

Automating the Call Center of the Future

Plus: 8 ways automation boosts the bottom line

76%

Customers who say it's easier than ever to switch service providers, after a poor experience

Crowded call centers have already taken a few technological leaps. First, the call center became the contact center, as customers moved to digital channels and demanded new ways to get in touch. Then voice recognition and other technologies let companies automate some repetitive aspects of call center work, like customer identification and call routing. But the next evolution of the call center — hastened by factors like a global pandemic — will be the most dramatic move yet, as AI and automation transform internal call center processes, making them ultra-efficient, highly personalized, and able to be staffed by a workforce that's entirely remote.

The problems

Most call centers struggle with productivity, resulting in long wait times, high call abandonment rates and poor average handling times. Agents average about 50 calls per day, meaning many call centers are high-stress work environments with low retention rates and high absenteeism. The agents typically have erratic work shifts, few breaks, strict metrics and deal with more than a few angry customers.

On the other end of the line, when things go awry with an agent, customers aren't afraid to take their business elsewhere: 76% of customers report that it's easier than

ever to switch service providers based on their experience. According to a NewVoice Media report, bad customer service costs U.S. businesses more than \$75 billion a year — all from client churn.

The solutions

Luckily, many aspects of call center and contact center work can be easily automated. Call center handling processes are often riddled with inefficiencies that can be optimized or eliminated with simple technological fixes.

Reduce application-switching and clicks

Nearly half of call center agents work with five or more tools to complete common call requests, depending on the industry. Swiveling between applications to copy and paste data requires several clicks and window switches, which lengthens the call handling time.

Robotic process automation (RPA) solutions let agents easily transfer data between systems without having to perform these tasks manually.

For example: imagine a call center employee for a commercial bank working on calls for lost or stolen credit cards. To complete an incoming request for a lost credit card, an agent needs to work within the bank's online portal, a CRM system like Salesforce, plus a third-party application to order the customer a new card. RPA can integrate all of the needed data in seconds and auto-populate missing fields. This includes the reason for card replacement, card number, mailing address, and other critical info.

For remote workers, automation can help on several fronts. Onboarding for new employees might be entirely virtualized, for example. And simple screen automations can assist at-home workers with faster logins into secure, compliant company systems.

Automate data pulls to encourage upsell

For call center staff and sales agents alike, switching between systems not only wastes time but also distracts from interacting with customers. When ten clicks turns into one, a call center employee can be more human, thinking critically and showing empathy. They can focus on things like the smoothness of dialogue with a customer and that customer's other potential needs.

For example, let's say a call center employee is working within the Salesforce Service Cloud environment. One button click might solve the client's immediate problem, while another could trigger an automation that pulls in a customer's past purchase history or demographic data. This would make a cross-sell or next-best-purchase recommendation more clear to the agent and could both boost revenue and increase customer satisfaction.

+ \$75 B

Bad customer service costs U.S. companies more than \$75 billion in client churn

8 ways intelligent automation generates ROI

1. Reduce customer wait times
2. Optimize call handling times
3. Improve first call resolution rate
4. Meet or exceed service level agreements
5. Reduce blocked calls and call abandonment rate
6. Decrease average after-call work
7. Obtain higher Net Promoter Scores
8. Boost call center agent happiness and retention rates

Design automations to reduce post-call work

After most incoming calls, agents must complete after-call work (ACW), tasks that complete the request, schedule the appointment, or may otherwise be required to input customer interactions into a centralized CRM system. The longer this work takes, the longer agents are prevented from picking up new calls, which only increases customer wait times, lowering metrics across the board.

Automation can speed up or eliminate ACW by inputting the call transcription into a CRM system on behalf of the agent, or by triggering a specific action after a call request is completed.

After a chat with a call center agent, many companies send a letter to a customer who has, for example, bought a new plan, scheduled an appointment, or updated or stopped their service. Automation can make much quicker work of this, extract relevant details from a CRM, autofilling it within a letter template and then sending it automatically or routing it to a different team for mailing.

These are some of the general tasks to be automated inside call centers. There are hundreds more specific applications, depending on the industry the call center or contact center serves.

Why call center experiences matter

In an era of vast choice for consumers, customer experience rules. Customer experience has even surpassed price and product as a key brand differentiator, meaning every touchpoint with a consumer is critical to retaining them. Writing in Harvard Business Review, Andre Schwager and Chris Meyer say “customer experience does not improve until it becomes a top priority and a company’s work processes, systems, and structure change to reflect that.” Meaning it’s even more important for companies to design call centers efficiently.

Satisfied customers contribute 2.6x more revenue to a company, and customers that have a positive experience are more loyal and more likely to refer your business to others. Is your call center keeping up with demands? You can improve experiences both inside and out, cutting costs and driving more revenue, with automation.