

The Multichannel AGENT



A 2014 Contact Center Roadmap, Research
Report and Best Practices Guide



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & KEY FINDINGS

In 2011, inContact and DMG Consulting released a whitepaper entitled “Best Practices for Transforming to a Multichannel Contact Center.” The whitepaper provided the single-channel and siloed contact center with a framework and recommendations to evolve into a strategic multichannel asset.

Contact centers were encouraged to “change” and to take the risk of refreshing their infrastructures and customer service practices in order to leverage the agent efficiencies, cost-savings, and customer satisfaction often seen with a successful multichannel environment.

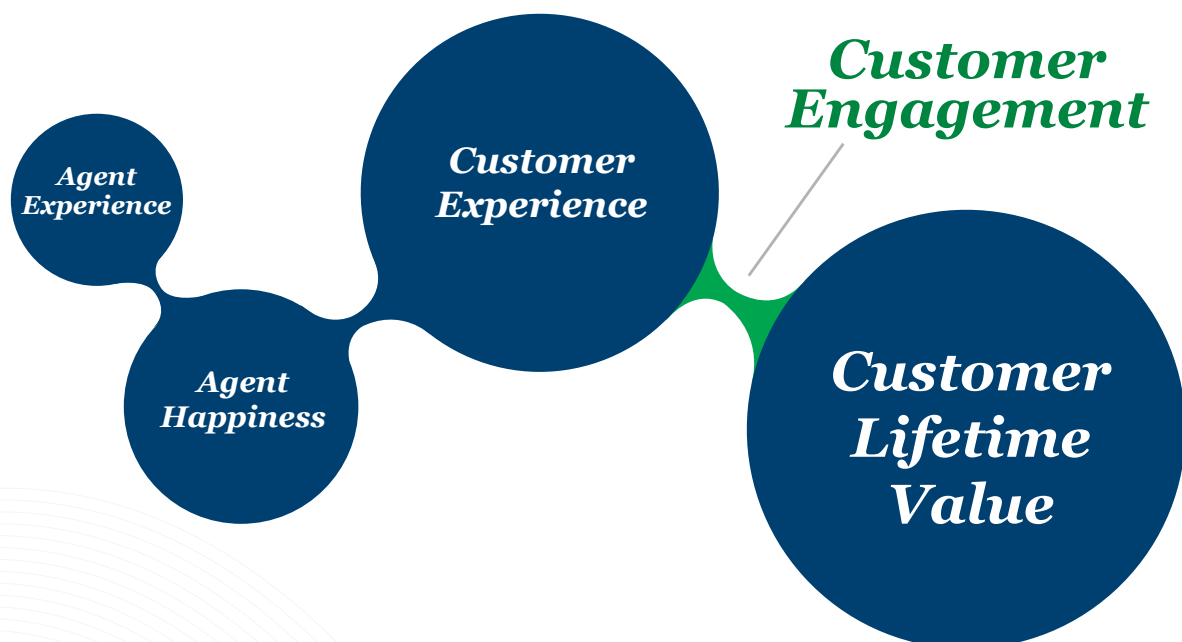
So how far have enterprises really come with multichannel support in the last two years? What progress has been made and which channels are still lagging behind? ICMI acknowledges that most contact centers are in the midst of some type of multichannel revolution, but have the outdated technologies, attitudes, systems and operations truly evolved? And are contact centers prepared for the connected customers and the changes in the year ahead?

Here’s what we know to be certain - a multichannel support structure is often being driven by the customer demand for emerging channels like social, mobile, and advanced self-service. In an almost equal number of cases, it is an internal push from other departments looking for cost-savings or shiny new channel differentiators. Unfortunately, this approach is not only reactive in nature, but also short-sighted for the contact center. Multichannel customer service isn’t just about adding new channels in order to appease a vocal customer subset, or to create a new marketing tool, or match a competitor’s strategy; it’s about providing the support opportunity that delivers the most effective service and provides the highest customer engagement. And in some scenarios that means expanding and experimenting with the more traditional channels of outbound voice, email, chat, web, and self-service before launching into uncharted territory.

In “Improving Engagement with Multichannel Service” by Aberdeen Group (December 2012), they talked about the need to build balance into the channel strategy. “It’s not about the quantity of channels supported,” wrote the author Sumair Dutta – VP and Principal Analyst, Service Management. “But the quality of interaction and customer experience delivered on the channels that are supported. Eventually customers will demand and seek out a wider channel presence,” he continued, “but will be very quick to drop a particular channel if they find it to be ineffective, thereby negating any investment made in supporting that channel.”

In early 2013, the International Customer Management Institute (ICMI) conducted a research study to better understand how contact centers intended to use emerging channels to improve the overall customer service experience and increase customer engagement. There was an emphasis on the activities and objectives around supporting customers in a multichannel environment, with an additional correlation of each emerging channel back to experience, efficiency and engagement.

While analyzing the data, ICMI kept noticing a trend threaded through the responses. And while it isn’t groundbreaking, it is a fantastic reminder of what is usually at the core of customer satisfaction and engagement - the agent. To extrapolate further, it is the agent experience that genuinely impacts the customer’s experience. More specifically, it is the agent experience that impacts agent happiness, which powers the customer experience, which builds customer engagement, which ultimately influences the customer’s lifetime value to the brand.





Now how does this all tie back to multichannel?

It's imperative that any multichannel strategy take into account the experience of the agent. As contact centers continue to place more demands on the agent, and as they become required to handle more channels, more complex questions, and more customer types, their value to a successful multichannel environment increases. In the 2011 inContact and DMG whitepaper, 13 key qualitative and quantitative benefits of transitioning to a multichannel contact center were identified. While the customer, the contact center and the enterprise were greatly affected, it was the agent that was positively impacted by all of them.

So in the third quarter of 2013, ICMI and inContact turned their focus specifically on the agent and launched "The Agent's Experience in the Multichannel World" survey. The intent was to determine how the contact center was leveraging the agent – both internally to make decisions on technology, channels and analytics, and externally to meet the demands of the customer.

This new research, along with other current ICMI data, will provide contact center professionals the materials they need to properly plan for multichannel in 2014. The ICMI Expert Spotlight accompaniments will help with key pieces of the puzzle – most notably advice on recruiting and training. Throughout the document we've also pointed out areas where multichannel best practices increase customer engagement, create contact center efficiency gains, and improve the customer lifetime value to the corporate brand.

KEY FINDINGS

Over **66%** of companies see linkages between operational efficiency, agent engagement (AE) and agent satisfaction (ASAT)

85% of contact centers believe that happy agents make happy customers

While multichannel agents do not demand higher wages, **46%** recognize they have more extensive training needs

Multichannel necessitates that agents learn new technology or new processes say **64%** of respondents

Multiple agent desktop applications are still the norm for **73%**



STUDY RESULTS

Demographics

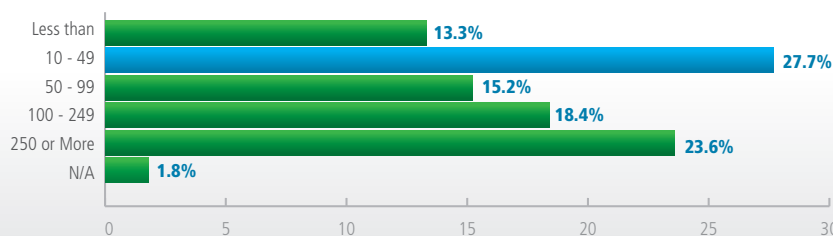
The 525 survey respondents represented nearly every role and level of the contact center, with the majority of results provided by executives (12.7%), directors (16.6%) and managers (39.6%). Also participating were operational managers and analysts from training, product, human resources, workforce management, and QA (12.0%), contact center supervisors (7.3%), and information technology (5.8%). A few agents and consultants rounded out the respondent mix.

Participation spanned across all industries with financial services (banking, insurance and securities), healthcare, technology (hardware and software), telecom, and manufacturing accounting for the top five verticals at 23.0%, 9.8%, 7.3%, 6.0% and 4.6% respectively. 5.0% are outsourced service providers.

Although North America and the United States specifically was the most represented region, participation in the study came from all over the world.

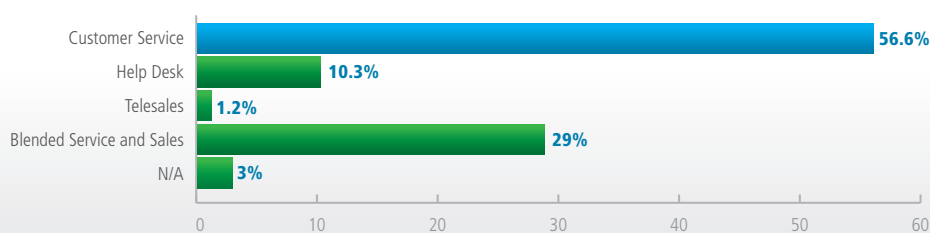
Contact centers of every size responded for an objective sample size, with those having 10-49 agents (27.7%), and 250 or more (23.6%), representing the majority.

How many agents work in your contact center(s)?



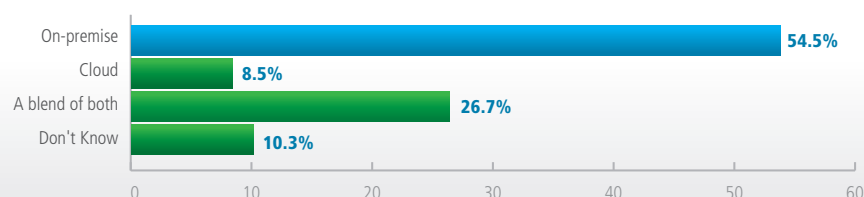
As expected, over half (56.6%) report customer service as their primary function, with another 29.0% offering a blend of service and sales. The remaining are either mostly help desk centers or telesales.

What is your contact center's primary function?



Of the survey respondents, 54.5% are operating with a premise-based infrastructure, while only 8.5% are pure cloud. 26.7% have a blended mix of both and another 10.3% are uncertain.

What infrastructure is your contact center built upon?





What is Multichannel?

Multichannel support simply implies that customers can reach an organization for customer service through a variety of methods. In the traditional sense, the business formally announces that they will provide specific live agent channels, like phone, chat or email during scheduled times and days. With other channels, most notably social media, the customer chooses the time, method and transparency in which they want to communicate. Multichannel also includes the always-on and always-available self-service channels like FAQs, forums and interactive knowledgebases.

The traditional live-agent channels of inbound voice (95.9%), email (85.7%), outbound voice (68.5%), and web inquiries (65.5%) still dominate, while the self-help and emerging channels are steadily increasing. Self-service IVR (40.4%) and online portals/knowledgebases (31.8%) report strong usage, but community forum moderation has not seen much traction. Social media as a supported channel is growing progressively, wherein mobile and SMS appear more challenging. Although chat is now often seen as a traditional channel, it is still only being utilized by 34.2% of surveyed contact centers. Remarkably, almost ½ of centers are still supporting offline activities like fax and mail (46.3%).

On average, inbound voice currently represents over half (56.4%) of the overall volume for the contact center. 28.6% report that it is in fact 80% or greater. It comes as no surprise then that inbound phone is also the channel that the organization prioritizes highest within the contact center.

We must also remember that multichannel takes into account the newer and currently less utilized channels such as video and advanced self-service virtual assistants. While we are tracking their adoption, it's difficult to yet predict their potential impact. For the purpose of this report, ICMI is focusing on the traditional channels that still comprise the largest portion of today's support interactions, and the emerging channels that contact centers are readily implementing within the next 12-24 months.

In the near-term, it is self-service that is dominating the contact center's planning, as phone IVR and portal/knowledgebases top the list when we asked which channels will be added within the next year. Chat, mobile and SMS round out the top five. As we look further out to 24 months, self-service is still leading, but there is a shift to SMS and community forums.

Which customer service channels do you PLAN to add within the next 12 months? 24 months?

	Planning - 12 months	Planning - 24 months
Phone - Inbound	20.0%	7.3%
Phone - Outbound	28.6%	7.9%
Email	26.9%	9%
Chat	36.7%	28.9%
Self-Service Phone IVR	47.1%	19.5%
Self-Service Portal/Knowledgebase	43.5%	22.8%
Web	29.3%	16%
Offline (fax and/or mail)	34.4%	7.7%
Community Forum moderation	35.7%	32.8%
SMS	30.4%	34.7%
Social Media	33.3%	28.3%
Mobile	36.1%	28.6%

As organizations are often painfully realizing, they can no longer stringently dictate how and when customers can reach them for customer service. Even if the phone queues are closed for the day, the brand is still accessible via social media, mobile, and through the web. Conversations around a business and their customers are happening 24x7, whether the organization chooses to formally control them or not. As we conveyed in a study earlier this year, it's important for organizations to acknowledge that multichannel support is increasingly expected by their customers. It is equally as important for the enterprise to realize that multichannel is most likely already happening within their contact center.

So where should you be with multichannel in 2014? You should be where your customers want you to be, where your business needs you to be, and in the channels where you are able to provide the highest level of service and satisfaction.

While ICMI can't specifically tell you WHICH channels to support, we can tell you how best to plan and prepare your multichannel contact center to perform at its best.



Hire and Train for Multichannel

In the past twelve months, 72.7% of our survey respondents state that they've added in at least one new channel to their contact center mix. And almost half claim that more channels are being planned for implementation within the next year. With this type of growth, it is becoming a requirement for leaders to hire agents with the passion and capability to handle not just one channel, but all channels.

Hiring for the Multichannel Contact Center

By Brad Cleveland, Senior Advisor and Former CEO, ICMI

Imagine for a moment dropping onto earth from another planet. Your task is to explore our economy—jobs, what we produce, and how we hire and train people for those roles. You're not familiar with precedent, history, or what's transpired to this point. You simply look around and take note of what employees do, the skills required, the challenges they face, the value they create. Teachers, actors, pilots, managers, and others. In your journey, you discover an intriguing profession, those tasked with serving customers through communication channels (not face-to-face).

The services these professionals provide are as diverse as the verticals they are part of—finance, healthcare, utilities, software, manufacturing, et al.—yet they share common challenges. For example, customers are diverse in their needs and wants; they access services on demand and expect quick response. They've most likely tried other alternatives before contacting the organization, e.g., through search, the Web, social channels, or mobile apps, so questions tend to be complex. Agents must be proficient in a wide range of systems internally, and be able to help customers with the channels and technologies they use. Products, content and policies change continually—this world is on the move. And when all is said and done, customers share how well things went through ratings, social channels and various surveys (much of this input is readily available and commonly used by other customers and prospects).

Easy jobs? No way. Important to customers and the organization? Yes, more than ever. To all but those shaded by perceptions formed in simpler years gone by, or those who haven't recently experienced this kind of setting, this is likely evident. Here are six rules of the road when hiring for the multichannel contact center:

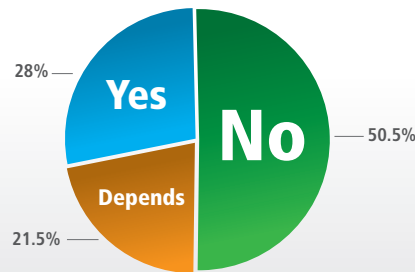
- 1 | Rethink everything you've been doing.** Many of these jobs are completely different than they were even a few years ago; the hiring practices of the past just don't cut it. Think multi-channel, multi-system, brand-impacting complexity.
- 2 | Define and characterize the job accurately.** This involves analyzing job tasks, identifying the skills and knowledge required, developing robust job descriptions and describing the performance you expect as specifically as possible. In recruiting, characterizations of the job should be as accurate and realistic as possible.
- 3 | Recruit through multiple sources.** This should include external career websites, sourcing companies, social channels, your own easy-to-find postings, and employee referrals (which many managers agree bring in the best candidates), among others.
- 4 | Assess applicants through a variety of communication channels.** For example, screen candidates through phone, email, chat, video, social channels, et al.—it's essential to get a read on how they come across in the channels you will need them to use. No, you can't expect them to be experts before they go through training, but you'll get a good sense of their comfort level and cultural proficiency in manners and approach.
- 5 | Give prospects side-by-side experience as soon as possible.** To really understand these jobs, you must experience them firsthand. That's a plea we often make to senior level execs—sit next to your agents and observe what they do. And the same is true for potential or new hires. Some will walk out the door and never look back—it's just not their thing. Better now than later (and in fact, some organizations offer new hires a stipend to leave if the recruit believes the job is just not a fit).
- 6 | Track recruiting results.** For example, correlate recruiting source to performance and tenure over time (6 months, 12 months and so on). Sometimes clear patterns emerge—e.g., maybe the local college produces candidates that outperform and outstay all other groups; maybe referrals by existing employees excel. This intelligence can help shape and prioritize future recruiting and hiring efforts.
- 7 | Hire nice people.** That's the way I heard a successful leader put it recently. Starkly simple, and, I am convinced, absolutely correct. When all is said and done, this is a people business. Above all, we need employees who love helping others. Another successful manager described the secret to his organization's success this way: "We hire the passion and train the skills."



There is a common misconception amongst contact center professionals that the universal queues and skilling associated with successful multichannel contact center are not cost effective due to the higher monetary requirements of the agents.

According to our research that is not the case. Although entry-level agent wages are up on average \$1.00 from similar research data derived in January 2012, universal agents are not the cause. Over 50% of the respondents say that multichannel agents do not demand a higher per hour wage than dedicated.

Do multichannel agents demand a higher per hour wage than dedicated agents?



In fact, it is the entry-level dedicated channel agents that are entering the contact center at a higher rate.

Entry-Level Average	\$13.01-14.00
Entry-Level Cross-Trained	\$10.01-11.00
Entry-Level Universal	\$13.01-14.00
Entry-Level Dedicated	\$13.50-15.00

That isn't to say that the average wage of a tenured universal agent does not skew a little higher. On average a tenured universal agent is making \$16.01-17.00 an hour compared to \$14.01-15.00 for a tenured dedicated agent.

None of our data suggests, however, that the universal agent makes up the preponderance of the highest paid agent pool, as all agent populations appear to be over \$20 an hour at that level.

Recently we asked, "How has the adoption of new channels, specifically the emerging ones of social and mobile changed your contact center?" The answer option of, "we've had to pay agents more money to support this channel" was negligible.

What is apparent though, is that universal agents do require and receive more training than their counterparts. When we asked, "Do multichannel agents require special incentives that other agents do not receive?" training was identified by 46.3% of respondents. 21.3% said they also have more opportunity to advance to higher complexity work.

As our contact centers evolve and expand into new channels to best meet continuously changing customer demands, the need and requirement for in-depth, comprehensive training has only become greater. While old principles and established methodologies will get you some of the way, it will become necessary to step into "unfamiliar territory" to fully meet the training needs of the multichannel agent.

For those contact centers that have already implemented the emerging channels of social and mobile customer service, agent training is identified as the top way in which the channel adoption has changed the contact center.



Training for the Multichannel Agent

By Justin Robbins, Manager, Training & Development, ICMI

The 2013 Kelly Global Workforce index, an annual study of about 122,000 international workers, revealed that 70% of employees prefer on-the-job experience for new skill development, while numerous other studies show that employees retain 95% of what they teach to others. In considering these studies and my own experience, ICMI has identified some key methods for ensuring successful knowledge transfer and retention.

1 | Back-to-the-Basics. Provide an overview of the types of channels which are handled. While previous experience with text chat, social networks, video chat, etc. is helpful, we cannot assume that the agents have an understanding of the channel's basic functionality or common best practices. And don't underestimate the value of foundational spelling and grammar rules. Take time with your team to discuss and evaluate the various style guidelines that are utilized across different channels. Review the impact of word choice in written channels and share your organization's guidelines on the use of tone, abbreviations, or emoticons in your communication.

2 | Gamification. Despite being a buzzword in the learning and development world, research shows that game play, when implemented appropriately, is an effective means of training. Gamification enables learners to practice and apply their new skills and knowledge in a fun, safe environment that encourages them to take risks, solve problems, and develop creative solutions. Because game design can be costly, you need to consider a game that is reusable and scalable to your business. Best practices encourage breaking the game into small sections and formatting it for play on a variety of devices. Whatever you do, don't forget to establish metrics that determine the learner's baseline knowledge pre-game and are then utilized for a post-game assessment of knowledge transfer and retention.

3 | E-Learning. Although e-learning may not be a stranger to your contact center, using it beyond a "glorified PowerPoint presentation" might be. When done right, e-learning is a powerful tool that can provide learners with the opportunity to observe a demonstration participate in simulation, take an evaluation, and have a reference and resource for on the job application. Utilizing those four components will ensure that the information is both understood and able to be applied by the employee. An end to end example of an e-learning solution for a multichannel agent would include a video and/or screen shots of how to complete a session in that channel, practice scenarios for them to complete the same type of session in the simulated environment, an assessment to determine their understanding of the concept, and a job aid or resource document that could easily be referenced while working with a customer.

4 | Role Play. A convenience of any channel is the ability to create accounts or environments to practice the skills and knowledge that are necessary for success. Role play and behavioral modeling is a critical component to the learning process and should not be forgotten when training the multichannel agent. A way to overcome many of the challenges of "on the fly" or impromptu role play is to develop a library of scenarios in advance. A mistake trainers often make is to encourage that the person playing the customer "makes something up". What should happen instead is that we provide the scenario for the customer and require the agent to improvise. This approach can ensure that we expose our agents to a variety of possible conditions, while alleviating some of the awkwardness that occurs during role play.

5 | Social Media. Not only is social media one of the channels that we may be talking about here, but it is also an invaluable tool and platform for delivering (and discovering) training. While video sharing sites may first come to mind, there are a plethora of ways to utilize everything from blogs as a knowledgebase to pinning sites as a product reference guide. The sky really is the limit here, as we're only as limited as the potential that we see in things.



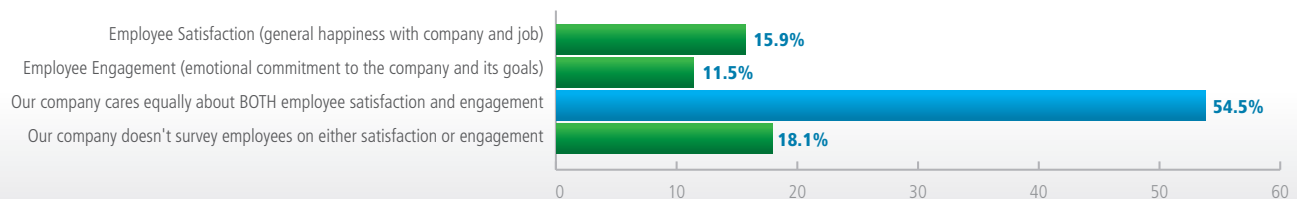
Transition to Agent Satisfaction (ASAT) and Agent Engagement (AE)

Just as organizations are broadening their voice-of-the-customer (VOC) programs beyond customer satisfaction to include experience and engagement, so should they with their employee programs.

Satisfaction is usually defined as fulfillment, gratification and contentment. On the other hand, engagement infers involvement, interest and loyalty. When we specifically refer to the employee, satisfaction pertains to their general happiness with the company and job, while engagement signifies an employee's emotional commitment to the company and its goals.

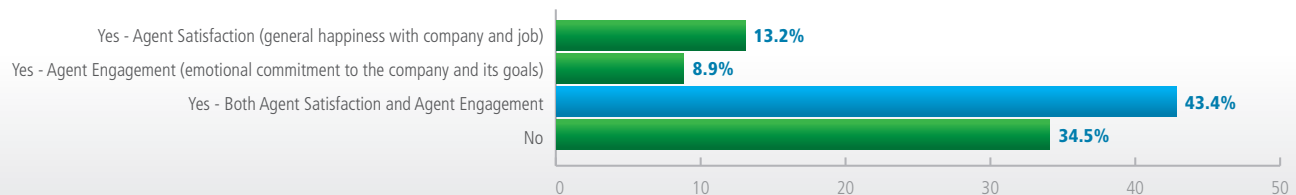
BEST PRACTICE: If not already doing so, ICMI encourages contact centers to formally include the measurement of agent engagement, and not just satisfaction. Typically, and appropriately, this transition starts at the enterprise level. When asked, “Does your organization survey all employees as part of an employee experience program?” over half (54.5%) said yes, and credited their company for caring equally about employee satisfaction and engagement. Another 15.9% said surveys measured employee satisfaction only, and 11.5% of companies focus solely on engagement. 18.1% unfortunately acknowledged that their organizations do not survey employees on either.

Does your organization survey all employees as part of an employee experience program? If so, do they care more about employee satisfaction or employee engagement?



Although it is best for the larger enterprise to drive the transition to a blend of engagement and satisfaction, the contact center can and should measure it independently at the agent level. A solid 43.4% of survey respondents said that they specifically measure both ASAT and AE. Here though is where the disparity widens, as 34.5% said they do not measure either.

Does your contact center specifically measure agent engagement or agent satisfaction?



An anonymous or blind internally administered employee survey is still the most popular collection tool for almost half of the respondents. A significant portion is also using a 3rd party to assist. Only about 15% use one-on-one sessions with contact center management to gather agent satisfaction or engagement. The other options barely registered – named employee surveys, suggestion boxes, focus groups, or one-on-one sessions with HR.

Almost ½ (47.8%) specifically measure agent engagement and/or satisfaction annually, with 28.6% conducting surveys twice a year.

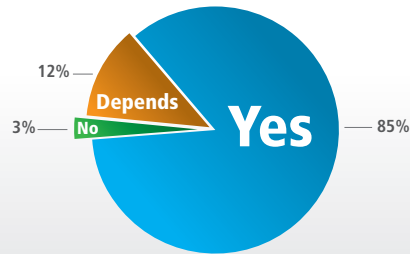
Why is knowing agent satisfaction and engagement so important?



Link Experience and Engagement

At a simple level, while the majority of overall survey respondents (85.0%) agree that happy agents make happy customers, the number rises to over 90% for those that measure both ASAT and AE. For those that do not measure either, the number drops to 78.0%.

Does your contact center believe that happy agents make happy customers?



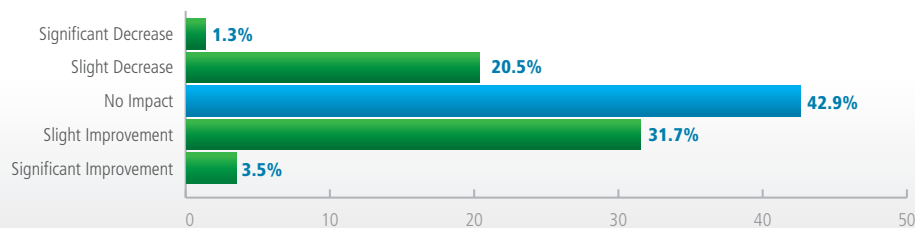
The contact centers that are not measuring agent satisfaction and engagement are missing out on the vital feedback loop that correlates the agent experience to that of the customer. They more often report that there are just too many variables to consider before they can associate happy agents to happy customers. They cite the variable dependency 16.5% of the time versus 9.4% for those that measure both ASAT and AE.

That alone may signify that without knowing the specific pieces that are driving engagement, or lack thereof, it's challenging to make any concerted changes or enhancements.

In some cases, the unaware contact center may not be realizing where improvements are coming from. For example, there is an oft-cited misconception that adding new channels into the contact center will naturally decrease an agent's satisfaction or engagement by adding extra pressures and responsibility. The reality is quite the opposite. When asked, "How has agent engagement/satisfaction been impacted by the addition of new channels?" 42.9% said there had been no impact and 35.2% said there had been an actual improvement.

"Our feedback shows that agents are highly interested in the new ways of communicating," said one survey respondent. "More channels bring interest, new learning, and a variety to sometimes mundane call center work."

How has agent engagement/satisfaction been impacted by the addition of the new channels?



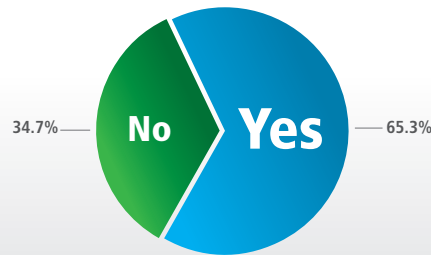
Centers that are not soliciting formal agent feedback are also bypassing connections to operational efficiency and productivity, which can be a byproduct of poor agent engagement, and which definitely impacts the customer experience.

Consider this, what agent activities are contributing to the poor customer experience? Is it knowledge? Is it empathy? Is it adherence? Is it the tools? Is it behavior? And then you have to extrapolate and determine the root – recruiting, training, management, technology, leadership, or channel selection. And then let's not forget the factors which are typically outside the control of the contact center – the product, marketing, budgetary constraints...you get the picture...it ALL contributes to the customer experience.



When explicitly asked, “Has your contact center identified linkages between agent engagement/satisfaction and a better customer experience?” 65.3% of the overall respondents said ‘yes’.

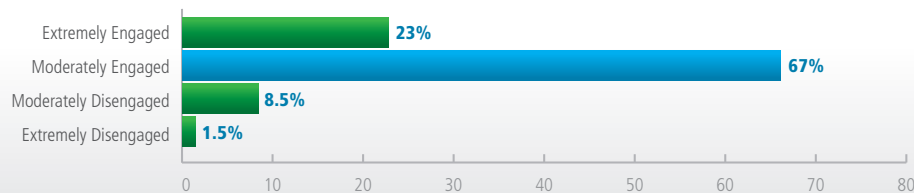
Has your contact center identified linkages between employee engagement/satisfaction and a better customer experience?



These linkages are much easier to ascertain with the right measurement. While it may come as no surprise, those that are not measuring ASAT and AE are not as cognizant that the agent-customer associations even exist. When we dove deeper into the data, this became apparent as only 44.8% of those that do not measure ASAT and AE see the connection, while 81.8% of those that measure both do.

Extreme customer engagement is the goal and it is attainable for most organizations. That engagement must start with the agent and will be quickly evident if the right measurement and linkages are made. When asked, “How actively engaged do you consider your customers to be with your company?” only 23.0% proclaimed ‘Extremely Engaged!’ While the majority (67.0%) did say their customers were moderately engaged, that proves a lot of room for improvement.

How actively engaged do you consider your customers to be with your company?



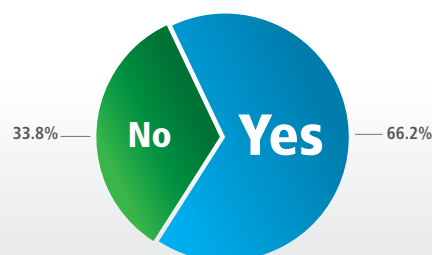
Of those contact centers that measure both agent satisfaction and engagement, they experience extreme engagement by 27.5% of their customers as opposed to the only 17.2% for those that do not measure either.

Understand Productivity and Efficiency Drivers

The daily contact center experience of an agent is a major influencer on their happiness, satisfaction and engagement. A loss of engagement typically manifests in less than desired behaviors that are reflected in standard metrics - schedule adherence, quality, utilization, activity compliance, CSAT and attrition. Oftentimes productivity and efficiency are affected as well.

The linkage between operational efficiency, agent engagement (AE) and agent satisfaction (ASAT) was indeed confirmed by 66.2% of survey respondents.

Has your contact center identified linkages between employee engagement/satisfaction and operational efficiency?





And again, those that do not measure ASAT and AE are in danger of not identifying the true areas of concern. Only 47.8% of these specific responders saw a connection to efficiency, in comparison to the 81.8% that measure both.

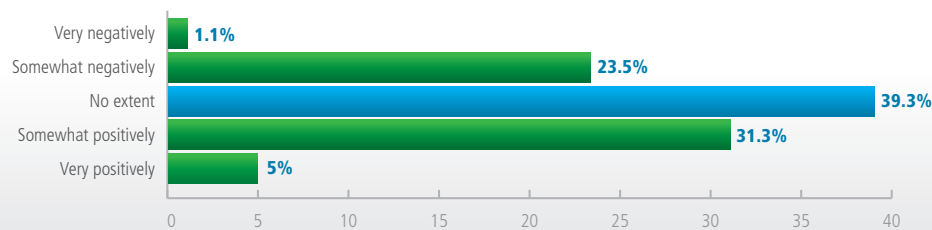
Here's where the circle comes back around to multichannel. ICMI has found that there is often blame being put on the concept of 'multichannel' for many of the productivity and efficiency challenges within the contact center. Adding more channels isn't the root cause of inefficiency and lower productivity; rather it's the processes, training and technology that are often not supportive of the new channel (and which also greatly impact agent engagement). The point is, our data shows that a large number of contact centers don't actually see efficiency or productivity decreases with the addition of new channels. 39.3% saw no impact and 31.1% said there has actually been a somewhat positive influence on the agent. It is probable to infer that they had the infrastructure in place to handle multichannel before actually implementing.

"The additional responsibilities equal increased job variety and job value," proclaimed one contact center. "There is less risk of burnout as we have happier agents."

Another simply said that their agents have a better chance to be more engaged with customers through multiple channels. And a third, "We added helpdesk ticket routing to our agents over a year ago, and they loved having something new to learn. The increased workload actually increased productivity."

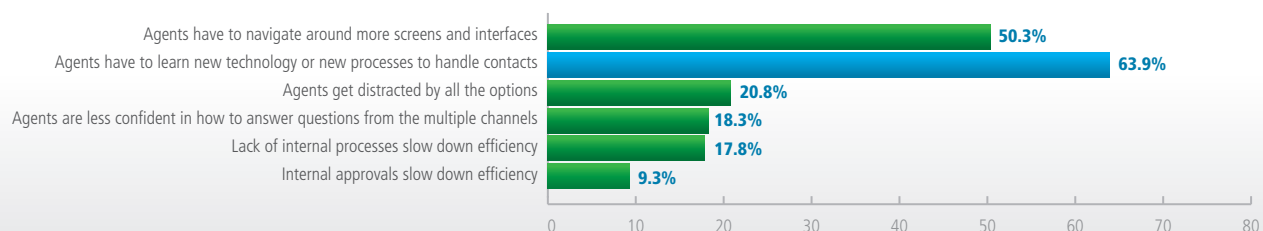
Of the 23.5% that saw a somewhat negative effect on agents, much of it appeared to be related to the potential for an initial learning curve. "We see a negative impact at first until the agents gain the right channel and technology knowledge", or "Productivity dips while the agent is learning something new, and the managers are figuring things out, and then it improves."

To what extent has agent efficiency/productivity been affected by adding new channels?



When we asked, "How has agent productivity/efficiency been impacted by adding channels into the contact center?" the responses supported the notion of framework challenges. 63.9% recognized that agents have to learn new technology or new processes to handle contacts, and half (50.3%) replied that agents have to navigate around more screens and interfaces. The other primary responses imply a need for better training and channel routing – agents get distracted by all the options (20.8%), agents are less confident in how to answer multiple channel questions (18.3%) and the lack of internal processes slow down efficiency (17.8%).

How has agent productivity/efficiency been impacted by adding additional channels into the contact center?



This is again echoed when we asked specifically about the impact of adding two of the most popular emerging channels – social and mobile. Of those that said their agents had been affected, the reasons were similar:

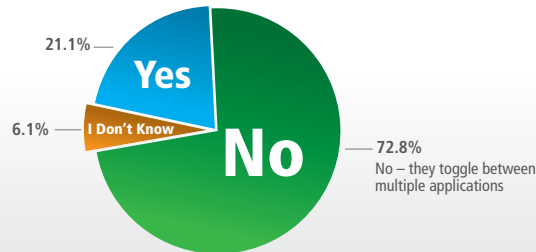
- *Agents have to learn new technology or new process for these customers*
- *Agents are less confident in how to answer mobile questions*
- *Agents have to navigate around more screens and interfaces*
- *Agents get distracted by social media*



Aberdeen says that 26% of an agent's time is spent looking for relevant data across different systems and our own survey data supports that agents use an average of 5 screens for each customer interaction. That's a lot of wasted time that they could be using to help customers.

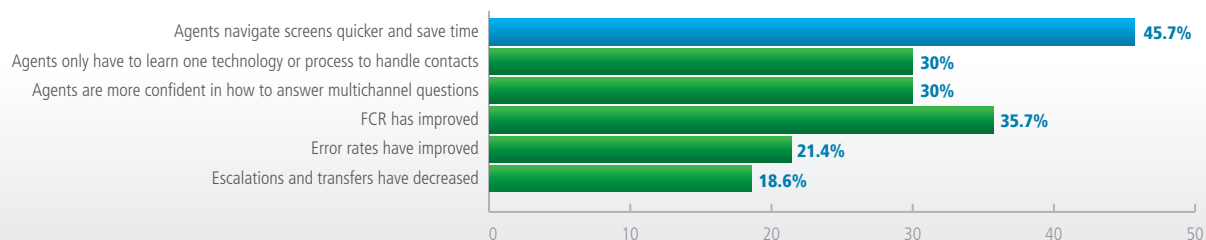
72.8% of survey participants acknowledge that their agents toggle across multiple applications to handle all customer service channels.

Do your contact center agents use ONE desktop platform to handle ALL customer service channels?



There are ways of mitigating, and simplifying the agent desktop can be an ideal place to start. In order to find out exactly where contact centers saw improvements, we focused on the 21.1% of respondents that have already undertaken this initiative. “How has agent productivity/efficiency been affected by simplifying the agent desktop system?” we inquired. 45.7% responded that agents navigate screens quicker and save time. Another 35.7% claimed that FCR improved. An equal amount felt the benefits came through agents only having to learn one process or technology to handle customers (30.0%), and agents feeling more confident in how to answer questions. Error rates improved for 21.4% and escalations and transfers decreased for 18.6%. Since all options pulled strong numbers, there is indication that a solid productivity and efficiency gain can be had.

How has agent productivity/efficiency been affected by the simplified desktop system?



Of the ¼ of respondents that didn't feel the simplified agent desktop made an impact, 70.6% had also admitted that their organization had not make linkages between agent engagement and operational efficiency.

BEST PRACTICE: While it is possible to use manual methods like time-trials and agent shadowing to understand the drivers behind productivity and efficiency decreases – navigation, engagement, confidence, technology, distractions – ICMI recommends utilizing agent desktop analytics tools to better measure activity. 34.1% of the call center community that responded to the survey already uses analytics to:

- *Measure start and stop of agent desktop activities*
- *Capture screen navigation*
- *Correlate hold times to desktop activity*
- *Trigger audio or screen recordings based on desktop events*
- *Track information*



Create a Holistic Experience

Effectively implementing multichannel takes an understanding of how to build and manage customer relationships in an evolving, multi-dimensional communications landscape. Contact center leaders must remember that customers expect a unified experience and superior service regardless of the communication channel.

BEST PRACTICE: A technology best practice is to merge all channels into one unified queue that eliminates channel and department silos, work duplication, and inconsistent customer care. This will keep the contact center from needing separate systems to queue work and will allow multiple channels to be routed to individual agents, when appropriate.

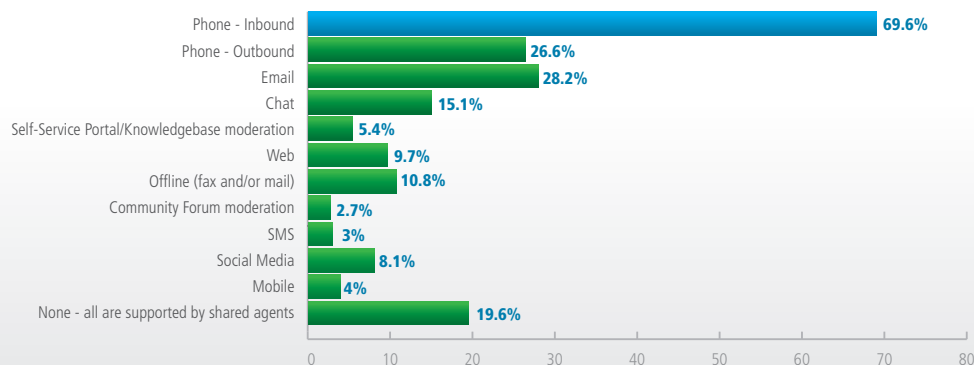
This will be much easier for organizations if their contact centers are built upon a cloud-based infrastructure. As we mentioned earlier, premise is still the predominant framework (55.5%), while 26.7% of survey participants report having a blend of both premise and cloud.

“The cloud has a great opportunity to help simplify the overall experience,” says Scott McDonald, Vice President of Customer Interaction Management Solutions for inContact. “At the desktop you’ve got three things that you’re trying to achieve. You’re trying to improve the agent experience and increase their engagement, you’re trying to improve the customer experience, which will increase their engagement, and you’ve got operational goals to balance out.”

A universal queue foundation that integrates all channels allows contact centers to have better control over contact deflection and volume. By leveraging routing that is both channel and skills-aware, they will be able to approach service from a more holistic customer-focused manner. This unified approach to multichannel truly harnesses the power of the agent and the channels themselves.

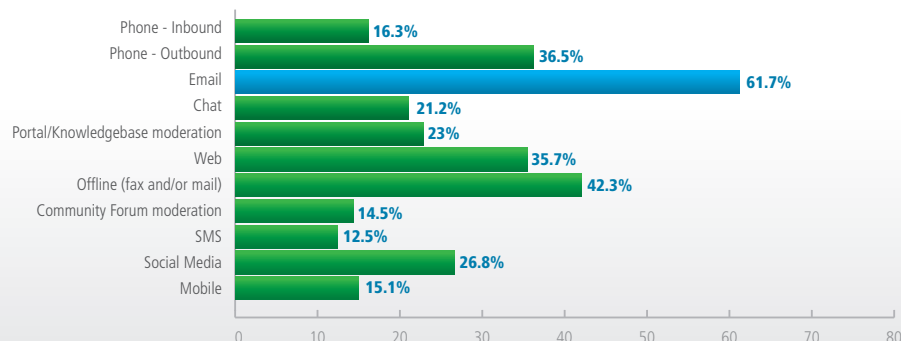
At this time, 41% claim that there are some channels that remain completely independent from others. 69.6% of that group says that inbound voice is isolated, while outbound is within 26.6% of the centers that responded to the survey. Of the non-voice channels, only chat (15.1%) and email (28.2%) were notable as purely dedicated channels.

Which, if any of your channels are supported by 100% dedicated agents?



More impactful is the disparate methodology in which agents are receiving customers across the channels. Of the top 5 highest volume channels that require live assistance, four of them are not automatically routed through the ACD to the agent. Not surprisingly email is often manually routed (61.7%), but that is problematic when you consider it's the second highest volume channel for most centers. Email, offline mail and fax, outbound voice, web, social media, knowledgebase moderation and chat all reported ad hoc routing by over 20% of respondents.

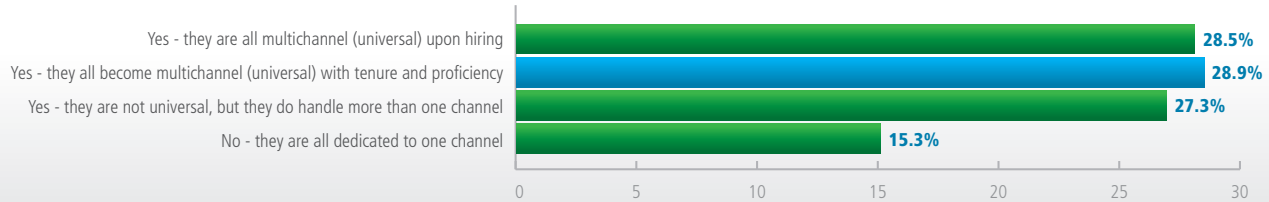
Of the channels that you DO support, which ones are NOT auto-routed by your ACD to an agent? Meaning, which channels are handled ad hoc, when agents are available, or when needed?





And it isn't just queues that are not universal. The ad hoc routing in great part explains the lack of true multichannel/universal agents (an agent that can handle all channels within a skill). 27.3% of agents do handle more than one channel, but are not universal across all customer touch-points. Only 28.5% are universal upon hiring, while an additional 28.9% become so with tenure and proficiency. 15.3% of respondents have completely channel-dedicated agents.

As a general rule, do your agents support more than one customer service channel?



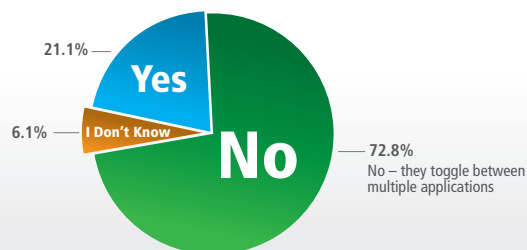
When asked how many channels an agent should routinely be able to support while still providing an exceptional customer experience, 2-3 was the prevailing response for the majority (57.2%).

BEST PRACTICE: Share with the agents the importance of keeping a customer in their channel of choice, whenever it is possible. Be very clear on the guidelines and expectations for when it is necessary to move a customer to another channel. Empower agents to take ownership of the customer's needs and develop their ability to use and apply discretion appropriately.

Simplify the Agent Experience

An important technology investment for the multichannel contact center is the simplified desktop system. When asked, "Do your contact center agents use one unified desktop platform to handle all customer service channels?" 72.8% responded that agents still toggle between multiple applications.

Do your contact center agents use ONE simplified desktop platform to handle ALL customer service channels?



The average number of applications that an agent uses to manage all customer service channels is five, and the complete breakdown is as follows:

- 2-3 applications – 39.7%
- 4-6 applications – 37.7%
- 7-9 applications – 12.5%
- 10-15 applications – 3.2%
- >15 applications – 6.8%

The argument for a simplified agent desktop system is strong, and when ICMI asked the community to select their primary reasons for implementing one, those that rose to the top all circled back to agent and customer experience. It's clear that this technology investment is recognized as a tool to extreme engagement.

"What are the 3 primary reasons your company was motivated to implement a unified desktop system?"

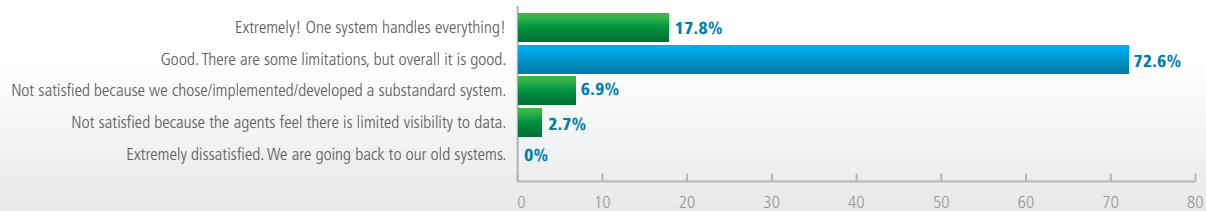
1. To improve the overall agent experience – 56.9%
2. To improve customer satisfaction – 51.4%
3. To improve first-contact-resolution (FCR) – 48.6%



The 56.9% of organizations that say they have implemented the simplified desktop system in part to satisfy the agent have truly recognized the link back to the customer experience. While the top three reasons remained the same for segments of the surveyed population that claim their organization had identified linkages between employee satisfaction and a better customer experience and those that didn't, the prior reported much higher numbers.

The agents are indeed satisfied with the technology as 72.6% report being happy with the single platform, while another 17.8% said they were extremely pleased. Of those that are not as satisfied, 6.9% say it is because the organization chose or implemented the wrong system. Only a small percentage (2.7%) is not satisfied due to limitations in the visibility to data, and no one reported extremely dissatisfied agents!

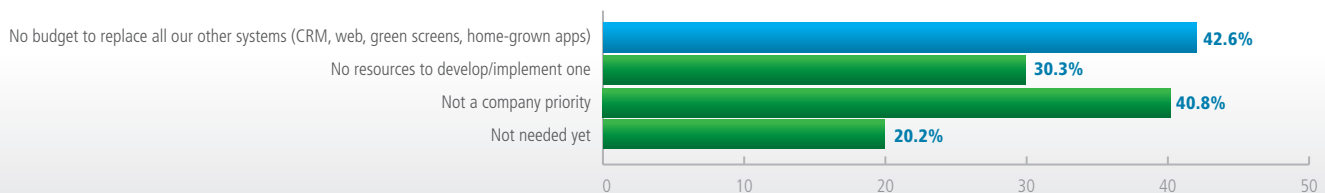
How satisfied are your agents with the simplified agent desktop system?



When we asked respondents “Why do you not have a simplified agent desktop system to handle all customer service channels?” a lack of budget to replace all their systems (42.6%) was the most prevalent answer. 30.3% have no resources to implement, and most discouraging is the observation that a simplified desktop system investment is not a company priority for 40.8%. Only 20.2% said that they were not actually in need of the technology yet.

As one community member stated, “The challenge I face in our multichannel center is that upper management doesn’t understand the importance of having technology and processes to support it.”

Why do you NOT have a simplified agent desktop to handle all customer service channels?



inContact’s Director of Market Intelligence, Madelyn Gengelbach has this to say, “There are different ways you can tackle simplifying the agent experience and simplifying their ability to navigate. One is by simply consolidating the number of screens and reducing the ones that they have to navigate through. Another is to have a unified desktop, which is a lot more resource intensive for the company and can take longer to implement, but both are valid approaches.”

As we discussed earlier, the contact center community still appears to be segmenting agents fairly heavily, instead of employing universal channel and skilling queues. This is not a surprise when one considers the lack of simplified tools and processes.

Use Metrics Wisely

The multichannel contact center often needs to reevaluate how metrics are measured and reported. The combined channels, queues and agents will tell a different story than when all are separate.

For starters, contact center leadership and the agents should have tightened alignment on expectations. There can often be a misunderstanding between what the contact center is reporting, what their unspoken KPIs are, and what the agent is being measured on. Agents operate at a higher efficiency and productivity, and with greater concern for customer satisfaction when they believe metrics are understandable and attainable.

BEST PRACTICE: Review the key metrics that will be measured in each channel and correlate the impact of those metrics on the individual. Include examples of how the data will be shared and with whom, discuss how to interpret reports, and most importantly, how to translate the data into actionable behaviors or process improvements.

Without proper measurements and guidelines, agents will inherently become frustrated, lose focus and engagement, and adopt behaviors that lead to errors, increased escalations, and lower schedule adherence.



BEST PRACTICE: It is necessary for all channels, regardless of volume, to have well-defined KPIs. While they can evolve and change over time, metrics will show the value and impact of each channel on the customer and the business.

With the rise of multichannel, centers are sometimes heard complaining that they see an increase in average handle time (AHT), while CSAT and first-contact-resolution (FCR) are declining.

Here again we see that the addition of new channels into the contact center is not the root cause for metric degradation. In fact, when asked to list the metrics that were POSITIVELY affected by adding channels, survey respondents most often cited:

- *FCR – 35.5%*
- *CSAT – 30.1%*
- *Utilization – 27.4%*
- *Quality – 20.6%*

Not surprisingly, the KPIs that have experienced a negative impact are directly related to agent training, technology, and processes (all which affect agent engagement):

- *AHT – 44.0%*
- *Errors/rework – 25.0%*
- *Adherence to schedule – 22.3%*
- *Transfers/escalations – 19.0%*

As we looked at earlier, the right technology suite will aid an organization in accomplishing their KPI goals. All of the above were seen as easier to achieve with true channel integration into a CRM platform. Newer metrics such as containment, channel availability, customer-effort-score (CES) and speed-to-resolve, can also be better considered with unified systems.

As your contact center evolves, you must ask yourself if the measures of performance that have served you well in the last decade are the same ones that will determine how well your contact center is operating today.

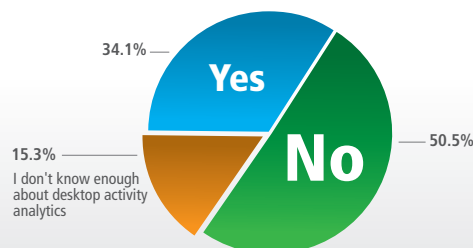
Turn Data into Actionable Data

The simplified agent desktop doesn't just benefit the agent by improving their experience and ability to assist a customer, it also allows for better optimization of their performance.

BEST PRACTICE: Richard Snow, VP and Research Director from Ventana Research recommends using the agent desktop analytics to close the loop between agent activity and the action needed to improve outcomes in the future. With this best practice, patterns can be identified in the data to determine how employees actually spend their time. One can see what applications they access, what data they enter, how much time they spend in each application, and how much time an agent is idle.

Right now, only 34.1% are using agent desktop analytics to measure productivity and efficiency. 15.3% admit that they don't know enough about the applications available, which provides a great opportunity for technology partners. Although it isn't surprising that the larger enterprise organizations report having such analytics tools – 44% for contact centers with 100-249 agents and 50.0% for centers with over 250 – all contact centers can benefit from this type of data.

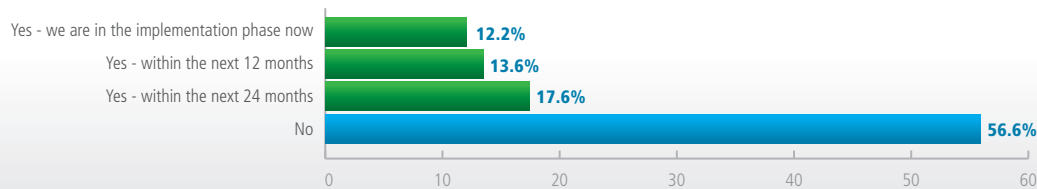
Are you using agent desktop activity analytics (Verint, eglue, Iontas, NICE, etc)
to measure productivity and efficiency of the agent?





Of those currently without desktop analytics in place, 43.4% are in the planning stages – 12.2% are implementing now, 13.6% within 12 months, and 17.6% within the next 2 years.

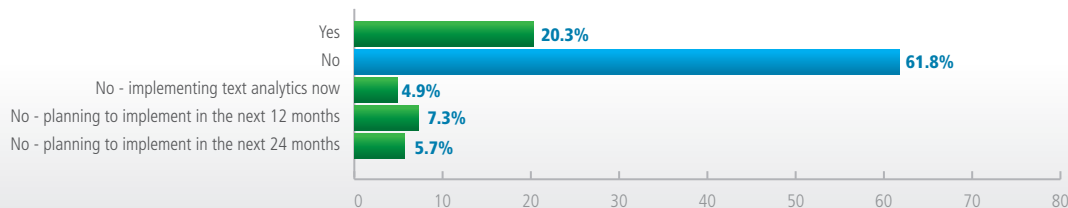
Are you planning to implement agent desktop activity analytics?



BEST PRACTICE: ICMI acknowledges that it can be challenging to establish the proper metrics (speed-of-answer, need-to-answer, and containment) for channels like social media and portal/community moderation. This is where tools that utilize text analytics to analyze written communication channels can be helpful. These applications are not yet commonplace, but we anticipate an uptick in 2014 as more self-help and social mediums are adopted for customer service.

Right now only 20.3% of contact centers are using text analytics, with another 17.9% either in the implementation or planning phases.

Do you currently use text analytics in your contact center to analyze social media interactions and other text-based communications?



As with any added channel, organizations need to invest in tools and agent knowledge so that consumers receive a consistent level of experience. With social in particular though, technology can assist with sifting through the massive volume of social media interactions to identify the most relevant postings that require attention and personalized responses.

Of the data review tools, those that analyze speech patterns and language have arguably been more utilized than desktop activity and text in recent years. Modern QA and recording systems often have them built in. The most common usage of speech analytics are:

- *After-the-call business analysis*
- *Automated Quality / Compliance checks*
- *Tool to decide what calls should go through quality management*
- *Real-time agent guidance (real-time analytics during call)*
- *Real-time supervisor alerts (real-time analytics during call)*

The ability for supervisors to get real-time analytics DURING a call is incredibly powerful. Mobile technology has made this data even more impactful as supervisors can now manage “remotely” while out on the floor and not at their desks. When asked about this innovative practice, only 18.7% of survey respondents currently have supervisors managing through mobile devices. For those that do, they are using the devices to truly make data actionable. Some of the real-time data and contact center capabilities that can be accessed through a mobile device include:

- *Reports and analytics*
- *ACD dashboards and real-time queues*
- *Agent schedules*
- *ACD supervisor interface*
- *Call-barging and call monitoring*
- *Real-time WFM*
- *QA forms and scoring*



“The center of gravity has shifted in terms of business priorities,” says Mariann McDonagh, inContact’s CMO. “With the dawn of the information age, companies began to grapple with how to collect and leverage data and information. And now here we are in a more connected age! A company’s success is tied both to its ability and willingness to put the employee and the customer experience at the very heart of their decision making.”

Involve the Agent

Contact centers that use agent feedback appropriately not only get increased agent engagement and a better customer experience, but also valuable awareness into fragmented processes and technology. This can be insurmountably beneficial for the multichannel center as new applications and methodologies are frequently introduced and changed.

BEST PRACTICE: Expose agents to the tools that the contact center is considering. Don’t wait for the agents to be in a live environment with a new application for them to discover the shortcuts, hang-ups, and idiosyncrasies. Pilot the tool with a group of senior agents and supervisors to vet those things prior to a final decision to ensure that your organization has a full understanding of the technology’s functionality AND limitations.

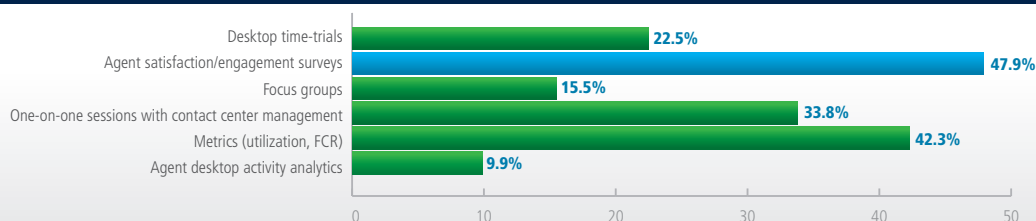
Let’s look at the contact centers that have implemented a simplified desktop system. 63.4% of them correctly realized the value of agent input and involved the frontline in some part of the process.

- *Capability testing – 37.7%*
- *Actual implementation – 29.9%*
- *Initial demo with vendors – 20.8%*
- *RFP creation – 19.5%*
- *SOP/process documentation – 15.6%*
- *Final vendor selection process – 13.0%*

Now take the 90% of agents that say they are somewhat or extremely satisfied with the simplified desktop systems their contact centers have implemented. How was that data procured?

For 47.9% of respondents, the insight was gleaned from surveys. Other methods include metrics such as utilization and FCR (42.3%), one-on-one sessions with contact center management (33.8%), desktop time-trials (22.5%), focus groups (15.5%), and agent desktop activity analytics (9.9%).

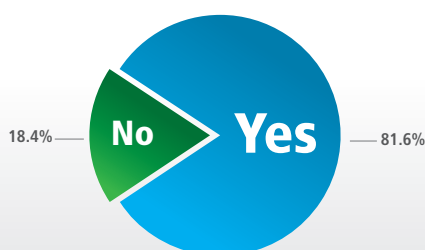
How have you measured agent satisfaction and /or productivity improvement of the simplified desktop system?



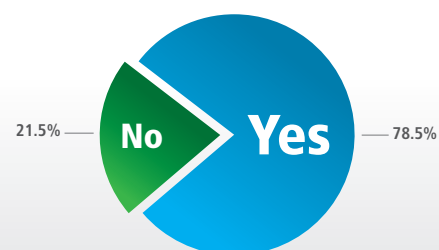
BEST PRACTICE: Technology selection is not the only place where candid agent feedback is advantageous. It is also useful to ask the front-line how they like supporting specific channels and customers so that the organization can potentially make adjustments to marketing, training, management style, customer type, or product direction. It’s important to ask them about ALL channels for comparison and contrast purposes.

For example, 81.6% of agents claim to like supporting social media customers and 78.5% like those that come in through mobile.

Do your agents like supporting social media customers?



Do your agents like supporting mobile customers?





The top cited reasons are:

- *Social customers are more technologically savvy than others - 41.84%*
- *Social media technology is more fun to use - 40.82%*
- *Mobile customers are more technologically savvy than others - 39.51%*
- *Agents are able to be more candid and less scripted in their social responses - 35.71%*
- *Mobile customers are less demanding than other channels - 33.33%*

Equally as valuable are the reasons that agents do not like supporting certain channels. In this case, social and mobile:

- *Contact center mobile technology is challenging for agents to use – 40.0%*
- *Social customers are more demanding than other channels - 31.25%*
- *The social QA process isn't as defined as with traditional channels - 31.25%*
- *There is inadequate training for social media - 31.25%*
- *Mobile customers are more demanding than other channels – 30.0%*

As one respondent said, “Social is such a public channel that agents are less confident posting versus a 1 on 1 interaction.” Another said, “Agents have helped us with the social rules - what to communicate and what not to address.”

Overwhelmingly those contact centers that have true universal agents and are actively soliciting AE and ASAT are the ones most likely to involve agents in the decision-making process. Those that are not tend to rely heaviest on metrics as success measurements and not agent feedback.

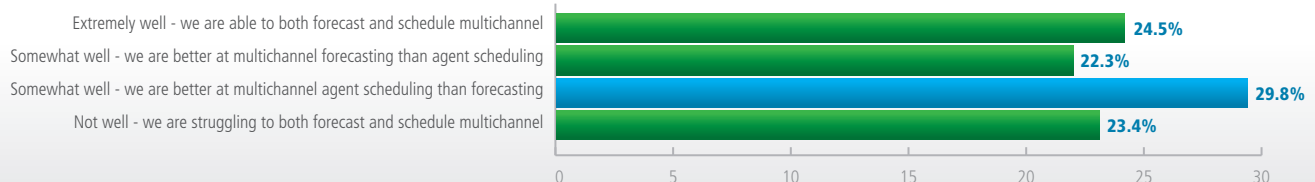
Connect the Forecasting & Scheduling Dots

As discussed earlier, ad hoc channel routing can negatively impact an agent's productivity. It also affects the contact center's ability to forecast and schedule as volume may not all be accounted for appropriately.

BEST PRACTICE: Not only will a universal CRM platform assist with scheduling and forecasting, but so too will the merging of channel queues and agent skills. Both of these best practices are necessary as contact center leaders acknowledge that they are currently struggling with these essential operational practices.

Only a quarter (24.5%) responded that they are able to forecast and schedule multichannel support extremely well. 29.8% said they are better at multichannel agent scheduling, while 22.3% replied that multichannel forecasting was easier. The remaining 23.4% admitted that they were unable to do either well. This divided response indicates a serious need within the multichannel contact center.

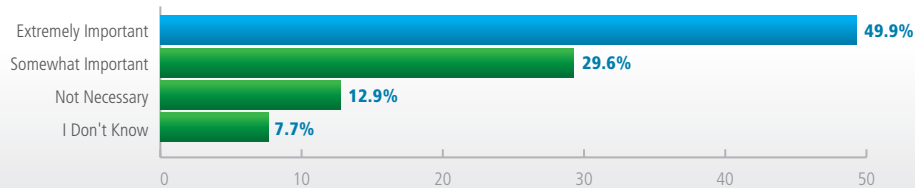
How well do you forecast and schedule multichannel blended activity for your contact center?



To further reinforce, when asked, “How important is the ability to forecast and schedule blended multichannel activity for your contact center?” 1/2 (49.8%) agreed that it is extremely important. Another 29.6% responded that it was somewhat important, and only 12.9% did not think it was necessary.



How important is the ability to forecast and schedule blended multichannel activity (ie: inbound/outbound, mobile, chat, social) for your contact center?



Consider Channel Experimentation

While industry research has shown that customer preference for using the phone is still strong, organizations must also understand how the other channels are perceived and where their evolution is headed.

ICMI recognizes that there are many new methods of customer support in the multichannel bailiwick, but that not all are being prioritized at this point. So where do you start?

BEST PRACTICE: ICMI encourages organizations to experiment first with non-voice channels that are either easily routed through your current technology, or don't require major investment or integration. If you don't already offer email, this is a logical place to begin. Email is the second most common channel and its asynchronous nature will add less queuing and KPI pressure on the contact center. Live agent chat is also a channel that you can easily experiment with in terms of queue priority.

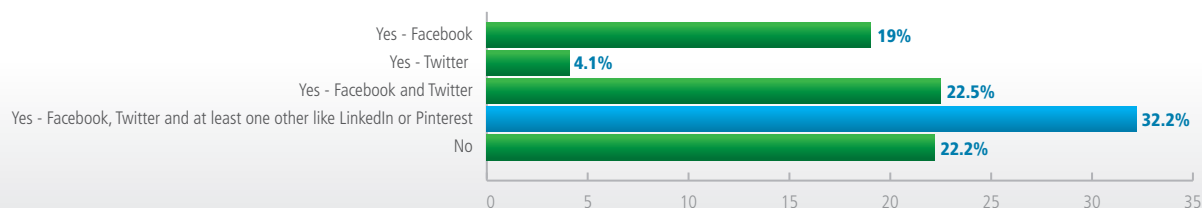
McDonald from inContact also reiterates that a cloud infrastructure can assist with experimentation. "It's very easy to experiment with new channels because it's easy to turn them on and off. The other thing with cloud, is that it's easy to add points of service, so that if you have seasonal spikes, you want to try out home agents, or add new locations you can do it. Regardless of where your contact centers are, you can harmonize the agent interface and keep all your rules and processes of reporting in one place."

While the emerging channels aren't as prevalent in the contact center yet, there are a few that are worthy of consideration. In a research study conducted by ICMI earlier in 2013, 51.5% of contact center professionals consider social media support to be a competitive differentiator and 63.3% said the same for mobile. 72.2% felt mobile was a necessary customer service channel, while 67.2% say social is.

Although we have inquired about the usage and planning roadmap for other channels, our research focus this year has centered on social, mobile (transactional, automated, or live) and advanced self-service (proactive one-way SMS, interactive knowledgebases, or virtual assistants/bots).

Social: According to Forrester, social media is at the core of a multichannel strategy because it has such vast impact on an organization's brand. Yet, while 77.8% of the ICMI community reports having an active social presence through Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, or other mediums, far fewer are actually supporting social media as a customer service channel.

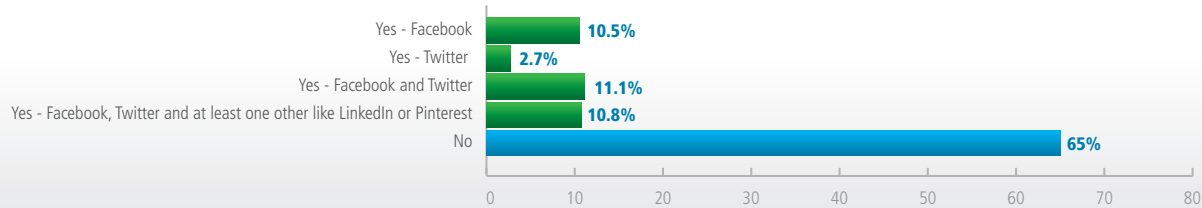
Does your company have an active social media presence?



When directly asked, 65.0% are not supporting social. For those that are, 11.1% are doing so through both Facebook and Twitter, 10.8% have added a third outlet such as LinkedIn or Pinterest, and 10.5% support through Facebook alone. A much smaller number (2.7%) are solely using Twitter as their social media channel.



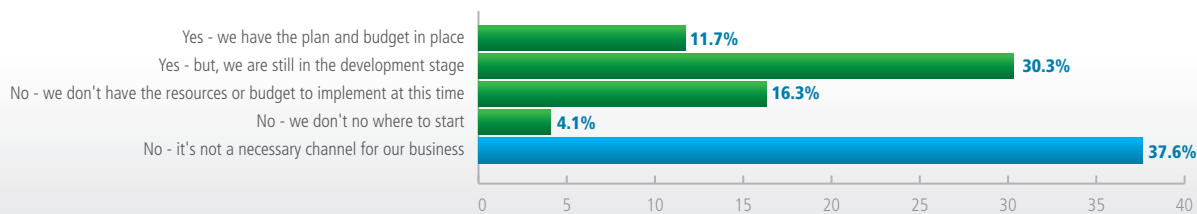
Does your contact center support social media as a customer service channel?



For those that are not yet supporting social, 58.0% (down from 70.1% earlier in 2013) are not planning to add it as a customer service channel within the next 12 months. The majority (37.6%) of those respondents do not feel it is a necessary channel for their specific business, another 16.33% want to but do not have the resources or budget, while a small percentage (4.1%) simply doesn't know where to begin.

Of those that are in the process, 11.7% have the plan and budget in place while 30.3% are only in the development phase.

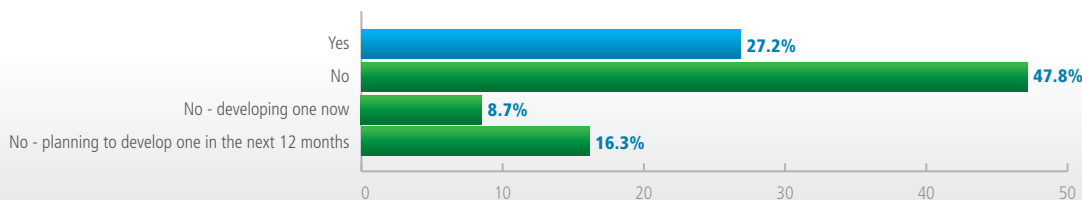
Do you plan to add Social Media as a customer service channel within the next 12 months?



Admittedly, contact center managers are struggling with social media integration in large part because the volume is small when compared to the traditional channels. Forrester and others reiterate though, that a focus on volume shouldn't be the point; it's about the channel impact and its ability to engage customers publicly.

Mobile: It used to be that customers would expect support through their mobile device as soon as a company debuted a mobile web app or native/smartphone app. That is no longer the case. If you have a website that can be accessed through a smartphone, then customers will naturally expect you can service them directly from the device. When asked, "Does your company have a mobile app your customers use to get information and connect with your contact center?" 27.2% answered in the affirmative, while another 25.0% are in development now.

Does your company have a mobile app your customers use to get information and connect with your contact center?

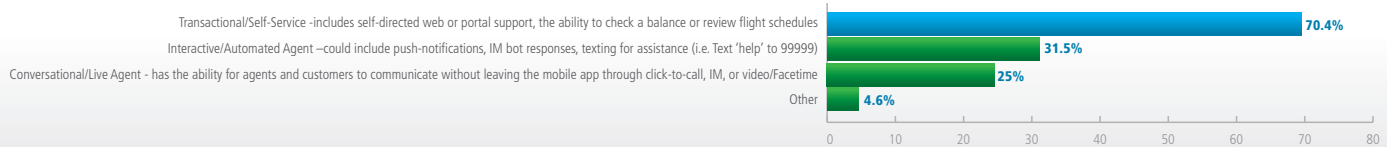


The point is, without "on the glass" support, customers will likely seek other channels and this will impact their satisfaction and thereby their engagement.

For the only 29.9% that are offering support through their web or native/smartphone app, 70.4% are offering it via in-app transactional self-service, 31.5% have more advanced mobile support that includes interactive or automated agents and texting for assistance, and 25.0% utilize live agents for in-app communication through click-to-call, IM, text/SMS, or video/Facetime.

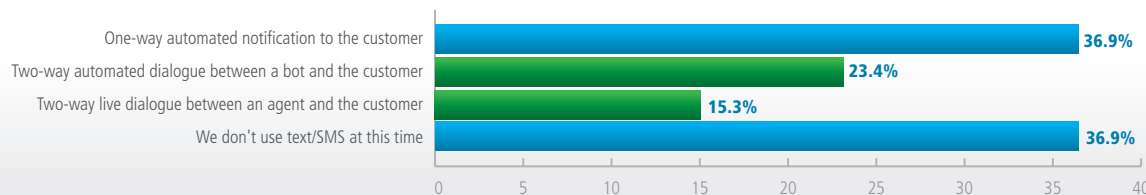


Is your Mobile customer service...



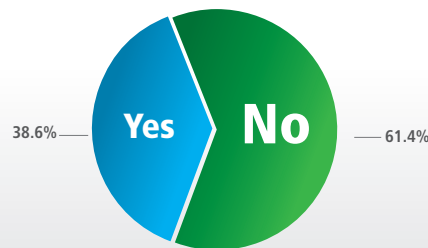
When we directly asked these respondents with a mobile solution how their company used the growing-in-popularity text/SMS to communicate with customers, 36.9% said they utilize it for outward one-way notifications. 23.4% consider it an automated dialogue mechanism between a customer and a bot, while only 15.3% utilize it for live conversations with agents. Another 36.9% do not use text/SMS at this time.

How does your company use text/SMS as a customer service channel?



61.4% are not planning to provide mobile customer service within the next 12 months.

Do you plan to provide Mobile customer service within the next 12 months?



And let's not forget self-service.

Advanced Self-Service: For years companies have tried to keep customers from having an unstructured access into customer service. Nowadays, customers want the opportunity to help themselves...until they can't any longer.

"Use self-service as your first agent," says Gengelbach. "Self-service is a dynamic tool to manage the customer experience and help the agent experience; it's not a gatekeeper or a welcome mat."

While self-service is often enough to resolve a customer's support issue, supplying a real-time (or near real-time) channel – chat, phone, or even Twitter – is becoming more and more important.

Customers who cannot resolve their issue through a self-service option need to be able to reach a human; lest they feel helpless. That helplessness often translates to frustration which is then shared publicly across social networks. It's quite easy to see how the multichannel options are intertwined with one another.

While this research did not specifically focus on self-service, it is an important channel to consider and an easy one to experiment with.

In ICMI research from earlier this year, participants rated web self-service as their second preferred choice, showing that a quicker and more thorough resolution may in some cases outshine live agent assistance.

When asked, "What impact does self-service have on your customers?" contact center leaders agreed that quicker response times (45.2%) and increased first-contact-resolution (42.6%) were of the most significant impact. The preponderance (84.1%) also thought self-service was a necessary customer service channel.

As with any channel selection, it is necessary that the organization balance a customer's perceived preference with the channel's best functionality.



Empower the Team

As Justin Robbins pointed out in his Expert Spotlight, ‘Training the Multichannel Agent’, there are several approaches one can take to ensure comprehension around new channels and material.

- *Back-to-the-Basics*
- *Gamification*
- *E-Learning*
- *Role Play*
- *Social Media*

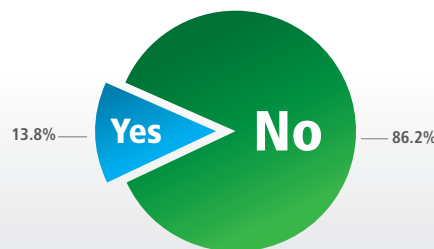
Not only do these methodologies work for training, but they can also be employed to increase excitement, empowerment, and engagement for the multichannel team.

BEST PRACTICE: ICMI recommends giving agents access to tools, products, and practices that the customer employs, so that agents can better understand the end-user experience. It’s challenging for the agent to buy-in on either the mobile or social customer service channels, for example, if they are forbidden from using them while within the contact center.

Let’s look at gamification and role-playing for the mobile channel. Agents that are supporting mobile customer service should understand the experience from the customer’s standpoint. By giving them access to smartphones, tablets, and apps you can both educate them through the eyes-of-the-customer, and make it entertaining and engaging to support them. This can be a challenging concept for many contact centers to adopt from a security, financial and utilization standpoint, but the empowerment end-result is worth the process investment.

According to our community, only 13.8% of agents currently use smartphones or tablets to answer customer service questions, although several respondents did say they were piloting programs.

Do your agents use smartphones or tablets to answer customer service questions?



And most agents (82.7%) still don’t have visibility into contact center technology via an app from their mobile device. Of the only 17.3% that do, agents are using the app to access:

- *Schedules*
- *E-Learning*
- *Reports and analytics*
- *CRM*
- *The community moderation tool or portal*
- *Social media*
- *QA scores*
- *Trouble-ticketing system*

The social media training methodology that Robbins’ discussed can also be useful as an agent empowerment tool. Here again, it is recommended that if agents support social media, that they should also have access to it.

When asked, “Do your agents have PERSONAL access to social networks while at work?” over ½ (58%) do not allow it. Of those that do, almost all have tight restrictions such as: not permitted during on-schedule hours, only on dedicated kiosks away from the operations floor, no access on work system/equipment, only on personal devices, on breaks, or access only from their own mobile device.



Of those that do allow access on company machines and property, the social media allowance is as follows:

- *Facebook* - 80.27%
- *LinkedIn* - 72.20%
- *Twitter* - 57.85%
- *SMS/Text* - 45.74%

This question generated a lot of free-form answers and the preponderance of responses indicates confliction over social media within the contact center. Of course, there was great concern conveyed over the inability to properly control usage.

Some participants in the study recognized that access to social increases employee engagement and morale. While this research did not specifically ask about that correlation, it is clear that allowing agents to use personal social media in the common areas of the contact center (break rooms, cafeteria, locker rooms) and while on lunch and breaks, is a perk appreciated by employees.

The disparity between the recognized importance of social, and the hesitation of organizations to allow it internally, is unfortunately very strong. There is evidence proving that a true social media presence must start internally and then be extended externally.

These are definitely areas where contact centers can contemplate investment and consideration in the upcoming year.

CONCLUSION

The Value of Multichannel

Ovum's Keith Dawson recently stated that there is a direct correlation between the contact center agent and the customer experience. Dawson said that, "We are still in the early days of what will clearly be a years-long revolution in how companies and customers communicate. But what's clear is that agents are still going to be the focal point for the highest complexity (and highest value) interactions."

We've seen many organizations handle multichannel well, and they are leveraging the new channels smartly. These enterprises know that the experience from the agent all the way to the customer must be as seamless and consistent as possible, regardless of channel. They also identify that a consistent experience allows the customer to choose their initial path indiscriminately and then escalate or be gracefully transitioned to a more appropriate channel if the issue is too complicated.

It's very important, no matter what the channel, for a customer to be able to seamlessly transition over to a live agent, when needed. Not only does it improve that immediate customer experience, but it also positively impacts the perceived significance of the agent. When agents are used less for the mundane and simple, and more for the complex and higher-value, they feel more utilized and valuable. That translates easily into agent happiness, which ultimately impacts customer engagement.

As inContact and DMG Consulting concluded in their 2011 report, transitioning to a multichannel contact center is no longer an option; it is essential. "Allowing customers to use their channel of choice, when they want and the way they want, is going to be considered the minimal acceptable level of service within the next 5 years." If that is to be believed, then contact centers have less than 2 years to adapt.

Benchmarking and guidance such as this provides contact centers the context they need to create a solid 2014 multichannel roadmap and take advantage of the opportunity to better align technology, agents, processes and customers.

While ICMI can't specifically tell you WHICH channels to support, we can tell you how best to plan and prepare your multichannel contact center to perform at its best.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

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ABOUT ICMI

The International Customer Management Institute (ICMI), is the leading global provider of comprehensive resources for customer management professionals—from frontline agents to executives—who wish to improve contact center operations, empower contact center employees and enhance customer loyalty. ICMI's experienced and dedicated team of industry insiders, analysts and consultants are committed to providing uncompromised objectivity and results-oriented vision through the organization's respected lineup of professional services including training and certification, consulting, events and informational resources. Founded in 1985, ICMI continues to serve as one of the most established and respected organizations in the call center industry.



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