



OnDemand Contact Center Technology: 5 Evaluation Criteria

Learn five critical evaluation criteria for choosing OnDemand contact center technology that gives you the flexibility to accommodate the changing demands of your business.

Executive Overview

You have already decided that an OnDemand contact center solution is right for your company; now you have to evaluate the available contact center technology alternatives. Beyond the must-have features to meet your current and future business needs, there are several critical technology criteria to evaluate. With several providers fighting for your business, you are likely to come under the barrage of sales pitches. You will hear catch phrases like “Uptime and reliability,” “100 percent webbased,” “No software, no hardware,” and many others. Careful evaluation of providers’ claims will help ensure that your company is not trapped in a contact center solution that is not a fit for your business. In this white paper, we discuss five critical evaluation criteria for choosing an OnDemand contact center technology that gives you the flexibility to accommodate the changing demands of your business while retaining full control of your contact center.

By the time you finish reading, you will

- » Learn to ask the right questions when speaking with potential OnDemand contact center providers
- » Understand potential pitfalls and learn how to avoid them

Requirement to purchase or lease hardware necessitates a significant upfront investment.

Software

Questions to ask: “Is your OnDemand solution 100 percent webbased? Does that mean that all my call center agents and supervisors need is a phone, Internet connection and a browser?”

Why these questions are important to your business: Only a 100 percent webbased system allows a company to standardize call center operations for any workspace environment. A true OnDemand solution reduces the complexity of implementation, eliminates maintenance, and increases the usability of the system.

Be aware that many vendors require that your contact center employees download, install and maintain a proprietary software component on their computers. Such solutions are not 100 percent webbased and cannot be called OnDemand. Proprietary software causes the loss of ability to effectively employ home/remote agents, a decrease in efficiency, and an increase in maintenance costs.

The requirement to install a local component forces the agent to go through all the steps they've completed initially to reconnect to the application if their PC fails. While agents are engaged in reestablishing their access, your call center experiences a significant service interruption that negatively impacts your company's bottom line. A true OnDemand solution allows your contact center agents secure access to the system from any computer with a web browser. As a result, your call center does not experience any loss of productivity.

Vendor involvement slows down your response to immediate business needs and complicates operational processes.

Hardware

Question to ask: "Is there any specialized hardware required to enable the contact center application to function?"

Why this question is important to your business: The requirement to purchase hardware puts a burden on your business. Setup of telephony routers, terminal adapters and on-premise servers can severely complicate implementation and support. Deployment of these additional hardware components could take days and requires skill sets your business may not possess (to fill the gap, you might need to purchase professional services from your vendor).

Additionally, your vendor should not limit your call center to the use of specific phone equipment. A robust call center solution should allow your agents, especially if you employ a distributed workforce, to use any phone device – soft, mobile, office or home without requiring you to purchase specialized gear.

Remember that contact center vendors' requirement to purchase or lease hardware causes your contact center to lose portability and necessitates a significant upfront monetary investment and ongoing maintenance costs.

Planned Maintenances

Question to ask: "How do you handle planned maintenances?"

Why this question is important to your business: While most providers will cover the "unplanned" downtime in their Service Level Agreement contract, the "planned" maintenances are typically not included. The truth is, however, that downtime – planned or unplanned – has a direct negative effect on your business and your customers.

Make sure that your vendor has HACC TM (High Availability Communications Cluster) technology to provide worldclass uptime and eliminate business interruptions during planned maintenances.

Be wary of providers who try to convince you that frequent planned maintenances are a normal cost of running the service. This is usually an indication that the platform that they are using to provide OnDemand services was not originally designed for this critical environment. The result is the need to repeatedly take down the service in a "planned" manner to avoid "unplanned" crashes, for which the provider has to reimburse your business. Needless to say, the typical uptime reports will not include "planned" maintenance service interruptions.

Changes to Call Center Configuration

Question to ask: "Can I make changes to my setup on the fly without contacting your support department?"

Why this question is important to your business: To successfully adapt to changing business requirements, you – not your vendor must be able to have control over your contact center. A provider's delay in responding to your request can mean devastating results for your business when changes need to be done quickly.

Creating prompts for new marketing campaigns, changing the phone device assigned to an agent, amending IVR flows, adjusting service levels across multiple communication channels – these are just a few functionalities that you should be able to handle on the fly without contacting the solution provider.

Vendor involvement slows down your response to immediate business needs and complicates operational processes. An OnDemand contact center solution vendor should provide your call center with all tools necessary to manage the changes and updates independently.

Solutions that provide only phone communication channel are placing you at a disadvantage against your competitors.

Integrated Multimedia Management

Question to ask: "I'd like to provide multiple ways for my customers to reach me, such as phone, email, and web chat. Does your technology support the same routing rules, skills based support and management and reporting across multiple types of media?"

Why this question is important to your business: While the phone remains a popular channel for customers to reach companies, email and web chat are not far behind. Businesses that can make it easier for their customers to do business with them will gain an advantage over the competition. A robust OnDemand contact center solution should provide your business with an integrated multimedia management engine. Solutions that provide only the phone communication channel might be placing you at a disadvantage against the competitors whose inbound communications include email and chat and who are therefore more accessible to their clients. Even if you start out by using telephony only, you want to make sure that your provider can support the multimedia interactions if you decide to open up those channels for your prospects and clients. Additionally, keep in mind that a robust system should allow your contact center to manage all types of media using the same routing engine. Such integrated multimedia management streamlines your contact center operations with agents being served the interaction at the appropriate time, whether it is a phone call, an email or a chat session. From the management perspective, an integrated solution should provide supervisors with a unified view of service level attainment across all communication channels.

About Packet8

The Packet8 (www.packet8.net) residential phone service, introduced in November 2002, incorporates 8x8's proprietary technology in an affordable, easy-to-use calling service delivered over DSL, cable modem or other high speed Internet connections. In March 2004, 8x8 introduced the Packet8 Virtual Office system, a full-featured hosted PBX VoIP solution for small to medium sized businesses. Two months later, the Packet8 DV326 Broadband consumer VideoPhone was unveiled at Supercomm 2004 and has since received high marks for its exceptional quality, ease of use and consumer friendly pricing.

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3151 Jay Street
Santa Clara, CA 95054
1.888.898.8733 Toll-Free
1.408.687.4120 Outside U.S.
1.408.980.0432 Fax
www.Packet8.net