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Ways to Modernize and Maximize Your Contact Center



Hospital contact centers are fundamental for coordinated care and patient experience

Your contact center isn't just there for agents to answer phone calls and direct inquiries to the right hospital or healthcare facility. It's a multifunctional communications hub, where agents serve as sophisticated, empathic healthcare navigators, with the goal of driving customer service standards higher each and every day.

Yes, agents field, manage, and route a wide array of incoming calls—but their mission-critical roles also help busy clinicians provide exceptional care. They coordinate emergency code responses and schedule appointments. They offer bed assignment and tracking assistance. They manage patient room service requests and coordinate with other facilities to support patient transfers.

For the hospital and health systems that field thousands of daily calls, with many managing more than [100,000 calls every year](#), contact center agents are the lynchpin of quality patient experiences and fundamental to the organization's operational and financial success. They also play a critical role ensuring compliance with various [National Patient Safety Goals](#) from The Joint Commission (TJC), a series of specific, measurable standards that help address the most critical safety issues in healthcare.

This eBook shares guidance with those looking to support their most powerful resource for patient retention, revenue growth, and competitive advantage: your contact center agents—particularly as their roles evolve, your expectations evolve, and the technology to shape and support a state-of-the-art communications hub evolve.



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Simplify the everyday

With all of the responsibilities on an agent's plate, technology that can help them be more efficient is a must. One of the biggest time-saving opportunities for many hospitals is to provide the contact center with an integrated, intuitive communications platform. Beyond an operator console to help answer calls, a truly unified solution brings together all the information and applications an agent needs to access on one screen. In addition, tools such as speech recognition and online directories can help reduce caller traffic to the contact center, giving your staff more time for other duties.

Operator consoles: Enhancing patient and provider coordination

The ability to process phone calls through computer systems revolutionized contact centers when it was introduced. Since then, consoles have become so much more than just call-answering software. A comprehensive operator console solution is one that integrates with all of the resources agents need to access for their duties, from staff directories and paging systems, to bed tracking and room service. With everything available at their fingertips using a few clicks, including detail down to the type of mobile device each provider prefers to be contacted on, agents can save a significant amount of time that was previously spent referring to rotary card files, paper binders, white boards, and sticky notes.

SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

TJC's Hospital Program Goal #2: Improve the effectiveness of communication among caregivers

Efficient, timely communication is a key component of patient safety. The capabilities that operator console solutions, speech recognition software, online directories, and online on-call schedules provide help to eliminate the fragmented, time-consuming processes that typically impact communication workflows, reduce preventable delays, and improve overall care team collaboration.

"When your healthcare communication platform functions beyond connecting calls and orchestrates intelligent communication workflows, your contact center agents can ensure the right information reaches the right person at the right time, making healthcare safer and more responsive to patient needs."
– Cassie Price, VP of Product Strategy, Spok

The top two motivators for health systems adopting new communication technology

are improving patient safety and outcomes and increasing the effectiveness of communications across the care team.

[15th Annual Spok State of Healthcare Report](#)

"Our...solutions have allowed us to provide a much better patient experience by decreasing call-handling times and streamlining scheduling and clinical communication."

Don Smith
Operations Manager
VCU Health

CASE STUDY:
VCU Health moved 48% of their paging traffic to the web and reduced operator training time from five days to 20 minutes.



[Learn more](#)



"We've built a unified contact center that allows our operators to do more than just answer and forward calls; we're streamlining processes and responding faster."

Jim Weeks
Vice President of
Information Services
Yale New Haven Health

[Discover how](#)

Speech recognition: Streamlining communication touchpoints

Speech recognition software can be used to cut costs, improve customer satisfaction, and increase productivity in the contact center. Waiting in a queue to connect with an agent or, worse still, finally being put through to the wrong person, can be very frustrating to your callers.

With the latest speech technologies using interactive voice response (IVR), there is no waiting time—callers speak their request, and the system listens to the response, finds the information, and directs most calls without the need to involve an agent. Healthcare systems are using this technology to make contact centers more efficient, giving agents the ability to manage rising call volumes easily and professionally, with more time to devote to higher-value customer needs, including handling special requests and supporting alternate services.

Online directories: Supporting accurate information management

Online directories are a valuable tool for hospitals because they increase staff productivity while improving contact center efficiency, employee satisfaction, and cost savings. Providing staff with access to a reliable, up-to-date source for contact information and on-call schedules eliminates the need for contact center agents to be in the middle and transfer calls between employees. The reduction in internal call traffic gives agents more time to devote to other activities. Online access also means staff members have the freedom to log on anywhere, anytime to search the directory, verify that their own information is correct, update on-call schedules, and send important messages.

"We've taken a lot of pressure off our operators...code initiation and clinical communications have been simplified. Fewer paper copies means more efficient communications and fewer pages sent to the wrong person."

Mac Stanford
Biomedical/Communication Services
North Mississippi Medical Center

**CASE STUDY:
Speech recognition and
online directories helped North
Mississippi Medical Center save time,
increase contact center efficiency,
and improve physician satisfaction.**

[Uncover insights](#)



Online on-call schedules: Reducing time-consuming administrative tasks

The benefits of online contact information extend beyond just reducing caller traffic. Web availability eliminates the need for costly (and quickly outdated) printed directories. With online on-call information, updates are immediately available, helping make sure the right people are being contacted around the clock. Accessing information is faster than flipping through paper binders. Web-based information also enables individual departments to take ownership of entering schedule information, removing this time-consuming task from the contact center's growing list of responsibilities. No longer needing printed materials saves money and can significantly reduce the amount of time spent on administrative tasks, giving your staff more time to focus on what they do best: coordinating communications and delivering excellent customer service.

“It was important for us to transfer responsibility of schedules to individual departments and reduce the number of paper copies floating around the hospital. With the web directory and on-call scheduling solution, we have been able to do just that.”

Heidi Lueck
Switchboard Supervisor
UnityPoint Health - Meriter

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2

Streamline communications during emergencies and time-sensitive situations

There are many situations when you urgently need to alert a specific group of people. Contact centers initiate code calls for everything from patient resuscitation and fires to infant abductions, dangerous weather, and local disasters resulting in an unexpected influx of patients. Coordinating emergency response and alerting staff to time-sensitive situations requires fast, accurate announcements and are crucial to patient and campus safety.

SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

TJC's Hospital Program Goal #15: Identify safety risks inherent in its patient population

Advanced code call workflows and call recording technology are important components of a patient safety risk management system that enables hospitals to proactively identify, respond to, and learn from critical situations. While a complete patient safety system includes additional elements such as quality improvement management (QIM) and root-cause analysis, code call capabilities help hospitals analyze critical events and support performance improvement efforts in alignment with TJC's requirements for incident analysis.

"When you have advanced, reliable technology in your toolbox, you create a culture of continuous improvement where every emergency becomes an opportunity to further enhance safety protocols and communication effectiveness."
– Cassie Price, VP of Product Strategy, Spok





Code calls: Improving communication effectiveness

Initiating code calls means a lot more than performing an overhead announcement. Responses must be tracked, and escalated if necessary, to ensure enough people answer the call for help. Mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, smart watches, pagers, etc.) offer opportunities beyond overhead pages to notify responders, but they can also make reaching the right people more complicated. Mobilizing your staff depends on fast, accurate dissemination of critical information to the right devices. Today's technology solves both of these challenges—reaching the right people quickly, and tracking their availability.

A good emergency notification and incident management system provides instant messaging options, including pre-programmed templates to notify specific groups of employees, such as rapid response teams, on their mobile devices. These pre-written, automated messages save critical time in emergencies—where every second counts—by eliminating the need for calling trees. Innovative technology can help improve communication effectiveness by automatically delivering messages, tracking responses, and escalating to additional staff. Agents oversee the process and can intervene if necessary. However, having technology with pre-configured templates and information about the correct escalation path based on a provider's availability and preferred device removes time-consuming tasks such as typing pages, manually tracking responses, and locating additional providers when primary contacts fail to respond on time.



CASE STUDY:

Emergency notification and online directory tools helped Indiana University Health streamline emergency communication, drastically reduce staff time spent on fire-drill notifications, and enhance messaging reliability across multiple devices.

[Unpack the details](#)

“We were spending too much time manually alerting the appropriate individuals and needed to find a way to streamline this process...[Spok’s] system has provided Indiana University Health with more messaging functionality than we ever imagined would be possible.”

Tom Huser
Safety Coordinator for IU Health’s Emergency Management Department



CASE STUDY VIDEO: Banner Health maximized their contact center and improved communications throughout the system

[Watch now](#)

Call recording technology: Assuring superior call quality

Call recording technology is another valuable feature in the changing landscape of contact centers. Recording phone calls and concurrent system activities helps identify opportunities for improving protocols and enhancing call quality and professionalism. Particularly in complex areas such as emergency coordination, call recording also lets centers document the handling of code calls and other emergencies.

This ensures the information is readily available for auditing purposes and allows hospitals to retrace a situation in case there are later disputes about how the response was handled. The appropriate technology for recording and evaluating how all calls are handled gives contact center management and agents the tools and training they need to continually deliver top-notch customer service for every call.

Contact centers are more important than ever

Healthcare organizations rely on them to deliver exceptional customer service while supporting exemplary patient care. Technology helps contact centers streamline their operational efficiencies, enhance the patient experience, and reinforce a positive brand image.

3

Support cost-saving and patient loyalty initiatives

Hospitals and healthcare systems continually strive to reduce costs while maximizing patient care. Contact centers are generally viewed as a necessary expense for running a facility. However, contact center communication technology is evolving to support greater efficiencies and expanded capabilities. This is important in an increasingly competitive landscape as the healthcare industry looks for innovative ways to engage with existing and potential customers.

For example, appointment reminder calls can reduce lost revenue from missed appointments. In addition, providing after-hours answering services for affiliated physician practices can generate revenue and give more control over the full customer service experience.

A well-run contact center supports improved patient care by helping to coordinate clinical communications. This can ultimately help boost patient satisfaction scores.

SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

"Patient safety begins with the first point of contact. When healthcare organizations invest in communication systems that ensure accurate information flows seamlessly from the contact center to clinical teams, they create a foundation where every interaction—from appointment scheduling to after-hours urgent calls—is an opportunity to improve patient outcomes."

– Elizabeth Sullivan, Product Manager, Spok

Strengthening patient engagement and loyalty

The contact center is often the first point of contact for healthcare consumers. Good first impressions are essential and can influence a caller's decision to become your patient, so it is important not to overlook agents as ambassadors of your hospital's brand. Successful organizations recognize that efficient and courteous service is a highly valued asset, and they support contact centers with the right tools to reduce call volumes and assure professional, individualized caller experiences.

Up-to-date, online directory information and on-call schedules available right from the operator console can significantly reduce the amount of time agents spend searching for contact information, and speech recognition can provide fast transfers for routine calls. Excellent service makes the contact center a cost-effective way to increase customer loyalty and boost patient revenue through referrals and increased participation in hospital programs.

Finding the right technology

In a continually evolving environment, how do you assess whether your contact center is using best practices and the most appropriate technology to maximize its potential while also ensuring the highest standards of patient safety?

Before you start evaluating your existing software or new platforms, the first step is to make a list of what features and functions your contact center currently performs, the internal systems that need to interface with the contact center, and what functions you would like to offer in the future. Remember to consider your organization's vision, mission, and accreditation and compliance requirements, and seek input from staff members at every level of the hospital, including clinical leaders, quality and safety officers, and frontline contact center agents. Input from multiple functions provides valuable insight about your strengths, weaknesses, and the direction to move forward.

The benefits of incorporating or upgrading new technology into your existing contact center will enable you to improve efficiencies and trim costs. More importantly, it'll help you create a robust infrastructure that protects patients while enhancing their experience.

Modern contact centers are more than call centers—healthcare organizations rely on them to deliver exceptional customer service while supporting exemplary patient care. And contact center technology does more than answer calls more efficiently—it creates a comprehensive communication ecosystem that strengthens the foundation of safe, coordinated, and equitable care that only exceptional healthcare organizations facilitate, while delivering operational efficiencies and reinforcing a positive brand image.

Know that when you invest in the right technologies and systems, you're investing in excellence.



Evaluation checklist

Does your current contact center communications hub have the following features and functions?

- Call recording technology
- Clinical alerting
- Code calls
(incident / emergency notifications)
- Clinical test result notifications (CTRN)
- EHR integration
- Enterprise directory
- On-call scheduling
- Operator consoles
- Paging
- Secure messaging
- Speech recognition / interactive voice response



ABOUT SPOK, INC.

Spok, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Spok Holdings, Inc. (NASDAQ: SPOK), headquartered in Plano, Texas, 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® platform to enhance workflows for clinicians and support administrative compliance. Our customers send over 70 million messages each month through their Spok® solutions. Spok enables smarter, faster clinical communication. For more information, visit spok.com.

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