



**Contact Center Agent  
Salary, Retention &  
Productivity  
Report**

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#### Productivity Report

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# Executive Summary & Key Findings

In 2012, the International Customer Management Institute (ICMI) surveyed 444 contact center professionals to understand the major drivers of external contact center agent attrition. The research examined agent salaries, contact center attrition goals and tools deployed to improve the agent's work life.

The results of the survey indicate a correlation between agent satisfaction and the customer experience and customer loyalty: more than half of those surveyed responded that agent performance is at least partially measured based on customer satisfaction scores.

The relationship is visible at even the most superficial level. It is also clear at the granular level when we look at agent attrition and the related processes and issues in the agent's daily life in the call center. This report endeavors to "connect the dots" for customer care and contact center executives, directors, managers and supervisors in a way that helps them balance the hard numbers of agent attrition and the related (and sometimes harder to define) costs of dissatisfaction at the agent level.

## Key Findings

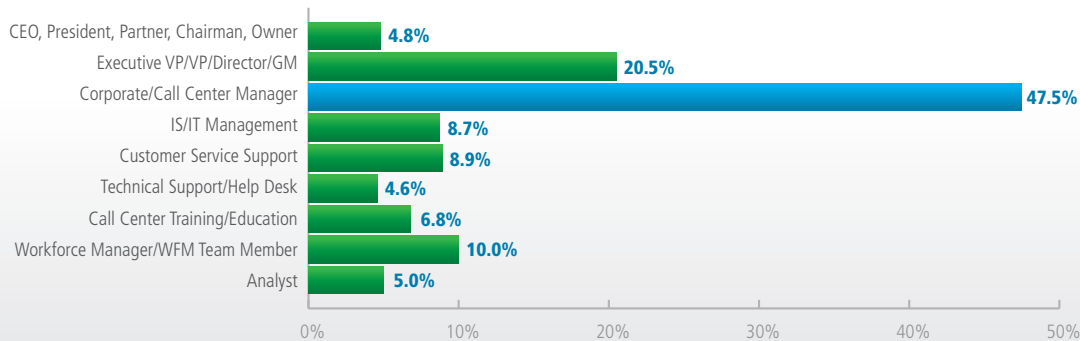
- **59.5%** say salaries are not a frequent reason for attrition
- More than **75%** the centers surveyed reward their agents, primarily with cash incentives
- **7.8%** have no agent satisfaction surveys in place, and **20.2%** only collect feedback during coaching
- **Instant Messaging** is the most widely used agent desktop tool

# Study Results

## Demographics

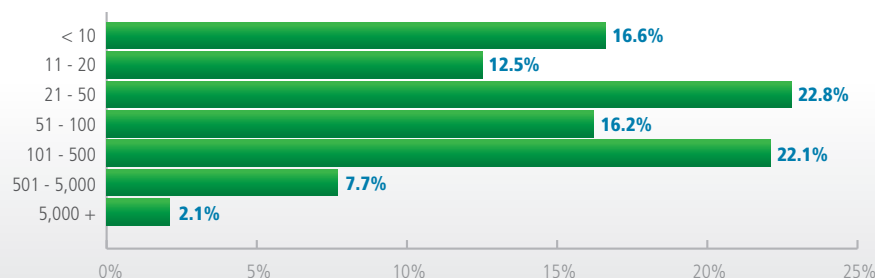
The 444 survey respondents represented nearly every level of the contact center, with the majority of results provided by executives, directors and managers. Also participating were functional team members and managers from workforce management and information technology, as well as a few agents.

### Which one of the following best fits your job description?



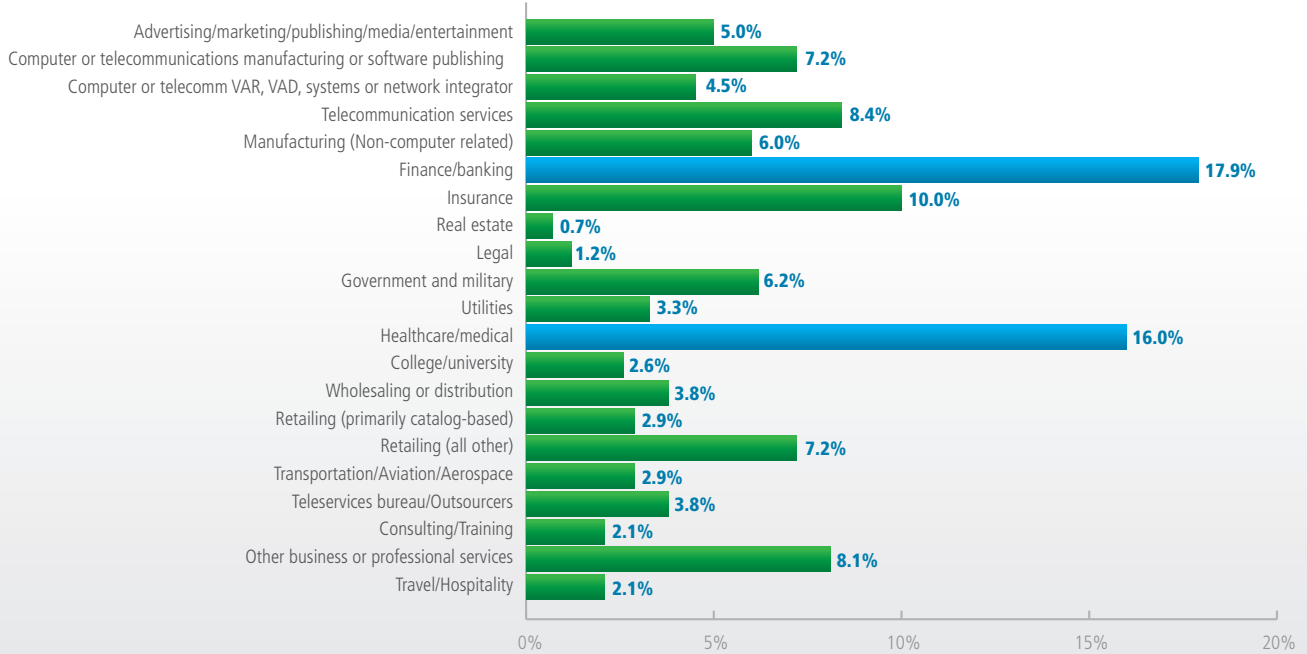
Call centers of every size are represented here, from small (50 agents or less) to "jumbo" (more than 5,000 agents). Contact centers with 100 agents or less comprised 68.1% of participating centers. Those with 100 and above (ranging to 5,000 agents), comprised 31.9% of participating centers.

### How many agents are in your contact center?



Although North America was the most represented region, participation in the study came from all over the world. Participation spanned all industry verticals. Finance, healthcare and insurance were the largest groups accounted for (17.9%, 16% and 10%, respectively).

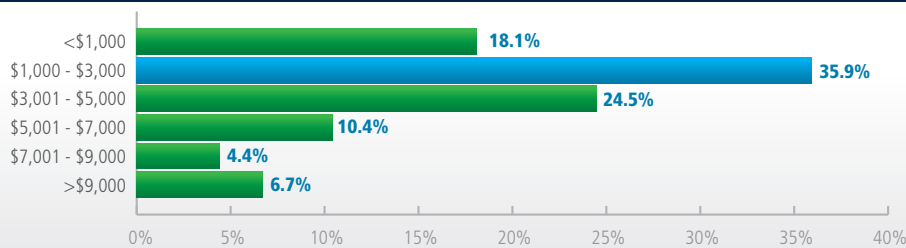
### Which one of the following best represents your organization's primary market or industry?



## The Cost of Agent Attrition

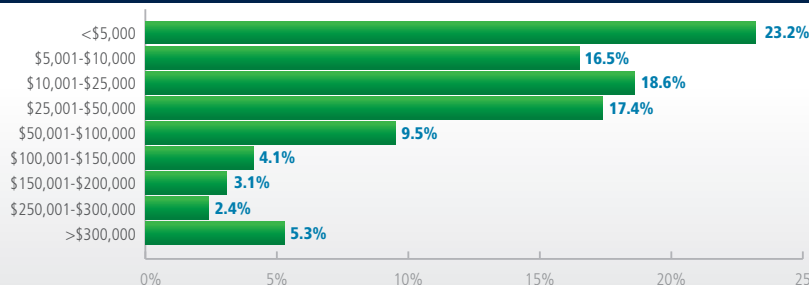
For the majority of contact centers, the agent workforce is the largest budget line item. Agent retention, then, is a significant part of the return on that investment. The cost to hire a new agent ranges between \$1,000 and \$3,000 (U.S.) for 35.9% of respondents while even more (46%) reported that they spend more than \$3,000 for each new agent hired.

### What is your estimated cost to hire a new agent?



The annual cost of agent churn can be a drain on the budget, and for 41.8% of the participating contact centers, that cost is \$25,000 or more per year.

### What is your annual total estimated cost of agent churn in your business?

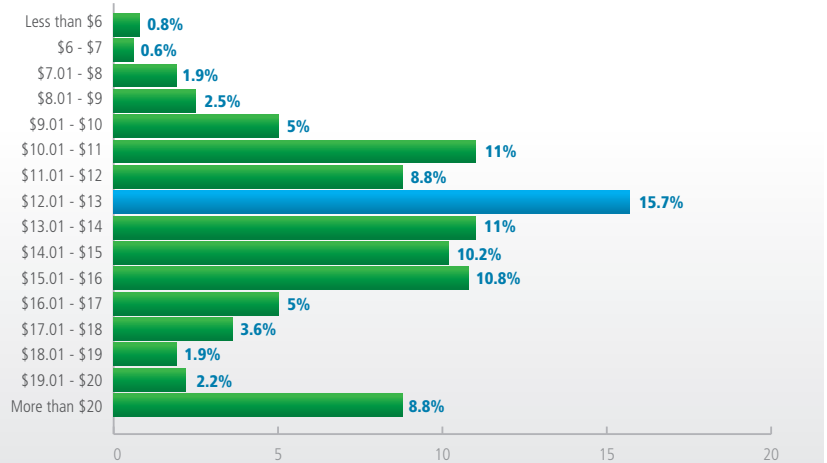


## Causes of Agent Attrition

It is an established belief that agent salaries are a primary factor in agent attrition.

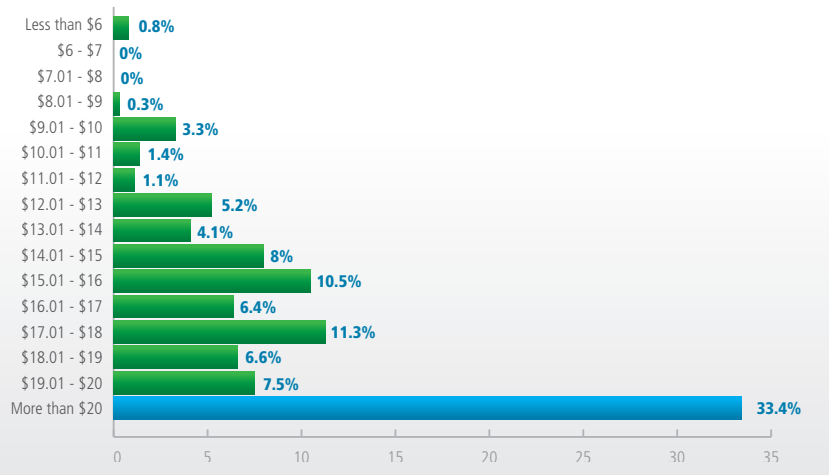
The most common salary range for entry-level agents in the United States as reported by survey participants is \$12.01-\$13, well above the U.S. minimum wage. 67.5% of U.S. participants said their centers pay agents between \$10.01 and \$16. However, there are contact centers that offer pay at the high (\$20 or more) and low (less than \$6) ends of the scale.

### What is the average hourly wage of an entry level full-time agent?



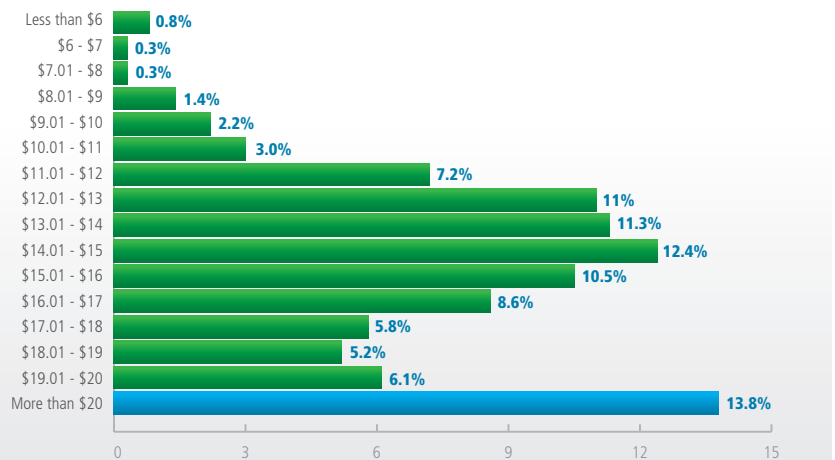
For top-paid full-time agents, 33.4 % of the U.S. centers represented report salaries of \$20 or more per hour.

### What is the average hourly wage of your top-paid full-time agent?



The average hourly wage for all agents is more than \$20 per hour at 13.8% of the reporting centers based in the U.S., with salaries above \$11 per hour not uncommon.

### What is the average hourly wage of ALL full-time agents?



While it is true that agents do leave the contact center because they feel underpaid, wage is not the top driver of attrition. Agents are more likely to leave their positions for other roles within the organization or, in regions with dense contact center population, for an outside opportunity. The top drivers of agent attrition uncovered here are:

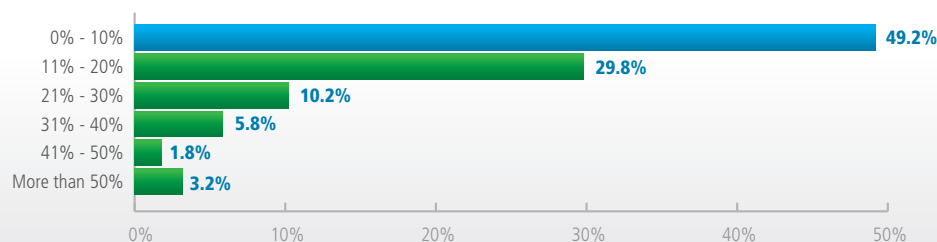
- Better opportunities (both inside and outside the organization)
- Lack of career development opportunities
- Skillset/expertise not being utilized
- Daily physical confinement (being tied to their desks)
- Sense of powerlessness or lack of control
- Repetitive work
- Pace of work too fast
- Dislike handling customer complaints and problems
- Inability to work up to handling more complex customer issues as skills advance
- Inflexible work environment

**Listed below are some common causes of turnover among agents.**  
For each cause, indicate how often it is a reason for turnover among agents in your call center.

	4=Very Frequent	3=Sometimes	2=Seldom	1=Never
Pace of work too fast	9.7%	38.9%	34.5%	16.9%
Sense of powerlessness or lack of control	5.8%	34.0%	37.0%	23.1%
Lack of challenge	3.2%	28.8%	39.4%	28.5%
Skillset/expertise not being utilized	5.3%	37.3%	38.2%	19.2%
No flexible work environment	9.5%	32.9%	32.9%	24.6%
Lacking tools to effectively meet customer needs	3.0%	19.8%	45.1%	32.1%
Inability to work up to handling more complex customer issues as skills advance	4.9%	34.6%	36.0%	24.6%
Repetitive work	13.5%	40.6%	27.6%	18.3%
Daily physical confinement (tied to their desk)	11.4%	35.4%	31.5%	21.7%
Excessive scrutiny/micromanagement	8.4%	23.2%	40.1%	28.3%
Not valued/appreciated for contributions	4.4%	29.8%	41.6%	24.2%
Dislike handling complaints and problems	7.0%	37.4%	36.0%	19.7%
Rigid rules	5.4%	28.1%	41.2%	25.3%
Inconvenient/undesirable work hours	9.6%	26.8%	36.9%	26.8%
Low pay	9.5%	30.9%	36.5%	23.0%
Better opportunities outside organization	12.9%	50.1%	25.6%	11.3%
Better opportunities inside organization	14.7%	45.0%	25.6%	14.7%
Lack of career/development opportunities	7.7%	40.4%	36.9%	15.0%
Lack of or insufficient training	2.6%	18.3%	45.2%	34.0%
Lack of or insufficient incentives/rewards	4.7%	27.9%	41.4%	26.0%
Personality conflicts with supervisor/manager	3.5%	19.5%	50.9%	26.0%

Career development opportunities are a recurring theme within these top drivers, and play a significant role in the retention equation. 50.8% of participating contact centers responded that “external agent turnover” (agents leaving the call center for opportunities outside the organization) accounted for 11 to 50% of overall attrition. The remaining 10.8% reported external attrition rates of 31% or higher. Agents will leave the contact center – or the organization entirely – if they feel overlooked, underutilized and otherwise ill-prepared for career advancements.

**What is your \*external agent turnover rate for the last 12 months?**  
(\*External turnover = staff who leave your organization either voluntarily or involuntarily.)

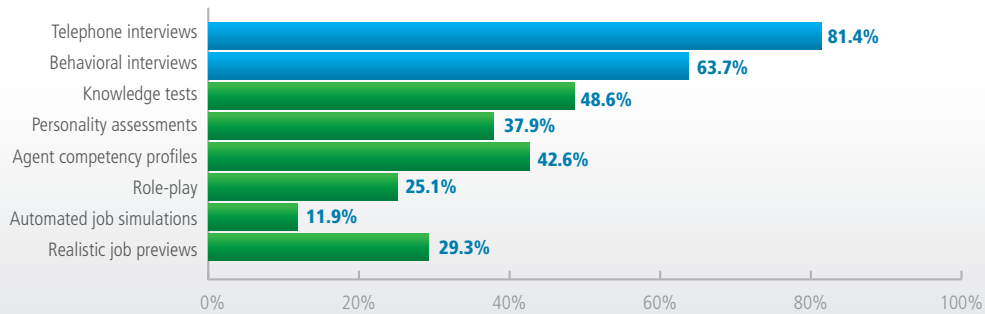


## Agent ROI

Stemming the tide of agent attrition is a critical part of getting the return on your agent investment. When we look at the common causes of agent attrition, we can see a pattern form in the survey results.

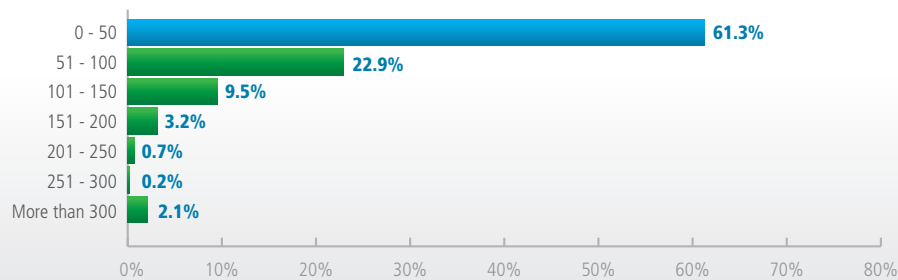
First, hiring the right agents is critical to keeping them. Telephone (81.4%) and behavioral (63.7%) interviews were reported to be the leading agent hiring tools. Knowledge tests, personality assessments and competency profiles were the next most employed tools. However, realistic job previews, role-play and automated job simulations have yet to become commonplace, according to participants.

### What tools do you currently use in your agent hiring process?



While many (61.3%) centers provide more than 50 hours of ongoing agent training, they still report that their agents feel that they are not allowed to exercise the full potential of their individual skillsets within the contact center.

### How many hours of ongoing training do your agents receive per year?

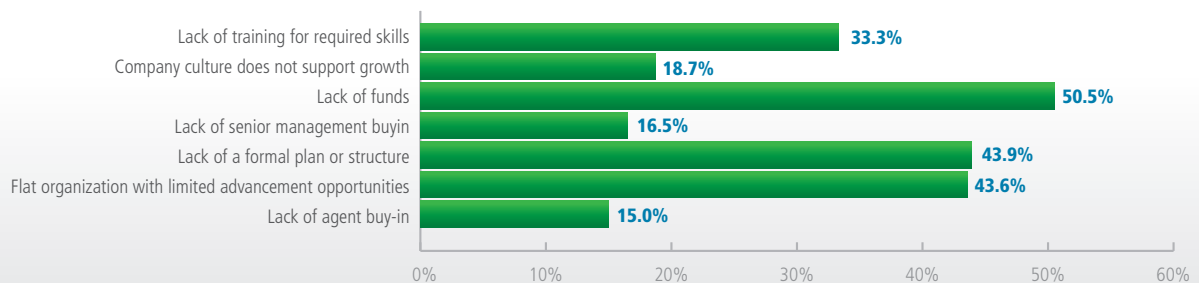


Despite saying that agents' career and skills development are limited, participants reported that supervisors are setting professional development goals to help them in career-pathing and skills development (80.1%). Setting the goals, however, may not be the problem: 64.3% of respondents said that they have encountered obstacles to developing career or skill paths in their centers.

#### Topping the list of obstacles are:

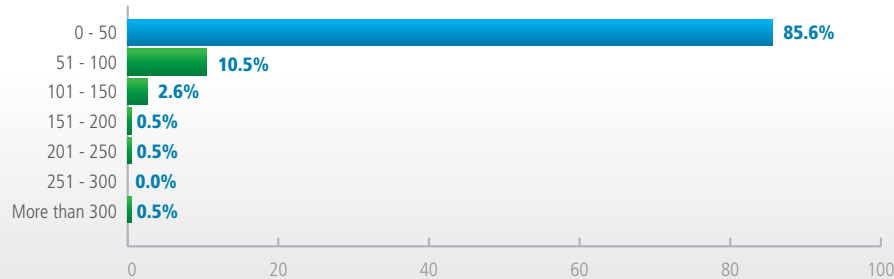
- Lack of funds
- Lack of formal plan or structure
- Flat organization with limited advancement opportunities
- Lack of training for required skills

### What obstacles have you encountered?

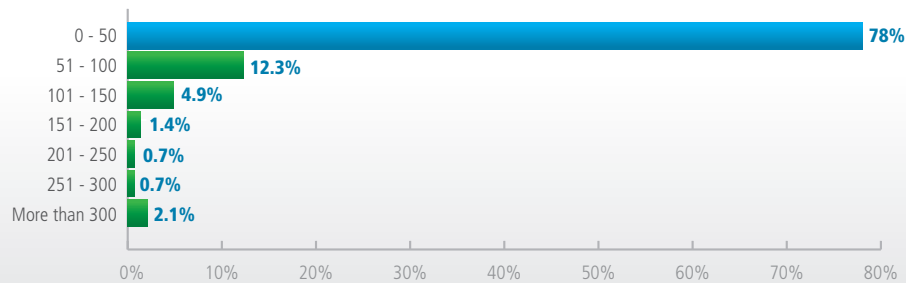


Much of the agent training, according to respondents, focuses on learning new and existing desktop applications: 85.6% reported that agents were spending up to 50 hours of training per year on new systems; 78% were spending an equal amount of training time on an existing desktop system. While this shows the contact center's dedication to improving agent's system skills, considering that most of this training happens On-the-job (80.1%) it also indicates that there is less time being spent on improving skills around customer relationships, selling and processes.

How many hours of ongoing agent training is dedicated to training on NEW desktop applications?



How many hours of new agent training is dedicated to training on EXISTING desktop applications?

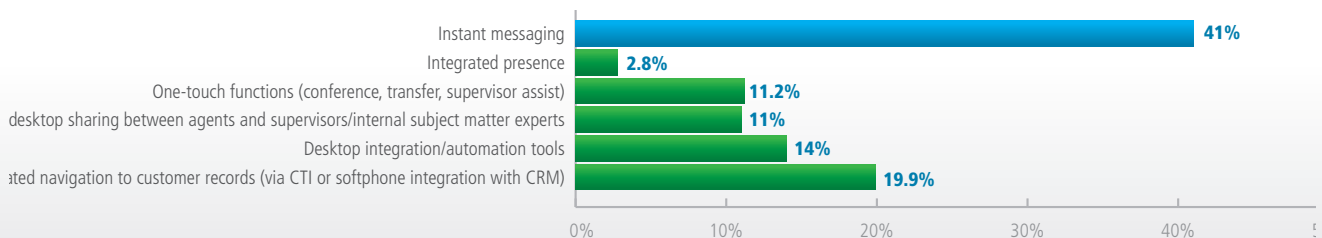


## Tools for Improving the Agent Experience and ROI

For agents handling multiple channels, there can be added pressure not only to learn and maintain the new skills required by these tools, but also to manage a variety of customer interactions. Some centers are using customer self-service to deflect simple and repetitive calls, which is removing some of the "grind" that can lead to attrition. But the challenge of agent training for skills and career development remains.

Agent desktop tools are helping some centers meet the challenge. Instant messaging (41% of centers surveyed use it) can help connect agents to more experienced colleagues and subject matter experts. The desktop tools currently being used include: integrated presence, one-touch functions (conference, transfer, supervisor assist), remote access/desktop sharing between agents and supervisors/internal subject matter experts, desktop integration/automation tools, and automated navigation to customer records (via CTI or softphone integration with CRM). Although the centers surveyed reported a gradual adoption of these tools, they are increasingly present in many other centers;

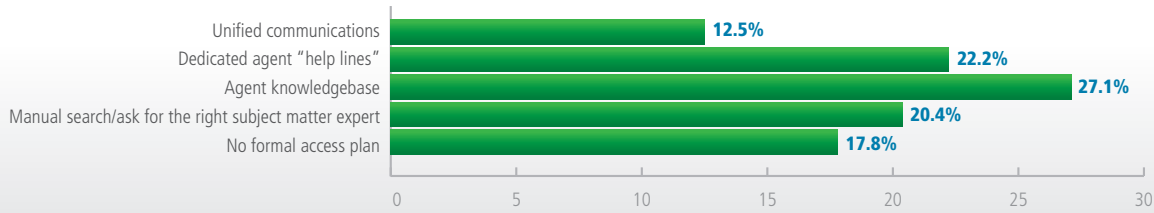
What agent desktop tools does your center use?





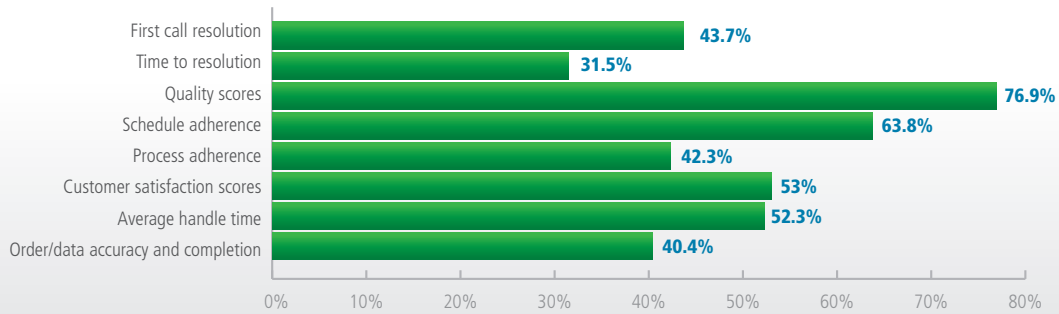
Also helping agents access the right people and information to best serve customers are agent knowledgebase tools (27.1%), agent help lines (22.2%) and manual search/ask for subject matter experts (20.4%).

**How can agents access experts within your business to help them answer highly complex questions and calls?**



These tools allow the agent to more quickly deliver service with quality (the most-used performance measurement) and with higher call resolutions. Additionally, they allow agents to get up and running on systems and processes faster so that training can be spent on more customer-focused skills and business rules.

**How do you measure agent performance?**



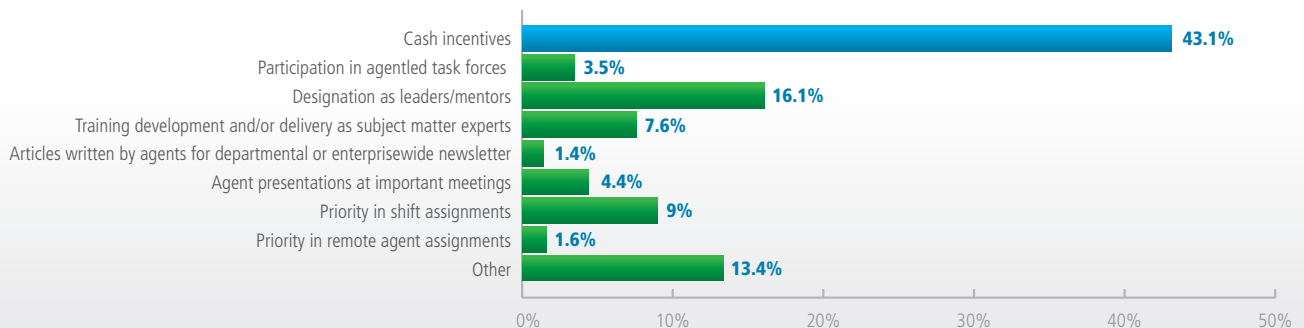
These tools also enhance the agent's ability to quickly and efficiently, which then enables agents to achieve their performance goals while working toward long-term career or skill goals.

**Rewarding Agents**

Most (83.1%) of respondents said they believe that agents are fairly compensated. Although the majority (63.5%) said their center's agent compensation is job based (rather than skills based). 72.5% of centers surveyed offer additional performance incentives to agents.

In addition to pay-based rewards (43.1% said they give agents cash incentives), leadership/mentor designation is used in 16.1% of the centers represented. It is a general best practice that agent rewards should be for a job well done under the best possible circumstances – not for surviving poor processes and people management.

**How do you reward agents based on their performance?**

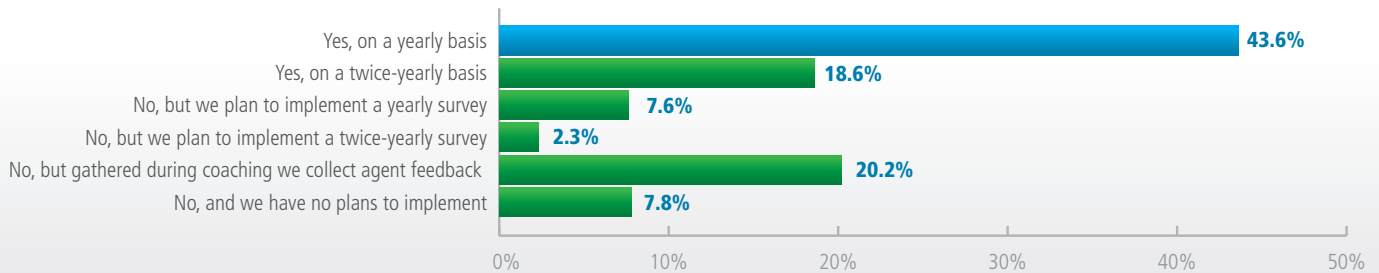


## Measuring Agent Satisfaction

When agents leave, their single most valuable parting gift is sharing their experience with the organization. The majority of organizations (80.3%) conduct exit interviews with departing agents. This information can be used in honing the hiring and training process, as well as in everyday people management.

It is important to prevent the attrition of top agents and those agents with strong potential. Agent satisfaction surveys are an effective tool. Of the centers represented here, 62.2% conduct such surveys; however, 43.6% conduct them only on a yearly basis. Frequency is beneficial in this area, so the 18.6% of centers conducting agent satisfaction surveys at least two times per year are closer to recommended practice.

### Does your contact center conduct agent satisfaction surveys?



It is important to note that, like customer satisfaction surveys and other customer feedback channels, agent satisfaction and agent feedback require regular collection and analysis. But the process cannot end there: Agent feedback must be acted upon and executives, managers, supervisors and team leads must communicate to agents regularly how their feedback is being put to use.

## Conclusion

High agent turnover is a tremendous cost point for the contact center. This research sought to uncover how much contact centers were spending on hiring, training and retaining agents annually, as well as how often agents were leaving and some of the top reasons why.

The majority of contact centers that participated in this research reported that a primary reason for their agent attrition is not salary, rather it is a result of inflexible – or lack of - career development opportunities within the organization. The high-level solution here is to begin by hiring agents who are right for the job, then keep them engaged and vested in their responsibilities through regular coaching and training. It is important to ensure that your agents up-to-date with new desktop tools and technology that are designed to increase agent empowerment, reduce training time and aid in rapid customer contact resolution are not widely deployed.

This report also uncovered that the majority of contact centers who participated in this research are seeking agent feedback on an annual schedule, it is important to realize that frequent and direct agent feedback is crucial to your agent's retention and productivity, and ultimately to the satisfaction of your customers.

Finally, it is especially valuable to your center's overall productivity and success to make your agents feel appreciated for their hard work and accomplishments.

## About This Report

This research was made possible by the underwriting support of Avaya ([www.Avaya.com](http://www.Avaya.com)). ICMI research sponsors do not have access to research participant information, including individual survey responses.

## About ICMI

The International Customer Management Institute (ICMI), is the leading global provider of comprehensive resources for customer management professionals—from frontline agents to executives—who wish to improve contact center operations, empower contact center employees and enhance customer loyalty. ICMI's experienced and dedicated team of industry insiders, analysts and consultants are committed to providing uncompromised objectivity and results-oriented vision through the organization's respected lineup of professional services including training and certification, consulting, events and informational resources. Founded in 1985, ICMI continues to serve as one of the most established and respected organizations in the call center industry.

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