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Service Oriented Architecture: A Q & A with Brian Garr of IBM

Call Center Times recently caught up with Brian Garr, program director and segment manager for Contact Center Solutions in the Software Group Division of IBM, to discuss how Service Oriented Architectures (SOAs) apply to the evolution of the contact center.

Call Center Times: First off, what is SOA?

Garr: A Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) is an approach for designing and implementing a distributed set of managed, secure components that supports flexible connectivity of applications and resources. Basically, it lets all your business processes "talk" to each other, allowing

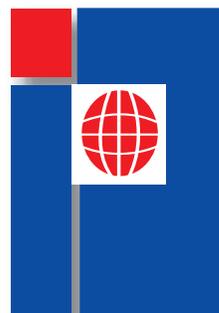
employees and customers to obtain information or conduct activities quickly and efficiently.

So rather than a typical operating environment that is built around applications, which are platform-dependent and siloed, an SOA is built around services. Services are interchangeable and transferable, and that makes your operating environment flexible and primed for scalability.

CCT: How does SOA work in contact centers?

Garr: For the contact center, this means that traditional siloed application development model and linkages to existing systems

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no longer have to be created/developed on a case-by-case basis. Implementing a service-oriented approach allows you to leverage the services available to others in your network-partners, suppliers, customers-and lets you modify your business rules in one or more services at will to meet changing demands and optimize usefulness.

This responsiveness is especially important for contact centers since they are the doorway to your company, the first experience customers will have with you. To this point, it is critical to optimize the efficiency, usefulness and productivity of the contact center, and SOA does this by linking business operations with IT so that the business can respond quickly to new changes in marketing, sales and service.

CCT: What are the benefits of using SOA in contact centers?

Garr: Adoption of an SOA in the contact center leads to an adaptive, on demand enterprise built from reusable components. It lets you connect and interact with your target audiences both internally and externally to drive business opportunities.

For example, a contact center responding to a marketing campaign may link to multiple applications in order to up-sell the customer when contact is established. A new offer or better pricing might be available, but only by linking into another system when triggered by the business scenario. Using a services-oriented approach, it is no longer necessary to create adapters and business rules anew. Instead, Web and business services can be quickly leveraged to deploy the new promotion.

Another example-suppose word gets out about how great your products are, and consumers are clamoring to buy them in their local stores. You'd like to make it easy for a national retail chain to place orders on behalf of local customers.

That's usually easier said than done, because it entails connecting the retailer's order system to yours. Connecting those two systems in a typical application architecture would require both systems to run the same applications on the same platform, or require human interaction to insert manual processes that would translate the outcomes from one system, into inputs for another. With an

SOA, neither of these things is necessary, because you can isolate those two processes and expose them to the retailer's systems as services, which are independent of the applications they were developed in. It's a major improvement.

CCT: Why is there a movement now toward adoption of SOA in the contact center?

Garr: The migration toward SOA is being driven primarily by the evolution of the contact center itself. The traditional call center rooted in phone banks has evolved into a multi-channel environment that possesses myriad touch points such as the Web, in-store kiosks and automated response systems and involves advanced technologies such as speech recognition.

As one might expect, the technologies powering this new environment can tend to be disparate and from numerous vendors. Adopting an SOA provides companies the flexibility and openness to integrate these technologies in order to provide their customers with a seamless service experience. An inbound caller does not care if one process is on AIX and one is on Linux. They just want a seamless

experience.

CCT: How easy is it for companies to transition their contact center operations to a SOA? What is the first step?

Garr: Keep in mind, SOA is an integrated strategy and not a product. Thus, transitioning to SOA from a legacy architecture first requires a company to make the strategic decision to shift its IT paradigm to one based on open standards and that aligns businesses processes and applications with corporate goals.

From there, the first step is determining your specific needs and then deciding what strategy you will want to take in making your purchasing decisions. The best bet is aligning yourself with a vendor that can work with you throughout the process as you grow your architecture, first building the platform and then designing, deploying and evolving your applications. A lot of things need to happen, but you need to start by making sure that the decisions you make now in the contact center are ready to take advantage of the new architecture. Insist on open standards and non-proprietary products. ■



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NEWS

Nexidia Announces Availability Of “Nexidia Enterprise Speech Intelligence 5.0”

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Atlanta, GA - Nexidia, the leading provider of audio search and speech analytics solutions, announced the general availability of its flagship product - Nexidia Enterprise Speech Intelligence (ESI) 5.0. Building on Nexidia’s award winning, patent pending technology, Nexidia ESI 5.0 can dramatically impact an organization’s ability to generate and analyze valuable intelligence contained in recorded spoken interactions. Nexidia’s unique approach makes recorded audio searchable at over 55 times real-time and returns search results from the database at over 30 million times real-time. It also delivers the most accurate, relevant audio search and analysis capability available today. ■

COPC Standards Committee Launches Release 4.0 – The New Framework for CSPs Achieving Certification to the COPC-2000® and COPC-2000 Gold Standards

Amherst, NY – Customer Operations Performance Center Inc. (COPC) announced the most significant change to the COPC-2000 Standards for Customer Service Providers (CSPs) since its 1996 introduction as the industry standard for contact center operational performance. Release 4.0 of the Standards introduces a narrower, deeper approach to process improvement and profitability.

The Standards Committee, responsible for the initial creation and oversight of the COPC-2000 Family of Standards, holds as its core objective the improvement of the end-user experience while driving operational and financial performance improvement. Throughout 2004 and the first quarter of 2005, the Standards Committee assessed performance of the Standards using data from formal surveys of COPC users to “stack rank” the Items of the Standard based on their impact on **Service, Quality, Cost, Revenue, and Customer Satisfaction.** The

culmination of this critical research was the development of Release 4.0 of the COPC-2000® CSP Standard (formerly referred to as “the Base”) and Release 4.0 of the COPC-2000 CSP Gold Standard. Release 4.0 of the Standards focuses on Items that are critical and most relevant to performance and profitability. By refining the Items of the Standards, certification to the Standards becomes inextricably linked to performance improvement. Release 4.0 also specifies a greater difference in the number of Items necessary for certification between the COPC-2000® CSP Standard and the COPC-2000 CSP Gold Standard, providing a clear upgrade path beyond the initial “entry point” for users of the Standards.

■ **NextNine Introduces The Latest Version Of Its Service Automation Platform, NSA v 3.5.**

Recently, automated service and support technology vendor, NextNine, introduced the latest version of its service automation platform, NSA v 3.5. The NextNine Service Automation platform enables



proactive monitoring, automatic problem escalation and diagnostics, self-healing and remote secure access - functionality which significantly increases system availability and customer satisfaction while simultaneously improving the efficiency of an organization's support mechanism.

According to CEO Adi Dulberg, NextNine Service Automation version 3.5 offers support professionals new tools that enable them to realize valuable, once unattainable returns on their investment, such as enhanced organizational efficiency, increased system

uptime, improved customer satisfaction, reduced Mean Time to Repair, and significantly reduced service and support costs.

■

InStranet Launches Telco-Media Edition of Award Winning Contact Centers In-Line Application

CHICAGO – InStranet, Inc., the leader in multi-channel knowledge applications announced the launch of their packaged Telco-Media Edition of their award winning Contact Centers In-Line (CCIL) application. Working with industry leaders in the Telecom, Media, and

Communications sectors, InStranet has packaged industry-specific knowledge processes in the Telco-Media Edition, which results in a consistent cross-channel customer experience and unbeatable deployment times.

The CCIL Telco-Media Edition is the only multi-channel, fully integrated knowledge application available for the telecommunications and media industries that can be extended across multiple customer touch points. Benefits of the solution include faster, better service for customers, increased agent satisfaction, and streamlined knowledge processes for managers. This boosts customer retention, lowers operating costs, and increases revenues.



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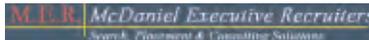
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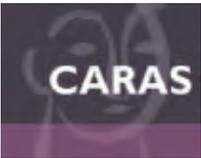
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Cost: \$425

_____ **Resource Directory/Call Center's Buyer's Guide:** This section of our website is the most elaborate advertising program that we provide: Your company will be profiled on our website, www.callcentertimes.com, for 12 consecutive months
You will be listed in the Rolling Banner for 12 consecutive months

Cost: \$517

_____ **Monthly Newsletter Advertisement:**

Cost: \$275

_____ **Corporate Logo Promotion (Website & Monthly Newsletter):**

Cost \$500

Simply check the applicable column(s) and return by fax to (972) 395-9205. Please note that all transactions are final. There will be no refunds.

COMPANY NAME/ Contact/Address/Telephone/Fax/E-mail: _____

MasterCard Visa American Express

Credit Card Number

Expiration Date

Name As Appears On Credit Card (Print Please) & Signature

Regards,
Nosa Eke, Publisher