

CALL AND CONTACT CENTRE CHOICES EXPAND FOR THE MID-MARKET



Call and Contact centres have changed. No longer the 'Dark Satanic Mills' of the 21st Century they are today staffed by more highly trained and valued individuals in this post offshore world and for the larger SME and the mid-market there are solutions that fit their desire to keep the customer at the forefront of business.

For most SMEs, effective call handling is crucial to the well-being of their business. For the larger, more ambitious SME and Mid-Market user, presenting an outwardly professional and slick image is key to competing in business.

The manner in which calls are handled and managed needs constant attention if the company is to remain competitive and provide customer service excellence.

Today, for say up to 500 users, the range of well featured products to help them manage their customers' expectations has expanded but features are not the sole issue to be decided upon. Whereas in the past the call and contact centre solution was a combination of on-site hardware and software today the options now include deploying scalable cloud based solutions from an array of suppliers.

So, the obvious question to ask is what's the best deployment model for Call and Contact Centre applications; CPE or Cloud?

Phil Reynolds, CTO at Oak Innovation says that today customers can have the best of both worlds.

"Users can have the power and focus of a CPE based app but deploy it in a data centre and virtualised environment if they require the benefits of automated backup and disaster recovery. The same app can of course be deployed on site on a local server and can also be virtualised locally as needed. As long as the app has

a web based front end you can deploy it almost anywhere and give secure access to it from anywhere.

With call centres running in real time, running many wallboards, recording many calls at the same time, there really is a benefit of having the PABX and the app in the same location whether that be in the data centre or on site. In the data centre you would be using SIP trunks to carry your calls but you could record ISDN if you're on site. PABX's offer very sophisticated call handling and routing based upon many years of development and experience in the field with millions of users so this is a great option.

It's also possible to take the powerful CPE based application and purchase it on the same model as Cloud and pay monthly as well as purchasing it outright if that's the preferred method of the customer.

At Oak Innovation we see a complete mix of deployments from the local server and local switch through to the data centre with mirrored solutions and automated backup."

Nick Galea, CEO at 3CX, believes that going with a top class vendor should mean that size really doesn't matter in the toss-up between CPE or cloud.

"Both deployment options should be able to offer the buyer a high quality solution with the same features, security and control no matter whether you

choose to go hosted or not.

Both cloud-based and on-premises contact centres should permit the business to retain complete control of data and settings. Additionally, choosing a hosted system that can be created as an individual tenant, gives the user more reliability and peace of mind about the status of their PBX than one that doesn't. Solutions hosted in this way are completely separate and unaffected by other tenants on the hosting server,

giving the individual company more control and room for customisation.

When taking into consideration how the company's new communications system is going to benefit the business and drive it forward, scalability is of course a significant factor. Any new business solution needs to be easy and cheap to scale, should the time come that the business

needs to expand.

A hosted system should scale at low cost, while an on-premises system should require little attention from IT staff and most certainly not any extra installations and wiring. In both cases, added lines and phones shouldn't require any additional licensing, so a price plan based on the number of simultaneous calls rather than the number of users or extensions is a must.

Pricing is, of **Continued on page 28**



Robin Hayman of SpliceCom

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understand their customers and review their experience of interacting with the business," says Simon Whatley, Sales Director at Tollring.

"This means plotting the various potential customer journeys through the business, not just those that pass through the call centre.

Analytics lie at the heart of any business and remain the leading factor in a decision when considering a contact centre solution.

If the aim of customer service excellence is to resolve a customer's query on their first call (First Contact Resolution) to maximise customer satisfaction, then an organisation cannot look at a contact centre in isolation but must understand how customers are trying to contact the business as a whole. However, often a contact centre is reviewed separately rather than in conjunction with the rest of the business that can have serious consequences.

Tollring recently studied the contact centre of a large multiple retailer with the aim of uncovering more intelligence in their data analytics. The pilot study revealed that the contact centre was measuring customer service levels in isolation to the rest of the business. The system measured answered / missed calls once they were in the contact centre queue, but the metrics of calls that had been queuing to enter the contact centre silo and calls diverted to a voice message or redirected as an overflow call had not been included. As a result, the number of missed and unreturned missed calls in the business was significantly higher than expected, clearly impacting the overall customer service strategy.

In our experience, the best reporting and analytics model for customer satisfaction is attained through combining a multi site call analytics system alongside a contact centre system. In this way, every site, group, team or individual across the business becomes in essence an "informal" contact centre or agent. By delivering some of the features and reporting capabilities of a contact centre into customer-facing teams within the business, the customers' entire journey can be tracked, monitored and handled correctly.



Simon Whatley, Sales Director at Tollring

The contact centre can only measure what it sees rather than the whole customer experience. Understanding the complete customer journey is the key

to improving customer service and analytics are vital in discovering where improvements can be made.

The cloud opens opportunities in reporting and analytics and removes historical localised deployment issues. The cloud extends the way customers can interact with a business, so as organisations move towards the cloud and evolve their digital

communications, it is important to ensure that measures are in place to watch over the entire 'cradle-to-grave' customer experience, of which the contact centre is just one element."

According to Phil Reynolds, in the contact centre it's all about answering or making calls quickly and efficiently.

"By accessing the core features of the selected applications you can drive continual performance improvement but you need to be able to see the stats on the wallboard together with the real time KPI's and a range of reports to show performance improvement over time.

The key areas that need to be monitored and reported on are Agent performance, overall contact centre performance in terms of calls in, out, calls lost, average and longest call waiting times. When using Quality Measurement you want to evaluate an agent's current performance then measure and report on it again in a number of weeks to see that the agent has improved, this would be displayed as a trend analysis graph.

Then of course you should display business related stats on the wallboard such as sales made, or support cases answered and closed, essentially meaningful KPI's that drive better customer service or increased sales.

Oak Innovation has three apps that address the contact centre market namely Clarify, Evolve and Adapt, covering reporting, recording, dialling and media blending."

Steve Tutt of VanillaIP believes that providing an informed and efficient experience for inbound callers is

an essential part of your customer relationship management.

"Our Hosted Call Centre combines sophisticated queuing, providing estimated time to answer and place in queue notifications, with skills based routing to ensure callers get to the best agent to assist them in the shortest possible time.

Agent and Supervisor apps provide visibility of key metrics, such as calls in queue and longest wait. Agents can alert Supervisors if they need assistance and supervisors can discretely monitor or barge into the call. Advanced features such as capturing abandoned callerID, configurable thresholds, unavailable and disposition codes are all supported. This is important for our resellers to compete and win complex, higher value opportunities."

The VanillaIP Uboss portal provides extensive reporting and analytics on incoming queue and agent statistics.

"All reports can be drilled into, for example when looking at incoming calls you can click in to see all legs for the calls. All call recordings are available within the same interface, providing a one-stop shop for configuring the call centre, accessing reports, adding users and uploading announcements. If customers have different portals to log into for these elements that's just a mess and customers do not tolerate that anymore.

Uboss will also provide reporting on which options are being selected from auto attendants, and provide heat map reports to graphically display calling trends. Together, the Uboss reporting and management allows call centre customers to optimise their call centre resources for home and office based agents."

ED SAYS...

It's clear that amongst the vendors we spoke to the jury is not quite back in the room over whether a CPE or Cloud based deployment is preferable and we can understand that. Cloud deployment is not for everyone and as Robin Hayman says that decision over CPE/Cloud is largely down to overall company IT strategy. The great thing for the channel however is that there are great choices to be had from either model to suit the user.

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