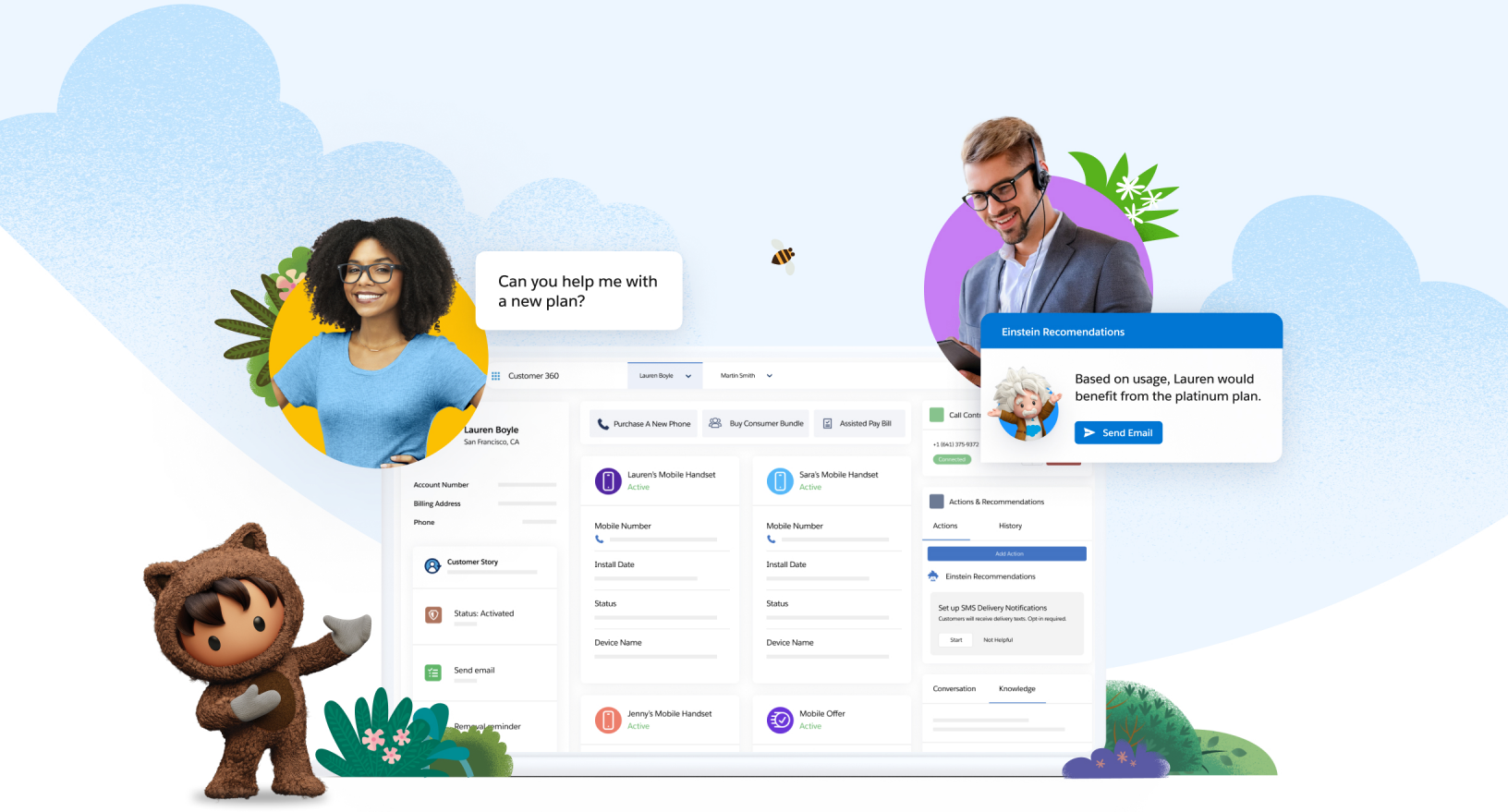
The Telecommunications Industry Playbook to Achieve Effective Data Maturity

A comprehensive guide to preparing your organization for success through the power of AI



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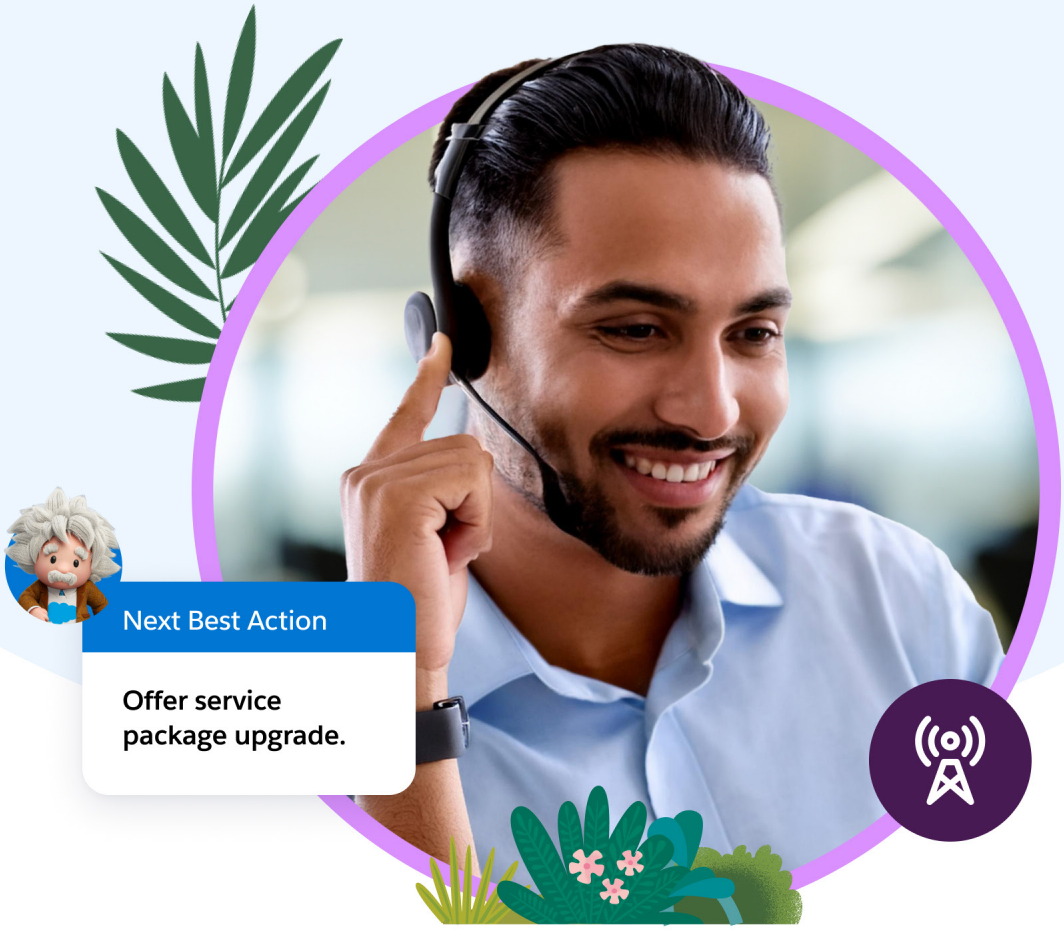


AI puts trusted data in the spotlight for the telecommunications industry.

The telecommunications industry finds itself in a transformative era as it looks to implement AI to meet elevated expectations for personalized service and products and to increase efficiency. The key to effective AI is data. And telecommunications companies are well positioned to take advantage of that technology thanks to the vast amounts of data the industry already has on their customers. From what shows your customers are streaming, to what locations they typically call, whether the industry has enough data isn't the question. Customers know this, and they expect their data to lead to better experiences; in fact, 80% of customers say their experiences should be better considering all the data companies collect on them – and considering the ubiquity of connectivity in their day-to-day lives

Many organizations have already invested in data warehouses and have existing strategies in place to manage them, but the problem is that data is often siloed or not easily accessible. What good is data if it isn't accessible or actionable? In the mad dash to align operational transformation with evolving customer expectations, many companies are ignoring the basics: The potential of AI to solve these problems is intertwined with the quality and trustworthiness of the underlying data. There must be an understanding that the diligent, yet sometimes time-consuming, work to ensure data is accurate and complete is a necessary investment for the payoff of high-quality insights. The work to create a data foundation at the outset is necessary for any future AI for telecommunications initiative.

This guide will lay out the steps telecommunications organizations need to take to become data mature. But before we dive in, let's define data strategy, data integration, and data maturity.

of communications industry professionals say operational efficiency is one of their company's top three goals

What is data strategy?

Simply put, a data strategy is the foundation for hitting company goals with the use of data analytics. But it's not one size fits all. You need to make sure your business objectives are clear and employees have been trained in data accuracy and security. Why does this matter?

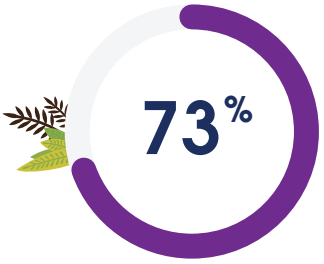
Data is the key to:

- Visualizing trends that identify opportunities and risk.
- Streamlining internal processes.
- Growing the business by targeting new and existing customers.
- Personalizing their journey with your brand.

A data strategy helps your company increase revenue opportunities and reduce churn by better understanding who your customers are and where they are in their journey.

What is data integration?

Data integration is the technical and business processes happening behind the scenes to bring together internal and external data scattered across various systems to one source. Most telecommunications companies have siloed operation support systems (OSS) or business support systems (BSS), which align with their different lines of business. For example, there are likely separate technology stacks for fiber, voice, wireless, etc. Not only are there multiple types of data, it's often fragmented with few linkages. Assembling a view of what products a customer may be using across many lines of business is one of the biggest challenges organizations face. Furthermore, customers often lament that their communications provider doesn't treat them as an individual – or worse, that they often need to tell their story twice. This is a direct symptom of the OSS/BSS fragmentation.



of customers expect companies to understand their unique needs and expectations, yet 56% say most companies treat them like numbers

Data integration automates and streamlines the process of requesting and combining all that data into a unified, single source of truth. Anyone or any system within the organization can access it. This process also includes identifying where the data needs to go after it's been harmonized – that is, if it needs to flow to another system as part of a process or automation.

What is data maturity?

Here's what it means when an organization is data mature:

- You use data to guide every strategic move, transforming insights into actionable plans and measurable achievement.
- Your customers benefit from your data-centric approach. Data-based insights help you anticipate their needs and provide customized experiences.
- Security and trust underpin every data initiative, with organization-wide standards to ensure that your data, and your customers' data, is always protected.

It goes beyond a pure digitally-driven transformation, as well. Data mature organizations have also evolved their culture – meaning every person is equipped with the insights and training needed to be data-driven. Data and analytics are simply part of every aspect of operations: aligned to business outcomes and prioritized in decision-making and processes. Data maturity is also the foundation for AI success. Data mature organizations are twice as likely to have the high-quality data needed to use AI effectively.

Data-leading companies also experience:

- 41% improvement in time to market.
- 89% improvement in customer acquisition and retention.
- 45% boost in employee retention.

But only 16% of telecommunications companies have integrated their data onto a unified platform, while 51% of organizations have partially integrated their data with gaps, and 33% still have data siloed across systems. So how do you get there?

Here are five steps to data maturity.

1 Set your business goals.

Start by determining the goals you are trying to achieve. Bringing together business and IT stakeholders to set their priorities and needs is the first step in developing a unified, cross-functional view of your data.

Set key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure progress toward your business goals. These goals can be company-wide optimization, such as:

- Revenue growth.
- Improved customer satisfaction.
- Cost reduction.
- Market expansion.

Or incremental, such as improving KPIs in different departments:

- Customer service time to resolution.
- Sales time to close.
- Marketing customer acquisition.

It's also important to determine if you have the systems, tools, and budget in place to carry out your goals. For example, you may need to invest in a more advanced CRM or data analytics platform to track specific KPIs. If you have goals around personalizing customer experiences, you may determine that you need to invest in solutions like Data Cloud for Communications to unite all your customer data and use it to serve them better. This assessment will help you determine what's realistic for your business.

2 Assess and unlock your data.

Identifying your data and assessing its current state is next up. With leaders on board and your end goals determined, you can now examine your data to identify what you have and what you need. Identifying data sources across your institution and every customer touchpoint, how each source can be accessed, and the quality hierarchy of the sources is a crucial early step.

Here are few things to consider when it comes to assessing your data:

- **Completeness:** Do your records include all necessary data fields?
- **Timeliness**: Does the data represent the current state of the business and its strategic goals? Is the data updated regularly?
- **Validity:** Does the data follow governance rules, constraints, and guidelines?
- **Usage:** How often is this data used for reporting and in applications?
- **Accuracy:** Are your data sets regularly updated from trusted sources? Does the data reflect what it's intended to represent?
- **Consistency:** Are data formatting standards required across all data sources or even within the same dataset?
- **Reliability:** Has the data maintained its quality and consistency over long periods of time?

But especially for communications providers, it's important to recognize that data ecosystems are incredibly complex and data from different sides of the business may not be perfectly synched. For example, is the data for your mobility side of your business sitting in a different stack than your fiber or internet side? Do you have duplicate contacts who are customers on both your B2B and B2C sides of the business? The average enterprise has data in over 800 applications, and just 29% of them are connected.

Unlocking it all is easier said than done. When integrating data sets, APIs offer a standardized way to unlock data as opposed to writing custom code. API-led integration is a methodical way to connect data to applications through reusable and purposeful APIs. These APIs are developed to play a specific role: in this case unlocking data from systems. But in further steps, they can also be used to compose data into processes or to deliver an experience. With this approach, teams can unlock a data set once and empower others throughout the organization to use that data in their own experiences.

Ensure your customers' data is secure.

Any breach, large or small, will destroy customer trust and deteriorate many of your larger strategy goals. The protection of your customer's data is paramount. Staying on top of data security – i.e., a customer's personal identifiable information or critical proprietary data – is critical to prevent privacy breaches. It's important to have robust data governance, transparency in decision-making processes and the implementation of fairness and bias mitigation, to build and maintain trust. This means implementing technical security measures such as protections against system vulnerabilities, logical separation of customer data, robust network security, encryption of data in transmission, and options for encryption of data at rest.

3 Reduce multiple, inconsistent sources of truth.

Once you've assessed and unlocked your data, it will shine a light on what data is missing, such as name inconsistencies and contact information gaps or redundancies, or bigger picture gaps like data not being tracked that is key to showing progress toward your goals. Many organizations are plagued with legacy data that is spread throughout multiple systems in various spreadsheets, PDFs, emails and scanned documents created by different employees. The data has been input manually and is riddled with inconsistencies and/or errors.

Employees are slowed down looking for what they need as they search for the right data from different sources, wasting time and resources. You'll need to work with stakeholders across your organization to identify, locate, and integrate these key sources of information. A platform like Data Cloud helps with this, taking all of that structured and unstructured data and mapping it to your CRM fields. This unification process allows you to analyze the data from different sources and strip away repetitiveness, discrepancies, and inconsistencies.

4 Make your data actionable by getting it in the right hands.

Data sitting in a warehouse is wasted. However, data in a warehouse that can be easily surfaced depending on the tasks, cases, and opportunities triggered is actionable and now useful. This allows you to get relevant insight into the hands of the teams that need it so they can start understanding your accounts and subscribers. And while many organizations may centralize their data, it's often never fully utilized. In fact, Forrester reports 73% of enterprise data goes unused for analytics. Simply put, you want to make it easier and faster to find what they need.

This single source of truth gives your teams all the tools necessary to achieve their goals. Focusing on specific employee roles allows you to combine relevant insights with questions agents face on a day-to-day basis (i.e., can our service department access a customers' past issues to provide personalized help; is marketing targeting the right customer segments for optimized growth, does our sales teams have the right tools to optimize orders and ensure completion?).

5 Empower culture change.

At this stage your data is clean and integrated, your teams are able to access relevant insights based on their role, and your AI is humming. There is, however, another, more people-focused step to take to truly optimize your business.

This type of digital transformation can cause trepidation among your employees – concern that this powerful technology will take their jobs. This is where empowerment comes in, to challenge them to take on new skills and embrace this technology to transition from manual, administrative work to missions that add real value and innovation to your organization. Your teams will need the skills to feel empowered to understand and use data, and this may require additional investments in training and change management initiatives to ensure your people buy into a new way of working.

You've achieved data maturity; here's what you can do with it.

You can make every customer interaction more productive now with the ability to discover and surface key insights about your customers and their needs. This includes predictive AI to forecast customer behavior and market dynamics. Automations such as AI-driven customer journeys, chatbots on the customer-facing side or internal order management systems can create more efficiencies and reduce costs. AI-driven insights can also improve the customer experience with features like helping customer service agents provide proactive solutions to problems and ensuring marketing and sales are targeting the right customers with personalized messaging at the right time.

This level of data maturity directly influences the sophistication and effectiveness of next-best-action recommendations. As you progress along your data maturity journey, it will continue to unlock the potential for more accurate predictions, personalized interactions, and ultimately a higher level of customer satisfaction. The integration of advanced analytics with real-time processing and continuous data improvement snowballs. This takes your customer engagement to a whole new level.

Here's what a data-mature telecommunications company would look like across the following departments:

Case studies:

Sales

Your sales department is using AI to analyze vast amounts of customer data to identify patterns, preferences, and behaviors to provide deeper insights. Specifically, agents can use AI to identify whitespace for new opportunities. They can identify upsell/cross-sell opportunities by looking at unified subscription and usage data across multiple OSS/BSS stacks. Once the opportunities are identified, AI can be used to personalize winning sales pitches and prebuild quotes to accelerate sales cycles.

Marketing

Marketing is using AI powered by customer and market data to help build highly personalized campaigns that consider both adoption and usage of existing products. Your marketing department can elevate its role in increasing total lifetime value by anticipating churn based upon AI analysis of network events, such as outages or slow-downs, and customer sentiment from call transcripts. AI is also measuring the effectiveness of campaigns in real-time so adjustments can be made based on performance metrics.

Service

Data Cloud for Communications can help your service team increase loyalty by providing a complete view of the customer across multiple lines of business. Built-in AI powered by past customer interactions can ensure a customer never has to tell their story twice about previous interactions and transactions. This deepens confidence by enabling more time for conversation and trust and less time on hold. Sentiment and usage analysis can identify risks and potential upsell triggers, creating a personalized experience.

Autonomous agents take your AI and data to the next level.

Having a data mature organization also means you can power autonomous agents, a new type of software capable of performing work at various levels of autonomy. Agentforce, deeply integrated in the Salesforce platform and powered by AI, data, and action, can meet customer needs by executing tasks on their own or seamlessly handing them off to an employee. It's transforming the way work gets done across every role or workflow, from sales, service, marketing, commerce, and more.

What does that mean for your organization? You can plug an agent into just about anything, from field service to billing support, customer experience to troubleshooting, to every order management step, offer recommendation, quoting, contracts, and order execution. An autonomous service agent can field an inquiry from a customer at any time on any platform with a billing question and independently answer questions like, "why is my bill so high?" Sales agents can engage with prospects 24/7, answering questions, managing objections, and scheduling meetings based on CRM and external data, allowing your sellers to focus on building deeper customer relationships.

With Agentforce, agents are ready to spin up out-of-the-box. You can also build agents with Agent Builder, using existing Salesforce Platform tools to create standard and custom topics and actions grounded in your trusted data.

Vonage uses connected data to speed up sales cycle.

A global leader in cloud communications that helps businesses accelerate their digital transformation, Vonage strives to create technology so good that users forget it's there. But the influx of innovative new technologies from a series of major acquisitions resulted in siloed datasets and manual processes. Teams lacked a full view into the data profiles of the customers they served. So Vonage used an integrated CRM platform to unite sales teams around a single view of their customers while managing change at scale.

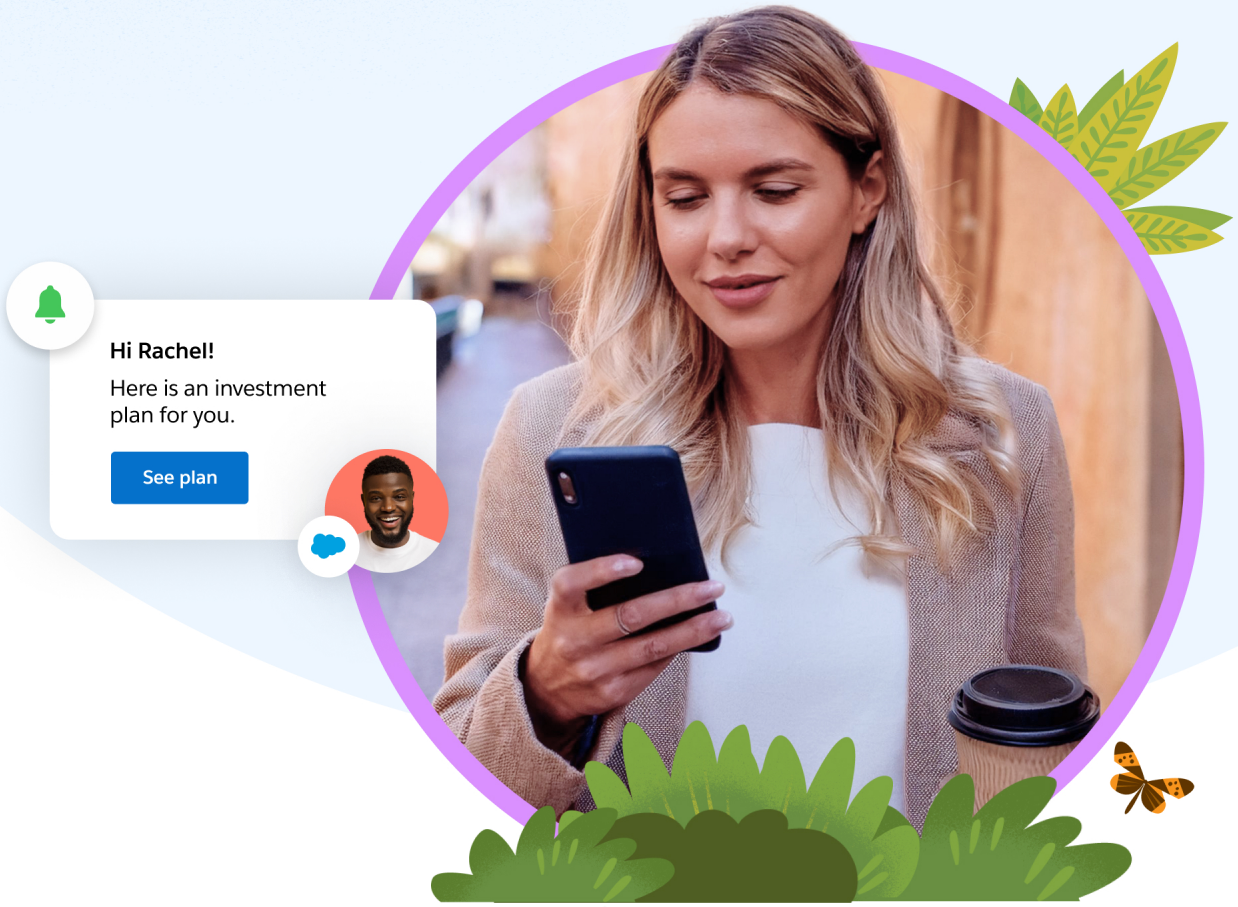
"The best way to scale a business is to let the data drive decision-making. Data is truth, right? It just doesn't lie," said Tara Zaleski, Vonage's Senior Director of Business Services.

Vonage's many acquisitions introduced integration challenges between legacy systems and their existing Salesforce instances. Customer data was siloed across different systems. Vonage implemented MuleSoft to link data from multiple systems with a unique identifier with help from Salesforce Professional Services. This gave sales and business teams a complete view of their accounts and set them up to build stronger customer relationships.

Vonage also consolidated accounts across instances in its data warehouse. Instead of manually searching for customer account information in each system, teams can view it all in one place, resulting in faster, more consistent support and better cross-selling across business lines.

With customer data in one place, Vonage sales teams were able to more quickly understand the needs of customers and prospects. Vonage has now unified sales operations, quickly building custom workflows with simplified quote creation and management. Provisioning time has gone from four days to just minutes, while also reducing the opportunity for human error.

Deliver personalized experiences at scale with your data-mature organization.



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Data maturity impacts the way actions are taken across all stages of the life cycle, starting with learning about a prospective customer, onboarding, order management and fulfillment, enabling real-time intelligent field service, and finally customer care. It also powers AI at every one of these stages to provide teams intelligent insight and create more efficiency.

This is where Salesforce Data Cloud for Communications comes in. It starts by connecting all of your customer data with out-of-the-box connectors, and harmonizing all of this data into a single view of a customer. This gives every team at your organization access to unified customer profiles, giving them everything they need to know about the customers as they interact with your business. This unified platform makes it easy for you to deliver intelligent, automated experiences.

Start your data journey.

Achieve your data and AI goals with a purpose-built platform for communications service providers. Get more insights on cost-saving applications, a data model, and integrations, all built on a powerful, AI-powered CRM.

Learn more