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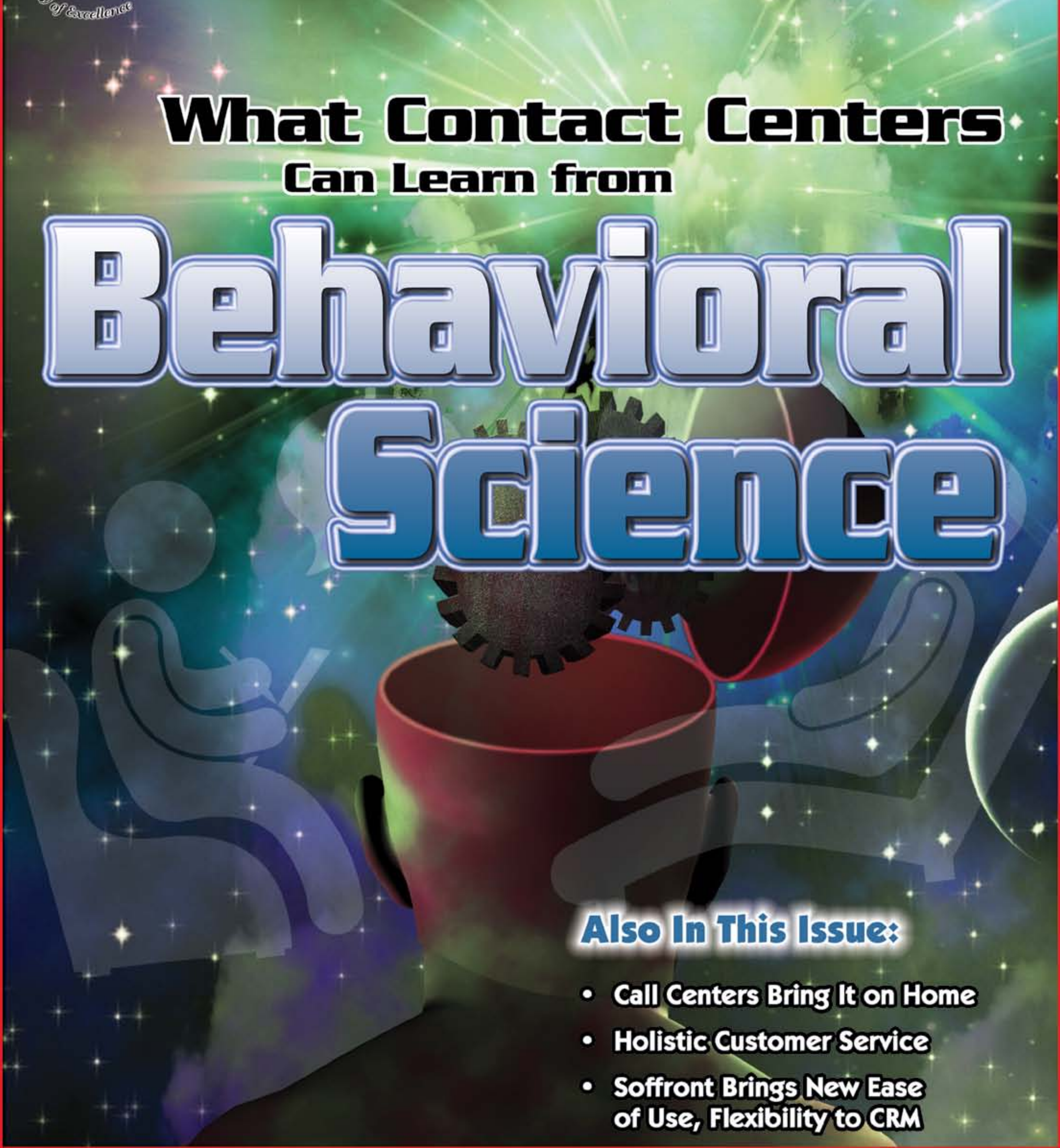
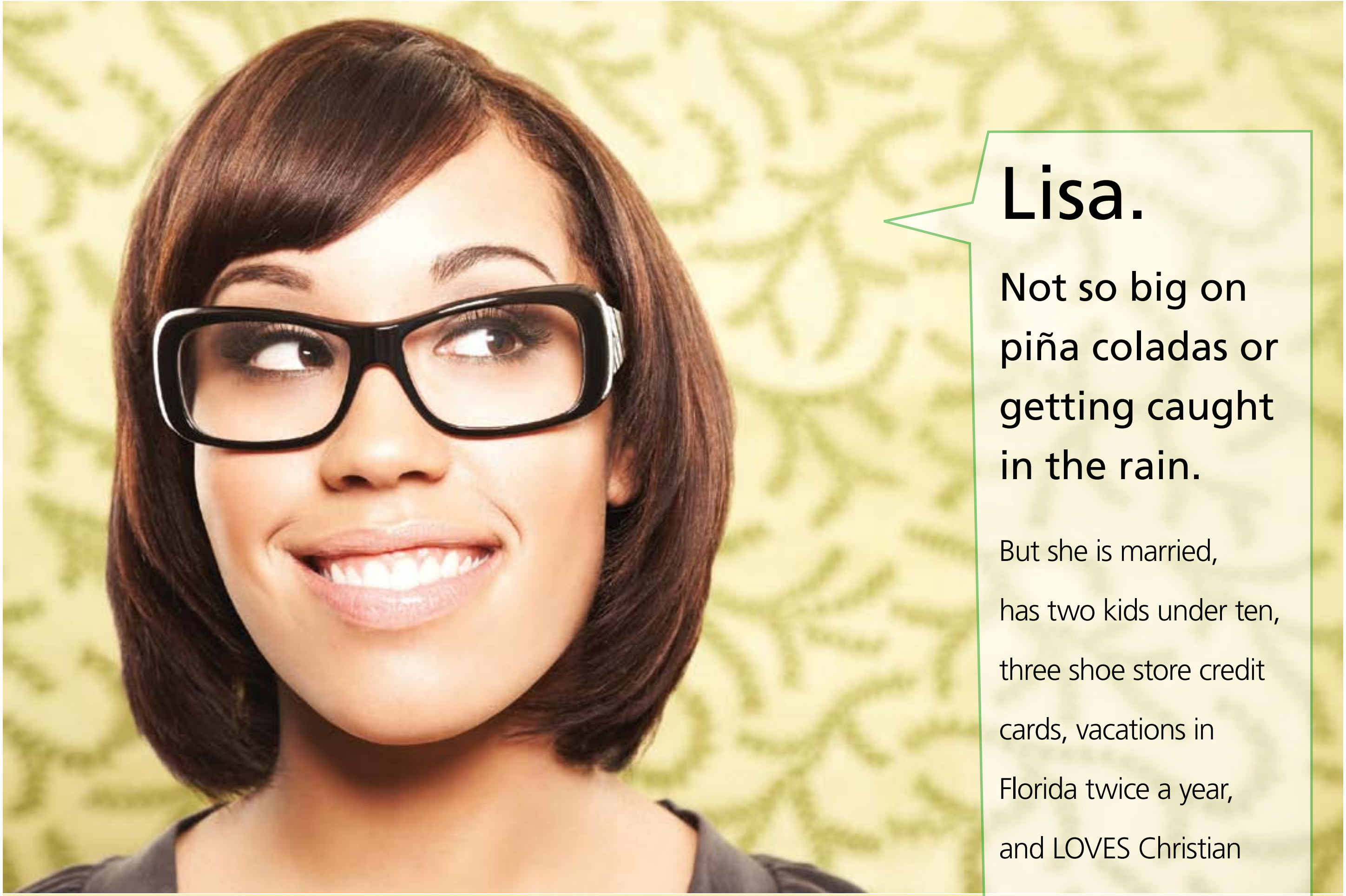


What Contact Centers Can Learn from Behavioral Science

Also In This Issue:

- Call Centers Bring It on Home
- Holistic Customer Service
- Soffront Brings New Ease of Use, Flexibility to CRM



Lisa.

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Rich Tehrani, *CEO, TMC*

What's New in Speech Technology

At the recent SpeechTek 2011 conference in New York I gained some great insight into the state of speech technology. For example, Jeff Schlueter of Nexidia told me his company's speech analytics solutions have been in greater demand in this current economy as the desire to control costs has led to increased adoption of speech analytics. The company has released version 9.0 of its Enterprise Speech Intelligence product suite, which cuts the TCO in half and allows customers to handle even larger amounts of data.

I also spoke with Novauris, a newcomer to the speech technology space. This outfit already has inked some deals with tier one OEMs and carriers. The company said its performance is best in class relative to accessing very large sets of databases such as addresses, names of people, product catalogues, IPTV and electronic programming guides, local search and directory assistance. The company works with Angel and SpeechCycle in the call center space as well – doing name and address recognition in the cloud and passing back the data via XML in real-time.

And Wavelink Corp.'s Jay Cichosz, told me his company has been enjoying success in the industrial market, where its terminal emulation solutions help workers more efficiently manage packing and shipping logistics via handheld devices. By speech enabling these apps, his customers have seen productivity gains as floor workers no longer have to glance at a watch or PDA to see what they need to do next – they can now just listen and respond with voice as well.

In a conversation with Anthony Leaper and Volker Hildebrand of SAP, they told me how the company sells its solutions in bite-sized chunks and also makes rapid-deployment solutions available for delivery in six to eight weeks. Sales, service and marketing are just some of the areas where such packages are available.

One of the latest SAP announcements is Sales onDemand – a feed-based system that brings structured and unstructured data together in a collaborative, Facebook-like way. Similar to Salesforce Chatter or Cisco Quad, the company is targeting very large companies and will also release Service onDemand. These two products will work together, allowing salespeople to see a feed of customer late payments or service requests. Leaper believes SAP has an advantage over Salesforce because his system is more integrated, allowing all objects in the CRM database to be seen, while he sees Chatter as a bolt-on solution.

The challenge for SAP is it is late to the game, but it may see these new releases as a way to protect and cross-sell to its installed base, and speed-to-market has to be balanced with interoperability across the company's ever-expanding software suite.

The Odd Couple was a favorite TV show of mine as a kid, featuring a very messy Oscar Madison, who was roommates with a very neat Felix Unger. I couldn't help thinking about these two when I met with Alok Kulkarni of Cyara Solutions and his customer Sam Jackel from Westpac, Australia's largest bank with 6-7 million customers.

Cyara provides next-generation premises and cloud-based solutions for simulating, testing and monitoring IVRs, voice biometrics, outbound dialers, voice callback and other contact center systems and applications. What it did for the bank was to help it take disparate solutions handling IVR, speech, complex routing algorithms, Websphere, java apps and more and integrate them more efficiently to dramatically improve customer satisfaction.

A three-year project resulted in customers being able to get to the information they want via phone in only 14 seconds. This is down from 90 seconds – a significant improvement. To get an idea of what challenges the company had, every time there was a customer interaction, messaging needed to traverse a number of different firewall hops and pipes between Telstra, IBM and Westpac networks causing potential packet loss, latency and jitter.

The bank is thrilled and views Cyara as a key plank in its strategy around quality and efficiency related to end-to-end regression, systems integration, functional, stress, performance and load testing, and real-time monitoring of the customer experience in the production environment. You generally don't get such a large company to give such a glowing testimonial to a relatively new company, so I thought it was worth sharing. **CIS**

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CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions® magazine (ISSN: 1533-3078) is published monthly by Technology Marketing Corporation, 800 Connecticut Ave, Norwalk, CT 06854-1628. Periodicals postage paid at Norwalk, Connecticut and additional mailing offices.

To Subscribe, Call: 203-852-6800

Or write to the circulation director at srusso@tmcnet.com. Subscription rates (published monthly): Digital Subscriptions free for qualified U.S., Canadian and Foreign subscribers. Print Subscriptions free for qualified subscribers in the U.S.A. only. For non-qualified U.S.A. subscribers, $59. All Canadian subscribers, $89. All Foreign (air mail), $109. All orders are payable in advance in U.S. dollars drawn against a U.S. bank. Connecticut residents add applicable sales tax.

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Postmaster: Send address changes to CIS magazine, Technology Marketing Corporation, River Park 800 Connecticut Ave. 1st FL., Norwalk, CT 06854-1628 U.S.A. Canada Post: Publications Mail Agreement #40612608 Canada Returns to be sent to: Pitney Bowes International, P. O. Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, CANADA

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Lists: For list rentals, please contact Jill Olsen at JOlsen@listincorporated.com or call 914-765-0700 x 105.

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CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions® magazine has been the voice of the industry since 1982. It is written by industry practitioners for industry practitioners and is regarded worldwide as the "Bible" of the industry. An annual Buyer's Guide is provided as a feature of the December issue.

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A Technology Marketing Publication
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River Park 800 Connecticut Ave 1st Fl.
Norwalk, CT 06854-1628 U.S.A.
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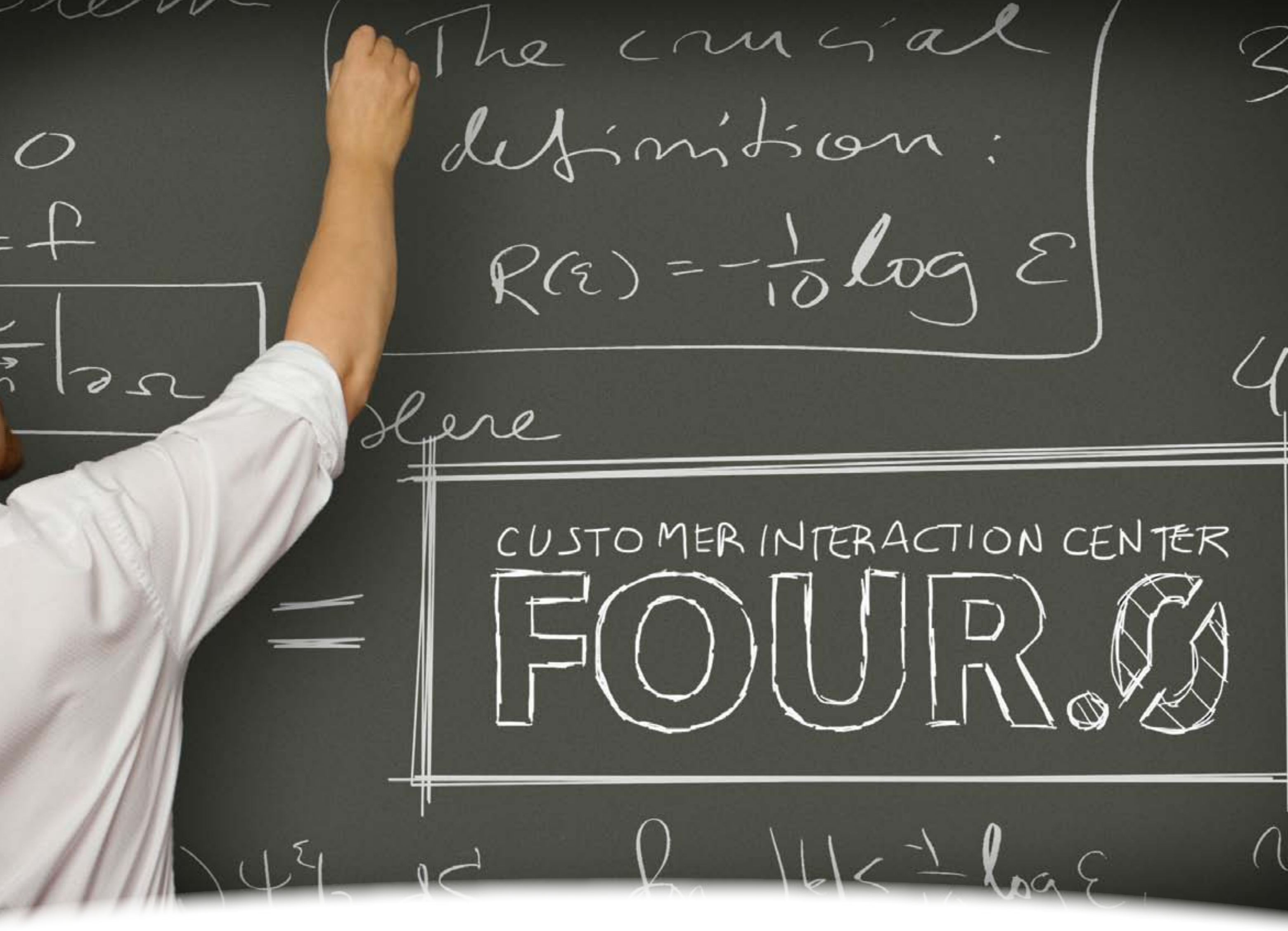
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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*

New Kids on the Contact Center Block

It's time. Your existing communications technology is reaching end of life, the service costs are exorbitant, and you just don't have access to the kind of feature richness that can keep your business competitive. It's time to migrate your enterprise communications infrastructure to an IP environment.

Now you have a decision to make, for there are countless options, though more than likely, you're at least considering a hosted or cloud-based solution, thanks to their many benefits over premises-based options.

But, like many businesses, you also have an aging call center platform, which will soon also require replacement to an IP-based alternative. Again, you have multiple options, but you will most certainly want a platform that integrates easily with whichever enterprise communications system you choose.

Why not go to one vendor for both? Why install two separate systems, have to integrate them and manage and maintain both? Instead, take the benefits of an IP infrastructure to heart and seek a solution that meets both your enterprise and call center needs. It will be easier to deploy and manage, will be more cost effective, and will drive the business efficiencies you seek by putting all your resources on one system.

Not to take anything away from the multitude of excellent call center platforms available, but I've long believed long-term success will favor those vendors that offer solutions that can handle both sides of a business' communications needs. That's why companies like Interactive Intelligence have been successful, and it's why 8x8's acquisition of Contactual is a smart move.

From a services perspective, the acquisition officially gives 8x8 a complete cloud-based offering, including a full-featured, scalable call center platform to meet the needs of its SMB and enterprise customers, and furthers 8x8's up-market growth initiatives. 8x8's Vice President of Business Development Huw Rees told me almost two years ago, when 8x8 moved into its then new headquarters in Sunnyvale, Calif., the company was making inroads in the enterprise and government markets.

"They have been watching from the sidelines and realize there are real advantages, not the least of which is cost savings, but also mobility, flexibility and ease of use and management," he said then.

At ITEXPO West in Austin, Texas, he reinforced the company's commitment to the enterprise market, noting significant growth not only in customers buying its services, but also in the size of those customers.

The reality is that, for 8x8 and its customers, little will change in the way of services and support. 8x8 has been reselling Contactual's contact center solution since 2007; that accounted for approximately 10 percent of its sales last year. This deal is a logical extension of that four-year relationship, during which 8x8 has been able to provide customers with converged communications and contact center services. That ability to offer a rich contact center suite in addition to its unified communications capabilities has helped drive growth, particularly in the enterprise markets, according to Rees.

Though the two product sets are already integrated at the IP layer, and Rees notes there won't be much work to be done to bring the Contactual contact center suite fully in house, the purchase will ensure even tighter integration, enhanced support and service capabilities, and faster rollout of new features and capabilities, increasing 8x8's competitive force in the enterprise market, along with increasing its expertise in the customer interaction management and contact center markets.

"It's a very good fit in terms of mentality, logic and the operations," says Rees. "We are very familiar with the technology and have built close relationships with the operations and technical staff. They have done a great job building reliable services that are in line with 8x8's reliability standards."

The deal also brings with it some international exposure through Contactual's installed base, meaning access to larger, distributed organizations, many of which will benefit from the ability to deploy a full communications suite from a single vendor.

While the existing installed base will serve as a driver for growth in the enterprise market, bringing the Contactual product in house will also allow 8x8 to scale it down to deliver an enterprise-class call center suite to smaller customers looking for a fully integrated platform.

8x8 has been part of the cloud movement from the beginning, and through major enhancements to its unified communications solution and now, by adding a complete on-demand contact center offering, it is emerging as a competitor in nearly every market. As cloud services continue to grow, and as businesses continue to seek ways to become leaner and more efficient, providers like 8x8 that are able to deliver complete packages comprising both enterprise and contact center solutions will continue to build momentum.

"We really have a complete offering now, with a variety of core, mission-critical applications and services," says Rees.

8x8 may be the new kid on the block when it comes to contact centers, but its history and experience in the cloud services space won't leave that impression. **CIS**

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by Luis Gonzalez

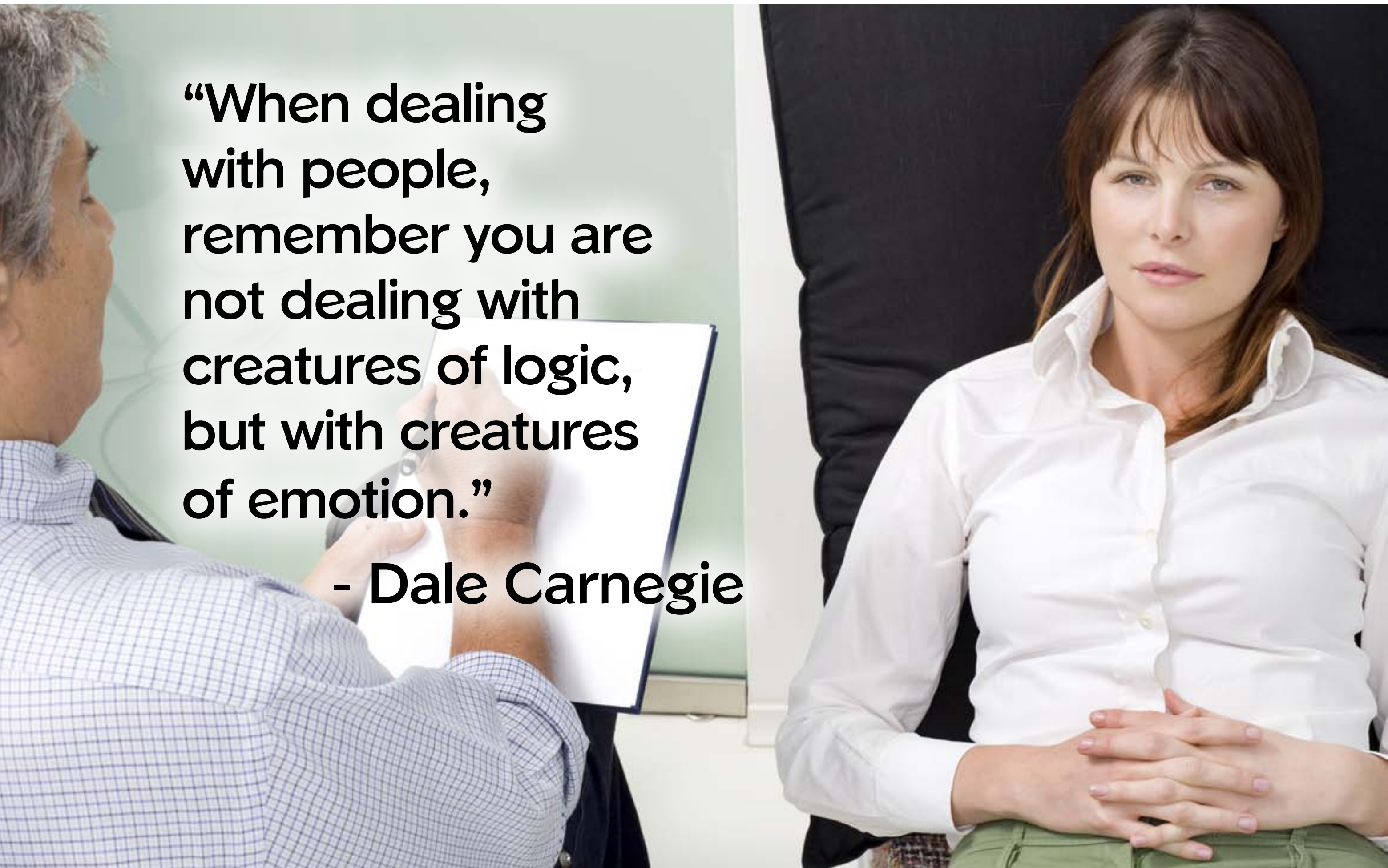
What Contact Centers Can Learn From Behavioral Science

Busy contact center managers often overlook their customers' feelings. They tend to focus on easily quantifiable metrics such as abandonment rates, service levels, staffing levels, etc. While these metrics are important to the bottom line, there is also tremendous value in focusing on the consumer's experience. This is where behavioral science comes into the picture. Businesses can leverage psychology to improve customer service in contact centers.

In 2001, Richard B. Chase and Sriram Dasu published the Harvard Business Review article "Want to Perfect Your Company's Service? Use Behavioral Science". They detailed a study that examined encounters between customers and service providers to understand how these experiences make customers feel. It was the first look into how behavioral science principles can advise customer service operations. In 2010, John DeVine and Keith Gilson built upon this research with the McKinsey Quarterly article, "Using behavioral science to improve the customer experience". These articles provide a roadmap for contact center professionals to improve customer satisfaction at low costs.

Perception is Reality

Applying behavioral science to customer service means remembering the old adage that perception equals reality. In any service encounter – from a simple request for information, to a strategic contact center outsourcing partnership – what really matters is how the customer feels during the encounter, since those feelings will shape their perception of your brand. Contrary to popular belief, these perceptions are principally emotional. Behavioral science can use this insight to help managers understand how customers respond to experiences, and how they rationalize experiences after the fact.



"When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion."

- Dale Carnegie

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Many behavioral scientists research how people process time. Though much remains a mystery, there have been breakthroughs. As chronicled in "Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience," when people are mentally engaged in a task, they lose track of time. Another study found that segmentation makes time feel slower. For example, six 30-second commercials will feel longer than three one-minute commercials. Research also confirms that people perceive time in terms of reference points; therefore, unless an activity is much longer or shorter than expected, people do not notice its duration.

Psychologists generally agree that people remember only a few significant moments of an experience. They remember those moments clearly and overlook the rest. Behavioral scientists have also observed that people desperately want things to make sense. Humans have an innate desire for explanations, and are willing to make them up if necessary. Psychologists further observe that people attribute a deviation from the norm as the reason for an unexpected outcome. Additionally, people are more likely to attribute blame or credit to individuals than systems, since humans prefer to put a face on a problem. All these discoveries have the potential to impact the customer service industry.

Behavioral Science: Application to Contact Centers

The seminal 2001 Harvard Business Review article laid out principles for managers to consider when designing customer service programs: segment the pleasure, combine the pain, give people rituals and stick to them, finish strong, get the bad experiences out of the way early, and build commitment through choice.

In 2010, McKinsey Quarterly took a deep dive into the implications of these principles. In their aforementioned article, DeVine and Gilson chronicled a leading North American health insurer's experience testing the return on investment of creating a customer service environment based on behavioral science. This inspired Inktel Direct to conduct a study examining the effects of implementing behavioral science in the contact center environment.

Principle 1: Segment Pleasure, Combine Pain

The number and sequence of painful and pleasurable incidents affects people's perception of an experience.

Winning $100 is typically not as satisfying as winning $50 twice. Conversely, someone who loses $100 is usually less distraught than someone who loses $50 twice. Despite that the amount of money is equal, an experience's emotional impact is magnified by the number of incidents. The lesson learned from gamblers is that, to maximize customer satisfaction, we should isolate unpleasant experiences while separating pleasurable ones, where possible.

Despite the remarkable implications of this behavior, most businesses have not taken advantage of this knowledge. The Department of Motor Vehicles, for example, usually has people wait in multiple lines. This compounds frustration and contributes to the negative perception of the DMV's customer service. In the insurance industry, and the various industries that Inktel Direct services, customer care teams identified the most uncomfortable parts of a conversation and moved them to the beginning of the call. Teams also identified conversations that customers enjoyed, such as discount opportunities, and touched on them throughout the call. Both studies saw an improvement in customer satisfaction.

Principle 2: Give People Rituals and Stick to Them

People have fixed habits, and typically experience discomfort when behaving differently. When creating customer service experiences, it is important to understand this distinction: Any part of the service process that causes people to break a ritual will decrease satisfaction. Changing call scripts or implementing new interactive calls can often cause discomfort, despite the intent to improve the customer experience.

Principle 3: Finish Strong

We have all heard about the power of a first impression, and it is certainly important in customer service. However, while a terrible start can ruin a call, it is better to start weak and end strong than the other way around. People judge interactions by whether they progress or deteriorate.

Principle 4: Get Bad Experiences Out of the Way Early

In customer service interactions, there will inevitably be negative experiences. It is important for contact centers to develop a system that quickly identifies and addresses these issues. According to behavioral psychology, people prefer to have bad experiences early on, so that they can stop worrying and look forward to desired outcomes. When people experience displeasure, the feeling is mitigated if it occurred at the beginning of an interaction.

Principle 5: Build Commitment through Choice

Empowerment is a buzz word around businesses, and for good reason. Empowered employees are generally more motivated, productive and satisfied. While most companies understand the importance of empowering employees, contact centers generally overlook the benefits of empowering customers. People's level of happiness is correlated with the level of control they feel.

The aforementioned insurance company gave customers a choice on three critical elements: the type of treatment plan, which facilities doctors they preferred, and the follow-up schedule. Inktel Direct identified specific choices to give customers, relative to the program. Both cases saw a higher rate of customer satisfaction with a minimal cost increase.

Contact Center Takeaways

Contact centers have the ability to improve customer satisfaction by using the knowledge accumulated by behavioral science.These changes have a low monetary barrier, but require knowledge and a conscious decision to move forward. The increased customer satisfaction, as a result of utilizing these principles, can increase brand equity, customer loyalty and result in more sales. As a bonus, greater customer satisfaction benefits contact center employees. When your customer service representatives are empowered with the tools and methods to better improve interactions with customers, employee satisfaction and motivation increases, which can revolutionize your workplace. **CIS**

Luis Gonzalez is executive vice president of operations for contact center outsourcer Inktel Direct (www.inktel.com).

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Prioritize Off-Phone Work with a Call Center Agent To-Do List

Call center agents are the only people within an organization that function without an ongoing to-do list. Granted, agents need to complete specific tasks in order to close out a ticket or finish a case, but their primary responsibility is to field calls. Other activities – reading communications, training, project work – are scheduled and typically require additional headcount to ensure service levels are met.

Providing a to-do list for call center agents seems like a nice-to-have, as their primary responsibility is to field calls. Availability is essential to service levels, but time between calls is lost – it's the elephant in the room. Nobody likes to think about agents spending time between calls sitting idle, with nothing to do.

What if agents could use that time more wisely? A to-do list is designed to make agent available time more productive, allowing time for agents to learn a new skill set or read up on new product information.

Creating the To-Do List

The most challenging part of creating the to-do list is gathering and prioritizing agents' tasks. If your supervisors and managers are worth their salt, they already know who needs additional coaching or who needs more time getting to know your products, but they just haven't had the resources or the time.

They know their main priority is to meet service levels and then find time for daily communications and projects, complete quality and performance management, schedule time for ongoing coaching and knowledge base reviews and forecast future training requirements.

There's no need to schedule extra agents or time for completing activities. That part can be configured with real-time integration with your ACD. Your call center agents' to-do lists can be created in three steps.

1. Define the activities – What types of activities need to be completed?

2. Prioritize the order – In what order should agents work on these assignments?

3. Allocate time per activity – How much time per day, week and month should agents spend on each assignment?

Providing technology that responds to real-time call volume allows center management to focus on these three steps and reap the benefits of utilizing collective idle time – which includes an increase in utilization and improved agent performance.

Finding the Time

Think you don't have time? Conduct this quick, one minute exercise at the beginning of your next meeting. Ask everyone to be quiet and don't say a word for one minute.

Notice how long that one minute felt as you were idle and unproductive. For every ten people in the room, that's ten minutes of collective unproductivity. If that only happened five times each day, you would waste nearly an hour every day.

Over time, this collective idle time becomes even more staggering:

- Per week – 250 minutes (4 hours 20 minutes) – over half a day's work

- Per month – 1,000 minutes (17 hours 20 minutes) – almost half a work week

- Per year – 12,000 minutes (200 hours) – five weeks of really bad vacation time

Imagine how many activities that could be completed in five weeks. And five weeks is just the tip of the iceberg. On average, agents spend 11 percent of their day in wait mode. If you add up the numbers for your call center, you'll probably be surprised at the time available.

A To-Do List for My Call Center Agents!

The agent's to-do list provides opportunities for call centers to operate more efficiently. It fills idle time with meaningful activities and provides direction where there was previously none.

Although it seems so at first glance, lack of time is not the issue preventing center management from having agents complete the activities necessary to be successful at their job. Plenty of time is available. With the right technology to find and aggregate time, an agent can be more productive than ever before.

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Looking Beyond the Technology

Critical Considerations When Developing the Channel

For any enterprise, the success of its unified communications or contact center solution hinges on the insights and skills of its solution and service provider (aka integrator). The integrator is the critical link that brings together the customer's business, its goals, its infrastructure, with all of the various multi-vendor technology components that need to work together to meet those objectives. As a contact center technology vendor, we've found the sales and integration channel to be an extremely important extension of our business. From our years of experience in developing our channel, we've determined four critical considerations when evaluating an integrator that can be valuable to the end user too.

Seeking integrators with a proven track record in providing implementation and support services is a given. But savvy end users should seek to partner with an integrator who will ask the right questions to understand the business's technology and business needs. The integrator's involvement in implementation is essential to provide that holistic view of all of the components that comprise the technology solution. When evaluating integration partners, technology vendors must examine whether the integrators are effective consultants, technically skilled, and attentive in the way they provide ongoing support. The best integrators will also have their finger on the pulse of what's new and impactful in the market.

Speaking from the vendor perspective, we know the importance of finding the right partner for our business, because it's essential to each of our customers' businesses. The following are four key tips we practice when building our channel, and it's guided us to some real gems. Using the contact center as an example, let's explore what is needed for integrators to maintain effective alliances with their vendor partners, and be invaluable advisors for their customers:

Supporting Role

Contact center solutions are sophisticated systems. The complexity of communication channels is growing, and a new generation of solutions is entering the industry. End users will likely be unaware of many of the new offerings, so it is the integrator's responsibility to consult thoroughly and guide them. Initial meetings between an integrator and the end user are critical for establishing good rapport and trust. To do so successfully, integrators must ask the right questions and provide sound advice on what solution is best to achieve a business's needs.

Calabrio's Brett Theisen

Providing stellar consultation, however, requires more than just technology expertise and its business application. The best integrators also spend time learning the ins and outs of the contact center operation and its role in the company. Doing so ensures that the end user will be outfitted with a solution that matches its needs. Business needs evolve from year to year, and customers should seek a long-term partner who works closely with them to continually recommend, implement and support new solutions.

Technical Competency

Modern contact centers continue to advance in their application of technology, using multiple communication channels such as VoIP, video, instant messaging and social media to collaborate. These new communication capabilities require integrators to leverage experience in technologies beyond telephony. If an integrator does not provide an essential competency directly, make sure that it is willing and able to form alliances with vendors that

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Translating Needs to Solutions

The contact center is a valuable information hub, with insight into customer satisfaction, sales performance and other business data. Company executives are starting to examine contact center data to identify trends, develop messaging and evaluate campaign or product success.

Integrators need to stay sharp, providing recommendations on how these new capabilities will elevate the contact center's value within the enterprise. The ability to demonstrate an ROI to the business is essential.

End-to-End Support

While examining potential integration partners, have them demonstrate an effective path for end-to-end support, particularly when working in multi-vendor environments. These systems will be in place and running a contact center for many years into the future, so it is imperative to partner with a knowledgeable integrator that is committed to the long-term partnership. Customers should demand an integrator who cares about them and cares about their business.

Not All Are Created Equal

A customer seeking to put itself in the best possible position for success must seek the best integrator. Unified communications and contact center solutions can be complex beasts. The best integrators will help seek solutions that are easy to use, simplify points of integration, and bring together those multiple components seamlessly – from the up-front business analysis through delivery and ongoing support. **CIS**

Brett Theisen is vice president of global channel sales and implementation at Calabrio (www.calabrio.com).

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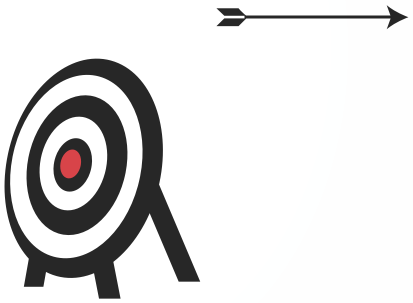

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CRM solutions are meant to help businesses manage interactions with current and potential customers. Yet some offerings on this front are cumbersome both in their set up, support and use. Soffront Software Inc. simplifies all that.

It does that by delivering a multi-faceted, easily customizable solution that can be used across an organization. The integrated CRM suite from Soffront spans and integrates the activities of sales, marketing, customer service and operations.

Soffront CRM connects all departments seamlessly, so all workers see the same interface. Information flows from one department to another based on the business's unique needs. And when marketing sends a campaign from Soffront CRM to a target list, for example, sales managers get immediate visibility to that.

"Soffront CRM really brings together every division under one umbrella," says Soffront customer Mark Herrington, who is manager of installation & support at Central Service Association. "Everything from marketing efforts, determining wants and needs of the customer, sales, delivery and training on hardware/software systems, and tracking of loose ends can be tied under one project record for the customer."

Recently Soffront unleashed Version 9.2 of its CRM solution, which offers a new intuitive and productive user interface; a central menu that enables users to access everything they need from a single screen with clearly accessible drop-down menus; and improved search capabilities.

New functionality of the solution also addresses ease of administration. Soffront's drag-and-drop form designer allows people to create sophisticated database forms with minimal effort. The drag-and-drop workflow designer can be used to automate repeatable step-by-step processes and improve productivity. And the drag-and-drop dashboard designer can be leveraged to customize home screens. Companies also can set pre-defined automated business rules within Soffront CRM to occur based on a triggered event, change in information, or lack of action within a specified time frame.

This robust and extendable CRM platform is based on a mature and comprehensive API. All the functionality built into the platform is part of the API to completely control the platform from outside systems. And it conveniently includes integration with Google Apps, Jigsaw, Microsoft Office and Intuit QuickBooks, to name a few.

All this equates to a flexible and comprehensive suite of applications, with no expensive add-ons necessary, and a low cost of implementation.

Sales people can use Soffront CRM to create quotes and proposals, which can be delivered via e-mail or in print form. To make those processes more efficient, Soffront puts all CRM customer information – including addresses, contacts, notes, activities, quotes, and purchase orders and invoices – in one place for easy reference.

Perhaps more importantly, however, Soffront streamlines CRM processes as well as information. For example, while Salesforce.com takes 20 steps to make and record a phone call, Soffront requires just three steps to complete the same task. That may help explain why sales people who have switched to Soffront from Salesforce.com report increased sales as a result. That means less time wasted and more time selling.

And with Soffront's lead management function, users easily can track prospect inquiries, seamlessly route qualified leads, nurture leads, and shorten sales cycles.

The Soffront multi-channel marketing solution, meanwhile, enables more efficient campaign planning, execution and results measurement. Soffront e-mail processing and Soffront marketing analytics are also included in the solution. The former can process multiple e-mail accounts and create tickets, leads, defects, etc., directly from the incoming e-mail messages. Soffront marketing analytics delivers instant snapshots of sales key performance indicators including forecasting, sales pipeline analytics, sales revenue analytics, and more.

Customer support staff (and, of course, those that they're helping) can also benefit from Soffront CRM. It can be used to manage customer support tickets from submission to resolution; provide a self-service interface to customers and partners; offer a web-based interface through which to submit tickets and check the status of pending tickets; allow for faster response to email inquiries via intelligent routing; and reveal data on key performance indicators including agent productivity, customer survey results and support response time. Field support also can use popular wireless devices to get real-time information via Soffront Mobile Support.

And the Soffront project management solution enables companies to improve utilization by keeping the right resources on the right project. It offers an easy way to track and monitor all time and expense-related data, providing a central location for managing the key aspects of projects, including their status and target completion dates.

In summary, if you want a CRM suite that works across your organization – that promotes working smart not hard, that is easy to use and customize and that reduces your cost of implementation – then think Soffront. **CIS**

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by Tim Handorf

Sales Mobility: What Your Sales Reps and Customers Need

The sales industry is constantly on the go and let's face it, selling is not a some of the time thing. It's an all the time thing. Sales executives are expected to always be upselling existing customers and finding new customers. Selling is in your blood, and sales people know it is most effective when they are out on the road selling.

Fortunately, enterprises have recognized this and are implementing the proper initiatives to help us do our jobs to the best of our ability. While tools have certainly helped to sell virtually, the method with the highest success rate continues to be face-to-face. As enterprises embrace mobile devices, particularly tablets, it's the sales departments that are leading the way in adoption.

There are a number of factors contributing to the emerging trend of mobile sales. At BigMachines, we recently conducted a survey to determine which factors were most critical and what we might be able to expect from mobile options down the road. The findings point to two primary issues: empowering sales reps with tools that work for them and streamlining the sales cycle for the client or prospect.

Of the enterprises surveyed, half either currently use tablets for sales or plan to implement them in the near future. The primary reason for this is that tablets are easier to use and more portable than laptops. For those of us that spend the bulk of our time traveling, the less we have to pack and carry around, the better. Laptops are certainly lightweight and don't take up much space, but in this case, less is more. As a recent Gartner report points out, sales of all PCs are virtually flat, while tablet sales are booming.

Tablets also provide easy access to critical data on-the-go. More than 80 percent of respondents said they plan to use tablets in sales specifically for this reason. The more information a sales rep has about a particular client or prospect going into a meeting, the greater chance for closing a deal.

Aside from portability, sales reps also prefer the ease with which tablets enable quick and professional price quotes on the spot. More than two-thirds of the survey respondents plan to use tablets for providing sales quotes. With the proper applications, an entire proposal can be generated in front of the customer and terms quickly negotiated. This new level of efficiency has driven sales reps to firmly believe that access to mobile devices and applications enables them to close deals faster.

Customers appreciate mobility because it adds an extra degree of transparency to the deal. As quotes and proposals are generated in plain sight, they have full visibility into what is being negotiated throughout the process. While closing deals faster is an obvious plus for sales reps, it is also incredibly advantageous to the client. The faster a customer is delivered the product or service it needs, the better off it will be.

Tim Handorf of BigMachines

Another benefit that applies to both the sales rep and the customer is how mobile devices minimize, or even eliminate, the confusion that often accompanies complex orders. Devices equipped with adequate software applications enable sales rep to walk a customer through an entire order in-person, allowing the rep to easily explain and iterate through all of the options available right in front of the customer.

With so many advantages of mobile selling, and certainly no shortage of options when it comes to devices, it's only a matter of time before it becomes the norm within the enterprise. The survey results point to two simple facts: Sales reps prefer these kinds of devices, and customers appreciate the ease with which their needs are met. For those enterprises that have already embraced mobile selling, you should be commended for enabling your sales reps to sell more and sell faster with the tools they need. **CIS**

Tim Handorf is vice president of product management at BigMachines (www.bigmachines.com).

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Autonomy helps companies understand their vast and growing amounts of human-friendly or unstructured data such as text, e-mail, web pages, voice, or video.

The company got its start offering technologies enabling enterprise search, helping knowledge workers locate unstructured information inside enterprise repositories like intranets, document management systems and even file shares. However, Autonomy grew to power other applications, which now include protecting organizations' information assets with e-discovery, content and records management, compliance and legal technologies. The company also provides solutions to both facilitate and analyze customer interactions from the web, contact centers and social media. Autonomy also OEMs its technologies to more than 400 software companies, so it's likely your business is already using Autonomy-powered solutions.

CIS magazine recently spoke with Andrew Joiner, CEO Promote, Multichannel Technology at Autonomy, to find out more.

Who are your target customers?

Joiner: Globally, Autonomy has 25,000 customers across every industry vertical. In the contact center space, specifically, we work with the largest and most sophisticated centers throughout the world.

What is meant by speech analytics?

Joiner: Speech analytics is a term used in the contact center space to mean the analysis of recorded conversations between customers and employees, though speech analytics doesn't have to be defined that narrowly. These routine conversations have extraordinary value. Customers tell us all kinds of things that are profoundly useful as we manage our businesses. Sentiment, preferences, competitive intelligence, multichannel challenges and future plans are just some of the nuggets our customers find through speech analytics – nuggets, incidentally, that divisions outside of the contact center are starving for.

How does it work?

Joiner: Autonomy has an engine that can process and understand all unstructured information, which includes call recordings. It has over 500 functions that help illustrate the concepts expressed in a phone conversation.

Using advanced techniques like clustering, sentiment detection and automatic classification it can easily surface hot and breaking issues throughout the contact center. It can determine when customers are upset or frustrated and why they're calling.

The engine looks at the words in conversations contextually, so the results are far more relevant than other approaches, helping automate the process of root cause identification and the recognition of emerging patterns.

How do customers typically use Autonomy Explore?

Joiner: Autonomy customers don't have to change their processes or underlying call recording technologies. Autonomy provides a layer that sits on top of the infrastructure while reading and listening to the information, the way a human would. Once it forms an understanding, marketing, customer service, product management and other groups can tap into it. The value explodes from there.

For example, a consumer may call about a defective product. Autonomy Explore analyzes what is being said and categorizes the conversation and cross-references the concepts with other recordings, web visits, e-mail correspondence and even social media buzz. From this information, Autonomy Explore searches for patterns like changing call volumes or changing sentiment for a competing product. It automatically generates alerts and reports in real time to flag the situation and address it before it worsens.

Provide an example of how one of your customers is benefitting from speech analytics.

Joiner: One of our biggest customers used our platform to identify cell phone fraud because the system was able to flag suspicious calls where customers where providing the same pattern of phone replacement requests. This trend was not statistically significant to the volume of calls, but it was an unusual pattern and required the company to ship new phones, which is expensive. Ultimately, they were able to involve the authorities.The customer estimates savings in the tens of millions.

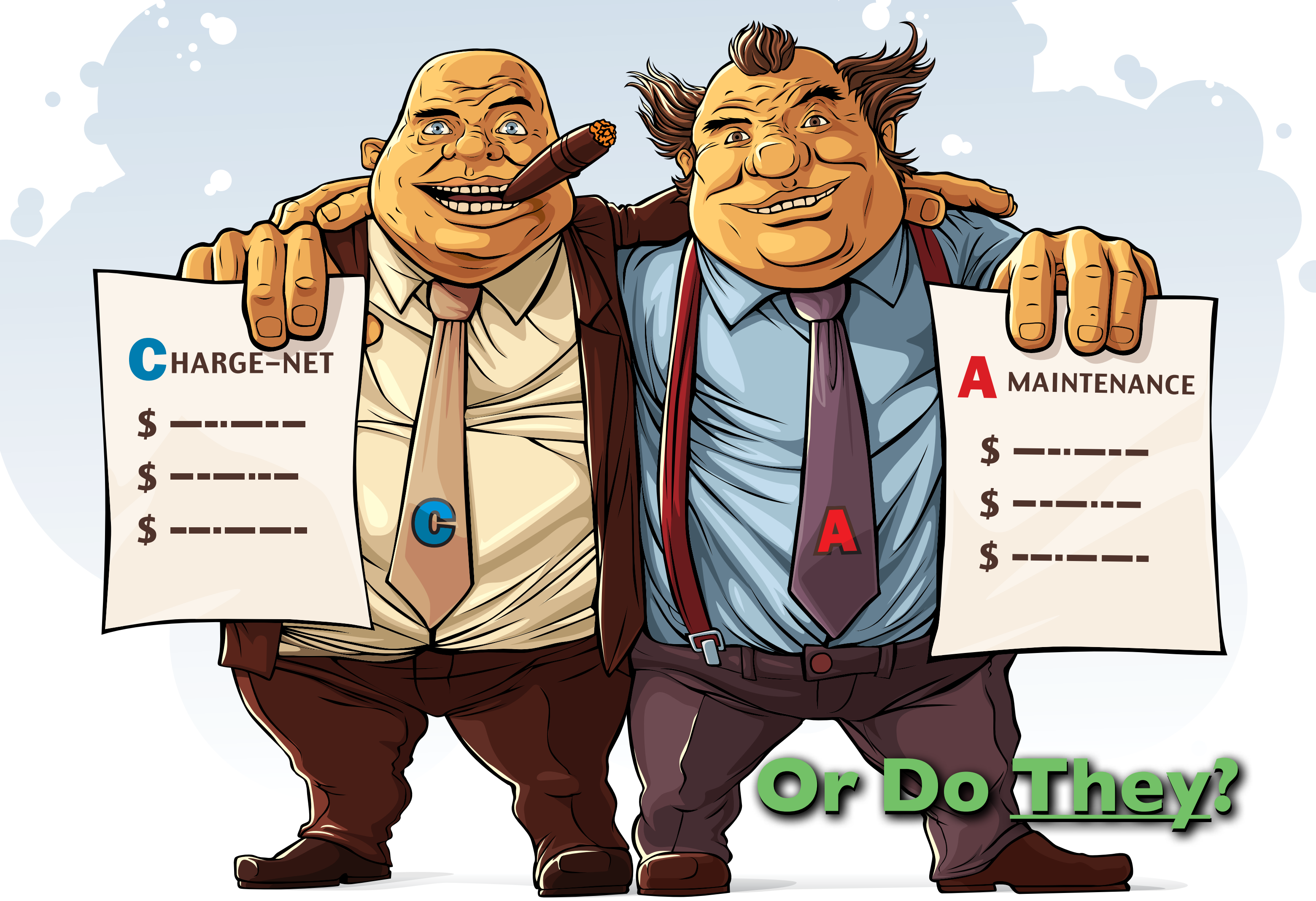
What steps should businesses take to ensure a successful speech analytics implementation?

Joiner: Firstly, I'd recommend that they select a conceptual-based technology that does not rely on keywords or transcriptions. This will simplify the process of building topics and automate the discovery process as related concepts will be generated by the system, while ensuring a focus on relevance rather than accuracy. When dealing with unstructured data, accuracy is not the target.

And secondly, don't stop with analyzing voice recording. Customers interact with a brand across multiple channels to research, purchase and service their products. Focus on this challenge through a multichannel prism to ensure a complete and unbiased view of the customer, throughout the buying cycle.

And, of course, give Autonomy a call! **CIS**

Do You Own Your Customer?



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by Paula Bernier

IP Contact Centers, the Cloud & Social Media Form Holistic Customer Interaction Solutions

Nearly two decades ago Vinton Cerf, who's considered a founding father of the Internet, drew headlines when he wore a T-shirt emblazoned with the saying: IP on Everything. Apparently he did, er, that happened, as the Internet protocol has seeped into virtually every nook and cranny of communications. Now the same seems to be happening with cloud computing and social networking – and the contact center is no exception to the rule.

Jason Harrington, president of Axia's Dialar Solutions, says that his company has embraced both cloud-based communications and social media to supply customers with complete contact centers. The three-year-old company has an IP technology stack of services including connectivity, including local and long-distance, and PBX, IVR, ACD, dialer, UC and broadcast messaging capabilities. What makes Axia different, he says, is it's not just an application provider; rather, it delivers end-to-end offerings that can hook into CRM, social media and other databases to create holistic solutions.

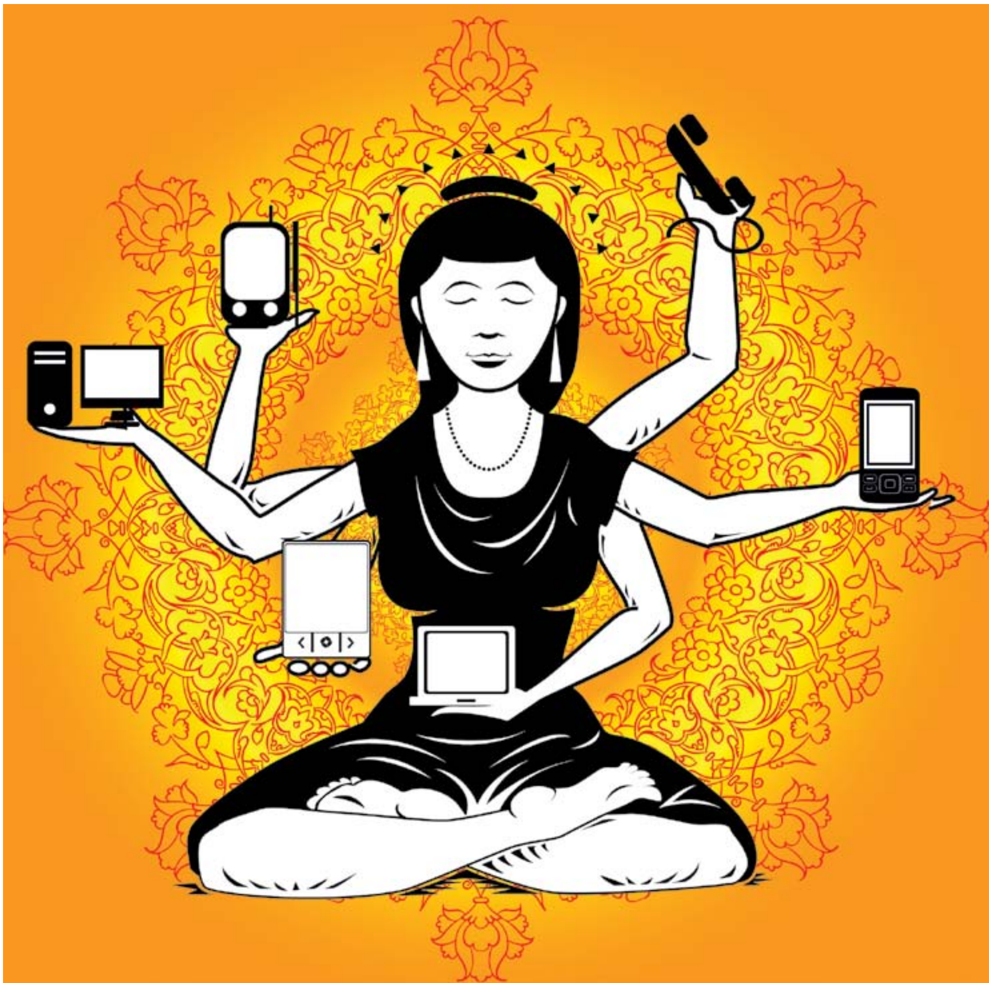
Axia to date has had its strongest appeal in the in-bound call center space and has sold its contact centers using a horizontal model. But the company is starting to expand more into the out-bound call center space and is also beginning to focus its efforts to market niches.

RightContact is Axia's name for its outbound dialer for contact centers. The Axia rightContact solution is delivered as a software-as-a-service offering via the cloud. The company says it is different from competing offers because it's built on a single platform to cater to all IP contact center needs.

One of the market niches Axia is now targeting is debt collection. In fact, it appears that the debt collection is a somewhat hot area for contact center solution providers at large, as Interactive Intelligence recently acquired Latitude Software, which is a player in this space.

Social networking has been central to the strategy of Interactive Intelligence, a customer care solutions provider, which sees social media as just another way for companies to communicate with customers and prospects. The company has been working on ways to reformat social interactions, like Facebook posts or tweets, into e-mails and send them to its call center solutions. Users of Interactive Intelligence Customer Interaction Center, or CIC, solutions can then use keywords, sentiment scores or user-related information (such as how many followers/friends the user has) to route that e-mail to the most appropriate call center representative, who can then decide how to respond.

Social networking and cloud are also part of the strategy at TeleTech, a company that's nearly 30 years old and delivers such solutions as VoIP, workforce management, quality management, agent productivity applications and



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customer management applications on an outsourced basis. Last year TeleTech began to concentrate more keenly on how to help its users manage the end-to-end customer experience and bring together all the pieces of it – including VoIP, mobile, social networking, etc. – in a seamless way for the end users, says Tina Valdez, TeleTech's vice president of OnDemand Operations. Today, the company has more than a handful of patents in the social and mobile space to enable that, she adds.

TeleTech can walk into a customer's shop and look across the whole experience, she says. For example, TeleTech has a customer that is bringing a new product in the energy space to market. TeleTech is working with that organization to define its revenue targets for this service and how sticky it can make the service to its customers. The company also offers cloud-based toolsets to help built and support such new services, and address customer needs and concerns around them after they go live.

The company leverages technology from such companies as Cisco and social CRM Lithium to do that. In fact, Valdez says, TeleTech operates a cloud out of data centers around the globe, and there are three CRM players and three different routing vendors as part of that core infrastructure. TeleTech also has its own agent management, a reporting suite of applications, and analytics and quality management solutions in the cloud.

By providing these tools, as well as a social media service that monitors and rates conversations about customers' companies, TeleTech solutions are able to arm contact center agents with a wealth of knowledge to better meet businesses' end users needs, she says.

Glance Networks is another company that is taking a SaaS-based approach to customer interaction solutions. Tom Scontras, vice president of marketing, emphasizes the screen-sharing capability of the Glance offering.

If the interaction between caller and customer service rep "gets stuck," as Scontras describes it, the rep can quickly and easily launch the screen-sharing capability to more quickly resolve the inquiry. For example, say a call center agent for Apple who uses Salesforce gets a call from someone shopping for an iPhone. That rep might offer to use screen sharing to take over that caller's desktop to see what features the caller is looking at on the web and asking about, or to see what competing devices the caller is reading about so the rep can offer a comparison. **CIS**

Artificial Intelligence in Customer Service

Next IT offers a solution that uses human emulation technologies to drive better user experiences.

Jeff Brown, executive vice president of sales at Next IT, says personalization is where things are headed, and his company's technology helps enable that with its software, which acts as a "virtual employee" that can have hundreds of thousands of conversations in a single day.

Next IT's ActiveAgent for Live Chat solution, the company says, "combines the best of virtual agent intelligence with the liveliness, helpfulness and personality of a company's best employees. Online conversations with these avatars are like talking with a person who really understands the business; they're fast, accurate and conversational. And most of the time: zero human contact. "

Alaska Airlines and The U.S. Army are among the users of the solution. Alaska Airlines has completely eliminated its online chat investment, just eight months after rolling out Jenn, its virtual assistant. The Army, meanwhile, reduced its use of live chat by more than 90 percent; it calls its virtual agent Sergeant Star.

"People expect to get their questions answered on our [goarmy.com] website, [but] live chat usage kept increasing, as did the cost," says Gary Bishop, former deputy director for advertising and marketing at U.S. Army Strategic Outreach. "We used focus groups and found that users preferred the speed, availability and accuracy of Sergeant Star."

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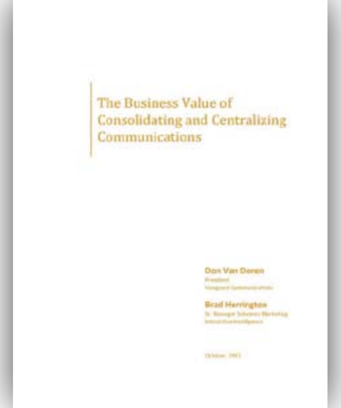
Consolidating onto a centrally managed contact center platform, well-equipped to service all your locations, can drive down your cost of ownership, while at the same time delivering more advanced services to your customers. Elimination of the multitude of systems in various locations, from various vendors, with distinct administrative interfaces provides an improved ability to centrally manage communications across the enterprise. Productivity increases through a common set of applications and services and the ability to deliver new functionality simultaneously across all locations. And overall reliability and availability of services can increase substantially. Great benefits, but how do you get there?

In this web event, featured industry experts Drew Kraus, Research Vice President, Worldwide Enterprise Communications Applications, Gartner; Brad Herrington, Sr. Manager, Solutions Marketing, Interactive Intelligence; Don Van Doren, President, Vangard Communications; and Tom Fisher, Director, Systems Engineering, Interactive Intelligence will share their insight and practical hands-on experience about how to build a successful plan for consolidating and centralizing your contact center and enterprise communications.

This complimentary Web event will conclude with an extensive live Q&A session.



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CRM for Small Fry

SMBs Get Hooked on Customer Relationship Management

Due to the cost and the technical prowess required to employ them, customer relationship management solutions used to live solely in the domain of the large enterprise. Today, however, CRM is within reach of a much broader array of organizations as a result of new pricing models afforded by the introduction of software-as-a-service offers, and just the competitive nature of the customer relationship management space at large.

There are many smaller fish in the CRM pond that are hooking customers with solutions that are targeted to the needs of small and medium businesses.

BatchBlue Software is among the companies that fall into this net. Web designer Pamela O'Hara started BatchBlue about five years ago after a publishing client of hers struggled to find an appropriate CRM/contact management solution. The client opted for Salesforce.com in the end, she says, but it wasn't an ideal fit. So O'Hara, now CEO of BatchBlue, established the company to meet this market need. She and two friends built the company from the ground up, catering to very small businesses (more than half of BatchBlue's customers have users or less, and 10 employees or less).

The company offers a SaaS-based solution for contact management, events and some light sales management. It integrates with social media networks so it can pull information on customers and prospects from Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. And it syncs with Gmail Contacts and other programs.

One example of a BatchBlue user is Vin-Tank, which employs BatchBlue to manage the seven-step sales process it recommends to distributing vineyards. But a wide variety of SMBs, including bed and breakfast operations, boutique hotels, financial advisors, insurance brokers, specialty manufacturers and real estate offices use the BatchBlue solution.

"For the small businesses and the startup businesses the most important thing about finding a CRM [solution] is finding something that your team will use," O'Hara adds, noting that the BatchBlue solution is intuitive to use. "A lot of the CRM choices out there can be overwhelming if you don't have an MBA."

Parature is another company focused on delivering customer service applications using a SaaS-based business model. Duke Chung, chairman and co-founder, started this business in 2001 just after graduating college.

The company's service suite – which enables customers to submit trouble tickets, deliver chat on websites, and includes other CRM functionality – is in use by more than 1,000 subscribers today, many of them SMBs, but also by well-known companies such of Rosetta Stone.

Chung says SMBs tend to prefer solutions that provide all the functionality and support they require through a single interface and point of contact. Parature fits that bill, he indicates, by providing a knowledge base, trouble ticket, direct chat and multi-modal support (including voice, e-mail, web and now social networking hooks) all through one license.

Nagaesh Bhide, principal of update CRM Inc., says his company's offering in the CRM space is unique because it doesn't require any up-front fees or term commitments. Update CRM works with customers to identify their needs and builds SaaS-based solutions – which can include CRM, social monitoring capabilities, and an upcoming crowd-sourcing product input tool – for them based on that.

"Our business model is totally risk free," says Bhide. "We don't have a fixed contract in place, so you can cancel at any time that you want to cancel."

Bhide adds that people are realizing the importance of leveraging CRM on a day-to-day basis, and that new solutions like the ones his company creates make CRM more accessible to a large cross-section of organizations.

"In the past small businesses were interested in retaining their customers, but they didn't do a lot of reach out opportunities," he says, adding that today if he has a dentist appointment, he gets a reminder call ahead of time and the office knows his background when he arrives for the appointment. "Small businesses are definitely adopting CRM."

Whether CRM and related tools are in use at a small, medium or large organization, however, Colin Shearer, worldwide industry solutions leader for the SPSS Predictive Analytics Brand at IBM, says that such solutions have moved beyond the environs of the white-coated lab technician to become usable tools for "mere mortals."

Shearer's business unit at IBM is not focused on CRM, but rather delivers business analytics solutions to analyze customer-related data such as their behaviors, likely behaviors and preferences. An organization might use such a solution to decide which special offers to deliver to a particular customer or customer set, Shearer explains, or to analyze customer behavior to see if it mirrors the behaviors of past customers that have dropped service (so the business can act before it's too late).

IBM uses a combination of structured and unstructured data as well as attitudinal data to draw such conclusions. Shearer says the inclusion of attitudinal data, which can be drawn from a text or other interaction with the customer, or a survey, for example, opens up exciting new possibilities that allow for far more targeted strategies. **CIS**

Empower Your Contact Center and
Your Customers Through
Multi-Channel Communications

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Bringing Multi-Channel Communications, Social Networking, into the Call Center

The world is not as it used to be.

Rather than staying home tethered to wireline telephones, most customers are out and about on their cell phones, laptops, and tablets. And while they may want to interface with your business via a good old-fashioned telephone call, they're just a likely to prefer to communicate via chat, e-mail, SMS/text, your website, or even indirectly through social media sites.

The bottom line is that customers are not satisfied with having just one way of contacting you. They want to communicate when they want, how they want. And they expect consistent service across all channels.

That's why, in order to stay competitive and keep up with customer demand, today's most successful companies are realizing the need to offer multiple communication channels.

When adding new communication channels, some companies opt to bolt on additional hardware and software to their telephony-based contact center infrastructure. This is usually not the best approach, and it's definitely not the way to position your company for the future. The problem with this option is that it can lead to increased complexity, integration issues, additional costs, and numerous questions when it comes to how to manage all of these new channels and customer interactions.

A better approach is to migrate to a unified, multi-channel software platform that provides the same intelligent routing and queuing of newer channels like social media, SMS, web self-service and chat, as it does for more traditional channels like phone, e-mail and fax. Such solutions enable all channels to be recorded and stored or monitored live, and contact center managers can generate reports and metrics for multiple channels all from a single interface.

Most importantly, with multi-channel software platforms all of the channels can be delivered to agents through a single interface. That allows managers to control how many interactions and how many different channels an agent should handle. That's beneficial not only during the day-to-day work within the call center, but also relative to agent training. It decreases training needs and improves the agent experience, while also improving the customer experience.

In addition to enabling multi-channel communications with your customers, state-of-the-art contact center solutions have the ability to monitor day-to-day social media and to bring those social media comments into the call center in a logical and manageable way.

Everybody knows about the social media craze. But the ability for your contact center to tie into social media may be more important than you realize. Social media is not just a passing trend, it's here to stay.

Facebook alone has more than 800 million active users. More than half of those individuals log on to Facebook in any given day. The average user has 130 friends. And more than 2 billion posts are liked and commented on per day.

As for Twitter, as of this March, there were 200 million Twitter accounts. According to a Twitter blog posted June 30, halfway through 2011 users on Twitter were sending 200 million Tweets per day.

Considering that in January of 2009, users sent two million Tweets a day, and one year ago they posted 65 million a day, that's some significant growth.

That's why companies should choose tools and create processes to "listen" to and actively respond, when needed, to online conversations on social media sites.

Indeed, as social media usage and mobile communications continue to increase, and a significant number of customers move away from making phone calls, offering multiple ways to communicate is no longer an option, it's a requirement to provide quality customer service.

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- Offering multiple contact options, but with no ability to route, record, track, monitor or automate
- Too many different systems bolted together which are costly and difficult to manage and support
- Too many desktop interfaces for your agents to manage
- Inaccurate or lack of quality data to report to upper management
- Information gathered during customer contact stuck in silos throughout the organization

Solution:

- Implement a multi-channel application platform with one central, rules-based engine.
- Intelligently route and queue multiple channels such as calls, emails, web interactions, SMS, faxes, social media data, and business process workflow. Deliver all channel types through a single interface.
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    - » Real-Time Monitoring- Listen, Join, Coach
    - » Real-Time Queue and Agent Statistics
    - » Search, Playback, and Score Recordings
    - » Screen Pop/CRM Integration
    - » Real-Time Word/Phrase Spotting
        - – Deal with compliance, trends, opportunities, or threats immediately BEFORE the customer or sale is lost
        - – Drive agent behavior and decrease handle time by automatically popping alerts, scripts and resources
    - » IVR/Self-Service Automation
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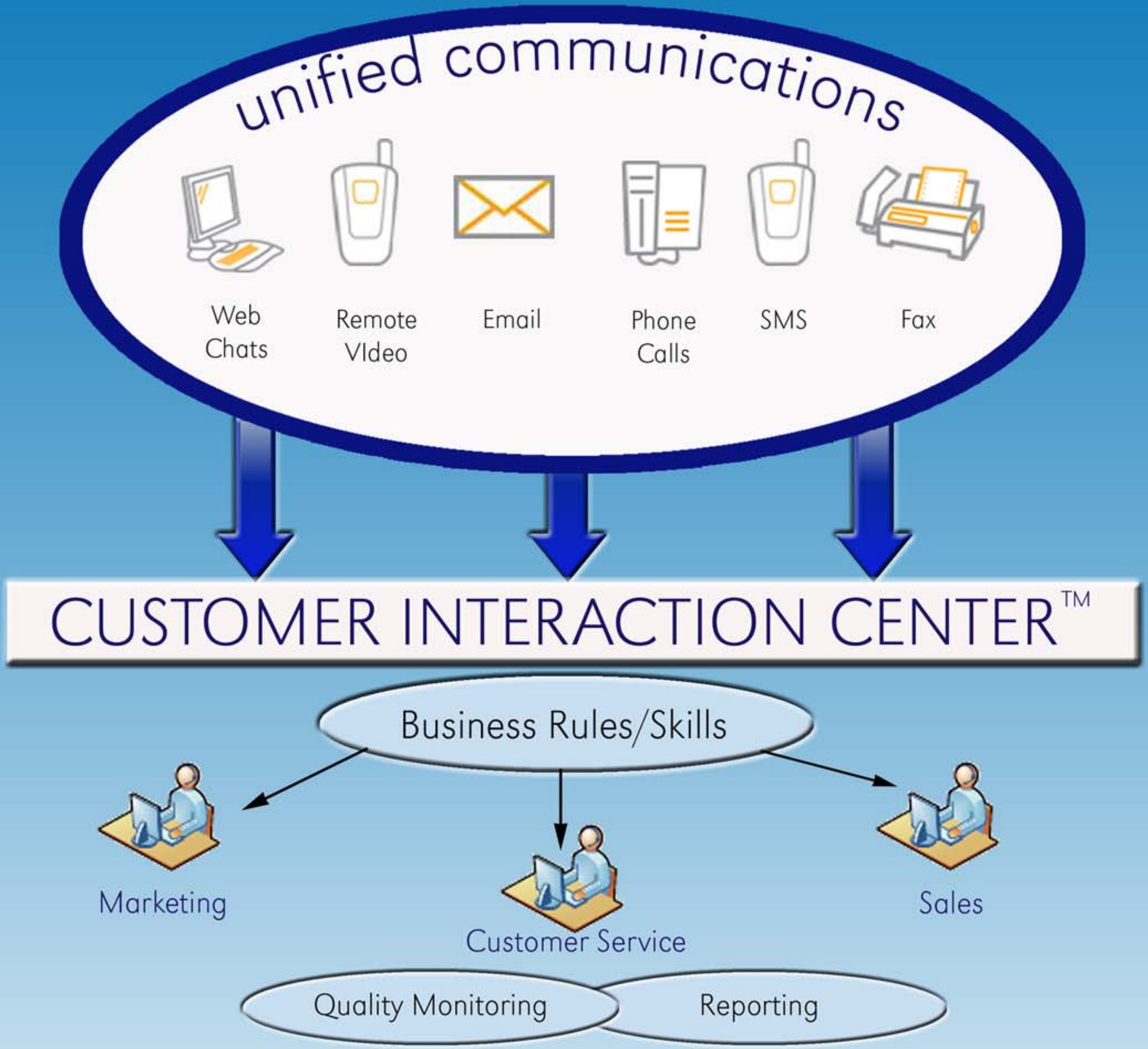

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2011

by Tom Keating

CIS Congratulates TMC Labs Innovation Awards Winners

This year marks the twelfth installment for the prestigious TMC Labs Innovation Awards in Customer Interaction Solutions, 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 – from all-in-one suites to targeted add-ons.

2011
TMC™ LABS
Innovation
Award

Here is the first half of the in-depth write ups of the award winners listed in the last issue of CIS.

Amdocs
Smart Agent Desktop
www.amdocs.com

Amdocs Smart Agent Desktop provides a unified agent desktop that enables agents to focus on the customer, which can lead to higher job satisfaction and lower agent churn rates for the contact center. The platform can integrate multiple back-end systems and applications. That eliminates the need for an agent to log in to multiple systems and reduces copy/paste operations, thereby improving agent efficiency even more.

Amdocs Smart Agent is usually deployed on the customer premises, but can also be deployed in a managed hosted services setting. The company claims to be the first to integrate the agent desktop with ordering systems to take complex orders for multi-play bundles for service providers, triggering processes to check eligibility, compatibility, and feasibility, and leading to fulfillment, and activation. With Smart Agent Desktop, Amdocs incorporates over 100 service provider-specific best practice business processes out of the box. Amdocs can handle high-volume contact centers with up to 30,000 concurrent call center users and manage several million transactions per day.

Improvements in the latest release include new enhancements to platform support, security, and application integration and a re-designed user interface that is task driven and customer centric, rather than the traditional user interfaces that are data driven and process centric.

CDC Software
CDC Pivotal CRM
www.cdcsoftware.com

CDC Pivotal CRM 6.0 is a modular solution built on the Microsoft .NET framework designed for automating and streamlining sales, marketing and customer services processes to improve efficiency and improve customer experiences. It provides task-based navigation, tools that mirror business processes, embedded Microsoft Office SharePoint Server and Microsoft Office System applications, easy customization, and a smart client user interface. One key feature is its intuitive and familiar user interface because of its deep Office integration with Outlook and SharePoint.

According to CDC Software, “With Microsoft SharePoint and Microsoft Visual Studio Form Designer embedded in Pivotal CRM 6.0, the CRM system can become a hub for all business activities and collaborations, allowing users to complete much of their daily work without having to switch back and forth between multiple applications. With Microsoft Outlook embedded, data synchronization is seamless between the CRM system and Outlook inbox, and users can complete their calendaring, task, or e-mail activities in either application.”

The Pivotal Visual Workflow Tool is an easy to use drag-and-drop, flowchart style designer that will allow the creation of a business process in both the production and customization environment. It saves organizations time and money while accurately modeling their business processes.

CloudStor.it
CloudStor.it Storage Service
www.cloudstor.it

Amazon’s S3 cloud is an extremely popular hosted storage service, due to its flexibility and relatively inexpensive costs. But with that popularity come the specter of competitors looking to offer similar features at even better price points. One such solution is CloudStor.it, which is designed to be a substitute for S3.

five9

Introducing the

Outbound Call Center Online Community

Five9's solutions deliver the benefits of million-dollar systems, but without their hidden costs. Five9's predictive dialer efficiently and effectively helps manage product campaigns, generate sales leads, process account collections, raise funds, administer research surveys, and conduct political and community initiatives. Outbound Call Center campaigns also help increase agent productivity, improve sales results, lower infrastructure costs and increase business agility.

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Michael Whitis, the founder and CTO of CloudStor.it, tells TMC Labs, "I have been a Unix/Linux Systems Engineer for over 20 years, supporting commercial websites and large client and server infrastructures. I founded CloudStor.it because I saw the potential for large savings in cloud and enterprise-class storage that none of the current vendors are addressing. My goal was to create enterprise-class storage appliances for $100 a terabyte, and true utility pricing for cloud storage." As an example, the company offers 1 terabyte of cloud storage with 2 terabytes a month data transfer bandwidth for just $600 a year. It also offers the 36, a 2U, 36- terabyte storage appliance for $3,600; the 72, which is a 4U 72 terabyte storage appliance. It can even scale up to a petabyte by clustering multiple 72s and 36s."

Whitis adds, "Our enterprise storage appliances are one-tenth the price of a comparable NetApp, 1/31st that of a Dell storage server, and 2240 times less expensive than an EMC SAN. Our public cloud storage is 1/7th the price of Amazon S3." CloudStor.it uses a KosmosFS JBOD architecture with triple redundancy for files, across both primary and backup CloudStor.it appliances, located in the Ashburn, Va., data center. And the company plans on having it redundant across multiple data centers within the next few months.

Coupa Software
Coupa Cloud Spend Management
www.coupa.com

Coupa Cloud Spend Management combines e-procurement and expense management capabilities to help organizations get control of spending and save money. It provides executive dashboards and alerts to provide real-time visibility and actionable intelligence to control company spending more effectively. Users can also prioritize audits via intelligent audit scoring so that accounting reviews focus on reports that are most likely to be out of compliance or in risk of fraudulent activity. Coupa is cloud-based, leveraging Amazon Web Services, so all you need is a web browser or any web-enabled mobile device. Coupa encrypts all communications between customers and their hosted data center using high-grade AES 256-bit encryption.

One truly unique feature is that it is fully integrated with Google Maps, so users simply need to enter their departure and destination addresses, and their mileage and reimbursement amounts are automatically calculated and added to their expense reports. Coupa explains "While many other solutions in the spend management space focus solely on automating the PO and expense report process, Coupa's Cloud Spend Management is more than an automation engine – it is a spend management platform that empowers organizations to take action. Budget owners are alerted immediately when budgets reach certain levels and can adjust before they go over. Managers can easily update workflows to meet the changing needs of the business without the need of high-priced technical resources. Executives have real-time insights into top spend categories, forecasts and much more so they can make the right decisions at the right time to help the business grow while keeping spend inline."

Another unique feature is the frugal meter, which educates employees on company policies to ensure they stay within limits.

Drishti-Soft Solutions Pvt Ltd.
Ameyo
www.drishti-soft.com

Ameyo is an all-in-one contact center software platform sporting features such as predictive dialer, ACD, IVR, voice logging, reporting, quality monitoring, CRM and CTI, campaign management and multimedia (e-mail, SMS, chat, fax, web) communications.

Ameyo certainly earns the all-in-one moniker since it features inbound, outbound as well as blended communication features. The company claims Ameyo provides high uptimes of the order of 99.9 percent and above. The solution is flexible due to its base architecture that is SOA- and MDA-based. Ameyo manages and automates customer interactions, keeping a log of those interactions and derives analysis reports to determine the customer experience.

Part of the solution is PACE, or Pro Active Connect Enhancer, which is a pretty innovation predictive dialer. What is unique here is it adds business intelligence to the dialing process, enabling targeted dialing operations with up to 30 percent better connects. For instance, rather than dialing blindly to an available list, PACE helps define a strategy to dial based on the past connect history of the customers and achieve more positive connects as well as reduced nuisance of unanswered calls. The solution also supports skill-based routing for outbound calling depending on available agent resources.

Enkata
Customer Journey Cloud
www.enkata.com

Enkata's Customer Journey Cloud is a SaaS solution offering a comprehensive set of solutions for contact centers. Enkata provides a full set of workforce optimization and performance management capabilities entirely in the cloud with access across multi-site, multi-vendor, multi-system environments to improve the customer experience. Enkata claims to be the first to use a cloud architecture to consolidate and store call recordings from multiple sites, multiple recording systems (agnostic of vendor brands), across multiple outsourced vendor locations for the purpose of improving call recording selection for scoring and coaching purposes. Enkata explains, "This approach solves a fundamental set of problems that plagues the industry: ability to pull relevant call recordings from the largest pool of examples; lower the cost of storage and archival; select those call recordings of highest relevance for archive; and store only those recordings."

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Enkata's performance management applications include a set of fully integrated analytic tools including speech, performance management, desktop, root cause, and cross-channel analytics, which help quickly identify priorities to achieve key objectives and performance metrics. It also correlates historical data to offer much more accurate analysis.

The system can identify the 10-20 percent of CSRs causing the majority of repeat calls as well as anticipate and preempt next calls. Enkata has an innovative contact reasoning engine and algorithm-based approach to accurately measure first call resolution. Its Next Best Action Framework compares CSR performance against peers and then systematically targets the pertinent agents who require more coaching. Another important feature is the cross-channel analytics, which monitors customer contacts across every channel with a common set of contact reasons so you can analyze channel preferences, compare channel resolution rates, and proactively discover weak links in the customer experience. The platform also features speech analytics, and even desktop analytics, which automatically tracks desktop activities. The application also helps improve agent productivity by automating routine functions like cutting and pasting of repetitive information.

esnatech
Office-LinX Version 8
www.esnatech.com

Many organizations have deployed IP PBXs that don't feature – or have limited – unified communications capabilities and cannot give up that investment. With Office-LinX version 8 you don't have to give up your existing phone system, while simultaneously providing seamless integration with cloud applications. Esntech explains, "Office-LinX version 8 is designed to leverage an organization's virtualization infrastructure while integrating cloud-based technology such as Google Apps and Salesforce.com directly with their voice and mobile network. This will deliver ubiquitous access to live communications and collaboration while driving down overall costs and management of enterprise communications."

Office-LinX communication and collaboration software enables speech-enabled auto-attendant, unified messaging, mobility, unified messaging, fax mail, and presence integration with both on-premises and cloud-based business applications and processes. Support for VMware Vsphere allows organizations to take advantage of their existing virtualization investment and easily integrate unified communication services with their existing business infrastructure with minimal change or overhead investment. Highlighted features include mass event notification with BlackBerry PINs, call recording and transcription integrated with Google apps, native speech-to-text support, speech biometrics and navigation, and GPRS-based locations routing and presence. Uniquely, it can deliver enterprise telephony integration natively in Google apps; this includes single inbox access for voice, fax, and e-mail from Gmail supporting legacy phone systems and MWI support. It also features embedded web framework to deliver dialing, call control and presence from Google, sites, Gmail, calendar and contacts, as well as offline speech access to Google Gmail, contacts and Google talk presence. The platform also enables organizations to plug SIP video endpoints into their voice networks and be part of the standard voice dial plan. The company explains, "By unifying video endpoints with existing legacy dial plan we are accelerating unified communications within the enterprise network. It allows us to unify and simplify real-time communications and drive video adoption by unifying it with voice communications."

ethosIQ LLC
Customer Engagement Platform
www.ethosIQ.com

ethosIQ's Customer Engagement Platform provides event-level data capture from a variety of sources to provide a more holistic view of the entire life of a call. ethosIQ states, "We differ from other reporting tools because we maintain the relationships between events. We maintain the relationships with previous transactions and contacts. We can create reporting buckets similar to other products; however, we can also show the relationship between each event and not require to average values across buckets of time."

The software can be co-located on premises or off premises. At the customer premises, you require just a browser and the hosted side consists of Oracle, Linux servers running Apache and clustering for redundancy. The company tells TMC Labs, "ACD reporting tools have been available for quite a while. We have changed the thought process to capture and maintain the relationship between each event. Our application is used to maintain a link between each activity that occurs between the customer and the contact center. Customers are beginning to use our applications to drive routing rules into Genesys and Cisco based on real time data collected."

The solution works on Windows, Macs, and Linux machines and is very granular in measuring activity. For instance, suppose an agent handles three calls or pieces of work during a 15-minute period, and each work activity lasts 3 minutes and only one has 6 minutes of after call work. The application reports the exact amount of after call work time for the one piece of work instead of averaging across all three. The solution can show customer effort, cost per call, cash per call, and a large list of other metrics related to each activity. **CIS**

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

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Cloud-Based Communications: Trends, Benefits and Drivers

If functionality, flexibility and innovation are important keys to your business needs, then Communications as a Service (CaaS) is right for you. Learn about trends, benefits and drivers for cloud-based communications from Richard Snow, Vice President and Research Director for Ventana Research and Joe Staples, Chief Marketing Officer for Interactive Intelligence.

Q: Where should an interested company start their investigation into Communications as a Service?

Joe: "It really comes down to looking at taking their communications, the applications they're looking for and having those served to them by a third party provider and changing the way they pay for that, moving from a capital expenditure to a monthly service charge."

Q: Why so much success, when past hosted models didn't get very much traction?

Joe: "The reason we're seeing such an increase in traction or acceleration in cloud-based communications has to do with the trends. There are a number of companies that started the trend by experimenting with moving different computing or different software to the cloud and have found that the cloud was a good way of doing business. They discovered there was a lot of benefit to it."

Q: How much momentum are you seeing in the area of cloud-based communications?

Richard: "I'm seeing quite a shift toward cloud-based communications, and people tend to forget that communications has been in the cloud forever. What we're seeing is that companies are moving the way they manage their communications into the cloud."

Q: Including how they "manage" communications, then, what are the overall drivers for customer adoption of cloud-based communications?

Richard: "The drivers for people adopting cloud-based communications come down to three categories: cost, resources and risk. However, when I asked people during my research, the drivers tend to be around flexibility in the way cloud-based applications and services can be managed; you can be flexible in terms of the volumes you use, can scale up or down to meet your business needs, but you can also use the functionality that you want. The bigger thing I find with people adopting cloud-based communications is innovation. With these kinds of solutions you can actually innovate the way your company runs, and how it communicates with the outside world and your customers."

Q: What are some of the things customers should look for in a mature, solid cloud-based communications offering?

Richard: "The three things that people told me you should look for are summed up easily. It's functionality, functionality, functionality. You should be looking for a system that's got the functionality that delivers your business needs. People should look for a supplier that's got a track record of providing solutions that are going to meet your business needs."

Joe: "Customers still have a little bit of trepidation around security. That's the thing customers brought up the most as a concern to migrating communications to the cloud. But there are some distinct ways of mitigating any kind of security risks. For example, at Interactive Intelligence we make sure everything is housed in a SAS 70 24x7 monitor data center. We provide an option to allow all of the voice recordings and the actual voice traffic to remain inside the customer's network, inside that customer's firewall. We also provide every customer an isolated environment where their software is running on a virtual machine."

Q: What percentage of the overall contact center market do you think will make the shift to the cloud in the next five years?

Richard: "I think over the next five years we're going to see an increasing adoption of cloud-based solutions for the contact center, including communications. The adoption of Voice over IP (VoIP) was down in the single figures, but over the last seven years, I've seen that figure go to the 60s and 70s. It's almost becoming the de facto choice and was largely driven by the same three things: cost, fewer resources and it enabled people to innovate. I anticipate a similar trend in this market place. Today people still prefer on-premises solutions, but over the next several years we are going to see this go from single figure adoption to 50%-60% adoption rates." **CIS**

For more information on cloud-based communications, please visit www.CaaS.com.

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CUSTOMER INTER@CTION SOLUTIONS® magazine (ISSN: 1533-3078) is published monthly by Technology Marketing Corporation, River Park, 800 Connecticut Ave 1st Fl., Norwalk, CT 06854-1628 U.S.A. Periodicals postage paid at Norwalk, Connecticut and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to: **CUSTOMER INTER@CTION SOLUTIONS®**, Technology Marketing Corporation, River Park, 800 Connecticut Ave 1st Fl., Norwalk, CT 06854-1628 U.S.A.

To subscribe, call toll-free: 800-243-6002. If busy, call 203-852-6800 or write to the circulation director at srusso@tmcnet.com. Subscription rates (published monthly): Free for qualified subscribers in the U.S.A. only. For non-qualified U.S.A. subscribers, $59. All Canadian subscribers, $89. All Foreign (air mail), $109. All orders are payable in advance in U.S. dollars drawn against a U.S. bank. Connecticut residents add applicable sales tax.

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation 1. Customer Interaction Solutions magazine 2. Publication Number: 68-2830 3. Filing Date: September 27, 2011 4. Issue Frequency: Monthly 5. Number of Issues Published Annually: 12 6. Annual Subscription Price: Free –Qualified US, $59-NonQualified US, $89-Canada, $109-Foreign 7. Complete Mailing Address of Know Office of Publication: Technology Marketing Corporation, 800 Connecticut Ave 1st Fl East, Norwalk, CT 06854-1631 8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: Same as above 9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Address of Publisher, Editor and Managing Editor: Publisher: Nadji Tehrani, Editor: Erik Linask, Technology Marketing Corporation, 800 Connecticut Ave 1st Fl East, Norwalk, CT 06854-1631 10. Owner: Technology Marketing Corporation, 800 Connecticut Ave 1st Fl East, Norwalk, CT 06854-1631, Nadji Tehrani, Rich Tehrani, Michelle Tehrani 11. Know Bond Holders, Mortgages, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: None 13. Publication Title: Customer Interaction Solutions magazine 14. Issue Date of Circulation Data Below: Sept 2011 15. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months/No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date a. Total Number of Copies (Net Press Run): 3,144/2,150 b. Legitimate Paid and/or Requested Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail) (1) Outside County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541: 261/131 (2) In-County Paid Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541: 0/0 (3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales and Other Paid or Requested Distribution Outside USPS®: 0/0 (4) Requested Copies Distributed by Other Mail Classes Through the USPS: 0/0 c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 261/131 d. Nonrequested Distribution (by Mail and Outside the Mail) (1) Outside County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541: 2,366/1,609 (2) In-County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541: 0/0 (3) Nonrequested Copies Distributed Through the USPS by Other Classes of Mail: 182/122 (4) Nonrequested Copies Distributed Outside the Mail: 259/248 e. Total Nonrequested Distribution: 2,548/1,731 f. Total Distribution: 2,809/1,862 g. Copies not Distributed: 76/40 h. Total: 2,885/1,902 i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 9.29%/7.04%. PS Form: 3526. Total Digital Distribution: 68,314/69,305, Total Print & Digital Distribution: 71,382/71,415. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete: Nadji Tehrani, Chairman, Founder & Executive Group Publisher, 9/22/2011.

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Paula Bernier, *Executive Editor*

Bring It on Home

Hello CIS readers. I suppose the first order of business for this issue's Logout column should be an introduction. As you may have noticed, I'm a new face at Customer Interaction Solutions magazine. In fact, I'll be heading up the editorial effort at CIS from here forward.

Just so you know where I'm coming from, I've been a trade magazine reporter in the telecom/communications space for 20 years. I got my start at Telephony magazine, then worked for a couple years as a senior editor for Inter@ctive Week, did an 11-year stint as editor in chief of xchange magazine, and came aboard TMC a little more than two years ago. TMC tapped me in August to lead the editorial charge at CIS, and I'm excited to present to you the first issue of Customer Interaction Solutions created under my guidance. As always, we welcome your input on this or any CIS issue.

As we got started on CIS October, one of the first pieces of customer interaction-related news that came to my attention was the launch of jobs4america. The FCC and a coalition of call center companies joined forces on this effort, which aims to create (or, more specifically in most cases, bring back from overseas) 100,000 broadband-enabled call center jobs in the next two years in the U.S.

The partners say that will help out some of the communities in our country that have been hit hardest by the economic downturn; that's in part because broadband connectivity, VoIP technology and newer call center solutions enable people to work remotely as customer service reps. That's good for workers because it gives them much more flexibility to work wherever they are. (I personally have been working at home for most of my career, and I love it.)

Alpine Access is among the 10 companies mentioned in the FCC's jobs4america announcement, which notes the company expects to add 4,000 U.S.-based call center jobs in the next two years. In August, the company revealed plans to hire more than 1,000 work-from-home employees across the nation by the end of 2011.

Cynthia Phillips, vice president of marketing of Alpine Access, told me in an August interview that the company is the only pure play, employee-based contact center business that uses home-based agents exclusively. As a result, she 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. Phillips says 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 Phillips says Alpine Access matches up with the special requirements of its clients.

Saying that 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, Phillips comments: "At the end of the day the question to the companies is: How valuable are your customers?"

It is far better to keep a customer than to lose one and have to go get a new one, she says.

"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," Phillips adds. That said, "there's always going to be a need for that human component."

Kevin Childs, practice leader, contact center lead at Manpower, tells me that 10 to 15 years ago many people thought contact centers had seen their best days in the U.S., because at the time many contact center work was moving overseas. But that's no longer the case, he indicates, adding that in the U.S. Manpower employs 10,000 contact center reps and provides contact centers to more than 3,500 companies.

Manpower, he says, works closely with client companies to deliver contact center solutions that balance cost vs. quality related to customer interaction. Those solutions, he adds, include matching the best talent with the individual customer, providing on-demand labor resources, and delivering performance management and process improvement tools and solutions. What's more, he says, Manpower customers can improve customer interactions while retaining control over contact center leadership and strategy, and the customer experience.

Pointing out that Consumer Reports in July reported that consumer satisfaction is at an all-time low, Childs says using U.S.-based call center reps – at least for high-value customers; doing performance management; and leveraging state-of-the-art contact centers solutions that don't remove the company's line of site to the customer, could help turn that around. **CIS**

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