Re(AI)magine Conversations

The New Contact Center Playbook

Sarika Gupta and Barry O'Sullivan

Sarika Gupta: Hello everyone. Welcome to yet another session of Re(AI)magine Conversations where we explore how AI and technology is disrupting the BAU for enterprises. In this series, we connect with the industry leaders and tech innovators to uncover some of the interesting stories behind these disruptive innovations.

I'm Sarika Gupta, SVP, Persistent, and I'll be the host for today's sessions. In today's sessions, we will examine how contact center modernization is no longer just trained, but is an essential business strategy for the contact center owners. In fact, contact centers are today fast transforming from cost centers to customer experience centers, and also adding a significant amount of revenue for the enterprises.

With me, I have Barry from Five9., Barry, before we begin, why don't you go ahead and introduce yourself?

Barry O'Sullivan: Sure. Thanks, Sarika. I'm Barry O'Sullivan. I'm the Senior Vice President, Strategic Solutions at Five9. Been with Five9 for 14 years and started in contact centers some decades ago. I won't say how many.

Sarika Gupta: That's what my first question is, why do you think this migration from legacy to cloud is becoming so important right now? And what is the risk which contact center owners are really running into if they delay this migration?

Barry O'Sullivan: Yeah. I think overall the customer expectations have radically shifted in a couple of dimensions.

One, they want you to communicate with them the way they want to communicate. So, we all understand that different demographics use different medias to communicate and even different

styles of communication within those media. So, one, you have to meet the customer where they are. Some of the legacy systems make that a bit challenging.

The other is that every customer expects you to know everything about them. They almost want you to know exactly why they are interacting with you and what is going on. Sometimes that is possible and sometimes it is not. And technology has been radically changing over the years. So, obviously we went from very simple systems back in the CD days, to now, we added omnichannel.

We've added all sorts of internal systems to make agents more effective with screen pops and things of that nature. But you really need the capabilities. Things like Artificial Intelligence (AI) to be able to move as quickly as customers expect, so that you provide that customer experience. Because the other thing is that's happening is, customers move. If they don't like the customer experience they get, they'll move on and find somebody else that'll serve them better.

Sarika Gupta: In fact, Barry, if I may add an important aspect is the cost model. I mean when we are moving from legacy to cloud-based contact centers, one of the most important aspects is also that we are moving from the infrastructure expansion cost to actual subscription consumption-based cost model.

Which definitely makes the scalability of some of the contact centers much more predictable in terms of cost and time, both. And that is something which most of the contact center owners are really looking at. You know, how do I expand with minimal disruption to my existing business? And in fact, at Persistent, we are working with many of the contact centers owners to actually not just help them migrate to cloud, but also helping them to automate some of the backend workflows. We are leveraging our legacy experience, our experience in CRMs, backend systems, which are vertical specific as well sometimes, so that itself is actually, you know, it's not just a tech upgrade to cloud, but also helping them derive some of the business outcomes from this tech upgrade as well.

Barry O'Sullivan: Yeah, and that's critical. The interesting thing is that the move from a CapEx to an OpEx model, while giving some consistency and allowing for more flexible technologies has also created an impediment for many customers to move. Because somebody who is already built in the CapEx, they already bought something and they've been running on it for years and years and years. To them, moving to the operational model might seem like a big jump in expenses if they've really been like squeezing every last moment out of the last system.

So, it can be a challenge, but more to your point, the longer people wait on the old systems, the more they find that their backend systems aren't able to keep up and aren't ready for a change. Now one of the things we've found, and I've noticed in particular, is anytime you go into a premise-based environment, customers who have lost the ability to differentiate between their true value, their true needs, their business needs, and what things they do just because they had to do it, to work around limitations of the technology stack that they've been living with for years and years and years.

So, that ability to tease those two things apart and help them understand what is truly the business need and how do we adapt the back-end technologies and the front-end technologies in order to meet those.

Sarika Gupta: Exactly. It's like you are carrying over a particular workload, which probably doesn't even serve the purpose today.

And we have seen that in legacy contact centers, a lot of workflows call flows are just duplicates, but they have just been kind of, piling over a period of time simply because different infrastructures got accumulated with a single customer. And that's where cloud migration, effective cloud migration is also very important.

Wherein, you just don't like do a lift and shift, but also optimize what is existing today, so that they can operate much more efficiently. And to that effect, if we look at it, for your customers what is the value prop they are seeing when they migrate from legacy contact centers to modern contact centers?

Barry O'Sullivan: Well, I think one of the biggest changes from legacy to C-A-S environment is that not only does the rate of change increase, but your ability to keep up with the rate of change increases. So, we can get done in a cloud environment more than a premise-based environment can get done in the same amount of time and by a factor of three to 10 times. Setting up a contact center from scratch in a C-A-S environment can be an hours long experiment. You can do integrations. So, think of the common CRMs. Those integrations are fairly standardized. Now, will that cover a hundred percent of the use cases?

Certainly not! But getting you the 80-20 rule, essentially out-of-the-box enables you to get much more done in a limited amount of time. So, whether you're struggling with limited resources or a time crunch, you can't do these things with premise-based environments. And then, as I mentioned before, the rate of technological changes is happening so quickly, trying to keep up with that with a premises-based technology stack and a premises-based mindset is almost impossible. So, you almost need to swap that technology stack out so that as the technology changes, the peripheral technologies, the AI systems, the capabilities there, you have the ability to adapt to it, try it out, see what works in your environment, see what works for your business, and enhance those things that need enhancing.

You have to move quickly and that's just not possible with the premises-based systems.

Sarika Gupta: Yeah, in fact, like the technology is obsolete and in order to upgrade it, you will have to probably put a lot of effort and maintenance of existing infra-based contact center is even more difficult. You're spending a lot of dollars in just maintaining that.

And then at the same time, you are not able to get the benefits of the latest technological trends as well. So, it's a double whammy for most of the contact centers.

Barry O'Sullivan: And yet people that have been in an organization for 20 years managing that existing technology stack have a level of comfort with it. And so, there's fear, uncertainty and doubt about moving to something different.

They know exactly what they have. They know how it works. It's in their data centers. They control it. And so, there is a lot of education that needs to happen to help them understand that they're actually not giving up control. They're getting more control and more abilities coming out of the new platforms, versus less.

Sarika Gupta: In fact that's an important point. Not just people who are maintaining it, but also people who are actually the agents, be it in tech support or even in the usual industry. One of the important aspects is many times we all worry that this person has a lot of legacy knowledge, right.

Because of which we, we can't kind of, replace this person or we just kind of, can't move this person to a different role where he or she can be much more effective with the kind of knowledge he or she has. Right? And that is where we believe AI, has a lot of roles to play. So, how do you see this AI actually impacting the overall contact center of efficiency or operational utility.

Barry O'Sullivan: So, historically there was a balance, and you either invested more capital to get better customer experience, or you squeezed harder to get more cost savings out of it. Right? A lot of contact centers were viewed as cost centers and nothing more.

And that was a balance. You either went for the better experience, or you went for better cost reduction. So, one of the big things with AI is the ability to actually achieve both at the same time. You can improve the consistency and quality of the customer experience while also realizing significant cost benefits.

So, everybody's familiar with the front-door automations. Then there's also on the agent side. The idea there is, if you've got a co-pilot-like feature, we call ours agent assist, that's listening to the conversation going on between the agent and the caller, they can be providing insight onto the next best action, potential offers to upsell potential things to offer in terms of troubleshooting.

And that's all integrated in with a customer's knowledge and policies and procedures. And it can be based on the performance of the best performing agents. That's where you get, the quick uplift in the general population of agents. Somebody new coming out of training is not experienced.

They know the basics, but they don't know the ins and outs of it versus somebody that does, and an agent assist type function can help uplevel them much quicker. But then there's a whole host of AI technologies that people don't think of, but that helps remove friction from the conversation with your customer.

So, it used to be the case that the frustration was, I've interacted with an IVR and now I get to an agent and I have to give them my account number again, or I've already authenticated through

an automated system and I have to authenticate again. That's a problem of passing context and astoundingly there are still companies out there that work this way. You've got to start from scratch all over again. That shouldn't happen anymore. At Five9, we think that AI should be kind of endemic through the system. It should be so prevalent throughout the system that you almost don't even notice it, but you're always getting those enhancements.

You're always getting the uplift, which again, drives better customer experience, better savings and better agent experience, all of which helps run a better business.

Sarika Gupta: So, in fact, to that effect, omnichannel has been around for quite some time in the contact centers. But I personally believe that now it has actually become so seamless that you don't realize how you're moving from a chatbot to an agent to a voice bot. Right. So actually, you don't feel that, some hands are getting exchanged. It is the same conversation which is being carried forward, and you are able to do that hand, you know.

Barry O'Sullivan: Certainly! That's certainly the way it should be, and that's possible now. I wish that many more organizations were already there.

Sarika Gupta: Absolutely. Yeah. So Barry, in that context, all the contact center owners, as we see, like we see that they actually are looking to leverage contact centers even for revenue generation to an extent, or at, at a minimum, maintain the customer loyalty, right?

So how do you see this? You know how the KPIs or the operational metrics are, which we used to track in the earlier contact centers, how those KPIs are actually changing as we move from the legacy to cloud and AI-first contact centers.

Barry O'Sullivan: It's an interesting question. Contact centers have been full of operational metrics forever.

So, speed of answer, handle time, time between calls, all of those types of things. If I'm in a sales type organization, those things used to be measured by how quickly is my system dialing? If I'm doing automated outbound dialing, what's the time between my salespeople, uh, talking from one customer to talking to another?

And those represented essentially your efficiency, but what it doesn't represent is actual results of selling. So, one of the things at the base of AI capabilities in all contact centers is highly accurate, real-time transcription. That transcription provides a huge amount of data in addition to operational contacts in our metrics that provides insight into what is going on.

It can give you the voice of the customer; it can give you insight into what's going on in your contact center, upcoming trends, things that are happening quickly. But it can also give you insight into sales, are my sales working? Are people agreeing to buy? Are they extending? Are they agreeing that they won't cancel?

Are they moving to an alternate plan? Are they talking about the competition? All of those things can now be automatically surfaced as part of the contact center platform, so you can now start to have that holistic view of what's going on. Right? So, that base capability of the real-time transcription really offers a lot of capabilities, and it's not just from a sales perspective.

I can take one lens and look at what we call AI insights. AI insights give you kind of a running view of what's going on in your context and what topics are coming up, giving you insights into where you might be able to add additional automation, either in that automation frontdoor or in the agent assist.

Kind of upleveling the skill perspective. But there's other ways of looking at that same data set and coming up with different views. So, think of automated quality management. Think of, uh, think of speech analytics. Think of things that are targeted at different user communities within the contact center that all have a different lens.

They want to get different insight out of it. It's all built on that same base layer of data. But I think the key component here is that, what people are looking at has fundamentally changed what used to be dark data, right? We used to record these things, and then they'd sit, you know, in the old days they sat on like literally reel to reel tape, and they were just used for conflict resolution.

Then it moved to disc and then you started getting some automated analysis of those things that's now just part of the contact center fabric and really adds real value.

Sarika Gupta: So, actually contact centers are becoming voice of the customers in real time today, which, but earlier, like you said, you used to collect the data and then generate those insights.

Right now, it is everything is in real-time and that helps to kind of tie up those operational metrics, you know, the success of those operational metrics to actually the customer experience and the parameters which actually matter for the contact centers, right? And not just tracking the operational metrics.

Barry O'Sullivan: Voice of the customer, that process has been broken for a while, right?

Because it's been driven by post-interaction surveys. And, and that data is naturally biased, right? Who responds to surveys? People that are extremely happy with what just happened, and people that are extremely annoyed with a bias towards the annoyed. That vast group in the middle.

Sarika Gupta: That's, I mean, even today where tech support, like service tech support, where contact center solutions are used there as well. Even there you have some proactive monitoring of quality of calls and all before we really get to the CSAT, right, so that you get an early indication of how things are, or how the agents are actually, or how the system is actually dealing with the customers. So, on that front, my final question, how is Five9 different and how is Five9 navigating this whole contact center market where you have so many solutions already prevailing?

Barry O'Sullivan: Yeah! That's a very interesting question. The reality is most of the major players in the contact center as a service space are all going to offer a similar set of features. Right? They are all going to look the same. Their ability to route interactions, the omnichannel capabilities are all going to look very similar.

Um, you might prefer the user interface in some ways better. You might prefer little bits and pieces of how particular interactions are handled in one versus another, but the core base capabilities are all there. We're all rolling AI into it as well. Um, so, that's also similar. So how do you differentiate in that space?

Well, in the Five9 world we have for at least the 14 years I've been here, but I've been told quite a bit longer than that, we are absolutely laser focused on our customer's success. Because one of the big things in changing from the CapEx to the OpEx model moving from premises to cloud is you're no longer making a financial decision that you have to rely, that you're going to live with for the next 5 to 10 to 15 years.

It's now a rental model, and it can be a short-term rental as well. So now the onus is on the vendor to ensure that you are happy. It's not a, I sold it to you. Here you go. Now you're a maintenance stream. For me, it's, I have to keep making you happy. I have to keep adding value. I have to keep working with you to ensure that the value I'm adding to the product, you can apply to your customer base so that you continue to drive value out of it. Because if you don't, it'll become stale and you'll go find somebody else. So, how do we differentiate? We differentiate in the way we treat our customers.

Whether it's what we do with our internal delivery team or how our customer support function works, all of those things are different. Whether we work through trusted partners such as yourselves, so that we train you to our level of expertise, give you that same mindset, the same metrics that we care about, uh, and then give you the support behind the ticket.

Behind the scenes, or whether we're going direct, it doesn't matter. So, how we engage with our customers and how we feel about them, I think is a differentiator for us.

I think also the way we're approaching AI is a little bit different. We are very conservative in many respects. We don't jump on every bandwagon that comes out. We don't immediately integrate to every brand new engine that comes out. Um, when ChatGPT hit the market, I think we were the last of the major players to announce an integration to it. I consider that a badge of honor, because we did not when it was beta. When there were no security guarantees, when there was no enterprise-level license around it, think that was something that our customers should be putting their customer data through.

Now when Microsoft invested in it and put it in Azure and put those security guarantees in place, and put SLAs around it and put legal frameworks in place around, how is the data controlled? Who uses what, who's, you know, where does that line get drawn? That's when we felt, okay, this is now enterprise ready.

We're ready for our customers to use it. So, while our platforms always give customers the ability to go off-road, what we make standardized and drop-down menu friendly is things that we think are ready for them. So how we approach AI is conservative, but it's also forward-thinking. How can we leverage these tools to enable our customers to better engage with their customers. How can we use our tools to better enable our customers to have happy and productive workforces, whether that's the agents, or the supervisors, or the administrators that are working on the system. All of that matters and I think we do a very good job there.

I think it's a differentiator. Ultimately, it's on us and our partners to prove that to customers out in the field.

Sarika Gupta: Yeah. And, I think, one of the things which definitely, I mean, two things in fact stand out for us, right? One is, like you said, you know, the passion for customer and customer center, it's like customer obsessed, how customer obsessed Five9 is.

The second part is, the way Five9 treats all the verticalized solutions and the openness of, and the flexibility of the platform to kind of, you know, create a seamless journey, like being in healthcare space. If you are deploying Five9 in a provider setup or in a payer setup, right? The way it integrates seamlessly in that whole customer journey, it doesn't appear that it always looks like it has been tailored for that whole.

You know, it's not something which has been kind of force fitted into a payer setup or into a provider setup. That's something which really stands out for us from the delivery experience. And that is one of the feedback which we have got from many of our customers that, why would they prefer Five9 over other CL solutions?

Barry O'Sullivan: Thank you for hitting a key point that I should have and, and didn't! No, you're, you're absolutely right! So, in my decades in this space, I have yet to find two contact centers that use exactly the same technology stacks and have the same needs. And so it's for us to adapt to their needs versus us coming in and saying, this is what you must take from us.

And yeah, the rest of the stuff I don't care about will integrate to those. So, we actually work with companies that compete with our core functions, agents assist, for example, or virtual agents. We have programs where we set up development environments, give technical guidance to competitors to help them integrate into our platform, and then validate technically that those solutions work properly.

So, that if there's a company that has an agent assist / Co-pilot-like type capability, that isn't ours but that a customer wants to use more than ours, it's on us to see that works as well as ours does, and that level of openness, I think, is rare in the marketplace.

Sarika Gupta: Uh, and yes, so that flexibility, actually every contact center owner really like, wants to have that flexibility because they have existing solutions or they have preference for certain solutions.

And that itself helps us, helps them scale right at a, you know, be it regionally supporting certain regions or be it supporting certain channels. This level of flexibility is definitely very, very important for any large contact centers to actually go through that modernization journey.

Like as we have discussed today, contact center modernization, if we look at it, is not just about moving to Cloud, it is actually about creating those connected, intelligent engagement layer, right? That drives the real value proposition for the contact center owners to track. As Persistent, we are very proud to partner with Five9 and help our customers navigate this journey end-to-end.

Thank you Barry for sharing your insights and personally, it has been a very insightful session for me and I'm sure it's true for the listeners as well.

Barry O'Sullivan: Thank you Sarika. It's been a nice conversation and we're pleased to get with our ongoing relationship, and look forward to helping many customers on the journey that we've been describing today.

Sarika Gupta: Absolutely! Looking forward to it, Barry. Thank you to all our listeners for joining us. Stay tuned for more conversations on the future of customer experience. Hope to see you soon!

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the World ™

About Persistent

Persistent Systems (BSE: 533179 and NSE: PERSISTENT) is a global services and solutions company delivering AI-led, platform driven Digital Engineering and Enterprise Modernization to businesses across industries. With over 26,500 employees located in 18 countries, the Company is committed to innovation and client success. Persistent offers a comprehensive suite of services, including software engineering, product development, data and analytics, CX transformation, cloud computing, and intelligent automation. The Company is part of the MSCI India Index and is included in key indices of the National Stock Exchange of India, including the Nifty Midcap 50, Nifty IT, and Nifty MidCap Liquid 15, as well as several on the BSE such as the S&P BSE 100 and S&P BSE SENSEX Next 50. Persistent is also a constituent of the Dow Jones Sustainability World Index. The Company has achieved carbon neutrality, reinforcing its commitment to sustainability and responsible business practices. Persistent has also been named one of America's Greatest Workplaces for Inclusion & Diversity 2025 by Newsweek and Plant A Insights Group. As a participant of the United Nations Global Compact, the Company is committed to aligning strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption, as well as take actions that advance societal goals. With 468% growth in brand value since 2020, Persistent is the fastest-growing IT services brand in 'Brand Finance India 100' 2025 Report.

USA
Persistent Systems, Inc.
2055 Laurelwood Road, Suite 210
Santa Clara, CA 95054
Tel: +1 (408) 216 7010
Fax: +1 (408) 451 9177
Email: info@persistent.com

India
Persistent Systems Limited
Bhageerath, 402
Senapati Bapat Road
Pune 411016
Tel: +91 (20) 6703 0000
Fax: +91 (20) 6703 0008

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