Unlocking the Transformative Power of AI for Contact Centers with Google Cloud and Avaya

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Written by: Ritu Jyoti, Program Vice President, Artificial Intelligence Strategies

Introduction

We are all aware of how important customer experience (CX) is — over 70% of buyers point to CX as an important factor in purchasing decisions — while a negative experience can lead to high turnover of customers. In fact, a Walker study states that in 2020, customer experience is expected to overtake price and product as the key brand differentiator. The contact center is on the frontlines. Imagine giving customers immediate 24 x 7 self-service in a way that’s most natural to them — a conversation — and seamlessly transitioning them to human agents who have artificial intelligence (AI) at their disposal to answer more quickly and helpfully.

That’s where Contact Center AI comes in. At the core of this technology are bots that can talk, listen, learn, and understand. The bots can converse naturally with customers, resolving basic issues directly, and assist human agents on tougher calls, providing real-time, turn-by-turn guidance and continuously improving by analyzing conversation transcripts to identify gaps in understanding or requested information. Combining the best of Google Cloud AI with the power of the Avaya customer experience platform, Contact Center AI can improve customer experience and increase operational efficiency at the same time.

Even with all the hype around AI, it’s hard to overstate the impact AI will have on enterprises’ ability to compete in the digital economy. In fact, IDC predicts that by 2025, "AI-powered" enterprises will be able to achieve Net Promoter Scores that are 1.5 times higher than those of their competitors.

AI has the potential to transform CX from empowering self-service to improving personalization. AI-powered contact center solutions can transform a transactional experience and a frustrating phone tree to a natural conversation where users can speak naturally about what they need, improve the customer experience, and help customers feel known and valued. Today, businesses must make a trade-off between great customer support and operational efficiency. Contact Center AI breaks this link, allowing businesses to get the best of both worlds. It is making an impact — turning transactions into relationships, improving customer satisfaction and customer lifetime value, increasing operational efficiency, and helping agents become specialists.
Definitions

Contact Center AI: Contact Center AI combines Google Cloud's natural language understanding and speech capabilities with third-party popular contact center software, improving customer experience as well as operational efficiency.

Benefits

Use of AI for contact centers can provide three critical benefits to an organization:

» Increase customer satisfaction. Customers can reach out 24 x 7 to an organization’s brand and self-serve in the way that’s most natural to them — a conversation. AI can enable fast, timely, and accurate responses. Natural language processing (NLP) can parse topics based on the conversation, identify customer intent, and automatically respond accurately. If a human agent is required, seamless transition between the virtual agent and a human agent can provide context, transcripts, and real-time turn-by-turn guidance.

» Empower human agents. AI in contact centers can transform human agents into specialists. It can offer real-time guidance by delivering information, workflows, and turn-by-turn instruction while ensuring consistent experience for customers. It can surface relevant and useful documents to help call center agents serve customers quickly. It can suggest chat responses for the agent using conversation context. It can provide guidance on the conversation flow to the agent from the identified customer intent. It can identify why users are contacting them in real time and automate call disposition classification. AI can do these tasks because it listens in on the calls, understands what the customer is saying/asking, and is therefore able to effectively help the human agent. AI assistance can allow human agents to focus on more specialized work, which helps increase customer satisfaction and foster relationship building because customers are getting the focused attention they need. A pop-up dialog box of the right information at the right time provides an easier learning curve for newer agents. Overall, it leads to higher job satisfaction for the human agents.

» Augment business insights. AI in contact centers can enable businesses to gain in-depth know-how about their customers. Organizations can leverage NLP to identify the reasons customers are contacting the business. NLP can surface the top call drivers and sentiments that help organizations prioritize strategy/product/service/service improvements, and so forth. NLP can assist organizations with compliance by identifying key phrases to allow operations and QA to stay on top of the most important obligations. It can also surface sentiment and language data to understand how agents interact with customers and drive faster complaint resolution.

Overall, AI in contact centers can help businesses ensure consistent "brand voice" to customers through all the channels. It can increase brand sentiment and loyalty, reduce customer churn, and increase customer lifetime value while enhancing contact center operational efficiency by improved call deflection, reduced call time, increased agent efficiency on calls, simplified agent training, and increased agent satisfaction — all of which reduce turnover. This means better return on investment, less overhead, and low costs. Customer lifetime value is linked to customer satisfaction and is directly tied to revenue growth.

"AI in our contact centers lets humans do what they do best — emotions, empathy, complex problem-solving — while machines do what they do best — data, number crunching, and automation."

— Director, Customer Experience, Large Mobile Software Company
Key Trends

In the digital era, where customer service is becoming a major competitive differentiator, organizations worldwide are looking to enhance their contact center as an asset to the company. Low customer satisfaction, high churn rate of the human agents, lengthy call times to assist the customers, and lack of 24 x 7 support are the current reality of most contact centers. Typically, contact centers and the marketing department have been separate organizations, where the contact center responds to inbound customer questions, marketing drives new business and demand. The marketing department is concerned with customer retention, and because a large part of customer interactions happen in the contact center, these two organizations should work together.

Organizations now need a common voice across all channels, including across the contact center and marketing. Contact centers need better analytics for customer insights to make proactive and informed business decisions. Executives are concerned about their customer satisfaction scores, customer effort scores, and Net Promoter Scores and ensuring they are not only high but also increasing over time. Contact center executives are partnering with marketing executives and exploring the power of artificial intelligence to drive consistent brand experience across all touch points and channels.

Considering Google Cloud and Avaya Contact Center AI

Google Cloud’s conversational AI — which incorporates speech recognition, synthesis, and natural language understanding — is at the core of Contact Center AI. Unlike use of robotic, pre-recorded voices or rules-based fixed hierarchy bots, Google Cloud’s conversational AI supports human-like text-to-speech generation “on the fly” and AI-powered virtual agents. While the legacy conversational AI solutions support clunky speech transcriptions that require regular tuning, Google Cloud’s conversational AI is auto-tuned and has AI-driven speech models running on TPUs (accelerated computing).

Google Cloud’s Contact Center AI incorporates broader Google innovation, uses the most advanced deep-learning neural network algorithms for speech recognition, and is being hailed to have one of the best accuracies and quality in the industry. Google Cloud’s Speech-to-Text supports 120+ languages (with more on the roadmap) and can auto-detect up to four languages. Google Cloud’s Text-to-Speech supports seamless integration with a REST or GRPC capable application, 110+ voices to choose from and exclusive multilingual access to DeepMind’s WaveNet technology, which offers the most human-like voices. Dialogflow, Google Cloud’s platform that enables users to build engaging voice and text-based conversational interfaces, such as voice apps and chatbots, is powered by AI and enables a human like conversational experience.

Avaya contact center solutions are designed to provide customers a consistent, smart, and positive experience that will help win a lifetime of loyalty. The solutions can be delivered in the cloud—public, private, or hybrid—or on premises, and are trusted by organizations in more than 170 countries. Avaya Intelligent Xperiences Contact Center’s open architecture with APIs and SDKs lets customers easily customize solutions to meet their customers’ needs. Avaya’s focus on mobility, security, structured process of compliance, and artificial intelligence help customers leverage what they have and build a bridge to tomorrow. With Avaya IX Subscription, customers have the flexibility to sign up their current users and agents and flex the plan to add more support and more users as their business grows.
Google Cloud and Avaya both have enterprise customers globally. They are jointly committed to deliver an omnichannel plug-and-play, turnkey solution with integrated and layered innovation for contact centers. Combining Google AI with the power of the Avaya’s Contact Center solutions, customers can choose fast and efficient self-service on the channels they prefer, with an agent available to help as needed. It’s seamless and context-driven, and agents can stay in sync and keep pace with customer expectations. With a consolidated view of relevant information, agents can exceed expectations and reach great outcomes faster. The joint solution can scale to millions of agents, enhance human decision-making, simplify operations, and automate processes.

**Challenges**

The quality of both the technology and the implementation significantly impacts the customer experience. A poor virtual agent can frustrate — rather than help — customers. Understanding which customer issues can be solved effectively through AI and which issues are better served by human agents is critical to the success of Contact Center AI.

Other critical challenges for Google Cloud and Avaya are speed to market and the general availability of a complete sellable solution as a broader set of cloud competitors are stepping up their games and launching their own Contact Center AI solutions.

**Conclusion**

IDC believes that the Contact Center AI market will continue to grow and be an important measure of customer experience. As customers embrace and adopt AI and the offerings continue to evolve and mature, Avaya’s Blended AI approach will help counter the risks associated with virtual agents frustrating customers at the point of contact.

Combining the best of Google Cloud AI with the power of the Avaya’s Intelligent Xperience Contact Center, Contact Center AI can improve customer experience and increase operational efficiency at the same time.

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**About the Analyst**

**Ritu Jyoti, Program Vice President**

Ritu Jyoti is Program Vice President, Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategies with IDC’s software market research and advisory practice. Ms. Jyoti is responsible for leading the development of IDC’s thought leadership platform for AI Strategies and management of the newly formed AI Strategies research team. Her research will focus on the state of enterprise AI efforts, organizational impact and provide guidance on building new capabilities and prioritization of investment options.
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