



THE UK CONTACT CENTRE DECISION-MAKER'S GUIDE 2015

(13TH EDITION)



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"The 2015 UK Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide (13th edition)"

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS.....	3
LIST OF TABLES.....	6
INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY	11
HOW TO USE THE REPORT.....	11
SEGMENTATIONS	13
VERTICAL MARKETS	13
SIZE BAND	14
CONTACT CENTRE TYPE	14
THE STRUCTURE OF THE DATASETS	14
DISTRIBUTION AND USE OF THIS REPORT	16
IMPROVING QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE	37
MULTICHANNEL WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT	39
INTERACTION RECORDING	51
CUSTOMER INTERACTION ANALYTICS.....	60
QUALITY & PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT	81
AGENT ENGAGEMENT & GAMIFICATION	91
DESKTOP AUTOMATION AND ANALYTICS.....	105
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT & IMPROVEMENT.....	117
CUSTOMER EFFORT AND ENGAGEMENT	133
MAXIMISING EFFICIENCY AND AGENT OPTIMISATION	149
CONTACT CENTRE PERFORMANCE	151
VIRTUAL CONTACT CENTRES	168
HOMEWORKING	180
INTERACTION ROUTING.....	191
PCI DSS COMPLIANCE.....	206
CUSTOMER IDENTITY VERIFICATION	220
CALL-BACK AND QUEUE MANAGEMENT	231
HEADSETS	242
NEW MEDIA AND THE CUSTOMER OF THE FUTURE.....	262
OMNICHANNEL	268
EMAIL MANAGEMENT	281
WEB CHAT AND BEYOND	293
SELF-SERVICE	308
ENGAGING THE CUSTOMER OF THE FUTURE.....	327
INCREASING PROFITABILITY	352
CLOUD-BASED CONTACT CENTRE SOLUTIONS.....	353
OUTBOUND & CALL BLENDING	370



HR MANAGEMENT	389
STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS	404
TECHNOLOGY USAGE AND PLANS	407
TECHNOLOGY, PEOPLE, PROCESS & PERCEPTION	411
HELPING THE CONTACT CENTRE ACHIEVE ITS AIMS	413
APPENDIX: ABOUT CONTACTBABEL	419

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LIST OF TABLES

FIGURE 1: VERTICAL MARKET DEFINITIONS	13
FIGURE 2: USE OF WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	44
FIGURE 3: USE OF WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS, BY VERTICAL MARKET	45
FIGURE 4: FUNCTIONALITY USED WITHIN WFM SOLUTION, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	46
FIGURE 5: SCHEDULING OF MULTICHANNEL WORKFORCE ACTIVITY, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	47
FIGURE 6: WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FUNCTIONALITY AND CAPABILITIES	48
FIGURE 7: USE OF CALL RECORDING, BY VERTICAL MARKET	54
FIGURE 8: USE OF CALL RECORDING, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	56
FIGURE 9: SITUATIONAL RECORDING CHOICES	57
FIGURE 10: STORAGE OF RECORDED CALLS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	57
FIGURE 11: STORAGE OF RECORDED NON-VOICE INTERACTIONS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	58
FIGURE 12: MOST USEFUL ADDITIONS OR IMPROVEMENTS TO INTERACTION RECORDING SOLUTION	59
FIGURE 13: USE OF INTERACTION ANALYTICS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	73
FIGURE 14: USE OF INTERACTION ANALYTICS, BY VERTICAL MARKET	74
FIGURE 15: USE OF HISTORICAL, REAL-TIME, SCREEN AND MULTICHANNEL INTERACTION ANALYTICS FUNCTIONALITY (FROM ONLY THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO USE ANALYTICS)	75
FIGURE 16: USEFULNESS OF ANALYTICS FOR ADDRESSING BUSINESS AND PERFORMANCE ISSUES	76
FIGURE 17: FOCUS OF ANALYTICS ACTIVITY	78
FIGURE 18: FOCUS ON IMPROVEMENTS IN KPIs AND ACTIVITIES USING ANALYTICS	79
FIGURE 19: MOST VALUED CHARACTERISTICS AND BEHAVIOUR IN CONTACT CENTRE AGENTS	83
FIGURE 20: MOST VALUED CHARACTERISTICS AND BEHAVIOUR IN CONTACT CENTRE AGENTS, BY CONTACT CENTRE ACTIVITY TYPE	84
FIGURE 21: MOST IMPORTANT AREA FOR CONTACT CENTRE IMPROVEMENT, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	85
FIGURE 22: HOW EFFECTIVE IS QUALITY ASSURANCE IN YOUR CONTACT CENTRE?	87
FIGURE 23: WHO SCORES OR EVALUATES CALLS FROM CUSTOMERS IN YOUR ORGANISATION? (BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE)	88
FIGURE 24: HOW EFFECTIVE IS YOUR QUALITY EVALUATION WITHIN THESE AREAS?	89
FIGURE 25: CHALLENGES TO MANAGING PERFORMANCE & QUALITY	90
FIGURE 26: EFFECTIVE METHODS OF REWARD FOR MOTIVATING AND ENGAGING AGENTS	91
FIGURE 27: EFFECTIVE METHODS OF REWARD FOR MOTIVATING AND ENGAGING AGENTS (BY AGENT ATTRITION RATES)	93
FIGURE 28: TOP 3 CHARACTERISTICS TO ENCOURAGE IN AGENTS	94
FIGURE 29: TOP 3 CHARACTERISTICS TO ENCOURAGE IN AGENTS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	95
FIGURE 30: EXTENT TO WHICH THE AGENT ENGAGEMENT / REWARD PROGRAMME DIRECTLY MONITORS AND SUPPORTS AGENT IMPROVEMENTS	96
FIGURE 31: COMPARISON BETWEEN CHARACTERISTICS ENCOURAGED, AND CHARACTERISTICS REWARDED	97
FIGURE 32: USE OF GAMIFICATION, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	102
FIGURE 33: USE OF / INTEREST IN GAMIFICATION, BY VERTICAL MARKET	103
FIGURE 34: USE OF GAMIFICATION, BY CONTACT CENTRE ACTIVITY	104
FIGURE 35: USE OF MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS ACROSS VERTICAL MARKETS	108
FIGURE 36: HOW MANY APPLICATIONS DOES AN AGENT USE WITHIN A CALL? (BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE)	109
FIGURE 37: SELECTED PERFORMANCE METRICS, BY NUMBER OF IN-CALL OR POST-CALL APPLICATIONS USED	110
FIGURE 38: HOW MANY APPLICATIONS DOES AN AGENT USE AFTER A CALL?	111

FIGURE 39: AGENT DESKTOP APPLICATION FEATURES.....	114
FIGURE 40: IN-CALL ACCESS TO COMPUTER-BASED KNOWLEDGE SOURCES FOR AGENTS.....	115
FIGURE 41: FACTORS MOST VALUED BY CUSTOMERS USING A CONTACT CENTRE.....	119
FIGURE 42: METHODS USED FOR GATHERING CUSTOMER INSIGHT (WHERE USED)	126
FIGURE 43: EFFECTIVENESS OF METHODS FOR GATHERING CUSTOMER INSIGHT (WHERE USED)	127
FIGURE 44: CUSTOMER JOURNEY / VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER PROJECT: AN ASSESSMENT	128
FIGURE 45: PROPORTION OF CALLS RECEIVED THAT ARE COMPLAINTS / TARGET OF COMPLAINTS, BY VERTICAL MARKET - MEAN	130
FIGURE 46: BEST CHANNEL TO USE FOR COMPLAINTS.....	132
FIGURE 47: CUSTOMERS' PREFERRED METHOD OF COMMUNICATING WITH A BUSINESS.....	135
FIGURE 48: CHARACTERISTIC MOST VALUED BY CUSTOMERS CALLING A CONTACT CENTRE.....	136
FIGURE 49: METHODS OF IDENTIFYING REASONS FOR MULTIPLE CUSTOMER CONTACTS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE ..	137
FIGURE 50: CAPTURE OF NON-VOICE CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	138
FIGURE 51: USE OF AUTOMATED OUTBOUND COMMUNICATION.....	141
FIGURE 52: FORMAL 'VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER' / CUSTOMER JOURNEY PROJECT, BY VERTICAL MARKET	142
FIGURE 53: FORMAL 'VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER' / CUSTOMER JOURNEY PROJECT, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	142
FIGURE 54: CONTACT CENTRE METRICS	151
FIGURE 55: USE OF MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	156
FIGURE 56: AGENT ACTIVITY	157
FIGURE 57: TALK TIME AND IDLE TIME, 2005-2015.....	159
FIGURE 58: SELECTED PERFORMANCE METRICS	160
FIGURE 59: MOST IMPORTANT CONTACT CENTRE METRICS	161
FIGURE 60: CHANGES IN FIRST-CALL RESOLUTION RATE (2003 - 2015)	165
FIGURE 61: USE OF FIRST-CALL RESOLUTION MEASUREMENT METHODS.....	166
FIGURE 62: EFFECTIVENESS OF FIRST-CALL RESOLUTION MEASUREMENT METHODS (WHERE USED)	167
FIGURE 63: VIRTUAL CONTACT CENTRE COMMERCIAL AND OPERATIONAL BENEFITS	171
FIGURE 64: MULTIPLE-SITE OPERATIONS BY VERTICAL MARKET	172
FIGURE 65: VIRTUALISATION BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE (MULTIPLE-SITE OPERATIONS ONLY)	173
FIGURE 66: EFFECTS OF CONTACT CENTRE VIRTUALISATION	174
FIGURE 67: REASONS FOR NOT YET IMPLEMENTING A FULLY VIRTUAL CONTACT CENTRE	175
FIGURE 68: TIMESCALE FOR IMPLEMENTING A FULLY VIRTUAL CONTACT CENTRE	177
FIGURE 69: NON-CONTACT CENTRE STAFF HANDLING SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF CALLS.....	178
FIGURE 70: CURRENT USE OF HOMEWORKING.....	182
FIGURE 71: CHANGES IN USE OF HOMEWORKERS, 2008- 2015	184
FIGURE 72: CURRENT USE OF HOMEWORKING, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	185
FIGURE 73: PROPORTION OF AGENTS TO BE HOMEWORKERS, MID-2015 & MID-2017.....	186
FIGURE 74: MOST IMPORTANT BENEFITS OF HOMEWORKING, (RESPONDENTS USING HOMEWORKING NOW)	187
FIGURE 75: MOST IMPORTANT BENEFITS OF HOMEWORKING, (RESPONDENTS NOT USING HOMEWORKING NOW)...	188
FIGURE 76: INHIBITORS TO HOMEWORKING	189
FIGURE 77: CURRENT USE OF IP PBX / TELEPHONY INFRASTRUCTURE, BY VERTICAL MARKET	195
FIGURE 78: CURRENT USE OF IP PBX / TELEPHONY INFRASTRUCTURE, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE.....	196
FIGURE 79: PRE-CALL ROUTING DECISION FACTORS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	197
FIGURE 80: PRE-CALL ROUTING DECISION FACTORS, BY VERTICAL MARKET	198
FIGURE 81: METHODS USED FOR CALL ROUTING, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE (ONLY RESPONDENTS WITH DTMF IVR AND/OR SPEECH RECOGNITION)	199

FIGURE 82: DTMF IVR ROUTING MENU LEVELS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	200
FIGURE 83: DTMF IVR TOTAL ROUTING OPTIONS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	201
FIGURE 84: TELEPHONY ROUTING STRATEGIES USED, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE.....	204
FIGURE 85: AGENT SKILL-SETS CONSIDERED WHEN USING SKILLS-BASED ROUTING, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE.....	205
FIGURE 86: DATA ELEMENTS AND STORAGE IN PCI DSS	209
FIGURE 87: HOW DOES YOUR CONTACT CENTRE TAKE PAYMENTS OVER THE PHONE? (BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE) – MULTIPLE SELECTIONS ALLOWED	211
FIGURE 88: CARD FRAUD REDUCTION METHODS USED	212
FIGURE 89: LEVEL OF CONCERN THAT CONTACT CENTRE FRAUD CAN HURT THE BUSINESS, BY VERTICAL MARKET.....	217
FIGURE 90: HOW IS THE CONTACT CENTRE’S PCI COMPLIANCE PROGRAMME RUN?.....	219
FIGURE 91: PROPORTION OF CALLS REQUIRING CALLER IDENTIFICATION, BY VERTICAL MARKET	222
FIGURE 92: CALLER IDENTITY AUTHENTICATION METHODS (ONLY THOSE CONTACT CENTRES WHICH AUTHENTICATE SOME OR ALL CALLS)	223
FIGURE 93: TIME TAKEN TO AUTHENTICATE CALLER IDENTITY USING AN AGENT (SECONDS)	223
FIGURE 94: FUTURE USE OF VOICE BIOMETRICS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	229
FIGURE 95: INHIBITORS TO USING VOICE BIOMETRICS.....	230
FIGURE 96: REASONS GIVEN FOR DISLIKE OF CONTACT CENTRE QUEUING	231
FIGURE 97: TYPES OF TELEPHONY CALL-BACK OFFERED TO CUSTOMERS (ONLY FROM RESPONDENTS OFFERING TELEPHONY CALL-BACK).....	234
FIGURE 98: USE OF WEBSITE AND QUEUE CALL-BACK OPTIONS AND QUEUE POSITION ANNOUNCEMENTS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	235
FIGURE 99: TRIGGERS FOR OFFERING CALL-BACK FUNCTIONALITY	237
FIGURE 100: TYPICAL QUEUE TIME BEFORE CALL-BACK IS OFFERED	238
FIGURE 101: PROPORTION OF CUSTOMERS IN TELEPHONY QUEUE ACCEPTING OFFER OF CALL-BACK	239
FIGURE 102: EFFECTIVENESS OF TELEPHONY CALL-BACK FUNCTIONALITY	240
FIGURE 103: EFFECTIVENESS OF WEBSITE CALL-BACK FUNCTIONALITY	241
FIGURE 104: HEADSET MANUFACTURERS USED BY RESPONDENTS (NB: TOTAL IS GREATER THAN 100% AS MULTIPLE HEADSET MANUFACTURERS MAY BE USED)	246
FIGURE 105: USE OF WIRELESS HEADSETS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	248
FIGURE 106: USE OF IP HEADSETS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	250
FIGURE 107: USE OF IP HARDPHONES AND DESKTOP SOFTPHONES, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	251
FIGURE 108: USE OF SINGLE AND DUAL EARPIECE HEADSETS	252
FIGURE 109: USE OF NOISE-CANCELLING MICROPHONES AND HEADPHONES/EARPHONES.....	253
FIGURE 110: INBOUND CONTACT CHANNELS: POPULARITY, SUITABILITY AND SPEED OF RESPONSE	262
FIGURE 111: MULTIMEDIA CHANNELS	265
FIGURE 112: MULTICHANNEL, MULTIMODAL OR OMNICHANNEL? (BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE).....	271
FIGURE 113: MULTICHANNEL, MULTIMODAL OR OMNICHANNEL? (BY VERTICAL MARKET)	272
FIGURE 114: MULTICHANNEL, MULTIMODAL OR OMNICHANNEL? (BY CONTACT CENTRE ACTIVITY)	272
FIGURE 115: BARRIERS TO OMNICHANNEL.....	273
FIGURE 116: MULTICHANNEL AGENT CAPABILITIES, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	274
FIGURE 117: DO NON-VOICE INTERACTIONS SHOW UP ON THE CUSTOMER’S RECORD? (BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE)..	275
FIGURE 118: HOW DO YOU THINK INBOUND CHANNELS WILL CHANGE IN YOUR CONTACT CENTRE IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?	278
FIGURE 119: INBOUND INTERACTIONS BY CHANNEL.....	279
FIGURE 120: INBOUND INTERACTIONS BY CHANNEL, BY VERTICAL MARKET.....	280

FIGURE 121: INBOUND INTERACTIONS THAT ARE EMAIL, BY VERTICAL MARKET	283
FIGURE 122: INBOUND INTERACTIONS THAT ARE EMAIL, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	283
FIGURE 123: ESTIMATED COST PER EMAIL	284
FIGURE 124: WHAT PROPORTION OF EMAILS ARE ANSWERED SUCCESSFULLY AND COMPLETELY WITHIN THESE TIMESCALES?.....	286
FIGURE 125: LEVEL OF AUTOMATION USED IN EMAIL MANAGEMENT	287
FIGURE 126: CONTENT OF INBOUND EMAILS.....	289
FIGURE 127: EMAILS THAT REQUIRE THE USE OF ANOTHER CHANNEL TO BE ANSWERED FULLY	290
FIGURE 128: REASONS FOR USING ANOTHER CHANNEL TO ANSWER EMAILS FULLY	291
FIGURE 129: ESTIMATED COST PER WEB CHAT	297
FIGURE 130: STAGE IN THE WEBSITE VISIT WHERE WEB CHAT IS OFFERED.....	297
FIGURE 131: WEB CHAT AGENT BLENDING, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	298
FIGURE 132: CONCURRENT WEB CHATS PER AGENT.....	299
FIGURE 133: WEB CHAT: NEW PROSPECTS OR EXISTING CUSTOMERS?	299
FIGURE 134: WEB CHAT: SALES ADVICE OR SERVICE REQUESTS?	300
FIGURE 135: LEVEL OF AUTOMATION USED IN WEB CHAT	301
FIGURE 136: AVERAGE WAIT TIME TO INTERACT WITH WEB CHAT AGENT.....	302
FIGURE 137: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF TELEPHONY SELF-SERVICE	311
FIGURE 138: SOME FUNCTIONS FOR SELF-SERVICE, BY VERTICAL MARKET	312
FIGURE 139: OVERALL PROPORTION OF CALLS HANDLED ENTIRELY THROUGH SELF-SERVICE (ONLY IN RESPONDENTS WHICH OFFER TELEPHONY SELF-SERVICE)	314
FIGURE 140: PROPORTION OF SELF-SERVICE CALLS HANDLED THROUGH DTMF IVR OR AUTOMATED SPEECH RECOGNITION, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE.....	314
FIGURE 141: PROPORTION OF SELF-SERVICE SESSIONS 'ZEROED-OUT' TO AN AGENT	315
FIGURE 142: REASONS FOR ABANDONING SELF-SERVICE SESSIONS	317
FIGURE 143: VISUAL IVR: BENEFITS FOR BUSINESSES AND CUSTOMERS	322
FIGURE 144: WEB SELF-SERVICE METHODS.....	325
FIGURE 145: PREFERRED METHOD OF CONTACTING A BUSINESS, BY CUSTOMER AGE.....	327
FIGURE 146: SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE.....	331
FIGURE 147: POSSIBLE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNEL.....	332
FIGURE 148: USEFULNESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BUSINESS ACTIVITIES	333
FIGURE 149: TARGET RESPONSE TIMES FOR HANDLING A CUSTOMER SERVICE REQUEST VIA SOCIAL MEDIA.....	334
FIGURE 150: SERVICE REQUESTS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA: VALUE-ADDED OPTIONS (FROM ALL RESPONDENTS OFFERING SOCIAL MEDIA SERVICE)	335
FIGURE 151: USE OF MOBILE FUNCTIONALITY (APP, MOBILE WEBSITE) FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	338
FIGURE 152: USE OF MOBILE FUNCTIONALITY (APP, MOBILE WEBSITE) FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE, BY VERTICAL MARKET	339
FIGURE 153: MOBILE CUSTOMER COMMUNICATION METHODS (BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE) – ONLY THOSE RESPONDENTS OFFERING MOBILE SERVICE	340
FIGURE 154: HOW CAN MOBILE CUSTOMERS ESCALATE THEIR QUERY TO AN AGENT? (BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE)....	341
FIGURE 155: WHAT INFORMATION IS PASSED TO AN AGENT AFTER ESCALATION FROM THE MOBILE CHANNEL?.....	342
FIGURE 156: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY BUDGET HOLDERS FOR THE MOBILE CUSTOMER SERVICE FUNCTION	344
FIGURE 157: MOST IMPORTANT BARRIER TO TRUE OMNICHANNEL ENGAGEMENT	345
FIGURE 158: REASONS FOR CHOOSING CLOUD-BASED SOLUTIONS.....	360

FIGURE 159: USE OF CLOUD-BASED CONTACT CENTRE SOLUTIONS, BY VERTICAL MARKET	364
FIGURE 160: USE OF CLOUD-BASED CONTACT CENTRE SOLUTIONS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	364
FIGURE 161: PLANNED AND FUTURE CLOUD-BASED FUNCTIONALITY	365
FIGURE 162: HAVE CLOUD-BASED SOLUTIONS MADE ANY DIFFERENCE TO YOUR CONTACT CENTRE?	366
FIGURE 163: CONCERNS ABOUT CLOUD-BASED SOLUTIONS (RESPONDENTS NOT USING CLOUD).....	368
FIGURE 164: CONCERNS ABOUT CLOUD-BASED SOLUTIONS (RESPONDENTS USING CLOUD)	369
FIGURE 165: OUTBOUND ACTIVITY.....	373
FIGURE 166: USE OF OUTBOUND CALLING, BY VERTICAL MARKET	374
FIGURE 167: OUTBOUND ACTIVITY BY VERTICAL MARKET.....	375
FIGURE 168: USE OF OUTBOUND CALLING, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE.....	376
FIGURE 169: OUTBOUND ACTIVITY BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	376
FIGURE 170: USE OF AUTOMATED OUTBOUND DIALERS, BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE.....	377
FIGURE 171: USE OF ANSWER MACHINE DETECTION (AMD), BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE	378
FIGURE 172: USE OF AUTOMATED OUTBOUND COMMUNICATION.....	379
FIGURE 173: USE OF CALL BLENDING BY CONTACT CENTRE SIZE.....	380
FIGURE 174: AVERAGE SPEED TO ANSWER, BY CALL BLENDING ENVIRONMENT TYPE	381
FIGURE 175: MOST VALUED CHARACTERISTIC OF A CONTACT CENTRE AGENT	391
FIGURE 176: HISTORICAL MEAN UK AGENT ATTRITION	393
FIGURE 177: AGENT ATTRITION RATE RANGES	394
FIGURE 178: SHORT-TERM AGENT ABSENCE RATE RANGES.....	396
FIGURE 179: AGENT RECRUITMENT COST RANGES.....	399
FIGURE 180: CONTACT CENTRE SALARIES AND CHANGES	400
FIGURE 181: TECHNOLOGY PENETRATION AND IMPLEMENTATION PLANS	407
FIGURE 182: TOP 5 MOST IMPORTANT AREAS OF CONTACT CENTRE IT EXPENDITURE IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS.....	408
FIGURE 183: RATING OF TECHNOLOGY, PEOPLE, PROCESS AND PERCEPTION IN THE CONTACT CENTRE.....	411
FIGURE 184: WHAT IS PREVENTING THE CONTACT CENTRE FROM ACHIEVING ITS AIMS?	413

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The "*UK Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide (2015 - 13th 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 answered by 221 contact centre managers and directors between July and September 2015. Analysis of the results was carried out in September 2015. The result is the 13th edition of the largest and most comprehensive study of all aspects of the UK contact centre industry.

ContactBabel is grateful for the support received from all of the sponsors of the report. However, complete editorial independence has been maintained at all stages, and readers can be confident about the objectivity of the report's findings. Where sponsors' opinions are given, these are clearly marked as such.

HOW TO USE THE REPORT

"The UK Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide" 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.

Third-party White Papers, case studies and thought leadership pieces may also be used 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.



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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) 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	Example of sub-sectors which may be included
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	Gas, water, electricity

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: at least 75% of activity is inbound
- Outbound: at least 75% of activity is outbound
- Mixed: less than 75% of activity is either inbound or outbound.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DATASETS

The data provided by the 221 contact centres interviewed in this study were broken down into discrete segments:

Vertical markets

- Finance - 21
- Housing - 20
- Insurance - 25
- Manufacturing - 12
- Outsourcing - 28
- Public Sector - 23
- Retail & Distribution - 17
- Services – 30
- Technology, Media and Telecoms (TMT) – 25
- Transport & Travel - 10
- Utilities – 10

Size bands

- Small (10 to 50 agent positions) - 93
- Medium (51 to 200 agent positions) - 70
- Large (200+ agent positions) - 58

Inbound / outbound

- Mostly inbound (75%+ inbound) - 136
- Mixed (between 25% and 75% inbound and outbound) - 53
- Mostly outbound (75%+ outbound) - 32

Sales / service

- Mostly service (75%+ service) - 135
- Mixed (between 25% and 75% service and sales) - 54
- Mostly sales (75%+ sales) - 29

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
- Regional & national development/inward investment agencies.

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THE SUPPLIER DIRECTORY

SOLUTION TYPES

CONTACT CENTRE SOLUTIONS.....	I
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT	XIV
HEADSETS.....	XV
INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS.....	XV
INDUSTRY INTELLIGENCE & SERVICES.....	XVII
TRAINING SERVICES.....	XIX

SOLUTION PROVIDERS

Astute Solutions	I
Bright UK	XVII
Buzzeasy	I
bxp software	II
Calabrio	II
CallCentreHelper	XVIII
CallMiner	III
Call Centre Management Association (UK)	XV
Contact-Centres.com	XVIII
Ember Services	III
Encoded	IV
Engage Customer	XIX
Enghouse Interactive	IV
Eptica	V
First Impression Training	XIX
Genesys	V
Intelecom	VI
Intradiem	VI
IP Integration	VII

NewVoiceMedia	VII
Nexidia	VIII
Noble Systems	VIII
Opinion-8	XIV
Performance Telecom	IX
Pindrop Security	IX
Plantronics	XV
Professional Planning Forum	XVI
Rant & Rave	XIV
Scorebuddy	X
SJS Solutions	X
Storacall	XI
South-West Contact Centre Forum	XVI
Team Knowledge	XI
Ultracomms	XII
VANAD Aloha	XII
Verint	XIII
VoxGen	XIII
Welsh Contact Centre Forum	XVII

CONTACT CENTRE SOLUTIONS



At Astute Solutions, we build the world's smartest consumer engagement software.

Customer care teams at British Airways, Danone, Estee Lauder, McDonald's, and other leading consumer companies rely on Astute's customer service software to increase efficiency, drive revenue and build brand loyalty.

Our CRM, social media management, chat and knowledge management software solutions help our customers deliver seamless customer service experiences across every channel.

We're obsessively focused on consumer engagement, and we've built our software specifically for business-to-consumer companies.

Contact us today to see how we can help you drive more revenue, be more efficient and make more people smile with the world's smartest consumer engagement software.

Be more loved. Get Astute.

Contact:

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e: mikcol@astutesolutions.com

w: www.astutesolutions.com



Buzzeasy provides innovative callback solutions: in-queue callback, callback from digital channels and proactive outbound callback.

We help our clients drive down costs, improve customer experience and ultimately increase revenue and profitability.

Buzzeasy is UK-based and was born out of the well-established contact centre technology specialist, Geomant.

Buzzeasy's solutions are delivered as cloud services, hosted in UK data centres. Pricing is on a subscription basis, and dependent on volumes.

Buzzeasy solutions interface with any contact centre infrastructure.

We are currently offering a limited number of pilot applications. You can be experiencing the benefits of a Buzzeasy solution within a few days.

Contact:

Kevin Ross

t: 01789 387800

e: info@buzzeasy.com

a: Turnpike Gate House, Alcester Heath, Alcester, Warwickshire. B49 5JG

w: www.buzzeasy.com

cb: Text "Buzz" and your name to 60006 and we'll call you back!



Making Your Business Run Better

bxp software is web-based modular software created to manage contact centres and backed up by powerful Quality Assurance and eLearning tools. Each bxp module is packed with functions that allow users to create and modify campaigns and records in minutes, with zero IT involvement.

bxp software is smart

You can update programmes, check on campaign results or drill down into team performance from anywhere in the world, on any device.

bxp software is secure

The layers of security in place make bxp software safer than online banking.

bxp software is simple

It was designed from the outset to be operated at user level, leaving your IT department free to deal with other challenges.

Clients include:

- CPM
- FEXCO
- RSA
- One4all Gift Cards
- Bank of Ireland
- Ladbrokes (Ireland)
- 3 Mobile

Contact:

e: info@bxpsoftware.com

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CALABRIO

Calabrio ONE® – The integrated Calabrio ONE® software suite—including call recording, quality management, workforce management and analytics solutions—empowers contact centres of all sizes to optimise agent performance and liberate the data that provides true insight into the voice of the customer.

Powered by a series of clear, intuitive, analytics-enabled widgets, Calabrio ONE allows contact centres to personalise the toolset for each user—agents, supervisors, managers, knowledge workers and executives—accelerating customer service improvements, effective performance management and alignment of customer engagement strategy with business goals.

Calabrio solutions are built on an intuitive, web-based architecture that positions the contact centre as an epicenter for customer insight.

Calabrio is the only workforce optimisation provider to integrate speech, desktop, and text analytics into a single, unified offering, allowing organisations to make better, faster, more consistent data-driven decisions to protect and grow their business by discovering the true nature of 100 percent of conversations.

Contact:

Calabrio EMEA

a: Abbey House, Wellington Way, Weybridge, Surrey KT13 0TT (United Kingdom)

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e: info@calabrio.com

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CallMiner helps businesses and organisations improve contact centre performance and gather key business intelligence by automating their ability to analyse every customer interaction.

CallMiner's market leading cloud-based voice of the customer analytics solution automatically analyses contacts across all communication channels: calls, chat, email, and social.

CallMiner offers both real-time monitoring and post-call analytics, delivering actionable insights to contact centre staff, business analysts, and executives.

The results include improved agent performance, sales, operational efficiency, customer experience, and regulatory compliance.

With over 10 years of industry leadership and over 2 billion hours of conversations analysed, CallMiner serves some of the world's largest call centres, delivering highly effective, usable and scalable speech analytics solutions.

Contact:

w: www.callminer.com



Ember

Ember is a business services group providing customer management consultancy, analytics, search and recruitment services that help private and public sector organisations to realise commercial value from their customer engagement activities.

It does so by identifying and then exploiting opportunities for cost reduction, revenue enhancement and improved customer value.

Ember has an unashamedly financial focus and is committed to achieving tangible business benefits.

Recommendations for change are backed by robust analysis that validates investment decisions and underpins financial gains as well as strong programme leadership.

In this way Ember offers its clients a clear business case for innovation, change and transformation and a proven, capable partner to see it through.

Contact:

Paul Mackenzie

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Encoded is a UK company founded in 2001 to offer affordable, pay-as-you-go IVR and payment solutions to small and large businesses. Hundreds of contact centres now rely on Encoded secure automated payments for their PCI DSS compliance requirements. Today the company's software supports many of the UK's leading brands including Virgin Holidays, Mercedes-Benz Finance and Hartlepool Water

All the company's services are designed to fulfil three key objectives:

- Reduce costs by automating card payments
- Increase security around payments and reduce PCI DSS compliance scope
- Improve customer service by maximising resource efficiency.

Solutions include:

- Virtual Terminal Payments
- IVR Phone Payments
- Agent Assisted Card Payments
- Web Payments
- Automated Recurring Payments

Contact:

Robert Crutchington

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e: sales@encoded.co.uk

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Crawley, West Sussex RH10 9SE



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



Eptica is a leading provider of multichannel and multilingual customer interaction management software, covering email, web self-service, social media, chat and even the more traditional channels such as faxes, letters and text messaging.

Eptica's Customer Engagement suite enables organisations to improve engagement with customers, increase efficiency and drive sales by delivering fast, accurate and relevant responses to their queries, through their channel of choice.

The Eptica customer engagement platform is designed around a central knowledge base, powerful workflow and Eptica Linguistic Services™, advanced linguistic capabilities that enable organisations to quickly understand the tone and context of digital interactions, ensuring that every incoming request is handled consistently and efficiently.

Today, more than 400 organisations across all industries and in 15 countries rely on the power of Eptica's platform, including AXA, Dixons Carphone, Domestic & General, AirAsia, Hastings Direct, L'Occitane, TUI, Debenhams, Capita and Ageas.

For more information please visit our [website](#) or browse the [Eptica Customer Experience Blog](#).

Contact details:

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Genesys is the global omnichannel customer experience and contact centre solution leader.

Our [customer experience platform](#) and solutions help companies engage effortlessly with their customers, across all touchpoints, channels and interactions to deliver differentiated customer journeys, while maximising revenue and loyalty. Over 4,500 successful customers tell the story best. [Here are a few.](#)

Organisations looking to modernise and expand the capabilities of their contact centres have three major architectural options to consider: pure cloud, on-premises, or a hybrid deployment. Genesys cloud offerings provide scalability, agility and security. Genesys contact centre solutions can [improve your customer's journey](#) by increasing personalisation and by delivering consistent connected customer experiences across touchpoints.

Powered by the Genesys Customer Experience Platform, our solutions enable businesses to intelligently manage interactions and improve customer satisfaction. That makes it easier than ever to align [customer experiences](#) with the perceived value they deliver– greater loyalty to the brand and higher revenue to the business.

Contact:

w: www.genesys.com/uk

t: +44 (0) 2037 348 133



Intelcom is a leading provider of contact management solutions. With over 17 years' experience, Intelcom was one of the first to develop a cloud-based contact centre. Highly flexible and scalable, Connect from Intelcom can be adapted to accommodate from one to several thousand concurrent agents using any device, in any location and integrates with multiple applications seamlessly.

Intelcom currently serves over 900 customers across 25 countries including; Affinity Water, Ombudsman Services, Capita, Domino's Pizza, Fingleaves and Oxford Brookes University.

Intelcom Connect is one of the few contact centre solutions that is completely multi-channel. Connect agents can respond to Phone, Email, Chat, Social Media and SMS enquiries all within the one application.

Contact:

w: www.intele.com

a: Intelcom UK Ltd. | 2-6 Boundary Row |
London | SE1 8HP

t: +44 (0) 333 300 0066

Intradiem is the only complete Intraday Automation solution provider for frontline workforces including Contact Centre, Back Office and Retail.

Intradiem's SaaS-based solution automates intraday management and real-time processes and turns frontline workforces into real-time workforces that can adapt and respond to changing conditions and events throughout the day. The result is a more agile frontline workforce that can adjust in real-time to deliver a dramatically better and more consistent customer experience at reduced cost.

Over 250,000 frontline workers use Intradiem's solution every day. Innovative companies such as Sprint, Harte Hanks and The General leverage Intraday Automation to engage their workforce and deliver extraordinary customer service while reducing operational costs.

Contact:

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IP Integration has been providing bespoke technology solutions to contact centres for nearly 20 years.

Our team of experts has both run and worked in contact centres - they've been in your shoes - so carry with them the expertise and knowledge they need to advise you on how best to meet your business goals. In fact, over 75% of our entire workforce is involved directly in contact centre technology, engineering, application development, systems, network and IT systems support.

We have worked with some of the country's leading brands and developed the market's most comprehensive suite of Contact Centre applications to enable you to provide your customers with the best possible experience. We offer solutions from leading vendors like Avaya and Verint, enhanced by the bespoke applications we have developed in-house to ensure your contact centre is optimised, complies with the latest regulations, gives you true insight into all aspects of your operation, and can adopt appropriate self-service applications.

But it's not just about the technology – it's about how we work closely with you to deploy it. Our clients span every conceivable market, but the common denominator is that they all want to provide differentiation to their end customers through fantastic service.

Contact:

w: www.ipintegration.com

e: ipi.info@ipintegration.com

t: 0844 871 2172

[Twitter](#) / [LinkedIn](#)

NewVoiceMedia powers customer connections that transform businesses globally.

The leading vendor's award-winning cloud customer contact platform revolutionises the way organisations connect with their customers worldwide, enabling them to deliver a personalised and unique customer service 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 128 countries and six continents, NewVoiceMedia's 400+ customers include PhotoBox, MobileIron, TNT, Lumesse, Qlik, JustGiving, Canadian Cancer Society and Wowcher.

Contact:

w: www.newvoicemedia.com

twitter: [@NewVoiceMedia](https://twitter.com/NewVoiceMedia)



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:

w: www.nexidia.com

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

Contact:

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Marketing Director EMEA

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w: www.noblesystems.com



Performance Telecom provide a comprehensive suite of telecom services to businesses and contact centres, proudly working with a number of blue-chip clients such as Motability, The Paragon Group of Companies, Royal Caribbean and Celebrity Cruises, Samsung and Toshiba.

Our principal products and services include cloud contact centre, automated IVR and customer satisfaction survey solutions, amongst an array of other exciting technologies.

We unlock aspiration by improving communication through tailored, leading edge and trusted technology that leverages excellence to achieve outstanding performance.

Contact:

w: www.performancetelecom.co.uk

t: 0330 303 4321

e: info@performancetelecom.co.uk

Pindrop Security provides enterprise solutions to secure phone and voice communications.

Pindrop solutions reduce fraud losses and authentication expense for some of the largest call centres in the world.

Pindrop's patented Phoneprinting™ technology can identify, locate and authenticate phone devices uniquely just from the call audio thereby detecting fraudulent calls as well as verifying legitimate callers.

Pindrop has been selected by the worlds largest banks, insurers, brokerages and retailers, detecting over 80% of fraud, even for attackers never seen before.

Our solutions are allowing our customers to reduce call time and improve their customers experience even while reducing fraud losses. Pindrop is restoring confidence in the security of phone-based transactions.

Contact:

e: info@pindropsecurity.com

w: www.pindropsecurity.com



Pinpointing the issue so that you can spend your time working on it.

Scorebuddy is a quality assessment tool that was built specifically for Contact Centres.

You will identify business critical issues in real-time. Your team will spend less time looking for issues and more time working on them. There will be significant time savings for staff performance reviews.

Scorebuddy will enable your supervisors to manage by exception, making for shorter, more precise meetings.

The data that Scorebuddy returns will enable you to build a deeper understanding of your team. Reporting will be consistent. There will be increased agent engagement through their personal dashboards.

ROI is typically 5x +.

Contact:

Dick Bourke, Scorebuddy.

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e: dbourke@scorebuddy.co.uk

w: www.scorebuddy.co.uk

Founded in 2001, SJS Solutions has now become a global leader in creating the most flexible, innovative and affordable digital display solutions for organisations of all sizes. Our mission is to ensure clients are quickly and easily able to deploy professional digital displays that will increase brand awareness, customer satisfaction, employee performance and engagement.

Our Optymyse range is compatible with 90% of all PBX technology including Avaya, Cisco, ShoreTel and Unify. Our free Application Programming Interface (API) allows organisations to capture data from any source – such as CRM, ERP, Salesforce, customer feedback, issue tracking – and display the information on any device.

Our solutions are suitable for environments where there are teams of people such as contact centres, helpdesks and sales teams. Clients range from multi billion dollar enterprises to insurance and automotive companies with small teams striving to deliver the very best customer service possible.

Contact:

Stephen Pace, CEO, SJS Solutions

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w: www.sjssolutions.com



Storacall Voice Systems was founded in 1969 and specialise in the development, supply and installation of call processing, voice recording and agent training/development solutions. We have a proven track record with over 40 years experience in these fields and truly feel we are the right choice for your business.

Whatever your priorities – bulk call recording, legal evidence disclosure, compliance, dispute resolution, quality management, customer satisfaction or service delivery – we can help with a rock solid tailored solution.

We integrate to analogue trunks / extensions, IP trunks, SIP trunks, Basic Rate ISDN, Primary Rate ISDN, Hosted VoIP and the majority of digital, IP and SIP handsets, whatever your needs we have a solution for you.

Contact:

a: Unit C1, The Dolphin Estate, Windmill Road,
Sunbury on Thames, Middlesex TW16 7HE

w: www.storacall.com

e: sales@storacall.co.uk

twitter: [@Storacall](https://twitter.com/Storacall)

t: 01932 710710

f: 01932 710711

TKDialogs is a standalone call scripting and web self-service solution that links to various CRM and other back office systems. There are 2 components to TKDialogs: 'Builder', a graphical design tool that enables business users to design and modify their own scripts, and 'Player', the browser-based end-user experience.

Through TKDialogs, data from different sources can be presented, used and updated from a single user interface removing the need for multiple screens and pop-up windows. In addition, Word or PDF documents can be created and emails sent directly from TKDialogs.

The same functionality that is available internally can also be delivered in a self-service mode, either via the customer's website or portal, or via mobile devices.

TKDialogs has deployments across the world in Banking, Financial Services, Government, Healthcare, Not For Profit and other business areas.

Contact:

w: www.teamknowledge.co.uk

e: sales@teamknowledge.co.uk

t: 01925 438022



As the first cloud-based contact centre solution provider in Europe, Ultracomms provides customers across the UK with outbound, inbound and blended contact centre services.

From inception in 2004, our unique approach has been based on continual collaboration with customers and partners to develop feature-rich platforms, ensuring clients remain at the forefront of the rapidly evolving contact centre market, as well as helping them comply with industry standards and regulations.

From our offices on the south coast of England, our in-house R&D and support teams provide clients with access to the very latest technology and the highest levels of support, to ensure they get the best possible results.

Our healthy financial track record has enabled us to invest in a robust cloud infrastructure across three geographical locations, ensuring the customers receive a reliable and consistent experience with ultracomms.

Contact:

w: www.ultracomms.com

e: sales@ultracomms.com

t: (0) 207 965 0207



VANAD Aloha is developed with the ultimate Customer Experience as its stepping stone. With the agent and customer in mind, VANAD Aloha delivers an ultimate Customer Journey across all touch points, channels and interactions. Resulting in a differentiated Customer Journey that delivers true Customer Engagement and maximized revenue.

VANAD Aloha is the challenger in Omni-Channel Customer Experience & Contact Center Solutions. It is a true cloud based solution with seamless integration beyond the Customer Contact Center.

Understanding the value of your Contact Center Agents and the ongoing complexity of customer interactions, VANAD Aloha is the one of a kind solution in true Customer Engagement.

Your benefits:

- In-depth operational Contact Center knowledge
- Working From Anywhere
- Omni-Channel support (Inbound/Outbound, E-mail, Chat, WhatsApp, Webchat, Social)
- 'Best of breed' seamless integration
- Easy to use
- Integrated functionalities such as Reporting, Quality Monitoring, Knowledge Management, Employee status etc.

Contact:

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[LinkedIn](#) & [Twitter](#)



Verint – transforming customer engagement

Verint® is a global leader in Actionable Intelligence®, which has become a necessity in a dynamic world of massive information growth.

By empowering organisations with crucial insights, Verint solutions enable decision makers to anticipate, respond and take action, and make more informed, effective and timely decisions.

Our solutions are designed to address three important areas of the actionable intelligence market:

- Customer engagement optimisation
- Security intelligence
- Fraud, risk and compliance.

Verint's vision is to create A Smarter World with Actionable Intelligence®, and today, more than 10,000 organizations in over 180 countries—including over 80 percent of the Fortune 100—already benefit from this vision.

Contact:

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e: Stuart.Clark@verint.com

VoxGen is a company on a mission: to make every automated call a great experience.

We're a team of interaction designers and technologists who believe there's a better way of designing, delivering and managing automated customer experiences. And we've done it for a wide range of consumer brands worldwide, including Shop Direct Group, LIME, Anglian Water and GAME.

VoxGen provides a complete set of services for smart, connected and conversational IVRs, comprising UX design and consultancy; outsourced application development; open-standards IVR development tools; managed cloud hosting; and on-premise IVR management.

If you're serious about putting your customers first, while keeping costs down, we can help.

Contact:

w: www.voxgen.com

t: +44 (0)20 7420 5900

e: info@voxgen.com

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT



Opinion-8's VoC and VoE surveys give you the power to listen directly to your customers and employees to drive service improvement in your business.

Our web and SMS surveys mean you can reach out to all your client base to ensure you're capturing feedback where it matters.

We offer 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



Rant & Rave provides customer engagement solutions with a difference. Created with the belief that fundamentally brands and consumers want the same thing – to deliver and receive great service – half of the FTSE rely on the Rant & Rave platform to proactively communicate with and gather fast feedback from their customers. By reducing customer effort and taking real-time inspired action, brands are able to transform Ranters into Ravers and happy customers into engaged Ravers – lifelong advocates.

We are proud to be working with some of the best known brands including:

SKY, EasyJet, M&S, Debenhams, npower, Papa John's, Homeserve, West Brom

We work tirelessly to ensure our clients get:

- Better response rates & more actionable insight
- An improvement in customer experience metrics (C-Sat, NPS, Customer Effort)
- A reduction in customer complaints.

Contact:

w: www.rantandrave.com

t: 02476 011 911

e: hello@rantandrave.com

HEADSETS



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.

Today, contact centres have evolved from mere call centres to Customer Service Centres, where relationships are cemented and your company's reputation gets tested during every call. At Plantronics we understand that your main concern is delivering a premier customer experience, and with our smarter communications solutions we can help turn your conversations into the perfect customer experience.

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/uk (case studies [here](#))

[Facebook](#) / [Twitter](#) / [YouTube](#) / [LinkedIn](#) / [Flickr](#)

INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS



Formed in 1994, the CCMA is the longest established association representing the call centre industry in the UK. We support contact centre managers through providing opportunities to network; to openly share best practice and to increase their skills and knowledge through specialist training.

Our aim is to offer timely and impartial advice to our members; to keep contact centre leaders in touch with changes in their industry; to provide credible benchmarking information and to help individuals maintain an awareness of the latest trends and developments.

The Associations board is made up of call centre professionals who work full time in the industry and give up their time voluntarily to support the association and its members.

Contact:

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e: info@ccma.org.uk

w: www.ccma.org.uk

w: www.ukcontactcentrewards.co.uk

Twitter: [@ccmataalk](https://twitter.com/ccmataalk)



As champions of best practice and professional development in customer contact, The Forum is widely recognised as an innovative, inclusive and independent community of professionals who stimulate collaboration and continuous improvement underpinned by four communities:

- Professional Planning Forum
- Quality & Customer Experience Forum
- Data, Analytics and Insight Forum
- Customer Strategy & Leadership

Our team of independent experts offers advice and support, enabling members to make a tangible impact in their organisation and show how the capability of each support function is fundamental to the business, through specialist accreditation, qualifications and standards benchmarking.

Contact:

w: www.theforum.social

t: 0333 123 5960

e: advice@theforum.social

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:

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

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:

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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:

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The UK's most popular contact centre magazine



contact
centres

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 many regular features, including articles that ask experienced people to answer real-life contact centre problems faced by their peers. We also run a successful webinar programme aimed at sharing best practice and insight into different technology solutions.

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



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

TRAINING SERVICES

F first I mp T raining

First Impression Training (also known as FIT) specialise in developing the hidden gifts and talents of your frontline customer service and telesales teams, through tailor made learning & development solutions designed to enhance your customers' experience.

Whether your team is just a handful of sales or customer service specialists or a 500+ seat call centre or multi-media contact centre operation, our innovative solutions will provide your people with the skills, techniques and behaviours guaranteed to enhance customer perception of your service.

Do you want to...

- ...build a new telesales team or customer service centre from scratch into a high performing operation?
- ...re-energise the performance of your existing inbound or outbound telesales team to achieve better results?
- ...positively influence the behaviours of your people to become the truly memorable voice of your brand?
- ...enjoy sustainable returns on your training investment?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then we can help you develop your people to deliver where it counts – to your bottom line!

Contact:

David Cross

t: 01622 277080

e: david@calltraining.co.uk

a: PO Box 815, Maidstone, Kent ME16 0GL

w: www.calltraining.co.uk

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:

- Multichannel Workforce Management
- Interaction Recording
- Interaction Analytics
- Quality & Performance Management
- Gamification
- Desktop Automation & Analytics
- Customer Experience Measurement & Improvement
- Headsets.

How to be a **Connected Digital Enterprise** ?

To gain traction in the market and build competitive edge, you need to get an insight into your customers' digital footprints, the kinds of channels they like to interact over and the particular likes and dislikes they have. The same is true of today's digital enterprises, organisations increasingly need to build their own digital DNA.

But how can you become a connected digital enterprise? Here are our top tips!



Understand and build intelligence of your customers DNA

Today's modern family are forever changing digitally, if you want to understand you need to know, how they interact, their digital footprint and to get to the real heart of what makes them tick, you need to have an insight into their digital DNA however, businesses also need to ensure that they have the right robust and flexible underlying infrastructure in place to be able to act on this understanding and deliver customer service that is precisely optimised to that individual customer's specific needs and preferences.

Everyone is a representative of your Business DNA

Now business DNA is public, we have all seen the horrors on social media sites, which can be detrimental. This means you need to start applying digital technology to the front-end customer experience across the whole business, and make sure back-end processes are fully automated and have a set of digital etiquettes so that everyone is responsible for customer experience. The enhanced connectivity between separate departments is turning many modern enterprises from siloed organisations into single customer-service focused entities.



UC tools are embracing the digital age

You also need to make best use of customer interaction tools like Skype for Business to further enable businesses to engage more closely with customers, have presence information of all staff, capture customer DNA and build loyalty and business advantage through effective communication.

It significantly reduces the cost of interaction for customers and keep them connected, blurs the lines of communications (voice or video), provides productivity tools and constantly manages quality for customers. Whilst providing a digital profile for both the consumer and the business.

Running a successful business today, much like building a successful modern family, is about good communication and collaboration and gaining an insight into people's likes and dislikes. Understanding your customers' digital DNA and being able to act positively on that understanding will be the key factor in delivering success for your business both today and long into the future. Follow the top tips advice above and you will be well placed to achieve it.

Download the full whitepaper to learn more.

MULTICHANNEL WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT

Workforce management solutions have to deal with environments which have become much more complex, in order to cope with 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 skills 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 multichannel interactions (either in real-time - such as web chats - or offline, such as emails).

Fulfilling service levels while managing costs is an iterative 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.

The modern contact centre not only requires the basics of having enough people to answer the phone in a reasonable amount of time, but is increasingly demanding more sophisticated functionality, such as the ability to forecast and schedule agents within the daily activity, accurately staff across both multichannel and voice interactions, and include back-office activities within scheduling as well where relevant.



Real-Time Rules

It's time to stop manually reacting to ever-changing intraday conditions. You'll never win.

Intraday Automation enables your frontline workforces to react in real-time to optimisation opportunities, such as unexpected call volume, imbalance across interaction channels, over- and under-staffing, and individual adherence issues

Now you can deliver a dramatically more consistent customer experience, without additional costs.

With Intraday Automation, you'll be a champion for cost control, productivity, agent engagement and customer satisfaction in record time.



Learn more.
www.intradiem.com/winthegame

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, 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 calls that are being received, and determining whether these could be reduced further up the line, in the departments whose work actively affects 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, speech analytics, 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. a new TV advert may trigger a wave of specific calls). 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 questions, 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 even at an intraday level to reflect reality.

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.

A scheduler will have to find the best way to match the company’s requirements with those of its employees, and agent self-scheduling functionality - which allows an agent to bid for and choose specific shifts and vacations - is not only helpful in terms of forecasting, but has a demonstratively positive effect on agent morale and attrition rates as well.

Scheduling 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.), and which may well be operating within a blended environment.



While enabling and empowering agents with self-scheduling options drives agent engagement, it’s of course imperative to ensure the right number of agents are always available for the right customer interactions as dictated by demand, but even advanced WFM tools can’t automate the manual, reactive and slow administrative tasks necessary to implement self-scheduling. Intraday Automation triggers real-time flex schedule offers at the agent level based on real-time data, and its agent mobile app provides more visibility and flexibility with notifications and schedule swapping, driving greater efficiency and labour savings. The key is the ability to respond in real time, possible only via Intraday Automation, to protect service levels and reduce costs given current intraday conditions.

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, and the more it is used, the more accurate 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, with automated intraday changes being used increasingly, taking away the need for human intervention.

WFM solutions enable contact centre managers to monitor and manage agent performance in real time by monitoring the status of an agent's activity (for example, time spent logged on, against planned work schedules), even if the agent is working remotely. Agent adherence and non-adherence can then be acted upon quickly, and used to support performance appraisals.



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. Intraday Automation provides 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.

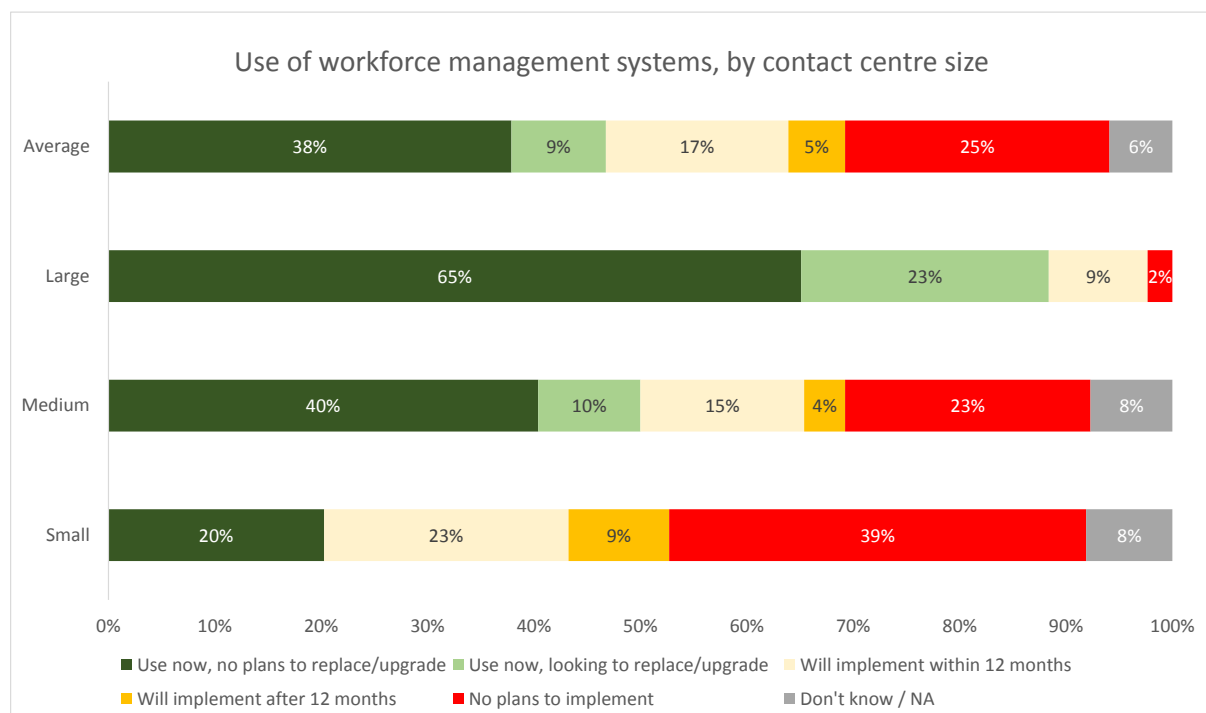
ENHANCED WORKFORCE OPTIMISATION

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.

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.

Workforce management systems are common in contact centres, with a penetration rate of 47% industry-wide. Of these users, 19% are actively looking to replace their WFM solution, and a further 11% indicate that they are likely to implement a system for the first time in the next 12 months.

Figure 2: Use of workforce management systems, by contact centre size



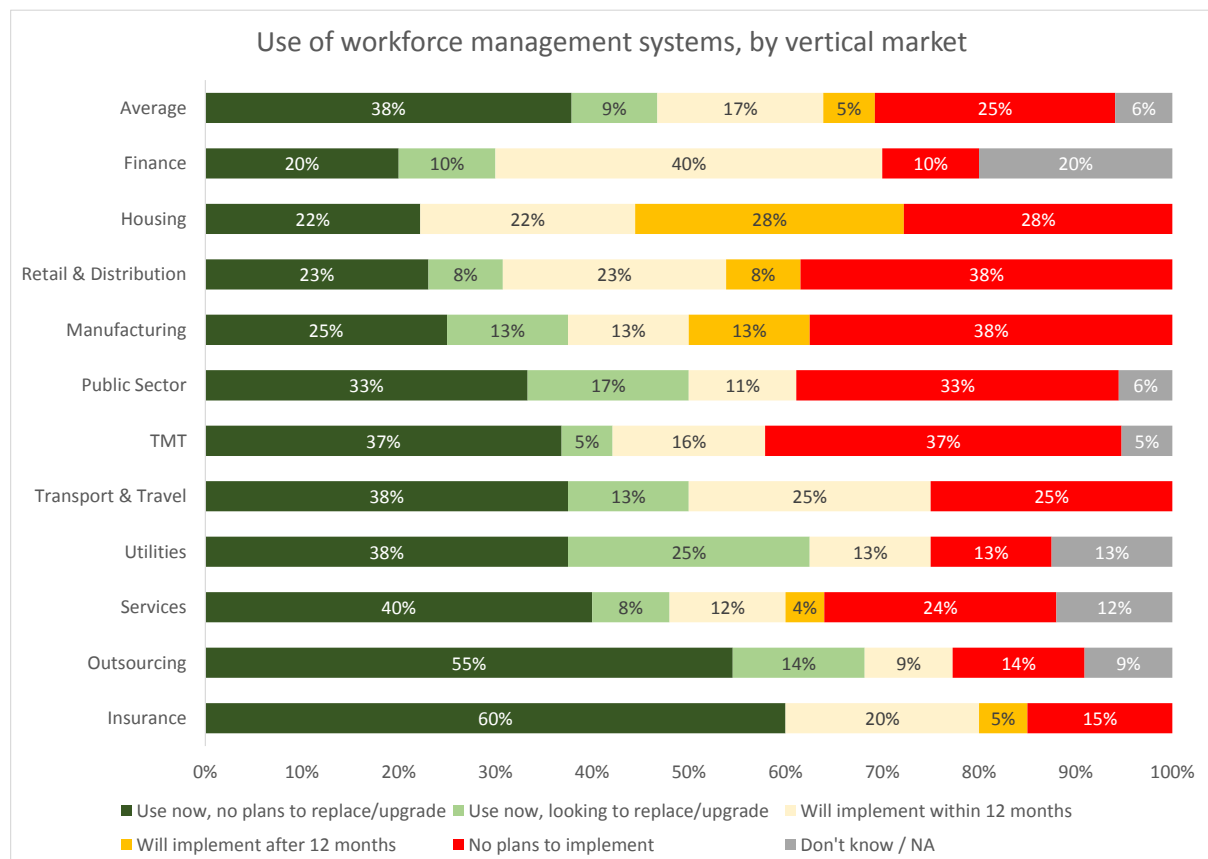
Medium and large operations are far more likely to use dedicated third-party workforce management applications into which historical data can be fed, providing a far more accurate schedule. It is noticeable that more than a quarter of current users of workforce management solutions from larger contact centres are actively looking to replace or upgrade this application.

Small contact centres have traditionally been less likely to have implemented workforce management, due to issues over cost, complexity and whether it was even necessary in small operations. Recent years have seen opportunities via cloud / SaaS (software-as-a-service) models, as well as subscription-based pricing alternatives, which enable accurate forecasting and scheduling options for smaller contact centres, and while 23% of respondents from the small contact centre sector expect to implement WFM in the next 12 months, there is still a very long way to go.

As the likelihood of workforce management system usage is far more of a factor of size and call volume, rather than the business type, care should be taken with the following chart which shows respondents' WFM penetration rates by vertical market.

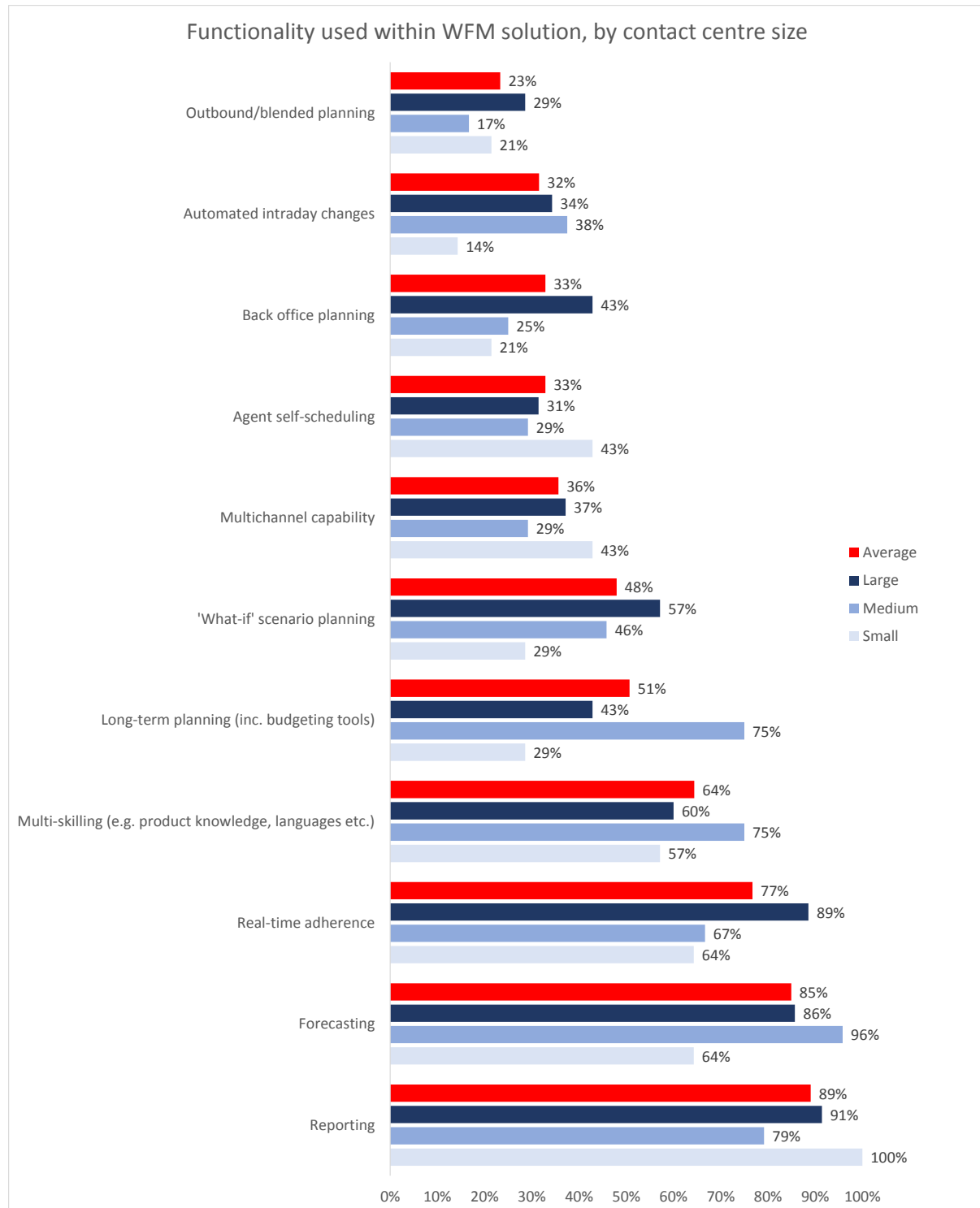
Those respondents in the utilities and public sectors seem most likely to be looking to upgrade their WFM systems, with those in finance and transport and travel most likely to be implementing the solution within the next 12 months.

Figure 3: Use of workforce management systems, by vertical market



Respondents who said that they used workforce management solutions were asked which functionality they actually used (as opposed to what was bundled in with the solution, but which was not used).

Figure 4: Functionality used within WFM solution, by contact centre size



As would be expected, forecasting and reporting scored very highly, with real-time adherence to schedule and multiskilled forecasting/scheduling also seen as being very useful.

Just over half of respondents used workforce management solutions for more strategic aims including 'what if' scenario planning and longer term forecasting, functionality which is more likely to be used in large and medium-sized operations.

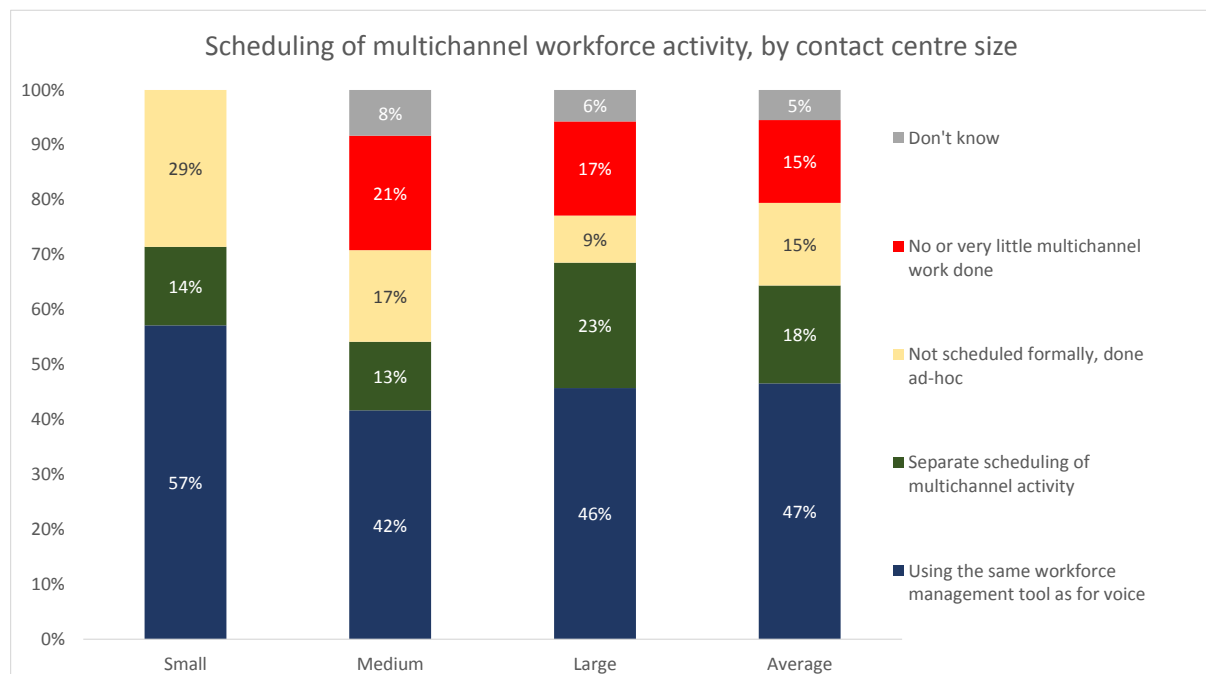
Only around a third used agent self-scheduling, which can be seen as a potential win-win for both agent and scheduler, in that it provides a more realistic schedule as well as giving the agent an element of control over when they wish to work.

Similar proportions used more recent forms of functionality such as multichannel scheduling, automated intraday changes, blending, and back office forecasting and scheduling.

Around half of respondents from all size of contact centre use a combined voice and multimedia workforce management application, with a minority of these types of respondent using an ad-hoc approach. Small contact centres that handle multichannel work are most likely to take an ad-hoc approach, depending on volumes of calls or multichannel interactions.

There was a noticeable use of standalone forecasting and scheduling for multichannel activity, usually in larger operations which may run their non-voice operation as a separate part of the customer contact environment, and for whom this segregated approach would make sense.

Figure 5: Scheduling of multichannel workforce activity, by contact centre size



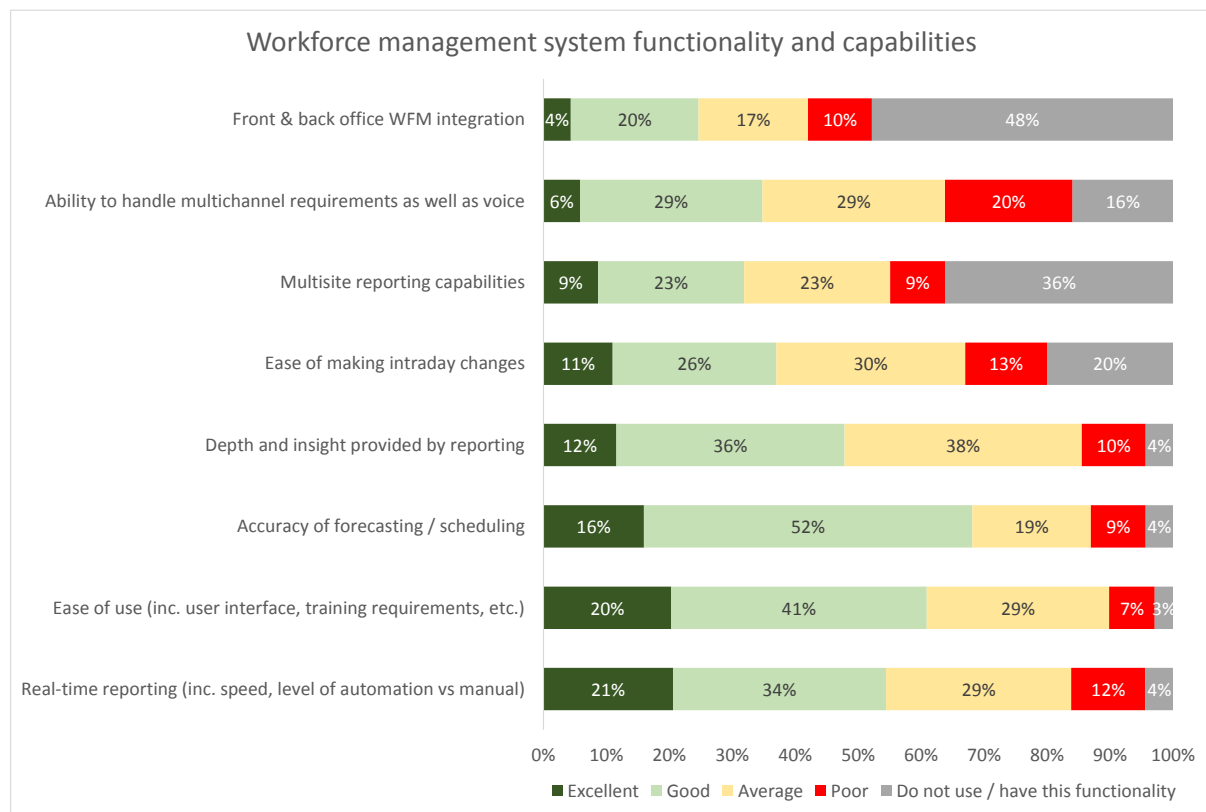
Respondents were asked to comment upon their opinion of the functionality and capabilities of their workforce management system as it stands.

The positive news is that the majority of respondents find the solution relatively easy-to-use, with the accuracy of forecasting and scheduling generally seen to be either excellent or good. As workforce management has been around for many years, these characteristics should by now be part of a good workforce management solution's DNA.

With the exception of handling multichannel, relatively few respondents commented negatively about any functionality (i.e. actively rating it as 'poor'). However, it can be viewed that functionality graded as being 'average' could be seen in a similar context to 'poor', in that no organisation or business should be satisfied if their products or services are merely rated as average by their customers.

Looking at where respondents believe that there are gaps in their WFM system's functionality, the integration between front and back office, ease of making intraday changes, the ability to handle both multichannel and voice requirements and concerns over the depth and insight provided by reporting are the main areas of concern, although there seems to be room for improvement across the board.

Figure 6: Workforce management system functionality and capabilities



Intraday Automation Making Life Easier in the Contact Centre

As contact centre environments have become more complex, strategic business leaders are looking for innovative ways to spend less and make customers happier.

In 2012, the Aberdeen Group surveyed contact centre executives about their top concerns. The primary objective of most respondents (65 %) was improving agent productivity and performance. But in a similar survey last year, the number one objective had changed. Over half (59 %) of respondents said their top concern was enhancing the customer experience and creating happier customers. Organizations have come to realize just how much customer experience affects their brand and their bottom line.

So what tools and strategies are leading contact centres using today and how do they maximise the benefits of these technologies? What will drive customer care executives in 2016 and beyond?

For more than 9 out of 10 WFO executives, better customer experience results and making sure the customer experience is consistent across multiple channels is today's top objective, according to an Aberdeen report released this past May. These executives are also looking at how to reduce customer effort for issue resolution, improve agent productivity and performance, and tie that back to improving the overall customer experience.

The first step to improving customer experience is creating and managing a work environment that helps agents become better performers. Aberdeen found that better technology tools to conduct day-to-day tasks was most important to agents — even over increased compensation.

Today's customers demand more personalised and timely service across multiple channels. Agents must be able to understand customers' needs and respond in real-time in whatever channel the customer prefers to communicate. Along with on-going training and coaching, technology solutions must be brought to bear here, too.


Leading companies — defined by high FCR rates and year-over-year improvement in customer satisfaction and AHT — are using innovative methods to increase agent productivity, generate revenue by providing agents with the information they need to cross sell and upsell, and create positive buzz from customers on social media.

Intraday Automation's unique value proposition —

- Aggregating natural idle time between calls provides an automated way to convert idle time to productive time for training and coaching agents and other essential activities.
- By automating manual processes in the contact centre, agents become a real-time workforce that can quickly adapt and respond to changing conditions and events throughout the day.
- Workforce managers no longer have to manually monitor and react to events, which allows them to better manage overtime and voluntary time off, as well as automate when agents acquire new skills, so agents can serve customers immediately.
- Agents are empowered, more productive, and can focus on the customer's unique needs to drill down to each resolution, while also cross-selling and upselling products and services.

The research says that intraday automation is among the top workforce optimisation strategies deployed by leading firms to help them succeed. These companies are working to adopt intraday automation programs to streamline contact centre WFO activities and to customise the training and retraining of agents based on individual assessments.

As customer needs change, organisations must ensure that agents' skills are also changing so they can address those needs and retain customers. For companies using intraday automation, customer retention rates are 75 % greater than for those not using it.

It's clear by the numbers that intraday automation is capable of producing some amazing results for customer experience, agents and the entire business. 

Benefits to Intraday Automation Users (vs. non-Users)

Agent productivity...



Year-over-year revenue...



Lower overall service costs...



Customer retention...



First contact resolution...



Customer satisfaction...



At first glance, the relatively lukewarm attitude of respondents towards various elements of their workforce management systems functionality might be seen as the failure of the solution to deliver what it should be doing.

However, when respondents' attitudes towards their workforce management solution are cross-referenced against the functionality which they are actually using, a different picture emerges. Respondents that actually **use** the specific workforce management functionality - such as automated intraday management - rather than carrying out such activities manually are far happier with their solution's capabilities. For example, only 15% of respondents that actually use automated intraday management functionality find the experience of making intraday changes 'poor' or 'average', compared to 65% who have to change intraday schedules manually. The problem seems to be more with the underuse of available WFM functionality, rather than any intrinsic flaws in its capabilities.



Intraday Automation is a major step above what is usually considered intraday management. It is designed to enhance WFM systems and fill in the missing gaps, using valuable data from your WFM in conjunction with user-defined rules to automate workforce actions and automatically responding to changing conditions in real time, replacing the need for manual decisions. Intraday Automation allows you to set rules to dynamically deliver training and coaching during idle time, prompt after-call or back-office tasks, automatically process schedule exceptions, automatically administer overtime and time-off based on conditions, and automatically reskill and associate agents with queues —greatly expanding the capabilities of most WFM and intraday management tools.

INTERACTION RECORDING

Call 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.

Recording solutions have moved on from the days of simple bulk recording, and the phrase 'call recording' is no longer an accurate description of the solution, and it is certainly more realistic to talk of 'interaction recording', which captures and synchronizes what is happening on the agent's screen with what is happening 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.

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. call outcome) 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 to listen to, considerably reducing cost.

The supervisor may also be responsible for the initial stages of 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.

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 the use of interaction recording capabilities may find that the agent is unable to 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 altogether.

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 can be acted upon by the company as a whole. 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.



Unlock Valuable Insights Trapped in Customer Conversations

In today's fast-paced world, optimising customer engagement can be a challenge. CallMiner Eureka interaction analytics makes it easy. You gain a 360 degree view into customer conversations, whether they are over the phone, email, chat or social media.

Realise these benefits with CallMiner Eureka interaction analytics:

- ✓ Enhance the customer experience with automated real-time feedback to agents
- ✓ Maintain compliance through 100% monitoring
- ✓ Reduce costs by driving operational efficiencies
- ✓ Increase revenue through sales or collector effectiveness

Unlock insights, improve efficiencies and increase revenue while delivering a great customer experience. Take a free CallMiner Eureka analytics test drive starting with your own phone calls!

Visit us at <http://callminer.com/free-speech-analytics/>

RANKED #1

in

Customer Satisfaction

among

SPEECH ANALYTICS

VENDORS

Independent Analysts Surveys

CallMiner
Eureka



In addition to improving agent performance, proactive enterprises like Defender Direct use [Interaction Analytics](#) to support all areas of the enterprise. After calls are recorded the CallMiner Eureka solution transcribes the interactions and looks for specific language Defender has identified: doing so uncovers trends in critical customer information that is then shared with all departments – sales, marketing, product management and legal. As Manager of Quality Assurance at Defender, Molly Sollie stated, “One of the teams we support currently said, ‘Now, instead of walking into a case with no flashlight, you just gave us a 5,000-watt bulb.’”

A strategic use of call recording may occur at the **management or executive** level. When all interactions are recorded and analysed, a complete performance management programme 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 business 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 call recording.



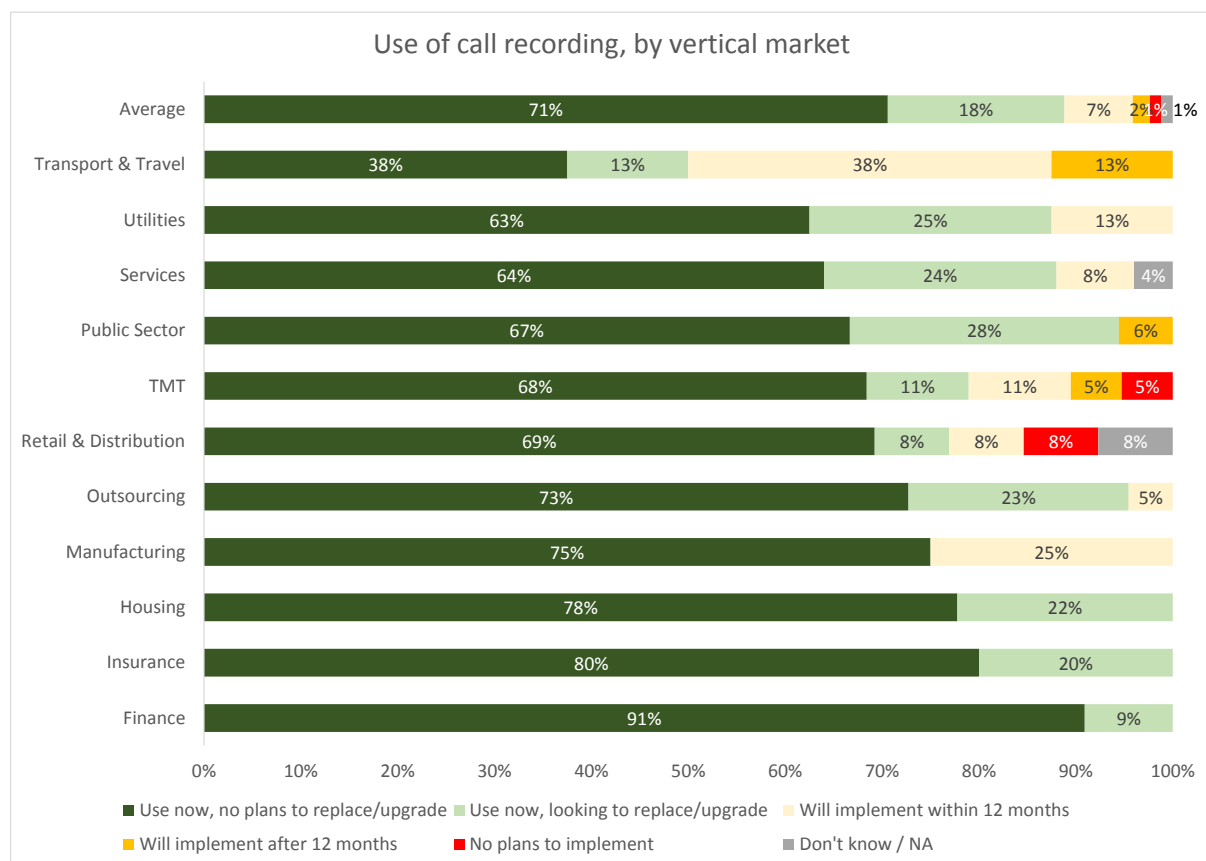
In addition to recording 100% of its calls, Southwest Credit also uses CallMiner Eureka to analyse them. By creating search strings to locate all calls that fit a certain criteria, Southwest Credit can now provide timely feedback on contacts that reference bankruptcy language, dispute language and escalation language. This has dramatically improved compliance and has allowed Southwest Credit to accurately measure and develop new strategies as part of its continuous improvement process.

Call recording may be used in three modes:

- 100% call recording: often used for compliance purposes, this records the entirety of every call
- Random / Scheduled Call Recording: priority-based call recording schedules can be defined based on business rules, using multiple criteria on each schedule
- On-Demand Call Recording: contact centres may have situations where they do not need to record an entire call. On-demand recording can be customised to support agent-initiated call recording through a desktop interface, or automated through call recording triggers sent from third-party software.

Call recording is used by 89% of this year's respondents, 20% of whom state that they wish to replace or upgrade their current system. Only 1% of respondents have no intention of using call recording - the lowest on record.

Figure 7: Use of call recording, by vertical market



20% or more of respondents in the public sector, utilities, services, outsourcing, housing and insurance sectors all report that they are looking to update their call recording solutions. Taken in the context of data from elsewhere in this report, this is almost certainly connected with adding speech analytics capabilities to the recording functionality in order to improve the QA process, increase compliance and gather new business insight from their customer interaction records.



Case Study

CallMiner Speech Analytics at TradeGlobal

RANKED #1
in
Customer Satisfaction
among
SPEECH ANALYTICS
— VENDORS —
Independent Analysts Surveys



TRADEGLOBAL

Industry

End-to-end commerce services and solutions provider

Use Case

Improve quality monitoring processes and agent performance while reducing costs

Business Impact:

Reduced effort associated with quality monitoring, automated call scoring, and improved customer satisfaction

Why Speech Analytics?

TradeGlobal invested in CallMiner speech analytics to accurately monitor 100% of agent calls. Manually listening to 3-4 calls out of the hundreds an agent takes per week was not enough for TradeGlobal to accurately assess employee performance. In addition, the long delays between the actual phone call and the feedback sessions meant agents couldn't even recall the interactions in question.

Results

Automated monitoring allows TradeGlobal to paint an accurate picture of the agent's overall quality and allows the quality assurance team to quickly identify areas for improvement. TradeGlobal provides agents access to their scores and enables them to listen to their own calls using CallMiner's agent portal, myEureka. In addition to receiving coaching from the QA team and supervisors, this allows the agents to self-coach. Agents feel more personally invested in their quality scores and take more initiative to improve them. **As a result, TradeGlobal is seeing a 10-15% increase in overall quality scores across all agents and clients.**

Prior to speech analytics, TradeGlobal had a team of 8 quality assurance specialists whose only job was to monitor calls. **After implementing CallMiner's solution, TradeGlobal repurposed the majority of staff into different positions, cutting staff costs in half and realising an immediate return on investment.**

In addition to the above, TradeGlobal sees benefits in the following areas:

- > Quickly see trends within groups of calls.
- > Analyse call volume and flow to improve agent efficiency.
- > Search for words or phrases in order to identify issues and successes.
- > Sort and analyse subsets of calls using metadata that is attached to every recording.
- > Easily adjust scores and searches to comply with changing client requirements.
- > Report and export results quickly in a variety of formats.

As TradeGlobal continues to grow and add employees to its contact centre, the company plans to expand its use of speech analytics. It has already been incorporated as a valuable training tool for onboarding new agents, using good and bad call 'snippets' to demonstrate preferred techniques and phrases. **New agents are hitting the phones with better quality scores than ever before and TradeGlobal no longer sees the long ramp-up times that were previously accepted as normal.**



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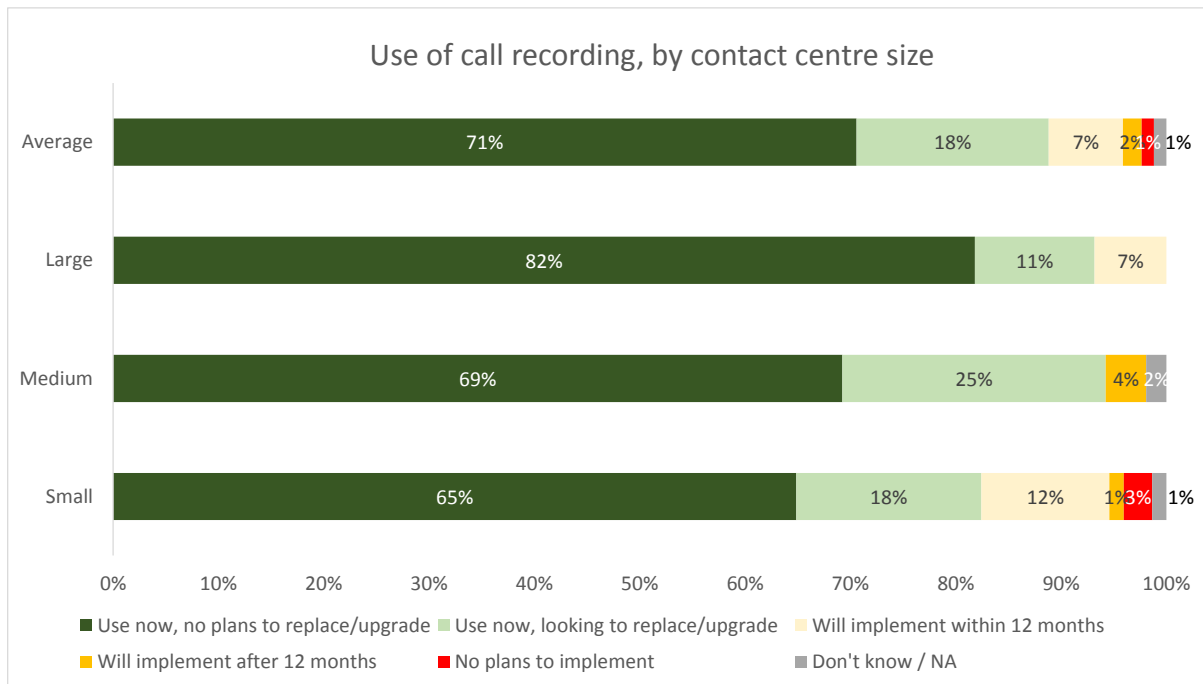
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in linkedin.com/company/callminer

The use of call recording is influenced by the size of the contact centre operation, although the figure of 83% penetration in small operations shows that vendors have been able to offer solutions successfully at various price points and deployment methods.

Call recording in contact centres with at least 50 seats is almost ubiquitous.

Figure 8: Use of call recording, by contact centre size



31% of respondents that use call recording do so for all calls, with 69% having the option to record only a part of their overall voice interactions.

42% of respondents state that they can choose to record based on the call profile (i.e. business rules based on the nature of the call), and almost half will do so based on the inbound number called. Only 26% identify the inbound caller's number and decide whether to record or not based on that.

Figure 9: Situational recording choices

Situation	% respondents choosing to record or not record
Call profile (e.g. do not record calls made to HR; outbound calls to states with 2-party recording regulations; etc.)	42%
Based on CLI (calling-line identity, i.e. the number calling in)	26%
Based on DNIS (dialled number identification service, i.e. the number being called)	43%

As with any form of recorded and potentially sensitive customer data, the secure storage of recorded calls must be taken into account. 42% of respondents choose to store their recorded calls offsite, either as part of a cloud-based call recording solution, or through a dedicated backup facility as part of a wider disaster recovery plan. This is somewhat more likely to be the case in large operations, although there is generally not a great difference found across size bands.

The majority of respondents in all sizes of operation state that they have dedicated secure hardware on-site in which to store their call recordings, and some choose both on-site and offsite duplication of storage.

A very small proportion of respondents state that the call recordings are stored onsite on standard hardware (e.g. in hardware that is also be used for other purposes).

Figure 10: Storage of recorded calls, by contact centre size

Contact centre size	Offsite (hosted / cloud)	Onsite (dedicated secure hardware)	Onsite (on standard hardware)
Small	39%	57%	7%
Medium	40%	67%	5%
Large	48%	52%	6%
Average	42%	59%	6%
NB: totals may add up to more than 100% as multiple options are allowed			

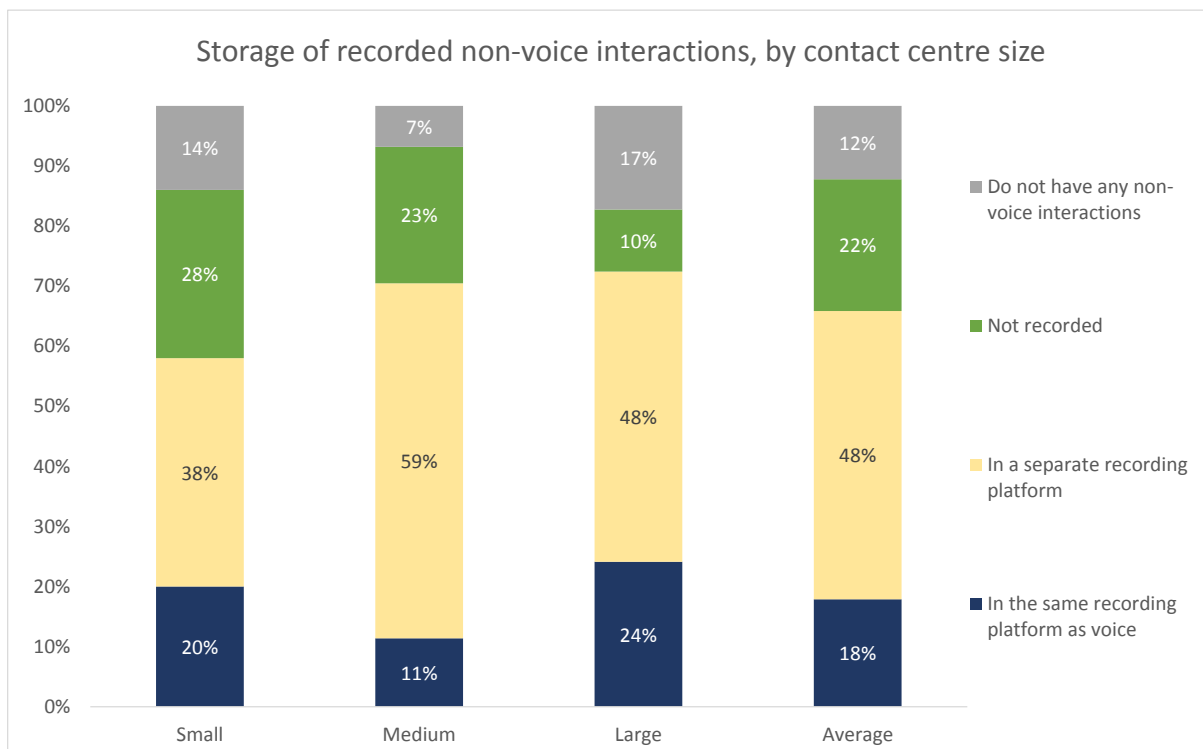


Interaction analytics tools can automatically prevent sensitive information from being recorded without any dependencies of the agent. For example, CallMiner Redactor automatically mutes the recording when account numbers and security codes are being recorded to ensure customer privacy and PCI compliance.

Respondents using interaction recording were asked about non-voice interaction storage, such as screen recording and multichannel interactions. Large contact centres were somewhat more likely to use a single recording platform that handled the storage of every sort of interaction, offering the opportunity to get a complete picture of a customer interaction by tagging interactions with non-voice metadata about the nature of the call and its outcome, allowing the later application of rich analytical functionality.

Around a quarter of small and medium operations stated that they do not record text-based interactions or the agent's screen. This seems strange due to the increasing volumes of email and web chat, and the difficulties in proving what a multichannel agent has said within the conversation.

Figure 11: Storage of recorded non-voice interactions, by contact centre size



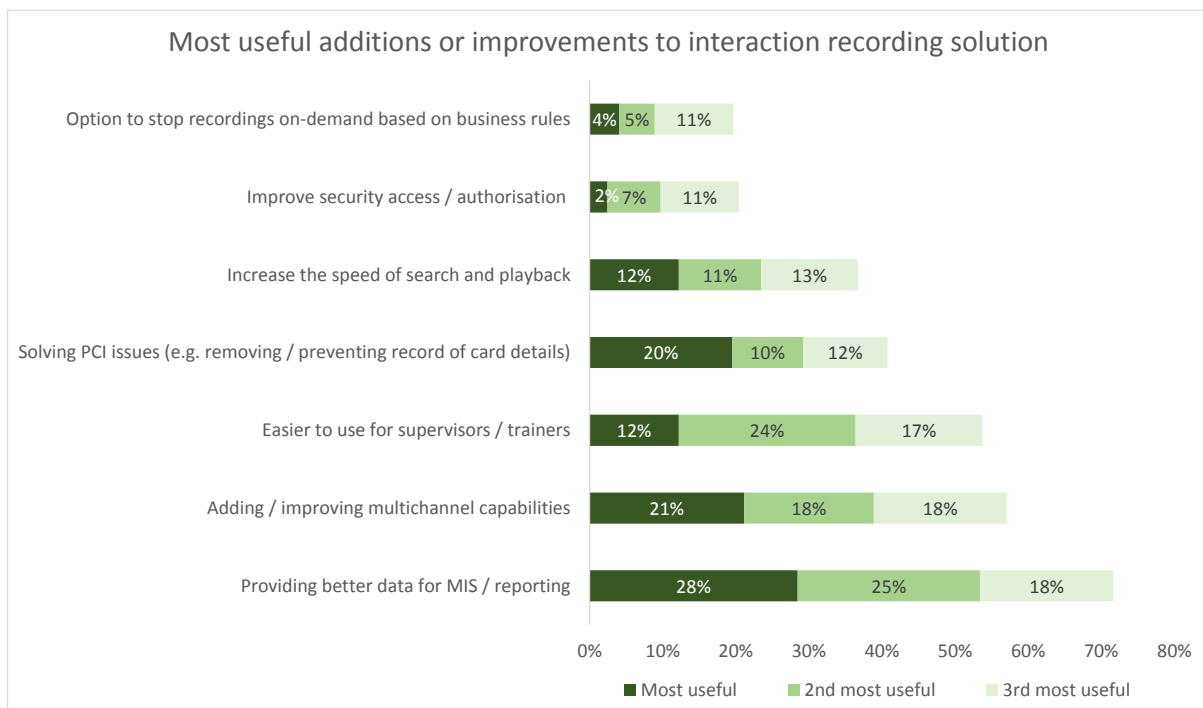
Survey respondents were asked which interaction recording functionality they would most like to add or improve. Of the seven choices provided, four stood out as the most popular. In order:

- providing better data management information systems and reporting
- adding and improving multichannel capabilities.
- improving the ease of use for supervisors and trainers
- solving PCI issues (including the prevention and removal of card data).

There is significant demand for higher quality of data to feed into the reporting process (and also into the supporting wider analytical processes), and many respondents also acknowledge that recording is moving out of the voice-only territory, and will need to be able to handle multichannel with similarly rich functionality.

42% of respondents state that addressing PCI DSS issues through call recording is one of their top three requirements for the solution, through pause-and-resume recording or the redaction of card data from existing recordings, as well as encryption and the enforcement and proof of compliance. The PCI Compliance chapter later in this report gives more detail.

Figure 12: Most useful additions or improvements to interaction recording solution



CUSTOMER INTERACTION ANALYTICS

The term “Customer Interaction Analytics” refers to the analysis of all interactions between contact centres and customers, whether that interaction was via telephone, email, a web chat session, or even social media. Such conversations are free-form by their nature, hence any data captured from the interaction will be unstructured by definition, which makes this data more difficult to analyse. However, there is an enormous amount of valuable information hidden in this mountain of unstructured data, and the interaction analytics technology available today is becoming very effective at capturing the voice of the customer and improving contact centre performance based upon this.

INTERACTION ANALYTICS TECHNOLOGY

There are various elements to customer interaction analytics solutions, many of which include:

- Speech engine: a software programme that recognises speech and converts it into data (either phonemes - the sounds that go to make up words - or as a text transcription).
- Indexing layer: a software layer that improves and indexes the output from the speech engine 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 look at specific issues such as adherence to script, debt collections etc., and provide suggestions on what to look for.

Most customer interaction analytics solutions use speech engines that are either phonetic or speech-to-text / LVCSR (Large Vocabulary Continuous Speech Recognition), also known as ‘transcription-based’.

In **LVCSR**, the call is transcribed into text in order for analysis to take place, and depends upon a language model and dictionary to identify words correctly. Unlike phonetics-based solutions, LVCSR does not require predefinition of words to search for as the content of calls is available in the index. Transcription processing is considerably slower than phonetic indexing (usually in the region of 4-20 x real-time for LVCSR, vs >1,000 x real time for some phonetics-based systems), but the search process is far quicker. It is generally accepted that 60-70% accuracy in word recognition is about average. This method allows companies to retain the entire content of calls, not just initially specified keywords and phrases, and is generally thought of as best for root cause analysis, and identifying clusters of terms that occur together, giving a starting point for deeper analysis.

Phonetics-based applications - which look for defined sounds or strings of sounds - attempt to match these sounds to target words or phrases in a phonetic index file. The phonetic indexing process converts the audio into symbols that represent the audio and the identification of issues relies upon the predefinition of the terms to search for. The phonetic search process leverages an acoustic model tuned to the specific language, with the search terms converted into phonemes and returns relevancy-ranked results. In circumstances where new phrases or words are frequently being used in conversations - for example, in retail, where new products may be emerging all the time - a phonetics approach means that analytics user can just type in the name and it can be searched upon. Using a transcription approach, the user has to add new words to the dictionary, and reprocess the audio, which can be time-consuming and may require professional services.

However, a system accurately identifies a key word, there is no guarantee that it will be used in the correct context (for example, the word "website" may not just refer to a company's own site, but to a competitor's or something else entirely), or will be the right word (e.g. it may be a homophone - reed/read - or homonym bank / bank). Phrase recognition (such as 'the website doesn't work', or similar) is used to alleviate this and reduce false positives, putting the words into a context. The longer the phrase, the more accurate and unique the results will be. Searching on a single word will bring back many more results, which can risk lots of false positives unless the word is very distinctive, like a competitor's name, for example.

Solution providers that offer analytics based upon a phonetic speech engine emphasize its usefulness and speed where customers already know the type of words and phrases that they are looking for based on their business needs, and not having to identify the right words in advance to put into a language model means that unknown words and phrases can be found quickly, uncovering trends or events that are relevant to the business. However, a different query will require searching all the data again. Many vendors have significant experience with specific business sectors and call types, and can offer useful advice on how to maximise the volumes of data available for analysis along vertical market lines, also pre-packaging typical words and phrases that are used in specific instances, so that their customers can get off to a quick start in using the application.

There are also solutions where a phrase-driven direct speech recognition engine recognises entire phrases within recorded calls without first converting the speech into text or phonemes. This approach combines speech and business concept recognition by directly recognising the phrases spoken during the conversation and comparing them to the phrases that are often found in these types of call (sales, complaints, etc.), or those that have been defined by the client, for example in the case of compliance or scripting which will support a real-time response. As calls are not recorded within this method, searching is not possible, so transcription or phonetic indexing is usually carried out on these calls as well.

Increasingly, solution providers are offering dual phonetic and transcription-based systems, in order to give their customers the best of both worlds. Although these solutions may be referred to as hybrid, the reality is that they use both methods in order to benefit from phonetics' rapid identification of key words and phrases, while allowing in-depth discovery and root cause analysis by use of the transcription method. One possible way to use this is to analyse 100% of calls quickly with phonetic indexing, categorising and viewing trends, then transcribing the calls that are identified as being of particular interest in order to conduct root cause analysis, without having to transcribe 100% of calls (which can require many servers in a high call volume environment).

Businesses should consider the most likely and frequent uses of the analytics solution while deciding upon a vendor. If they are likely to be searching the information many times a day as part of business intelligence or process improvement, then transcription may be preferred as searching is quicker. If the business will be processing large amounts of audio but searching it infrequently, for example in the case of evidence production or proof of compliance, then phonetics may be a more appropriate choice.

However, businesses should be aware that the speed, accuracy and precision of customer interaction analytics technology is continually improving. Even amongst vendors, there is broad agreement that transcription and phonetics both work, and that they will both be around for quite some time to come. System integrators and consultants that implement both types of solution state that accuracy levels and phrase-finding capabilities are similar for each type of technology, and that both are able to provide historical analysis and reporting. There is also consensus that the major issue is not which flavour of analytics solution to choose, but the organisation's ability to deliver business change based on the insights that come out of the customer interaction analytics solution.



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

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www.nexidia.com

nexidia 

DRIVERS FOR CUSTOMER INTERACTION ANALYTICS

Customer interaction analytics solutions offer huge opportunities to gain business insight, improve operational efficiency and develop agent performance. In fact, the list of potential applications for this technology is so high that businesses could be forgiven for being confused about how to target and quantify the potential business gains.

Depending on the type of business, the issues being faced and even the type of technology being implemented, drivers, inhibitors and return on investment can differ greatly. There is also the very realistic possibility that while an analytics solution will be implemented to look at one particular pressing issue, such as automating the QA process, it will further develop over time into looking at business intelligence and process optimisation.

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.

Interaction 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. However, depending upon how interaction analytics is used, it can assist in:

- agent improvement
- business process optimisation
- avoidance of litigation and fines
- customer satisfaction and loyalty improvements
- increases in revenue and profitability
- improvements in contact centre operational performance, and cost reduction.


AGENT IMPROVEMENT

Improve the quality monitoring program

Interaction analytics tries to take 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 interaction analytics can carry out an evaluation of chosen calls - for example, unhappy customers - the results of which can 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.

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.

Identification of training needs

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.

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 organisation. 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 concerns 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.

BUSINESS PROCESS OPTIMISATION & INTELLIGENCE

Cross-departmental insight

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


The marketing and website departments are amongst 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.

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, and the importance of having a project champion of sufficient seniority to exercise cross-department control cannot be underestimated.

Categorisation

No other contact centre solution apart from customer interaction 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. 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. This categorisation gives a starting point for analysis, meaning that businesses can listen to the right calls rather than getting randomly or employing large numbers of people to get insight from customers' calls.

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.

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: around 1 in 5 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.

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.

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

Real-time compliance and adherence to script

Real-time call monitoring means 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.

While some compliance solutions use historical analysis to check that regulations have been adhered to, other solution providers take the view that compliance should be enforced within the conversation itself, and trigger alerts to the agent desktop to make sure that all of the relevant script and customer responses have been included.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION & LOYALTY IMPROVEMENTS

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 interaction 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. Other solution providers use this type of analysis to help online educators predict which students will pass the course, and which will drop out, meaning they are able to target assistance as required.

First-call 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 categorised 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.

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 categorisation 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. 7% of UK calls received by contact centres are complaints, with around 80% 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.

REVENUE AND PROFITABILITY

Competitor and product feedback

Customer 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. Some businesses are actively using speech analytics to uncover competitive intelligence as well. For example, one wholesaler uses analytics to identify when competitors' pricing information is mentioned on a call, and passes this back to the commercial team to revisit their own pricing structure.

Some businesses carry out detailed and sophisticated analytics looking at a combination of variables, in order to seek out correlations. For example, a business may discover that a combination of two issues mentioned by the customer on a call, as well as the mention of a competitor's name is correlated with an extremely high churn rate. In these cases, businesses may choose to use real-time monitoring to trigger a customer offer to be made if these factors are identified within the call, or may use post-call historical analytics in order to trigger a post-call event, such as an email, phone call or text message offering similar incentives to remain loyal to the company.

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. 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.

Solution providers note that it is common for outbound collections agencies to employ analytics initially in order to check their compliance, but will often move beyond this to improve the efficiency and performance of their collections operation by being able to understand the language, behaviour and characteristics of those calls which yield a higher rate of promises to pay, or cash collection.

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. Some businesses use customer interaction analytics to identify phrases or behaviours that indicate potential likely cancellation, but protect their profit margins by making sure that agents are only offering incentives such as money off coupons at appropriate points within the conversation, to those customers that are at risk of churning. Integrating speech analytics with desktop analytics allow CRM information such as the value of the customer to be added to the decisioning engine, providing extra accuracy and confidence that any offer made will be the right one.

IMPROVEMENTS IN CONTACT CENTRE OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE

On first glance, customer 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 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?

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), speech 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).

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 interaction 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 interaction analytics helps to find out whether these issues take place across the entire call volume, and allows businesses to quantify and prioritise issues.

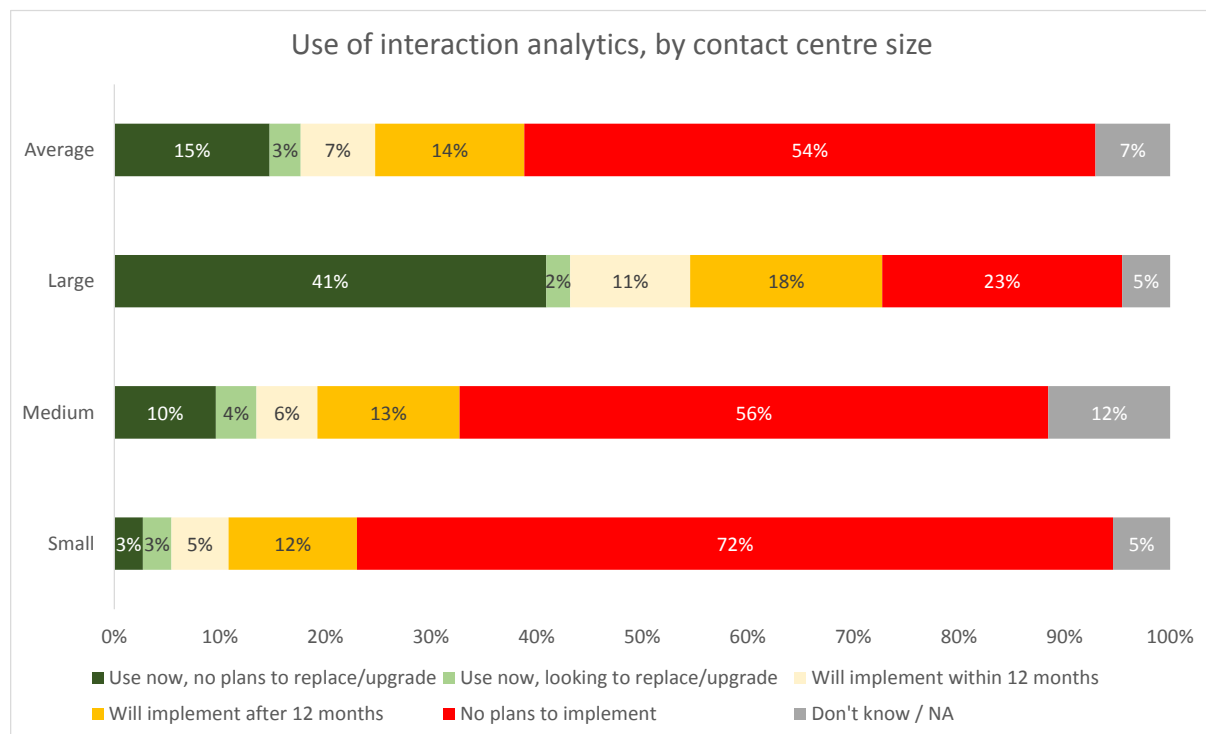
USE OF INTERACTION ANALYTICS

Compared to recording-based functionality which has penetration rates of over 90% in most sectors, interaction analytics (especially of the multichannel variety) is still to reach its full maturity, although the continual increases in penetration rates and the enthusiasm shown by contact centres to learn more about the subject is very positive.

The positive correlation between size and penetration rate is very noticeable for interaction analytics, which may require significant investments. Additionally, having huge volumes of recorded calls and a large customer base to learn from means that business patterns can be identified more accurately, and any improvements reap correspondingly higher rewards.

Large operations are also more likely to have the budget and resource to use analytics to its potential, although there is also a significant level of long-term interest in implementing analytics in both the small and medium contact centre sectors.

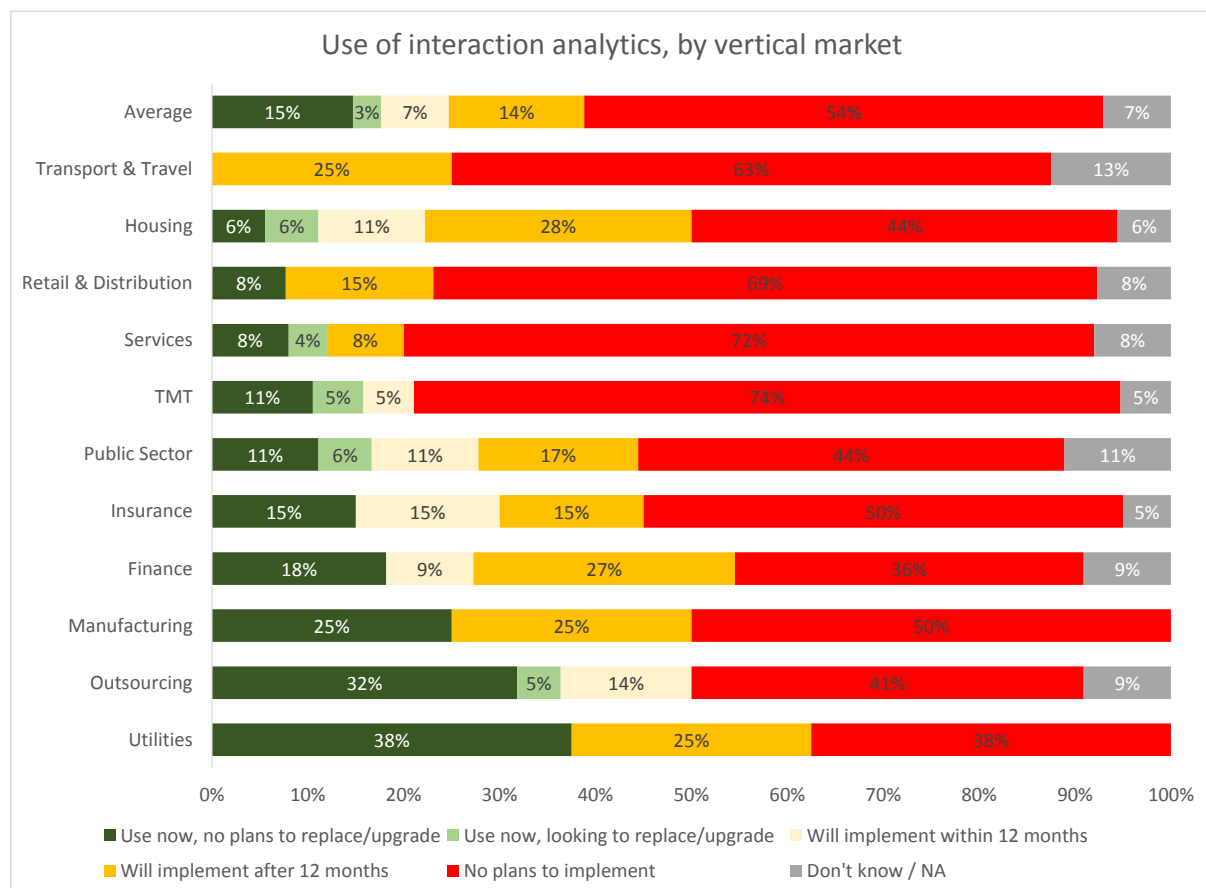
Figure 13: Use of interaction analytics, by contact centre size



Against a virtual ubiquity of call recording, the penetration rates of interaction analytics are much lower: 18% of this year's respondents use it now, with 21% stating that they have plans for implementation.

Respondents from the utilities and outsourcing sectors report the greatest use of analytics this year, with those in housing and transport & travel least likely to be doing so. It is probable that the use of interaction analytics is driven more by contact centre size in call volumes than through the requirements of specific types of business: housing and transport & travel contact centres are smaller than average, whereas those in outsourcing and utilities are higher. The manufacturing sector is a slight anomaly, as many of these operations are quite small. Future years will determine whether this is a statistical blip, or actually reflects the true nature of analytics usage.

Figure 14: Use of interaction analytics, by vertical market



As we might expect, the use of historical speech analytics - the bulk analysis of historical call recordings - is by far the most widely used type of interaction analytics functionality. Almost half of analytics users have also implemented functionality which can analyse the agent desktop activity which is linked to these calls.

Real-time (or near real-time, i.e. within the call) speech analytics is used by 45% of interaction analytics users, with more than half stating that they use multichannel analytics. The rise in non-voice interaction volumes has meant that there is an increased requirement to understand and analyse the customer journey.

Figure 15: Use of historical, real-time, screen and multichannel interaction analytics functionality (from only those respondents who use analytics)

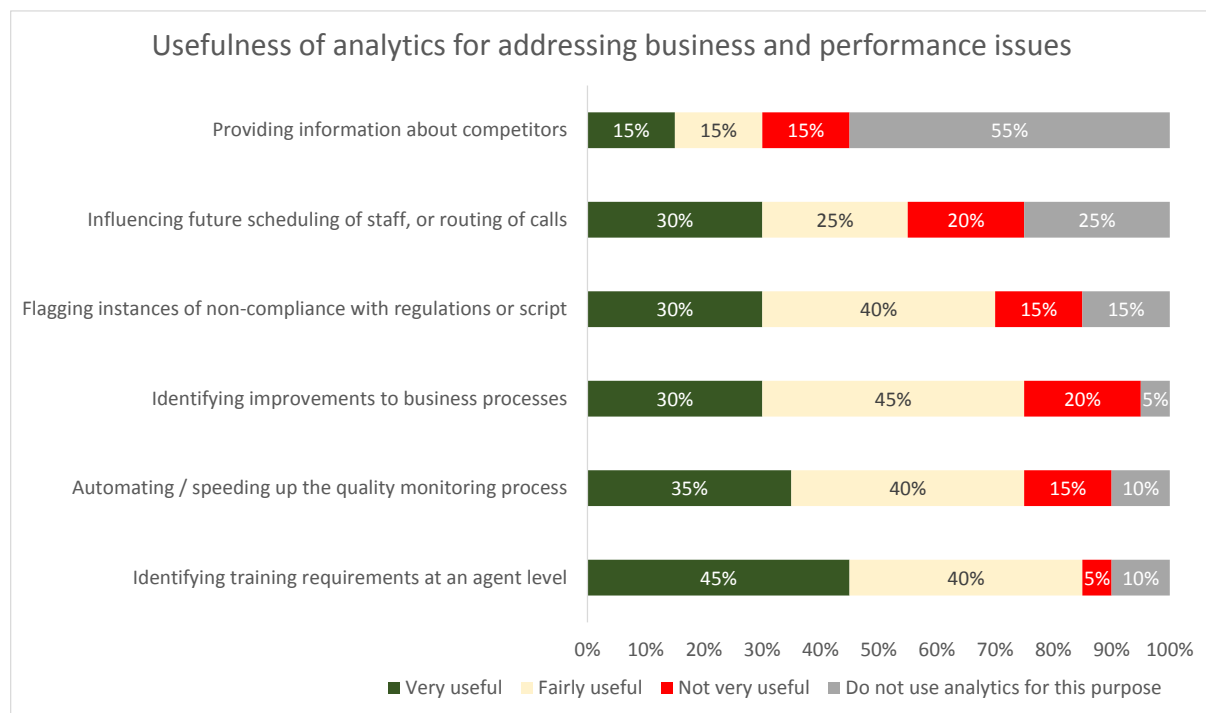
Interaction analytics type	% respondents using this functionality
Historical speech analytics	90%
Screen / text analytics (i.e. agent desktop activity)	45%
Real-time speech analytics	45%
Multichannel analytics (i.e. email, web chat, social media, etc.)	55%

The automated quantification of agent performance and capabilities, feeding into the training and skills upgrades required should be one of the most important outputs for interaction analytics, and 45% of respondents state that analytics is very useful for this purpose. 35% indicate that analytics is very useful for speeding up the overall quality monitoring process as well.

Although 30% of analytics users state that it is very useful identifying improvements to business processes, a further 20% report that analytics is of little use for this. Optimising processes and gaining actionable insight that can be applied to the customer journey will become one of the most important uses of analytics, as users' sophistication increases and solutions' capabilities are explored more fully.

There is little real enthusiasm around the use of analytics for providing information about their competitors, with the majority not using it for this purpose at all. This is a very underused area of analytical usage at the moment, and one which we would again expect to see growing significantly in the future.

Figure 16: Usefulness of analytics for addressing business and performance issues





Steve Mound
COO, Cabot Credit Management

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



Claudia Thorpe
Call Centre Industry Commentator

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 to 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.

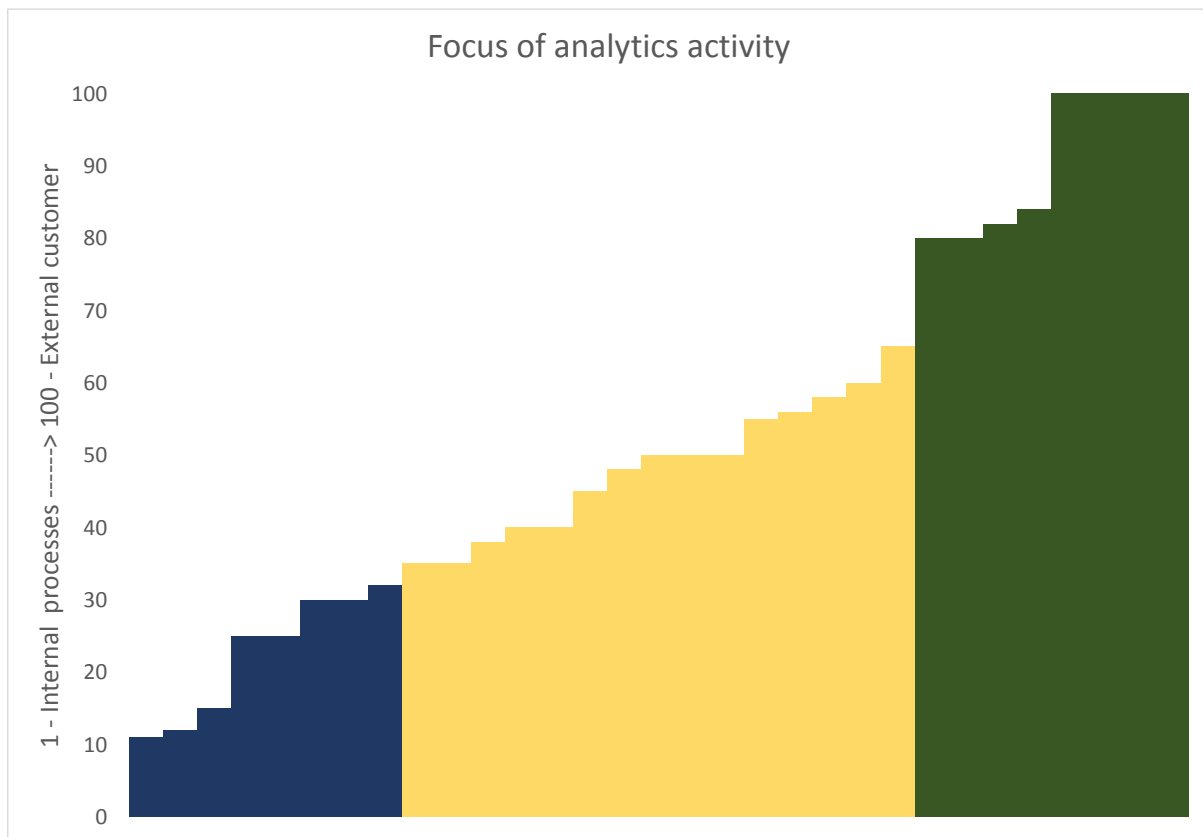
Seven key lessons for implementing analytics

- 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.

The following chart shows what happened when interaction analytics users were asked to state the extent to which their analytics activity was used to improve internal business processes or external customer facing activities.

Each bar of the chart represents a single respondent's score, from 1 to 100. Those using interaction analytics mainly for internal activities were asked to score this question as low (those respondents showing a strong focus towards internal improvements are marked in blue), with those using analytics for external customer facing improvements being asked to score towards the top of the range (marked in green). Those in yellow did not have a strong focus either way.

Figure 17: Focus of analytics activity



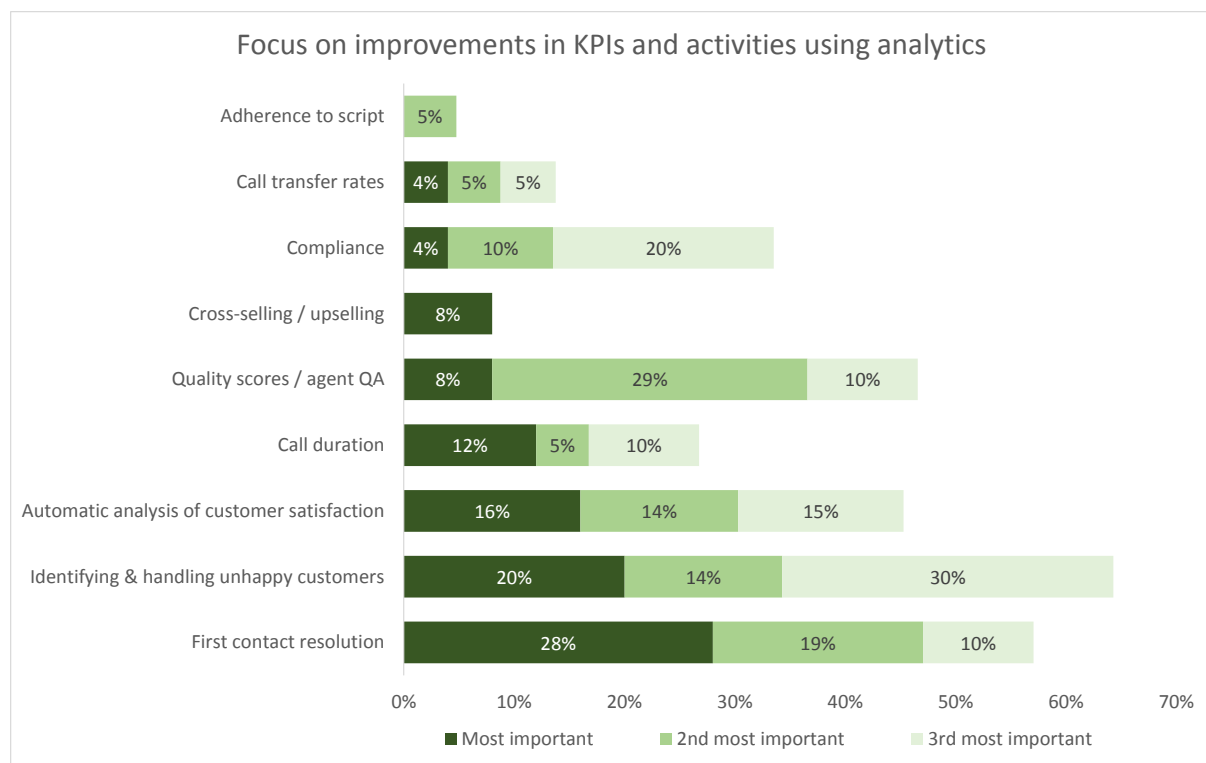
Respondents' use of analytics was split fairly evenly between internal process improvements and external customer facing activities. Many initial implementations were mainly about compliance and quality assurance, and it seems that a significant number of analytics users have now widened the scope of the solution to understand the customer experience as well. It should be noted that this is a subjective question, and those looking to use interaction analytics to improve QA scores and focus agent training may choose to see these activities as external customer-facing, rather than an internal process.


Throughout this report, most respondents state that one of their main business focuses is to improve customer satisfaction, and while this is laudable, the real question is perhaps “How can analytics achieve this aim?”.

It is reported elsewhere in this report that first contact resolution is seen as being the key to customer satisfaction. Interaction analytics can assist with this goal through automatically grouping and assessing the nature of the enquiries that required multiple customer callbacks, and through identifying whether the call should be classed as a callback in the first place (e.g. by searching for relevant words or phrases, such as “I’ve called about this before”, or “this is the second time I’ve called”), which would further assist in the notoriously difficult process of accurately calculating first contact resolution rates. As FCR and customer satisfaction ratings are closely linked - being consistently quoted as the number one way to achieve high customer satisfaction ratings - the use of analytics to identify FCR accuracy and improvements is a very positive finding.

It is positive to find that the second and third greatest focuses on improving KPIs are also related to customer satisfaction.

Figure 18: Focus on improvements in KPIs and activities using analytics



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 free ["Inner Circle Guide to Customer Contact Analytics"](#).

QUALITY & PERFORMANCE 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 then 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.

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.



Scorebuddy

QUALITY SCORING SYSTEM



Pinpointing the issue so that you can spend your time working on it.

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Scorecards are created, scored and stored online. Create a scorecard for every occasion and modify your scorecards at any time without breaking reports!

Easy to Use

A logical set of menus with everything at your fingertips, flexible 'User Categories' control access and the activity log tracks user input for auditing.

Engage Agents

Agents trust scorebuddy for accurate, consistent evaluations, viewing scores and comments from their desktop, listening to calls and even self-scoring!

Empower Team Leaders

Team Leaders rapidly identify behaviours for intervention. Attach calls, email or screen grabs for easy access during reviews.

Improved Customer Satisfaction

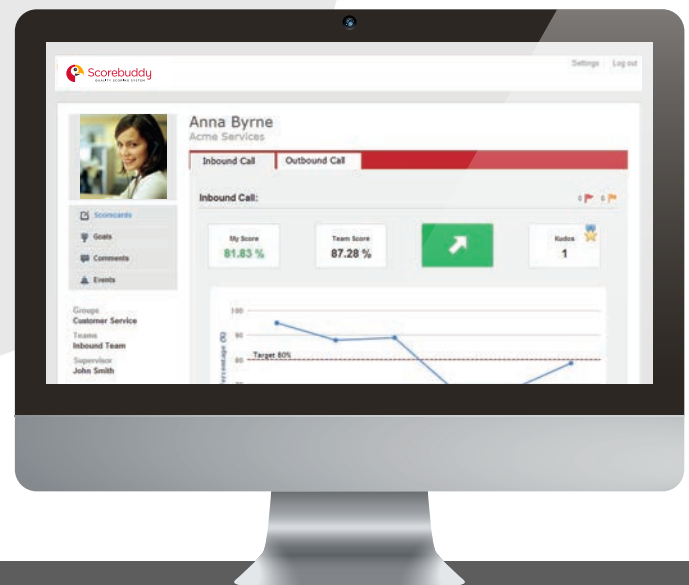
Using scorebuddy improves the performance of customer service staff which significantly boosts customer satisfaction.

Actionable Data

Analytics visualises variations and exceptions, drill through to identify root causes, highlight best practice and top and bottom performers.

No IT Required

Your FREE TRIAL provides templates and a user guide to get you started, import staff details from a CSV file and get scoring!



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"Scorebuddy is so easy to use. It provides us with the flexibility to quickly create and adapt scorecards that doesn't affect the historical data."

- Nikki Davies (Allianz Global Assistance)

"Scorebuddy has had a much wider impact than we initially thought it would have, and the call centre have had great use for it."

- Lorraine Rothwell (Ryanair)

FREE TRIAL

To try our software for free please visit the website and click on "Free Trial".

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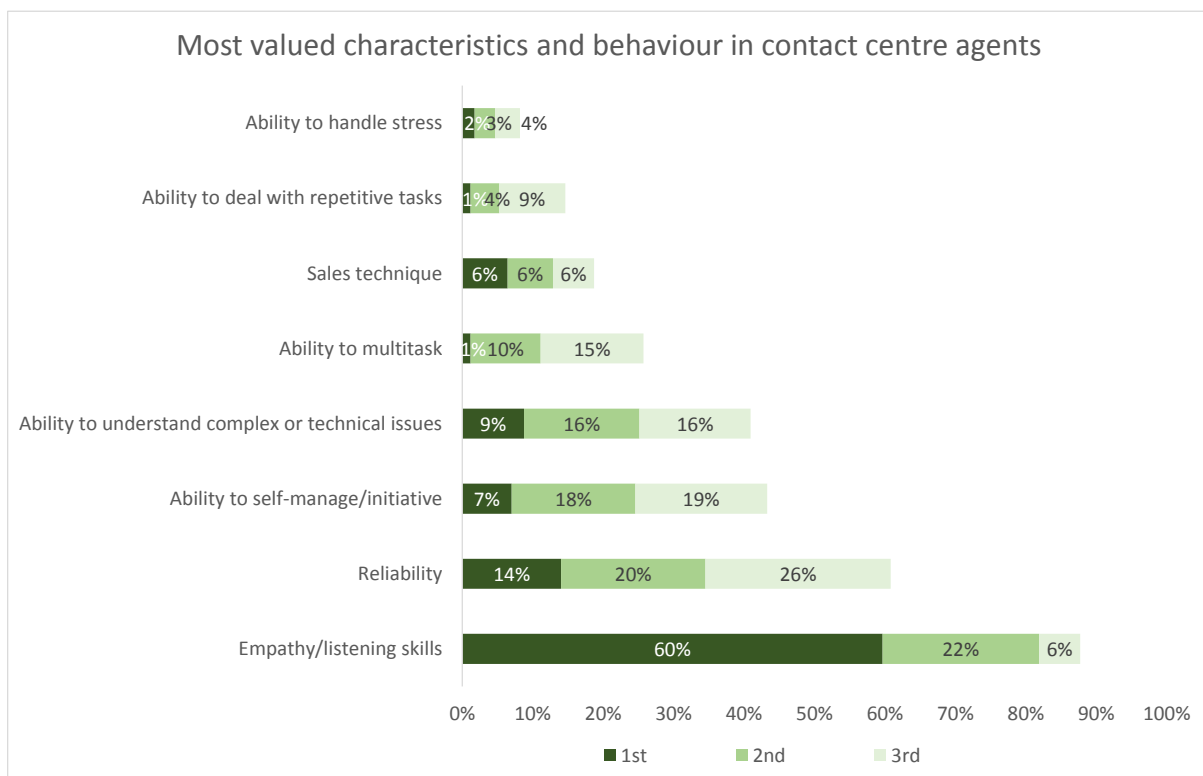
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info@scorebuddy.co.uk
www.scorebuddy.co.uk

There are also 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 itself, "quality" is a subjective description of an outcome or set of behaviours deemed positive. As such, before we can talk of quality management, it is important to identify what is actually meant by this word.

Figure 19: Most valued characteristics and behaviour in contact centre agents



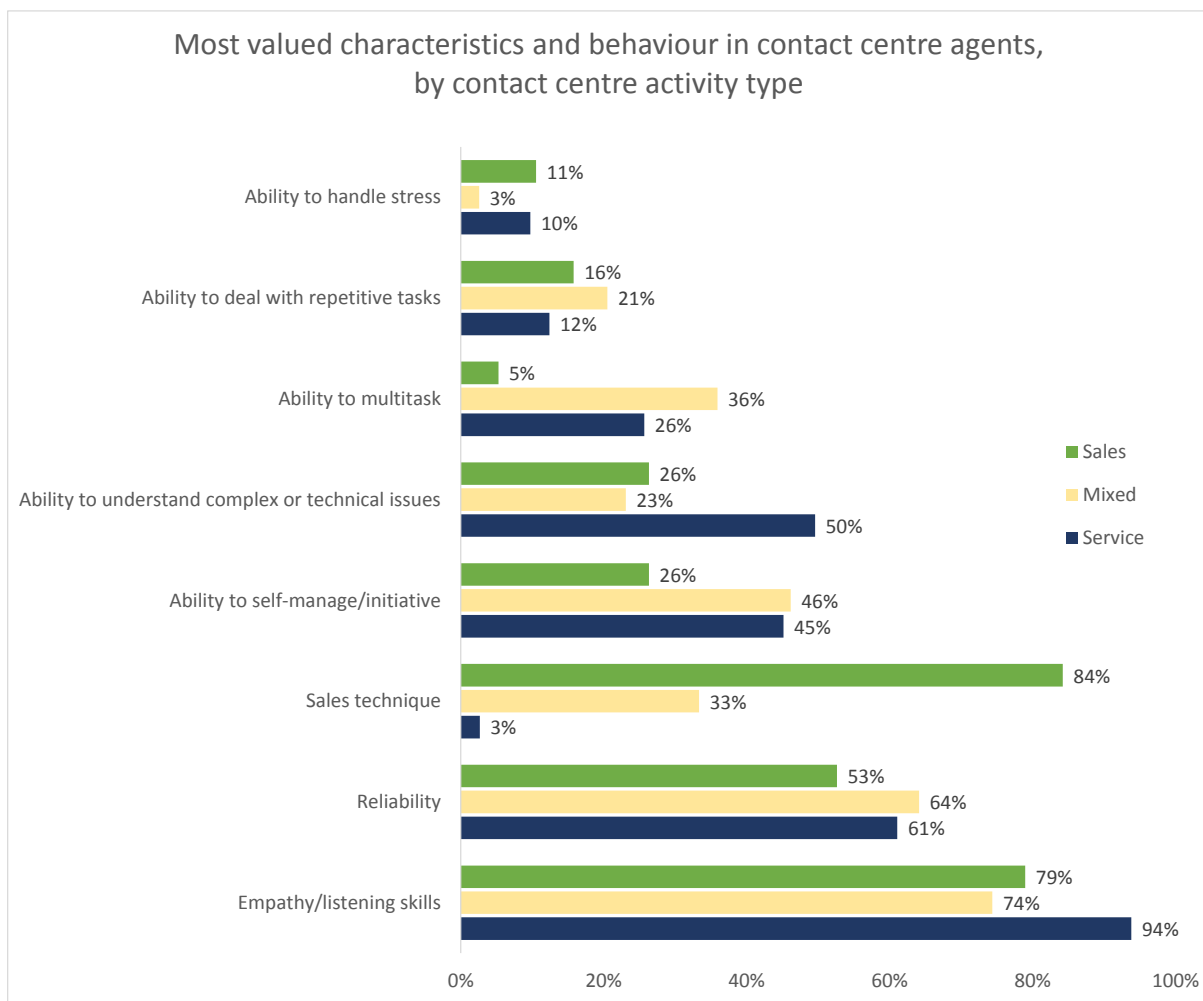
When asked to choose the top three most valued agent characteristics and behaviours, survey respondents overwhelmingly chose empathy and listening skills above any other, with 60% placing it in first position. Only 12% of respondents did not consider this a top three attribute.

Reliability - both in terms of timely attendance and the work itself - came a clear second, with initiative and the ability to understand complex technical issues being judged as important as each other.

Encouragingly, the ability to handle stress and deal with repetitive tasks were not seen as characteristics that were particularly required in the vast majority of today's contact centres, unlike the volume driven environments of a decade or more ago.

The following chart looks in greater depth at the most-valued agent characteristics when looking at the type of work which they carry out, showing the proportion of respondents placing each of these characteristics within their top three.

Figure 20: Most valued characteristics and behaviour in contact centre agents, by contact centre activity type




As we would expect, sales-orientated respondents were far more likely to value sales technique, but there are other findings that vary substantially across activity types.

The ability to multitask is most important within the mixed environment, where agents have a wider variety of interactions to deal with, and those working in service-based contact centres are more likely to have to understand complex or technical issues and to display initiative.

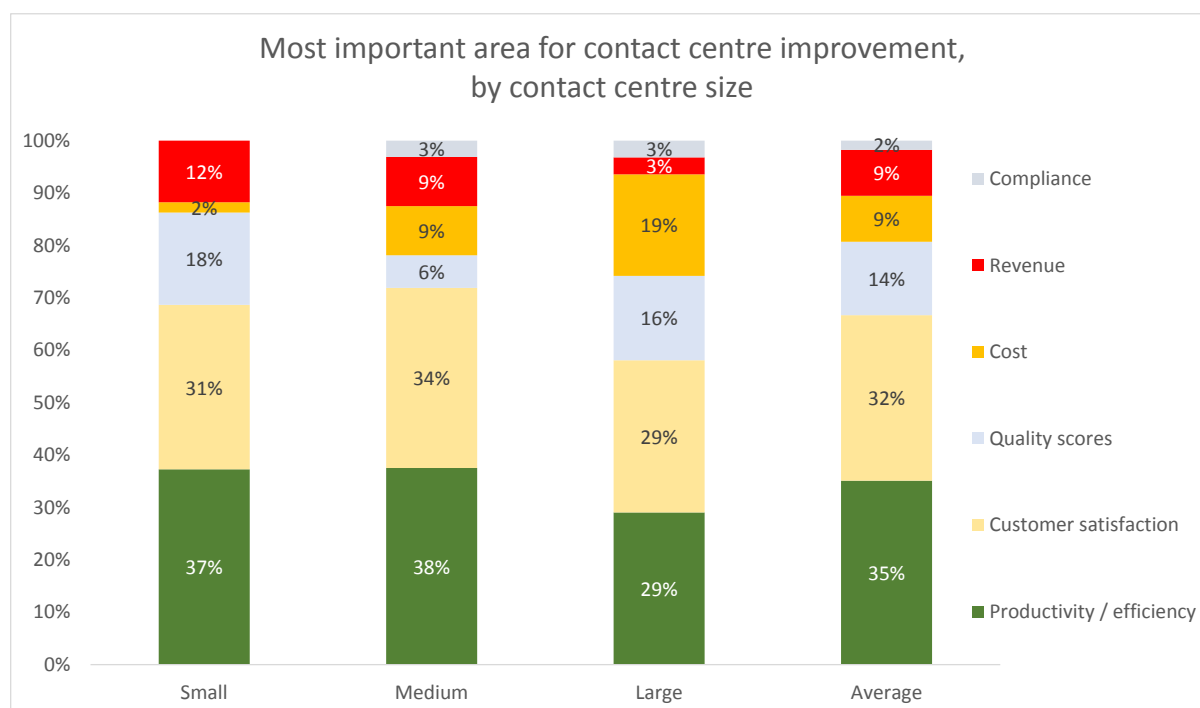
It is interesting to note that empathy and listening skills is consistently valued by all types of respondent, and as this is a characteristic that is perhaps more difficult to train than sales technique or the understanding of complex issues, it is something that should be specifically looked for within the recruitment process.

When asked which area of the contact centre needed most improvement, respondents' most frequently given answer was that productivity and efficiency required major enhancements.

 **Scorebuddy** QUALITY SCORING SYSTEM From our experience within the industry, we would whole heartedly agree with all of the above but we would add consistency to the mix here. Productivity, efficiency and consistency are challenges faced by contact centres globally. The key to circumnavigating these challenges is to implementing a robust, bespoke piece of software that will achieve these goals for you.

This is a little alarming, in that the contact centre industry has spent decades, and billions of pounds on cutting unnecessary cost and time to serve customers, yet a substantial proportion of the industry still sees the need for major improvements in this area above any other. Larger operations - which have generally spent more time and money streamlining their processes – are a little less inclined to feel this way.

Figure 21: Most important area for contact centre improvement, by contact centre size



Despite the general focus upon customer satisfaction, 32% say that improvements are needed in this area more than any other, with 14% saying that quality definitely needs to pick up significantly. Cost, revenue and compliance are less likely in general to be the area identified the greatest improvement, with the exception of 16% of the large contact centre bracket, for which cost reduction is their greatest focus.

Quality assurance programs and processes should positively affect not just quality scores, but also agent performance, and with them, productivity and customer satisfaction. As such, an effective and impactful QA programme should go a long way to addressing the major problems shown in the previous chart.



CASE STUDY: AGILISYS

SECTOR: OUTSOURCING

CLIENT REQUIREMENT

Agilisys is an innovative business services provider in the UK serving the local government, healthcare and the private sector. Agilisys helps clients solve complex problems with simple solutions.

Agilisys chose Scorebuddy as it brought together all of their quality monitoring into one place while reducing the manual labour associated with monitoring. Scorebuddy represented good value for money and as a small company the sense of being able to work in partnership with Scorebuddy was an added benefit.

SOLUTION

Agilisys use all of the Scorebuddy suite: the Core Features, Analytics and Agent Insight and gain great value as it is very cohesive. "If we need to do anything, it doesn't take all day, everything is quicker. Instantly you can get the information at the click of a button."

For customer service representatives Agent Insight is most useful, especially for new staff. It helps boost morale and confidence.

"Agents used to often ask a lot of questions about their scores and then supervisors would have to bring them to their instance of Scorebuddy but now they can go through it themselves on their own dashboards and they can answer their own questions. There's also good banter with teams about scoring now so it's creating a positive process".

The quality team get most benefit from the Analytics module as it provides detailed insight for clients. "It's great because if a client has a new question we can have the answer in 10 minutes. It's transparent for everyone. It can break the information down in so many ways to help us understand; campaigns, sites, teams, subject matters, channels, individuals. We can find the root cause quicker." – Carrina Erdos, Quality Manager, Agilisys

OUTCOME

"One of our core values is innovation and we grow our innovation with Scorebuddy, they work with us to help us to improve our offering. If we want to design something for our clients we can work with the guys and as long as it can add value for Scorebuddy's other clients it's on the table. We don't have to wait every 6 months for updates. – Carrina Erdos, Quality Manager, Agilisys

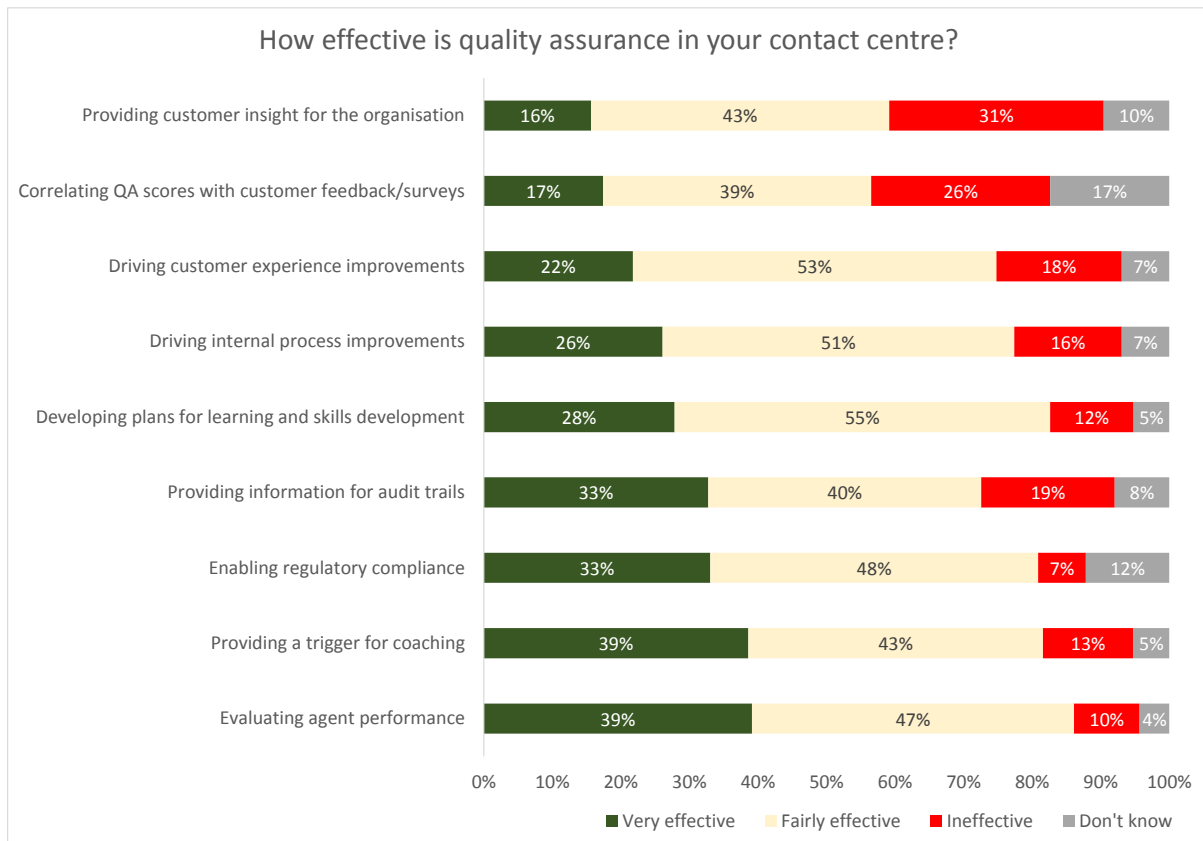
"Scorebuddy has had a big impact on the professionalism of our staff and the service we are able to provide as we are able to identify areas of best practice and opportunities to improve quality of service delivery.

Scorebuddy has definitely contributed to our success and continued growth as it allows us to demonstrate how seriously we take quality of service delivery during site visits from prospective customers.

Scorebuddy work with us in an exceptionally flexible and supportive manner demonstrating a keenness to support us in the delivery of great customer service" - Richard Hanrahan, Director of Customer Service, Agilisys.

86% of respondents state that their QA processes are at least fairly effective for evaluating agent performance - which is once again the highest score of any category this year - with a similar proportion stating that QA identifies training and coaching needs for agents effectively as well, which is a very popular use for QA processes.

Figure 22: How effective is quality assurance in your contact centre?



It is noticeable however that more of these respondents are lukewarm about the results of their QA processes than are actively enthusiastic: none of the nine categories offered have more respondents judging the QA process as 'very effective' rather than merely 'fairly effective' for this purpose, showing that there is still a demand and requirement for improved functionality.

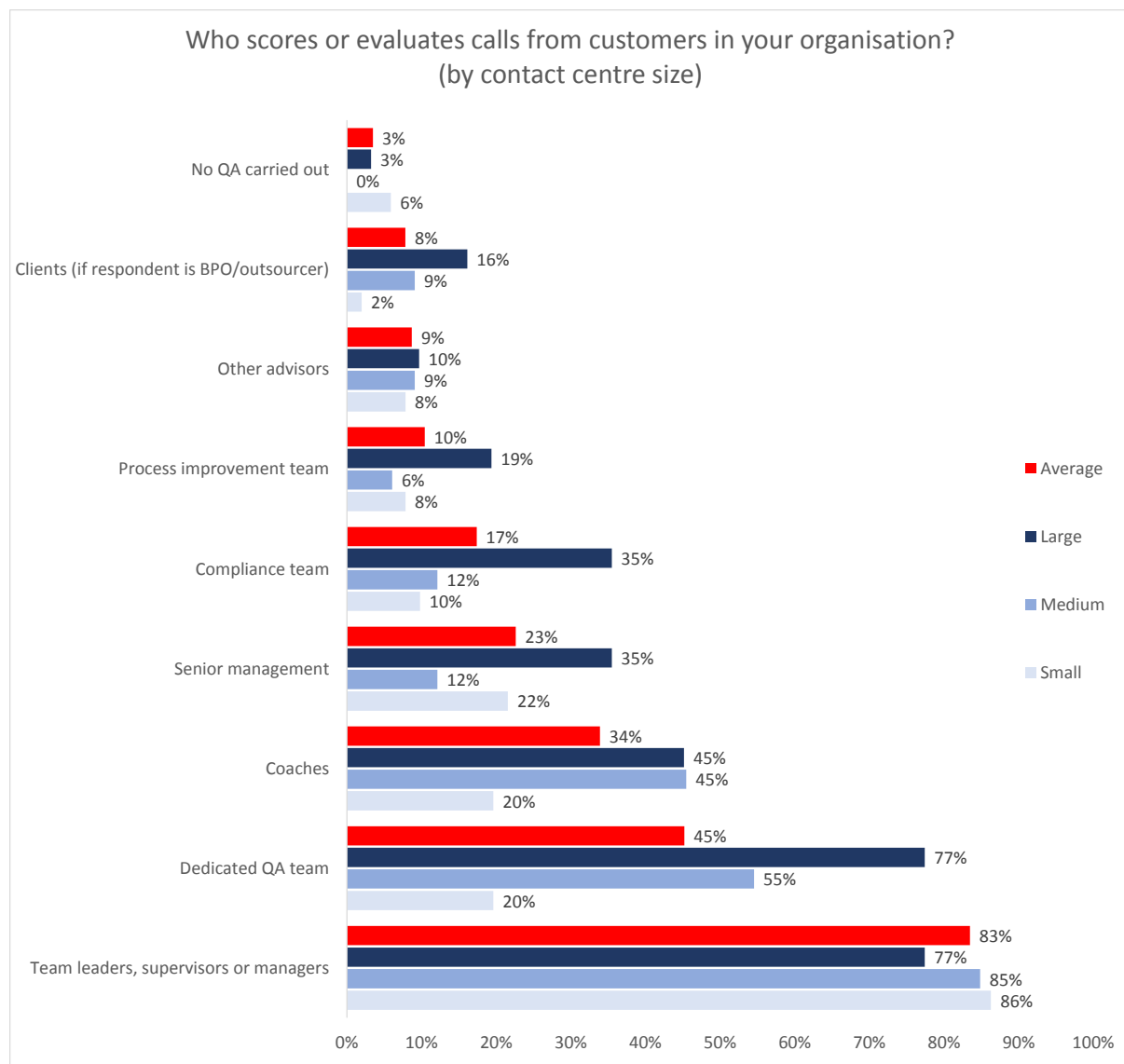
Only 22% feel that QA drives customer experience improvements significantly, although there is a major disconnect between matching and correlating quality assurance with any customer feedback that is gathered. Customer insight gained from the quality assurance process stands a very significant risk of not being used effectively within the wider organisation, or even affecting the outcome at agent level. As such, it seems fair to comment that QA is currently used far more effectively and widely as a tool for improving agent productivity and skills, rather than as input into strategic business improvements.

The great majority of respondents have team leaders and line managers involved in scoring agent calls manually, with 77% of respondents from large operations having a specific, dedicated quality team involved as well. Large and medium 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 program.

A little less than 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 before this stage.

35% of respondents from large operations have a compliance team evaluating calls, and are much more likely to use a business process improvement team as well to learn from the QA output.

Figure 23: Who scores or evaluates calls from customers in your organisation? (by contact centre size)

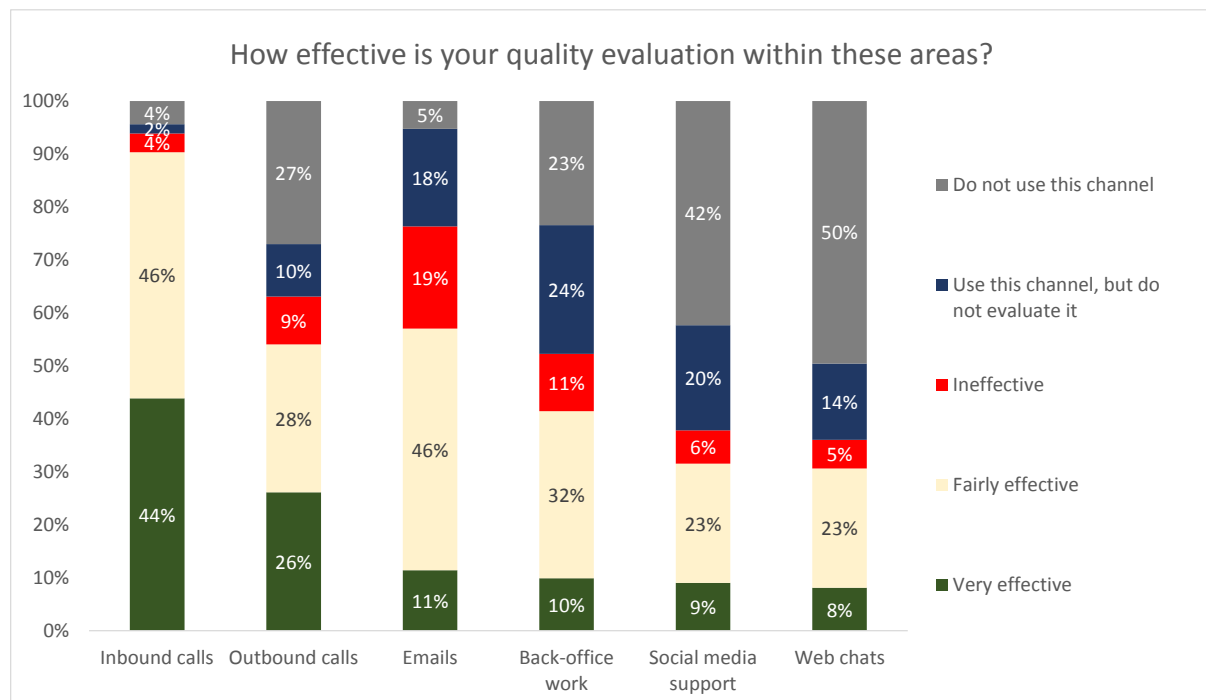


Respondents were asked their opinion on how effective they felt their quality evaluation was for specific contact centre activities, including inbound and outbound activity, and multichannel work. As might be expected from the activity that has been around the longest, inbound telephony was judged to have the most effective quality evaluation, with almost half of respondents that carried out this form of QA stating that it was very effective. Evaluation of outbound calling was a little less positive, with 9% of respondents feeling that it was ineffective and only 26% very effective.

For back-office work evaluation, more respondents believed their QA to be ineffective than did very effective, but 47% either did not have an opinion, or did not use quality evaluation for back office processes. As workforce optimisation solutions continue to evolve, and processes get tracked throughout the enterprise - not just in the contact centre - the back office will have considerably more attention drawn to it, as it is ripe for improvement in many organisations.

It seems that multichannel quality evaluation still has some way to go to reach the standard of telephony QA. Only 14% of respondents that carry out quality evaluation on emails felt that it was very effective, with 25% believing it ineffective. For a channel that has been offered to customers for well over a decade by most businesses, this is not very impressive: both the newer channels of social media and web chat had better results, although the majority of respondents either did not carry out quality evaluation on these channels, or did not use them at all.

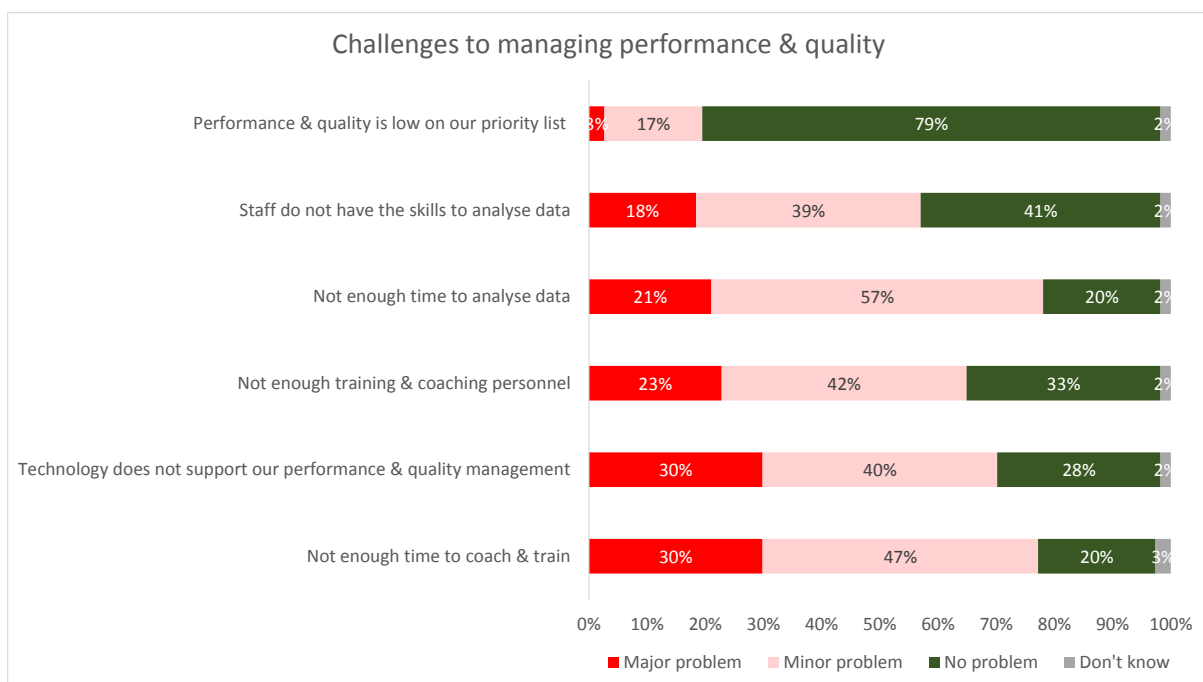
Figure 24: How effective is your quality evaluation within these areas?



The greatest challenge to managing performance and quality is reported to be caused by not having sufficient time to analyse and use data, with 77% of respondents stating that this was a problem in some form, and 30% stating that it is a major problem for them: this is particularly the case in medium and large operations. 18% of respondents also stated that it was a major problem for them that staff using the QA solution did not have the necessary skills to get the most out of the solution.

This suggests a greater level of automated analysis and insight is required from quality and performance solutions, a hypothesis which may be seen to be further supported by noting that the second-greatest challenge to performance and quality is that their current technology simply does not support what they want to do with performance and quality.

Figure 25: Challenges to managing performance & quality



The third-greatest challenge – and that of greatest concern to mid-sized operations - is also related to training and coaching: a lack of personnel to deliver this, even assuming that the QA process has successfully identified training requirements at an individual level. Once again, increased automation could be the answer here: e-learning has grown greatly in importance and popularity over the years, and in many cases has taken over from the traditional lecture-based forms of mass coaching, without requiring the one-to-one dedicated time and effort which places even greater strain on resources.

It is positive to say that very few of our respondents believe that performance and quality is low on the priority list: just that their systems and personnel are having difficulty achieving their goals.

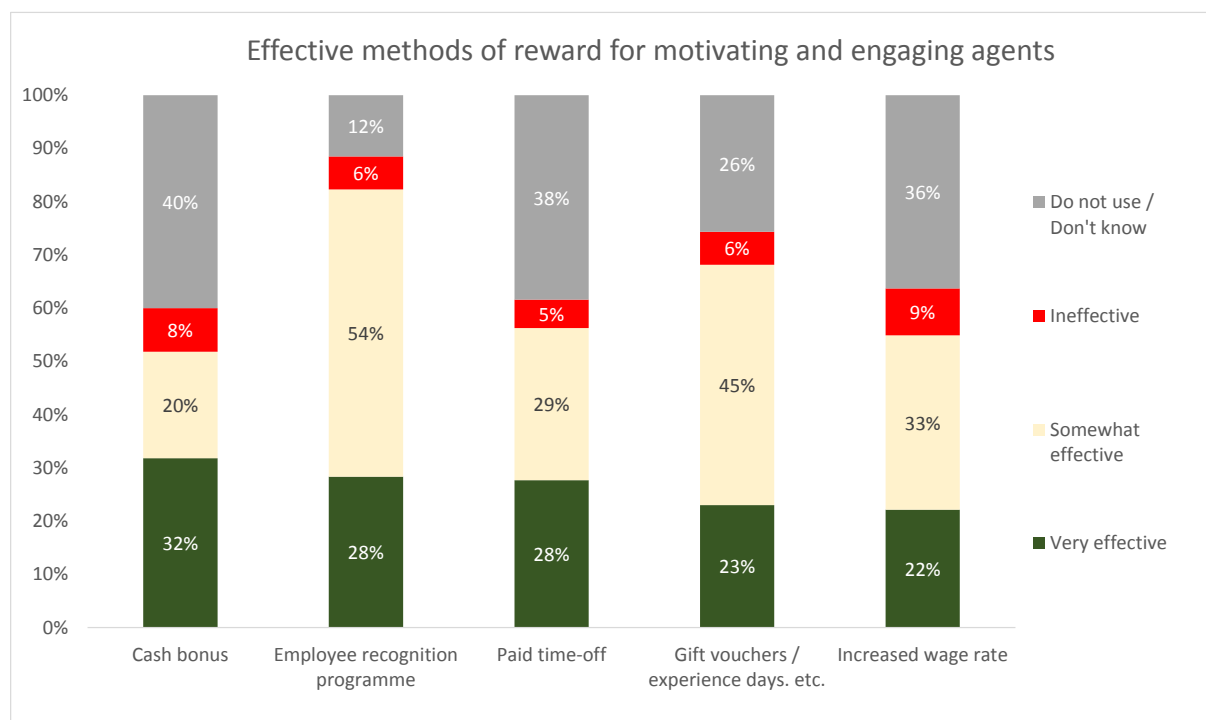
AGENT ENGAGEMENT & GAMIFICATION

Motivating and keeping good agents in a working environment that is often stressful, sometimes repetitive and usually not well-paid is a challenge the contact centres have had to face since their inception.

As the nature of contact centre work becomes increasingly complex, and customers' expectations of what constitutes good quality service becomes ever higher, the agent's job is now rarely just reading something off the screen: they have to be empathetic to the customer, use their initiative to solve the issue and remain focused on answering the next call just as effectively.

Respondents believe that their methods by which they reward agents - thus motivating and engaging them - are generally effective. Five methods of reward were presented within the survey, with an employee recognition programme being the most widely used (88% of respondents), and cash bonus the least (60% of respondents).

Figure 26: Effective methods of reward for motivating and engaging agents



FRONTLINE ENGAGEMENT



Agents, Partners, Team Members or Staff. Whatever you call them, your employees are the heart of your business, which is why Agent Engagement & Gamification in the Contact Centre is so important. They may not be going into battle any time soon, but they're the face and voice of your brand and can ultimately make or break the customer experience.

The insight gained from the implementation of Rant & Rave has shaped the way we operate as a company. The Frontline Engagement solution gave the project a competitive edge and educated staff on the impact they were having on the overall service provided by OVO Energy.

GAMIFY THE FRONTLINE EXPERIENCE WITH RANT & RAVE

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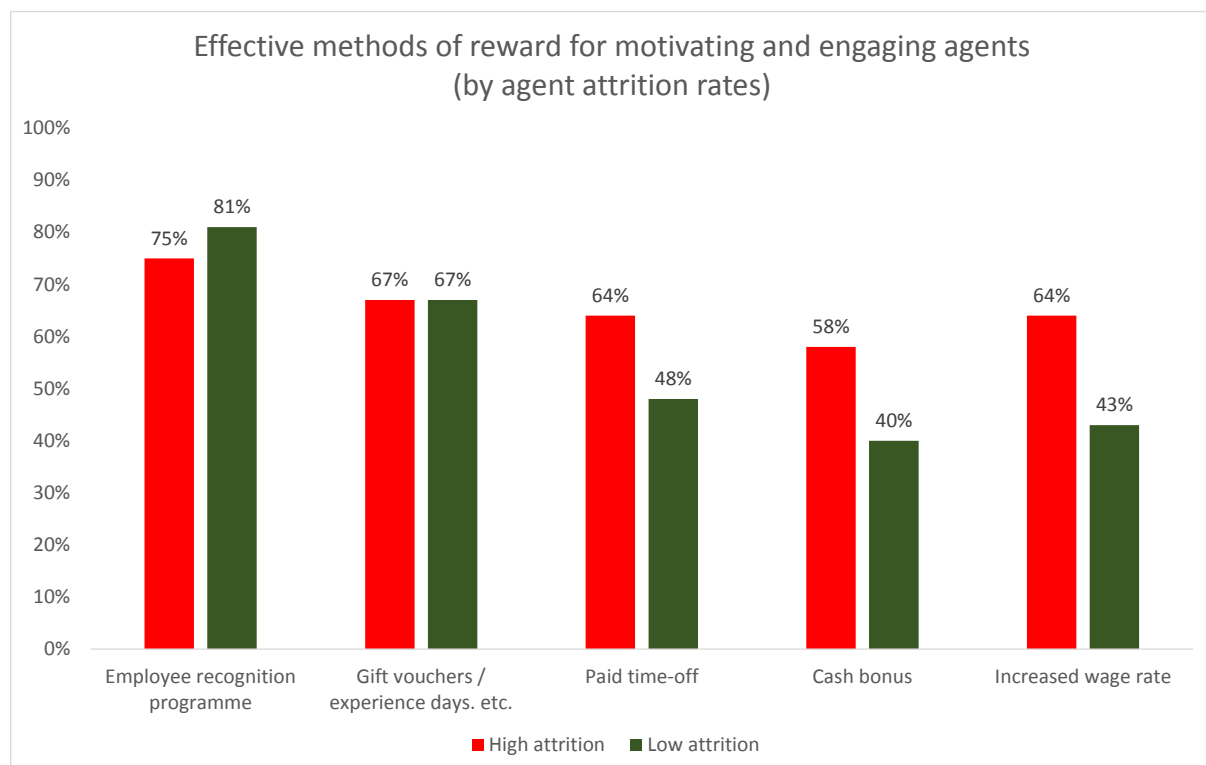
Very few respondents found any of their reward methods to be ineffective, although most believe that they were more 'somewhat effective' than 'very effective'. On the face of things then, most of the contact centre industry believes that it is generally quite good at motivating and engaging agents in an appropriate and effective manner. Rather than taking this opinion at face value, further data analysis was carried out to cross-compare the effectiveness of reward methods depending on the level of agent attrition present within those respondents.

Respondents with attrition rates of 10% or lower were put into the 'Low Attrition' group, whereas those with attrition rates of 25% or higher were put into the 'High Attrition' segment, with their opinions of how effective reward methods were in motivating and engaging agents then considered.

The following chart shows the percentage of respondents within each attrition group who believe that this reward method is either 'very effective' or 'somewhat effective' for them. For example, 81% of respondents with low attrition state that an Employee Recognition Programme is 'very or somewhat effective' in their experience. 19% either think it is ineffective, or - more likely - do not use it at all.

The logic behind using attrition rates to compare effectiveness is that agents who are motivated and engaged are less likely to leave an operation than those who are not, and so the effectiveness of the motivation methods can be compared at some quantitative level: while this is a broad statement, ignoring the individual reasons for leaving an organisation, it makes a certain amount of sense. As such, we would expect high attrition contact centres to believe that their reward methods are consistently substantially lower than those in contact centres which do not have an attrition problem.

Figure 27: Effective methods of reward for motivating and engaging agents (by agent attrition rates)

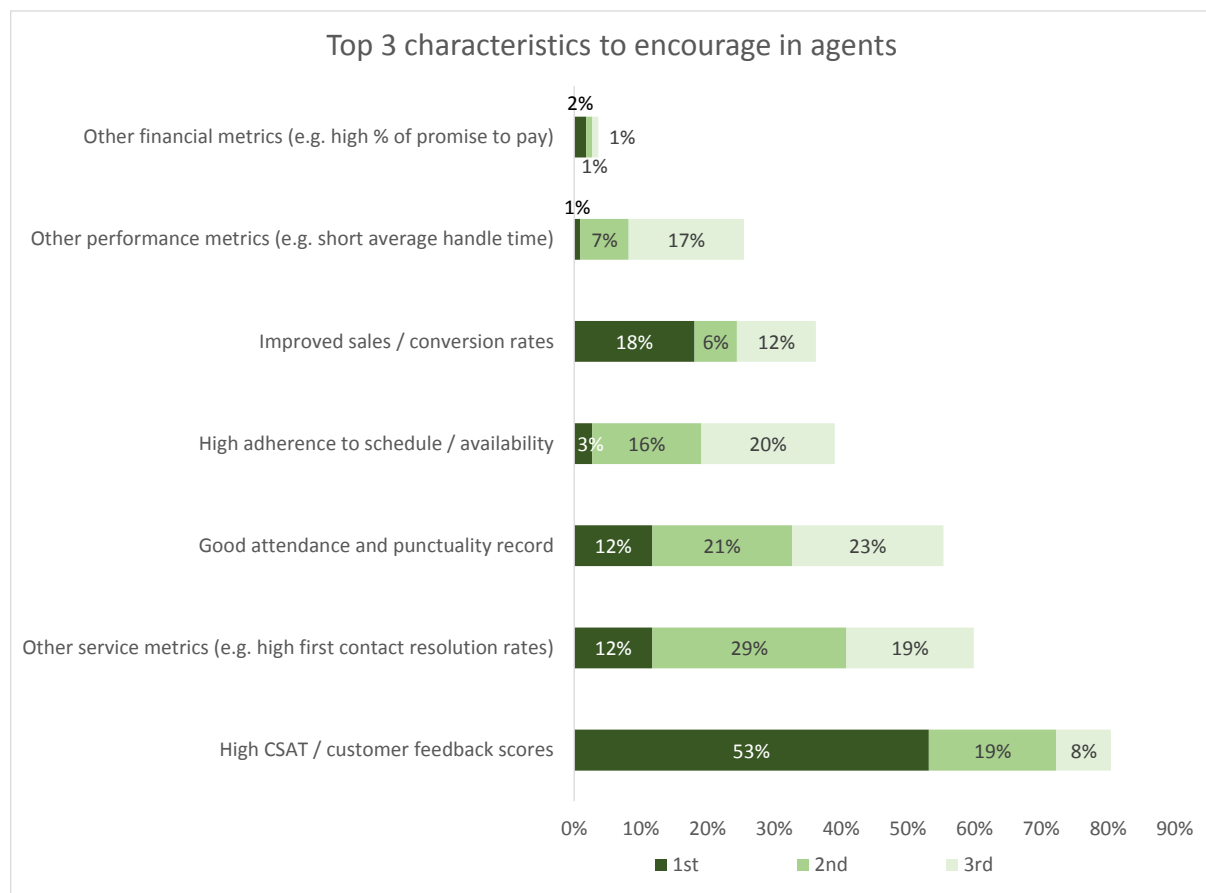


However, this is not the case. Even in contact centres which experienced extremely high and even troubling levels of staff attrition, most still firmly believed that their methods of motivating and engaging agents through reward were generally effective, and were actually much more likely than low attrition respondents to be confident about this.

Leaving this aside for a moment, it is one thing to encourage and motivate agents, but quite another to understand which agent characteristics and achievements are most helpful to the business to encourage and reward.

Respondents were asked to choose which, from a list of seven characteristics and agent achievements, were the top three that they would most like to encourage.

Figure 28: Top 3 characteristics to encourage in agents



53% of respondents stated that they would most like agents to achieve higher customer satisfaction and feedback scores, with a further 18% saying that improving sales and conversion rates was most important to them.

Agent attendance and punctuality records featured as a top three choice of 56% of respondents - 80% mentioned high CSAT scores - and half of respondents stated that other service metrics (such as an improvement in agents' first contact resolution rates) was a top three priority for them.



We are now seeing our clients focus more on service metrics such as C-Sat and FCR, which backs up what's been said in this report. Our clients find that allowing agents to see this information in real-time, alongside customer feedback, gives them the ability to self-coach and improve during the day, leading to higher metrics throughout.

Looking in more depth at responses from respondents within the three contact centre size bands, large contact centres place high CSAT and customer feedback scores higher than any other characteristic, whereas those in small operations are almost as likely to look for good attendance and punctuality from their agents.

All sectors look for customer-focused service metrics such as first contact resolution rate. Larger operations are more likely than others to look at operational performance metrics and sales rates.

Figure 29: Top 3 characteristics to encourage in agents, by contact centre size

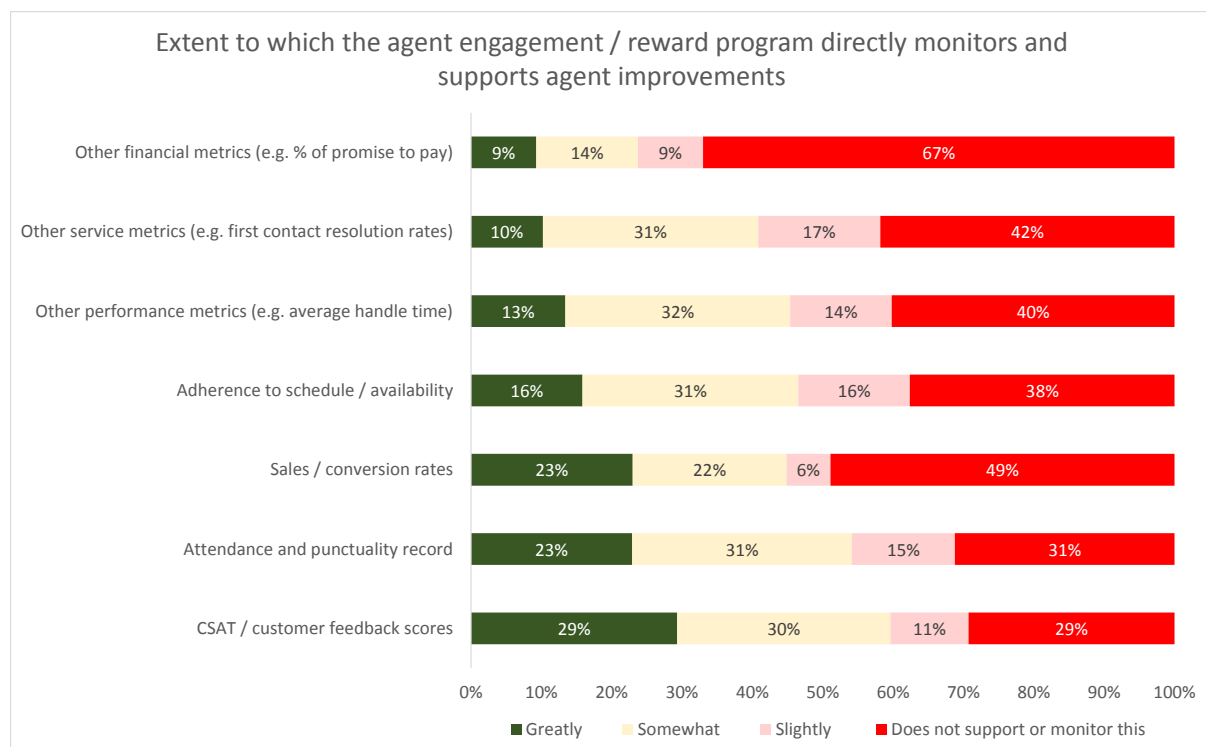
Agent characteristic / contact centre size	Small	Medium	Large	Average
High CSAT / customer feedback scores	78%	81%	86%	80%
Other service metrics (e.g. high first contact resolution rates)	59%	59%	59%	59%
Good attendance and punctuality record	69%	50%	38%	55%
High adherence to schedule / availability	35%	47%	38%	39%
Improved sales / conversion rates	33%	34%	45%	36%
Other performance metrics (e.g. short average handle time)	22%	25%	31%	25%
Other financial metrics (e.g. high % of promise to pay)	4%	3%	3%	4%

Bearing these findings in mind, we might expect to see that the agent engagement/reward programme will support those characteristics and achievements that are most highly valued by contact centres: specifically customer satisfaction, attendance and punctuality, and customer service-focused metrics such as first contact resolution rates.

This hypothesis is borne out in large part: the agent engagement/reward programme is said to monitor attendance and punctuality record and customer satisfaction scores either 'greatly' or 'somewhat' in more than half of cases.

However, operational performance metrics such as average handle time feature more frequently than service-based metrics such as first contact resolution rate, despite respondents' insistence that the latter matters far more than the former.

Figure 30: Extent to which the agent engagement / reward programme directly monitors and supports agent improvements



For 42% of respondents to say that vital customer-focused service statistics such as first contact resolution rate does not play a part in rewarding agents is in our opinion very short-sighted, particularly when considering that operational performance metrics such as handle time are taken more into account, despite not aligning with businesses' own stated requirements of the characteristics and achievements that agents should have.

The following table shows this more clearly. The agent characteristics and achievements that are **encouraged and required** are shown, in order of importance, on the left. The characteristics and achievements on which **rewards are actually based**, are placed on the right.

It would be expected that the most encouraged and desired characteristic would be that which was also the most important when considering how to reward agents: in this way agents would be rewarded closely based upon how much they aligned with the needs of the contact centre and the business.

High customer satisfaction scores are stated to be the most important, and are said to be rewarded the most often, which is as it should be, and although the characteristics do not quite match exactly, there is one element that stands out.

The greatest discrepancy, and one that is cause for worry, is that customer-focused service metrics such as first contact resolution rates are seen as being the 2nd most important characteristic to be encouraged, but only rated as the 6th most important characteristic to be actually rewarded, putting this out of alignment with what the contact centre and business itself deem necessary for success.

Figure 31: Comparison between characteristics encouraged, and characteristics rewarded

Rank	Agent characteristic encouraged	Agent characteristic rewarded
1 st	High CSAT / customer feedback scores	High CSAT/customer feedback scores
2 nd	Other service metrics (e.g. first contact resolution rate)	Good attendance and punctuality record
3 rd	Good attendance and punctuality record	Sales / conversion rates
4 th	High adherence to schedule / availability	High adherence to schedule / availability
5 th	Sales / conversion rates	Other performance metrics (e.g. short average handle time)
6 th	Other performance metrics (e.g. short average handle time)	Other service metrics (e.g. first contact resolution rate)
7 th	Other financial metrics (e.g. high % of promise to pay)	Other financial metrics (e.g. high % of promise to pay)



Agent Engagement & Gamification

Agents, Partners, Team Members or Staff. Whatever you call them, your employees are the heart of your business, which is why Agent Engagement & Gamification in the Contact Centre is so important. They may not be going into battle any time soon, but they're the face and voice of your brand and can ultimately make or break the customer experience.

Create a competitive edge...

OVO Energy use Rant & Rave to deliver the Voice of the Customer directly to agents in a gamified way so they feel engaged, motivated and continually improve.

"The insight gained from the implementation of Rant & Rave has shaped the way we operate as a company. The Frontline Engagement solution gave the project a competitive edge and educated staff on the impact they were having on the overall service provided by OVO Energy."

As a result, we've reviewed our entire induction training to take into account customer feedback; changed the way we assess quality within customer services and changed the way we coach and give feedback to agents."

Justin Haines

Customer Service Director, OVO Energy



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We work tirelessly to ensure our clients get:

- Better response rates & more actionable insight
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The difficulty in keeping agents engaged, understanding and focusing upon the behaviours, actions and characteristics that are most helpful for the contact centre and the business, and the limited budget which most contact centres have for incentive programs create a situation whereby an alternative approach may need to be considered.

Gamification is an approach taken to improving agent engagement, aligning behaviours and characteristics with those of the contact centre and wider enterprise: at the most basic level, it involves making work tasks into games. The contact centre is a particularly rich potential environment for this approach, as it contains many of the factors that can make gamification successful:

- opportunity for achievement, reward and recognition at an individual level
- the possibility of team-based and goal-based quantified success
- a large pool of competitors and team members, that can be segmented appropriately to make competition and teamwork more manageable
- clearly defined tasks and metrics that can enable direct comparison between individuals and teams, over time, with measureable improvements possible.

Generally speaking, contact centre agents tend to work in stressful environments for relatively low pay, doing work which may sometimes be repetitive. Depending on the nature of the calls, they may be dealing mainly with customers who have negative experiences of the company, which is unlikely to make the agent happier about representing the enterprise, especially over time.

The new agent, while often feeling uncertain about their competence to do tasks, is usually willing to learn and is engaged in their work. As time goes on, their competence will increase but they are more likely to become bored and cynical, which may in the longer term lead to high levels of agent attrition and correspondingly lower levels of operation-wide competence. As such, there is a twofold problem: lack of engagement at agent level leading to lower quality and productivity, and the corresponding costs associated with unnecessary agent attrition.

Gamification looks to meet these twin challenges with two solutions of its own: making work a more fun place to be, while encouraging the behaviours, competencies and characteristics that most closely aligned with the enterprise's own requirements, through giving agents real-time feedback about their performance, the opportunities to improve themselves and to be seen positively by peers and managers with the attendant social and material rewards.

Through the process of awarding badges, points and achievement levels, gamification gives agents an opportunity to show their achievements and compete as individuals and part of the team. The goals in mind are set by the business, and these require a great deal of thought, as any agent behaviours and actions must be closely aligned with where the business wants to go. This is an area of particular potential risk for businesses: taking a simple example, rewarding agents based upon average call handling time so as to reduce cost could obviously lead to them dropping difficult calls or not answering customers fully in order to meet these targets. There is also a risk that the novelty of games will wear off, with rewards having to have a higher and higher tangible monetary value in order to keep people's motivation, so ongoing efforts must be made by management to keep games fresh and goals relevant.

It is also important to note that gamification - while providing feedback and rewards to agents on an individual level - should be used as part of a team or community experience, encouraging high performing agents to share their best practice and for all agents to be continually challenged and pushed to learn new skills and improve their own performance.

Contact centres that use gamification frequently report that most agents go beyond the required training schedule, completing extra units and developing skills further in order to accumulate more points and badges. In a heavily incentivised sales environment, encouraging agents to take time off revenue generating activity to take training can be difficult, and this is a potential solution.

Gamification looks to increase agent engagement through:

- providing immediate feedback to the agent, who does not have to wait until the scheduled supervisory review to see how they are doing
- improving *esprit de corps* through the pooling of knowledge and collaboration within a group in order to achieve specific goals for which all will be rewarded
- cut down on the amount of time required for new agents to become competent, providing real-time feedback in order to encourage positive behaviours
- reduce the amount of management time required to run incentives programs, and deliver them more fairly and objectively
- focus upon and reward those characteristics and behaviours that are most closely aligned with the contact centre's and enterprise's own requirements.

This final point - encouraging agents to do what benefits the business - is a key purpose for gamification. As seen earlier in this chapter, many organisations are rewarding agents for behaviours which are not closely aligned with where the business needs to go, while ignoring those attitudes and characteristics that would actually support them in their journey, often because these latter are more difficult to measure.

Gamification can help businesses to support their objectives, and to achieve specific results. For example, steps to make gamification assist with achieving a company's business priorities could include:

- clarifying the enterprise's objectives
- identifying contact centre metrics that directly impact upon these objectives
- identifying the agent characteristics, behaviour and actions that impact these metrics the most
- developing a gamification strategy that can measure and improve these metrics, through motivating the agents to act in ways that support this goal.

For businesses which want to achieve specific results, gamification can assist through:

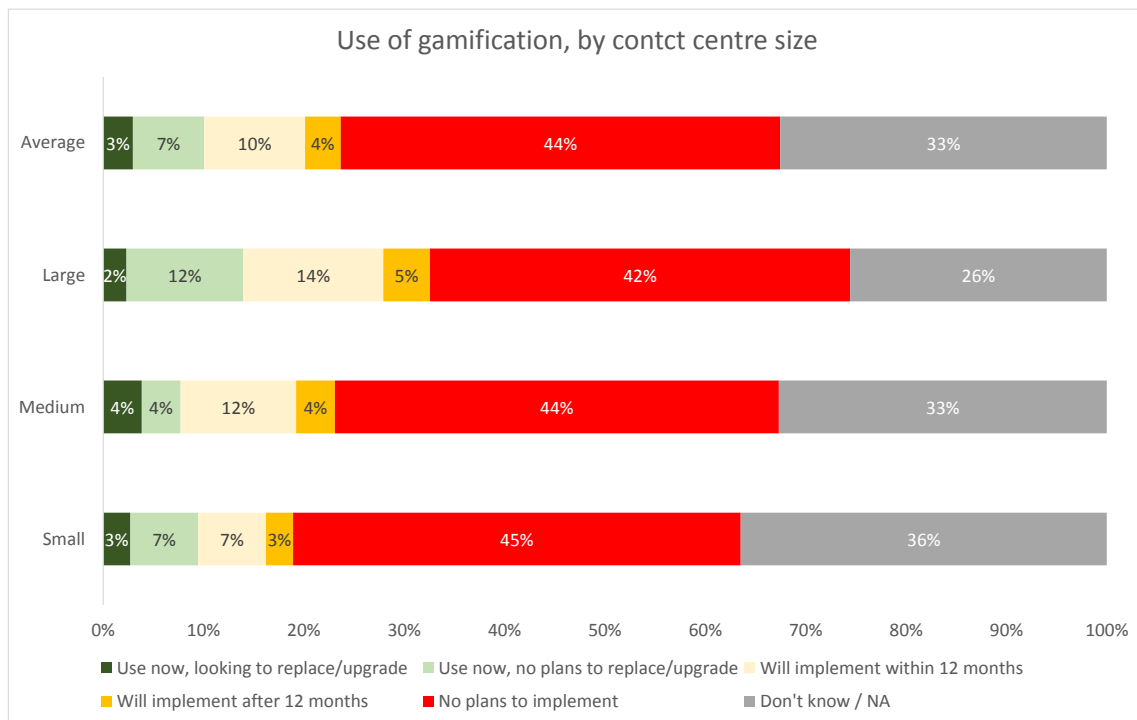
- increasing the skills and competencies of new agents more rapidly, decreasing time to productivity by switching from formal, classroom lecture-based training into structured real-life work tasks
- further developing the skills of agents through encouraging and rewarding the completion of extra training courses and activities beyond what is required
- cutting agent retention through increasing agent engagement, and recognising and rewarding positive behaviours and characteristics.



Our clients find that using our solution to gamify the contact centre experience, motivates agents, improves performance around service metrics and leads to lower attrition. They've also found that rewarding agents around service doesn't necessarily require monetary incentives, instead recognition amongst their peers is more than sufficient. This approach not only aligns the contact centre environment to business objectives but differentiates organisations from their competitors around customer experience.

Only 10% of respondents currently use gamification within their contact centre operations, although a further 10% believe that they will implement this within 12 months. The use of gamification is a little higher within large contact centres, where 14% respondents currently use it, and 14% intend to implement it within a year.

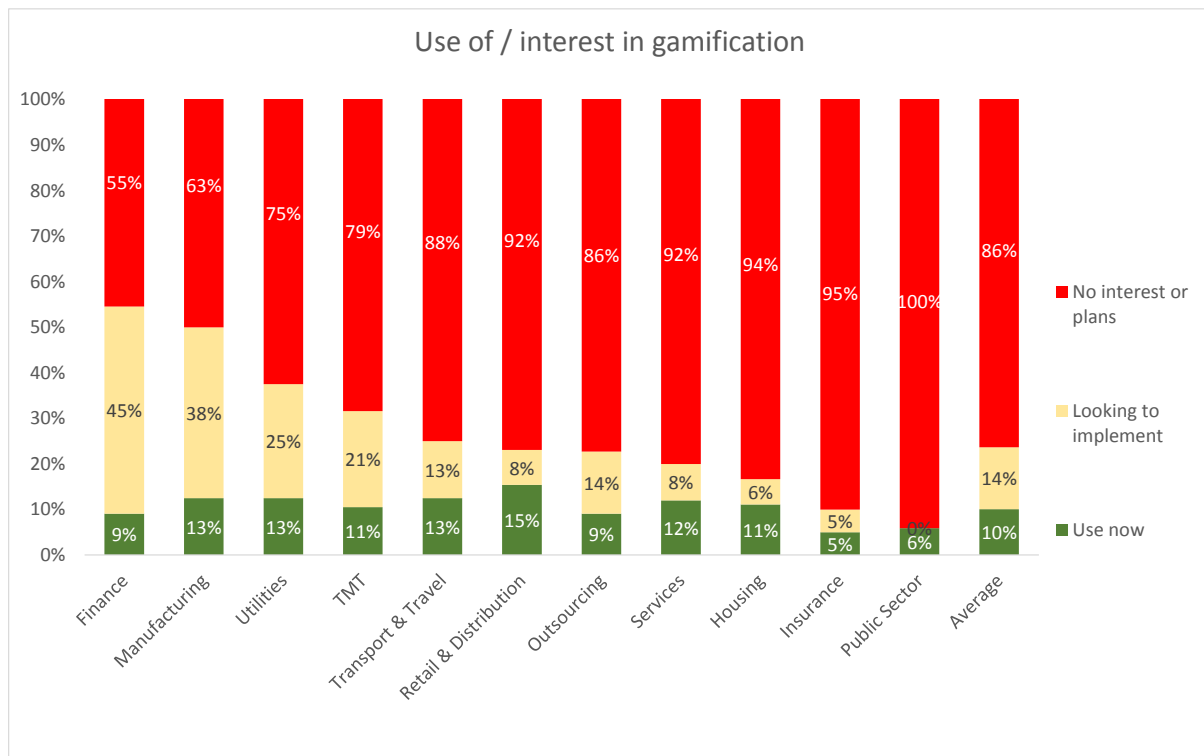
Figure 32: Use of gamification, by contact centre size




There is a danger in over-analysing data where the segments are too small, and this can be the case when considering vertical market implementations of a nascent solution.

However, it is interesting to note that the finance, manufacturing, TMT and utilities respondents from this year's survey report a strong interest in implementing gamification.

Figure 33: Use of / interest in gamification, by vertical market



Looking at the activity type of respondents, those working in the sales environment, which are already culturally used to the public, competitive practice of sharing sales targets and achievements, should be far more likely to be using gamification today.

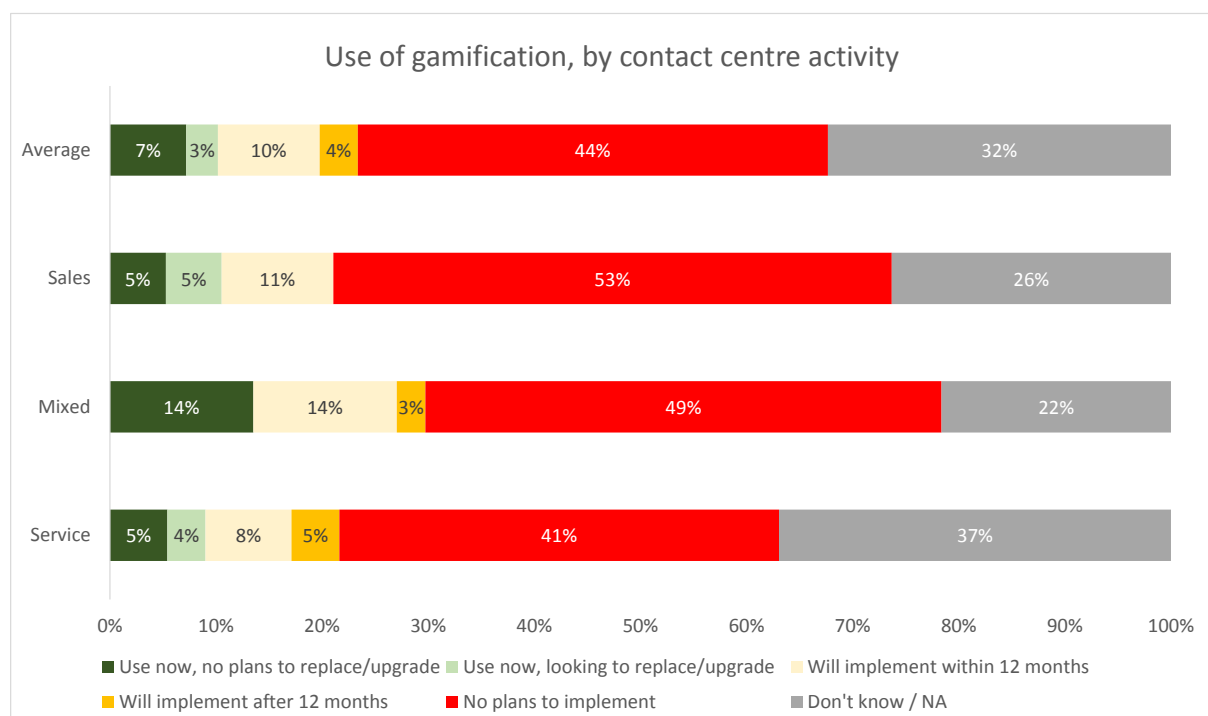
 Our clients who operate in purely service-orientated environments (and sometimes regulated) are embracing gamification on an unprecedented scale. We expect to see this trend increase over the next 12 months.

“Gamifying the agent experience gave us a competitive edge and engaged staff in the impact their individual service was having on their quality and the overall service provided by OVO.”

Justin Haines, Customer Service Director, OVO Energy

However, it is the mixed sale/service operations that are more likely to be doing so at the moment, and also look to do so in the future. This will be tracked in the future to see whether any definite patterns emerge – US contact centres involved in sales are far more likely to be using gamification than their service-orientated equivalents.

Figure 34: Use of gamification, by contact centre activity



DESKTOP AUTOMATION AND ANALYTICS

The variable capabilities of agents is a contributory inhibitor to quality improvements and profit maximisation. One possible solution is to look at an overall unified desktop environment that includes dynamic scripting, as well as understanding agent training needs through an integrated solution that includes call recording and analytical functionality, which delivers up-to-date performance metrics and in-call information, including relevant cross-selling and upselling offers.

The agent desktop lies at the heart of the integrated contact centre, with data and processes flowing to and from it. The requirements for a truly integrated solution have never been greater, incorporating the performance and effectiveness of the agent, as well as being a key node within contact process.

The “Contact Centre Strategy” chapter at the end of this report finds that survey respondents place back-office integration as the 4th most important solution that they are considering in the next two years, from a list of 24, with 38% stating that it was one of their top five priorities. This shows that the need for end-to-end integration - not just between the agent and the customer, but also throughout the entire contact centre - is to the forefront of the minds of contact centre decision-makers.


Throughout this report, respondents’ need to integrate processes and systems, providing up-to-date and accurate view of performance and issues, is a consistent message. Yet the tools provided for the agent and their management have often been added on piecemeal, requiring bespoke or partial integration at each step, growing the level of complexity to such an extent that the full potential of the solution is never fully realised. Only with a truly integrated solution - from the customer, through the agent, into the back office processes and back again as required - can an accurate level of performance and identification of requirements be truly achieved. Findings later in this report show that voice of the customer projects are often running into difficulty when trying to track the customer journey across departments, processes and channels. There is a high level of loose and flawed integration across many contact centres, which has often been caused and exacerbated by the high levels of resource required to make sure that each solution implemented is able to leverage the insight and data from existing technological solutions.

The rapidly growing addition and use of new channels is only making this need more urgent. Role-based performance dashboards and real-time reporting of analysis means that insight into the contact centre’s efficiency and effectiveness can be shared immediately, with relevant business users, without the need for high levels of user expertise and experience before the full value can be realised.

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The recent movement towards an integrated omnichannel environment shows a desire to break down silos that are preventing the optimisation of the customer experience, but it is not just customer channels that benefit from this approach. The integration of the workforce optimisation suite - performance and quality management, call recording, interaction analytics and workforce management solutions - offers the opportunity to reduce the complexity of the experience for users, widening the functionality with which they are comfortable and increasing the level of actionable insight available to the whole business, in a timely fashion.

CALABRIO Now, more than ever, businesses need clear and quick access to information that drives better decision making – not just in the contact centre, but across the entire enterprise. The right voice-of-the-customer analytics tools make it easy for the contact centre to share valuable insights with stakeholders in other areas of the organisation, including sales, marketing, human resources, legal/compliance and operations, to fuel better, faster, data-driven decisions.



Most organisations
analyse only 12% of
their data.

Think of how much they're missing.

Your customers are feeding you vast amounts of data on a daily basis, giving you the potential to improve nearly every aspect of your organisation.

Visit calabrio.com to learn more about advances in multichannel analytics systems. Our white paper, **Unlocking the Contact Center's Hidden Asset: How Multichannel Analytics Can Translate the Voice of the Customer into Business Intelligence**, describes how forward-thinking contact centres are unlocking the insight from customer interactions and becoming the nerve centre for business intelligence.

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THE AGENT 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, and there is always the danger that even if the call has been completed successfully, opportunities to maximise revenues have been missed.

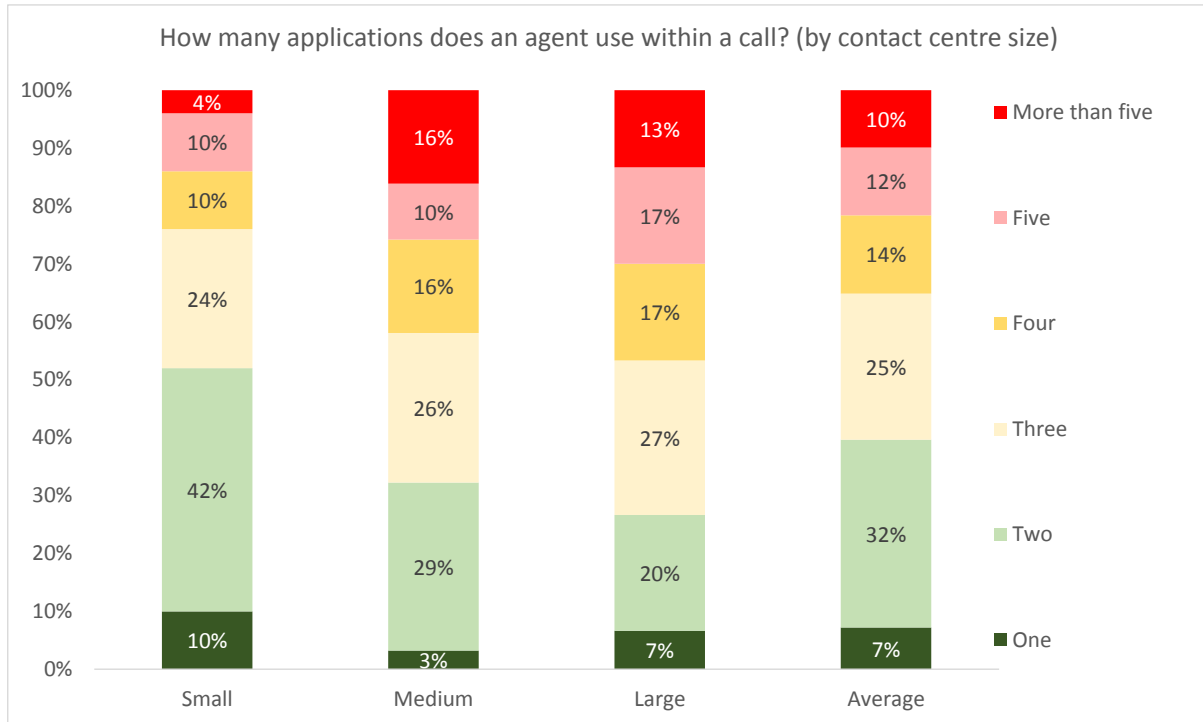
Figure 35: Use of multiple applications across vertical markets

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 suboptimal, leading to low customer satisfaction, unnecessary costs and decreased profits.

With 93% of respondents requiring their agents to use multiple applications within a call, there are significant dangers around forgetting to key in information, not asking 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 and accuracy rates for new agents as well.

Figure 36: How many applications does an agent use within a call? (by contact centre size)



As the chart above shows, this is not merely an issue in large, complex environments. Only 10% of sub- 50 seat operations use a single in-call application, although those in larger organisations are substantially more likely to be using four or more applications on the agent desktop.

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 what’s required.

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.

Integrated desktop solutions can remove the need for agents to log into multiple applications, assist them with the navigation between applications within the call, and make sure that customer data is gathered from the correct places and written consistently back to any relevant databases without the need to navigate through multiple systems.

Within the call, dynamic call scripting helps the agent to provide the right information at the right time, seamlessly linking with multiple back-office applications and databases, providing only what is relevant onto the agent's screen. Depending on the experience or profile of the agent, what the customer is trying to do and any regulatory inhibitors, on-screen buttons can be enabled or disabled, or access to fields limited according to business rules. Furthermore, adherence to business processes can be assured by making the agent complete all of the required steps in the transaction (for example, adding call notes, reading disclaimers, etc.).

The following table shows some key contact centre performance metrics that were analysed in the context of the number of in-call applications that agents use. It is important to note that although there appears to be a correlation between superior performance metrics and the use of fewer in-call and post-call applications, this does not necessarily demonstrate **causality**: this pattern of statistics do not mean that it is possible to say definitely that the use of fewer applications within a call will in itself improve contact centre performance. However, it can be supposed that not having to navigate through multiple screens or spend significant periods at the end of the call typing out notes or making changes to multiple databases, and being given access to dynamic scripting that provides the correct information without having to search for it will encourage shorter post-call wrap-up, improved agent availability, and lower call abandonment rates.

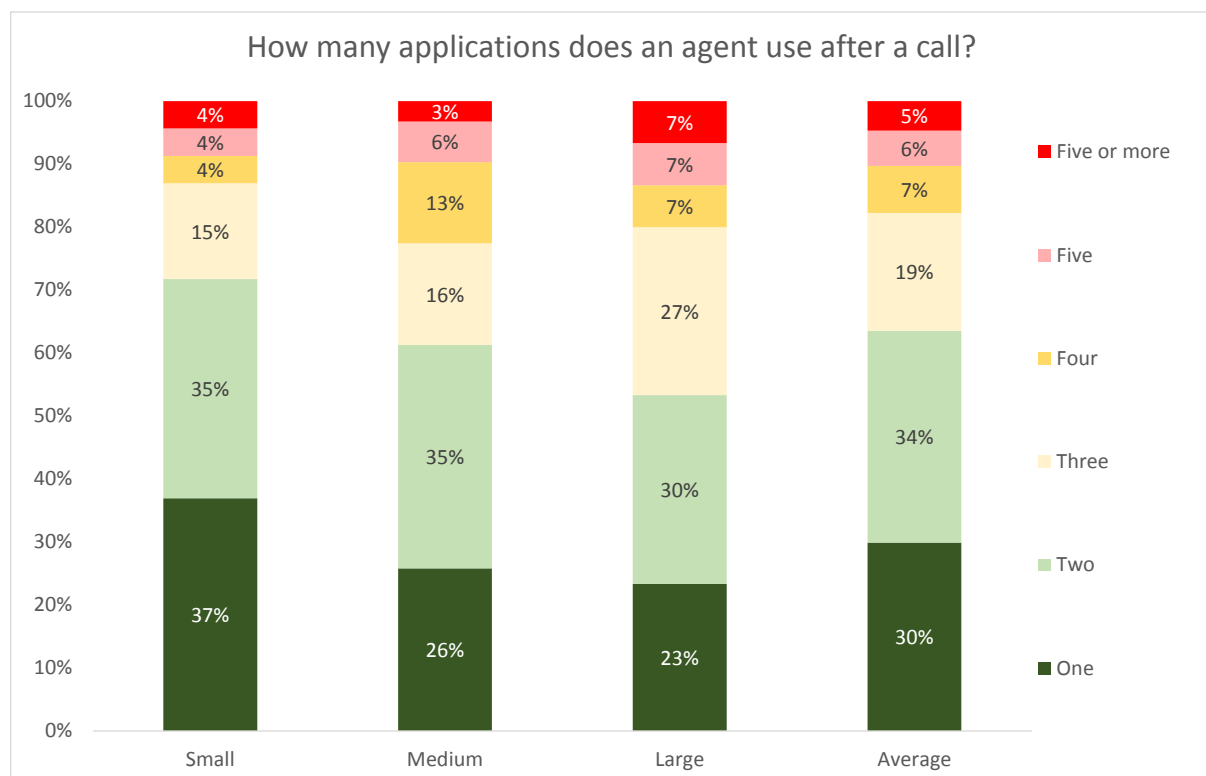
Figure 37: Selected performance metrics, by number of in-call or post-call applications used

Metric	Respondents using 1 application	Respondents using 4 or more applications
Average speed to answer	21 seconds	41 seconds
Call abandonment rate	4.0%	5.3%
Post-call wrap-up as % of call	10.0%	17.2%
NB: ASA and abandonment rate apply to # in-call applications. Post-call wrap-up % refers to # post-call applications.		

It is logical to hypothesise that using complex, multiple applications without any specific agent support will often lead 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 (as shown 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.

Figure 38: How many applications does an agent use after a call?



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, productivity per agent declines and 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 reduced escalation levels.

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REDUCING THE BURDEN OF PCI COMPLIANCE IN THE CONTACT CENTRE

By Brad Snedeker, Calabrio Innovation Centre Manager

As credit card use continues to expand and data security breaches plague organisations across industries, protecting sensitive customer data is a top priority for executives. In recent years retailers have been among the top targets for cybercriminals.

Since US discount retailer Target reported a data breach affecting 40 million debit and credit card accounts during the 2013 holiday shopping season, many more breaches have occurred in the retail industry alone. Neiman Marcus, eBay, and Carphone Warehouse and several other retail chains have been in the news for similar incidents. These hacks not only create a nightmare for affected cardholders, but they also damage the reputations of hacked retailers as customer trust and loyalty are eroded.

The first Payment Card Industry (PCI) Data Security Standard was published in 2004 to increase the security of credit and debit transactions and reduce fraud. Any business that accepts credit cards must meet the twelve requirements outlined in the standard to be PCI compliant and to avoid significant penalty fees.

But this is easier said than done.

According to *Verizon's 2015 PCI Compliance Report*, while compliance is increasing overall, only 1 in 5 companies is fully PCI compliant. And 67 percent of organisations are not testing the security of their systems adequately.

Achieving full PCI compliance is an expensive and ongoing challenge that requires heavy investment in people, processes and technology. One area of investment is the contact centre. PCI guidelines stipulate that storing credit card information after a transaction has been authenticated is not permitted, even if it's stored in an encrypted call recording file.

Calabrio, Inc, a leading customer engagement software company, helps organisations reduce the burden of PCI compliance by blocking the capture of cardholder information from audio and screen recordings.

Calabrio recently pioneered an innovative approach as a standard feature in its Calabrio ONE Quality Management solution. When a customer care representative accesses a particular screen or field, the audio and screen recording is automatically paused, and when the representative leaves that screen or field, the recording automatically resumes.

The end result: sensitive information is never recorded or stored.

One of the world's most exclusive retailers recently implemented this solution from Calabrio as part of their larger PCI efforts, ensuring that the following information is not recorded:

- The audio portion of the credit card transaction during the call
- The screen showing the credit card entry dialog box
- The keystrokes for the credit card transaction

When a customer service representation accesses the credit card entry dialog box, Calabrio's solution sends an automated pause message to halt the recording of screen, audio, and keystrokes. Once the representative has entered the sensitive data and leaves the dialog, Calabrio ONE sends a resume command and the recording starts again. Not only does this solution support the retailers' compliance efforts, it allows the retailer to protect its valued customers and its own prestigious reputation.

Calabrio Support Services team lead Josh Rusch assisted the retailer during the implementation process.

"This is a powerful piece of software that responds to what a customer care representative is doing in real time," Rusch said. "Best of all, it eliminates human error such as forgetting to click the stop or resume recording button. With this solution, contact centres are assured that they are recording everything they need and that nothing is recorded that should not be stored."

Calabrio ONE, unique in the contact centre software industry, offers both manual and automated solutions to support the PCI compliance efforts of its customers. It also offers something even more valuable in an industry in which consumer trust is essential: peace of mind.

More information about Calabrio ONE is available at www.calabrio.com.

About the Author

Brad Snedeker has over 15 years of experience in the contact centre space. As Calabrio's Innovation Centre Manager, he works directly with users to teach and develop new and innovative techniques and best practices for customer engagement and workforce optimisation.

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.

Some calls require a great many notes to be made to the agent desktop application the end of the call. Desktop automation solutions can automatically log the events which happened within the call (for example, changes to customer data records, billing enquiries, alterations to orders, etc.) which can save minutes in the post-call wrap-up stage in some cases.

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 average of 10.1% of time that contact centre agent spend each hour in after-call work adds up to an enormous cost.

The overall expenditure of the UK contact centre sector - salaries, IT, telecoms, building, rent, utilities, etc. - comes to around £23bn each year. Wrap-up time accounts for 10.8% of the time spent by the industry: usually slightly less in larger contact centres, which account for the bulk of the jobs. As such, wrap-up costs the industry almost £2.5bn 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 250-seat contact centre, processing 3m calls per year, would spend over £1.2m each year just on wrap-up. A 25% reduction in wrap-up time could save over £300,000, 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).

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.

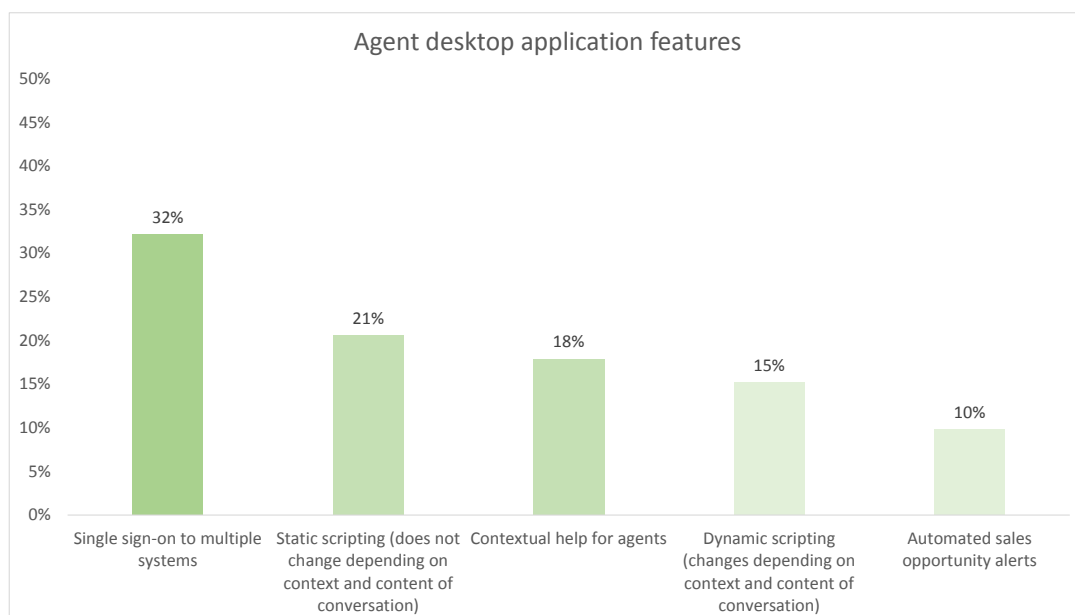
An application which supports less-experienced agents, and helps them to learn means that staff attrition rates can be managed more effectively. High attrition rates and poor knowledge bases mean that people take away the knowledge as they leave. By having a user interface which provides the right information 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.

Only 32% of respondents use agent desktops which provide a single sign-on mechanism to multiple systems, which can potentially greatly reduce the amount of time that agents spent logging in and out of systems. Any scripting used is more likely to be static scripting which does not change depending on the context of the conversation, rather than dynamic scripting.

CALABRIO Integration is a loaded term within the industry, mostly defined as disparate, bolt-on products that loosely talk to each other, but look and feel different. An integrated system with a single sign-on and unified interface provides users with a consistent experience across modules, which reduces training time and offers more efficiency in daily operations.

Only 10% of respondents have agent desktop applications which provide automated sales opportunity alerts to their agents while on the phone, which may be triggered by the use of keywords or phrases using real-time speech analytics, or through agent field or screen input.

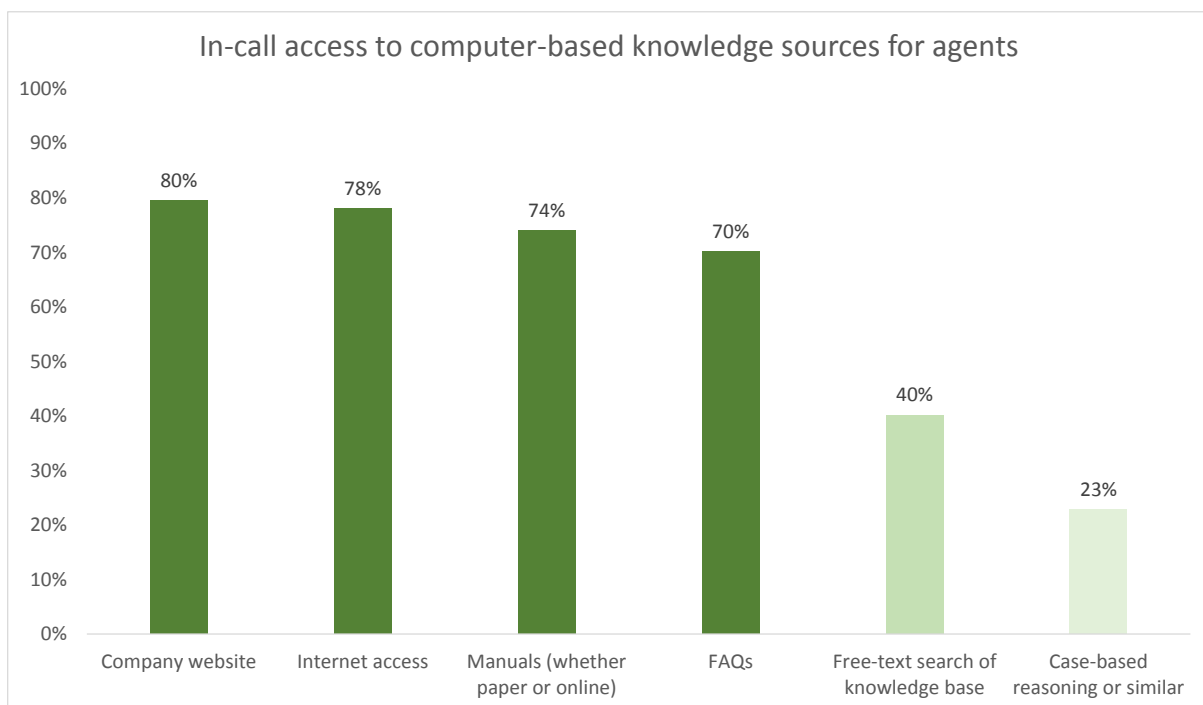
Figure 39: Agent desktop application features



AGENT DESKTOP KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

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 23% 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.

Figure 40: In-call access to computer-based knowledge sources for agents



Not only do most agents have numerous in-call / post-call applications as well as non-integrated knowledge sources to contend with, but most also have hard-copy documents in their workspace that they have to refer to as well. Only 26% of respondents had effectively a clean-desk policy with no hard copy reference material available to agents, a figure which was lower for agents working in a mixed service/sales environment, who tend to have to cover a wide range of varying topics.

CALABRIO

While the previous chart refers to information sources that agents have available when handling customer queries, it is also desirable for agents and supervisors to have up-to-date, easily understood information about their current performance, as well as priorities and issues that are developing in real-time within the rest of the contact centre. A single user interface incorporating a performance dashboard, integrating data from the wider workforce optimisation and performance management suite will go some way to removing the concept of the 'agent as an island', allowing priorities and issues to be identified in real-time before the impact upon the performance of the contact centre as a whole. This will also mean that the agent does not have to wait until a weekly or monthly performance meeting with their supervisor in order to be made aware of any performance or effectiveness issues.

CALABRIO Clear dashboards that display survey and evaluation scores and adherence metrics allow agents to see their stats at-a-glance and make immediate improvements. Gamification tools can help agents see where they rank amongst their peers, creating healthy competition that reinforces positive behaviours.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT & 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 quickly 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 be.

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.

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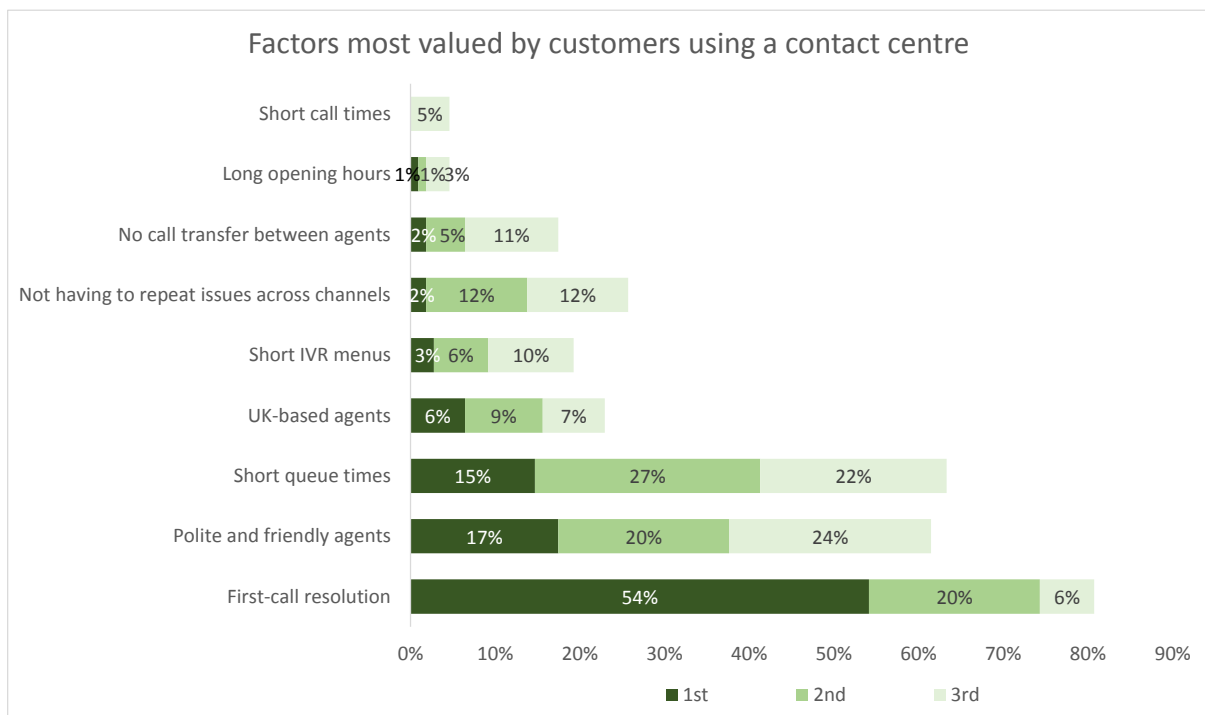
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FACTORS IN ACHIEVING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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.

As with last year, the top choice was “first-call resolution”, with “polite and friendly agents”, and “short queue times” once again in second and third place, the latter acknowledging that the customer experience starts well before the agent's greeting.

Figure 41: Factors most valued by customers using a contact centre



Contact centre management also believe that having UK-based agents goes a long way to helping customer satisfaction, with 22% of respondents placing domestic agents in the top 3.

Short call duration, which has been slipping as a primary metric for a number of years, was picked as a top 3 factor in achieving customer satisfaction by only 5% of the respondents this year, further evidence that average handle time is becoming increasingly irrelevant in the modern day contact centre, in businesses’ opinion at least: it would be interesting to see if customers agree.

When considering how the factors involved in keeping customers happy differ depending on whether it is a service or sales call, some conclusions can be drawn:

- First-contact resolution is still seen as the most important factor, albeit a higher proportion of service respondents (53%) place it in first, against 41% of sales contact centres
- As a service call is perhaps more likely to require multiple agents to resolve it, 29% of service respondents place this in the top 3, compared to 18% of sales contact centres
- Sales contact centres are more likely to believe that polite and friendly agents are key: 35% place this as the top priority, against 14% of service respondents
- 49% of service contact centres put having short queue times as being key to customer experience, against only 30% of sales operations. This may be because callers to service operations are generally calling to get a problem resolved and may not be in the anticipatory frame of mind that sales callers may have
- Sales operations are far more likely than service agents to believe that UK-based agents are key to a positive customer experience (41% place this in their top 3, against only 17% of service operations). It may be that these types of contact centre are aware that there are usually easy alternatives for prospects to call, and do not wish to put off callers who do not like speaking with offshore agents
- No sales respondents put short IVR menus in their top 3, compared with 27% of service respondents. This is likely to be because labyrinthine IVR menus are usually restricted to large service operations, whereas sales operations are more likely to have representatives who can sell any of the products, whereas service agents may be more specialised and work in specific departments.



Though service and sales teams often operate quite independently and have differing views on the customer experience, it is important to remember that your customer does not make the same distinctions. Your company's reputation is formed by a combination of impressions created at every touchpoint. Companies that skilfully manage the entire customer experience across multiple departments and several channels reap the great rewards of enhanced customer satisfaction, increased revenue, reduced churn and greater employee satisfaction.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUES

Customer surveys have been an integral part of most businesses since time immemorial. Recently, there has been a great increase in the number of organisations implementing “Voice of the Customer” programs, often based around large-scale analysis of call recordings. This approach is investigated in more depth within the ‘Customer Interaction Analytics’ chapter within this report, but the more traditional, direct methods of understanding customer experience and requirements are still very much present.

The numerous methods of directly 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.



When you conduct customer surveys, it is important that you do not limit your mode of communication to that which you prefer. Adopting a multi-mode approach to surveying your customers will help you keep pace with your customers’ expectations. Many people will still want to give their feedback by phone but combining this with web surveys, links to web surveys on social media and SMS surveys will enable you more effectively to represent your entire customer base.

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.

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.

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.

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.



THE BENEFITS OF SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

It seems like everybody is on a “journey” these days but when it comes to service, many companies ignore the customer journey to focus instead on the service they are offering at separate, distinct touchpoints. The cumulative customer experience, therefore, is often frustrating and dissatisfying. Customers dealing with yet another department within one organisation are left with the sense that nobody has exclusive control over their issue or even fundamentally understands it. This compartmentalised nature of service delivery fosters an insular culture where each department works independently and the customer’s goodwill is steadily eroded.

So, what should be done?

Companies that skilfully manage the entire customer experience across multiple touchpoints and multiple channels over time reap the great rewards of enhanced customer satisfaction, increased revenue, reduced churn and greater employee satisfaction.

That is not to say that this is an easy business model to implement. It requires in depth examination of specific customer issues, cross-departmental collaboration, and the establishment of new employee responsibilities and performance expectations.

Collating feedback from customers and employees across all departments gives you the overall picture you need to fully understand the customer journey and identify those areas that need improvement. But asking the questions is not enough. Once you have listened to customer feedback, you need to act on it and communicate to customers and employees alike that you have addressed the issues. Letting your employees have knowledge of/ accountability for the entire customer process engenders a holistic, shared, company-wide approach that gives a more accurate impression of what the customer is experiencing when dealing with your organisation. This can only improve the customer experience!

Voice of the Customer Surveys

Voice of the Customer surveys help you learn first hand about specific service shortcomings and identify any discrepancies between marketing promises and service delivery. Hearing directly from your customers and looking in depth at individual cases can often highlight trends which are not visible if you focus exclusively on each customer interaction point separately.

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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.

Opinion-8 Though most successful companies acknowledge the importance of collating feedback on an ongoing basis, many fail to communicate the results of this feedback to their customers and staff. If you find that take-up for your customer satisfaction survey is falling, consider ways in which you can demonstrably broadcast to employees and customers alike that you have listened to and acted upon the feedback you have collated. Remember, we all like to think that our opinions are valued.

The most popular way respondents gather customer insight is through the informal channel of team meetings, where team leaders pass agent insight up the management chain. This relies upon goodwill and effort from agent, team leader, contact centre manager and the relevant business unit to get things achieved, and should not be relied upon solely. A more formal process of gathering agent comments is used by 82% of respondents.

84% carry out customer experience research via phone calls & emails, and 53% use IVR or SMS to get near-real time feedback.

71% state that they have a customer journey project taking place and 36% use call analytics (automated speech analytics as well as supervisors listening in to recorded calls) to gain customer insight.

Figure 42: Methods used for gathering customer insight (where used)

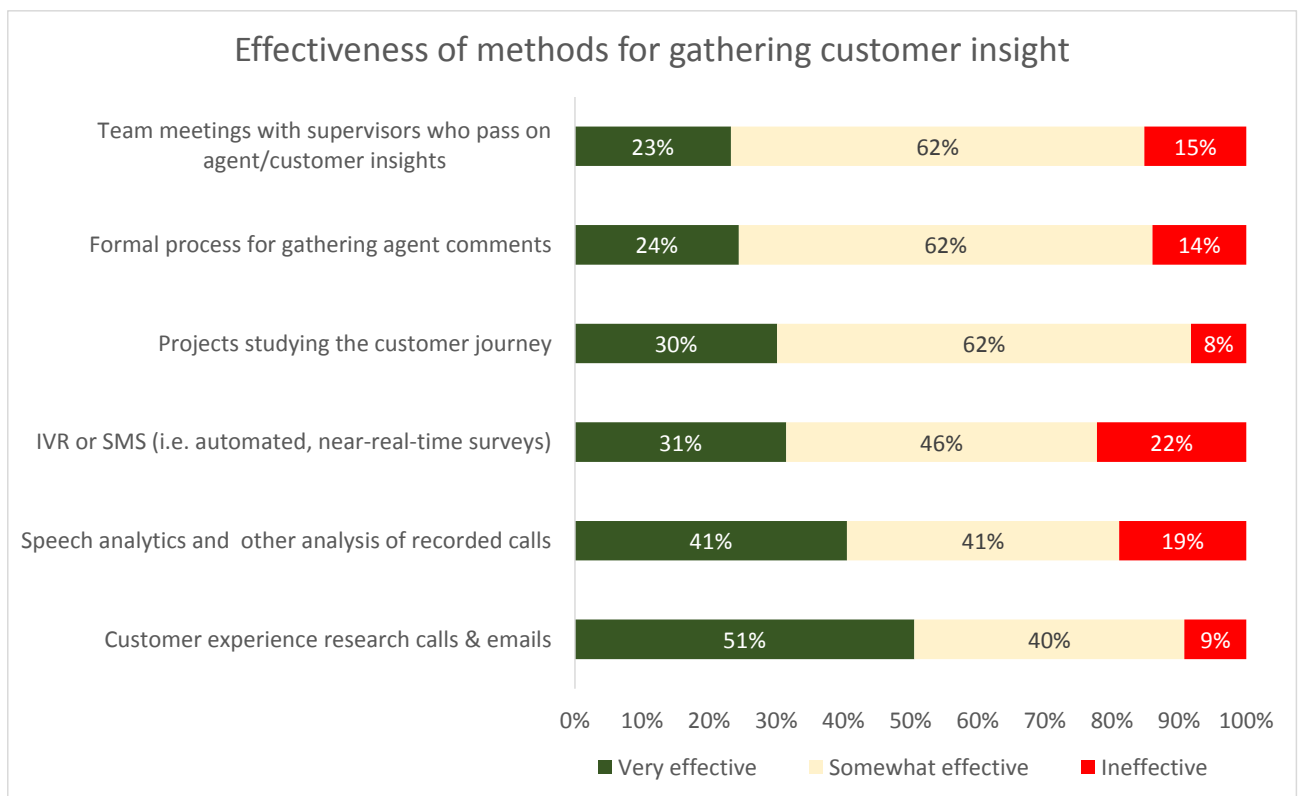
Method	% of respondents using this method
Team meetings with supervisors who pass on agent/customer insights	94%
Customer experience research calls & emails	84%
Formal process for gathering agent comments	82%
Projects studying the customer journey	71%
IVR or SMS (i.e. automated, near-real-time surveys)	53%
Speech analytics and analysis of recorded calls	36%

The chart below takes into account the respondents' opinions of the effectiveness of each method of gathering customer insight only if they use that method.

Respondents tend to rate customer experience research calls and emails most highly, with more than half finding these very effective and only 9% ineffective.

Call analytics - which in this case also includes supervisors analysing call recordings as well as the use of automated speech analytics solutions – also gets general approval, but neither the informal nor formal gathering of insight directly from agents are judged particularly useful.

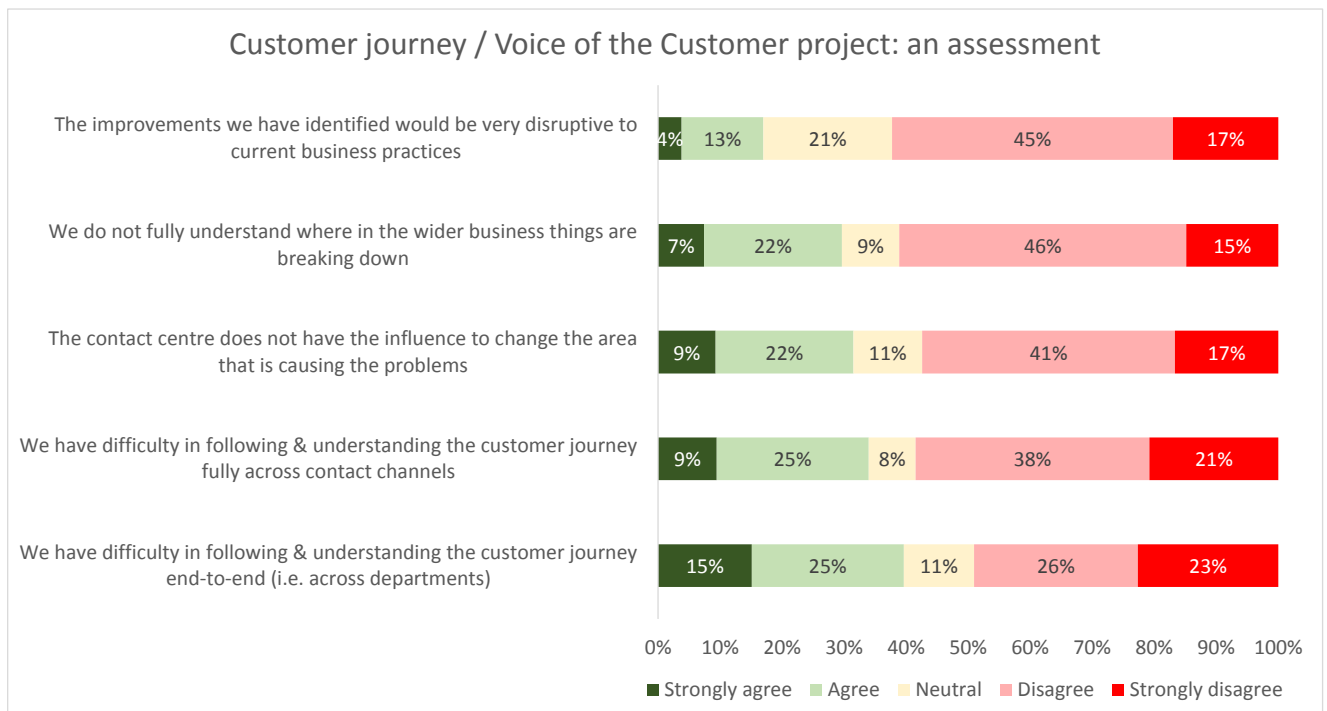
Figure 43: Effectiveness of methods for gathering customer insight (where used)



Respondents using a formal customer journey/voice of the customer project reported generally positive outcomes. 58% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the contact centre does not have the influence to change the area that is causing the problems.

However, 29% of respondents state that they do not fully understand where in the wider business things are breaking down and 40% find that they have difficulty in following and understanding the customer journey across departments, with 36% struggling to follow it across channels.

Figure 44: Customer journey / Voice of the Customer project: an assessment



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 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 or has gone elsewhere (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. In cases where multiple processes have to happen in order for the customer’s requirement to be met, automated outbound messaging to the customer, whether by email, SMS or IVR is likely to reduce the number of follow-up contacts that the customer feels that they have to make.

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. Interaction 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.

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

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 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 45: Proportion of calls received that are complaints / target of complaints, by vertical market - mean

Vertical market	Proportion of calls that are complaints	% complaints about the contact centre	% complaints about the wider business
Manufacturing	29%	17%	83%
Retail & Distribution	9%	28%	72%
Outsourcing	9%	25%	75%
Public Sector	17%	6%	94%
Transport & Travel	8%	12%	88%
Services	5%	17%	83%
Insurance	2%	42%	58%
TMT	4%	14%	86%
Utilities	2%	13%	87%
Finance	3%	10%	90%
Housing	7%	2%	98%
Average (mean)	7.4%	20%	80%
NB: table is sorted by largest proportion of complaints about the contact centre - high-to-low			

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).

Once again, the housing sector receives the fewest proportion of calls that are complaints about its contact centre operations, with manufacturing and retail & distribution again amongst the highest.

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.

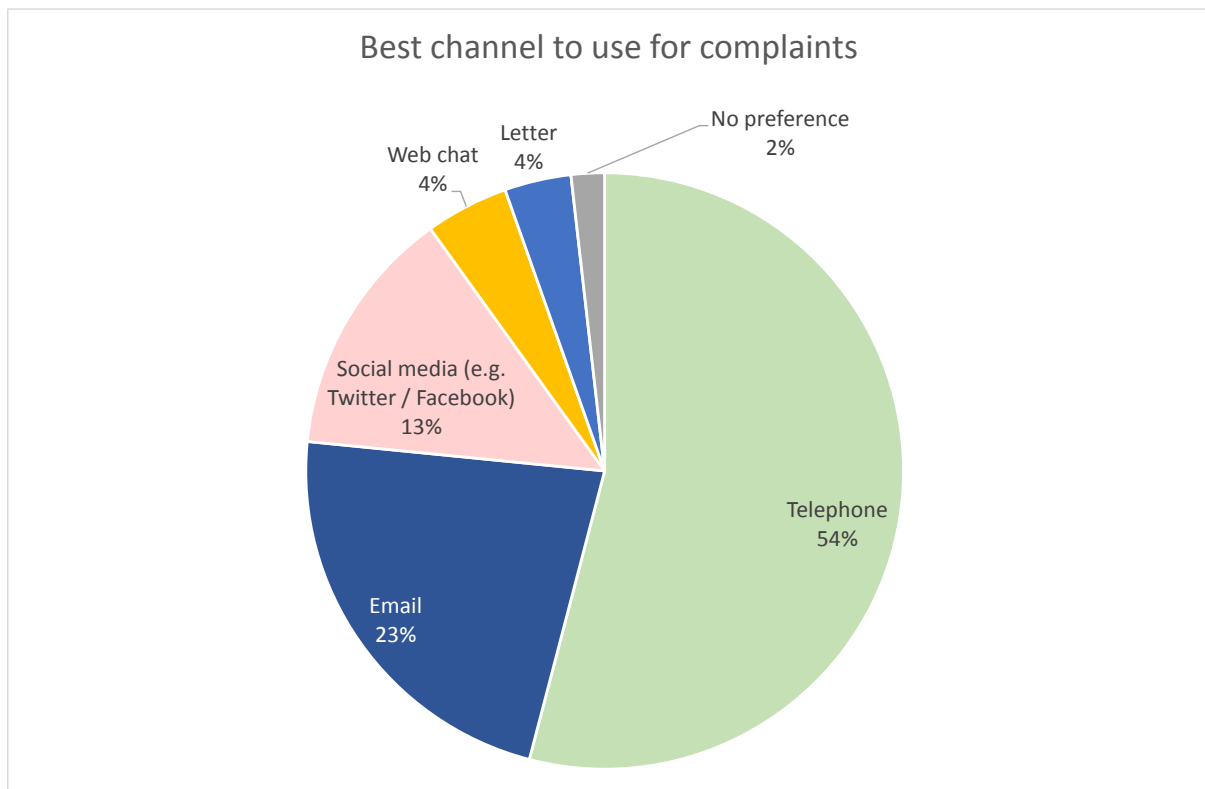
MOST EFFECTIVE CHANNELS FOR HANDLING CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

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 slight majority 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 the same support by respondents.

Only 2% gave the diplomatic answer that there would be no advantage to choosing one channel over another within their own organisation.

Figure 46: Best channel to use for complaints



CUSTOMER EFFORT AND ENGAGEMENT

For many years, customer satisfaction has consistently been seen as the most important metric within the contact centre environment, with huge efforts being made to understand and improve CSAT scores, with the hope being that satisfied customers are more likely to stay with the business and to buy more from them in the future.

Alongside this, many organisations use Net Promoter Score® (NPS) to understand how customers act as promoters or detractors of companies, with the theory being that higher NPS scores will correlate with greater loyalty between providers and consumers, with the word-of-mouth factor impacting upon those with whom customers interact.

The Corporate Executive Board takes a different angle, asking customers how much effort they had personally to put into handling their issue (more information about this is available in an article in the Harvard Business Review²), with the theory being that customer loyalty can be predicted and driven by the ease-of-use with which they deal with the organisation.

This chapter considers customers' effort in their dealings with organisations, not just with the contact centre's telephony channel, but also through the many and expanding new channels available to them, as well as the ways in which businesses can engage with customers in order to reduce this effort.

² <https://hbr.org/2010/07/stop-trying-to-delight-your-customers>

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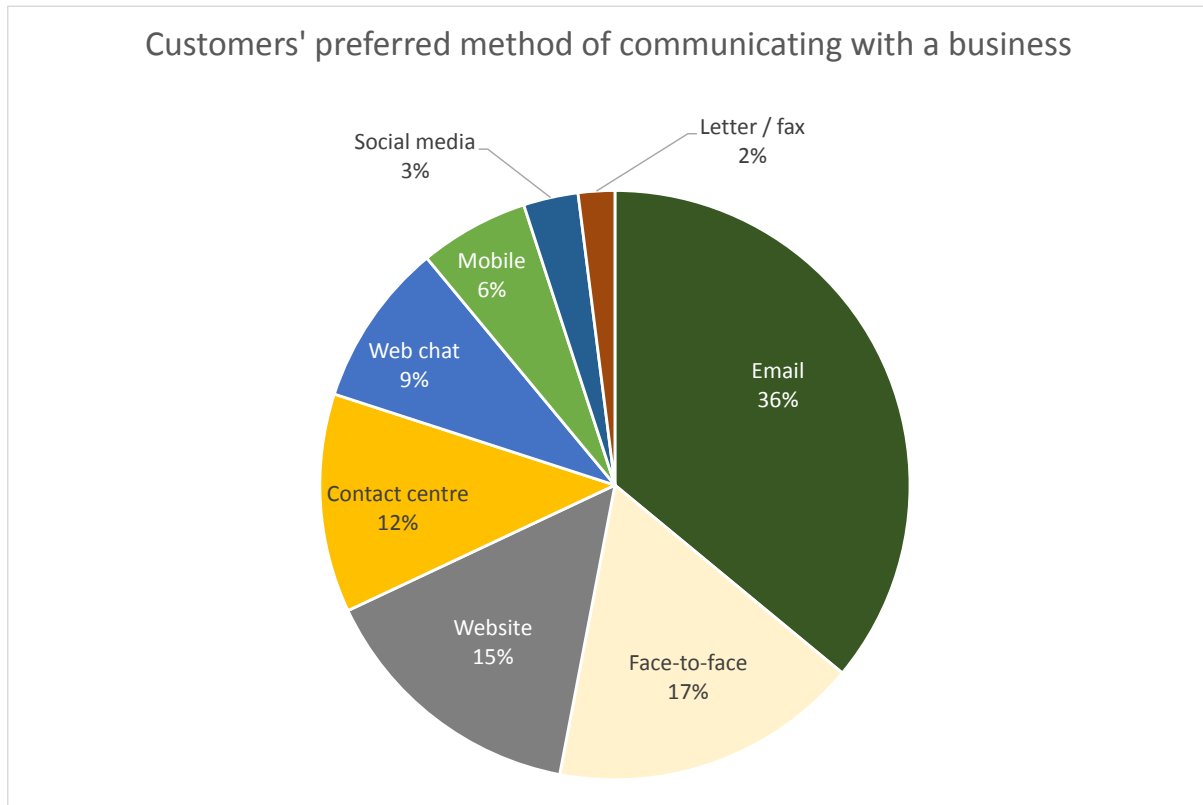
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Through ContactBabel research with UK customers, the chart below shows that 36% of customers prefer to communicate with the business via email, with only 12% initially preferring to pick up the phone and talk to an agent.

Figure 47: Customers' preferred method of communicating with a business



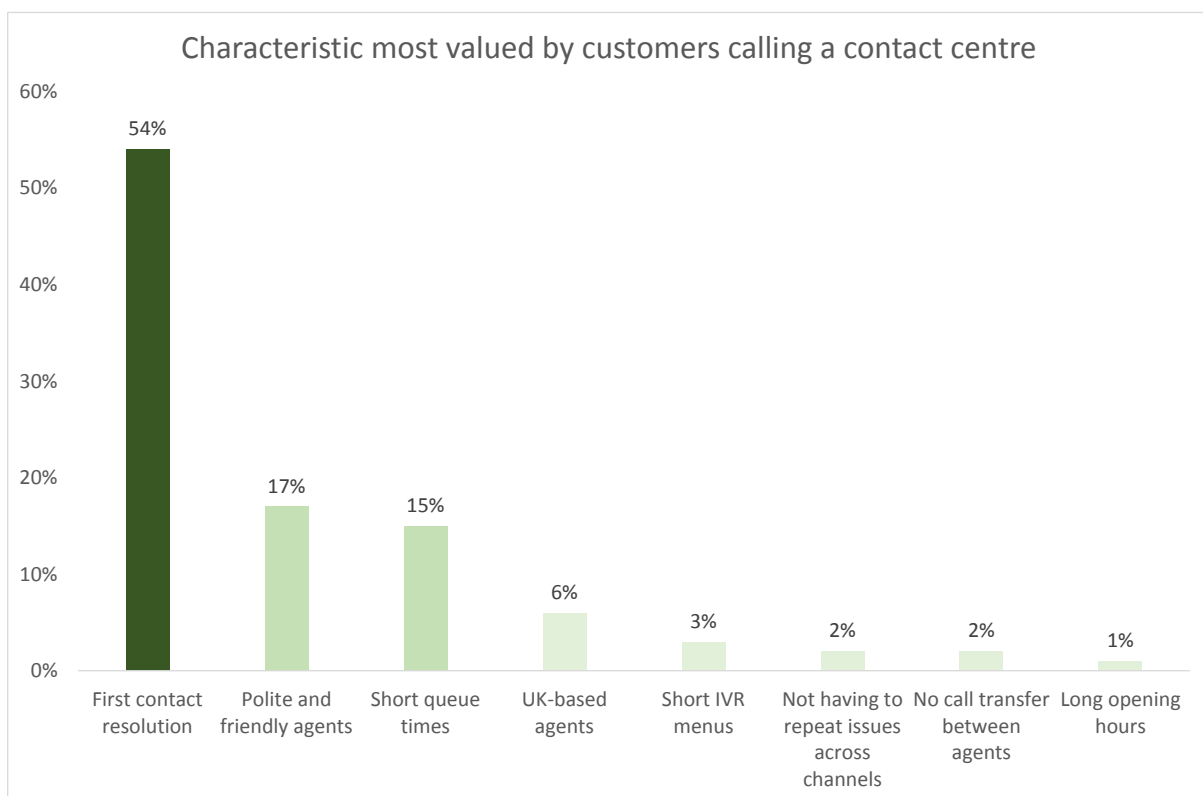
However, the reality is that two-thirds of two-way communication between businesses and customers is still done through contact centre telephony, with an average of only around 17% through email. This suggests that businesses should consider focusing upon offering a greater level of support and automation for this channel, the majority of which currently requires a high level of manual agent input and effort. The cost differentials between emails and telephone calls are not great (between £2-3 per email, and £3-4 per phone call), so there appears to be a huge opportunity both to align channels with customer demand, and reduce cost at the same time.

One of the reasons that email is a popular first choice with customers is as it does not require much effort: there is no queueing time and can be done at the customer's convenience. ContactBabel research continually finds that customers value ease-of-use and minimal effort when dealing with businesses: consistently, key to the customer's experience is having their matter dealt with quickly and effectively, at the first time of asking.

Perhaps the key to minimal customer effort is first contact resolution. In the past, this usually referred to everything being dealt with within the first telephone conversation, preferably by the same agent. As time has passed, and multiple channels included as part of the wider customer service mix, this has created in interest in developing an omnichannel strategy: a situation where a customer's request can be dealt with immediately and seamlessly, regardless of the initial channel which they choose to use. For many businesses, their underlying business processes and technology solutions are currently holding them back from being able to offer an omnichannel customer experience (the Omnichannel chapter within this report gives greater detail on this).

The following chart shows that first contact resolution is clearly seen as being the characteristic most valued by customers contacting a business, a long way ahead of being helped by polite and friendly agents (which should be a given in any case), and almost 4 times as important as having short queue times, a variable which has always had strong emphasis placed upon it both by businesses and customers.

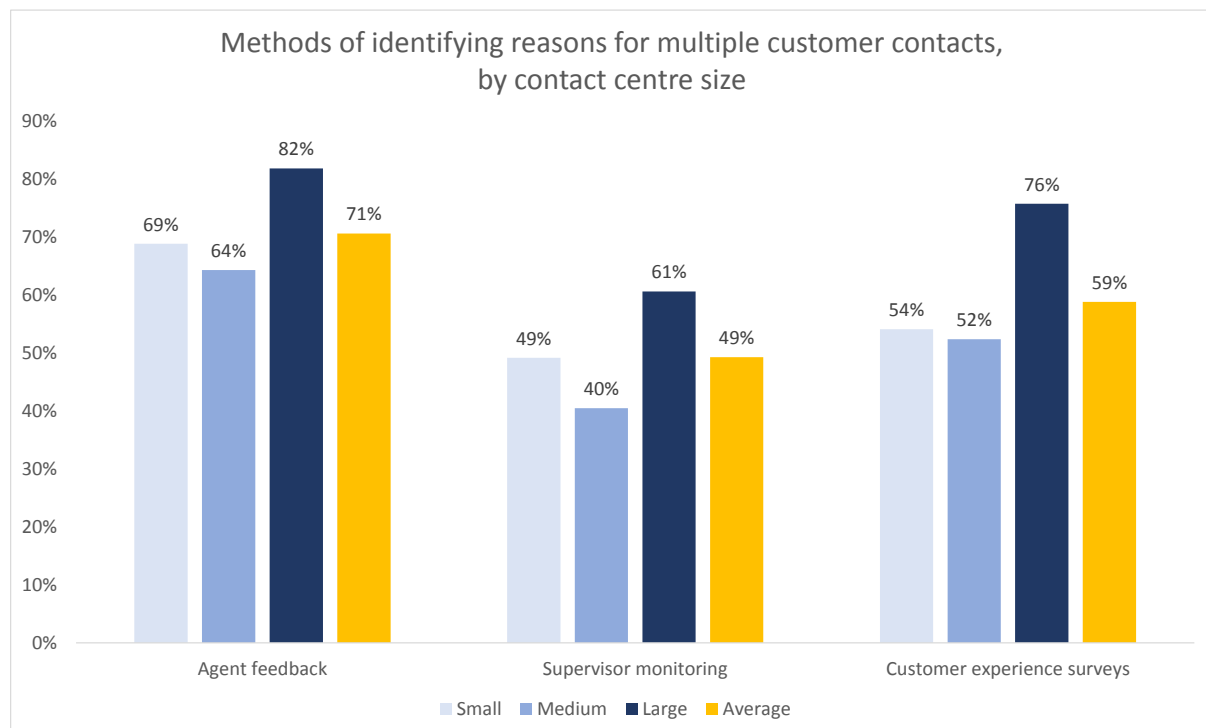
Figure 48: Characteristic most valued by customers calling a contact centre



Without first contact resolution, customer effort is necessarily driven up to unacceptable levels, greatly reducing levels of satisfaction and the promotion of the company to others. With around one in five customer interactions currently identified as requiring an entirely separate interaction as a result, there is still a considerable amount of work to do. However, this figure of one in five refers only to multiple telephone calls: of almost certainly greater importance are the multiple interactions required by customers who fail to get an issue resolved in one channel, having to start an interaction again within another channel (for example, not getting a timely or accurate answer from an email, and thus having to call a contact centre). In the majority of cases, the business does not count these in their first contact resolution figures, as they are likely to be unaware that the customer has tried and failed to resolve the issue using another channel. As such, quoted first contact resolution rates are likely to be hugely underestimated.

One of the reasons for this lack of understanding of true customer effort can be seen in the following chart, which shows that the most widely used measure of first contact resolution is agent feedback (which also incorporates the use of end-of-call disposition codes). Unless they specifically ask the customer, the agent will have no idea whether the customer has been browsing a website previously, has sent an email or attempted a web chat, especially as these extra efforts are unlikely to be included in the customer master record.

Figure 49: Methods of identifying reasons for multiple customer contacts, by contact centre size



Although the contact centre environment typically involves a great deal of quantification and analysis of statistics and performance, there is a huge gap in knowledge around the customer journey, and the effort involved in carrying out the same enquiry of a multiple channels. From what the survey has been able to gather, an average of 17% of emails require the use of another channel in order to be resolved satisfactorily. There is no reason to believe that this differs greatly the channel such as social media or web chat.

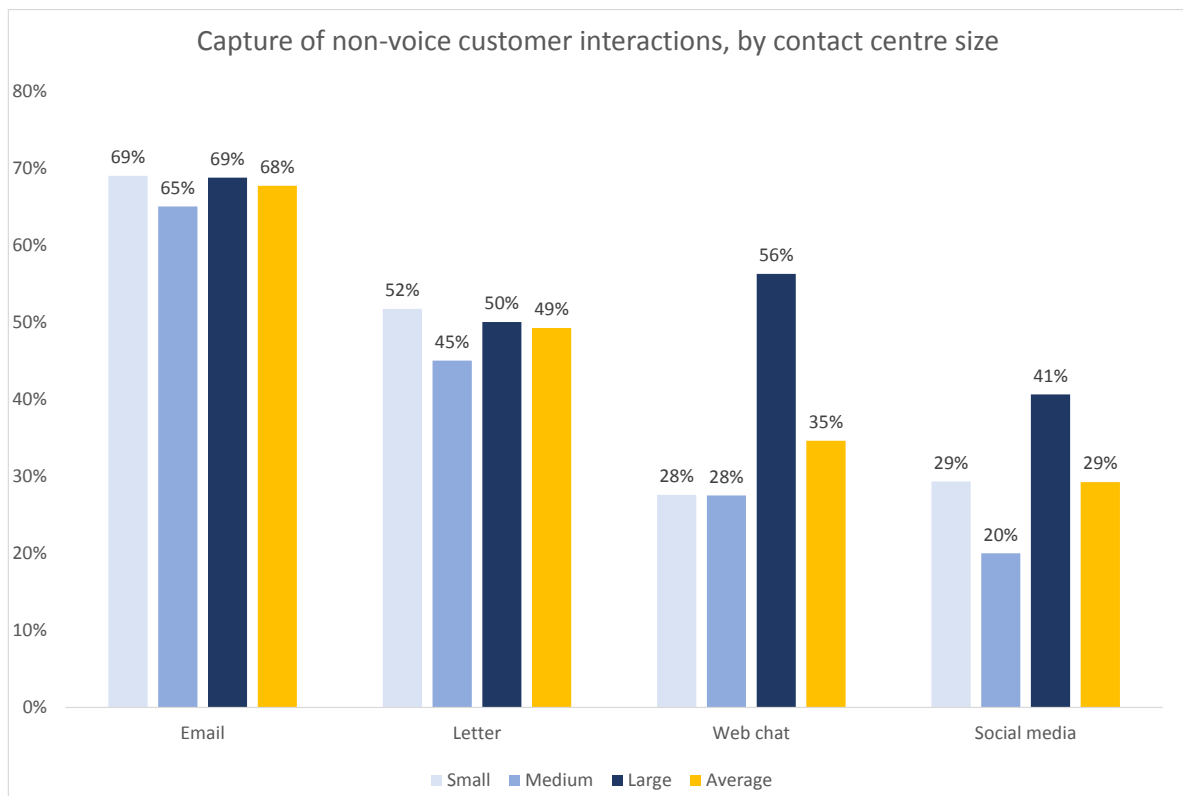


We now operate in an omni-channel world which makes Customer Effort hugely important. We need to understand customer effort in relation to all channels the customer communicates through and not just the interaction with an agent. Having a joined-up way of measuring the customer journey will give us the insight we need to constantly improve it.

This is not to say that having to use multiple channels is necessarily negative to customer effort: a scenario in which a customer sent an email, which then requires an outbound phone call from an agent in order to clarify and resolve the issue may actually involve far less customer effort than sending a series of emails back and forward, which itself will involve more elapsed time and actual effort on behalf of the customer. However, if the customer has to change channels numerous times, restarting the communication process again, this will very quickly increase customer frustration.

Currently, the reality of the customers is that once a service attempt by one channel breaks down, they are likely to have to do start again from the beginning with another channel.

Figure 50: Capture of non-voice customer interactions, by contact centre size





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Rant & Rave provides customer engagement solutions with a difference. Created with the belief that fundamentally brands and consumers want the same thing – to deliver and receive great service – half of the FTSE rely on the Rant & Rave platform to proactively communicate with and gather fast feedback from their customers. By reducing customer effort and taking real-time inspired action, brands are able to transform Ranters into Ravers and happy customers into engaged Ravers – lifelong advocates.

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Professor Moira Clark

Director of the Henley Centre for Customer Management and Author of Customer Effort: Help or Hype

1st Class Customer Engagement

"As a company that prides itself on offering first class customer engagement platforms, it's no surprise that Rant & Rave really do practice what they preach – their customer service is outstanding and we've always felt 100% supported and confident in their ability to deliver. Even though the Fast Feedback solution is clearly impressive, Rant & Rave aren't complacent with this. They have, and continue to put a massive focus on new innovations, and actively engage us in this process, which highlights that their customer's needs are at the heart of Rant & Rave's future."

Brian Henderson

Customer Experience Team Leader - Scottish Water

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We work tirelessly to ensure our clients get:

- Better response rates & more actionable insight
- Improvement in customer experience metrics (C-Sat, NPS, Customer Effort)
- Reduction in customer complaints

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For example, a customer using a smartphone for service request via an app or mobile website will only even have their name passed through to an agent in 40% of cases, with only 19% of organisations stating that they gather any information about who the customer is and what they are trying to achieve before passing the service request through to a telephony agent.

Customer effort is further increased by the current lack of information sharing between channels. The following chart shows that the master customer record is only updated in a majority of cases where the customer has sent an email, with 68% of respondents stating that a customer email will be added to the master customer record which can then be accessed by an agent at a later time. This figure is particularly low for web chat and social media, which for many businesses exist in a vacuum. In many cases, this is caused by these types of interaction not having gone through a process of customer identity verification, which means that they cannot be accurately and safely added to the master customer record.

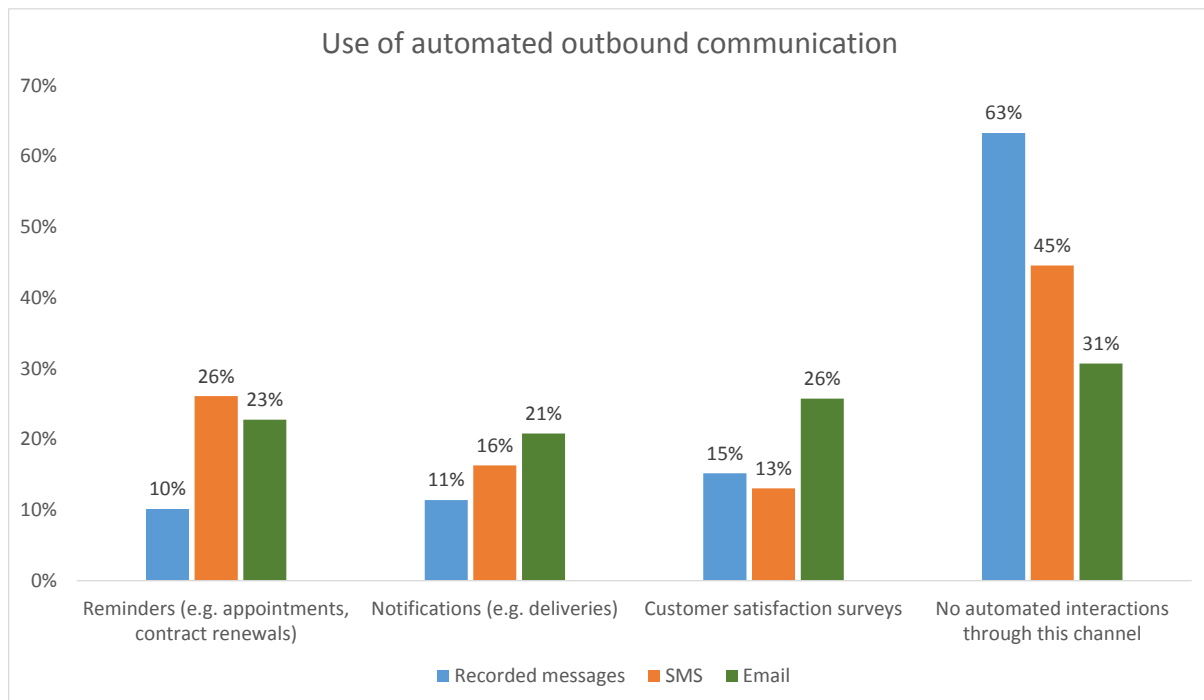
One of the ways to reduce customer effort is to carry out proactive outbound customer service, including reminders, notifications of pending action and to gather information about the customer's experience and ways to improve.



With so many channels of choice it's more important than ever to understand how the customer is feeling across each one. We must then use this insight to improve each channel with the aim of delivering a consistent customer experience across them all. Our clients have seen that a combination of proactive communication and incremental improvements (following customer feedback) reduces customer effort and enhances the overall experience.

However, the following chart shows that only a minority of businesses do any of these, relying upon the customer to contact them. An increased use of proactive automated service could go a considerable way to both reducing the overall amount of customer effort required, as well as reducing inbound call, email and web chat volumes.

Figure 51: Use of automated outbound communication



In the past few years, a widespread realisation amongst businesses that the complexity of the customer journey has increased in line with the number of new devices and channels available to customers to communicate with the business has led to the initiation of Voice of the Customer or customer journey projects, backed by new management positions coming under the wider customer experience banner.

This is particularly the case in larger contact centre operations, where the Voice of the Customer projects are increasingly looking at the effectiveness of back office processes that can impact upon whether the customer has to contact the business multiple times.

Figure 52: Formal 'Voice of the Customer' / customer journey project, by vertical market

Vertical market	% of respondents with formal VoC / customer journey project
Utilities	80%
Manufacturing	67%
Housing	65%
Insurance	60%
Retail & Distribution	55%
Finance	50%
Outsourcing	50%
Public Sector	50%
Services	50%
Transport & Travel	25%
TMT	25%
Average	51%

Figure 53: Formal 'Voice of the Customer' / customer journey project, by contact centre size

Contact centre size	% of respondents with formal VoC / customer journey project
Small	38%
Medium	45%
Large	79%
Average	51%



Our clients are starting to measure Customer Effort alongside C-Sat and NPS. The key here is to use the right metrics at the right part of the customer's journey - sometimes it will be more appropriate to measure Customer Effort rather than Satisfaction or Advocacy. Find out more at: <http://ravingcontent.rantandrave.com/measuring-customer-experience>.

In summary, customer effort and engagement is very dependent upon effectiveness by which channels work together, as well as the level of first-time contact resolution. Proactively engaging the customer at the appropriate time within the customer journey has an opportunity to reduce the effort required for the customer to fulfil their interaction completely. As part of a wider omnichannel engagement, businesses must seek to understand how and why customers prefer to engage with them, optimising the flow of information throughout any connected processes and channels so that the organisation becomes easy to do business with.



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Finding the right interaction to monitor and score can be a real challenge for many organisations: through Genesys' integrated [Interaction Recording](#), [Quality Management](#) and [Speech & Text Analytics capabilities](#), organisations can select the conversations to analyse with precision improving quality, compliance and agent engagement.



With Intraday Automation from Intradiem, agents receive the training, coaching and communications they need to improve their performance and deliver exceptional service to your customers, and their queue assignments are always up to date to reflect their most recent skills and performance.



If you are worried about how to improve your customer interactions, talk to us - there is no other organisation in the UK that has a broader set of tools to help you tune your customer service, from operational consultancy to speech analytics, the full suite of contact centre technology and even the best approach for securing your credit card transactions.



We deliver more customers.



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 offers market leading contact centre solutions including [Interaction Analytics](#) - a powerful tool that analyses customer interactions to spot trends, identify reasons for customer calls and ultimately improve the quality and performance of your agents.



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Experts in Contact Centre Performance, PCI Compliance and Security, Workforce Management and emerging technologies such as Voice Biometrics, Performance Telecom are passionate about delivering exceptional solutions for your call centre - contact us today to discuss your ideas, we'd love to hear from you!



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Pinpointing the issue so that you can spend your time working on it.



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Verint® can help your organisation drive smarter engagement with customers, enhance employee productivity across the front and back office, and deliver the real-time guidance needed to help improve the overall customer experience.

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
- Call routing and queue management
- Workforce management
- Headsets.



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VOIP IS FRAUD WEAPON OF CHOICE

FRAUD CALLS



53%
VoIP



26.1%
Landline



20.9%
Cell

INTERNATIONAL CALLS ARE RISKY

64.5%

OF FRAUD CALLS ARE INTERNATIONAL
(originate in a country other than the country of the attack target)

THIS COMPARES TO 6.6% OF
NON-FRAUD CALLS

NON-FRAUD CALLS



7.8%
VoIP



52.1%
Landline



39.1%
Cell



KBA AUTHENTICATION IS INEFFECTIVE



**More than
15 PERCENT**

of legitimate customers fail
knowledge based authentication

Reducing time
spent
authenticating
low risk callers
can reduce call
centre operations
costs 52%

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-time call 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, and the earlier chapter on Agent Engagement & Gamification shows that agents are far more likely to be rewarded for meeting required operational metrics rather than customer-focused service metrics. Depending on the type of work that they do, contact centres may consider focusing upon various measurements from the following table.

Figure 54: Contact centre metrics

Metric	Comments
Call duration / Average Handle Time	A typical 'old-fashioned' metric, which is generally going out of favour, 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.
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.
Customer satisfaction ratings	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 Satisfaction Measurement and Improvement chapter earlier in this report should be read into order to understand the various methods of measuring customer satisfaction scores.

Metric	Comments
Cost per call	<p>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 (see later in this chapter).</p> <p>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 situations where the customer has had to call multiple times to get a resolution (a situation which in fact brings cost per call down, although being 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.</p>
Agent occupancy rate	<p>The agent occupancy rate is calculated as the proportion of time in a given period that is 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 as though the agent is constantly active, but which is actually negative for both business and customer.</p>
Call throughput and abandonment rates	<p>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.</p>

Metric	Comments
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 analysis of call recordings in cases of high transfers should identify the issue.
Revenue per call / promise to pay	As many contact centres are now profit centres, understanding the effectiveness of the sales or debt collection efforts is vital to judging the success of the contact centre itself.
Staff attrition rates	A well-publicized 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 excessive recruitment and training costs, 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 by 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.

Metric	Comments
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 call resolution	Improving first call 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. There is more detail and the use and effectiveness of first call resolution methods later in this chapter.

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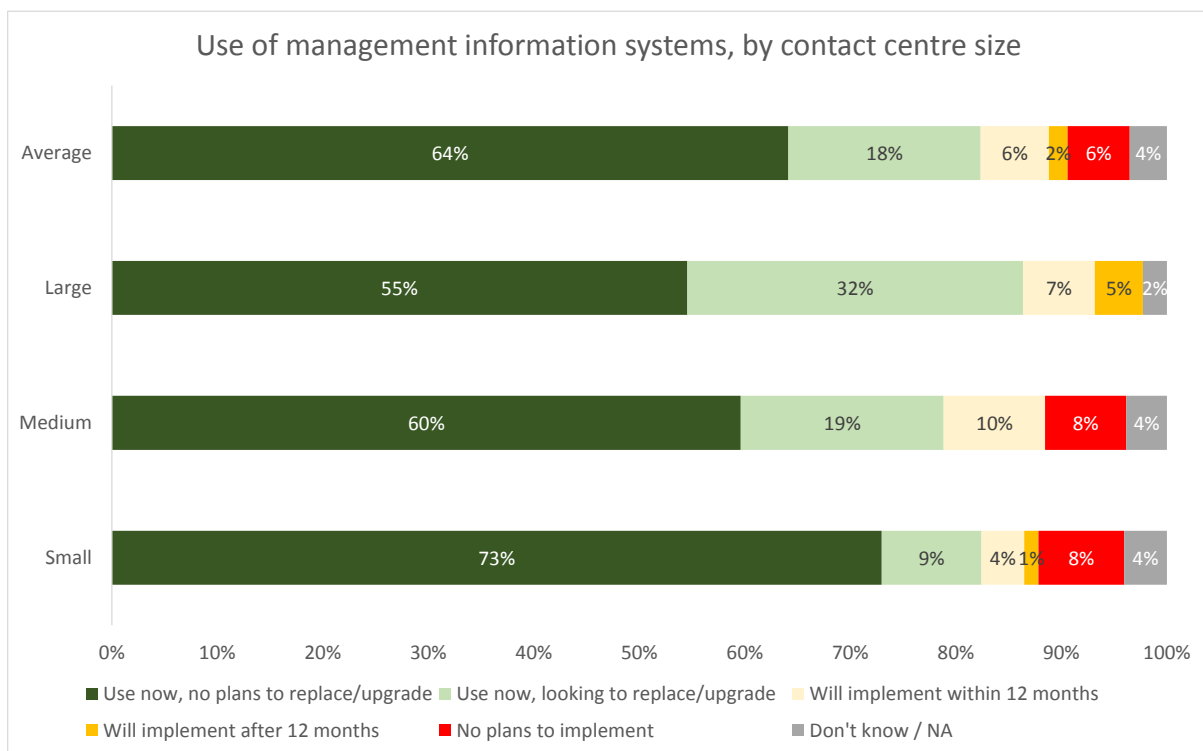


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Management information systems are the contact centre management's eyes and ears, providing them with the tools and information to judge the effectiveness and efficiency the operation. The results of its reporting capabilities may be output to wallboards, desktop displays (at management, supervisor and agent levels as appropriate), batch reporting and feed into real-time scheduling and forecasting functionality.

It is noticeable that of the medium & large respondents, a very considerable proportion are actively looking to upgrade or replace their current MIS, suggesting that in many cases, it is not giving management what they need in terms of actionable information.

Figure 55: Use of management information systems, by contact centre size

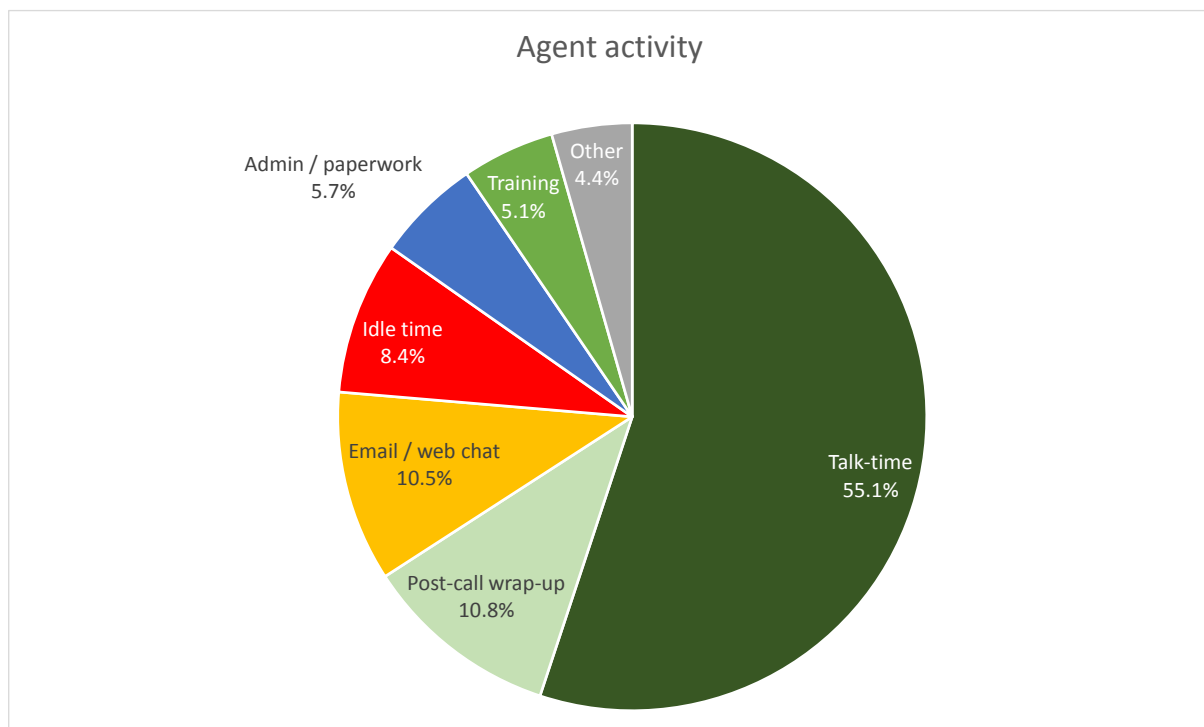


AGENT ACTIVITY

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

- **Talk 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
- **Email / web chat:** text-based communication with customers
- **Training:** whether desk-based or lecture-type
- **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:** time spent not taking calls or doing other work, usually waiting for the next call
- **Other:** anything not covered by the previous activities.

Figure 56: Agent activity



Talk time remains rise slightly to over 55% this year, with post-call wrap-up declining a little from 12.7% to 10.8%, and idle time from 9.6% to 8.4%.

Taking into account email and web chat handling time as well, the overall agent/customer communication time is now around two-thirds.

Greater depth of analysis, including historical changes in talk time, as well as segmentations of agent activity by vertical market, contact centre size and type of activity are available in the ["UK Contact Centre HR and Operational Benchmarking \(2015\)"](#) report, available from late October 2015.

The identification of idle time is one thing: being able to recover unproductive time in the agent's daily routine and use this otherwise-lost capacity is quite another. A workforce management solution that has intraday capabilities can recover these small pockets of fragmented agent idle time as the day goes on, aggregating this time into larger blocks that can be allocated to other productive activities such as training, coaching, back office tasks or administration, which goes a long way towards using the agent time that businesses necessarily pay for already, but which could not previously be accessed.

There is also a significant opportunity 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 30 seconds or more of agent time, which makes a big difference to call and queue lengths. This element is investigated in-depth in the 'Customer Identity Verification' section later in this report.

Post-call wrap-up time is also an area which could further be reduced in many contact centres. 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. There is further detail on how this can be achieved in the 'Desktop Automation & Analytics' chapter.



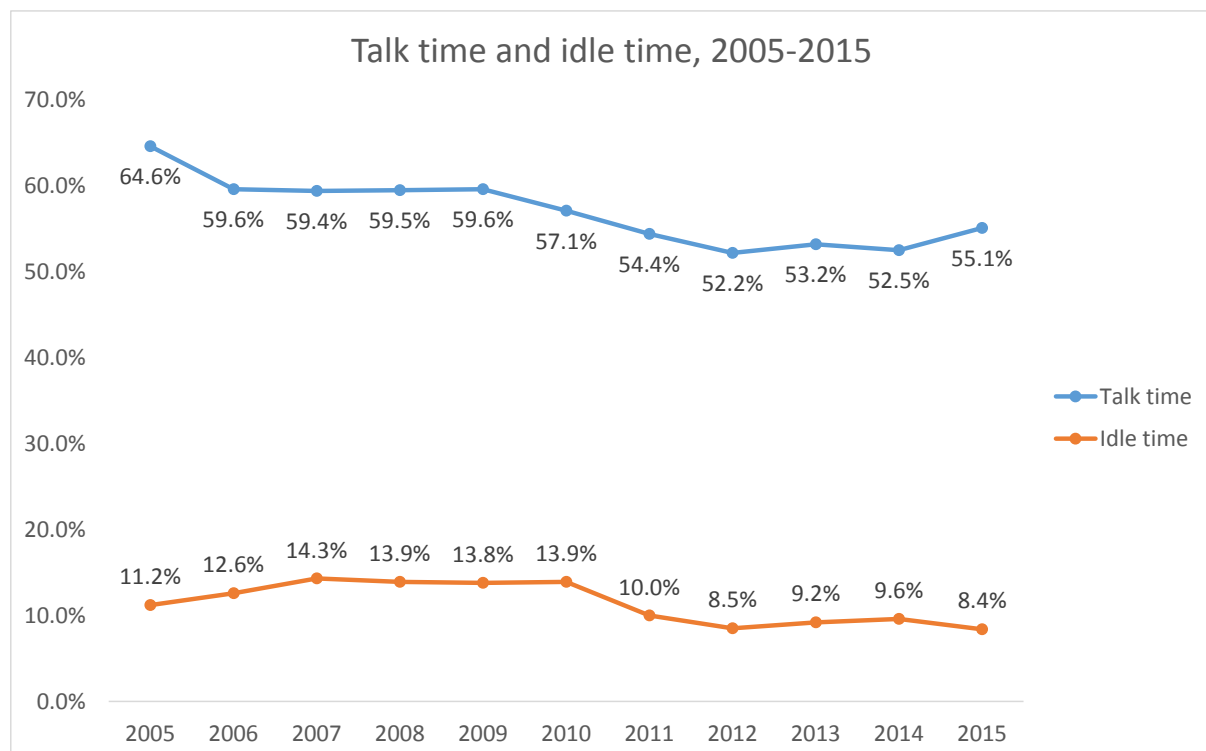
In Contact Centres, the days of gathering a lot of data/metrics and producing reports have passed and we are now entering a new era of Contact Centre Analytics. The focus is no longer on discretely reporting on different elements of the transaction, if you want to stay ahead of your competition it is essential to start to analyse the whole customer journey and react to changes as they happen. The focus must now shift away from 'I must be doing okay because we are on target for average speed of answer', or even 'our NPS score is fine so I don't need to change anything', to drilling further into the data, analysing it to identify how the next level of improvement can be achieved and how the 'Customer Lifetime Value' can be increased.

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 the low 50% and this year's reported slight increase will need to be viewed in the context of future surveys to see if it is meaningful. 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 almost 14%, there had been little significant decline seen in this metric within the past few years. Again, this year's drop to only 8.4% will need to be viewed as part of a longer-term picture to see if this is sustained.

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, keeping idle time much below 9%-10% will be extremely difficult.

Figure 57: Talk time and idle time, 2005-2015



PERFORMANCE METRICS

Figure 58: Selected performance metrics

Metric	Mean average	Median average
Average speed to answer	35.0 seconds	22.8 seconds
Call abandonment rate	5.4%	4.9%
First-call resolution rate	75%	80%
Call duration (service)	298 seconds (4m 58s)	274 seconds (4m 34s)
Call duration (sales)	394 seconds (6m 34s)	358 seconds (5m 58s)
Call transfer rate (excl. receptionists)	8.4%	5.2%
Cost of inbound call	£3.55	£2.95
Cost of outbound call	£3.30	£2.60

NB: as a few respondents may show extreme results, data are not distributed symmetrically. 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 is more appropriate.

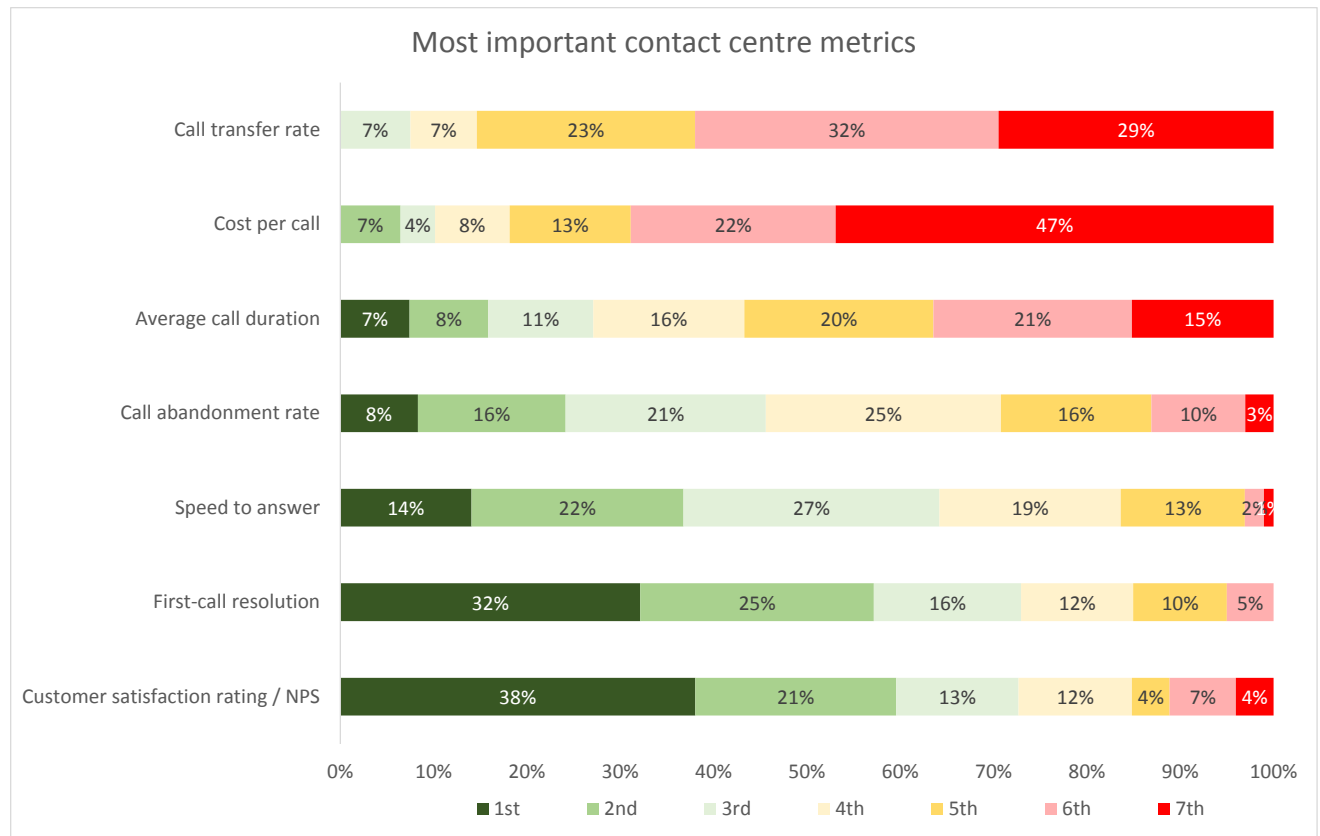
Detailed analysis of all of the above performance metrics, including historical changes and segmentations by vertical market, contact centre size and type of activity are available in the ["UK Contact Centre HR and Operational Benchmarking \(2015-16\)"](#) report, available in late October 2015.

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 the most important metrics, but respondents to recent reports consider them of minor importance compared to more customer-focused measurements.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one-third of respondents chose customer satisfaction rating as being the most important measurement that a contact centre tracks, and customer satisfaction is in large part driven by the other metrics shown here, and can be seen as a consequence of how these other elements perform.

First call resolution is almost exactly as important as customer satisfaction ratings, and speed to answer is fairly close behind: both of these metrics are of huge importance to customer satisfaction (or the lack of it), and handling more calls effectively first-time is key to improving customer satisfaction and reducing repeat calls, which will impact positively upon queue lengths.

Figure 59: Most important contact centre metrics





STOP GUESSING AND START TRULY UNDERSTANDING YOUR CUSTOMERS

*You may think you're listening to your customers but in fact, you're missing half of what they're **actually** saying. Unplug your ears, and you could grow your customer base - and even get customers effectively working on your behalf.*

If you have a sustainable business, you'll surely agree that the most important aspect of it is your customers. But how best to keep existing ones and attract new ones?...You need to listen to them. Sure, you already do, but is all of what they are saying getting through?

To be more specific, do you know what your customers *really* think about your business, services, products or processes? Assembling proper plans to address these issues can have a 'snowballing' effect on your customer growth.

The term for this is measuring and analysing the 'voice of the customer' - also known as VoCA. VoCA is a process by which your customers' preferences and experiences are collected. It will enable your organisation to 1) Gather 2) Assemble 3) Analyse 4) Understand and 5) Act Upon a goldmine of data. When performed correctly, it will help you to improve sales and customer retention strategies way beyond what you might have thought possible.

So, it is imperative to understand that VoCA enables your company to truly understand the journey your customers undertake. Customers each interact in different ways, through different touch-points, with different members of staff, they buy different products and services, and have different experiences post-purchase, so it is vital that your business understands these paths within itself, in order for improvements to be made. VoCA takes a unified view of all of these customer journeys, rather than focusing on just one angle.

But we have a simple customer survey: what's wrong with that?

Wrong answer. To truly understand the voice of your customers, a simple customer satisfaction survey will not do the trick. Whether you like it or not, it is also essential to gain unsolicited feedback from social media or review sites, and to speak to teams at the coalface, who not only understand customers, but know better than anyone the daily interactions that they are having with them. So, don't forget to solicit internal opinion, as it can drive immense value to your business by helping define what is going on.

Our expertise

We thrive in helping organisations understand what their customers think of them, how to serve them better and how to increase profitability on every transaction.

We make contact centres (and businesses, for that part) smarter. We have created global and regional programmes for our customers and have the tools and personnel to help you obtain, distil and action rich data from your contact centre MI, structured surveys and verbatim dialogue through Speech Analytics.

Our Voice of the Customer solutions, along with our passion for excellence, will enable you to make business decisions faster, more intelligently and at a lower cost. So contact us today for a simple, yet robust, discussion on how to turn your customers into an army of marketers that will drive measurable customer growth and long-term customer loyalty.

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.



Metrics are just discrete indicators of performance, what is required is to make sure that what you are measuring sits within a framework that drives the Contact Centre to strive for continual improvement. Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) must be that framework, for most if not all organisations, this is what we are trying to maximise and grow. Start measuring CLV and this will drive you to analyse your Contact Centre transactions with the focus on making rapid, incremental improvements to the whole customer journey, some of which may fall outside of the Contact Centre.

THE ROLE OF FIRST-CONTACT RESOLUTION

For most businesses, there is no fixed agreement on what a successful contact centre looks like: 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. Contact centre 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. Often these contact centres exist on a virtual island away from the rest of the business, not just geographically, but logically as well. Although they belong to the business, and constantly receive insights about other parts of the operation, they may not have the ability to provide actionable insight either for their own benefit or for other departments.

Having said that, most of the contact centre world has moved on from the ruthless focus on call throughput and call duration that characterized 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 though, 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, 80% 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 54% stating it as being no.1: in effect, far more important than any other metric. (The earlier section of this report on 'Customer Experience Measurement & Improvement' gives 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 simple 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, but if the business had been handling live calls that were more suited to self-service or avoidable through better marketing communications, getting rid of these 'easy' calls entirely will make the FCR rate decline. If many calls are about the same issue, and are answered quickly and accurately, it 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 the reasons for these unnecessary calls, rather than just focusing upon a single metric, as 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 rate (FCR) in 2012 seems to have been more of a statistical blip than a fundamental change, with the mean average rising back in 2014 to a more typical 78%. However, the drop to 75% this year may yet signal a structural change in this statistic.

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.

The exodus of 'easy' work to self-service channels may not be quite balanced by improvements in knowledge sharing and other agent support processes that would mean stable first call resolution rates. Future years' research will cast more light on this.

Figure 60: Changes in first-call resolution rate (2003 - 2015)

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%
2015	75%

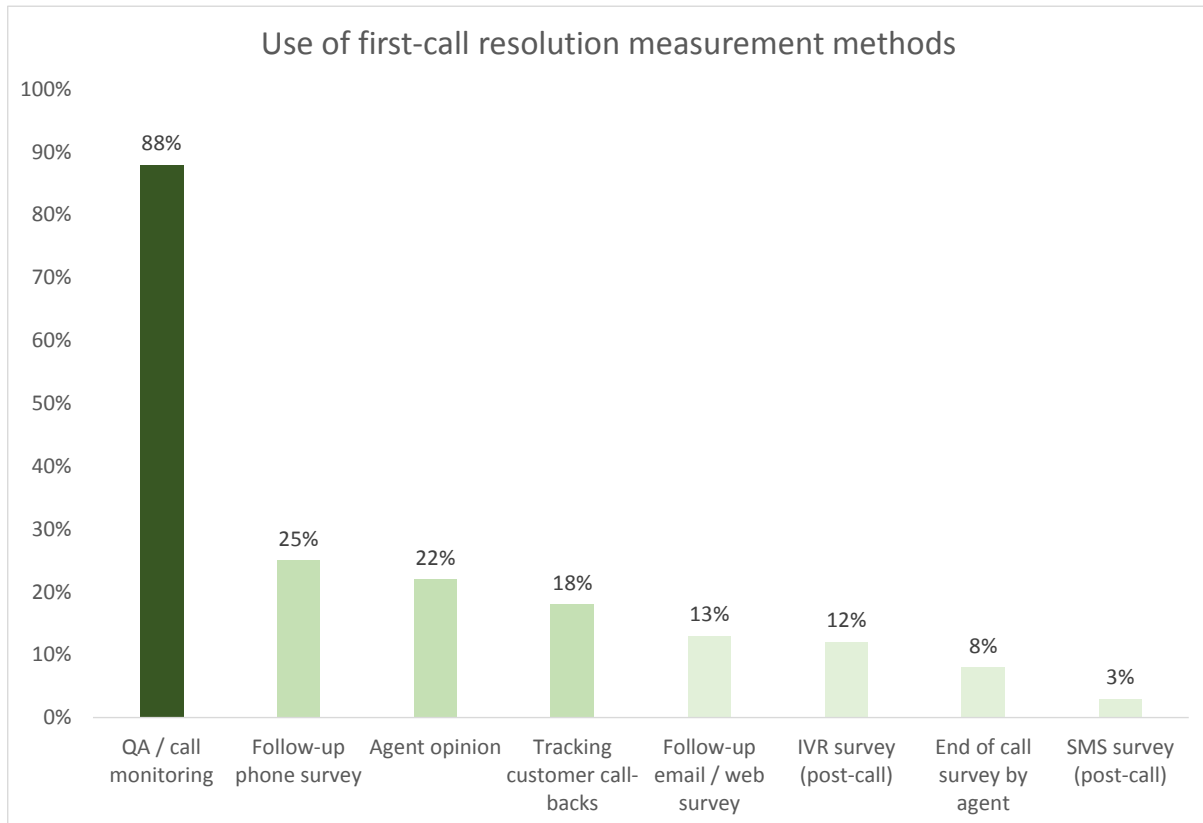
The first-contact resolution rate is an important metric to study, being concerned both with the customers' experience as well as avoiding unnecessary calls. However, it is very difficult to measure effectively, with no single best practice method of getting definitive statistics that are directly comparable to the rest of the industry. This difficulty is shown by the fact that five or six years ago, perhaps half of contact centres responding to this survey did not collect FCR performance at all (this year's non-responding figure is only 20%, which is an ongoing improvement).

Of those that do, there are various ways to measure, or at least closely 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 88% of respondents. Post-call methods of trying to gather first-call resolution rates are much less widely used.

Figure 61: Use of first-call resolution measurement methods



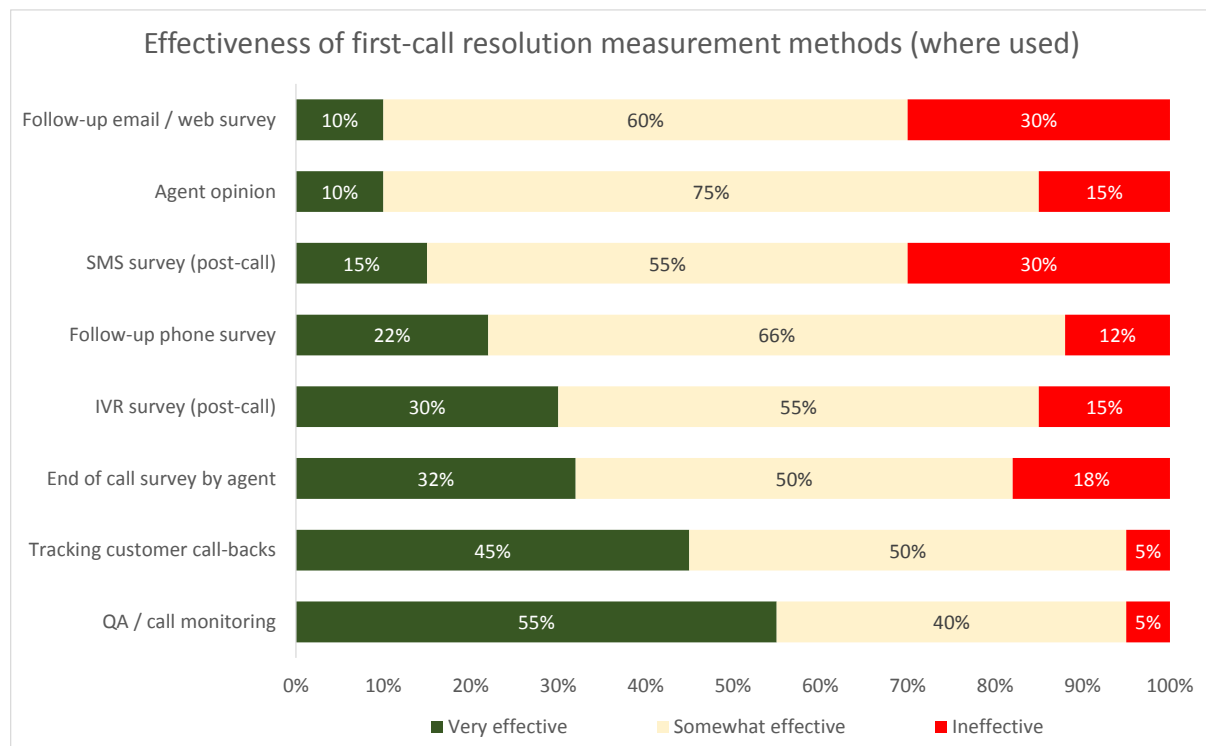
However, even if FCR can be measured successfully and accurately, this figure is still not necessarily actionable: we do not always know why some calls are not resolved first-time. Without a greater level of insight, contact centre managers may not be addressing the real issues that are impacting on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

It is worth noting that the majority of contact centres who 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. Most complaints received by a contact centre are about the failings of the wider business (80% this year), 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 55% of respondents that use this, with only 5% viewing it negatively. Tracking customer callbacks, and carrying out agent end of call surveys are also generally thought well of.

Follow-up email and web surveys, as well as SMS, are thought less useful by respondents in general.

Figure 62: Effectiveness of first-call resolution measurement methods (where used)



If you buy into the idea that Customer Lifetime Value should be what you strive to improve, then how do you start measuring it and, more importantly, how do you start to improve it? It is challenging, which is why relatively few

organisations have embarked on this journey, but the secret is to face up to the challenge and find a partner that can help you navigate the landscape before your competition. The good news is there are lots of new tools and approaches that are being deployed to help you analyse your customer interactions, identifying area for improvement which include: Intraday Analytics that identify how to make your agents more effective and motivated; Speech Analytics that, provided as a service, can be used as a continual improvement tool; social media interaction tools that identify and enable you to react to issues quickly before they snowball; and 360 degree feedback analysis that can, in near real-time, enable the business to make changes that can have a profound impact on customer service.

VIRTUAL CONTACT CENTRES

Although many contact centres still operate in the same way in which most were originally set-up - a single, centralised site - for many years there have been increasing commercial pressures and technical opportunities allowing businesses 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 economies 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 as a result of self-service take-up
- 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 for an hour or two, 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 due to market saturation and a shrinking labour pool.

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.

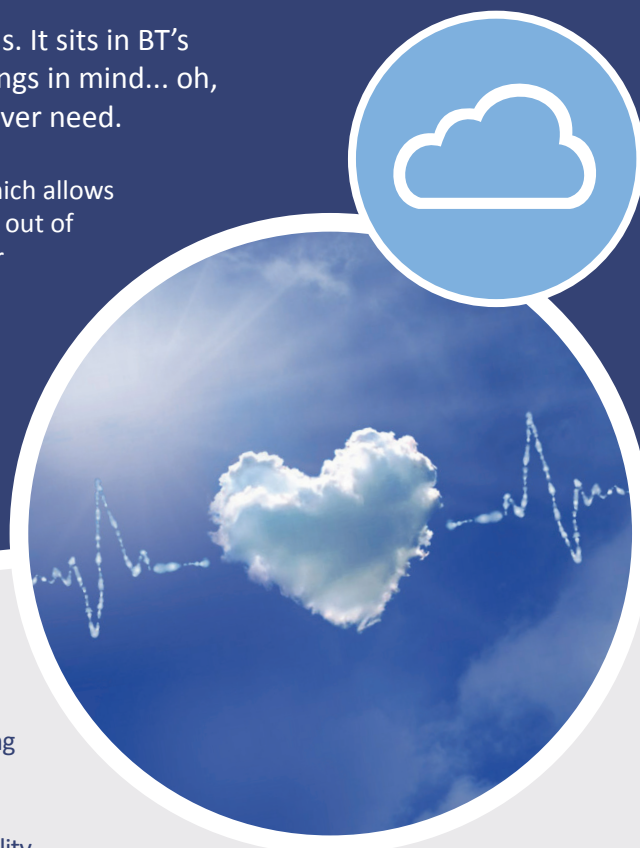
The application of technological abilities to commercial issues created the virtual contact centre which, although located in multiple sites, can still be run as a single logical entity. The virtual contact centre consists of many operations (including homeworkers or satellite offices) which are linked together so as to be viewed and managed as a single site, allowing significant economies of scale and improvements in performance to take place, but with fewer of the attendant problems around environment, morale and attrition that plague many very large operations.

Pulse operates on a one solution, one licence, one price basis. It sits in BT's core network and has been designed with actual human beings in mind... oh, and it also has all the functionality your contact centre will ever need.

We give you real-time control via a secure, easy to use dashboard which allows you to grasp ownership of your call centre. With hundreds of reports out of the box and the support of Performance Telecom's experts whenever required you have no third party fees or delays.

Quarterly feature updates mean we add ground breaking features to operational stability.

Quite simply, Pulse is the most secure, most reliable and most flexible hosted call centre solution on the UK market today.



- ✦ Multi-Channel Solution
- ✦ Scalable Pricing
- ✦ Secure & Resilient in the BT Cloud
- ✦ 100% Browser-Based
- ✦ PCI Compliant Call Recording
- ✦ Advanced IVR and Queuing
- ✦ Single or Multi-Site Availability
- ✦ Customisable Dashboards & Reports



Campaigns

Set up inbound, outbound or blended campaigns in minutes. Scale up when you need extra agents or scale back when there's less demand. You can even update agent scripts on the fly.



IVR, Queues and Reporting

Intuitive visual IVR and queue builder that allows you to set-up and modify IVR templates, messages and call flows in real-time – the drag and drop report builder is awesome too.



Quick & Easy Setup

Our solution is quick and easy to implement thanks to its Cloud nature and our friendly and intuitive user interface. In the time it takes to arrange a demonstration of a traditional on premise solution, we could have already delivered your first calls.



Outstanding Reliability

Pulse is plugged into the BT internet backbone, and peered with virtually all other service providers. Diverse platform instances across multiple datacentres deliver high availability with geo-resilience, no single point of failure and automatic failover.



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, insurance, telecoms and utilities sectors
- Rapid contact centre growth in certain geographical hotspots has caused agent recruitment issues. This has meant that businesses have to consider 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 cloud and IP telephony, have meant that the virtual contact centre is now much more easy to realise at an affordable cost with reduced upfront investment required
- 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, meaning that a large virtual operation made up of several smaller sites could benefit from this.

Treating multiple contact centres as a virtual contact centre allows great efficiencies to 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 deeper.

Figure 63: 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 through a cloud-based hosted solution. 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 now featuring in many businesses' decisions.

Respondents from the finance and outsourcing sector are most likely to have multiple UK operations, with the public sector the least.

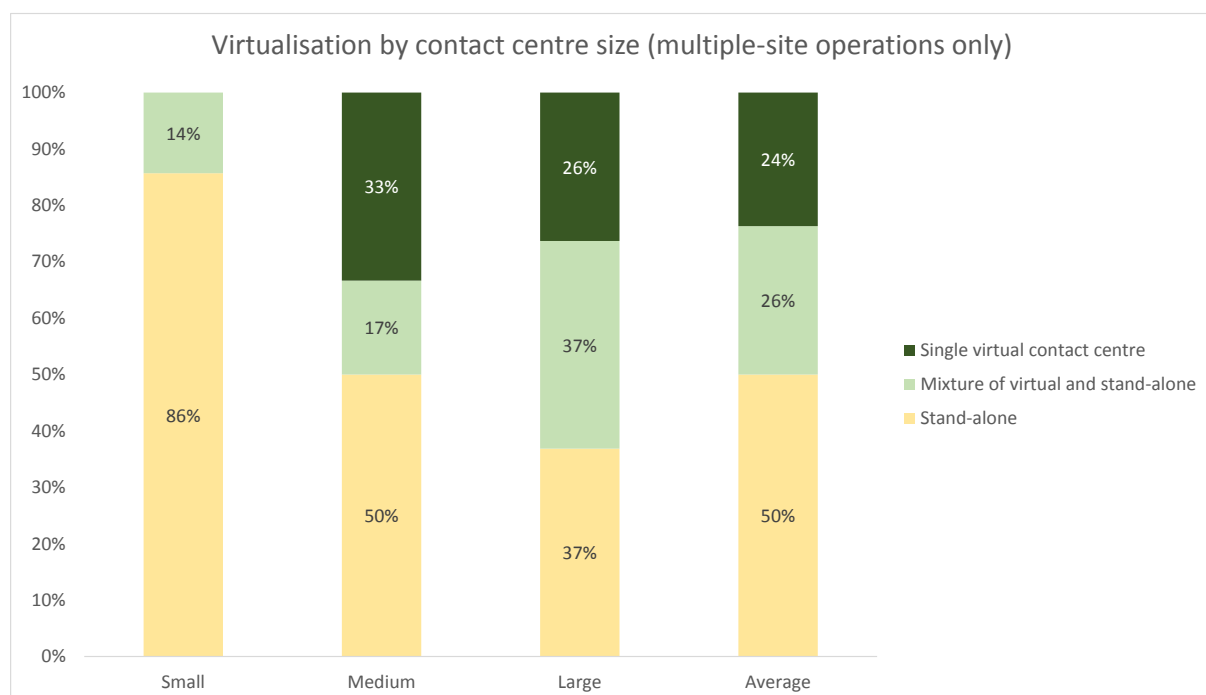
Figure 64: Multiple-site operations by vertical market

Vertical market	% respondents with more than one UK contact centre
Finance	67%
Outsourcing	50%
Services	47%
TMT	33%
Retail & Distribution	27%
Insurance	25%
Manufacturing	25%
Housing	20%
Transport & Travel	20%
Utilities	20%
Public Sector	9%
Average	33%

While 33% 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, only 24% of multi-site contact centres act as part of a full virtual contact centre operation, with a further 26% 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).

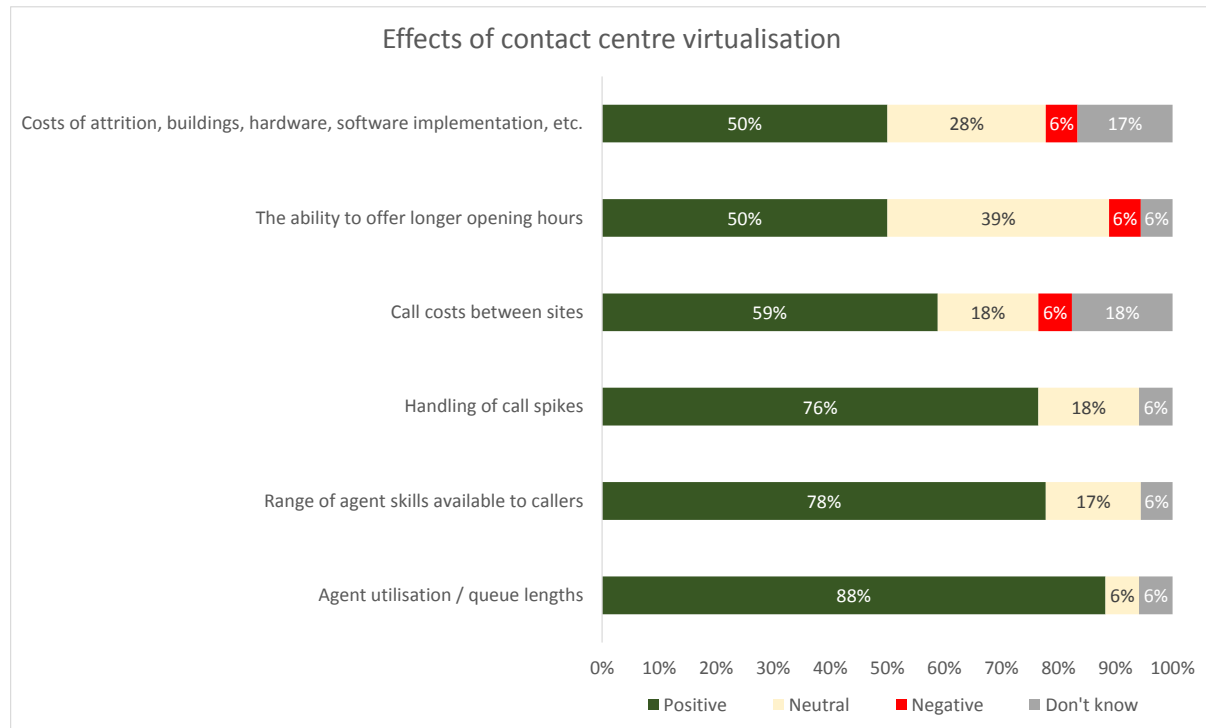
Looking at the uptake of virtualisation by contact centre size, the larger operations have been much more likely to put enabling technology in place to gain further from their existing economies of scale, although with a substantial proportion of respondents showing a mix of virtual and standalone operations,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

Figure 65: Virtualisation by contact centre size (multiple-site operations only)



Respondents with virtual contact centres have generally been 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 reduced wait times were particularly mentioned, although all of the potential virtual contact centre benefits mentioned were rated positively, showing a maturity and bedding-down of the technologies. However, there is some lack of unanimity amongst respondents about the net effect of costs caused by virtualising contact centres.

Figure 66: Effects of contact centre virtualisation

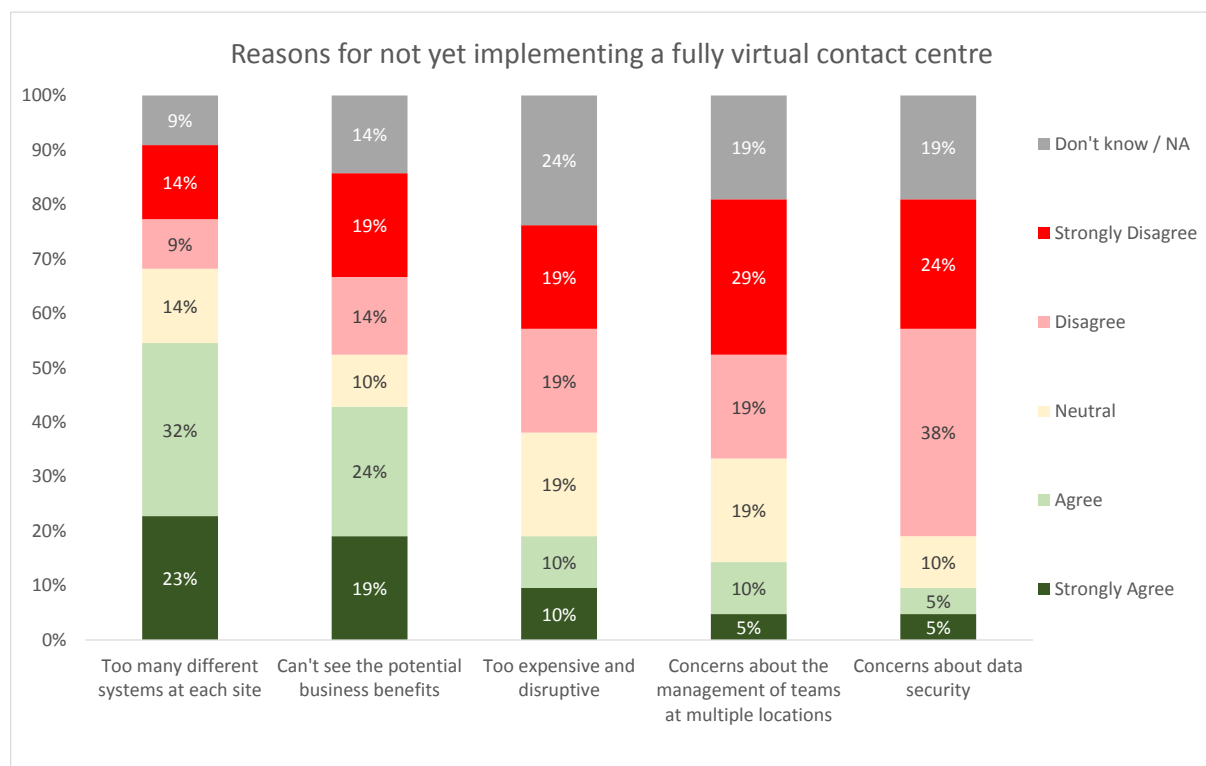


The issue of coping with call spikes has grown year-on-year, and virtual contact centres allow agents from other locations (including homeworkers) to make themselves available to deal with a different queue, being seamlessly moved back to their original work when the spike has flattened or the length 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.

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' – but this year's survey shows that the argument has not yet been won, with 43% of respondents doubting the business benefits.

55% 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 being less of an inhibitor than in previous surveys. Concerns over data security also featured for relatively few respondents this year.

Figure 67: Reasons for not yet implementing a fully virtual contact centre



Move your Contact Centre to the Cloud

Top Tips for Creating a Winning Business Case

1 Clearly Define your Primary Pain Points

Any technology decision – Cloud or traditional – needs measurable business objectives against which the Business Case can be accurately evaluated.

2 Highlight the Benefit of Real-Time Control

One of the most unique and least understood benefits of Cloud Contact Centre Applications is the ability for Contact Centre staff to control the technology directly via a web browser (accessible from any device).

Direct control saves time and money – and means businesses can scale their operations in real-time to cope with unexpected peaks in demand or a Disaster Recovery situation.

3 Highlight the Commercial Benefits of a 100% Opex Technology Spend

Businesses should only pay for technology when they use it, and Cloud's 100% usage-based OPEX pricing model makes this a reality, removing the commercial risk associated with new business ventures.

4 Access Disaster Recovery at No Additional Cost

Real-time system control means that all Cloud Contact Centre customers have a free in-built Disaster Recovery solution which can be activated from any office or mobile location.

5 Emphasise the Importance of Rapid Technology Innovation

Another unheralded benefit of Cloud software is its ability to deliver continued innovation. Whilst traditional on-premise solutions can go months or years without upgrades, Public Cloud Solutions include a regular stream of technological innovation.



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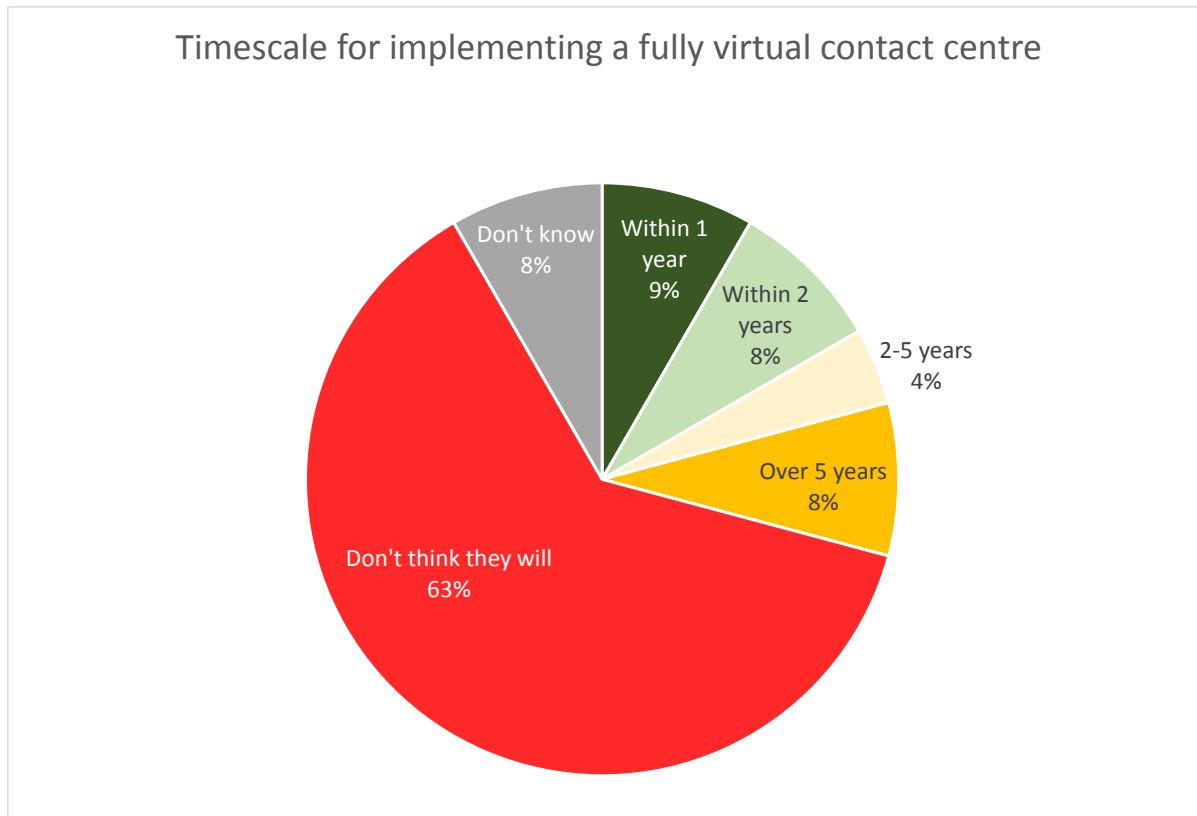
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...Unlocking Aspiration

The widespread feeling that the business benefits of virtualisation are still debatable - despite the strong benefits experienced by the majority of those who have done so – is further shown in the following chart, where 63% of multiple-site respondents who have not yet fully virtualised do not believe that they will ever do so. This is perhaps an overly negative view bearing in mind the strides that open, scalable systems have taken in recent years, but shows that concerns over the benefits and risks of joining operations together are still very real for some contact centres.

Figure 68: Timescale for implementing a fully virtual contact centre



THE ENTERPRISE AS THE CONTACT CENTRE

For many years, the larger 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 contact centre and cloud-based solutions can break down the boundaries between the contact centre and the 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 telephony has come 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 and 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.

Knowledge workers / experts form part of the overall customer handling resource pool in 21% of respondents' operations, especially in the insurance, finance and services sectors.

12% of respondents state that employees within branches or stores handle a significant number of customer calls, with the finance, insurance, retail and manufacturing sectors most likely to do this (respondents from the latter vertical market are probably referring to their satellite offices).

18% of this year's respondents state that field-based workers handle customer calls, with those in the insurance and retail & distribution having the greatest proportion of these.

This suggests that the wider enterprise is not yet quite integrated into the contact centre, but the demand for these services is certainly taking it that way.

Figure 69: Non-contact centre staff handling substantial numbers of calls

Type of staff	% respondents using non-contact centre staff to handle calls
Branch- or store-based staff	12%
Field-based employees	18%
Knowledge workers / experts based elsewhere in the organisation	21%

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.

HOMWORKING

Homeworking and homeshoring promise contact centres significant benefits, but is perhaps not for every agent or 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 often unpopular, yet businesses are looking at ways to cut costs
- increased flexibility in working hours means rapid response and reduced idle time
- increasing costs of recruiting and retaining staff allow agents outside the commutable distance to be employed at times that suit them and the business.

 Another advantage of Homeworking is that there are no geographical limitations; meaning multilingual support is therefore easier to realise. The growing diversity of the countries' population, and to meet the various needs of existing and globally-expanding markets to initiate and establish international operations, are the reason why companies are keen to add multilingual support to their services.

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 taking calls. For an industry facing cyclical difficulties in recruitment of employees who themselves are having to become more highly skilled and deal with more complex issues year-on-year, this opportunity to deepen the labour pool without widespread pay increases 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.

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.



‘Inspired by agents,
built for agents’ for the
ultimate Customer Experience

VANAD Aloha

Your benefits

- In-depth operational Contact Center knowledge
- Working From Anywhere
- Omni-Channel support (Inbound/Outbound, E-mail, Chat, WhatsApp, Webchat, Social)
- ‘Best of breed’; seamless integration
- Easy to use
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VANAD Aloha is developed with the ultimate Customer Experience as its stepping stone. With the agent and customer in mind, VANAD Aloha delivers an ultimate Customer Journey across all touch points, channels and interactions. Resulting in a differentiated Customer Journey that delivers true Customer Engagement and maximized revenue.

VANAD Aloha is the challenger in Omni-Channel Customer Experience & Contact Center Solutions. It is a true cloud based solution with seamless integration beyond the Customer Contact Center.

Understanding the value of your Contact Center Agents and the ongoing complexity of customer interactions, VANAD Aloha is the one of a kind solution in true Customer Engagement.

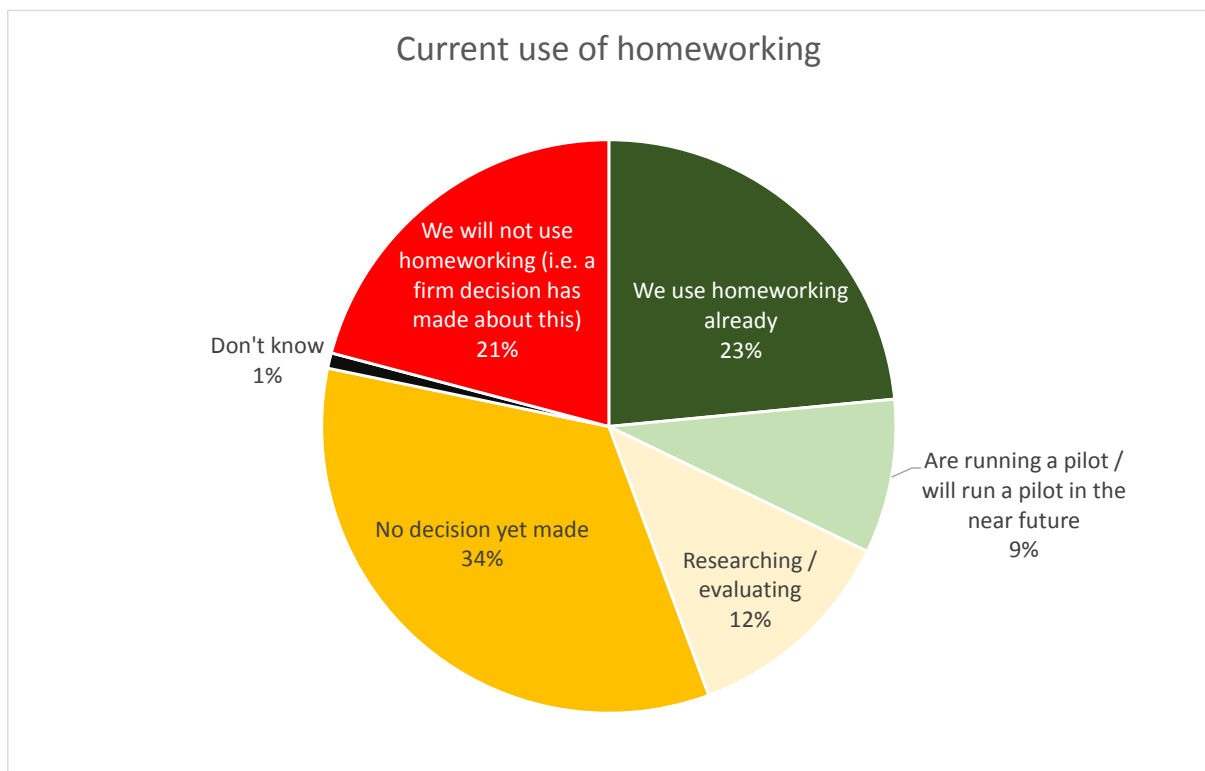
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CURRENT USE OF HOMEWORKING

39% of respondents are already using homeworking, with 12% running a pilot scheme or about to set one up.

17% of respondents have not acted either way on homeworking, although almost 1 in 5 state that they have made a firm decision that homeworking is not for them.

Figure 70: Current use of homeworking



At a vertical market level, outsourcers lead the way, with 44% of respondents using homeworking. Those in the TMT and Services sectors are also above average for homeworking use, including running pilot schemes. Respondents in the financial services sector are most likely to have said there has been a decision made not to use homeworking, as a result of heightened fears around security and fraud.

T-Mobile Working From Home

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Case study

Why?



Reduce costs



Improve customer & employee satisfaction



Enlarge target group of agents



Geographic independency



'From control to trust'

Results!

Value to Customer

10% higher customer satisfaction

Outperformed Brick & Mortar on Friendliness and Simplicity

Increased customer loyalty

Operational Excellence

21% cost reduction

Increased flexibility on workforce demand

Higher results on performance

Empowered Employees

20% higher employee satisfaction

18% decrease in Average Handling Time (AHT)

33% lower attrition

A customer relationship is only successful if it is strong in both technological and human development. We believe in the perfect combination of digital and human customer engagement. Especially when it comes to 'Working From Home'. Is your organization ready for this perfect combination?

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The proportion of contact centres using homeworkers has almost doubled since 2008, and the overall numbers of homeworking agents has increased by almost 300% since 2010.

This leads to the conclusion that the increase in homeworkers is due more to homeworking operations adding to the numbers of their homeworking agents, outpacing new users of homeworking.

Figure 71: Changes in use of homeworkers, 2008- 2015

Year	% respondents using homeworkers	Mean % of agents that are homeworkers industry-wide
2008	12%	-
2009	13%	-
2010	15%	1.9%
2011	18%	2.5%
2012	23%	3.6%
2013	22%	4.1%
2014	21%	4.6%
2015	23%	5.2%

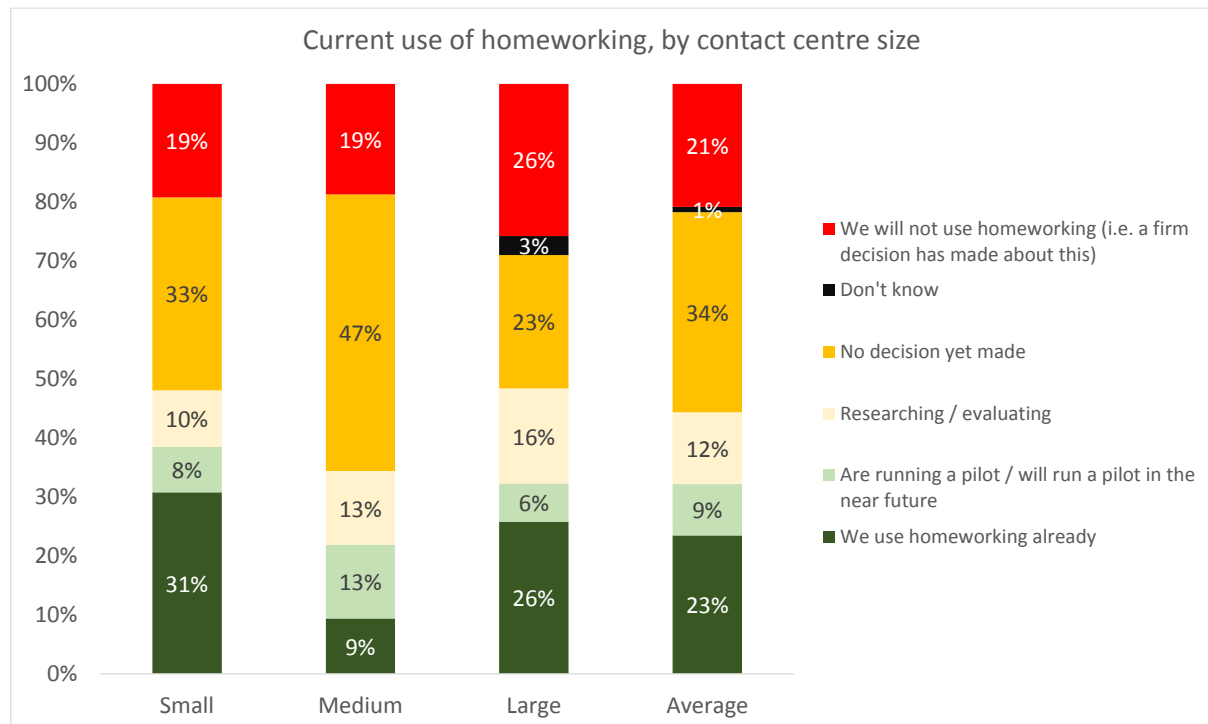
NB: calculation for "mean % agents that are homeworkers industry-wide" is taken from "% of respondents using homeworkers" multiplied by the mean % of agents that are homeworkers ONLY from these operations (i.e. 22% x 23% in 2015)

Respondents that use homeworking reported that a mean average of 22% of their agents were homeworkers (with a median of 11%, first quartile of 30% and third quartile of 5%).

An average of four-fifths of a homeworker's time is spent working at home, meaning that around one day a week is spent at their parent operation.

Unlike the US, where there is a continuing and growing trend that larger operations are more likely to use homeworkers than small operations, UK respondents from smaller operations are at least as likely as 200+ seat contact centres to be using some form of homeworking. While a significant number of medium-sized operations are trialling homeworking, there appears to be no real pattern to homeworking by size.

Figure 72: Current use of homeworking, by contact centre size

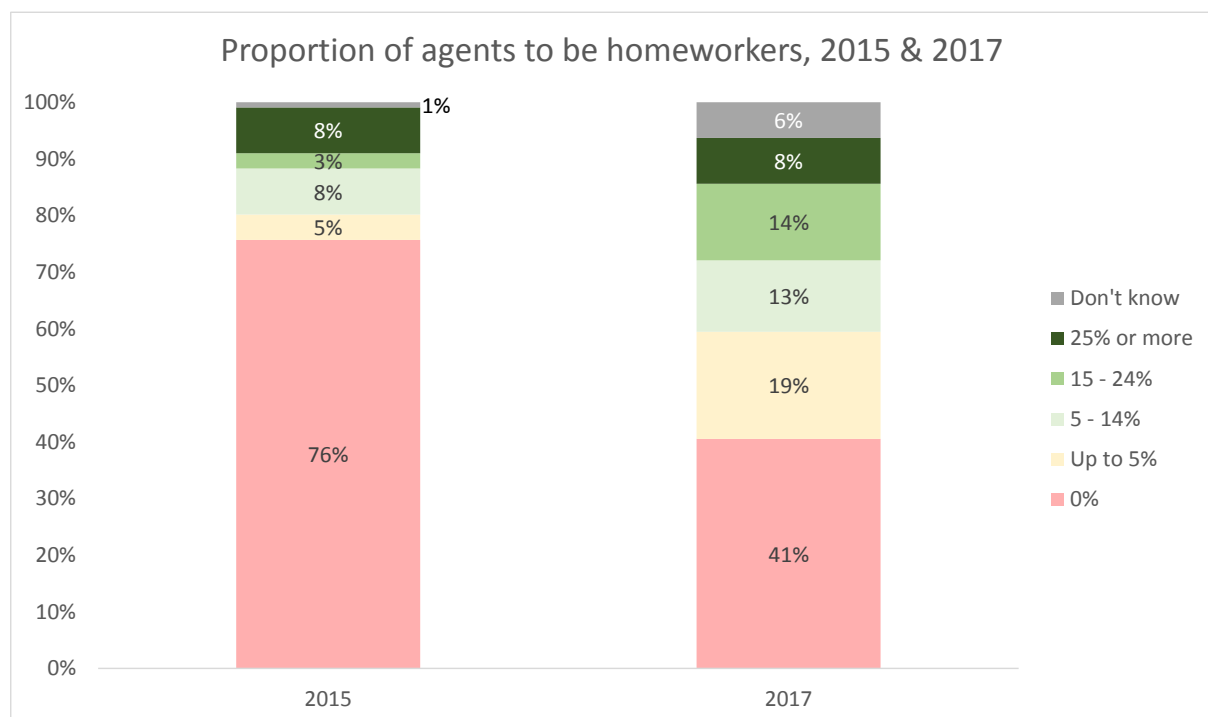


Respondents from outbound operations are as likely as inbound or mixed contact centres to use homeworkers, although they are far more likely (29% vs 12%) to have made a definite decision not to do so.

Although asking survey respondents to predict the future is a risky business - much of the time, organisations tend to be somewhat overenthusiastic, and underestimate how long is needed to achieve anything - it is interesting to see that the proportion of contact centres not using any homeworking is predicted to decline from 76% to 41% within the next two years.

Although we would be extremely surprised if this level of growth in homeworking materialized in reality, it is indicative that there is a broadly positive expectation around the future of homeworking, even amongst many of the contact centres that do not use it today. There is also a broad expectation amongst current users of homeworking that this will be expanded within their organisations.

Figure 73: Proportion of agents to be homeworkers, mid-2015 & mid-2017



DRIVERS & INHIBITORS FOR HOMEWORKING

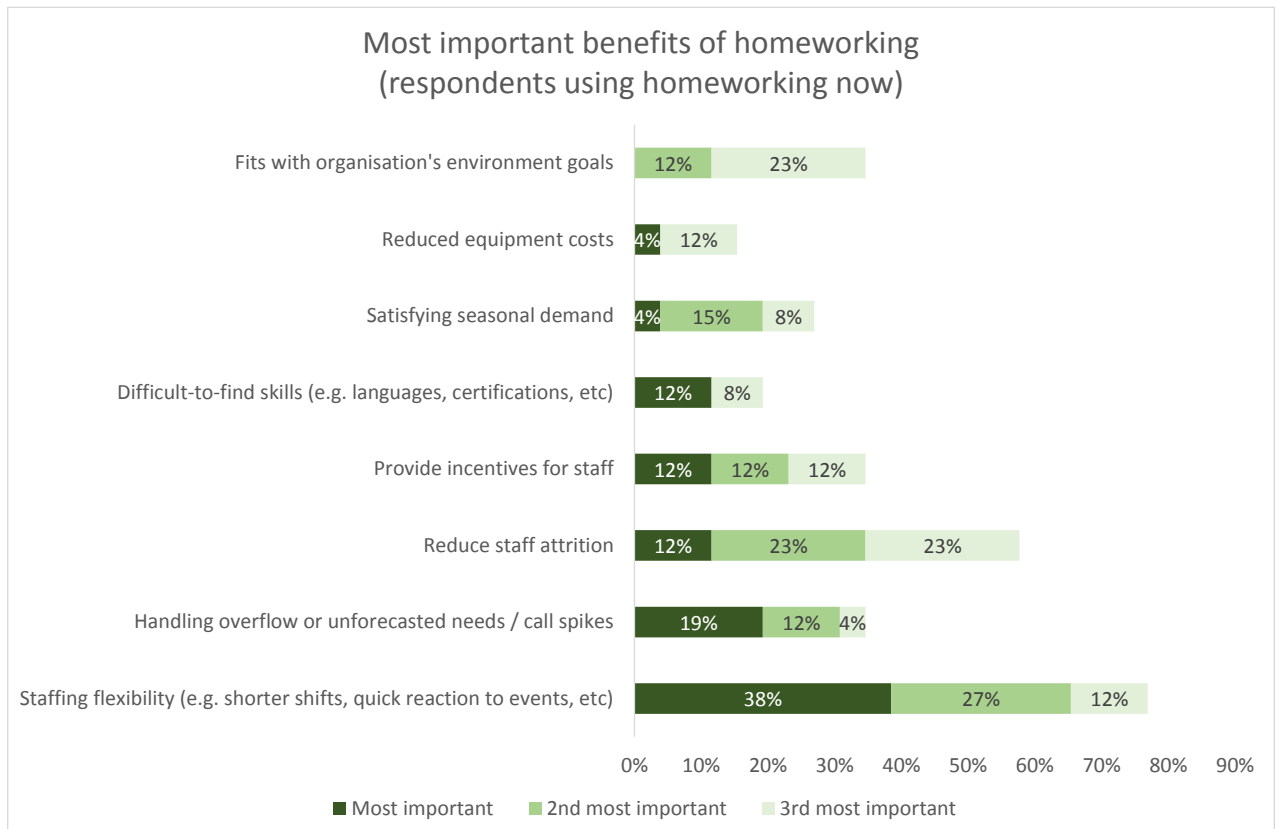
When considering the main benefits of homeworking - both expected and actual - side-by-side analysis was carried out to understand any differences between those who are considering using homeworking and those who have actual experience of doing so.

In both cases, the main benefits are reported to be around improved staffing flexibility and improved ability to handle overflow or unexpected volumes of traffic: in the same way that the virtualisation of multiple contact centre sites allows agents to be moved between virtual queues instantaneously, having a large pool of homeworkers to draw upon very quickly, as needed, can be a great advantage in handling call spikes.



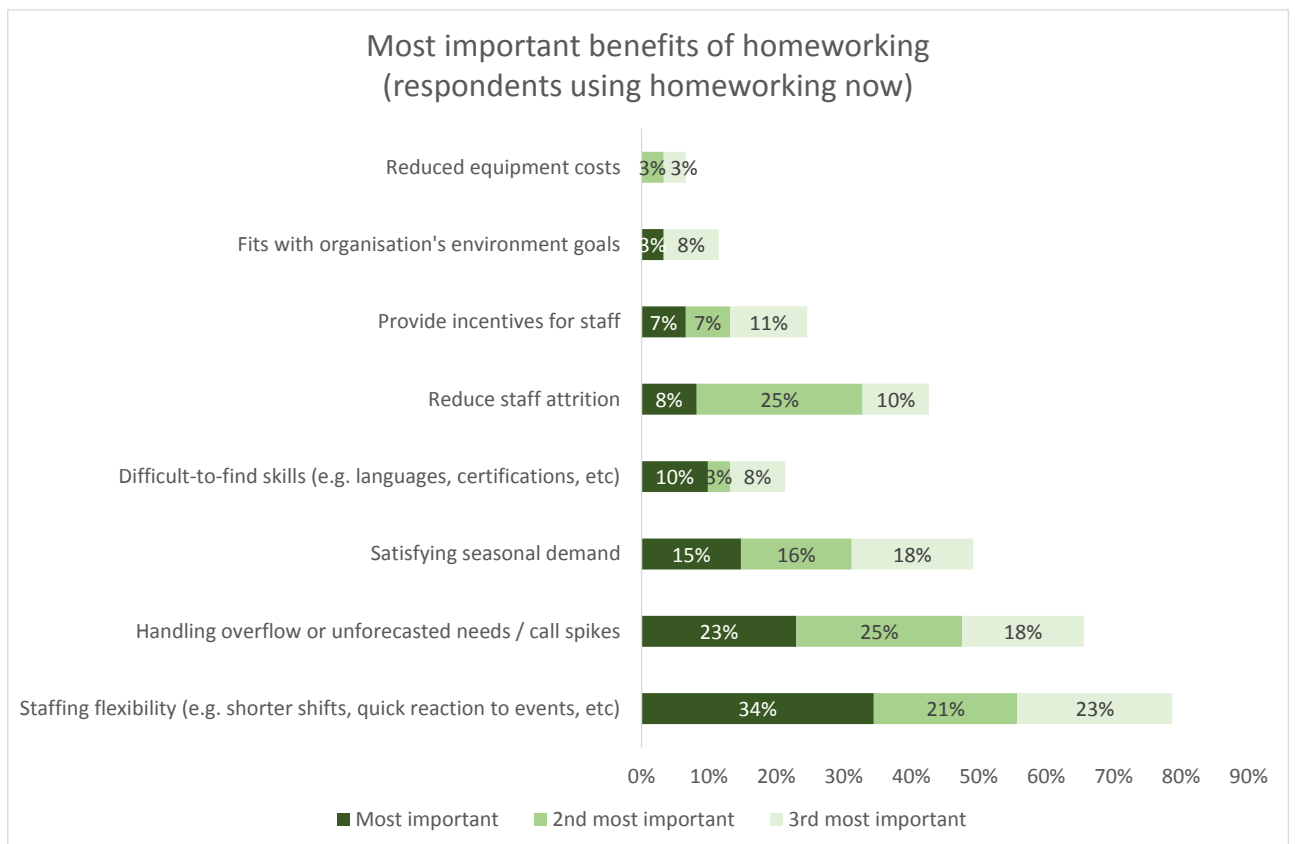
Homeworking allows employees to feel more involved with the company and brand, resulting in improved performance and therefore an increase in Customer Satisfaction, on average by 10%.

Figure 74: Most important benefits of homeworking, (respondents using homeworking now)



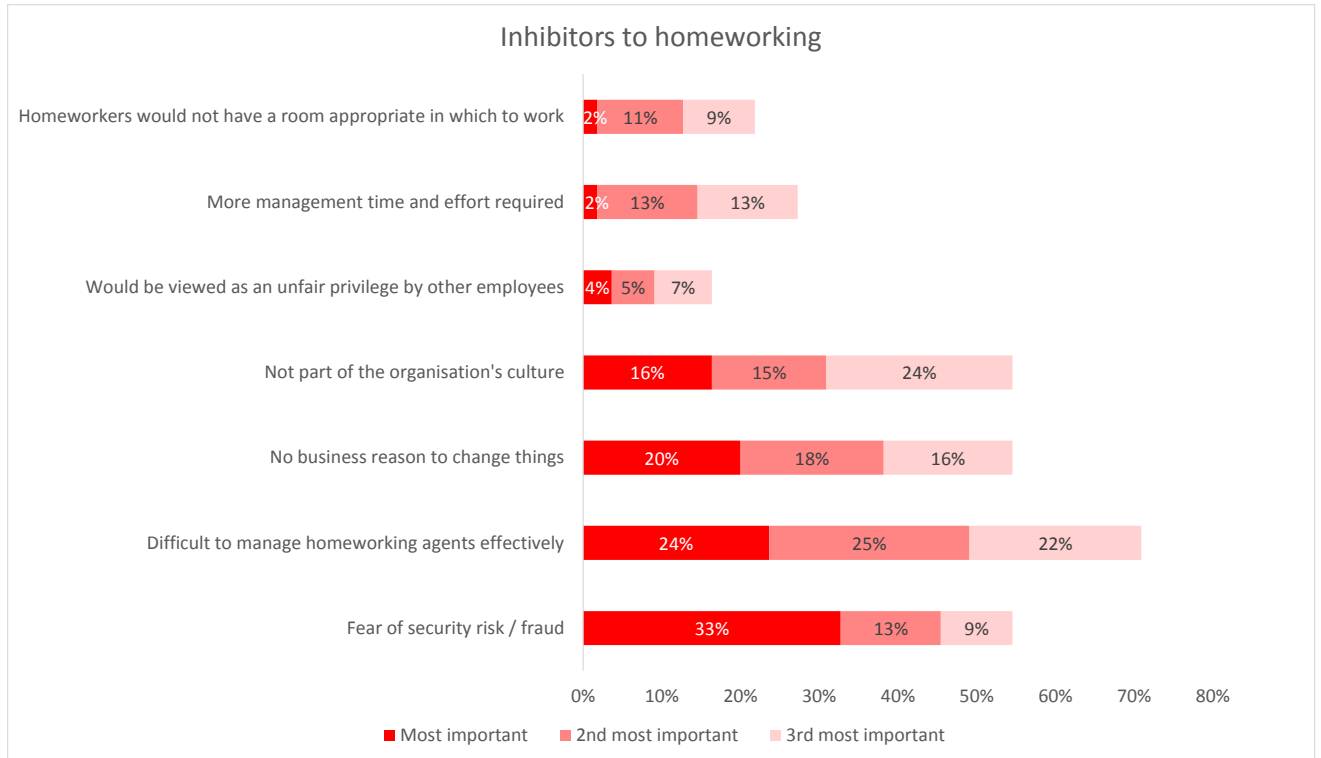
To some extent, homeworking is both expected and found to reduce agent attrition, as it takes away the stress, cost and time of the commute and enables the employee to work in less stressful, more personal surroundings. This allows the business to offer a more flexible working day to their employees, for example, a 4 or 5 hour shift in the middle of the day, allowing the employee to pick up and drop off their children at school, which may also coincide with the busiest period of the day for the organisation. In such cases, the employee is happy to work the hours that suit them, and the organisation bears less cost. Agents are far more likely to be able to work an hour or two in the evenings as well, allowing the contact centre opening hours to be longer.

Figure 75: Most important benefits of homeworking, (respondents not using homeworking now)



When looking at the inhibitors to homeworking, concerns over security and fraud are stated by 1 in 3 respondents to be the greatest hurdle, especially in the financial services sector, which is noticeably less enthusiastic in general about homeworking.

Figure 76: Inhibitors to homeworking



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 accessible to family members and visitors as well, risks are not just restricted to the homeworker.

The use of an automated mid-call or end-call 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.

There is also widespread concern that it would be difficult to manage homeworkers effectively from a remote location, which has always been an 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.

Employees have been shown to feel more socially involved with each other in a homeworking setting, thanks to built-in communication tools. The combination of technological and human development is key when considering implementing Homeworking in your organisation. Technology has dramatically helped organisations realise the potential benefit of implementing home working arrangements for their employees.

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) has to be re-addressed.

Non-homeworking respondents are far 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 - possibly 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.

The third-greatest inhibitor is that there is no need to change the status quo: these respondents do not believe that homeworking would help with any business issue that they face. There is also a considerable belief that homeworking would not fit into the organisational culture.

For some contact centre workers, it would be difficult to have a room away from the noise of the household, and this is a concern for some businesses. Obviously, it's important to consider working location on a case-by-case basis to assess the suitability of the agent for homeworking.

INTERACTION ROUTING

IP IN THE CONTACT CENTRE

Traditional contact centres operated 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.

There have been 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.



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Reporting

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. 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.

SIP - SESSION INITIATION PROTOCOL

Advances in standards such as the Session Initiation Protocol (RFC 3261) or SIP, 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?”.

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.

SIP will enable companies to use CTI-like functionality throughout IT infrastructures instead 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 allows CTI-like functionality to be used far more widely and effectively.

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 for which the CTI server was formerly responsible.

Standards-based SIP proxy servers are much 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.

IP PBXS

The mantra “evolution, not revolution” has been applied to the IP contact centre environment, with vendors encouraging contact centres to consider the option of moving at their own pace towards IP, and this is what has happened in recent years.

The movement from TDM to hybrid, and then to pure IP can certainly be seen over the years, with IP telephony infrastructure penetration at 80% of this year’s respondents.

Uptake is strong throughout all vertical markets, although the public sector seems to lag a little. There is demand to upgrade the telephony systems further, with 18% of the respondents looking to do so, an opinion particularly strong in the utilities, outsourcing, transport & travel and finance sectors.


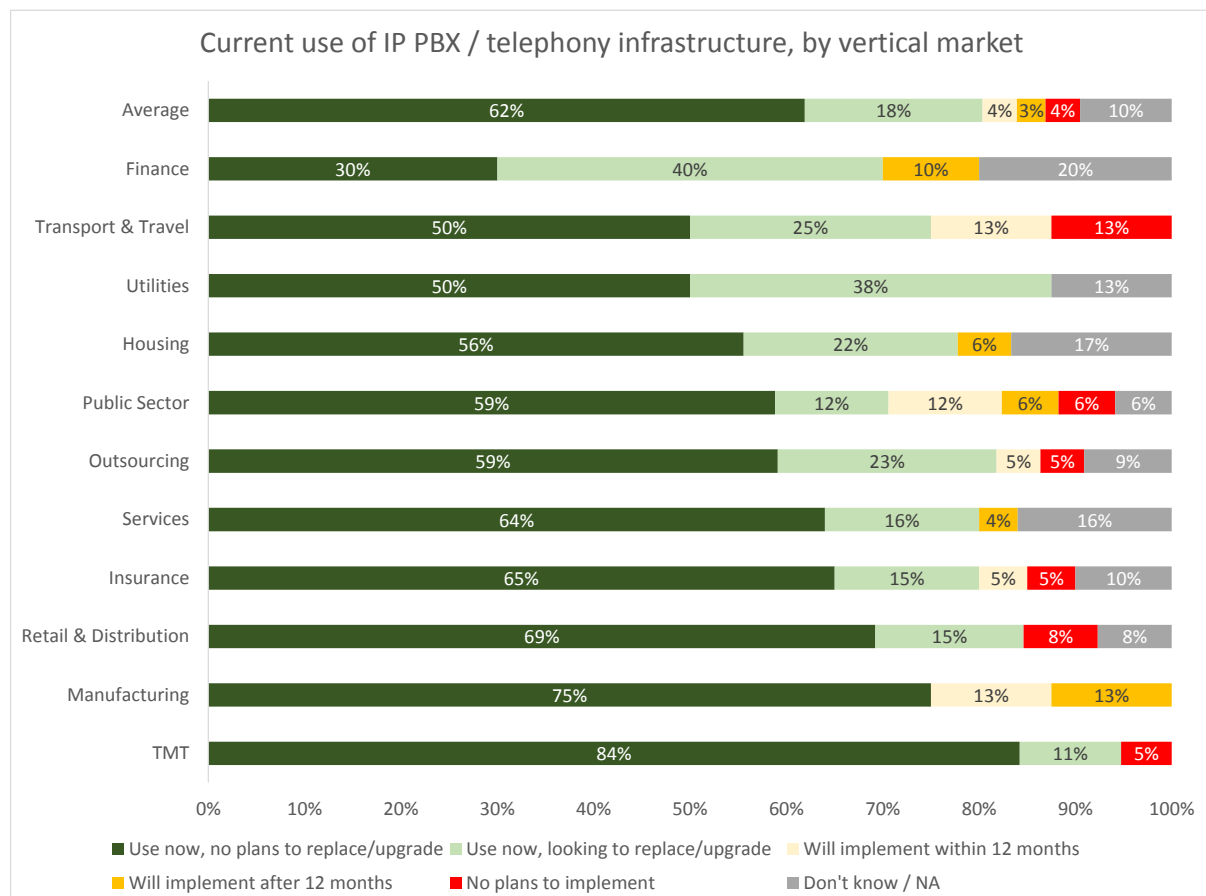
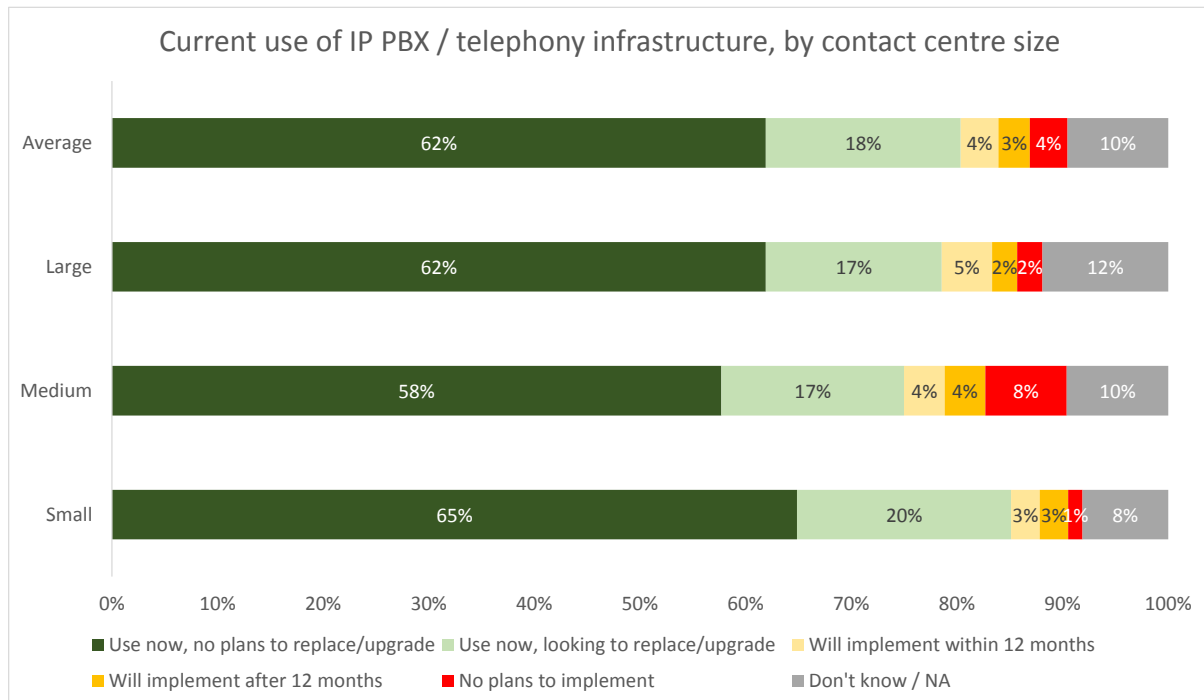
 Contact centres both large and small, in all sectors, benefit from the flexibility and scalability of the cloud. Having the ability to easily scale up and down provides the freedom to always have just enough agents. With the additional benefits of pay as you use and no upgrade, maintenance or additional software fees, this is particularly valuable for seasonal businesses such as transport & travel.

Figure 77: Current use of IP PBX / telephony infrastructure, by vertical market



Smaller contact centres were the early adopters of IP solutions, as to upgrade or replace equipment and networks is cheaper for them than for large operations. The past few years have seen a big jump in the proportion of larger contact centres indicating that they are using IP, although it is worth noticing that a very substantial proportion of IP users within all size bands are actively looking round to replace or upgrade this solution.

Figure 78: Current use of IP PBX / telephony infrastructure, by contact centre size



CALL ROUTING

30% of respondents identify the actual caller through one or more techniques, for example using DTMF tones to input account number, through an automated security process or through calling line identity (CLI) which displays the number that the customer is calling from, allowing a database lookup. This may be used for a screen pop, or to automatically route the customer to a specific department or office. (Some businesses may use CLI to identify a region or country and route appropriately without looking up who the customer is, and these are not included in this figure).

58% of respondents use this information or other sources (for example, identifying the language that the customer is using via speech recognition) in order to identify the skills that the call may require, and use this to route the call appropriately.

26% state that they access the customer's records and history in the CRM system, which will result in the agent being provided with a screen pop that should in theory have the customer's records and history pre-populated as the call is received.


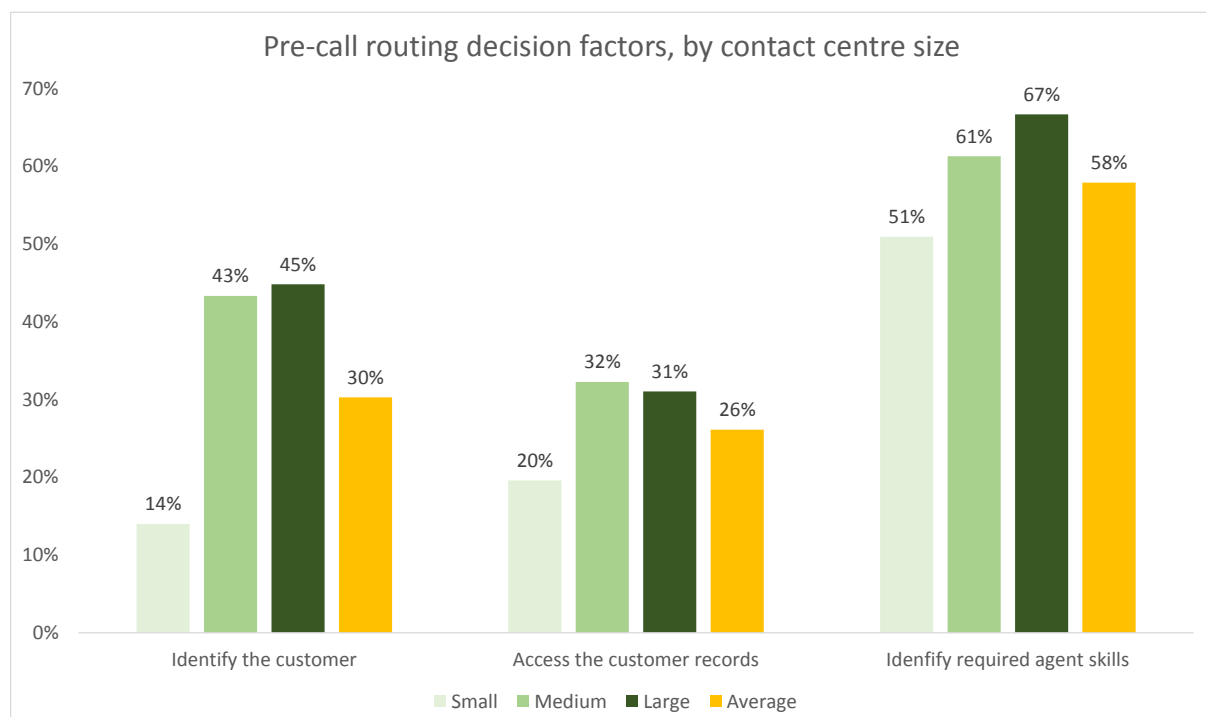
 Implementing a platform with Open API (Application Programming Interface) processes ensures easy integration to third party applications for greater agent productivity. Intelcom has found demand for fully integrated access to Salesforce.com and Microsoft Dynamics to be the most popular and has developed a standard integration for both of these CRM systems.

Figure 79: Pre-call routing decision factors, by contact centre size



Respondents in the finance, TMT and utilities sectors are most likely to identify the caller and access their records. These tend to be larger operations, with high levels of servicing.

Figure 80: Pre-call routing decision factors, by vertical market

Vertical market	Identify the customer	Access the customer records	Identify required agent skills
Finance	75%	50%	25%
Housing	22%	44%	78%
Insurance	18%	6%	78%
Manufacturing	33%	33%	67%
Outsourcing	44%	47%	71%
Public Sector	0%	17%	54%
Retail & Distribution	22%	11%	60%
Services	25%	13%	31%
TMT	64%	45%	50%
Transport & Travel	0%	0%	75%
Utilities	60%	40%	20%
Average	30%	26%	58%

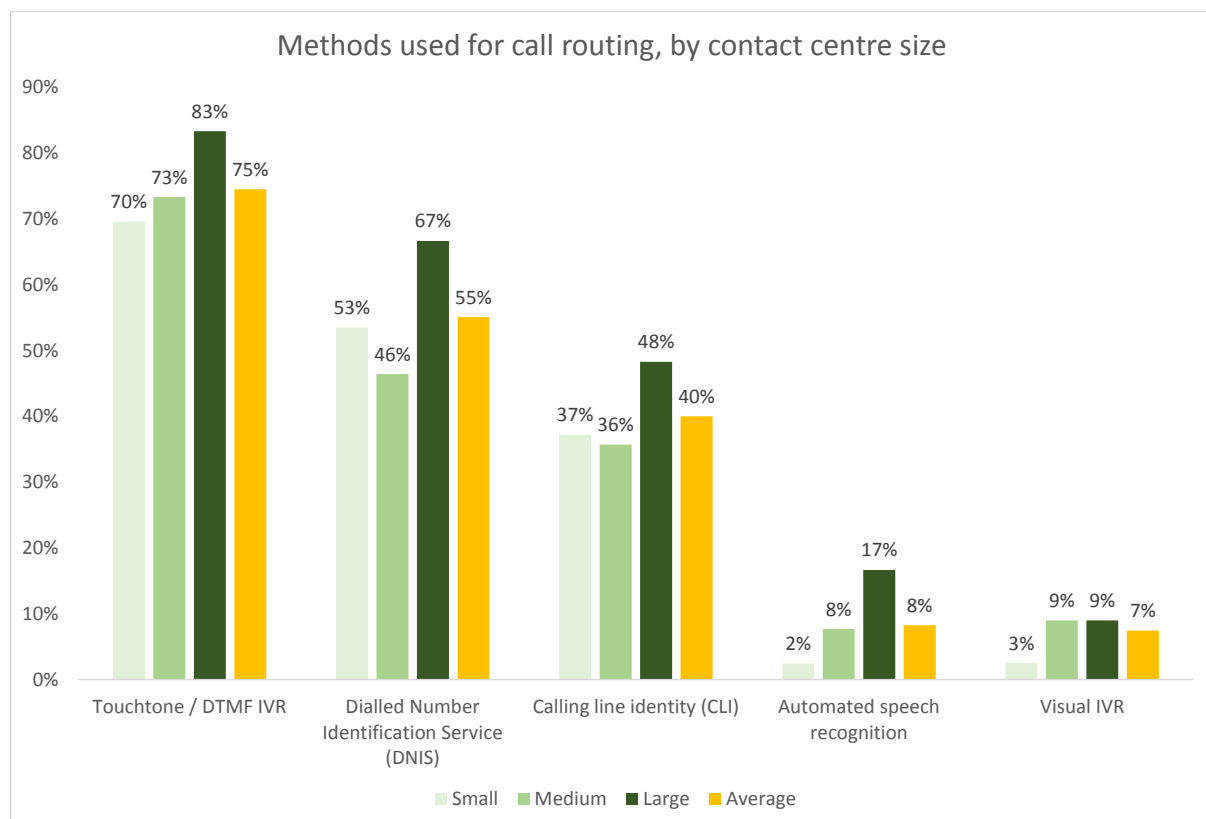
Those contact centres which use DTMF (touchtone) IVR or automated speech recognition (ASR) considerably more than average have traditionally been found in the telecoms, utilities and finance sectors: high-volume environments where a few seconds shaved from a call through the use of a screen pop, or a 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'.

In the past, less-automated or volume-based contact centres, such as public sector, and sales-focused operations, such as retail, have shown less of a demand for IVR call routing solutions. However, over the past few years, a substantial proportion of respondents from every sector have reported that they use DTMF IVR for call routing purposes, and automated speech recognition is used for routing calls in 17% of large respondents' operations.

70% of respondents in the sub-50 seat contact centres report that operate DTMF IVR use it for routing, demonstrating that this is no longer a technology just for operations with lots of budget and in-house IT support. More expensive speech recognition solutions are 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. CLI and DNIS are both very well used especially in larger contact centre operations.

This year for the first time, visual IVR has been offered as a survey option, although only a handful of contact centres report its use. Giving existing IVR functionality a visual interface simply means that the current IVR's path can be shown graphically on a website or smartphone, with callers touching the selection that they require without having to listen to all of the options. 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. The addition of new functionality and the ability to offer this consistently across multiple channels will move IVR to the next generation and provide a shot in the arm for a faithful but unloved solution.

Figure 81: Methods used for call routing, by contact centre size (only respondents with DTMF IVR and/or speech recognition)



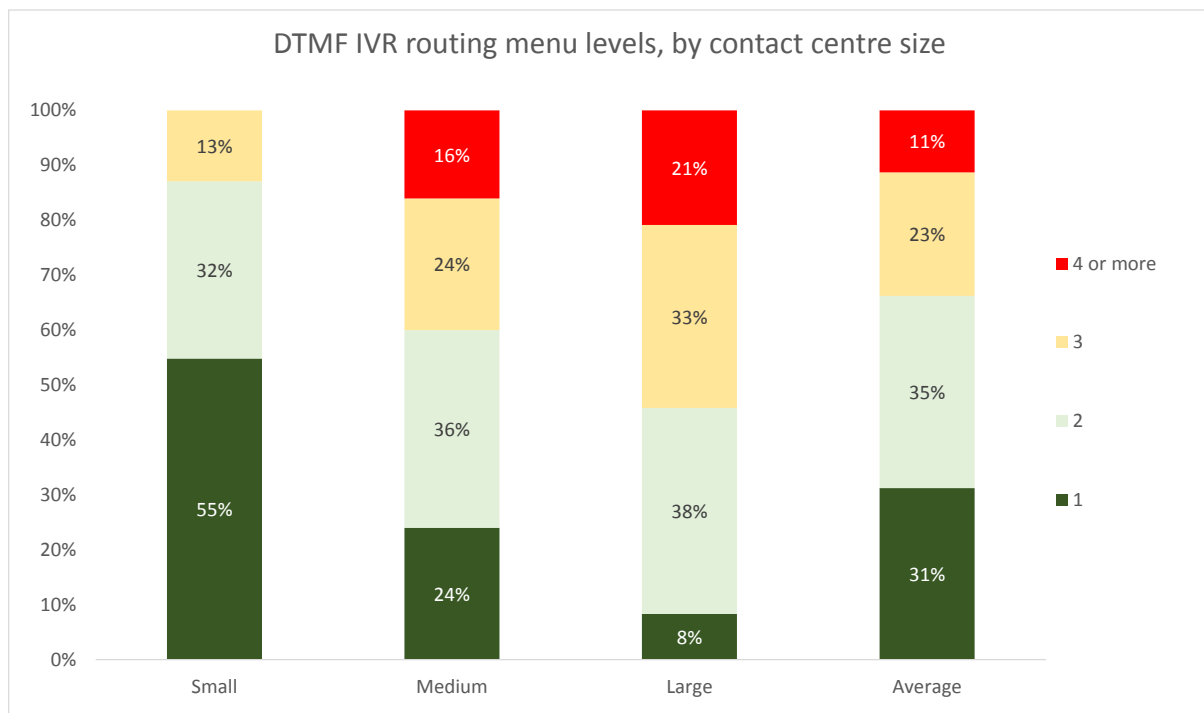
DTMF IVR ROUTING

This report now investigates how DTMF-based auto-attendant is actually used for routing from the customers' viewpoint, as overly-long and confusing DTMF IVR options have been a common complaint.

Looking at the number of levels used on a DTMF IVR (i.e. how many key-presses a caller must make to reach their destination), 31% of this year's respondents keep it simple with a single-level of options, e.g. "Press 1 for Sales; 2 for Service; 3 for Accounts".

54% of large operations present a possible three or more routing menu levels to their customers, a level of granularity that must appear daunting to their customer base.

Figure 82: DTMF IVR routing menu levels, by contact centre size



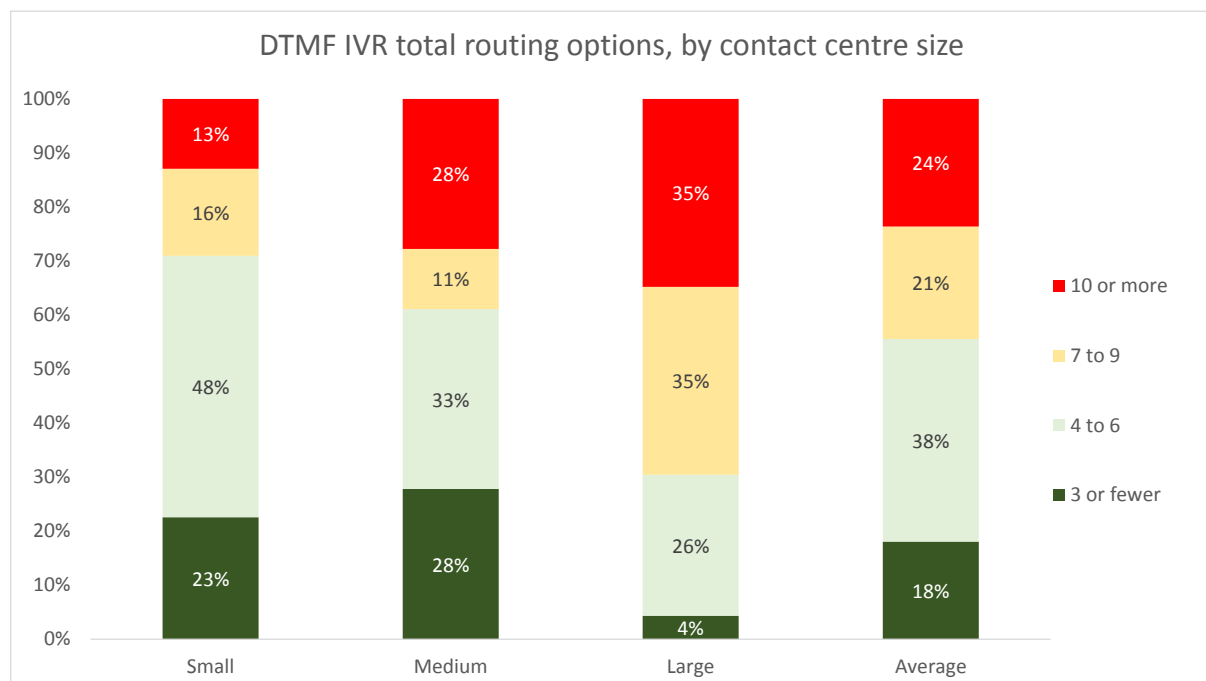
When considering the number of routing menu levels presented by sales or service focused operations, 53% of mixed sales/service respondents present three or more menu levels, whereas 88% of the sales-focused respondents report providing only one or two levels.

It is not just the amount of levels in a menu that can frustrate customers, but also the number 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 via a smartphone will go a long way towards alleviating.

Respondents claim to restrict themselves to a median of 8 options (e.g. 2 levels with 4 options on each, or vice versa), which can still be a considerable number for a caller to listen to, especially if their preferred choice is the last one in line.

Logically, larger contact centres will tend to support larger businesses, which usually have more departments, offer a greater level of segmentation and have more products and services available to customers. Consequently there are on average many more menu choices offered in the phone menu of large contact centres, with 70% of these respondents reporting offering seven or more routing options to their customers.

Figure 83: DTMF IVR total routing options, by contact centre size



A Practical Guide to Implementing Multi-Channel Customer Service



Customers today demand a far higher level of interaction with organisations they are doing business with. According to Gartner¹, customers expect to be supported regardless of their choice of communication channel. Customers require a two-way dialogue and are beginning to use, and indeed expect to use, a mixture of new and existing communication channels ranging from traditional telephone conversations to instant messaging and webchat, through to the latest social media networking sites.

In this white paper Intelcom, supported by research from ContactBabel, takes a closer look at the reality of multi-channel customer service today. The research reveals differences in methods of inbound interaction over a 10 year period and what that suggests. It provides insights for use when planning multi-channel strategies and in the final section, recommends five steps to developing effective multi-channel customer service.

Cloud-based platforms and multi-channel customer service

Integral to the adoption of multi-channel customer service is the flexibility to scale up and down contact centre agent numbers to respond to demand, whilst keeping an eye on costs and productivity. One of the key findings in Gartner's report is that cloud-based subscription models will remain the fastest growing segment in the customer engagement software market. This is because of the flexibility, scalability and integration opportunities provided by cloud-based contact centre platforms to enable multi-channel customer service.

However, many businesses are struggling to keep pace with rapid changes in customer engagement, with reports suggesting a drop in customer satisfaction ratings, which are now at their lowest since 2010. Therefore, there is no time to lose when it comes to evaluating whether a multi-channel strategy is right for your organisation. The advice in this white paper is relevant to those setting up non-voice channels for the first time and for those partially down the route to implementing multi-channel customer service.



Download white paper at intele.com

SKILLS-BASED ROUTING & OTHER STRATEGIES

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 even have assisted the customer previously.

There are many different call routing strategies employed by contact centres, including:

- **Hunt groups:** also known as direct routing, this is a basic strategy which aims to connect callers to the department which they have called, searching for available members of that group to take a call
- **Least Idle / Least Occupied:** these strategies are based upon the agent's level of activity, respectively looking for agents who have been waiting the longest or who have done least work throughout the day
- **Skills-based routing:** particular skills and characteristics can be assigned to specific agents, allowing a better match between the call and the agent. This requires knowledge of who the caller is, or what they want, or both
- **Dynamic or service level routing:** building on skills-based routing, this strategy also takes into account the predicted demand for the specific skills, which can flexibly reallocate other agents who may have lesser skill sets if service levels risk being missed
- **Business rules based on customer identity:** once the customer has been identified - perhaps through the use of CLI or automated verification - the business can then decide how they would like calls from this particular customer to be handled. For example, Premier customers may get put to the front of the queue; agents who have handled this customer's calls successfully before may be allocated; or customers who have indicated that they wish to cancel a contract may be put through to expert retention staff
- **Intelligent routing based on customer history:** intelligent routing goes one step further than this, by gathering information from the customer's record, and routing the call based not only on the customer's identity but also on their history, status and profile. For example, those who are in debt may get passed straight through to the collections department, whereas high-value customers reaching the end of the contract may be passed through to staff who are highly skilled in cross-selling and up-selling.

Routing calls based on current and past agent activity is the most widely used routing strategy, with little real difference across contact centre size bands.

Skills-based routing is said to be the second most popular routing strategy, particularly in contact centres with more than 200 seats, where meaningful pools of skill-sets can be created and used.

The basic routing strategy of hunt groups is used more in smaller operations, with service level routing, business rule routing and intelligent routing being far more common in the largest and most sophisticated contact centres.

Figure 84: Telephony routing strategies used, by contact centre size

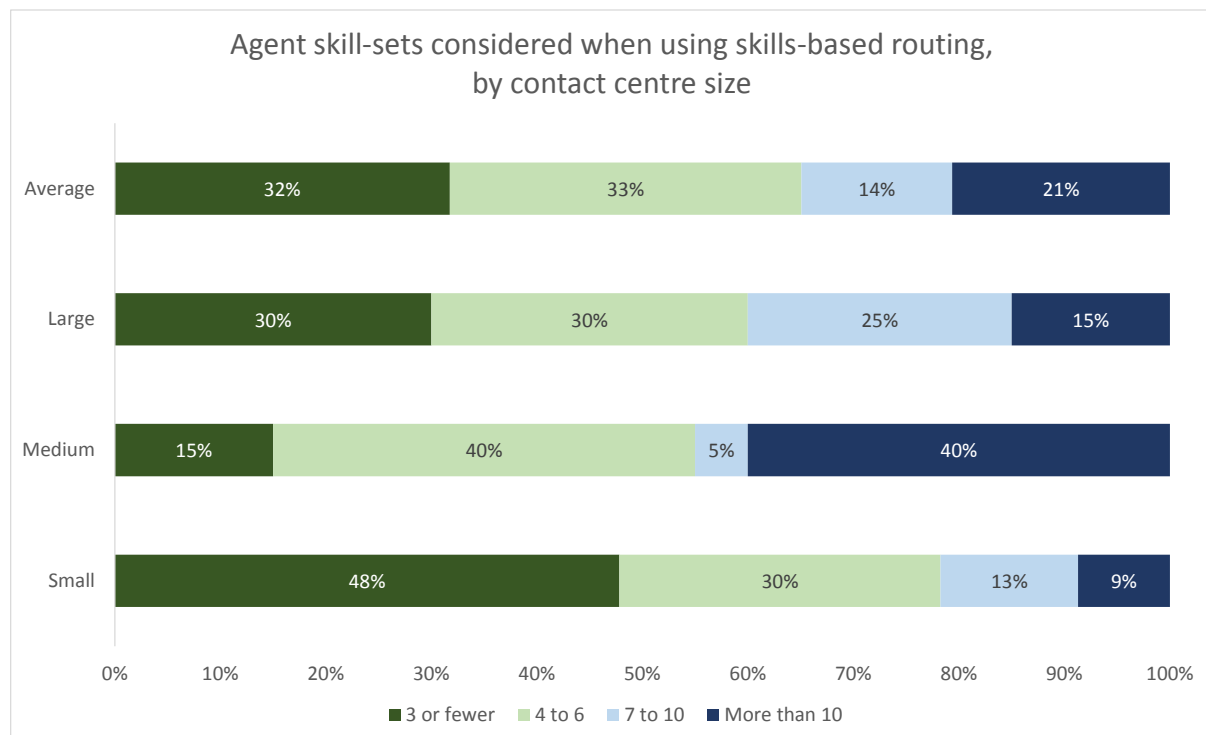
Routing strategy	Small	Medium	Large	Average
Least Idle / Least Occupied	72%	81%	83%	77%
Skills-based routing	54%	75%	90%	69%
Hunt groups	59%	47%	52%	54%
Dynamic / service-level routing	13%	28%	45%	25%
Business rules based on customer identity	13%	19%	41%	22%
Intelligent routing based on customer history	2%	9%	14%	7%

An additional question was asked around skills-based routing, which is the most widely used routing strategy that takes into some account the customer's requirements. Skills-based routing 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's capabilities, instead of simply choosing the next available agent, allowing the call to be passed to specific virtual agent groups (clustered by skills) rather than routing through to a particular department or physical team. Historically, 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 to which they were not necessarily suited.

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 - calling line identity), 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.

There is a very wide spread in terms of the number of agent skill-sets used for skills-based routing, with one respondent claiming to be able to allocate 150 skills-sets to their agent population, although the median is only a more manageable five. Medium and large operations are much more likely to consider seven or more agent skills.

Figure 85: Agent skill-sets considered when using skills-based routing, by contact centre size



PCI DSS COMPLIANCE

PCI DSS BACKGROUND

The Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS) is the creation of five of the largest payment card providers: VISA, MasterCard, American Express, Discover and JCB International, which together have named themselves the PCI Security Standards Council. The PCI SSC wished to clarify and align their various fraud prevention measures and regulations into a single agreed global framework. PCI DSS provides guidance to merchants as well as payment card processors around how to process, store and transmit information about the payment card and its owner, with the aim of reducing the incidence of card fraud and promoting best practice in information security. Although compliance with PCI DSS is not enforced by law, the card brands may fine those which do not follow its regulations, or even deny the merchant the ability to take card payments at all.

There are 12 requirements to fulfil in order to achieve PCI DSS compliance (full details are available here³), with many specific sub-requirements within them. While all of the requirements have some impact upon the workings of the contact centre, it is generally considered that Requirements 3, 4 and 12 may have the greatest relevance.

Requirement 3: Protect stored cardholder data

This requirement is about reducing the impact of any data breach or fraud, by minimising the holding of any unnecessary data as well as reducing the value of any stored payment card information. Data must only be stored if necessary, and if stored must be strongly encrypted, and only kept for the period where it is actually needed, with a formal disposal procedure. Businesses should revisit the necessity of data storage on an ongoing basis, and it should be remembered that the storage of sensitive authentication data such as card verification codes, is prohibited even if encrypted, and must be permanently deleted immediately after authorization. The requirements of other regulations (which may mandate keeping recordings for a long period of time) may need to be balanced against PCI DSS guidelines, with possible compromises occurring such as archiving encrypted call recordings offsite in a secure facility, with access to them only in the case of fraud investigation or when proving industry-specific regulatory compliance.

Sensitive authentication data such as the card verification code should normally never be stored, even in an encrypted format. PCI DSS requirements also indicate that the full card number (PAN) should only be available on a need-to-know basis, and should otherwise be hidden, with 1234-56XX-XXXX-7890 considered the minimum masking format. For businesses which choose for agents to type in card details, post-call masking and role-based access to the full PAN should be considered, along with strong cryptography when stored.

³ https://www.pcisecuritystandards.org/documents/PCI_DSS_v3-1.pdf



The ultimate white paper from Encoded

- Find out the three most commonly asked questions about PCI DSS and telephone card payments (and get the answers)
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- Learn about the four main misconceptions of PCI DSS and how to descope your contact centre

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For contact centres, the most obvious place where data is stored is in the recorded environment, and there is an increased use of RAM scrapers, which is a form of malware that takes data from volatile memory as it is being processed and before it is encrypted.

Organisations have to determine all of the locations which credit card data could potentially be stored, even if it is not part of the formal card handling process. For example, there is nothing to stop the customer sending their credit card details, including the card verification code, by email or web chat: if the email or chat interaction is then stored, then a risk exists, and the operation is not PCI DSS compliant. There is an increasing use of data loss prevention solutions as a way to track data that has somehow moved out of the original environment, and PCI DSS version 3.1 states more clearly than previously that businesses need to have a good inventory not just of the equipment and infrastructure, but also of their logical environment as well.

Requirement 4: Encrypt transmission of cardholder data across open, public networks

In the event of a security breach, it is important to make sure that credit card data (such as the PAN, or 'long card number') is not readable through the use of strong cryptography, not only at its stored location but also as it is being passed across the network. The network is only as strong as its weakest link, and badly configured wireless networks, with out-of-date security and weak passwords are a particular concern.

Requirement 12: Maintain a policy that addresses information security for all personnel

All employees should be made aware, in writing and through daily exposure to information security guidelines, of what their responsibilities are in terms of handling data. The regular and ongoing minimisation of potential security risks is perhaps even more important for homeworking agents, who are less likely to be in a rigidly maintained environment, and whose vigilance and adherence to security guidelines may therefore be less rigorous.

Compensating controls

Businesses that are unable to fully comply with PCI DSS objectives, for technical or business process reasons perhaps, may consider implementing 'compensating controls', which act as workarounds to achieve roughly the same aim as the PCI control in situations whereby the end result could not otherwise be achieved. These are not meant as an alternative to the control objectives, to be used in cases where the business simply does not want to meet the regulations, but are supposed to act as a last resort allowing the business to achieve the spirit of the control, if not actually the very letter. Guidelines for valid compensating controls indicate that it must meet the intent of the original requirement, and provide a similar level of defence, go at least as far as the original requirement and not negatively impact upon other PCI DSS requirements.

THE VIEW FROM THE CONTACT CENTRE

Potential danger points within the contact centre fall into three main areas: storage, agents and infrastructure. The storage element will revolve around the recording environment - both voice and screen - and the potential and opportunity for dishonest employees to access recordings or write down card details should also be considered. In terms of infrastructure, this is not simply a matter of considering the CRM system or call recording archives, but also includes any element that touches the cardholder data environment. This could include, but is not limited to the telephony infrastructure, desktop computers, internal networks, IVR, databases, call recording archives, removable media and CRM / agent desktop software.

The various elements of card data may be handled in different ways.

Figure 86: Data elements and storage in PCI DSS

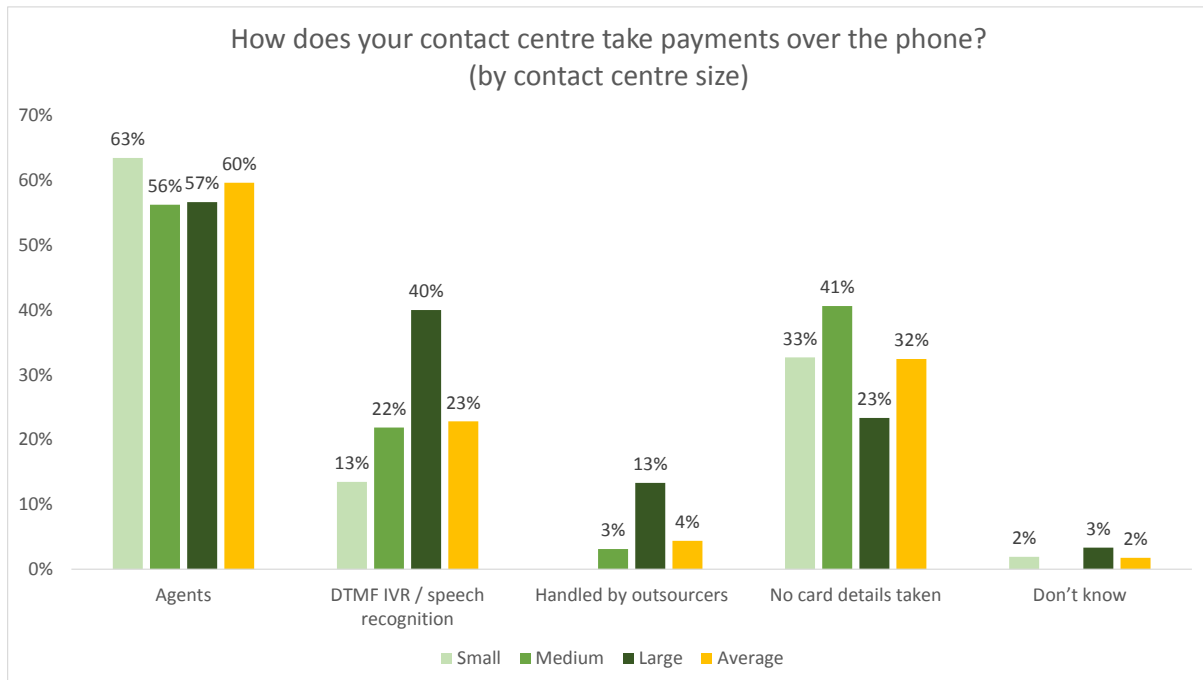
	Data Element	Storage Permitted	Must Render Data Unreadable
Cardholder Data	Primary Account Number (PAN)	Yes	Yes (e.g. strong one-way hash functions, truncation, indexed tokens with securely stored pads, or strong cryptography)
	Cardholder Name	Yes	No
	Service Code	Yes	No
	Expiry Date	Yes	No
Sensitive Authentication Data	Full magnetic stripe data	No	Cannot store
	CAV2/CVC2/CVV2/CID (Card Security Codes)	No	Cannot store
	PIN / PIN Block	No	Cannot store

Compliance with PCI DSS should be seen in the wider context of a far-reaching information security framework, which may also take into account industry-specific regulations. There is likely to be a balance to be found between compliance with the various regulations in the context of the business's unique processes and internal guidelines. Policies and activities that are helpful include:

- make sure that contact centre employees do not share passwords or user IDs with each other, in order to maintain a segmented and auditable security and access environment
- limit the number of employees given access to full card information. For example, restrict access to call recordings based on logging and corporate role, only allowing screen recording playbacks that display payment card information to managers and compliance officers, having it masked for all other users
- manage the physical and logical access to stored recordings and regularly report upon those accessing this information
- do not allow payment card data to be transferred through non-encrypted means, including email, web chat, SMS or other means, and have the means to identify and delete it immediately if present
- initial focus should be on improving business processes, rather than implementing technology. For example, analysing and restricting access to cardholder information to only those employees who actually need it will significantly reduce the risk of fraud even before implementing any technology
- quarterly vulnerability scans should be carried out via an external approved scanning vendor approved by the Payment Card Industry Security Standards Council (PCI SSC), which holds a list of these. ASVs perform penetration tests on the company's network in order to verify that it cannot easily be hacked
- use secure data centres and limit physical access to servers which store payment card information
- do not record sensitive authentication data such as the card validation code in any circumstances if possible
- use strong encryption for the storage and transit of voice traffic, call recordings, screen recordings and personal identification data, making sure that the most current guidelines on encryption and transmission protocols are adhered to
- up-to-date, fully patched and automated malware, anti-virus and personal firewall software (of particular importance to homeworkers) - requirements 5 and 6
- regularly review stored data, and keep only that which is necessary for business or regulatory purposes. For example, hotels need to keep customers credit card details from the reservation point until checkout: there is no hard and fast rule.

This year, 68% of respondents stated that their operations handle card payments from customers over the telephone. Payments are normally taken by agents, although large contact centres which are more likely to have high volumes of card payments are much more likely to provide a fully-automated as well as a human payment option to their customer base, or use outsourced third parties to handle their card payments.

Figure 87: How does your contact centre take payments over the phone? (by contact centre size) – multiple selections allowed



There are significant elements to consider around manually taking payment from cards: the time taken to take payment, the risk of fraud by agents, unauthorized access to call recordings, and compliance with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard⁴, in order to reduce credit card fraud.

Some of the literature around PCI compliance and card handling mentions organisations which adopt a “trust-based approach” that relies on the honesty of their agents as well as their recruitment and agent management processes to avoid fraud. While incidences of agent fraud are relatively rare, compliance with PCI DSS no longer makes this an acceptable option.

Businesses may consider that as well as achieving and maintaining PCI DSS compliance, they may benefit by reducing the DSS scope as well, which will limit the size of the compliance task and cost. A significant reduction in DSS scope can make maintenance easier, reduce the amount of patching and vulnerability scans, as well as reducing the areas of risk and potential attack. For many organisations, the cost and upheaval of large-scale PCI compliance projects, as well as the ongoing efforts of remaining compliant means that trying to move as much of the operation out of scope is a very attractive proposition that makes sense in terms of cost and resource.

⁴ https://www.pcisecuritystandards.org/security_standards/

Businesses attempt to reduce their DSS scope by limiting the number of places where card data is present by:

- removing redundant and obsolete storage facilities and applications
- replacing the full PAN with a truncated, encrypted and/or masked version
- move away from the need to encrypt by using tokenization
- outsourcing elements of card handling, storage and processing to PCI DSS compliant third parties, and reducing or eliminating the cardholder data environment as a result
- large organisations may define 'PCI security zones' and locate the system components that handle card data, and all systems connected to it, within those zones. Full isolation of the cardholder data environment may be prone to failure due to lack of clear guidelines around how this can be practically implemented and sustained.

PCI DSS compliance is not simply about implementing a piece of technology, as compliance covers people and business processes, as well as systems. As PCI DSS is replaced and upgraded every few years (the current version is v.3.1), businesses have tended to implement a patchwork of solutions and processes to reduce the danger of card fraud and maintain compliance.

Respondents were presented with a long list of solutions, approaches and business processes that aimed to reduce the risk of card fraud within the contact centre, and were asked to indicate which they used. It should be noted that some of these methods used do not in themselves render the operation full PCI-compliant.

Figure 88: Card fraud reduction methods used

Card fraud reduction method	% respondents using this method
Pause and resume voice recording	36%
Manual processes and training	27%
Screen recording application does not capture card details on-screen	20%
Obscure the data entered on an agent's screen	18%
Clean desks / rooms - where pen, paper and mobiles are prohibited	18%
Detect and block the phone's DTMF tones	9%
Take payment via automated IVR at the end of the call	8%
Take payment via automated IVR mid-call	7%
Specific internal team dedicated to taking card payments	4%
Cloud-based solution (card information does not enter the contact centre)	4%
NB: percentages total more than 100% as multiple methods may be used	

The ultimate white paper – Telephone card payments and PCI DSS

Making payments via a credit card or debit card is now largely common place but the regulations around accepting card payments over the phone remain a mystery to many organisations. Encoded's ultimate white paper removes the confusion around telephone payments and PCI DSS. In this extract we look at four things you probably don't know about PCI DSS:

- 1 Responsibility** – the latest version of the PCI DSS standard includes a responsibility matrix in which suppliers of payment services must include a full list of all 258 controls in contracts clearly showing who is responsible for each control. This can be the client, the supplier or both. In the event of lost data and a subsequent audit identifying where the breach in security occurred, the contract will form the basis of accountability. Potentially this is the first step towards holding suppliers accountable for lost data, which historically has always been the responsibility of the merchant or client.
- 2 VISA will never fine a merchant** – VISA cannot fine a merchant for card data loss because its contract is not with the merchant but the Acquirer (the bank or financial institution that processes debit or credit card payments on behalf of merchants). It is the acquiring bank's responsibility to make sure its merchants are compliant and as such it is the bank that will issue fines, increase charges for non-compliance and impose compulsory PCI programme costs. The revenue raised is used to fund the compliance programme. VISA will, however, fine the Acquirer if its merchants are non-compliant.
- 3 There is no such thing as a PCI DSS compliant product** – products are often incorrectly marketed as PCI DSS compliant. To advertise this claim is to miss the very point that PCI DSS is trying to achieve ie to maintain a unified security standard to which merchants must adhere. Only companies and other legal entities can be PCI compliant, not products or software.
- 4 Only select suppliers which appear on the VISA Merchant Agent List website** – not all payment solution providers are created equal. Contact centres typically use multiple technologies so it is becoming increasingly important to understand just who does what and who needs to be PCI compliant. To be certain whether a third-party vendor is compliant it is important to check the VISA Merchant Agent List which has two levels of organisation with very different validation procedures. Level 1, the top level requires an Attestation of Compliance (AOC) from a Qualified Security Assessor (QSA) and applies to organisations that store, process and/or transmit more than 300,000 VISA transactions per year. Level 2, applies to smaller providers with less than 300,000 transactions and can be achieved by completing an annual self-assessment questionnaire. More information at www.visamerchantslists.com

Finally, remember that PCI DSS applies to every contact centre that takes card payments over the telephone whatever its size. It is also important to know who you are dealing with and the status of their PCI DSS credentials. The full white paper can be downloaded at www.encoded.co.uk/whitepaper-request or for more information call: 0845 120 9790 email: r.crutchington@encoded.co.uk or visit www.encoded.co.uk

‘**Pause and resume**’ or ‘stop-start’ recording aims to prevent sensitive authentication data and other confidential information from entering the call recording environment. Pause and resume may be agent-initiated, act for a fixed time period (e.g. stopping recording for a minute), or be fully automated. The standard could be interpreted as to prefer automation over manual intervention to avoid human error. Automated pause and resume may use an API or desktop analytics to link the recording solution to the agent desktop or CRM application, being triggered when agent navigates to a payment screen, for example. The recording may then be paused, to be resumed at the time when the agent leaves the payment screen, which in theory should remove the period of time whereby the customer is reading out the card details.

There are also alternative options, such as muting the recording or playing a continuous audio tone to the recording system while payment details are being collected, rather than actually pausing the recording, meaning that there is still a single call recording which can be used for QA and compliance purposes. This principle is similar to that applied to **screen recording** applications, where 20% of respondents stated that their application does not record card details from the agent’s screen. 18% of respondents **mask card details** on the agent’s screen, to prevent copies being made.

The second-most widely used method was that of **improving processes and agent training**: the biggest risk in any organisation relating to data theft is its staff – not necessarily from fraudsters, but laxity in taking proper care of data - and the relatively low cost of training and education of the risks can go a long way in making staff vigilant to perils such as phishing emails and such like.

Some organisations set up **dedicated payment teams**, working away from other agents, often in a **clean room** environment with no pens, paper or mobile phones, so that customers can be passed through this team to make payment. As these agents have a single responsibility - handling card payments - sometimes they are underutilised, and at other times there can be a queue of people waiting to make payments. In terms of the customer experience, this latter scenario is suboptimal. A clean room is generally not seen as being a particularly pleasant working environment for agents, being Spartan of necessity. Not being able to be in touch with the outside world, for example with children or schools, can be a significant problem for some agents. It has been estimated that it takes around £2,000 per agent per year to create and maintain a clean room environment.

A minority of respondents, especially those with a large contact centres, using automated IVR process to take card details from the customer, cutting the agent risk out of the loop entirely. **Mid-call IVR** (or agent assisted IVR) is more popular than **post-call IVR**, as it is seen as a more customer-friendly approach: the caller may have additional questions or the requirement for reassurance and confirmation after the payment process, perhaps around delivery times or other queries not related to the payment process.

9% of this year’s respondents use **DTMF suppression** in order to assist with their PCI compliance. DTMF suppression describes the practice of capturing DTMF tones and altering them in such a way that cardholder details cannot be identified either by the agent, the recording environment or any unauthorized person listening in. DTMF suppression aims to take the agent out of scope as well as the storage environment, as card details on the agent’s screen may be masked as well as the DTMF tones being neutralised (thus removing any - albeit theoretically small - danger of a handheld recorder being used).

At the point in the conversation where payment is to be taken, the agent directs the customer to type in their card details using the telephone keypad. The DTMF tones are altered so that they no longer represent the card number or sensitive authentication details. The caller inputs their card data via a touchtone keypad in a similar way to an IVR session, keeping them in touch with the agent at any point in the transaction in case of difficulty, clarification or confirmation. There are anecdotal references made to an average time-saving per call of around 10 seconds if the caller types in their own card details rather than reading them out and having confirmed by an agent.

Only 4% of this year's respondents use **third-party cloud-based payment solutions**, which is far more likely to be the case in larger operations. Using a hosted or cloud-based solution to intercept card data at the network level means that no cardholder data is passed into the contact centre environment, whether infrastructure, agents or storage. As such, this can be seen to de-scope the entire contact centre from PCI compliance. Like any cloud or hosted solution, it relies heavily upon the security processes and operational effectiveness of the service provider, although the PCI DSS attestation of compliance and external audits, along with regular penetration testing may well show superior levels of security over what is present in-house. Some cloud-based solutions may require greater levels of integration or configurations than their on-site equivalents, but most seem to be engineered in such a way as to minimise changes to the contact centre systems, processes or agent activities.



The many varied ways that organisations can achieve PCI DSS compliance is testimony to the fact that one size does not fit all. Encoded finds that agent processing of card details is still the preferred method of payment and offers the best customer service. Automated 'pause and resume' combined with staff training is typically the most cost effective, quickest to implement and offers the least amount of call disruption which is why it remains the preferred method in most contact centres.

In this discussion, the practice of **tokenisation** should also be mentioned. Tokenisation takes place in order to protect sensitive card information such as the PAN (primary account number or 'long card number') by replacing it with non-sensitive data which merely represents the initial data. The purpose of this is to devalue the data so that even if it is hacked or stolen, it is of no use to a criminal. One of the main benefits to tokenisation is that it requires little change to the existing environment or business processes, as apart from the addition of a decoding mechanism, the flow of data, its capture and processing works in the same way as if it were true card information coming into the contact centre environment.

A customer entering a 16 digit card number might have six digits within the middle of the card taken out and replaced by entirely different digits, before this information is passed as DTMF tones into the contact centre environment. This allows the contact centre to be outside PCI scope, as there is actually no **real** cardholder data entering the environment, as well as making it a less attractive target for data hacking and stealing.

Tokenisation does not require special integration with existing payment processes, storage systems, telephony or IVR systems, nor does the agent desktop have to change as the same data format is coming into the desktop environment.

The first stage of tokenisation is to collect the actual cardholder data via DTMF tones. For each key press, the solution replaces the associated tone with a neutral or silent tone, and sends the actual number relating to the DTMF tone elsewhere within the solution in order to be tokenised. Card numbers and sensitive authentication data such as card validation codes are replaced as necessary, and the new tokenised DTMF tones are played down the line to the contact centre. The actual cardholder data is held temporarily within the hosted environment.

Within the contact centre environment, the tokenised DTMF goes to the same places that the existing payment process defines, being recorded as usual and going to the agent desktop just as if the card information was actually true, passing through a decoder (which may be hardware or software) which converts the tones to keystrokes that are entered in the payment screen. As the card data is only a tokenised representation, it cannot be said to be actual cardholder data and thus does not fall into the scope of PCI DSS compliance.

Once the agent submits the tokenised payment card details, the transaction is sent back to the hosted environment, where the tokenised data is matched and converted back into the actual cardholder information, which is passed on to the payment service provider, which returns the usual payment success/failure confirmation.

Of course, cardholder data is not the only DTMF-provided information coming into the contact centre environment, as other data such as IVR routing options and the entry of account numbers often requires capture of DTMF tones as well. Various configuration options exist within solutions, based upon the specifics of the business in order to circumvent confusion. Customers should check that any hosted tokenisation solution will not alter the performance of any required card number validation checks, including card length, range validation and 'Luhn' checks (to make sure a card number 'looks right' before presenting it to the payment services provider).

The PCI SSC has published tokenisation product security guidelines⁵.

Further details about all of these methods, as well as other approaches to consider, are investigated in depth in ContactBabel's free report, "The Inner Circle Guide to PCI DSS Compliance in the Contact Centre", which is available from www.contactbabel.com/reports.cfm

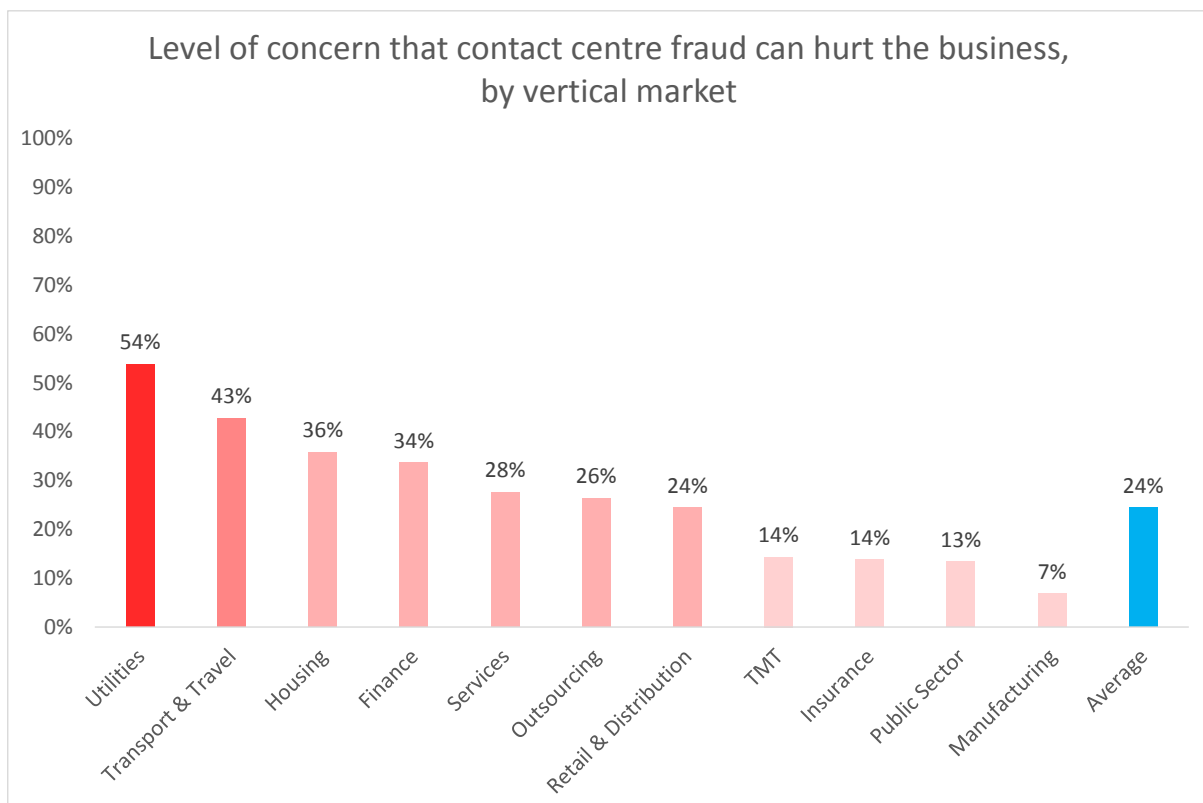
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https://www.pcisecuritystandards.org/pdfs/15_04_02%20PCI%20Tokenization%20Product%20Security%20Guidelines_Final%20Press%20Release.pdf

The following chart shows the extent to which contact centres within each vertical market are concerned about the possibility of fraud within the operation. Respondents were asked to show their level of concern by giving a score between 1 and 100, where “1” was “Not at all concerned about fraud as we have the necessary measures in place”, and “100” was “Extremely concerned, and we know we need to improve this”.

On average, contact centres tended to be much more sanguine than concerned, although the utilities respondents seem to take things less for granted. While this may appear reassuring, other findings in this chapter suggest that a high proportion of contact centres have a patched-together and possibly even partial approach to PCI DSS compliance and fraud prevention, and that this low level of concern is possibly more about complacency or obliviousness than reality.

Figure 89: Level of concern that contact centre fraud can hurt the business, by vertical market



Depending on the merchant level (i.e. how many card payments are taken), businesses can either self-certify PCI compliance or use a Qualified Security Assessor (QSA) who is accredited by the PCI SSC. Only Level 1 merchants with over 6 million transactions per year or who are a 'Compromised Entity' (having experienced attacks before) must have an annual QSA audit rather than the self-assessment questionnaire. Businesses should see QSAs as expert consultants, rather than as auditors who are just there to tick boxes, agree compliance and then disappear for a year.

Service providers have two levels rather than four, with a cut-off point of 300,000 aggregated card transactions per year. Service providers also have to prove compliance, but to each card brand, rather than to an acquiring bank (which merchants have to do). The proof of compliance is a formal Attestation of Compliance (AOC) which is usually signed by the Financial Director, and states that all PCI requirements have been met. Each card brand provides a list of compliant service providers on its website. QSA-audited PCI certification offers independently confirmed security, which removes the issue of how an organisation might interpret a PCI requirement in an internal self-assessment. Merchants who are looking for a service provider should investigate the limit of the scope that any self-assessment is taken, for example a cloud-based solution provider only applying it to the segments of their platform that handle sensitive data. Merchants may feel that a holistic perspective of security is more appropriate, and should also ask how the service provider tracks its assets (for example software versions, servers, operating and transport systems), in order to identify risk and react more quickly.

Businesses should be aware that proving compliance is not simply a matter of making sure all of the requirements are covered, but is also about understanding which parts of the business fall into the scope of the PCI compliance audit. It is important that whoever runs the PCI compliance program, whether internal or external, is experienced in interpreting it fully. QSAs should look at intent and risk - what was the PCI requirement trying to achieve, and what risk was it trying to minimise?

Respondents from small operations are likely to choose unaudited self-assessment questionnaires (SAQs) to prove compliance, with 13% having no PCI compliance programme at all (this figure is 28% in amongst medium-size respondents, which is a concern). Larger operations likely to have a mixture of programs, using both internal and external resources, especially QSAs.

Figure 90: How is the contact centre's PCI compliance programme run?

PCI compliance programme method	Small	Medium	Large	Average
SAQ, not externally audited	38%	22%	22%	29%
SAQ, externally audited	16%	11%	39%	21%
External QSA	13%	33%	50%	28%
Internal dedicated resource	41%	17%	67%	41%
<i>No PCI compliance program</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>28%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>13%</i>
NB: totals may add up to more than 100% as multiple selections allowed				

CUSTOMER IDENTITY VERIFICATION

Customer security processes are about two factors: are you who you say you are, and are you allowed to do what you are trying to do?

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 as critically important and most calls that are not initial enquiries will need to verify a caller's claimed identity by asking for additional information that only the real customer should know. The increasing focus upon fraud detection, strengthened by the need to comply with regulations, has meant that identity verification continues to become more important year-on-year, yet businesses have been slow to take up alternatives to the traditional challenge/response method.

Identity theft is high-profile, and businesses have tightened security and been seen to do so by their customers: fraud prevention is a brand issue, as well as a regulatory one. While fraud certainly causes losses to a business, along with the threat of regulatory fines, risk of losing customers' confidence by being seen as lackadaisical about security is at least as great a risk. Criminals' methods and the technology used have become more sophisticated, and businesses have had to respond by introducing ever more complex identity verification processes.

Customer identity verification has become intrusive and inconvenient for the customer, who is expected to remember an increasing array of IDs, passwords, PINs, memorable information, details of their last transactions, or to carry smartcards or tokens everywhere they go. Customers can undergo a 'Spanish Inquisition' before being permitted to make their enquiry or place their order – not only reducing customer satisfaction, but also costing businesses time and money. It takes an average of over 30 seconds to verify a customer's identity manually, and this mounts up considerably: the UK contact centre industry spends many billions of pounds each year, just to verify the caller is who they claim to be, and are permitted to do what they are asking.

Over the past ten years, our surveys have found that over 30% more calls now require identity checks, which can themselves take considerably longer due to more stringent testing. Although in-call efficiency has improved, identity verification is no faster than it ever was: all factors which drive 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 some credit cards.

Combining these factors creates a more complex, and potentially more secure two-factor or three-factor authentication process, although being able to rely upon a previously enrolled voiceprint, rather than have to remember various pieces of information or carry round a code-generating device makes life far easier for the customer.

In today's market place, contact centre management are under pressure to reduce costs but improve service levels. Budgets get squeezed, service levels are impacted and customer satisfaction plummets.

Dissatisfied customers take their business elsewhere.

An application has arrived to combat this –reducing outgoings, improving the customer experience, and protecting businesses and consumers from fraud.

Performance Telecom have made this facility available 'On Demand' as a turnkey cloud enabled service requiring no local hardware, complex training, or software knowledge.

It's the most customer friendly efficiency drive you'll ever deploy into your contact centre – and it couldn't be easier!



- ✦ Simple Customer Enrolment
- ✦ Secure Verification Process
- ✦ Fraud Detection
- ✦ Integrated Payments Facility
- ✦ Call Blaster
- ✦ Gender Recognition
- ✦ Multi-site and Home-worker Enabled



Turnkey

Performance Telecom deliver Voice Biometrics as a turnkey 'on demand' service. No local hardware or software is required and the application is easily integrated into your existing processes. Delivered using NGN services or integrated to our Pulse Cloud Contact Centre, the application identifies callers before they are connected to your team.



Clear Pricing & Return on Investment

Voice Biometric authentication is charged on a simple 'per verification' basis which offers an immediate ROI of 3:1 versus the cost of manual ID verification. This rises to 10:1 ROI at the top end of the volume & commitment based pricing structure.



Rapid Establishment & High Security

We can deliver Pulse in days, not months. Our solution is quick and easy to implement thanks to its Cloud nature and our friendly and intuitive user interface. In the time it takes to arrange a demonstration of a traditional on premise solution, we could have already delivered your first calls.

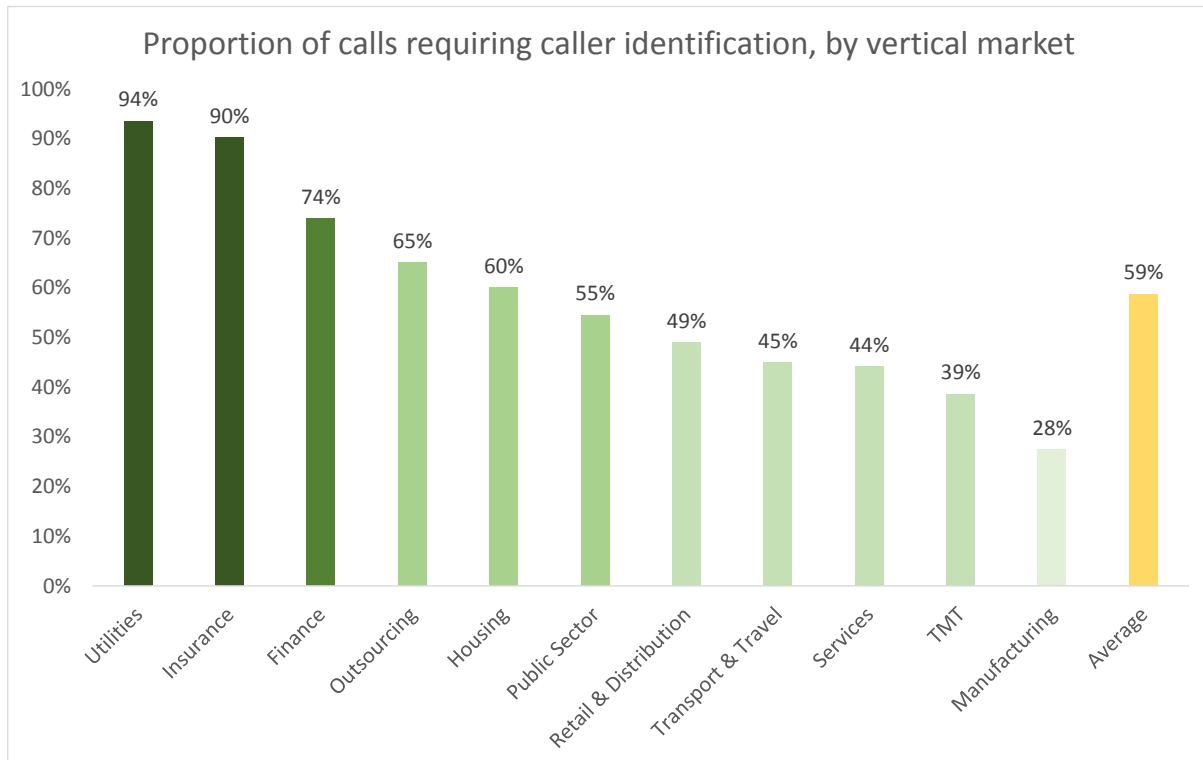


An outstanding customer experience

We've all had occasions when we've been refused access to our own information and had to go around the houses, wasting everyone's time to regain access. Make this a thing of the past – verify callers based on their individual voice print, something they bring with them everywhere!



Figure 91: Proportion of calls requiring caller identification, by vertical market



Industry-wide, a mean average of 58% of calls require caller identity verification, with little difference in the figures between contact centre size bands. As we would expect, service-oriented operations are far more likely than sales-focused contact centres to have to do this. The insurance, utilities and finance industries are amongst those most often authenticating callers' identity.

Figure 92: Caller identity authentication methods (only those contact centres which authenticate some or all calls)

Identification method	Proportion of callers identified using this method
Agent	95.2%
DTMF IVR (touchtone)	2.9%
Speech recognition	1.5%
Voice biometrics	0.5%

90% of respondents who authenticate identity do so through **purely** human means, taking an average of 33 seconds to do so.

Almost all respondents that use IVR or speech recognition may 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.

Figure 93: Time taken to authenticate caller identity using an agent (seconds)

Seconds to authenticate caller identity using an agent	
1 st quartile	15
Median	22
3 rd quartile	45
Mean	33

The unnecessary cost of caller authentication

Using figures from this report and other ContactBabel research, it is possible to estimate the industry-wide cost of customer identification authentication using an agent. Please note that as respondents change each year, this figure is an indicative estimate based on this year's survey and should be read as such.

59% of all calls require a security and identification process to be completed first. This year, 99% of respondents may require some agent input even if IVR or speech recognition is also used. On average, it takes 33 seconds to go through security. Using these statistics, it is possible to estimate how much UK contact centres spend each year on screening customers by using agents.

Inbound calls per year (handled by agents): 7.9bn⁶

Proportion of inbound calls that require security and identification checks: 59%

Average length of agent-handled security and identification check: 33 seconds

Average call duration: 290s (therefore 11.3% of the call is ID&V)

Mean average cost per inbound call: £3.55

Cost of time spent on agent-handled security and identification check: 40.1p per call

Overall cost of agent-handled security and identification checking: **£1.87bn per year**

⁶ ContactBabel, "UK Contact Centres in 2015: The State of the Industry"

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, device, etc.) are not secure and/or are user-unfriendly
- it is not just criminal fraud that identity verification aims to stop. The issue of privacy, especially in the healthcare vertical market, is a powerful driver for using right-party authentication to facilitate personal information sharing. This is also the case when using speech-enabled automated outbound calls, it being necessary to make sure that the person answering the call is the one to which the business actually needs to talk.

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 currently be used over the phone, making it a viable identity verification solution for contact centres. (Future years may see thumbprint-enabled smartphones be used as trusted devices as well, but this is some way off). 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, as well as other physical and behavioural factors, including pronunciation, emphasis, accent and speech rate. These systems are not affected by factors such as the caller having a cold, using different types of phones, or ageing. 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 both enrolment and verification 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 utilising voice biometrics to authenticate customers within the course of the conversation.

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 zero customer effort, significantly improving the customer experience: the first few seconds of a call will be enough to match the customer's voiceprint against those on record
- Help agents expedite time to service, cutting 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.

PERFORMANCE TELECOM The drawback of in-conversation ID verification is that the agent will need to ask who the customer is in order to locate their account, meaning that some pre-agent ID verification is required in order to present a flag to the contact centre to pop the customer's account in CRM. This begs the question as to whether call centres should invest in technology that verifies the caller's ID in-conversation at all, or whether it should all be front-ended. This makes it far more likely that the caller will 'self-care' rather than need to be put through to an agent, thus bringing forward substantial cost-saving opportunities.

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 - minimising 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.

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 33 seconds and being performed by an agent:

- Eliminating the time taken by an agent to verify a caller's identity can save 40p per call (£4m per annum, assuming all calls require verification)
- 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.

It is also possible to use contextual analysis, such as the caller's geolocation (as detailed from their mobile phone's GPS coordinates, or their CLI) to add another layer of confidence in the security process, automatically notifying the agent whether the caller has been identified successfully, and guiding the agent to ask alternative questions if further verification is required.

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.

Endless Possibilities with Voice Biometrics

Voice Biometrics – a daunting term that sounds high-tech and complex. In reality, however, the technology is not difficult to implement.

The reduction in Average Handle Time and the proven enhancements to the customer experience are obvious business case benefits – but having a secure method to confidently and immediately identify a customer offers far reaching advantages which can prove revolutionary for the self-care, security, convenience and customer management aspects of your business.

-  The ability to identify a customer using their voice print means contracts can be signed verbally during a call – in much the same way as it's now legally binding to sign contracts online. This is both convenient for your customers and far more efficient for your business.
-  Given the reliability of voice print as a means of verifying ID, businesses can now provide private information via an automated IVR facility with confidence. Imagine – you'll be able to offer key financial information or private test results without the need to dedicate agent resource.
-  If you are considering expanding by enabling home working but are worried about information security and system access, Voice Biometric technology offers the perfect solution. Staff will only be able to gain access by logging in with their voiceprint – the most unique passphrase one could hope for.
-  By recognising customer voice prints before they reach an agent, you save precious time for customer and agent alike. You also actively prevent fraudulent activity by verifying the customer's identification from the outset. Callers claiming to be another person can be identified as an imposter - not only this but you may be able to identify the imposter by making a comparison of the voice file with others held on record to assist authorities in dealing with an attempted fraud.
-  Voice Biometric technology allows you to take payments over the phone, with approval from the customer. Their payment details can be captured via secure DTMF entry and stored securely within our PCI compliant payment gateway.



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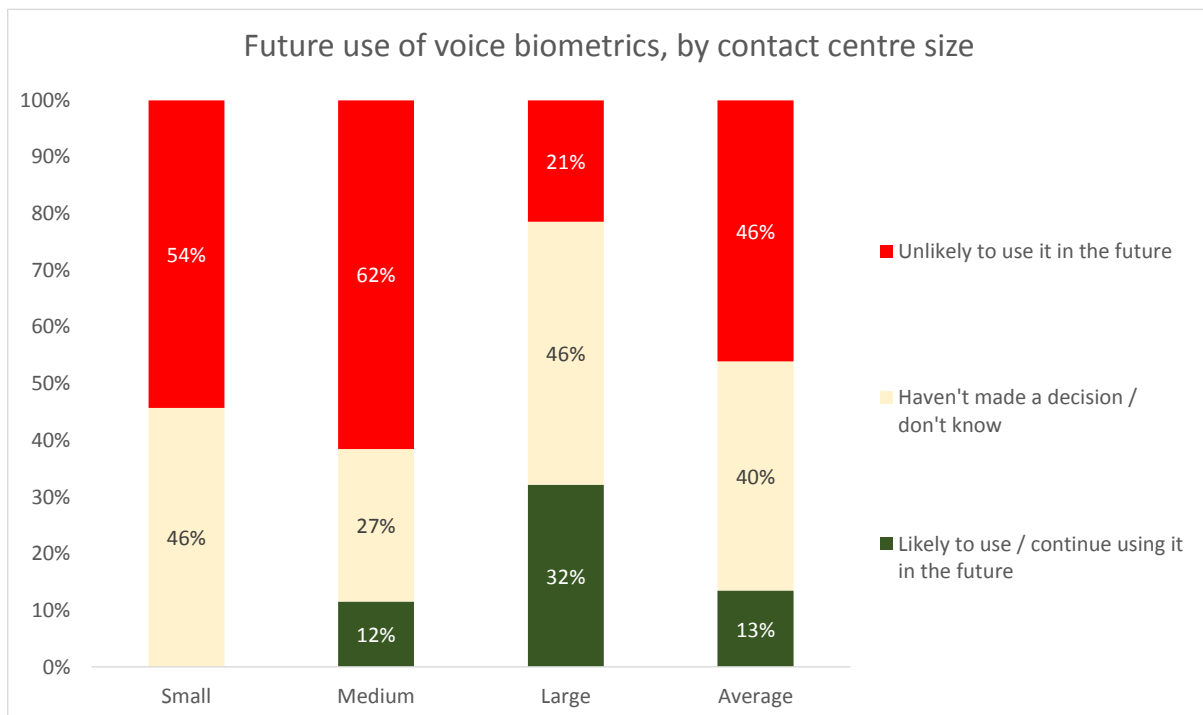


...Unlocking Aspiration

The interest in using voice biometrics for customer authentication is tipped more towards larger operations, which are more likely to have high call volumes meaning that 30 seconds cut from each call would add up to a very considerable saving, without affecting the customer or agent experience negatively.

Finance respondents were by far the most likely to look favourably on voice biometrics, but the argument has certainly not yet been won.

Figure 94: Future use of voice biometrics, by contact centre size



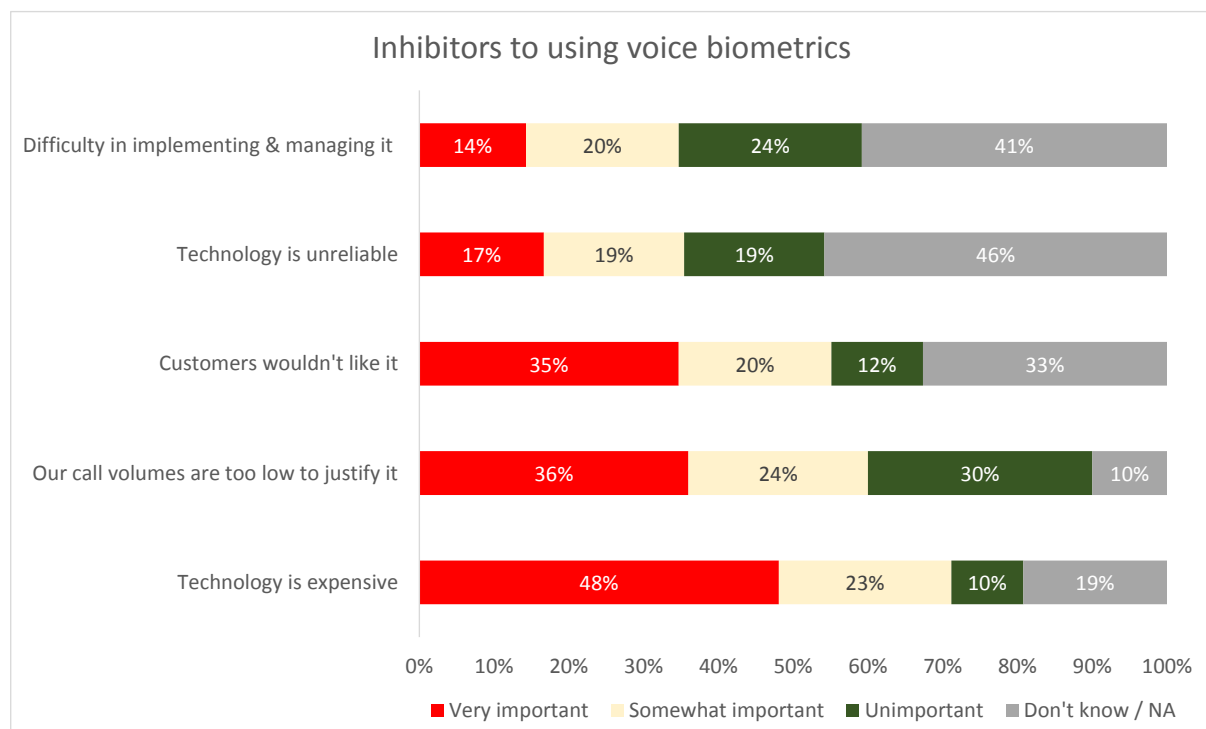
The main inhibitor to voice biometrics is the perceived expense of the solution, with 48% of respondents stating that this was a very important reason not to implement it. This was particularly the case for both small and medium operations, which reported well over 60% of respondents considering this factor very important for them.

PERFORMANCE TELECOM Voice Biometrics will be available on a turnkey 'pay per verification' basis by the beginning of 2016. Our intention is to make this technology available at low cost for contact centres of any size without the need for complex, lengthy and expensive implementation projects.

These types of contact centre were also the most likely to have concerns over the reliability of the technology, with worries about running the solution also present in small & medium operations. Worries over customer sentiment were significant for contact centres in all size bands.

As might be expected, respondents in small contact centres are most concerned that call volumes are too low to make the solution worthwhile: for large operations, it is not the case that the commercial benefit isn't there, but concerns over the use of the solution are certainly present.

Figure 95: Inhibitors to using voice biometrics



CALL-BACK AND QUEUE MANAGEMENT

ContactBabel carried out a large-scale survey of the public that explored why customers notoriously hate queuing to speak to a contact centre agent, yet seemed far more acceptant to wait in an actual physical queue, often for a longer time.

Figure 96: 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%

Apart from the fact that customers have a lot of strongly felt reasons for disliking phone queues, the key finding from this table is that 61% of the public 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, to estimate their own wait time, and exercise some level of control over the situation. 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 contact centres over many years indicate that an average wait time is around 20-30 seconds. However, when the public was asked to estimate the time they **usually** (not exceptionally) spent waiting to speak to a contact centre, the average answer was 11½ minutes - 27 times longer than the reality.

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 for the contact centre 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 even if the caller does decide to hold on, this experience starts the call off badly leaving the agent with a lot to make up. 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 are given 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 not only provides customers with information about current queue conditions but also presents them with various active options, such as remaining on hold or choosing to be called back when it is their turn.



Today's customers have different expectations of how they should interact with organisations. They expect an omni-channel, self-service experience, but also expect to be able to talk to someone if and when they need to, and calling into and waiting in an inbound queue is particularly alien to the younger generation. By deploying a multi-channel callback solution, where customers can automatically switch to a call from whatever channel they are interacting with, organisations can start to meet those expectations.

There are several different varieties of virtual queuing systems: the "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 the likely wait time and offering the option of receiving an outbound 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 a queue. Customers who opt for a call-back are prompted to enter their telephone number and possibly some extra details that can be used for agent selection and skills-based routing, and are then asked to 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 suitable 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.

Scheduled call-back options differ from a FIFO experience, 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 (for example, when they know they will be back at their desk and available to take a call).

Callback has evolved.

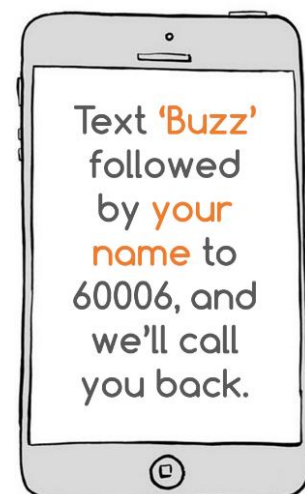


Customer Callback Solutions:

- Banish the Queue! Offer in-queue callback to callers.
- Add Buzzeasy 'call me' buttons to your web-site, mobile app and emails.
- Send Proactive outbound SMS campaigns - your customer simply replies to a personalised text message to request a call.
- Works with any contact centre infrastructure.
- Pilots available - set-up in days!

72% of customers buy more from organisations they can talk to!

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In-queue Callback

- Banish the contact centre queue!
- Reduce caller abandonment
- Flatten call volumes
- Increase business
- Improve customer experience



Digital Channel Customer Contact

- Powerful 'Call Me' buttons
- Connecting web, mobile and social to the contact centre
- Bringing context to the conversation
- Omni-channel experience
- Improved MI and Digital Customer Experience



Outbound Customer Engagement

- Re-inventing outbound
- Personalised, interactive & permissions based
- Sales, fraud alerts, collections, surveys, appointments
- Multi-channel: SMS, email, IVR and voice

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There are several types 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 a 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.

Respondents offering a telephony call-back option were asked to state which types of call-back were presented to callers. The majority of respondents that offered call-back functionality allowed callers to request a FIFO call-back (i.e. acting as a placeholder in the queue), with a minority allowing customers to specify a scheduled time.

Figure 97: Types of telephony call-back offered to customers (only from respondents offering telephony call-back)

Type of call-back	Proportion of respondents offering call-back that use this
FIFO (first-in, first-out) - holds the caller's place in the queue, then calls once they are at the front	75%
Forecast-based (called back at a time to suit the contact centre)	30%
Timed (called back at or before a specific time, regardless of queue conditions)	30%
Datebook (caller can specify a day to be called back on)	18%

More than half of respondents who offered call-back reported that FIFO placeholder call-backs were far more requested than one of the delayed call-back types. On analysing the contact centre activity type (i.e. sales or service), those callers making sales enquiries were more likely to want a placeholder-type of call-back. This could possibly be explained by the differing states of mind of customers calling to purchase something, or to make a query or payment. The former are more likely to have chosen to call the contact centre to make a purchase that they are enthusiastic about, and/or which is time-sensitive, and as such, want to speak to the business as soon as possible.

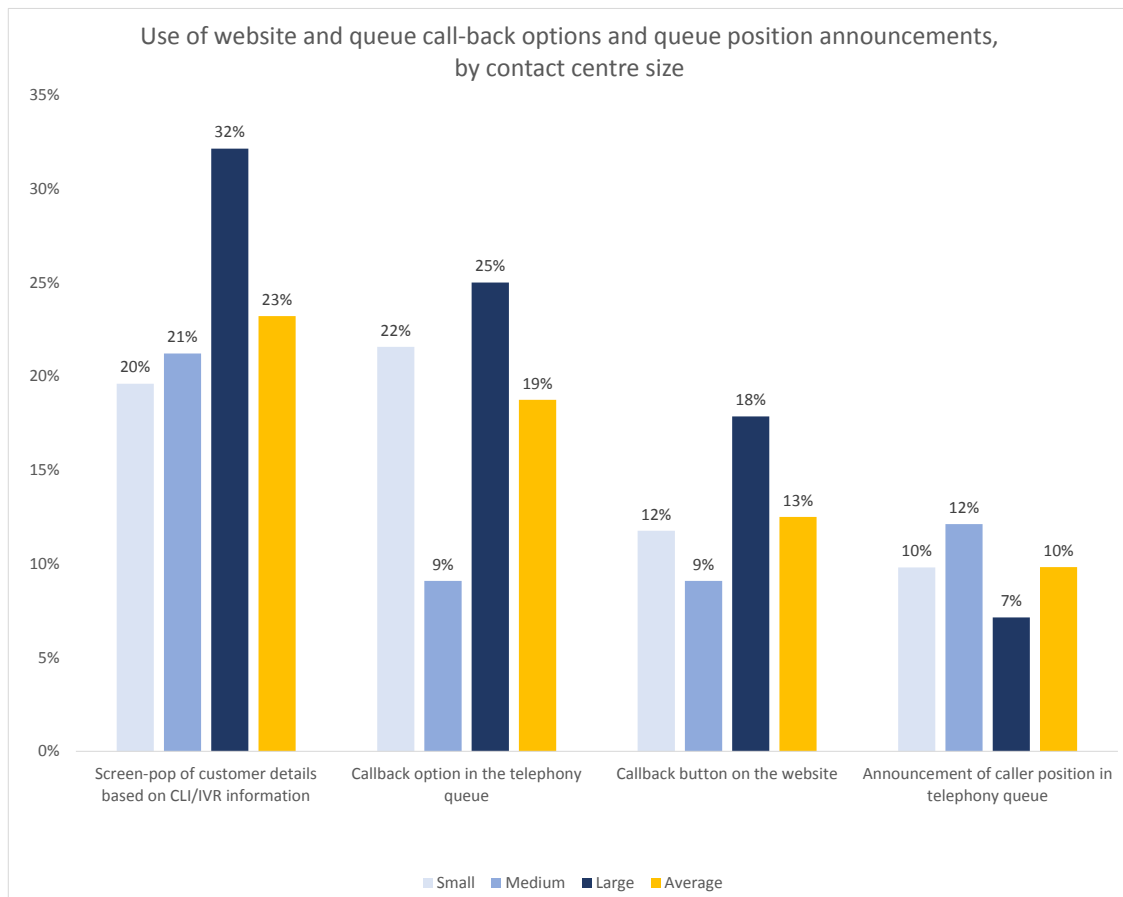
The use of a website 'call-me' button (which initiates an outbound call at a time specified by the recipient) is weighted towards operations that carry out significant sales, but is present only in the case of 13% of this year's respondents. We would expect to see this continue to increase significantly, and play an important part in providing customer support especially via mobile / smartphone channels.



With the rush to migrate to digital channels, there is a real danger that organisations are forgetting the huge value of their contact centre interactions with customers and potential customers. UK callback specialist Buzzeasy analysed 20 leading UK retailers' mobile apps and found that mobile customer service lags far behind the customer service options available from browser based e-commerce. A simple 'call me' button in mobile and web channels is an incredibly powerful tool to increase sales and improve customer experience – particularly if the call is delivered to the agent with context (i.e. details of the online interaction that resulted in a callback request).

19% of respondents offer a telephony queue call-back option, and only around 10% of respondents announce the position of the call in the queue. 23% of respondents use screen-popping functionality, putting information about the caller and possibly their requirements on the agent desktop as the call is delivered, which is more likely to be used in larger operations.

Figure 98: Use of website and queue call-back options and queue position announcements, by contact centre size



Callback in an Outbound Environment

Think callback is only relevant for inbound customer contact? Think again!

UK Callback specialist Buzzeasy provides the rationale and a case study for the use of Responsive SMS with Callback as an outbound strategy.



Transform Outbound Contact using SMS:

Outbound customer contact is a complicated process, and one that is becoming increasingly difficult due to onerous regulations and customer cynicism. Responsive SMS is an alternative outbound contact process that revolutionises customer engagement by putting the customer in control, leading to increased conversion rates and reduced agent time.

Responsive SMS with Callback: Traditionally, relying on customers to respond to an outbound communication has resulted in poor response rates. But if you can personalise the communication, make it incredibly easy for the customer to express an interest, and if you can respond to that interest immediately, the results can be incredible. Responsive SMS with Callback delivers all this, automatically, and it works seamlessly alongside your existing inbound or outbound contact centre infrastructure.

The Benefits of Responsive SMS:

- Reduced costs through focusing on the part of your database that is interested in your offer.
- Significantly higher sales conversion rate. Typically double the conversion rates for outbound campaigns.
- Lower staff turnover. Staff are able to talk to customers who are interested and engaged, leading to higher job satisfaction and lower recruitment and training costs.
- Faster returns. By focusing on only the customers that are interested in your offer, and being able to get to them first time, you are able to convert them faster than with traditional calling techniques.
- Better quality customer relationships. By talking to your customers when they choose you build a stronger relationship with them which makes future sales efforts more effective.

Text “Buzz” and your name to 60006 and we’ll call you back!

Case Study: UK Financial Services

Before: A UK bank has a significant outbound contact programme and uses a predictive dialling system. They were engaging online with a range of customers interested in their financial products and receiving online registrations and requests for further information. When they tried to call the customers to provide that information using traditional outbound dialling techniques, they were only reaching between 15% and 25% of those customers within 24 hours – the key period for engaging interested customers. So, they were missing between 75% and 85% of customers who didn’t even talk to the bank, even though they had expressed an interest in the offer. The time delay was crucial – it gave customers time to look elsewhere.

Solution: The bank adopted BuzzCampaign – a cloud-based SMS callback solution from Buzzeasy. For the bank this was a simple technology to adopt – it works seamlessly with any call centre

infrastructure (inbound or outbound) and automatically makes calls to connect the bank’s agents with their customers.

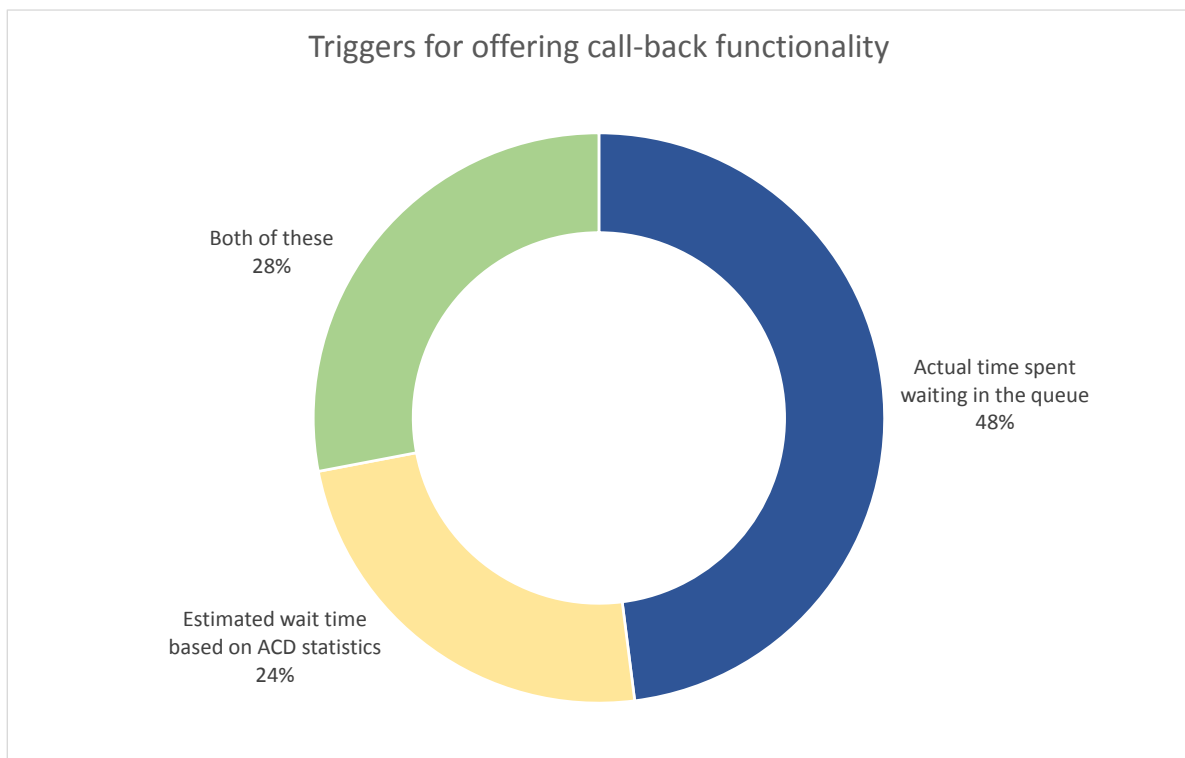
Process: Using BuzzCampaign, the bank now sends those customers that express an interest a personalised text asking them to simply reply by text when they are ready to talk. BuzzCampaign then places that request in a queue to be handled as soon as the next agent becomes available, and immediately conferences in the customer.

Outcome: By adapting to the convenience of the customer, response rates of up to 6 times greater have been achieved. Not only that, but the bank is now talking to customers when they are ready to consider the offer, and so the sales conversion rate for each call is higher too. Plus, instead of encountering 85% rejection rates, and having to staff for failed calls and voicemails, they are now talking to over 50% of their campaign list, without the failed calls they were previously experiencing.

www.buzzeasy.com

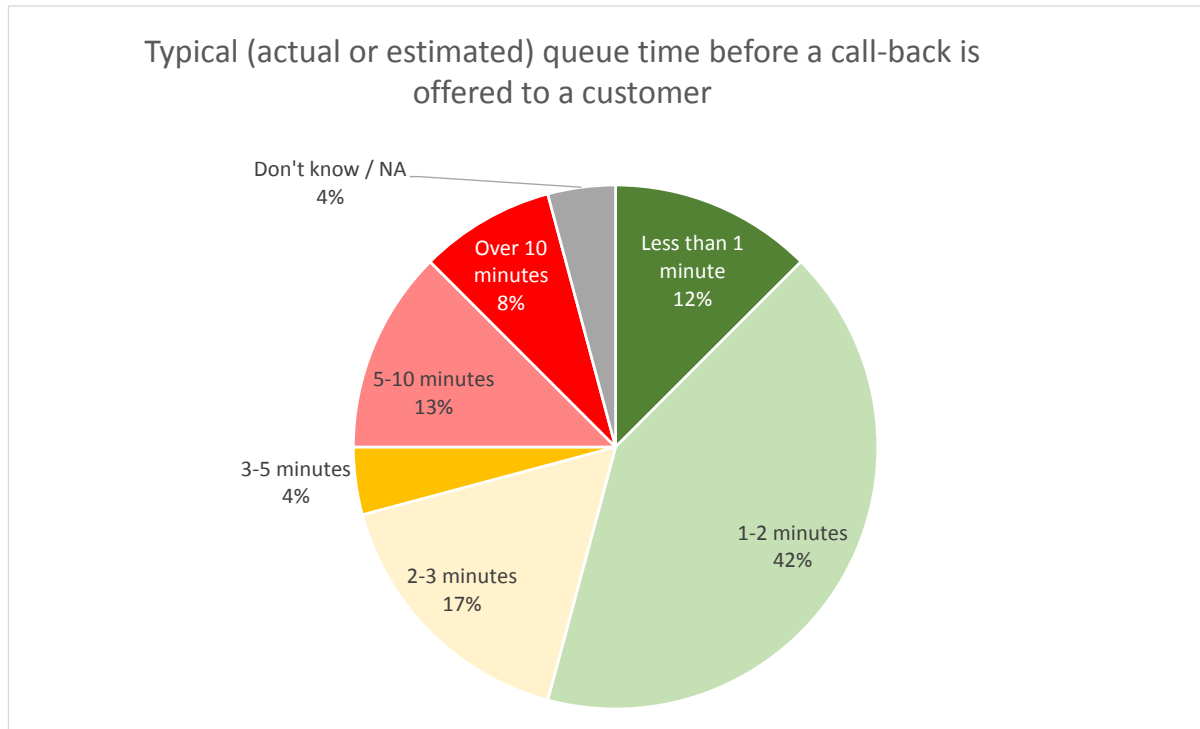
Respondents indicate that telephony call-back tends not to be universally available to callers, with businesses only offering it after a certain period of wait time or once the queue becomes so long that it triggers the functionality to be offered. 48% of respondents trigger call-back functionality based on the actual time that the customer has spent waiting, with almost a quarter looking at the estimated wait time based on ACD statistics. 28% of respondents use a mixture of actual and expected queue time.

Figure 99: Triggers for offering call-back functionality



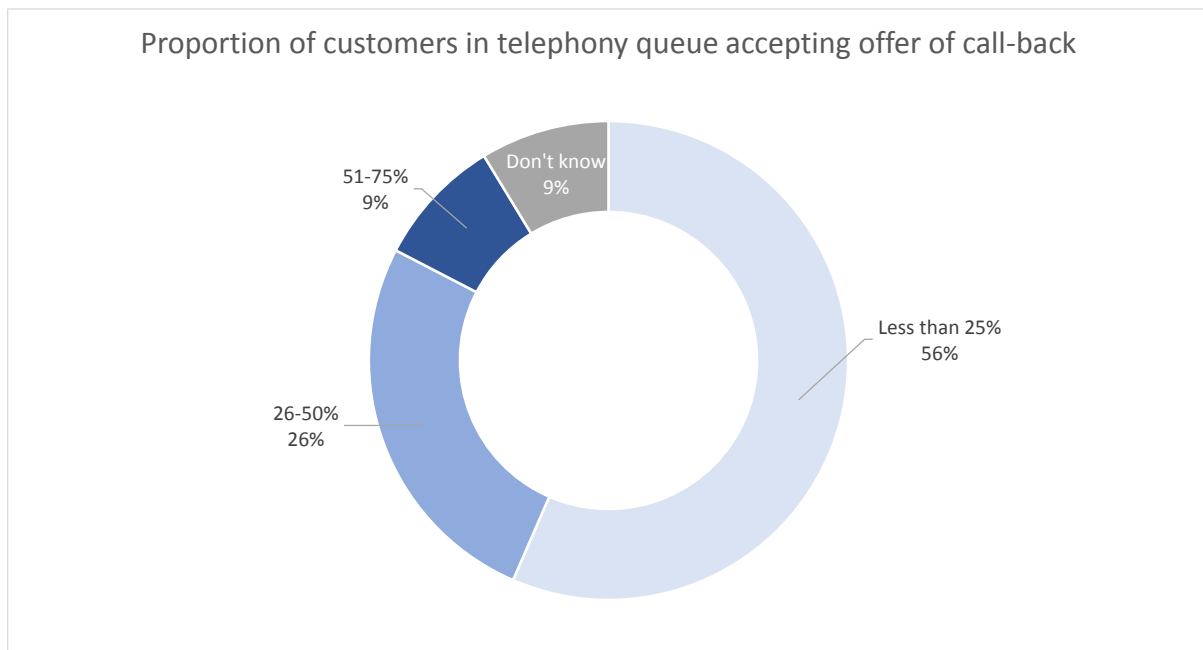
42% of respondents using call-back state that it is offered after the caller has spent between one and two minutes in the queue, although 21% say that it takes longer than five minutes before call-back is offered, and which point many customers have already given up.

Figure 100: Typical queue time before call-back is offered



Of those who are offered a call-back, most respondents report that fewer than a quarter of callers chose this option. This may be because customers lack confidence that the business will call back when they say they will, are relatively unfamiliar with the technology and/or do not have the call-back option offered to them early enough and so have already abandoned the call.

Figure 101: Proportion of customers in telephony queue accepting offer of call-back



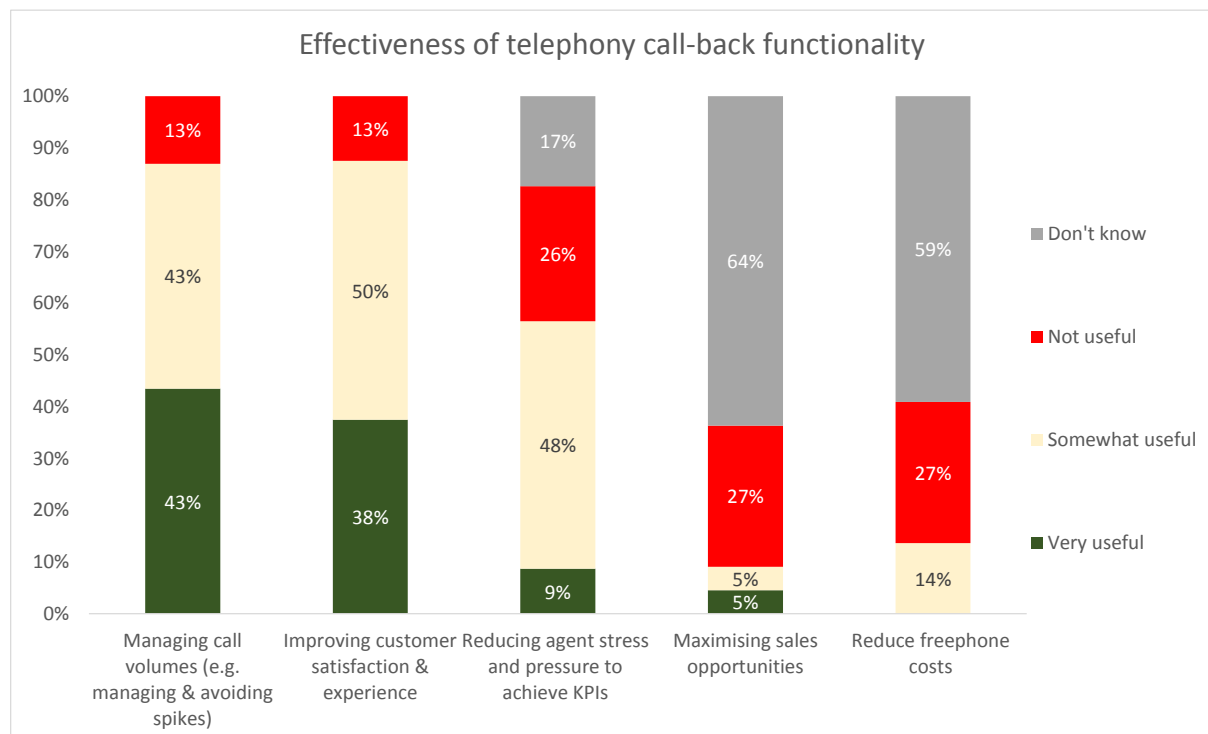
The previous finding is concerning, as call-back has great potential for both customers and businesses: virtual queuing and call-back, when implemented - and explained properly to customers - can be a win-win for both business and customer by:

- 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 toll-free costs, as virtual queuing time does not incur telephone charges.

Respondents offering telephony call-back functionality stated clearly that it was most useful for managing call volumes and spikes in busy periods, and thus improving customer satisfaction and experience. Being able to spread calls out over the day and allow callers to keep their place in the queue - without actually having to queue – is seen by users as being of great use to both company and customer.

Telephony call-back is not seen by businesses as having much of a positive effect upon reducing agent stress and pressure to achieve key metrics, nor is it viewed in the context of maximising sales opportunities from customers who would otherwise go elsewhere. No respondents considered it particularly useful in reducing their freephone costs from customers who were queueing at the businesses' expense from considerable amount of time. It is not to say that telephony call-back does not provide these benefits, just that respondents do not use call-back with these in mind.

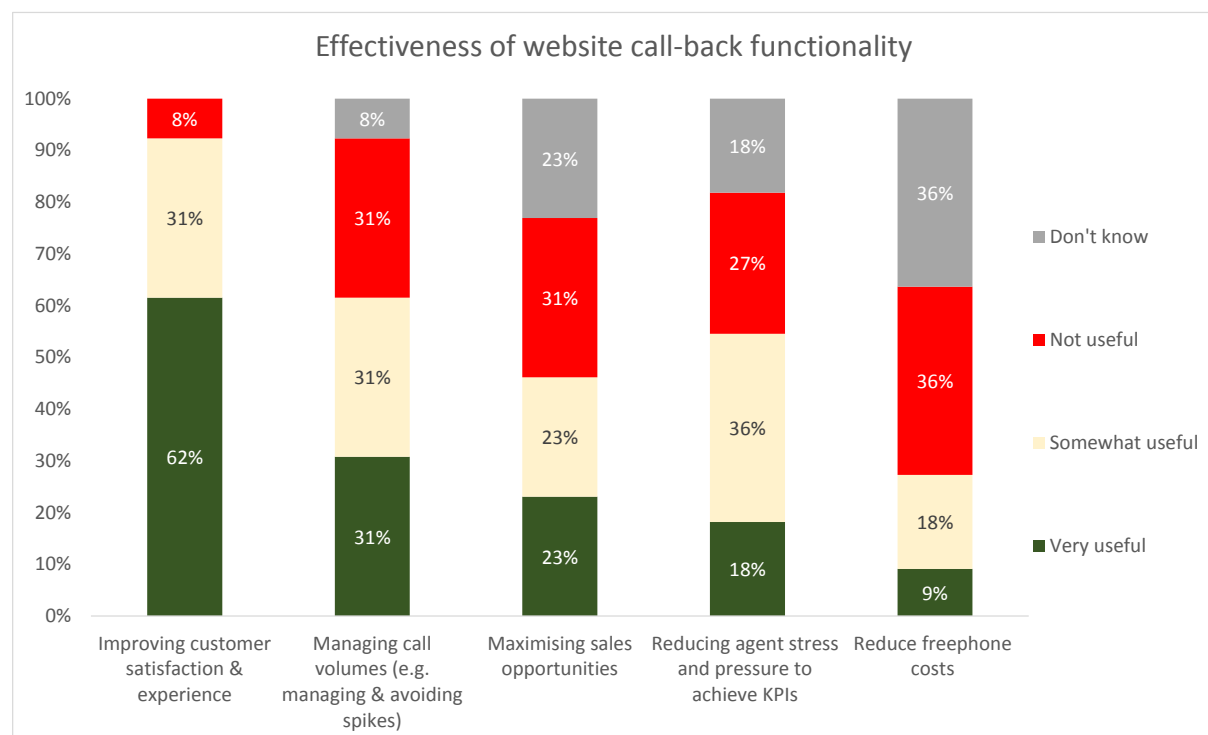
Figure 102: Effectiveness of telephony call-back functionality



Looking at the perceived effectiveness of website call-back functionality, it is worth noting that respondents believed web call-back was particularly beneficial for improving the customer experience, and thus satisfaction.

A significant proportion of respondents did not believe that it particularly affected call volumes, and although a greater proportion noted its use in maximising sales opportunities, more respondents surprisingly did not appreciate this benefit, which is arguably one of the main features of website call-back.

Figure 103: Effectiveness of website call-back functionality



HEADSETS

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 employees, headset purchase is a large ongoing 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.

Most contact centre employees 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 employees 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 employees wandering around, but that the supervisor needs to be able to be mobile. Employees 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 can reduce the time taken on each call, improving customer satisfaction.

Headsets and the 'enterprise as contact centre'

The newest headsets support the 'enterprise as contact centre' model by allowing the employee to involve knowledge workers in a three-way conversation with the employee via Microsoft Lync, IBM SameTime or VoIP, for example. This could allow 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. Employees will make and take calls via their PC, so choosing a headset that can adapt to future technology infrastructures is key.

Stand out from the crowd

ENCOREPRO 700 SERIES



Customer expectations are higher than ever before. So help your people deliver the ultimate in customer service with the ultimate headset.

Introducing the EncorePro 700 Series.

Every component is designed for exceptional performance – from the seven axes for easy adjustability to the extendible mic boom. So now there's no need to accept any compromises when it comes to all-day comfort, audio quality and reliability.

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The weight, sound quality, amount of background noise allowed in and out, 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 employees can feel isolated if they cannot hear the world around them. In addition, 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.

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 employees 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 employee 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, employees handled an average of 10% more calls per day than did the control group.

plantronics® By the time a customer service representative (CSR) answers a call, it's likely that the customer has exhausted other routes to resolve their concern, and has reached a high level of frustration that the CSR has to deflect. As the brand ambassador, the CSR needs to focus on and engage the customer in a way that delivers satisfying service (restoring their confidence in the brand). Providing CSRs with reliable, premium devices that make their jobs easier and more enjoyable will boost productivity, improve employee satisfaction and create a better customer experience.

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 employees' 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 it⁷.

⁷ Source: CCF magazine

In the UK, “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 employees:

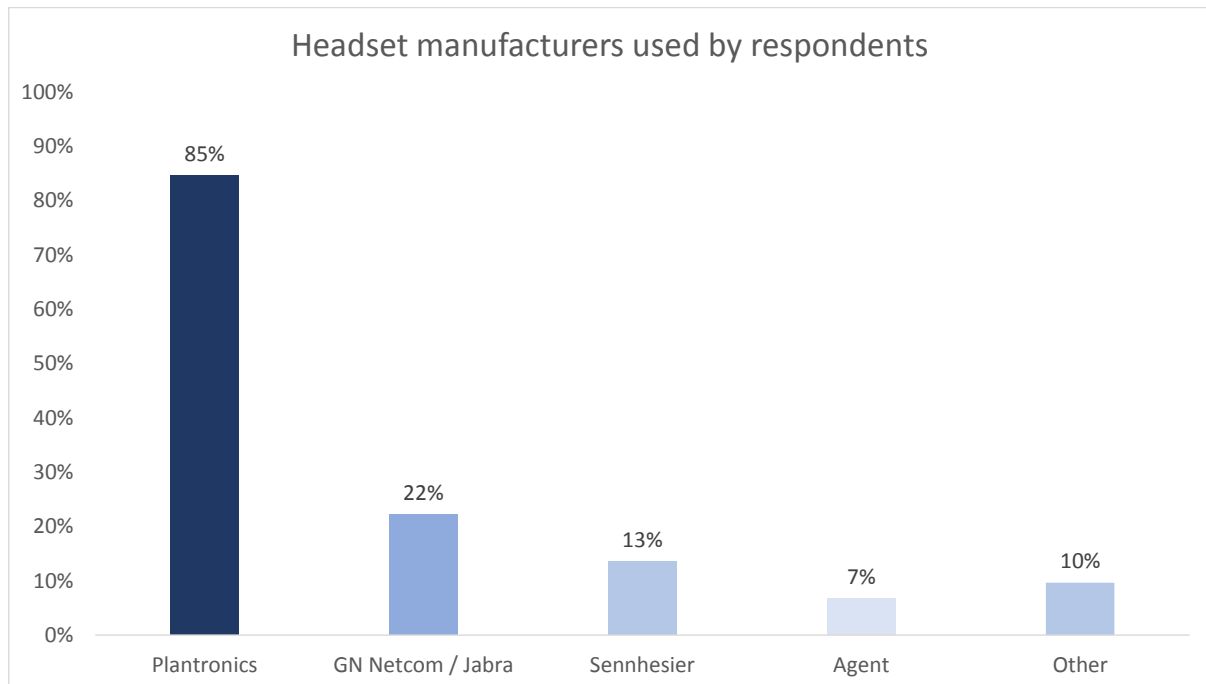
- Measure contact centre noise regularly and record it
- Fully understand legislation and create a formal policy so that staff at all levels of a business are aware of it
- Make sure that the headsets used are compliant with current legislation, and test them throughout their life
- Provide employees with a choice of headsets - monaural or binaural - the latter can help to absorb background noise, but may make the employee feel more cut-off from their environment
- Be aware that excessively long shifts may cause damage to employees’ hearing, even if within nominally-safe limits
- Use sound-absorbing materials as much as possible to absorb unnecessary echoes and reverberation
- Educate employees 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.

HEADSET MANUFACTURERS

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. There has been a recent decrease in headset replacement which may be a response to the cost reductions put in place across most contact centres in the past few years, as well as the fact that the overall quality and durability of headsets is improving, meaning there are fewer requirements for replacement.

Figure 104: Headset manufacturers used by respondents (NB: total is greater than 100% as multiple headset manufacturers may be used)



WIRELESS AND IP HEADSETS

WIRELESS HEADSETS

One of the main advantages of wireless headsets, compared to wired versions, is that employees 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 employees 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 employee is to the base station, and use less transmission power when the employee is near, but boost it when the employee is further away, increasing the potential roaming distance when required and increasing battery life when the employee 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 employee productivity due to increased mobility and reduced hold time, as the employees 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 employees can listen in to a live conversation by pairing their headsets to the employee's base
- Improved employee 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.

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 much weaker than previously: 43% of respondents in smaller contact centres use wireless headsets, with a penetration rate of 72% in operations that use them, whereas. In larger contact centres, while 34% of operations have some wireless headsets, there is a penetration rate of only 21% in these contact centres, suggesting that it may be the supervisors and team leaders who use these, rather than the employees.

Employees working in product or technical support tend to have wireless headsets, as do supervisors. Outbound sales staff may prefer to be more mobile on their calls, and ask for wireless headsets too.

Figure 105: Use of wireless headsets, by contact centre size

Contact centre size	% respondents using wireless headsets	% of headsets that are wireless (ONLY in contact centres using them)	% of headsets that are wireless (industry-wide)
Small	43%	72%	31%
Medium	29%	31%	29%
Large	34%	21%	7%
Average	37%	44%	18%

plantronics® Wireless density is a possible issue — the general rule is that the number of devices you can operate without interference in a 10,000 sq. foot area using a given protocol is twice the number of available channels. There are two mainstream protocols: DECT, which offers 120 channels, and the 900Mhz standard, which supports up to 90 channels. These two protocols can operate alongside each other without conflict for maximum density, so it is worth seeking vendors that offer the same headset style for both protocols, and which use adaptive power to reduce transmission energy based on proximity of the headset to its base.

IP HEADSETS

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, although performance and delivery has improved considerably over recent years.

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. 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 employee 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 employee, particularly when experienced as poor sound quality, such as missing pieces of sound, as well as the lag itself.

Currently, 76% of respondents have some headsets that are able to cope in an IP environment. Of these respondents, 86% of their headsets can handle IP. Industry-wide, respondents report that 77% of their headsets are IP-capable.

As with previous years, there is little major difference with across size bands.

Figure 106: Use of IP headsets, by contact centre size

Contact centre size	% respondents using IP headsets	% of headsets that are IP (ONLY in contact centres using them)	% of headsets that are IP (industry-wide)
Small	70%	89%	63%
Medium	81%	97%	78%
Large	79%	97%	77%
Average	76%	86%	71%

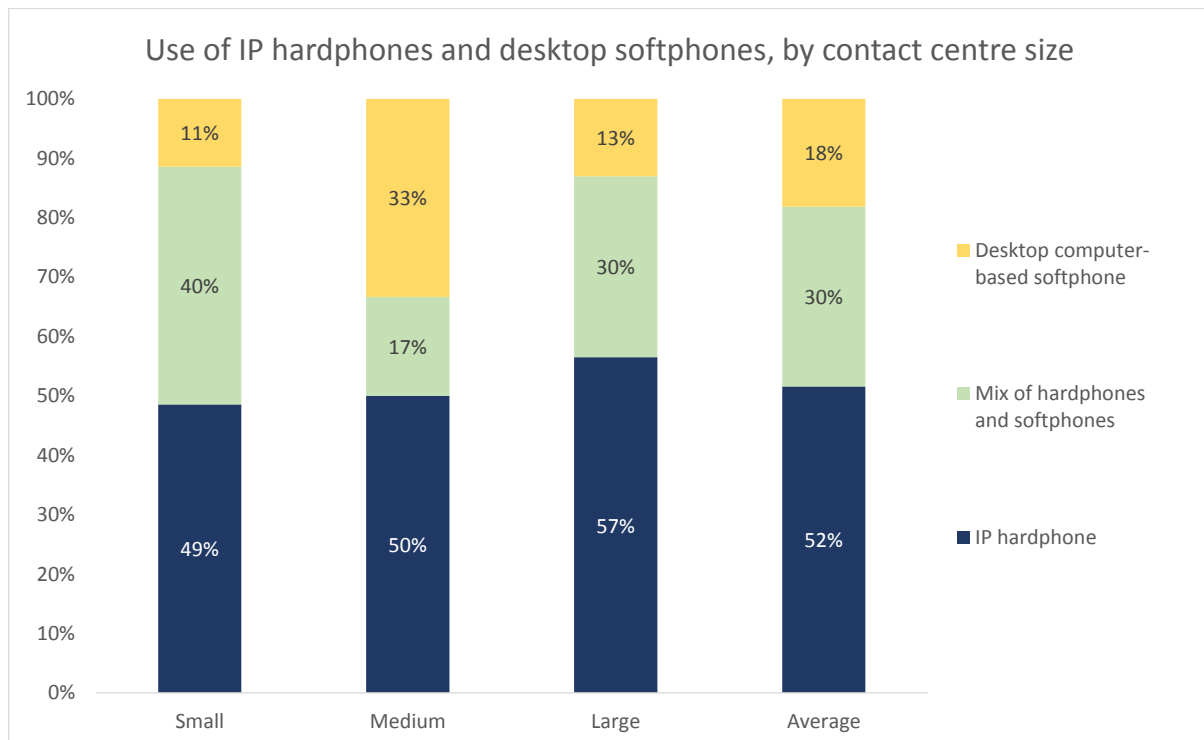
IP headsets and homeworkers

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 employee 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 employee connects a headset to the PC, without having a traditional telephone at all.

Most respondents have a mixture of both types, with larger operations a little more likely than smaller contact centres to be a hardphone-only environment. Respondents from mid-sized operations seem most likely to be using softphones.

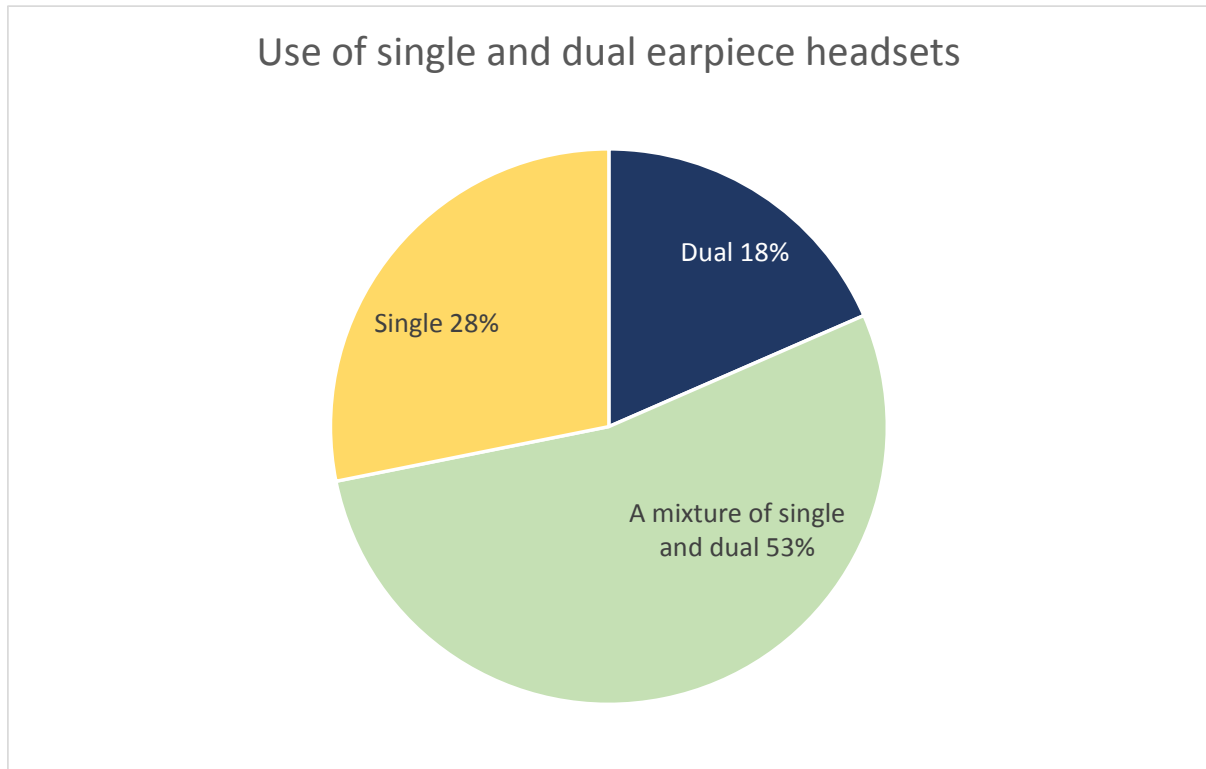
Figure 107: Use of IP hardphones and desktop softphones, by contact centre size



SINGLE- / DUAL-EARPIECE HEADSETS

Whether an employee 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.

Figure 108: Use of single and dual earpiece headsets

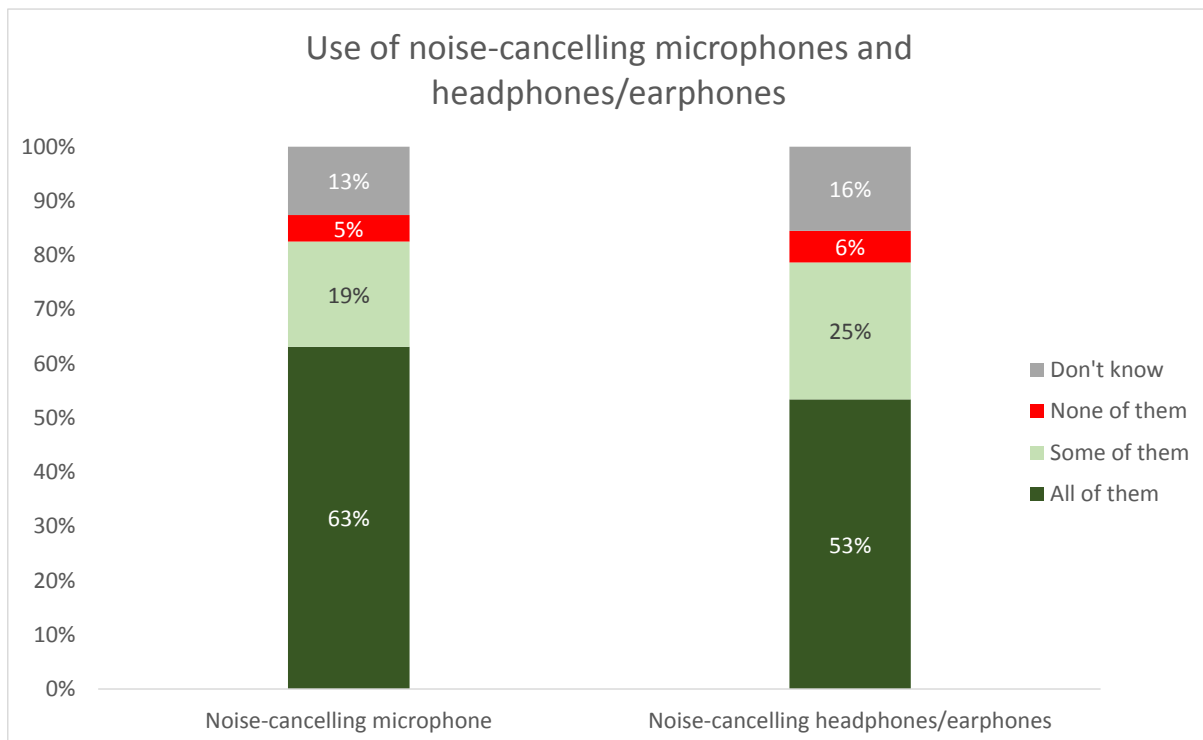


NOISE-CANCELLING HEADSETS

63% of respondents report that all of their headsets have noise-cancelling microphones, which cut out the background noise that can be distracting for the caller. 19% report partial use of these types of headset.

53% have noise-cancelling headphones / earphones for all of their headsets, which means that some employees are still prone to noisy environments which can affect their concentration, accuracy and performance. 25% of respondents partially use this type of headset.

Figure 109: Use of noise-cancelling microphones and headphones/earphones



plantronics® In an open-office environment, people must compete to hear and be heard as noise becomes a growing concern. These noise challenges can be addressed by applying best practices, starting with determining what can be done acoustically to improve the environment. The next step is finding the right technology: a variety of headset technologies are available for noise management, including active and passive noise cancelling for both transmit and receive audio processors to enhance clarity and intelligibility, hearing protection, and tracking of acoustic events for later analysis.

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."

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](https://www.plantronics.com/casestudies) >

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. The CCMA (www.ccma.org.uk) has stated 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

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:



Drive more revenue, be more efficient and make more people smile with the world's smartest consumer engagement software—[Astute Solutions](#)



Buzzeasy provides callback solutions that reduce call abandonment and increase agent productivity.
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CALABRIO

[Calabrio](#) redefines integrated [workforce optimisation](#) and voice-of-the-customer analytics with software that is intuitive, flexible and hassle-free, for today's multi-channel customer engagement centres.



[CallMiner Eureka](#) and [myEureka](#) interaction analytics reveals opportunities to streamline processes, correct technical issues, reduce talk time, improve first-call resolution, and optimise agent and overall call centre performance.



Your trusted partner for secure telephone and web card payments to reduce PCI DSS compliance scope



The Eptica customer engagement platform is designed around a central knowledge base, powerful workflow and Eptica Linguistic Services™, advanced linguistic capabilities that enable organisations to quickly understand the tone and context of digital interactions, ensuring that every incoming request is handled consistently and efficiently.



Developing your People to Enhance Your Customers' Experience



[Workforce Management](#) from Genesys helps organisations increase workforce efficiency and employee performance across all communication channels and business processes (cases, claims, activations, billing etc.) through an integrated omnichannel platform approach.



Everything you need to build a multi-channel contact centre in the cloud.



Intraday Automation from Intradiem facilitates more essential training, schedule flexibility and variety in the agent's day, leading to higher levels of agent satisfaction and engagement and enabling an exceptional customer experience.



If you are worried about how to improve your customer interactions, talk to us - there is no other organisation in the UK that has a broader set of tools to help you tune your customer service, from operational consultancy to speech analytics, the full suite of contact centre technology and even the best approach for securing your credit card transactions.



We deliver more customers.



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' [Agent Desktop](#) gives contact centre agents easy access to tools and workflows, helping them work more efficiently and increasing productivity with flexible scripting features, an intuitive, graphical layout interface and WYSIWYG design tools to make it easier to build sophisticated agent screens and to unify the agent desktop environment.



Opinion-8's VoC and VoE surveys give you the power to listen directly to your customers and employees to drive service improvement in your business: our web and SMS surveys mean you can reach out to all your client base to ensure you're capturing feedback where it matters.



Experts in Contact Centre Performance, PCI Compliance and Security, Workforce management and emerging technologies such as Voice Biometrics, Performance Telecom are passionate about delivering exceptional solutions for your contact centre - contact us to discuss your ideas, we'd love to hear from you.



Used by some of the largest call centres in the world, Pindrop catches attackers and verifies customers over the phone, saving you time and money, and improving your customer experience.



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



Rant & Rave's Frontline Engagement Solution optimises performance and efficiency by delivering Voice of the Customer straight to the agent so they can continually improve.



Pinpointing the issue so that you can spend your time working on it.



Ultra is the leading provider of Cloud technology solutions offering inclusive campaign performance monitoring services to ensure clients' contact centres are continuously as efficient and productive as possible.



Understanding the value of your Contact Centre agents and the ongoing complexity of customer interactions, VANAD Aloha is the one of a kind solution in true Customer Engagement.

Request a free demo at www.vanadaloha.com



Verint® can help your organisation drive smarter engagement with customers, enhance employee productivity across the front and back office, and deliver the real-time guidance needed to help improve the overall customer experience.



VoxGen is the IVR design, development and hosting company with a mission to make every automated call a great experience.

NEW MEDIA AND THE CUSTOMER OF THE FUTURE

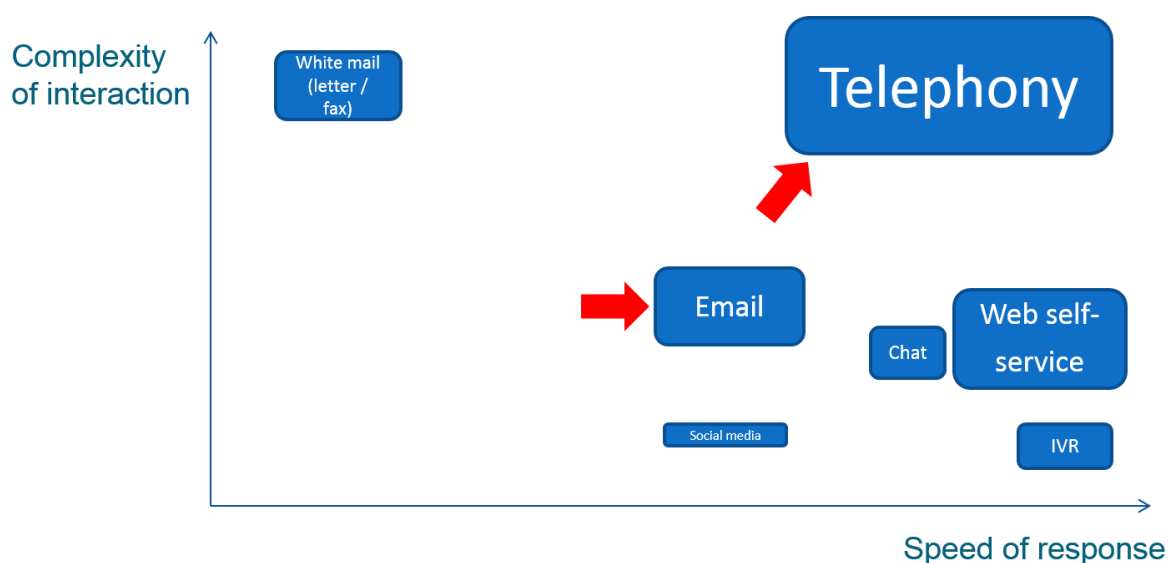
In the late 1990s, analysts predicted email to be the next big B2C communication method, only for customers to find that, in many cases, sending an email didn't get customers any sort of answer at all. Predictably, for many years, email accounted for only 1-2% of a business's inbound communication. However, 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 because the required volumes weren't there, which further weakened its effectiveness.

It is consumers, not businesses, who make the decision on which communication methods will be most used. 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, and the web - as a channel for self-service, sales and increasingly person-to-person contact - is an integral part of most businesses' customer contact strategy, with the advent of social media and the mobile channel throwing other elements into the mix.

The following chart gives an idea of where things stand today. The size of the boxes gives an indication of the relative importance of major channels, by volume (with the exception of web self-service, for which we do not have comparable data on volumes).

Figure 110: Inbound contact channels: popularity, suitability and speed of response





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, insurance. Response times are, by definition, relatively long.

Telephony: on average, by far the largest inbound interaction channel. It has ubiquity, is a real-time two-way channel that is able to cover many different topics, and if queue length is reasonable, has one of the quickest speeds of response 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 'knowledge experts', without this having being planned.

Email: despite the inherent difficulty of establishing a real-time, two-way conversation, 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, and the ability to create a paper trail with attached documentation and reference is particularly valued for complex issues. The red arrow 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: this channel has declined somewhat, but 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. The appearance of visual IVR - which allows users of smartphones in particular to view the IVR menu structure - should give this technology a major boost.

Web chat: this formerly niche channel is establishing itself with significant recent growth, particularly in retail-based environments. As telephony agents provide a live back-up to telephony IVR self-service attempts, web chat offers the same capabilities to support a web self-service session which cannot be fulfilled successfully. It offers 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: social media as a customer service channel is growing rapidly and has an extremely high profile both outside and within the organisation, and grabbing the attention of senior executives far more than the traditional contact centre has ever managed to do. As such, there is a great deal 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.

For more information about the future of multichannel and omnichannel customer communication, please download the free report: “The Inner Circle Guide to Multichannel Customer Contact” from www.contactbabel.com.

Figure 111: 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. Templated 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 UK contact centre industry has 15% or more 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.5% of inbound contact centre interactions are dealt with by voice self-service, higher in some sectors with very large contact centres. Movement to web self-service continues.
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, 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..	Minority of UK businesses currently use SMS to communicate with customers, although a great deal of interest is being shown.

Channel	Current use	Drivers	Inhibitors	Proportion of interactions
Web chat / instant messaging	Growing as specific applications for its use emerge. Used in significant minority of businesses.	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 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. 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, with potential to grow rapidly, especially in retail.
Video agents	Limited current use. Can be delivered through PC, kiosk or interactive digital TV. Canned video via YouTube is growing for product demos. Also C2B video also emerging.	Eye contact is critical for establishing trust and 60% of the communication process is visual. Opportunities for demonstrating product features. "Show, not tell" is powerful. Growth driven by 4G, Web RTC & smartphones.	Instead of live video, customers may prefer the impersonality of telephony. Agents will need training in visual presentation	Currently very low.
Cobrowsing	Currently limited. Page-pushing and joint form-filling more used in the US than elsewhere.	Allowing an agent to work alongside a customer's desktop can give more personal and effective assistance.	Can be expensive per session. Not widely understood by customers.	Interest from finance, insurance and medical sectors, used alongside web chat.
Social media	Many US businesses offer social media as a customer service channel, predominantly through Facebook and Twitter.	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.	No security or ID verification process means 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.	Around 2-3%, but seen by senior management as far more important than volumes suggest.

Channel	Current use	Drivers	Inhibitors	Proportion of interactions
Kiosks	Supermarkets, cinemas, banks, fast-food outlets and train stations have touch-screen terminals which can deal with financial transactions, issuing tickets, taking orders & 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.	Growing, especially in the mobile sub-sector, as well as financial services in rural areas.
Mobile app	Around one-third of survey respondents have a mobile customer contact channel.	Ubiquity, powerful processing allowing specific apps to be used, 'always-on', video and camera offer additional routes	Bandwidth has to be paid for; small screen	Not tracked separately, although growing rapidly.

OMNICHANNEL

Today's customer has numerous devices, both voice and text-based, with which they can contact the business. They may decide to query an automated system, or a live agent. They may want the answer in real-time, or prefer to receive a reply at their convenience. They may use a fixed-line phone, a smartphone, PC, letter or use a kiosk in the street or in a physical store. Of course, not all contact is one-way - the business can also initiate outbound communications with its customers as well.

The complexity of the situation 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 they choose 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 platform is required 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, e-mail, fax, instant messaging and activities such as work items must be 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 approach can set priority levels to incoming calls, e-mails and chats, and offers functionality 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.

Such is the theory. The reality for most businesses is that the requirements of their customer base, along with the opportunity to cut service costs has thrust numerous new channels into the customer service mix, leaving them with the headache of deciding how to implement and integrate new technology, recruit and train agents appropriately, and forecast and schedule the right staff to handle these new types of interaction. The quickest and easiest option has generally to treat each channel separately, having agent siloes and treating each interaction as being independent, rather than part of a wider customer journey. If the customer changes channel, or contacts the business later about the same issue, they tend to have to start again from the beginning.



BREAK THROUGH THE OMNICHANNEL NOISE!

Deliver Personalised Experiences That Wow Your Customers And Stun Your Competitors!

Genesys has been powering great customer service and experiences since 1990 and orchestrates more than 100 million digital and voice interactions each day.

See how we can help you break through the omnichannel noise with exceptional customer experiences and journeys that create brand advocates and stun your competitors.

Find out more at genesys.com/uk



Multi-channel contact centres have been a reality for some time. However, most of them are deployed through a disconnected set of systems and siloed architecture. To provide a consistent omnichannel journey experience, a single platform approach towards managing all touch points consistently, through a single set of business rules is a must for companies that are serious about Customer Experience.

Recent years have seen the word ‘omnichannel’ introduced as describing the goal of customers being able to contact (and be contacted) through any channel - switching between them during the interaction as appropriate, while taking any relevant data and history along with them – with a single, unified view of the customer’s journey being available to the agent.

For the purposes of describing how far along the omnichannel process our survey respondents are, those who offer multiple communication channels to customers were asked to place themselves into one of three categories:

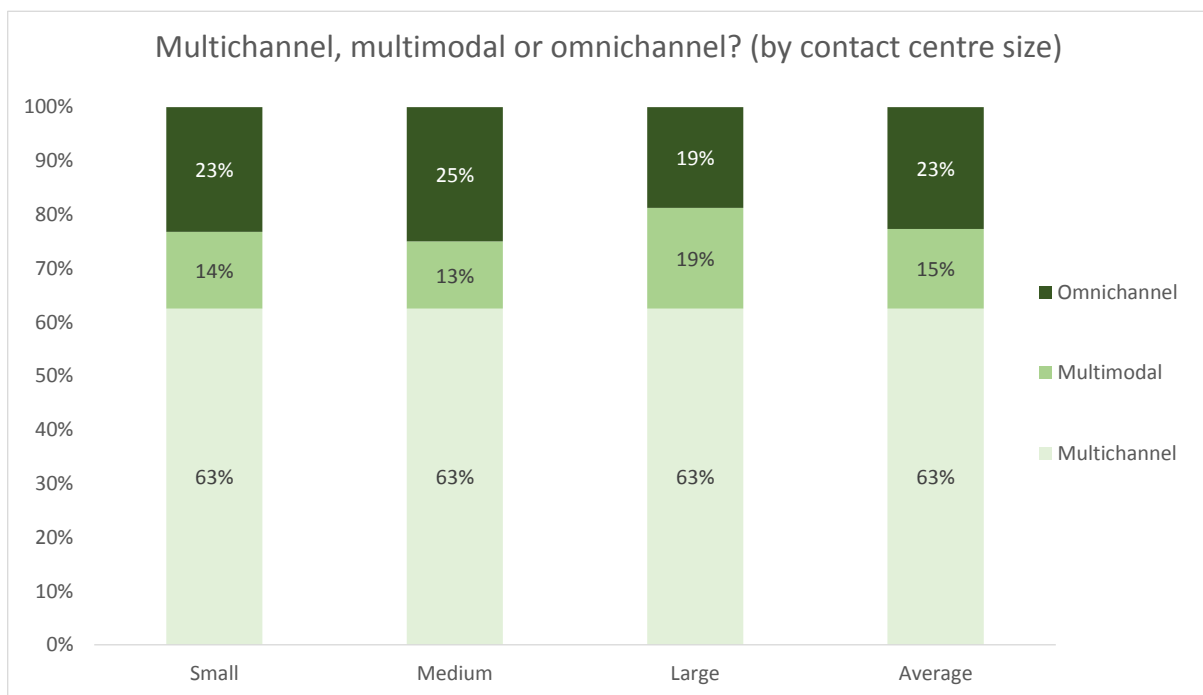
- **Multichannel:** “We offer a choice of channels to customers (i.e. several of voice, email, social media, web chat), from which they can use one in a single interaction. If they change channel, the context and history is lost”
- **Multimodal:** “We offer a choice of channels, and customers can use more than one in the same interaction (e.g. an agent can send an email or SMS to a customer while they are talking on the phone)”
- **Omnichannel:** “We offer a choice of channels, and can use more than one over multiple interactions, while retaining the history and context of the original enquiry. Relevant information follows the customer across channels and interactions”.

23% of respondents described themselves as omnichannel, with 15% as many assessing themselves as multimodal and 63% multichannel.

This was not a factor of contact centre size - smaller, sub-50 seat operations were as likely to identify as either omnichannel or multimodal as larger operations – and to some extent this makes sense, as the proportion of non-voice activity in smaller operations is generally far higher than in large contact centres.

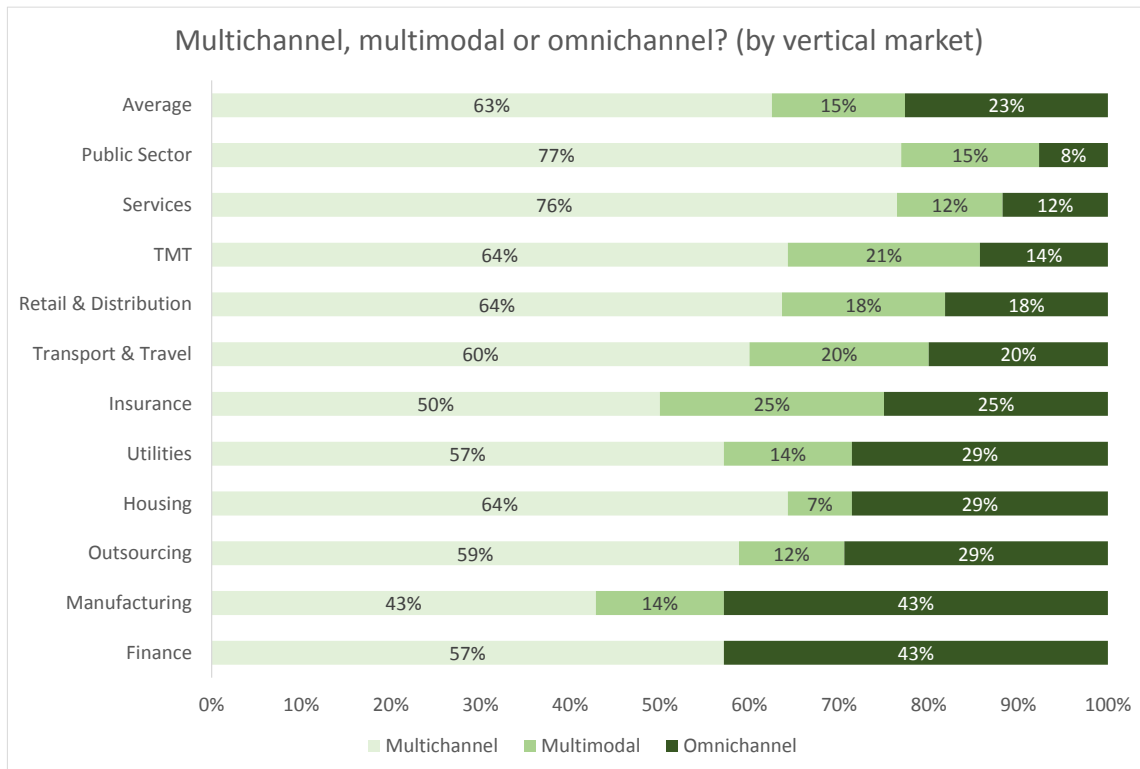
Yet may smaller contact centres be setting the omnichannel bar lower? Do they really have the platform, infrastructure, applications and resources available to identify, route and switch interactions between agents and channels seamlessly while keeping all relevant data gathered in the course of the interaction? Without further individual investigation at a contact centre level, it is not possible to give a definitive answer, so this finding should be treated with caution.

Figure 112: Multichannel, multimodal or omnichannel? (by contact centre size)



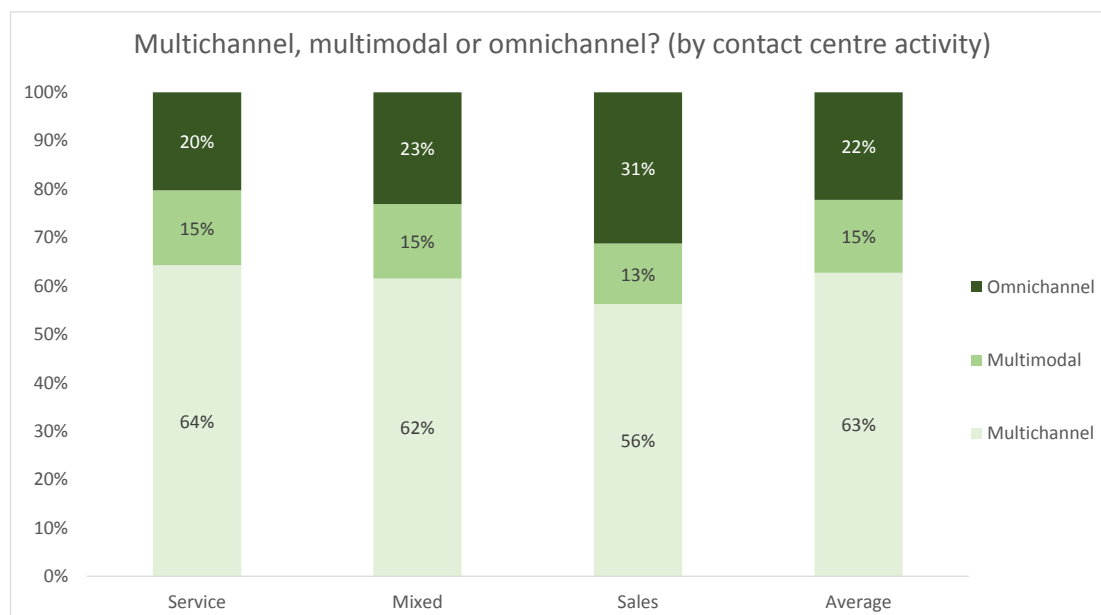
As a vertical market level, finance and manufacturing respondents were most likely to describe their operations as omnichannel, with the public sector the least.

Figure 113: Multichannel, multimodal or omnichannel? (by vertical market)



Self-assessment of omnichannel at a contact centre activity level shows that sales-oriented operations are a little more likely than service contact centres to consider themselves as omnichannel, although there is little real difference.

Figure 114: Multichannel, multimodal or omnichannel? (by contact centre activity)



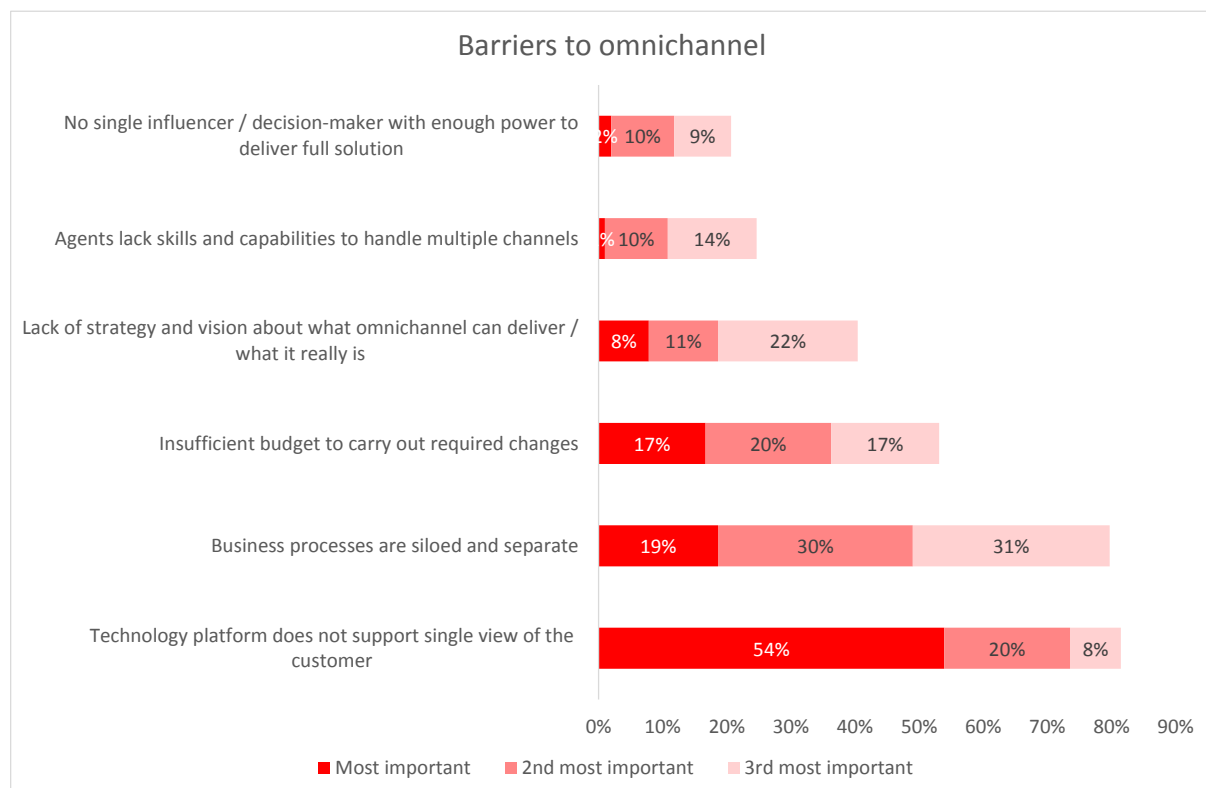
Respondents believe that there are three main barriers to omnichannel, any of which in isolation would be hard enough to overcome, but together appear to be quite daunting:

- the technology platform does not support a single view of the customer
- there is insufficient budget to carry out the required changes
- business processes are siloed and separate.

While these inhibitors to omnichannel are certainly formidable, they are not insurmountable. From a technical viewpoint, the starting point is to have a single integrated platform that is capable of identifying a customer regardless of the channel which they choose to use. This will involve mean evolving from the siloed, channel-focused point solutions that were put in place to handle a specific need, and using a services architecture that is extendable to different channels in the future. It is also important to have a master dataset for product and customer data which is a 'single source of truth' that can be drawn upon by any customer or agent through any channel.

A key aim of omnichannel is to provide a consistency of customer experience, and this requires access not only to the same master dataset, but also the same knowledge bases and business logic must be applied equally. There must be real-time data flow and updates between channels and databases, as without this, consistency is impossible.

Figure 115: Barriers to omnichannel

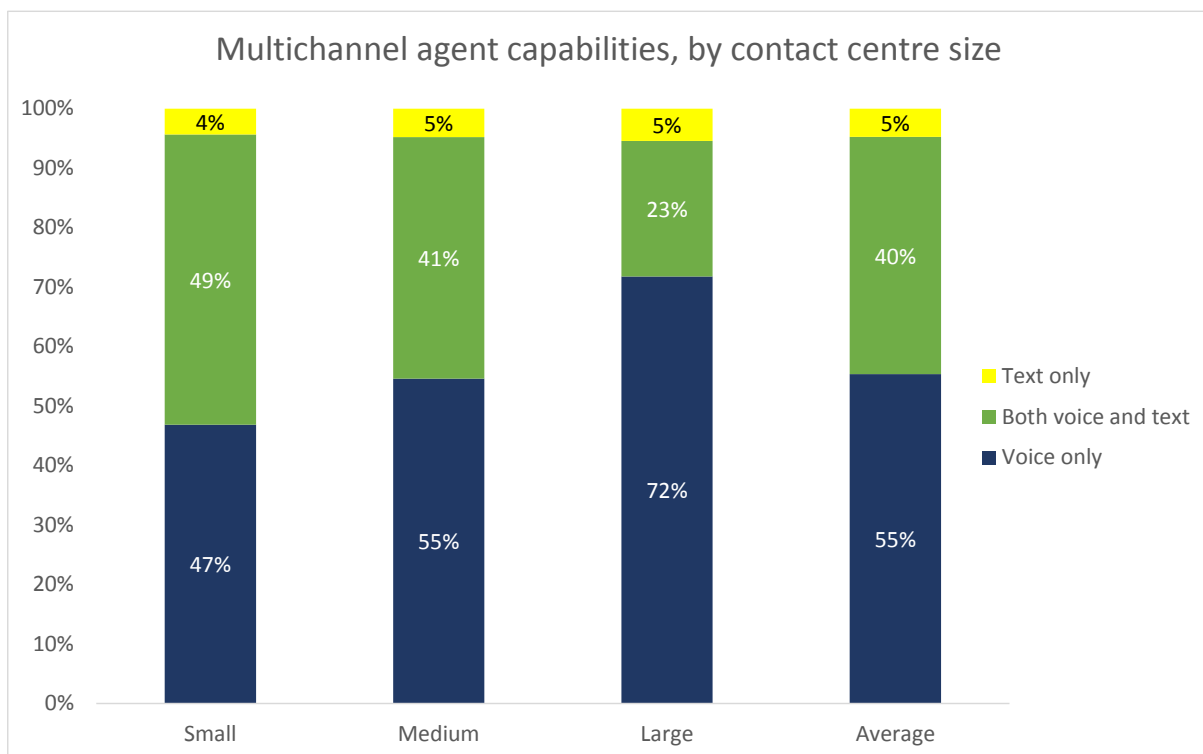


Concern that agents lack the skills and capabilities to handle multiple channels is not seen as one of the major inhibitors, as the majority of respondents do not feel that this holds them back from offering customers a full omnichannel experience.

Respondents were asked a question of how they used agents to handle multichannel. In medium and large contact centres, around 55% of agents handle only voice, with 5% handling text only (including email, web chat and social media).

As has been found in previous years, smaller contact centres - which tend not to have the depth of resource available to operate a dedicated single channel teams - are far more likely to have agents moving between voice and text interactions as required. This approach, whether ad hoc or through a more formal blended approach, has been proven many times in past years' data to be positively correlated with improved agent attrition. This is not to claim causality, but that a variety of work may impact positively upon agent engagement and attrition rates is a point to consider.

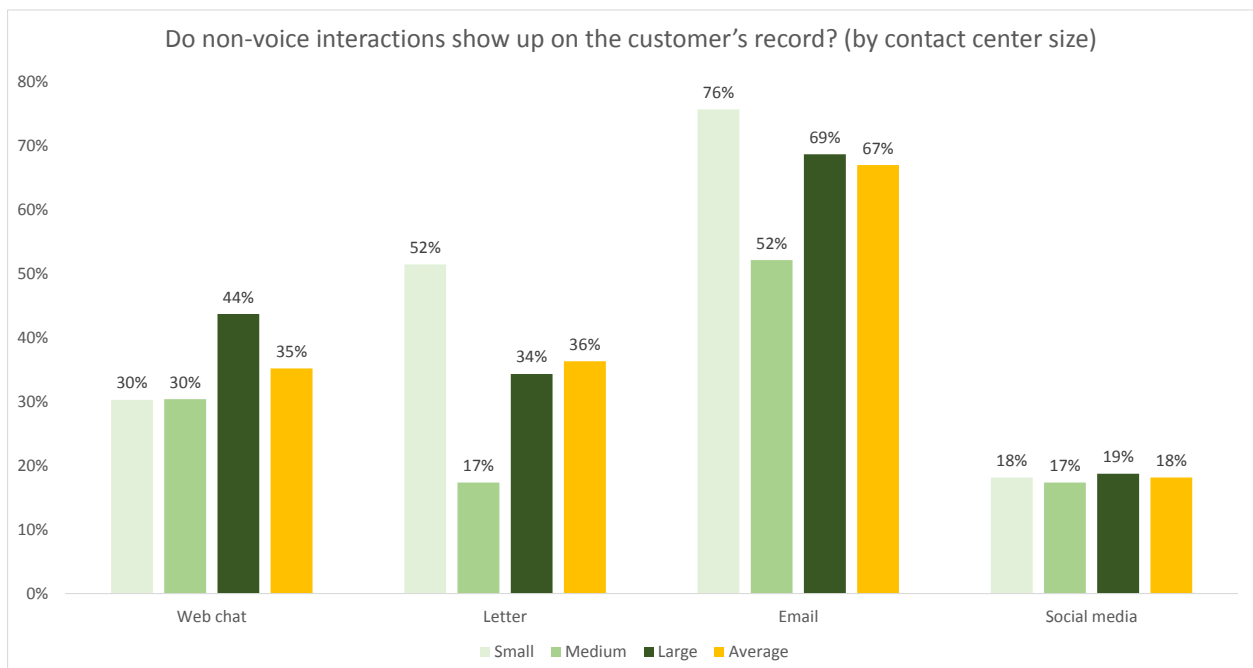
Figure 116: Multichannel agent capabilities, by contact centre size



The importance of master dataset and real-time updates cannot be overestimated. The following chart shows just how far most contact centres have to go in achieving even a small portion of this, as the majority of respondents do not even update customer records with details of non-voice interactions such as web chat, letters or social media interactions. Without this relatively basic information, omnichannel is impossible to achieve.

However, one positive finding is that customer emails will tend to be linked to the master customer record: the challenge is to make sure that all interactions are.

Figure 117: Do non-voice interactions show up on the customer's record? (by contact centre size)



THE CASE FOR DELIVERING SEAMLESS OMNICHANNEL EXPERIENCES

Omnichannel engagement is rapidly transforming customer engagement from self-service to assisted service. With the rise of web, mobile and social media, empowered customers are increasingly leveraging self-service over multiple channels when offered. While most companies support multiple channels today, they typically manage them in silos, resulting in a fragmented customer experience, missed sales opportunities and reduced operational efficiency.

THE MULTI-CHANNEL CHALLENGE

Customers engage with companies in multi-channel and cross-channel journeys that pause and resume over time. Without a unified approach to managing the customer experience, adding more channels can often do more harm than good. With multiple point solutions deployed, it's difficult to consistently manage the customer's experience across self-service and assisted service channels including voice, email, chat, mobile and social interactions.

Customers are frustrated when they transition from touchpoint to touchpoint and have to start over to explain their needs. Employees are frustrated when

they lack the knowledge and context to deliver the low effort experiences your brand has promised to your customers.

SUCCESSFULLY MANAGING OMNICHANNEL JOURNEYS

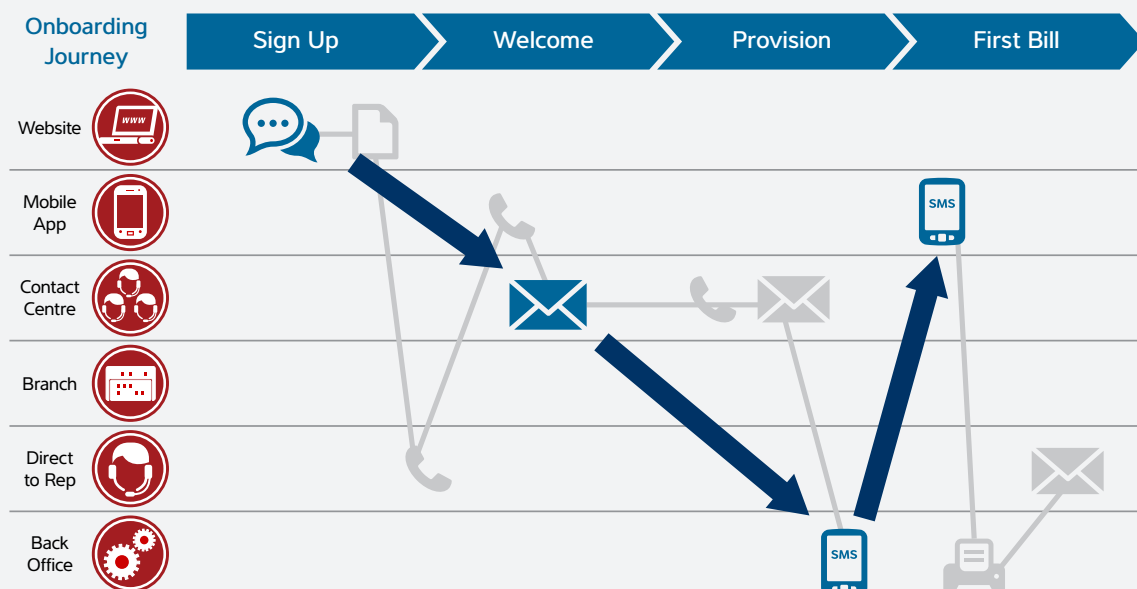
From a sales and service perspective, it's critical that companies deliver seamless, consistent and personalised customer interactions across channels and across the full lifecycle of customer journeys. Omnichannel customer engagement means that customer context is carried forward as they transition from one channel to another, eliminating the need to repeat key information. It combines multimodality (supporting multiple channels within a single interaction),

orchestration (linking interactions into step by step workflows), and journey management (proactively designing, orchestrating, monitoring and tuning customer journeys) to provide great customer experiences with compelling business outcomes.

Implementing a 'system of engagement' that manages, in real time, all customer touchpoints and communication from a single platform approach, but leverages the 'system of record' (your CRM and other business information systems), enables leading companies to embrace omnichannel engagement. Only through such an approach will organisations gain a competitive advantage.

DELIVER THE OPTIMAL LOW-EFFORT EXPERIENCE AND SHAPE CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR

Frequent Proactive Notifications Lower Customer Effort - fewer interactions



What used to be a random customer journey resulting in random business outcomes, is now transformed into an optimal and proactively orchestrated customer experience. The result is increased customer loyalty, improved sales and greater workforce efficiency and employee engagement.

To learn more about how to create and deliver seamless omnichannel experiences read the [eBook: 5 Steps to Building a Customer Experience Driven Contact Centre](#). You can also read the [eBook: Best Practices For Omnichannel Customer Experience](#).

One of the main irritants for a customer is having to contact the business on numerous occasions, often through different channels, about the same issue. Omnichannel promises a way in which this experience can be made less painful and more effective for both customers and businesses, by providing a single view of the customer's journey - not just that particular interaction, but the entire experience - so that agents do not have to ask the same questions again and again, and can treat the customer's request more effectively and intelligently.

A question was asked to respondents about how they identified the topics or reasons that caused customers to contact the organisation multiple times. Knowing this should allow an organisation to amend its business processes to reduce this demand, proactively assisting customers by removing a problem or issue entirely.

However, it is found that the majority of respondents rely mainly upon agent feedback to identify reasons for recurring calls, which as a method is very dependent upon the culture of the organisation and the agents' own initiative. The second most popular method was to run customer experience surveys, with some respondents also using supervisory monitoring and reporting. Very few used interaction analytics to identify the root cause of repeat calls, and this is an opportunity which will surely grow in importance in the future. (More information about this is found in the 'Customer Engagement & Effort' chapter earlier in this report).



The introduction of digital channels increases the complexity for Voice of the Customer initiatives and understanding why customers contact you is often a manual process. Organisations must implement Interaction

Analytics solutions that are designed to analyse both voice and text based interactions through a single solution for best results, a full view of the omnichannel experience and highest levels of automation.

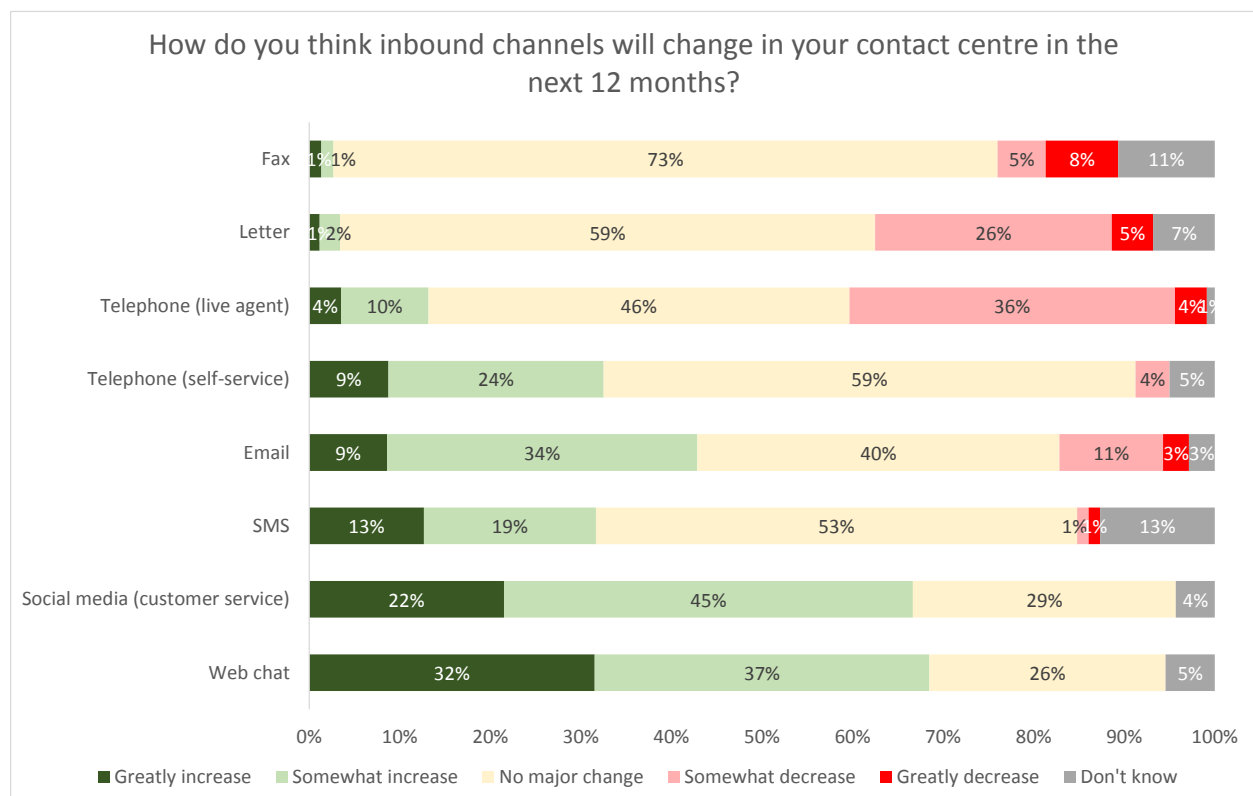
Looking at the reality of multichannel, multimodal and omnichannel activity, the UK contact centre industry has embraced the various forms of non-voice customer communication, with 91% of respondents who provided information about their interaction volumes offering an email channel. 15% of respondents offered SMS, 39% web chat and 52% social media. Traditional channels such as fax and especially letters are still present in a large proportion of cases.

As not all of the same respondents take part in this survey every year, a jump or drop in the usage of a minor multimedia channel could be an industry-wide phenomenon or a case of a handful of early-adopters skewing the results, which is certainly possible where only a few use a channel, and where mean averages are used. As such, a question is asked to respondents about how each inbound channel will change, so being able to judge if any alterations in the use of channels is due to real changes at a contact centre-level, or caused by a different set of respondents providing data.

As usual, the traditional media of letters and fax will have a net decline in our respondents' eyes, although still have their place in the likes of the insurance and manufacturing industries. Interestingly, many more respondents this year (40%) believed the live telephony channel volumes would drop than thought they would rise (14%).

Strong growth is expected in web chat and social media customer service interactions, with email volumes still predicted to grow although at a lesser rate. After some years of relative decline, telephony self-service is expected to grow, with its twin benefits of customer convenience and low cost still very much relevant. New approaches, such as visual IVR, are likely to encourage further use of self-service.

Figure 118: How do you think inbound channels will change in your contact centre in the next 12 months?



The previous chart's real message is that channels aren't being replaced - even letters and fax will continue to be supported - but rather augmented, and businesses have to accept that they need to develop an omnichannel approach, as that's what their customers are expecting. This means that the pressure to unify the view of the customer across channels is a challenge that isn't going to go away.

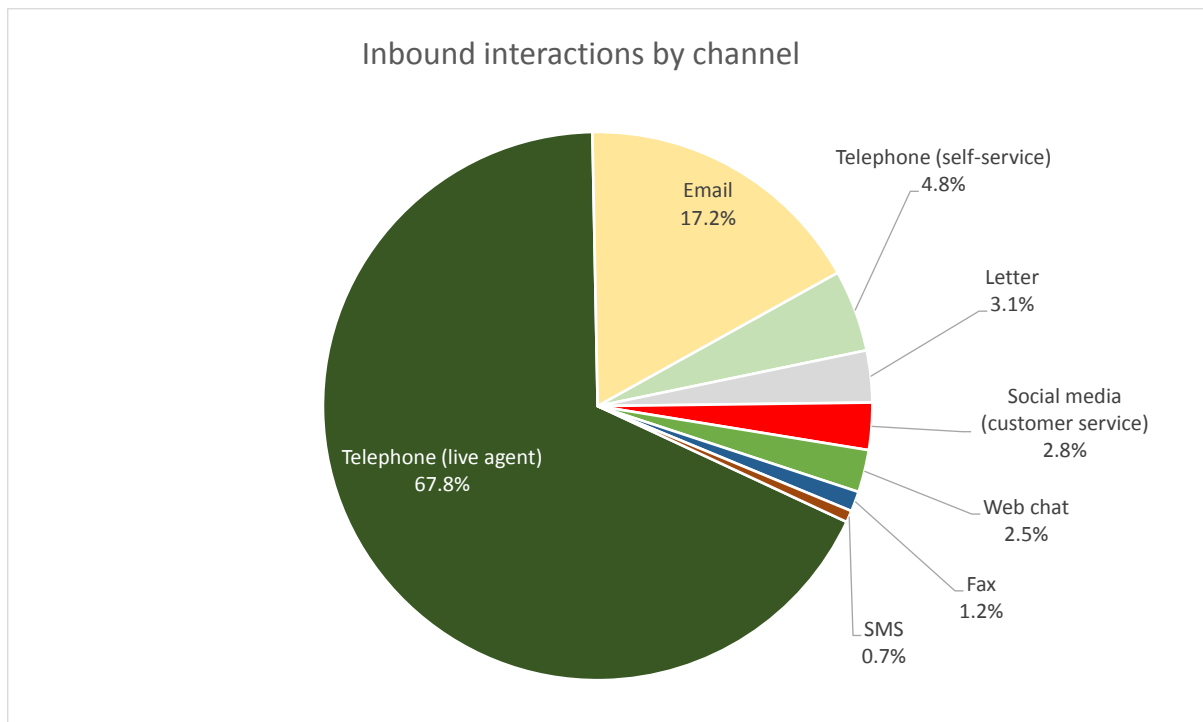


24% of UK businesses have mobile apps that allow you to contact them for customer service. When transitioning from the mobile app to the IVR or a contact centre operation, customer context is usually lost and customers need to repeat information, leading to customer frustration and introducing operational inefficiency.

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 in 2013, and the email figure of 16.2% in 2014 suggested that this channel is still growing strongly, up to 17.2% this year.

In line with what has been happening in the US, a general drop in both the live and self-service telephone channels can be seen, as more customers choose an online option as their primary channel. Web chat is steady at 2.5% and social media has grown to 2.8% this year.

Figure 119: Inbound interactions by channel



As was the case in 2014, agent-handled calls are most important to respondents in the public sector, transport & travel, housing, outsourcing and insurance sectors.

Email is again well represented in the manufacturing, retail and services sectors.

Telephony self-service seems strongest in the utilities and finance sectors, as well as TMT.

Web chat is developing a much stronger presence in retail, so as to encourage and close online sales, but is still a way off being a major channel for any other vertical market.

Retail and finance are a little way ahead of most other vertical markets in terms of social media customer contact.

Figure 120: Inbound interactions by channel, by vertical market

Vertical market	FS	HS	INS	MAN	OS	PS	RD	SVCS	TMT	TT	UTILS	Average
Telephone (live agent)	68%	82%	74%	39%	74%	75%	45%	67%	62%	88%	59%	67.8%
Email	15%	13%	18%	28%	16%	11%	30%	20%	17%	6%	12%	17.2%
Telephone (self-service)	11%	0%	1%	13%	2%	8%	0%	2%	13%	0%	15%	4.8%
Letter	1%	2%	3%	4%	3%	2%	3%	5%	1%	0%	9%	3.1%
Social media	6%	2%	1%	5%	2%	2%	6%	3%	3%	5%	1%	2.8%
Web chat	0%	1%	1%	5%	3%	1%	9%	2%	2%	1%	4%	2.5%
Fax	0%	0%	1%	4%	0%	0%	7%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1.2%
SMS	0%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0.7%

NB: "0%" refers to a number lower than 0.5%, rather than necessarily a zero value.

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.

EMAIL MANAGEMENT

Email was the first of the non-voice multimedia channels to be used, and is still by far the most well-used, having been mainstream for well over 10 years. Although its current penetration rate of over 12% makes it a relative success, this should be placed in the context of the expectations of contact centre managers who in a 1998 survey confidently expected email to account for 25% of inbound traffic by 2003 (the current figure is just over 17%).

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 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 increasing 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 realise 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 attachments, 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 real-time 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.



Transforming Customer Service in a Multichannel World

Eptica Customer Engagement Suite™ MULTICHANNEL AND MULTILINGUAL CUSTOMER INTERACTION MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

IMPROVE
CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE

INCREASE
EFFICIENCY

INCREASE
SALES



REDUCE
SERVICE
COSTS

- EMAIL MANAGEMENT
- WEB SELF-SERVICE
- SOCIAL MEDIA
- CHAT
- KNOWLEDGE BASE
- MULTILINGUAL LINGUISTIC ENGINE
- FAX-LETTER-SMS
- CUSTOMER HISTORY, INSIGHT AND REPORTING

DOWNLOAD OFFER



We evaluated 100 UK leading companies on their ability to provide answers to 10 routine questions via Email, Web, Chat and Twitter.

We invite you to download the full report with infographics, sector breakdowns and a best practice guide to improving Customer Experience.

[CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD](#)

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 for once shows high levels of email, and this may be due to a change in working practices which allows customers and intermediaries to send through document via email rather than by the more traditional fax and letter.

Figure 121: Inbound interactions that are email, by vertical market

Vertical market	% of inbound interactions that are email
Retail & Distribution	30%
Manufacturing	28%
Services	20%
Insurance	18%
TMT	17%
Outsourcing	16%
Finance	15%
Housing	13%
Utilities	12%
Public Sector	11%
Transport & Travel	6%
Average	17.2%

As with previous years, emails are proportionally less important for large contact centres, with similar differences between size band seen year on year.

Figure 122: Inbound interactions that are email, by contact centre size

Contact centre size	% of inbound interactions that are email
Small	21.4%
Medium	16.9%
Large	10.0%
Average	17.2%

The cost of email is a little lower than live telephony (which tends to be around £3.50 - £4.00), but more expensive than a self-service session. The cost of web chat is usually a little less than email.

Figure 123: Estimated cost per email

Email cost	
Mean	£2.67
1 st quartile	£4.10
Median	£2.06
3 rd quartile	£1.30

Do you need an email response management system?

An organisation that has relatively small volumes of email will tend to handle it initially on an ad-hoc basis, often using Microsoft Outlook to do so. At some point, the contact centre will realise that costs are going up and quality going down, and that they need to implement the more sophisticated email response management system. What signs are there that show this is the right time to do so?

- While there is no fixed figure for email volume, as it will depend on the complexity and time required to handle each one, organisations receiving greater than 100 emails per day are likely to have issues handling and tracking them
- There are a significant number of customer telephone calls that refer to emails that were sent, but which never received a response
- Prioritisation and routing of emails to agents with specific skills sets is no longer a matter of a few minutes of management time
- Email handling times are not going down, despite most being about a small number of topics
- Complex emails may take days or even weeks to resolve, and different agents may be working on similar types of issue without even realising it, thus duplicating the effort
- You lack flexibility in dealing with spikes in email traffic, as it is too difficult to bring secondary email agents to bear without damaging the voice channel's service level
- Visibility and accuracy of service levels for email channel is worse than that for the voice channel
- It is difficult to report on the content of the emails that you receive as this has to be done manually.



Effective web self-service systems reduce the number of calls and emails a company contact centre receives, as basic questions are dealt with without needing an agent to become involved - in many cases web self-service can deflect up to 90% of queries, showing the potential for dramatically reducing costs without impacting customer service. Creating an integrated web self service and email offering allows agents to focus on more complex queries, where they can use their skills to solve customer problems and add value to the experience. Concentrating on this type of transaction is more rewarding for agents, who get the chance to make a difference by helping customers, rather than simply responding with routine information.

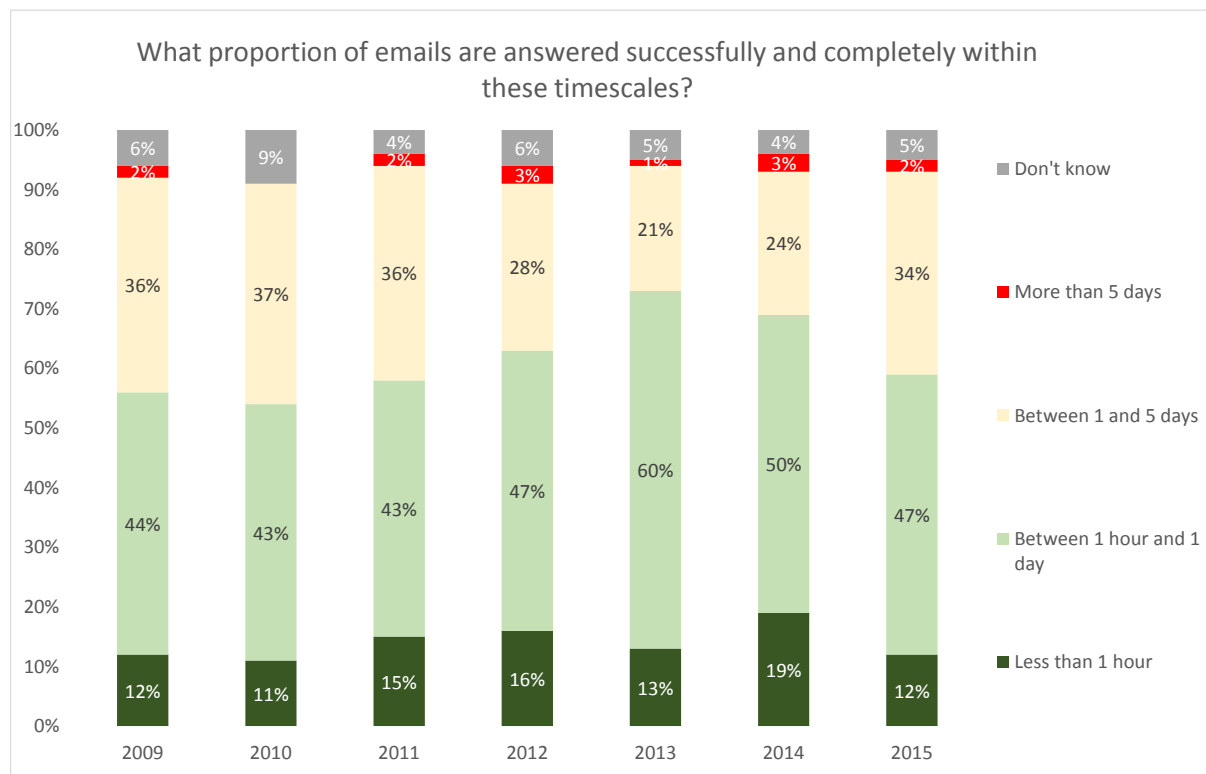
For businesses that handle substantial volumes of email, while it is not suggested that they should aim to answer an email in the same amount of time that it takes to complete a phone call, it is desirable to manage all interactions closely to consistent business rules, and to act quickly if service 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 historically been sacrificed to meet telephony service levels, although there have been steady and significant improvements in the response rates in recent years.

This year, reported email response handling times reverse the improvements of recent years, especially in the all-important 'less than 1 hour' segment.

Those answered the same working day declined from 69% to 59%, and those taking 1 – 5 days has increased from 24% to 34%. 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.

This may be a statistical anomaly, or may be linked to the reasons that call lengths have increased over the years: an increase in self-service taking up a lot of the shorter, easier work, leaving the more complex interactions for live agents, whether through phone or email.

Figure 124: What proportion of emails are answered successfully and completely within these timescales?



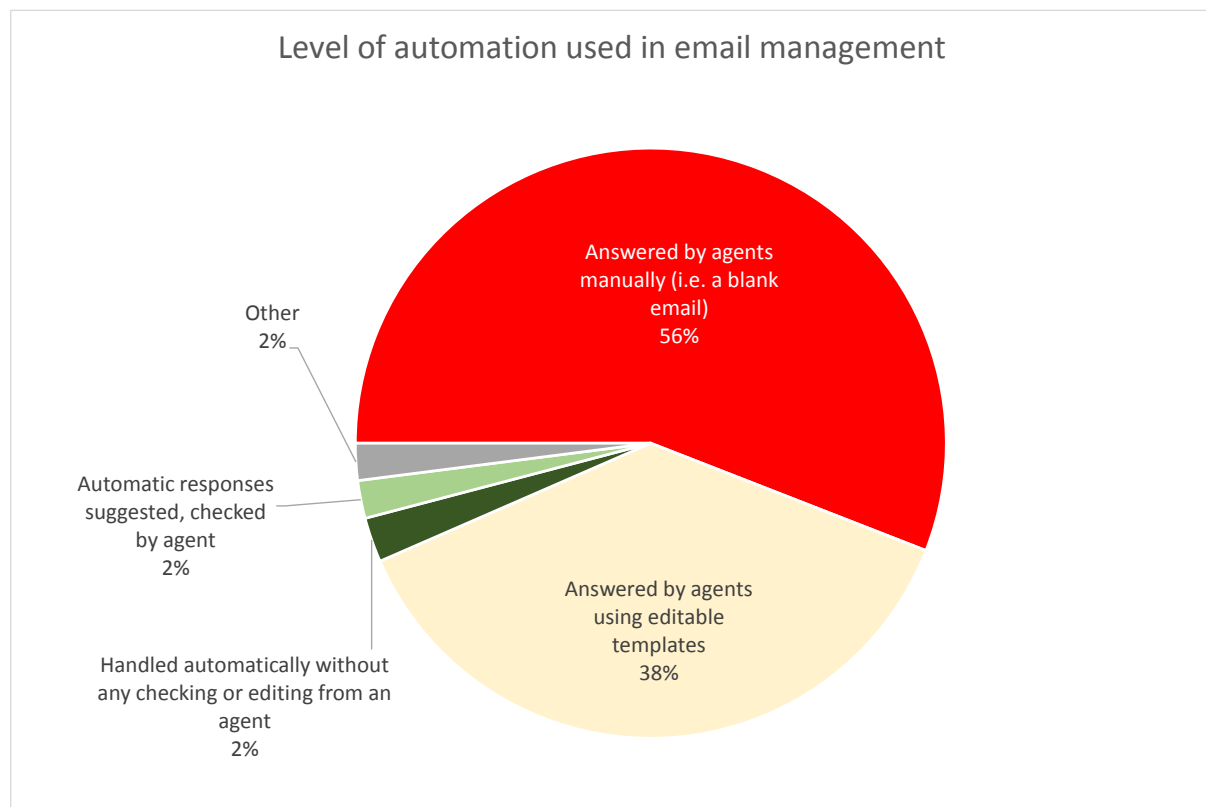
Recently, we have seen a shift in our customers' use of automated email, with the advancements in tone and meaning detection allowing automatic responses to be sent to for simple queries, for example "where do I find my serial number?", with an appropriate escalation for customers who feel that they need further assistance. This is often backed up by best practice where initially the system proposes template responses to agents - the more often that template response is used then the more reassured an organisation becomes that an automatic email can be sent effectively.

This suggestion is supported by the finding that the most popular methods of answering inbound email are to use agents, rather than rely on automation. 38% of emails are answered by agents who start with templated, editable responses and change them accordingly, thus not having to compose every email from scratch, but also being able to draw from a common pool of knowledge.

Surprisingly, the most popular method of answering emails was to start with a blank email, and let agents complete it themselves. This is not only likely to take longer, but also leads to an increased risk of poor grammar, spelling and punctuation, as well as a less consistent response. This is particularly the case in smaller operations.

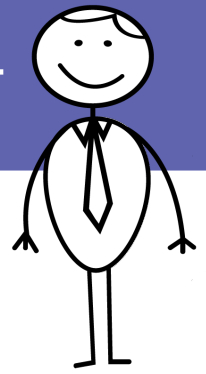
Only 4% of emails have automated responses, (these statistics do not include simple automated acknowledgements), and of those, around half have to be checked by agents before sending.

Figure 125: Level of automation used in email management



Increasingly we see forward thinking customers integrating their email management platforms with 3rd party applications such as CRM and Marketing solutions. Not only does this allow for a holistic integrated view of the customer but it also lets these solutions propose targeted response offers to the end customer based on their interaction and purchasing history. A true Next-Best-Action!

WHY IMPROVING EMAIL PERFORMANCE IS VITAL FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE SUCCESS



Customers across all demographics like the written audit trail and flexibility of email. So, rather than dying out, this means that more and more emails are sent year on year. In fact, there are [144.8 billion emails sent every day](#) worldwide – and mobile devices account for over 50% of these.

Still, companies do face significant challenges responding to the growth of email. A midsize organisation can expect to receive 250,000 emails every year – that's nearly 700 a day. Providing a fast, accurate and consistent answer is therefore both business-critical and complex to achieve.

So, what is the solution? There is no magic bullet, but from Eptica's experience there are five areas to focus on if companies are to better manage the email channel:

1. Deflect what you can

While many people use email as their channel of choice, others only switch to it when they can't find basic information through other means, such as on a company's website. Make sure you provide the right information online, such as through web self-service systems, to minimise emails that are unnecessary for both the customer and the company.

2. Automate the workflow

Instead of simply collecting all incoming emails into a single queue and then passing them to agents one by one, use intelligence to route them to the best available employee to provide a fast answer. By analysing incoming interactions and looking at factors such as language, type of product and even sentiment, they can be prioritised and passed to the agent with the best skills.

3. Provide a consistent response

Many companies struggle to deliver a quick response to emails, as each answer is created by hand, by individual agents. Not only does this lower productivity but it also breeds inconsistency. Create a centralised Knowledge Base that contains approved information for agents to use and build templates that are automatically suggested dependent on the query. This speeds up response times while still allowing agents to personalise each email to the needs of the individual customer.

4. Manage the process

Answering emails has to be turned into a well-drilled process, with the technology able to support and manage the entire lifecycle. Desktop email systems [simply cannot cope](#) with large volumes of messages, can be difficult to manage across teams, and don't have any built-in management tools. For that reason, consider putting in place an end-to-end platform with in-built workflow to replace desktop email if you want to take back control of the process and improve service levels.

5. Set targets – and stick to them

As with every channel, customer expectations are continually rising. We found recently that [56% of UK consumers expect their email to be answered within 4 hours](#). Most importantly, make sure that you can achieve your target, so be realistic when setting expectations, but at the same time be sure that they are not too long as to be meaningless to your customers.

Email is now [33 years old](#) and rising volumes demonstrate that as it ages, it should remain a vital central part of every business's multichannel customer strategy.

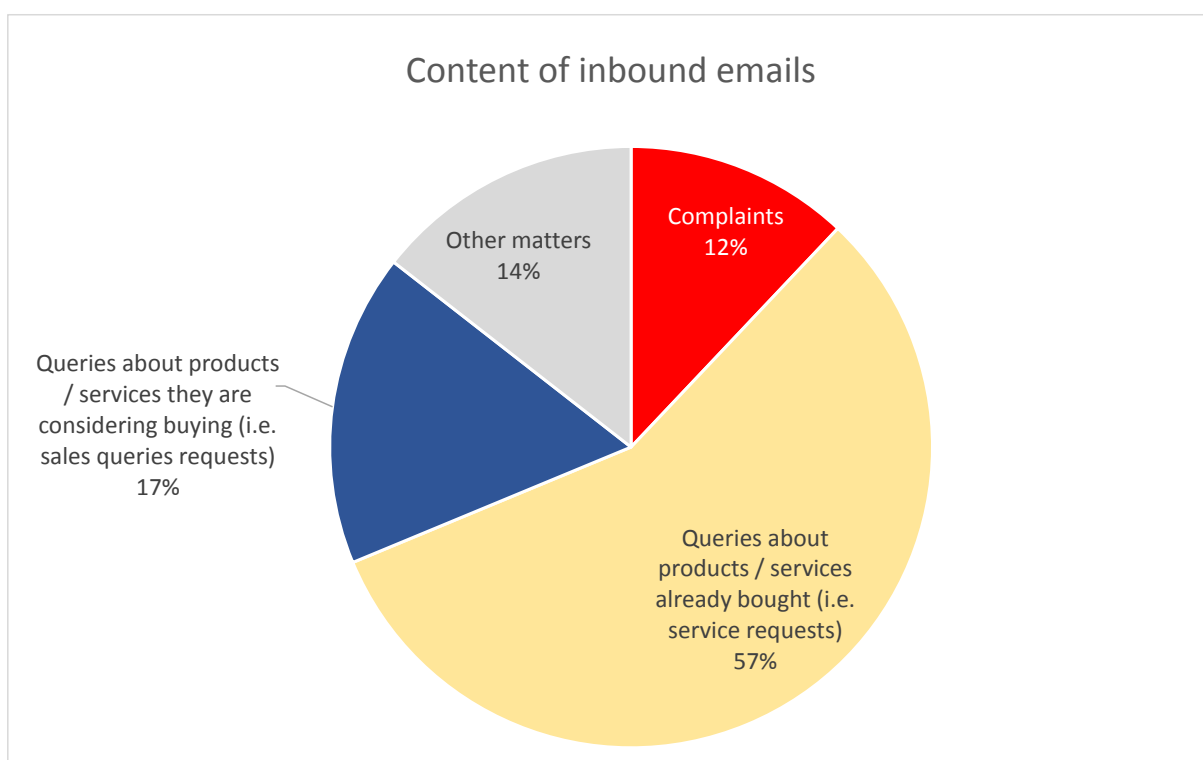
You can read more blog posts about email management and more at the [Eptica Customer Experience Blog](#).



Respondents state that 57% of their inbound emails are queries about products or services that have already been bought, with only 17% being from prospective new customers, who have queries about products or services which they are considering buying.

Complaints represent around 12% of inbound email traffic for our respondents, compared to the telephony figure of 7.4%. Earlier in this report, 23% of respondents stated that email is the best channel to use for making complaints, but 54% said that telephony was the most effective complaint channel for customers to use.

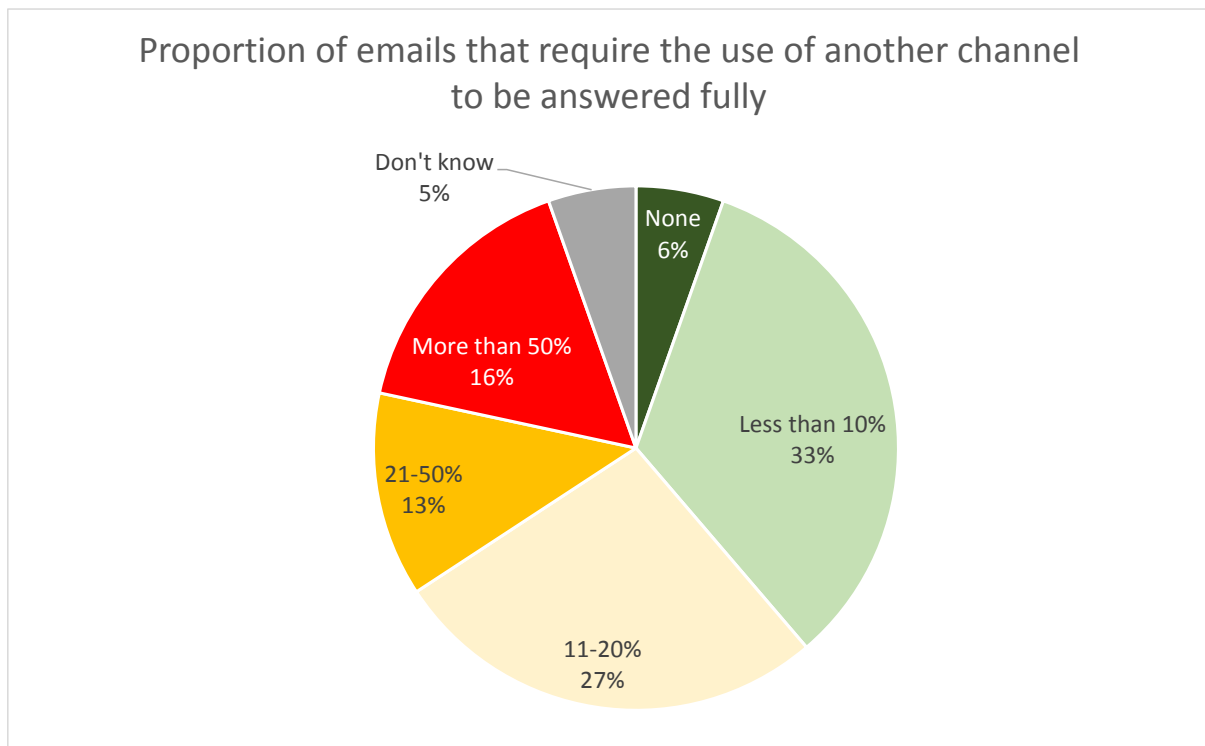
Figure 126: Content of inbound emails



Respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of emails that required the use of another channel to be answered fully. Only 6% of respondents stated that all of their emails could be answered fully without recourse to alternative channels, with a further 33% of respondents stating that fewer than 10% of their emails needed supplementary channel assistance.

However, 16% of respondents said that more than half of their emails had to be followed up using an alternate channel.

Figure 127: Emails that require the use of another channel to be answered fully



Respondents that indicated that a proportion of their emails require the use of another channel to be answered fully were asked to give the top three reasons causing this.

Two interlinked responses came out clearly ahead: the multiple, back-and-forth nature of the queries are quicker to answer on a call; and that complex issues are better handled with a phone call rather than an email.

The ability to take customer through security checks more easily in a different channel was also considered important by 51% of respondents, and 41% considered that email agents do not always have access to the sources of information that they need to answer the question fully.

Figure 128: Reasons for using another channel to answer emails fully

Reason for using another channel	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
Multiple and/or back-and-forth queries, which are quicker to answer on a call	36%	29%	15%
Complex response which requires a phone call	29%	37%	18%
Need access to other sources of information not available to email agents	17%	6%	18%
Need to take them through security checks before query can be answered	16%	12%	21%
Sensitive / confidential information which requires a letter to be sent	2%	6%	15%
Regulations or legislation	1%	9%	12%

MULTIMEDIA BLENDING

There is no general agreement 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 great majority of respondents in most sectors 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, 66% of agents in a blended multimedia environment are allowed to do both email and voice work, a figure which had been growing year-on-year, but which has steadied recently.

Those in small and medium operations are much more likely to use the same agents to handle email and telephony, probably because there is not the option to have the specialised teams found in large contact centres, which are much more likely to have a dedicated group handling email.

Simply 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. Small and medium operations - which in the past may not have had sufficient email volumes or the investment available to formalise the blending by forming a universal queue to deal with all types of interaction - are now as likely to use a universal queue as the ad hoc method. Many larger contact centres prefer to use dedicated email groups.

However, this preference of many larger contact centres to form specialised multimedia groups may not provide the same levels of service. 2014 data indicated a formalised blending environment, such as a universal queue, has a beneficial effect on email response times. Respondents using a formal blended environment reported that 32% of emails are handled within 1 hour, with a further 41% being dealt with inside a day.

The ad-hoc approach is less successful at very rapid response, with only 16% of emails having had an average handle time within 1 hour, although a further 58% were handled in a day.

Dedicated email-only agents of the kind used in many larger contact centres answered an average of 17% of emails within the hour, with a further 48% handled within a day.

WEB CHAT AND BEYOND

Most web chat (or instant messaging / IM) sessions act by offering a live assistance option to the process of web browsing. Like email, it has been around for many years, but only very recently has started to grow volumes to the extent where it has become a mainstream channel for customer-business interactions.

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. Some solution providers have stated that an agent can deal with 4 or more web chat 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 (and one that is answered below). Agents can respond to frequently-asked questions by using 'hot-keys', which provide templatised answers and can escalate queries if required, but current levels of automation are low.

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 in providing web chat: revenue maximisation, 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.

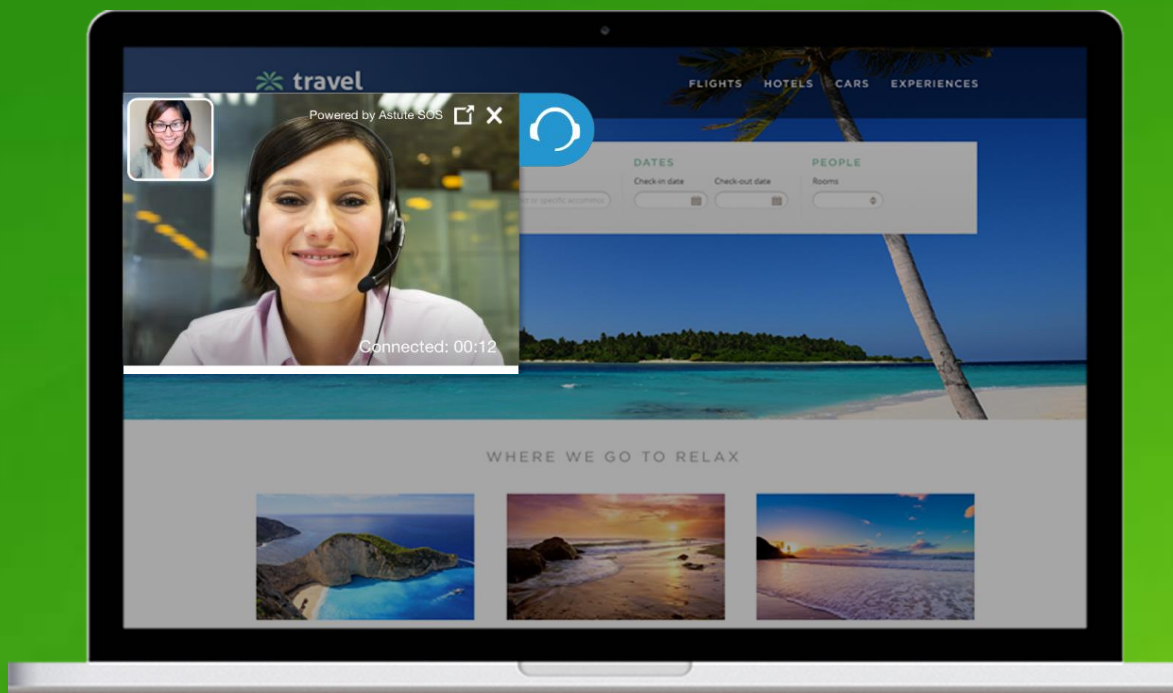
The customer of the future - especially the younger generation - are often accomplished Instant Messengers, and will be keen to use the web chat option with the businesses they work with. However, web chat is in reality most useful for general information and sales purposes, as users currently usually aren't taken through security processes, meaning 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, perhaps as some customers are wary of giving out personal details online.

Rescue at just the right moment
with

Astute SOS



Sometimes a nudge is all it takes. Auto-escalate high value conversion opportunities and go beyond text with voice and video chat.



Be in all the right places
at all the right times.

Spur conversations and provide timely assistance on any device, on your site or within your app. Configure SOS to intelligently escalate interactions and funnel high-priority consumers to a live agent.

Equip your agents to
drive conversions.

Put cart contents, website browsing status, order history and loyalty status at your agents' fingertips to increase consumer satisfaction and convert sales.

Drive more revenue, be more efficient and make more people smile
with the world's smartest consumer engagement software.



One form of value-added web chat functionality is a Virtual Agent, which may appear 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 may then 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, although some businesses believe it is best practice to identify clearly between virtual and real agents.

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 either work with what it has been given, or ask the user for more detail about what they actually meant. 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), customers must be encouraged and educated to use natural language queries in order for virtual agents to be able to deliver to their full potential.

The virtual agent application is different from standard search functionality, ignoring bad punctuation or grammar, and using longer phrases rather than just searching on keywords. 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. Through 'listening' to what the customers actually say - perhaps through a mixture of large quantities of audio and text - the initial set-up configuration can achieve a good accuracy rate, which really benefits over time as a positive feedback loop is established. Solutions that 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, with the result being more akin to that of an empathetic human who also has had access to what the customer has been trying to do. For example, if asked "When can I expect my delivery?", the context and the required answer will be different depending on whether the customer has placed an order and is enquiring about its status, or has only a 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.

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 personalise the experience, (for example including details of relevant offers to that customer).

As an aside, some contact centres report that 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, many of the negative issues surrounding offshore are not applicable to the multimedia channel, such as the possible mutual incomprehensibility of accents.

Web chat is experiencing strong growth in its availability in the UK, although volumes on average are still only 2-3% of all customer/business interactions. There is no reason why the user uptake of web chat 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, although cost differential between phone and web chat are not dramatically different, as so much of the web chat work carried out is still non-automated. 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 full implementation is a success.

Figure 129: Estimated cost per web chat

Web chat cost	
Mean	£2.58
1 st quartile	£3.93
Median	£2.40
3 rd quartile	£0.93

43% of respondents using web chat offer the option immediately to all website visitors, with 57% only doing so at some specifically-triggered point in the interaction.

Of these 57%, the most frequently used trigger for web chat was when a visitor went to a specific page, with other popular triggers being when a customer was on a page for a certain amount of time, and at the point of sale.

Figure 130: Stage in the website visit where web chat is offered

Point at which web chat is offered to the website visitor	% of respondents
If the visitor has visited a specific page	75%
If the visitor has been on a specific page for a certain amount of time	46%
At the point-of-sale / checkout screen	33%
If they had been identified as a specific type of customer (e.g. high value, prone to defection, etc.)	17%
If the visitor has visited a certain number of pages	8%



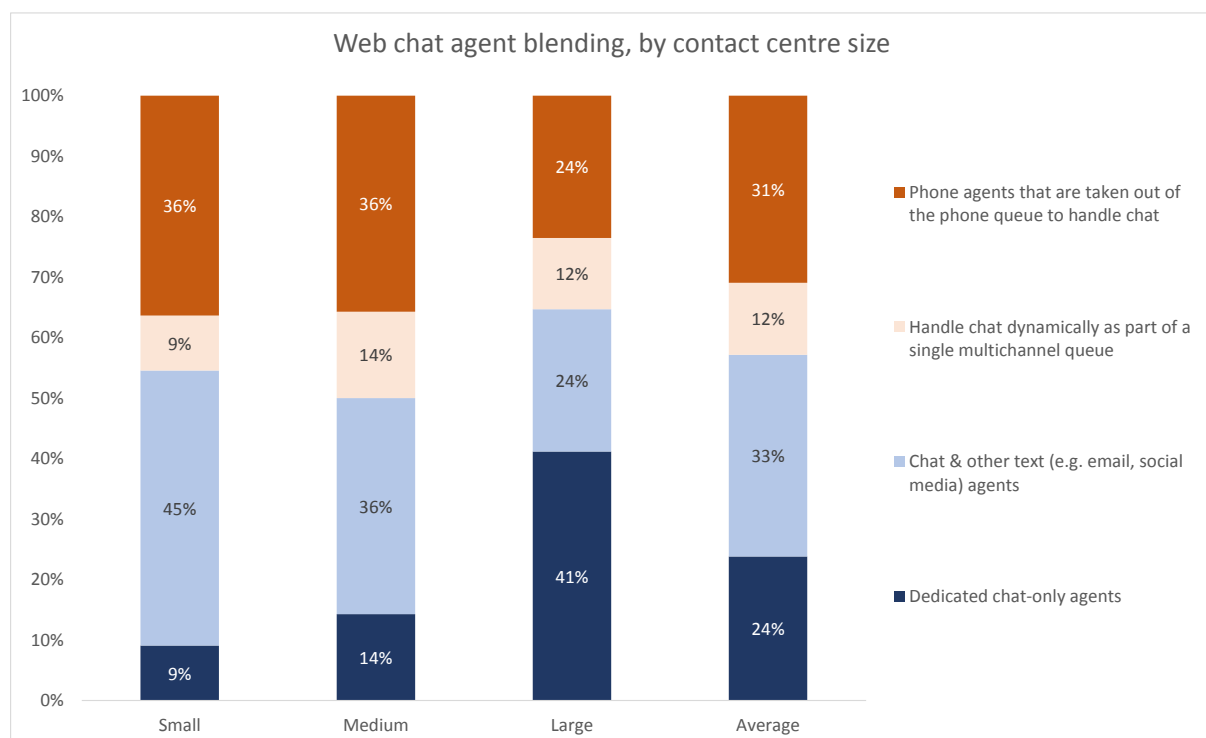
Astute encourages our customers to utilise a combination of the consumer's profile (loyalty status, prior purchases, etc.) and interaction context (web pages visited, shopping cart contents, etc.) to drive escalations to web chat. This combination helps ensure maximum impact from the chat intervention, while protecting efficiency metrics. It's also critically important that the context of the user's session be presented to the agent to enhance the consumer experience and speed of response.

Respondents from larger contact centres are more likely have dedicated chat-only agents, rather than taking phone agents out of the queue to handle web chats on an ad-hoc basis, probably because chat volumes are more predictable in high-volume businesses.

Multi-channel text agents (e.g. handling social media or email too) are popular in small and medium respondents' contact centres.

Small and medium operations also seemed more likely than large contact centres to give their phone agents text-based work at appropriate times.

Figure 131: Web chat agent blending, by contact centre size



One of web chat's traditional strengths is seen as the ability to have agents handle multiple chats concurrently (of course, it only seems this way to a customer, as the web chat agent uses the time that the customer is typing their response to handle other chats).

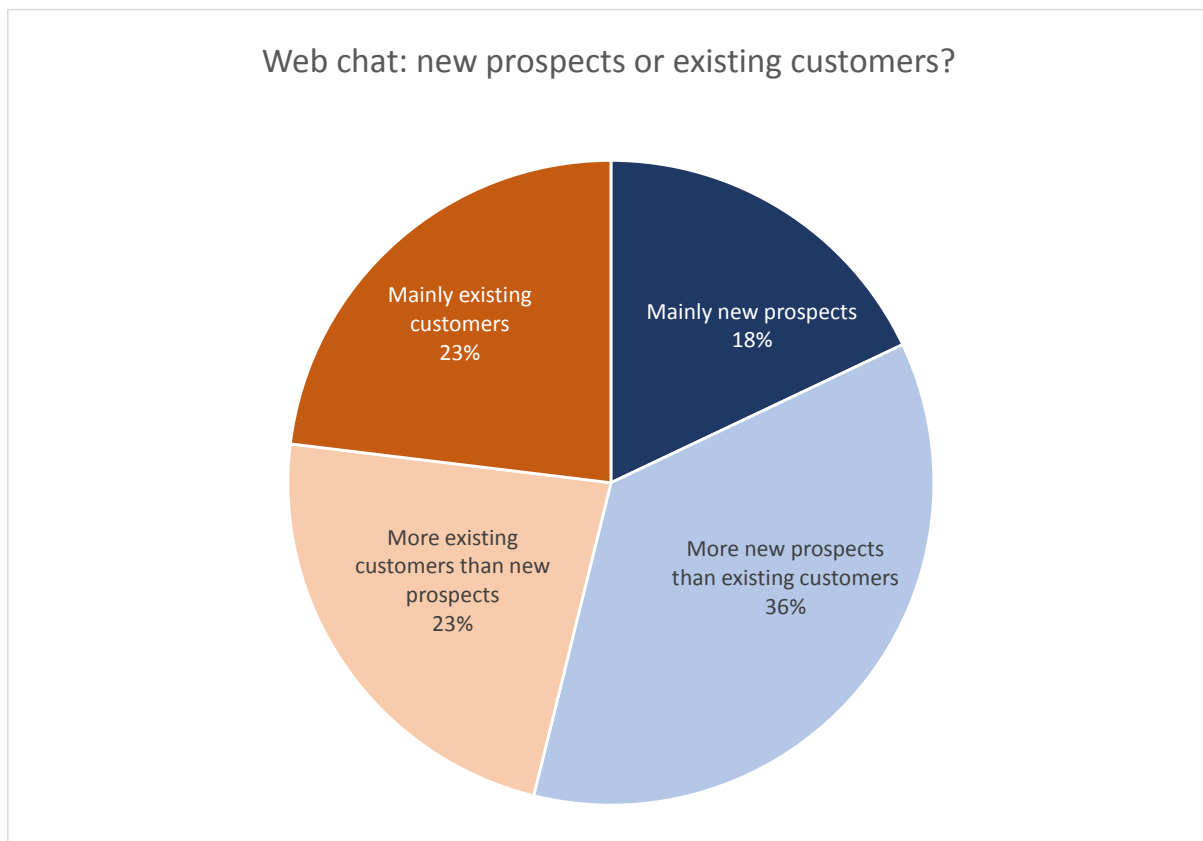
Some vendors have stated in the past that agents could run five or six concurrent chat sessions: the reality seems to be that two sessions is a reasonably consistent average, with a peak of three or even four if required, but which is not possible on a long-term basis.

Figure 132: Concurrent web chats per agent

	Average number of concurrent web chats	Maximum number of concurrent web chats
Mean	2.0	3.2
1 st quartile	2.2	4.1
Median	1.8	3.2
3 rd quartile	1.1	2.0

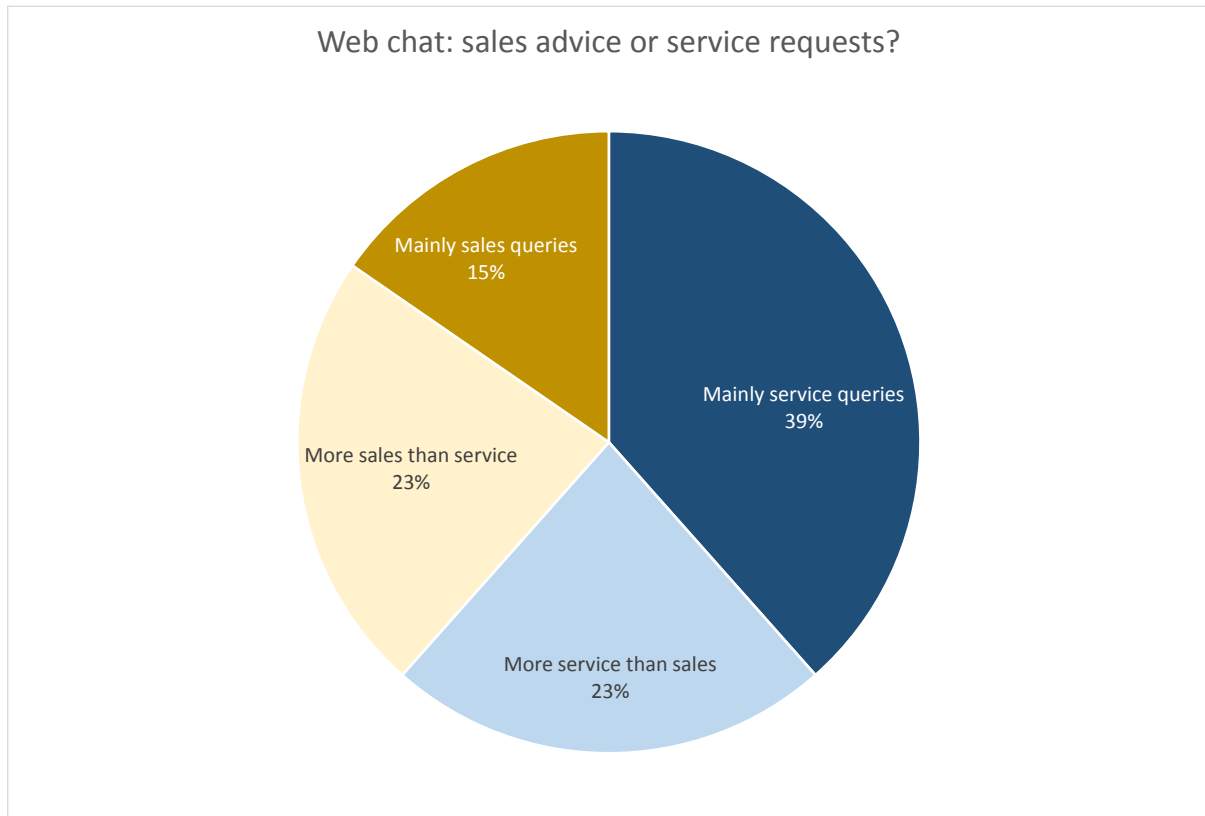
Slightly over half of respondents indicated that web chats are mainly carried out with existing customers, although 23% said they deal with mainly new prospects.

Figure 133: Web chat: new prospects or existing customers?



This finding is supported by the nature of most web chat: 62% of respondents state that their web chats are mainly about service of existing products and services, with only 15% of respondents stating that they deal much more with sales queries than service requests.

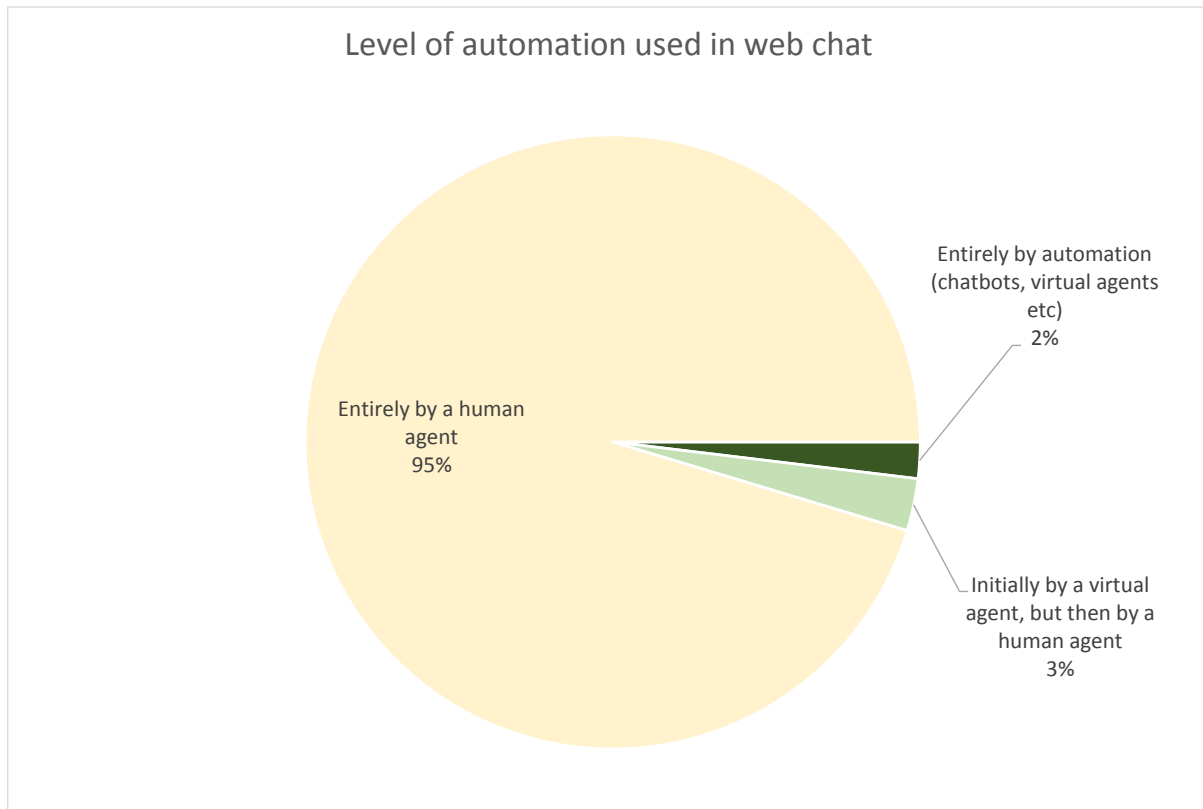
Figure 134: Web chat: sales advice or service requests?



While web chat is seen in the report's findings to offer the lowest cost of the live service options (voice, email, web chat), there is still considerable room for increase efficiencies and lower costs.

While 44% of email handling has some automation involved - although the majority of this is limited to using templatised responses - the figure for web chat is only 5%, which is a major opportunity to decrease costs and handle far more web chats.

Figure 135: Level of automation used in web chat



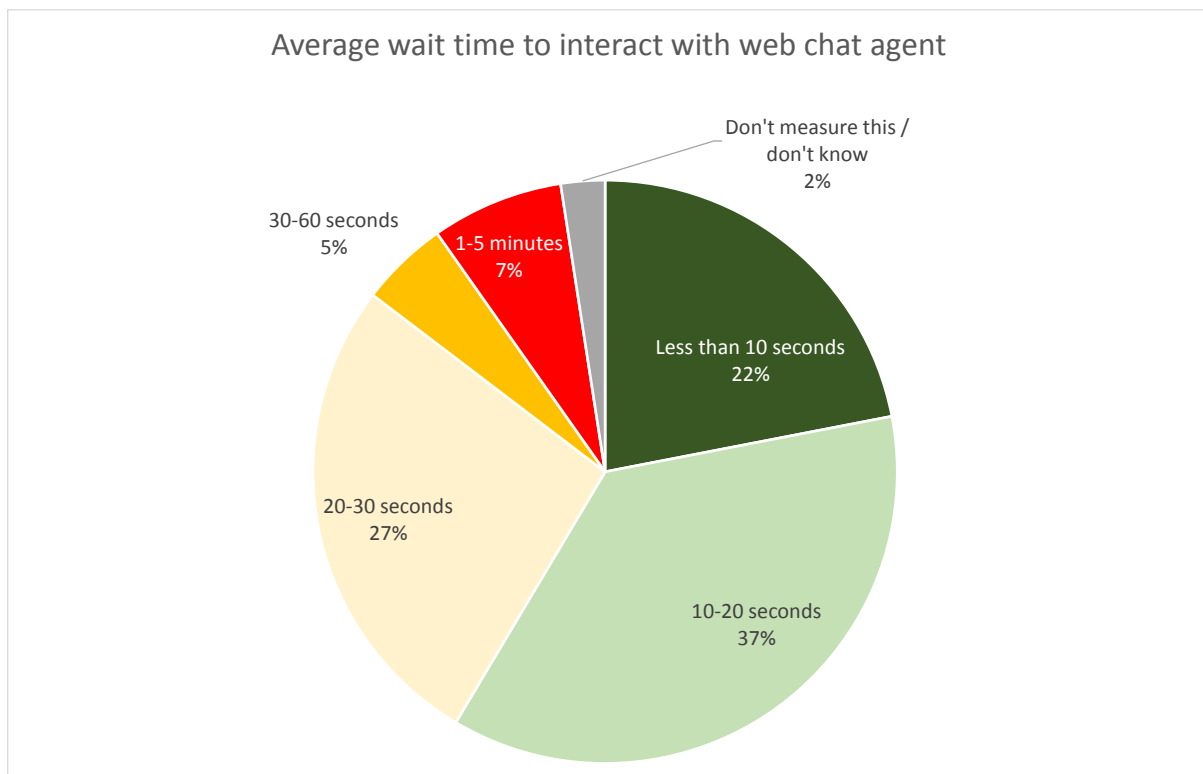
Astute customers have seen tremendous efficiency gains in email and chat by leveraging natural language processing to understand the intent of the user's question or issue. Once the intent is understood, suggested content and templated responses enable the agent to easily and rapidly respond. The combination of sophisticated NLP and suggested content has enabled our customers to achieve up to a four-fold increase in capacity for responding to email and chat queries.

Respondents indicate that the typical wait for a web chat session is actually less than that of a phone call.

22% of respondents have an average wait time for web chat of lower than 10 seconds, with a further 37% stating that the average wait time is 10-20 seconds. Maintaining this level of accessibility for customers will reinforce their positive experiences of web chat, and will encourage customers to keep using the channel, not only when contacting a specific business, but also in general.

Little research has yet been carried out into the expectations of customers around web chat service levels, but it is reasonable to expect a channel being presented as an alternative to phone to have similar service level expectations and reality. If only 7% of web chats take longer than 1 minute to initiate, then we can expect customers to flock to this channel enthusiastically, as these service levels are generally superior to that of voice.

Figure 136: Average wait time to interact with web chat agent



Tips for using chat and cobrowsing successfully

Understand the role that you want web chat to have within the customer contact mix. Do you see it as a replacement for email? Or is it more of a call avoidance strategy? Or is it perhaps a way to close the sale? Without understanding this, it'll be difficult to measure its success. Some businesses will offer web chat and cobrowsing only to their premium customers, or to those who are in the final stages of purchasing but who have stalled.

Choose the most suitable metrics for what you're trying to achieve. If web chat is about revenue, then perhaps focus on sales conversion rates, rather than average handle time, in order to encourage agents to make the most of cross-selling and up-selling opportunities.

Some customers may use web chat as an initial method to ask tentatively about products and services. The solution should provide the option to continue the conversation via a phone, or to send relevant documents and videos.

Work with the solution provider to determine what a reasonable and realistic number of concurrent web chat sessions might be. While it is theoretically possible for an agent to cope with four or more conversations at once, the reality is that this is unsustainable over long periods or with complex issues. It is far more realistic to expect a well-trained agent to deal with perhaps two or three conversations concurrently, and this should be fed into your workforce planning system. However, it may be that agents who deal with both telephony and web chat find it too difficult to deal with multiple chat sessions as well, and will deal with only one chat at a time.

As with any real-time interaction channel, monitoring traffic is vital to success. Plans need to be made to handle web chat spikes and providing estimated wait times to those in a web chat queue will allow them to choose a self-service, phone or email option instead.

Plan how web chat will integrate with existing customer service channels. It is possible to run web chat as an entirely separate, siloed channel, but customers expect to be able to move between channels seamlessly. Being able to treat web chat interactions in the same way as other communication channels means that resources can be spread across channels as and when needed.

Sophisticated web chat solutions allow for 3-way chat, so that an agent can bring subject experts into the conversation as required.

Consider using a trial, in a discrete department, product or service area. This will allow you to understand what works and what doesn't, in a relatively low-risk environment. Changing a small number of variables will also provide a more accurate understanding of how web chat affects customer service levels, customer satisfaction and revenue. It will also provide information about the types of customer and queries that web chat is likely to be used by and for.

Make customers aware that you're offering web chat, by promoting it through existing, higher-cost channels such as within the telephone queue's recorded announcement.

BEYOND WEB CHAT

While web chat is an increasingly popular channel to offer to customers, the current reality is that it is being used as a direct replacement for live telephone calls, with very limited use of automation or value-added features. Although customers are increasingly comfortable with initiating chat sessions, the visual nature of this channel and the increasing use of smartphones means that opportunities exist for businesses to leverage customers' increasing acceptance of web-based communication to provide deep functionality, a richer customer experience and improve their own profitability.

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 or web chat. 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 or web chat, can be an effective way of closing a high-value sale. It is, however, currently used in few UK organisations.

WebRTC or Web Real Time Communications, is an API definition that supports browser-to-browser applications for voice calling, video chat, and P2P file sharing without the need of either internal or external plugins⁸.

It allows customers to start a video or voice call from the web browser (which may be via a desktop computer or smartphone, perhaps as an escalation from an existing web chat session), which means the organisation's website can then offer video or voice contact centre functionality in a seamless manner, with customers able to request live communication with the business without the need to download specific software or seek out the phone number and break off from what they are doing on the website. Two-way video communication is likely to be of more interest to mobile users, as their smartphone device already comes enabled with a camera and microphone, unlike many desktop computers which may not have this functionality or whose users have it disabled. One-way video, to protect users privacy, is perhaps a more likely option in many instances.

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WebRTC>

3 Ways to Win with Real-time Interactions

According to Forrester, consumers view the valuing of time as one of the most important things a company can do to provide good online customer experience, and self-service solutions are being utilized across all industries to satiate this demand. The most successful companies will provide an ongoing conversation with their consumers that is device agnostic, personalized and pain-free. Although there are many ways in which the consumer experience can be enhanced, if you have the following three things working, you are off to a great start:

Don't drop the ball on mobile

Given that Google recently announced that mobile browser use is now exceeding desktop browser use for the first time in history, offering a consistently great experience regardless of the device consumers engage with is essential. When considering a mobile strategy, it's also critical to remember what the consumer might be doing (i.e. pushing a cart, carrying a child, hauling bags) while trying to get answers on their phone with the other hand. Make getting information easy, and provide options for additional channels that might be more convenient for them. For example, put the web chat right up front, with options for a voice or video call with a simple click.

Leverage in-context information for continuity

Having options is great, but even more important is to ensure the transition between those channels is seamless. In-context information must be passed along so that the agent can pick up where they left off on the last channel. Browser history, cart contents, questions asked in the knowledgebase are all valuable pieces of information to give context and provide consistency. Making a consumer recap their journey as you catch up is not valuing their time. In addition, this in-context information allows your agent to personalize the experience. Consider one step further, if the consumer had identified themselves on the website, the agent would have full access to their loyalty information, order history, location and more. Not only will this drive cart conversion, but imagine the upsell opportunities that could be presented all while delighting your consumer with a friction free interaction.

Escalate intelligently when it matters most

Whether escalation is consumer driven or automatic, having a system that is flexible enough to allow you to orchestrate the highest quality interactions to the right agent, through the right channel. There are many reasons you may want to escalate a consumer including cart size, inactivity on the site or customer loyalty status or a specific question asked through self-service. The idea is to keep the consumer engaged while providing the best possible experience for them. Connecting consumers through web-chat, voice or video can serve as a way to emulate the in-store experience and increase conversion. Video can be particularly powerful. Consider a consumer who wants to replace an item in a particular pattern that they bought from the brand. They don't know the name, but they can quickly show the agent who can not only identify the pattern for them, but also make add on suggestions of other coordinating items.

Astute SOS delivers all of this powerful functionality combined with an easy to implement solution so you can get started fast, and machine learning that enables your system to learn with every interaction. Ready to get started with real-time interactions?

<http://www.astutesolutions.com/products/astute-sos> .

Natural Language Processing

While some knowledge base solution providers state that 80% of questions can be answered by 20% of content, it is each business's decision to decide how the remaining 20% of queries will be handled (but of course, even these 20% of documents will change over time as customers' requirements and the businesses' products will not stay static). Some will consider that this is a reasonable proportion to be handled by more traditional means, such as the contact centre, whereas others will leverage expert internal resource, as well as customer communities and forums to fill these knowledge gaps. It is not just the publishing of information that is vital: it is feedback on its accuracy and success from the wider user community and any automated systems which will help the business to fine-tune the knowledge base. Processes to gather this feedback should be put in place, and continually revisited to check their effectiveness, and it is possible to add successful answers to the knowledge base very quickly if a response from an agent (for example, via email or web chat) has been marked to be successful.



Practical, effective knowledge management tools like Astute Knowledge make administering a knowledge base easier in three ways:

1. Delivering a daily summary of customer questions that were not adequately answered the prior day;
2. Crawling the organisation's content (e.g., website, intranet, product manuals) to identify responsive content that can be edited rather than written from scratch;
3. Routing the content for review using intuitive but robust workflow routing.

In all cases however, one of the keys to successful knowledge management is continually monitoring, updating and publishing the most accurate and in-demand information. Businesses should consider setting internal service levels for the knowledge base, for example only returning documents and suggested answers that have over a specific score for relevancy, and no more than a small number of answers per enquiry. If customers are trained to expect a self-service or virtual agent experience that returns pages and pages of documents that bear little relevance to their original query, they will very soon abandon self-service entirely. It is also vital that the information contained in the knowledge base is available consistently across all channels, whether through a virtual agent or human agent.

One of the keys to successful automated service, with a via telephony or website, is for the user to be able to describe their issue in their own words, rather than feeling that they have to use specific terms or a stilted, incomplete account of the issue. Natural language processing-based systems encourage users to describe their issue more fully, asking follow-up questions if there is any degree of ambiguity in the initial request. One of the obstacles to overcome for NLP-based systems (whether through speech recognition or text recognition) is that many Internet users have been trained to use keywords, believing that simplifying the description of their issue will lead to greater levels of accurate response. In fact, NLP works best with longer and more detailed requests, and it is a challenge for businesses and solution providers to encourage and support users of the system in using the solution in an optimal way.

Many current self-service systems are inflexible and structured rigidly in their information flow, so as to handle simple, unambiguous service requests by customers (such as account balances). Generally speaking, these are very successful at delivering this information, and customers will often choose a familiar and effective method of handling the simplest enquiries. However, historical interaction volume information shows that the number of live calls received by contact centre remains steady: although the contact centre is the primary channel choice for only 12% of customers, two-thirds of interactions with the business still come via live telephony. This suggests that the various methods of using self-service and the supporting knowledge base still have a very long way to go before customers rate them as highly for effectiveness and timeliness as they do the traditional contact centre.

New channels such as social media, email and web chat have grown rapidly in popularity, yet the vast majority of interactions involving all of these channels are still along same lines as the traditional contact centre telephony model: that is, a customer making a request to a live agent. Although web chats and emails tend to have slightly lower costs than telephone calls, the differential between these is far smaller than between a live phone call and a self-service phone call. Of course, not only are businesses missing out on huge potential cost savings, but one of the main customer experience problems still exist: that of having to wait until an agent is available to answer the query.

Expanding the boundaries of self-service outside the simplest and least ambiguous requests will be one of the main challenges over the next few years. Success in this will mean not only greatly reduced costs for businesses, but also improved customer experience through higher real first contact resolution rates through the customer's channel of choice.

SELF-SERVICE

TELEPHONY SELF-SERVICE

Despite the rapid growth in the use of web-based services, the importance of the voice channel has not diminished in absolute terms:

- Customers still find voice the most convenient, flexible and quickest communication channel in many instances, especially in older demographics and for complex enquiries
- Customers' expectations continue to rise. Not only do they seek out competitively-priced goods and services, but they require quick, efficient service as well
- The general level of awareness of identity theft as a real issue has also grown, and customers expect to see that their private and personal information is protected by those organisations with which it is shared. The voice channel still provides customers with the greatest level of confidence.

The challenge for businesses is to improve the customer experience, protect their customers' private and personal information and control their own costs. As such, the use of automated voice-based solutions has become widespread and offers a rapid service option to customers while keeping contact centre costs down.

VoxGen™ Many companies design self-service IVRs around the cost-saving needs of the business, rather than around what customers actually want to do. As a result, the caller experience suffers, driving callers to zero-out and talk to an agent. When we redesigned the IVR of a pharmacy chain around its customers' needs, we saw self-service engagement increase by 200%.

Voice self-service is usually delivered either by touchtone (known as DTMF – dual tone, multi-frequency) IVR, which allows customers with a touchtone phone to access and provide information in a numerical format. A growing number of businesses, often with large contact centres and high call volumes, use automated speech recognition (ASR), which allows customers to speak their requirements to the system, allowing greater flexibility and functionality.

IVR (interactive voice response) - whether through DTMF 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, prioritising against business rules in order to deliver a premium standard of service to them (e.g. minimising time on-hold, spending longer on the phone with them, offering high-value services, etc.)
4. to deliver a total customer service interaction without having to use a human agent, saving the business money - historically, it has been calculated that 6 or 7 self-service IVR calls cost about the same as a single person-to-person call.



Meet Dave, your new top-performing agent.

Since Dave joined your team, you've seen customer churn drop, first call resolution soar and agent productivity increase.

That's because Dave isn't your usual contact centre agent.

In fact, he isn't an agent at all. Dave is the persona of your new VoxGen IVR.

Dave doesn't sound like a machine – he sounds human, friendly and professional. And he brings the best of customer service to your IVR: he's helpful to first-time callers, recognises people when they call back, and remembers what they did before.



If you'd like to get more from your contact centre platform, talk to VoxGen about smart, connected and conversational IVR. Find us at www.voxgen.com, or call +44 (0)20 7420 5900.

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This section of the chapter considers the role of IVR and speech recognition as part of a full telephony self-service solution, i.e. one that takes the place of an agent to handle the **whole** interaction.

To learn more about IVR as a call routing solution (i.e. options 1, 2 and 3), please see the chapter on 'Queue Management & Call-Back' earlier in the report.

Figure 137: Advantages and disadvantages of telephony self-service

Advantages	Disadvantages
Fantastic cost-cutter: 6 or 7 IVR calls cost less than a single person-to-person call	Can be inflexible to change IVR options, due to proprietary nature of many existing IVR solutions
Captured customer data from an IVR enables key CTI (computer-telephony integration) solutions, such as 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.
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	When overdone, self-service can be 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
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 open standards and cloud-based delivery has alleviated this issue somewhat

Customers need to be persuaded to use IVR self-service, and success can be measured in two ways: through the “play” rate (the proportion of customers that 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”, i.e. pressing the ‘zero’ key to try to connect to an agent). Customers need to be motivated to use IVR (i.e. there’s something in it for them), and the business needs 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 results in perhaps fewer than 20% of possible 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.

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 more than others. Many businesses are finding that web self-service is increasingly popular with their customers, especially with the uptake of smartphones which allow web browsing on the move (see later in this chapter, and ‘Engaging the Customer of the Future’ chapter of this report for more information on web self-service and mobile service).

Figure 138: 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
Account access & card payments	Banking
Product information & registration	Retail
Online registration	Any
Order entry	Retail, travel
Balance enquiry	Banking, credit cards
Dealer or store location enquiries	Car sales, retail
Ticket booking	Cinemas, other entertainment
Real-time punctuality checks	Airlines, trains
Order status and delivery checks	Telecoms, Retail (esp. online), IT helpdesk
Address changes	Subscription services, utilities
Form filling	Any
Brochure request	Travel, retail
Password reset	Finance, IT

SPEECH TECHNOLOGY AND CLOUD-BASED SOLUTIONS

DTMF IVR has been a notable success for many businesses, and many businesses have added to this, leveraging both the added flexibility and power of speech recognition as well as being able to share the functionality that businesses have recently developed with their web self-service applications. Of course, this is likely to come at an additional cost, and trying to find capital budget to invest in these solutions may be difficult. In such cases, businesses should consider alternative application delivery methods, such as a cloud-based solution.

One of the most consistently strong inhibitors against the uptake of speech recognition is the initial cost involved, as well as the expected ongoing support costs, and cloud has a particular appeal to organisations who don't wish to invest or tie-up large sums of up-front capital investment on their own systems or software, or pay for the in-house IT resource to run them. One advantage of cloud is that the need for significant upfront technology investment is lessened, providing on-tap access to extensive telephony resource, albeit of a third-party nature. Additionally, the use of cloud-based solutions means that businesses don't need continual ongoing investment to upgrade their own systems.

VoxGen™ Cloud is the future of IVR, not just because of the savings from not having to buy and maintain hardware, or dedicate time and resource to managing the application. In a cloud environment, IVR apps can be built using popular, versatile open-standards technologies like Java and VXML. That frees the developer to focus on building a modern, conversational app with a great user experience, which can then integrate with any contact centre platform.

Like other self-service applications, automated speech has of course been more attractive for organisations with high volumes, where the cost of handling the call can even exceed the business value it represents. In this scenario, the need to reduce cost is imperative, but for speech-based self-service to work well, the technology infrastructure on which it depends must be robust enough, and the number of phone lines linked to it large enough to accommodate the maximum number of callers ever likely to contact the service, or run the risk of turning callers away, a cost which can be very high. Cloud-based speech services, where the telephony and technology infrastructure is centrally-owned and managed by a third party overcomes this capital investment hurdle, and the pay-as-you-go model adopted by most cloud suppliers means that ongoing operating costs are directly pegged to transaction volume, providing valuable operational flexibility.

More information can be found in the 'Cloud-based Solutions' chapter of this report.

Looking at the prevalence of voice self-service, 32% of respondents - very similar to last year's figure - offer a full telephony self-service channel, with the finance and utilities sectors leading the way. The retail & distribution and insurance sectors were least likely to be doing so.

There is a very distinct pattern in full self-service when considering contact centre size, with 63% of respondents from large operations doing this, compared with 27% in the mid-sized sector and only 15% of small contact centres.

There is an equally strong pattern when looking at sales vs service: 31% of service-focused operations and 44% of mixed respondents used full telephony self-service, but no sales-orientated contact centres did so.

Figure 139: Overall proportion of calls handled entirely through self-service (only in respondents which offer telephony self-service)

Proportion of calls handled entirely through self-service <u>if offered</u>	
1 st quartile	45%
Median	18%
3 rd quartile	9%
Mean	28%

On average, 33% of voice self-service is handled through automated speech recognition, rather than DTMF IVR, a rise in last year's figure of 20%.

61% of self-service interactions in small contact centres are through DTMF IVR, and although automated speech recognition has been much more widely-used in larger operations in past years, this may signal a greater take-up of cloud-based solutions by smaller contact centres: future years will bear out whether this is an actual structural change or not.

Figure 140: Proportion of self-service calls handled through DTMF IVR or automated speech recognition, by contact centre size

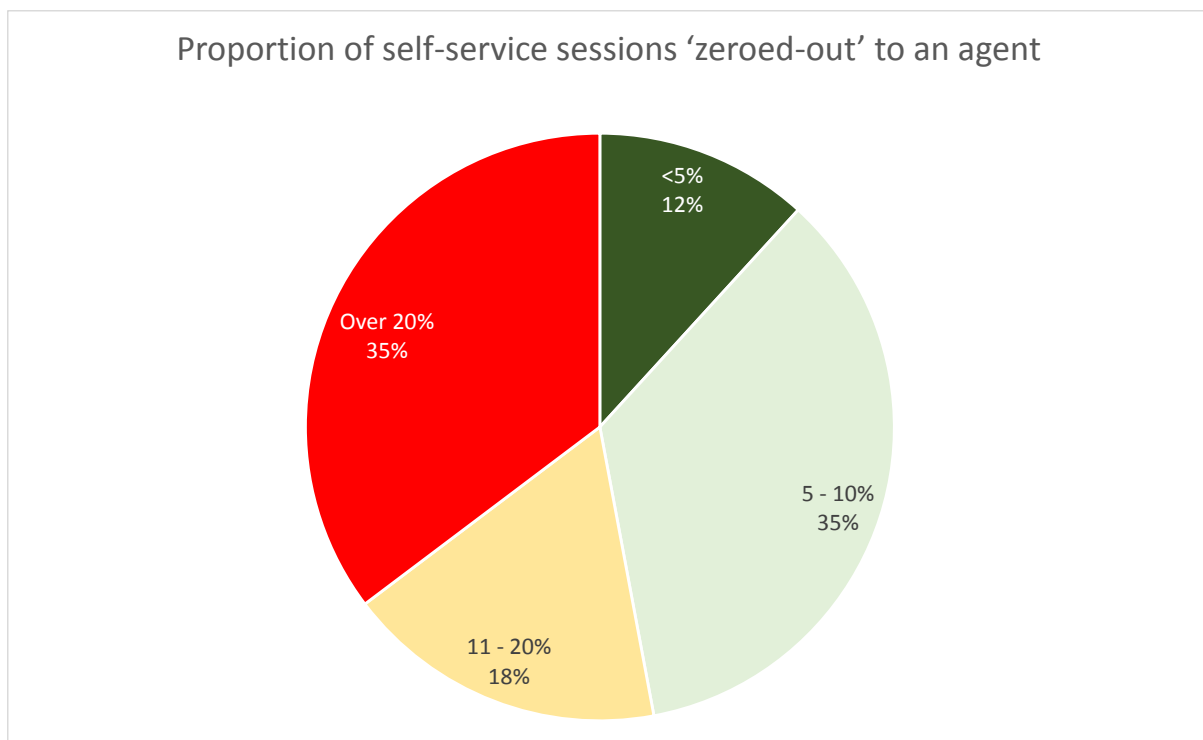
Contact centre size	Proportion of self-service calls handled by DTMF IVR	Proportion of self-service calls handled by automated speech recognition
Small	61%	39%
Medium	60%	40%
Large	73%	27%
Average	67%	33%

Many calls are not suitable for self-service, as they may require multiple requests within the same call, be of a complex nature or be from a caller who feels that they need to speak with a human agent. Additionally, some small businesses may have such a low volume of calls that it is not cost-effective to implement self-service.

Even amongst those respondents for whom telephony self-service is a vital part of the customer contact strategy, 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, or try to find a similar shortcut). 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 in the future, as they'll go elsewhere.

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 hectorated into using an unhelpful and irrelevant self-service system.

Figure 141: Proportion of self-service sessions 'zeroed-out' to an agent



Overall, a mean average of 21% 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 once again the previous years' figures (2014's statistic was 14%, and 2013's 13%).

NB, 1st quartile performance for 'zeroing-out' is 7%, the median is 14% and the 3rd quartile is 35%.

If this increase in 'zeroing out' is a structural trend within the industry, this should be of concern, suggesting that self-service systems are increasingly not offering what customers need. The following table looks in more depth at the reasons for abandoning self-service sessions.

There is a broadly 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 evidence to suggest that this is the case, as it is very noticeable that respondents from larger organisations tend to have far more options in the auto-attendant functionality of their IVR solution, and this tendency to offer a great deal of functionality and options may well also apply to IVR's self-service functionality as well. Overly complex or long-winded IVR functionality will tend to encourage session abandonment, and this may well be what we see here.

Due to the potential additional flexibility and functionality offered by automated speech recognition over DTMF 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 DTMF 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 27%.
- In contact centres where the majority of self-service is offered through DTMF IVR, the mean zero-out rate is 18%.

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 DTMF 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 currently prefer to choose from a finite 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 cost of a live service telephone call varies considerably, but has a mean average of £3.55
- Respondents state that the average cost of a telephony self-service session is around 65p.

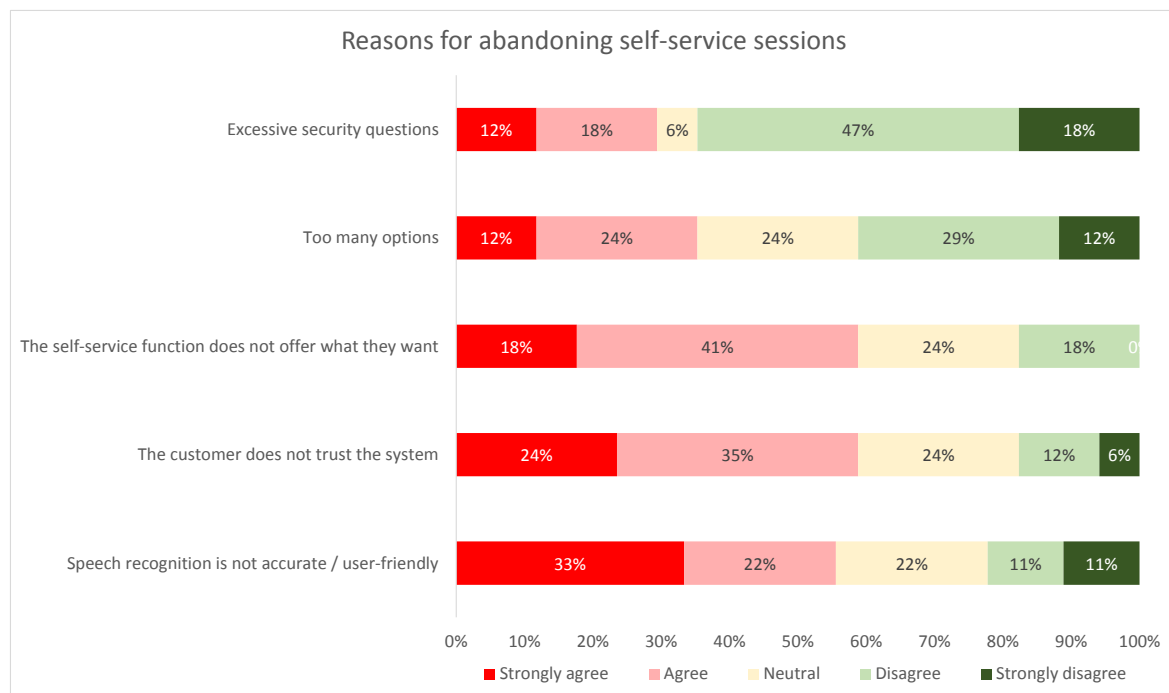
The most popular reason respondents gave for customers abandoning self-service sessions as that the self-service function simply does not offer what the customers want. While this at first glance may appear negative, it is the case that even in the most commoditised and transaction-driven environments, a substantial proportion of customers will want to speak to a person: either because the system does not allow them to do what they want, there is a complicating factor involved, or simply that they wish reassurance or have multiple questions. In such circumstances, it is the customer's choice to abandon the session, and this does not have to be a particularly negative experience as long as a clear exit path that leads to a live agent is marked early in the process. Situations where businesses hide their agents from customers, making them go around in IVR loops are the ones that give all telephony self-service a bad name.

36% of respondents agree that having too many options presented to customers as a major reason for them seeking human assistance, and it is noticeable that well over half of respondents believe that the customer simply does not trust the system, preferring to have human reassurance that the request they have made has been carried out, or the information they are looking for is actually correct.

VoxGen™ Too many IVRs simply present every option to every caller, every time they call. But by making smart use of available data (e.g. recognising when someone has called before), IVR menus can be tailored to the caller's context, narrowing down the options and making the caller feel better served by the system. When we implemented data-driven prompts into a telco's IVR, it resulted in an 18% reduction in calls reaching the contact centre.

33% of respondents strongly believe that speech recognition is unpopular with customers due to lack of accuracy and user-friendliness. This is perhaps more to do with customer habits and lack of confidence with how to use the system than anything more technical.

Figure 142: Reasons for abandoning self-service sessions



Three Hallmarks of a Great Self-Service IVR

Is there any customer service technology around today that's less customer-friendly than IVR?

If you're not sure, try setting up a search for "IVR" on Twitter. On any given day, you'll see a stream of furious people saying things like:



"Just rang to add a #travelpack, went through ID&V on the IVR and then an advisor AGAIN. To be told to call back at 8. Joined AA instead."



"Seriously, how many levels of IVR do I have to go through to report an issue with my phone?!?"



"Can you DM me a number to reach them on? Your IVR is awful to navigate."

These are all real tweets, typed by real customers. There are thousands of others like them. Together, they send a very clear message: IVR is broken and customers are mad as hell about it.

WHY IS IVR SO AWFUL?

For a technology that's meant to help customers, most IVR could hardly be worse at it. That's because most IVR is not designed with the customer in mind. It's designed by business analysts around business priorities like saving money, maximising sales, and reducing inbound call volumes.

While these instincts are correct, trying to achieve them by making life difficult for customers isn't the most productive approach. In fact, IVR is a golden opportunity to engage customers, and give them the help they need in the kind of self-service environment that so many now crave.

THREE HALLMARKS OF A GREAT SELF-SERVICE IVR

To win fans among customers and still achieve the efficiency goals identified by the business, a great self-service IVR should have three main characteristics:

Smart: It uses data and context from other channels to personalise the caller's experience. Even small things count: if you know the person has called before, you might play them a shorter, more relevant message. A major US retail pharmacy did this, and saw a 200% uptick in IVR containment.

Connected: It offers callers other ways to get the help they need, using smart integrations with other channels. During a broadband outage, Caribbean telco operator LIME offered callers the option to sign up for an SMS alert to learn when the outage was fixed – reducing inbound call volumes by 18%.

Conversational: It satisfies the human craving for empathetic interaction, with a human-sounding persona who embodies the brand's values and makes the call feel like a real conversation, rather than an encounter with a robot.

None of this is rocket science. But for many companies, it means rethinking IVR design, development and deployment to create an experience that signals to customers that they are valued and cared for, while still achieving business goals like increased use of self-service and reduced service costs.

As in any area of customer interaction design, it helps to keep in mind what Steve Jobs said about Apple's outrageously successful design ethos:

"You've got to start with the customer experience and work back towards the technology, not the other way around."

Approach your IVR design with that mindset, and you'll find the angry Tweets melt away, your Net Promoter Score soars – and you meet your contact centre targets far more often.

ABOUT VOXGEN

VoxGen is on a mission: to make every automated call a great experience. We believe there's a better way of delivering automated customer experiences, and we've already achieved it for a wide range of consumer-facing brands.

Find out more and book a free healthcheck for your own IVR: call us on +44 (0)20 7420 5900, drop an email to info@voxgen.com or visit www.voxgen.com/connect.

DEVELOPMENTS IN DTMF IVR

The rise in VoIP and SIP (session initiation protocol) has allowed IVR to run on standard servers, rather than more expensive and proprietary telephony cards or specialist hardware, with media gateways and IP PBXs being supported within an open standard, commoditized telephony environment.

The pure software IVR platforms used today run on standard servers, reducing the restrictions that proprietary hardware placed upon functionality, scalability and flexibility, as well as the cost of purchasing and maintaining dedicated hardware. Some companies prefer to adopt the cloud-based method of providing IVR options to the customers: 15% of respondents use cloud-based IVR functionality, whether based upon DTMF or speech recognition.

Speech-enabling IVR increases the features available to the caller. Standards-based languages such as CCXML and VoiceXML support speech recognition and improved access to relevant corporate data, the integration of which into the IVR experience supports text-to-speech and the use of caller profiling to enable personalised IVR sessions based on who the caller is, their history, their contact preferences and any other relevant information that would further assist the self-service session.

With PCI compliance so much to the fore for many businesses, we would expect to see an increased use of IVR to take card payments, whether within a call or at the end of it (more information on this can be found within the 'PCI DSS Compliance' chapter of this report). With the focus of many solution providers on achieving the relevant ISO security standards, it can be seen that the vendor community is very aware of what the market requires. DTMF has the advantage of extreme simplicity, which means that it may well have an important role to play on a sector-specific basis, even with the advent of newer and more sophisticated solutions. In situations where callers need the same piece of information on a recurring basis - such as checking the balance of prepaid credit cards - customers can access the information within a few seconds by typing in the DTMF digit sequence that they have learnt off-by-heart, and it may well be that this method of accessing information is the most convenient and quickest for customers. In addition, interactions that require a simple list of digits, such as e-parking, may be more suited to the unambiguous nature of DTMF (which, unlike speech recognition, is unaffected by background noise). Of course, by far the most common application for delivering long sequences of numbers is through making a payment via credit card, and placing a customer call into an automated DTMF session in order to do this has numerous advantages for businesses and customers in terms of convenience, familiarity and security.

The take-up of cloud-based IVR solutions, particularly by small-medium sized companies, is driving growth within this sector. The ability to personalise IVR sessions, as well as the low initial start-up costs and limited in-house maintenance required, means that businesses that traditionally were unable or unwilling to see the benefits of IVR for their own company are now revisiting this.

Many solution providers state that they are actively increasing the power and range of the analytics solutions not just within live contact channels such as chat and voice, but also within automated IVR environments as well.

FROM DTMF IVR TO AUTOMATED SPEECH RECOGNITION

Despite the wider and more powerful functionality that speech recognition gives to an IVR system, significant inhibitors are present. It is generally acknowledged that speech recognition can be considerably more expensive to implement than DTMF IVR, and is also likely to require significant, highly-paid in-house resource to fine-tune and operate it going forward. Some solution providers note that the majority of businesses' interest in moving from DTMF to speech recognition comes when the existing telephony self-service legacy system is approaching end-of-life.

Speech-based IVR is particularly useful in cases where very long lists of items such as place names or surnames may be chosen, for which the more structured DTMF IVR is unsuited. The success or otherwise of speech-based IVRs is very affected by how callers are encouraged to use the service. It has been the case that some speech implementations have actually made life more difficult for the customer, who may not have the confidence that the system will understand their natural language request and provide very short, one-word answers; if nothing is given in the way of prompts or examples, callers may give too little or too much information as they are unsure of the sophistication or capabilities of the system, and this may be a reason for the high self-service abandonment rates seen earlier. Using prompts such as "describe in a few words why you are calling us, for example 'to start a new mortgage application'" can be extremely useful in setting ground rules for the successful use of the system.

Some solution providers offer a semi-automated option for their speech recognition-driven IVR, whereby the agent has a chance to hear one or two pertinent words from within the speech recognition session before the live call is taken, giving the agent an initial insight into the context, mind-set and intent of the customer before the conversation actually begins.

In previous years, the main issue that held back speech-enabled self-service was that their business wasn't really suited to automation. However, previous research has shown that more than half of the contact centres that currently offer no full self-service options could see some benefit in automating at least some part of their processes.

As such, there are likely to be issues around expenditure, operational costs and customer reaction to address for these potential users of self-service. Respondents are more concerned than previously they do not have the in-house IT resource to run automated speech self-service, and many believe that the ongoing costs and effort would not be worth it. However, the biggest inhibitor was the initial investment, which could be alleviated through a hosted model. As DTMF IVR, when badly-implemented, is a major bugbear for customers, replacing it with a quicker and more powerful alternative (ASR) could be seen as a benefit.

In all, there is still a great deal of work to be done by solution providers to deliver ASR solutions - either as a replacement for DTMF IVR, or as a new solution - through offering innovative payment and service delivery methods, and to create a greater market awareness of the success stories in this area. Against a background of potential inhibitors, there is some positivity coming from the consumer base. Because there are so many speech recognition applications now in use in daily life - for example Siri, PC-based voice recognition software, and voice-enabled hands-free dialling - consumers are now becoming more comfortable giving voice commands to an automated system. With every successful speech interaction, customers' confidence increases and speech-enabled self-service becomes a little more firmly embedded in the customer base's psyche.

VISUAL IVR

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 an opportunity to display corporate branding and deliver an improved customer interaction experience.

Figure 143: 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 self-service 'zero-out' rate for your specific industry compared to your own statistics, considering your call transfer rate and 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.

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.

Research has 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 all cases, providing effective web self-service options - with a clear path to escalation to a live agent, along with any contextual customer specific information - is in the best interests of the business.

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 your customers.

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

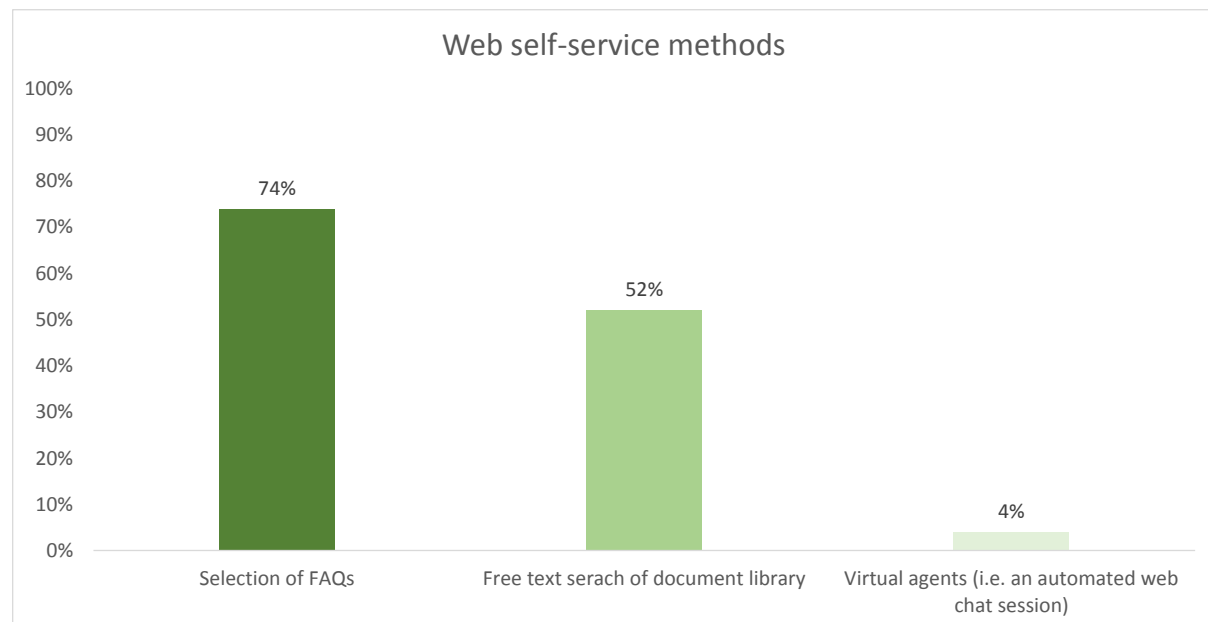
Virtual agents, otherwise known as virtual assistants, are software applications that engage customers in conversations in order to provide them with an answer to their queries. They may be personalised to reflect the company's branding, and often act as the first point of contact between the website visitor and the business.

Virtual agent functionality 'understands' the context of what the customer is asking, with the result being more akin to that of an empathetic human who also has had access to what the customer has been trying to do. For example, if asked "When can I expect my delivery?", the context and the required answer will be different depending on whether the customer has placed an order and is enquiring about its status, or has only a 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.

Of these three methods of web self-service, by far the most prevalent is that of the FAQ, which is used by 74% of businesses that offer telephony self-service as well. The free text search of the document library is rather less well supported, and only 52%. Virtual agents are still employed only by a very small proportion of respondents, usually those within large enterprises.

Figure 144: Web self-service methods



SELF-SERVICE CHANNELS: E2E AND 'VIPA'S

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 at all 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 true VIPA though.

'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 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 commoditized products and services, with major impacts on existing businesses.

ENGAGING THE CUSTOMER OF THE FUTURE

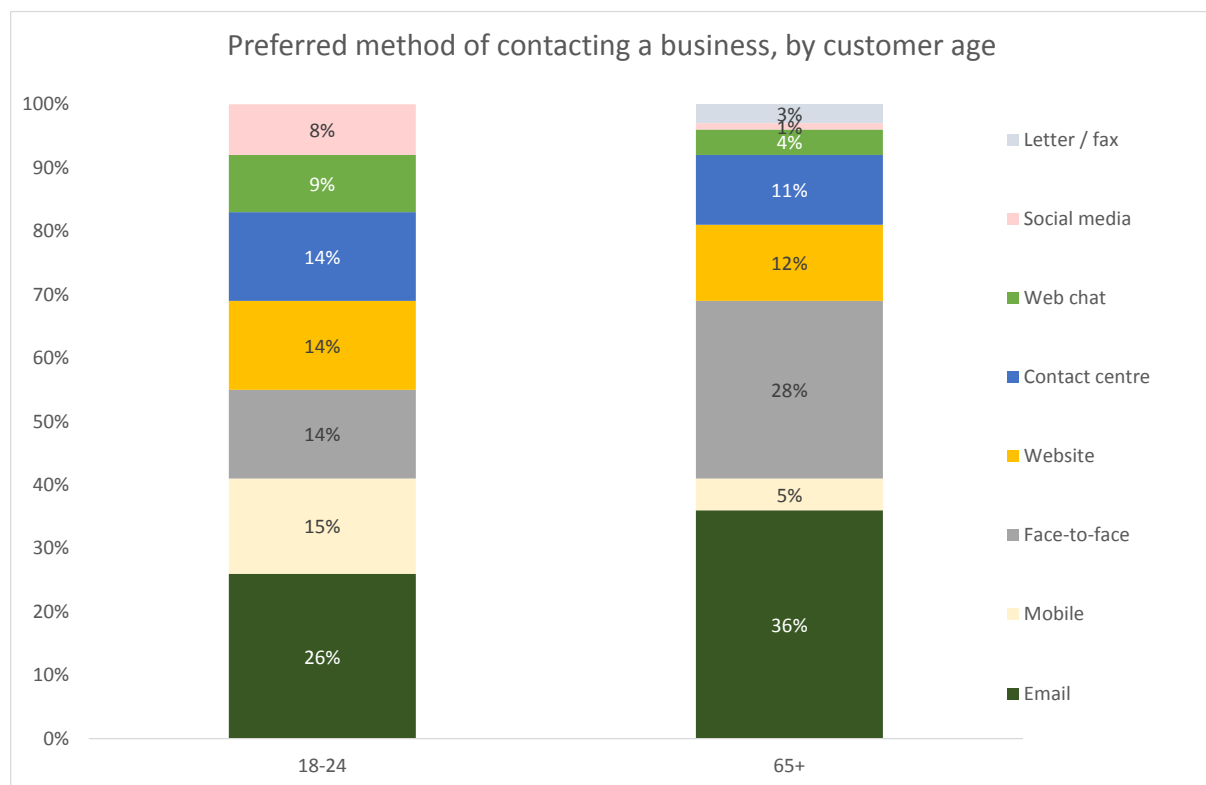
Engaging ‘the customer of the future’ may sound like a theoretical, intellectual challenge, but perhaps nothing that those responsible for customer management today need actually act upon.

However, the customer of the future is also the customer of today for many businesses: mobile phone providers and many retailers rely very much upon the 18 to 24-year-old demographic, with insurance companies (especially motor) and banks trying to attract new customers who need their first current account, loan or credit card.

Common sense dictates that the way in 18-to-24-year-old wishes to communicate with the business may differ dramatically from the preferences of a 70-year-old. Yet it is not only current intergenerational preferences that need to be taken into account: the ways in which customers of any age communicate with businesses is perhaps driven more by the options available to them and their effectiveness as to any existing habit.

The following chart shows how customers in the 18 to 24-year-old and the 65+-year-old age groups state that they prefer to contact a business.

Figure 145: Preferred method of contacting a business, by customer age





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Key findings include:

- As we might expect, twice as many respondents from the older demographic prefer face-to-face communications
- More surprisingly, the 65+ year old respondents are far more likely to prefer to communicate via email than are the younger demographic. 3% of older customers still choose writing a letter over any other form of business contact, and taken with the extremely high figure of 36% for email, this might suggest that measured, written communications of all types are still very much preferred by this demographic: the email has become the 21st-century letter
- The younger demographic are far more likely to choose a mobile-based contact method such as an app, although 1 in 20 respondents from the over-65 group chose this option as well
- 18 to 24-year-olds are far more likely to choose social media as their preferred business contact channel with 8% of respondents doing so, compared to only 1% of over 65's. They are also likely to be far more comfortable with web chat
- Direct telephony communication with the contact centre is a preference for 14% of young people, compared to 11% of the older survey respondents.

When considering these findings, it is vital to understand that these responses are how the survey respondents would choose to communicate with the business **in an ideal world**. Bearing in mind that the contact centre telephony channel still accounts for around two-thirds of customer interactions, compared to only 2-3% for each of web chat and social media, a conclusion can be drawn that while customers might prefer to use a specific channel, they accept that the reality is that a phone call is currently more likely to get the job done.

Additionally, it may well be the case that many businesses simply do not yet offer new channels that are fully and competently supported to the level that they do so with telephony: there is a demand gap that needs to be filled.

This chapter looks in depth at how the channels which the youngest adult generation are more likely to prefer to use - mobile and social - are actually being supported: the importance of the 18-24-year-old age group to businesses will only grow with time.

Yet businesses should also bear in mind that many members of the 65+ year group are also 'customers of the future' as well as 'customers of today'. There is more than enough evidence here to suggest that this demographic is willing and even eager to try new ways of communicating with businesses, although the expectations and user experience are likely to be different for each type of customer.

THE SOCIAL CUSTOMER

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. For foreseeable future, ContactBabel expects social media to remain a relatively minor channel in terms of overall number of interactions compared to telephony, but one with the 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. Some savvy customers, 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. Others might choose the social channel after they've had a bad experience on another channel, such as waiting on hold for a phone agent.

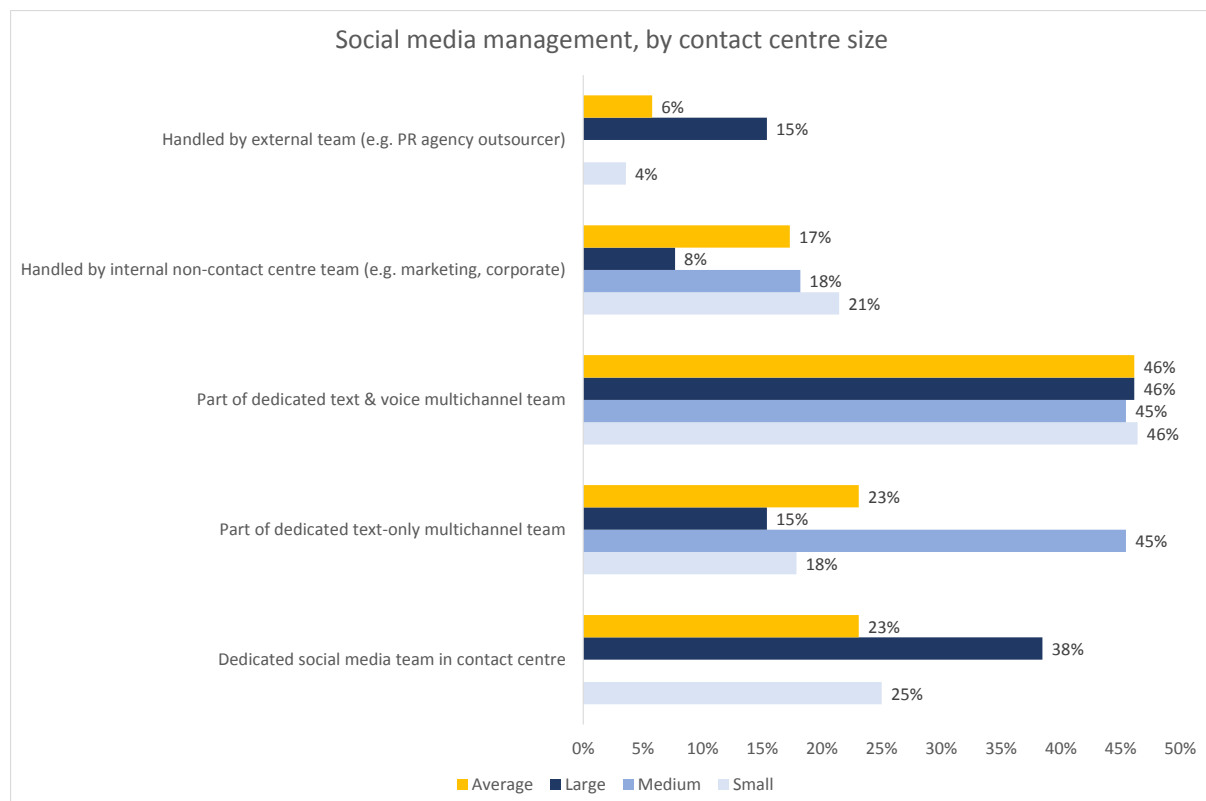
SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP

Unlike previous years, most respondents report that social media is now handled by an in-house team based inside the contact centre. 21% report that it is handled by internal marketing, PR or corporate communications, with 4% letting an outsourcer or agency handle it. This change implies that social media is being viewed and treated as more as part of a wider omnichannel strategy, rather than as a standalone channel.

29% of respondents reported that they have a dedicated social media team working within the contact centre (38% in larger contact centres), and 18% have a dedicated multichannel team working within the contact centre location but which does not answer telephone calls. (NB multiple choices were allowed, so totals may add up to more than 100%).

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. Small and medium operations are more likely to rely upon a non-contact centre-based corporate team to handle their social media, but operations of all sizes are most likely to handle social media as part of the entire customer interaction mix, including telephony.

Figure 146: Social media management, by contact centre size









The role of social media, and how it is managed, is heavily influenced by who holds the budget. For the majority of respondents, it is the marketing department that holds the money for social media, with the customer contact department only responsible for this channel's investment and finances in a small minority of cases. Larger contact centres are somewhat more likely to hold social media budget, but such respondents are still in a minority. As social media continues its move away from being primarily a 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.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Uniquely, social media has taken off as a customer service channel as a result of customer demand, rather than businesses' enthusiasm for promoting a cheaper service channel. The following chart shows how channels fit customers' needs, and we can see that 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 popular methods of social media handling are not optimal: 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 outside world to be reacting quickly and effectively, or to have solved the problem. 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.

Figure 147: Possible customer experience of social media channel

Social media

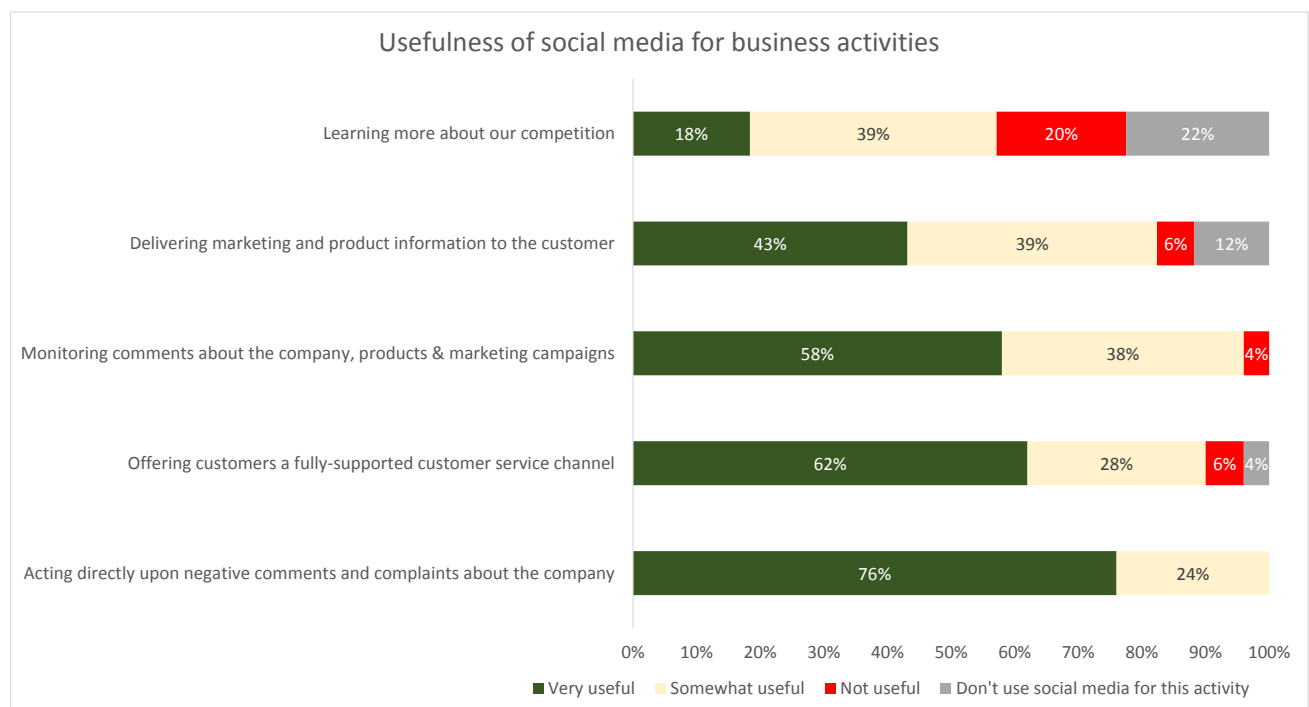
Perceived effectiveness		The customer says "Jump". The business asks "How high?"
Channel availability		Via PC or smartphone
Ease of use		Simple to send a tweet or write on a wall – no queue
Low cost of use		Free
Painlessness		Venting frustration at a company can be a positive experience...
Speed of conclusion		Immediate response and personalised service

Despite respondents' opinions earlier in this report that social media was generally not the best channel for unhappy customers to use to make a complaint, the following table tells another story. 76% of respondents that offer social media as a customer service channel consider it to be extremely useful for acting directly on negative comments and complaints picked up from customers, a statistic that is growing rapidly.

In previous years, there were very mixed opinions on whether social media is actually providing customers with a fully-supported customer service channel. This year however, 62% feel strongly that they are doing so, whereas only 6% feel that they are not.

Earlier in the report, respondents stated that call recording and speech analytics were not felt to be supporting the business to learn more about its competitors, and there is little sense here that social media is providing this information either. It may be that businesses are focusing their efforts upon learning what their customers are saying about their own products and services, rather than worrying too much about the competition, but all of these solutions offer opportunities for competitive advantage.

Figure 148: Usefulness of social media for business activities

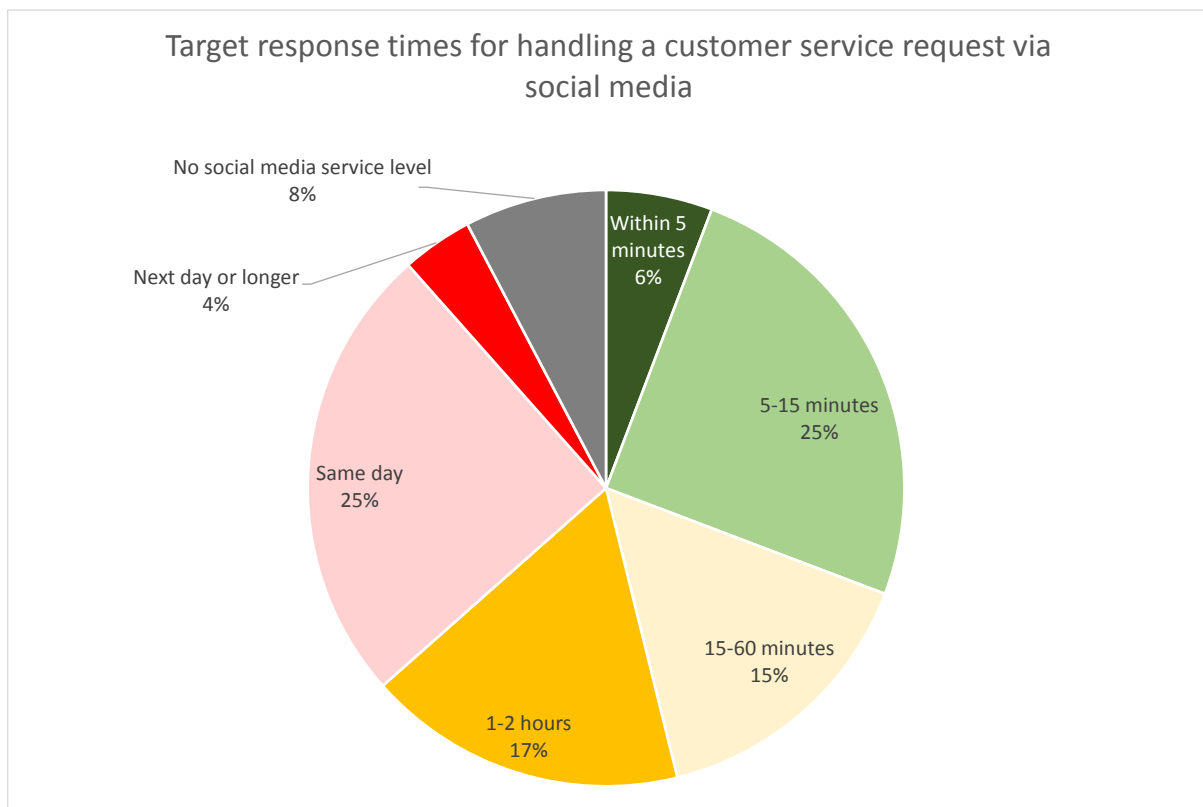


There is some debate about the best way to handle social media inquiries. While it is possible for requests via social media to be analysed (often by keyword spotting), prioritised and then routed to the agent team most capable of dealing with these specific inquiries, it is not just the same as a phone call or web chat. An almost instantaneous response is expected, with the attendant pressure that such a service level places upon the organisation, but social media does not exist within the same one-to-one paradigm as other customer service channels.

Target response times for handling a social media customer service request are somewhere between a phone call / web chat on the one hand (i.e. a maximum of a few minutes), and an email on the other (i.e. the same working day).

46% of respondents try to answer within the hour, but the same proportion state that they will probably take longer than an hour. 8% do not have a service level target at all.

Figure 149: Target response times for handling a customer service request via social media



58% of respondents offering service via social media state that they put the interaction into the customer's file as if they'd made a phone call, with analysis of the interaction being undertaken by 35% of respondents to ascertain whether the insight can be fed into the wider business processes.

42% of respondents state that they can escalate this to a phone call if required (note as well the high level of email escalations, suggesting that phone calls are still the 'go-to' channel). 33% of respondents state that they take customers through security (probably via direct messages), a figure higher than previous years.

This lower figure for security checking should be viewed in context with the higher figures for those who say they add social media interactions to customer records: it would be imagined that before the customer record is opened and amended, security and identification processes would have been completed, so these findings are a little contradictory as they stand.

Figure 150: Service requests via social media: value-added options (from all respondents offering social media service)

Value-added option after social media service request	Proportion of respondents
The request & conversation kept on their file, as if they'd made a phone call	58%
Request can be escalated immediately to a phone channel (e.g. through placing an outbound call)	42%
Requests analysed to identify broken processes and issues	35%
Can be taken through security (e.g. through direct messaging)	33%

THE MOBILE CUSTOMER

Statistics that show the number of smartphone users, volume of apps downloaded and the value of mobile transactions are rising so quickly that they would be out-of-date before this report is published. It is sufficient to note that with very few exceptions, the mobile customer is relevant to every organisation, in every vertical market, in every geography of the world.

The rapidly decreasing cost of mobile bandwidth, coupled with the huge improvements in mobile networks (e.g. 4G) means that businesses can be ambitious in what they are attempting within this channel, as they can have a high level of confidence that what they can imagine today will be technically possible within a couple of years, if not a matter of months.

Research from Netbiscuits⁹ shows that 91% 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: there is no differentiation or allowances made for sub-optimal mobile web experiences. Furthermore, most businesses are currently failing in this attempt, with the mobile channel lagging way behind online websites and bricks-and-mortar shops.

Offering a mobile customer experience tends to mean offering a smartphone app and/or a mobile version of a website, and the next section of the report looks at what this means for businesses and customers.

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 smartphone to access the web, such as tiny fonts, excessive scrolling and difficult-to-press buttons.

Mobile websites usually do not try to offer every single item available on the full website, but focus upon 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 businesses have had to consider minimising the use of graphics to achieve quicker load times in areas with poor mobile data services, although this is becoming less of an issue as 4G and cheaper data becomes more widespread.

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 very desirable.

⁹ Quoted at <http://mobilemarketingmagazine.com/34-per-cent-abandon-poor-mobile-experiences>

It is beneficial for businesses to understand why customers are using a mobile site rather than waiting until they are in front of a PC: the request may be related to what they are doing at that current time, and so waiting is not appropriate. Generally, customers 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 high-volume interaction types.

SMARTPHONE APPS

A good app may 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.

Smartphone platform market shares show that Android and iOS shipments account for over 95% of the market¹⁰, so businesses could decide to produce only two flavours of app, which would actually support the great majority of the smartphone market.

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 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 \$30,000 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 sales conversion rates are taken into account.

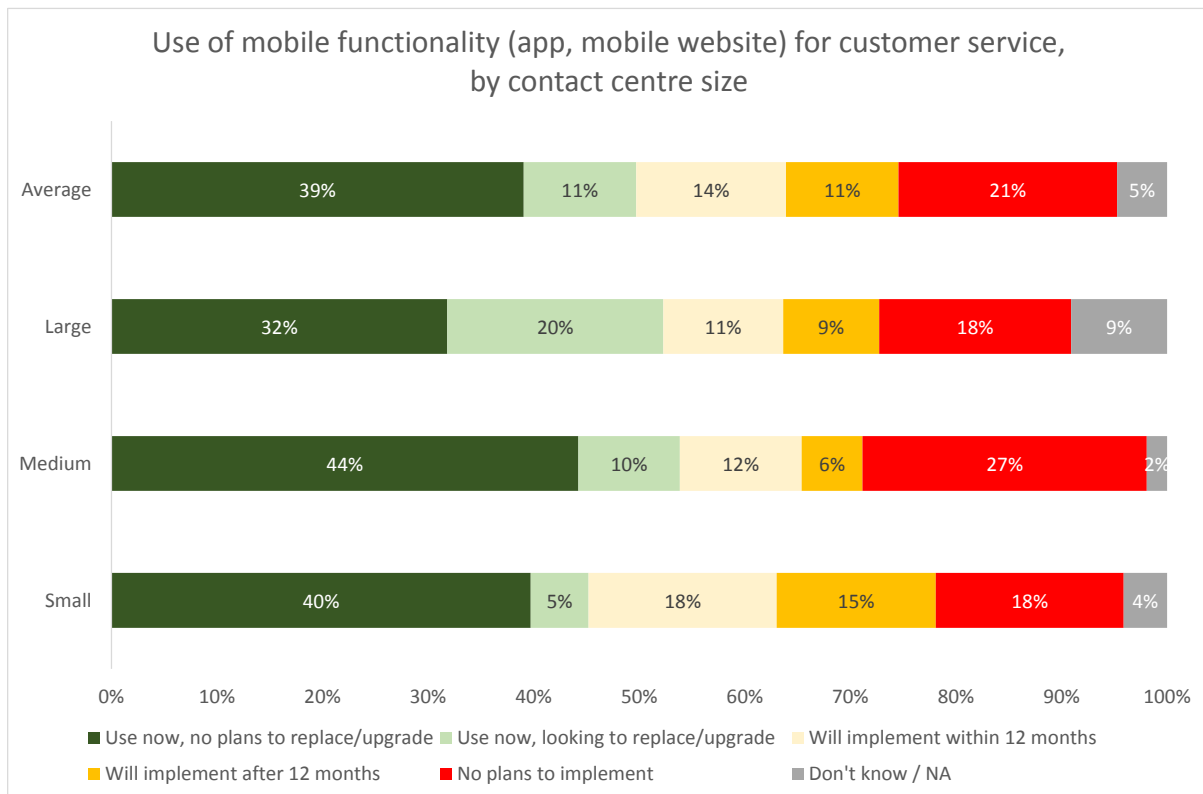
¹⁰ <http://www.idc.com/prodserv/smartphone-os-market-share.jsp>

USE OF MOBILE SERVICE FUNCTIONALITY

50% of this year's survey respondents stated that they offer mobile functionality for customer service, with a further 25% having definite plans to doing so.

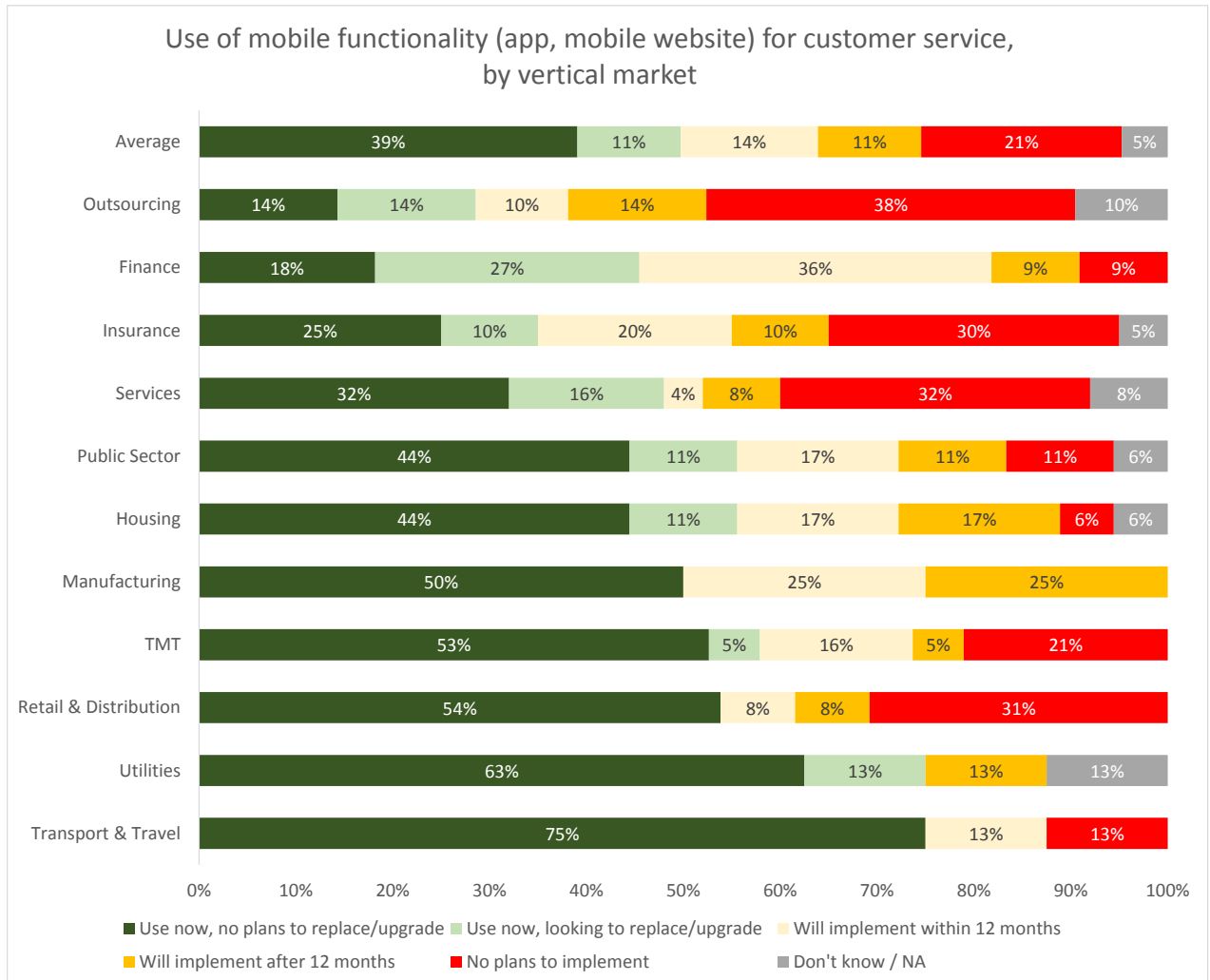
There is little difference between size bands, although respondents from large operations are much more likely than others to be looking to upgrade their functionality.

Figure 151: Use of mobile functionality (app, mobile website) for customer service, by contact centre size



Those respondents in the utilities, TMT and transport & travel sectors are most likely to be offering customer service via mobile functionality, and those in insurance and outsourcing the least.

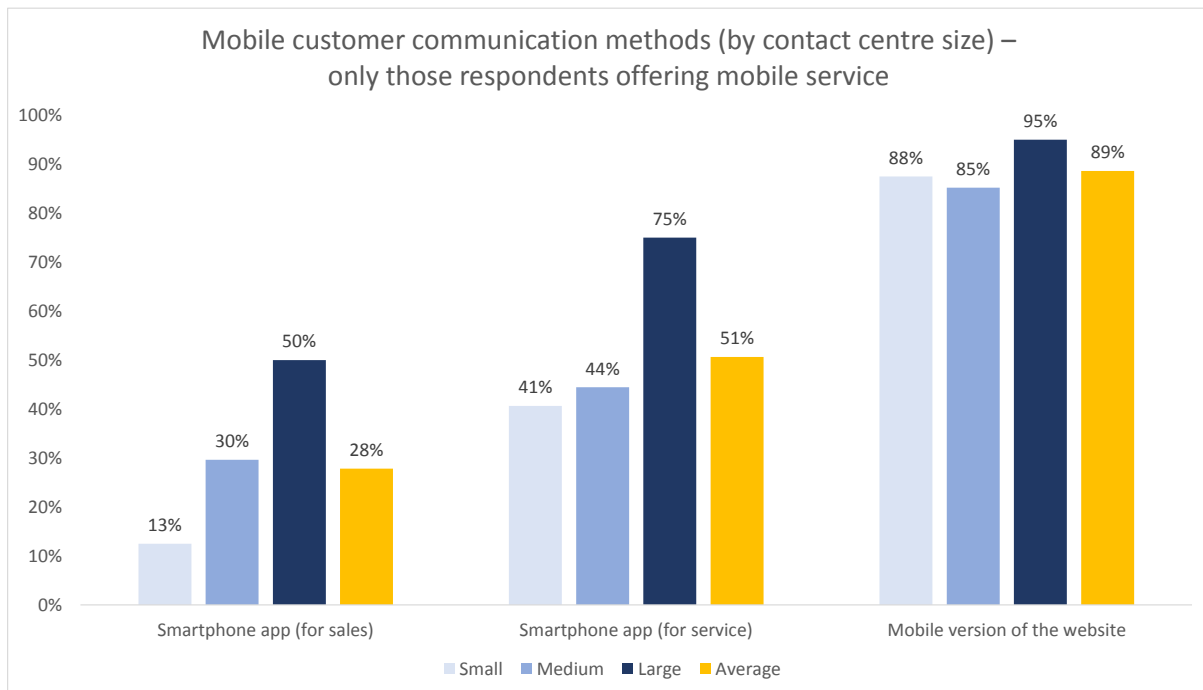
Figure 152: Use of mobile functionality (app, mobile website) for customer service, by vertical market



As the following chart shows, of the respondents which provide mobile customer service, 89% offer a mobile version of their website, for example by having the most popular elements available, speedy load times, optimised graphics, improved readability and scrolling, etc.

51% of respondents offered a smartphone app for service, with larger respondents much more likely to be doing so. However, only 28% offer the same mobile support for sales, with larger operations again being more likely to try to win new business through investing in an app.

Figure 153: Mobile customer communication methods (by contact centre size) – only those respondents offering mobile service



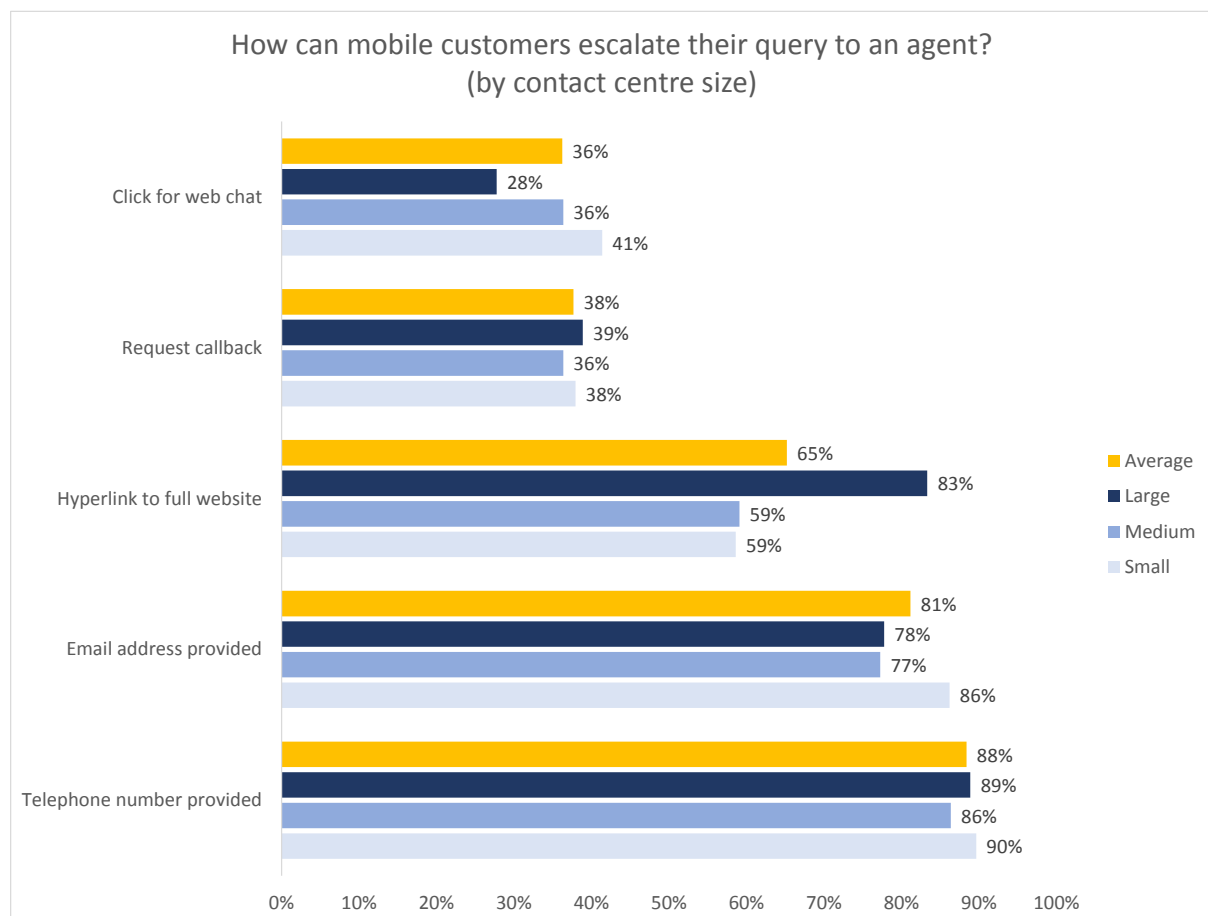
CROSS-CHANNEL ESCALATION

A considerable amount of service functionality available to the mobile consumer is unsophisticated and often 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 want to, 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 separate request without any understanding of the history, activity or effort that the customer has already undertaken. No business where this occurs can describe itself as being 'omnichannel'.

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.

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.

Figure 154: How can mobile customers escalate their query to an agent? (by contact centre size)



The easiest way to support cross-channel contact is to offer a telephone number on the mobile website or inside the app, and 88% of respondents do so. However, the user/ customer must often start their request again from the beginning, as many respondents will not credit the security and identification process that the customer has already been through, 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.

Providing an email address is the second most popular escalation method, which does allow the pre-population of fields in an email form (user details, account details, type of issue etc.) although only a few respondents go as far as this. However, email is a slow medium even when done correctly, and the user will not get an answer in real time. Sales operations prefer to encourage mobile browsers to contact them through a more immediate channel, to reduce the chance of losing a sale.

38% 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.

36% of respondents offered a web chat option within the mobile site or app, this being the channel most closely resembling the activity the user is already undertaking (i.e. using the mobile device to look for information, and 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. The difficulty in typing on a smartphone screen means that this is still not a perfect solution.

Similar to last year's findings, a significant minority of respondents state that upon escalation, an agent is provided with some information about the customer, most often only the customer's name, rather than anything more closely linked and relevant to what the customer was trying to do, their account details, or where they are currently located. As such, this means an escalation from the mobile channel will rarely 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 155: What information is passed to an agent after escalation from the mobile channel?

Is this information passed to the agent from the mobile channel?	Proportion of respondents
Customer name	40%
Account information / customer profile	27%
Current interaction history	19%
Customer location	17%

CORPORATE OWNERSHIP OF THE MOBILE FUNCTION

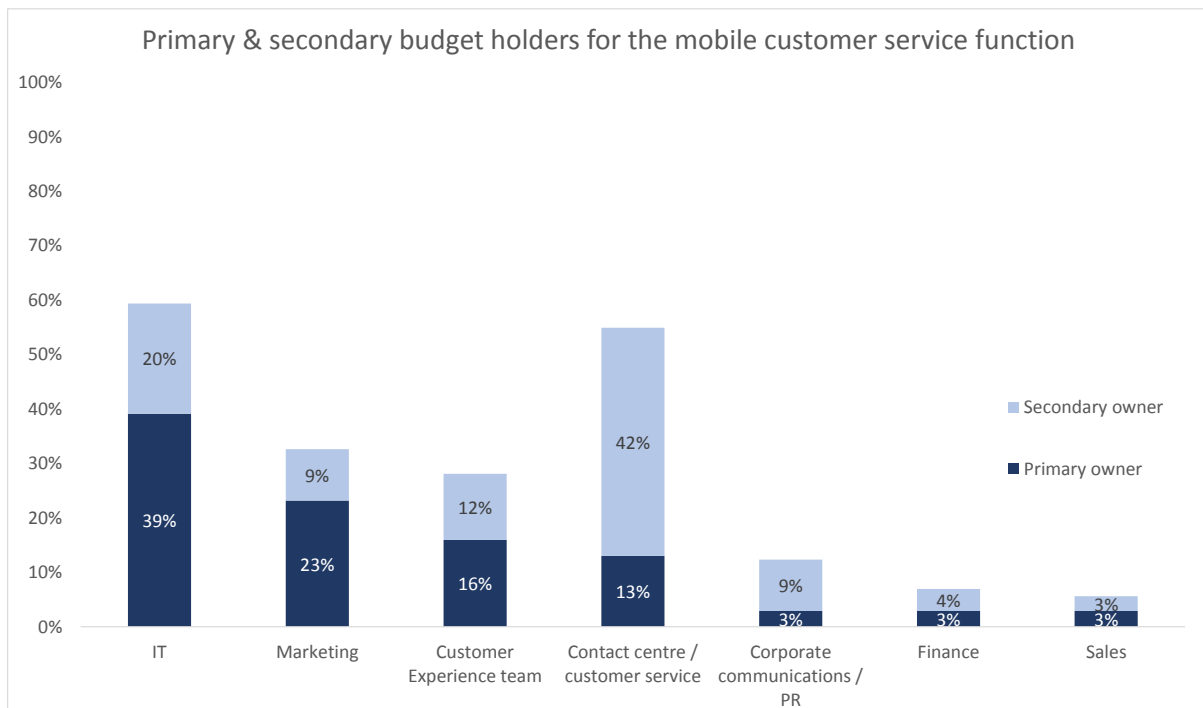
One of the major issues to overcome within most organisations that offer service across multiple channels and devices is this: who actually owns the space? Telephony is established as a contact centre function, and some other non-voice customer channels also fall under its auspices, but social media is often still owned by marketing (who may also lay claim to mobile strategy), and the wider self-service functionality may be a remit of the IT function. This fragmented and inconsistent ownership of multichannel customer contact functions means that maintaining the same high and reliable standard of information and service across channels has become an even more considerable challenge, and the path to true omnichannel even more fraught.

It may not be possible or even desirable for a single unified group to take charge of all such functions. However, because the customer neither knows nor cares about the internal structure of the organisation, a bridge between the channels must be created to ensure that a multichannel customer experience does not break down if the initial channel cannot handle all the customer's requirements effectively, and the growth in cross-functional customer experience teams is a response to this issue. This is explored further within the recent ContactBabel report [“The Inner Circle Guide to Multichannel”](#).

The following chart shows that 39% of respondents named the IT function as the primary budget holder for mobile customer service, with only 13% stating that it was the responsibility of the contact centre or customer service division, although 16% state that it comes under the broad 'customer experience team' banner, which is a positive finding.

As an increasing number of mobile interactions start with self-service (which may be IT's purview), and then moved to a live agent (the customer service/contact centre function), IT's strong involvement may be understandable, if not optimal for the customer or the business.

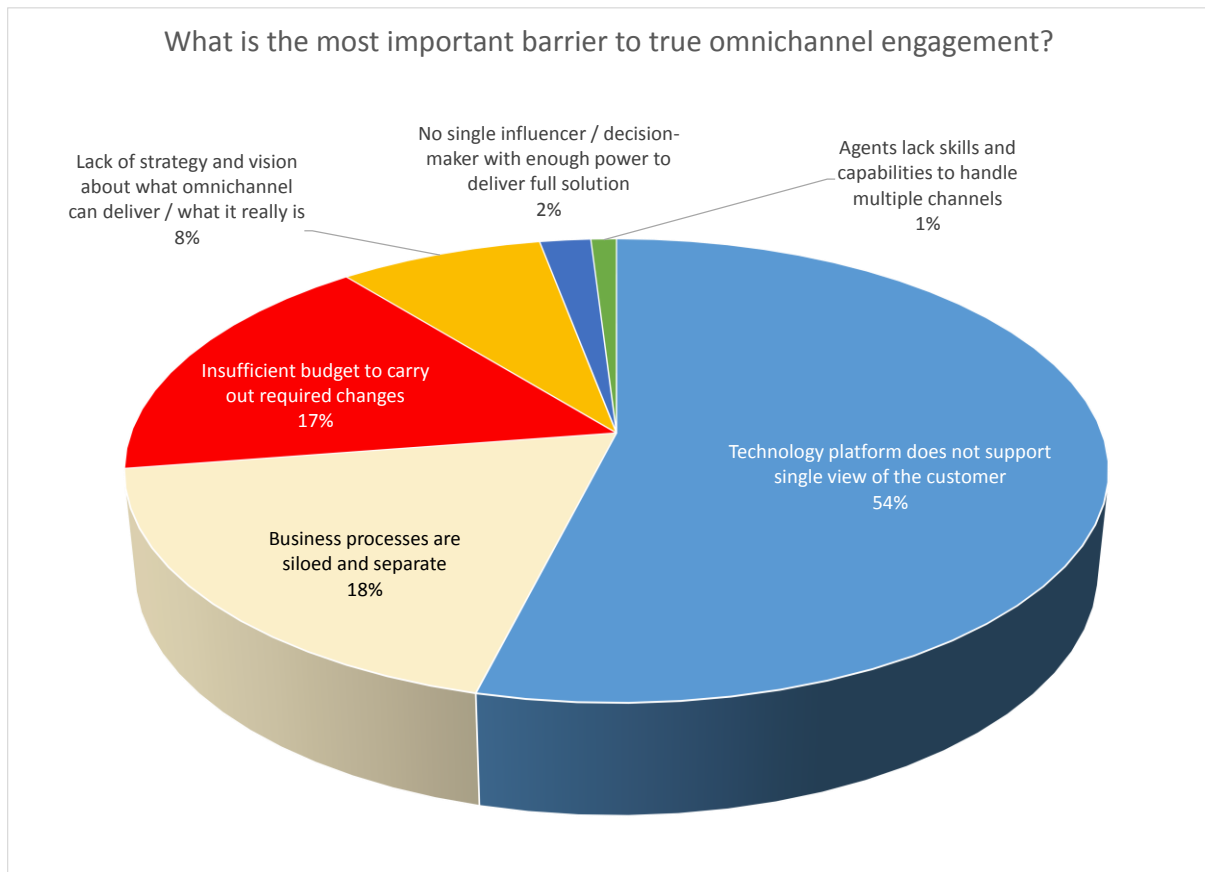
Figure 156: Primary and secondary budget holders for the mobile customer service function



Having looked at two of the main channels used in engaging the customer of the future, it can be seen that although both the mobile and social channels are taken seriously by the vast majority of businesses, they exist to some extent as yet another siloed channel, either fully or partially separated from other more mainstream channels, and currently providing a customer experience that breaks down if the customer has to resort to another channel: multichannel, not omnichannel.

The majority of respondents state that the greatest barrier to delivering a true omnichannel customer experience is that their technology platform does not support a single view of the customer across channels. While a minority of respondents state that budget or the underlying business processes are the main issue, it is existing technology solutions that are seen for most as being the biggest inhibitor to omnichannel.

Figure 157: Most important barrier to true omnichannel engagement



LIKELY FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS IN MOBILE

Looking to the future, solution providers are keen to offer technology that ties the mobile channel in more tightly with the existing voice and data customer support channels, providing a single integrated user 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. There is also the danger that because the organisation is unaware that a failed mobile session has been the root cause of a live contact, it will underestimate the reality of cross-channel interaction failures.

On moving from self-service to assisted service, 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. In fact, the inherent capabilities of the mobile device offer businesses huge opportunities to impress their customers, including location-specific information, such as local broadband outages, or the ability to leverage photo-taking functionality on the phone to provide the agent with a clearer picture of the situation (which may be particularly useful for insurance claims, for example).

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 can be positives for the customer at that specific place and 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.

Like any technology, application or channel, mobile service has to be seen to pay its way. Quite apart from the importance of fulfilling a customer demand, there are numerous elements to consider when looking at return on investment:

- Call avoidance due to increased use of self-service, although the difference made to the number of IVR sessions should be taken into account: customers may simply be swapping one self-service method for another, rather than avoiding expensive live calls
- Increasing the accuracy of routing by leveraging mobile and customer data means that calls are more likely to go to an agent that can resolve them first-time, impacting positively upon first-contact resolution, call transfer rates, average handle time and customer satisfaction
- Decreased call handling time in cases where mobile browsing information and other contextual data is passed to an agent, enabling them to reduce effort duplication
- Improved customer satisfaction, and decreased customer effort is likely to lead to improved loyalty, revenue and customer advocacy
- Contextual information, such as geographical location, enables greater cross-selling and up-selling opportunities based on improved knowledge about the customer and their circumstances.



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Eptica's Customer Engagement suite enables organisations to improve engagement with customers, increase efficiency and drive sales by delivering fast, accurate and relevant responses to their queries, through their channel of choice.



Introducing new media channels while still offering a consistent customer experience across all channels is a big task: Genesys enables organisations to design, orchestrate, monitor and tune end-to-end omnichannel customer journeys and introduce new interaction channels utilising [the omnichannel capabilities of the Genesys Customer Experience Platform](#).



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If you are worried about how to improve your customer interactions, talk to us - there is no other organisation in the UK that has a broader set of tools to help you tune your customer service, from operational consultancy to speech analytics, the full suite of contact centre technology and even the best approach for securing your credit card transactions.



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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.



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Rant & Rave believe innovation should be at the heart of any strategy which is why they strive to help their clients deliver a great customer experience with the future in mind.



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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 outbound automation in depth, and also looks at cloud-based solutions, which offer contact centres new financial and operational options which can make a very significant difference to the bottom-line.

CLOUD-BASED CONTACT CENTRE SOLUTIONS

'CLOUD': TERMS & DEFINITIONS

The modern contact centre has a multitude of applications supporting it, with hardware, middleware and networking equipment around and inside it. The traditional method of deploying these resources has been on a CPE (customer premise equipment) basis, with the business's IT resource implementing and maintaining it. Now, the vast majority of this equipment, functionality and supporting resource is available in a third-party hosted environment, through one of the various types of cloud-based delivery.

Cloud-based solutions are the latest in a line of alternatives for businesses to owning and running their own technology. Here are explanations of some of the terms that readers may have encountered in researching cloud-based contact centres.

- **Cloud** is the delivery of computing and storage capacity as a service to different business, organisations and individuals over a network. It can be said to consist of Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) - servers and storage space, Platform as a Service (PaaS) - operating systems and web servers, and Software as a Service (SaaS) - the functionality of software available on demand without the need to own or maintain it. The cloud is characterized by huge scalability and flexibility, (often, but not always) shared resources, a utilities approach to billing (pay for what you use, for example) and an abstraction of obvious on-site infrastructure.

There are various deployment models:

- 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
- 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 a third-party
- 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

- 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. 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. It may be an appropriate deployment model for departments within government or public sector bodies, rather than within commercial organisations (for example, a department could share Contact Centre as a Service with other departments or agencies within their network)
- Hybrid cloud is a composition of two or more clouds (private, community, public or a linked cloud/CPE solution) 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.
- **SaaS (Software as a Service)** is a model of software deployment whereby a provider licenses an application to customers for use as a service on demand. SaaS software vendors may host the application on their own web servers or download the application to the consumer device, disabling it after use or after the on-demand contract expires. The on-demand function may be handled internally to share licenses within a firm or by a third-party service provider sharing licenses between firms.

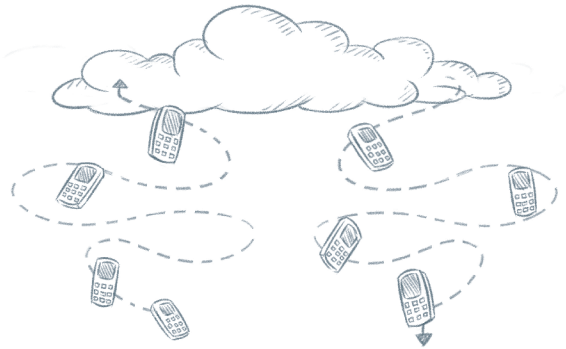
On-demand licensing and use alleviates the customer's burden of equipping a device with every conceivable application. It also reduces traditional End User License Agreement (EULA) software maintenance, ongoing operation patches, and patch support complexity in an organisation. On-demand licensing enables software to become an operating expense, rather than a fixed cost at the time of purchase. It also enables licensing only the amount of software needed versus traditional licenses per device. SaaS also enables the buyer to share licenses across their organisation and between organisations, to reduce the cost of acquiring EULAs for every device in their firm.

Using SaaS can also conceivably reduce the upfront expense of software purchases, through less costly, on-demand pricing from cloud providers. SaaS lets software vendors control and limit use, prohibits copies and distribution, and facilitates the control of all derivative versions of their software.

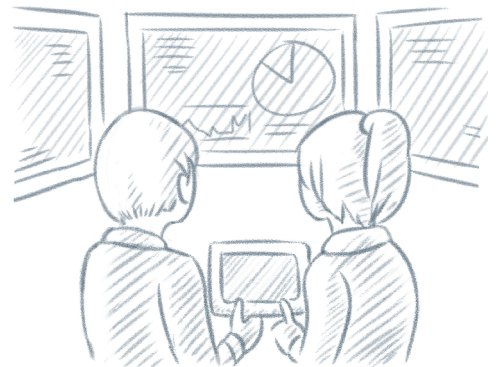
- **Hosted** solutions have similarities to SaaS in that the application is hosted off the customer's premises, but may not actually be managed by the service provider. A hosted solution may be an individual instance of an application running on a single server dedicated to the customer, restricted in scalability by its finite nature. Although this may allow greater control and flexibility, it can be more expensive and there is less redundancy. It may be thought that all SaaS solutions are hosted, but not all hosted applications are SaaS.
- **Network-based solutions** are marketed as solutions with equipment physically located in multiple locations, permitting users to access the various services via a combination of the contact centre's internet connection and the standard PSTN networks. This allows complete geographic independence and disaster recovery (DR) solutions.
- **Multi-tenancy** refers to where a single instance of the software runs on a server, but serves many customer organisations. Clients' data and configuration are separated virtually but the same actual hardware, software versions and databases are used. This deployment model is likely to be able to offer functionality at a lower cost due to the economies of scale possible, but is less customisable than other options
- **Multi-instance** occurs where separate software instances or versions (and possibly actual physical hardware) are provided for each individual business. This deployment option is considered most effective for complex and deep integration, but is unlikely to be offered at a similar cost to a multi-tenant option
- **Hardware virtualisation** masks from users the physical characteristics of the platform, hosting multiple isolated instances of an application on one or more servers. The same image can be used on multiple sites, whether customer-owned or hosted.

For more information on cloud-based solutions, please download ContactBabel's in-depth, updated report, "[The Inner Circle Guide to Cloud-based Contact Centre Solutions \(2nd edition\)](#)".

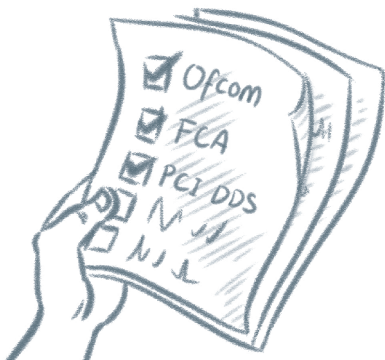
Instinctive cloud contact



Efficient, robust, secure capacity



Insight driven solutions



Protecting brands and consumers



Cost effective execution



Enabling best practice - 24/7

Inbound
Outbound
Blended

DRIVERS FOR CLOUD-BASED SOLUTIONS

The many factors influencing the uptake of cloud-based solutions can be grouped into several areas, and it is important to remember that a factor (e.g. security) can be both a driver and an inhibitor:

Financial: how does cloud affect the investment and ongoing expenditure connected with technology and the operations of the contact centre? Cloud offers contact centres a way forward without relying on capital investment:

- Businesses can scale down future customer premises equipment (CPE) investment, with a resulting decrease in capital expenditure
- Services are bought using a per-concurrent-user or even per-hour pricing model, which helps to keep operating expenses manageable and controllable
- Outright purchase of equipment isn't for everyone, perhaps for reasons of budget or the ability to maintain the systems
- There is the opportunity to scale up quickly as demand dictates, without purchasing lots of redundant licenses or the hardware to support them
- Low-risk ability to start up, move, expand or trial new functionality without changing existing business plans or budgets
- Business retain the freedom to downscale, change targets and react to meet demand, rather than commit themselves to long-term arrangements needed to justify CPE investments.

Flexibility & Agility: how can cloud-based solutions help businesses with changing interaction volumes and distributed operations?

- Reduced need for IT support and implementation: having hardware and software based in the cloud means that ongoing system maintenance is significantly reduced, as it is the cloud provider's job to do this
- Larger pool of agents to choose from: cloud enables advanced features to be deployed across sites without complex and possibly unreliable call flows, while offering disaster recovery and risk minimisation. For example, queueing interactions in the cloud allows for the searching and identification of relevant agents based on skill and requirements before the call is routed
- Short-term scalability: cloud offers great flexibility in adding or shedding agents and user licenses, of particular relevance to businesses which have substantial changes in call volumes over a year (such as the seasonality experienced by healthcare providers in the US, retailers and travel agents), or which have to react quickly to handle event-driven call spikes (e.g. an emergency weather situation affecting utilities companies).

Functionality: what is the effect of cloud-based solutions on the functionality available to the contact centre?

- Trial new applications quickly using a low-risk pilot: using a pay-per-use model allows businesses to start a contact centre or move at low risk or increase for a temporary campaign or try out new functionality without having to spend excessive amounts of time and money first
- Future-proof the contact centre: a competitive, open cloud environment should mean that vendors will be motivated to innovate and provide better service, enhancing and developing their services ahead of the mainstream market.

Security: does Cloud bring a greater risk to security, or the opposite? Organisations should expect that data should be **at least** as secure in a third-party environment that is dedicated solely to providing a high-quality cloud-based service, as this is one of the factors by which the solution provider will succeed or fail.

Potential cloud clients should look for:

- multiple levels of firewall protection
- continuous intruder detection systems
- a two-person rule for changes to code or hardware
- frequent scheduled password changes
- external testing and audit trails
- data encryption used both in storage and in transit, under the control of the user
- additional layers of user authentication and privilege
- vetting of employees with access to sensitive information or hardware
- internal traffic and server monitoring.

Control: can a cloud contact centre change how it operates quickly enough?

- **Control, visibility and reporting:** loss of control is of as much concern to some businesses as fears over integration. A service provider may not be as responsive as an in-house team, and it may take hours or even days to make changes to the system, so service level agreements should include agreed response times
- **Cultural considerations:** making the move to cloud is seen as a far bigger proposition than deciding whether to implement or replace a particular contact centre application such as call recording or workforce management. However, many vendors offer options for customers to keep what they feel that they need on-site - for example call recordings and sensitive data - while moving offsite the elements of the contact centre solution that businesses are most comfortable with outsourcing.

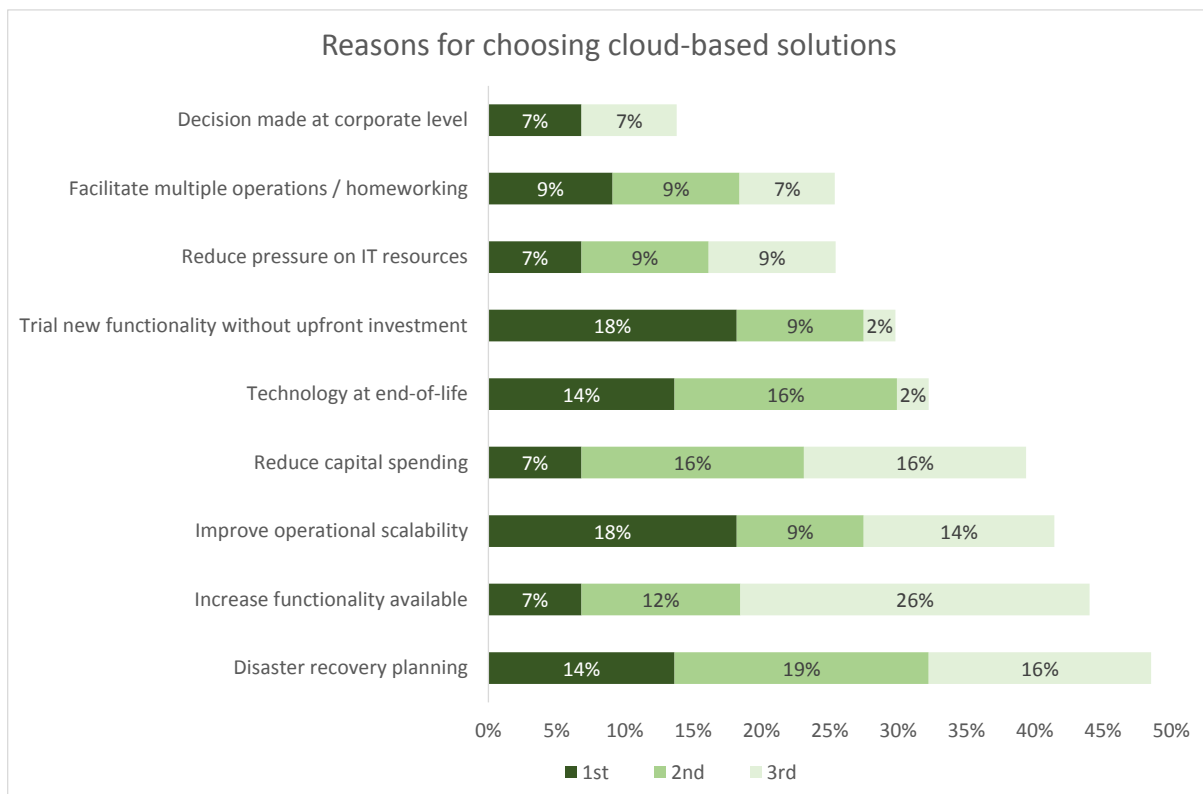
Integration & Customisation: while out-of-the-box functionality can be quick and cheap enough to get things moving, what if businesses need more a personalised approach? Being able to continue using relevant existing CPE systems, and access databases and back-office systems is a minimum requirement for all businesses considering cloud-based solutions. Some solution providers note that the private cloud option is becoming more popular, where a third party is responsible for the management of dedicated infrastructure, especially in environments which require complex integration and customisation.

Performance & Reliability: how does cloud affect the contact centre's ability to deliver its service? Service providers will test their systems on an ongoing basis, and a few will even guarantee their availability to 99.999% (the '5 9s target of carrier-grade availability), backed by penalties if they do not achieve this. This level of reliability is the standard for very large contact centres which have paid significantly for this in a CPE environment, but is likely to be an improvement on what SMEs are used to, with their much smaller budgets.

The ability to reduce upfront investment is usually seen by respondents as the most important primary reason to move to the cloud, but the figures show that increasing scalability and developing disaster recovery plans are reported as the main reason almost as often as avoiding Capex, with the optimisation of user licenses being widely acknowledged as a chance to cut costs while trialling new functionality.

The following figure shows that there is no single overarching reason to move to cloud, as much depends on the nature of the business and contact centre environment. It is interesting to see that the obsolescence of their existing technology was stated as only the 5th-most important factor in choosing cloud, as interviews with cloud solution providers reveal that vendors believe this to be one of the key factors in moving to cloud.

Figure 158: Reasons for choosing cloud-based solutions



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.

CHECKLIST WHEN CHOOSING A CLOUD SOLUTION

Most cloud contact centre solutions only require agents to have a standard telephone/USB headset and an Internet connection from their desktop. Some cloud-based solution providers require software to be downloaded upon the agent desktop, whereas others need only a standard Internet browser.

SECURITY

There are various accreditations and certifications used by providers of cloud-based solutions, some aimed at demonstrating the security of the datacentre (whether physical or virtual security) including ISAE 3402 or SSAE 16 in North America. Others focus on the process of processing payment card data (PCI DSS), whereas others are around information security controls (ISO 27001/2). Other interested parties include the [Cloud Security Alliance](#), a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to promote the use of best practices for providing security assurance within cloud computing as a whole. Potential customers should look for independent third-party accreditation, proof of investment above and beyond the minimum required by regulation and regular penetration testing.

The solution providers interviewed for this report were confident that the dedicated security procedures and architecture in place within their solutions were likely to exceed those found in their clients' previous contact centre operations, having full-time dedicated security resources and a vested interest in keeping client data safe. A security breach for in-house contact centre is damaging and embarrassing; for a cloud provider to suffer a similar failure would impact very severely on their credibility and the very future of the company. However, as the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) states in its [Guidelines on Security and Privacy in Public Cloud Computing](#), security should not be left simply to the solution provider.

Solution providers note that while security concerns are still very much to the forefront of the conversation, the questions that potential customers have are now far more sophisticated and realistically founded compared to a few years ago. There is a great desire across the entire business to ensure all security requirements are met, and much greater detail offered to the solution provider on what is actually needed.

INTEGRATION AND CUSTOMISATION

Cloud vendors will keep APIs up-to-date, with screen-popping into a home-grown CRM system, look-up of call recordings in a CRM system, and sending reporting and recordings to a third-party application being mentioned as some of the more frequent integrations requested. Some providers have very close relationships with specific CRM vendors, and as a general maxim, cloud-based contact centre solutions can be seen to be following in the footsteps of cloud-based CRM.

Some customisation in existing operations may have come about as an ad-hoc 'work-around' that has over time become the way in which things are done. It is important to revisit the business processes that the technology is there to facilitate, to see if there are easier ways to achieve this rather than reproducing the same method in a cloud-based environment.

FUNCTIONALITY

Solution providers state that moving from a premise-based deployment to the cloud should not reduce the functionality available to users. Potential cloud users are responsible for carrying out an audit of all existing and required functionality, and how it relates to defined business processes, before asking solution providers to guarantee that any move to cloud will include the required depth of functionality. It is not enough simply to accept that solution providers have 'workforce management' or 'outbound' capabilities. There is a great deal of upgrading and increased sophistication happening in the cloud world, which in some cases is from quite basic functionality, so potential users should have a list of specific processes and functionality that any solution should be able to deliver, and make sure that the chosen solution can deliver that, as well as being able to view a product roadmap that is updated on a regular basis (e.g. quarterly), which will project expected functionality a least a year in advance, preferably more.

It is also important to understand the opportunities for scalability. Adding and shedding agents when required is one of the big advantages that cloud computing has over its premise-based equivalent, but potential users should put real-life scenarios in front of bidding suppliers to make sure that the required level of scalability is possible and that no hidden costs or nasty surprises are associated with it.

RELIABILITY

Multi-location datacentres are ubiquitous amongst cloud providers, providing redundancy and disaster recovery as part of the deal. Stated levels of availability amongst cloud providers are typically 99.99% or higher, and most are backed with performance-related guarantees, with reimbursement of fees if targets are not met. While this is somewhat reassuring, it will do little to assuage the loss of revenue or customer goodwill if the cloud-based contact centre solution is unavailable for any amount of time. Potential clients should investigate the exact levels of redundancy built into solutions, including the use of alternative network providers and mirrored datacentres if the problem occurs outside the software providers' purview.

Solution providers note that quality of service testing is vital to ensure that contact centre network traffic and any associated data processing has sufficient guaranteed bandwidth. For operations using dynamic scripting, it is vital to ensure the fast and immediate reaction of input and response, and guaranteeing network quality of service should be high on the implementation priority list.

COST

Most cloud solution providers operate a per-agent/per-month option to pricing, with a minimum number of logged-on agents per month being the baseline minimum cost. To this, the cost per minute of calls made or delivered should be added, although many providers will offer this as part of the package, to make fees more predictable. Additional costs for customisation and integration should also be investigated.

SUGGESTED PROCESS FOR CHOOSING A CLOUD-BASED PROVIDER

The selection of most IT solutions is normally carried out in a similar way, but some steps you may wish to consider for cloud-based solutions include:

- A selection team should be chosen with responsibility for all of the areas affected, including contact centre operations, IT, compliance, back-office, business operations and probably sales and marketing
- While bearing in mind the underlying business processes that the technology supports, select the specific technologies that are to be cloud-based, and also those bespoke applications that are to remain in-house, such as specific complex reports. Take the opportunity to consider 'ideal world' functionality as well
- Research the types of solution available in the market, and understand any actual differences between premise-based and cloud-based functionality. Provide vendors with specific instances of complex functionality and business processes required to meet your own particular requirements and challenge them to prove that they can be met. This should include all instances of existing back-office functionality that the solution needs to integrate with and where possible, a wish-list of functionality in the future
- Investigate publically-available referenceable sites from cloud-based providers that are similar to your own requirements, and submit an RFP (request for proposal) to the long-list. Request a detailed product roadmap along with timescales in order to assess whether this solution will meet your demands along the line. You may wish to invite solution providers informally to demonstrate their product before offering an RFP. Potential clients should look closely at the vendor's financial position and backing to make sure that the quality of service and level of innovation can be maintained in the future, also that they have the technological expertise in-house to keep making these improvements
- Any response to an RFP should include service level agreements over availability, call delivery, voice quality, speed to make requested changes, support hours and availability, details of security and redundancy offered, prices for customisation, contract length options, implementation times, contract cancellation penalties and notice periods.



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.

USE OF CLOUD SOLUTIONS

More than half of respondents from the outsourcing, utilities, retail & distribution, TMT and insurance sectors reported that they were currently using at least one cloud-based contact centre solution within their operations this year.

The transport and travel, housing and manufacturing sectors were least likely to be doing so.

Figure 159: Use of cloud-based contact centre solutions, by vertical market

Vertical market	Proportion of respondents using cloud-based contact centre solutions
Outsourcing	69%
Utilities	60%
Retail & Distribution	55%
TMT	55%
Insurance	53%
Public Sector	45%
Finance	40%
Services	35%
Manufacturing	25%
Housing	20%
Transport & Travel	20%
Average	46%

There is a slight positive correlation in the use of cloud-based contact centre solutions when looking at contact centre size.

Figure 160: Use of cloud-based contact centre solutions, by contact centre size

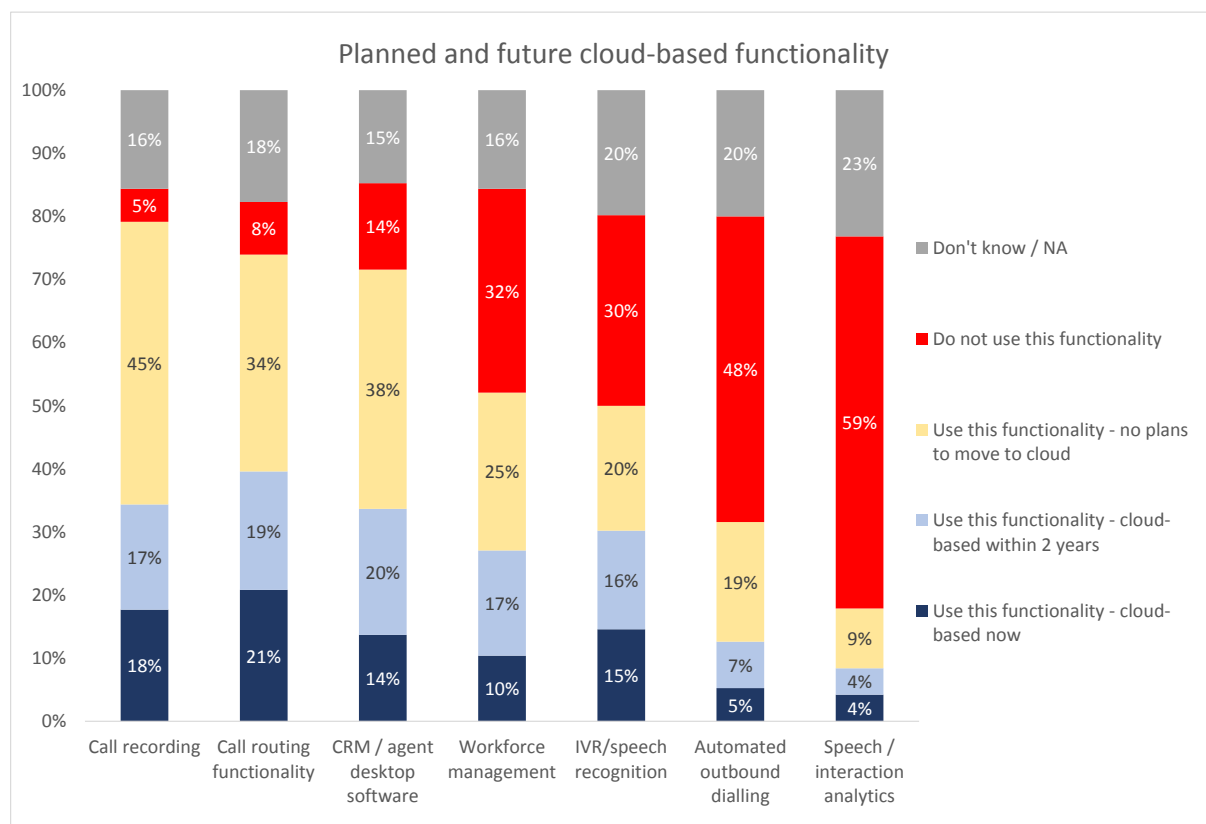
Contact centre size	Proportion of respondents using cloud-based contact centre solutions
Small	41%
Medium	47%
Large	55%
Average	46%

Respondents were asked about the contact centre functionality that they had within the cloud, and what their plans were for the next two years.

Call routing functionality was the most likely solution to be deployed through cloud-based solutions, with call recording, CRM/agent desktop and IVR/speech recognition functionality also used in a significant minority of instances.

Respondents expect to see significant extra amounts of their functionality being delivered in the cloud by mid-2017. Respondents seem to indicate that the cloud-based deployment of almost all of the solutions mentioned within this question will at least double within two years.

Figure 161: Planned and future cloud-based functionality



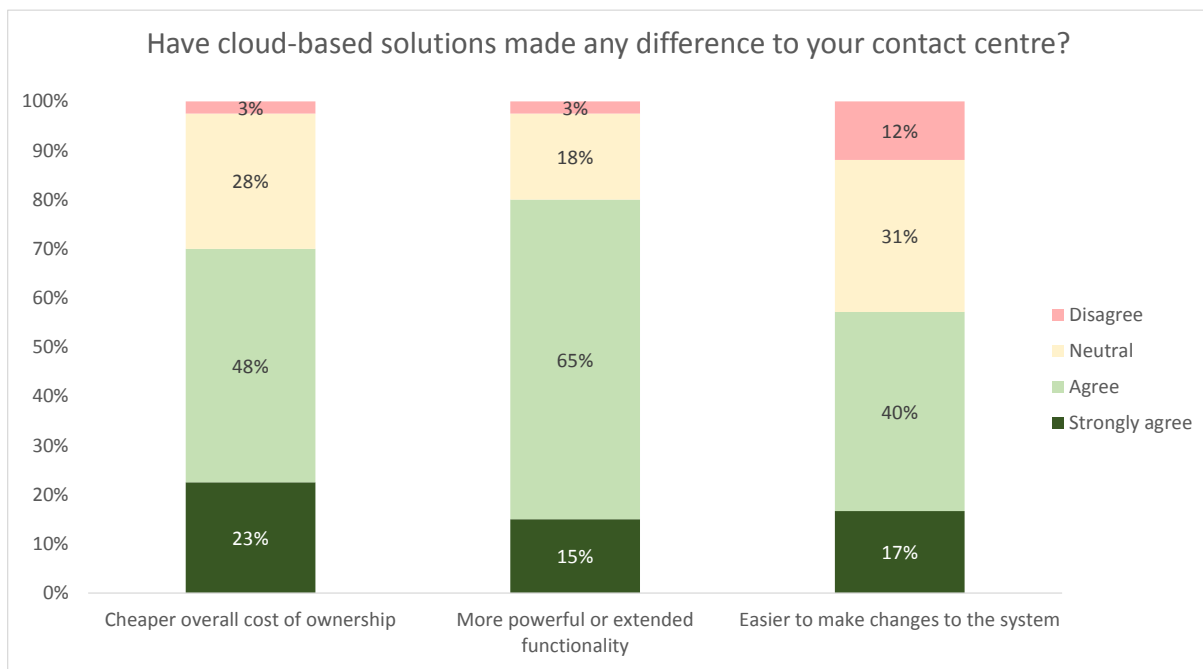
RESULTS OF USING CLOUD SOLUTIONS

Those contact centre respondents who have actually implemented a cloud or hosted solution have generally found that it has delivered significant advantages in most cases.

71% of respondents stated that cloud-based solutions had given a cheaper overall cost of ownership of their contact centre technology, with 3% disagreeing, although not strongly. 80% experienced more powerful extended functionality in a cloud-based environment, with 3% disagreeing that this was the case. 57% of respondents stated that cloud made it easier to make changes to the system, with 12% disagreeing.

These research findings have been consistent for many years despite different companies taking part each year, and readers can treat these findings with considerable confidence.

Figure 162: Have cloud-based solutions made any difference to your contact centre?



5 WAYS TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY WITHOUT COMPROMISING CUSTOMER SERVICE OR STAFF MOTIVATION

By Justin Hamilton-Martin, CEO, Ultracomms

Successful campaigns need to tick several boxes: clearly, cost control and maximising staff time is essential, but there are other issues to consider, including compliance, keeping staff motivated and of course, creating a great experience for others. With recent advances in technology, balancing and meeting all these needs has become more possible than ever before. Here are five examples

ONE - Real-time campaign monitoring

For instance, real-time campaign monitoring – which is a good example of a service that has only really become viable thanks to cloud-based contact centres – provides instant information that can be used to make rapid changes (if necessary) to the current situation. Traditionally, performance has been reviewed daily, weekly or even less frequently than that and while the data might prove useful guidance for future campaigns, it may be too late for the current one.

With real-time campaign monitoring, there can be constant observation of, for instance, whether the waiting time for inbound callers is becoming unacceptably long. Remedial action might include immediately changing the ratio of inbound versus outbound calls, so that the staff previously handling only outbound calls are switched to inbound until the peak has passed.

TWO – Intelligent routing – this cloud-based feature routes calls according to an adviser's skills or priority groups, so calls can be handled more effectively and arguably in a more time-efficient manner. Inexperienced agents are not put in difficult situations, more skilled staff see that their expertise is being used properly and importantly, customers get a better experience.

THREE – Smaller, multiple lists - staying with the theme of campaign monitoring, a useful technique is to interleave multiple, smaller lists into one campaign, so that new sources of data can be tested without having any major impact on the current balance or momentum. Testing lists in this way makes it easier and quicker to assess contact rates and conversion, so tweaks can be made in a fairly risk-limited environment.

FOUR– Call scripting – for collecting valuable information agents need to be kept 'on message' but too rigid a structure can inhibit natural conversations and impact the customer experience. While it takes time to build flexible, engaging scripts, it will pay dividends, especially if the agent's screen is integrated with any CRM systems, so that improvisation is in line with on-screen data about that customer or their situation.

FIVE – Compliance can improve, not hinder, the customer and agent experience – for instance, the latest generation of answering machine detection (AMD) technology actually improves agent productivity, while also helping to ensure compliance. In independent testing, AMD+ achieved 99.99 per cent accuracy based on a sample set of over one million calls, is undetectable for the caller and recipient (with no delay) and as data is collected automatically, Ofcom compliance is simplified.

These five features or services are all examples of how developments in technology – particularly cloud-based services - are helping to create more efficient, cost-effective customer-centric contact centre environments.

Justin Hamilton-Martin is CEO of Ultracomms, which was founded over a decade ago as Europe's first ever cloud-based contact centre service provider and today, supports a wide variety of UK organisations through its portfolio of innovation-focused services.

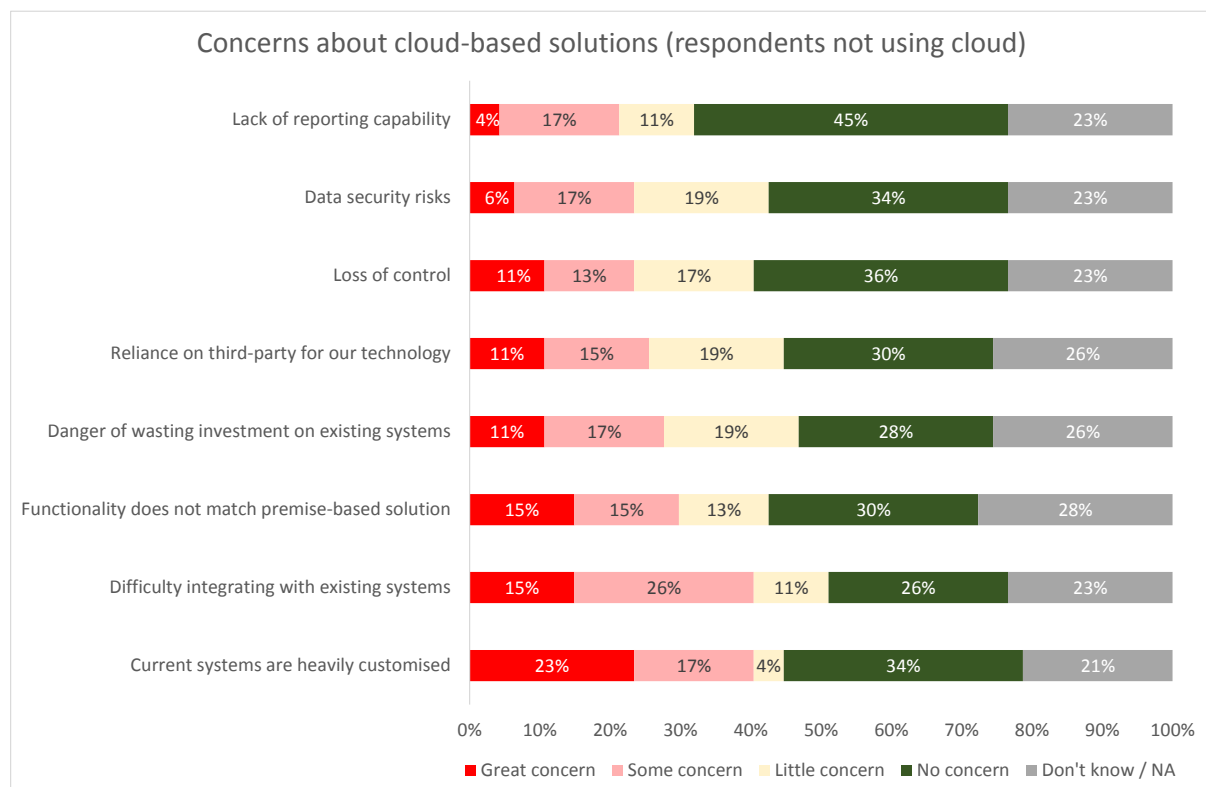
CONCERNS ABOUT CLOUD-BASED SOLUTIONS

Despite the generally positive experiences that most users of cloud solutions have reported, there are still considerable barriers to implementation that are holding back some potential users, connected with fears around data security, integration and investment.

For once, the concern that data security will be compromised by allowing a third-party to control customer details is not at the top of the list: only 6% of non-cloud using respondents stated that this was of great concern to them this year. In fact, respondents using cloud-based solutions report being slightly more concerned about data security. Solution providers should continue their efforts to provide greater education and understanding about risks and the reality of this, as well as striving to improve (and prove) the security and reliability of their own systems. Some cloud-based solutions allow clients to keep call recordings and sensitive customer information on their own site, whereas most others provide externally-audited and accredited dedicated security that can usually surpass most on premise offerings.

Respondents' main concerns were around whether the levels of existing CPE system customisation and functionality could be replicated in the cloud environment, and whether any new system would integrate fully with their existing environment.

Figure 163: Concerns about cloud-based solutions (respondents not using cloud)



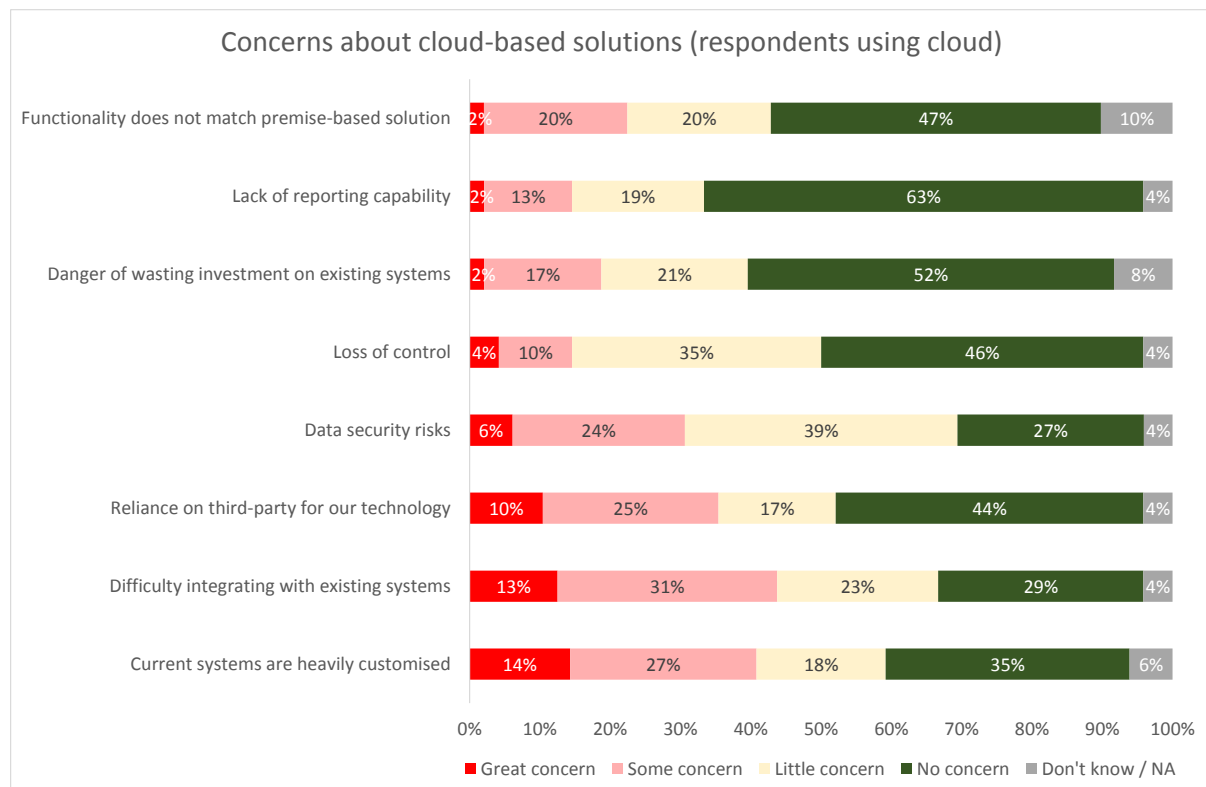
Those 28% of respondents with concerns that existing investments would be wasted if they were to move to cloud should be aware that many vendors offer a solution that can work alongside existing CPE elements, and in many cases, cloud functionality closely mirrors that available at CPE level from the same solution provider.

It is worth noting that more than one in five of non-cloud-using respondents were unable to answer this question, suggesting that knowledge around the topic is much less advanced than for many other solutions, and which will require continuing market education.

When considering only those respondents that actually use cloud, the difficulty in integrating with existing systems, and concerns over necessary customisation are still of concern to many cloud-using respondents. Reliance on third parties and concerns over data security are also present for many.

In all, it seems that cloud-based solution providers still have a significant amount of market education, reassurance and demonstration to carry out before all of these concerns are addressed to the satisfaction of the whole market, although the general positive experience of most cloud users lends an element of reassurance.

Figure 164: Concerns about cloud-based solutions (respondents using cloud)



OUTBOUND & CALL BLENDING

The traditional outbound call was simply about selling more products to new and existing customers. However, legislation and customer pressure impacted 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 maximising 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
- 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 (TPS) in the UK allow customers to opt out of receiving any sales calls at all in theory.

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Call blending is an element of outbound calling which has had to fight against the conventional wisdom of the traditional contact centre industry, which implies that the more one can segregate the contact centre into a series of production lines, the better-run the operation will be.

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 joining TPS. 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 into a cross-sell or upselling opportunity has become a widely-used tactic.

OUTBOUND ACTIVITY

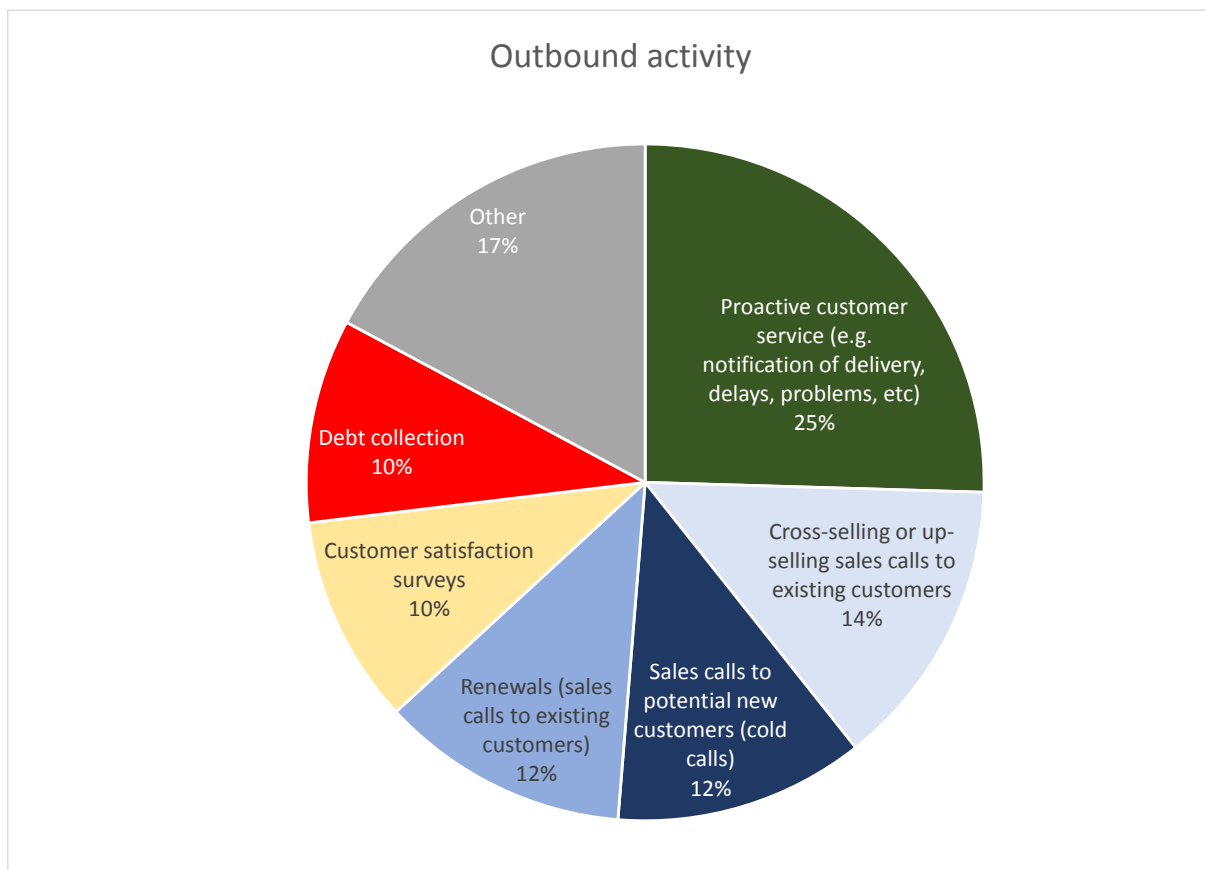
The single most popular outbound activity continues to be proactive customer service - a strong brand builder as well as an effective call avoidance tactic.

The overall proportion of sales calls grows from 31% to 38% this year. Making sales calls to potential new customers continues to decline this year to 12% (it was 24% in 2013): this will continue to be tracked closely in future years to see whether this is a permanent structural change in the outbound industry.

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 14% of outbound calls being made for this purpose.

Renewals calls increase to 12%, and debt collection also rises to 10% of respondents' calls. Customer satisfaction surveys remain at levels last seen before the economic downturn.

Figure 165: Outbound activity



As the 'Other' segment usually accounts for a significant part of the outbound mix, this year's survey finds out what this is made up of. The following areas are some of the responses given:

- Call-backs (from call-back requests and answerphone messages)
- Case management and ongoing customer care
- Chasing contractors and suppliers
- Fraud investigations
- Gathering missing order information
- Market research and surveys
- Responding to complex customer questions sent via other channels
- Return calls where the agent was unable to answer the question on first call
- Saving customers that are or are at risk of cancelling contracts
- Seeking authorisation from clients
- Updating complaint status.

82% of respondents carry out some form of outbound calling, with the TMT, transport & travel, utilities and outsourcing & telemarketing sectors leading the way.

Once again, the public sector lags quite some way behind the rest of the contact centre industry in terms of its outbound activity, although for once, a majority of these respondents carry out some outbound work.

Figure 166: Use of outbound calling, by vertical market

Vertical market	Proportion of respondents using outbound calling
TMT	95%
Transport & Travel	88%
Utilities	88%
Outsourcing	86%
Services	85%
Insurance	85%
Housing	83%
Retail & Distribution	79%
Finance	77%
Manufacturing	75%
Public Sector	61%
Average	82%

Vertical market patterns of outbound activity 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 utilities, and 44% of the manufacturing sectors' outbound activity is proactive customer service, advising of status, 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.

Outsourcing and transport & travel respondents all report cross-selling and upselling being a significant part of their outbound activity.

The insurance, TMT 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 utilities and housing respondents report very significant outbound activity connected to debt collection once again.

The contract-based business models, often found in insurance (17%) and TMT (21%), are amongst those most likely to be carrying out renewal sales calls to existing customers.

Figure 167: Outbound activity by vertical market

Outbound activity	FS	HS	INS	MN	OS	PS	RD	SVC	TMT	TT	UT	Avg
Sales calls to potential new customers (cold calls)	11%	0%	16%	8%	22%	6%	2%	11%	18%	0%	15%	12%
Cross-selling or up-selling sales calls to existing customers	14%	0%	17%	13%	27%	1%	12%	7%	19%	43%	2%	14%
Renewals (sales calls to existing customers)	4%	0%	17%	22%	12%	3%	14%	7%	21%	31%	3%	12%
Proactive customer service (e.g. notification of delivery, delays, problems, etc.)	20%	30%	25%	44%	17%	4%	55%	24%	19%	11%	51%	25%
Debt collection	9%	41%	2%	5%	8%	1%	1%	4%	10%	9%	25%	10%
Customer satisfaction surveys	1%	15%	15%	4%	3%	27%	1%	17%	7%	7%	1%	10%
Other	41%	14%	8%	4%	10%	59%	16%	29%	6%	0%	3%	17%

For once, there is little real pattern between contact centre size and the propensity to make outbound calls: in the past, large contact centres were more likely to do so, but this is not the case amongst this year's respondents.

Figure 168: Use of outbound calling, by contact centre size

Contact centre size	Proportion of respondents using outbound calling
Small	81%
Medium	87%
Large	78%
Average	82%

A case could be made that variations in outbound activity are more closely linked to the type of business (i.e. vertical market) than the contact centre size.

However, it is worth noting that sales calls in general are more likely to be made by larger operations (52% of activity is sales-related, as opposed to only 32% in small contact centres). Correspondingly, small operations spend far more time on proactively updating the customer.

Figure 169: Outbound activity by contact centre size

Outbound activity	Small	Medium	Large	Average
Sales calls to potential new customers (cold calls)	9%	12%	17%	12%
Cross-selling or up-selling sales calls to existing customers	11%	10%	25%	14%
Renewals (sales calls to existing customers)	12%	10%	15%	12%
Proactive customer service (e.g. notification of delivery, delays, problems, etc.)	33%	19%	19%	25%
Debt collection	10%	12%	8%	10%
Customer satisfaction surveys	9%	14%	6%	10%
Other	16%	24%	11%	17%

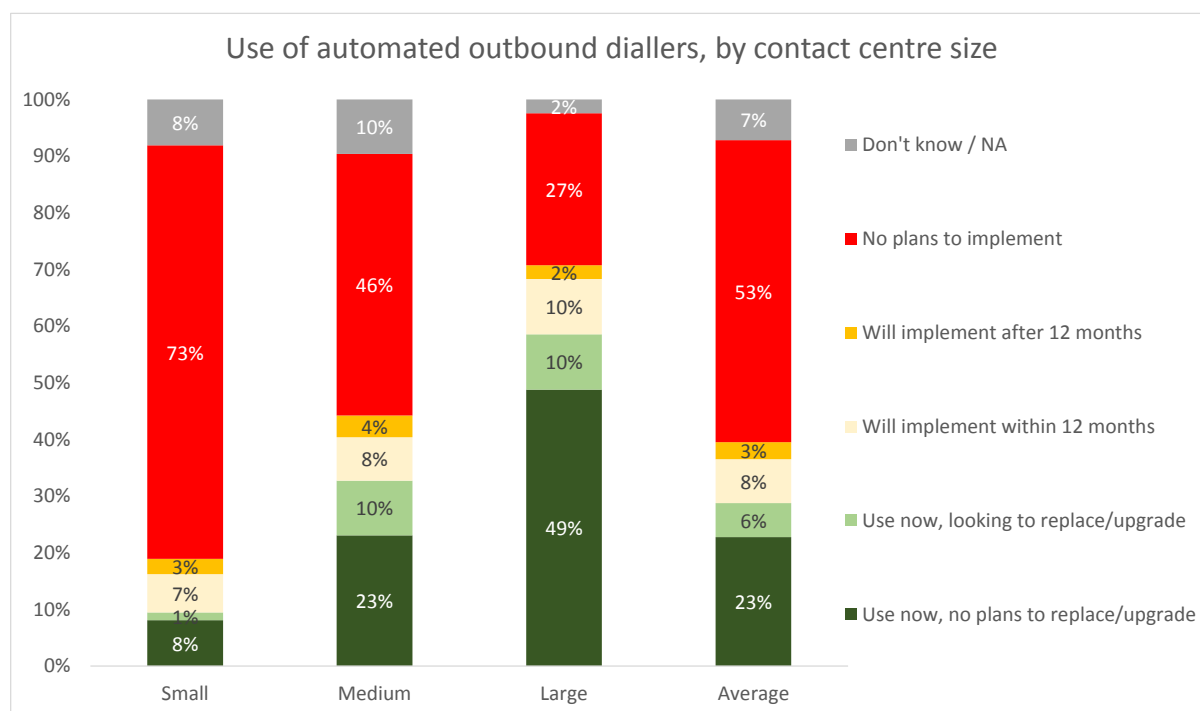
THE USE OF OUTBOUND DIALERS

Automated outbound diallers are most often found in large operations which carry out reasonable amounts of outbound work, as the efficiencies over manual dialling are so considerable that it will often make commercial sense.

Outbound automation in the cloud is becoming increasingly widely-used, and this means the barriers to usage are even less, with smaller operations also showing increased interest.

Although dialler usage in respondents from small contact centres is currently only 9%, a further 7% are actively planning implementation within the next 12 months. Many suppliers of this technology are able to offer low-cost, scalable functionality in the cloud, and we would expect this figure to increase considerably in the next couple of years.

Figure 170: Use of automated outbound diallers, by contact centre size



Answer Machine Detection (AMD) is a type of technology that allows diallers in predictive mode to recognise calls that are picked up by an answer machine, and stop the outbound agent taking that call, keeping them free to speak with actual customers.

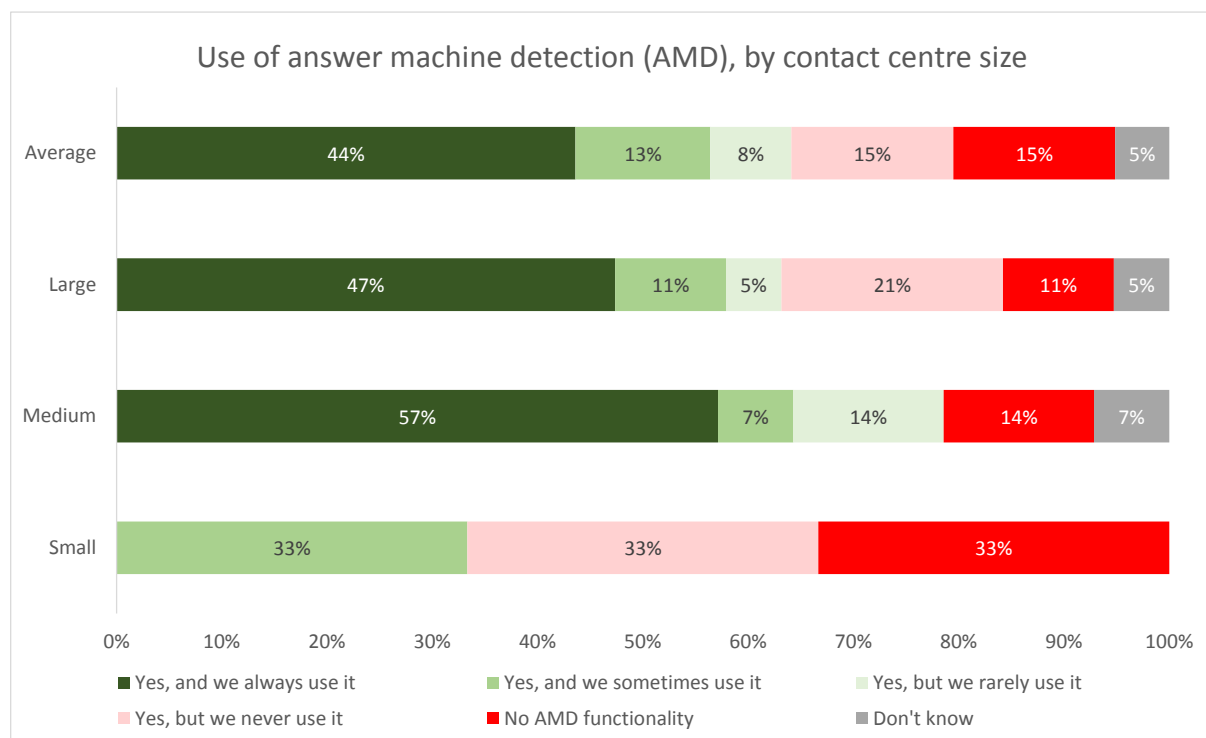
Most AMD solutions usually work by:

- Detecting a long string of words in one burst such as “Hello, we’re not available, please leave a message after the tone ...”
- Identifying a live caller who may answer by saying “Hello?” and then waiting for a reply.

However, AMD may cause problems and is not 100% accurate:

- There will be a pause or delay while the system tries to connect an agent, which may lead to the called party hanging up
- the AMD solution may incorrectly flag a live person as being an answering machine, hanging up the call. The effect of this ‘false positive’ is that the customer will effectively get a silent call which can be frustrating and worrying for the majority of the public who are unaware of how outbound technology works.

Figure 171: Use of answer machine detection (AMD), by contact centre size



Of those respondents that use AMD, 44% employ it all of the time, particular the case in medium and large operations. A minority pick and choose the times they use it (some contact centres only employ it in peak calling times, where customers or prospects are most likely to be available, so as to maximise live contacts). Only 15% of outbound users state that they do not have AMD functionality in their solution, especially those in small operations.

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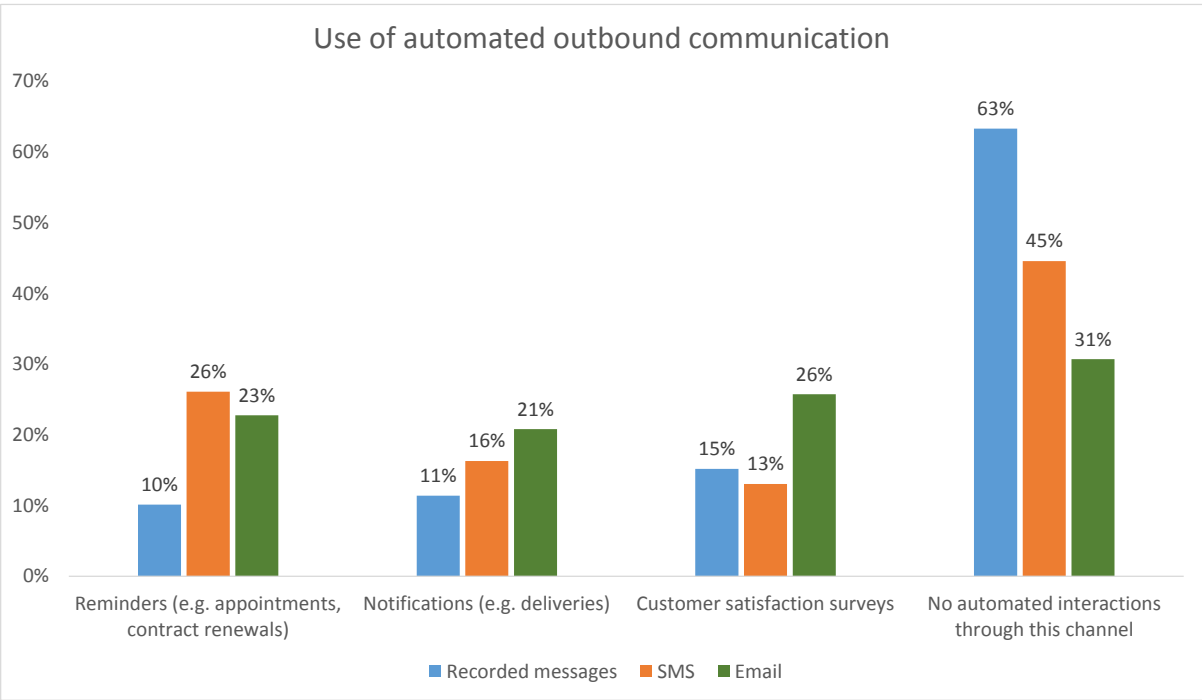
Noble Systems is a strong advocate for best practices within the contact centre industry. Noble believes that when used appropriately and responsibly, AMD is a valuable tool for driving productivity in a compliant contact centre. Noble is committed to ensuring that all of our platforms can be managed 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 multichannel contacts and resources, allowing them to build productivity, improve efficiency, increase right party contacts and manage customer contact preferences in line with Ofcom regulations.

While the vast majority of targeted outbound contact is carried out by agents, the opportunity exists for automated outbound 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. Many customers will choose to seek clarification or a status update at some point in the buying process through making an inbound interaction. By sending a pre-emptive outbound message, the business is proactively assisting the customer to manage their interaction.

63% of respondents do not use automated recorded voice messages for any purpose, whereas SMS messages are used by over half of respondents, mainly for notifications and reminders. Only 31% of respondents do not send automated emails at all.

Email is used most for outbound customer satisfaction surveys, and 15% of respondents use recorded messages (which will usually include an IVR session to capture customer input) for this purpose as well.

Figure 172: Use of automated outbound communication

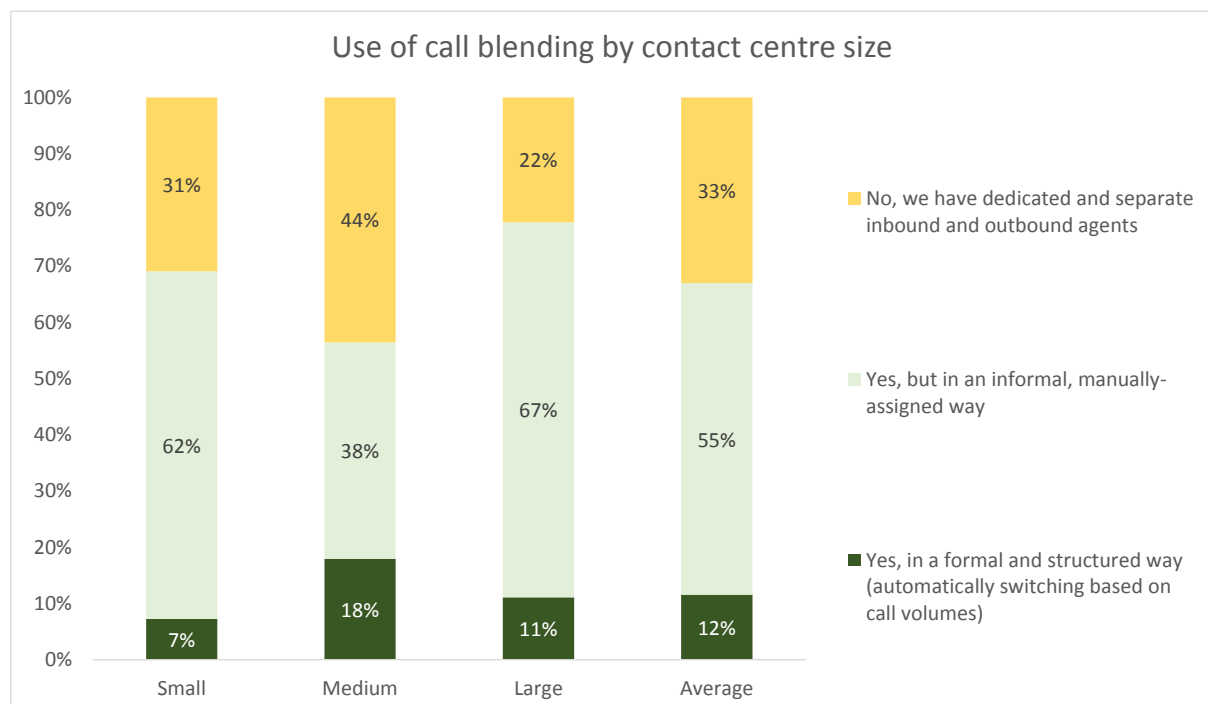


CALL BLENDING

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, systems 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 only 12% of this year's respondents' operations. As usual, medium and large contact centres are more likely than smaller operations to use this type of approach. Small operations are more likely to operate blending on a manual, ad-hoc basis. A substantial proportion of respondents from medium operations use dedicated teams to handle only either outbound or inbound.

Figure 173: Use of call blending by contact centre size



It is interesting to put the use and type of call blending against key contact centre performance and operational metrics, such as average speed to answer, which is - as usual - somewhat lower in formal, blended environments than in dedicated and more ad-hoc environments, as agents are moved between tasks quickly and seamlessly.

Figure 174: Average speed to answer, by call blending environment type

Call blending environment	Average speed to answer (seconds)
Blending used in a formal and structured way	24
Blending used in an informal, ad-hoc way	38
Dedicated and separate inbound and outbound agents	33

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Call Blending can be further enhanced by intelligent call routing for incoming, outgoing and blended communications to ensure that contacts are handled quickly and effectively based on your contact centre's specific business rules. Adding the ability to automatically deliver the relevant workflow and customer data to the agent's screen for each call further improves the agent and customer experience and eliminates redundant keystrokes and manual look-ups to reduce call handle time. 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 using agent preferences when creating schedules also helps to reduce agent attrition, contributing to the bottom line by utilising resources more effectively.

Case Study: Freedom Finance

Freedom Finance recently reviewed the contact centre technology market with a view to replacing their unsupported legacy dialler; they engaged multiple vendors to evaluate their ability to meet the organisation's current and future requirements. Noble Systems was eventually chosen following a deep-dive review of the shortlisted technologies and the vendors - including product roadmap, support and implementation.

"It was important that we chose the right technology and partner to deliver against our requirements. Freedom Finance selected Noble Systems because of the immediate and longer term benefits that the technology offers", says Nicola Georgiou, Managing Director of Freedom Finance. "We fully intend to leverage the broad range of value-add modules and platforms that are available via Noble".

Historically, Freedom Finance had operated disparate teams to manage inbound and outbound customer communications, largely because legacy platforms did not adequately support blending.

"True blending is a huge win for Freedom Finance" commented Alan Hill, Operations Director. "With Noble Systems we are able to fully utilise all of our contact centre resources, either by keeping inbound agents busy with outbound work or supplementing outbound teams with inbound agents during exceptionally busy periods".

The implementation of the Noble Composer agent desktop will allow Freedom Finance to introduce greater uniformity to the way agents handle calls. Mandatory scripts and statements will become part of the workflow, as will prompts for agents to ask questions and/or request additional information from the customer. Composer will also reduce the overall call duration by automating a variety of actions, such as the simultaneous updating of CRM and Dialler database with call outcomes.

Colin Chave, General Manager of Noble Systems EMEA, said "One of the main advantages that Freedom Finance will experience with the unified Noble platform is improved visibility of agent activity via a multitude of reports and dashboards through Noble's management interfaces. In addition, the introduction of new IP telephony from Noble will give Freedom greater operational flexibility, including hot-desk capability and ease of adding and amending user profiles".

Freedom Finance has survived the recent financial crisis where many of their competitors did not. Now that the financial market has improved, this strategic investment will allow Freedom Finance to become more efficient on behalf of their existing clients and to attract new partners in the future.

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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.

In the UK, Ofcom is getting progressively stricter in its outbound regulations, a summary of which appears here. Please note that regulations are subject to change and readers should refer to the Ofcom website for the most up-to-date information.

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 ROLE OF MOBILE TELEPHONY IN OUTBOUND CALLING

The majority of UK mobile users have access to a smartphone, meaning 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 to access the Internet, the 'mobile channel' may actually be the first port-of-call for many customers, especially those in the younger demographics.

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 functionality such as multimedia streaming and videoconferencing could give them a competitive advantage in the customer service world.

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.

This year's respondents report that it costs almost twice as much to call a mobile phone than a landline, a gap that is shrinking each year:

- Mean cost of outbound call to landline (ppm): 2.2p
- Median cost of outbound call to landline (ppm): 1.0p (1st quartile 0.2p, 3rd quartile 2.7p)
- Mean cost of outbound call to mobile (ppm): 4.1p
- Median cost of outbound call to mobile (ppm): 3.0p (1st quartile 1.0p, 3rd quartile 6.5p)

Although it is more expensive to call a landline than a mobile, the latter's 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'** section of this report for more about the role of mobile.

Further information about servicing the Mobile Customer can be found in **"The Inner Circle Guide to Multichannel Customer Contact"**, and **"The Inner Circle Guide to Self-Service"**.

Both reports are available free of charge from www.contactbabel.com.



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Intraday Automation is the only proven technology solution that enables contact centre leaders to maximize cost-effectiveness (by eliminating manual processes and streamlining staffing costs), drive upsell and customer retention (through more knowledgeable and engaged agents), and improve customer service delivery (less wait times and better call resolution) - all at the same time.



If you are worried about how to improve your customer interactions, talk to us - there is no other organisation in the UK that has a broader set of tools to help you tune your customer service, from operational consultancy to speech analytics, the full suite of contact centre technology and even the best approach for securing your credit card transactions.



We deliver more customers.



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.



Automated diallers have become an integral part of most customer service strategies, however, these devices working alone cannot determine the right time to call the right customer and get the right result – Noble's [CallTech](#) software balances available agent resources.



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Used by some of the largest call centres in the world, Pindrop catches attackers and verifies customers over the phone, saving you time and money, and improving your customer experience.



Rant & Rave believe that every consumer has the ability to become a raving fan, a customer that will go on to spend more, stay longer and recruit new customers.



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 are flexible and scalable ensuring clients only ever pay for what they use.



VoxGen is the IVR design, development and hosting company with a mission to make every automated call a great experience.

HR MANAGEMENT

With staffing accounting for up to 75% of a contact centre's 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.

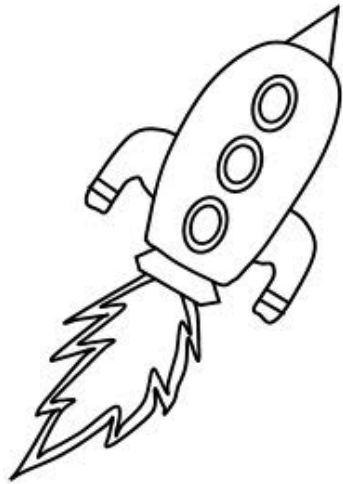
This chapter contains detailed information around contact centre HR benchmarks such as attrition and absence.

["The 2015 UK Contact Centre HR and Operational Benchmarking Report"](#) also gives detailed analysis of salaries, bonuses, training methods and costs, segmented by vertical market, contact centre size 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.

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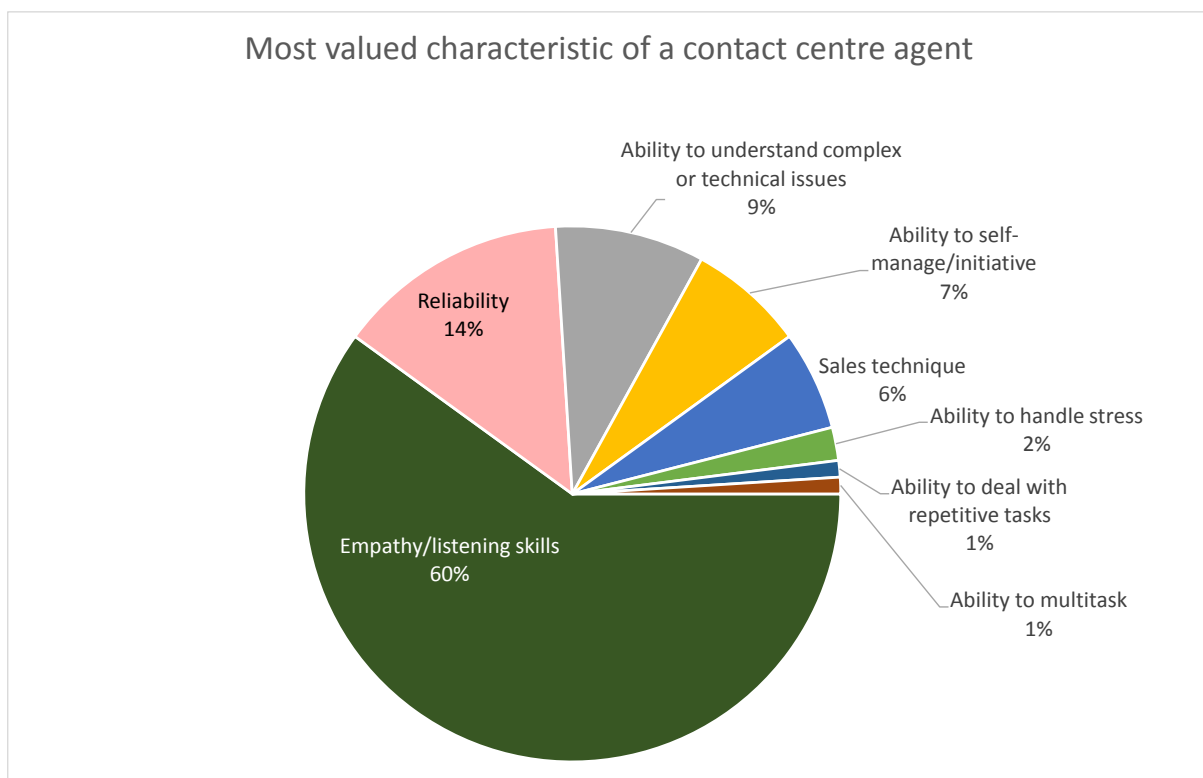
Email: fit@calltraining.co.uk

Web: www.calltraining.co.uk

60% of respondents this year's survey state that the most valued characteristic of a contact centre agent is their ability to listen and empathise with the caller. This ability is seen as far more important than being able to handle stress, multitask, sell effectively or understand complex or technical issues.

While some people naturally have this skill, experience and directed training can maximise it in others. As self-service and other text-based channels handle increasing amounts of straightforward customer interactions, those that are left to be handled by a telephony agent will be of a more complex nature and/or of a type where the customer needs reassurance and empathy.

Figure 175: Most valued characteristic of a contact centre agent



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 placing 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 reduced attrition greatly, but recent years' data shows 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.

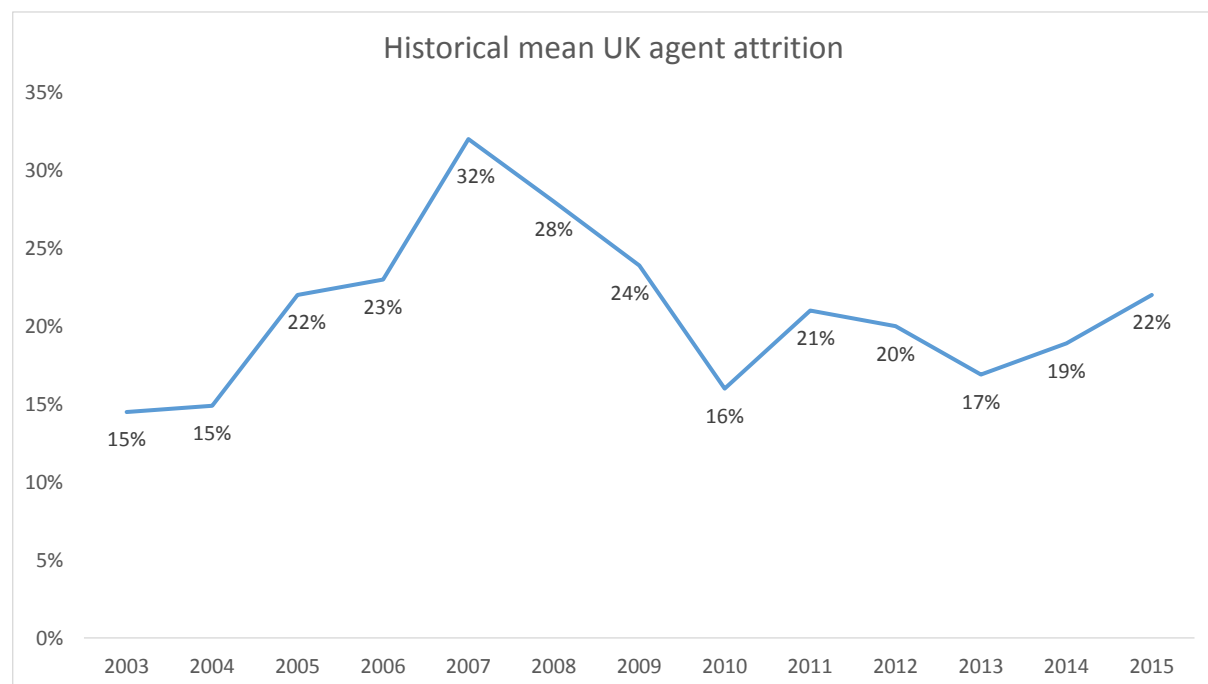
In the mid-2000s, staff attrition rates crept up from the mid-teens to well over 30%. Driven in large part by the drop in alternative employment driven by the widespread economic downturn and banking crisis, attrition dropped sharply for a number of years, slackening to a mean average of 24%, with the median (the midpoint of all respondents' answers) being significantly less, at 14%.

2010's data showed 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%. However, 2014's figures showed a slight rise in mean attrition, up to 19%, with the median rising to 12%.

2015 shows another increase, to a mean of 22%, with the median rising to 16%, which is around the historical average.

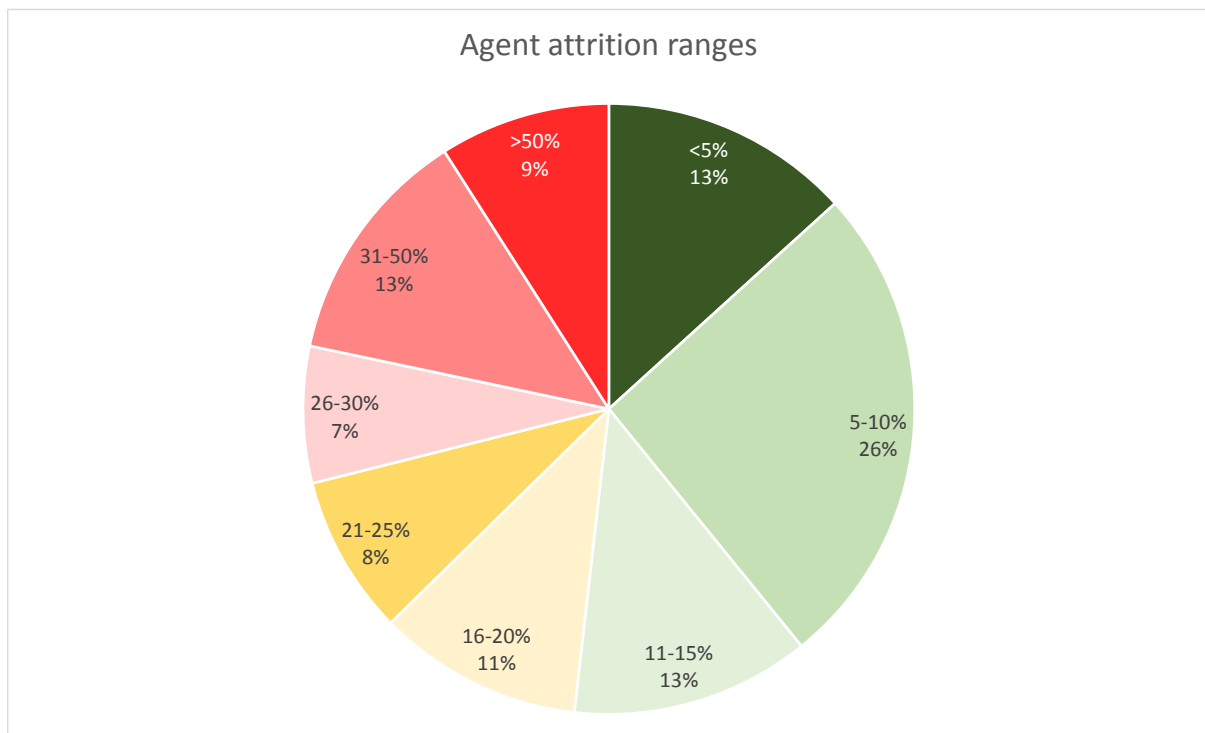
Figure 176: Historical mean UK agent attrition



One of the difficulties with tracking metrics such as attrition over time is that the companies responding to the research programme may be different year-on-year, meaning comparing like-for-like is difficult. As such, 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.

While 45% of respondents say that there has been little real change, 32% say that attrition has increased, with 20% saying it has decreased, with the 3% remainder being unsure. This suggests that there is an actual rise in attrition across the industry.

Figure 177: Agent attrition rate ranges



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 \(2015\)"](#).

It also includes detailed research on salaries, absence and recruitment.

All forward thinking financial services companies are trying to raise the bar in customer service. Is yours?

Clare McVey finds out what investing in your frontline teams could do for your customers' experience. And your business.

Whether your team handles incoming or outbound calls, is working within a sales or service environment, the benefits of soft skills training can be massive in terms of improving the customer experience, which in turn is reflected on the bottom line. All of this can have other positive spin offs — more motivated and engaged employees, improved staff retention and a team that is easier and more enjoyable to lead, manage and develop.

In an increasingly competitive global market, industry experts say customer service is now paramount in helping brands stay ahead of the game. The Contact Centre Association (the CCA), described as 'the leading independent authority on customer contact strategies and operations', says customer service is no longer the preserve of an individual department but an across-the-board consideration in businesses. The CCA has produced a film in association with ITN Productions, called Raising the Bar, which investigates how organisations are now building their proposition around customer service.

Ben Page, chief executive of the leading market research company, Ipsos Mori, said: *"When you ask consumers how they judge companies, in the last few years the quality of product has actually declined in importance and instead what we've seen is a rise in the proportion of people mentioning service, authenticity and honesty and those have actually overtaken basic quality... the way brands can distinguish themselves is through service and how they make people feel."*

While many companies have an in-house training facility for their core functions, such as product and technical training, they may not be delivering effective customer service or sales training — this type of 'soft skills' training is increasingly being out-sourced to specialist providers.

So what are soft skills, can they be taught and how do they make a difference?

One company gaining recognition for their training is Kent-based First Impression Training (FIT) — a people development company specialising in enhancing the skills and behaviours of frontline call and contact centre teams.

Managing Director, David Cross says: *"It is possible to enhance the customer experience by changing the behaviour of your frontline staff, however it does require specialist training because when you are not face-to-face, you are left with what you say and the way you say it, to determine your customer's perception. This is where our unique approach makes a difference. We focus on your people — your brand ambassadors — they are vital because they separate you from your competition. As the voice of your brand they could create or destroy customer loyalty. They have responsibility to communicate your brand in a way that enhances your customer's experience. Investing in this USP (unique selling proposition) is a wise use of an organisation's resources."*

So where's the proof that this investment yields a return?

In the last few months, First Impression Training have been instrumental in helping Legal & General, win a prestigious industry award, while they have been shortlisted for two others and won a Business Excellence award themselves as well. Perhaps more important to their clients is the difference this training has made to the perception of their brands. At Legal & General, the insurance claims division achieved a reduction in the time it takes to close the average claim by 40 per cent, after First Impression Training helped them deliver a change management programme on their frontline. Later analysis showed complaints had been reduced by 40 per cent while positive customer feedback increased by 40 per cent.

Another highly successful project was with AXAPPP Healthcare in Leicester. Brian Gilfillan, Head of SME Sales at AXA PPP explained: *"Concentrating on FITs 'Selling Through Service Excellence' philosophy has made a vast positive difference to our interactions with our customers, giving our frontline teams the confidence to focus on their relationship with their customer before anything else. It's enabled us to build rapport and trust more quickly than ever before. "The rate of our 'one and done' calls has shot up. If we compare the first six months of the year, before we made the changes, to the subsequent four months since, we've already exceeded what we achieved by 196% with two months to spare! As well as bringing on business more quickly it means less follow-up calls are required ... we're saving time for both our customers and ourselves."*

To find out more about First Impression Training solutions call 01622 277080 or email fit@calltraining.co.uk



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Impression
Training

www.calltraining.co.uk

ABSENCE

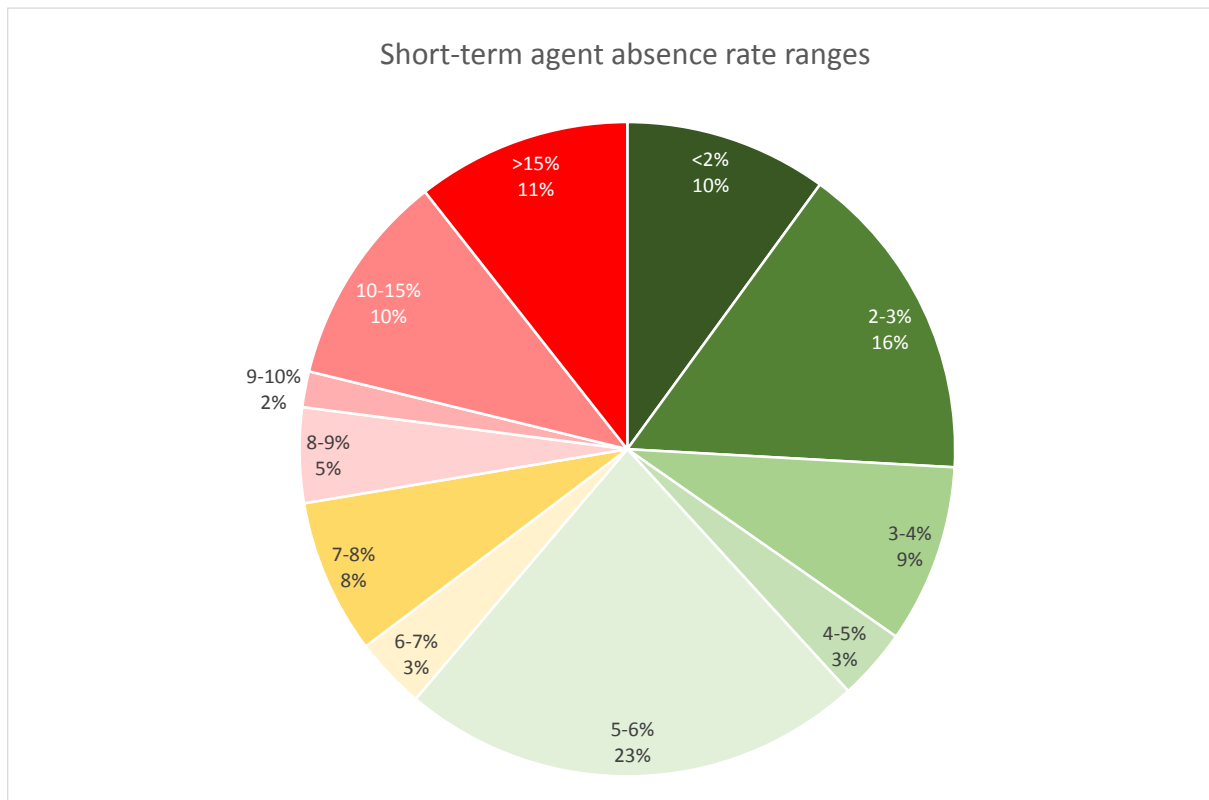
In a tightly-run operation like a contact centre, where costs and performance are closely managed, significant levels of staff absence can cause major problems with contact centre performance and the customer experience. Even just a slight increase in absence rates can mean a major difference to how 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 6.4%, with a median of 5.3%, an increase on last year's figures of 5.2% / 5.0%.

Figure 178: Short-term agent absence rate ranges



RECRUITMENT

Contact centre managers were asked for their experience of how effective a number of recruitment methods were. There is a definite pattern: the closer you get to the candidate (through competency based assessments, personality tests and face-to-face/telephone interviews), the more likely the recruitment team is 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 consistent research findings, which indicate 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:

- empathy
- dependability
- customer focus
- 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-learned. 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.



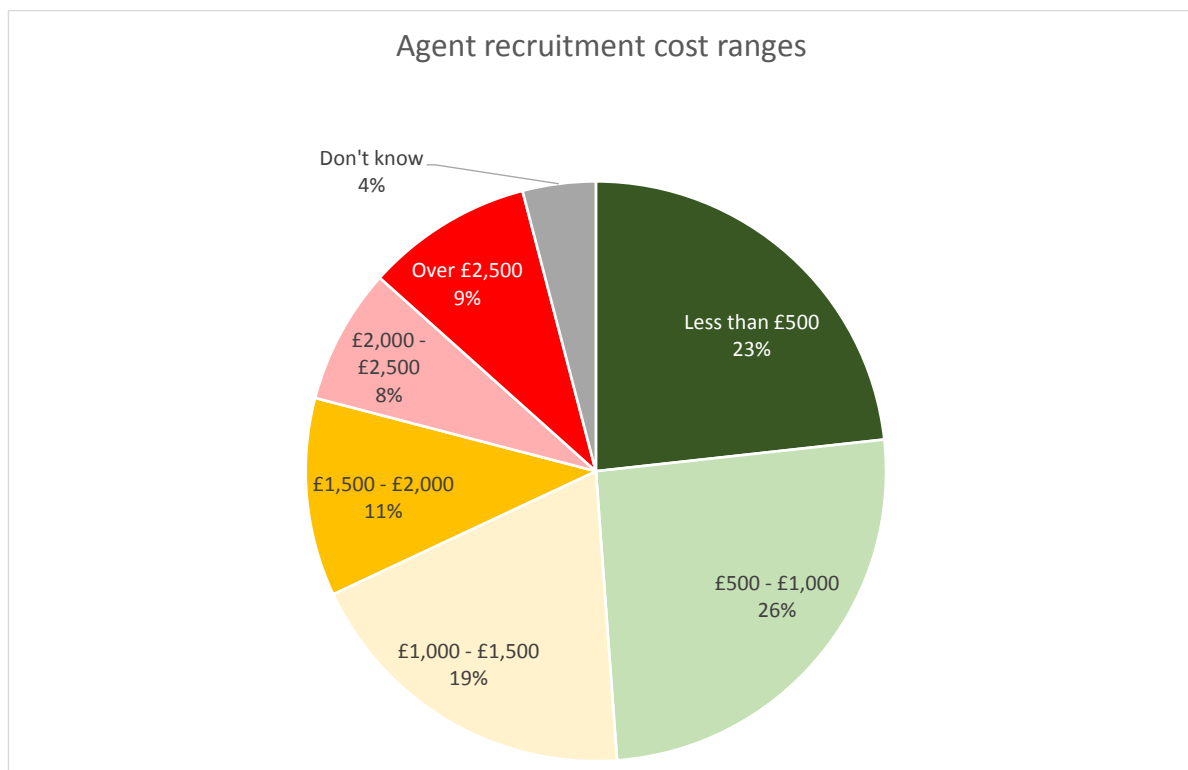
During the recruitment process FIT always recommends you seek out the personal attributes of the individual that best reflect your own brand values – the Values Match is a critical first step to ensuring the person will fit with your company’s culture. Gut-feel recruitment is underestimated – ultimately, it will be the emotional connection (or not) that you have with the potential recruit that will be the best indicator of whether the individual appears to be a good fit with your brand.

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.

Figure 179: Agent recruitment cost ranges



SALARIES

New agent salaries are reported to have increased by around 5% after last year's increase of 2%, and there was a 4% increase reported in the salaries of experienced agents.

At a team leader level, the salary increase was somewhat lower at 2.7%, and respondents' average contact centre manager salaries showed a decline of 2%.

This is not to state categorically that managers' salaries have actually dropped across the entire industry, but is more likely to be a statistical correction (2014's reported increase in contact centre managers' salaries was well over 5%, which was considerably in excess of the inflation rate and as such, may not have been representative of the whole industry).

Figure 180: Contact centre salaries and changes

Role	2015 mean average salary	Change 2014-2015
New agent	£16,808	5.1%
Experienced agent	£19,036	4.1%
Team leader / supervisor	£24,851	2.7%
Contact centre manager	£39,375	-2.0%

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 \(2015\)"](#).



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Increasing employee engagement and efficiency while still adhering to labour laws is an ongoing challenge for HR and Contact Centre operations: Genesys [workforce planning](#) and [skills management](#) enables companies to better manage workforce schedules, improve employee skills and automate training processes to deliver better customer experiences and improve employee engagement.



If you are worried about how to improve your customer interactions, talk to us - there is no other organisation in the UK that has a broader set of tools to help you tune your customer service, from operational consultancy to speech analytics, the full suite of contact centre technology and even the best approach for securing your credit card transactions.



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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.



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Rant & Rave helps identify what customers want from agents and helps brands utilise this information to recruit likeminded employees.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Much of this report is about how contact centres are performing today, but this final chapter looks at the strategic decisions and issues that contact centres face.

Traditionally, HR issues such as attrition have 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. Many solution providers note that as part of their sales engagements, they will typically carry out a business process review. They often find that staff are typically committed and capable, but are hamstrung by legacy applications, data systems and inefficient processes. 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 some 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. A recent phenomenon has been the explosive growth in multichannel communications, and the dawning realisation that customer contact should not exist in a siloed environment, but as part of an omnichannel strategy.



Although customer satisfaction is still a key metric, more forward-thinking organisations use a broader range of metrics to measure and deliver better service. Customer loyalty, customer effort, Net Promoter Score™, life time value. etc. A joined-up Omnichannel strategy is also fundamental, with tech-savvy consumers wanting to interact with business whenever and however they choose.

The industry is still growing in terms of increased volumes of interactions and even headcount to a lesser extent, and more needs to be done to increase the effectiveness of agents, particularly as the move from live voice to text-based service means learning new ways of operating. Voice self-service levels have been low across much of the industry for some years, although have picked up significantly in the past two years. Far more is also being done via the web and especially mobile channels (and new technologies such as visual IVR offer a boost to existing technology), taking low-value work away from agents and freeing them up to do more profitable, valuable and difficult work. Wireless sales discovery project will typically highlight several opportunities for self-service and call deflection, the customer satisfaction element of a poorly implemented self-service application also needs to be considered. Businesses have to ensure that they choose the right areas to self-serve, and then do it well.

For businesses where self-service is not seen as a viable 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 levels of wrap-up time and non-call time is worrying: often 40% or more 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. Interaction analytics offers businesses a major opportunity to understand why customers are calling, and to gain real commercial insight that will impact at the heart of the business.

Open systems and infrastructure now make the implementation of automated identity verification and CTI-like processes far more cost-effective and simpler to deploy. Linking with cloud-based CRM applications, the agent desktop can unify all of the legacy applications within a single customer view, significantly reducing agents' post-call wrap-up activities and overall call handling time.

Customer satisfaction and improved customer experience 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.

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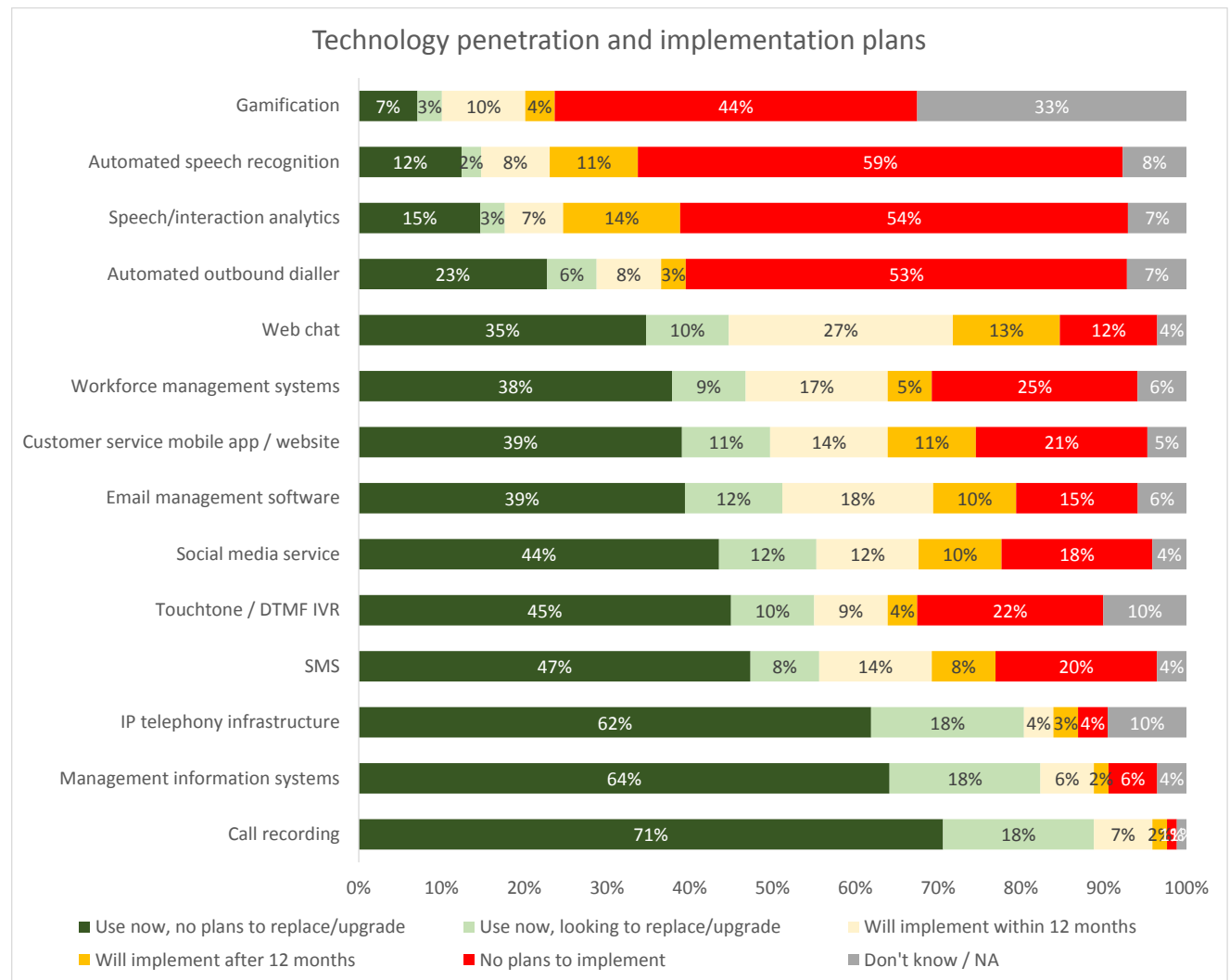


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TECHNOLOGY USAGE AND PLANS

The following chart shows respondents' current and future use of specific contact centre solutions.

Figure 181: Technology penetration and implementation plans



Management information systems, IP telephony infrastructure and call recording systems are amongst the most likely to be upgraded or replaced in the next year, with a significant proportion of respondents using social media and email management also looking to improve or upgrade their solution. IP infrastructure and converged networks can cut costs, but also lay the foundations for other technologies and strategic initiatives. Many organisations are also moving legacy call recording technology to the cloud, removing the need for on-site storage and maintenance, security management and improving operational flexibility.

In terms of new implementations, web chat, workforce management systems and email management systems are singled-out in the short term, with gamification also receiving a high level of attention when considering its low current usage.

In the longer-term too, web chat, speech recognition and speech analytics were seen by respondents as likely investments very similar to previous years' research. This may show that businesses are serious about these solutions, or alternatively it may be viewed as something that businesses would like to do, but find it difficult to get around to as they have more pressing tasks in the meantime.


Recognising that the reality of contact centre investment does not always match the intention shown in the previous chart, the following table gives closer analysis of IT investment priorities. Respondents were asked to consider 24 technology solutions, and to choose the top five most important areas of IT expenditure in their contact centre within the next two years. Viewed together, these data are likely to give an accurate picture of likely investment.

Figure 182: Top 5 most important areas of contact centre IT expenditure in the next two years

Technology solution	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th
CRM / Agent Desktop Software	24%	7%	8%	5%	3%
Omnichannel (i.e. getting channels to work together)	13%	7%	10%	4%	7%
Email Management	3%	20%	5%	6%	6%
Back-Office Integration	4%	8%	11%	12%	3%
Web Chat	6%	7%	7%	6%	11%
Management Information Systems	5%	1%	7%	9%	7%
Performance & Quality Management	4%	6%	5%	3%	7%
Social Media	1%	3%	4%	7%	6%
Self-Service (includes DTMF IVR, Automated Speech Recognition and Web Self-Service)	5%	3%	4%	7%	1%
Workforce Management	5%	2%	1%	8%	3%
Desktop Automation & Analytics	0%	6%	3%	7%	3%
Hardware (including PCs & servers)	1%	8%	1%	3%	6%
Call Recording	5%	4%	3%	2%	5%
Cloud	13%	2%	3%	0%	0%
Interaction Routing (including ACD/CTI-like functionality)	2%	3%	6%	4%	2%
Mobile Service	1%	1%	4%	4%	5%
Homeworking	0%	3%	1%	2%	8%
Telephony Infrastructure (including IP)	3%	3%	2%	0%	2%
Speech Analytics	0%	1%	3%	2%	3%
Gamification	1%	0%	2%	2%	3%
Virtual Contact Centres	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%
Headsets	0%	1%	4%	1%	1%
Outbound Automation	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%
Voice Biometrics	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
NB: technology solutions have been ordered by the cumulative score of their appearance as a top 5 priority					

For many years, CRM (including improvement to the contact centre agent desktop and contact management system, as well as company-wide CRM) has been in no.1 position, and this is the case once again this year. In fact, 48% of respondents put this as one of their top five priorities, with omnichannel, email management, back-office integration and web chat close behind.

Moving contact centre functionality to the cloud is of prime importance for 13% of respondents, with 18% in total placing it within their top five priorities. Improving performance and quality management features in the top 5 for one-quarter of respondents, and can be seen as a widespread and compelling requirement for many operations.

 **NEWVOICEMEDIA** The advent of cloud CRM allows businesses to unify legacy applications into a single customer view and delivers significant operational value (scale, virtual, single customer view across all business functions sales/service/operations, etc.). Time to value is maximised and businesses can minimise the risks by phasing the deployments without a major forklift upgrade.

Omnichannel - which has been defined within this part of the survey as getting the various channels to work together is placed within the top 5 priorities by 42% of respondents, which is actually higher than any solution apart from CRM. The various supporting applications, such as web chat, email management systems and social media have significant proportions of respondents placing them within the top 5, especially the former two solutions.

 **NEWVOICEMEDIA** The acceleration and adoption of mobile technologies means that customers now want to interact with business anytime and anyhow. The challenge for businesses is how to bridge the gap between consumer expectations and the services they can deliver. This 'intelligence gap' between mobile technology and legacy business applications is rapidly being transformed by cloud technology: businesses can now react faster and deliver more innovative services.

One interesting point to note is that telephony infrastructure upgrades (usually involving IP) is no longer one of the main planned expenditures on contact centre technology, as so many have moved to this already, although upgrades are planned for a significant proportion of respondents.

It is interesting to note that respondents place back-office integration as the fourth-most likely investment priority over the next two years, with 38% of respondents putting them in their top five. This suggests that respondents are very aware of the need to underpin the entire customer contact infrastructure - both front and back office - with a robust and stable infrastructure that allows a single view of the customer throughout their entire experience in an omnichannel environment. While back-office integration may not be the most glamorous technology solution available, this significant level of interest and planned investment shows the contact centre's remit is widening to cover the entire customer journey, not just the voice element.

Vax cleans up: big gains in customer experience and efficiency using NewVoiceMedia



- **Product:** ContactWorld for Service
- **Sector:** Manufacturing

Customer experience is a top priority for Vax. True to its innovative products, Vax uses the latest in cloud technology from NewVoiceMedia and Salesforce to achieve amazing results in its new customer contact centre.

Although the company is best known for its orange tub (the world's first multi-functional cleaner, developed in the early 1970s) Vax is constantly innovating and introducing new products, focusing on the needs and wants of its customers.

Vax's customer metrics surge with NewVoiceMedia's ContactWorld

- 1 First contact resolution has risen from 78% to an industry leading 87%
- 2 Efficiency has escalated, with headcount falling from 97 to 84 while handling the same number of contacts
- 3 Employee satisfaction in the contact centre has rocketed from being the lowest ranking department in the organisation to the highest
- 4 Average call handling time has been reduced by 20 seconds
- 5 Number of calls per period per advisor increased from an average 6 calls per hour to 8 calls per hour

"I have to pinch myself. We've got a great new contact centre and highly motivated customer engagement team. Previously, we had people upset on the floor; there were numerous complaints from customers - it's such a step-change. The team have done an amazing job. I'm delighted for our customers. We're working at the next level."

Carole Edwards, Head of Customer Contact, Vax

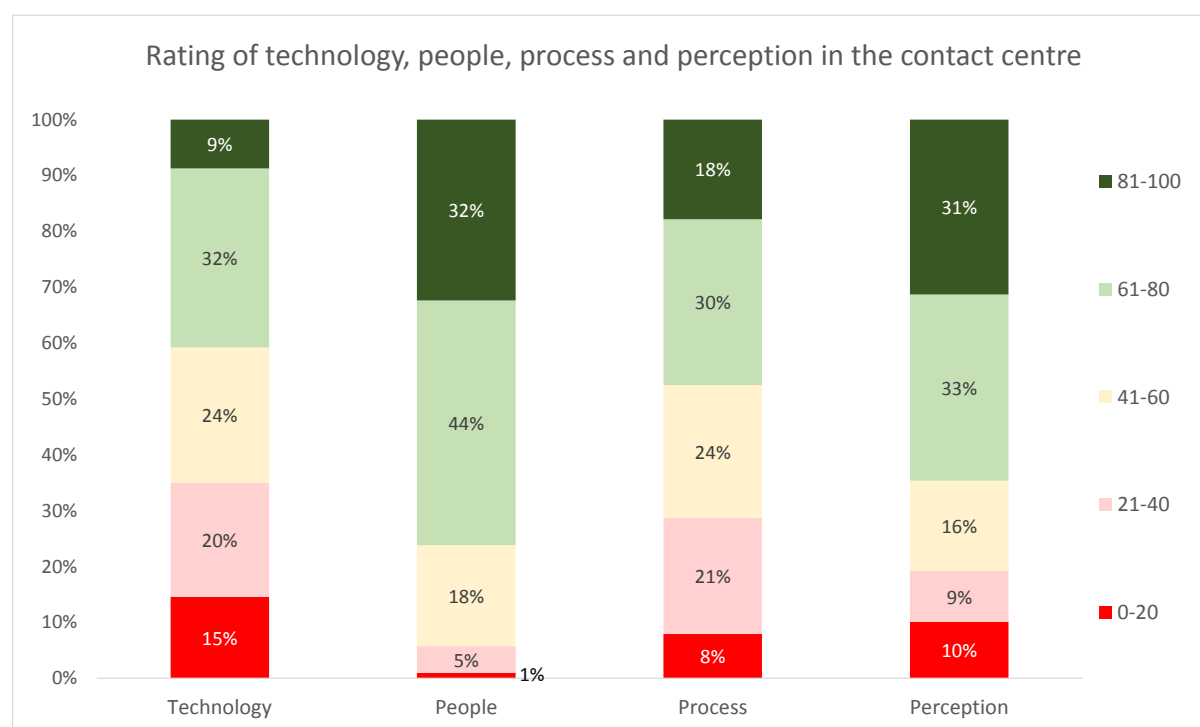


[Click here to see how NewVoiceMedia revolutionised Vax's contact centre](#)

TECHNOLOGY, PEOPLE, PROCESS & PERCEPTION

Respondents were asked a series of four questions around how well or poorly they felt their contact centre was doing around four key areas: technology, people, process and perception. They were asked to score their operation on a scale of 1 to 100, where a low score represented a poor outcome, and a high score a positive one. The scores for each question within grouped into five categories in order to draw out a pattern.

Figure 183: Rating of technology, people, process and perception in the contact centre



Technology (where 1 – “Little investment in systems and technology” -> 100 – “A great deal of investment in systems and technology”)

Respondents were the most negative in their views of the investments they saw being put into systems and technology within the contact centre, with 15% scoring this below 20/100 and a further 20% between 21 and 40.

Agent skills (where 1 – “Agents do not have the skills & characteristics needed” -> 100 – “Agents have all of the skills & characteristics needed”):

The majority of respondents were very positive about the skills and characteristics that their agents had. 76% scored this at 61/100 or above with very few stating that the agents did not have the skills and characteristics required.

Processes (where 1 – “Contact centre processes need a lot of improvement” -> 100 – “Contact centre processes need little or no improvement”):

The pattern here is similar to that seen in technology investment, although the proportion of respondents feeling very negative about this is much lower. While 48% of respondents feel that their contact centre processes don’t need much improvement, 29% feel that they require significant change.

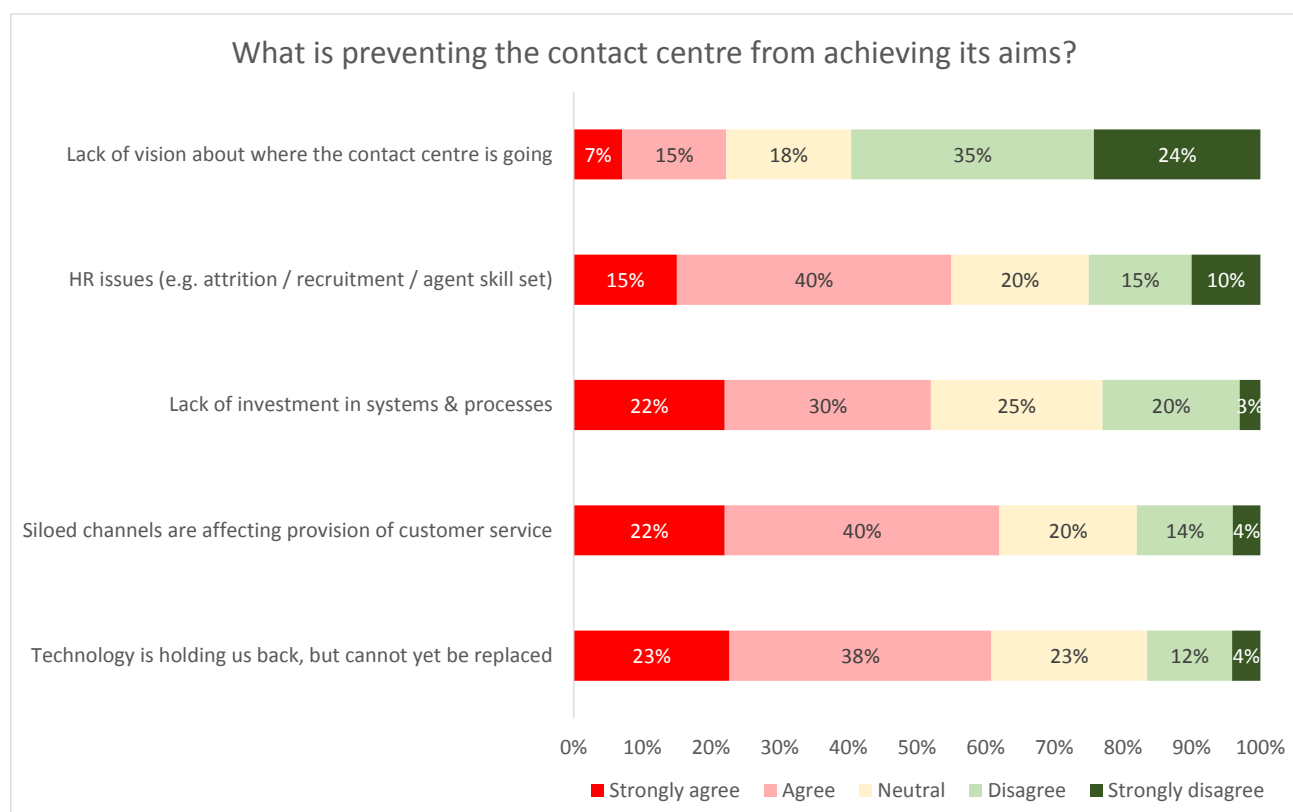
Management view (where 1 – “Management views the contact centre as an operational cost” -> 100 – “Management views the contact centre as a strategic asset”):

Respondents were asked whether the business’s management views them as an operational cost centre (low score), or as a strategic asset (high score). 64% said that their management viewed them more as a strategic asset, with only 19% stating that they were seen as an operational cost centre. The move towards being viewed strategically continues this year, as 10 years ago, most operations were seen as cost centres.

HELPING THE CONTACT CENTRE ACHIEVE ITS AIMS

Respondents were asked to give their views on what was preventing the contact centre from achieving its aims, assuming that there was a gap between what was being achieved and what would be ideal.

Figure 184: What is preventing the contact centre from achieving its aims?



There was little real conclusion to be drawn from this: 22% of respondents strongly agreed that lack of investments in systems and processes was holding the contact centre back, and it was interesting to note that 61% agreed or strongly agreed that it was irreplaceable technology that was a problem. This lack of ability to change or upgrade its systems may be around the previously stated lack of investment, or maybe more to do with the highly customised and bespoke legacy environment that the business feels it requires to operate.

It is also of interest to note that 62% of respondents admit that siloed channels are affecting how they can provide customer service: most of these channels were added and integrated in a piecemeal fashion, and require the re-engineering of underlying infrastructure and business processes in order to provide the omnichannel experience which many respondents feel is necessary to improve the customer's experience significantly.

Considering that most respondents have historically low levels of agent attrition, and stated earlier in this chapter that agent skills and characteristics were generally good, it is surprisingly to see 55% of respondents agreeing that HR issues were preventing the contact centre from achieving its aims.

As these findings do not shed real light on which specific factors are holding contact centres back, it is necessary to look in more detail to see if there are specific issues related to the size of the contact centre.

When considering the attitudes of respondents from various size bands, there are a few key areas of differentiation:

- 64% of large contact centres state that HR issues are holding them back, compared to 51% of small operations and 46% of medium-size contact centres
- Medium-sized contact centres are far more likely to believe that a siloed approach to channel management is holding them back, with 75% of this size band expressing this opinion, against 49% of respondents from small operations and 60% of large. This may be because medium-sized operations have to deal with large numbers of multichannel interactions without having the budget or internal support of large contact centres
- To some extent, this is borne out by respondents from medium-sized operations also being more likely to see that the lack of investment in technology is restricting their plans (72%, compared with 53% of small operations and 63% of large).
- There is little pattern across size bands when considering how a lack of investment in systems and processes is holding them back (49% small; 57% medium; 52% large)
- Only 13% of large operations agreed that a lack of vision was a problem (with none strongly agreeing). 26% of small operations and 25% of medium-sized contact centres agreed.

Respondents were also asked for any other issues that they felt were preventing their contact centre from achieving its aims that had not already been mentioned. Responses included:

- Budget constraints
- Too little time to carry out all of the improvements identified
- Declining revenues in markets that are changing, meaning investment in the contact centre becomes less.



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Companies who can deliver a seamless [omnichannel customer experience](#) (CX) across multiple channels and touchpoints can develop a significant competitive advantage, reduce customer churn and increase profit: the [Genesys Customer Experience Platform](#) ensures that the experience you deliver aligns with the expectations of your customer - and is [journey appropriate](#).



Everything you need to build a multi-channel contact centre in the cloud.



If you are worried about how to improve your customer interactions, talk to us - there is no other organisation in the UK that has a broader set of tools to help you tune your customer service, from operational consultancy to speech analytics, the full suite of contact centre technology and even the best approach for securing your credit card transactions.



We deliver more customers.



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's VoC and VoE surveys give you the power to listen directly to your customers and employees to drive service improvement in your business: our web and SMS surveys mean you can reach out to all your client base to ensure you're capturing feedback where it matters.



Performance Telecom provide a comprehensive suite of telecoms services to businesses and contact centres - we unlock aspiration by improving communication through tailored, leading edge and trusted technology that leverages excellence to achieve outstanding performance.



Used by some of the largest call centres in the world, Pindrop catches attackers and verifies customers over the phone, saving you time and money, and improving your customer experience.



Rant & Rave's deep understanding of customers allows brands to make key strategic decisions like process improvement, digital transformation and financial planning, all with the consumer in mind.



Pinpointing the issue so that you can spend your time working on it.



VoxGen is the IVR design, development and hosting company with a mission to make every automated call a great experience.



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.

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