

The distributed contact center. The future is now

What will the contact center of the future look like? It certainly won't be the type of shiny, sterile environment showcased in science fiction movies, but it will take a different form and feature more modern technology. That technology, however, won't be as visible as it is today. In fact, neither will the staff or the spaces themselves. So, what are the key elements of a contact center that can handle the challenges of today while being prepared for tomorrow, and why is now the time to act?



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A brief history

Although the first recorded use of the term “call center” dates back around thirty-eight years, they existed long before. Initially, call centers acted as sales channels; outbound calls connecting to prospects to sell products.

The internet and the new communications channels it provided shifted how people engaged with organizations. Organizations in turn, then had to respond and deal with the complexities and challenges of delivering services in this new technologically-driven world.

The call center also evolved and gave way to the contact center, quickly becoming the interaction hub for businesses.

Technology has become central to the success of the contact center. Single and fragmented channels have become omni-channel, and complex telephone trees have been replaced by intelligent voice recognition.

Email has been largely replaced by messaging platforms, while processes that have been enhanced with automation and communication are now often handled by Bots.

The contact center services of today are vastly different when compared with early call centers. However, the physical environments they exist in have not kept pace.

Many contact centers have moved from in-house to offshore to near-shore, but the concept of a contact center environment is still broadly the same – people at desks in a large office space. While the consumer experience has changed beyond recognition, the employee experience has not.

Why now?

As businesses across sectors continue to fight disruption, shifting consumer behavior, a diverse workforce and new labor markets, a robust contact center is more important than ever.

As an example, a Citrix customer in the insurance sector recently claimed that if **15% of their contact center capacity went down for an hour, it would cost them nearly \$700,000.**

Before the global pandemic of 2020, there was already a need for contact centers to modernize the employee experience. Established issues, including employee attrition and a lack of engagement, plus over and understaffing, have persisted. Now, traditional contact center environments, large open-plan workspaces and commuting employees are no longer the norm. Change is required.

Finding efficient ways to store, manage and protect data were already key concerns and continue to be, with strict and ever-changing regulations, requiring enhanced visibility and control. For compliance and risk management, contact center operators must use scalable technology that enables effective work while adhering to retention and discovery policies. This includes including storing and accessing call recordings. In an already disrupted time for the industry, the damage from a fine could be catastrophic.

Today, businesses are evaluating and rapidly adapting to a new vision of the future of work, making now the ideal time to rethink the contact center. An environment built for the future but available today is currently shaped by several factors. There is a need to drive customer experience or adapt to challenging environments and future global crises. Contact centers also need to attract new customer service agents while retaining existing agents and reducing costs.

What's preventing progress?

Many believe there are human and technology-based blockers that will prevent a smooth transition to a hybrid contact center. Cost is a major concern, as is the technological upheaval that enabling flexible and remote work might bring. The impact on work culture is another significant factor for stakeholders.

Traditional success measurement and concerns about maintaining those levels have also come into question, raising concerns that prevent progress:

- Will shrinkage increase beyond the industry standard of **30-35%**?
- Can we meet **standard 80/20 service levels** (80% of calls answered within 20 seconds)?
- What's the impact on first contact resolution –will it drop below the **70 – 75% standard**?
- Will **abandon rates** increase?
- What is the impact on **cost per call**?

The 'if it ain't broke' mindset has been commonplace for contact centers, too, meaning legacy phone and CRM systems have aged without requiring significant upgrades.

The jump from traditional PBX infrastructure to cloud-based telephony, while of interest, has been either adopted incrementally or side-lined in favor of cost-cutting.

Network upgrades have also been seen as too disruptive to operations or, again, introduced in a staggered manner over long periods of time.

Fears that data might fall into the wrong hands is another concern when considering flexible and remote work, with many believing security can't be assured when employees operate outside of company walls and networks.





What's changed?

There has also been a slow change in the services that customers need from contact centers.

Millennials and Gen-Zs are digitally native; they prefer online communication and self-service. Often, they will use online services to carry out research and form opinions.

They get to know what they want from an organization and typically understand how to achieve it. The services they require will continue to move away from traditional complaints, sales and admin tasks. Instead, they will use all of a company's channels and look to the contact center for advice, hints, tips, education and support instead.

Even before COVID-19, this part of the contact center evolution was already in progress, with technology used to create and enable new services and communication channels.

When the pandemic took hold and the world responded, it created a greater need, urgency and expectation for those services.

It also meant that more people became digitally savvy and reliant, with many day-to-day activities moving online.

Retail, entertainment and restaurants all moved to promote their online services as their main channels.

To keep people safe and to follow government and health agency guidelines, many people (including customer service agents) could not commute to the office, contact centers closed, and employees had to work remotely.

Those with offshore contact centers were at the hands of local regulations in those regions, which put them out of step with their domestic-based customers.

This was a dramatic shift for contact centers where traditionally everybody was in the office. It meant that staff had to be set up to work from home very quickly, processes had to change, and reporting metrics became temporarily less important.

However, it also created an opportunity for contact centers to look at the creation or acceleration of new, differentiated services and new ways of working. A new vision of what the contact center could look like and a chance to redefine the employee experience.

Capita plc transitioned 18,000 customer service agents from office to remote working in just three days with Citrix.

As the UK's largest business process outsourcing and professional services company, Capita provides customer contact, support and management services to government and well-known companies. It operates contact centers in the UK, South Africa, Europe and India.

“Citrix has always played a primary role within our customer management function,” says IT Director Adrian Whitaker. Capita used Citrix to deliver a secure and stable desktop to customer service agents' thin-client terminals from the data center. Whitaker and his team were in the process of migrating the data center to Microsoft Azure when the COVID-19 lockdown was announced. The traditional model for contact center operations is office-based.

“When the pandemic arrived, we didn't have a homeworking solution in place for our advisers,”

Capita's IT platforms team included several highly experienced Citrix engineers, and they quickly recommended **Citrix Workspace** as the best solution to provide users with simple, secure access and consistency of experience.

“From the time of our decision to deploying a homeworking solution took just three days. We stood up an environment to support 18,000 users and commenced the transition with unique apps required for each client, all presented via Citrix Workspace.”

Capita's clients include many organizations with critical customer support requirements, such as utilities, animal welfare and mobile telecommunication providers. During a period when care for elderly or vulnerable customers was vital, Capita's rapid response was important and appreciated.

“We were able to deploy a homeworking solution for all our clients in a very short space of time, and that is testament to the team,” Whitaker says. “Clients have said, ‘thank you for doing what you've done, so quickly.’ We've delivered faster than some of our clients' own IT teams. Citrix Workspace has enabled us to do that.”

“Overnight, my team of 10 was tasked with implementing a solution for the 18,000 contact center advisers in three countries, plus Capita's corporate personnel, so we could move them seamlessly to a full homeworking solution that would mimic exactly what they had on-site.”

– Adrian Whitaker, IT Director



How can it be achieved?

Managing the scale and complexity of employees and infrastructure in a contact center environment is already a difficult task. Combining this with the need for a dynamic workforce capable of working beyond the office only adds to the challenge.

In addition to enabling employees to work remotely and be productive, contact centers must manage costs efficiently and deliver the experience securely, monitoring performance and maintaining control.

At a time when organizations across sectors are struggling to adapt to new models of work while ensuring business continuity and, in many cases, survival, significant change isn't welcome. However, those that adapt quickly and embrace technology to speed up their transformation are more likely to emerge stronger.

Deploying a unified IT solution that drives an employee-centered approach while ensuring high levels of security will provide much-needed streamlining and smarter working, but it doesn't have to be a costly or long process.

A platform and workspace fit for the future can be integrated with and enhance an existing IT estate, be it on-premises or across clouds. Doing so can quickly bring about benefits, including unlocking secure access to information for employees, boosting their engagement with technology, driving up response times and improving the customer experience.

To achieve this, organizations should think carefully about how they wish to operate while ensuring they can adapt to unforeseen changes.

The option, for example, to enable all employees to work from home or adopt a hybrid approach is common and made possible by a solid technology foundation, including cloud-based telephony.

At the same time as delivering a great employee and customer experience, a virtual contact center needs to stay in control and efficiently manage its resources.

These should be accessible from anywhere with an internet connection, equip people with the tools they

need to work effectively in the office or at home while allowing monitoring and control by IT teams. Such implementations can be applied to include existing networks and applications so that employees can access tools they are familiar with on any device, not just those provided by their employer. It is this point, however, that often raises concerns. How can data security be assured when end users can access potentially sensitive information on their personal devices? The key here is that they don't.

Securing data in a hybrid work world

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) allows employees to work on their own devices and is a popular approach that has proven effective at boosting employee satisfaction while delivering cost savings and productivity gains.

However, for contact centers, where protecting sensitive data is crucial, the idea of a user 'bringing' their own device into a secure environment (or accessing data outside of it) is problematic due to the lack of visibility and control available. However, Citrix technology allows organizations to provide employees with a 'presentation' of information on their device rather than storing it locally. They simply have a view of data via the device they choose, providing IT teams the reassurance that employees will not be able to take or download sensitive information.

In a dynamic working environment, this offers the best solution for fully managing any perceived risks associated with BYOD.

Teleperformance leverages digital workspace solutions to enable work from anywhere, opening new pools of talent that give business advantage

Teleperformance is headquartered in France and provides customer acquisition, customer care, technical support, debt collection, social media and other services around the world.

When COVID-19 hit, **Teleperformance** was challenged to quickly enable remote work to keep its operations – and the clients around the world who rely on them – up and running. The company rose to the occasion, successfully equipping more than 250,000 employees to work from home using **Citrix digital workspace solutions**, including **Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops** and **Citrix ADC™**.

But Teleperformance isn't just using Citrix to enable remote work. Instead, it's rethinking the way work gets done - and even who does it - leveraging technology to build more agility into its work model and workforce strategy.

“Work from anywhere is not a pandemic play,” Jose Guereque - Executive Vice President of Infrastructure and Chief Information Officer, Teleperformance

Nearshore said. “We will keep the hybrid scheme forever as our permanent model, and Citrix will be a key technology partner in driving it.”

With Citrix and Teleperformance Cloud Campus, Teleperformance can create a powerful digital workspace experience that enables its agents to securely access the resources and tools they need to collaborate and get work done in the most efficient and effective way possible across any channel, device or location, enabling the company to reach new talent pools in remote locales, which according to Guereque, has been game-changing.

In enabling remote work, Teleperformance isn't just solving a short-term problem created by the global pandemic but driving long-term value for both its business and the customers it serves.

“What we're seeing as a result of enabling work from anywhere is higher NPS scores from both our agents and our clients,” Lance Brown, Executive Vice President of Network, Telecommunications and Architecture, Teleperformance.

Teleperformance joins more than 400,000 companies around the world who are using Citrix solutions to create a modern digital workspace that gives their business an advantage.

“We used to be limited to big cities when we recruited, but today, we are recruiting people in really small towns and even other countries. So, we can put more people in the field to flexibly serve clients and accommodate the seasonal and cyclical demand inherent in our business.”

– Jose Guereque, Executive Vice President of Infrastructure and Chief Information Officer, Teleperformance Nearshore



What are the benefits?

While many have enabled remote working as a necessity in recent times, the ongoing benefits of such flexibility can't be ignored. It can cater for short term disruption and enable business continuity while also providing opportunities to redefine the customer service agent experience, their environment, and the way they work. This approach also provides the benefit of scale, sustainability, cost management and efficiency.

Cutting costs and carbon

By moving to a hybrid model of office-based workers and remote employees, real estate footprints could be reduced or re-developed. This approach can help overcome common challenges associated with maximum occupancy and scaling for additional capacity. Adding more workers no longer means a need for more office space.

It might also mean businesses can eliminate the ongoing cost of their business continuity sites in favor of enabling employees to work from home. Alternatively, they could make use of these locations as additional sites to enable social distancing or scale their operations.

Moving to cloud-based infrastructure instead of on-premises servers can also reduce ongoing costs and help to drive sustainability initiatives. Sustainability plays a significant role for businesses across sectors, with carbon emissions under scrutiny and organizations facing evaluation. Yet many organizations are not aware of the impact of IT on their Green house gas (GHG) emissions. Adopting a modern, intelligent workspace platform helps support a greener IT agenda:

1. Moving workloads to carbon-efficient or neutral hyper-scale data centers
2. Reducing commuting by enabling secure remote or flexible working
3. Enabling a choice of low energy end-user computing devices
4. Extending useful device lifecycle of end-user compute devices by moving workloads to the cloud

Supporting staff. Satisfying customers.

As consumers become more accustomed to high-quality service from the brands they choose to interact with, the work of the contact center becomes more complex and more valuable. A modern platform enables smaller, more transactional customer interactions to be managed by new technologies. This could include artificial intelligence (AI) and robotic process automation (RPA) as well as web-based self-service portals. Interactive voice response (IVR) and chatbots are also becoming popular, with the Global Chatbot Market Anticipated to Reach **\$9.4 Billion** by 2024.¹

However, with many customers opting to make use of self-service tools to complete basic tasks, their calls to a business will likely be to deal with more complex matters. In 2019, **18.5%** of inbound interactions to contact centers came via email².

However, **52%** of customers still prefer to speak to an agent in times of crisis, and **24%** still seek live contact for routine tasks³.

Let's not forget that the pandemic sadly provided many moments of crisis and not just in the traditional areas of healthcare or emergency services. Food and access to medication became crucial, and the list of organizations deemed to be critical or key workers was brought into sharp focus.

As we hopefully exit the pandemic with the rollout of the vaccines, we must not overlook the importance of a person on the end of a phone or a chat.

As a result, contact center agents must be well informed, skilled in communication and capable of quickly shifting gears to provide satisfaction or conflict resolution.

With **72%** of consumers expecting customer service agents to know who they are and have insight into their previous engagements⁴, an agent must have access to the information they need to do their job and be consistent in their work wherever they do it.

As the old adage goes, the customer is always right, hence why **88%** of contact center leaders believe customer experience is a key priority to address, in addition to **73%** who believe service improvement to be essential⁵.

By providing agents with a secure, seamless, yet powerful workspace that's available wherever they are, efficiency and productivity are enhanced. Service levels and first contact resolution can be more easily supported during times of disruption by scaling capacity even when employees cannot be in the office. This can be achieved during macro-level disruption or even when employees have personal challenges preventing them from traveling to work.

This approach provides mutual benefit to the business and its agents, providing both with the flexibility to adapt to changing needs. With a broader pool of staff available to work remotely, the contact center can quickly scale up its headcount to meet surges in demand without requiring additional physical space. Meanwhile, employees can work remotely and within the specific hours they have chosen that fit their lifestyles, providing a win-win for business and employee while benefiting customers.

Gallup reports that engaged employees are more likely to improve customer relationships, with a resulting **20%** increase in sales⁶.

In a contact center environment, where time and accuracy are essential, enabling users to quickly access the information they need is key, and frustration (at either end of the phone line) can quickly rise if too many applications are required to achieve positive outcomes.

In fact, the average employee must 'context switch' (jump from one app to another) around ten times per hour, which can increase the average handling time by up to an hour per day or **32 days per year**⁸.

31% of employees claim they lose their train of thought while navigating between apps, and their focus on the customer's query or problem is also at risk. With better-informed customer service agents able to operate efficiently from both a contact center location and remotely, key metrics including average handling times, first call resolution and shrinkage can be improved.



Slowing the churn

Meanwhile, employee engagement with modern technology and their understanding of its value to their work can also help to slow attrition rates.

Contact centers aren't traditionally seen as places where a career can be shaped for the agents, and they see a high turnover of staff as a result.

The changing role of the agent will see demand for more skilled workers that are fueled by information and operate beyond simply responding to calls. Yet, unlike traditional customer service agents, this talent may be harder to come by.

While **63%** of contact centers have expanded their training programs to equip staff with skills for more complex tasks¹⁰, ensuring the needs of such employees are met will be crucial.

Where once companies spent many hours training agents only for them to leave due to the role's lack of flexibility not fitting their lives, the provision of a more flexible, technology-driven workspace broadens the talent pool and reduces time spent replacing and onboarding staff.

52% of contact centers intend to deploy flexible working arrangements to meet such demands¹¹ and, with the option to move the role out of the contact center itself, those previously not interested in or unable to commit to a physical contact center role will find the option of more manageable hours or remote work locations more attractive.

This is especially true of those returning to work and those only available to work at specific or non-traditional times, as well as individuals who prefer not to be tied to a formal office location.

By offering contact center employees a consistent experience across devices as well as a flexible approach to their working environment, a better work-life balance can be achieved, built on the following pillars:



FLEXIBILITY

Work from anywhere, anytime on any device, allowing your employees the flexibility to fit work around their life and increase loyalty.



SIMPLICITY

Single sign-on to any device, to view and work with all apps and data, cloud-hosted and on-premises.



SUSTAINABILITY

Employees are increasingly looking for employers whose ethics and values match their own.



INTEGRATION

Seamless, familiar and user-friendly tools that enable employees to be more productive.

Taking all of this into account, contact centers can widen the talent pools available to them. It can help increase diversity by appealing to those currently restricted by the physical location, working hours, physical or mental disability, social mobility and a number of other factors.

By working with these new groups of talent, churn can be reduced while productivity and employee loyalty is increased. It can also help to drive up the level of service employees provide.

The ability to provide customers with the service they require while enabling flexible yet secure working for employees allows the business to quickly respond in a crisis.



This approach also enables the development of a more modern space for work that's prepared for the future.

Beyond simply permitting employees to work remotely, this technology will allow staff to be productive outside the office environment, with access to the tools and information they need to deliver the best possible service to customers.

And for the business, it means better managing costs while ensuring security concerns are met, performance is monitored, and control is maintained.

Today, businesses are evaluating and rapidly adapting to a new vision of the future of work, making now the ideal time to rethink the contact center.

An environment built for the future but available today is currently shaped by several factors. There is a need to drive customer experience or adapt to challenging environments and future global crises.

Contact centers also need to attract new staff demographics while retaining existing employees, reduce their costs and meet sustainability targets.

The contact center of the future, today

The contact center remains a crucial part of many organizations but must adapt in order to meet the demands of the modern world.

As the needs of customers and employees shift, technology advances and disruption continues, the key to efficient operations and ongoing success will be agility.

Citrix provides the flexibility for contact centers to adapt by way of a digital workspace experience that not only unlocks flexibility but improves outcomes.

From quicker onboarding of employees to new workstyles and enhanced service to customers, it cuts down on repetitive tasks and frees up hours in the week, engages employees and drives up productivity. In both times of crisis and business as usual, IT retains complete control and visibility while unlocking more time to spend on innovation and business-critical activities.

Achieving such agility today solves a range of immediate problems and enhances sustainability but also puts in place foundations for the future.

In addition to accelerating digital transformation initiatives, the contact center of the future prepares the business for the next major disruption, enabling a swifter response to challenges ahead and the ability to maintain service to customers without significant upheaval.

As the transformation develops, this agility within the contact center can be expanded to other areas of the business, providing a secure way to quickly enable many if not all employees to work from home and create a crucial competitive advantage over those less prepared.

The world is changing, and contact centers must be prepared to change with it in order to thrive in a modern, customer-centered business landscape.

By acting today, you can begin this transformation at your pace, preparing your business for what's next while immediately improving experiences for your employees and your customers.

Why Citrix?

When it comes to engaging and motivating your employees, creating a smarter working culture where each employee is as capable as the next, Citrix Workspace delivers a user-centric experience.

In a world where technology is rapidly advancing, Citrix Workspace enables you to offer employees an engaging experience and anywhere access through any device while driving productivity and reducing travel footprint. With secure access to information, your employees can work safely from any device and location while you better protect your sensitive data.

Exceed expectations and strengthen security with cloud workspace solutions from Citrix.



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1. Markets Insider 2. Contact Babel 3. McKinsey 4. Microsoft 5. Deloitte 6. Gallup 7. Citrix – “Planning for and investing in productivity across the UK” 8. Ring Central 9. Corporate Central US 10. Deloitte 11. Deloitte