

# CRM Forum Resources

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## The Future Call Center

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Throughout the 1990s, call center implementations have primarily supported customer services via the telephone. Automated Call Distribution (ACD) products have provided much of the “call routing” functionality needed to connect a voice caller with a service agent. Computer-to-telephony integration capabilities (CTI) have also been leveraged in call centers to extend this routing functionality with more options: ready information, intelligent queuing, and customer-programmable features or APIs. However, as customers have become more technology aware and as the use of the Internet expanded, significant pressure has caused existing environments to re-focus business processes and push toward the next generation of customer service technology. For instance, the requirements for “instant” access to information force businesses to redefine their Customer Management support strategy. To ensure Customer Management objectives are achieved, CMICs will need to be equipped to handle not-only traditional telephony requests, but also those that come through e-mail, the Internet (voice or data only and voice/data/video-based) and facsimile services.

Consumers have come to expect 24-hour, 7 day-a-week and prompt resolution support services that the CMIC will deliver. On top of it all, Customer Management strategies will derive tier services, workflows and proactive call-out scripting for the agents in the centers.

To handle this, the new generation of call centers, will need to address several challenges if the “all-media”, “always-available” Customer Management Interaction Center environment is to be successful.

## **1. The redesign of existing business processes, workflows and operations**

Businesses need to rethink how customer requests are handled by the CMICs. Well-defined workflows that allow a company to manage real-time transactions with online updates are necessary to ensure operational effectiveness.

In the CMIC, the routing of transactions is performed automatically by the system as customers request various services. As an example, requests may be sent to:

- Skilled agents
- Specialized inquiry-only or full-service systems
- Third Party Applications
- Customer Information Marts

Customer Management Interaction Centers must be designed to react to customer requests faster and further than earlier-generation Call Centers.

**2. Review of existing system capabilities vs. availability of new functionality**

Traditional ACD products are already in place in most call centers (*Fig. 1*). These products typically support automated attendant, call queuing, call prioritization and call routing services. Some implementations include the use of basic CTI and voice-messaging functionality to aid in the processing of calls, by providing routing alternatives based on information about individual callers.

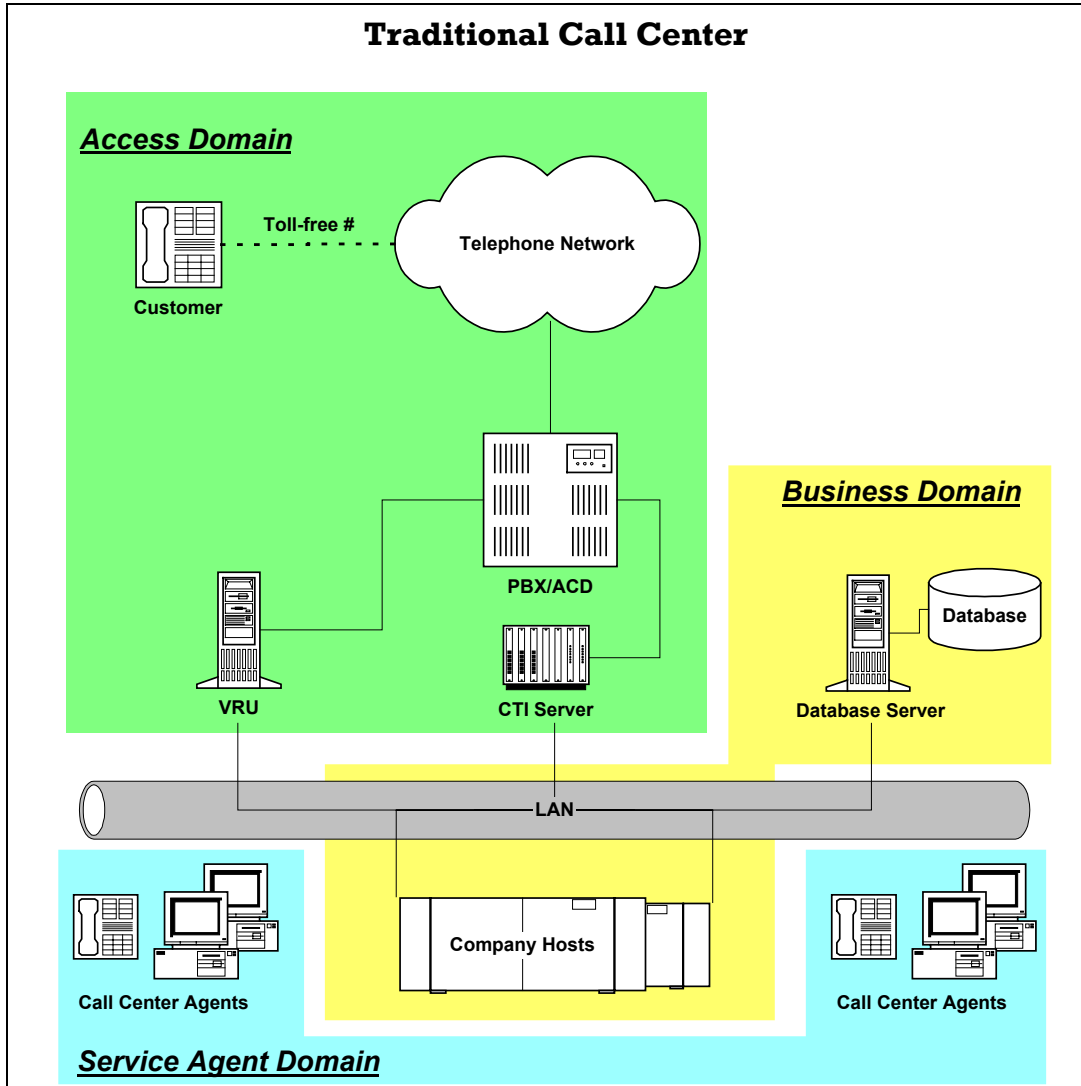


Figure 1

In the Customer Management Interaction Center, CTI functionality must be expanded to ensure customer requests can be processed and completed from an expanded set of services (*notice the new Access Domain in Fig. 2*). This capability requires the availability of a robust set of data stores with the right information about customers, and the appropriate CTI server components to manage the different media requests.

All in all, CMICs will need a larger, more competitive and intelligent Business Domain than in the past, if Customer Management objectives are to be achieved.

CTI services must support a broad set of networking (IP, Circuit-Switched, etc.), messaging (voice mail, IVR) and telephony platforms to facilitate the prompt identification, routing, completion, and reporting of all service requests. CTI applications must be developed based on open standards so that they are not operating system software or hardware-dependent. The ability to integrate and interface simultaneously with multiple platforms will provide the optimal benefit in this implementation.

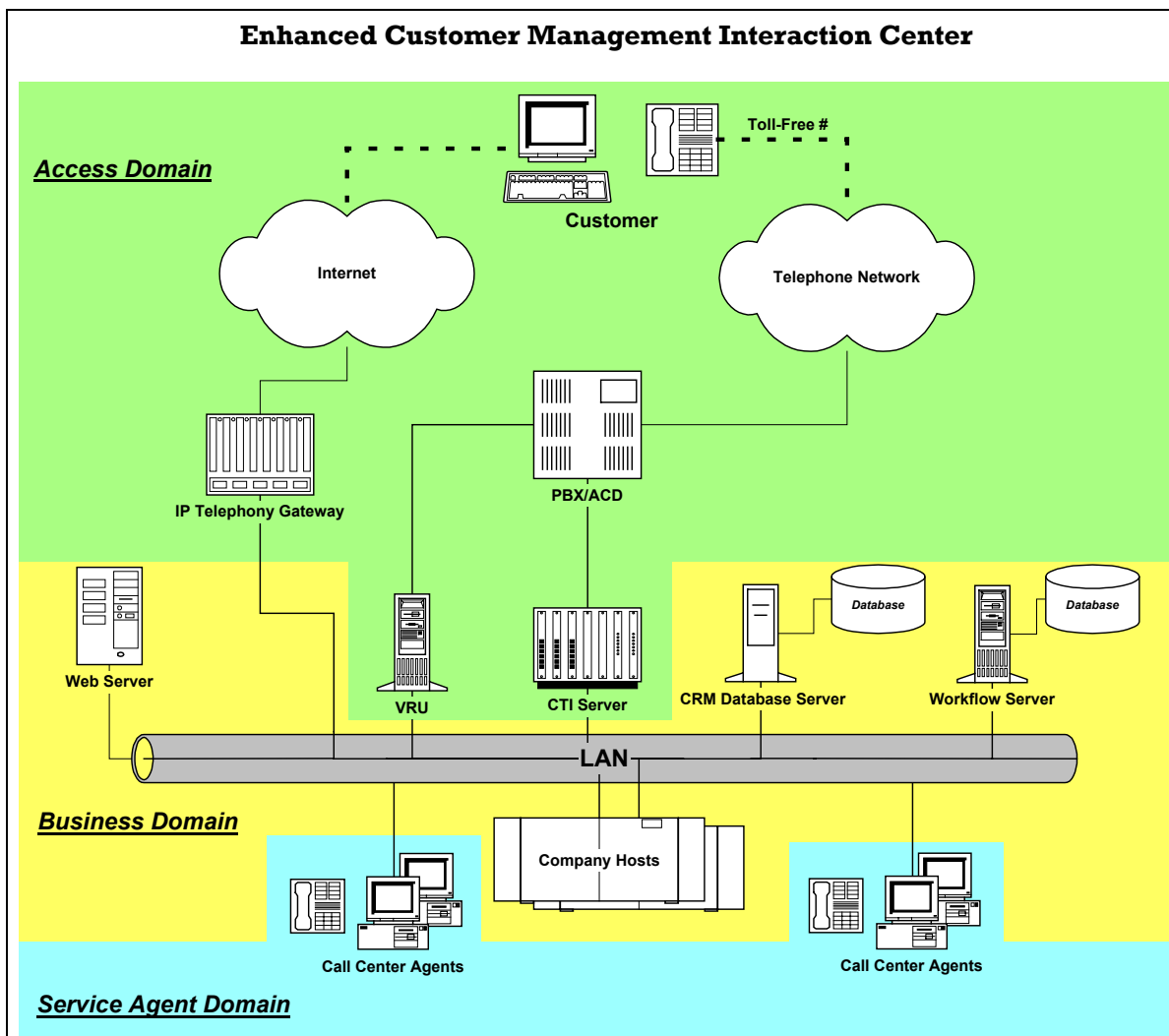


Figure 2

The enhanced Customer Management Interaction Center will be characterized by the integration of Local Area Network (LAN), Wide Area Network (WAN) and telecommunications systems to manage the processing of voice and data traffic in and out of the enterprise. While this is not a new concept, the infrastructure of the future differs from existing ones in one element: all media is received, managed and processed by the same core network, and prioritized according to its content and intended purpose. For example, voice traffic may be prioritized above video when managing available bandwidth. This prioritization is predefined, and automatically applied by the network as the traffic is delivered.

Customer data stores built around a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) approach, allow CTI applications to quickly access, select and use the right information prior, during and after customer requests are received. Understanding customer interaction trends and behaviors can lead to the customization of products and services into value-added automated workflows to react and fulfill changing client needs. Through the integration of customer databases with CTI technology, customers and businesses will derive mutual benefits. This is the key in implementing and using new technologies in the future.

Since the implementation of advanced CTI services may be costly, businesses wanting to enhance this capability will need to measure the total cost of this implementation versus the potential customer value and company benefits resulting from the use of this technology. Table 1 provides a high-level breakdown of some of the initial thinking leading to understanding the benefits of such a strategic effort.

**Table 1 - Benefits Matrix**

<b>Customer Benefits</b>	<b>Business Benefits</b>
May be able to obtain direct answers to their questions at first contact	Customer satisfaction; Lower network and telephony costs
May be offered specific product choices based on utilization history	Target Marketing; Lower product support costs
May be automatically routed to an individual or group of agents (if calling on the phone), a custom IVR application (to support self-service functions), or an online Web page that they can use to get all pertinent information (if using the Internet)	Effective use of staffing and system resources; Lower operational costs  Customer retention; Higher sales  Better historical data and utilization information;  Greater center availability hours; Longer coverage for same or lower costs

### **3. Integration of hardware & software components into the existing environment**

Once a business has made the decision to implement a CMIC, the next consideration needs to be given to the existing systems and technologies employed. The setup of the CMIC will likely require the upgrade of telephony, network and computing services within the organization.

A fundamental component of this new environment is the availability of the right desktop tools for the agents. This includes fast computer devices, desktop applications (front-end systems, CTI clients, etc.), and communications interfaces. The power of the computing device employed will be dependent on the types of services that a company will offer its clients.

Since agent computers need to interface with customers real-time, network bandwidth and availability are crucial to support this strategy in the future. The rapid development of network technologies has resulted in new products and services being available to companies and consumers. Careful consideration to corporate needs and future traffic utilization are required in order to measure the level of bandwidth that will have to be supported on an on-going basis. Products that allow the consolidation and routing of IP, traditional voice and video traffic in the same network, should be considered as the best choice for implementation.

The next critical component of this strategy is the integration of host systems and applications with network and telephony resources. For businesses that already have CTI installed, they need to review current system functionality to see if it is enough to support a self-service strategy (for example: call-blending, Internet browsing and intelligent call routing functions). In addition, existing IVR and voice mail systems need to be looked at to ensure they can provide the right capabilities (callback requests, automated "banking"-type functions, fulfillment options).

### **4. Recruitment and retention of the right staff resources in the centers**

The single most-important resource in support of the future Customer Management Interaction Center is the call center agent. This agent will have to be more technology-capable than in the past, and be knowledgeable in the integrated suite of customer functions that will form the future electronic processing character of a company.

Since business rules will drive most of the support functions of the center, staff must understand not-only the products a company sells, but also be guided by the principles of workflow management, CTI technology and self-service functions. Agents will be required to interface with customers on-line (through Internet chat pages, collaboration programs, Web "call-me" pages, etc.), while updating company databases, answering phones, receiving faxes (at the desktop), etc.

Companies must redesign job positions, benefit options, scheduling and working conditions if the necessary talent is to be attracted and retained for their centers. Some ways this can be accomplished is by the creation of Work-at-home/mobile worker programs, performance-based compensation and benefits, educational and advancement opportunities, and partnering with colleges, universities and professional societies. This Customer Management Interaction Center agent position needs to be considered, treated and marketed as a career and not as a job, if companies expect to hire and keep this select group of people.

As it has been noted, implementing a CMIC that supports self-services and real-time customer support has to be planned carefully and thoroughly. Business changes as well as technology enhancements are required if full benefit is to be realized from such an implementation. It is through the adaptation of technology into “every day” business process that companies will realize significant savings, retain and grow their customer base, and allow them to create and market their products and services. Flexibility, not complexity will define the future call center.