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ANGLE

Paula Bernier, *Executive Editor*

Aptean Works to Gain an Edge

I recently got a chance to attend Aptean Edge, an event in Las Vegas at which Aptean welcomed its customers and shared its product and strategy stories.

For those of you who are not familiar with Aptean, the company provides a variety of enterprise software solutions in such areas as analytics and business intelligence, CRM, and ERP. The company was formed a couple years ago when its current owner, Vista Equity Partners, bought CDC Software and Consona, and brought their offerings together under the new name Aptean.

CEO Paul Ilse, formerly CFO of RedPrairie Corp., where he successfully headed up the company's mergers and acquisition effort, joined Aptean in March of 2013. In his Aptean Edge keynote speech, Ilse said that last year when he was new to the company, some customers may have wondered if Aptean was even a viable company. But today and going forward, he assured the audience, Aptean is the kind of partner customers can count on.

"We have the right team to drive this company forward," he said. "Aptean is here to stay and grow with you."

In 2014, Ilse said, Aptean's three goals for the year are:

- to increase its solutions value via new investments in its product portfolio, including making them easier to deploy and integrate, and accessible via any kind of device.
- to strengthen its industry commitment, which refers to the company's existing and continuing effort to deliver industry-specific solutions addressing the needs of various business verticals. This year, 75 percent of the features Aptean introduces will be industry-specific, and 81 percent of Aptean's team has expertise in the verticals the company serves.
- to expand its partnerships with customers, with other companies in the business software ecosystem, and via acquisition where it makes sense.

During an interview with CUSTOMER magazine, Ilse said while CDC and Consona both sold individual products, he is positioning Aptean to build a reputation for offering a great set of products and being a solutions provider.

Aptean delivers a broad set of products, which includes a collection of CRM solutions called Pivotal, Onyx, and Saratoga. Pivotal, explained Matt Keenan, Aptean's vice president of CRM product management, is targeted at marketing, sales and services units at mid-market and enterprise-class organizations. Meanwhile, he said, Onyx and Saratoga address the SMB and lower end of the mid market.

Pivotal, the name of the company CDC bought about a decade ago, was a market-leading brand, with strong growth and big wins, in the area of CRM in the market before Salesforce arrived on the scene, Keenan told CUSTOMER magazine. During his presentation in Las Vegas, Keenan thanked Aptean's Pivotal customers for sticking it out during what he referred to as a turbulent time for Pivotal. He explained to CUSTOMER that CDC had financial troubles and ultimately filed bankruptcy, and there were a couple years during which serious investment in Pivotal came to a halt.

"We kept the lights on" but didn't advance the product to address customers' interests, he said.

However, Aptean is now dedicated to investing in research and development, doing acquisitions, and forming partnerships to make sure Pivotal and its other products meet and exceed customer requirements, said Ilse.

Evidence of new investment includes Aptean's new mobile first strategy, through which the company is leveraging HTML5 technology to deliver a consistent experience to customers whether they're accessing the company's solutions via the desktop, smartphone, or tablet.

Ilse declined to provide details about in which areas we might expect acquisitions by Aptean. But the company in May at Aptean Edge announced an important new partnership and related product, called Aptean Analytics.

That partnership is with Qlik, through which Aptean will leverage QlikView to power its Aptean Analytics–Business Intelligence dashboards and analytics solutions. The QlikView Business Discovery platform from Qlik, a leader in the analytics and business intelligence space, gives organizations quick and easy access to data, so they can find answers to specific questions, and use that information to drive better decision making for their businesses. That makes data more accessible and useful than it is when it's presented in the more traditional way via static reports. Tools like QlikView that enable business leaders to get answers to specific questions and drill down into data from multiple angles can be transformative in helping businesses fine-tune how they operate and identify opportunities, according to Aptean and many other sources.

The initial Aptean products leveraging the QlikView-powered analytic dashboards target the electronic and medical devices, financial services, food and beverage, metals, retail, and software industries.

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PERSPECTIVE

Rich Tehrani, *CEO, TMC*

Hot Trends in Customer Care

The need for the integration of contact center solutions with customer relationship management capabilities has never been more important. Improving the customer experience is a top priority of enterprises around the world. In short, being able to have the requisite business intelligence, a holistic and accessible view of a customer's profile, to meet customer demands in a timely and appropriate manner has become paramount.

Front line employees – contact center agents, sales and marketing resources, to put it simply – need as much information as possible to be efficient and effective. In fact, industry observers believe we are in the midst of a convergence of what had been siloed views of the customer. And, for those readers who went to the CX Hot Trends Symposium in Indianapolis, you know this subject was a major hot trend that several subject matter experts addressed.

An indication of this trend is the announcement from Huawei of the launch of eSpace Contact Center solutions for enterprise customers, which are certified for SAP Customer Relationship Management. As Huawei notes, "The eSpace Contact Center empowers customers to move toward a customer contact center architecture, offering sales, marketing, and service information and insights, and providing high-quality customer experiences, enhanced customer interaction, and more efficient service."

This is a significant launch given SAP's large CRM footprint in large global enterprises, and certification sends a strong message to customers of both companies. In this regard, the SAP Integration and Certification Center has certified that eSpace Contact Center V2 integrates with SAP CRM and the Huawei contact center platform which provides a multi-channel access gateway to interactive channels for customers, including voice, web, and SMS. In fact, the Huawei eSpace Contact Center is a fully-featured contact center solution that offers web-based customer services that incorporate a portfolio of collaborative applications, such as social media, remote desktop, whiteboard, file transfer, and annotation.

"We are proud to launch the eSpace Contact Center solutions certified for SAP CRM, which will enable our enterprise customers to offer first-class customer service experiences," said Wang Junhai, Huawei eSpace Contact Center product management director. "Committed to forging open collaborations with partners, Huawei strives to bring high-quality and innovative ICT products and solutions to the enterprise business market. We look forward to more successful collaborations with SAP."

Huawei is no stranger to the contact center sector, having entered the market in 1993. It is now the market leader in China's growing contact center market and has achieved traction with its solutions around the world. Moreover, it is extremely successful in the carrier equipment market and is growing quite quickly in wireless as well. M2M is one of the new markets the company has entered. The company told me recently at a conference in Las Vegas how well its new IoT gateway is being received by the market.

Contact centers and CRM solutions are naturals for tight integration. In a world where customer demands are changing at an accelerating pace, where alternatives are only a click or a touch away, and customer loyalty can be problematic, having the tools to understand the full extent of the customer relationship is, as noted, no longer something nice to have but a must have. It is in this way such integrations are a hot trend that bear close scrutiny and evaluation.

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TMC's Peter Bernstein contributed a great deal to this story and his efforts are appreciated.

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By Mike Stokes

Stop the Brain Drain

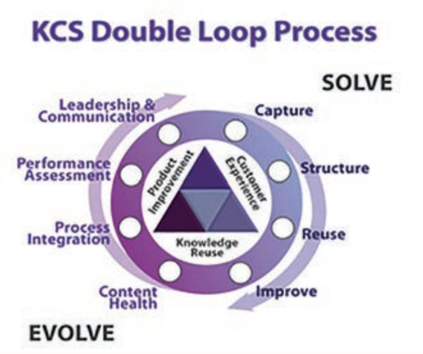
Critical Knowledge is Walking out Your Door Everyday

Knowledge certainly doesn't walk, but people do, and with them goes the intelligence they develop and retain from years of building your brand. This tribal knowledge is one of your most important assets. Equally important are the documents and materials in people's bags and home computers when they exit. What should you do about this challenge?

Capture the Tribal Knowledge

This may be the most difficult task you take on next to building your brand. Why? Because it's typically not documented, and it's time consuming to extract. Consider these steps:

- Identify the key roles of individuals who possess valuable knowledge such as engineers, product management, marketing, process owners, customer interaction managers, and many IT professionals.
- Make a list of these individuals before they consider leaving the organization. Also identify people who have left and consider bringing them in as contract resources.
- Inform them about the need to capture their corporate intelligence and incent them to participate in a process to capture the most important knowledge they believe the company needs to have.
- Develop a capture process. Create a team with templates to interview and document information – this will be unique to your organization.
- Ask individuals in these key roles to document critical information in parallel with interviews – a stream of thought approach is often necessary.
- Identify a repository, catalog, tag, and store the information for access by an enterprise knowledge management system enabled by knowledge management tools.
- Keep the capture process alive and make it part of how the organization operates.
- Start a project to develop a Knowledge Centered Support process following the methodology from the Consortium for Service Innovation http://www.serviceinnovation.org/kcs/. The KCS model is the recommend approach for establishing a culture based on capturing, authoring, and managing knowledge.



Managing and capturing tribal knowledge will continue to be a challenge. Implementing an enterprise approach to knowledge management will significantly reduce the problem.

Protecting Your Knowledge Assets

As you continue to manage the tribal knowledge challenge, don't forget about the paper and terabytes of electronic information scattered around the organization. Paper-based knowledge is high risk and the biggest opportunity. Identify paper sources such as:

- Individual file drawers with product information, business process data, and other forms of information assets – reach out to employees to identify these sources.
- Manuals with product and instructional information.
- Parts books and related materials that contain product details.
- Marketing materials created using outside resources that may be electronically available.

So what to do with the paper? Establish resources and a process to scan and electronically capture and store this information. Use the same cataloging and tagging process discussed for tribal knowledge.

Mike Stokes is president of management consulting firm Innovate Forward Inc. (www.innovateforward.com).

The Value Proposition – Why The Effort is Worth It

Here are some compelling facts about the benefits of knowledge management. By harnessing knowledge, companies are able to:

Solve Cases and Incidents Faster

- 50 – 60% improved time to resolution
- 30 – 50% increase in first contact resolution

Optimize Use of Resources

- 70% improved time to proficiency
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- 20 – 40% improvement in employee satisfaction

Enable eServices Strategy

- Improve customer success and use of web self-help
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Build Organizational Learning

- Actionable information to product development about customer issues
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Art Rosenberg

How Will You Support Consumer Mobile Customer Service?

It is getting very obvious that business customer services are moving from telephony-based call centers and very limited IVR capabilities, to more cost-efficient, online self-services with more flexible, multimodal click for live assistance. It's not that customers will immediately stop making phone calls for customer assistance, but such contacts will increasingly be made over the Internet, within online and mobile self-service apps.

So, it's not so much that businesses have to replace their existing customer service call center operations, but rather they will have to develop new and complementary capabilities to service properly their many customers, who now have multimodal smartphones and tablets and will want to exploit UC flexibility and IP-based connectivity, rather than limited legacy PSTN contacts. In terms of business benefits, moving to IP voice and video connections, especially with integrated access from browsers through the increasing adoption of WebRTC, will also significantly reduce the costs of legacy telephony access.

Where Do You Start? – Mobile Click for Assistance

Many business organizations already have online websites and portals, where authorized customers can directly access information and perform simple online transactions. Many organizations have also already branched out and developed mobile app versions of these online applications for the most popular smartphones and tablets that consumers are currently using. So, the next important step really is to UC-enable such mobile apps when the consumer needs live assistance within the context of specific mobile use case applications.

This capability is already being offered by a number of cloud service providers, since they also support development and access to mobile apps in private, public, and hybrid clouds. So, rather than publish a legacy call center phone number in the mobile, online application, which would require initiating a separate, blind phone call, a more flexible, click-for-assistance connection can be offered within the context of the individual application.

Such an approach will provide more contextual information about why the customer is making contact, rather than just identifying who the customer is or where he or she is located at the moment. This will enable the contact center function to more accurately respond to the customer's current assistance needs, including exploiting the greater accessibility and flexibility of contact that a mobile smartphone user will inherently have.

Next Step – Proactive Mobile Notifications

After taking care of mobile customer demands for both self-service apps and access to live assistance, the next logical step is to support the benefits of increased contact accessibility to mobile customers. Such capabilities have traditionally been handled by contact centers in initiating outbound phone calls for the timely delivery of important information to customers, e.g., reminders of appointments. However, with multimodal smartphones, notifications don't have to be just disruptive and expensive voice calls any more, but can be in the form of text messages that contain flexible response links for greater mobile recipient choice.

The label typically used to describe such automated outbound notification services has been communications-enabled business process. Although the concepts have been around for a while, it is only with the greater use of mobile technologies that practical implementations can be considered. So, as part of the strategic planning for mobile customer service, this capability should be considered based on practical vertical market use cases.

Who Will Do the Heavy Lifting?

Communications technology has reached a point where it has become too complex for internal IT organizations to handle. That is one reason that cloud-based services are displacing legacy premises-based technologies. It has also become difficult for business management to define new communication solutions, although they may be able to identify their operational business problems with customers.

For this reason, there has been rapid growth in professional services, both by independent consultants and solution integrators, as well as from technology vendors. Accordingly, it will be important to utilize objective and trusted resources to start planning strategically to implement the above two steps for mobile customer services. Once that has been done, then it will be appropriate to look at the impact the changes will have on internal staff, i.e., all customer-facing staff.

Art Rosenberg is with The Unified-View/UC Strategies Expert.

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BY CHRIS VITEK

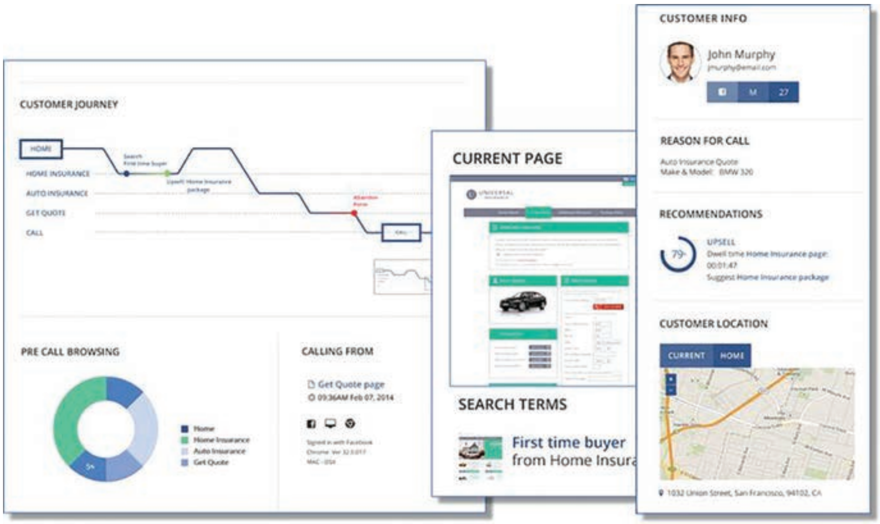
Rise of the Machines in the Contact Center

It is hard to overstate the importance of machine learning when it comes to customer support. The benefits are reduced customer effort, higher customer loyalty, reduced labor requirements, and elimination of the most unfriendly of customer care interfaces – the IVR.

The Discovery Channel surveyed its viewers on the most annoying technology ever invented, and they picked interactive voice response. The key driver for the invention of IVR was labor savings. The method was to push labor and effort onto the customer by collecting information from the customer while contact center agents were busy handling live support interactions. This, along with computer telephony integration, had a profound effect on labor requirements in the vast majority of contact centers in the early '90s.

Nearly 20 years later, the Corporate Executive Board conducted a survey of 17,000 customers and determined that while the labor savings were real, they came at the cost of customer loyalty. Maintaining customer loyalty is exponentially more expensive than saving 18 seconds on your average handle time.

Seventeen years ago, Aspect published an article about the use of the Internet to enable personal software agents that would evaluate your behavior and use this information to improve your experience with products and services that you purchase. I remember reading this twice because it seemed way too complex for the technology of that day. But Moore's Law marches on.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Recently, Barry O'Sullivan and AltoCloud have become the first-movers in this area with a cloud-based solution. They are using an array of simple to build software agents to gather information to paint a digital picture of your behavior. This is not an invasion of privacy; it is about gathering information about how specific customers interact with a specific product or service. A sort of cookie on steroids, but it includes real-time interactions as well as web interactions.

AltoCloud uses a variety of PC and mobile technologies at the end points. This includes legacy telecom, web services, and WebRTC. This last technology component contemplates real-time audio, video, text, and file transfer. It is the last component, real-time file transfer, that makes this different from anything else in the business. Specifically, WebRTC uses a standardized construct called data channel to move files in real time. This is the part that makes WebRTC different from Skype or any other SIP-based communications tools. This is what makes the 17-year-old Aspect vision of personal software agents economically possible in the real-time world.

AltoCloud has taken this to the next level. It has created an infrastructure in the cloud that supports the customization and calculation that are necessary to reduce customer effort. These are table-stakes for our new cloud-based world. The next level that it has implemented is an intuitive interface that the contact center agent can use to quickly visualize the needs of the customer.

Even in this world of customer relationship management, most contact centers require their agents to use many, many interfaces to solve customer problems. Some of my customers require their agents have access to 20 or more discreet databases. The cost to integrate these databases into a new CRM platform

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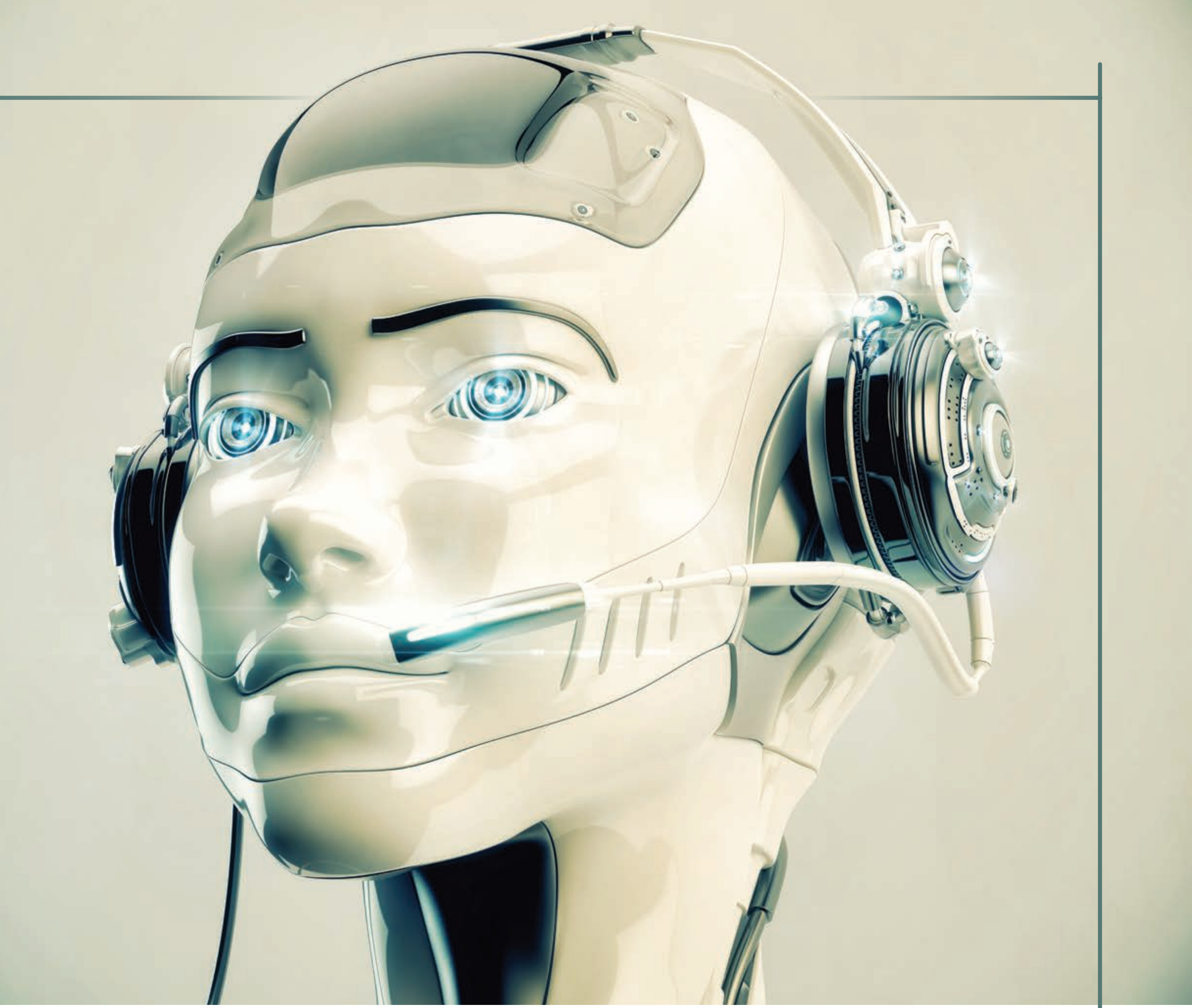

is often prohibitive, especially when the agents already know how to use the 20-plus interfaces that are already on their desktop computers. What AltoCloud has done is created an intuitive set of displays that are easy to understand and can be quickly assimilated into the customer support technology infrastructure and business process.

The Customer Journey, Current Page and Customer Info displays are all easy to read, and relevant to the moment. Routing and authentication are accomplished without an IVR, and the displays collectively allow the contact center agent to quickly understand the customer's needs. This is the paradigm for the modern contact center that reduces both customer effort and agent effort with the added benefit of increasing customer loyalty.

The use of these types of tools will grow exponentially in the next few years. Many enterprises have already embarked on the big data path, but few have figured out how to use it in the contact center. AltoCloud has made it easy and affordable. First-mover comes to mind. It is among a new breed of cloud-based solution providers that offer big data solutions that are targeted at a specific industry. The key benefit here is that it eliminates the cost and time to build a big data solution. Contact centers can now deliver these solutions in months instead of years with an operating expense model that will run in lockstep with their revenues and profits.

As stated earlier, the benefits are reduced customer effort, higher customer loyalty, reduced labor requirements, and elimination of the most unfriendly of customer care interfaces – the IVR. For the last 20 years, the contact center industry has not offered any new capabilities that have really moved the needle. Rapid and inexpensive access to big data and machine learning tools in the cloud will change this.

Chris Vitek is president of WebRTC Strategies Inc. (www.WebRTCStrategies.com).

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It Starts with Reliable Quality Interaction Recording

BY CHARLEY EATON

Interaction recording is the first step in the process to evaluate and improve customer service, increase quality, optimize a workforce, or ensure regulation compliance. However, in most cases it is the least discussed product when contact centers are considering WFO Solutions. Solution providers do not spend millions marketing interaction recording. Why should they, when it does not have the sizzle of “speech analytics” or “workforce management”? Interaction recording is often mentioned as an afterthought and presented as if all recording products do the same thing, the same way and deliver a simple file so that all the “real” technologies can perform their magic. Don’t get me wrong; these other solutions and the associated processes are critical to achieving better customer service and operating more efficiently. But, without a quality and reliable interaction recording product in place, the other processes do not consistently take place to produce their benefits – not to mention, having peace of mind when it comes to regulation compliance.

Boxed or Bundled?

Many contact centers have accepted interaction recording as an afterthought, bundled in other products they have purchased. They are often very limited on the technology solutions they can implement and experience unplanned upgrade costs. These hidden upgrade costs can happen when the interaction recording product does not integrate with products outside of the “brand” or has to be upgraded due to another product it interfaces with being upgraded. No brand has all the solutions for the vast needs of every contact center and new technologies are coming to market every day from new providers. Yet, many customers are limited to the same brand for all the processes and requirements of their contact center operation, because it all came bundled in the package. They have tried to mold their business around the products and do not have options for integrating best in class niche technologies to improve their operation. There can be cost savings by bundling open products that meet your business requirements. There can be many unseen costs and frustrations by accepting a closed product promising the best of everything for all requirements. This can leave the customer feeling boxed in and forced to upgrade many products based on one product, which eliminates options for future technologies due to lack of integration.

Quality Always Matters

The quality and reliability of an interaction recording product is essential to every business segment of a contact center. Most contact centers only know when an interaction was not recorded if they have the need to locate an interaction and it can’t be found. Customers assume that everything is being recorded and stored in a quality format, but have no real-time measurements or visibility, and are only aware of issues as problems arise. There are many methods used to record interactions that result in a wide range of file quality and reliability, compliance standards and integration flexibility. Contact centers should consider their business requirements when selecting the products that will record their interactions. It is a bumpy and expensive road to adjust your business to the products after the purchase.

Demand Quality and Flexibility

Contact centers need a high quality and reliable interaction recording product to take the first step in the process of being the best at what they do. They also need the flexibility and option to integrate with existing technologies they want to keep in production, as well as the future technologies they may want to integrate. Customers that take the extra time to compare and select the interaction recording that is right for their business will reap the dividends of peace of mind, cost savings and flexibility.

About TantaComm

TantaComm is a global innovator in customer interaction recording, compliance and quality management solutions. Many of the world’s largest contact centers, service desks, inside sales teams and technology providers have relied on TantaComm to help them deliver great customer experiences for the past 20 years. For more information, visit www.tantacomm.com.

Charley Eaton is the President and CEO of TantaComm. Having successfully re-engineered the future for several other businesses, he has established a compelling customer-centric value proposition based on operational optimization and supported by deep industry knowledge and expertise in effective technology deployment.

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People Power

How Connecting Customers with Quality Reps Can Create a Rewarding Experience

BY PAULA BERNIER

It's a tough business environment out there.

Always-connected customers want – no, demand – that the companies with which they do business deliver solutions quickly and efficiently. One bad, or even mediocre, experience can mean lost business. So organizations are quickly waking up to the fact that customer service matters.

That's why the term customer experience has recently come into vogue. And it's why more businesses today (while still wanting to spend their dollars efficiently) now view customer service not just as a cost center, but also as a potential revenue center.

Many companies are responding to all of the above by formulating strategies to enable customers to interact with them via e-mail, text, the web, voice, or even video. That's important. But with all the talk about multichannel and omnichannel strategies these days, it may surprise you to know that good old voice remains the preferred channel for customer service interactions.

"Voice is still the preferred channel, and InfoCision can help organizations answer that call with its personalized service solutions," says Steve Brubaker, chief of staff at InfoCision Management Corp. "We offer multichannel solutions to meet a variety of marketing objectives, but we know that when people want to ask a question, they frequently pick up the phone."

Because voice communications remain central to the success of customer service initiatives, organizations need to make sure they have helpful, knowledgeable, and understandable people in place to address customer concerns, says Brubaker. That, he explains, can significantly improve first call resolution, resulting in fewer callers being put on hold and strengthened customer loyalty.

It's no secret that callers dislike being put on hold, which can lead to mounting discontent, and even customer churn.

"If the issue is not resolved in the first call, it may make an unfavorable impression," says Brubaker. "People get frustrated if they have to be put on hold."

Call center representatives who listen to caller concerns, express sensitivity to them, and have the tools to respond appropriately to their requests in a personalized way, however, can frequently achieve first call resolution. In the process, the customer typically senses he or she is valued, and that creates a positive outcome both for the customer and for the organization.

"When customers reach someone, and receive assistance right away, it strengthens their relationship with the organization," says Brubaker. "And it

> “Voice is still the preferred channel, and InfoCision can help organizations answer that call with its personalized service solutions.”
>
> *– Steve Brubaker, chief of staff at InfoCision Management Corp.*

lets them know that you appreciate their business.”

The importance of listening to customers cannot be underestimated, Brubaker adds.

“We teach that, not just by encouraging it, but through various exercises in which call center reps are challenged to use and then work with managers to analyze their listening and sensitivity skills,” he says.

Specifically, InfoCision involves call center representatives in role-playing exercises, and then works with those individuals to evaluate the language and tone used in the interactions and their likely outcomes.

Training is just part of the equation that figures into delivering strong customer service, he says. Another key component is to hire the right people for the job in the first place. That entails finding individuals who already possess the basic skills of good communications, the ability to listen and quickly process conversations, and to use their own good social skills and company-provided information to identify solutions for callers.

“The call center is the front line and starting point for customers’ experiences; they can either choose to continue their journeys with your company or move on to partner with a competitor that is delivering the best customer experience,” says Brubaker. “This essentially makes your agents the face of your company.”

The ability to not just do problem resolution, but to deliver a customer experience that is above average is of the utmost importance, says customer experience expert and author Shep Hyken. To illustrate this point, Hyken refers to a Vanderbilt University study indicating that 40 percent of satisfied customers never revisit a restaurant or other business even though they are satisfied.

“It’s just ok, and just satisfactory isn’t good enough,” says Hyken.

Every time an organization interacts with a customer, it has the opportunity to create moments of magic, moments of misery, or moments of mediocrity, Hyken continues. Moments of magic don’t need to blow customers away, he says, but have to be at least a bit above average. To create the magic, he says, it’s important to create a good first impression, put in place employees who behave as if they have a stake in the business, use good communication skills – such as asking the extra question to ensure customer expectations are met, and avoid moments of misery.

This last item is particularly noteworthy, as a recent survey by Zendesk and Dimensional research indicates that a stunning 39 percent of consumers will avoid a vendor for two or more years after a bad customer experience. Meanwhile, 55 percent will simply switch to a different product or company following a negative interaction. This same study also reveals that consumers are far more likely to share experiences than they were even five years ago when things go awry with a brand, as Brubaker noted in a recent InfoCision blog.

To avoid such outcomes and build customer loyalty, organizations need to put people first – both in terms of their customers and their customer-facing employees, says Hyken, because the bottom line is that people like to do business with people who they know, like, and trust.

“If we don’t get the people part right, it doesn’t matter,” he adds.

Indeed. And that’s a key component of InfoCision’s strategy, says Brubaker.

“We have found that having knowledgeable people on the phone who can speak clearly and represent the product and the company makes all the difference in the world,” Brubaker says. “They understand the company, they have been trained properly, they have a good background, and they know how to make the customers happy.” M

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Let’s Get Social:
Best Practices in Utility Outage Communications

A Thought Leadership Advertorial from Interactive Intelligence

Utility outages are inevitable. They happen, and utility customers for the most part are understanding when an outage occurs. Yet it’s how a utility company communicates with impacted customers that can determine whether those customers perceive the experience as relatively positive – or negative.

In this age of social media in particular, the negative impact of an outage can spur an excess of bad press in no time. All it takes is a customer putting a comment out in the social universe. Add the need for media damage control during an outage, and the situation can become precarious rather quickly.

A strategic, proactive social media plan

Having a social media plan in place and being able to execute it proactively can help alleviate negative bad press. Utilities can also use such a plan to help facilitate outage restoration, and to improve the accuracy of the information they’re receiving and providing. A utility must therefore develop a plan that incorporates real-time, two-way communications into standard operating procedures, with a focus on what will be done during an outage.

What utility customers really expect

Smartphones, mobile devices and the ease of information sharing and availability have raised consumers’ expectations of customer service tremendously. The impact is evident with more companies now encouraging multichannel communications through email, chat, and SMS texting, and with the increased use of mobile apps to access info at any time. This all contributes to utility customers wanting more control during an outage:

- Two-way communications about when they can expect their power to be restored
- Detailed information about their community and their neighborhood
- Easy access to the information, ideally from a familiar source

The deeper impact of social media on utilities

According to a report from market intelligence firm IDC, utility executives agree on four key points about customers, outage information, and how and why social media makes a noticeable impact:

- Customers want accurate outage information that’s consistent across all communications channels.
- If customers can’t get this information from their utility, they will use social media to generate and share this information among themselves.
- Customers can and will provide accurate, useful outage information back to their utility, if the utility is “plugged in” sufficiently to receive and make use of that information.
- Utilities cannot “control” social media outage reporting, but they can and should participate in the discussions, providing accurate information.

Plan accordingly

Understanding the changes in technology and mobility, coupled with an ever increasing need for relevant, timely communications, utilities must plan accordingly.

- Map out a social media strategy as it relates to customer service, outages, and stakeholder communications.
- Brainstorm all potential means of communicating with constituents and conduct a cost/benefit analysis on each, including softer benefits such as “good will” and reduced churn.
- Implement industry best practices such as posting outage maps and service restoration updates on a company website.
- Determine a contingency plan for call overflow into the contact center in the event of an outage.
- Decide on implementing communications channels such as SMS, chat, an interactive map, call backs when power is restored, self-service IVR options for reporting, or other means.

For a utility company and the customer experience, improving communication with customers, communities, local media, and other stakeholders throughout an outage can be a decided competitive advantage.

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The Post Plug-in Era is Now

By Sajeel Hussain

The experience has been repeated by users the world over for so long that it is second nature: browse to a website, only to be greeted by a notification to download the latest version of a plug-in, click to install, and eventually, without any hiccups, get to the desired content. It is a cumbersome, problematic process, and as new innovations continue to enter the market, the concept of the plug-in may soon be headed to the scrap heap of technology – and not a moment too soon.

Those who closely monitor the technology side of the web should be well aware of the impending changes in major browsers. Chrome, Internet Explorer, and FireFox have all stated that they will eliminate – or severely limit – the use of plug-ins at some time in the near future, a move that will change web browsing for many, and will also change the way certain media is accessed by the user.

The list of popular plug-ins includes Adobe Flash, Adobe Reader, Java, Silverlight, QuickTime, and Windows Media Player. These are common solutions that are widely used to display video and documents, while also enabling user interaction with applications on a webpage. For enterprises that have relied on plug-ins for enabling content, the time to start looking toward the future is now.

Plug-ins have served us well, but with recent advances in technology and browser capabilities, there are more efficient and secure ways to deliver existing and new features without the use of plug-ins. By employing the latest technologies, companies and marketeers can now create web pages that offer robust interactive capabilities and rich communication channels while enhancing the user experience – without relying on downloads or updates, just immediate delivery of content and function.

Rich content delivery and interactive engagement with users are the key objectives of many websites and user portals. Businesses now want to extend these concepts beyond the desktop to include tablets and smartphones, which employ different versions of browsers, as well as native apps, for rich media engagement. Users also are increasingly more sophisticated, and are demanding that websites have the same look and feel across all endpoints. What does this mean to the business or web developer trying to engage with a customer? Simply, that it's time to leverage the advanced technologies, features, and capabilities found in the latest browsers and mobile operating systems – and leave plug-ins behind.

WebRTC is one emerging technology that is being viewed with great interest by businesses looking for an efficient way to incorporate one-way or two-way video, and other rich content features, into a customer portal. WebRTC uses the native capabilities of the browser to establish desktop-to-desktop video connectivity – virtually on demand. There is no need for any plug-ins, just the current version of Chrome or FireFox, and it can be as simple as one click on a link to launch a video call. Whether this peer-to-peer connection is used for an impromptu videoconference, to deliver rich media content such as streaming audio or video, or to share screens and documents, it is inconsequential to the operation of the browser.

In the desktop realm, WebRTC is certainly a major leap forward that will overcome the loss of certain plug-ins. However, modern business to consumer engagement extends well beyond the desktop. Enabling users to have the same experience on a mobile device requires a creative mix of browser technology, such as WebRTC, and mobile platform-specific programming and technology. To facilitate seamless mobile-to-desktop or any-to-any interaction and communication, a media broker and signaling gateway are

needed to smooth out any protocol or media encoding bumps related to different endpoint implementations.

With the technology pieces in place, the stage is set for enabling a new and exciting platform for customer interaction. Enterprises that are able to make use of multiple media types and communications channels to engage with customers are certain to have the upper hand. Doing so without requiring downloads on the part of the consumer, and delivering a common experience on multiple devices, makes the appeal even stronger. The tools to enable this level of engagement are ready today, and the change in support for plug-ins is a catalyst for change.

With WebRTC on the desktop, combined with mobile apps empowered with in-app video, voice, screen sharing, and more, businesses can begin to deliver the experience that consumers now demand. And it can all be done without the plug-ins that have been in use for so long. The impending changes in major browsers to limit or eliminate plug-ins should not be viewed as a loss of something that is necessary, but rather as a doorway to what is possible.

Sajeel Hussain is vice president of marketing and partner development at CaféX Communications (www.cafex.com).

Omnichannel is More Than a Buzzword

BY JOE SCARTZ

Omnichannel has become the buzzword de jour in retail circles lately, and for good reason – e-commerce pure plays are now trying to do it too. Consumers are always shopping and looking for a way to trade product ideas, compare price, and ultimately make the purchase via whatever medium works best for them, regardless of where they are.

You'll read a lot of different definitions of omnichannel shopping, but generally I define it as a seamless shopping experience where the consumer can move between digital devices, bricks-and-mortar locations, and other outlets like connected kiosks or pop-up stores, and find the same inventory at the same price with the same shopping cart and the same customer service. It's an always on, always available shopping experience facilitated by a single retailer and shopped by consumers across several retailers.

This all started years ago, but the accelerated move to omnichannel has been accentuated by the continued explosive growth in mobile and use of the shopping comparison apps popularized a couple of years ago by Amazon's Price Check App, among others. In effect, the hastened move to omnichannel was forced by showrooming more quickly than it might have been without the in-aisle price-checking phenomenon taking off.

Online retailers (some unauthorized) have continued to undercut the minimum advertised price policies of many manufacturers and sell products at rock bottom prices through various online marketplaces. Retailers have responded to price wars with expanded inventory, price matching, and better in-store and cross-channel experiences. By moving to omnichannel strategies that take advantage of the best of each medium and, of course, by price matching, retailers have been able to slowly fight back against insurgent e-commerce pure plays and this has resulted in, for the first time, some truly integrated omnichannel shopping experiences.

Mobile really enables omnichannel shopping, and Macy's and Best Buy are good examples of this. Macy's is encouraging shoppers to scan its mobile app while in-store for more product information. Macy's is also rolling out touchscreen check out kiosks in-store and running a TV campaign encouraging viewers to download its mobile app. Best Buy famously tore down the showrooming walls this past holiday season by calling its stores a showroom and inviting the process. It has heavily advertised its in-store pick up option through its shopping cart and elsewhere on Bestbuy.com.

Both massive retail chains are looking to engage the customer through personalized shopping experiences, relying heavily on CRM, unique offerings, spruced up bricks, technology utilized within bricks, and consistent pricing and shopping experiences across platforms. Best Buy has also heavily promoted its price guarantee and has quietly rolled out an online marketplace where third-party listers can sell products via Bestbuy.com and increase their inventory without taking the inventory risk.

I recently was interviewed for an article in The Chicago Tribune that dissected the question as to why some online pure-plays were getting more into the business of bricks-and-mortar locations – permanent and pop up. The rationale for these moves by e-tailers is simple: shopping is an always on activity; shoppers expect to be able to find a great price anywhere; shoppers want to be able to browse and explore anywhere; brand awareness; and improved customer service.

In essence, mobile changed the game – first by inviting showrooming into the retail lexicon and second by introducing the masses to another buzzy buzz term – omnichannel. Buzzwords or not, these terms reflect real shifts in behavior and the consumer shopping experience is getting better – fast. M

Joe Scartz is chief marketing officer at Digital BrandWorks (www.digitalbrandworks.com), a Chicago-based digital consultancy that specializes in representing manufacturers in digital marketplaces.

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RFID and Retail: The New Power Couple

For years, the promise of radio frequency identification, or RFID, was just that – a promise. But with the costs associated with tags falling, and the real need for better inventory visibility and control increasing, there is real strength in RFID as a technology and as a business. A strong case in point is retail.

Walmart initially led the way with investments in the supply chain nearly a decade ago – tagging cartons and pallets to speed up distribution. Today, new deployment models being implemented by American Apparel, Lord & Taylor, and others are bringing RFID to the item level and delivering unprecedented visibility to retail inventory, increasing revenues and reducing shrinkage. All of these benefits are vitally important to retailers looking to build profitable businesses in this omnichannel era.

Satisfying Customers the Omnichannel Way

Omnichannel retailing is quickly changing how we view retail stores. Traditional brick-and-mortar retailers need to turn products quicker and facilitate customer engagement across a variety of digital touch points. To do that, they have to know what they have in stock at all times. Now many retailers are taking on expanded roles, functioning not only as a storefront, but also as a shipping fulfillment center. Item-level RFID is helping omnichannel retailers meet the challenges of these new roles and creating competitive advantage in the process.

Macy's is using RFID technology to maintain an accurate inventory of items with the greatest turnover rate in the store. Better inventory accuracy and insight of where those items are located is improving in-stock positions and increasing sales. Other retailers are using the technology in shoe departments to ensure compliancy. You can't sell shoes without a representative sample of stock on the sales floor at all times. In most cases, Macy's found 20-30 percent of shoe samples were not found on the sales floor, eliminating the opportunity to sell those styles. Implementing RFID changes all that, providing product inventory and location data that is up to 99.5 percent accurate.

So, what does a successful omnichannel customer experience look like with RFID? Here's one of many possible scenarios.

On the train during her Friday afternoon commute home, Jessica leafs through the catalog she received in the mail the day before. In it, she finds the perfect sweater to go with the pants she's wearing to a party tonight. Grabbing her smartphone, she visits the store's mobile website to see if the location near her home has the sweater. The store's item-level RFID tagging system provides an accurate inventory status to the website, allowing Jessica to find that her size is available and in stock. She purchases the sweater and arranges to pick it up from the store on her way home. When she arrives, her purchase is waiting; her outfit is complete.

Today's RFID technology improves inventory management, customer transparency of that inventory, and most important, provides accurate product availability data that is vital to sales. According to the American Apparel & Footwear Association, a typical retailer's inventory is only about 65-70 percent accurate – a fact fueling the RFID tipping point for many.

Generating Greater Efficiencies and Control

Inventory accuracy was a catalyst for Macy's RFID initiative, as well as for other global retailers now rolling out the technology. As brick-and-mortar stores become more integral to omnichannel supply chain operations, inventory visibility and management become even more critical. Retailers must meet the expectations of in-store customers who want to find exactly what they want on the sales floor, as well as those customers who want items purchased in-store, at an outlet, on a mobile app, or online shipped directly to their home.

Empowering Customer Transparency

Visibility has always been important to inventory management. But it traditionally involved keeping store associates and management informed of in-store inventory levels – a manual, labor-intensive process that takes days or weeks and many people to accomplish on an annual basis. RFID is changing that paradigm. Not only can the technology drive improvements several orders of magnitude better than current standard methods, but it now offers customers a glimpse into that inventory wherever they shop.

Ensuring Accurate Availability

A customer wants to order a specific item to be picked up at the store. The store's inventory shows two items are available. But are they really? Without RFID, it's hard to tell because that number is likely based on point-of-sale data that may not be accurate or timely. There's no way to ensure the item is actually available. It could be on the shelf, in a dressing room, or may even be in the wrong location. RFID ensures retailers' inventory is accurate, as it helps them count faster, count more frequently, and can provide additional benefits such as accurate product locationing, which in turn gives them the confidence to share that inventory information with their customers for flexible fulfillment. M

Bob Sanders is senior vice president of data capture solutions at Motorola Solutions (www.motorolasolutions.com).

The ROI of Omnichannel RFID

Reduces Out-of-Stocks by 60-80 percent
Improves inventory accuracy up to 99.5 percent
Reduces cycle count time by 75-90 percent
Reduces inventory carrying costs by 30-59 percent
Reduces receiving time by up to 91 percent
Improves conversion rates up to 92 percent
Increases unit transactions by up to 19 percent
Increases sales by 4-21 percent

Where to Begin

Item-level RFID can improve efficiencies and boost sales. Retail deployments are proving it. And many more retailers are testing that proposition. So where should a retailer interested in exploring the technology begin? What questions need to be asked? For starters, it's important to determine what may need visibility.

Out-of-Stocks – Is there a particular department that constantly is out-of-stock or problematic to keep filled?
Complex SKUs – Are there items with multiple styles, sizes, colors, widths, lengths, etc.?
Too Much Stock – Is there a line of goods that has too much back or safety stock?
Compliancy – Is there a department where you have display-only items that an associate must go to the back room to retrieve for a customer or, if sold from the floor, was the only one on display?
Labor-Intensive Area – Is there an area in the store or displays that consistently needs merchandising due to customer activity?
High-Value Area – Is there an area where you must take a manual count on a daily basis?

When considering a pilot, it's important to create a clear vision of the desired solution. The appropriate scope of the project needs to be identified – number of stores, number of departments/items, etc. Setting up performance measurements, along with engaging with all key stakeholders, will ensure the pilot yields actionable data and the buy-in to move forward after success. A controlled environment is critical for implementation to review RFID's performance compared with current non-RFID processes and ultimately determine its ROI.

Proven Business Benefits

In any retail environment, delivering an exceptional customer experience is priority number one. In the omnichannel, that means a consistent customer experience across every channel and at every point of a transaction – from online research and information gathering, to shopping and purchasing, and finally to accurate and timely fulfillment. RFID's unique ability to provide accurate, real-time inventory visibility is key to making sure customers can locate, purchase, and receive what they want, when, and where they want it. With American Apparel, Lord & Taylor, Macy's, and a growing list of others realizing significant value from early deployments, item-level RFID is proving a powerful tool for creating positive experiences and increased satisfaction for customers and building loyalty and sales for retailers.

– Bob Sanders of Motorola Solutions

By Matt McConnell

How The General Found More Time to Coach Agents

With the increasingly competitive auto insurance landscape, providers that offer the lowest rates and deliver quality customer service will prevail. Frontline agents need to be ready for any type of interaction – and need to be able to proactively keep customers from leaving for the next best offer. A great way to ensure agents are always updated on the latest promotions, policies, and product offerings is with individualized coaching and training.

The General, a national auto insurance provider with multiple contact centers and more than 250,000 customers, wanted to improve the efficiency with which it responded to unexpected business events. Occupancy rates were high (85 to 90 percent), and there was little time to pull agents off the floor for training and coaching.

When agents were off the phones and in classroom training, significant additional headcount was required to cover their shifts, which was expensive. Manually scheduling and rescheduling cancelled training time was cumbersome, and bringing at-home agents in to train was both costly and time consuming.

The company needed a better way to deploy critical information such as compliance training, development activities, and other work-related tasks to agents while still providing the highest level of customer service. This meant finding more time to create and deliver training to agents to improve their performance, while at the same time improving overall efficiency in the centers.

The General turned to Intradiem, a provider of intraday management solutions for the contact center, to help improve operational efficiencies, increase the amount of training agents received, and enhance overall agent engagement and satisfaction.

The Solution

The General knew agents wanted and needed more individualized coaching and training; it was a frequent request made through employee satisfaction surveys. But it also wanted a way to certify that agents had completed regulatory training.

To improve training efficiencies, Intradiem intraday task management finds and aggregates slivers of available time and dynamically delivers training sessions directly to the agent desktop. As a result, The General's workforce managers and trainers no longer schedule classroom training sessions. Instead, Intradiem delivers short sessions to agents' desktops during natural downtimes in call volume, which fits in seamlessly with The General's high occupancy environment.

If call volume unexpectedly spikes, agents are returned to answering phones so that service levels are not negatively impacted.

The General tailors and prioritizes training to specific agent and business needs. Additionally, trainers now use time previously spent on the logistics of classroom training to develop new content and administer materials to agents through Intradiem's intraday management solution.

In addition to training and coaching, The General also uses Intradiem for agents to complete other important tasks such as outbound calls or follow-up documentation.

The Results

Since implementing Intradiem, agents at The General have completed an average of eight courses each month compared to the three or four courses per month they were previously able to complete in the classroom. Typical training sessions that used to take 45 minutes or more to complete can now be completed in 20 to 25 minutes, making agents more productive overall and improving transparency into the completion of training.

At-home agent training has greatly increased and is now at the same level as in-office agents.

Within the first 12 months of using Intradiem, unproductive downtime, new hire ramp-up and shrinkage were all dramatically reduced and operational efficiencies improved by 20 percent. The first year return on total investment was 104 percent, with the benefits distributed across the following categories:

- Agent productivity gains – 53 percent
- New hire ramp-up gains – 22 percent
- Operational efficiency gains – 20 percent
- CSR performance gains – 9 percent

Today, trainers at The General have more time to complete critical activities such as follow-up work and coaching. This additional coaching has resulted in dramatic improvements to agent performance as agents now receive the training and updates they want and need to provide an outstanding customer experience.

Additionally, as agents have increased their knowledge and skills, they are more confident in their jobs and more satisfied overall. And as agent engagement and productivity has improved, so has customer service and satisfaction.

Matt McConnell is CEO at Intradiem (www.intradiem.com).

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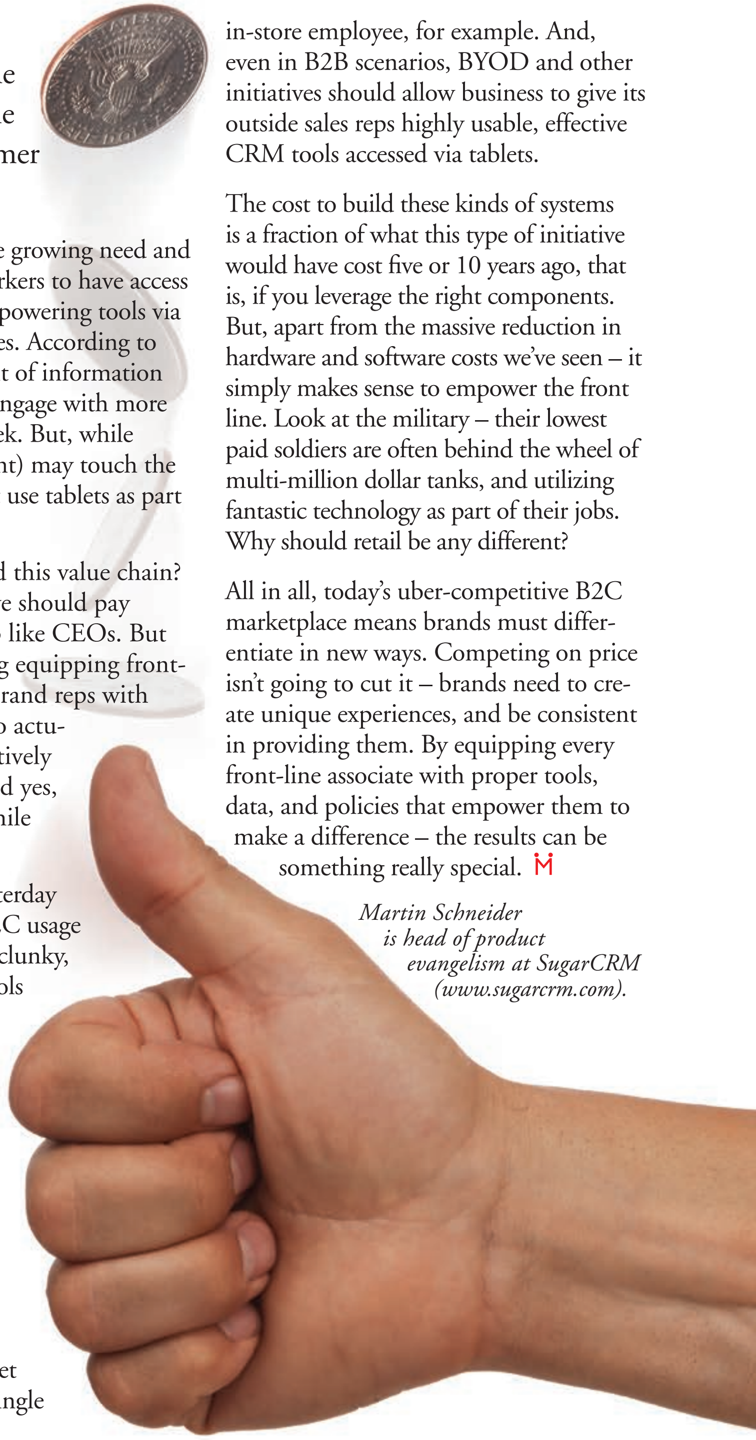
By Martin Schneider

Flipping the B2C Employee Value Chain with CRM

There are countless vendors, analysts, and pundits talking up the concept that we are in the age of the customer. In a lot of ways this is true, but the same technology and social trends that have enabled the customer age are in essence really about individual empowerment.



Think about it, we as individuals can have more of an impact in our world than ever before. So many times, a single action, speech, complaint, etc. – which would have been lost among the crowd years ago – has shined the light on social wrongs, changed global consciousness, and in our industry, wreaked havoc on major brands' marketing departments.

For the past several years, much of the development and attention around this individual empowerment has been focused on customers. The notion of more empowered, educated and connected customers sent shockwaves through both the B2B and B2C universe. And companies (especially B2C brands) bent over backwards to quickly address customers across social and mobile platforms.

And it was right to do so. Customers are individuals, and we should try our best to provide relevant messages, personalized service, etc., as much as possible.

But what about employees – namely, those that touch the customer on a daily basis? What tools have they really been given? As the front line to customer perceptions for many B2C brands, the in-store sales clerk seems to be the lowest on the corporate food chain for a B2C company. Low pay, little recognition, little room for advancement – and usually few tools to actually do the job well.

Some recent survey results from Forrester's Business Technographics Application and Collaboration Workforce Survey, Q4 2013, shed light on the growing need and desire among retail workers to have access to CRM and other empowering tools via tablets or similar devices. According to the research, 44 percent of information workers in retail sales engage with more than 25 people per week. But, while many (nearly 96 percent) may touch the CRM, only 18 percent use tablets as part of their jobs.

But, what if we flipped this value chain? No, I am not saying we should pay in-store part time help like CEOs. But rather, I am advocating equipping front-line customer-facing brand reps with better, modern tools to actually engage more effectively anytime/anywhere (and yes, that means not just while working in store).

The CRM tools of yesterday did not fit well into B2C usage paradigms. They were clunky, unwieldy, expensive tools that could potentially capture data from a point of sale – but not be used as a tool to better equip the employee with information and guidance at the point of interaction. But that is changing.

Today, it is more than possible to make a tablet PC available to every single in-store employee, for example. And, even in B2B scenarios, BYOD and other initiatives should allow business to give its outside sales reps highly usable, effective CRM tools accessed via tablets.

The cost to build these kinds of systems is a fraction of what this type of initiative would have cost five or 10 years ago, that is, if you leverage the right components. But, apart from the massive reduction in hardware and software costs we've seen – it simply makes sense to empower the front line. Look at the military – their lowest paid soldiers are often behind the wheel of multi-million dollar tanks, and utilizing fantastic technology as part of their jobs. Why should retail be any different?

All in all, today's uber-competitive B2C marketplace means brands must differentiate in new ways. Competing on price isn't going to cut it – brands need to create unique experiences, and be consistent in providing them. By equipping every front-line associate with proper tools, data, and policies that empower them to make a difference – the results can be something really special. M

Martin Schneider is head of product evangelism at SugarCRM (www.sugarcrm.com).

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Customer Analytics

This issue's CUSTOMER roundup is about customer analytics. Here are the submissions we received.

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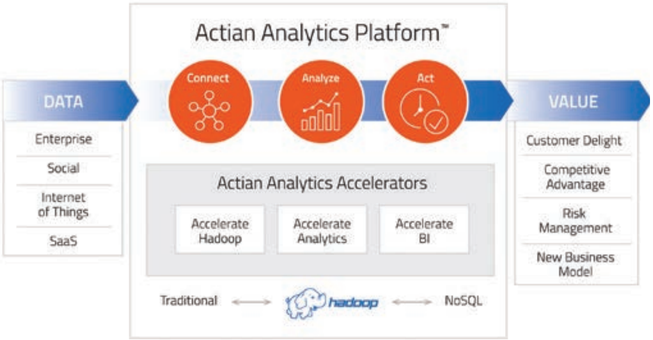
ww.actian.com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The Actian Analytics Platform is purposefully designed to accelerate all of your analytics – from simple queries against historical reports to sophisticated discovery analytics on Hadoop to more complex predictive and contextual analytics. Its 200-plus connectors allow you to connect anything across millions of data sources on premises or in the cloud. With more than 700 mathematical, statistical, data mining and other analytics functions, you can analyze everything with unconstrained analytics across entire ecosystems of data, users, and applications. The platform allows you to automate actions and events with real-time intelligence by embedding operational analytics into your business. Actian also delivers Big Data Analytics Blueprints that are based on real-world customer engagements. These proven building blocks provide starting points for deeper analysis and better accuracy across different industry problems. They deliver validated approaches to foundational issues with stepwise methodology across analytic workflows and advanced analytics across digital and traditional data. Actian's Customer Analytics Blueprints include Customer Profile, Micro-Segmentation, Customer Lifetime Value, Next Best Action, Market Basket Analysis, Campaign Optimization and Churn. The company is headquartered in Silicon Valley and has offices worldwide.

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Aptean Analytics features Business Intelligence dashboards and analytics for a wide range of vertical markets and is powered by the QlikView Business Discovery platform. Aptean Analytics is integrated across Aptean's portfolio of products to provide end-to-end BI for process manufacturing, discrete manufacturing, and financial services. The Aptean Analytics dashboards allow customers to easily spot and resolve issues related to profitability, planning, manufacturing, inventory or sales pipeline. The dashboards can be tailored to fit any user, from sales managers to executives, not just database analysts – delivering data in straightforward charts, tables and other advanced visuals. Aptean Analytics helps drive decisions and execution with the right amount of data provided in the right way.

Aspect Software
www.aspect.com

Aspect's Customer Experience Analytics provides organizations with the ability to understand the dynamics, quality, and outcomes of every interaction, across every channel. Aspect solutions capture and analyze the context and content of interactions that flow between customers and agents through voice recordings, e-mail, text, IM, chat, and other means. Aspect's lineup of Customer Experience solutions include: Aspect Analytics for Speech and Text, Aspect Desktop Analytics, and Post-Interaction Surveys. Aspect Analytics for Speech and Text provides a holistic view into 100 percent of speech and text-based interaction data, unharnessing actionable insights. Aspect Desktop Analytics allows users to learn from every action performed by an agent on a desktop – whether an application is installed on agents' machines or accessed virtually through a browser. Post-Interaction Surveys capture the Voice of the Customer after key interactions through easy-to-deploy engaging web-based and IVR surveys.

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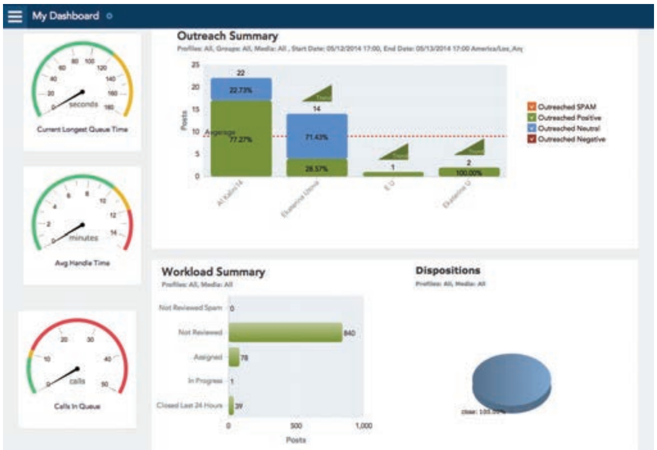
Ericsson
www.ericsson.com

Ericsson in June announced Ericsson Expert Analytics, a big data analytics platform that enables network operators like broadband providers and telephone companies to derive actionable insights from big data and to turn those insights into appropriate actions in real time. Expert Analytics is a fully configurable, horizontal platform that can support a wide variety of use cases for marketing, customer care, operations and network, based on fresh data from network nodes, OSS/BSS, probes, terminals, social media and others sources. Going beyond big data analytics tools themselves, Ericsson has applied its deep network expertise to configure the platform to support a growing list of applications, including customer experience management. For instance, by correlating carefully selected network events with probe data and other metrics, Expert Analytics can identify both symptoms and probable causes of customer experience issues for all individual customers. The platform then exposes these insights to applications such as Ericsson Customer Experience Assurance, which in turn allows customer care to shorten call durations and improve first call resolution, and also enables service operations centers to become more proactive and reduce mean time to repair. Additional Ericsson and third-party applications will support other use cases, such as experience-based marketing, which enriches customer profiles with recent behavior and experience data, leading to superior targeting of marketing offers to individual customers.

Five9 Inc.
www.five9.com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Dispositions
Profiles: All, Media: All

Five9 helps businesses take advantage of secure, reliable, scalable cloud contact center software to create exceptional customer experiences, increase agent productivity and deliver tangible business results. Five9 is a cloud-based solution that integrates voice, social, chat, and e-mail to provide a seamless and intelligent multichannel

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experience. Powered by an innovative layer of technology called Five9 Connect, Five9 understands which requests are important, decides how to prioritize them, and resolves customer problems efficiently. Five9 offers everything needed to run an inbound, outbound, or blended contact center, including an ACD, IVR, automated dialing capabilities, sophisticated management applications with real-time and historical reporting, recording, workforce management, quality monitoring, and pre-built CRM integrations.

Information Builders
www.informationbuilders.com

The WebFOCUS business intelligence platform from Information Builders features extensive business analytics capabilities that allow customers to uncover and understand the patterns and trends in their enterprise data and facilitate faster, smarter planning and decision-making across the organization. WebFOCUS enables customers to utilize the power of predictive analytics to ensure that users of all levels can make decisions based on accurate content, instead of relying on gut instinct alone. WebFOCUS Social Media Analytics is another key part of the Information Builders offering. This solution empowers all stakeholders to perform deep analysis of structured and unstructured information from any source, ensuring that valuable customer data obtained from social channels is properly processed to deliver value. Only Information Builders offers the cutting-edge integration capabilities needed to collect data from social media sites, blogs, and other unstructured sources and seamlessly combine it with data in CRM, sales, marketing automation, and other systems – for the most complete view of customer activity possible.

Intelemedia
www.intelemedia.com

Intelemedia's analytical reporting provides an in-depth picture of sales and customer service within the teleservices environment. These analytical reports incorporate call routing, self-service IVR, queue management, agent level performance, call sourcing

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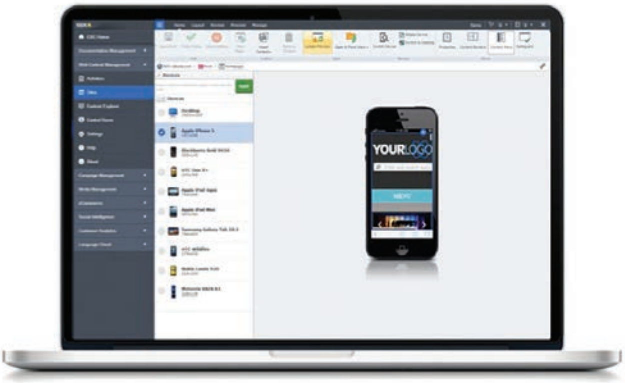
comparisons, volume comparatives, time of day, and more. Intelemedia analytics provide deep actionable insight into how teleservices elements affect key sales and customer service metrics. The end results are improved performance within sales and customer service. Maximum performance improvement requires data beyond traditional, high-level, obvious facts such as number of calls, conversion rates, and abandonment. Clients need deep analytical data and applied insight to understand what is happening and how to improve performance. For example, if average speed to answer seems high and save the sales too low, what is driving this? To address and take action, you need the following comparative information at your fingertips in simple-to-understandable formats: how do the various time interval performances compare, how does call volume map to metrics throughout the day, changes in staffing, are the same quality of agents and call volume to these agents occurring, any volume changes based on the source of calls? This information is critical to determine internal or external elements affecting your environments and what specific actions can be taken to improve performance. Comprehensive analytics are the key to providing actionable solutions.

Monet Software Inc.
www.monetsoftware.com

Monet Analytics, consisting of Speech Analytics and Desktop Analytics, helps contact centers get more insights into customer interactions and internal processes resulting in a better customer experience, high quality of services, and improved customer loyalty. With Monet Speech Analytics, service centers will transform voice data into critical customer intelligence. The system automatically evaluates calls based on key phrases and makes it easy to discover actionable data of customer conversations. It helps them improve agent performance, customer experience, compliance, first call resolution, sales effectiveness, and overall quality of service. Monet Desktop Analytics automatically collects activity and application data and tracks business objects across time and multiple users while comparing key metrics against a defined business workflow. This includes monitoring and measuring performance and tracking work tasks such as sales orders, support issues, claims, work orders, and other customer-related processes throughout your organization. Monet Analytics is fully integrated with Monet's Workforce Optimization suite and delivered as a cloud-based subscription service. Monet's cloud-based WFO platform efficiently and securely delivers web-based applications that are fast to set up, easy to learn, and highly scalable to grow with the customer's needs.

SAS
www.sas.com/en_us/software/customer-intelligence.html



SAS customer analytics solutions help firms make smarter, fact-based customer-centered decisions with insights derived from relevant data, powerful analytics, data visualization, and data management. SAS enables companies to develop more relevant, targeted campaigns using customer analytic techniques – segmentation, propensity, clustering, social network analysis, etc. – to understand customers better than ever. With SAS, companies can predict how customers will act in the future using advanced forecasting and modeling routines to analyze past customer behavior derived from CRM and other corporate data. SAS also helps firms identify which customers are most and least valuable – and why – by calculating churn, customer lifetime value, and profitability. SAS has an extensive suite of integrated enterprise marketing solutions available today including SAS Marketing Automation, SAS Marketing Optimization, SAS Real-Time Decision Manager, SAS Adaptive Customer Experience, SAS Digital Marketing, and SAS Marketing Operations Management. Deployment options for SAS Customer Intelligence solutions include: on-premises, enterprise hosting, and software as a service.

SDL
www.sdl.com

The SDL Customer Experience Cloud packs all the critical elements of customer experience manage-ment into one accessible suite and delivers on SDL's vision that every marketer can meet the expectations of their global customer base and remain connected and responsive throughout the entire buyer journey. The CXC integrates web content management, campaign management, social intelligence and analytics, e-commerce, language solutions and documentation to give companies the power to optimize multi-channel customer experiences from any device, understand brand health and product perception in real time, and nimbly adjust campaign strategies to increase marketing effectiveness and impact revenue – all from a single interface. With more than 1,500 global enterprise customers –

including 72 of the top 100 global brands – and 400 partners, SDL is one of the only vendors with a truly integrated, comprehensive customer experience management offering.

Teradata
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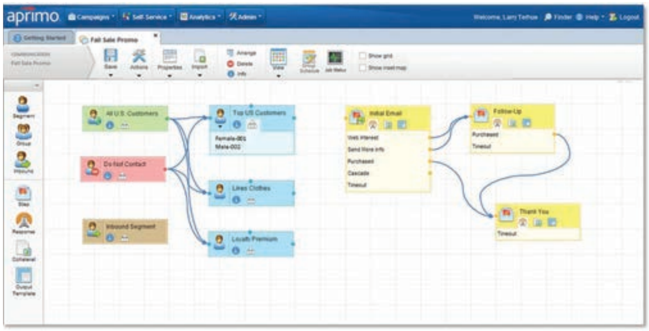
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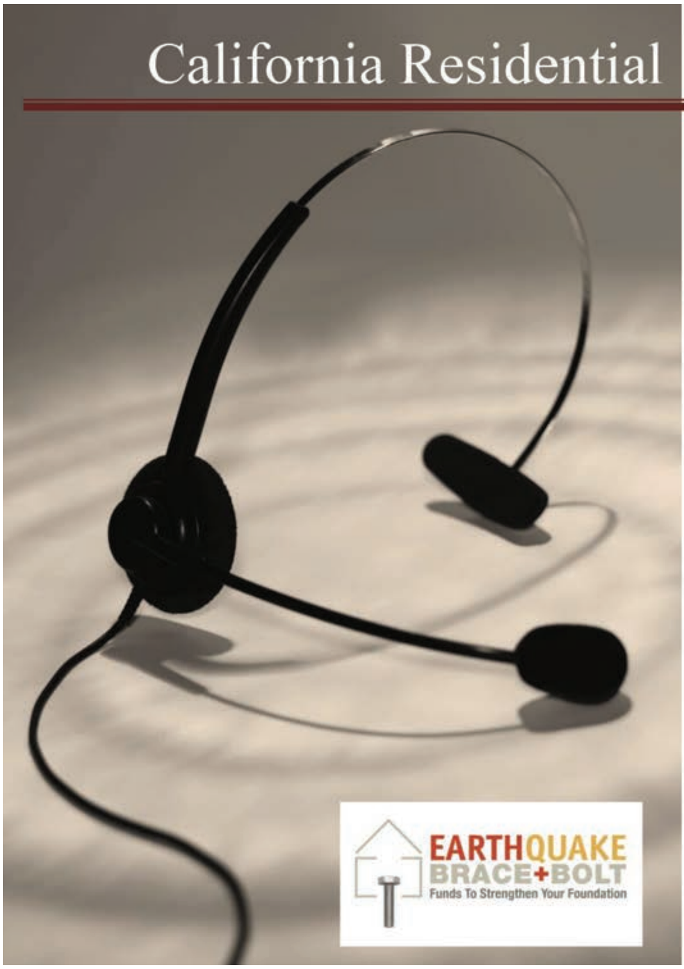
As part of the Teradata Campaign Management solution for marketing departments, Customer Interaction Manager is a comprehensive cloud-based application that helps data-driven marketers derive more insights from their data so they can do more to increase the value of customer relationships, and drive top-line growth. With embedded predictive analytics, the application enables organizations to integrate and analyze customer data and act on data insights to improve customer experience, as well as segment specific audiences, trigger events that lead to relevant, measureable real-time customer engagement, and choreograph multi-channel dialogue across online and/or offline channels. The solution offers various capabilities aimed at improving campaign performance, such as open access to data anywhere on multiple databases and from multiple data sources (such as web, social, lists or call center data), expanded data visualization, mobile-enabled dashboards, integrated digital messaging and personalized landing pages, and enhanced Real-Time Interaction Manager. Appropriate insights are shared across the organization through this cloud-based solution, and contribute to marketing flexibility and agility from strategy to implementation through reporting and analysis. Marketers are enabled to better understand customer behavior and preferences – including knowing which channels or methods are best to use to achieve the most personalized communication. M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The California Residential Mitigation Program (CRMP) seeks a qualified organization that will provide substantial in-bound customer-service call-center service on a 24/7 basis, to answer questions and provide basic information on the Earthquake Brace + Bolt seismic-retrofit-incentive program.

Knowledge and understanding of basic construction terminology are a plus.

See the RFP posted at
www.californiaresidentialmitigationprogram.com
or email questions to
info@calilforniaresidentialmitigationprogram.com.

Refer to CRMP RFP#08-07 in the email subject line.

Responses to the RFP are due by 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time, August 15, 2014.

inContact Buys Uptivity

Workforce optimization leader Uptivity (formerly CallCopy Inc.) has been purchased by inContact for $8.8 million in cash and approximately $37 million in stock. The deal better positions inContact to address the WFO needs of mid-sized contact center organizations, delivering cost-effective access to capabilities such as speech and desktop analytics, agent coaching, call and desktop recording, as well as quality, performance, workforce management and satisfaction surveys.

Mitel Launches Cloud-Based Service

The new MiContact Center Live service from Mitel is a full-featured customer care platform delivered as a service via the cloud. It provides multi-channel support, including WebRTC for real-time chat via the Internet and popular social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter as well as traditional customer service channels such as phone, e-mail and SMS text messaging. The service is available immediately in the U.S., with plans to launch in select countries over the next 12 months.

Pontis Unveils Solution for CSPs

Pontis Ltd. has launched a contextual analytics, engagement and execution solution that promises to increase mobile data service adoption, open new monetization opportunities with OTT partners, and optimize customers' service experience. It does so by building a data profile of each customer to allow service providers to engage with each of those customers in a personalized manner. Services can leverage the solution to formulate and deliver specialized customer engagement, product activation and price plans, and to apply dynamic network policies such as zero-rate data.

AireSpring Intros Cloud Contact Center

AireContact is a new cloud-based contact center solution from AireSpring, which recently acquired hosted contact center provider simplyCT. AireContact enables companies to customize their configurations and capabilities to support campus environments and remote offices, as well as residential locations.

Adform Closes $5.5M Funding Round

Adform, an ad tech partner for media agencies, trading desks, advertisers and publishers, has raised $5.5 million in a Series B funding round from new Via Venture Partners. The money will be used to expand the company's Brand-Led Media Platform into the U.S., with sales efforts supported out of Adform's Los Angeles and New York City offices. Adform has been a profitable business for 12 consecutive years.

Latest Progress Easyl Integrates Data

The new version of Easyl from Progress integrates data from both on-premises and cloud-based systems such as CRM, marketing automation, and SaaS-based applications. It presents data such as customer lists, lead flows, and sales information from these disparate systems via a single pane of glass.

Pegasystems Releases Updated Sales Platform

The latest release of the Pegasystems Sales Force Automation solution, Pega SFA, provides organizations with the ability to manage complex multi-step sales processes, reduce sales cycle times, and increase pipeline generation. The system can dynamically suggest to sales staff the best actions to move a deal from prospecting to close, and recommend the best products to sell a contact to increase revenue and build loyalty.

Spoken Uses Silent Guides

The new Spoken Smart IVR for 411 is a patented solution that uses what Spoken Communications refers to as silent guides to increase the efficiency of IVR automation. When the automated speech recognition engine doesn't understand a caller comment, that comment is flagged for correction while the call flow continues without pause. As a result, the company says, directory assistance providers can answer more calls with fewer live agents while improving accuracy and the customer experience.

LiveContext 2.0 Helps Transform Online Stores

CoreMedia's digital engagement application LiveContext 2.0, which gives organizations greater creative freedom in how they visually present and augment their online stores, is now integrated with IBM WebSphere Commerce. Glenn Conradt, vice president of global marketing at CoreMedia, comments: "By integrating with IBM WebSphere Commerce, we are providing the necessary tools to ensure businesses can build a strong emotional connection to their customers while delivering an intimate shopping experience."

Marketing Insight Firm Picks MapR

DataSong, a company specializing in customer insights for marketing purposes, has selected the MapR Distribution for Hadoop for its central data hub. That hub provides marketing effectiveness solutions to leading omni-channel retailers, including Williams-Sonoma and Neiman Marcus. "MapR is our data store for everything," said John Wallace, CEO of DataSong. "It's our data processing and analytical engine, the main file system, the utility, the hub of everything for our business."

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*

WebRTC Expo IV Final Thoughts

As I am writing this, the WebRTC Expo IV has just wrapped up in Atlanta, so I wanted to share a few thoughts regarding the state of WebRTC and its future.

Based on what I saw in Atlanta, I would say the buzz around WebRTC is at least as strong as it has been, if not stronger. But it's a different buzz in some ways. Initially, the noise came from startup companies looking for an opportunity for greatness. It made sense, and it created the momentum to kick-start the WebRTC community and introduce it to the world.

But, the real use cases weren't there at the outset. The possibilities were almost endless, but doubters remained, and businesses have (rightfully) become hesitant to spend on technology that doesn't have proven value or that isn't required to solve a pressing need.

That's where this year's show significantly differentiated itself from previous editions. Between the conference sessions (particularly the special focus areas), keynotes, and exhibits, evidence was plentiful that businesses are starting to leverage WebRTC within their communications infrastructures – taking advantage of the browser-based medium to create differentiating value for their customers. As expected, many of these use cases are in the health care and contact center industries, and Avaya's Val Matula believes many businesses will seek to use WebRTC to create real-time customer satisfaction feedback tools.

Dialogic CEO Kevin Cook, whose company has more than 90 WebRTC-related engagements in progress, says that success is being driven by the community's ability to make WebRTC "business useful." In other words, finding ways to implement WebRTC to solve business problems is the path to success. In fact, Dialogic itself is using WebRTC for its internal conferencing calls.

From the beginning, there have been two WebRTC camps – those who see WebRTC taking over the world of communications, and those who see it as another complementary tool in the communications toolbox. Phil Edholm's comments ahead of Cook's keynote make it clear he is in the former, and sees WebRTC as a surfer waiting for that one huge wave.

Based on what I saw and heard in Atlanta, I sense something less dramatic taking place, which is an increase in real deployments, but with little noise. Businesses are adding WebRTC capabilities where they help solve real problems, but they aren't necessarily making a big fuss about it. Rather, many customer service enhancements are simply implemented with the idea that by simply eliminating problem areas, satisfaction will increase. On the other hand, by drawing attention to their implementations, businesses open themselves up for criticism. Better to simply deliver a positive customer experience.

The wave that does seem to have emerged, however, is the growth of WebRTC support from traditional vendors such as AudioCodes, Avaya, BroadSoft, Dialogic, GENBAND, Huawei, Ingate, Sansay, and Oracle – all of which had a presence at WebRTC IV alongside the more WebRTC-centric vendors. What it means is WebRTC is real and must be acknowledged and supported.

At the show, that acknowledgement came at the WebRTC Pioneers dinner, where many of the innovators and thought leaders that have helped bring WebRTC from concept to reality came together. The most integral part of that process, and also WebRTC Pioneer Award recipient, Serge Lachapelle, headlined the Wednesday keynoters, with a brilliant recollection of the process he and his team have gone through to make WebRTC "just work" – to use a phrase that was heard over and over at this week's conference.

Judging from the Atlanta show and the excitement already growing for the San Jose edition planned for Nov. 18 through 20, 2014, growth will continue. Support will grow, and implementations will increase, not only in number but also breadth of use cases.

What is not, however, likely, is major change. We're not going to see new standards or support from Microsoft or Apple, each of whom already have successful video platforms widely adopted by their users. WebRTC will continue to be a B2C and, perhaps, B2B in some cases, technology. The C2C interactions will continue to use FaceTime and Skype and WhatsApp for the foreseeable future.

I look forward to even more exciting implementation stories in San Jose at WebRTC Expo V.

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