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# **Boost Your CX With A Better Integrated Contact Center, CRM, And Collaboration Systems**

## Table Of Contents

<u>Executive Summary</u>	3
<u>Key Findings</u>	4
<u>Contact Centers, CRM Systems, And Collaboration Systems Need Better Integration</u>	5
<u>A Unified Technology Approach Is Essential For Improving CX</u>	7
<u>An All-In-One Approach To System Integration Can Alleviate CX Challenges</u>	11
<u>Key Recommendations</u>	15

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## Executive Summary

Contact centers play a central role in supporting the customer journey across both pre-purchase and post-purchase touchpoints. These touchpoints are essential for answering customer questions, resolving customer complaints, troubleshooting product/service issues, and many more tasks. However, the way in which these interactions are executed is important; because a single, negative customer experience can have lasting effects beyond just that one interaction. It is no surprise then, that nearly 50% of decision-makers responsible for contact centers say that their number one objective is improving the customer experience (CX).

In February 2021, Microsoft commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate the ways in which companies are investing in their contact centers, collaboration strategies, and business applications as a way of improving CX. Forrester conducted a survey of 372 global contact center decision-makers who are responsible for digital transformation strategies and planning. We found that while organizations have the right tools in place to support contact centers, those tools often lack the system integration needed to help call-center agents operate more efficiently. For organizations to drive the business outcomes they want with their contact centers, a tighter integration between contact center systems, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and internal collaboration systems is essential.

**Key Findings** →



## Key Findings



**Most companies are not entirely confident in the ability of their contact centers to meet customers' needs.** Key factors contributing to this lack of confidence include: inadequate technology, inability to service customers on their channel of choice, lack of visibility into customer data, and limited collaboration between agents and internal peers/experts to help answer questions.



**Poor integration between contact center systems and CRM systems is a key challenge.** Poor integration makes the experience for contact center agents more cumbersome by limiting their access to important customer data and complicating the number of systems agents must access to support customers' needs.



**An all-in-one approach to the integration of contact center systems and CRM systems can alleviate customers' current challenges.** The surveyed decision-makers highlighted that system integration can be improved by moving contact centers and CRM solutions to the same cloud vendors.



**The benefits of improved contact center and CRM system integration are three-fold.** Improving contact center system integration with CRM and collaboration tools helps to drive benefits for agents, improve technology management, and enhance contact center business outcomes (e.g., the ability to support more seamless customer journeys across channels, general CX improvement, etc.).

# Contact Center, CRM, And Collaboration Systems Need Better Integration

The majority of contact center decision-makers are making a push to deliver higher quality customer experiences. However, there are a lot of layers and processes that go into enabling a company to create a positive customer experience. For instance, most contact centers support a number of customer engagement channels such as email, voice, SMS, and chat. Our study found that, on average, contact centers use 3.7 different kinds of business applications, all of which come from different technology providers. And 74% of contact center agents are using four or more applications during a typical interaction. The challenge of supporting these tools and channels is in integrating the operational and data perspectives of those systems and applications. Common contact center challenges include: high costs to maintain and deploy simultaneous updates and integrations with contact center and CRM systems; difficulty linking operational data to customer data; and the time-consuming management of multiple systems.

Figure 1

## Most Companies Are Not Fully Confident In Their Abilities To Meet Customer Needs



Base: 372 global decision-makers of digital transformation strategies as it relates to the business strategy and planning of contact centers  
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft, February 2021

As a result of these integration challenges, many companies are not fully confident in their contact center capabilities (see Figure 1). **Less than half of contact center decision-makers strongly agree that:**

- They have adequate technology to enable agents to easily meet customer needs, which includes servicing customers on their channel of choice.
- They have proper visibility of the customer information/history to help agents better understand customer context.
- They have collaboration tools that connect agents with peers, supervisors, or subject matter experts (SMEs) to help resolve customer questions.

Addressing these gaps will drive improved CX. To achieve this goal, customers need to focus mainly on the integration of technology for contact centers, CRM systems, and collaboration systems.

On average, contact centers use 3.7 different applications (from different technology providers).

**74%**

of contact center agents are using four or more applications during a typical interaction.

## A Unified Technology Approach Is Essential For Improving CX

Contact center systems, CRM systems, and collaboration systems all individually play an important role in supporting customer interactions. Each offers a unique function that complements the others, yet they all converge to provide a solid base for high performance. However, for most companies, these three systems are implemented by different vendors and managed separately. This can create challenges for contact centers that rely on customer information and data from CRM systems to meet customer needs. Top challenges in the integration between contact center systems and CRM systems include (see Figure 2):

- **Poor integration.** Most organizations have multiple tools or applications that serve specific customer needs. And within each of those systems, customer information is captured in every interaction; leaving a valuable trail of breadcrumbs behind that illustrate the customer journey. Unfortunately, most interactions occur within an isolated system, and retrieving relevant customer information from disparate systems can be time-consuming and challenging without the right integration or support. This is why 46% of contact center decision-makers said that improving the integration between contact center systems and other systems (such as CRM) was a top business objective.
- **Poor connections with collaboration tools.** Contact center agents are under constant pressure to quickly find client solutions. Agents are not expected to be experts on every customer need, so having the right tools to connect them with the right people who do have the answer can be a tremendous help. Collaboration tools can allow agents to chat, message, share content, and find answers quickly back and forth with their more knowledgeable peers (even during customer interactions).

# 46%

of contact center decision-makers said that improving the integration of contact center systems with other systems (such as CRM) was a top business objective.

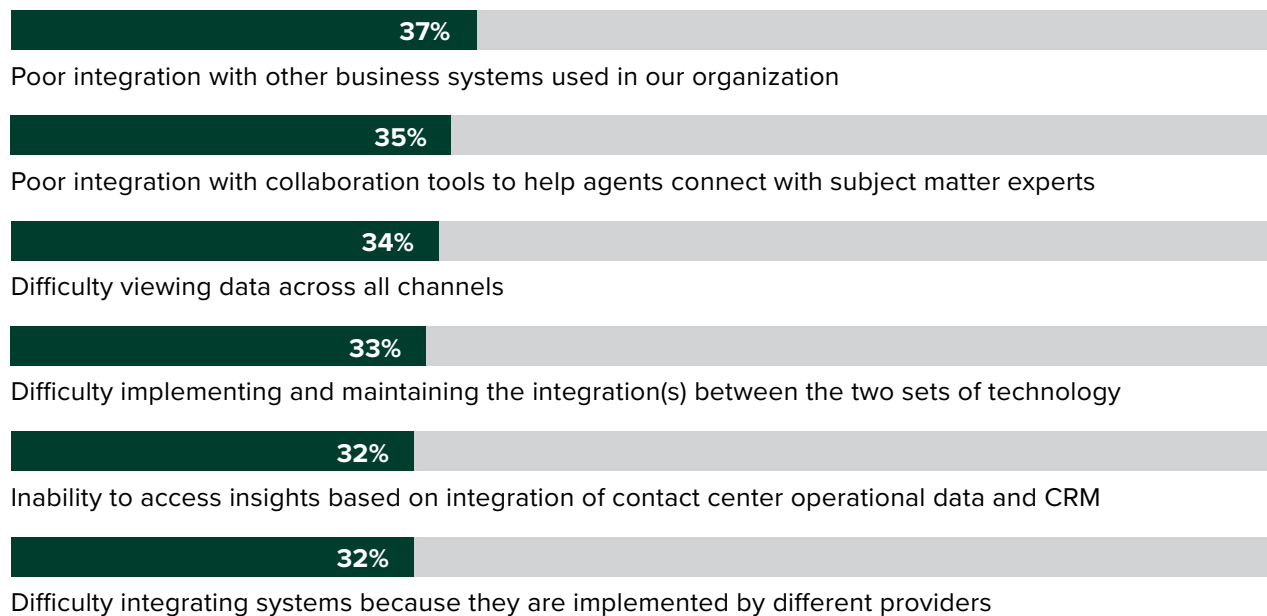
- Difficulty viewing data across all channels.**  
 One-third of surveyed contact center decision-makers put data sharing as one of their top-three challenges. Understanding how customers are engaging with each channel is important, but sharing that data between systems can be challenging. Part of this difficulty stems from security concerns with how data is shared and who has access. Sharing the data can help support customer interactions, but 40% of contact center decision-makers have put a high priority on bolstering data security, privacy, and access policies — which must be taken into consideration when improving data visibility and access.

40% of contact center decision-makers have put a high priority on bolstering data security, privacy, and access policies.

## Figure 2

### Working Between Contact Center And CRM Systems Is Challenging

(Percentage ranked as top 3 challenge)



Base: 372 global decision-makers of digital transformation strategies as it relates to the business strategy and planning of contact centers

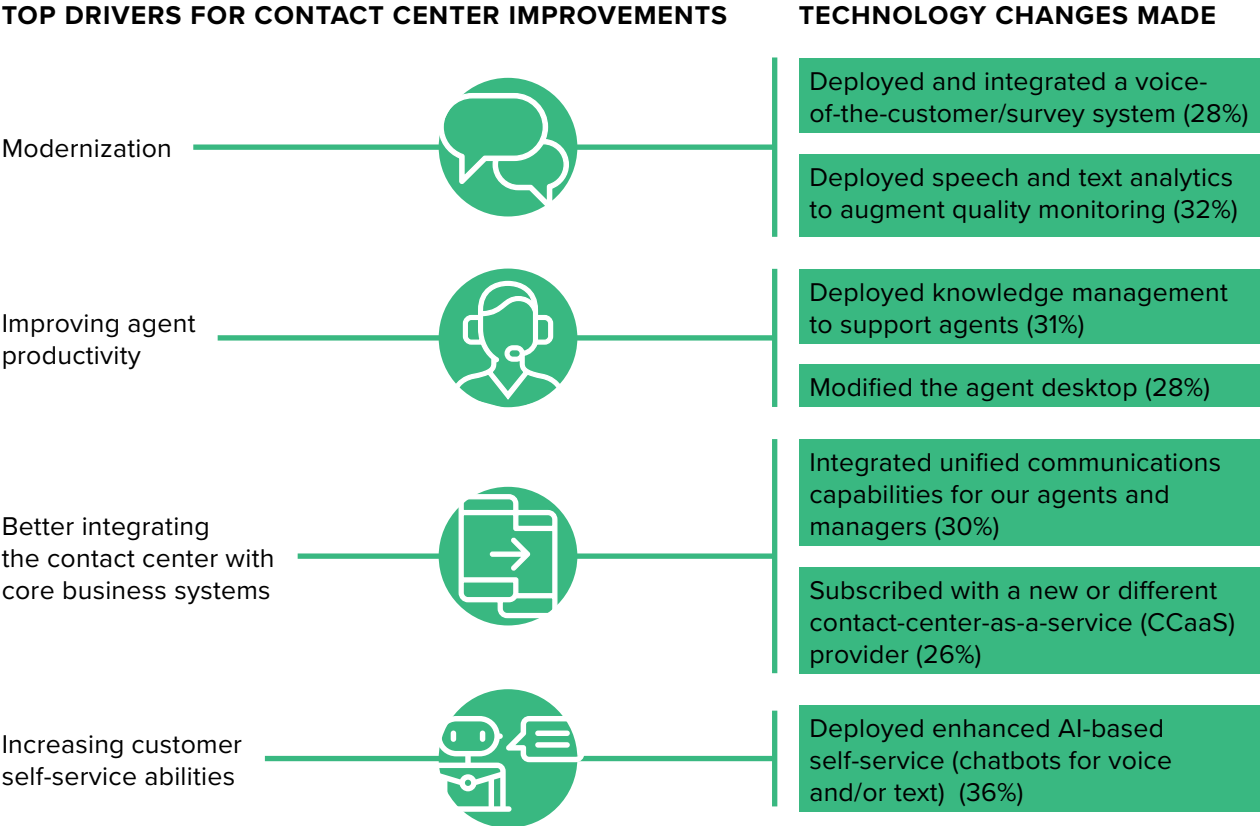
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft, February 2021



# COMPANIES ARE IMPROVING CONTACT CENTER SYSTEMS TO ADDRESS CURRENT ISSUES

Nearly two-thirds of contact center decision-makers report having made a significant change to their contact center systems in the last year. The most common drivers behind those changes included: 1) improving support across all communication channels through modernization; 2) improving agent productivity with better tools; 3) better integrating the contact center with core business systems; and 4) increasing customer self-service abilities. With these drivers as the primary goal, companies' investments in technology have been closely aligned with one or more of those key drivers (see Figure 3). For example, 36% of surveyed decision-makers have deployed AI-based self-service to either resolve customer issues without intervention from live agents or to ensure that service calls are routed to the best possible agent for remediation.

**Figure 3**  
**Most Companies Have Made Recent Contact Center Updates**



Base: 372 global decision-makers of digital transformation strategies as it relates to the business strategy and planning of contact centers

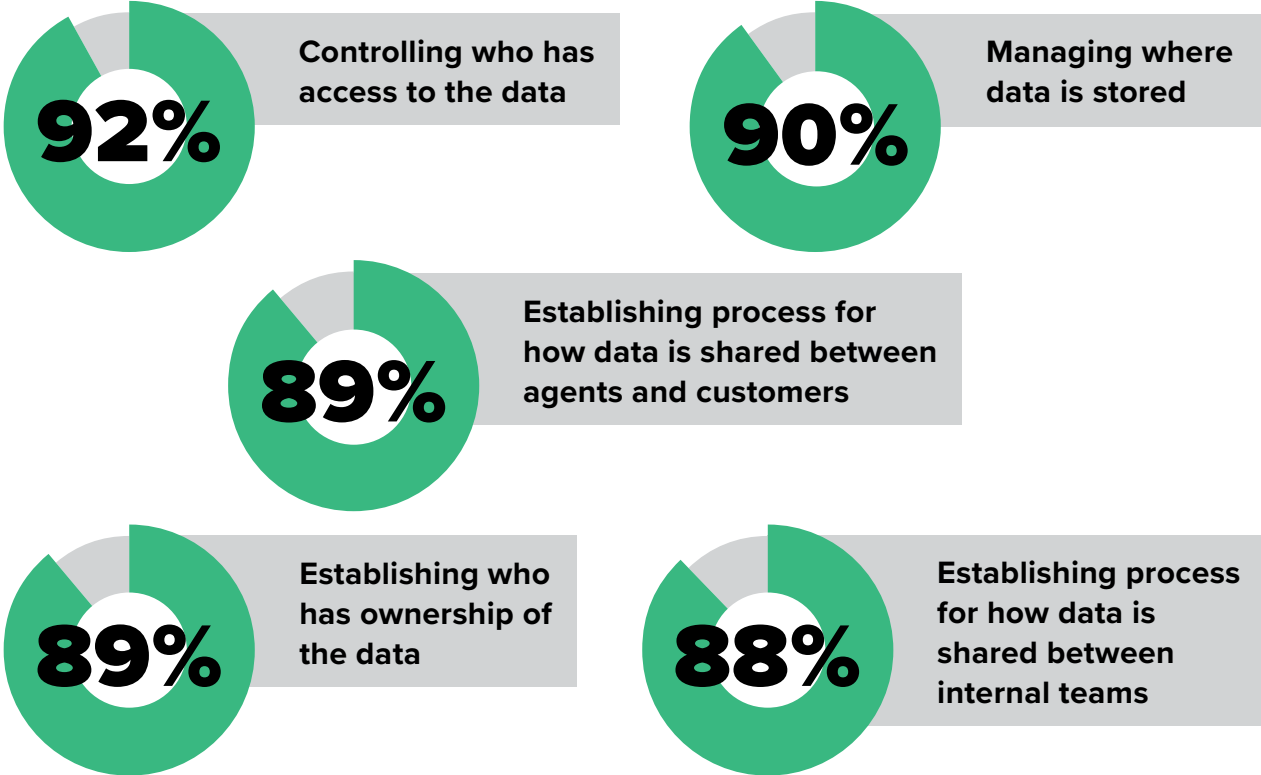
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft, February 2021

As contact center systems are updated, companies face the additional challenge of ensuring that the data between contact center systems and CRM systems is connected. Strict data privacy regulations are a challenge for nearly 40% of those surveyed. The security of customer data is of the utmost importance to contact center decision-makers, especially as they think about better integrating business systems. Key considerations include: who is controlling access to the data; where is the data being stored; who has ownership over the data; and how can the data be securely and compliantly shared between internal teams, agents, and customers (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4**  
**Security Is Top Of Mind When Handling Customer Data Between Contact Center And Business Systems**

**What Importance Does Your Company Put On The Following Aspects Of Security As It Relates To Customer Data?**

(Percentage saying very or moderately important)



Base: 372 global decision-makers of digital transformation strategies as it relates to the business strategy and planning of contact centers

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft, February 2021

## An All-In-One Approach To Contact Center Systems Integration Can Alleviate CX Challenges

Taking into account all of their current challenges, we asked contact center decision-makers to indicate what solutions they are considering when addressing their most pressing technology challenges (e.g., lack of integration with business systems, limited agent access to collaboration tools, and customer data privacy and security). Of the solutions identified, two stood out as key opportunities.

- **Moving contact center systems, CRM systems, and collaboration systems to the same provider.** Nearly 40% of contact center decision-makers believe that consolidating their technologies to a single service provider will help overcome current integration barriers between contact center systems and CRM systems. Additionally, 47% intend to select contact center systems and CRM systems that are better integrated and aligned with current collaboration tools. This improved connection with collaboration systems is important to ensure that agents are connected with the resources they need to serve customers faster and better.
- **Moving all systems to the cloud.** Forty-one percent of contact center decision-makers are planning to move all systems to the cloud in order to mitigate their current challenges. Moving to the cloud can help solve challenges by eliminating on-premises infrastructure requirements and improving the pace of needed enhancements and upgrades.

Nearly 40% of contact center decision-makers believe that consolidating their technologies to a single service provider will help overcome current integration barriers between contact center systems and CRM systems.

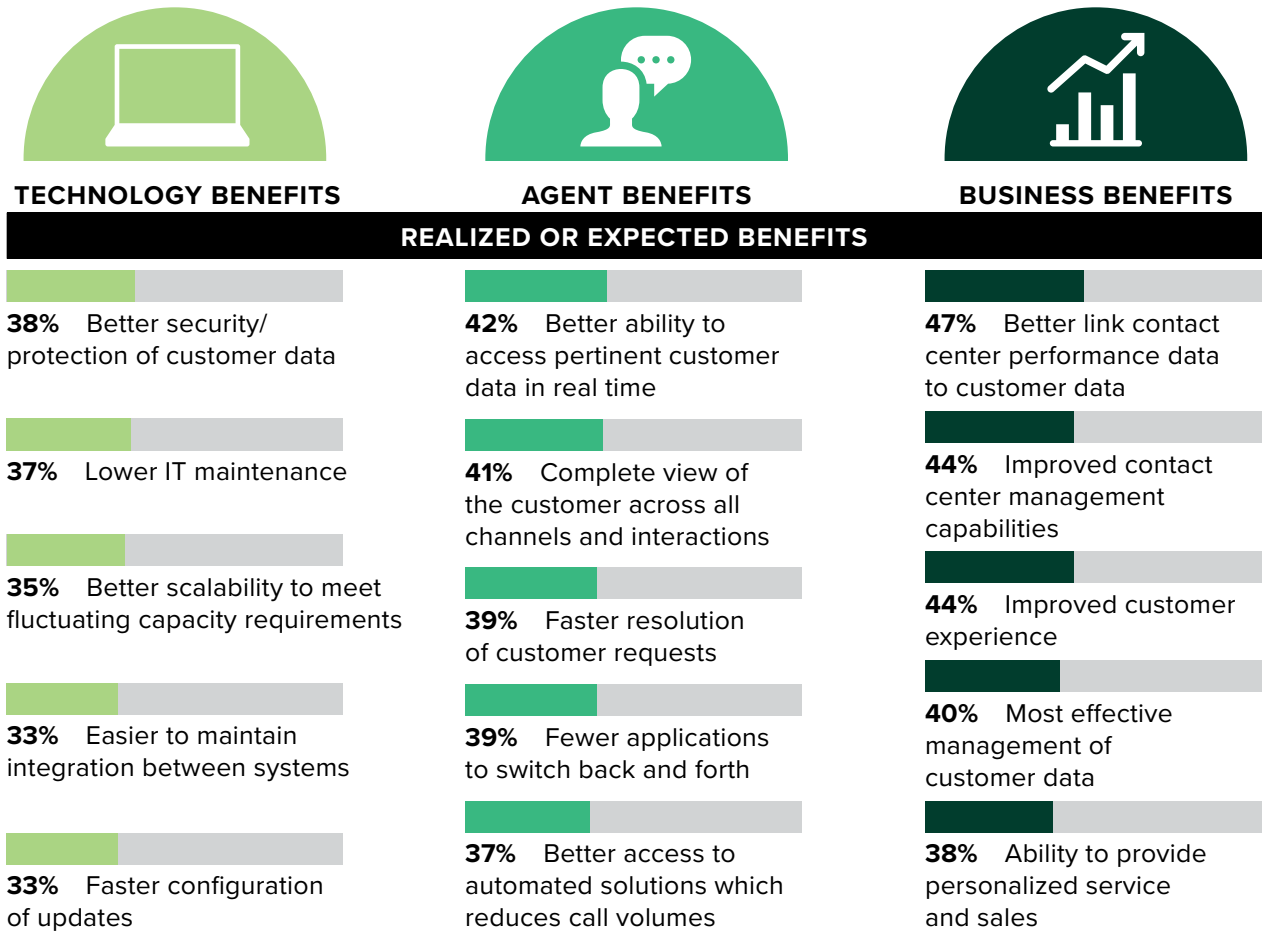
## THE BENEFITS OF IMPROVED CONTACT CENTER SYSTEMS INTEGRATION ARE THREE-FOLD

Improving integration between contact center, CRM, and collaboration systems paves the way for several positive benefits and outcomes, including CX improvements, which is the top priority for 50% of contact center decision-makers. The benefits of improving integration between contact centers and key cloud-based business systems are grounded in three key themes (see Figure 5):

- **Technology benefits.** Improving integration — via vendor consolidation and cloud migration — is expected to improve customer data security for 38% of respondents. With customer data being such an important part of contact center operations, this benefit offers business leaders greater peace of mind. Shifting to the cloud helps lower support costs, and 35% consider cloud-enabled scalability to meet fluctuating capacity a key benefit. Contact center leaders recognize that implementing contact center and CRM software — built and managed by a single vendor — will make it much easier to maintain system integration and make configuration easier.
- **Agent benefits.** Forty-two percent of contact center decision-makers believe that bringing contact center systems and CRM systems together will better enable agents to access customer data in real time; which includes having a more complete view of the customer across all channels and interactions. Additionally, tighter integration between the agent's desktop and collaboration tools is expected to drive several improvements as well: higher customer satisfaction (48%); better ability to find answers to difficult questions (45%); improved agent productivity (43%); and others (see Figure 5). Around 40% believe that the combination of these collaboration and integration benefits will lead to a faster resolution of customer requests and a reduced need to switch back and forth between applications when helping customers.

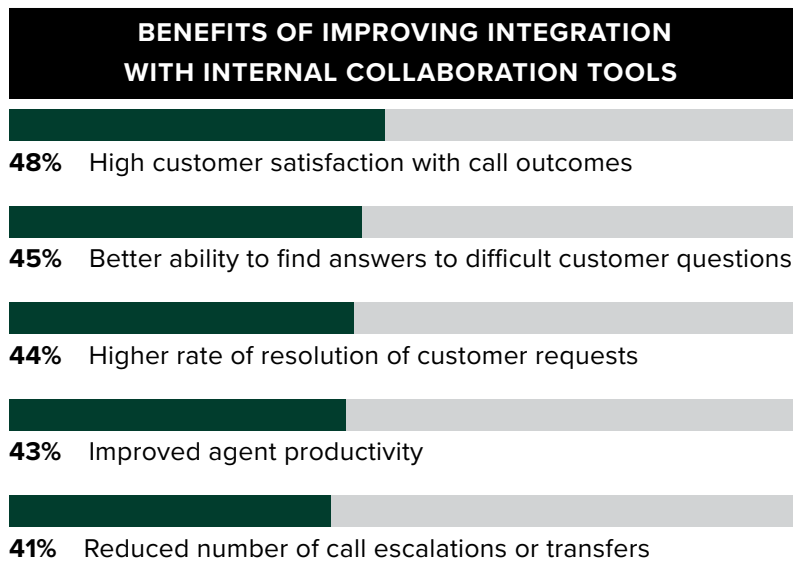
**Figure 5**

**Benefits Of Moving Contact Center, CRM, And Collaboration Systems To A Single Vendor In The Cloud**



47% intend to select contact center and CRM systems that are better integrated and aligned with current collaboration tools.

Base: 372 global decision-makers of digital transformation strategies as it relates to the business strategy and planning of contact centers  
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- **Business and customer benefits.** All of the agent and technology benefits — that come from stronger integration between systems —ultimately work together to drive key business outcomes. Businesses will be able to better link contact center operational data with customer data to complete customer profiles and drive contact center improvements (e.g., better scorecards, dashboards, performance analytics, forecasting, etc.). The deeper understanding of customers and improved operational rigor will help bring companies back to their primary contact center objectives of improving CX. In fact, 44% of respondents expect improved CX to be a key outcome of moving their contact center systems and CRM systems to a single cloud vendor.



**44%**

of respondents expect improved CX to be a key outcome of moving contact center systems and CRM systems to a single cloud vendor.

## Key Recommendations

The contact center is a strong contributor to an organizations' overall CX, yet its performance has been hampered by a legacy of diverse, disparate applications used in their operations. A customer's interaction with a contact center agent can either make or break brand loyalty. Consolidating contact center, CRM, and collaboration software into a tightly integrated set of applications and data will improve CX. Agents can serve customers on their channel of choice, while customer journey analysis and history are managed by a well-integrated CRM application.

Forrester's in-depth survey of 372 global decision-makers about their contact center digital transformation strategies yielded several important recommendations:

### **Consider consolidating contact center, CRM, and collaboration solutions onto a single cloud vendor.**

The market for these solutions is advancing toward more integrated suites of capabilities to support the contact center. This trend is being enabled by the fact that more integrated software suites are being delivered in the cloud.

### **Lift and shift, or transform?**

Change management for a contact center is difficult, and many organizations will simply plan a lift-and-shift approach when migrating their contact center. However, a more integrated suite can ease that transition, so consider a transformative approach (e.g., deploy chatbots) to drive more immediate benefits.



**Stay close to agent training and performance.**

Revamping an agent's desktop can be disruptive, so it is critical to roll out new CRM adoption with a generous level of training and follow-through to ensure agents are effectively supporting customers across all channels. Providing them with the necessary contextual data to address customer questions will be mandatory.

**Leverage collaboration tools for enhanced agent support.**

Ensure that when agents use collaboration tools during a customer interaction that your operational model has SMEs available to support them. Typically, SMEs outside the contact center are not necessarily tasked with quickly addressing questions.

**Leverage customer journey data for continuous improvement.**

Ensure you have a structure for continuous process and product improvements. The contact center can be a rich source of feedback for product and service owners external to the contact center. Identify hot spots in customer journeys (e.g., a poorly designed web page) to improve self-service and enable a smoother transition from self-service to agents in the contact center.



## Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester interviewed 372 decision-makers for contact center digital transformation strategies. Respondents were from the US, UK, Germany, Japan, and Australia, and they were from companies with employee counts ranging from 100 to over 20,000. The survey focused on six industries: government, healthcare, energy/utilities, retail, financial services, and telecom. Questions provided to the participants asked about current contact center and CRM improvement strategies for delivering better contact center results. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive as a thank you for time spent on the survey. The study was completed in February 2021.

## Appendix B: Demographics

COUNTRY	
US	33%
Germany	17%
Japan	17%
Australia	16%
UK	16%

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	
100 to 499	2%
500 to 999	10%
1,000 to 4,999	48%
5,000 to 19,999	22%
20,000 or more	18%

INDUSTRY	
Government	17%
Healthcare	17%
Energy, utilities, and/or waste management	17%
Retail	17%
Financial services and/or insurance	16%
Telecommunication services	16%

DEPARTMENT	
IT	63%
Operations	12%
Contact center	10%
Customer service/support	9%
Customer experience	7%

TITLE	
C-level	21%
VP	24%
Director	37%
Manager	18%

NO OF CONTACT CENTER SEATS	
100 to 199	20%
200 to 299	27%
300 to 399	22%
400 to 499	15%
500 or more	17%



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