# CTI Alive and Well

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Where would we be without suppliers? They develop and manufacture all of the products and services used by purchasing companies and individuals, and they are responsible for some of the development of applications, programming languages, protocols and other standards. Suppliers provide us with just about everything, except direction.

Material produced by supplier marketing departments can be of some use advising potential purchasers of the capabilities of their products and services. Provided the potential customer understands the technology in question, and has a genuine need for it, such information can be useful in making a product selection.

But such material often contains implicit and explicit statements of where the market is heading. Almost without exception, the 'next big thing' is the technology or application that vendor has recently developed, adopted or acquired. And almost as often, competing technologies and applications are rubbished. Some examples include:

- In the late 1980s, data communications equipment manufacturer Gandalf put out a paper describing the ISDN as a conspiracy to put data communications suppliers out of business;
- IT&T claimed ISDN did not apply to the US and formulated a quasialternative they dubbed 'USDN';
- In a press release for Northern Telecom's SL-1 (predecessor to the Meridian 1), the not so new feature of speed dialling was claimed to make tie-lines obsolete; and

- When the entire Ethernet-using computer industry had adopted the TCP/IP protocol stack, DEC stuck by its proprietary LAT protocol.

But none of these beat the claims made by David Paddon of Rockwell Electronic Commerce in "CTI a Thing of the Past" (*e-Access*, April/May 2000).

To examine the claim that CTI is dying, we must start with a definition of CTI. In the call centre market where Rockwell's ACDs are used, CTI is the combination of the telephony and computing applications used by agents performing screen pop, screen transfer with call transfer, preview dialling and so on. I have identified 80 companies worldwide with CTI products in this category; eight of them also have a telephone system as part of their portfolio. Three vendors being acquired from a total of 80 is hardly evidence that CTI is dying.

And these acquisitions actually refute his assertion – companies are acquired because their core technology has a strong future, not because it is dying!

Another claim he made is that companies use CTI to extend the life of old PABXs. It is true that some PABXs with mediocre ACD facilities have partnered with some CTI systems that offer off-switch queue control, which 18 of the 80 do, but this is hardly extending the life of old PABXs, it is increasing the functionality of new ones.

Paddon claims ACDs now include CTI, another assertion that cannot be supported. Although not all of the 40 vendors

of PABXs worldwide of which I am aware have a serious ACD capability, only six of them own CTI products. And they all require integration as some call centres with even these ACDs will elect not to buy the ACD vendor's CTI product. Rockwell is an interesting example: it has its VarCTI CTI product, but in the US Rockwell is also a major reseller of Genesys.

Paddon asserts the availability of CTI products from ACD vendors dramatically simplifies integration. Integration between an ACD and a CTI system is straightforward, especially if the ACD vendor supports standard CTI protocols such as CSTA, rather than proprietary protocols such as Rockwell's Transaction Link and NEC's OAI. The more challenging work is integrating a CTI system, ACD supplied or not, with the PCs and enterprise computers.

Paddon claims "customer contact to be the core of its business" because Rockwell has compiled a suite of products that includes a predictive dialler and Web integration. It may be, but I've heard the jaded 'tomorrow, everyone will [adopt what we are promoting]' line so many times before, I'll be watching with sceptical interest.