

2018 Edition
Cloud Contact Center
BUYERS GUIDE



**Trends and Top Considerations
When Comparing Cloud Providers**

PURPOSE

Whether you are considering an upgrade, a vendor replacement, or a brand-new solution, you'll have many options. The process can be expensive, time-consuming, and extremely impactful to your operations. That said, you'll want to make sure you're headed in the right direction from the start.

Chances are you've been through this before, and you're dreading the impact of this evaluation on your staff and your business. Our Buyers Guide will make it easier to sift through the options.

ASSUMPTIONS

This paper assumes that you, like many of your peers, have decided that a better solution exists for your Contact Center. It also assumes that you have already decided a **Cloud** solution is best. We're assuming from the fact that you're reading this paper, that you understand the benefits of hosted contact centers over on-premise solutions, but just in case you aren't sure...

Hosted (Cloud) Contact Centers

- Are less expensive to own, operate, and maintain than on-premise installations.
- Offer advanced customer service options to improve your levels of service.
- Eliminate the need for you or your team to maintain, repair or pay any attention to the system's hardware or software.
- Offer flexible capacity handling - you always have just the capacity you need regardless of peak and low-load variances.
- Give you the ultimate control over your call center.
- Report on all of the above and more, like useful and insightful operator statistics.
- Free up your staff to focus on more important things.

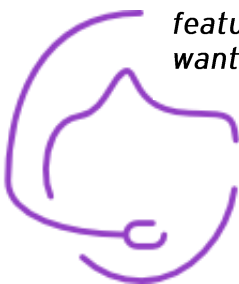
INTRODUCTION

Whether you are considering a change or a first-timer, you'll want to make sure you are considering all the aspects of the total solution. The whole enchilada so to speak.

Before you look at features, functions, and price, it's important to know that Contact Center solutions encompass more technology (and potentially more vendors) than ever before. For a successful outcome, you'll want to get acquainted with the types of vendors and who is accountable for delivering what. Providers come in many different forms. Some specialize in writing/maintaining the software, some market and sell it, some implement it, and some support it. Some do all, but very few also provide the dial-tone, the Internet, the network, the hosting, and centralized billing for the full stack of things you'll need to make it all work. That's why it's important to know who you'll be working with during all the stages including procurement, implementation, and support.

Before you do a traditional feature/function bake-off, you'll want to check the ingredients. Here's a short list of 12 types of companies and resources you might need to work with as you consider your options. The real question is whether you want to shop for all the ingredients yourself, or eat a cake that's ready to bake?

- Your local phone company, a long-distance or toll-free provider
- Value-added reseller
- Software OEM
- Network provider for private circuit connectivity (Fiber, Ethernet, MPLS)
- Internet provider
- Hosting provider
- Business partner for implementation
- Business partner for monitoring and support
- Business partner for training
- LAN/WAN network consultant
- Phone handset, wireless phone, headset VAR
- Technology integration specialist
- Technology compatibility specialist



" Before you do a traditional feature/function bake-off, you'll want to check the ingredients. "

In short, what are the companies you plan to consider, what specifically do they offer as deliverables, do they implement and service what they sell, and do they stand behind everything with an SLA. Who is accountable for your customer experience? Are you getting these services as close to the source as possible to prevent finger-pointing and confusion down the road?

MARKET TRENDS

In the beginning, Call Center software had many of the same common features like IVR, ACD, and Call Recording. The term Call Center has now become Contact Center because of the much-expanded features including live chat, SMS texting, and social media to name a few. This trend is the result of customers wanting more and different service options.

At the same time, on-premise solutions, while still available, are quickly becoming yesterday's news. Cloud solutions are the new normal. Cloud solutions are dominating the landscape and for a good reason. Cloud solutions are here to stay.

1. Consolidation and Specialization

The voice market is a crowded market, with too many providers to list. Acquisitions are common, both large and small. ISV's are buying other ISV's, and many companies are integrating vertically. By vertically, we mean companies that write the software, host it, and are also CLECs for example. In the past, users have always been frustrated with ISVs acquiring other ISVs. In many cases, the future product, support and enhancement outlook becomes unclear for one or all products in the portfolio. Although this a natural evolution of the industry, it's something to consider. There will be winners and losers, and no one wants to invest in products that aren't likely to be supported long-term.

Another trend is that companies who formerly maintained source code and sold/implemented their software have now opted to focus exclusively on development of the software and platform. Focus is good, but where does that leave you? Based on the history of the ownership, the company, and the products, the tea leaves might be able to tell you something.



“ Now that the unification of voice and data is in full swing, the risk to voice information packets is of particular concern.”

2. Security

While not a trend specific to Contact Centers, increased the risk for all things voice and data are greater than ever. Now that the unification of voice and data is in full swing, the risk to voice information packets is a particular concern. Just because your Cloud Contact Center is “hosted,” doesn't necessarily mean that your system is exposed to the public Internet. But if it is, you'll need to pay particular attention to user authentication, firewalls, and other network connectivity considerations such as Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks. Mitigating or closing those security loopholes is vital, and it's now more difficult because more attack vectors are available to the bad guys. Something else to consider is that SIP trunks (Internet phone lines) are still subject to hijacks, which allows hackers to make calls on your phone system – making you responsible for the fees they rack up! In short, the bad guys can potentially shut you down or make you pay – literally. Security is at or near the top of every CIO's priorities, and it's not likely to get any easier or less costly to mitigate those risks with unified communication.

3. Analytics

Data analytics has always been one of the advantages of Contact Center solutions. Technology in this area is advancing, and with the expansion of chat, SMS, social, and video features comes the ability to mine more touch-points – providing even more relevant and meaningful information with which to make informed decisions. Ultimately, this information offers the opportunity to automate, provide real intelligence, and who knows - maybe help us realize the benefits of artificial intelligence.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

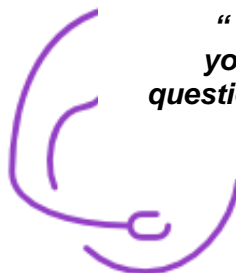
Since today's Cloud Contact Center solutions are more complex than ever, it's easy to get into the "weeds" and get bogged down with techno-speak. Yes, you want and need certain functionality, but don't let that cloud your thinking and your purpose. You'll want someone internally to keep things on track.

- Why are you upgrading, changing or pursuing this?
- What were our lessons learned from any previous evaluations and recommendations?
- Whose pain and what pain are you solving?
- What do we consider as "requirements" vs. nice to have?
- Is a traditional product evaluation the best course?
- Who delivers on promises made?
- Who is flexible if things get off track?

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROVIDERS

Maybe you've done this all before, or maybe you're relatively new in your role. Likewise, maybe you have network expertise, but voice technology and unified communications are more like a foreign language. The best way to educate yourself is to ask pertinent questions of the providers you are considering.

- What is the level of expertise of the people I'll be interfacing with?
- Tell me about your company focus. What is it that you do and what are you good at?
- Has that changed recently?
- How many clients do you support and how do you support them?
- How do you manage tickets and escalation?
- How do you ensure 24x7 availability?
- What is your disaster recovery plan?
- What are your options for failover of my calls and connectivity?
- What is your Net Promoter Score?
- What are your uptime statistics and your SLA?
- What is the level of customer satisfaction with the provider(s) vs. the actual product?
- Who do I work with if there's a problem?
- How long will it take you to get here if I need assistance on-site?
- What flexibility do I have as my business changes?
- Are you involved in my local community?



“ The best way to educate yourself is to ask pertinent questions of the providers you are considering. “

EMPLOYEE INSIGHTS & CONTEXTUAL ANALYTICS

If your company leverages analytics for other parts of the business, you'll want to give the analytics capabilities of your Contact Center pursuit top priority. As an evaluator or recommender, these capabilities may not matter much to you, but chances are these capabilities will be high on the list of your key executives.

A handful of service providers are enhancing their analytics capabilities and allowing you to extend those capabilities to your company as a whole, not just your contact center. These insights are designed to extend into the functioning of all your people, not just those working in the call center.

Some providers allow you to track all inbound and outbound calls and to measure, based on the content and context of the call, the efficiency with which your knowledge workers are handling their calls. Now you'll truly know who's calling, what they're calling about, and how quickly your staff resolves their issues.

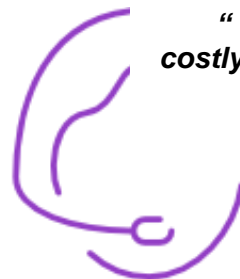
Here are a few of the things you can track:

- email, social and outbound voice calls
- The classification (both automatic and manual) by context and content
- Time factor involved, time of day and length of engagement
- The applications used in performing the task
- Agent's time allocation by category and task

These types of analytics help you determine if someone else can engage and route to backup personnel. They also help manage overall priorities and time commitments by task and project.

NATIVE VS. INTEGRATED

Your call center doesn't operate in a vacuum, and you'll likely want to interface with existing systems such as your CRM or ticketing system. Native integration means that the integration is pre-built into the Contact Center solution. Similar to a plug-in on your Web browser. Evaluate what points of integration you need and refer to the vendor specs. If the vendor does not offer native integration, make sure they offer integration via API so the integration can be done easily by you or the vendor. Custom software or integration is costly, prone to break, and will become a constant frustration. If you do need to integrate with one of your custom systems, check the cost and feasibility of doing so.



“ Custom software or integration is costly, prone to break, and will become a constant frustration. “

WHAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU?


At the end of the day, it's all about you. Make sure you communicate with all providers who YOU are. Are you a large company with unique needs. Are you a small company with very simple needs? Do you have a single location? Multiple locations? International locations or Agents? Do you need some particular flexibility with features, implementation, support or contractual terms?

Pay particular attention to providers who are listening instead of talking. You're probably more likely to get something that meets your needs and have a successful outcome. Successful outcomes lead to better customer experiences. You get the point.

If ease of use and training are of particular concern, see if the provider will do a short proof of concept to make sure it works in your current network environment and your technology is compatible. You'll want to know that before you test it with users. Rarely does a demonstration, and especially an online demo/video demonstrate how it works for YOU.



“ Pay particular attention to the providers who are listening instead of talking. “



The remainder of this paper lists the most popular vendors of hosted call center solutions and compares their feature sets and offerings. The solutions are powerful and have many features - some overlapping, some unique, and all extolled in glowing terms. Our easy-to-read chart helps you to zero in on the set of features you really need, and thus enables you to choose the right system.

PROVIDERS OF CLOUD CONTACT CENTER SOLUTIONS

The following list is not an exhaustive one; it focuses on reputable companies who have established a loyal client base and whose technology is regarded by industry experts as solid, reliable, innovative, and powerful.

- LightBound
- InContact
- 8X8 (previously Contactual)
- Genesys (previously Interactive Intelligence)
- Five9



FEATURE/SERVICE	DESCRIPTION					
-----------------	-------------	--	--	--	--	--

Company						
SSAE16 Certified	Datacenter(s) meet strict security and audit requirements	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
PCI DSS Compliant	Hosting meets credit card industry requirements	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
HIPAA HITECH Compliant	Hosting meets healthcare compliance requirements	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
CLEC	Is a Telecommunications provider or "carrier"	Yes	N/A	N/A	No	N/A
ISP	Is an ISP accountable for Internet Uptime	Yes	N/A	N/A	No	N/A
Key Product Features						
High Availability (2+ Sites) with failover capability	Geographic redundancy ensures the utmost in uptime	Yes	N/A	N/A	No	N/A
Single-Source Provider	Vendor provides the full stack. Software, enterprise voice switches for the platform, manages the hosting platform, owns the datacenter(s), Is the ISP, Is the CLEC, provides local and LD DIDs, project manages the implementation, sells the solution, manages contracts and fulfillment, provides on-site and 24x7 support (with company staff), accountable for the SLAs, and experts in networking, Internet and monitoring.	Yes	N/A	N/A	No	N/A
Integration	Provides Native and API integration	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Multi-Channel ACD	More than voice channel (email, chat, fax, and social media)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Full Service or Self-Service Portal	Full service from the company, not external business partner	Yes	No	No	No	No
Executive Dashboard	Intuitive dashboard with KPI's	Yes	No	No	No	No
Intelligent Routing	Intelligent identification and routing of callers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
IVR	Interactive Voice Response	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Call Recording		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Native Workforce Management	No integration necessary for workforce management	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Additional Features						
Premium Support Included	All clients receive top-tier support	Yes	No	No	No	No
Native Toll Free	No integration with other modules	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Toll Free numbers and usage included		Yes	No	No	No	No
Blended inbound and outbound		Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Remote, at-home agents		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Agent scripting and evaluation		Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Admin and supervisor licenses included		Yes	No	No	No	No
Pricing based on concurrent agents		Yes	N/A	Yes	No	No
All inclusive, fixed price	Includes network, Internet, support contracts, and SaaS Hosting	Yes	N/A	No	No	No
Deployment						
Cloud						
Appropriate for Company Size	Small, Medium, Large	S,M,L	M,L	M,L	M,L	L
Total Cost of Ownership	Relative price for the full stack, including implementation and support	\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$

■ Note: If specific functionality or information is not, or was not available at the time of writing, N/A is noted. This comparison chart was prepared by LightBound, LLC and Telax. The authors make no and disclaim all warranties, express or implied, including the warranties of merchantability, or fitness for a particular purpose, with respect the comparison chart or the features and functions of the comparable providers. The comparison was prepared based on the most current information available.