Automatic Call Distribution

Main Resource offers uninterruptible power supplies from Isoetec and others. If you are interested in Automatic Call Distribution, you can order on-line or by phone at 800 362-6740.
Automatic Call Distribution (ACD)

ACD is a specialized telephone system used by incoming call centers. This programmable device automatically answers calls, queues calls, distributes calls to agents (or groups of agents), plays delay announcements to callers and provides real-time and historical reports on these activities. This may be a stand-alone system or ACD capability built into a CO, network or Private Branch Exchange (PBX).

ACDs systems are becoming more affordable, flexible and easier to use and set up. Most PBXs and some late-model key systems now provide ACD. If you have a switch system, you may be able to find and upgrade for the entire product line.

Once upon a time ACDs were only for large corporations. Suddenly this technology has become a necessity for all but the smallest of call centers.

In the past, automatic call distribution systems were packaged as purpose-dedicated switches, or as a module to plug into your existing telephone system. These early ACDs cost tens of thousands of dollars and their installation, configuration and maintenance required specialized skills. Newer lower-cost phone systems specially designed for small business are becoming less expensive and easier to set up and maintain. Most PBXs and some of the more advanced key systems provide some ACD functionality. Select switch makers have made available excellent ACD upgrades for their entire line.

The features and operation of ACDs vary widely, but they all fill the same purpose. That is, to route incoming calls to agents organized into groups. Main Resource utilizes ACD for their busy sales group. Using sophisticated algorithms, Automatic Call Distribution determines which agent is next in line for a call, and if no agents are available, the calls are automatically placed on hold, transferred to a mail box, or into all call (where all employees can pick up the call). Most systems include monitors for agents and supervisors to show the status of each active call. Some will trigger an alarm when hold times get too long. Administrative tasks are also automated, allowing tracking of agent performance, resource utilization, and call patterns. As an ever-present performance incentive, consider wall-mountable LCD boards to display call statistics to the entire work area.

Additional Customer-Service features may include:

- Context-sensitive greetings
- Music-on-hold
- Verbal status announcements with estimated wait times
- The ability to go to voicemail, faxback or automated problem-resolution system.
Originally, ACDs were used to free call centers from having to hire one agent for every incoming line. Lately the trend has been to offer service specifically tailored to the needs of each caller. Many now include computer telephony features that couple ACDs to LANS, Windows workstations, and customer-tracking databases. Services like DNIS or ANI/caller ID are utilized to identify callers and automatically display on the agent’s monitor or LCD screen pertinent customer information. Some ACDs even use that data to route the call directly to a specific customer—service group or the agent assigned to the customer’s account.

**ACD Internal Upgrades and External Servers**

In general, ACD products designed for smaller call centers are either internal software/hardware upgrades or external servers that add ACD capability to existing systems and integrated PBX-ACDs—switches that ship with built-in call distribution features. Main Resource carries Inter-tel AXXESS and Premier products as well as ISOETEC IDS systems that will support ACD call handling.

**AVT**

The AgentXpress for Windows NT is an internal upgrade which can work with any late-model analog or digital phone system. The AgentXpress can be configured to handle 240 lines for 192 agents in up to 64 groups. For about $2,000 per agent your system will include PC-based software telephones, routing capabilities that use caller ID and DNIS to direct calls and a graphical reporting system are part of the package. You can add advance features including screen pops, enhanced queue options, voice-menu toolkit and an interface to DE-compliant Windows applications.  

**COMDIAL**

For its Impact line of phone system, you have two choices of stand-alone ACD solutions. QuickQ 3.0, which adds ACD capability to their Impact 224 and Impact 50 PBXs is a Windows NT application. This ACD can support up to 72 agents in 16 groups, includes a wall-mountable PC server, screen pop capabilities and Queue Escape function that lets callers transfer themselves out of a queue for an MSRP of only $10,000. The other option is the QuickQ 4.0 ACD, which sells for $2,150 plus $200 to $550 per agent, is designed for small businesses. Its Windows client-server architecture features a Microsoft Access-based reporting system. **Comdial – Charlottesville, VA 800-347-1432**
IWATSU

The ADIX APS, designed for small-company PBXs, can provide full ACD functionality when upgraded with the ADIX ACD package. The PBX sells for approximately $425 per station. Add the ADIX ACD module for $35 an agent to $55 an agent, depending on the size of the business. This product supplies call-handling, routing, and tracing functions that belie its low cost. Consider adding the Taske ACD Toolbox reporting system. It can be added to stand-alone and client/server configurations for $1,500 to $27,000, depending on system size and architecture.

Iwatsu – Carlstadt, NJ 800-974-5070

LUCENT

The Lucent CentreVu Compact Call Center is another add-on that is compatible with their DEFINITY ProLogix and ECX R6.3 PBXs. The CentreVu is specifically designed to promote advanced functionality to small call centers. Among its capabilities is ability to route calls based on criteria such as time of day, day of week, customer number, anticipated wait time, or caller zip code. It balances workloads by sending overflow calls to remote sites, allows agents to handle more than one call at a time and can assign a call to more than one queue. Add the BCMS VU reporting package for around $7,000 and you will enhance CentreVu’s basic reporting and real-time monitoring capabilities to provide a broad range of graphical reporting features in an IP-networked client/server environment.

Lucent – Murray Hill, NJ 800-247-7000

NEC

CallCenterWorX is an ACD software application designed for NEC’s NEAX1000 IVS and NEAX2000 IVS lines of PBX phone systems. The software is sold in 20, 40, and 80-agent configurations and attaches to the PBX’s Open Application Interface port via Ethernet. The Windows GUI format is utilized to create a familiar interface with an excellent context-sensitive glossary and help section. The easy to learn MIS module includes menu-driven reporting and agent-monitoring capabilities and the ability to display current call-center statistics on an optional wallboard LCD.

NEC – Irving, TX 800-TEAM-NEC

NITSUKO

At $250-450 per station Nitsuko’s 124i is a small switch capable of handling 52 incoming lines and 72 extensions. Add the ACD/MIS software option to the basic 124i model and you get a good selection of mid-range ACD call-management and reporting functions.

Nitsuko – Shelton, CT 800-365-1928
PICAZO

VS1 Business Telephone System is a Windows-based client-server application. Its modular architecture makes it possible to configure custom phone systems by combining seamlessly integrated PBX, ACD, auto-attendant and voice-messaging modules. A maximum configuration provides 192 ports, each of which can be connected to either an incoming trunk line or to an analog or digital telephone. Pricing, including server hardware, varies from $5,000 to over $45,000. The VS1's ACD module features TAPI support, caller ID-enabled routing and data collection facility that allows report designing using Microsoft Excel or Access. Picazo – San Jose, CA 800-464-3274

TOSHIBA

The Strata DK424 PBX can be upgraded by purchasing the add-on module ($2,000 to $5,000), which supports up to 256 agents and 16 groups. The software features screen pops and queue management, call-tracking, routing and supervisory functions. The Insight DK and Insight DK Plus MIS reporting packages range in cost from $2,500 to $15,000 not including a necessary Pentium PC. A LAN-based messaging application that displays wallboard data on supervisor monitors and a customizable real-time monitoring utility, report generator, and electronic wallboard support make this Windows application truly comprehensive. Toshiba – Irvine, CA 800-222-5805

VODAVI

Add-on ACD software modules are available for the Vodavi Starplus Triad and infinite DVXPlus telephone systems. They support up to sixteen 16-agent groups and offer features such as 8-party conferencing, agent Help facility and real-time supervisory monitoring for $1,500 to $5,000. The Discover ACD+ reporting, which starts at $4,000 without the required Windows-based server, offers real-time report templates. Also included are user-configurable large-character screen layouts, support for wallboard displays, and visual and audio alarms to warn supervisors of high call loads. Vodavi – Scottsdale, AZ 800-207-9944

PBX-ACDS: Everything in One Box

If you are currently looking for a new phone system, choose one with built-in ACD functionality. Many PBXs with integrated call-distribution capabilities can't match the features of a stand-alone ACD. However, they often provide more
flexible telephone feature sets and a broader array of agent and supervisor services while transparently integrating telephone system and ACD functionality.

ESI

ESI’s IVX128 Integrated Voice Exchange blends a full-featured key telephone system with an ACD which handles up to 32 agents at a cost of $600 per agent. It can be purchased in configurations ranging from 4 incoming lines and 8 stations to 42 lines and 84 stations. The optional T-1 boards increase that capability to 66 lines. The IVX128 is equipped with 16 voicemail ports, a flexible auto attendant, 24 conference-call bridges, ANI support, ESI’s new programmable digital telephone sets, automated facility and customizable music-on-hold. Supervisors will appreciate the Service observation feature that allows them to silently monitor calls for security or training purposes.  

ESI – Plano, TX 972-422-9700

EXECUTONE

An exceptional small center PBX-ACD is the Executone Medley. The Medley can be configured with up to 16 incoming trunks and 32 agents in 10 groups for about $300-$400/station. This all-in-one solution includes integrated ACD, auto attendant, voicemail, caller ID and verbal Help functions. Despite being one of the least expensive solutions, the Medley is easy to install and use. Its feature set is sure to meet the needs of many small businesses without the hassles and expense of adding a stand-alone ACD to an existing switch.  

Executone – Milford, CT  800-955-XTON

INTER-TEL

The Inter-Tel AXXESS PBX systems all include the AXXESSORY ACD module, providing full ACD functionality integrated with the rest of the phone system. The AXXESSORY ACD is packed with enough features to meet the needs of most small businesses with screen pops, call-routing mechanisms and on-hold announcements that keep users up-to-date with their place in line and anticipated wait times. Also available for $690-$13,000 per supervisor is the Taske ACD Toolbox. The Toolbox includes reporting functions including graphical real-time monitoring, forecasting, and traffic-study capabilities along with file-export options.  

Inter-Tel – Chandler, AZ  800-669-5858

LUCENT

Lucent’s Merlin Legend handles up to 127 stations and includes Lucent’s Basic Service Center cal-distribution module in its $200-$350/station price. Support for
32 ACD groups and 200 agents as well as a superior selection of call-distribution algorithms are standard features. Optional are reporting software, CTI and TSAPI interfaces as well as 28-button ACD-friendly telephone sets. The Enhanced Service Center, which sells for $19,750, significantly upgrades the system capabilities by increasing the maximum number of groups, transfer options and auto attendant functions as well as remote diagnostics, support for up to 100 caller announcements, multiple languages and prioritized queues.

Lucent – Murray Hill, NH  800-247-7000

NITSUKO

The 384i PBX, designed for mid-sized call centers, offers built-in ACD features similar to the 124i’s ACD module. The 384i supports up to 128 incoming lines, 256 extensions, 8 groups and 144 agents. The optional InDepth and InDepth+ reporting packages sell for $4,000-$10,000 and add flexible real-time status and historical reporting capabilities as well as a custom report generator and wallboard display unit supporting. Nitusko

– Shelton, CT  800-365-1928

PANASONIC

Panasonic’s Digital Business System 576 is a hybrid PBX that features least-cost routing, automatic call recording and the ability to attach any port to either a trunk line or an extension, and both station-side and trunk-side ISDN compatibility. Its built-in ACD provides flexible call-routing options, report package and supervisory and administrative functions. Two independent ACD systems can be set up on a single switch, with both supporting 32 agents, 3 groups and 6 supervisors. The cost for the system is about $5000 for the hardware options and $400-500 per user. Panasonic – Secaucus, NJ  201-932-4220

SIEMENS

The Siemens Hicom 300 E, Model 30, is a flexible system that can be configured with up to 576 stations at an average of $400-$600 per port. Siemen’s base configuration includes a broad FlexRouting ACD application, which consists of CTI screen pops, real-time monitoring, and a graphical report system. The Model 30 will support 255 groups and up to 750 agents, with capability for 150 active agents at any given time. For around $40,000, add the Resume Routing option, which enables complex skills based call routing. It also includes a Simulation option that enables administrators to test new routing programs in a controlled mock-company setting. Siemens – Santa Clara, CA  800-765-6123
TADIRAN
The Coral SL Multimedia Switching Platform ($300-$500 per extension) by Tadiran comes with full functionality and can provide 120 trunks and 128 extensions. Its built-in ACD is state-of-the-art and comes with CTI and screen-pop capabilities and provides support for 128 agents and up to 500 groups. It has the ability to assign agents to multiple groups. Tadiran’s Coral I Coral II HD, III systems are also fine choices. These offer higher capabilities, while maintaining a similar price per user as the SL model. Tadrian also offers ACD reporting applications also which range in cost from $500 up to $10,000. For $500 you can get the PC-ACD that produces standard pre-designed reports. The Coral Center package permits custom reports using SQL and ODBC database queries. Tadrian – Clearwater, FL 727-523-0000

Main Resource, Inc.
74 Evergreen Drive
Portland, ME 04103-1066
800 397-8417
www.MainResource.com

All Contents copyright 2000, Main Resource, Inc. All rights reserved.