

3 Smart Strategies for Empowering an At-Home Contact Center Workforce

Contact centers are increasingly supplementing their in-house staff with remote employees. Deloitte's 2017 Global Contact Center Survey revealed that “53% of companies plan to offer customer service agents flexible work arrangements—including the ability to work remotely.”¹

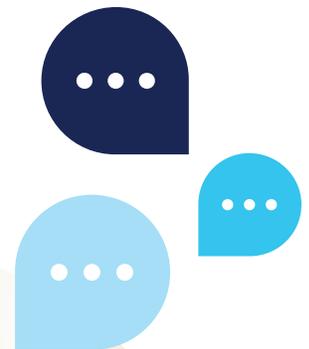
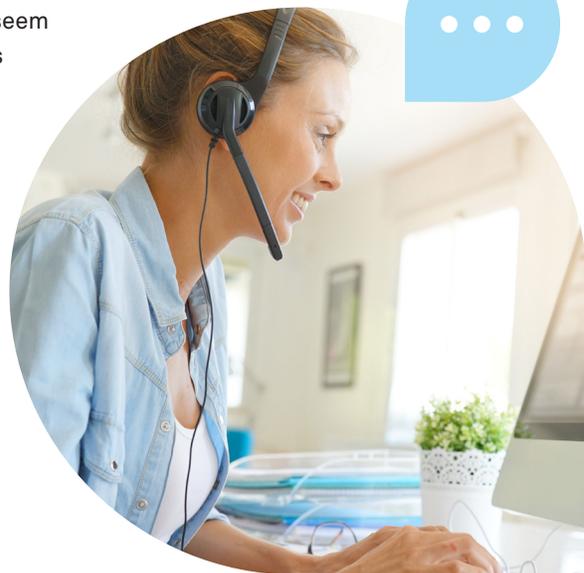
This trend should be no surprise as a remote workforce can deliver substantial benefits, most notably cost savings. According to Forbes, American Express reported annual savings of \$10 to \$15 million thanks to its off-site operations.²

Research shows that remote workers can also be more productive. A nine-month study conducted by Stanford of 16,000 call center employees found that working remotely increased productivity by 13.5%³ while Best Buy's flexible work program boosted employee productivity by 35%.⁴

When you specifically consider the benefits of remote workers for contact centers, you find that managers can more easily match agent supply to demand as extra staff that works from home can be available at just the right times. If your company requires highly specialized agents, rather than being limited to local resources, you can access a broader talent pool through remote agents. This means you can choose the best, most experienced agents in the niche you're looking for from across the nation or around the world.

Yet managing a team of remote contact center agents may initially seem more difficult than managing an in-house department. When agents aren't down the hall, the processes of training, supervising and motivating them to ensure they are all performing to the highest levels can seem daunting. Additionally, your IT department won't be available to ensure the solution is always working properly so agents can provide reliable customer service.

Fortunately, you have, at your disposal, numerous methods to fully empower your at-home contact center workforce. Smart strategies include initiating quality management programs, gamification and evaluating the steps your contact center vendor takes to ensure its solution's security, reliability and performance.



1 Deloitte's 2017 Global Contact Center Survey

2 Forbes, Flexible Workspaces: Employee Perk or Business Tool To Recruit Top Talent?

3 Harvard Business Review, To Raise Productivity, Let More Employees Work from Home

4 Forbes, Are Remote Workers More Productive Than In-Office Workers?

One: Embrace Continuous Training

Organizations today largely differentiate their products or services not by features or price, but by the experience they deliver. A 2017 Deloitte survey found that a positive customer experience is no longer a “nice-to-have;” it’s become a clear priority for contact centers. In fact, 88% of respondents say the need to deliver a great customer experience is the main driver of growth within their contact center, up from 71% the previous year. ⁵

Agent interactions are often the make-or-break point for customer experience. If your agents fail to live up to your customers’ expectations, you’ll miss your opportunity to impress them. So, despite whether your agents are remote or on-site, you need to ensure they deliver the highest quality interactions.

Quality management technology enables you to monitor the quality of your agent’s interactions with customers wherever they are. You can then use the insight from agent performance to address any issues your agents may have that impact call quality and continually improve the customer experience.

These solutions start by allowing you to determine what subjective and objective metrics you want to track, such as customer courtesy, call handling time or first contact resolution (FCR). As you make your choice of key performance indicators (KPIs), be sure to solicit input from all stakeholders, including agents who handle the calls.



These solutions also allow for managers to monitor calls. Even when remote agents aren’t in the contact center, they spend most of their time on the phone. Call center quality management solutions enable live monitoring and call recording so you can consistently evaluate your remote agents’ calls just as if they were onsite. Recording calls allows you to refer to the actual call in case you encounter any differences of opinion in call quality scoring. You can also use snippets of these recordings to reinforce training points.

Quality management technology can also capture an agent’s desktop screen and synchronize it so managers can easily understand the full context of each interaction. By playing back the voice and screen interactions simultaneously, managers fully understand the details of how agents are completing work processes.

With this input, managers can then employ comprehensive, multi-level, skills-based assessments to identify areas that warrant improvement to ensure customer satisfaction. Managers can review a sampling of agent interactions and score their performance against evaluation forms. For example, managers can assess whether the agent deviated from the standard script, used a pleasant tone of voice or politely handled customers who were upset.

Based on agent scores, managers can identify which remote employees need additional coaching or training and offer instant, relevant feedback based on actual customer interactions.

Reporting capabilities also enable managers to analyze performance trends to determine specific areas where improvement and training are needed.

⁵ Deloitte’s 2017 Global Contact Center Survey

Two: Improve Agent Engagement

Contact center employee engagement can make a tremendous difference in the tenure of your contact center agents. Retaining contact center agents has a significant impact on the reduction of on-boarding and training costs. A study by McKinsey on contact center performance showed satisfied contact center agents are:

8.5

times more likely to stay than leave within a year

4

times more likely to stay at a company than dissatisfied colleagues

16

times more likely to refer friends to your company

3.3

times more likely to feel empowered to resolve customer issues⁶

Given this reality, ensuring that all your remote and onsite contact center agents feel equally involved is vital to meeting customer demands, retaining employees and boosting your bottom line.

Answering the phone as a front-line representative for a company is often exhausting, repetitive and boring. And when contact center agents are remote, it can be more difficult for managers to notice signs of disengagement, while agents can often feel alienated.

One way organizations can promote remote contact center agent engagement and achievement is through gamification. Gamification encourages contact center agents to compete to complete objectives and outpace other agents. Rewards are given based on alignment to the company culture, but may also include recognition on leaderboards, badges or even physical prizes such as gift cards or plaques.

A contact center gamification solution offers the following capabilities to enable you to implement games for your contact center agents:



Metrics: Contact center gamification solutions enable you to choose any number of agent or group-level metrics to gamify. These metrics might include:

- Hours worked
- Average speed to answer
- FCR
- Number of dials
- Average after-call work time
- Total talk time
- Percentage of calls handled by type



Reporting and dashboards: Reporting capabilities and dashboards consolidate KPIs into an integrated view and clearly communicate to managers and individual agents how well they are meeting goals set for their KPIs.



Public wallboards: Agents also need to be able to access the scores and stats of the agents they are competing against. This helps the agents benchmark their scores and ensures there is a sense of fairness when awards are given. A solution that provides public wallboards with automated slideshows of rankings, awards and achievements can further motivate employees.

By using gamification, your organization can more effectively assess and motivate agents, resulting in lower contact center employee attrition, greater agent productivity, better agent training and an improved contact center culture.

⁶ McKinsey & Company, Boosting Contact Center Performance through Employee Engagement

Three:

Ensure Reliability, Performance, Scalability and Security

Of course, the only way you can make the remote contact center model work is by giving your remote workers a reliable, high-performing, scalable and secure solution. The trick is providing this solution even though your remote workers are in their homes and outside the control of your contact center's IT department. You can achieve this objective by choosing a contact center solution that offers these capabilities:



100% Cloud—to enable access to the solution from any location



Thin Client—to allow agents to access the solution with a standard browser through an internet connection rather than requiring the agent to install software on their desktop or laptop machine



Mobile phone-enabled—to permit agents to call into the platform from their mobile phone in case of an internet outage



A disaster recovery program—to get the system back up and running quickly should it go down

Additionally, since your agents may well be working with sensitive data, you need to ensure your solution delivers the right data security. Look for a vendor that designs applications with security in mind. The solution should also provide identity and access management to ensure only authorized staff access your applications and data, encrypt data as it travels the network to keep it private, ensure security of the data in the cloud and monitor the entire system for any signs of attack or data breach.

Make the Most of Your At-Home Workforce

Incorporating remote workers into your workforce offers numerous advantages, including the ability to better match agents with demand, lower costs, increase the pool of talented workers and enhance workforce productivity. With modern contact center solutions that improve your ability to manage agent quality, boost agent engagement through gamification and ensure high-performing and reliable internet connections, your contact center will be able to optimize your remote workforce.

About Serenova

Serenova simplifies every aspect of the customer experience to make life easier for contact center executives, their customers and employees. The world's most passionate, customer-focused brands achieve better interactions, deeper insights and more meaningful outcomes with Serenova's contact center solutions. To see the power of Serenova for yourself, [sign up for a demo](#).