ODCC meets core functionality of average call centre

By Rob Lith

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One of the most topical issues in call centres currently is the 'on-demand call centre (ODCC)'. It implies being able to grow and shrink your agent pool in line with the ebb and flow of demand, without being concerned with details like being under- or over-provisioned with resources (bandwidth and scale of application support).

Resourcing must not be a worry and it must happen seamlessly. Required changes must happen at the speed of business, and you most certainly do not want to be charged for excess capacity or ever be left under-resourced.

The efficiency of this model promises significant savings. Nevertheless, buyers should carefully scrutinise the offer on the table: does it give you all the possible benefits of an on-demand call centre, and at what cost and compromise?

Example - Takealot.com

Identifying true ODCCs - the example of Takealot.com, an online retailer, serves to illustrate what a true on-demand call centre entails:

'Elasticity':

Its promise to customers is to deliver any orders placed before 1PM on the same day. To handle the spike in demand, the company has to increase its normal capacity sharply before 1pm and back down again shortly afterwards. This must happen quickly and seamlessly - an infrastructural delivery capability best described as 'elastic'.

Several things work in concert to make elasticity possible. The seamlessness of the variation is firstly the result of delivering bandwidth and application resources as a managed service - that is, in the background.

Virtualisation of the computing infrastructure is another contributing factor. As an architectural design feature that separates the customer's requirement for capacity from physical infrastructural resources, virtualisation makes it easier to deliver just enough capacity.

By contrast, non-virtualised call centres are by their very nature over-provisioned to cater for times of peak performance. They are therefore routinely underutilised, as their spare capacity cannot be divorced from the underlying infrastructure to be put to better use elsewhere. All this happens at immense upfront capital expenditure and on-going operations and maintenance cost over multiple years.

Alacrity:

Its other non-negotiable requirement was speed of provisioning, as it needed to be up and running in six weeks.

The way to achieve this is through a standards-based hosted call centre platform that can easily and quickly be made to slot into the customer's call environment. With a standards-based platform, all the customer needs is an internet protocol-based broadband connection to be up and running in no time.

Non-standard platforms, on the other hand, cannot claim to be on-demand, as they require an immense upfront integration effort, leaving the provider powerless to deliver much this side of six months.

Frugality:

ODCCs are also typically not as expensive as their proprietary counterparts. Such systems are notorious for requiring that customers buy the entire spectrum of functionality of the platform, including some it will never use.

By contrast, a true ODCC based on an open-source software-based system offers core functionality at per-extension pricing that is close to a normal telephony service. At a reasonable additional cost, extras like dialling campaigns, agent queues and reporting can be included.

In this example, call centre management was provided with reports of peak-time call distribution across agents to enable it to ramp up resources when necessary. Caller ID functionality revealed missed-call numbers, allowing the service-obsessed company to phone back customers it missed.

However, should a call centre not have use for this functionality, it need not procure it.

In short, an ODCC can rapidly meet the core functionality and capacity needs of the average call centre, by virtue of being hosted, virtualised and standards-based. This can greatly shorten the time to market for new call centres and decrease their cost, provided the buyer carefully scrutinises the contract.

ABOUT ROB LITH

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