

## **UCX USA TALKS: How to keep your employees and customers happy in 2023 with Jon Arnold, Principal of J Arnold and Associates**

Hello and welcome to UCX USA Talks. My name is Tyler Carmody and I'm the Conference Operations Manager at UCX USA. And it is my pleasure to introduce Jon Arnold, Principal of J Arnold and Associates. Today, he'll be presenting a topic that is surely on all of our minds, how to keep your employees and customers happy in 2023. With that, let's get into it. Our first question today is, what does a broader vision look like for workplace leaders?

Jon Arnold:

So to have a broader vision for really going into this year for both employees and customers being happy, that is more than what organizations usually do, mainly because contact center decisions are in a silo. They've traditionally been that way, just as the people who manage communications technologies are doing something as well. Contact center solutions are vertical. They're only for the contact center. Whereas, collaboration solutions like unified communication, on-prem and UCaaS in the cloud are horizontal. They're applied to the entire organization. So you've got two different solutions that go a long way to doing what they're built for.

But if you're really trying to have a more holistic strategy about what your organization needs to do to maximize that satisfaction across the board, you have to think along those lines and saying, "Okay, if I'm only deploying UC or UCaaS to address collaboration needs across the organization, that's great, but it also has a role to play within the contact center environment." So the broader vision is to think about how contact centers, yes, have purpose-built technology, but they also use a lot of the same tools that a UCaaS solution provides for internal employees.

So the trend has been for a while now to think in a more integrated approach where your UCaaS and your contact center, when it's in the cloud is called CCaaS, contact center as a service, when those two solutions can be integrated as a common platform or as a broader, overall platform where they are working together, then you get the best of both worlds, because now your contact center operations has full access to all the tools you're using in offices. But also more importantly, how agents have much better access to what we call knowledge keepers, who are in the organization or what they call key subject matter experts, who are very deep in certain things that agents wouldn't normally know.

So when you have UCaaS capabilities in the contact center, now it's much easier to find those people and bring them in really on a call when something is actually happening with a customer. That's how you really drive satisfaction, because now you're bringing a higher level of engagement to customers in a way you couldn't do before. And so now you're also bringing a real time element to the technology that you didn't have previously. You could do things on the fly. And again, time is of essence in the contact center for making customers happy. And when you dial that back to what makes employees happy, when they have the tools they need to do their jobs, not just like the way they've always done them, but also how they could be doing them now with more advanced, really digital technologies. And that's the world we're moving towards in 2023, not just with those solutions, UC and CC, but also the broader migration from premise to cloud. That's a very big trend. And I know that's going to be part of our longer conversation here.

Tyler Carmody:

Our second question is what trends are you seeing pushing the continued growth of cloud-based platforms?

Jon Arnold:

So the trend to the cloud has been going on for quite some time. The UC world adopted it earlier. So now the trend from UC to UCaaS is very firmly in place. Contact centers have been laggards in this regard. They are a few years behind, mainly because it's just a harder transition to make. So it's taken more effort and more buy-in to do the cloud thing in the contact center. But the broader trend, regardless of where they are, is the fact that the cloud in general has matured to a point where it's business grade for everything that an organization needs. In other words, it does things at scale. The reliability is there.

There have been problems in the past with security, for example, but they've largely been overcome. And in particular these applications, the big barrier has always been that, well, these are real time applications, voice in particular, and to a lesser degree video. There's no margin of error when you have real time modes, especially when you're dealing with customers. When the cloud can deliver real time communications capabilities pretty much as well as you have on premise, that's one of the last barriers to deal with for migrating to the cloud. Other areas that are important to this discussion is the fact that the vendors have all pretty much gone all in on cloud at this point. All their innovation and R&D is in that area. So they're not investing in continued innovation for premise-based solutions.

So their roadmap going forward is clearly on cloud. Also for the customers, the end buyers who are using these technologies, they've gotten to a point now where cloud is an acceptable delivery platform or what we call deployment model for these technologies in a way that they can justify doing it. So in other words, the transition from premise to cloud does take work, but it's easier to do than it's been in the past. So it's not a barrier, but also you look at the economics. Traditionally, new technology investments have been on-premise-based, almost always capitalized investments. You've got to build this into your budget and get the funding to do it. With cloud, of course, it's an on-demand, consume-as-you-go model where you're basically renting. You're paying on a per-month fee or charge subscription fee for each seat out there.

It's a better model in terms of managing your economics. So if your cash flow is tight and everyone's in that boat in 2023, the economics of cloud make a lot of sense. Longer term, yes, it is more expensive than prem, but there are a lot of benefits that go with that. So the drivers for cloud adoption are going to be quite strong in 2023, not just because it's proven itself to this point, but the economic model is more attractive in cases where companies are really struggling with their own growth, so they've got to cut back expenses. And in contact centers in particular, the further they fall behind in using old technology to meet customer expectations, the more urgent the need is for them to catch up. And the only way they can really do it is to go to the cloud.

That's where the innovation is happening so they can short circuit that gap between today's customer expectations, which are very digital to contact centers, which are more in the analog world in a lot of ways. They have a bigger gap to close to meet customer expectations. And that, of course, ties into our theme here, how do you make customers and employees happy in 2023? You work backwards. When

those customers are happy, when you can meet them where they are with technology, those agents, they're doing a better job, they're happier in their work. And then of course, in the office environment, now we get into the whole hybrid work thing, these cloud-based technologies work equally well for office-based and home-based settings.

And that's absolutely essential. If hybrid work is going to happen, you've got to have the tools to do it regardless of location. And that's one of the strong selling points of the cloud.

Tyler Carmody:

Absolutely. Our third question is how does AI improve the hybrid work and employee experience?

Jon Arnold:

So the AI story, and we could easily do a whole segment or 5 or 10 on what that brings right to the marketplace today, but AI has really made great strides in the last year or two. And certainly my view and many others sees that 2023 is going to be a breakout year for AI. And the use cases are distinct in the UC, the collaboration space, and in the context center. They are very different applications of AI, but they're all using similar technologies just in different ways. So to illustrate, for example, in workplace settings, AI can be very helpful when we're doing meetings. That's one of the common use cases you see for conferences, collaboration, team-based work, where you're dealing with maybe 5, 10 teammates. You have a lot of conversations going on, a lot of information being exchanged.

When it's all in a digital form, and that's the key, when your voice is now being captured in a digital environment, which is what it is now in the world of IP, internet protocol, then it's just another data stream. When everything can be captured as data streams, AI, that's where the magic happens. It can synthesize all of that into one thing, which means it can pick pieces that you need. So in other words, when you're in a meeting, the AI elements allow you to do things like real time translation, real time transcription. So now, if you're in a group where some people aren't speaking the same language as you, you can overcome that barrier with AI. When you have all these conversations going at once, AI can take notes from the meeting automatically so you don't have to scramble trying to record everything manually.

So now you can pay more attention. You're more engaged. You're less fatigued from being in these meetings all day long. So there is an employee satisfaction part of this. Same thing in the contact center. There are many use cases for AI there, particularly to help automate service. So chat bots are a typical, high-level example of what this automation looks like, where you have a text-based and sometimes a voice-based bot that engages with customers cutting down the volume of traffic that has to go to agents, because agents are overwhelmed with all the things they have to do. The last thing we want to do is handle routine questions. AI-based chat bots, that's what they're built to do. So to alleviate some of that workload so agents don't burn out, and also the contact center makes better utilization of their time. So there are a lot of benefits to AI.

And I think the overarching thing is people think first, "Oh, automation." And yes, that is one of the reasons to be looking at AI, but you want to also filter that along to say, "Well, when you do these things and they go, right, what does that get you?" It gets you more engaged workers. They don't burn out as fast and they feel more empowered in what they're doing because they can use those same tools, those AI tools that are being used by the organization, now to leverage their own personal workspace and

manage their workflows in ways they couldn't do before. And that's a really good feeling, because everyone has too much to do, too many messages, too many meetings. AI can really help people get a handle on that. So that's a welcome use of it.

The flip side, of course, surveillance, Big Brother, all of that stuff, everything we do is being tracked. And AI has infinite capacity to do that, and you're never going to win trying to outsmart those applications. That's a concern. So there are, in 2023, I think will be raised some very valid, ethical, governance issues, certainly in the world of compliance. AI has to be managed carefully. But if you're mindful of those things, AI can be a really great leap forward.

Tyler Carmody:

For sure. And that's actually a great Segway into our next question, which is, what are the most compelling reasons for contact centers to embrace AI?

Jon Arnold:

So I talked a bit about chat bots in the contact center, and that is a great driver for AI. I look at it as the low-hanging fruit, though. It's the stuff that is the first response you associate with AI and say, "Oh, well, I can have chat bots to automate service." Yes, and you should think along those lines, but AI can do a whole lot more as it earns your trust in the contact center. So what I mean by that is, AI does not get speech recognition a hundred percent perfect, but guess what? We don't either. But it's good enough and getting better all the time that it will help keep everything on track almost magically in the sense that AI, because it works in real time and can process information faster than humans can, when you get into live conversations between agents and customers, AI can detect what we call sentiment.

And it can pick up cues from the way a customer, as well as an agent, by the way, are speaking. It may be gaps in their speaking. It may be the tone. You can pick up an anxiety cues. So in other words, things that indicate that the customer is getting stressed out, they're not happy. Lesser trained agents may not pick up on these things fast enough. So where AI comes in here, is what we call sentiment analysis, it knows how to mine data from across your whole data set to say, "Ah, in a high probability, when customers start doing these things, it leads to these outcomes." So it can coach the agent on the fly and say, "Based on how the customer is behaving right now, that sentiment tells us, 'You should be using these words to defuse the situation or show empathy or try to understand what is going on so you can address the problem to get them back to a happy state.'"

That's really good, because now agents don't have to be playing psychologists all the time and guessing. The AI cues can help them with more accuracy to do that. And the same applies to the supervisors in the contact center, where their job, a lot of it is about quality control. They need to make sure that the agents are doing what they're supposed to be doing. And with AI capabilities, now supervisors are able to track every call all the time. Whereas without AI, the more conventional way is they can only tap a subset of interactions because that's all that you're humanly capable of processing. But now, you can get alerts in real time across hundreds of calls happening at the same time in your contact center. It can flag for you right away, "Here are 10 situations that are about to blow up." You can now get involved and help those agents.

Whereas, otherwise, you would not get those cues until it's too late. So it brings a level of coaching that you can apply across the board. The other quality things to of course, are just to make sure that you can

monitor agents who may be on the phone too long, repeating the same thing over and over again. AI can pick up all of those conversations and identify where agents are struggling. And conversely, by the way, applications with AI can help identify who your strong agents are in terms of who are the most effective ones. And you use that for training purposes. You get best practices that AI can draw from across all the conversations. That helps shorten the learning curve when you're hiring new agents to say, "Hey, stick within these guidelines. You're going to have more success with customers."

And you can imagine what that does for your training costs, for your retention of agents. And of course, agents who are happy because they're not banging their head up against the wall all the time, they're actually saying the right things and getting good results. That's a good feeling, that you're doing a good job. So when the tools are helping your job as opposed to being seen as a job just taker, because a lot of agents could be very anxious that AI is going to take their jobs, your organization needs to be careful how you position AI. Don't say, "Oh, we're here to use this to cut costs." No, we're here to use it to augment how agents are doing their job. We want them to see it as being their friend, not a threat.

Tyler Carmody:

Absolutely. And with that, we're actually at our final question for the session, which is, how are meetings being reimagined to drive richer engagement and more intelligent collaboration outcomes?

Jon Arnold:

Well, meetings have always been a thorn in a lot of people's side, too many of them, too long, nothing happens. So AI has been a big set of options that, yes, can make that experience better to reimagine the concept of meetings. So there's a few things you can do there with AI. And I'm thinking too there's, of course, in-person meetings, where everyone's gathered around a board table. And then of course, you've got the remote element, where people are offsite being part of that meeting. So one example of that is how AI is used in the recording and staging of these meetings. So in other words, the camera work that is set up in a room, it used to be there'd be one stationary camera at the end of the room that captured everything. Now, you're seeing multiple cameras or multiple views of cameras that capture everything in a very dynamic way.

So in other words, instead of having a static view of the whole room where you really only get to see and maybe hear the people closest to the camera in the meeting, and you're participating remotely so that when the person at the back of the room is there, you can barely see them, can barely hear them, the camera and cameras will adapt in real time to put the spotlight on the speaker, regardless of where they are. And can do the same for the people at home who are offsite. So there's a term for this called meeting equity, where everyone gets equal time and representation in a meeting setting. And that's where the AI really can provide that experience, because the cameras, you can have them pan and zoom, you can do a few things there, but it's not really picking up all the cues in the room. And that's where the AI just takes it to another level.

But the other things too, to make that experience better, I mentioned earlier about taking real time, no taking. It goes further than that because it also, the AI, you can train it. That's the cool part about it. It's never finished. You just keep showing it new things. You trust it. You give it more tasks, because now it can take you from end-to-end with the whole meeting experience. Before the meeting, you want to have invites. You want to prep people with information. You can use AI to automate a lot of that, so you

don't have to spend your day looking at people's calendars, trying to find the right times. Let my bot talk to your bot. We'll find the right time and place to do all of this before the meeting so it goes smoothly.

And then of course, post meeting, that's when you really get the payoff. You can have AI, these virtual assistants will sift through the important parts of the meeting, and you can have it catch the action items, not only identify the action items, but tag them to the people who need to do those things. And you can take it to the next level with setting up the next meeting, setting up the next steps for that action item and tracking all of it. So if you really want to work with AI and trust it, you can do that, and finally get a little bit more payoff from the meeting experience. And then of course, you want to use AI to make that experience as comfortable as possible. And what I mean by that, you want the lighting to be okay.

In other words, AI can help dynamically adjust your settings. So if your broadband isn't good, it can automatically adjust the visual qualities of the call, and the audio qualities and make it as enjoyable an experience as possible. And also too, with speech recognition, you can rely less on your hands and more on your voice to control or set up next steps or action items within the meeting. And think about people who are, for example, in a car, or they're in settings where they can't really use their hands to get to a keyboard, AI allows them to be more participative in the process. Another element of AI, which I think is important to reimagining the experience is on the security side where you can use AI with, it could be facial recognition, it could be speech recognition as ways to authenticate people coming in and out of the meeting.

Or say someone is trying to impersonate somebody else, AI tools can help catch that to make sure your meetings are safe. And also too, there can be instances where someone in a meeting takes some of the visual, some of the digital content, I should say, and they may for whatever reason, want to publicize it, put it out there on their social feeds, somewhere on the web where you didn't want them to do that, and they should know better. But there are lots of reasons why people do things shouldn't. There are certainly safeguards that AI can provide to have almost digital watermarks to protect your property. So it could be done to stop them from doing it. But more importantly, if they do it, you can track it back to them to protect.

Because part of the security element in this new digital world is, how do you protect your data? Just because it's so easy to do, these visual experiences, the technology is working behind the scenes very magically. But at the same time, it's so accessible, it can fall in the wrong hands very easily. And that's an issue. Digital espionage is another consideration. So to reimagine meetings, they've got to be safe experiences. You've got to feel comfortable that everyone in the room is there legit. And they're not going to misuse the data because they have access to it too. So that's another thing that makes the meeting experience better, that feeling of safety, that everything that is in house, stays in-house.

Tyler Carmody:

For sure. Well, Jon, that does it for our first episode of UCX USA Talks. Before we end, do you have anything else you'd like to say? Any takeaways, anything you'd like to tell our audience?

Jon Arnold:

Well, I think as a takeaway and think about the year ahead, we're going into this world now where we're out of pandemic mode and really trying to figure out how to make hybrid work, work. I mean, it's easy if

everyone's in the office, not so easy if everyone's at home. But how do you get a balance between the two? Most businesses are struggling with that. But I think that going forward into the new year for technology decision makers and buyers, they need to be thinking about, you really should have a holistic approach to how you invest in these technologies. Because the old approach of saying, "Oh, I buy a PBX, because I need a phone system. I do that. I buy a new voice messaging system. It goes here. I buy a new IVR system for the contact center. It goes there," that piecemeal approach isn't really going to do the job in a hybrid world.

We need a more integrated set of tools and applications that work everywhere all the time, regardless of location. And it's a good experience regardless of where you work. And you can't do that on this siloed-based approach of bringing in technologies one at a time. So that's the takeaway to think about, you know what? With AI and cloud reaching these levels of maturity now there are ways to go that you can get that outcome that's really thinking about, how does the hybrid model work? Because I think that's the biggest challenge overall for most businesses going into 2023.

Tyler Carmody:

Well, Jon, thank you very much for your time today. Thank you all for your time and attention. Today's session will be available on our website, [ucxusa.com](http://ucxusa.com). And if you found this valuable, please share it with all your colleagues and peers. You can also follow us on social media for more information, not only on today's session, but as well as other trends and topics in the unified communications, AV, customer contact and customer experience industries. And be well.