

## 7 QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE TRANSITIONING TO A HOSTED SOLUTION



**PURPOSE: THIS PAPER WILL BE USEFUL TO IT MANAGERS FACED WITH UPGRADING THEIR CALL CENTER HARDWARE.**

## INTRODUCTION

Faced with an upgrade to your call center hardware? If your current system needs a hardware upgrade or lacks key features to maintain or improve your customer service levels, you may be excused for thinking, “Oh no, here we go again”. Call center upgrades involve:

- A great deal of your people time.
- Fears that the call center will be even more expensive to maintain and run after the upgrade.
- Concerns about how your call center will function during the upgrade.
- Expensive outlays of cash.
- Worries that at the end of the process, your call center will still not be what you want it to be.

But what if you could avoid this next upgrade and, on top of that, never have to upgrade the system again?

You can, by simply getting rid of the hardware and replacing it with a hosted call center in the cloud.

Hosted call centers offer significant benefits. Compared to their on-premises hardware solutions, they...

- Provide a support team who offloads this function from your own people – no more having to be on call or standby!
- The vendor’s support team troubleshoots the call center, repairs it and maintains it. Your own people can finally get on with that long list of new feature requests and forget about the call center.

- Are, according to a Yankee Group analysis, one third less expensive to operate and maintain.
- Provide flexible capacity handling - you always have just the capacity you need regardless of peak and low-load variances.
- Provide one fixed-price fee every month, regardless of your usage or levels of support needed.
- Report on all of the above and more, like useful and insightful operator statistics.
- Offer advanced customer service options to improve your levels of service.

If you are thinking about replacing your existing system with a hosted solution, you are probably asking yourself one or more of the following questions.

## QUESTION 1: WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE TRANSITION?

If we switch from on-premise hardware to a hosted solution, what happens to our call center while we’re doing so?

The switchover to a hosted system is painless. The hosted system provider assigns a team to your account. They interview your people and precisely specify the set of features and capacities you need in your new system. They set the system up so that it’s all ready to run. They test it and ensure it’s working well. Then your Telco switches the phone lines over from the old one to the new one and your hosted call center takes over. You scrap the old system at your convenience.



## QUESTION 2: WHAT ABOUT SUPPORT?

Reputable hosted call center solutions usually come with a built-in support team provided by the vendor. Many of the vendors offer packages designed to suit your needs – for example, some vendors will provide 24/7, 365 day support services if you need them.

In other words, your hosted call center monthly cost includes all the support you need: training and help for your agents, a superb technical team to troubleshoot any problems and keep your solution functioning at optimum levels.

When negotiating your contract with a hosted call center provider, here are some of the questions you should ask to ensure that you get the level of support your organization needs:

- What terms does the standard or basic support contract provide? When is support available, when is it not available?
- What is your average response time to queries?
- What procedure do you use to escalate problems which have not been solved within the accepted limits?
- Does the team stay with me for life, or will I have to reeducate people each time the team changes?
- What are the costs involved?
- What uptime and service level is guaranteed and what happens if you don't live up to it?
- What about training my people? Who does it and where does it occur? And how often do you provide this training – will all of my agents have to attend a single course?
- What about retraining my people – do you do this and if so, is there a cost?

If the vendor doesn't offer a fixed - monthly price regardless of how much or little support you actually use in a month, find another vendor!

## QUESTION 3: WHO DOES THE SWITCHOVER?

Do my people get involved in the switchover? Your own people will be responsible for decommissioning the old system, but in general terms, they will have little to do with setting up and then operating the new hosted call center. Because the hardware moves from your premises to the cloud, your own team relegates all support, maintenance and repairs to the hosted solution's vendor.

## QUESTION 4: WHAT HAPPENS WITH FUTURE UPGRADES OR MAINTENANCE RELEASES?

The capacity of a hosted call center can be adjusted at any time, at the moment you need it increased or decreased. So with a hosted solution, you never need to worry about capacity, even if hit suddenly with a new, higher, peak load. Updates and new features are provided to you automatically by the hosted solution vendor.

## QUESTION 5: WILL I STILL NEED TO WORRY ABOUT A FAIL-SAFE OR REDUNDANT SYSTEM?

With on-premise solutions, your Call Center Director has probably spoken to you about the need to setup and operate a second system to be held permanently in hot standby mode in case the main system fails. You probably budget some of your people time to maintain this system every month, and you would be excused for flinching each time you think of how much money your organization spends on it without ever using it. Just in case...





Hosted solutions provide built-in redundancy and fail-safe operation. Your whole building could be swept away in a tsunami and provided your agents can find a phone somewhere, your call center will keep on handling customers. So there's less need to worry.

And the best part about this aspect is that you get this peace of mind for free. Good hosted call center vendors provide this redundancy as a part of their regular service and it's usually included in your monthly fixed-price fee.

#### **QUESTION 6: WILL I STILL NEED TO RESPOND TO REQUESTS FROM THE END-USERS TO DO SOMETHING?**

With an on-premise call center, the team using it is not able to change its behavior in any way without getting either your team or the vendor involved. Even for relatively simple things like moving an agent from one location to another, the change is complex enough and usually requires specific technical skills, rendering it impossible for the average agent or call center manager to do.

But with hosted systems, the changes can be achieved with any of the following methods:

- Your hosted call center vendor can do them for you quickly and easily. And usually the costs of these changes are included in the fixed monthly fee because they do not take much time to implement.
- Your own end-users (agents or call center management) can make these changes directly via the browser-based central command console. They will have been trained by the hosted solution vendor to make these changes, and to do many more such as creating new, customized reports, or requesting more or less capacity.

So the answer to this question is “no”. Your department will not receive any requests from the call center users or management.

#### **QUESTION 7: WILL THIS IMPROVE OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE LEVEL?**

The answer to this one is unequivocally yes! Better features aimed precisely at improving customer service levels are available in most hosted solutions. For example, hosted call centers offer:

- Better assignment and usage of agents. Work from anywhere, at any time. At last you can reduce the overtime bill.
- Tracking, recording, and reporting of all customer care touch points because you can set-up automated workflow queues and handling of calls based on each one's specific needs. Your agents handle more calls, more effectively.
- Monitoring of all agents and calls if desired.
- Better management and handling of crisis situations.
- The custom reporting feature allows the system's users to setup their own reports. Call center management can thus create reports to reveal the actual levels of service being provided by their agents and the system as a whole. So yes, not only will service levels be improved, but you'll have the reports to prove it.

