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- TMC Labs Innovation Awards, Part II



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Rich Tehrani, CEO, TMC



Marketing Consistency is Key in Building Brand, Business

As I look out at the technology landscape, I find it surprising that replacements of marketing personnel – whether initiated by the company or people resigning – seems to be near an all-time high.

I have stated before that the job of marketers is tougher than ever. Marketing staff have to deal with online and offline media, social, search, events, web seminars, community building, landing page creation, testing, e-mail marketing, article writing, blogging and public relations on a daily basis. We are at the point where marketers should be injecting Red Bull into one arm while injecting Maalox into the other.

To make matters worse, the scrutiny marketers have to deal with is at an all-time high, meaning investors, CXOs and presidents are demanding accountability for every cent of spending. They want to see a sale linked to virtually every dime spent.

While this may make sense to the casual reader, what is lost in this equation is the concept of branding. And without branding, lead generation doesn't reach anywhere near its full potential. This is especially the case when a product category requires a strong brand to instill confidence in a purchase decision.

For years I worked as the head of MIS here at TMC. I was fortunate enough to computerize this company in the eighties – building PCs myself. I quickly migrated the company to desktop publishing later in the same decade and was intimately involved in many of the tech purchase decisions over the past decades. More recently I have helped companies communicate with customers – not only explaining in many cases what their new products are designed to do, but just as important, advising customers on how to achieve their goals.

The one thing I have learned is consistency is the most important aspect of marketing. In fact, it seems that consistency trumps message.

Some companies have been at trade shows consistently for years, and their booths haven't been very descriptive or large, but they are entrenched because they prove their commitment to buyers at important events. Other companies spend far more at conferences and marketing in general, but it comes in spurts. Guess what – the companies that have ups and downs in their outbound communications seem to underperform – even though they spend more.

The situation gets worse when there is turnover in marketing. There is an epidemic of companies replacing marketing departments, or people just deciding to up and leave their

posts for whatever reason. My hunch is that they are tired of working in a macro-marketing environment that is devoid of fun, creativity and experimentation. Perceived failure is met with a wrist slap and a dressing down, and success is infrequent because marketing departments are not easily able to justify the results of branding.

Branding is an amazing thing. Here's one great example: If I was to ask anyone in their late thirties or older "How do you spell relief?" they would likely say Roloids. Amazingly, the company's TV ad has been in the collective memory of much of America for decades, more than paying for itself. But today it is tough to get many newbie CEOs to comprehend how an ad campaign like this is worth pursuing.

TMC's Peter Bernstein recently wrote about the need for consistency in reference to the management challenges faced by the boards at HP and Yahoo. He explained that CEOs themselves are part of the brand. Here is an excerpt:

"After all, brand stewardship is by extension a core part of a board of directors' fiduciary responsibilities. When investors and other critical audiences (customers, partners and employees just to name the top critical ones) lose confidence in the leadership capabilities of those entrusted with guiding a company, the brand is tarnished and no good can come of it. In fact, as we were all taught as kids, trust and respect are easily lost and extremely difficult to regain. This is true even in the U.S., where we seem enamored sometimes with stories of reclamation and redemption."

Sometimes I meet CEOs with awesome technology, but they are devoid of marketing understanding. They can't for the life of them comprehend why they need to have a strong brand or why searing it into the minds of potential buyers is important. It is maddening.

If you tell someone that the most successful companies are the ones with the best marketing, not the best product, they generally agree with you. But when it's their product, company and ego in the middle of the equation, they seem to lose all sense of reason.

And until turnover eases and CXOs understand the importance of building strong brands, expect customer acquisition programs, including direct selling, to be far less efficient than they could be. **CIS**

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*



Does Your Brand Have Friends?

Did you know that more than 1 billion people – that’s more than 70 percent of the population of Internet users – use social networks? And did you know that nearly half of them use Facebook every day?

Do you know what else half of them do as part of their social networking activities? They connect to brands like yours (or your competitors), and 36 percent have posted some form of content on their social networks about those brands (according to InSites Consulting).

Does that mean your business must have a social media presence? No – but you really don’t have a reason not to, if you follow the tried and true mantra of advertising where your customers are. Today, that is less about physical geography than it is about cyber geography. In other words, if you’re going to market, do it where you will be visible to your target customers – the world of social media.

Mobility is changing the game even more, providing access to customers when they are more likely to respond to messaging. In August of this year, more than 72 million mobile users visited social networking sites on their mobile devices, an increase of 37 percent from August, 2010, according to comScore. About one-third of the mobile social networkers received some form of digital offer during those visits, with more than a quarter of them clicking on an ad from a social networking site.

The message is clear: Social networkers are engaging with more than their friends and family – they are engaging with many of their preferred brands as well, effectively becoming volunteer spokespeople.

When you consider that most new mobile devices are equipped with GPS capabilities, the potential for growing your social media-based business opportunity increases exponentially, as a high percentage of users will provide their location data in exchange for valuable digital offers.

I recently spoke with Sandro Tavares, head of business intelligence and analyst relations, business solutions, at Nokia Siemens Networks about this very topic. He agreed that businesses don’t “have to” engage via social media (read: they don’t have to if they want to risk falling behind).

“It’s all about keeping customers happy,” he explained. “And now that they’re happy, let’s sell more to them.”

While that may seem a bit forward, it’s the name of the game, and the easiest sales are to those in need and those who have already had positive experiences (fans). In fact, in increasingly competitive environments, one of the best strategies for building brand loyalty is to create greater dependence on your brand.

“The only way for CSPs to differentiate is to provide a high quality experience, especially with high value subscribers who can churn easily,” noted Tavares.

Nokia Siemens Networks is helping its network operator customers differentiate their service and provide that differentiated experience by helping strengthen subscriber relationships through social networking.

With the Facebook app for self care, operators are not only meeting subscribers where they engage on a regular basis already – so subscribers are in an environment on their own terms – they also give them the ability to resolve situations on their own, including purchasing additional services from within the Facebook app. Basically, the app is connected to the operator’s self-care portal and, when subscribers “like” the operators, they gain access to a number of features and offers based on their behaviors and preferences.

Orange Switzerland was able to increase FCR by 50 percent by providing these kinds of social media integrated services.

Despite the larger number of social media users who follow brands, the fact is they are also apt to stop that practice given a period of inactivity. In fact, inactivity is the most popular reason for dropping or de-friending a person or brand.

Social networking hasn’t randomly become popular. As with anything else that grows in popularity, it’s about benefits. On a personal level the benefit is being able to share and have things shared with you. On the brand level, it’s about getting the scoop on the latest products, earning additional discounts, getting special Facebook coupons, etc.

Considering these facts, no, you don’t “have” to have a social media presence. Then again, consider that your competitors do. **CIS**



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Virtual Agents

Home-Based CSRs Deliver New Benefits to the Contact Center

Anybody talking to me about the benefits – both to employer and employee – of working at home is preaching to the converted. I have happily, and very productively, I think, done my jobs from living quarters for most of the past two decades. And because my employers have granted me the awesome benefit of telecommuting, I always try to go the extra mile for them.

Clearly, I'm not alone.

Residential dwellings also have become important outposts for many contact center operations. And the trend toward virtual agents, as these home-based workers are often called, is only expected to grow.

Michele Rowan, president and CEO of At Home Customer Contacts, says that 15 to 20 percent of the total agent population in North America's 60,000 contact centers work from home. The share of home-based call center agents is forecast to reach 30 percent by the end of 2013.



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Such major brands as JetBlue today rely exclusively on home-based call center agents. However, even businesses in verticals like finance and health care, which have stringent privacy requirements, are now embracing the virtual agent model, says Rowan.

They are “signing on to the remote agent model in droves,” she adds.

Realizing New Savings

The acceptance and adoption of the virtual agent model is being driven by several factors, including a desire to lower contact center costs, drive productivity, expand the workforce, allow for more flexibility, and gain expertise.

Embracing the virtual agent model can enable contact centers and their customers to realize savings on a number of fronts.

Rowan notes that it’s cheaper because it doesn’t require the call center to pay – or pay as much – rent and utilities.

Joe Jacoboni, president and CEO of outsourcer Contact Centers of America, says that its work-at-home agents also bring to the table their own computer and phone equipment, and related telecom/data services, eliminating call center costs in the process. And while some businesses hire on virtual agents full time, Contact Centers of America hires them on as independent contractors.

“The interesting thing is it alleviates all the [Social Security taxes and unemployment] taxes for us,” he says.

Using virtual agents and call centers near college campuses just makes sense, Jacoboni adds, because it allows Contact Centers of America to compete better with offshore outfits. Contact Centers of America, which had just a dozen home agents as of September, also likes the home agent model because it allows the company to support seasonal efforts – such as outbound call center customers during the campaign season – without having to invest in new on-site infrastructure.

Expanding the Agent Pool

Virtual agents often are more productive than their in-office counterparts. The virtual agent model also can help improve customer satisfaction.

Rowan of At Home Customer Contacts says that, in general, customer satisfaction scores are better with home agents, as is employee satisfaction. Allowing reps to work at home also enables call centers to staff on the hour. And attendance tends to be better, she adds, perhaps because if reps are not feeling 100 percent, they still may opt to work because they can do so in the comfort of their own homes.

Because the virtual agent model opens the call center to telecommuters, contact centers also have a much larger potential base of employees at their disposal.

For example, Contact Centers of America has a home agent program that recruits disabled war veterans.

InfoCision Management Corp., meanwhile, has had a good experience finding quality virtual agents via neighborhood recruiting. Sometimes InfoCision does a press conference in a community, inviting the mayor and other officials, and uses that gathering as a launch pad to develop a work-at-home program in that area.

“The home environment is absolutely perfect for anyone who has any physical limitations,” says Steve Brubaker, chief of staff at InfoCision, at which less than 10 percent of CSRs are virtual agents.

In Ohio, InfoCision employs some blind reps, who are very good communicators, but who want to work at home, says Brubaker. He adds that stay-at-home moms also have been a good match for the company, noting that many moms have personal connections with the charity organizations using solutions from InfoCision.

The virtual agent model also expands the contact center to retirees and others with expertise in certain areas such as computers, health care, insurance, or what have you. Those backgrounds sometimes dovetail nicely with the interests of the call center operation, or its customers, which can result in higher levels of customer service.

For more on virtual agents,
check out VoltDelta’s
Strategic Solutions Series
in this issue.

Improving the Customer Experience

Cynthia Phillips, vice president of marketing at Alpine Access, which uses home-based agents exclusively, says the education and quality of the Alpine Access call center reps is much higher than reps at competitors’ brick-and-mortar call centers because it can recruit from a much broader base of job candidates. She adds that Alpine Access also has older reps (which typically means more work experience) than is the norm in the industry and low employee turnover. Some of company’s employees have been on the job for eight or 10 years. Many of these folks also have industry-specific expertise that Alpine Access matches up with the special requirements of its clients.

About 70 percent of Alpine Access business in the last year involved companies that decided to bring their call centers back from overseas in an effort to increase customer service and at the same time support the U.S. economy.

“At the end of the day the question to the companies is: How valuable are your customers?” she says, adding that it is far



better to keep a customer than to lose one and have to go get a new one. "As a consumer myself, sometimes the only interaction I have [with a company] is through their call center, so the call rep I talk to at a company is my only perception point about that company."

Elizabeth Herrell, founder and president of communication initiatives at Constellation Research, in her September blog writes about the importance of the customer experience relative to contact center interactions.

"After many years of moving contact center operations offshore, either directly or through outsourcers, several companies have changed direction and are repatriating agents to onshore locations," Herrell wrote. "Lower salaries and improved profit margins drove companies to offshore locations, such as India and the Philippines, but now a growing number of companies are reconsidering their decision. Bringing agents back onshore is not based on any new spirit of nationalism but on the fact that many customers complain about the quality of services received from offshore agents."

In a recent interview with CIS magazine, Kevin Childs, practice leader, contact center lead at Manpower, pointed out that in July Consumer Reports reported that consumer satisfaction was at an all-time low. Childs says using U.S.-based call center reps – at least for high-value customers – could help turn that around.

Ensuring Control & Privacy

Of course, the virtual agent model poses its own challenges, both real and perceived.

For example, how does the presence of remote employees impact training and management? And how can a contact center ensure the privacy of customer data in this scenario?

InfoCision's Brubaker says the training part is easy.

"We give our agents a CD ROM, and they pop it into their system and they're up and running," he says. "It's that simple."

Remote agents for InfoCision need their own PCs, hard-line phones, and broadband connections, he says, adding that the company runs a check on all their gear and connections to make sure it all works. Rarely do virtual agents come in to the InfoCision location. Instead, Brubaker says, InfoCision brings training to areas close to the agents.

To address security concerns, he adds, InfoCision doesn't have remote agents take financial information from customers.

Security and control is extremely important, notes Brad Forsythe, technical sales consultant at Interactive Intelligence, who was on the panel "Remote Agents: The Big Game Changer for Contact Centers" at September's ITEXPO West in Austin, Texas, along with Brubaker, Jacoboni and Rowan. The Citrix product, he says, offers pretty granular control of what kind of access agents get, and each agent can have a unique level of access.

"Everything we do is on demand in the cloud, so nothing sits on our reps' desktop, nothing," says Jacoboni of the Contact Centers of America infrastructure. "It's all in the cloud."

Adds Jacoboni, "The webcam [also] is a beautiful tool. It's just like being there."

Tapping into the Larger Organization

Carefully selecting virtual agents, however, goes a long way toward mitigating such control and privacy concerns, notes Rowan.

Jacoboni agrees, noting it's important to hire people with the desire to do the job and to keep them engaged by including them in regular meetings and other communications.

Organizations also should consider other ways they might bring remote workers into the loop. For example, if management has an open door policy, it could invite virtual agents to e-mail management with any questions or concerns. A business could build social meeting rooms in which virtual agents can congregate and visit for work or leisure time activities. Virtual agents can be invited to come in for holiday parties or other big events. And, importantly, organizations should recognize remote workers with online kudos or other rewards.

"You have to have a culture of excellence, and they have to feel they are part of that culture," says Jacoboni.

InfoCision's Brubaker agrees, noting that one way his company does that is by offering remote workers the same experience – in terms of benefits, environment, pay and status – that in-office reps receive.

"We haven't changed the model," Brubaker says, noting that 250 of InfoCision's 4,300 employees work from home. "We've just extended the environment."

"I think it's a great program, and perhaps more of our clients will be open to it in the future," Brubaker adds.

And with that comment Brubaker gets to what may be the primary gating factor of the virtual agent model: customer acceptance.

The ITEXPO panelists noted above indicate that all the procedural and technical tools are in place to enable contact centers and their customers to embrace the virtual agent model with confidence that will it deliver a cost-efficient, high quality and secure experience for them and their end users. Nonetheless, some customers are not quite ready to hop aboard.

"It's all a perception issue," says Jacoboni.

As the contact center industry continues to educate current and potential customers about the benefits and reliability of using virtual agents, perhaps more organizations will join this growing movement. **CIS**

It Pays to be Positive: The Cost Benefits of a Positive Call Center Culture

Customers expect a lot from agents. They want them to have a good attitude, be knowledgeable, and have the ability to resolve issues on the first attempt. Research shows that happy agents ultimately lead to happy customers.

But keeping agents satisfied requires resources and time. How do you create a positive and profitable call center that benefits both agents and customers? And most importantly, where do you find the time?

The Power of Positivity

The average cost of training a call center agent in the U.S. is about \$5,000. Combine this with an average industry turnover rate of 33 percent and a 100-seat center realizes a loss of \$165,000 per year due to trained agents walking out the door.

Additionally, many of these agents who leave go to work at another call center nearby, taking your \$5,000 in training expenses with them.

Satisfied agents are less likely to leave. And when turnover is reduced, resources spent hiring new agents and subsidizing the competition can be spent on investing in your existing agents to improve their knowledge, skills, and overall satisfaction.

What can you do to improve your call center's culture?

Change your measurement focus.

Tracking metrics is a critical element to maintaining call center efficiency. Though call volume is largely out of your control, how you respond to certain metrics ultimately defines your center's culture. Don't just measure volume – measure quality of calls. Explain organizational goals to agents and how they contribute to the big picture. Agents who understand how they fit into the larger organization are generally more satisfied and productive.

Offer a career path.

Almost half of agents polled in a recent nationwide survey cited a clearly defined career path as an important reason they chose to work in a particular center. Most agents want to believe that if they do a good job, there will be an opportunity for them to make more money, be promoted or take on more

responsibility. If you don't offer a career path, you could lose some of your best agents.

Invest in your agents.

Almost 80 percent of the cost of a call center is labor. Your agents are your most expensive asset – invest in them! When agents are not challenged, boredom sets in and they are more likely to pursue other opportunities. Take the time to ensure agents are knowledgeable and prepared for calls and that their day is broken into different tasks to alleviate burnout.

To learn more about how to create a positive call center, download our webinar (<http://bit.ly/ppteCa>) with David Butler, director of the Call Center Research Laboratory.

Finding Time to Stay Positive

In the call center, the scarcest resource is time. Less than one third of call center operators provide as much training to agents as they intended. Some 73 percent say that service level agreements don't allow enough time for training and 37 percent have no set target for coaching time.


Where can you find the time to empower agents and improve their work environment? The truth is – it's already there.

Roughly 60 percent of an agent's day is spent handling calls. Another 11 percent is spent in idle time. In other words, nearly 50 minutes per day is spent waiting for a call, which adds up to about 16 hours per month, per agent, or five weeks of idle time each year! This unproductive idle time – which generally occurs in two minute intervals – costs the industry an estimated \$30 billion annually.

Technology exists today to convert wait time into productive time by pushing off-phone shrinkage activities such as training, coaching and communications to agents to complete during idle times. By converting idle time into productive time, you can drive a more positive call center culture by improving the performance of your agents. Make idle time work for you and your agents. Find time to make them better. You are already paying for it – use it productively! **CIS**

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DVS Helps Organizations Leverage the Contact Center as a Competitive Differentiator

As companies like Apple teach us the value of customer experience, more companies appear to be looking inward to figure out how they can improve both their products and their outward-facing operations and brands. Yet when it comes to customer interaction solutions, many businesses to date seem to have put more emphasis on cost cutting via automated systems and offshore call centers than on how to harness new solutions to meet and exceed customer expectations and drive new revenues. If this sounds familiar, perhaps it's time to take a closer look at your customer contact strategy.

"The contact center can be a real competitive tool to a company, and not just to see how low you can keep the cost," says Tom Parrott, president and founder of Digital Voice Systems Inc. "[It can] bring in new revenue and keep your customers sticky so they want to stay and keep on doing business with you."

A former IBM employee, Parrott established Digital Voice Systems in 1987. Parrott's company got its start providing IVR solutions for customers such as banks. Digital Voice Systems was the first Synellect reseller, says Parrott, and had great success with that. Then, in the early 1990s, Digital Voice Systems partnered with contact center outfit Edify, which was later acquired by Intervice, and then bought by Convergys.

But Digital Voice Systems really hit on something special when it met up with Interactive Intelligence in 1998, Parrott says.

"I think the CIC product is unmatched in the industry right now, and our experience in the industry is unmatched," he says.

Interactive Intelligence's CIC, or Customer Interaction Center, is an IP-based platform that can be delivered as an on-premises or hosted basis. It features PBX/IP PBX functionality, ACD features, agent scoring, customer satisfaction surveys, IVR and self-service automation, knowledge manage-

ment, multi-site routing, outbound dialing, quality monitoring and reporting, screen recording, and workforce management. The CIC solution also enables multimedia queuing to the right agent at the right time, records those interactions, and scores interactions so agents performance can be evaluated and optimized, adds Parrott.

CIC also offers speech analytics, which uses keywords during conversations to determine the most significant parts of interactions to help provide direction on how and when to

act on them. Contact centers have hundreds or thousands of hours of recorded transactions, says Parrott; that can make it particularly challenging to tune in on what's most meaningful. But CIC's Interaction Analyzer can tag keywords and rank calls in real time, so call center managers can elect to listen to the top and bottom 5 percent of calls, for example, to see what went right and what needs to be improved.

"Before, it was a just a sea of calls," he adds.

Parrott says Digital Voice Systems adds to that its 25 years of experience deploying contact center solutions.

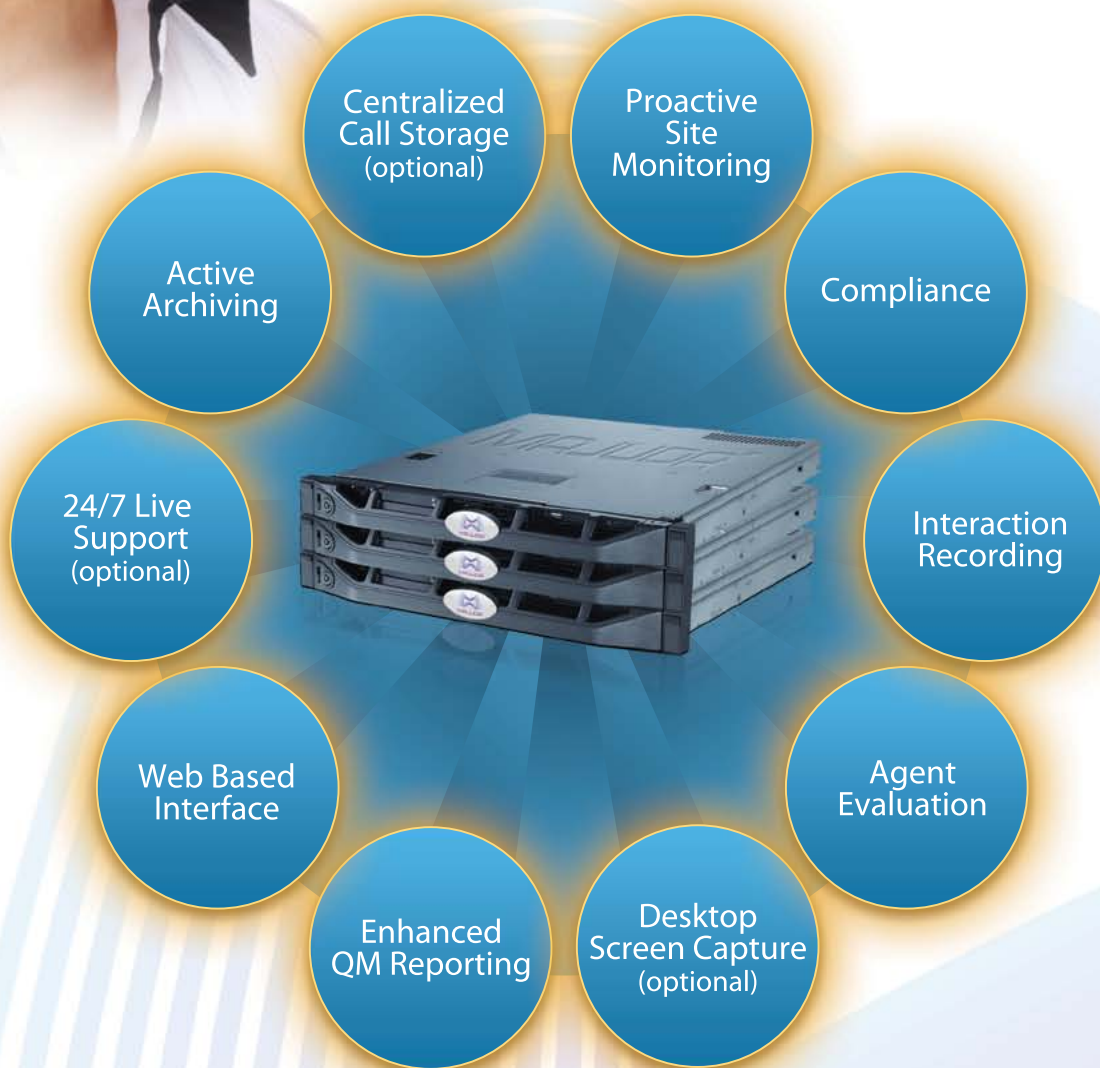
When a customer wants its contact center to be a competitive advantage, that's where Digital Voice Systems excels, he says. Customers tend to call on Digital Voice Systems when they have multiple contact center applications they want to leverage to be different or best in the industry. The company can get customers' made-to-order contact centers up and running, and provide back-end integration with a variety of systems, including applications like SAP



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and Seybold. Digital Voice Systems also maintains customers' contact center solutions, most of which are premises based (although the company also sells cloud-based contact center solutions through its partnership with Interactive Intelligence).

This year, Digital Voice Systems also began selling cloud-based software from RightNow Technologies Inc., which Gartner in September recognized as a 2011 Magic Quadrant leader for CRM web customer service.

"Integration with RightNow and CIC is going to be big for us," says Parrott.

While Digital Voice Systems and Interactive Intelligence together offer solutions to make the agent and the contact center more productive, Parrott explains, with RightNow it can make the customer more productive. That's because the RightNow solution allows customers to access information via e-mail, Facebook widgets, the web or other channels.

That way, agents don't have to get involved in inquiries for which customers can find the answers themselves. This solution also caters to the preferences of the younger generation, which tends to prefer chat or self help to picking up a phone, adds Parrott. Self-help solutions also can be especially useful in cases



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where the customer is involved in an activity and doesn't want to get involved in a phone call with a customer service rep. For example, a fisherman who has a question about how to operate his gear on a boat might prefer accessing the Internet using his smartphone to get an answer as opposed to making a call to get the information from an individual, Parrott says.

Leveraging the software from Interactive Intelligence and RightNow, Digital Voice Systems addresses the needs of a wide variety of organizations. At the moment, Digital Voice Systems serves more than 100 customers with contact centers involving anywhere between 28 and thousands of agents.

"Because CIC is software based, you can buy exactly what you need, so that makes it very flexible," adds Parrott.

Based in Northbrook, Ill., the privately owned and profitable Digital Voice Systems has deployments throughout North America, and has done some work in Latin America as well as in London and Sydney. The company caters to businesses in various verticals, including business process outsourcing, financial, oil, pharmaceutical, and more. Its customers range from those with annual revenues from the tens of millions up to much larger organizations, including Fortune 10 or 50 companies, Parrott says.

"At Digital Voice Systems, we partner with innovative organizations to deliver a solution that handles all communication channels, empowers both the customer and the agent, and management tools that improve the performance of any business," he says. "The unified application platforms from Interactive Intelligence and RightNow Technologies provide a cost-effective and easily managed multichannel system for consistent and responsive customer service, along with end-to-end reporting and quality monitoring. Our proven solution provides real answers to the problems faced by today's leading contact centers." **CIS**

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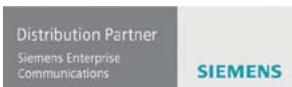
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Enhancing Agent Communications

The advent of new communications methods offers innovative ways that companies interact with their customers. Many simple transactions or straightforward phone calls that used to be the bulk of the call center interactions are increasingly handled effectively through self-service channels. What remains are often more challenging or complicated queries. In addition, centers are increasingly focused on improving first call resolution – being able to address effectively the caller's issue without callbacks or delays.

There are a number of techniques that companies use to support agents dealing with more complex contacts and with pressure on immediate resolution. A long-standing technique is to route calls to specialized skill queues. Increasingly, knowledge management systems bring information to agents needing specific data to respond. Finally, advances in unified communications tools provide new ways to support access to real-time expertise and improved collaboration with customers.

One familiar UC tool is instant messaging chat sessions. Many contact centers use IM internally to enable an agent to ask a question of a colleague, a supervisor, or an expert within the center.

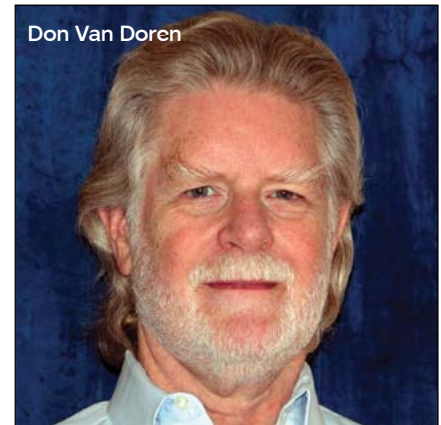
In many situations, however, the needed expertise isn't located in the center, but in some other department of the company. It seems logical to extend agent visibility for IM and conferencing to appropriate experts in engineering, R&D, product management, logistics, or other groups. The benefit is that complex customer inquiries might be addressed by those best able to answer. The challenge is that there are many hurdles to make this approach work effectively. Many call center managers don't want to relinquish control over external calls, add routing complexity, or mess with their performance metrics. Moreover, other departments don't want their staff be on call for handling random customer queries, especially if there are few controls of when an agent can engage an expert. Finally, there are legitimate ques-

tions about whether the engineer in R&D is trained to handle this sort of interaction.

Presence, as currently deployed, is not a very well-honed tool. Available, busy, and similar general status indicators (often set manually) do not provide the richness needed to determine which expert to engage. And presence shouldn't be one-size-fits-all. Many current vendor offerings lack robust policy capabilities to determine who can interrupt and when.

Other unified communications-based solutions beyond the use of IM are starting to be deployed to enrich customer interaction opportunities through improved self service through customer portals, better collaboration, and even social networking forums in which customers help each other. What's interesting is that some of these solutions have the potential to bypass, and thus diminish, the role of the contact center.

Customer portals, sometimes accessed through applications written for mobile devices, allow customers direct access to information about their interactions with the enterprise. Depending on the business, this could be order status, delivery dates, technical support, account balances, etc. These can be tailored to address the business application, as well as specific customer requirements on a case-by-case basis. For high-value customers, suppliers, and partners, portals can also be enhanced to support direct connections to the advisor, designer, or production planner they interact with on a regular



basis. UC offers secure presence capabilities to let customers see availability, and initiate the best contact directly. These interactions bypass the contact center, provide direct control to the customer, and build strong connections between the customer and the enterprise.

As customer interactions become more specialized and complex, UC offers a broad spectrum of tools to enhance collaboration among different departments within the organization, and can include partners and suppliers as needed. In an increasingly mobile and distributed world, UC tools rapidly organize and support appropriate interaction methods. Simple phone calls can be escalated to video or web-sharing sessions. Shared workspaces for documentation can be created. Conference sessions can be recorded for later review.

Finally, social networking capabilities are playing an increasingly important role in helping companies establish new channels of customer interaction. While these generally operate outside the contact center, agents in a few companies establish their own social network identities and actively monitor and participate in forums. **CIS**

Don Van Doren is principal of UniComm Consulting, an independent UC consulting firm, and a co-founder of www.UCStrategies.com. He also is president of Vanguard Communications, an independent contact center consultancy.



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Kuhn Offers Vision of Industry Trends

Envision is a pioneer in delivering team coaching and performance improvement products and services to the contact center. The company's Click2Coach integrates quality monitoring and management, e-learning, automated coaching, and analytics and performance management capabilities. Click2Coach and Envision Workforce Management are offered via the Envision Centricity web-based workforce optimization platform.

CIS magazine recently interviewed Envision Founder and CEO Rodney Kuhn, who is a pioneer in the field of CTI and call center technology, about the company and his thoughts on industry trends. Kuhn launched Envision in 1994 when he unveiled Sound-Byte Enterprise. Prior to founding Envision, Kuhn helped define computer telephony standards while developing CTI-enabled voice messaging products for Active Voice, a manufacturer of voice processing systems.

What kind of demand are you seeing for your solutions?

Kuhn: At Envision, we see accelerating demand for more value-added features. Customers are replacing first-generation, simple recording solutions that were positioned as QM solutions with a full-featured WFO product suite. Customers are also adopting more advanced WFO product features, such as speech, to aid in everything from coaching to customer intelligence.

Are the markets for performance management/workforce optimization, recording and analytics tools maturing? What role does the move from TDM to VoIP play in all this?

Kuhn: The switch from TDM to VOIP is creating opportunity for growth, not limiting it. The massive forklift infrastructure upgrade is giving companies a reason to also look at their application stack and determine where additional value can be derived. The integrated suite, lower TCO and ROI opportunities, as well as the fact that many of the piecemeal WFO solutions are fully amortized make this a great time to be in the space.

Some say analytics, although useful, can be pricey. What's your answer to that?

Kuhn: There's no question that analytics can be a valuable tool for an organization in achieving its goals. The expense can be high, which is why we at Envision have produced a right-sized speech analytics solution that a customer can install affordably, then determine the value of speech to their organization and scale the solution according to their requirements.

How is the social channel impacting contact centers?

Kuhn: With social media, agents may respond, and many customers will see that response. This creates many opportunities for the contact center to handle multiple inquiries with a single response, but also creates tremendous risk if the agents are not receiving ongoing coaching on how to respond.

How will third-party hosting affect the demand and sales for OEMs like Envision?

Kuhn: As infrastructure providers take over the recording and archiving of telephone conversations, it allows Envision as a software developer and provider to focus on application value to our customers. Our recording architecture fits this model today, where a separate appliance from Envision can be installed to collect calls and our Click2Coach and Centricity suites can be used to evaluate, coach and train agents, as well as help improve customer experience.

What are Envision's differentiators in the marketplace?

Kuhn: As a trusted partner and solutions provider for over 17 years, Envision is in a



position to not only provide value-added, road-tested solutions and services, but thought leadership as well. We have the benefit of being a part of the evolutionary process of the contact center industry and have witnessed and helped shape many of the trends and industry standards we see today. Realizing that the needs of the contact center will never stop evolving and changing as consumer needs, wants and desired modes of communication continue to shift, we have developed a mindset of agility, nimbleness and continual learning that help us best support our clients' changing needs. This attitude – combined with superior, tried-and-true technology, customizable solutions and services that fit a range of contact center sizes, shapes and needs – make Envision unique. The purpose of our work is to be here for our clients to make their jobs easier and more effective, increasing end-customer satisfaction and the bottom line. We continue to work with our customers to develop solutions that provide maximum ROI. **CIS**

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Cutting Customer Churn in the Collections Business

For a long time, building customer loyalty was arguably the business world's equivalent of the weather. Lots of people talked about it, but very few seemed committed to doing anything about it. In the presence of an increasing number of well-managed customer retention programs, research confirms that customers who are targeted by a retention program demonstrate higher loyalty to a business.

Analytics driving powerful customer and business intelligence systems have helped contribute to that evolution. But at the heart of it, every successful customer retention program – in the telecom and media arena as well as other areas – revolves around understanding your customer; steady, consistent communications; providing appropriate rewards; and establishing clear feedback loops. Do these things consistently well and you stand a very good chance of developing loyal customers who engage in profitable behavior for extended periods of time.

Putting a Price on Customers

It's no surprise that building loyalty and retention has achieved prominence on the agendas of businesses generally, and customer service-driven companies in particular. The costs of customer churn and attrition are well understood by management teams.

The key culprits behind customer churn include some seemingly obvious ones that remain persistent:

- irrelevance of a service offering;
- competitors providing a service offering at a lower cost, or a more compelling offering;
- not living up to customer commitments;
- poor customer service;
- emergence of new, disruptive technology; and
- consolidation in the form of bundled offers, with disruption in the form of one-stop-shop offerings for all services.

According to multiple sources, including leading industry publications and various annual reports, churn rates in the U.S. range anywhere from 2 to 3 percent per month, or approximately 25 to 35 percent annually overall. It is estimated that

the cost of acquiring a new customer is roughly six times the cost of retaining an existing one. It's no surprise then that there has been an intensified focus on customer retention awareness and corresponding initiatives. Consistently applied with an emphasis on both reactive and proactive measures, success save rates can reach as high as 40 to 45 percent.

Executing retention programs right, however, means expanding the range of key metrics to include a variety of more nuanced factors such as actual cost per save and customer value post save. For that reason, churn analytics have taken a leading role in this area.

Whether viewed through the lens of customer retention or the larger framework of increasingly robust loyalty management models that are emerging in the sector, it is essential that service providers and other businesses today thoroughly understand what makes today's customers tick from behavioral and lifestyle perspectives.

Know Your Customer

Successful proactive retention efforts start with the recognition that customers are people. In other words, they do more than simply use a particular mobile phone – they lead active, busy lives and spend time and energy doing many different things. Understanding your customers' lifestyles is the first step in developing a sustainable program to keep them as customers – seeing every customer interaction as part of an ongoing dialog rather than simply as a transaction constitutes a beachhead in long-range customer lifestyle awareness and management campaigns. Such an effort can be the catalyst in lifting a program from loyalty to advocacy.

Our own experience has shown us that relevance and a competitive edge in this regard stems from our ability to provide our clients with customer lifestyle data (through analytics, surveys, and other tools) that can be the fuel for loyalty programs. By understanding these lifestyle choices, likes and dislikes, hobbies and interests, a service provider can help its clients manage the processes that come with implementing these kinds of programs.

One dimension of customer lifestyle that defines our era is that of mobile phones. We are witnessing a sea change in use and behavior among customers that is nothing less than industry transforming. More than ever, consumers are using their mobile phones to partake in activities that had been conducted on their computers. From researching prices and locations for services and goods to finding entertainment to purchasing tickets and much more, the advent of social media has been a major catalyst in these behavioral changes. For call center professionals today, the importance of embracing these substantial behavioral changes and integrating them into a service offering for customers has become mission critical.

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Retention: Proactive Vs. Reactive

Reducing customer churn in a sustainable way means looking at the process from both reactive and proactive dimensions. Reactive retention efforts often start with outbound calls to customers who have decided to leave to determine their reasons for churning out, understand their concerns and provide ways to address those concerns. Not infrequently, an exit interview can provide an opportunity to fix a problem there and then to hold onto the customer.

From a proactive perspective, it is essential to be able to perform the appropriate data analytics to identify probable future churn in concert with outbound calling or outreach in order to pre-empt churn. Part of these analytics incorporates identifying unprofitable customers and determining ways to increase profitability.

In one such case, a leading mobile service provider with more than 140 million customers was able to increase customer retention from 20 percent to 53 percent with help of proactive and reactive retention strategies employed by a business process outsourcing partner.

Segment the customer base.

Identify the most profitable customers and compile loyalty-oriented data drawn from lifestyle markers (e.g., travel, entertainment, sports, etc.). This calls for robust customer analytics.

Communicate effectively.

Multi-channel contact includes direct phone contact, e-mail, automated notifications, website personalization, direct (white mail) billing notices, message boards, customer forums, text, SMS, and social media outreach (Facebook, Twitter). Messages should reflect information from customer databases and recent interactions.

Target and reward.

Reward customers based on their predictive lifecycle value and their buying behaviors. Establish short- and long-term benefits based on current or anticipated behavior and activities. This is the most common area for companies to focus their efforts on. Coupons, discounts, rebates, frequency programs, special

Understanding your customers' lifestyles is the first step in developing a sustainable program to keep them as customers - seeing every customer interaction as part of an ongoing dialog rather than simply as a transaction constitutes a beachhead in long-range customer lifestyle awareness and management campaigns.

Finding a Recipe for Retention

Achieving customer retention and loyalty are the results of well-managed processes that go the extra mile in a host of ways to communicate with customers, and encourage them to remain active and engaged with the client in consistently profitable ways for an extended period of time.

While there are no guarantees that a customer will remain one for an extended period, there is a roadmap for cutting customer churn in clearly quantifiable ways. As noted earlier, step one is recognizing that more customers today handle almost all of their interactions through a mobile device. Our ability to keep those devices up and running has never been more core to our role in terms of customer retention.

Beyond that, this roadmap has several clearly marked signposts:

Identify the customer base.

Keeping track of all customer interaction data across all touch points – including churn data and why customers leave – is the keystone of an effective customer management initiative.

programs and offers, differentiated customer care, and other incentives fall into this category.

Measure customer satisfaction and act on customer feedback.

Measure product innovation, speed of delivery, customer service, and other factors that have the greatest appeal to customers and their propensity to remain loyal. Use after-call surveys, first-call resolution rates and Net Promoter scores.

Customers interact with brands not in a linear fashion, but through a circle of touch points comprising everything from sales and service, billing and advertising to day-to-day use of the product or service. Forging substantive relationships that will support a customer retention platform also means relating to customers in their day-to-day lives as customers and as people. Companies that do so in ways that are strategically aligned with the brand promise will be best positioned to navigate the road to cutting customer churn. **CIS**

Satwant Khalsa is vice president at Firstsource Solutions (www.firstsource.com).

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Capturing the Value of Voice, E-Mail Information

Organizations are losing loads of important and actionable data that is communicated during conference calls and other interactions that never make it into databases, or is stored but is not easily accessible. However, there is a movement afoot to capture such information and put it to good use.

HarQen is among the companies that recently have unveiled solutions to harness the power of such data. CEO Kelly Fitzsimmons tells CIS magazine HarQen solutions enable businesses to capture and organize voice and related content so they can be interacted with easily over time. That's important, she says, because voice communications not only convey information, they are unique from other communications like text and e-mail in that they can provide insight into meaning.

The HarQen Symposia solution, which is offered on a software-as-a-service basis, inserts passive and active tags at key points in the audio conversations. Users can tag certain parts of the audio as action items, inspiration, concern, etc. That way, conversations are organized so all important content is easily findable; the content lives in the CRM as a link, says Fitzsimmons, who adds HarQen is integrating Symposia with Salesforce and other major CRM solutions.

The service, which became generally available Sept. 26 and is initially free, will be sold both as a stand-alone capability and as part of other solutions, such as partner companies' conferencing services.

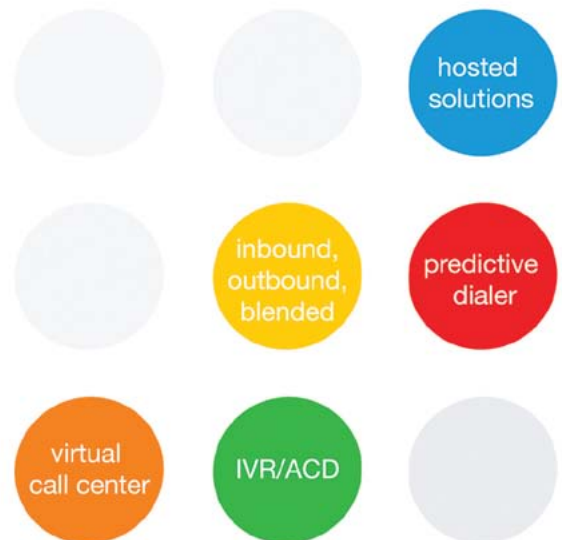
A one-year-old company called Yesware, meanwhile, recent made generally available a Gmail extension that enables salespeople to easily tag e-mails and save them to CRM systems.

CEO Matthew Bellows tells CIS magazine the Yesware SaaS-based template addresses the big disconnect between salespeople working in e-mail and entering customer and prospect information into CRM systems. Salespeople want to spend their time selling, not entering data into a CRM system, he says. Yesware lets them do business as usual, using e-mail to follow up with customers, while creating a channel from those e-mails into CRM. Managers, mean-

while, can leverage the Yesware solution to add members to their teams, review reports on their teams (to see, for example, how much a particular rep spend on prospecting), and can create templates for the team.

Ultimately, the goal of the Yesware solution, says Bellows, is to help "salespeople close more deals by making e-mail work better, and making CRM work better for your management."

"For small and medium businesses," he adds, "the hour a day salespeople spend typing [data] into CRM is a huge waste of time." **CIS**



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Breaking Business Boundaries with Virtual Contact Center Efficiency

Customer retention and the need to create loyalty building initiatives are topics for every customer care organization. Plans for these initiatives frequently hit a brick wall when the need to reduce costs is considered equally important as such corporate directives. These seemingly divergent customer care requirements are really not mutually exclusive if a hosted (or often referred to as “virtual”) contact center solution is considered.

Flexibility to optimally distribute agents by availability of skills, favorable wage rates or geographic coverage is perhaps the most obvious benefits. However, a capable virtual contact center solution can also vault customer care efforts to new heights by:

- enabling multi-channel support that might previously have been inhibited by a legacy system;
- empowering supervisory control, queue management and agent assistance across a distributed workforce; and
- ensuring call spike and telephony uptime via redundant call center resources.

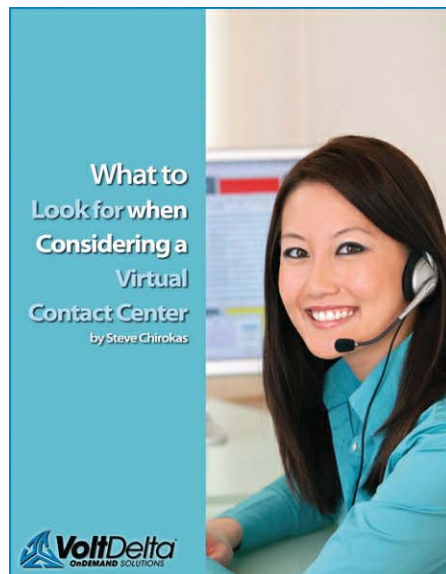
More organizations are turning to hosted solutions for these competitive reasons. Host solutions can also be the answer when an organization is faced with making a substantial capital investment to update obsolete premises-based equipment.

So, is a hosted solution the right fit for your organization?

WHAT IS A VIRTUAL CONTACT CENTER?

Virtualizing contact center services means removing typical limitations such as physical connectivity to a brick-and-mortar agent pool. Call distribution and central management of agents or automated services makes it easy to deploy “best agent” call routing, introduce home-based agents, or immediately answer every call with engaging voice recognition and without concern for port availability within a single contact center.

Servers, telephony access, networking equipment and all associated hardware and software required to accept calls and route them to agents are hosted by a third party in a virtual contact center model. IP-based technology provides a robust and cost-effective means of



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“Virtual” is the critical operative word, as any location with Internet access, including a home, can become a contact center. This flexibility generally comes with the added value of redundancy and security from hosting facilities created with multi-tenancy in mind.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Flexibility to engage customers and prospects with best agent routing and multi-channel communications to improve satisfaction is one of the key benefits of the hosted contact center model. Cost savings and scalability are also strong factors. Commonly highlighted benefits of a virtual contact center also include:

One Virtual Resource – Contact center walls are no longer barriers. The best agent to handle the call may be located in another state or at home. Managers have a unified “global” perspective of queue status, agent availability and call resolution statistics.

Superior Satisfaction between Channels – Virtual contact centers can also make cross-channel support a customer satisfaction benefit. Integration between an IVR and agents to reduce repeat requests and the ability to send an SMS confirmation after an audio dialog are examples of operations that are frequently difficult for legacy systems to support.

Consolidation and Integration – Almost everyone is challenged with multi-vendor systems in various stages of a useful lifecycle. A hosted contact center solution is not an all or nothing proposi-

tion. Virtual call centers can easily be phased in or agents transferred without geographic boundaries and without massive disruption.

Scalability – Instant reaction to fluctuating call volumes is a strength of the hosted contact center model. Agent availability and expertise means ability to scale is not infinite. However, it is far more capable than a premises-based model that might carry the overhead required to build out for spikes, thus remaining idle most of the time.

Operational Expenditure – Pay per use vs. capital expense can be the key to a compelling return on investment. OpEx can mean the difference between deploying a hosted contact center model with minimal upfront costs vs. remaining with a less capable premises-based solution.

VIRTUAL CONTACT CENTER EVALUATION CRITERIA

A virtual (or on-demand) model for contact center services provides a number of valuable customer satisfaction AND cost saving benefits. However, a provider of those services must be capable of delivering a level of service to ensure the appropriate return on investment. Download a free whitepaper that provides some guidelines on what to look for in a hosted contact center solutions vendor.



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CIS Congratulates TMC Labs Innovation Awards Winners

This year marks the 12th installment for the prestigious TMC Labs Innovation Awards, for which TMC Labs analyzes dozens of applicants to find the most unique and innovative products. Contact centers are constantly looking to increase agent productivity, reduce costs, and improve customer satisfaction through the utilization of innovative products. Like last year we have quite a few hosted offerings, but it's a very diverse group, featuring everything from hosted file storage to hosted workforce management. With the growth of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, it's no surprise we have at least one winner that directly integrates with social media.

We are proud to bestow this award to 17 worthy companies, listed in full in the September issue of Customer Interaction Solutions magazine and online at TMCnet. CIS divided between two magazine issues the detailed write ups of the winning products and services. You can find the first installment in the October issue of CIS magazine. Here is the second installment.

Five9

Five9 Cloud Computing Platform for Call Centers www.five9.com

Without a doubt, Five9 is one of the earliest pioneers of cloud-based applications. Its platform lets you build your call center in the cloud for faster deployment and easy scalability. Five9 enables you to instantly build a call center virtually that handles inbound, outbound (including predictive dialing), and blended traffic. The platform also enables developers to integrate with their call center applications through the use of APIs. The cloud-based call center features CTI, VoIP, text-to-speech, agent scripting, call recording of agents, quality monitoring and real-time reporting that offer personalized dashboards that let supervisors monitor call center statistics on ACD queues, agents, and campaigns. They also offer pre-built integrations to leading on-demand CRM vendors including Salesforce, NetSuite, RightNow, and Leads360.

One notable feature is the ability to deliver automated messages to your contacts. Another feature of note is its powerful workforce management capabilities, which enable you to predict future call volumes, handle times, and staffing requirements. The WFM feature set also enables you to easily create agent schedules that conform to working rules and optimizing your staffing requirements. Importantly, you can monitor agent adherence to their current schedule in real-time, make intraday adjustments, and report on



historical adherence. Lastly, the platform features integrated Do Not Call capabilities rounding out the call center feature set.

FrontRange Solutions

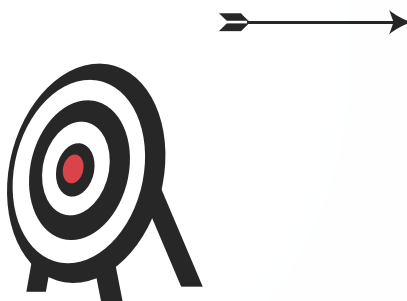
FrontRange Customer Service Management (CSM) www.frontrange.com

FrontRange Customer Service Management (CSM) is both an on-premises (first available in early 2007) and SaaS (to be released by the end of 2011) multi-channel, interaction management application that enables customers to communicate to the company's service team via channels such as e-mail, web or self-service and the phone. CSM is a voice-enabled application with automatic call distributing, integrated voice response, as well as agent desktop and VoIP softphone.

Features include skills-based routing, screen pops, whisper coaching, and call recording. Outlook integration, call center statistics, and even a knowledge management system that both internal and external users can utilize. CSM enables you to customize business workflows, which proactively create the activities and communications needed for timely support and improved customer service. Important call center statistics measured include number of calls placed, abandoned, transferred, total talk time, average talk time, as well as business productivity statistics such as activity achievement, customer service request per source, product, owner and teams.

This is a unique solution because it provides customer service business functionality along with voice capabilities from a single vendor. Typical customer service and voice system implementations require customized integration between the CRM application, which provides the business functionality, and the voice system that provides the ACD, IVR, and agent softphone functionality. CSM can support multiple service requests/interaction channels all from one centralized queue. In fact, CSM can take multiple interactions from the same customer (i.e. service requests submitted via e-mail, self service, voice, etc.) and route and assign them to service agents/teams in one queue, regardless of the originating channel. Thus, all customer interactions can be centrally managed in one queue for better management and quicker time to resolution.

*Selling the **right** product to the **wrong** customer?*



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Knoa Software **Virtual/Cloud End-User Monitor (VCEM)** **www.knoa.com**

Knoa Virtual/Cloud Experience Manager (VCEM) is designed to monitor and manage real end user experience for enterprise and CRM applications that are running in virtualized environments or in the cloud. Knoa VCEM monitors application performance and end user experience in the cloud. It uses a desktop-based passive agent (Knoa's Universal Client Agent) to monitor application performance, end user experience for applications that reside in the cloud. As more applications deploy to the cloud, Knoa VCEM helps to mitigate the risk. Knoa explains, "The only way to ensure web application performance and quality for apps deployed in the cloud is to monitor your applications from the real end user level – capturing user experience right at the front line of user experience. And that's just what Knoa's VCEM end user monitoring solution is designed to do."

The product features dynamic benchmarking, which enables the IT organization to compare system performance before and after a system change. It also has powerful alerting features that allow you to create and manage alerts based upon established service level agreements. It also has a unique dynamic baselining feature, which allows the IT organizations to monitor when any performance metric (response time, quality or utilization) varies from short- or long-term historical trends. Importantly, the platform enables the IT team to examine the impact of end user behavior and desktop resources that caused the performance issue. With VCEM providing insights to the actual users experience of their applications both historically and currently, this gives the IT team a powerful tool in its arsenal.

LiveOps **LiveOps Screen Recording** **www.liveops.com**

While voice recording and screen capturing of an agent's screen is nothing new, offering it as a SaaS cloud-based offering is quite unique. The LiveOps Screen Recording is a new application with cloud-based storage that enables the audio and screen capture and review of any customer-agent interaction. LiveOps Screen Recording doesn't require any hardware at the customer premises. Putting these recordings in the cloud eliminates the costs associated with traditional storage systems used with call and screen recording products. LiveOps Screen Recording allows you to determine exactly when and where the recording application should be used. Leveraging a web interface, you can easily view recorded calls and stream them back with a simple click. LiveOps provides secure audio and screen recording transmission, encryption, and storage protection for all recordings and at no time are audio or screen recordings ever stored on an agent's desktop.

Medallia **Medallia Text Analytics** **www.medallia.com**

Medallia Text Analytics automatically analyzes millions of customer comments collected from online surveys, IVRs, comments, and other sources. Medallia Text Analytics collects, categorizes, and organizes customer comments and other free-form text. The solution enables companies to not only track customers' feedback day-to-day but even minute-by-minute. Medallia Text Analytics is a SaaS cloud-based CEM solution requiring just a browser. It provides easy

to understand dashboards and a performance color-coded heat map showing how various parts of your organization perform over time. Surveys can have quantitative (scored) questions as well as open-ended questions that are difficult to analyze. With Medallia's text analytics module, you can understand what customers think even with open-ended questions. In fact, sometimes surveys don't ask the right questions so they don't get the answers the company needs to hear. Thus, the only way to do this is to read and analyze the text comments that their customers write.

Medallia tells TMC Labs, "Medallia Text Analytics is the first in the industry designed to allow users to easily distribute analysis results company-wide with built-in collaboration tools and workflows. Most text analytics solutions analyze only text and ignore other important parts of the feedback – like quantitative scores. Only Medallia combines both text and scores together, so you can see which comment topics are having the greatest impact on your scores. Medallia does that by creating a simple, proprietary algorithm called the Medallia Impact Index. The MII helps you determine what comment categories have the greatest impact on overall satisfaction and loyalty scores. You can easily slice and dice data to get deep insights on any topic. You can see at a glance what customer segments are talking most about, and which business locations or teams are generating the most feedback on this area."

Siemens Enterprise Communications **OpenScape Contact Center Campaign Director** **www.siemens-enterprise.com**

OpenScape Contact Center Campaign Director Solution is an open, feature-rich predictive dialing and outbound campaign management platform. It can run as a standalone complete contact center solution, or it can be blended with inbound contacts handled by Siemens' OpenScape Contact Center Enterprise solution.

The dynamic campaign management features a call tactics feature that allows managers to define unique calling strategies for each contact, and leverages the predictive dialing Smart Pace VI algorithm. Supervisors and managers can manage outbound campaigns through an intuitive, easy-to-use client desktop to configure scripting, design IVR applications, manage compliance rules and customize reports. Important features include preview, progressive and predictive dialing, skills-based outbound routing, agentless IVR outbound applications, inbound/outbound call blending, and integrated recording and remote monitoring.

It features the ability to dial multiple phone numbers from a single record, increasing your chances of getting your intended call recipient on the line and a web-based agent desktop (called WebAgent) that provides flexible call scripts and allows agents to make quick changes. Campaign Director's VisualScriptor tool enables managers and administrators to build scripts quickly. VisualScriptor is actually an Adobe Dreamweaver extension so web and HTML developers can use this popular tool to build outbound campaign scripts quickly. Campaign Director enables supervisors to monitor audio and video simultaneously from their desktops, viewing screen pops for a full picture view of agent performance and works on-site or remotely. Real time do not call lists from Gryphon Networks are also supported. Campaign Director also allows you to play messages when an answer-

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Buttons are available in the Call Manager to be programmed for a variety of functions. In addition, other buttons can be added for ACD agent functionality. Each button companion application can hold eight banks of 64 buttons per bank, offering extensive customizability. Buttons can be programmed by the user for feature codes, speed dialing, system/PBX commands, user-defined actions, ACD keys, DSS extension keys, web keys, and running programs.

The desktop call control feature has the ability to drag and drop incoming calls to either voicemail or another extension. Call Manager also supports outbound dialing from applications, including Microsoft Outlook, Act!, and Tigerpaw. Users can highlight any phone number from any application and perform a quick dial for click-to-dial outbound dialing. Importantly it has CRM integration with screen pop support for many popular CRM programs, including Act!, Goldmine, Tigerpaw, and Salesforce.com. You can view contacts and presence of other extensions from the UI, as well as view the history of calls dialed, received, and missed. The ACD Viewer lets users view the status of all contact center groups to which they are a member.

**Upstream Works Software Ltd.
Business Interaction Manager
www.upstreamworks.com**

Business Interaction Management captures customer interactions in real time and offers detailed analysis, enabling you to pinpoint customers at risk, which agents require more training and more. It can run as a hosted or premises-based solution. Business Interaction Manager captures key elements from each customer interaction with each agent or system, as it happens, saving it in a data mart in an easy-to-use and channel-agnostic (i.e. phone, e-mail, chat, etc.) format. This simplifies the data visualization task and ensures that the data being used is complete and auditable down to the granular interaction level. It uses traditional BI tools for visualization (industry-standard BI tools like Business Objects or dashboard tools like Qlickview).

This solution does not rely on the mashup of existing databases to provide a 360-degree customer view. Instead, the technol-

ogy connects into existing applications (self-service or assisted service) or optionally provides an agent toolbar to assist with capturing the required information, and saves the information on a per interaction basis. This real-time capture provides executives with live, accurate dashboards, and agents with up to the minute information on a customer's interaction history.

Upstream explains, "Our competition requires a mashup of existing data sources to provide true value. These data sources are not normalized to each other, and the process of integration is complex and by its nature decreases the accuracy of the resulting data. As a result of this mashup, the visualization process is one way. There is no easy way to audit the information and find specific problem examples in the data that can be drilled to and cross related to other agents or channels." The company continues, "Because of the nature of how we collect this information, the channel and type of interaction are unimportant, so that direct comparisons can be made across various assisted channel types (e.g., e-mail and phone) and across self-service channels (e.g. IVR and web)."

**Vivisimo Inc.
Vivisimo CXO Suite
www.vivisimo.com**

Vivisimo's Customer eXperience Optimization (CXO) solutions provide your sales, support and customer service organizations with all of the information they require for a positive and successful customer interaction. The platform can help increase cross-selling and up-selling, enhance customer satisfaction, improve staff retention, as well as reduce support, training and operating costs. CXO maps content from multiple data repositories in real time for a comprehensive view. CXO is an alternative to custom CRM deployments. With CXO, the CRM system manages customer and transactional data while CXO provides rapid deployment and customization for the top-level view that customer-facing professionals need.

Vivisimo explains, "Most organizations assume that because they have deployed a CRM platform or other tools they have properly equipped these employees to provide an outstanding customer experience. But research shows that the average customer-facing professional has to separately access 10 different applications and data sources in the course of a day to perform their job. This adversely affects their ability to focus on the customer. Vivisimo's CXO solution consolidates all of the information that customer-facing professionals need – including data in the CRM system – into a single view in a way that is contextually relevant. This frees sales, support, and account management professionals to focus directly on providing an outstanding customer experience, including cross-selling and up-selling where appropriate."

CXO incorporates elements of social media and Web 2.0 by providing activity feeds to keep account managers and other customer-facing professionals informed about all events that relate to customers, products, and other topics they are following. Because of CXO's comprehensive connectivity to any enterprise application or data store, activity feeds may contain information from any of these sources. **CIS**

Tom Keating is vice president, CTO and executive technology editor/SEO director of TMC. He runs TMC Labs.

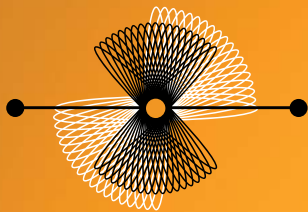
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Home Agents: The Big Game Changer

When organizations successfully reach beyond the confines of bricks and mortar sourcing, they tap into a vast labor pool filled with unprecedented talent. And when they re-engineer their scheduling models to enable more flexibility, employee satisfaction climbs and the customer experience improves. So says Michele Rowan of At Home Customer Contacts, in the first of a three-part series with Interactive Intelligence on the growing home agent trend.

What's the hitch to a successful home agent program? Just one. Companies need to leverage their technology platforms. Call delivery, access to applications, content management, virtual learning, and collaboration tools are all readily available, although these tools often reside on existing corporate platforms but not in the contact centers. Technology decisions also must be made. Do you lease or buy; bundle or unbundle products; house the data, host it, or both.

Nevertheless, businesses now have more flexibility in the home agent equation than they've ever had to satisfy infrastructure and cost requirements, to meet customer demands, and to embrace the changing face of the mobile employee.

Growth of home agents: Then and now

Look back over the better part of this decade and the success that several large BPOs have realized with material footprints in teleworking. They've uncovered the best talent to deliver the best customer experience, and done so at the best cost. But with the technology more fully in place, the ability of home agents to thrive is far greater.

Along with call delivery, the required security mechanisms, hardware and software, and remote access to networks and applications largely exceed baseline requirements to support at home initiatives. There's also this terrific bonus: the Software as a Service (SaaS) option and cloud computing. For the home agent model, SaaS can reduce startup costs to nil in many cases, and makes adoption quite seamless from the capital investment perspective. Beyond technology, other drivers are equally influencing the move to engage home agents. Companies are growing, need seats, and refuse to make additional investments in real estate. High value customers are being moved back on shore. Or pure and simple, home agents reflect the pursuit of the best talent and reducing costs.

Five tangible returns companies are taking to the bank

1. Applicant flow quadruples and nets unprecedented talent

Companies that remove the stigma associated with "brick and mortar call center positions" are the ones that attract experienced, educated professionals — thousands of people from the likes of financial services, real estate, teaching, and healthcare who otherwise might never consider a role in a contact center.

2. Productivity improves: New hires and transfers home

Organizations that are smart about workforce management realize these tangible productivity improvements with home agent deployments.

Reduced shoulder staffing Home agents can easily work brief, staggered work segments that let companies schedule succinctly to peaks and valleys in volume during the day, and reduce often unproductive scheduled labor hours.

Shrinkage drops Home-based employees are delighted to be home, and put their best foot forward to exceed expectations and avoid returning to the office. Attendance improves, too, since home agents are more likely to "try to get to work" when not feeling 100%.

Reduced overtime and seasonal staffing. Many people in the remote applicant pool agree to expand their part-time hours during seasonal or peak business periods, in exchange for extended time off later in the year. Think retirees, who love to travel.

3. "Employee satisfaction" (ESAT) and retention

Employers report heightened ESAT from remote agents when flexible scheduling is included in the staffing strategy. No wonder. Remote employees eliminate commute times and costs, the employer shifts incremental time and money to the employees, and those employees stay with the company longer. By the numbers, employee satisfaction can improve by 4-10 points, and overall operating expenses can drop by as much as 10-30% as a result of improved retention.

4. Heightened "customer satisfaction" (CSAT)

Better CSAT scores are primarily a result of the experience and education levels of new home agent hires. The "happiness factor" of existing and new employees who choose to work from home also enhances the customer experience. The net result is that when customer satisfaction scores improve, they propel customer loyalty, share of wallet and revenue.

5. Training cost reductions

For new hires during on-boarding as well as for recurrent training, technology and unified communications platforms enable companies to measurably reduce the labor costs associated with learning. For instance, self-paced e-learning modules, chats, webcasts, and webcam meetings are cost-effective channels for learning and collaboration, and are delivering high returns. **CIS**



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Paula Bernier, *Executive Editor*



Considering the Customer Experience

Despite the significant investment in customer experience management made by telecoms, banking, retail and IT, customer experiences with these organizations remain largely poor. That's the word from Beyond Philosophy, which recently released its 2011 Global Customer Experience Management Survey.

The fact that HP is tops across all sectors in terms of its investment in customer experience over the past year would seem to be a clear indication of that point, as the company apparently has been rudderless for some time. Other top spenders in this regard are banking firm HSBC, retailer GAP, and American Express.

"With the exception of American Express, which frequently earns accolades for its customer experience, the companies we see allocating the greatest amount of resources are widely recognized for providing disappointing customer experiences," says Steven Walden, senior head of research and consulting at Beyond Philosophy, who based his survey on 53 in-depth interviews with customer experience executives and industry experts and research of 8,000 customer experience executives from 2,106 so-called customer experience-active companies across 239 countries.

Even among the four top-tier vertical spenders, which comprise 63 percent of the customer experience market, Beyond Philosophy indicated that customer experience management efforts often are plagued by managers who lack experience in the practice, and an absence of true commitment to customer experience initiatives at the corporate level.

The companies that are getting it right, meanwhile, leverage CRM to collect data, analyze it to understand customers and their motivations, and use that information to create highly personalized experiences for customers, according to Beyond Philosophy. The firm notes that Apple, Amazon and Zappos are most admired by customer experience experts. Other top-ranking companies on this front include, in this order: Starbucks, Disney, retailer Tesco, aviation company Virgin Atlantic, Vodafone, Nordstrom and bank First Direct.

"Apple has married all the elements of its experience and connected with its customers in a deeply emotional, irrational way," says Walden. "Amazon put a stake in the ground when it announced it would become the world's most customer-centric company, and Zappos claims to be a customer service organization that happens to sell shoes." (Zappos last year was purchased by Amazon.)

Walden also notes that Westernization abroad that is creating middle class societies in places like India, as well as social media that now gives customers a voice, are raising customer experience expectations.

However, while many individuals seem to feel very comfortable making their lives public via social networking sites like Facebook,

customer expectations regarding their privacy remain extremely high. Attorney Michele Shuster of MacMurray, Cook Petersen & Shuster LLP in New Albany, Ohio, made this point during a panel called The Hottest Trends for Successful Engagement, during ITEXPO West this September in Austin, Texas.

She went on to say that privacy is the No. 1 hot issue right now in the area of customer engagement. That means organizations need to take care to be informed about rules and requirements on this front. She says privacy advocates have gone as far as to classify a California zip code as private information. But, on the whole, she adds, privacy rules related to social media are the same existing privacy requirements organizations already follow.

Mobile is clearly another prominent trend in terms of customer engagement, adds Shuster. But companies need to make sure they have a permissible reason to reach customers and potential customers via their cell phones and other devices. Because of that, and the fact that rules are getting more restrictive on this front over time, Shuster suggests that every time an organization touches base with its consumers that it gets their permission to contact them using every potential channel it uses now and may use in the future.

And while it's important to get customers' permission to reach out to them via some of these new channels, allowing customers to communicate using the channels of their choice can result in a better customer experience and a better response for the organization, notes Steve Brubaker, chief of staff at InfoCision Management Corp.

Although more communications channels are opening up between businesses and their customers, Mark Miller, senior director of market development of the contact center practice for the global services and emerging industries division of J.D. Power and Associates, says it's interesting to note that some people actually prefer using an IVR. He says that's because it gives them the sense of having more control of the situation. (For example, a live agent can't put them on hold.) And some people really like that control, he adds, especially those of us in the U.S.

When it comes to the business end of IVRs, however, Millers adds that one of the biggest culprits of a bad customer contact experience is a bad IVR. However, he continues, that doesn't necessarily mean a live agent is always the best option.

Every time a person picks up the phone to your call center, says Miller, your organization has the chance of either "creating a brand assassin" or a brand supporter. **CIS**

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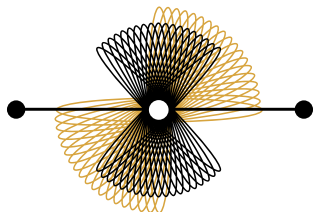
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