Tech Line

Contact Centers Need to Go Mobile: *Are You Ready to Move?*

By Brian Hinton, Strategic Contact

It's no longer a question of whether or not to go mobile — it's when and how.

According to CTIA–The Wireless Association, there are now over 300 million wireless connections in the United States alone. Society as we know it has clearly gone mobile. We can reach family, friends, colleagues and service providers anytime, anywhere, increasingly with web-friendly smartphones and tablets. Your IT organization may already have plans for the infrastructure and applications to support internal and external mobile users. The question is: Are you ready to take advantage of the enterprise mobility strategy, collaborate with a mobile workforce and respond to your customers' need for mobile self-service and assisted service?

The Mobile Market Is Moving Fast

Smartphones offer a rich, multimedia experience that captivates users—from email and photos to music, videos and high-definition movies. It's no wonder that Frost & Sullivan predicts 80% smartphone penetration in the United States by the year 2015. These devices are already a common fixture within the management ranks of most enterprises. Business doesn't wait for employees to be at desks to respond to urgent requests for assistance or return voice and email. Mobile devices support multitasking on days that are wall-to-wall meetings.

We're also purchasing tablets by the millions to provide rich media interaction with greater mobility than laptops afford. According to a recent Morgan Stanley research report, 29% of companies currently purchase tablets or allow user-owned tablets on their networks, with 67% expecting to move in that direction in the next year.

The vendor community has noticed the shift in business communications needs and responded with applications that enable workflow using mobile endpoints. For example, "soft clients" for mobile devices provide unified communication (UC) functionality that includes access to CRM and collaboration applications, such as presence and instant messaging. We're also seeing support for mobile supervisor clients (smartphones, tablets) within contact center applications. Penetration rates are currently low, but overall market trends suggest a healthy appetite for the freedom and flexibility that such offerings afford.

The Contact Center Can Leverage Enterprise Mobility

Your IT department is probably already moving to support the mobile workplace. IT departments are exploring mobility as they have begun to recognize the benefits. When mobile devices become the preferred interface, IT supports fewer desktops. Many studies support this trend, crediting tablet sales with causing PC sales to not reach expectations in 2010. Also, IT can reduce their overall cell charges by controlling voice traffic over the corporate Wi-Fi network rather than incurring minutes on cell plans or international long-distance charges.

Mobile workers are also starting to express requirements for enhanced functionality. Currently, many employees who use the "follow me" function to route calls to their mobile phones are asking for more enterprise telephony functionality from the mobile device. They don't want their caller ID displayed when they return calls using their personal cell phones. They're interested in capabilities that mobile unified communications offer—e.g., access to corporate directories and applications, presence information, instant messaging, single reach/single voicemail, and desktop dashboards customized for mobile devices.

The contact center could benefit from a mobile presence by increasing the likelihood of connection with other workgroups or subject-matter experts to help resolve issues during the initial call—or at least prevent greater problems in connecting with them as more go mobile. With a mobile workforce supporting customers, IT will need to make contact-handling applications accessible on mobile devices and contemplate use of mobile "soft clients" by contact center supervisors. Mobile clients enable advanced collaboration tools like co-browsing and video and mobile recording/QM. Vertical business applications are also growing, with health care and banking leading the charge.

IT departments are also beginning to realize the benefits of a mobile strategy on their business continuity/disaster recovery plans. With access to appropriate applications through mobile devices, a mobile workforce can work from anywhere. Mobility can reduce the need for alternate facility plans. Contact centers traditionally struggle to define credible and effective business continuity plans due to a large workforce tied to phones and computers. The enterprise mobile strategy could facilitate the contact center's operational business continuity plan.

With mobile devices increasingly prolific in the market and increasing as our primary business form of communication, there's clearly pressure for mobility to play a role in customer support.

Your Customers Expect You to Keep Pace

Customers like being in the driver's seat when it comes to choosing how they interact with their product and service providers. Their needs and preferences, combined with cost-efficiency drivers, have created the multichannel environment in which the overwhelming majority of contact centers operate. With the explosive growth in mobile devices and their use in personal and professional settings, it's no longer a question of *whether* the contact center will go mobile. It's a matter of *when* and *how*.

Serving a mobile-anytime customer implies the need for a mobile-anytime service organization. We've already mentioned the proliferation of smartphones and tablets and that organizations are developing mobile applications. Are mobile applications the next step in self-service?

Our mobile society can't always get to the desktop or even the laptop to self-serve on the web. With readily accessible devices, mobile applications could have a major impact on incoming contacts—not only reducing the number of incoming contacts but causing a transition from self-service to assisted service through text messages. Who is planning your company's mobile applications now? The contact center should be part of bringing the service implications to the table.

There are many examples of companies and industries not just moving in the mobile direction, but heavily promoting it. Banks, airlines, credit card companies and retailers are just a few of the places where mobile applications are becoming a standard way to self-serve. These industries and companies may also offer service through texting (e.g., fund transfers and balance requests over cell phones), as well as customer alerting through texts (e.g., exceeding balance thresholds, flight delays, etc.). Mobile applica-

tions in these industries also support web functionality geared for small screens.

Social networking gets a big boost from the proliferation of mobile devices. Mobile users are prone to more frequent and immediate postings and updates on Twitter and Facebook. This ubiquitous access may put more emphasis on the need to interact via social media. It's all interlinked.

No aspect of mobility eliminates the other channels you support now. You will still receive calls and emails, although the mix might change. The "mix" speaks to the ongoing need to synchronize cross channel activity. A customer using a mobile application expects you to know who they are and how they are interacting. And when they switch channels and decide they actually want to talk to someone in the contact center, you better be ready! Cross-channel tools such as CRM, knowledge management and analytics provide the foundation for a consistent customer experience (see "Multichannel Technology Optimization," *Pipeline*, March 2011*).

As customers who contact you routinely become used to service "on the go" from other companies or industries, they may want the smart phone to become their "go to" channel, further strengthening their expectation that you offer mobile service.
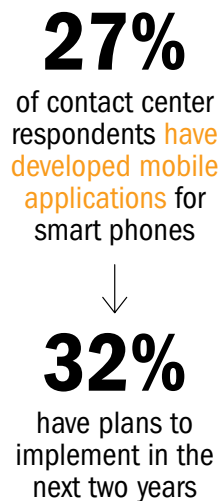
Be Ready to Move

With all the demands placed on contact centers these days, it would be easy to stick one's head

*Download "**Multichannel Technology Optimization**"
at http://tinyurl.com/CCP0311-MTO

The Multichannel Survey Says…

Here's what we learned when Strategic Contact and Pipeline polled contact center leaders about the impact of a mobile society on their planning horizon:

14%
of contact center respondents include text messaging as a contact media

↓

34%
have plans to implement in the next two years

27%
of contact center respondents have developed mobile applications for smart phones

↓

32%
have plans to implement in the next two years

61%
of organizations consider themselves lagging in their mobility service strategy

62%
of contact centers are not involved with creating mobile applications

The action in mobile applications is happening largely outside of customer service. Contact centers have yet to establish a clear role with this channel. For the moment, IT and marketing (with 37% and 30% participation, respectively) are in the driver's seat in mobile apps development.

in the sand and hope that mobile applications would simply go away, or at least stay out of the center's realm of responsibilities for a while. But the market trends and predicted customer behaviors don't support that approach, and benefits abound for you, your company and your customers (see Figure 1). Leading contact centers join with the rest of the business and IT to plan for the addition of the new forms of interaction for sales and service that mobile devices for customers and staff make possible.

Your organization is most likely already moving toward supporting a mobile workforce. Just as you are concerned with integrating the overall web strategy into the contact center service strategy, the contact center should be part of developing the mobile application strategy to understand the impact on service. You definitely care about the overall enterprise mobile workforce strategy, as your staff may become mobile right along with the rest of the enterprise.

Get involved now to help shape your mobile future. ⦿

(Figure 1)

Mobility for Customers and for Staff Benefits Everyone
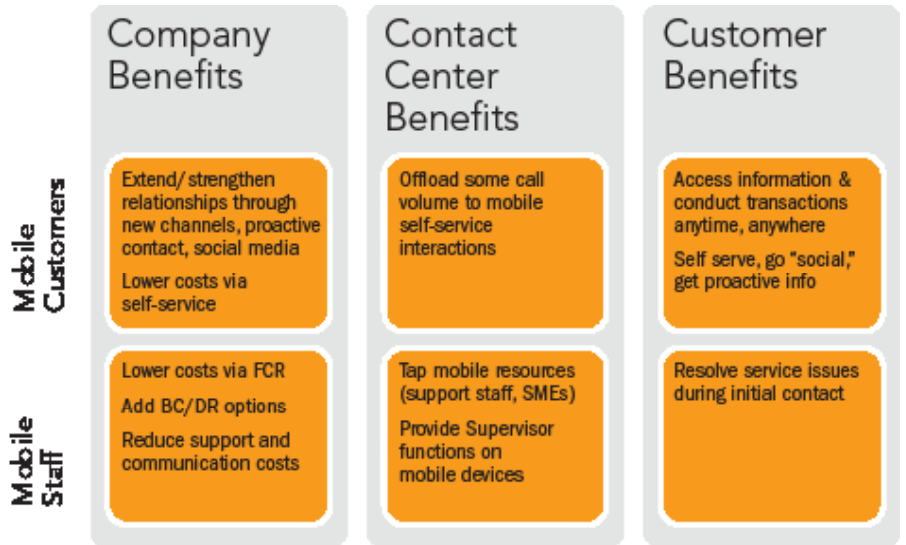
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