



Communications services trends for 2015 — transformation takes hold

What's ahead for 2015? For the sixth straight year, Avaya has asked leading thinkers from across the organization to offer ideas about what IT departments, contact centers and enterprises can expect in the year ahead with regard to communications support services. Here are the six key trends that emerged from our discussions, along with a brief profile of our thought leaders:

#1: The cloud takes shape. Many large enterprises are well along the cloud migration path, moving from dedicated on-premises communications solutions to virtualized environments and, ultimately, to private, public or hybrid cloud solutions—with most choosing private or hybrid solutions. Many mid-size enterprises (200 to 2,000 employees) still value the simplicity and total-cost-of-ownership scenario offered by the right kind of on-premise equipment, but they are increasingly moving to cloud-based solutions. Typically they will choose more economical public cloud solutions, but a growing number could look for hybrid or private cloud solutions that make economic sense.

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Meanwhile, the manner by which support services are delivered for cloud solutions is quickly evolving. Large and mid-size enterprises alike want seamless integration between the hosted cloud software and related support, so administrative and support components will need to be built into the software. This approach will allow organizations, particularly mid-size enterprises, to link users directly to the software provider's support services. Larger enterprises that want to retain more control will want administrative functions to be built into the software while having the flexibility for external handling of support tool sets and access. Either way, the hosted cloud solution will need to drive a differentiated support services experience in which users can click from within the application to get timely help.

#2: Video support reaches an inflection point — if you snooze, you lose.

At the end of 2013, Amazon.com became the first company to offer one-way video customer support. In 2014, Avaya became the first company to offer both one-way and two-way video support options for customer engagement. Now companies in many industry verticals are adopting — or at least pilot testing — some form of video. Often they are using video either to speed processes — for example, insurance claims settlement — or to make deeper connections with customers and suppliers, such as through branch banking, health care, distance learning and, especially in mid-size businesses, supply chain. For complex support issues, video will become a formidable interaction channel. At Avaya, we've seen a measurable boost in customer satisfaction around video interactions. Businesses that haven't begun to make the move to video will be challenged to catch up with their competitors.

#3: As omni-channel support matures, Web chat plays a pivotal role.

Businesses are beginning to offer a true "omni-channel" support experience to customers, seamlessly providing service via the customers' choice of voice, video, Web chat, e-mail and mobile channels. As a result, customers are

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self-selecting channels based on personal preferences. Even as video gains momentum as a high-touch channel (see Trend #2), companies will continue to use Web chat as the relatively low-expense way to initiate the customer experience from a Web site, to triage that experience, and to direct customers to other support resources and tools. For example, if a support services customer is unhappy, your contact center agent can suggest that the customer “click-to-call” so the agent can resolve the issue in a more personal way. In another example, if a customer wants to return merchandise, a live agent using Web chat can direct that person to the automated process for return authorizations. It's still a personal interaction, which customers appreciate, but it quickly allows agents to redirect customers for timely access to the appropriate channel and resource for their situation, emotional state and other factors affecting them at the moment. Companies that take full advantage of the Web chat channel will enjoy a real customer engagement advantage over their competition.

#4: Social media and crowdsourcing: Are you really engaging your customers?

As we predicted last year, more businesses are encouraging customer-employee interaction through crowdsourcing, which is often carried out in private forums. But don't forget how important broader social media conversations are. It will be imperative to bridge the gap between simply monitoring social platforms for conversations about your company and doing something about them — i.e., capturing, routing and responding to those conversations within your contact center and/or broader enterprise. As with Trend #3 above, it's all about meeting customers wherever they choose to be and encouraging interaction between customers, employees and even third parties. The more companies engage with customers, the more loyal and embedded those customers can become.

#5: Support services transparency: Customers like what they see. More businesses will give their support customers controlled access to support-related tools, trends and other related information. For example, customers will have a view of their supplier software and hardware footprint, network and application performance, number of incidents, and even support provider performance. Mobility will be a growing factor, contributing to more seamless and transparent interactions that give customers instant access to rich information about their relationship with your company and about your company's products and services. Such an environment of “free choice” empowers customers and improves customer engagement.

About Avaya

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#6: The high-accountability support model emerges. Traditional support organizations organize around a model of escalation, issue passing and transfers between, for example, tiers and areas of expertise. Under most circumstances, this approach can be frustrating for customers, but at the speed of real-time chat support, it can be miserable. Look for leading companies to begin organizing around a high-accountability or ownership model where individual support personnel retain ownership of the customer experience and use techniques such as collaboration and “swarming” to concurrently break down the barriers of the “tiered” organization. This approach will drive a better experience for customers and ultimately make for more efficient resource utilization in support organizations.

The trend spotters

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