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IPSA Soluciones de Convergencia

Rosa Cabrero
Business Development
28016 Madrid (Spain)

phone: 902 33 63 50
www.ipsa.es

Virtual Contact Centers on IP technology

The technology of the future in the Contact Center

When thinking about the technology to be used in the near future in a Contact Center, it is impossible not to predict a native IP platform. Many of the current systems are still too fond of traditional telephony platforms, which have been updated with additional items as new needs were appearing. This have not allowed to keep on its progress, because of the effort invested in migrating, instead of creating, and because of the compromises with old protocols, designs and ways of working that, in a way of trying to make longer its depreciation, required complex heuristic methods for its use. Facing this, the native IP platforms are free from restrictions, and focus all its energy forward, with no need to fight against old designs and systems of the last century.

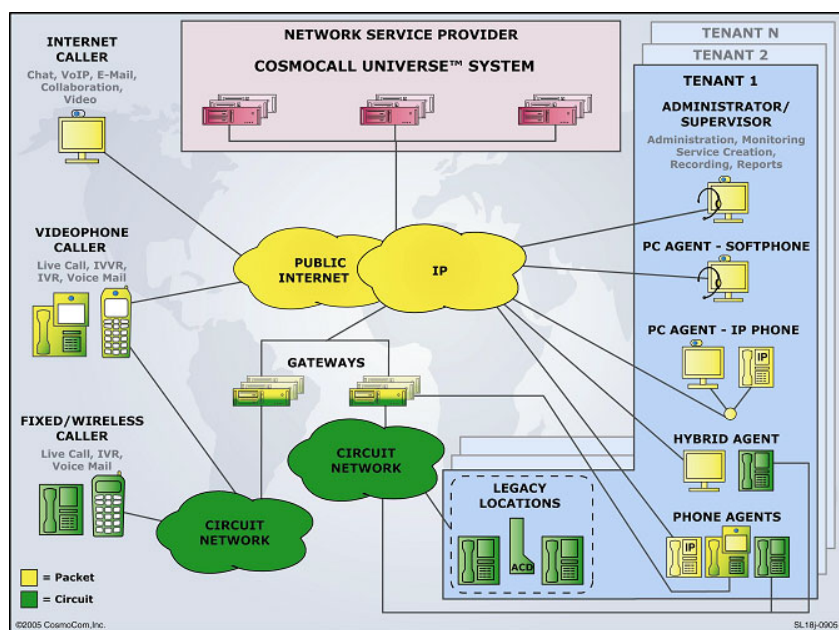
The success of an open IP environment will not fall only upon the huge savings in costs that implies the commutation of packs instead of circuits, but it will rather be the answer to a strategy of creating new services through any multimedia channel.

We must not forget about security. Therefore, the new platforms shall offer suitable and appropriate mechanisms in order to guarantee confidentiality and security as in the transfer as in the storage of information. Systems that offer high levels of availability will obtain higher success in the future, and so will do those companies that offer good answers to possible contingencies to cover the weak points that may affect to the continuity of the business.

Systems developed for multi-sites environments will result specially interesting in the future of the Contact Center. Currently, the possibilities that offers an environment geographically distributed are being exploited, but giving up the central control of all the sites. Facing this problem, the new systems will be able to manage a sole net and by applying the same business rules, the contact of multimedia customers whatever the channel they use, and all that with just one unique platform of high capacity and ubiquitous accessibility.

A key factor for evolution is the adaptation to the environment. Because of that, there will only survive those contact centers which fast adapt and offer quick responses to the upcoming critical changes, such us reorganizations, spin-offs, mergers and acquisitions, or simple growths or decreasing due to the variation in the market share. Many companies cannot afford to invest resources in technology that may become under-used in case changes are "downwards". Trying to find this flexibility that will provide companies with enough celerity and at a reasonable cost, it can be predicted an On Demand model, being the services provider, whether ISP or Telco, who install the technologic platform in their sites, establishing a multi-company platform, with an individual administration, whilst the customer company will supply to their agents depending on its needs, having all the necessary tools in the Contac Center.

The main figure of the Contact Centers of the future will be the human factor, maintaining its current preponderance not only because they absorb the biggest economic investment, but also because the consolidation of new models of labour that contribute to the conciliation between labour and domestic life and a decrease in the number of traffic movements in the big cities, which means an environmental improvement as well as a reduction in the time the transport takes. Unquestionably, technologic platforms shall adapt to this environment, adding up to the already known geographic delocalization of the different sites, the virtualization that working with a myriad of agents imply. It can be predicted that the center of the future will be a new Virtual Contact Center,



A contribution derived from this virtualization will be the decrease in the costs of infrastructure and an increase in the efficiency in the delivering of services. Satisfied agents increase productivity and radically improve the sensation of perceiving a good service that the customer feels. In this improvement are involved several factors related to the human resources department, but also technology must provide the necessary tools for measuring correctly the quality of the delivered service, as well as for allowing continuous improvements in the service, based on the dynamic feedback once fluctuations in the service are detected.

Since customers are day by day more exigent and ask for a better service, and they file a complaint when feeling disappointed about the service received, the platform of the future shall include multimedia recording modes of different forms – total, selective, controlled by the agent- as well as quality monitoring tools. These systems will not only allow increasing the quality in the delivered services, but also will protect the Contact Center against possible legal lawsuits that disappointed customers may bring, by having the possibility to ratify what the parts say from acceding to the recorded files, and these systems will also allow evaluating in an objective way the agents' performance. An important required factor in the new Contact Center platforms will also be the fact that applications allow developing historic databases that can track all the interactions done through any type of channel. The interface of these applications shall be GUI type, intuitive and easy to use.

A peculiar feature of multi-channel equipment is the fact that all the channels are connected to a universal only tag, in order to administrate the interactions with customers through any multimedia channel, from the database, with unified business rules and through only a common set of reports.

Within the multi-channel, some sure values will be kept up, as a way of "blue chips": agents will keep on using the telephone, though they will do so through different "formats": TDM



and IP – telephone and Internet-, through a fixed place or cordless (WAP), classical phone call or with video...

In the Internet age, e-commerce is getting more important against other traditional business forms. However, it is not limited to the self-service business to select and buy a product through a web page, but it will be reinforced with a personal attention service, in which an agent will answer to doubts questions a potential customer may ask, whether through a Chat, collaboration web or voice. Hence, it is clear enough what channels should include the new Contact Center platform. Therefore, the aim is to find synergies between the classical personalized customer service and the advantages of the automation that offers electronic business. Since new generations of customers are more used to the use of new Technologies, e-mail is other channel that will increase its use. In marketing push-campaigns, its use will be restricted by legal data protection policies, which exclusively allow sending e-mails and the use of the customer's personal information just with the consent of the receiver. The major growth in the use of e-mails will be in the reception of incoming mails, to attend orders, claims, and complaints from customers, that is why the technology must allow an efficient management of this channel and the incorporation of information that can be used in the company database.

Given that the proliferation of devices with the video function incorporated and the extreme growth of the broadband available during the last years, video-calls will constitute a basic part for the companies as well as for the consumers. It can be predicted an increase in the use of video-calls similar to the increase in the use of the mobile phone in the last decade. In the Contact Center, platforms based on XML, with a graphic interface that will allow an easy use of the new elements in the treatment of an interaction, will offer voice and video self-service, providing a new dimension to the traditional menu of the IVR, in which publicity insertions add a new source of income. The agents also will be able to make video-calls to the customers who have those devices incorporated, improving the perception of the service level and the customer commitment. The interface of the agent will be unified, to manage all the interactions with the customer, so that the agent can visualize easily and clearly the status of the different channels he is managing. For the multimedia monitoring, new specific tools will be created in order to facilitate the control of the correct operation of the center. Statistics will keep on being relevant to measure the level of services and to allow developing reports on a real-time basis for all the activities of the Contact Center that allow a dynamic adjustment of the resources assigned to the services.

New platforms shall include predictive dialers, a new tool for managing outbound calls, and they will be keep on being used in their different working modes - preview, progressive, predictive and IVR, along with other call management tools. However, platforms shall be flexible in order to quickly adapt to drastic changes in legal restrictions, that aiming to protect the consumer, will limit the legal use of the dialers.

The spread velocity is basic in a Contact Center platform, as in its installation and implementation as in the integration of other system elements. The last should be decreased by pre-integrating different modes, in such a way that could limit the link to business applications such as CRM or ERP, and being facilitated with a prior design already packet that takes into account the communication flows. The platforms that will survive will be those platforms of the more "plug and play" type the better, so that the restart can be done within days/weeks instead of the current months/years. Of course, they shall be completely opened, so that they can integrate many elements of the Contact Center with no breaking points. The modularity of these systems is a key factor to offering this flexibility and speed.

As a summary, some key words used for the definition of the Contact Center of the future are the following: IP, multi-channel, multi-site, multi-company, unified, virtual, safe and secure, complete, modular and scalable.