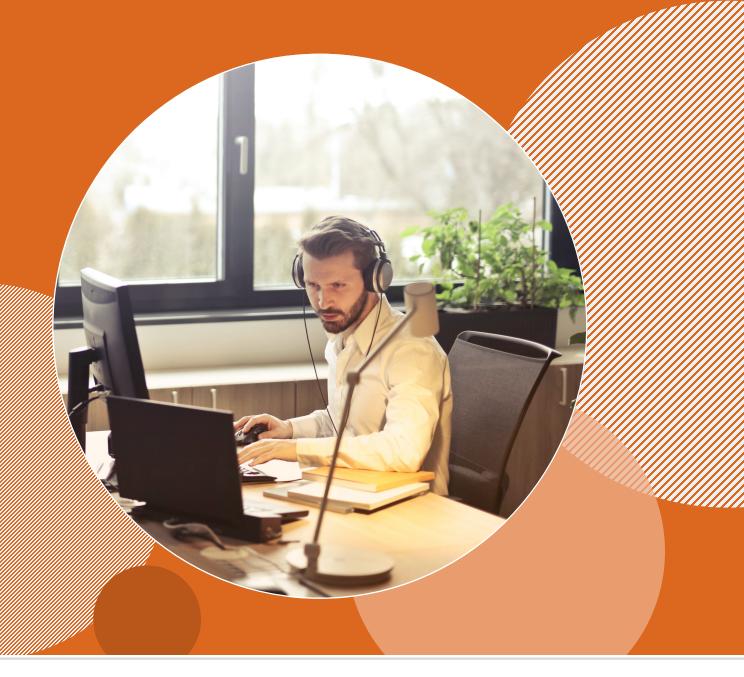# Maximizing Productivity in the Contact Center

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Maximizing Productivity in the Contact Center

In 2022, maximizing productivity is a non-negotiable. Over the past two years companies have recognized the value of optimized contact center operations and are working to extensively improve processes, streamline operations and ignite efficiency. While many have been slowly working to enhance productivity, the metric has quickly become critical for customer experience success.

The stakes for better experiences have also grown immensely. Amid economic uncertainty, organizations are scaling back and attempting to do more with less, while working to meet rising customer expectations. Today, only 10% of customers believe that experiences have significantly improved over the past year — even with a full staff of agents ready to support them.

Now, working with stricter budgets and a diminished workforce, organizations are attempting to continuously improve experiences and meet customer expectations while navigating uncertainty. By maximiz-ing productivity, companies can streamline the agent experience, eliminate inefficiencies and facilitate better interactions.

This report will dive into the current employee experience, uncover leading pain points preventing efficiency and establish a framework for maximizing productivity in the contact center. By empowering agents to do more with less, companies can continuously improve even during moments of economic downturn, keep-ing customers and employees satisfied over the long term.

State of the Employee Experience in 2022

The agent experience has become increasingly complex. Agents are now engaging with more customers than ever, working within new channels and managing ever-changing expectations. And as customer needs and   behaviors evolve, the agent experience has also shifted. Further, added friction and complicated workflows have made this transition less than seamless.

As companies add outlets for communication, they are introducing more platforms and tools for agents to learn. In fact, CCW Digital research confirmed that almost 91% of agents are required to access multiple screens, dashboards and systems when handling a typical customer interaction.

While the introduction of new channels and technology are undoubtedly positive, there must be a focus on unifying experiences for companies to reap the rewards. And, surprisingly, many organizations have not taken this step yet — when asked about how their digital customer experience has evolved since the start of the   pandemic, as few as 37% of companies stated that they have improved integration or connection between channels. This lack of connection means that agents are facing points of friction across their journey, preventing efficiency and limiting productivity. To improve, companies must focus on implementing intuitive technology that doesn't just add an adequate option to the customer experience, but an immersive and seamless outlet for support.

"With the nature of hybrid work, agents are being asked to support more channels than just phone. Evolution means less downtime, agents are constantly engaging with customers not waiting for calls to come in or place outbound calls, there's always a channel. Agent workload is increased. Agents are measured on quality over quantity as agent handle time rises." - **Leah Westfall, Director, Content Marketing, RingCentral**

External Factors and the EX

Between increasing inflaton and fears of a potential recession, employees are becoming increasingly cautious when making career moves. According to a recent report published by FlexJobs, 80% of employees are taking inflation into account and 73% are citing concerns about a potential recession impacting their career decisions. So, while the impact of the Great Resignation may be fading, the confidence and morale it afforded employees may also be on the decline.

News of layoffs and pay cuts are keeping employees concerned over their current roles and future career with companies. Major organizations like Apple, Snap and Walmart have all announced layoffs, with re-ductions as high as 20% of their total workforce. Twitter even warned its employees that they may receive half of their typical annual bonuses in 2022. This has understandably prompted a rising sense of instability and con-cern for employees everywhere.

While a workforce reduction may be inevitable for some, the greater sense of worry and uncertainty can and should be avoided at all costs. Organizations that empower their employees and foster a sense of security dur-ing moments of change will continue to provide better experiences for both employees and customers. As em-ployees begin to do more with less, companies must ensure they are providing all of the necessary resources for them to actively succeed.

"As customer inquiries continue to rise, many contact centers have simply thrown more unnecessary tools and technologies at the problem— which requires agents to not only learn new (potentially ineffective) systems, but also increases the time it takes them to find a solution. If contact center tools are constantly glitching or unable to meet agents' needs, it can add to employees' frustration and stress levels." **- Leah Westfall, Director, Content Marketing, RingCentral**

Evolving Support Strategies

For agents to effectively take on more, they must be supported by self-service initiatives. Realistically, agents cannot support all customers to the best of their ability if they're handling every concern from a password change to a product quality issue. However, many customers are still inclined to reach out to a live agent be-cause they feel they will receive the highest quality support.

When asked about where companies believe self-service is going wrong, 57% blamed speed. Within their cur-rent support strategy, customers will receive a faster response when speaking with a live agent. And, while it may be efficient for a select few customers, this affinity for live support also creates volume overload and prompts steadily increasing wait times. All of this ultimately defeats the purpose of that 'fast' response custom-ers are seeking.

Therefore, to effectively improve all experiences, companies must focus on creating a more unified support strategy, because when one channel fails, all others suffer. CCW Digital confirmed that long wait times were the #1 customer pain point in 2022, so implementing a strategy that empowers customers to self-serve when need-ed will help establish faster response times while enhancing, not replacing, live support options.

To meet rising expectations, companies must offer multiple outlets of support. But, to exceed expectations, these channels must remain consistent, relevant and accessible throughout the customer journey. By improv-ing the connection and quality of each channel experience, organizations will continue to optimize experiences and enhance productivity over the long term.

"Phones aren't going away, but it's important for organizations to offer other channels to address customer preferences for trying to resolve issues over digital channels like live chat and email or SMS. Making these interactions seamless allows agents to focus on more complex issues that are best resolved over the phone." **- Leah Westfall, Director, Content Marketing, RingCentral**

Improving Connections for Maximum Productivity

It is clear that creating more connected experiences will enhance productivity. By making the agent experience as seamless as possible, customer interactions will be more efficient, wait times will decrease and interactions will ultimately improve. However, achieving this connected experience isn't that sim-ple. Here we uncover the leading solutions for a more unified agent and customer experience and highlight tools for optimizing productivity in the contact center.

Implement a Unified Platform

According to CCW Digital research, 55% of customers currently state that they are not currently receiving seamless support. So, to create a seamless experience, companies must start by unifying their processes. As they introduce new channels, companies must ensure that agents are able to effectively engage with customers and navigate interactions in one distinct platform.

An omnichannel contact center solution can power this level of connection. By curating all channels, from call to live chat to social media, agents can easily work across conversations without losing context or complicating their workflows. With a more unified experience, agents can effortlessly engage, limiting inefficiencies and increasing first call resolution. Further, they will become more proactive, identifying every new opportunity to interact and quickly resolving customer issues as they arise.

With a unified platform, agents also benefit from real-time tools and assistance. Scripting resources allow organizations to build communication flows so agents are consistent and prepared for every case. Co-browsing features empower agents to see what the customer sees, giving them insight as they walk custom-ers through forms or web pages. Dynamic reply assistance triggers automated suggestions based on channels or messaging to ensure an exceptional interaction at every touchpoint.

By creating an all-in-one experience, agents can easily communicate, support and empower customers throughout their journey. Once prompted with the tools and insight, agents will continue to optimize productivity and improve interactions.

"RingCentral can power any type of conversation. (call, meeting, text, message, fax, customer inquiries on omnichannel capabilities (Facebook Messenger, What's App, Aple Business Chat etc.) Agents are never left sitting idle waiting for calls to come in and are not wasting time switching between screens." **- Leah Westfall, Director, Content Marketing, RingCentral**

Think Digital-First

To empower agents to take on more, companies must first upgrade their self-service initiatives. By automating common interactions, companies can finally remove repetitive and frustrating back end work and create a better experience for both the agent and the customer. With the help of an effective IVR and chatbot, companies will confidently support customers while eliminating these points of friction in the agent workflow.

Currently, the leading pain point companies are hoping to solve with digital channels are long wait times. So, establishing a digital-first strategy will alleviate some of this volume on live agents. However, digital-first does not imply a wholly digital strategy — it simply means that organizations can rely on digital as a means for sim-plifying experiences and improving connectivity, rather than replace traditional channels altogether.

"I'm proud to say that even with our agents working remotely, the wait time on our Customer Service lines never exceeds 30 seconds. We've got a great team of agents and supervisors, but some of the credit for that also goes to RingCentral Contact Center." **- Matt Jansen, Customer Service Manager, UK & France, Conair**

Therefore, implementing a chatbot that can handle simple queries is important, but ensuring it has the ability to gather contextual insight and interaction information upfront and deliver it to a live agent is even more   critical. Self-service should ultimately act as a valuable addition to a range of customer service outlets, not as a replacement for other support options. For example, organizations can program their IVR to offer alternative digital outlets to customers waiting for a live agent. This promotes a convenient and seamless experience for customers while avoiding unnecessary volume.

"44.9% of large companies have a digital-first strategy today, which we think is the right approach to take. But some customers will always prefer phone, and some interactions are best resolved 1:1 with a live agent, so it's important to have your support strategy optimized so that customers can efficiently leverage channels as needed." **- Leah Westfall, Director, Content Marketing, RingCentral**

Integrate to Innovation

To power maximum productivity, companies must leverage their frontlines' expertise. As agents take on more, organizations can lean on their specific skills to increase efficiency. To do this, companies can leverage intelli-gent routing.

Skill-based routing will ensure that the most knowledgeable agents are matched with specific inquiries. The agent's unique skill set will dictate how each call is directed, creating fewer escalations and better experiences. And, when a customer is engaging digitally, machine learning can instantly recognize intent and route digital messages for faster resolution.

Companies can even utilize data-driven routing powered by open APIs. Open API connections allow companies to tailor their solutions and improve integrations to continuously improve their systems. Features like CRM in-tegrations empower organizations to collect data from backend applications and power interactions with con-textual insight, interaction history and individual preferences to personalize interactions across channels. Agents can also leverage screen pops with key details and customer information for moment-to-moment sup-port.

By matching customers with subject matter experts, organizations can provide more tailored and consistent support. Additionally, with integrated features and add-ons, companies will consistently empower these employees to create individualized experiences, unique to each customer's needs.

"With the RingCentral for Salesforce i, our agents can easily take notes during a call and not have to re-enter the data. Those notes go straight into that caller's Salesforce profile, where the next agent can see them. For a person going through something as challenging as breast cancer, not having to retell their story each time makes for a much more comfortable experience." **- Krista Park Berry, Director, Komen Breast Care Helpline**

About the Author

Brooke Lynch, Analyst & Staff Writer, Customer Management Practice

Brooke Lynch is an analyst and staff writer for CCW Digital. With a background in television news and production, she's worked across industries covering B**2**B marketing, procurement and finance events.

Her current work highlights challenges and opportunities for customer experience and contact center leaders, with a recent focus on e-commerce, retail, and technology.

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