

*THE VALUE OF CLOUD ROUTING IN
DIRECT RESPONSE CAMPAIGNS*



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Nothing tests the performance of a contact center more than a direct response campaign. If the campaign is successful, the contact center will be flooded with inbound calls, chats and emails from eager prospects in response to a compelling call-to-action they just encountered on television, radio, Web, print and a variety of other media.

Because these prospects are typically acting on impulse, adequate contact center resources must be in place in order to mitigate the massive spikes in call volume, which can result in increased hold times and erosion of customer service. In short: These customers, who are typically acting on their emotions, are statistically more likely to abandon if left on hold for too long.

In order to achieve return on investment on any direct response campaign, agents must not only convert nearly every contact, they must also be effective at capitalizing on up-sell and cross-sell opportunities, while at the same time delivering superior customer service that breeds long term loyalty.

In a traditional, brick and mortar contact center model, an organization running a direct response campaign typically routes all contacts to either a centralized facility or multiple centers that must be fully staffed in order to handle potential spikes in call volume. This “overstaffing” approach is highly inefficient as some agents can end up sitting idle. In the event a campaign is unsuccessful, this approach can result in a significant financial loss, as labor accounts for the single biggest expense in any contact center’s operating budget.

Conversely, if campaign response exceeds expectations, call hold times can increase dramatically, agents can fatigue, customer service levels can plummet and abandonment rates can skyrocket. There are few things more frustrating than to succeeding in garnering a strong response to a clever campaign, only to see customer service fail. What’s more, with customers’ ability to freely air their gripes via social media channels, it has become all the more critical for direct response marketers to deliver prompt and reliable customer service across all media channels.

Today’s hosted, or “[cloud-based](#)” [contact center systems](#) allow direct response marketers to rapidly scale their operations in reaction to changing conditions. This in turn enables them to deliver faster, more efficient customer service. Unlike costly on-premises, hosted contact center systems can be deployed quickly and with little upfront investment. These “Web-based” systems give organizations a smooth path to decentralizing their contact center operations and taking advantage of new deployment options, including outsourced and home-based agent models. Many direct response marketers have long since discovered that hosted systems can help them improve customer service, lower communications costs, and yield new operational efficiencies via Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology.

Connect First’s hosted contact center platform gives direct response marketers unprecedented control over their contact center operations via its integrated Cloud Routing solution. Offered as a standalone service, or tightly integrated with the [Connect First ACD](#) and [IVR](#), Cloud Routing gives direct response marketers the ability to route incoming contacts to any end point on Connect First’s network based on their own predefined business rules. With this innovative system, all contacts enter a single cloud-based queue and are then distributed among multiple contact centers — or secondary queues such as IVR, or specialized ACD skill groups — based on set policies.

With Connect First's Cloud Routing platform, direct response marketers can deftly "load balance" incoming contacts among multiple outsourced centers, remote locations, specific agent groups or home-based agents via the system's intuitive Web-based administrative interface. All that is needed are the computers, a high speed connection and, in U.S. locations where there will be 30 or more agents, a single pre-configured, self-provisioning appliance which the customer deploys on site.

With Cloud Routing, direct response marketers have full control to route calls in a manner that is both cost effective and yields a high level of customer service. This is important as no two direct response marketers handle customer service quite the same way. Some companies that run campaigns continuously may want to keep all their customer service in-house, using multiple, geographically-dispersed centers, but most will opt for a hybrid model, using a strategic mix of large outsourced centers, small "boutique" centers and/or home-based agents. Often it won't make sense for an organization to invest in a large, brick and mortar center if it only runs a limited number of direct response campaigns per year.

Connect First's Cloud Routing solution enables organizations to load balance among geographically distributed centers using preset customized call routing tables. For example, a company using two contact centers — in-house and outsourced — could use the "Percent Allocation" setting to route 60 percent of voice traffic to the in-house center and 40 percent to the outsourced center, based on the size of the centers, number of available agents, quality of the agents or any number of other factors.

Suppose an organization's best agents are in its main center — therefore management wants to route all calls to that center first. Setting the Cloud Routing solution to "sequential" allows an organization with multiple centers to have all calls terminate at the main center until it reaches capacity, then "overflow" to a second, perhaps outsourced center, and a third, and so on. A fourth group could be a pool of home-based agents who have been notified and stand ready to handle overflow calls.

Other out of the box settings include "Round Robin," which directs each successive incoming call to the next center, keeping the load evenly balanced among all centers. Then there is "Geo Location," which enables administrators to set the system so that calls are directed to the center that is geographically closest to the caller.

These routing policies, or "Cloud Profiles" can be set to run on schedules or they can be changed manually, thus giving organizations the ability to react quickly to massive spikes in call volume caused by seasonal trends or direct response campaigns.

Connect First's Cloud Routing also gives direct response marketers the ability to more effectively leverage the outsourced model. For example, an organization with a small contact center can use the system to route overflow call volume to an outsourced center for a fraction of the cost a big carrier would charge. With this "on demand contact center" model, which is now common in the industry, a direct response marketer only pays for the services rendered by the outsourcer, thus making campaigns many times more cost effective.

To that end, Connect First is actively building a roster of [certified outsourcing partners](#) that operate leading contact centers in the U.S. and are already connected to the Connect First network. Direct response marketers who subscribe to Connect First's Cloud Routing Solution can use any of these outsourcers for call overflow—~~orevenastheirprimaryserviceprovider~~—~~thushelpingthemdeliverfastercustomerservicein~~ a more cost effective manner.

In addition to its advanced call routing and load balancing capabilities, Connect First's Cloud Routing technology gives contact center managers and system administrators unprecedented insight into operations via granular Call Detail Records. These records are delivered either as a wide selection of prepackaged historical reports or as raw data which can be uploaded to any ancillary system with a SOAP interface, HTTP or even a web service. When combined with Connect First's Real Time Telemetry solution, managers and supervisors can view contact center KPIs and other important statistics graphically, in real time, thus giving them the ability to react to quickly changing conditions.

The system also includes a host of advanced features found previously only on enterprise-grade contact center systems, including call recording/monitoring (for compliance and quality assurance), and billing codes (tracks which calls went with which products for third party billing purposes), among others.

Connect First's Cloud Routing solution is unique in the industry. No other hosted platform offers this type of load balancing solution so tightly integrated with the contact center platform. At the same time, some organizations are using it as a standalone solution (i.e. without the inbound ACD), just to manage the spiky traffic from campaigns.

What makes Connect First's Cloud Routing platform innovative is its architecture. In essence, Connect First has built its own "private cloud" with built-in QoS which customers can lease to terminate calls to their contact centers based on their own policies. When used as a standalone system, organizations only pay for the minutes they use.

Lastly, thanks to Connect First's ongoing commitment to customer-driven innovation, the Cloud Routing solution comes with a host of APIs allowing it to be [seamlessly integrated](#) with other leading systems, including third party ACDs, IVRs, call recording/monitoring systems, reporting systems, Workforce Management (WFM) systems and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems from the leading vendors.

ABOUT CONNECT FIRST

Connect First is an award-winning SaaS telecommunications and cloud contact center software provider that focuses on customer satisfaction and elegant hosted solutions. Connect First offers a robust platform, designed and supported by a team of highly experienced engineers, designers and business analysts, and backed with personalized in-house customer care. Solutions include Cloud Routing, Inbound ACD, Outbound Dialing, Call Tracking, Interactive Voice Response (IVR), Voice Broadcast, Disaster Recovery, Predictive Dialer, Real-Time Telemetry, CDR Reporting, Live Agent Chat and more. Through a consultative approach with each customer interaction, Connect First builds customized solutions to meet the needs of a discerning customer base.