ICMI International Customer Management Institute

2011 Research Report

Call Center Practices for Pairing and Blending Inbound, Outbound and Service and Sales

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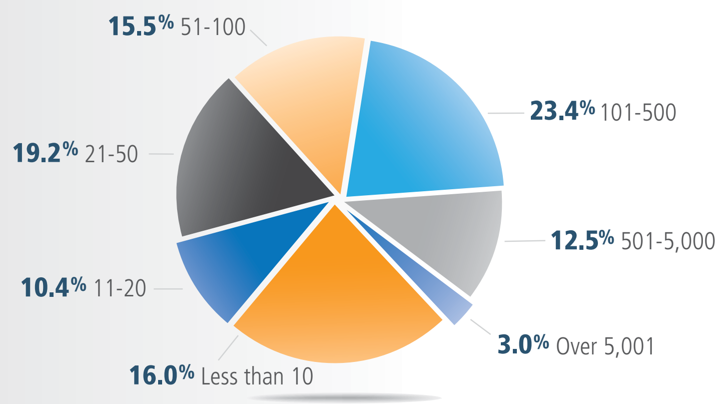
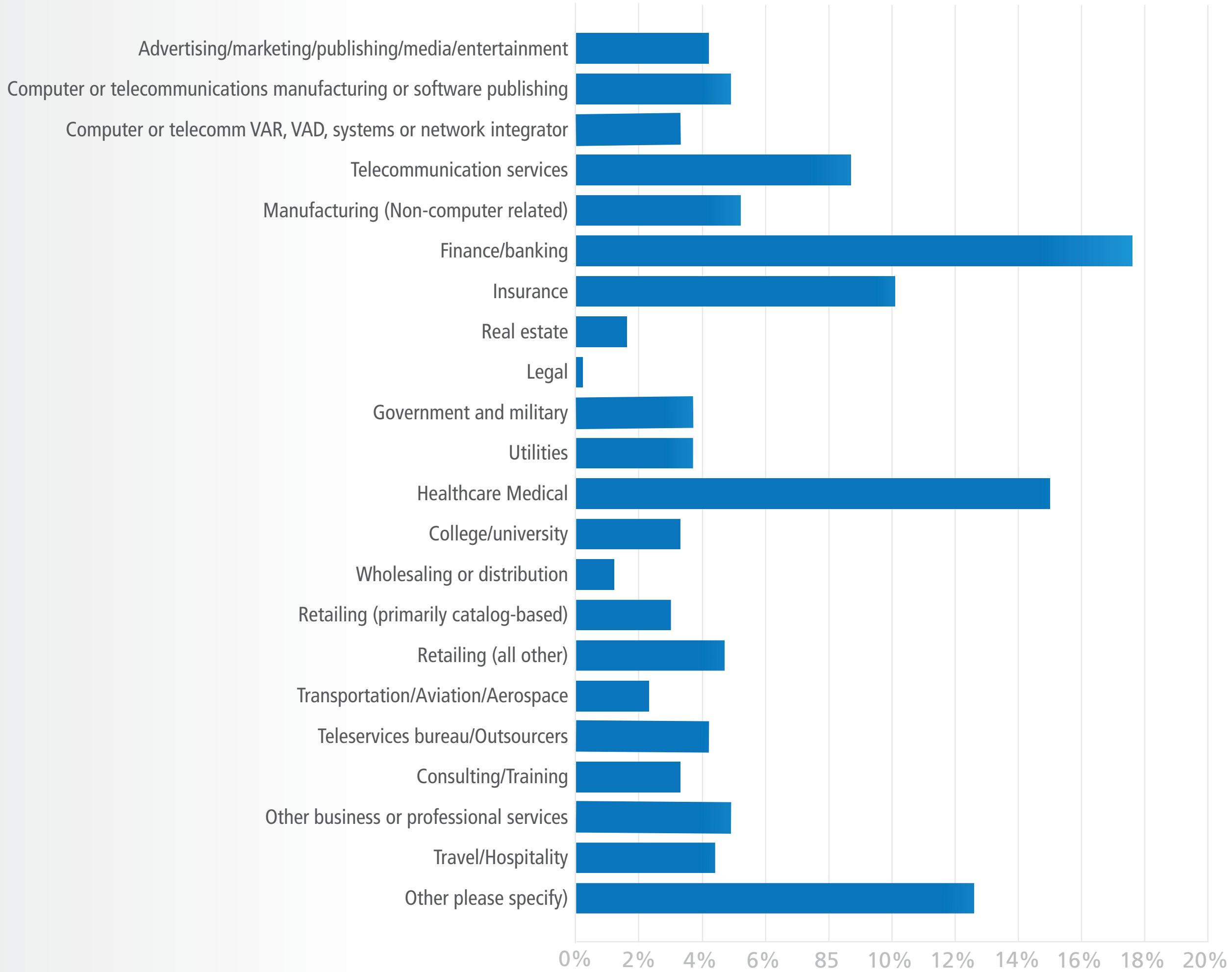
Executive Summary

The current combination of economic changes and evolving customer expectations (including new communication capabilities and emerging social communities) is driving fundamental changes in the contact center: Satisfy customers and do it more efficiently, even grow revenue. This research focuses not on customer access channels but how call centers approach interactions. In June and July of 2011, 440 call center professionals from around the world shared with ICMI how — and if — they handle inbound and outbound as well as sales and service contacts in their centers. Our goal was to

Call center sizes represented



Industry verticals represented



understand the industry's practices around these activities: how centers account for resources and how their centers perform under current practices. In doing so, call centers and the businesses they serve should be better informed in their efforts to increase agent productivity along with productivity for the whole center by leveraging this critical data around transaction handling. What's impacting service level, average handle time, the customer experience and sales? What are some of the barriers to progress and success? What are other call centers doing and what are the impacts? These and other questions are answered here.

Survey Demographics

Organizations participating in this research represent the gamut of sizes, geographic location and industry vertical.

Call Center Size

Most of the call centers in our survey, 23.5%, have 101-500 agents; another 12.6% are in the 501-5,000-agent range. Consider that another 3% are in the 5,001+-agent range and we see that large call centers are strongly represented with a total of 39% of the total participation. (See figure on Call Center Sizes Represented, p. 3)

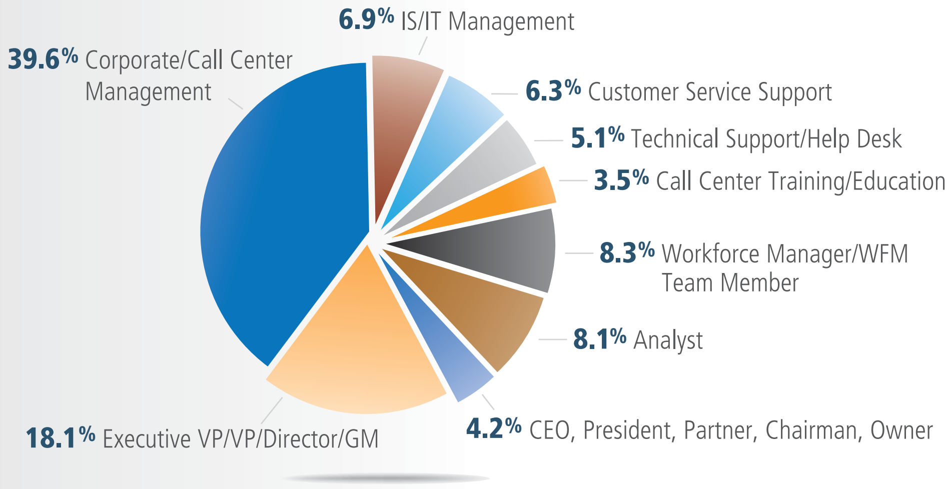
Industry Verticals

More than 21 industries are represented here, with finance having the most robust presence among responders (17.7%), with healthcare/medical and insurance (15.1% and 10.1%, respectively) rounding out the top three. (See figure on Industry Verticals Represented, p. 3)

Call Center Roles

Survey participants ranged in roles and levels of responsibility, with the largest segment, 39.9%, sitting at the corporate or call center management level, followed by 18.2% at the executive VP/VP/director/GM level and another 3.7% at the CEO, president, partner, chairman, owner level. (See figure on Call Center Roles Represented)

Call center roles represented



Key Findings

Key findings from the research include:

- Inbound call centers that don't account for (or are not even tracking) outbound calls may be experiencing drops in service level as a result.
- Centers have growing confidence that service agents could transition to a selling environment and vice-versa.
- Business rules and the nature of business still require the segregation of inbound and outbound agents in some call centers.
- Occupancy rates for inbound centers that do not account for outbound call-backs to customers or calls to internal departments is slightly higher than for those that do; this effect may be related to agents performing extra activity that is not part of work that is typically included in forecasting.
- Centers that are blending inbound and outbound calling today are in the clear minority — partly because they may not have had access to sophisticated tools that make blending feasible.
- Increasing customer satisfaction is a more motivating driver for blending than additional revenue alone.
- Most blended centers, and centers that would consider blending, are seeing or expecting a positive impact on both customer satisfaction and additional revenue generation.
- A robust majority of call centers surveyed identify value with taking a blended approach to inbound/outbound and service/sales call handling — whether or not they are currently using a blended approach.

Call Center Strategies for Inbound and Outbound Calls

In order to understand the types of activities participating call centers conduct, we asked them to tell us whether their call centers are *inbound only, outbound only, mostly outbound, mostly inbound or about even inbound/outbound*.

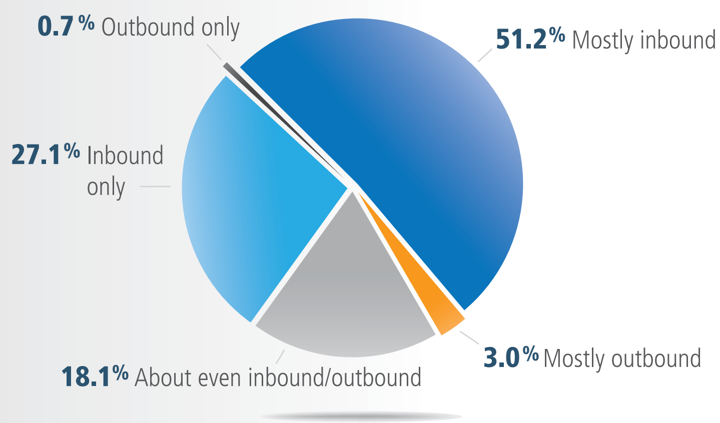
In our survey, centers represented fall predominantly into the *mostly inbound category* (51.3%) followed by *inbound only* (27.3%). Those *about even inbound/outbound centers* represent a strong 17.7%, with mostly outbound and outbound only lagging significantly in representation (3% and 0.7%, respectively). (See Figure 1)

Inbound Only Centers and Outbound Traffic

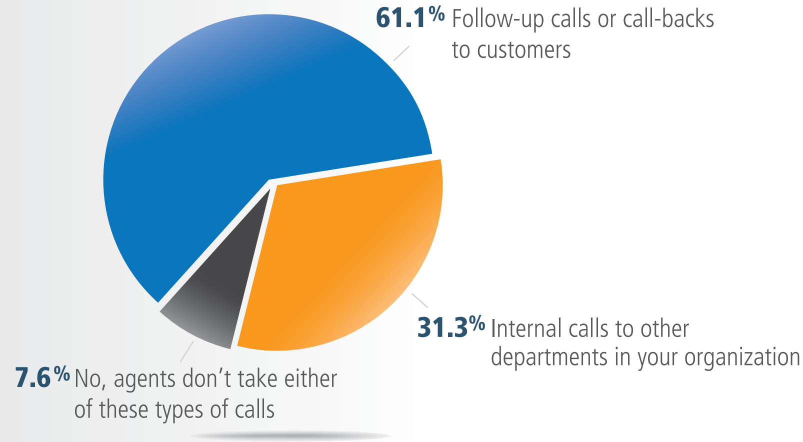
Centers designated as *inbound only* in the survey, were asked if those agents make follow-up calls or callbacks to customers and/or internal calls to other departments in the organization. In 7.6% of the responses, inbound-only agents do not make either type of these outbound calls. Outbound calls are predominantly to customers (61.1%), with just more than half (31.3%) going to other departments in the organization.

Of those inbound-only centers (or agent groups), only 57% of those account for outbound call-backs to customers or to other departments. (See Figure 2)

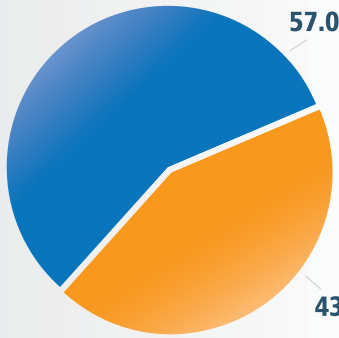
1. Call center types



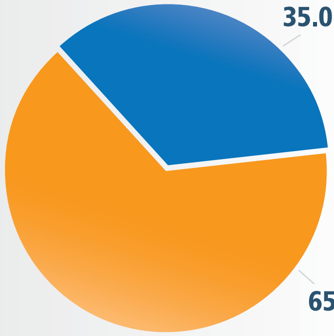
2. Inbound-only agents and outbound calls



3. Centers that account for outbound customer call-backs or calls to internal departments in call time



4. Centers that account for outbound client call-backs or calls to internal departments rostered staff factor

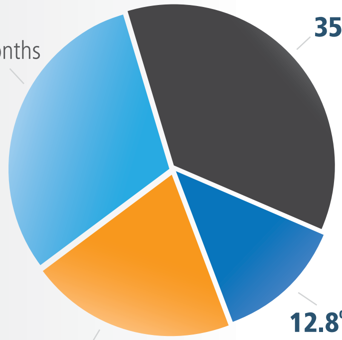


Even fewer inbound-only centers (35%) account for outbound calls in their rostered staff factor (or shrinkage) calculations, leaving 65% of those centers with no accounting or forecasting for this type of work. However, the majority (57%) do account for such outbound calls in their call times. (See Figures 3 and 4)

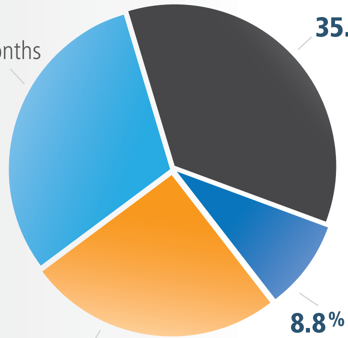
Comparing the service level achievement between inbound-only centers that do account for some sort of outbound calling, there is a small difference in performance. Whether they account for these calls or not appears to have little effect on the top service level achievers (those making service level objectives for all or 9 out of 10 of the previous 12 months). However, we see that the percentage of centers that reached their service level for 7 or fewer of the previous 12 months is much larger (25.3% for centers that don't account for these outbound calls and 20.5% of those that do).

We can reasonably assert a correlation between accounting for all types of work — in this case, those outbound calls — and service level performance, even if we can't show causality. (See Figures 5 and 6)

5. Service level performance for inbound-only centers that account for outbound client call-backs and calls to internal departments



6. Service level performance for inbound-only centers that do not account for outbound client call-backs and calls to internal departments



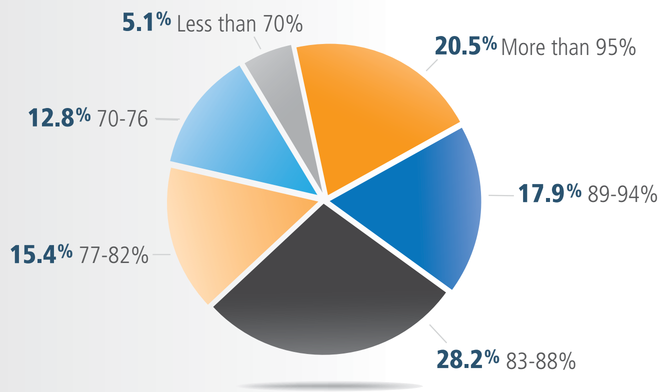
Comparing inbound-only centers that make at least some outbound calls, those that account for those calls fall more into the "sweet spot" for occupancy of 83-88% (agents ready for work and less likely to be burned out), while those that don't say their occupancy is primarily in the 89-94% range. (As a side note, whether the center does or does not account for these calls, 95% occupancy rates are more common than leading recommendations would establish.) (See Figures 7 and 8)

Mostly Inbound Centers and Outbound Traffic

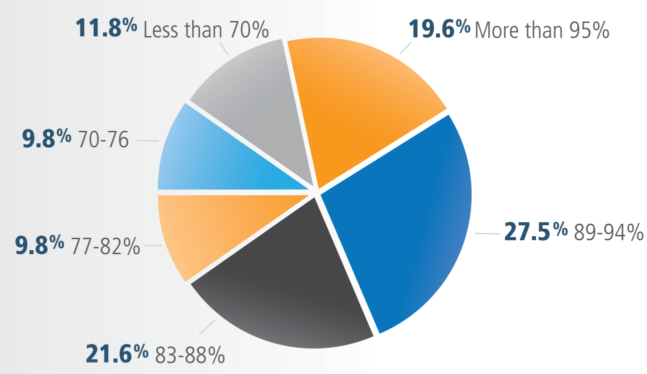
The majority (51.3%) of centers surveyed are classified as *mostly inbound*. A little more than half (56.8%) of the mostly inbound centers reportedly account for outbound calls in call time, yet less than half (44%) account four outbound calls in their rostered staff factor calculations. Of those centers that do not account for outbound calls, 65% have missed service level objectives in 2 to 5 of the previous 12 months. (see Figure 9)

Notable is that, while 32.3% of these centers report occupancy rates between 89% and 94% (and 14.6% report occupancy at greater than 95%), more than half of them report occupancy at 88% or below. (See Figure 10)

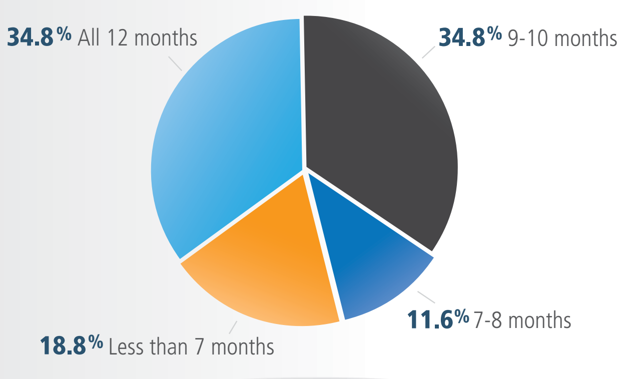
7. Six-month average occupancy for inbound-only centers that account for outbound client call-backs and calls to internal departments



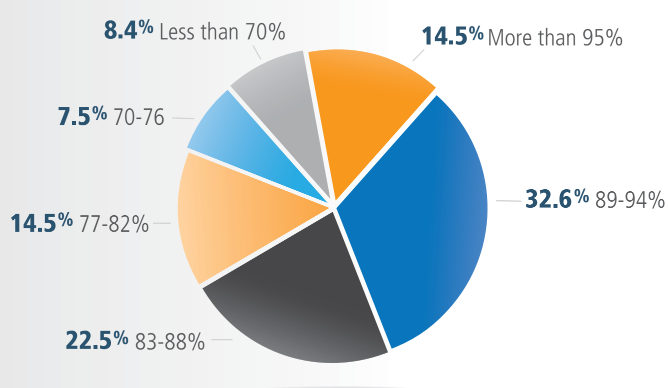
8. Six-month average occupancy for inbound-only centers that account for outbound client call-backs and calls to internal departments



9. Service level performance for mostly inbound centers that do not account for outbound client call-backs and calls to internal departments



10. Six-month average occupancy for mostly inbound centers that do not account for outbound client call-backs and calls to internal departments



Adding Outbound Calls for Customer Satisfaction and Revenue

Of those inbound centers with an outbound element, 88.9% say they focus the increased agent capacity on increasing customer satisfaction, with a primary effort on callbacks (62.5%) and reminders (50%), all conducted by live-agent outreach (as opposed to automated outreach).

Those 11.1% citing driving additional revenue as the priority report that their efforts are equally divided (33.3% each) between up-selling and cross-selling, installed base add-ons, net new revenue, and other various activities.

Interesting is that 11.1% don't know where that extra agent capacity is leveraged.

Dual-Role Pay Models

None of these inbound centers that have added an outbound segment adjust pay models for agents with regard to their inbound or outbound functions.

While 44.4% of respondents in these centers said their agents required additional training, 33.3% said they noted no overall impact on agents, while 22.2% reported increased agent turnover. A small but notable portion (11.1%) said they did not know if there were overall impacts on agents caused by adding an outbound segment.

Measuring Blended Success with Outbound Additions

Success for adding outbound functions to predominantly inbound centers is primarily measured using traditional inbound and outbound call metrics (33.3%); respondents said their centers measure this success by tracking incremental revenue and by monitoring customer satisfaction improvements (11.1% for each measure). Notably, 44.4% do not measure success in this area at all.

The majority of centers (62.5%) incorporate outbound calling on a full-time basis, while 25% do so on a seasonal basis.

Although 37.5% of survey participants whose centers incorporate both inbound and outbound calling segments said they do not know if any metrics improved, 12.5% said that service levels and abandon rates and dropped calls improved. These and other metrics (number of calls handled, average handle time, average speed of answer) showed no improvement for 25% of respondents' centers.

Metrics that survey participants said have worsened with combining inbound and outbound segments are average speed of answer (37.5%), service levels (37.5%), abandon rates or dropped calls (37.5%) and average handle time (25%). The number of calls agents handle and the number of successful calls per month (outbound) were unaffected; although, 12.5% of respondents said they did not know which, if any, of these metrics worsened with the inclusion of outbound calling.

Agent Roles in Inbound/Outbound Centers

With regard to which type of agent they'd be more comfortable placing in an outbound calling role, survey participants were evenly divided (33.3% each) to see service reps taking on a sales role or vice versa.

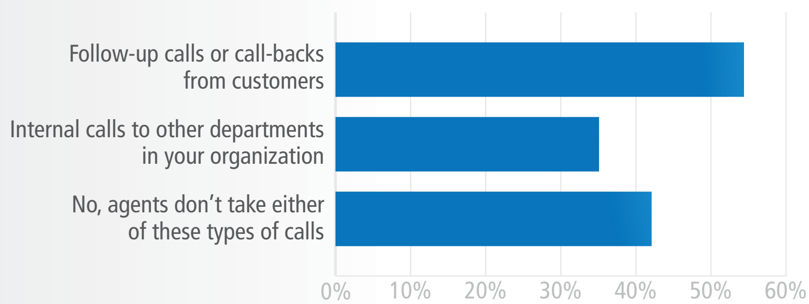
Regarding development of agents' job functions in the dual-role center, 100% of respondents said that their service representatives perform additional customer outreach but that none of their sales reps took on additional inbound or outbound selling processes.

Outbound Only Centers and Inbound Traffic

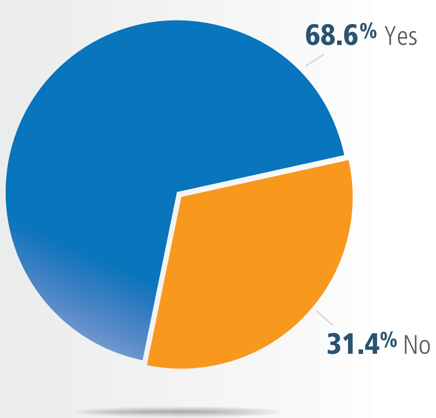
Centers designated as *outbound only* (0.7%) are a true minority in the study. However, their practices and performance are notable. When asked if their agents take inbound calls — follow ups from customers and internal calls from other departments in the organization — 42.1% said their outbound-only agents do not take either of these types of inbound calls. For those outbound centers (or agent groups) that do take these types of calls, 54.4% said they take follow-up calls or call-backs from customers, while 35.1% take internal calls from other departments in the organization. (See Figure 11)

Of those outbound-only centers that take inbound calls, 68.6% of them account form them; and 41.4% of those include those inbound calls in their rostered staff factor calculations. (See Figures 12 and 13)

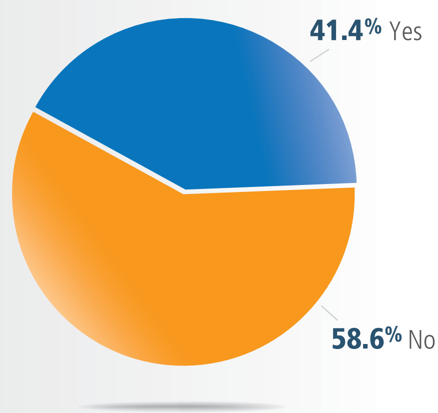
11. Outbound-only agents and outbound calls



12. Outbound-only centers that account for inbound calls from clients or from internal departments in call time



13. Outbound-only centers that account for inbound calls from clients or from internal departments in rostered staff factor



Outbound-only centers that account for inbound traffic report occupancy rates in the range of 89-94% (26.7%) and 83-86% (26.7%). Those outbound-only centers that do not account for inbound traffic report occupancy rates primarily in the 89-94% range (25.8%). (See Figures 14 and 15)

Selling in the Call Center

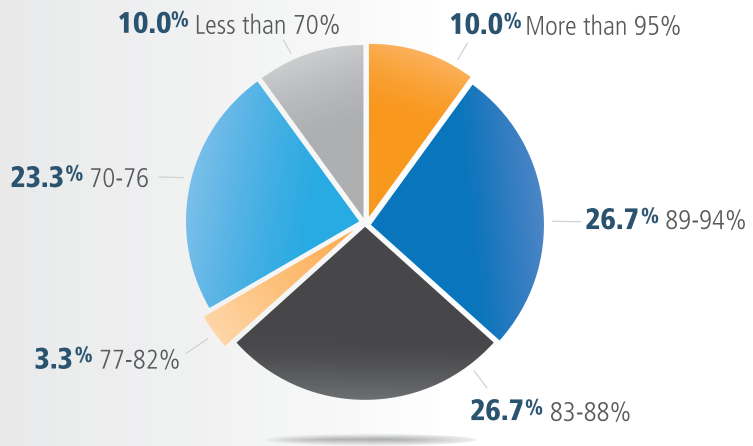
Nearly half (47.2%) of survey participants said their call centers sell to customers. More than half (53.6%) said that selling efforts are based on a customer segmentation strategy.

The majority (82.2%) of call centers that conduct selling do so using cross-selling and/or up-selling inbound agents or a combination of inbound and outbound agents.

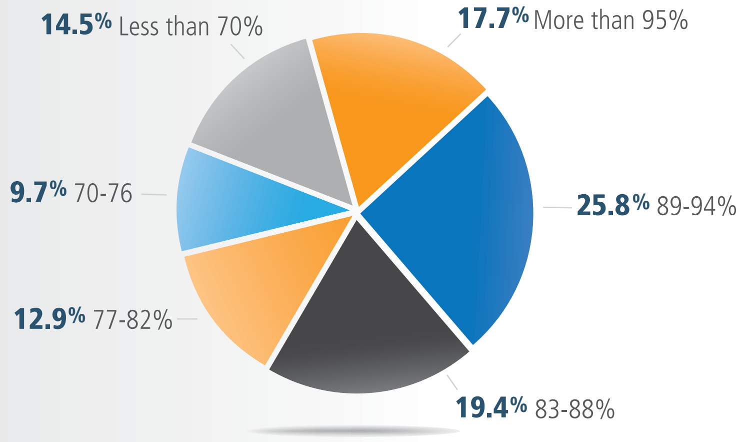
Blended Call Center Operations

The survey asked participants about their call centers' activities and attempts around blending inbound and outbound as well as sales and service calls. Regardless of whether they currently blend or not, 53.3% of survey participants said they could see the customer experience value in applying a blended process in their centers (and 28.7% said they might be able to see such value). (See Figure 16)

14. Six-month average occupancy for outbound-only centers that account for inbound cliaent call-back or internal calls



15. Six-month average occupancy for outbound-only centers that account for inbound client call-back or internal calls



However, only a small portion of participants reported that their centers are currently blended. Those centers did, however, share information about what they thought blending might accomplish (or not, in some cases) and prior experience with blended environments.

Blended Inbound/Outbound

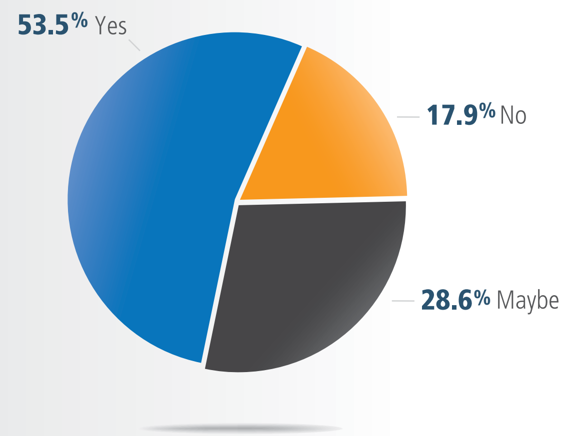
Just 0.02% of survey participants say their call center currently blends inbound and outbound calling activities — and this on a full-time basis for all, with the sole focus on increasing customer satisfaction.

In this segment, 100% said service representatives perform additional customer outreach. And pay models are the same for all agents, regardless of their blended function. Increased agent turnover and additional training requirements were the primary effects of blending.

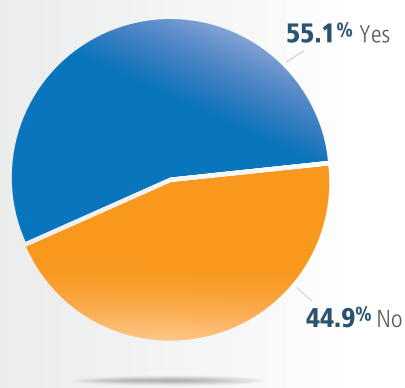
Traditional inbound and outbound call metrics combined with monitoring customer satisfaction improvements are equal leaders for measuring success in the blended environments. Tracking incremental revenue is not at all used.

For the blended population represented in this survey, the following metrics are reported to have worsened with the addition of blending: average speed of answer (100%), service levels (100%) and abandon rates or dropped calls (100%). Calls handled, average handle time and number of successful calls per month were reportedly unaffected.

16. Perceived customer experience value in applying a blended process in the call center



17. Evenly distributed inbound/outbound centers that segregate agents by function



Centers’ Consideration of Blended Inbound/ Outbound

A relatively small percentage (10.2%) of call center professionals surveyed said they've considered blending inbound and outbound calls in their centers. Of those, 56% said they currently have an approximate even distribution of inbound and outbound calls and their agents are segregated regarding which type of calls they handle. While the majority of all centers represented in the study said their centers do not have a blended operation, results here (44% of centers that don’t segregate agents based on inbound or outbound duties) point to agent skill sets as a less daunting barrier to blending. (See Figure 17)

Utilizing Increased Agent Capacity — Customer Satisfaction and Revenue

Of those centers, 53.3% said they'd focus the increased agent capacity from blending on both driving additional revenue and increasing customer satisfaction: 33.3% said they'd focus solely on increasing customer satisfaction and 11.1% would focus on driving additional revenue. (See Figure 18)

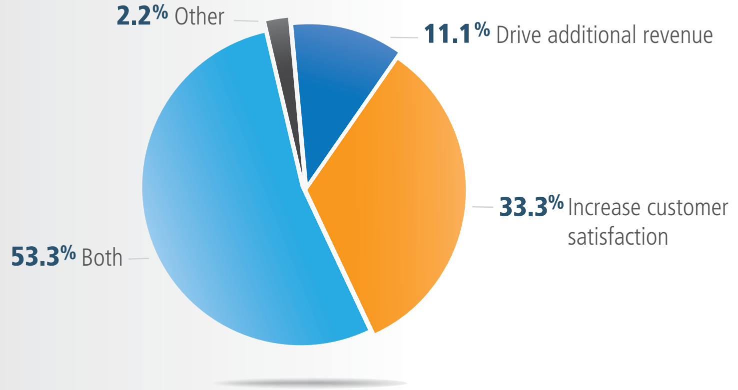
For those centers that would focus blending efforts on increasing customer satisfaction, 33.3% said their primary effort would be on callbacks, with another 26.7% saying it would be on live agent outreach. Surveys and reminders fell in at 8.9% each, with automated outreach at 4.4%. (See Figure 19)

Those survey participants would focus on bringing in additional revenue said their primary effort would be on up-selling and cross-selling (61.1%), with net new revenue falling in much lower with 13.9% each and installed base add-ons at 11.1%. (See Figure 20)

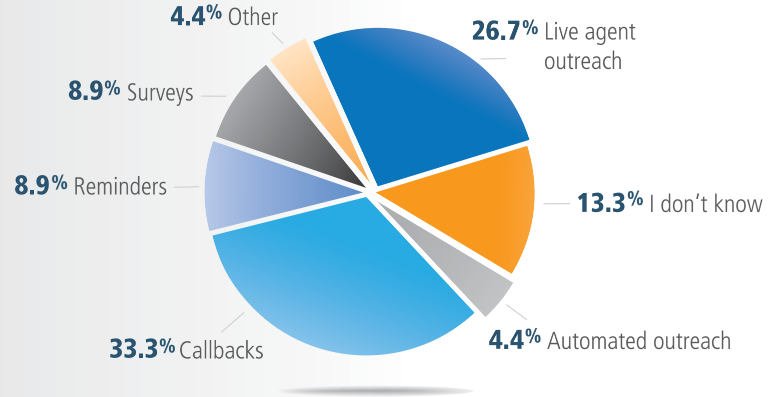
Agent Roles in the Blended Center

Asked which type of agents survey participants would feel more comfortable putting into a blended role, 38.6% said they'd rather have sales reps take on an additional service role; 34.1% said they'd have service reps take on a sales role. Interestingly, 27.3% said they'd feel comfortable giving each agent type the additional role of sales or service.

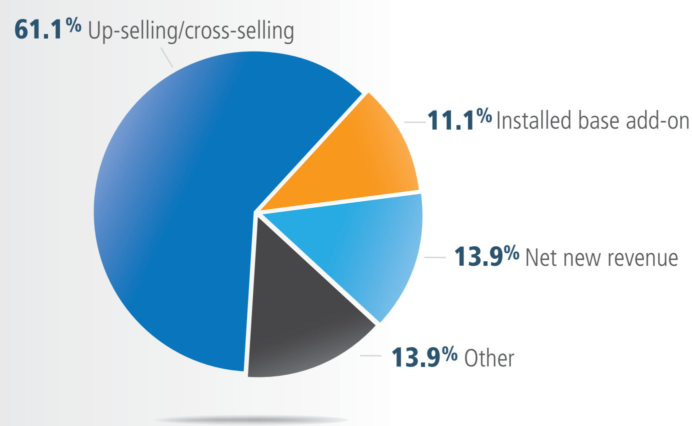
18. Where centers that have considered blending would focus increased agent capacity from blending inbound and outbound call processes



19. Where centers that have considered blending to increase customer satisfaction would focus primary effort

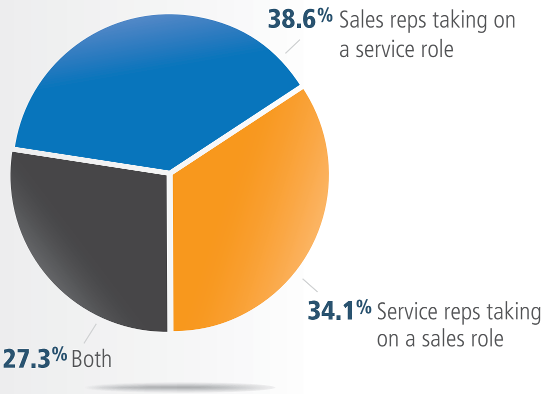


20. Where centers that have considered blending for additional revenue would focus primary effort

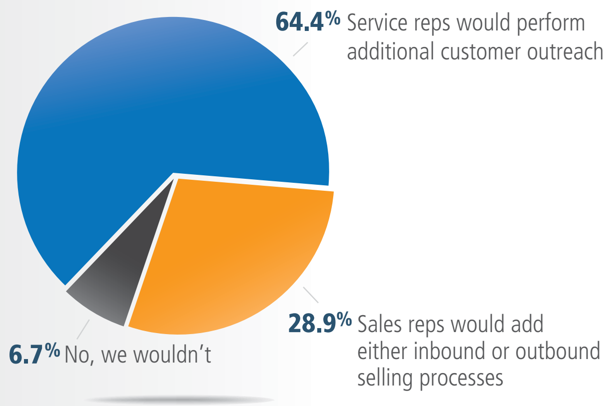


Furthermore, 93.3% of respondents said they would develop a blended process within agents' existing job functions. Service representatives would perform additional customer outreach, according to 64.4%, and 28.9% said sales representatives would add either inbound or outbound selling processes. (See Figures 21 and 22)

21. **Agent types centers that have considered blending would put in a blended role**



22. **Agent role development for centers that have considered blending**

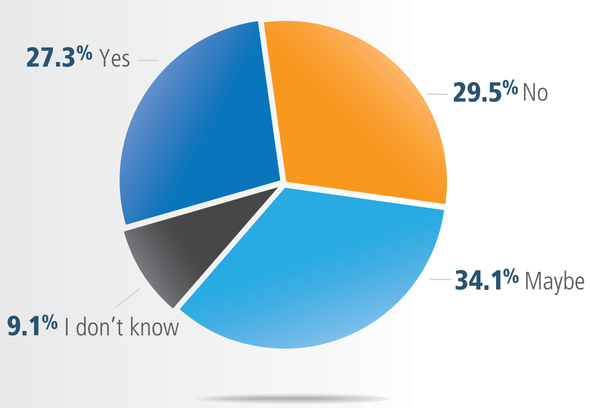


Agent Compensation and Requirements for Success in the Blended Call Center

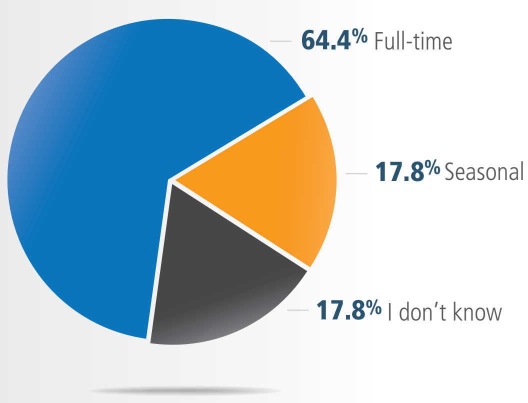
Asked if they would adjust pay models for agents when introducing a blended model, 34.1% of responding call center leaders said they might; 29.5% said they would not; and 27.3% said that they would. Another 9.1% said they didn't know if they'd make compensation adjustments for agents in a blended environment or not. (See Figure 23)

Note that 62.2% of survey participants said they would introduce blending on a full-time basis. Just 17.8% said they would introduce it on a seasonal basis. (See Figure 24)

23. **Likelihood that centers that have considered blending would adjust agent pay by role**



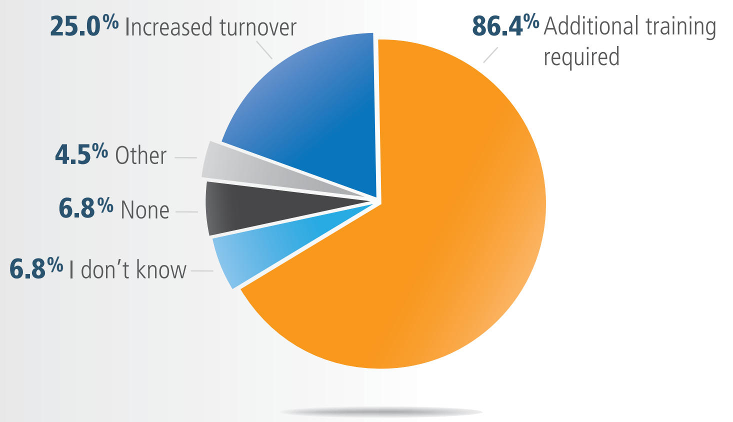
24. **Seasonal or full-time preference in centers that have considered blending**



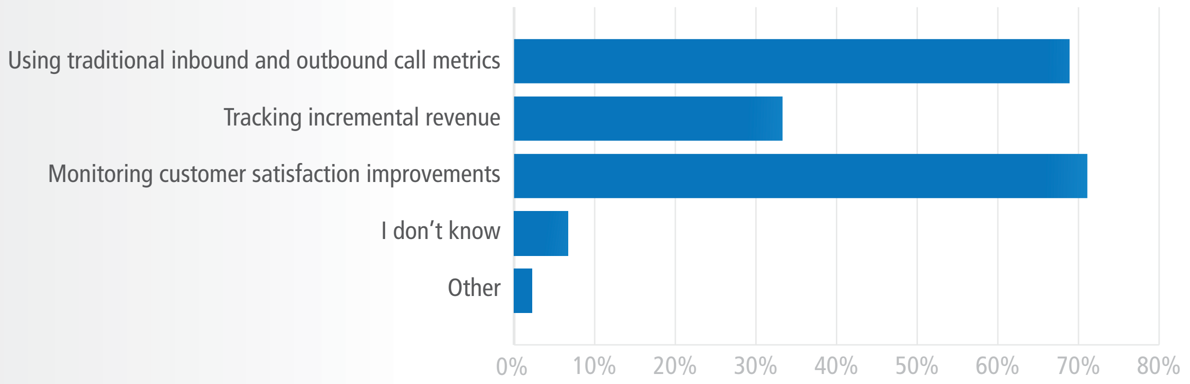
To understand the requirements for success in introducing a blended environment in their center, survey participants were first asked what they estimated would be the overall impacts on agents. An overwhelming 86.4% said additional training would be required; 25% said they'd expect to agent turnover increase. A very small number, 6.8%, said they would expect no impact on agents. (See Figure 25)

Regarding how they would measure the success of introducing a blended inbound/outbound environment in their centers, study participants were nearly evenly split between monitoring customer satisfaction improvements (71.1%) and using traditional inbound and outbound call metrics (68.9%), while 33.3% said they would track incremental revenue to measure success. Notable is the fact that 6.7% said they did not know how they would measure the success of a blended approach. (See Figure 26)

25. Expected impacts on agents for call centers considering blending

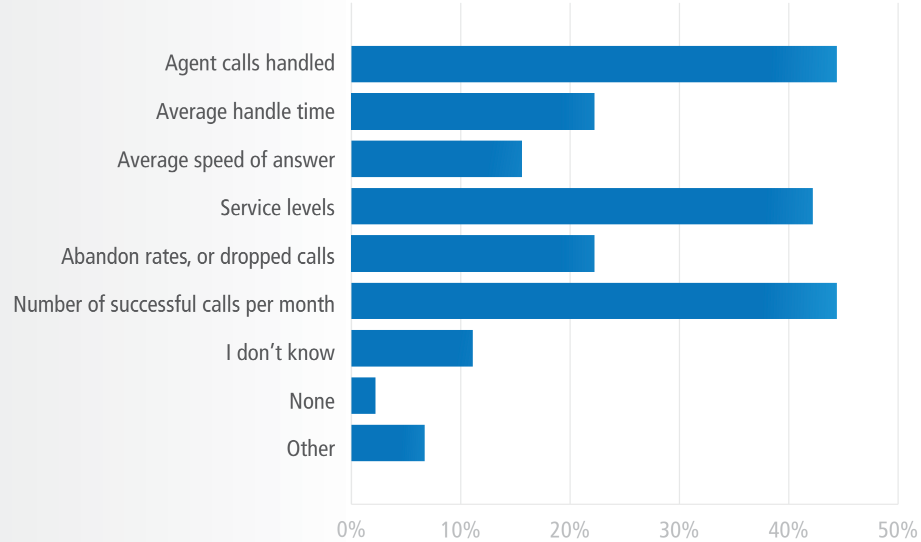


26. How centers would measure success for a blended process



Metrics that survey respondents who would consider blending would expect would be improved against run the gamut, but agent calls handled and the number of successful calls per month (both outbound metrics) lead with 44.4% each. Service level was most expected to improve by 42.2% of participants. Average handle time, abandon rates and dropped calls and average speed of answer are also expected to improve. (See Figure 27)

27. Metrics expected to improve by call centers considering blending



Average handle time, however, would be expected to worsen, according to 44.4% of call center professionals. Another 35.6% said average speed of answer would worsen, followed by service level, agent calls handled, abandon rates and the number of successful calls per month (in descending order), with 17.8% saying they don't know which metrics might worsen with the introduction of blending inbound and outbound calls.

Centers that Tried but Abandoned a Blended Process

In the study, 12.5% of participants said their call centers had tried a blending process in the past but returned to a single process. Respondents cited agent impacts (47.3%) as the primary reason for abandoning a blended process, while 30.9% said cost was an issue and 29.1% said the initial benefits of blending disappeared over time. Here are some of the anecdotal explanations from participants for ending blending programs:

> *A. To be more efficient in handling in and out bound call traffic. We felt that the center was growing rapidly and hence had to quickly consider specialized treatment. Secondly occupancy was on the rise — 10% increment on a weekly basis and headcount was becoming unmanageable. The need to streamline the complaint handling process increased the need to have a single process contact center: 20% of the complaints would have delayed response because of the effect of prioritizing tasks using the blended approach. Growth and development was the other driving factor. Our strategy involved moving the best performers to new roles something that increased productivity especially in the agents who had served longer in the contact center*

B. Difficult training, longer training, single focus helps build better skills in that focus.

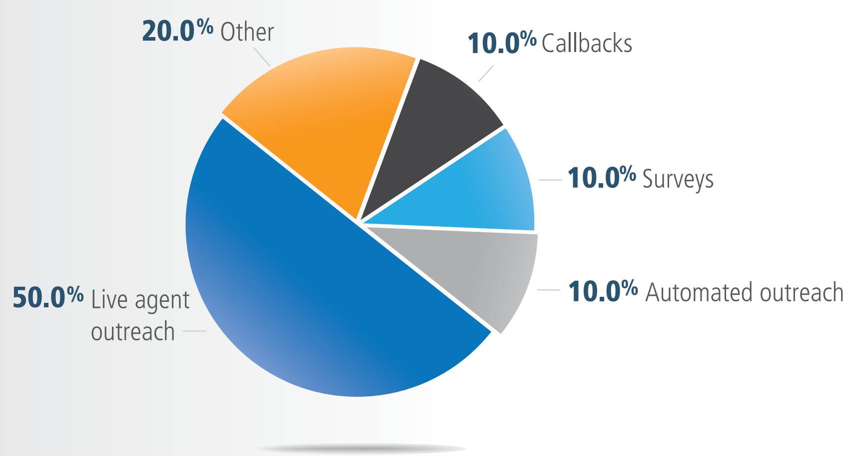
C. The type of outbound skills required specifically on the technical support side [was] much different than inbound skills. We found that agents were much more satisfied to do one or the other and many chose through an interview style process to be part of the inbound or outbound team. Additionally, the type of work done on the inbound and outbound side varied, [so] splitting it created a more positive client experience. We also saw less "wasted" time on the agent side. Before splitting we would see agents who were getting ready for an outbound call stop accepting inbound work approximately 10 minutes prior to their scheduled outbound time. This has disappeared with the removal of blending. I would say that this decision was very specific to our organization, and client experience and not so much industry trends.

D. Inbound / outbound call types are inherently different (customer service is primarily inbound, with some outbound callbacks; collections is primarily outbound, with customers returning voicemails, etc via inbound phone call).

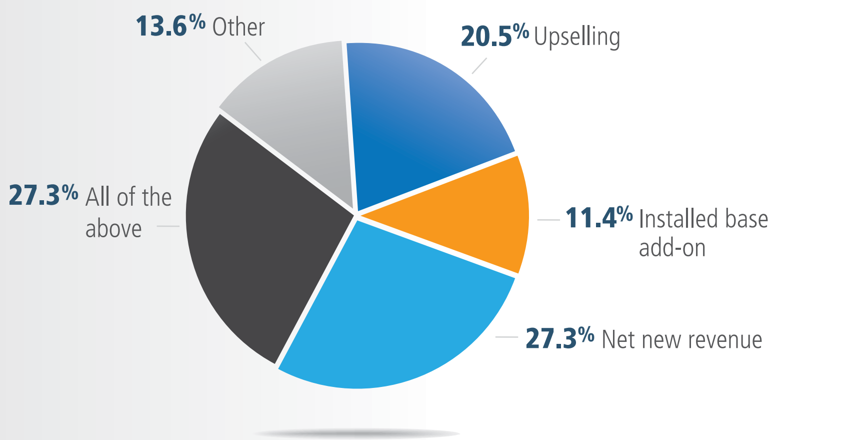
The focus on blending as a means to increase customer satisfaction was live agent outreach, according to 50% of survey participants. Callbacks and surveys were the next greatest focus, but distant runners up at 10% each. (See Figure 28)

For those centers that attempted a blended approach with a goal of driving additional revenue, 27.9% said net new revenue was their primary focus, followed by a combination of net new revenue, up-selling and installed base add-ons. (See Figure 29)

28. Primary effort to increase customer satisfaction for centers that tried but abandoned blending



29. Primary efforts toward additional revenue for centers that tried but abandoned blending



Utilizing Increased Agent Capacity — Customer Satisfaction and Revenue

Those centers that, at some point, incorporated a blended process focused the increased agent capacity they recognized primarily to increase customer satisfaction (62.5%) rather than drive additional revenue (25%). (See Figure 30)

Agent Roles in the Blended Center

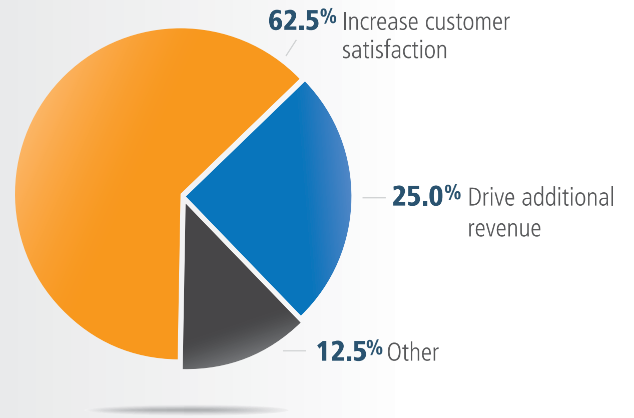
In centers that previously introduced a blended environment, study participants said they were equally comfortable placing sales representatives in a service role (25%) or service representatives in a sales role (25%) or either/both (50%). They were also equally divided between developing a blended process within agents' existing job functions, with service representatives performing additional customer outreach and sales representatives adding either inbound or outbound selling processes. (See Figure 31)

Agent Compensation and Requirements for Success in the Blended Call Center

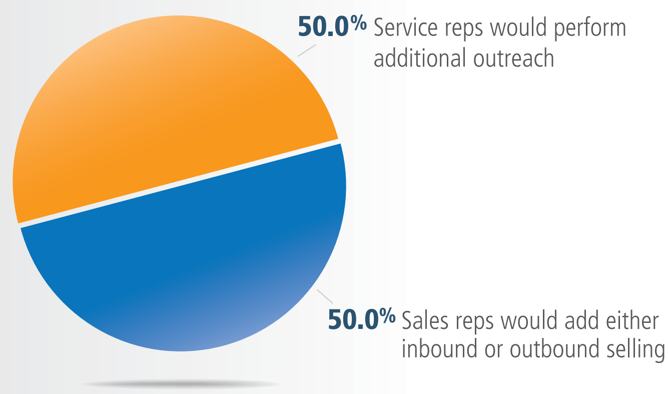
The majority of centers (55.6%) that once tried blending did not adjust pay models for agents in the blended environment, although 33.3% said they might have been inclined to do so.

Blending required additional training for agents, according to 60% of respondents, with 40% saying that agent attrition (turnover) increased, as well. Note that 40% said they didn't know what the overall impacts of blending were on agents. (See Figure 32)

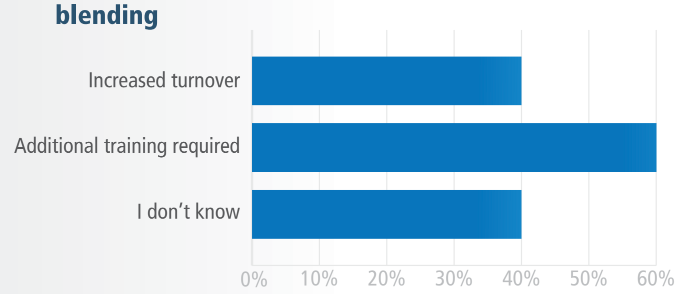
30. Areas of focus for increased agent capacity in centers that tried but abandoned blending



31. Primary effort toward increasing customer satisfaction for centers that tried but abandoned blending



32. Impact on agents in centers that tried but abandoned blending



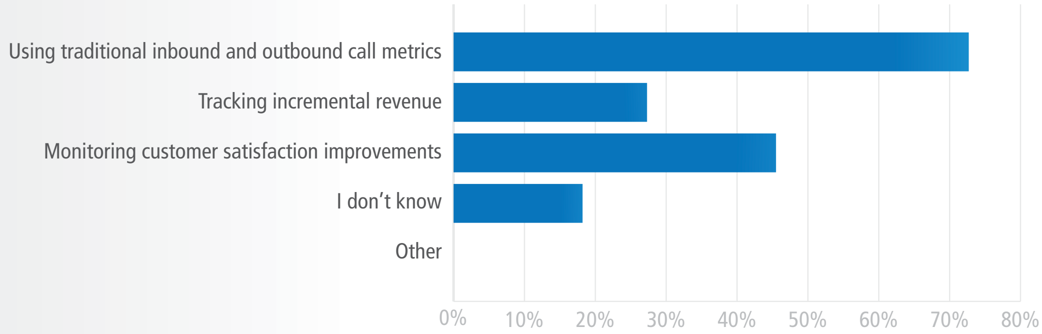
A full-time blending model was most common among center that tried and abandoned a blended process, with a full 50% doing so; just 16.7% said their centers introduced blending with a seasonal model.

Respondents said their centers measured the success of introducing a blended process for agents using traditional inbound and outbound call metrics (72.7%), while 45.5% focused their tracking on monitoring customer satisfaction improvements. A minority, 27.3%, used incremental revenue tracking to chart how well blending was performing in their centers. (See Figure 33)

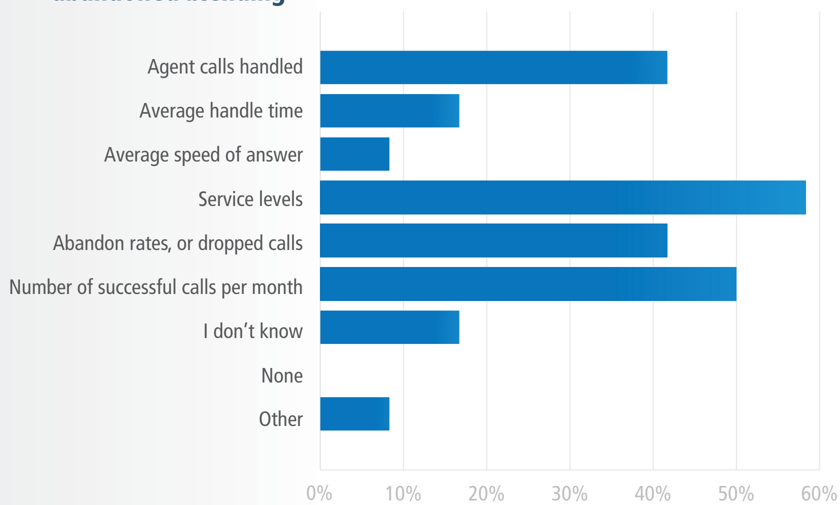
Service level, the number of successful calls per month and agent calls handled and abandon rates/dropped calls improved most with the introduction of blending (58.3%, 50%, 41.7% and 41.7%, respectively), participants said. Average handle time improved for some (16.7%), as well as did average speed of answer (8.3%). (See Figure 34)

Metrics that worsened with the introduction of a blended process included, average speed of answer (41.7%), average handle time (33.3%), number of calls handled and abandon rates/dropped calls (25% each). Given that sturdy participants cited increased customer satisfaction as a goal for introducing the blended process, worsening of performance against these metrics might have been a deciding factor in abandoning it. (See Figure 35)

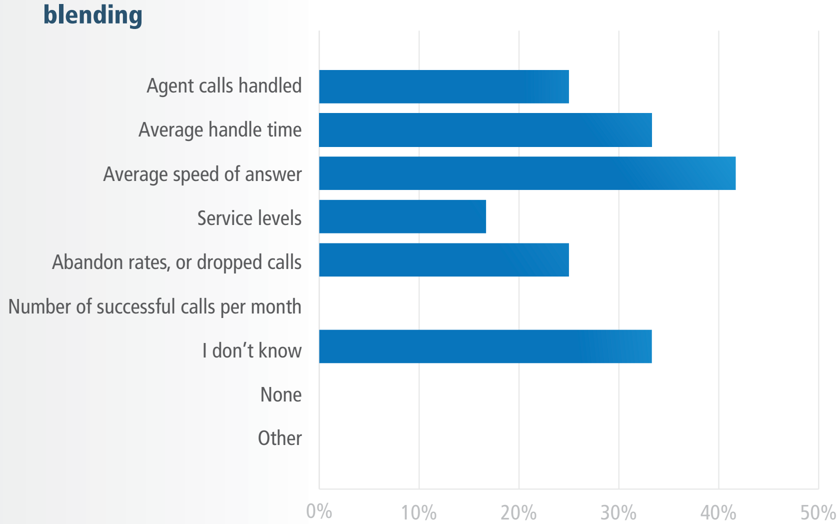
33. Measures for blending's success in centers that tried but abandoned blending



34. Metrics that blending improved in centers that tried but abandoned blending



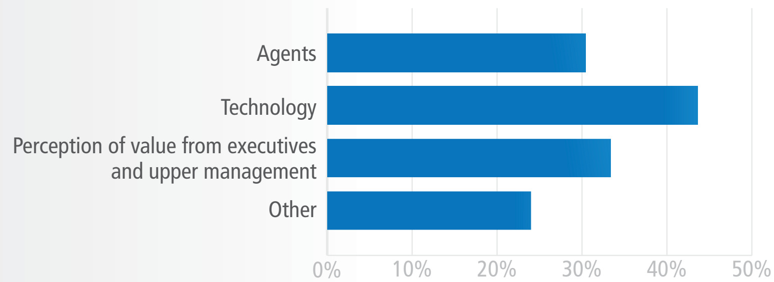
35. Metrics that blending worsened in centers that tried but abandoned blending



Barriers to Blending

When we asked all survey participants about the barriers to applying a blended process in their centers, 43.7% of respondents said technology was the leading obstacle, followed by the perception of the value of blending from executives and upper management (33.6%) and agents (30.2%). (See Figure 36)

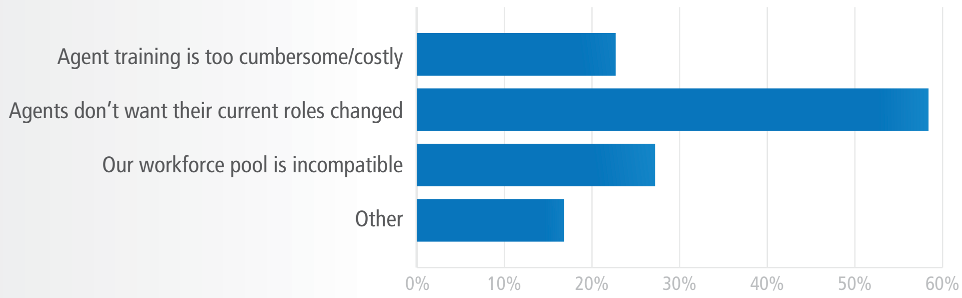
36. Barriers to blending



Agents as a Barrier to Blending

Where agents were cited as a barrier to blending, the majority of study participants (58.4%) said that agents don't want their current roles changed; 27.2% said their center's workforce pool is incompatible with blending; 22.7% said they expected additional training is too cumbersome and/or costly. (See Figure 37)

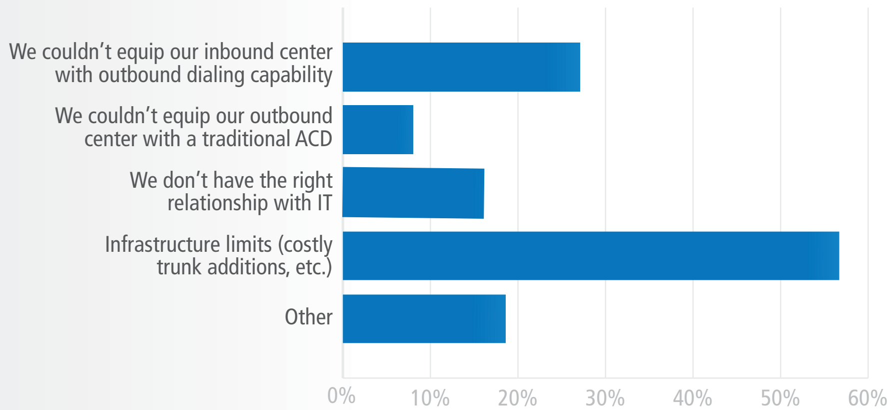
37. Agent-related barriers to blending



Other agent-related barriers to blending included:

- Balance of different approaches to tone during inbound vs. outbound call
- Concern about differentiation of contacts
- Unsure of agent skill level/ability and/or how to structure roles/teams
- Training needed is unknown Caliber of agent; very different call types
- Number of agents is a barrier to be an effectively blended contact center
- Matching the skill set needed with the staff on hand
- Getting agents to correctly utilize the technology to capture reporting accurately

38. Technology-related barriers to blending



Technology as a Barrier to Blending

Where survey participants said technology as a barrier to blending, infrastructure limits was cited most (56.7%), followed by the inability to equip the inbound call center with outbound dialing capability (27.1%), lack of a solid relationship with the information technology team (16.1%) and an inability to equip the outbound center with a traditional ACD, or automatic call distributor (8%). (See Figure 38)

Other technology-related barriers to blending included:

- Bona fide Multimedia solution required
- Our primary business tool quite simply doesn't lend itself to proper scheduling of follow up — but in the development phase of a new tool to allow better functionality
- Call routing issues
- Need to install a new call management application that will allow effective management and blending of both inbound and outbound transactions (calls, emails, faxes, chat sessions, click to call sessions etc.)
- Technology costs: dialer, system integration with CRM (customer relationship management tools, platform)
- Don't have the right telephony infrastructure
- Need systems to support easy access to product information
- Technologies that do not integrate
- Correct, consistent usage of the technology to successfully measure the right data elements through reporting
- How to merge the system to provide vital information
- Cost

Executives/Management as a Barrier to Blending

Where the perception of blending's value among executives and upper management is a barrier to applying it in the center, respondents said the primary objection is that customer interactions don't necessitate blending (60%); 35.2% said upper management doesn't see the value in blending.

Other executive/management-related barriers to blending included:

- Difficulty in quantifying the labor cost savings in a blended environment
- Cost
- Budget constraints
- Sales management does not want sales activity outside their control.
- Viewed as a cost/benefit issue: management sees inbound calls as more critical to keeping the service level up/abandonment rate down instead of seeing community perception of how available our service is
- Lack of understanding of the actual order process where each order requires multiple touches

General Barriers to Blending

Other general barriers to blending inbound and outbound operations in the call center include:

- Priority of our senior management is still inbound (but appreciate the value of giving back feedback to clients as much as our load can accommodate)
- The value is to the bottom line in customer service costs, not in the customer experience
- Business Needs
- Outbound calling is secondary — when allocating tools and staff, inbound remains first priority
- Unable to combine inbound and outbound activities into one role due to type of business/service
- Being able to demonstrate a financial ROI
- Blending is a lower priority than enhancing CRM capabilities
- No customer input on whether receiving outbound contacts from us would be of value
- Need to consider the number of agents/time away from inbound (headcount)
- Process needs to take into account off phone work like call backs
- We have an outbound team and they do all the outbound calling we need so we don't have inbound reps doing any outbound calling
- Insufficient shared definition of business processes
- Not all our customers can be directly contacted as we do not collect all phone numbers

Conclusions

While inbound call centers outnumber those performing outbound activities, this research shows that even where centers deem themselves exclusively one or the other, they are performing, to some extent, both types of activities. Significantly of note is that in the inbound environment, outbound calls are sometimes necessitated for call resolution and customer satisfaction; however, inbound centers that do not account for such types of outbound calls may be experiencing inefficiencies because they do not account for and track these calls. Of course, the number of outbound calling in an inbound center does not merit specific accounting in every center, but it is a good practice to at least keep an eye on them.

The same can be said, to some extent, for outbound centers that accept a certain number of required inbound calling. While it may not be necessary for those centers to create granular reporting and forecasting for such calls, their occupancy rates and productive time on the phone may be affected by not performing at least some measurement and tracking, even on the most informal basis.

For both types of call center, the research reveals a trend in the realization that two-way communication between the call center and the customer may have a positive impact on the customer experience and the satisfaction levels that organizations so carefully try to design it for.

A significant number of call centers are split evenly between inbound and outbound calling. However, the overwhelming majority of those segregate these activities. Many of these survey participants make a strong case for maintaining this model: The nature of their organizations' business or their business models (at least their organizations' current view of such), or their technology constraints prohibits blending.

It's important to note, however, that a significant number of survey participants agree that they consider that blending inbound and outbound calling in their centers would be beneficial to their organization in both adding revenue and in increasing customer satisfaction. Technology and agent skills and sentiment were identified as barriers, of course, but these appear to be reliant on a per-call center inability to integrate technologies and to overcome agent perceptions about the nature of the work.

Interesting is that when it comes to blending sales and service in the call center, agent skills and sentiments appear to be less of a barrier than they have been, anecdotally, in the past — particularly when it comes to cross-selling and up-selling.

Overall, we assert that this research has uncovered a range of call center optimization or productivity-increasing paths that organizations might take today to save money, generate revenue and increase customer satisfaction and loyalty.

About This Report

This research was made possible by the underwriting support of Five9 (**www.five9.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.

About Our Sponsor

Five9 is the leading provider of cloud-based call center software, delivering comprehensive functionality for inbound, outbound and blended call centers. Built on a single technology platform that requires no hardware or software, the Five9 solution allows seamless blending of inbound and outbound processes for agents. Improved agent productivity has given Five9's 1000+ companies the opportunity to redefine customer experience, improving both customer satisfaction and overall revenue per agent. A true cloud solution, Five9's solution provides companies with total flexibility, both financial and operational, to address constantly changing business requirements.