



Innovation with Internet Protocol contact centers: how IP communications empower business.



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Introduction

Are your customer support and sales agents armed with the tools and information they need not only to answer customer questions about their accounts, but to cross-sell and up-sell? Whether agents are in touch with a customer by phone, e-mail, instant message, fax or other method, they need to have up-to-date, integrated customer information. Most companies today are challenged with providing their agents with the integrated access they need using traditional approaches.

Organizations usually rely on distinct voice, e-mail, Web and fax messaging systems to support customer services. Depending on the contact method customers choose, the contact experience may vary. One channel may not know the customer has contacted the other channel, leading to customer dissatisfaction and lost cross-sale opportunities. Such traditionally disparate communications and data systems are difficult to integrate; don't offer the agility needed for business growth; and impose high support and maintenance costs.

Today's new Internet Protocol (IP) contact center solutions can help your company improve customer interactions through the integration of multiple channels and can also help your company implement a business resiliency strategy that accommodates remote customer service agents and geographically distributed operations. Updated contact centers can also help your business gain sophisticated interactive capabilities that can transform your facility into the contact center of the future. IP contact centers combine time-division multiplexing (TDM)-based voice services, IP-based voice services and presence awareness, with e-mail, fax, Web and video capabilities. These technologies provide one network interface among agents, who are trained to handle all communications methods. And customers can still access the contact center through traditional TDM-based or IP-based voice methods.

***Business value delivered via
IP contact centers***

Improvements in IP contact centers can help you increase operational efficiencies, improve the customer experience and grow revenue. An IP contact center implementation can:

- *Decrease agent attrition due to burnout by providing variation in work assignments through multichannel methods of customer interaction.*
 - *Eliminate some of the callbacks normally required to complete a customer interaction.*
 - *Reduce current infrastructure costs.*
 - *Improve call abandonment rates and increase sales.*
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Traditional call center blues

In traditional call centers, internal systems don't communicate with one another, which can lead to customer dissatisfaction, operational inefficiencies and revenue loss. This lack of integration can mean that customers may be put on hold for 10 minutes or longer; transferred to agents who can't help them; and asked to repeat account information after each transfer. In addition to increased customer dissatisfaction, this can lead to higher overhead, longer queue times and extensive hold times. And it's not just your customers who become frustrated by these inefficiencies. Dissatisfaction cascades over to your employees. Agents can become disheartened by the lack of information needed to do their jobs correctly. They could even leave your company, leading to high turnover with its associated costs.

In addition to these operational inefficiencies, internal systems that don't communicate can cause customers to abandon you for your competition. Time is often not on your side. Customers want to take care of business on *their* time schedule, not yours. If they can only do business with you through your call center, then your business hours effectively are limited by your call center's agent capacity and hours. And limiting how and when your customers can reach you could drive them to find better service with your competition.

A look at the numbers

A study conducted by Sage Research¹ showed that among companies using Cisco IP communications in contact centers:

- *Eighty-eight percent reported generating an additional US\$3,000 or more per month, per sales agent.*
 - *Over 50 percent reported agents handled an average of 30 or more additional calls per day.*
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Customers want to find what they need, when they need it—day or night. And knowing what customers need before they do can work in your favor. Imagine a company wants to increase the number of its telephone lines in a branch office. The business manager calls the phone company to see what telephone service packages are available. Unfortunately, the customer service agent may not even know what services the company currently uses. Not only that, it could be difficult for the agent to find the company's account records. When legacy systems aren't connected, your agents have no idea what services or products customers already have. This makes it impossible to up-sell or cross-sell, when customers call for advice about additional services.

Imagine a better contact center

In an ideal world, your agents move on- and offline in a precision dance to meet call volumes. Contact center locations are smaller and distributed, but function as a large, integrated virtual contact center with central support. Work-at-home agents integrate seamlessly into your agent pool. Agents' skills perfectly match your customers' needs. Non-agent subject matter experts can be included in your customer interactions through the use of collaboration and presence technologies. Because call volumes are better managed, callers don't have to wait for agents. Account information is available whether a caller dials in or comes to the agent via your Web site. Customers can be routed to on-, near- and offshore agents with equal ease based on customer value. Telecommunications costs are reduced by using converged intersite trunking, which reduces or eliminates costly carrier take-back and transfer charges, and the associated dropped calls that can occur.

When you use Web technology with IP interactive voice response (IP IVR) and contact center agents, your phone, Web and legacy systems all have access to the same pertinent customer information. High-value customers with more sophisticated demands are routed to your local resources and given complete call resolution, no matter how long it takes. Customers with simple-to-solve issues are sent to less expensive global resources, where their issues can be resolved quickly. Sophisticated voice response services can even provide intelligent self-service to your customers, thereby offloading work from agents while quickly satisfying customers. This connectivity between all Web and contact center agents results in faster call resolution and better customer service, so you retain valuable and loyal customers.

In the world of the new IP contact center, the online sales and customer information center is available 24 hours a day. Agents can answer click-to-call questions or chat online with your customers whenever they have questions or needs. With access to all relevant customer data, the agent knows precisely what the customer has purchased in the past. Using phone or online tools, the agent can then cross-sell and up-sell when given the opportunity. As a result, not only do your customers receive faster service, your company can increase revenue from existing customers.

Take advantage of the IP contact center revolution

To revolutionize how your business handles customer requests, you must work with a company that understands your needs, your customers' needs and the tools and methods available to upgrade your contact center. You need a company that has systems integration services capabilities in collaboration and

knowledge management. That company also needs to understand network consulting, integration, deployment and management services for converged communications, including network convergence and IP telephony services. IDC has named IBM Global Services as the top marketplace share leader in network consulting and integration services revenue each year since 1996.² IBM has extensive experience deploying large-scale IP telephony solutions in contact centers and providing IP contact center technical support, help desk, business transformation outsourcing and business process outsourcing services.

In addition to a wide range of services and hardware, IBM can provide IBM Lotus® Sametime® and IBM WebSphere® software. Lotus Sametime software can boost productivity while improving customer satisfaction by allowing contact center agents to consult with supervisors or subject matter experts in real time, without placing customers on hold. Its Web conferencing feature can be used for impromptu screen sharing or scheduled training sessions, ensuring everyone has the information he or she needs to work effectively. The same WebSphere application server that faces the Web for your customers can be used by the IP IVR and contact center agent, and can be load balanced for high availability in the same manner as Web access. And if you need it, IT support from IBM will help you reduce your in-house skill requirements. In short, IBM has all of the tools and services to provide an end-to-end IP contact center.

IBM has also forged alliances with Cisco, Avaya and Genesys, whose products support IBM's service-oriented architecture and integrate with IBM's unified communications and collaboration architecture to provide seamless interoperability. This advanced IBM product functionality creates a high-value contact center solution that extends throughout the enterprise. IBM has used these tools and methods internally for more than five years to deploy its own IP contact centers. Today, IBM has Voice over IP (VoIP) competency centers with over US\$40 million invested in converged technology elements.

Conclusion

IP contact center technology and methodology can transform much of your traditional contact center by helping you align IP technology with your company's business strategy and operational reality. As new capabilities and technologies are implemented, customer expectations will continue to rise as customers interact with the best and most sophisticated companies. And what was a ground-breaking change in one industry will become standard in others. Organizations that lead the way with innovative and customer-focused call center capabilities—those that adopt a customer vision—will be the success stories of the future.

For more information

To learn more about IBM contact center solutions, including IBM Lotus Sametime and IBM WebSphere software, contact an IBM representative or visit:

ibm.com/services/us/index.wss/offerfamily/gn/a1000397



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 - 2 *Worldwide and U.S. Network Consulting and Integration Services 2004 Vendor Shares: Top 10 Market Share Leaders*. March 2006, IDC #34663