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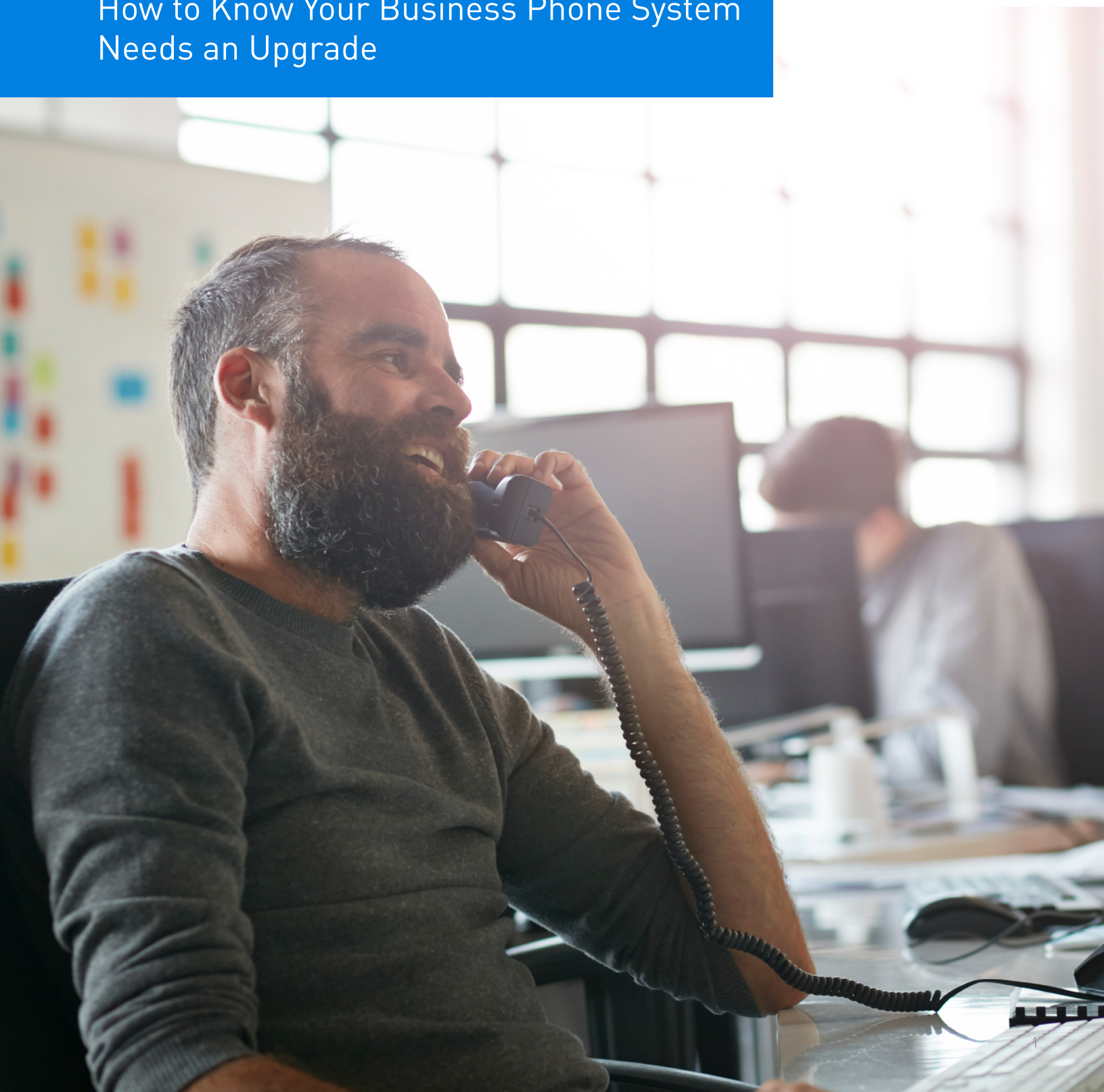BRINGING BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY TOGETHER

Evolving Your Customer Communications:
How to Know Your Business Phone System Needs an Upgrade

In today's competitive business landscape, customer experience reigns supreme. Businesses are increasingly recognizing the need to prioritize exceptional customer interactions across all touchpoints.

While traditional business phone systems and Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) solutions offer a valuable suite of communication tools, they may not be enough to handle the evolving needs of customer engagement. The question most businesses have is "When does it make sense to upgrade my customer communications tools?" We'll explore why businesses need to be customer-centric, how to know when it's time to upgrade your business communications, what solution and features to look for, and how to ensure a smooth transition to more advanced customer communications.

WHAT IS CUSTOMER CENTRICITY?

Customer centricity is the practice of prioritizing customer experience throughout an organization's actions and attitude. It goes beyond merely answering a customer call; it requires anticipating and integrating customer needs and preferences into every facet of business decision-making. Rather than treating the customer base as a single group, a customer-centric approach focuses on caring for individual customers on a granular level. This understanding includes identifying the most valuable customers, their communication preferences, expectations, and what drives their purchasing decisions.

WHY DOES CUSTOMER CENTRICITY MATTER?

73%[1] of customers point to experience as an important factor in their purchasing decisions. Consumers expect businesses to prioritize their experience. They want their wants, needs, and opinions reflected in their interactions with brands, from marketing campaigns to customer service interactions. Some reasons why customer centricity is crucial include:

Increased Customer Loyalty:
When businesses tailor their offerings and services to individual customer preferences, satisfaction levels rise, leading to repeat business and long-term loyalty. In fact, **89%[2]** of customers are more likely to make another purchase after a positive customer service experience.
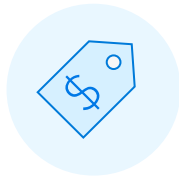
Greater Financial Returns:
Great customer experiences turn customers into brand champions. With marketing costs rising and customers increasingly turning to reviews as trusted sources of information, happy customers can be your best, budget-friendly source for new business.

Competitiveness:
Technology has made it incredibly easy for customers to take their business to a competitor. It's probably why **82%[3]** of customers said they've stopped doing business with a company after a bad experience. Customer experience has quickly become the new battlefield that differentiates businesses in the eyes of the customer.

1. Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)
2. Source: Salesforce
3. Source: Qualtrics and ServiceNow

WHEN YOUR PHONE SYSTEM WON'T CUT IT

The road to great customer experiences starts modestly. Many businesses begin with a traditional phone system coupled with an auto attendant (e.g. "press 1 for sales, press 2 for support, press 3 for billing") that sends customers to the right department where an employee or voicemail is available.

From there, many businesses quickly move to a Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) solution that facilitates better internal collaboration and customer communication. It includes features like voice calling, video conferencing, instant messaging, and file sharing to boost employee productivity.

For customers, businesses using a UCaaS platform can text message customers or place calls on hold while ringing multiple phones simultaneously to find an available employee using hunt groups. UCaaS also provides some degree of transparency into call hold times, missed calls, etc.

However, business phone systems and UCaaS solutions eventually often fall short as a business grows and their customer expectations evolve. There are several reasons why:

Call volumes become unmanageable:
As a business's customer base grows so does their call volume. Seasonal events, outages, and promotions can lead to spikes in call volume which compound the problem. Unfortunately, traditional phone and UCaaS tools can only place calls in a queue which lead to long wait times or worse, a busy signal. Customers may ultimately choose to hang up before ever reaching an employee.

Customers can't communicate the way they want:
Part of the reason why call volumes can be high is because businesses only offer a phone number to call if a customer wants to contact them. This potentially limits a business's market reach. If they do offer texting, webchat, or email, employees must manage multiple apps which leads to inconsistent customer experiences, possibly missed interactions, and app fatigue for employees.
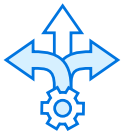
Employees experience burn out due to manual workflows:
Manually jumping between communication apps can certainly cause employee burnout, but that's just the beginning. Skilled employees may be inundated with time-consuming calls asking for simple requests (e.g., hours of operation, order status, or bill payments). Employees could also be frustrated with manually calling customers to remind them of appointments or dialing a long list of sales leads.

Customers want more personalization:
Customers want businesses to know who they are and to treat them accordingly. Businesses are also incentivized to prioritize their high-value customers. However, traditional phone and UCaaS solutions treat all customers the same with auto attendants that put VIP customers in the same queue as a low-value customer.

Businesses need better quality assurance and analytics:
Traditional phone and UCaaS solutions may have some high-level metrics like overall hold time and some call monitoring abilities, but they lack the ability to really dive into the data and measure quality at the individual employee or queue level. They also lack tools to identify the customer calls that have the biggest impact to the business and tools to help them coach employees.

UPGRADING TO AN ADVANCED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE SOLUTION

Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) is a cloud-based solution that takes customer experience to the next level by providing businesses with the advanced tools and infrastructure to manage their customer interactions. It also makes it easier for employees to prioritize and focus on the most important customer interactions and creates better visibility for business stakeholders to track customer satisfaction.

When someone hears the word "Contact Center" they may incorrectly assume CCaaS is only for large, enterprise organizations with an army of customer service employees. In reality, businesses of all sizes and industries, can benefit from CCaaS. Contact Center offers a comprehensive suite of features that address the limitations of business phone systems and UCaaS.

Omnichannel Management:

Contact Center seamlessly integrates voice calls, emails, web chats, social media interactions (like WhatsApp), and SMS into a single, unified interface. Employees can manage all customer inquiries from a centralized platform, leading to a more cohesive customer experience.

Intelligent Contact Routing and Queuing:

Contact Center goes beyond auto attendants by allowing customers to input information (e.g. account number, patient ID, etc.) and route their call based on pre-defined parameters (e.g., skillset, language) ensuring customers reach the most qualified agent quickly. CCaaS lets customers request a call back from an employee when they are available instead of waiting on hold.

Better Personalization:

Intelligent call routing can ensure high-value customers are routed to the right employee based on information they provide. In addition, CCaaS admins can prioritize customer interactions coming from specific queues and can route return customers to the last employee they interacted with. Like UCaaS solutions, Contact Center can integrate with CRMs and other systems of record to automatically pop up a customer's account when they call in to improve personalization.

Artificial Intelligence (AI):

Contact Center-based AI gave businesses a whole new arsenal of tools to improve their customer experience. Supervisors can use AI to pinpoint the most important calls to review based on customer sentiment or phrases they care about (e.g., "cancel", "I'm not happy"). AI can automatically summarize what happened in a call and identify topics mentioned. Businesses can create a virtual agent to manage webchats with the ability to understand what a customer types.

Real-time Analytics and Reporting:

CCaaS provides comprehensive data on customer interactions, including call duration, individual performance, and customer sentiment analysis. These insights empower businesses to identify trends, optimize workflows, and improve customer satisfaction.

Businesses can use Intermedia's Contact Center archiving to retain all customer interactions to help with dispute resolution, legal challenges, and comply with possible regulations around communication retention (FINRA, HIPAA, etc.).

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Workforce Management Tools:

Intermedia Contact Center offer features like scheduling, skills-based routing, and performance monitoring, enabling businesses to optimize agent productivity and ensure adequate staffing levels to meet customer demands.

Outbound Dialer:

An outbound dialer significantly enhances efficiency, productivity, and customer satisfaction. By automating the dialing process and optimizing call handling, businesses can improve overall performance and achieve better results. Here are some key benefits:

- Reduced Agent Dialing Time: Automation allows agents to focus more on customer interactions.

- Predictive Dialing: Dialers can predict call outcomes, ensuring agents are available for live calls and minimizing idle time.

- Increased Call Volume: Agents can handle more calls, boosting overall productivity and reducing wait times.

- Lower Labor Costs: Enhanced agent productivity leads to reduced labor costs.

Automated Notifications:

Some CCaaS platforms offer automated notifications, such as Intermedia Contact Center's Dynamic Notifications, to enhance customer interaction. By sending targeted messages across various channels (voice, SMS, email), businesses can boost engagement, satisfaction, and growth.

These automated notifications streamline operations by eliminating manual tasks, allowing agents to focus on complex issues. Additionally, they expand customer reach through multiple channels, fostering stronger connections and an improved overall experience.

Adding Contact Center to your business communications tech stack offers a multitude of benefits for your business:

Enhanced Customer Satisfaction: Contact Center empowers businesses to deliver exceptional customer service by providing a unified, personalized, and efficient experience across all (communication) channels.

Improved Employee Productivity: Feature-rich contact center solutions streamline workflows, automate tasks, and provide valuable insights to agents, allowing them to handle customer inquiries more efficiently.

Reduced Operational Costs: By consolidating communication tools and eliminating the need for separate platforms for your phone system and customer service platform, the addition of an integrated, cloud-based contact center (with the phone system) offers cost savings for businesses. Offering self-service tools can reduce call volumes which reduces the need to hire additional employees.

Increased Customer Loyalty: Delighting customers with a seamless and positive experience fosters loyalty and increases customer lifetime value.

Scalability and Agility: Contact center solutions are inherently scalable, enabling businesses to easily add or remove features and functionalities as their needs evolve.

IMPLEMENTING CCAAS IN YOUR BUSINESS

It's important to know that CCaaS isn't replacing UCaaS solutions. Customer calls will still first go through UCaaS, but they're subsequently routed to the CCaaS platform via the internet. The CCaaS platform processes the call, applies the advanced call handling rules, and sends the call back to the UCaaS platform, which then routes the call to the appropriate handset or device. The call is then connected to the recipient's device, allowing them to communicate with the caller.

The addition of Contact Center to an existing phone system requires careful planning and execution. Here are some key factors to consider:

Look for an integrated UCaaS and CCaaS experience: Customer-facing employees can continue to enjoy having one application to manage their internal collaboration and customer communications if a business chooses a CCaaS solution that integrates seamlessly with their UCaaS platform. Otherwise, employees are stuck using two different applications and it can lead to a lack of coordination between employees.

Define Business Needs and Outcomes: Clearly define your customer service goals and identify the specific functionalities required to meet them. CCaaS solutions allow admins to establish service level goals and alerts for when they fall below those goals.

Evaluating CCaaS Providers: Research and compare different CCaaS providers based on features, pricing models, scalability, and integration capabilities with existing UCaaS systems if desired.

Prepare for Change Management: Some businesses mistakenly try to recreate their prior customer communication workflows within CCaaS. For example, they want an incoming customer call to ring all phones when it's best practice to assign calls to a specific employee based on skill and expertise which leads to faster resolution times. These sorts of changes will require some change management to acclimate employees to the new workflow.

User Training and Adoption: Provide comprehensive training to agents and staff on the new CCaaS platform to ensure optimal utilization and a smooth transition.
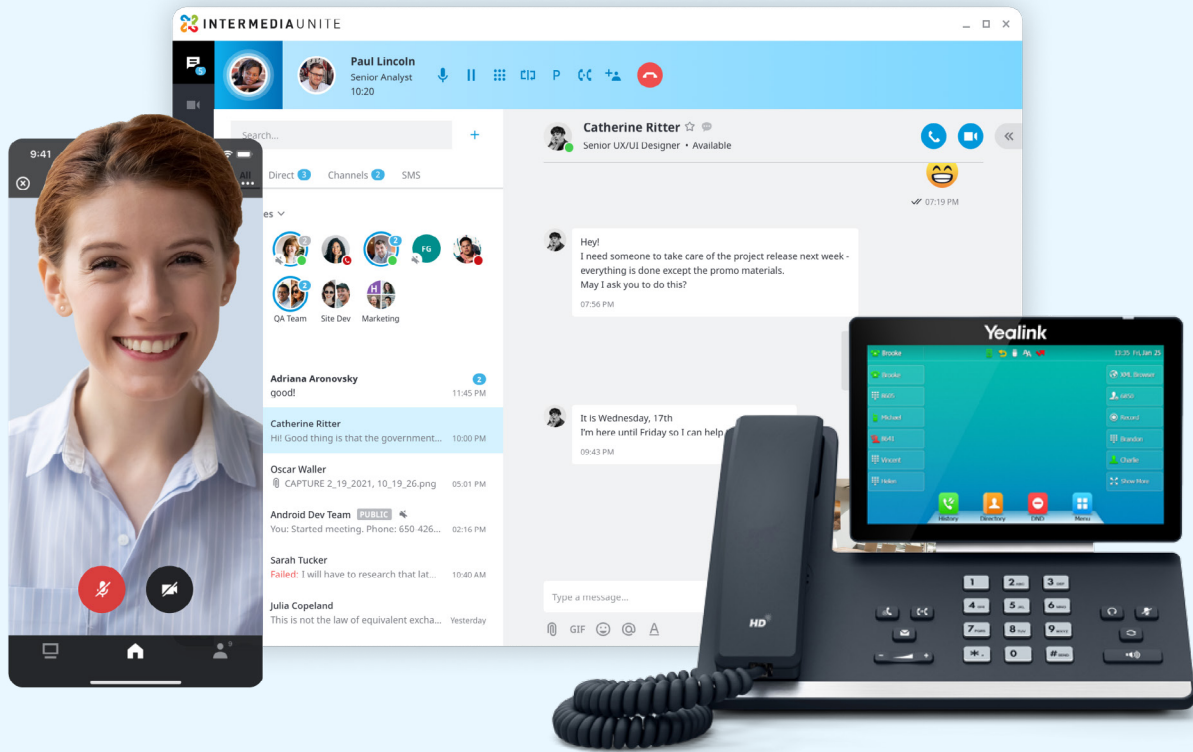
THE FUTURE IS CUSTOMER-CENTRIC

The business landscape is clear: customer experience is the ultimate competitive advantage. Businesses that prioritize understanding and exceeding customer expectations will not only survive but thrive. Upgrading your customer communications can enable your teams to deliver exceptional customer service, cultivate loyalty, and achieve sustainable growth.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Don't let your current communications hold you back from achieving customer-centric excellence. Contact us today to discuss your specific needs and explore how Contact Center can transform your business.

QUESTIONS? CONTACT US TODAY!

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