for jitter, packet loss and diminished QoS.

“Contact centers depend upon phone service, so voice quality and reliability are essential,” says Jeff Valentine, M5 senior vice president of product marketing.



Yet in totality quality is fading as an issue. Networking hardware, DSPs and codecs have matured and become more reliable. To be sure Koniecki recommends that contact centers evaluate carriers instituting QoS and employing network monitoring and testing software.

Moreover, IP/SIP it can be argued offers greater reliability than PSTN because it offers many more routes available in a network. With IP/SIP if one signaling server, say on the East Coast goes down, such as from a fiber being cut there is probably 15 or 20 other signaling servers on a carrier's SIP network, explains Koniecki. With PSTN this degree of redundancy, which relies on copper wires and maintaining continuous circuits is not practical. SIP voice traffic reaps the benefits of IP's existing ubiquity and redundancy.

"With the right combination of planning, ISPs, SIP providers, hardware and monitoring, contact centers can confidently use SIP trunking with VPNs to deliver voice over the public Internet," says Koniecki.

Ben Navon, president and CEO of Optimized Business points out that as long as the bandwidth is in place, VoIP is extremely reliable and provides the technology for fallback routes. He is seeing contact centers switch over to VoIP once they have tested it; they recognize the major improvement in the call quality versus other lines. And he adds there are universal benefits to using VoIP, such as reporting, tools, conversion and product simplicity as well dramatic cost savings.

"The only concern that contact centers may have is the reliability of VoIP," says Navon. "Everyone that starts using VoIP at any given point in the past, very quickly forgets about these concerns."

### The Carrier Market

Carrier services, driven by IP firms are becoming competitive and versatile. TNCI offers the TNCInet Private IP Network Solutions which includes dedicated long distance, integrated voice and direct Internet access. Contact centers can converge all of their voice, data and Internet applications onto a single private IP network. TNCI uses MPLS VPN for dedicated Internet access with integrated voice services including analog, PRI/CAS as well as SIP trunking. The TNCInet Dedicated LD Solution for Call Centers features a 15 second average length of call requirement and extremely aggressive rates as low as \$.0099.

Carriers – and contact center services – have been expanding outside of the U.S. InContact has expanded to Europe and has implemented patent-pending voice gateway technology to help improve call quality. This will eliminate static and voice delay problems frequently experienced by other providers who do not have infrastructure in the region, improve service to existing customers, and offer a competitive advantage for prospective new multinational accounts.

Carriers continue to make improvements to their IP/SIP networks. One Source Networks has deployed the Sonus GSX9000 high-density media gateway with NBS SBC functionality and the Sonus PSX Centralized Routing and Policy Server. These tools permit the firm to manage and scale their network more easily and efficiently through enabling centralized routing. This method provides consistent service globally and disaster reliability through fully redundant architectures via separate policy servers.

The Sonus solutions also support transitioning contact centers from TDM to IP. They allow them to implement network architectures that support routing and signal interworking between any IP-PBX or ACD.

Others are enabling call-quality-conscious contact center customers to bypass the public Internet. Broadvox uses Covad's IP Backhaul Aggregation Service and Ethernet access services to deliver, prioritize and segment voice traffic. The service provides a high-speed connection to Covad's nationwide private IP network.

8x8 has introduced new bundled affordable carrier offerings that make it easy for contact centers to get started with basic voice functionality. They can then upgrade to more advanced functionality (i.e. chat, e-mail and fax queueing) as their needs mature or their business changes.

IP carriers are now offering sophisticated hosted contact center solutions. One of the most recent of these is M5's purchase of Callfinity. New features include prioritized skill routing, an online evaluation forms designer for qual-

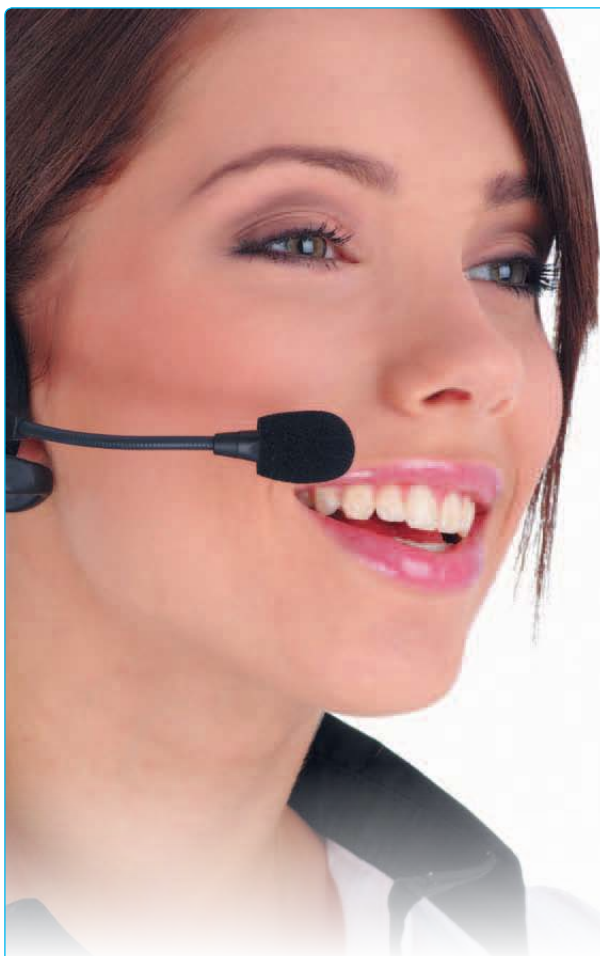
### Ensuring IP Quality Inside the Contact Centers

IP voice quality concerns do not end when the calls arrive at the routers or leave the premises via the carriers. There can be just as many if not more issues such as with jitter and latency inside the contact centers on their LANs.

The internal quality challenges arise from bandwidth competition from data on the reports Jeff Betteker, COO of One Source Networks. Services are delivered across a common port and data connection. And there is usually no QoS – which is commonly available on WANs – to prioritize the voice traffic.

"To preserve quality, it's essential to evaluate the data environment and determine if the router supports QoS, ensuring that prioritization is set correctly," recommends Betteker. "For example, when we deliver IP voice equipment to our clients, we provide an IP phone that offers QoS to consistently guarantee quality."





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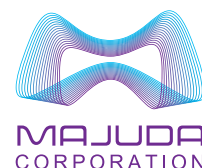
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ity management, extensive IVR capabilities, CRM integration support, and both real-time and on-demand contact center reporting and analytics. Callfinity products are deeply integrated within M5's core hosted and managed VoIP offering for seamless service.

The incumbent local and long distance carriers are getting into the game as SIP trunking carriers and for good reason. Not only are the SIP trunking firms taking additional profits from them – while generating revenue by leasing their fiber – but IP costs less to provide than copper/facilities/equipment-energy-heavy and expensive-to-maintain PSTN.

For example, AT&T offers MPLS-enabled IP VPNs, allowing use of a single network to support their voice, data and other business applications. VPN traffic can be prioritized using CoS so a single VPN can support all applications, including VoIP.

Verizon's Verizon IP Trunking services offer a native SIP trunk directly to IP PBXs; Verizon IP Integrated Access leverages gateway devices that interface with PBXs and key systems. Contact centers can obtain network efficiencies such as sharing trunking resources for multiple centers with Verizon's Burstable Enterprise Shared Trunking feature. Enhanced IP-based failover solutions from the carrier ensure business continuity, and reliability and performance.

"The incumbent carriers are definitely in on this," says Koniecki. "They have finally come around to realize that SIP is the future."

Carriers have been attempting to employ the same kinds of complex pricing and tariffs for SIP as they used in PSTN. But Imeish and Koniecki are now seeing them back off in the face of competition.

When buying carrier services Koniecki and Imeish recommend performing thorough quality and pricing due diligence and from this menu selecting one possibly two suppliers, then split the traffic between them to keep them competitive and redundant. Also to own their own SBCs, which makes it easier for firms to switch SIP carriers, use other ones and provision SIP trunks.

To monitor carrier costs contact centers should take a second look at telecom expense management and broaden its scope from traditional landlines to WANs and to wireless. This method can pay off in spades. Dimension Data did one such analysis for a large hospital and it found that the client was paying for a multimegabyte Internet circuit that was three to four times more than they could pay for it from anywhere else.

"As long as carriers have interesting ways of presenting bills there will always be a need to have someone who can decode and analyze the bills for potential savings and adherence to policy," says Imeish.

Navon recommends doing test calls, considering redundancy/failover options so that your phones will always be up – this is a great feature of VoIP—and ensure that the broadband

connection has the needed QoS. Also, avoid signing any long-term contracts, because the service should sell itself. Optimized Business's VoIPDialing.com subsidiary provides no term or volume commitments or per-trunk fees as well as cost savings.

"My advice is to enjoy the overall flexibility of VoIP," says Navon. **CIS**

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

**8x8**  
[www.8x8.com](http://www.8x8.com)

**AT&T**  
[www.business.att.com](http://www.business.att.com)

**Broadvox**  
[www.broadvox.com](http://www.broadvox.com)

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

**Dimension Data**  
[www.dimensiondata.com](http://www.dimensiondata.com)

**inContact**  
[www.inContact.com](http://www.inContact.com)

**One Source Networks**  
[www.onesourcenetworks.com](http://www.onesourcenetworks.com)

**Optimized Business**  
[www.optimizedbusiness.com](http://www.optimizedbusiness.com)

**TNCI**  
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# Cisco and Interactive Intelligence

## The Value of a Combined Solution for Enterprise IP Telephony and Customer Care

Over the last few years a growing number of businesses have standardized on Cisco Unified Communications Manager (CUCM) for IP telephony. For good reason. Cisco Systems is a trusted name, and CUCM is a flexible and effective voice solution for the enterprise. Yet many of these same businesses are at a solution cross-roads for their contact center operations and customer care — and face a key decision. “Do we expand our investment in Cisco to the contact center? Or do we look for an alternative contact center solution that can integrate with CUCM and, at the same time, simplify our IT infrastructure and better meet the needs of our business as a whole?”

The issue can be a balancing act among the business itself, contact center management and IT. Each entity not only has different solution perspectives and experiences, they have differing priorities. The business, for instance, wants a solution that's more cost-effective. The contact center wants to simultaneously enhance the customer experience and simplify operations. And IT has to find ways to handle these new demands alongside the countless other responsibilities already on their plate. More importantly for IT is being able to leverage — and protect — the business's existing investments in CUCM and other Cisco collaboration applications.

For companies that have a Cisco infrastructure and CUCM in place, implementing the Interactive Intelligence Customer Interaction Center® (CIC) suite in the contact center is a practical alternative to enhance customer care operations. By way of straightforward SIP integration, CIC supplements CUCM with an all-in-one architecture that improves performance for the business as well as for customer care, that simplifies maintenance and administration for IT, and that keeps costs under control throughout.

### Simplifying IT Infrastructure And Operations

At the infrastructure level, IT and the contact center both want fewer moving pieces that inherently work together and

utilize common administration and management tools — i.e., a unified, tightly integrated solution. Unfortunately, many contact center vendors sell “simplicity” through the integration of acquired technologies and products that actually result in multiple boxes, multiple points of administration and still more integrations. Other contact center vendors such as Interactive Intelligence, however, deliver simplicity with a suite of products developed to work together from the ground up. These kinds of unified solutions are proving to be a convincing answer for simplification, as was the recent case for a Fortune 500 insurance company that maintains call center operations of 1,100 agents across 27 sites in the U.S. and the UK.

Leveraging its Cisco infrastructure and SIP to implement a combined CUCM-CIC solution, the insurance company retained CUCM as its standard IP telephony platform for the enterprise, with IT and business teams collectively choosing CIC to create an integrated contact center platform capable of supporting additional channels and applications for customer care. Simplification came primarily via CIC's multimedia routing and contact management functionality, which further leveraged the insurer's existing investment in CUCM. Moreover, CIC afforded the company a single unified platform and application suite to replace disparate systems at various call center locations — ACD, IVR, reporting and quality monitoring — as well as existing best-of-breed tools for call recording and workforce management.

### Containing Costs While Offering Scale And Agility

The goal of price performance often translates to IT wanting less infrastructure to manage, and the contact center wanting the ability to add channels and functions via licensable, cost-effective applications. For both parties, they want routine tasks such as MACs and upgrades to be simple events that don't require excessive additional cost or disrupt their operations. The CIC solution's smaller footprint satisfies each criteria while leveraging the existing investment in CUCM. In documented case studies, companies integrating CIC to their CUCM architecture explained that 10 servers did the work of anywhere from 60-80 servers for competitive contact center products — and still delivered the same or greater functionality for customer care. In addition to lower upfront expenditures and ongoing maintenance costs, CIC's application licensing model allowed these companies to also reduce costs by using only the applications their contact center required. And with CIC's license-based ability to scale capacity or add

features on-demand as needed, the business could focus on its people and process changes without concern for what it would take to get the technology ready.

### Business Is The Driver... Technology Is The Enabler

Though IT and the business have different priorities, most IT departments recognize that the business is their “customer.” That is, IT provisions the voice and data infrastructure, but the business ultimately defines the requirements for applications that leverage the infrastructure. In between, the contact center holds a position of importance as the central interface to customers, and requires applications to deliver:

should be capable of leveraging CUCM as a foundation for meeting the complex needs of the business.

### All-In-One Architecture Vs. Multi-Point

All-in-one architectures such as CIC are built in a manner in which each functional component is developed on the same platform, using the same tools and interfaces that inherently fuse the components together. Licenses are turned on rather than adding servers to the mix.

While the all-in-one approach delivers the same functionality, or more, as multi-point solutions, the methods for implementing, managing and maintaining systems are very different. With no

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**Though IT and the business have different priorities, most IT departments recognize that the business is their “customer.” That is, IT provisions the voice and data infrastructure, but the business ultimately defines the requirements for applications that leverage the infrastructure.**

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Robust functionality that covers the gamut of routing, reporting, IVR, CTI and performance tools across all media (voice, email, web chat, etc.) and multiple sites (including home agents and remote offices).

Ease of administration and management across applications, ideally with a common set of tools and user-friendly interfaces to make it simple and quick to make changes — add agents, reassign call types, change routing paths, etc. — and to manage their resources.

IT must support both of these objectives within the context of protecting the enterprise technology strategy and architectural integrity. They also must offer a choice in mission critical applications that leverage the core infrastructure, without applications being treated as non-differentiated or commoditized. To enable the contact center to succeed, the technology infrastructure, as well as the knowledge and processes for managing it, are a starting point for delivering applications. A proven, highly invested enterprise platform such as CUCM is valuable and should be fully utilized, and the contact center platform

help from IT, system administrators and contact center managers can usually license new features, add agents, configure lines, structure interaction routing and skills, perform moves/adds/changes, and change other elements such as IVR menus. The ease of management becomes evident as end users quickly gain comfort and proficiency with such administrative tasks.

Moreover, as a natural by-product of the all-in-one approach, CIC can be implemented as a cloud-based solution. This way, IT is freed-up to focus on the enterprise-side strengths of CUCM, and the customer care side of the business can easily manage their needs through the cloud.

### United In Solution

Who says IT and the contact center can't see eye to eye? Professionals on both sides see the possibilities and advantages in solutions that address a common vision, such as the CUCM-CIC solution. For businesses standardized on the Cisco infrastructure, it's a combined solution that can provide value to the business as a whole. **CIS**



# Finding Productivity Opportunities

Every organization has the same goal, which is doing more with the same, or less such as boosting productivity. The pressure to reach that objective is intensified when the economy is slow and resources are tight.

In the rush to achieve this objective there is the risk of making missteps that could cripple the effort. For example, this includes agent burnout and churn that lead to higher staffing and training costs and output lags as replacements are brought up to speed.

The challenge is finding ways to generate more results without large negating impacts. Customer Interaction Solutions reached out to leading firms to get their insights and advice on increasing contact center productivity. We asked them questions on:

- Trends affecting productivity
- New methods and solutions
- Caveats in employing them
- Productivity best practices

Here are the highlights of their responses.

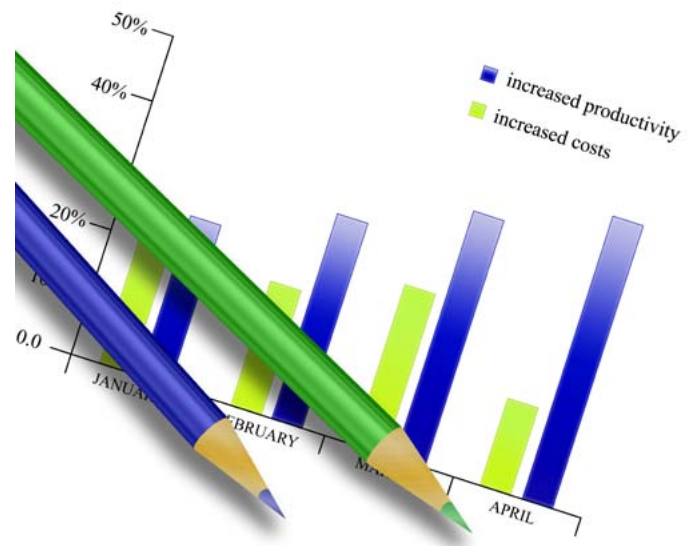
## Aspect ([www.aspect.com](http://www.aspect.com))

Serge Hyppolite, director of product management  
Here are the productivity trends we see:

- Growth in unified communications (UC) that delivers a level of collaboration that never existed before across a host of interaction types. That includes between agents and supervisors, agents and customers, agents and experts within the enterprise (beyond the contact center) and even directly between customers and these experts
- Unified multichannel communications across voice, web, social, e-mail, IM and chat that are proving to be necessary for providing truly customer-centric interactions
- Distributed workforce (remote, at-home or flex-time agents) as organizations look to efficiently staff contact centers while keeping overhead costs down
- Proactive (outbound) contact as it lowers contact center agent costs while increasing the likelihood of more timely payments.

Aspect has new or enhanced productivity-enabling solutions, among them:

- Aspect Workforce Management: improved scheduling and enhanced productivity



- Aspect Performance Management: improved dashboard usability, enhanced workforce management and automatic coaching
- Aspect Quality Management: provides rich search capabilities for fast retrieval of recordings and is fully integrated as part of the supervisor's dashboard and has automated workflows that send quality scores to schedule agent coaching or evaluate agent requests
- Aspect Unified IP 7: features contextual enterprise routing and manageability, high availability, dynamic inbound routing and enhanced agent desktop to support Microsoft UC&C (Unified Communications and Collaboration)

It is important to fully understand the potential and capabilities of productivity tools to drive the greatest benefits while minimizing risk. For example, while UC has proven to drive significant productivity increases, people need to be mindful of how and with whom they share data. Parameters around desktop sharing and instant messaging must be considered so as to not inadvertently share confidential information, like credit card information, or misdirect an instant message to an unintended recipient.

With social communications, people must realize that social responses are permanent and spread quickly. So it is important to have some audit processes and controls in place so that employees, agents or others understand the rules and circumstances. It's also important to understand that in a multichannel environment not all agents are skilled in every channel. That should be evaluated in advance to avoid finding out the hard way.

There are a number of best practices that are good to follow when setting up and using tools to boost contact center productivity. Research is the first step. The second is determining



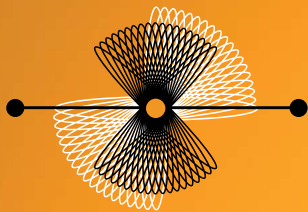
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the appropriate tools and ensuring that all of the components work together seamlessly.

Contact center managers should have full visibility into the solution to be able to map skills appropriately and make changes as necessary. For instance, if someone cannot type fast they probably should not be the main agent who handles e-mail or chat queries. There should be appropriate tools tracking performance, like quality assurance or speech analytics, which can be tracked through reporting or dashboards. This way if an agent is underperforming, a coaching or training session can be triggered – which will ultimately save time and money.

### **Eccentex ([www.eccentex.com](http://www.eccentex.com))**

Glen Schrank, CEO

A key productivity issue is that today, a majority of the contact centers still operate with fragmented IT systems. To process a customer request or a complaint, agents have to access multiple systems that are not connected by a single end-to-end process. Growth in social media interactions and web collaborations added to the channel mix. Working with a desktop cluttered with open applications greatly slows down case resolution and leads to inconsistent customer service across various communication channels.

Eccentex has released AppBase 4.0, a new version of our dynamic case management platform, which runs in a secure cloud environment. New features include pre-integrated communications and real-time channel management, which empower agents to process different types of cases and provide consistent level of service. Robust dashboards and reporting tools provide detailed visibility into the process, helping managers and agents prevent service failures. Our latest solutions increase the speed of case processing and rates of successful case resolutions.

Our solutions are meant to be set up in a secure cloud environment. Sometimes organizations are intent on bringing the system “on-premise” – but this can slow down deployment, increase the cost of maintenance and make upgrades less flexible.

It is imperative that the organizations wishing to optimize their call center operations have very clear requirements on the types of benefits they are trying to achieve and pain points that need to be eliminated. In addition, while Eccentex conducts a thorough process and workflow review in the initial engagements, it is very helpful for the process owners to be aware of their current systems. We also provide training sessions and materials to ensure quick system adoption.

### **FurstPerson ([www.furstperson.com](http://www.furstperson.com))**

Chris Van Landuyt, director of research and development  
Dashboard software and phone systems have streamlined the contact center job and increased the scope of capabilities for an individual agent, but these changes have also drastically increased the complexity [of the work]. Our research has found that screening applicants for the right skills and abilities up front has become much more important. New agents must embrace technology tools and quickly learn complex details about how to navigate several systems quickly and efficiently.

We have two new simulations in our CC Audition suite, both building on the core CCA dimensions of computer ability, accuracy, and multitasking, which are critical to all contact center positions. CCA Talk & Note incorporates live audio capture and free form account note entry to help refine the measurement of certain types of communication and technical skills. CCA Sales simulates inbound sales calls, and is designed to target the probing, persuasion and negotiation skills critical for these types of roles.

Our 1stScreen personality assessment targets core characteristics that can help determine job fit. Characteristics such as service

## EFM and Productivity

Enterprise feedback management (EFM) solutions are not just for obtaining the voice of the customer. They also make for excellent contact center productivity-enhancing tools.

Carolyn Hall, product marketing manager, Confrimit ([www.confrimit.com](http://www.confrimit.com)) says that EFM solutions can identify what metrics matter most to customers. One of her firm's customers did just that and experienced significant results.

“That customer spent years measuring their call center success on call waiting times, but found customers didn't care that much,” says Hall. “When they started focusing on ensuring agents could answer queries in the most helpful way, both customer satisfaction and employee engagement productivity went through the roof.”

Justin Schuster, vice president Enterprise Products MarketTools ([www.markettools.com](http://www.markettools.com)) points out that MarketTools CustomerSat EFM solution contains data from customer feedback surveys that helps managers immediately identify

and resolve issues that affect agent performance. It can identify staff for further coaching or training.

“When managers know exactly where the performance improvements are needed they can immediately coach agents about how to resolve issues quicker,” says Schuster. “Agents are able to get to the right answer faster and resolve customer calls more quickly, improving individual productivity.”

On the flip side, EFM data can also boost output by enabling managers to pinpoint agents that did exceptionally well and recognize them for jobs well done.

“The ability to reward agents for good performance, together with proactive coaching, leads to higher job satisfaction for call center employees,” says Schuster. “Seasoned agents stay on longer, allowing the call center to avoid the productivity loss that comes with training green employees. Through improved employee retention, the entire contact center becomes more productive.”



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Chris Spear, Extra Space Storage

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orientation, stress tolerance, achievement and detail-orientation can be just as pivotal to an employee's success as harder skills like keyboarding or computer ability. They can impact an employee's productivity, satisfaction and/or intent to leave the company.

The decision to implement a pre-employment assessment process should be couched in the context of the overall health and stability of a given contact center. Often, the process for implementation includes assessing current employees and then using statistical analysis to determine which skills and characteristics really distinguish between top and bottom performers.

However, in contact centers where the culture is dysfunctional, simply cloning those top performers who have found a way to still remain effective (often despite, but sometimes because of the dysfunctional culture) can exacerbate the larger problem at hand. The culture should be optimized to allow agents to succeed.

We do not recommend or offer "off the shelf" assessment solutions. Instead, we customize each implementation to client specifications. To do so, we partner with the client to collect various types of data directly from the organization. This helps us understand the knowledge, skills, abilities and characteristics required to perform the jobs of interest. It also helps us determine which assessments (and for some assessments, which particular scales or scoring configurations) will most closely target the key performance indicators for those jobs.

### Knowlagent ([www.knowlagent.com](http://www.knowlagent.com))

Matt McConnell, president and CEO

Here are trends that we are seeking that are affecting contact center productivity. Customers are increasingly expecting effective personal service, and the risk of customers leaving is higher than in the past. Contact centers have also increasingly turned from a pure cost cutting mode into investing in customer experience but they want to do it as inexpensively as possible. The focus is to be more effective and solve the issue the first time, ultimately improving customer retention.

In addition, contact centers now have rich information about agents. Managers can make better decisions on agent segmentation and customer queues and routing.

On average, every agent has 16 hours per month of wait/idle time. They also have about 19 hours of scheduled off-phone activities (shrinkage), which includes communications, coaching and training. Knowlagent increases productivity by deliver-

## Service Engineering For Productivity

Contact centers that want to boost contact center productivity need to focus on service engineering techniques, recommends Nina Kawalek, CEO, RCCSP Professional Education Alliance ([www.the-resource-center.com](http://www.the-resource-center.com)).

Productivity is about throughput, she says and that's what engineering is also about. Contact center managers need to know how to apply scientifically-based design principles and tactical uses of metrics to balance service quality, efficiency, and profitability.

The RCCSP Professional Education Alliance offers the Contact Center Service Engineering Boot Camps which does just that, by teaching contact center managers:

- Six Sigma design to ensure less variability in the contact center processes
- Better models for the proper division of labor
- Service engineering techniques to optimize the flow and routing of calls into the center

"All too often, high levels of efficiency come at the cost of low service quality," says Kawalek. "Or, high quality service comes at the cost of profitability. By giving a value to both the center and the customer, competing demands, priorities, and issues can be balanced."

ing these shrinkage activities during idle time, creating active wait. In late 2010 we introduced RightTime 8.5 that allowed us to push any off-phone activity, such as corporate training, call research and knowledgebase reviews, to active wait.

When discussing productivity tools, it's only natural to ask, "When does the agent begin to burn out?" This is a valid concern but let's state the facts:

The 16 hours of idle time per month per agent is accumulated in 15-45 second increments over time. This translates to five

## Analytics and Productivity

Analytics solutions can be an invaluable productivity-enhancing tool. For example Verint's ([www.verint.com](http://www.verint.com)) Impact 360 Desktop and Process Analytics (DPA) provides real-time guidance to agents at the right time.

The guidance and automations produced by the solution have consistently shown to reduce average handle time, reduce errors and help ensure compliance, says

the firm. It can slice time-consuming repetitive activities within and between applications.

For contact center managers who run a blended environment where agents may be used for off-phone activities, DPA, by analyzing agent working patterns, can have a dramatic impact on agent utilization and productivity. In these cases, DPA routinely quantifies over 15 percent in under-utilized capacity that can be recaptured by the business.



weeks of a really bad, boring vacation per year. From our experience, our customers convert about 25 percent or less of this wait time into productive active wait time. However, we're giving agents breaks in bigger chunks: one 15-minute break in active wait versus thirty 30-second breaks. Which would you prefer? Active wait provides a better breather for agents from calls.

The other common caveat is, "What if an agent is taken off the phone to do active wait when the agent should be taking calls?" Knowlagent's technology is integrated with the ACD, and it is installed by the customer to never negatively impact customer service levels. Agents are only put into active wait when they are truly idle. If their call volume spikes during active wait, our technology interrupts the agent from their active wait session and alerts them to return to the phone to be available for calls.

One best practice is to set active wait goals by call center instead of by company. When you push the goal down by center, you can drive the active wait goal higher and higher in total for the company. Another is to establish "site councils" to determine content needs. Site councils are a cross-function group of agents, supervisors and trainers from different lines of business. They meet to discuss what they need, such as information gaps, refresher courses and customer demands, to determine the content queue priorities for agents during active wait.

#### **Nexidia ([www.nexidia.com](http://www.nexidia.com))**

Jeff Schlueter, vice president of marketing and business development

A trend that is having positive impacts on contact center productivity is the use of speech analytics. The drive to use speech analytics has been a desire to gain a better understanding of the voice of the customer. It is also driven by a need to uncover the business processes and agent behaviors that affect productivity and ultimately, the customer experience. Speech analytics is allowing contact centers to tap into the intelligence hidden within their call recordings. They can expose the root cause of the underlying issues driving down productivity and take active steps towards improvement.

Nexidia's new Real Time Monitoring and Agent Assist solutions offer a unique way to increase agent productivity through analyzing interactions in realtime, hone in on key words or phrases being spoken, and automatically provide screen prompts. These prompts allow agents to handle calls efficiently, without the need to manually search the knowledge base for answers or the appropriate next step. They also offer agents tips on a better sales or customer retention techniques as the calls occur. Finally, these screen prompts ensure that customers are being given the correct information the first time, thus reducing multiple call backs.

There are caveats to productivity solutions. A company must ensure that its knowledge base content is up-to-date to guarantee optimal results. If Agent Assist is not pulling from one it could negatively impact agent performance by agents supplying insufficient answers or being guided to take an incorrect

## **Increasing Productivity: InfoCision Show How**

Contact centers can achieve improved productivity with low turnover with high morale.

InfoCision ([www.infocision.com](http://www.infocision.com)) has shown how it can be done.

InfoCision starts by hiring agents (which it calls Communicators) who are more mature; and focused on long-term career goals, reports Steve Brubaker, the firm's chief of staff. It put together training and development programs including mentoring where seasoned, veteran Communicators are assigned to new Communicators: offering advice and tips.

InfoCision created processes that have allowed agents spend more time talking to customers and less on other tasks such as follow-up and coding. It built proprietary applications to enhance the recognition of answering machines and other unproductive call scenarios before they reach a Communicator. It has also seen significant benefits from intelligent call routing.

The processes and applications have increased the BPO firm's productivity in some areas by as much as 20 percent. Brubaker reports that many Communicators have expressed appreciation for helping them be more productive and achieve higher results.

The firm has also shaved turnover, making it reportedly one of the industry's lowest through employee benefit and amenity programs – including wellness that keeps them healthy and working – have helped it to achieve industry-low turnover rates. These allow InfoCision to keep top-performing, highly productive employees, "which is a big driver of our success," says Brubaker.

action. First call resolution rates could decrease or average handle times could increase.

Using speech analytics is best achieved through a clear plan to operationalize findings. A company must have a defined plan that includes goals, how information will be communicated throughout the contact center and to those who are capable of implementing change, and how change will be monitored and measured.

A best practice for operationalization is to use a "Managed Analytic Services Team." The Team is comprised of individuals who are experts in contact center operations and various industry verticals. Their experience guides a company's area of focus, provides actionable intelligence, and drives implementation. **CIS**



## ExtremeTix's Well-Timed Disaster Response

**B**usiness continuity/disaster recovery (BC/DR) is about staying in operations during and after disasters and to rebound from them. Effective BC/DR strategies require having, knowing how to use and actually applying the right methods and tools, and the ability to adapt on the fly as situations change.

Perhaps the most important factor in BC/DR is timing. That is, having these disaster responses in place or easily launched before or immediately after the euphemistically-termed “events” happen.

BC/DR methods earn their mettle in hurricanes. Few large-scale disasters are as common, widespread, long lasting and as devastating as them—when measured in losses, in power and voice/data outages and economic especially transportation disruptions and dislocations.

While Hurricane Katrina, which slammed into New Orleans in August 2005, has stayed in most peoples’ minds as the iconic such disaster, Hurricane Ike, which hit Texas in September 2008, has come in after it in the impact. Ike has proved to be, so far, reported Wikipedia as “the third-costliest hurricane ever to make landfall in the United States.”

Ike ripped into Galveston and wreaked havoc in the Houston area, leading to 112 people being killed and causing nearly \$30 billion in damage in the U.S. alone, said Wikipedia. The hurricane “also resulted in the largest evacuation of Texans in that state’s history. It became the largest search-and-rescue operation in U.S. history.” The state was the main but not the only event for Ike; it had punched up the Turks and Caicos, Haiti and Cuba on the way. And after landfall it tore into the Midwest and the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec then touched Iceland before petering out.

Houston-based ExtremeTix, which develops and markets web-based ticketing solutions, is one of many firms whose operations – including contact centers – that had stood in the way of Ike. The hurricane ripped out power and phones lines

and forced employees out of the firm’s building. In doing so Ike silenced ExtremeTix’s contact center as the company relied on a legacy on-premises platform.

ExtremeTix searched and then found a temporary location in a hotel conference room with power and Internet access. It also set up a few cubicles in its data center for staff who could not reach the hotel.

Fortuitously ExtremeTix had already decided to switch to hosted/software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions at its now-stricken contact center. And it had selected inContact ([www.incontact.com](http://www.incontact.com)) to provide the platform when Ike rolled in.

The company called inContact to see what they could do to help out. InContact gave ExtremeTix high priority. It connected the hotel- and data center-located agents and enabled those who could not access either site and were staying at home or with others, connected by landlines or by cellphones.

“The response from inContact was just fantastic,” recounts Mike Hergert, chief technology officer for ExtremeTix. “They were ready to do whatever it took to make us successful. They understood what we were facing and were quick to make things happen. As we scrambled to find a location with power and Internet that we could work from, inContact was up and running before we were even ready.”

One of the reasons that inContact was able to get ExtremeTix back in business so fast was that as a SaaS solution, there was no need to put in any phone switches or deploy servers, reports Hergert. inContact’s services were not affected by Ike. The



applications are housed on servers located in Dallas, Texas and Los Angeles, Calif. at secure sites with battery-powered UPS and generators. inContact has agreements and connectivity to multiple major tier one communications providers.

“We were able to hand off everything to inContact with no worries or fuss,” says Hergert. “And the fact that inContact itself employs redundant systems, assures us that they can deliver the business continuity we needed.”

ExtremeTix operated from its temporary quarters for over two weeks. It completed the disaster-prompted switchover to inContact.

Disaster response was and is by far not the only benefit gained by ExtremeTix from the inContact hosted solution. It has enabled the firm to gain greater efficiencies. For example ExtremeTix can run with two less agents, saving approximately \$52,000 annually.

“inContact has been willing to do whatever it takes to make us successful,” Hergert says. **CIS**





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## Improving Productivity Via Simplified Self-Service Authentication

**I**VR and web self-service systems have long been excellent contact center productivity-enhancing tools by handling calls that would have been answered or made by live agents at a fraction of the interaction costs. They can boost customer satisfaction by providing queueless responses.

And one of the most important factors in enabling self-service functionality is authenticating customers when they use them; it is also key in providing effective customer service. Unfortunately effective authentication has been too often overlooked, reports a new ClickFox ([www.clickfox.com](http://www.clickfox.com)) study, "The Impact of Authentication on Customer Experience and Operational Costs", prompting customers to reach out to live agents.

ClickFox estimated that approximately 10 percent of customers that call into an IVR system will then contact agents for that reason. In addition, unauthenticated IVR callers that transfer to agents are 30 percent more likely to be transferred to second agents than authenticated callers. On the web up to 23 percent of customers that fail to recover passwords will have cross-channel interactions with agents within seven days.

The chief culprit is requiring customers to use difficult-to-recall identifiers like PINs, account numbers, usernames and passwords. It found that when other factors are held constant, the security question answer results in the highest levels of recovery success, while requiring account number drives the most failed authentication recovery attempts.

The impacts are three-fold: increased costs from higher live agent call volumes and longer average handle times to perform the authentication process live. Customer satisfaction scores drop significantly, up to 12 percent for those customers requiring multiple agents during their call.

Authentication success depends on two factors offering the simplest and most seamless processes for customers, and for a company's ability to match their inputs to the correct accounts, says the ClickFox report. Creating a process that limits the amount of time and effort required from the customer drives authentication success and subsequent single contact resolution. Further, it is critical to ask for information that will be easily remembered by customers, but also unlikely to change over time.

Here are the ClickFox study recommendations when designing the authentication process:

- Automatically identify the customer where possible, including using dialed-from number for IVR systems
- Use easy-to-recall information, such as phone number, Social Security Number (SSN) or date of birth. When the customers' phone number is not used to identify the caller, often they are asked to enter an account number or their SSN. Given the familiarity with their SSN, customers using that option are nearly 10 percent more likely to successfully authenticate than by using account number
- Include self service to retrieve forgotten usernames or passwords and apply processes that use security questions instead of account numbers
- Collect all fields that are used to authenticate customers during the new customer on-boarding process
- Audit systems to find customers that have blank authentication fields in their customer profiles. Proactively reach out to them via e-mail or text to gather information
- Should a customer reach live help, coach live representatives (contact center or retail) to update missing authentication data and educate/remind customers about authentication options
- Following the changes, notify customers of authentication changes via e-mail, SMS/text and continuously educate them of self service options available during interactions

These methods work, sometimes in spectacular fashion. For one unnamed client, ClickFox identified a low online password retrieval rate that drove significant customer calls into customer care. It made recommendations to streamline the password retrieval process and educate customers struggling with passwords. The firm now saves over \$12.5 million.

"A large percentage of customer contacts across industries begin with an authentication process," Chad McMahon, senior business analyst at ClickFox. "The simpler this process is, the more customers will repeatedly attempt and complete authentication, which in turn enables them to self serve. Ensuring authentication requirements include information easily recalled by customers is key to the success of any enterprise's self service goals." **CIS**





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## In Hiring, To Avoid “Big Brother” Quit Being “Nasty Sister”

“In order to be prepared to complete our online pre-screen questionnaire and application you will need your address history for the past seven years...”

So is this wording for a Defense Department, Homeland Security or other similar agency or law enforcement position, or for one of their contractors, where the individuals would have access to classified and other sensitive information, restricted areas and/or have power over lives? Or for jobs that handles and/or manages dangerous chemicals, explosives, nuclear materials or weapons that could have unfunny consequences if the “bad guys” get their hands on them? Would the work entail getting into the critical agencies’ departments’ and suppliers’ underlying IT systems, like the help desk that I once visited at a NORAD facility that fixed the systems that enable aircraft (and missile) detection, identification – and response?

Nope.

It is for contact center work – handling customer service and sales. This wording is part of boilerplate language on the application forms for a large well-known firm that is best left unidentified.

What, pray tell, is the overriding necessity for this “Nasty Sister” – the corporate sibling to government “Big Brother” – intrusion into individual privacy? Are contact centers hotbeds of crime? Are agents and their unwitting supervisors putting their nations at grave risk by deliberately or carelessly having information fall into the wrong hands? Have there been widespread outbreaks of ID, asset and corporate documents theft, insider trading, reputations destroyed, property damaged and lives lost and individuals maimed via unscrupulous contact center staff?

Unless a job requires high level security clearance where there are clearly identified threats it is none of employers’ business to know where applicants/employees have lived. No more than it is for them to know their credit histories: which the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) is cracking down on by suing Kaplan (see March’s Logout) as it unfairly discriminates against applicants.

Contact center agents are arguably one of the most carefully and extensively watched positions there is. Any risk factors – however slim – are mitigated by the extensive array of

already-required and proven call and contact monitoring, data blanking and IT security tools such as secure desktops.

One can make the argument that “there is no such thing as too little information on prospective employees”. Also that “we know the risk is slight but what happens if something does happen?”

The problem with this logic that it is the equivalent to “there is no such thing as too little security”, such as requiring reception staff to wear Kevlar vests and having Uzi-toting guards patrolling call floors. It covers the butts of lazy, and/or incompetent management, who can then abdicate their responsibility to properly assess risks and fairly screen individuals as individuals to vendors who profit from this insecurity and paranoia.

Requiring past personal addresses and credit checks are just two more of the many examples of dumb HR tricks that will rightly and repeatedly bite employers who use them in the hindquarters. Just ask Kaplan.

Don’t be surprised if the EEOC and/or lawmakers target the address requirements. Why? Because applicants may be denied employment because they felt – arguably with justification – they had to lie about where they had lived. Like the woman who is staying in a shelter because her spouse had been beating her up. Or the new American who chose not to disclose they had lived with relatives who were illegal immigrants.

Personal privacy intrusions are also counterproductive especially in already high-churn sectors like contact centers. As the employment picture brightens these give more reasons for the good agents – especially those that have needed topnotch skills like SMS/text and social media handling – to say “I’m outta here” while discouraging potential star performers. These invasions add resentment – and fear – on top of the too-common poor training, petty supervision and low wages and benefits in already stressful jobs that can shrink net output and engender a “getting back at the boss” culture. Talk about self-fulfilling prophecies...

No firm likes “Big Brother” interfering with their business. If they and/or their counterparts quit being “Nasty Sister” by violating individual privacy there will be less need for the sibling to step on their toes. **CIS**



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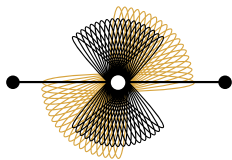
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