

REPORT REPRINT

Salesforce enters CCaaS market with Service Cloud Voice

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Introduction

Dreamforce is the venue that Salesforce uses to showcase its biggest announcements and strategy shifts; this year the focus was on its 2020 entry into the contact-center-as-a-service (CCaaS) market with Service Cloud Voice. Salesforce is betting (correctly, we think) that the voice channel will continue to carry a heavy load in service interactions for years to come, even as companies try to shepherd their customers into digital and self-service channels. With the industry scrambling to figure out how to provision service departments with appropriate tools for managing cross-channel and omnichannel interactions, Service Cloud Voice takes advantage of the Amazon Connect platform to embed telephony into Salesforce Service Cloud.

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Salesforce's Service Cloud Voice is the inevitable result of years of commodification of the voice channel, combined with the advantages of treating it as one of the digital channels managed by cloud applications. When Amazon opened the door to ultra-low-cost telephony services for contact centers in 2017, it created an environment in which the traditional separation of telecom plumbing, digital channels and cloud-based operational software collapsed. Now buyers want to get all of the elements from one vendor (or a few), with one bill and one common set of UIs. Service Cloud Voice is potentially a disruptive offering – it gives centers 'permission' to decouple from the legacy telephony vendors that have generally moved slowly toward the cloud and toward omnichannel capabilities.

Details

Service Cloud Voice unifies phone, digital channels and CRM data in real time in one centralized console. CRM systems like Service Cloud often provide the main desktop interface for contact center agents, so it makes a lot of sense to integrate it with the channel controls, particularly the voice call controls. This keeps agents from having to swap back and forth between applications.

Service Cloud Voice, by leveraging Salesforce's extensive platform resources, leverages AI-powered agent recommendations. Einstein AI can now provide recommended solutions and next-best actions for the agent in the background, reducing average call time and improving both the agent and customer experience. An expanded supervisor console will let managers view all calls and digital conversations in real time, monitor where calls are being routed and what skills each agent has, and identify which conversations may require them to assist on or offer coaching – live or after the fact.

Service Cloud Voice users will have a bring-your-own-telephony option that lets them select a provider of their choosing, keep their existing telephony provider or use the out-of-the-box capabilities that come with the Amazon Connect integration. The application will be generally available in summer 2020.

Salesforce also announced Customer 360 Truth, something of a rebranding and enhancement of capabilities of the C360 unified customer profile functionality discussed in 2018. While the 2018 discussions of Customer 360 focused on the CDP-like foundations found in Audience Manager, Salesforce is now casting a wider net, rolling a variety of related applications and services under this banner, including Customer 360 Data Manager, Salesforce Identity for Customers, Customer 360 Audiences, and Salesforce Privacy and Data Governance.

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Our takeaway from Dreamforce is that Salesforce has determined that the industry is ready to explore a model that combines the application software (especially CRM and case tracking) with the interaction plumbing, as well as to put digital channels on the same footing with voice. It reasons that contact center buyers are comfortable enough with omnichannel operations that they are now ready to put voice into the digital basket, in the quest of having just one vendor's throat to choke. The strategy will likely have an effect among Salesforce's competitors, both by pushing core prices lower and raising the stakes on integrated platforms.

Salesforce will now compete with Genesys, NICE InContact, Five9, Talkdesk and other cloud-based contact center routing providers, along with its traditional CRM and application software competitors.