



CONNECT FIRST: WHAT ALL ORGANIZATIONS NEED IN A HOSTED CONTACT CENTER PROVIDER

In this tough economy, delivering superior customer service is essential to business survival. This is especially true in the United States, where customer service is practically in our DNA: According to the 2011 American Express Global Customer Service Barometer, which measures consumer attitudes toward customer service in ten countries, only India surpassed the US in terms of expectations for “flawless” customer service.

What’s more the study shows that 66 percent of Americans are willing to spend an average of 13 percent more with companies that deliver excellent customer service. This is up considerably from 2010, when 58 percent said they would spend an average of 9 percent or more with companies that offer great service.

The challenge for businesses today is delivering excellent customer service cost-effectively across all customer touch points. As a result, many have transitioned their traditional call centers in multi-channel contact centers capable of supporting alternate channels such as chat and email. This transition to the multi-channel contact center, however, has been a costly headache for some organizations. Those that went the route of carrying out expensive on-premises installations often found that the complexity of those systems put a strain on their limited IT staff, resulting in the need for additional positions or third party support. That’s because the multiple systems that make up a contact center require specific IT skill sets, including training to carry out proper integration.

When these on-premises systems are extended to multiple centers, the complexity becomes even greater. Because they are hardware-based, reconfiguring these systems, adding new modules, or even running routine updates can be tedious, time consuming, expensive and potentially disruptive. What’s more, many of the organizations that invested in on-premises systems later discovered they lacked flexibility, in terms of adding new features or carrying out alternative deployment options.

Today, organizations have a much smoother migration path to advanced contact center features and capabilities by way of the hosted model. These “cloud-based” systems, which are typically hosted on a multi-tenant server in a Tier 1 data center, deliver all of the core applications needed to run a full-featured, multi-channel contact center — only they can be deployed in a fraction of the time, and without having to make a huge upfront investment in hardware, software licenses and network architecture.

Organizations are increasingly deploying hosted contact center systems because of their extreme scalability, flexible deployment options (including a path to the home-based agent model), improved redundancy, fast access to the latest technologies and lower communications costs via Voice over IP technology. With a hosted system, an organization can readily scale up or down its contact center operations, creating new operational efficiencies that on premises systems cannot deliver. In addition, hosted systems deliver advanced features and capabilities that used to be limited to expensive on-premises systems, thus giving organizations fast access to enterprise-grade features that will help them “wow” their clients with superior customer service.

In recent years some organizations have gone to the extreme and done a complete “rip and replace,” switching to a hosted “all-in-one” or “bundled” system from a single vendor. Although these systems, which offer every application under the sun, have their advantages, some organizations have found that the “add-on” modules they come with (IVR, WFM, CRM, etc) lack certain features or capabilities. What’s more, the nature of these “all-in-one”

systems means they sometimes lack flexibility in terms of allowing organizations custom tailor the features and capabilities they need. In addition, some organizations simply want to get the most out of their past technology investments. As a result, most continue to use one or more “stand alone” applications from vendors that focus on a particular technology as a core competency.

For this reason, system flexibility and ease of integration are top considerations when shopping for a hosted service. Vendors should be evaluated on how well they assist customers with selecting and integrating the “add on” solutions best suited to carry out their goals and objectives, as well as the quality of their ongoing customer support. Candidates for hosted contact center systems should also consider vendors that have a passion for innovation and are continuously updating their platforms with new features and capabilities, based on feedback from existing customers.

CONNECT FIRST

Boulder, Colorado-based Connect First offers a highly scalable, best-of-breed hosted contact center platform that delivers enterprise-grade intelligent call routing, inbound load balancing via its innovative Cloud Routing solution, IVR, chat and email, call tracking, call recording, historical and real time reporting and perhaps most importantly simple, reliable integration with leading “add-on” systems. Founded in 2004 by a group of veteran telecom engineers, the company prides itself on its continuous innovation based on customer feedback and strong track record of providing prompt, reliable and effective product support.

It is this mix of ongoing innovation, personalized support and what Connect First calls “agile integration” that has led to the company’s rapid growth: Connect First now has more than 500 customers and 32,000 seats deployed. In 2012 the company hit a major milestone when it had carried more than 500 million minutes on its platform. The company has announced dozens of partnerships with technology and BPO firms since its inception and is adding new integrations and enhancements to the platform practically every month.

Quick to deploy, full featured and fault tolerant, the Connect First platform is suited for inbound, outbound, and blended contact centers serving a range of industries including BPO, telemarketing, education, insurance, collections, and more. Geared for single or distributed contact centers in the 50 to 500 seat range, it offers advanced features found in on-premises systems costing hundred of thousands of dollars, while at the same time delivering the flexible deployment options that only a Web-based system can deliver. With the Connect First system, there is no need to lease any dedicated lines or sign carrier contracts — all that is needed are the computers and ample bandwidth, preferably a T1 line or better.

INBOUND ACD

At the core of Connect First’s hosted contact center system is its intelligent, enterprise-grade Automatic Call Distributor (ACD), which can route inbound calls to any agent on the network, no matter where they are located. Ideal for facilitating the remote or home-based agent model, this virtual ACD sports an intuitive Web-based administrative interface that enables contact center supervisors to deftly manage accounts; add/drop agents; create agent pools; establish call/chat queues; monitor/record calls; whisper coach; barge in; IM coach; change hold music; update scripts; launch post call surveys and carry out many other advanced functions “on the fly.” Connect First’s hosted ACD offers other features and capabilities typically only found on expensive on-premises systems.

CLOUD ROUTING

A key feature that distinguishes Connect First's hosted contact center system is the company's innovative Cloud Routing solution, which creates a "unified queue in the cloud" for all contacts. With this proprietary system, calls can be routed to multiple distributed contact centers or assigned to secondary queues such as IVR, or specialized ACD skill groups, based on set policies. This simple yet powerful solution enables supervisors and system administrators to "load balance" incoming contacts among multiple centers, remote locations, specific agent groups or home-based agents on a "carrier free" basis. Offered as a standalone solution, Cloud Routing facilitates a private "telecom network in the cloud" that gives organizations unprecedented control over how calls are distributed among all locations. This way, organizations can route calls in the manner that is most cost effective, yet results in the highest level of customer service.

OUTBOUND DIALERS

Connect First also offers a powerful outbound predictive dialer to help organizations run efficient and cost effective outbound campaigns. The intuitive dialer filters out busy signals, no answers, and answering machines so that agents are only connected if a live person picks up. Capable of supporting thousands of agents simultaneously, this powerful system can help organizations dramatically reduce the cost of their outbound campaigns, as it eliminates the need for manual dialing. Number lists can be quickly and easily uploaded into the dialer in any format. As an added service, Connect First will also scrub your lists for Do Not Call Registry compliance.

INBOUND IVR

No inbound contact center today can operate efficiently without a speech-enabled IVR system to give customers self-service options and preserve precious live agent resources. Connect First offers a powerful IVR system that comes tightly integrated with the ACD. Using the IVR system, customers can transfer themselves to the appropriate department or agent using either voice or DTMF (touchtone) commands. Or they can access a range of other self-service options, such as a company FAQ, or complete simple transactions. In addition to automating the routing of incoming calls, the Connect First IVR categorizes calls so they are routed more accurately, and so the agent has a general idea why the customer is calling.

CALL TRACKING

Connect First's Call Tracking solution collects and compiles raw "metadata" on each and every inbound call (origin/termination/duration, etc), which can be used to analyze inbound traffic patterns, uncover trends, and react to changing customer behavior. With the solution's Real Time SOAP/Web Service Data Transfers feature, organizations can track raw call data in real-time, via any standard SOAP interface. With the Call Tracking solution, organizations can compile and continuously update profiles on their customers, which in turn can be used to deliver more personalized service. For example, caller ID can be used to identify customers by name and address, and then present that information to the agent upon contact. Call Tracking also includes call recording for quality assurance. Recordings can be quickly and easily accessed to review agent performance. In addition recordings can be easily downloaded to an on-site server to carry out speech analytics, if so desired.

REPORTING

In order to continuously optimize contact center operations and perfect the customer experience, managers and supervisors need fast access to historical call detail records. Connect First's hosted contact center platform delivers hundreds of detailed "out of the box" reports including inbound/outbound reports, agent reports, survey reports and more, each containing dozens of sub-reports. These reports, which can be fully customized, are invaluable for driving agent performance, as well as making timely business decisions based on changes in customer behavior. The system's report scheduler allows supervisors to schedule reports to run when they want — weekly, daily, hourly, etc. In addition reports can be automatically emailed to supervisors, managers and upper management.

REAL TIME TELEMETRY

Connect First's hosted contact center platform also delivers real time stats via its Real Time Telemetry solution. Want to see how many calls are currently in queue, what the current maximum hold time is, or how many agents are currently available? With Real Time Telemetry supervisors have a Web interface that gives them a holistic real time view of all contact center activities. The graphical interface allows managers see volume spikes as they occur, giving them the ability to react quickly to changing conditions. For example, suppose there is a spike in Web chat traffic, due to the launch of a particular campaign, but meanwhile incoming phone volume has slowed. Seeing this trend, a manager could quickly dedicate more agents to handling chat, thus improving customer service.

ON Q LIVE AGENT CHAT AND EMAIL

As an added module, Connect First also offers support for Web chat and email via its On Q Live Agent Chat and Email solution. This tightly integrated solution enables chats and emails to enter the cloud-based queue along with calls and be routed based on set policies. So, for example, chats and emails can be routed to those agents who have been specifically trained to handle those channels. With this flexible solution, agents will be able to handle more chats and emails concurrently per shift. In addition the system allows for real-time monitoring of agent/customer chat sessions, as well as historical reporting via the platform's CDR Reporting solution.

EASE OF INTEGRATION

As mentioned, ease of integration is a top consideration when choosing a hosted contact center system. Connect First offers a suite of "add on" systems from its technology partners, who are each respective leaders in their fields, including Workforce Management, Customer Relationship Management and Order Management systems. In addition, Connect First is continuously forging new technology partnerships and is ambitiously expanding its suite of certified solutions.

But what puts the company in a separate class from its competitors is its willingness to assist customers in integrating the solutions of their choice. Rather than trying to sell an "all-in-one" system, or dictate which solutions work best, Connect First recognizes that no two organizations handle customer service the same way, and thus need to be in control of their own destiny in terms of selecting solutions that best meet their strategic goals. For this reason the company has instead placed a strong emphasis on developing sophisticated yet simple-to-use Web-based APIs that enable even small IT teams with limited training to carry out reliable integrations with existing systems — or new, cutting edge systems — in a short period of time.

ONGOING INNOVATION

Connect First is also continuously evolving, refining and expanding its hosted contact center platform based on customer feedback. The company has made dozens of enhancements in just the past year and is introducing new features on an almost monthly basis. For example, the company recently introduced its advanced "Queue Callback" feature, which gives a customer on hold the option to hang up and get a call back as soon as an agent is available.

SUPERIOR CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Connect First has established a reputation for delivering high level of personalized support. No other hosted provider offers such a comprehensive set of solutions, yet gives personalized attention to customers during the setup period and beyond. The company's products are backed-up by an imaginative and energetic team that is willing to jump in and make even the most minor changes to help a customer's contact center run more smoothly.

Customer-centric, agile and transparent, the Connect First team invites prospective clients to take a peak "under the hood" of its full featured, enterprise-grade hosted contact center platform. Come see why more than 500 organizations have deployed Connect First's platform, and how it has helped them deliver superior customer service cost effectively.

ABOUT CONNECT FIRST

Connect First is a leading telecommunications service provider and contact center solution firm focused on enabling growth and profitability through a robust portfolio of cloud-based communications solutions. As a hosted contact center management solutions provider, Connect First offers a customized platform, designed and supported by a team of highly experienced engineers, designers and business analysts.

LEARN MORE

To find out how the Connect First Contact Center Platform can help your organization gain a competitive advantage, please visit www.connectfirst.com.

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