Contact Center Managers' Roadmap to the Future in the Cloud

The growing trend of contact center solutions moving to the cloud has been a boon for improved customer experience, greater workforce efficiency, and increased business flexibility. The opportunity to deploy new features fast, scale up or down to meet business needs, and deploy agents all over the world (not just in a contact center) has increased the potential for benefit to both business and customers.

The explosion of new channels and mobile-connected customers has created the need for omnichannel engagement, a customer experience characterized by seamless transitions between touchpoints and contextual information informing each interaction.

The future of the contact center in the cloud demands recognition that even more advances are on the way. To stay ahead of customers' growing demand for connection, managers need to understand what's coming and embrace the platforms and solutions that will support the interconnected future. Only then will they be able to compete aggressively in a modern business environment.

This white paper looks at current trends and outlook for the future, with recommendations for how contact center managers can prepare for what's coming.

Letting Go of the Past

Much of the thinking around customer engagement is stuck in the past, where the contact center has been thought of as place from which agents respond to customers, rather than as a capability or framework, for customer interactions. More limiting, companies have traditionally viewed their contact center as a cost center, rather than as an opportunity center filled with promise and tools for building customer loyalty, growing revenues (through up-sells and cross-sells), and besting competitors by delivering superior customer experiences. Contact centers have also been traditionally voice-only, yet the advent of numerous new channels has changed the methods by which companies typically connect with their customers.

The future roadmap for contact centers involves use of a very different framework, with consumers increasingly connecting on mobile devices and supported by agent groups who are distributed globally, rather than centralized in a physical contact center. Support might also come in the form of crowdsourcing, where other consumers provide service, information and resolutions to certain issues. Customer engagement will span multiple touchpoints and technologies, often at the same time (multimodal), to connect people to the resources they need during all the journeys during the lifecycle of their vendor relationship. The use of the landline telephone has already declined by 12% in 2015, compared with all of the other interaction types handled by contact center[1], including web, mobile, social, self-service, and other tools.

In the future, the contact center plays a bigger role in supporting marketing campaigns and sales initiatives, rather than simply providing after sale customer service. The competitive differences among companies can be measured in prices, products and market share and also in customer experience, something more than 82% of companies recognize today.[1]

Since an alternate vendor is only a click away in this always-connected digital world, the goal is to deliver a level of automated customer engagement that is both personalized for the customer and highly efficient for the business.
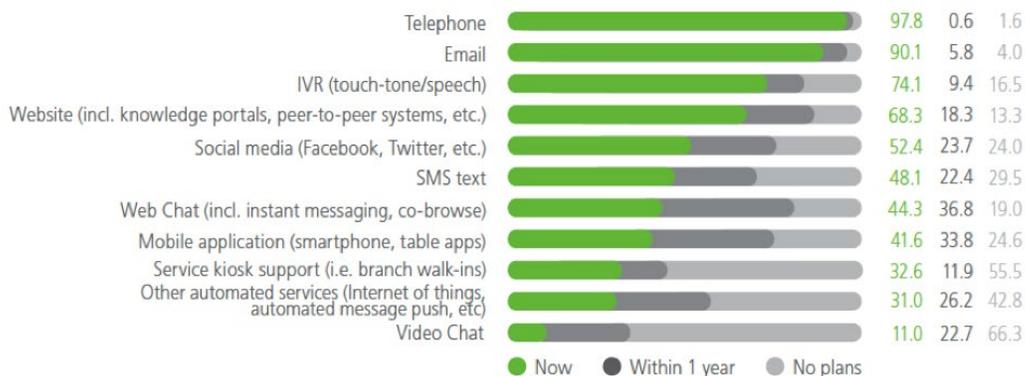
Embracing the Future of Customer Engagement

Today's customers are more internet- and mobile-savvy, more informed and socially aware, and as a result they are seeking to use all the new channels at their disposal to communicate. Their connections with friends and family are facilitated through these new channels, and they expect and prefer to choose similar means for connecting with their vendors and product and service providers.

Contact centers are struggling to keep up with these new and different paths. While most support telephone and email, there is currently less support for other channels—and no plans by contact centers for implementing them anytime soon.

Common services supported, now and in the future
Dimension Data—2016 Global Contact Center Benchmarking Report

| Channel	Now	Within 1 year	No plans
Telephone	97.8	0.6	1.6
Email	90.1	5.8	4.0
IVR (touch-tone/speech)	74.1	9.4	16.5
Website (incl. knowledge portals, peer-to-peer systems, etc.)	68.3	18.3	13.3
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	52.4	23.7	24.0
SMS text	48.1	22.4	29.5
Web Chat (incl. instant messaging, co-browse)	44.3	36.8	19.0
Mobile application (smartphone, table apps)	41.6	33.8	24.6
Service kiosk support (i.e. branch walk-ins)	32.6	11.9	55.5
Other automated services (Internet of things, automated message push, etc)	31.0	26.2	42.8
Video Chat	11.0	22.7	66.3

Rather than treating each channel as a silo, with separate technology and skills to support, the best strategy is an integrated approach, where the customer journey becomes the central focus, and agents are equipped with a unified view into the various channels through which they communicate. One important thing to remember is that people don't naturally think in terms of channels. Their analogue is interacting with friends and family, where they switch channels between mobile, social, chat, web, email and messaging, never having to start a conversation over. Context between channels is always carried across, and the concept of continuity in the conversation applies regardless of the chosen path. Consumers want the same experience when interacting with businesses.

Evolving Voice Capabilities

The bastion of stability for contact centers, inbound voice, is still the most commonly supported channel (more than 97%, according to Dimension Data).[1] But today, even voice is changing. No longer is the contact center simply a bank of phones and agents receiving support calls from consumers. Customers are using new channels, using self-service more than ever, and leveraging technologies like Skype and callback along with crowdsourced support to improve communications, get faster results, and lower friction during their journeys.

It's all about making the connection easily and fast, like Skype for Business (formerly Lync) from Microsoft, which offers new unified communications and integrates instant messaging, voice and video calls, and online meetings.
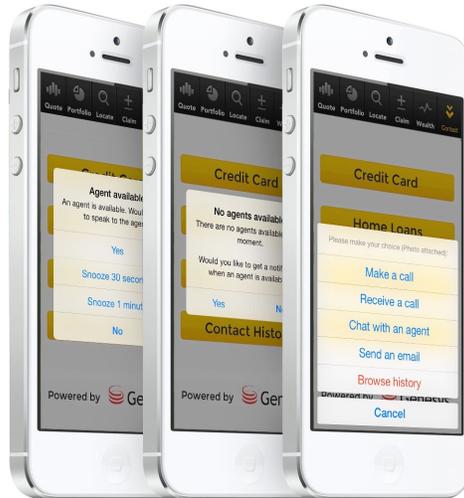
With the spread of peer-to-peer messaging services and the growth of Skype, more crowdsourced support will take place and self-service will becoming increasingly important to reducing both customer effort and support costs. According to Frost & Sullivan, in 2016, over 60% of all customer interactions will be fully automated, illustrating the level of investment companies are making in self-service technologies.

Callback capabilities are another important extension of voice, providing an alternative tool for customers to use in reaching the contact center. In cases where an agent might not be available immediately, callback allows the customer to specify when they'd like an agent to get back to them—typically as soon as an agent is available, or alternatively at an appointed time more convenient to the customer. Contact centers used to use metrics such as average hold time to gauge the potential unhappiness of customers being ignored. With modern technology like Skype and callback to facilitate presence and convenience features, contact centers can instead turn to measuring more important satisfaction and loyalty metrics, such as Net Promoter Score (NPS) or Customer Effort.

Mobility is Mandatory

It's hard to dispute that everything has gone mobile. Look at your airline travel, where chances are, you use a mobile app instead of a printed boarding pass. Or consider how much of your shopping and purchase research takes place on your mobile device. Forrester says that by 2018, mobile commerce will account for more than 50% of all eCommerce.[3]

Vendors' ability to anticipate needs and consumers' expectation for more seamless and effortless vendor connections through their mobile devices continues to evolve and grow. Consider how information from traffic apps is derived from automated crowdsourcing, leveraging the location and speed of other app users. Notice how suggestions offered by apps like Facebook or Google are related to things you've previously expressed interest in or somehow been involved with.

Companies are increasing the availability and quality of mobile apps, with mobile offerings up 61%, year over year.[1] Every mobile app should have an ability to connect customers directly with the vendor involved to get assistance, facilitate a purchase, chat, email, or call in a question. When they detect or expect service disruptions, product unavailability, or change in delivery schedule, vendors should ensure the customer receives a push notification or text message. Their location, presence, and activity (like what product they were shopping for) are things that customers shouldn't have to repeat, because they expect vendors to know already. Consumers understand these inherent capabilities of the mobile device and its apps.
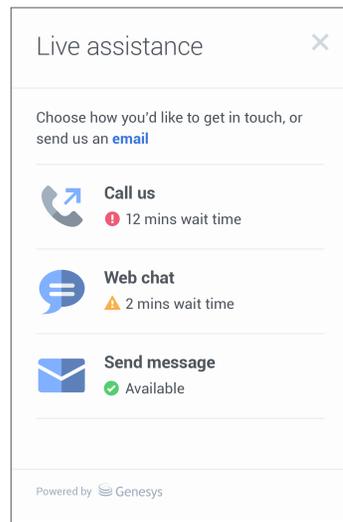
Today's contact center must systematically and regularly adopt technology that facilitates close connection with customers in both B2C and B2B relationships. Companies not able to connect by all the different mobile channels—chat, mobile callback, proactive text or push—can't connect with customers when most needed, leaving the door open for competitors.

It's truly a mobile-first, cloud-first world in an ever growing number of industries.

Web of Opportunity

Virtually all companies today maintain a comprehensive website as well as provide interaction capabilities on the web for their customers. This could mean offering opportunity to purchase or order products and services or simply the ability to view account information or confirm shipping dates.

The web's changing. Interface technologies such as HTML5 and expanded JavaScript libraries enable companies to deliver a richer web experience, including video and other animations, to deliver a more engaging online encounter. Regardless of the visuals or the mechanics, however, customers rely on a company's web presence as a point of interaction for service and support needs.

Live assistance ✕

Choose how you'd like to get in touch, or send us an **email**

Call us
🔴 12 mins wait time

Web chat
⚠️ 2 mins wait time

Send message
✅ Available

Powered by Genesys

Web chat has increasingly become a preferred channel for customers to connect quickly with someone knowledgeable for assistance. Companies that provide this capability appear infinitely more responsive to customers than those that don't, and gain a significant competitive edge. Co-browse is another technology that contact centers can use to assist agents in providing service. It lets agents see what the customer sees in their browser, for example, when filling out forms or providing technical support.

Web Real-time Communications (WebRTC) is an open source technology by Google that provides another tool for service and support over the web. Widely supported by most browsers, WebRTC enables applications for voice calling, video chat, and file sharing over the internet, without the need for browser plug-ins, which can cause stability and performance problems.

The Social Spectrum

Most people view social networks as a way to connect with friends, family, and business associates. To contact centers, however, they are a great tool to gauge customer sentiment, intercept support and sales opportunities, and drive customer loyalty. Research done in collaboration with web and mobile application company Pinterest found that 87% of their users decided on products to buy because of things they'd seen on the social network.[3]

Social networks and interactions live in the cloud. As a result, activities such as monitoring streams of social media commentary, analyzing attitudes that affect your brand, and even engaging with customers through direct response are easy to accomplish with the right tools. Contact centers that choose to make social media a top channel choice by 2017 are expected to increase to 76%, according to Dimension Data.[1]

Even when contact centers don't set up these channels, social media is now a primary venue for crowdsourced support, recommendations, referrals and ratings. Why not take advantage of the consumer interest and incorporate them into your offerings? Companies that fail to connect with their crowd miss a huge opportunity to build their brand and grow loyalty.

One promising new application you'll likely see more of is the use of chatbots, designed to employ artificial intelligence in providing machine-driven customer support conversations, often through social media messaging systems. Facebook introduced a chatbot capability that uses natural language processing and machine learning to automate support for customers with business accounts. By integrating with Facebook identity, chatbots reduce customer effort by automatically verifying personal information and transferring information by hyperlinks and rich media (like video) rather than through voice translation. This technology offers

opportunity to improve the content center customer experience by removing the negative experience of being transferred. If another agent needs to connect, it can happen seamlessly in the background.

These capabilities related to reducing effort, verifying identity, eliminating transfers, and delivering better information are possible through integrated contact center systems and agent desktops. To prepare for the interconnected future, it's crucial to engage today with your customers on social networks, including monitoring, analytics and direct support.

The Thing About IoT (Internet of Things)

Contact centers are about to be immersed in a sea of activity, and they need to prepare today. The Internet of Things (IoT) is a framework by which devices of all kinds, shapes, and sizes are connected wirelessly to the cloud and equipped with electronics, software, and sensors to report status and performance metrics through web services.

The contact center will be increasingly involved as greater numbers of consumers and businesses take advantage of these new ways of managing the monitoring, collecting, and reporting of information. Here's a short list of examples:

- Vending machines reporting inventory levels and ambient temperature so that re-order points are managed intelligently
- Medical devices triggering automatic dosage changes for medications, based on health monitoring and updated prescription notifications from connected physicians
- Retailers triggering coupons when they see that a customer is shopping online or in-store to ensure a sale and happy customer
- Appliances notifying homeowners of new faults, automatically scheduling repair services

With upwards of 50 billion connected devices by 2020, according to Cisco and Intel, the contact center will be at the core of this information flow.[5] Customers will need to be notified and engaged around the decision points triggered by all those "things." Cloud storage is perfect to accommodate the massive volume of information, which will need to be maintained, filtered, and acted upon. Having proactive notification and multichannel systems in place is a precursor to this explosion of information and activity in the cloud.

The New Era of Employee Engagement

As customers find ways to connect with companies through new channels, so too must their employees be equipped for new ways to interact. Agents need new skills to manage the customer lifecycle. Employee engagement software and cloud solutions improve the efficiency and quality of customer response and task management and also help with coaching and analytics. The end game is not only to improve the efficiency of the contact center, but also to improve the work environment and job satisfaction of contact center agents.

As more information is collected through the course of each journey, the more automated and less random the interactions within those journeys should be, and customers know it. They are demanding more efficiency from their vendor relationships, which contact centers can offer through increased personalization.

Contact center staff skills must evolve to satisfy new expectations. By continuously optimizing your workforce by means of planning and task management, employee recording, quality management and training, you can more efficiently and completely leverage the talent you employ.

Anticipation Means Analytics

The holy grail in the contact center is anticipating customer needs to the point that effortless engagement and proactive communications are realized. Personalization is the key to this contact center grail and personalization requires advanced analytics. Today, we have more tools than ever before to analyze journeys across the customer lifecycle. These lead to improved automation and optimized customer experiences.

The more you know about customers and how they engage with your business, the more such personalization can be increased to reduce customer and agent effort, as well as meet performance expectations. By analyzing interactions, engagement levels, routing efficiency, agent activity, and related metrics, contact center managers can maximize productivity, boost customer satisfaction scores, and make an even greater impact on the business.

Predictive analytics can be most valuable, helping to drive broader process and policy decisions based on what customers are likely to need. This type of analysis employs multiple techniques to make predictions about likely future events, based on evaluating past data. Strayer University applies predictive analytics to enhance student behavior and engagement. In a pilot using predictive analytics to initiate faculty outreach, they found that attendance of at-risk Strayer students increased by 5%, their course drop rate decreased by 8%, and their course success improved by 12%.[6]

Machine learning is adding to the effectiveness of analytics, as evidenced by products such as IBM Watson. Watson adds a cloud-based advisor to traditional contact center touchpoints, learning from historical interactions and providing new insights for both self-service and agent-assisted service. Companies are starting to incorporate these systems into contact center solutions to deliver new intelligent customer engagement solutions.

Business Optimization and the Rise of the Machines

The term cloud has entered the vernacular for many scenarios and applications. It's a new spin on what we call the internet of connected systems and hosted applications, with some evolved architectural improvements. While the internet is about connecting computers, the cloud is about connecting services, specifically, delivering software platforms as a service. Ultimately, for the cloud to be successful, people must trust the security, integrity, and regulatory compliance of data storage and applications. The high availability of systems must ensure that information and applications are as reliable as (or even more than) utilities like electricity or television programming.

The immense investments made by many companies to provide cloud infrastructure and software as a service (SaaS) now includes data centers spread around the world, providing disaster recovery across regions, and global accessibility of systems and data. These capabilities mean that businesses today are unencumbered by geopolitical boundaries, languages, or physical constraints. They can provide customer service wherever and whenever needed, scaled up or down to match special campaigns, bursts of demand, or seasonal variations. No longer limited to the machines under their own care in their own data centers, companies can rely on the machines in the cloud, a massively growing infrastructure of capabilities and services designed to meet the needs of every industry in every country across the globe.

In the spectrum of adoption, much has been made about the merits of public versus private clouds or a hybrid of cloud and on-premises data storage and functionality. While the perception used to be that the public cloud was somehow less secure or dependable, the caliber of companies delivering public cloud services now includes the likes of Amazon, Microsoft, Google, and other technology leaders. More and more, companies are trusting the public cloud, with 88% in a recent survey from RightScale stating that they've started adoption of the public cloud in some form or another.[2] Many contact center vendors today utilize

infrastructure components from these public cloud technology leaders to help ensure the reliability and scalability of their specific applications. Cloud in some form is quickly becoming a requirement, with more than 60% of companies planning for cloud adoption in contact center systems.[1]

More contact center capabilities will come online in the cloud in years to come, including new natural language and artificial intelligence subsystems (like IBM Watson), further improving customer engagement efficiency.

Following the Roadmap to the Future in the Cloud

The contact center is evolving to become a comprehensive customer engagement center, solidifying and extending relationships with customers through improved customer experience. This involves expansion of the traditional role of resolving service and support issues to include the equally important new role of helping companies to manage new revenue opportunities.

Improved customer experience depends as much on business efficiency as it does on customer loyalty and improved customer experience also reduces costs. In a recent study, 77% of companies proved cost savings with improved customer experience.[1] Yet to achieve this, the contact center managers have to face the reality that to stay relevant and competitive, they must adapt and embrace new technology.

What's the roadmap to the future? Following is a summary of the steps we've explored in this white paper. By addressing these areas, contact center managers can ensure their centers are prepared, relevant, and competitive in the interconnected future in the cloud.

Empower Staff and Build Infrastructure

Fundamental to supporting contact centers in the cloud, empower staff with relevant skills and build the infrastructure to handle all channels your customers expect, including mobile, social and web chat. By interacting with customers however and whenever they choose, you'll establish a stronger trusting relationship. This requires investment in supporting technology and preparing staff for handling new channels.

Use Analytics and Interaction Insights

Contact center managers can employ analytics and interaction insights to inform their work so that they're managing customer journeys, not just individual interactions. By using relevant data, the contact center can evolve quickly to support connected journeys, with automation being the key to reducing customer effort. Journey analytics and interaction insights help you discover where customers are struggling so that you can quickly and directly improve your engagement profile. Improving agent efficiency and ensuring that the contact center is having a powerful business impact takes it beyond the traditional role as a customer service cost center.

Leverage the Cloud

Hesitancy to embrace the cloud because of concerns about security and performance has given way to confidence in cloud technology and a new agility in deployment. Turning up features, scaling up or down to meet demand, and quickly spinning up distributed agent groups to match new campaigns and customer demand now offers great new flexibility. Most companies are moving to cloud technology to compete.

Embrace Change

Don't be inhibited to act by the inevitability of continued change. Eric Knoor wrote in InfoWorld, "There can be no static endpoint—by the time you assemble perfection, it's obsolete." [4] As new technologies and approaches described here become mainstream, we'll write a new white paper and you'll continue to evolve. Knoor's right, technology is like a moving train, it isn't going to stop. To be competitive, you've got to climb onboard.

Summary

To compete aggressively, contact center managers can stay ahead of customers' growing demand for connection by embracing a platform and solutions that gives them a robust path to the interconnected future.

Learn more about Genesys cloud contact center solutions, a full range of cloud-based call center and contact center applications that improve your customer's journey through increased personalization and ability to meet customer channel preferences.

Request a Demo

Try Genesys Cloud Solutions

About Genesys

Genesys, creator of the world's #1 Customer Experience Platform, empowers organizations to build exceptional customer relationships with personalized, omnichannel experiences across all journeys in the customer lifecycle. For over 25 years, we have put the customer at the center of all we do, and today, we continue to passionately believe that great customer experience drives great business outcomes. Trusted by over 4,700 customers in 170 countries, Genesys orchestrates over 25 billion interactions per year in the cloud and on premises.

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[1] Dimension Data. 2016 Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report.

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Corporate Headquarters 2001 Junipero Serra Blvd., Daly City, CA 94014 USA

Tel: +1 650 466 1100 │ Fax: +1 650 466 1260 │ www.genesys.com