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## ACD: Leave No Customer Unattended

What is ACD? ACD stands for Automatic Call Distribution. But don't let that rather dry description fool you. ACD can be the flypaper that keeps important customers from slipping through the cracks. How? Allow us to illustrate:

Imagine a caller, who starts out as a satisfied customer, calls into a business with a technical question on a product recently purchased. An overburdened receptionist responds to the call with a terse "Thank you for calling ABC Company, please hold." Five minutes go by and the receptionist comes back on the line to ask how he or she may direct the call.

The receptionist tries the extension of a customer support agent who could handle the call, but the line is busy. A page then goes out to find someone who can answer the question. The call is routed to several different people. Each time, that person is unable to answer the question, and the call gets routed back to the receptionist who tries someone else. Eventually, the call is accidentally dropped.


So...do you think this customer is still satisfied?

Let's try a different scenario: The same customer, with the same question, calls into ABC Company. This time, they are dialing in on a number specifically designated for technical support (even though the tech support department consists of only one person). When that person can't be reached, the phone system automatically seeks out a sales support person who is capable of answering the same question, and routes the call to that individual. In the meantime, the caller was listening to a recording of helpful advice regarding their product.

The customer is happy because the call was routed quickly, it was handled with professionalism—and most importantly—their question was answered. Employees are happy, because no one's workday was interrupted with annoying pages, and the inbound call volume is more evenly distributed. Everyone is more productive at the company, because everyone is empowered to be an individual call center within the organization, regardless of what the job title is on their desk. That's the value that ACD delivers.

### Become a center of opportunity

ACD drives the creation of opportunity groups within a company. Think of it this way: Every time a call comes into a business, it is an opportunity. And opportunities can be missed if a caller is transferred from one extension to another, getting nothing but on-hold music or a standard voicemail message.



What ACD does is allow everyone in the company to capitalize on every opportunity that is presented to them. With ACD, an inbound caller can be transferred to the requested primary destination (let's say Sales), but if there is no one available at that destination the system will automatically route the call to someone else to pick up the phone. That way, 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 voice 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 it is completely seamless, with the caller thinking that the call was connected to the right person almost immediately.

### **What to look for in ACD**

With many ACD systems, if the primary group designated for a call is busy or unavailable, the call forwards to a 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. The key to effective automatic call distribution is that it be based on an architecture known as "expansion".

Here is how expansion is different: expansion will keep trying the best possible person or group to answer a call while it is trying a secondary group. If someone from the primary group becomes available, that's where the call goes. What this means is that the system is constantly looking for the best possible way to route a call to meet a customer's needs. And if the primary group has specialized on-hold messages or other automated information, that's what the caller hears while they are holding. The customer is always hearing messages targeted to his or her needs, including special offers and information tailored to the original reason for the call.

To get the most out of expansion, your ACD platform needs to be programmable directly, without requiring third-party software. You should be able to choose how the ACD system prioritizes call transfers when it is searching for the best way to route a call. An ACD system should be able to prioritize call routing by determining which employees are logged in, and out of those who are the most qualified to address the issue. The system should also look at which extensions have been idle the longest, in order to load balance inbound call volume.

ACD has not been traditionally associated with small-to-medium sized businesses in the past, but ACD shouldn't be reserved for large organizations with entire floors devoted to their call centers. The reality is that ACD is affordable even for companies with only 5-10 employees and it offers far more benefit for the average SMB than you may realize.