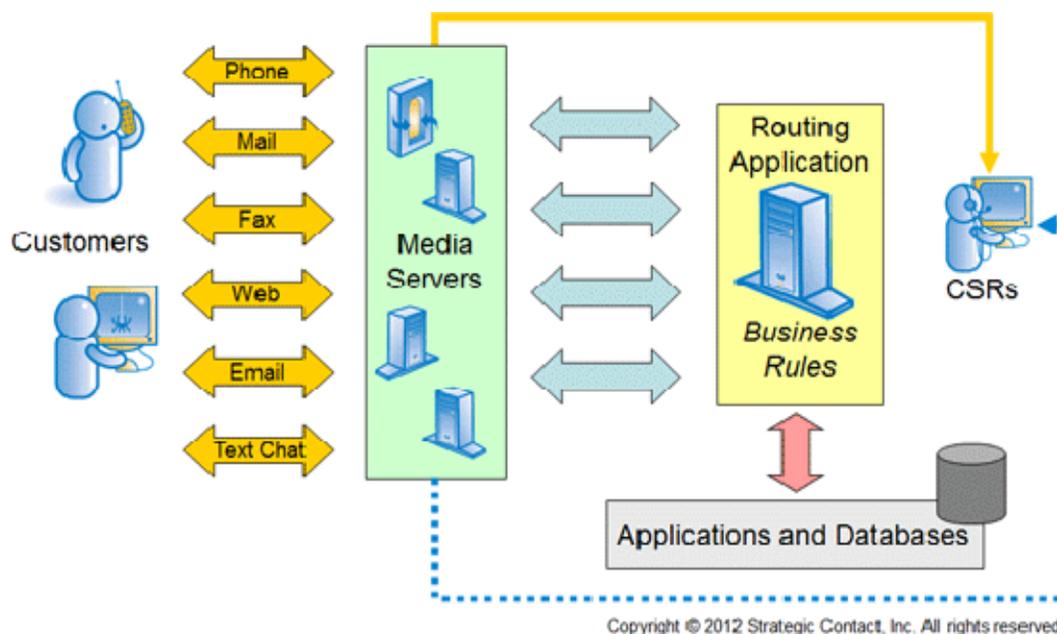# Multimedia Moves Beyond Manual

By Brian Hinton, Principal Consultant
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Calls have been the predominant contact type and likely will be for the foreseeable future. However, most contact centers handle other media, many with significant volumes. Email is a given almost everywhere. Chat is taking hold. Most organizations are at least dipping their toes in social media, even if the contact center's role is not yet clear. Customers in every industry are armed with mobile devices, eager to interact.

Centers tend to implement a different process to handle each media, with different tools and varying degrees of sophistication. For example, you may just use Microsoft Outlook or Lotus Notes and route email to a specific inbox with agents "pulling" email or a Supervisor distributing email to individual mailboxes. Many centers try to assign emails for handling during slow periods between calls. Calls or chats can arrive while working an email, interrupting the email process and inflating handle times. Difficulty forecasting how many emails an agent can handle during slow periods and no real-time monitoring of email queues can lead to emails delayed for days before anyone realizes the problem. It's not pretty.

This segmented, manual approach to multimedia is also plagued by disparate routing and reporting. In the email example above, routing is manual and reporting is often non-existent. Chat is often on a hosted platform with its own login, skills, and routing. And, of course, phone call data pours out of the good old ACD with its sophisticated routing and skills management. An analyst can combine the available data to attempt some level of consolidated view to support planning and staffing, and to create a picture of how the center is doing as a whole. Most centers make it work, but these approaches are not scalable, cost effective, or efficient in planning for and achieving service level and response time, and meeting customers' expectations.

Consistent routing and reporting for all media is the goal. A common routing engine with media as a skill and a single administrative interface and database is a beautiful thing. Consolidated reporting reveals the balance and performance across media, and feeds volumes and handle times into the Workforce Management application for forecasting and scheduling.

Besides consistent routing and reporting, **we need visibility through contact tracking in a CRM application.** This provides an end-to-end view for issue resolution, cross-selling or up-selling, regardless of the customer's media choice or cross-channel activity.

You can continue to grow the multimedia integration with **advanced performance tools** such as Voice of the Customer Surveys in all media and speech or text analytics for more advanced root cause analysis of contact types and reasons.

Unfortunately, this cohesive multimedia world can be hard to achieve. **Centers can become so tied to current processes and tools that it is difficult to envision change.** Most centers have achieved a delicate balance with individual applications across all media and worry that any change will disrupt operations. The current manual approach can be a "house of cards" that will collapse with any change in volume, contact types, or the myriad of business drivers that can impact a contact center, not to mention the departure of key staff that are the glue holding the routing or analysis together. It is important to create a vision for your multimedia strategy and bring it to life. You will have to leave your manual processes and independent applications behind and create a transition strategy that enables you to optimize efficiency and effectiveness.

When is the time right for a change? Review your planning processes as well as how you answer questions about performance across media.
- How much guesswork goes into volume forecasting and staffing requirements or performance reporting?
- How confident are you in your ability to achieve service levels and response times in all media?
- Do your response time goals for email meet your customers' expectations?
- If you want to add chat, mobile or social media to your channels, will you be able to plan and deliver?

If a thorough and honest review reveals holes in your planning or ability to achieve goals across all media, it is probably time to explore a multimedia solution that "brings it all together."

Start by looking deeper into what you already have. Most ACD vendors have multimedia solutions for consistent routing and reporting for all media. Depending on your starting point, implementing your ACD vendor's multimedia solution may only involve a license upgrade. Review the consolidated reporting and the integration with your WFM application before making a final decision. And don't forget the integration with CRM to track contacts for the total customer view.

As customers' expectations evolve, so can your center. Acknowledge the need for change, honestly assess where you are, and plan for and implement the best solution for your environment. Once you see the transformation, you'll wonder why you didn't shift out of manual sooner!