

THE BUSINESS VALUE OF INTEGRATING UC IN THE CONTACT CENTER

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This Knowledge Brief will highlight how integrating unified communications (UC) within contact center programs positively influences agent performance and customer experiences.

The Opportunity Cost of Not Integrating UC in the Contact Center

Findings from Aberdeen’s *Contact Center Workforce Optimization: Productive Agents, Happy Customers & Reduced Costs* (May 2017) study shows that poor communication processes result in contact center agents spending 15% of their time looking for information. This must be worrying to customer experience leaders, as the contact center is the frontline in addressing buyer needs and has a direct impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Aberdeen’s *Agent Experience Management: Customer Experience Begins with Your Agents* (September 2017) research sheds light into the factors influencing agents’ ability to serve customers.

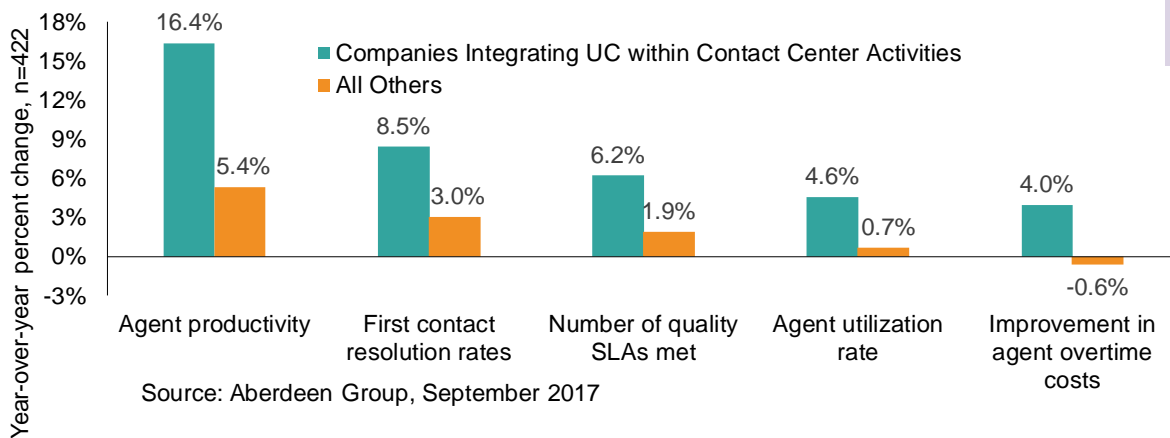
This research shows that not empowering agents with relevant knowledge (e.g., resolution guidelines and customer data) and technology tools are among the top factors resulting in poor agent productivity and performance. This is where streamlining business communications with the help of UC (see sidebar) comes into the picture. Integrating UC within contact center activities helps firms minimize agent challenges in communicating and collaborating with other employees (e.g., other agents or departments) to find, access, or share relevant insights needed to address customer needs. In turn, it helps companies achieve the year-over-year performance gains depicted in Figure 1.

Definition: Unified Communications

For the purposes of this research, Aberdeen defines “unified communications,” or UC, as a set of technologies that allow employees throughout the business to interact with one another through various modes of communications. These include phone, video, chat, etc. UC also enables employees to use a single number to interact through all these channels, making it easier for employees to communicate and collaborate.

Technology is only the delivery mechanism for UC; the goal for most UC platforms is to help employees such as contact center agents more easily communicate and collaborate to do their jobs.

Figure 1: UC Helps Dial Up Contact Center Metrics



Meeting and exceeding customer needs first requires companies to address the needs of those that get this job done: contact center agents. Therefore, breaking down the communications barriers across the business allows firms to make it easier for agents to access the right insights they need to do their job.

For example, when a contact center agent needs to work with a subject-matter expert (SME) in the business to address a complex product problem, the lack of UC capabilities would require the agent to ask other agents for recommendations, send a company-wide email, or seek assistance from a supervisor. Then, the agent would need to wait until the SME became available to address the client's needs.

Meanwhile, the customer receives no resolution and is likely to get frustrated due to such poor communication and collaboration activities. Using UC, on the other hand, would allow the agent to find and interact with an SME while simultaneously interacting with the customer. Thus, UC maximizes agent productivity and minimizes customer effort.

As illustrated in Figure 1, firms integrating UC within contact center activities enjoy 3.0 times greater annual increase in agent productivity, compared to those without such integration (16.4% vs. 5.4%). Furthermore, these "UC-enabled contact centers" also improve agent utilization rates by 6.6 times more than All Others (4.6% vs. 0.7%). This is because the agents in those firms are more productive, and hence they need less time to handle the same level of customer traffic, compared to their counterparts without UC.

An important point to emphasize in Figure 1 is that UC-enabled contact centers improve (decrease) agent overtime costs by 4.0% year-over-year whereas Others observe a 0.6% worsening (increase). This finding is tightly aligned with improvements in agent productivity, as sub-par productivity (among several other factors) causes agents to work overtime to handle customer traffic. This, in turn, costs businesses unnecessary resources in overtime labor spend.

While agent productivity and performance improvements are top of mind when managing workforce optimization programs in the contact center, other measures of operational efficiency, such as first contact resolution rates and number of quality SLAs met, are equally important (see sidebar). Data shows that firms integrating UC within contact center activities achieve 2.8 times greater annual increase in the former metric (8.5% vs. 3.0%) and 3.3 times greater annual increase in the latter one (6.2% vs. 1.9%). This means that UC capabilities help agents handle customer issues at the first point of contact, minimizing the need for repeat conversation as well as building customer trust by meeting commitments made to buyers.

Productive agents are a gateway to success in maximizing customer experiences. When agents are enabled with the right knowledge and tools to help customers, the buyers in turn reward these businesses with their loyalty, advocacy and repeat spend. To this point, Figure 2 shows that contact centers utilizing UC capabilities enjoy 3.2 times greater annual improvement in customer

Definitions

For the purposes of this research, Aberdeen makes the following definitions:

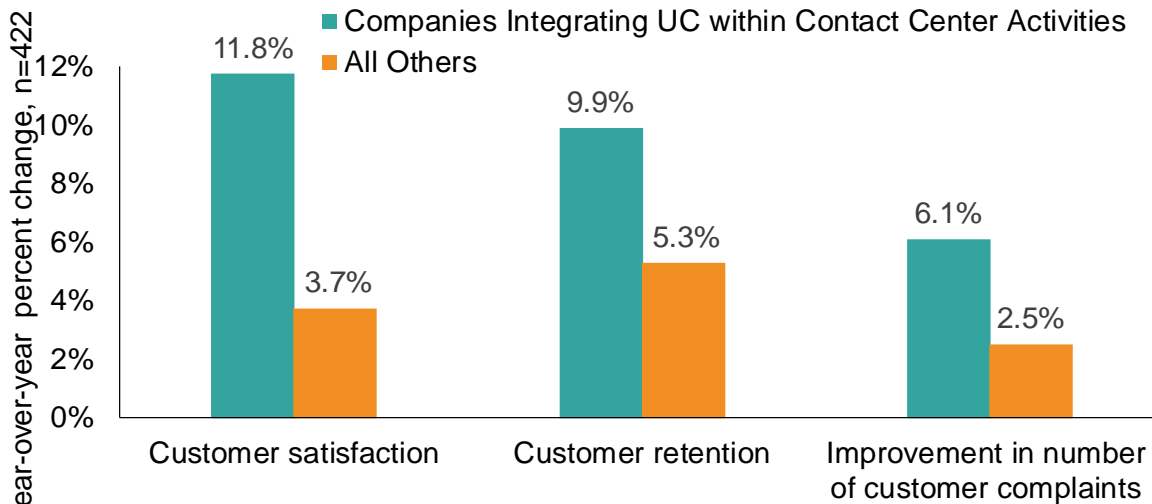
First contact resolution rates: A measure reflecting organizational success in addressing customer needs without the customers needing the contact the business repeatedly—an activity that frustrates buyers and risks firms losing customers.

Number of quality service-level agreements (SLAs) met: A measure reflecting an organization's ability to deliver on commitments made to customers. Such commitments can include connecting a customer to a live agent in less than five minutes after they call.

satisfaction rates, compared to All Others (11.8% vs. 3.7%). Such improvement is closely linked with these firms' ability to improve (reduce) the number of customer complaints year-over-year by a margin of 2.4, compared to firms not utilizing UC in their contact center (6.1% vs. 2.5%). Success in addressing customer issues in the first point of contact and enabling agents with timely and relevant insights are closely linked to such drastic performance gains in customer experience metrics.

UC is a key enabler of success for the modern contact center.

Figure 2: Contact Centers Using UC Have Happier Customers



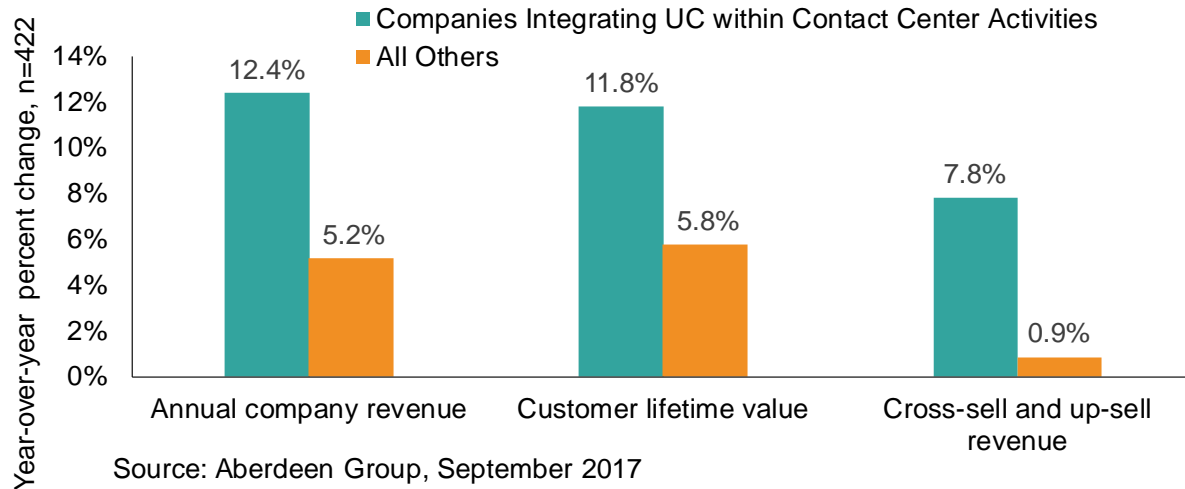
When companies meet and exceed the needs of their customers, their buyers reward them with repeat spend. In fact, as demonstrated in Figure 2, UC-enabled contact centers improve their customer retention rates by 87% more than All Others (9.9% vs. 5.3%). Considering that customer satisfaction and loyalty are among the top objectives of today's contact centers, we can note that UC is a key enabler of success for the modern contact center.

One of the benefits of creating happy customers is that these buyers tend to not only retain their business, but also increase their spend over time as well as recommend company products and services. Figure 3 shows that UC-enabled firms observe 2.0 times greater annual increase in customer lifetime value, compared to All Others (11.8% vs. 5.8%).

Customer lifetime value reflects the total spend customers make with the business through the course of the interactions they have with the firm. As such, success in improving this metric requires firms to retain their clients and increase their clients' spend over time. UC-enabled contact centers excelling in this area validate that better communication and collaboration can help firms turn the contact center to a strategic pillar influencing financial success of the business.

Better communication and collaboration capabilities help these firms turn the contact center to a strategic pillar influencing financial success of the business.

Figure 3: Better Communication Means Better Financial Results



Data in Figure 3 shows that firms integrating UC within contact center activities also grow their overall company revenue by 2.4 times more year-over-year than All Others (12.4% vs. 5.2%). While increased spend by existing clients is one of the reasons for this growth, success in cross-sell and up-sell revenue growth, and net-new client growth through referrals by happy buyers are also other key influencers contributing to these results. In short, many firms might consider UC as an operational necessity that only influences traditional efficiency-oriented metrics such as agent productivity. However, those that successfully integrate it within their contact centers not only drive efficiency but also deliver shareholder value through improving the financial health of the business.

Key Takeaways

Thus far, we learned that integrating UC within the contact center has far-reaching benefits. It helps firms improve employee engagement levels in the contact center, resulting in greater agent productivity and performance. When agents can do their jobs well, they are better positioned to delight customers. Indeed, UC-enabled contact centers outpace their peers in boosting customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Contact center leaders have numerous technologies and processes they can choose to upgrade or incorporate in their activities. When making such decisions, we recommend firms focus on activities that have the greatest impact on meeting business objectives. Improving customer experiences and enhancing operational efficiency are among the top objectives influencing the contact center executive's agenda. Considering how UC helps firms improve their performance across these areas, we recommend firms without this capability to consider how it might influence their performance. Those that already use UC within the contact center must regularly evaluate their performance, so they can adjust their use of these capabilities to continuously improve their results.

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