

SIX STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES OF

# Consolidated Contact Centers



# Getting to now: Mergers and Acquisitions

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According to the American Hospital Association there are approximately 6,120 hospitals across the United States<sup>1</sup> and more than half of them belong to merged healthcare systems. Mergers and acquisition activity among healthcare systems has played a critical role with reducing costs, delivering high quality care, increasing accessibility to rural communities and gaining more leverage with insurers.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Kauffman Hall notes that 2023 saw mergers and acquisitions return to pre-pandemic levels, surpassing activities in 2021 and 2022. Additionally, more and more systems are comprised of multiple hospital facilities, outpatient service sites, clinics, and affiliated medical groups.<sup>3</sup> These multifaceted, post-merger organizations have increasingly complex needs and often operate using disparate systems across different buildings and campuses.



# Raising the bar

As the first point of contact for a hospital, the contact center has the critical role of fostering and maintaining current (and potential) consumer loyalty. Contact centers represent the brand of your organization to the public, and agents are vital ambassadors. A poorly managed call can quickly overshadow a carefully cultivated reputation.<sup>4</sup> In addition to handling inbound calls, contact centers perform vital roles in clinical communications such as code calls.

In order to create greater economies of scale, generate cost reductions, streamline processes, and deliver more consistent customer service, many systems are transitioning to a single, multifunctional contact center solution. The infrastructure consolidation of technology is also often accompanied by a physical consolidation of agents into one location. Here are six reasons why these complex efforts are worth your while.

## 1 Increased staff satisfaction and efficiency

A consolidated contact center can help hospital systems reduce both operating expenses and call-processing time. The key is not just in the physical consolidation, but in implementing a unified infrastructure that can easily scale with changing call volumes, even if new facilities need to be covered by the team. With a central contact database and intuitive operator console, staff can quickly access the information they need, from one system, to process calls with just a few keystrokes. Utilizing one technology solution across the enterprise means you can manage greater call volumes while reducing operator workloads and fatigue. Agents will appreciate automated paging and messaging technology that frees them up to provide more in-depth caller assistance whenever needed.

Consolidating multiple contact centers to one system and a single source for data has several advantages. It gives staff, whether they are in a consolidated location or not, a standardized reference point for directory information. In addition, physically consolidating locations increases efficiencies related to training, overhead expenses, staffing models, and even staff satisfaction with a larger space and better training and support.

To meet social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, UW Health established remote operator workstations that proved remote contact center employees were as just efficient as being on site.

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## 2 Improve response times to critical codes

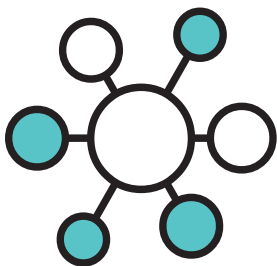
The contact center must efficiently connect the organization's internal departments and various sites to one another, especially when issuing critical codes, because every second counts in a medical emergency. One way to facilitate these critical communications is by consolidating all emergency response sources (facilities, ambulatory, rapid response teams, etc.) and protocols into a single call center function. On the front end, this gives hospital staff just one number to call when a code needs to be launched, whether it is a fire, gas outage, or a dangerous change in patient vitals. In addition, standardizing the software that supports contact center functions (the console platform) and integrating directory contact information with on-call schedules and messaging capabilities can eliminate a reliance on paper binders, white boards, sticky notes, spreadsheets, and other disparate or manual sources.



A unified directory of contact data also means cleaner data. Agents can quickly and accurately access staff, launch code calls, and send messages to individuals, groups, or roles. And this streamlining of technology works for contact centers that are physically consolidated, as well as ones that remain geographically separated. With one consolidated database, one set of tools, and one set of protocols, training is streamlined for agents and code alert recipients are notified in the same way every time, no matter their location or device. Consistency and speed lead to better outcomes.

## 3 Enable agents to handle more diverse tasks and responsibilities

The role of a contact center agent has changed dramatically over the years, and these professionals are now tasked with a lot more than simply answering and transferring phone calls. When managing the diverse duties expected of them, agents at contact centers with consolidated technology solutions are able to streamline many processes and make information easy to access. The time savings and more sophisticated tools allow staff to handle a wide array of requests, including inquiries about costs and insurance plans, appointment scheduling, event registration, physician-to-physician referrals, and nurse triage.



Technology can also support staff providing after-hours answering services for clinics and physician practices. Another big benefit of using a single technology platform to consolidate all disparate tasks agents perform (transfers, answering services, code calls, etc.) is that it allows all functions to be repeatable and consistent. This is effective whether staff are in a single location or not. In the case of a single location, task diversity is benefited by more process efficiency and consistency as agents continually hear and learn from one another.



## Sample operator workflow

1



Patient's EKG indicates a heart attack; ER nurse initiates the code

2



Operator launches code STEMI protocol and begins manually sending pages and working through a calling tree to notify responders

3



There are unconfirmed responses

4



The operator spends more time manually sending messages; over communicates to ensure proper staff response

5



Caregivers rally to help patient



## Sample operator workflow with consolidated infrastructure and streamlined protocols

1



Patient's EKG indicates a heart attack; ER nurse initiates the code

2



Operator launches code STEMI protocol and kicks off notifications

3



System determines 'Code STEMI' team members, including on-call members

4



Staff are automatically contacted on preferred device

5



Operator resolves any exceptions

6



Caregivers rally quickly to help patient

7



Full audit trail tracks performance

## 4 Enhance security and risk management

In an era of ransomware attacks and data hackers, a password-protected system helps maintain data security while still letting staff securely log on anywhere, anytime to update contact information and on-call schedules, search the directory, or send important messages. In the case of emergencies such as fires, severe weather, or bomb threats, call recording capabilities give the contact center a record of how those calls were managed. This will help your organization with situation debriefing and future emergency preparedness planning. It also provides an account of call handling details during emergency situations to assist authorities with investigations. Additionally, an audit trail of calls lets management retrace conversations if organizational disputes arise.



## 5 Strengthen customer service for your patients and their families

One of the keys to exemplary customer service is creating a positive experience. Another is having the time to devote to assisting callers with specialized questions or requests. These are efficiency benefits that both technological and physical consolidation of contact center functions support. Standardizing technology and processes will save time, giving contact center staff the ability to focus on customer calls that require a more personal approach. Improved processing can give staff more bandwidth to take on complex tasks and perform a wider array of responsibilities. And having staff in the same place helps with best practice development and allows staff to call on each other for support or guidance.



## 6 Improve training for new staff

One of the best ways to teach new team members, or refresh the skills of veteran agents, is through real examples of well-handled calls, which call recording technology can capture. When staff are in a single location, official onboarding can include live listening and learning, team support, and more exposure to task diversity for a faster learning curve. A consolidated location also produces innumerable opportunities for unofficial learning through the ability to hear and learn from other staff sitting in the same location.





## Evaluate the consolidation ROI

In order to assess the return on investment, or ROI, for a consolidation effort, start by documenting pre-consolidation service levels. Next, determine the metrics or indicators your organization will use to measure success.

Success metrics could include:

- Number of full-time agents
- Percent of calls answered within a specific time frame
- Percent of calls handled accurately
- Hold times
- Length of calls
- Training costs
- Evaluation of contact center staff

After you implement new technology, you can track improvements over time and compare new metrics with the baseline established before consolidation. Cost savings represents another opportunity to demonstrate ROI. Be sure to include the cost savings from unified technology solutions that reduce the hours required to maintain and update multiple data systems, work with multiple vendors for support, and track different types of processes. And in cases of physical consolidation, ROI includes the cost of overhead (space, equipment) and the efficiencies gained from faster training times.



**St. Dominic  
Hospital**

**75%**

reduced emergency  
process training time

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# Looking ahead

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Today's consumer-centric environment is placing more demands on healthcare systems to provide consistent, positive, personalized patient experiences at all levels of the organization. Consumers (including established patients) expect levels of customer service that mirror what they receive in other arenas. For a healthcare system, the contact center may serve as a customer's first touchpoint with the organization, and it often sets the tone for the rest of the individual's experience.<sup>5</sup>

Growing healthcare systems can meet increasing patient expectations, and enhance their value by offering a more personalized, efficient, and responsive level of customer service to potential and existing patients. One way to help achieve this enhanced customer service is with the consolidation of the contact center's infrastructure. A unified, multifunctional infrastructure supports better patient interactions, as well as streamlined processes such as coordinating code calls. The physical consolidation of agents into one place can also offer training and staff satisfaction advantages. With new, innovative communication solutions you can not only reduce overhead, but also improve the caller experience and allow your organization to present the best-possible public face to the community it serves.



## References

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aha.org/statistics/fast-facts-us-hospitals>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aha.org/fact-sheets/2023-03-16-fact-sheet-hospital-mergers-and-acquisitions-can-expand-and-preserve-access-care>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.kaufmanhall.com/insights/research-report/ma-quarterly-activity-report-q3-2023>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.spok.com/blog/3-hospital-contact-center-metrics-that-indicate-the-health-of-your-operations/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.spok.com/blog/create-consistent-customer-experience-through-your-hospital-contact-center/>



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Spok, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Spok Holdings, Inc. (NASDAQ: SPOK), headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, is proud to be a global leader in healthcare communications. We deliver clinical information to care teams when and where it matters most to improve patient outcomes. Top hospitals rely on the Spok Care Connect<sup>®</sup> platform to enhance workflows for clinicians and support administrative compliance. Our customers send over 70 million messages each month through their Spok<sup>®</sup> solutions. Spok enables smarter, faster clinical communication. For more information, visit [spok.com](https://spok.com).

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