



## **Omni-Channel Contact Center**

# **Are You Prepared for 2017? A Cloud Strategy**

*By Chris Recio*

### **/ Multi-Channel / Omni-Channel**

As a customer of services myself, I find that I prefer to help myself as often as possible and wherever I might be. Typically, I prefer to be in front of my PC or on my iPhone when conducting certain business. I am not likely to use Social Media for customer service inquiries or for product support, but that's not to say I haven't, and, there are those that most certainly do.

It has only been over the past year that I have begun to use SMS as a means for updating an account, making a payment for a service and usually my cell service, or confirming a dental appointment, but that's not really the point here – at least in part.

**The point is:** as I think of my own habits and patterns in obtaining customer service assistance, I need only look at what choices I have made to gather insight into the impact these services have on the Contact Center operation and the choices available to consumers.

The use of technology allows me the freedom to pick and choose how I interact with certain services, and more often than not, I leave the old tried-and-true-pick-up-the-phone-and-call-the-toll-free-number as a last option when dealing with certain transactions. I usually save those types of

discussions for those special cases where I need to dialogue with someone about something more specific. I will say, I have also used chat services in order to avoid making the oftentimes “dreaded phone call” usually because making the phone call can be painful at times.

The impact of technology on the Contact Center and the increasing knowledge of customers and their demands to get to information any way they feel most comfortable has put an incredible amount of pressure and expectation on Contact Center operations.

Providing multi-channel and omni-channel options is no longer a choice for the Contact Center of today. Consumers are moving at a rapid pace and are becoming increasingly more comfortable with technology and the options it offers. Even the so called “baby boomers” are climbing aboard – I need not look any further than my mom and dad to understand this.

However, bringing a Contact Center up to today's standards and providing such multi-channel options can be a daunting task. Add to that the omni-channel experience, and it can become quite a project requiring thought and planning.

Thankfully with the progression of technology, there are Cloud options available now that make the transition a swift process allowing the Contact Center to leapfrog in meeting the customer demands. Before we get into the options, let's first demystify the terms "multi-channel" and "omni-channel" as each requires a base level of understanding in order to arrive at a solution to achieve both.

## **/ Multi-Channel**

Simply put, multi-channel refers to the various communication options or media options that can be used to facilitate communication with the service provider – the Contact Center. This includes: voice, email, web chat, SMS, Social Media, and more – and yes there is more.

Each communication process is one channel. Multi-channel refers to the ability to provide the communication methods that customers demand by communication type. You may not even be aware of it, your customers are likely texting you now, searching your website for chat, and the various ways in which they can – or shall I say - MUST reach you because your Contact Center doesn't offer such choices.

In today's world of technology, MUST should never be the sole option. It's to your advantage to discover what your customers are seeking in order to provide the best service options possible, or risk the loss of that valued customer.

## **/ Omni-Channel**

Now, omni-channel was borne out of the multi-channel needs and has created an overlap of misunderstanding and confusion. But, in the grand scheme of things, multi-channel and omni-channel go hand-in-hand and should be considered as part of the customer journey strategy. That's not to say they are one and the same, but rather, the demand for multiple channels forces a need to have an omni-channel customer service strategy.

Omni-Channel is the ability to provide a consistent experience to the customer across all channels regardless of which

channel is chosen as a first option. Customers shouldn't have to learn a new trick or jump through a different hoop in order to gain great customer service simply because they chose a different method of communication.

Add to that, the ability to transition the communication to other channels is an important aspect of omni-channel. If the customer initially engages your Contact Center through your website via chat, and then, the discussion needs to move to a phone call, this should be a seamless transition for the agent and the customer.

The key here: each line of communication should offer the same experience, ease of effort, availability of data, and overall satisfaction as any other communication offered by the Contact Center.

## **/ The Challenge**

Bringing the multi-channel and omni-channel crossroads together is the challenge. Ultimately, omni-channel is the here and now, and has been brewing for quite for some time. The concept of omni-channel has been aggressively forced upon us by availability of technology and customer demands for access.

Ultimately, integration is the foundation to omni-channel. This is not a new concept and something I have preached over 20 years in my career. Today, whether you like it or not, the Contact Center of the future has no choice than to look at integration as a cornerstone of their Contact Center operation. Keeping pace with technology and customer utilization is no longer a choice for any Contact Center operation.

Adding to that, the demands on applications to provide a seamless user interface and experience for the Contact Center agent is paramount to achieving agility in satisfying the ever demanding customer experience goals.

Bridging the gap between data, integration, and customer service is the only way to satisfy the needs and must be the

foundation that supports both goals.

Finding an application that provides a pathway for this foundation is critical and can leapfrog your Contact Center operation to the forefront of customer satisfaction, with a well-planned strategy and goal. More and more Contact Center operations are looking for the all-in-one solution to satisfy their needs now, while offering a platform to grow into the future, no matter the emerging options that may become available to the customer. This will be the continued trend going into 2017 and those that are nimble now will benefit from having a forward thinking strategy for improvement and growth.

## **/ Multi-Channel/Omni-Channel** *A Cloud Strategy*

Here at Inflow Communications we are laser focused on Customer Service and providing our clients with more than one way to reach us. We understand the value of being accessible in ways that are easy for the customer. It is with this need that we sought to look at various Cloud options for providing such services with a feature-rich, easy-to-deploy offering that allows us to bridge the gap between multi-channel and omni-channel.

While researching solutions and reviewing the many options where we have experience, we had one question that drove our target: “Why with today’s advances in technology do most Contact Center solutions neglect a key feature most Contact Centers need?” This has been a persistent and pervasive issue that needs to change.

If the Contact Center solution provides X, Y, and not Z, then I am forced to limit my own customer service offering, or, I must cobble together an outside service in order to meet the needs of my customer, and in doing so, I generally need development services to function as one system – at the often great cost of professional services, of course. This also complicates any strategy for an omni-channel Contact Center.

In our search, we were very discerning about what we wanted and what we knew about where our customers were headed. We eventually found what we looking for in PureCloud by Interactive Intelligence.

## **/ PureCloud by Interactive Intelligence**

With our thoughts on a deployment strategy for multi-channel, while also focused on providing an omni-channel experience, we found PureCloud by Interactive Intelligence.

Now I can go on about the PureCloud architecture, resiliency, and its forward thinking development process – forward thinking at least 3-5 years ahead of its competition – but a key aspect of the application is that with a PureCloud deployment we immediately gain multi-channel processing within the Contact Center, with a ready-made platform for providing an omni-channel experience.

PureCloud Engage – the Contact Center solution with PureCloud – provides a foundation of multi-channel functionality: voice calls, email, web chat, outbound dialing, and soon to be offered SMS – and with its all-in-one offering, the deployment process becomes less of a project and more of a strategy – for both multi-channel and omni-channel.

When looking for a viable solution to bolster our own efforts of an omni-channel customer service center, we sought a solution with the following criteria:

- **Ease of Integration**
- **Flexible Options of Integration**
- **Cross-Platform Communication**
- **Easy Deployment**
- **Single User/Agent Interface – regardless of channel**
- **Open API**
- **Easy Data Consumption**

Because whether or not providing omni-channel is no longer a choice, the application option requirements become

crystal clear. It's fascinating to me how many Contact Center options do not fully extend their solutions to meet the needs of today's rapidly developing technology and the willingness on the part of consumers to make their own choices. Forcing Contact Centers to cobble together solutions with many 3rd party applications simply to meet the needs of the basic multi-channel requirements is a disservice, and not providing a ready-made platform for an omni-channel solution leaves the Contact Center at the mercy of the vendor.

If your Contact Center hasn't laid the foundation for an omni-channel Contact Center, you're already behind the 8-ball and 2017 will continue to push the demands onto the Contact Center operation.

Learn how Inflow Communications leverages PureCloud by Interactive Intelligence in providing both multi-channel services within the Contact Center with a strategy for taking the next steps in achieving an omni-channel Contact Center operation.

**PureCloud is changing the Contact Center game.**

## About Inflow

*Inflow is a national leader in unified communications and contact centers. With over 100,000 endpoints under Inflow's innovative support plans around the world, Inflow's dedication to knowledge and innovation, and unrivaled customer support, has landed them in ShoreTel's top 2% in global customer satisfaction and as a winner of ShoreTel's coveted Circle of Excellence Partners award. Inflow was also recently named a ShoreTel Platinum Partner and is their fastest growing partner globally. In addition, Inflow is the only cloud contact center provider that provides implementation, ongoing support and compressive consulting and training programs. Founded in 1997, Inflow has offices in Portland, Seattle, Dallas, Houston, Tampa, L.A. and the Bay Area.*

## About the Author



Chris Recio, is a 20-year veteran of technology focused on Contact Center. He recently spent three years at ShoreTel as a Contact Center Specialist where he was quickly awarded Top Presenter, Solution Architect of the Quarter, attained President's Club status and Solution Architect of the Year internationally among his peers. As Inflow's Director of Contact Center & Advanced Applications, Recio assists in evaluating Contact Center product solutions to enhance inflow's Contact Center expertise and continuing education with staff.



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