

ARE YOU DELIVERING A 21ST CENTURY CONTACT CENTER EXPERIENCE?

AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH FOR
PROVIDING SUPERIOR CUSTOMER
SERVICE EXPERIENCE

STRATEGIC WHITE PAPER

Why did you pick up this white paper? Because you understand that delivering a stellar customer experience has become a key way for your business to differentiate itself in a global, Internet economy. Even if you are doing a great job today, you know that the bar is constantly being raised. Customers expect more and more, year after year.

You need to understand the possibilities, so you can decide what you should be building into next year's budget. That's what this paper is all about. It explores the transition happening in how customers want to interact with companies and their contact centers. It details how this transition is being driven by customer need for an experience that matches the capabilities of the technologies they use every day.

The paper examines how contact center and IT management want – and can gain – similar revolutionary advantages by deploying the latest customer experience solutions. We describe how the capabilities of Alcatel-Lucent OpenTouch™ Customer Service can be deployed to meet the expectations of all three groups of stakeholders: customers, contact center management and information technology professionals.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Experience for your customers / 1

Don't just answer the phone, solve the problem / 1

Keep abreast of changing communications trends / 3

Experience for your contact center management and agents / 4

Retain both the call and the workflow / 4

Improve agent effectiveness across channels / 4

Deploy flexible management tools for real-time interactions / 5

Experience for your CIO / 5

Deliver ROI through a modular solution / 6

Provide a solution for today that also meets tomorrow's needs / 6

Prepare seamless migration from small to large / 7

Engage everyone to deliver exceptional customer experience / 7

Creating your 21st century contact center / 8

Alcatel-Lucent OpenTouch Customer Service / 8

Alcatel-Lucent contact center solutions / 9

Acronyms / 9

About the authors / 10

Sheila McGee-Smith / 10

Alcatel-Lucent / 10

References / 10

EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS

There is no reason to belabor the technology frenzy that has taken over consumers in the post-PC smartphone and tablet era. What *is* worthy of discussion is how the increasing number and capabilities of the gadgets we carry around with us every day continues to change customer expectations about how they want to be supported.

Companies need to deploy technologies today in ways that offer the type of “wow” factor consumers are looking for. Remember the first time you used your smartphone to take a picture of a car crash and send it to your insurance company? When that experience goes well, you love your insurance company. You tell all your friends.

Now imagine that you have some type of problem with uploading the picture. What do you do? With most insurance companies, you start looking for the customer service phone number. But it often isn't easy to find the phone number on the company website or anywhere in the mobile application.

Why? Because many insurance companies (and other types of businesses) mistakenly try to discourage you from calling them.

When you do find the number and reach the contact center, the agent typically has no idea that you've become frustrated while attempting a mobile picture upload. Negative feelings build as you are forced to tell your long, frustrating story.

The good news is that contact center solution providers have spent the past few years building capabilities into their applications to meet the requirements of the 21st century customer. Here are just a few of the things your customers expect you to do for them and that are possible with the contact center suites available today.

Don't just answer the phone, solve the problem

Imagine this scenario. Your contact center is meeting its established goals of, for example, answering 90 percent of calls in 15 seconds, but you still find that customer dissatisfaction is rising. Answering the phone does not necessarily solve the customer's problem: that the package didn't arrive, that the Internet isn't working or that the bank says your account is overdrawn but you know that it shouldn't be.

Companies are increasingly finding that just responding to a customer's inquiry does not resolve the issue that generated the interaction. Applying the same policies and procedures common in contact centers to certain back office tasks is often the answer.

Sophisticated contact center software solutions can route trouble tickets to the best skilled technician or track a broadband change order from first customer call through back office assignment of an engineer — reporting on the steps required along the way to achieve a successful outcome. This is most often done by integrating the contact center and the customer relationship management (CRM) application, unifying the entire enterprise's ability to sell to, serve and retain customers.

Offer inviting voice self-service alternatives

There is a reason that someone posted this article online, [Bypass IVRs - Talk to a real person – Cheat sheet](#), explaining the steps people can take to avoid integrated voice response (IVR) systems at various Fortune 500 companies. It is because so many existing systems are arduous, requiring customers to input information using the telephone keypad and then having the agent *ask for the same information* again.

With modern contact center software, information about callers not only can but should be captured and delivered seamlessly to agents. In many cases, based on the information we have about customers, we can even *predict* why they are contacting us and offer that information — before they even ask! Customers expect it. Increasingly, companies are offering natural language speech recognition to avoid the dreaded IVR menus of the past.

Route calls to the appropriate resource

If you are involved in any capacity in the operation of a contact center, you have likely heard the term “skills-based routing”. According to United States patent law, systems to route calls only to the agent best skilled to respond to the customer issue go back to the [mid-1990s](#)¹. And yet the practice of sending calls to a group of agents and then to the agent in that group who has been idle the longest persists in too many companies.

Not surprisingly, today’s contact center applications incorporate skills-based routing but go even further to enhance the customer experience. Simple-to-use business rules engines are now embedded in contact center software, allowing a company to go beyond routing interactions to an agent known to be skilled in the topic of the call.

The company can decide, for example, that calls related to a specific promotion will be given priority over other calls (because they will drive higher revenue). Or a rule can be created during a service outage that routes all calls to a relevant recorded announcement, avoiding long delays for calls that must be sent to a live agent.

Business rule routing ensures that interactions with the most value to the business benefit from the best available resource while avoiding delays in handling customer queries.

Process and organize interactions across all channels

Admittedly, the *discussion* of routing e-mail and Web chats through the contact center far preceded the volume of customer interactions required to make implementation of multi-channel routing engines necessary. But now, few would dispute Dimension Data Benchmarking global research that shows email is being handled by 89 percent of contact centers, Web interactions by 69 percent and, in a growing numbers of centers, SMS (36 percent) and social media (33 percent) as well.

While more centers today are handling interactions other than voice, the process being used is often sub-optimal. It’s not unusual to see e-mail being handled manually, by a separate group of agents, or social media being responded to by a single agent simply clicking on a tweet or Facebook post. While a contact center may say, “Yes, we are offering our customers multi-channel alternatives,” the experience of the customer may not match that offered for voice calls. If we think of the sum of all the interactions a customer has with a company to purchase a product or resolve a single issue as a conversation, few companies today are effectively tracking that conversation.

1. <http://www.google.com/patents/US5825869>

The answer is an integrated contact center solution that treats any type of interaction the same way. That means being able to establish service level targets and measure average speed of answer for e-mail. It means agents being able to use the same knowledge base to respond to queries regardless of the channel, so customers can be assured of consistent responses. It means being able to tie together separate interactions related to the same customer task in to a single conversation.

Silo-ed operations are no longer acceptable. Companies can delight customers — and thereby increase loyalty — by being aware of, and acknowledging, the journey that customers have already taken to successfully complete their task.

From a customer's perspective, contact with your company is often a series of separate interactions related to a given goal; for example, buying a new laptop. They may visit your website, send an e-mail asking for information and finally call the contact center to place an order. In each case, they will be working with different members of your company's team. The aim is for each new team member to have the information from the previous interactions in order to deliver a seamless customer experience.

Keep abreast of changing communications trends

The way each of us communicates has massively changed in the past ten years. The combination of mobile communications and social media means that people are much less likely to pick up the phone in their daily lives to call loved ones, to check appointment details or just to chat with friends. One person may choose Skype™ to see the face of a loved one, many text a colleague to check the address of a meeting and others choose to post on Facebook to engage with friends. Your contact center can offer your customers the same level of flexibility they have when communicating with friends and family — choosing the most appropriate technology.

Match communication channel availability to customer preference

While there will always be a need for contact center agents to answer the phone when a customer calls, contact centers can do a better job of matching the channel of communication to the task at hand, as each of us does in our non-work lives. For quick queries on the go, allow customers to use SMS to ask a question, and respond in near-real time. For the communication of personal information, including credit card numbers, allow customers to choose a voice call to the contact center. And if there is something that just is easier to communicate over video, such as looking at a customer's bicycle over mobile video and explaining where to adjust the gear shift, have technicians equipped to view that video call.

No one knows what the next big thing will be in communications. In April 2013, Google released the [Mirror API](#) so that developers could begin to build applications for wearable Google Glass. Next-generation contact center solutions available today have open APIs that will allow connectivity to whatever device your customers want to reach you on in the future.

Provide targeted proactive communications

Your customer is sitting at home, waiting for your engineer, who is scheduled to arrive between 8:00 a.m. and noon. At 7:00 a.m. your company knows that, for whatever reason, the engineer will not be able to visit today. Is your contact center equipped to seamlessly send a message, an automated phone call, an SMS or e-mail to the affected customers?

The best multi-channel contact center solutions today are able to proactively reach out to customers to alert them about issues that impact them. Yes, first call resolution is a great contact center goal to have. But *no* contact resolution, contacting a customer so that they don't have to become frustrated and contact you, is an even better goal. Any company can likely think of processes in their business similar to this, where a proactive communication to a customer not only avoids an angry interaction but results in a delighted customer.

EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR CONTACT CENTER MANAGEMENT AND AGENTS

While meeting customer expectations is the most important consideration in building a next-generation contact center, there are additional key stakeholders who will benefit from what the newest solutions can provide. Your contact center staff deserves a 21st century experience as much as your customer. Today's contact center solutions offer a host of benefits for them as well.

Retain both the call and the workflow

In the past few years, the use of recording in the contact center has gone from being necessary for some calls in some types of businesses to an increasing proportion of contact centers recording 100 percent of calls. In the past, recording the audio component of a call was seen to be sufficient for most use cases, but for evaluation of agent performance, it is no longer enough.

It is impossible to evaluate, from an audio recording alone, whether an agent used the most efficient process to handle a particular interaction. During a 10-second pause, what was going on? When the agent put a customer on hold for 3 minutes without updates, what was the agent doing? Also, without screen recording, how can a supervisor evaluate non-voice interactions, such as an agent's Web chat performance?

Just as moving from voice to multi-channel interactions has become an imperative for contact centers, upgrading from voice only to integrated voice and screen recording is no longer an option. It can increase the insights that supervisors have into agent performance as well as help them more easily target specific areas where additional training may be required.

Improve agent effectiveness across channels

Much of the work that agents need to do today to handle customer interactions involves accessing and entering data into sales or support applications, often a CRM application. In many contact centers, time is lost while agents "Alt-tab" their way through disconnected applications, copy and paste across systems, and search for information.

Agents working in this type of legacy environment are required to access and manipulate multiple applications. A simple call from a customer to find out when a purchase will arrive can involve the agent having to first access a customer database to find out what was ordered, then go to a shipping database to access a tracking number and finally open a Web-based application to retrieve the current status. This type of iterative process is often the cause of the phrase dreaded by callers: "Can I put you on hold?" No customer wants to be placed on hold while an agent tries to sort through various applications and data sources.

While there have been ways to integrate agent desktops with CRM systems for many years, typically building the integration required an up-front professional services engagement. After deployment, continued funding was required to keep the integration current. As a result, in many centers the agent desktop remains completely separate from the applications agents use.

What has changed in the past few years is the amount of effort required to integrate contact center desktops with CRM applications. Pre-integrated connectors for the most popular packages have been built so that integrated desktops no longer require six-figure professional services budgets. There is no longer a reason to keep a customer waiting on the line as an agent frantically attempts to input data and find answers to the customer's question while traversing sometimes as many as eight to ten different screens.

Deploy flexible management tools for real-time interactions

The first generation of call center solution applications were built before the PC era. They were designed with the assumption that IT professionals would be required to make any changes to the routing of calls. IT support would also be required for the creation of any report that varied at all from that available out-of-the-box from the vendor.

Giving contact center management flexible tools that allow them to make certain types of changes without the need for IT resources is no longer a "nice to have," it's a necessity. In a world that operates not only at the speed of the Internet, but the speed of Twitter, the inability to quickly create new routing strategies or deploy new self-service prompts can have dramatic impacts.

A corollary to being able to control contact center routing strategies in real time is the need to be able to evaluate the success of those changes. Center supervisors and management need the ability to create and monitor key performance indicators, combining the data from interactions with company-specific information, such as revenue per call or sales leads per campaign. Working effectively in a 21st century contact center requires 21st century tools. Flexible management tools are required not just to manage day-to-day operations but to schedule and train the inherently more complex, multi-channel agent workforce.

EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR CIO

Reading through the first part of this paper your reaction might be, certainly it would be ideal to have the very best technology in the contact center, to provide agents and contact center supervisors with flexible, integrated tools and, most important, to deliver a world-class customer experience. Certainly the goal of all CIOs is to provide the very best technology available, enabling employees to deliver outstanding products and services to benefit existing customers and attract new ones.

But the IT organization must do this within the constraints of their budget and the size of their department. To deliver as many essential services and projects as possible to the entire enterprise, today's CIOs are looking for solutions they can deploy quickly, with minimal support, and that will allow end users a level of control to make day-to-day changes.

Deliver ROI through a modular solution

How old are the PCs in your business? Even the very oldest among them is likely no more than five years old — and a good many are less than one year old. In addition, there are probably a fair proportion of employees using mobile devices such as an Apple® iPad®.

Why? Because both IT and users understand that with the pace of innovation in devices, continuing to maintain and repair older devices is more expensive and provides less functionality than replacement.

Now apply this thinking to your contact center solution. How long has it been since there was a technology refresh? How many solutions from how many different vendors are required to run your contact center today?

In addition to the automatic call distribution (ACD) system, you likely have a recording solution from another vendor, and perhaps an IVR from a third. For collections or telemarketing, you may have a separate outbound dialing system. If you are handling e-mail in the contact center, it may be from yet another vendor, and e-mails are routed separately from customer voice calls. Finally, the reporting for all these different systems is either manually collated, using tens of hours of staff time a month, or remains only marginally useful because any one report shows only one part of the story.

As in other areas of the business, *not* planning a technology refresh may be more costly in the long run. A contact center technology refresh serves two vital roles: it can actually help keep costs down while putting up-to-date technology tools in the hands of your staff.

Today's contact center suites are built with modular components that offer common administration, design and reporting functionality. Instead of requiring staff to manage three, four or even more separate solutions for ACD, IVR, recording, and so on, a suite uses one set of unified management tools for all of this functionality.

In addition, IP and SIP-based architectures allow IT to support contact center operations across multiple locations. Today, your operation may require you to disperse IT personnel to multiple company locations to do something as simple as updating IVR recorded announcements. With a contact center suite deployed over SIP networking, tasks such as these can be performed centrally — with far fewer required resource personnel and hours.

Provide a solution for today that also meets tomorrow's needs

Many contact centers today handle only voice calls. Over the past couple of years, some have begun to add email — likely requiring either a significant upgrade to the existing system or an add-on solution from a different vendor. Contact center management has likely requested support for Web chats, SMS, social media and mobile applications — because customers are asking for it.

When you estimate the cost in equipment, software and IT project management time to add just one of these new channels, and combine that with other IT projects for the rest of the business, you likely turn down the contact center request. Year after year.

The ability to add new channels for customers to engage with your business is another major advantage of a contact center suite. For example, many businesses are finding that the number of communications received over social media, from consumer-driven Facebook and Twitter to more business-oriented LinkedIn, is on the rise. In March 2013, Deloitte reported anticipated growth of 38 percent in social media contact over the next 12-14 months. As the volume rises, the advantages of having contact center agents handling social media interactions increases.

Want to add social media as a channel in your contact center? Purchase the agent licenses and within days — not months — you can be engaged in social media interactions. Initially, this might be done with a small dedicated group of social media agents. If the volume of social interactions increases, the next step might be to route voice calls, e-mails and social interactions to completely blended agent pools. With a multi-channel contact center suite, quickly responding to the needs of the customers and contact center will happen without the drawn-out implementation cycles of the current operation.

Prepare seamless migration from small to large

Regardless of the size of your current contact center, it is often difficult to judge how quickly it may need to scale next year. Predicting what will be required in five years is usually a practical impossibility. And regardless of how many agents you have, the requirement to provide customers with an outstanding level of service remains. Yet several vendors of contact center solutions have created one solution for small centers and another for large centers.

Given the inherent uncertainty, as CIOs investigate the various alternatives for upgrading to next-generation contact center suites, it makes sense to narrow the search to solutions that can grow from as few as twenty agents to hundreds, even thousands, without requiring a complete application replacement. While this may seem intuitively obvious, contact center portfolios that have been built through a series of acquisitions of different solutions or that require a number of third-party components often fail this very basic test.

Engage everyone to deliver exceptional customer experience

Unified Communications (UC) solutions have been available in the enterprise for several years, increasingly being deployed to improve the ability of employees, especially across multiple locations, to collaborate. Often, however, the contact center has been viewed as an island, not seen as needing to be part of the corporate UC deployment because their work is restricted to a set of narrow tasks.

It is becoming clear, however, that bridging the gap between the contact center and the rest of the enterprise can help a company deliver an improved customer experience. It can also aid in recognizing individual interactions with a customer as part of a larger conversation with the company.

First call resolution is a metric often talked about in the contact center, but it translates to a real benefit to customers. For customers it means they won't be transferred from one agent to another, won't be told to call another toll-free number. Contact center solutions that enable agents to communicate with designated experts in the rest of the organization have been shown to significantly reduce not only the number of repeat calls but the duration of calls.

In a truly customer-focused organization, everyone is motivated to deliver exceptional customer service, not just the contact center. For too long, contact center systems have operated as an island within a business. The integration of UC for the enterprise and flexible, modular application software for the contact center is the technical underpinning required to deliver company-wide, world-class service.

CREATING YOUR 21ST CENTURY CONTACT CENTER

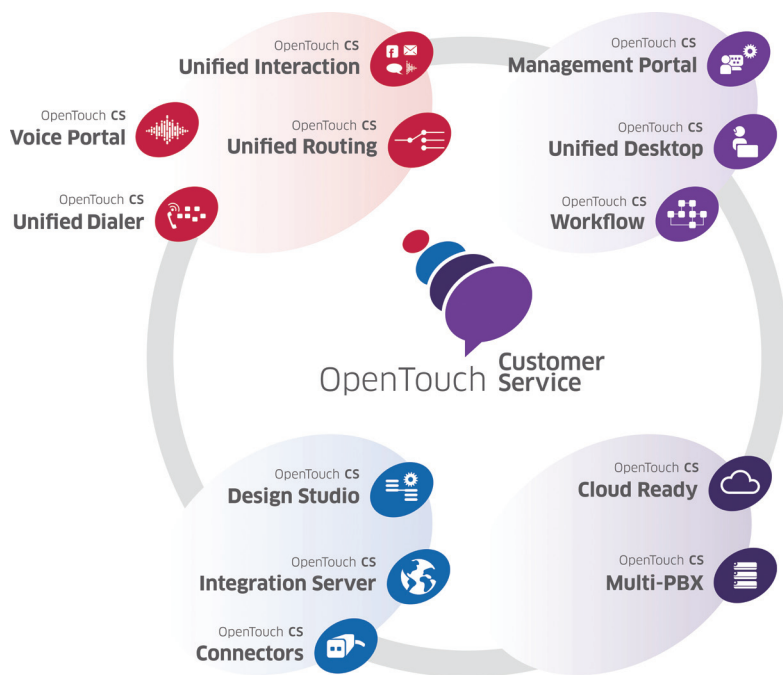
Delivering your 21st century contact center means partnering with an experienced and trusted contact center provider such as Alcatel-Lucent, which has almost 1 million contact center agents installed. With a proud heritage in North America, Europe and around the world, Alcatel-Lucent is recognized within the industry as instrumental in developing the contact center market from call center to contact center, from analog/TDM telephony infrastructure to IP and multimedia.

This expertise as an innovative solution provider can help you open new channels of communications with your customers — from Web browsing, e-mail and chat to voice and video and increasingly the asynchronous social media dialog. These new channels will allow your customers to interact with you the way they want to and when they prefer while providing the context of the overall conversation.

Alcatel-Lucent OpenTouch Customer Service

Alcatel-Lucent is one of a very few companies today that can effectively address and manage all these separate communication channels into a single coherent conversation that provides all agents and knowledge workers involved with the context to quickly address customer needs. Alcatel-Lucent OpenTouch Customer Service provides this new 21st century contact center, with a smooth evolution leveraging your existing telephony and contact center investments, in single or multi-vendor environments (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Alcatel-Lucent OpenTouch Customer Service



OpenTouch Customer Service is a complete, modular contact center solution that unifies all communication media throughout the organization with real-time key performance indicators (KPIs). With OTCS, contact center managers can focus on key goals by monitoring, in real time, operations and business outcomes, then take immediate actions to improve productivity and results.

Built on an open and standards-based platform, OpenTouch Customer Service allows unified management of all customer-related activities in the front and back office. Focusing on business value, the solution ensures the consistent application of business rules, monitoring and automation to achieve excellence in customer service, ensure compliance to legislation and reduce operating costs.

OpenTouch Customer Service also supports multi-PBX environments, which makes it an effective solution for multi-site companies running complex and diverse technology environments.

Alcatel-Lucent contact center solutions

Good customer service is not just about completing a transaction or fixing a problem; it's about your customer's experience of that process. Regardless of your specific industry or integration requirements, Alcatel-Lucent can address your existing needs as well as help you implement the business rules and skills-based routing required to flexibly and easily manage the requirements of new media.

With Alcatel-Lucent contact center solutions, you can make real-time workflow adjustments to quickly react and optimize the conversation, taking into consideration the customer's specific needs and addressing them with a customized and appropriate solution. The timely insertion of knowledge workers into these conversations improves your workflow efficiency and provides that "wow" factor customers are looking for.

Developing a 21st century contact center environment is an ongoing engagement with vendor and partner. Alcatel-Lucent supports partners with a range of quality, personalized integration services that enable you to integrate your contact center completely into your business processes, breaking down the barriers between customer relationship management and the back office. We deliver this in a scalable, modular architecture that grows with your requirements and can be deployed from customer premises to the cloud, in a standard CAPEX or pay-per-use business model.

ACRONYMS

ACD	automatic call distribution	PBX	private branch exchange
API	Application Programming Interface	ROI	return on investment
CIO	Chief Information officer	SIP	Session Initiation Protocol
CRM	customer relationship management	SMS	Short Message Service
IVR	interactive voice response	TDM	Time Division Multiplexing
KPI	Key Performance Indicator	UC	Unified Communications

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sheila McGee-Smith

Sheila McGee-Smith, the founder of [McGee-Smith Analytics, LLC](#), is a leading communications industry analyst and strategic consultant. With a practice focused on the contact center and enterprise communications markets, Ms. McGee-Smith works on a daily basis with both solution providers and enterprises to help them develop strategies to meet the escalating demands of today's consumer and business customers.

Ms. McGee-Smith has spent over 20 years in the communications industry, including 12 years with the New Jersey-based analyst firm The PELORUS Group. Prior to joining The PELORUS Group, Ms. McGee-Smith held sales management, market research and product management positions at AT&T, Timeplex and Dun & Bradstreet. She received a bachelor's degree from Barnard College, Columbia University and an MBA from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University.

Alcatel-Lucent

Alcatel-Lucent is at the forefront of global communications. The company provides products and innovations in IP and cloud networking as well as ultra-broadband fixed and wireless access. Alcatel-Lucent serves service providers and their customers as well as enterprises and institutions throughout the world. Alcatel-Lucent Bell Labs, one of the world's foremost technology research institutes, is responsible for countless breakthroughs that have shaped the networking and communications industry. Alcatel-Lucent have been recognized by Thomson Reuters as a [Top 100 Global Innovator](#) and named by MIT Technology Review among [2012's Top 50 "World's Most Innovative Companies"](#).

REFERENCES

1. Alcatel-Lucent, *OpenTouch Customer Service*, datasheet.
<http://enterprise.alcatel-lucent.com/?product=OpenTouchCustomerService&page=documents>
2. Deloitte, *2013 Global Contact Center Survey Results*, March 2013.
http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-UnitedStates/Local%20Assets/Documents/Consulting/us_consulting_2013GlobalContactSurvey_051513.pdf