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# New Strategies for Contact Center Leaders

Contact Center leaders drive transformation.

Advanced technology and new process optimization techniques are transforming the traditional role of the contact center. Contact center leaders have an opportunity to position the contact center as a critical component of strategic transformation across the corporation.



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The traditional view of the contact center as an interchangeable assemblage of talking automata who disseminate minimal information to the calling masses within the shortest possible talk time is equal parts outmoded and ubiquitous. This underestimation of the contact center's role deserves rethinking--particularly given the wide range of process improvements and technological advances in recent years that extend a center's capabilities. Taking full advantage of the contact center's expanded capacity to enhance revenue and drive customer loyalty requires contact center leaders to develop new strategic perspectives.

Contact center leaders can extend their strategic role within the corporation by understanding the many advances and improvements that are reshaping the center's impact on innovative business strategies. The focus here is on business transformation. Certainly, there are always opportunities to improve the day-to-day operating capabilities in a contact center. This is an important and continued focus for any effective leader. The added suggestion is to also jump up a level and position the contact center as a fundamental engine of change for the entire business. This strategic reassessment outlines what is changing, what is unique, what capabilities can be effectively leveraged to support broader business goals and how to think about these advances in a way that optimizes the new role of the contact center.

## **New Strategies**

Viewed from a fresh perspective, the contact center's principle strategic roles in a business are threefold: 1) increase the accuracy, impact, and reach of a company's market intelligence, 2) serve as a collaboration engine for continuous improvements in client loyalty, and 3)

radically alter the economics of client interactions that ultimately drive revenue growth.

## **Contact Center's Role in Market Intelligence**

First, market intelligence, broadly defined, encompasses a company's knowledge of client needs, relationship management insights, product development savvy, and the processes or workflows that generate value for customers and clients. Thinking about marketing knowledge in this broad context highlights the new role of the contact center in disseminating, collecting, and leveraging knowledge.

Market intelligence, in the past, was primarily generated by the marketing department, with a small sample of customers, for subsequent application to targeted clients and customers. The contact center was used as a response mechanism to answer specific product inquiries or fulfill offers; more advanced centers developed tele-sales departments using rudimentary triggers to identify cross-sell or up-sell opportunities. The proposed new role incorporates the contact center both as a listening post and as a source of information gathered through social networks and in-market product testing.

Massive quantities of purchasing advice, innovative applications that extend a product's capabilities and intensely technical product information developed by expert users are now exchanged through purpose-built Internet discussion groups and social networks. Nielsen Online reports that Member-communities have overtaken email as the fourth most popular online activity, behind only search, general purpose information portals, and software applications. Companies now have an opportunity to plug in to these member communities, evaluate current products as well as proposed enhancements in the crucible of unrehearsed and unre-

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strained public opinion, and conduct broad scale in-market testing using the contact center's capabilities.

Contact centers are routinely connected to customer relationship management (CRM) databases, but these databases are often extracted specifically for the center and do not connect back to the marketing databases that drive offer analysis. By extending the concept of CRM to include some elements of marketing analytics, the fundamental capabilities of the contact center are enhanced.

The contact center, with its advanced skills and infrastructure for texting, chat, email, and web inquiries becomes the natural place for the core marketing group to embed their listening capabilities by leveraging the lower cost, high production controls, and expertise of the contact center to reach out to social networks, engage member communities, and conduct broad scale in-market tests of new concepts and products. Traditional focus group research, with its high costs and small sample sizes, can now be bolstered by a willing public that will comment, criticize, and improve market intelligence with reactions from thousands to hundreds-of-thousands of consumers—without paying any participation fees.

### **Collaboration Engine for Loyalty Improvements**

Second, the contact center infrastructure is now capable of serving as a collaboration engine to drive continuous improvements in client loyalty. Part of the shift here is driven by newer on-demand, or “cloud,” software architectures that hide much of the development complexity from the developers. Just as spreadsheets shifted the focus from doing math to analyzing business results, the “soft” architecture underlying contact center applications shifts the focus from

years of development to days of table changes. The contact center can afford to change workflows to reflect process improvements requested by consumers and employees because many of the changes are now point and click rather than code and debug. Equally important, the contact center is continually receiving a sufficient volume of client feedback to effectively evaluate the needed changes. Again, in-market tests with a small percentage of the production traffic can quickly evaluate and sort through the various change hypotheses.

For example, increasing first contact resolution is always one of the superordinate goals of any contact center because of the beneficial impacts this has on staffing levels, costs, client loyalty, and business margins. However, finding the right combination of self-service capabilities, IVR prompts, transfer capabilities, and dialogue that will consistently improve first contact resolution can be elusive outside of a structured, carefully measured, high volume contact center. The quality measurement structure that is an integral element of most high volume contact centers is perfectly suited to this critical role of driving client loyalty to exceptional levels through constant iteration and improvement of the client workflows.

### **Radical Economic Improvements**

Third, the contact center will continue to fulfill its traditional role, significantly improving the economics of customer interactions, but the strategic opportunity is now open to extend this technology across much more than the “back office.” The development of fully distributed, VoIP, cloud, and outsourced technical capacity that can be purchased on demand has changed the definition of “center.” The center of the contact center is now strategic rather than tactical, virtual rather than instantiated in a partic-

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ular pile of bricks and mortar. In the past, the automatic call distributor, one of the first pieces of special purpose contact center technology, was designed to equitably connect calls across a waiting queue of available telephone representatives performing repetitive tasks (although often highly complex) in an anonymous pool of similarly trained staff. This advance over previous distribution schemes eliminated overloaded representatives and enabled detailed measurement of workloads—since every representative was presented with an equal opportunity to complete a fair share of the incoming traffic.

With the addition of email, integrated voice response, voice recognition, chat, and assisted self-service the core capabilities of the contact center have been extended across a wide range of customer access channels. These capabilities can now be extended beyond a narrow definition of “telephone service representatives” to incorporate many functions across a corporation. Skill-based routing was a first step in this evolution. However, an overly narrow definition of “skill” prevented the contact center from demonstrating its full range of capabilities. Skills were always defined within the center, across a very tight, operational, compensation range, rather than across the company as a whole. Contact centers are now virtual—the connection between the client and the representative can be from anywhere to anywhere. Contact center software is now collaborative—knowledge is accessible across multiple organizational levels. Contact center workflow automation includes a wide range of contact and case distribution rules, review steps, and intelligent queues (i.e., retrieve and reroute if the delay is  $> x$ ).

### **Extending the Contact Center’s Role**

These capabilities extend the center in two directions. Outward, because the center can now leverage resources across the organization to resolve client issues that were previously too infrequent or too complex to become part of the center’s retinue. Inward, because “front office” functions that required highly compensated professionals to resolve can now be shared with the contact center. A simple example of this is the migration of tasks away from a front end sales force and toward the contact center. Most sales people spend 30-40% of their time on non-critical, non-client facing tasks. Relocating these tasks to a contact center nearly doubles the productive face time with the clients. Advanced routing capabilities and virtual center capabilities mean that the actual configuration of the center can conform to the traditional operational modes of the sales force—e.g., the assistant can still be in the next cubicle, but the work queue becomes enormously more efficient as it is shared across the corporation.

### **Strategic Business Transformation**

These three strategic capabilities of the modern multi-channel, collaborative contact center provide a starting point for rethinking the design and distribution of work across a corporation. By fully leveraging the distributed resource model found in virtual call centers, taking advantage of the workflow automation tools, strong production controls and collaboration tools that are now available off-the-shelf, there are a range of strategic choices opening up to build client loyalty and drive revenue that have not previously been fully utilized.

Contact center leaders have a new range of strategic choices and strategic impacts open to them with the advanced technology and new process optimization techniques developed over the past few years. Cloud computing, VoIP distributed architectures, real-time CRM, and advanced knowledge management systems allow the contact center to achieve a strategic role in improving gathering market intelligence, improving client loyalty, and driving revenue growth. New Strategies for Contact Center Leaders outlines the key people, process, and technology changes that demand a new strategic perspective from contact center leaders. Re-thinking the traditional role of the contact center allows leaders to transition from simply containing contact costs to participating in the strategic redesign of the larger organization. Contact the Customer Research Center for more information about contact center strategies and delivering extraordinary client experiences.

# Customer Research Center

Experts in  
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**“The CRC experts understand the technology, the underlying processes, and the human components that must work together to make a contact center deliver extraordinary service.”**

Contact the Customer Research Center at:

176 Broadway, Suite 9C  
New York, NY 10038  
Phone: (646) 325-3329  
Email: [info@customerresearchcenter.com](mailto:info@customerresearchcenter.com)