

Maintaining Contact Center Modernization Momentum

How technology can improve customer experience, agent satisfaction and overall efficiency.



"I need assistance, and I've heard there is a benefit program I might qualify for. But when I call to apply, I'm transferred so many times, the process is slow and I have to repeat my information again and again."

This scenario is all too common for residents and business owners when they call a government office. Agency contact centers have long been a first stop for constituents seeking unemployment insurance, social services, business assistance and other vital services. But they frequently can't provide the level of service constituents expect.

Contact center agents responding to these inquiries are frustrated, as well. They often struggle to find information they need, especially when they must switch between systems and databases. Problems like these slow down issue resolution and limit the number of people agents can help.

Fortunately, the pandemic accelerated adoption of online self-service options, virtual agents, automated chatbots and other contact center tools to cope with unprecedented demand from residents seeking help. These intelligent tools quickly provided callers with basic information and enabled them to complete routine transactions promptly and efficiently, reducing call backlogs and relieving pressure on overwhelmed staff.

Now, contact center teams are identifying ways to fully leverage technologies they deployed over the past several years. They're also launching further modernization efforts to improve services now and prepare for the future. Goals for these efforts include increasing efficiency for handling calls and online interactions, synchronizing systems and data across the organization, and reducing overall costs.¹

Delivering Better Experiences

Residents and businesses expect convenient and responsive telephone and digital interactions with government. These constituents have grown accustomed to great service and seamless interactions from top-notch commercial retailers — and they want the same thing when they deal with government agencies.

Although government contact center teams strive to provide good customer service, their technology may prevent them from meeting today's expectations. These teams identify multiple priorities for modernization, including the adoption of chatbots, self-service web tools, knowledge management and mobile apps.² Many of these priorities can be met with cloud-based contact center platforms.

Top goals for contact center modernization:

- Improve speed and efficiency
- Synchronize systems and data
- Reduce costs



Cloud-based customer experience solutions offer constituents multiple channels to obtain help quickly and provide a clear and efficient customer journey. These solutions can also help agencies communicate in multiple languages and provide accessibility features for both phone and online contacts.

"If I need to talk to an agent, I want it to be easy and I want that person to already have my information and know where I left off if I was using an online tool," says Bob Woolley, a Center for Digital Government senior fellow and former chief technical architect for the state of Utah's Department of Technology Services. "The best contact centers do a good job of offering multichannel options and supporting the handoff from an online tool to an agent call."

Cloud-based contact center platforms also integrate systems and data to enable greater efficiency and effectiveness. This can help agencies reduce call wait times and increase first-call resolution rates. Constituents experience fewer transfers and less need to make multiple calls to reach the

right resource. And cloud-based solutions offer FedRAMP certification for robust security and privacy compliance.

Increasing Agent Effectiveness and Job Satisfaction

Frontline contact center jobs have always been complex and challenging. In a tight labor market, state and local agencies find it even harder to attract and keep agents. Cloud-based contact center solutions support remote and hybrid work that can make it easier for agencies to attract employees and keep them on the job.

These solutions also offer other features to improve agent experience and increase job satisfaction. For example, knowledge management functions can help agents navigate program information, procedure documents and other resources during a call or online session.

In addition, cloud platforms can address one of the biggest customer service barriers for agency contact centers: siloed systems and separate databases that make it difficult for agents (or online self-service tools) to access information needed to perform a service or resolve an issue. In a poll during one recent *Government Technology* webcast, 84% of participants said their agents typically access two or more systems to find information.³

System and data integration in the cloud addresses these challenges. When agents can easily access the systems and information they need, they become more engaged and empowered in serving callers.

"If you can reduce the friction in the work of agents, it will be easier to keep them," Woolley says. "But this

means contact centers need more capable infrastructure for networking, contact handling and database access."

Improving Contact Center Operations

Modern contact center technology can deliver operational improvements in multiple ways — boosting efficiency, enhancing customer experience and improving agent job satisfaction.

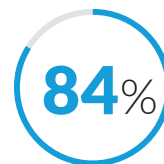
Moving callers to automated response tools and online self-service options. Intelligent self-service tools can help agencies reduce call volume. Chatbots and interactive forms let residents find information and complete routine transactions online without speaking to a human agent. Using artificial intelligence (AI), these tools can interpret the user's input and determine an appropriate response — which can range from providing relevant information automatically, connecting the user to a live agent or performing another predefined action.

Combining interactive voice response (IVR) with AI enables contact centers to collect information from a caller using natural voice recognition and text-to-speech software, then automatically route the call to the right resources. Routine issues may be directed to automated self-service tools, with callers having the option to connect with an agent at any time. More complex issues can be routed directly to an agent for resolution.

Similar AI-driven technology can improve user experience for online contacts. Online self-service tools let users complete routine transactions themselves. At any point in that contact flow, the customer may switch to an agent-assisted call instead, with information entered during the online session transferred to the agent for a smooth response.

Self-service options are increasingly important — both for boosting contact center efficiency and improving user satisfaction. According to NICE, a company that specializes in cloud-based contact center and customer service platforms, most people prefer a digital tool over a phone call as the first step in obtaining information or assistance.

Cloud-based contact center platforms with built-in AI and automation also make contact centers more resilient. Calls and online inquiries can be rerouted when a contact center location is inaccessible due to an emergency or disruptive event. In addition,



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Technology priorities for improving customer experience:

- Chatbots and online chat
- Self-service web tools
- Knowledge management
- Mobile apps



the cloud makes it easy to add remote agents to handle call surges. Online tools that offer 24/7 services and information to residents can also be updated quickly as conditions change.

Providing faster issue resolution. AI and knowledge management tools can boost agent productivity, which enables agents to serve more callers and resolve issues faster. These tools automate internal processes and give agents quick access to centralized subject-matter content and organizational knowledge. They also provide better integration between systems or databases to reduce the need to re-enter data, require fewer call transfers and make it easier to resolve an issue on the first call. Agents automatically see the relevant customer data for every interaction, whether it's a voice call, online chat, email or text message.

In addition, an AI-powered technology known as automatic contact distribution (ACD) can streamline the customer journey by taking advantage of the cloud's flexibility for handling calls and online inquiries. ACD can identify customers who have specific needs (e.g., language requirements or complex issues) and connect them to an available agent with the right skills, training or subject knowledge.

"Citizens shouldn't have to do the work of navigating government, especially if technology can do it for them," Woolley says.

Gaining more insights from data. Data analytics capabilities built into modern contact center platforms can improve customer experience across all channels. Agencies can use data-driven insights to forecast call volumes more accurately and improve agent scheduling. They can also use these AI-powered tools to understand customer sentiment and identify issues that may require special handling.

These capabilities are becoming more common in contact centers across all industries. The NICE survey found that 66% of contact centers surveyed use data and AI in at least one channel to improve customer service.⁴

In addition, analytics can drive improvements in contact center management. For example, analytics tools let supervisors develop optimal agent schedules based on predictive call forecasting. They can also help manage the agent bidding and assignment processes for individual schedules, as well as schedule sessions for agent training and coaching.

These powerful tools let contact center managers measure performance and customer satisfaction in more sophisticated ways, as well.

"Data on average time to issue closure by itself may not tell you much about the customer experience. Instead, look for system reports that will give you meaningful information about how well you are serving customers," Woolley says.

Keep modernization moving forward

Ultimately, modern contact center technology improves services for constituents while increasing agent job satisfaction and boosting operational efficiency. Many organizations made great strides on contact center modernization over the past several years. These efforts open the door to even greater transformation now.

The key is continuing to move ahead, leveraging the capabilities and data insights available in new technologies. Modernizing with cloud-based solutions gives government contact centers powerful tools for enhancing services and operations — and improving experience for agents and customers.



of contact centers use AI in at least one channel.

This piece was written and produced by the Government Technology Content Studio, with information and input from NICE CXone.

¹ Informal poll of participants in a Center for Digital Government (CDG) webinar

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

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