



The Ultimate Guide to Improving Contact Center Productivity

10 Essential Strategies for Increasing Agent Productivity

Why It's Time to Take a Fresh Look at Agent Productivity

Your agents are your contact center's greatest asset. As the literal voice of your brand, contact center agents have the power to shape what customers think about your product or company. And the research backs this up: 80 percent of consumers say the experience a company provides is just as important as its products and services.¹

Agent performance is inextricably tied to business performance. And when contact center agents are efficient, happy, and productive, they deliver a level of service that drives customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention. When they are dissatisfied or disengaged with their work, motivation wanes, output decreases, agent attrition grows, and your brand and bottom line suffer.

Productive contact centers strengthen customer relationships, deliver cost savings, and help fuel business growth. And while it may sound daunting, cultivating a productive call center environment doesn't have to be a massive undertaking. Even small improvements to agent productivity can yield big results. United Wholesale Mortgage (UWM), for example—[just by implementing a blended agent solution in its contact center](#)—increased agent productivity by 50 percent and improved its Net Promoter Score (NPS) by 23 percent.

In this eBook, we'll explore ten ways contact center supervisors and business leaders can help contact center agents stay engaged, motivated, and productive. By implementing these best practices, you can empower your contact center agents to reach their full potential and deliver five-star customer service that sets your business apart.

10 Strategies to Boost Contact Center Productivity

From technology to the physical environment and operational processes to general corporate culture, there are a wide range of factors that can positively (or negatively) impact agent productivity.

Here are 10 proven strategies for increasing contact center agent productivity, satisfaction, and effectiveness:



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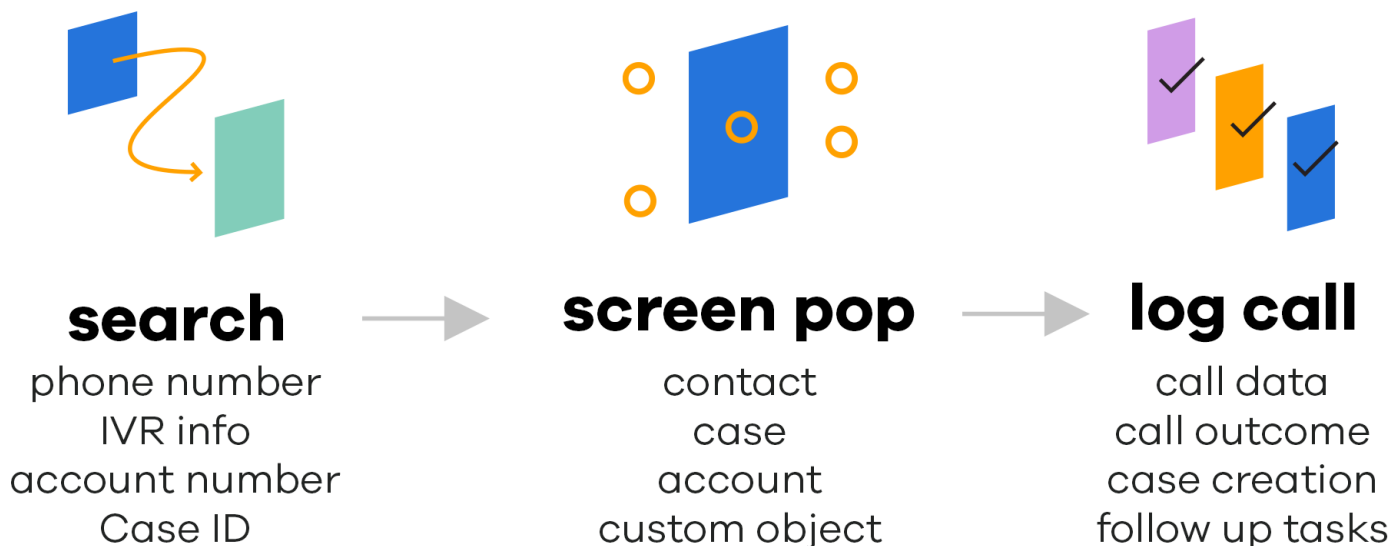


1. Leverage AI and automation

Today, 79 percent of high-performing customer service agents believe their role is more strategic than it was two years ago.² Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) and automation to drive process efficiencies allows your agents to step into their role as strategic thinkers and focus on the needs of your customers, rather than a tactical to-do list.

A recent study by Salesforce found that AI adoption by service teams is expected to grow by a staggering 143 percent within 18 months,³ and it's easy to see why. AI allows service teams to quickly and conveniently automate manual tasks, answer routine customer questions, and scale support. This gives agents more time to focus on building customer relationships—a key driver of customer satisfaction and loyalty which, in turn, drive profit and growth.

Leveraging intelligent automation technology boosts agent productivity by streamlining or even eliminating repetitive, non value-added tasks. Using computer telephony integration (CTI) software to integrate your phone system and customer relationship management (CRM) system is one example of this. Working with custom objects or entities in your CRM—as well as interactive voice response (IVR) data—a robust CTI solution allows you to create flexible workflow configurations. With a CTI platform like InGenius, for example, you can populate your agents' CRM interface with information collected from your IVR system, or add a scheduling field. Not only does this immediately boost agent efficiency, but it also makes it significantly easier and faster to address future workflow requirements in a maintainable way.



Quick-Start Checklist:

- Analyze your end to end call flow to find tasks that can be automated or eliminated.
- Remove barriers to productivity through AI and automation technology.
- Look for tools that integrate or enhance existing contact center workflows.

2. Increase agent autonomy

Are your best contact center agents receiving a constant barrage of chat messages, calls, texts, and emails from other agents asking for help with urgent customer questions? Are your supervisors and managers bogged down trying to assist remote staff with new work-from-home applications? These dependencies can be a big source of frustration for team all-stars and subject matter experts (SMEs) who also need to get to their own work.

Technology that puts all your enterprise knowledge at your agents' fingertips—by capturing and sharing information across the organization—enables everyone to be a subject matter expert. This empowers agents to deliver excellent customer service and organizations to more readily scale contact center operations. It also allows call center managers and SMEs to spend less time addressing simple inquiries, and more time analyzing call center performance and solving particularly challenging customer issues.

When choosing knowledge base software, choose a solution that brings together the knowledge that typically lives in disparate, disconnected systems across the organization. After all, siloed knowledge does not enable complex problem-solving. To improve efficiency, ensure your technology can connect to the other knowledge repositories in use by your business, such as SharePoint, Dropbox, Outlook, Jive, and Confluence.

Giving your agents a certain degree of autonomy when it comes to how they approach customer service and decision-making can also keep agents happy, motivated, and productive. Agents get to hone their skills, feel like they're making a tangible impact, and form stronger agent-customer relationships.

Quick-Start Checklist:

- Use technology to put enterprise knowledge at your agents' fingertips. [\[Learn more\]](#)
- Empower agents with decision-making and problem-resolution authority

Real-World Success:

Paychex Empowers Support Agents to Deliver Outstanding Customer Service With Right Answers

PAYCHEX[®]

Payroll and HR services leader, Paychex, was growing year-over-year and needed to expand the breadth of knowledge across its support agents to deliver a consistent, high-quality customer experience. As Paychex had been following Knowledge-Centered Service (KCS) as its knowledge management methodology, RightAnswers seemed like an obvious choice.

For over 12 years now, Paychex has been using RightAnswers—a KCS Verified v6 knowledge management software—to optimize its call center activities. Leveraging RightAnswers to create a knowledge culture has contributed to Paychex's success in becoming an award-winning customer service organization that sees \$3 million in support cost savings per year as a result.

[Read the case study](#)

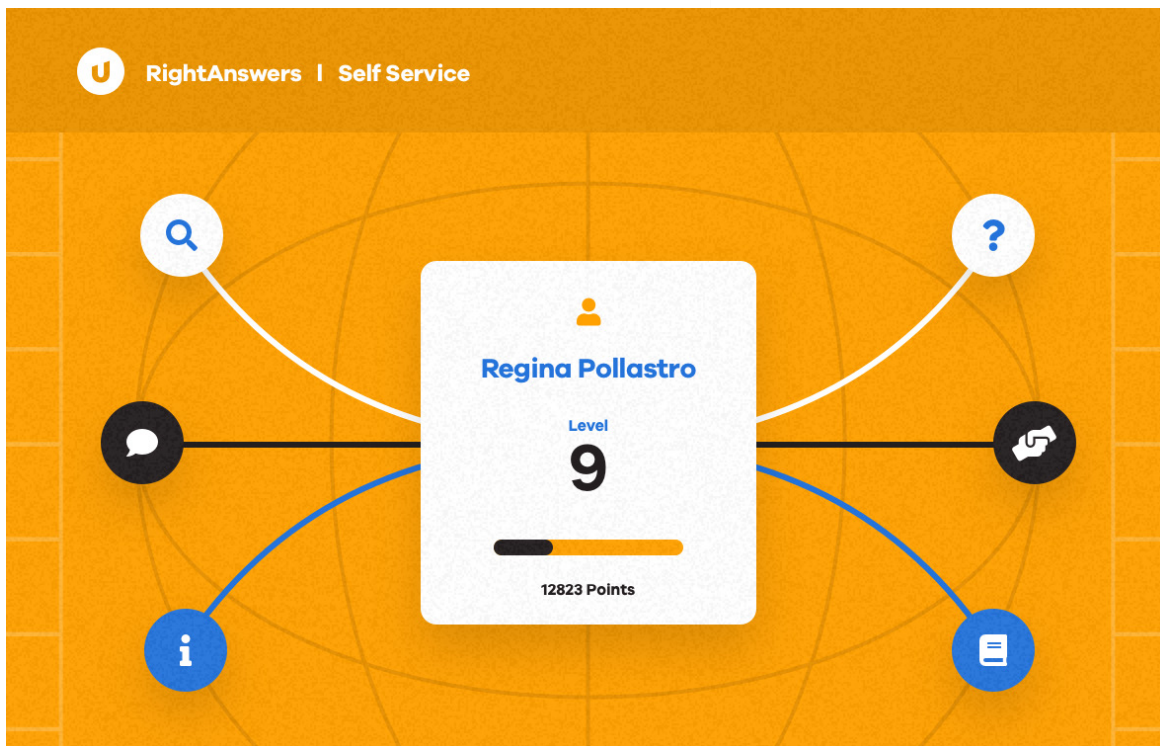
3. Enable customer self-service

Do your agents handle the same calls over and over again? Is there a set of topics or questions that they understand well and solve quickly, but find repetitive and uninteresting?

For most contact centers, the answer to these questions is a resounding yes. Tracking call drivers will allow you to identify trends and determine which call drivers can be automated or deflected to self-service. And leveraging self-service channels for common call drivers can help boost agent productivity, increase satisfaction, and lower support costs. It's why, in a recent survey conducted by Contact Center Pipeline, nearly a quarter of survey respondents said their top priority for 2020 was implementing or improving self-service channels.⁴

But not all self-service platforms are created equal. Technology for customer self-service needs to do more than return a set of results from the knowledge base. It should provide answers in the context of the page a customer is already on, to increase the relevance of responses and reduce the time it takes for customers to solve their problems. It should also incorporate a community of your customers, giving them a way to answer one another's questions. Most importantly, your customers should be able to self-serve on the channel of their choice, including messenger applications.

Here are a few innovative examples of customer-centric self-service options:



Quick-Start Checklist:

- Empower customers to help themselves by scaling self-service solutions.
- Offer a unified self-service experience that returns all relevant knowledge articles and community discussions. [\[Learn more\]](#)



4. Bring your customers to life

According to Contact Centre Magazine, the industry standard average handle time (AHT)—the average duration of one transaction—is six minutes and 3 seconds.⁵ And one of the biggest factors influencing handle time is how long it takes the agent to find information to help the caller.

Call center technology such as CTI software that provides comprehensive information about the caller in a unified workspace significantly improves AHT and agent productivity. As the phone rings, a pop-up appears in the agent's CRM window displaying all of the customer information that is vital to delivering a positive call center experience. Agents don't have to search through multiple systems looking for the information needed to resolve a customer's issue.

Another strategy for enhancing call center productivity is to help agents understand the impact their work has on customers and how they contribute to the organization's purpose. Dr. Adam Grant, organizational psychologist and Wharton professor, conducted a series of studies to evaluate call center agent productivity. In one experiment at a university

fundraising call center, a group of agents was introduced to a scholarship recipient. The recipient spent five minutes explaining the positive impact their work had made on his life. One month later, agents who had met the recipient increased their weekly phone time by an average of 142 percent and raised 171 percent more money.⁶

Connecting agents directly with end customers, showcasing customer photos, sharing customer stories, and having agents describe their own meaningful experiences with customers can all increase productivity. This puts a real face and voice to your customers—and helps your agents serve them better.

Quick-Start Checklist:

- Empower agents with screen pop-ups and screen transfer technology. [\[Learn more\]](#)
- Showcase real-life customer stories and customer service examples.

5. Measure what matters

Traditional key performance indicators (KPIs) like AHT and first call resolution can be used to measure how well agents perform. But to truly move the needle on agent productivity, you need to provide specific, individualized insight into an agent's performance and where they can improve. Fortunately, technology can help.

By implementing robust reporting tools in your call center that analyze critical success factors such as call drivers, call outcomes, time spent on calls, wait times, and response times, you can readily assess which groups or agents need improvement and coaching. It's critical that this information be available directly within your CRM alongside other data points for full visibility into key performance metrics that foster better decision-making.

A vital (but often overlooked) aspect of measuring and managing agent performance is to allow agents to reflect on their own experiences and abilities. This performance self-assessment and thought-sharing usually exposes inefficient processes and other causes of agent dissatisfaction—which is also highly correlated with customer dissatisfaction.

The chart below highlights a few metrics to consider measuring and reflecting on as a team:

	What it is	Reflective questions to improve performance
Active Waiting Calls	Ratio of the current active call volume compared to the number of callers waiting to be put through to an agent.	What is an acceptable wait time in our industry, and for our customers? Can we make staffing adjustments or build smarter workflows to improve this metric? Can we coach agents on how to handle calls quicker?
Abandonment Rate	The percentage of callers who hang up before reaching an agent.	What has been our threshold historically, and how can we decrease this number? Can we implement better self-service options to help prevent customers from reaching this point?
Service Level	The percentage of calls answered within a specified number of seconds.	What is our current desired service level based on cost efficiencies? Are there specific tools or technologies we can implement to help the team hit this target?
First Call Resolution	The percentage of calls where the agent completely addresses the caller's needs without having to transfer, escalate, or return the call	Do we need additional training to increase subject matter expertise? Would a knowledge management platform help us increase first call resolution?
Agent Turnover Rate	The percentage of agents who leave the call center to work elsewhere.	What is a typical turnover rate in our industry? Why are agents leaving? Are our onboarding, training, and career progression programs adequate?
Call Drivers	The categorical reasons someone is contacting the business.	Are customers frequently contacting us with one type of question over another, for example questions related to their latest bill? Can we enable self-service around this topic to decrease call center volume?
Active Waiting Calls	Ratio of the current active call volume compared to the number of callers waiting to be put through to an agent.	What is an acceptable wait time in our industry, and for our customers? Can we make staffing adjustments or build smarter workflows to improve this metric? Can we coach agents on how to handle calls quicker?

Using CTI technology, contact center leaders can create additional visibility around these contact center KPIs and bring them to the forefront. Real-time dashboards can instill urgency amongst contact center agents, foster teamwork and collaboration, and even let management know when it might be time to jump into the queue themselves to lend a helping hand.

Quick-Start Checklist:

- Measure specific KPIs that can help identify agents in need of coaching.
- Incorporate self-assessment and reflection into agent performance discussions.
- Use CTI software that provides advanced analytics, call reporting, and live dashboards in your CRM. [\[Learn more\]](#)

6. Develop multi-channel agents

In an industry where repetition is impossible to avoid, developing multi-channel agents gives agents a more diversified workday and the opportunity to expand their skill sets, increasing agent satisfaction and retention.

Training agents to provide customer service across multiple channels gives agents the opportunity to uncover more of their strengths and managers the insights needed to refine skills-based routing. Service quality and customer satisfaction improve, as do your agents' overall work experience, sense of fulfillment, engagement, and productivity.

In order to do this, contact center leaders need to map and deeply understand the customer journey. Which mix of interactions and touchpoints are customers taking to reach your contact center? Which channels and topics are the most popular? Which channels are you equipped to manage successfully? Which channels should you nix? This will help you to unify your strategies across channels and ensure you are delivering a consistent customer experience.

You will need to ensure your agents receive adequate, ongoing training and development on the new channels they may be using. Establish best practices and guidelines across your omni-channel environment to ensure service quality.

CTI software—which connects your telephone system to your CRM system—can also help agents be more productive and deliver a great omni-channel customer experience. By enabling agents to manage all customer interactions through a single pane of glass, a CTI solution also ensures agent workload and availability are properly managed in a seamless and automated manner.

Quick-Start Checklist:

- Study interactions across channels and touchpoints to unify service strategies.
- Cross-train agents to provide customer service across multiple channels.
- Enable agents to manage all interactions through a single pane of glass. [\[Learn more\]](#)

Real-World Success:

United Wholesale Mortgage Improves Agent Productivity With Upland InGenius and Salesforce Omni-Channel



Leading wholesale lender United Wholesale Mortgage (UWM) had client service teams that were divided out into phone teams, case teams, and chat teams. This proved to be highly inefficient because the demand on each platform wasn't equal. UWM wanted to improve agents' productivity and response time, no matter the contact channel.

UWM integrated InGenius Connector Enterprise with Salesforce Omni-Channel to enable a blending of voice and case channels. This blended agent integration brought the company's 53 agents into one holistic blended agent team that manages all cases. As a result, UWM agents handled 50 percent more cases per day and improved their Net Promoter Score (NPS) by 23 percent.

[Read the case study](#)

7. Harness idle time

A study by Harvard Business School found that idle time costs U.S. businesses up to \$100 billion per year.⁷ Meanwhile, research by Aberdeen Group found that call center agents spend an average of 25 percent of their paid time in an idle state. This equates to an approximate loss of \$11,252 per agent, per year in unnecessary operational expenses.⁸

Even though idle time in an omni-channel contact center is typically low, it is still bound to happen. So, make the most of it. Here are a few creative ways your agents can leverage idle time to enhance performance:

- » Break down large projects like complex troubleshooting or product customizations into bite-sized tasks that take three minutes or less.
- » Implement convenient micro-learning for agent upskilling.
- » Promote more frequent, short breaks for agents to get outside for some fresh air or grab a snack.
- » Share interesting articles, customer stories, or company updates that are a quick and easy read.
- » Encourage knowledge sharing and collaboration via your knowledge management software.

While some idle time is necessary to prevent agent burnout, filling idle time with engaging, skill-boosting activities is a great way to supercharge agent productivity. But remember, this isn't about working your agents into the ground—it's about reorganizing and making better use of their time.

Quick-Start Checklist:

- Encourage agents to utilize idle time to their advantage.
- Facilitate agent growth and development via micro-learning and knowledge sharing.

8. Celebrate the wins



We all want to be successful and know our work matters. Providing agents with positive feedback, incentivizing good performance, and recognizing even small achievements are great motivators. For many agents, knowing that they are making a difference to customers and the business is the key to feeling engaged and motivated.

Delivering frequent, in-the-moment feedback is critical to motivating and empowering agents to continually improve their skills and performance. Incentives can also be an effective way to spur motivation. Whether you are offering a sizable cash bonus or simply a free lunch, extrinsic rewards can give agents an extra motivational boost. However, if you decide to provide incentives, make sure they encourage behavior that won't ultimately cause your business harm. For instance, incentivizing the ability to take many calls won't always have a positive effect on performance. In some cases, it can cause agents to rush through calls and fail to adequately solve customers' needs—the opposite of what you are trying to achieve.

Encouraging a healthy sense of competition through gamification can also encourage productivity and drive desired agent performance in a way that team members can rally behind. Research by Aberdeen Group also found that 58 percent of businesses with elements of gamification embedded within their contact center activities improve agent retention rates year-over-year, compared to a mere 16 percent by all others.⁹

Quick-Start Checklist:

- Acknowledge and reward great performance.
- Experiment with gamification to promote a healthy sense of competition.

9. Encourage agent participation

Research by McKinsey reveals that only 38 percent of contact center agents are “extremely satisfied” with their job.¹⁰ This certainly leaves a lot of room for improvement. And the impact that agent engagement and satisfaction has on call center performance—and your business—is significant.

Engaged and satisfied call center employees are:

- » 4x more likely to stay with their current employer
- » 16x more likely to refer friends to their company
- » 3x more likely to feel extremely empowered to resolve customer issues

One area which is often overlooked when thinking about agent participation and collaboration is knowledge sharing. Every agent starts from a point where their knowledge of tasks and processes is limited, which often leads to them reaching out to colleagues for help, and in the case of some new agents, a reluctance to ask. This is where the Knowledge-Centered Service (KCS) methodology can help as it is designed to encourage all agents to actively take ownership in the knowledge they use.

Using KCS, agents can search knowledge base articles created by their peers, create new articles capture their own information gathering and problem-solving journey, and review peer articles to help disseminate best practices in case resolution. This gives agents a stake in the performance of their team and encourages active agent participation.



Quick-Start Checklist:

- Encourage active participation in knowledge sharing
- Consider adopting the Knowledge-Centered Service (KCS) framework



10. Enhance the work environment

The environment of a call center can significantly impact agent productivity. From the floor plan to hardware and software to work schedules, there are many factors that shape how agents perceive their work environment.

One way to boost productivity is to, when feasible, allow agents to arrange their schedules around obligations and commitments outside of work. Involve your agents in the planning and the creation of shifts. Consider flexi-shifts or home-working options. Your employees will appreciate the flexibility around their lifestyle, enabling them to work the times most convenient to them. This in turn will improve long-term agent productivity and retention.

Within the office, create vibrant break rooms for socialization and places of solitude where employees can take in quiet relaxation. Provide ergonomic workstations to help create a comfortable working environment. With voice interaction still the preferred communication method into most call centers, untethering agents from their desks with wireless headsets can also boost productivity.

Leveraging tools and technologies that reduce the administrative burden associated with operational tasks like after-call work (ACW) can also help agents spend more time on value-added activities. Implementing automated call logging can significantly reduce the amount of manual data entry required by the agent and reduce ACW—while also maintaining data quality and customer service.

And don't forget about agents that may be working remotely, either on a temporary or permanent basis. The COVID-19 pandemic moved a whopping 80 percent of agents to work-from-home environments, and your remote agents need more than a laptop and WiFi to maintain the service quality your customers expect.

Quick-Start Checklist:

- Support flexible work arrangements and include agents in call center scheduling.
- Ensure agents—both on-site and remote—have an environment conducive to productivity.
- Leverage tools and technology that help reduce ACW, like automated call logging. [\[Learn more\]](#)

Empowering Contact Center Agents to Thrive

Every minute matters in customer service. The more efficient your contact center agents are, the happier your customers and more profitable the business. But improving agent productivity isn't about making people work harder—it's about helping them work smarter.

While investing in productivity-boosting tools and technologies for contact center agents may have once been seen as a luxury, it's now an urgent necessity. The COVID-19 pandemic has put extreme pressure on contact center teams to produce. Support agents have had to handle a surge in interaction volume while also working from home. At the same time, Millennial and Generation Z professionals are increasingly moving into decision-making and influential positions within their organizations. Adopting modern call center technology and processes that support their unique technology and communication preferences will be critical to capturing loyalty and driving business growth moving forward.

By implementing these ten contact center productivity strategies—and leveraging technology like knowledge management and CTI software to help agents be more efficient—you can achieve significant benefits for your agents, customers, and bottom line alike.



Ready to build a more prosperous and productive contact center?

Upland can help.

Improving agent, team, and contact center productivity is a top priority for businesses across a wide range of sectors—and for good reason. Productive contact centers drive customer loyalty, deliver cost savings, and fuel business growth.

The Upland Contact Center Productivity Suite empowers agents with easy access to CRM information, knowledge, and real-time customer sentiment to drive focused engagement. Unlike other productivity platforms, our enterprise-proven capabilities integrate with existing processes, ensuring seamless communication through the full customer journey.

With our RightAnswers knowledge management software and InGenius CTI technology, you can boost contact center productivity to reduce agent attrition, improve customer service, and drive better business outcomes.

Learn more.

www.uplandsoftware.com/products/contact-center/

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