Rethinking Your Contact Center
How to Engage the Modern Customer

A Frost & Sullivan White Paper

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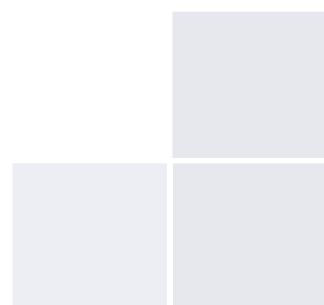*50 Years of Growth, Innovation and Leadership*

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INTRODUCTION

Do you know what happens when a customer connects with your contact center? Not just the way in which he or she is routed to an agent, or the information accessed during the interaction—but what really happens in the conversation that makes the encounter an exceptional one? Do you have any insight into how your agent responded to that individual user, or a way to proactively ensure that other prospects and customers on any channel can have a consistent and positive experience? Are you leveraging all employees in your organization who have a stake in the customer experience, either directly or because their job influences the process? Do you feel confident that you have every metric at your disposal to make the best business decisions?

If your answer to any of these questions is "no," you need to rethink the boundaries of your contact center—and consider whether you're enabling truly exceptional experiences for all your customers and prospects, regardless of which channels they use to communicate with your business. And last year's engagement strategy isn't going to last for long; customer expectations and behaviors have changed rapidly over the past few years, pushing brands to modernize their approach or get left behind for good. This involves not just the technology, but also the approach: clear, agile and authentic, so that you can respond to your customers where they live — online, on mobile devices, via voice, or right in front of you—and deliver a consistent experience anywhere in the world.

Of course, that's easier said than done—despite the fact that the "omnichannel" contact center has been promising such results for years. In reality, delivering an excellent customer experience is extremely difficult and demanding, especially in today's global, always-on world. It requires that companies provide an immediate response whenever customers need one, on their channel of choice; that they be both reactive *and* proactive; that they leverage data across enterprise, contact center, and external actors; and that they fully empower agents, back-office employees, and in-store associates to do whatever it takes to create joyful journeys.

To do this, you need a modern customer engagement solution—not solely confined to the contact center—

that supports an integrated view of all interaction channels, including social and mobile, as well as data analytics and integration with CRM and other back-end systems. In addition, most companies touch customers at multiple points along their journeys—starting with marketing and sales, moving through customer service and support, and on to retention. All of these touch points engage customers, but are they providing a great, seamless, always-on experience? If not, that will impact loyalty and long-term revenues.

> *A modern, cloud-based contact center should engage customers via their channel of choice; leverage all employees, not just agents; optimize the experience to increase loyalty, sales, and revenues; and make customer experience the top priority for all employees.*

This paper will outline the difficult challenges faced by all businesses—in a variety of industries and sizes—in creating an exceptional customer experience; discuss the value of a contact center that also supports all channels of choice, disaster recovery, data analytics, and leveraging back-office workers; stress the need for cultural change throughout the organization to truly meet today's customers' expectations; and offer best-practices recommendations for taking the lead in creating a customer journey that engenders loyalty, delivers total satisfaction, and drives revenues.

MULTIPLY CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

There *is* a way to bridge the customer experience gap: a full communications and engagement solution that drives cost savings by providing scalable, flexible, and optimized customer-focused operations, globally, that are always there to meet your customers on their channel of choice.

Unfortunately, many prospects and customers are not receiving that experience. According to a recent survey by 8x8, when they last called a company, just 22% of people said their call was answered the first time they called—and more than one-third of them were new customers looking for information on products, trying to open an account, or make a purchase.

But as important as it is for customers to be able to reach you whenever they need to, they must also receive a consistent, exceptional experience — regardless of the way in which they come in. Even when customers do manage to get through to someone, businesses are still at risk of losing them to a competitor while they're on the phone; 12% say they have started searching for competitors online during a call, rising to more than a quarter of young people (aged 25-34), who appear to have a lower tolerance for bad service. More than a tenth of those surveyed have even posted live on social media to name and shame a company during a poorly handled call, rising to 26% of those aged 25-34.

Changing these outcomes requires an advanced contact center that integrates all interactions across all channels, so that when an agent responds to, say, a customer's text, the agent sees the customer history just as he would on a call or chat — and anything he does for the customer in that text-based interaction will also be preserved in the customer history for future use. Furthermore, the contact center should apply all policies and procedures to every interaction — including skills-based routing, recording and archiving, manager oversight and training, and populating the knowledge base — even if that interaction took place in a mobile app, a web community, or a social site like Twitter or Instagram.

Such an implementation will deliver a consistent customer experience that multiplies your company's positive impact in five key ways:

- **Multiply Channel Choice** Letting customers interact with you on their channel of choice keeps them engaged and loyal, but doing so must provide a consistent experience and support a continuous journey to increase customer satisfaction (CSAT) and lifetime value (LTV) scores. There's more to it than simply supporting customers on a variety of devices and sites. You must also ensure that every interaction leverages the advantages of the channel in question and doesn't leave customers wanting because the channel isn't designed for the engagement. For example, customers using mobile phones need apps that are built specifically for the small-screen environment, understand mobile-user limitations, and take advantage of mobile-specific functionality like geo-location data. Similarly,

customers contacting you through Twitter expect a different tone and response rate than those who are engaging through traditional voice.

- **Multiply Workforce Productivity** Paying attention to continuously improving agent performance, operational metrics, and customer satisfaction scores creates better outcomes for customers and employees. But as you embrace a range of new channels, make sure you change your performance expectations and metrics to reflect the new reality. Agents can juggle multiple chats at once, but they cannot effectively respond to customers on the phone and online. Reps who are tasked with monitoring and responding to social media posts will need different scripts than those using email and voice — but not so different than those used for chat — and they will probably want more autonomy, too. And while back-office employees can significantly enhance the customer experience with their in-depth knowledge, they are not service agents; training and feedback is critical to ensuring they deliver an exceptional experience every time.

- **Multiply Savings** By utilizing global, cloud-based communications in the enterprise and the contact center, you can lower your total cost to serve while taking advantage of the most up-to-date features and functionality across the organization. In addition, leveraging a single, common platform for both unified communications and contact center in the cloud yields even greater savings and benefits than using siloed solutions, because doing so allows you to easily connect agents to experts anywhere in the company for more specific, targeted support as well as expand the bounds of your contact center to any employee company wide. And if you choose a global cloud-based solution that's available 24/7, your agents can work from anywhere—allowing you to hire the best and brightest employees no matter where they live in relation to the organization.

- **Multiply Customer Operations** By offering flexible service across globally distributed locations, agile organizations can ensure always-on communications that are easy to manage and which scale to fit demand. This is especially valuable for growing companies, which can easily add agents

to existing contact centers or open new support services in expanding markets, and for seasonal businesses, which typically need to add agents for short periods of time on a cyclical basis. As an added bonus, companies also boost business continuity, since cloud-based services make it possible for agents to work anywhere, anytime, in the event of outages or larger disruptions. Agents and employees who don't normally work from home can do so on an as-needed basis, without any loss of productivity; the experience will be the same for the staff and for the customers they continue to serve.

- **Multiply Simplicity** Using a DIY solution for customer-focused managers that doesn't require IT help can make it easy for executives and line-of-business managers to monitor all customer interactions, scale up or down on the fly to meet demand, and ensure a consistent experience across channels.

LOOK TO THE CLOUD TO CREATE AN EXTRAORDINARY CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Clearly, companies must acquire a full communications and contact center solution that drives measurable savings, while also providing scalable, flexible, and optimized customer service. That will ensure you are always able to meet your customers on their channel of choice — in real time and anywhere in the world.
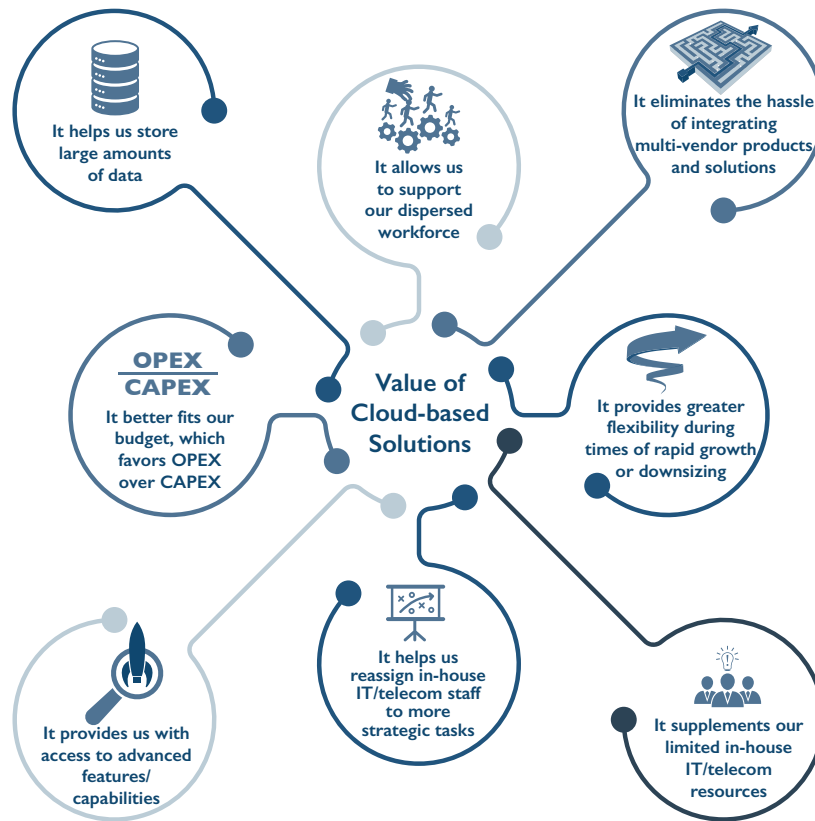
> *The vast majority (91%) of British consumers surveyed say they have had a poor experience on the phone. Source: 8x8*

To make this a reality, companies are embracing the cloud. Their reasons are many, including speed of deployment, moving to an operational versus capital expenditure model, simple scalability, greater flexibility, easier management and support, and the ability to access new applications, features, and functions as soon as they are needed. A recent Frost & Sullivan survey of almost 2,000 IT decision makers from around the world reveals that 90% of companies have deployed at least some of their enterprise IT applications in the cloud; the largest cohort has moved as much as 50% of their business applications off their premises. The contact center is often one of the first areas to make this transition, with 36% of organizations having already moved their customer-focused apps to the cloud and 50% more expecting to do so within the next three years. Depending on the organization, IT managers tell us they see immediate benefits from making the shift; topping the list are easier data storage, greater flexibility, and access to advanced features and capabilities.

Cloud-based Solutions Support the Ideal Customer Engagement Scenario:

a) Access to the latest features

b) Lower costs

c) Flexibility to adapt to short-term or long-term changes in customer demand

d) Scalability to easily ramp up as your company grows

Value of Cloud-Based Solutions

It helps us store large amounts of data

It allows us to support our dispersed workforce

It eliminates the hassle of integrating multi-vendor products and solutions

OPEX / CAPEX
It better fits our budget, which favors OPEX over CAPEX

Value of Cloud-based Solutions

It provides greater flexibility during times of rapid growth or downsizing

It provides us with access to advanced features/capabilities

It helps us reassign in-house IT/telecom staff to more strategic tasks

It supplements our limited in-house IT/telecom resources

Q: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements related to your organization's use of cloud solutions.

Even with all these advantages, three key areas of opportunity stand out for cloud-based communications in the contact center:

- **Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery**
  The need for business continuity and disaster recovery (BC/DR) for the contact center should be clear: whether an outage or interruption is manmade or the result of a natural disaster, global companies cannot leave their customers without support when they need it. Customer and investor expectations, increased government regulations, higher-skilled agents, globalization, and our always-on world are making the need to be up and running at all times critical to business success. Companies can start by implementing several best practices, including smart site selection, multi-shoring, supporting home-based workers, and, most importantly, moving key data and applications to the cloud. Once a luxury, service providers are now expected to offer redundant data centers that ensure their customers will always have

access to their apps and services. Making sure the customer-facing part of your business stays up even though the rest of your business may be down not only ensures your business does not lose money, it also provides a better experience for your customers.

- **Data Analytics** Analyzing "big" and "small" data can have measurable impact on the bottom line. Big data, which has received a lot of attention in the past few years, provides information on larger trends in the market and user behavior, and it can span everything from broad demographics and census data to industry news, competitive rollouts, and market performance. By tracking what customers and prospects are saying and doing within their interaction with your company *and* on general social media and community sites, you can get a good sense of what they are looking for from the products you sell, why they buy when they do, and how to better meet their needs. But so-called "small data," which is all the information you have

on one specific customer or product line, can also deliver operational insights that can affect how you do business. Knowing where a given customer is in his or her journey, based on that customer's history with your company as well as other information directly related to him or her, helps you target messaging and offers personalized for that individual. That can increase conversion rates, drive loyalty, and raise overall sales.

• **Channel of Choice** Many companies struggle to support the growing number of channels their customers want to use for sales and support, but a cloud-based solution can make it easy and cost effective to do so. Mobile, web, social, communities — all offer opportunities to reach new prospects and keep existing customers engaged, regardless of where they live or how and when they choose to do business with your organization. These media can also be leveraged to deliver additional benefits: as your customers use these new channels to conduct research, make purchases, and receive post-sales support, they are sharing their experiences with their friends, families, and colleagues; those encounters will then shape how others see your business and whether they want to buy from you, too. Companies that want to stay competitive in this global marketplace must enable exceptional experiences across all these new channels, but also deliver them in a way that is fast, flexible, and controls costs. Cloud-based solutions deliver on all three of these, with easy deployment support for mobile, social, and online interactions whenever you are ready to implement them, without worrying about the time and expense it takes to evaluate, buy, deploy, and support new media.

CLOSE THE CULTURE GAP

As important as technology is to driving the customer experience, corporate culture almost matters more. Technology only serves to empower the people who own the relationships, but it's critical to empower *all* your employees to own the customer relationship, and make agility and responsiveness top priorities. Again, this goes well beyond the bounds of the contact center and includes executives, managers, and employees across the organization — in marketing and sales, product development, in-field support, and even

back-office functions like finance and HR. After all, it requires a company-wide effort to always put the customer first, and your contact center solution should have great training and support to ensure that message gets through.

> *Customers are more likely to shout about poor service than a great experience. Nearly three quarters say they feel a personal responsibility to warn friends and family against a company that provides bad service, while only 53% have shared a positive experience; just 17% have posted positive reviews on social media.* Source: 8x8

On the consumer side, this means ensuring that the channel of choice is always on, so you can deliver an immediate, satisfactory response. On the business side, one of the biggest challenges lies in understanding and supporting all the people and business units that touch a given customer along his or her journey — from awareness, to purchase, to service. Your technology investments should reflect the quality of the customer experience you expect your employees to deliver, and your company mission should include a statement about doing everything possible to make every customer interaction a great one. The organization must then back that up with the tools and processes that make it easy for every employee to do whatever is needed to put the customer first.

The sharing of expertise is also an important part of a successful corporate culture. Smart companies are involving back-office employees in the customer interaction itself. This does not mean sitting them at a contact center workstation and putting them to work as agents; rather, it means giving them the tools they need to be available to support agents and managers any time their expertise would be helpful. Presence (employee availability information) and chat capabilities let agents reach out to product experts and other knowledge workers throughout the day; skills-based routing can be extended to apply to back-office employees, ensuring the right people are answering the right questions at the right time; and integration lets those workers see the same customer-history data as the agents they are working

with, so they have the context and understanding they need to best facilitate a sale or support a product or service. All interactions should be captured and saved for training and best-practices purposes, and so managers can easily see what's working and what's not, and then use that information to coach new and underperforming employees to improve future engagements.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A MODERN CONTACT CENTER SOLUTION

There are scores of vendors and providers that offer cloud-based enterprise communications and contact center solutions. But finding the right one to partner with is critical to success. Not all can deliver every element of a complete deployment, with an integrated set of capabilities that span a wide variety of channels and expertise. Look for a provider with deep experience in the market, global reach, excellent knowledge of specific industries and markets, robust security, and support for every channel you want to offer today and into the future.

Specifically, your provider should deliver on the following eight criteria:

1. **Support for any channel—now and tomorrow.** This should include voice, web, social, mobile, online and offline capabilities, as well as easy integration into the next big interaction technology.

2. **Enabling the right conversation with right person at the right time.** Leverage a single unified communications and contact center platform to connect with experts across the organization—eliminating the silos among departments.

3. **Always-on customer engagement.** An agile organization works across global locations, can be easily managed even in times of crisis, and scales to meet demand.

4. **Leveraging collaboration and integration with CRM and other back-office systems.** Through rich media, video, co-browsing, and geo-location, capture every interaction and activity to ensure customer information is always up to

date and enriches the customer experience by providing insight to all employees who need it.

5. **DIY operations.** Customer-focused managers should be able to easily scale their staff and resources as needed to fit demand, allowing agents to work from anywhere, anytime while maintaining a consistent level of oversight and training. This frees up the IT team to focus on its own strategic goals.

6. **Continuous improvement.** Leverage quality management, screen recording, training, and real-time data and analytics to enable relevant, timely coaching and ensure agents and employees are always at their best.

7. **Insights for business decisions.** Operational and relationship metrics optimize the customer experience based on real-world data and help you better manage your business and remove obstacles in the customer journey.

8. **Leveraging the power of the cloud.** Consistent, global cloud communications lower the total cost to serve, scale instantly, support smarter disaster recovery and agent recruiting, and offer access to advanced features and functionality.

CALL TO ACTION

The notion that companies must create joyful journeys for all their customers isn't new, but turning the vaulted promise into reality is surprisingly difficult. Today's contact center is really better described as a place for "engagement," thanks to new customer expectations. But despite the hype from vendors and providers, and demand from customers of all demographics, many companies struggle to successfully enable seamless interactions across a wide variety of channels, including traditional voice and chat, as well as more advanced mobile and social applications.

Businesses that want to create an exceptional customer experience for all their users must deploy an integrated enterprise communications and contact center solution that supports all channels of choice, enables disaster

recovery, delivers advanced data analytics, and makes it easy to leverage back-office workers in a thoughtful and disciplined way.

A cloud-based solution can make it cost effective for companies to meet their customers' needs, without incurring the time and expense of a premises-based deployment. It will also provide disaster recovery, allow for easy scalability, enable a flexible workforce, and support cultural change throughout the organization—all required to truly meet today's customers' needs. The goal is to ensure your business is a leader in creating customer journeys that spur loyalty, increase satisfaction and lifetime value scores, and have a positive, measurable impact on the bottom line.

NEXT STEPS (>)

> **Schedule a meeting with our global team** to experience our thought leadership and to integrate your ideas, opportunities and challenges into the discussion.

> Interested in learning more about the topics covered in this white paper? Call us at 877.GoFrost and reference the paper you're interested in. We'll have an analyst get in touch with you.

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