Contact Center Technology Trends: Part 1

- Cloud Computing
- Security
- Social Media
- Gamification
- Artificial Intelligence
Introduction

The annual Call Center Week Conference and Expo, held in Las Vegas in June 2014, brought together the industry’s leading technology vendors and some new players eager to introduce their solutions to contact center service providers.

This information brief, presented as a two-part series, serves as a round-up of the major technology trends exhibited at the conference. For each trend presented in this paper, we have made an effort to identify vendors in that field who exhibited at the conference. However, it is important to remember that these vendor lists are not comprehensive—they are meant only to serve as a starting point for your research.

DATAMARK’s Contact Center Technology Trends: Part 1 highlights industry offerings for cloud-based communications; security and authentication; social media and digital communities; products that incorporate gamification; and products using artificial intelligence technology.

Trend 1

Cloud Communications

The most crowded field of technology solutions at Call Center Week was easily cloud-based communication software platforms for enterprises and contact centers. Well over a dozen vendors exhibited these type of products.

In recent years, cloud communication has been the major disruptor of conventional business telephony, which requires expensive equipment for private branch exchange (PBX) infrastructure.

Vendors now offer cloud software suites, with apps built into a browser-based agent console for communication by voice, email, chat window, social media and other channels. Organizations that subscribe to these hosted contact center services may also store data offsite on the provider’s or third-party’s server system.

Cloud solution providers tout benefits that include low start-up costs and Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) pricing models, in which organizations pay only for services that they subscribe to. Other benefits include the ability to quickly implement and scale up contact center services.

On the risk side, cloud-based services require a reliable, high-speed Internet connection, which may not always be available for all organizations. Also, issues with high latency over networks can negatively affect voice quality. In addition, up-time and security must be assured for data hosted on third-party servers.

Cloud-based contact center solution vendors include: 3CLogic, 8x8 Inc., BrightPattern, ConnectFirst, CallFire, Dynamic Interactive, Five 9, InContact, IntelliPeer, LiveOps, Platform28, Twilio, Vocalcom, Zendesk, and Zipwire.

Cloud and the Contact Center

•78% of organizations agree it’s helped reduce customer service costs—just 3% disagree.

•65% of organizations using hosted or cloud-based solutions agree that it’s provided access to new and enhanced functionality.

•65% say it has improved flexibility.

Source: Dimension Data’s 2013/14 Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Summary Report

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Call Center Week exhibitors promoting products and services for contact center and enterprise communication security included LogMeIn and TrustID.

LogMeIn offers a suite of cloud-based services for remote access to computers, files and for backing up data. The company protects access to data with multi-level security mechanisms that include options for printed or emailed security codes.

Other LogMeIn products aimed at the contact center industry include Rescue, which allows IT support technicians and others to remotely connect to customers’ computers, and BoldChat, a multichannel customer engagement software application.

TrustID offers contact centers an SaaS solution that works automatically behind the scenes to authenticate callers before they are connected to an agent. The company says the technology can help prevent risks associated with Caller ID spoofing and “social engineering”—using a false sense of trust to manipulate contact center agents.

TRUSTID says contact centers can save time and operating costs by quickly identifying valid customers so they can be routed to an appropriate agent for quick service. Potentially fraudulent calls are tagged so they can be routed to specially trained agents for more scrutiny.

Organizations’ Leading Concerns About Cloud Contact Centers

• Quality of Service/Call Quality: 52%
• Security: 52%
• Reliability/Up-time: 46%
• Loss of Control: 43%
• Internal ability to administer the system: 42%
• Dependence on vendors: 38%
• Ability of vendors to meet SLAs: 25%
• Total Cost of Ownership: 19%
• Location of data centers: 18%
• Other: 7%

Source: Evolve IP-CCNG 2014 North American Call Center Survey Results
Customer Service Via Social Media and Digital Communities

Conversocial, In the Chat, and Metaverse Mod Squad were among the companies at Call Center Week with a focus on customer service over social media channels.

Conversocial offers a web-based platform that organizations can use to manage conversations in social media channels. Their “prioritization engine” uses natural-language processing to identify customer complaints and problems in social media messages so they can be handled quickly by contact center agents.

In the Chat offers a similar social media customer relationship management platform, also powered by algorithms that identify keywords and messages that require a response from a contact center agent.

At Call Center Week, In the Chat introduced a new platform for serving and engaging customers through SMS text message communication channels. The company said it is applying its keyword-mining technology to text messages to quickly route customer inquiries to the appropriate agents for handling.

Metaverse Mod Squad isn’t a technology provider, but deserves a mention here as an outsourcer of support agents, known as moderators or “mods,” trained to engage with its clients’ customers in online communities and over social media channels. The company also develops custom solutions for organizations’ social and online customer relationship management.

The State of Multi-Channel Solutions at Contact Centers

• 55.5% of contact centers surveyed have a multi-channel solution to handle chat, email, fax, SMS, Facebook or Twitter—44.5% do not have a multichannel solution.

• 25% of contact centers surveyed indicate that multi-channel is an investment priority in 2014.

Source: Evolve IP-CCNG 2014 North American Call Center Survey Results
The idea behind gamification is to turn regular office work into a game, in the hope it will make the employee experience more fun and enjoyable, while increasing productivity and revenue.

Gamification companies have found a prime target in contact centers, where agents are typically required to meet daily, weekly and monthly sales or problem resolution goals.

At Call Center Week, Bunchball and RedCritter presented their enterprise gamification solutions targeted at contact centers. Their cloud-based applications create games in which agents earn points and virtual badges for successful work such as closing support tickets and resolving problems on the first call. Agents cash in their points for gift cards and other rewards.

Both companies’ solutions integrate with customer service platforms such as Zendesk and customer relationship management (CRM) platforms such as Salesforce. Their application programming interfaces (APIs) also permit custom integrations with organizations’ CRM and contact center platforms.

**Gartner’s Definition of Gamification:**

“The use of game mechanics and experience design to digitally engage and motivate people to achieve their goals.”

*Game mechanics* describes the use of elements such as points, badges and leaderboards common to many games.

*Experience design* describes the journey players take with elements such as game play, play space and story line.

Gamification is a method to digitally engage, meaning that players interact with computers, smartphones and other devices rather than engaging with a person.

The goal of gamification is to motivate people to change behaviors or develop skills, or to drive innovation.

Gamification focuses on enabling players to achieve their goals. When organizational and player goals are aligned, the organization achieves its goals when players achieve their goals.

Source: Gartner Research
SATMAP and SmartAction are two companies marketing contact center solutions powered by artificial intelligence—advanced, powerful computing systems that approach the decision-making and language processing abilities of humans.

SATMAP offers a technology that pairs customers and agents based on their personalities. The assumption is that similar personalities between the two will result in faster problem resolution and higher levels of customer satisfaction.

The system evaluates the agent’s personality through an online survey that takes about 20 minutes to complete. Callers’ personalities are determined by publicly available demographic and “psychographic” databases, according to company representatives. When a customer calls, SATMAP is able to determine the best agent match within milliseconds and assign the call accordingly.

SmartAction uses artificial intelligence technologies to provide an advanced level of interactive voice response (IVR) service for contact centers. The company says its solution offers major advantages over conventional rule-based IVR systems which may recognize only a limited number of caller responses. These systems often lead to customer frustration, wasted time and the eventual need to connect with a live agent.

SmartAction says its conversational, “open grammar” system can recognize a wide variety of callers’ responses to questions, improving call success rates. By eliminating the need for menu-style IVR systems, call time is reduced significantly as well, according to the company.

**Conclusion ... and a Look Ahead**

The evolution of cloud computing and SaaS has led to a proliferation of technological tools that have shaken up the old model of contact centers, which relied on expensive communications and computing infrastructure. Today, just about every contact center need can be met as long as an organization has reliable, high-speed access to the Internet.

The second part of our review of contact center technologies will focus on:
- Language translation solutions
- Callback technologies
- Workforce management
- Customer relationship management
- Analytics
About DATAMARK

For more than 20 years, DATAMARK, Inc. has provided bilingual (English/Spanish) multichannel contact center services, mailroom management, data entry, document processing, business process improvement consulting and other outsourcing services for Fortune 500 companies across all industry sectors.

If you have questions or need assistance in developing your organization’s case for outsourcing and business process improvement, DATAMARK’s business process outsourcing specialists are available for a complimentary initial consultation.

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