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## Every Business a Contact Center: What ACD Means for You

ACD, or Automatic Call Distribution, is something that has not been traditionally associated with the small-to-medium business (SMB). But ACD shouldn't be reserved for large organizations with entire floors devoted to their call center staff. In fact, ACD is affordable even for companies with only 5-10 employees and it can offer far more benefit for SMBs than you may realize.

Every time a call comes into a business, it is an opportunity. It may be a prospect presenting an opportunity for a sale. It may be an existing customer requiring service, which might result in the opportunity for future sales-if the customer is satisfied. It could be a vendor or partner presenting a chance to expand your business relationship. The bottom line is this opportunity could be missed if that caller is transferred from one extension to another...to another; getting nothing but muzak or a standard voicemail message.


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 call could be routed to someone in Customer Service (who might be able to address the customer's 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.

Through Management Information Reports 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 functionality greatly aids in loading balancing and in determining which of your representatives is the most productive.

### ACD the Right Way

When implementing an Automatic Call Distribution System, we recommend two key strategies. The first is that you deploy a PBX with ACD integrated directly into the system. That way, all technology is provided by the same vendor, eliminating licensing and maintenance complexities.

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 also trying the second group.
4. If the primary group becomes available, the call is handled by 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.

The main thing to remember is that regardless of how you move forward with the implementation, Automatic Call Distribution will deliver solid benefits in both process improvements and customer satisfaction. And it will give you real visibility into the current state of all your customer communications efforts.