

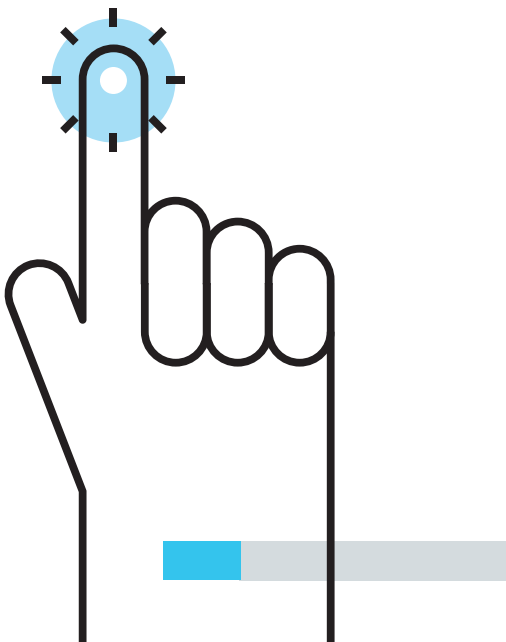


Contact Center Trends You Need to Know

2019

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Keeping your finger on the pulse of industry trends is how you identify opportunities to gain an advantage in your contact center. Finding the time to collect and analyze all the necessary information, though, is challenging.

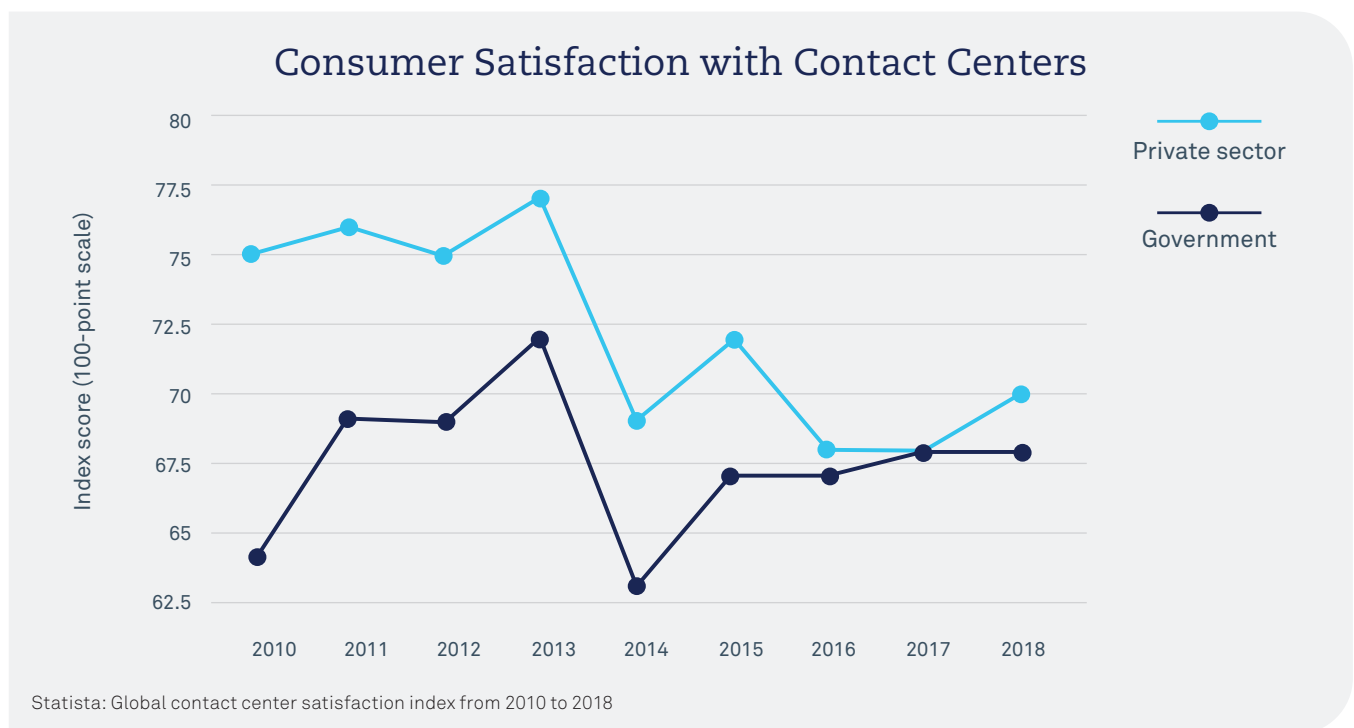
In this E-book, we've done the legwork for you by talking to our prospects and customers to understand their most pressing needs and the trends with the most promise for ensuring your contact center operates at full potential. Read on for insights and ideas you can apply to transform how you operate your contact center and deliver a customer experience that stands apart.

1 Making It Easier to Do Business

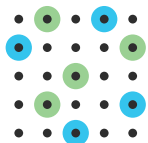
Customers expect contact centers to solve their problems. But they also expect a good experience, no matter how they contact you—even if it's to use a self-service option. People want to walk away with their issue solved, feeling that the contact center truly understood who they are and what they needed. You should want the same because word of a poor experience can quickly spread.

Forty-one percent of customers share their customer service experience with others, according to the 2017 Contact Center Satisfaction Index report from CFI Group. Further, Zendesk research found that 66% of B2B and 52% of B2C customers stopped buying after a bad customer service interaction.

Unfortunately, too few customers are satisfied with their contact center experience. According to the Contact Center Satisfaction Index, customer satisfaction with the contact center experience has remained low since 2014. Data compiled by Statista backs this assertion (see below).



The writing is on the wall: Organizations must make it easy for customers to do business with them—across every interaction with the company. So how do you go about that?



Understand customer pain points

Start by understanding common points of frustration, such as not wanting to provide the same information multiple times. Customers don't expect an agent to know why they're calling. But they do expect your company to better leverage all the information it has gathered to facilitate more intelligent interactions.

It could be as simple as the agent recognizing a previous caller by saying, “Welcome back, Jane.” It might be as sophisticated as seeing that Jane has called five times over the past two days and putting her on a prioritized path to your most skilled agent.

Another source of frustration is technology getting in the way. It's great if your contact center has invested in interactive voice response (IVR)—it's a critical piece of the contact center. But customers don't want to spend 10 minutes talking to it and then repeating themselves once they are connected to an agent.

A creative way to address this pain is by figuring out how to better meet your customers on their turf, so to speak. As an example, we know most consumers are on mobile phones. By leveraging something like a visual IVR, you empower them to quickly and visually navigate through your contact center menu before connecting with a live agent.



Partner to build trust and company-wide success

To figure out how to make it easier to do business with your company, map customer experiences to truly understand all entry points and touch points. Then brainstorm on how to meet and exceed expectations by resolving easier issues in the moment. For tougher issues, make customers feel you are partnering with them and focused on answering the question, providing the necessary information and fixing the issue.

2

Self-Service Reset

Today's busy customers are short on time and patience.

Recognizing this, many contact centers now offer self-service options. However, not all issues can be resolved through self-service. In fact, simply embracing self-service for the contact center's benefit—to deflect calls, for example—can backfire.

For customers, it's a nightmare when they are stuck in the auto-attendant system, getting pushback when asking to be transferred to an operator or agent. It's easy to alienate customers by forcing them to self-serve when they want to talk to an agent. In one example, a large telecom company removed contact numbers from its website, triggering frustrated customers to call into the company's sales phone number only to reach agents that could not help them. It's a reminder that contact centers need to allow customers to contact them in the channel of their choice.

When customers are dealing with problems they can't easily solve on their own, contact centers need to make the transition to an agent seamless and smart. This transition can be a great opportunity. Or a great failure.

Think about it from the customer's point of view. An already frustrated customer does not want to repeat steps taken or information they've already entered into your IVR system. Today, it's possible to pivot to a live agent who is already aware of the customer's service journey to date due to centralized, integrated information across channels. This empowers you to surprise customers with an experience that quickly soothes frustration and paves the way for a positive interaction.



3

Realizing AI and Other Advanced Technologies Are Not a Silver Bullet



Gartner predicts that by 2020, customers will manage 85% of their relationships with a company without interacting with a human. No wonder artificial intelligence is used increasingly in contact centers. This technology can quickly find patterns in tons of data, parse language and adapt to changing data circumstances. As a result, it's already being used to power self-service options. Plus, it empowers agents to better handle and resolve challenging issues.

When used strategically, AI can improve contact center operations and the customer experience. However, more contact centers are realizing that AI isn't a plug-and-play, set-it-and-forget-it technology. AI is only as good as the data fed into it. The process of training AI to provide value can be a cumbersome process for contact center supervisors and managers. During this ramping process, customers might experience yet another source of frustration.

Rather than risk alienating customers in this way, figure out how you want to use AI before implementing it. AI and humans are imperfect on their own but complement each other perfectly. You can strike the right balance by deploying AI to "listen in" and whisper tips and hints to agents to guide the conversation. It's critical to use AI in combination with well-trained agents because, once AI is involved, customer inquiries are likely to be more specific and targeted since AI will handle the more general questions.

4

The Rising Impact of Agents on the Bottom Line

Agents are the face and voice of most companies, interacting with more customers in a day than any other area of the business. As a result, the agent experience has a huge impact on the success of the contact center—and a company's bottom line.

Attrition erodes profitability

When agents aren't happy in their jobs, customer interactions suffer. In worst-case scenarios, agents quit, which means that contact centers lose expert agents, must train new agents or are simply ill-equipped to handle call volume. One or more of these triggers a domino effect that negatively impacts the customer experience. No wonder contact center executives cited agent turnover as their top challenge, according to Contact Center Challenges and Priorities for 2017 published by Contact Center Pipeline.

This makes agent attrition one of the highest costs in a contact center. Consider that, on average, it costs \$4,000 or more to hire a call center service agent, plus \$4,800 or more to train that person.* Moreover, it can take weeks to bring a new agent up to speed on procedures, policies, soft skills, customer experience strategy, contact center technologies and the company's products and services. That timeline is getting longer as products and services get more complex. The costs to your business can quickly add up when a steady stream of agents walks out the door.

*Source: The Easiest Customer Service Agent You'll Ever Find, IBM

Engaged agents deliver tremendous value

On the flip side, highly engaged agents remain loyal employees who help drive up customer satisfaction and even revenues. That's because engaged employees supported by a strong process and workflow can focus on customers and deliver the right experience.

Agent Engagement Levels Matter

ENGAGED	NOT ENGAGED	ACTIVELY DISENGAGED
High performer Innovative Efficient Committed Understands role High energy	Minimal effort Little passion Lack of creativity Increased absence Little motivation Checked out	Disruptive Very miserable Bad attitude Often late or absent Wastes time Undermines coworkers

Source: The Four Benefits of Employee Engagement, Engage (The Employee Engagement Blog)

Unfortunately, 87% of employees worldwide are disengaged, according to Gallup. In the US alone, the majority of the workforce (51%) is not engaged. As Gallup says, “These employees are indifferent and neither like nor dislike their job. They represent a risk, and that risk can tilt either way—good or bad.”

Mitigating that risk is well worth your while. According to the Liveops 2018 Call Center Industry Report, 79% of call centers pay agents on an hourly or salaried basis as opposed to a per-minute rate based on actual talk time. In other words, four in five agents are paid regardless of whether they are helping customers. A five-point increase in engagement can yield a 3% increase in revenue, while also boosting meaningful customer experience metrics.

Organizations can better engage their agents by:

Equipping them to do their jobs effectively.



Agents will find a way to get the job done even if you don't arm them properly. This can include using their own choice of tools to communicate with customers. While some might be tempted to applaud agents' enterprising efforts, these renegade moves can lead to a breakdown in the contact center. When agents rely on their own tools, your contact center is further hamstrung in ensuring seamless interactions across channels with all agents working from the same information about customer issues.

You can instead position your agents to succeed by giving them intuitive tools that empower them to efficiently handle calls. Such tools should enable agents to become proficient in their process and ability to get to data needed to provide answers and resolutions.

Remember that agents need to effectively communicate on an array of communication channels (Facebook, email, webchat, etc.). Handling multiple channels simultaneously only complicates matters. Quality tools can track interactions and guide training.

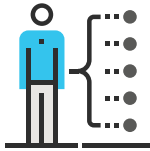


Specifically, Quality Management tools help monitor and evaluate agents' interactions with customers in order to identify areas for improvement and ensure customer satisfaction. These tools can ensure agents are properly coached and more engaged. They can be used, for instance, to effectively train agents to handle inquiries promptly and accurately, and ensure agents possess soft skills such as how to politely handle an upset customer.

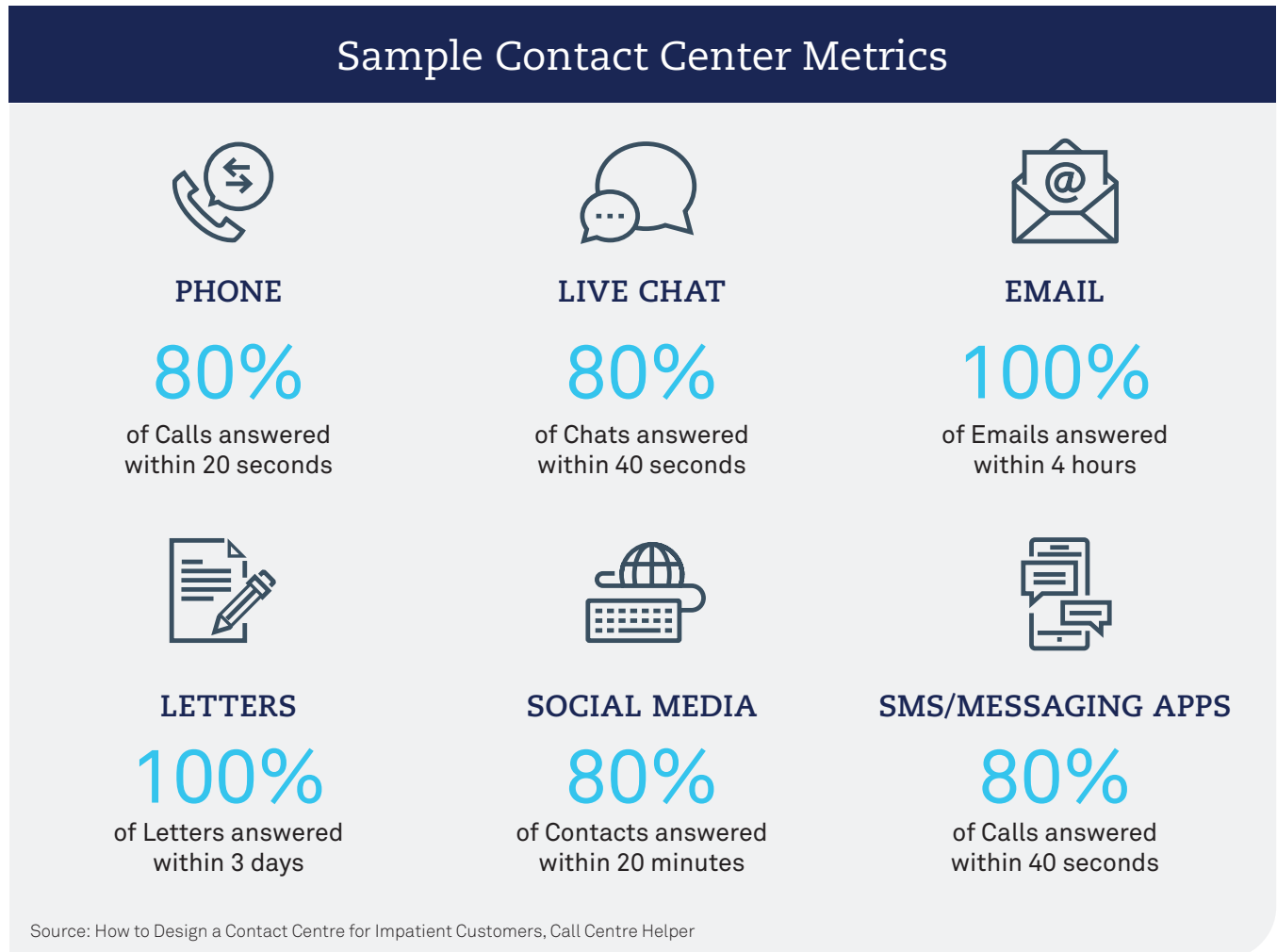
You can also use tools like gamification to motivate and incentivize agents. Making it as easy as possible for agents to understand what is expected of them and to perform toward your contact center and business goals is a proven way to better engage them.



Tracking the right set of metrics.



Service levels are one important piece of the measurement puzzle. Below are samples of six traditional service level metrics.



But service levels are not the only metric to consider. It's important to give careful consideration to all metrics and their sweeping effects on contact center efficiency, customer experience and agent productivity. When the contact center focuses too much on metrics or puts too many in place, agents lose track of what's important—and that's frustrating for them. In fact, the wrong metrics can drive the wrong type of behavior. If agents are held accountable for taking as many calls as possible or shortening call time, this metric manifests as a negative customer experience.

Instead, start with metrics like Net Promoter Score (NPS) and Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) that have a direct impact on revenue. Then, based on your business, identify and track the key metrics that drive those top-level metrics (for example, customer lifetime value). Ideally, focus your contact center agents on three to five critical metrics that help move and drive the number.

5

Tapping into Generational Shifts

Smart contact center executives are paying attention to the preferences and habits of the newest generations (e.g., Gen Y and Z) as they increasingly become customers and contact center agents. According to the Pew Research Center, anyone born between 1981 and 1996 is a Millennial (aka Gen Y), and anyone born from 1997 onward is part of the new generation (commonly referred to as Gen Z). By 2020, Generation Z will represent 40% of all US consumers. Both of these generations have evolved in a way that can greatly impact your contact center performance.

GENERATION	BRAIN	GENERATION
Y		Z
<p>Optimists</p> <p>Tech Savvy: Two Screens Simultaneously</p> <p>Decision-making Power</p> <p>Want to Be Discovered</p> <p>Focused on the Present</p> <p>Spenders</p> <p>Communicate Through Text</p>		<p>Realists</p> <p>Tech Innate: Five Screens Simultaneously</p> <p>More Influential</p> <p>Want to Work for Success</p> <p>Focused on the Future</p> <p>Savers</p> <p>Communicate with Images & Symbols</p>

Source: Bainbridge Consulting

Satisfying a new generation of customers

Both Millennials and Gen Z are tech savvy, and can often be found tethered to their smartphones surfing the web and using an array of apps. In addition, they are largely self-reliant when it comes to technology. Their first choice isn't to reach out to talk to a person—they're used to the online experience and controlling their own destiny electronically. As a result, phone calls are not their communication channel of choice. In fact, 72% of Millennials believe a phone call is not the best customer-service option for resolving their issue.

Instead of calling customer service, *I would rather...*

	MILLENNIALS	GEN XERS + BOOMERS	TOTAL
Go shopping on Christmas Eve	32%	20%	25%
Get my teeth cleaned at the dentist	34%	19%	24%
Be stuck in standstill traffic	26%	18%	21%
Go to the DMV to get a new ID	26%	17%	20%
Give a speech in front of 100 people	19%	17%	18%
Post an unattractive selfie on social media	18%	10%	14%

Source: Crossing the Generational Divide: Providing Customer Service for Today's Consumers

A wise approach for contact centers is offering a range of self-service options as part of an omnichannel experience, including texting, online chat, bots, FAQs and forums. The newest generations are also comfortable with voice recognition, so offer these options where appropriate. Enable self-service leveraging AI to automate non-cognitive tasks like resetting passwords and taking credit card information, and other technology like IVR on mobile.

Just remember: When these newest generations need the human touch, they expect a fast, personalized and secure interaction. Don't make them sit on hold or get frustrated explaining a situation to an agent.

In fact, Mark Mathews, vice president of research development and industry analysis at the National Retail Federation, warns businesses that Gen Z in particular views customer service differently than any other generation. According to him, they expect a frictionless experience that aligns with their expectations for immediacy and convenience.

Engaging a new generation of agents

Clearly, many of these same generational preferences and inclinations will apply to the Gen Y and Z agents in a contact center. But it's also important to understand what motivates these generations and what they expect as part of the workforce.

Well informed contact center executives are pushing for agent training that emphasizes the use of advanced technologies in a multi-tasking environment. After all, Gen Y and Z are accustomed to toggling between applications and multiple browser windows, even as they simultaneously interact with others.






While it's smart to tap into the strengths of these generations, it's equally important to equip them to succeed. When it comes to their comfort with multi-tasking and toggling, it's important not to overwhelm them with multiple screens and discrete apps as they're helping a customer. This can frustrate both the customer and agent when it takes too long to find needed information. Younger agents dealing with too much frustration might rapidly “check out” and fail to live up to the contact center's expectations for quality interactions.

It's also vital to bridge the generational divide between your newest and long-standing agents. Acclimate younger generations to your workforce culture and contact center environment through videos, role-playing and even interactive games. Address soft skills so new agents understand acceptable ways to interact with colleagues and customers, advocate for themselves and approach their supervisors. Provide opportunities for them to share their ideas and collaborate with colleagues to help shape the future of the contact center.

Just be cautious not to lump Gen Y and Z into one bucket. A recent Forbes article underscores, “Generation Z has come of age in the shadow of Millennials who prize hyper-competence (or at least the appearance of it), which has manifested in a strong desire to learn. More than the preceding generation, they are seeking out opportunities to add or sharpen skills. Offer Gen Z agents plenty of options for honing their skills, such as online courses, video tutorials and product demos.”



Gen Z agents also want consistent, immediate and actionable feedback on where they stand against their peers and how they are performing against their own baseline. Use a solution like CxEngage Scoreboard, which incorporates gamification to help agents track to daily goals, and agent-engagement enablement such as the following:

-  Aggregated key performance indicators (KPIs) in a customizable dashboard
-  Analytics to identify ways to improve agent performance
-  Auto-generated coaching sessions triggered by performance thresholds
-  Ways to create rewards and incentives to align agent KPIs with top business goals
-  A way for supervisors to understand what motivates each agent by comparing KPI performance and automatically ranking achievements

Conclusion: Keep Moving Forward

Contact centers were once more operationally focused. Now, however, contact center executives tasked with enabling customer experience initiatives is becoming more prevalent across organizations. Hand in hand with this, they need to tap into the trends that will help them improve the customer experience.

While trends come and go, it's clear that contact center operations are rapidly evolving in line with technology advances and changing customer and agent cohorts. By studying these trends and identifying the ones that will most impact your contact center, you can make plans to harness these changes to your advantage. To that end, if your contact center is not yet in the cloud, check out Serenova and a demo of CxEngage to pave the way for future success.

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](#).



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