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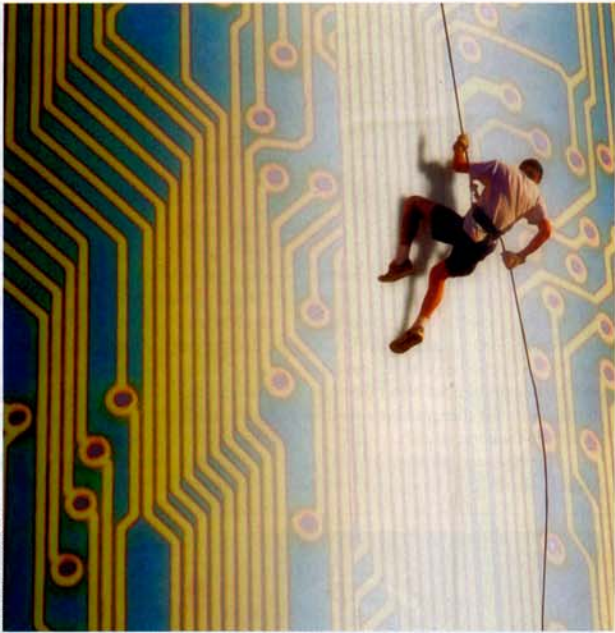


Illustration: Getty Images

The Evolution of The Physical Dialer

Dialer technology is at risk of becoming a liability despite serving as the heart of collections for years.

By Louis Summe

WHILE DIALERS OFFER KEY productivity gains for agents, the legacy systems behind them can require complex networking, significant IT support and high costs to acquire and maintain.

The result: large capital costs that can force call center management to sub-optimize agent productivity. The costs to provide necessary resources – including lines per agent, voice boards and infrastructure used to support high-volume campaigns – can be prohibitive.

Most dialer implementations also

limit paths to change. They typically do not mesh easily with multi-vendor interactive voice response (IVR) and automated call dialer (ACD) systems and this limits how outbound and inbound campaigns are blended.

Because dialers are a physical asset, they often are dedicated to location-specific requirements, offering little operational visibility in an organization.

New, hosted voice applications offer a low-risk migration path to eliminate legacy systems completely while provid-

ing an option to migrate to VoIP. Such on-demand choices can complement and be layered on current systems, enabling organizations to migrate without having to rip out existing dialers in cases where the assets still carry value. IDC Research estimates the market for on-demand software will grow to \$4.6 billion in 2010 and the automated voice messaging (AVM) market will increase to \$1.4 billion. Businesses capitalizing on this are gaining many advantages.

An on-demand model eradicates the inherent costs and hassles of in-house systems – and associated maintenance and upgrades – since this solution requires no hardware, no software licensing and no extra telephony capabilities. Also, since organizations will no longer be investing in on-site hardware, there is no need to be concerned about technology becoming obsolete or incurring the high cost of integrating dialers with other premise-based systems.

By moving to an on-demand model, organizations are free to scale up and scale down to meet their needs. For example, outbound call capacity for traditional dialers is usually limited to two or three lines per agent, yet many campaign techniques require outbound line capacities approaching 50 lines per agent. Using on-demand voice solutions, call centers only pay for active line usage time. This takes the guesswork out of call center capacity needs – enabling the organization to operate with unlimited call capacity at a far lower cost.

Call centers today seek on-demand solutions that support a virtual call center model and overcome physical barrier limitations dictated by traditional dialers. For example, organizations often have little insight into activities underway across many sites from a single, unified management console. This is not practical in today's global economy. On-demand solutions offer secure, multi-site and role-based visibility into the status of agents, campaigns and calls, regardless of geographic location.

Add intelligent call-pacing algo-

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rhythms that include outbound and inbound call traffic volume, as well as the real-time availability of each agent, and the call center now can traffic outbound calls based on inbound volume, agent availability and agent skill set. This means customers avoid wait times and agents can engage more customers each day. Moreover, with integrated outbound/inbound on-demand options, companies can support many engagement models.

Automated voice mail campaigns can operate easily and the call center may choose to employ inbound, self-service tools that enable customers to conduct activities such as paying bills, renewing a service contract or checking shipping status. This frees agents to focus on high-value and challenging calls, including the most delinquent accounts or customers making big ticket purchases.

Calls also can be sent to agents either after a right-party script screens the call or before the connection is completed.

Gleaning staff productivity traditionally is a vexing issue for call centers. ACD's merely measure agent productivity based on connect time or the number of calls selected from the queue, even if the caller hangs up before speaking with an agent.

A better approach is a system that integrates ACD and outbound-hosted dialing capabilities that enable the system to track relevant caller data, ensuring agents receive credit for actual calls handled.

Call centers today are bogged down with old technology. After investing millions for dialers, organizations are not simply going to toss them out – yet they need a bridge to the future. Progressive-minded businesses have applied on-demand voice applications to support both public

switched telephone network and IP traffic. This flexible pay-as-you-go approach has opened opportunities for lowering costs and enhancing agent performance.

By balancing outbound/inbound calls, average call times and agent availability parameters, call centers are finally able to optimize staff productivity while improving collections and debt management.

The introduction of on-demand hosted choices is poised to usher in a fundamental change, providing businesses with an option to completely remove their legacy dialers – something that was never thought possible. With this freedom call centers are on the precipice of changing not only their underlying technology but how they run their businesses. **CCR**

Louis Summe is CEO of LiveVox, which offers SIP-based, on-demand, integrated voice application services for call centers.