USAN

Why Moving Your Contact Center to the Cloud is the Way to Go

table of contents

Abstract

This paper explores the value proposition for hosted contact center solutions and compares them to legacy, premises-based services. It contains an overview of the hosted contact center concept, differentiators for hosted contact center architectures, and advanced capabilities and benefits of hosted solutions. The paper also captures some of the predominant reasons behind the rapid expansion and surge in demand for hosted solutions in the contact center marketplace.

Enterprise technology-adoption decision makers should take note of the cost benefits and platform flexibility of a hosted contact center environment. Hosted models are ideal for businesses of varying sizes, including:

- Expanding companies
- Businesses with geographically dispersed offices
- Emerging small and medium-sized businesses interested in augmenting center capabilities in sync with their growth
- Businesses in need of superior center continuity and contingency planning
- Enterprises with fluctuating peak contact center demands
- Companies with fluctuating contact center labor pools or requiring advanced agent support capabilities
- Businesses navigating merger and acquisition activities
- Enterprises interested in common reporting across applications

The Changing Contact Center Industry

The contact center industry is undergoing a significant change as new and emerging technologies continue to supplant traditional premises-based contact center solutions. Advances are driven by innovations in Internet Protocol (IP) technologies and networking evolutions which enable a host of new features and capabilities, including:

- Inherently diverse platform infrastructures
- Unification of dispersed agents and resources
- Superior monitoring and trending capabilities
- Greater flexibility in center management
- Superior platform redundancy
- Enhanced service scalability
- On-demand, usage-based pricing

These capabilities enable new ways of doing business that reduce capital expenditures, expand productivity, and create improved channels for sales and service. Ideal for help desks, sales, technical support, business continuity services, and more, hosted contact center models are resuscitating an industry that has long been suffocating under legacy, premises-based solutions and bulging capital expenditure demands.

Cost Benefits of Hosted Solutions

Nearly every feature of a hosted contact center solution has a cost benefit associated with it. A significant, primary cost advantage with a hosted solution is the ability to pay for services on an as-needed and per-transaction basis. This is in stark contrast to premises-based services which require enterprises to purchase outright hardware and software licenses and agree to ongoing substantial maintenance contracts as their platforms oftentimes need to be significantly overbuilt in order to accommodate peak contact periods. Premises-based models underutilize their assets the majority of the time whereas hosted solutions are modeled to accommodate peak contact periods and only charge for this peak contact period usage when additional capacity and services are utilized.

Hosted solutions have the flexibility to efficiently service the undulating requirements of a business in a more cost-effective manner. Fully hosted architectures deliver on the promise of lower CAPEX costs, free enterprises from having to plan for hardware and end-of-life issues, reduce burdensome maintenance costs, and eliminate the need for continual software revisions.

The reduction in required hardware and software resources to support an existing application base lowers costs associated with:

- Network connectivity
- Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) ports
- Speech recognition and other software licenses
- Equipment, power, and space
- Environmental controls
- VXML licenses and servers
- Monitoring and trouble reporting
- Training and administrative expenses
- On-site personnel, developers, etc.

1. SCALABILITY

Improved workforce, hardware and application scalability can be achieved through hosted solutions. An entire hosted platform and its associated agent pool can be scaled up or down depending on the changing requirements of the business in regards to functionality, seasonal or peak contact periods, and business objectives such as sales promotions, campaign management and product introduction.

Hosted models allow businesses to purchase services and seats on demand to meet their business needs and avoid the numerous costs associated with overbuilding and staffing premises-based, centralized solutions. Businesses are able to scale seamlessly without service or quality disruptions.
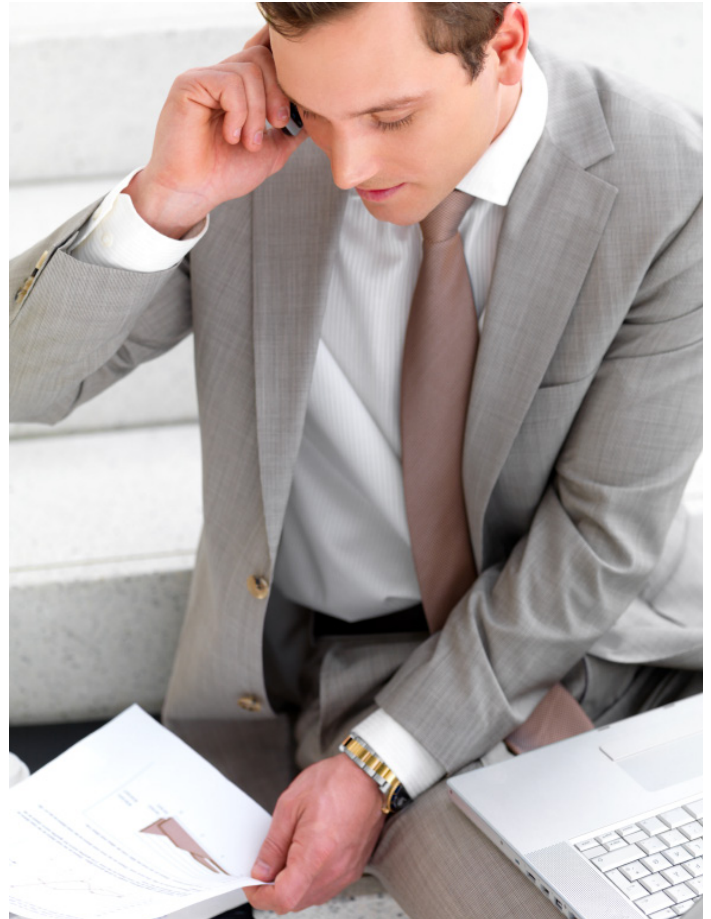
2. FLEXIBLE TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

Subscription-based hosted models allow businesses to adopt and trial new functionality without investing significant time or capital. This reduced risk enables businesses to better fine-tune services to meet the needs of customers and business objectives. Services can be adopted and removed on a regular basis without the expensive overhead of purchasing systems and software that may or may not be a proper fit for a business' specific center environment.

Hosted solutions can provide access to the latest contact center technologies as they are introduced and remove the time-intensive process of building, implementing and maintaining new hardware and software components within the platform. This flexibility also removes costs associated with the additional personnel needed to perform these operations.

3. WORKFORCE OPTIMIZATION

By decentralizing contact centers, businesses gain capabilities never before experienced. They maintain superior visibility and control into agent scheduling, monitoring and performance, as well as call-flow data tracking, application management and more. Hosted solutions enable businesses to create centralized queues that intelligently route contacts to qualified agents who meet specific skill sets without requiring them to be located in a single location. The number of locations for agents can be limitless, thus enabling businesses to reduce costs for dedicated services to centralized centers, hire and retain better qualified personnel, and seamlessly manage service level requirements and personnel from various locations without degradation in quality.

Managers can increase efficiently and effectively manage queues, coach and schedule agents, monitor contact histories and call flows, and more through Web-based monitoring and dashboard views of an enterprise's entire contact center platform. This virtualized contact center capability opens the door to near limitless possibilities.

This remote center approach can reduce seat costs, increase retention rates and expand the center pool when needed. Enterprises can increase efficiency and maximize the effectiveness of agents and applications to drive higher performance levels of customer service, sales and marketing campaigns, collections and other contact center objectives.

4. RELIABILITY

Ensuring business continuity is paramount and hosted solutions provide the necessary reliability with the dispersion (and costs) of physical assets and personnel. The reliability of most hosted contact

center solutions is oftentimes superior to premises-based solutions in that systems can be dispersed geographically and serve as complete backups to one another. When buttressed with a shared, soft-switch architecture, hosted platforms can allow all applications full access to state-of-the-art, contact center feature sets so there are no stranded investments in the case of a location fault.

Hosted center providers that offer disaster recovery sites can replicate —in real-time— the information from their primary network operations centers (NOCs). In the event of a disaster, these hosted solution providers can offer full functionality from the disaster recovery site.

In addition, a robust, hosted NOC can monitor all facets of the service delivery platform, including carrier connectivity, platform performance, data connectivity, and host response performance. This allows a hosted solutions provider to proactively identify and correct many problems before an application is ever affected.

5. CARRIER NEUTRALITY

When integrated with multiple carriers, hosted platforms can allow for more effective capacity planning and trouble management processes to ensure adequate capacity for contacts on its platform and quickly identify trouble ownership between the platform, enterprise resources and carrier networks. Redundancy and survivability of an IVR, ACD and other contact center functionality are delivered at carrier-grade standards when connected to a hosted solution provider's multi-node platform which can rely on the redundancy of carriers' meshed networks.

When co-locating with carriers, hosted providers have more contact center switching and routing capabilities than those available from a carrier's traditional service. By tightly integrating with neutral carriers, hosted providers can more effectively manage capacity planning and trouble management processes to ensure adequate capacity for contacts on their networks and quickly identify trouble ownership between the platform, enterprise resources and carrier networks.

6. VOIP/TDM

Many hosted platforms connect with both time division multiplexing (TDM) and IP circuits with network interfaces that are independent from applications, thus any given application can receive inbound calls on TDM and IP – providing enterprises complete flexibility and enhanced contact center capabilities.

In addition, when modularly designed, platforms can allow for remote gateways located at any hardened site. This provides an extension of an IP backbone that can be used to create private IP networks capable of offering IP services for existing legacy TDM locations.

Hosted contact center solutions enable businesses to concentrate on their core capabilities while the complexities of a contact center platform are independently managed and its services tailored to meet the unique needs of the enterprise.

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Demonstrable Return On Investment

Several market research groups have documented the dramatic growth of the hosted contact center industry, between 30 to 45% per year. This growth is spurred by the benefits and positive return on investment (ROI) of moving to a hosted solution. The same research projects ROIs of 20 to 50% depending on the individual business environments.

USAN can work with enterprises to analyze their current call center infrastructure environment and their desired end-state architecture to develop a cost comparison between premises and hosted solutions.

Summary

Reducing the total cost of ownership (TCO) with any solution is a significant benefit to most every enterprise. Hosted contact centers provide a unique combination of flexibility in regards to applications, workforce management, reliability, and overall cost savings versus comparable premise-based solutions.

Enterprises of all sizes can benefit from hosted contact center solutions. Hosted solutions are easily provisioned and maintained, provide an appealing alternative to the inflexibility of premise-based solutions, allow enterprises to take advantage of cutting-edge technologies without maximum investment and provide an improved return on investment. They enable businesses to concentrate on their core capabilities while complexities of a contact center platform are independently managed and its services tailored to meet the unique needs of the enterprise.

About USAN

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USAN helps companies profitably engage customers and deliver amazing cross-channel experiences with the industry's first and only cloud, premise and hybrid multi-channel customer engagement solution. From traditional telephone interactions to the web, social media and everything between, USAN's portfolio of call center products delivers effective and affordable customer experience and contact management. In addition to campaign management, back-office integration, and business process automation, USAN's premise and SaaS offerings include IVR, ACD, and outbound dialers, all built upon a fifth-generation carrier-grade infrastructure that delivers "five nines" of availability and proven scalability.