



Best Practices and Technology for Small Contact Centers

A white paper by The PELORUS Group



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ABOUT THE PELORUS GROUP

The PELORUS Group was founded in 1987 and has emerged as one of the fastest growing independent market research and consultancy companies in the financial services and telecommunications industries. The PELORUS Group produces authoritative analysis and research reports, provides custom business planning services, and offers timely industry conferences.

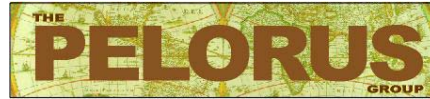
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Introduction

You might forgive managers of smaller contact centers for feeling a little slighted these days. They are seeing an explosion of exciting new technologies and applications all around them, from sophisticated workforce management software that can accurately forecast agent requirements down to 15 minute intervals to amazing speech and data analytics tools that can quickly scan thousands of interactions searching for the precious few that can shine a light on the root causes of customer disaffection or uncover valuable information nuggets that lead to innovative marketing campaigns. But none of this matters to smaller contact centers with modest capital investment budgets and small hard-pressed IT resources.

There are many reasons why contact centers of all sizes have not shared equally in the bounty. The major factor is that smaller operations simply don't have the high six and even seven-figure capital budgets to invest in all the hot new technologies. As a result, they don't always get a lot of attention from the top vendors. The good news is that is changing. Innovative technology companies like SER Solutions have launched new solutions designed and priced to meet the needs of small to mid-sized contact centers.

We will get to this in more detail, but first it is important to explain the important role of small contact centers and explore some of the special challenges and opportunities confronting the sector. This paper will also provide some practical ideas managers of smaller contact centers can take to make sure that their performance is as good as or better than their peers.

Importance of small contact centers

Employment in giant contact centers is stable or even declining, due to business consolidations, self-service, and outsourcing. On the other hand, small to mid-size contact centers, defined as fewer than 150 agents, are thriving. At The PELORUS Group, we estimate that 94 percent of U.S. contact centers have 150 or fewer agents. These small to mid-size contact centers employ nearly half of all agents.

Contact Centers and Agents by Agent Size
USA (2006)

Number of agents	Contact Centers		Agents	
	Value	Percent	Value	Percent
150 or fewer	62040	94%	1593900	48%
151 or greater	3960	6%	1716000	52%
Totals	66000	100%	3309900	100%

Source: The PELORUS Group

If these numbers seem surprising, we need only reflect on the composition of U.S. business establishments. In fact, 86 percent of U.S. employment locations have fewer than 500 employees. Small business is the growth engine of the U.S. economy. From 2003 – 2004 businesses with 500 or fewer employees added 1.8 million new jobs. Businesses with 500 or more employees lost 181,122 jobs.



Small business succeeds because of its vitality, innovation, and the entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes our economy. While there are a lot of challenges in running a small to mid-size organization, there are also advantages. One of these is greater customer intimacy. Small businesses grew to become bigger businesses because they took care of their customers. For many businesses, the person on the phone may be the primary or even the only human contact customers have with the firm. These individuals are in a unique position to shape customer perceptions and thereby influence customer retention. Satisfied, or more accurately, **delighted** customers are the best advertising there is. One thing competitors cannot match is the quality of customer care. Properly managed and supported, the contact center can become a major strategic advantage over larger more powerful competitors.

The converse of poor customer care can spell disaster for even the largest companies. Where once it was well understood that a highly dissatisfied customer would tell an average of nine others; now, with tens of millions of blogs and social networking sites, unhappy customers can get the word out to thousands of people within hours.

You do have a contact center – probably several

Our table showed that there are about 66,000 “formal” contact centers in the USA. That’s a big number but it still substantially undercounts the actual number of contact centers. The operative term is “formal.” In fact, we can reasonably assume that nearly every enterprise of 50 or more employees has a contact center – possibly several.

If your company has dedicated staff that does any of the following, you have a contact center:

- *Take orders by phone or email*
- *Handle complaints*
- *Make sales calls to set appointments*
- *Collect overdue accounts*
- *Receive large volumes of customer emails*
- *Provide a customer help desk*
- *Have an inside sales department*
- *Conduct promotional campaigns*

A contact center is any group of individuals that spends a large proportion of their time answering or placing external calls. Examples could include order takers, help desks, sales support teams, accounts receivable clerks, purchasing agents, service advisors, reservationists, and admissions clerks.

Channeling customer queries to a dedicated team of call-handling professionals has many benefits to the organization;



- *Goals are aligned with broader corporate objectives.*
- *Queries are handled courteously, consistently, and accurately.*
- *The process is continuously measured, evaluated, and reported.*
- *A monitoring process is in place to assure compliance with laws and regulations.*
- *Operating costs are identified, budgeted, and controlled.*
- *Revenues grow via higher levels of customer retention and/or direct sales.*
- *Most importantly, customers are treated with the highest standards of care reasonably achievable by the organization.*

Special Challenges of Smaller Contact Centers

All contact centers regardless of size have the same basic needs to drive customer satisfaction, grow revenues, control costs and capture and convey valuable market intelligence. While under-150 agent contact centers have the same missions, there are some significant challenges.

Hard to maintain service levels

Calling patterns in smaller contact centers tend to exhibit greater variation than in very large contact centers. Sharp spurts can be followed by periods of relative inactivity. This complicates the manager's ability to develop work schedules that are both cost-effective and maintain desired service levels.

Little room for experts

Agents can be expected to handle multiple situations, like taking orders, tracking deliveries, answering billing questions, addressing quality issues, and even providing basic technical assistance. When agents have multiple tasks, handle time will increase. Contact center applications like customer relationship management and interactive voice response can help cut handle time without compromising service quality.

Limited information technology (IT) support

A large enterprise will have a substantial staff of information technology (IT) professionals. A smaller organization may have a handful of people whose primary interest is in supporting production, inventory control, order management, and accounting. In many cases there may not be an IT department at all. The organization will contract with a third-party to handle its needs. In the former case, the idea of supporting sophisticated contact center applications with which they have had little prior experience is not always welcome. In the latter case, every call to the outside company rings the cash register to the tune of at least \$200.

The IT support issue is exacerbated when the contact center chooses point solutions, each with their own integration and database management issues, service contracts, and uncoordinated software release schedules. Fortunately, there are suite-based solutions available today in which each application is pre-integrated with the ACD and each other. Databases are entered only once and the entire suite is centrally administered.

Absenteeism and adherence deviations have outsize impact on service levels

Absenteeism and schedule deviations can wreak havoc on smaller centers' service levels and agent morale. Jeff Theiler, call center manager for Hancock Bank put it

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this way, "When you're in a smaller call center, if you lose two or three people, you're just hammered." That's easy to understand. In a call center of 30 agents, if three go to lunch or take breaks at the same time occupancy for that time period falls by 10% and service levels deteriorate.

Insufficient time for coaching agent evaluations

Evaluating, coaching, and developing agents is the most important part of the supervisor's job. Smaller contact centers that rely on manual systems could relieve supervisors of time wasting activities by investing in modern quality monitoring systems. Take evaluations for example. In order to perform just one monthly evaluation per agent a supervisor will typically live monitor for at least 35 minutes to find just one call worthy of evaluation. Even a modest sample for evaluation purposes would require five calls. That's 5 x 35 or 2.9 hours per agent per month. If the contact center has 30 agents total monitoring time (not including the time it takes to complete the evaluation form), this would amount to 87 hours. At an average supervisor cost of \$35/hour, the total time **just listening** comes to over \$3,000 per month! Then, what do you do with the completed evaluation forms? Paper forms are not easily retrievable for developing the pattern analysis needed to identify training and coaching skills.

Assuring compliance with laws and regulations

There are many laws and regulations contact centers need to comply with. A short list includes the:

- *Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act*
- *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)*
- *Fair Debt Collection Practices Act*
- *Family and Medical Leave Act*
- *State single party and two-party consent statutes*
- *Payment card industry compliance standards*

For smaller firms, simply knowing the rules can be a challenge. They may not have access to attorneys that specialize in FCC and fraud prevention matters. Small companies may be exempt from some of these regulations but is very important to have the facts so they can make this determination. Whether or not your company is legally required to comply, it is *always* good practice to get caller prior permission to record calls. You also need to tightly control access to sensitive customer data, and treat every caller – even those that are way behind on payments – with courtesy and respect. Managers are encouraged to join a professional association to keep abreast of regulatory developments.

Another important consideration is liability. Disputes can often arise between what agents say and what customers thought they heard. Consider insurance claims reported by phone, delivery dates, negotiated prices, promises to pay, and the use of offensive language.

Retention is critical

Agent retention is a challenge in every contact center but especially in smaller contact centers. Large contact centers have other resources to pick up the slack and have already forecasted in some level of shrinkage. Shrinkage refers to unanticipated reductions in staff capacity due to weather, sickness, school closings,



network problems, sudden resignations, and other unforeseen events. Because there is often a higher spirit of camaraderie in smaller centers the loss of a popular agent can adversely impact morale as well as service levels. In smaller companies, customers get to know and like their agents, like favorite tellers at the local bank branch. This is an advantage smaller companies want to leverage. In massive contact centers customers may never speak with the same agent twice.

Overcoming the challenges

While smaller contact centers have their share of challenges they also have inherent advantages. These include;

- *Agents and supervisors get to know each other on a personal level*
- *The contact center is more closely looped into sales, marketing and other customer-facing functions*
- *Easier to gain access to subject matter experts*
- *More flexibility in arranging or rearranging schedules and assignments*

In light of these inherent advantages, there are many actions smaller contact centers can take to stand out against their peers, often at little or no additional cost.

Achieving service levels goals

Regarding service levels, the first priority is to establish attainable objectives. Small contact centers cannot afford the idle time to make sure that the "80/20" rule (80 percent of calls must be answered in 20 seconds) is consistently attained. A 70/30 objective during the busiest hours may be more realistic. You can boost service level by confining more calls to the IVR. In banks, it is not unusual for 80 percent of inbound calls to be properly handled through the IVR. For smaller contact centers, it is important that the IVR include a scripting tool so you can make changes to the IVR menu without having to call in professional programmers.

Quancor Marketing provides reliable, cost effective outbound and inbound telemarketing programs designed to generate above average results for its clients. The company operates an outbound contact center with 88 agents. At any given time they are running 30-40 campaigns. Quancor recently added IVR from SER Solutions. Marie Korn, co-owner of the company, remarked "The IVR is a very valuable feature to our company because of the way we are structured. A company calling in can enter an account code or press 1 for English, 2 for Spanish, etc. We use it for transferring calls after hours. You can program as simple or as complicated as you wish. The ENSERCLE product allows you to do that – and it is not complicated to build." Marie added "You don't need a programmer anymore for the IVR system. If a call center wants to create a quick IVR they can go in and create it themselves."

Some tips – always provide callers with the option of using self service – don't force them into it. Keep menu trees short – maximum of four choices. Web self-service is another option and, if available, it should be mentioned during the IVR greeting. Remember, the caller is looking for answers – not necessarily conversation. A well designed IVR is just as effective in building customer satisfaction as personal dialogue.

Most importantly, you need to staff the contact center to closely match traffic flow. Workforce management software is designed to consider the multidimensional problem of building schedules and forecasts in highly dynamic environments but is difficult to justify in smaller environments. More economic choices are to purchase

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off-the-shelf basic scheduling software and to use Excel spreadsheets to do the forecasting and scheduling internally. In any event, you need an ACD to collect and report the raw data.

Part of the scheduling process is to build work rules that help assure that call coverage follows call flow. For example, try to schedule lunch breaks during slow traffic hours and limit the number of agents that can be away from the phones at any one time. The same concept applies to training and coaching. Time these sessions on days and day-parts when calling activity is lightest.

Agent retention

While turnover is a fact of life, there are actions management can take to make the agent's job more satisfying and rewarding. In fact, smaller contact centers generally have higher agent retention rates than very large contact centers. An important advantage of smaller contact centers is greater management flexibility. They can adjust hours to help agents balance work and family responsibilities. Incentive compensation and contests don't require five levels of management approval. There are more options for creating career paths. For example, establishing a career ladder with a step-wise progression between agent and supervisor is a workable option. Titles can be "Team Leader" or "Senior Agent" or words to that effect. This individual – or individuals – can support the supervisor with training, coaching, evaluation, and reporting duties. This position also provides a relief valve for the supervisor when he or she cannot be at work.

Another major advantage of smaller organizations is greater viability within the enterprise. In large contact centers employees often leave because there is no where to progress within the organization. Hidden away in command centers or confined to their desks, agents do not have the opportunity to foster relationships with mentors outside the contact center. Managers should encourage agents to use idle time productively, by meeting with product managers and other subject matter experts. This way, they learn valuable information and gain exposure that could lead to advancement opportunities within the organization.

Investments in technology can also promote longer agent retention. Modern agent desktop software makes the job easier for the agent and more satisfying for customers. Intelligent screens with built-in business process routines, like processing credit card payments, automatically present workflows in a logical sequence. This helps assure accuracy, reduces handle time, and relieves agents from the need to open multiple applications or enter the same information repetitively.

Managing absenteeism

Large contact centers factor in some value for shrinkage in their workforce planning models. Similar to overbooking at an airline, the concept is to schedule extra people to account for the number you can reasonably expect to be absent on any given day or be away from the phone for scheduled activities. Small contact centers depend on people showing up for work. However, there will always be absences. In a 200 agent contact center one absence means a drop off in capacity of 0.5%. In a ten-agent contact center, that's a 10% drop and can wreak havoc with service levels and customer satisfaction.



Calling on remote agents to cover for absentees or to handle call spikes is a realistic option if you have the infrastructure to securely distribute calls and caller data over the Internet. Remote agents must be able to instantaneously view the same desktop screens used at the central operation. Systems like ENSERCLE™ from SER Solutions have that capability. Home workers are more likely to be available on short notice and do not have to incur the expense of traveling to a central hub.

Another way to deal with shrinkage is to cross-train workers to handle contact center as well as other administrative duties. Similarly, agents can assume other internal responsibilities during slack times. This approach is very hard to implement in large organizations because of rigid work rules and turf battles between managers.

Making time for evaluation and coaching

Modern quality monitoring software can quickly search through thousands of hours of recorded voice looking for calls that meet specific criteria; such as extended handle times, long holding periods, and multiple transfers. Some systems today enable supervisors to review screen actions and voice at the same time. Supervisors can spot problems in workflows, accessing databases, and the use of shortcuts that can significantly reduce handle time. Advanced quality monitoring systems also include evaluation software. Supervisors can use the basic evaluation templates provided with the application or design their own – including weighting factors that account for the relative importance of each performance attribute. Performance records are electronically stored and can be viewed anytime in graphical format. Supervisors can spot trends and indicators that highlight agent's strengths and areas that need improvement. Especially effective interactions can be saved as model calls for use in training and coaching sessions.

Managers need to carefully consider the metrics they use to evaluate agent performance. These metrics need to be directly tied to the core missions of the contact center and they need to be controllable by the agent. Every contact center, regardless of size, has four core missions;

- *To delight customers*
- *To sustain or grow revenues*
- *To control operating costs*
- *To share valuable consumer insights with management*

If a KPI does not directly or indirectly measure progress toward one or more of these goals then you need to question its usefulness. Further, metrics used to evaluate agent performance must be controllable by the agent. This excludes many of the commonly used KPI's, such as numbers of calls processed, occupancy, time-to-answer, cost per call, and abandonment rates. These are largely a function of call traffic, staffing levels, network capacity, and the power of your ACD. Focusing on "Metrics that Matter" reduces the management time to perform evaluations and sharpens the process.

Compliance and liability

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to monitor compliance without automated interaction recording systems. These devices can capture, archive, and retrieve **all**

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voice interactions. In addition to compliance with applicable laws and regulations, there is the issue of potential liability. Lacking a tangible record of what actually transpired, disputes may devolve into unpleasant he-said, she-said arguments where nobody wins. Liability protection is especially important to smaller contact centers as litigation can be very costly and agents are often pressed to become experts on multiple subjects. Scripting tools are also valuable to help assure that mandatory disclosures are accurately communicated.

Contact centers that engage in heavy volumes of outbound calling should consider investing in a predictive dialer. Dialers are major productivity boosters and help assure that calls are not directed to people that have registered on the FCC's do-not-call list. Built in work flows also help prevent violation of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

Technology requirements

Rather surprisingly, a minority of smaller contact centers have invested in the time and money-saving contact center applications available today.

	Agents in Contact Center	
	25-50	500 - 1000
Interactive voice response	46%	66%
Interaction recording	35%	90%
Predictive dialers	11%	21%
Workforce management software	8%	85%
<i>Performance management software</i>	<1%	10 - 13%

Source: Contact Babel, The PELORUS Group

While manual processes, such as side-by-side agent monitoring, are common in small contact centers, they are not very productive and become unworkable once a contact center grows to 20 - 30 agents, depending on call volume. Listed below are essential and desirable applications.

Must Haves	Should Haves
• IVR w/self-service	• Forecasting/scheduling
• Intelligent call routing	• Predictive dialing
• Screen pops	• Speech analytics
• Scripting	• Open architecture design
• Digital call recording	• VoIP enabled
• Messaging	• Dashboards
	• Campaign management

Interactive voice response (IVR)

An IVR not only answers and directs calls but also provides self-service options. The basic systems use touchtone response to announced menu selections. The most advanced IVR's use automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology to accept caller voice commands and reply in computerized speech.



Intelligent call routing

Highly successful contact centers need a dedicated call routing system to terminate and distribute inbound calls. Very small operations can function reasonably well with hunt groups from the PBX or service provider but these are very limited in flexibility and provide minimal reporting features. Intelligent call distributors such as ENSERCLE from SER Solutions can direct calls based on several variables including the identity of the caller and the unique skill sets of the agent.

Screen pops

Screen pops provide agents with valuable customer information at the time they take the call. The type of information depends on the integrations between the call distributor and other databases within the contact center. Access to up-to-date details about the caller and their prior history with the contact center speeds the call handling process and relieves the caller from repeating basic details like name, address, account number, etc. each time they contact the call center or get transferred to another individual. The screens are generated from caller input, such as the calling number or account number.

Scripting tools

Scripting tools allow contact center management to devise scripts agents should follow. Applications include mandatory disclosures; Q&A's to refer to during the call, tests, training materials, IVR menus, customer surveys, and others. The application includes authoring capability.

Automated call recording

Digital recording systems are essential for quality monitoring and compliance. Other methods, like remote monitoring and side-by-side observation are workable in small environments but are of little value for coaching, evaluations, calibration, and compliance. You need a permanent record. Many systems have easy to use search and retrieval features and even include evaluation forms.

Messaging

Agents usually do not have access to enterprise messaging systems or Internet applications like Microsoft Outlook. Messaging software confined to the contact center provides a quick and easy way to communicate with agents. These systems are typically one-way only, from supervisor to agent.

Scheduling software

Sophisticated workforce management software is rarely used in small contact centers. The cost is simply too great and small centers do not need the advanced features. Basic off-the-shelf employee scheduling software is inexpensive and helpful. Erlang calculators are readily available to help predict agent needs at different levels of call flow given defined service level goals. Once you determine coverage requirements based on the Erlang call calculations, you can build spreadsheets that identify agent needs by day of week and time of day.

Predictive dialing

Automated dialers are great time savers if you do a lot of outbound calling. Call lists are fed into the dialer and the device automatically places the calls. The systems are smart enough to disregard answering machines, busy lines, no answers, and voice

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mail. When a call is answered by a live person, the call is directed to a live agent along with a screen pop.

Speech analytics

Speech analytics is a technology that can quickly scan large volumes of recorded voice searching for specific words, phrases, or combination of words. More advanced applications categorize human utterances so users can see what topics and questions prompt the most caller queries. These applications are invaluable for compliance verification and can lead to valuable insights about customer attitudes. A good example is SERTAINTY™, by SER Solutions which is designed and priced to meet the needs of all contact centers.

Open architecture design

Open architecture design allows for easily adding, upgrading, and swapping components. Unlike closed or proprietary designs, users can purchase off-the-shelf devices and software to expand or modify their application. Another important advantage is easier interoperability with other systems and applications. Open architecture running on industry standard platforms is especially important if you need to modify the software to meet special requirements. Your IT department can make changes on its own, without the need for costly and time-consuming vendor certifications or calling in outside experts.

Greene, an RMG Direct company, is a professional teleservices firm headquartered in Lincolnshire, Illinois, near Chicago. Founded in 1988, the company operates three blended call centers in Iowa, with an average of 80 agents each. For 2007 Greene was once again ranked one of the top 50 teleservices firms in the country. Greene chose ENSERCLE because it is built on an open standards platform. Mark Deutschmann, Director of Technology, found that he and his team could make adaptations without calling in costly third party specialists. According to Mark, "The biggest advantage is the open architecture. We can tie the product to our existing business processes." Mark came up with several ideas that helped Greene stay a step or two ahead of their competition. "For example, when one of our agent's makes a sale we can use the client's existing web technology and post the sale data real-time to a secure client site."

VoIP enabled

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is a protocol optimized for the transmission of voice through the Internet or other packet switched networks. Voice over IP protocols carry telephony signals as digital audio, typically reduced in data rate using speech data compression techniques, encapsulated in a data packet stream over IP. For contact centers there are cost advantages, in that the cost of transmitting voice is included in the fee they pay for data services. However, the main advantage is that voice and data are pushed to the agent over the same network. Agents working from home see the same screens as in-house agents and call center hubs. VoIP-enabled applications can distribute the software (like CRM and quality monitoring) to distant locations while administering the applications centrally.

Dashboards

Dashboard is a generic term that describes real-time or near real-time data appearing on agent desktops. The dashboards can be pre-configured or defined by the contact center. The screens typically include ribbons of contact center metrics but may also include messages, alerts, news feeds, and other data that the contact center deems useful to the agent.



Campaign management

Campaign management applications are used for outbound promotional efforts. The software controls a predictive dialer that is programmed to call only targeted accounts and prospects. Campaign management software directs the agent to use specialized scripts when connecting to a live contact and tracks the progress and results of the campaign

A Suite Solution

Smaller contact centers looking to enhance their operations have more acquisition options today than ever before. The choices are to start with a few essential applications then add more as needs and budgets grow, to acquire all they need at one time with an integrated solution suite, or use various hosted services on a pay as you go model. The traditional approach is to start with the basics. You must have an intelligent call distributor – without one you do not have a formal contact center – then add quality monitoring. Following these two “must haves” contact centers add the functionality most useful for their unique requirements. These would typically include interactive voice response, some type of CRM application, forecasting/scheduling software, and; for outbound and blended environments, predictive dialers. This one-at-a-time approach, commonly called “point” solutions has the advantage of migrating more slowly and choosing the solution that managers believe is best suited for their contact centers. Hosting has some attractive advantages, principally the avoidance of large front-end and ongoing support costs. However, with the exception of CRM there are very few providers at this time.

The suite approach is rapidly becoming the preferred option – particularly for brand new contact centers and those that wish to displace all their legacy systems with a more modern, tightly integrated solution suite built on the latest technology. The suite model has several very important benefits.

Tight integration

Contact center applications are most effective when they work in unison. Purchasing a unified suite means you not only gain all the benefits at once without having to wait years as you source and justify individual pieces of the puzzle. You also have the advantage of knowing that everything is tightly integrated. All of the applications have been designed and tested to function harmoniously. Each application is administered from a common interface. User training is easier because all screens have the same look and feel.

Centralized Administration

A major advantage of the unified suite approach is centralized administration. There is no need to separately enter databases, a slow and error-prone activity. Database updates are entered only once and all the applications are automatically populated with the new information. The reporting function is centralized. There is less need to piece together reports from disparate systems and databases to achieve comprehensive reporting.

Single point of contact accountability

By purchasing all the applications from one vendor, you have one organization to hold accountable for needs assessment, configuration, installation, testing, and user



training. There is one service level agreement to administer and one company to call if things aren't working the way you want.

Coordinated system upgrades

A major problem with individual applications is that they all have their own architecture and software release schedules. Tracking and maintaining separate systems can be a real strain on small IT departments.

Cost savings

While the initial cost will be higher for a suite than a single application, the total cost of ownership will be lower. It is not unusual for the initial cost of any advanced contact center system or software to consist of at least 50 percent services. The largest piece of the initial service fee will be the cost of systems integration. Vendors may or may not have pre-built connectors for your legacy ACD or PBX. If they don't, then the connectivity must be created from scratch, using costly CTI. And when that job is completed you still have only one point of integration. If you need each application to play as a symphony and not a rock band, you need integration with each of the other applications. Additionally, ongoing support costs are much lower for integrated suites. Upgrades and fixes are announced in advance and coordinated. Generally, the IT department does not even need to be involved. Since the system is based on open standards including popular scripting languages, you do not need costly specialists to make programming changes or add new custom features.

Summary

Smaller businesses are the backbone of the U.S. economy. Small business succeeds because of its vitality, innovation, and the entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes our economy. However, smaller businesses face significant challenges. Lacking the economies of scale of larger competitors, it is difficult to match prices. Nor can they match the marketing muscle and product development budgets of their larger competitors.

What they can do and must do is excel at customer care. Every customer is important and a few are vitally important. The old adage about you never get a second chance to make a good first impression has special meaning for mid-size enterprises. The contact center is the front door to the business.

Small to mid-size contact centers have the same missions as giant centers with thousands of agents. They do not have the same resources. Smaller centers have many inherent advantages that they can leverage but too often lag far behind on technology implementation. This is largely because of the paucity of solutions designed and priced to their special needs. Basic applications like intelligent call routing, screen pops, and interaction recording systems are not just nice-to-haves but absolutely essential for professionally run contact centers. Over the past three years, we have seen a dramatic change, as vendors are recognizing that the market size and growth warrants their attention. There are more options available today than ever before. Integrated application suites layered over a common platform are a "sweet" solution that warrants exploration.



ABOUT SER

SER Solutions, Inc. delivers unsurpassed inbound, outbound and blended contact management and speech analytics solutions to support business activities such as planned and proactive customer care, telemarketing, collections, market research, fundraising, emergency notifications, and political calling. SER's solutions enable enterprises to turn customers into loyal, long-term sources of recurring revenue by generating increased customer loyalty, expanding up-sell and cross-sell opportunities, maximizing agent productivity, and reducing costs. The company, an affiliate of The Gores Group, LLC, is headquartered in Dulles, Virginia with operations in North America and Europe. Additional information about SER is available at <http://www.SER.com>.