

The Future of Contact Centres:

The age of the customer





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Executive summary

The primary focus of contact centers has always been delivering quality Customer Experience (CX). In the wake of COVID-19, with massive shifts in the way people do business, this is even more important. If companies want to retain customers, and procure new business, the pressure to provide a positive experience is at an all-time high. This eBook will cover:

The 'Age of the Customer'

Rapid advances in technology empower customers more than ever.

The eContact Center

- What comprises an omni-channel Contact Center?
- Customers' expectations of equal service quality across all channels

Achieving a 360° customer view

Identify and fix problems before they impact customer experience

- Using analytics
- Troubleshooting
- Being proactive

4 keys to Contact Center success

1. Technology choices
2. Enhancing customer experience
3. The 90-second rule
4. Customer experience management as you:
 - Plan, build, deploy & migrate
 - Operate, troubleshoot & optimize
 - Maximize usage & ROI

Managing the omni-channel eContact Center

- Know that carrier and toll-free services are correctly provisioned
- Be confident IVR and self-service applications are available, up and running
- Ensure host response times are acceptable
- Ensure availability of speech recognition and text to speech services
- Ensure the right data pops on the agent's desktop



The Age of the Customer

Rapid advances in technology have been empowering customers more than ever, and as a result, they are demanding more.

IR, as an industry leader in CX management solutions, helps companies to keep the focus on where it should be; delivering a simple and collaborative quality customer service.

The Contact Center's challenge

If an organization is unable to communicate and provide the same level of experience and service across the customer's channels of choice, the customer will quickly choose a competitor who can.

The effect of a global pandemic has caused a significant shift in consumer behaviour. Banks are being forced to both redefine their priorities and transform their distribution models. A Financial Services Global Distribution & Marketing Consumer Study conducted by Accenture*, gathered the views of more than 32,000 banking customers across 18 markets.

*Beyond Digital: How can banks meet customer demands

The research provides valuable insights into how customers want to interact with their banks. With the rapid shift to digital-first, it's clear that banks need to encompass both digital innovation and traditional values to meet their customers' needs.

One of the key purchase decision drivers is having a consistent, credible experience across multiple channels – search, company website, social media. This is known as an omni-channel approach.

According to a US study by minewhat.com (applies to purchases over US\$100) – the more expensive the product, the more people research online:

- 81% of shoppers research online
- 60% of these start with a search engine query (that should lead to a company website if SEO is correct)
- 61% of these look further for review sites
- 54% then visit a bricks-and-mortar store to see the product before purchase – this is known as ROPO (research online, purchase offline) ROPO behavior is a reliable indicator of the customer's expectation to use a corresponding omni-channel approach if they need to contact the company before, during or after purchase.

The challenge faced today across all industries is to embed the same customer experience into the fabric of the Contact Center, so that customers receive excellent service regardless of the channel they choose.



52%

of customers
use more than 3
communications
channels

Enter the eContact Center

In an eContact world, the company's customer service agent (CSA) serves customers simultaneously across many channels. It may be for support where responding to a tweet is the difference between closing a sale or not. Or it may be to provide detailed pre-sales advice that a buyer asks via web chats.

Irrespective, once engaged, customers expect to receive the same quality of service using any of the channels available to them.

And with more than 50% of customers using multiple channels it's vital the CSA can reference the customer's previous purchases, preferences, contacts, and complaints – in other words – have a 360° view of a customer.

To the company this means universal availability and equal quality responses on all supported channels; an omnichannel mandate.

This can be enabled by a sophisticated CRM system (like cloud-based Salesforce.com, Oracle, or SAP) pulling data on demand from a variety of sources – point of sale, accounting, loyalty programs, reverse phone number, IP lookup, location, social media, and many more.

Or it can depend on the agent manually adding a chat transcript or other interaction to the customer's history. Irrespective, companies need a single 360° view of every customer via a unified dashboard.

Unresolved contacts, regardless of channel, must be escalated and actioned quickly or they will impact Net Promoter Score (NPS*).

* The Net Promoter Score is a loyalty metric developed by Fred Reichheld. At its core, the Net Promoter Score tracks how customers represent a company to their friends.



Omni-channel is more than just multi-channel

A good customer experience means your customers will spend more. CX also influences on-the-spot purchasing, too – as 49% of buyers have made impulse purchases after receiving a more personalized experience*.

Potential and existing customers see a company as a single entity – they don't care about the company's internal silos like sales, marketing, website, ordering, accounts, support and repair. This means customers increasingly expect one point of contact with the company – not several, and do not want to be passed from 'pillar to post'.

Similarly, companies must stop thinking about communication in silos – and meet the customer's expectations across all channels.

86% of people are prepared to pay more for a better customer experience.

On the other hand, 89% of people who have ever stopped doing business with an organization due to a poor customer experience, began doing business with a competitor.**

It doesn't matter how companies measure customer delight – NPS, satisfaction, recommendation, trust, ease of doing business, customer effort, value, loyalty – as long as they measure it on all channels.

In essence, the eContact center is a data-driven machine that can solve customer issues or provide advice quickly.

Here, the brand is promoted, defended, or ruined.



* The 2017 State of Personalization Report by Segment

**Forbes: 50 Stats That Prove The Value Of Customer Experience



A 360° view of customer communications

Social media and web based applications have overtaken most traditional forms of contact, even email.

In the past, voice was the first resort by non-computer literate customers. Now, with more and more people empowered by the ease of communications apps, it's more of a last resort – especially for millennials or younger. Ideally companies should know if a customer has already accessed other channels before calling as a last resort so that eContact agents can give knowledgeable responses based on any previous contact.

Chat channels

Chat channels are becoming an increasingly popular means of contact amongst both customers and organisations. They are one of the best ways to offer personal and fast customer service. Chat channels can be divided into 4 basic categories:

1) Live web chat

Human-powered live chat is an increasingly popular contact channel for younger audiences, because it provides in depth, tailored responses to their queries instantly.

2) Chat bots

Quickly growing in popularity, automated chatbots provide an efficient alternative to human-powered live chat. They can usually deal with multiple queries at once, are available 24/7, and offer customers immediate responses.

3) Messenger Apps

A vast improvement on the simple SMS contact channel, today's messaging apps, like Facebook Messenger, WeChat, or WhatsApp, are quick and convenient customer contact methods. They also provide valuable insights about how many of your messages are delivered and read.

4) Social media

Nowadays, many brands are discovered on social media apps like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and many more, making them a great communication channel for engaging with new and existing customers.

Written Channels

Some customers, reluctant to embrace the speedy growth of technology, may prefer the less efficient customer contact channels, such as email, post and webforms.

1) Email

Email is one of the best options for formal communication when an immediate response isn't necessarily required.

2) Post

With many companies moving towards paperless correspondence, often for environmental and convenience reasons, post is not a very prolific customer contact channel today.

3) Web forms

Web forms operate slightly differently to email, but with the key advantage that a customer doesn't need to leave your website to get in touch, which can reduce abandonment rates. Web forms are also a good way to capture customer data.

Voice channels

Voice contact channels are generally a way to deal with inquiries that a customer deems more urgent.

1) Traditional Phone Calls

A popular and more conventional contact channel for 65+ customers is a telephone based contact centre. A downside, leading to frustration is that customers are often required to wait in long queues to have their calls dealt with.

2) Web calling

WebRTC (Web Real-Time Communication) technology, via a click-to-call button means customers can engage in a voice call with an agent directly through the website. Agents will already have information about a customer's journey, and built rapport with a customer, before they speak to them.

3) Call backs

The addition of web call back is a great way to reduce call wait times, abandonment rates and boost customer satisfaction and leads. Similar to a phone call, customers can request a call from a company at a time that suits them

Face-to-Face channels

Face-to-face contact channels are the perfect way to provide personalised customer service. By helping to bring the in-store experience online, they are great for dealing with complex queries and showing customers products.

1) Video chat

Preferred by the younger generation, video chat delivers in-person customer support remotely. This has become increasingly important since the coronavirus pandemic, with traditional brick-and-mortar stores being forced online.

2) In-store appointments

For many customers, nothing beats speaking to a customer service agent in person. Making customers feel relaxed and comfortable in your company's physical environment is immeasurable in building a reputable and trustworthy brand.

To deliver the best online customer experience and customer service, companies need to deploy a variety of different contact channels, creating a true omni-channel customer experience.



The No. 1 technology trend being

prioritized by contact centres is customer demand for emerging channels

The bottom line

A major issue with adding multiple eContact communication channels is that companies often end up with disparate software and systems. Another issue is turning unstructured data, like comments from social media platforms, and manually copied chat interactions – into actionable outcomes.

Customers who are reaching out are usually time sensitive. You can lose them in less than 90 seconds – the shelf life of emotion, if communication channels aren't supported adequately.

For example, a request is left on an organization's Facebook page. Followers and friends of that person see the complaint as do organizations using social listening tools to pick up on disgruntled competitors' customers.

Before a response can be made, that customer may have received a referral or solution from a competitor.

Companies may opt to initially service a limited number of channels, and customers are relatively happy with this.

However, many of the excluded channels should still be monitored for brand and reputation issues – usually a communications department role but increasingly an eContact Center role. It's not enough to just put some or all those channels out there. You owe it to your customers and to your brand to know you're in line with the omni-channel mandate.

All those channels must be available when customers want to use them, do what they're supposed to do, and do so efficiently and effectively. You need to make sure your customers don't get frustrated by all the you put in place that's designed to make it easy to eConnect with you.

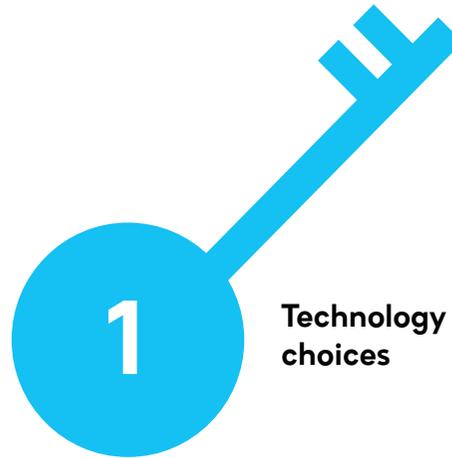


4 keys to eContact Center success

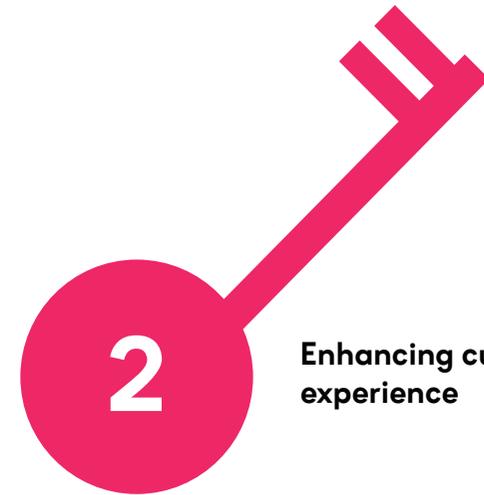
We've identified 4 keys to ensuring a successful Contact Center. Technology choices and maturity levels drive the performance of important Contact Center metrics like customer satisfaction and NPS.

Frictionless customer experience has emerged as a key business differentiator – as little as 90 seconds can be the difference between a happy customer and a dissatisfied one.

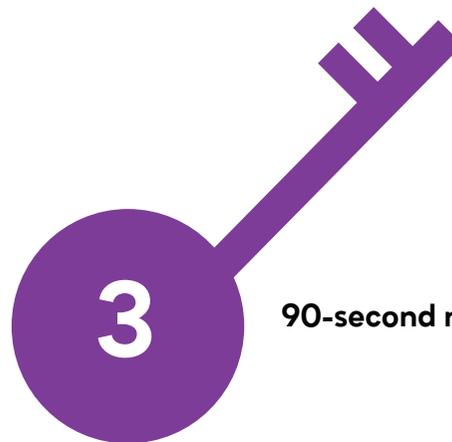
Monitoring the performance of the technology that underpins your Contact Center is the key to delivering the customer experience you're striving for.



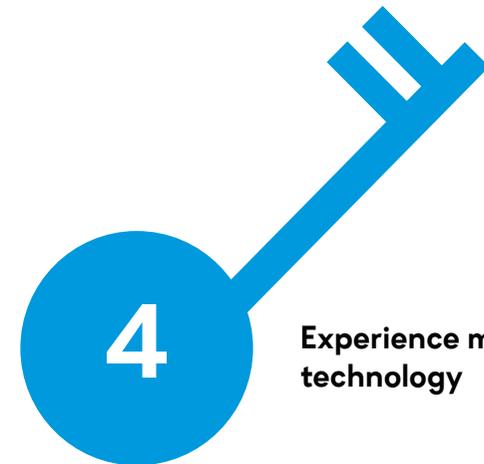
Technology choices



Enhancing customer experience



90-second rule



Experience management technology



Key 1: Technology choices

Contact Centers are strategic connection hubs and their purpose is evolving from 'fixing things' to enhancing CX (Customer Experience) at all stages in the pre/during/post sales process

Customers want immediate and frictionless ways to communicate, and recent Contact Center research reports provide some valuable perspectives. In fact, a study at MIT found that companies embracing digital transformation are 26% more profitable than their peers!

1. A true eContact Center will have at least 9 available channels. This means that embedding CX into the fabric of the Contact Center is not just about providing the channels, but servicing all of them properly.

2. Digital or multi-channel is not just another way of describing omnichannel. The former are technologies and the latter is how these are focused on CX. It is as fundamental as changing the view from 'inside out' to 'outside in'!

3. Improved CX is the most competitive business differentiator.

4. Capturing data from all sources to obtain a 360° view of the customer is key to CX but applying comprehensive business analytics is key to profit growth.

According to research from IDC, two-thirds of the CEO's of Global 2,000 companies are poised to shift their focus from traditional, offline strategies to more modern digital strategies to improve the customer experience. Furthermore, 34% of companies believe they'll fully adopt digital transformation within 12 months or less...



More choices than ever

Unified Communications vendors are a great place to start as omni-channel is as much about voice – and moving from it – as it is moving to digital and self-help channels.

To begin with, you need hardware and software from vendors like Cisco, Avaya, Microsoft, Genesys, Alcatel-Lucent, Mitel, NEC, IBM, and more. And then there are Open Source solutions and new cloud entrants; 68.5% of Contact Centers plan to move to cloud technology soon.

And the complexity only begins with the hardware. This key to eContact success can also rely on a customer relationship management (CRM) system to bring the omni-channel customer journey together for a 360° view.

This introduces vendors like Oracle, Salesforce, SAP, NetSuite, Microsoft Dynamics CRM, SugarCRM, IBM and perhaps lesser known vendors like Shopify, Shopatron or Ultra Serve’s Hybris may be viable.

There are many interface solutions to interact with the hardware, IP and CRM as well as monitoring social media feeds from Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or any of the international or ethnically driven social channels.

Some monitor, some facilitate feedback, and some allow for transfer to a more established channel, but all use proprietary data feeds and algorithms that need to be fed into the 360° view.

But... all this technology is no use if it doesn’t deliver a quality user experience!

See Key 3: the 90-second rule

Global State of Customer Service: The Transformation of Customer Service from 2015 to Present Day.



*Source 2015 U.S. State of Multichannel Customer Service Report published by Parature, from Microsoft and Microsoft Dynamics ©



Frictionless customer experience has emerged as a key business differentiator

Key 2: Enhancing Customer experience

Companies focusing on end-to-end customer journeys, across multi-channels and touch-points, are building significant competitive advantage, measurable business benefits and reducing customer attrition.

CX simply means that customers expect the same journey as they would if they walked into the bricks and mortar store where they bought an item.

Hasty adoption of eContact technologies often overlooks this face-to-face people factor. When implemented properly good CX can lead to reduced costs and increased profit, and is therefore one of the most valuable performance measurements organizations can implement.

The people factor may involve recruitment and training of a different type of customer service agent and equipping them with the tools to quickly resolve all issues regardless of channel.

Businesses must move from being product focused, to customer focused.

Customers can choose from a huge range of channels; so most companies start out offering limited channels and add more as customers demand them.

With improvements in technology and the emergence of new platforms, voice is no longer the clear winner as preferred channel for contact center communication.

As discussed, SMS text, web chat and mobile apps are key growth areas, with the latter able to cover a broad range of functionality from research, inquiry, support and feedback from the convenience of a mobile phone.

Social media is widely used by brands as a communication channel, and is growing rapidly. However, because of the very public nature in which it operates, companies typically start with one social media channel like Facebook (or its regional equivalents) – and look to get that right before expanding to other platforms.

Mobile apps change the game because they inherently inject a sense of immediacy into the interaction, plus they have the potential to add location and video to the context of the CX. The ability to bring the entire customer journey to bear in a mobile interaction is key to meeting customer expectations.



Key 3: The 90 second rule

eContact Centers must meet acceptable, customer-centric service levels.

The 90-second rule applies – giving you the opportunity to mirror your customers' expectations, fully engage with them and deliver the best experience possible.

You can elevate them to your level of positivity, refusing to let any negatives interfere with the bond between you and them. Full engagement with customers enables you to weather hardships in the future. It says to them "I value you."

Don't violate the 90-second rule.

Unlike basic voice metrics like queue length or voice quality, eContact is about offering a consistent experience across all channels. If you expect all voice calls to meet a specified service level, you must expect all methods of eContact to be measured similarly.

And this technology can be an expensive nightmare if it doesn't work – potentially comprising dozens of 'best of breed' solutions and an on-premises or cloud platform that has to cope with it all.

Recent research** has shown that currently 40% of digital systems fail to meet current needs and 78% of managers fear these systems will not meet future needs regarding volume, traffic and customer response times.

eContact is complex and it needs the platform, operating system, hardware and software agnostic tools to ensure it's working. Imagine the issues in a voice only Contact Center and multiply them by at least nine times.

Most vendors will have performance measurement metrics for their individual solution's 'silo' – measurements of digital transactions such as time to respond.

But performance of the back office technology that underpins all of this – the IP networks, cabling, switches, routers, gateways, storage, computer, power and more is critical.

If the back office fails to deliver, it affects the ability of front line staff to serve customers.

Knowing how important the 90-second rule is to customer satisfaction and loyalty, it makes sense to ensure everything that powers your Contact Center is working. And working well.

This is where experience management comes into play. In addition to management of agents' performance and availability, its management of the infrastructure that enables agents to deliver the best customer experience possible.

**Source - Dimension Data's 2015 Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report, © Dimension Data 2009-2015



Key 4: Experience management technology

Comprehensive performance management correlates disparate data sources from network, voice, web and Contact Center technologies, adds in real-time CX measurements and brings a 'thousand points of reference' into a single 'point of view.'

Experience management of Contact Center technologies is the key to delivering quality customer experience, productivity and cost efficiencies.

Experience management technology bridges the gaps. It creates powerful and actionable intelligence to optimize operations and work-flows ensuring frictionless omni-channel communications with your customers.

From an 'outside looking in' customer perspective it will measure end-to-end channel performance and inform if it performed as intended.

You can see step by step response times, results and recordings – unobtrusively observing the CX and getting actionable data to reduce issue resolution time and cost. Channel performance, or lack thereof, is the largest single issue that contributes to a good or bad Net Promoter Score.

From an 'inside looking out' perspective, real-time monitoring helps identify and quickly remedy channel issues. You can see network activity, identify network segments adversely impacting voice quality – the Contact Center technology's response to customer interaction.



Each part of the entire customer experience requires focus. But with so many channels just how do you do this?

 **2.7 billion monthly active users**

 **330 million monthly active users**

 **1.3 billion monthly active users**

 **2 billion monthly active users**

 **2 billion monthly active users**

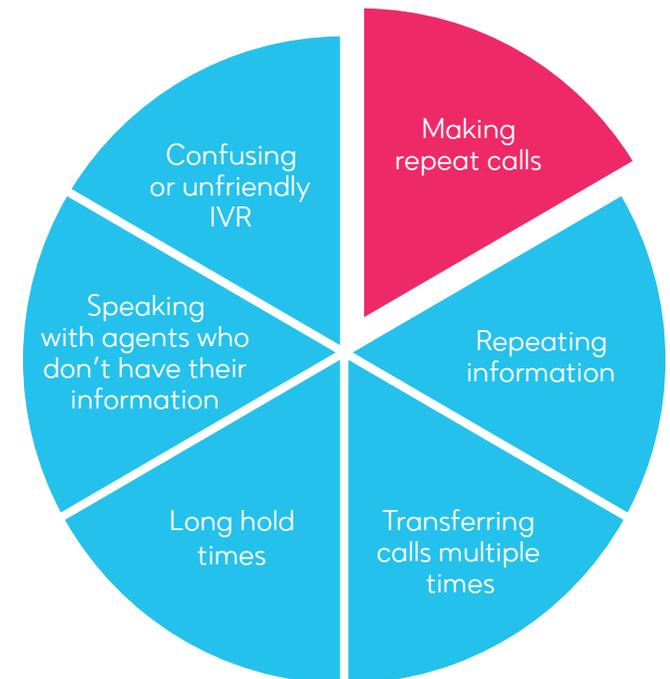
As many customer complaints revolve around basic functions you need to focus on fixing issues across every channel before you expand what you offer. But with so many channels just how do you do this? The answer is IR Collaborate.

The Collaborate suite of customer experience management solutions is the 'sheriff' that impartially gives advice, finds the root cause, reduces downtime and gives you the confidence you need to deliver legacy and innovative solutions.

It frees you to focus on your customers, your markets, your brand and your reputation while it manages the infrastructure that's behind every experience you deliver.

- Be confident IVR and self-service applications are available, up and running
- Ensure host response times are acceptable
- Ensure the right data pops on the agent's desktop
- Ensure availability of speech recognition and text to speech services
- Know that carrier and toll-free services are correctly provisioned

Focus on fixing basic frustrations like these across every channel





IR Collaborate capabilities

IR Collaborate provides invaluable insights every step of the way. In the table below we explain the value it offers as it helps you manage the risks and gain the rewards at each stage of a Contact Center solution life cycle.



Plan, Deploy & Migrate

Deliver successful deployments



Operate, Troubleshoot, Optimize

Minimize expensive outages



Maximize Usage & ROI

Improve customer experience

BEING PROACTIVE

- UC network assessment
- Deployment validation & verification
- Ecosystem stress testing
- IVR functionality testing

- Ongoing network assessment
- Customer experience alerting
- Real-time ecosystem alerting
- Automation

- Investment planning
- Capacity right-sizing
- Maximize customer retention
- Regulatory compliance

TROUBLE SHOOTING

- Assess network capacity
- Keep project on time
- Stress test CX under load
- Resolve problems fast

- Investigation & triage
- Root cause isolation
- Impact and forensic analysis
- Prescriptive remediation
- Multi-vendor data correlation

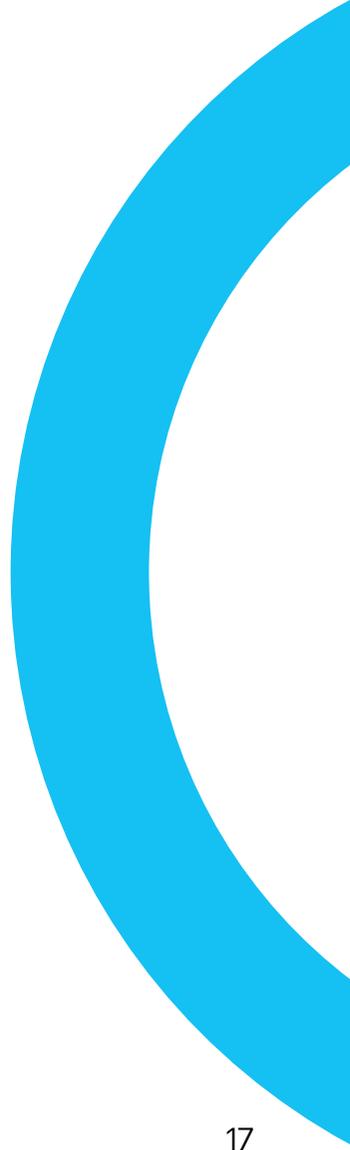
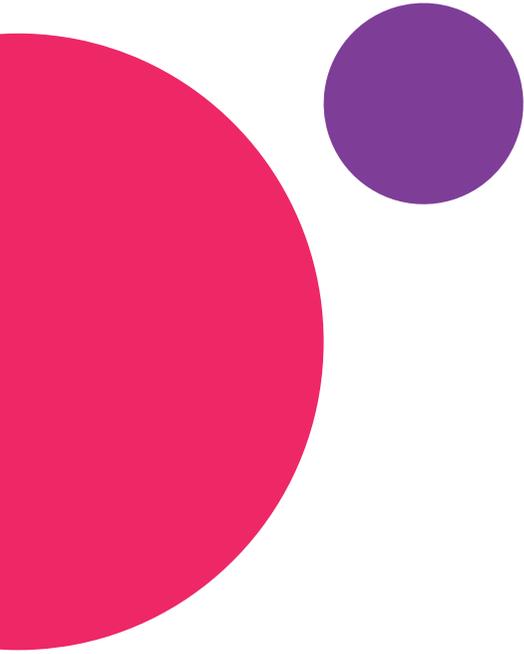
- Accelerate deployment
- Maximize user experience
- Drive customer satisfaction
- Optimize IT operations cost
- Focus on strategic initiatives

ANALYTICS

- Assessment reporting
- Capacity planning
- Testing reporting

- Operational reporting
- Capacity optimization
- Root cause analytics

- Service level reporting
- Adoption & usage analysis
- Compliance reporting



Conclusion

In an increasingly digital and automated world, contact centers are one of the few opportunities for human interactions your customers will have with your brand.

Contact Center customer experience management solutions from IR give you the power to be on top of everything 24/7.

Ensure your voice quality, connection, availability, and critical systems are problem-free so you can deliver a superior customer experience.



Who are IR?

The modern world relies on a complex array of technologies to keep turning. IR's aim is to simplify that complexity.

We provide insights, monitoring and support to keep your business-critical systems running as they should.

More than 1,000 organizations in over 60 countries rely on IR's experience management solutions.

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