Today customers expect more from every business interaction. For many, this ‘interaction’ starts and ends with their contact centre experience. They expect a personalised and unique service each and every time through every channel.

It is no longer acceptable to offer a phone or email process that requires the customer to repeatedly enter the same information, navigate many layers of menus or resolve a case in days and weeks vs minutes and seconds. Your customers want an effective interaction that predicts their needs and resolves their issues via their preferred communication channels. For example, your customers are mobile, web savvy and socially connected. They want to work with companies that optimise these channels and deliver superior levels of service through them.

Many companies also realise that by optimising and even broadening these channels, they can further differentiate their customer service experience. A recent example of this is Amazon’s Mayday functionality in the new Kindle Fire devices. Mayday promises immediate help from a real person, a person who already has a very good idea of what you want before they even talk to you. The best part is this service is delivered with a full video experience and high quality communication, so questions that require a visual explanation, now take seconds to resolve.

So how can other contact centres emulate what Amazon has done? Thankfully technologies to support and toggle between various communication channels are becoming increasingly available. The greatest contributor for this is the expansion of WebRTC.

WebRTC allows chat, voice and video communications to be done directly in the web browser or on a smartphone. This innovation integrated into the cloud contact centre experience enables; rapid deployments, intelligent routing based on CRM data and the ability to support any communication channel(s) your customers desire.

**So what might a contact centre of the near future look like?**

Imagine a customer browsing a website, on a tablet, laptop or phone. In addition to the commonplace web chat option, there are also options for voice or video chat. These additional communication channels can either be initiated by the customer, or offered up proactively when the website predicts the customer is having issues. Then as the customer initiates a conversation, they are automatically directed to an agent who already can see the previous interactions the customer had with the company and the web journey that brought them to the agent that day. The customer no longer needs to experience a series of automated questions or re-entry of data! The conversation is rich in information, with the agent talking to the customer over video, providing the customer with the relevant information (possibly combining textual and graphical information), or a ‘how-to’ video, combined with a follow up via email. Not only is the customer experience improved but so is the agent experience. Now agents are more effectively armed with real-time customer insights and with the right tools to resolve issues quickly.

**How soon could this become a reality?**
Many cloud contact centre solutions already provide the complex routing and strong integration with CRM systems to drive multi-channel communications. The added strength is when WebRTC can reliably become part of this ecosystem. Currently, WebRTC is already available on over 65% of desktop browsers. It is supported for desktop and mobile Chrome browsers and standardisation is nearly complete for Firefox. At the same time, Microsoft has a competing standard, CU-RTC-Web and Apple has its proprietary Facetime. It will take some time before we see a completely standardised approach.

Overall, WebRTC is very important to the innovation of contact centres for two reasons. 1) It brings ubiquitous voice and video into the browser, without the need for any plugins; 2) maybe more importantly, it provides a strong peer-to-peer data communication protocol. This combination of voice, video and data are what is needed to provide rich communications and rich routing to the contact centre. The combination of WebRTC with robust cloud technology offerings will be the beginning of fast, low friction, satisfying communications into the contact centre. It is time to give our customers what they want, when and how they want it!

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