How-To Guide: Top Ways to Optimize Your Contact Center Investment

The Dos and Don'ts for Contact Center Transformation

Improving the customer experience to strengthen loyalty is a top goal for global brands[1]. And because contact centers are typically a once-in-a-decade investment, the stakes are high. Picking the right platform and the right partner is proven to:

- Improve customer satisfaction
- Lower cost per call
- Increase first contact resolution[2]

Make the wrong choice, and you risk losing customers and brand equity. This paper outlines what to do (and not do) when transforming your contact center.

The Multichannel Customer Is Calling… Chatting, Conferencing, and Blogging

Customer care is in the midst of a major transition. For 45 percent of customers, online methods such as web, email, and user forums are now their first choice for customer service[3]. Forrester Consulting reports that the next-generation contact center will have several important characteristics[4]. It will be:

- Multichannel, to create more interactive and collaborative customer relationships.
- Multiplatform, to keep contact center agents and supervisors up-to-date with relevant information regarding customer interactions. This will be accomplished by uniting the communications and collaboration platforms that have evolved over time, including VoIP, presence, chat, conferencing, video, mobility, and social media.
- Multimedia, to engage with customers in ways they prefer, such as video, chat, mobile content, and social media.
- Social media fluent, to monitor online conversations and interactions and provide the kind of real-time proactive response that will promote greater customer loyalty and brand preference.

> "The time is now for companies to use collaboration tools to evolve customer service."
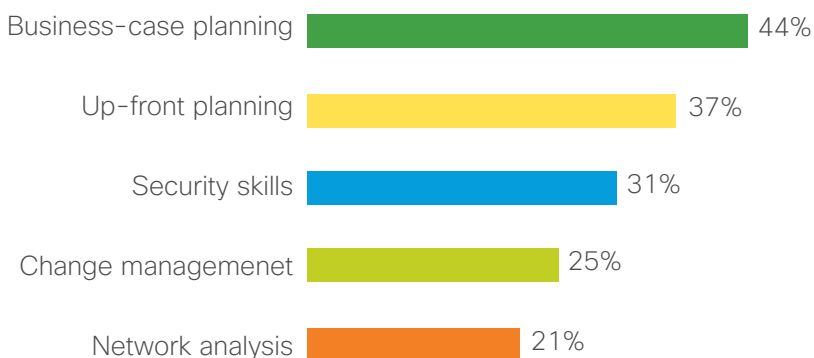>
> —ZK Research, Collaboration is the Next Game Changer in Customer Service

"Organizations that wait too long to adapt run the risk of losing customers to more agile competitors waiting for the right moment to pounce," according to ZK Research[5]. Organizations that do it right can expect happier customers, faster problem resolution, and consistency in measurement—all at a lower cost.

Picking the Right Platform and Partner Can Be a Decade-Long Commitment

How can you collaboration-enable your customer center quickly, confidently, and cost-effectively? A recent ZK Research survey shows that many companies lack the skills to roll out unified communications and collaboration platforms (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Many Organizations Lack the Experience and Sometimes the Skill to Roll Out Unified Communications and Collaboration

Business-case planning	44%
Up-front planning	37%
Security skills	31%
Change managemenet	25%
Network analysis	21%

Customers operating legacy contact centers today have veteran staffs with a great deal of experience on older technologies. They typically do not have the experience with new contact center technology found with the Cisco® solution. This experience and skill deficit means that picking the right partner is as important as picking the right platform, because you might need to rely on your partner to fill in your skills gap. You might also need to rely on your partner to guide you through the cultural, behavioral, and process changes required to make sure of successful adoption throughout the organization

Each department in your organization will have unique challenges. Some of the most common challenges include:

- Resistance to, or fear of, change
- Inadequate sponsorship
- Unrealistic expectations
- Poor project management
- Unpersuasive case for change
- Lack of necessary skills on project team
- IT perspective not integrated

Studies show that companies are most successful implementing collaboration technologies when they incorporate a change management plan to help people adopt and incorporate the new technologies into their daily activities. Change management can help you overcome the challenges of business transformation.

Here are some expert recommendations of what to do and not do when transforming your contact center.

Potential Pitfalls of Going It Alone

- A solution that is designed for today, but not tomorrow
- A solution that doesn't support your unique customer base
- Delayed deployment
- Unnecessary costs
- A rocky rollout
- Disruption to customer service

All of these can lead to fear, anxiety, and finger-pointing.

# Do Seek Help from Experts; Don't Go It Alone

In today's accelerated global business environment, getting it right right away is critical for success. With 25 years of networking expertise, more than 50,000 installations, and over 6 million annual customer interactions, Cisco can help you accelerate time to value for your collaborative contact center investment.

Our rock-solid company, proven products, broad partner ecosystem, and comprehensive services (Figure 2) can help you get more value at any stage in your evolution to a collaborative customer care environment. These strengths are why some of the most risk-averse companies in the world choose Cisco as their collaborative contact center partner.

Our customers who decide not to "go it alone" believe Cisco and our partners can help them move forward with the least risk possible. Our work with global organizations in virtually every industry has resulted in a wealth of best practices and deep insights. The insights in this paper are designed to help any organization that is planning, building, or managing a collaborative contact center.

Insurance companies are some of the most conservative of all our customers, with rigorous requirements when it comes to reducing risk. They are a good example to use in this paper, because if the Cisco services and platform meet the stringent requirements of these enterprises, they will undoubtedly meet yours. For example, the marketplace for the U.S. insurance industry, with record numbers of billion-dollar weather events (14 in 2011 alone)[6], has become one of the most volatile and unpredictable in the world. As a result, a rapidly growing number of insurance companies have recently chosen to work with Cisco Services and solutions to transform their contact centers.

Figure 2. Insurance for a Risk-Averse World Includes Services at Every Stage
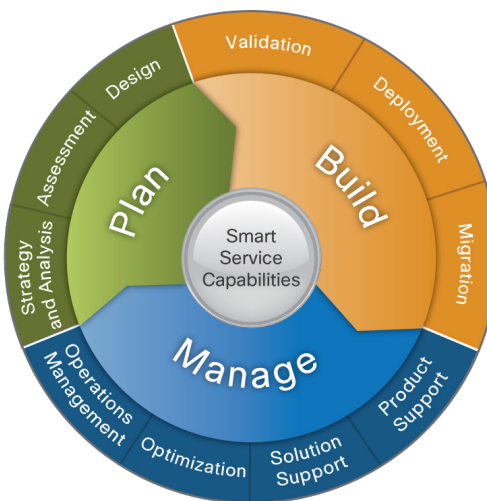
Although every customer situation is unique, a contact center will typically have one or more of the following challenges:

- Disparate systems built on legacy voice
- Standalone or integrated solutions from multiple vendors
- Multiple vendor release cycles
- Incompatibilities with release cycles
- Stringent reporting requirements

> "If you haven't invested the time to develop a thoughtful plan and purposeful design, you could be putting your company at risk."
>
> Dave Gopfert, Cisco Customer Collaboration Services Manager

Many of our customers are either evaluating or deploying transformative technology initiatives as part of their contact center refresh, including:

- **Virtualization:** Although virtualization is not new to the enterprise, it is new to voice. Many of our customers are doing contact center refreshes to use virtualization. Cisco has considerable virtualization expertise, and we can help you address the challenges of virtualizing voice, which requires rethinking redundancy.

- **Video:** The use of video is rapidly growing in healthcare and other industries, and it is being used by some of our insurance customers to deliver innovative services. One of our customers uses video in self-service kiosks located in high-end motorcycle retail stores to enable on-the-spot sign-up for motorcycle insurance. Extensive experience in deploying video, combined with customer contact center technical expertise, enabled a flawless rollout of this new customer service.

- **Multichannel capabilities:** Because so many of our customers are deploying email integration or click to chat, we now have a custom development group that assists these customers with click-to-chat capabilities. We can help determine where best to use click to chat and how to avoid inundating your agents with too many click-to-chat requests.

Every Company We Work with Has Unique Needs

These are the diverse needs of six of our insurance company customers:

- Mobile solutions for a younger customer base
- Out-of-hours coverage for call centers
- Innovative online services for all online customers
- High-touch and highly personalized care
- Rapid and radical reinvention of customer service
- Slow evolution to more collaborative interactions

Every contact center requires a purpose-built architecture.

Do Plan Ahead; Don't Skip Essential Steps

Before embarking on a major contact center transformation, you have to have a comprehensive plan. Although this seems fairly evident, our experts frequently observe significant omissions during the plan stage, which can derail your contact center transformation. Frequently observed omissions include:

- **No planning stage:** Some organizations bypass the plan stage altogether, assuming that all contact centers are basically the same. However, our experience shows that every company has unique needs, and every contact center requires a purpose-built architecture designed to address those needs.

- **No companywide perspective:** This typically happens when a company responds to the needs of one department, because that group has an urgent need. In responding to this highly focused need, the company fails to look at the big picture. This, of course, can have a devastating effect on the overall viability of the platform as a mission-critical enterprise tool.

- **No consideration for future demands:** Many companies deploy a platform that successfully addresses their current needs, but is not designed to address their needs five years from now. This lack of flexibility can dramatically shorten the life of the platform and its overall value.

- **No preparation for change in technology or vendor:** When there are new technologies and/or a new vendor in place, change management is essential. Proper planning and training must be provided to reduce risk.

- **No "go live" strategy:** There are a myriad of things that should be done leading up to launch to make sure of a successful rollout. Failure to do one or more can have a tragic and costly effect when you "go live."

- **No "day 2" plan:** Many companies spend all their energies leading up to the launch, but fail to create a plan for what happens after the system goes live.

- **No migration plan:** Companies often fail to recognize the difficulty of taking down a current system in order to bring the new system online. One of our insurance company customers is migrating 15,000 agents and 12 contact center, a major undertaking. Because the company is working with Cisco Services and the company's partner, there will be transparency to customers and minimal disruption to the business.

- **No resource planning:** Most of our customers worry about training their operations staff. To complete a successful contact center transformation, the challenge is not solely about training; it is also about resource planning and experience. Migration for one of our insurance company customers spans three years. The same staff will have to continue to manage operations for the legacy environment and the new environment.

> ## "The build phase is something our customers do once every four to six years. It's something we do every day."
>
> Justin Hoffman, Cisco Customer Collaboration Services Manager

To make sure of a smooth migration, appropriate resources must be allocated to accommodate this short-term increased workload. This might require "bulking up" or bringing in temporary expert resources who can work side by side with your people to help them gain the necessary experience to operate the platform when the migration is complete.

Working with Cisco Services and our partners during the plan phase can help you address essential steps. We have access to global expertise in multiple industries, and we use best practices from each one. Because we bring both business and technical proficiency to the table, your plan will support your strategic business needs and include a roadmap that takes you from your current environment to one that supports your collaboration vision.

Do Build a Solid Foundation; Don't Underestimate Integration

Our substantial work with hundreds of companies across myriad industries reinforces the need for best practices and proven methodologies to make sure of success in the build phase. These include:

- **Solid foundation:** When we plan, design, build, and test the system, we know it is rock solid and will support your day-to-day business and future requirements.

- **Base implementation:** If the initial implementation doesn't go well, it is likely that other things will also break eventually. In a recent self-installation, one server wasn't installed correctly, and it had a rippling effect across the entire system.

- **Integration**: Many large organizations have custom desktop platforms and unique web interfaces and dialers. Some have equipment from five or more different vendors. We help them transparently integrate these systems.

- **Security and compliance:** We work with your personnel to meet your unique security requirements while making sure of the integrity of the platform. This can require nuanced negotiations with your security personnel. Our experts are up to the task and bring best practices from every industry to the entire process.

Do Optimize; Don't Neglect Operations Management and Product Support

After you have deployed your collaborative contact center solution, it is time to focus on operations management, optimization, solution support, and product support. Attention to each of these important areas will deliver impressive results and returns. In a study sponsored by Cisco, Forrester Consulting interviewed five Cisco Collaboration Optimization Services customers:

- A leading U.S. financial planning services company

- One of the largest electrical utilities companies in the United States

- A global financial services firm

- A leading global telecommunications provider

- A global payments and technology company

> "In all our projects, we bring all the knowledge from all the contact centers we've ever built."
>
> Peter Galvin, Cisco Customer Collaboration Services Manager
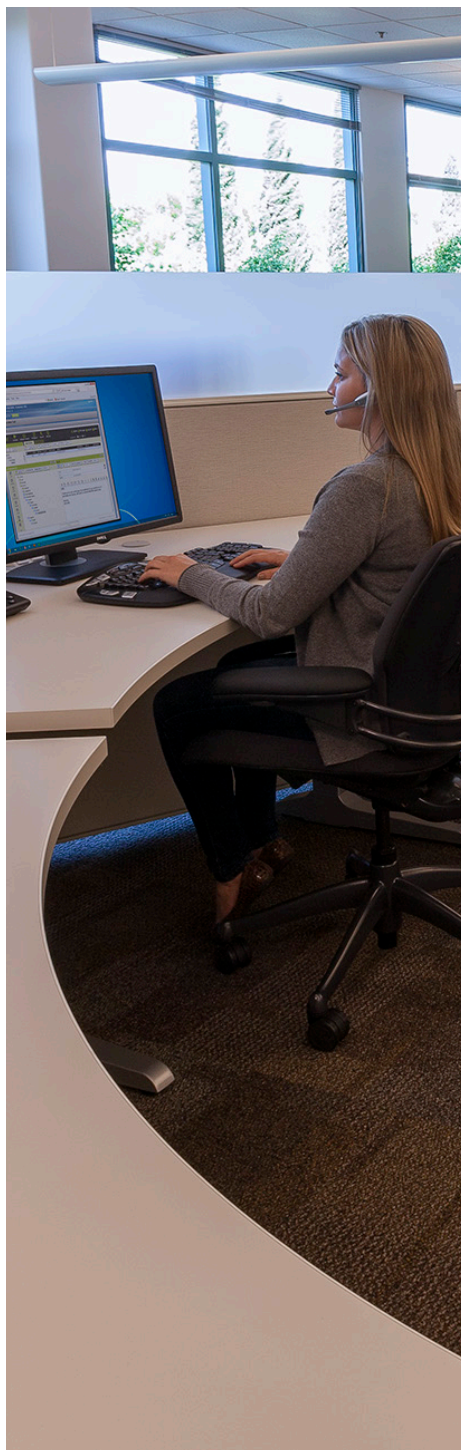
Based on interviews with these five companies, Forrester created a composite organization and determined that optimization services provide 58 percent ROI with an almost immediate payback period[7]. This impressive ROI was made possible by:

- **Project cost savings:** Because of faster deployment of new network services and ease of rollout of complex solutions and new functionality.

- **Productivity savings from improved stability:** Coming from better user productivity and customer experience.

- **Cost avoidance savings from software and design recommendations as a result of audits:** Some customers wait for something to go wrong. Cisco recommends periodic audits to look for potential problems. This is especially important when you have limited personnel. Because you don't know what you don't know. Proactive audits can lead to IT resource productivity savings.

- **Cost avoidance savings from IT resource headcount:** Using resource augmentation and access to deep knowledge of Cisco escalation process, technologies and new products can help you avoid costs.

- **Savings from improved staff training and knowledge transfer:** Some of the insurance companies with which we work initially indicated they would do their own audits. We at Cisco feel this is like a patient telling a surgeon, "I'll do my own operation."

- **IT productivity savings:** Enabled by ease of administration.

- **Labor savings from improved availability:** Made possible by improved collaboration architecture service availability.

Optimization opportunities you should look for fall into three categories:

1. **Assessment and infrastructure optimization:** This might include an architecture design review to determine if your installed system still meets your current business needs. It might also include capacity planning reviews. Our service experts got a call from a large insurance provider that was about to embark on an open enrollment initiative and was panicked because it didn't feel prepared for the expected high volume of callers in the coming month. We did a capacity planning review and determined the company could use more ports.

Another customer had a series of blizzards and needed 150 mobile agents to work from home. The customer's system was only designed to handle a small number of mobile agents. We were able to alleviate the customer's concerns with a quick capacity review that showed the system could—just barely—accommodate all the mobile agents. This enabled the customer to confidently move forward with its plan without having to worry about busy signals, dropped calls, or system crashes.

A system audit can help by assessing the system performance from a hardware and software perspective. This audit includes:

- Looking at the configuration and performance metrics
- Comparing them to best practices
- Making recommendations to mitigate any risk in potential system failures or outages

Ten Questions to Consider When Selecting Your Partner

1. Can the vendor help you identify and close your skills gap?

2. Does the vendor bring global best practices and comprehensive services to the table?

3. Can the vendor help you anticipate current and future collaboration requirements?

4. Has the contact center platform been proven to provide value in your industry?

5. Has the platform demonstrated a rapid return on investment?

6. Can the new platform and collaboration tools integrate with your existing databases?

7. Will the vendor be around 10 years from now?

8. Will the vendor keep pace with customer expectations by investing in new technology trends?

9. Has the vendor demonstrated an ability to help its customers achieve targeted business goals?

10. Does the vendor have comprehensive "cradle-to-grave" reporting and analysis capabilities?

Remember: The platform and the partnership might represent a 10-year commitment.

2. **Applications area optimization:** As part of a script optimization assessment, scripting experts should do more than answer scripting questions as they arise. They should proactively inspect scripting at the application level and pair it against best practices to make scripts more efficient.

When we initially discussed a scripting design review with one of our insurance company customers, the customer indicated that it had a team of script experts who had been scripting for 10 years. Upon initial examination, it was obvious to our script experts that the customer's existing scripts did not reflect current best practices and in fact were 10 years out of date.

Working with this customer, we were able to pare its scripts down from 94 to 14. The script design review not only made the customer's staff more efficient, but also enhanced the staff's scripting skills. This ability to bring new perspective and new methodologies is one of the hidden values in the services we provide.

Another service in this category is software recommendation review, which helps a customer with its contact center lifecycle management. Someone has to look after your software lifecycle and manage it. If you do not do the maintenance, your software can go all the way to the end of its support, and you might be in a situation where you have to do multiple upgrades in a very short time. One of our customers was four major releases behind. The customer ran into a problem after six years, which required a major unplanned and costly upgrade.

Cisco Services can help you understand your options and the pros and cons of when it is best for your company to move to a new version of your software. We can also help you proactively plan your budgets for hardware, software, and software lifecycle management.

3. **Business relevance:** When it comes to reporting, there are many optimization opportunities. A custom reports assessment makes sure you have the reporting tools you need to manage your contact centers. A report discovery service can help you identify all of your reporting requirements and provide an assessment including best practices and recommendations. A custom report development service can help with building custom reports that are over and above out-of-the-box reports. And for customers with database- and reporting-savvy resources, a reporting knowledge transfer service can "teach you to fish," so you can create your own custom reports.

Do Look for Proof of Value; Don't Underestimate the Importance of Comprehensive Services

Our industry-leading platform and services are proven to provide reliable results and rapid ROI for thousands of organizations. By engaging the Cisco Collaboration Services team, you can:

- Accelerate time to deployment
- Reduce OpEx costs
- Improve return on investment
- Increase customer satisfaction

Why Cisco Services

Realize the full business value of your technology investments with smart, personalized services from Cisco together with our partners. Backed by deep networking expertise and a broad ecosystem of partners, Cisco Services enable you to successfully plan, build, and manage your network as a powerful business platform. Whether you are looking to quickly seize new opportunities to meet rising customer expectations, improve operational efficiency to lower costs, mitigate risk, or accelerate growth, we have a service that can help you.

For More Information

To learn how you can engage Cisco Collaboration Services to help achieve your vision for a more collaborative contact center environment, contact your Cisco sales representative or certified partner or visit www.cisco.com/go/collaborationservices.

[1]Forrester Consulting, Next-Generation Contact Centers Must Become Relationship Platforms, February 2011.

[2]Research report sponsored by Cisco, The Impact of Technology on Contact Center Performance, 2012, Center for customer-Driven Quality™ and BenchmarkPortal™.

[3]http://www.cisco.com/en/US/products/sw/custcosw/Products_Sub_Category_Home.html, Improve Customer Care VOD.

[4]Forrester Consulting, Next-Generation Contact Centers Must Become Relationship Platforms, February 2011.

[5]ZK Research, Collaboration is the Next Game Changer in Customer Service, May 2012.

[6]Climate Central, Nov. 2011.

[7]Forrester Research, The Total Economic Impact of Cisco Collaboration Optimization Services, 2012.

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