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EDITORS' CHOICE

Synchrony

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With technology constantly changing and new communications methods being created, companies are yearning for solutions that can help them manage multiple customer touch points as well as integrate their disparate database systems. Synchrony is a customer experience management (CEM) solution that enables small and mid-sized organizations to combine multichannel contact center functionality with a powerful Universal View Web-based portal. Universal View searches a company's various business systems looking for information about a particular customer, and then intelligently and instantaneously presents only the relevant information about that customer to the agent's desktop; for example, the details of a specified customer activity (see Figure 1). Available in both on-premise and hosted service versions, this universal portal delivers productivity gains by providing a consolidated portal of the information necessary to optimize each customer interaction, including the ability to connect to and display a company's accounting system, billing and CRM database. Also, Synchrony uses a multitenant architecture, which allows multiple clients to reside on the same infrastructure, which keeps costs low.

Synchrony is completely thin-client, using dynamic HTML and CSS (cascading style sheets), which is an improvement over the previous version, which

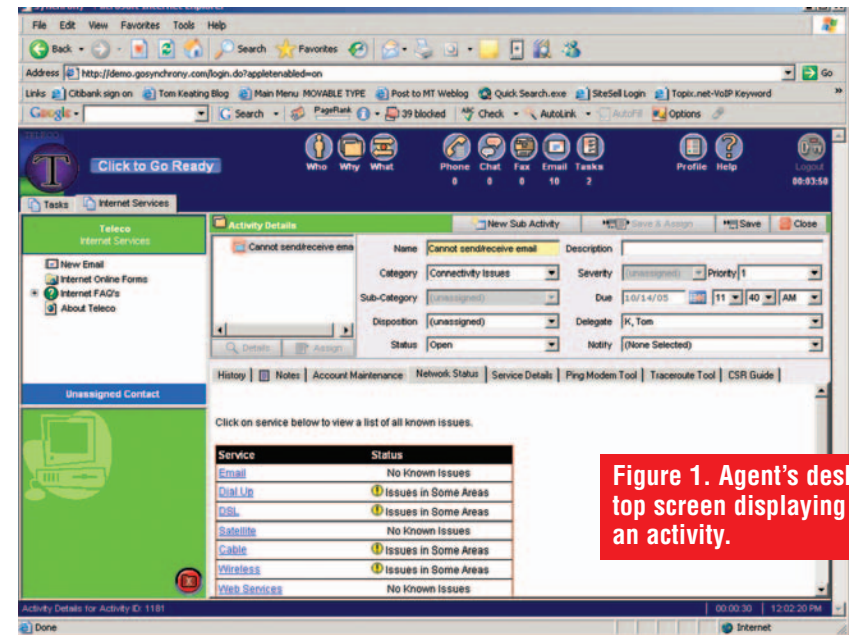


Figure 1. Agent's desktop screen displaying an activity.

required JREE (Java runtime execution environment). Because it is completely thin-client, users can easily customize the interface using templates. The templates are based on Velocity templates, which allows users to render data from within applications and servlets, and it separates templates from Java code. Due to this architecture, every screen can be customized down to the campaign level.

One of the most important competitive advantages of Synchrony is that it integrates e-mail, fax, phone and chat. For instance, it integrates an e-mail inquiry along with a phone inquiry for the same problem/issue, whereas many competing systems are segmented. Another nice integration capability is as follows: when an agent takes the next trouble ticket, the system will automatically display the appropriate customer record on the agent's screen using various methods, including e-mail address, IVR account number entered or teleph-

ony number. It also features a phonetic search tool to find contacts or companies phonetically if the agent is unsure of the exact spelling.

The interface is well laid out and well designed. It features smart tabs that can be hidden, depending on the issue selected. When a user switches tabs on the browser, the screen instantly loads the information, so there are no performance issues. The top of the screen lists the current number of phone, chat, fax, e-mail and tasks in the universal queue, giving users a nice snapshot of what's happening. At the top left of the

RATINGS (0-5)

Installation: 5
Documentation: 5
Features: 5
GUI: 4.75
Overall: A

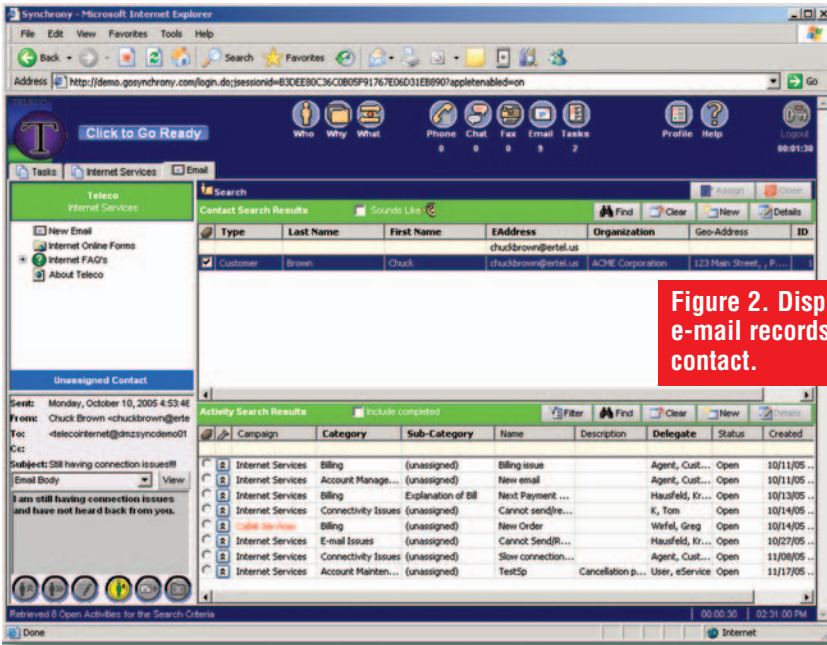


Figure 2. Displaying e-mail records for a contact.

spends on any particular activity. For instance, if an agent changes tabs (e.g., e-mail tab to the phone tab) while working on an activity, the system pauses the “work clock” so supervisors can see a more accurate representation of the actual amount of work spent on a particular activity. This way, it won’t appear that the agent spent two hours on a single e-mail. Other interesting features include the ability to record e-mail activity (and tie it to the contact record) as well as the chat transcript for future retrieval. Reporting is very powerful and uses the popular Cognos reporting and analytics engine.

Room For Improvement

We were impressed with the usability and flexibility of Synchrony. The only suggestion we have in terms of usability is to allow some keyboard shortcuts to navigate through the tabs. For instance, in Windows, “alt-tab” lets users switch between applications. Often, “shift-tab” lets users shift through an application’s tabs. Unfortunately, “shift-tab” doesn’t tab you through the various smart tabs on the Synchrony screen. We’d also like to see VoIP support, and we were informed that this will be available sometime in the first quarter of 2006.

Conclusion

The most advantageous feature of Synchrony is that it integrates all of a company’s disparate databases into a single unified interface. This results in reduced training times, as a consistent interface is much easier for agents to learn. Cincom’s Synchrony multichannel customer experience management system handles all types of customer transactions, including phone, e-mail, fax, Web collaboration, chat and call-me. With its advanced CRM capabilities, including contact information, accounting integration, activity/issue tracking and interaction history, Synchrony covers the whole gamut.

screen is the “click to go ready” button, allowing the agent to become available to take the next task.

One important part of the interface is the smart tabs. Synchrony’s smart tabs feature exposes and provides access into relevant back-end systems and databases and changes based on defined business variables, turning the desktop into a dynamic view of the customer. We liked Synchrony’s smart tabs feature since it exposes the agent to only the relevant information for that specific customer interaction, which helps to keep the amount of data on the screen limited to eliminate potential agent confusion. Managers can customize the smart tabs to give agents only the resources they need for specific transactions, which helps shorten the call handling times. The e-mail interface is simply another tab that lists the historical e-mail interactions for a particular contact record, as shown in Figure 2.

One interesting feature is that it can take a fax-to-e-mail solution from RightFAX, GFI, etc., parse it using OCR, dump the text into the database and then prioritize it for the agent accordingly and place it into a separate fax

queue. Another priority-related feature is the solutions’ ability to detect “platinum” customers. It can, for example, override the default priority of phone over e-mail. If a platinum customer sends an e-mail, it will jump to the head of the queue.

The universal queue manages all of a company’s interactions across all channels, including phone, e-mail, chat and fax, which has obvious synergies. Not only does it provide a single location for managing the incoming flow of various customer interactions, Synchrony provides intelligent routing that connects customers to the most appropriate available agent.

Additionally, it’s important to note that many call centers require that agents toggle between multiple screens to access separate database systems. This is time-consuming, hurts agent productivity, increases call times and increases customer frustration. In addition to combining all of a call center’s interactions into a universal queue, Synchrony also combines disparate data into one Web-based application.

Synchrony does an excellent job of measuring agent productivity by calculating the amount of time the agent