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How to select the right Teams Contact Center for your organization

Introduction

Enterprise communications have evolved; Teams contact centers are now one of the most exciting possibilities for uniting customer contact with integrated processes.

If you look at the options however, it's easy to get overwhelmed. There's a bewildering array of different providers, and many *seem* to offer the same features and capabilities. When you dive deeper, however, these prove hard to compare.

One provider's queuing system may operate quite differently to another's, for example - or the pricing models aren't transparent enough, so you discover that you can only get the features you need with the highest possible subscription level or by adding optional extras.

This makes it hard to see what you actually get with each package, and you could easily become limited by selecting the wrong option for your needs.

Establish your basic requirements first

The first thing you'll notice if you visit the website of a Teams contact center provider is all the headline features their solutions can offer. Features are important, of course, but they're not as important as the fundamental architecture of the solution. So, let's ignore the features for a moment, and focus on the basics: the integration model used.

Once you've determined if the architecture meets your needs, then you can start to look at the next level of detail: how easy it is to set up, customize, and use – and the price.

To help guide you through this process, we'll start by explaining the different integration models and what they mean for implementations.

Then, we'll look at the leading providers in Teams contact centers, with an aim of making a clear comparison that outlines the most important features and considerations for making the right decision. As we'll see, there's no one 'best Teams contact center' – but there is a solution that's best suited to your needs. The key is finding the right match.

Understanding Teams contact center integration models

There are 3 models for Teams contact center integrations: Extend, Connect, and Power. Currently, Teams contact centers are either using the Connect-model or the Extend-model to integrate contact center functionality with Teams.

The Power-model is still in development, so there are no providers currently using this model. We can, however, expect solutions using the Power model to emerge in the next few years.

The Connect-model

The Connect-model uses Session Border Controllers (SBCs) to connect the Teams architecture to the Contact-Center-as-a-Service (CCaaS) solution, and the CCaaS solution to the public network.

This setup can be characterized as a 'light integration' which is most often used when an existing CCaaS provider makes their services accessible via Teams. The Connect model architecture means that the contact center functionality itself is hosted somewhere else, remotely in the cloud.

With the Connect-model, agents are simply using Teams as an interface, or window, for accessing this solution – so it's not truly Teams-native in this respect. Instead, Connect-model solutions tend to claim a 'Teams native user experience'.

If data security is especially important, then you must carefully consider if this is the right model for you, as data will pass outside of the secure Teams framework, so there's a potential risk associated with this and encryption must meet any required standards.

Pros
- Ideal for direct-routing systems.
- A light integration model for accessing a legacy CCaaS solution via Teams
- Well-suited to voice-only call centers

Cons
- System architecture can lead to latency issues
- Possible loss of quality for voice calls and media
- Data security requires extra attention to ensure sensitive information doesn't leave Teams
- Only supports direct-routing

The Extend model

The Extend model is a deep integration that makes the CCaaS an integrated part of Teams, by extending its native functionality within the client.

With this setup, Microsoft Teams is still the client, so you get all of Teams' functionalities with the added capabilities of a call center or omnichannel contact center – directly within Teams. This model can support direct-routing, operator connect, or a Teams calling plan for voice calls. If you've already migrated to Teams and you're using the operator-connect or calling plan for voice calls, then the Extend model is a natural choice.

A great advantage of the Extend model is that it is practically limitless in terms of customization and functionalities. CCaaS providers using this model can integrate any number of capabilities and resources using APIs.

With this model, Teams becomes the secure hub for all connected processes and communications. It can work with numerous integrations including CRMs, chatbots, AI, and social channels.

Pros

- Simplified architecture - everything stays within the secure Teams framework
- No loss of quality for voice or media, minimal latency
- Complaint and secure setup
- Vast array of potential functionalities and integrations (can be highly customized).
- Ideal for businesses that plan to grow, adapt, and change

Cons

- Providers vary in flexibility and available integrations (e.g. CRM options, AI, etc.)
- Custom integrations are not always possible (depends on provider and available APIs)

The Power model

We won't spend a lot of time on this model, because it's still a work in progress. According to Microsoft, the goal of the power model is "to provide a one-app, one-screen contact center experience." The principle behind it is that Teams becomes embedded in a third-party app, making it 'powered' by Teams.

This model has a great deal of promise, but it's still a theoretical framework. Solutions using this model have yet to emerge.

CCaaS providers are anxiously waiting to see how this might evolve, but it is likely that many of those currently offering Extend model solutions will be able to adapt these into a Power Model using Software Development Kits (SDKs) from Microsoft.

Some extend-model providers already offer a seamless 'one dashboard' experience, so the power model is not necessarily a massive step-up from an adaptable extend-model.

Which model is best?

For most organizations, the best integration model for a Teams contact center is probably the Extend model.

The Extend model gives the smoothest user experience, with everything happening directly within Teams. It's also highly customizable, so you can shape how things like CRM integrations and automations work. The Extend model can be used with direct-routing, operator-connect, and Teams calling plans, whereas the Connect model is limited to direct-routing only.

The architecture of an Extend model solution also keeps everything within the secure and compliant Teams framework – so this solves many issues surrounding compliance and data governance. It also supports the greatest possibilities for customization and further integrations.

However, you must pay attention to how flexible a provider is about this. Can it support custom integrations, or is it limited to a fixed package of pre-built integrations? Do you have the freedom to add integrations like chatbots or other applications?

And for some organizations, a Connect model solution may still be a better fit. If you only need to support voice calls with direct routing and have no intention of adding other channels in the future, then the Connect model may be preferable – especially if the price is more competitive than more sophisticated solutions that boast features like AI-powered productivity tools and automated after-call tasks.

Complete list of Microsoft-certified CCaaS providers

It's worth checking whether a solution provider is Microsoft-certified. The certification process requires that providers adhere to specific best practices, and complete multiple stages of validation and verification. It's a rigorous system that ensures the best quality third-party solutions for the Microsoft product family.

The value of being Microsoft certified is that it demonstrates that the solution is stable and works seamlessly within the Microsoft ecosystem. A non-certified solution may be just as good, but there's no way of knowing without taking the plunge.

To keep a clear focus on reliable solutions, we list all current Microsoft-certified Teams contact center providers below, divided by integration model. Then, we'll look at a selection of these, with a detailed comparison of features.

Microsoft certified Connect model solutions

CONNECT MODEL Direct routing
- 8x8 contact center for Microsoft Teams
- Anywhere365 Dialogue Cloud
- AudioCodes Voca Conversational Interaction Center
- Bright Pattern for Microsoft Teams
- ComputerTalk ice contact center with Microsoft Teams
- Content Guru storm INTEGRATE: Microsoft Teams
- Enghouse contact center for Microsoft Teams
- Five9 Adapter for Microsoft Teams
- Genesys Cloud CX
- Intermedia contact center for Microsoft Teams
- Mida C3 – Cloud contact center for Microsoft Teams
- Netcall Contact Centre for Microsoft Teams
- NICE CXone
- Puzzel Contact Centre for Microsoft Teams
- Sikom contact center
- Talkdesk CX Cloud
- ULTATEL contact center
- Webex contact center

Microsoft certified Extend model solutions
EXTEND MODEL Direct routing, Teams calling plans, operator connect

- Anywhere365 Dialogue Cloud*
- CentrePal Contact Centre for Microsoft Teams
- ComputerTalk ice contact center with Microsoft Teams*
- CONTACTCENTER4ALL CC4Teams Omni-Channel contact center
- Enghouse contact center for Microsoft Teams*
- Heedify Customer Experience for Microsoft Teams
- IP Dynamics Microsoft Teams in the Service Center
- Landis contact center for Microsoft Teams
- Luware Nimbus
- ROGER365.io Omnichannel contact center for Microsoft Teams
- Sikom contact center*
- Solgari Customer Engagement for Microsoft Teams
- Tendfor contact center for Microsoft Teams

*described as both Connect and Extend model on Certified Microsoft Partners page.

What features does a contact center really need?

There are some essential features that almost all CCaaS providers seem to recognize as being mandatory for a modern contact center.

There are additional features that are swiftly becoming essential (AI, omnichannel support, etc.) and these should be considered carefully.

Must-have contact center features include:

- Reporting and live insights
- Enterprise software integrations
- IVR, Skills-based routing (SBR) and advanced routing options
- Chatbots
- Integrated AI
- Dedicated apps/dashboards for Agents and Supervisors
- Transparent pricing

Reporting and live insights

While Teams already has historical reporting available, this is no substitute to a detailed customized report that comes with insights. Similarly, a historical perspective has limited application, whereas live queue insights and statistics can be used right now.

Enterprise software integrations

Who's calling? Integration with your CRM can help agents give the best possible service. As soon as a call or message comes through, a 'card' will pop up directly in Teams (if using the 'Extend model') with the caller's information.

With this integration, the agent has immediate access to the entire contact history without needing to switch between screens or apps.

It should also be possible to directly update details from the Teams client. If you can't find a vendor that can integrate with your CRM, then look for one that can integrate with any CRM or ERP, or help you do this.

IVR, Skills-based routing (SBR) and advanced routing options

IVR is relatively common and generally considered a 'must' for call centers and contact centers alike. Skills-based routing and other advanced routing options should enable you to create and update customized menus, design call flows, and support your ideal customer experience.

Chatbots

Chatbots can massively reduce the cost of human agents by fielding many common queries and forwarding the rest to the right department via webchat or another channel. More sophisticated Chatbots can also trigger actions directly.

Integrated AI

AI-powered productivity tooling is becoming more important, and more capable. More contact center solutions are offering these tools as an integrated part of their offering. It's important to determine if this tooling comes pretrained and ready to use, and if it can be customized.

[Conversational AI](#) can serve up to 10% of contact center queries, using voice recognition and natural language processing. This means you can quickly answer the most common queries without any human intervention, while reducing [call abandonment](#) by 50%.

AI-powered summaries of WhatsApp chats and call transcripts are also a powerful way to reduce after-call workload.

Thankfully, you don't need to select a vendor that includes this as part of the deal. Provided you can customize and add your own integrations, there are several third-party providers who can provide this service.

Dedicated Apps/Dashboards for Agent and Supervisor

Managing and optimizing a contact center isn't just a matter of luck – it takes care and attention. With dedicated Agent and Supervisor apps/dashboards, every team member can get insights and functionalities that matter the most to them.

At a glance, Agents should be able to see how well they're performing, and Supervisors can gain a real-time overview, get actionable insights, and have the ability to intervene when needed.

Transparent pricing

Pricing is rarely transparent or simple. Most vendors only provide the 'full functionality' advertised at the highest subscription level. This makes it hard to compare, especially when not all the features are needed.

There's also the question of how subscriptions are charged. Many CCaaS providers charge a monthly rate per user. This means that cost is tied to the number of specific authorized agents, which can make these solutions comparatively expensive as your company grows.
Per-user pricing also doesn't account for seasonal variability which affects most businesses on some level.

By contrast, some providers give pricing based on the number of queues (for voice calls) and/or conversations (for social channels) – this is often better balanced against the actual rate of use.

Costs based on actual usage can be hard to estimate in advance, whereas a per-queue tariff can become more cost effective over time.

Provided the package is affordable from the start, a 'per-queue' pricing system becomes increasingly better value-for-money as your company grows and hires more customer service agents. This is especially important when seasonal demand surges.

As a rule, it should be possible to have all the available contact center features (including social channels, AI, etc.,) for less than one thousand euros per month, and in some cases much less.

Comparison of top Teams Contact-Center-as-a-Service (CCaaS) providers

CONNECT MODEL Direct routing

8x8

8x8 is a VoIP company that provides communication solutions for businesses. The 8x8 platform is now also available via Teams using the Connect model. As well as a direct routed calling solution, they offer a managed operator-connect Teams-based voice contact center.

Highlights

8x8 has offered their own contact center solutions for several years already, and the move to connect this with Teams shows how respected the Microsoft Teams platform is. This solution appears to operate as a connect model, with voice calls being directed to Teams, while the rest of the contact center operations are managed with the 8x8 interface.

Core features
- Voice calls via Teams (other functionalities via integrations with 8x8 platform)
- Voicemail transcription
- Selected CRM/ERP integrations (including Dynamics 365, Salesforce, Zendesk, Netsuite)

- Multi-channel support (Chat, email, SMS, social media, messaging apps, MMS and Fax via Teams)
- Internet Fax
- Post-call survey
- Media storage
- Skills-based routing
- Supervisor analytics
- Hotdesking

Price

8x8 is priced based on a per-user/month subscription (prices not advertised). At the top subscription level, you get all the available features, but it's not the cheapest option. If you don't need every possible feature, then a lower subscription level might suffice as you can add these for a fee.

Cons

As their main products are business communication solutions, the Teams contact center is an add-on to this package.

This means you may be paying for something you don't need – especially if you're already using Teams Calling. Teams functionality comes as an integration, so training with the 8x8 platform is still needed. Advanced reporting is only available at the highest subscription, or at extra cost.

EXTEND MODEL Direct routing, Teams calling plans, operator connect

Luware Nimbus

Luware Nimbus contact center is available as their top subscription level. It's an Extend model solution that uses Azure Communications Services to support voice and video calls. Nimbus is still somewhat based on Luware's original 'voice-only' advanced routing concept, so it still lacks some of the more advanced features that are available. Other integrations are theoretically possible, using Teams standard connectors (REST API), but the onus is on the user to build this themselves.

Highlights

Nimbus contact center offers customizable workflows, standard real-time reporting, and Power BI reporting. Advanced routing and skill-based routing are also available.

Core features

- CRM integration (Salesforce, Dynamics, HubSpot, some others)
- Simple IVR (text to speech only)
- Skills-based routing
- Reporting and analytics
- Drag-and-drop workflow editor
- Attendant Console
- Live chat, SMS, WhatsApp, video

Cons

Additional features like AI, Webchats, Chatbots, and custom analytics aren't automatically included but can be integrated yourself. Azure Communications Services is needed, and this means you lose some of the cost-savings of Teams for calls.

Price

- Per named user/month.
- Queue-based plan for basic features.
- Multichannel support with extra subscriptions.

EXTEND MODEL Direct routing, Teams calling plans, operator connect

ROGER365.io

ROGER365.io is tailor-made for Microsoft Teams as a certified extend-model solution. Designed for growing businesses, ROGER365.io offers many of the 'more advanced' features - even in the most basic package. It consists of a contact center module and a Social Messaging Module, which can be selected at different subscription levels. It also comes with a selection of ready-to-use AI tools that automate and streamline WhatsApp and other interactions. These require no training to use, and can be customized as needed.

Highlights

ROGER365.io can equip a Teams based contact center with every possible functionality at an attractive price. Advanced 'optional' features can also be added using APIs, and can be facilitated on your behalf using an integration partner.

The reporting is exceptional and in-depth, using speech and text recognition to gauge sentiment and satisfaction. Supervisors have a constant snapshot view of the live queues, agent statistics, agent and call status, and can listen in, whisper, or join challenging calls.

Core features (Enterprise contact center)

- Native integrated Teams App
- Ready to use AI tools (also customizable)
- AI-powered summary and sentiment analysis
- Azure Active Directory Integrated
- Omnichannel solution (Voice, Social Messaging, WhatsApp, & Chatbots)
- Agent, Supervisor & Reporting interface
- Automated Attendant / IVR
- Live queue insights
- Blind & Consultative Transfer
- Calendar Integration & Callback Requests
- Outbound dialing
- Advanced Graphical Call Flow Editor
- Powerframe for custom app integration and behavior
- APIs for custom development
- Skills-based routing
- Numerous CRM/ERP integrations (Exact Online, HubSpot, Microsoft Dynamics, Salesforce, TOPdesk, Zoho, etc.,)
- Any custom integration available
- Automations using Webhooks, Powerframe, and Power BI
- Live queue and agent overview
- Live call overview
- Reporting including insights, queue summaries and heatmaps
- Monitor, Whisper, and Join
- Schedule-based routing
- Dedicated Agent/Supervisor Apps

Cons

The Enterprise contact center is the highest subscription level, and may not be needed if omnichannel support, advanced analytics, and AI integration aren't required. Many organizations use only the Attendant Console, or the Professional contact center subscription.

Pricing
Subscription rates for the contact center are priced per configured queue.

The ROGER365.io solution is available via a worldwide partner network, with a [growth-friendly pricing system](#) that makes scaling-up very cost effective.

EXTEND MODEL Direct routing, Teams calling plans, operator connect

Landis Technologies

Landis Technologies is a US-based IT and technology company that offers a wide range of solutions including communications tools. Their Teams contact center solution is a relatively new addition, but currently supports only voice calls.

Highlights

The lightweight contact center app uses the Extend model to offer many of the functionalities you can expect, plus some of the more advanced features too. Attendant Console is now available as a separate module. The metrics are a strong part of Landis' offering.

Core features

- Call recording
- Live and Historical reports
- Monitor, whisper, and join
- Live wallboards
- Speech to Text call monitoring
- CRM integration (Salesforce, Dynamics, ServiceNow, some others)
- Power BI, Automate and Power apps
- Skills Based Routing
- Live sentiment analysis

Price

Priced per user/month (currently US$75 per user/month)

Cons

Limited to voice. Social messaging and multi-channel support not yet available. May not offer the full depth of functionality or ability to easily make custom integrations. Details provided by Landis are few, including cost and subscription options.

CONNECT MODEL Direct routing

Genesys

Genesys offers a range of apps and products for customer experience and engagement. Their Cloud CX product works using the Connect model to integrate their cloud platform with Teams. It is a standalone contact center solution that can integrate with Teams using the Connect model.

Highlights

Genesys announced recently that they were discontinuing their legacy PureConnect software in favor of a cloud-based alternative: Genesys Cloud CX. They're placing a strong emphasis on AI-enabled features, including native bots.

This is still a connect-model solution, but it's an 'all in one' package offering a confusingly wide array of features. Access to these depends on subscription level, and everything is managed via the Cloud CX interface – not directly with Teams.

Core features

- CRM integration (including Salesforce, Dynamics 365, and other integrations)
- Prebuilt and custom integrations available
- Social messaging and multi-channel support (Webchat, Email, SMS)
- Voice recognition/NLP (depends on subscription)
- Chatbots (depends on subscription)
- Skills based routing
- Live insights (depends on subscription)
- Reporting (depends on subscription)

Price

Offers 3 subscription levels, based on a per-user/month pricing. Further subscriptions may be needed for add-on services. Additional components like AI, chatbots, digital channels, and reporting can also be added to lower subscription levels.

Cons

Using the Connect model can be a disadvantage in terms of data compliance and latency. Teams is no longer the secure hub of all communications, and vendor lock-in may be a concern.

CRM-BASED SOLUTION (Teams as a channel)

Dynamics 365 contact center (previously Microsoft Digital contact center Platform)

After several years, Microsoft has now launched their own solution. This was originally based on Teams and known as the Microsoft Digital contact center Platform. It has now morphed from an Extend model solution into a CRM-centric contact center based on Azure Communications Services and Teams.

As a Copilot-first solution designed to work around your own CRM, it's clear that there is immense potential to this product, but it loses some of the big benefits of a Teams contact center.

Highlights

This solution has many of the features you would want in a modern contact center but lacks certain features and the flexibility that growing companies might want.

To compensate for a lack of native queuing capabilities, the Dynamics 365 contact center offers a Queues app for Teams. This is a good solution for small teams of perhaps up to 5 users, as it includes a simple auto-attendant, the ability to opt in/out of queues, colleague collaboration and basic real-time statistics. You can also make outgoing calls and view call history easily, and it can integrate with Microsoft 365 Copilot for transcription and AI-powered summaries.

This solution can use Teams as a channel, but the contact center is really a separate solution that's tightly integrated with your CRM.

Core features
- Many CRM integrations possible
- Multi-channel Support via Azure Communications Services
- Chatbots and voicebots
- Intelligent routing (including skills)
- Simple IVR
- Customer and Channel Analytics/Reports
- Sentiment analysis
- AI conversation summaries
- Other integration possibilities using APIs

Price
Contact center costs US$110 per user/month. Additional subscriptions are needed for omnichannel support and other capabilities.

Cons

It's hard to find faults with Microsoft's products. However, this solution currently lacks the ability to create complex IVR options or use advanced routing, has no after-call work, and the reporting is quite limited. This may be an issue for larger organizations. Voice and social channels also rely on an Azure Communication Services subscription, meaning inbound and outbound calls cost you money. The overall setup is quite complicated and is best arranged via an MSP.

Additional considerations for selecting a Teams contact center

Building on the features offered by each solution, there are other things you need to consider, as these affect the effort required to use your contact center solution and the ROI. Unless these are taken into account, they can easily add unexpected costs to your chosen solution.

Data compliance

Risk mitigation must be part of any decision-making process for IT and communications. By keeping everything in the secure Teams platform, risks associated with data handling are greatly reduced and role-based access is easily enforced.

Even if malicious attacks weren't a concern, the potential for inadvertent errors in data handling is much higher when data must travel outside the secure Teams platform.

Training costs

There are always some training costs when a new app or platform is implemented. With the Extend model solutions this is very low, as everything happens within the familiar Teams client. Connect-model solutions are still operated from within Teams, but the learning curve can be steeper (unless you've already used the solution before).

Channel support

Omnichannel support should be a standard, but there's a lot of variation between providers. Many CCaaS providers are still focused on optimizing voice interactions. This means that the support for WhatsApp or Facebook messenger, is an afterthought - even though these channels are increasingly popular.

Customers expect the ability to interact with your company using whichever channel suits them. When they do so, your agents need to have the same capabilities to serve their enquiries as if they called on the phone. In many cases, these interactions can be largely automated as well.

Customizability and the long game

Adopting a long-term perspective can help companies move away from short-term wins, towards a more strategic objective of optimization and streamlining. A contact center must service all the needs of today and have the potential to adapt to the requirements of the future.

The right solution should help a company to build an adaptable communications system - one that's fully integrated with its own processes. Customization should be easy and possible to achieve directly from Teams by building automations using an embedded no-code or low-code UI.

Adding new integrations should be easy, and companies should be free to choose which CRM fits their needs best, without facing a vendor lock-in or an uncomfortable commitment.

Streamlined and automated processes

By customizing workflows with the Power platform, companies can add automated processes and bots. They can also easily send information automatically to other apps with Webhooks, while APIs can enable deeper integrations with other software such as third-party Interactive Voice Response (IVR) solutions or Voice Recognition.
Customizability is a distinguishing factor, as not all providers offer this versatility.

Using AI with impact

Not all AI tools are equal. Some require extensive training and customization to work, and others may not be compatible with your compliant environment. It's also important to look at whether the AI tools on offer can be used straight away, without any training for the AI or staff.

You should always consider if AI tooling creates real value by seeing if it reduces errors, increases productivity on basic tasks, or accelerating positive outcomes with self-service options.

Want to talk it over?

Selecting a provider for your Teams contact center is a complicated task, and many vendors aren't clear about included features and costs.

The only way forward is to eliminate providers that don't meet your criteria at the earliest stage, and then compare offers from whichever providers can give you what you need.

It's important then, to determine first which integration model is best for your organization. In most cases, this will be the Extend model, which offers the greatest forward-compatibility and potential for integrations. But not always – for some the Connect model may be better.

Then, you should create a clear list of 'must-have' features, including any channels you want to support in the near future. Once you have a shortlist based on this, you can start to get quotes and make a meaningful comparison among suitable contenders.

If you want to talk over what's needed for your situation or get a free demo of the ROGER365.io Teams contact center, then just get in touch. We'll be happy to help.

Contact us
You can always send an email to info@roger365.com or check out our website: www.roger365.io/contact-us

Send a WhatsApp message to: +31 88 365 1000 to start the conversation right away!

More information

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