Create a Cohesive Customer Experience by Uniting your Communication Platforms

**Enterprise CX Goes Beyond your Contact Center.
Can your communications converge?**

COMMfusion

Introduction

As a CIO, you know the importance of customer experience (CX) for your organization's continued growth and success. Customer Experience is on the minds of every type of organization, especially those that operate contact centers. As the front door to the customer, nowhere else is CX success or failure more visible than in the contact center. Yet responsibility for serving and interacting with customers is moving beyond the traditional contact center and its agents, to other parts of the organization. Successful companies know that ensuring a positive CX is now the responsibility of the entire company - sales, marketing, engineering, finance, and so on. However you know this is easier said than done, especially for large, geographically-distributed enterprises with many knowledge workers. These enterprises are particularly hampered by the siloed structure with which they purchase and operate major communication tools internally, preventing information from flowing freely and optimally between major internal communication platforms.

Can your enterprise meet the vision of CX you want, while ensuring agility, compliance, openness, and control? Do you, or can you, trust your primary cloud contact center vendor to be responsible for your destiny? In most cases, the answer is no. The good news is, enterprises can leverage the convergence of unified communications (UC) and contact center applications and technologies to better serve their customers with personalized context, enabling more collaboration between contact center agents, subject matter experts (SMEs) across the organization, and customers. Security, fraud prevention, and compliance can also be managed in an enterprise-wide approach to CX.

Achieving this cohesive enterprise CX requires a different way of thinking, as well as the right architecture to act as a unifying layer to help converge your standalone contact center as a service (CCaaS) and unified communications as a service (UCaaS) applications. With a carrier-based software platform integrating the various components and elements needed for a world-class, enterprise-wide CX strategy, your organization can pick and choose the tools with the specific customizations you need to best meet your goals.

The Role of Enterprise CX

More and more, enterprise businesses are differentiating based on CX. Customer experience - the sum of all the interactions, engagements, transactions, and touchpoints a customer has with a business or brand throughout the customer lifecycle - helps build long-term customer relationships. CX-focused enterprises need to not only embrace digital channels and new innovations, but also expand the role and responsibility of CX throughout the organization.

Automating simple interactions through digital transformation has been a primary focus for many years, essentially the low hanging fruit. Today, from finance to marketing to specialized teams, responsibility for important CX interactions and costs is expanding to the entire enterprise, including subject matter experts, specialists, and others outside of the contact center. Communication, collaboration, and coordination between those inside and outside of the contact center requires the right tools and technologies to best serve customers. Most importantly, this requires integration between the enterprise's unified communications and contact center technologies. As organizations of all sizes are moving to cloud services, much of this required integration will be between UCaaS and CCaaS offerings from various providers.

Today's cloud-based as-a-service solutions, including UCaaS and CCaaS, provide a host of capabilities and benefits, notably scalability, elasticity, business continuity, redundancy, remote worker support, automatic updates, and more. Businesses of all sizes are turning to cloud services in increasing numbers, for good reason. However, as will be discussed, cloud services have some limitations that make it hard to provide some of the integrations and capabilities required by large enterprises.

UCaaS and CCaaS Convergence An Essential Element for Enterprise CX

Driven by the need to improve CX across the business, more and more organizations are finding ways to begin to integrate their UC and contact center environments, or more recently, look at what's possible to orchestrate customer communications across their UCaaS and CCaaS silos. By providing more capabilities and functionality to both enterprise workers and contact center agents, enterprises can improve customer relationships, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, while reducing costs.

Unfortunately, in most large enterprises the contact center technologies and platform are separate from or not well integrated with the business UC platform that the majority of

the company uses day-to-day, creating challenges to realistically achieving the vision and goals of Enterprise CX.

Opportunities to Create a Cohesive Enterprise CX

Several key use cases are driving the need for UC and contact center tools convergence to provide Enterprise CX.

Expert Agent

While the contact center is the front door to the business, there's a whole house beyond the front door. Contact centers are ideal for many customer interactions, but sometimes you need to go beyond the contact center to other individuals or teams in the enterprise. According to COMMfusion, over 20 percent of all telephone inquiries handled by contact center agents will require some sort of assistance from knowledge workers or SMEs in various parts of the organization. As artificial intelligence (AI) tools and chatbots begin to offload basic inquiries and transactions, contact center agents increasingly handle more complex interactions, often requiring expertise or knowledge beyond the agent's scope. With integrated UC and contact center services, organizations can tap into expertise across the organization simply and quickly, enabling contact center agents to collaborate in real time with subject matter experts throughout the organization to quickly respond to a customer issue.

These SMEs become "expert agents," providing expertise and insights to agents, and in some cases to the customers themselves. Examples include claims adjusters helping with insurance claims calls, financial experts assisting with bank loans, or sales engineers answering technical questions about a product.

In a typical scenario without an integrated platform, when a contact center agent needs to reach out to an expert in the organization for additional information or assistance, they would put the caller on hold while tracking down the SME, and then call the customer back once they found the information they needed. These lengthy calls and multiple customer interactions can be costly to the organization. By communicating and collaborating with individuals in various parts of the organization – whether sales, marketing, or accounting – contact centers can better serve customers in real time. Reducing the time it takes to resolve a customer's issue can save contact centers hundreds of thousands of dollars.

With an integrated UC and contact center platform with a shared digital corporate directory and UC tools such as presence status, instant messaging, click to call, and so on, contact center agents can see which SMEs are available, and collaborate with the expert regardless of their location. Agents can send an instant message or click-to-chat to an SME from within their contact center agent screen, and even bring the expert into the conversation with the customer.

The Collaborative Contact Center

By using today's enterprise collaboration tools, contact center agents, help desk specialists, teams, and individual workers can more easily communicate with each other and better serve customers, while improving departmental service level a greements (SLAs).

With integrated UCaaS and CCaaS, agents can launch an instant message (IM), voice call, two-way video call, and even screen sharing or co-browsing session from the agent desktop. When needed, escalating from a chat session to a web conference with document sharing and other collaborative tools helps the agent, SME, and customer better collaborate to more quickly resolve the customer's issue. With screen sharing, agents can visually guide callers through a process, such as filling out a complicated tax form or using an online ordering system. Using UCaaS collaboration capabilities such as shared spaces for interacting and sharing documents, agents, experts, and customers can truly collaborate and work together to find a solution to the customer's issue.

Many contact centers already use IM to enable backchannel communications between agents and specialists or supervisors, but going outside of the walls of the contact center has been challenging. Using the same underlying platform for contact center agents and enterprise knowledge workers makes it easier to provide unified communications and collaboration applications such as presence, IM, conferencing, and video to contact center agents and supervisors. Efficiently sharing information through internal collaboration enhances the overall customer experience, shortens call handling and resolution time, reduces call transfers, improves first contact resolution, and decreases costs.

Channel Switching

Gaining in popularity, digital channels such as web chat, SMS, email, social media, and messaging play a key role when it comes to CX. With digital channels, consumers can reach and interact with businesses using their channel of choice.

Different channels are appropriate for different types of interactions or situations. Businesses supporting multiple interaction channels provide customers with choices and options. Email may be a preferred interaction method when the consumers need to provide photos or documents to the customer service representative or want to maintain a record of the interaction. Web chat is a real-time alternative to email that lets customers and representatives share information such as documents or web page links, making it especially easy to interact while a customer is on a company's website. Visual tools such as video, co-browsing, and screen sharing make it easier for customers and agents to truly collaborate, enhancing the customer experience.

In many cases, a customer interaction will begin in one channel and move to another channel. For example, a web chat customer who didn't get the information they needed or had a more complex follow-up question may need to switch to a voice interaction; or a customer on a voice call with an agent may want to share photos or documentation and needs to escalate to a video and document sharing channel.

As the use of more digital channels, as well as chat bots, continue to increase, the ability to seamlessly switch channels will also increase. Having the right unified underlying platform that unites the channels will become even more important.

Barriers to Creating a Cohesive Enterprise CX

Just like the evolution of the ERP convergence and increasing CRM consolidation or specialized platforms, it's not a stretch to see the ultimate single contact center/UC platform consolidation, but that is likely many years out still. The best way to reach the vision of Enterprise CX today is by integrating UCaaS and CCaaS, which isn't always easy, with several challenges that need to be overcome.

Fragmentation

While small- and medium-sized businesses can use a single provider for CCaaS/UCaaS, such as RingCentral, 8x8, Vonage, or many others, large enterprises work with a multitude of vendors and have to deal with many fragmented pieces of a total solution. Large enterprises generally have discrete systems for business telephony, hardware peripherals management, video communications, remote collaboration, and contact center, tied together through API, SDK, or native integrations. As will be discussed, an underlying platform can bring these different elements together.

Walled Gardens

Channel switching, or moving from a web chat to a phone call to screen sharing, for example, is very important, but challenging when using different products and providers. How can a contact center agent who received an inbound text message from a high-value customer pass the text to a dedicated account team for priority customers? How can an agent hand off a WhatsApp interaction to a specialized subject matter expert in the marketing department? How can a contact center agent find the right product specialist in a different department and location to help solve the customer's issue – and how does an agent using a cloud contact center service pass the call to a Microsoft Teams user?

For now, enterprises have to trust that their contact center provider has done the integration work to bring it all together, but that's not always practical. In part, there are too many vendors and providers to work with, and no one can have deep integration with all of them. Enterprises with mission-critical contact centers rely on their contact center vendor roadmap and partners, but there's often a walled garden between the various vendors and their offerings, making it challenging to integrate the preferred specialized applications and vendors.

Small- and mid-size organizations may have a single omnichannel contact center solution that enables channel shifting, but this isn't generally the case for large enterprises. In these large enterprises, agents are usually dedicated to either voice or digital channels and have specialized applications and best-of-breed products for these different channels. Rather than choosing an all-in-one contact center solution, many large enterprises with mission-critical contact centers opt for a best-of-breed approach, selecting innovative vendors with specialized applications that fill a specific need – such as for visual engagement, digital interactions, messaging channels, AI, virtual agents, etc. While most CCaaS providers have partnerships and relationships with a handful of specialized third-party providers, they may not be the vendors that the enterprise prefers, thus limiting their options.

To differentiate and provide the digital customer experience desired, enterprises need to be able to pick and choose the technologies and technology providers they prefer, and somehow integrate and tie together these various technologies with their core CCaaS platform. As noted, while the cloud has many benefits, integration and customization are not among them.

Innovation Requires Best of Breed

There are many cloud-based UC and contact center products out there today, but to get the solution that specifically meets your organization's needs isn't easy. Enterprises and their solution provider vendors need to embrace innovation, agility, and flexibility in order to bring together different technologies and capabilities.

There's no lack of innovation when it comes to UC and contact center solutions, with new companies introducing advanced capabilities on an almost daily basis. Whether it's AI, video, new forms of engagement, or even virtual and augmented reality, there's a continual stream of rising stars – new companies with ground-breaking technologies to help enterprises realize their CX visions. No one company can do it all and provide all of the new and advanced capabilities enterprises want, heightening the need for partnerships and integrations. In order to leverage these innovations, CIOs and enterprises need to work with a variety of providers while still meeting their security requirements.

Compliance and Security

Compliance and security is top of mind for CIOs – especially in large enterprises. From preventing fraud and identity theft, to complying with ever-changing privacy laws that have created a matrix of new state, country, and regional complexity, communications isn't just about making connections with customers. Moving to the cloud UC and CC also means ensuring security, compliance, authentication, and fraud protection consistently across calls, messages, video, screen sharing, etc., which creates significant technical challenges. CIOs must be cognizant of the various security and compliance issues when using different security and compliance vendors and when integrating UC and contact center cloud services. Adding channels such as video, or redirecting calls over the public Internet compounds this issue. For example, moving a call from a cloud contact center provider such as Genesys to Microsoft Teams or handing off calls and chats between agents and moving between cloud vendors means losing the layer of compliance and security. The challenge is CIOs need to plan to integrate once, think globally, and ensure flexibility to be able to leverage these capabilities across multiple UC, contact center, and other communication applications so they can instead focus on high-value differentiating CX projects for their business while minimizing liability for their organization.

Different Buyers

Beyond the technical challenges mentioned, large enterprises have another issue to contend with – different buyers and stakeholders for contact center and UC. With different purchasing criteria and goals, it's difficult to coordinate roadmaps, strategies, and purchases between these groups, hindering integration efforts.

Cloud-to-Cloud Integration Reality - Cloud Isn't a Panacea

Despite the many benefits of cloud communication platforms, there are some downsides – notably, the loss of control and inability to deeply customize for your business. Customization is more difficult in a cloud environment, as most cloud services provide a fixed set of capabilities for all customers. As opposed to premises-based solutions, it's hard for the enterprise IT staff to go in and make changes, add integrations, or customize the cloud solution to meet their specific needs for orchestrating communications channels. Enterprises prefer to have hands-on control of their communication solutions, enabling them to add the technologies and vendor offerings of their choice, which is more challenging with cloud-based services.

The Solution

Achieving Enterprise CX and overcoming the challenges described requires a unifying platform to bring the various elements and applications together.

Enterprises with the right base layer can control their destiny. For example, Bandwidth, a software-powered carrier company, provides a common base layer across both cloud-based UC and contact center platforms, with the necessary integration capabilities for video, messaging, and voice calls. This means you can leverage a common denominator at the communications provider layer integrated into multiple software platforms to enable your large enterprise to solve the challenges described above, ensuring excellent CX across your entire organization.

For more information on how Bandwidth helps organizations create Enterprise CX, watch this video interview.

Conclusion

CX is no longer solely the responsibility of the contact center – it involves the entire organization. Integrating cloud-based UC and contact center services to provide CX tools and capabilities to enterprise workers, while providing enterprise collaboration capabilities to contact workers, is the first step to Enterprise CX. With higher customer satisfaction or CSAT scores, reduced operational costs, and increased first contact resolution (FCR), a more collaborative contact center enables organizations to better serve customers, save money, and ensure long-term customer loyalty.

Achieving CX across the enterprise requires the right cloud platform, providing security and compliance while enabling customers to move seamlessly from one channel to another, integrating video, messaging, voice calls, video share, and more. Enterprises need to work with best-of-breed vendors, providing innovative capabilities such as AI, chatbots, and new interaction channels such as messaging and video, while still ensuring security and compliance.

Businesses are moving to Enterprise CX – are you ready?

About the Author

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