Tech Line

What's New?
What's Hot?

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15 HOT TECHNOLOGIES TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON.

WHICH WILL FIND A HOME IN YOUR CENTER?

It is fun, and perhaps an essential exercise, to occasionally take inventory of what is on the technology scene to "rock your world"—or better yet, rock your customers' world. Like a good window shopping trip on the Miracle Mile or Madison Avenue, there is much to entice the prospective buyer. But smart contact center and technology leaders won't just fall for the latest or hottest fad; they will take the time to understand the business value for the company and the customer, and find those things that are a fit with their goals and needs.

Many factors influence innovation in the marketplace, as Figure 1 shows. Recession or not, the mechanisms of change never stop, and vendors old and new respond. Let's take a look around at what exciting things await you!

The New, Hot List

I've got a rapid-fire list of 15 ideas. Each addresses what it is and why it's hot, and shares the company and customer perspectives on the value this technology might deliver. If you see an idea that resonates for you, take action to learn more about the possibilities for your center.

SOCIAL MEDIA

We've got to start here because it's the hottest of the hot. So what is it? "Media designed to be disseminated through social interaction through highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques," according to Wikipedia (a social media site!). That means things like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Forums, Wikis, Blogs, RSS feeds… places where people can interact through Web 2.0-based technologies to collaborate and share info, insights, opinions and knowledge. This technology facilitates interactive, dynamic, responsive content contributions from a community of users. It's hot because it's ALL we hear about, and so every company feels like they have to play… even if they aren't sure why. What's the value to your company? That's the million-dollar question. Certainly it enables you to interact with customers who choose this channel. Most likely its biggest value is brand protection/promotion (marketing!). But it can be an alternative service tool, including letting the community members address customers' questions. And who can turn down free labor? In fact, a focus group might say, "I love using these tools and they let me have a voice and connect person-

ally while also having the chance to learn from people I trust."

CRM IN ITS NEW INCARNATION: SOCIAL CRM

While we're talking about social media, let's talk about its impact on customer relationship management. It's hot because social media is hot, and CRM is a capability most every company needs or already has. Your visionary leaders might be heard to say, "We need to extend the marketing, sales and service capabilities that CRM brings to these new channels and build relationships through social interactions." Social CRM delivers. Your customers' view is, "Whatever channel I use, I want you to know about it and serve me well, and I want to tap that community."

WIKIS (AKA SOCIAL MEDIA-LIKE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT)

I think I see a theme emerging here… Wikis leverage the community to share knowledge and vote the good stuff in and the bad stuff out (like a KM tool that can build knowledge faster, easier). Everyone needs KM, but sometimes the implementation hurdles are great (cost, project size, time before achieving value, etc.). So now there is a new way to get there faster and cheaper (see also the hosted solutions idea below). As with KM, a contact center leader

might exclaim, "I share knowledge across my teams serving customers and ensure consistent and up-to-date information. I can also enable more self service by leveraging content to customers. Unlike KM, I can do it faster, at a lower cost." While the manager is dancing in the aisles with all this value, the customer also has access to information to self serve and first-contact resolution goes up. If they need assisted service, the agent they reach has access to good information that is up to date, accurate and consistent.

INTEGRATED MULTICHANNEL CONTACT HANDLING

Really, we mean it this time—even though we've talked about it for years. It's time for common routing and reporting across media, including all these new channels. It's hot because of social media, the growing use of web chat, and the fact that everyone is doing calls and email at least. So it's time to get out of the silos and prevent more silos. The company gets better reporting and ease of management (of technology, contact handling, and media). The customer finally feels like every interaction is with the same company and they can get good service on their channel of choice.

MULTICHANNEL, PART 2: OUTBOUND ALERTING/NOTIFICATION (VIA VOICE

CALL, EMAIL, TEXT, ETC.)

It might be time to capture and maintain customer preferences for proactive communications, including triggers for contact and channels to use for delivery. Customers want timely information and want you to anticipate their needs. Why wait for them to contact you? Your company can preempt inbound contacts, serve customers at a lower cost, and drive loyalty while providing differentiated service. That value to you also produces a "wow" experience as customers get information when they need it, potentially saving time, money, and hassles.

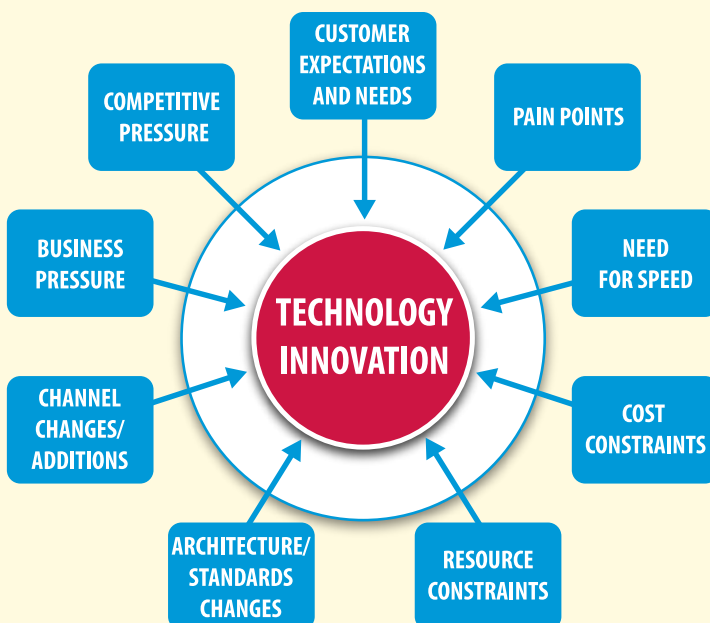## MOBILITY: FOR CUSTOMERS AND FOR STAFF

I love my iPhone. So do your customers. Maybe your staff loves their Blackberries or Droids or whatever. So do your customers. Everyone is on mobile devices with mobile apps seeking to interact—whether self-serve or assisted—via voice or text or browser or app or… They might contact you, or you them. You may even go so far as to have staff that can handle customer contacts anywhere, any time (if you have an empowered environment!). These personal communications trends and workplace trends point to mobility as a hot technology. While it might feel like yet another burden and may be developing as yet another customer interaction silo, it allows you to support customers on the go, providing info when and where they need it when done right. Your customer extends their love for their mobile device to your company as you offer channel choice and leverage the characteristics of mobility, such as location based services.

HOME-AGENT TECHNOLOGY

Even if your agents are not yet mobile, they may not be under your roof. Instead, they work from home offices using remote technology capabilities—whether employees or contractors. This idea is not new, but it is hot because we've reached the "tipping point." Enough companies have done it, have addressed all the usual fears (legal, HR, support processes and technology), have proven it works, and have reaped the benefits. So if you haven't done it before, it may be time to plan. If you're already doing it, it may be time to expand the program. The "veterans" enjoy a wider labor pool, better

Figure 1: Many factors drive technology innovation

COMPETITIVE PRESSURE

CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS AND NEEDS

PAIN POINTS

BUSINESS PRESSURE

NEED FOR SPEED

TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION

CHANNEL CHANGES/ ADDITIONS

COST CONSTRAINTS

ARCHITECTURE/ STANDARDS CHANGES

RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

and more productive agents, and (generally) lower cost (facilities, wages, overhead, etc.), with more schedule flexibility. When done right, your customers don't know they are speaking to a home agent, but they experience better access at extended hours and during peaks.

ANALYTICS: SPEECH, DATA, DESKTOP, TEXT, MULTICHANNEL

Analytics is hot, hot, hot in all its various forms because it provides companies with the ability to analyze structured and unstructured data to gain insights and define actions. It's time to take a deeper dive than traditional reporting provides, and analytics is the means to do it. Speech analytics has lit up eyes for a few years. Data analytics is an enterprise activity that has strong applicability to the contact center. Desktop analytics lets us understand more about what happens in front and back office work. Text analytics takes the "wow" of speech analytics and applies it to text-based contacts such as email, web chat, and social media. Multichannel analytics addresses the overall goals of supporting a variety of channels and optimizing interactions for the company and its customers. Enthused buyers see value when they take action to optimize their centers based on real insights about what is happening. Take

note that these actions may include process and organization changes, so only those willing to tackle such feats should go down this path. The customer experiences continuous improvement based on metrics such as first contact resolution, quality, and customer satisfaction.

VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER

Speaking of customer satisfaction, another performance tool makes my list because it has reached the "no excuses not to do it" stage. Companies can gather and report on (and ideally analyze) customer feedback tied to interactions (via IVR, email, outbound call, etc.). And let's be clear: We're not just talking about annual marketing surveys that might tell you how customers feel about the company but reveal little about their last interaction. There are many ways to do it today—by technology type, vendor type or sourcing type. Companies that want to understand the true customer experience and respond to opportunities for improvement will see value in these tools. The customer benefits as their voice is heard and the trends those voices reflect lead to service improvements.

ELEARNING AND COACHING TOOLS

These performance tools deliver training at

the desktop and tie CSR coaching to performance against target metrics. These tools make the hot list because they may be how companies really drive value from things like analytics and VoC. They help answer the question, "What will you do with what you learned?" Coaching and development are elusive tasks in the center that often get compromised due to time constraints. The right tools and processes will help make them happen and deliver both improved customer and employee satisfaction.

CONSOLIDATED DESKTOP APPLICATIONS

This hot technology doesn't have a sexy, commonly used name. So whether you call it CDA or desktop integration or something else, the goal is to create a single interface for CSRs to access information in a variety of systems. This technology can integrate to desktop analytics to monitor and see the opportunity for improvement. Buyers of this technology are the ones who have finally figured out contact centers need more than just hand-me-down apps from other business needs—they need an interface built for customer interactions to achieve lower handle time, higher FCR and therefore lower cost and a better customer experience. CDA can be a cheaper,

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Does This Technology Fit?

Any shopping trip requires an honest look in the mirror. Does this fit? Do I like it? Does it make me look and feel good (or, in this case, make my company look good and my customers feel good)? Here are some key considerations to help you figure out which of these exciting hot and new technologies are a fit for your center.

- Business strategy/goals/drivers. Driven to cut costs? Improve service? Drive sales? The things that drive your business are the first place to look to identify hot or new technologies that could make it to your "to-do" list.

- Vertical market. A utility looks mighty different from a catalog/online retailer, financial services, manufacturer or health care company. Think about your customer base, competition and contact types before narrowing the list of technologies that might fit.

- Customer demographics. You don't want to stereotype but you will want to consider the profile of your customers, such as age, location, income, etc., and how they might impact your priorities.

- Contact types and the opportunities they present. Are you providing service, conducting sales, protecting revenue or an existing customer base? Different contact types and roles in the center can place very different demands on technology.

- Budget and resources available. Your company and contact center

size, among other things, can influence the budget and resources available to you and the other competing projects. Consider what it will really take to pursue this technology and whether you have the means to do it.

- Contact center maturity. The level of maturity of your center provides the building blocks to drive value from technology. You don't want to try to tackle the tools that require a level of maturity you don't have—including the ongoing commitment to process changes and resources to apply the technology.

- Technology adoption profile. You might be an innovator or early adopter who seeks out technology to differentiate your company or service, even when that technology is not fully proven or widely adopted in the market. Or you might be more cautious, waiting for technology to have a broader market and be well past the "bleeding" or "leading" edge before you get in the game. Map the technology of interest and your approach to technology purchase to the technology adoption profile to see if it's a fit. 🅿

faster way to address desktop issues than some alternatives.

BUSINESS PROCESS AUTOMATION/OPTIMIZATION

Another hot technology with various aliases (such as "Communications Enabled Business Processes"), this one can ensure that the end-to-end experience is optimized. Think of it as workflow (like call flow) to make things happen and move tasks along, and think about how powerful that could be with an optimized desktop. Most centers (and the departments on which they depend) are heavily dependent on tribal knowledge and manual processing that lead to inconsistency and create errors, rework, and missed commitments. BPO tools enable companies to write business rules to trigger reliable actions and outcomes, resulting in consistency, speed, and reliability in conducting transactions end-to-end—a win-win for the company and the customer!

UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS

I'm not really putting unified communications (UC) as a whole on my list, but some of the things that get thrown into this bucket are hot, like using presence and instant messaging (IM) to enable collaboration and problem solving among teams in the center or across the enterprise. UC is a big umbrella term that is about collaboration and breaking down silos across the organization. UC has been trying to be hot for a while, and perhaps has finally achieved it by feeding into the social media mindset that collaboration is a good way to solve problems. Companies can tap the right resources across the organization in a timely fashion and get people to work together to address customer needs—resulting in happy customers and service optimization.

HOSTED SOLUTIONS AND/OR MANAGED SERVICES

This technology is about delivery or sourcing many of the items listed here, and others. I'm putting it in the hot category even though it's been around a while because it's getting traction with a lot of applications and more and more companies of all sizes are taking a serious look at these options. Rather pay a service fee than buy technology and manage it all in-house? With hosted solutions, you manage the applications (e.g., routing, skills) and the provider manages the technology. With managed services, you pay for professional services to manage the application of the technology as well (think of your IT/telecom/support staff being another company providing services). These options provide a faster way to get functionality and a better way to buy specialized knowledge or expertise. They enable you to tap capabilities you might otherwise not be able afford to buy by paying for service as you go. At the same time, you get increased agility to adapt to changing business needs (capacity, functionality, etc.). So if you are saying, "I need to get capabilities faster with little or no capital outlay" and "I want to try it before spending too much time and money or have the agility to adjust to my dynamic needs," then this one might be for you.

MONITORING AND TESTING TOOLS AND SERVICES FOR CONTACT CENTER TECHNOLOGY

Last, but not least. Not sexy, but maybe essential. Vendor/distributor offerings and in-house tools can be used to test and monitor systems, network performance, servers, services on those servers, call flows, functions, etc. This one is hot because of the pain points brought on by the growing complexity of contact center technology and because things can (and do) go wrong more often than they did in the old days. Mission-critical centers need to have good tools and processes to keep all that technology working well to serve customers. This one deserves a proactive look before problems strike and your center is saying, "I need to ensure that my systems are up and working (and protect my ability to respond to customer needs)" and your customers are saying, "I don't understand excuses about 'the system is down'—I just want service when I need it."

ONE MORE TIP BEFORE YOUR SHOPPING TRIP…

My list shows there are plenty of opportunities out there—and they could help to optimize interactions for your company and your customers. And who doesn't want that kind of benefit? But as you embark on your shopping trip, keep in mind there is no "silver bullet" technology that will be just the right fit for every center. Take the time to learn before you become too enamored with anything, and seek those technology capabilities that will help you meet your business goals, relieve pain points, and have a positive impact that is measurable for your company and your customers.

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