

Smarter software



A unified desktop might sound intelligent, but how clever is it really? CCF talks to the experts in the field of intelligent desktop solutions to find out whether they're really worth having in your contact centre

CCF What do you think are the key disadvantages to having multiple agent screens allowing access to applications?

Carl Adkins, managing director, Infinity:

The tools that we provide our agents to support them in their interaction with the customer, in my opinion, are the most critical part of the contact centre. Many contact centre agents find themselves supported by a multitude of complex applications that they are expected to navigate around, while trying to focus 100 per cent of their attention on the conversation with the customer. We then sit back in amazement when we see that our contact centre performance is dropping.

Richard Woollaston, general manager,

Altitude Software: One of our prime concerns is to empower agents to handle interactions effectively, without having to worry about managing the technology on the screen in front of them. Having to handle multiple screens will inevitably distract the agent from managing the interaction. It will also impede their ability to handle customer questions quickly and confidently – particularly if a new application needs to be opened and searched for the answer.

Trent Fulcher, CEM Programme Director,

Cincom Systems: Agents are often hampered in their ability to be productive and meet their performance and satisfaction targets simply because their access to information is constrained by an unwieldy crowd of tools

and multiple disconnected agent applications. Between pre-call setup, on-hook data retrieval and entry, and post-call wrap-up, agents can spend more time getting to the correct information than the time required for them to actually perform the work.

Clare Dorrian, head of product marketing,

ciboodle: The use of multiple screens has a negative impact on agent productivity, which in turn affects the customer who is forced to experience a longer interaction than is necessary. In addition, performing repetitive or duplicate tasks on multiple screens leads to low agent motivation and hence to attrition.

Guy Tweedale, senior vice president,

European Operations for Jacada: A chaotic agent desktop fosters costly operational inefficiencies and frustration for both agents and customers. An agent's desktop is often overly complex, with dozens of open applications and tools, each of which contains important – but siloed – information

Philip Briscoe, marketing director,

SmartPoint Technologies: According to recent research (from Siemens) "most workers on average had to gather information from

five different applications, while 9 per cent had to juggle 11 or more applications, and 5 per cent had to access 15 different screens. While many customer service advisors work primarily within a CRM application, to service customer calls they often need to access multiple back office systems.

CCF What exactly is an 'intelligent desktop' and what benefits could this solution bring to a call centre?

Carl Adkins: When your customers call, you want your agents focused on the conversation with the customer and not distracted by the systems they are using. The aim of the intelligent agent desktop is just that: provide the agent with access to the information that they require when they require it and in an intuitive way that reflects how they should be interacting with the customer.

Richard Woollaston: An intelligent desktop is one that is sensitive to available information regarding the interaction, and that adapts presentation of data and choices to the agent by linking this information to available databases and business rules. A very early, simple example of an intelligent

"Many agents find themselves supported by a multitude of complex applications that they are expected to navigate while focusing on the customer."



► desktop is one that displays the caller's identity on presentation of an inbound call through linking the caller's number with a database record.

Trent Fulcher: An intelligent desktop is a smart, integrated desktop that can take the power behind each and every point solution and that powers a modern business, and place it all behind a single, coordinated interface. These unified desktops are designed to maximise agent productivity and minimise the administrative downtime created by knowledge application overload – helping the contact centre to gain dramatic efficiency. Unifying the agent experience into a single, consistent desktop takes the complexities out of the training process and job performance.

Clare Dorrian: An intelligent desktop is one that ensures the agent knows all of the required information is available to help the customer reach the best outcome and understands the full context of the interaction, even if only joining half way through the process.

Guy Tweedale: The intelligent or unified service desktop provides a single point of access to all the mission-critical applications and tools required by the agent for effective customer interactions. More importantly, it provides an integrated, automated, contextual view of customer data and customer service processes.

Philip Briscoe: The intelligent desktop needs to pro-actively assist the agent: streamlining their tasks, empowering them to provide a better customer experience and using technology as an enabler and not an inhibitor.

ccf **It all sounds a bit complicated to me – how does it work with multiple channels? And do I need a comprehensive CRM system to get the most out of it?**

Carl Adkins: Creating a unified intelligent desktop does not have to be complicated and does not require an organisation to embark on an expensive and lengthy CRM project. People often think that a unified desktop means the replacement of all existing systems with a single new system in a big bang approach. It doesn't mean that. The unified desktop does not need to replace any existing data or processes: its role is to simply automate the access of this information and the flow of processes within a unified user interface.

Richard Woollaston: It really isn't that complicated. Altitude has enabled the intelligent desktop to adapt to different channels of communication – inbound and outbound voice, messaging such as email and SMS, and webchat and collaboration. The key is to identify and implement the different workflows associated with these channels so that the agent is best supported to handle them.

Trent Fulcher: Many organisations are struggling to handle multiple channels. However, one benefit from the business point of view is that the unified desktop provides the same interface to handle every type of interaction. Agents don't have to be trained on different systems, or go into a different system in order to respond to emails, and then go back into the voice based system to handle phone calls.

Clare Dorrian: People tend to think this is complicated because their data is typically disparate and they have multiple integration points. If you base your customer interactions on a process that is built once and then uses rules to determine what's appropriate for each contact channel, it removes complication because you have a single source that can be re-used across the contact centre.

Guy Tweedale: The simple answer is, a properly designed intelligent desktop solution works with current systems and applications: it should not be necessary to "rip and replace" existing applications or even modify or re-write these systems. This is why the ability to integrate natively (through APIs, web services, database access, etc) as well as 'non-invasively' is so important. The existing applications are likely to be a mélange of homegrown, purchased, and inherited systems, in various states of disrepair.

ccf **How difficult/lengthy is it to implement this solution?**

Richard Woollaston: Some intelligent desktops are designed to be simple to implement. At Altitude we use a rapid development environment for prototyping the requirement, supported by a purpose built development tool for developing more complex requirements where these exist.

Clare Dorrian: This is dependent on the starting point and scope but we would always advocate short, sharp delivery bursts to bring immediate value back to the business.

Guy Tweedale: Generally speaking, implementing an intelligent desktop solution

is much easier and less costly than the typical alternatives – replacing or rewriting core business systems, or trying to build a composite application/portal application 'from scratch' using in-house development.

ccf **Are there any circumstances under which an intelligent desktop is not the ideal solution?**

Carl Adkins: In our opinion, all contact centres with multiple systems would benefit from implementing an intelligent unified desktop. Even consolidating two systems into one unified interface will reduce call lengths, reduce agent training and drive up contact centre productivity. Why are contact centres investing so much in becoming multi-functional and cross-skilling agents? It is to provide a single service to their customers, a single port of call. We need to ensure we are not putting too much burden on the agent and having them act as a multi-disciplined bridge, without enough focus on the systems that should be supporting them.

Trent Fulcher: Organisations that are small, slow-growing, have a static environment, in non-competitive industries, with very simple interactions, without a need to access other applications and do not need to track or view customer activities, follow-up and history, will have little need for an intelligent desktop.

Guy Tweedale: There is both a business and a technology answer. From a business perspective, if you are not in a business environment where it is important to reduce costs associated with your call centre operations, or improve call centre

effectiveness, or improve customer service levels and customer retention, then you do not need to consider an intelligent desktop.

Philip Briscoe: If the business does not depend on agility of customer interaction then the intelligent desktop is not always the ideal solution.

ccf **How can a call centre manager persuade the Board that this is a worthwhile investment?**

Richard Woollaston: Look at the processes that are currently handled in your centre, look at the staff turnover and new hire system training, and identify areas in which an intelligent desktop can allow you to exploit new opportunities.

Trent Fulcher: Every aspect of modern business runs on information, and the contact centre is the hub of knowledge flow, both into and out of the organisation. Bringing a sensible presentation and a unified view of critical business data to every agent desktop is a meaningful and critical way to rationalise the powerful yet uncoordinated applications that drive each and every customer interaction, and improve client value at every opportunity.

Clare Dorrian: It is possibly both by outlining the disadvantages of multiple systems and benefits of intelligent desktops, and by providing a business case showing what

business benefit (reduced AHT, reduced training, improved C-sat scores etc) will be delivered and when.

Guy Tweedale: If the current call centre environment is at all complex, developing a strong business case with demonstrable, tangible ROI is actually quite easy. During our engagements with prospective customers, we conduct a Business Process Assessment, which results in a number of deliverables - one of which is an ROI Model. Reducing handle times by 20 per cent, or reducing training time by 30-50 per cent usually results in millions of dollars of savings for most companies with moderate to large contact centres.

Philip Briscoe: As with any operational investment, a strong business case and return on investment needs to be demonstrated before final approval. Intelligent desktop tools can achieve targets, reduce training costs, add revenue and reduce staff churn.

Carl Adkins: Putting together a return on investment (ROI) for a unified intelligent desktop is not normally difficult. We find with our clients that we can focus on a couple of areas and simply do the math to calculate potential savings. In our experience, the key areas where organisations can either save or make money, are productivity, effectiveness and agent costs. ■

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