The decision path towards cloud

The current hype around cloud computing belies a more complex consideration for contact centres. Contact centres use a range of technologies that are at different stages of evolution and readiness for cloud and contact centre operators all assess cost, performance and risk in different ways.

**Think about cost**...Cloud reduces capital expenditure (capex) and reduces total cost of ownership. Functionality or scale can be added at incremental cost, especially helpful for handling highly variable call volumes or for a need to deploy new operations rapidly. Costs should be measured in terms of management, support and lifecycle management (including refresh).

**Think about performance**...Don’t just think about applications’ ‘speed’, but also about how flexible they are in terms of functionality, how quick and easily they can be deployed, how simple they are to manage and how much business value they add. The key to performance is often good process design and execution. There’s a difference between buying technology as a service, and buying business services. Both qualify as cloud, yet they offer different business values at different price points.

**Think about risk**...In addition to the usual risks of vendor stability and capability, solutions stability, disaster resilience and data security, contact centres have additional exposures. Cloud offerings that remove flexibility and / or configuration control, but can’t replace it with suitable processes, add more risk; as do offerings that provide flexibility, but don’t protect the business with well-designed tools. Legislative constraints in certain regions and industry verticals also have different risk profiles.

**How are others using cloud?**

The earliest and most enthusiastic adoption has been of cloud-based data / computing by the smaller, more capex-sensitive contact centres doing outbound telemarketing or telesales. This ongoing trend is now spreading to mid-sized contact centres. Speed to market, cost, stability and lack of constraints where no back-end systems integration requirements exist have driven this adoption. These organisations have also been keen adopters of voice / channel cloud offerings, as these have become available with rich functionality at lower seat counts.

For larger enterprises, modern IP and Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) architectures now make cloud a viable solution for voice / channel technologies, especially for geographically distributed or operations requiring agent mobility. Concerns over data security and lack of control are driving some towards a private cloud, or hybrid solution. For computing / application systems, the concerns around systems integration, data security, data protection legislation and workflow constraints are inhibiting adoption – more than the industry hype would suggest.

**Workforce optimisation solutions** present all contact centres with an opportunity to gain access to capability that has traditionally been the domain of the larger enterprise. These functions also make excellent packaged business services for contact centres of all types, and we expect to see growth in this area accelerating.

**Self-service** has long been provided for the voice channel as a cloud offering in the telecoms network, although this is also subject to the same systems integration, data security, data protection legislation issues as the enterprise application. The significant growth we observe in self-service usage is driven more by the proliferation of mobile applications than the provisioning of these as cloud services.

**Getting there**

The journey to the cloud is an inevitable development. Contact centres should think about each application in terms of its cost performance and risk profile, each covering commercial, operational and strategic business objectives and constraints. As with all procurement processes, be careful to select vendors on the basis of capability and strategy, as well as price. Remember, cloud is a model of ownership – but one of many. Most organisations will migrate gradually to the cloud using a hybrid approach, with an appropriate ownership model selected for each application. Cloud is not an all-or-nothing decision.