

A blurred background image of a call center with several agents wearing headsets working at their desks.

13 Ways to Boost **PRODUCTIVITY** IN **YOUR CONTACT CENTER**

Tips for making your call center agents more efficient and your customers happier

13 Ways to Boost Productivity in Your Contact Center

All too often, you have only one chance to make a lasting impression with a customer. And that one impression often is handled by your contact center. So whether it's a small, internal help desk focused on supporting staff or a large, geographically dispersed group of agents helping drive sales and customer support, serving your customer base efficiently and effectively while creating quality customer experiences is of the utmost importance.

How can you ensure the highest level of customer satisfaction while controlling resourcing costs? By helping your agents be more efficient and effective! How do you do that? Here are 13 ways:

#1

Give Agents a Heads-Up About Who's Calling

One of the main priorities of a customer service organization is providing personalized service. This starts from the moment a customer first contacts your business. In order to drive quality customer engagements and provide prompt, informed service, your contact center agents need to be able to quickly identify customers and the services they are requesting. This can be achieved with contact center software that instantly delivers caller and account information to agents as they receive calls.

With customer information delivered to agent desktops, agents can readily identify callers by their names, their phone number, the number they dialed to reach your business and by digits they entered in an automated system (e.g. their account number). With screen-pop tools on the agent's desktop, callers avoid having to repeat information and agents have pertinent information at hand to provide efficient service.

When screen-pop solutions are integrated with a third-party application or Web page—such as a CRM solution—agents have even more access to customer information and can readily verify and update records. This reduces the cost per interaction and improves agent productivity.

Agents can tap into the knowledge gained by agents who previously assisted particular callers and provide premium customer service.



#2

Better Yet, Provide Them with a Brief Call History.

We've all been there before. You call a business back to follow up on a previous inquiry and the agent you're speaking with has absolutely no knowledge of your previous interactions with their co-workers. There is an easy solution to this frequently encountered problem: Give your agents access to detailed call history. This can be provided through desktop screen pops, reports and CRM integrations.

With quick access to detailed call history, agents know how often a caller contacted the company the previous week, with whom the caller spoke, the duration of each call and what happened during those calls from the notes provided. Agents can tap into the knowledge gained by agents who previously assisted particular callers and provide premium customer service.

#3

Make Data Entry Automatic

Information sharing isn't just about providing customer information or call history on the agent desktop. It's about information sharing between applications to automatically duplicate the necessary information across applications. This reduces the possibility of data entry errors, speeds up the time it takes for an agent to handle an inquiry, and ultimately, facilitates first-contact resolution.

Do your agents have to enter customer information into different systems? For instance, do they record call information in your contact center software and then have to re-enter it into your CRM database? If so, they're wasting valuable time that they could otherwise be helping customers.

#4

Offer Agents Incentives—That They Want

Recognizing and rewarding employees for their performance is an effective strategy for boosting productivity, sales, customer satisfaction, process adherence, call times—whatever it is you want to improve. The right contact center software will give you all the right tools at your fingertips to track these and other key performance indicators.

There are a number of ways to incentivize employees: salary increases, free lunches, gift cards, performance bonuses or even simple gestures such as putting employee names on a leaderboard. The key is to know what motivates your staff. And there's only one way to find that out and that's to ask them.

#5

Monitor, Measure, Manage

There's an old adage in the contact center industry: If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. This is why at the core of any good contact center software is a rich reporting component. Look for one that provides comprehensive historical reporting, real-time monitoring, lifecycle reports, and advanced data filtering and search capabilities. These tools enable supervisors to see the big picture while readily pinpointing problem areas to effectively measure and manage performance.

Historical monitoring capabilities and lifecycle reports often include agent call notes and call recordings to provide a cradle-to-grave view of call history. With these tools, supervisors have a 360-degree view of events and can trace activities related to specific calls, identify agent and queue performance issues, and optimize call flow designs. With the right reporting tools at their disposal, supervisors can focus on what's important—coaching agents, refining business efficiencies and improving the customer experience.



#6

Get Agents Multitasking With Multimedia

In today's digital age, customers are more technically inclined than ever before and that has dramatically changed the way they contact your business. As opposed to simply phoning your business, they may send you an email, a text message, a chat over the Internet or even reach out to you through Twitter or Facebook. Regardless of the way customers contact your business, you need your agents to be just as responsive as they would be on the phone.

With a multimedia contact center solution, you allow your customers to contact you in the channel of their choice, which is a key step in creating happy customers. Equally as important, you can enable your agents to handle multiple contacts simultaneously.

For example, agents could handle a voice call, two emails and a couple of Web chats at once, which boosts agent productivity and lowers customer wait times.

A multimedia contact center solution also steers customers to the lowest cost channel of service. For example, a customer purchasing a product or service from your website costs you approximately 24 cents per transaction, whereas a customer purchasing the same product or service over the phone costs you about seven dollars per transaction. Flexible communications and efficient service are what customers want, expect and value. They are more likely to remain loyal if doing business with you is easy.

#7

Help Customers Help Themselves

One of the easiest ways to boost productivity in your contact center is to enable your customers to serve themselves. This can range from being as simple as providing an auto-attendant so inbound callers can intelligently decide who is best suited to answer their calls or as complex as providing callers with the ability to interact with your business without ever talking to an agent—for example, checking account balances or making billing payments over the phone.

In order to allow customers to help themselves, you'll need contact center software that has interactive voice response capabilities.

With an IVR solution, you can automate routine, low-value calls to free up employees for mission-critical tasks. This enables businesses to reduce their cost per transaction while improving service over the phone and extending service hours since customers can help themselves through the system 24/7. Most IVR applications also enable you to proactively reach out to customers with outbound dialing capabilities. This proactive outreach increases agent productivity by automating outbound calls and simple messaging and improves business processes and services by collecting customer feedback.

#8

But If They Don't, Transition The Information To An Agent

We've all been there: After spending several minutes on a call listening and interacting with an automated system, sometimes you get fed up and just want to speak with a live agent. With the right advanced IVR application, you can ensure your business is ready to handle these cases by programming an option that enables customers to leave the IVR system and speak with a live agent.

With a flexible, customizable IVR system, you can program this functionality to perform in a number of different ways: route the caller to a queue (which would then transfer the call to the longest idle agent), route the caller to a specific agent or route the caller to an operator. When calls are transferred to a live person, any data previously entered by the caller (e.g. their phone number, account number, etc.) is retained and automatically appears on the agent's desktop so that he or she can provide prompt, efficient customer service.

#9

Let Agents Work From Home

One of the easiest ways to improve agent satisfaction is to provide them with flexible work options. More and more, today's workforce is expecting the ability to work from home and, fortunately, with the right contact center software, you can make that happen.

Businesses of all sizes are increasingly relying on home offices and remote workers for connecting their part and full-time teleworking agents. In order for these agents to be productive, they require access to the same services used at the corporate headquarters or main contact center location. This includes all the applications, data, voice and multimedia capabilities they require to do their job.

Remote working is also about providing agents with the capabilities to receive routed calls on any endpoint, whether a digital, analog, SIP or mobile phone. This functionality ensures best-in-breed voice customer service regardless of an agent's location, while retaining all key data so supervisors can still measure and manage agent performance just as if they were in the office.

Allowing agents to work remotely means you won't be confined to the local talent pool, which may get you better candidates. It also allows you to more easily have agents work odd hours or split shifts. For instance, if call volumes spike for your business early in the morning and late afternoon, you can have some agents work only during peak times—something an employee expected to come into an office would rarely agree to.

#10

Coach Them On Customer Service

Coaching contact center agents isn't just about being able to follow up with them after calls. It's also about proactively helping them during calls to ensure they are providing superior customer service.

With a sophisticated contact center solution, supervisors can listen in on calls and coach them or even feed them dialogue through the "whisper" feature that is undetectable to the caller.

In necessary situations, supervisors can even barge into calls to take control of a situation. These features help ensure that customer questions and problems are taken care of in one call rather than having to call back multiple times for the same issue. That, in turn, ultimately improves customer satisfaction.

#11

Route Calls To The Right Agents

One of the main reasons businesses invest in contact center software is to leverage its automatic call distribution (ACD) functionality. But it's not enough to simply route calls to agents. You want to route calls to the right agents. Now, if all of your agents provide similar levels of service and/or expertise, then you may configure your system to route calls to whichever agent has been idle longest.

Or you may want to configure your ACD list in groups, meaning a call of a particular nature, say technical support, would be routed to your agents who are able to provide technical support. This way, you don't have a middleman answering calls and then sending them over to tech support. And conversely, you don't have agents who have technical knowledge wasting their time answering billing questions. Of course, sometimes particular groups will be overloaded with calls while others sit idle. You can configure software to prioritize a second group to answer calls when the primary call group is overcommitted by a set amount of time of your choosing.

Contact centers can also configure queues with different priorities so that calls in higher priority queues will be delivered to agents before calls in lower priority queues. This allows contact centers to differentiate service levels offered to groups of customers based on their value and requirements.

Finally, calls can be routed and queued based on business hours. Callers who try to dial queues outside of business hours can be transferred to a redirect destination such as voicemail or presented with a message. All of these ACD routing capabilities are designed with one thing in mind—delivering prompt, efficient and effective customer service.

#12

Make It Fun!

Being held to monthly, weekly or even daily goals puts a lot of pressure on contact center staff. And this often overlooked department tends to feel disconnected from the rest of the company. That's why it's so important to promote a fun, social company culture in your contact center. Here are a few ways to keep your employees satisfied, engaged and, ultimately, more productive:

- **Give agents a change of scenery.**

Hold meetings outdoors or out of the office. Have a team lunch outside on a sunny day. Schedule weekly team walks where you can socialize and step away from the hustle and bustle of the contact center.

- **Make it a team effort.**

Put the power in the hands of your employees. Start a social committee and challenge them to come up with ideas to step away for a few minutes and have some fun.

- **Encourage staff to express themselves.**

Invite employees to decorate their workspaces to make them feel comfortable. Decorating with bright colors and big green plants and handing out healthy snacks are all ways to inject a positive energy into an otherwise mundane office environment.

- **Celebrate together.**

Have managers and supervisors set calendar reminders for employee birthdays and milestones. Don't let someone's birthday or employment anniversary go without making it feel like a special occasion. It's one more opportunity to remind people of why they love working for your company.

- **Host non-working events.**

Movie nights, lunches, talent shows, sporting events and scavenger hunts are all ways to get your employees to stop thinking about work and start thinking about the great people they work with.

#13

Predict And Make Use Of Downtime

One of the main challenges facing contact centers is balancing the right number of skilled agents against the forecasted call volume. With a work-force management solution, you will have access to forecasting and monitoring tools that help optimize resource planning and effectively control costs.

Another way to easily control downtime is to have agents switch from handling inbound calls to making outbound calls during low volume call periods throughout the day. If agents aren't fielding customer calls, have them make sales, follow-up or survey calls. Not only do these calls minimize downtime and boost employee productivity, but they can be also used to proactively reach out to customers, for example, to remind them of appointments. This increases agent productivity by automating outbound calls and simple messaging, improves business processes and services by collecting customer feedback, and enables you to proactively reach out to customers and provide advanced, self-service options.