What's On Your Radar for 2012?

Four technology projects that can deliver the greatest bang for the buck.

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It seems like only yesterday that we budgeted and planned for 2011. Now 2012 is upon us. We're hearing that companies are ready to invest in their contact centers—because they can, or because they must. With no shortage of projects vying for your attention, we thought we'd sift through the noise and highlight four areas that merit serious consideration in the New Year. While your actions will depend on your center's operational and technological maturity and penchant for innovation, it's worth exploring these possibilities and determining the fit for your business.

Multimedia Routing and Reporting

For over 10 years, we've been talking about multimedia silos and the myriad of challenges they present for contact centers. Unfortunately, there has been little movement toward solid routing and reporting of media other than voice. Even when centers handle other media (such as fax or email), they are generally separate and often involve manual routing and little, if any, reporting (e.g., email routing using Outlook or Lotus Notes with no performance targets or reporting). To be honest, we're not terribly surprised. Real-time voice still dominates the scene with email playing second fiddle. But the growing popularity of chat, social media and mobile apps is pushing centers to expand their channel support. A siloed approach to contact management won't be scalable or sustainable in the coming years.

What does it mean to break down the silos and manage multimedia contacts holistically?

- **A common routing and reporting engine manages all contacts**

- **Resource optimization across all media**

- **Customer experience optimization across all media**

- **Integrated administrative tools provide the means to gather insights about all forms of contact while providing an efficient means to manage them**

It takes significant investment in people, process and technology to reach multimedia nirvana. We don't expect an industrywide transformation in 2012. But if you are pursuing a new "phone system," ACD, voice platform or whatever you call it in the next 12 months, multimedia contact management needs a prominent place in your requirements specification and deliberations. [You don't need technology to be a stumbling block when your people and processes are ready to go!] If a platform change isn't in the cards, engage in dialog with existing vendor(s) and/or third parties to build a multimedia technology roadmap, leveraging and enhancing your existing environment. You may find upgrades that make quantum improvements in contact management. And you may discover tools that you've already purchased and simply aren't using! Any step in the right direction will benefit you and your customers.

Desktop Optimization

We've been beating the drum on desktop optimization for a number of years, as well. Messy, clunky, non-integrated applications drag down agent efficiency and ability to serve customers in excellence. In fact, we marvel at agents' skill and creativity in making the best of difficult circumstances! Yet "cleaning up" the desktop isn't just about integrating different systems. With desktop analytics, you'll be able to see what people are doing (or not doing), what works (or doesn't work), where you've got performance issues, and where compliance

Table 1: Top Opportunities to Put on Your Radar

Potential Technology on Your Radar	Opportunity	Options*
MULTIMEDIA ROUTING AND REPORTING (MMRR)	▸ Blended multimedia routing engine ▸ Blended multimedia reporting engine ▸ Common administrative tool	▸ ACD vendors for their multimedia routing and reporting engines (e.g., Avaya, Cisco, Genesys, Aspect, Interactive Intelligence) ▸ Third parties with MMRR that integrate with your systems
DESKTOP INTEGRATION, ANALYTICS AND COLLABORATION	▸ Consolidated desktop application integration into existing systems ▸ Desktop analytics capturing events and time in systems, applications ▸ Desktop collaboration tools to communicate internally and/or with customers	▸ Vendors focused on desktop improvement (e.g., Jacada, OpenSpan, Cicero) ▸ Performance tool vendors for desktop analytics (e.g., Verint, Nice, Aspect) ▸ "Unified Communications" vendors ▸ Niche vendors with targeted applications (e.g., LiveLOOK)
KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND WIKIS	▸ Shared and updated information across internal resources (center and across enterprise) ▸ Shared and updated information with customers for self service	▸ KM modules that are part of CRM solutions (e.g., via Oracle, SAP, SalesForce.com) ▸ Wikis (e.g., via SocialText, PBWiki/PBWorks) ▸ Microsoft SharePoint 2010
REPORTING AND ANALYTICS	▸ Improved reporting for specific systems, media, applications ▸ Scorecards/dashboards leveraging information from various systems ▸ Analytics tools (speech, text, data, desktop)	▸ Existing system vendors ▸ Performance tool vendors for analytics (e.g., Verint, NICE, Aspect) ▸ Niche vendors (e.g., Nexidia, HardMetrics)

*Consider both premise and hosted or "cloud-based" solutions

problems arise, to name a few.

Taking a serious look at the agent desktop in this multichannel world also includes considering collaboration tools. They're an invaluable resource for facilitating discussions among peers, as well as with contact center leaders and/or subject-matter experts—especially for centers with a significant number of remote workers or the need to tap others beyond the contact center walls. They can also engage agents in interacting with customers via the web and/or mobile apps.

We believe desktop complexity may be the biggest hindrance for achieving contact centers' goals, whether it's service optimization (FCR, contact handling efficiency, etc.) or sales expansion (cross-sell, close rate, order size, etc.). It's time to fix the problem. Fortunately, there are solutions out there that won't overly burden your IT and other project staff or your bank account.

If you do nothing else in 2012, get educated on options for desktop integration, desktop analytics and collaboration tools. Factor these tools into your technology roadmap and develop a timeline for implementation. If you're tempted to push it off and "make do" for one more year, keep this in mind: the longer you wait, the more operational cost you incur and the more revenue opportunities pass you by.

Knowledge Management and Wikis

In all likelihood, your most experienced, skilled, "go to" agents have a vast warehouse of information in their heads and in their personal filing systems to respond to customer requests and help out their colleagues when they hit a tough question. Your center may also have some homegrown, user *un*-friendly and difficult-to-navigate tools housing unapproved, out of date and oft-ignored information. What would it be like if *all* of your agents had access to a wealth of accurate, approved, consistent, readily available knowledge at their fingertips? How would customers feel if they could tap into some or all of those repositories, as well? Enter knowledge management and wikis.

Knowledge management (KM) systems provide a structured, controlled means to retrieve and catalog information from a myriad of sources. They're a great choice for centers with a lot of (likely dispersed) existing information, the requisite resources to design and implement the software, as well as manage submission, editing and approval of content. For folks with modest resources and/or less stringent needs for control, or a desire to move farther, faster, wikis can get the job done, as well. They're special-purpose websites that give nontechnical users the wherewithal to create and edit any number of interlinked web pages using a simplified markup language or text editor. An integrated search engine delivers content by titles, keywords and phrases. [Think Wikipedia.] Whereas KM generally cedes power to a governing body with a "knowledge manager," wikis typically give power to the people with a "community manager."

In their respective elements, KM solutions and wikis repeatedly demonstrate solid business cases with benefits for reps, customer self-service and assisted service. *The technology is growing in importance given changes in the customer interaction model:*

- **Customers want to succeed in their channel of choice on the first try. They don't want to be put on hold, transferred between reps, transferred across channels or, heaven forbid, called back. The customer experience depends on real-time access to structured and unstructured information.**

- **Self-governing communities offer advice, solve problems, share ideas and collaborate in the world of social media. They don't wait for the wizard to come out from behind the curtain.**

- **The products and services and associated customer interactions have become more complex. "It takes a village" to serve the internal and external constituencies.**
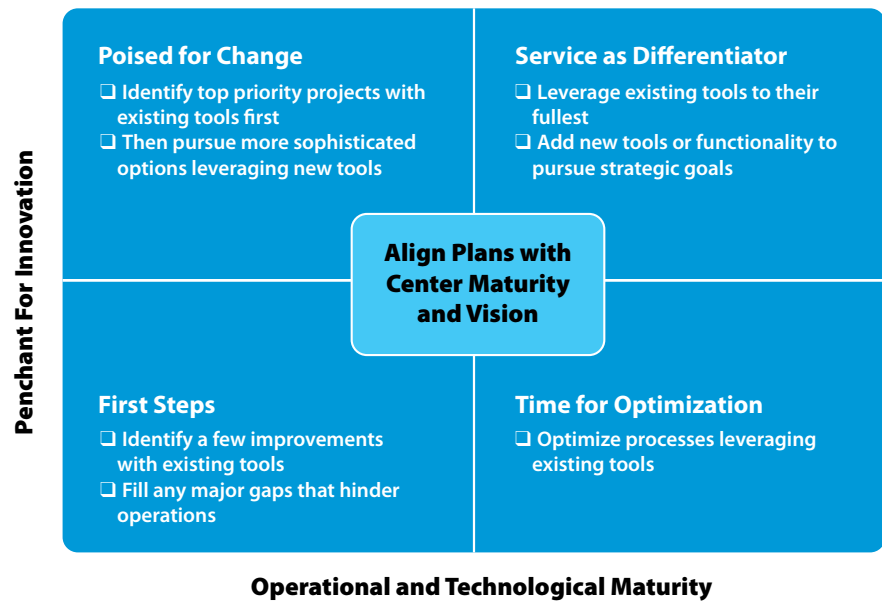
There are so many products and solutions that are ready-made for this application that there's no excuse to delay. Most of the KM vendors have been bought by the industry's heavy-hitters in CRM. In all likelihood, one of your prominent desktop applications has a KM module that could be turned up with relatively modest effort. [Perhaps you already licensed it, but aren't yet using it!] Wikis are a proven technology that can be licensed as cloud-based solutions on a trial or permanent basis. If nothing else, SharePoint 2010 has wiki capabilities that we see many centers deploying relatively quickly and without much cost. SharePoint may limit your range of motion for external users, but you'll gain experience internally as you rally support for a comprehensive solution.

Reporting and Analysis

A long as you are in the contact center business, you will be tasked with creating meaning out of data and leveraging the insights you glean. The more your center grows and changes,

> ## Companies are ready to invest in their contact centers—because they can, or because they must.

Consider Maturity and Penchant for Innovation When Defining Plans

Figure 1, right

Penchant For Innovation

Poised for Change
- ❏ Identify top priority projects with existing tools first
- ❏ Then pursue more sophisticated options leveraging new tools

Service as Differentiator
- ❏ Leverage existing tools to their fullest
- ❏ Add new tools or functionality to pursue strategic goals

Align Plans with Center Maturity and Vision

First Steps
- ❏ Identify a few improvements with existing tools
- ❏ Fill any major gaps that hinder operations

Time for Optimization
- ❏ Optimize processes leveraging existing tools

Operational and Technological Maturity

the greater the need to address analytics. It starts with defining metrics (hopefully balanced) that align with business and operational goals. It demands that you look at your ability to capture, track, report, trend, analyze and act on data to optimize your environment. And it challenges you to identify gaps that need to be filled and performance tools that drive and measure achievement. *Some specific technology considerations include:*

- **Improved reports and reporting tools, even if you simply revisit and fine-tune existing applications (e.g., ACD reports, IVR reports, other media) and/or blend production and effort metrics (Customer Information system and Phone/other media reporting)**

- **Integrated Quality Assurance and Voice of the Customer processes and tools**

- **Consolidated reporting into scorecards/dashboards**

- **Analytics tools (speech, text, data, desktop) targeted to your specific needs and/or integrated into suites**

Your existing vendors are a good place to start the ball rolling, whether for ACD, IVR or performance tools. The bigger players in the performance tool market have integrated suites and now mid-tier performance optimization companies have fairly comprehensive suites, as well. And there are some targeted players with core competencies in select areas if that's what you need. If all else fails, the data you have may just need Crystal or another custom reporting tool to give you more value.

Setting and Pursuing Priorities

Consider Figure 1 as an aid to prioritize changes in your center. Take a careful and honest look at where you are with both operations and technology, and gauge your vision and readiness to innovate. Your focus is first on using what you have in new and different ways. Then you can identify the "next great thing" that will help you transform your business.

We've given you four major areas to consider in addition to the "hot topics" that continue

to garner attention—e.g., social media, social CRM, outbound alerting, mobility, process optimization, cloud-based services (see "What's New, What's Hot," *Pipeline*, November 2010). Whatever lights up your radar, make sure that you take a careful look at what *really* applies to your business. Ask: Where is your pain? What is keeping you from achieving your corporate or contact center operations goals? Put up your hype guard; make the distinction between the razzle-dazzle and the real costs and benefits. Recognize the limitations of your resources—staff, time, money. Explore different ways to accomplish priority projects (e.g., through hosted/cloud-based services) to equip you to tackle more, move faster and accelerate benefits.

People and process elements must factor into every project you pursue. During implementation, take time to revamp business processes to take advantage of the new technology. [Don't do the same old things with the brand-new tool.] Assign resources on your team to make the changes and use professional services where needed to design, develop, and test your systems and applications. Post-implementation, make sure that you have a plan for technology support and management. Consider your needs for applying and leveraging the tools going forward. If analytical or other roles are necessary, make provisions to bring your staff up to speed. Make sure that there are clear accountabilities for implementing new functions, making day-to-day changes, conducting ongoing monitoring and testing, and trouble-shooting. Define the vendor/distributor role and include it in your contract.

It's a New Year

Our assessment of the market landscape reveals four key themes that have the potential to deliver the greatest bang for the buck: multimedia routing and reporting, desktop optimization, KM/wikis, and reporting and analytics. The need is manifest in almost all of our projects, and the industry buzz around them is palpable at conferences and other networking events. We hope they make it on y our radar in some form or fashion in the coming months, making 2012 an exciting year in which the contact center industry makes major strides to improve the customer experience and optimize operations by applying new as well as tried-and-true technologies effectively. ⓟ

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