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Team Collaboration in the Contact Center

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For companies with Microsoft Teams, integration with the contact center will bring measurable benefits

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Executive Summary

Contact center agents aren't the only ones serving customer needs, thanks to technology. By integrating Unified Communications (UC) and contact center platforms, one big benefit is to leverage other employees to help solve a customer problem or help close a sale.

Companies that integrate their UC and contact center platforms rate their UC providers 16.8% higher vs. when they are not integrated.

Team collaboration is a fast-growing application within the UC suite. In fact, 28.9% of companies define team collaboration as their "hub" for all work and collaboration. Microsoft Teams is the most widely used of these applications, and because of the value they see with features such as notifications, team workspaces, and integration to click-to-screen share, they want to extend it to agent desktops.

Nemertes' 2019-20 *Intelligent Customer Engagement* research study, independently conducted with 518 organizations, found key benefits with integrating UC and contact center, including increases in customer ratings (56.7%) and decreases in operational costs (19.7%). This report covers the benefits companies find with integration of contact center and UC platforms and why those using Microsoft Teams should consider integration. It also provides tips on selecting the right contact center application provider—one that is certified and accustomed to working with Microsoft integration partners.

The Benefits of Integration

By integrating Unified Communications (UC) with contact center platforms, organizations can expand the agent toolkit, ultimately improving customer experience. Already, 71.2% of companies have integrated at least some of the UC application suite with their contact center platforms. (Please see Figure 1.)

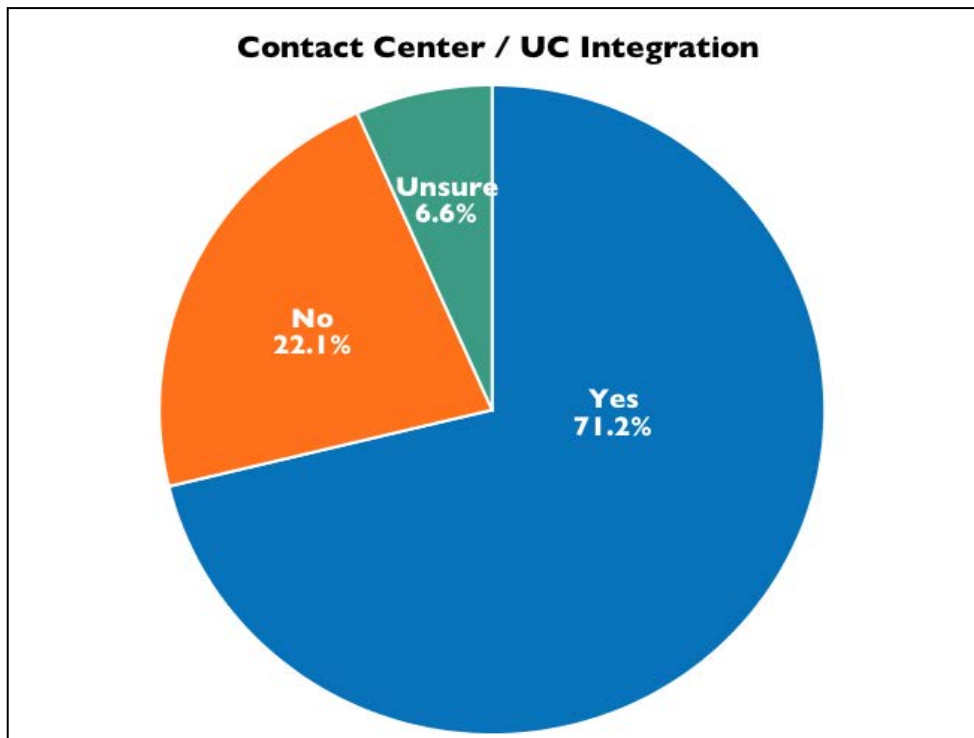


Figure 1: Contact Center/UC Integration

Benefits come in two forms: Using UC apps within the contact center, and using contact center apps for employee communications. Contact center agents have found these benefits:

- Customer-specific team collaboration workspaces created for agents to communicate with their supervisors and non-agent knowledge workers (sales teams, product specialists, marketing teams, etc.). For example, the agent may be trying to solve a persistent issue for a customer. By adding appropriate people to the workspace, they can discuss the issue, review the interaction and chat history, as well as any additional documents, to address the issue and any follow-up problems that may emerge.
- Video conferencing or screen sharing. Customers and experts (either inside or outside the contact center) can coordinate a response to an issue, or make recommendations for upsell.
- Key Performance Indicator improvement. KPIs, such as First Call Resolution or Net Promoter Score, can improve by ensuring agents get support from other agents,

supervisors, or knowledge workers. Extending UC presence data across the enterprise and contact center lets agents bring others into a call, or even transfer calls to non-agent knowledge workers to quickly solve a customer problem.

Non-agent employees also are finding benefits with integration, as well, including the following:

- Customer analytics data helps sales and marketing activities. Data from post-call surveys or other success metrics give sales and marketing leaders information to adjust their sales strategies or marketing campaigns. They also can use the information to coordinate customer engagement outreach with the contact center.
- Product development teams can now track customer interactions (either in real-time or recorded) to get a sense of what they like or dislike about the product and whether usability issues are emerging. Data on warranty claims, or overall questions about products can help them make improvements or adjust product roadmaps.
- Leverage technology investments. Contact centers may use self-service knowledge bases, help desks, or AI-enabled virtual assistants. All of these technologies can help internal employees, as well, in areas such as IT or human resources.

Measurable Success

Those benefits result in measurable success in two key areas: Customer ratings and operational costs. Figure 2 illustrates the improvement in customer ratings and the decrease in operational costs when organizations integrate UC and contact center. Over a one-year period, customer ratings (as measured by CSAT, Net Promoter Score (NPS), Customer Effort Score, or a custom rating system) increases by 56.7% when the two platforms are integrated, vs. only 38.3% when they are not. Operational costs decrease by 19.7% when integrated, vs only 14.5% when not.

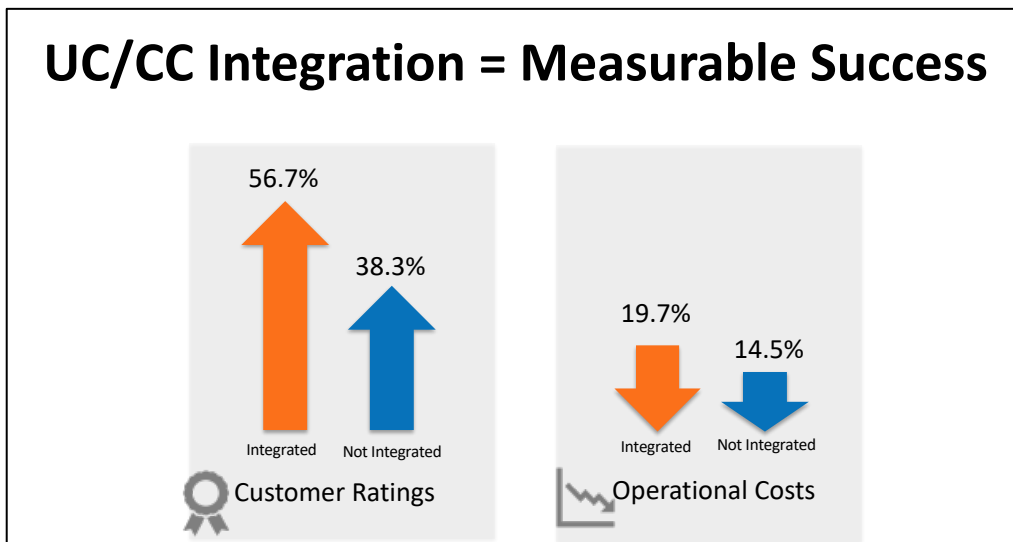


Figure 2 UC/CC Integration = Measurable Success

Drill-down: Team Collaboration

UC suites generally include three types of applications: Calling (telephony), meetings (video, audio, web conferencing), and team collaboration (collaborative workspaces). Many companies (72.4%) have team collaboration available to employees because it's part of a broader UC suite, but utilization varies widely.

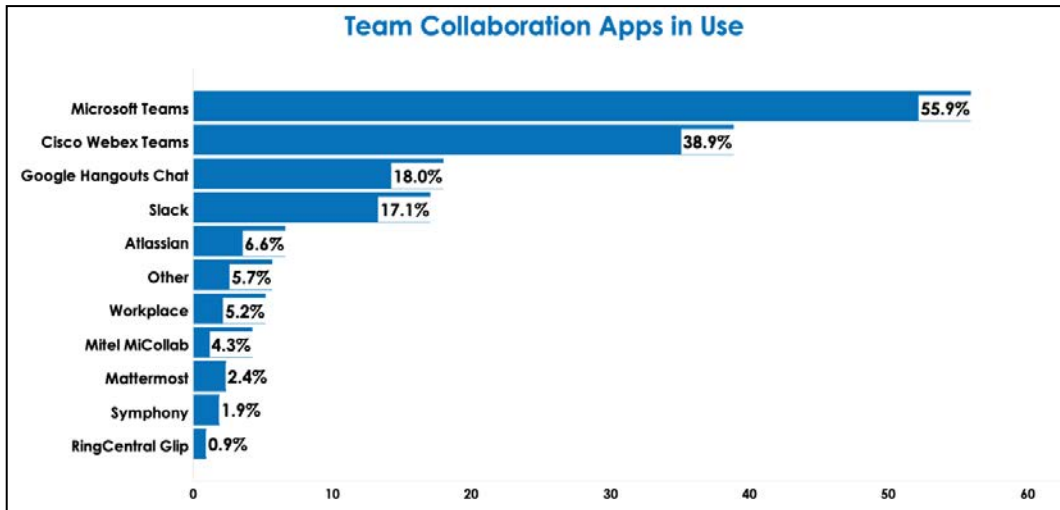
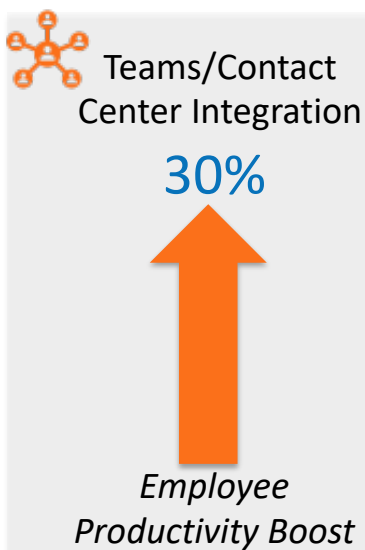


Figure 3 Team Collaboration Apps in Use

Most organizations use Microsoft Teams (55.8%) or Cisco Webex Teams (38.9%) in Nemertes 2019-2020 Workplace Collaboration research study of 645 companies. In fact, if companies buy these UC application suites, their team collaboration capabilities are part of the license.



Those using Cisco have an option to integrate it with Cisco's own contact center platform—and moving forward, they will be able to integrate it with other contact center platforms. (Cisco Webex Teams has announced plans for APIs.)

But those using Microsoft Teams have no choice but to integrate it with other platforms, since Microsoft does not offer contact center products or services. Given the widespread use of Microsoft Teams, coupled with the benefits of integrating team collaboration and contact center (as described above), organizations need an option. Among all research participants, 48.1% have integrated or plan to integrate the two platforms. Among those that have, they see a 30% improvement in employee productivity.

Why Integrate Microsoft Teams With Contact Center?

Organizations already using Microsoft Teams would rather not add an additional team collaboration platform, either from their existing contact center provider or from another vendor that may already have Teams integration. Similarly, about 14% of research participants still are using Microsoft Skype for Business, and are contemplating their next steps—should they move to Microsoft Teams or consider a different platform?

In making that decision, the ability to integrate Microsoft Teams with their existing contact center platforms allows them to protect their investments in both platforms. Such integration is particularly relevant to small and midsize businesses, or those with fewer than 500 endpoints and between 20 and 100 agents. These companies typically don't have the IT staffs to handle the integration—as well as the move from an on-premises Skype for Business platform or their premise-based PBX to a cloud-based Teams platform.

As stated, a clear benefit of Teams/contact center integration is the ability for agents and knowledge workers to collaborate to solve a customer problem or leverage an opportunity. In addition to that and other UC benefits described earlier, integrating Teams allows companies to provide various capabilities. Among them:

- Call flows via Direct Routing, which may help reduce the number of dropped calls
- Support of multi-tenant SIP trunking
- Ability to transfer calls and set up group calls with other Teams users, or to simply have Teams be the primary calling endpoint for the agents
- Agent experience app integrated with mobile clients
- Real-time alerts when a voicemail or email is waiting, or when a Key Performance Indicator is at risk
- Real-time notifications to alert agents when there are any changes to contact center policies, conditions, regulations, scheduling, etc.
- Analytics, workflow management, role-based policies for agents within Teams

Provider Selection

Organizations may be looking at various providers. For example, they may be evaluating new contact center platforms or architectures; new UC or team collaboration providers; or a partner to help with the Microsoft Teams/contact center integration.

When evaluating providers that can assist with the Teams integration, or a new contact center platform, consider the following:

- Look for a contact center provider that is *certified* to provide integration. Specifically, ask if the provider has certified its application's out-of-the-box integration with Microsoft

Teams' contact center vendor certification program, which is continuing to release APIs that improve the user experience.

- Evaluate the contact center vendor's roadmap. Microsoft is still working on issuing APIs. Some APIs are available, but the functionality that can be integrated is still evolving, while other APIs are not yet available. These include tight integration of different user interfaces with the native Teams interface. Going into the integration with full knowledge of the differences—and the plans for upgrades—will level-set expectations and make the rollout smoother.
- Select a provider that will assist and train with the integration. This is particularly important for SMBs, or larger companies, that do not have staffs or budgets to train both employees and the IT staff that will manage the integration.

Conclusion

For many years, contact centers have operated as islands, with their own, isolated communications platforms. That has been changing, as companies are integrating the communications and collaboration apps used among all employees with those used by contact center agents. In fact, companies rate their UC provider 16.8% higher when it's integrated in with their contact center platform.

Team collaboration is a fast-growing application within the UC suite that 28.9% of companies define as their “hub” for all work and collaboration. Microsoft Teams is the most widely used of these applications. Because so many companies are using Teams for employee communication, they see value in extending it to the contact center agent desktop, as well.

Though Microsoft still must address some shortcomings in the APIs, it is working to certify contact center providers to deliver this integration and continually improve the capabilities. IT and CX leaders should consider the following:

- Those using Teams should evaluate integrating it into their contact center platforms to improve employee productivity and customer satisfaction.
- Validate that your contact center provider is certified or in the process of becoming certified, as they have the most influence over Microsoft's roadmap—and also have the expertise to successfully integrate the platforms.
- Don't forget training! The most important factor in making sure employees use new technologies is training them on the value to them, as well as the nuts and bolts of how to use it.
- Measure success. Determine the metrics that will document change, and take the baseline measurement prior to deployment.

About Nemertes: Nemertes is a global research-based advisory and consulting firm that analyzes the business value of emerging technologies. Since 2002, we have provided strategic recommendations based on data-backed operational and business metrics to help enterprise organizations deliver successful technology transformation to employees and customers. Simply put: Nemertes' better data helps clients make better decisions.

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