



## **Learnings from the 2011 ACCE Conference**

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I just returned from the ACCE Conference in New Orleans, one of the biggest and best contact center conferences of the year. While more people seem to be finding budget to attend conferences again, perhaps some of you are wishing you could have been there to attend sessions and talk to peers and vendors (and perhaps drink a “Hurricane” or eat some Gumbo!). So here are some tidbits to share.

### **Heads are in the Clouds**

Call it what you want – hosted solutions, Software as a Service (SaaS), Communications as a Service (CaaS), cloud solutions – but regardless, it has arrived for both buyers and sellers. At least half of the vendor exhibits featured cloud-based solutions. Some offer full blown contact center solutions with routing, reporting, IVR, CTI, and performance tools (e.g., WFM, QM). Others were peddling targeted applications such as CRM, proactive outbound contact, web chat translation services, analytics, or voice of the customer surveys. The chance to get something done quickly, with little upfront cost, really seems to resonate with companies constrained by IT resources and budget dollars. In a knowledge exchange session I facilitated on the topic, attendees testified to implementations that maxed out at three months. No one could recall a premise-based implementation of similar technology that came close to that timeframe. Concerns seem to be security, reliability, and negotiating and managing service level agreements – all topics that can be addressed with the proper due diligence in project processes.

### **You Can Optimize Your Desktop**

I’m not sure I’ve ever seen a contact center with an “ideal” desktop, but I know a lot of people who long for an improved desktop and applications. People need to capture interaction information and customer profiles (including the increasingly changing and elusive contact information – like cell phones and email addresses), and they want to make it easier for their reps to help customers. Enter today’s CRM solutions and desktop optimization applications. The former can be had for less pain through hosted applications and improved deployment approaches (configured instead of customized, with “easy” integration). The latter bring the metrics to see what is happening on the desktop, integration between applications to avoid the pain of cut and paste and notepads, and the process optimization to smooth interactions delivering shorter handle times and increased first contact resolution (which EVERYONE wants). Both deliver a desktop “portal” that truly transforms the customer and rep experience.

### **Performance Tools Cross Barriers and Channels**

With the proliferation of analytics tools, customer satisfaction surveys, and eLearning and coaching capabilities, vendors are vying for the attention of call center leaders who want to take their staff and center performance to new heights. As centers mature, they yearn for these tools to meet the high demands corporate leaders place on them to improve customer service, cut costs, and drive revenue. Speech analytics has been the “hot” topic in the past few years, and seems to be settling in to the realities of where and how to use it – including the commitment of appropriate analyst resources to drive value from this powerful technology. And now with text analytics and cross channel analytics, companies can apply similar analysis to their email and web chat. Scorecards and dashboards were of great interest, as was desktop analytics coming from both the performance suite vendors and from those with desktop optimization solutions. The sessions the attendees flocked to (popular topic!) and vendors present (many



choices for VoC) reinforce that there is no reason not to do voice of the customer surveys anymore to complement quality monitoring and other internal performance perspectives.

### **Still Room for Niche Vendors**

While some of the big vendors anchored the event, it was also clear there is still plenty of room for niche players that help companies solve the specific challenges. Want to improve your reps' keyboarding skills? There's an app for that! Need to add proactive outbound contacts to your customer interaction strategy? Recover idle time to use for knowledge building with your agents? Improve your forecasting ability? You guessed it; there are apps for those too. Whether your needs are wide-ranging or targeted, whether you have a "suite" approach to technology or seek best of breed solutions, there are good options to consider.

### **Social Media Hype Continues and Takes a Reality Check**

We heard and talked about "tweets" and "followers," social media strategies and the role of marketing and the contact center in responding to these important interactions. From keynotes to sessions to vendor booths, social media hype flowed. But at the same time, the table and hallway conversations were flavored with some healthy skepticism on the fit of social media for various companies and their customers. Perhaps we've reached a point in the maturing of these new interactions where people will take a careful look at the role they play today and tomorrow. In a time where companies must make careful choices about priorities for their precious investment of time, money, and resources, the reality check is a healthy thing.