

Automatic Call Distribution: Every Business a Call Center

When you think call center, a mental image of banks of servers and scores of phone representatives might come to mind. But with the power of an Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) system, even a small business can handle calls with the professionalism of a big-business call center. And that's only the beginning.


An ACD platform moves beyond the concept of a call center to a new paradigm known as an "opportunity center". The idea is that every inbound call is an opportunity for business, whether it's a prospect, existing customer, or even a new partner. There is always the opportunity to build confidence with the caller in the way that a call is handled.

This is where the value of ACD really delivers. With Automatic Call Distribution, an inbound caller can be transferred to the requested primary destination (for example, the sales department). If there is no one available at that destination, the system will automatically route the call to someone else to answer. So, if Sales is busy handling other calls, the customer could be routed to someone in Customer Service (who might be able to address their question anyway). When combined with an Interactive Voice Response System (IVR), an inbound caller can be directed through a series of prompts to the representative with the best knowledge base to address the situation. If that person is unavailable, the call will go to the second most qualified person in order of priority. And all of this is completely seamless - the caller will think he was connected to the right person almost immediately.

Now factor in a VoIP network. If you combine ACD with a group of employees answering the phones in different remote locations, there's no reason that a caller will know the difference. Picture this scenario: Three members of a tech support group are based in one office, with a fourth working from home. If that fourth employee is set up with an IP phone and access to the network, the ACD system will route calls to their location with the same call quality as the other three, and with a negligible connection time.

The Right Approach

When implementing an Automatic Call Distribution System, we have several recommendations. The first is that while it is possible to add ACD as a stand-alone system, it may not be your best option. The problem with this approach is that you will need to interface an independent PC with your PBX system. You will have to pay for licensing from two different vendors, not to mention programming and maintenance for two different technologies. Instead, we recommend integrating ACD directly into your PBX. That way, all technology is provided by the same vendor, eliminating licensing and maintenance complexities. With the right vendor, you will be able to add ACD functionality to your existing PBX for about \$50-\$100 a port.



Our second recommendation is that you look for ACD technology that includes a feature known as "expansion". With many ACD systems, if the primary group designated for a call is busy or unavailable, the call forwards to the second group responsible for answering the call. The problem with this approach is that someone from the primary group may quickly become available, but the call has already been forwarded to a less-qualified destination.

This is where expansion is different. An inbound call handled through expansion would proceed this way:

1. A call will come in, and the ACD tries the primary group.
2. If the line is busy the ACD tries the secondary group.
3. The ACD still keeps trying the primary group while trying the second.
4. If the primary group becomes available, the call reverts back to that group.

What this means is the system is constantly looking for the best possible way to route a call to meet a customer's needs. Another benefit of expansion is that the on-hold messages and other automated information always come from the primary group. That way, when a caller is on hold or being transferred, the messages received include special offers and information tailored to the original reason for the call.

Finally, we recommend that you make sure that the ACD system you're considering is of the highest caliber. Did you know that the some ACD platforms also offer Management Information Reporting? With this functionality, you can see which employees receive the most calls, how long each call lasts, how long a caller had to wait while being transferred or put on hold, and how many times that person was transferred. This greatly aids in load balancing and in determining which of your phone representatives is the most productive.