

## Every Business Should Have a Contact Center

Every business should have a contact center because every business wants to provide their customers with the best service possible — it's that simple.

Many small businesses balk at this statement, because they don't think they can afford a contact center of their own. And if they think of a contact center as a room with 100-200 agents and the supporting infrastructure of servers, telephones and headsets, they might be right. But the latest advancements in phone technology means that any employee — anywhere — can function as part of a contact center.

A contact center can be as simple as an automatic call distribution (ACD) platform that queues calls for the parts department of an auto dealership. It can be as small as a single staff person scheduling appointments at a physician's office. The key is that calls are handled in the most efficient manner possible to ensure that customers' needs are met and they leave a caller feeling they are of value to the organization.

### Traditional Contact Centers

Let's look at the dynamics of a traditional contact center, and how the latest technology can apply those concepts in non-traditional ways to empower the small-to-medium business. Contact centers are often organized into a multi-tier support system for a more efficient handling of calls. The first tier in such a model consists of operators, who direct inquiries to the appropriate department and provide general directory information. If a caller requires more assistance, the call is forwarded to the second tier, where most issues can be resolved. If a caller requires more assistance, the caller might be forwarded to a third tier of support; typically formed by product engineers/developers or highly-skilled technical support staff of the product<sup>1</sup>.

### Contact Centers "with a Twist"

Now let's look at how a smaller company might provide this same level of service without the massive investment in hardware and staffing. Through ACD, the same inbound caller could be transferred to the requested primary destination, but if there is no one available at that destination the system will automatically route the call to someone else to pick up the phone. That way, if Tech Support is busy handling other calls, the call could be routed to someone in Customer Service (who might be able to address the customer's question anyway). When combined with an Interactive Voice Response System (IVR), an inbound caller can be directed through a series of prompts to the representative with the best knowledge base to address the situation. If that person is unavailable, the call will go to the second most qualified person in order of priority. And all of it is completely seamless with the caller thinking that the call was connected to the right person almost immediately.

### What to look for in ACD

Your ACD platform needs to be programmable directly, without requiring third-party software. You should be able to choose how the ACD system prioritizes call transfers when it is searching for the best way to route a call. An ACD system can prioritize call routing by determining which employees are logged in, and out of those who is the most qualified to address the issue. The system can also look at which extensions have been idle the longest, in order to load balance inbound call volume.



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102 Timbertrace Ct.  
Columbia, SC 29212  
1-866-IDEACOM (433-2266)  
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## Proper measurement

To gain a truly effective contact center, you must also gauge what the customer expectation is, and what the impact of meeting that expectation is — most importantly what is the impact of not meeting that expectation. The right technology can help you accomplish this by answering key questions such as:

- How many calls are processed per hour, per day?
- What is the call abandonment rate for inbound calls?
- How many times does the phone ring before it's answered, and how often is a customer put on hold?

You need to use this information to develop a profile of a typical customer's patience. This could be patience with being put on hold, or patience navigating through the prompts of your phone system. Customer patience can actually vary depending on the type of business that person is dealing with. Customers will typically be willing to hold longer when dealing with a monopolistic business (such as a utility company) when compared to a highly competitive industry where the customer can easily take his or her business elsewhere.

Take this information and compare it to your company's average time-to-answer calls. If you discover a gap exists between customer patience and your average time-to-answer, you're not alone as that is the situation found by many businesses. But you can use the same phone platform that identifies this issue to also address and overcome it by decreasing the time it takes calls to be routed to the proper destination.

If your organization still does not have a truly functional contact center, the question is why? With dynamic solutions that can bring a contact center to any size business, there really is no reason to miss out on the customer service benefits that will be gained through this approach.

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<sup>1</sup> This information on call center dynamics was obtained from Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Call\\_centers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Call_centers)



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