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A Frost & Sullivan White Paper

Modern Contact Centers Drive the Evolution of Customer—and Employee—Experiences

By Frost & Sullivan

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Contents

How, when, and why customers interact with contact centers is an ever-evolving process. For example, onset of the COVID pandemic in 2020 caused a sudden increase in connecting customers and employees through digital channels. While the pandemic was an extreme example, contact center operations and strategies will continue to be impacted by varying forces: new technologies and customer habits, changing demographics, and fluctuating global forces will continue to shape and alter how contact centers can meet customer expectations and equip their employees for success. This paper will illuminate how contact centers can improve their competitive positioning by embracing changes in workforce dynamics, adopt new operational strategies, and leverage advanced technologies to better fulfill—and exceed—customer and employee expectations.

Chapter 1: Contact Centers in a New Age of Workforce Dynamics

The millennial generation, the most populous in US history, is rapidly overtaking the labor force. In 2020, millennials made up over 40% of employees, as baby boomers—the second-largest generation to date—continued retiring at an increasing rate. In less than a decade—by 2030— Gen X will start retiring, and millennials, along with the subsequent Generation Z (Gen Z), will become an overwhelming 74% of the workforce.[1] Most contact centers have likely noticed the shift in demographics, but they may underestimate the technological and cultural demands that go beyond simply having "younger people" in the office. Coupled with the sudden acceleration of virtual employee and customer interactions brought on by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, employers should be aware of the trends unique to new workers and the best ways to engage, train, and retain these critical team members.

> 66 **In less than a decade—by 2030—Gen X will start retiring, and millennials, along with the subsequent Generation Z (Gen Z), will become an overwhelming 74% of the workforce.** 99

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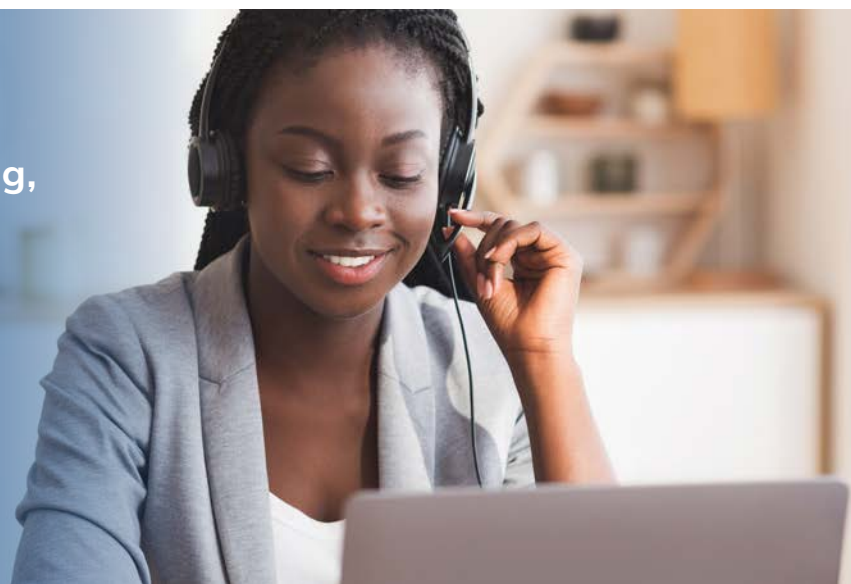
While the idea of working for the same employer for one's entire career began to dwindle decades ago, millennials and Gen Z are perceived to be more likely than their predecessors to switch companies more frequently. Data to support this assertion is not entirely conclusive. For example, while Gen Z workers may be more than three times more likely to switch jobs than boomers[2], other surveys indicate millennials would rather work for the same employer for five years than leave after two.[3] Regardless of seemingly conflicting trends on a macro level, however, with typical churn rates hovering around 30% to 40%, contact centers need to consider the following unique characteristics of these groups when creating employee engagement strategies.

High technology skills and expectations: Millennials and Gen Z are often defined as technology-driven generations, born after the creation of the internet and with access to smartphones since they were teenagers or younger. They are accustomed to setting filters, customizing dashboards, and enabling features that increase their value and engagement with technology. Businesses that try to force antiquated, static user interfaces that do not evolve with the company, employee, or customer needs may find workers frustrated, non-compliant, and ready to move to the competitor.

Cultural shifts, such as growing diversity and social responsibility: Workplaces will need to ensure that both company culture and technology are accessible to, and inclusive of, increasing diversity. The millennial generation has a roughly 44% minority rate, as opposed to 25% of boomers, and Gen Z is on trend to be the last US generation with a Caucasian majority.[4] Millennials and Gen Z also put a higher priority than previous generations on working for employers that demonstrate environmental responsibility and promote positive social causes.

Historically high levels of education: Millennials have higher rates of education than any preceding generation, providing them with more bargaining power as employees. Forty-one percent of millennials have a bachelor's degree or higher, as opposed to an average of 34% for older generations.[5]

Comfort with technology eased the transition to work from home: A recent benefit of having millennial/Gen Z workers is that their tech-savvy abilities may have made their transition to work from home (WFH) more seamless than those with lower technical aptitude. This advantage will persist well into the future: A recent Frost & Sullivan survey shows 79% of organizations have at least one-half of their staff working from home on a part- to full-time basis, and 57% expect this to continue in the coming years.[6]
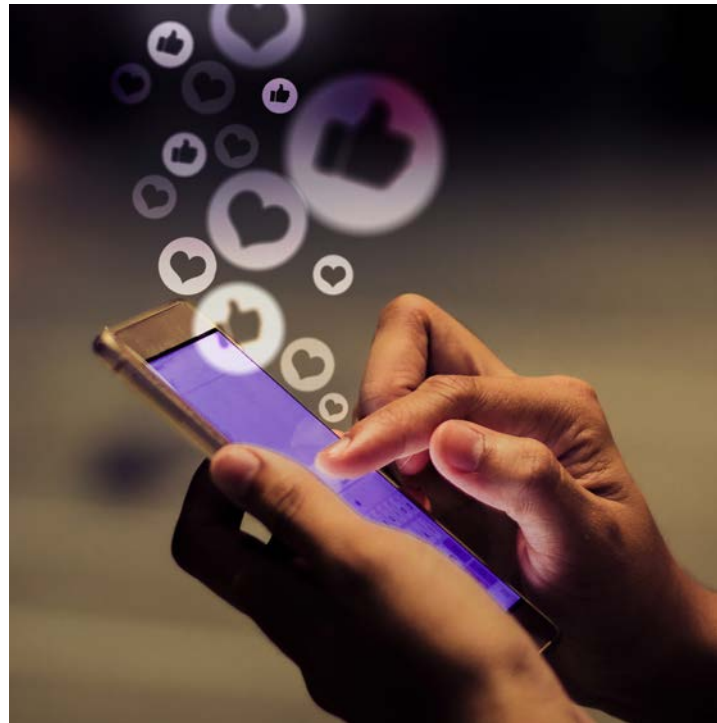
Giving Contact Centers an Edge on Talent Acquisition and Retention

Contact centers wanting to optimize engagement and productivity of both new and current employees need to evaluate which aspects of current workforce strategies still apply and the best ways to engage a changing landscape. Businesses can augment traditional workforce optimization (WFO) processes through advanced workforce engagement management (WEM). WEM goes beyond legacy WFO by placing a focus on improving the employee experience (EX) in contact centers. WEM is invigorating the contact center market with benefits that reverberate across the organizational landscape, from reduced costs and lower churn rates to improved customer satisfaction (CSAT) and customer experience (CX). WEM enables employers to provide their workforce with important differentiating factors such as agent personalization, a need for connection, and the ability to be mobile, flexible, and self-sufficient.

Frost & Sullivan's conversations with the industry repeatedly show a growing interest and investment in workforce engagement platforms, particularly those that are robust, sophisticated, and client-focused. Figure 1.0 outlines the seven strategic areas in contact centers that are witnessing improvements in the work environment. These areas speak directly to millennial and Gen Z priorities, providing benefits such as voice of the employee (VOE) agent experience, customizable technologies, flexible scheduling, and agent empowerment.

Figure 1: Six Strategic Areas of Workforce Engagement

The New Roadmap for Workforce Engagement

Contact centers ahead of the EX *and* CX curves recognize that partnering with a WEM service provider can be a crucial step in turning potential challenges into competitive differentiation. Critical areas that these solution providers should be able to address include the following:

Tools for managing remote contact center agents: While millennials and Gen Z may seem better prepared for remote work environments from a technical capabilities perspective, they still need adequate training, clear processes to follow, and intuitive systems and user interfaces. They want to interact with colleagues and customers in ways that are engaging and help them feel part of the team. Managers and supervisors also need tools to ensure WFH agents are as productive as their bricks-and-mortar agent counterparts. An advanced WEM partner can provide a cloud-based solution, tools, and metrics that are secure and easy to access, regardless of where the agent is located.

Creating greater agent specialization: Stratifying agents by product, customer need and level, and channel (e.g., social and video) can improve productivity and performance. Expert specialist agents provide a more efficient, high-quality, and personalized CX and can have a more rewarding work experience than generalist agents. Advanced WEM solutions can facilitate agent specialization. For example, they can create "smart routing" of calls based on a customer's recent purchase or open service ticket or help employers create metrics designed to consider a specialist's functions versus blanket metrics across all roles. They can also ensure those customer interactions are tracked consistently across channels: chat, email, mobile apps response, SMS/text, or social media.

Optimizing IT teams with advanced, cloud-based platform: Millennials and Gen Z will not just populate agent roles, they are also part of the IT teams that will support contact center operations. IT personnel costs continue to rise rapidly as these roles become increasingly complex and are being added more quickly than they can be filled. Organizations will get better ROI from expensive IT teams if IT is focused more on key business objectives and less on mundane fixes or vendor management. Partnering with a WEM solution provider with a comprehensive platform that can cover agent departments across the organization streamlines IT's activities. Robust functionality can also maximize agent productivity and minimize idle time. A cloud-based platform and applications also help ensure IT costs scale with use, can be accessed more reliably and securely by remote agents, and can grow with the business.

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Meeting the Challenges Head-on with Technology Solutions

How can organizations unleash the power and full potential of a changing workforce? Understanding which digital technologies are required today and which will be important in the future is critical when it comes to sketching out plans, prioritizing budgets, sequencing investments, and scheduling workforce implementations. Digital leaders will be those organizations that are skilled at utilizing business analytics to offer deep insights into customer behaviors, wants, and needs; developing new products and services; and ultimately innovating and exploiting new business opportunities. Embracing and leveraging WFH can also work to a business's advantage: Advanced WEM solutions can provide remote-based millennials, Gen Z, and all employees more flexible scheduling,

> **New workforce management tools was the top measure being undertaken by contact centers globally, according to a Frost & Sullivan survey of 661 contact center decisions makers.**

secure mobile connectivity, end-to-end performance monitoring, improved training solutions, friction-free access and interfacing with systems, and cloud-ready collaboration tools. Frost & Sullivan research shows that leading enterprises, when equipped with a complete set of the right WEM tools, are better positioned to enhance agent retention. New workforce management tools was the top measure being undertaken by contact centers globally, according to a Frost & Sullivan survey of 661 contact center decisions makers.[7] Additional leading measures included enabling flexible/remote workers and management training. Workforce engagement tools can be utilized to enhance these measures by providing the following benefits:

- Drive higher productivity

- Accelerate innovation in products and services

- Vastly improve knowledge sharing across teams

- Conduct customer interactions anywhere they are best served

When it comes to keeping contact centers filled and humming at peak efficiency, the newly dominant millennial and Gen Z agent population will thrive with flexible scheduling and shift bidding, near real-time performance dashboards, and an environment that sustains employee growth. The ultimate goal of greater organizational flexibility is to connect, engage, and motivate employees to meet customer needs and work efficiently, regardless of their role or location. These benefits translate into an improved customer experience that reduces the risk of churn, improves satisfaction, and ultimately leads to higher customer lifetime value (CLV).

Chapter 2: The Top 3 Strategies for Creating Competitive Contact Centers

Successfully connecting with customers and addressing their needs and concerns is essential for creating industry-leading customer experiences. Effective, well-equipped contact center agents are vital to executing a robust CX strategy. Advanced tools using artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and automation enable contact centers to more effectively train and equip agents to excel. This chapter will examine how these tools and technologies can optimize agent time, improve productivity, and help personalize customer interactions. The chapter will also discuss how organizations can benefit from specialized agents.

Changing workforce dynamics impact how contact centers optimize and retain the best talent, making the use of modern contact center tools crucial for optimizing operations. Such tools can prepare employers to engage the next generation of agents. For example, by 2030, 74% of the workforce will be of the millennial generation or younger,[8] categorized by higher levels of education, greater diversity, and different work expectations than earlier generations. Another defining trend shaping the modern contact center workforce is the massive shift to a work-from-home status. While many companies are repopulating their offices and contact centers with agents, a Frost & Sullivan survey of 1,129 employers published in 2021 found that 83% expected at least 25% of their workforce to remain remote part- to full-time[9] in the coming years. The versatile, scalable nature of new contact center technologies counteracts the challenges of managing remote workers and ensures that agents perform their roles successfully from anywhere.

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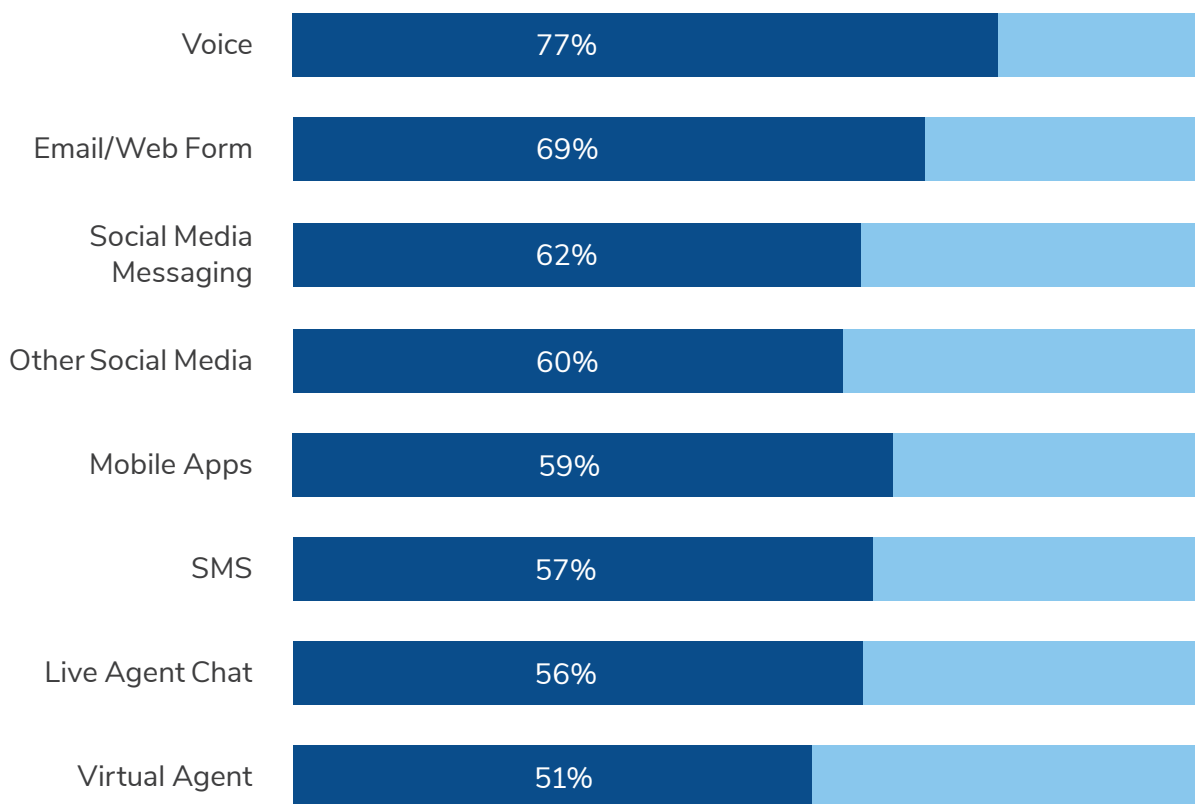
Empowering Agents, Improving CX

Contact centers can improve operations and CX through 3 strategies: optimizing how time is spent by both agents and customers, improving how agents are managed and coached, and leveraging subject matter experts (SMEs) and agent specialization.

Optimizing Agent, and Customer, Time

Successful organizations constantly seek ways to shrink average handle time (AHT), increase agent productivity, lower hold times, and improve CX by minimizing unnecessary interactions. One strategy for improving customer contact is ensuring that the business has broad and well-managed avenues to connect with customers. Exhibit 1 illustrates the range of channels through which customers now want to interact with businesses. Advanced contact center tools use omnichannel routing that enables agents to connect seamlessly and coalesce information from different channels into a complete customer profile.

Exhibit 1: **Interaction Channels Supported by Contact Centers in 2021**

Channel	Percentage
Voice	77%
Email/Web Form	69%
Social Media Messaging	62%
Other Social Media	60%
Mobile Apps	59%
SMS	57%
Live Agent Chat	56%
Virtual Agent	51%

Source: Frost & Sullivan's *Global Customer Perspectives on Contact Center Trends by Country*. October 2021

Organizations can also use technology to make these channels more effective. For example, AI- and ML-based tools can employ natural language processing and learn through their interactions, thereby consistently improving the accuracy of virtual agents.

However, focusing agent time on interactions that need human involvement can begin before the client even reaches out to the contact center. Data analytics-driven contact center solutions can create customer profiles that capture past purchases, service tickets, and interactions conducted across any channel. AI-based tools can learn from these histories and related customer behaviors, delivering a range of benefits: for the customer, advanced tools can anticipate follow-up needs to intelligently route calls and predict the best self-service options; for the agent, advanced tools can create intelligent summaries of a customer's issues and journey to date, reducing the time needed to track down important information. Automation, guided assistance, extensive knowledge management, and robotic process automation (RPA) combine to limit agents' data entry, keystrokes, toggles between applications, and information searches. Arming agents with succinct, important information also mitigates the need for the client to repeat their issue with every new interaction. Advanced AI- and ML-driven tools can even suggest a solution to a problem or provide recommendations for an appropriate upgrade or cross-sell.

In the cases where little history is available, smart, feedback-driven routing systems can still automate responses to frequent issues and funnel only more complex or sensitive topics to a human agent. Self-service options can quickly answer simple or common questions, reducing the queue—and hold time—to speak to a live agent for those issues that need more personal intervention.

Overcoming Coaching Obstacles through Performance-based Measurements and Intuitive Tools

Companies are realizing that basing productivity primarily on legacy cost metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) can fall short of optimizing business performance. Managing remote employees adds further complexity to overseeing and measuring agent productivity. New productivity metrics are more closely tied to business outcomes and can apply to different workplace scenarios—whether in person, WFH, or hybrid—and include achieving higher

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first-call/contact resolution (FCR) marks; enhancing retention rates; and improving sales revenues, customer satisfaction and Net Promoter Scores (NPS).

Workforce management solutions leveraging advanced technologies such as AI and ML can also better track—and learn from—new productivity metrics, pinpointing agent best practices. Advanced desktop analytics, blended with insights gained from speech and text analytics, gives managers in-depth knowledge of agent performance, even in WFH situations where direct supervision can be challenging. Managers can use the insights to create data-driven productivity and process improvements that can be replicated across an organization. For example, managers can measure and quantify the best practices of an agent with high FCR and then use the information to create training or tools to replicate the agent's success. Analytics can also provide insight into how effectively managers train new agents—notoriously difficult for remote work situations in particular—thereby enabling continued refinement of hiring and training processes.

Along with evolving productivity measurements, successful agents and customer outcomes also stem from good employee coaching. The recent shift to remote work has made it difficult for many contact centers to oversee, manage, and train staff. Frost & Sullivan research finds that training on new processes, tasks, or applications is a leading obstacle facing contact centers. In 2020–2021, the issue of training was second only to COVID-19-related issues.[10] More engaging and intuitive tools help companies train workers more quickly and manage them more effectively.

How well an agent can connect with company tools, systems, and data is almost as important as the tools themselves. Cloud-based contact center solutions—especially when combined with data communication services—can provide the same voice quality, system access, security, and data speed, regardless of whether the agent is office-based or remote.

Agent Specialization and SMEs

Today's demanding customers routinely have issues beyond the abilities of generalists. This development has driven leading contact center organizations to move away from staffing universal agents and focus instead on specialized agents—those who focus on a specific customer category such as frequent fliers—and SMEs. Stratifying agents by products, customer spend levels, or service needs can increase productivity, performance, and CX. In turn, this approach makes agents' work more varied and interesting. The net result is higher levels of engagement as measured by voice of the employee surveys and dramatically lower attrition. New, advanced contact center solutions enhance this trend through sophisticated routing and analytics that channel the customer needs to the most qualified representative available.

However, increasing agent skills and specializations and adding new channels have made scheduling and forecasting more complex. Remote work complicates this already multifaceted picture, making it even more important that contact centers invest in excellent quality management (QM), consistent and effective coaching, and analytics to uncover issues requiring immediate action. Advanced workforce management tools can also address complexity by forecasting agent availability and creating responsive, automated scheduling. Analytics-driven, automated contact center tools are essential to creating a higher level of service through SMEs and specialized agents.

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Optimized employee experience leads to satisfied customers. Every company must be both customer-centric and employee-centric because this directly affects satisfaction, loyalty, and business outcomes. EX + CX helps companies improve vital touchpoints to deliver a more engaging, unified, and desirable experience as needs, behaviors, and trends evolve. Advancements in technology provide opportunities to improve customer experience, drive agent productivity, and offer our workforces the precise tools they need, regardless of location or specialization.

Chapter 3: How Advanced Workforce Engagement Management Bridges Challenges for Diverse Industries

New, advanced workforce engagement management tools will be crucial for contact centers as they address workplace trends such as changing demographics and remote employees. The same forces shaping the work environment are changing how customers interact with contact centers. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the virtualization of customer experience and employee experience, leaving contact centers scrambling to adapt their operations accordingly.

Shifts in CX and EX have heavily impacted financial services and healthcare businesses. While this chapter will provide examples of how and why they can use advanced WEM and other contact center tools to improve operations and experiences, the lessons learned here apply across industries.

Different Industries, Similar Challenges

Despite being widely divergent in the services that healthcare and banking provide, the challenges their contact centers face are remarkably similar.

Accelerated digitization: Financial services and healthcare were already rapidly moving toward digitizing records and creating virtual CX. However, before 2020, both industries retained a high number of in-person interactions. The global pandemic forced digitization of CX at an accelerated pace, albeit more so for banking than healthcare (it is arguably more difficult for doctors to diagnose a patient via a webchat than for an individual to open a savings account). Nonetheless, healthcare saw a significant increase in services conducted remotely. In the United States, the telehealth market swelled from $16.6 billion in 2019 to more than $36.4 billion by the end of 2021 and will exceed $111.8 billion by 2025.[11]

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The resulting implications for contact centers are twofold. First, channels of communication need to expand to accommodate customers who now want to conduct their transactions through new avenues such as online portals and apps, virtual chat, social media, and even SMS texting (see Frost & Sullivan's white paper titled "Contact Centers in a New Age of Workforce Dynamics" for more details on the different modes of contact center communication). A recent Chase Bank report showed that 80% of its customers preferred digital banking to in-person interactions[12]. Second, many customers need intuitive channels because they are new to online commerce and communication. For example, by May 2020, first-time users accounted for more than 40% of online grocery sales[13].

Increases in transactions and customer service: With new ways to communicate with customers, banking and healthcare experienced spikes in customer interactions. Globally, 34% of banking and 62% of healthcare market participants noted recent, significant increases in customer interactions.[14] This comes as no surprise as the healthcare industry is at the front line of caring for waves of COVID-19 patients. In banking, economic uncertainty, low interest rates, increasing interest in cryptocurrencies, and a housing boom resulted in sudden peaks in activity. For example, new brokerage accounts at investment giant Charles Schwab Corp. grew 93% in early 2021.[15] Contact centers must ensure that their tools allow them the flexibility to handle surges of activity without compromising quality or unduly stressing agents. WEM tools that leverage smart analytics and automation can identify and funnel more direct questions to virtual service solutions (chatbots, for instance), leaving human agents the time to focus on more complex customer issues.

As a result, many finance and healthcare contact centers are integrating unified communications and contact center tools. In a recent Frost & Sullivan contact center management poll, 53% of banks and 60% of healthcare businesses said integrating such tools in the future was "extremely important" (considered a 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale of importance). "Improved customer journey" was the leading reason for the integration of such tools for both industries.

Already Leading in Digital CX, Upgrading Contact Centers to Save Money and Improve Operations

The financial services and banking industry is at the forefront of digital transformation. Before the pandemic, mobile account servicing, banking apps, and online lending procedures were commonplace, but contact center tools have not always kept pace with an organization's advances in CX and operational efficiencies.

Case study 1: A major US bank found that it could improve its CX and speed to market by unifying disparate contact center platforms through Verizon's Virtual Contact Center (VCC) solution. The new solution increased customer interactions through digital web and chat channels, corresponding to trends observed independently in Frost & Sullivan's research. Along with improved CX, the new solution helped accelerate decision-making by improving the management of enterprise-wide reporting and metrics. It also provided cost-saving features such as e-learning for training,

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which is now a requirement considering remote workforces. Frost & Sullivan research found that banks cite cost as the leading restraint for not upgrading their contact center tools; hence, finding ways to mitigate upfront investments helps these enterprises benefit from upgrades more quickly.

Case study 2: A large regional bank with hundreds of branches and more than 1,000 agents needed to upgrade its aging contact center technology that was rapidly approaching obsolescence. Systems that were more than a decade old, such as customer relationship management (CRM) and interactive voice response applications, required significant improvements. Outdated contact center technologies are hard to maintain and keep secure and may struggle to meet business growth, new modes of communication, and increasing customer expectations.

In addition to updating crucial systems, the bank integrated new solutions to enhance CX and EX. These included intelligent routing that could integrate with the latest CRM, real-time and historical reporting, and a new queueing platform adapting to evolving omnichannel needs. It also included speech recognition and outbound calling to increase operational efficiency and quality management capabilities to help track and improve scheduling, agent coaching, and performance.

An overhaul of this magnitude needs careful planning and budgeting. Hence, the bank chose Verizon to help it build a Genesys cloud platform that scales with business needs and moves previously fixed capital expenses to usage-based operational costs. Genesys's complete contact center solution allows the bank to upgrade its entire contact center strategy without fear of under-building its capacity or over-investing in unneeded capabilities.

More Than CX: Modern Contact Center Tools Critical for Meeting Regulatory Mandates in Healthcare

The healthcare industry has shown remarkable changes in its digitalization of records and CX during the last decade. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the move to virtual experiences for patients, providers, insurers, and other entities; as a result, calls and service requests can increase as patients interact digitally with more aspects of the healthcare value chain. Contact centers have expanded the channels through which agents can interact with customers as more services, such as making appointments, billing, and even virtual visits, move online.

Case study 3: A large US-based healthcare company found that its customer contact strategy lacked critical features needed to accommodate an anticipated 200% growth in new business on top of seasonal contact volume expansion and contraction. Specifically, the company did not have multichannel solutions that could scale on demand, echoing the two main challenges noted earlier: adding channels and managing contact volumes. The business was also concerned that patient response time was too long, and other mandates needed addressing to comply with recent regulatory requirements.

The healthcare provider turned to the VCC to help it create a scalable, responsive system. Verizon's solution streamlined communications through features such as automated call routing, email solutions, and integrated click-to-chat. The solution also improved agent productivity by adding multichannel capabilities and addressing response time and capacity fluctuations. It gave the healthcare business better visibility and near-real-time reporting across contact center operations.

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Challenges—and Leading Solutions—Span Industries

While the examples above show how leaders in banking and healthcare addressed current contact center challenges, the implications and benefits of improving operations with advanced technology reverberate across industries. Retail, travel, shipping, and other massive industries all confront the need to expand and integrate customer service channels and manage capacity fluctuations. They must ensure that such solutions improve rather than hinder CX and agent productivity. The rapid, accelerating digitization of how people buy goods and services, conduct their work, and communicate necessitates a technology-driven contact center for any business in any industry to optimize operations, serve customers, and remain competitive.

Analyst Perspective: The Bigger Picture

Customers often reach out to agents only after trying—and abandoning—self-service options. Frustrated customers in heightened emotional states value genuine interactions that quickly and accurately address their concerns. Communicating with clients seamlessly across channels, providing agents with the same intuitive, automated experience from their home or office, and using advanced technology to improve self-service and live agent interactions improves CX, lowers resolution time, and delivers more customer loyalty and sales opportunities.

Achieving optimal contact center agent productivity has become a balancing act between meeting increasing customer expectations and controlling costs. Understanding and then separating issues best addressed via automation versus those that need human interaction can reduce costs and enhance CX. For example, contact center solution providers such as Verizon have products that can centralize data, generate insights, automate tasks, and direct the appropriate interactions through self-service wherever possible. Providers can quickly implement these cloud-based solutions to provide end-to-end data security, help ensure data privacy compliance, and scale with business needs. Judiciously applying new tools and technologies moves contact centers from being efficient to becoming highly effective.

About Verizon

At Verizon, we help you plan, build and deliver a winning customer experience solution for today, while looking ahead to tomorrow's business transformations. With over 30 years of expertise in customer experience, Verizon offers several advanced Contact Center solutions, supported by Professional Services, that are designed to maximize agent productivity, simplify operations and improve customer interactions for growing businesses. The power of Verizon 5G, combined with our integrated solutions, dynamic eco-system and strong relationships with leading technology vendors helps customers create better experiences that will give them the competitive edge they need for their business operations - simply, securely and reliably. Across mobility, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, security and business communications, our proven solutions connect people, places and things around the world to help organizations deliver a digital-first customer experience and improve customer satisfaction. Discover how Verizon's solutions can help transform your customer experience.

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