

Considering Agent Services?

Ask the right questions to find the
best vendor and get the best results

E-BOOK



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The State of Customer Service Today

Are call centers still the apex of enterprise customer support? And what role does automation and self-service play?

Businesses spend \$1.3 trillion on 265 billion service calls each year.¹ And 53% of companies expect call volumes to hold steady or increase over the next two years.²

With the rise of AI and the hype that came with it, many organizations hope they can automate customer service conversations to reduce call center costs while maintaining, or even improving, customer satisfaction.

¹ IBM, 2017, "How chatbots can help reduce customer service costs by 30%"

² Deloitte, 2019 Global Contact Center Survey

53% of companies

expect call volumes to remain the same or increase in the next two years

Source: Deloitte, 2019 Global Contact Center Survey

Customers want to get things done quickly and all at once, using their agent of choice—human or automated. They expect a self-serve option, so that's a must-have for any customer experience (CX) leader. However, consumers also crave a human touch.

Companies want to keep customers happy and to drive profitability, which require they deliver superior customer service experiences and control costs. Accordingly, companies need to carefully evaluate, and balance, their use of live agents and automation.

The Virtues, and Challenges, of Outsourcing

Agent services providers are usually good at containing costs. But will the service itself be superior? This is especially tricky today when automation handles the easy issues, which means agents must be more sophisticated than ever, with deep knowledge and unique skills.

How do you find the right agent services vendor? Just getting started is daunting.

Use this e-book to figure out your goals and what type of provider best matches your needs.



The top CX drivers for customers are:

- Reps answering all their questions
- Quick problem resolution
- Reps solving their problems without help

Source: Forrester, 2019

Chapter One

What Do You Want From Your Agents?



What Do You Want From Your Agents?

In today's digitally saturated world, companies need to create an outstanding CX to maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty. But with so many brands clamoring for customer attention, how can companies separate themselves from the pack?

By making it personal.

Consumers expect the option to self-serve, but for many issues they still want the human touch. Human connection is key to building brand value and elevating CX, and drives loyalty, retention, and revenue.

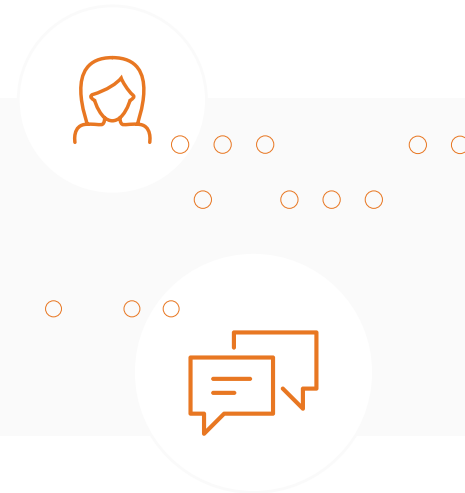
Aligning to your brand DNA

Part of creating a superior CX is delivering on your brand promise with every interaction. Only with deep knowledge of your solutions, processes, and style can agents truly be "on brand." And that requires more than basic training.

Understanding digital and conversational nuance

Consumers today want to contact brands however they prefer, which means companies need to offer more options than just a voice channel. As you expand your customer service to include voice, chat, messaging, and more, you need agents who know how to interact effectively on each channel.

For example, voice agents need core conversational skills and emotional intelligence in your customers' native language. Digital agents need to read between the lines of written communications to understand what consumers are really trying to say or do. On messaging channels, digital agents need to know how to pause and resume the conversation at a pace determined by the customer. Agents working alongside automation need to pick up a conversation without asking for that's already been provided. The more complex the customer journey, the greater the required agent skill level.



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Training and skills

Evaluate your agent requirements

To select the best vendor for your needs, first decide exactly what you expect agents to do.

In what channels do we need agent proficiency?

Do you need voice agents, digital agents, or both?

Where are agents located and how are they managed?

With COVID-19 forcing agents to work from home, the ability of an outsource partner to train and motivate a distributed workforce has never been more important.

What soft skills do we require?

In addition to technical know-how, agents need to be savvy in hard-to-quantify abilities such as emotional intelligence, core conversational skills, digital nuance, and cultural cohesion.

What languages do we need agents to speak?

What language(s) do your customers speak? Do you have plans to expand into new countries or markets? Make sure your vendor is able to accommodate your changing needs.

What are the highest value customer journeys agents will handle?

Automation can handle basic inquiries, but companies need skilled agents to resolve more-complex issues. Define the journeys your agents will address, starting with the most frequent and valuable.



**61% of
organizations**

anticipate contacts will
become more complex
in the next two years

Source: Deloitte, 2019 Global Contact Center Survey

Training and skills

Questions to ask providers

Once you've established your requirements, you can start looking at vendors. Ask these questions to ensure they provide the training and skills agents need to give your customers what they want.

How do you hire agents and what are your requirements?

Look for a vendor that recruits new hires based on skill, experience, and willingness to learn, and offers opportunities for advancement. And make sure your provider has experience interviewing, training, motivating, and rewarding employees who cannot be interviewed in person, and who must work from home.

What kind of brand, channel, and soft skill training do your agents receive?

Look for a vendor with a proven system for bringing out the best in agents. In addition to channel-specific and people skills, agents need a deep understanding of brand products, processes, culture, and attributes.

How do you keep agents engaged and motivated?

Look for a partner that has a good track record in engaging agents through activities and special events. Happy employees yield better performance.

What kind of brand-specific training do your agents receive?

Vendors need a proven system for training agents on everything from brand promise to the specific intents and journeys they'll be dealing with, prior to going to market. Agents must be rigorously trained so they're confident before hitting the call center floor.



When agents solve problems quickly, they create value, making customers:

7x more likely to stay
8x more likely to spend
8x more likely to recommend

Source: Forrester, 2019



39% of contact center executives

recognize "accuracy and quality of information" as the most important CX attribute for future contact center interactions, followed by "trust" at 29%

Source: Deloitte, 2019 Global Contact Center Survey

How do you measure agent performance?

Agent performance affects ROI and should be tracked regularly. Key KPIs include AHT, first-call resolution (FCR) rates, and customer sentiment. It's also worth asking how the provider assesses agent knowledge, and how they handle failure—can agents try again if they fail to meet requirements or goals? This may give you some insight into the work environment, which directly impacts performance and outcomes.

Do you provide any ongoing training?

Agent training is not a one-and-done need. Providers should provide regular on-the-job training, retraining for core skills when needed, and opportunities to learn new skills.

What is your agent attrition rate?

High attrition (around 5 percent for digital and 7 percent for voice agents) leads to poor CX and lost productivity. Look for a provider with high agent satisfaction and retention. Happy agents provide better service, which leads to better outcomes.



Chapter Two

What Do You Want From Your Agent Services Provider?

02





What Do You Want From Your Agent Services Provider?

It's an on-demand world. Consumers expect everything to be available as soon as they want it. This is especially true when a customer is seeking support: Consumers expect issues to be resolved quickly, certainly within the first conversation. Agent performance is key.

Your goal is to achieve high CSAT with optimal costs. That means evaluating agent performance using such metrics as cost per transaction and cost per resolution—rather than cost per hour or cost per agent—to ensure you're measuring agent results, not their cost of filling a seat. Note that agents paired with the best artificial intelligence drive better results at a lower cost point, resolving issues faster and more effectively, reducing repeat contacts, and increasing customer satisfaction.

Of course, it's tempting to select the lowest cost vendor. But slashing your bottom line today at the expense of your CX will cost you a lot more in the long run. If agents don't effectively solve customer issues, your CSAT will suffer. That will drive down short-term revenues and hurt customer loyalty, a key driver of long-term profitability. It may also have a ripple effect via word of mouth, poor online reviews, and social media rants.

85% of businesses say improving customer experience is the most important strategic objective and driver of contact center investment

Source: Deloitte, 2019 Global Contact Center Survey

Performance

Align your organization on performance goals

Ask these questions to ensure your organization is aligned on performance goals.

What's the primary goal for adding agent services?

Provider services vary greatly, so be clear about your immediate and long-term goals. These may include elevating CX, increasing efficiency through automation, improving FCR rates, and creating new revenue streams. While controlling costs is a common goal, optimizing for customer CSAT and average handling time (AHT) are likelier to improve your long-term bottom line.

How will we measure success?

Your goals will determine your KPIs. For example, if your goal is to improve CX, look at NPS and CSAT scores. For sales performance, measure revenue per contact and upsell conversions. And for cost efficiency, keep tabs on AHT.

Will agents work with our CRM system or on the vendor's platform?

A provider that integrates with your existing systems will drive faster, higher ROI and leverage your customer data. If agents use the vendor platform, AI and machine learning (ML) delivers better insights across channels, speeding resolution and improving agent productivity.

Do we require a provider that's onshore, offshore, or nearshore?

Onshore agents offer cultural proximity but may cost more. Offshore and nearshore agents can provide deep experience, the ability to scale quickly, and language diversity (for example, Spanish and English). You may also be able to blend locations to optimize costs and outcomes.

What volume of calls/chats must they handle?

Look at historical contact data for a period of 6-12 weeks to determine your call/chat volumes.

Do we need flexibility for seasonal changes or other events?

Determining whether your support needs are consistent or fluctuating is crucial to ensuring the provider can handle your volumes now and in the future.



Performance

Questions for potential providers

Once you've defined your performance goals, you can ask potential vendors these questions to ensure they're able to meet (or exceed) your expectations.

Where are your agents located?

And, just as important, what are the geo-balancing options if one location goes offline?

Can we flexibly adjust the number of agents based on peak periods?

If you're looking to start small and expand, ask if they have a minimum deal size.

What tools do your agents use?

If you're planning to integrate agent services with your existing CRM, make sure the vendor's agents are familiar with your system. Providers that equip agents with AI-powered tools reduce both customer and agent effort, streamline conversations (for example, by prompting agents with suggested responses), and improve outcomes.

Can those tools integrate with our CRM?

Integrating with your existing CRM drives higher ROI and speeds time to market.

Do you support agents with any of the following: predictive intent analytics, journey context, recommended responses, rich media capabilities, automation?

Each of these capabilities can help agents perform better. When used together, they deliver what McKinsey research calls the "multiplier effect" combining operational improvement efforts and internal processes to maximize results.

How long have you been in business?

Look for a provider with deep experience providing BPO agent services and running contact centers.

What results have you achieved for your clients?

Ask to see case studies and proven results for similar organizations.

Do you provide any additional services to streamline customer service journeys such as text mining, pain point analysis, or identifying opportunities for improvement?

These services improve your customer service CX and agent services outcomes.

How do you measure (and report) performance?

Find out what metrics they use and how they share results with you. Be sure their metrics align with your goals.

What kind of ROI can we expect?

Ask to see results for existing clients in your industry. Remember, it's more meaningful to look at overall outcomes than bottom-line costs alone.



76% of
telecommunications companies
plan to invest in artificial intelligence

Source: Deloitte, 2019 Global Contact Center Survey

Chapter Three

What to Look For And What to Avoid





What to Look For and What to Avoid

Weeding through your options can be overwhelming. Here are some general pointers to home in on the right vendor for your organization, and steer clear of those that might not be able to deliver what you want.

What to look for

Experience

A vendor with well-established credentials for performance excellence.

Escalation management

Agents who get things done without calling a supervisor.

Additional services

Services such as value journey mapping, intent identification, and chat transcript mining drive the best results.

Optimization

To get the most out of your investment, look for a vendor that combines operational improvement efforts and “best practices” internal processes.

Forward-thinking

Keeping up with technology and consumer expectations is hard as new tools and communication channels are continually introduced. Find a partner that’s a step ahead of you in keeping up with consumer trends.

Augmented and trained

Agents who work closely with technology are able to reach faster resolutions.

What to avoid

Lowest cost agents

Chances are they will not provide the superior service customers desire. One bad experience is all it takes to lose a customer, and consumers are more likely to tell others about a bad experience than a good one.

High agent attrition

High churn rates lead to lower performance. Lower churn (around 3.5 percent for digital, 5 percent for voice) is linked to consistently higher performance over time.

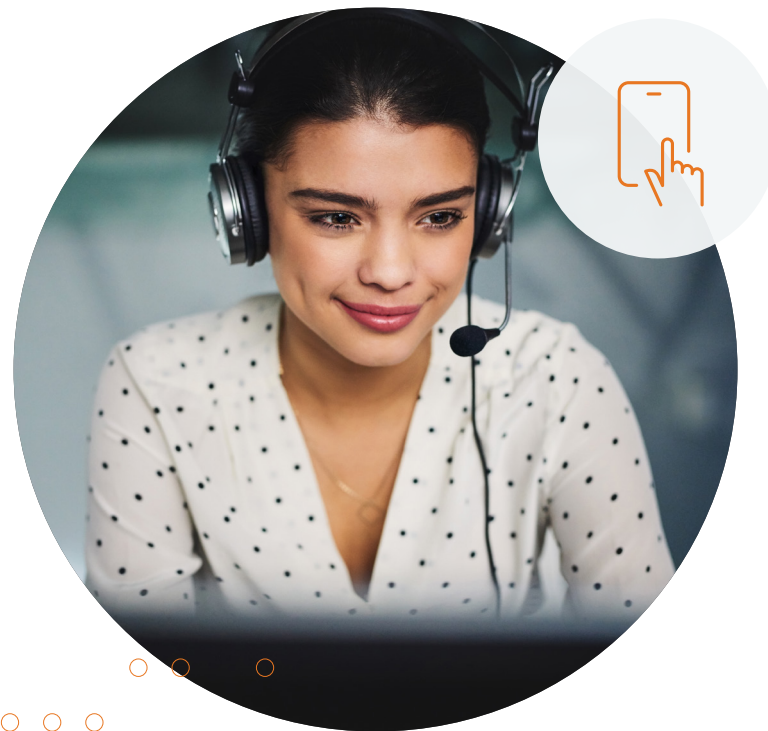
Voice-only natives

Voice providers that add digital may lack the nuance and understanding necessary for today's digital environments. Look for a vendor with digital-native agents instead.

Take the Next Step

Whether you are looking to expand your existing customer service strategy by adding an outsourced contact center, or looking to transform it completely, choosing the right agent services provider is crucial to your success. [24]7 Agent Services has almost 20 years of market presence with deep experience in multiple key verticals. We align our agents to your brand DNA, provide ongoing training, deliver 95 percent agent retention, and guarantee we'll outperform your best site by at least 10 percent. Ninety percent of our clients rank us #1 compared to all other competitive agent services solutions.

To learn more about [24]7 Agent Services, visit www.247.ai.





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About [24]7.ai

[24]7.ai is redefining how artificial intelligence and human insight are combined to produce satisfying customer experiences. Our conversational AI platform predicts consumer intent to create frictionless interactions, across every channel, that strengthen relationships and increase brand loyalty, at the lowest cost per resolved conversation.

For more information visit: www.247.ai