

Integrated vs. Unified: Five Reasons Why Contact Centers Must Get Unified

Executive Summary

Imagine your contact center as a jigsaw puzzle, but each of the pieces has been provided by a different puzzle maker. One created the automatic call distributor piece, another the voice portal piece, another the predictive dialer piece, and still others the Internet contact, workforce management, recording and quality management pieces. Completing the puzzle to make it look like the picture shown on the lid of the box has become a futile effort – the pieces just won't fit the way they should.

Providing better service to your customers should be your focus, not getting your disparate contact center systems to work together. Custom integrations can be cost-prohibitive, labor-intensive and potentially very time-consuming and burdensome. Implementing upgrades or adding new capabilities in an environment like this only adds to that challenge. And, reporting and administration become a veritable nightmare when trying to pull information from multiple systems.

For most of you, this isn't an imaginary scenario, it's your day-to-day reality. You're striving to deliver the exceptional experiences your customers demand and deserve, but you're spending more time with your IT department trying to get the systems to work together. When you can't focus on maximizing the solutions you have, agent productivity can suffer, customer experiences become dismal and the bottom line may take a direct hit as a result.

How would you feel if, rather than dealing with multiple puzzle makers or contact center vendors with niche experience and expertise, you could have a single, master craftsman who could build, run and maintain your contact center, regardless of the shape or size? What if there was a way that you could have everything fit together, literally, right out of the box?

Well, there is.

The solution to your perplexing contact center puzzle and its many different pieces and parts is a unified solution. By administering, managing, monitoring, and driving the performance of the contact center – inbound and outbound calls, emails, chat sessions, faxes, staffing, productivity and more – from a single unified platform, you can increase flexibility, reduce complexity, lower costs, inspire customer loyalty, and enhance productivity. Most importantly, a unified contact center puts control in the hands of those closest to the customer – your business managers.

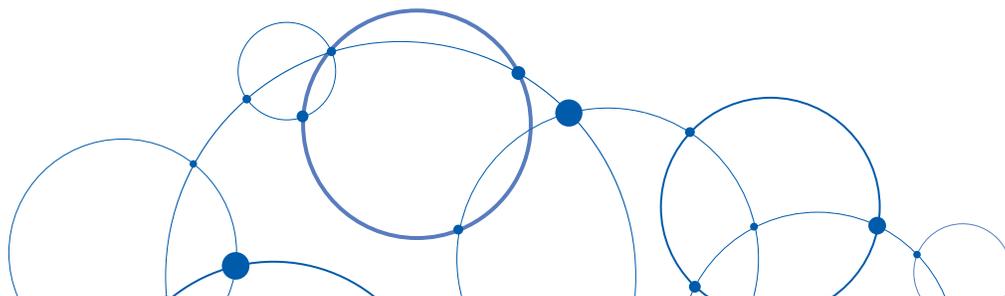
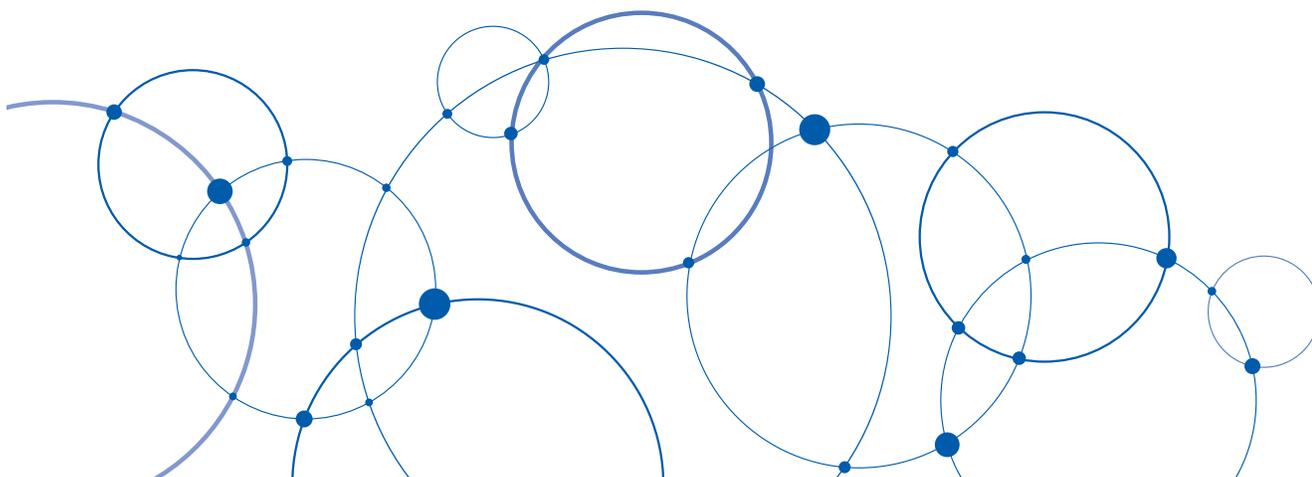


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The time has come to ask yourself...

- Can I address my customers' changing business needs quickly and easily?
- Am I able to deliver an exceptional customer experience?
- Do I have a complete view into my contact center's operations?
- Are my agents as efficient as they could be? Are they empowered with the tools they need to make the most of my customer relationships?

Learn how to rise above those integration challenges, control the chaos and reap the benefits that a unified solution can bring to your contact center.

The Tyranny of Integration

Unified and integrated. Many contact centers make the expensive mistake of not differentiating between the two. It is typical that, in an effort to address the pressing customer service, collections, or sales and telemarketing needs of a quickly growing business, companies accumulate a plethora of siloed, or point, solutions. As a result, most established contact centers today are integrated contact centers, where point solutions from various vendors have been cobbled together to give the appearance of a 'single' solution.

The reality is that these integrations are often chaotic, inefficient and very costly – and most importantly, they hinder the contact center from meeting its customer demands and strategic objectives. With multiple systems in play, the experience that customers receive is different depending on whether they contact a company via telephone, email or Web chat; agents lose productivity because they are logging in and out of systems all day long to accommodate spikes and valleys in traffic; and, business leaders lack the ability to truly see what is happening with employees or customers at any given time. Identifying the source of an issue in an integrated environment may take hours or even days since there are so many products tied together, and making any little change to this type of fragile arrangement can be a daunting, if not crippling, task.

Most of the challenges that emerge in integrated contact centers can be categorized into the following areas:

- Inflexibility
- Extreme Complexity
- High Costs
- Low Customer Satisfaction
- Unproductive Agents

Inflexibility

In an integrated environment, where flexibility is limited, it is extremely difficult for companies to adapt to changing market needs or campaign conditions. Adding new functionality or scaling the entire environment to grow with the business is an undertaking that makes many contact center managers cringe. But even simpler tasks, like setting up new promotions and customer care programs, or responding to unexpected increases in call volumes, may turn an entire operation on its head. Often, a whole IT staff and a number of additional experts are required to set things right, and hopefully keep them that way. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee.

Extreme Complexity

An integrated contact center is a complex contact center. With various systems linked together in one way or another, things like reporting and administration, as well as troubleshooting become quite difficult. Accurate, comprehensive reporting is essential for managing a successful contact center operation. Supervisors and managers need to know about the status of queues, campaigns, and agents in order to make educated staffing and routing decisions, and to properly manage productivity. Trying to consolidate this information from disparate systems with differing views is difficult and time consuming, and often yields only incomplete information. Similarly, if a contact center is experiencing a system issue, or worse, having downtime, it can be nearly impossible to pinpoint the root cause in an environment where there are a myriad of systems integrated together. In addition, implementing and acting on business rules is quite tricky in an integrated contact center. Maintaining the same set of business rules across systems is burdensome, and, with tens or hundreds of

changes to staff properties (e.g. groups, job status, permissions) and routing rules daily, this can quickly prove to be impossible. Unfortunately, customer experiences with these contact centers suffer a great deal because they don't receive a consistent experience across interactions or channels. This breeds frustration and dissatisfaction that ultimately leads to churn, and worse, brand erosion.

High Costs

The cost of integration, in both hours and dollars, can be exorbitant. To get all the pieces to work together in the first place, each vendor with a piece of the puzzle must be involved in the integration job, which usually requires some level of customization. In most cases, the integration cost is above and beyond the cost of the products, and as new versions of these products are released and deployed, all of the components must be reintegrated all over again. What's more, compiling and interpreting reports from various systems in an integrated center often requires one or more dedicated, full-time employees. And, as it is well known, in many geographies, people are the most costly resource in the business.

Low Customer Satisfaction

Never underestimate the value of delivering a positive or exceptional customer experience. The risks of not doing so are frightening, but the rewards are potentially endless. Integrated contact centers are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to delivering any consistency at all across interaction channels. Often, they are unable to tell if the customer who just emailed them a follow-up question about their order was the same customer who called the day before. As a result, the conversation starts at the very beginning again, much to the dismay of the customer. Most customers believe that if they are doing business with a company, that company should know them and treat them the same way whether they call and speak with an agent or they email and wait for a reply. Even if they choose to chat via the Web, or use the voice self-service application after hours, their experience should not change, just as their value to the company should remain the same.

Unproductive Agents

Agent productivity is one of the key measures of success for contact centers. Of course, defining success depends on the actual business, but in most centers, productivity is an indicator that is regarded highly. When agents are forced to log in and out of numerous systems multiple times a day, as they are in an integrated center, valuable seconds and minutes are lost each time. At first glance, this may not seem to present a problem, but when seconds and minutes are multiplied by the number of agents in the center and again by the number of times they change systems each day, hours a day and days a year are wasted on this menial task. That alone can spell disaster for the bottom line.

Controlling the Chaos with a Unified Contact Center Solution

Acknowledging that no two contact centers are alike, it is fairly safe to say that any contact center, in any business, would welcome the positive affects of things like saving money, and having more flexibility and less complexity in their operations.

There is a better way to put the pieces together, and that way is unified. A solution that has applications which are inherently designed to work together as a single product is the answer for every contact center that has been subjected to the tyranny of integration.

Contact centers need to take a good, hard look at their operations and ask, "Is this the best we can be?" They need to push themselves to answer questions like:

- Are we able to navigate the maze of our customers' changing business needs quickly and easily?
- Do we have a comprehensive view of what is happening in our center at all times?
- Are we spending time and money on things we could alleviate if our technology were different?
- Do we deliver the best possible customer experience? Every time? Via every channel?
- Are our agents the most productive that they could be?

Once an organization has examined things like this, it will be ready to understand why the contact center must get unified.

Five Reasons Why Contact Centers Must Get Unified

By uniting multiple capabilities – including automatic call distribution (ACD), predictive dialing, speech self service, Internet contact via email or chat, recording, and logging and quality management, all with unified reporting, routing and administration – in a single platform, contact centers have complete control and can forever break the tyranny of integration.

For new and existing contact centers alike, the benefits of implementing a unified solution are real, measurable and very tangible, unlike those of an integrated center.

1. *Increased Flexibility*

Gone are the days of living at the mercy of multiple vendors to help make one small change to a campaign, self-service menu or call flow. With a unified contact center, organizations can dynamically adjust to changing business conditions or peaks and valleys in traffic without requiring highly technical resources or intervention from multiple vendors. In addition, altering business rules, campaign programs, and staffing requirements becomes much easier.

2. *Reduced Complexity*

With all customer contact channels being managed on a single platform, administration and reporting become infinitely simpler. What's more, all rules related to routing, workflow, agent skills and prioritization are managed centrally so any change or new input is reflected across the entire system in real time. Similarly, consolidated monitoring and recording in a unified contact center enables real-time monitoring and recording of each customer contact from call initiation to call completion. Ultimately, this means more accurate and consistent treatment of customers – or a better overall customer experience.

A unified solution provides managers with a comprehensive perspective of contact center and agent performance. It allows centers to generate enterprise reports across all applications that reveal service and campaign performance via inbound and outbound calls, chat sessions, and email communications; workflow and agent performance statistics; and operational metrics. All communication channels use a central repository for reporting, meaning that information about agents, queues, resolution status and other key metrics is automatically consolidated across every communication channel, enabling supervisors to best understand what takes place in their contact center so they can make the best choices for the business.

3. *Lower Costs*

No integration means zero hours or dollars spent on integration. It's that simple.

Because a unified solution can work with existing infrastructures, contact centers can migrate from an integrated environment to a unified one without losing previously made investments in other systems. There is no "rip and replace" required. As certain technologies become end of life, or the capabilities of existing applications no longer meet strategic objectives, a contact center can begin to implement a unified solution by adding licenses for specific functionality as it is needed.

A unified approach also eliminates the endless version control issues normally present with multiple systems, reducing the amount of staff time needed to manage those version updates. And, because it's considerably easier to troubleshoot issues in a unified environment, it doesn't require hours to identify which system is causing the problem, resulting in even more cost savings.

4. *Enhanced Customer Satisfaction*

With a unified contact center, the big picture is revealed not only to management but to the agents working on the frontlines with customers. With real-time access to information centralized from front- and back-office systems, agents have clearer view than ever before and can make helping customers their number one priority, over finding customer information from various places.

A better informed agent will know that the customer sent an email yesterday, and had a web chat with another agent three days ago. The agent can use this data to more quickly and efficiently resolve the customer's inquiry, resulting in increased customer satisfaction.

In addition, when a contact center is unified, its customers are almost always going to have the same experience regardless of the channel they choose for their interactions. This, in itself, is a benefit with immeasurable positive impact.

5. Greater Agent Productivity

With a unified solution, agents log into one system, versus multiple systems, with multiple logins, multiple times per day. The ability to toggle between inbound and outbound services, to change from answering a call to answering an email, or to move from one campaign to another when traffic changes helps agents save time and resolve customer inquiries much faster. In addition, this simplified process provides agents with the tools they need to be successful and so leads to a happier, more productive workforce

Case Study

The Company

A leader in financial services business process outsourcing (BPO) combines deep industry experience with a proven, global infrastructure to deliver best-practice operations support for more than 200 banking, life, annuity, pensions, and property and casualty (general) insurance clients. The company offers industry-leading vertical BPO solutions like policy and contract administration for insurers and re-insurers, and loan servicing and insurance tracking for banks worldwide.

The Business Challenges

- Keep pace with evolving multi-customer requirements to maintain a competitive edge
- Enhance productivity and flexibility to achieve customer care excellence through Six Sigma improvements
- Continue to deliver on the company's outsourcing value proposition: speed-to-market, access to proven and shared infrastructure and capital management

The Solution

A unified contact center solution delivering advanced multichannel contact capabilities, provided the best total value over other solutions evaluated. The company is now able to differentiate itself from competitors and meet multi-client, multi-product "private label" customer service needs for inbound call handling, interactive voice response (IVR), predictive outbound dialing, unified reporting, skills-based routing and agent scripting, among many other capabilities.

The Results

- Improved agent productivity 32 percent
- Increased inbound voice portal call handling by 20 percent
- Reduced the load on agents enabling expanded service offerings
- Decreased agent training time from one month to one week
- Met Six Sigma quality goals through contact center operational improvements and best practices implementation
- Increased speed-to-market with new contact center technology

Why Unified

Remember the jigsaw puzzle we talked about? Is that what your contact center looks like? If the answer is yes, don't feel bad. Sometimes the needs of a changing business force you to implement piecemeal solutions with complex integrations. Hindsight is always 20/20, and, knowing what you know now, looking back it is easy to see these were nothing more than short-term fixes that possibly created an even larger mess.

But, there is hope. There is not only a vision for an ideal contact center, but a reality, as well. The unified contact center is the affordable, attainable, flexible, reliable way to break the tyranny of integration that you have been subject to for far too long. And it can be yours today.

Of course, your business is unique. Perhaps you have extremely dynamic practices and processes, or maybe your organization operates in a more consistent manner. Whichever the case, the common requirement is for extreme flexibility to respond to changing customer demands and business environments, while balancing the realities of the bottom line.

And really, the bottom line is on everyone's mind, whether they know it or not. Increasing flexibility, reducing complexity, lowering costs, enhancing customer satisfaction and improving productivity are responsibilities that fall across the entire organization, not just the contact center, and all add up to positively impact the bottom line.

This is why getting unified is in every contact center's future. The question is when, not if.

Don't get caught up trying to make your pieces fit together when you could be putting control in the hands of those closest to your customers – your business. Get unified.

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About Aspect

Aspect is a global software and IT services firm specializing in applying Microsoft unified communications and collaboration to help customers achieve optimal results through enhanced business processes across the enterprise and in the contact center. Aspect provides IT consulting, integration services and business applications. For more information, visit www.aspect.com.

