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## UC, Contact Center Integration Drives Business Value

*How extensive is integration, and how are companies leveraging it—both technically and operationally?*

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## **UC, Contact Center Integration Drives Business Value**

*How extensive is integration, and how are companies leveraging it—both technically and operationally?*

**Q3 2021**

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## Executive Summary

Contact centers have been hidden gems for years. On one hand, they operate on islands, often isolated in their own buildings or floors of buildings, and the agents who work there typically don't interact with employees in other departments. On the other hand, those same agents can deliver detailed insights, backed by artificial intelligence and analytics, about customers and prospective customers—vital information for business success.

At the same time, the rest of the company has been humming along with superior collaboration applications unavailable to contact center agents. Not only does this prevent them from interacting and collaborating with other departments, it reduces the level of collaboration within the contact centers.

Now, companies are integrating these two platforms, and to some extent, the people working on each of them. But it's a gradual process, and even though 62.8% of organizations have integrated the platforms, they've done so to varying degrees.

So, what does Unified Communications (UC)/contact center integration really mean to business and technology leaders? They are evaluating several issues, including the following:

- What business problems are companies trying to solve with platform integration, and what success metrics are they measuring?
- Is platform integration best when it comes from a single provider?
- Technically, what's actually integrated—and what's needed today and in the future?
- How are companies leveraging integrated platforms in their day-to-day operations?
- How do integrated platforms help for remote or hybrid workforces?

Already, companies have measured improvements with integrated platforms, but most companies are not leveraging the integration as much as they could. Providers can do a better job creating *solutions* using the integrated platforms, rather than simply selling applications, to help spur some creativity. Because many are still working on the technology integrations themselves, they haven't yet gotten to the solutions engineering part. We expect that to become more widespread in 2022-2023.

Our research success group provides some insight into best practices that improve business metrics the most. But many of the decisions around the type of integration and how it's leveraged are company-specific. So don't rush the decisions. Rather, take time to understand the value to the company—and then cast a wide net in evaluating options available.

## State of the Market for Integrated Platforms

Already, 62.8% of companies have some level of UC/contact center integration. (Please see Figure 1.) Midsize companies (250-2,500 employees) have the highest frequency of integration (72.4%), while very large companies (more than 10,000 employees) have the lowest (50%). Among those that have integrated UC and contact center, 61.9% are using the same provider. Again, midsize companies also lead in frequency (68.4%), and very large have the lowest (51.6%).

Integration is most prevalent in North America (70.6%), followed by Asia-Pacific (68.2%) and Europe (63%). When it comes to using the same provider, Europe (49.5%) is significantly lower than North America (66.8%) and Asia-Pacific (61.3%).

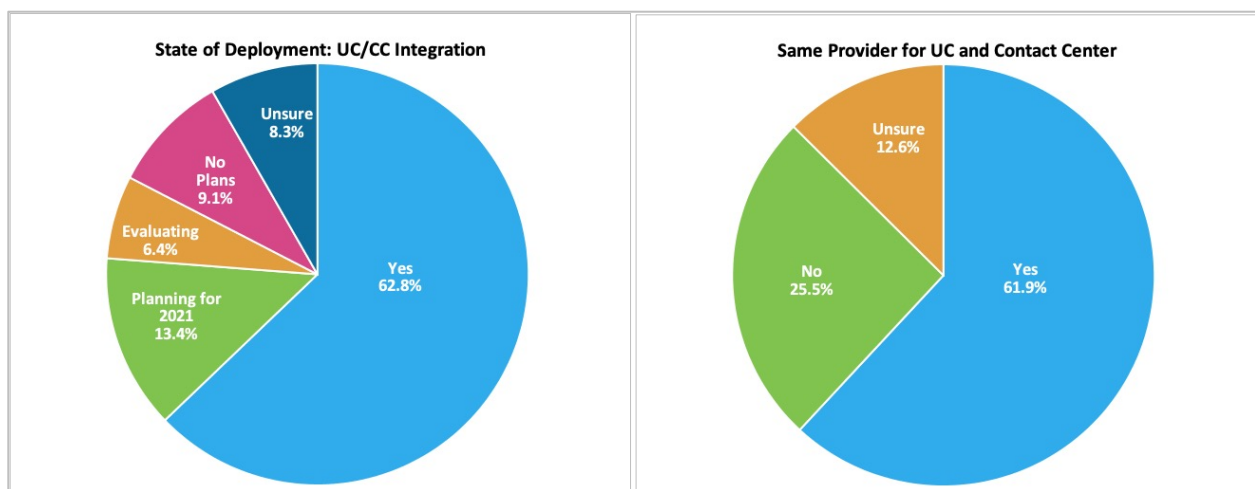


Figure 1: State of Deployment: UC/CC Integration

## Business Issues UC/Contact Center Integration Addresses

As the number of technology applications, products, and services continue to increase, IT leaders reassess the number of providers they have and whether they can consolidate them. To some extent, this opens the door to integrating communications platforms, including Unified Communications, contact center, and even CRM.

In recent months, they have focused on the integration of UC and contact center platforms—particularly cloud-based platforms. As companies hire Chief Customer Officers (about 34% have already), they are working with the C-suite to improve customer satisfaction. One catalyst for that is improved companywide collaboration enabled by integrated platforms.

By reducing the number of providers, IT staffs subsequently reduce the amount of training they need for IT staffs, relationship management, application management, and finger-pointing. Though that's typically not *the* reason companies ultimately decide to integrate, it *is* a key reason IT staffs put the topic on the table. They make the technology decisions—and it can be easier to deal with fewer providers.

But there are business drivers that push this idea to a decision. Disparate UC and contact center platforms can cause the following problems:

- Increased costs to operate two platforms
- Lack of information flow between those interacting with customers every day and the rest of the company
- Absence of collaboration applications for contact center teams
- Decreased customer satisfaction
- Missed revenue opportunities

## Provider Options and Extent of Integration

The term “integrated platforms” gets thrown around quite a bit, but its definition varies considerably, particularly when it comes to the provider(s) and what they integrate. It’s important to note: ***Just because a company has integrated UC and contact center doesn’t mean it’s using a natively integrated platform.*** It may be using a single provider with different platforms with just SIP trunking for voice, for example.

In any provider scenario, IT leaders must evaluate exactly what their goal is for today and the future—and then map that to the providers’ roadmaps, which are rapidly improving thanks to the Chief Customer Officer input and customer demands. Integration can involve progressions. For example, as a baseline, the provider may offer SIP trunking only for voice across the entire company (including the contact center). From there, it can then synchronize presence status of each employee. Beyond that, the next phase may be contact center controls and user interface within the UC front end for voice calls. And a final phase may be full convergence of voice, video, chat—all collaborative applications—with the contact center platform.

Of course, companies typically won’t need every employee to have a bundled UC/contact center license. From a technology perspective, the value is greatest for the contact center. But, in practice, the benefits will be companywide. (Please see page 7).

Regardless of the type of provider, companies are more apt to integrate when they are using a cloud architecture: 56.8% of those that have integrated are in the cloud. Though integration is possible on-premises, it requires more development work from the IT staff. Let’s consider the provider and the options to consider:

### *Two Providers, Two Platforms*

As with any technology, some IT leaders prefer to use multiple vendors based on the features each offers. In this case, UC and contact center providers each build integrations with multiple other providers. Even among companies that offer their own platforms for both applications, they also may offer integrations to third parties. For example, Enghouse provides both applications, but also integrates with Microsoft Teams. Or, as Five9 and Zoom evaluate their future combined company, they each have integrations with other UC and contact center

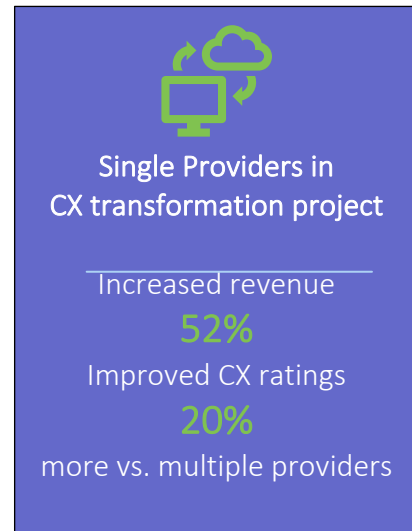
providers; yet, they will also offer an integrated solution. The main goal in this method is to offer companies options.

### Single Provider, Single Platform

Many, though not all, providers offer both UC and contact center services. Some have or are in the process of integrating their UC and contact center platforms with a common back end and user interface, along with bundled pricing. They're also starting to offer targeted solutions that take advantage of the common platform at varying levels ranging from SIP trunking only to truly integrated desktop. For example, when a contact center agent wants to initiate a video conference, the button to start a video is right in the same desktop application and is fully integrated with contact center analytics, transcriptions, and customer data records.

### Single Provider, Two Platforms

Most providers that offer both UC and contact center services fall into this category. They have both platforms, but they're not yet integrated into a common backend or user interface. They can offer bundled pricing, but the desktop interface typically remains two separate applications. So, when contact center agents want to initiate a video conference, they must leave the contact center application, launch a video, and send the customer a link. This is how 64.9% of contact centers are conducting videos today.



### Managed Service Provider (MSP) Model

Some companies opt to use an MSP, such as AT&T, BT, or Lumen, to be their one-stop-shop for UC and contact center. They may use the same provider for both contact center and UC or different providers (in some cases, the customer can decide), and they are responsible for making sure the platforms work and have some level of integration.

### Measuring Success

Companies see baseline improvements with UC and contact center integration. For example, companies rate their technology providers 16.8% higher when they buy both UC and contact center services from them, vs. when they buy them separately. In our *Customer Engagement Transformation 2020-21* research study of 700 global organizations, we asked participants to rate their providers in eight categories, ranging from technology features, to reliability, to AI and analytics capabilities, to account team performance. They rated their providers higher in every category when they used the same provider for both UC and contact center applications.

In addition, the average monthly cost per contact center agent decreases by 22% with a bundled UC/contact center license from a single provider vs. buying them separately from different providers.

Business success metrics are compelling, as well. In measuring improvements to business metrics before and after a CX transformation project involving advanced technologies (artificial intelligence, analytics, automation), companies see higher success when they have some level of UC and contact center integration. As Figure 2 illustrates, revenue and agent efficiency improvements are higher with integrated UC and contact center.

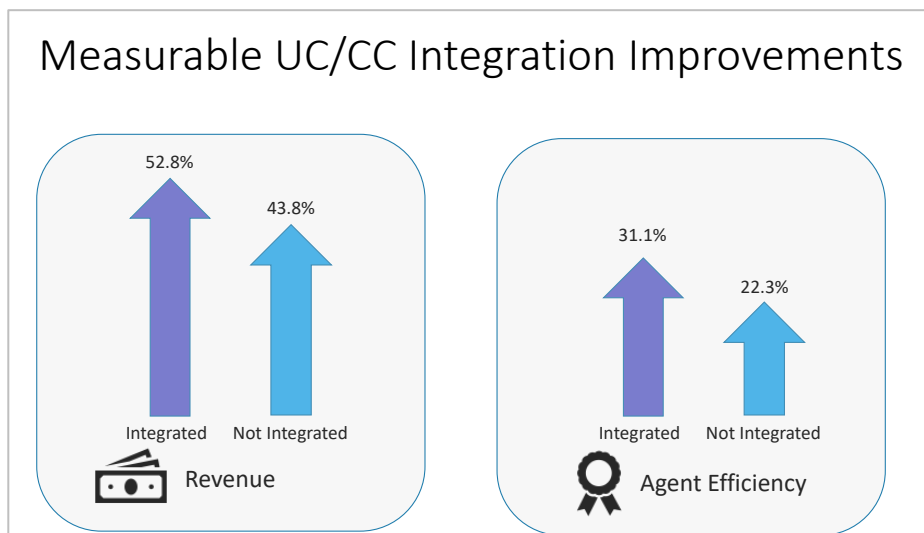


Figure 2: Measurable UC/CC Integration Improvements

The success metrics also are compelling when companies use the same provider. For example, revenue increases 52% more with a single provider than with multiple providers, and customer ratings improve 20% more with a single provider.

### Practical Changes with Integrated UC/Contact Center

As companies integrate UC and contact center, they are changing how employees interact with each other and with customers—but there is still significant room for advancement. The largest percentage of companies (57.2%) simply started using collaboration applications internally for agents and supervisors. It seems basic for those who have been using collaboration for years, but in many contact centers, these capabilities simply did not exist until recently.

This has become vital ever since contact center agents moved to home offices starting in 2020—and continuing indefinitely for 72% of organizations. Without video, team collaboration, and screen sharing, organizations would have had a very challenging time managing remote employees. In fact, 67% of research participants said video applications are vital for managing remote workers, while 58% said team collaboration is vital, and 52% said screen sharing is vital



Other changes with the integration include integrating agents with other employees to collaborate on projects or key customers (56.7%). Employees-at-large benefit here. For example, those responsible for product development are including contact center agents and/or supervisors in team workspaces. They can get regular and near-real-time updates on customer product complaints, warranty issues, or new uses of the product that they can consider as they upgrade existing products or develop new ones. Some organizations are even giving non-contact-center employees access to Voice of the Customer analytics to understand customer sentiment—enabling them to use that information for marketing strategies, sales campaigns, and product development.

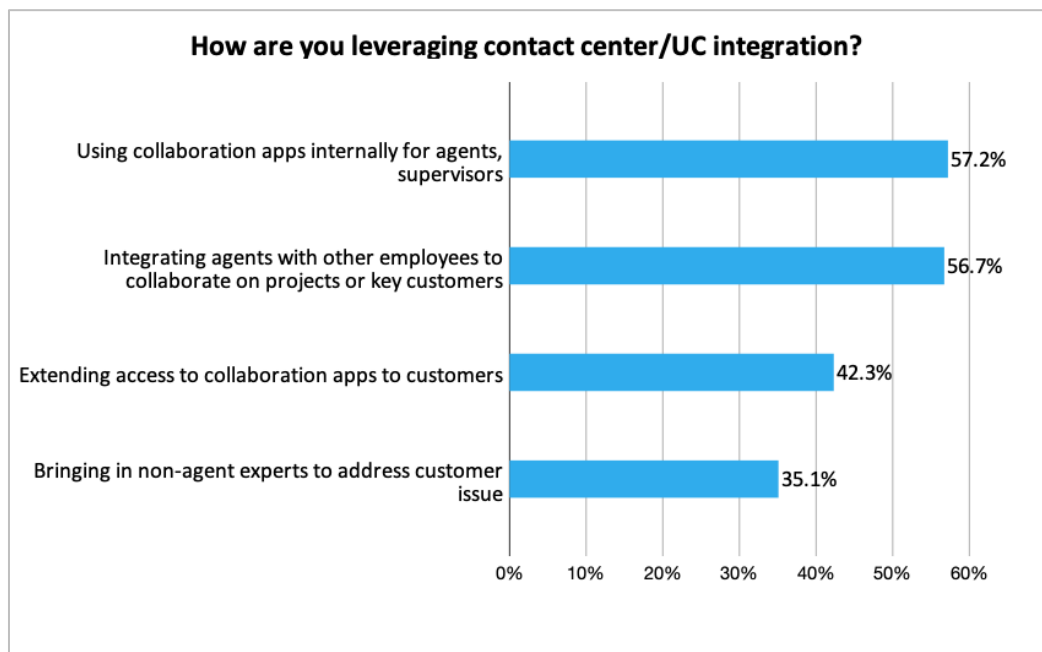


Figure 3: How are you leveraging contact center/UC integration?

Organizations are extending access to collaboration apps to their key customers. This is most common in the financial services sector. For example, high-net-worth customers at one investment company can access presence status of their account teams, and launch an interaction via video, voice, or webchat. In fact, video is the fastest-growing customer interaction channel in 2021. Why? It speeds resolution, improves the customer relationship—and both customers and agents are asking for it.

And least common—for now—though frequently referenced as a benefit of UC/contact center integration is the ability to bring non-agent experts into customer interactions. Though only 35.1% of companies are doing this today, it is the most frequent way our research success group is leveraging integration. The success group (157 of the 700 research participants) has the highest measurable business metric improvements, and 59% of them are regularly tapping into the expertise of employees companywide to help close sales or address customer issues.

## Conclusion

If you're not considering UC and contact center integration, you're at a competitive disadvantage. And if you're already doing it, there are numerous ways to continue leveraging the capabilities. As time goes on, we expect providers to offer innovative solutions that take advantage of common platforms for solving business issues or creating opportunities.

The benefits of integration are clear and compelling. Consider the following as you contemplate next steps:

- Evaluate your business requirements. Is your contact center on an island? What benefits could you uncover by integrating vital and valuable customer insight with the rest of the company?
- Evaluate your customer interactions. Are customers and agents asking for video and visual communications? Adding collaboration capabilities to the contact center will improve customer satisfaction.
- Consider the type of integration that works best for your organization—and the type of provider that makes the most sense. Always map your needs with the providers' current offerings and roadmap.
- Measure success. Determine what you want to improve, take a baseline measurement, and then continue with regular checkpoints.
- Leverage the ability to bring in outside experts to customer communications—and to bring in-house customer agents to marketing, sales, and product-development needs.

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ABOUT METRIGY: Metrigy is an innovative research firm focusing on the rapidly changing areas of Unified Communications & Collaboration (UCC), digital workplace, digital transformation, and Customer Experience (CX)/contact center—along with several related technologies. Metrigy delivers strategic guidance and informative content, backed by primary research metrics and analysis, for technology providers and enterprise organizations.