



Restructuring your contact centre technology for the customer experience era

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1: The imperative

Your customers no longer tolerate bad experiences.

In fact, 76% of customers say they will quit doing business with a company following a bad customer experience.

A 2017 [Ombudsman Services report](#) estimates that UK businesses lose about £37 billion every year due to bad customer service.

Yet, in the Institute of Customer Service's January 2020 [UK Customer Satisfaction Index](#), it is highlighted that few brands are able to consistently rise to the challenge their customers have set them, with customer satisfaction levels having declined for the past five years, reaching their lowest level since January 2015.

There are numerous obstacles hampering businesses' ability to deliver great customer experiences. When it comes to the contact centre, technology is often a primary source of complaint.

In BT Global's bi-annual [The Autonomous Customer](#) study, it found that contact centre technology – and the choice of engagement channels available to customers – are the leading reasons for poor experiences. Crucially, only 21% rate the consistency between the digital experience and contact into the call centre of large multinational organisations as 'excellent'.

With employees becoming increasingly disgruntled by the lack of appropriate tools at their disposal, it's not just the customer experience that poor contact centre technology is affecting. 9 in 10 call centre rep say disjointed communications technologies hamper workflow and motivation, damaging customer satisfaction and the bottom line, according to a [RingCentral report](#).

“With the rise of bot and AI-driven automation, it demands a new contact centre model for customer interactions.”

“Consumers are more technology-driven and do notice if their contact centre experience is not what they are expecting, and that changes their brand loyalty,” says Sunny Dhami, senior director of product marketing for RingCentral.

“With the rise of bot and AI-driven automation, it demands a new contact centre model for customer interactions; an agile operating model to move towards digital engagement. The end result leads to resolving customer issues faster and providing a much better customer experience.”

Resolving issues faster remains a crucial concern. According to [a survey](#) of the retail industry by Retail TouchPoints, the top customer communication challenge among 42% of contact centres is the ability to improve the speed of response to customer enquiries.

Yet artificial intelligence is becoming an accepted technology to bridge the gap. As stated in BT’s The Autonomous Customer research, 8 out of 10 customers now expect organisations to use AI as an enabler for transforming service.





2: The tech

Artificial intelligence may be a catalyst for improving customer experiences, but the bedrock for many companies looking to restructure their contact centre technology is the cloud.

According to [current projections](#), by 2021, spending on cloud-based communications technology will surpass on-premises communications technology for the first time, in the contact centre.

The benefits of investing in a cloud-based communications platform for the contact centre vs on-premises technology are clear.

On-premises solutions are considered costly, inflexible and unable to cope with customers' expectations of multichannel engagement with brands.

Customers are capricious when it comes to communication channel choice, and expect to be able to channel-hop when communicating with brands. What's more, they hop between digital and traditional channels, and want brands to have a record of their journey as they pass between them.

It's no coincidence that ContactBabel's [2018 decision-makers report](#) highlighted 'omnichannel' as being the single-most important strategy for contact centres in transforming their technology for the modern customer. The report also noted that without a cloud-based platform, this was an almost impossible goal:

“Without a solid and scalable platform, separate applications, hardware and locations will remain isolated, or will cost so much time and money to integrate that it would be better to leave them alone. Using a single open platform, the investment becomes much lower, and leaves the way open for businesses to add locations, channels and applications as needed.

“The single open platform should be a concept which is always in the minds of people making decisions about the future of their multisite, multiplatform operations, with the cloud now featuring in many businesses' decisions.”

“Companies that engage in omnichannel communications post 2x greater annual growth in customer lifetime value.”

[According to Aberdeen](#), companies that engage in omnichannel communications post 2x greater annual growth in customer lifetime value, and 2x greater annual growth in customer satisfaction rates, compared with those that don't.

And as well as appeasing customer expectations around their channel-hopping experience, the financial benefits of being omnichannel are also clear for contact centre technologists. Accenture Strategy's [Global Consumer Pulse Research](#) [recently](#) found that it is the channel-hopping customers that are actually the most profitable.

The ideal setup

Outlined in the whitepaper, [How Collaborative Communications Improves the Customer Experience](#), the ideal technology platform setup for a modern enterprise's contact centre should be:

- A broad choice of communication channels for customers.
- Analytics so businesses can understand customer preferences and trends.
- Support for quickly responding to and resolving issues on the first call.

- The ability to route calls to the most suitable agent rather than simply the next available one, and interactive voice response (IVR) for quicker resolution to problems and inquiries.
- Unified communications and the ability to integrate tools so agents don't need to switch applications so frequently to resolve inquiries.

This last point is particularly pertinent, given that 2018 [CITE research](#) found that more than two-thirds of contact centre agents say they waste up to 60 minutes at work navigating between apps, and 68% of workers toggle between apps up to 10 times an hour.

53% of workers get so frustrated they say they'd rather do household chores and pay bills than navigate between apps.

Integration is a vital component, along with collaborative tools that allow businesses to “connect with customers, partners and teams anywhere and on any device to offer premium customer service”.

2020's global [coronavirus crisis](#) has also highlighted just how flexible contact centres need to be, with millions of agents suddenly displaced from traditional office-based

environments but being expected to continue their regular work function from home.

Even before the crisis hit, in the UK the number of remote workers had [increased by 25%](#) in the decade from 2008 to 2018.

“What the crisis highlights is that unforeseen events have the potential to disrupt your communications,” says Sunny Dhami. “They can cause a vital data loss or prevent employees from accessing your business location. Downtime, loss of customer data, or losing valuable staff due to a disaster could risk your company's survival.

“Disaster recovery and business continuity plans to prepare for unforeseeable events like this have become must-haves for most companies, especially those running contact centres.

“There's also the issue of hardware: a physical phone tied to a desk in an office is no longer functional. Cloud-based solutions are software applications that can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection. The convenience of adopting cloud-based solutions is that anyone with internet access can use the software to get things done. It enables agents to work remotely.

“The cloud delivery model means operations can be quickly scaled up and down based on demand.”

“You can quickly switch your contact centre operations to agents located anywhere in the world or even deploy a temporary contact centre or enable agents to work from home. The cloud delivery model means operations can be quickly scaled up and down based on demand.”

The side effect of flexibility is the possibility of a heightened security risk, and as more and more businesses move to cloud computing, cloud service providers have been forced to maintain high-levels of security to meet the demands of their users.

“Traditional on-premises technologies can be highly complex and limited in scalability and flexibility,” adds Dhami.

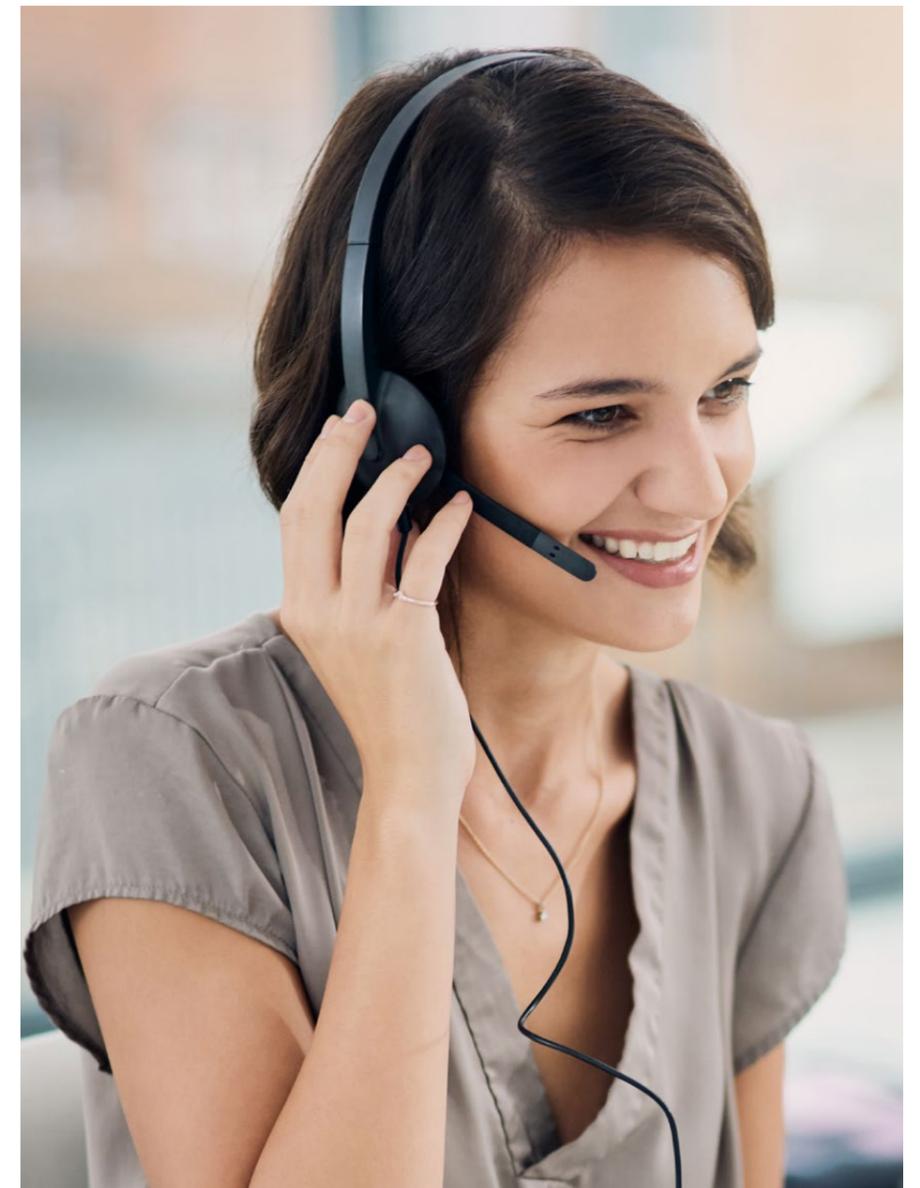
“As a result, businesses are not able to respond and adapt to customers’ needs quickly. To keep the on-premises programmes and servers secure from external attacks and breaches, IT would have to install layers of passwords, firewalls, and VPN. This can make access to the on-premises programmes and databases difficult to manage and create a negative impact for employees to work remotely or from the office.”

There are also a number of other clear obstacles for contact centres looking to modernise their technology, as respondents to the [2017 Global CX Benchmarking Report](#) highlighted:

- Integrating multiple tech systems (reported by 61% of respondents).
- Legacy systems inhibiting flexibility and progress but can’t be replaced (46%).
- Stretch on resources - too many competing priorities (37%).
- Securing budget and cost burdens (37%).
- No common strategy - solutions created in silos (26%).
- Lack of required technology (27%).
- Speed of change - technology can’t keep up with requirements (27%).
- Maintaining a Big Data view across the organisation (15%).

Under these auspices, restructuring contact centre technology is evidently complex, and requires a balance of introducing new technology that can work with old technology until it’s phased out.

Thus, the process of restructuring needs to be piecemeal, requiring the right technology provider that can adapt as the nature of the contact centre’s customer experience requirements change along the way.





3: The restructure

There are four key stages to restructuring contact centre technology, as described by the whitepaper [Cloud Communications: a Methodology for Successful Deployment](#).

Stage one: Qualification

Before any transformative technology can be implemented and legacy removed, a business must have a clear picture of the locations the new technology is set to be used in, the network conditions there and the user profiles for the agents and employees set to make use of it.

This helps the business get a full view of all the advantages and limitations that come with their bespoke requirements. It should also include:

- **Rollout strategy**

A phased rollout is usually the preferred method for new technology, which means contact centre technologists need to identify the locations they plan to implement in first, and the strategy they'll take for implementing across all chosen locations, along with a desired timeframe.

It is often recommended that headquarters are selected for immediate implementation, and that those managing the rollout clearly identify the strategy and communicate with all stakeholders.

- **Network-readiness assessment**

A network-readiness assessment allows IT teams to understand constraints around quality of service. This will also help prospective service providers, who often recommend that an enterprise network supports a minimal set of features to ensure high-quality video and communications services, at volume.

Stage two: Design

In adopting cloud-based communications technology, one of the triggers tends to be new digital transformation of customer experience initiatives. Therefore, in planning the transition, the project must be connected to the new user experience it aims to support:

- **Call routing and IVR**

Whilst Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems have historically garnered a negative reputation, they remain at the centre of good and bad customer experience and perform a necessary task for many contact centres. To enhance the customer experience, organisations can take advantage of multi-level IVRs that enable them to design, deploy, and modify custom intelligent inbound call flows that simplify call routing management for multiple locations. Designing a new IVR system is a crucial undertaking that relies on experts that can map out the desired call flow routes, central and local IVR menus, and connections to external numbers that will optimise the IVR.

- **Integration**

As previously mentioned, integration is a vital component of restructuring technology for CX, and especially when a cloud communications migration is involved. Organisations have the opportunity to align their new communications tech with wider, digital transformation goals. This is likely to mean automating certain processes to make contact centre agents more productive and customers more satisfied, i.e. sales and service alignment such as automatic call logging, screen pops showing customer histories, automatic notifications about orders, and two-factor authentication.

- **Business requirements documents**

A Business Requirements Document (BRD) is likely to be the blueprint for your implementation and provides a clear overview of project timelines, required resources across the organisation, roles, and responsibilities, such as the locations you're rolling out to, your connectivity across all of them, your IVR design, your hardware requirements and the custom applications you plan to integrate into current systems.

Stage three: Deployment

Any vendor partner should provide an organisation undertaking a technology restructuring process with a single point of contact.

Depending on the BRD, this project manager will help contact centre technologists and the IT team tasked with the process. Their role will be to identify stakeholders, manage both internal and external resources, and establish timescales.

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Stage four: Implementation

When an organisation is ready to implement new cloud communications technology, there are three critical workstreams:

- **Build the account**

This includes creating individual users, assigning the correct user entitlements, and implementing billing rules. Legacy numbers must be transferred to your cloud communications provider, at which point the project manager will oversee the entire number-transferring process.

- **Build the IVR**

The new IVRs are frequently at the centre of cloud communications transition and successful deployments rely on the chosen vendor to execute it. This can become a complex and lengthy process done in-house, whereas a cloud communications vendor can help accelerate a live date and remove the complexities associated with it.

- **Build the single platform**

Consolidation is the fundamental reason for restructuring your contact centre technology and migrating to cloud communications. Bringing all apps onto a single platform helps eliminate unnecessary spend in redundant tools, however the deployment must factor relevant training and adoption initiatives that account for both end-users and administrators. These can be done either in person or remotely, and helps ensure your organisation has been trained, as well as preventing users from bringing in new applications or communications vendors that will erode the financial benefits of the restructuring project.



These four stages take time and good planning, but are crucial to a successful restructure.

“Due diligence is needed for a smooth migration to ensure no disruption and a more effective outcome,” explains RingCentral’s Sunny Dhami.

“It’s all about delivering a better workflow for agents and managers that truly shows improvement in their day-to-day operation. When organisations know changes need to be made to their platform, they choose cloud technology that enables rapid implementation. It’s about considering the right integration capabilities in the form of a tight integration to businesses’ most important applications, such as CRM. It’s also important to deploy features and functions that are relevant to the business, and make sure the provider has the open API to enable additional features and functionalities to be added at a later stage when they are actually needed.

“The cloud platform enables quick launches and reduced development, testing and training processes. And you no longer needed to purchase and maintain expensive on-site hardware without hindering day-to-day operations.”

Artificial intelligence

With a new technology platform in place, AI’s benefits become clear, and should be factored into the latter stages of any restructuring process. The use cases for AI in customer communication include:

- **Virtual agent learning engines**
Including the deployment of chatbots and natural language processing (NLP) which can leverage these continual improvements to solve customer issues faster, saving contact centre agents’ time.
- **Speech analytics**
Supporting agents by accessing a knowledge base to gain contextual information while the agents’ is engaging with a customer.
- **Routing engines**
That use behavioural analysis to detect intent and optimise skills-based call routing, connecting customers to the agent best equipped to handle the interaction.
- **Intelligent cross-selling and upselling engines**
Which provide customer insights, and propensity to buy to indications, based on real-time interactions.

According to Gartner, organisations report a reduction of up to 70% in call, chat and/or email enquiries after implementing AI-powered virtual assistants and/or chatbots into the contact centre, so it’s understandable that many IT leaders and technologists may wish to prioritise AI during the restructuring of their technology stack. However, without taking the necessary steps to ensure the right platform is in place first, AI is unlikely to deliver the benefits many contact centres crave.



4: Checklist

There are some clear benefits to overhauling legacy contact centre technology, especially in terms of delivering consistent and enhanced customer experiences.

However, there are some obstacles lurking in the pathway of any business that isn't painstaking in their approach to implementation.

Therefore, a checklist for those contact centre leaders starting out on the road towards transforming their current technology stack is a must, specifically the options any prospective vendor providers should be offering. Sunny Dhami, Senior Director of Product Marketing from RingCentral recommends the following tips:

✓ **Service level**

Check the provisions in the terms and conditions regarding availability, back-up facilities, planned outages, critical and noncritical outages, service credits and termination rights.

✓ **Find a flexible solution**

That can quickly scale up and down as needed. You want to stand up a contact centre to suit your needs and stick within your budget, so start with the solution that fits your current requirements and expand the operation when you have the need for it.

✓ **Cost-effective**

You don't need to make a huge upfront investment for changes or upgrades. Seek a robust functionality with features and tools to suit your requirements.

✓ **Application integrations**

As well as access to comprehensive tools like CRM ensure you meet the individual expectations of customers who contact you via multiple channels and need relevant answers fast; connect with customers via channels of their choice, and use team collaboration to improve agent and management efficiency.

✓ **Remove silos**

Such as data, information and monitoring with a centralised system.

✓ **Select a unified platform**

That delivers all contact centre workloads (calling, messaging, collaboration and video meeting) in an integrated fashion, from a single platform.

✓ **Single vendor approach**

Select the same vendor to cover the contact centre operation as well as the telephony and collaboration components. You'll have the same SLA across all elements, you'll save yourself the headache of dealing with multiple contracts, and the consolidation will work out more cost-effective.

✓ **Streamline your operation**

You should consider a technology that can simplify the work of agents. Better agent experience leads to better customer experience.

✓ **Scalability**

Consider adopting cloud-based solutions that are scalable, facilitate remote collaboration between agents, business associates and customers, and enable the highest security and reliability. This allows for more flexible work practices compared to traditional on-premises IT infrastructures.

About RingCentral

We work with our customers to reimagine the world of business communications and collaboration. This relentless passion to innovate has made us the #1 cloud communications provider worldwide, and we don't plan on stopping there.

Technology breaks down barriers and unlocks potential, making it easy for people to do their best work together. In today's mobile world, this means giving teams, partners, and customers the ability to communicate, collaborate, and connect the way they want on any device, anywhere, anytime. It's what we call collaborative communications, and it's at the heart of everything we do.

With our flexible, cost-effective cloud communications and collaboration solutions, we've created the ideal workplace, where business can be done more efficiently and effectively. From an all-in-one cloud phone system with team messaging and video conferencing to a complete contact centre and more, we build solutions for every business, no matter how big or small.

www.ringcentral.co.uk

The RingCentral logo features the word "RingCentral" in a bold, sans-serif font. The "Ring" is in blue and includes a small orange Wi-Fi symbol above the letter "i". The "Central" is in orange. A registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the end of the word "Central".

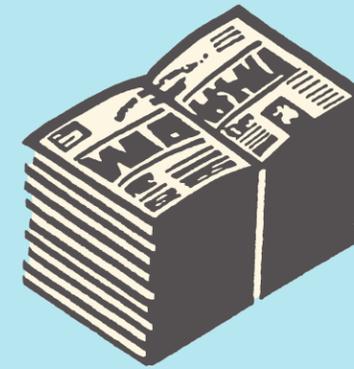
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MyCustomer.com is Europe's leading online resource for customer-focused professionals, with over 100,000 members.

Sharing news, advice and resources on topics ranging from customer engagement to CRM and the contact centre, MyCustomer is a vital hub for business leaders aiming to enhance every facet of the customer experience they deliver.

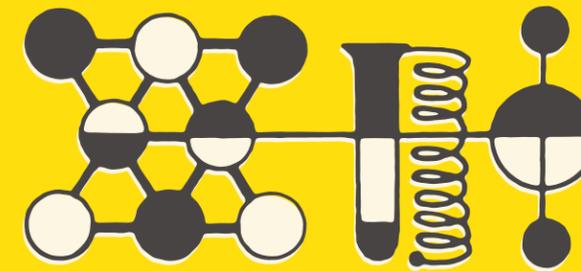
With a network of expert contributors from around the globe and a focus on strategy, technology and in-depth research, members of the MyCustomer community are able to tap into a wealth of knowledge and receive the most comprehensive view of the trends affecting and influencing the world of customer management.

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