

BT Launches Multichannel CRM for Small and Midsize Businesses

Steve Blood

BT's Contact Central provides a prepackaged CRM solution that can be quickly and inexpensively implemented. U.K. businesses with fewer than 100 contact center agents should evaluate the offering.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 14 November 2001, BT Group announced Contact Central, a prepackaged CRM solution aimed at small and midsize businesses (SMBs) in the United Kingdom. Contact Central will provide all the components for a multimedia contact center, including voice, fax and Internet, within a single agent desktop application.

Analysis

Contact Central, designed by BT Affinitis, is based on partners' technology: a contact center infrastructure from CosmoCom (a provider of IP-based contact center technology), and a CRM platform from Siebel Systems, an e-business application software supplier. By tightly integrating these two components to create a bundled solution, BT has removed a major inhibitor for SMBs looking to implement contact-center-enabled CRM solutions. Up until now, the integration costs have prohibited SMBs from contemplating integrated solutions.

Because it is prepackaged, Contact Central can be implemented in about 25 days – significantly less than comparable solutions. The standard implementation is priced at £3,000 per seat and enables voice and e-mail contacts to be managed. Prices range up to £7,000 per seat depending on the modules and media channels required.

Contact Central agents use a single desktop application to support customer communication through both telephone and Internet channels; a patented administration interface enables managers to effectively measure and monitor customer communications. Because it uses IP-based technology, Gartner's view is that Contact Central is not readily scalable, though this is less of an issue for fewer than 100 agents. Contact Central's unique proposition is that it is a complete solution from a single service provider.

Gartner expects other vendors and European service providers to follow BT's lead in offering shrink-wrapped solutions for the SMB market. Contact Central is a credible solution that BT can use to launch its strategic partnership with Siebel for enterprisewide CRM solutions. BT's challenge, though, will be to identify clearly the target market for Contact Central given the broad portfolio of other CRM-related partnerships, including Nortel Networks, Avaya and Genesys.

U.K.-based customers with contact-center-enabled CRM requirements with fewer than 100 users should include Contact Central in the short lists. Its functionality, price and speed of implementation compare favorably with competing offerings from Pivotal (CRM Service Suite), and other bivendor partnerships (e.g. Avaya and Siebel, Siemens and Remedy).

Analytical Source: Stephen Blood, Marketing Knowledge & Technology

Need to Know: Reference Material and Recommended Reading

- "Avaya Set to Stir the CTI Middleware market" (P-12-8543) A look at how a partnership between market-leading contact center and CRM vendors has created a product that meets the needs of corporate enterprises. **By Stephen Blood**
- "Bundled Call Center Suites: A Maturing Market" (M-11-7656) An examination of the benefits, disadvantages and risks of prepackaged, integrated call center application suites. **By Bern Elliot**

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