

WIN! WIN! WIN! THE CLOUD CONTACT CENTER HAS SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY

While cloud solutions appeal to IT and the center, there is also an obvious appeal to the corporation overall.

By Brian Hinton, Strategic Contact

CONTACT CENTER OPERATIONS has long been interested in cloud contact center solutions to compensate for scarce IT resources and to pursue enhanced contact center technology. As cloud solution providers have expanded the features/functions, architecture choices and services provided, there truly is something for everybody. Contact center management, contact center support, and IT in centers of all sizes find the value proposition of cloud solutions worth considering.



Brian Hinton
Strategic Contact

IT Finds Peace in the Cloud

IT supports a complex environment that has been built to address business needs. They face high demands to ensure stability, reliability and resiliency while continuing to meet the feature/function challenges from the contact center. Most organizations have some experience with cloud solutions, so IT is comfortable considering the cloud as an option for the contact center.

IT resource constraints are the “tipping point” to bring a discussion of cloud computing to the fore. Most IT departments struggle to retain the right resources with the right expertise or can’t afford the focused, trained resources required for specific vendor’s products and other applications and solutions. Add the requirements for day-to-day maintenance and you end up with technology support processes that tend to be reactive rather than proactive, with little time for optimization. IT is often only staffed to fight fires or address the greatest pain points.

The contact center’s complex, mission-critical environment demands reliable networks, systems and applications that deliver needed features. The support system must include:

- Effective testing and monitoring tools for proactive problem identification and faster issue resolution
- Trained, dedicated resources that are specialists on mission-critical systems and applications
- Formal, documented processes for troubleshooting and reporting
- Detailed knowledge of contact center processes and systems
- Specific experience with each contact center application
- A focus on service excellence with accountability for service level agreements (SLAs) established between IT and the contact center

Given these requirements and the IT staffing gap, a cloud solution can surpass a premise solution in many respects. Cloud contact center vendors typically provide advanced, intelligent monitoring of all their applications. They offer trained, dedicated resources that can provide 24/7 support. They proactively manage all aspects of the technology. In some cases, they can offer a more secure data environment than the company can achieve internally. They will commit to performance standards and response times when required by contract. Last, but not least, the cloud vendor’s multiple data centers and “anywhere” technology can deliver effective business continuity and disaster recovery—something many centers lack but know they need.

Using a cloud contact center solution frees IT to focus on the most pressing enterprise issues where they can add the most value. Businesses face issues such as “bring your own device,” mobility, infrastructure demands and required upgrades, enterprise solutions like data warehouses for “big data,” and analytics. IT is crucial for success. By moving to a cloud contact center solution, IT’s limited time is focused where it really matters. And besides, the contact center wants more control over its own environment anyway. In today’s world, IT is generally willing to give it.

Operations Gains Control Via the Cloud

Contact centers support an equally complex environment in which the quality of customer support is heavily dependent upon effective use of technology. With long “to do” lists and limited staff to complete the tasks, centers find themselves behind the power curve on deploying new applications and hamstrung in leveraging existing ones.

Cloud vendors offer state-of-the-art contact center solutions. Large centers get advanced conditional routing based on customer data and business rules to reach the most highly skilled agent and to determine appropriate scripts and cross/upsell offers. They also get fully integrated performance management suites that feed analytics, scorecards and dashboards. Smaller centers get skills-based, multimedia routing, and fully featured performance management tools such as QM, WFM and reporting/analytics.

Besides meeting demands for advanced functionality, cloud contact center solutions provide a high degree of flexibility in implementation. Cloud solutions are cost effective for varied contact volume; centers pay for the licenses they use and can add or subtract when needed. Cloud solutions free contact centers from any location constraints enabling multisite virtual visibility and remote agents—not to mention disaster recovery. The “on/off” ability of cloud solutions enables contact centers to pilot new applications with minimal financial risk. And the technology stays current without struggling to find the funds and resources for upgrades or new releases.

Cloud contact center vendors minimize IT resource requirements by providing the required technology support. They have the responsibility to optimize the technology environment for reliability and resiliency. They are motivated to establish a strong working relationship with the contact center to optimize the use of technology. They’ve developed processes to deliver simpler solutions with faster implementations initially and when adding functionality. Vendors are also motivated to offer responsive ongoing support to retain their customers and grow their business.

GETTING THE “CLOUD” VALUE

Getting the “cloud” value is subject to selecting the right vendor and defining proper SLA commitments. You need a vendor that takes the benefits of the cloud contact center seriously. Look for the following requirements:

- Baseline technology offered should include multimedia routing and reporting, IVR and call recording
- Specialty in contact center and cloud technology
- Up-to-date platforms with the latest versions and releases
- Architecture that supports redundancy, resiliency and security
- Geographically diverse data centers
- Monitoring and testing tools for problem identification and resolution
- Standard, documented processes for problem resolution and reporting
- 24/7 experienced and knowledgeable support staff
- Accountability to detailed SLAs

Contact Center Support Gets the Tools They Need from the Cloud

Resources that support the contact center, such as workforce and reporting analysts, quality monitors, trainers, real-time monitors, technology administrators, etc., can be limited by the available tools. Support staff continually struggle to provide contact center management with the data and analytics they need to manage effectively. Manual processes and reports drive inefficient and ineffective support. Cloud contact center solutions solve these problems by providing tools with the right performance management capabilities, such as reports, QM and WFM.

Cloud contact center solutions offer integrated reporting, typically offered through user-friendly, web interfaces. Basic offerings start with canned ACD reports with limited customization. More advanced solutions offer integrated analytics with tools such as speech analytics. The right vendor with effective integration can offer reporting and analytics functionality equal to a premise solution.

The cloud contact center solutions put more administrative ability into the hands of the contact center support resources for routing changes, adding, and deleting users, etc. The user-friendly administrative graphical user interfaces (GUIs) enable effective management without relying on IT for day-to-day changes. Additionally, when vendor support is required, the contact center can have direct access to responsive and knowledgeable vendor support resources.

Size Doesn't Matter

While different sized centers may have varied motivation for their interest in cloud solutions, there is value for centers of all sizes.

Cloud contact center vendors can deliver the support expertise small centers often lack internally. Even with effective and knowledgeable resources available, small centers typically can't do everything at once so a cloud solution makes it easier to add functions over time. Vendors that cater to very small centers may still have limits in their offerings, but options abound. Proper due diligence will lead to the right vendor.

Medium-sized centers with several hundred agents are ready for more functionality but may not have access to capital funds for premise solutions. Cloud contact center solutions enable these centers to move forward, adding functionality as required using operations budget.

Large centers need the most advanced functionality available in the market but struggle with budget and resource constraints. The pay-as-you-use benefit of cloud solutions benefits the large centers as much as the others.

The Whole Business Wins

While cloud contact center solutions appeal to IT and the contact center, there is also an obvious appeal to the corporation overall. Most businesses struggle to achieve their goals concerning data security and BC/DR. Cloud contact center solutions can take that burden off IT and help the enterprise achieve these goals. Cloud vendors can take advantage of economies of scale and offer advanced capabilities that benefit all users.

Most businesses want to meet the funding requirements of every department, but simply cannot. Priorities have to be established and funding decisions made based on those priorities. Cloud contact center solutions free the tight capital investment dollars for other priorities. Cloud contact center solutions allow for advanced functionality that meets strategic needs even with funding constraints. The contact center technology then offers the flexibility to grow or reduce licensing with business changes.

There Is a “Right” Solution and a “Right” Time for You

It is time to consider cloud-based solutions. Centers that are unable to meet all their proactive and reactive needs, or perhaps hindered by aging systems (e.g., end of life, end of support) and upgrade delays due to limited capital availability should push for this option. The cloud solution will respond to cost concerns, fast time to value requirements, functional needs and agility requirements.

Select a vendor with a view for the long term. Make sure that the vendor you choose provides contact center technology leadership. Consider the architecture of the proposed solution and the suite of capabilities they offer. Explore the range of support that may include BC/DR, managed services, proactive monitoring and testing, and detailed service level options and SLAs. Review the amount of user control through configurable interfaces, the ability to integrate, data ownership and data security. Take the time to consider the needs of IT, the front line, and management and support. Chances are you will find a solution that results in a “win” for all. 

Brian Hinton is the Principal Consultant for Strategic Contact.

✉ brian@strategiccontact.com

☎ (706) 310-0544

MANAGED SERVICES CAN SOLVE RESOURCES CONSTRAINTS

A managed service can solve many of the funding, control, and resource constraint issues facing IT and contact centers. In a managed service, a third party provides maintenance, management and administration. There are several managed service options, including:

- **Hardware/software support and maintenance:** This option is appealing to IT as it frees resources from the basic day-to-day maintenance to focus on more advanced requirements. The hardware can be located in the hosted vendor's data center, at a managed services data center, or even your own data center.
- **Break/fix:** The managed service provider has remote access to the contact center systems and applications. It provides proactive monitoring to reduce problems and time to resolution when problems occur.
- **Ongoing configuration/MACs:** The managed service solves the problem of limited resources to perform technology user administration such as moves, adds and changes. The managed service can be set up with committed response times and service fees.
- **Full Managed Service:** A managed service vendor can provide all of the functions described.

About Contact Center Pipeline

Contact Center Pipeline is a monthly instructional journal focused on driving business success through effective contact center direction and decisions. Each issue contains informative articles, case studies, best practices, research and coverage of trends that impact the customer experience. Our writers and contributors are well-known industry experts with a unique understanding of how to optimize resources and maximize the value the organization provides to its customers.

To learn more, visit: www.contactcenterpipeline.com



Online Resource

This issue is available online at: [Dec 2012, Contact Center Pipeline](http://www.contactcenterpipeline.com/CcpViewIndex.aspx?PubType=2)

<http://www.contactcenterpipeline.com/CcpViewIndex.aspx?PubType=2>