Whitepaper

NiCE

Business continuity & disaster recovery in the contact center

Table of contents

This whitepaper examines the advantages and best practices of implementing and managing a disaster recovery program in a cloud contact center environment. It reviews the direct and indirect impact of various disasters as well as short- and longterm effects. We will examine a series of practical steps that will help you prepare your cloud contact center for potential disasters and minimize their impact on your operations. Finally, we will delve into the technology and costs required to ensure business continuity and explore deployment options for disaster recovery solutions.

Introduction

Disasters and their effects on business technology come without warning and can have significant impact on your company's image and bottom line. Making matters worse, if you haven't implemented a disaster recovery/ business continuity plan (BC/DR), your platform may not have the flexibility and scalability needed to respond to the situation and handle recovery requirements, potentially leaving you off-line for hours, days or even weeks.

Many contact centers are not prepared to ensure business continuity under emergency situations. Most disaster planning in contact centers is focused on recovery instead of business continuity. Contact center executives and managers need to understand the impact different disasters or emergencies can have on their operations and evaluate the solutions that keep business operations going while the system recovers.

What are business continuity and disaster recovery?

Paramount to providing service in the event of an emergency is to ensure that citizens are always able to reach the contact center even in the event of network or voice service outages. Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery (BC/DR)for network and voice connections should be part of any emergency plan, pandemic or not.

So, what is BC/DR? Contact centers need a secure data connection to operate. Often times companies will use multiprotocol label switching (MPLS), a software defined network (SD-WAN) from a cloud contact center provider or network providers. Many companies still use T1 or DSL connections from a carrier.

However, a single connection isn't enough. Part of an effective BC/DR plan is employing a second connection to serve as a backup, as well as software protocols that automatically switch to the backup network should network downtime occur.

The same process should be employed for voice connections, as it is the most widely used channel for contact centers. Voice as a Service (VaaS) or hosted voice for contact centers is often delivered on an internet service provider (ISP) of the company's choice. Should the ISP experience an outage, a backup connection with a separate ISP can prevent voice services from going down. Cloud contact center providers such as NiCE can provide their own voice services to contact centers and ensure redundancy by using a mix of multiple ISPs—sometimes up to nine or ten. Using a mix of even just three ISPs reduces the chance of voice downtime to one in more than a billion.

Impact on contact centers

There are various types of emergencies that can affect business processes: severe weather, earthquakes, fires, epidemics and illnesses, traffic congestions, hardware and human error— just to name a few. The resulting impact on staff availability, infrastructure downtimes, busy signals, or excessive wait times have direct and indirect repercussions, as well as immediate and long-term operational and financial impacts.

Operational

When it comes to natural disasters, no one knows how it may affect the business or for how long. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assumes that typically most basic services will be restored to most areas within 72 hours post-event, potentially leaving your company without basics like Internet connectivity for up to 3 days. Non-redundant technology could mean even longer downtime as you scramble to install new servers and software. The consequences to your business could be devastating:

- **Customers are left in the dark.** Customers are unable to reach you, creating a direct impact on operations and finance.
- **Workers are stuck at home.** Some emergencies, such as pandemics, can prevent your workforce from coming into the office. This can mean that you suddenly have an insufficient number of agents to serve your customers.
- **Office space is inaccessible.** Building damage or road impairments can render your office space physically unusable for days, weeks, or even months. This means that you will have to find alternative agent space, and relocate infrastructure.
- **Call volume spikes beyond capacity.** There may be an event that increases your call volumes beyond what your current system can handle. This results in an inability to handle all calls in a timely manner, creating a bad experience for your customers.
- **Impact extending beyond the contact center.** Your call center might service internal customers as well, and if the contact center is impacted then those other functions will be impacted too. For example, an IT help desk or human resources department.

Financial

While losses like property damage are covered by insurance, financial damages such as lost sales, collections, decreased customer satisfaction or brand image cannot be as easily recovered.

- **A damaged brand** has a staggering effect on a company's finances, directly affecting consumer confidence and revenues.
- Customers that cannot reach you will not be customers for long. **Lost customers** have both an immediate and ongoing impact on finances, as winning new customers to make up for lost ones is expensive and time consuming.
- **Unsatisfied customers** spend less with your business and tell more people about their bad experiences, indirectly impacting your revenue numbers.
- Disasters most likely mean you need to spend money on **recovery activities** like new hardware, relocation of office space, hiring new agents, and employee time spent in recovery efforts.
- **Employees may have to quit** due to circumstances such as injuries, forced relocation, or loss of transport to come

Best practices in designing a BC/DR Plan

Designing a BC/DR plan takes time and effort and is only one small part of the process to make it successful. The more difficult part is implementing and executing on the plan to ensure that everyone in the contact center knows their responsibilities in case of an emergency.

Disaster recovery and business continuity plans are only successful if the contact center routing and call handling technology is available after the emergency hits and the organization is ready and prepared to pivot as necessary.

Different disasters may need a different response or plan, so let's look at some common best practices from companies who have successful strategies in place:

- If operating a contact center as part of your business, partner with a cloud contact center provider to design and review your BC/DR plan. They likely have redundancy and continuity built into their platform to keep your business going.
- Assign dedicated disaster recovery resource— preferably a team instead of just one person. This team should meet often and maintain or update the DR plan in response to changing business conditions
- Train agents and supervisors on disaster recovery processes and systems as part of the on-boarding process and provide frequent (quarterly) refreshers. The more knowledge workers that understand how the system responds in the wake of a disaster, the better.
- Provide written instructions of disaster recovery procedures. Documentation is often overlooked, but there should be a central resource that anyone can refer to. A best practic is to maintain both physical and digital copies of these procedures—depending on the type of disaster, one could be easily lost or destroyed.
- Get monthly system health checks customized to your solution to ensure everything works as specified
- Fully test your internal disaster recovery plan 1–2 times per year (evacuation, meeting places, communication, etc. Undertake a quarterly readiness test for all employees if possible.
- Work with carriers to establish lead times offorwarding or repointing phone numbers

Technology solutions

A well thought out BC/DR plan considers three main factors: processes, people, and technology. Technology can severely limit the business continuity plan if it lacks functionality and flexibility. When designing your plan, don't let technology limit your ability to create the right plan. Invest in solutions that will bolster your BC/DR efforts.

On-premises vs. cloud

In an on-premises environment, contact centers have to achieve redundancy by deploying a duplicate hardware system on site. This is expensive to purchase and maintain, especially for gear that hopefully never gets used.

However, even after a considerable investment, there is still no guarantee that the duplicate system is available to agents in the event of an emergency depending on the severity and footprint of the event. Further, the costs increase if the contact center wants geographic redundancy. On-premises solutions are also limited in flexibility and on-demand scalability, both of which are necessary to solve business continuity in many circumstances.

Cloud solutions allow agents, supervisors, and administrators to access tools from anywhere with only an Ethernet connection and a computer, making it the winning choice for a resilientcontact center platform. Most cloud contact center solutions can be deployed as a primary solution or as a supplemental or backup to an existing on-premises implementation. 800 numbers and DIDs can be automatically re-directed in the event of an outage, connecting customers to the same experienced agents—business as usual.

How a cloud contact center provider can help

A cloud contact center platform has built-in redundancies and failover mechanisms built-in as well as proactive network monitoring by NOC agents, so you gain the advantage of the technology without having to deploy it yourself. When it comes ensuring business continuity during an emergency, a cloud contact center provider can specifically help in the following ways:

1. **Enabling work-from-home agents:** With only a computer and an internet connection, cloud contact center software allows agents to have the same functionalities they get in the physical call center at their own homes.
2. **Moving work across geographic locations:** If agents physically are prevented from getting to the office, or as in the case of a pandemic, advised not

to do so, the platform can dynamically move call capacity send call flow to other unaffected office locations or agents' homes.

3. Handling spikes in call volume: Depending on the industry, a natural disaster or pandemic can result in higher than normal call volumes into a contact center—think healthcare, government agencies or financial services companies for example. Cloud contact center software is designed to minimize wait times by routing calls to the agents that can most quickly solve the issue at hand, and makes it easy to turn up new agent accounts in order to handle spikes in call traffic.

Choosing a cloud contact center solution

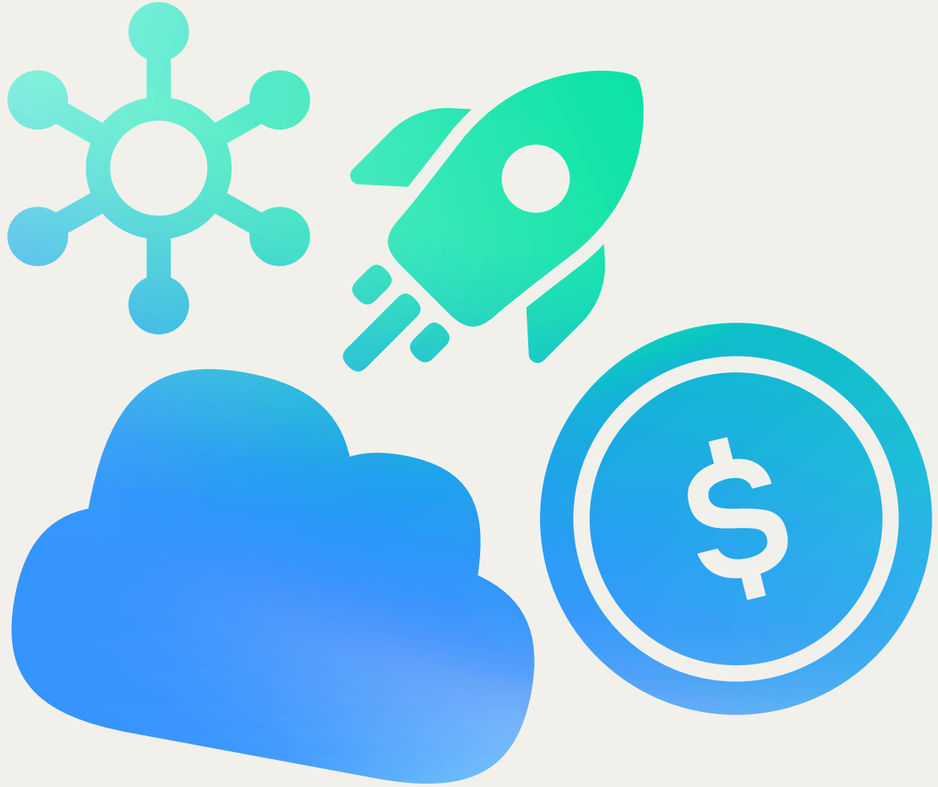
With a cloud contact center solution as a clear ingredient in your BC/DR plans, the next step is to make a careful assessment of the options in the market. Not all platforms are created equal, and while some may thrive in certain areas, they may fall short of the some of the BC/DR features you require. Here is what to look for when choosing a cloud contact center solution as part of your emergency strategy:

- **Enable remote agents** with the same functionalities they get in the physical call center at their own homes
- **Manage spikes in call volume/ seasonality**—route calls to the agents that can most quickly solve the issue at hand and turn up new agents quickly
- **Geographic redundancy**—this ensures that even if oneconnection or datacenter goes down, all functionalityautomatically switches over to a second site.
- **99.99% platform uptime guarantee**—redundancy is great, butuseless if the system is not available when you need it.
- **Flexible connectivity options** ensures that you get calls toagents even if some options are failing.
- **Flexible call routing to other geographic locations** guarantees that you can make quick changes to call routing rules depending on the situation.
- **Scalability**—make sure that your provider can scale you up immediately should you need to add more capacity.
- **24/7/365 network monitoring** guarantees that the vendor isproactive about arising problems and solves them quickly.
- **24/7/365 support**—ensure the vendor is there to give you the support in case of an emergency no matter what time of day.
- **System health checks**—make certain that the vendor is able to provide you with testing services for the cloud solution. to do so, the platform can dynamically move call capacity send call flow to other unaffected office locations or agents' homes traffic.

Cost

Duplicating an on-premises installation and trying to deploy it in geographically dispersed locations can run in the millions of dollars. Yet, it might still fail or not meet situational needs in case of a disaster. On- premises disaster recovery solutions will also require additional servers, installation, maintenance, and inhouse support further adding to the cost.

Cloud solutions are quicker and cheaper to implement, maintain, and a monthly subscription model turns your IT budget from large capital expenditures to manageable operating costs. In most cases the high availability and business continuity capabilities of cloud solution pays back the investment after the first disaster or emergency event.



Conclusion

When it comes to protecting your contact center against emergencies, there are many options for your contact center platform. However, each provider has a different approach to business continuity/disaster recovery. It's important that call center executives fully understand the potential risks, capabilities, financial impacts and how they are addressed before selecting a provider. Executives need to be completely confident that their contact center is ready for disasters and the largest part of this readiness is the technology.

Cloud contact center solutions offer enormous benefits over on-premises solutions, including scalability on demand, flexibility to access from any location, lower IT administration overhead, and reduced capital expenses (CAPEX). A cloud contact center business continuity plan deliver benefits to your organization that are too great to ignore—successful companies are implementing these strategies and those that don't are being left behind.

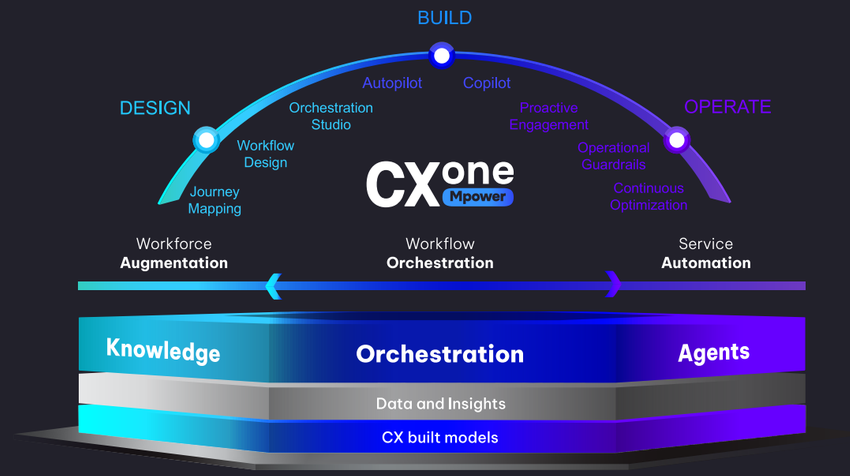
Great customer experience starts in your contact center

NiCE CXone Mpower is the AI-first platform for Customer Experience (CX). It's built to automate service experiences from intent to fulfillment, elevate workforce performance, and orchestrate workflows across the front and back office.

With AI at the core, CXone Mpower unlocks exponential benefits for organizations to increase the success of AI transformation in CX on one platform—driving revenue growth, cost savings, efficiency gains, and customer lifetime value.

Only NiCE delivers connected intelligence across a comprehensive portfolio of advanced applications on one unified platform, with an open framework to streamline your tech stack while ensuring enterprise-grade security and scalability in the cloud.

Unlike on-premises solutions that stall innovation and cannot keep up with AI-driven change, the unified platform combines generative and CX-specific models to route, summarize, assist, and automate in real time. Insights flow across the platform, improving with every interaction. With full transparency, open integrations, and flexible model orchestration, the platform truly empowers organizations to innovate with AI faster—without sacrificing control.



About NiCE

NiCE is transforming the world with AI that puts people first. Our purpose-built AI-powered platforms automate engagements into proactive, safe, intelligent actions, empowering individuals and organizations to innovate and act, from interaction to resolution. Trusted by organizations throughout 150+ countries worldwide, NiCE's platforms are widely adopted across industries connecting people, systems, and workflows to work smarter at scale, elevating performance across the organization, delivering proven measurable outcomes.

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