The UK Contact Centre Decision-Maker's Guide 2014

(12th edition)

CONTACTBABEL

Platinum sponsors

Eckoh

Genesys

INTERACTIVE INTELLIGENCE
Deliberately Innovative

Enghouse Interactive

infinity ccs
contact centre solutions

ip integration

nexidia

VERINT

NEW VOICE MEDIA

SAP

CONTENTS

2

3

LIST OF TABLES

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The *"UK Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide (2014 - 12th edition)"* is the major annual report studying the performance, operations, technology and HR aspects of UK contact centre operations.

Taking a random sample of the industry, a detailed structured questionnaire was asked to 215 contact centre managers and directors between June and August 2014. Analysis of the results was carried out in September 2014. The result is the 12th edition of the largest and most comprehensive study of all aspects of the UK contact centre industry.

ContactBabel is very grateful to the support which it has received from all of the sponsors of the report. However, complete editorial independence has been insisted upon and given at all stages, and readers can be confident about the objectivity of the report's findings.

HOW TO USE THE REPORT

Unlike previous reports, which looked at discrete solutions without prior reference to the commercial and operational issues which they address, the UK Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide first identifies six of the major pain points and issues that affect the contact centre industry:

- Improving quality and performance
- Maximising efficiency and agent optimisation
- New media and the customer of the future
- Increasing profitability
- HR management
- Strategic directions.

Within each section, specific solutions are identified that can be used to solve these issues, along with the analysis of the primary research data that are relevant to this area, including a comprehensive statistical analysis in graphical and tabular form.

Case studies and thought leadership pieces are also included to assist readers who may wish to look more in-depth at specific areas or gain another viewpoint.

The report also contains a Supplier Directory, of organisations which provide services, products and solutions to the UK contact centre industry, divided by discrete category.

SEGMENTATIONS

Looking at industry averages for contact centre statistics is only so useful. Only with a clear understanding of how and why metrics differ between operations can readers see where they stand compared to their competitors. As such, key statistics have been segmented in many different ways where relevant and possible:

- by vertical market (industry sector)
- by contact centre size (agent positions)
- by contact centre type (e.g. inbound/outbound).

We may also segment data along other lines (e.g. sales / service, and by region) where possible and relevant.

VERTICAL MARKETS

Where possible, we have segmented and analysed data along vertical market (business sector) lines, to highlight the specific issues and environments particular to that vertical industry. Below are the eleven vertical markets studied within this report which had sufficient respondents to justify inclusion.

Figure 1: Vertical market definitions

Vertical market	Sub-sectors
Finance	Banks, credit cards, loans, debt collection, credit checking, corporate
Housing	Housing associations
Insurance	Insurance for life, motor, house, corporate, reinsurance, etc.
Manufacturing	Mainly B2B sales and support, along with customer helplines
Outsourcing	Large full-service outsourcers and smaller telemarketing firms
Public Sector	Government, central and local, agencies, emergency services
Retail & Distribution	Retailers, home shopping, catalogue, parcel carriers, logistics
Services	Non-physical service offerings to public and business
Technology, Media and Telecoms (TMT)	Technology sales and service; Mobile and fixed line operators, TV and cable providers; Broadband
Transport & Travel	Transport information, booking, travel agents, airlines, hotels,
Utilities	Electricity, water and gas providers

SIZE BAND

Almost every survey question is considered from the size aspect, as differences in resources, management techniques and technology vary greatly between size bands.

Contact centres surveyed fit into one of three categories:

- Small - 10 to 50 agent positions
- Medium - 51 to 200 agent positions
- Large – over 200 agent positions.

CONTACT CENTRE TYPE

Whether a contact centre is predominantly inbound or outbound can fundamentally determine how the contact centre is run. Therefore, we sometimes analyse data by contact centre type:

- Inbound: more than 75% of work is inbound
- Outbound: more than 75% of work is outbound
- Mixed: less than 75% of work is either inbound or outbound.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DATASETS

The data provided by the 215 contact centres interviewed in this study were broken down into discrete segments:

Vertical markets

- Finance - 17
- Housing - 14
- Insurance - 19
- Manufacturing - 16
- Outsourcing - 28
- Public Sector - 32
- Retail & Distribution - 19
- Services - 27
- Technology, Media and Telecoms (TMT) - 18
- Transport & Travel - 14
- Utilities - 9
- Others (not included in vertical analysis): 2

Size bands

- Small (10 to 50 agent positions) - 77
- Medium (51 to 200 agent positions) - 78
- Large (200+ agent positions) - 55
- Did not disclose (not included in size band analysis) - 5

Inbound / outbound

- Mostly inbound (75%+ inbound) - 138
- Mixed (between 25% and 75% inbound and outbound) - 40
- Mostly outbound (75%+ outbound) – 30
- Did not disclose (not included in activity analysis) - 7.

DISTRIBUTION AND USE OF THIS REPORT

This report is written for the community of people interested in the present and future performance of the UK contact centre industry. Amongst others, these may include:

- Contact centre managers and directors
- HR managers and directors
- Operations managers and directors
- Customer service directors and those involved in contact centre strategy
- IT managers and directors
- Contact centre solution providers: hardware, software & services
- Outsourcers
- Consultants
- Training providers
- New entrants to the UK contact centre industry
- Government bodies
- Academic institutions
- Contact centre industry organisations.

THE SUPPLIER DIRECTORY

SOLUTION TYPES

SOLUTION PROVIDERS

CONTACT CENTRE SOLUTIONS

Eckoh is a global provider of secure payment products and customer service solutions, working with organisations in over 10 countries around the world.

Our range of secure payment products removes customer card data from contact centres and IT environments. They are designed to help merchants reduce the risk of fraud and become compliant with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS). Eckoh's CallGuard product can be deployed on the customer's site or hosted. It allows contact centres to take card payments from customers without their agents seeing, hearing or accessing card data in any way. We have been a PCI DSS Level One accredited Service Provider since 2010 and currently process over $1 billion in card payments annually.

Our multi-channel customer service solutions allow customers to self-serve through automation, reducing the need to speak to a live contact centre agent and improving contact centre efficiency.

Contact:

w: www.eckoh.com

e: tellmemore@eckoh.com

t: +44 (0)1442 458300

Enghouse Interactive is a leading global provider of customer experience and contact centre solutions. With over 10,000 customers in 80 countries we work with organisations of all sizes, industries and complexity to improve their service, productivity and operational efficiency.

Our integrated suite of solutions includes multi-channel contact centre, self-service, quality management, operator consoles & outbound communications, and can be deployed on-premise or in the cloud.

The ability to align all of your organisation's people, processes and systems at exactly the right time, in the right way to consistently deliver seamless, effortless customer experiences across all channels and devices is what we believe creates real differentiation.

To find out more…

Contact:

w: www.enghouseinteractive.co.uk

t: +44 (0)2033 573040

e: marketingemea@enghouse.com

Genesys is the leading global provider of multi-channel customer experience and contact centre solutions. With over 4,500 customers in 80 countries, Genesys orchestrates more than 100 million customer interactions every day across the contact centre and back office. Genesys helps customers power optimal customer experiences that deliver consistent, seamless and personalised experiences across all touchpoints, channels and interactions.

With the industry-leading Customer Experience Platform, Genesys ensures that the experience you deliver aligns with the expectations of your customer and is journey appropriate. By most effectively matching the workload and the required staffing levels for each customer journey, you can deliver consistent service levels over all touch points, channels and interactions throughout your call or contact centre and back office.

The Genesys Customer Experience Platform is available in three editions to address the needs of businesses from the smallest company to the largest global enterprise and can be deployed in the Cloud or on premise.

Contact:

w: www.genesys.com

t (General Enquiries): +44 (0) 1276 457000

t (Sales Enquiries): +44 (0)2037 348133

Infinity CCS's technology solutions help you improve customer experience and drive down cost to serve:

- Enable your agents to work smarter and faster, and focus on customers not processes and software, with our Unified Desktop, Intelligent Workflow and Knowledge Base software.

- Reduce costs and live call volumes while maintaining quality of service and maximising sales opportunities with Web & Telephone Self-Service and integrated multi-channel solutions.

- Remove capital expenditure, improve operational flexibility and extend legacy systems with cloud / hosted Telephony, Multi-channel and Desktop solutions.

- Provide your operational management team with real-time, actionable insight into performance and compliance with Management, Reporting and QA software.

Contact: Stuart Bidwell

a: Infinity CCS Ltd, 3rd Floor, Quayside Tower, Broad Street, Birmingham B1 2HF (UK)

t: 0121 450 7830

e: info@infinityccs.com

w: www.infinityccs.com/dmg
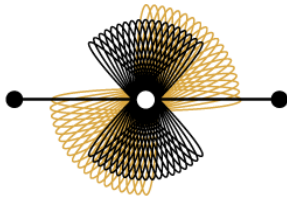
Deliberately Innovative All-in-One IP Communications for Business.

Interactive Intelligence is a global provider of contact centre, unified communications, and business process automation software and services designed to improve the customer experience.

The company's standards-based, all-in-one IP communications software suite, deployed via the cloud or on-premises, is backed by more than 6,000 organisations worldwide.

In addition to software, Interactive Intelligence provides a comprehensive solution-set including hardware, implementation, consulting, support and education.

The company was founded in 1994 and is headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.A. with offices throughout North America, Latin America, Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia Pacific.

At Interactive Intelligence, it's what we do.

Contact:

a: EMEA Headquarters, Thames Central, Hatfield Road, Slough, Berkshire SL1 1QE (UK)

t: +44 1753 418 800

w: www.inin.com/uk

Intradiem is the leader in intraday automation solutions for multi-channel contact centres.

Intradiem's customers achieve an invincible customer experience with a real-time workforce by automating manual processes such as intraday task management, real-time adherence, intraday staffing, reskilling, channel balancing, and real-time alerts.

Intradiem empowers an immediate and consistent response to unpredictable events and changing conditions, resulting in labour savings, improved employee performance and a better overall customer experience.

More than 200,000 contact centre, field service, retail, bank branch, and back office employees around the world use Intradiem's solution every day.

Contact: David Marshall, Regional Manager, Europe

e: dmarshall@intradiem.com

w: www.intradiem.com

t: +44 (0)207 562 8309

a: Level 17 Dashwood House, 69 Old Broad Street, London EC2M 1QS United Kingdom

IP Integration is a leading UK provider of Contact Centre solutions. Our portfolio comprises systems design and consultancy, bespoke application development, network services and the latest in collaboration technologies.

We combine technologies from trusted partners such as Avaya and Microsoft with our in-house application development and managed service divisions to deliver award-winning solutions for some of the UK's leading commercial and public sector organisations.

Our goal is to help our customers derive maximum value from their contact centre technology. We measure our success through the return on their investment with us and their continued loyalty; won through our commitment to excellence of service.

Contact:

a: IP Integration Limited, Integration House, Turnhams Green Business Park, Pincents Lane, Reading RG31 4UH

t: 0118 918 4600

e: ipi.info@ipintegration.com

w: www.ipintegration.com

NewVoiceMedia powers customer connections that transform businesses globally.

The leading vendor's award-winning cloud customer contact platform connects organisations with their customers worldwide, enabling them to deliver a personalised and unique customer experience and drive a more effective sales and marketing team.

With a true cloud environment and proven 99.999% platform availability, NewVoiceMedia ensures complete flexibility, scalability and reliability.

Spanning 116 countries and six continents, NewVoiceMedia's 250+ customers include: Topcon, PhotoBox, DPD, Lumesse, QlikView and Wowcher.

Contact:

w: www.newvoicemedia.com

twitter: @NewVoiceMedia

nexidia ((!))

Nexidia, long term educators of Customer Interaction Analytics, works with some of the world's largest contact centres to develop and deliver comprehensive video and audio search platforms.

Innovation is at the heart of the systems that Nexidia develops and our impetus is to drive forward the value of the contact centre as a strategic asset.

The ability to capture multi-channel interactions, analyse the data and then use this valuable insight into the customer experience to develop business strategies to improve the performance of nearly every area of the organisation, is the heart of Nexidia.

Customer analytics, an intrinsic part of our DNA, puts executives and customer service leaders in touch with the frontline.

Nexidia is committed to continually innovate and support initiatives that drive the customer service arena forward.

Contact:

For more information, please visit http://www.nexidia.com

NOBLE SYSTEMS

Noble Systems is a global leader in the customer communications industry, providing innovative solutions for Unified Communications, Business Process Management and Analytics.

Tens of thousands of agents at 4,000+ client installations worldwide use Noble platforms to manage millions of customer contacts each day.

Noble offers a unified suite of multi-channel inbound, outbound and blended contact processing, strategy planning, and resource management tools for companies of all sizes.

Our premise, cloud and innovative premise/cloud hybrid platforms include ACD, predictive dialling, blended processing, recording and monitoring, IVR, messaging, interaction analytics and workforce management.

Contact:

Sian Ciabattoni

t: 0161 772 7100

e: sciabattoni@noblesystems.com

w: www.noblesystems.com

CONTACTBABEL

rostrvm

Rostrvm supply Multichannel Contact Solutions onsite or in the cloud. Our modular suite of applications allow you to manage and blend all of your inbound and outbound communications with clear and accurate reporting available on any device.

- Intelligent, data driven, skills based routing ACD for your inbound call centre, email and social media

- Predictive, progressive and preview diallers for outbound contact management

- Desktop optimisation and process management for the call centre and back office

We have been implementing customer contact solutions for nearly 30 years. In that time we have seen the call centre's role expand to accommodate ever increasing customer service expectations. Our flexible, robust applications allow our customers to work profitably, productively, efficiently and with accountability.

Start from scratch or use rostrvm to work in harmony with your existing technology and add new features at a fraction of the cost of other suppliers.

Visit rostrvm.com to read our case studies and to learn more about our products, services and customers.

Contact: Peter Brown, Sales Director

t: 08432 163500

e: enquiries@rostrvm.com

w: www.rostrvm.com

a: Rostrvm Solutions Limited, Dukes Court, Duke Street, Woking, Surrey GU21 5RT (UK)

SAP

SAP is at the centre of today's customer engagement revolution developing innovations that help businesses of all sizes and industries run better.

Contact centre and customer engagement solutions from SAP are part of a market-leading portfolio of solutions designed to increase efficiency and effectiveness of marketing, sales, service and omni-channel commerce.

Our contact centre solutions help you provide consistent, personalized customer service via multiple communication channels, increase agent productivity and monitor and adapt your contact centre operations real time.

Contact:

t: +44 (0)800 0852 631

w: http://www.sap.com/uk

w: www.sap.com/contact-center

ContactBabel

Ultra Communications is the UK's largest provider of Cloud contact centre technology, offering services to clients around the UK and Europe for 1000s of advisors, recording over 6 million inbound/outbound/IVR call minutes every month.

Our solutions are fully flexible, scalable and resilient, enabling clients to easily manage all of the contacts both in and out of their centres. All solutions include a proactive 24/7/365 support service and unparalleled campaign performance monitoring, ensuring client centres are continuously as efficient and productive as possible.

Solutions include:

Inbound Call Management, Inbound ACD, IVR for self service and payment collection, automated Queue Call Back, automated Outbound Dialler, Contact Blending, Call Recording, automated Messaging, full MI/reporting suite and real-time monitoring tools.

Ultra also provides a trio of PCI solutions for secure card payment collection, to allow businesses to completely de-scope their centres and attain full PCI compliance.

Contact:

w: www.UltraComms.com

t: 0207 965 0207

e: Sales@UltraComms.com

Verint® (NASDAQ: VRNT) is a global leader in Actionable Intelligence® solutions.

Actionable Intelligence is a necessity in a dynamic world of massive information growth because it empowers organizations with crucial insights and enables decision makers to anticipate, respond and take action.

Verint Actionable Intelligence solutions help organizations address three important challenges: customer engagement optimisation; security intelligence; and fraud, risk, and compliance. Today, more than 10,000 organisations in over 180 countries, including over 80 percent of the Fortune 100, use Verint solutions to improve enterprise performance and make the world a safer place. Learn more at www.verint.com.

In 2013, Verint acquired Victrio™, an innovator in fraud prevention and authentication solutions. The combination of Verint and Victrio advances this comprehensive solution set by combining industry-leading voice biometrics and predictive analytics with enterprise workforce optimisation solutions, furthering the company's portfolio of fraud, risk and compliance solutions.

Contact:

t: (0)1932 839500

e: info@verint.com

w: www.verint.com

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT	HEADSETS

Opini8n-8

Opinion-8 is an innovative and effective customer-experience management tool which allows you to gain customer and employee feedback in a simple and cost-efficient way.

We offer a range of IVR and web surveys for use in your contact centre and give you support at every stage, from the survey design to its implementation and hosting. Operated as a SaaS platform, Opinion-8 is suitable for use in any call centre. Our unified online reporting offers a variety of analysis and graphing solutions and the results are available in real-time. Gain real insight into your customers' perceptions of your service with Opinion-8.

Contact:

t: +44 (0) 117 398 2342

e: sales@opinion-8.com

w: www.opinion-8.com

a: Square Systems Limited, Maxet House, 28 Baldwin Street, Bristol BS1 1NG

plantronics®

ABOUT PLANTRONICS – SIMPLY SMARTER COMMUNICATIONS™

Plantronics is a global leader in audio communications for contact centres worldwide.

For 50 years we've pioneered innovations in audio technology, creating solutions that combine superior call clarity and noise reduction with uncompromising quality and service.

Plantronics products allow you to simply communicate.

Contact:

a: Plantronics UK Ltd, Interface Business Park, Royal Wootton Bassett SN4 8QQ (UK)

For sales enquiries: t: +44 (0) 1793 842426

For technical support/ customer service: t: 0800 410014

w: www.plantronics.com

Facebook: plantronicsea

Twitter: @Plantronics_UK

YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/SmarterWorkingTV

Linked-In: www.linkedin.com/company/plantronics

Flickr: www.flickr.com/photos/plantronics

w: www.plantronicscasestudies.com

CONTACTBABEL

Call Centre Management Association (UK)

Established in 1994 to promote the profession of call centre management the CCMA (UK) is an independent, not for profit organisation for Call Centre Managers, Supervisors and Team Managers funded by membership subscriptions.

The CCMA is run on an unpaid, voluntary basis by an elected Board of call centre professionals who give up their own time to put something back into their industry and help to support others.

There are around 500 CCMA members in the UK and our mission is to contribute to the continuous professional development of call centre managers and supervisors and to assist wherever we can in sourcing high quality training courses.

Contact:

Keith Stagg, Membership Secretary

t: 0844 8000623

e: keith@ccma.org.uk

w: www.ccma.org.uk

As an independent industry body, we champion best practice in customer contact operations – working in all sectors to provide strategic advice, best practice support, standards, benchmarking and accreditation, professional qualifications and specialist training for those responsible for planning, data insights and analytics, quality and customer experience.

Widely recognised as an innovative, open and independent community of professionals, we promote collaboration, continual learning and customer focus and offer advice and support to help our members make a genuine difference in their organisation. Highly rated by members for the value and practical nature of our support, we offer advice and support through our four core communities of customer contact professionals including Quality & Customer Experience, Data, Analytics and Insight, Planning and Customer Leadership & Strategy.

Contact:

w: www.planningforum.co.uk

t: 0333 123 5960

e: info@planningforum.co.uk

SECCF
SOUTH EAST CONTACT CENTRE FORUM

south west contact centre forum

The **South East Contact Centre Forum** is the regional call/contact centre user group for Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey & Sussex, being home to around 985 contact centre operations.

SECCF has been created in response to a growing demand for a regional network that allows operational managers to meet with their peers, review and discuss key challenges and hear how other organisations are responding.

Contact:

Trevor Butterworth, Membership & Events Manager

t: 01252 540 768 / 07932 669 299

e: trevor@uk-ccf.co.uk

w: www.uk-ccf.co.uk

The **South West Contact Centre Forum (SWCCF)** gives contact centres the opportunity to be heard and to influence the shape of the industry in the region. The SWCCF offers a range of products and services designed to add value to members' businesses:

- Industry updates and developments both from national and regional perspective
- An understanding how businesses can engage with many business contacts within the contact centre industry
- An extensive programme of conferences, seminars and special interest groups to keep in touch with issues relevant to all contact centres
- Access to free helpdesk facilities offering strategic advice and information to contact centres
- Free benchmarking
- Access to supply chain information
- Members also have the opportunity to attend a quarterly Best Practice event free of charge

Contact:

Jane Thomas – Managing Director

t: 02920 709800

m: 07966 092149

e: jane@swcontactcentreforum.com

w: www.swccf.co.uk

The Welsh contact centre market is very vibrant with growth predictions varying between 20 – 30% cumulatively over the next three years. This growth is predicted to come from both Inward Investment and, more significantly, indigenous growth.

The Welsh Contact Centre Forum is a high value Employers' Forum for the 200-plus contact centres we now have in Wales, providing strategic direction for contact centres in Wales, also offering our members the following:

- Four key forum seminars a year
- Networking opportunities
- Members website
- Our flagship event: Annual Welsh Contact Awards

Contact:

t: 029 2070 9800

e: callcentre@callcentrewales.co.uk

e: lucinda@callcentrewales.co.uk

w: www.welshcontactcentreforum.co.uk

Bright helps you build a world-class customer management operation.

Three areas need to be monitored and managed to achieve this; internal performance, customer satisfaction and employee engagement. Over the last 10 years we have perfected tools to address all of these areas, such as:

- Customer Satisfaction Measuring – The Bright Navigator is an automatic post contact survey solution, gathering millions of customers' views yearly.

- Employee Engagement Monitoring – Gauging the state of your staff and giving actionable recommendations on how to drive agent engagement.

- Performance benchmarking – The Bright Index survey delivers GAP analysis and recommendations on +50 contact centre metrics to almost 100 participants annually.

Contact:

w: www.brightindex.co.uk

XI

Call Centre Helper is the UK's most popular contact centre magazine with over 200,000 readers. It is a free, weekly online magazine aimed at giving contact centre people advice on how to make their businesses work more effectively.

There are 4 distinct areas – management, technology, life and jobs – readers can navigate swiftly to the area that interests them most. There are many regular features including articles that ask experienced people to answer real-life contact centre problems faced by their peers. We have also produced a number of reference guides aiming to be the main source of content on the internet for specialist call centre areas.

Contact:

e: newsdesk@callcentrehelper.com

w: www.callcentrehelper.com

contact-centres.com was launched , initially in print format, in May 2001 and from May 2005 in digital format only; both with the strap line *'everything contact centres'.*

Whether you are looking to outsource, seeking a new supplier or simply to read up on the latest news and information from the UK's contact centre industry contact-centres.com has the answers.

We look forward to being of service to you, your contact centre and, perhaps more importantly, to the UK contact centre industry which we are proud to serve.

Contact:

w: www.contact-centres.com

t: 0207 993 3425

e: info@contact-centres.com

CONTACTBABEL

Engage Customer is committed to promoting and positioning as a business imperative the need for organisations to recognise and establish close links between positively engaging their employees and their customers. Nowhere is this more important than in the contact centre environment.

Engage Customer continues to go from strength to strength and has now launched engageemployee.com - sister website to engagecustomer.com – the essential new resource for leading edge thinking on the issues, challenges and opportunities relating to employee engagement and its impact on customer engagement, performance and profitability.

Research reveals that the two most important business challenges identified by CEO's are around their people and their customer relationships. The cultural and commercial benefits of organisations taking an holistic view of their employee and customer engagement strategies are proven and Engage Customer will keep you abreast of what makes organisations tick - their people and their customers.

Contact: Nick Rust

t: 01932 506 301 / 07968 416007

w: www.EngageCustomer.com /
www.EngageEmployee.com

a: Engage Customer, Nicholson House, 41 Thames Street, Weybridge, Surrey KT13 8JG

IMPROVING QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

Within this chapter, methods and solutions are discussed that improve the quality of the customer experience and allow the contact centre to gain insight into each customer and agent to improve their own business strategy.

Topics include:

- Interaction recording and analytics
- Quality and performance management
- Scripting and the Unified Desktop
- Customer experience, satisfaction and complaints.

INTERACTION RECORDING

For the past decade, there has been increasing desire within contact centres to improve upon customer satisfaction and experience, in order to keep customers loyal and profitable for longer. ContactBabel studies have consistently shown that increasing customer satisfaction is the no.1 focus of UK contact centres, outperforming other key areas such as decreasing costs or increasing sales.

Interaction recording and monitoring may have been around for a long time, but it is at the forefront of the battle to improve quality and thus customer satisfaction and loyalty. The new generation of interaction recording solutions brings the whole contact centre into play, potentially gaining at several levels of the business through using the solution in different ways, particularly in association with interaction analytics.

Interaction recording (comprising both voice and screen recording) is one of the most prevalent contact centre solutions, having many applications around quality assurance, compliance, security and agent training. It is used by 87% of respondents, 16% of whom state that they wish to replace or upgrade their current system. Only 5% of respondents have no intention of using interaction recording.

Figure 2: Current and future use of interaction recording, by vertical market
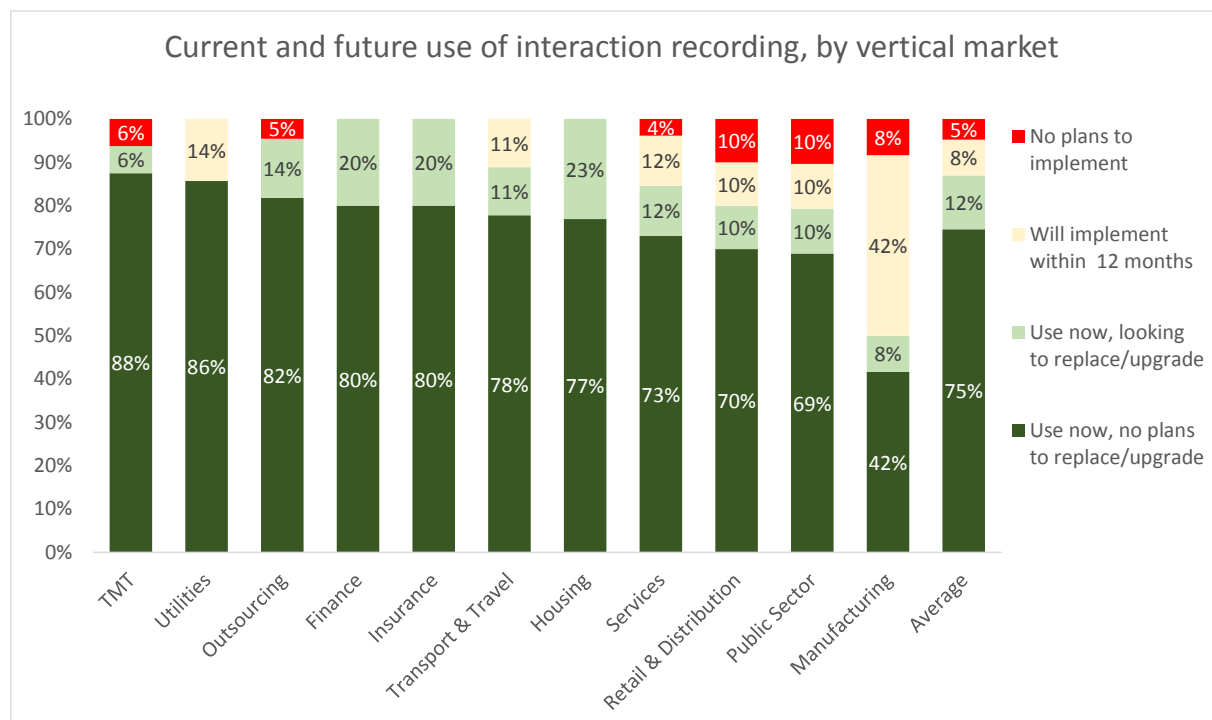
The majority of respondents in all sectors surveyed use interaction recording today (except for manufacturing which still had a penetration rate of 50%), a solid background upon which new applications based on voice and screen recordings can thrive.

28

The use of interaction recording is influenced by the size of the contact centre operation although the figure of 78% penetration in small operations shows that vendors have been able to offer solutions successfully at various price points. With businesses of all sizes being legislated into proving compliance, the reduced cost of storing data and the overall drive to improve quality, interaction recording has become a mainstay of contact centre technology solutions.

Figure 3: Current and future use of interaction recording, by contact centre size

Current and future use of interaction recording, by contact centre size
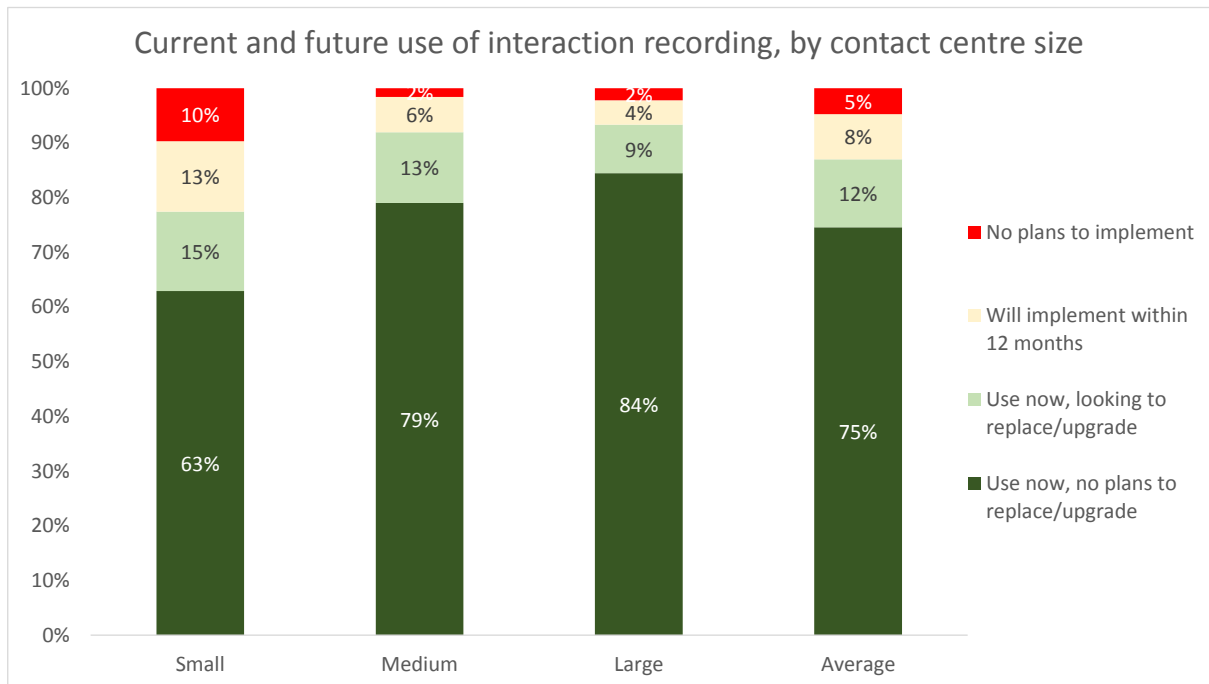
Recording solutions have moved on from the days of simple bulk recording, and the phrase 'call recording' is no longer even an accurate description of the solution. 29% of respondents from large contact centres use screen recording as well as call recording, with an industry-wide figure of 20% usage. It would certainly be more realistic to talk of 'interaction recording', which captures and synchronizes what is happening on the agent's screen with activity in the audio channel, and allows recording of after-call work, email and web chat, and can be used to identify areas of workflow improvement.

With the rise in non-voice work such as email and web chat as well as the need to prove compliance, screen recording will continue to grow strongly – for example, the penetration rate of screen recording into large US operations is 58%.

Figure 4: Use of screen recording, by contact centre size
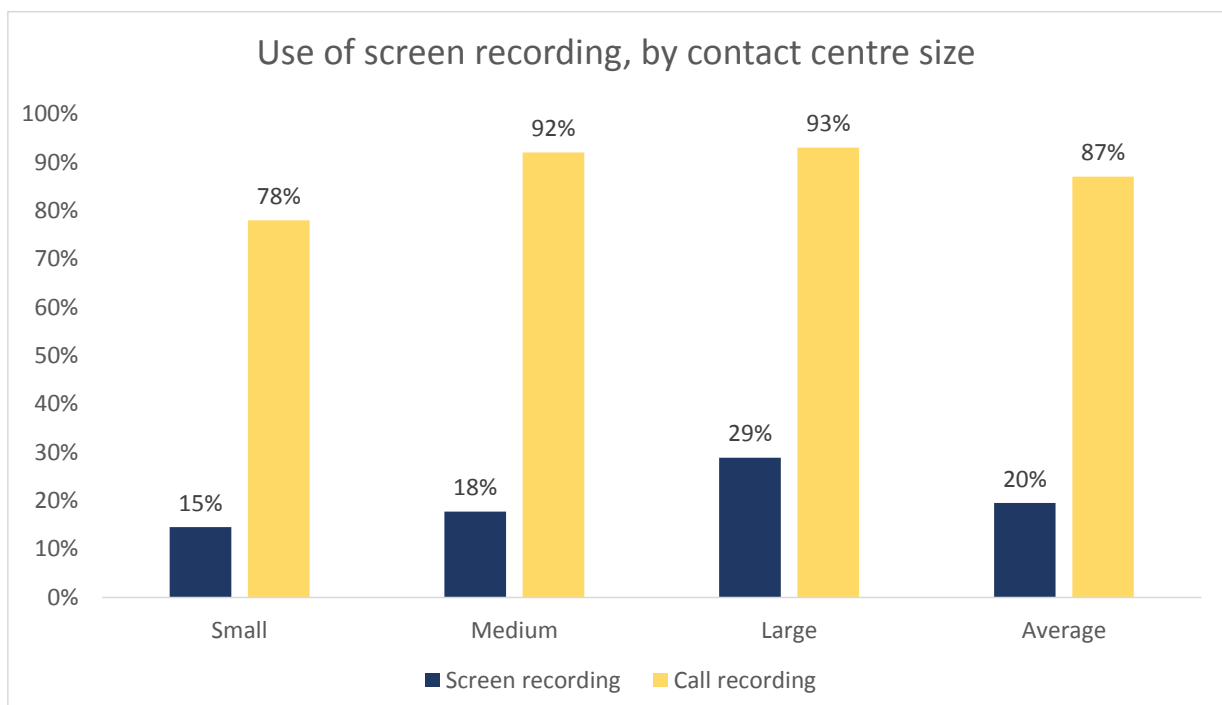
The new generation of interaction recording solutions brings the whole contact centre into play, potentially gaining at several levels of the business through using the solution in different ways.

The traditional user of interaction recording solutions has been the contact centre supervisor or team leader. The **supervisor** deals heavily with quality monitoring at the agent and team level, using the recording facility along with data about the call (e.g. deal size) to provide examples of best practice to other team members. This means the supervisor does not have to listen in live to the call, but can choose which ones to listen to, and when. This considerably reduces cost.

The supervisor may also be responsible for customer dispute resolution, and can find out exactly what has been said by customer and agent in order to deal with the matter accurately. In industries where recording may be a legal requirement – an increasing trend - businesses may have **compliance officers** to deal with disputes. Even in areas which do not require bulk recording, many companies look upon this solution as a tool to protect against an increasingly litigious world.

Call recordings can also be marked with tags based on onscreen activity, which can be placed by the application screens in use, or even through specific data entries made in certain fields. This allows supervisors to review specific call types, and compliance officers can check compliance in cases where sensitive payment screens were accessed.

With some of the more sophisticated interaction recording solutions available, the supervisor can move into a more analytical role, understanding not only what has happened, but the reasons for it as well. Taking a top-level view of team performance, a supervisor may see that certain types of call have been dealt with very quickly by a specific agent. Standard management information systems may show this as a positive situation, but using interaction recording capabilities may illustrate that this agent cannot help the customers, and is simply passing the calls through to colleagues. Now the supervisor has a chance to improve the situation, rather than missing the problem in the first place which may happen without this interaction analysis.

Agents can be given the chance to add to the value which interaction recording can provide. By using agent-initiated tagging of calls, your front-line team can add to the store of useful information which the company as a whole acts upon. For example, if customers talk about the competition and what they are offering specifically, these agent-tagged calls can be reviewed for possible action by a business's commercial team. This has the added benefit of making agents feel a key part of the overall business.

A more strategic use of interaction recording may occur at the **management or executive** level. When all interactions are recorded and analysed, a complete performance management program may be put in place. Agent performance can be viewed by supervisors, team performances can be analysed by the operational manager, and contact centre performance can be evaluated by executives. Analysis of interactions is also vital as part of a wider process optimisation strategy, to identify good and bad business practices and process bottle-necks.

Using interaction recording, the performance of the contact centre as a whole can be viewed in terms of quality, not just quantity. Key performance indicators can be set and reviewed (such as average revenue per call), which are directly relevant to the needs of a business as a whole. Contrast this with the traditional efficiency measures of a contact centre's success: average speed to answer, average call duration and occupancy rate. Measurement and improvement in key performance indicators, due to interaction recording analysis, will help to **prove** the contact centre capable of making a real impact on a company's profit.

Of those contact centres which use interaction recording, the majority use it for both quality assurance and training purposes, so that the supervisor and the agent can both learn from it. Many of those using interaction recording solutions are trying to get their senior management involved in what goes on within the contact centre. Compliance has also been a major reason to implement this solution.

31

Interaction recording may be used in three modes:

- 100% recording: often used for compliance, risk and dispute management purposes in businesses that require continuous call logging, this records the entirety of every call, with associated on-screen activity if screen recording is used

- Random / Scheduled Recording: priority-based recording schedules can be defined based on business rules, using multiple criteria on each schedule, such as number called / calling (CTI-driven criteria)

- On-Demand Recording: contact centres may have situations where they do not need to record an entire interaction. On-demand recording can be customized to support agent-initiated recording through a desktop interface, or automated through recording triggers sent from third-party software.

The need to prove compliance with industry regulations is not solely restricted to financial services companies, with outsourcers, insurers and medical organisations particularly aware of their regulatory requirements, with 100% call recording a key element in proving compliance and dispute resolution. Organisations that take payment card data have to comply with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) v2.0. It is highly recommended that when implementing a recording solution, organisations chose one that offers automatic audio and video "blackouts" that will prevent the recording of sensitive cardholder data, in accordance with the PCI DSS.

There is more information about the role of call recording in PCI compliance within the "PCI Compliance" chapter of this report.

When considering the effectiveness of interaction recording solutions for specific tasks, survey respondents are very positive about the effectiveness of interaction recording for quality monitoring and agent training, including the demonstration of best practice to other agents. Recording is also seen by most as a very effective tool in proving compliance (which can be further improved when linked with automated speech analytics that checks specific phrases or sentences have been used).

Figure 5: Effectiveness of call recording for specific tasks

Effectiveness of call recording for specific tasks

Task	Very effective	Effective	Neutral	Ineffective	Very ineffective
Learning about the competition	5%	8%	27%	44%	16%
Gathering feedback about your products or marketing	11%	27%	29%	27%	6%
Understanding why customers call	21%	37%	24%	12%	5%
Customer satisfaction / sentiment measurement	24%	32%	27%	13%	4%
Making sure of compliance with regulations	33%	53%	9%	5%	
Targeting agent training needs	38%	40%	14%	5%	3%
Quality management	44%	46%	6%	3%	1%

However, there is a little less enthusiasm for call recording's effectiveness at getting feedback from customers – although the information is there, it can be a difficult manual task to pick the right calls to demonstrate customer sentiment - and there is a strong link between those who find interaction recording very effective for this purpose and those who are using speech analytics, which the next chapter investigates in more depth.

Interaction recording by itself does not seem able to provide users with insight into their customers, nor is it of much use in getting feedback about our own products or marketing. It is possible in theory to brief agents to record a conversation in which a caller mentions a competitor's name, but in practice the moment will have already passed, and it might be seen as disrupting the flow of the conversation and breaking the agent's concentration in any case. Interaction analytics can hunt for specific words and phrases automatically, and should be a far more effective method of gaining competitive information.

INTERACTION ANALYTICS

Most contact centre solutions have a specific, easily-communicated reason for purchase, usually around cost savings. The most popular and widespread solutions, such as IVR, workforce management, CTI and outbound dialling, have all had a clear and quantifiable route to cost savings and improved efficiency.

Customer contact analytics has a different appeal to contact centres, and can be used in many different ways to address various business issues. This is an advantage - it is hugely flexible - but it can also make its message to the market more complicated, and to the cynical, it can seem as though analytics is claiming to solve every problem that a contact centre could possibly have.

While many businesses initially implement customer contact analytics to solve a specific problem, successful usage of analytics solutions often encourage a more strategic approach to the technology later on. While there are various ways to segment the uses of customer contact analytics, it may therefore be useful to divide them into one of two groups: those that are around solving a specific known problem, and those which are of a more strategic, long-term nature, although there is some crossover between the two groups.

Figure 6: Uses of customer contact analytics

Problem-solving/issue resolution	Strategic/long-term
Compliance with regulations	Gathering competitive intelligence
Verbal contracts/repudiation	Feedback campaign effectiveness and pricing information
Redaction of card information for PCI purposes	Understanding the customer journey
Adherence to script	Understanding why customers are calling
Identifying agent training requirements	Improving contact centre performance metrics
Reducing the cost of QA	Optimising multichannel/inter-department communication
Identifying and handling problem calls	Deepening the power and functionality of the workforce optimisation suite
Estimating customer satisfaction and first call resolution rates	Identification and dissemination of best practice
Predictive routing	Identification and handling of dissatisfied customers, and those that high risk of churn
Real-time monitoring and on-call feedback	Maximising profitability by managing customer incentives
One-off discovery/analysis via managed services option	'Tell-me-why'/root cause analysis

Customer Interaction Analytics

While 70% of all customer contact is still taking place over the phone an increasing percentage now happens via email, web and social media. Nexidia Interaction Analytics extracts the invaluable front-line intelligence from these multiple data sources to help you transform your business and make the changes your customers really want.

Applying Nexidia's award-winning speech and customer interaction technology enables you to increase customer satisfaction, improve agent performance, ensure compliance and drive business growth. Nexidia's managed analytic service team has the proven expertise to ensure you're able to maximise the potential of your interaction analytics solution and solve your key business challenges.

To find out more about

Nexidia Interaction Analytics

Contact Jonathan Wax, VP EMEA on:
020 8973 2442 or jwax@nexidia.com
www.nexidia.com

nexidia (•!)

The elements of analytics

There are various elements to analytics solutions, including:

- Speech engine: a software program that recognizes speech and converts it into data (usually either phonemes - the sounds that go to make up words - or as a text transcription, although there are solutions which directly recognize entire spoken phrases)
- Indexing layer: a software layer that improves and indexes the output from the speech engine (when the speech engine is phonetic or speech-to-text) in order to make it searchable
- Query and search user interface: the desktop application where users interact with the speech analytics software, defining their requirements and carrying out searches on the indexed data
- Reporting applications: the presentation layer of speech analytics, often in graphical format
- Business applications: provided by vendors, these pre-defined modules help improve agent coaching and/or quality monitoring with speech analytics data, or look at specific issues such as adherence to script, debt collections etc., and provide suggestions on what to look for.

Against a ubiquity of call recording, the penetration rates of interaction analytics are much lower, with 18% of this year's respondents using it today (up from 16% last year). Vertical market figures have been provided but readers should not rely on these as the research base is relatively low for this question.

Figure 7: Current and future use of interaction analytics, by vertical market

Current and future use of interaction analytics, by vertical market
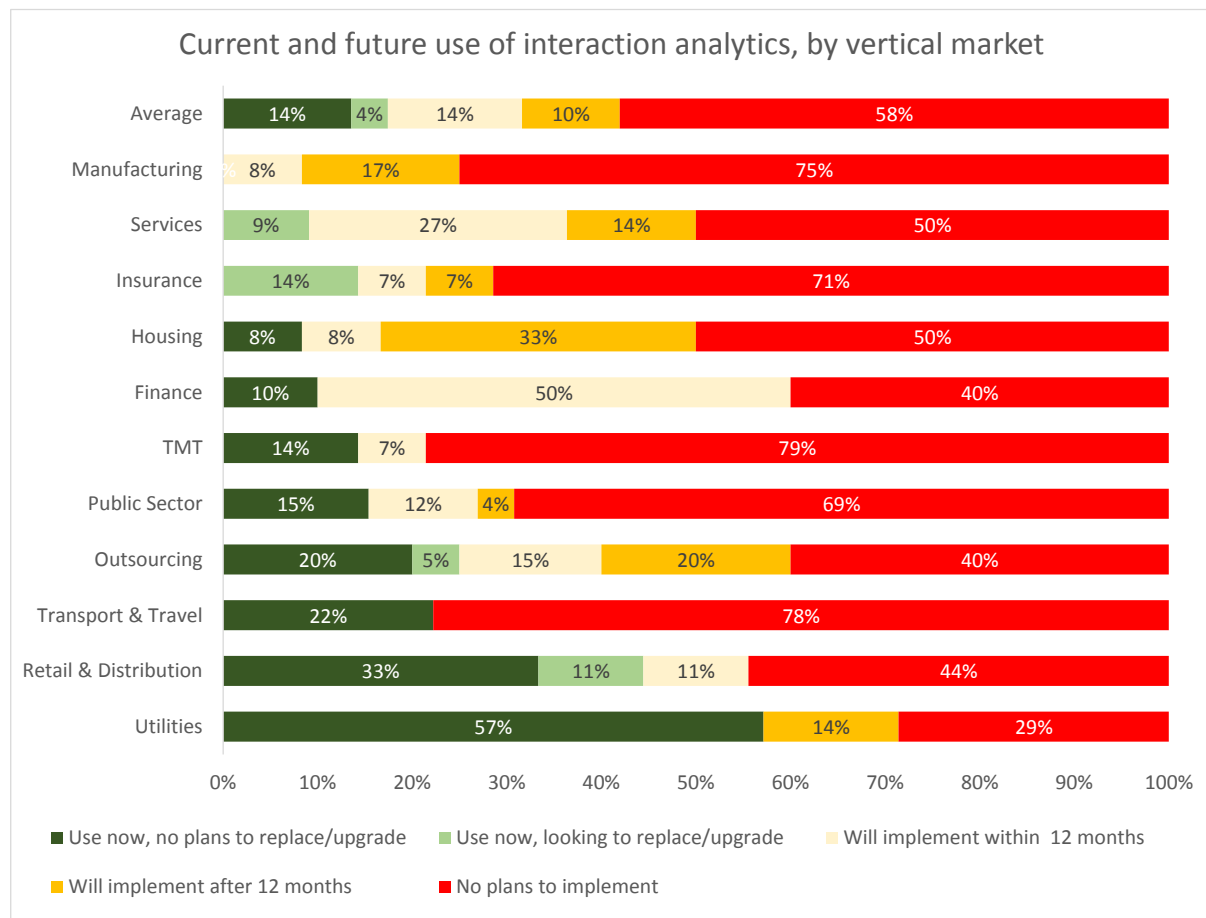
The correlation between size and penetration rate is very noticeable for interaction analytics, which may require significant investments. Having huge volumes of recorded calls and a large customer base means that business patterns can be identified more accurately, and any improvements reap correspondingly higher rewards.

38% of respondents from large contact centres are already using interaction analytics, with those in the small and mid-sized sectors demonstrating enthusiasm in the near future, as the mid-market becomes increasingly well catered for by vendors, with cloud-based options being available.

Figure 8: Current and future use of interaction analytics, by contact centre size

Current and future use of interaction analytics, by contact centre size

Size	Use now, no plans to replace/upgrade	Use now, looking to replace/upgrade	Will implement within 12 months	Will implement after 12 months	No plans to implement
Average	14%	4%	14%	10%	58%
Large	28%	10%	20%	8%	35%
Medium	12%	4%	14%	14%	56%
Small	5%		10%	9%	76%
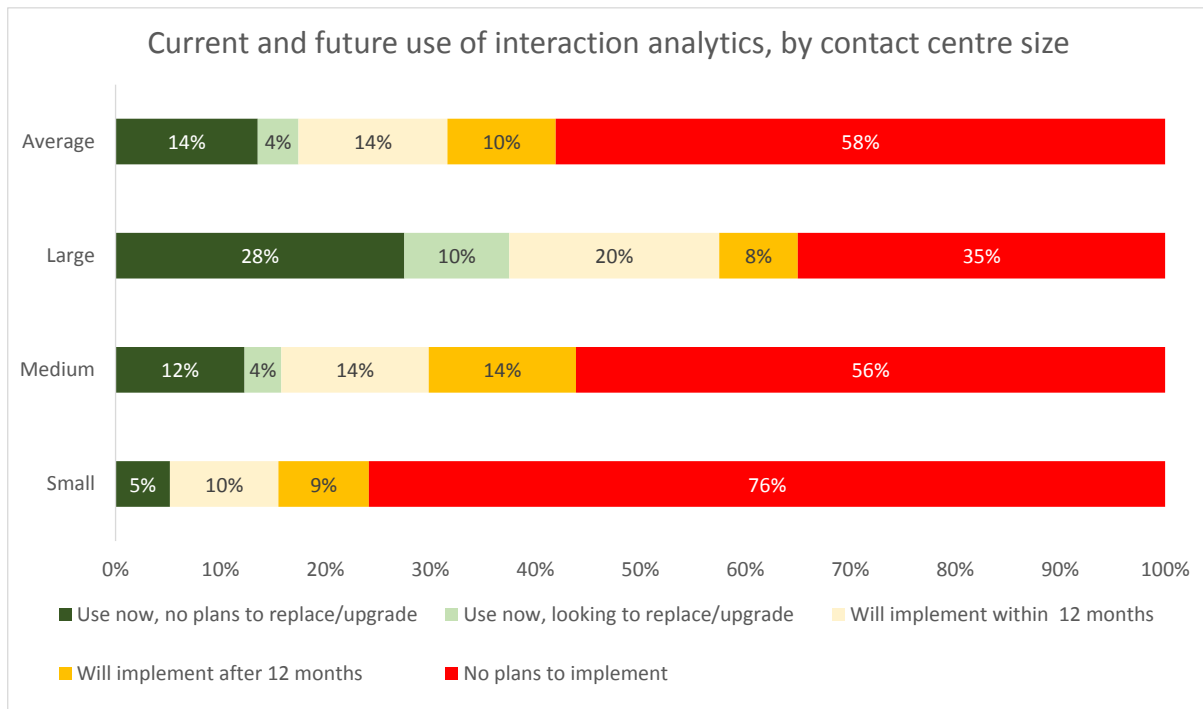
COMPLIANCE

Many businesses, especially those in finance, insurance, public sector and debt collection, have become encumbered with regulations which they must follow strictly, with potentially expensive penalties for failure, including heavy fines and criminal prosecution. Contact centres have tried to reduce their risk through scripting, call monitoring and call recording, but these do not offer any guarantees or proof of compliance. Speech analytics means that 100% of calls can be verified as compliant - and be proven to be so - preventing disputes or escalation of enquiries by monitoring the exact language used within each call.

This is true for both inbound and outbound operations: purchasing insurance, for example, may require a long script to be read by the agent and agreed to by the customer; whereas outbound debt collection agencies may have to identify themselves and the purpose of the call clearly or else be found to be in breach of regulations. In such cases, using analytics to check and be able to prove that 100% of calls are compliant is a popular option.

Although many debt collection firms have detailed scripts for their agents - often driven by the need to comply with regulations - the results, such as the promise-to-pay ratio - can differ widely by agent. Speech analytics provides two benefits for debt collectors: the ability to prove compliance, and through the analysis of successful and unsuccessful calls, the chance to understand the type of agent language and behaviour that yields the best results, and share these with underperforming agents.

Return on investment comes from the avoidance of litigation and fines, and the use of speech analytics for compliance is very prevalent, especially in North America.

Figure 9: Effectiveness of analytics for compliance

Effectiveness of analytics for ensuring compliance with regulations

- Ineffective 11%
- Very effective 28%
- Effective 61%
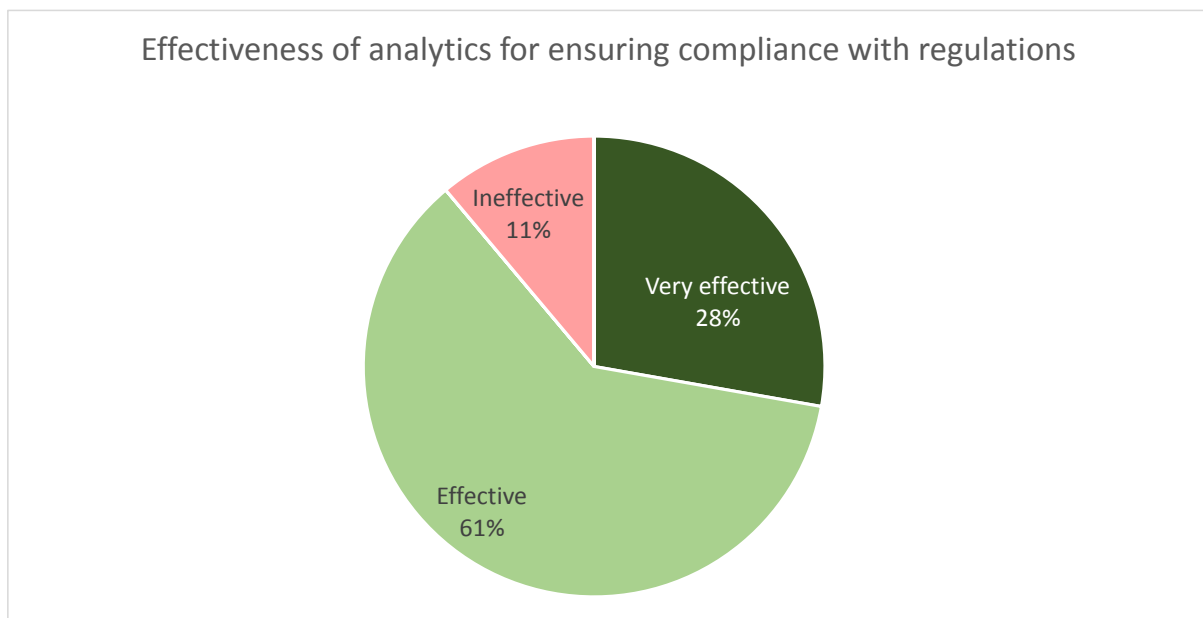
AGENT EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Improve the quality monitoring program

Interaction analytics tries to takes the guesswork out of improving customer experience, agent performance and customer insight. By moving from anecdote-based decisions, from qualitative to quantitative information, some order is put on the millions of interactions that many large contact centres have in their recording systems, improving the reliability of the intelligence provided to decision-makers. The need to listen to calls is still there, but those listened to are far more likely to be the right ones, whether for agent evaluation or business insight.

Customers using customer contact analytics can carry out an evaluation of chosen calls - for example, unhappy customers - the results of which can be then be fed back into the existing quality assurance process. This can take the same existing path, without upheaval or any need for altering the QA/QM process, only improving the quality and accuracy of the data used by the existing solution.

The limitation of a recording-only quality management approach is that it lacks scale, objectivity and relies on the consistency of multiple supervisors and analysts: the only reason that a business would not want to monitor the quality of every single interaction in and out of the contact centre is because it is far too difficult to get reliable, timely and accurate information via human means alone.

Being able to monitor 100% of calls with 100% of agents means that it is possible to make sure that agents comply with all business rules as well as regulations. Linking this information with metadata such as call outcomes, sales success rates and other business metrics means that the most successful behaviours and characteristics can be identified and shared across agent groups.

Some solution providers report that automating the QA/QM process has enabled large contact centres to decrease headcount of these teams by as much as 75%, making very significant cost savings.

Figure 10: Effectiveness of analytics for quality monitoring
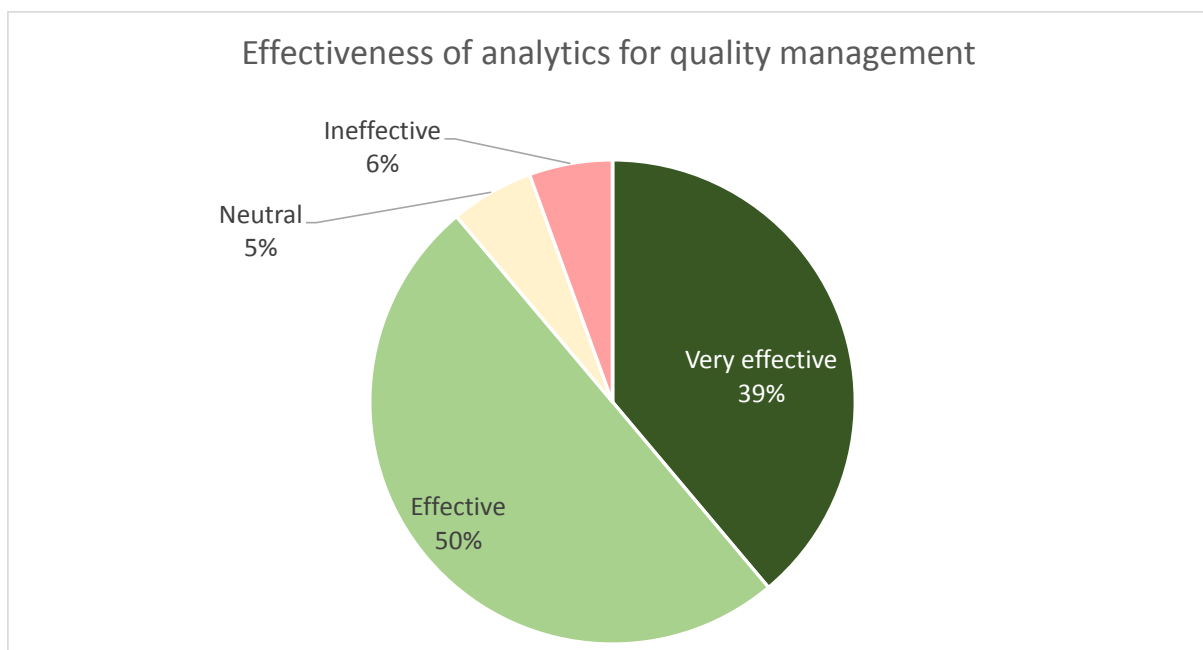
nexidia (·!·) *We have conducted research into this area, and most users understand that the key limitations of today's QM approaches are a lack of scale, lack of consistency and lack of linkage to corporate goals; critically good quality scores do not link to a positive customer experience. Companies are now looking to implement performance management that is based on a new definition of quality based on agent behaviours and customer outcomes, not on scores and tick sheets. This metrics-based approach to performance management is based on the evaluation of all calls, agents are given timely coaching specific to their needs and as the framework is based on the needs of the customer and the company, the improved outcomes are beneficial to agents, the company and their customers.*

Identify agent training requirements

Apart from 100% monitoring of calls, speech analytics is used to flag cases of talk-over, as well as silence detection. The former can be a source of irritation to the customer and long silences can indicate lack of agent knowledge, although long system navigation times or delays in system response times can also cause this. The analysis of these types of call will identify which of these issues is really the problem.

Additionally, speech analytics will also make the training and coaching received by new agents in particular far more effective and targeted. This is especially important for this class of agent, as many operations report that half of their overall staff turnover occurs in the first 90 days of the job, when agents are obviously less-skilled or confident about their role or the organization. Speech analytics can identify the types of behaviour - good and bad - that lead to successful call resolution or otherwise, and these can be presented in a targeted way to the new agent to fast-track them to a level of competency that should reduce attrition based on a feeling that they simply can't do the work to a high-enough quality. There is also increased interest in agent self-assessment of calls, where they can view automated quality scoring results, and request relevant training.

Figure 11: Effectiveness of analytics for identifying agent training needs

Effectiveness of analytics for targeting agent training needs

- Very ineffective 5%
- Ineffective 5%
- Neutral 5%
- Very effective 37%
- Effective 48%
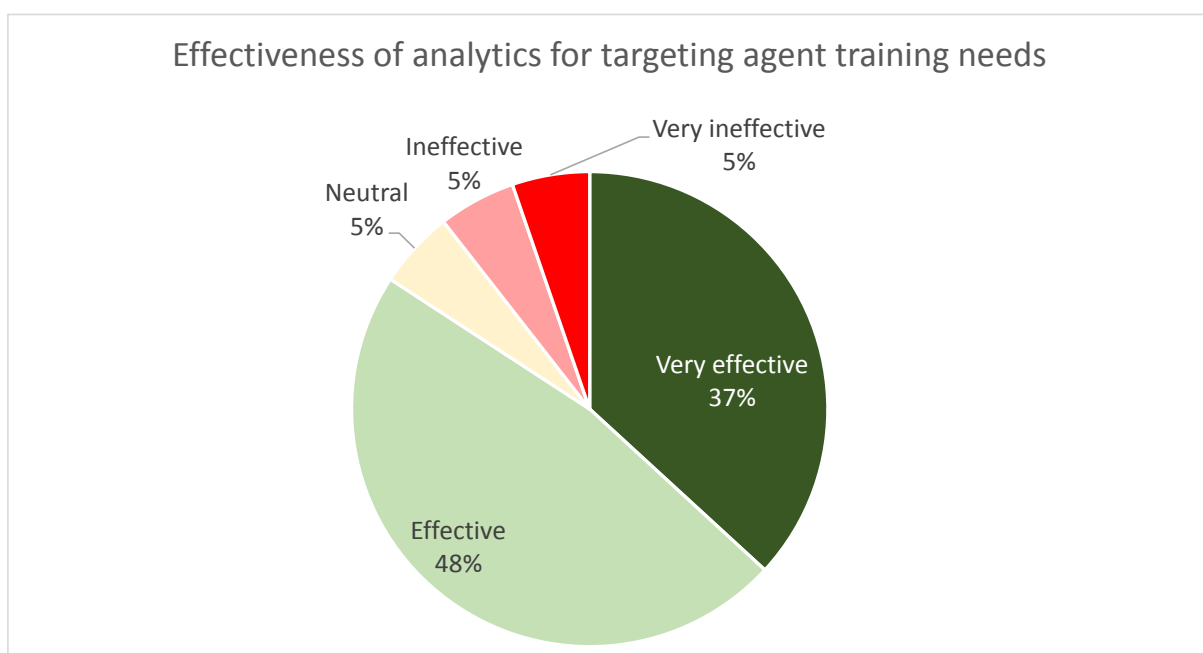
On first glance, interaction analytics can be seen as providing similar information to management information and reporting systems - taking masses of data and making sense of what they mean to the contact centre's performance and perhaps even inside the wider business. However, the vital thing to understand about interaction analytics is that it gives contact centres the answer to 'Why', not just 'What'. Why are average handle times so different across agents? Why are customers of this product upset? Why are people calling the contact centre? With high quality data inputs, mixing audio information with data such as call outcomes and revenues, analytics also identifies patterns which the business had no idea even existed, suggesting best practice and identifying areas for improvement at agent, contact centre and process levels.

Why are customers calling?

No other contact centre solution apart from customer contact analytics can provide a solid understanding of **why** customers are calling. Categorising types of calls, and then analysing them for the occurrence of similar types of words and phrases can give an insight into the reasons for customers' calls. For example, a category such as 'sales' might be analysed for patterns, and it is discovered that the words 'delivery' and 'website' are mentioned in a disproportionate number of them. Listening to some of these conversations, it may be found that the website does not highlight delivery times effectively enough, leading to unnecessary calls to the contact centre, rather than the customer purchasing on the website. The automatic categorisation of calls, based on the types of words and phrases that typically get used within these types of calls, is a starting point. Analytics solutions can then add non-audio data, such as desktop activity or account status, and the tracking of word usage compared with its historical use (e.g. a 300% rise in the use of the phrase "can't log-on" after a software upgrade) can quickly indicate and identify issues that can be handed to the relevant department much more quickly than typical inter-department channels could usually manage.

Figure 12: Effectiveness of analytics for understanding why customers call

Effectiveness of analytics for understanding why customers call

- Ineffective 5%
- Neutral 21%
- Very effective 37%
- Effective 37%
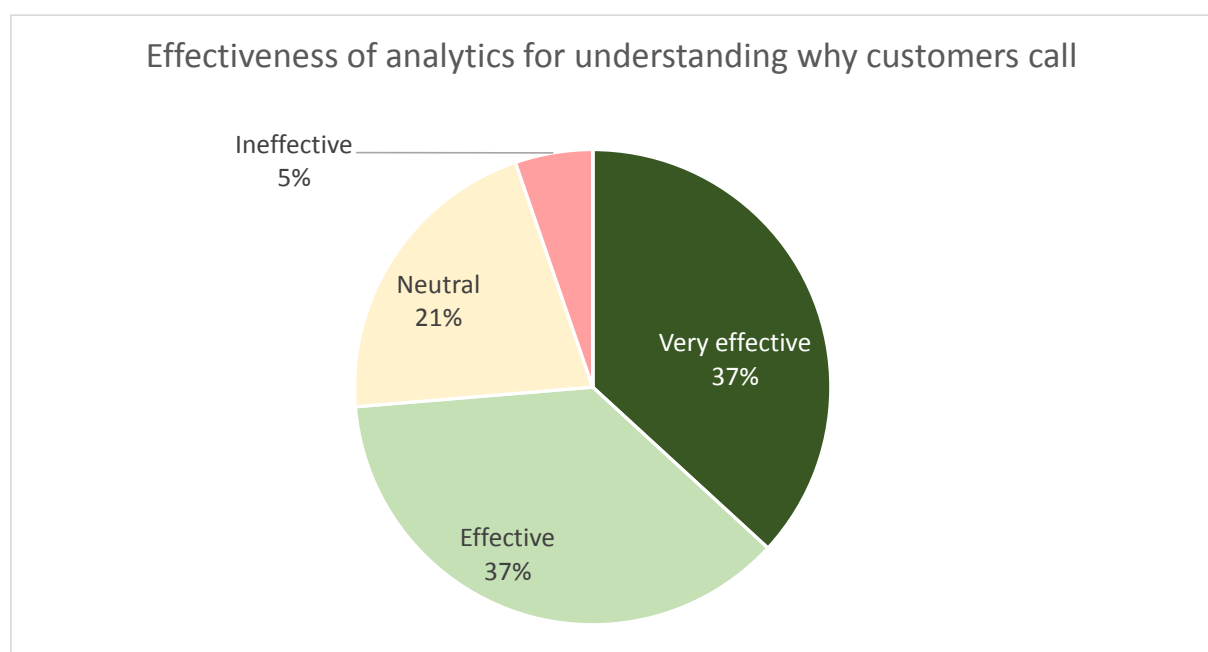
Call transfers

Rather than making an agent use a call disposition code when they pass a call to another agent (which they may forget to do, or code inaccurately), interaction analytics can identify the reasons for passing calls to other agents and putting customers on hold (whether lack of training, broken processes or lack of access to the right systems).

First-contact resolution

A major metric for contact centre and customer experience success, first-call resolution can be increased by identifying repeat callers and eliminating the root cause of repeat calls.

An example of this was an organisation where they had identified repeat issues as being a problem. Analysing the calls categorized as such, it was found that agents were saying "we'll call you back within 3 hours". As the callers were very keen to get the issue resolved, they were prone to overestimate the time passing, so analysis found that many called back before the three hours were up. By changing the script to e.g. "It's now 11.45am, we'll call you back by 2.45pm", customer expectations were set and call-backs dropped immediately. A few weeks later, call-backs went back up, and it was found that many agents had gone back to the 'old ways', and had forgotten to give the exact time.

Average handle time

Average call duration / average handle time has traditionally been one of the main measures of a contact centre's 'success', at least when judged by those outside the operation whose focus has often been on cost reduction. In recent years, an increasing focus on the customer experience and first-call resolution has meant that AHT is viewed as less important than previously. However, almost every contact centre still tracks this as a metric, as it is closely linked with cost and performance.

Long call durations may be linked with poor agent abilities, lack of knowledge, navigation between systems or very complicated calls, and of course, impact on cost, queue times and the customer experience. Short AHTs can be as bad, if not worse, as they can indicate lack of agent capabilities (so agents pass the call to a colleague, or even deliberately lose the connection), that the contact centre is handling too many simple calls that might be better handled by self-service or that there is a quick and easily-resolved common issue, the solution to which could be propagated in the IVR announcement, on the website or via email/SMS. The problem for businesses is that they often don't know with any level of confidence why call durations differ.

Customer contact analytics allows businesses to categorise each type of call, and through root-cause analysis, determine what a reasonable length for each type of call is, and investigate the outlying anomalies, either on an agent level, or more widely, by comparing the amount of time taken on each category of call now compared to the past. The identification of calls resolved successfully in a reasonable amount of time will also provide the training department with examples of best practice.

It is also the case that solving issues is much easier when the situation is understood and evidence presented, especially if this issue is associated with an area outside the contact centre's control, and interdepartmental politics have to be considered. Agents may give some indication if they see something happening in recent calls, but that does not provide enough information to act upon. Businesses will find it difficult to justify changing a whole campaign because an agent said that he had two customers struggling to understand it. Customer contact analytics helps to find out whether these issues take place across the entire call volume, and allows businesses to quantify and prioritise issues.

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS

Everyone connected with the contact centre industry has always known that there is huge insight and knowledge held within the operation and its agents, but which has never before had the ability to be quantified or acted upon by the wider business.

Customer contact analytics offers the ambitious business the greatest potential for improvements in business processes, but there is a great danger of underachievement with so many departments and divisions potentially involved.

In the course of researching this report, we have found that the marketing and website departments are the non-contact centre areas most likely to be benefiting currently from insights about customers' views, but there are also examples of how delivery, provisioning, billing and even warehousing departments have learned from the analysis of customers' experiences in the contact centre. For example, tracking customer comments and outcomes after the advent of a marketing campaign can mean the difference between success and failure. Messages that are incorrectly understood can be identified and altered quickly before the contact centre becomes swamped with calls about the issue.

The quality of insight and its actionability is totally dependent on a swift reporting process, simple yet rich intelligence, the ownership of process improvement at senior level and before/after comparisons to prove success. Cross-department rivalries or poor communication are a real risk to this.

Surprisingly, considering the rapid rise in multichannel customer contact over the past few years, few businesses are as of yet taking text analytics - around email, web chat and social media - is seriously as audio. In theory, multichannel analytics can analyse any source of text using the same underlying methods and tools, so that audio transcription and email transcription can both be mined to give business insight.

Solution providers report that a few businesses include web chat in their analysis, but as dedicated teams in large operations will tend to handle this, and volumes are relatively very small, this is far less importance than analysing audio. Some solution providers point out that often a business will not know with whom they are conversing in a web chat, so it is much more difficult to pull in other relevant data that would provide detailed analytics and insight.

However, vendors report that some clients are asking how they can extract more information from customer interactions, not just for the contact centre's use, but for business data analysts and financial analysts as well. Another future trend that is broadly agreed upon is that customer contact analytics will be merged into the wider 'Big Data' arena, with the insights being beneficial for the commercial, financial and operational sides of the business, as well as the customer contact division.

nexidia (·) *The question "Why do Customers call?" is critical to the ability to manage and improve contact centre operational performance and the existence of variance in how these calls are handled causes cost to the company and increased customer effort. Accurate call categorisation shows the variance that occurs within a single call type; this variance can be quantified at the individual level, team level, site level and even at the outsource partner level. Analytics provides the information that allows a company to reduce the variance that exists and deliver a predictable, cost efficient service at a lower customer effort, and the end result is a win-win for the company and its customers.*

44

nexidia

Cabot Credit Management

A Nexidia Best Practice Interview

Steve Mound
COO, Cabot Credit Management

Claudia Thorpe
Call Centre Industry Commentator

About Cabot Credit Management

Cabot Credit Management is a market leading acquirer and manager of consumer debt. Divided into four specialist businesses, Cabot Financial, Cabot Financial Ireland, Apex Credit Management and Apex Discovery Solutions it covers debt purchase, contingency collections and customer tracing.

The group has:

- over £7.5bn face value of purchased assets
- over £1bn face value of managed assets
- cash collections of circa £20m per month
- over 700 employees across multiple sites in the UK and Ireland

---

When debt solutions company Cabot Credit Management wanted to gain greater insight into its daily interactions with customers, speech analytics seemed an attractive option. But such a significant investment obviously needs careful consideration and a compelling business case. Claudia Thorpe talks to Cabot's operations director Steve Mound about why he chose Nexidia's interaction analytics and the business benefits that have been realised as a result.

What first attracted you to analytics and why did you think it was an important investment?

Over 13 years working in contact centres, I observed that I only ever had a relatively small insight into what was happening on our calls on a daily basis. Although the contact centre industry has seen an evolution through call recording and quality assessment teams over time, this insight is still fairly limited. For example, Cabot used to have a quality assessment team made up of 13FTE who were listening to 6,000 calls a month – but this represented just one or two per cent of our total calls.

So my perception was that through speech analytics we would be able to gain a greater level of whole business insight – and I wouldn't have to rely on assumptions I'd made based on small samples of activity.

Also the nature of Cabot's work inevitably involves high levels of stress and complex negotiations, so I also wanted to gain a better insight into how our customer-facing agents were handling those calls. I wanted to be able to equip them with better skills and train them more effectively to drive an improved compliance and customer service standard.

What were the key events and lessons you learned when getting colleagues interested in analytics?

Firstly, you have to be passionate about the solution – you must have conviction. There's no

point in talking about what this technology might do, you've got to be able to demonstrate what it is actually going to do.

Secondly, it's vital to undertake a proof of concept process. Working with Nexidia, we used essentially a trial process, which allowed members of the board to experience real insight into the interactions between staff and customers.

It's also important to make the business case scientific, rather than based on generalisations about compliance or knowing more about the customer journey. We knew that the best way to show a return on the investment was to demonstrate that we had better trained people who were able to deliver a better level of return. To do that, we took two or three teams within our 20 or 30 team contact centre and trained them using Nexidia, as well as introducing coaching using the analytics tool. We monitored the performance of those teams and could see that over a 3-6 month period there was a 30% uplift in some of their key performance metrics.

One final point is around the culture of the business. I was confident that we had a culture of trust where our people would accept that Nexidia was there to help them rather than to catch them out, but there is a danger that your culture could become one of control. It's important to promote it as a learning and development opportunity and a training tool rather than a Big Brother management tool.

Once you purchased interaction analytics, what lessons did you learn over the first six months/year about how to make the initiative a success?

On a practical level, my advice would be to get as much data surrounding the call as possible (e.g. caller ID and history, time of day, status of account, etc). This can allow you to identify types of calls at a very granular level and gives you the chance to drill down to individual business issues or challenges.

Another thing I've learnt is to beef up your analytical resource – having people who can understand the analytics, build sessions, and identify business problems is important. Make sure you train a whole team so you have resilience against people leaving the business.

It's also important to see implementation as a journey and a continual learning exercise. For example, we discovered through using Nexidia that agents needed be trained to ask customers to pay a debt balance in full, but also that it was important to ask in the right way.

What have been the most important business benefits to date?

There have been a number of benefits, but the following are those that have had the biggest impact:

More meaningful coaching. Previously, a team leader managing a team of ten people would spend more than 50% of their time away from their teams trying to find meaningful calls and then scoring them – with little time spent actually feeding back to the individuals. Nexidia changed that because team leaders are now

able to sit down with an individual on a side-by-side coaching session and use Nexidia to easily identify development needs and allow for a much more interactive and more productive session.

Better business results. Our key business metric is cash, and we convert that to a cash-per-hour metric for each agent. Across a 6-month period after implementing Nexidia, we saw a 30% increase in cash-per-hour across the business.

Improved complaint resolution. We've been able to use Nexidia to identify verbal complaints and then talk to our people about their complaint handling process. Consequently, we have seen an increase in capture of verbal complaints – and as a result of dealing with these more effectively, I have seen noticeable reductions in written complaints.

Increased transparency for clients. We buy debt from clients who are then interested in how that debt is handled to ensure their reputation is not damaged. Or we may be working debt on behalf of clients, who are very interested in how it is handled because they still own it. With Nexidia, we can be very transparent about this – plus we are able to build specific queries to help clients with some of their business challenges.

How do you see the potential value of interaction analytics over the next 12 months?

We're far from a position where we've bottomed out all the opportunities and I want to continue to develop the analytical resource and look at specific business problems.

Also, we don't currently have an integrated multichannel platform, but we are looking at this and I'd like to develop a web chat facility. I'd then be keen to talk to Nexidia about what web chat analytics would do for us.

Seven key lessons for implementing analytics

- Conduct a proof of concept. This is a useful way of introducing the solution to the organisation and allowing the various operational stakeholders to take ownership.

- Talk about the solution as scientifically as possible – remember, whatever the benefits are will have to be converted into hard numbers for the finance director.

- Be honest with yourself about whether your culture is ready for analytics. You will only realise the benefits if it is accepted as a development tool, rather than a stick for driving performance.

- Gather enough data about individual calls to allow you to dig deep to identify potential business improvements.

- Employ enough analysts to understand the analytics, build queries and identify business issues.

- Don't assume that your work is done once you have implemented the technology. There is a lot to learn from this tool and it is a continual process of improvement.

- Treat your people as adults and make sure coaching sessions are seen as such, and not as a management session.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

There has been a great increase in customer satisfaction surveys in recent years, with the widespread uptake of Net Promoter® being a good example of companies' desire to learn what their customers actually think about them. However, research has shown that a 'satisfied' customer isn't necessarily a profitable or loyal one, and the results of customer surveys, particularly the written or telephone-based variety (the latter of which, despite its limitations and expense, is still seen as the best method), are carried out at a time when any feelings about the original interaction may have changed or dissipated, are prone to inaccuracy, delay and lack of detail.

With all of the methods of customer surveys, the questions are fixed in advance, and if the right questions aren't asked, the level of actionable insight is low. In many cases, a business might know that x% of its customers are satisfied, and y% dissatisfied, but it still has no real idea why this is, or even how it will impact upon their profitability. As an alternative to customer satisfaction surveys, customer contact analytics allows a business to gather customers' views within the interaction itself - guaranteeing immediacy and accuracy - and can be applied across 100% of calls, rather than focusing on the outlying 'very dissatisfied' or 'delighted' customers. Furthermore, through widespread and detailed analysis of what the call is about, the type of language or messages used in the call, how the customer was handled, and the eventual outcome, businesses will be able to learn how to improve their customer retention and satisfaction in real-life, by-passing the standard metric (e.g. "83% of customers are satisfied") and getting to the root causes of satisfaction or dissatisfaction and sharing the results with the rest of the operation.

Some solutions use historical analysis of call characteristics, agent behaviours and interaction outcomes to estimate customer satisfaction or Net Promoter® scores on every call, and can also predict the attrition of customers based on what they have said and what has happened within the call, allowing the business to act swiftly.

Figure 13: Effectiveness of analytics for measuring customer satisfaction or sentiment

Effectiveness of analytics for customer satisfaction / sentiment measurement

Ineffective 10%

Neutral 21%

Very effective 32%

Effective 37%

nexidia
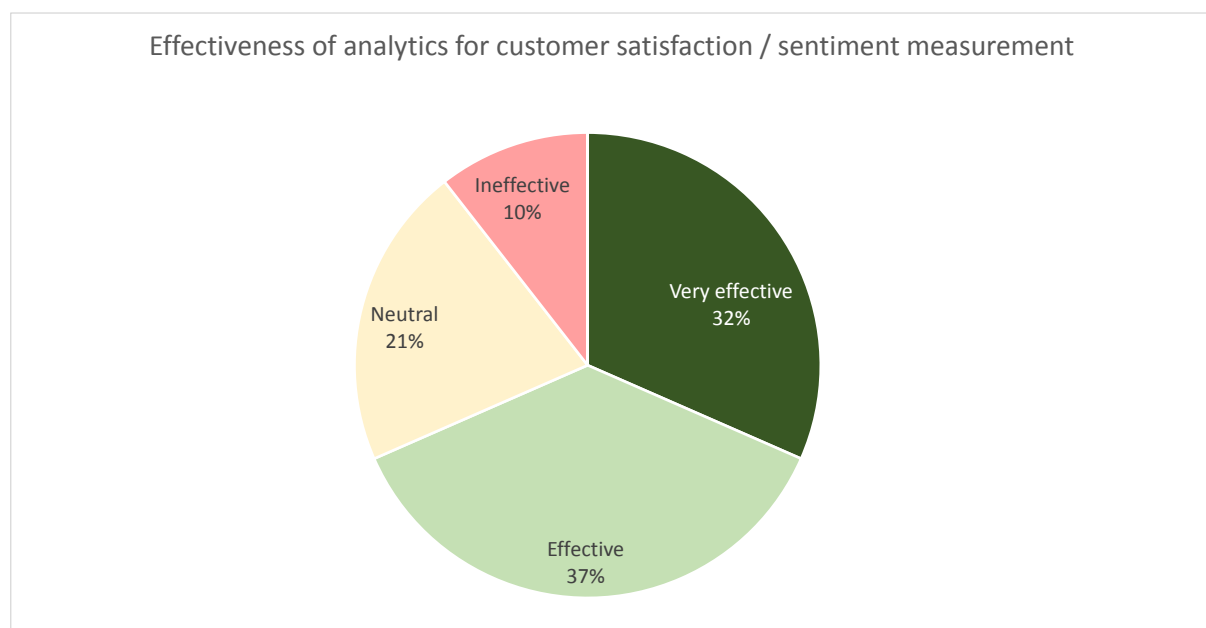
Customer Insight

As introduced above, one of the greatest advantages that interaction analytics can provide is the ability to understand **why** things are happening, rather than just **what** is going on. With some solutions, it is not even necessary to know what you are looking for: automatic categorization of calls into their constituent types is a starting point, based on the types of words and phrases that typically get used within these types of calls (e.g. "complain", "not happy", "disappointed", "speak with a manager" etc., will often relate to customer complaints). Non-audio data, such as the activity of account closure, refunds etc. can also be captured from the screen and linked with the call to provide richer data for analysis.

Regular references to competitors and their products can be captured, analysed and passed to the marketing or pricing teams to provide them with real-life, rapid and accurate information upon which to base decisions. Businesses still seem to be coming to grips with gaining insights about products or marketing from the analysis of customer interactions.

Figure 14: Effectiveness of analytics for gathering feedback about your products or marketing

Effectiveness of analytics for gathering feedback about your products or marketing

47
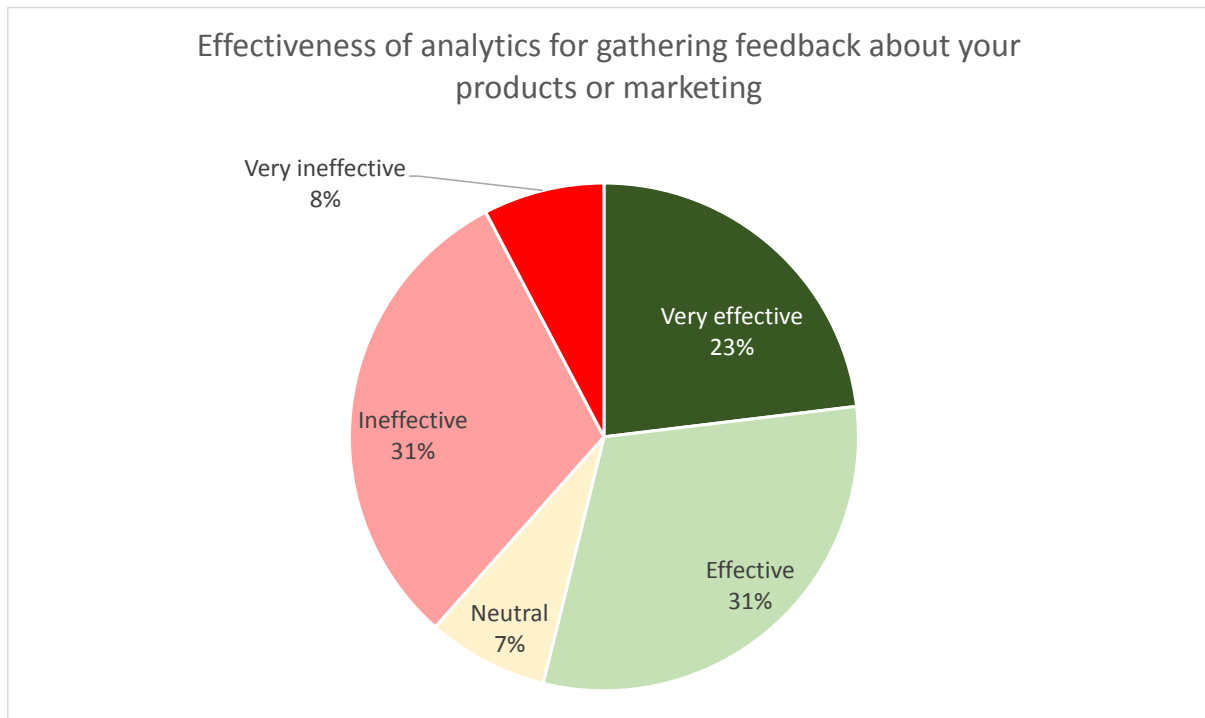
Crisis management and reaction

A solution with automated root-cause analysis capabilities - constantly looking for anomalies and new patterns - can identify spikes in unusual activity shortly after it happens, alerting specific users to the key issues so as to handle them before it runs out of control, damaging brand or customer satisfaction.

Product and pricing feedback

Interaction analytics allows businesses to seek out key words and phrases, such as competitors' names or any instances of pricing, or to gather feedback after a marketing campaign goes out. Our respondents report that this is the least successful current use of analytics, but there is no reason why analytical functionality cannot give in-depth information about the competition or the business's own performance.

Figure 15: Effectiveness of analytics for learning about the competition

Effectiveness of analytics for learning about the competition

- Very ineffective 8%
- Very effective 17%
- Effective 25%
- Neutral 8%
- Ineffective 42%
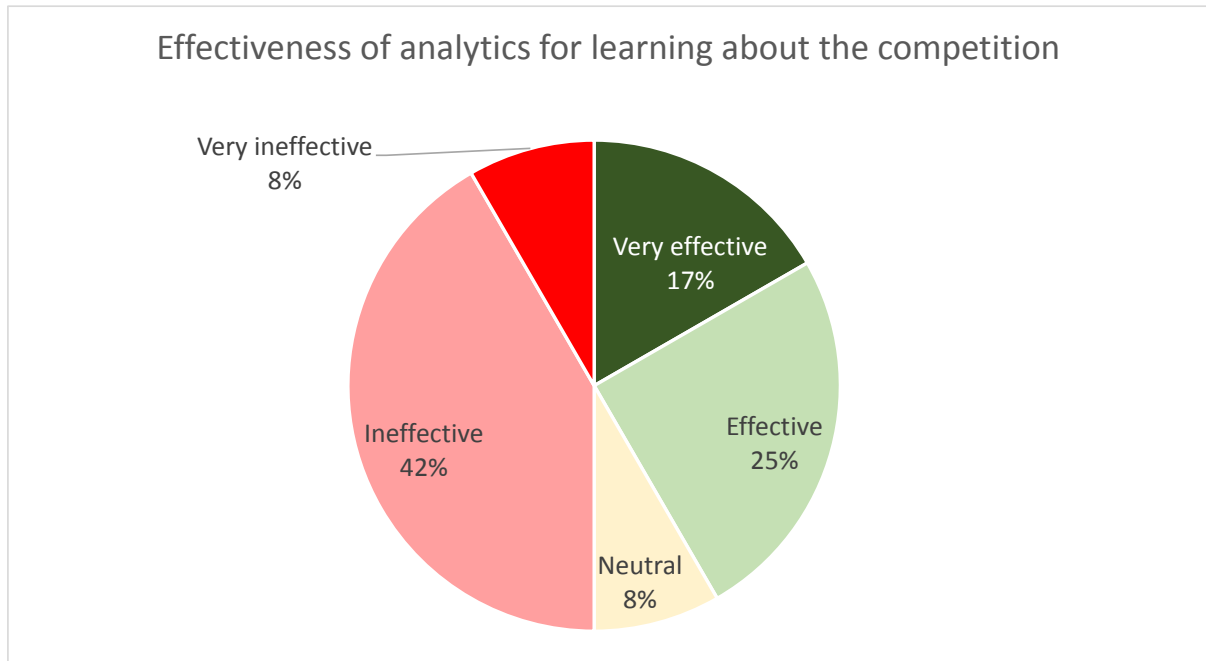
Factors that impact the customer experience - such as first-contact resolution and shorter call and queue times - have been addressed already. This section looks at the handling of complaints, and how interaction analytics can take into account the entire customer experience outside the contact centre.

Complaints handling

Complaints are a potentially rich environment for businesses to understand where they are going wrong, and which issues are in danger of turning a customer into an ex-customer. For many businesses, each complaint is dealt with on a case-by-case basis, with little in the way of categorization or structure being put in place formally, and little chance of communicating findings in an actionable way to the relevant department.

Speech analytics gives businesses a chance to quantify the reasons that customers complain, identifying the most important factors, assessing trends and spikes, and providing hard recommendations based on every call taken. 6% of UK calls and 5% of US calls received by contact centres are complaints, with respectively 80% and 77% of these being about problems elsewhere in the enterprise (rather than in the contact centre). Understanding and acting upon what is driving these complaints will clearly make a huge difference to cost and customer satisfaction.

On an individual-call basis, real-time analytics allow businesses to track words and phrases related to complaints (such as 'supervisor', 'manager', 'complain', 'unhappy' etc.), allowing escalation to a supervisor, or screen-pop to the agent to provide them with a revised script or suggestions of how to handle the call. Emotion detection and sentiment analysis may also be used to identify unhappy or wavering customers within the call, updating supervisors who can then break into the conversation or advise the agent accordingly.

The customer experience outside the contact centre

There is an increasing requirement and interest in multichannel analytics, including considering email, web chat, IVR and web browsing sessions to get the full picture of the customer's real journey in a single interaction, in order to identify and improve any channels that failed to fulfil their requirements. Improving self-service optimisation is often a quick win that can provide immediate economic benefit to businesses: a mean average of 10-25% of calls that go into an IVR system are 'zeroed-out' - rejected by the customer in favour of an operator.

Businesses using interaction analytics to review these failed self-service sessions will be able to categorise many of them in order to improve the processes at a macro-level. Common findings from the analysis of these calls is that the IVR system was poorly worded or menu choices are not intuitive or match current service choices. Other failures occur through mistakes in IVR routing, and there may also be problems with a lack of customer awareness that various activities can be carried out by self-service.

Debt collection and improving cross-selling & up-selling

Although many debt collection firms have detailed scripts for their agents - often driven by the need to comply with regulations - the results, such as the promise-to-pay ratio - can differ widely by agent. Interaction analytics provides two benefits for debt collectors: the ability to prove compliance; and through the analysis of successful and unsuccessful calls, the chance to understand the type of agent language and behaviour that yields the best results, and share these with underperforming agents.

The same principle of matching successful outcomes with particular call traits can be used for improving cross-selling and up-selling rates in sales environments.

Managing customers at risk of churn

Using real-time analytics, linked with a company's own CRM systems, agents can be provided with up-to-the-second advice on how to handle customers identified as being at risk of churn, including linking what the customer is saying on the call back to the transactional model in order to update the best offer available for that customer.

Feedback on marketing campaigns

Tracking customer comments and outcomes after the advent of a marketing campaign can mean the difference between success and failure. Messages that are incorrectly understood can be identified and altered quickly before the contact centre becomes swamped with calls about the issue.

Phone-based contracts

Real-time interaction analytics mean that phone-based contracts can be seen to be completed first-time, with all relevant information provided to the customer on the call, and red-flagged on the agent's screen if they have missed saying anything vital, or made an error. This reduces the need to call a customer back and avoids any dispute over whether a legitimate contract has been made.

ESTIMATING RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR INTERACTION ANALYTICS

As part of the research for ContactBabel's "The Inner Circle Guide to Customer Contact Analytics", thousands of contact centre professionals were asked for their views on interaction analytics, particularly about what would hold them back from implementing it. By far the most important issue raised was how to build a strong enough return-on-investment (ROI) case to get the required corporate buy-in.

Return on investment for speech analytics can come from numerous sources, depending upon how the solution is used. Generally, it will come from the avoidance of a specific cost, (including the reduction of a risk in the case of compliance), or the increase in revenue.

The return on investment of speech analytics used for compliance can at first glance be difficult to prove, but it is the avoidance or reduction in litigation and regulatory fines which can be placed against the cost of the solution. Large banks will have funds put away running into the tens of millions of pounds each year against the possibility of paying out, and any significant reduction in fines would pay for a speech analytics solution very quickly. In the UK, the banking industry had put aside several billion pounds to pay compensation for the mis-selling of PPI (payment protection insurance), and having the ability to prove that no regulations had been broken would have been of great use.

Variables to be considered for ROI measurements include:

Cost reduction:

- Reduce reduction in headcount from automation of call monitoring and compliance checking
- Understand and minimise the parts of the call which do not add value
- Avoidance of fines and damages for non-compliance
- Reduction in cost of unnecessary callbacks after improving first-call resolution rates through root cause analysis
- Avoidance of live calls that can be handled by better IVR or website self-service
- Reduced cost of QA and QM
- Understand customer intent. For example, an insurance company received a lot of calls after customers had bought policies from their website. Analysis was able to show that customers were ringing for reassurance that the policy had been started, meaning the company could immediately send an email to new customers with their policy details on it, avoiding the majority of these calls
- Lower cost per call through shortened handle times and fewer transfers
- Lower new staff attrition rates and recruitment costs through early identification of specific training requirements
- identifying non-optimised business processes (e.g. a confusing website or a high number of callers ringing about delivery) and fix these, avoiding calls and improving revenue.

Revenue increase:

- Increase in sales conversion rates and values based on dissemination of best practice across agents, monitored by script compliance
- Increase in promise-to-pay ratios (debt collection)
- Optimised marketing messages through instant customer evaluation
- Reduced customer churn through dynamic screen-pop and real-time analytics
- Quicker response to new competitor and pricing information
- increase sales revenue by automating manual, non-revenue generating activity by identifying and improving self-service options
- route specific customer types to the best available agents to optimise empathy by matching communication styles
- some businesses assign a revenue value to an improvement in customer satisfaction ratings or Net Promoter Score®
- understand and correlate call outcomes, using metadata and call analysis to see what works and what doesn't.

Also, the improved quality of agents, better complaints handling and improved business processes outside the contact centre should be considered.

Against these potential positives, costs to consider include:

- Licence fees or cost per call analysed
- IT costs to implement (internal and external)
- Upgrade to call recording environment if required
- Bandwidth if hosted offsite: the recording of calls is usually done on a customer's site, so if the speech analytics solution is to be hosted, it will involve of lot of bandwidth, which will be an additional cost, especially when considering any redundancy
- Maintenance and support agreements, which may be 15-20% annually of the original licencing cost
- Additional users - headcount cost - decide who will own and use it, do you need a speech analyst, etc.
- Extra hardware e.g. servers
- Ongoing and additional training costs if not included
- Extra work generated by findings
- May need extra software to extract data from the call recording production environment.

Any business case needs to be built with support from the potential end-users, understanding the specific key performance indicators that are important to them, rather than focusing on IT specific issues. Whatever the variables and factors that businesses choose to build the ROI and business case, it is important to gather benchmark data before the solution is deployed, so as to be able to quantify any change accurately. If possible, use a 'control and experiment' approach - for example, one sales team carries on as they were, while the other may have their scripts changed or receive tailored training based on analytical insights. It is also important to get business users involved early in the process, giving them a key part in defining the right business case and the desired ROI.

A major inhibitor to uptake is an awareness within the company that their environment is not yet ready for interaction analytics, in that they may still not have a reliable recording environment or an optimized QM or QA process. Some businesses consider that their existing call recording and manual quality monitoring processes are sufficient, and fail to understand the potential business value of interaction analytics.

Vendors' own estimates of the time taken for the solution to pay for itself vary between 6 and 18 months, with most current implementations having been in the 100+ seat contact centre sector. Apart from calculating figures for ROI, perhaps the most difficult element of the business case is to ensure that executives beyond the contact centre understand and support the contact centre's role in enterprise success. Finance, marketing, IT and senior management need to be talked with in the terms they understand - customer retention, product satisfaction, revenue, competitive metrics, and more - showing that interaction analytics is an effective way to give a window into these trends.

Have your vendor help you to create an ROI to justify the project to the corporation in terms they understand: most vendors have tools which can be used to estimate return on investment, often based on what they have seen in similar operations elsewhere, and they are keen to share them with potential customers. Start with a project that you are comfortable managing from a cost and resource perspective to ensure you can track and present an ROI. Once you've achieved those results, it will be easier to justify expanding the project into other areas.

nexidia (·) *Interaction Analytics isn't something you buy; it is something that you do – yes, there is a need to take the interactions and structure them so that they can be analysed, but the process of structuring isn't analytics. Analytics is the process of applying categories and queries to the structured data in order to prove, or disprove a hypothesis, with the resulting conclusions being used to support a business change. The Analytical process needs governance, analysts, plus an open data framework that allows the import of all the relevant interactions, plus all related meta data, and then allows for the analysis to be presented to all classes of users in a timely and appropriate manner, as well as supporting the unrestricted export of the data to any other relevant system, including BI systems, data warehouses and corporate data marts.*

For more information about interaction analytics, please download ContactBabel's new "Inner Circle Guide to Customer Contact Analytics".

PERFORMANCE & QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Historically, the success or otherwise of contact centres was measured in terms of efficiency: call throughput, average handle time, calls per hour, etc. In recent years, the focus upon customer satisfaction has grown to such an extent that it is now seen industry-wide as the number one indicator of success, being consistently voted more important than increasing revenues, decreasing costs or hitting target metrics.

Of course, customer satisfaction is also closely linked to efficiency: part of the customer experience is the amount of time spent in the queue, and whether or not the agent can actually help them quickly and decisively. As such, internal contact centre metrics directly correlate to external customer satisfaction, which also is influenced by the customer's experience of any telephony or web-based self-service, or other pre-call activity such as customer authentication.

The contact centre industry has to find a balance between increasing the efficiency of its processes - which in the 'production line' mentality tends to mean following specific processes without deviation - and the need to understand the individual requirements of each customer so as to deliver appropriate service. As such, the measurement and improvement of quality and performance is not straightforward: in fact, even deciding what 'quality' actually means is very much a subjective matter.

The Professional Planning Forum, an independent industry body championing best practice and effective planning in customer operations, notes that operations driving their performance and quality forward often carry out many of the same types of improvement:

- Assessment: changing QA assessment frameworks (the scorecard), not just in the contact centre but in some cases across back office functions as well as for emails and other contact types
- Freedom: giving advisors the freedom to do what is needed to meet the customers' needs; stepping away from the standard process where this is not appropriate and taking steps to improve processes for the future
- Development: creating a cultural change supported by a new coaching and development framework – for example, how the evaluation process is used for performance management and enabling the advisors to make suggestions for improvement
- Learning: linking quality into a wider continuous improvement framework, gaining insight about the drivers for customer satisfaction and loyalty which can be shared throughout the organisation in a quality-focused 'voice of the customer' programme.

The Professional Planning Forum also notes some clear critical success factors:

- Organisations need to distinguish compliance from customer satisfaction. Adherence to process and risk management are vital in most industry sectors but they don't necessarily drive customer satisfaction, so there has to be a balance that doesn't impact the customer negatively
- Organisations have to put the customer first: learning from customer feedback mechanisms is essential to driving success
- There has to be a strategic use of quality – aligning QA to strategic goals is extremely important, if businesses are measuring something that doesn't impact upon their strategic aims, then it's a pointless exercise that takes focus away from what's really important.

In the opinion of most of our respondents, improvements are happening in most of the wider target areas that most organisations will have for their contact centres - customer satisfaction, quality, compliance with regulations, efficiency and revenue - with around a third of respondents claiming major improvements in most of these areas. As such, although this is subjective opinion, it seems a broadly positive finding that the majority of the industry is heading in the direction that is good both for businesses and customers.

Figure 16: Are you seeing significant changes in the following target areas?
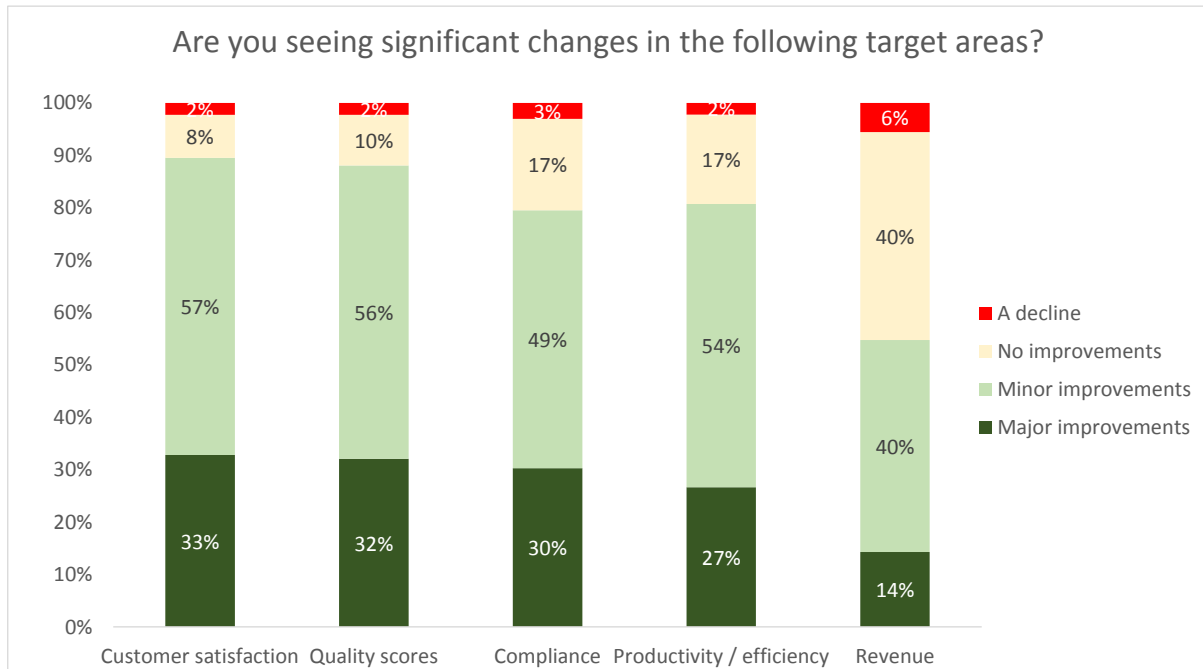
90% of respondents state that their QA processes are at least fairly effective for evaluating agent performance, with a similar proportion stating the QA identifies training and development needs for agents as well. It is noticeable however that more of these respondents are lukewarm about the results of their QA processes than are actively enthusiastic.

Fewer than one-third strongly believe that their QA processes feed into driving customer experience improvements and more than 1 in 5 see that there is a major disconnect between quality assurance and any customer feedback that is gathered. Customer insight gained from the quality assurance process stands a very significant risk of not being used effectively within the wider organisation, with 29% of respondents saying that this was the case in their experience.

Figure 17: How effective and impactful is quality assurance in your contact centre?

How effective and impactful is quality assurance in your contact centre?

Category	Very effective	Fairly effective	Ineffective	Don't know
Providing customer insight for use within the organisation	18%	41%	29%	12%
Correlating QA scores with customer feedback/surveys	21%	35%	21%	22%
Driving customer experience improvements	32%	49%	13%	6%
Developing plans for learning and skills development	35%	49%	10%	5%
Providing a trigger for coaching	40%	46%	8%	5%
Evaluating agent performance	43%	47%	7%	3%

Only 5% of respondents stated that there was no QA process within their organisation, which is a positive finding.

The vast majority have team leaders and line managers involved in scoring agent calls manually, with almost three-quarters of respondents from large operations having a specific, dedicated quality team involved as well. Larger operations are also more likely to have coaches evaluating calls, which will also feed into the process of understanding each individuals' need for specific improvement, as well as developing the wider training programme.

Around a quarter of respondents have their senior management - most likely the contact centre manager - involved in evaluating calls as well, although this is likely to have gone through an initial process of identifying calls which are relevant to the business or operational issue that these calls are demonstrating.

Over one-third of respondents from large operations have a compliance team evaluating calls, and a small minority from each size band use other advisors or a process improvement team as well.

Figure 18: Who scores or evaluates calls from customers in your organisation?

Who scores or evaluates calls from customers in your organisation?

Category	Average	Large	Medium	Small
No QA carried out	5%	3%	4%	8%
Process improvement team	6%	3%	10%	4%
Other advisors	13%	9%	18%	11%
Compliance team	16%	34%	14%	6%
Senior management	25%	23%	28%	23%
Coaches	38%	49%	44%	26%
Quality team	46%	74%	54%	21%
Team leaders / supervisors / managers	88%	91%	82%	92%
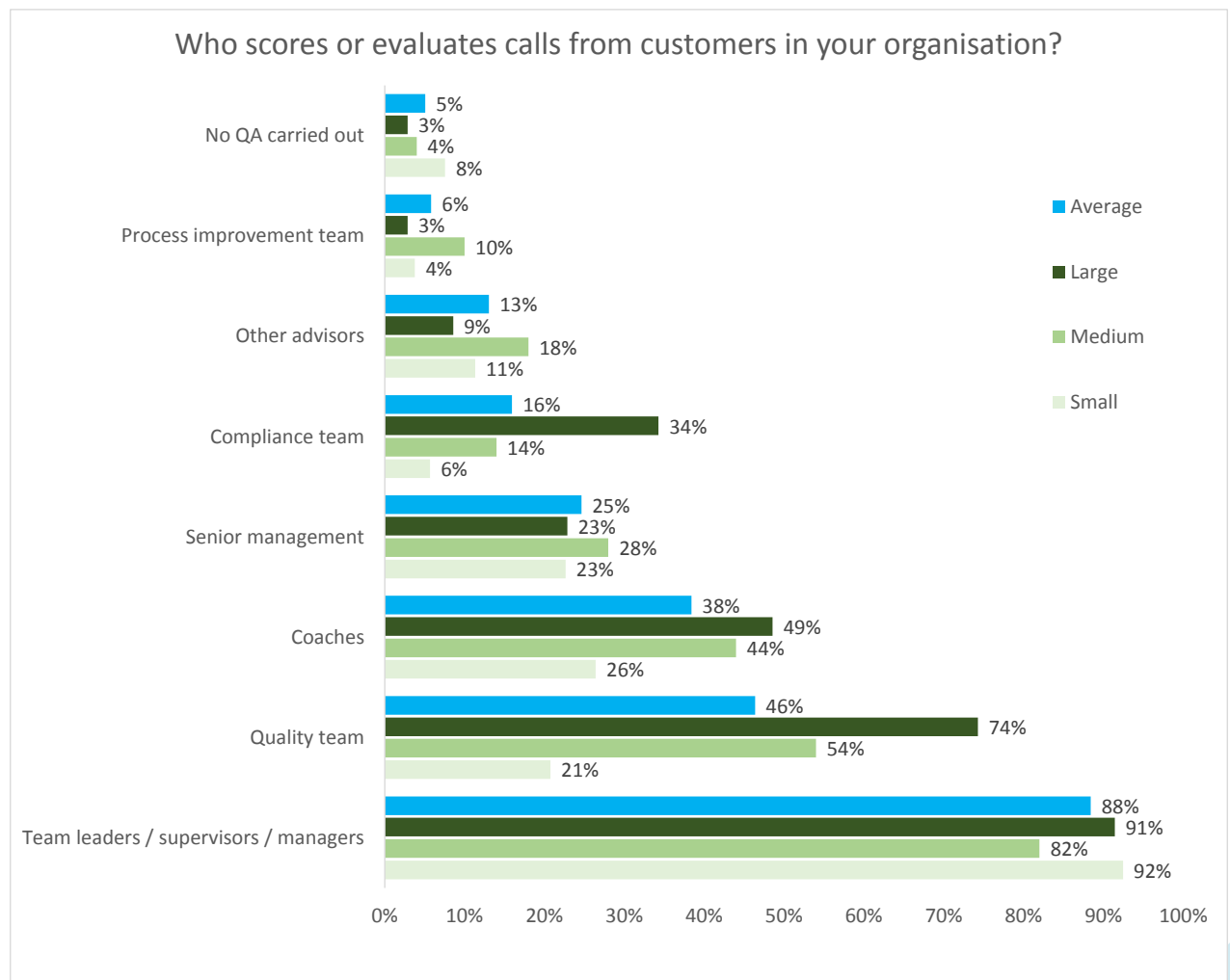
Respondents were asked their opinion on how effective they felt their quality evaluation was for specific contact centre activities, including inbound and outbound activity, and multichannel work.

As might be expected from the activity that has been around the longest, inbound telephony was judged to have the most effective quality evaluation, with half of respondents that carried out this form of QA stating that it was very effective. Evaluation of outbound calling was also relatively positive, although 15% of businesses carrying this out felt that it was ineffective.

It seems that multichannel quality evaluation still has some way to go to reach the standard of telephony QA. Although 28% of respondents that carry out quality evaluation on emails felt that it was very effective, over 20% believed it ineffective.

For the new channels such as web chat and social media, the majority of respondents did not carry out quality evaluation on these at all. Of those that did, there was relatively little confidence that the process was effective. For back-office work evaluation, more respondents believed to be ineffective than did very effective, so there is clearly more room for improvement across the board, especially outside the traditional telephony QA processes.

Figure 19: How effective is your quality evaluation within these areas?

rostrvm
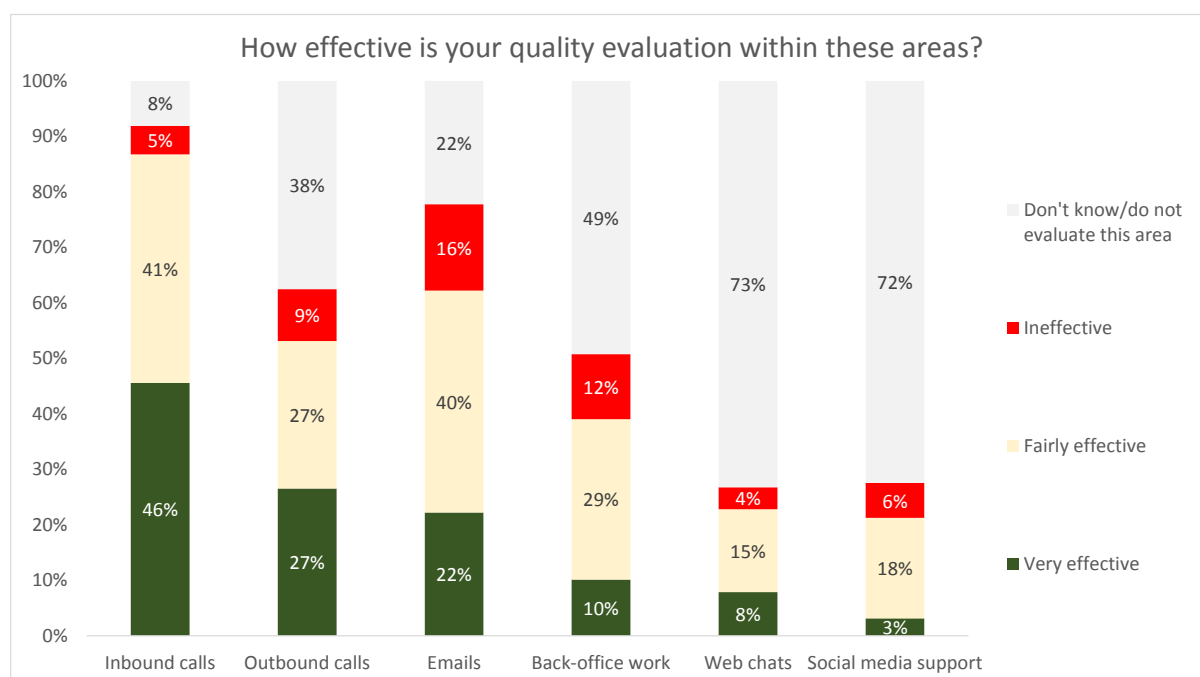
DYNAMIC SCRIPTING AND THE UNIFIED DESKTOP

The variable capabilities of agents is a contributory inhibitor to quality improvements, and the increasingly complex and variable nature of agents' work means that rigid, linear scripting is not appropriate for many contact centres. One possible solution is to look at dynamic scripting applications within an overall unified desktop environment, as well as understanding agent training needs through call recording and analysis, and delivering the right training and in-call information.

DYNAMIC SCRIPTING

Scripting has a mixed reputation, rightly or wrongly, with inflexible outbound sales scripts being particularly disliked. However, a dynamic scripting environment, sometimes referred to as a workflow - where the help provided on the agent's screen changes depending on who the customer is and what they actually want, applicable to both inbound and outbound work - can be beneficial to agent and customer alike, supporting complex interactions where multiple systems and media are required. Applications that define each step of the call interaction flow and present the relevant data to the agent allows agents to take advantage of pull-down menus, on-screen buttons, pop-up windows, inheritance mechanisms, and fill-in-the-blank parameters. Workflows guide agents dynamically through dialogues with customers which change as required, while managing contacts, controlling interactions, and updating databases. In a large operation, there may be distinct groups of agents (e.g. a large dedicated sales outbound team) that use scripting whereas inbound agents may not. Large contact centres, by their nature and also because of generally higher attrition rates, may have more requirements to help new agents learn the ropes.

rostrvm

Desktop and more
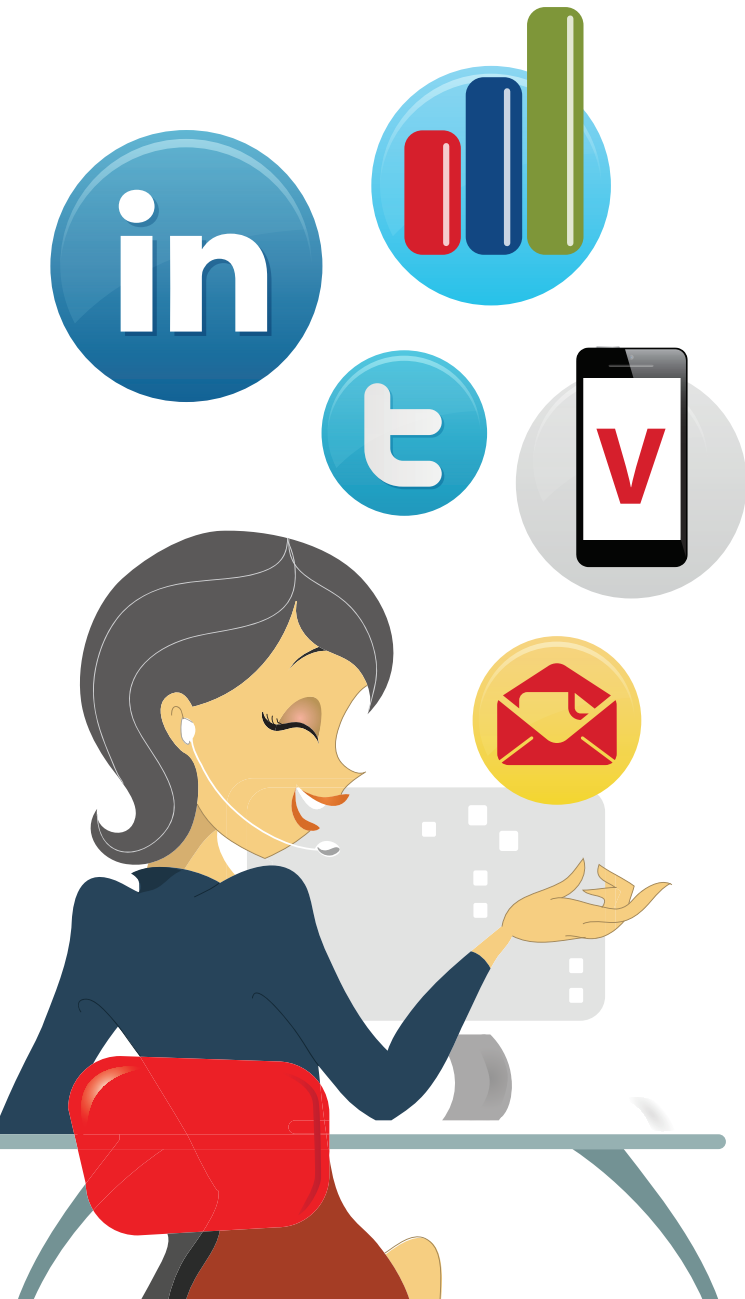
rostrvm's robust suite of software applications delivers effective multichannel customer contact

rostrvm optimises desktops in all business areas so that your teams have less screens and processes to go through

rostrvm's scripting app can be integrated with inbound and outbound campaigns. Scripts can be altered fast

rostrvm acts as customer service hub 'middleware' in harmony with your communications infrastructure and information technology to:

- control the consistency of contact and transaction handling activity
- improve the quality of your customers' experience
- support compliance processes
- deliver accurate, accessible operational information and performance analysis

Onsite? **In the cloud?**

Call us on **0800 2122 192**
Email us on **enquiries@rostrvm.com**

rostrvm.com

Insurance, transport and travel, public sector and outsourcing respondents are amongst the greatest users of scripting, with around well over half of respondents from each of these sectors stating that agents used the application (although not necessarily for 100% of calls, or agents - scripting may be used widely in financial industries for legal disclaimers, terms and conditions, etc.).

Those in TMT, retail and outsourcing are most likely to use scripting to assist with outbound sales campaigns, and those in transport and travel and outsourcing are amongst those most likely to use it dependent on the call type or specific campaign.

None of the manufacturers responding to this survey use scripting in any way. While this appearance of the absolute rejection of scripting in this sector should be placed in statistical context, and manufacturing vertical market consistent large part of B2B sales and consumer helplines (which may have a great variety of queries to answer), neither of which are typically suited to a heavily-scripted environment.

Figure 20: Use and type of scripting, by vertical market

Use and type of scripting, by vertical market

Legend:
- For all agents
- For new agents
- For outbound agents
- Sometimes, dependent on call or campaign
- No scripting

Vertical market	For all agents	For new agents	For outbound agents	Sometimes, dependent on call or campaign	No scripting
Average	27%	14%	8%	12%	51%
Manufacturing					100%
Finance	13%			38%	50%
Retail & Distribution	13%	25%	13%	13%	63%
Services	14%	14%	10%	5%	67%
Utilities	17%	17%	17%	17%	67%
TMT	29%	14%	21%	7%	43%
Housing	30%	10%	10%		60%
Transport & Travel	33%	17%		33%	33%
Outsourcing	38%	25%	13%	19%	31%
Public Sector	42%	19%		15%	35%
Insurance	45%		9%	9%	36%

Small contact centres are less likely to implement scripting for all agents, but are almost twice as likely to use it as assistance for their new agent intake. Larger contact centres are far more likely to use scripting for outbound and also depending upon campaign or call type.

Figure 21: Use and type of scripting, by contact centre size

Use and type of scripting, by contact centre size

Size	For all agents	For new agents	For outbound agents	Sometimes, dependent on call or campaign	No scripting
Average	27%	14%	8%	12%	51%
Large	31%	11%	14%	20%	46%
Medium	30%	10%	8%	14%	50%
Small	21%	19%	4%	6%	56%
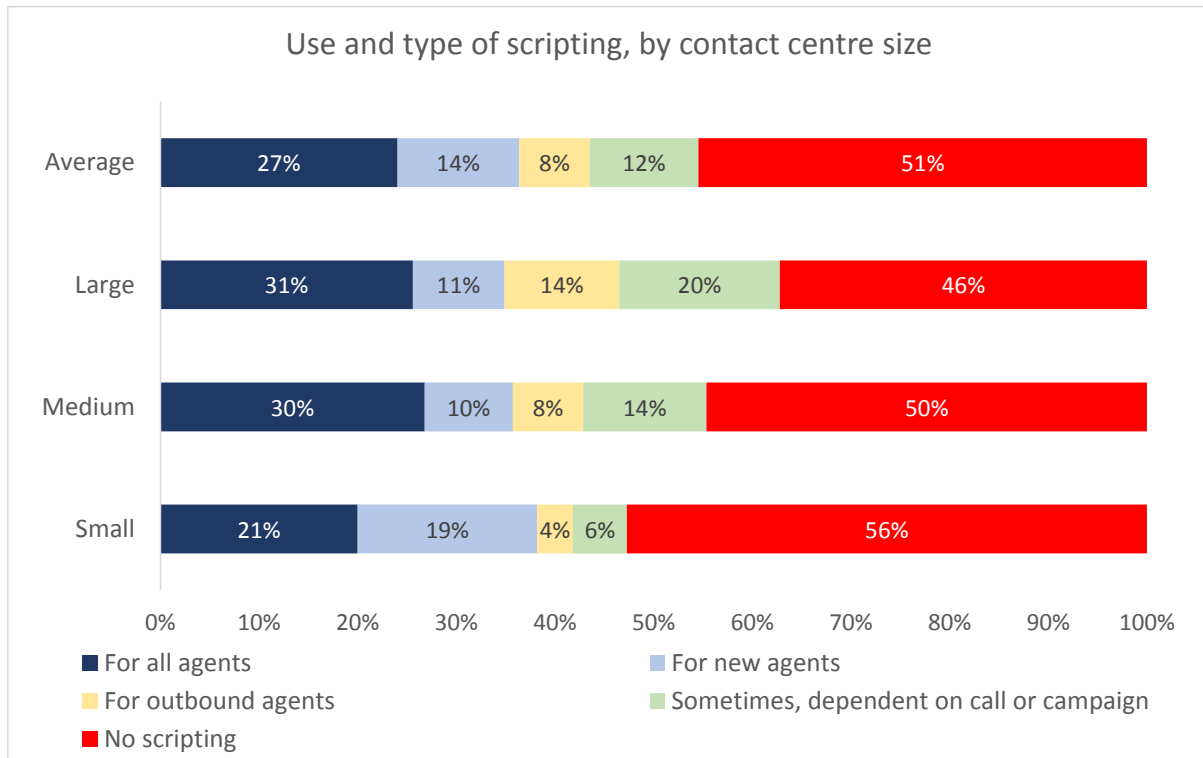
Our experience is that agents in smaller contact centres have to handle a wider range of contacts across a wider skill set and the impact of staff attrition is much greater. So it's surprising to see that small contact centres are less likely to use scripting when the potential benefits are greater.

Those respondents who used scripting were generally enthusiastic about the benefits they had received. In particular, the assistance with compliance was particularly well-thought-of, as was the consistency of data capture (as the same information is collected each time, with no short-cuts or missed questions). 75% of respondents found that scripting was effective or very effective at standardising interactions with customers - of course, this only helps quality of the 'average' interaction is high to begin with.

Figure 22: The effectiveness of scripting
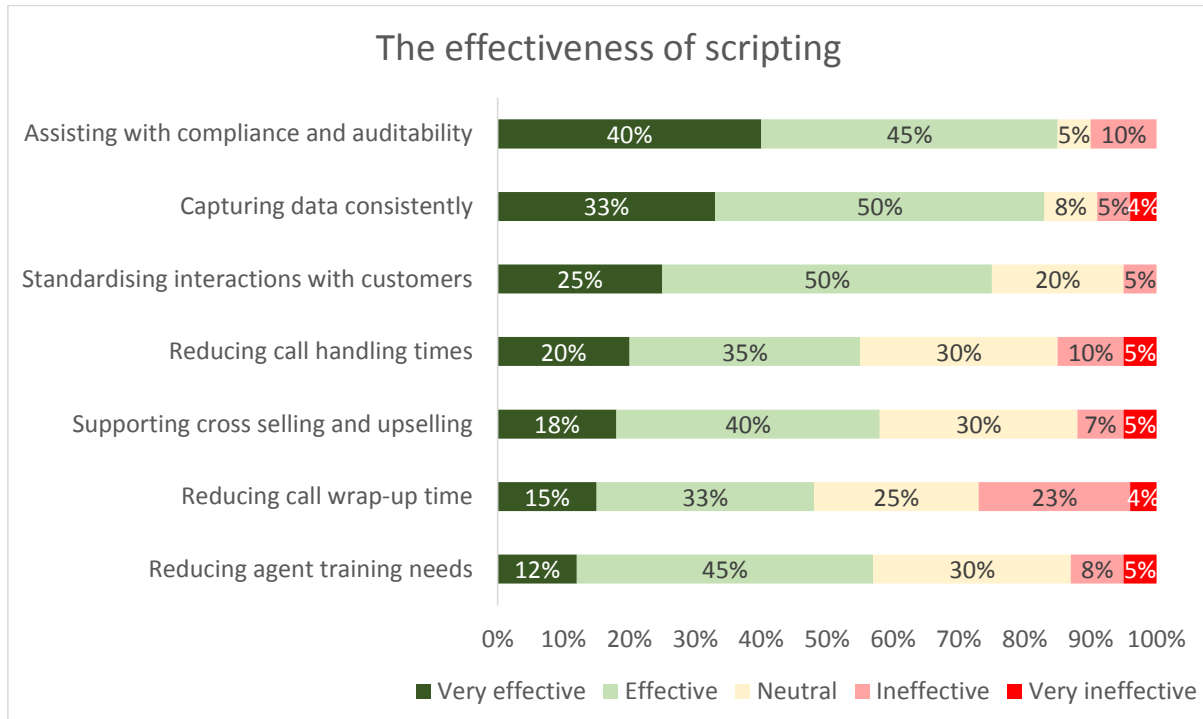
Secondary benefits around reducing call handling times (through a structured call flow) and particularly as an agent training tool were also reported, with 58% of respondents also saying that scripting was an effective tool for assisting with cross-selling and up-selling. Using scripting to facilitate call wrap-up was still a net positive, but is seen as being less useful than other factors.

It seems fair to say from looking at these results that, while overly-scripted conversations are frustrating for both caller and agent, a dynamic script or prompt which guides an agent through a conversation and provides relevant information and suggestions is certainly worth considering and tends to yield positive results.

rostrvm *Make sure that your dynamic 'scripting' looks after your agents as well as your callers. Match the reason for the contact and the agent's skills and experience with the content of your scripts. An inexperienced agent may need word-for-word instructions while an old hand just needs a few "don't forget" sign-posts.*

Despite these positive responses from users, scripting has had a bad name, engendered by the uncomfortable-sounding scripts often used by outbound sales agents, particularly those from offshore. Part of this problem is that the agent can sound robotic after delivering the same spiel dozens of times, but perhaps as important, there is also the fact that outbound sales calls are generally not well-received by customers, so anything that is associated with them (be it scripting, offshore agents, silent calls, etc.) will have a negative connotation to overcome in any case.

Figure 23: Inhibitors to scripting

Inhibitors to scripting

Category	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Every interaction is different	45%	35%	7%	3%	10%
Customers don't like it	40%	45%	10%	5%	
Agents don't like it	32%	48%	18%	2%	
Strategic decision by senior management	30%	35%	20%	15%	
Takes too long to produce the script	5%	23%	40%	27%	5%
Too expensive	5%	5%	30%	35%	25%
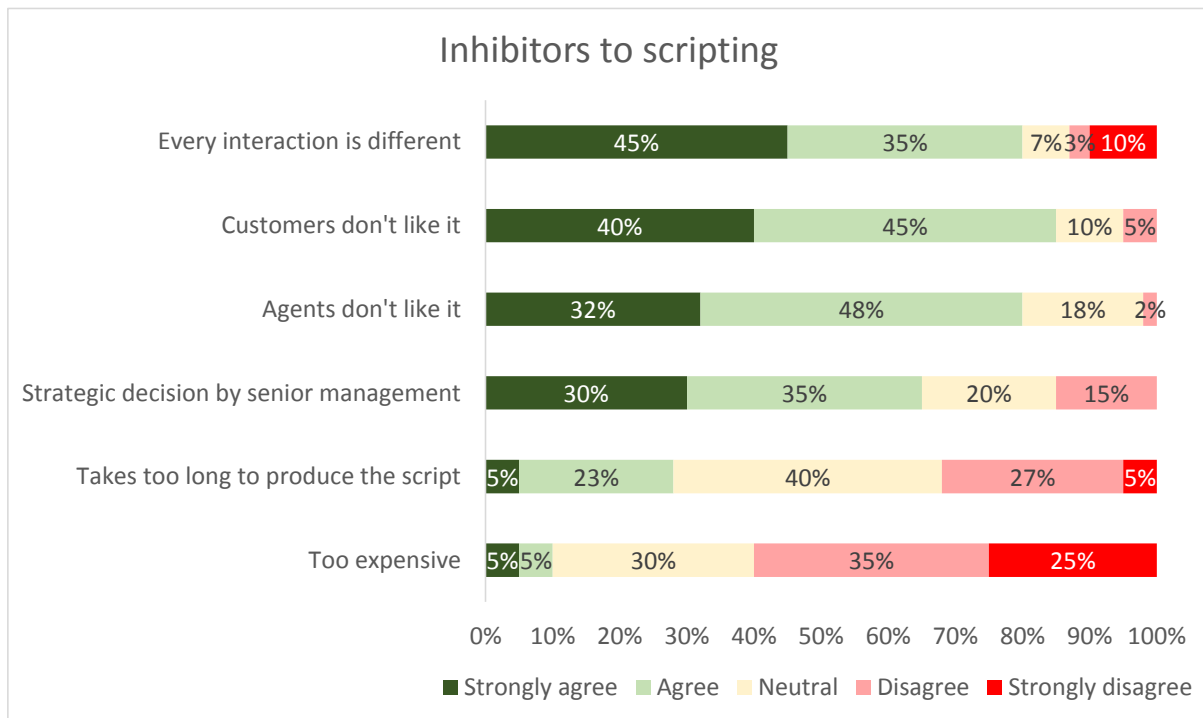
One of the biggest objections to scripting is that every conversation is different. While this is certainly true, readers should be aware that contemporary solutions offer a whole spectrum of scripting, from tight to loose, with the latter simply offering checkpoints within the conversation: much of the negativity around scripting comes from familiarity only with the tight, constrained version, and as this chart shows, contact centre management strongly believe that neither customers nor agents like scripting (and seemingly, neither do the people at the top of the organisation, who appear to hand down non-scripting edicts).

Scripting is much more than a series of dialogue prompts, as it is now more about designing the customer experience and journey for a particular type of interaction - for example, making an insurance claim - using design sessions fitting together workflow, data sources and dialogue. People with less experience of modern-day scripting often think the robotic 'scripted conversation' experience is what scripting creates, and indeed, many of the respondents to this questionnaire believe that there are too many variables to anticipate within a conversation and that letting agents make the best decision about the conversation is really the only way to handle things. However, real-time decision engines are an example where online resources can be leveraged to work within the contact centre as well: real time responsiveness in an online environment is achieved through automated decision-making built on a set of business rules which identify pre-defined customer profiles and the solutions, products and data that are suitable for presentation to the customer.

The design environment that new scripting solutions provides can use existing back end resources without further development, so scripts no longer have to anticipate every possible alternative. Data gathered during conversations, combined with customer profiling, trigger appropriate responses which can be immediately presented to the customer, which is beneficial for customer and agent alike. As such, dynamic scripting can be considered as one part of a group of solutions aimed at reducing the complexity of the agent's desktop while improving the quality of the interaction. The next section looks at optimising the quality of customer interactions through a unified agent desktop, a key supporting feature of which is the ability to define call scripts, either as a flow of data capture screens, or as a set of actual words or prompts. Simple, non-technical tools enable supervisors and managers to define these call flows, the data required and the scripts/prompts to be used.

THE UNIFIED DESKTOP

Many of today's contact centres use complicated, multiple applications, often only loosely-linked, which require skilled and experienced agents to navigate, let alone to manage interaction with customers successfully at the same time. Even after the call is completed successfully, each system may need specific inputs from the agent in order to start the required back-office processes, or to keep each database consistent with the others.

Figure 24: Use of multiple applications across vertical markets

Vertical market	Use of multiple applications
Finance	Customer accounts, CRM, product database, payment systems, email, quotation system (esp. insurance), complaints, other sister companies' systems (often through merger and acquisition), legal and compliance scripts, insurance claims
Outsourcing	Multiple screens and applications depending on customer requirements, not all of which will be familiar to agents
Retail & Distribution	Supply chain systems, distribution and shipping history, warehouse stock systems, CRM, customer history, pricing applications, payment systems, complaints, email
Telecoms	Customer accounts, cross-selling/upselling applications, CRM, field maintenance booking systems, real-time network status screens, complaints, payment history, credit/debit card applications, fulfilment systems, email
Utilities	Customer accounts, payment systems, utilities status systems (e.g. scheduled or emergency work being done on water, gas, electricity supplies), cross-selling/up-selling prompts, product information, maintenance and booking systems, complaints, email

The result is that even though a contact centre may be staffed with experienced, hard-working and skilled staff, its overall performance is disappointing, leading to low customer satisfaction, unnecessary costs and decreased profits.

With 89% of contact centres requiring their agents to use multiple applications within a call, there are significant dangers around forgetting to key in information, forgetting to ask for the required information, starting the correct processes or failing to type in consistent data. The use of multiple applications will have a negative effect on training times for new agents as well.

Figure 25: How many applications does an agent use within a call?
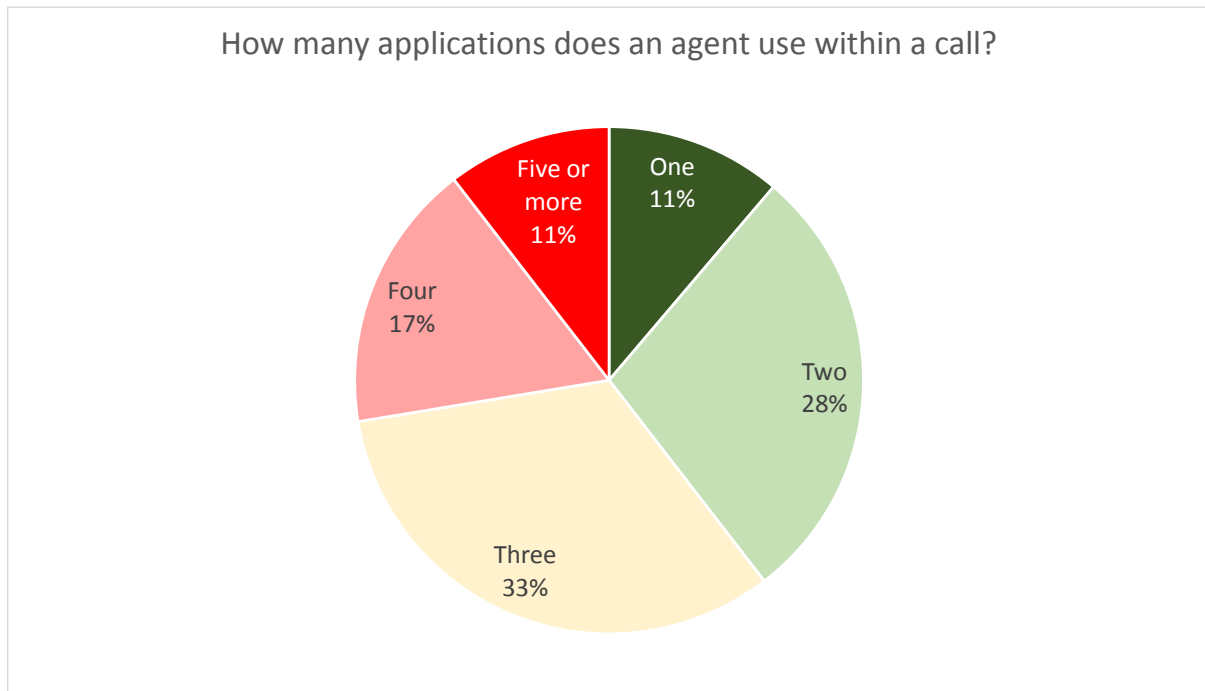
In most cases where complex, multiple applications are used, they are necessary for the agents to do their job, so the question is not "How can we reduce the number of applications?", but rather "How can we improve how the agent uses the applications?". At the moment, due to complexity, expense and the sheer weight of constant change, applications are either integrated very loosely, or not at all. Agents are trained (or more likely, learn on the job) to switch rapidly between applications, relying on their experience to make sure they don't forget to do everything.

Such an approach can have severe primary and secondary effects:

- Increased training costs
- Higher staff attrition caused by inability to complete tasks successfully
- Inconsistent data caused by keying errors or missed procedures caused by manual wrap-ups
- Increased call handling times
- Lower customer satisfaction caused by long queues and unnecessarily long calls
- Missed opportunities to cross-sell and up-sell
- Multiple open applications on the agent desktop can lead to system instability and lower performance.

Desktop magic for successful, effective contact

One of the biggest challenges facing many businesses is trying to work efficiently with a mixture of legacy IT, newer architecture and existing processes. This is particularly problematic on the contact centre desktop where accuracy and compliance are vital.

We recently carried out a survey of a significant number of UK contact centres, which found that staff productivity is being hampered by having to battle with too many desktop applications. 60% of contact centres surveyed used at least three desktop applications to complete a single task yet the greater the number of applications needed, the higher the workload for the agent. This was leading to high operational costs but lower productivity and customer satisfaction. It wasn't just happening in the call centre but also in back offices and other departments too.

Buying more hardware to try and fix this adds to the problem. Software which overlays and streamlines existing business systems is available which will integrate and reduce the amount of screens needed, making desktops quick and easy to use. Not only that but it will guide staff through processes and display information automatically that's relevant to the customer, based upon historical data and other criteria, at the right point in the conversation. It's flexible to work with and easy to update. It makes activity and performance visible at the individual, team and corporate level with rich, real-time and historical information displays.

One of Rostrvm's customers used this technology on a mixture of legacy applications and has reduced the time and hassle required to handle a data entry and processing task from 12 minutes to 45 seconds! This was achieved by rationalising the previous 14-screen marathon to a single screen, providing improved accuracy and consistency – and increased customer satisfaction.

Succinct scripting

Providing scripts to the contact centre team to base their conversations around can really boost their performance in a variety of situations and ensure compliance. Scripts can also help to achieve higher first call resolution rates because agents have more information, which engenders confidence.

A decent scripting system will support advisors in maintaining good customer relationships and in accessing all the available information, no matter where it's held. Context-sensitive scripts based upon telephony data and contact details like email address and business information can guide the team through every step of each call.

Scripts can be integrated with inbound and outbound call routing apps, as well as the management information system. Calls can then be routed to specific advisors and wording can be personalised according to individual campaigns and skill sets. Agents can modify scripts using user-friendly "drag and drop". The ability to alter scripts easily enables businesses to keep up with changes in regulations and compliance issues. Management information can be generated to check how scripts are being received and modified as necessary.

Why don't you contact us to find out about these or other cost-effective solutions that can add real value to your business? **0800 6122 192 or www.rostrvm.com**

The bottom-line is that using complex, multiple applications without any specific agent support usually leads to longer calls. However, this is not the end of the problem, as this type of work also tends to initiate requests for processes to be carried out within the back-office (e.g. initiating an engineer or sales visit, sending out literature, moving a customer request onto the right department with the right information, flagging a customer as a hot prospect for a specific marketing campaign, etc.). This, as well as the need to enter information in multiple applications (below), will tend to increase post-call wrap-up to a point where the agent spends a great deal of their time unavailable to take more calls. Historically, 10-15% of an agent's time is spent on post-call wrap-up (the 2014 figure is 12.7%).

Figure 26: How many applications does an agent use after a call?

How many applications does an agent use after a call?

- Five or more 8%
- Four 10%
- Three 14%
- One 34%
- Two 34%
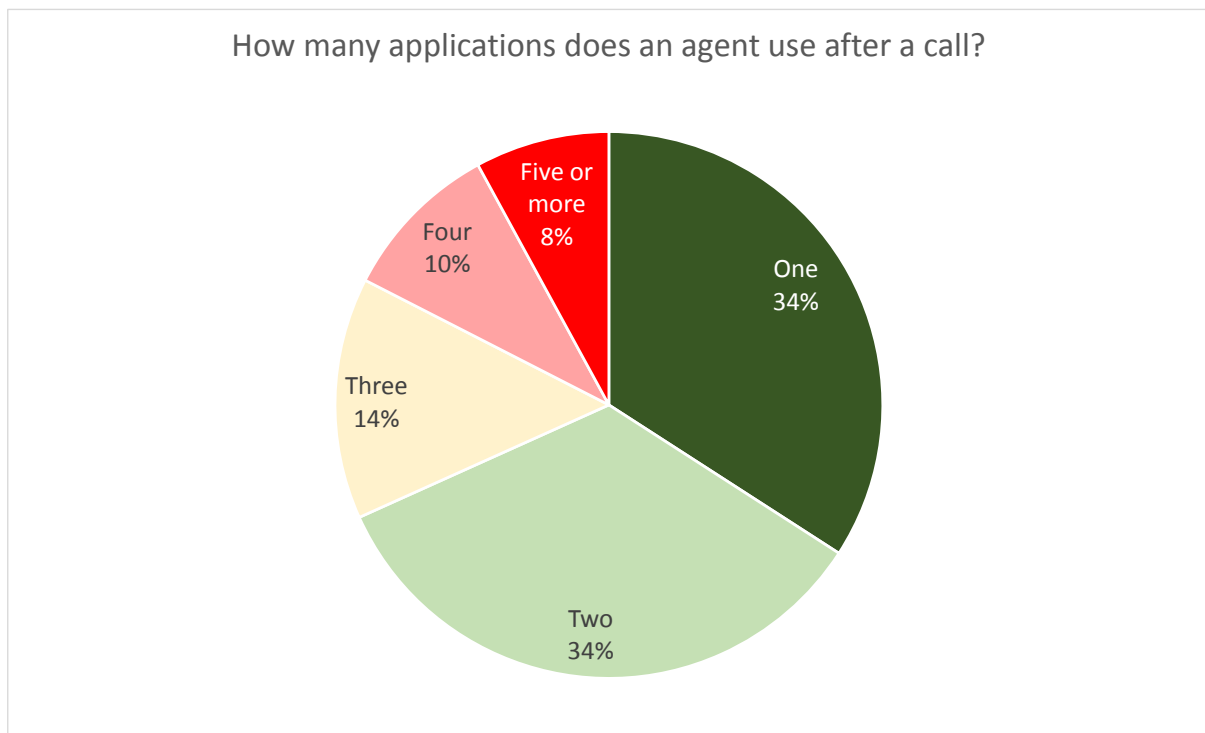
Additionally, manual inputs involved in transferring data during wrap up commonly lead to data entry and processing errors, causing an adverse effect on operational efficiency, contact centre cost, performance and customer satisfaction. Cost per call rises, and productivity per agent declines first-call resolution rates slip as more calls are escalated due to the complexity of the systems hindering agents, rather than helping them. So we can see that poor application integration and presentation at the desktop level has a direct and negative effect on those long-term contact centre strategies deemed most important and desirable, such as customer satisfaction, lower first-time resolution and higher escalation levels.

It is in the post-call wrap-up stage that a lot of time and effort is wasted by sub-optimal manual processing of data. For example, a simple change of address request could take many minutes in a non-unified environment, with several separate databases having to be altered, which is itself a process prone to error, with a negative impact on the customer and business, as well as at least one extra unnecessary future phone call from the customer. Reducing wrap-up time through optimising the agent desktop is not simply a matter of writing consistently to the correct databases, although this is a key element. The contact centre also kicks off a number of processes elsewhere in the enterprise: it is the prime mover for sending out documents, instructing the warehouse to release goods, arranging deliveries, taking payment and many other key elements to a successful customer-business transaction.

You can talk to your clients on the phone, by email, text message, chat, social media … the list goes on. Your customers are expecting choice but delivering it can make the agent's job more complex. A unified desktop needs to take channel shift into account.

Businesses can usually focus either on cutting costs or improving quality. However, there is a third way, which allows desktop solutions for users to be developed separately from the underlying applications, re-using existing logic and interfaces rather than replacing them. The agent works with a single desktop application which is tailored to their specific needs, pulling in only the right data and applications from disparate systems and presenting them on a single screen. In the background, business rules and workflow make sure that the right back-office processes happen without agent intervention, thus reducing wrap-up costs.

This unified desktop approach also supports the availability of a higher level of business intelligence, as every aspect of the call, including the outcome, can be viewed holistically during and after the call. This is especially useful for gauging first-call resolution rates, which are growing in importance every year - there being a very strong positive correlation between first-call resolution, lowering costs and improving customer satisfaction – yet few contact centres measure it accurately.

An application which supports less experienced agents, and helps them to learn means that staff attrition rates can be managed more effectively. High attrition rates and poor knowledge bases mean that people take away the knowledge as they leave. By having a user interface which provides the right information dynamically – and which increases the amount of leeway an agent has as they become more competent – means that agents can find the right balance between being too tightly managed and feeling cast adrift by the system's lack of user-friendliness.

The following table shows the knowledge resources that agents have within a call. Finding, reading, assimilating and using information actually within a call as very difficult and is rarely done seamlessly. An application such as case-based reasoning, which prompts the agent to ask specific questions, drilling down to find the right answer, is very useful but only 20% of agents have access to this sort of dynamic application. Most have to search around on a company website or FAQ page, or rely on a wide, unsupported search of knowledge bases or the wider Internet, hoping to get lucky. While it may seem that agents have access to a whole raft of various knowledge sources, the reality is that unfettered access to numerous pools and information is likely to lengthen the call considerably without necessarily providing the information required.

Figure 27: In-call access to knowledge sources for agents

Figure 27: In-call access to knowledge sources for agents showing a bar chart titled "In-call access to knowledge sources for agents": Company website 93%, Internet access 91%, FAQs 84%, Free-text search of knowledge base 51%, Case-based reasoning 20%.
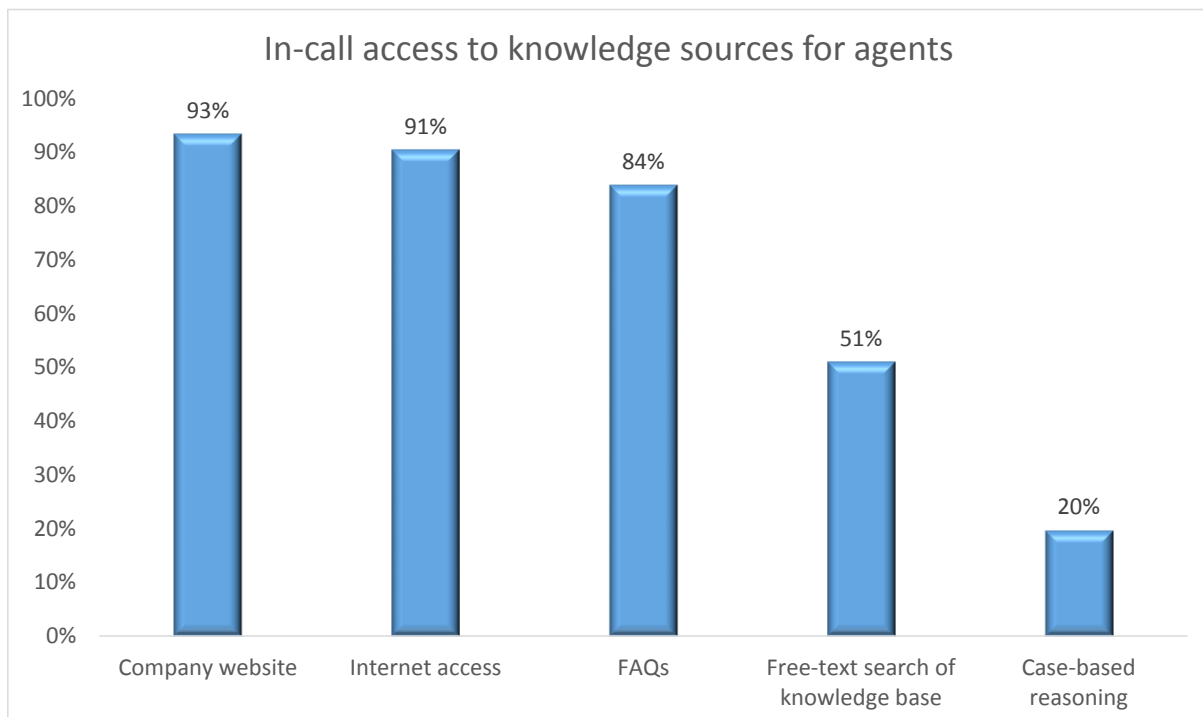
Agents' access to multiple knowledge sources within a call is further exacerbated by the presence of hard-copy reference material on the desks of over half of respondents' agents. Encouragingly, the majority of agents' desks are reported to be relatively clear of paper-based clutter, although it cannot be said that the UK contact centre industry has an entirely clean-desk policy. Coupled with access to numerous, unstructured information sources, the typical agent has a huge number of potential inputs to consider, increasing the risk of longer, rambling conversations that do not result in first contact resolution.

Figure 28: Access to hard-copy reference materials in the agent's workspace

Access to hard-copy reference materials in the agent's workspace

- Notebooks of procedures, data and reference materials, plus numerous documents 18%
- Little or no task-oriented hard copy reference materials 40%
- A few documents and phone lists 42%
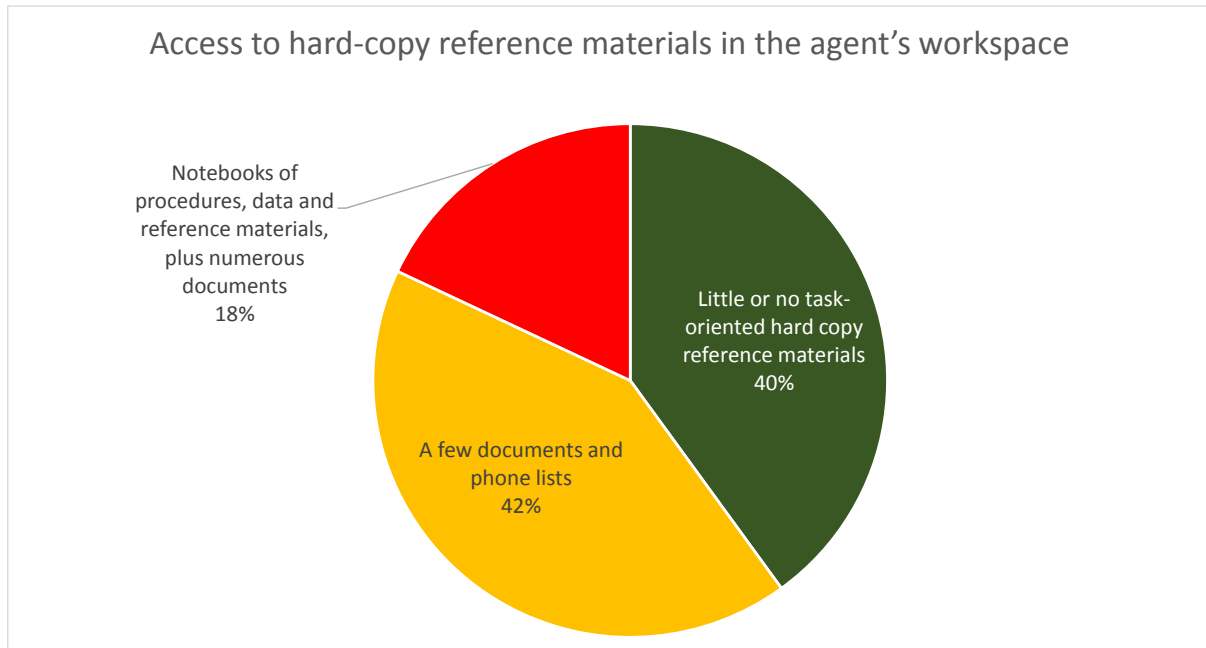
The cost of excessive wrap-up

Although few contact centre managers would say that excessive wrap-up times cause the same level of concern as attrition or customer satisfaction, the current industry average of 12.7% of time that contact centre agent spend each hour in after-call work adds up to an enormous cost.

The overall expenditure of the contact centre sector - salaries, IT, telecoms, building, rent, utilities, etc. - comes to around £22bn each year. Wrap-up time accounts for 12.7% of the time spent by the industry: slightly less in larger contact centres, which account for the bulk of the jobs. As such, wrap-up costs the industry around £2.8bn each year. This is not to say that all wrap-up is wasted and unnecessary, but this is a segment of expenditure that is ripe for efficiency-enhancement.

As an example, a 500-seat contact centre, processing 5m calls per year, would spend around £2m each year just on wrap-up. A 20% reduction in wrap-up time would save around £400,000, quite apart from the savings in training and lower attrition, as well as the benefits of shorter queues and simpler applications.

There has been a big growth in interest in unified desktop solutions in recent times, with additional benefits coming from reduced training times (as agents are learning one system, not many); processing the call quicker (by hiding slow legacy applications or posting information to multiple systems in one go without replicated effort) and improved customer satisfaction / conversion rates (as the agent can concentrate on the customer and is supported by knowledge bases).

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MEASUREMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

Most businesses say that customer satisfaction is vital to them. Yet this raises more questions: how satisfied do customers have to be? And what do customers want from contact centres? Quite simply, they would like to be answered quickly by a person who is able to help them without passing them around, and have the correct answer given to them by someone with whom they feel comfortable talking. Additionally, the business has to deliver on the reason the customer is calling in the first place – by sending out the purchased item promptly, changing the database details or refunding money, for example. So the contact centre does not stand alone: it orchestrates the rest of the business.

Various pieces of research show that the benefits to a business that are made from increasing customer satisfaction are non-linear: if a customer is very happy, they are likely to be worth a great deal in additional direct purchases and possibly more importantly, will act as a brand advocate for your company. A customer who is merely 'satisfied' will not have anywhere near the same positive impact on revenues or profits, and is likely to be a good deal less loyal.

A contact centre can achieve all the operational performance measurements which it sets for itself, without actually being successful. If the customer does not hang up the phone feeling that she has been treated appropriately and that her query has been resolved to her satisfaction, then that counts as a failure, regardless of how good the internal metrics may indicate that the interaction was.

As customers become more demanding and their expectations of what constitutes good service increase, then contact centres are forced to develop greater external focus. This is in part due to the growth of outsourcing, which has introduced a new competitive edge to the business of handling calls. In addition, the greater choice available to customers in terms of suppliers means that customer retention is now as important as customer acquisition. Without knowing what your customer thinks of your service, you cannot legislate for their requirements. A continuous tracking survey hosted by a third party is a useful piece of corporate intelligence. Surveys hosted on a SaaS platform have the advantage of being contact centre provider- and equipment-agnostic. Businesses can continue using surveys non-stop as they outsource, switch suppliers or take their contact centre service back in-house, hence tracking the impact of these changes.

FACTORS IN ACHIEVING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Respondents were asked to choose the three most important factors impacting upon customer satisfaction from a list of eight, with the graph below showing the most popular choices.

Figure 29: Which of these factors do you believe to be the most important in achieving customer satisfaction?

Factors most important in affecting customer satisfaction
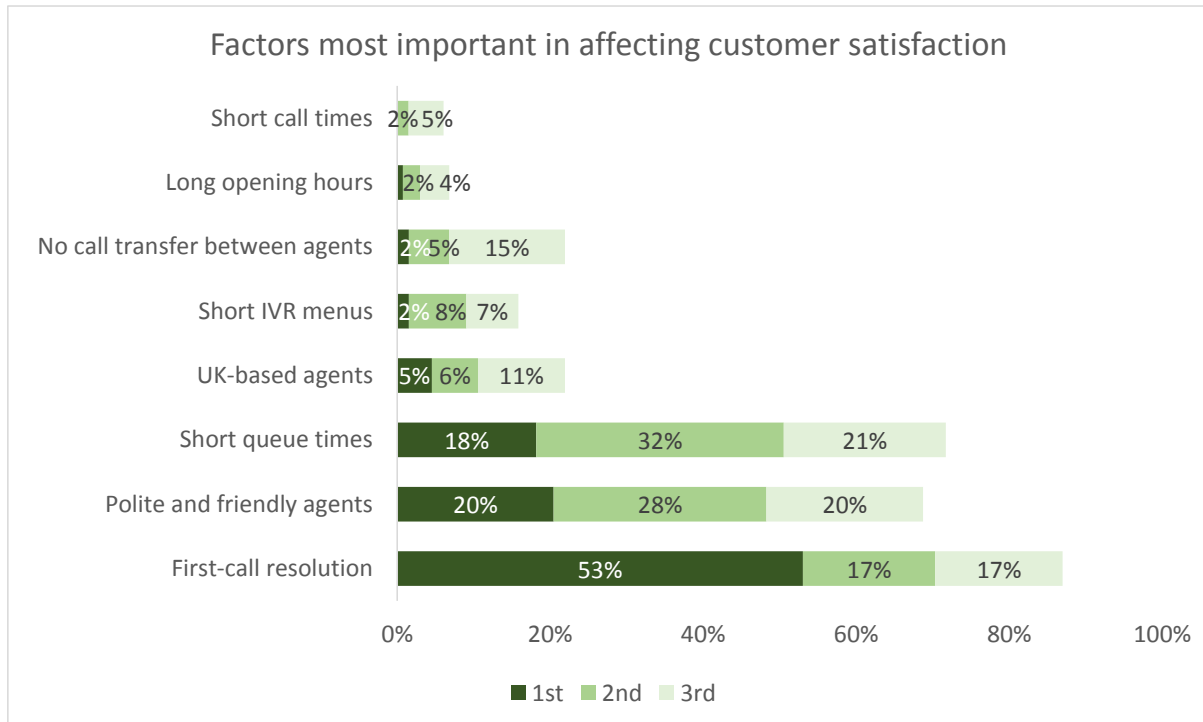
Once again this year, by far the most frequently-chosen was first-call resolution. Having a polite and friendly agent deal with the call and a short queue time were also seen as very important, acknowledging that the customer experience starts well before the agent's greeting.

Contact centre management also believe that having UK-based agents goes a long way to helping customer satisfaction, with 21% of respondents placing domestic agents in the top 3, although this has slipped somewhat from its figure of 30% last year. Short call durations, which has been slipping as a primary metric for a number of years, as seen as having very little effect on customer satisfaction.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUES

The numerous methods of surveying customers include the following:

IVR: at the end of the call, and after agreeing to do so, the customer may be passed through to an automated IVR system, which typically asks a mixture of open and closed questions which can be answered with a combination of touchtone and speech. This has the benefit of immediacy, in that the caller will be able to give an accurate assessment of the call and the agent, and also the business may be alerted in near-real-time to any major problems through pre-programmed automated SMS or email alerts.

The speed and ease with which an agent-invited IVR survey can be implemented gives it a distinct advantage over a survey conducted via outbound calls. The resources and staff time required to make outbound calls often mean that they are conducted erratically and rarely during peak times which undermines the quality and usefulness of the data collated. As agent-invited IVR surveys are automated, they require little staff input and can monitor customer satisfaction whenever the contact centre is open.

Outbound automated surveys are becoming more prevalent, with more than 10m outbound IVR survey calls estimated to be made each year in the UK. After the call has been concluded, the caller's number may be put into an outbound dialler's queue, which calls them and offers an IVR survey. The speed with which this call-back is made is crucial to the take-up rate of the survey, with up to 70% acceptance rate if the call-back is in minutes, but perhaps only 10% if the call is made over 48 hours later.

We would suggest that there is no single best way to gauge customer satisfaction: if detailed feedback is what's needed, a written or telephone-based questionnaire is best, although IVR can offer the option of direct quotes through speech recognition or recording transcription. If what you need is immediate knowledge about an issue (including your customers' views of your agents' performance), consider post-call IVR or an SMS survey. The more information you have at your disposal, the more confident you can be that you understand your customers fully.

Written: a system-generated letter is posted to the customer soon after an interaction takes place, requesting feedback. Typically more customers who have had a poor experience will bother to return the questionnaire, skewing the figures, and although some good and detailed learning points can emerge, it's an expensive way to survey customers. It's also the case that results will be tilted towards the demographics with more time available to them, especially older people. There can be a lack of immediacy, and some people might feel that sending out a written questionnaire to ask about how well a call was handled is overkill.

In today's multimedia society, it is important to choose a survey platform that caters for all your customers. Though many customers want to continue to contact a business by telephone, there are others who prefer to text or email and it is necessary to offer consistent service across all channels. Monitoring all interactions to the company will give comprehensive insight into customers' opinions of the service offered.

Similarly, different customers will prefer to be surveyed in different ways and a survey platform should have the flexibility to support IVR, web, text and written surveys and collate the results in a unified reporting system. Not only will this mean that businesses are increasing the number of customers accessed, but a different quality of feedback will be received from each approach.

Written surveys via letter or person-to-person interviews, have an important role to play, particularly where the feedback generated can be compared side-to-side with feedback by other methods. Having quantitative and qualitative data provides valuable feedback that can't be achieved by adopting a single surveying method.

Outbound: frequently, the contact details of a proportion of incoming callers will be passed to a dedicated outbound team, who will call the customer back, often within 24 hours, to ascertain the customer's level of satisfaction with the original call. Sometimes customers will find this intrusive, while others will welcome the chance to provide feedback. Additionally, certain companies employ **outside agencies** to survey customers regularly, which may be useful in benchmarking exercises, since they will apply a more formalised and structured approach to data gathering and presentation. The automated option as mentioned in the IVR section above should also be considered as an option.

SMS: Text messaging has the advantage of immediacy of sending and also of reporting on the results. It is a cheap way of carrying out surveys, and can be linked to a specific agent, allowing the contact centre to use this information for agent performance as well as satisfaction with the business. SMS does not allow detailed or multiple questions though, and businesses will have to collect mobile numbers if they do not already have them. However, take-up rates are better than many other forms of feedback (at around 25-35% on average), and younger and more time-poor customers are more likely to respond, providing a wider universe of responses across demographics. This form of survey can allow the contact centre to identify very unhappy customers and schedule an outbound call to deal with the problem.

opini8n-8 *The feedback you collate must be relevant and actionable so we advise that you examine your survey provider's reporting capabilities thoroughly. If a customer has taken the time to register dissatisfaction you risk making the matter worse if you don't respond quickly to that issue. Being alerted via SMS or email if results are falling outside acceptable limits, ensures that action can be taken immediately.*

Despite this discussion, carrying out the survey is the easy bit. Many companies pay lip service to listening to their customers. The question is…do they actually hear what their customers say? And more importantly do they act upon it to change or improve their processes? There is no point in generating an expectation which the business has no intention of fulfilling. Don't ask the customers for feedback if there is no intention of using it to make the service provided substantially better. The next section on using customer feedback explores this in more depth.

Formal surveys of customer satisfaction offer the customer a chance to feed-back, and the business to learn. Setting up surveys involved various elements which should not be overlooked, including:

 Defining the purpose and objectives of the survey

- Deciding the approach

- Developing the questionnaire

- Carrying out the survey

- Collating the data

- Analysing the results

- Presenting the findings - and acting upon them.

The point of a customer satisfaction survey is to discover what the company is doing wrong, where improvements can take place, how the company is perceived against its competition and how it can improve. It is important to view the survey from the customers' perspective, rather than checking boxes that just relate to internal company metrics, which is self-serving. Surveys should also be ongoing, to check whether real improvements are being made after the issues have been identified.

Survey forms should be simple and quick to complete, but if possible should carry enough weight to allow the company to change its processes and behaviours if that is what is required, using a mixture of objective questions that can be segmented and scored, as well as free text, especially in telephony questionnaires, where customers can be encouraged to add real value.

For surveying contact centre users, the key to success is to keep the survey fairly short, with a maximum of around 5 questions, which can be range-based (e.g. "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree", "strongly agree", etc.), a more simple 'Yes/No' option and a free-text, 'any comments' question. These questions may include:

- Was the call answered quickly?
- Was the agent polite?
- Were you satisfied with the response?
- Was this the first time you had called about this matter?
- Do you have any comments you would like to make?

Opinion is split on whether surveys should identify specific agents, as although major outlying training and behavioural problems can be identified, many operations are keen to avoid the 'Big Brother' feeling of spying on agents, and prefer to emphasise that surveys are done to identify broken processes, not to criticise individuals.

Regardless of whether surveys identify specific agents or not, a key to success is whether the survey implemented is considered by agents as just yet another form of monitoring, or a genuine attempt to help them provide better service in the long run. Agents tend to respond well to successful customer satisfaction improvement initiatives as they usually make their job easier and more rewarding. Keep the survey process simple, focus on agent engagement and act quickly to provide positive feedback to the team. It's more important to get the survey adopted as a positive part of the company's customer service strategy, than it is to design the academically-perfect survey that has a negative impact on the morale of the team.

It is vitally important before beginning to survey customers, that a business:

- Clearly determines the purpose and aims of the survey
- Considers adopting a variety of question types. Scored questions enable a business to produce statistically significant and representative data. Free comments allow the gain of real insight into customers' perception of service
- Selects an experienced company to set up and host the survey. Businesses will benefit from their expertise and knowledge and avoid potentially costly errors
- Ensures that the survey can be carried out throughout the day, including peak times, to gain a true picture of the customer experience
- Makes sure that the results of the survey can be collated and analysed in a wide variety of ways. It is pointless to amass information if it cannot be evaluated and the results disseminated usefully
- Has procedures in place to act upon the information that it finds. The survey may have uncovered some broken processes in the service which need attention. It will also inevitably throw up disgruntled customers whose specific concerns need addressing. In this instance, the survey platform should provide some mechanism for alerting and following-up to ensure that dissatisfied customers are escalated to the appropriate staff
- Adopts a unified approach across the business to assessing and monitoring customer satisfaction. If a business continues to reward agents based on traditional call performance metrics, it is merely paying lip service to good service. If agents are rewarded based on customer satisfaction ratings, it will increase agent engagement and retention at the same time as improving the service it offers to customers.

opini8n-8

USING CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Many companies **hear** their customers, but do they actually **listen** to what their customers say? And more importantly do they act upon it to change or improve their processes? There is no point in generating an expectation which you have no intention of fulfilling. Don't ask the customers for feedback if you have no intention of using it to make the service you provide them with substantially better.

Only 8% of respondents admit that customer feedback is never used by the wider business. Improving once again on last year, 50% of respondents state that they have a formal process for gathering, analysing and passing on information to the relevant sources, with a further 41% of respondents trying informally to pass information to where it might be useful to the business, but this can be fairly hit-or-miss. There is little difference across contact centre size bands as to how knowledge from the customer is used to improve the business.

Figure 30: How is knowledge gained from customers used to improve the business?
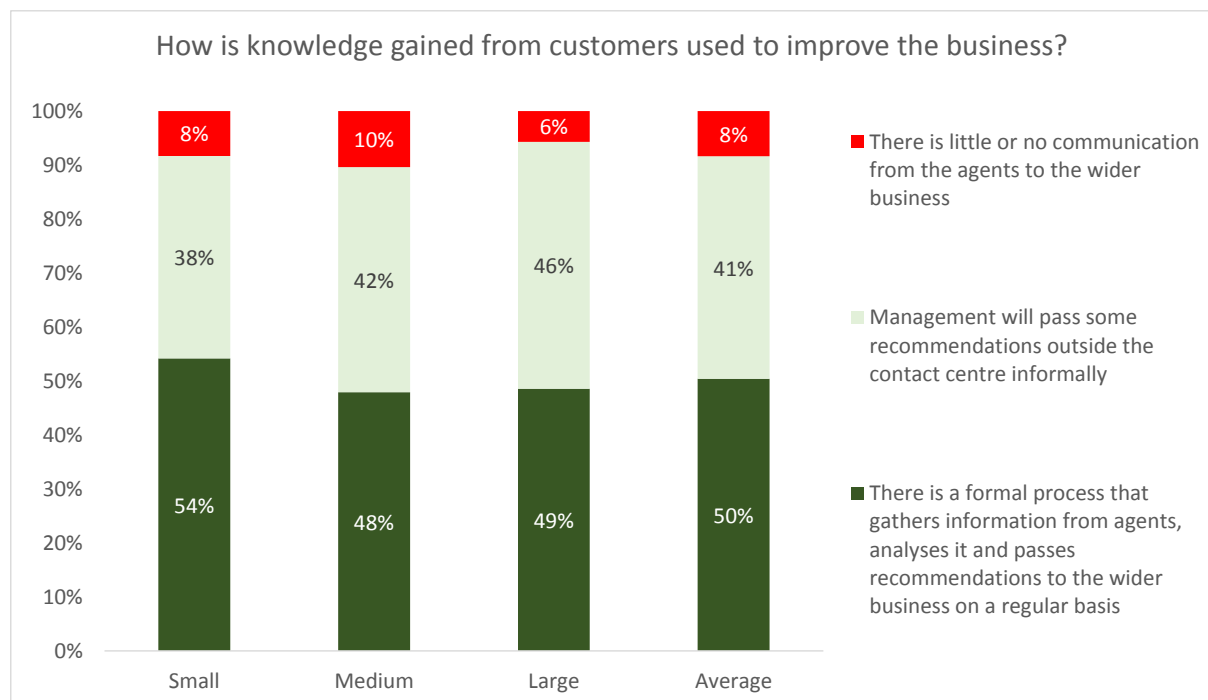
You're Never Too Big to Listen to the Voice of your Customer

Large, multi-national organisations supporting several brands and employing thousands of people face a great many challenges to ensure that they are listening to their customers and responding to their needs. In large companies, where those making decisions can become very distanced from their customers, it is imperative that the Voice of the Customer is continually listened to and analysed in order that the business can respond with speed to their customers' changing requirements.

Choosing a feedback supplier

If you are looking to run surveys across different brands, in many contact centres, in different languages, you need to look for a sophisticated, complex yet user-friendly solution:

• Ensure that your survey provider is able to run surveys in several languages and can set up surveys abroad if necessary. Also, ensure that they have the ability to allow for variations of the same survey to run simultaneously and the results to be examined independently and as a whole.

• To get a truly accurate impression of how your business is operating, it is necessary that you capture the voice of your customers and learn directly from them. This naturally has added complications if your business operates in many different countries. Make sure that your survey provider can capture verbatim and offers a transcription service.

• Check that your survey provider can provide a variety of survey methods to give you choice and flexibility. A good provider should be able to offer inbound and outbound IVR telephone surveys, web surveys and SMS surveys. Having one point of contact will reduce stress, increase efficiency and will invariably be more cost effective.

• If you are spanning a surveying project across many contact centres, it is more than likely that you will be contending with several differing technical capabilities. The provider you select ought to have a variety of methods in its armoury to enable you to run the surveys and link customer contact details and agent identifications to each survey with minimum effort on your part.

• If your contact centres handle a large number of calls, it is important that you can keep a handle on costs by controlling the amount of feedback you collate. Check that your survey provider has a solution for that. Automatic agent quotas, for example, can ensure that only a set number of surveys associated with each agent are conducted each day.

• When soliciting opinions from your customers, you are reliant on their goodwill. It is important, therefore, that the process of surveying them does not potentially jeopardise their good opinion of your business. With this in mind, check that your survey provider has the requisite technology to schedule calls only within business hours, regardless of whether you operate a 24/7 operation or not.

• The feedback you collate must be relevant and actionable. Thoroughly examine your survey provider's reporting capabilities. Having the ability to create favourite reports that automatically update, applying filters to tunnel down to the data and ranking results by agent, allows easy comparison for performance management. Being alerted via SMS or email if results are falling outside acceptable limits, ensures that action can be taken immediately. You may also simply want the raw data to use a third party reporting system.

About Opinion-8

Opinion-8 offers a powerful, flexible range of surveying solutions. It has vast experience with managing complex, multi-national, multi-lingual surveys across many sites and has the flexibility and technical knowledge to ensure that your surveying project is a success, no matter what the size. For more information, contact Rachel Hyland on rachel.hyland@opinion-8.com.

Some of the most important feedback a customer can give is that they are dissatisfied, as these people are far more likely to go elsewhere, and to tell their acquaintances (in real life or via social media) about their bad experience, doing exponential damage to the brand and company.

Looking in more depth about how disgruntled customers are treated, only 47% of respondents that identified this customer type claim to do something about it within a single working day, usually calling to discuss the matter further. 23% of respondents admit that they do not have any target at all for getting back to disgruntled customers. A rapid response offers businesses the chance to prove themselves to the customer, potentially turning a detractor into an advocate.

Figure 31: Target response time to contact dissatisfied customers, by vertical market

Target response time to contact dissatisfied customers, by vertical market
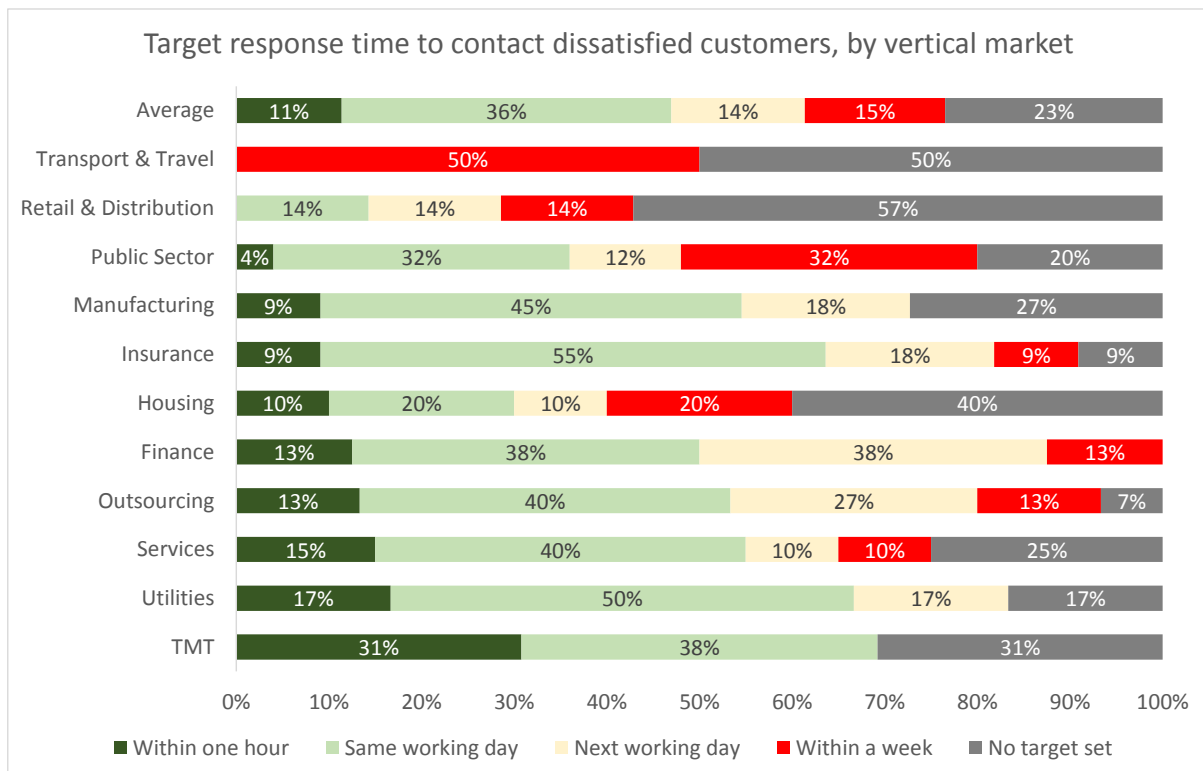
Because of the relatively small sample size within some of the vertical market segments, the chart above should be treated with some caution, but it is interesting to note that some of the businesses more likely to be active upon social media - such as the TMT sector - set themselves the toughest targets to get back to dissatisfied customers. The public sector, as well as respondents in the transport and travel vertical market, seem to be the most relaxed about dealing with disgruntled customers quickly.

Any reluctance to deal promptly with unhappy customers does not seem to be a factor of contact centre size or available resource. In fact, 18% of respondents from small contact centres stated they try to get back to dissatisfied customers within the hour. Surprisingly perhaps, 21% of respondents from the largest contact centres stated that they aim to contact customers who have had a negative experience within a week, a delay which will be much less likely to result in a positive outcome.

Figure 32: Target response time to contact dissatisfied customers, by contact centre size

Target response time to contact dissatisfied customers, by contact centre size

	Within one hour	Same working day	Next working day	Within a week	No target set
Average	11%	36%	14%	15%	23%
Large	12%	35%	15%	21%	18%
Medium	4%	37%	22%	14%	22%
Small	18%	35%	6%	12%	29%
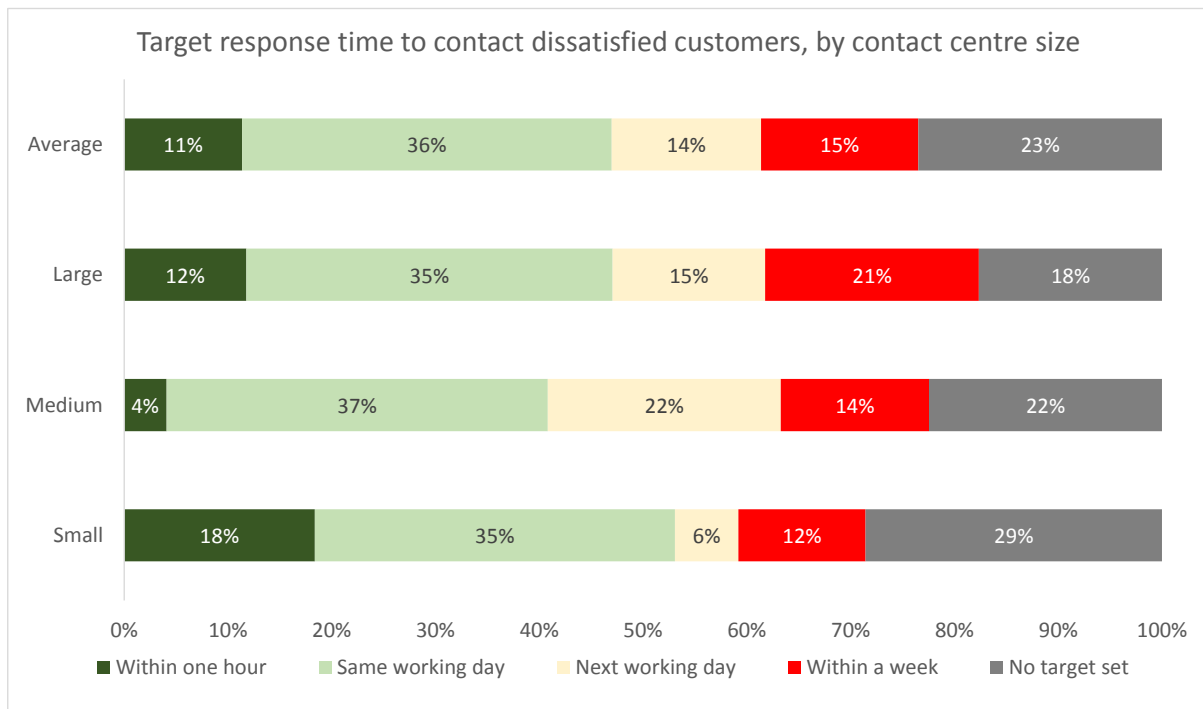
COMPLAINTS

John Seddon uses the term "failure demand" to describe calls that are created by the inability of the business's systems to do something right for the customer:

> "A failure to do something - turn up, call back, send something…causes the customer to make a further demand on the system. A failure to do something right - not solve a problem, send out forms that customers have difficulty with and so on - similarly create demand and creates extra work. Failure demand is under the organisation's control, and it is a major form of sub-optimisation."[1]

Seddon cites the instance of the UK bank where failure demand created almost half of the calls which they had to deal with. Another classic example of failure demand is where emails go unanswered, leading to calls being made (first-stage failure demand). Later, the email will be answered, unnecessarily, as the customer already has their answer (second-stage failure demand). This redundant work will then impact on other (still live) messages in the email queue, creating a vicious circle of failure demand. Redesigning and restructuring the way in which work flows around the organisation, putting the contact centre at the heart of it, rather than treating it as a separate silo, will go much of the way to reducing unnecessary contacts. The customer ends up getting a better service from the whole company, not just the contact centre.

One way in which this can be achieved is to unify and automate the agent desktop, bringing in the relevant data automatically, depending on who the caller is and what they want. At the end of the call, the correct data is written back to the relevant places, and the correct processes kicked off automatically, meaning that the right departments will be provided with the right information, thus reducing the risk of failure demand, unnecessary calls and irate customers. This also takes the pressure off the agents to remember which systems to update and how to navigate through them within the call (which causes long delays, negatively impacting customer satisfaction), or in the wrap-up, which risks agent forgetting to do things, and also decreases agent availability, increasing the queue length, and decreasing customer satisfaction.

Information on failure demand can be gleaned from the contact centre, which can also hold huge amounts of knowledge about what customers' views of the products, services, competitors and company are. Feedback loops will be established in leading contact centres to push information and insights upwards to those who can make a difference in product development, process improvements and customer strategies. Speech analytics offers businesses the chance to mine huge amounts of data and find patterns and reasons in a timely fashion, and it is vital then to act upon this knowledge, proving to both customers and agents that the business takes them seriously.

Customers who take the time to complain are also taking the time to state what went wrong with your process, product or communication, and this effort should be acknowledged and treated as being important. Businesses have found that fixing the problem for one customer can help many other customers, including the ones who never contacted you. Most customers are not complaining to cause trouble - they want you to know what went wrong, and believe that you can fix it. If one customer makes a complaint, the chances are that there are many more who are experiencing the same thing. A customer that has given up on your company will probably not complain, but go

---

[1] *Freedom from Command and Control: A better way to make the work, work*, John Seddon, 2005

elsewhere and tell everyone who will listen that they are doing so, an issue that is particularly important in today's world of omnipresent social media.

Figure 33: Proportion of calls received that are complaints / target of complaints, by vertical market (sorted by largest proportion of complaints about the contact centre - high-to-low) - mean

Vertical market	Proportion of calls that are complaints	% complaints about the contact centre	% complaints about the wider business
Retail & Distribution	22%	14%	86%
TMT	10%	23%	77%
Manufacturing	15%	10%	90%
Public Sector	8%	19%	81%
Outsourcing	5%	27%	73%
Services	7%	17%	83%
Utilities	3%	23%	77%
Finance	4%	21%	79%
Transport & Travel	3%	21%	79%
Insurance	1%	42%	58%
Housing	3%	8%	92%
Average (mean)	**7.5%**	**21%**	**79%**

The preceding table shows, by vertical market, the proportion of inbound calls received that are complaints, and also, in the widest sense, what that complaint is about (i.e. internal - such as a rude agent or not being called back when promised, or external - such as failure demand, which is explained below). The table is sorted by those vertical markets which have the greatest proportion of their calls being complaints about the contact centre itself. In this case, respondents from there retail & distribution sector have 3.2% of overall calls being complaints about the service received in the contact centre itself (calculated by multiplying the % of complaints 22% - by the % that refer to the contact centre - 14%). On the other hand, housing respondents had a miniscule 0.2% of calls being about the failings of their contact centre operations. Obviously, these figures change substantially at a vertical market level from year to year depending on the participating organisations in the research, but annual surveys consistently report around 80% of complaints being to do with failures outside the contact centre.

For every vertical market, the majority of complaints received are not about the contact centre itself (or its staff), but rather 'failure demand', caused by a breakdown of process elsewhere in the organisation. However, the contact centre has to deal with the dirty work, and further failures within the complaints procedure (or lack of it) can see customers calling into the contact centre again and again, becoming more irate each time, despite the real problem lying outside the contact centre. This is further exacerbated by the multitude of channels available to customers, who may choose to complain initially via letter or email, and follow up with multiple phone calls if these initial channels are not able to provide them with an acceptable response.

There is also the case that there is a blurring of responsibility between the contact centre and the rest of the business so that lines of demarcation over where the fault lies can be difficult to find. For example, a telecoms provider that has taken an order for a new line has to rely on the rest of the organisation to provision and deliver this correctly. If the agent takes the contact email down incorrectly, the customer will not receive any information about their order, which may have a query on it. When the irate customer rings in to complain, the problem may appear to be with the back-office processes where the order has halted, but the fault actually lay with the agent. Whether this is tracked or reported on correctly is not a certainty, so the split above between contact centre / back-office complaints should be treated with caution.

There is also a real risk, especially within large contact centres, that a single agent does not have the capability or responsibility to deal with the customer's issue, which may reach across various internal departments (e.g. finance, billing, provisioning and technical support), none of which will (or can) take responsibility for sorting out the problem. Businesses who choose to monitor customer satisfaction evidently value their customers' opinions. However, the report's findings reveal that the majority of contact centres are missing a great opportunity to utilise customer feedback to drive real service improvement. Many contact centres do not know the specific characteristics and behaviours most liked or disliked by customers, and these operations are investing time and money without reaping the benefits of meaningful and actionable information.

opini0n-8

The challenges faced by very large contact centres can be complex, as layers of management, business protocols and multiple agents dealing with the same customer do not facilitate transparency. It is imperative in these instances that the Voice of the Customer is captured and analysed to cut through the obfuscation brought about by the operations of big business. Management must also take the time to communicate the feedback they gather to their agents and work across all relevant internal departments in order that the lessons learnt from the customers can be put into operation.

opini8n-8

MOST EFFECTIVE CHANNELS FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS

Respondents were asked to assess which channel they personally would use if they had a complaint as a customer of their own organisation.

While a significant minority said that the telephone would be the best channel, the multimedia channels such as email and social media also had considerable support. There is little support for writing a letter - which is the traditional channel of complaint - with even web chat being given more support by respondents.

Only 7% gave the diplomatic answer that there would be no advantage to choosing one channel over another within their own organisation.

Figure 34: If you were a customer of your organisation, which channel would you choose to get the best response to a complaint?

Most effective channel at handling complaints

No preference 7%
Face-to-face 1%
Letter 4%
Web chat 5%
Social media 14%
Email 26%
Telephone 43%
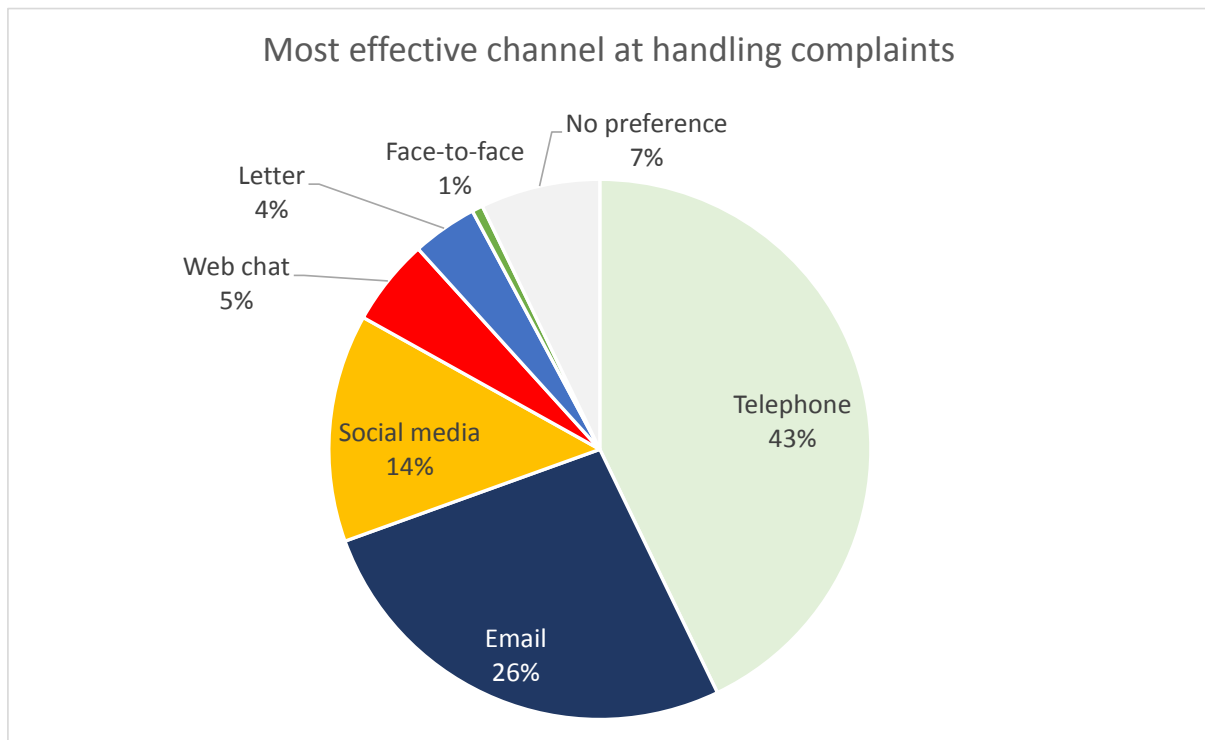
Organisations able to help with Improving Quality and Performance:

Eckoh's multi-channel customer service solutions allow customers to self-serve through automation; helping to reduce call queues, free up agents for more complex calls; and improve overall contact centre efficiency.

Enghouse Interactive offers the tools necessary to improve your business operations with an integrated quality management, real-time speech analytics and workforce optimisation suite to increase customer service quality and performance: our solutions, which include call and screen recording, agent coaching, speech analytics, workforce management, performance metrics, score cards and reporting tools, are highly scalable and modular enabling you to choose the level of complexity that meets your requirements for continuous performance improvement.

Optimise Workforce Performance and your Customer Experience with the Genesys patented Speech and Text Analytics solution.

Infinity CCS's technology solutions help you improve customer experience and drive down cost to serve: Enable your agents to work smarter and faster, and focus on customers not processes and software, with our Unified Desktop, Intelligent Workflow and Knowledge Base software; provide your operational management team with real-time, actionable insight into performance and compliance with Management, Reporting and QA software.
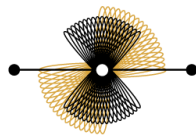
INTERACTIVE INTELLIGENCE
Deliberately Innovative

At Interactive Intelligence, it's what we do.

Customers really only want two things as they interact with your business — speed and satisfaction — and Intradiem's Intraday Automation enables your organisation to interface with customers with a real-time frontline workforce that is responsive, knowledgeable and accurate.

ip integration

IP Integration's in-house team of specialists have developed a range of bespoke applications that deliver improvements in contact centre performance and quality-of-service; including payment processing, call queuing and multi-service management.

NEWVOICEMEDIA

NewVoiceMedia is a leading global provider of true cloud contact centre and multi-channel communications solutions.

nexidia

Nexidia, long term educators of Customer Interaction Analytics, works with some of the world's largest contact centres to capture multi-channel interactions, analyse the data and then use this valuable insight into the customer experience to develop business strategies to improve the performance in every area of the organisation.

NOBLE SYSTEMS

Improve the quality of your contact centre campaigns with Noble Systems' quality assessment tools that include recording and reporting, screen and data captures and scoring features to help you manage your quality assurance activities for verification, training and quality control.

Opinion-8

Opinion-8 is an innovative and effective customer-experience management tool which allows you to gain customer, employee and stakeholder feedback in a simple and highly cost-efficient way - its powerful, integrated web and voice survey technology with unified online reporting offers you a variety of telephone and web survey solutions

plantronics.

The premium audio quality of Plantronics headset solutions is proven to improve customer experience and agent productivity by up to 43%.

rostrvm

rostrvm's robust software enables consistently high standards of contact and transaction handling activity, minimises queues and improves call handling time, to delight customers and give them choice: all this can be monitored using our versatile performance management system that supports compliance processes and delivers accurate, accessible operational information and performance analysis.

SAP

SAP Contact Center software helps organisations efficiently manage contact centre operations for improved customer service quality and performance.

Ultra is the leading provider of Cloud technology solutions offering advanced contact centre solutions with inclusive, proactive support and unparalleled campaign performance monitoring - simple to set-up, integrate and manage, secure solutions for full compliance and the smart choice for any business.

Verint Systems is a global leader in Actionable Intelligence® solutions, which help organizations address three important challenges: customer engagement optimization; security intelligence; and fraud, risk and compliance.

MAXIMISING EFFICIENCY AND AGENT OPTIMISATION

Improving call throughput and decreasing costs has been a focus of most contact centres since the industry started, and few solutions or processes are considered without understanding how they will affect productivity.

This section looks at ways in which contact centres can make the most of what they've got, through increasing efficiency, or by avoiding unnecessary calls in the first place. Solutions and issues include:

- Contact centre performance metrics
- Alternative ways of working - virtualisation and homeworking
- The enterprise-wide contact centre
- IP and convergence
- Voice biometrics
- PCI compliance and security
- Queue management and routing
- Workforce management
- Headsets.

How to build a Customer Centric Enterprise?
Best practices for building a customer centric enterprise

Enghouse Interactive

Customers are the lifeblood of your organisation and should be at the heart of everything your employees do. Customers should not solely be the concern of those in the front line of your organisation. Only when every employee defines their actions by the impact they have on the customer experience can you consider yourself a truly Customer Centric Enterprise.

There are three pillars which support on building a Customer Centric Enterprise:

Connected Enterprise

The connected enterprise brings your entire organisation together in a customer-focused and customer-accessible pool of resources and systems. Blurring the boundaries between front office, mid office, back office, branch and remote workers, all customer interactions and associated tasks are delivered to the most appropriate resource, fulfilling the need of the customer, first time, every time.

"We were able to reduce data and telephony network requirements and implement a single unified communications network across our offices, significantly reducing costs and connecting the council with our citizens".
SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

Creating a truly connected enterprise is a journey. It can be embarked on without the need for a wholesale change to your processes, people or technology. *The key milestones in this journey are:*

Enable the entire business to collaborate, by providing a virtual pool of resources and systems that can be dynamically applied to servicing your customers' needs

Prioritisation and distribution - applying a consistent set of rules to all customer-related tasks with the customer and work associated with the fulfilment of their needs.

Monitor and measure - delivering timely and accurate management information to those that need it, irrespective of location and allowing for continual refinement

Optimised Customer Access

Optimised customer access intelligently opens your organisation to customers through their channel of choice, with that choice based upon convenience, availability and effectiveness. Customers can navigate across various channels to connect with your organisation joining the different threads to create a coherent customer journey.

When and how they want it - Intelligently providing your customers with a choice of channels through which to communicate

Help them to help themselves - Enable customers to resolve many of their issues and queries without the need to interact directly with your staff.

Multichannel customer demand - Throw in the potential for customers to move between channels and back and forth from self to assisted service..

Empower customers to self-serve - Intelligently engage customers through the most effective and accessible channels whilst ensuring a consistent and joined up experience.

"SunTrust Bank has increased customer satisfaction by 30% ...with a platform that answers support questions round the clock, also our support site bounce rate decreased by 20%"
SUNTRUST BANK

Proactive Customer Engagement

Why be reactive when you can be proactive? Proactive customer engagement creates a new level of customer engagement driven from understanding, empathising with and predicting your customer's needs. By proactively engaging your customers before they feel the need to reach out to you, an organisation can deliver a low effort customer experience that reduces customer frustration whilst, at the same time, reducing costly unplanned, reactive workload and improving organisational efficiency.

"The Outbound dialler exceeded expectations (i.e. gave an uplift) despite a challenging environment." IJENTO

Keeping the customer informed - proactively informing the customer of the event you will have a significant impact on uptake, which as a minimum creates a better customer experience and, more likely, will have a significant impact on your bottom line.

Complementing self-service - Keeping the customer interacting through the web will avoid them picking up the phone and allows them to continue to self-serve once they have finished interacting with an advisor.

Maximising operational productivity - Agent productivity could be increased by as much as 200%, using advanced dialling algorithms; thereby agents will spend less time dialling, and more time calling and speaking to customers

Contact Enghouse for expertise to help you to build your own customer centric enterprise.

CONTACT CENTRE PERFORMANCE

The success or otherwise of contact centres has traditionally been measured by observation of key metrics, usually related to cost and efficiency – average call length, average speed to answer, % of calls answered within a certain time, etc. While these figures are a useful and still widely-acknowledged and understood benchmark, times are changing. Many contact centres now try to measure the effectiveness of their operation by tracking metrics such as first-contact resolution and customer satisfaction levels, although there are no standard measures or agreements on what constitutes a satisfied customer or fully-resolved call. This does tend to strengthen the hand of those who believe that because the contact centre **can** provide detailed data on call volumes and handling times, then that is what it **should** primarily be measured against. Depending on the type of work that they do, contact centres may consider focusing upon various measurements from the following table.

Figure 35: Contact centre metrics

Metric	Comments
Call duration / Average Handle Time	A typical 'old-fashioned' metric, which has gone out of favour for many operations, based on the idea that each call is different and should take as long as it takes. However, it is one of the easiest statistics to measure, and work out cost against.
Cost per call	Although this is an attractive and easily-understood metric for senior management to view, there is a real danger that calls are closed too quickly and revenue and loyalty-building opportunities are lost. If a contact centre has many short calls (which may be better off being dealt with by self-service), this will produce a lower cost-per-call figure, which makes it look as though the contact centre is doing well, when the opposite may be the case. The same logic applies to first-call resolution rates. Cost per call is a very complicated metric that is difficult to get correct. However, senior non-contact centre management understand how cost figures impact the business more than occupancy or call abandonment rates, although these have an impact on all parts of the business. At the most basic level, cost per call can be calculated by dividing the overall spent budget of the contact centre by the number of calls, although this does not take into account abandoned calls or instances when the customer has had to call multiple times to get a resolution (a situation which in fact brings cost per call down, although negative to both business and customer). Neither does it take into account the effect of failure demand - where the contact centre cleans up after processes elsewhere in the business go wrong, leaving the contact centre to sort them out. As such, it should be viewed with caution.

Schedule adherence	Schedule adherence is a metric that looks to help with the fine-tuning of a contact centre's labour force, so that calls are answered swiftly, but that agents are not sitting idly waiting for calls. It is a metric that is of more importance to schedulers than to customers, although the impact of getting schedules wrong can be catastrophic for efficiency, cost and performance.
Agent occupancy rate	The agent occupancy rate is made up the call-time plus wrap-up, that is, the proportion of time that each agent spends on dealing with the call itself and the actions deriving from it. A laborious wrap-up time caused by slow back-office systems or lack of familiarity from the agent's perspective, can go some way to producing high occupancy rates, which looks good at first glance, but is actually worse for the business in these cases.
Customer satisfaction ratings	A very hot topic for some time, customer satisfaction is seen to be directly linked to profitability through increased loyalty, share of wallet and customer advocacy. There is considerable debate about how satisfied (or delighted) customers have to be before it starts making a noticeable difference to the bottom-line (i.e. how happy does a customer have to be before they accept premium pricing strategies, and how unhappy do they have to be before they go elsewhere?). There's no easy answer, but high customer satisfaction ratings - at a reasonable cost for the business - are surely good for everyone. The Customer Experience Measurement & Improvement section in this report should be read into order to understand the various methods and meanings of customer satisfaction scores.
Call throughput and abandonment rates	Understanding the types of call being received as well as tracking the number that are dropped can be translated into lost revenue within a sales environment, making a pitch for greater investment easier.
Call transfer rate	This metric can indicate training needs at the individual agent level, a failure in the initial IVR routing or a need to update FAQs or other information on a website (for example, a spike in this metric might be driven by a recent marketing campaign which has confused some customers, creating a high level of calls about the same issue). Tracking and call recording in cases of high transfers should identify the issue.
Revenue per call	As many contact centres are now profit centres, understanding the effectiveness of the sales efforts is vital to judging the success of the contact centre itself.
Staff attrition rates	A well-publicised cost that senior management are very aware of, high levels of staff attrition are poisonous to the effective running of the majority of contact centres, causing high levels of recruitment and training cost, lower average call handling quality and longer queue times due to inexperienced staff, as well as the vicious circle of lower staff morale.

Average speed to answer / longest call waiting etc.	Has a strong and demonstrable effect on customer satisfaction or frustration, as well as impacting on call abandonment, lost revenues and high staff attrition rates caused be excessive pressure. Average speed to answer is a metric which is easily measured, and forms a vital view of the contact centre's staffing levels as well as impacting directly upon the customer experience. As such, it is similar in nature to the call abandonment rate. Contact centres should of course consider the amount of time that a customer spends in the IVR segment of the call when considering the 'speed to answer' metric - as the customers themselves surely do so.
Customer loyalty / lifetime value / churn rates	A central thought of CRM is that a business should focus upon keeping profitable customers, and growing unprofitable ones. A single figure for customer retention is not effective, as it does not include the types of customer churn, or the undesirability (or otherwise of losing such customers).
First contact resolution	Improving first contact resolution (FCR) benefits customers (who are more happy / loyal / profitable / etc.); agents (higher morale; fewer frustrating calls); and business (lower cost of repeated calls; higher profitability): everyone wins. This can be very hard to measure, as it is the customer, and not the contact centre that should be stating whether the issue has been resolved successfully. It is perhaps the Gold Standard for forward-looking contact centres, and methods of measuring it are found later in this section.

ip integration

Contact Centre Intraday Task Management

An Intraday Task Management solution can release trapped agent capacity in your contact centre to help improve quality and performance, as well as reduce operational costs.

Use inaccessible agent idle time to create half a day per month, per agent, to invest in improving key metrics like FCR, AHT and CSAT.

Intradiem is an innovative self-funding solution, available from IP Integration, that enables you to recover agent idle time in near real-time throughout the day.

Intradiem aggregates this additional capacity into larger, more useable blocks of time that can be re-allocated for any agent activity, all without affecting the existing agent schedule or service levels. As a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) solution it is quick to deploy and delivers results from day 1.

To discover more about Intradiem, visit **www.ip-consulting.co.uk**

CALL NOW to arrange a FREE consultation
0844 871 2172

Intradiem™

AGENT ACTIVITY

Agent activity per hour is a key structural metric aimed at helping contact centre management understand how the agent's time is being spent. We have segmented it into seven parts:

- **Call time**: amount of time actually spent on the inbound call
- **Post-call wrap-up**: after-call data input and actions driven specifically by that call
- **Training:** whether desk-based or lecture-type
- **Email / text chat:** time spent on answering multimedia queries
- **Administration /paperwork**: general administration and keyboard- or paper-driven work which may be for internal purposes only (e.g. timesheets) or for external work as well (e.g. sending faxes).
- **Idle**: time spent not taking calls or doing other work
- **Other**.

Figure 36: Agent activity
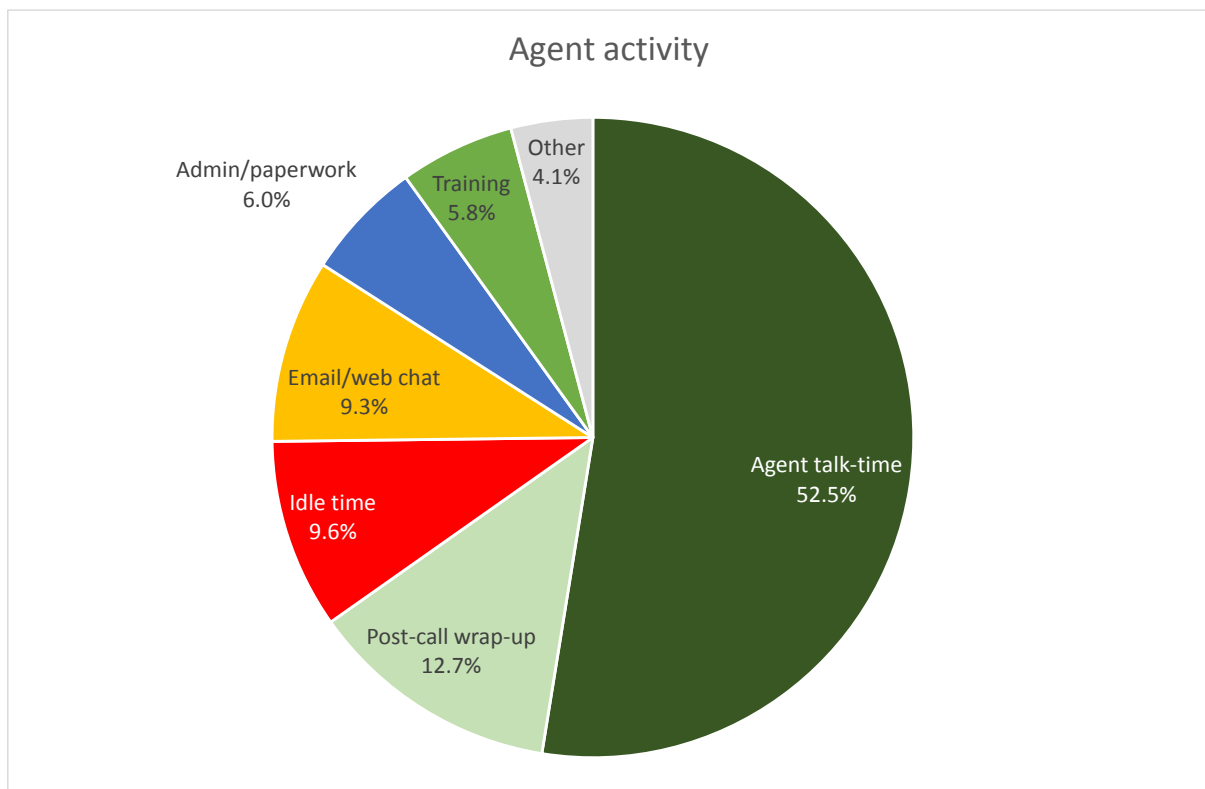
The historical decline in the proportion of talk time seems to be continuing, with respondents' agents spending an average of 52.5% of their time on calls (compared to 53.2% last year), with just over 12% of time spent on wrap-up and a little less than 10% on idle time. Training and administration time is roughly similar, at around 6% each, with over 9% of time spent doing multimedia handling, a significant increase on last year's figure of 7.3%.

100

Despite the widespread management expertise within the mature UK contact centre market, and the ongoing efforts of solution providers to improve efficiency with new products, there are still significant opportunities for reducing the non-productive call time at the beginning of the call, where an agent is authenticating the caller's identity. By doing this automatically, either through IVR or more securely, through biometric identification, the business can free up around 20-30 seconds of agent time, which makes a big difference to call and queue lengths. This element is investigated in-depth in the "Voice Biometrics" section later in the report.

Post-call wrap-up time is also ripe for slimming-down. There are many applications in the market which are capable of reducing the amount of after-call work that an agent has to do, by bringing together all of the systems and applications the agent needs on that specific call into a single virtual application, and then updating the relevant databases accordingly. This removes the need for a specialist knowledge of legacy system navigation, reducing keying errors and dramatically shortening wrap-time through kicking off relevant back-office processes automatically. Most of these agent desktop optimisers do not touch the logic of the existing systems, but act as a user interface that picks up and presents the relevant fields and business processes at the right time.

ip integration

A significant factor in improving agent activity ratios is the ability to recover unproductive time in the agent's daily routine and repurpose this lost capacity towards improvement or cost reduction initiatives. An Intraday Management solution that can recover small pockets of fragmented agent idle time throughout the day and aggregate this time into larger blocks of time that can be allocated to complete off-phone activities like training, coaching, back office processing or administration goes a long way towards improving agent productivity with time you have already paid for, but could not previously access.

Looking historically at how talk time and idle time has changed, it can be seen that the average amount of time an agent spends talking to customers has dropped to around 52%-53%. Certainly the agent today has more tasks than previously: the job will tend to be more varied and require greater depth of knowledge, meaning that increased training and administration tasks will need to take place, and of course many agents now handle significant amounts of multichannel work in addition to their traditional telephony role.

We would also expect to find that the overall amount of agent time spent idle has reduced very significantly as a result of agents having so much more to do and the focus that the economic downturn placed on efficiency and cost-cutting. However, although idle time has indeed decreased from a historical average of 14%, there has been little significant decline seen in this metric within the past few years. One of the main problems with idle time is that it is mainly comprised of small chunks of a few seconds or a couple of minutes at most between calls, which are too short a time for an agent to do an alternative task. As such, unless these fragments rolled up into a larger, schedulable amount of time, reducing idle time much below 9%-10% will be extremely difficult.

Figure 37: Talk time and idle time, 2008-2014

102

ip integration
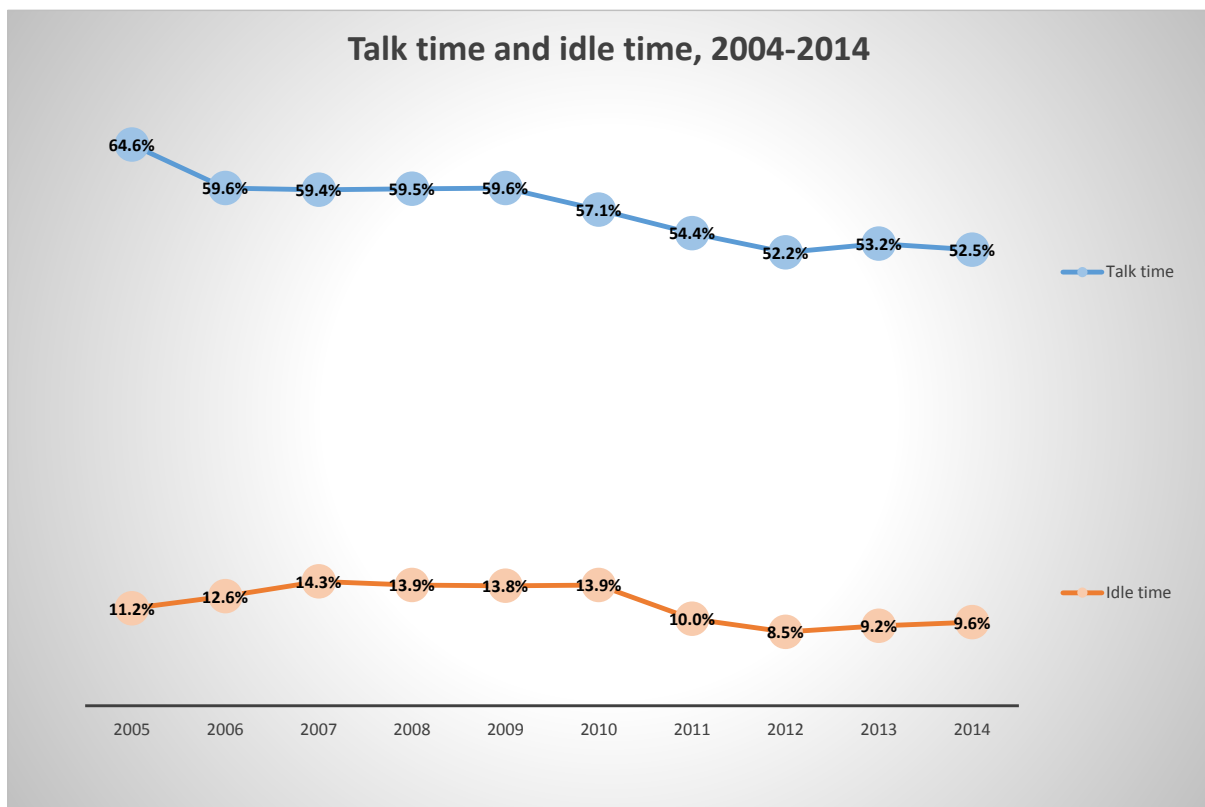
The Rise and Rise of Intraday Management

Did you know that organisations who adopt Intraday Management initiatives in their contact centres achieve significantly better results across key performance indicators such as customer experience, first call resolution rates and average handle time (AHT)?

Recent research from the Aberdeen Group illustrates how organisations who adopt best practice Intraday Management programmes outpace their peers:

- More than doubling their year-on-year improvement in customer experience
- Generating a 55% increase in agent utilisation
- Tripling annual increases in year-on-year revenue growth

So, how can you achieve these results; especially in an environment dominated by budget constraints and high agent occupancy rates? The answer lies in tapping into additional agent capacity that you've already paid for, but can't get access to through traditional contact centre processes or technology. This capacity is known as agent idle time.

A typical contact centre may experience idle time of between 12-17% of total agent time. The problem is idle time often occurs throughout the day, as small fragments of time of up to a few minutes - not long enough to get anything done. If you could recover some of these pockets of idle time, you could create additional capacity in the contact centre and improve productivity.

An Intraday Management programme from IP Integration allows you to do exactly this; utilising an innovative and patented technology from Intradiem. Intradiem is an automated Intraday Task Management solution that recovers agent idle time in near real-time, throughout the day, and aggregates it into larger, more useable blocks of time that can be re-allocated for any agent activity.

Intraday Task Management
How centers address idle time

11% of an agent's day is **idle**

Idle time is sporadic, averaging in **2.5 minutes slivers**

58% of WFM professionals) said intraday scheduling is something they **can improve upon.**

Idle time is plentiful but hard to use without a way to defrag the available time across agents.

Automatic assignment of targeted, prioritised tasks (such as training, communications and back-office work) into the recovered time not only improves productivity but also enables scheduled agents to handle more calls; reducing operating costs.

Unlike alternative solutions, this is achieved whilst also protecting the existing agent schedule and service levels against unexpected changes in customer traffic.

Whether a contact centre is trying to improve customer experience, reduce operational costs or increase sales revenue, agents are one of the biggest influences on moving these dials. The degree with which business leaders can improve agent performance through additional training, or overall business performance through re-purposing agent time towards other activities such as back office processing, has a significant bearing on the opportunity to achieve the desired business outcomes.

IP Integration, through its specialist contact centre practice, can provide the experience and expertise to identify where and how an Intraday Management solution will enable the achievement of your contact centre improvement initiatives and transformation programmes.

To book a free consultancy session call us now on 0118 918 4634 or visit www.ip-consulting.co.uk for more details.

ip integration

Intradiem™
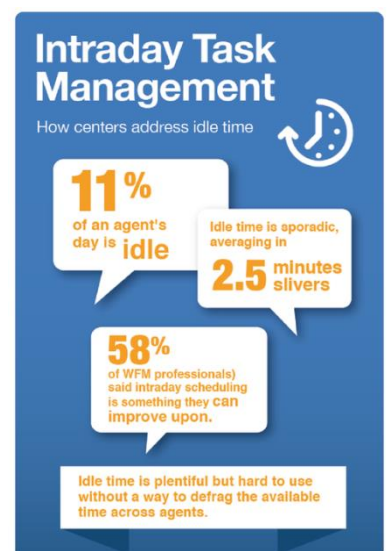
PERFORMANCE METRICS

Figure 38: Selected performance metrics

Metric	Mean average	Median average
Average speed to answer	36.1 seconds	20.0 seconds
Call abandonment rate	5.5%	4.0%
First-call resolution rate	78%	83%
Call duration (service)	296 seconds (4m 56s)	263 seconds (4m 23s)
Call duration (sales)	392 seconds (6m 32s)	290 seconds (4m 50s)
Call transfer rate	7.9%	5.0%
Cost of inbound call	£3.77	£3.00
Cost of successful outbound call	£3.64	£3.05

NB: as a few respondents may show extreme results, data are not distributed symmetrically. In such cases, median values show the midpoint and may demonstrate the truer picture of a typical operation. If calculating an industry-wide amount (e.g. total cost of calls, or total time spent waiting to answer), the mean average should be used.

Detailed analysis of all of the above performance metrics, including historical changes and segmentations by vertical market, contact centre size and type of activity are available in the "UK Contact Centre HR and Operational Benchmarking (2014)" report.

There is also analysis of budget expenditure, including past and planned changes in Opex and Capex budgets.

Over the years, the importance of contact centre metrics have changed considerably. 10 years ago, average call duration and cost-per-call were considered to be amongst the most important metrics, but respondents to this year's report consider them of minor importance compared to more customer-focused measurements.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 34% of respondents choose customer satisfaction rating as being the most important measurement that a contact centre tracks. In second place is first-call resolution, with 28% of respondents placing it as their number one priority and a further 30% putting it in second place. Speed to answer, of huge importance to customer satisfaction, comes in third place, with call abandonment rate in fourth.

In fact, customer satisfaction is driven by the other metrics shown here, and can be seen as a consequence of how these other elements perform.

Figure 39: Most important contact centre metrics
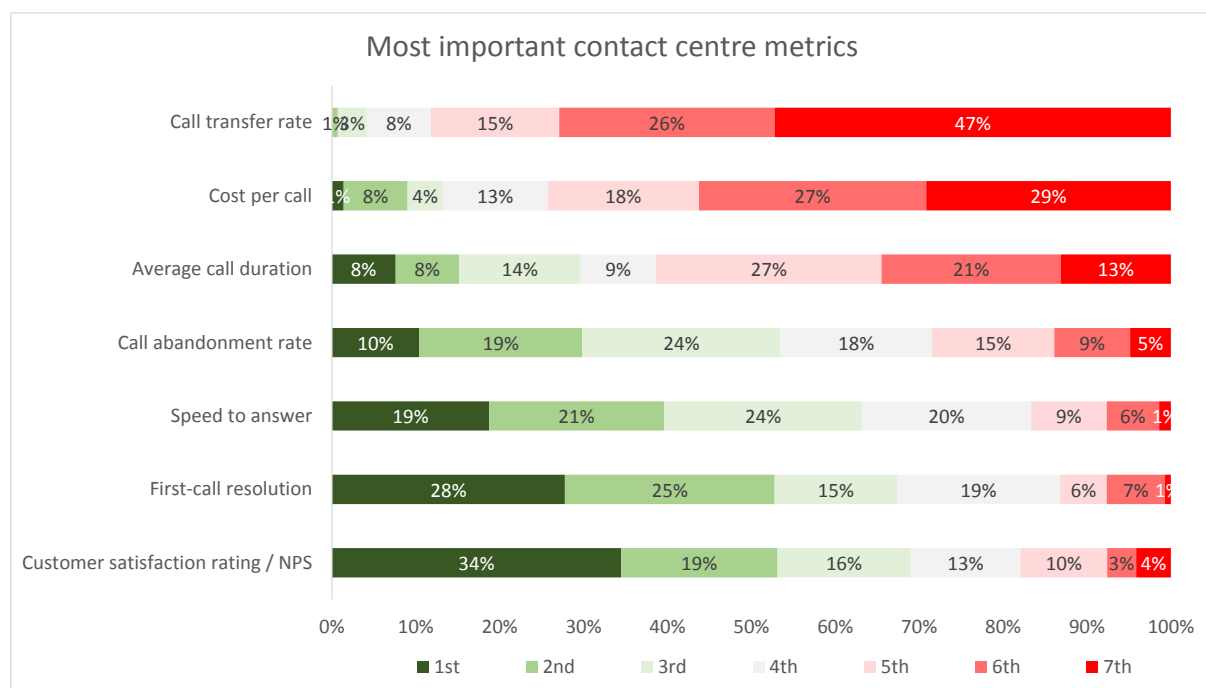
The rest of this chapter considers the way in which first-call resolution can be measured accurately, as it is perhaps the major key to any contact centre's success, and to improving customer satisfaction scores.

It is widely recognised that improving performance measures, like First Contact Resolution and Speed to Answer, goes a long way towards improving both customer satisfaction to retain customers, and agent morale to reduce attrition. However, the resources required to move such dials in the contact centre are often prohibitive, so how can you make progress towards these goals in a budget-constrained environment with high occupancy rates, without leaving any spare agent capacity? An Intraday Management solution can typically uncover around 5% of additional agent capacity to repurpose towards any off-phone activity to improve performance or reduce operational costs, which can include agent training, coaching, back-office processing or administration.

THE ROLE OF FIRST-CONTACT RESOLUTION

For most businesses, there is no fixed agreement on what a successful contact centre looks like and there isn't even an agreement at board-level on how an operation should be viewed. Even in similar industries, around half of businesses state that a contact centre is a strategic asset, with the other half seeing it as an operational cost centre. At an operational level, managers are tasked to balance factors such as cost, efficiency, staff morale and attrition, call quality, customer satisfaction and revenue - some of which may be mutually antagonistic - in a constantly-changing environment where there is limited opportunity for reflection.

Having said that, the contact centre world has moved on from the ruthless focus on call throughput and call duration that characterised many operations a decade ago. A major question being asked today is, how do contact centres attempt to measure the most important metric of all – first-contact resolution? (First-contact' resolution differs slightly from 'first-call' resolution, in that it includes emails, web chat and other non-voice channels as well. In reality, non-voice resolution rates are much less commonly measured).

It can be stated with some confidence that first-contact resolution is seen as the key to a successful contact centre: while the previous chart shows that customer satisfaction rating is the most important metric (with first-contact resolution coming second), the majority of the report's respondents place first-contact resolution as being one of the top 3 metrics that are most **influential** on customer satisfaction, with 53% stating it as being no.1, in effect, far more important than any other. (See the earlier section on Customer Experience Measurement & Improvement for more detail). So, logically it seems that to improve customer satisfaction, a business has to improve first contact resolution rates.

The ability to understand a query and deal with it in a reasonable timeframe at the first time of asking is the key to a contact centre's success, reducing the overall number of contacts while providing the customer with a good experience which will impact on the company's overall performance. It also has a positive effect on the agent's morale (and thus, staff attrition rates), and increases the chances of a successful cross-sell and up-sell being made. Little wonder that the first-contact resolution metric has grown hugely in importance, but it can be problematic to quantify accurately. This risks the metric being downplayed, especially as it is not simply a matter of producing a monthly report from ACD statistics.

First-contact resolution rates are not a simple statistic to understand, but have to be viewed in context: an improving business may well see its FCR rate actually decline after it implements process improvements, which is counter-intuitive. Some businesses are currently handling live calls that are more suited to self-service or better marketing communications. Many of these calls are about the same issue, and are answered quickly and accurately, which improves FCR rates, but of course, piles up cost and impacts negatively upon other performance metrics, such as queue length and call abandonment rate.

Businesses should consider what is causing these unnecessary calls, rather than just focusing upon a single metric, and high first-contact resolution rates may actually be masking underlying problems:

- The contact centre is handling simple and repetitive calls that could be moved to self-service, or which could be addressed on a website and through better marketing communications
- Callers are dropping out of self-service to speak with agents because the self-service application is failing in its task and should be re-engineered
- Unclear marketing communications are causing customers to call
- Calls are being received that are actually driven by mistakes from elsewhere in the enterprise.

When businesses begin stopping unnecessary calls at the source, those left are usually of a more complex nature. This will lower first-call resolution rates initially, allowing a clearer picture of what is really happening in the contact centre to emerge, which can then be addressed more fully.

The dramatic drop in first-call resolution (FCR) if rate in 2012 seems to have been more of a statistical blip than a fundamental change, with the mean average rising this year to a more normal 78%. The overall trend for FCR is quite steady: as the easier interactions go to self-service (especially online), the contact centre is left with more difficult and varied tasks, which are also very complicated to categorise effectively using the current tools available to most. As the contact centre adapts and invests in better ways of handling customer requests, first call resolution rate increases and parity resumes.

Figure 40: Changes in first-call resolution rate (2003 - 2014)

Year	Mean average first-call resolution rate
2003	77%
2004	74%
2005	76%
2006	80%
2007	80%
2008	79%
2009	77%
2010	77%
2011	77%
2012	70%
2013	76%
2014	78%

First-contact resolution rates seem an important metric to study, being concerned both with the customers' experience as well as avoiding unnecessary calls. However, it is very difficult to measure effectively, with no single best practice method of getting definitive statistics that are directly comparable to the rest of the industry. This difficulty is shown by the fact that in past years, 40-50% of contact centres responding to this survey do not collect FCR performance at all (this year's non-responding figure is only 24%, which is a positive improvement).

Of those that do, there are various ways to measure, or at least estimate, first-call resolution rates:

- Agents provide opinions on whether the call was resolved completely
- Tracking of issues shows if they are re-opened
- Supervisors monitor calls and score based on their opinion
- The company or a third-party can contact customers later to ask their views
- Customers provide feedback in end-of-call IVR sessions
- SMS messages or emails are sent to customers at times defined by the business.

Call monitoring is by far the most widely-used way of gauging the call's success, and is used by 73% of respondents. Post-call methods of trying to gather first-call resolution rates are much less widely used.

However, even if FCR can be measured successfully and accurately, this figure is still not necessarily actionable: we do not always know why some calls are not resolved first-time. Without a greater level of insight, contact centre managers may not be addressing the real issues that are impacting on customer satisfaction and the effectiveness of the operation. In the near future, we expect to see the power of speech analytics being directed at understanding why customers contact a business multiple times.

Figure 41: Use of first-call resolution measurement methods
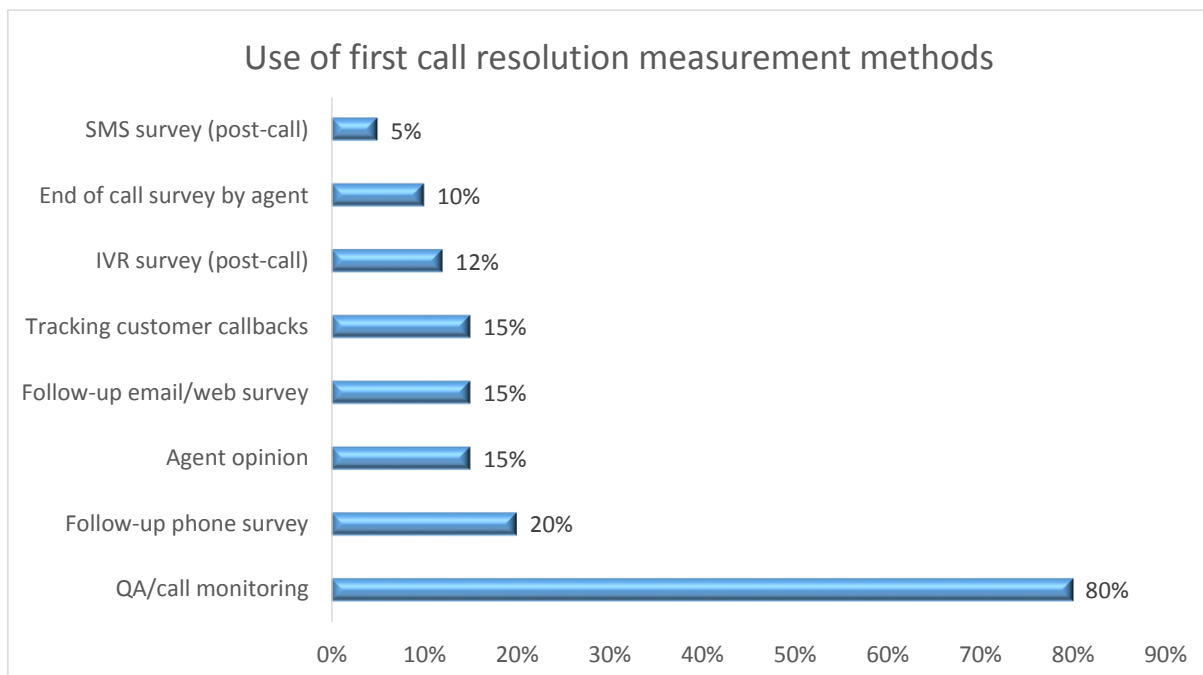
It is worth noting that more than half of contact centres which track first-call resolution do so **only** based on the initial telephone call itself: that is, they do not check whether the action or business process initiated by the call has been followed through successfully. The vast majority of the complaints received by a contact centre are about the failings of the wider business, so focusing entirely upon the work done within the contact centre is missing the point of measuring first-call resolution. The traditional insularity of the contact centre operation fails the needs of the wider

business, but without an explicit remit to investigate and report on processes outside the contact centre, it can hardly be blamed for the failure to hunt down and fix the wider problems.

Perhaps logically, the most widely-used form of gathering first-call resolution information is also seen as being the most effective (or else, why would it be so widely used?). Call monitoring is seen as being very effective by half of respondents that use this, with only 5% viewing it negatively. Post-call methods, such as follow-up phone, email or web surveys are generally considered to be reasonably effective, although respondents tend not to be as enthusiastic about these as they are about call monitoring. The tracking of customer call-backs, which can be complex and inaccurate if systems and processes are not set up to do this, is also widely seen to be an effective way of tracking first-call resolution.

Figure 42: Effectiveness of first-call resolution measurement methods (where used)

Effectiveness of first call resolution measurement methods (where used)

Method	Very effective	Fairly effective	Fairly ineffective	Very ineffective
SMS survey (post-call)	10%	55%	35%	
Follow-up email/web survey	12%	62%	21%	5%
Agent opinion	15%	77%	5%	3%
End of call survey by agent	25%	65%	5%	5%
IVR survey (post-call)	25%	70%	3%	2%
Follow-up phone survey	25%	70%	5%	
Tracking customer callbacks	35%	60%	5%	
QA/call monitoring	50%	45%	5%	
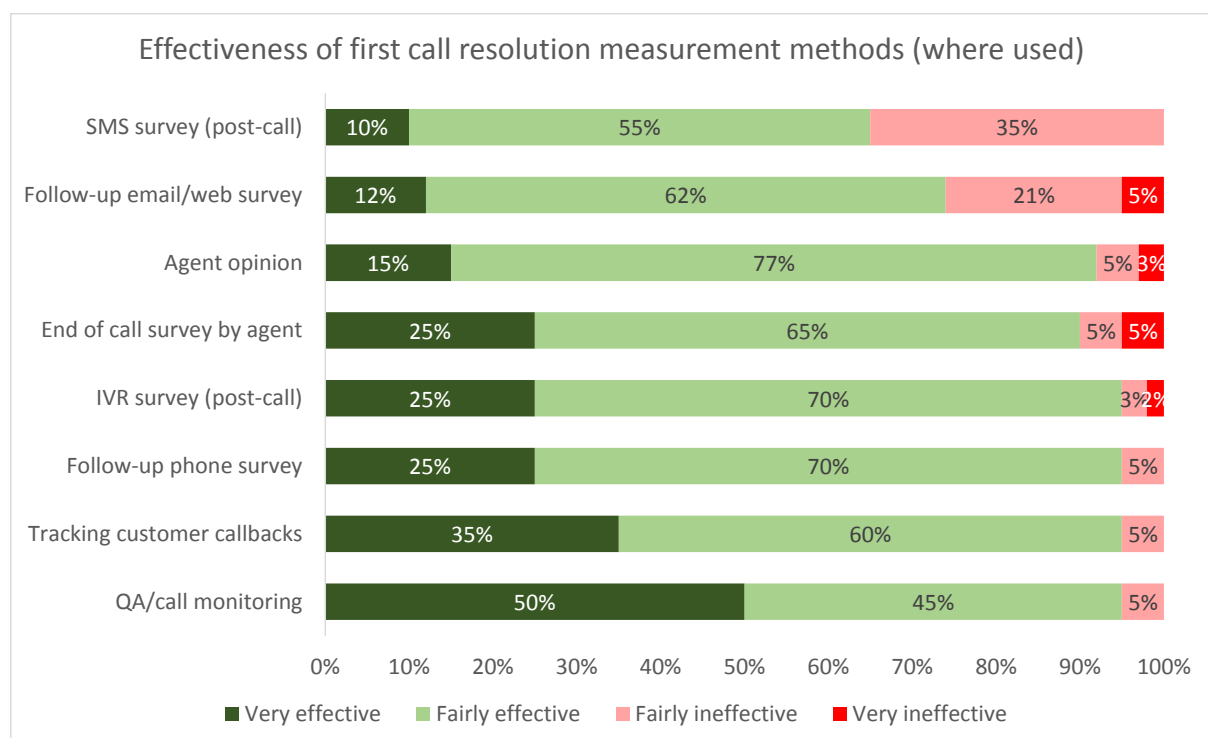
Fundamentally, you cannot improve First Contact Resolution without investing in agent training and development. The age-old dilemma is where to find the time to release agents off the phone to undertake these development activities. An Intraday Management solution that can recover small pockets of fragmented agent idle time throughout the day and aggregate this time into larger blocks of time that can be allocated to complete off-phone activities like training, coaching, back office processing or administration goes a long way towards improving agent productivity with time you have already paid for, but could not previously access.

ALTERNATIVE CONTACT CENTRE MODELS

Although many contact centres still operate in the same way in which most were originally set-up – a single, centralised site – there increasing commercial pressures and technical opportunities within the industry to look at alternative ways of working, such as using virtual contact centres, or encouraging homeworking.

The causes for this include:

- the presence of multiple contact centres – possibly gained through mergers and acquisitions (especially in the finance, insurance, telecoms and utilities sectors) which are not linked together in any way, thus not gaining from any economics of scale
- increasing levels of staff attrition and difficulty in finding the right staff to replace them, especially highly-skilled agents
- the requirement of many contact centres for better-qualified staff, rather than just "warm bodies" to answer phones
- the need to keep the contact centre open for longer, despite agents not wishing to work anti-social hours or businesses wanting to pay for a full shift when only a couple of hours are needed
- the rising concern about coping with call spikes, which could be dealt with by logging agents on when needed, rather than having them come in for a full shift
- the desire to increase the size of the contact centre, which may not be possible in that location.

This section looks at alternatives to the 9-to-5, full-time, centralised ways of working, and investigates the number and type of contact centres that are using these alternatives.

VIRTUAL CONTACT CENTRES

The application of technological abilities to commercial issues has created a new breed of contact centre - the virtual contact centre – which, although located in multiple sites, can still be run as a single entity. The virtual contact centre consists of many operations (including homeworkers or satellite offices) which are linked together so as to be viewed and managed as a single mega-site, allowing significant economies of scale and improvements in performance to take place, but hopefully without the attendant problems around environment, morale and attrition that plague many very large operations.

The virtual contact centre model has been driven by several factors. These include:

- For businesses involved in acquisitions or mergers, the number of contact centres they run have increased, particularly in the finance and insurance sectors, but also in telecoms and utilities sectors more recently

- Rapid contact centre growth in particular areas has caused agent recruitment issues. This has meant that businesses have moved to new physical locations in which to establish and grow their operations

- A rise in teleworking and remote locations means some agents may never see their parent contact centre. This is increasingly the case in 2nd- and 3rd line technical support, where skilled agents can be extremely scarce and expensive to replace

- Some companies prefer to offer a local touch to customers by basing operations in the area or country which they serve, or in which the company already has a non-contact centre operation, but with capacity available to develop a new telephony department

- Improvements in networking and communications, such as IP telephony, converged networks and cloud-based solutions, have meant that the virtual contact centre is now much more easy to realise at an affordable cost

- Companies have increasing needs to serve global customers, necessitating either contact centres operating in different time zones, or paying overtime for working anti-social hours

- Operational redundancy, disaster recovery and continuous service are possible with multisite contact centres

- Smaller contact centres tend to have lower staff attrition rates than large operations.

Treating multiple contact centres as a virtual contact centre allows great efficiencies can be made through economies of scale. This is especially true where businesses are using skills-based routing. All agent competencies are displayed to the scheduler – regardless of agent location - who can be more flexible, simply because the available resource pool is so much more deep.

REMOTE AGENTS

Typically, work at home agents enjoy what they do, are loyal, are well educated — and appreciate not having to commute. They're more satisfied, and extend that satisfaction to the customers they serve. And because they don't take up expensive office space, they cost less.

Interactive Intelligence makes work at home agents your best front-line ambassadors by making sure technology is never an obstacle. You deploy applications easily over IP networks, to reduce costs. You schedule, train, monitor, record, and report on at-home agents just like agents in-house, to ensure a consistent and superior customer experience.
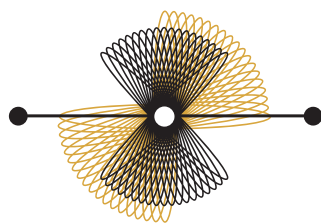
INTERACTIVE INTELLIGENCE®

Deliberately Innovative

www.inin.com/UK

CONTACT CENTRE • UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS • BUSINESS PROCESS AUTOMATION

Cloud or On-premises

Figure 43: Virtual contact centre commercial and operational benefits

Effect of virtual contact centre	Commercial advantage
Larger pool of skills available	More likely to be able to match the call to the customer effectively. This improves first-call resolution, customer satisfaction and also improves agent morale, as they are able to help more customers first-time. It also means that businesses can route calls based on more detailed criteria than previously, as the available pool of skills is greater (e.g. if there are 5 contact centres, but only 1 person in each contact centre speaks a specific language, then it only becomes feasible to offer this as a routable skill once the contact centres are linked together to create a virtual language team)
More balanced work across contact centre locations	In a stand-alone multiple contact centre environment, there is a very real risk that agents in one contact centre will be overworked (leading to stress and increased queue times), whereas those in another may be underused yet unable to help their colleagues. The ability to overflow calls between physical locations is a key advantage of virtual contact centres, which can improve both customer and agent experience
Skills may be widely deployed and managed	Virtual contact centres can look at agent skills and competencies with a view to scheduling staff and routing calls accordingly. This allows specialised virtual teams to emerge
Forecast and schedule only once	Where many contact centres are treated as a single entity, work can be shared across sites as the contact centres are viewed as a single resource. Viewing the operations and skills available as one entity makes scheduling easier and more flexible. The resource pool is much deeper, allowing customers to be offered more skills, and the time and cost of scheduling is greatly reduced
Increase global coverage	For global businesses which have contact centres spanning distant time-zones, the opportunity exists to create a follow-the-sun contact centre, where the customer can be served 24/7, without the need to increase headcount or bear the costs and inconvenience to staff of working anti-social hours
Deploy applications in a standardized way	Virtualisation can mean that improving and standardizing the functionality available to agents in separate locations can be easier, if solutions which allow remote upgrades are in place. Making the same functionality available to each agent regardless of their location means that a consistent level of customer service and agent experience can be achieved
Offer 24/7 availability and use more flexible and imaginative agent resourcing	Agents which work from home or smaller offices allow the business to expand dynamically, offering 24/7 cover without the cost of keeping the major contact centre operation open. Virtual contact centre technology also allows businesses to reach out to new labour pools such as the housebound and other non-traditional sources
Allows dynamic choice of outsourcers	If a company uses multiple outsourcers, these outsourcers can bid dynamically for the work available, e.g. the company does 80% of the work with its own people, but outsources the overflow as and when needed

Linking contact centres together has been a complex task, especially in circumstances where the business has multiple types of switch and other infrastructure, perhaps as a result of merger and acquisition history. In recent years, the widespread take-up of IP-based infrastructure has made such a task easier. Without a solid and scalable platform, separate applications, hardware and locations will remain isolated, or cost so much time and money to integrate that it would be better to leave them alone. Using a single open platform, this investment becomes much lower, and leaves the way open for businesses to add locations, channels and applications as needed. The single open platform should be a concept which is always in the minds of people making decisions about the future of their multi-site, multi-platform operations, with the cloud featuring in many businesses' decisions.

30% of this year's respondents' centres are part of a multiple-site operation, and as such, are potentially part of a larger virtual contact centre structure. However, only 38% of multi-site contact centres act as part of a full virtual contact centre operation, with a further 35% acting as a part of a partial virtual operation (e.g. in cases where a only few of the overall number of UK operations are linked together). This increased level of virtualisation continues the recent trend, and may indicate that an increased use of cloud-based technology is being shown.

Looking at the uptake of virtualisation by contact centre size, the larger operations have been much more likely to put enabling technology in place to gain further from their existing economies of scale, although with a substantial (and indeed, growing) proportion of respondents showing a mix of virtual and standalone operations, it would be safe to say that this is still a work in progress.

Figure 44: Virtualisation by contact centre size (multiple-site operations only)

Figure 44: Virtualisation by contact centre size (multiple-site operations only)
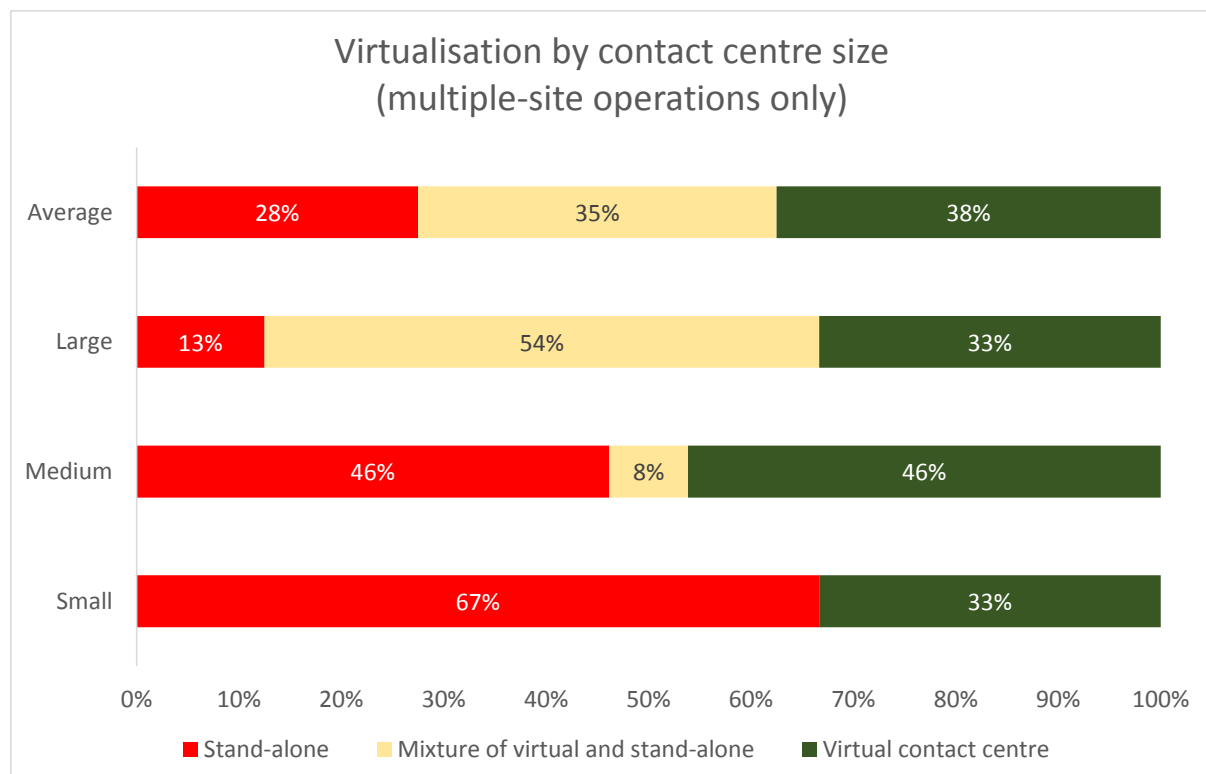
Respondents with virtual contact centres generally report being very pleased with the gains in efficiency and service level that they have experienced. The ability to smooth out call spikes by moving them between contact centres, and the improvements in agent utilisation resulting in short queue times were particularly mentioned, although most of the potential virtual contact centre benefits mentioned were rated positively.

Figure 45: Benefits of virtualising a contact centre

Benefits of virtualising a contact centre

Benefit	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Cost of attrition, buildings, hardware, software implementation, etc	61%	26%	13%
The ability to offer longer opening hours	64%	36%	
Range of agent skills available to callers	69%	27%	4%
Call costs between sites	77%	23%	
Handling of call spikes	86%	7%	7%
Agent utilisation/queue lengths	89%	11%	
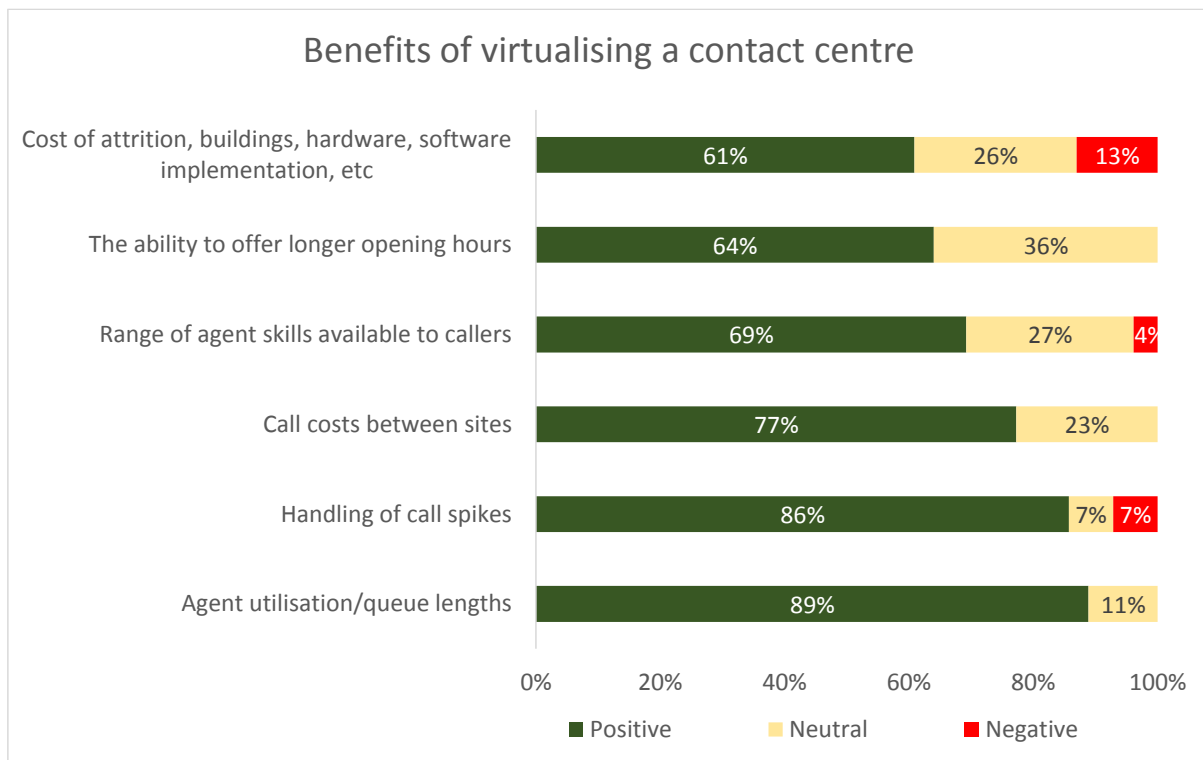
The issue of coping with call spikes is one which is growing year upon year, and features prominently in the thoughts of many respondents. Virtual contact centres allow agents from other locations (including homeworkers) to make themselves available to deal with a different queue, being seamlessly moved back to their original work when the spike has flattened or the length of their own primary queue triggers a move back to their original work. Dealing early with such call spikes can often remove the issue before it becomes a real problem, and such movement between call groups can be done automatically by setting thresholds in each queue. Such flexibility of agents means that there is a fairer agent utilisation, as the situation of a set of agents sitting idle while others are under great pressure is less likely to happen.

For spikes in interaction volume, tactical urgent staffing requests and overtime requests for agents is improved for work-at-home agents. The simplicity of walking into their workroom and logging on to the phone system allows the contact centre to staff emergency situations within minutes. Contrasted to brick-and-mortar agents who must drive to a facility, centres avoid hour or daylong service-level problems that could never be accomplished without rapid assistance from work-at-home agents.

115

Figure 46: Reasons for not implementing a virtual contact centre

Reasons for not implementing a virtual contact centre

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Concerns about management of teams at multiple locations	6%	33%	11%	33%	17%
Too expensive and disruptive	6%	41%	24%	24%	6%
Concerns about data security	12%		24%	41%	24%
Can't see the potential business benefits	12%	6%	24%	35%	24%
Too many different systems at each site	28%	22%	11%	22%	17%
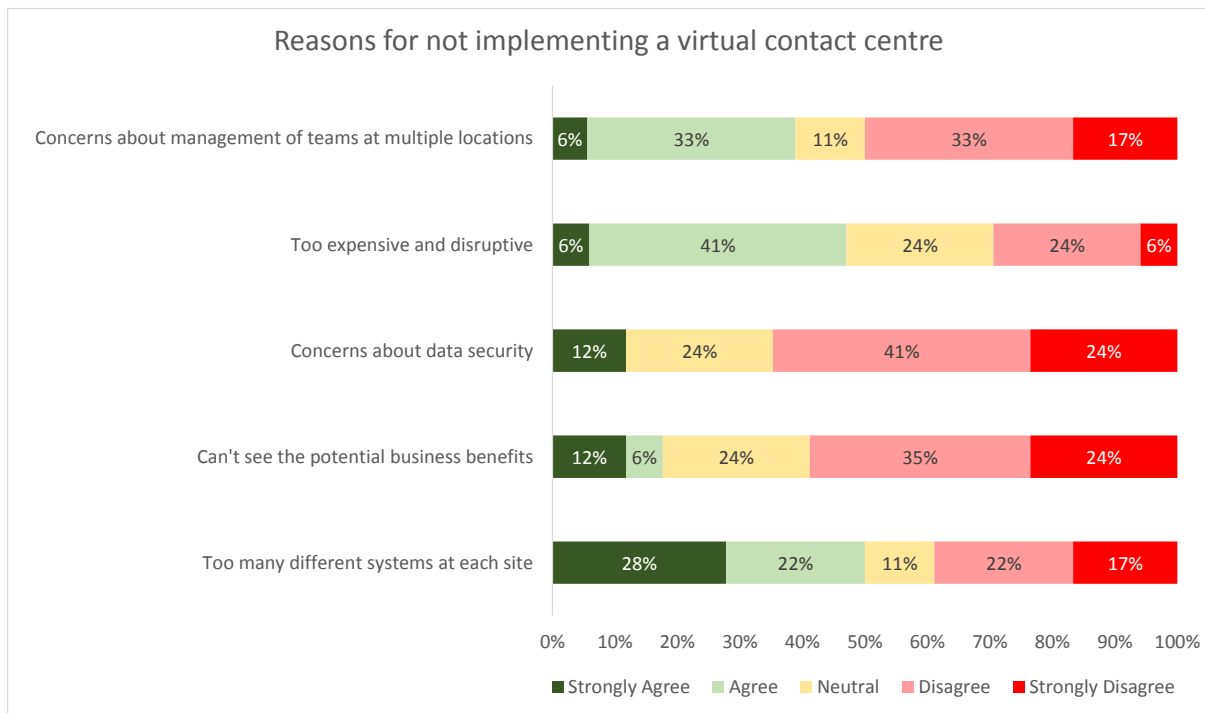
In the early-and-mid 2000s, multi-site respondents who had not virtualised their operations were most likely to state that they could not see the commercial benefits. This changed around 2007, when the more practical problems of how virtualisation should be achieved was the greater inhibitor - a question of 'how' rather than 'whether' - and this year's survey continues to show the strong feeling that the potential business case for virtualisation has been generally accepted, with only 18% agreeing that the reason for not implementing a virtual contact centre was that they could not see the potential business benefits.

Half of non-virtualising respondents considered the complexity of different legacy systems at each site to be too great an issue to handle, even considering the potential benefits. There were also generally less concerns over remote management of systems and agents, with the disruption and expense associated with this change also being a major inhibitor. Concerns over data security featured for relatively few respondents this year.

Such doubts should be considered in the context of the next few charts, which - while they refer to homeworking rather than the wider virtual operation - can give insight into which of these potential fears are real, and which may be over-exaggerated.

Home Agents: The Technologies that Make "Flexible" Possible

**A Thought Leadership Advertorial from
Interactive Intelligence**

Contact centres constantly face the same quandary. Reduce costs, but improve service at a time when customers continue to want more, and "faster." Customers want more interaction channels, more freedom from IVR menus, and more self-service calls to action, along with a premium on time-to-service.

To pave a broader, more fluid and less costly path for the customer experience, many organisations are unifying customer touch points. They're closing the gaps between the contact centre and the enterprise, and constituting a new agent profile. Rather than traditional agents trained in customer service and selling, businesses and their contact centres are targeting knowledge workers experienced in customer engagement and skilled in issue resolution, as well as sales. And to attract this new breed of agent, businesses are offering them total flexibility in where they work and when — to forgo the bothersome commute to an office and fit work in with their daily lives.

Call it the home agent model, and technology providers are giving organisations and contact centres everything they need to support it. Among the new products and hosted cloud-based solutions that ease interoperability, improve remote connectivity and reduce operations costs, here are the key technologies that let agents work from virtually anywhere.

Cloud technology
Hosted IP contact centre platforms provide instant virtualisation, and practically eliminate the capital requirement of an on-premises infrastructure. Cloud-based application updates are automatic, deployment time is compressed, and ramp-up and down costs are minimised. Throughout, optimising a remote work force — and the customer experience — remain securely in the control of the business.

Global VoIP and call delivery
The first consideration for home agents and customer contact requirements is the global flexibility of VoIP and call routing over that of a local physical footprint or ACD. The second consideration is anticipating end of life upgrade cycles for ACD/PBX equipment, and investigating the benefits of cloud-based offerings, either through VoIP or a hybrid MPLS network model.

Real-time monitoring and speech analytics
For at-home agents, supplement real-time monitoring, coaching, and call and screen recording with real-time speech analytics. Speech analytics help supervisors readily identify customer behaviours and sentiments, service performance trends, and training gaps, and can further help mitigate risk of deviant agent behaviour or fraudulent activity.

Utilisation of presence
Presence connects remote workers with one another, with supervisors, with the corporate base, and most importantly, with customers in the form of agents being "available." As a whole, presence in real time enables full-time visibility and instant collaboration.

Flexible scheduling
Allow home workers to break full-time schedules into "micro shifts," or split shifts. Workers can then maintain desired time and energy in their lives, and adapt work requirements accordingly.

Live virtual help and collaboration
By way of a virtual meeting room or chat room, establish a help environment for home agents seeking information to complete customer transactions. Home agents can also collaborate with other agents and subject matter experts to resolve knowledge search queries.

Knowledge management system
Such a system is a home agent's self-service quick stop for completing customer transactions. System capabilities often include a customized search function, plus the ability to bookmark, tag, and contribute knowledge to improve content overall.

Live platform for team meetings and training sessions
Use platforms such as GoToMeeting or Microsoft Lync for training updates, daily team huddles, recognition and reward, one-to-one coaching sessions, and customer-facing meetings. As virtual teams collaborate and share experiences and content, the business can effectively measure the activity of remote end-users.

Learning management system (communications management system)
Support self-paced training modules and push them to home agents via business rules established in the ACD. Also capture information from additional channels such as email and product updates, and deliver the info in conjunction with training courses. Self-paced e-learning programs also aid in training.

Video
Use video to establish early-day relationships between the company and remote employees, and among remote employees themselves. Video also is effective in one-on-one performance management sessions with homee agents, particularly when delivering constructive feedback.

INTERACTIVE INTELLIGENCE®

HOMEWORKING AND TELECOTTAGES

Homeworking and homeshoring promises contact centres significant benefits, but is certainly not for every agent or every contact centre. Amongst the potential advantages are:

- the environmental benefits of working at home, reducing carbon emissions and decreasing congestion on the roads
- offshored contact centres are generally unpopular yet businesses are looking at ways to cut costs
- increased flexibility in working hours means rapid response and reduced idle time
- the increasing costs of recruiting and retaining staff allow agents outside the commutable distance to work as well.

Remote working is becoming a real option that people are talking about and in many cases, actually using today. Although there are real concerns about remote management of agents - and obviously, not all agents are suitable for this type of environment - remote working opens the door to the sorts of people who might not otherwise seek employment in a typical contact centre but who would happily work in their own home or small telecottage taking calls. For an industry facing cyclical difficulties in recruitment - but which cannot afford whole-scale pay increases - this opportunity to deepen the labour pool should not be ignored. The contact centre could also use limited homeworking (for example, one day a week) as a reward for its top agents, encouraging their loyalty and offering a tangible promise to others, although some are dubious about the effectiveness of this, particularly those which actually use homeworking.

Remote agents, whether working at home, or in a telecottage (small, remote sites), can be a part of the larger virtual contact centre by being linked to the main operation via DSL or a leased line (in the case of telecottages). Some solutions permit least-cost routing and redundancy, where if the IP voice quality deteriorates, the call can be switched onto a back-up connection until the IP quality improves sufficiently to move it back to IP. Agents need only a PC which may act as a softphone, a headset (or IP phone) and a data connection.

INTERACTIVE INTELLIGENCE®
Deliberately Innovative

Applicant flow expands significantly when companies reach beyond the confines of brick-and-mortar operations. Employee referrals become the primary source of hires and the pool of candidates grows organically. Many individuals have voluntarily stepped away from full-time careers, have been displaced, or are simply retooling their professional lives on user-friendly, life-balancing alternatives with organisations that offer them the flexibility and benefits of telecommuting.

There is a great deal of research and consideration being shown to homeworking by this year's respondents – in fact, more are actively considering homeworking than are using it – and a relatively small proportion of respondents have considered homeworking, only to reject it.

Figure 47: Progression with homeworking decision, by contact centre size
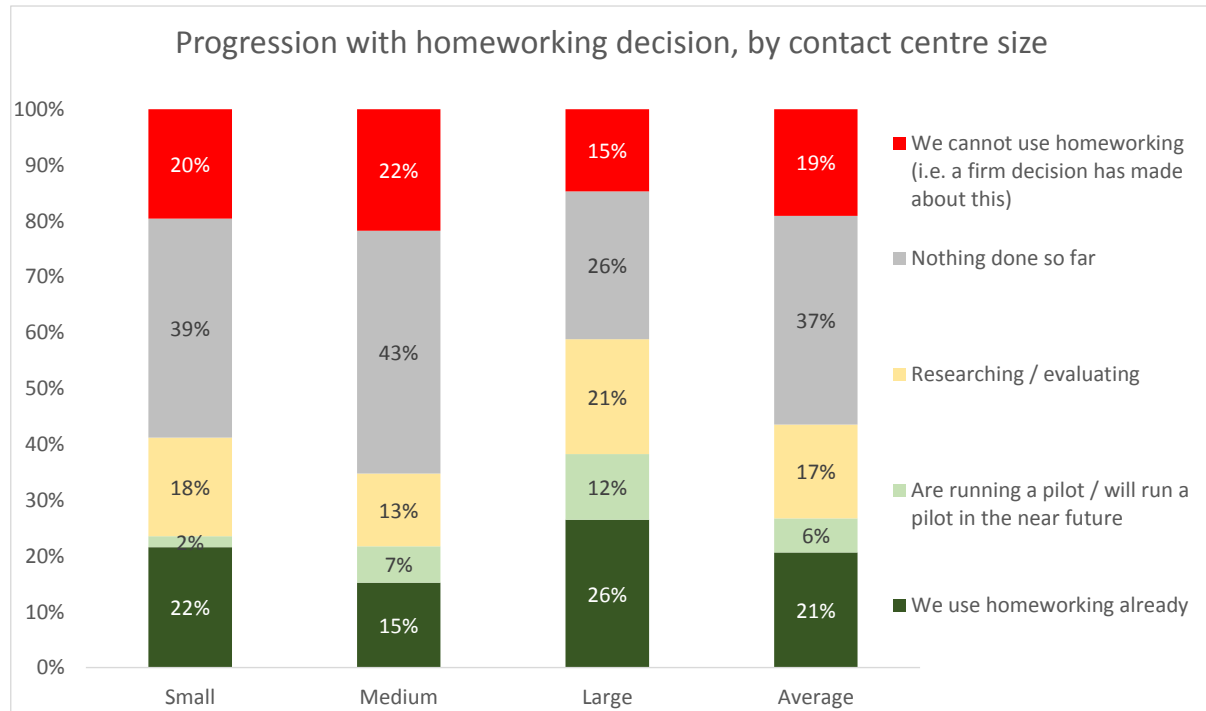
Figure 48: Homeworking, 2008-2014

Year	Proportion of respondents using homeworking	Proportion of agents working at home
2008	12%	-
2009	13%	-
2010	15%	1.9%
2011	18%	2.5%
2012	23%	3.6%
2013	22%	4.1%
2014	21%	4.6%

Of the 21% of contact centres that were using homeworkers, a mean average of 22% of their agents are homeworkers. The median is 12%, the first quartile is 28% and the 3rd quartile is 4%.

22% of small contact centres were using some homeworking, compared to 26% of large and 15% of medium-sized operations (these figures do not include active pilot schemes, for which there appears particular interest amongst larger operations).

As a comparison, 2014 US figures show that 43% of contact centres were using some form of homeworking, so there is still some way to go for the UK to catch up.

Homeworking does not just have to be a matter of moving your own employees from a centralised location to their own homes. It is also possible to add an outsourced contingency workforce through a homeshoring model (for example, ki-work or Arise), employing staff as and when they are needed, rather than employing them directly. Stated benefits include increased agent productivity and decreased staff turnover, and cost savings of up to 20% are claimed.

Respondents' view on the future of homeworking are more positive than they have been in the past, perhaps as a result of there being some definite successes experienced from businesses which have started using homeworking. In the following charts, respondents were asked to give their views on homeworking, and responses segmented depending on whether or not the respondent had any experience of homeworking.

Respondents that use homeworking report that such agents spend 67% of the working time at home, with 33% in the contact centre. Only 23% of homeworking respondents stated that their homeworkers spent all of their time at home.

"It is / would be difficult to manage homeworking agents effectively"

The concern that homeworkers cannot be managed effectively from a remote location has always been a fundamental objection to this way of working. Isolation can be a problem for both agent and management, and not all roles or agents are suitable for homeworking. It is generally considered that new mothers returning to work part-time, or older people who wish to reduce their working hours but who are not yet ready to retire completely are particularly suitable to be considered for homeworking roles, which require experience and maturity in the agent.

With real-time adherence and call management systems in place, there is no real reason that a virtual contact centre made up of homeworkers is more difficult to manage than a 'typical' operation, although the role of the team-leader (being someone to help actively) will have to be re-addressed.

Figure 49: Opinion: "It is / would be difficult to manage homeworking agents effectively"

It is/would be difficult to manage homeworking agents effectively

Category	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Do not use homeworking	22%	38%	22%	13%	5%
Use homeworking	4%	15%	19%	38%	23%
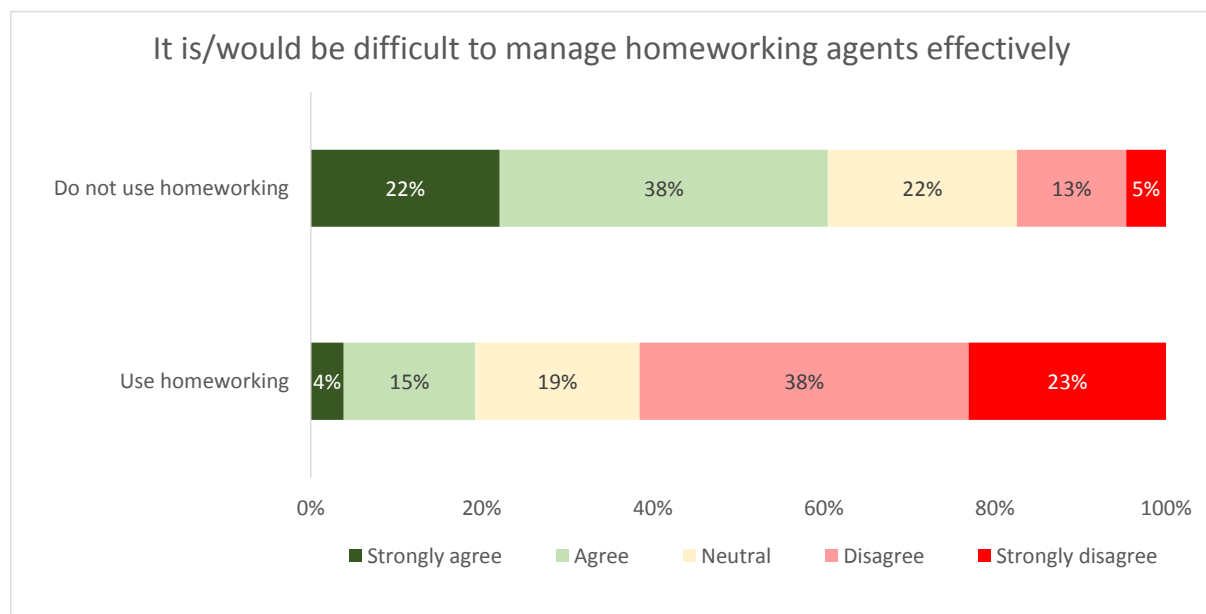
Mirroring previous year's results, those contact centres with some experience of using homeworking are far more likely to be positive about management of staff than those without this experience. 60% of non-homeworking contact centre respondents are concerned about this, but few of those who have implemented some homeworking agree that remote management is difficult, and 61% actively disagreeing that it was any harder than managing someone in a traditional contact centre environment. Non-homeworking respondents are more likely to expect homeworkers to be less productive than centralised staff, perhaps as they are not in such a high pressure environment, with supervisors encouraging them, peer pressure and wallboards telling them the state of play. To some extent, it depends on the definition of 'productive': if it is a matter of call volumes, then not having these cues to hurry up may well have an effect. On the other hand, there are perhaps fewer distractions in the home. In any case, there is no reason to expect that quality will suffer - probably quite the opposite - and the homeworking model is particularly suitable to moving agents between queues rapidly, which in fact will improve the productivity of the entire operation.

"Homeworking brings / would bring us flexibility to add agents and be open longer hours"

This is one of the main advantages of homeworking, in that travel-to-work time is eliminated, and in an emergency, agents can be requested to log-on for an hour or so by a text message to their mobile phone (in a typical contact centre, the operation just had to deal with it, or overflow calls to an outsourcer, which can be expensive). Many contact centre agents rely upon public transport which may not run well outside core hours, and may be put off by having to wait around and travel in the dark.

Homeworking also opens the door to the sorts of people might not have otherwise want to or be able to seek employment in a typical contact centre, but who will happily work in their own home taking calls.

Figure 50: Opinion: "Homeworking brings / would bring us flexibility to add agents and be open longer hours"
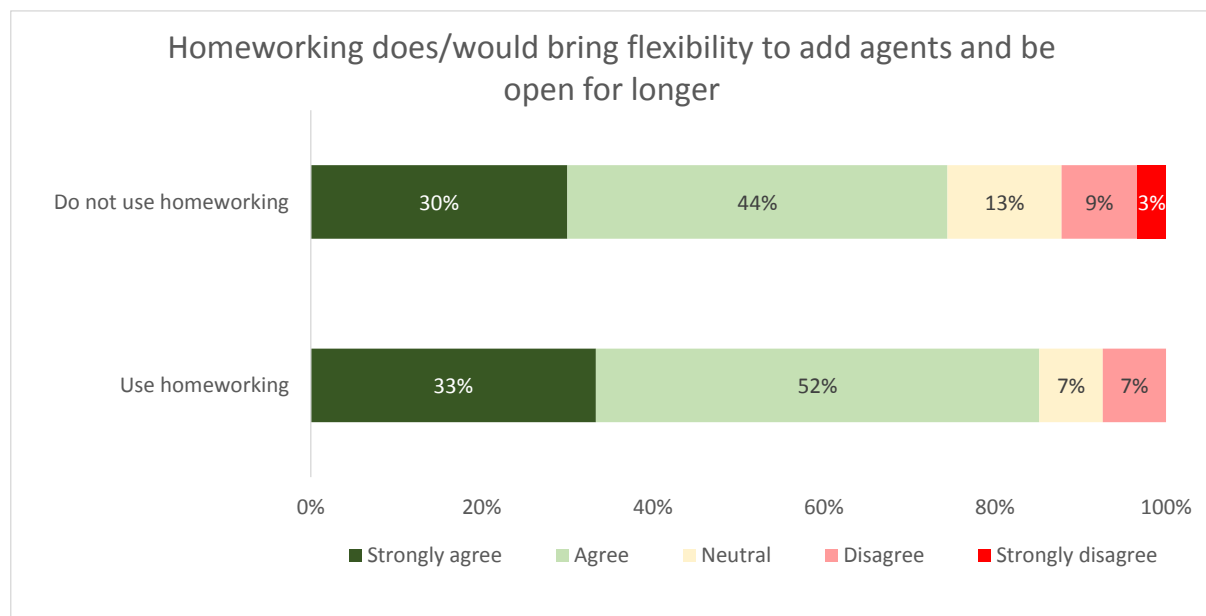
There is a general opinion that flexibility of staffing is both a potential and real major advantage of homeworking. 85% of contact centres using homeworking agreed that flexibility was a benefit to them as a result. Non-homeworkers seemed convinced of this potential too.

"Homeworking means that data security issues are / would be more of a concern"

Working in an unsupervised environment is likely to mean that the potential risks for data theft and fraud are greater than in a closely-supervised environment such as a traditional contact centre, especially if any physical paperwork is involved, payment card details taken or passwords written down. With the home workspace available to family members and visitors as well, risks are not just restricted to the homeworker.

The use of an automated payment card application would reduce the opportunity for deliberate card fraud and definite policies around the storage and usage of equipment have to be agreed upon. There are various data access methods available that circumvent the need for written passwords, such as voice biometrics or coded key-fobs, and strong firewalls and encrypted hard drives will also reduce risk.

Figure 51: Opinion: "Data security issues are / would be a concern"

Homeworking means that data security and fraud issues are more of a concern

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Do not use homeworking	39%	34%	11%	13%	3%
Use homeworking	15%	30%	26%	22%	7%
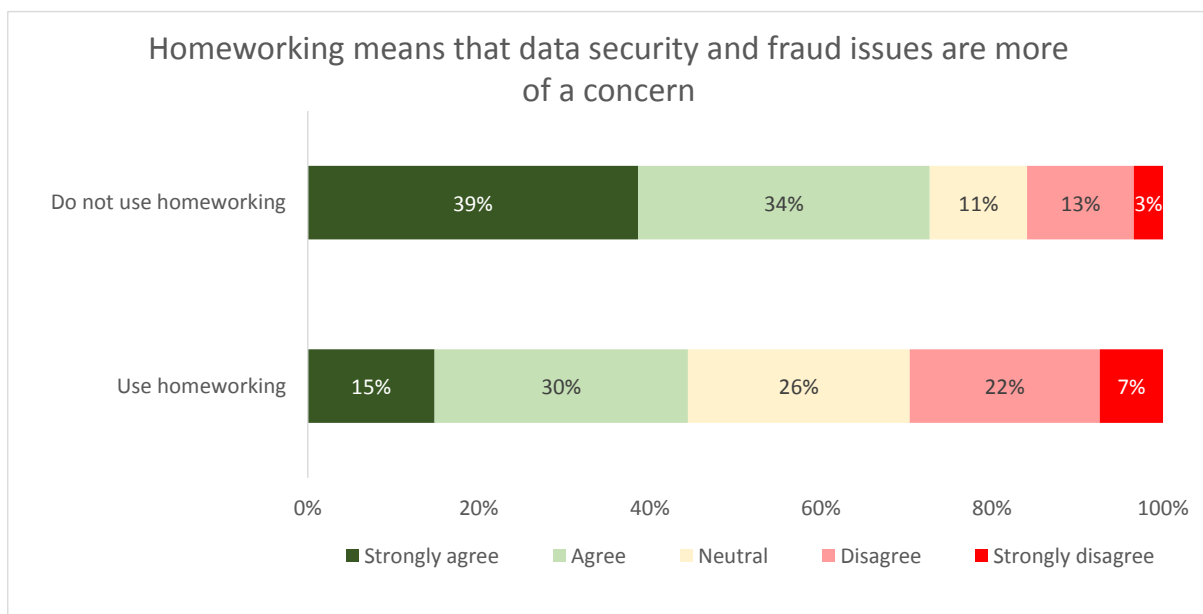
Those with no experience of homeworking are concerned about security issues, with 73% expressing doubts. While only 15% of those who use homeworking strongly agree that data security is a concern to them as well, a further 30% agree that this is more of an issue with homeworkers. Managing data security is not an insurmountable problem, but it is certainly something that those entering into homeworking projects need to research and manage very carefully.

"Homeworking is / could be used as a performance incentive or reward for the best agents"

Interestingly, this possible advantage to homeworking is one which both homeworking and non-homeworking respondents have similar findings, although no general agreement can be reached. There is a substantial proportion of respondents from both groups who feel that moving their best agents out of the contact centre is not the message they want to send to the operation as a whole.

Figure 52: Opinion: "Homeworking is / could be used as a performance incentive or reward for the best agents"

Homeworking is/would be useful as a performance incentive or reward for the best agents

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Do not use homeworking	4%	34%	24%	30%	8%
Use homeworking	15%	33%	22%	19%	11%
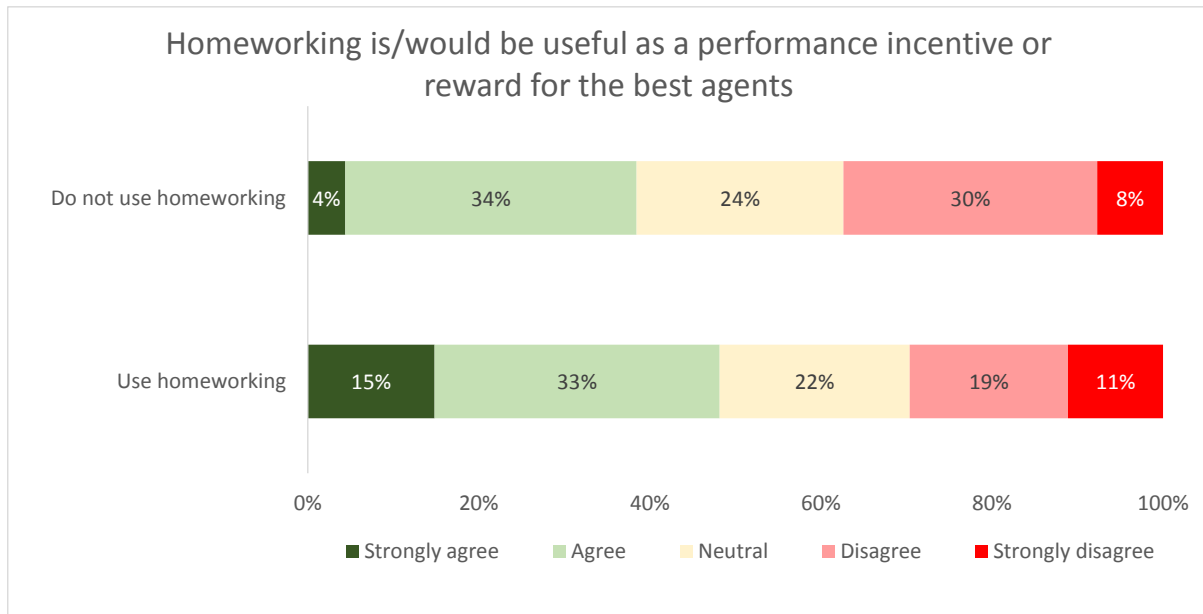
"Many staff do not / would not have anywhere suitable to work in their homes"

For many contact centre workers, it would be difficult to have a room away from the noise of the household, and this is a major concern for those operations that do not have any experience of homeworking, with 54% agreeing or strongly agreeing that this would be a problem.

Even for those with experience of homeworking, 28% say that finding somewhere quiet for agents to work is an issue. Obviously, it's important to consider working location on a case-by-case basis to assess the suitability of the agent for homeworking.

Figure 53: Opinion: "Many staff do not / would not have anywhere suitable to work in their homes"
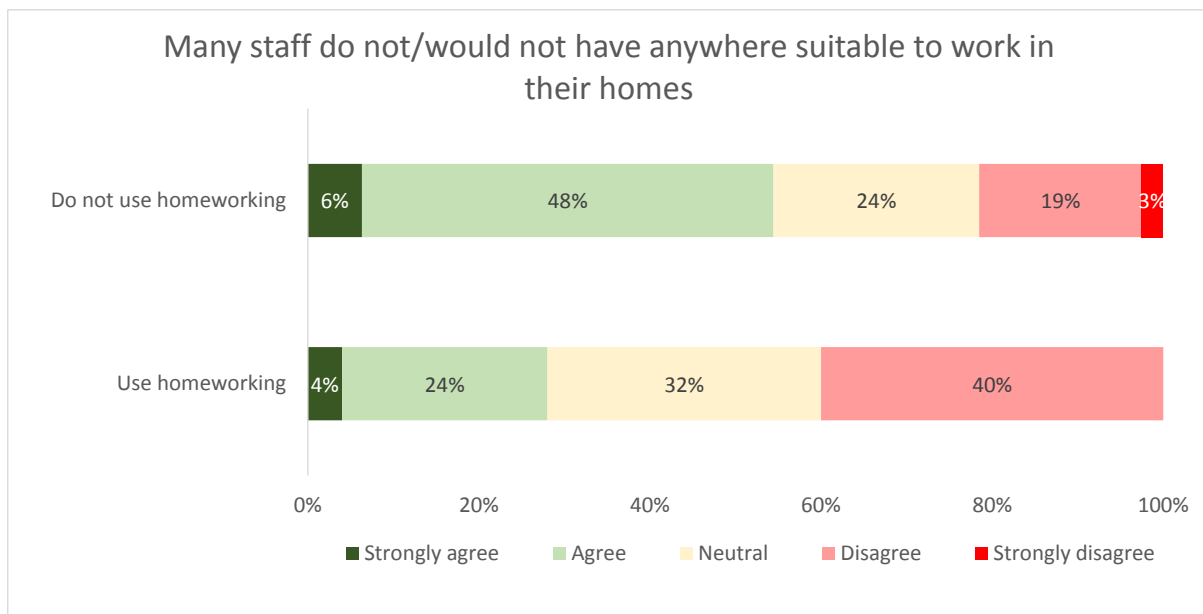
"Homeworking reduces / would reduce the cost of equipment"

A contact centre will have to be equipped with PCs, desks and phones to accommodate the maximum numbers of agents that it will require at any point, leaving desks empty in the quieter times. As such, most contact centres could be considerably physically smaller a large proportion of the time, and waste money in rent and equipment.

While 30% of respondents that use homeworkers state that it has made a positive impact on their equipment and running costs, 48% of this group disagree that their IT costs have dropped, so on the face of it, this does not seem to be a particularly powerful argument for implementing homeworking.

Figure 54: Opinion: "Homeworking reduces / would reduce the cost of equipment"

Homeworking reduces the cost of equipment

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Do not use homeworking	6%	21%	38%	30%	5%
Use homeworking	4%	26%	22%	44%	4%
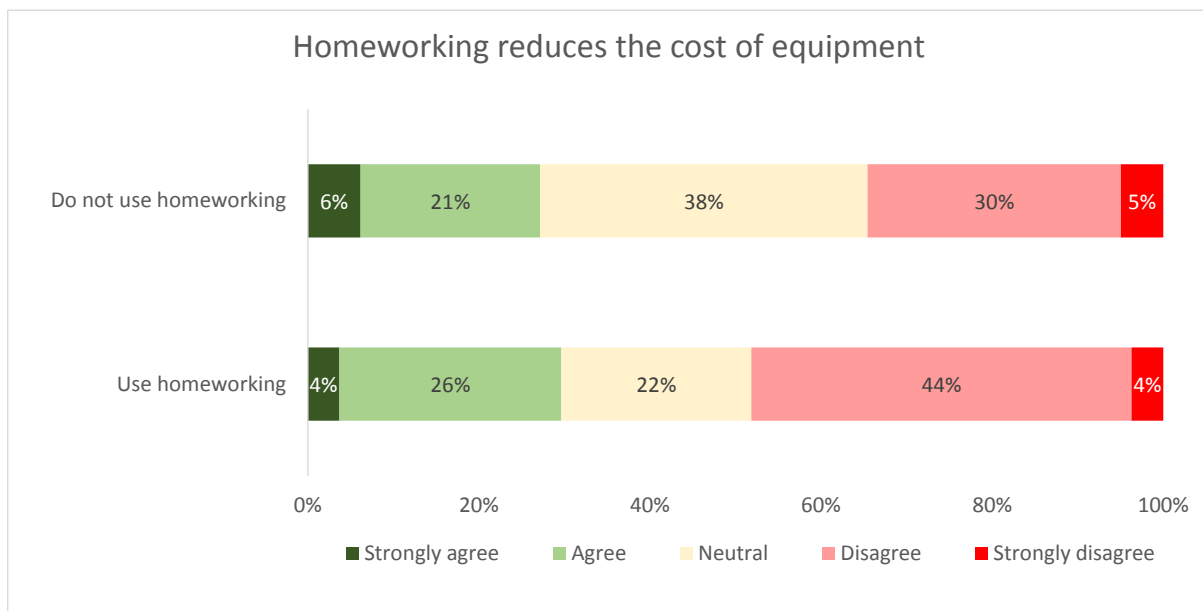
"Homeworking is becoming a lot more interesting to us"

A general question was asked, to gauge the level of interest in homeworking projects as a whole. The findings between the two groups were very similar: just under half in each case reported that homeworking was growing interest for them, with relatively few disagreeing that this was the case. As such, the hypothesis that homeworking is not yet reached its peak is strengthened.

Figure 55: Opinion: "Homeworking is becoming a lot more interesting to us"

Homeworking is becoming a lot more interesting to us

Do not use homeworking: Strongly agree 13%, Agree 32%, Neutral 32%, Disagree 11%, Strongly disagree 13%

Use homeworking: Strongly agree 15%, Agree 31%, Neutral 42%, Disagree 8%, Strongly disagree 4%

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree
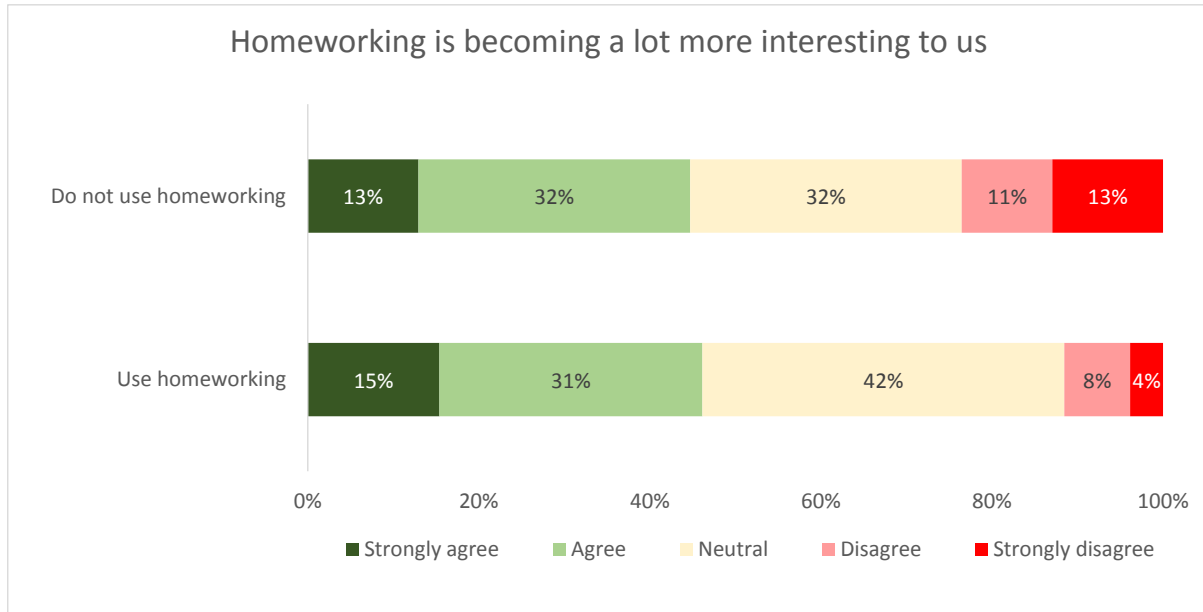
When respondents were asked about the specific benefits that they believed homeworking can bring to their business, the greatest enthusiasm was shown in the areas connected with optimising the resourcing of the contact centre in a flexible way, both in terms of HR and also call volumes. A small minority thought that it would expand the labour pool to include people with skills and experience that they would not otherwise be able to attract. Only 1 in 7 respondents stated categorically that homeworking was not, and would not ever be relevant for their business.

Figure 56: Benefits that homeworking could bring to the business
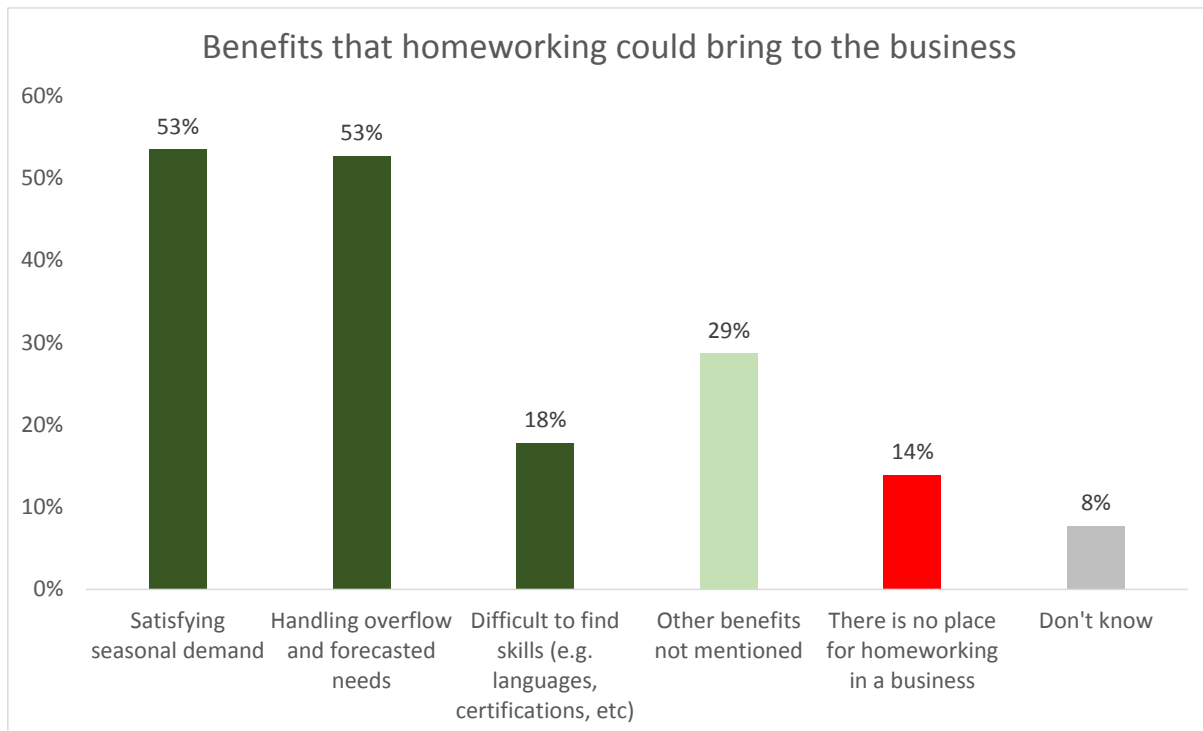
To reduce overtime and seasonal staffing, large portions of the home agent pool consider expanding their part-time hours during seasonal or peak business periods, in exchange for extended time off later in the year. Think of retirees, parents, college students, and individuals with disabilities. Organizations who are savvy with this approach can significantly reduce temporary staffing, overtime and related ramp-up costs associated with highly seasonal customer contact management.

128

More than half of all respondents actively believe that their operation will have some form of homeworking in place within two years. If nothing else, this shows that there is an open-mindedness and willingness to consider homeworking on its own merits, rather than rejecting a different way of working out of hand.

Amongst those with experience of homeworking, there appears to be considerable enthusiasm for expanding its role within the contact centre mix. Almost 40% of respondents that use homeworking today expected to have at least 15% of their customer contact activity handled from people's homes by 2016.

Figure 57: In 2 years' time, what proportion of your agents do you think will be homeworkers?

Expected use of homeworking in 2 years' time, by current use of homeworking
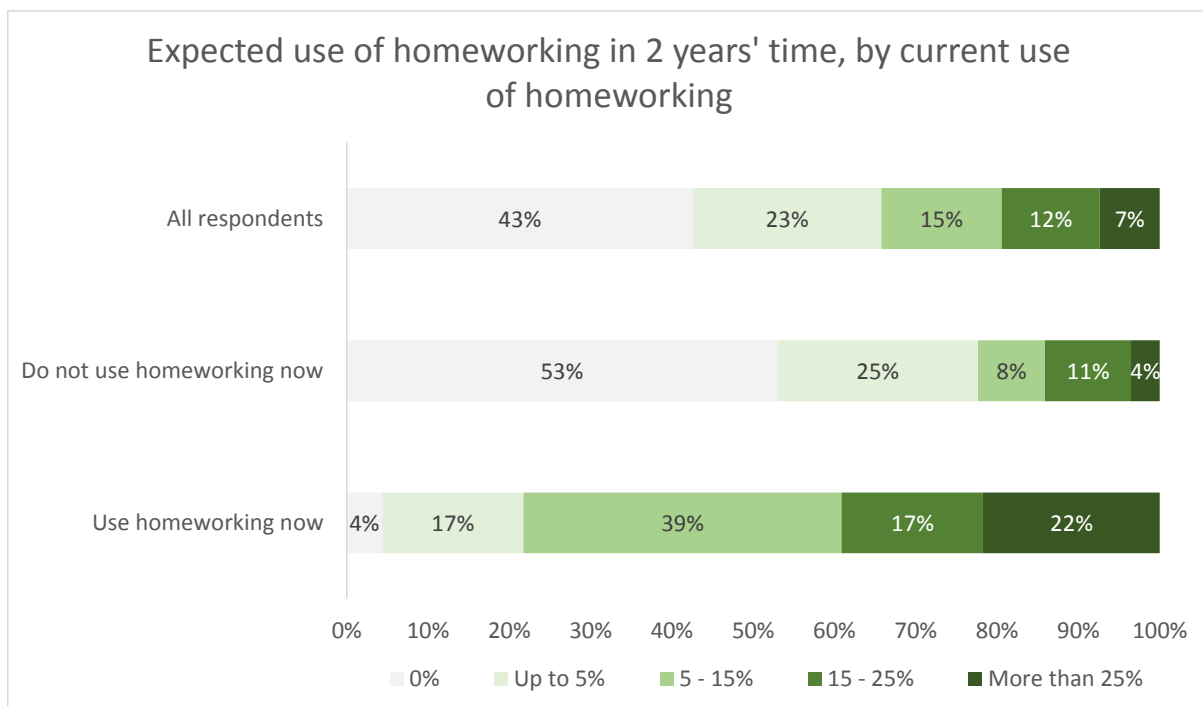
THE ENTERPRISE AS THE CONTACT CENTRE

For some years, leading contact centre solution providers have been encouraging businesses to look beyond the four walls of a typical operation and consider how and when to involve other knowledge workers in the enterprise, whether office- or field-based, in the business of customer service.

IP and cloud contact centre solutions have the potential to break down the boundaries between contact centre and wider business, allowing every employee to act in the capacity of a contact centre agent if in the best interests of the business. In many cases, the drive and interest towards IP and cloud is coming from the internal corporate telephony and IT departments, especially in the multi-office environments where real savings can be made.

From a contact centre perspective, there are potentially massive advantages to having non-contact centre personnel available to speak with customers on occasion: superior customer service (and the attendant improvements in customer spend and retention), immediate interaction with the right person, reduced call abandonment rates, shorter resolution times, as well as more intangible benefits, like the ability of executives to listen to the customer first-hand and learn from the experience.

Figure 58: Non-contact centre staff who handle a substantial number of calls, by vertical market
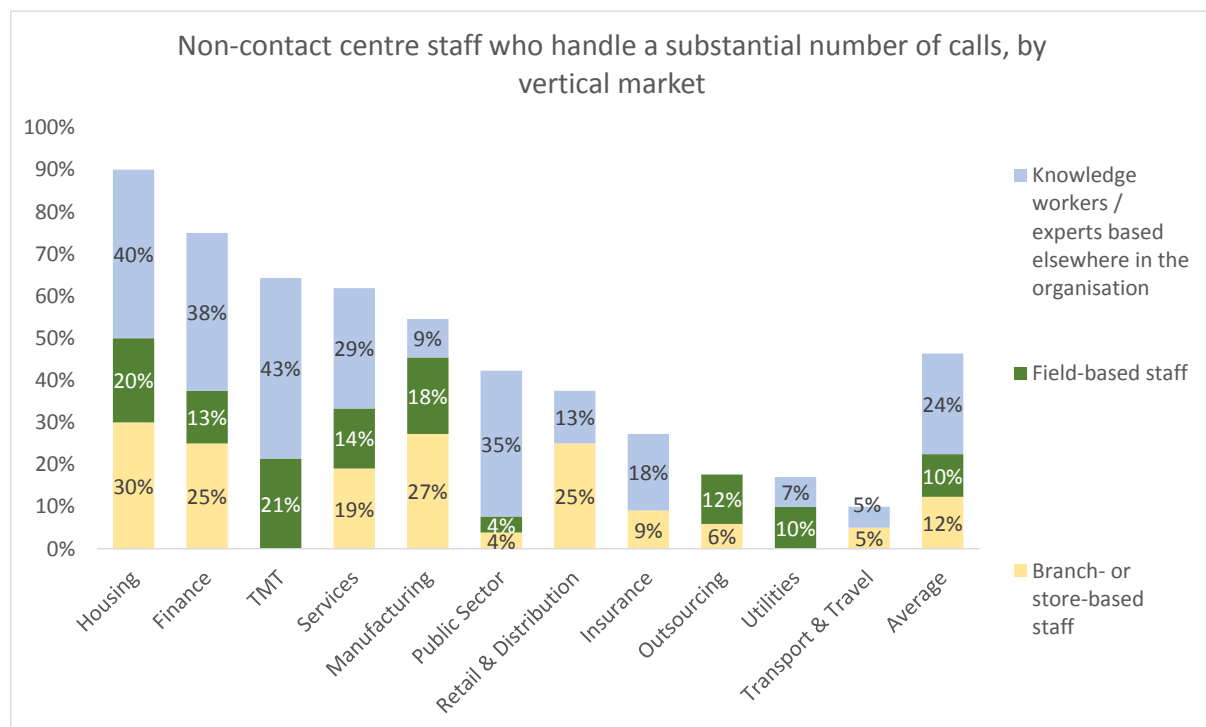
Knowledge workers / experts form part of the overall customer handling resource pool in 27% of cases (especially in the housing, finance and TMT sectors this year), with field staff and branch staff sometimes handling customer calls in 10% and 12% of organisations respectively: figures that have stabilised somewhat in the past couple of years. Care should be taken when considering vertical markets, as the research base may be low in some of the minor sectors.

When looking at differences by contact centre size, small operations seem more likely to have to draw on the knowledge and resources of staff based outside the contact centre, certainly in terms of knowledge workers and field-based staff.

Larger contact centre operations - as the nature of their business is more likely to involve having multiple stores or customer-facing locations throughout the country - find that they are the ones that are most likely to bring in store-based resource to the customer conversation as and when needed.

Figure 59: Non-contact centre staff who handle a substantial number of calls, by contact centre size 0

Non-contact centre staff who handle a substantial number of calls, by contact centre size

	Small	Medium	Large	Average
Knowledge workers / experts based elsewhere in the organisation	33%	16%	22%	24%
Field-based staff	13%	10%	6%	10%
Branch- or store-based staff	10%	12%	17%	12%
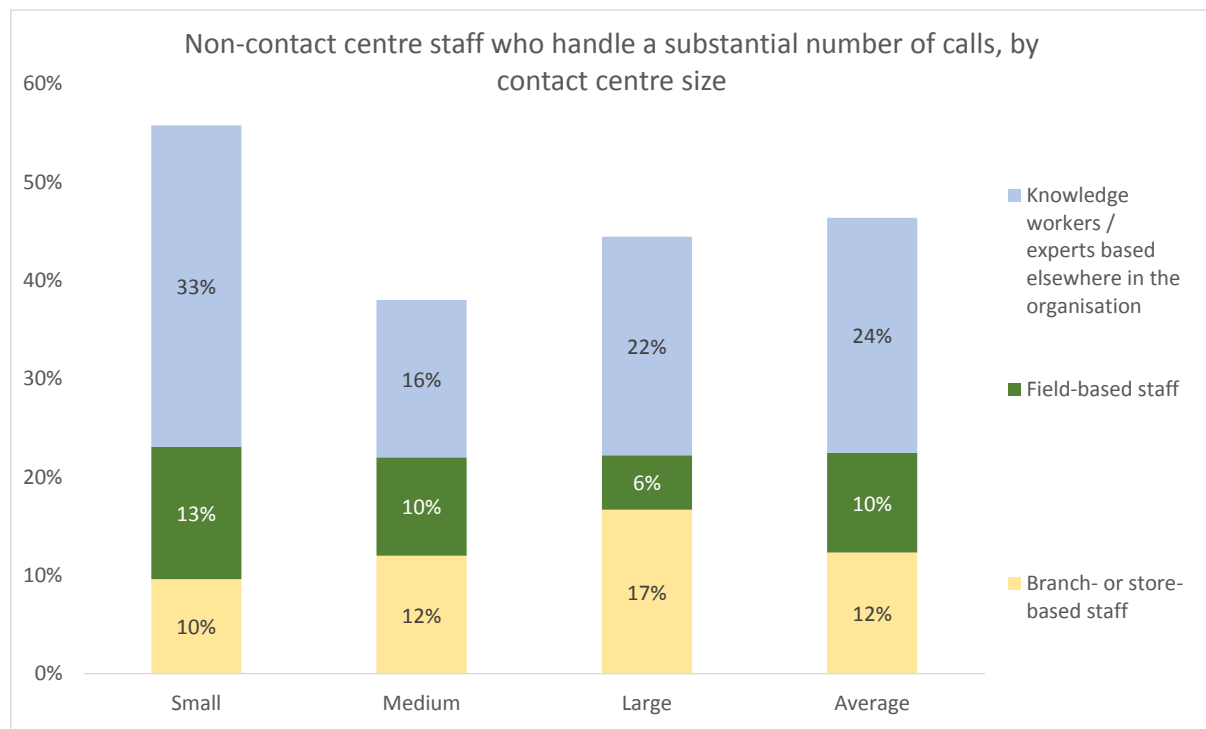
Knowledge workers can be incorporated into the contact centre on a part-time basis, without actually becoming a customer service agent. 'Presence management' links workers from diverse back office departments into the contact centre by allowing communication and collaboration across sites and functions. Presence management shows if a user is available to communicate via a specific medium, such as instant messaging, email, telephony etc. Availability can be defined either by the knowledge workers themselves, or via device detection. It is possible to route calls to experts using the same criteria as in the contact centre.

Presence can be seen as an extension of multi-channel contact routing by being integrated into software-based contact routing solutions, and can take multimedia routing further, particularly in a SIP environment where presence can be detected in a greater variety of modes.

There are, of course, some potential dangers:

- Highly-paid knowledge workers may be overworked by the demands and interruptions placed on them by agents, and become less productive
- Most collaborative tools include directory search, instant messaging and presence for every individual, however, it is skill sets rather than names that should be used, to discourage dependency on one expert.

Intelligent routing should be used to govern requests for help to experts, creating routing rules to decide when experts should be used, and at what times. This should have the benefit of keeping the knowledge workers onside, and not choosing to show their presence as unavailable to avoid interruptions. Each skill area or department could offer a schedule to make sure that someone is available for the contact centre, thus ensuring the privacy of the others in that virtual team.

IP AND CONVERGENCE

Traditional contact centres operate their telephony functions in a circuit-switched telephony environment, where a fixed, dedicated line is left open between caller and agent. Running alongside this, a packet-switched data network breaks up any data (e.g. a customer record to go along with the phone call), sends it in packets along many routes, and reassembles it at the destination in the right order.

IP contact centres differ from traditional PBX-centric operations in that voice traffic is converted into packets of data and carried around the contact centre (or between contact centres) on a data network, rather than a voice network. There are two types of IP contact centres: those running on an IP-only architecture, and those running a hybrid environment, where both IP and traditional circuit-switched infrastructures are used.

However, all IP-enabled contact centres are not the same. A distinction should be made between the type of IP systems where there is still some need for proprietary equipment and software to communicate, and "Open IP", which is entirely open standards-based and will allow any standard-based application or piece of infrastructure to communicate with another.

There are many reasons to consider changing from a traditional to an IP contact centre, including:

- The use of common protocol (IP) and the growth of key standards such as SIP allow rapid development of new application functionality
- IP enables virtual contact centres, homeworking and the remote office model
- IP promotes the successful take-up and management of multimedia customer interactions
- More affordable functionality is made available to smaller contact centres
- IP reduces the cost of maintaining two networks
- There is more flexibility to add and change agents in an IP environment
- There is a reduction in call charges between sites via IP trunking
- IP supports reduced staff attrition through allowing flexible working
- The boundaries between contact centre and the wider business are breaking down, and IP is a common theme across all parts of the enterprise
- IP infrastructure may be cheaper to upgrade than a circuit-switched platform.

The use of IP within the contact centre has been present for some years now, and despite the relatively slow start to IP implementation, IP is now an integral, mainstream and strategic part of the contact centre industry.

Moving contact centre operations to an open IP environment should be seen as a strategic enabler, rather than just an obvious cost-cutting exercise. It is very difficult to put a number on the really important pieces, which are the business functionality improvements, but over time these will be far more important than short-term costs or savings that are associated with IP.

The key to understanding the real value of IP is through how it enables functionality to be deployed quickly and effectively regardless of physical location. Put simply, completely and genuinely adopting open standards means that contact centres release themselves from high maintenance costs associated with proprietary systems, and can choose the applications that exactly suit their needs at the time. Standards-based IP solutions are the closest the industry has come to being truly able to future-proof their contact centres.

In the following diagram which represents a likely return on investment scenario for an IP contact centre, the initial capital outlay can be considerable, and far outweighs the immediate savings made from reduced telecom costs. However, over time, the business benefits from IP's greater openness and flexibility, allowing it to be more innovative and responsive. Costs are reduced as the system beds in, allowing maintenance of a single network. Over time, the benefits keep accruing, making the quantitative return on investment take longer than in most IT projects, but deliver greater benefits for longer.
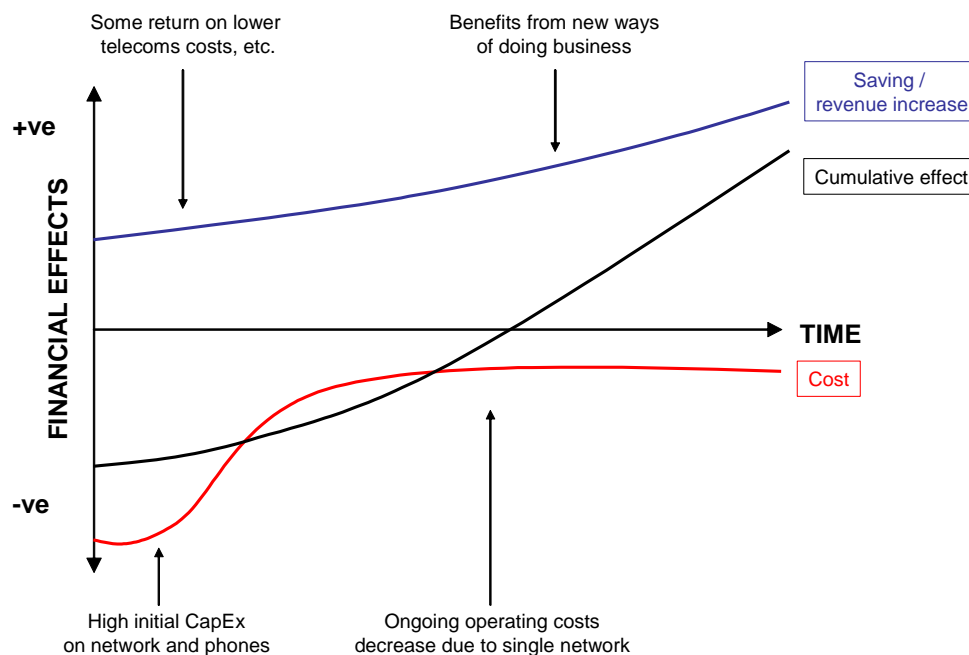
SIP – Session Initiation Protocol

Advances in standards such as the Session Initiation Protocol (RFC 3261) enable telephony applications to interface with each other and provide functionality that used to be only available using proprietary infrastructure hardware.

- Widely regarded as the successor to H.323 for IP-based telephony
- Gaining increased attention and visibility due to major technology solution providers
- An alternative to TAPI-based IP telephony models
- A protocol that removes the need for a separate IP-PBX and contact centre solution
- The emerging standard for session control for a variety of media - greater flexibility and more scalability than many alternative multimedia communication protocols in use today
- Software-based, open and lightweight, allowing organisations of all types to support the new breed of SIP phones along with soft phones, analogue phones, desktop PCs, and even mobile devices and PDAs
- SIP also provides strong support for real-time voice communications, text-based messaging and application sharing – SIP can initiate real-time, multimedia sessions that seamlessly integrate voice, data and video

Open systems allow customers to select non-proprietary hardware and software for queuing, routing and applying treatments to interactions. This means that future contact centres will be free of the restrictive nature of proprietary systems, and able to develop and deploy applications which may have previously been too complex to integrate or maintain cost-effectively. The widespread use of a truly open standard will encourage application developers to push functionality boundaries further as time-to-market should be significantly decreased because integration will become much easier.

It is important to understand that there is no CTI link in the SIP world – true interoperability takes care of the integration. This has a distinct cost benefit, a reduction in complexity of deployment and maintenance, and an ability to implement quickly. Through SIP, the value of contact centre solutions is moving from routing to applications – not so much "how shall we do it?" as "what shall we do?".

Recently, some vendors have developed unified communication platforms that allow contact centre solutions to operate on standard servers with no specialised hardware components, providing an infrastructure that can be supported and maintained by clients' existing IT staff. This offers an easy path to a software-only platform or to allow hybrid applications where both traditional telephony and software-only SIP environments can be unified for a best-of-breed Unified Communication approach.

Please note that, in order to expand research insight into different areas this year, including performance and quality management, PCI compliance and multichannel workforce management, questions on IP and convergence were not asked in the 2014 questionnaire, in order to keep the survey at a reasonable size. The following charts and graphs are taken from research carried out in Summer 2013, and have been included here for completeness' sake, in order to provide some insight into the role of IP within the modern contact centre for interested readers.

By including respondents who were not sure of their current use of IP, penetration rates cannot be directly compared with previous years, however a more accurate view of the industry can be portrayed this way. Of those respondents who were sure of their current use of IP, the majority and are using pure IP infrastructure, which is particularly the case in the small and medium operations taking part in this year's survey.

Figure 60: Current use of IP, by contact centre size

Current use of IP, by contact centre size

	Small	Medium	Large	Average
Don't know	28%	9%	16%	18%
No VoIP (traditional TDM)	17%	25%	16%	20%
Hybrid IP / TDM	13%	16%	31%	19%
Pure IP infrastructure	41%	50%	38%	43%
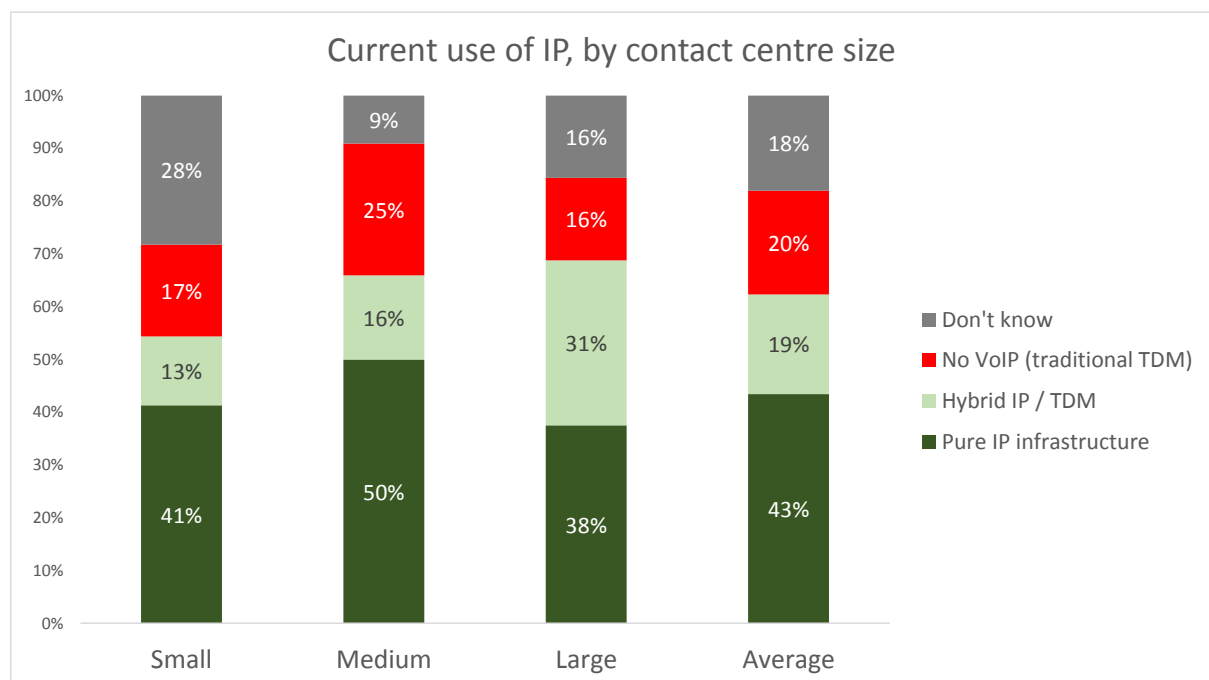
Around one-third of respondents believe that they will implement a pure IP infrastructure within the next two years. However, there are still a significant proportion of respondents in all size bands, especially in the small sector, that do not know when, or even whether they will implement pure IP. This indicates that such decisions in many instances are made outside the contact centre, at a corporate level.

Figure 61: Future implementation of pure IP, by contact centre size
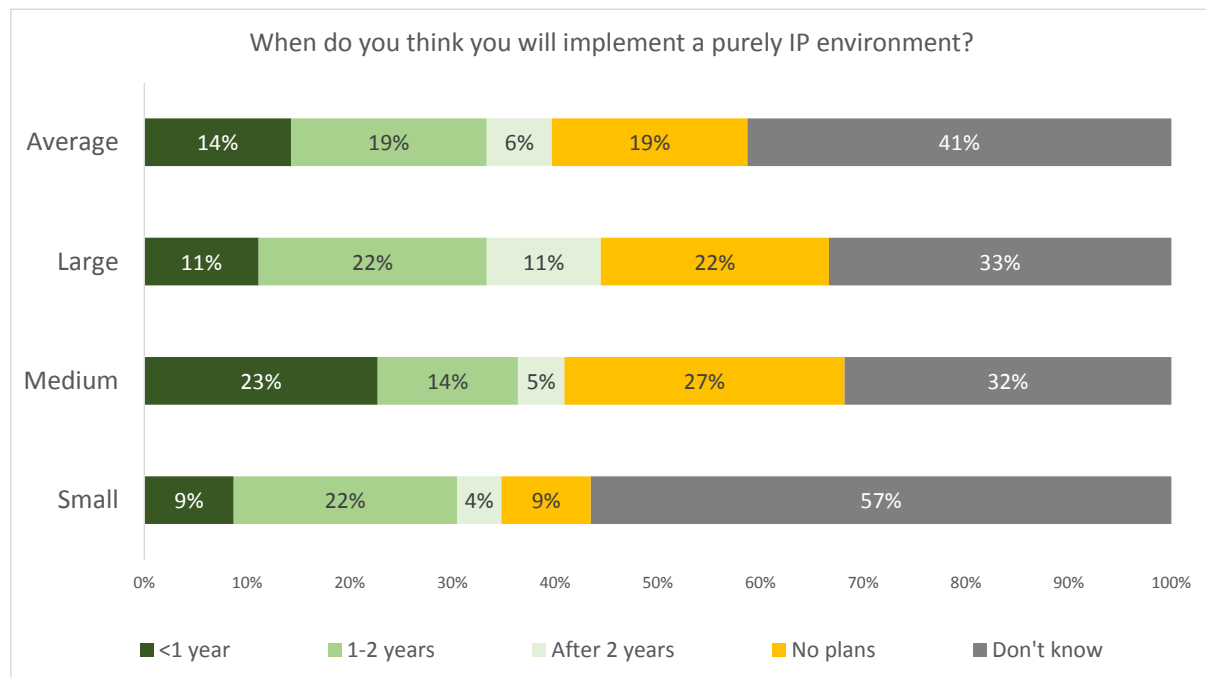
In many cases, the decision on whether to make most contact centre technology investments tends to boil down to operational cost savings: the amount of money saved by implementation is greater than the cost of the solution plus its maintenance. In many cases, IP contact centre solutions do not easily fit into this simple model. There are some contact centres (especially small, or new operations) where the value of having an IP-based solution is immediately obvious and provable, but at the other end of the spectrum, short-term ROI can be more complicated to find.

Yet in all cases, when businesses are considering implementing IP contact centres, they must look beyond the present day. IP contact centre solutions are enablers, not necessarily ends in themselves. The value of an IP solution for many will come in what it will allow the contact centre to do in the future, not the short-term cost savings it can make now. Having said that, IP solutions can certainly reduce operational costs in some cases, but anyone either researching or actively considering implementation of IP contact centre solutions must be aware that they will be enabling their contact centre to change and improve the way it operates. IP is a critical strategic decision which will support what you want to use your contact centre for in 1, 2, 5 or 10 years time.

The main driver for IP implementation has historically been to reduce costs through running a single network, with significant numbers of contact centres having a forced necessity to implement IP because of the requirement to replace their PBX, as well as it being a corporate decision for many too. Surprisingly perhaps, implementing IP in order to deploy homeworkers or create virtual contact centres has been seen as much less important, except in larger operations where flexibility and economies of scale are perhaps more achievable.

Enabling new multimedia channels, such as video, is also a driver for IP decisions. Although two-way video may not be what customers want, there are certainly advantages to being able to provide visual support, whether in a live environment or in a self-service application:

- the self-service experience is faster and more interesting

- visual agent interaction may enhance trust

- improved communication - a picture is worth a thousand words - reducing call costs

- higher customer perception of the level of service

- new revenue opportunity through video advertising.

Having said that, there is no single overriding reason for implementing IP - it adds flexibility and future-proofs the contact centre somewhat (especially in a multi-site environment), and most importantly perhaps, offers a foundation upon which to base the next generation of contact centre functionality.

The effects that IP implementation has **actually** had (rather than the perceptions of what it could do) revolve, as with previous years, around network cost reduction, inter-site cost reduction and the flexibility to add and change agents quickly.

While the effect that moving to IP has presented businesses with a greater choice of vendors or applications garners the least enthusiasm amongst users of IP, it still receives a broadly positive answer. The increased use of SIP and drive to open standards should help this factor increase in importance, but the proprietary nature of solutions and hardware, as well as long-standing contracts and vendor relationships is still widespread.

Figure 62: What effect has implementing IP had on your contact centre?
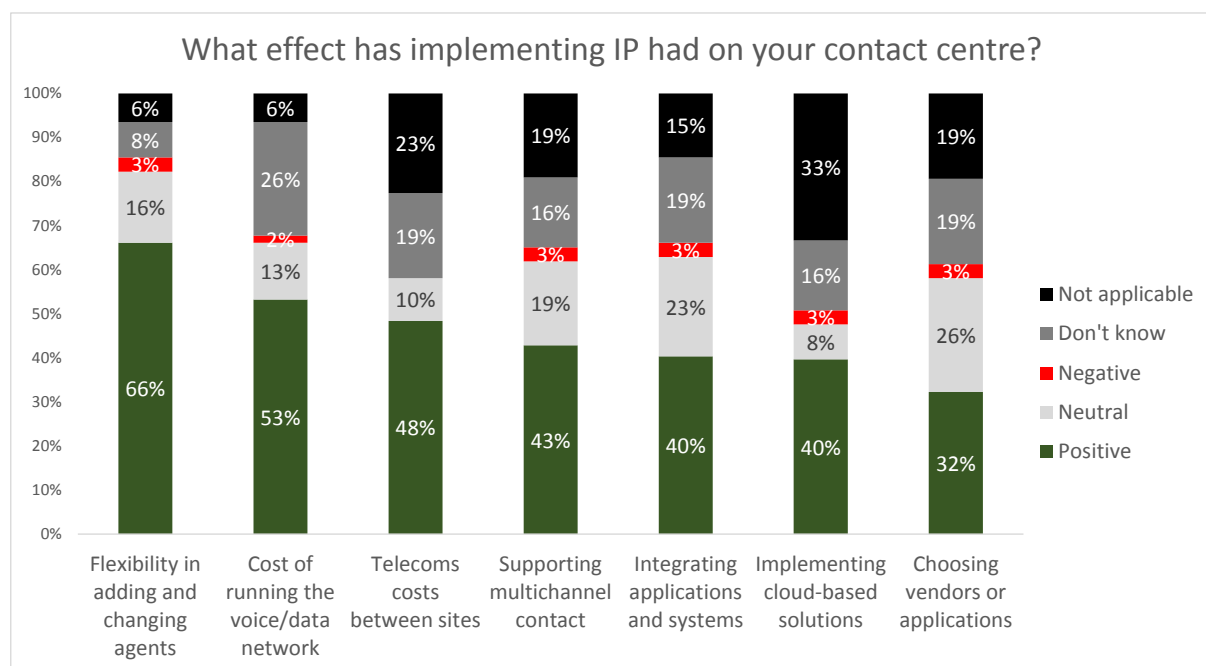
PCI COMPLIANCE

There are significant elements to consider around manually taking payment from cards: the time taken to take payment, the risk of fraud by agents and compliance with standards set by the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (https://www.pcisecuritystandards.org/security_standards/), in order to reduce credit card fraud.

PCI DSS requires businesses taking payment card details to protect the data (such as the card number and security code) making sure that authentication data is not retained which could otherwise allow future fraudulent use. In the contact centre environment, this not only means that these data should not be retained within the database (regardless of encryption level), but also that any data capture functionality, such as screen or call recording, cannot be used to search for this information either.

71% of respondents' operations take card payments from customers over the phone, although the services and manufacturing sectors are once again the least likely to do so, probably as a result of much of this business being high-value, invoiced B2B work.

Payments are normally taken by agents (in 66% of cases), although vertical markets such as utilities housing, finance and public sector may well offer a fully-automated as well as a human payment option to their customer base.

Figure 63: Does your contact centre take payments over the phone? (by vertical market)

Does your contact centre take payments over the phone? (by vertical market)

Vertical Market	No card details taken	Via automation	Via an agent
Average	29%	29%	66%
Services	50%	12%	50%
TMT	44%	31%	50%
Utilities	29%	57%	57%
Manufacturing	42%	8%	58%
Insurance	33%	27%	60%
Finance	40%	40%	60%
Public Sector	24%	48%	72%
Outsourcing	22%	22%	74%
Transport & Travel	11%	11%	78%
Retail & Distribution		18%	82%
Housing		54%	92%

Legend:
- ■ No card details taken (black)
- ■ Via automation (yellow)
- ■ Via an agent (blue)

The Most Effective Way to De-Scope Your Contact Centre

Eckoh

CallGuard removes cardholder data from your contact centre recordings, agents, networks and processes.

- **Agent assisted telephone payments**
- **Hosted or premised services**
- **Mid-call conferencing option**
- **Swift implementation**
- **Seamless integration with PSPs and IVRs**
- **Contact Centre specialist**

Take advantage of our PCI DSS Level One accreditation and take the headache out of compliance.

www.eckoh.com
tellmemore@eckoh.com

PCI Security Standards Council ™

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATION

The following two charts show the level of concern that respondents believe that their organisations have towards contact centre fraud. (NB: as this chapter is about PCI compliance, those respondents which do **not** take customer card payments within the contact centre have been excluded).

Respondents were asked to score their concern over potential contact centre fraud on a scale of 1 to 10, where a score of 1 meant that they were "very unconcerned", and 10 meant that they were "very concerned". As focusing upon those respondents at either end of the spectrum is likely to offer greater insight into real issues, only those displaying either very little concern or great concern are shown on the charts, for greater clarity.

There are two findings that are immediately apparent: many respondents are extremely confident that contact centre fraud is not a major risk within their own business, with 40% scoring this as 1/10 or 2/10; and that a significant proportion of the finance sector takes this potential threat extremely seriously.

The latter finding is perhaps less surprising, given the nature of the business and the unparalleled access that financial services customer contact agents have to sensitive financial information, systems and personal data. However, the widespread confidence that contact centre fraud is not a direct threat that is shown elsewhere in the contact centre industry is interesting, and may be misplaced.

Figure 64: How concerned is your organisation that contact centre fraud could harm your business? (by vertical market)

How concerned is your organisation that contact centre fraud could harm your business? (by vertical market)

Organisations know the risks of non-compliance. As well as the obvious risk to the security of payment card data and risk to your brand it also carries a risk of incurring significant fines should an organisation suffer a breach (now estimated at over £130 per card at risk). Businesses have been deemed non-compliant if they fail to meet just one requirement of the standard, regardless of whether it contributed to the security breach.

When looking at contact centre size bands, small operations are far more likely to feel that contact centre fraud is not a risk to them, with 55% of respondents from this sector expressing a great deal of confidence about this, compared to only 24% within large operations. Almost 1 in 8 respondents from 200+ seat contact centres were extremely concerned about the potential that contact centre fraud has to damage their business.

Figure 65: How concerned is your organisation that contact centre fraud could harm your business? (by contact centre size)

How concerned is your organisation that contact centre fraud could harm your business? (by contact centre size)

- Average: 18% (1 - very unconcerned), 22% (2 - unconcerned), 1% (9 - concerned), 8% (10 - very concerned)
- Large: 9% (1 - very unconcerned), 15% (2 - unconcerned), 12% (10 - very concerned)
- Medium: 23% (1 - very unconcerned), 20% (2 - unconcerned), 10% (10 - very concerned)
- Small: 24% (1 - very unconcerned), 31% (2 - unconcerned), 3% (9 - concerned)

Legend: ■ 1 - very unconcerned ■ 2 - unconcerned ■ 9 - concerned ■ 10 - very concerned

Although over half of respondents from contact centres which handle card payments are satisfied that their existing approach to PCI compliance, and the systems and processes that support this do not require change, 27% of respondents who are PCI compliant are open to an alternative approach if it can be seen to deliver superior benefits or save significant time and cost.

19% of respondents handling card payments are not yet fully PCI compliant, and although the majority of those are actively working towards becoming so, there are still a small handful who seem to be ignoring the need to comply with these regulations.

These findings do not fully match up with the widespread dismissal of risk demonstrated in the past two charts. Further in this chapter, we find that only a minority of respondents have implemented payment solutions that take agents out of the equation altogether, so there may well be a disconnect between the reality of risk, and businesses' perception of the threat of fraud.

Figure 66: Organisational attitude towards PCI compliance (only respondents which handle card payments)

Organisations' attitude to PCI compliance (only those which handle card payments)
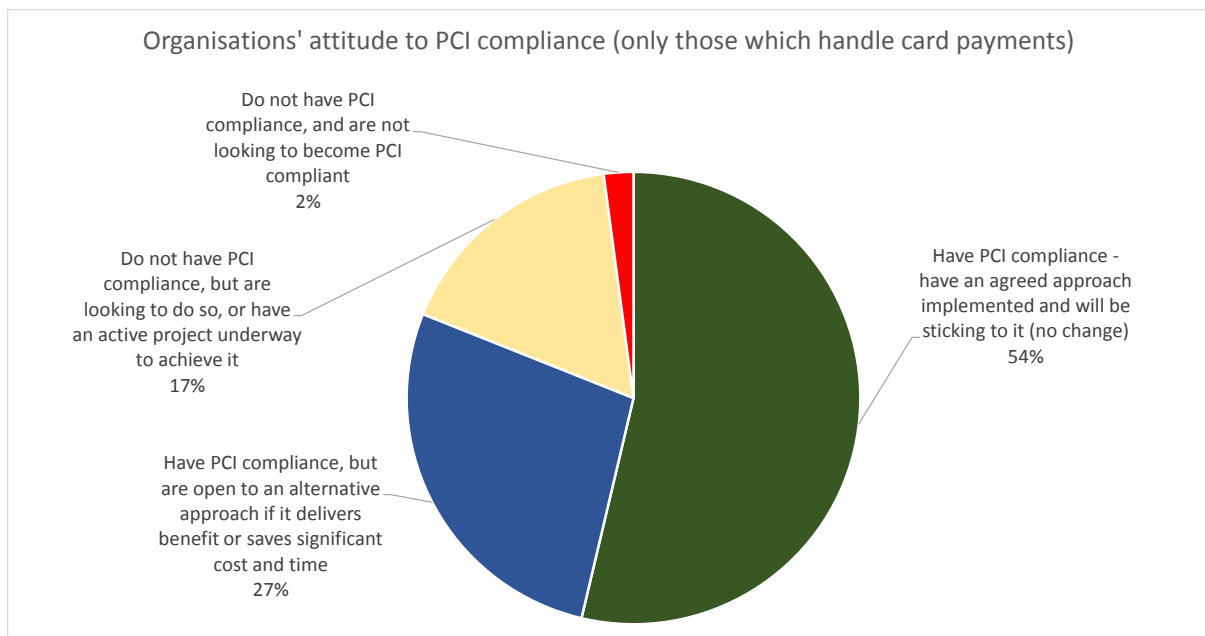
Any business that processes card payments over the telephone has to comply with PCI DSS, which means that no storage of personal authentication information such as the CVV2 code is permitted, even if the data is held securely in an encrypted state. For contact centres which use call recording - which is the majority of the industry - this creates an issue. This is further exacerbated by the presence of screen recording solutions as well. As such, contact centres need to consider both compliant call recording and automated payment solutions.

It is important to understand that PCI DSS compliance is not just limited to securing call recordings and the full journey of cardholder data within the contact centre must be mapped and secured, including voice systems, data systems and human touch points.

The scope of the audit is extensive and can require either an external auditor or dedicated internal resource to spend a number of months analysing and evaluating the environment and internal processes, to determine compliance without a guarantee of on-going security.

While every merchant or organisation that processes credit cards will need to validate that they are PCI compliant, reducing the audit scope can directly reduce the cost of compliance.

There are various options, either used individually or in tandem with each other, to assist contact centres to remain compliant.

Allowing agents to pick and choose which part of an interaction are recorded is not the ideal way to eliminate fraudulent activity, and more importantly, this process is not PCI-DSS compliant, as the instructions state that "sensitive authentication data has to be removed from recordings, automatically, with no manual intervention by your staff." However, many call recording solutions now allow automated triggers to pause and restart the recording process at the appropriate time. Businesses using this functionality should be aware that some recording solutions do not allow pauses, only a complete halt within a recording, meaning that multiple recordings will exist for the same transaction, which can cause serious inaccuracies to management information. Muting the recording while the sensitive payment card details are taken may be a way around this, but the process has to be automated rather than requiring an agent's action.

Taking the agents out of the payment process completely is another option. Some contact centres prefer to initiate a mid-call or post-call IVR session in order that the caller may type in the digits of their card using DTMF tones. If necessary, the caller is then reconnected with the agent. The call recording system also has to be addressed here, which can be done by masking the DTMF tones or using pause-and-resume functionality. The use of audio-processing technology means that the sound of a voice and a DTMF tone can be distinguished from each other: the agent asks the caller to enter their card details using an IVR, but these tones are not passed through to either the agent or call recording solution. There is a potential further benefit for the business: if post-call IVR is used successfully to take payment card details, then the time an agent would normally spend on this can be freed up to speak to other customers.

Other methods of assisting with PCI compliance include specific training and business processes to ensure the correct handling of payment information, outsourcing the payment method altogether to a third party, and implementing clean desk/clean rooms where even manual data recording is not allowed.

Figure 67: Methods of assisting with PCI compliance

PCI compliance method	% respondents
Pause and resume voice recording, which stops while card payment is taken	59%
Manual processes and training to ensure payment information is handled correctly	51%
Clean desks / rooms - where pen, paper and mobiles are prohibited	37%
Take payment via automated IVR mid-call or at the end of the call	29%
Obscure the data entered on an agent's screen	25%
Screen recording application does not capture card details on-screen	19%
Detect and block the phone's DTMF tones	10%
Cloud-based solution so that payment information does not enter the contact centre	9%

59% of respondents choose to stop or pause voice recording during the payment process, a significant increase on last year's figures. Just over half use manual processes and train their agents about PCI compliance, rather than focusing on automation. A clean desk policy is in place in over one third of respondents' operations and 1 in 4 obscure the data entered onto the agent's screen

There has been a significant increase in the proportion of respondents using an automated IVR to take payment, up from around 1 in 6 last year, to over 1 in 4 in 2014. A minority use screen recording applications that do not capture the card details on screen, and 1 in 10 detect and block the phone's DTMF tones, with 9% using a cloud solution outside the contact centre.

'Pause and resume' methods may work and are used extensively, however, the downsides are that they are still open to human error; and standards and regulations are continually evolving making gaps to achieve compliance ever wider.

It is also well known that the PCI Standards Council prefers solid, technology-based solutions, such as DTMF suppression through IVR, or the more customer friendly option of agent assisted DTMF payments.

The latter is an increasingly popular method with merchants as it enables the agent to stay on the call with the customer and guide them through the payment process, while the agent isn't exposed to any card data.

Just over half of all respondents manage their PCI compliance program by having dedicated trained and qualified personnel (either singular, or as a team) look after the process, this being particularly prevalent in medium and large operations.

De-Scoping Your Contact Centre for PCI Compliance

PCI compliance is viewed it as an expensive burden with concerns including disruption to daily business, budget restrictions, the complexity of the PCI DSS audit process, the potential training of staff, and so on. But whatever merchants think about PCI DSS, it is the favoured payment security standard and will continue to be the benchmark for the industry, and more increasingly, for consumers.

Most merchants are endeavouring to meet increasing customer security demands and protect their customers' data, and the related contact centres are changing their approach to how they deal with customer information. So, what methods are contact centres currently using to achieve compliance?

Segmenting

Creating 'clean room' environments or segregating card handlers from other personnel is generally good practice, however there are still gaps in these systems and processes. Call recordings and data collected on PCs and networks will be exposed in a PCI audit, so segmenting in isolation will not adequately address the full scale of PCI requirements.

Pause-and-Resume/Recording Switch-Off

Other systems enable agents to manually pause and resume recording using buttons on their screen or handset. These methods are used extensively but they are still open to human error. As a result, PCI DSS does not approve manual intervention. In addition, any pause and resume system leaves agents exposed to card data, increasing fraud risk.

Outsourcing to a PCI DSS Service Provider

Changing the internal processes of contact centres can in some instances be more time consuming, counterproductive and costly than choosing scenarios that may be more sustainable over a longer period of time. Owing to the complexity of the PCI DSS audit, more large contact centres are opting to outsource their requirement to VISA approved PCI DSS Level One Service Providers, so that they can continue to run their busy operation without distraction and reduce the scope of the lengthy and time consuming audit.

IVR Automation

Some contact centres use an external system to transfer calls to an IVR platform at the point in a conversation when they need to take payment. The caller uses their telephone keypad to enter their card details. This solution is highly effective at removing the agent threat from the transaction, but for good customer service, many organisations prefer to keep the caller on the line while the customer is taken through the payment process.

DTMF Tone Suppression

The second solution offered by outsourced providers enables the agent to guide the caller through the payment process, but is not exposed to any card data. This works by the agent asking the caller to enter their card details manually through their telephone keypad. The agent doesn't see or hear cardholder data and the customer stays on the phone with the caller while they are processing their payment. Minimal agent intervention is needed and the system hides card entries on the agent screen and blocks the DTMF tones from being recorded. This type of solution is generally considered to be one of the most robust PCI compliant contact centre solution and is usually offered on a premised or hosted basis. Depending on which service provider you use, it tends to vary in cost, complexity of integration and PCI Certification. To what extent the system actually de-scopes your contact centre from PCI also differs. For instance, some services are geared to de-scope the entire contact centre, which makes them fairly inflexible to organisations that take a relatively small proportion of payments through their agents.

At Eckoh we know that organisations have a range of requirements, from making a small amount of agent seats compliant to removing their entire contact centre environment from PCI scope. As a result, we've developed solutions to meet every contact centre's PCI compliance need offering the widest range of contact centre solutions on the market with quick implementation schedules and competitive costs.

For more information, call: +44 (0)1442 458300 | email: tellmemore@eckoh.com | visit: www.eckoh.com.

Eckoh

This is not to say that smaller contact centres necessarily have a *laissez-faire* approach to PCI compliance, as they are just as likely as large operations to seek external advice, whether through the auditing of self-assessment questionnaires or through consultancy provided by qualified security advisors.

Figure 68: How is your PCI compliance programme run? (by contact centre size)
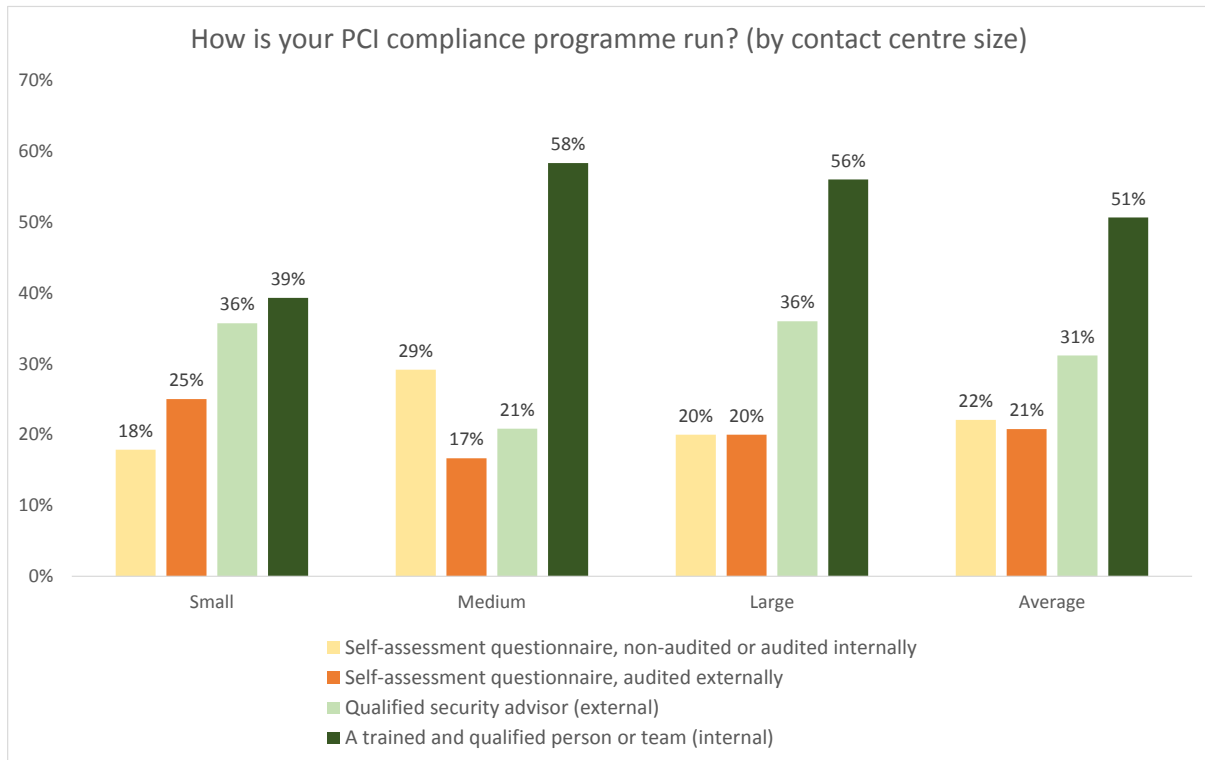
VOICE BIOMETRICS

Until a few years ago many businesses relied on trust that the caller was who they claimed to be – asking only for a name and address. Today, strong identity verification processes are now seen by virtually all businesses as critically important and most make some attempt to verify a caller's claimed identity by asking for additional information that only the real caller should know. The increasing focus upon fraud detection has meant that identity verification has become far more important, and this is unlikely to change.

Identity theft is a high-profile issue, and as such, businesses have had to tighten security and, as importantly, be seen to be doing so by their customers, as fraud prevention has now become a brand issue, as well as a regulatory one. While fraud certainly causes losses to a business, the risk of losing customers' confidence by being seen as lackadaisical about security is potentially a much greater negative. Criminals' methods have become more sophisticated and businesses have had to respond by introducing more complex identity verification processes.

However identity verification procedures have now become intrusive and inconvenient for the customer. Customers are expected to remember an increasing array of ID's passwords, PIN's, memorable information, information on their last transactions or to carry smart cards or tokens everywhere they go. Customers can undergo a 'Spanish Inquisition' before being permitted to make their enquiry or place their order – which reduces customer satisfaction, and also cost businesses time and money. It takes an average of 30 seconds to verify a customer's identity manually, and this mounts up considerably: the UK contact centre industry is estimated to spend almost £2bn each year, just to verify the caller is who they claim to be.

In fact, the cost of identity verification in the contact centre has increased hugely over the years, with more calls requiring identity checks, which now themselves take longer due to more stringent testing. With rising salaries and longer call times, cost-per-call has increased as well, and the overall number of all inbound calls has increased by around 15% since 2007, although this has slowed considerably in recent years. Although in-call efficiency has improved, identify verification is slower than ever before, all factors which have driven up the cost of initial identification.

Identity verification processes are typically based on one or more authentication factors that fall into the following generally-accepted categories

- something you **know** - e.g. password, PIN or memorable information

- something you **are** - a biometric such as a finger print, retina pattern or voice print

- something you **have** – a tangible object, e.g. a PIN-generating key fob, or the 3-digit CVV2 code on credit cards.

Is the category "something you know" really useful for authentication any more? There is a wealth of untapped identifying data in a call's audio and session metadata. When combined properly in a multi-factor authentication system, this passively available data can provide accurate authentication and fraud detection.

150

Combining these factors creates a more complex, and potentially more secure two-factor or three-factor authentication process. Increasingly, regulations are requiring two-factor authentication processes. Financial institutions' can no longer rely on simply passwords to protection web banking services. For example, in the US, FFIEC guidance indicates that financial institutions should implement similar stronger authentication processes in their contact centres and IVR systems.

Figure 69: Proportion of calls requiring caller identification, by vertical market
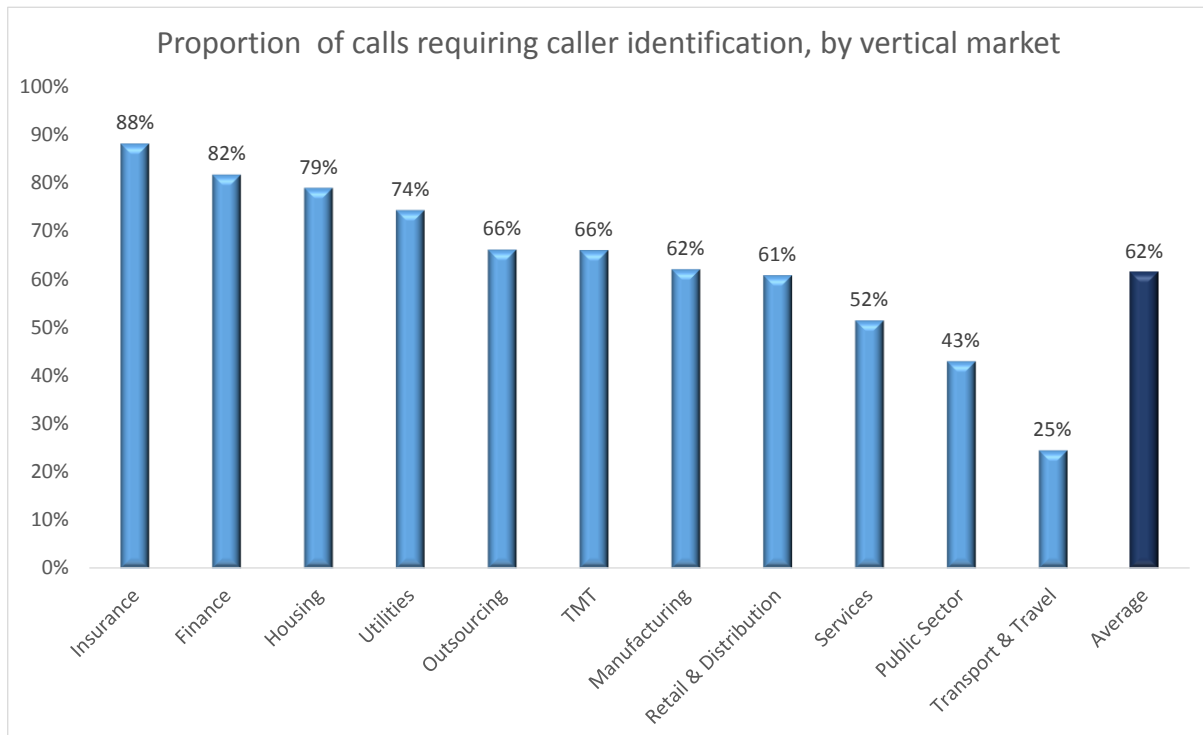
In line with regulatory and commercial pressure to improve fraud detection and achieve compliance, businesses' identity checking procedures have become more stringent, with 62% of calls this year requiring identity verification, compared to only 47% in 2007.

As might be expected, the financial, insurance and utilities sectors are amongst the sectors most often authenticating callers' identity. The more sales-oriented sectors do so the least, as do the information-driven public sector respondents.

Figure 70: Caller identity authentication methods

Identification method (when used)	Proportion of contact centres using this method
Using **only** an agent	88%
Using **only** automation	2%
Using **both** human and automation	10%
Do not authenticate any calls	*13%*
DTMF IVR	*47%*
Automated speech recognition	*53%*

88% of all respondents that identify callers do so through **purely** human means, taking an average of 30 seconds to do so. 12% use IVR or speech recognition to identify the caller (which itself takes around 20 seconds), but in most of these cases, first get the caller to use an IVR to collect their details, then also use the agent to double-check once the call is passed through, wasting the caller's time and increasing the contact centre's costs. DTMF IVR and automated speech recognition are used fairly equally to authenticate callers.

The amount of time required to authenticate an identity through manual means (using an agent) differs significantly between vertical markets.

Figure 71: Time taken to authenticate caller identity, by vertical market

Vertical market	Time taken to authenticate caller's identity (seconds)
Housing	40
Outsourcing	38
Finance	35
Public Sector	34
Retail & Distribution	31
TMT	27
Insurance	26
Services	25
Utilities	23
Transport & Travel	22
Manufacturing	16
Average	**30**
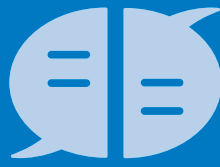
Step Up Your Game in Fraud Detection
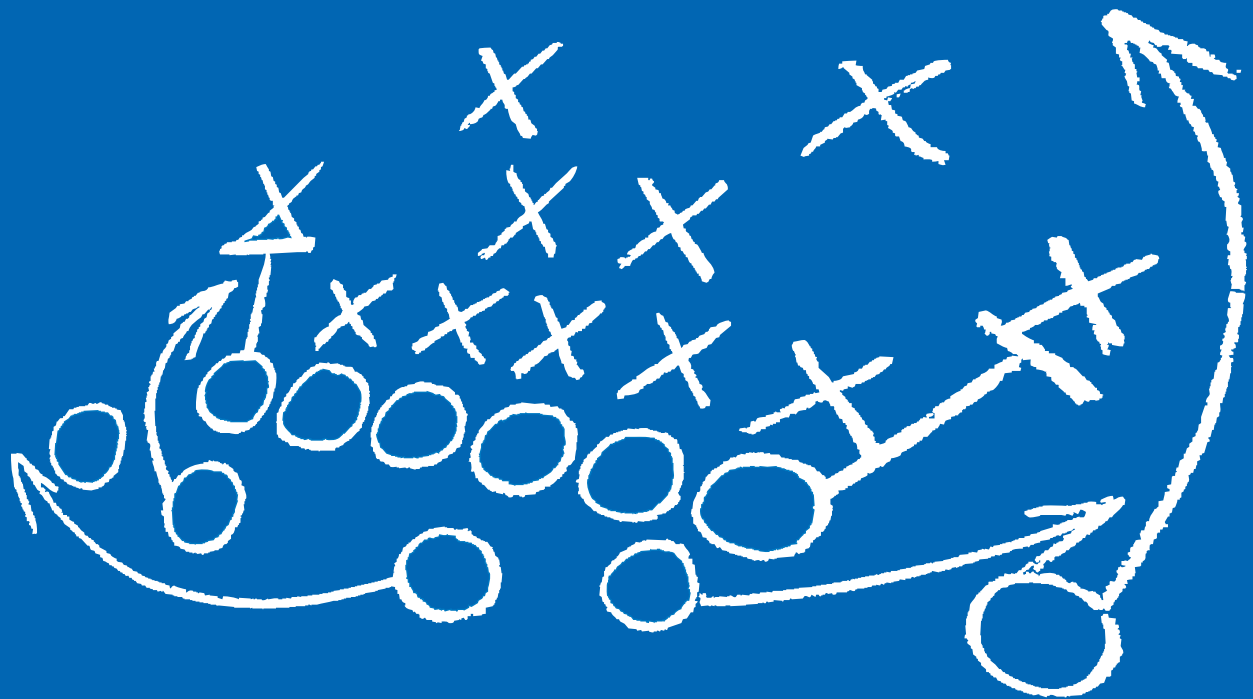
- Decrease contact centre fraud attacks.
- Deter fraudsters from returning.
- Reduce risk and fraud-related losses.
- Benefit from fraud analytics and visibility.

Victrio *is now a part of* **VERINT**

With Verint® voice biometrics and predictive analytics solutions, your contact centre can dramatically improve its ability to detect fraudulent callers, reduce fraud-related losses, and deliver a better customer experience. Learn more at verint.com.

VERINT.

The unnecessary cost of caller authentication

62% of all calls require a security and identification process to be completed first. 98% of these will require some agent input even if IVR or speech recognition is also used. On average, it takes 30 seconds to go through manual security.

Using these statistics, it is possible to approximate roughly how much UK contact centres spend each year on screening customers by using agents.

Inbound call minutes per year: 41bn[2]

Average inbound call length: c. 5 minutes

Inbound calls per year: 8.2bn

Proportion of inbound calls that require security and identification checks: 62%

Proportion of security and identification checks carried out using an agent: 98%

Average length of agent-handled security and identification check: 30 seconds

Mean average cost per inbound call: £3.77

Cost of time spent on agent-handled security and identification check: 37.7p per call

Overall cost of agent-handled security and identification checking: c. **£1.9bn per year**

VERINT.

Dragging your customers through 30 seconds or more of traditional KBA (knowledge-based authentication)? Multi-factor authentication systems can shorten handle time tremendously by using voiceprint and other passive data to reduce security questions.

---

[2] From ContactBabel, "The UK Contact Centre Industry in 2014: The State of the Industry", January 2014

To recap, there are several factors to consider when trying to predict changes in the ways in which customers are identified:

- businesses want to reduce the cost of fraud
- customers want convenience but also their personal information and assets protected
- businesses need to comply with existing and new laws and regulations
- contact centres spend excessive amounts of money on identifying and verifying customer identities
- existing methods of identity verification (e.g. PIN, password, etc.) are not secure and are user-unfriendly.

The emergence of biometric technologies

Biometric technology uses physiological or behavioural characteristics to verify a person's claimed identity. Physiological biometrics includes fingerprints, iris, or retina recognition, and voice verification. Behavioural biometrics includes signature verification, gait and keystroke dynamics.

Of these, voice is the only biometric that can be used over the phone. In fact, a voice verification system's strength lies in its ability to work over the phone or web and mobile making it a viable identity verification solution for contact centres. Voice verification systems use spoken words to generate a voiceprint, and each call can be compared with a previously-enrolled voiceprint to verify a caller's identity. The most sophisticated systems generate a voiceprint by using spoken words to calculate vocal measurements of a caller's vocal tract, thereby creating a unique digital representation of an individual's voice. These systems are not affected by factors such as the caller having a cold, using different types of phones, or aging. Voice verification systems are now delivering levels of accuracy and security that have proven robust enough for use by banks and insurers.

A significant advantage of voice biometric verification is that it can be done unobtrusively – in the background during the natural course of customers' conversations with an agent – using text independent and language independent technology. Real-time authentication significantly reduces average handle time and improves the customer experience by utilizing voice biometrics to authenticate customers in real time. With this advanced technology, contact centres can:

- Voiceprint the vast majority of customers for seamless passive enrolment: in the course of a conversation, a voiceprint is created for that customer which lies on record for them to be authenticated against on the next call
- Securely authenticate customers with no customer effort—significantly improving the customer experience: the first few seconds of a call will be enough to match the customers' voiceprint against those on record
- Help agents expedite time to service, shaving valuable seconds off average handle time: no need for customers to answer numerous security questions as the conversation they are having provides enough information to identify them

- Significantly reduce fraud risk for all customers, and deter fraudsters: it is estimated that the vast majority of fraud is carried out by repeat offenders. Once a potential fraudster has been identified, their voice biometrics and call behaviour can be captured and held on file to identify future repeat occurrences.

Do you know your Repeat Fraud Rate? Fraud has a high repeat attack pattern, with the same professional fraudsters attacking a contact centre 80-90% of the time. Voice biometric screening against a fraudster database can have a dramatic impact on reducing fraud without burdening your customers.

The customer's experience

Since speaking is natural and intuitive, a well-planned implementation can result in a better customer experience that eliminates the need for PINs or passwords. For example:

- In the case of text- and language-independent authentication, the customer's voiceprint (collected on previous calls) is authenticated in the background during the natural course of conversation with an agent, while simply outlining their service request – minimizing both customer effort and time-to-service. There is no need to remember PINs or passwords, which greatly improves the customer's experience

- 'Account Number' based voice verification – the caller is asked to speak their account number. The account number identifies the caller, and the spoken words are used to generate a voiceprint that verifies the caller is the account holder

- 'Challenge Response'. Typically the customer is asked to repeat a series of numbers , e.g. "Please say 'one seven three four'". The spoken words are used to generate a voiceprint. The numbers spoken are usually different each time the caller phones.

In cases where a two-factor authentication process is required, voice verification can be combined with a 'something you know' – such as an answer to a memorable question. Real-time agent guidance can prompt agents to ask a further security question within the call if the process requires it.

--- Thought Leadership ---

Passive, Multi-Factor Authentication and Fraud Detection: The Future is Now

Contact centres are looking to improve the authentication process which faces problems with customer experience, agent handle time, and fraud detection. Today, contact centres at leading financial institutions are implementing a new solution called passive, multi-factor authentication. By analysing identifying audio and metadata characteristics in the background of a call, the new solution reduces security questions while increasing fraud detection.

Growing Issues with Security Questions (a.k.a. Knowledge-Based Authentication / KBA)

The contact centre's process of asking security questions, called knowledge-based authentication (KBA), is facing major challenges. Customers are frustrated, with 10%-15% of real customers failing their own questions and tens of thousands of complaints in the financial sector. One of 3,000-5,000 callers is a fraudster; KBA puts everyone through an interrogation process in order to catch that one fraudster. Ironically, the questions are not stopping professional fraudsters today, who have answers from social networks and retail POS data breaches. Therefore KBA is amounting to poor customer experience, higher agent handle times, and lower security. Contact centres are searching for a better solution to authentication.

Untapped Potential in Passive Analysis of Call Audio / Metadata for Security

A call's audio contains multiple identifying factors in voice biometric (an individual has a unique voiceprint) and non-voice audio characteristics. Callers can be identified by screening against a database of known customer and fraudster voiceprints. In addition, call metadata add identifying characteristics to each call. Analyzed together, these factors can quickly identify the caller as a known customer or fraudster, seconds into the call. **Most importantly, these factors can be analyzed passively in the background of the call, without any customer burden. This new approach is called passive multi-factor screening for authentication and fraud detection.**

New Generation of Passive Voice Biometrics

Passive multi-factor authentication uses a new generation of "passive" voice biometrics. The first call coming into the system enrols the customer's voiceprint. Subsequent calls are authenticated by screening against that voiceprint. Passive voice biometrics is text-independent, meaning customers are not required to say anything specific. Passive enrolment and screening are done in the background of natural conversation between agent and caller, the key to successful customer adoption. In contrast, "active" voice biometrics which require specific passphrases have failed due to poor customer adoption.

Multi-factor Authentication and Fraud Detection: Results for the Contact Center

Multi-factor authentication reduces security questions by using passively available data to quickly distinguish customers from criminals and achieve the following results:

o **Better customer experience** – Most customers will receive 'express lane authentication' with fewer security questions

o **Less agent handle time** – Due to fewer security questions per call

o **Better security and fraud detection** - Screening calls against a fraudster voiceprint database has been proven to greatly increase fraud detection for contact centres at major financial institutions.

The business benefits

Businesses benefit from two types of savings. These can be illustrated in the following example:-

A contact centre receives 10 million inbound calls per annum with the existing identity verification procedure taking on average 30 seconds and being performed by an agent:

- Eliminating the time taken by an agent to verify a caller's identity can save 35-40p per call (£3.5m - £4m per annum)
- Secure automated identity verification enables a broader range of fully automated services to be offered, reducing agent cost.

The potential benefits for the business are huge, and the customer also gains through a better experience, longer opening hours and greater identity protection.

Similar savings will also be found in the case of text-independent authentication, where the caller's voiceprint is authenticated within the natural course of the conversation. The agent begins each call by immediately asking how they can help the customer, and the authentication process is carried out by voiceprint verification at the same time that the agent is listening to the caller and preparing to help them.

Voice verification can also be used to protect the enterprise against repudiation (where the customer says at a later date that they did not do it) as it can verify the physical presence of an individual at the other end of a phone line. Interestingly, this capability is already used by various US law enforcement agencies to check that released offenders are where they should be.

For procedures such as internet password resetting, the higher level of security achieved with voice verification can enable businesses to offer real-time password resets or reminders. This benefits both customer and business and can reduce up to 70% of helpdesk calls.

Voice verification has the advantages of near-ubiquity (the vast majority of people would be able to use it) as well as improving levels of security and reducing costs. The increasing demand of the public for identity protection, coupled with businesses' permanent desire to increase profits mean that voice verification is an option that any company concerned about identity authentication should now seriously consider.

Even in organisations where fraud isn't seen as being a major risk, speech biometrics can be extremely useful. Many organisations have built business cases for these solutions based on improving their self-service security and customer experience, rather than focusing upon reducing the cost of fraud. The most obvious way to improve security is to make procedures more complex, insist upon passwords being changed more often, and make these passwords more convoluted and consequently difficult to remember. The result is that frustrated customers are more likely to need to call a live agent to take them through security, which is obviously counter-productive. Voice biometrics hugely improves security, while making it far easier and more rewarding for the customer to use the self-service application, without having to involve human agents at all.

CALL-BACK, ROUTING AND QUEUE MANAGEMENT

Collecting information about customers before an agent has spoken with them is a contact centre technique which has been around for decades, under the wider auspices of CTI (computer telephony integration). CTI infrastructure routes calls and automate information retrieval to help agents deal with issues quickly and accurately, without transferring callers or leaving them on hold.

CTI and SIP

SIP ("Session Initiation Protocol" - see the section on IP elsewhere in this report for more detail) enables companies to use CTI functionality through IT infrastructure instead of using a proprietary hardware/software layer. Applications will use SIP commands to carry out call-related activities and also non-call functions such as presence management.

A contact centre's CTI servers use caller ID information from PBXs to retrieve customer information from various databases. This information is then passed to the agent along with the voice call as a screen-pop, cutting down the time spent at the beginning of a conversation. If calls are transferred, the information follows the voice call so the customer does not have to repeat information they have already given. CTI is extremely effective, however, it's also expensive, proprietary and complex. The use of SIP enables CTI functionality to be used far more widely and effectively, and cloud solutions can now encapsulate the CTI functionality within native integration so that there is no need for separate CTI servers and software licenses.

Enabling a voice device to communicate with a data network has required the CTI middleware layer to translate TDM (Time Division Multiplexed) voice traffic into data. If a contact centre uses SIP and a pure IP infrastructure, it removes the need for CTI as a separate layer in the IT infrastructure because SIP enables mobile phones, laptops, smartphones, etc. to communicate directly with IT resources. In pure IP networks, calls will enter the infrastructure as VoIP traffic and travel to a SIP proxy server which initiates sessions with the necessary applications to perform call routing and customer information searches that the CTI server was formerly responsible for.

Standards-based SIP proxy servers are cheaper than CTI servers and can be implemented on standard hardware. Integration is easier and quicker as all the input and output in the network is one standard protocol, which opens this up to smaller operations too, however all voice traffic must be through VoIP.

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT MADE EASY

EVERY CHANNEL. EVERY TOUCHPOINT.

The 'always on' customer can be tricky to do business with; they do their homework online before calling and have a voice via social media to tell everyone how happy or unhappy they are with you. Perhaps trickiest of all, they hop from channel to channel expecting you to be right alongside them for the whole journey. In today's competitive landscape, it's more important than ever that you get that customer journey right.

- Personalised routing and contact handling regardless of customer channel choice

- Enhanced by rich data in Salesforce to inform every conversation

- Effortless customer experience as contacts are routed on context rather than channel

- Boost agent productivity with a single integrated desktop for handling all contact channels

NEWVOICE**MEDIA**

salesforce

AppExchange Program
PARTNER

newvoicemedia.com

Those contact centres which use DTMF IVR (touchtone) or speech recognition considerably more than average have traditionally been found in the telecoms, utilities and finance sectors: often high-volume environments where a few seconds shaved from a call or a reduction in misrouting can save considerable amounts of money. Most financial services companies have many products which require specific skills and product knowledge. As such, routing based upon selection criteria such as customer account numbers, sales/service and specific product choices can take place, supported by an IVR front-end, functionality which is often known as 'auto-attendant'.

The use of integrated cloud contact centre and cloud CRM solutions can make sophisticated routing based on customer data a very easy thing to implement, no need to employ expensive programmers or call centre specialists. We are seeing more customers build self-service IVRs against data held in cloud CRM solutions. In past years, this would not be possible due to internet speeds but now all major cities have fibre infrastructure that allows real time interaction across internet things completely reliably.

It is worth setting some definitions here. While some IVRs are **also** used to front a contact centre, they are typically designed to filter out and resolve the majority of calls, rather than route them. The real benefit of an IVR is that it has the ability to provide all of the assistance that a customer needs, such as company or event information or when integrated with customer recognition technology, account balances and other information sourced from internal databases. A solution used solely to route callers would simply be the (cheaper and less sophisticated) auto-attendant functionality within the CTI solution.

This particular section of the report investigates the business purpose of the IVR / CTI application as it is used for routing calls, rather than providing a full-service solution (which is looked at within the 'Self-Service' section elsewhere in this report). As such, 'IVR' will be used here as shorthand to describe this particular call routing functionality, although the actual technology may differ between contact centres.

Less-automated or volume-based contact centres, such as manufacturing, and sales-focused operations, such as retail, show less of a demand for IVR call routing solutions. Larger contact centres, such as those found in the utilities and finance industries, will very frequently use IVR to improve their routing capability.

Automated speech recognition is in use by 21% of respondents, with the utilities, TMT and finance sectors as usual being the greatest users of this. The vast majority in all sectors that use IVR/ASR for routing use DTMF IVR, possibly in addition to ASR.

As IVR is a solution which provides major cost savings in volume-based environments, we would expect to find more of the larger contact centres using it, and this year's figures once again support this idea to some extent. However, 40% of respondents in sub-50 seat contact centres report using DTMF IVR or ASR for routing, demonstrating that this is no longer a technology just for operations with lots of budget and in-house IT support.

Figure 72: Does your contact centre use DTMF IVR or speech recognition to route calls? (by contact centre size)

Contact centre size	Use of DTMF IVR or ASR for routing
Small	40%
Medium	54%
Large	58%
Average	**50%**

More expensive automated speech recognition solutions are somewhat more prevalent in large operations, where the correct automated routing of many thousands of calls each day can very quickly make a case for ROI.

Figure 73: Use of touchtone IVR and speech recognition to route calls, by contact centre size (only respondents where calls are routed using these solutions)

Contact centre size	Touchtone IVR	Speech recognition
Small	95%	15%
Medium	96%	20%
Large	83%	30%
Average	**92%**	**21%**

NB: figures may add up to more than 100% if both DTMF IVR and ASR are used

Overly-complex and long-winded IVR menus are a frequent source of irritation to customers. Looking at the number of levels used on an IVR (i.e. how many key-presses a caller must make to reach their destination), only 23% of respondents keep it simple with a single-level of options, e.g. "Press 1 for sales, 2 for Service, 3 for Accounts", with 36% having three or more levels. It seems the larger the contact centre, the more complex and granular the IVR menu.

Using CRM data is the key to reducing these menus. Once we identify a customer through CLID or account number, then we should be able to reduce the amount of options open to them by over 50%.

Figure 74: DTMF IVR levels, by contact centre size
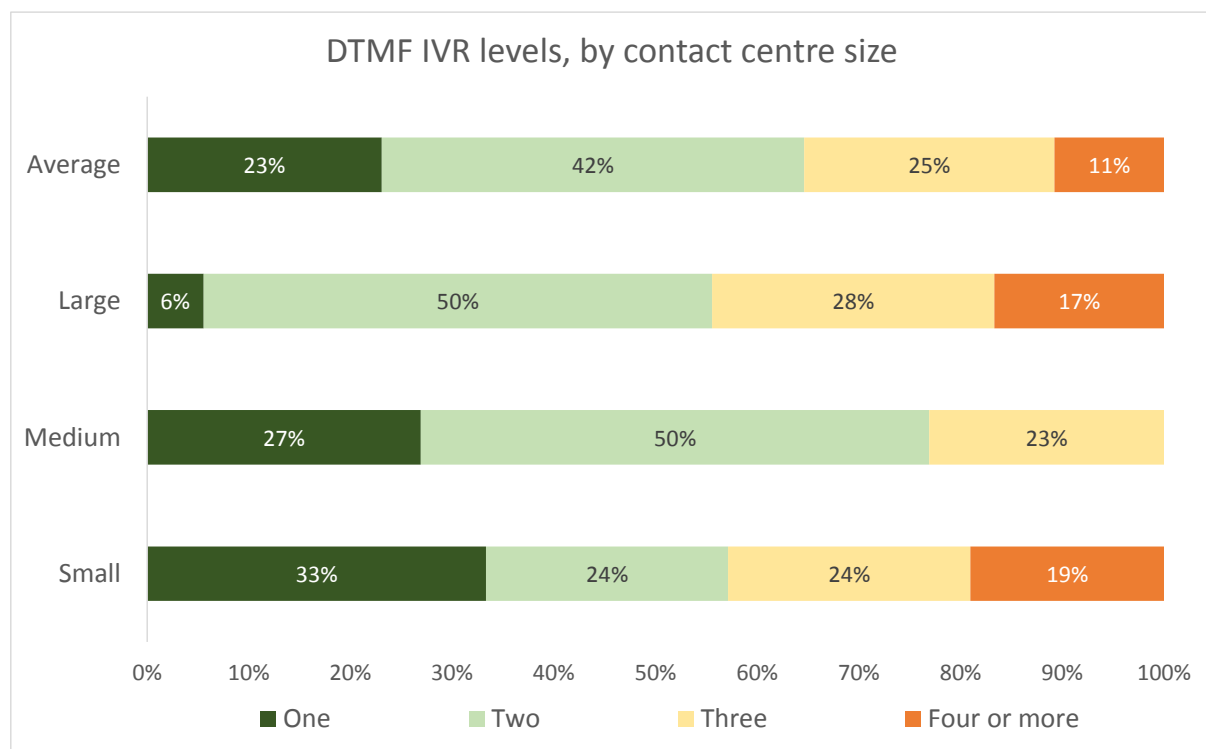
77% of respondents use a multi-layer IVR, making the caller choose at least two options. For example, after pressing 1 for sales, the customer may then have to choose a particular product or service to talk about.

25% of respondents using touchtone to route calls have architected a three-level IVR menu, where for example, the customer having chosen to talk about sales, then chosen Product X, may then have to choose whether they are a business or private customer.

11% of respondents take this at least one level further, and make our putative business customer who wants to buy product X then make yet another choice, for example, whether they are an account holder or a cash buyer.

163

It is not just the amount of levels in an IVR menu that can frustrate customers, but also the amount of options within each level. As the customer cannot see what the options are, but has to listen to each, it can be a very frustrating experience, and one which the movement to visual channels such as web self-service or visual IVR / IVVR (interactive voice and video response) via a smartphone can go some way towards alleviating. (There is more about visual IVR in the Self-Service section of this report).

Vertical market	Mean average	Median average
Housing	12	5
Insurance	11	9
Finance	10	10
Public Sector	10	5
Retail & Distribution	9	5
TMT	9	6
Outsourcing	7	4
Services	6	7
Transport & Travel	5	5
Manufacturing	5	3
Utilities	4	4
TOTAL	**9**	**5**

NB: 1st quartile = 3; 3rd quartile = 9; High = 50; Low = 2

The median has been shown as a small number of respondents report using 20 or more options in their IVR menu, which skews mean averages upwards and is less representative of the majority than the median.

Most respondents claim to restrict themselves to a median of 5 options (e.g. 2 levels with 2 or 3 options on each), with the finance and insurance sectors - often home to multiple product sets, as well as service and sales in the same location – amongst those businesses offering the greatest numbers. Automated speech recognition removes the need for multi-level menus, as callers can be prompted to speak the service they require. These types of speech based solutions have been expensive to deploy and not necessarily had the desired accuracy levels, but this is far less the case and can now be delivered cost effectively to mid-sized and smaller operations.

Sophisticated call routing capabilities allow the business to put the right agent with the right skills in front of the customer to meet the business's strategic aims, keep costs low and improve the customer's experience. Obviously, a business will want to treat a delinquent account differently to a high-value customer, or a caller identified at risk of leaving the business. The former can be routed straight through to collections, and the latter two to highly-skilled agents who may have worked with the customer previously.

Figure 76: Capability of routing calls automatically depending on the customer history

Can you route calls automatically depending on...	Proportion of respondents	Main vertical markets	Difference by size band
Unpaid account	14%	Retail, manufacturing	Small 10%; Med 15%; Large 17%
High-value customer	17%	TMT, Outsourcing	Small 10%; Med 15%; Large 28%
Risk of defection / end of contract	3%	Retail, TMT	Small 5%; Med 0%; Large 6%
Specific language requirements	18%	Transport & Travel, outsourcing	Small 14%; Med 19%; Large 22%

Relatively few of this year's respondents use much in the way of value-added routing, despite the ability to route a delinquent account automatically through to credit control being of great value to any business which offers accounts in arrears to its customers (finance, retail, telecoms, utilities, for example). Retail and manufacturing respondents showed the most enthusiasm for this, with large contact centres being only slightly more likely than smaller operations to do this. Almost no respondents acted when presented with a customer was who likely to defect or churn.

Identifying a high-value customer (and presumably bumping them up the queue or sending them to a top agent) is somewhat more popular, especially in larger operations. 18% of respondents route calls automatically based upon a caller's language requirements.

Screen-popping

Information about the specific caller is collected and popped to the agent's screen by 33% of respondents. This functionality has tended historically to be a factor of contact centre size, as the benefits of cutting 20 or 30 seconds from a call is worth far more to a large operation than a smaller one, simply due to the volume of calls received making the CTI investment worthwhile, although solution providers comment that cloud CRM & contact centre solutions now make screen popping more of an out-of-the-box commodity. 44% of large operations route calls to an agent complete with screen-pop, compared to 22% of small and 38% of medium contact centres.

At a vertical market level, 55% of TMT respondents report using screen-popping, with outsourcers, retailer and utilities respondents all at 50%. The housing, transport & travel and public sector respondents are very low users of this solution. Screen popping of an existing record may be seen as simple and cheap, the real value becomes clear when the customer verification and additional information collected from the initial IVR session can determine the information that is shown to an agent. If a call is transferred to another agent, information sent to the receiving agent will hopefully avoiding the customer having to repeat their requirements.

Skills-based routing

This is a call-assignment strategy used in contact centres to assign incoming calls to the most suitable agent based on the caller's requirements and the agent capabilities, instead of simply choosing the next available agent. It differs from the previous table, in that calls are passed to specific virtual agent groups (clustered by skills) rather than routing through to a particular department or team.

Previously, agents answering calls were generally able to be assigned to only one queue taking one type of call, meaning that agents who could deal with a range of call types had to be manually reassigned to different queues at different times to make the best use of their skills, or end up handling calls that perhaps they were not suited to. Skills-based routing allows the agent capabilities required for a call to be assessed by the telephone number dialled (DNIS - dialled number identification service), the calling number or caller's identity (CLI), as well as options selected in the IVR system. A skills-based routing system then tries to match the call to a suitably-skilled agent. Instead of being served in the order of their arrival, calls are handled as agents with the right skills become available.

32% of respondents use DNIS (45% of large operations), compared to 30% using CLI (45% of large operations).

NEWVOICEMEDIA

Wowcher's customers given the 'wow' factor with NewVoiceMedia

- **Sector:** e-commerce
- **Product:** ContactWorld for Service

Wowcher has used NewVoiceMedia's ContactWorld for Service to successfully resolve over 150,000 inbound and 40,000 outbound calls a year, improving both first contact resolution and customer satisfaction. In the process, Wowcher has revolutionised customer service efficiency and created a great place to work, with 91% advisor satisfaction.

Since Wowcher was launched in 2011, it has grown tenfold to become the UK's second largest online vouchering website. Part of DMG Media (owners of the Daily Mail and Metro), it takes advantage of group or bulk buying to offer unbeatable deals to subscribers. The purchase process is online or by mobile Apps, but some customers call Wowcher with queries.

Transforming Wowcher's customer service

In 2013, Head of Customer Service Samantha Tomlinson and Head of Operations Julian Boardman faced three major challenges:

- Advisor performance was varied and needed improvement
- Connections could not be made between sales and customer service outcomes
- Contact volumes were too high because of poor first contact resolution

In response, Wowcher invested in NewVoiceMedia's ContactWorld for Service, with Salesforce integration. Julian had extensively researched technology solutions and felt that the integration offered by these two products would improve advisor management, the quality of business information and ultimately deliver a better customer service experience.

The key benefits of NewVoiceMedia's ContactWorld for Service are:

1. **Continuous improvement enabled through real-time reporting and analytics**

2. **Better advisor performance resulted in improved customer experience**

3. **Advisor engagement is on the up, helped by NewVoiceMedia's easy interface**

4. **25% of calls fully resolved using ContactWorld for Service IVR**

5. **Costs are down and flexibility is up**

Samantha Tomlinson

Julian Boardman
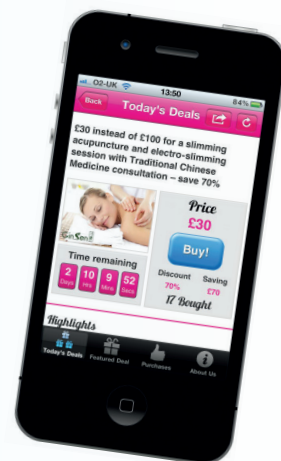
"NewVoiceMedia's ContactWorld solution has revolutionised our customer service efficiency and helped us create a great place to work.

Samantha Tomlinson, Head of Customer Service at Wowcher

Click here to download the full **case study**

US 1 855 435 7933   International +44 20 7206 8888
sales@newvoicemedia.com   www.newvoicemedia.com

CS | EC13788 | PO5799 | 08/14

VIRTUAL QUEUE MANAGEMENT

Some years ago, a telephone questionnaire was asked to a representative sample of the UK population by ContactBabel on behalf of Vicorp[3], which aimed to explore why the UK public hated queuing to speak to a contact centre agent, yet were legendarily happy to queue for almost everything else.

Figure 77: Reasons given for dislike of contact centre queuing

Reason for disliking queue	Average score from 10 where 10 is "extremely frustrating"	% of public scoring this at a maximum 10
Not knowing how much longer you'll have to wait	8.7	61%
Repetitive announcements	8.0	45%
Having to restate account information already given earlier in the call	8.0	45%
Can't do anything else in the meantime	7.9	46%
The music you have to listen to	7.3	39%

The key finding from this table is that 61% of the public absolutely hate not knowing how much longer they will be waiting. This is less of a problem when waiting in a shop to speak to an assistant, as although they cannot give you an exact statement of when someone can help, the queuing system allows a customer to see how many people are ahead of them, and to estimate their own wait time. This makes queuing psychologically easier for the customer, **even if the actual waiting time is significantly longer than it would be in a contact centre queue**.

The phenomenon of 'Dentist-Chair Time' - time which seems to stretch out to infinity - is very much active in the contact centre world. ACD statistics from thousands of UK contact centres, over many years indicate that an average wait time is around 20-30 seconds. However, when the UK public was asked to estimate the time they usually spent waiting to speak to a contact centre, the average answer was 11½ minutes - 27 times longer than the reality.

With the increase of email and other non-voice channels the need for blended routing technology is vital. If queue times exceed thresholds, then the contact centre solution must automatically move handling agents off non-critical work.

---

[3] "Your call is important to us…" Why does the British love of queuing not extend to contact centres? - available from www.contactbabel.com without charge

Clearly, trimming 10% off a queue time isn't going to make a lot of difference to the perception of the caller, even though it may be a very difficult task to carry out. If customers aren't informed of wait time, they may become discouraged and frustrated as hold time drags on. This can lead to increased abandonment and starts a call off badly, leaving the agent with a lot of work to do. Customers waste time complaining about their experiences and may even ask additional questions on the call so that they get their money's worth.

If customers hear the estimated wait time, they may decide to abandon immediately or may judge that the wait is acceptable and remain on the line to speak with an agent. This alleviates some customer frustration but means that some of the callers which abandon may not call back - ever - and it doesn't solve the fact that customers are still having to wait. One solution is to implement a virtual queuing system, which provides customers with information about current queue conditions and presents them with various options, such as remaining on hold or being called back when it is their turn.

There are several different varieties of virtual queuing systems: the standard "First-In, First-Out" (FIFO) system keeps the customer's place in line by monitoring queue conditions until the estimated wait time hits a set target, at which point it intercepts incoming calls before they enter the queue, informing customers of their wait time and offering the option of receiving a return call in the same amount of time as if they had personally waited on hold.

At this point, customers choosing to remain on hold go directly into queue. Customers who opt for a call-back (typical acceptance rates of a FIFO call-back are around 50%) are prompted to enter their telephone number and then hang up. Virtual placeholders keep the customers' places in line and the virtual queuing system launches an outbound call to the customer at the agreed time. When the call-back is answered by the customer, the system checks the right person is on the line and ready to talk. If this is the case, the call is routed to the next available agent, who handles it as a normal inbound call.

By replacing real hold time with this virtual version, customers are free to do other things, thus removing four of the five problems that they have with queues - unknown queue times, hold music, the inability to do anything else and repetitive announcements.

It is also worth considering a scheduled call-back system, which differs from a FIFO system in that customers do not keep their place in queue, but are called back at some time in the future that is more convenient for them. There are several flavours of scheduled virtual queuing:

- **Datebook-type scheduling systems** allow customers to schedule appointments for days in the future, with times blocked-out that are unavailable for scheduling, and limiting the number of call-backs available. This system also allows customers that reach a contact centre out-of-hours to schedule an call-back during normal working hours
- **Timer scheduling systems** promise a call-back after a specific amount of time, regardless of queue conditions. While this ensures an on-time call-back for the customer, a surge in call volume or staff reduction due to a shift change can create problems for the contact centre's queue, lengthening wait times for other callers.

- **Forecast-based scheduling systems** offer appointments during times that are expected to have low call volumes. These times may not be convenient for the customer, and the contact centre runs the risk that their scheduling may be inaccurate.

Agents carrying out call-backs will know exactly who they are calling and in many cases why they are doing so. A scheduled call-back system increases customer satisfaction, reduces call durations and delivers higher first-contact call resolution rates.

Virtual queuing and call-back, when implemented - and explained properly to customers - can be a win-win for both business and customer by:

- Increasing customer satisfaction
- Reducing average speed to answer
- Reducing call abandonment rates
- Reducing call lengths as customers should spend less time complaining and adding-on unnecessary queries "while they're on..."
- Reducing freephone costs, as virtual queuing time does not incur telephone charges.

The use of call-back functionality is growing gently, year on year, and is more likely to be offered on the websites of businesses with larger contact centres. The use of in-queue call-back options is less tied to contact centre size.

Respondents from smaller contact centres seem much more likely to announce the position of the caller within the queue, encouraging them to stay on the line and providing the company with a greater opportunity to close the sale.

Figure 78: Use of website 'call-me' buttons and call-back options, by contact centre size

Contact centre size	Website call-me button	Queue call-back option	Position in queue announced
Small	10%	33%	24%
Medium	15%	30%	15%
Large	28%	33%	11%
Average	**17%**	**32%**	**17%**

Vertical market figures are not given, as the numbers of respondents involved are low, and statistics may be misleading. However, outsourcers and those in the TMT sector seem to be amongst the greatest users of all of these queue management solutions.

MULTICHANNEL WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT

Workforce management solutions have to deal with environments which have become much more complex, in order to satisfy the reality of the work that is being presented to agents. For example, all agents require good listening ability, familiarity with keyboard and IT skills and a knowledge of the business they are working in, but more now need a pool of in-depth and specific talent to be available in order to satisfy customers fully, including:

- Familiarity with either specific customers (e.g. account management) or customer sub-sets (e.g. commercial vs. domestic products)
- Specific product or technical knowledge
- Right level of experience and empowerment for the customer (e.g. "gold-card" customers may demand single-call resolution, meaning senior agents must take the call)
- Language skills (both in domestic and international markets)
- Ability to deal with multimedia interactions (either in real-time - such as web chats or social media - or offline, such as emails)
- Similar regional accent to caller (where considered appropriate).

Fulfilling service levels while managing costs is a repetitive cycle, requiring several key processes to be completed. Feedback from each stage means that the enterprise can continually improve its efficiency and become more confident in future predictions.

FORECASTING

Before any staff planning can be done, an enterprise first needs to understand what has happened in the past. A solution which provides historical data from entire customer contacts means that scheduling can take place in a more realistic way. Enterprises should also be able to factor in exceptions, such as advertising campaigns, training and public holidays, and view when the best time for a meeting or training session will be, and measure the impact on the rest of the contact centre. Running regular hypothetical 'what-if' scenarios can show a scheduler how alterations to shift-patterns would impact performance, as well as assisting in business continuity by seeing what would happen in a flu epidemic, for example.

A great deal of unnecessary agent work can be removed by identifying the types of interaction that are being received, and determining whether these could be reduced further up the line, in the departments whose activities actively affect the volume and type of calls received, e.g. marketing or IT (for the website). As such, workforce management is increasingly being used as part of an overall quality or performance optimisation suite, which can include quality monitoring, HR management and training as well as the traditional workforce management forecasts and schedules, as all of these factors affect each other.

For example, understanding when and how other departments will be operating means that workforce management tools can be used to forecast and schedule accordingly (e.g. about a new TV advert). Additionally, contact centre management is able to brief agents - via a desktop broadcast if

at short-notice - about the correct responses and issues, as well as changing IVR prompts and messages to provide answers to the more simple answers, as well as managing agent skill-sets for relevant call groups.

Businesses should look for flexibility in forecasting functionality: situations can develop very quickly which mean that forecasts can become useless without the ability to alter schedules dynamically, increasingly at an intraday level, to reflect reality. Historically, workforce management solutions only allowed resource planners to schedule in relatively large chunks of time (for example, quarter-hour or half-hour periods), which could mean that agents would be inflexibly allocated to specific types of work, even if that work was not actually available in reality. Some workforce management solutions of today check incoming call volumes several times per minute, allowing them to respond in near real time and to allocate agents dynamically to meaningful off-phone work, such as replying to emails or taking training sessions. If required, agents can be returned to the phones as and when call volumes increase. This parcelling-up and recovery of small chunks of idle time into a period of time large enough that something can actually be done has the potential to reduce the 10-12% of a typical agent's time that is spent idle waiting for calls.

SCHEDULING

Scheduling is not as simple as it may seem at first glance. The enlightened enterprise takes agent preferences and skill sets into account when scheduling. The "standard agent" approach to solving resource issues (i.e. treating one agent the same as any other) will cause problems with both agent satisfaction and customer service levels. Most companies using advanced workforce management software will have between six and nine skill-sets to work with, although a few contact centres use as many as 50.

Yet the business's needs must come first, so a scheduler will have to find the best way to match the company's requirements with those of its employees. This can get particularly complicated in a multimedia environment which usually has agents with multiple media handling skills (e.g. voice, e-mail, web chat etc.) and multiple business abilities (e.g. sales, service, product knowledge, languages etc.).

Businesses must look for a solution which does not over-simplify the scheduling process, yet retains usability and the flexibility to make changes. Solutions that allow agents to request and alter their own schedules (for example, around holidays) have become used more frequently, as this has been proven to strengthen agent morale.

As reported in this Guide, more than two-thirds of respondents believe that a reduction in the effort required to perform scheduling would have value to them. Intradiem's Intraday Staffing solution integrates with existing WFM systems to automate and augment standard staffing capabilities, and organisations that have taken this automated and rules-based approach to staffing have reported that they are able to react faster in situations where they are understaffed, thus better protecting customer experience. These organisations report a 10% gain in WFM team productivity and a 25% reduction in cost associated with voluntary time-off and overtime management.

Real Time Rules

Intraday Automation for a Real-time Workforce
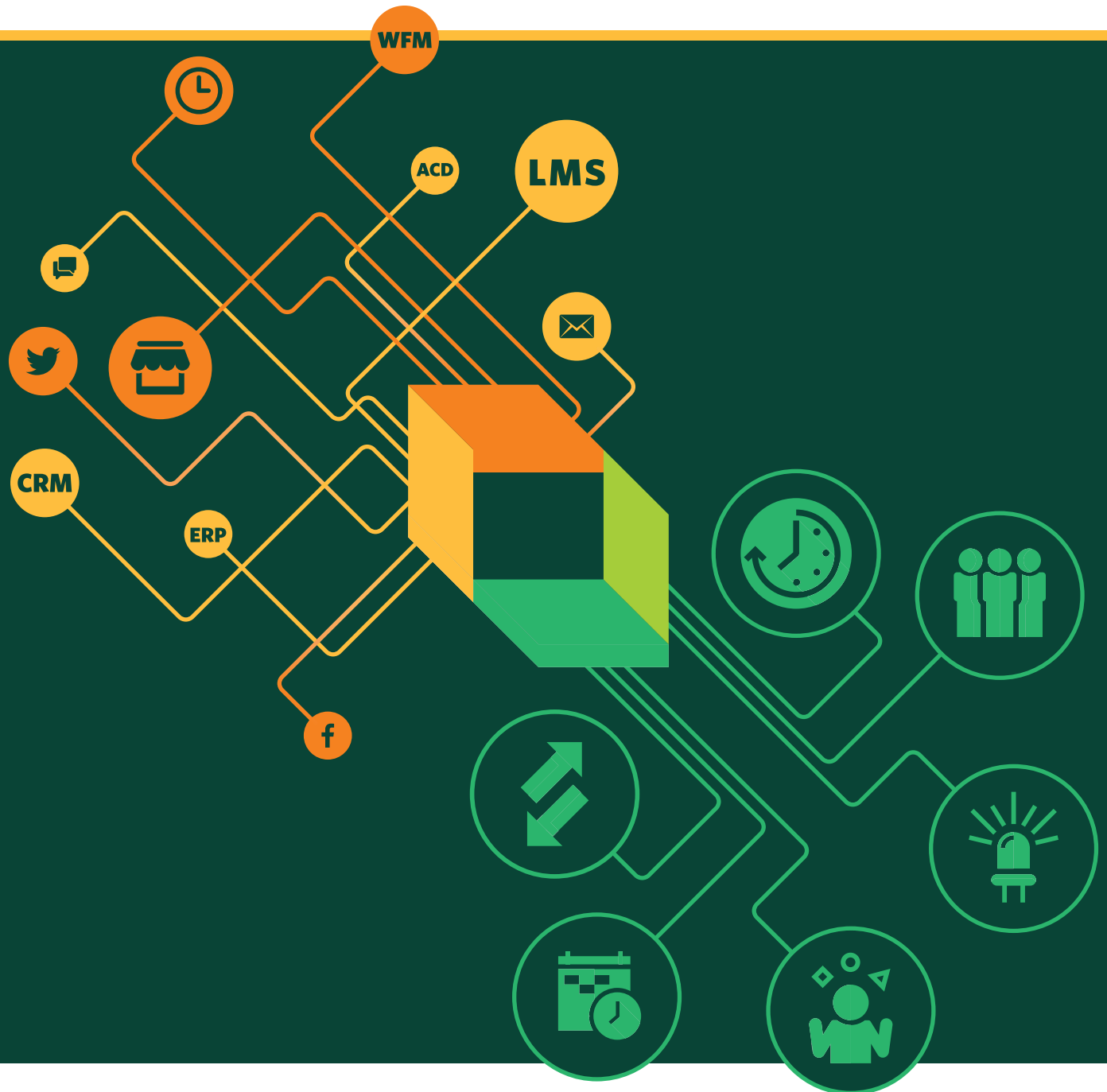
Intradiem empowers you to create extraordinary customer experiences by optimizing the workday, using automated workforce adjustments to ensure that people on the floor, in the call center and behind the counter can effectively respond to any situation. By capturing these real-time opportunities throughout the day, you prompt productivity and a new level of customer confidence.

www.intradiem.com   📞 **44 (0) 207 562 8309**

ADHERENCE AND REPORTING

Adherence is the ability to compare forecasts with reality, and learn from mistakes. Sophisticated scheduling and forecasting is useless without the opportunity for improvement brought about by adherence monitoring. Real-time adherence allows managers to see exactly what is happening, and can alert them to deviations from the expected activity, allowing them to make changes before problems occur. Adherence allows a business to fine-tune its contact centre activity: put simply, the more you use it, the more accurate your forecasts and schedules become.

This is another area where the cerebral activity of traditional workforce management has become more dynamic. Real-time reporting on schedule adherence, and the ability to access this information through a web browser or mobile phone means that dynamic changes can be made to the system. In the more sophisticated solutions, 'workforce management' has now become 'workforce performance management'.

For example, adherence does not have to refer to the contact centre as a whole, as WFM solutions enable contact centre managers to monitor and manage agent performance in real time, by connecting to the ACD system and monitoring the status of an agent's activity, (for example, time spent logged on, against planned work schedules). Agent adherence and non-adherence can then be acted upon quickly, and used to support performance appraisals.

Businesses should look for a solution which is simple to understand (so staff will feel comfortable using it) yet retains the power and functionality to help the contact centre manager understand what has happened and to make changes quickly if necessary.

Intradiem™

The value of adherence monitoring is the ability to know and understand real-time conditions and then alert the right people with relevant information so that actions can be taken on the spot. Automated intraday solutions perform monitoring and exception processing which eliminates the need for manual WFM team intervention and also helps reduce the need to overstaff the centre to allow for exceptions. In Intradiem's experience, the utilisation of an automated real-time adherence system can drive up to a 75% gain in WFM productivity, primarily because these resources can be re-focussed on strategic rather than tactical activities: in a 500-seat centre that requires six FTEs (on average) to process intraday exceptions, this can amount to a 5% gain in labour productivity.

Until relatively recently, small contact centres were still very heavily involved in manual workforce management, which offers extremely limited opportunities for doing anything other than a static schedule that cannot easily be changed. In fact, forecasting and scheduling in this scenario is more of an art than a science. The low take-up of third-party workforce management tools was almost certainly down to cost, the fact that the time taken to create a manual schedule for 10 agents is far less than for 100 agents, and that the manager of a small contact centre does not need the flexibility or capabilities that a large operation can benefit by, as their labour and skills pool is so much more shallow to begin with.

174

However, there has recently been a significant uplift in the use of workforce management solutions in small contact centre sector, probably as a result of the increasing number of solutions - whether being offered through CPE or a hosted/cloud-based deployment - aimed at the smaller end of the market by solution providers. These solutions offer relatively simple functionality, but will also have an easy-to-use interface for non-specialist users.

Medium and large operations are more likely to use dedicated third-party workforce management applications into which historical data can be fed, providing a far more accurate schedule. It is noticeable that around a third of current users of workforce management solutions from larger contact centres are actively looking to replace or upgrade this application.

Figure 79: Use of workforce management solutions, by contact centre size

Use of workforce management systems, by contact centre size

	Use now, no plans to replace/upgrade	Use now, looking to replace/upgrade	Will implement within 12 months	Will implement after 12 months	No plans to implement
Average	48%	17%	11%	7%	18%
Large	56%	27%	11%	4%	2%
Medium	51%	15%	11%	7%	16%
Small	39%	12%	10%	10%	29%
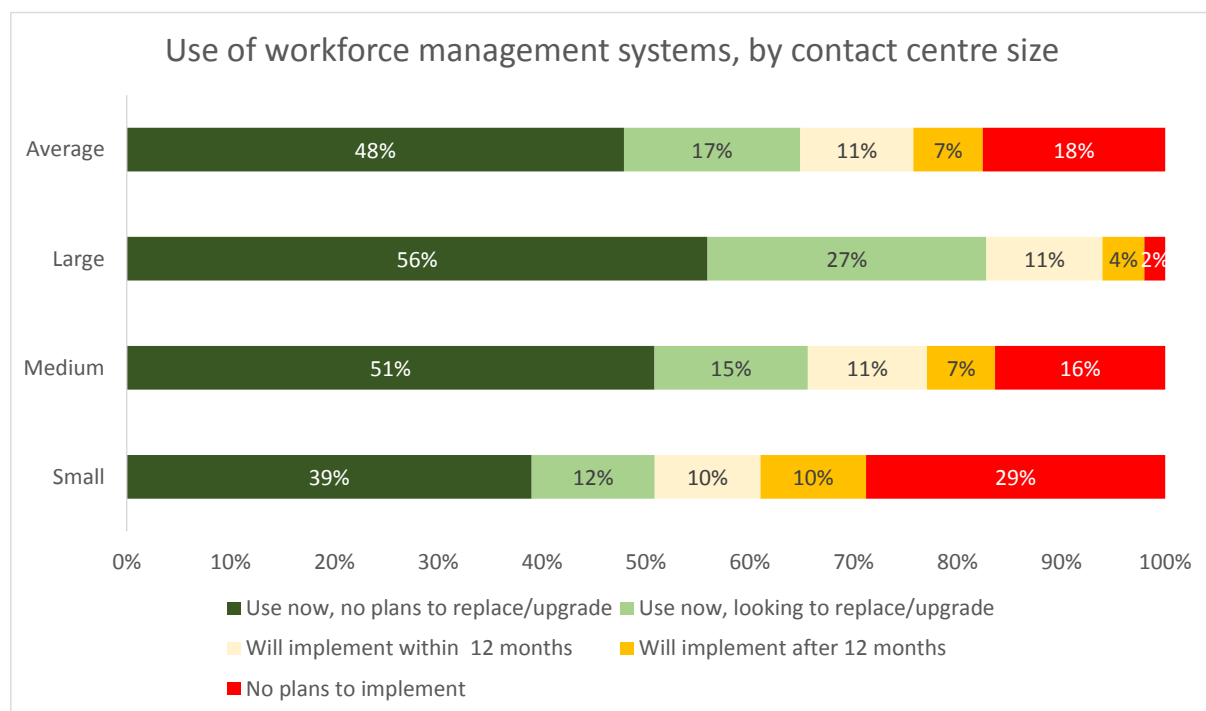
Workforce management solutions, especially the more complex and sophisticated systems used by larger contact centres, may have extremely deep functionality. This is not to say however that these features are necessarily used in the production environment. Respondents were asked which workforce management functionality they actually used on a daily basis.

The vast majority of contact centres from all size bands use workforce management for its reporting and forecasting capabilities, as you might expect. There is also a very high usage of real-time adherence with larger contact centres, which are far more likely to use detailed and optimised scheduling functionality as well.

Only around half of respondents use the multi-skilling element to workforce management, which leads to the disturbing conclusion that around half of contact centres have no way of matching the skills of their agents to the requirements of their customers.

Respondents from larger contact centres are more likely to include back office work within their schedules. Agent self scheduling and outbound planning functionality are used only in a minority of cases, regardless of the size of the operation.

Figure 80: Workforce management functionality used, by contact centre size

Workforce management functionality used, by contact centre size

Functionality	Average	Large	Medium	Small
Outbound planning	17%	19%	12%	20%
Agent self-scheduling	17%	14%	16%	20%
Back office planning	30%	44%	26%	24%
Multiskilling	50%	44%	56%	51%
Optimised scheduling	53%	81%	60%	27%
Real-time adherence	56%	81%	63%	33%
Forecasting	74%	83%	74%	69%
Reporting	86%	83%	88%	89%
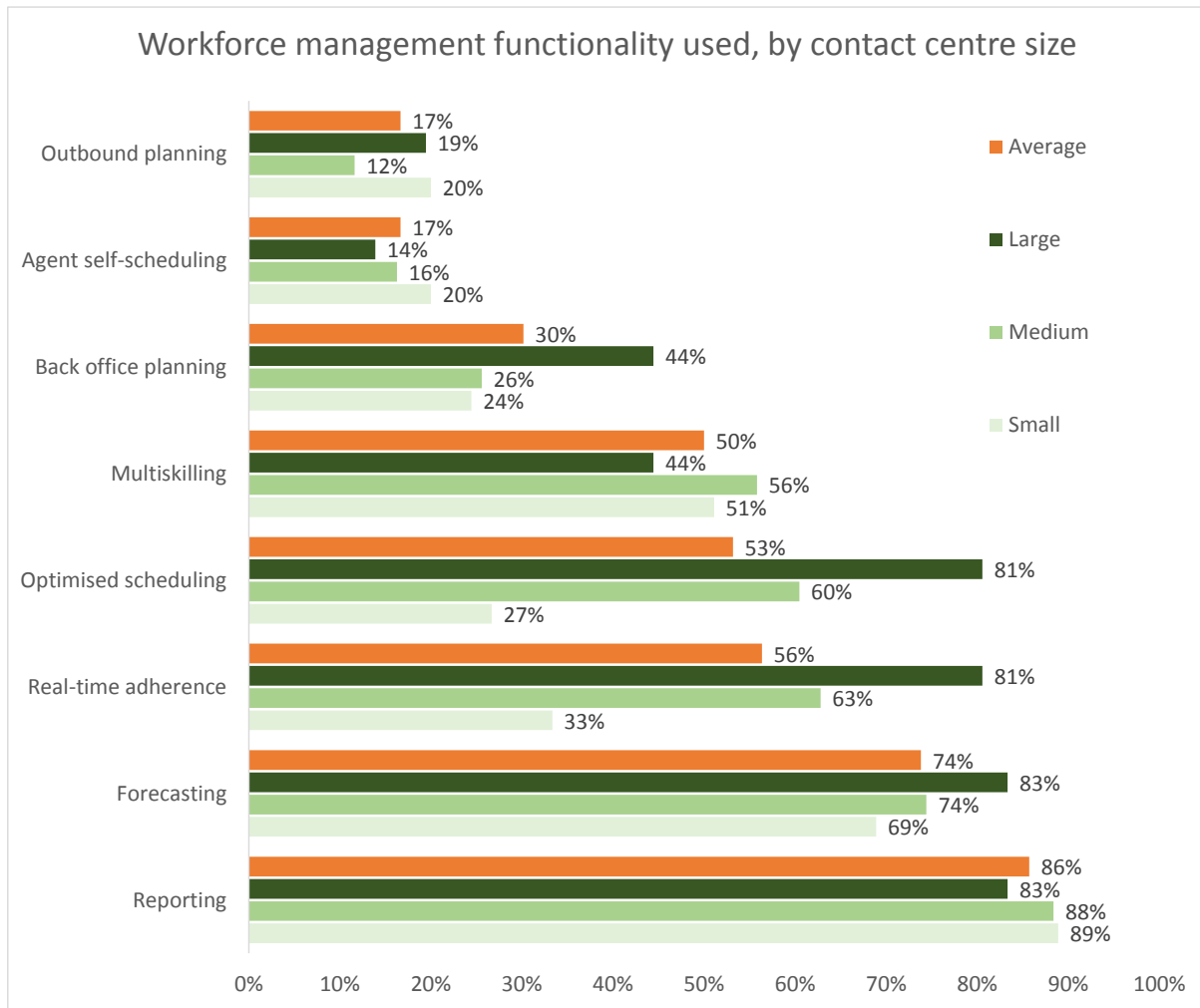
Today's contact centre workforce management solutions include back office as well as contact centre processes (although as the previous chart shows, this functionality is not yet always actually used), and most now include email as well as a minimum, despite the different service levels and expectations around each type of work item. Further complexities arise as data is often siloed by channel, and third-party point solutions and legacy systems can muddy the water further. Solution providers are continuing to integrate more fully with multichannel, (for example, by offering a connector for MS Exchange), and by looking at live data on email volumes to improve the accuracy of intraday scheduling. Traditional measurements are not applicable to multichannel interactions, as many are not done in real-time, which means different handling strategies need to be applied per channel, which makes forecasting and scheduling much more difficult.

Of those respondents who have significant amounts of multichannel work to schedule, 45% do not use a formal process for this, a figure which is significantly higher in small and medium operations. Within those businesses that do schedule multichannel activity, the majority will use the same workforce management tool as for voice. Large contact centres are far more likely to carry out separate scheduling of multichannel activity, probably as a result of dedicated multichannel teams being more prevalent in these types of operation.

Figure 81: Scheduling of multichannel agent activity, by contact centre size
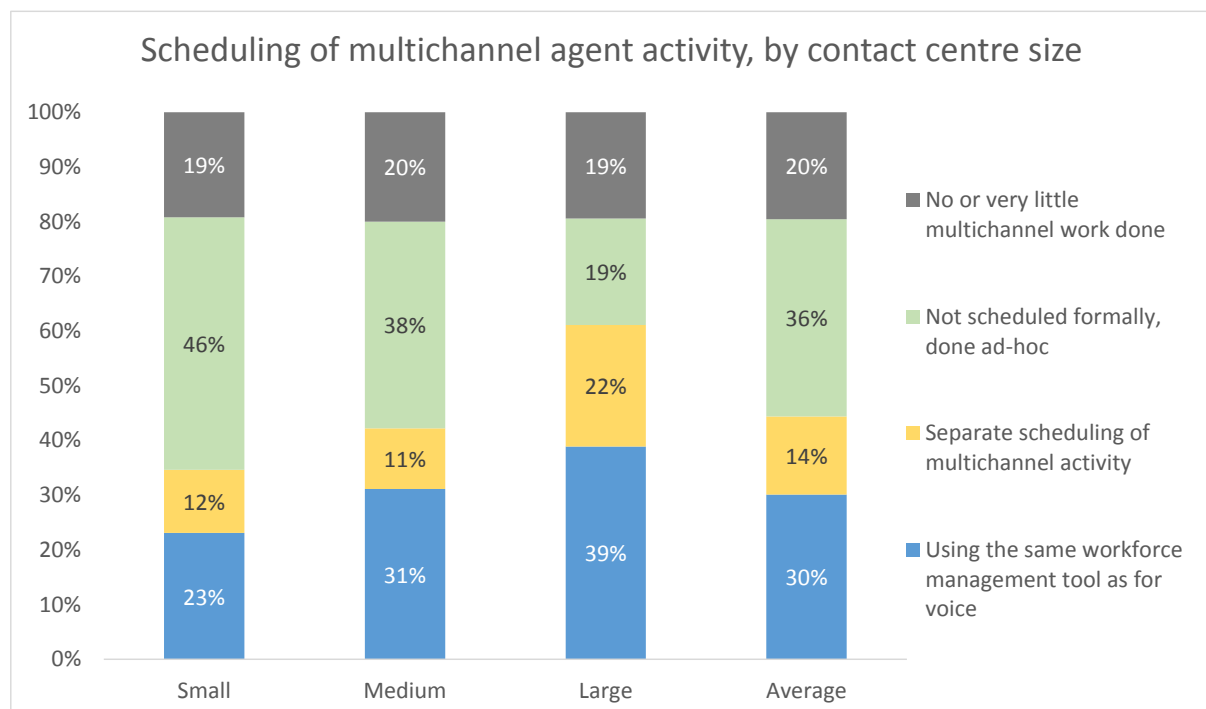
Vivint Applies Real-time Approach to Prepare Agents for Fast-changing Business

The Challenge of Finding Time to Train

A home security, energy management and automation services provider to more than 675,000 customers in the U.S. and Canada, Vivint's 600 customer service and retention agents support multiple products in a competitive business and require a lot of development and communications. But, as in many busy centres, finding the time to deliver critical training and coaching to agents was a challenge.

Prior to implementing Intradiem, Vivint's agents typically received one training session per week, and it was difficult to keep track of which agents had completed particular sessions. While all new hires were segmented out for training, others were randomly pulled off the floor during overstaffed periods.

Agents found it difficult to get the information they needed to handle customer inquiries effectively, and managers struggled to find the right balance between taking agents off the phone for development while at the same time maintaining service levels.

Taking Advantage of Idle Time

Vivint implemented Intradiem's intraday automation solution to provide agents with the knowledge they need to effectively handle complex customer inquiries and provide a consistent customer experience.

Intradiem increases the frequency of training and coaching by dynamically delivering individualised and prioritised activity sessions directly to the agent desktop during natural downtimes in call volume. When call volume unexpectedly spikes, agents are automatically prompted to return to answering calls so that service levels are not negatively affected.

Today, the level of information Vivint is able to deliver to agents is more in line with the complexity of its products, which translates to more efficient and higher-quality customer interactions overall. Agents receive consistent, ongoing product specific and soft skills training, company and team communications, compliance training, and call reviews. When specific areas of need are identified, performance-based training is also assigned.

Intraday Improvements, Long-term Results

Vivint has measured the financial benefit of Intradiem as an operating impact of 3.1 percent, with 2.2 percent based on increased productivity and 0.9 percent based on increased performance. Since implementing Intradiem, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of training delivered to agents. Within the first five days of introducing Intradiem, Vivint was able to deliver 2,400 sessions to 400 agents – each agent receiving six sessions in five days – all during idle time.

Usage has increased every month since launch. In one month alone, Vivint used five hours of downtime per agent that would have otherwise been lost as idle time. Average handle time has decreased by 5%, and there has been a dramatic increase in Vivint's "fixed on the phone" metric, which measures agents' ability to address customer issues during the initial conversation. Additionally, quality and escalations have improved.

Overall agent productivity has also increased. Agents are more highly utilised and employee morale has improved, with agents reporting that they enjoy the training and the "break" it provides to vary their work. This has led to empowered agents who are more confident and better equipped to do their jobs, and the customer experience has improved as a result.

The advent of social media contact, the rise in web chat and the jump in email volumes mean that contact centres suddenly have significant amounts of multichannel interactions to handle, as well as their voice traffic.

39% of respondents would find improvements to their multichannel scheduling capability to be of great benefit, with 41% wanting to improve the multiskilling element to their workforce management solution, despite only half of respondents actually using multi-skilling to any level of detail.

Aside from limiting the ability to meet customer need at a variety of interaction points, taking a siloed approach to channel activity can lead to inflated costs from overstaffing and contact centre attrition due to agent dis-engagement. Intradiem reports that organisations implementing a more intelligent cross-channel agent allocation approach improve their overall metrics while reducing labour productivity costs, while agents find value in job variety and the chance to apply their skills across multiple channels. In addition, these organisations have realised double-digit gains in sales by shifting qualified agents, as needed, to match customer demand.

Over 70% of respondents believe that a reduction in the effort needed to schedule would be of significant benefit to them. Improvements to employee self-scheduling, and what-if scenarios would also be looked upon positively by many contact centres, but perhaps not to the same extent.

Figure 82: Which changes to your workforce management systems would benefit you most?

Which changes to your workforce management systems would benefit you most?

	Of great benefit	Of some benefit	Of little or no benefit	Already have this functionality / no change needed
Introduce employee self-schedule	20%	27%	36%	17%
Running 'what-if' scenarios	23%	35%	17%	26%
Ability to plan abandonment rates as well as service level	26%	38%	18%	19%
Reducing the effort / headcount needed to schedule	35%	36%	17%	13%
Adding multichannel traffic scheduling (e.g. email, social media, web chat) to existing voice scheduling	39%	25%	19%	16%
Improved multi-skilling functionality	41%	30%	10%	20%

Several issues related to workforce management were identified, and the opinions of respondents of how important and pressing each of these were appears below.

Which of these workforce management-related issues need to be addressed / improved?

The greatest interest was in better understanding the impact of agents' behaviour upon business and operational results. Perhaps the biggest discrepancy between the industry-wide results and those simply for large contact centres was the finding that bigger operations are much more likely to be aware that there can be a disconnect between how an agent behaves and how the company wishes to be seen. For example, an agent can be encouraged to finish a call quickly (and rewarded for it), which is good for the contact centre's metrics, but which may make the customer feel rushed and less valued, going against what's best for the company. Understanding where the potential gaps are will allow scheduling and forecasting to take place that looks beyond simple efficiency, and which measures the quality of the call in the context of the company's goals.

There was also a widespread requirement for bringing multichannel more closely into the workforce management world, and some respondents, often from the larger contact centres, were very keen to understand the impact of intraday staffing changes, perhaps as this is a relatively new area for many contact centres, albeit one that has a great potential for reducing the stubborn idle time statistic which has been stuck around the 10-12% mark for many years.

Large contact centres were also keen to improve the forecasting in complex environments, bringing in multichannel, multiskilled and back-office resources to the traditional inbound telephony workforce management environment. Tailoring access rights to the workforce management solution was rarely seen as being something in urgent need of improvement.

180

plantronics®

There are various factors to consider when deciding which headset to purchase for your contact centre workforce. If you have many hundreds or even thousands of agents, headset purchase can be a large ongoing capital expenditure that is important to get right. There are many things to consider:

- Compliance with health and safety legislation
- Total cost of ownership
- Durability
- Performance
- Comfort
- Contact centre telephony infrastructure
- Sound quality.

Contact centre agents wear headsets for hours every day, and the cost of replacing or repairing headsets should be considered in the total cost of ownership, requiring good levels of after-sales support and guarantees.

Some contact centre agents like having the freedom to move around while on calls, especially in a high-pressure sales environment. Some contact centres may decide they don't want agents wandering around, but that the supervisor needs to be able to be mobile. Agents with wireless headsets can spend less time putting callers on hold as they can walk to where the information they need is held, taking the caller with them. This in turn reduces the time taken on each call, and improves customer satisfaction.

Headsets and the 'enterprise as contact centre'

The newest headsets support the 'enterprise as contact centre' model by allowing the agent to involve knowledge workers in a three-way conversation with the agent via Microsoft Communicator, IBM SameTime or VoIP. This allows, for example, a 2nd-line technical support worker to help immediately with a difficult part of a query without a formal, long-winded escalation process taking place.

The majority of contact centres have implemented Internet protocol (IP) telephony as part of their technology environment. Agents will make and take calls via their PC, so choosing a headset that can adapt to future technology infrastructures is key.

The weight, sound quality, amount of background noise allowed in, comfort and the length of time the headset will be worn should also be considered. Having sound in both ears (binaural) allows noise levels to be lower than is the case with single-ear sound (monaural), although some agents can feel isolated if they cannot hear the world around them. In addition, a noise-cancelling microphones filter out the unwanted background noise which can make the conversation harder for a caller to hear. This may be especially relevant for homeworkers, where the background noise (traffic, children, dogs, etc.) may be less easily managed or predictable. Voice tubes can also allow more flexible positioning of the microphone, with attendant improvements in sound quality.

181

![Plantronics]

ENCOREPRO 510 & 520

Help them leave a lasting impression

EncorePro 510

EncorePro 520

Customer expectations are rising and calls are becoming more complex than ever. So your contact centre customers need headsets that will help them stay focused on the conversation.

The all-new EncorePro does just that.

With a sophisticated design for all-day comfort, superior noise-cancellation and longer-term reliability, offer your customers the EncorePro and show them how to exceed expectations at every level.

Visit plantronics.com

plantronics.

The effect of headsets upon productivity

There are examples of how improving audio and speech quality can positively impact upon call handling time and overall contact centre performance. A Spanish contact centre gave some sets of agents headsets with digital audio processors, and some used the more traditional headset. The first group's technology had the effect of 'cleaning up' unwanted noise at either end of the line, allowing the customer and agent to communicate more effectively. Calls were handled more quickly, fewer mistakes were made with data collection (with the attendant knock-on effect that fewer repeat calls were required), and overall, agents handled an average of 10% more calls per day than did the control group.

HEADSET REPLACEMENT AND MANUFACTURER

Around 20% of respondents' headsets are replaced in a given year, meaning that the average headset will have a useful life of around 5 years. This recent decrease in headset replacement may be a response to the cost reductions put in place across most contact centres in the past couple of years, and also that the overall quality and durability of headsets has improved, meaning there are fewer requirements for replacement.

Figure 84: Headset manufacturers used by respondents

Headset manufacturers used by respondents

- Agent 3%
- Sennheiser 4%
- GN Netcom / Jabra 13%
- Other 9%
- Plantronics 71%
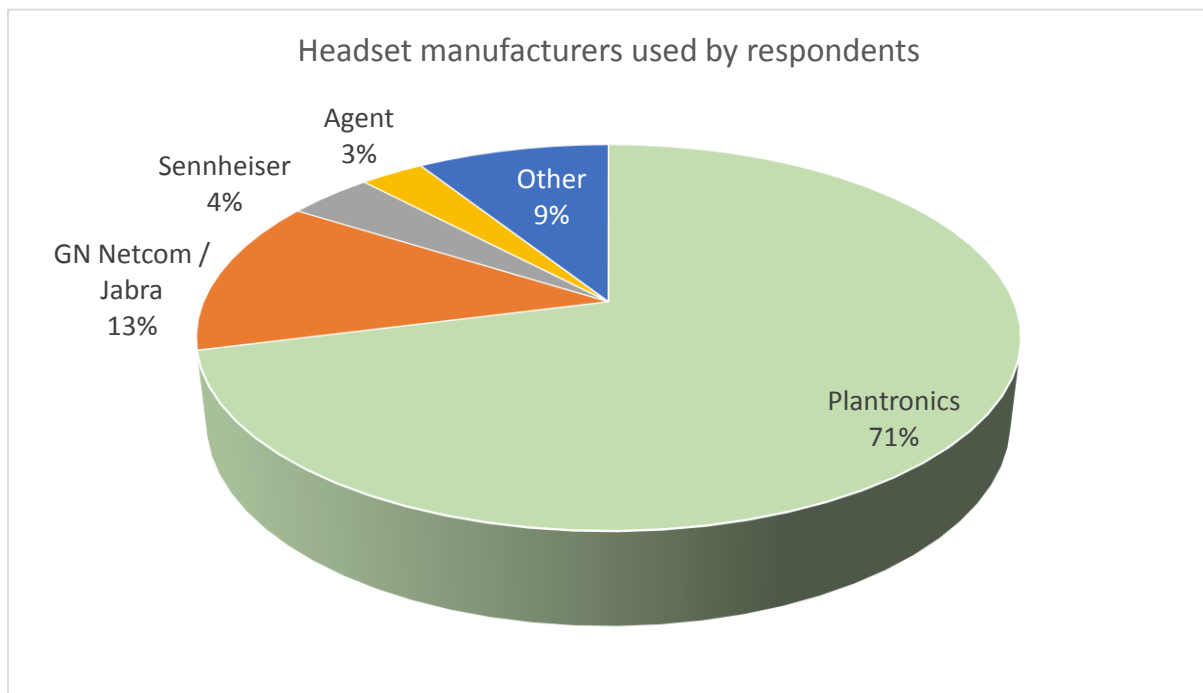
Plantronics®

Ready for the new world of customer service?

How leading contact centres are already delivering smarter customer interactions with Plantronics headsets.

Smarter Customer Interactions

As service expectations continue to rise, those contact centres that prioritise the customer conversation over internal processes will be the ones that succeed. To achieve this, Plantronics headsets are helping to align people, workspaces and technology so contact centres can deliver the brand promise through smarter customer interactions.

ENHANCING EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION
Contact centre employees are now expected to spend more time with individual customers and maintain ever-higher standards throughout the call. With personalisation at the top of the agenda for many organisations, Plantronics lightweight and ultra-comfortable devices allow staff to forget they are wearing a headset and focus on the customer.

OPTIMISING AUDIO QUALITY
When you are handling premium payments for over 3,000 brokers in the UK and Ireland, you need equipment that cuts out background noise so the caller feels like 'the only person in the room'. Nine-time winner of 'Premium Finance Provider of the Year', Close Premium Finance was struggling with call clarity so chose Plantronics headsets following a successful end user trial.

"The new digital wideband headsets have certainly made a positive difference to our call centre people and our customers also benefit from the headset's noise-cancelling ability. We are particularly pleased with the direct support that Plantronics has given us during a complex transformation to Centrica's new VoIP solution,"

Rosie McCabe, Telephony Operations Manager, Centrica.

FUTURE-PROOFING INVESTMENTS
As communication technology continues to evolve, contact centres switching to softphones, video calls or Unified Communications need know they can rely on headsets that integrate into the new infrastructure. With headsets already optimised for the leading technologies, Plantronics headsets set the benchmark, even for its existing customers.

Combining staff satisfaction with improved audio quality and the latest technologies, Plantronics is supporting contact centres of all sizes with the shift to smarter customer interactions.

Read how our customers benefit from Plantronics headsets – plantronicscasestudies.com ❯

Are you ready to shift to smarter customer interactions? ❯

plantronics®

Wireless headsets

One of the main advantages of wireless headsets, compared to wired versions, is that agents may leave their desks to consult colleagues or refer to information resources elsewhere in the contact centre without having to put the caller on hold. Supervisors particularly benefit from the ability to move around a team, helping agents as required.

More sophisticated wireless headsets may also be IP-enabled, integrating with softphone software on a PC, as well as taking calls delivered through regular desks phones if required. The enterprise standard known as Digital Enhanced Cordless Telecommunications (DECT) supports communication at up to 110 metres, which is obviously more than enough for a contact centre environment, although buildings change the way radio signals operate, thus affecting the range of these headsets.

The issue of density also has to be considered: the DECT standard enables wireless headsets to work without interference in high density environments, as each headset-base pair continuously monitors the channels available to them, changing to the best available channel depending on the interference it encounters. However, there is a trade-off between density and the roaming range of headsets: as the number of conversations in a given area increases beyond the number of channels available, headsets start to share channels, which will reduce the roaming range. A possible alleviation is provided by some advanced wireless headsets, which take into account how close the agent is to the base station, and use less transmission power when the agent is near, but boost it when the agent is further away, increasing the potential roaming distance when required and increasing battery life when the agent is close to the base station.

DECT also incorporates security technologies between headset and base to block any eavesdropping which can occur on analogue transmissions, and these digital transmissions are coded and encrypted.

Possible benefits to wireless headsets include:

- Improved agent productivity due to increased mobility and reduced hold time, as the agents can move across the centre to consult a colleague or obtain the necessary resource
- Increased customer satisfaction due to reduced time on-hold
- Improved quality, as supervisors can move freely within their team, not are being held back by the physical limitations of wired headsets
- Improved training, as small groups of new agents can listen in to a live conversation by pairing their headsets to the agent's base
- Improved agent morale, as a high-quality headset is seen as a perk of the job, and wireless headsets tend to be more physically comfortable. Not having a wire hanging over the desktop also makes the workstation a neater and more pleasant place to work.

57% of contact centre respondents used some wireless headsets within the contact centre (a slight increase on last year's figure of 55%), with an average of 40% of headsets in these contact centres being wireless.

In past years, most of the wireless headsets were used by supervisors who are more likely to have to be mobile to help agents in their team, and more than half of those respondents who were using wireless headsets had a penetration rate of 20% or higher, strongly suggesting that wireless has filtered into the agent population as well. 17% of respondents were using wireless headsets for all of their agents.

In past years, there has been a strong negative correlation between the contact centre's size and its use of wireless headsets. This year, this pattern is still there, but weaker than previously: 64% of respondents in smaller contact centres use wireless headsets, with a penetration rate of 61% in operations that use them, whereas. In larger contact centres, 50% of operations have some wireless headsets, with a penetration rate of only 12% in these contact centres, suggesting that it may be the supervisors who use these, rather than the agents.

The housing, public sector and manufacturing vertical markets are the most likely to be using wireless headsets once again this year.

IP headsets

IP telephony can occasionally throw up some negative performance issues. As VoIP is a digital signal and human speech is analogue, converting between the two takes a certain amount of time. IP was not initially designed to transfer speech and so does not guarantee a time between the signal leaving one point and arriving at the next. These two points mean that there may be more of a delay in speech being transmitted from one point to it being heard at another on a VoIP system than with a conventional system.

As with all telephone systems, the person speaking will hear some of their own speech in their ear. This is referred to as 'sidetone', and when the delay levels are low it is an important part of the telephone system. When delays are excessive, the sidetone becomes echo, which is distracting for the people on both ends of the call. As detailed above, excessive delays are more common in VoIP systems than with standard telephony, meaning that echo cancellation is a critical component in improving call quality.

Some headsets are able to alleviate or even remove the impact of sub-optimal network performance on the conversation:

- Echo - how the earpiece fits to the ear and the positioning of the microphone relative to user's mouth helps prevent echo, and digital signal processing (DSP) alleviates echo management when it is unavoidable. DSP can help with unequal call levels, and manage sudden increases in amplitude and/or volume, and prevent acoustic shock

- Distortion - clipping the voice signal by taking away the highest and lowest voice registers can mean that the voice sounds distorted, an unpleasant sound for both agent and caller

- Latency - often viewed as one of the major bugbears of IP, latency is experienced as a lag, due to information being sent and received across the network in a sub-optimal manner. This can cause broken conversations, and can be extremely frustrating for both customer and agent, particularly when experienced as poor sound quality, such as missing pieces of sound, as well as the lag itself.

Currently, 86% of respondents have some headsets that are able to cope in an IP environment (up from 83% in 2013). Of these respondents, 94% of their headsets can handle IP, with 73% of these respondents saying that all of their headsets are IP-capable.

Respondents from large operations report having implemented IP headsets in 82% of cases, against 89% of medium and 88% of small operations. 97% of headsets in these large operations are IP-capable, against 93% in small and medium contact centres.

The retail & distribution, services, transport & travel, public sector and utilities respondents were most likely to have IP-capable headsets (in 90%+ of operations this year).

IP headsets and homeworkers

The homeshoring / homeworking model can be supported by using a headset and IP audio processor (that links the headset and PC), rather than an IP phone. This method is cheaper than an IP phone, is simpler to support, and has the added advantage that if the PC locks up, the agent can continue to speak and be heard.

An IP-based contact centre can choose either: an IP hardphone, (a physical phone with a keypad and headset/handset), or a PC-based softphone, where the agent connects a headset to the PC, without having a traditional telephone at all.

Figure 85: What sort of IP phone device are you using?

IP phone device	Proportion of respondents
IP hardphone	43%
PC-based softphone	16%
Both hardphone and softphone	34%
Don't know	8%

Single- / dual-earpiece headsets

Whether an agent or operations prefers single or dual earpiece headsets will tend to depend on the environment: those working in noisier backgrounds may prefer to reduce external distractions with a dual-earpiece headset, while others may prefer to be able to keep in touch with what's going on around them and choose a single-earpiece headset.

Dual-earpiece headsets are making inroads into the contact centre space, with the proportion of respondents using a mixture of both increasing year on year.

Figure 86: Use of single and dual earpiece headsets

Type of headset	Proportion of respondents
Single-earpiece only	36%
Dual-earpiece only	15%
Mixture of both	49%

plantronics

ACOUSTIC SHOCK

'Acoustic shock' is a phrase coined to describe a sudden, unexpected noise, often delivered at a very intense frequency. It may be caused by feedback from telephone equipment, faulty telephone lines, non-compliant switchboards and headsets. Other sources of acoustic damage include caller abuse (shouting, screaming, blowing whistles etc. – most often found in the outbound environment) or background noise on the call. Acoustic shock also refers to the damage done by long-term exposure to noise in excess of healthy limits. It can lead to permanent hearing damage and cases of psychological trauma.

There is some doubt as to whether contact centre agents are exposed to levels of noise sufficient to cause permanent deafness: studies from Denmark and Australia indicate that it can happen, whereas the UK government has been more doubtful, and the HSE is gathering more evidence on the issue. The CCMA (www.ccma.org.uk) claims that "tens of millions of pounds" have been spent in the UK alone on settlements related to acoustic shock. Readers wanting more information may like to consider viewing www.acousticsafety.org

In some countries, there has been legislation put in place around noise at work, which detail maximum average and peak noise levels that a worker may undergo, and the maximum amount of time that it is permissible for the worker to experience these sounds. We believe that it is only a matter of time until similar legislation is imposed in all Western contact centre industries, and that businesses should be putting procedures in place before they are forced to, which could help agents' health, and limit the business's exposure to litigation.

Surveys have seen that only 6% of contact centre managers are aware of the level of ambient noise within their contact centres, and only 9% regularly measure it[4].

The Acoustic Safety Programme has developed some simple advice for contact centres to help them meet or exceed legislation and make working life safer and more comfortable for their agents:

- Measure contact centre noise regularly and record it
- Fully understand legislation and create a formal policy so that staff at all levels of a business are aware of it
- Make sure that the headsets used are compliant with current legislation, and test them throughout their life
- Provide agents with a choice of headsets - monaural or binaural - the latter can help to absorb background noise, but may make the agent feel more cut-off from their environment
- Be aware that excessively long shifts may cause damage to agents' hearing, even if within nominally-safe limits
- Use sound-absorbing materials as much as possible to absorb unnecessary echoes and reverberation
- Educate agents on how to use their headset and phone correctly, including volume and ergonomic adjustments
- Test staff's hearing throughout their contact centre career.

For more information, please visit www.acousticsafety.org.

---

[4] Source: CCF magazine

Contact centres may like to implement a traceable reporting system for headset users who may have been exposed to acoustic shock incidents.

The following information should be reported:

- Date and time of the incident;
- Details of the source of the exposure;
- Description of the noise;
- Duration of the exposure;
- Details of the headset and telephone equipment used;
- Whether the incident was electronically recorded (a copy should be kept for future reference);
- Symptoms experienced by the operator directly related to the acoustic shock incident.

Operators should be trained to recognise such incidents and how to report them. Organisations that operate call centres are further advised that they should keep up to date with developments in this field through their professional associations and other representative bodies, as well as through their enforcing authority if applicable.

Organisations able to help with Maximising Efficiency and Agent Optimisation:

Eckoh's PCI DSS compliant payment products enable contact centres to take card payments from customers over the phone without fraud risk, and maintain a high level of customer service.

Enghouse Interactive can help balance your customer channel demands against the need to reduce contact centre operating costs, with our flexible multichannel contact centre, self-service, workforce optimisation solutions deliver optimum efficiency and maximise agent productivity across your operations.

Genesys Workforce Management is a comprehensive automated software application that accurately forecasts, schedules and tracks the performance of multi – skilled employees in single and multi-site front and back-office environments.

Infinity CCS's technology solutions help you improve customer experience and drive down cost to serve: Provide your operational management team with real-time, actionable insight into performance and compliance with Management, Reporting and QA software; reduce costs and live call volumes while maintaining quality of service and maximising sales opportunities with Web & Telephone Self-Service and integrated multi-channel solutions.
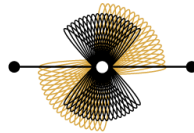
INTERACTIVE INTELLIGENCE®
Deliberately Innovative

At Interactive Intelligence, it's what we do.

Intradiem enables organisations to transform idle time into Active Wait Time so agents can complete meaningful activities that make them better at their jobs with fewer hassles and unknowns.

IP Integration helps business leaders create self-funding agent efficiency and optimisation programmes by releasing trapped agent capacity to reinvest in agent training and development or other off-phone activities

NewVoiceMedia is a leading global provider of true cloud contact centre and multi-channel communications solutions.

Nexidia, long term educators of Customer Interaction Analytics, works with some of the world's largest contact centres to capture multi-channel interactions, analyse the data and then use this valuable insight into the customer experience to develop business strategies to improve the performance in every area of the organisation.

NOBLE SYSTEMS

The Noble Composer agent desktop gives your agents easy access to tools and workflows, helping them work more efficiently and increasing productivity - our flexible scripting features with an intuitive, graphical layout interface make it easy for contact centre managers to build sophisticated agent screens and to unify the agent desktop environment.

Opinion-8

Opinion-8 is an innovative and effective customer-experience management tool which allows you to gain customer, employee and stakeholder feedback in a simple and highly cost-efficient way - its powerful, integrated web and voice survey technology with unified online reporting offers you a variety of telephone and web survey solutions

plantronics.

The premium audio quality of Plantronics headset solutions is proven to improve customer experience and agent productivity by up to 43%.

rostrvm

rostrvm's flexible software helps you provide an efficient response however and whenever you're contacted, whilst our powerful data-driven routing ensures contacts are delivered to the right person, making blending easy: if agents use our desktop tools, which bring together multiple data systems, this will reduce response times still further – and ask us about Precision Dialling, which makes for even more cost-efficient campaigns.

SAP Contact Center software helps organisations efficiently manage contact centre operations including inbound and outbound customer communications across multiple channels.

Ultra provides 24/7/365 inclusive campaign performance monitoring services to ensure clients' contact centres are continuously as efficient and productive as possible, as part of all of its Cloud technology solutions: secure solutions for full compliance, simple to set-up and integrate and manage, and the smart choice for any business.

Verint Systems is a global leader in Actionable Intelligence® solutions, which help organizations address three important challenges: customer engagement optimization; security intelligence; and fraud, risk and compliance.

NEW MEDIA AND THE CUSTOMER OF THE FUTURE

Channels of communication used by UK consumers have proliferated in the past 20 years, but despite the constant media-led groaning about how much everyone hates call centres, the telephone has emerged as the channel of choice, based on ubiquity, speed and ease of use.

In the late 1990s, analysts predicted email to be the next big B2C communication method, only for customers to find that, in many cases, sending an email didn't get customers any sort of answer at all. Predictably, for many years, email accounted for only 1-2% of a business's inbound communication. However, individual organisations (especially those in the IT and retail sector) managed to make email an acceptable channel for customers, breaking the vicious circle that consumers had experienced: receiving poor service via email from a number of companies put customers off from using the medium, which meant that investments weren't made in improving the email channel, which further weakened its effectiveness.

The past teaches us that it is the consumers that make the decision on which communication methods will be most used, not the businesses. If the channel proposed by businesses is suitable for the type of interaction, then it will succeed - otherwise, it will fail. Predicting which channels will be used in future, and by whom, will give businesses a better chance to deliver high-quality service at the right points, while reducing cost where possible. Getting it wrong is expensive and damaging to the brand.

Multichannel contact centres have been mainstream for years, with over 90% of UK contact centres dealing with a significant proportion of email as well as telephony. The Internet – as a channel for self-service, sales and increasingly person-to-person contact – is an integral part of many businesses' customer contact strategy, with the advent of social media throwing another element into the mix.

Figure 87: Inbound contact channels: popularity, suitability and speed of response

196
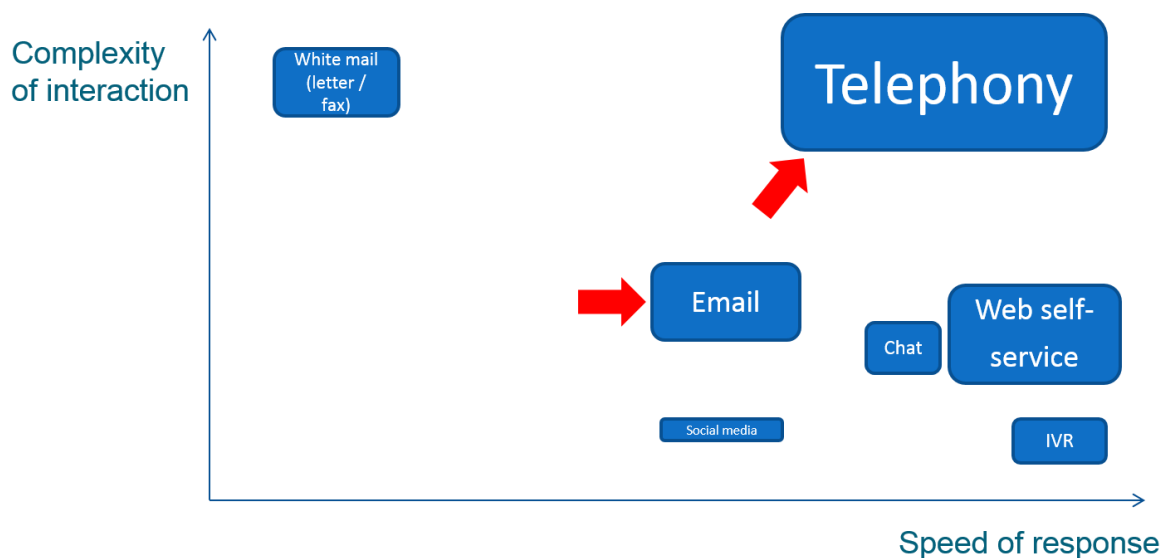
The preceding chart gives an idea of where things stand in 2014. The size of the boxes gives an indication of the relative importance of major channels, by volume. Each channel can handle interactions of certain complexity, and some are far quicker to provide a response than others. The red arrows indicate how the phone and email channels have altered their capabilities within the last few years.

White mail: suited to issues of great complexity and importance, due to the ability to establish a paper trail, found particularly in industries that are contract-driven, for example finance and insurance. Response times are, of course, relatively long.

Telephony: on average, by far the largest inbound interaction channel. It has ubiquity, is a real-time two-way channel covering many different topics if necessary, and if queue length is reasonable, has one of the quickest speed of responses of any channel, despite popular perceptions. Since the widespread uptake of self-service, telephony is in the process of reinventing itself as the channel of choice for lengthy, important or complex interactions. For many businesses, contact centre agents have actually become 'experts', without this having being planned.

Email: despite the inherent difficulty of establishing a real-time, two-way conversation via this medium, email volumes have grown dramatically in the past few years. Like white mail, email allows customers to go into considerable detail, expressing their thoughts in the order in which they wish. This ability is particularly valued in issues such as complaints, where the customer may have detailed information to impart which it is difficult to put across on a phone conversation. The red arrow in the diagram shows that email response times have improved considerably, but it is still by no means the quickest channel.

Web self-service: this channel has grown enormously in the past few years, to some extent at the expense of telephony self-service. The visual medium provides customers with a far more flexible experience, and it is a very quick channel to use for simple queries. (As we do not have statistics on the volume of web self-service interactions, the relative size of the box should be ignored in this case).

IVR: after some years of decline, this channel has stabilised this year, and is still widely available and widely used. It is most useful for handling the simplest of transactions, such as balance-checking or providing a meter reading.

Web chat: this niche channel is beginning to establish itself, particularly in retail-based environments. As telephony agents provide a back-up to telephony IVR, web chat will offer the same capabilities to support a web self-service session which cannot be fulfilled successfully. It provides a similar speed of response to the phone channel, and there is no reason why customer authentication cannot take place which would allow access to a wider level of service than is currently the case. Cobrowsing can be seen as a very closely related to channel to web chat, with similar capabilities and uptake which will be closely tied to that of web chat.

Social media: as can be seen by the tiny size of the box in the preceding chart, social media does not yet have significant volumes of interactions for most companies. However it has an extremely high profile both outside and within the organisation, and has grabbed the attention of senior executives far more than the traditional contact centre has ever managed to do. As such, there is a disproportionate amount of interest being shown in social media as a customer contact channel, due in no small part to the potentially damaging nature of a customer service failure being made extremely public.

From a Genesys perspective, we had seen in the early days of social media that it was predominately managed by the marketing organisation. In the past year however there has been a double digit increase in the number of contact centres offering this as a customer engagement channel. It is important that the Contact Centre and Marketing organisations collaborate when it comes to social media to provide consistency and a good experience for the customers.

Despite the much lower penetration rates, it is also worth mentioning the presence of **virtual worlds, avatars, kiosks** and **video agents** in the customer contact mix as these are options which certain businesses may use to target the Internet generation as well as more technically-literate existing customers.

Turn On Great Customer Experience

Today, great CX is great business.

Take your customer experience to the next level. Engage effortlessly with your customers across all touchpoints, channels and interactions. Differentiate your customer journeys. Even maximise revenue while improving loyalty.

Do it all with Genesys, the global leader in multi-channel customer experience and contact centre solutions. Available from the cloud or your datacentre, the Genesys Customer Experience Platform can help you turn on great customer experience today.

Find out more at www.genesys.com/uk.

Genesys®

Figure 88: Multimedia channels

Channel	Current use	Drivers	Inhibitors	Proportion of interactions
Email	Widely offered for inbound and outbound service by all sectors, especially IT and retail.	Email is widely-used and accepted by customers. As a non-real-time application, businesses can deal with emails in slack periods. Written format is suited to long and complex answers. Templatised responses offer cost savings.	Without investment in email systems, email is no cheaper to handle than a phone call. Service levels are often poor or inconsistent, leading to customer dissatisfaction. Any interaction that requires security is unsuitable for email checks.	IT and retail often highest. Insurance and finance usually low. On average, the contact centre industry has over 15% of inbound interactions as email.
Self-service	Both voice and web self-service are widely used, the former either through touchtone IVR or speech recognition, which handles simple queries and transactions.	Variable costs of using self-service are very low (i.e. once the system is set-up correctly, incremental cost per use is negligible), making it suitable for high-volume, simple interactions, avoiding the costs of these calls being handled by agents. Allows 24/7 service at low cost.	Excessively pushing the use of self-service, & badly-designed IVR menus can mean that callers feel frustrated & alienated. The use of natural language self-service is not yet widespread, & older voice-based applications are often inflexible & long-winded.	c.3-6 of inbound contact centre interactions are dealt with by self-service, usually higher in finance and utilities sectors. Movement to web self-service is gathering pace strongly.
SMS	Often used for marketing messages, SMS can also provide proactive customer service, such as balance threshold alerts and appointment reminders.	SMS is a cheap channel, with texts costing less than 10p each. UK mobile phone penetration is greater than 100%, and SMS senders are very likely to have their messages read.	The same rules against email spam apply to SMS, so customers must give their permission to be sent SMS. Inbound SMS is like email, in that security cannot be established, and it is not a real time application.	Around half of businesses currently use SMS to communicate with customers, usually for marketing purposes.
Web chat / instant messaging	Growing as specific applications for its use emerge. Penetration rate over 30%.	Real-time nature of web chat means it is akin to a voice conversation in immediacy. It is possible to ask security questions through web chat, although it is debatable whether the customer will feel happy about passing on this information over the web. Multiple concurrent web chat sessions can be run, cutting cost per interaction. Younger generation is used to messaging.	Web chat may be too alien to the older generation who may feel pressured by the sudden appearance of a chat initiation. It is also an expensive option, and may encourage people to ask unnecessary questions that they would otherwise use the website to find the answer to.	2-3% of interactions into UK contact centres, growing rapidly.

200

Channel	Current use	Drivers	Inhibitors	Proportion of interactions
Video agents	Limited current use. Can be delivered through PC, kiosk or interactive digital TV.	Eye contact is critical for establishing trust and 60% of the communication process is visual. Opportunities for demonstrating product features.	Customers may prefer the impersonality of telephony. Agents will need training in visual presentation.	Not known, although very low.
Web collaboration	Very limited. Page-pushing and joint form-filling more used in the US, but rarely in the UK.	Allowing an agent to work alongside a customer's desktop can give more personal and effective assistance.	Very expensive per session. Not widely understood by customers.	Still very low in the UK.
Avatars	An avatar is a physical representation of an individual in cyberspace. Rarely used in commercial environments, avatars are usually found in online games and virtual worlds. Some businesses are using avatars to act as the front-end for self-service applications, offering customers a human-like interface with which to carry out self-service operations.	Online customers can move their avatars around a website in the same way they would move around a shop, and ask sales avatars for help. If avatars were physically similar to their owners, businesses could use web collaboration to show exactly how the customer would look in an item of clothing, or behind the wheel of a car.	Customer service avatars require 'anthropomorphous software' to be able to decipher unformatted text and natural language, read and write text and display some level of behaviour that might be seen as personality and intelligence - it needs to be seen as being more than just an attractive way to do the same limited things.	Not known, although very low.
Kiosks	Supermarkets, cinemas, banks, fast-food outlets and train stations have touch-screen terminals which can deal with financial transactions, issuing tickets, taking orders and scanning items.	Low-cost, effectively another variant of self-service, with a possible option to move to a video agent if required, although privacy issues are present. It takes an average of $3 for an agent to check-in an airline traveller, but only 14c each with a kiosk (source: Forrester Research).	Possible mechanical breakdown. Non-private. Limited functionality.	Not known, although growing, especially in the mobile phone sub-sector.
Social media	Twitter, Facebook, Linked-In, YouTube are all becoming very popular for businesses.	Personal social engagement (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) is spilling into the corporate world. Originally used by businesses as outbound marketing / brand awareness, has developed into de facto inbound customer service.	Limited security or ID verification processes mean not all interactions are suitable for social media. High risk of negative PR associated with this channel may lead to over-resourcing at the expense of others.	Over 1%. Seen by senior management as far more important than volumes suggest due to the often high-profile nature of interactions.

The complexity of providing consistent and timely customer service increases exponentially once a new channel, device or medium is added to the customer service mix. The only constant is that – regardless of the method chosen to communicate with the business – customers want accurate, timely information delivered in a form with which they are happy. The challenges for the business are to provide a high quality of service which is consistent across the channels and to do so in a cost-effective manner. To do this, and break down the boundaries between contact channels that has been stifling the potential of non-telephony contact, a universal queue is required.

The Universal Queue

Although the 'universal queue' as a phrase is showing its age, having been around for at least ten years, as a concept it's still vital to understand. In some ways, it has segued into the currently popular concept of 'omnichannel', as both phrases refer to the technology and processes aiming to deliver seamless customer service across channels.

A universal queue is a platform which automatically captures, processes, routes and reports on customer interactions and related activities based on a company's specific business criteria, providing a view of each and every customer interaction. Customer interactions through channels such as voice, email, fax, web chat and activities such as work items are handled according to business-defined processes and strategies, avoiding the problem of rogue interactions that are left outside normal workflows, or favouring one channel (usually voice) to the permanent detriment of others.

The universal queue can set priority levels to incoming calls, emails and chats, and may also have the ability to blend inbound and outbound calls into a single queue to allow agents to move between media as required. This approach also facilitates a single view of the customer across all channels, which is one of the key ways to improve the quality of service offered, as well as improving the agent's confidence and morale.

Although multichannel is the current buzz, the reality is that most "multichannel" contact centres are a series of siloed interactions where customer information is not shared across channels, making for a disjointed rather than a single conversation. Today a customer web chatting must start all over and repeat information when calling into the company for additional assistance and work started on the web is lost. A true "One to One" conversation requires that all channels operate seamlessly as one conversation.

An optimised multichannel contact centre will have specific groups of agents with the skills deemed necessary for handling particular channels. Interactions from every channel will come into the universal queue, and are routed appropriately based on the agent skills and any information that the system has been able to gather about the nature of the request and the customer who is contacting them. Some operations, particularly large contact centres, will have channels handled by a separate group of agents. While specialisation of this type fits in well with the concept of the efficient contact centre being like a production line, overly-inflexible allocation may lead to spikes and idle periods which could otherwise be alleviated by moving agents between groups.

The UK contact centre industry has embraced multichannel customer communication, with 97% offering an email channel as well as 54% SMS and 34% web chat.

Traditional channels such as letter and fax are still present in most cases, and social media as a customer service channel is also offered by 58% of respondents this year, showing continued strong growth from last year's figure of 44% and 2012's penetration rate of 31%.

Figure 89: Current and future use of customer communication channels

Current and future use of customer communication channels
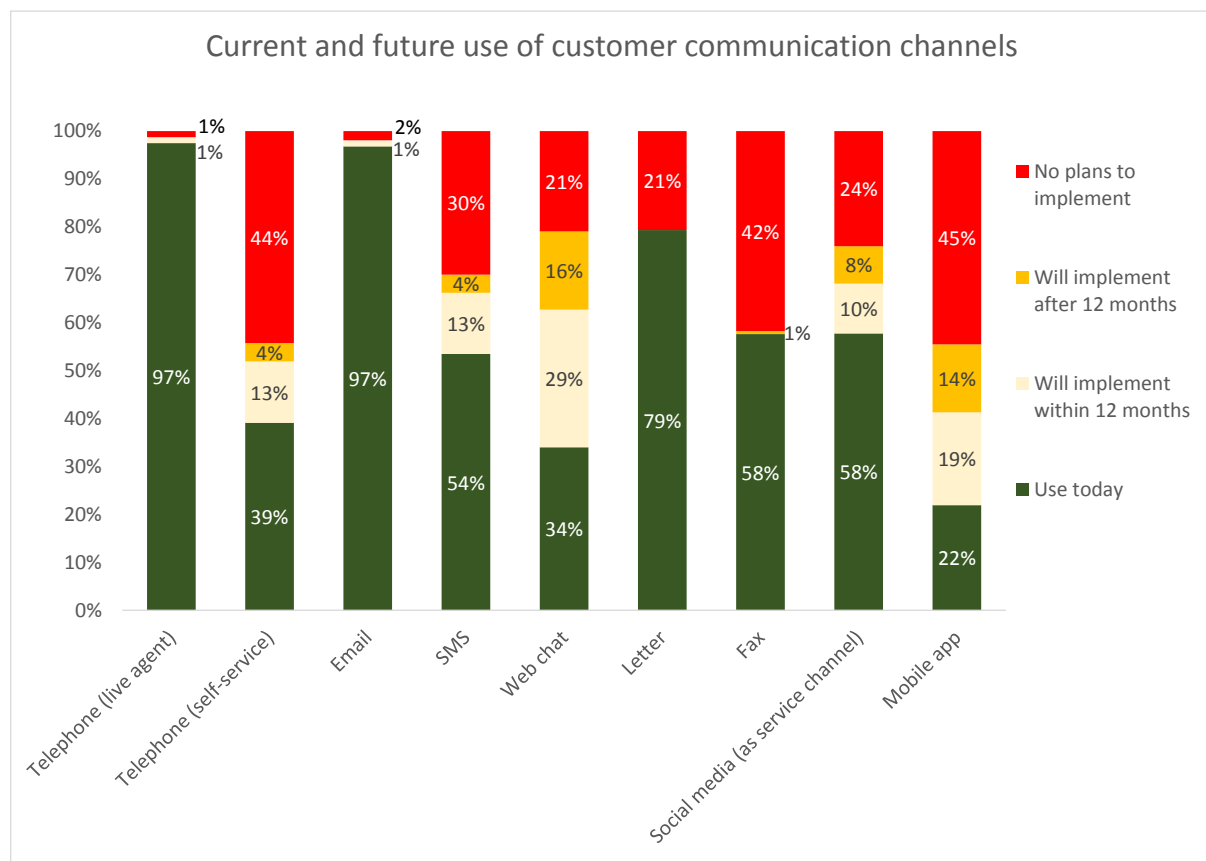
Although 22% of UK businesses have apps that allow you to contact them for customer service, any work performed in the app is typically lost as the customer must leave the app, call into an IVR and start the whole process over. Customer care integrated with the contact centre does not exist within virtually every app out there today. Apps were originally created for marketing purposes and have not yet evolved to be true vehicles of customer service.

While the proportion of inbound interactions by channel did not change greatly between 2009 and 2011 - perhaps as many initiatives and investments were put on hold - 2012 saw a big jump in email from 10.4% to 15.4%, and although this figure dropped back somewhat last year, and the email figure of 16.2% in 2014 suggests that this channel is still growing strongly.

In line with what has been happening in the US, a further drop in both the live and self-service telephone channels can be seen, as more customers choose an online option as their primary channel, a view further supported by web chat jumping from 1.7% to 2.7%.

Figure 90: Inbound interactions by channel

Inbound interactions by channel

- Email 16.2%
- Telephone (self-service) 4.2%
- Letter 3.3%
- Web chat 2.7%
- Social media (as service channel) 1.4%
- Telephone (live agent) 70.7%
- Fax 0.8%
- SMS 0.7%
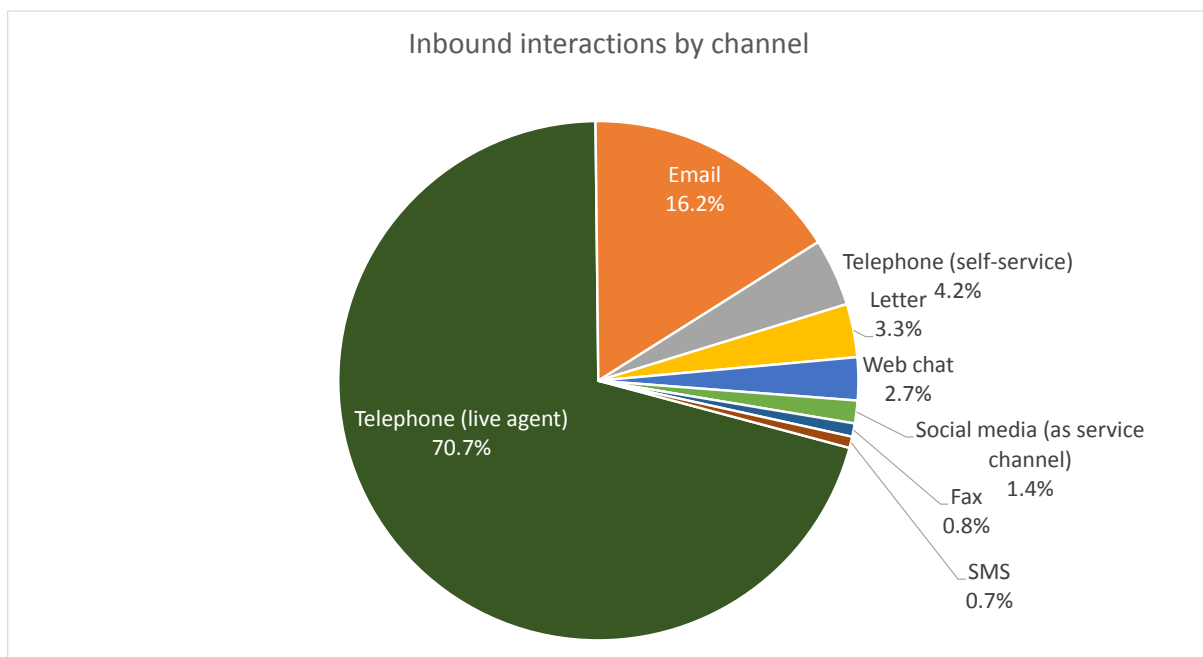
As was the case in 2013, agent-handled calls are most important to respondents in the public sector, transport & travel, housing and insurance sectors.

Email is again well represented in the manufacturing, retail, services and TMT vertical markets (especially the IT sub-sector).

Telephony self-service seems strongest in the utilities and finance sectors, as well as TMT. Web chat is developing a presence in retail, so as to encourage and close online sales, but is still a way off being a major channel for any vertical market. Outsourcers specialising in multimedia and social media contact are growing significantly.

Figure 91: Inbound interactions by channel, by vertical market

Vertical market	FS	HS	INS	MAN	OS	PS	RD	SVCS	TMT	TT	UTILS	Average
Telephone (live agent)	72%	80%	84%	65%	70%	76%	69%	60%	67%	74%	63%	**70.6%**
Email	13%	10%	7%	24%	11%	14%	18%	27%	16%	12%	13%	**16.2%**
Telephone (self-service)	6%	3%	0%	0%	4%	4%	4%	3%	10%	2%	9%	**4.2%**
Letter	8%	6%	6%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	9%	**3.3%**
Web chat	0%	0%	1%	3%	10%	1%	5%	3%	2%	3%	2%	**2.7%**
Social media	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%	3%	1%	2%	4%	2%	**1.4%**
Fax	1%	0%	1%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	**0.8%**
SMS	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%	1%	2%	**0.7%**

NB: "0%" refers to a number lower than 0.5%, rather than necessarily a zero value.
Great care should be taken when considering vertical market statistics, as the research sample size may be small. Use only as an indication of relative importance.

As not all of the same respondents take part in this survey every year, it is not always possible to have confidence that a jump in the usage of a relatively minor multimedia channel is an industry-wide phenomenon, rather than the case of a couple of early-adopters skewing the results, which is certainly possible where only a few use a channel. Therefore, a question is asked about how each inbound channel is changing, so being able to judge if any alterations in the use of channels was due to real changes at a contact centre-level, or is more of a statistical blip.

Email is still looked upon as a growing channel, and web chat, mobile apps and social media are looked upon even more positively. The traditional media of letters and fax are declining in our respondents' eyes, although still have their place in the likes of the insurance and finance industries.

Telephony self-service usually throws up somewhat paradoxical findings: although respondents to the survey each year tend to indicate that they expect a slight growth in telephony self-service interactions, there tends to be a slight decline in the overall proportion of inbound interactions that happen through this channel, mainly as a result of the success enjoyed by web self-service channels: expectation seems different from reality.

The figure for live agent telephony declined somewhat to around 70% this year, and a similar proportion of respondents expect it to increase as decline.

Figure 92: How are inbound channels changing in your contact centre?
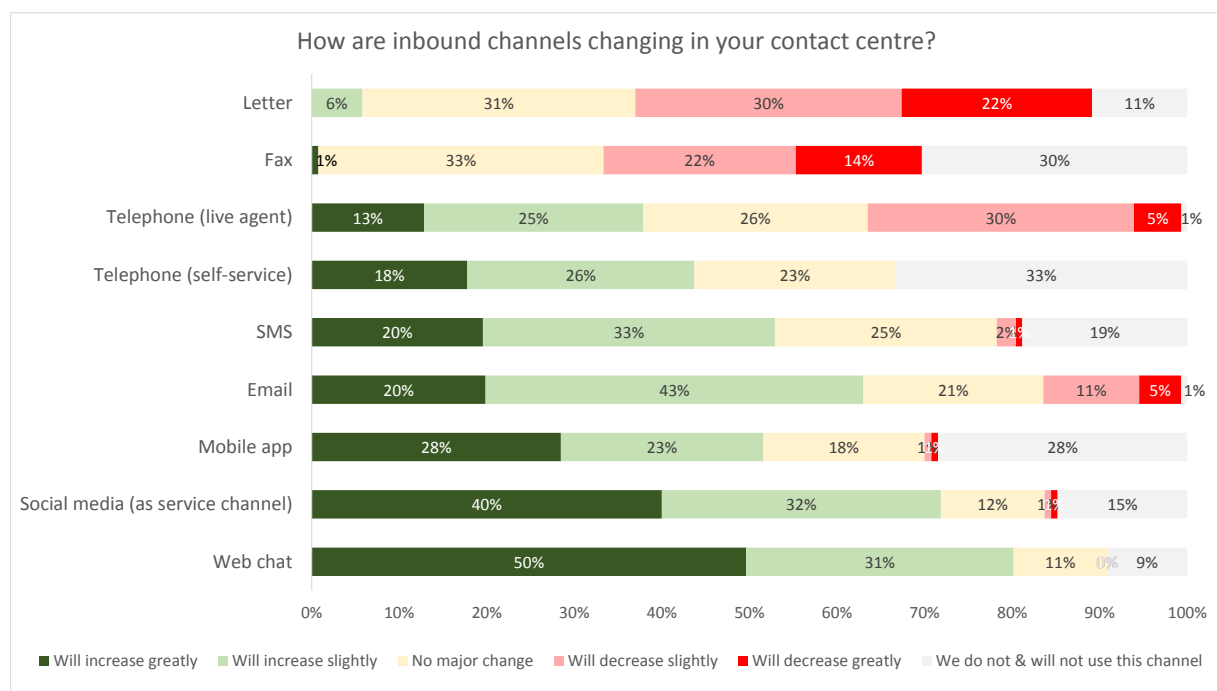
Delivering Great Multi-Channel Customer Experiences

Connect the Customer Journey with an Integrated Customer Experience Platform

Experts often tout 'best practice' recommendations that advocate adding more channels in order to keep pace with the modern, digital and social consumer. But adding channels blindly isn't the answer to improving Customer Experience (CX). At the same time, having just voice and email channels in the contact centre just won't cut it for today's consumer. According to analyst firm Ovum, 74% of people that interact with your company in 2014 will communicate on 3 or more channels.

Eliminate Silos to Carry Customer Context Across Channels

The key then is the ability to not just offer the channels your customers desire, but to also preserve the context of all interactions across those channels. For most companies, customer-facing processes and associated back-office departments are siloed from the functional departments and the lines of business. The result? The context of the customer's question or issue is not carried between channels or between departments. This means the customer's journey will be made up of:

- Countless emails, calls and chat sessions
- Numerous handoffs and transfers
- Repetition of info and lost context with inefficient processes
- Deeply dissatisfying customer experiences that lead to customer churn and negative word-of-mouth

Your 'best of breed strategy' can become detrimental to growing your business. When trying to deliver great CX, creating a consistent experience across all of those multiple channels is critical—and a unified platform is the best way to deliver that consistent experience.

A Common Platform for Great CX

Companies that want to increase revenue and decrease operating costs must evolve their customer strategy to include the entire customer experience journey from end-to-end, understanding the context of all previous interactions and touchpoints. To do this effectively and efficiently requires a platform that brings together centralised routing of all interactions with a context-aware workforce optimisation system. The platform must also incorporate context-aware routing and cross-channel interactions across all channels to deliver a personalised experience. That is precisely what the Genesys Customer Experience Platform offers.

Your 'best of breed strategy' can become detrimental to growing your business.

To learn more watch the videocast Connecting the End-to-End Customer Journey with a Single, Integrated Customer Experience Platform, featuring Analyst Firm Gartner and Emirates Airline.

To learn more about Delivering Great Customer Experiences Across All Channels and the Genesys Customer Experience Platform please visit Genesys.com/uk.

Genesys®

EMAIL MANAGEMENT

Email is the first of the 'multimedia' channels, and by far the most well-used, having been mainstream for well over 10 years. Its penetration rate of over 16% now makes it unequivocally a key customer service channel, despite the low take-up that it experienced for many years in the early 2000s.

Email should stand as a salutary lesson that it is not businesses that make new channels a success, but customers. Put bluntly, email in its first, Stage I incarnation, failed almost entirely. Too many businesses rushed to push customers to this new channel – commonly supposed to be cheaper than voice – without having the processes, solutions or staff to manage this properly. What happened next can be understood as a 'herd inoculation': enough customers had enough bad experiences from enough organisations that the entire channel was discredited, even for those businesses which were providing a reasonable service through email or just keeping a watching brief.

The reason for this rejection was the appalling level of service provided by many of the early multimedia businesses. With response times stretching into many days, if not weeks, the companies failed to understand that any communication with the business has a degree of urgency to it, else why would they be trying to speak with the business at all? Of course, even when a response was eventually provided, the issue might have gone away, or been dealt with by calling the contact centre, meaning that customers' existing confidence in the voice channel was further reinforced at the expense of the email channel. It is also the case that email does not fit the type of enquiries that people make in some cases, such as the need for quick, simple and confidential information (such as an account balance), and the increased requirements for identity checking places a cap on the usefulness of email as a channel for some types of business.

It took many years, much investment and the coaxing of customers to try new channels again for email to emerge as being credible. Of course, businesses and customers now both realize that email is more suitable for some interaction types than others (the rise of web self-service has meant email is no longer the only online communication method available), and complex issues such as complaints, or other enquiries requiring a formal paper trail are well-suited to email. In fact, much of the demise in the letter and fax as channels can be traced to a direct replacement by email. Email is also an excellent outbound channel, providing reassurance, great levels of detail and is able to link to other specific areas of information via hyperlinks.

As an inbound channel, it has inherent weaknesses: an inability to carry out customer authentication and to carry out a 2-way conversation being amongst them, as well as the lengthy wait to get a response. In the longer term, it is likely to be superseded to some extent by more immediate online channels such as web chat and social media. It does however have the advantage over virtually every channel that there is no queue time at all – the customer writes the email and presses 'Send' immediately – a 'fire and forget' interaction.

For businesses that do take substantial volumes of email, while it is not suggested that they should aim to answer an email in the same amount of time that it takes to complete a phone call, it is desirable to manage all interactions closely to consistent business rules, and to act quickly if service levels slip. Too often it seems, contact centres have become so used to managing the telephony queue that they neglect multimedia interactions. The result is that multimedia response times (mostly email) have often sacrificed to meet telephony service levels, although there have been continuous and significant improvements in response rates in recent years.

Figure 93: Inbound interactions that are email, by vertical market

Vertical market	% of inbound interactions that are email
Services	27%
Manufacturing	24%
Retail & Distribution	18%
TMT	16%
Public Sector	14%
Finance	13%
Utilities	13%
Transport & Travel	12%
Outsourcing	11%
Housing	10%
Insurance	7%
Average	**16.2%**

As usual, it is the retailers and TMT (especially IT) respondents with the greatest proportion of inbound traffic as email, with the B2B manufacturing and services sectors also reporting high levels of email this year. The former's email volume are often driven by sales via a website, with TMT/IT's more about technical support.

The insurance sector does not deal with a large volume of email, mainly due to the restrictions on security, customer identification and customer data, and has correspondingly higher levels of letters and sometimes fax.

As with previous years, emails are proportionally more important for small contact centres, although the past three years have seen a significant increase in the importance of email to the largest operations.

Figure 94: Inbound interactions that are email, by contact centre size

Contact centre size	% of inbound interactions that are email
Small	21.0%
Medium	13.8%
Large	13.1%
Average	**16.2%**

Email response handling times continue to show further improvements on past years, especially in the all-important 'less than 1 hour' segment. Those answered the same working day declined very slightly from 73% to 70%, but still supports the virtuous circle whereby customers are more happy to use email as they as more confident that they will get a good, timely response.

Taking longer than one day to answer an email runs the risk of the customer losing patience, and going elsewhere or phoning the contact centre, placing a greater cost burden on the business than if they had just called in the first place, but this figure is down from 38% to 27% since 2011.

Figure 95: Proportion of emails answered full and successfully in these timescales

Proportion of emails answered fully and successfully in these timescales
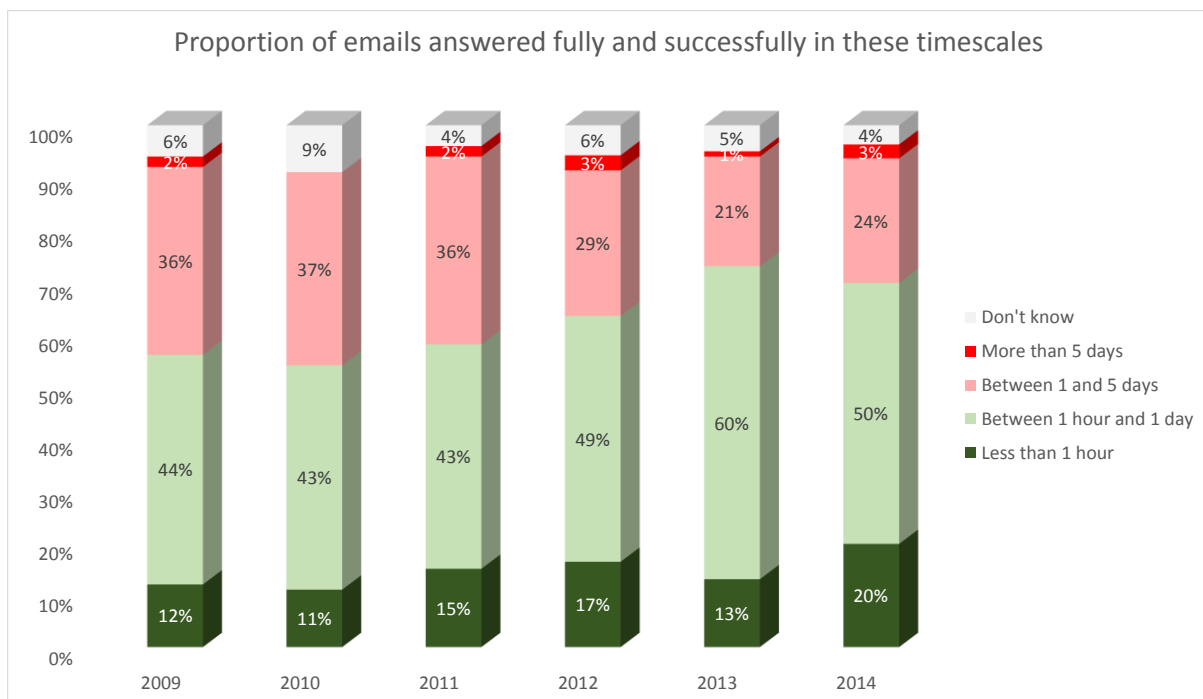
The proportion of emails answered within 1 day can be considered the minimum acceptable standard for an organisation to respond fully to an e-mail, although leading multi-channel businesses are aiming for a 1 hour turnaround in a significant proportion of cases.

The manufacturing and TMT vertical markets are most likely to answer emails very rapidly, but the majority of emails in every sector except for utilities (once again) are reported to be answered within a day. Of course, the contents of the emails will heavily influence the turnaround time, and with the increase in web self-service, this means that the average complexity of emails – like phone calls – is likely to increase, which should in theory mean that they take longer to answer.

Figure 96: Proportion of emails answered within 1 day, by vertical market

Proportion of emails answered within 1 day, by vertical market

Vertical market	Less than 1 hour	Between 1 hour and 1 day
Manufacturing	30%	57%
Finance	11%	69%
Retail & Distribution	23%	56%
Public Sector	17%	56%
Housing	12%	58%
Outsourcing	22%	46%
TMT	33%	34%
Services	21%	47%
Insurance	18%	48%
Transport & Travel	10%	49%
Utilities	3%	35%
Average	20%	50%
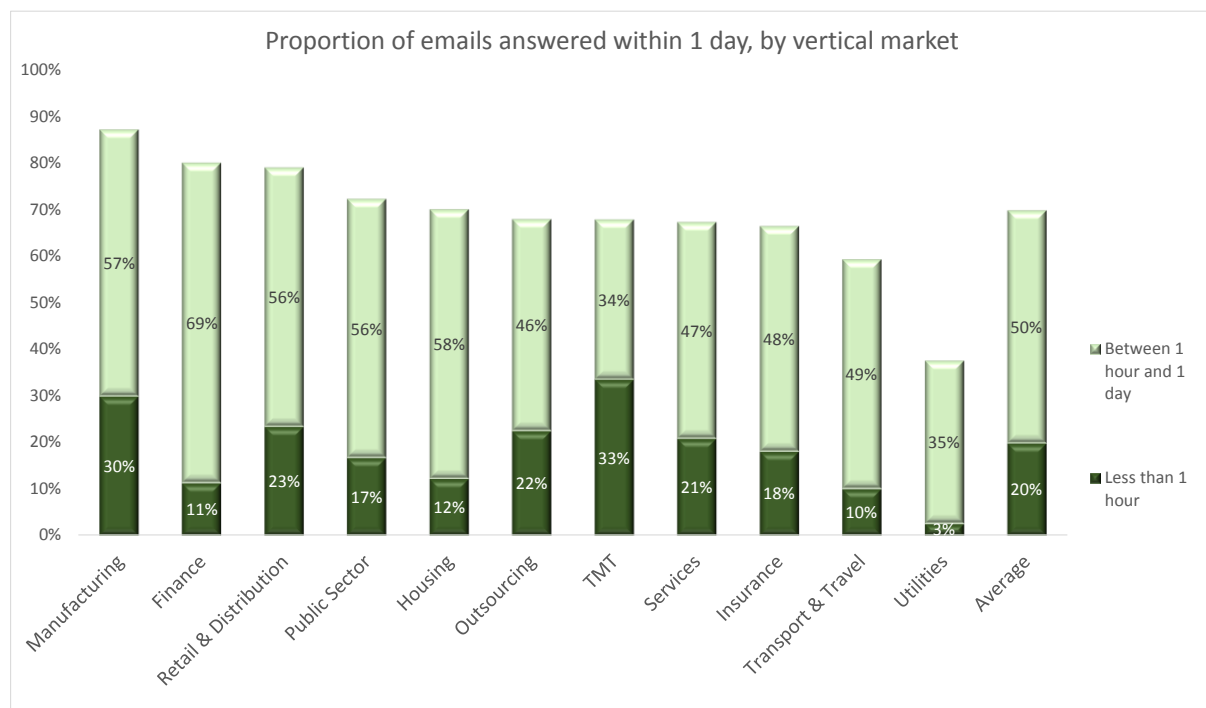
The following table shows respondents' estimates of the cost to handle an inbound email or web chat (and are restricted to agent-handled interactions, excluding those that are entirely automated).

A caveat: only around one-third of respondents that offered each channel felt confident to estimate the cost, so sample size is relatively small.

Emails are estimated to cost only a little less than a live agent handled call, certainly when looking at the mean average.

In the main, web chats appear to be considerably cheaper, although there are few very high cost answers which drag up the mean average considerably.

Figure 97: Cost of email and web chat

Contact centre size	Email	Web chat
1st quartile	£1.14	£0.55
Median	£2.38	£1.00
3rd quartile	£4.10	£2.55
Mean	£3.84	£2.30

MULTIMEDIA BLENDING

There is no general consensus within the industry on how best to deal with email, although there are genuine reasons to encourage email/voice blending. On one side, there is a case made that letting agents answer email makes the job more interesting for them, lowering attrition and improving skills. The other side to this says that the skills required by email agents are different from voice agents, and that it is difficult to find the agents to do both jobs. Both sides make sense logically, and historically, of those contact centres which use voice/email blending, only around 1 in 5 have experienced problems finding the right staff for these types of role, a figure that decreased each year that it was surveyed.

The majority of UK contact centres allow at least some of their agents to carry out both email and telephony. However, email requires certain skills, including grammar and punctuation, which not every agent has, even with assistance from an email management system's response template. On average, slightly more than half of agents in a blended multimedia environment are allowed to do both email and voice work.

Just because a contact centre uses the same agents for email and voice does not mean that all operations use the same level of multimedia blending. For some operations, multimedia blending is a strategic decision which has been invested in with the right levels of technology and training being provided. For others, it is a necessity, with agents encouraged to answer emails in slack call times.

Figure 98: Methods of multimedia blending, by contact centre size

Methods of multimedia blending, by contact centre size

213
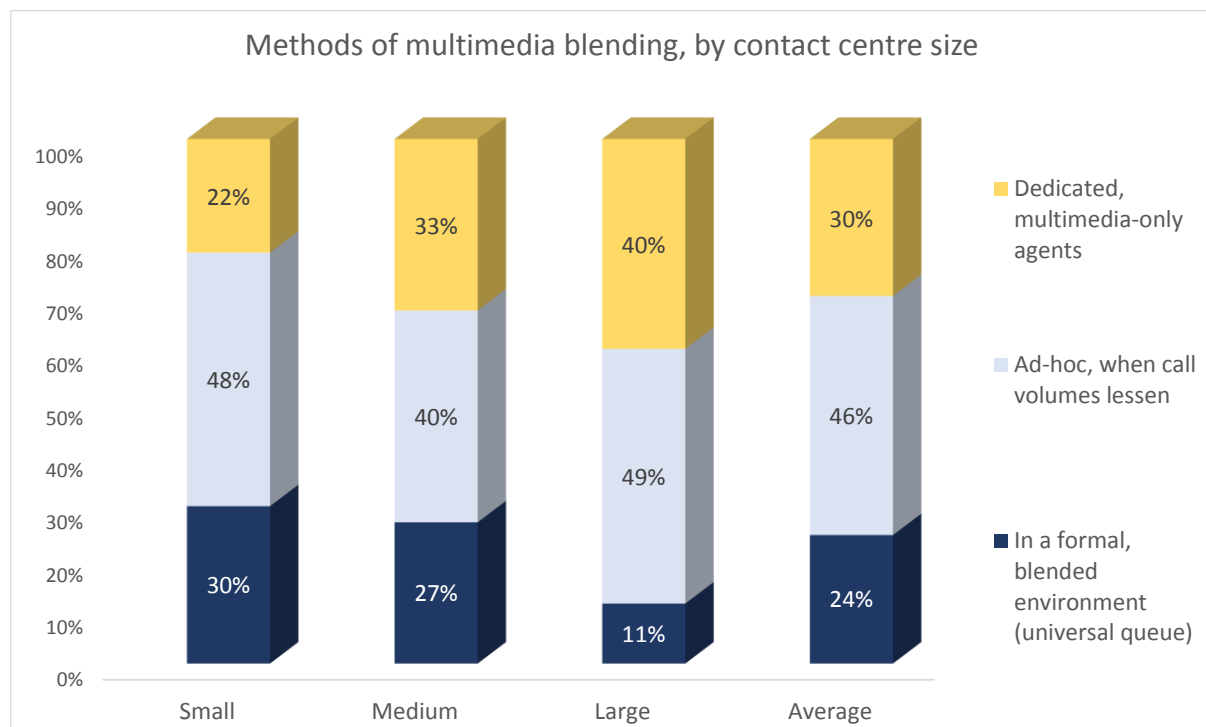
Historically, smaller operations - which may not have had sufficient email volumes, or the investment available to formalize the blending by forming a universal queue to deal with all types of interaction - had been much more likely to deal with emails on an ad-hoc basis, whereas there had been a positive correlation between contact centre size and the use of a formal blended environment or universal queue.

In the past few years, this has changed, perhaps as a combination of the larger volumes of emails coming into smaller operations, along with more reasonably-priced multimedia-capable solutions becoming available to this market. The result is that 30% of respondents from sub-50 seat contact centres state that they use a formally-blended environment, rather than an ad-hoc approach, with only 11% of large contact centres doing so. Larger operations are far more likely to have dedicated teams of multimedia-only agents.

The following chart indicates that a formalised blending environment, such as a universal queue, has a beneficial effect on email response times. Respondents using a formal blended environment report that 32% of emails are handled within 1 hour, around twice the rate that operations using either ad hoc blending or dedicated email agents report.

It seems from these statistics that the universal queue is more likely to increase the chances of an email being answered very rapidly. There is likely to be a similar and significant number of email requests that will take longer than 24 hours to be resolved, regardless of the initial queuing and routing mechanism used, as all contact centres will receive a certain proportion of emails which will require complex handling over a number of days.

Figure 99: The effect of Universal Queues on average email handling time
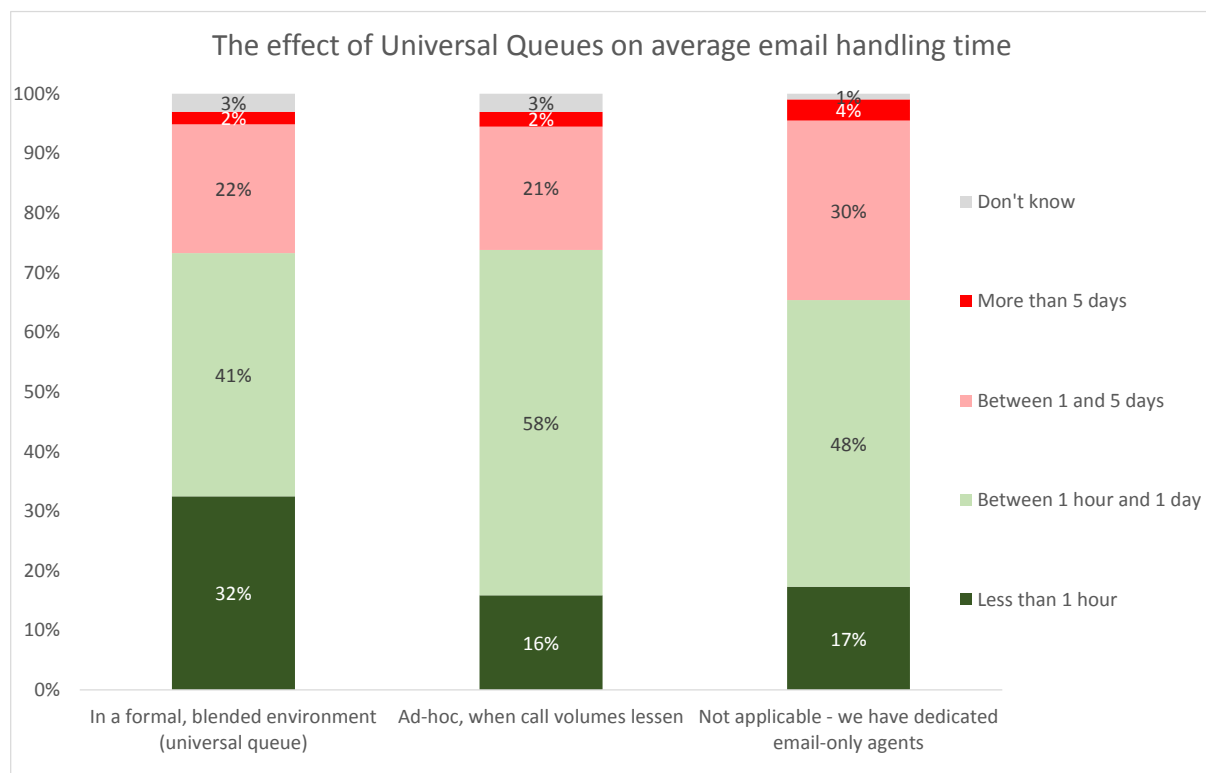
NICHE CHANNELS

Apart from email, which is the most important person-to-person multimedia channel, organisations may feel that their customer base and business model is suitable for other channels to be used as well.

SMS

SMS is a potentially advantageous technology that many businesses have ignored. Growing numbers of people do not have a landline phone, preferring to use their mobile phone. In the US, close to half of 18-29 year-olds only use a mobile phone for telephony, while in the UK, 16% of all households are mobile-only[5], a figure which is continuing to grow. While the mobile is more expensive to call, its ubiquity and responsiveness has a great advantage over landline phones and even emails, as the business is far more likely to reach the customer by calling their mobile number. Increasing the use of SMS as a channel to the customer would reduce many of the costs associated with mobile communication (including agent time, as well as transmission costs), while keeping the advantages of contacting a customer's mobile number.

Despite the effects of legislation on outbound calling being seen, SMS does not act as a substitute for voice calls, but rather as a complementary channel, and this is something that should be emphasised: outbound communications are now definitely seen by businesses as opportunities to add value and secure loyalty through proactive customer service, as well as being a powerful sales tool. Using a mixture of SMS and voice, a business can communicate quickly and effectively with its customer base, choosing the right channel depending on the urgency of the message and the customer's own preference.

SMS marketing is widely seen as 'edgy', and aimed primarily at young (and sometimes naive) consumers. It has also attracted more than its fair share of cowboys and con-men, lending a certain disreputability and gold-rush feel to the practice of SMS marketing, particularly around textback services. In future, SMS will work best where customers are happy to hear from a business (e.g. if their account is in danger of becoming overdrawn) and in cases where the business is saving money or strengthening their brand.

The link between mobile telephony and web is only going to get stronger with the path to smartphone, tablet and mobile communications looking clearer, with media and communications on the same device. This will mean the boundary between SMS and email will just blur, with the current visual drawbacks of SMS becoming irrelevant, particular as MMS (multimedia messaging service) becomes more prevalent. Although the small screen of any mobile device means it's hard to do anything complex on-screen, the addition of voice-to-text technology may allow users to form longer and more complex sentences, more akin to email.

---

[5] Ofcom, 2013

One of the potential issues with written communication - and especially SMS - is finding the best way to deal with replies from the customer. If the SMS is a call to action - e.g. texting a keyword to a five-digit shortcode to receive more information, for example, then that is simple enough. However, problems can arise when a customer wishes to reply directly to the SMS, in order to start a conversation with the business. The issue of queuing and routing the SMS to an appropriate agent is the same as for email, and there is also the question of getting through security - if necessary - which takes around 30 seconds in a normal conversation with an agent, but the same process can take minutes through the exchange of texts, making it unworkable, meaning that SMS is probably best as a one-way outbound or limited two-way channel.

SMS is suited to automated information requests from customers, marketing campaigns and proactive customer service. Like email, it is unlikely to be the channel of choice for customers with complex requests, but will be very capable of doing what it is good at: simple information provided in a timely fashion.

WEB CHAT AND WEB COLLABORATION

Web chat (or instant messaging / IM) and co-browsing are similar in that they offer a live assistance option to the process of web browsing. Like email, they have been around for a long time, but have yet to achieve the usage that had been predicted, but this is certainly changing quickly.

Web chat offers an organisation a chance to cut costs through running more than one chat session at a time with customers, using the time that a customer spends reading and replying to an agent's response to deal with other customers concurrently. Solution providers offer the option for an agent to deal with 4 or more sessions at the same time, but whether this is a sustainable model for the agent or provides an acceptable quality of service for the customer is quite another question. Agents can respond to frequently-asked questions by using 'hot-keys', which provide templatised answers and can escalate queries if required.

Web chat has often been used as a 'point of crisis' channel, for example, to convert an online shopping basket into a sale by providing timely service, or if a browser is paused on a webpage too long, perhaps as they can't find what they are looking for. In such cases, there are two main benefits to the business to provide text chat: revenue maximization, and the avoidance of unnecessary calls.

Web chat can also act as a safety net for the customer if an online self-service attempt fails. An analogy can be made with voice self-service, where a failed session is often ended with the customer 'zeroing-out' – pressing zero to get in touch with an agent. Failed web self-service sessions may end with a phone call being made, but web chat can avoid a number of these, which is a cost saving for the business, and better for the customer as well.

The customer of the future - especially the younger generation - are often accomplished Instant Messengers, and will be keen to use the web chat option with the businesses they work with. However, web chat is currently only really useful for general information and sales purposes, as users usually aren't taken through security processes, so the agent can't help with specific account queries; the same usually applying to email. Putting some form of trusted biometric device on a PC or mobile device (such as a thumbprint reader) which then assures the businesses' system of the user's identity could possibly overcome this issue. Alternatively, and more simply, there doesn't seem to be any reason why the web chat agent can't ask the standard security questions to the customer via chat, but this is rarely done today.

217

A **Virtual Agent** appears to a browsing website visitor to be a human agent, offering web chat. However, it is an automated piece of software which looks at keywords and attempts to answer the customer's request based on these, including sending relevant links, directing them to the correct part of the website or accessing the correct part of the knowledge base. If the virtual agent cannot answer the request successfully, it will seamlessly route the interaction to a live web chat agent who will take over. It is possible that the browser will not even realise that any switch has been made between automated and live agent, particularly if the web chat application is sophisticated enough to pass the context and the history to the agent.

Proactive and reactive chat: originally, web chat was reactive, relying upon the browser to initiate a conversation. Businesses then decided to go on the offensive, popping up chat boxes and encouraging customers to start conversations. Some more sophisticated customers are unfazed by this, but overly-insistent use of web chat can put some customers off entirely.

There are various levels of intelligence that can be used to support proactive chat more effectively. If the customer has logged in, it is possible to identify them, and take into account past channel preferences, purchase history and other relevant information in order to personalize the experience, (for example including details of relevant offers to that customer).

As an aside, some US contact centres report that gamers - those experienced in playing online games - are particularly suited to the fast-paced, text-oriented nature of web chat, and some businesses are actively recruiting such people to work as web chat agents. It is also worth commenting that although offshore customer contact has received a mixed press (at best), many of the negative issues surrounding offshore are not applicable to the multimedia channel, such as the possible mutual incomprehensibility of accents.

Current and future role: web chat

Web chat seems to be experiencing growth in the UK, with the proportion of interactions jumping to 2.7% in 2014. There is no reason why this growth will not continue: it works well for customers as providing an immediate response, and with multiple concurrent chat sessions per agent, it can be a lower cost channel than voice for the business to support. Solution providers report that web chat is currently being trialled by numerous businesses, often at a limited, or departmental level so they can assess the suitability of the channel for a company-wide rollout, and understand what needs to be done to ensure a success.

A strong case can be made for the future rise of web chat at the expense of email. From a customer's perspective, the near real-time response of web chat is far superior to even the best email response rates (i.e. less than one hour). This speed also means that a 2-way conversation is possible, with clarification and multiple questions being available in the same way that happens in a phone conversation (albeit more slowly). Customer identity verification is also in theory possible; although, the reality may be that some customers do not feel secure enough to divulge password or personal information online.

Web chat's perceived effectiveness is still not as great as email's, due in large part to the unfamiliarity of the new channel to many customers, rather than anything intrinsically less effective about the channel.

The increased importance of the mobile channel, especially via smartphones, means that customers will have a way to interact with agents without having to use their mobile's call minutes. We would expect a growing number of customer service mobile apps to have a web chat option included in them in order to provide live customer service in those cases where self-service has broken down.

Co-browsing (or web collaboration), which sometimes includes form-filling and page-pushing as a sub-set of functionality, is a very intensive, one-to-one channel, formerly used for high-value customers or in those cases where it is quicker and more effective for an agent to take over the reins than to talk the customer through the process. While it has been useful for certain businesses, processes and customers, it is difficult to make a case for it on a cost-saving basis alone, although it will encourage the completion rate of sales, and as such, improve profitability.

Co-browsing may be used to help customers fill out forms, or to complete online transactions, and may be done in conjunction with a concurrent telephone call. Unlike page-pushing - which is a one-way movement of information from agent to customer - and screen sharing - where the agent takes control of the customer's desktop - co-browsing is a true two-way collaboration tool. Either the agent or the customer can control the cursor or enter data into fields, and business rules can be set up so that the agent does not see or enter sensitive information.

While it is not a cheap option, cobrowsing, particularly in association with a telephone call, can be an effective way of closing a high-value sale. It is, however, currently used in very few UK organisations.

More information about the future of multichannel customer contact can be found in "The Inner Circle Guide to Multichannel", available for download, free of charge, at the ContactBabel website.

SELF-SERVICE

TELEPHONY SELF-SERVICE

Telephone self-service has been around since the 1970's, when the first IVR (interactive voice response) units became widely-used. Touchtone IVR allows customers with a touchtone phone (also known as "DTMF" – dual-tone, multiple frequency) to access and provide information in a numerical format.

There has also been growth in the use of automated speech recognition (ASR), which allows customers to speak their requirements to the system, allowing greater flexibility and functionality.

IVR – whether through touchtone or speech recognition - has four main functions:

1. to route calls to the right person or department (e.g. "Press 1 for sales, or 2 for service…") in auto-attendant mode
2. to identify who's calling via either caller-line identity (where the caller's number is recognised, and their records brought up immediately), or through inputted information, such as account number. The caller's information is then "popped" onto the screen of an agent who then understands who the customer is and what they are likely to want
3. to segment and differentiate between customers, identifying the most important in order to deliver a premium standard of service to them (e.g. minimizing time on-hold, spending longer on the phone with them, offering high-value services such as web collaboration, if required)
4. to deliver a total customer service interaction without having to use a human agent, saving the business money – around 6 self-service IVR sessions cost as much as a single person-to-person call.

To learn more about IVR as a call routing solution (i.e. options 1, 2 and 3), please see the section on 'Call-Back, Routing and Queue Management' in the 'Maximising Efficiency and Agent Optimisation' section.

This chapter considers IVR and speech recognition <u>only</u> as part of a full self-service solution, i.e. one that takes the place of an agent.

Figure 100: Advantages and disadvantages of touchtone IVR for self-service

Advantages	Disadvantages
Fantastic cost-cutter: 6 IVR calls cost around the same as a single person-to-person call (a live call is reported to cost an average of £3.75 with an IVR session costing 65p)	Can be inflexible to change IVR options, due to proprietary nature of many older IVR solutions.
Captured customer data from an IVR enables key CTI (computer-telephony integration) solutions, such as personalisation, screen popping and skills-based routing to take place	IVR menus difficult to visualise for customers, leading to stress and dissatisfaction. Users may feel "there is no end in sight" and become frustrated. Use of visual IVR or automated speech recognition can alleviate this
Frees agents from boring and repetitive work, reducing staff attrition and improving morale	Long-winded menus annoy customers, where shorter ones can reduce the options available, and thus, the functionality
Allows agents to spend more time doing high value-add work, like cross- and up-selling, and complex customer care and loyalty work	General negative perception of IVR: it is seen as a low-cost option aimed at helping the business, not the customer. Overuse of IVR makes customers feel as though the company does not value them
High level of familiarity of touchtone IVR as it has been in wide use for a long time	Although not a specific disadvantage of touchtone IVR, contact centres may measure the customer queue time only once IVR has been passed through, whereas the reality for the customer is that the IVR session is part of the experience
Reduces queue times and call abandonment rates, improving customer satisfaction for those needing live agent help	Expensive, proprietary hardware has kept businesses locked into existing suppliers in the past, although VoiceXML and cloud-based solutions alleviate this

221

infinity ccs
contact centre solutions

Desktop • Workflow • Knowledge • Self-Service • Telephony

Helping you have better conversations

Here's a paradox:

Using phone and web self-service can actually improve the quality of your customer relationships while allowing you to reduce costs.

To find out why, and how to:

- Meet customers' new expectations,

- While massively reducing call volumes and AHT,

- And improving NPS and Customer Satisfaction ...

Go to **www.infinityccs.com/dmg**

... while reducing cost to serve

+44 (0)121 450 7830   info@infinityccs.com   www.infinityccs.com/dmg

THE USE OF TELEPHONY SELF-SERVICE

This section looks in depth at how contact centres are using DTMF IVR and speech recognition to provide automated self-service solutions for their customers, such as paying bills, checking balances, checking-in, buying tickets and other end-to-end automated processes. It does **not** cover the use of IVR and speech recognition as a front-end, for example, collecting customer details for security or routing purposes, which are applications studied in the 'Maximising Efficiency and Agent Optimisation' chapter.

Self-service is found across most industries - there is often at least one function that self-service is suitable for, regardless of what a company actually does - but some sectors use it far more than others. Many businesses are finding that web self-service is more popular with their customers, especially with the uptake of smartphones which can provide customer service apps and allow web browsing on the move. Findings later in this report show that there is still a lot of interest in implementing and upgrading voice-based self-service solutions, as well as implementing web-based and mobile self-service options as well.

Figure 101: Some functions for self-service, by vertical market

Self-service activity	Typical sector offering this form of self-service
Problem reporting and resolution	IT helpdesk
Check balance information	Banking
Product information	Retail
Online registration	Any
Order entry	Retail, travel
Balance enquiry	Banking, credit cards
Meter reading	Utilities
Dealer or store location enquiries	Car sales, retail
Ticket booking	Cinemas, other entertainment
Real-time punctuality checks	Airlines, trains
Status checks, delivery information	Retail (esp. online), IT helpdesk
Bill payments	Subscription services, utilities
Form filling	Any
Brochure request	Travel, retail, estate agent
Password reset	Finance, IT

Although self-service is in widespread use, there are specific sector and business types where it can excel in reducing cost and increasing service levels. At a generic level, self-service can be seen as a function of the complexity and volume of interactions.

Self-service usage

	Simple	Complex
High	**Very high** - balance enquiries - ticket booking - utilities meter reading	**Medium** May use speech recognition - form-filling - stock purchase
Low	**Medium** May use hosted solution - FAQs - low security interactions	**Low** Cost of system purchase and update may be prohibitive compared to using live agents

Volume of interactions (vertical axis)

Interaction complexity (horizontal axis)

The main element for calculating return on investment on self-service has traditionally been cost reduction, due to call avoidance. Even today, with the increasing sophistication and functionality available, this cost reduction is still perhaps the most closely-considered metric for calculating return on investment, especially for those of a more traditional mindset.

The kind of cost savings to be made from reducing live call volumes alone cannot be underestimated – using the storm platform available from Infinity CCS one of the UK's largest local authorities, which receives more than 36,000 enquiries per month, reduced the number of calls requiring agent assistance by 58% and saved over £400,000 a year; while a 'big six' energy provider automates the 75% of enquiries it receives that are routine in nature, and also uses automated SMS to push information to customers. Providing self-service options not only reduces costs for the company, it also delivers additional value to customers as it enables them to access information and services more quickly and in a manner of their own choosing. This rare coming-together of business and consumer preferences means that – at least in this case – you do not have to compromise on quality to reduce costs to serve.

224

However, the reduction or avoidance in live agent support costs is only one part of self-service that has a potential benefit to the business. Perhaps the focus upon live call avoidance is due to it being relatively easy to predict and measure the quantitative effect that self-service has on live channels. Businesses should also be aware that self-service now offers strong and growing opportunities for increasing revenue as well. By identifying a customer within a self-service process, and by personalising and contextualising offers that they may be interested in based upon their profile, history and what they are searching for now, businesses stand a very good chance of improving their cross-selling and up-selling rate accordingly. There are also wider and longer-term benefits to be had by understanding more about the customer mindset.

The utilities sector has always been a leader in voice self-service technology, with automated meter readings, balances and payments having been used for many years, with the finance sector also using self-service for balance-checking especially. While most utilities respondents offer a telephony self-service channel, they have also made significant investments in web-based self-service, and the relatively low proportion of self-service phone calls handled (10%) shows that many customers are choosing online servicing ahead of telephony self-service for simple tasks.

Overall, 34% of respondents offer a full self-service option through a voice channel, compared to last year's figure of 28%, although of course many more offer IVR for routing and CTI purposes, as well as a widespread and growing use of web and mobile self-service. It is interesting to note that while the proportion of **respondents** offering telephony self-service has increased, the actual proportion of **calls** handled through this channel has declined significantly, from 22% in 2013 to 13% in 2014. This can be seen as further evidence for the hypothesis that web self-service is increasingly being used to handle simple requests.

Figure 102: Overall proportion of calls handled entire through self-service (only in respondents which offer telephony self-service)

Vertical market	Proportion of contact centre respondents offering a full self-service option	Overall proportion of calls handled entirely through self-service if offered
Utilities	83%	10%
Housing	54%	6%
Finance	44%	14%
Public Sector	44%	10%
TMT	43%	29%
Outsourcing	33%	11%
Retail & Distribution	33%	16%
Transport & Travel	29%	3%
Insurance	25%	2%
Services	16%	16%
Manufacturing	0%	n/a
Average	**34%**	**13%**

NB: proportion of calls handled through self-service refers only to the 34% of respondents offering a full self-service option. A full-industry view of how self-service telephony fits into the inbound picture, including non-users, can be seen in the Multimedia chapter.

On average, 20% of voice self-service is handled through automated speech recognition this year, rather than touchtone IVR, a figure which has increased on last year's figure of 17%, and this will be tracked in future years to see if a trend is emerging.

Figure 103: Proportion of self-service calls handled through touchtone IVR or automated speech recognition, by vertical market

Vertical market	Proportion of self-service calls handled by touchtone IVR	Proportion of self-service calls handled by automated speech recognition
Finance	100%	0%
Housing	83%	17%
Insurance	100%	0%
Outsourcing	78%	22%
Public Sector	55%	45%
Retail & Distribution	49%	51%
Services	93%	8%
TMT	68%	32%
Transport & Travel	100%	0%
Utilities	80%	20%
Average	**80%**	**20%**

THE SUCCESS OF TELEPHONY SELF-SERVICE

When considering telephony based self-service, customers need to be persuaded to use IVR, and businesses can measure success in two ways: through the "play" rate (what proportion of customers try to use IVR), and the "completion" rate (how many can successfully interact with the company without having to involve a human agent by "zeroing-out"). Customers need to be motivated to use IVR (i.e. there's something in it for them), and businesses need to design, maintain and promote the self-service application to get them to keep using it.

Simply making IVR self-service available without too much thought or effort will result in perhaps fewer than 20% of appropriate calls being completed without human interaction. Designing the IVR self-service experience with customers' needs in mind, marketing it as an aid for customers, rewarding the customer for using it and tuning the application to make it even better can mean up to 90% of relevant calls are dealt with automatically: a massive cost saving, an improvement in the customer service experience and a boost for the company's reputation with its customers.

It's no use trying to shift every customer service interaction onto IVR self-service, as if customers don't want to use IVR, they will "zero-out" (press 0 for a live agent) straightaway. And if businesses don't offer a live agent option to an irate and frustrated caller, they won't need to worry about providing customer service to them at all in the future. It is worth reiterating that if callers agree to try a company's self-service system rather than insisting upon talking to an agent, there is an implied contract that if the self-service session is unsuitable, the caller should be allowed to speak with an agent. Few things can frustrate callers more than being hectored into using an unhelpful and irrelevant self-service system.

Figure 104: Proportion of self-service sessions 'zeroed-out' to an agent, by contact centre size

228
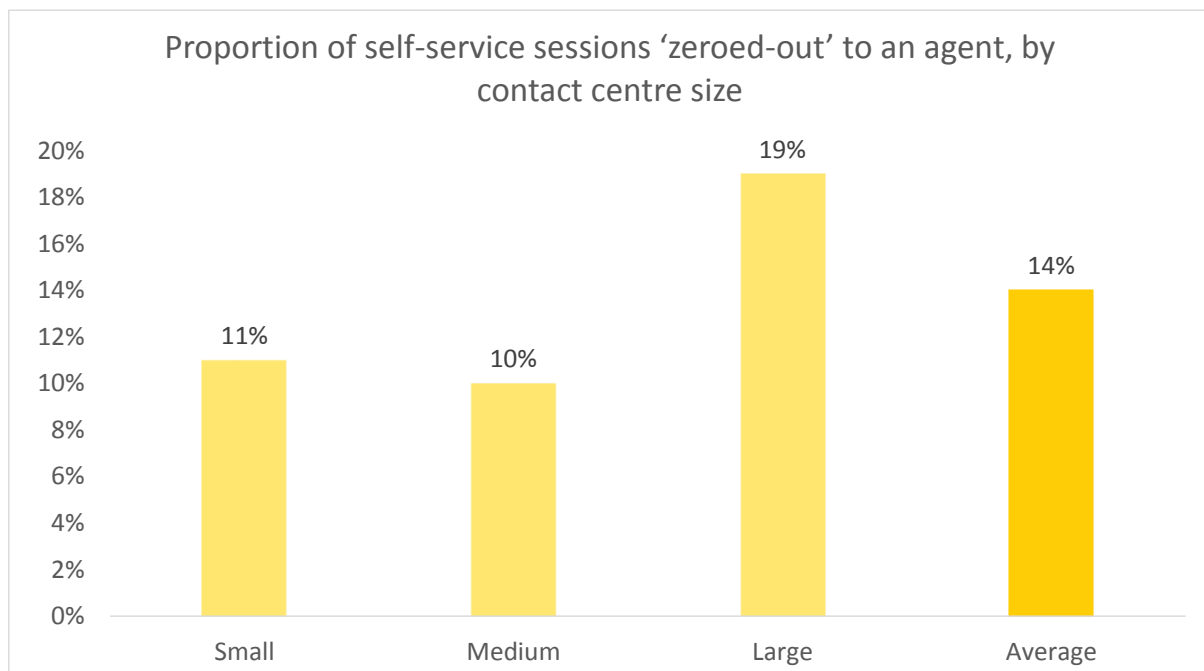
Overall, a mean average of 14% of calls that go into the self-service option are "zeroed-out": instances where the customer decides that they in fact wish to speak with an operator, which is up very slightly on last year's 13%. (NB, 1st quartile performance for 'zeroing-out' is 1%, the median is 10% and the 3rd quartile is 25%, which indicates that there are a relatively small number of contact centres where self-service failure rates are high, which this year's data indicate are more likely to be in the public sector, finance, and utilities sectors).

There is a very noticeable historic and current positive correlation between the size of the contact centre and the proportion of self-service sessions that are abandoned in favour of speaking to an agent: the larger the contact centre, the more often customers 'zero out'. One possible reason for this might be that larger operations are trying to do too much with their self-service. There is some circumstantial evidence to suggest that this is the case, as it is very noticeable that respondents from larger organisations usually have far more options in the auto-attendant functionality of their IVR solution, and this tendency to offer a great deal of functionality may also apply to IVR's self-service functionality as well.

Due to the potential additional flexibility and functionality offered by automated speech recognition over touchtone IVR, we would expect the zeroing-out rate (which can be viewed as connected to customers' rejection of the self-service option) to be lower for speech recognition than touchtone IVR. However, once again this year, the opposite is the case:

- In contact centres where the majority of self-service is offered through speech recognition, the mean zero-out rate is 17.2%.
- In contact centres where the majority of self-service is offered through touchtone IVR, the mean zero-out rate is 11.5%.

Without interviewing these respondents in more depth, there is no certainty as to why this is happening. It is possible that customers are simply more used to touchtone IVR; that speech recognition often offers an option to speak to an agent early in the script (which is taken as the easy way out); or that customers do not know what to say to an automated system to make it work, so look to speak with a live agent. That customers may actually prefer a closed group of options is an interesting conundrum, and one which deserves more attention from the industry.

Cost differentials in self-service and live voice support

- The average cost of a live telephone call varies considerably, but has a mean average of £3.75.
- Respondents state that the average cost of a telephony self-service session is 65p.

FROM TOUCHTONE IVR TO AUTOMATED SPEECH RECOGNITION

In 2013, respondents were asked to give their views on some of the issues that impact the future uptake of automated interactions.

The following diagram shows the net scores based on how respondents considered the importance of various inhibitors to upgrading from touchtone IVR to automated speech recognition. If a respondent strongly agrees that an inhibitor is important, it will score 2; if they agree, but not strongly, a score of 1 is given. Conversely, if a respondent strongly disagrees that this inhibitor is stopping them upgrading to automated speech recognition, a score of -2 is given; if they merely disagree, a score of -1. Neutral opinions score zero. The figures next to the bar refer to the net score, with the highest figures being the strongest inhibitors.

Figure 105: Inhibitors of movement from touchtone IVR to automated speech recognition
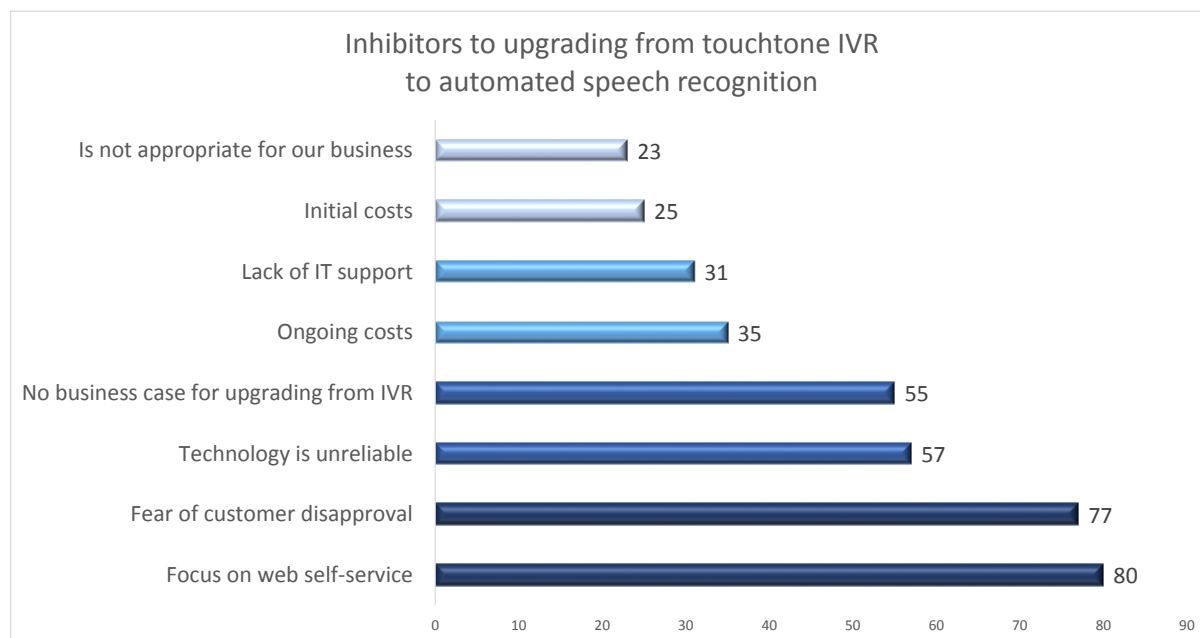
Historically, the main issue that held back speech-enabled self-service was that their business wasn't really suited to automation and that their customers would not like it. While fear of customer disapproval is still a strong inhibitor to moving towards speech recognition, the most important inhibitor is that businesses now feel that they should focus upon web-based self-service, rather than looking to move from touchtone IVR to speech recognition, and the next section looks at this functionality in some depth.

230

WEB SELF-SERVICE

For businesses, by far the major advantage to having customers use web self-service is the fact that the cost per support session is estimated to be between 40 and 100 times cheaper than a live call to an agent.

There are numerous high-quality market research findings available on the importance of web self-service to the overall customer experience: the sheer breadth and volume of them is such that it is indisputable that web self-service is one of the most powerful and important technologies that a business can support. In one example, it was stated that 58% of calls to the contact centre result from bad website service or a failure in another channel. Quite apart from the current importance of this application, research shows that as customers become more educated and experience many different qualities of online self-service, their expectations increase across the board which puts pressure on other organisations to keep up or even exceed the current benchmark performance.

Put basically, most customers will visit a website first; if they cannot find what they're looking for immediately they will try self-service; if the self-service experience does not give them what they want immediately and accurately, they will either call the business or go elsewhere. In cases where the customer is tied into an existing business, this will result (merely) in a higher cost of service and decreased customer satisfaction. In cases where the web visitor is only a potential customer, a failure in the self-service process on a website will mean the almost-certain loss of a sale.

In terms of pure self-service, the website can provide various options for the customer, ranging from the most basic search and static FAQ functionality, to personalised virtual agents and dynamic FAQs.

SEARCH

Since corporate websites first came into being, businesses have offered search tools for customers to look through indexed information, based on keywords found in these documents, in order to answer their questions without the need to call the business. While such functionality has the advantage of at least being familiar, indices grow, documents get old and out-of-date, and customers become educated that there are more sophisticated and effective self-service solutions available, with customers' opinions of standard search functionality suffering as a result.

With only a blank text entry box to guide them, the onus to search successfully is with the customer, who has to try to 'get into the mind of the business' and phrase the question or search terms in a way that fits the business and its internal jargon. However, this is not always possible, and customers have a limit to the maximum number of times that they will attempt to search, or how many pages they will read from the numerous documents that a wide keyword search can bring back, claiming that it has answered the query. The customer then has two possibilities: to engage the business through a high cost channel such as telephony or email, or worse, to find an alternative supplier that can help them without going through this high effort process.

Search functionality does have its place: for example, if a customer wanted to find out very specific information about a product that had an unambiguous name (for example, 'SDK36479 installation'), a search on this particular term would at least bring back documents that had a high level of

relevance to this product and how to set it up. However, if the customer had a query that used keywords that were very popular and widely found elsewhere (for example, "What are your delivery times?"), typical search functionality might return every document that contains the word 'delivery', relying upon the customer's patience and goodwill to find the correct answer for themselves. In the case of very large companies, this could bring back potentially hundreds or thousands of documents, many of which could be out-of-date and have been superseded. The major problem with search functionality is that it pays close attention to the answers, but very little to understanding the question or the customer's thought processes.

It is one thing to be presented with a long list of documents while sitting in front of a large screen of a PC, where scrolling up and down the page is not an issue. For the same flawed search functionality to be placed onto a mobile website, expecting the user to zoom in and out, scrolling up and down, and then to potentially scan through numerous documents whose text is too small to read properly is probably a step too far even for the most enthusiastic and loyal of customers.

Brands can shave as much as 98% off the cost of a support interaction by enabling customers to use self-serve on the company website, but to deliver those kinds of savings the information the customer requires must be easily accessible. If customers have difficulty finding the information they need, either because they're not expert searchers or because the information is scattered across too many corporate repositories, or if information on the web is missing, inaccurate or outdated – or worse, inconsistent across channels – this leads to a frustrating customer experience and eventually a loss of trust. Modern web self-service platforms, like that provided by Infinity CCS, use machine learning algorithms to understand customer inputs in context in order to determine – or even predict – their real intent and deliver accurate responses, and can also take advantage of the interactive nature of the web to guide customers with intelligent self-help wizards that offer concierge-level assistance with step-by-step guidance for fast, do-it-yourself troubleshooting.

FAQS

FAQs - frequently asked questions - are one of the most popular forms of Web self-service. At its simplest, an FAQ list can simply be a group of static documents and/or text, categorised under wider thematic headings, and kept up-to-date manually. Solution providers state that perhaps 80% of questions can be answered by 20% of documents, however for most businesses, customer requirements change on an ongoing basis so it is unlikely to be the same 20% of documents that are most useful as time progresses.

More complex applications can use techniques such as text mining and fuzzy search (approximate string matching) to return documents that are not just an exact or very close match to the search terms entered by the user. Sophisticated FAQ technology will leverage natural language processing to deliver more accuracy than standard search functionality.

It is possible to minimise the use of manual updates and supervision by making the FAQ list more dynamic and self-learning through using responses taken from emails to customers who have asked specific questions, which will then dynamically enter the FAQ list at an appropriately high level. Being able to restructure the knowledge base on a regular and ongoing basis through automation is key to maintaining the usefulness and relevance of the FAQs. Unlike the virtual agent (below), FAQs by their nature provide the user with a list of alternatives, asking them to judge and choose the correct most relevant answer for themselves. While this process takes longer for the customer than the provision of a single answer, it is currently more closely aligned with the typical user experience, and thus has the advantage of familiarity.

Providers of FAQ technology report that the typical reduction seen by customers in inbound live contact (such as email or telephony) is in the region of 25%.

VIRTUAL AGENTS

Virtual agents, otherwise known as virtual assistants, are software applications that engage customers in conversations in order to provide them with an answer to their queries. They may be personalised to reflect the company's branding, and often act as the first point of contact between the website visitor and the business.

Most virtual agents encourage the visitor to engage with them using natural language, rather than keywords. The virtual agent will parse, analyse and search for the answer which is deemed to be most suitable, returning this to the customer instantly. Many virtual agent applications will allow customers to give all sorts of information in any order, and will either work with what it has been given, or ask the user for more detail about what they actually meant. It is probable that customers, having been unconsciously trained over the years to provide their queries in a way which standard search functionality is more likely to be able to handle (for example, a couple of quite specific keywords), will have to be encouraged and educated to use natural language queries in order for virtual agents to be able to deliver to their potential.

The virtual agent application is quite different from standard search functionality. It may be able to ignore bad punctuation or grammar, and certainly be able to use longer phrases rather than just searching on keywords. More sophisticated applications attempt to look for the actual intent behind the customer's question, trying to deliver a single correct answer (or at least a relatively small number of possible answers), rather than a list of dozens of potential answers contained in documents which may happen to contain some of the keywords that the customer has used. The virtual agent application may also try to exceed its brief by providing a list of related questions and answers to the original question, as it is well known that one question can lead to another. Solution providers and users train the system to pattern-match the right words or association of words with the correct result: the application, unlike older forms of web search techniques, does not simply guess what the customer wants, or how they will express themselves. It listens to what the customers actually say - perhaps through a mixture of large quantities of audio and text - which enables the initial set-up configuration to achieve a good accuracy rate, but which can really benefit over time as a positive feedback loop is established. Solutions that can gather and differentiate customer requests and results from multiple channels, noting the difference between them, have an even better success rate.

Virtual agent functionality 'understands' the context of what the customer is asking. Although of course it is still just a piece of software, the result will be much more akin to that of an empathetic human who also has had access to what the customer has been trying to do previously. For example, if a customer asks "When can I expect my delivery?", the context and the required answer could be different depending on whether the customer has placed an order already and is enquiring about its status, or has an as-yet hypothetical interest in turnaround times in case they decide to place an order.

When the virtual agent application has low confidence that it has returned the correct result, it is able to escalate the customers query seamlessly to a live chat agent, who then has access to the self-service session history, enabling a greater chance of a successful resolution without repetition. (It is generally considered best practice that escalations to real agents are not hidden from customers). The eventual correct response can be fed back to the automated virtual agent (and the knowledge base underlying it), which will make it more likely that future similar requests can be handled successfully through automated agents.

Some solutions offer chat agents the opportunity to see what the customer is typing in real time, and enabling the agent to get a head start, while at the same time linking to the contact centre knowledge base in order to provide a list of most likely answers, which will increase the accuracy of response and decrease the overall time to serve.

Solution providers indicate that virtual agent functionality is of interest to most sectors, however they point out that the commercial reasoning and business drivers differ greatly. Banks have an appreciation that they need to understand their customers to keep them loyal in a highly commoditised and competitive environment, and as such there is considerable interest in using virtual agent functionality within Voice of the Customer initiatives. For example, using real-time analytics, such organisations can learn that customers are talking about a specific issue, which can feed into wider commercial decisions in business areas unconnected to customer service. On the other hand, the utility sector in some countries is regulated and has a geographical area of customers which is the same, meaning the level of competition varies widely by country. As such, this sector can be heavily focused on cost reduction, and business cases will focus on contact avoidance, which is different from the online retailer, who wants to cross-sell and reduce their shopping cart abandonment rates.

Figure 106: If customers are offered web self-service, what options are available to them?

Chart: If customers are offered web self-service, what options are available to them?
- Free-text search of document library: 33%
- Selection of FAQs: 73%
- Virtual agent (automated chat session): 6%
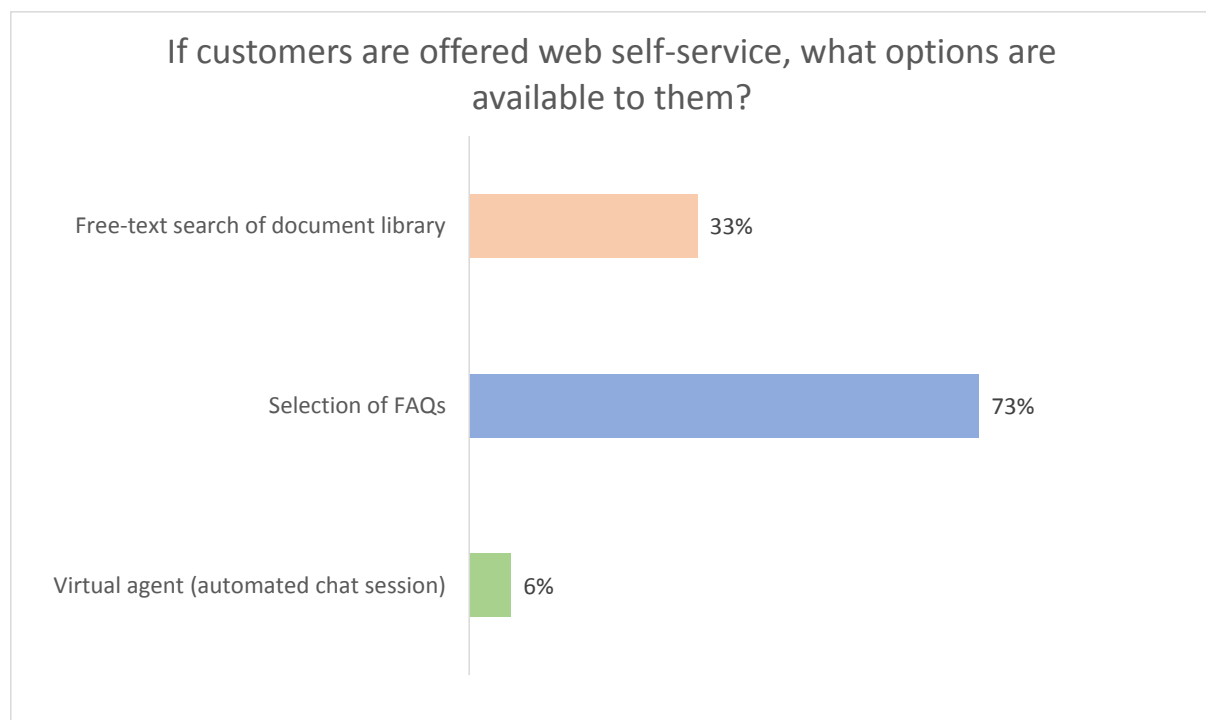
Perhaps unsurprisingly, offering a selection of frequently asked questions is by far the most popular knowledge source offered to customers, with around one third of respondents offering customers a chance to get lucky by using search functionality. Very few respondents use virtual agent functionality, which is unsurprising given the relatively low penetration rate of a live web chat in the industry as a whole. However, this channel offers great growth potential in the future.

The success of the self-service application should not simply be measured on whether the customer feels that they have been provided with the right information. Opportunities exist outside the immediate self-service session to improve the customer experience and to improve the self-service process in the future.

In the event that the customer does not have the requirement entirely fulfilled by self-service, 16% of respondents state that they pass on the details of the self-service session to the relevant agent. In reality, this may just be something as simple as passing over the customer's name rather than anything more sophisticated or useful.

26% of respondents state that they analyse the search terms used by the customer and the success rates of the query in order to optimise and fine-tune the self-service tool.

- Many customers are willing to experiment with new ways of contacting the company and trying to get answers to their queries with less effort. It is stated as a truism that contact centres are successful because people like talking to people. Our own view is somewhat different: contact centres are successful because they have proven over a long period of time that they are the most efficient, effective and confidence-inspiring way for customers to do what they need to do. There is nothing intrinsically more valuable about the voice channel the, but the familiarity and confidence that customers have developed through using the voice channel must be matched or exceeded by the online variant. Consequently, businesses must offer customers an easy and effective way to escalate self-service issue to live contact, preferably keeping knowledge of the customer's history, profile, previous requests and any customer inputs that have already been made so that customer effort is minimised

- Before detailed web self-service developments are made, efforts must be made to understand the requirements of the typical customer, including the nature of the information that they will request, the devices from which they most often search for information and the relative technical sophistication of the user

- Businesses can encourage customers to use self-service through providing them with better service levels in cases where escalation is required. While this sounds like a good application of carrot and stick theory, it does run the risk of alienating those customers who for reasons of their own simply want to speak to an agent without going through a self-service option first

- There is not simply the binary decision to be made: self-service or live assistance? In certain cases, it may be appropriate to use collaboration to take the customer by the hand through the website, particularly in cases where they are confused by complex product comparisons, or in the process of trying to complete a web form. The use of decision trees and case-based reasoning is appropriate for guiding the web visitor towards certain predefined goal, and having a live agent available - perhaps via the chat medium - to explain the various product features or required information within the form can be the difference between closing a sale and having the potential customer abandon the whole experience

- Although the underlying knowledge base is the same regardless of whether it is the agent or the customer who is accessing it, different users will find different access methods work best for them. For example, a business might want to ask an agent one or two very quick questions while they are on the call in order to focus with a high level of confidence in getting exactly the right answer available within a couple of seconds. However, this rather brusque, "expert" approach may well not be suitable for a novice customer, who may prefer to use natural language with a virtual agent, or to use a more guided and structured question-and-answer approach

- While there are certainly benefits for businesses to publish information about themselves (such as typical delivery times, the processes for purchasing particular goods or services, or store locations), customers will also want access to their own personal, account-based information such as order status, invoicing or current tariff. While this does require access to back-office systems, the level of integration required to extract such information is far less than that required to give the customer the ability to alter their records, i.e. having to provide 'write access' to the underlying databases

- A well-designed and pleasant user interface can make the self-service experience a positive benefit for the customer, quite apart from the increased likelihood of getting a query answered accurately in a short space of time. Companies should give consideration to what value-added activities they can provide at the point of self-service that they could not do in a live channel. For example, accessing customer reviews; having video clips of models wearing clothes that they are considering buying; and providing relevant offers via cross-selling and up-selling

- It is of vital importance to include customer feedback loops within any web self-service application. Only in this way will businesses understand fully which content (and indeed, content providers) are most highly valued, and where any gaps in the knowledge base exist

- The success of self-service applications should not be judged entirely on the reduction in the volume of calls or emails received by the business after self-service has been implemented. A prospect or customer that has been thoroughly alienated by unsympathetic and ineffective self-service implementations will also demonstrate a low propensity to call the contact centre: because they have gone elsewhere. Sophisticated self-service solutions offer businesses an outstanding opportunity to analyse their customers' behaviour, and to ask and understand what customers are most concerned about, reacting dynamically to the market requirements and fine-tuning offers and information to make the customer experience even better

- While the headline cost figures for a web self-service or telephony self-service session are much lower than any live channel, customers must bear in mind that shifting customers away from one-to-one contact with an employee is a double-edged sword. Once the emotional investment that the customer has with the company is lessened, they are far more likely to lose loyalty and to look elsewhere for the best deal. Companies must resist the temptation to force customers to use self-service exclusively, particularly in cases where they have spent many years building up personal emotional investment capital with the customer. Self-service is part of the customer contact jigsaw: it is not the full picture.

VISUAL IVR AND IVVR: WHERE WEB AND TELEPHONY SELF-SERVICE MEET

The audio-only nature of DTMF IVR places limitations upon how user-friendly the experience can be for a customer. There has always been a trade-off required between functionality and usability, which manifests itself in the number of menu options and levels that made available within the IVR system.

The rapid growth in smartphones has meant that it is now possible to offer a visual representation of IVR menus on a device which will then be used to call the business. Because it is far quicker to read text than to listen to text being spoken - some studies show that a caller can navigate a visual IVR menu between four and five times quicker than a DTMF IVR menu - the customer experience is improved without sacrificing any functionality or options. Furthermore, visual IVR can be used to send video presentations while waiting for an agent, for educational or marketing purposes, or to answer the self-service requirement (for example, pushing the relevant YouTube clip in order to show the caller how to do something).

Many businesses that use DTMF IVR have made long-term investments in this technology, and retiring the system entirely is not desirable. Giving existing IVR functionality a visual interface simply means that the IVR's path can be shown as a picture on a website or smartphone, with callers touching the selection that they require without having to listen to all of the options or to go up and down levels or branches. This has the dual benefit for the customer of being far quicker than listening to IVR menu options, and of being significantly more likely to get them the correct information or to be routed to the department most appropriate to their needs. Visual IVR menu systems integrate with existing DTMF structures and reuse the same VoiceXML scripts, meaning that any changes made to the existing DTMF IVR system will be automatically replicated regardless of channel or device.

Visual IVR offers companies the ability to develop value-added applications for their customers, rather than simply providing a visual representation of existing IVR menus. For example, in cases where very specific expertise is required, visual IVR can be used to help the caller self-diagnose where in the organisation they need to be going, rather than having to speak to a front-line agent who will then have to ask them the same questions in order to route the call to the appropriate resource.

It is worth noting that despite the huge uptake in smartphones and mobile apps, it is very unlikely that customers will find it convenient to have an app for every company with which they deal. Like apps, a visual IVR option provides businesses with a opportunity to display corporate branding and deliver an improved customer interaction experience.

As visual IVR is quite a new and innovative technology, it has a correspondingly low penetration rate of only 4%. Segmenting this by contact centre size band, 2% of respondents in smaller operations currently use visual IVR, 4% in mid-size and 8% in large contact centres.

Figure 107: Visual IVR: benefits for businesses and customers

Business	Customer
Cost reduction through improved call avoidance and more accurate routing, improving first contact resolution and decreasing call transfer rates	Greater granularity of routing, and improved functionality means that callers are more likely to arrive at the place where they need to be. Consistent functionality shared across IVR channels and customer devices means that customer engagement and confidence in using the system will be improved
Leveraged existing IVR investments, without having to rip and replace	Significant decrease in customer effort to access self-service or call routing capabilities
Reusability of existing scripts lowers development costs	If the agent has contextual information, there is less likelihood of the caller having to repeat information
Contextual information gathered within the visual IVR session can be popped to agents, giving an improved understanding of the customer's journey, reducing agent handle time and customer frustration	As more customers are finding the correct information without having to call the contact centre, this means lower wait times for the customer base in general

Building a business case for visual IVR may involve looking at the zero-out rate for a specific industry compared to your own statistics, considering the call transfer rate, and by listening to the voice of the customer via call recording or speech analytics as they comment upon their IVR experience. Carrying out a specific IVR customer experience survey is also a good way of gaining accurate insight into what might turn out to be a significantly negative experience for some of your customer base.

CONTACTBABEL

Further reading: "The Inner Circle Guide to Self-Service" (ContactBabel) - the definitive analyst study of how intelligent automated service - via IVR, speech, virtual agents, mobile and social channels - fits into the customer contact mix.

Download: http://www.contactbabel.com/reports.cfm (requires registration)

How to reduce costs and improve quality with self-service

The major cost of providing customer service is still human resources. So if we're looking at cutting costs, what we're really interested in is reducing **Total Traffic Time (TTT)** for voice calls handled by agents. **TTT** is determined by the average length of calls and by the overall volume of calls. Targeting agents to reduce Average Handling Time (AHT) might achieve some cost-cutting goals, but it will almost undoubtedly do so at the expense of quality of service. So, what else can we do?

Reducing the overall volume of calls handled by live agents not only reduces TTT and therefore costs, but can actually improve quality of service. Why? Because it aligns with customers' new preferences. Their willingness to use telephone and web self-service is that rarest of things; a confluence of both business and consumer preferences. It allows us to cut costs and improve quality at the same time. These are the implications for your business:

- You must provide telephone and web self-service, and integrate these with the contact centre and back office for consistency and to allow customers to move seamlessly between channels.
- Your most important KPI for reducing contact centre costs is not AHT but **Total Traffic Time (TTT)** for live agent interactions.
- If simple queries are automated then live agents will only have to deal with more complex or emotional interactions, so AHT might actually increase – which is OK as the overall reduction in live agent calls more than compensates.

WEB SELF-SERVICE

Web self-service platforms, such as those provided by Infinity CCS, have been shown to reduce call volumes by as much as 20% and can reduce the cost of a support interaction by 98%. These use machine learning technology to determine a customer's real intent by relating concepts and recognising the meaning of words in context. This means that a customer is able to interrogate your Knowledge Base in a much more natural way.

Using it, one company was able to answer 97% of web self-service queries accurately, and on average companies switching to the platform manage to double their online resolution rates. The platform can also be integrated into your agents' desktop environment, providing them with context-sensitive Knowledge to help improve service and reduce AHT.

TELEPHONE SELF-SERVICE

Self-service using IVR and speech recognition can help automate up to 90% of voice interactions, and deliver cost savings of hundreds of thousands per year. The **storm** platform provided by Infinity CCS is capable of handling huge volumes of calls to shield the contact centre from repetitive, routine or emergency-related enquiries. Several of the 'big six' energy companies use **storm's** IVR and SMS facilities in this way to automate requests for information about power outages.

When integrated with your Knowledge Base, **storm** is able to use speech recognition to allow customers to naturally search for information. And when integrated with your back office systems it can even process complex orders with no need for human intervention. One large retailer, for example, was able to automate 90% of its order enquiries.

INTEGRATING EVERYTHING TO MEET CUSTOMER NEEDS

To deliver on the promise of self-service you need to provide customers with consistent information across all channels (web, IVR, chat, etc.) and integrate all these channels with each other and with your back office systems. Infinity CCS – which also provides unified desktop technology, CTI and telephony solutions – is able to ensure all your systems are connected, enabling you to present the customer with a single unified interface through which to interact with you.

The result of providing self-service channels and ensuring they are properly integrated is that you are able to handle each type of interaction by the most appropriate and cost-effective method, while still giving customers enough choice to meet their personal preferences. This is the key to reducing **Total Traffic Time (TTT)** and therefore gaining the cost reductions you seek while actually improving the quality of your service and meeting customers' new expectations.

For a demo or consultation, call **+44 (0)121 450 7830** or visit **www.infinityccs.com/dmg**

VIPAS - THE FUTURE OF SELF-SERVICE?

Businesses' interactions with the customers of the future will be a highly-polarised mixture of the automated and the personalised.

Moving a large proportion of interactions onto self-service will work for businesses, and having a VIPA (see below) or other third-party seek out the best deals on offer will appeal to many customers. This leads to the conclusion that many customer-agent interactions will be exceptional, such as a complaint, an urgent or complex issue or a technical query that an FAQ or customer community couldn't solve. It is also likely that whole segments of the customer base who don't want automation will be handled directly by live agents in many cases.

The VIPA is something which isn't yet widely available, but which is inexorably on its way, being driven by improvements in technology and the desire of the customer of the future to get the best deal with the least effort. Perhaps the most widely-used (albeit very basic) version of the VIPA is the iPhone's "Siri", which provides basic web search functionality based on speech recognition. It is still a very long way from being a VIPA.

'VIRTUAL INTELLIGENT PERSONAL ASSISTANTS'

Most self-service scenarios suggest a world in which customers speak directly to 'intelligent' systems. The world of the 'virtual intelligent personal assistant' (VIPA) - turns this idea on its head, postulating an e2e world where the customer delegates many business interactions to a pseudo-intelligent device.

Storing information on a VIPA device - such as personal preferences, financial details and individuals' physical profiles - is the first step, and one which is possible to do today. Customers of the future will then instruct the device to research the best deals for products and services, and to come back to the device's owner with the best selection. The VIPA would 'call' the relevant contact centre (which would in fact be either a number of back-office company systems or possibly a live agent in some cases) and could even purchase the best deal without having to involve the owner in any way.

VIPAs may be used in association with knowbots and smart assistants (also called intelligent agents), which roam the web for answers to questions or situations, and could act as a third-party broker between the customer and a business. Price comparison sites act today as a type of first-generation smart assistant, but are entirely reliant on accurate and complete data inputs being provided by suppliers and the site's owners.

If VIPA technology could be relied upon to work, and standards of interoperability between VIPA and businesses were implemented, then this immediate and extensive market knowledge could create a 'perfect market' for commoditised products and services, with major impacts on existing businesses.

Whether you choose to deploy telephone or web self-service – ideally both – delivering the cost savings and service improvements you require means ensuring consistency of information and functionality across all channels, which in turn means integrating your self-service solutions with each other, with the contact centre and with your back office systems. For example, maintaining one Knowledge Base of articles, FAQs and guides, and using it to power both web and telephone self-service, as well as to deliver knowledge to agents in the contact centre, ensures consistency and reduces maintenance costs; and hooking up transactional systems and customer databases to self-service enables customers to choose channels according to their preferences and perform a wider range of functions automatically, on their own. Infinity CCS – which provides unified agent desktop technology, CTI, knowledge solutions and telephony – is able to ensure all your systems and channels are connected, enabling you to present the customer with a single unified interface through which to interact with you.

243

SOCIAL MEDIA

There are a huge number of definitions for social media, but the majority highlight certain aspects and traits in common, including, but not limited to:

- interactivity between peers supported by a collection of online tools
- dialogue rather than monologue
- ubiquity
- free-to-air
- user-generated content
- person-to-person communication.

On the face of it, social media seems more about individuals communicating with each other, leaving companies out of the loop. However, many organisations have been eager to step up to the plate, setting-up Twitter, Facebook and Google+ accounts (or Quepasa, Renren, Mixi etc., depending on their geographic location), as well as YouTube channels for marketing and customer support, with corporate blogs and customer communities also widely supported.

Social media started as a way to make marketing more effective, and social media analytics has focused mainly on this area as well. Now, the reality of social media is dual: it accounts for inbound customer service as well as outbound marketing, whether the business likes it or not. There is also another duality to consider: businesses can learn through direct solicitation of customer responses, and indirectly through the social media analytics process.

The *de facto* customer service channel

The rise of social media as a customer service channel has often been *de facto,* in that customers have actively sought out the company's Facebook page or Twitter account to communicate with it, even if the company originally had a social media presence only to disseminate information. ContactBabel expects social media to remain a niche channel in terms of overall number of interactions compared to telephony, but one with potential to be strongly negative – to punch well above its weight – and many senior executives within most companies are treating the channel with a great deal of respect.

Despite the low levels of customer interactions via social media, the high-profile nature of this channel and the possible magnifying effects of negative comments means that social media is viewed as being far more important than baseline interaction statistics would suggest. There are anecdotal tales told of savvy customers who, knowing that their public complaint or issue will be dealt with quickly, prefer to go straight to a social media channel rather than wait in a telephone queue.

However, as the following diagram shows, most contact centre professionals believe that customers would usually be better off served by using the telephony or email channel to make a complaint, although 1 in 7 respondents said that using social media would get the best response. Only 7% gave the diplomatic answer that there would be no advantage to choosing one channel over another within their own organisation.

Figure 108: If you were a customer of your organisation, which channel would you choose to get the best response to a complaint?

Most effective channel at handling complaints

- No preference 7%
- Face-to-face 1%
- Letter 4%
- Web chat 5%
- Social media 14%
- Email 26%
- Telephone 43%
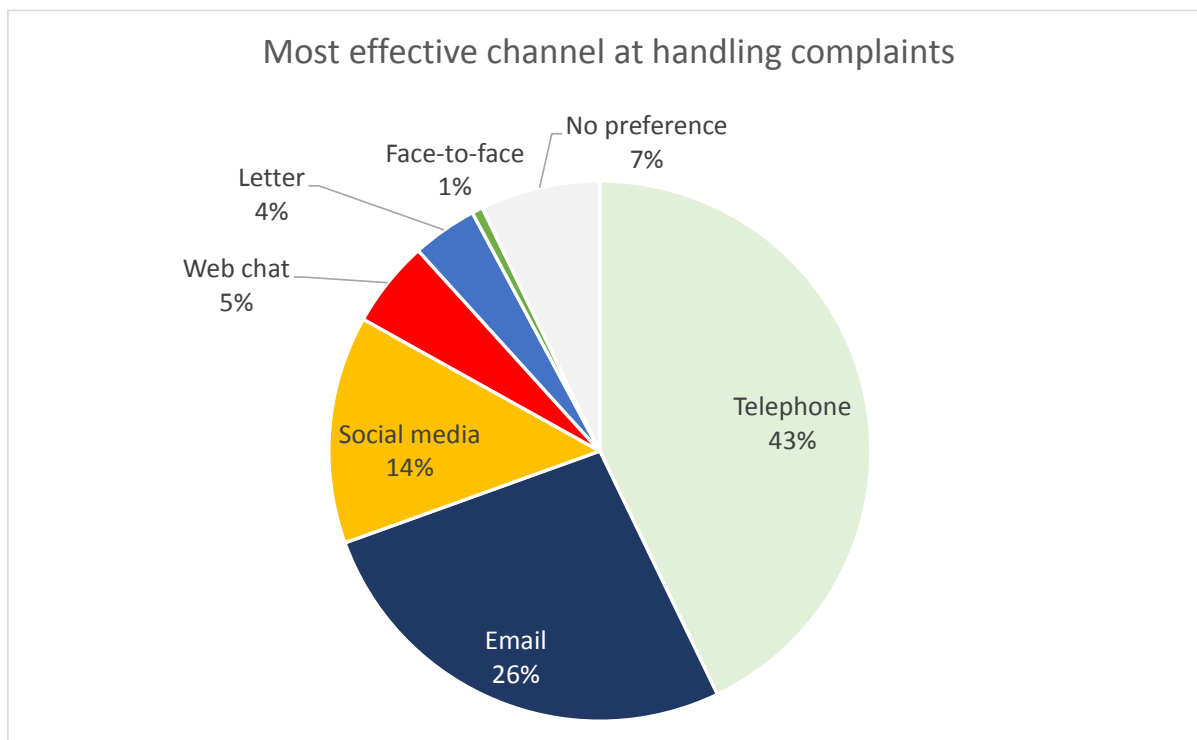
SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP

The evidence that the social media channel was originally set-up as a marketing route rather than as customer service support can be seen within this section. Despite the increasing numbers of customers choosing to use social media for customer support, 47% of respondents report that social media is handled by a team based outside the contact centre, usually marketing, PR or corporate communications. 18% reported that they have a dedicated social media team working within the contact centre, and a similar proportion handle social media as part of the multichannel/telephony team, with 14% of respondents having a dedicated multichannel team working within the contact centre location, but which does not answer telephone calls. The use of a third-party PR agency or an outsourcer to handle social media interactions is relatively rare, certainly compared to the US.

Figure 109: How is social media managed? (by vertical market)
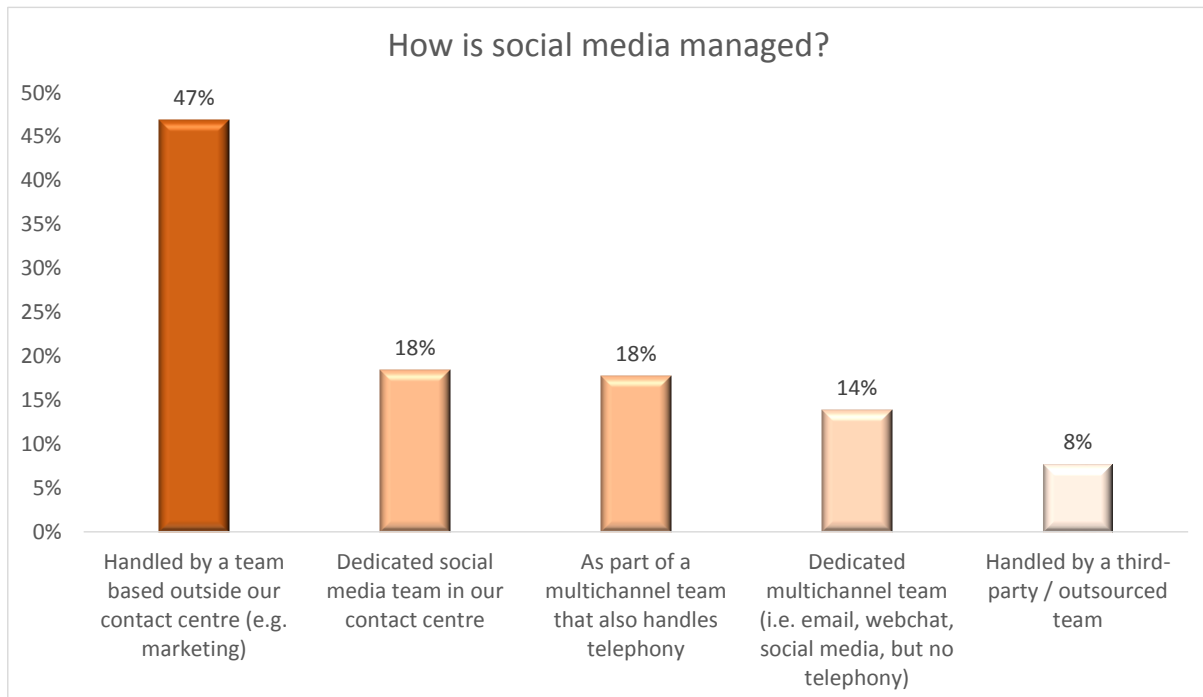
When considering the management of social media by contact centre size, larger operations are far more likely to have a dedicated social media team within the contact centre, or to have a dedicated multichannel, non-voice team. Smaller operations may well rely on a non-contact centre based team to handle their social media, although both small and medium-sized contact centres seem more likely to run a wider multichannel and voice blended team within the contact centre.

Increasingly, we would expect businesses to treat social media requests in the same way as other interaction types, using the expertise of existing agent teams. Requests via social media can be analysed (often by keyword spotting), prioritised and then routed in the same way as other interaction types to the agent team most capable of dealing with these specific enquiries. In terms of customer expectations, social media is perhaps closest to that of web chat, in that an almost instantaneous response is expected, with the attendant pressure that such a service level places upon the organisation.

The role of social media, and how it is managed, is obviously heavily influenced by who holds the budget. For 73% of respondents, it is the marketing function that holds the money for social media, with the contact centre only responsible for this channel's investment and finances in 23% of cases. Larger contact centres are somewhat more likely to hold the social media budget, but such respondents are still in a minority. As social media continues its move away from being a purely marketing channel towards being a key part of the customer contact mix, it would make sense for the contact centre and customer support operation to take more responsibility for the strategy and budget of this channel.

Figure 110: Who owns the social media budget? (by contact centre size)

Who owns the social media budget? (by contact centre size)
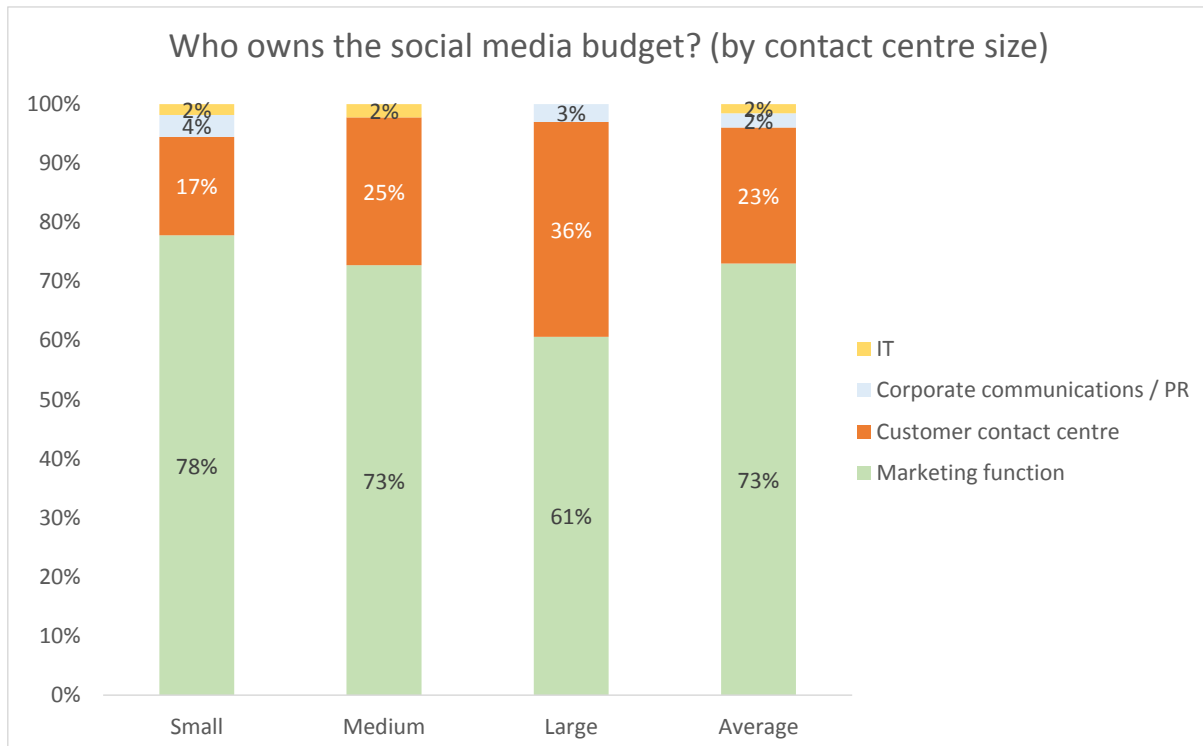
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Uniquely, social media has taken off as a customer service channel as a result of customer take-up, rather than businesses' enthusiasm for promoting a cheaper service channel. Social media for some customers can provide a very positive experience with a very low pain point, and at virtually no cost of time or money: the customer complains, loudly and in public, so the business reacts quickly and effectively. For the customer, this is great: it is the business for whom the current methods of social media do not work as well. Not only do they have to carry out their business in public, reacting quickly and without being able to authenticate the customer's identity, but they often cannot handle the query without resorting to another channel such as phone or email, which provide more privacy and functionality. In such cases, they are not even seen by the world as a whole to be reacting quickly and effectively. Both customers and companies are finding out what works with social media and what does not. Crucially, as with any channel, success will only come when a channel delivers a successful experience for both sides of the equation.

Despite respondents' previous insistence that social media was generally not the primary channel for unhappy customers to use to make a complaint, the following table suggests otherwise. 37% of respondents that offer social media as a customer service channel considerate to be extremely useful for acting directly on negative comments and complaints picked up from customers. In fact, this ability to immediately address unhappy customers maintains the number one position this year.

Positively, for both businesses and customers, there seems to be increased confidence that social media can actually provide customers with a fully-supported customer service channel. 25% of this year's respondents feel strongly that they are doing so, compared to only 12% two years ago.

Figure 111: Usefulness of social media for business activities

Vertical market	Average score / 10	% scoring 1 or 2/10	% scoring 9 or 10/10
Acting directly upon negative comments and complaints about the company	7.3	7%	37%
Monitoring what is being said about the company, products and marketing campaigns	7.1	11%	29%
Delivering marketing and product information to the customer	6.9	14%	32%
Offering customers a fully-supported customer service channel	5.9	14%	25%
Learning more about our competition	4.7	22%	11%

CUSTOMER COMMUNITIES

Apart from the globally-recognised names like Facebook and Twitter, which promote B2C and C2C communications, there are a large number of self-built customer communities that band together – not always uncritically - around a brand or product that they are interested in that tends to support the site at one remove. The case study below, although a few years old, explains why these unheralded social media methods can be quietly effective.

Customer communities - effects on brand perception and loyalty

A major academic study of eBay community participants[6] studied how such membership of online communities altered behaviour, psychology and attachment to the eBay brand. Groups of active participants ('enthusiasts', who post messages to forums), and passive members ('lurkers', who may read posts, but do not enter into conversations) were considered.

Customer communities on eBay exist in the form of clubs for people with similar interests, such as specific car types, Barbie dolls or other special interests. There are also live chat rooms, and conversations exist both on-topic and off-topic.

The results of the research, which encouraged people to use communities, and then tracked behaviour, found that "with increasing community participation, customers bid more, won more auctions, paid higher final prices, spent more money for buying items and were more motivated to make purchases if they didn't do so before." The same positive effects were witnessed on the sales side, where community members sold more, made higher revenues and received better feedback than non-community members.

The researchers suggest several reasons why this should be:

- Community membership means that a person is more likely to identify themselves with the brand, using it and recommending it more often
- Members gain educationally from the experience, receiving tangible benefits
- The shared goals and values of the group reinforce member identity
- Trust emerges as a result of asking for, and receiving help and advice, making the member more likely to give back in return
- This trust means that members are less likely to fear fraud, and to hold back from purchasing behaviours
- Continual positive experiences within the community mean that the supporting brand is considered positively, even if it is peripheral to what is happening within the community

The researchers estimate that the increased use of customer communities within eBay that were created by this experiment produced a rise in revenues of £59m over the course of a year. The costs of encouraging greater community participation was around £7,000, a return on investment of almost £8,500 for every £1 spent.

---

[6] "The Long Term Effects of Joining and Participating in Customer Communities", Algesheimer and Dholakia (Zurich / Rice Universities), 2006

The study's researchers, Algesheimer and Dholakia, identify three types of business which would most benefit from supporting customer communities:

- Those with complex products and services, to offer educational services and to enable rapid peer assistance with technical issues, which can work out extremely expensive otherwise
- Firms with already strong brands and customer identity (e.g. Ducati and Apple iPod are noted by as having positive experiences from running customer communities) where customer communities further strengthen the brand
- Those companies with rapidly-evolving products and services, especially "objects of desire", such as the latest mobile phones or games consoles. Customer communities can offer the most up-to-date information to customers and browsers, who will react by checking the community more frequently so as not to miss anything.

Businesses can also benefit from closely tracking the community's views, extracting high-quality, unbiased feedback about products, services and competitors, with an unsolicited opinion being far more likely to be honest and useful than asking someone directly what they think. It may be that independent and objective customer service review websites emerge into the mainstream, whereby benchmarking of performance metrics and experiences means that potential customers can check out how good a company is to deal with before they use them.

Businesses such as giffgaff (www.giffgaff.com) have a great deal of their customer service strategy based around customer communities. Customers of the mobile phone network are encouraged to find their own solution via the web self-service application, with the next step being to ask the customer community to help. Giffgaff's agents are there to help with confidential account information, but this is via email with a published 24-hour turnaround target.

THE MOBILE CUSTOMER

The dual, mutually-supporting drivers of high-speed mobile networks and the proliferation of smartphones means that provision of services via a mobile channel offers businesses and consumers the opportunity to make a step-change in the way that they communicate with each other. This new world of communication allows businesses to consider whether exotic-sounding functionality like multimedia streaming and videoconferencing could give them a competitive advantage in the customer service world.

However, the vast majority of service functionality available to the mobile consumer today is unsophisticated and divorced from the rest of the customer experience. Put simply, if the customer tries to use a mobile app or website but cannot successfully do what they wanted, in many cases they will be forced to initiate a service request via another channel, such as email or phone, which will be treated by the business as a similar request without any understanding of the history, activity or context that the customer has already undertaken. The rapid growth in smartphone use, and the increased variety and sophistication of apps have led customers to expect similarly high standards of service through this channel. However, too many mobile apps start and end on the smartphone, rather than offering a seamless route into the organisation if the customer cannot complete their interaction solely on the smartphone device.

Gathering, understanding and using the contextual data that can surround the mobile consumer will be key to pushing the uptake and functionality of this channel forward. The plethora of channels immediately available to the mobile consumer - including voice, web browsing, SMS, social media, and web chat - encourages the customer to act immediately for all their service or information requirements, rather than waiting until they are in front of a desktop computer.

60% of UK mobile phone users have access to a smartphone, with this figure growing rapidly[7]. This means that a large proportion of customers will want to contact businesses through these devices, whether via the telephony element of the device, or via the company's website or mobile app. Taking into account the use of tablet computers and handheld games consoles to access the Internet, the 'mobile channel' may actually be the first port-of-call for many customers, especially those in the younger demographics.

---

[7] http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Nearly-Half-of-UK-Consumers-Will-Use-Smartphones-This-Year/1009956

Research from Limelight Networks[8] shows that 80% of customers who have a poor experience with shopping on a mobile site will abandon it: some may intend to return via a PC, but many others will search elsewhere. As the author of the blog astutely comments: "There is no mobile web as far as consumers are concerned. There is only the web. And it has to perform well." Furthermore, most businesses are currently failing in this attempt, with recent research[9] around the shopping experience showing the mobile channel lagging way behind online websites and bricks-and-mortar shops.

Currently, offering a mobile customer experience tends to mean offering a smartphone app and/or a mobile version of a website.

Mobile websites:

A mobile website differs from simply accessing a full website via a mobile browser, rather offering a mobile-optimised alternative which is easier to use and overcomes some of the constraints around using a mobile device to access the web, particularly around usability and the high cost of data.

Mobile websites should not try to offer every single item available on the full website, but rather just the information and processes that most users will want in order to act or make a decision. Ease of use is vital: text must be fully displayed on screen, buttons must be clickable, and consider minimising the use of graphics to achieve quicker load times in areas with poor mobile data services. Many devices do not support Flash, and video uses a lot of data in any case, meaning greater cost and time for the user, at least until mobile bandwidth becomes cheaper and faster.

Bearing in mind that a mobile site generally cannot support every type of interaction that a customer may want, businesses may consider that allowing mobile users to access the main website is a good idea. Contact details should be clear, and offering a seamless route from self-service into supported service, via email, web chat or telephony is becoming increasingly expected, ensuring all of the data and information they have input, along with relevant contextual data, is passed across as well.

It is beneficial to understand why customers will use a mobile site rather than waiting until they are in front of a PC. Generally, they will be more task-focused on a mobile device than a PC, so the emphasis should be on delivering quick, simple, high-volume interactions. For example, by looking at the current use of their full website, a bank may discover that a high proportion of users want to check their bank balance or view recent transactions, rather than setting up automatic bill payments or ordering foreign currency. Consequently, the mobile version of the website may focus only on a small number of simple, high-volume interaction types.

---

8 http://blog.limelight.com/2011/11/new-stats-show-how-critical-the-mobile-experience-is-for-e-commerce/
9 http://www.prweb.com/releases/2013/6/prweb10789229.htm

Smartphone apps

A good app can provide a superior user experience to a mobile website, due to the greater level of design. However, they tend to be much more expensive to build, and unlike a mobile website, a new one has to be developed for each smartphone platform. Additionally, company apps will tend to be free to download, so there is little opportunity to make money directly from them.

Recent years have seen the smartphone platform market change considerably. In 2013, Google Android has slightly more than 50% of the market, with Apple iOS at around 35%. BlackBerry and Microsoft each have less than 10%, so businesses could decide to produce only two flavours of app, which would actually support over 85% of the smartphone user market. (Of course, the downside is that you could be alienating 15% of your customer base).

A native application developed for a mobile device can use some of the device's capabilities to enhance the customer experience. For example, a smartphone app[10] can prompt drivers at the scene of a car accident to provide and capture the correct information, including photos. Such an app could also use GPS to give the exact location of the accident for use by the insurance company.

Industry estimates for building an app vary considerably depending on what they are trying to do, but many sources indicate that a cost of £20,000 upwards (per platform) is very feasible. The cost of developing a mobile website is less, and only needs to be done once. Whether an app is suitable for a company depends on their budget, and their customer base. It may be that the superior branding associated with apps is seen as being well worth the expense, even before factors like increased conversion rates are taken into account.

Solution providers mention that there can be a slight hurdle to overcome for customers who want a call-back via a mobile app, particularly for iPhone users. Apple's iOS stores the device's telephone number, but that cannot be accessed automatically by an app, for security reasons. This means that iPhone users may have to type in their telephone number rather than get a call-back automatically.

---

[10] http://www.naic.org/Releases/2012_docs/wreckcheck_mobile_app_auto_accidents.htm

253

Tips on building successful apps

- Understand what the most popular self-service transactions are that your customers wish to do, and focus initially on providing the means to do this via a mobile app. This will give you a quick win, familiarise your customers with this channel, and encourage them to think positively about it.

- If any interactions require knowledge of a customer's location, the GPS capabilities within a smartphone may make this particularly suitable to put onto a mobile app.

- An app should be able to divert a large number of simple calls away from the contact centre. Businesses may find that mobile apps are able to replace telephony IVR, with the visual element allowing a greater depth of functionality and a quicker self-service experience for the customer.

- Consider the demographics of your customer base. Do your younger customers wish to carry out different transactions or interactions than your older customer base? If so, focus mobile functionality on the demographic that will use it most.

- If there is a problem with the app, or the customer cannot do what they wish to do, it is vital to offer a clear route into live customer service. This may be via a 'call me' button on the website, which can put the customer into a virtual queue, and can provide all the transaction-based information that the customer has already input, along with any of the other relevant customer details so that the agent does not have to start from scratch. A call-back option also means that the customer does not have to spend their own mobile minutes waiting in a queue.

- Businesses may use apps to encourage customer behaviour proactively. For example, an SMS message may be sent to a customer prompting them to take an action such as providing a meter reading, which can be done within the app. In this way, the only incremental cost to the business is through sending the original SMS.

Contextual data: the great mobile opportunity

The nature of mobile devices means that businesses potentially have the opportunity to know more about their customers and their specific requirements and preferences than ever before.

This includes:

- Customer identity: once the customer has identified themselves, such as by logging on, or through the mobile phone number, this allows the agent to access their existing customer history in the same way that would be done so on a phone call into the contact centre.

- Geographical information: smartphones are GPS-enabled, allowing agents to see where customers are, and to direct them to the nearest store, for example.

- Historical activity: if the customer has been browsing a mobile website or app beforehand, the information that the customer browsed previously may be useful for the contact centre agent to have to hand, in order to see and understand what the customer has already tried to do.

- Stored data: the mobile device may have data stored that identifies the customer, such as account number, that can speed up the interaction and make it more effective.

- Collected information: the mobile device may also be used to capture and share information with the business such as photographs or videos. It may be possible to automate a two-way interaction: for example, a customer may use their mobile phone to scan a QR (quick response) code on a product. Using the information on the code, as well as the customer's input into the app about what they are trying to do, the customer may be directed to the correct place within business's self-service function in order to solve the issue that they have. This can take the contact centre out of the equation altogether, resulting in reduced costs for the business and a quicker and more effective customer experience.

49% of respondents offer customers some form of mobile-friendly service or sales functionality, whether an app, or a mobile version of the website.

As the following chart shows, only 45% of respondents provide their website in a 'mobile-friendly' format, for example by having the most popular elements available, speeding load times, optimizing graphics, improving readability and scrolling, etc.

Figure 112: Mobile customer communication channels (by contact centre size)
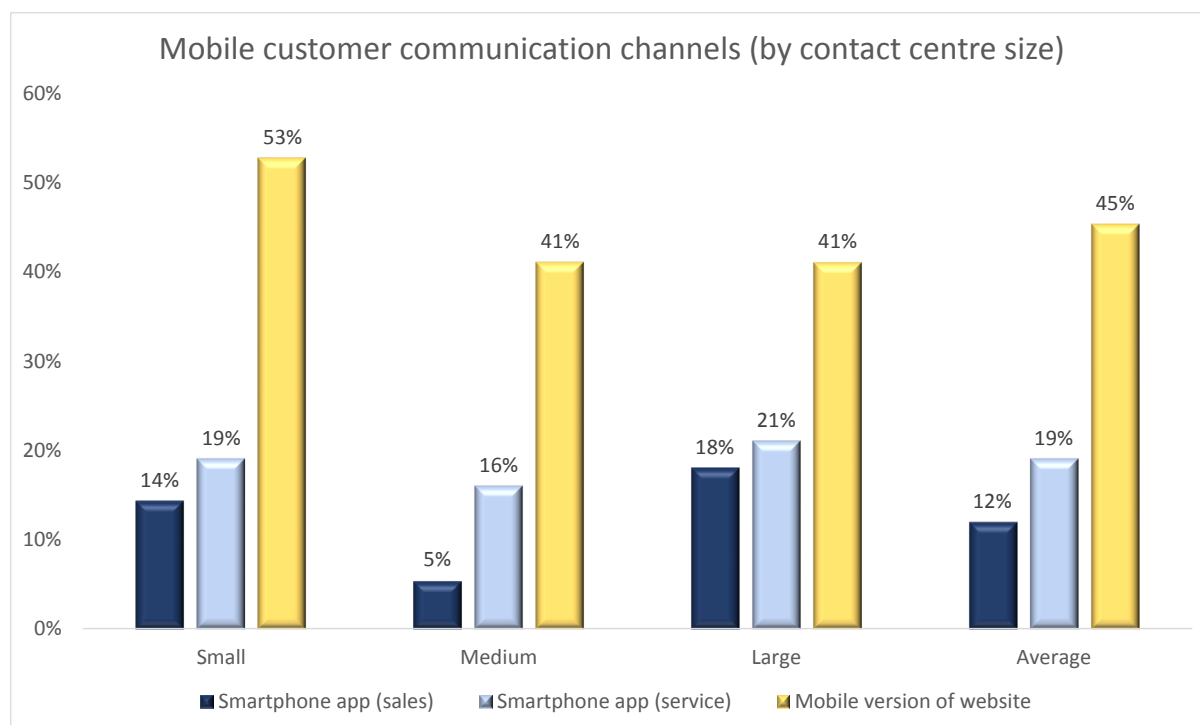
However, only around 1 in 5 respondents have a dedicated smartphone app, either for sales or for service, although larger businesses were somewhat more likely to have both.

Earlier in this report, it was found that 62% of inbound calls require some form of customer identification and verification process to happen. The figure for mobile interactions appears to be somewhat similar, with 19% of respondents that offer a mobile channel stating that users always have to identify themselves, and 36% requiring this only for some interaction types, with 45% never doing so.

Figure 113: Security and identity verification via mobile channel (only if app / mobile website available)

Security and identity verification via mobile channel (only if app / mobile website available)

No 45%

Yes, always 19%

Yes, sometimes 36%
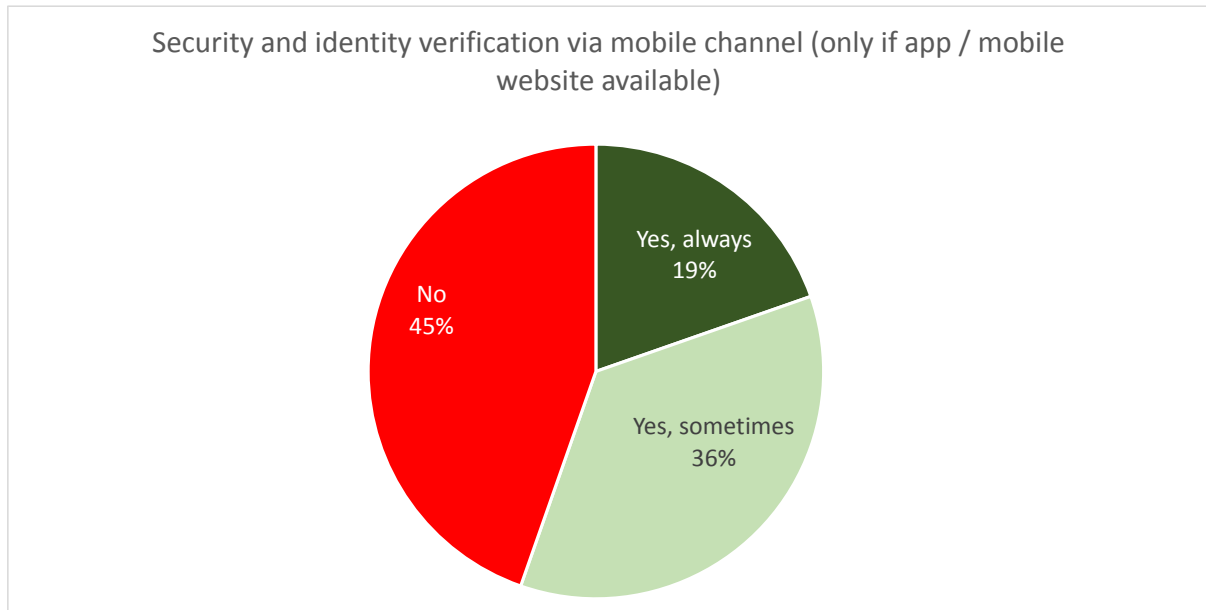
CROSS-CHANNEL ESCALATION

In cases where the user needs to pass through security - and also where other reasons mean that the customer cannot complete their interaction solely through mobile browsing or using an app - businesses should consider how they will keep the customer or prospect engaged with the business if the customer has to change channel.

Figure 114: Methods of escalation to an agent via the mobile channel
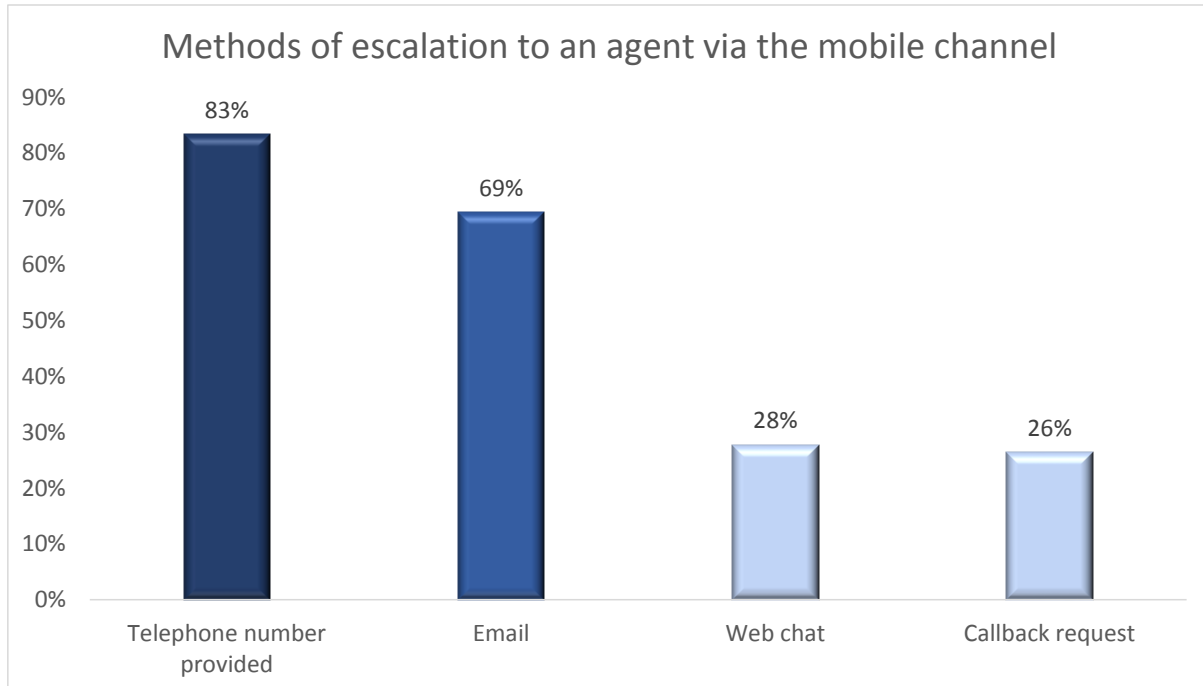
The easiest way to support cross-channel contact is to offer a telephone number on the mobile website or inside the app, and 83% of respondents that offer a mobile channel do so. In the vast majority of cases where the customer breaks from a mobile session to initiate a live contact, they must start again from the beginning, as even if security has been passed through on the mobile channel, most respondents will not credit this security and identification process, nor will the browsing history be passed onto the agent. Effectively, the customer may as well not have used the mobile channel at all, which is a negative for them and their attitude towards this channel in future: not just for this business, but for all mobile customer experiences.

Providing an email address is the second most popular escalation method, which in theory does allow the pre-population of fields in an email form (user details, account details, type of issue etc.) although only a few respondents do this. However, email is a slow medium even when done correctly, and the user will not get an answer in real time.

26% of respondents using the mobile channel state that they offer scheduled call-backs to customers. While this is a positive and proactive response, the user is often left in the same situation as if they had called in the first place, as the agent will often have to take them through security and establish what the problem is. However, it should be a more real-time experience for the customer than sending an email.

28% of respondents using the mobile channel offered a web chat option within the mobile site or app, despite this being the channel most closely resembling the activity the user is already undertaking (i.e. using the mobile device to look for information, but typing rather than speaking). Web chat is more immediate than email, and offers a chance to move between self-service and assisted service seamlessly, with the agent being able to push links and video to the user in real-time.

It is possible for businesses to choose in real time which is most appropriate channel to offer to the customer. For example, if a telephony channel is experiencing a high wait time, a web chat option may be offered as a priority. This allows the organisation to turn on its head the traditional model of moving internal resource to manage external demand, instead moving customers to where the resource is actually available. Alternatively, a real-time appreciation of each channels' availability and queue length can be shared with the customer, allowing them to make their own decisions and encouraging self-management of resource.

A minority of respondents state that, upon escalation, an agent is provided with some information about the customer. This is most often the customer's name and possibly account information, rather than anything more contextually relevant to what the customer was trying to do, and where they are currently located. In reality, this information is currently rarely used to provide a quicker customer experience (for example, by jumping a call queue or by having details of the mobile session already undertaken screen-popped onto the agent's desktop).

Figure 115: What information is passed to an agent after escalation from the mobile channel?

What information is passed to an agent after escalation from the mobile channel?
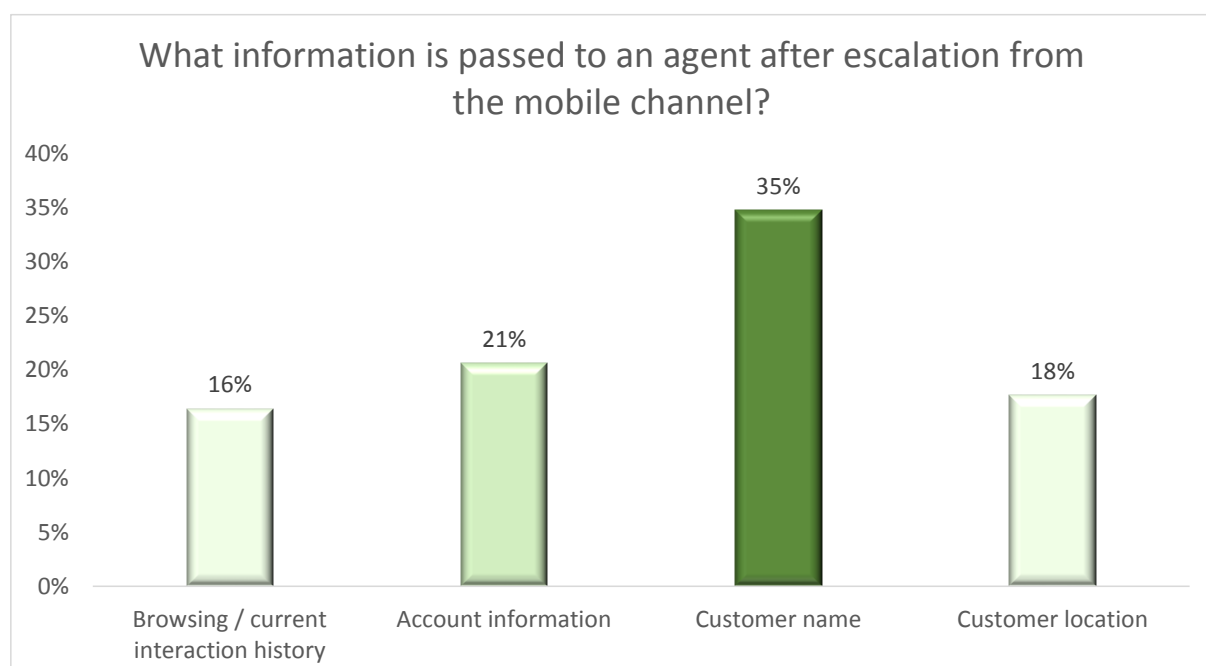
Looking to the future, solution providers are keen to offer technology that ties the mobile channel more tightly in with the existing voice and data customer support channels, providing a single integrated use experience regardless of initial channel choice, and any cross-channel movement by the customer. One of the key ways to do this is to offer live agent support more easily (for example, through clicking an icon within an app), which provides a context-relevant, geographically-supported and personalised customer experience. The movement between self-service and live service is currently very difficult for many customers – it is certainly not seamless - and actually may involve abandoning the mobile channel entirely as a failure in order to start afresh with another channel. As the customer has chosen originally to use a mobile channel, even a successful outcome with another channel will risk leaving the customer dissatisfied with the company, and less likely to use the mobile channel in future.

On moving from self-service to assisted service, leading mobile service applications should gather the browsing history, customer information and the context of the session in order to pass this to a live agent. Smartphones are enabled with GPS tracking, so businesses should look to leverage this capability to deliver better customer experiences where possible and desirable.

SMS and outbound calling also offer opportunities for businesses to deliver proactive customer service through the mobile channel, creating a positive attitude. Furthermore, location-specific device information also allows businesses to deliver timely service and relevant marketing messages which are positives for the customer at that time.

It is not just the customer interaction points that will become more integrated. Brick-and-mortar stores are also becoming more integrated with their digital component, in order to provide correct inventory levels at store- and company-wide levels, thus matching the capabilities of their dot-com competitors while being able to take advantage of being able to provide in-store services to customers.

Organisations able to help with New Media and the Customer of the Future:

Eckoh's multi-channel customer service solutions allow customers to self-serve through automation; helping to reduce call queues, free up agents for more complex calls; and improve overall contact centre efficiency.

Enghouse Interactive helps you prepare for the future with our multichannel contact centre suite; continuously developed with new media in mind such as social media, video and mobility capabilities.

Genesys digital channels (Web, Social, and Mobile) helps organisations manage consistent cross-channel experiences by preserving context and history across interactions as customers transition between channels.

Infinity CCS's technology solutions help you improve customer experience and drive down cost to serve: Reduce costs and live call volumes while maintaining quality of service and maximising sales opportunities with Web & Telephone Self-Service and integrated multi-channel solutions.
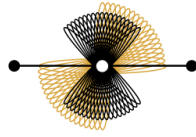
At Interactive Intelligence, it's what we do.

Introducing Contact Centre 3.0. Next generation Contact Centres like Avaya Aura Call Centre Elite are fully-featured Contact Centre solutions with applications for multi-channel, inbound and outbound contacts and feature integrated, real-time and historic reporting.

NewVoiceMedia is a leading global provider of true cloud contact centre and multi-channel communications solutions.

Nexidia, long term educators of Customer Interaction Analytics, works with some of the world's largest contact centres to capture multi-channel interactions, analyse the data and then use this valuable insight into the customer experience to develop business strategies to improve the performance in every area of the organisation.

INCREASING PROFITABILITY

Not only are contact centres under pressure to reduce their costs, but many - either directly or indirectly - are also major revenue-generators for their businesses, and the recent drive to maximise profitability has made many businesses look at whether their contact centres can add more to the bottom-line. Although much responsibility for revenue generation lies with senior management, production and sales divisions, the contact centre also has an important part to play in maximising revenues through selling the right product to the right customer at the right time (aided by a CRM system or similar), and through proactive and efficient outbound selling.

This chapter considers CRM and outbound automation in depth, and also looks at two alternatives to the usual ways of doing things: outsourcing and hosted & managed solutions. Both offer contact centres new financial and operational options which can make a very significant difference to the bottom-line.

Not only are contact centres under pressure to reduce their costs, but many - either directly or indirectly - are also major revenue-generators for their businesses, and the continuing drive to maximise profitability has made many businesses look at whether their contact centres can add more to the bottom-line. Although much responsibility for revenue generation lies with senior management, production and sales divisions, the contact centre also has an important part to play in maximising revenues through selling the right product to the right customer at the right time (aided by a CRM system or similar), and through proactive and efficient outbound selling.

CRM is not a technology, or even a group of technologies. It is a continually evolving process which requires a shift in attitude away from the traditional business model of focusing internally. CRM is an approach a company takes towards its customers, backed up by thoughtful investment in people, technology and business processes. Focused upon the idea of keeping and growing the existing customer base, the concept of CRM contains everything that all businesses need to succeed.

Customer:

All businesses, when they first start, strive to focus upon the needs of their customers. As businesses get larger and more complex, they become more inward-looking as they try to cope with their internal issues. Often, the customer gets treated as an afterthought. With CRM, one goal is to make the individual customer become important once again, at an acceptable cost to the company.

Relationship:

Until relatively recently, it was impossible for large companies to form relationships with customers – with a customer base of millions, how can a company know their preferences or dislikes? This is an area where technology can help businesses build lasting relationships with customers, to keep them loyal and increase their value to the company.

Management:

Realistically, businesses are not implementing CRM because they have had a change of heart and decided to be nice to the long-suffering customer. Loyalty equals profit: both customer and business gain from it. The "management" part of CRM demonstrates that it is the business which ultimately controls the relationship with the customer: it provides the right information at the right time; it offers the right price to keep the customer happy enough to stay; it anticipates what else the customer would like to buy, and understands why.

The business objective of CRM is to maximise profit from customers, as a result of knowing them, treating them well and fulfilling their needs. As such, increasing ongoing sales from the existing customer base is one of the most important results of a CRM strategy.

Sales force automation, customer contact solutions, multimedia routing and data management tools have all been claimed as being the key to a business's CRM solution. While these are all useful and reliable aids to a business, none of them on their own are CRM solutions. As before, this is for a very simple reason: CRM is not just about technology.

Instead, think of CRM as a holistic and ongoing approach to refocusing on customers, rather than being about the internal structure of your organisation. It is more about the competencies that you have, rather than a list of technologies, the goal being to win, know and keep profitable customers.

While technology is not the only answer to the CRM question, there are several ways in which processes and technologies can be implemented to assist businesses in achieving this goal:

- provide a single view of the customer across the enterprise to whoever needs it
- help agents to fulfil customer needs and business strategies in real-time
- provide customers with a high and consistent level of service across all channels
- proactively and intelligently inform customers about products and services they will be interested in, while keeping marketing costs under control
- have the strategy and tactics in place to identify and keep profitable customers, and manage to convert loss-making customers into valuable customers.

The contact centre plays a crucial role in the wider CRM space. For companies whose main channel to their customers is through the telephone or e-mail, they cannot become truly CRM-focused without putting the contact centre at the heart of any improvements they make to their operations and their CRM strategy. CRM is about increasing revenues and growing the business aggressively, through influencing and matching the needs of the customer in a timely manner.

While CRM is not a technology, few companies can re-engineer themselves to be truly customer-facing without providing their business and staff with the tools they need, such as real-time information about customer history and preferences, routing technology which puts the right call through to the right agent at the right time, and the ability to be able to advise the customer immediately, even with complicated matters.

There has been a great deal of interest in recent years around gathering relevant data from multiple legacy sources, presenting it to the agent on a single screen, improving both the quality of the interaction and reducing the time taken to serve. With the increased use of analytics, sales-focused initiatives now can draw not only on detailed and specific knowledge of the customer, but also on which selling strategies are the most successful in each circumstance, providing new opportunities for businesses to offer tailored and relevant cross-selling and upselling offers to their customer base.

A problem for over 50% of contact centres is that customer information is kept in different data silos or on different systems, which can make it impossible or time consuming (opening multiple applications) for agents to deal with different types of queries, and means that calls can also be unnecessarily lengthened when customers have to repeat information. A unified agent desktop, like the Infinity Desktop, can be integrated with back-end systems such as your customer database, billing system, ERP and CRM system, so whatever information you want to display from those systems can be presented to agents in a simple workflow, and vice-versa, the agent can write to those systems. Additionally, a workflow can present the agent with context-sensitive information from a Knowledge Base, and even suggest products to upsell and cross-sell based on the customer's history, all of which result in faster calls, more sales opportunities and improved customer satisfaction.

Cross-selling and up-selling have been major sales strategies since commerce began, but it took the advent of CRM to get businesses firmly focused on them. One definition of up-selling is that it is the process of offering a customer who just placed an order, either a bigger or better deal on a more expensive item than that which they have just bought. This also includes the process of "accessorising", where a customer who has bought a high-value item is persuaded to add (probably higher-margin) accessories to it. For example, a customer purchasing a DVD player may be offered insurance, better leads, a dust cover and various other items connected to the DVD's operation.

Cross-selling, unlike up-selling, refers to offering customers additional items in different categories. These items may be related (e.g. a television to go with the DVD player), or unrelated (e.g. a digital camera).

Although there are differences between cross-selling and up-selling, the purposes are the same:

- to increase overall revenues
- to increase profit per customer
- to decrease customer churn
- to lower the costs of associated marketing (e.g. there is no need to send out brochures to customers who have already received a sales pitch on a call)
- to make sure that the customer has all of the right products and services for their situation
- to make the customer more dependent on the business and its products so they are less likely to defect, helping the customer retention strategy.

Cross-selling and up-selling can happen on both inbound and outbound calls, but the importance of selling off the back of an inbound service call is greatly increasing, as legislation against outbound contact has tightened. Added to this is the stated aim of many businesses to move their contact centres away from a being a service-based cost centre to becoming a sales-focused profit centre: cross-selling and up-selling have become crucial to the business.

Cross-selling and upselling conversion rates

Figures for successful cross-selling and upselling conversion rates are difficult to come by. As only 1 in 5 respondents were able to give an exact, meaningful figure, any detailed segmentation would be misleading. Of those industries that provided enough answers, the insurance sector claims a mean 14% (median 15%) conversion rate, manufacturing 21% (10%), and TMT 32% (23%).

There was little difference across size bands, with small operations reporting 29% (20%) conversion rate, medium 32% (20%) and large 28% (23%).

Across all respondents, the mean average was 29%, the median 15%, with 1st quartile 50% and 3rd quartile 8%.

Helping you have better conversations

Here's a paradox:

The exact same steps you take to reduce cost to serve can actually lead to better customer relationships.

To find out why, and how to:

- Meet customers' new expectations,

- While massively reducing call volumes and AHT,

- And improving NPS and Customer Satisfaction …

Go to **www.infinityccs.com/dmg**

… while reducing cost to serve

As with previous years, the transport & travel and insurance sectors have the greatest proportion of service agents able to sell opportunistically, with the manufacturing and insurance sectors also geared-up to achieve extra sales. Public sector and housing respondents are obviously less likely to find this relevant. Retailers, TMT and services respondents feel their cross-selling capabilities have the greatest potential.

After last year's increase from 37% to 45%, the proportion of service agents able to cross sell or upsell has dropped back to its historical average, suggesting that last year's increase was perhaps a statistical blip. This theory is strengthened by findings later in this chapter which show that there are a number of very significant issues that operations feel are holding back an increase in cross selling and upselling activity. While the oft-stated intention of respondents - both past and present - is to increase their cross-selling and up-selling capabilities, their enthusiasm is not yet being matched by their ability to do so.

Figure 116: Agents capable of cross-selling and up-selling, with future requirements, by vertical market

Vertical market	% of service agents able to cross-sell and up-sell	% of service agents desired to be able to cross-sell and up-sell	% increase required
Transport & Travel	80%	80%	0%
Manufacturing	72%	81%	13%
TMT	49%	60%	23%
Insurance	49%	50%	2%
Outsourcing	41%	44%	7%
Retail & Distribution	40%	55%	38%
Utilities	38%	40%	4%
Services	33%	51%	54%
Finance	32%	34%	6%
Housing	4%	8%	100%
Public Sector	0%	3%	n/a
Average	**37%**	**46%**	**23%**

Figure 117: Agents capable of cross-selling and up-selling, with future requirements, by contact centre size

Contact centre size	% of service agents able to cross-sell and up-sell	% of service agents desired to be able to cross-sell and up-sell	% increase required
Small	41%	41%	0%
Medium	27%	36%	34%
Large	46%	54%	18%
Average	**37%**	**46%**	**23%**

Unlike previous years, where there has usually been a somewhat positive correlation between contact centre size and the ability of service agents to cross sell and upsell, this year's findings create little pattern.

There are a wide variety of factors inhibiting businesses' desire to maximise their cross-selling and upselling capabilities, and these seem to be getting stronger year-on-year. It is noticeable that the strength of feeling about such inhibitors is generally increasing: for example, last year's survey found that only 6% of respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that customers didn't like being sold to an a service call, a figure which jumps to 32% this year, and this pattern of stronger feeling is present across all of the stated inhibitors.

Figure 118: Inhibitors to cross-selling and upselling
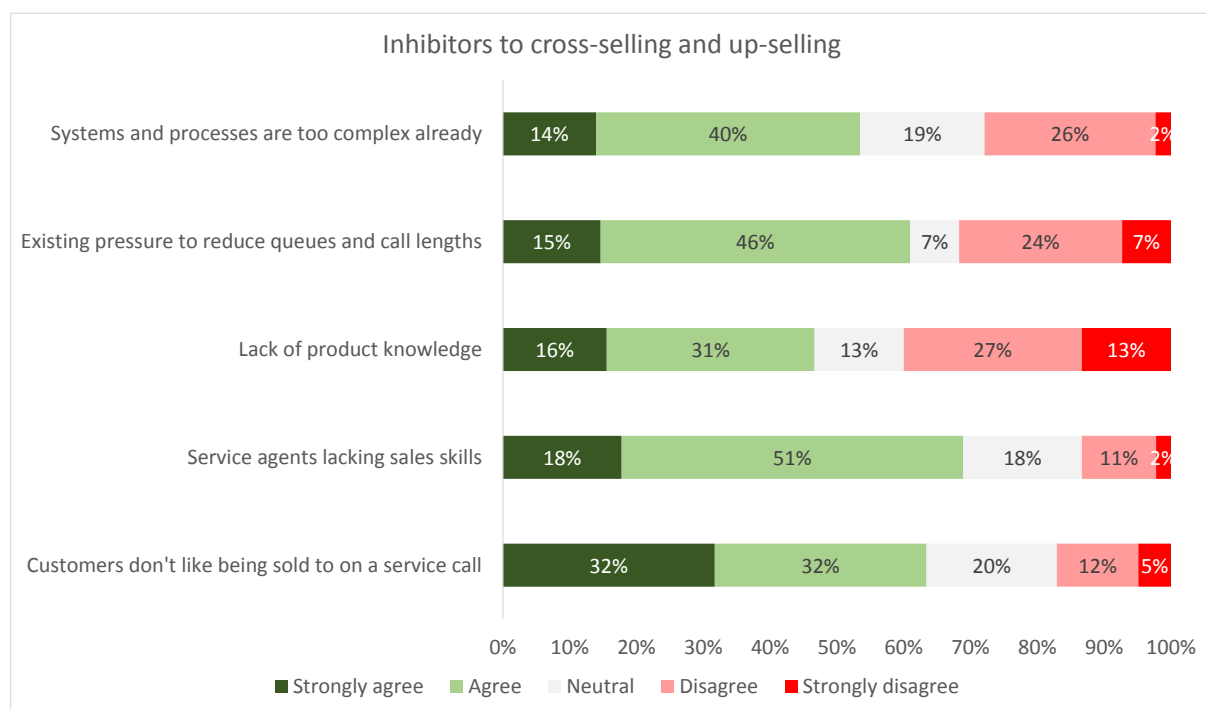
After last year's drop in importance, the belief that ***customers requiring service do not wish to be sold to in the same call*** has jumped in importance in the minds of the survey's respondents, with 32% agreeing strongly with this comment.

Here is a clear case of one size not fitting all: cross-selling and up-selling is far better left to the end of a conversation which has gone well, rather than any where the customer is clearly disgruntled or even in a hurry. There is also the fact that some customers are very aware that they are paying for a call, and trying to sell them something and make them pay for the privilege of the time spent doing so is seen by many to be negative. Of course, offering a freephone number takes this element away.

Agents are usually trusted to use their experience and intuition to judge whether to start a sales conversation, although inflexible scripting and an insistence on compliance with this, regardless of circumstances can cause problems. Some service agents may not feel confident enough in their sales ability or product knowledge in order to start a conversation, so of course supervisors have to make sure agents push themselves as well.

Real-time speech analytics applications are starting to be used for this purpose, with the speed capabilities of the real-time application being crucial to its success: long delays can mean missed, inappropriate or sub-optimal sales opportunities being presented; cancellation alerts can show up too late; compliance violations over parts of the script missed-out may occur after the call has already ended. It is vitally important however not to get carried away with real-time, as there is a danger that businesses can get too enthusiastic, and set alert thresholds far too low, resulting in agents being constantly bombarded with cross-selling and upselling offers and/or warnings about customer sentiment or their own communication style, so that it becomes a distraction rather than a help.

The effectiveness of real-time may be boosted by post-call analytics taking place as well. For example, by assessing the outcomes of calls where specific cross-selling and upselling approaches were identified and presented to agents in real time, analysis can show the most successful approaches including the use of specific language, customer type, the order of presented offers and many other variables (including metadata from agent desktop applications) in order to fine-tune the approach in the future.

The main barriers to upselling and cross-selling are agent skills, product knowledge, pressure on AHT, complexity of IT systems and the relevancy of the product being offered, with the upshot that if agents are left to their own devices to determine when and how to upsell then results will be inconsistent at best and your company may be missing out on revenue and opportunities to deepen customer relationships. Use of an agent desktop with built-in workflows and a Knowledge Base can help overcome all these issues by guiding agents through interactions and processes, and reducing the number of systems they have to use to one, which speeds up calls and enables all agents to act like your most skilled ones. Knowledge can be made context-sensitive, so information about products can be popped automatically to agents when appropriate, and the workflow itself can even decide – based on pre-determined criteria – when an upsell attempt should be made and prompt the agent.

69% of respondents agreed (whether strongly or not), that the greatest inhibitor to increasing the amount of cross-selling and up-selling was once again the concern that *service agents do not have the necessary skills of sales agents*.

It is a debatable point whether this is a matter that can be rectified with training, or whether it is a deep-rooted truth that a service mentality excludes sales. While the latter point is certainly true for some agents, for most a successful transition into sales mode depends upon having the confidence that the system and their own knowledge will support them in this uncharted territory, and that they are in fact, servicing the customer at the same time by offering products and services that are relevant and helpful. It is up to the contact centre and the wider business to make sure that the agent is helped with this new task, rather than just issuing a blanket statement that all callers are to be offered Product X through a heavily-scripted approach.

61% of contact centres say that the *pressure they are under to cut call times* means that any drive to increase cross-selling and up-selling on the call (and thus, increase average call lengths) is much more difficult. This seems to fly in the face of what contact centre respondents say elsewhere – that call durations are almost unimportant compared to how things used to be – but obviously average wait time is closely linked with this metric, which is itself critical both to customer satisfaction and operational performance.

Such businesses could consider their recruitment policy (working out a cost-benefit analysis to see what sort of additional revenues would be achieved through cross-selling and up-selling, against the cost of recruiting and paying additional staff), as well as looking at a call avoidance policy (such as self-service) and efficiencies possible within the call (such as automated security). The medium and large contact centres are far more likely to cite this as an inhibitor to cross-selling and up-selling, with these sectors of the industry traditionally having the greatest focus on efficiency and call throughput metrics. However, with an increasing number of calls being handled entirely through self-service, with the resultant uptick in the average complexity and importance of live calls, this mindset is likely to weaken further.

47% of respondents cite a *lack of product knowledge* as being something of an inhibitor, a matter that can be addressed through training, but also through offering support systems such as dynamic scripting within the conversation, and also being more realistic with the number of products on offer through cross-selling and up-selling. This issue is of particular concern to smaller operations, with 63% of these stating lack of product knowledge as an inhibitor to cross-selling and up-selling, compared to only 36% of larger contact centres. It may well be the case that larger operations will tend to have more of the applications and infrastructure available to support agents' knowledge of a wider variety of products and services.

54% of contact centres – a significant jump on previous years – believe that their ***environment is too complicated*** and that they can't carry out additional sales work. Businesses should certainly be addressing the underlying systems as well as the presentation layer - as effectively their internal systems and procedures are stopping them from moving their business forward. It is expected that the interest in the unified agent desktop, open systems and cloud-based applications will support a production environment more able to delivery the necessary service rather than being held back by legacy systems or integration issues.

*One of the goals of CRM is to turn the contact centre into a profit centre, and there are of course two variables in the profit equation: revenues and costs. The biggest cost of any contact centre is still human resources, so if we're looking at cutting costs, what we're really interested in is reducing **Total Traffic Time (TTT)** for voice calls handled by agents; which implies reducing both Average Handling Time (AHT) and the volume of live calls. Web and telephone self-service channels can now automate vast swathes of calls, and even process fairly complex orders, and as these are often a time-saver for the customer you actually improve service while reducing costs; while in the contact centre, the use of workflows and a Knowledge Base can dramatically reduce AHT while raising the skill levels of all your agents.*

Thought Leadership

Improve customer relationships by reducing costs

In a recent survey by the CCA Research Institute, respondents said their greatest challenges were improving quality and reducing cost to serve. You don't have to be Einstein to work out that those two goals appear to be contradictory. But are they? Is it possible that customers' changing expectations actually align with both goals?

MEETING QUALITY AND COST OBJECTIVES

The major cost of maintaining customer relationships is still human resources. So if we're looking at cutting costs, what we're really interested in is reducing **Total Traffic Time (TTT)** for voice calls handled by agents. This implies reducing both Average Handling Time (AHT) and the volume of calls handled by live agents. The trick is to do this in a way that meets with customers' new expectations, and so maintain or even improve quality of service. The same CCA survey also asked**: How do you think your business model will adapt to meet changing customer demands?** Here are the top responses: 1) Increased use of self-service and automation, 2) More skilled, knowledgeable workers, 3) Clear, single view of the customer. Could these be our answers?

1. LET CUSTOMERS SELF-SERVE

Customers' willingness to use telephone and web self-service is that rarest of things; a confluence of both business and consumer preferences. It allows us to cut costs and meet customer preferences at the same time. Web self-service platforms, such as that provided by Infinity CCS, have been shown to reduce call volumes by as much as 20% and can reduce the cost of a support interaction by 98%. Self-service using IVR and speech recognition can help automate up to 90% of voice interactions, and deliver cost savings of hundreds of thousands per year. The **storm** platform provided by Infinity CCS is capable of handling huge volumes of calls to shield the contact centre from repetitive, routine or emergency-related enquiries.

2. MAKE ALL YOUR AGENTS SKILLED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE

Much of the work an agent performs involves following processes, which may require the use of several IT systems. Simplifying this and providing guidance by using workflows allows all agents to perform to the same level as your best ones, even with vastly reduced training. In the Infinity Desktop – which integrates with your telephony and back-office systems – workflows prompt agents through calls and also pull together in one simple User Interface everything an agent needs, such as customer information and data entry fields from multiple back-end systems. The results are lower AHT and hold time, higher First Call Resolution (FCR), reduced training time and improved customer satisfaction.

In addition, the Infinity Desktop includes a Knowledge Base, which becomes context-sensitive when embedded in a workflow. So when an agent needs to know something – say the details of an insurance policy – the workflow can ensure the appropriate knowledge article is already on screen, or only a click or a keyword search away. **This dramatically cuts down the 20% to 80% of an average call agents spend searching for information.**

3. PULL DATA FROM DIFFERENT SILOS AND SYSTEMS INTO ONE VIEW

A problem for over 50% of contact centres is that customer information is kept in different data silos or on different systems, which can make it impossible or time consuming (opening multiple applications) for agents to deal with different types of queries. Calls can also be unnecessarily lengthened when customers have to repeat information. The Infinity Desktop can be integrated with back-end systems such as your customer database, billing system, ERP and CRM system. Whatever information you want to display from those systems can be presented to agents in a simple workflow. And vice-versa, the agent can write to those systems. The result is faster calls, multi-tasking agents and improved customer satisfaction.

RESULT: COST AND QUALITY GOALS MET

What seemed like contradictory problems – reducing costs while improving quality – actually have the same solutions. The key is to reduce **Total Traffic Time (TTT)** in a way that aligns with customers' changing demands. Applications such as phone and web self-service combined with a unified, knowledge-enabled agent environment like the Infinity Desktop allow you to use your existing IT infrastructure to do this cost-effectively.

For a demo or consultation, call **+44 (0)121 450 7830** or visit **www.infinityccs.com/dmg**

CLOUD-BASED CONTACT CENTRE SOLUTIONS

Building an effective contact centre can be very expensive due to the capital expenditure required to purchase, install and integrate client premises-based technology (CPE). There has been a genuine alternative to the traditional approach to the purchase and management of CPE for many years, but a proportion of the industry has been either unaware or misinformed of the abilities of cloud or hosted solutions. The past three years have really seen 'cloud' as a technology deployment become credible, even fashionable, driven in large part by the success and wide uptake of CRM solutions such as Salesforce.com. The contact centre technology industry has reacted by releasing cloud-based options of former CPE-only solutions, as well as raising the profile of those businesses which have been delivering solutions in this manner for much longer.

The target audience, and the overall market share that cloud providers have secured, have been growing rapidly, fuelled in part by the effectiveness that those solutions have had the opportunity to prove. However, there remains much uncertainty about the potential advantages or even the exact nature of the various non-CPE solutions. 'Cloud' as a piece of terminology is still being fought over by the many and various types of solution provider. Some definitions follow:

- **Cloud** is the delivery of computing and storage capacity as a service to different businesses, organisations and individuals over a network. It is often said to consist of:

  o Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) - servers and storage space
  o Platform as a Service (PaaS) - operating systems and web servers
  o Software as a Service (SaaS) - the functionality of software available on demand without the need to own or maintain it.

  The cloud is characterised by huge scalability and flexibility, shared resources, a utilities approach to billing (pay for what you use, for example) and an abstraction of obvious infrastructure.

  There are various deployment models:

  o Public cloud: applications, storage, and other resources are made available by a service provider, often offered on a pay-per-use model. Public cloud service providers own and operate the infrastructure and offer access via the Internet.

  o Private cloud: infrastructure operated solely for a single organisation, whether managed internally or by a third-party and hosted internally or externally. They require management by the organisation or its third-party

  o Virtual private cloud: a deployment model that pulls in public cloud infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS) while running the application on-premise or in a private cloud, in order to improve disaster recovery, flexibility and scalability and to benefit from Opex-based costing while avoiding expensive hardware purchases

- o Community cloud shares infrastructure between several organisations from a specific community with common concerns (security, compliance, jurisdiction, etc.), whether managed internally or by a third-party and hosted internally or externally. The costs are spread over fewer users than a public cloud (but more than a private cloud), so do not gain as much from cost reductions.

- o Hybrid cloud is a composition of two or more clouds (private, community or public) that remain unique entities but are bound together, offering the benefits of multiple deployment models. By utilising "hybrid cloud" architecture, companies and individuals are able to obtain degrees of fault tolerance combined with locally immediate usability without dependency on internet connectivity. Hybrid cloud architecture requires both on-premises resources and off-site (remote) server based cloud infrastructure.

- **Hosted solutions:** often built from tried-and-trusted CPE equipment that has been modified to offer functionality to various separate clients at multiple locations, although has not been originally designed to be partitioned. As with reliance on any single piece of equipment, a fault at that point would cause issues for clients. Access to hosted solutions is generally provided by fixed access links installed specifically for the purpose, but can also be via connecting to existing private WAN networks.

For more information on cloud-based solutions, please download ContactBabel's free, in-depth report, "The Inner Circle Guide to Cloud-based Contact Centre Solutions".

WHAT TYPES OF COMPANY SHOULD CONSIDER CLOUD SOLUTIONS?

- Small and medium businesses, especially those needing rapidly deployable, easy-to-use services, such as enhanced routing
- Any size company looking to start a contact centre - outbound, inbound or both or move at low risk, or increase size for a temporary campaign
- Any size company looking to provide or leverage the advantages of a multi-site capability
- Enterprises that desire advanced contact centre functionality and are interested in acquiring a complete solution as a service
- Businesses needing contact centre business continuity plans
- Businesses needing to expand and contract quickly for peak seasons/traffic/campaigns
- Any size company wishing to gain access to technology with uncertain potential gains, such as call blending, and callback services.
- Enterprises with CTI-like functionality today who wish to enhance enterprise functionality with network call queuing and network routing or other components such as outbound, call blending, workforce management, Internet or web functionality (see following box).

Profit-based calls

Contact centres need to get the most value from each customer interaction and maximise the potential of every call.

To achieve this, some contact centres route inbound calls by agent group or individual agent skills. Others route calls by 'customer value': i.e.. By collecting information about the dialled number (e.g. a number only available to Gold customers), or by using information collected within an IVR session, businesses can route calls more intelligently - such as to low cost offices or specific countries.

This adds value to the business by ensuring agents get 'appropriate' calls, while customers get the level of service they need for first call resolution. This can not only reduce the cost of individual contacts, but also make the contact centre more profitable.

Put simply, whether delivered by customer premise equipment (CPE) solutions, by hosted or network systems, or a mixture of both, enterprises always demand control, choice and intelligence in a financial framework that is acceptable. Cloud solutions offer businesses the opportunity to deal with operating costs rather than capital expenditure which will always get a positive hearing at the budget-holder level of a business, although some CPE providers also offer leasing options.

277

The bottom line is that a successful cloud solution should offer everything a business could achieve with CPE, but yet be available on a pay-per-use or pay-as you-talk basis (per minute or second / call / month, etc.), be scalable and reliable, and offer easily-added functionality if required. Offering functions on ad-hoc basis - rather than clients having to pay for them up-front and then maybe never using – is an ability offered with many cloud solutions. Clients can choose to 'turn on' functions when campaigns require, and then 'turn off' if needed. In comparison, on-site systems need all the functions installed to begin with.

While these solutions already offer some inherent benefits provided by their design - such as simpler disaster recovery planning - their providers should also have the ability to offer functionality and managed services that would not be possible with CPE: the very nature of providing a service on equipment based external to the contact centre means that the real time activity of that operation can be monitored. For example, a good provider of outbound dialler solutions will be able to monitor and advise on the use, management, configuration and results achieved while using their dialler services, all in real time. As the supplier / manufacturer, they should also be best-placed to supply answers, support and advice on the best configurations of the dialling platforms.

"One of the key benefits to working with Ultra is their collaborative and proactive approach to all aspects of enhancing our service to customers. I am now able to see in one snapshot how my organisation is performing and have the data I need to continuously refine and improve my team's service delivery.

From business-as-usual support to one-off projects and acquisitions, our partnership with Ultra has been of huge benefit to the company and I know that I can rely on them to provide on-going advice and support with my company's best interests at heart."

Kieran McGuigan
Business Improvement
Manager, Grant Thornton

Global Advisory Firm Achieves Compliance with a Long Term Technology Partner

Client Overview: With over 31,000 staff across 100 countries, this is one of the world's leading organisations of independent assurance, tax and advisory firms. They offer award winning audit, tax and specialist advisory services to privately-held businesses, public interest entities and individuals. Client satisfaction and superior service are their number one priorities.

The Challenge: The company already had an existing hosted inbound call centre solution in use, however the solution did not offer the full resilient provision that they required to maintain their customer service levels; the functionality was limited in what it could provide for the multiple call flows that needed to be managed; and the management of the call flows was cumbersome and time consuming as each call flow had to be created from scratch each time. There were also additional concerns about the lack of support that was available from the solutions provider during periods of downtime, and for new requests for additional features to help with the client's campaigns.

The company required that any replacement solution must not only provide better resilience, increased functionality and easier user experience but offer a transition path that would: minimise the risk, as the inbound call flows needed to migrate seamlessly; ensure that the call flows were replicated with help/guidance from the new solution provider; and provide a regression plan should the UAT testing not return a 100% pass.

Additionally, due to the nature of their business, the solution needed the ultimate flexibility to scale up or down, given fluctuations based around 'local events', with unlimited capacity at any given time.

Finally, as a call handler for multiple group-companies taking details and payments for those individual businesses, not only did the solution need to be fully PCI compliant but the company needed to ensure that they could offer a high degree of transparency to the individual companies, as well as the requisite auditing and reporting requirements. Reputation and client satisfaction were key to this company.

The Solution: The firm chose an inbound and outbound call blending, call recording, customer surveys and queue management solution, which also enabled them to be totally removed from the scope of PCI regulations.

Ultra was selected from a number of providers, as the only supplier to offer a 'complete' solution and package, along with the partnership relationship that the client was seeking for better and closer day to day support.

Business Benefits:

- Fully functional, fully resilient solution across multiple sites
- Secure, FCA and PCI compliant solution
- Easy to use and can be monitored remotely, in real time and historic
- Transparent pricing model – charged on a usage basis with no additional maintenance or upgrade costs
- Unlimited, proactive 24/7 support included
- Reduced resources and cost required to manage multiple contact centres
- Ability to maintain accuracy and quality of data capture, even within a high payment transaction volume environment
- Real time supervisor management and online control of call flow rules
- Flexible solution for both functionality and scalability

Smart, simple and secure cloud technology solutions.

DRIVERS FOR HOSTED AND MANAGED SOLUTIONS

In order to change the way things work, there needs to be pressure exerted to make change worthwhile. After considering several potential financial and operational drivers for cloud solutions, respondents were asked how these factors affect their own contact centre operations, to see if there are forces that would make a contact centre consider changing the way they deploy technology.

Figure 119: What is your opinion on these cloud-related issues as they apply to your contact centre?

What is your opinion on these cloud-related issues as they apply to your contact centre?

Issue	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Reducing capital expenditure is a focus	5%	40%	37%	18%	1%
The pay-as-you-go model is attractive	10%	16%	42%	24%	9%
Virtualisation and homeworking have become more interesting to us	10%	37%	29%	15%	10%
Our IT support and implementation teams have become more overworked	13%	41%	27%	16%	3%
Having the flexibility to add agents and change functionality quickly is vital	38%	52%	8%	2%	
Our IT systems need to be improved	40%	39%	8%	6%	6%

With 90% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing, the ability to improve flexibility comes out on top once again this year, with the opportunity that cloud solutions offer to optimise user licences being widely acknowledged as a chance to cut costs while maintaining or improving functionality.

Virtualisation and homeworking is of interest to almost half of respondents. As more solutions become available and more businesses actually go ahead with this, the non-centralised model is something that is frequently being revisited. The flexibility of adding agents and licences is also connected with this.

47% of respondents agree or strongly agree that incorporating home-based employees into their business model is relevant in today's market. Having the option to employ remote workers allows organisations to appoint individuals who may not be able to physically travel to the office and can recruit based solely on the talent and skills of the candidates. There are also considerable cost benefits to consider including lower overheads associated with running an office and lower recruitment fees in line with a higher staff retention rates.

There is a strong feeling held by the majority of respondents that systems need updating urgently, which offers contact centres the opportunity to look at other options to the traditional CPE model, as it becomes a matter of choosing which change to make, rather than deciding whether any change is necessary. This can be also linked with the fact that over half of respondents say that their IT staff are increasingly overworked. A cloud-based solution can offer a significant reduction in the level of on-site support required.

The interest in cloud-based solutions seems more driven by what this deployment method can offer in terms of adding functionality and operational effectiveness, rather than through purely financial concerns such as using pay-as-you-go, or a reduction in capital expenditure.

Cloud services can offer a wealth of benefits over the traditional approach of providing infrastructure and running software in-house. Organisations that employ cloud technology solutions have access to increased flexibility, scalability and availability, which are all key requirements for contact centres facing changing regulatory requirements and an uncertain business climate.

THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF CLOUD SOLUTIONS

There are several factors driving the adoption of cloud solutions. The first is the 'pay-as-you-go' financial model that allows business of all sizes to move away from high front-end expenditures in favour of a more manageable operational expenditure approach. Small and mid-size companies typically do not have the ready access to cash to make the necessary capital expenditures for expensive CPE. As a result, making the shift from capital expenditure (Capex) to operational expenditure (Opex) is especially relevant for these firms. Additionally, the pay-as-you-go model simplifies overall cost management and business planning, making it more favourable than the Capex model. Recently, poor market conditions have affected companies and finances and some organisations that would not have previously considered Opex investments (e.g. public sector, utilities companies) are now doing so, as large Capex projects have been shelved, especially in the public arena.

However, the lack of growth in interest shown in pay-as-you-go from respondents to this survey - despite their stated lack of Capex funding - is puzzling, and runs quite contrary to logic. It may be that there is a misunderstanding about this form of solutions funding, messaging which must be addressed by solution providers, as all of the commercial drivers for Opex-funded hosted implementations are present: a lack of capital; the need to improve systems; the lack of in-house IT availability and the need for greater flexibility.

From a customer perspective, the low upfront investment, instant access to cutting-edge technology and rapid results associated with the cloud model should make it difficult to ignore. The real enabler of the low cost model is, surprisingly, a technical one - namely, leveraging multi-tenancy architecture. End-users, referred to as tenants, share server capacity in a partitioned environment. This allows the hosted provider to pass on cost savings from economies of scale realised through the use of shared resources.

Cutting the cost

- Decreased capital expenditure:

  o Businesses can scale down future customer premises equipment (CPE) investment, with a resulting decrease in capital expenditure

  o There is also an opportunity to buy services using a pay-per-use or even pay-as-you-talk pricing model, which helps to keep operating expenses to a minimum

  o Additionally, issues surrounding the total cost of ownership of CPE do not arise with cloud solutions: outright purchase of equipment isn't for everyone, perhaps for reasons of budget or the ability to maintain the systems

  o Low-risk ability to start up or move or expand without risking existing business plans

  o Business retain the freedom to downscale change targets and plans to meet demand, rather than commit themselves to long-term arrangements needed to justify the purchase approach of high value CPE.

- Lower development costs:

  o Businesses can experience a decrease in development costs and an increased speed of implementation, as cloud solution providers will already have solutions up and running

  o Network-based providers can arrange solutions to be integrated in days, as no specialised onsite equipment or dedicated connections are required. This reduces project times and costs, and allows business to react to requirements far more quickly.

- Managing calls at the network level decreases costs:

  o There are benefits of scale available with cloud solutions, which may offer businesses far greater overall capacity than would normally be provisioned with onsite CPE equipment. There are invariably transient periods where dialler equipment will calculate that it should be making more calls than there are phone lines provisioned, however the shared services approach means that providers may permit these higher demand periods to be serviced. This feature can save critical agent time and improve the consistency and overall performance achieved by dialling solutions

  o Business are able to reduce associated infrastructure Capex and Opex costs, such as telecoms requirements, as only one PSTN line per agent is needed for outbound & inbound campaigns. The overcall is carried out in the network and only live calls are placed to the agent, thereby reducing telephony line and terminating equipment costs

  o Cloud solutions can save on staffing/resource as they are no longer needed to manage the physical technology as it is not on-site

o Call queuing at the network level also saves money. In multi-site operations - rather than pass a call down to a contact centre which may not have an agent immediately available to take the call – it makes sense to queue the call at the network level until an agent is capable and available to take it. The call is then passed – once – to the agent in the specific contact centre

o Infrastructure and processes which are held at network level can avoid issues which CPE resources can experience, such as unnecessary duplication across multiple sites and a corresponding increase in management costs for configuration, administration and performance checking.

Improving the service

- Open access to systems allows greater functionality and lower costs:

  o CPE systems are, in the main, proprietary. Although they may be feature-rich, this can often mean that they are difficult to integrate, time-consuming to maintain, and limited in scalability. A superior cloud solution should be designed to be open, offer multi-site remote management and scale easily to accommodate multiple clients with high growth rates

  o Using CPE often means that development cycles are long, and that technology imposes its own limitations on what can be achieved

  o Cloud solution providers continually enhance and develop their services. This bestows a competitive advantage to clients who can deploy the latest technology and the often inherent advantages of improved functionality, service and reduced costs, through their contact centres. In effect, a cloud solution removes the technology stranglehold experienced by many contact centres with CPE and allows them to concentrate on their core businesses.

- Maximize existing resources:

  o Cloud solutions enable a business to make the most of their existing call routing infrastructure. By holding calls in the network and allowing unlimited database lookups, the solution maximises CPE resource usage and improves routing accuracy: with calls are transferred only when correctly-skilled agents become available

  o Cloud solutions can substantially reduce telephony and switch infrastructure costs. ACD functionality is controlled via the network and inbound calls routed through a variety of selected rules - using a script application to 'pop' agents' screens with relevant information collected from calls.

- Disaster recovery (DR):

  o Ensuring business continuity during outages, facility emergencies and inclement weather is a critical requirement. The cloud contact centre model ensures business continuity by enabling agents to be connected to the technology platform and necessary applications from anywhere with Internet access. Even in an outage, companies maintain the ability to service and sell to the client base, undermining what could otherwise be a disastrous situation resulting in lost revenue, dropped calls and negative customer experiences

  o Cloud solutions offer complete disaster recovery and business continuance as they may be delivered from multi-site locations, with flexible and immediate switching between sites should an outage or problem occur

  o Good cloud solutions provide a high level of disaster recovery integrally, meaning that clients should not require additional disaster recovery cover. For clients with existing on-site CPE, cloud solutions can also provide reserve back-up disaster recovery protection.

- Improve agent morale and availability:

  o Hosted self-service options such as IVR and voice portals mean businesses can save money through not having to employ live receptionists to route calls. Self-service also frees up time which would otherwise be taken up with answering repetitive questions, improving the happiness of agents and helping to reduce staff attrition

  o Real-time monitoring across multi-sites (and home-workers) allows identification of contact centre best working practice, which contributes to improved Agent/Team/Campaign productivity and cost reduction. In effect, a cloud solution removes technology from the equation when comparing productivity and efficiency in a contact centre.

- Expand/move/increase or try out new functionality without the high initial set-up costs:

  o Using a pay-per-use model allows businesses to: start new contact centres, move at low risk, increase capacity for temporary campaigns, or try out new functionality without having to spend excessive amounts of time and money first. This is especially the case with speech recognition which can be a very expensive solution to implement

  o Pay-per-use or pay-as-you–talk tariffs also allow cost-effective coverage of peak loads and overflow based upon seasonality.

- Take steps towards a virtual contact centre:

  o Cloud solutions support virtual contact centre functionality, including real-time monitoring across sites, sometimes even at an agent level. This can often be a critical factor in promoting a fair and effective working environment

  o For some cloud solutions, the only requirement for the agent apart from bandwidth is a PC and a DDI phone, therefore multiple sites and home-working can be achieved more easily and rapidly

- Scalability is key: contact centres want to be able to gear up and down to suit business demands and cope with peaks and troughs without unnecessary expenditure. With cloud-based solutions, this can be done on a daily basis, instead of investing on capacity that may not be used for months

- Network access to real-time reporting allows clients to see performance across multiple sites down to campaign-, sale- and even agent-level.

- Keep a consistent feel to the business:

  - Self-service and call routing scripts are held centrally, managed from a single interface, so that any changes can happen quickly and consistently

  - Network systems can have the dialler and ACD controlled by secure website access still providing complete control to the business even though there is no CPE on-site

  - Superior network solutions do provide their solutions as managed services. These offer the added benefit of complete management support for the supervisor and centre. The network provider is incentivised to ensure that the centre is working at optimum productivity levels, unlike on-site providers.

Every business needs to gain value from the purchases they make. With a low initial outlay, businesses can easily trial Cloud services and compare performance against current systems and processes, often providing a rapid ROI to users. Pay-as-You-Use Cloud suppliers have a natural incentive to provide exceptional performance, superior functionality and unsurpassed resilience – namely that they have to care about their clients' businesses to get paid: this is why good Cloud providers look to become partners rather than suppliers.

CPE OR CLOUD SOLUTIONS - OR BOTH?

There is a common misunderstanding within the industry that the choice is either CPE or a cloud solution. Where expansion is required, superior cloud solutions can be easily integrated into existing CPE ancillary systems, allowing the business to experience the functionality and advantages of a cloud solution without compromising existing investment. From a financial perspective, most cloud solution functionality is paid for as an ongoing operating cost, rather than requiring an upfront major investment: this should make it easier for contact centre management to persuade the budget-holder to upgrade the systems in place.

The flexibility of cloud solutions allows a business to experience these solutions as an additional 'bolt-on', the use of which can be expanded as the current CPE reaches obsolete / depreciated / non-regulatory status, or further functionality and capacity is required by the contact centre.

A perceived lack of control over operations and the security of critical customer data in a cloud environment continue to cause end-user concern. But the reality is that a well-engineered cloud environment will have deeper security infrastructure in place than many SMEs could afford on their own. This is a significant advantage in being able to leverage the financial investment that the cloud provider has made in security standards and measures. Tenant self-administration capabilities, along with process/methodologies with enhanced security options, can play a critical role in overcoming these reservations.

Cloud solutions need at least the same level of functionality as CPE-type equipment with good providers even providing remote web-based access to authorised users. Suppliers of cloud solutions must offer fully managed and supported services, with the trend moving towards offering proactive monitoring. On outbound pay-as-you-talk solutions, for example, there is clear synergy between the contact centre and the dialler solution provider to ensure the system is efficient, and is configured to operate at the optimum level, as this benefits both parties. This support offered by cloud providers is an essential factor in the decision-making process for businesses, and is vital to driving the non-CPE industry forward.

CHECKLIST WHEN CHOOSING A CLOUD SOLUTION

Vendor background and experience

- What is the company's history and experience in contact centre operations?
- Can the company provide references and implementation examples?
- How many contact centre seats are currently in production?

IT considerations

- Is there additional hardware or software to install on-site?
- What bandwidth and reliability issues should we address with our ISP?
- Are there additional costs required to integrate existing back office applications?
- What kind of resources & skill sets will I need to commit to the project, and when?

Network/hosting environment

- What reliability parameters are included in the Service Level Agreements?
- How can you maintain control, minimise business risk, & maximise service quality?
- How does the company address security and privacy concerns?
- How is your data separated from other clients' data?
- Do you provide 24x7 monitoring and support?
- What backup/disaster recovery procedures are in place?

Implementation expectations

- How long is the training cycle and is it administered on-line?
- Are there additional support and service costs?
- How long and complicated is a typical implementation?

Data Access

- Can I access my data outside of the provided contact centre application (e.g. sales or marketing queries and reports)?
- How does the vendor return data to you at the end of the hosting agreement?
- How do I integrate my local data and applications?

USE OF CLOUD SOLUTIONS

Call routing is the most likely functionality to be deployed through cloud-based solutions, with hosted IVR, call recording and CRM functionality also used in a significant minority of instances.

48% of respondents used at least some cloud-based functionality, with larger operations somewhat more likely to be using outbound dialling and analytics.

Figure 120: Is any of your contact centre functionality hosted in the cloud?
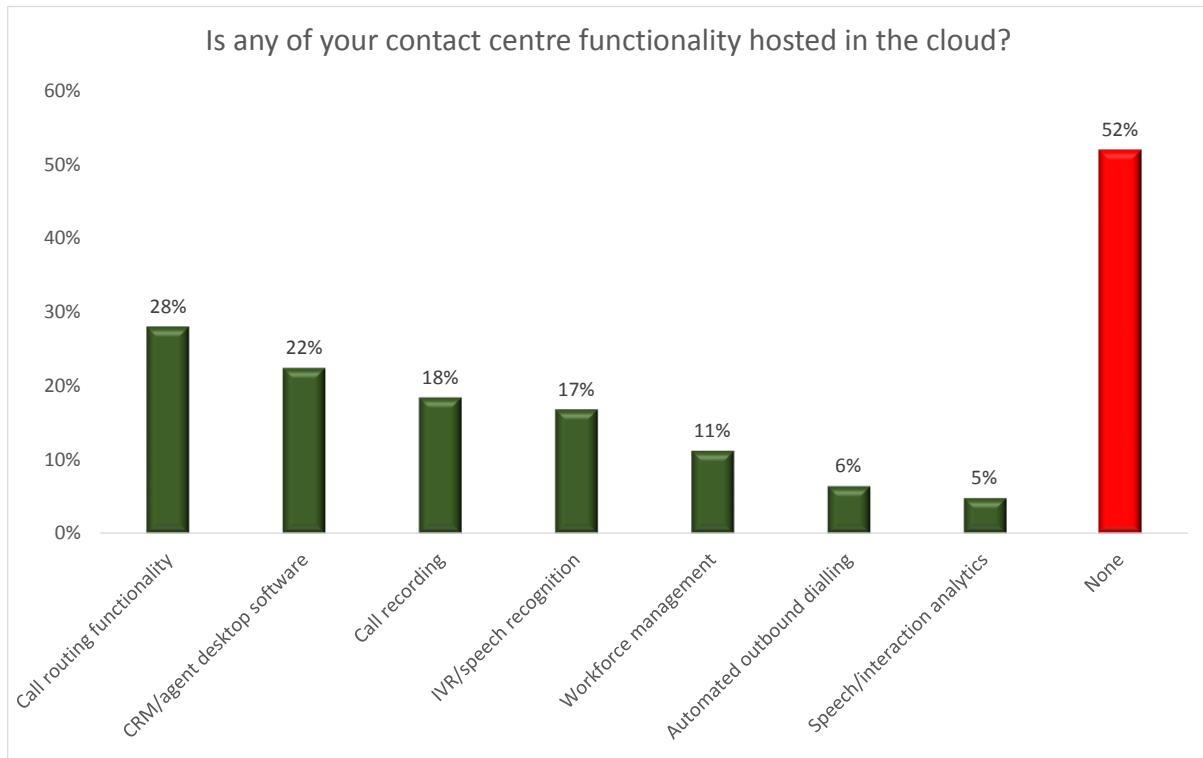
Figure 121: Is any of your contact centre functionality hosted in the cloud? (by contact centre size)

Technology	Small	Medium	Large	Average
Call routing functionality	30%	26%	27%	28%
CRM/agent desktop software	33%	11%	24%	22%
Call recording	24%	9%	24%	18%
IVR/speech recognition	20%	9%	24%	17%
Workforce management	11%	11%	12%	11%
Automated outbound dialling	7%	4%	12%	6%
Speech/interaction analytics	4%	0%	12%	5%
None	*48%*	*61%*	*45%*	*52%*

RESULTS OF USING CLOUD SOLUTIONS

Those contact centre respondents who have actually implemented a cloud-based solution have generally found that it has delivered significant advantages.

The strongest experience was a more powerful or extended functionality, with 82% of respondents agreeing that the overall cost of ownership was cheaper. 67% experienced a cheaper overall cost of ownership in a hosted or managed environment, with only 5% disagreeing. 56% found that making changes to the system was now easier, although there were 24% of respondents who felt the opposite.

These research findings have been consistently positive for many years despite different companies taking part each year, and readers can treat these findings with considerable confidence.

Figure 122: Have cloud-based solutions made any difference?

Have cloud-based solutions made any difference?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
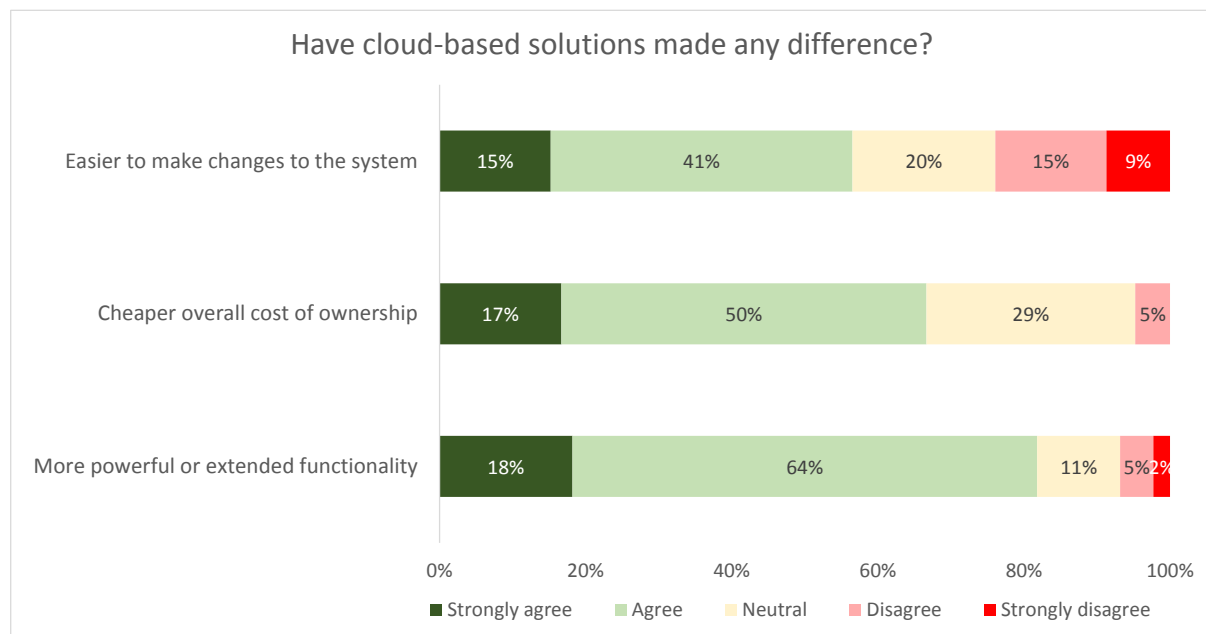
CONCERNS ABOUT CLOUD-BASED SOLUTIONS

Despite the generally positive experiences that most users of cloud & hosted solutions have reported, there are still considerable barriers to implementation that are holding back some potential users, mostly around security, wasted investment and integration with existing systems.

The strongest of these is the concern that data security will be compromised by allowing a third-party to control customer details. 27% of non-cloud-using respondents state that data security in the cloud is of great concern to them, showing that communication of the reality of these risks still needs improvement. For example, while some cloud-based providers allow clients to keep call recordings and sensitive customer information on their own site, most have external audits and accredited dedicated security to surpass the security delivered by on-premise offerings.

The difficulty in integrating with existing systems, and the danger of wasting existing investments is also of concern, although most respondents rightly do not consider a lack of reporting or loss of control to be a deal-breaker. Those with concerns that existing investments would be wasted if they were to move to cloud, should not that many vendors offer a solution that can work alongside existing CPE elements. Solution providers should continue to focus their efforts on demonstrating the strength of their security measures, and reassuring potential users of cloud and hosted solutions that the security measures in place are actually stronger than would be feasible within a fully premise-based system. Concerns about the practicality of integrating with existing solutions, along with guarantees over performance should also be addressed.

Figure 123: What are your concerns about cloud-based solutions? (respondents not using cloud)
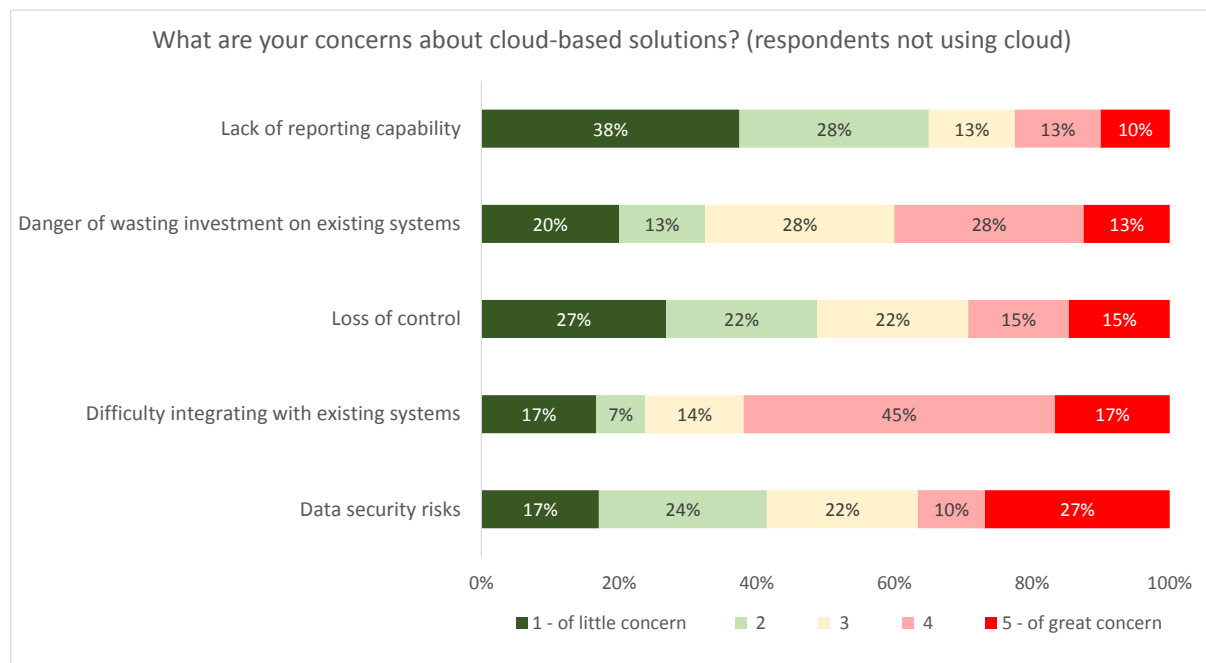
When the same question about concerns is asked to users of cloud-based contact centre solutions, it is noticeable that 24% still have concerns about data security. While this figure is lower than that given by non-cloud users, it shows that data security issues have not yet been fully addressed to the market's entire satisfaction.

On a more positive note, the possibility of wasting investment on existing systems and the potential difficulty integrating with existing infrastructure is of much less concern in reality to those respondents who have actually gone through this process. However, a minority of cloud-users still have significant concerns about loss of control and lack of reporting capability of cloud-based solutions, only a little less so than the respondents who are still using CPE.

Figure 124: What are your concerns about cloud-based solutions? (respondents using cloud)
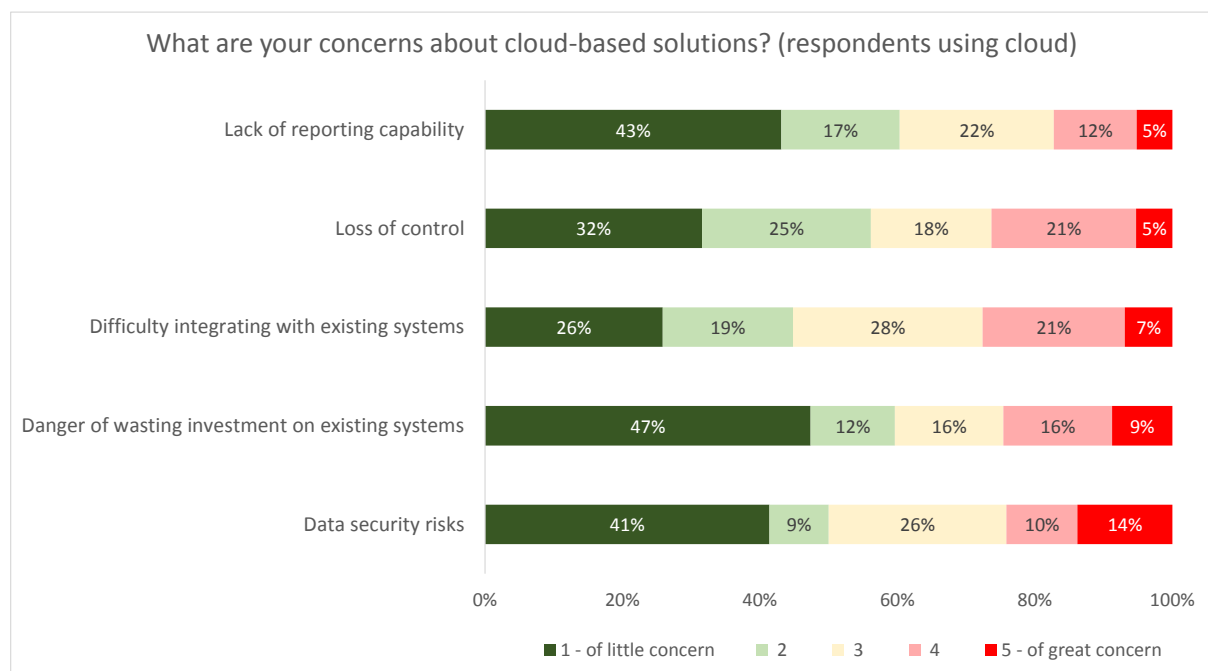
OUTBOUND AND CALL BLENDING

The traditional outbound call was simply about selling more products to new and existing customers. However, legislation and customer pressure is having a continuing impact on cold calling, and the past years have seen an increasing proportion of outbound calling being made to existing customers, either to deliver customer care or to inform them proactively about events and circumstances which affect them. Outbound calling is fundamentally different from inbound, and – facing significant and growing cultural and legislative issues - must be managed sensitively:

- the nature of outbound is intrusive and usually driven by the needs of the business rather than the customer (except in cases of call-back requests and for proactive outbound service)

- this means that customers are more likely to be defensive and wary of the purpose of the call. Trust needs to be built very quickly in order to overcome this negative start point: having the right information about the customer to hand will improve the experience for both agent and customer

- outbound work can be very hard on agents: few people actively welcome most outbound calls, and persistent refusal, lack of interest and rudeness can be very wearing for agents, especially if productivity-enhancing technology such as diallers are being used. Management should consider ways of alleviating agent stress, through sensible scheduling and call blending, judicious use of technology, focused training and improving working environments, amongst other ways

- especially where the technology exists to do so, it can be tempting to treat outbound calling campaigns as an exercise in maximizing call volumes and (theoretically) revenues. However, this can result in brand damage and high staff attrition rates through over-pressured and exhausted agents delivering poorer quality interactions

- there has been a tendency to use offshore contact centres for low-value outbound sales campaigns which would otherwise be unprofitable to run. However, the same high standards of training and support are needed by offshore agents to do their job properly: too many businesses simply put the agents on a dialler with an inflexible script in front of them and then wonder why their customers and prospects become negative towards their brand (for example, 73% of the UK public who considered offshore customer contact to be inferior cited inflexible scripts as a key issue)[11]

- tough legislation has emerged which is reducing the amount of cold calling which businesses can do. Cold calling is illegal in Germany, and the Do-Not-Call register in the US and the Telephone Preference Scheme in the UK allow customers (and now businesses in the UK) to opt out of receiving any sales calls at all. Over 15m consumer telephone numbers in the UK are registered with TPS (approximately 60% of households).

---

[11] ContactBabel, "Finding the Balance: The Effects of Offshore Customer Contact on Profit and Brand"

Call blending is an element of outbound calling which has grown significantly in recent years, as some of the conventional wisdom of the traditional call centre industry - which stated that the more one can segregate the contact centre into a series of production lines, the better-run the operation will be - has been re-evaluated.

Call blending gives the ability to deliver both inbound and outbound calls seamlessly to the agent, regulating outbound call volume based on inbound traffic. When inbound traffic is low, outbound calls are automatically generated for a specified campaign. When inbound traffic picks up, the dialler dynamically slows the number of outgoing calls to meet the inbound service level. Results can include increased agent productivity, streamlined staffing, and improved customer service. However, this process needs to be understood and managed carefully, as not all agents are adept at dealing with both inbound and outbound calls.

Sales to both new and existing customers are obviously still key reasons why companies carry out outbound calls, and the hybrid method – customer service leading to a cross-sell/up-sell opportunity – is seen a good way of circumventing the increasing numbers of people registering for the Telephony Preference Service. However, businesses must be careful not to pester customers or abuse the relationship they have built up with frequent calls about products and services that are not tailored to the customer. Increasingly, turning an inbound service call which has been handled successfully into a cross-sell or upselling opportunity is a widely-use tactic.

OUTBOUND ACTIVITY

Similar to last year's findings, 69% of respondents carry out some form of outbound calling, with the outsourcing & telemarketing sector leading the way, as might be expected. Once again, the public sector lags quite some way behind the rest of the contact centre industry in terms of its outbound activity.

Figure 125: Use of outbound calling, by vertical market

Vertical market	Proportion of respondents using outbound calling
Outsourcing	90%
Manufacturing	90%
Services	85%
Insurance	80%
Housing	80%
Retail & Distribution	75%
Finance	70%
Utilities	60%
TMT	56%
Transport & Travel	50%
Public Sector	20%
Average	**69%**

Once again, there is some pattern between contact centre size and the propensity to make outbound calls, with large contact centres being more likely to do so.

Figure 126: Use of outbound calling, by contact centre size

Contact centre size	Proportion of respondents using outbound calling
Small	62%
Medium	74%
Large	73%
Average	**69%**

The single most popular outbound activity continues to be proactive customer service - a strong brand builder as well as an effective call avoidance tactic, which grows strongly to 37% this year.

The overall proportion of sales calls declines somewhat to 31%. While making sales calls to potential new customers continues this year as the top sales-related outbound activity, it declines in 24% to 14% this year: this will be tracked closely in future years to see whether this is a permanent structural change in the industry, or simply a statistical blip for 2014.

Cross-selling/upselling continues to be an important outbound activity (and bear in mind that this figure does not include those many inbound service calls that are turned into cross-selling opportunities), with 11% of outbound calls being made for this purpose. (More information on cross-selling and up-selling can be viewed in the Profit Maximisation and CRM chapter of this report).

Renewals calls dip slightly to 6%, perhaps as a result of automated reminders via email and SMS playing more of a role.

Debt collection calls have declined, and customer satisfaction surveys increased to levels last seen before the economic downturn.

Figure 127: Outbound activity
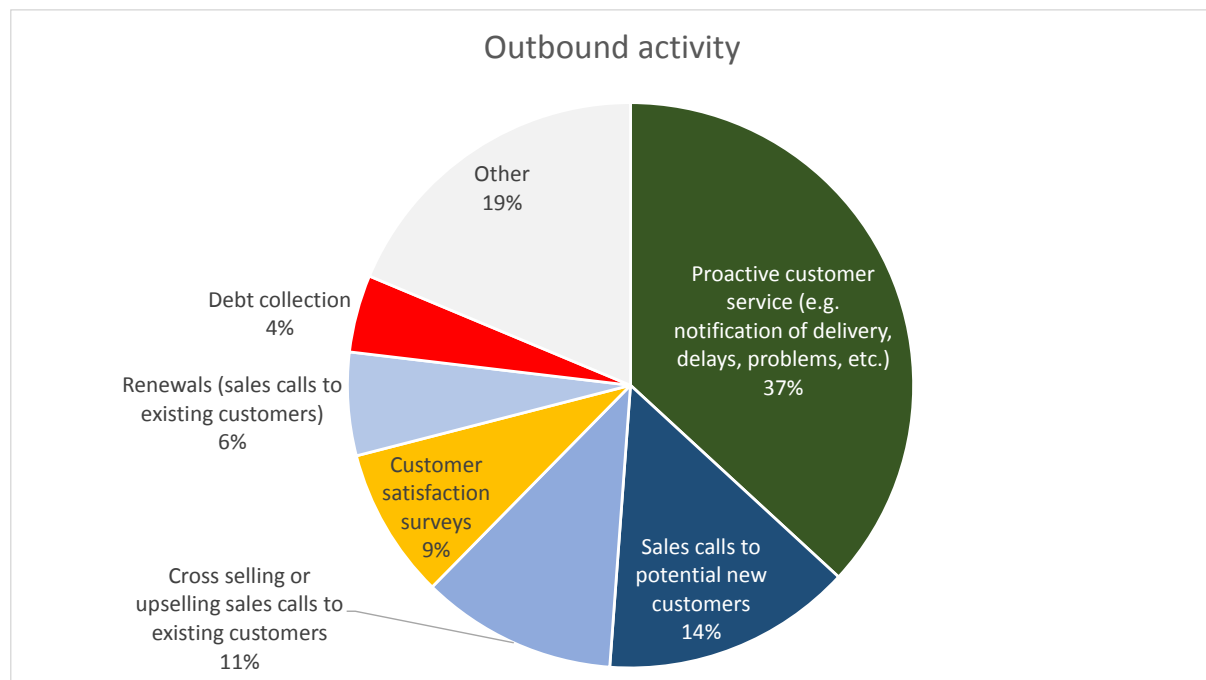
Vertical market patterns are very different from each other, and there is not even a great deal of homogeneity within sectors, so these figures should be treated with some caution. However, there are some interesting findings to bring out.

The majority of retail & distribution and manufacturing sectors' outbound activity is proactive customer service, advising of delays and deliveries, and providing information up and down the supply chain, with the transport and travel and housing sectors are also very involved in this.

Insurance, TMT and utilities respondents all report cross-selling and upselling being a significant part of their outbound activity.

The insurance, services and outsourcing sectors are the hungriest for new business and most likely to cold-call (within the law, of course), with the former sector possibly driven by the uptake in web-based sales lead capture via comparison sites, which provide qualified leads to be acted upon immediately.

The finance respondents report very significant outbound activity connected to debt collection, with utilities and housing also active, although to a much smaller extent.

The contract-based business models, often found in insurance (17%), are most likely to be carrying out renewal sales calls to existing customers.

OUTBOUND SELF-SERVICE

Traditionally, outbound customer contact had been heavily sales-focused, and as it relied on live agent communication, has tended to be expensive. Leading companies now carry out a significant amount of live proactive outbound customer service, which accounts this year for 37% of their outbound activity. However, the same restrictions around cost apply to this process as well.

The opportunity exists for automated proactive customer service to expand, such as sending reminders and notifications to customers through an automated process, thus significantly reducing the cost to the business while improving the overall customer experience. In a significant number of interactions with the business, a customer will choose to seek clarification or a status update at some point in the process through making an inbound request for service, regardless of channel. By sending a pre-emptive outbound message, the business is proactively assisting the customer to manage their interaction.

Figure 128: Use of automated outbound for proactive customer service

Use of automated outbound for proactive customer service
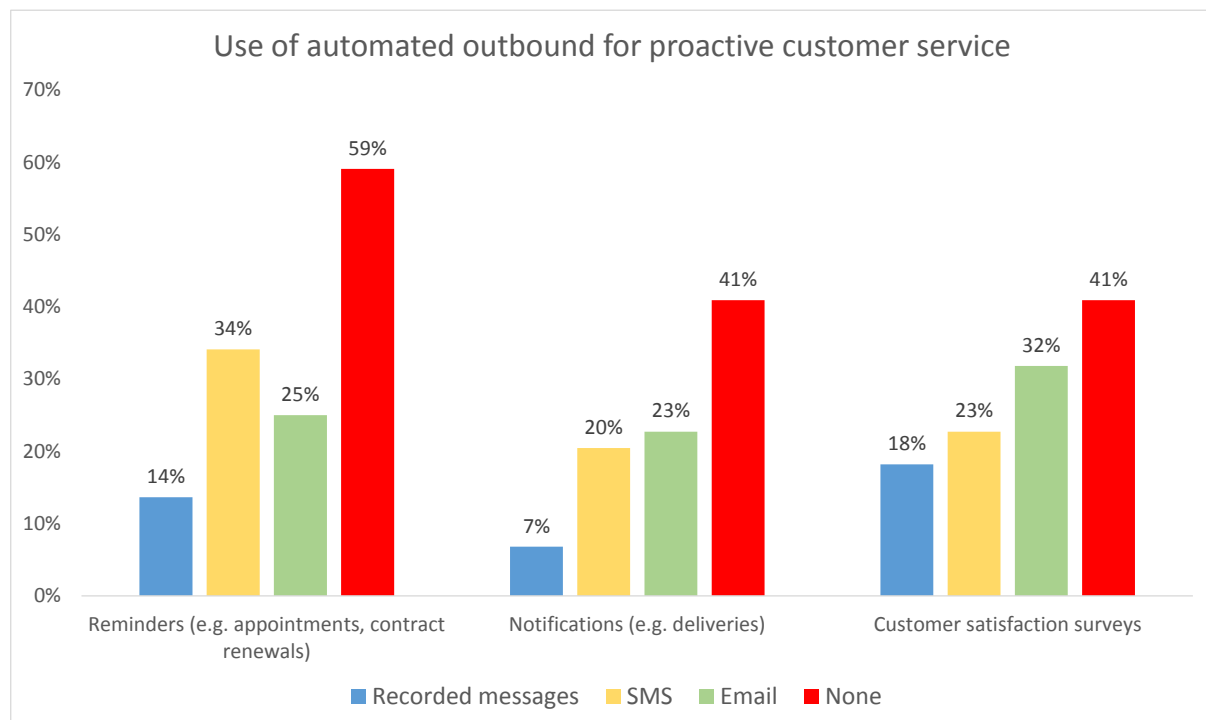
59% of respondents do not use recorded messages for any purpose, perhaps in part because of cultural negativity surrounding this form of communication, such as those pushing PPI compensation or personal injury claims. However this figure is significantly lower than that of 2013 (78%), and it may be that future years show this to be an ongoing trend. Where they are used, recorded messages are more likely to be reminders to customers.

SMS messages are used much more widely, with reminders and notifications being particularly popular for this channel, particularly in the retail and finance industries. The simplicity of SMS provides a cheap and easy route to the customer, with all of the information that the customer requires able to be sent in a small number of characters.

Outbound customer satisfaction surveys are also a fairly popular activity for customers to be invited to take part in via an automated outbound channel, with email being the most frequently used channel for this purpose.

USE OF DIALLERS

When including **all** respondents to this survey - even those with little or no outbound activity - research shows that 31% of UK contact centres use an outbound dialler.

When looking **only** at those who report a significant level of outbound activity, survey results show that 52% of respondents making outbound calls do not use a dialler to automate their outbound calls (a figure which has been consistent for the past three years). Of those 48% of relevant respondents that do use an automated dialler, 60% own it and keep it on their premises, with 40% having the functionality hosted off-site.

Larger contact centres are far more likely to be using a dialler, and this year's respondents from large operations report only 30% of these are hosted diallers, with the majority owning and managing it themselves. A majority of respondents in medium-sized operations that use a dialler report that it is hosted, but a surprisingly high proportion of respondents from small contact centres stated that they own their own dialler. This may be a factor of having only a small sample (only 21% of the small contact centres that carry out significant levels of outbound even use a dialler at all), so this finding should be treated with appropriate caution.

Figure 129: Use of hosted or CPE diallers

Figure 129: Use of hosted or CPE diallers
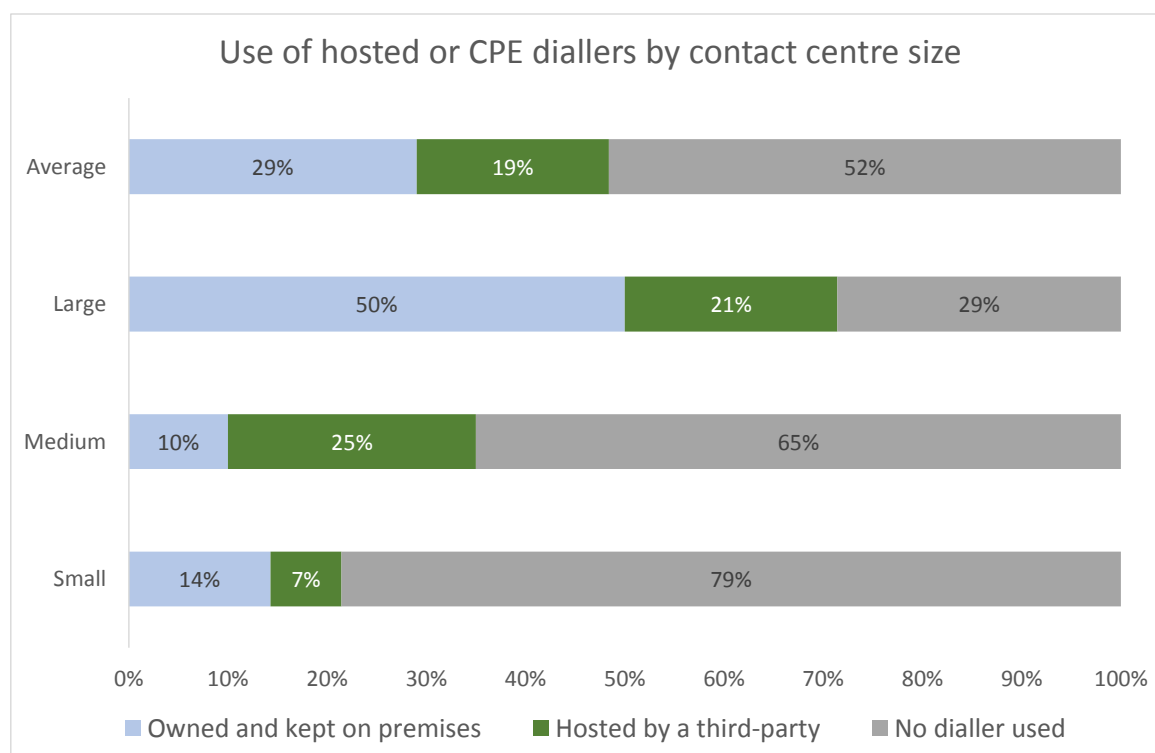
NOBLE SYSTEMS   *Today's businesses move at a fast pace, and keeping up with changing conditions and new technologies while controlling costs can be a challenge. Hosted contact centre solutions can be an attractive alternative to traditional premise-based systems, delivering a complete contact centre technology solution with all of the advantages of a cloud-based CaaS (communications as a service) infrastructure, with the flexibility to scale your operations to meet your changing needs. Noble Systems has seen a continued growth in the demand for hosted contact centre solutions over the last 24 months from both new and existing customers.*

NOBLE SYSTEMS

--- Case Study ---

Swinton Group

Swinton Group was formed in 1957 and is now the UK's largest insurance intermediary with a high street presence. Swinton Group Ltd is owned by MMA Group Ltd, with the ultimate parent being a French company - Mutuelles du Mans Assurances I.A.R.D. Today, Swinton has over 560 Retail and Commercial branches located throughout mainland UK and Ireland with a 300 seat inbound call centre based in Manchester, a 250 seat outbound call centre based at Hebble Brook near Halifax, and specialist call centres based in Maidstone, Horsforth and Norwich.

Swinton had an existing dialler in place that was not performing to the levels required and as a result sales performance was not up to its full potential. The contact centre managers at Swinton manage numerous outbound campaigns at any one time and it was difficult on their original dialler to manipulate data when setting up new campaigns or amending existing campaigns.

When the decision was made to find a new supplier, Swinton was looking for a solution to give them improved dialling performance together with alleviating some of the constraints they had around campaign set up. They chose the Noble Enterprise Solution and gave the Noble Systems team some performance criteria against their existing solution for a side-by-side testing program, with an extensive measurement period lasting ten weeks.

Jez lamb, Swinton's Telephony Manager commented, "We knew almost immediately that the Noble platform by far outperformed our existing system; it exceeded our list penetration and saw wait times decrease by 61%, thus resulting in an improved sales performance". Following Noble's success against the performance criteria, Swinton decided that the Noble Enterprise solution gave them the right balance between performance and usability.

As a result of installing the Noble Solution, Swinton management were able to increase their sales targets by 57%, ensuring maximum return on their solution investment. Swinton have found that Noble has given much greater control to the dialler management team; they have found that they are now able to launch new campaigns without any interaction with the IT team. "It has made my life so much easier. The dialler virtually runs itself and has taken so much support pressure away from my team. It used to take the dialler managers 3 months to set up new campaigns, this can now take a matter of days depending on the complexity of the campaigns," explained Jez Lamb.

The Swinton management team have found the integrated Noble Recorder invaluable, as 'sales' are tagged within the solution and call recordings can be retrieved quickly to ease training and management of the sales executives. Swinton has also recently introduced an element of Noble IVR (mainly for data capture purposes). They are delighted with Noble Composer, which makes it easy for their managers to build, amend and launch IVR and campaign scripts as required.

The Noble Solution integrates seamlessly with Swinton's existing PBX. In addition, as part of the script flow, when a sale has been identified it seamlessly 'breaks out' of the calls script into Swinton's back end system and pre-populates all of the relevant data populated into the Swinton system, making the process simple and efficient for the agent.

Jez also commented on the Noble CARE team, saying "The Noble training was excellent and the support team has a great understanding of the Swinton site. On the few occasions that we have required support, the team has nearly always achieved first call resolution and the support team are great at keeping us informed of progress."

EFFECTS OF LEGISLATION

The Telephone Preference Service (and the EC Regulations on Electronic Communication which deals with email and SMS) are part of the general social and political drift towards allowing consumers and businesses the right not to be contacted by companies. This is part of a global movement, perhaps indicated best by the state government of California, which does not allow over-dialling at all. In the UK, Ofcom is getting progressively stricter in its outbound regulations, a summary of which appears here.

Summary of Ofcom's Dialling Regulations

- Call abandonment rate shall be no more than 3% of 'live calls' on each individual campaign over any 24 hour period;
- In the event of an 'abandoned call', a very brief recorded information message is played within one second of the call being answered, which;
1. identifies the company on whose behalf the call was made;
2. identifies the intended purpose of the call (i.e. "unsolicited sales call", " call as part of debt recovery", etc.)
3. offers the called person the possibility of declining to receive further calls from that company by contacting a no charge or basic rate number;
4. includes no marketing content and is not used as an opportunity to market to the called person;
- calls which are not answered should ring for a minimum of 15 seconds before being terminated;
- when an 'abandoned call' is made to a particular number, that number is not called again in the following 72 hours, unless a dedicated operator is available;
- for each outbound call a CLI number is presented, to which a return call may be made which is not charged at a higher rate than the national call rate;
- either a recorded message or a live operator is available at the CLI number presented to inform called persons of the identity of the organisation that called them, the intended purpose of the 'abandoned call' and that the called person's number will be deleted from the organisation's database and added to its in-house suppression list at the called person's request if they leave their name and telephone number;
- any call made by the called person to the contact number provided shall not be used as an opportunity to market to that person;
- records are kept that demonstrate compliance with the above procedures.

The entire document, including the commentary on ongoing proposals for change, is downloadable from : http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/silent-calls/

NOBLE SYSTEMS

Noble Systems is a strong advocate for best practices within the contact centre industry, and we believe that when used appropriately and responsibly, AMD is a valuable tool for driving productivity in a compliant contact centre. Noble is committed to ensuring that all of our platforms can be managed in full compliance with the regulations that govern customer contact, and our solutions allow users to control the pacing and business rules of their outbound dialling campaigns. The solution automates, organises and manages our clients' outbound multi-channel contacts and resources, allowing them to build productivity, improve efficiency, increase right party contacts and manage customer contact preferences in line with Ofcom regulations.

OUTBOUND PERFORMANCE METRICS

The most widely-used outbound metric is perhaps the simplest to measure - how many calls are made per hour? In joint-second place comes sales conversion rate and hourly/daily sales, with live contacts per hour measured slightly less frequently.

The number of calls dropped or abandoned, which is important to see if the contact centre is keeping to Ofcom regulations is measured by almost two-thirds of respondents, with only 40% of respondents judging themselves on how closely they stick to the dialler schedule.

Figure 130: Use of outbound performance metrics (only respondents using outbound)

Outbound performance metric	Proportion of relevant respondents using this metric
Calls per hour made	83%
Sales conversion rate	72%
Hourly / daily sales	72%
Live contacts per hour	70%
Call drop rate	65%
Adherence to dialler schedule	40%

CALL BLENDING

A contact centre handling different processes involving customer service, sales orders, and outbound telemarketing, will have different groups of agents with specific skills for these areas. Some agents are more capable and adaptable than others, and can be used as blended agents. For example, these agents may have a primary responsibility to handle inbound calls, but when the inbound call volume drops, the dialler will send a message to these agents indicating that they have been switched to outbound mode and start offering outbound calls to them. Where relevant, a CTI link will prompt a script for the outbound calls to run on the agent desktop and - depending on the call volume in the inbound queue, the agents will be switched automatically, improving productivity. However, if there is a constant switching from inbound to outbound and back again, the agent may lose concentration and the productivity may go down.

A structured blended environment, where agents are moved seamlessly and dynamically between inbound and outbound, is used in 31% of respondents' operations, an increase on previous years. Historically, larger operations were more likely to use this method more frequently than smaller contact centres, but this pattern seems to be breaking down. Having dedicated and separate inbound and outbound agents appears to be much more prevalent in large operations. Smaller contact centres are more likely to take an informal, ad-hoc approach, as might be expected.

Figure 131: Use of call blending by contact centre size

Use of call blending by contact centre size

Legend:
- No, we have dedicated and separate inbound and outbound agents
- Yes, but in an informal, ad-hoc way
- Yes, in a formal and structured way

	Small	Medium	Large	Average
No, we have dedicated and separate inbound and outbound agents	20%	20%	37%	26%
Yes, but in an informal, ad-hoc way	55%	40%	37%	43%
Yes, in a formal and structured way	25%	40%	26%	31%
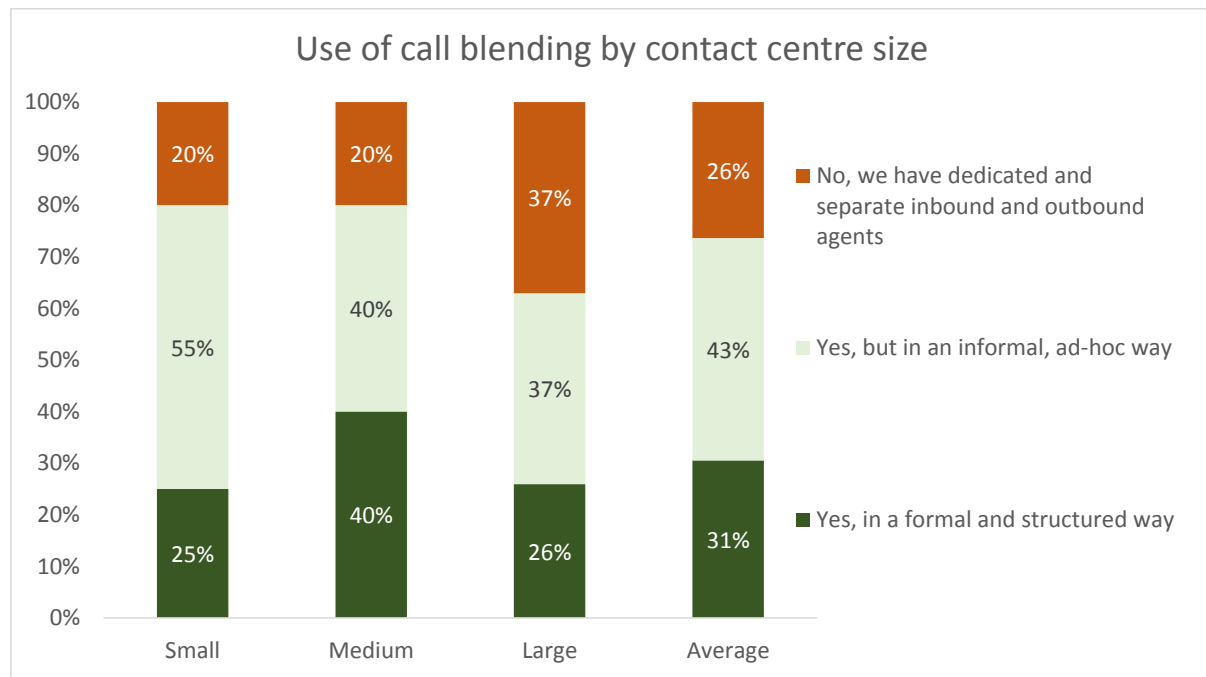
As with previous years, the attrition rate in contact centres using formal blending is somewhat lower than in those that do not, as perhaps the variety of work may have a positive impact. Those respondents reporting formalised blending had an annual agent attrition rate of 13%, against 19% for those with dedicated inbound/outbound staff, and 20% for those employing an ad-hoc approach.

Of course, there are many other variables at play that affect attrition, such as contact centre size, location, salary, working conditions and type of work, but although attrition is currently a serious problem for only a small proportion of operations, the use of blending as an antidote for attrition should be considered for the future.

NOBLE SYSTEMS

The majority of Noble Systems' customers use call blending, many of which have seen a huge improvement in agent attrition since adopting this technology; the system seamlessly adjusts the pace of outbound dialling in response to changing inbound volumes, so that agents are always kept busy, alleviating agent boredom and improving morale. Adding the ability to automatically deliver the relevant workflow and customer data to the agent's screen for each call further improves the agent experience and eliminates redundant keystrokes and manual look-ups. Finally, using workforce management and real-time adherence tools can ensure that the right agents are in the right place at the right time and agent preferences can be taken into account when creating schedules – this also helps to reduce agent attrition, and contributes to the bottom line by using resources more effectively.

THE ROLE OF MOBILE TELEPHONY ON OUTBOUND CALLING

In around 70 countries, mobile telephony analysts have put out seemingly counter-intuitive mobile phone penetration rates of well over 100% - that is, there are more phones than people. The UK is one such country.

Businesses wishing to use mobile telephony - whether through voice or SMS - should be aware of the unique nature of the channel, including the psychological state of many mobile phone users towards the device. The mobile phone is seen as a private, personal communications channel, in a way that a PC or landline phone is not. The mobile phone goes everywhere with its owner at all times (the peak hours for texting in Western countries are between 10pm and 11pm), and the external appearance, sound and function of the phone can be personalised and modified to reflect the user's personality.

Figure 132: Proportion of outbound calls made to mobile phones
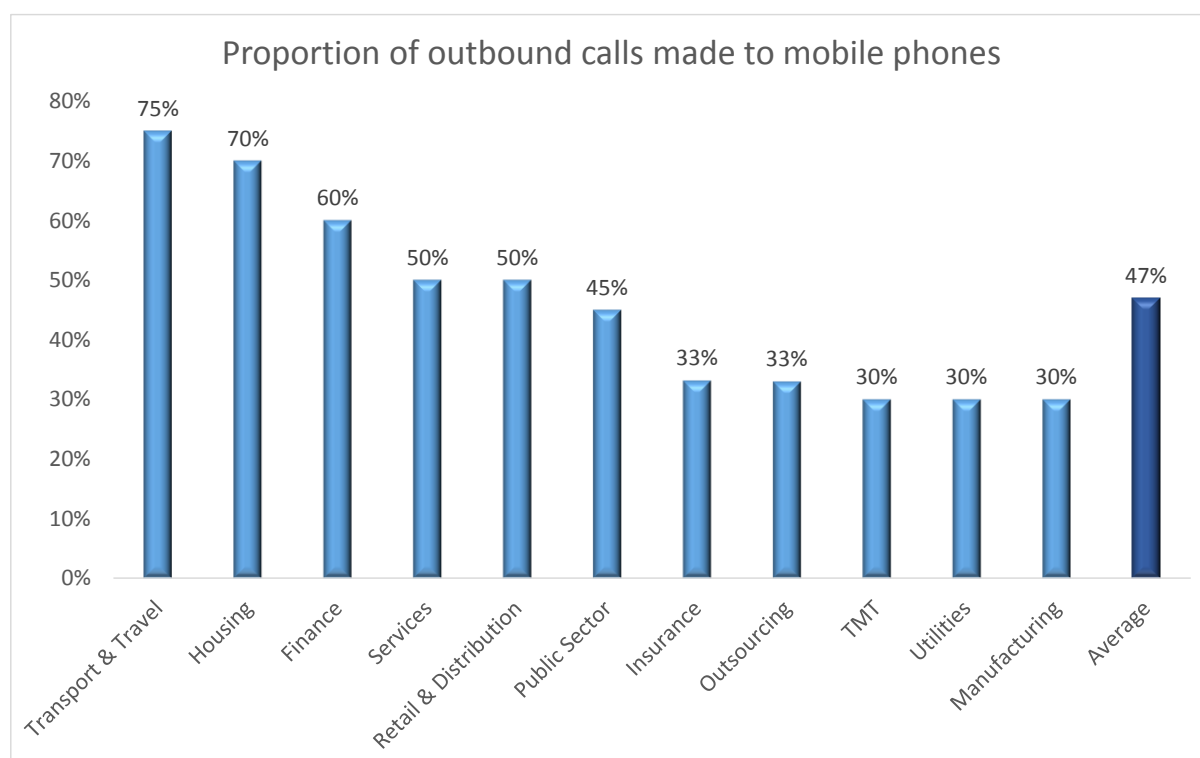
Currently, as a mean average, UK respondents make 47% of their outbound calls to mobile phones (historically, 48% in 2013; 46% in 2012; 42% in 2011; 35% in 2010; 36% in 2009; 28% in 2008).

It costs an average of around 3 times more to call a mobile phone than a landline:

- Mean cost of outbound call to landline (ppm): 1.3p
- Median cost of outbound call to landline (ppm): 1.0p (1st quartile 0.3p, 3rd quartile 1.5p, low 0.0045p, high 5p)

- Mean cost of outbound call to mobile (ppm): 3.5p
- Median cost of outbound call to mobile (ppm): 3.0p (1st quartile 1.4p, 3rd quartile 5.0p, low 0.1p, high 11p)

As outbound calling switches from landline to mobile, businesses faced with a growth in the costs of calling may feel tempted to cut back on outbound communications, perhaps even going as far as not encouraging mobile numbers as the primary contact method. However, this would be very short-sighted, as its ubiquity and responsiveness has a great advantage over landline phones and even emails, as the business is far more likely to reach the customer by calling their mobile number.

The ubiquity and massive increase in the use of smartphones also means that the mobile channel has become a crucial part of the customer contact mix, and businesses should look to engage with mobile customers, not worrying too much about cost differentials. Besides, increasing the use of SMS as a channel to the customer would reduce many of the costs associated with mobile communication (including agent time, as well as transmission costs), while keeping the advantages of contacting a customer's mobile number. See the 'New Media and the Customer of the Future' chapter for more about the role of SMS.

Organisations able to help with Increasing Profitability:

Enghouse Interactive helps you meet your profitability objectives, with our contact centre solutions that address today's business needs and tomorrows.

Infinity CCS's technology solutions help you improve customer experience and drive down cost to serve: Enable your agents to work smarter and faster, and focus on customers not processes and software, with our Unified Desktop, Intelligent Workflow and Knowledge Base software; reduce costs and live call volumes while maintaining quality of service and maximising sales opportunities with Web & Telephone Self-Service and integrated multi-channel solutions.

At Interactive Intelligence, it's what we do.

Profitability really comes down to a matter of customer happiness, and Intradiem's Intraday Automation tool empowers you to create extraordinary customer experiences by eliminating manual processes and optimizing the workday so that your front line agents are always available to respond to customer inquiries, in any situation.

IP Integration helps business leaders reduce operational cost and increase revenue yield in the contact centre through self-funding contact centre improvement initiatives and transformation programmes; utilising an optimal mix of people, process and technology.

NewVoiceMedia is a leading global provider of true cloud contact centre and multi-channel communications solutions.

Nexidia, long term educators of Customer Interaction Analytics, works with some of the world's largest contact centres to capture multi-channel interactions, analyse the data and then use this valuable insight into the customer experience to develop business strategies to improve the performance in every area of the organisation.

Noble Systems provides innovative solutions for Unified Communications, Business Process Management and Analytics to increase the profitably of thousands of contact centres throughout the world.

rostrvm is a 'one-stop-shop' for contact centres but we listen then tailor-make the right, individual solution, scalable and modular to fit with your needs: it can improve performance, reduce average handling times, increase first-call resolution rates, reduce overall costs ... thereby delighting customers and raising profitability – and, always, being software it's future proof.

SAP Contact Center software helps organisations efficiently manage contact centre operations including inbound and outbound customer communications across multiple channels.

Ultra offers advanced Cloud technology solutions for the contact centre on a Pay-As-You-Use basis - various Dialler modes optimise customer contact rates and all services and flexible and scalable ensuring clients only ever pay for what they use, and full 24/7/365 support provides proactive advice on optimising performance for clients' campaigns.

HR MANAGEMENT

With HR accounting for 75% of operational cost, issues such as attrition, recruitment and training are always towards the front of any contact centre manager's mind. This section looks at how time and money are spent on the human element to contact centres.

This chapter contains headline statistics around contact centre HR benchmarks.

"The UK Contact Centre HR and Operational Benchmarking Report" gives detailed analysis of salaries, bonuses, attrition, absence, training methods and costs, segmented by vertical market, contact centre size, region and contact centre activity type where relevant. Historical trends are observed with a view to predicting what future standards will look like.

The report also contains operational benchmarks such as speed to answer, call abandonment rates, call duration, call transfer rate, cost per call, agent occupancy, target service levels and first-call resolution rates.

ATTRITION

Throughout the studies that ContactBabel has carried out over the years, whether in the US or Europe, staff attrition has consistently been quoted as one of the major worries of contact centre management. Along with staff absences, high levels of unexpected attrition can cripple a contact centre's ability to provide even an acceptable level of service, raising costs and creating a negative customer experience, as well as pacing massive stress on those agents who remain at work.

For many years, attrition has been one of the greatest challenges facing the industry, and one which has rarely been addressed with much in the way of a truly radical approach. The recession has reduced attrition greatly,, but contact centres must understand that this may be a temporary respite: with no structural change to the industry, its recruitment and train methods, management techniques or job types, the same problems will emerge as the economy picks up.

The reduction of attrition has two main factors - that the successful candidates are suited to, and competent for the work which they will undertake, and that the work and conditions in which they find themselves will be conducive to a long-term stay.

Solution providers experienced in analysing attrition state that that understanding the 0-to-90 day attrition data is critical to being able to reduce attrition. Most organisations believe that a very significant proportion of their annualised attrition occurs in the first 90 days after recruitment. This strongly suggests that there are often errors made in the type of people employed, who are all but doomed to failure by their unsuitability for the task. Businesses should collect information on the sorts of behaviour and characteristics of people likely to do well in each role - preferably analysing the people who are successful in the roles already - and pre-screen applicants against those criteria.

Getting a high proportion of the right sort of people through the doors and onto the induction course can greatly reduce early attrition: attrition is something that should be focused upon at the recruitment stage, rather than leaving it until the candidates are already in the business before noticing the problems.

Staff attrition in small doses can be good for a contact centre, bringing in fresh blood and enthusiasm. However, high levels of staff attrition have some serious side-effects:

- Increased recruitment and training costs
- Decreases the average agent competency as there are so many 'learners'
- Can decrease the quality of the customer experience, as the agent may not know how to answer the query correctly first-time
- Adverse affect on contact centre performance indicators, including first-time resolution, call transfer rates, queue time and call length
- Bad for the morale of the remaining staff
- Inexperienced staff are more likely to miss cross-selling and up-selling opportunities
- Increased pressure put on team leaders and experienced agents
- Difficult to bring on-board new systems and ideas, as the agents are struggling with what is already in place.

Attrition rate: the total number of agents leaving the contact centre in a 12-month period, divided by the average number of occupants during the same 12-month period, expressed as a percentage.

In the mid-2000s, staff attrition rates crept up from the mid-teens to well over 30%. In 2009, attrition slackened to a mean average of 24%, with the median (the midpoint of all respondents' answers) being significantly less, at 14%. 2010's data show that the economic downturn continued to impact on staff movement, with attrition levels dropping further to a mean average of 16% and median of only 12%.

In 2011, respondents reported attrition rising, to a mean of 21% and median of 15%. In 2012, figures dropped very slightly, to 20% and 12% respectively. In 2013, attrition fell further, to a mean of 17% with the median dropping to only 10%.

2014's figures show a slight rise in mean attrition, up to 19%. The median has risen to 12%.

One of the difficulties with tracking metrics such as attrition over time is that the companies responding to the research programme are not exactly the same year-on-year, meaning comparing like-for-like is difficult. This year, the question was asked, "How does your current attrition rate compare with 12 months ago?", giving a consistent view of changes at a company level. In fact, 52% of respondents say that there has been little real change, with 15% saying the attrition is on the way up, and 31% saying it has decreased, the 1% remainder being unsure, figures which are almost identical to 2012's findings.

Figure 133: Agent attrition rate ranges

Agent attrition rate ranges

>50% 5%
31-50% 10%
21-30% 14%
16-20% 12%
11-15% 12%
5-10% 34%
<5% 13%
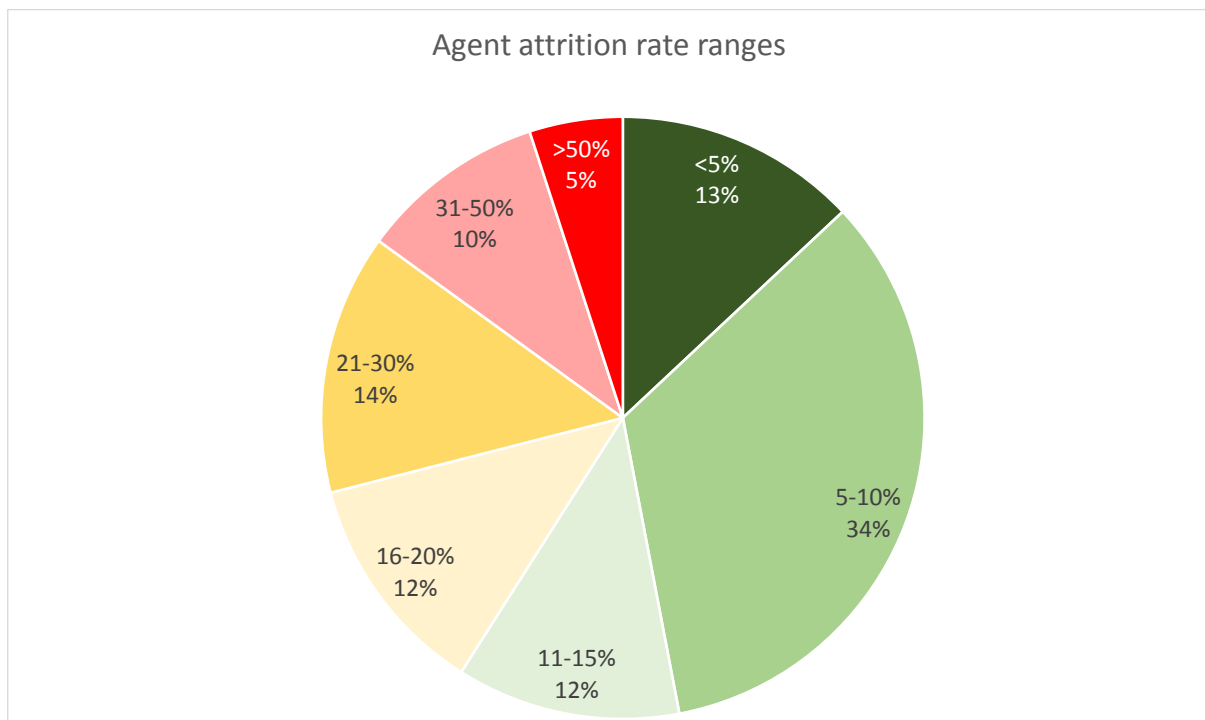
Detailed analysis of agent attrition, including historical patterns and segmentation by vertical market, contact centre size, region and activity type is included in "The UK Contact Centre HR and Operational Benchmarking Report (2014)".

It also includes detailed research on salaries, training, absence and recruitment.

ABSENCE

In a tightly-run operation like a contact centre where costs and performance are closely managed, significant levels of staff absence can cause major problems with contact centre performance and the customer experience. Even just a slight increase in absence rates can mean a major difference to how well the contact centre performs on that day. Staff end up over-worked and stressed, and more likely to take time off as a result. Morale suffers, which increases staff attrition, overwork and thus, further absence.

Short-term (no-show) absence - *this is the average number of agent days lost through short-term sickness and unauthorized absence as a percentage of contracted days annually. This is included in this year's report.*

Long-term absence - *this includes long-term sickness, maternity leave, sabbaticals and other long-term absences where the business is able to expect and plan for the absence. This is not included in this year's report.*

The mean average for staff absence is 5.2%, with a median of 5.0%.

Figure 134: Short-term absence
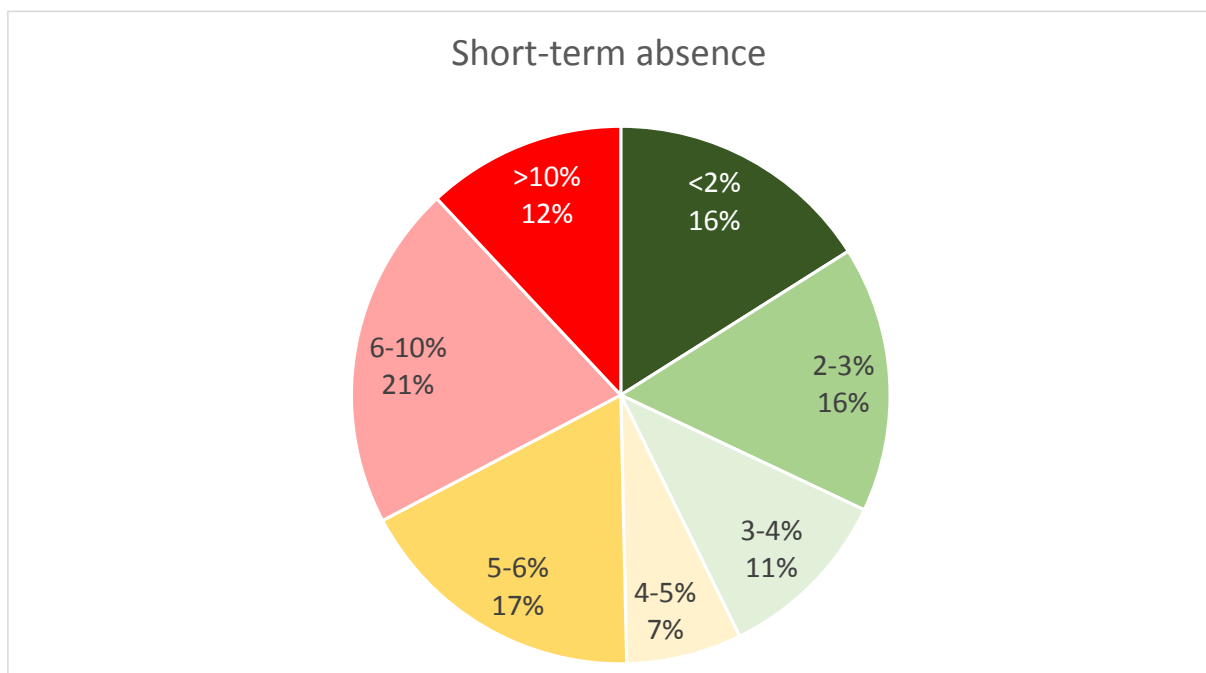
Detailed analysis of agent absence, including historical patterns and segmentation by vertical market, contact centre size, region and activity type is included in "The UK Contact Centre HR and Operational Benchmarking Report (2014)".

315

RECRUITMENT

Rather than just asking about which recruitment methods they use, contact centre managers were also asked for their experience of how effective each recruitment method was. There is a definite pattern: the closer you get to the candidate, the more likely you are to make the right decision. The average contact centre role is slowly changing into something requiring higher skills – a high level of IT, business and communication abilities are needed in many contact centres now and this trend will certainly continue – yet agent salaries are not taking this into account. Coupled with this is the popular view of contact centres as career dead-ends, not helped by the biased and erroneous media view of contact centres (and by extension, their employees) as an unpopular and unloved part of modern life. Improving the contact centre "brand" is a vital part of the industry's future success, which will feed directly into the recruitment process.

While most contact centres do not admit to having problems with staff recruitment, many of the same operations have problems with staff attrition, although this is temporarily less of an issue. The case could be made that high-attrition operations **do** have a problem with recruitment, but they just don't realise it. Having filled their job roles, the recruitment process is deemed to have been a success, but how many of these new recruits turn out to be no-shows, leave before the induction course is complete, or shortly into the job? These recruits are gauged to be part of the *attrition* problem, when in fact, they are indicative of a *recruitment* problem. As such, businesses should try harder to understand what skills and attributes successful agents are already demonstrating in this role - empathy, resilience, reliability, sales technique, technical capability, etc. - and seek to recruit more people with this specific factors and behaviours.

RECRUITMENT METHODS

Recruitment has traditionally been about asking the question "Can the applicant do the job?". Having the skills to carry out the task is obviously important, but most skills can be learned, and in an environment such as a contact centre - where both tasks and environment are not suited to everyone - other factors are perhaps more important. This is borne out by the findings earlier in this chapter, which indicated that the main reason for staff attrition was that they were just the wrong type of person for the job. Firstly, the business must understand the competencies, characteristics and behaviours that are most suitable for the contact centre positions that they are trying to fill, for example:

- dependability
- customer focus
- empathy
- problem-solving
- the ability to understand and follow instructions
- a focus on a goal.

Successful agents will also require some hard skills, although many of these are more easily-learnt. Through judging competencies objectively, and using a combination of processes (for example, telephone and face-to-face interviews, with upfront psychometric analysis to determine the likelihood of the prospect being a long-term success in the contact centre), the business reduces the risk of high attrition and growing costs, and can focus upon its strategic goals.

The most effective form of recruitment method is consistently said to be a face-to-face interview, with assessment centres, contact centre simulations and skills-testing also effective. There is a definite split between how directly the company interacts with the candidate and how successful the recruitment method is. Those that keep the candidate at arm's length – through standard application forms, recruitment agencies and CVs – have a lower success score, with studies having shown that half of applicants admit to stretching the truth on their CVs, and 10% lie outright.

Respondents using personality testing tend to report high levels of success through this method, reflecting the awareness that it is the type of person at least as much as what they can do, that is crucial to being a successful agent. Many contact centres employ large numbers of recent university graduates, whose biodata and work experience may not show much of the applicants' abilities. In such cases, getting a better scientific idea of what makes the candidate tick, and being quite sure about their personality traits will reduce the high risk associated with recruiting straight from higher education.

By tracking the in-job performance of applicants who scored either well or poorly in pre-job assessments, businesses can improve their ongoing recruitment techniques. For example, agents who have high assessment test scores often have higher revenue-per-call ratios, lower average call lengths and lower attrition rates than those who scored lower in pre-job character and personality assessments. The behaviours, personality traits and characteristics that a top agent is most likely to have can then be identified, and the results fed back into the top of the recruitment process. This allows the recruitment process to seek out the types of people who have already been proven to succeed in that role.

On average, it costs £1,950 to recruit a new contact centre agent, with a median cost of £1,550. The 1st quartile cost is £2,250 and the 3rd quartile is £500.

SALARIES

New agent salaries are reported to have increased by around 2% after last year's decline of 3%. 71% of respondents state that salaries rose in the past 12 months, against an annual average inflation rate of 1.5% - 2%.

Detailed analysis of salaries, including historical patterns and segmentation by vertical market, contact centre size, region and activity type is included in "The UK Contact Centre HR and Operational Benchmarking Report (2014)".

Figure 135: Contact centre salaries and changes

Role	2014 mean average salary	Change 2013-2014
New agent	£15,993	2.0%
Experienced agent	£18,278	1.2%
Team leader / supervisor	£24,209	3.7%
Contact centre manager	£40,183	5.4%

Figure 136: Changes in contact centre salaries

Changes in contact centre salaries

- Have decreased by less than 5% — 1%
- Have increased by more than 5% — 6%
- No change — 28%
- Have increased by less than 5% — 65%
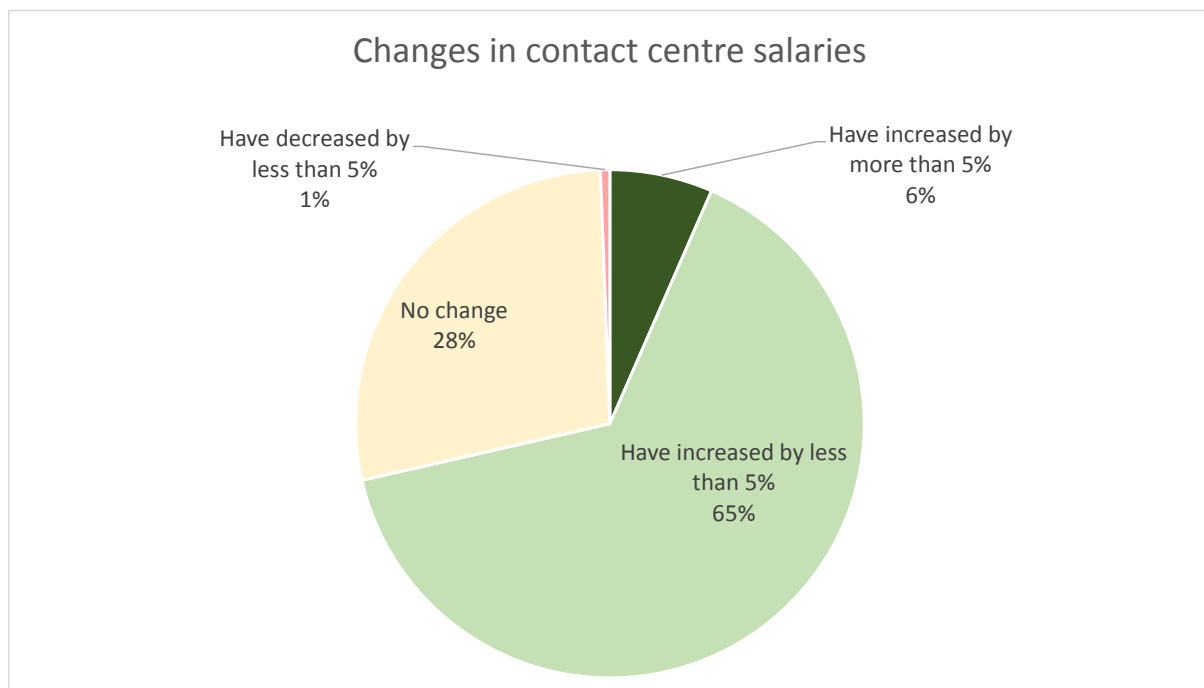
Organisations able to help with HR Management:

Enghouse Interactive has the ability to equip your agents to deliver better customer experiences through quality monitoring and agent coaching with agent evaluation software: employees will benefit from feedback and training utilising live customer calls and objective feedback mechanisms; flexible scorecard templates allow you to tailor your quality assurance program to your business needs; you can deliver objective employee evaluations, coach employees for improved success, and track performance improvements over time using our agent evaluation software solution.

Infinity CCS's technology solutions help you improve customer experience and drive down cost to serve: Provide your operational management team with real-time, actionable insight into performance and compliance with Management, Reporting and QA software.
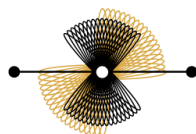
INTERACTIVE INTELLIGENCE®
Deliberately Innovative

At Interactive Intelligence, it's what we do.

IP Integration can help reduce agent churn and improve agent experience by helping release trapped agent time through a self-funding model to reinvest in training and development resulting in happier, more productive agents.

NewVoiceMedia is a leading global provider of true cloud contact centre and multi-channel communications solutions.

Nexidia, long term educators of Customer Interaction Analytics, works with some of the world's largest contact centres to capture multi-channel interactions, analyse the data and then use this valuable insight into the customer experience to develop business strategies to improve the performance in every area of the organisation.

A Plantronics headset can help reduce neck and back tension by up to 31% leading to an increase in productivity of as much as 43%.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Much of this report is about how contact centres are performing today, but this final chapter looks at the more strategic decisions and issues that contact centres are facing. HR issues have often been what make contact centre managers most concerned, but the past years have seen a growing feeling that the technology in place is letting the operation down, or at least, preventing it moving forward to the extent that it needs. Contact centres are also aware that they have to modernise their processes as well as the technology, but as ever, cost, time and the need to keep the operation running smoothly make this sort of strategic thinking very difficult, especially in a situation where many contact centres still do not have much in the way of a champion at the higher levels of the business.

The need to measure and improve customer satisfaction, and its impact upon profitability, has become an obsession throughout the industry, which is positive for customers and businesses. Historically, much of the short-term investment coming from the wider business has been focused on improving efficiency than effectiveness. As many of the issues that the contact centre has to deal with come as a result of sub-optimal or even broken processes, both within and without the contact centre, spending money on doing unnecessary things more quickly seemed strange.

While the industry is growing in terms of increased volumes of interactions (especially non-voice) and the recruitment of new agents, more needs to be done to increase the effectiveness of agents. Self-service levels are low across much of the industry, and we can see that taking low-value work away from agents, freeing them up to do more profitable and difficult work, is an important step. It is clear to see that there is a movement away from voice self-service to more flexible visual self-service, whether through a website or a mobile app, changing the face of customer contact.

For businesses where self-service is not an option, great opportunities still exist to trim unnecessary elements of the calls, from identity verification through system navigation to post-call wrap-up: consistently high and growing levels of wrap-up time and non-call time is worrying, as around 40% of an agent's time is spent doing something other than communicating with customers. Agent desktop optimisation – putting the right things on the desktop at the right time in the conversation, without disrupting the underlying system functionality – is gaining in popularity, especially in very large contact centres with multiple, complex processes and legacy systems.

Yet the background against which the technologies and HR issues that contact centre management now talks about is that of customer satisfaction and improved customer experience. This is the common ground where senior executives and contact centre operations can now meet and discuss how to head in the right direction together. Much of what respondents to this survey have talked about is coloured by improving customer satisfaction, the almost-certain driver of where the contact centre industry is headed long-term.

Improving customer satisfaction is a key priority for contact centres, but they also need to keep the costs down. According to a recent Aberdeen reseach report, companies that integrate their contact centres within the omni-channel strategy, increase customer loyalty, customer lifetime value and cut contact centre costs. Download the complimentary report here.

Keep the Contact Center at the Heart of Your Omnichannel Strategy

As customers increasingly use social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter to communicate, many companies are creating omnichannel customer engagement strategies. According to a recent report from Aberdeen Group[1], omnichannel approaches help businesses deliver a consistent customer experience, whether people communicate using phone, Web, mobile, e-mail, or social media channels – and regardless of the device customers choose. By delivering a seamless, engaging customer experience, omnichannel strategies can help companies increase customer retention and improve the lifetime value of each buyer.

In their focus on these newer communication technologies, however, some companies neglect to include contact centers in their omnichannel strategy. This is a mistake. Contact centers are still an important touch point that most customers choose to address product and service issues. And many contact center agents are already trained to use technology tools that offer a complete view of the customer interaction history.

Integrating the contact center into your omnichannel strategy is just good business. The Aberdeen research states that this integration helps maximize the success of omnichannel programs and enables profitable customer experiences. Companies can reduce costs, enhance customer loyalty, and increase customer lifetime value – all leading to better bottom-line results.

SAP offers a full portfolio of cloud and on-premise solutions to help you build and execute an effective omnichannel strategy – while keeping your contact center at the heart of your approach. The solutions handle traditional contact center channels including phone, chat, e-mail, and SMS, as well as other customer communication channels such as social, e-commerce, and mobile. When used in an integrated solution, the SAP offerings can help you better engage your customers across multiple touch points throughout the whole customer journey.

For more information on how you can make your contact center a key component of your omnichannel strategy, download Aberdeen's report, "The Business Value of Integrating the Contact Center Within Your Omnichannel Strategy" at www.sap.com/contact-center.

---

[1] Omer Minkara, "The Business Value of Integrating the Contact Center Within Your Omni-Channel Strategy," Aberdeen Group, March 2014

TECHNOLOGY USAGE AND PLANS

Figure 137: Current technology usage and short-term investment plans

	Currently use, no plans to replace/upgrade	Currently use, looking to replace/upgrade	Likely to implement < 12 months	Likely to implement > 12 months	No plans to implement
Call recording	75%	12%	8%	0%	5%
IP/PBX	68%	16%	6%	1%	9%
Management information systems	61%	17%	9%	4%	9%
DTMF IVR	52%	11%	9%	3%	26%
Email management software	49%	12%	13%	5%	22%
Workforce management systems	48%	17%	11%	7%	18%
Web chat	33%	7%	28%	13%	20%
Outbound dialler	24%	7%	6%	4%	59%
Customer service mobile app	15%	4%	17%	12%	51%
Speech analytics	14%	4%	14%	10%	58%
Automated speech recognition	13%	4%	9%	6%	69%

The preceding table shows respondents' current and future use of specific contact centre solutions. Workforce management systems, telephony infrastructure and management information systems are the most likely to be upgraded or replaced in the next year, with more than 1 in 10 also expecting investment to be made in upgrading call recording, DTMF IVR and email management.

In terms of new implementations, multimedia seems to be a focus, with email management and especially web-chat being singled-out, with mobile apps and interaction analytics also receiving attention. In the longer-term too, these are seen as likely investments.

Recognising that the reality of contact centre investment does not always match the intention shown in the previous table, the following gives closer analysis of the priorities of respondents over the next two years. Viewed together, these data are likely to give a more accurate picture of likely investment.

Analysing the areas that contact centres are focusing their IT expenditure upon is quite complicated, as there is rarely exact concurrence or use of the same phrases, so similar types of expenditure have been grouped together.

Figure 138: Most important areas of IT expenditure in the next two years

Expenditure type	1st	2nd	3rd
ACD/routing functionality and telephony systems	20%	8%	7%
Multichannel/email	13%	5%	4%
Web chat	8%	10%	7%
Workforce management	7%	16%	9%
Telephony self-service	7%	10%	10%
CRM	7%	6%	6%
Web self-service/customer portal	5%	4%	6%
Call recording	5%	2%	3%
Agent desktop	4%	6%	9%
Speech analytics	4%	5%	10%
Cloud	4%	3%	3%
Outbound dialler	4%	3%	0%
Management information systems	2%	2%	4%
Homeworking/virtual contact centre	2%	0%	7%
Customer satisfaction measurement/voice of the customer	1%	4%	3%
Knowledge base	1%	4%	0%
Social media	1%	2%	3%
Quality monitoring	1%	1%	1%
PCI compliance	1%	1%	0%
Video	1%	1%	0%
Workflow	0%	2%	3%
SMS	0%	1%	3%
Scripting	0%	1%	0%
Disaster recovery	0%	0%	3%

As has been the case for many years now, upgrading their telephony environment has been the most popular priority amongst respondents, with 20% of respondents stating that upgrading their telephony system was the most important area of expenditure, with a further 8% putting it as their second priority.

As we see in this report, ACD/routing functionality, multichannel and web chat are the most popular priorities among UK contact centres. See how SAP Contact Center can help.

CRM (taken to indicate an improvement to the core customer management systems as well as company-wide CRM) has dropped from its historical no.1 position, with self-service (which includes both web and IVR) growing rapidly, as well as web chat which is the priority investment for 8% respondents.

Workforce management, especially in smaller contact centres, maintains its performance, being a top 3 priority for 32% of respondents.

The movement to support multimedia looks likely to attract the required funding, with 22% of respondents putting this as a priority, although only 6% mention social media, a drop on previous years.

Speech analytics has maintained its importance, with 19% of respondents making this a top 3 priority, an increase on last year's figure of 14%.

SAP

The Best-Run Businesses Run SAP®

Contact center solutions from SAP for best-run businesses like yours

Managing contact centers and multichannel communications to optimize the omnichannel customer experience is not easy. But SAP® Contact Center software can help boost your performance to keep you ahead of the game. It enables you to manage inbound and outbound contacts with customers and partners across multiple locations and communication channels so you'll have more satisfied customers and improved sales and service operations. Visit **www.sap.com/contact-center** and see how we can help your business run better.

PRESSING MANAGERIAL ISSUES

Survey respondents were asked to rank nine managerial issues in the order of their importance to them. Improving customer satisfaction was rated in the top 3 by 68% of respondents, with increasing revenues and decreasing costs in 2nd and 3rd place. Improving first-call resolution rates was found in fourth place, with the HR issues of attrition, morale and growth in headcount being seen as less important generally.

Figure 139: Most pressing managerial issues
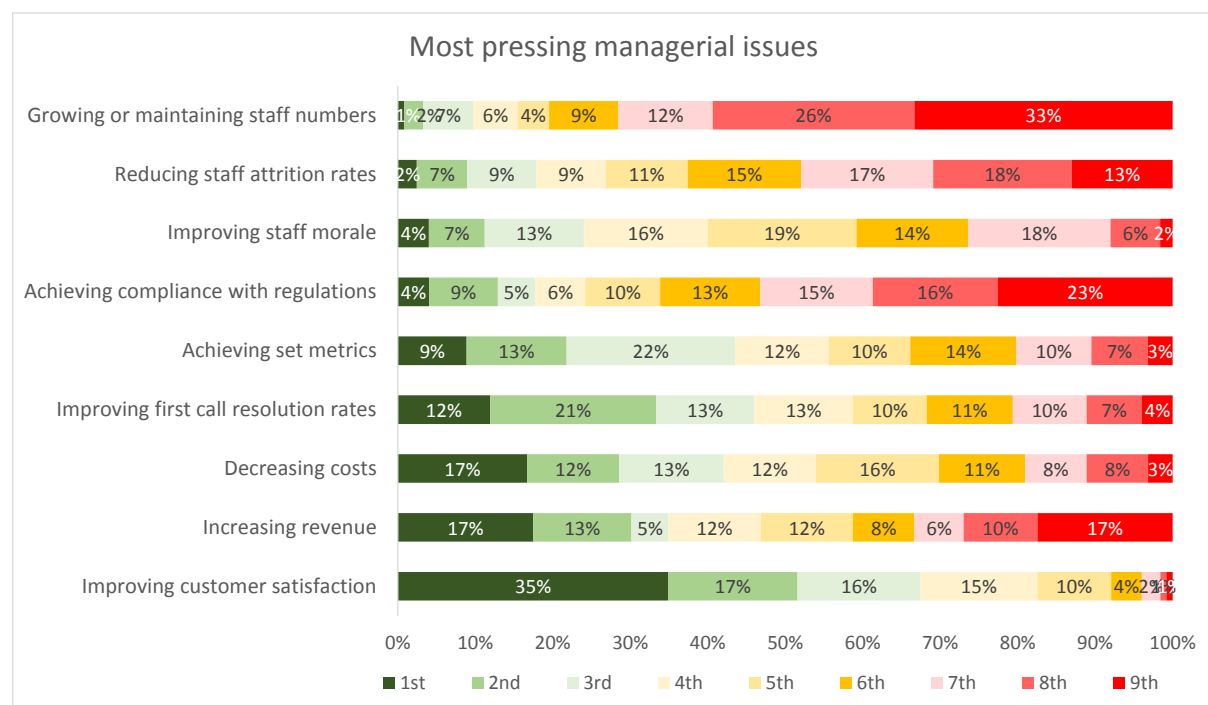
Improving customer satisfaction is the most pressing managerial issue among respondents. Download this customer case study to see how Huntsville Utilities improved customer satisfaction in their contact centre.

INDUSTRY TRENDS

Respondents were asked how important specific industry trends would be to them in the future. The focus on customer experience improvement, as in previous years, rated the highest, and this year maintains its lead considerably. This strong showing indicates that many other issues, concerns and trends within the contact centre are being viewed in the light of customer satisfaction. For example, "I'm concerned about contact centre productivity" may actually mean "I'm concerned about how contact centre productivity is impacting upon our customers' satisfaction".

There is a wide and growing acknowledgment that business processes have to change, and the work that the contact centre does will need to be more closely coupled with the back office and also the wider business. This was felt especially strongly by the respondents which kick off a great many back office processes through their work in the contact centre, such as the insurance sector. As many of the calls that most contact centres take are about failures elsewhere in the organisation to deliver what the contact centre has promised, fixing broken or sub-optimised processes, and allowing the contact centre agent to access the relevant information is vital to getting a satisfactory conclusion to these calls. Mending the processes that are identified as broken could have a major impact upon call avoidance as well.

It is very noticeable that issues around compliance with legal regulations has become far more important in the past three years, with 27% of respondents scoring this as a maximum, compared to only 10% in 2011. This year, again, the majority of sectors are concerned about compliance and data security – this is not simply an issue for the financial services industries.

Figure 140: The importance of industry trends, by vertical market

Vertical market	FS	HS	INS	MAN	OS	PS	RD	SVCS	TMT	TT	UTILS	Average	% of respondents scoring this as a maximum
Customer experience improvement	8.9	8.9	9.0	9.3	8.4	7.7	8.9	7.8	8.4	9.2	9.3	**8.5**	**49%**
Business process optimisation	7.1	7.7	7.7	6.3	7.7	7.1	7.0	6.5	6.8	6.5	7.2	**7.0**	**15%**
Web/mobile self-service	5.8	8.0	7.1	6.6	6.0	7.2	7.7	6.4	6.9	7.3	7.7	**6.9**	**20%**
Effects of legislation/compliance	7.1	8.7	7.8	3.2	7.7	6.3	4.8	6.3	8.0	8.2	7.8	**6.8**	**27%**
Multichannel	5.6	6.9	5.7	6.1	6.8	6.3	8.6	5.8	7.8	7.5	7.8	**6.6**	**19%**
Agent desktop optimisation	5.6	4.9	6.5	7.4	6.8	5.7	6.0	6.9	8.0	6.3	6.5	**6.5**	**11%**
Social media	4.8	7.8	4.3	5.9	5.7	5.8	8.7	5.2	7.2	7.0	7.7	**6.1**	**8%**
IP/unified communications	6.3	3.8	6.1	3.2	6.6	4.6	4.6	5.0	5.8	6.5	5.7	**5.2**	**8%**
Telephony self-service	4.5	5.0	6.2	1.5	5.0	5.5	5.6	5.6	5.6	4.4	5.8	**5.1**	**7%**
Cloud/hosted solutions	5.2	3.3	4.0	3.3	6.4	4.1	3.6	4.5	6.6	3.2	5.4	**4.6**	**9%**
Site consolidation/virtual contact centres	6.0	3.0	4.3	2.6	5.3	3.8	4.0	5.0	4.4	4.0	3.7	**4.2**	**8%**
Domestic outsourcing	5.0	3.5	3.2	2.3	8.5	2.6	5.3	2.0	4.8	2.2	1.8	**3.7**	**15%**
Offshoring	1.6	1.0	1.0	1.6	4.0	1.9	2.2	2.5	2.4	1.4	2.2	**2.1**	**2%**

Looking at data segmented by contact centre size, telephony self-service is - as would be expected - more positively thought about by larger operations with a potentially greater cost saving, with the same logic applying to virtual contact centre functionality as well. However, web-based self-service and social media seem to have the same level interest to smaller operations as well.

Respondents from large contact centres are also far more concerned about compliance, probably as a result of the type of business that many larger contact centres carry out.

Figure 141: The importance of industry trends, by contact centre size

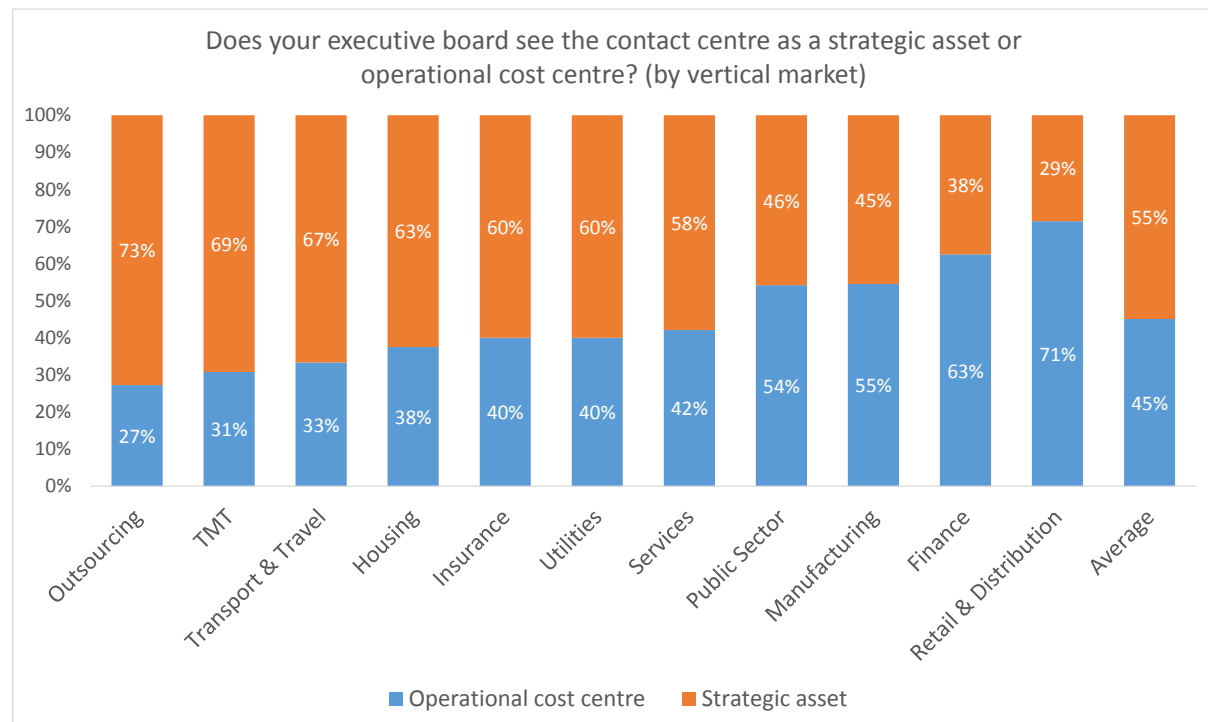| Contact centre size	Small	Medium	Large	Average	% of respondents scoring this as a maximum
Customer experience improvement	8.4	8.3	8.8	**8.5**	**49%**
Business process optimisation	7.3	6.7	7.1	**7.0**	**15%**
Web/mobile self-service	7.2	6.5	7.0	**6.9**	**20%**
Effects of legislation/compliance	6.4	6.8	7.3	**6.8**	**27%**
Multichannel	7.2	5.9	6.9	**6.6**	**19%**
Agent desktop optimisation	6.8	6.1	6.6	**6.5**	**11%**
Social media	6.5	5.7	6.0	**6.1**	**8%**
IP/unified communications	5.1	5.0	5.5	**5.2**	**8%**
Telephony self-service	4.6	5.2	5.7	**5.1**	**7%**
Cloud/hosted solutions	4.5	4.7	4.5	**4.6**	**9%**
Site consolidation/virtual contact centres	3.9	3.2	5.5	**4.2**	**8%**
Domestic outsourcing	3.0	4.3	3.9	**3.7**	**15%**
Offshoring	1.5	2.2	2.6	**2.1**	**2%**

THE CONTACT CENTRE AS A STRATEGIC ASSET

There has historically been a rough 50-50 split between whether contact centres are seen as strategic assets or operational cost centres by the organisation's executives, which went some way to explaining why so many operations did not share their insight with the wider business.

However, last year, the strategic group seemed to nose in front and this is also the case this year. The transport & travel, outsourcing and TMT respondents more likely to feel that they are seen as strategic, whereas those in the retail, finance and manufacturing sectors are less likely to do so this year.

There is little difference between size bands, with 59% of large, 55% of medium and 52% of small operations feeling that they are seen as strategic to the business.

Figure 142: Does your executive board see the contact centre as a strategic asset or operational cost centre? (by vertical market)

Does your executive board see the contact centre as a strategic asset or operational cost centre? (by vertical market)

Vertical market	Operational cost centre	Strategic asset
Outsourcing	27%	73%
TMT	31%	69%
Transport & Travel	33%	67%
Housing	38%	63%
Insurance	40%	60%
Utilities	40%	60%
Services	42%	58%
Public Sector	54%	46%
Manufacturing	55%	45%
Finance	63%	38%
Retail & Distribution	71%	29%
Average	45%	55%

■ Operational cost centre   ■ Strategic asset

Organisations able to help with Strategic Directions:

Enghouse Interactive

Enghouse Interactive has the expertise to help build and scope different multichannel contact strategies: as practitioners, we have been involved in the implementations across thousands of different customer contact strategies and offer consultant services to help shape your customer journey.

Genesys®

Genesys Business Consulting Services collaborate with you to address the strategic business considerations for designing and delivering the optimal customer journey, including customer journey mapping and identifying the use of people, processes and technology required to support the journey.

infinity ccs
contact centre solutions

Infinity CCS's technology solutions help you improve customer experience and drive down cost to serve: Reduce capital expenditure, improve operational flexibility and extend legacy systems with cloud and hosted telephony, multi-channel and desktop solutions.
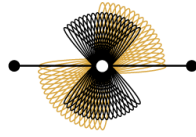
At Interactive Intelligence, it's what we do.

IP Integration helps business leaders originate and define a self-funding road map; articulating qualified and measurable contact centre improvement initiatives and transformation programmes to achieve your desired business outcomes.

NewVoiceMedia is a leading global provider of true cloud contact centre and multi-channel communications solutions.

Nexidia, long term educators of Customer Interaction Analytics, works with some of the world's largest contact centres to capture multi-channel interactions, analyse the data and then use this valuable insight into the customer experience to develop business strategies to improve the performance in every area of the organisation.

Opinion-8 is an innovative and effective customer-experience management tool which allows you to gain customer, employee and stakeholder feedback in a simple and highly cost-efficient way - its powerful, integrated web and voice survey technology with unified online reporting offers you a variety of telephone and web survey solutions

Verint Systems is a global leader in Actionable Intelligence® solutions, which help organizations address three important challenges: customer engagement optimization; security intelligence; and fraud, risk and compliance.

APPENDIX: ABOUT CONTACTBABEL

ContactBabel is the contact centre industry expert. If you have a question about how the industry works, or where it's heading, the chances are we have the answer.

The coverage provided by our massive and ongoing primary research projects is matched by our experience analysing the contact centre industry. We understand how technology, people and process best fit together, and how they will work collectively in the future.

We help the biggest and most successful vendors develop their contact centre strategies and talk to the right prospects. We have shown the UK government how the global contact centre industry will develop and change. We help contact centres compare themselves to their closest competitors so they can understand what they are doing well and what needs to improve.

If you have a question about your company's place in the contact centre industry, perhaps we can help you.

Email: info@contactbabel.com

Website: www.contactbabel.com

Telephone: 0191 271 5269