Improving CX in Your Agency Through Contact Center Modernization

GENESYS™ govloop

Introduction

There's a major shift in government to transform the way citizens interact with agencies across a variety of platforms. More specifically, there is a concerted effort to deliver consistent, seamless and personalized experiences.

Today, citizens demand intuitive services across voice, social media, chat, SMS and all types of automated self-services. To better understand agencies' top customer experience (CX) challenges and what benefits they hope to gain from efforts such as contact center modernization, GovLoop partnered with Genesys, an omnichannel CX solutions provider, to produce this report.

As part of our research, GovLoop surveyed 140 government employees who are knowledgeable about CX initiatives at their agencies. About half said CX has been stagnant in the past year and most cite communication silos as their greatest challenge to providing better experiences for citizens.

In this report, you'll gain insights about agencies' sentiments toward CX and how they are modernizing their contact centers. We also share insights from Stuart Crutchfield, Senior Strategic Business Consultant at Genesys, on specific steps agencies can take to improve overall CX.
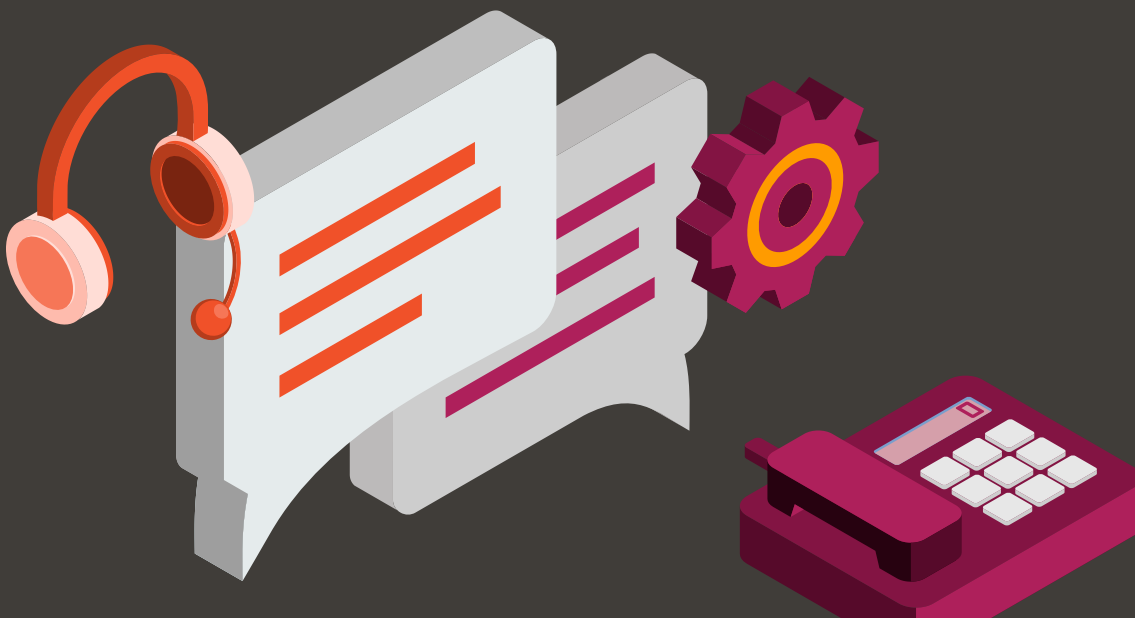
The State of CX in Government

Customer experience is a staple of the President's Management Agenda, which lays out a long-term vision for where the administration is heading and its overarching priorities. The goals include improving the usability and reliability of the federal government's most critical digital services and using technology to break down barriers and increase communication with the public.

But only 27 percent of GovLoop survey respondents feel that CX at their agency has improved in the past year (see Figure 1), and half believe there is a gap in the level of service that their agency provides when compared with the private sector (see Figure 2).

The key to increasing those numbers lies in the challenge of providing multichannel experiences to citizens across all their preferred devices.

Although government agencies are often pitted against online retailers and ride sharing services when it comes to CX, there isn't widespread evidence that CX across the public and private sectors has materially improved, Crutchfield said.

New research from Forrester's US 2018 Customer Experience Index rankings back that claim. Customers expect their experiences to keep getting better, but the index found that "U.S. brands remain mediocre when it comes to providing quality customer experiences. No brand has risen to the top of Forrester's rankings and continued to improve – a clear indication that U.S. brands are lacking a CX leader for the third straight year."
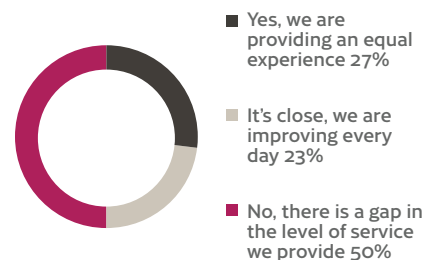
The issue is that CX has not kept pace with citizen's rising expectations. "This has been going on for the last three years and will begin to boil over in 2019, leading to a series of systemic shocks for CX transformation efforts," according to Forrester.

Crutchfield noted that both the public and private sectors share a common problem: the uncontrolled growth of digital communication channels. "This has led to a disjointed patchwork quilt of technologies trying to keep up with citizens' channel preferences," he said.

FIGURE 1: *Over the past 12 months, do you feel customer experience at your agency is:*

- Improving 27%
- Staying the same 51%
- Getting worse 22%
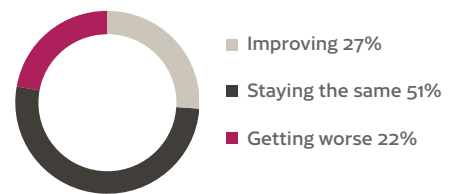
FIGURE 2: *Does your agency provide the same level of customer experience to citizens, as they receive in the private sector?*

- Yes, we are providing an equal experience 27%
- It's close, we are improving every day 23%
- No, there is a gap in the level of service we provide 50%

Government's Top CX Challenges

When asked to describe their top CX challenge, 40 percent of respondents said they grapple with too many siloed communications channels that don't sync well. Think contact centers, online platforms, in-person services and more (see Figure 3).

The common issues respondents raised were lack of training for personnel to use CX technologies and gaps in information about the citizen (see Figure 3).

Here are some of the write-in responses that GovLoop received about agencies' CX challenges:

- Constituents' demands exceed resources while federal and state mandates and requirements are increasing
- Understaffing
- Poor/lack of leadership
- Resources for IT solutions

The bottom line is that disjointed technology drives disjointed processes and disjointed information, Crutchfield said. "Without a complete picture of what your customers are doing and why, and how they've been interacting with you over time, a holistic and effective CX strategy cannot be built."

But how can agencies gain a complete view of their customers when they are bogged down with legacy IT and most of their funding is spent maintaining old technology?

FIGURE 3: Which of the options below most closely describes your top CX challenge?

- Too many siloed, communication channels that don't sync well (i.e. call center, IVR, online platform, in-person services) 40%
- Limited channels for citizens to communicate with agency on their device of choice 11%
- Limited view of the customer journey needed to develop a holistic CX strategy 16%
- Lack of training for personnel to use CX technologies 17%
- Other 16%

Prioritizing CX When Budgets Are Tight

The realities of budgetary pressures can severely limit CX modernization efforts, especially from a technology standpoint. We saw this firsthand from survey feedback about the issues that prevent agencies' leaders from providing a holistic strategy to create robust customer experiences (see Figure 4). Fifty-two percent said limited budget to implement changes was the issue, followed by 46 percent who said CX is a low priority at their agency and there are too many competing technology and not the right talent to maintain interactions with CX. There's also a lack of understanding regarding the importance of seamless CX, according to 41 percent of survey respondents.

When leaders not only take an interest in CX but make it a focal point of the organization, internal and external benefits are inevitable. Take the Veterans Affairs Department, for example. In the past three years, the agency has made significant strides in CX, including recent improvements to its Debt Management Center (DMC).

"It's our mission to take care of our Veterans, no matter what their needs are," VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a news release about the center reducing average wait times by 79 percent while fielding 40 percent more calls.

"DMC is in concert with our priority of improving customer service and will continue to gather customer feedback through direct feedback, surveys and outreach in FY19 to further enhance the Veterans' experience."

Ironically, what some leaders fail to understand is that prioritizing CX and investing in an integrated omnichannel platform that unites channels and work types alleviates budgetary pressure, Crutchfield said. These steps will also help agencies realize benefits in other areas, including improved operational efficiency and overall experiences for citizens.

According to the survey, agencies provide multiple channels for citizens to communicate with them. More than 60 percent of respondents said they offer services through email, website, call centers and in person (see Figure 5).
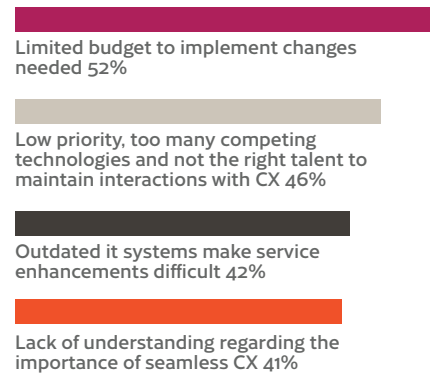
Offering multiple channels for citizens to communicate with government agencies increases participation and makes services more accessible to a greater number of people. But where agencies often stumble is in integration. Only 13 percent said all their communications channels are integrated (see Figure 6).

That's a stark contrast to the 46 percent of respondents who said their communications channels aren't connected, and they don't have plans to connect them.
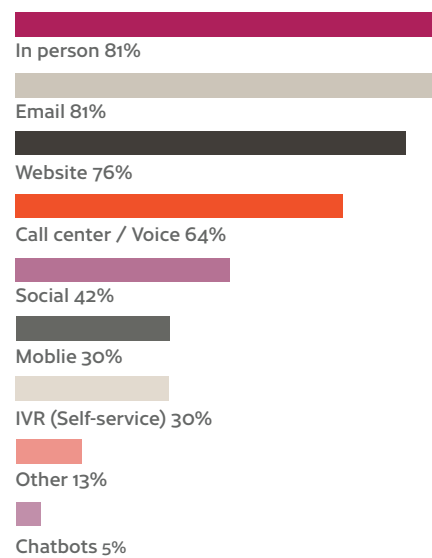
"You won't have the tools that enable you to proactively engage with citizens in the way you would ideally like to within a holistic CX strategy," Crutchfield said.

This is a missed opportunity for agencies. In the next section, we discuss practical solutions to agencies' greatest CX challenges.
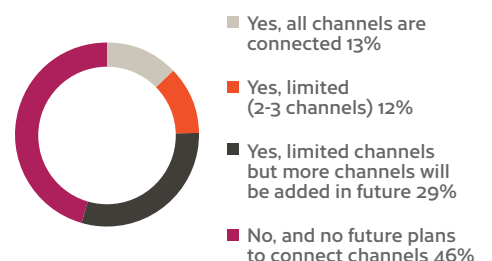
FIGURE 4: What do you think prevents your agency's leadership from providing a more holistic strategy to create robust customer experiences?

Limited budget to implement changes needed 52%

Low priority, too many competing technologies and not the right talent to maintain interactions with CX 46%

Outdated it systems make service enhancements difficult 42%

Lack of understanding regarding the importance of seamless CX 41%

FIGURE 5: What channels do you currently offer your citizens to communicate with your agency?

In person 81%

Email 81%

Website 76%

Call center / Voice 64%

Social 42%

Moblie 30%

IVR (Self-service) 30%

Other 13%

Chatbots 5%

FIGURE 6: Are all of your communications channels connected?

- Yes, all channels are connected 13%
- Yes, limited (2-3 channels) 12%
- Yes, limited channels but more channels will be added in future 29%
- No, and no future plans to connect channels 46%

How Omnichannel Can Improve CX at Your Agency

Investing in an integrated omnichannel platform will give agencies more flexibility to access information across channels and gain a holistic view of citizens and their needs, eliminate the hassle and cost of managing multiple technologies, and enable them to better glean insights and use that data for reporting and analysis.

The future state of improved CX and contact modernization greatly depends on agencies' ability to implement omnichannel solutions. A recent whitepaper by the General Services Administration on contact center modernization lays out the key differences between multichannel and omnichannel. "Just as 'omni' meaning all is superior to 'multi' meaning many, omnichannel builds on the capabilities of the multichannel contact center," according to the report. "The key difference between the multichannel contact center of today and the omnichannel center of the future is a consistent brand experience regardless of the technology or method of communication customers choose to use."

Support for an omnichannel experience is critical to any organization that wants to become — and remain — competitive. Although most government agencies are not competing with the private sector for customers, there's still a lot at stake. Agencies must consider the impact that CX has on their reputation, customer satisfaction and employee engagement. There are also costly consequences when agencies make it difficult for citizens to get what they need, when they need it and through the channel that best meets their needs.

A modern contact center improves the CX that agencies deliver. At its core, contact center modernization is about delivering a consistent, seamless and personalized experience across all customer interactions — voice, interactive voice response (IVR), social media, chat, SMS, agent-assisted and automated self-services.

Another benefit of an integrated omnichannel platform is that it enables agencies to provide artificial intelligence and self-service capabilities that are automatically woven together with human-assisted components.

The use of AI and chatbots is steadily increasing across government, but agencies are at varying levels of adoption. Twenty-one percent of respondents said they are either using or considering implementing AI and chatbots as part of their CX strategy (see Figure 7). Nearly half are unsure about their agency's use of AI and chatbots to boost CX because it has not been discussed.

The agencies that have successfully integrated AI into their overall CX strategy understand that it is not a standalone solution but rather part of a holistic approach. For example, when the Homeland Security Department's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services debuted a virtual assistant called Emma in June 2016, the technology answered an average of 101,000 questions a month in the first two months, and customers used it nearly twice as much as they used the search feature on USCIS.gov, according to the agency's website.

In addition to Emma, the agency also launched Live Chat, an online customer service software with live call center support. Both Emma and Live Chat are embedded within USCIS.gov. The online chat system provides customers immediate help from customer service representatives.

In the next section, we'll take a closer look at the benefits that agencies hope to gain through contact center modernization and how they can achieve those results.

"The key difference between the multichannel contact center of today and the omnichannel center of the future is a consistent brand experience regardless of the technology or method of communication customers choose to use."

"Emerging Technologies in Contact Centers" Whitepaper by GSA

FIGURE 7: *Is your agency using or considering implementing AI and chatbots as part of your CX strategy for citizens and employees?*

- Yes, we are already using AI 6%
- Yes, we are considering implementing within next 6 months 4%
- Yes, we are considering implementing within next 6-12 months 4%
- Yes, we are considering implementing within next 12 months 7%
- No, we are not considering implementing at this time 31%
- Unsure, we have not discussed the role of AI 48%

Tackling Contact Center Modernization

Earlier in this report, we shared survey data indicating that government employees feel CX at their agencies is stagnant. What's behind this flat line?

The answer lies in the challenge of providing multichannel experiences to citizens across all their preferred devices.

It is incredibly difficult for government agencies to maintain the same level of communication and CX on the phone, online, via email and with chatbots when a lack of technological integration forces agencies to think and act in silos. They need a way to seamlessly integrate citizens' preferred communication streams to drive an improved experience.

That's why contact center modernization should be a priority for government agencies. And while agency leaders know they need to modernize, many don't know how to begin. They may also be under the impression that contact center modernization is a massive, high-risk, all-or-nothing investment. But that isn't the case.

Modernization should be viewed as a prioritized approach that focuses on your agency's needs and mission. That's the model Genesys uses when working with its customers. "Agencies gain the holistic information base that enables them to see what's going on and then control and orchestrate it in Genesys," Crutchfield said. "We like the word 'orchestrate' to emphasize transition from a reactive to a proactive state, something business leaders are very focused on. Their reactivity stems from ever-growing complexity and ever-rising customer expectations, and modernization

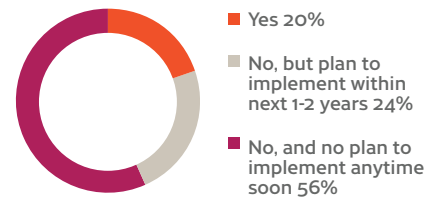is the key to successfully managing those challenges."

When asked if their agencies have a contact center modernization plan for CX in place, 20 percent of GovLoop respondents said yes (see Figure 8). Twenty-four percent don't have a plan yet but expect to in the next one to two years. However, more than half (56 percent) don't have a plan and don't expect to implement one anytime soon.

Many agencies want the benefits that come with contact center modernization, but achieving those goals requires a plan or roadmap for modernization — one that has senior leaders' support and addresses the root causes of poor CX. We know from the survey responses that the top CX challenge for agencies is too many siloed communications channels, but there is a slight disconnect when it comes to prioritizing what must be done to address that pain point.
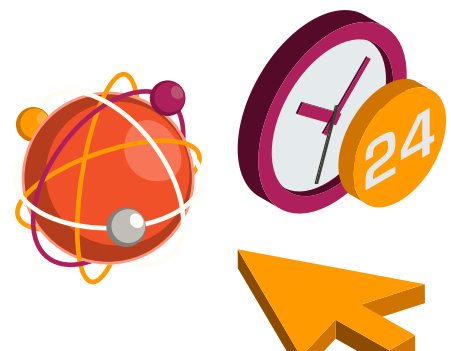
For example, survey respondents shared their feedback on several goals they want to achieve through contact center modernization, including increasing operational efficiency and improving CX, which ranked highest on the list at 60 percent and 48 percent, respectively (see Figure 9).

But only 10 percent said that consolidating disparate technology into a single vendor is one of their top goals for modernization. That's a mistake. Crutchfield explained that by tackling disparate technologies and using omnichannel solutions, agencies are better positioned to achieve all the other goals.

FIGURE 8: *Does your agency have a contact center modernization plan for CX in place?*

- Yes 20%
- No, but plan to implement within next 1-2 years 24%
- No, and no plan to implement anytime soon 56%

FIGURE 9: *What are your agency's top 3 goals for contact center modernization?*

Increase operational efficiency 60%

Improve citizen experience 48%

Reduce costs 36%

Improve citizen self-service 29%

Increase employe engagement 26%

Improve agent skills 18%

Unify reporting across contact center 15%

Decrease employee turnover 14%

Mitigate risk / dispute resolution 13%

Consolidate disparate technology into a single vendor 10%

Below we've listed some of the key benefits that come from consolidating disparate technologies. These benefits are also remedies for the top CX challenges agencies cited and the goals they hope to achieve. They include:

- **Lower overhead maintenance costs** for agencies, especially those with limited budgets that see funding as a barrier to better CX

- **Guaranteed unified reporting** across the contact center

- **Unified real-time reporting** that ensures supervisors can proactively control all interactions to ensure undesirable citizen experiences are avoided

- **Unified historical reporting**, which provides the interaction insights needed to design the most efficient, citizen-friendly experiences consistently across all channel touch points

- **Improved employee engagement and satisfaction**, which drive greater productivity and decrease turnover and recurring recruitment costs Employees can see all necessary information about a citizen on a single screen and those interactions with customers can be measured through feedback and performance metrics

- **The ability to fairly measure and report** agent skills at the most granular levels and automatically provide the right form of training

- **The ability to add new channels** when your agency needs them

Using an omnichannel platform to drive contact center modernization empowers employees to better serve citizens because they have seamless access to pertinent information. It also improves engagement and better supports self-service options for customers.

Now that we've reviewed the benefits of contact center modernization, in the next section we'll discuss practical steps to getting started.
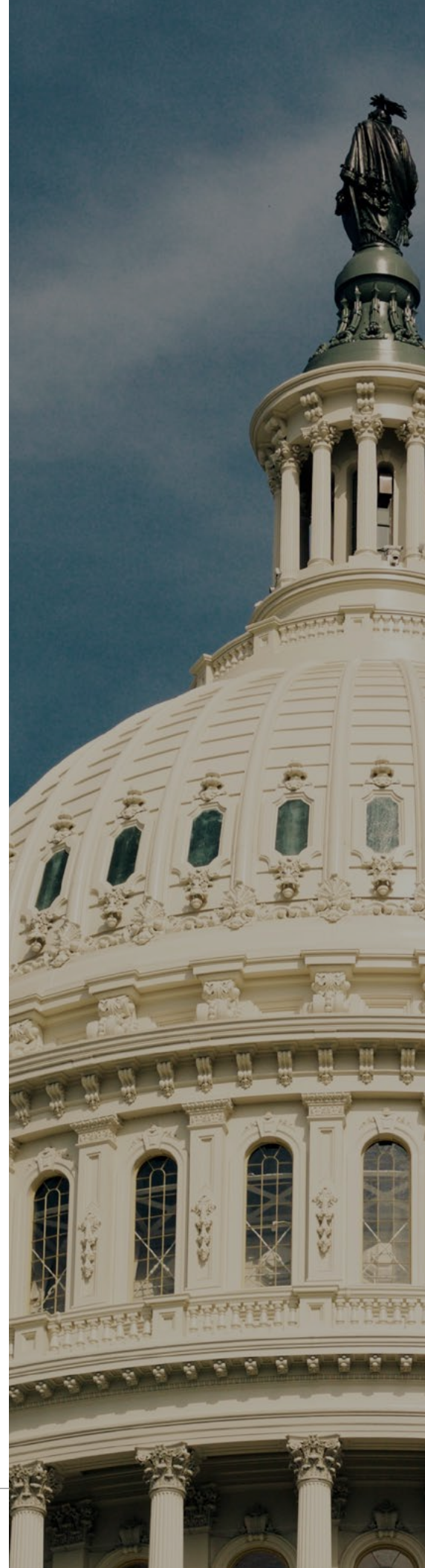
An Integrated Approach to Modernization

Modernization shouldn't be tackled all at once. Prioritization is imperative and must reflect your unique needs and opportunities.

The good news about contact center modernization is that a few small steps can bring big improvements and position you for further progress over time. Here are three ways to get started:

1. Define the vision.

First, get input from all stakeholders, including contact center representatives and leaders of all the agencies the contact center serves. Find out what services they want to provide and what outcomes they want to achieve. Make sure to solicit advice from the customer service agents who work on the front line. Also, be sure you understand the citizen's journey.

What process does a citizen go through today when engaging with government via IVR, live conversation, email, web forms and any other channels you offer?

Where are the pain points? What changes could you make to improve the interaction?

Once you have collected and analyzed this data, use it to create a picture of the improved customer service experience you want to provide. For example, the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles created a customer journey map when it launched a program to modernize its contact center, including its IVR.

Then, putting themselves in the consumer's shoes, bureau staff scrutinized each element of the experience, noting the ones that

were bothersome or unhelpful. Based on their findings, the bureau cut the recording on its IVR from two and a half minutes of introduction with many menu choices to less than 20 seconds, just a few menu choices and a quick path for reaching a human associate.

Because the new system offers many opportunities for self-service, fewer customers need to speak to an associate. Associates used to handle about 2 million calls a year. In 2018, that figure only reached 1.5 million.

2. Identify easy wins.

Once you have a list of desired improvements, choose the ones that offer the biggest return on investment in terms of better CX, reduced cost and stronger employee engagement. Plan to implement those first.

"Working with a partner like Genesys, agencies can use that outside expertise to review their operations and find quick wins," Crutchfield said. "Ultimately we're going to consolidate and make everything simpler, but where is that quick win for you? The answer is different for every agency. Some will focus on workforce management, others will

focus on routing and still others will focus on AI."

You might start by replacing your current IVR with a more capable system and then move on to enhancing or adding to your digital channels later. Once you've accomplished a few early successes, you can use that foundation to make incremental improvements over time.

## 3. Assess the vendor landscape.

Determine which technologies, from which vendors, can deliver your high-priority improvements. Keep the following in mind: It's best to choose an integrated platform from a single vendor. This strategy will reduce overhead and shorten the learning curve for users of the new system. It will also create a single point of responsibility for any problems that might arise.

Make sure the vendor can take advantage of technologies from third parties to enhance its platform. This is especially important when it comes to evolving technologies such as AI. Your vendor might offer an AI engine, but if someone develops a much better engine a year from now, you'll want the flexibility to incorporate that technology.

How Genesys Helps

Genesys empowers agencies to connect customer interactions across all voice and digital channels and ensure that customers have a consistent, seamless and personalized service experience. Through its CX solutions in the cloud and on-premise, Genesys works with agencies to offer personalized experiences and anticipate citizens' needs, consolidate all channels into a single platform at their own pace, and modernize their contact centers.

The goal of modernization is to ensure agencies can support all the ways in which customers want to communicate with them and provide those services in a timely and efficient manner.
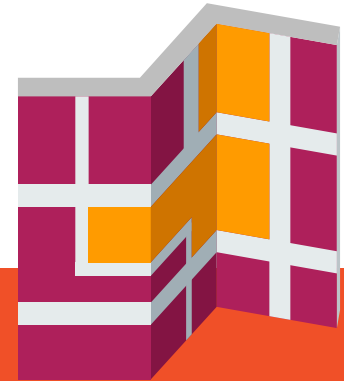
Conclusion

One of the major drivers for agencies to update their contact center is ROI associated with making the change. That include increased operational efficiencies, reduced costs and more options for employee and citizen self-services.

When modernizing, consider where you and your customers will go in the future. For example, moving to an all-in-one omnichannel solution makes it easy to integrate new channels as they emerge with ones already in place.

For government agencies, the cost of not investing in contact center modernization is too high. Employee engagement, citizens' trust and quality of services are at stake. Agencies that invest in omnichannel solutions to drive modernization will see greater consistency across their CX channels and guide successful interaction outcomes between employees and the customers they serve.

About Genesys

Genesys® powers 25 billion of the world's best customer experiences each year. Our success comes from connecting employee and customer conversations on any channel, every day. Over 11,000 companies in 100+ countries trust our #1 customer experience platform to drive great business outcomes and create lasting relationships. Combining the best of technology and human ingenuity, we build solutions that mirror natural communication and work the way you think. Our industry-leading solutions foster true omnichannel engagement, performing equally well across all channels, on-premise and in the cloud. Experience communication as it should be: fluid, instinctive and profoundly empowering.

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About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 270,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

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