



# Contact Center as a Service: A View from the Trenches

**8x8**



## Introduction

When evaluating the strategically significant move from a premises-based to cloud contact center solution, there are several perspectives that need to be considered. Company executives have one perspective, the marketing and sales departments each have their own and the IT department will have a unique point of view. The employees on the frontlines of the on premises-to-cloud transition are contact center management and there is little information available on what their direct experience has been.

In this white paper, we will examine the impacts a shift from premises-based to cloud contact center has to employees on the frontline, the supervisors, and contact center managers tasked with running the day-to-day operations. First, we will discuss the challenges faced by contact center management when using hardware-centric contact center solutions. We will then contrast that with the experiences doing the same or similar tasks in a contact center as a service (CCaaS) environment. Specifically, we provide insight on these common questions companies have as they consider a move from a legacy solution to a cloud contact center.

- What are the most salient differences between working with a premises-based contact center solution and a cloud contact center environment?
- What, if any, differences are there between on-premises and cloud contact center voice quality, as reported by customers and agents?
- What differences are there between cloud and on-premises solutions when managing a geographically-distributed contact center operation?
- Does the cloud change how contact center data is reported and analyzed?
- What advice would contact center management staff in companies that have made the switch offer to companies considering a migration to a cloud-based contact center solution?

## Straight from the Source

To answer the questions above, we interviewed contact center and IT staff from three different companies currently using 8x8 Virtual Contact Center.

- **A Retirement Services** and consulting services provider headquartered in the United States. The company has created 300+ contact centers for clients over the past few years. While it was happy to share its insights on moving to 8x8's cloud contact center, due to the competitive nature of the services it provides, the company prefers to have its identity cloaked in this paper. The company's comments will be attributed to RS.
- **Optiv** is a market-leading provider of end-to-end cyber security solutions. The company helps clients plan, build and run successful cyber security programs. Optiv employs nearly 1,700 people at offices around the U.S., including a large security operations center in Kansas City. We interviewed the company's IT Systems Administrator, Ryan Wahrenbrock.
- **8x8**, not surprisingly, is a user of its own Virtual Contact Center and Virtual Office solutions, with hundreds of agents and sales users. We spoke to Kara Allen, Senior Manager of Global Workforce Management and Optimization.

## Legacy versus Modern

When asked what the biggest difference is between on-premises and cloud contact center environments, the most common answer from all three companies focused on location.

Ms. Allen from 8x8 has worked in contact centers for 15 years, in companies as diverse as Comcast Cable and Grainger Industrial Supply. She first talked about the agent's ability to work from anywhere.

*"The big difference is you can be anywhere in the world and still be logged-in to the same queues, the same contact center. You don't have to be in an office; you don't have to be in San Jose to answer the San Jose queue."*

In fact, 8x8 is also able to easily support work-at-home agents, dramatically expanding their agent pool.

*"Living in California is not cheap. We have a lot of very high skilled agents that want to work for us, but many must live in Sacramento or Tracy or somewhere else (one- to-two-hour drives from the 8x8 office in San Jose) in order to be able to afford to live in California. We are able to allow those employees to work from home."*

Note that the ease of deploying work-at-home agents does come with some requirements, for both agents and supervisors. 8x8 asks agents to come to the office several times a year, for important events or training. Supervisors are not relieved of their duties of monitoring and managing agents, but the cloud contact application allows them to perform those duties easily with remote employees.

Mr. Wahrenbrock of Optiv echoed the opinion that location-independence is a key benefit of a cloud-based contact center solution.

*"The biggest difference is that agents can be anywhere. With the on-prem solution, they had to be in the office because we didn't have any VPN (virtual private network), softphones or anything like that. So, if they were going to be in the call queue, they had to be in the office. Now they can be spread out across the whole country."*

While RS agreed that location independence was a key benefit of cloud over premises-based contact center, they also explained an advantage that was very specific to their industry. RS said that the speed with which they can support a client with a short-term project helps them as they compete for new business. RS had been using a Centrex-based ACD solution which means that RS was very dependent on the carrier providing the service for most contact center administration.

*"The process used to take days. We would have to request a phone number to be assigned for the project and then work with the carrier to whom it is aligned. Now, we're able to do all that internally within the support team within just a few hours. We're able to set up a new contact center within 2 or 3 hours basically."*

## Is Cloud Voice Quality an Issue?

As voice moves into the cloud, many believe that it becomes difficult for service providers to monitor voice quality performance. While the vendor's solution may be highly reliable, some imagine that problems on the network (jitter, packet loss, delay) will result in poor voice quality. That's when the SaaS customer will call their service provider to complain, and the finger pointing will begin.

We asked our contact center interviewees whether they receive voice quality complaints, from either customers or from agents. Optiv gave us this reply.

*"I can't remember the last time someone came to me and indicated there was a problem with the call quality. The only time it has been indicated, I know it was an issue with our network...in that specific office. But that's just not something that I have to deal with or address."*

8x8's Allen replied, "Honestly, we don't really have too many of those issues." However, she went on, the fact that 8x8 has robust diagnostic tools allows 8x8 to quickly address any complications that may arise quickly.

*"We can isolate any issues if it's on our side or advise the customer if it's not on our side so the customer can contact their internet service provider to find a resolution. It's a much quicker time to resolution for any of those types of things."*

The RS we spoke to said that there are times voice quality issues have arisen. "Once in a while we've had issues with that. We needed to work with 8x8 support team to get those resolved." Asked what his experience was working with the 8x8 team, RS gave this response.

*"Most issues are resolved within the same day or within three or four hours. But there have been isolated instances where the problem has gone on for two or three days before it was resolved."*

Contact center as a service demands, and provides, a different approach from the traditional "break/fix" communications support model used with premises solutions. Cloud communications service providers like 8x8 are more proactive, monitoring networks on a 24/7 basis. This allows them to often address a problem *before* a customer can pick up the phone to make a support call, and allows them to offer a voice quality service level agreement.

## Managing a Multi-Site Contact Center

The location-independence offered by a cloud application extends beyond agent flexibility to supervisor and manager efficiency. Each of the managers we spoke to work at companies that have been undergoing rapid—sometimes global—expansion. Moving to a cloud-based contact center solution has dramatically improved their ability to handle this growth easily and without a lot of management overhead.

Optiv's expansion been the result of the acquisition of several companies over the past few years, much of it occurring since the deployment of the 8x8 cloud contact center solution, Virtual Contact Center. According to Wahrenbrock, being in the cloud eased IT's operational burden for bringing the new companies and their various locations into a single, integrated enterprise communications framework.

*"It made set-up extremely easy since you didn't have to set up physical devices at every office location. With the cloud, we also didn't have to provide a solution that would have to be managed for home users to VPN back into our network to get access to an internal phone system."*

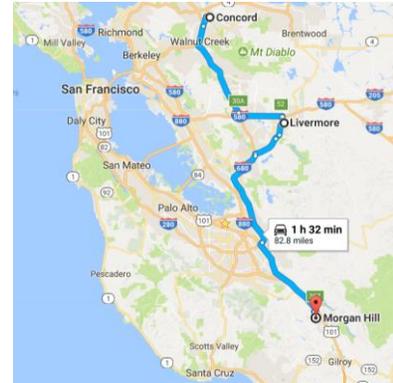
Optiv went on to talk about how several of their contact centers are able to perform a lot of tasks themselves, without having to involve IT.

*"The security operations center takes care of themselves. We've delegated access to them so they can manage their own provisioning and de-provisioning of agents."*

Asked if the ability to manage their own administration was available with the earlier premises system, Optiv replied, "No. They didn't have rights to provision anyone."

8x8's Kara Allen commented on an earlier job she held as a contact center manager working with a premises-based system. She was managing operations in three centers spread across Northern California, and was forced to spend a lot of her time in a car, traveling from one location to another.

*“It was much different back then, because it was more hardware-related. I would have to go into each office, inside the network within the building, to make changes. I had three buildings: one was in Morgan Hill which is south, one out in Livermore, which is kind of East Bay and then one all the way out in Concord. I was having to travel all over the place to do certain types of changes that always made it very difficult.”*



## Reporting and Analytics in a Real Time World

The richness and availability of detailed data, analyzed to support customer care use cases, is a key advantage of cloud contact center solutions. For RS, moving to the cloud meant having access to data that they can share with their customers that go way beyond what they had with the legacy system.

*“A lot of times, you can't really tell how you're going to use data until you have it available. We're able to go to our clients with types of information that we didn't have before. We're able to be proactive and share a lot of information that was never available before.”*

Speech analytics is a feature that has gotten a lot of market traction for its use in quality management. Companies often believe that such a state-of-the-art, advanced technology will require extensive, expensive customization. As a result, they believe it is not accessible to those with limited budgets. Cloud contact center solutions dramatically change the economics of speech analytics, allowing companies without tens of thousands of agents to benefit from the latest advances in the technology.

In quality management, speech analytics makes supervisors and managers dramatically more productive. Instead of listening to a randomly-selected call to review an agent's performance, the analytics system can search for selected key words that are associated with successful and/or unsuccessful calls. This allows supervisors and managers to avoid listening to calls that won't lead to a constructive conversation with an agent.

Ms. Allen of 8x8 describes how she uses the speech-to-text embedded in 8x8's quality management solution.

*“You can scroll through the speech-to-text to get to where you need to in the call, to either help the customer with something that they want to do or create a coaching opportunity for the agent, a training opportunity. You can get to the exact portion of a 30-minute call without having to waste your time going through the whole call, trying to find where that interaction is. It's very beneficial. It saves time, and any time you can save time you impact the company profit and loss.”*

Optiv's Wahrenbrock offered a very realistic comment about the use of reporting and analytics.

*“Reporting and analytics is one of those things that if everything is going fine, the users don't care. If they are having problems, then they care. With 8x8 Virtual Contact Center, they can get the data on agents or trends when they need it.”*

## Cloud Contact Center: It Makes a Lot of Sense

The last question we asked in our interviews was, “What advice would you offer to companies considering moving their contact centers from premises based to the cloud?” We take the title of this session from the answer received from Optiv. Asked to expand, Optiv talked about the continuous delivery of new features. Many have argued that a constantly-changing application would be difficult for agents, supervisors and managers to absorb. Optiv’s experience is just the opposite.

*“We look at 8x8’s updates, whenever 8x8 Virtual Contact Center has updates. They add features that you may not think you need but they make it easier for you in the long run. And easier for your customers calling in.”*

Kara Allen, 8x8’s Senior Manager of Global Workforce Management and Optimization, summarized that there are many benefits but the most important are those that help drive the bottom line for the business. In charge of operations that include hundreds of agents in locations all over the globe, Allen reports that she can do that with just herself and one additional person on her team. In the past, working for companies with similarly-sized customer care operations on a premises-based solution, “We’d have to have a full team. It was very labor intensive.”

*“If I can manage a large call center with a very small team, at the end of the day, that is more money to the bottom line.”*

Allen’s comment reinforces something that was true of all three of the managers we spoke to—an understanding of how key the successful operation of the contact center is to the entire business. For both the RS and for Optiv, their contact centers are a core offering that drives revenue into the business. At 8x8, Allen recognizes her role not only in providing customer support, but as acting as a showcase for 8x8 customer care technology.

All three interviewees agreed that the 8x8 cloud contact center solution is allowing them to support both their internal and external customers far better than the solutions they have used in the past.

## About 8x8

8x8, Inc., the leading provider of truly unified cloud communications, powers over a million business users worldwide. The 8x8 suite of products seamlessly weaves together unified cloud communications, messaging, meeting and contact center solutions so today’s modern organization can communicate at the speed of employee and customer expectations. 8x8 uniquely combines one unified management platform, one seamless communications experience for employees and customers, and one real-time data analytics platform for constant learning and improvement. For additional information, visit [www.8x8.com](http://www.8x8.com), or connect with 8x8 on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Google+](#) and [Facebook](#).

## About McGee-Smith Analytics

Sheila McGee-Smith, the founder and principal analyst at McGee-Smith Analytics, is a leading communications industry analyst and strategic consultant with a proven track record in new product development, competitive assessment, market research, and sales strategies for customer care solutions and services. Her insight helps enterprises and solution providers develop strategies to meet the escalating demands of today’s consumer and business customers. She is the contact center track chair for [Enterprise Connect](#) and her views on the market can be found regularly on [NoJitter.com](http://NoJitter.com) and through her Twitter feed [@mcgeesmith](https://twitter.com/mcgeesmith).