

Journal Telecom Journal

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The Hidden Contact Centres, we all have them!

BY BILL ELLIOTT

In a contracting economy, organizations begin to search for opportunities to reduce overhead costs and improve efficiencies. It becomes increasingly important to be able to leverage the skills of every employee. One opportunity may be to search for the 'hidden contact centres' and use technology to improve business processes; provide better customer service and save money.

Regardless of their size, businesses often fail to recognize the 'hidden contact centres' that may exist within their organizations. There is a common misconception that a contact centre needs to be quite large to take advantage of the economies of scale traditionally associated with that environment.

There are operational efficiencies by implementing 'contact centre metrics' where groups of employees share communications responsibilities from FOX GROUP research.

These centres can be high tech help desks; inside sales groups; order bureaus; or any other business process wherein calls are distributed amongst a group of employees.

Distance is no longer a factor in deploying and managing contact centres with customers and their contact centre staff.

In today's technological environment, these employees can be distributed geographically but can share centralized job functions. Some examples could include car rental agencies who have agents located in separate store fronts but can share incoming client calls to provide improved customer service or a high tech support organization that can improve retention of highly skilled employees by allowing them to work from home.

What are the business drivers?

The use of internet and IP based tools are driving business transformations. People want the ability to have a seamless interaction with companies whether the approach is made by telephone, fax, email or web chat. In addition, when the approach occurs there is a strong desire to communicate with someone who can resolve the issue on the first initial interaction.

Therefore, to be successful in the long run, the contact centre needs to process the initial contact efficiently regardless of platform (voice, fax, email or web); ensure that the request is handled by someone who can resolve the issue on the initial contact and be able to provide service levels that are based on identification of the incoming request.

This can be a tall order for a small or medium sized business to be able to provide the capital investment and technical talent to install and maintain systems that can provide these services. The answer therefore, can be found in hosted contact centre services.

What are Hosted Contact Centres?

While the "sweet spot" for a hosted contact centre solution is in the range of 20-25 agents, there can be value in this service for some groups outside this range where multimedia services, call recording, quality monitoring, intelligent call routing, workflow rules, multiple locations or transaction reporting are required or beneficial. The service provider hosts the contact centre applications in a secure environment and provides the services to subscribers on a per line basis.

The service provider hosts the contact centre applications in a secure environment and provides the services to subscribers on a per line or per seat basis.

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The Hidden Contact Centres,

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These services are available from a number of providers including Bell Canada Contact Centre Solutions (including ComputerTalk™), TELAX Hosted Call Centre, and TELUS CallCentreAnywhere™. There are a variety of other providers, but this group provides an interesting profile of the services that can be delivered including some specialty applications. These service providers have been listed alphabetically and the order does not infer any difference in service quality or value.

What are the services?

Generally speaking, the hosted service providers can provide the same advanced technology solutions found in the systems provided by traditional PBX or IP PBX suppliers. Each of the hosted contact centre providers has their own value propositions based on the feature availability and solution design. In all cases, the service can be delivered to a centralized contact centre office environment or to a decentralized environment.

Bell Canada Hosted Contact Centre Solutions leverage third party service providers such as ComputerTalk™, among others, as part of their suite of hosted services with the service being delivered on an IP platform. The service can be delivered anywhere a stable high speed IP connection is available with no requirement for an additional telephone service other than the IP connection.

Telax provides a custom designed solution that offers a wide range of features to agents with basic ten-digit dialable telephone service and sufficient IP bandwidth to support the computer applications. Telax does not have a Lite version and offers flat rate pricing policy with no additional costs for addition and deletion of features.

The TELUS service also requires ten-digit dialable basic telephone service and sufficient IP bandwidth. However, they provide the service in Lite and Multimedia versions. The service is targeted at Small and Medium Businesses with package pricing for less than 10 agents. They offer SLA's (Service Level Agreements) with 99.9% availability. TELUS also offers a Disaster Recovery Service for an additional fee.

What does it cost?

Clearly, the costs must be negotiated between the service provider and the client. The monthly costs can range from up to \$450 per line per month but are more commonly in the \$250 to \$300 range. Initial one-time costs would include set up and training. Some service providers may charge per minute costs for toll free and service delivery in the range of 6 cents per minute.

This compares favourably to the costs of an in house solution, when one considers both the hard and soft costs. Hard costs may include the amortized cost of the PBX, associated licensing costs, the required servers, provisioning of access lines and toll free services. Some of the softer costs include IT and support staff to maintain the communications environment.

What is the payback?

There are tangible and intangible benefits to the introduction of this type of service into the 'hidden contact centre' in your business. Based on an 18% efficiency improvement of an administrative employee with a loaded rate of \$40,000 per annum, the offsetting savings are in the range of \$600 per month.

There are several other valid reasons to consider a hosted contact centre including the ability to scale the service for busy seasons; to be able to take advantage of skilled

employees in multiple locations; to use skills based routing to ensure the employee answering the call is sufficiently skilled and, in today's environment of reducing carbon footprint, to provide professional level services to home offices.

Summary - Look for those 'hidden contact centres' in your organization and discover the real value that technology can provide to help ensure your business is in a position to compete on an equal basis with your competitors in a rapidly changing, competitive marketplace.



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