A Unify Perspective

The Anywhere Touch

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Five ways that mobility will change your contact center

Since mobility as we know it (not just making phone calls, sending texts, and taking pictures with a cell phone) began emerging as a genuine social phenomenon in 2007, the reality has turned out to be bigger than any of the optimistic language initially pointed in its direction. Everyone, it seems, has a smart phone or tablet and the considerable apps to leverage their capabilities. We don't just communicate with them – we live through them.

We used to discuss how mobile communications was poised to change how we work and communicate; it almost sounds quaint in retrospect. Because mobility hasn't just changed things; it has obliterated old models, personal and professional, and replaced them with new ones. More accurately, it is replacing them, at dizzying speed, and will continue as far as any reasonable horizon can be contemplated.

The untethered contact center

Once, our company had large, world-class contact centers in major regional offices, enclosed in glass and strategically co-located with our executive briefing centers. These were corporate marketing assets as well as call centers, and they were industry models for what call centers should be – for a long time. But they also came with drawbacks.

There was no such thing as a flexible workplace so contact center staff just accepted the turnover-inducing strain of trying to get to work on time in traffic and weather emergencies and then being desk-bound all day.

What if a subject matter expert lived somewhere else and didn't want to move? Some supervisors had wireless headsets, but they couldn't see their displays when with an agent. What happened when a supervisor was in a meeting or at lunch just when call volumes unexpectedly became critical or when loads needed to be rebalanced between centers? How could offline agents be brought online in a moment's notice?

Because of advances in contact center technology, as well as the impact of social media, how we maintain customer touch is being significantly redefined. And, while the mobility revolution that has transformed so much of professional and personal life has taken a little longer to infuse the contact center, the technological capabilities are now aligned to usher in a new way to work that could only be wished for in the past.

The physical contact center is alive and well, and will be for a long time to come. Home-working / remote agents have also become an established contact center model, as has the flexible blending of the two (our centers now use this blended model). What is emerging is the capacity for mobility to unshackle agents, supervisors, and manager from their desks to reach new levels of already high productivity and, more critically, responsiveness.
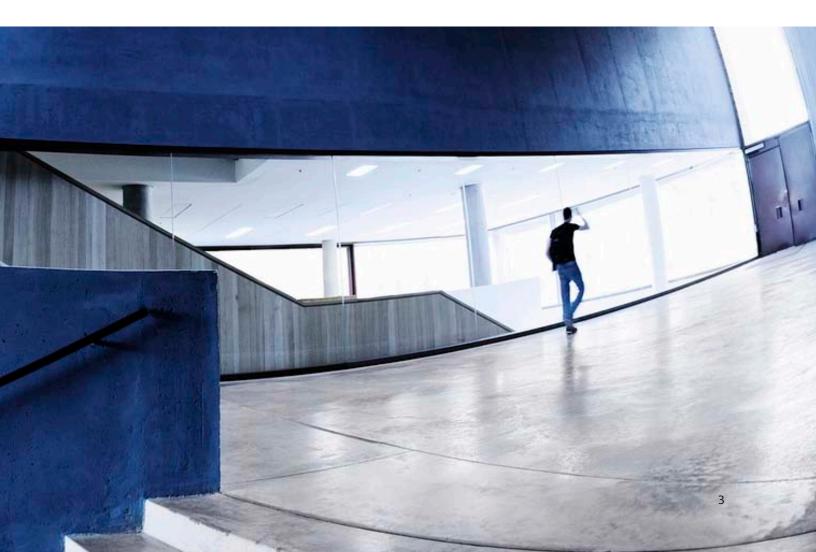
Straightening the line

The overriding quest in enhancing customer service is to get the right and complete information to the customer as rapidly as possible. Just as "the shortest distance between two points is a straight line", all customer service organizations aim to remove as many arcs, or obstacles, as possible between question and answer. Can increased mobility help straighten and shorten that line?

From a Unify perspective, the answer is "unequivocally yes." The currency of the business realm is speed, agility, responsiveness, and productivity.

Your competitors and your customers are trading in this currency; any enterprise that hopes to thrive now must either adopt it or be left behind.

Increasingly, more than any other business application, mobility is the primary enabler of this currency. Customer expectations have soared, and everyone, from executives to staff (and, most certainly, your customer care team) is presumed to be "always on" and within reach. In a culture that seems to revel in sharing and promoting bad consumer experiences, the cost of missing those expectations is high.

We see five main areas where mobility can positively contribute to removing obstacles, or straightening the line, to excellent customer service.

#1 – The Anywhere Agent

We tend to think of contact center agents as sitting with a headset in front of a screen at a workstation. But, for this person, as well as knowledge workers, roaming experts, overflow agents, account managers, and back-office personnel, the ability to collaborate instantly, regardless of location, is critical to achieving First Contact Resolution (FCR). New solutions give agents that flexibility – to use tablets, smart phones, web-browsers, or home phones – in addition to standard-issue agent phones and computers. Mobility and flexible remote working tools combine with skills-based routing to ensure you reach the right agent quickly, which enhances FCR, which enhances customer loyalty.

Mobility is also the cornerstone of any business continuity plan, enabling agents to rapidly get online during disasters when other facilities may not yet be operational. And, if your business plan allows it – and there is plenty to suggest the merits – happy agents tend to be loyal agents, and few things enhance workplace "joie de vivre" more than letting them work where they choose with the device they enjoy.

Solutions to evaluate: iOS and Android based mobile agent applications for tablets and smartphones.

#2 – The Anywhere Supervisor

In this mobility-saturated world, how does the contact center supervisor monitor call volumes in response to a new campaign? Or quickly apply pricing discounts, or urgent customer service dispatches? What if service levels fall below acceptable thresholds? Or, how about just maintaining peace-of-mind that things are under control and working smoothly?

Relying on human intervention to manually communicate the right information at the right time to the right individuals, at best, has limitations. At worst, it injects risk of mission failure. Being able to use and respond to information on a real-time, "event-driven" basis is the new model for exploiting the value of mobile business, and extending your existing corporate information systems. Only then can the most important situations be prioritized, regardless of location or device.

Contact center supervisors are constantly on the move. They need to have a view into their operations wherever they are – at home, in the car, in their office, in a meeting, or off-site.

Solutions to evaluate: iOS and Android based mobile Supervisor applications for tablets and smartphones
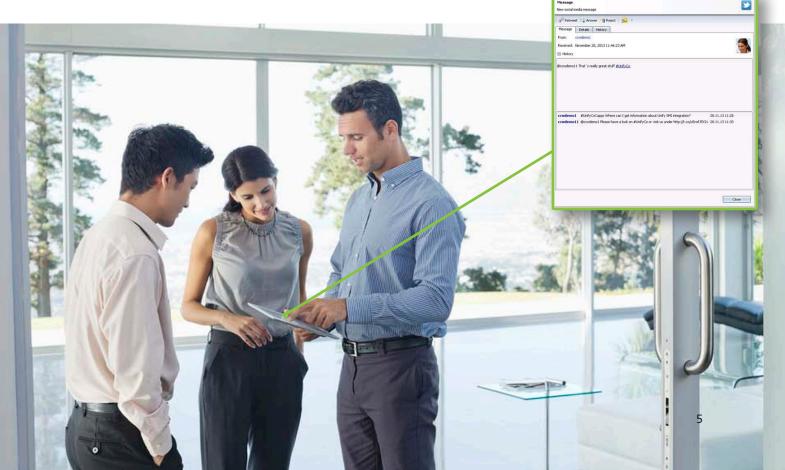
#3 – Mobile-social customer service

Leveraging social media in the contact center used to sound like marketing hype. No more. Among an abundance of other research data, DMG Consulting predicts that, "within five years, the number of relevant social media interactions will be equal to the number of phone interactions, with 70% to 80% being service-oriented and requiring attention. In the same analysis, they predict that only 20% of companies will be properly invested in integrating their social channels with the contact center. That's a substantive disparity. Put more bluntly, Erik Qualman, author of Socialnomics, says "the ROI of integrating social channels into your customer strategy is to remain in business."

Clearly, customers are saying that social channels are important for interactions and dialog, and those involved on the front lines are starving for the right tools to deal more effectively with those channels.

Companies need to recognize that the "digital perimeter" of their company is now the central and most important factor attracting prospects and winning new customers. As the number of potential social interactions involving your brand or organization progressively increases, the amount of social channel monitoring, filtering, routing, and responding will become too cumbersome for ad hoc approaches. The successful enterprise needs the right tools to strategically leverage these trends.

If social media can be a primary contributor to the lightning overthrow of decades-entrenched dictatorships, it stands to reason it can impact your business. And if the primary mechanism for enabling social media is mobile devices, then having your agents respond to Tweets or Facebook posts routed to them on their smart phones can keep your team ahead of events.

Solutions to evaluate: Integrating mobile social media interactions into your contact routing strategy.

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#4 – Mobility and workforce optimization

Through automated monitoring and recording of speech and text across different channels of interaction, workforce optimization (WFO) solutions help companies identify and interpret data trends and then act on them to enhance the customer experience to cultivate their loyalty. And, by analyzing workload and interaction volumes using sophisticated modeling, workforce scheduling is optimized in terms of trading off human capital expenses versus maintaining desired customer service levels.

Workforce Optimization helps you integrate customer care operations with the rest of your enterprise. By making WFO mobile, you can make better decisions, faster. Whether checking staff schedules 'on-the-go' on any device, monitoring key performance indicators from anywhere, or quickly interacting or approving administrative requests from agent staff – mobile WFO can streamline your management processes.

Solutions to evaluate: WFO solutions that support native mobile clients on your preferred mobile device.

#5 – Anywhere analytics

Taking workforce optimization simultaneously deeper and farther is the realm of contact center analytics. By allowing your supervisors to mine, model, monitor, and manage deep system metrics, and then by gauging these against real-time big data trends, managers can gain better insight into how their operation stacks up to best practices. Analytics takes the raw data from the contact center, combines it with outside data from other back office or CRM systems, and produces actionable intelligence in the form of alerts, dashboards, and historical reports.

Enabling contact center analytics for managers and supervisors as native mobile applications (or web-based Java applications) means performance dashboard metrics, visual KPI's, notifications and alerts are close at hand for the untethered 'anywhere manager'. This enables maximum insight and control of agents, campaigns and customer service performance in the hands of supervisors, managers and executives.
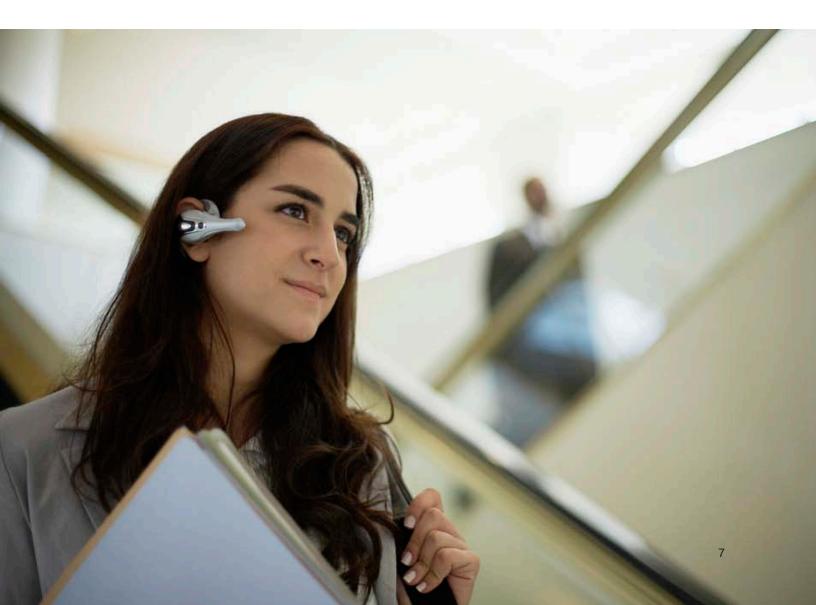
Solutions to evaluate: Contact center analytics supporting mobile clients on a range of mobile devices.

Conclusion

Fixed site-based contact centers continue to make up a major share of global installations. However, the capacity to flexibly integrate home and remote workers has combined with dramatic enhancements to our ability to process and direct enquiries, as well as to gather customer and employee sentiment, yielding a more intelligent and deft enterprise. By infusing the transformative power of mobility into this mix, businesses now can engage their customers and even their own workforce with greater speed, agility, responsiveness, and productivity than ever before.

Unify's OpenScape Contact Center Solutions enable mobile agents, supervisors, and managers to deliver personalized support across all channels of customer engagement to drive more intimate, vibrant, and loyal relationships. It is, well and truly, a new way to work.

About Unify

Unify is one of the world's leading communications software and services firms, providing integrated communications solutions for approximately 75 percent of the Fortune Global 500. Our solutions unify multiple networks, devices and applications into one easy-to-use platform that allows teams to engage in rich and meaningful conversations. The result is a transformation of how the enterprise communicates and collaborates that amplifies collective effort, energizes the business, and enhances business performance. Unify has a strong heritage of product reliability, innovation, open standards and security.

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