On the Radar: CafeX Communications

Integrating context and calling into the digital customer service experience

Summary

Catalyst

As customers switch to mobile and web for their communications, businesses need to adapt their contact center strategies. Customers expect faster access to information and vendors need to integrate calling and customer data into the digital experience. CafeX helps organizations to do just that: it provides WebRTC calling solutions that can be easily added to websites or mobile applications, linking cross-channel data when customers use the click-to-call functionality. Customers also get the option to arrange a callback via the Web rather than waiting for an agent in an IVR system. CafeX was one of the first vendors to enter the market with a simple and useful WebRTC solution and is therefore a good vendor to rely on for its expertise in this area.

Key messages

- CafeX Communications is one of the most active developers of WebRTC toolsets, delivering products that are specifically designed to extend real-time communications to websites and mobile applications.
- With CafeX's Live Assist product, agents can view context about a customer's profile and historical interactions during the call, meaning interactions will be personalized to the customer's needs.
- WebRTC will play a more important role in contact center communications to allow customers to connect with a live agent via an audio or video call without leaving a mobile application or website.
- Businesses still need educating around the benefits of WebRTC-based solutions and how to integrate them with existing contact center tools.

Ovum view

CafeX has a strong future ahead of it as businesses look at ways to connect data across channels and improve customer experiences. Contact center technology partnerships will be imperative for the vendor to gain traction among businesses and gain the trust of contact center managers, who are typically wary of new tools.

Recommendations for enterprises

Why put CafeX Communications on your radar?

Businesses that want to differentiate their customer support and enable digital customers to connect more easily with live representatives should consider implementing CafeX's Live Assist solution. They should integrate its WebRTC-based calling with existing business call control platforms to ensure that interactions are routed to the most suitable agents. By giving customers more power to contact an agent via a call or video chat from the Web or a mobile application, businesses can improve both resolution rates and customer satisfaction.

Highlights

Background

Founded in 2013 as a software spin-out from Thrupoint, CafeX has developed a number of communications tools to improve customer engagement on mobile devices and websites. The vendor is known for being one of the leading developers of WebRTC toolsets. WebRTC is a web standard that allows real-time voice and video communications to be made through browsers and mobile applications without additional plug-ins or downloads. It benefits customers who want to call a business without leaving a mobile application or website and provides an alternative to Flash-based softphones.

Current position

Although the market for WebRTC is still very young, CafeX has gained a significant number of customers, including deployments and trials with a number of top banks and insurance companies. Through OEM agreements the vendor provides underlying technology to several of the largest collaboration and contact center equipment manufacturers. Most recently it announced a partnership with Humanify, a new business focused on delivering smoother mobile customer service experiences. As businesses look to add new digital support capabilities to their customer service stacks, these technology relationships will be vital for CafeX to grow. Contact centers need to be able to connect the type of communications that CafeX is delivering (inside apps and websites) with their existing contact center operations and are likely to rely on existing infrastructure vendors to help them.

The company's signature product, CafeX Live Assist, was launched in December 2013 and has since undergone three version upgrades to add new features and capabilities. Today it includes co-browsing, file sharing, and annotation, in addition to enabling voice and video calling from within websites and mobile applications to enterprise endpoints. Key features of Live Assist include:

- **Co-browsing and app sharing** – an expert can see an online visitor's web or mobile application screen through remote screen sharing, temporarily take control to navigate for the visitor, draw on their screen using a simple pen tool, and fill out forms remotely, as well as push links, pictures, and documents from a relevant knowledge base. The agent accesses collaboration features through either a standalone console or via a web interface integrated with popular contact center desktop and CRM applications.
- **CafeX's context bus** – this correlates digital context with a customer call to facilitate advanced call treatment by the contact center. Examples include context-based routing to the appropriate specialist, IVR bypass, and display of wait time/queue length within the customer's mobile app, as well as screen pops to the agent showing the customer's online activity, breadcrumbs, user profile, or geo-location.

In addition, client-side SDKs enable developers to add WebRTC-based voice and video to mobile apps (iOS and Android) and websites in as little as one to two lines of code. Businesses can also add server-side software to integrate WebRTC-based sessions with enterprise collaboration and contact center systems and endpoints. Functions that provide an enterprise on-ramp for WebRTC include WebRTC-to-SIP signaling, media brokering, media transcoding (Opus to G.711 for voice and H.264/VP8 for video), and impaired network handling.

Alongside Live Assist, CafeX offers mobile self-service to create a more complete end-to-end customer service experience. Mobile self-service displays visual IVR menus dynamically on mobile applications so that enterprises can create intuitive user interfaces and improve resolution rates in self-service without reprogramming existing IVR scripts. And CafeX's context bus collects context from the mobile application or website to help route calls, set up a callback, and push customer data to agents once a WebRTC call begins. CafeX's software can extract context from one channel and inject it into another to provide continuity for customers who escalate between channels – from a web chat to a video call, for example.

Although CafeX does offer professional services for design, configuration, installation, integration, testing, and training activities, it is primarily a software company. It focuses on enabling its business partners to perform many of these services independently.

Challenges

CafeX's solutions show clear value for organizations looking to differentiate their customer service, but many businesses are still behind in terms of allowing customers to communicate directly with agents without going through an IVR. Contact centers also need to get sponsorship from different business units, particularly those that are responsible for developing mobile applications and websites in order to add new integrated communications functionality.

In addition, there are still issues with acceptance of WebRTC as a standard and many businesses do not yet understand its uses. CafeX needs to work with its technology partners to educate potential clients about how it can benefit their own customers. Call quality and security need to be closely monitored; problems with quality and dropped video calls could damage growth in the market if customers decide that issues with quality overshadow the benefits of this type of service. Representatives will need training on video calling, co-browsing, and how they should use contextual customer data within their existing applications to improve customer satisfaction.

Future developments

Ovum expects to see deployments of WebRTC across various environments. CafeX is developing B2B environments for its products, including intra-company interactions via mobile apps or web portals. This is in addition to being useful for B2C interactions such as a financial advisor speaking to a client or a clinician to a patient. Communications could be used to enable better employee-to-employee collaboration or remote field support. The prospect of integrating data and analytics with calling and live communications is a big opportunity for all contact center vendors and CafeX is aware of this trend. It will focus on using the predictive analytics of partners such as Humanify to improve routing and context for agents.

Data sheet

Key facts

Table 1: Data sheet: CafeX Communications			
Product name	CafeX Live Assist	**Product classification**	Contextual real-time communications for web and mobile

Version number	1.2	Release date	2014
Industries covered	All	Geographies covered	Global
Relevant company sizes	All	Licensing options	Perpetual software license and monthly subscription options
URL	www.cafex.com	Routes to market	Direct and through OEM partnerships and resellers
Company headquarters	New York, US	Number of employees	50–100

Source: Ovum

Appendix

On the Radar

On the Radar is a series of research notes about vendors bringing innovative ideas, products, or business models to their markets. Although On the Radar vendors may not be ready for prime time, they bear watching for their potential impact on markets and could be suitable for certain enterprise and public sector IT organizations.

Further reading

When to Consider WebRTC in the Contact Center, IT0020-000075 (December 2014)

Optimizing Digital Self-Service to Boost Customer Loyalty, IT0020-000056 (October 2014)

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