CCW Vegas 2019 - Cloud Call Center Search

Cloud Call Center Search

Fred Stacey, Founder. With over 500 cloud software providers in the call center market, choosing the right cloud call center software solution is no simple task. A 25-year veteran of the industry, Fred put together a team of experts to help companies make better informed decisions.

With all the suppliers in the marketplace who claim that they make it so easy to implement cloud contact center technology, why do businesses need assistance in selecting the right one?

The reality of our technology landscape is that there are far too many contact center technology providers for any IT or operations professional to possibly know. I am always learning of a new technology company launching in our space, and I live in the technology world because it is my business to know. It is impossible to expect anyone whose primary job function is running IT or operations to know all the right companies to consider.

When I started in this industry over 25 years ago, there were 5 major players and they all circled around the telephony side of the business. Today we have technology companies from AI to workforce optimization and everything in between.

What is your mission and how can you make it easier for companies to make the right choices?

We are a master agency for contact center technology. Most of the industry is not aware of the master agency model on the technology acquisition side, but it's been here since the early nineties when master agents first started to help on the telecom side. We partner with hundreds of different technology companies, evaluating them for their infrastructure integration points, functionalities, what verticals and industries they specialize in, get input from their clients, etc. We also have our clients and BPO partners that come to us and say, "We need a new omnichannel platform" or "We're thinking about bringing in AI." How can you make it easier for us to make the best investment?" We assist those individual buyers by starting a conversation about what the business needs first, what it's trying to accomplish, what is its current infrastructure? We go through a discovery process, understand the client's needs and then bring vendors for them to review. With the CPaaS players coming into the marketplace, there are multiple technologies entering daily built on top of those platforms. I spend half my time evaluating technology companies in our industry and every week I still hear of a brand new contact center technology. I can't imagine as a buyer who has a day job, anyone can possibly understand the landscape of our marketplace.

How do you see the cloud contact center technology landscape changing and what do companies need to know about the evolving options before they start the search process?

First, we are seeing both an expansion and consolidation in the technology players in our market. Acquisitions are hot and heavy as many companies in the tech space are trying to leverage the momentum of the growth in valuations and the "land grab" of the premise-based customers being forced to migrate.

With CPaaS platforms we will continue to see a rise in new entries into the market, which is only going to make the process more confusing for the end users/buyers. I expect to see this trend continue for the foreseeable future as no one has really established themselves as the clear industry leader in any segment of the market.

Companies considering their move to a new contact center technology need to really understand that there is a ridiculous number of options that can solve all kinds of problems. There is no one-size-fits-all solution in any segment of the contact center technology market. You need to prepare your internal organization by taking the appropriate steps to get a plan together for the jump to cloud. Journey mapping and digital transformation are not just buzz words. These processes make the understanding of what you need from a vendor significantly easier to define and implement.

In putting together a plan, do you create a complete timeline and roadmap for implementation, or do you find businesses simply want to fill an immediate need?

It's a mix of both. In our industry, we encounter people who just need to implement something different. In those situations, we help them identify the right solution for their current infrastructure. We take pains to ensure what they implement today will help them move forward, but I prefer to be able to talk about a plan. My services are free to the end user and I can leverage my nearly 25 years in the industry to help them identify the first things they need to do, figure out the platforms they need to take a serious look at and show them how to map it out so that they use that information to put their own plan together.

There certainly are a lot of startups. What if you analyzed one and found they had an amazing solution, one that shows the type of difference-making potential that you had not previously seen. Would you advise a customer it might be a risk worth taking?

Absolutely. There are a few providers in my portfolio that know the needs of the contact center market and have built something that is truly unique; a solution which could revolutionize how a company operates and possibly change the landscape for my clients. I will bring such a company on as a partner, knowing full well that there is a risk involved. I'll tell my clients that and not every client with want to take that risk. Often though, because it's a startup with a smaller customer base, they have an opportunity to get in at a lower pricing structure but like any early adoption there is inherent risk.

If you walk through the exhibit hall at CCW, many vendors seem to be saying the same thing. If you were going to advise a company trying to find the right solution, what are some of the questions they should be asking?

Fundamentally, any business should start with understanding its own infrastructure. I always began with what I call the "system of record". I consider it to be one of the most critical pieces as we progress in the marketplace to digital processes and automations. If a company doesn't have its data normalized, it doesn't have everything prepared for business intelligence, analytics, and AI for the future. Even if a business is not ready to implement these technologies, it's still imperative to start at the system of record and understand where it stands. Then they can intelligently start looking for the most effective solution for their company in that space.

What are the technologies in which companies are now expressing the greatest interest?

We get a lot of "I need AI tomorrow" calls, but the reality is that many businesses are still kicking the tires. That's what we saw with omnichannel and chatbots as companies got excited by the industry buzz without knowing what went into the adoption process. The tide is turning and AI is being implemented in many places. I'm seeing true progress in moving from POC (proof of concept) to full implementation.

Voice analytics is also a big talking point right now. Natural language processing or NLP engines are becoming more accurate. With the addition of AI and machine learning, a company can do some pretty impactful things with voice analytics and do it quickly. The one that has surprised me is CRMs. While everybody knows Salesforce and a lot of people bought into it, they're tired of paying the license fees and issuing developer checks every month. Salesforce is the 800-pound gorilla and offers some tools that are good for the contact center, but now many of my customers are looking for contact center focused technologies that are much more flexible and cater towards the contact center model.

When a client comes to you for guidance, do you give them individual or multiple recommendations?

I always try to find at least two, if not three vendors, that fit all their needs. There are specific requirements in every deal. There's always going to be some requirements on integration and budget, but then you find out unique ones such as the ability to do routing based on certain data points, that not every system has available. I'll put the solutions in front of them and they pick which vendors they want to talk to and can then skip the entire RFI/RFP process and go right to the short list of providers.

Does that make you essentially the Human RFI?

I had a partner tell me that I was the 'Match.com of contact center technology'. We're trying to find the right match. We are more human RFI, RFP machine which takes the discovery process back to the technology companies, verifies that they're willing to compete for this deal and they have all the correct requirements.

Can you provide a few brief examples of how your services have enabled organizations to find the right cloud contact center solutions to meet their needs?

In one example, we had a client who needed to move very quickly to a new vendor for their CCaaS platform, but they had some unique requirements that not many vendors could meet. We worked with the client to define those needs and quickly engaged the vendors, bringing them right to the client to move quickly through demo into the selection process. The time from engagement to selection and implementation was a little over a month. This type of timeline is extremely difficult, but because of working together with the client and vendors we were able to accomplish this without any interruption to the brand's ability to service their clients.

Do you have any final thoughts for our audience?

In this landscape, especially if your're new to the contact center space and trying to identify the right technology, I would say even if you don't use my company, find resources in the marketplace to help you. Read as much as you can. There are many great organizations to help you identify the vendors that you need. Just don't do it alone, because no one has do it that way today.