

# Looking TO THE Horizon

As the biggest provider of cloud-based contact-centre solutions in Europe, Intelcom is at the forefront of an industry that's constantly evolving.

Images courtesy of Intelcom Group AS

**T**he evolution of cloud-based solutions has been a transformative force within the software industry. As a prominent pioneer in this sector, Intelcom Group has been leading the change with a focus on innovation and dedicated business units. Torkel Engeness, CEO of Intelcom Group, caught up with *The CEO Magazine* in Intelcom's headquarters in Oslo, Norway, to discuss the development of this unique space.

***The CEO Magazine:*** You've been leading Intelcom for around three years. During that time, what changes have you seen within the company and the industry as a whole?

**Torkel:** There have been big changes, both in the industry and within our company, so it's been quite an intense period.

Traditionally, if you wanted to open up a call centre you'd rent a big building, fill the first floor with the agents working in your call centre, and fill the basement with communications hardware. What we do is to completely eliminate the need for that hardware basement. We also enable the call-centre manager to place the agents wherever they want to, so you can actually do without the first floor as well!

It's this elimination of hardware and complex local infrastructure that is key for traditional call centres to transform into modern contact centres. We know the difference to the traditional approach as we have been delivering on-premise solutions within the communications industry for more than 30 years. That has been the key change we have made during these three years.

What we have seen during this period is that the cloud contact centre part of our business and the on-premise communications businesses are quite different. If you want to go to your customer and sell a cloud-based contact-centre solution it's only interesting to those customers who need a contact centre, whereas most companies do have some need for an overall communications infrastructure.

We have gone through quite a big transformation in our company. We split it into very distinct business units: one that only develops and provides our innovative cloud-based contact-centre solution, and another that takes care of other communications solutions based on third-party hardware and software.

If you look at the cloud-based market, the word 'cloud' has >



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moved from a buzzword to a real driving force for change in many fields over the past few years. We have seen the market's willingness to adopt cloud and that willingness is entirely different from what it was a few years ago. That has in turn driven the organisational changes that we have undertaken. This is because when cloud was viewed with scepticism, it was very useful for us to be one organisation where we could first sell in some communications hardware and then once we had built that trust we could recommend the cloud-based contact-centre solution to them. Now that cloud is no longer a liability, but an asset, the market's readiness to invest in this product becomes much greater. We therefore found that selling cloud to customers beyond those who

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already have found trust in Intelcom through our legacy deliveries became feasible.

Cloud-based solutions offer virtually infinite flexibility and scale. Intelcom's data centres have essentially an infinite supply because we're supplying so many customers throughout Europe. Customers can easily increase their volumes from one day to the next by a factor of five without that being a problem for us. Customers only need to pay for what they actually consume so this is something that is tremendously valuable for all industries where from time to time contact-centre spikes occur. The flexibility in supply is an incredibly important asset.

Another benefit is future proofing. Intelcom spends significant efforts to innovate and to develop our solution further. Examples are new communications channels like webchat and social media. When we make an improvement to our

solution or service, the customer can immediately see that improvement. Whereas, if you've bought a lot of hardware then you've got to pay to get updated equipment. It means our customers are always benefiting from cutting-edge technology, which is absolutely essential in the contact-centre market where so much innovation is happening right now.

**Looking towards the future, what are your plans for Intelcom's growth?**

We've spent a lot of time and effort on developing a very strong and innovative solution that we have traditionally promoted only within the Scandinavian markets. However, the beauty of the cloud-based model is that it allows us to easily and effectively serve customers throughout Europe and even overseas. We have customers as far away as Australia, Canada, and South Africa. Once you've done that big job of establishing a solid solution, you can reach the whole world.

However, we still believe that you need to have some sort of local footprint to be able to sell to and support customers and we have invested quite a lot in a strong footprint. In the UK, we've built a very strong team that has experienced radical growth in sales and that's a model we want to replicate in other geographies going forward.

When entering new markets, we spend a lot of time reaching out to customers and engaging with them. As more and more people understand the cloud and what it offers, we're finding that we're talking through more complex issues like security, redundancy, and reliability. You need to spend time with your customers and I think that's something that can be easily forgotten when you talk about cloud. You can sit in Norway or London and sell to Australia, but you still need to spend that time with the customer to develop that connection.

For almost any customer that we have, the contact centre is the most important way for them to communicate with their customers. They're really trusting us with their key communication channel and customer assets. Therefore, you need to be convincing and trustworthy.

A big part of ensuring that trustworthiness is working very closely with our suppliers to ensure that we have both hardware and software that is current and very reliable. We have close, long-term relationships with several suppliers within that area that we manage tightly to ensure the level of service according to international standards within quality and information security. For us to develop our solution as fast as possible, we also want to utilise external resources to help us to drive innovation and speed. These have been the most important dimensions of our innovation strategy.

Another dimension to our partner strategy comes out of the need to work very closely with national and



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international carriers to interface with their communication infrastructure. For us, it's a lot of work to make sure that we remain current and with broad geographical coverage, but an interesting twist on that is that those companies who often serve as providers to us can be important sales channels for us as well. These are fantastic partnerships, where on the one hand the operators provide services to us. On the other hand, despite a bigger brand name and sales footprint, they often meet customers who require more sophisticated services than what the telecom provider can provide from their own breed. They will often bring us in on deals with them. That's an interesting partnership where we both buy from and sell through them.

**In such a competitive space, what do you think sets Intelcom apart?**

We are the biggest provider in Europe and we have the longest track record. We have some of the biggest customers in the world using our cloud-based solutions. We really pioneered this as a product, not just to smaller companies that can't afford an internal IT department but to

bigger corporations as well replacing larger legacy installations.

We are a company that is really at the cutting edge of this sector. Overall, I think the fact that we have an approach that is so radically different from the established players today is vital, and I think it's something companies really need to hear about.

Cloud-based contact centres are certainly the way of the future. The elimination of the need for hardware creates an enormous flexibility—in terms of pricing that can be volumes based, in terms of capacity that enables customers to handle massive volume peaks without difficulty, in terms of time-to-market where new call centres can be opened in a matter of days, in terms of future-proofing where new functionality is added to the solution continuously, and in terms of location where agents can staff the call centre from work or from home or even while visiting another country. This again allows businesses to transform the way they engage with their customers. Some businesses are there and some are not, but the message of the urgent need for the transformation of businesses is the most important thing that I can communicate. ●

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