5 Ways to Drive Calls Out of Your Call Center

Sometimes, the Best Calls Are the Ones That Never Happen
Discover how to get more value from your highly skilled agents, and empower your customers at the same time.
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Introduction
There’s a magical trifecta in customer care: Reduce contact volume, increase efficiency and empower your customers. Read on to see how you can achieve it for your organization.
Introduction


Raise your hand if you love calling customer service...yeah, didn’t think so. With few exceptions, most of us would rather not spend time on the phone to resolve the problems we sometimes experience with products or services. What’s more, as wages continue to rise, these calls are increasingly expensive for contact centers to manage—leading many to ask, ‘is there a better way?’

How can contact centers enhance efficiency, while keeping the quality of the customer experience high?

A typical assessment of contact center volume by Alorica’s Customer Experience Transformation (CxT) team reveals a 10% minimum opportunity to reduce agent-assisted contacts.
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Simply put, this means there’s an opportunity to make your customers happier while driving down your costs. But how?

This eBook examines five strategies that will help you deliver excellent customer support with less call volume:

• **Automate** where you can
• **Adopt** unassisted support channels
• **Prevent** poor service experiences
• **Resolve** issues the first time
• **Remove** the waste

Ready to dive in? Good. Us too.
Introduction

Market Situation

With customers demanding more from their favorite brands, contact centers are often the frontline when it comes to influencing customer perceptions. Nearly three-quarters of organizations believe the contact center is an important, competitive differentiator and gauge its performance heavily by the impact it has on customer experience.¹

So what’s a contact center to do? Reducing call volume is often the best way to reduce costs. Yet many executives fear that such cost-cutting efforts will lead to a degradation in the customer experience. However, saving money and improving the customer experience need not be opposing objectives; by eliminating just a fraction of contacts, you can experience incremental and meaningful improvement to your contact center cost structure. Moreover, eliminating waste also improves the customer experience.
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The issue at play is that traditional ways of measuring contact center activity are not necessarily the best measures of optimization opportunity. As customer experience professionals, it is no longer enough to ask how you can handle contacts better when they arrive in your support channels; it’s critical to be proactive and ask why customers are reaching out in the first place.

Solving problems at the root cause is the key to driving down call volume, while driving up customer experience. And when done successfully, it allows you to spend valuable interaction minutes where they count—driving the best outcomes for your customers.
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#1. Automate Where You Can
Customer Elation Through Automation

According to Gartner, by 2020, customers will manage 85% of their relationship with companies *without* human interaction. As this new contact center paradigm becomes a reality, smart investments in automation can help reduce agent-assisted calls while still delivering high-quality customer experiences. But what should be automated, and what shouldn’t?

Let’s press on.
With advancements in technology, the role of a contact center agent is also evolving. Instead of simply helping customers with basic tasks (i.e. updating an address or tracking a package), contact centers will get the most value from their highly-skilled agents when their efforts focus on complex customer interactions requiring specialized expertise, abstract thinking and autonomy (i.e. a warranty claim or an account closure).
What’s Right for Automation?

To determine which tasks are best suited to live agent interaction—and which can be automated—let’s start by evaluating tasks according to three tiers: low, mid and high.

Low-skilled tasks, such as tracking a customer’s package, are process-driven tasks that require little abstract thinking or autonomy—these are tailor-made for automation.

Mid-skilled tasks, such as account upgrades or credit limit adjustments, are more complicated and require abstract thinking, but may still be partially or fully automated.

High-skilled tasks, such as a warranty claim or an account closure, are more complicated. These skills require the most expertise, abstract thinking, and autonomy, and are not ideal for automation.
As a general principle, reserve automation for simple issues and transactions that are easy to solve, such as:

- Resetting passwords
- Checking order status or account balance
- Ordering a replacement card or part
- Appointment reminders
- Address changes
- Basic technical support, such as sending a reset message to a cable box
Want some real-world proof points? In industries like utilities, the use of automation for simple interactions (meter readings, balances and payments, etc.) has allowed up to 90% of relevant calls to be dealt with through automation. What’s more, because the experience is designed with the customers’ needs in mind, these businesses are seeing significant cost savings while delivering a boost to customers’ perceptions of the company.
The Energy Behind Automation

Automation can also enhance the customer experience and improve agent productivity. For example, using automation to allow customers to receive a call back at a certain time or when the next agent is available reduces customer wait times and provides a better overall experience. It also has the added benefit of allowing contact centers to optimize staffing levels and potentially decrease operational costs.\textsuperscript{vi}

When used appropriately, automation can play a key part in deflecting calls. The key is understanding when, where and how best to use it.
Automation Can Bring Operating Costs Down and Customer Satisfaction Up

By using technology to automate, streamline and improve its credit card contact center processes, one bank was able to answer more than 80% of customer queries automatically. From these efforts, they expect to reduce overall operating costs by $40 million over five years, while improving the call center experience for customers by reducing the time required to answer customer questions.\(^\text{vii}\)
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#2. Adopt Unassisted Support Channels
Less Call. More Click.

28% of customers call customer service as their first attempt to solve a problem. Meanwhile, most (75%) search online for an answer to their customer service problem. So, what does this tell us? Essentially, it’s a clear indication that what customers really want is to have their issues solved with as little effort as possible.

Let’s give the people what they want.
Less Call. More Click.

With 75% of customers already online, serving them there should be central to your strategy. Along with the cost savings associated with self-service, it’s very empowering for customers to be able to solve problems on their own. According to research by McKinsey & Company, customer satisfaction rates in digital self-serve channels are 19 percentage points higher than traditional voice, agent-assisted channels.\textsuperscript{x}

75% of customers search online for an answer to their customer service issue.\textsuperscript{x}\textsubscript{i}

Less than 1/3 of customers call customer service first in order to solve a problem.\textsuperscript{x}\textsubscript{iv}
Help Your Customers Help Themselves

Unsurprisingly, customers don’t like to waste time—so when they can’t find the answer quickly, they move to another channel. In order to keep call volume low and the customer experience high, make sure your self-service offerings are comprehensive and easy to use—the last thing you want is to make your customers fail and start all over by calling you.

CASE STUDY
Opportunity to Deflect Calls through Self-Service Channels
Looking to standardize best practices, improve performance and deliver a consistently exceptional customer experience? Turns out there’s one simple way to achieve all three. A retail client observed top-performing agents with a low average handle time (AHT) on top contact drivers. The client discovered that many of these low AHT contacts, such as “Order Status” or “Place an Order—Product Already Known by Customer”, represented approximately 20% of call volume—and that these contacts could be successfully deflected to self-serve channels.

That’s what we call empowering.
#3. Prevent Poor Service Experiences
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#3. Prevent Poor Service Experiences

Make the Most of the Miss

Not every interaction is going to go perfectly. But lemonade was invented from lemons, and when poor customer interactions inevitably occur, there is a valuable opportunity to address these scenarios, learn from them and ensure they aren’t repeated.

43% of contact centers never review their service-assisted processes.\textsuperscript{xiii}
Typically, when customer feedback or the quality assurance team determines that an interaction was frustrating to the customer, managers address the issue with the individual agent. While this may appear to be a logical course of action, it’s often a missed opportunity to reflect on whether the issue is a systemic problem outside of the agent’s control. Start by asking if it is possible that any agent would have the same challenges and customer feedback. If the answer is yes, then address the issue in a broader context—by better training agents, making it easier for customers to find the answer to a specific question on multiple channels, or further empowering agents to solve the problem on their own.
An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of treatment. Focus on prevention, and you’ll solve larger-scale problems before they negatively impact other customers.
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#4. Resolve Issues the First Time
How do you make a customer a customer for life? Simple—solve their problems. Resolution is by far the largest influencer of positive customer experience scores. Repeat attempts to resolve issues are not only detrimental to experience scores, but also they are expensive to support. Therefore, understanding what drives and prevents resolution is a critical component of your contact reduction strategy.
Make Resolution Your Resolve

Measuring resolution can—and should—be achieved through the following:

• Agent reporting and tracking in a CRM system
• Quality monitoring team’s assessment of calls
• Customer survey responses
• Technology that measures repeat activity in the same or other channel
Make Resolution Your Resolve

Taking a multi-pronged approach to measuring resolution can help identify disconnects between policy and customer perception. For example, if you experience a high rate of resolution on a particular issue, but customer survey scores are low or these same customers contact again a short time later, it could be because agents are following a procedure that does not fully resolve the customer issue.
To understand how to optimize resolution, you must first look at variation in resolution rates by agent, by contact driver and by product and/or transaction type.
Start by isolating the scenarios where first contact resolution is unlikely. Then complete a detailed root cause analysis, searching for both agent-controllable and organizational opportunities to improve. You have to dig deep! Scratching the surface won’t cut it—it’s critical to understand when a resolution doesn’t eliminate repeat contacts, so that you can help agents address those additional pain points in the initial call or through better self-service customer channels. By solving customer issues the first time, you spare yourself and your customers from painful repeat contacts.

CASE STUDY
Data Reveals Ways to Reduce Repeat Contacts
At one technology company, data suggested that 30% of customers who contacted the contact center with a “New Device Set-up” question, contacted the center again in the following 60 days with a “Wireless Connectivity” question. What’s the takeaway? Using data to communicate to customers about potential future questions, both during the initial contact and through an ongoing customer communication strategy (emails with customized information about products, curated in-app articles, etc.), can greatly reduce future contacts.xiv

Field fewer questions and experience a bump in customer satisfaction—imagine that!
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#5. Remove the Waste
Average is Not the Goal

You want to spend your money where it matters—on complex problems, high value customers and sales, and high-risk retention scenarios. And just as obviously, you don’t want to spend your support dollars on simple transactions like password resets, account maintenance, status updates and other simple support topics.

The first step in spotting waste is to stop managing to averages. An average won’t tell you where the problem is. For example, knowing that your AHT for billing questions is approximately 4 minutes is meaningless, if a large number of calls take 30 seconds and an equally large number take 8 minutes. Clearly, some agents are solving the issue quickly and others, not so much—so understanding the variation in the metric is the real story.

“The greater the variation, the more opportunities there are to optimize. Averages are good for summarizing outcomes, but it is outliers that drive action.”

“*The Tyranny of Averages,*”

Order Dynamics
A Deep Dive of AHT

Let’s take a closer look at the common contact center metric, AHT. While an AHT may help you summarize your performance and even plan your budget, it won’t help you to understand where the opportunity is to optimize. You need to understand the differences across agent groups, contact drivers and other factors in order to get to the root cause—and address accordingly.

When you conduct a deep dive of AHT, you might discover that handle time is higher on contacts where agents must seek approval from another group before acting, or that a support procedure or policy is difficult for agents to locate. The same principle holds true for metrics like escalation and transfer rates or repeat contacts—understanding where and why the outliers and anomalies exist is essential to creating a strategy for avoiding them.
Areas of waste that should be examined include:

- Poorly trained agents
- Inadequate agent tools (knowledge management)
- Rigid policies
- Narrow scope of support
- Offline processes
- Transfers
- Multiple approval levels

Keep in mind, however, that it’s only by observing the variation that will lead you to discover which of these issues you can best address to cut waste, reduce call volume and optimize your agents’ valuable time.
Prioritize and Measure Success

As you begin to identify call deflection opportunities, it’s important to focus on solving one problem at a time—with a priority towards low-effort, high-return initiatives. These successes will help fund initiatives that require investment, and will help keep your executive sponsors onboard. You will earn points with the cost savings, while driving a low-effort experience that earns rave reviews from your customers.

Talk about win-win.

To help prioritize, you will want to start by simply looking at what percentage of contacts a specific issue is driving.
Prioritize and Measure Success

By sorting the most common call drivers and then examining which call drivers can be automated or deflected to self-service alternatives, you will be able to uncover areas of low effort and high returns. For example, if a top call driver is 20% of your call volume and the AHT is 30 seconds, there is a high likelihood that the issue is easy to resolve through automation or self-service channels. Alternatively, if your top call driver takes 20 minutes to resolve, it’s clearly a complex issue; in this case, it’s unlikely that automation or self-service can help and therefore, it should be a lower priority to resolve with a call deflection strategy.
Prioritize and Measure Success

Meanwhile, you should be looking at resolution rates. If a top call driver has a low AHT and a low resolution, it indicates that while you are handling it quickly, the issue is likely something you cannot resolve. In these cases, it’s worth considering whether there is a deflection strategy that would be more worthwhile to both the customer and your contact center.

For instance, with technology integrated across companies, customers often call device manufacturers about issues not related to the device, but to their wireless service provider. By analyzing the education and communication process, you may realize there is a way to communicate critical information to customers earlier in their customer service journey. If your company is not the appropriate one to handle the question, you should proactively provide customers with information in your self-service channels on who to contact for those inquiries.
Prioritize and Measure Success

Such an approach not only reduces call volume to your contact center, but boosts customer satisfaction. In fact, 27% of customers say that one of the most frustrating phrases to hear is, “We’re unable to answer your question. Please call XXX-XXX-XXXX to speak to a representative from XXX team.”

So identifying how to deflect these types of issues beforehand will not only benefit your contact center financially, but you’ll earn brownie points from your customers to boot. And who doesn’t want more brownie points? Or brownies for that matter…but we digress.
Conclusions
Fewer calls. Lower costs. And happier customers.

So you tell us—what is a 10% reduction in support spending worth to your organization?
With Great Pressure Comes Great Opportunity

Wages are rising. Onshore solutions are increasing. The upward pressure on costs is real—but so is the opportunity to scale back costs while enhancing the customer experience. Investments in analytics, digital channels and automation make it possible to reach what seem like conflicting goals—delivering exceptional customer experiences while lowering costs.

Make sure your contact center leadership understands this sentiment, and has the capabilities and experience to apply the strategies outlined here to significantly reduce your costs without sacrificing experience.
And if you need a Sherpa along your journey, give us a call. We would love to guide you to fewer calls, reduced costs and happier customers.

For more information—and to get started on transforming your customer experience—call 866-ALORICA or email sales@alorica.com.
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About Alorica
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About Alorica

Alorica

Alorica is a leading provider of Business Process Outsourcing solutions that span the entire customer lifecycle. Good, glad we got that out of the way. Here’s the deal—we think serving customers is awesome. And that’s why, when it comes down to it, we really only do one thing—we make lives better...one interaction at a time.

PASSION • PERFORMANCE • POSSIBILITIES
These are the principles that guide us in helping others make better choices and informed decisions. They’re more than words. They’re our rally cry.

PASSION
Everything starts with conviction. A desire to obliterate the status quo, and the audacity to believe that we will. We’re problem solvers. Question answerers.

Strategic dreamers. We see every interaction as an opportunity to create opportunities—for our customers, our clients, our colleagues and our communities.

PERFORMANCE
We’re 110% committed to the end result. Onward and upward, it’s all about taking our clients to the next level. We stay engaged. We mine new sources of inspiration. And we give it our all, no matter the challenge. They say go big or go home. We don’t believe in the latter.

POSSIBILITIES
100,000 employees. Operations in 16 countries. Over 70% of our business is with Fortune 500 companies. So where do we go from here? Anywhere. Everywhere. We’re always innovating, evolving, imagining new ways to continuously improve. Some see the sky as the limit. We see the sky as a stepping stone.

WHAT’S IN OUR SECRET SAUCE?

Guess it’s not so secret anymore, huh...
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