

Driving Customer Satisfaction Up While Driving Support Costs Down with Cloud-based Unified Communications

Executive Summary

In corporate environments where competition is fierce and companies struggle to gain market share, anything to differentiate from the rest has to be considered. But when margins are already slim and prices cannot be cut, and incremental product advances are quickly matched by others in the industry, the most obvious place to look to gain a competitive advantage is in the customer satisfaction area. Within that framework, there are two distinct improvements that can be made: First, improving customer satisfaction drives additional sales (at a lower cost of sale), and second, using advanced Cloud-UC technology within that environment drives down bottom-line costs while preserving that customer satisfaction advantage. When no additional improvements can be made in the product itself, added value has to be delivered through being more responsive and more accessible to customers.

This heightened level of customer satisfaction can be delivered by enhancing the existing communications system to allow for a broader scope of interaction methods, faster response time, and easier access to agents. The boost in customer satisfaction ultimately leads to more sales and increased revenue. On the other end of the balance sheet, the elusive goal of giving more and spending less can be achieved with a cloud-based unified communications system.

The range of services that cloud-based unified communications services has to offer differs from more traditional hosted and on-premise unified communications solutions. Agility is the one aspect that really defines cloud UC, as compared to on-premise, or standard hosted and managed solutions that also provide solutions that go beyond the onsite resources. Hosted and managed services are fixed, contracted solutions which do offer the advantage of reduced capital expense (just like cloud-UC), but typically offer a more fixed basket of services that may not always suit what is needed. With a cloud-based unified communications service, in addition to the broad range of communications options, there is the option of scaling services up or down as per real-time demand and a constantly changing customer dynamic.

Cloud-based Unified Communications provides solutions primarily for small and medium business enterprises and does not need any software or hardware to be installed on the premises. The communication services offered combine unlimited digital voice, collaboration, messaging, and call center services through one single administrative and user interface. The cloud-based call center solutions enable enterprises to provide the highest level of sales and service support to customers, without the need of procuring hardware and software from multiple vendors, often at a very high cost. And by delivering multiple channels of customer interaction, including voice, IM, SMS, fax, VoiceMail and email, costly phone time can be kept to a minimum.

Cloud-based Unified Communications drives the costs of efficient support operations down, while at the same time optimizing customer satisfaction, through an efficient, user-friendly and prompt infrastructure that offers quick, seamless and networked performance at all times. Most importantly, by virtualizing the call center infrastructure, greater flexibility can be achieved to allow the company to respond quickly to changing requirements.

Cloud-based Unified Communications Overview

Cloud-based UC brings together the best of the best. The advantage of the cloud (low cost, extreme scalability, and high-end features and infrastructure) are combined with the advantage of unified communications (greater availability for customers, improved customer satisfaction, better use of call center staff), with the end result reflecting tangibly on the bottom line.

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Cloud-UC is a combination of software, data access and storage devices, and communications infrastructure that has been abstracted so that a non-technical end user can easily take full advantage of the service. On the customer side, the technology components are completely hidden—it is seen simply as better access. Neither the company providing it, nor the customer taking advantage of it, need to touch any of the physical infrastructure, or even know where it is located. This level of abstraction leads to a much higher level of efficiency and ease of use, and most importantly, from the customer's point of view—leads to easier communication.

The cloud itself has achieved a state of maturity and market acceptance, and Cloud-UC is the next step and a natural by-product of this evolution, and the ever increasing nature of distributed businesses and customer bases.

Users do not need to have any expertise or control over the technology infrastructure that exists in the 'cloud', the services of which are scalable and combine a host of resources. As a cloud service, Cloud-UC is a result of the increasing demand for instant connectivity and visibility, from any point and any location. Customers no longer depend solely on the telephone—they want the flexibility to connect with customers, suppliers, partners and co-workers via email, IM, SMS, fax, or mobile message; they want the flexibility of a full-featured web meeting solution with complete collaborative capability, and they want the added value of features like call recording and one-touch conferencing. Fortunately for the company, providing these added options doesn't come with added cost, and in fact, it drives down cost because it minimizes the usage of the most expensive aspects of the call center, voice calls, while providing other less costly and more effective alternatives. Cloud-based UC platforms provide the agility and flexibility that on-premise and managed services do not have as users can access and take their communications wherever they go. The additional advantage is that companies can now scale their deployments up or down as needed, including adding new features or functions.

The emergence of cloud-based unified communications has made a significant difference in how companies deploy IP-based communications solutions. The use of cloud services eliminates the capital expenditure incurred to set up an in-house communications platform, together with the various complex processes involved in offering a seamless, support service to customers. Companies are afforded an opportunity to drastically cut costs while retaining the useful features necessary to provide support, increase responsiveness, and improve customer satisfaction. Though security still remains a delicate issue as critical data is stored on offsite servers managed by a third-party provider, unified communications on a cloud-based platform is a field where research and development is continuing, where the uncertain economy has put the brakes on many other projects.

Customer Satisfaction Infrastructures Today

Customer satisfaction stands at an important crossroads today. The old model of the labor-intensive, telephone-centered call center still exists, although it represents a major cost center. Significant advancements have been made in the technology, allowing for integration with back-end systems, automatic screen pops, and escalation for priority. Further innovations are driven by VoIP, which allows for the inexpensive transfer of calls to offshore call centers. These systems however, are designed mainly for the convenience of the call center, and not for the convenience or satisfaction of the customer. To gain a true advantage, a company needs to address both levels of convenience. The most effective way to achieve this is by leveraging the advantages of a cloud-based UC system, which when combined with other innovations, allows the call center to better serve customers, while still driving down costs and making the customer satisfaction center more efficient.

Cloud-based UC services for customer satisfaction delivers these benefits from a virtualized platform environment. A company does not need to purchase servers, software, network equipment or data-center space for its support services, but buys these resources as a fully-outsourced service. This totally transforms the way the IT department functions in any company, as the

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cloud-based infrastructure brings in an entirely innovative approach through enhanced productivity, online collaboration, seamless support services and cutting-edge solutions. With cloud-UC solutions, a new world of possibilities has emerged that is not hampered by the old constraints and the power of communications without boundaries is well within your reach.

Communication has reached an incredible new level; it is now a streamlined, continuous process that can be delivered through PC, telephone and browser and enhances productivity and customer satisfaction in a completely flexible and reliable way. People across the organization can now interact, share experience and expertise, find information they need and gain valuable insight into business operations.

A tier-3 data center is often the base of the 'cloud' infrastructure that has many tier-4 features, brought together from innumerable virtual machines. Telephony services delivered from a cloud-based platform enables the service providers to have direct access to their customers and ensures the very best in support services.

Cloud-UC Customer Satisfaction Benefits

Whatever the business may be, whether retail, insurance, finance or professional services, the cloud-based UC brings an unmatched gamut of communication features that work in seamless integration. These enhance productivity, information flow and improve responsiveness between employees, different offices and clients. Cloud-UC customer satisfaction is the most cost-effective solution as each solution can be activated for a single user or a group or even the entire company staff regardless of location. The infrastructure is totally outsourced, so that all support services, equipment and other expenditure is eliminated and overall operational costs are substantially reduced. The guarantee of continual service offers updates for life and the ongoing support is 24/7, right round the year.

Overview of In-House Support Center Based on Cloud-UC

In most companies, employees interact with one another and with associates and clients by means of a combination of mobile phones, email, fax and conventional landline telephones. Instant messaging and video conferencing are also utilized as communication tools and each of these channels has always operated independently of the others. As a result, instead of achieving the desired goal of streamlined communications, the end result is a user that is weighted down with multiple devices, interfaces and disconnected messages that are mutually inaccessible.

The Cloud-UC concept has one striking difference with these modes of communication; this separation and disconnected operation is now integrated into one unified whole. Each platform can exchange information with each other, thereby enabling simplified and coordinated internal communications. This makes for enhanced business operations with seamless interaction between individuals who can be easily located and contacted at any time and at any place. The ease and streamlined flow of communication provides customers with a more effective and responsive support system, which ultimately makes all the difference in a highly competitive marketplace.

It is now a world where an employee has one handheld device that doubles up as a PDA, video device, email inbox, a mobile phone and an IM platform with all modes interconnected with each other and others in the company. Each mode whether email, phone, fax or IM works in tandem with the rest, providing the user with much more flexibility, agility and control over the communications process.

Sales figures are critical to the success and growth of any organization and employees are the ones responsible for the healthy bottom-line. It is essential that all those who are part of the company work efficiently as otherwise it has a negative effect on company operations. Just a little slackening in any part of the organization is enough to make a dent in the credibility of the firm

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or lead to customer dissatisfaction. It could be a call that was not attended, a delayed meeting or not being able to get in touch with someone; all these small events add up to a much bigger total that affects productivity.

Cloud-UC prevents this kind of lacunae and shortfall in productivity by enabling each person in the organization to be in touch with every other person and all the clients and with other associates at any point of time and at any location. Cloud-UC enhances productivity, efficiency and responsiveness by providing a constant flow of communication, information and interconnectivity.

Higher Customer Satisfaction

Retention of the client base is crucial in today's competitive world, where it may be less difficult to acquire a customer, but keeping him happy and satisfied is another matter altogether. This is especially true with of "recurring revenue" service oriented businesses, which depend on keeping a customer happy month after month. It costs approximately 4 times more to acquire a new customer than it is to retain and existing one. So it makes sense to provide the kind of support that would make the clients totally delighted and prevent customer churn, which would ensure the success of any business.

Customer satisfaction has, in today's environment, taken on outsized importance, and as Forrester Research notes, "No longer can a company lay claim to a market segment and have free reign over the customers in that area." Customers, as well as prospective customers, have more access to information, and this has changed the very nature of commerce, and of the customer satisfaction role.

Within that global marketplace, differentiation becomes more difficult, and improved customer satisfaction is one area that can make a difference. Yet despite this opportunity, too often customer satisfaction is relegated to a subsidiary role, when compared to sales in any company. The customer support group is looked upon almost as an afterthought and generally regarded with scant respect. They are left to fend for themselves and if by chance, a customer shows appreciation, it is seen as a given, something that is to be expected anyway. Customer satisfaction can however turn into customer fury and it is then that the management wonders what went wrong. It is only with the creation of a customer-centric corporate culture, backed by a cloud-UC environment that facilitates multiple communications channels and improved access, that a company can overcome these challenges.

Multiple communications channels

Customer satisfaction can zoom into the present century with the aid of cloud-UC solutions that equip all customer-facing employees with multiple communication tools that help to bring down customer frustration and increase satisfaction. In most cases, the need to wait in a phone queue or the frequent dispatch to "voicemail limbo" is eliminated.

There is 24/7 support, with prompt response and remedial action taken immediately. In the cloud-UC platform, there are many channels of communication for the service department and complaints can be distributed and managed efficiently by them. With the integration of IM, faxes, email and SMS, many more support interactions can be handled by each person, than could be done with a conventional telephone system. Indeed, instant messaging enable support agents to cope with more than 10 concurrent interactions simultaneously. Not only are costs reduced, but customer satisfaction will reach levels no ordinary telephone system could ever achieve.

More responsive customer satisfaction

It is crucial to drive customer satisfaction. That is what ultimately ensures the success of any business enterprise, and the most

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important aspect to driving customer satisfaction is responsiveness. The organization that is quick to respond to an inquiry or solve a customer's problem, maintains the highest level of customer satisfaction. The one that is not quick, generally doesn't get a second chance. It is as simple as that.

There are two aspects that encourage responsiveness: one is ease and simplicity of communication between employees, the customer and the management; and two, responding to the communication in the most suitable manner regardless of whatever location or situation. The first imperative mandates that the communications infrastructure must be widespread and interlinked and cover all the diverse channels of communication. The second aspect means that the communications system must not just be interconnected, but also intelligent and able to route the specific message and move from one form to another until it reaches the concerned individual or individuals in real time. Access to information becomes crucial as that could be needed to respond properly to a prospect.

Cloud-UC ensures this kind of seamless connectivity between employees, management and the customer, thereby resulting in increased customer satisfaction through thorough preparation and expedient response.

Lower Support Costs

The cloud-based unified communications platform integrates all the communications services together and also unifies them by interconnecting all of them, so that there is no more worry about this aspect of the operations.

All the diverse communications services work seamlessly in concert, adapting and evolving to your needs. The interconnectivity of the diverse kinds of communication makes for far greater efficiency, speed and responsiveness. It reduces costs and enhances both customer satisfaction and prospect conversion.

Fewer Phone Calls

It costs more to take a phone call from a customer than it does to answer an email or have an IM chat. Naturally, a business wants to have a full-featured call center and be available for those who prefer phone contact, but the fact is, a lot of customer interactions can be addressed easily through less costly means. Routine questions can be answered by email or IM, leaving the agents on duty free to tackle more challenging issues.

IM is more efficient than phone calls and therefore less costly in resources. Cloud-based UC creates multiple channels for customer interaction, so accessibility is enhanced, costs are reduced, and customers are satisfied because their wait time is decreased. Instant Messaging (IM) is one of the most efficient means and thus can be the primary method of contact for Cloud-UC enabled support centers. When used properly, support agents can handle multiple customer interactions in parallel, many times up to 10 interactions at once, greatly increasing agent productivity while reducing customer wait time. Indeed, when IM is deployed as the primary means of contacting support, agent resources are reduced for a given number of customers.

Extended Support Hours

When utilizing a cloud-UC platform for customer satisfaction, the ability to dramatically increase agent productivity through the use of IM has other benefits as well, most notably, it gives the company the option of reducing support costs, or increasing support hours. Increasing support hours might mean going from a business hour only support model to a 24/7 support model, for the same cost! This means turning an internal cost reduction into a competitive weapon! With Cloud-UC, you are in charge of your customer satisfaction strategy.

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Less calls, lower costs -> extended hours! -> happier customers

Will a customer satisfaction environment that has fewer calls as its goal result in happier customers? Absolutely, if it's done right. Fewer calls doesn't mean less service, if other options are available. By reducing the overall number of phone interactions, increasing interactions through other channels, and using the savings to offer extended hours, the customer will be better served, happier, and more likely to be a repeat customer.

Virtual agents around the world

The cloud-based virtual call center can provide inbound and outbound calls at costs much lower than premise-based infrastructure. There is no need for hardware or software and the center can be deployed anywhere in the world to have local agents, thereby cutting costs substantially. The call center solution has a diverse number of advanced features and these enhance the customer call experience and increase agent productivity. The customer is attended to promptly 24/7, with no waiting, no confusion or lackadaisical responses, which leads to optimum customer satisfaction.

The cloud-UC platform enables better call center performance from any location anywhere in the world, with the on-demand delivery model. There is no problem with multiple locations, as there is no need to set up on-premise infrastructure in any form. The virtual call center can be installed and working in just a few minutes and can be scaled according to user demand. The cloud-based call center solution is ideal for customer satisfaction, product support and sales promotions and campaigns.

PanTerra Networks: Futureproof Cloud-based Unified Communications

One of the key objectives of any good company is to offer the best possible service to their existing customers. This is really the crucial factor that differentiates a good company from an average one. The cloud-UC platform of PanTerra provides excellent value to the end-user by driving higher levels of customer satisfaction, lower Total Cost of Ownership (TCO), enhanced productivity and service flexibility that is available on demand and at any time. PanTerra's browser-based administration makes the installation, provision and support of the service simple, easy and very user-friendly. The remarkable synergy between state-of-the-art technology and industry partnerships enables PanTerra to provide the best cloud-based unified communication services to small and medium-sized enterprises.

The cloud-based platform is future-proof as it provides the right system that can deliver value-added services that may be incorporated in the future. The platform also can be integrated with other third-party applications and solutions such as Microsoft Outlook and Salesforce.com. There is a single contact point, with support, administration and communication all being provided through this one central point. This makes it easier and simpler to access all communication needs.

About PanTerra Networks

PanTerra Networks, Inc. delivers the most comprehensive cloud-based unified communications service through its Streams solution. Streams makes companies more competitive by making them more responsive and includes all services and unlimited usage for unified business communications including voice, unified messaging, fax, video, instant messaging, email and calendaring, file transfer, mobile text messaging and presence integrated into its Unified Command Center (UCC). Streams also includes group communications including desk sharing, web conferencing, IM conferencing, and audio conferencing. Streams also integrates with Outlook and Salesforce as well as other commonly used CRMs through its included application programmers interface (API) enabling communication-enabled business process (CEBP) environments to flourish.

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Being fully cloud-based, Streams stores all your communications in the cloud, allowing you to access them with just an Internet connection and browser. The company is privately held and is headquartered in Santa Clara, California, with Research and Development based in Hyderabad, India.

For more information, please visit <http://www.panterranetworks.com> or call us at +1 408.702.2200. Or email us at info@panterranetworks.com.

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