

FEATURE

BY BRENDAN READ, CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE;
INTERVIEW WITH EARL E. SMITH JR.,
HOME TELECOM

HOME IS WHERE THE CX IS

How Home Telecom transformed its business.

HOME IS WHERE THE CX IS

HOW HOME TELECOM TRANSFORMED ITS BUSINESS.



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE IMAGES

Home is where the connections begin and are the most important: with family members, loved ones, and friends. Connections that then extend into the broader community, like for business/work, education, services (e.g., financial, government, healthcare), shopping, and entertainment.

Home Telecom, headquartered in Monck's Corners, South Carolina (north of Charleston), has been enabling such connections since its founding in 1904.

The company is a locally-owned telecommunications provider that connects residential and business customers throughout Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester counties with high-speed internet, voice, video, managed Wi-Fi, security solutions, and business communication services.

Home Telecom's customers range from residential subscribers and remote workers to small businesses, enterprise organizations, healthcare providers, educational institutions, and government agencies.

EARL E. SMITH JR.



"For more than 120 years, our mission has remained centered on delivering exceptional service while being 'the easy-to-do-business-with company,'" says Earl E. Smith Jr., Home Telecom's Director of Customer Experience.

To learn more about how Home Telecom serves and supports its customers and builds and maintains their loyalty, we had a virtual conversation with Earl. We also discussed the company's service challenges, how it overcame them, and its next steps for the future.

Q HOW DO YOU SERVE YOUR CUSTOMERS? WHICH CHANNELS, INCLUDING AUTOMATED AND LIVE AGENT, DO YOU USE TO ENGAGE WITH THEM?

A: Our Customer Care organization supports customer service, basic troubleshooting, billing inquiries, account management, retention, sales, and support for our customers, utilizing our security and connected home solutions (also see **At A Glance**).

Customers engage with us through multiple channels, including:

- Voice interactions through our contact center
- Online self-service tools
- Customer portal and mobile applications
- Email forms
- Web chat
- Retail store locations
- Field service interactions

I think in today's environment, it's important to understand the wide range of everyday consumers that any organization may interact with.

While some industries have the luxury of catering to one generation or another, that simply isn't the case in the telecommunications industry. Everyone needs the ability to connect in some shape or form.

So as the provider that makes that possible, the question becomes how to do that in a way that caters to all ages and lifestyles.

As customer expectations continue to evolve, we have focused on creating a seamless customer experience (CX) across channels while increasing self-service capabilities that allow them to resolve issues on their own schedules.

Q OUTLINE ANY CHALLENGES YOU HAVE FACED

A: I will say some of the biggest challenges from the customer service perspective were too many manual processes and inefficiencies, which caused service level challenges.

When I was a kid, my mother used to work for C & P Telephone Company, which is one of the predecessors of Bell Atlantic that subsequently became a part of Verizon.

One of the things I remember her telling me was how everything from order taking to repair requests had to be handwritten and telegraphed/intraoffice-mailed to the appropriate departments to have the work done.

While we were not telegraphing order forms when I joined Home Telecom, in 2022, we were still taking paper orders and later entering them into the system. This alone cut our productivity in half.

We also used many different applications with single monitors which, as someone who started as a service rep himself, not only understood how much time it wasted, but simply made the end-user experience daunting to say the least.

After observations, it became clear that the billing system we then had in place simply was not efficient enough to allow us to enter orders in real time while on the phone with customers.

We also had to call or email other departments to get basic information, such as if our customer was exceeding their bandwidth or whether we could service a specific address.

AT A GLANCE

HOW MANY AGENTS DO YOU HAVE?

- 15 Contact center representatives
- 10 Retail representatives
- Total customer-facing team: 25

WHAT IS YOUR CONTACT VOLUME?

- Approximately 15,000 customer interactions per month

WHAT IS THE SPLIT BETWEEN INBOUND AND OUTBOUND?

- 90% inbound
- 10% outbound

WHAT IS THE SPLIT BETWEEN INBOUND CHANNELS?

- Voice calls: ~78%
- Walk-in retail interactions: ~10%
- Email forms: ~10%
- Web chat: ~2%

Email volume continues to decline as adoption of online self-service tools increases.

ARE YOUR AGENTS IN-HOUSE OR OUTSOURCED?

- The majority of customer interactions are handled by in-house teams.
- It utilizes a trusted vendor partner to provide overflow support during periods of peak demand.

HOW MANY AGENTS ARE ON-PREMISE AND HOW MANY ARE REMOTE?

- Contact center team: 100% on-premise
- Retail teams: 100% on-premise

WHERE ARE YOUR CONTACT CENTERS AND AGENTS LOCATED?

- Contact center: Moncks Corner, South Carolina
- Retail locations: Four stores located throughout Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties

WHAT ARE THE KEY CONTACT CENTER TECHNOLOGIES THAT YOU USE?

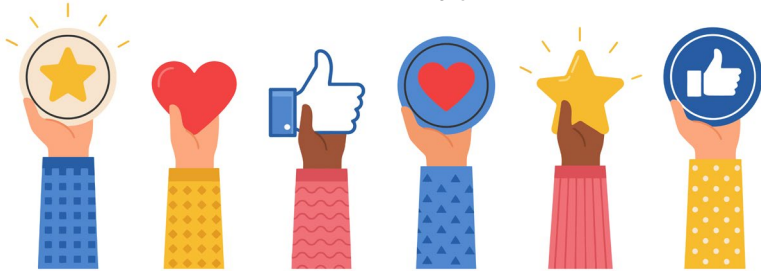
- CDG MBS (Elements) Billing and Customer Management Platform
- GoCare Customer Experience Platform
- Calix Cloud
- My Contact Center and IVR Platform
- Customer Portal and Digital Self-Service Tools



With a small customer service team, it is critical to be as efficient as possible in order to maximize productivity.

But as our subscriber base continued to grow, we recognized an opportunity to simplify both CX and many of our internal business processes. Customers increasingly expected digital self-service options, faster issue resolution, and greater visibility into their accounts without needing to contact us directly.

At the same time, we wanted to remain true to our mission of being the easy-to-do-business-with company. To achieve that, we needed better automation, more streamlined workflows, and tools that would empower customers to manage their services when and how they preferred.



Q WHAT STEPS DID YOU TAKE?

A: After a few weeks of watching and learning how we operated it was clear that some things needed to change, with the understanding it couldn't all happen at once. Call volume suggested we needed to increase the size of the team, but before that we had to eliminate as much inefficiency as possible.

Reducing after-call work (ACW) offline time for order entry was the first area of focus. Every minute we spend in wrap-up is a minute we are unavailable to service our customers.

While we still use this time when necessary, our improved ability to multitask has helped us reduce our ACW to less than 50% of what it was before.

Next, we upgraded the call center with dual monitors at each workstation, which in itself was a great improvement. With the work we do, we often use many different applications and/or webpages within a single customer interaction.

When you have one screen, having to click back-and-forth between windows takes up time. But when you have two screens, you can have more windows open in front of you at the same time. Now that my team also has laptops, we even have some that use the laptop screen as a third monitor.

Although each of these changes helped us improve simply by putting focus where it was needed, the true improvement came when we switched billing systems. That occurred beginning in 2023 as part of an overall evaluation of how technology could help us automate routine processes, modernize our operations, and better support our long-term growth strategy.

To accomplish this, we embarked on a significant business transformation initiative that included implementing a new billing and customer management platform, expanding self-service capabilities, and providing employees with better tools to support customers.

Our goals included:

- Simplify customer interactions.
- Increase customer self-service options.
- Reduce manual processes.
- Improve operational efficiency.
- Create a more seamless CX.



MAINTAINING CUSTOMER (AND AGENT) CONNECTIONS

Maintaining continuous and reliable connections is critical for all organizations, including when disasters threaten and strike. But especially so for "last-mile" telecommunications companies that provide those vital links to homes and businesses.

So, we asked Earl E. Smith Jr., Home Telecom, "How does your company enable business continuity and disaster response for your customers and employees, like your contact center agents? Also, how do you keep them informed of what is happening and next steps?"

"When it comes to disaster response and/or business continuity, the easiest thing I can say is we are going to get it done," says Earl.

"Our operations team starts planning and preplanning from the very moment we know that there is a possibility that we could be impacted by a disaster.

"Even for those situations where it isn't something you can prepare for, we have an extensive set of guidelines that tell us what needs to happen and who the parties responsible are.

"It doesn't matter if we have to have planning calls at 5 in the morning or 10 at night; we plan ahead so that we can be safe and be prepared to provide our consumers the quality of service they expect."

Home Telecom has also invested tens of thousands of dollars to enable its customer service and support teams to be able to work remotely in the event it is not safe to travel. Or like when school and daycare closures have put its team members in a bind that prevents them from making it into the office.

"As soon as we know there is a chance of an event, we advise our frontline teams to take home their laptop bags and necessary equipment to be able to work remotely if needed," says Earl.

Before Home Telecom determines whether to have its teams return to regular operations, it has team members, even its top leadership, who check roadways as well as its structures.

"I literally mean all the way up to the top," says Earl. "We have actually been on conference calls while even our COO and VPs are out surveying the area. It's things like this that I think truly set Home Telecom apart and make it a great place to work."

BOX

- Equip employees with better visibility into customer services and support needs.
- Support continued subscriber growth without proportional increases in contact volume.

Every decision was evaluated against our mission of being the easy-to-do-business-with company.

Q WHAT SUPPLIER(S) DID YOU CHOOSE AND WHY?

A: We selected several strategic technology partners to support our transformation initiative.

- CDG's MBS platform (now known as Elements) became our new billing and customer management system, providing enhanced automation capabilities and a modern foundation for future growth.
- We also implemented GoCare to expand customer self-service options and improve the digital CX.

Additionally, we further integrated Calix Cloud into our customer support operations. While it was already utilized within our Tier 2 network operations center (NOC), expanding its use provided customer service representatives with greater visibility into customers' Wi-Fi performance, connected devices, and usage trends.

Together, these platforms are aligned with our goals of improving efficiency, increasing automation, and enhancing CX.

Q OUTLINE THE IMPLEMENTATION, INCLUDING WHEN AND STEPS TAKEN, INCLUDING CUSTOMER EDUCATION AND CONTACT CENTER TRAINING.

A: Once we selected Elements, most of 2024 was spent designing workflows, organizing data, going over configuration requirements and training.

There were points where meetings were weekly, and right up to crunch time, daily. I'll tell you one thing: I don't think I've ever seen a group of people so dedicated to one cause.

Don't get me wrong. There were periods of frustration and uncertainty, but right down to go-live (which ended up amid a snowstorm in January 2025: that has only happened in Charleston maybe two-three times in the 12 years I've lived here), our team put in a lot of long hour days to make sure we got it right.

One of the most important early steps was ensuring MBS and GoCare were properly configured to support our specific business processes and customer requirements. This required extensive planning sessions and collaboration between operational leaders, technology teams, and our vendor partners.

Training was equally critical to success. While Calix Cloud was already familiar to our Tier 2 NOC team, it represented a new toolset for many members of our customer service organization. Training focused on helping employees leverage customer insights, like from their bandwidth usage and devices. We invested months in preparation through:

"CUSTOMERS INCREASINGLY EXPECTED DIGITAL SELF-SERVICE OPTIONS, FASTER ISSUE RESOLUTION, AND GREATER VISIBILITY INTO THEIR ACCOUNTS..."

-- EARL E. SMITH JR.

- Classroom training
- Hands-on learning sessions
- System simulations
- Process documentation
- Internal communications
- Development of subject matter experts who could provide ongoing support after deployment.

Maintaining strong communication throughout the process helped build confidence and secure buy-in from frontline employees, which proved essential to a successful transition.

We also dedicated significant effort to customer education by communicating upcoming changes, promoting self-service capabilities, and helping customers understand the benefits of the new tools available to them.

Q WHAT, IF ANY, OBSTACLES DID YOU ENCOUNTER, AND HOW WERE THEY MANAGED?

A: The greatest challenge was managing the volume of change occurring simultaneously. Implementing a new billing platform, customer-facing tools, and operational processes represented a significant shift for both employees and customers.

Having experienced billing system conversions in previous roles, I understood that no implementation is ever perfect on day one. Despite extensive planning and testing, there were naturally areas that required refinement once the systems were live.

We addressed these challenges through:

- Frequent communication.
- Rapid issue identification and resolution.
- Ongoing employee feedback.
- Additional training sessions.
- Process adjustments and system fine-tuning.

We also closely monitored customer contact patterns and made operational adjustments to help manage temporary call spikes during the transition period. By remaining flexible and responsive, we were able to work through challenges while maintaining service levels and supporting our customers.

Q YOU MENTIONED RETAIL AND FIELD SERVICE. DID YOU HAVE ANY CHALLENGES CONNECTING THEM WITH THE CONTACT CENTER: ENSURING SEAMLESS EXPERIENCES? AND IF SO, HOW WERE THESE SPECIFIC ISSUES OVERCOME AND STREAMLINED?

A: In October 2023, retail and customer service teams were aligned under one manager. I think this decision has made us more agile. The two departments have several overlapping tasks, so it was best to ensure we are all doing things the same way, receiving the same message, the same training etc.

Here's one of the core issues: our customer service and retail departments had no real understanding of what our field services team did.

To overcome that challenge, we arranged to have each member of Retail and Customer Service go into the field to see an install from beginning to end. This enabled them to understand what the customer should expect and gave them the confidence to better speak about our products.

Q WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES OF YOUR CHANGES/IMPROVEMENTS AND HOW DID THESE ALIGN WITH YOUR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES?

A: The results have been nothing short of a success story. Despite continued subscriber growth, we have successfully reduced overall contact volume while simultaneously improving operational efficiency.

By automating manual processes and expanding self-service capabilities, we have enabled customers to complete many routine transactions without requiring assistance from an agent.

Key outcomes include:

- Significant reduction in manual processes.
- Increased customer adoption of self-service capabilities.
- Reduced contact volume despite subscriber growth.
- Improved visibility into and enhanced CX.
- Better tools for frontline employees.
- Greater operational efficiency.
- Truck rolls reduction.

Most importantly, these improvements have caused Home Telecom to continue growing while maintaining the high level of service our customers expect and deserve.

Q WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS FOR HOME TELECOM?

A: Our focus remains on continued growth and continuous improvement. We will continue expanding our fiber network, enhancing digital experiences, increasing customer self-service capabilities, and identifying opportunities to further simplify interactions for both customers and employees.

As customer expectations evolve, we remain committed to investing in technologies and processes that support our mission while maintaining the personalized service that has defined Home Telecom for more than 120 years.

Q WHAT ARE YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND CONTACT CENTERS FACING SIMILAR CHALLENGES?

A: My recommendation is to begin with a clear understanding of your CX goals and work backwards from there.

Technology alone does not solve business challenges. Success comes from aligning people, processes, and technology around a common objective.

"THE RESULTS HAVE BEEN NOTHING SHORT OF A SUCCESS STORY. DESPITE CONTINUED SUBSCRIBER GROWTH, WE HAVE SUCCESSFULLY REDUCED OVERALL CONTACT VOLUME WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY IMPROVING OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY."

I would recommend organizations:

- Focus on CX first.
- Invest adequate time in planning and configuration.
- Communicate frequently throughout the project.
- Involve frontline employees early.
- Develop internal champions and subject matter experts.
- Expect adjustments after go-live.
- View implementation as a journey rather than a one-time event.

Most importantly, remember that technology should support your employees and customers, *not* complicate their experience.

The organizations that achieve the greatest success are those that embrace change while maintaining a relentless focus on serving their customers. 



Brendan Read is Editor of Contact Center Pipeline. He has been covering and working in customer service and sales and for contact center companies for most of his career. Brendan has edited and written for leading industry publications and has been an industry analyst. He also has authored and co-authored books on contact center design, customer support, and working from home. Brendan can be reached at brendan@contactcenterpipeline.com.

PREMIUM CONTENT + RESPECTED CONTRIBUTORS FOR CONTACT CENTER PROFESSIONALS

ENABLING A NEW GENERATION OF CX AND EX PROFESSIONALS to create successful customer management strategies, develop cutting-edge technologies, refine the skills necessary to advance their career, and build a culture that advances the contact center within the organization—that's what we do.

Since 2009, **Contact Center Pipeline** has leveraged the insight of today's notable CX and EX thought-leaders, along with our advisory board, expert magazine authors, blog contributors, and industry insiders; keeping our audience ahead of the trends transforming the contact center and customer sales, service, and support industries, improving outcomes, and the way companies engage with their customers.

Contact Center Pipeline Magazine is published monthly digitally and in print. For more information and to subscribe, visit our website.



INSIGHT AND INSPIRATION FOR CONTACT CENTER PROFESSIONALS

© COPYRIGHT 2026, CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION FROM THE PUBLISHER IS PROHIBITED.
THE VIEWS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHORS AND/OR SPONSORS AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE
OPINION OF THE OWNERSHIP OR MANAGEMENT OF CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE, INC. OR PIPELINE PUBLISHING GROUP, INC.