

Simplifying Contact Center Technology

*Eliminating complexity with a single-vendor
on-demand contact center solution*

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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Computer Telephony Integration (CTI) greatly increases contact center efficiency. However, in-house CTI installations often involve as many as four or more vendors, which places severe and disruptive demands on contact centers during installations, upgrades, administration and issue management.

Today, contact centers either live with this complexity, may outsource the same complexity to a third party— where the complexity becomes the problem of their contact center partner or may forego a CTI-enabled contact center solution as they simply do not see a tangible return on their investment. A very few providers are offering a new solution, OnDemand CTI-enabled contact centers. These providers are taking the logical next step of *eliminating* contact center complexity through a hosted solution from a single vendor. Oracle leads the way in these single-vendor contact centers.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

In traditional contact centers, the following “nightmare” scenario clearly illustrates the multi-vendor complexity. Imagine you have staffed your center with agents specifically trained to support a televised promotion blitz. Thanks to CTI integration and rules-based routing, calls to the number on the prospect’s television screens are automatically routed to the agents trained for this campaign. The agent immediately knows not only what number and campaign the customer is dialing, but also knows if the caller is already a customer and has access to the customer information. Suddenly, calls stop being routed to your specially trained agents and are delivered instead, to your general service group. Your multi-vendor contact center system has stopped recognizing which number the caller has dialed (DNIS) and call and caller data is not being passed either from the telecom system to your rules-based routing system or on to your customer service system.

Is the problem with your carrier? Could it be your PBX is not passing the appropriate data to your desktop applications? Is it the CTI middleware, the connection from the PBX to the customer service system? Whom do you call? Where do you start? How many sales opportunities will you lose before all parts of the complicated CTI solution are correctly working together again?

TODAY'S CTI OFFERS GREAT BENEFITS—AT A PRICE

Companies automate their call centers with CTI solutions for a variety of very good reasons. Screen pops reduce interaction time, improve customer service and increase sales close rates – all by automatically pushing customer information to agents as they answer incoming calls.

Why then is not every call center in the world fully automated with a complete CTI solution? It's because these money-saving and money-making benefits have always come at a steep price in upfront capital cost, in implementation time and in the difficulty of solution management. Once the capital expenditure is made to integrate multiple systems, there is often an additional headache - of dealing with the inevitable finger pointing when a link in the complex, multi-vendor chain breaks down.

LIVING WITH COMPLEXITY

Companies typically face an uphill path to contact center automation. A traditional CTI solution includes a desktop call center application from one vendor, call routing from a second, middleware components from a third, and usually an expensive PBX/ACD replacement or upgrade from a fourth.

Most contact centers already have equipment and software their agents use to answer calls, email, fax and chat – often enabled by a vendor or custom application for each of these contact channels. Since they do not want to replace this entire infrastructure in order to implement CTI, call center managers typically approach the vendor(s) that currently provides their existing call center technology. However, they quickly discover that these vendors only provide a part of a complete contact center solution.

Even contact centers that use their own custom-built applications, will find their telephony provider requires an upgrade to their existing PBX/ACD to support CTI. This large upfront cost, which can range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars depending on the size, geography and complexity of the contact center, is a major barrier to entry for would-be contact center automators.

Even packaged contact center application suites require a multi-vendor solution. These include not only the application vendor but also vendors who offer call routing and middleware components that are integrated to work with the packaged application suite. This long vendor chain adds complexity as well as expense. In addition, companies that run CTI in-house must retain dedicated staff to administer this complex, multi-vendor system.

It is not always clear whom these dedicated telecom staff should call when problems arise. With so many links in the chain, and a different vendor for each component, who is accountable for delivering the business benefit of a CTI-enabled system?

Aspects of hosted contact center services that have the most traction with Gartner clients include:

- Budget shift from capital expenditure (CAPEX) to operating expenditure (OPEX)
- Rapid expansion or contraction of capacity to address seasonal call loads
- Application sophistication and control
- Consolidated acquisition and support in multi-site environments
- Richness of reporting data

Source: Gartner — Hosted Contact Center Routing Market Offers New Revenue Source for Service, December 2005

OUTSOURCING COMPLEXITY

Many companies that were tired of managing complex CTI solutions have progressed to the next stage—outsourcing that complexity to someone else. This moves the problem from their IT department to a third-party, but does not eliminate it.

Companies that outsource their CTI complexity typically consider two models: a managed service model or a hosted model.

In the managed service model, the contact center still purchases the software and equipment from multiple vendors and then deploys it, either within their data center or at the managed service provider's data center. The managed service provider's consultants will implement, administer and manage the contact center solution at either location.

While only the management of the contact center systems has been outsourced in this option, there are several advantages to outsourcing CTI-enabled contact centers with a managed service model. As the industry matures and Voice over IP (VoIP) contact center options become more prevalent, it has become more difficult to find system administrators who understand not only contact centers but also the transport of voice calls as data and how voice and data networks interact. Therefore, one advantage of the managed service approach is that an outsourced firm may be better able to attract and retain expert staff in the multiple vendor disciplines around CTI, contact center and VoIP system operations than would an individual contact center.

The second traditional option for outsourcing is the hosted model. In this model the CTI-enabled contact center solution is owned and operated by the hosting-provider and the contact center subscribes to this service. In this option, a *single-vendor* provides and connects all the different pieces of the contact center solution in a bundled offering. The hosting provider purchases and integrates all the various contact center hardware and software elements from multiple vendors. It then deploys the contact center solution in its network and charges the customer — usually on a per-user and/or per minute basis. The outsourcer may also offer tools for other communication channels and track much needed live and historical statistics.

The most obvious benefit of the hosted approach is the reduction of upfront costs. Since the entire CTI solution is now a service, call centers do not have to upgrade their PBX/ACD systems or purchase expensive licenses for CTI software or middleware. Because the outsourcer already owns the necessary hardware and software, another benefit is reduced implementation time. Finally, the customer's contact center is free from the burden of maintaining the system and keeping current.

While addressing several pain points in this model, the complexity of a multi-vendor CTI enabled contact center systems remains, as does the need to integrate

to the customer service applications. The company that provides the hosted offering would still face most of these issues. This includes how to rapidly locate a problem when multiple vendors' products are in play and who to hold accountable.

ELIMINATING COMPLEXITY

Until now, outsourcing the system complexity represented the state of the art. However, a new class of solutions, called “Single-Vendor On-Demand Contact Centers” is emerging. These solutions are designed not just to manage the complexity, but also to eliminate it all together by removing multiple vendor integration points and delivering CTI-enabled applications to the contact center as a pure service from a single vendor.

This type of solution was not possible until now because no single vendor owned both the complete contact center, CTI and application footprint as well as the required service delivery infrastructure. Convergence of voice and data technology, along with consolidation in the technology sector has fundamentally altered the vendor landscape. A single-vendor on-demand solution is now not only highly desirable but also completely feasible.

The driving idea behind single-vendor, on-demand contact center is to provide simplicity and reliability by eliminating integration points and by removing links from the chain rather than trying to better manage the complex collection of links. Unlike an “outsourced complexity” solution, the on demand contact center vendor is both the application company as well as the provider of the entire on demand solution. The contact center technology is offered in a “Software as a Service” (SaaS) model.

This makes it possible to quickly empower agents. If additional capacity is needed, more agents can be added in a “ subscription sign-on” manner. Contact centers do not need to worry about the underlying technology, because one vendor has created, integrated and deployed the entire solution and is accountable for the entire footprint. Multi-vendor complexity is eliminated and the contact center can focus on its core business, operating an efficient, effective, profitable contact center.

SINGLE-VENDOR ADVANTAGES

The advantages of this single-vendor approach fall into three categories: cost, reliability and accountability. Single-vendor on-demand provides **cost advantages** by eliminating upfront capital costs. No longer does a CTI-enabled contact center solution start with an expensive PBX upgrade and move on to the selection of a CTI middleware product. Now the CTI-enabled solution is delivered directly from a single vendor, who not only created and integrated the software but also deploys the solution that provides the business benefit to your agents.

Single-vendor on-demand is more **reliable** than traditional CTI solutions for three reasons. First, one vendor produces all layers of the solution. Second, eliminating the requirement for CTI-enabling PBX removes one technical layer from the solution. Finally, the same company that created the solution also administers it. This removes one *organizational* layer from the solution, because the system administrators who maintain the solution and the developers who created the solution are part of the same company. Rather than three different companies, system administrators, technical support and development are all part of the same company with ready access to the right resources.

A single-vendor CTI provider is also completely **accountable** to the contact center. The “nightmare” scenario that opened this paper is a real story from a real company. That company lost a significant amount of money during the six hours it took the telecommunications department to isolate the problem between its carrier, phone system provider and software vendor.

When the dust settles, the problem in a multi-vendor solution often lies at an integration point between vendors. When this occurs, it is not only harder to solve the problem, it is difficult to hold any vendor accountable - even with a service level agreement in place.

With a single-vendor solution, there is only one call to make, and the vendor is 100 percent accountable for fixing the problem. This not only makes solving problems easier, it means that service level agreements are clear and enforceable.

CONCLUSION

Single-vendor on-demand CTI-enabled contact centers provide significant cost advantages to any contact center considering CTI automation. On top of that, single-vendor CTI solutions offer increased reliability by minimizing overall complexity. If one further considers the accountability advantages, it becomes clear that single-vendor CTI solutions are worth consideration – especially by contact centers that have not been able to justify the return on investment for a multi-vendor integration and implementation effort.

With Siebel CRM Contact Center On Demand, customers take advantage of a single-vendor on demand contact center solution. Integrated out-of-the-box with Siebel, PeopleSoft and Oracle CRM applications, Oracle customers can leverage CTI-enabled contact center features without incurring the capital cost outlay, complexity and risk associated with these otherwise challenging integration projects.



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