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interactions
talking with customers

Desktop virtualisation

Virtual Desktop Infrastructure is getting a lot of attention from businesses across the globe with its promise of improved business continuity and fast, flexible deployment.



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Virtual desktop infrastructure is getting a lot of attention from businesses across the globe with its promise of improved business continuity and fast, flexible deployment. A unified approach to your organisation's computing infrastructure is the key to effective collaboration and increased efficiency.

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Quality management is less about number crunching and more about using data to drive improvements to meet customers' needs. This new shift in focus means organisations can realise business benefits and use their existing resources effectively to achieve their goals of improved customer service.

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Presence is enhancing collaboration to deliver great customer service. Contact centre success depends on the ability to get a call handled by the right person with the right skills. Although it's not a new concept in the contact centre, new applications of presence are helping improve customer service through intelligent information about the caller and their requirements, and enabling better efficiency

It's all about effective collaboration for **efficiency**

In the drive to deliver an excellent customer experience, organisations need to optimise existing resources and use them effectively. As customer expectations continue to rise and businesses look for ways to stay competitive, the challenge for many contact centres is how to be quick to adapt to changing conditions and deliver great service, while doing more with less. In this fourteenth issue of Interactions, we focus on the different ways that organisations can boost collaborative working to deliver outstanding customer service. Over our 30 years in the contact centre industry, we understand how tough the marketplace is. Companies are being squeezed from every angle to deliver on customer demands and enable their people to efficiently provide a customer experience that delights. Being customer focused means reinventing business processes and taking a critical look at how resources are being used and most importantly, how they can be used better.

Our first article takes a look at virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI). A unified approach to your organisation's computing infrastructure is the key to effective collaboration and increased efficiency. Centralised computing infrastructures support improved business agility, enable contact centres to be scalable and flexible and

help drive operating and support costs down. It is also why VDI is getting a lot of attention from businesses across the globe with its promise of improved business continuity and fast, flexible deployment.

If you're serious about delivering an excellent customer experience on every interaction, you need a quality programme that works. Our second article looks at why quality management today is less about number crunching and more about using the data to drive improvements to meet customers' needs. In the past, quality management initiatives haven't been able to demonstrate measurable returns to the business. This new shift in focus means organisations can realise business benefits and use their existing resources effectively to achieve their goals of improved customer service.

Our final article looks at how presence is enhancing collaboration to deliver great customer service. Contact centre success depends on the ability to get a call handled by the right person with the right skills. Although it's not a new concept in the contact centre, new applications of presence are helping improve customer service through intelligent information about the caller and their requirements, and enabling better efficiency and responsiveness across the enterprise.



I hope that you find this edition of Interactions engaging and informative in highlighting ways you may be able to use your existing resources more efficiently to drive improved collaboration. Please feel free to pass this on to any of your colleagues who might be interested.

Best wishes,

Martin Dove

Managing Director,
Customer Interactive Solutions

Desktop Virtualisation

A unified approach to your organisation's computing infrastructure is the key to effective collaboration and increased efficiency. This is why desktop virtualisation is getting a lot of attention from businesses across the globe with its promise of lower operating costs, improved business continuity and fast, flexible deployment.

We've come a long way since PCs were liberated from the mainframe environment. Now, desktop virtualisation signals an evolution in the way we work and is delivering real business value at the same time. Centralised computing infrastructures support improved business agility, enable contact centres to be scalable and flexible and help drive operating and support costs down. Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) is speeding up desktop deployments by streaming applications out of data centres to clean, simple user interfaces that are backed up by a centralised computing environment.

Sounds good –
but what is it?

To understand the advantages of desktop virtualisation, it's worth looking at what it is and why it's relevant to the contact centre. As Dimension Data's Group General Manager of Microsoft Solutions, Peter Menadue explains, the background trends influencing desktop virtualisation have an effect on its use.

"If we think back to the past and how we approached our work, a typical scenario probably involved a PC installed with software and applications. Data would be accessed via a network drive or on the PC itself and management, updates and control of data and applications was more complex and difficult. Desktop virtualisation is about abstracting these elements and breaking them apart into their different components (hardware, software, applications and



“Desktop virtualisation signals an evolution in the way we work and is **delivering real business value** at the same time.”

data) and reworking how they are flexibly stored, run and provided”.

He adds that global changes to individual ways of working are forcing organisations to be more flexible.

“The emergence of new devices such as laptops, desktop phones and iPads has added even more pressure to the mix, as organisations work out how to cope with the numerous demands to support these changes. Virtualisation technology delivers this flexibility in managing and provisioning these requirements by breaking up the server, hardware and operating system”.

The driving force behind desktop virtualisation

Virtualisation is not a single technology – it is a collection of technologies that can be applied to all aspects of the server and desktops. All these virtualisation options increase the flexibility, business continuity, security and agility of desktop and server deployments. And despite the current hype, virtualisation is already widely used in the workplace. The most well known form of virtualisation is Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI), which extracts the desktop environment and runs it elsewhere through a centralised server infrastructure in a data centre.

Application virtualisation provides applications without installing it on PCs, either through

streaming technology or a virtual presentation of an application or environment. Client side virtualisation uses a hypervisor (or virtual machine monitor) between the hardware and operating system to run multiple environments or virtual machines on one host computer, as in a server environment.

User profile virtualisation separates documents and profile information to allow users to work on any machine and data virtualisation gives access to data from a service elsewhere.

Menadue points out that it is VDI that is attracting the most interest.

“There is a lot of uncertainty in how to approach it, which is why it’s useful to look at the drivers behind the move to virtualisation. Companies want to be able to drive the costs of provisioning and support down and flexibly manage and cope with mobile working in a distributed environment, while offering increased access to communication”.

Consumerisation of IT means businesses need to match their employees’ style of working and meet their expectations to use any device, while providing

a consumer experience that complies with the security and governance of the work environment. In doing this, companies are searching for ways to apply the principles of cloud computing to provide applications, data and platforms that are managed elsewhere in the enterprise environment.

A new age of flexible working

Virtualisation supports new working trends across companies through its flexibility and ability to offer services to people quickly. It is able to provide remote workers with access to and delivery of services in the contact centre, while supporting a variety of hardware. For contact centres, a flexible work environment provides the ability to scale complex application sets up and down according to the number of people. This increased flexibility helps centres overflow from tightly defined resources and tap into the resources of the rest of the enterprise.

Merchants’ Head of Information Technology, Sashen Naidu, says that what really counts is how organisations put this into practice.

Virtualisation helps **manage intellectual property better,** **reduces the management costs** and **increases quick provisioning** over the long term.

“For companies with multiple sites, the deployment of a virtualised desktop has created many efficiencies in the contact centre. Using a simple terminal, provisioning of applications and software is done centrally and when new applications are rolled out, we can test before deployment in a matter of hours through building a template and pushing it out to the terminals”.

VDI is the perfect solution for organisations with seasonal peaks that require technology on, demand and a telephony solution to cope with fluctuating demand. The benefit in not having to buy new PCs each time means it's a case of putting terminals down, pushing an image to each of them within hours and scaling up and down as needed.

Management and data security is done centrally in a virtualised desktop infrastructure that is hosted offsite and contains the server processing power. Backups are done to a central storage area network (SAN), instead of a PC hard drive, and central policies define the VDI environment, using drag and drop functionality that enables lock down of ports, even down to specific USB ports on terminals.

Delivering real business value

Centralised resources deliver cost savings and a level of future proofing by replacing the need to deploy new PCs, processes and systems across a contact centre. As Naidu explains, virtualised terminals are literally made up of a robust box with no hard drive or moving parts and only contain a chip to allow the display of a

picture and a networking module to facilitate a connection to the VDI environment.

“The benefit of having virtualised desktops, through assigning control to high end servers to create virtual PCs, means the only requirement is to increase the back end processing power of the VDI environment. Another advantage lies in the area of bandwidth where, if you're running full applications that make heavy use of WAN links, virtualised desktops use only a fraction of the bandwidth. For centres operating off-site or offshore, the cost savings can be huge”.

Naidu adds that a VDI environment also supports a better balance of staffing support.

“Traditional contact centres with physical PCs would need second level engineers at a ratio of 1:100 PCs to physically install, troubleshoot, fix on the fly and maintain these individual PCs. For virtualised desktops, more entry level skills can be used with only one engineer to 200 terminals, delivering double the value at half the cost!”

In a VDI environment, there are no setups to configure – all that is required is power, network, a keyboard and screen and to push an image of a virtual PC to a terminal to get going. This means higher skilled engineers with specific capabilities can deploy two and a half times the number of terminals from a back end server environment.

From an operations perspective, the benefits of using terminals include quick start up time.

Agents can switch on, boot up within under two minutes, and start working as soon as they've started their shift. Terminals are easier and less frustrating to use and aesthetically they improve the working environment by being a small box that fits neatly under a desk. Menadue points out that as the benefits and more efficient use of resources become apparent, companies should bear in mind that it takes a lot more planning at the start to realise this value.

“It can take two or three times as long to set up the initial VDI environment compared with other more traditional infrastructures. However, while there is more complexity at the start which calls for higher skilled engineers, this soon tapers off as management tools prove their worth in needing less skilled management”.

Facing the challenges

As with everything, there are barriers to cross. The higher price tag of VDI may be a barrier to initial investment, but the business benefits more than pay for themselves over time. Naidu explains that organisations will need key components that include servers, software licences for virtualisation technology, a storage area network (key to resilience in environment) and the skill set to complete this highly complex set up.

“Initial costs can be five or six times more expensive at the outset, which is why it's a good idea to work with experienced partners like Dimension Data to help complete the deployments successfully, and hand over to the skilled people you

already employ. And, because the devil's in the detail, they also ensure your business has complied with important international standards around security and change management to ensure the infrastructure is properly set up".

Menadue agrees that there are challenges to overcome, and that businesses need to go into desktop virtualisation well informed and prepared. Challenges like licensing complexity, avoiding duplication of management tools and processes, and ensuring a good end user experience are definitely real, but there are real business benefits to be achieved.

"Virtualisation helps manage intellectual property better,

reduces the management costs and increases quick provisioning over the long term. While virtualised desktops may not fulfil a business need at this stage, there are a host of other options under the virtualisation umbrella to help deliver business value. Whatever the choice, it's important to work out how to manage a combination of different tools in a unified way".

A virtualised future

Current hype in the industry tells us that companies, are keen to reap the business benefits of using desktop virtualisation to increase their flexibility. As virtualisation breaks down

the ties of where services are delivered and where they come from, the cloud computing environment is expected to mature even further.

Menadue and Naidu agree that confidence in cloud computing will grow to drive increased usage of services in the public cloud. Virtualisation is the first stage of consolidating services as companies provide their own private clouds and the use of data centres continues to grow at a rapid rate.

Though it's too early to predict how public cloud service provision will be delivered to contact centres in the future, VDI is here to stay. Companies will now need to work out how they will embrace it in their business.

About the authors

Peter Menadue is the Group General Manager for Microsoft Solutions. His role is pivotal to the future growth of Dimension Data's Microsoft Solutions business around the world. In his role he is responsible for the strategic direction of the Dimension Data group's Microsoft Solutions line of business worldwide. He has primary responsibility for driving Dimension Data's go-to-market offerings, solution development, sales, alliances and technology strategy. Peter has more than 20 years experience in the IT industry, working in both

Australia and the US, where he has focused on the Microsoft integration space.

Sashen Naidu is the Head of Information Technology at Merchants. He is responsible for technology and service delivery that supports Merchant's own South African contact centre operations. Over the past 18 months he has built the internal support services infrastructure to manage and support Merchants' contact centres, and established a number of key strategic partnerships to provide technology on demand and telecom services to Merchants.

This will be expanded to form a key part of a global service and support capability for Merchants' Managed Services for IT for global contact centres. Sashen was previously with a leading converged voice and data service provider, where he held the position of Technology Director and led a team that provided innovative solutions to both enterprises and contact centres and was the first to offer VoIP to the industry. His career has spanned 13 years in IT, with a special focus on convergence.

Driving collaboration through quality management

If you're serious about delivering an excellent customer experience on every interaction, you need a quality programme that works. Today, quality management is less about number crunching and more about using the data to drive improvements to meet customers' needs. In the past, companies have questioned the value of quality management initiatives when they have not been able to demonstrate measurable returns to the business. This new shift in focus means organisations can now realise business benefits and use their existing resources effectively to achieve their goals of improved customer service.

Driving a quality customer experience

Simply put, effective quality management is a contact centre's ability to manage the level of service delivered on each and every customer interaction. Problems in the past have centred on the failure of quality programmes to drive the priorities of the customer, deliver accurate data and act upon service priorities in order to bring about the necessary changes.

As Merchants Operations Consultant Taryn Jordaan explains, quality is what drives the improvements needed to satisfy the customer experience.

"If we think of the customer as the brain, telling us what they think through customer satisfaction feedback, quality management and coaching are the hands and feet that should act upon these instructions".

Quality management looks at customer feedback and breaks the findings down into measurable behavioural competencies.

"On the one end it's about gathering the right data for intelligent decision making. On the other end, it's about acting on the information you have – and this is where companies most often fail", adds Jordaan.

"A customer may be unhappy because their query was unresolved. A quality programme examines the reasons for this which may include a lack of agent product knowledge, a process failure or an incorrect system entry. It's all about getting a full picture of the issue and



The **new hybrid approach** combines **traditional quality assurance** with coaching to ensure the **data is acted upon**.

the interdependencies which may have caused it”.

This means using technology and well-designed tools to help isolate and target customer priorities and then provide customised coaching to individual agents to deliver against them. The benefits of doing this include measurable returns such as: increased customer satisfaction and first call resolution, reduced call volumes due to improved efficiencies, reduced employee absenteeism and attrition and the resultant increase in employee morale.

A quality programme that works

An effective quality framework looks at the individual business' objectives, how it differentiates itself in the market and what's important to it in respect of the experience of its customers. This means researching customer demographics and identifying their needs through market research, finding out what existing and prospective customers are saying and then translating these findings into measurable competencies to feed into the quality management system.

As Jordaan points out, the success of any quality framework depends on three key elements in order for the programme to have impact:

- Alignment to customer objectives
- Reliability of data
- Effectiveness of agent coaching and execution against results

Quality programmes need to allow contact centres to measure how they're doing in meeting customer needs and then make

the necessary changes. Quality management is important if we are to understand how we can improve the customer experience.

“Working with experienced partners can help organisations identify the type of experience they wish to deliver to their customers”, adds Jordaan. “After a thorough review of customer needs, data and service objectives, we translate these findings into measurable competencies that isolate the behaviours needed to deliver that type of experience on calls. This enables quality management staff to coach effectively to bring about sustained improvements”.

Depending on the type of contact centre, there are different approaches to quality management programmes. Traditional programmes would tend to rely on a group of quality assurers who monitor calls and provide scores. A common problem for companies is where they generate large amounts of data but nothing is done with it. The lack of interpretation means no decisions are made and there is no change as a result. Jordaan says that centres miss out on the business benefits by being too focused on scores.

“The new hybrid approach combines traditional quality assurance with coaching to ensure the data is acted upon. An expert company like Merchants combines elements from a number of quality approaches by using a quality assurance group for independent random call analysis and feedback and operational team leaders for individual coaching”.

This unique approach means investing in and developing the coaching competency of quality management staff within the contact centre and enabling them to be the drivers of change.

Using the people you have

Organisations often make the mistake of believing that a good contact centre data gathering tool or method means you don't need quality management. This mistaken belief is founded on the idea that if you know what people are saying, you're taking care of quality because you know what needs to be done. Jordaan says the reality for most businesses is that their people are generally not empowered to deliver against those needs and drive the necessary changes.

“This is where coaching proves its mettle in bringing about these changes. Through the coupling of gathered data with the appropriate coaching methodology, coaches and team leaders are able to prioritise against objectives and drive permanent behavioural changes in the individual agent.

The coaching feedback cycle breaks down these independent quality control steps into first assessing random calls and then entering them into a quality tool to determine objectives. After a feedback session, a coaching action plan is used to effect change and encourage accountability, while reducing the overall training need.

The tools of the trade

There are a host of management tools available on

the market (e.g. NICE) which serve as a call recording tool that can give you:

- The ability to evaluate online (automating the store and archive functions)
- Real-time monitoring
- Reporting

However, as Jordaan warns, while there is no doubt that quality systems work, the competencies required have a big impact on the customer experience. “These systems are excellent where they can take the custom designed scorecard and derive meaning and insight from data to deliver real business intelligence”.

In fact, Jordaan encourages companies to squeeze as much as you can out of them as possible.

“With strong analytics, you are able to slice and dice data and integrate this with other performance information in the contact centre to make powerful decisions”.

If you’re using an automated quality management tool, one of the key benefits is being able to use your quality resources more effectively and allow more time for interpretation. Other advantages relate to factors such as call archiving and storage. Manual systems simply take too long and technology can provide a lower margin of error to gives more confidence in the metrics.

Jordaan advises caution when considering the role of quality management tools.

“There is a risk of confusing quality management with the tool used to capture quality data. An effective quality programme is more than a tool. It’s about translating customer feedback into

This is a major move away from agents suspiciously **viewing quality management as a policing system** designed to ‘catch them out’.

measurable competencies, measuring the impact of each of these through the use of the data provided by the quality tool and then interpreting the results. The tool provides the intelligence to identify priorities and coach accordingly”.

A collaborative approach

To support better collaboration across the enterprise, training should always be delivered when new technology is implemented. Jordaan points out that people need to know how to interpret data and use it in a less reactive way.

“It is often easier to react to a statistic without looking at the relationship between it and other related elements. By not looking at the big picture, collaboration is undermined because actions are taken on incomplete data and relationships between different areas of the business are not taken into account”.

Jordaan offers the example of call handle times.

“Situations often arise when call handling times will be driven down to increase efficiencies in service levels. The problem arises where a number of factors are driving the time taken to handle a call.

The handle time could be high because of poor agent product knowledge, an inability to multitask between systems, excessive hold times and slow systems, lower agent tenure compared with the rest of the centre, or even the type of call and competency required e.g. handling complaints or difficult customers.

Where a reactive manager might see a high call handle time and tell their staff to bring it down, a proactive manager first takes time to understand what is driving this metric and coaches on those behaviours”.

Quality management is slow but steady when you adopt a coaching approach. The difference is that after coaching for a while, a centre will start to see sustained results that are embedded and not temporarily driven by bad behaviours such as cutting calls, repeat calls or an increase in escalated calls. For this reason, Jordaan warns that the successful implementation of a quality framework means changing the existing .

“When agents understand that coaching is there to empower them and encourage personal accountability, growth and opportunities for progression, they soon realise it’s not about picking up their mistakes”.

This is a major move away from agents suspiciously viewing quality management as a policing system designed to ‘catch them out’.

Instead, the new approach focuses on building on agents’ strengths and recognising the areas they perform well in and identifying areas for improvement. As soon as agents realise this, morale improves, there is more buy in and this has a powerful knock on effect in driving down attrition and absenteeism and delivering a consistently better customer service.

Jordaan explains that while initial buy in might take time to win, an outcomes-focused environment delivers incredible long-term benefits.

“Where training and quality were usually the first to face the chop when businesses are under financial pressure, regular one-to-one coaching improves motivation and behaviours and reduces training expenses because it’s already built in”.

A mindshift

Cultural change is a must for any contact centre looking to rid itself of the disease of reactive management. Jordaan explains that contact centre managers often simply pay lip service to quality and their actions echo that attitude.

“The important thing to remember is how to motivate agents through helping them find the ways of balancing quality with efficiency”.

Proactive quality management focuses on team leaders not simply performing management activities but also leadership

activities every day. Normal daily management tasks include taking escalated calls, conducting back to work interviews and keeping the team afloat. The new leadership activities involve driving the team forward through effective one to one coaching, career development, guidance and mentorship.

For team leaders the big challenge centres on finding the time to coach and developing their own coaching ability. Effective training helps change their mindset about short and long term objectives and teaches new approaches to suit different styles of learning.

The time invested in good coaching helps team leaders to work more efficiently. In time, good leadership practices can significantly reduce the time spent on many daily management activities and, in some cases, render them unnecessary. Team leaders’ confidence grows as they discover their role as a leader – that their job is no longer simply

about managing metrics and keeping things ticking over.

Your people are the key

Effective quality management relies on the roles of its stakeholders to deliver results. Quality teams need to be independent and objective and team leaders are pivotal to the coaching aspect.

Quality management works closely with management information systems and workforce management to ensure correct scheduling and provision for coaching sessions as well as the integration of quality data with other performance information. By making the time to pick up where training left off and building on and developing core skills, quality coaching helps support every department in the contact centre.

By recognising agent potential and encouraging accountability, organisations can see the results of a motivated workforce that delivers on its customer objectives.

About the author

Taryn Jordaan is a quality specialist working for Merchants Consulting, South Africa. She has over nine years experience in the UK and South African Contact Centre industry which includes Outsourcing, Customer Experience Management, Quality Management, Knowledge Management and Development Training. Taryn is passionate about bringing a true understanding of

service back into the contact centre and empowering front-line staff through effective coaching to both understand and deliver on customer expectations. Taryn believes that an outcomes based quality programme is the driver of all sustainable service improvement within the Contact Centre and is focused on implementing quality programmes which “execute against the data they provide”.

Presence in the contact centre

The ability to get a call handled by the right person with the right skills is critical to a contact centre's success. Presence looks to route calls based on resource availability and is an integral part of effective collaboration for any sophisticated operation. Although it's not a new concept in the contact centre, the way it's done is.

New applications of presence are helping improve customer service through providing intelligent information about the caller and their requirements. It adds significant value by enhancing the call routing process and enabling better efficiency and responsiveness in any contact centre. As Dimension Data's Senior Unified Communications Consultant for Microsoft Solutions Jannes van Tonder explains, by extending access to the available set of resources outside of the contact centre and enabling adhoc location of specialist skills and expertise, call routing can better serve customer requirements and use available resources efficiently.

Using presence in the contact centre

Already in use in contact centres, presence management is available in a limited form when agents log into the telephony hub that forms the basis of the inbound call centre. Because it depends on agents being logged into proprietary Automated Call Distribution (ACD) systems as part of the underlying telephony system, agents have to be logged onto their phones. Calls are then routed to available agents based on the type of query by referencing a skills or resources registry.

Van Tonder says the problem with the traditional approach is the basic level of presence information focused on one interaction channel – the phone. The fact that it relies on fairly expensive proprietary systems also restricts access to valuable resources outside the contact centre.

“Today, presence can be more integrated into the contact



By **combining presence, status, expertise and task allocation information**, organisations can ensure **calls are resolved faster, repeat calls are reduced** and the customer experience continues to impress their customers.

centre based on the level of automation required and its level of integration with existing workforce and knowledge management systems. In providing the basis for skills-based routing, it optimises the time and effort required to manage a call and resolve a customer query. There are times when agents might need assistance with a call and this means finding the best available resource. That expertise might be in the contact centre already and advanced presence allows agents to locate them, even if they're not logged into the telephony system".

Enterprise-ready unified communications products like Microsoft® Lync™ Server 2010 (formerly known as Microsoft® Office Communication Server) integrate this advanced presence information with existing telephony systems. This means businesses can extend the pool of available specialist resources across the whole enterprise using the same presence infrastructure, without incurring the cost of having them dedicated to the call centre.

A new approach to presence

By adopting a more flexible approach to presence, organisations can use a software infrastructure like Lync Server 2010 to act as a presence platform across a range of applications. Its integration with normal desktop applications and other communication channels means it can be used across the whole enterprise and add to the available specialist pool of resources. Van Tonder points

out that it easily integrates with back end systems and comfortably works alongside existing telephony and contact centre applications.

Simple agent presence

The starting point in implementing a presence infrastructure like Lync 2010 in the contact centre is to enable access to Lync Server 2010. Agents and the rest of your workforce use Lync 2010 on their PCs to manage their presence status, i.e. 'available' or 'busy'.

It is quite simple to implement but does rely on your agents setting their presence status and identification of the right person to ensure proper call hand off or referral to a subject matter expert. The advantage for agents is being able to contact other available resources through instant messaging (IM) while customers are on the phone. It helps avoid transferring calls around the call centre and means agents can locate resources within the enterprise to help resolve calls indirectly.

Presence and telephony

The next level of sophistication integrates Lync 2010 with the contact centre telephony system to provide automated levels of presence. Through 'click-to-dial' services, it helps reduce the effort by contact centre agents in managing their presence and transferring calls in the centre.

This level of integration detects user status automatically when people are on a call or in a conference and routing decisions and access to resources is more accurately managed. Though it does depend on existing PABX systems, specialist middleware can integrate with traditional

PABXs while Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) PABXs can integrate directly with Lync Server 2010.

Presence and contact centre systems

The final level sees Lync Server 2010 integrated with all contact centre systems. It can provide encrypted and fully-logged transactions between internal users and external IM clients; real-time communication capabilities from within Microsoft® Word®, Microsoft® Excel® and other Microsoft® Office® applications; enterprise-grade unified communication solutions for single sign-in, data recovery and compliance with audit and regulatory requirements and more. In this scenario, it should ideally be deployed as part of a unified communications approach to streamline and optimise interoperability.

Real-time application creation means existing third-party applications can be made presence-aware, and integration with Lync Server 2010 extends and enhances communications-related functions, including transfer of calls between numbers and networks, full integration with the corporate telephony system and video communication capabilities. Public Internet Connectivity also gives customers the security of contacting a corporate identity in an otherwise anonymous internet.

How to make presence work for you

If you're considering using presence in your contact centre, van Tonder says it's important to work out how it will better

service the needs of your customers through access to the right skill set.

Find the right resource for the call

Agents might need more information, a decision or intervention by someone else within the business. These people might be outside the contact centre and spending time looking for the right expertise is not an option when someone is waiting on a call. Lync 2010 uses a normal client or web portal to search across the corporate directory and Microsoft®Outlook® contacts and locate people by role via specialist names, job roles or company information, referenced against their presence information.

Getting help with the call

Agents often need help while you're on a call and need to talk to a supervisor or lead agent who is not connected or logged into the queue. By knowing who is available to help, the agent can call or conference in a subject matter expert to assist and can even get real-time coaching and information through audio and IM monitoring by a supervisor.

Escalating a call

Agents may need to escalate a call to someone who is not logged into the call queue. That person might work in the contact centre or back office and an agent might not know who they are. It might be that a complex call needs to be escalated to a senior advisor who is equipped to handle the call. These people are often only rostered to handle queries for a part of their day, so

it's vital to know who to transfer a call to, their knowledge and whether they're available.

Getting specialist help

Agents may need to find an advisor with specialist information who might only be available remotely. An agent will typically take a call, complete part of the query and then pass it on to a specialist to complete. This means they need to find the person in the organisation and simple telephone lists can be out of date or not provide enough information. The caller might also want to talk to someone in their own area, which is why agents need to know the expertise, location, and availability of the particular advisor. In the case of a mobile advisor, location is a critical part of the presence information required.

Follow up calls

Agents often need to determine the progress or status of an ongoing customer query. Follow up calls can be costly and difficult to complete and be frustrating for customers who want to talk

to the original agent. Because these agents may not always be available, information about the status of follow up activities can greatly enhance call completion and customer satisfaction. By combining task allocation information (who is handling the task in the back office) with presence information, companies can reduce customer call backs and provide real time status updates.

Presence keeps customers happy

As the range and complexity of calls into contact centres continues to rise, companies are focused on cutting operating costs while retaining a loyal, profitable customer base. Presence can play an important role in optimising processes to deliver on these goals.

By combining presence, status, expertise and task allocation information, organisations can ensure calls are resolved faster, repeat calls are reduced and the customer experience continues to impress their customers.

About the author

Jannes van Tonder is a Senior Unified Communications Consultant for Microsoft Solutions, Dimension Data. He has been with Dimension Data for four years and his role includes proof of concept testing of various integration scenarios and the subsequent planning and building of Unified Communications solutions.

As one of only two Microsoft Certified Masters (Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007) in South Africa, Jannes specialises in Microsoft OCS and Exchange integration with Cisco Call Manager, Avaya, TANDBERG and Polycom. He is specifically focused on the financial services and the telecommunications sectors.

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