

GOOD, FAST AND CHEAP! CAN YOU REALLY HAVE IT ALL?

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Make sure that lower cost solutions meet your business needs and will be delivered at the price point you expect.

BY Lori Bocklund, Strategic Contact

Low-cost contact center technology solutions abound in today's market. Centers can quickly implement cloud-based applications at a low price point (well under \$100 per agent per month!). These options may seem like a slam-dunk for companies with limited IT resources, aging or ineffective systems, and limited budgets. And they can easily tempt others, as well! Is it too good to be true or a welcome transformation in technology offerings? Let's take a look.

A Reasonable Temptation

The old saying, "Good, fast, cheap... pick two," tells us we can't have it all. But today's low-cost contact center technology options send a resounding message that is at odds

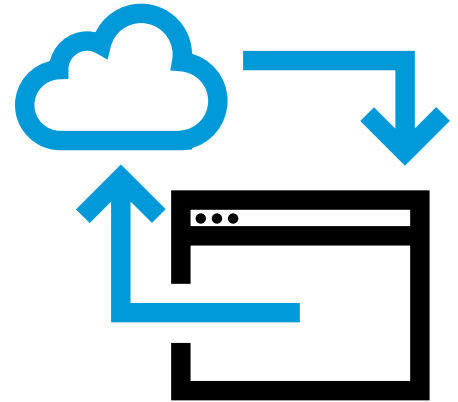
with this maxim. And it's not just one or two vendors with this message. It comes from legacy premise solution providers, long-standing cloud infrastructure and application providers, and a host of newer players. See **TABLE 1**.

The message of "fast and easy" is just what some centers need when they are hamstrung by their current technology (or lack thereof). Some vendors offer a free trial to test things out, or simple contracts with no-term commitment. They may offer low- or no-cost startup to further enable this "try it" mindset. As tempting as this may sound, it's important to apply a critical eye to discern if the "good, fast and cheap" solution answers the needs of your center. As **TABLE 2** summarizes, distinct differences can be seen at the various price points.

Too Big or Complex to Have It All?

If your center and/or company is bigger and you have requirements around vendor financials, market presence, security/compliance, etc., you are probably going to pay a higher price. Or, if you want a solution on the Gartner "Magic Quadrant" (or equivalent) as your third-party seal of approval, you will hit a higher price point. **TABLE 2** outlines the characteristics across low-cost, mid-market and higher-end solutions.

Many of the bigger or more traditional vendors offer cloud solutions at a higher price point. Their lowest entry point is around \$80-\$100 per agent to start, and the top solutions are \$100-\$175. Two big differences are functionality and support, which includes SLAs that deliver 99.99% uptime or higher. Functionality can span sophisticated routing and reporting across a variety of channels, QM, callback queuing, speech recognition IVRs and more. They also offer implementation services, private network connectivity and even private cloud/single tenant options—all big differences from the lower cost, faster, easier options.



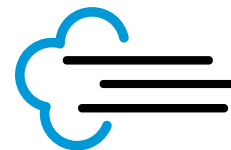
Can You Have it All?

Good, fast and cheap can all be relative terms, and there is an "it depends" factor that ties to your business needs. I'll help you dissect each term.

GOOD: Look at whether the vendor offers all you need—today and tomorrow. Start with essential functionality, such as channels and workforce optimization (WFO) applications like recording, quality monitoring (QM) and workforce management (WFM). And don't forget to dive into any other hot buttons specific to your industry, such as security or compliance. Another part of "good" is stable. Is the solution as reliable as you need it to be? Does the vendor have SLAs to back it up? If any of these things are important to you, ask targeted questions and do some reference checks to move past marketing promises to realities.

FAST: Most low-cost options are fast to set up because they just want you to access

the application through a browser and use internet connectivity. Place an order, get a phone (if you need one—you may just use a USB headset into the PC) and a number, login and go. But if you want a dedicated and controlled network connection (e.g., you have privacy, security or performance concerns), it



is not going to be as fast. Provisioning network connectivity can easily stretch your timeline to 90-120 days or more. As a result, some buyers of these services start with internet connectivity and move to private network if they can bear the short-term risk.

CHEAP: You can definitely find options that are low-cost on the per agent per month price point. Some vendors post prices on their websites, or you can readily get a quote from an inside sales person. Then you need to assess if there are any additional costs. You need to dive into what is included in the license costs. For example, do they charge for minutes or is it unlimited minutes? Do they charge for each number, or for IVR or an additional integration fee such as the CRM



connector? Implementation costs such as phones or startup fees are sometimes waived or credited on a deal, but don't assume!

Is It Right for You?

So now let's look at the "it depends" part of this to see for whom these solutions may be best suited, and who may want to think twice.

If you have a DIY mindset in the contact center and low or no reliance on IT, raise your hand! Just make sure you have capable people with time to learn and configure the solution, and IT will relinquish control. If you are a small business or have small center(s) in a bigger organization that operate somewhat independently (for example, help desks), these options could be a great fit. Confirm your functional needs are in line with the offering and no hot buttons will come out of IT or security/compliance that drive the need

for elevated control.

Lower cost solutions can also be a good fit for a center that wants to start at this level and then grow and mature. Maybe you can't afford something more robust now, but you can start here. Be aware of current requirements and any limitations a lower cost solution may present. The risk can be low; you may mature with the vendor, move up a license level, or potentially change if/when the center outgrows the vendor's offering. Keep in mind it's not as easy to change as it might seem on the surface. It requires time and resources to select and implement a new solution, and has ripple-effects with changes that impact integration, workflows, metrics and reporting, and end users (agents, supervisors, administrators).

On the flip side of these best-fit scenarios, these solutions are not as likely a fit for

TABLE 1: Many Different Cloud Vendor Types!

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Traditional contact center technology (and UC) vendors	Have been in telephony and/or contact centers and previously offered premise solutions; they now offer cloud options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspect • Avaya • Genesys • Mitel
Cloud telephony vendors	Made a name selling business telephony and also offer contact center functionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8x8 • RingCentral • Vonage
Cloud infrastructure vendors	Provide the infrastructure that many cloud applications run on (including contact center technology) and offer cloud solutions of their own	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amazon
Carriers	Provide voice and data network services and offer contact center applications as well (which may be based on Broadsoft or other applications)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CenturyLink • Verizon
Outsourcer spin-offs	Spun off from outsourcers that used their own cloud solution; offer that solution (or its offspring) to others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West • Serenova
Cloud CC providers that focus on partnerships with CRM vendors	Provide the contact center technology applications with a focus on voice and use tight partnerships with key CRM players like Salesforce.com for non-voice channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TalkDesk • NewVoiceMedia
CRM vendors	CRM vendors that offer a license option to provide contact center applications (including voice routing) that are integrated with their CRM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zendesk • Oracle • Salesforce (via app partners)
Cloud CC providers	Companies that have a focus on cloud-based contact center solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity Connect • ConnectFirst • EvolveIP

mature, larger centers or bigger companies that want to have more control over the vendor, solution, connectivity, etc. If you are migrating from a previous solution, it's important to look at key functional areas and make sure you won't experience gaps (and buyer's remorse). Issues can surface in areas such as routing, reporting, WFO and/or stability.

Buyer, Be Smart

If you're going to pursue a low-cost cloud solution, here are some suggestions as you

evaluate, select and procure a service.

Functionality will be the top interest of users. Make sure you get demos, screenshots and sample reports, and have deep-dive conversations that address your hot buttons. For example, do you want callback queuing? The ability to see dashboards on a mobile device? Easy configuration and scheduling of reports? Explore whether they offer the functions you want, and any additional costs (e.g., higher license level). Look at channels; voice is a given, but sometimes additional channels

cost more (e.g., put you into a higher-level license). Do they offer email, chat, text/SMS? How? Some solutions rely on the CRM for non-voice channels; that can have cost and integration impacts. Explore whether they offer WFO. In many cases, call recording is included but things like QM or WFM may be through partners. Explore how integrated those are and how you purchase them.

Many of these vendors have pre-built connectors to top CRM (everyone has Salesforce.com), but again, don't assume.

TABLE 2: Comparing Cloud Solution Types

TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS	LOWER COST SOLUTIONS	MID-MARKET SOLUTIONS	HIGH-END SOLUTIONS
Monthly Recurring Cost per Agent Seat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$50 or less • Some are 100% usage-based (\$0/agent but charges per minute) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$50-100 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$100-175
Market Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often direct; may use inside sales and self-provisioning via web • “Sweet spot” example: small centers (e.g., <50 seats) • CC features may be part of UC package or option with CRM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners or direct • “Sweet spot” example: 50-100 seats • CC is the focus, but may offer UC as well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often sold through partners • Typically target larger enterprises • CC is the focus, but may offer UC as well • Covered in analyst reports (e.g., Gartner Magic Quadrant)
Solution Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic features • May be voice only; may rely on CRM or chat solution for other media, or charge more for other media • Call recording only, no QM or WFM • Pre-built integrations to top CRM solutions • Check if they have the compliance you need (e.g., HIPAA, PCI) • Generally multi-tenant • Generally use internet connectivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded features • Omnichannel • May offer WFO suite, can integrate to full-feature WFO vendors • Pre-built integrations to top CRM solutions • Generally HIPAA, PCI compliant; need to check for other compliance • Typically multi-tenant • Often use internet connectivity; offer options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full feature including omnichannel • Integrated WFO (theirs or partners) • Pre-built integrations to top CRM solutions • Variety of security, compliance certifications (including HIPAA, PCI) • Some are single tenant (private cloud) • Often use private network connectivity
Implementation and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation professional services may be limited or require partners; offer online knowledge base and training • Limited support options—use online training and knowledge base for self-support • No or minimal SLAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation professional services may be limited or require partners • May offer different support packages • Some charge extra for SLAs (higher license level) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation professional services options including onsite training, testing, cutover • Full 24x7 support, including monitoring • Typically offer solid SLAs (e.g., 99.99% or 99.999% uptime)

Check that they have integration to your environment if you use Microsoft Dynamics, Zendesk, SugarCRM, Zoho, Oracle, etc. If you need integration to something else (e.g., for screen pops), explore how they do it and whether you need professional services (from the vendor or a partner). And if you have any existing technology that you want to use, like an IVR or WFM, explore how they leverage that or if you need to replace it.

Generally, the more you pay, the better support you will get.

Even though the solution is cloud-based and it's the vendor's job to architect it, explore where the technology resides, how it is connected, and how it is managed. Most assume you'll connect over the internet and use a browser, so you need to make sure that works for your environment or understand the implications of alternative connectivity. Understand the level of redundancy, how failover impacts you, and the "what-ifs" of various scenarios. Make sure the architecture, connectivity and performance meet your business needs

Understand what, if any, help you are going to get in implementation. Consider design, configuration, training and testing. Recognize assistance is likely to be remote, and you will tap their online knowledge base and classes. If you want onsite time and more rigorous professional services, clarify what the vendor provides and where the partners step in and engage with the right resources to define the plans and costs.

Once the system is in, support is going to be your touchpoint with the vendor. Generally, the more you pay, the better support you will get. At the low end, followup and ongoing training likely come from online resources. Check if you get any SLAs, and if so, are they good enough? How are they tracked? Is there remediation for not meeting them? Look for these in the standard agreement and if they don't offer any (or they are not well defined), decide if you want to try to negotiate. We don't recommend unique SLAs as they are

hard to manage, but it is a business decision based on risk.

Finally, as noted above, you need to dive into the true cost because it may not be as simple (and low) as it seems. Vendors often have multiple price options (e.g., two or three levels of licenses) or à la carte options. Calculate total monthly costs for your typical seats, volume and handle time. Work with the vendor to get a complete quote for your one-time costs and your monthly recurring cost.

Pick Three?

The old saying of "good, fast, cheap, pick two..." is in jeopardy in today's diverse market. If you want to "pick three" and have it all, make sure the lower cost solutions you consider meet your business needs and will be delivered at the price point you expect. ☎



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