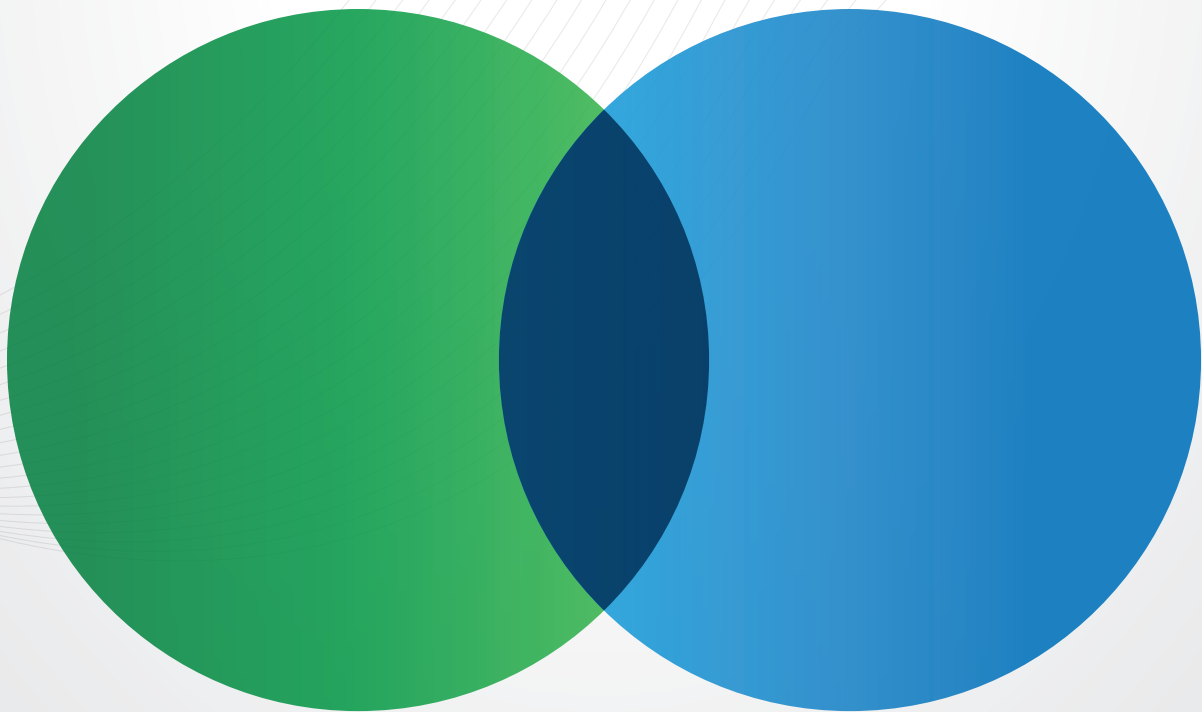


Overcoming **PRODUCTIVITY & EFFICIENCY** *Challenges*

in the Multichannel Contact Center

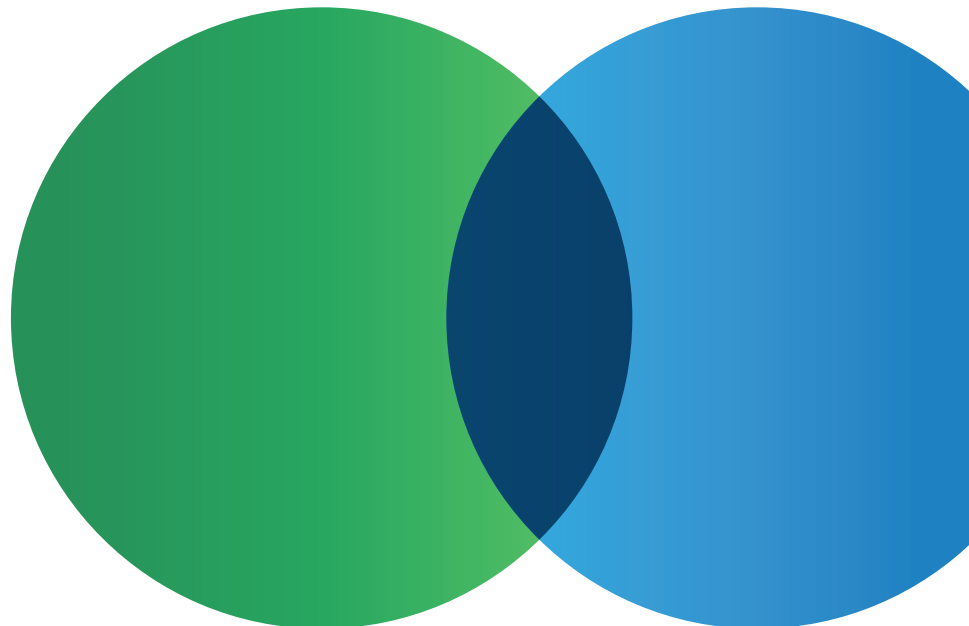




OVERCOMING PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY CHALLENGES IN THE MULTICHANNEL CONTACT CENTER

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OVERCOMING PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY CHALLENGES IN THE MULTICHANNEL CONTACT CENTER

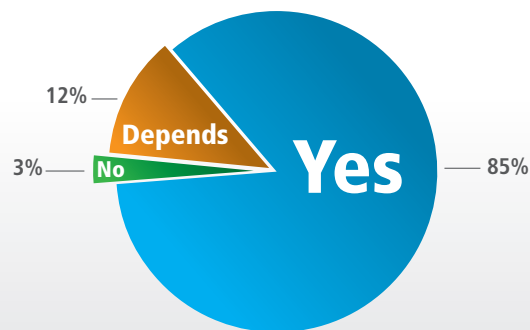
Many contact centers struggle to find a happy balance between engagement and efficiency. This is often amplified by the seemingly continuous need to add new channels to service customers. Senior leaders and contact center executives are often concerned that every additional channel of contact – be that chat, phone, email or emerging modes like social media, smartphone apps or text – puts the organization at risk of creating productivity hurdles and speed bumps. Interestingly, the secret to increased productivity in the age of multichannel isn't necessarily achieved through more resources but rather through a keen attention to the needs of a contact center's talent pool. A happy agent can be instrumental to optimized efficiency in the multichannel contact center, suggests findings from a recent study.

In the third quarter of 2013, the International Customer Management Institute (ICMI) polled contact center professionals through its survey titled "The Agent Experience in the Multichannel World." The 525 survey respondents exemplified all levels of the contact center, with the majority being in leadership roles - managers (40%), directors (17%) or executives (13%). Participants around the world took the survey, although primary representation came from North American contact centers.

The results, published in ICMI's October 2013 report "The Multichannel Agent: A 2014 Contact Center Roadmap, Research Report and Best Practices Guide" revealed that two-thirds of survey respondents perceived a strong correlation between agent satisfaction, agent engagement and operational efficiency. The report also revealed that in order to capitalize on the agent in the multichannel environment, more training is required over an oft-perceived need for higher wages or financial incentives.

With regards to the customer, 65% of contact centers have identified links between an agent's engagement/satisfaction and a better customer experience. Furthermore, 85% truly believe that happy agents do make happy customers.

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



So how does this all relate back to multichannel and agent productivity? An ICMI survey conducted in June 2013 determined that 93% of customers felt that even if they got good service from a contact center agent, they would have a substantial increase in satisfaction if they were also able to get that service through their preferred channel.

The root cause of highly-engaged (or disengaged) customers all points back to the agent experience.

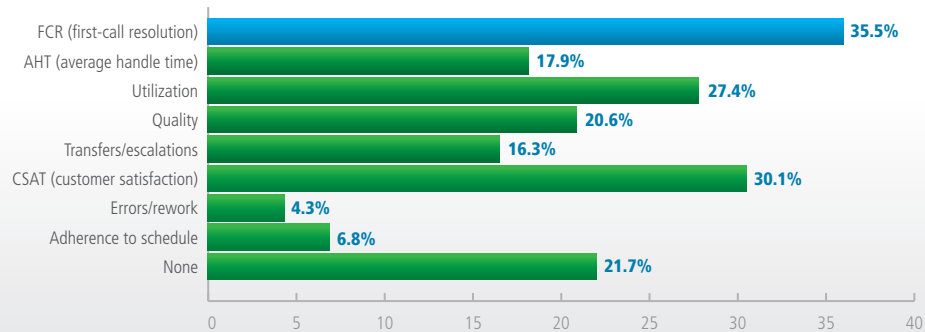
Don't blame the multichannel

When it comes to the multichannel call center experience, much focus is put on the channels of contact – be it through web chat, social media or mobile applications. As contact center administrators begin to put more pressure on agents to be all things to their callers, they fear a loss of productivity and increase of inefficiency. It makes sense, after all – executives add another channel of support and watch as the change ripples outward to affect the entire contact center. It's easy to blame the new service model for any perceived decrease in productivity or efficiency.

But for about 40% of survey respondents, additional points of contact did not actually have any effect on the overall productivity or operational efficiency of the operation. What's more, critical KPIs were improved for a third of the survey respondents – first call resolution (FCR) went up with the addition of more channels for 36%, and customer satisfaction (CSAT) increased for 30% of survey respondents.



What agent KPIs/metrics have been POSITIVELY affected by adding in the new channels?



“There’s too much blame being put right now on multichannel for the productivity and efficiency challenges within the contact center. It’s really not the fault of the multichannel,” said Sarah Stealey Reed, content director for ICMI. “Adding more channels isn’t the root cause of inefficiency and lower productivity. It’s actually the processes, training and technology.”

Adding more channels to the contact center process does not automatically decrease productivity for contact center agents. The negative impact on productivity from offering multichannel points of contact stems from the initial learning curve related to a new process, revealed the study. The study also highlighted a decrease in productivity linked to the requirement of the agents to juggle multiple applications for each channel.

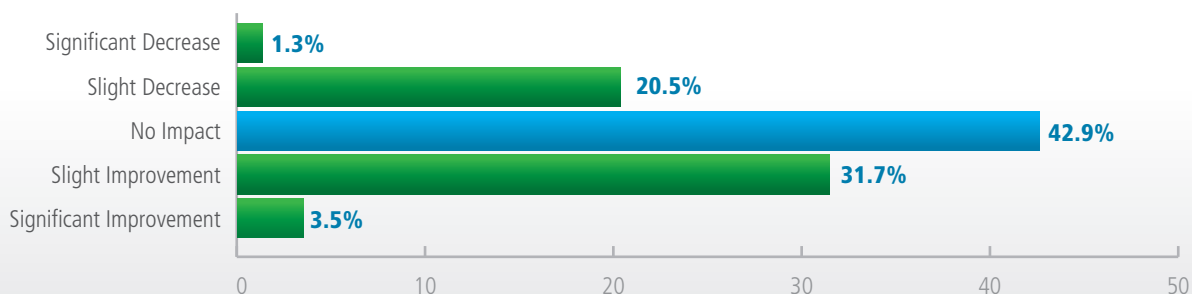
Given the opportunity for growth and expansion, the multichannel offers unexpected perks for contact centers struggling to do more with tighter budgets, but as with all ventures, several critical factors must also be tweaked. Success in the multichannel has a direct relationship with the contact center agent experience.

Happy agents make happy customers

Every contact center director wants their employees to be happy, and while that is a lofty goal, it sometimes is prioritized low on – or is absent from – the list of critical business needs. ICMI has found a direct relationship between happy agents and customer engagement, which supports a solid profit margin for the business. Over 85% of ICMI survey respondents said that happy agents make happy customers. The customer also feels the impact of agent happiness – 92% of consumers agreed that the contact center agent’s perceived “happiness” really impacted the consumer experience with the company.

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?” 43% said there had been no impact and 35% said there had been an actual improvement.

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



“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.”



The additional points of contact offered by a multichannel contact center can provide a positive influence upon the engagement of the agent, and as mentioned earlier, ICMI research indicated that 65% of contact centers have confirmed linkages between engaged employees and better customer experiences.

So if increasing channels is necessary for today's connected customers, and agents actually prefer the higher complexity, then why are multichannel centers experiencing problems with productivity and efficiency? How can we balance the needs of customers and the business while maintaining sanity and well-being for the contact center agents?

Unfortunately, it's not as easy as scheduling office pizza parties and casual Fridays: In this case, the kind of agent happiness that drives customer engagement lies in removing elements of the processes that make the agent frustrated or make it difficult for them to do their jobs.

Analysis of ICMI's survey data suggests two primary courses of action: training for the many channels and establishing technological strategies to optimize agent and customer engagement.

Training for multichannel

While operational efficiency is often optimized by technological processes, contact centers are first and foremost still a human-oriented business. The ICMI research reveals that training is an area where contact centers can make enormous strides toward agent satisfaction.

The primary point of fallout is a learning curve around the unique frameworks for individual new channels. According to 46% of survey respondents, multichannel agents necessitate more training than their dedicated channel counterparts and a quarter of the respondents felt that multichannel offerings require different agent skill sets.

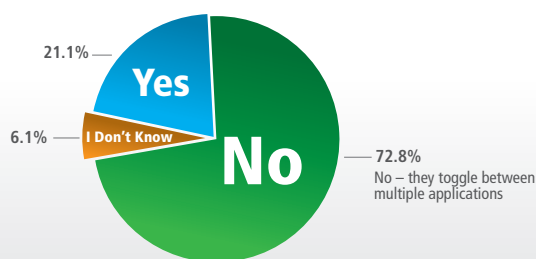
The emerging channels often make this even more challenging, and about a third (31%) of contact center agents themselves indicated that their training for social customer service wasn't up to snuff. And in an online poll conducted by ICMI in the first quarter of 2013, almost half (49%) of respondents admitted that they had not formally trained or even casually coached their agents to handle social media questions.

The right tools for the job

Training alone isn't enough. Agents require the right tools to be able to act quickly and address customer needs efficiently. Given the different nuances of the different channels, and the fact that many contact centers are built on multiple applications and platforms, the infrastructure and agent support may call for a major paradigm shift.

Multichannel has the potential to be a death by a thousand paper cuts. For instance, 73% of respondents recognized that agents supporting multichannels were required to toggle between multiple screens and user interfaces.

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 survey results were supported by anecdotal responses from ICMI's members. "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."

Those many applications and the minutes spent toggling between them can add up to big productivity vacuums. According to Omer Minkara of the Aberdeen Group, about 26% of an agent's time during each customer contact is spent trying to find relevant data across different systems and screens. Imagine the opportunity for better customer engagement if the agent could spend a fraction of that wasted search time on building rapport and trust – or simply by decreasing the time spent per engagement to reduce AHT or waiting agents, driving resources and expense avoidance that fuels the overall organization's bottom line.

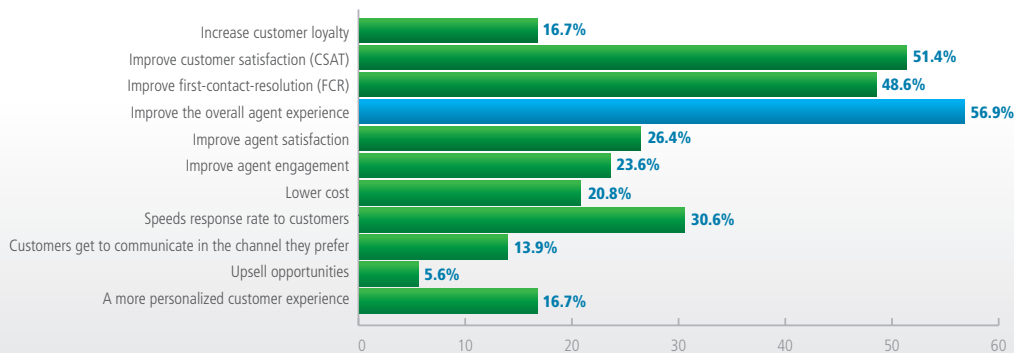
Many wasted moments can translate into big savings in a tough economy. For a contact center with 400 agents, for instance, Minkara estimates a \$2.1 million unnecessary spend annually. Those three out of four survey respondents with multiple desktop applications as standard operating procedure should keep that in mind.

The key for contact center strategists will be finding a happy medium. Research indicates the solution could be in the form of a simplified desktop.

Of the survey respondents (21%) that had begun to simplify the agent desktop, the ROI is clearly paying off in terms of increased productivity and decreased inefficiency. For instance, over 46% have recognized that agents could navigate screens faster and reduce the time spent per contact. About 36% realized an improvement in their FCR scores and 21% improved error rates. Benefits were realized downstream as well, as escalations and transfers decreased for 19% of survey respondents. About a third of the survey participants (30%) welcomed the benefit of simplifying the agent experience, allowing the agents to focus on mastering only one process or technology while building confidence in their ability to respond to customer inquiries.

More compelling is the why behind the buy-in for a simplified desktop system. More than half (57%) of organizations that have adopted a simplified agent desktop system did so in hopes of improving the overall agent experience. Other reasons included improving customer satisfaction (51%) and FCR (49%).

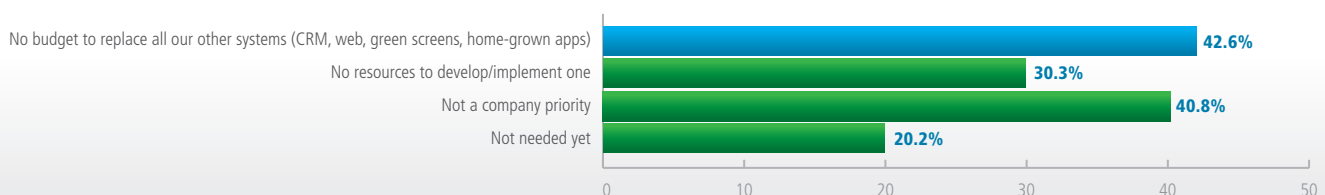
What are the 3 primary reasons your company was motivated to implement a simplified agent desktop system?



These hypotheses are proving true, as 73% of agents who have enjoyed a simplified desktop report being happy with the single platform while another 18% reported being extremely pleased. ICMI's "Best Practices Roadmap for the Multichannel" supports a simplified agent experience, suggesting these organizations that have adopted a single platform are poised for extreme engagement for agent and customer experience.

The main hurdle to obtaining a simplified desktop is lack of budget for 43% of survey respondents, but for some, it's either not a company priority (41%), there are no internal resources to implement (30%), or a simplified desktop was deemed unnecessary (20%).

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



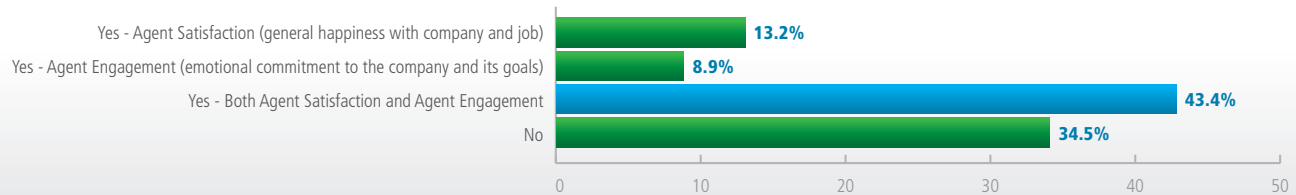


Strategy for engagement

Additionally, a top down paradigm shift is necessary for true operational efficiency in the multichannel. It starts with how senior leadership approaches the people behind the points of contact. True multichannel success hinges upon senior leadership having a deep commitment to the idea that a satisfied agent is the first step toward having engaged customers

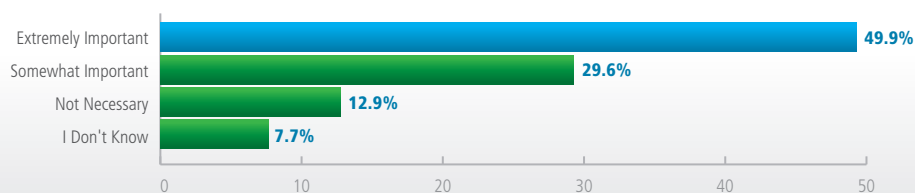
About 65% of ICMI survey respondents specifically measured agent engagement or agent satisfaction, and 43% of those respondents engaged in measuring both. Among those contact centers that measure both agent areas, a staggering 82% were able to draw a positive connection to operational efficiency.

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



Agents who are employed by contact centers that are forecasting volume for multichannel are also better enabled to understand and focus on supporting and serving the customer. Imagine trying to schedule and staff towards a projected light phone volume day, only to be slammed in reality by hundreds of emails and chat requests. Contact center leaders overwhelmingly felt that multichannel scheduling and forecasting was either somewhat important (30%) or extremely important (50%).

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



Strategic forecasting of all contact volume is critical to maintaining engaged and satisfied agents, which has a direct correlation to customer satisfaction, according to the ICMI study. However, the trend of customer contact through newer channels like social media and even standard contact points like email are tougher to track and therefore tougher to predict.

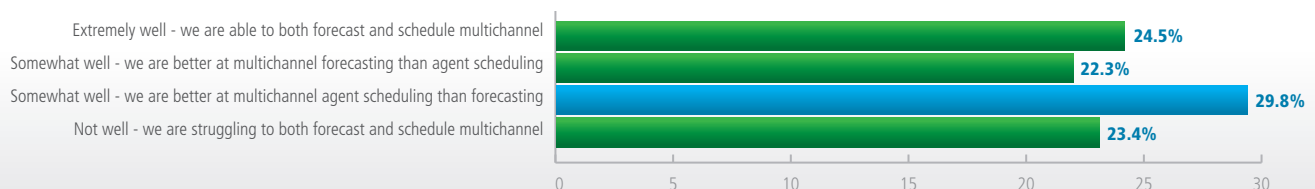
"We only forecast inbound calls," said one respondent. "Our emails and other channels do not come through an ACD and are difficult to forecast."

"Our primary forecasting and scheduling is ONLY for our phone volume," said another respondent.

Only a quarter of the survey respondents reported that they are able to both schedule and forecast against multichannel activity extremely well and 23% indicated that they are struggling to forecast traffic and schedule agents against the influx of new channels.

Strategic staffing against the multichannel activity will be a critical component of extreme contact center productivity as customers come to expect more mobility, connectivity and transparency from organizations.

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





The Value of Multichannel

With the new multichannel world comes a host of opportunities for maximum exposure, but with all growth comes a few growing pains. As the contact center transitions via multichannel to become what Gartner describes as a “customer engagement center,” leaders will need to address some fundamental leaps of faith in the agents.

For instance, agents are often confused by the significance of average handle time (AHT) in the contact center. While they can appreciate the correlation to operational efficiency, they may feel conflicted with their interest in taking care of a customer.

It’s also imperative that leaders recognize and communicate that with different models of support, the same KPIs aren’t applicable. For instance, agents can handle and prioritize multiple emails and chats simultaneously, wherein they cannot with voice. Self-service support is often not tracked or credited to a particular agent (or is perhaps tracked at the same level as a traditional phone call), despite being a highly sought service for customers. Agents can be concerned that their work isn’t “counting” or worse, is counting against their productivity metrics. For instance, “Chats take almost twice the amount of time compared to a call,” said one survey respondent. Without defined KPI goals and operational transparency, agents are at risk for feeling frustration and losing focus – along with that critical level of engagement that is directly correlated to customer satisfaction.

“To better engage customers, better analytics are required in the hands of agents. Better integration of channels is essential...Better social media engagement capabilities. New types of hiring,” said Michael Maoz, vice president distinguished analyst for Gartner. “In short, new ways of thinking and doing.”

Another best practice requires an alignment of the skill sets of the right agent with the right channel, which may impact how contact centers are staffing currently.

“Just because an agent is great in voice does not mean that they’re great in written channel and vice versa,” said Madelyn Gengelbach, director of product marketing at inContact. “We’re seeing changes in hiring practices in multichannel contact centers by screening first even before they get to verbal – writing samples to prepare them for being in that multichannel world.”

“As a multichannel service agent, I need to mention that not everybody is qualified nor oriented to provide support for different situations and products at the same time,” one survey respondent remarked.

Multichannel doesn’t have to be a productivity killer and in fact, may increase and optimize the efficiency of contact centers. The road to extreme engagement requires a commitment from the senior leadership to create positive experiences for the agents through technological and cultural cues. Training is key as agents move into these desired multichannel contact points like social media, mobile, and self-service models, with very clear expectations and accurate forecasting measures to lessen the risk of agent burn-out.

With strategic implementation of multichannels, specifically those channels that are attractive to an organization’s particular customers, contact centers can potentially enjoy improved CSAT and FCR results as well as better talent retention through happy agents. For more insight on building a highly engaged customer contact center, read ICMI’s recent report titled “The Multichannel Agent: A 2014 Contact Center Roadmap, Research Report and Best Practices Guide.”



ABOUT THIS REPORT

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ICMI research sponsors do not have access to research participant information, including individual survey responses

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.



ABOUT INCONTACT

inContact (NASDAQ: SAAS) is the cloud contact center software leader, helping organizations around the globe create high quality customer experiences. inContact is 100% focused on the cloud and is the only provider to combine cloud software with an enterprise-class telecommunications network for a complete customer interaction solution. Winner of Frost & Sullivan 2012 North American Cloud Company of the Year in Cloud Contact Center Solutions, inContact has deployed over 1,300 cloud contact center instances. To learn more, visit www.inContact.com.

