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What Are Hosted Services?

By Wayne Scaggs

What do you know about hosted services? I believe you probably know – and use – more than you realize. Do you have your own Web site or domain name? Have you gone to a Web site and bought anything? Have you used a search engine (Yahoo, MSN, or Google)? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you have experienced hosted services. So what is a hosted service? A hosted service is a company's (or an organization's) ability to provide services via the Internet. The hosting entity provides servers, applications, and Internet connectivity – often more economically and reliably than its customer would be able to provide, due to the infrastructure and the technical support needed to maintain the applications. Hosted services have been around since the Internet began. When it comes to general data hosting applications, we've all been conditioned mentally to accept what is available, such as the speed or delay in opening a site or page. Our eyes have been conditioned to accept the jitter or blinking, and we even accept the lockup of a Web page. These irritations are considered part of surfing the Web.

A hosted service, as a business, has to do better to minimize these irritations, or they will not be able to compete. Another important element is the type of application being hosted. How critical is this application? Is it revenue producing? Could there be life and death issues? Is your pride or reputation at stake? All of these factors dictate how your hosted services should perform and what you are willing to accept as a hosted service subscriber.

In the call center industry, we already subscribe to many hosted services, whether we realize it or not. Web-based appointment setting and Web accounts are examples of hosted services we are currently using. A few companies have ventured beyond the traditional data-hosting model and have incorporated the ability to host voice applications along with

the data. With call center hosting, one of the first things you realize is that you can have remote agents that are not tied to a traditional phone line. Next, you realize that if you can have a remote agent, you can have a remote office, and so on.

With new ventures come new challenges. Adding voice to hosted services opens untapped opportunities as well as known challenges – what a combination! I defined a hosted service as the ability of a company or organization to provide services via the Internet. When voice capabilities are added to this accepted application, what happens? Our ears have not yet been conditioned to accept delays or retries in the same way our eyes have been conditioned to accept delays on the screen. If the voice is choppy or cuts out on either end, it is unacceptable. VoIP is the voice in data form over the Internet. Due to the unique requirements of voice, your hosted voice service needs adequate bandwidth and real time to perform as advertised.

Sufficient and stable bandwidth will make an agent anywhere in the world seem like they are in the next room taking calls. When you host your services, you have added a new layer of disaster recovery to your call center because agents can be working from outside the disaster area. You are also able to keep a valued agent who moves away and needs employment – wherever they go. You have worked with them, you have trained them, and now you can keep them.

Embrace hosted services and open the door to new opportunities to enhance your call center's profitability. When you do what is necessary (to stay in business), you begin to see what is possible (new opportunities), and suddenly you are doing the impossible (adding more clients and improving your bottom line). ☛

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