

Modernizing to cloud-based operations gives contact centers the opportunity to leverage a wealth of AI capabilities to scale operations, augment agents, and improve the customer experience.

Using AI and Cloud to Empower Agents: The Rise of the Modern Contact Center

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Questions posed by: Uniphore

Answers by: Hayley Sutherland, Research Manager, Conversational AI and Knowledge Discovery

Q. How do you see the evolution of the contact center, contact center as a service (CCaaS), and conversational artificial intelligence (AI)?

A. We're seeing many businesses migrating their contact center operations to the cloud, particularly in the face of a global pandemic that has greatly increased remote, distributed work and commerce. As organizations shift legacy environments to the cloud, IDC has been watching the rise of CCaaS offerings in the market. These solutions are increasingly being infused with AI capabilities that can provide significant business advantage, such as:

- » Conversational AI including text- and voice-based virtual assistants to help answer customer questions, scale operations, and triage inbound requests
- » Intelligent routing capabilities to help determine where (i.e., on which channel), how, and by whom a customer issue or question should be resolved
- » Conversational intelligence tools to analyze customer conversations, whether they take place with a human or AI, to provide real-time and post-conversation insights
- » Knowledge discovery layers that leverage technologies such as AI, knowledge graphs, and search to analyze various types of information, empowering virtual and human agents with the knowledge they need to achieve resolution and provide a great customer experience
- » Agent assistance and coaching tools to take these insights and deliver them within the flow of work as real-time guidance and recommendations
- » Reporting capabilities that examine agent behaviors and customer experiences on a broader level to identify coaching opportunities and best practices
- » Automation capabilities to complete rote post-call tasks such as logging call disposition or other follow-up

These kinds of capabilities are helping contact centers modernize their operations in ways that impact a variety of areas, including real-time and long-term agent coaching, efficiency and productivity, issue resolution, customer satisfaction, and

employee satisfaction. Some capabilities, such as conversational intelligence, can even impact other areas of the customer journey, such as identifying opportunities for cross-sell and upsell.

AI-driven capabilities are a key piece of modernizing and future proofing the contact center and should not be left out of a CCaaS migration effort. While some organizations are leveraging conversational AI to provide better self-service for customers on digital channels, others are using AI to enhance the capabilities of their human call center agents. For example, IDC predicts that by 2023, over 30% of organizations will have added AI capabilities to their inbound call handling environments, augmenting these areas with AI-powered insights rather than simply trying to increase call deflection. Leading businesses are already well on their way to adopting these kinds of capabilities, so it's important to not wait until after a contact center cloud migration to start looking at incorporating them.

In addition to enhancing features such as conversational AI, conversational intelligence, and intelligent routing, AI is helping transform the modern contact center with AI-powered knowledge discovery. In the past few years, we've seen that simply making information accessible through a search interface is not enough; workers need knowledge discovery tools that can distill customer data points into actionable, relevant insights and recommendations and deliver them proactively and seamlessly within the flow of work.

To achieve greater visibility into and understanding of customer data, in 2020, nearly half (47.5%) of respondents to an IDC survey said they were undertaking AI-powered knowledge discovery projects in at least one business area. IDC is also seeing more AI-powered knowledge layers built directly into business solutions such as CCaaS offerings. Embedded in these platforms, knowledge discovery capabilities can provide key insights for human agents.

These knowledge layers and other AI services are increasingly cloud based and being embedded in CCaaS solutions to provide new and enhanced capabilities that can help improve time to resolution, customer satisfaction, and even agent satisfaction. IDC sees the future contact center, and other areas of a modern business, as always connected and always learning, leveraging AI-powered insights and recommendations to empower its employees and provide its customers with the best possible experience.

Q. Why are contact centers migrating to the cloud and implementing conversational AI capabilities at the same time?

A. Updating legacy technology is an opportunity to go beyond simply replacing the status quo. While a contact center cloud migration can seem urgent, it's important to take time to prepare, avoid just "checking the box," and view it as a chance not just to update but also to upgrade. The conversational AI and cloud aspects are both critical for modernization and future proofing, but there are equally important requirements related to security, scalability, and efficiency, and organizations can see increased improvements in all these areas by combining the two initiatives. The following are capabilities gained by updating and upgrading legacy systems:

- » **Supporting remote, distributed work.** Many on-premises systems were not designed to handle remote, distributed environments, which have become the norm today, and many of those legacy systems are reaching end of life. On the other hand, cloud-based solutions are a natural fit for this type of business environment. Meanwhile, AI-powered features such as real-time knowledge discovery, agent monitoring, and agent assist can help speed onboarding and ensure empowered, knowledgeable employees — regardless of where they are working.

- » **Scalable, 24 x 7 operations.** SaaS systems can be more flexible, scaled up and down to meet demand, or more easily expanded into new regions or communication channels. These aspects are important on their own, but especially in times of economic uncertainty. Conversational AI such as text- or voice-based virtual agents can also help organizations flexibly offer 24 x 7 self-service to customers, with demand-based scalability helping ensure they pay for only what they need and use.
- » **Improved security and reliability.** In general, business readiness for cloud-based solutions has improved across a variety of industries as organizations realize that modern cloud solutions can be more secure and disruption proof than some on-premises environments. In late 2021, U.S. respondents to an IDC survey indicated that they were allocating an average of over 90% of their conversational AI spend to public or private cloud offerings (81% public cloud, 10% private cloud). AI-based features such as biometric authentication can also help reduce fraud and improve call security.

By combining a contact center cloud migration with the adoption of conversational AI technologies, organizations can take advantage of the cutting-edge capabilities embedded in modern CCaaS platforms while helping ensure a secure and always-on contact center environment that can be accessed anytime, anywhere by employees and customers.

Q. What are the benefits of modern AI-based capabilities for contact centers?

A. Just to zoom in on the conversational AI aspect for a moment — the potential benefits for the contact center include improvements to efficiency, resolution rates, time to resolution, and customer satisfaction. On a broader scale, when these systems are implemented properly, they can kick-start a flywheel of positive employee and customer experience that can result in a significant competitive advantage for a business or a brand. However, it can be easy for businesses to forget that the customer experience has two sides; when a human agent is involved, a good customer experience is typically also a good employee experience. Just as repeated positive customer experiences can build into a positive perception of the brand, repeated positive employee experiences can help reduce the problem of agent churn.

Challenges in quickly finding the right answer or solution can be a barrier to achieving a good experience on both sides. Workers need to access an average of at least 5 different systems to find job-critical information, and they waste an average of 4.6 hours a week manually combining disparate data points to arrive at a complete answer or solution. In a customer support scenario, time lost to these kinds of issues means frustrated customers and unhappy agents. However, AI-based capabilities such as knowledge discovery, agent assist, conversational intelligence, and post-call task automation can help empower employees with key knowledge in the right moment while reducing rote manual tasks. Real-time agent coaching and assistance was listed as one of the top 3 capabilities businesses find most beneficial in a conversational AI platform.

By strategically leveraging AI, businesses can free their human agents to shine where they do best — solving complex problems and providing empathetic responses that help customers feel heard and understood.

Q. What steps can organizations take to successfully implement conversational AI while moving to the cloud?

A. IDC offers the following recommendations to organizations that are considering contact center cloud migrations and want to take advantage of game-changing AI capabilities:

- » Review documentation, features, and usage for your current contact center environment. What features and capabilities are critical to retain? What is missing or not working?
- » View this as an opportunity to upgrade to advanced capabilities, such as intelligent routing, conversational intelligence, agent assist, knowledge discovery, agent monitoring, and biometric identification. Review what is on offer and what has the potential to quickly show ROI and business value, including improving both the employee experience and the customer experience.
- » Determine whether your business environment requires a public cloud or a private cloud. Public cloud options may be more economical, but some businesses may need to invest in a private cloud. At the same time, investigate what compliance/certifications potential CCaaS vendors provide.
- » Investigate conversational AI-based capabilities offered by modern CCaaS platforms. Leverage internal end users and external experts to understand what new features might be most beneficial to employees and customers while also exploring the art of the possible.
- » Determine what knowledge is most important for your agents to provide a great customer experience. Where does that data sit, what format is the data in, and how will the data be incorporated into any knowledge discovery, virtual agent, or agent assist features the CCaaS platform might have?
- » Consider how other systems, such as CRM, will be integrated to ensure you are getting the most value out of your chosen CCaaS solution.

Further, when measuring the success of these systems, think beyond simple monetary ROI. Some capabilities can help cut costs and others can help increase existing revenue streams or create new revenue streams, but aspects such as better resolution rates, improved customer satisfaction, increased NPS, and even greater employee satisfaction can help determine how well a new contact center technology is working. When conversational AI capabilities and contact center cloud migrations are implemented correctly and at the same time, they can go beyond incremental improvements to power true business transformation.

About the Analyst



Hayley Sutherland, Research Manager, Conversational AI and Intelligent Knowledge Discovery

Hayley Sutherland is a Research Manager for Conversational AI and Intelligent Knowledge Discovery within IDC's Software market research and advisory group. Her core research coverage includes conversational AI and search, with a focus in AI software development tools and techniques for chatbots and digital assistants, speech AI and text AI, machine translation, embedded knowledge graph creation, intelligent knowledge discovery, and affective computing (also known as emotion AI).

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At Uniphore, we believe companies that best understand and take action on those conversations will win. We have built the most comprehensive and powerful platform that combines conversational AI, computer vision, emotion and tonal analysis, workflow automation, and RPA (Robotic Process Automation) with a business-user-friendly UX in a single integrated platform to transform and democratize customer experiences across industries.

To chat with a solution expert, please reach out to us <https://www.uniphore.com/contact/>.



IDC Research, Inc.
140 Kendrick Street
Building B
Needham, MA 02494, USA
T 508.872.8200
F 508.935.4015
Twitter @IDC
idc-insights-community.com
www.idc.com

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