

The Cloud Imperative

MegaShifts and MegaTrends for Customer Care



By Frank Tersigni, Chief Customer Officer, Altivon LP

Introduction

Dramatic changes are underway in customer care. Some are MegaShifts—discontinuous breaks from previous patterns. Others are MegaTrends—distinctive paths to the future. All promise to improve customer experience and business outcomes for Utilities.

In ordinary times, business leaders consider trends for planning cycles. Bold predictions spur conversation and further fact finding.

These are not ordinary times.

As the world shutdown, leaders improvised. Out of sheer necessity businesses pivoted overnight to remote work and social distancing. This sudden disruptive moment pushed everyone to rethink processes, adopt technology and knock over walls preventing forward momentum.

Cloud is the New Normal

Period. The proving grounds of 2020 are squashing all arguments against cloud adoption. Even in the Utilities industry.

"A recent study shows that a vast majority (71%) of utilities now use cloud software, up from just 45% three years ago."—[Smart Energy](#)

"It is critical for everyone—from the CIO to the CEO to the board to the IT department and possibly every employee throughout every facet of the business to understand what's at stake by failing to invest in cloud—and what making the move will mean in terms of workloads, benefits and so much more."—[Accenture](#)

CapEx/OpEx Arguments No Longer Win

Rate of return has been a roadblock to cloud adoption by Utilities. To encourage Utilities to maintain and improve its service, regulators allow a higher return rate for assets (such as poles, wires, meters, and IT equipment). This preferential treatment of capital assets created an unintended consequence—it discouraged cloud adoption.

"The net effect is a significant disincentive for utilities to procure service-based solutions provided by private advanced energy companies. This limits utilities from taking advantage of many new technologies that are solely offered through service [subscription/ op ex based]

contracts, such as cloud computing, since these services displace an earnings opportunity.”
—[Advanced Energy Economy](#)

The initial advantages of scale, operational expertise, and equipment cost avoidance made cloud computing attractive. Additional value in continuous innovation, artificial intelligence, advanced analytics, flexible usage models, simple distributed deployment architectures and demand-based licensing make cloud computing imperative. The conversation has shifted from ‘whether to adopt’ to ‘how to account for’ cloud technology.

The Time is Now

The argument in favor of cloud computing is overwhelming. MegaShifts and MegaTrends drive one conclusion:

“At this point, cloud adoption is mainstream.” —[Gartner](#) research vice president

MegaShifts

Sudden, discontinuous, unexpected turns of events drive dramatic change in thinking. Think about the fall of the Berlin wall and the aftermath of 9/11. The MegaShifts generated by these kinds of events have a significant and lasting effect. They change the way people live and work.

#1: Digital Transformation Acceleration

Microsoft put into perspective what many people have experienced in the past few months—they saw [two years-worth of digital transformation in two months](#). And this acceleration is still going on.

The uptake in mobile and Internet use is palpable. Consumers now shop for everything online. Musicians, actors, movie studios, news networks, teachers, and politicians broadcast from their homes over YouTube or other Internet-accessible streams. Online banking and bill pay usage went up as did social media and FaceTime. Zoom came into the vernacular as it took the home, classroom, and office markets by storm.

Utilities across North America reacted swiftly in March to safeguard employees. They sent home everyone they could including contact center agents. Technologies like videoconferencing and collaboration tools were adopted at an incredible pace.

“There will be new ways of using technology to achieve productivity while meeting customer and market needs. The new normal will include different workforce models and a rebalanced portfolio across sectors (e.g., industries, retail, real estate, etc.). It will also enable improved monitoring of operational indicators as well as more sophisticated demand and supply management and forecasting.” —[Accenture](#)

Customer care successfully adapted to remote work, social distancing, and distributed operations. Contact centers serve as a good model for the rest of the organization.

#2: Fundamental Operations Re-Thought

The indefinite ban on social gatherings and the limitations of social distancing forced a scramble for relevance. Grocery stores progressed from limited in-store shopping to delivery and curbside pickup. Restaurants became de facto kitchens, cooking to order and handing off for pickup and delivery. Concerts moved online to benefit charities and promote artists. Manufacturers pivoted production lines to make personal protective equipment (PPE). Agents moved from physical centers to online hives where they could continue to function as virtual teams.

Utilities face a wide range of challenges, including [supply shortages, load reductions, and second-order effects related to commercial customers](#). Fundamentally of course, energy is more important than ever, as students, parents and workers in the home and office depend on it for productivity and social connection.

“Traditionally, while this sector has been measured in its adoption of digital transformation initiatives, current global events are driving utilities to re-examine how technology can help achieve critical operational and safety goals. For example, using remote technologies to support smaller work crews, evaluate work more quickly and efficiently, and help stabilize critical situations.”—[The Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Utilities](#)

In my role as Chief Customer Officer, I get to speak with CIOs and other executives across a wide sweep of companies. Business continuity and disaster recovery planning has always been a topic of keen interest. However, the focus of most plans has been on physical infrastructure failures rather than what we face with COVID-19—workforce disruption.

Thankfully, many businesses have been able to switch to a remote work model. This switch was largely improvised as a stop gap measure. However, it is increasingly clear that remote work is viable for the long term and desirable for many situations.

I think we will see reduced rigidity around schedules, rapid adoption of distance learning, uptick in videoconferencing, and a mix of part-time, full-time and freelance workers across organizations. There will be more interest in AI-enabled technologies and self-service applications. These are all changes that the gig economy was starting to drive. COVID-19 has forced a heavy foot on the accelerator to ensure business continuity.

#3: Disruption of the Space/Time Continuum

Many workplace tenets were called into question in the wake of the shutdown. Businesses discovered that employees can be productive working from home. In-person stand ups can be done effectively using videoconferencing. Doctors can give medical advice through telemedicine. Work can be spread

across a longer day to accommodate employee needs including childcare. There are many benefits to remote work for all involved.

“While 30% of employees surveyed worked remotely at least part of the time before the pandemic, Gartner analysis reveals that post-pandemic, 41% of employees are likely to work remotely at least some of the time.” —[Gartner](#)

We at Altivon have been entirely virtual for about a decade. We have no brick and mortar office. That change allows us to hire and retain the best talent no matter where they live. It enables greater schedule flexibility and employee morale. We leverage contact center software and team-oriented tools to stay connected with our customers and our teammates. Our experience with work at home has certainly come in handy as our customers jumped in with both feet.

The first and most urgent action our customers needed was to get their agents remote. Virtually all major contact center software vendors stepped up to the plate, offering free interim licensing. We offer free services to help our customers get remote and continue serving their customers. It is a positive, feel good story from that perspective.

#4: Advantage Cloud

The move to the cloud this year was certainly accelerated for many out of necessity. Cloud architectures can get up and running quickly, flex with demand, and serve agents distributed between homes and offices.

Many of our Utilities customers needed increased capacity to meet rogue waves of demand. Like companies in other industries, they expected surges that go beyond what they were already set up for from a maximum capacity perspective.

For many of these customers we are setting up brand new cloud deployments to handle additional demand. These deployments have been a mix of information-based messaging, call diversion, and call containment (where self-service functions can substitute for agent involvement).

Our partner Genesys and others have stepped up to the table with licenses and deployed them in literally 48 hours on a no-charge basis. For example, City of Helsinki wanted to set up an information line for their population over 70 years old. They were able to get that done, literally, in about eight hours, and up and running, and taking calls. It was an astonishing response.

Here at Altivon we helped more than a dozen customers secure more than 11,000 trial licenses. In collaboration with Genesys, we also established a new Genesys Cloud platform for a Utility customer, used as safeguard to ensure business continuity for one of their critical Emergency queues.

MegaTrends

The cloud is proven as a suitable platform—this is not a question anymore. Trends now focus on added value over traditional platforms—making cloud the clear winner.

#1: Cloud Contact Centers Now Consume Innovation OnDemand

Simply put, new cloud architectures enable rapid adoption of innovation. This is an essential difference from older approaches. It is a gamechanger. Customer care operations can consume innovation in almost real time.

The long wait for software releases and IT evaluation are over. With the cloud, businesses can consume functionality on an as-needed basis, shortening time to value. This trend is here to stay.

Cloud software itself is easy to deploy. All of the infrastructure components are eliminated from project timelines. I'm really excited about the possibilities for fine-tuning operations for both better customer experience and improved business outcomes.

In the past, a tremendous amount of energy was spent by IT departments and system integrators on setting up and maintaining premise-based systems. Now with the cloud, much of that work has been offloaded. As a result, there is more opportunity to tune the system for the needs of each business and its customers. Our role is to help our customers take advantage of continuous innovation.

#2: Artificial Intelligence Powers Hyper-Personalization and Experience-as-a-Service

There is certainly lots of talk about Artificial Intelligence (AI). There are also plenty of misconceptions. People often think about AI only as a tool for self-service such as bots, chat bots, and voice bots. In the same way that Amazon and Google have impacted the home voice assistant world, these bots are impacting the self-service world in a very positive way.

However, others, like Genesys, see AI as a fundamental enabling technology. It accelerates decisions. So, every decision point is an opportunity for AI.

In the contact center, AI can make true personalization a reality. This experience-as-a-service meets each customer in the moment and time of interaction. That is what is going to be required to deliver trust and true loyalty.

Personalization requires data and strong analytics that spot trends, both on a macro level and an individual level. Personalization leads to predictive engagement (understanding what the customer wants next) and predictive routing (understanding where to send the customer next). AI and analytics both require incredible computing power, which is available in the cloud.

#3: Workforce Engagement

One of the big lessons coming out of the pandemic is that business success depends on both customers and employees. I expect there will be renewed attention on workforce engagement and contact center agent engagement. Particularly as we expect to see more agents working at home, the traditional tools for supervision, monitoring, mentoring, and engagement need to evolve to accommodate the new remote work reality.

Workforce engagement is a hot area for contact center technology research and development. There is a lot left to learn. We at Altivon know from experience that team cohesion, morale, and good business outcomes stem from processes and technologies designed for engagement.

About Genesys

Every year, Genesys® delivers more than 70 billion remarkable customer experiences for organizations in over 100 countries. Through the power of the cloud and AI, our technology connects every customer moment across marketing, sales, and service on any channel, while also improving employee experiences. Genesys pioneered Experience as a ServiceSM so organizations of any size can provide true personalization at scale, interact with empathy, and foster customer trust and loyalty. This is enabled by Genesys Cloud™, an all-in-one solution and the world's leading public cloud contact center platform, designed for rapid innovation, scalability, and flexibility.

About Altivon

Altivon designs and implements Genesys-based contact center solutions across North America. Leverage our more than 30 years of experience—with specific work with many utilities—to deliver great customer experience, increase employee engagement, and enhance business outcomes.

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