A close-up photograph of a man and a woman looking down at a small device, possibly a smartphone or a small tablet. The man, on the left, wears glasses and a green button-down shirt. The woman, on the right, has curly hair and is wearing a light-colored blazer over a dark top. They are both focused on the screen of the device.

Agent Experience is Underrated

Why Great CX Starts Behind the Scenes and What You Can Do About It



LIVEVOX

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Agent Experience is Underrated



Customers continue to require more from their interactions with businesses. In fact, 80% of American consumers say the most important factors in a positive customer experience (CX) are speed, convenience, knowledgeable help, and friendly service¹. 73% of contact center leadership surveyed by LiveVox in March of 2020 showed an understanding that improving customer experience is a key part of their business's success². But a new element of that success is beginning to be explored: agent experience.

One of the most essential pieces of customer success is the agent experience (AX)...

— the extent to which businesses are providing agents with the tools, training, and environments that advance customer success.

With data integration, noisy desktops, and poor remote training constituting significant blockers to agent experience, a recent LiveVox survey found that 51% of leaders reported that integration issues were the most critical impediment to their customer experience ambitions because they make agent ease of use difficult². And therein lies the rub of AX—in order to make contact centers more effective, flexible, and suited to customers, businesses need to invest more in behind-the-scenes areas like the tools and systems agents use, as well as continually provide robust training and coaching opportunities.

Once you recognize the direct impact AX has on CX, you can quickly adapt your operation to any challenge you face because you'll have built-in elasticity in your most valuable assets: the humans who represent your business. The incorporation of new channels and functionality, the ability to provide greater flexibility and scope to your agents in their day-to-day, all of this becomes simpler and allows you to pass more value to customers.

This ebook looks at the rise of the agent experience, examining how AX affects CX, and highlights some of the most prominent AX trends and the ways you can provide tools, training, and strategies to prepare your team for maximal success.

80%

...of American consumers say the most important factors in a positive customer experience (CX) are speed, convenience, knowledgeable help and friendly service¹.

73%

...of contact center leadership surveyed are starting to understand that improving customer experience is a key part of their businesses success².

51%

...of respondents reported that integration issues were a critical impediment to their customer experience ambitions².

The Rise of Agent Experience



As the activity and output from contact centers grows in importance, more attention is paid to the agents executing the work. In 2020, with the economic upheaval caused by the coronavirus pandemic and various phases of stay-at-home-orders, it is no surprise that the number of calls and interactions in contact centers increased as customers faced economic uncertainty and could no longer handle their inquiries in person. While the 2020 pandemic hastened this shift to remote interactions, many of the resulting customer trends predated the outbreak and were already significantly altering the way contact centers serve their more digitally savvy customers.

As businesses pivoted to remote work, they created an opportunity to optimize, and rethink, how their agents operated. This also impacted customer communications, relying more heavily on digital and virtual touches. Customers still expected the best service, and their demands have kept pace with the rapid rate of change.

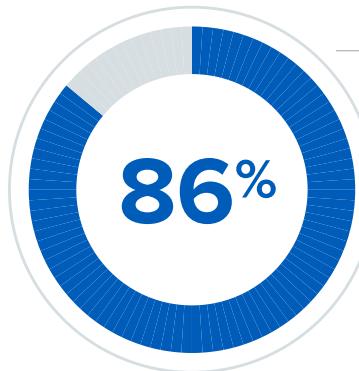
A photograph of a young woman wearing a pink hijab and a black over-ear headset. She is smiling and looking down at her work. She is sitting at a white desk with a silver laptop open in front of her. A white mug is on the desk to her right. The background is a bright, modern interior.

*The shift to remote work opened
a window of opportunity for
rethinking agent experience*

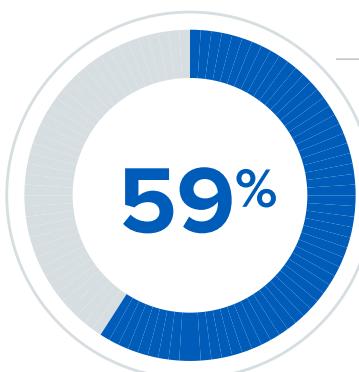
Contact center leaders are wise to pay attention. Positive or negative customer experience can have a marked impact on a business. For example, PWC has reported that 86% of people that have a positive experience with a contact center say they would do business with that company again and 59% of customers in the U.S. will walk away from a company or product after a few bad experiences, while 17% will walk away after just one bad experience¹. These stats underscore the need to adopt next generation contact center technology and equip your agents with the right systems and tools. They also illustrate how this backend infrastructure—particularly the ease of use of these agent tools and systems—directly impacts the quality of service they can provide.

So what is a good agent experience?

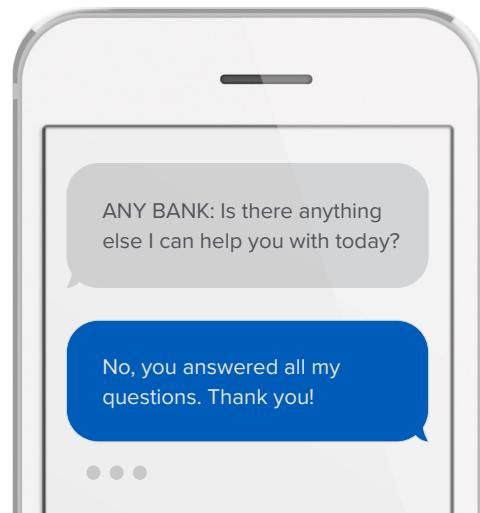
A good agent experience is one with minimal technological barriers that allows customer conversations to transpire freely over a multitude of channels where information is surfaced effortlessly and resolutions are reached efficiently via intuitive workflows and post-call administrative automation.



of people will come back to your business after a positive experience with contact centers¹.



of U.S. customers will walk away from a company or product after a few bad experiences¹.



Summary

As the number and complexity of queries that agents solve grows, the need to upskill for a wider range of customer interactions increases proportionally. This also necessitates a more sophisticated technology stack in the contact center. With the added challenges of an unpredictable world and ever-shifting customer preferences, building strong agent environments in the contact center allows for greater business elasticity and lays the groundwork for improved customer experiences.



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SUMMARY SECTION

How AX Drives Customer Outcomes



The customer journey starts behind-the-scenes in the contact center with ease of use for the agent. With the right technology, training, feedback, and more, agents are set up for successful interactions across channels and working environments. That success translates into faster, more engaging, efficient, and pleasant agent interactions, leading right back to happy customers.

As the face of your business, agents are critical to the long-term health of customer relationships. When you equip agents with the right tools and training, they can handle more inquiries faster and accurately while focusing on the art of conversation and putting customers at ease. Ultimately, agents and customers want the same things: speed of service, to feel appreciated and heard, and to accomplish their ends easily with the least amount of frustration.

Contact center leaders are beginning to realize that the components of good agent experiences and the components of good customer experiences are oftentimes one and the same. Leaders are recognizing the need to create an environment within the contact center where agents feel they can provide solutions and are 100% productively engaged because this investment comes full circle for their customers.

AX improvement has meant removing friction between internal tools and applications for greater ease of use and speedier service times. This initiative drives business results that ultimately benefit the organization's overall goal of delivering positive customer experiences.

When frictionless systems are introduced, replacing once siloed technologies, agents can access the full scope of information they need to do their jobs better.





Customer data, account history, profile and account status, previous ticketing activity, and 3rd-party data are instantly displayed, allowing agents to view all of the necessary information when speaking to customers. When agents have access to relevant data via integrated and dependable technology, they are able to focus on their customer interactions, improving customer satisfaction, but also helping agents feel valued and productive, **making them more likely to go the extra mile for customers and have a bigger business impact.**

50%

faster implementation time
with greater productivity³.

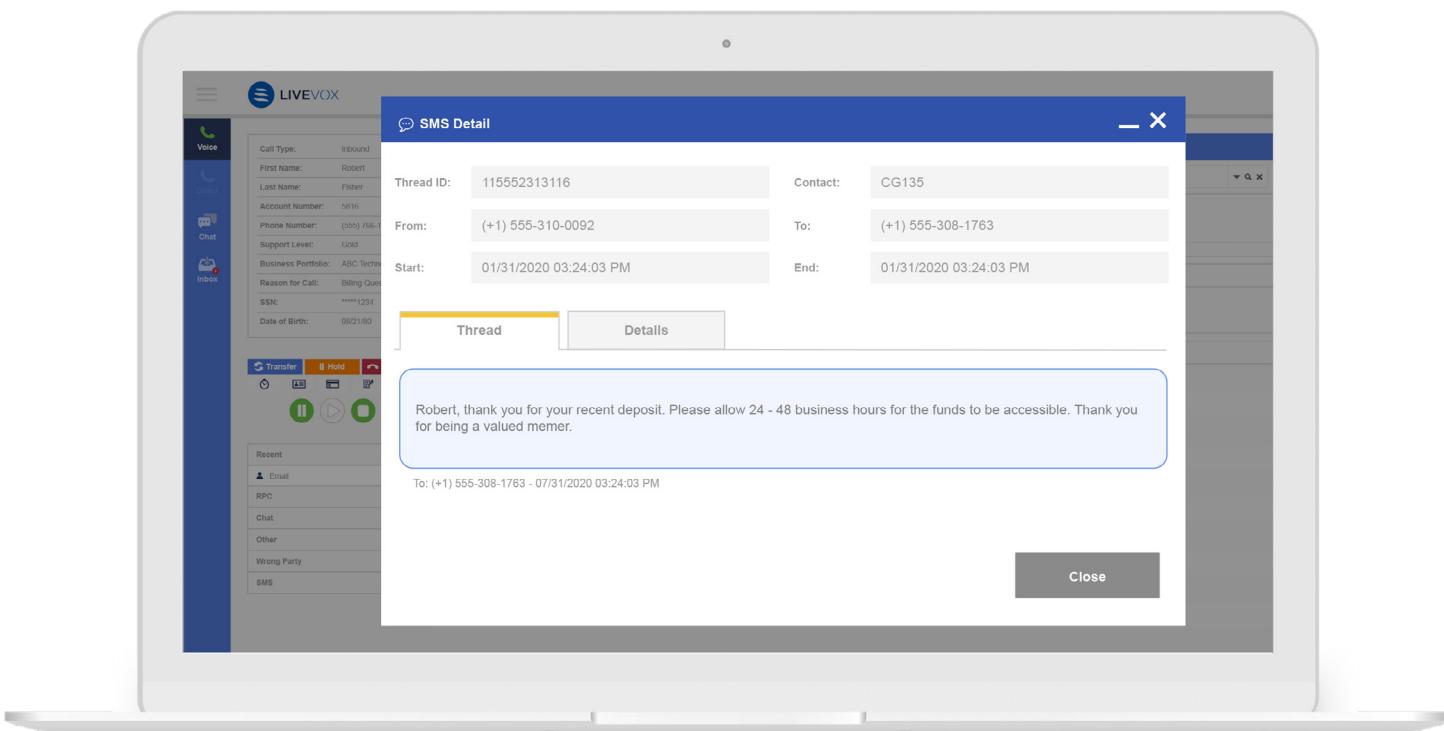
11%

increase in YoY sales
was seen by one contact
center using CRM³.

Adding digital messaging
can yield as much as a

1319%

ROI. The average voice call
length is 210 seconds⁴.



Summary

Because the customer service journey begins behind the scenes, there's a consistent experience loop between what agents live day-to-day and the service customers receive. Higher task difficulty translates to poor support. Tools like CRMs and digital messaging can help to increase productivity and cut down on agent churn by better preparing agents when inbound volumes spike and contact attempts jump across channels.



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The AX Platform



Investing in the right contact center technology is equivalent to investing in your agents.

Contact center leadership is recognizing the importance of this technology investment. As of a few years ago, efforts to optimize agent desktops increased by 62% but these upgrades have largely been cosmetic⁵. Data integration continues to be a pain point because of piecemeal point solutions. Contact centers are continuing to optimize workflows, including implementing streamlined management systems to give customer care representatives the information they need to provide exceptional service.

It has always been important to supply your agents with the right tools to be most efficient, but providing the right tools in a remote work environment is new. Agents no longer sit together in one large contact center space, but rather in the comfort of their own homes.

The job requirements remain the same, but the need for integrated systems with limited distractions is of the utmost importance.

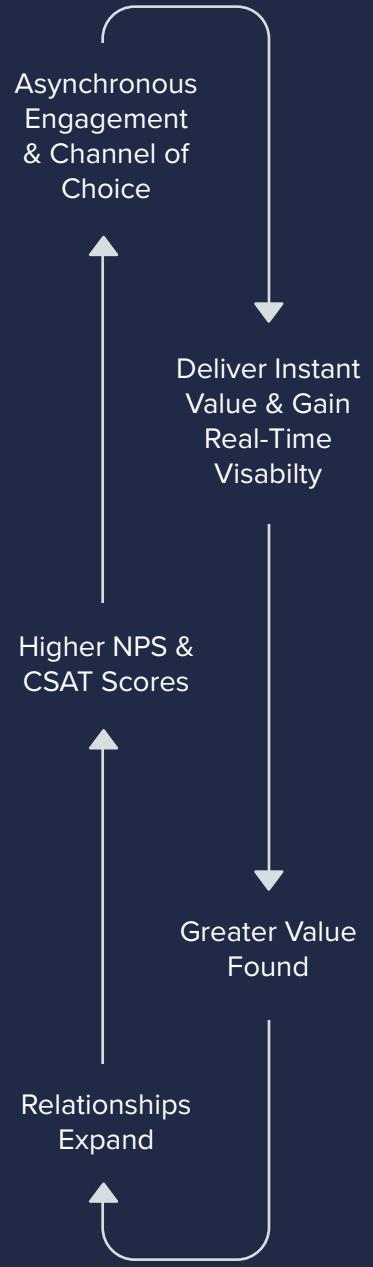
There are several technologies available to help your agents be their most productive from anywhere, while providing the best possible service.



Omnichannel CRM

An omnichannel CRM allows agents to access unified customer profiles that present a threaded view of interaction history. Agents can identify customers, their needs, and their conversational preferences to help provide a better customer experience. The CRM software allows the contact center agent to see all forms of communication with the customer (email, text, call). It also helps route the customer to an agent who is familiar with their needs and can provide the best customer service.

How CRM Improves AX





IVR

IVR systems tackle repetitive tasks like processing payments or troubleshooting simple yet frequent service issues. These monotonous tasks can contribute to burnout when they're handled by human agents. Further, when given the option, customers will choose self-service first before escalating to agent assistance. Allowing live agents to focus on more complex tasks reduces on-the-job boredom and keeps engagement levels high.

More engaged agents foster stronger relationships with customers...

...than those who feel disconnected from their work. This self-service option also helps decrease the number of calls that reach agents, allowing them to prioritize excellent customer service.



Virtual agents

Virtual agents can help to collect information for live agents faster. On complicated calls where multiple account lookups might be needed, this can save a lot of time and reduce agents' overall call handle time. Virtual agents help deliver both a better customer and agent experience because they create efficiency, increase capacity, and increase productivity overall. AI also streamlines digital channel conversations through automation, further reducing agent workload to focus only on those most critical cases. You'll be able to enhance your IVR workflows and create fallbacks for high-volume periods ensuring no one has to wait if they don't want to.



Real-time reporting

Reports can be used to evaluate your agents. You are able to see how efficient your agents are and if they are meeting customer expectations. Reporting allows you to discover inefficiencies in your operations. By tracking agent and contact center performance, as well as customer satisfaction, you can determine where you need to implement more training, better tools, or adjust staffing.



Configurable agent desktops

Configurable agent desktops consolidate the applications and systems required to serve the full range of customer requests into one screen, eliminating the hassle of toggling between systems when time is of the essence. Presenting agents with the information and context they need, including providing 3rd-party data at their fingertips to succeed from a single window decreases agent handle time, increases first-time resolution rates, and minimizes attrition by cutting down agent frustration and burnout.



Skills-based routing

An ACD can route inbound calls to specific agent teams, outbound services, voicemail boxes, a self-service IVR, or several of these options. ACD helps ensure customers are matched up with the correct agent. This allows agents to handle inquiries about which they're most knowledgeable and increases the likelihood of a positive interaction and overall customer experience.



Agent Scorecards

Agent scorecards transcribe and score 100% of calls, giving you an unbiased and holistic understanding of performance, while increasing your ability to monitor for quality and compliance. You can learn where agents may be falling short or where they're excelling. Contact center managers can pinpoint the challenges and use the successful interactions to train and improve execution.

80%

of companies who focus on CX report an increase in annual revenue⁶.



Dynamic scripts

Make interacting with customers easier for your agents by incorporating dynamic scripts directly into the agent desktop. Flexible agent scripts pull together all of the relevant information your agents might need for any interaction. You can guide agents through a variety of customer interactions including onboarding, account servicing, support, and sales. By leveraging scripts, you help agents, and your business, mitigate risks.



Agent-to-Agent Chat

Agent-to-agent chat helps to smooth handoffs between teams and facilitate cleaner transitions across departments. This functionality can also serve as an agent lifeline by providing the ability to solicit real-time assistance and troubleshooting from colleagues, a crucial capability in a remote setting.



Ticketing

Your ticketing system can create more streamlined workflows that eliminate complicated, clunky internal logic that lets customer issues stagnate or slip through the cracks. Much like agent-to-agent chat, ticketing can foster cross-team and departmental collaboration. Smart ticketing helps agents better triage and organize customer requests by category, improving service efficacy and productivity for optimized outcomes.



Digital options

Providing omnichannel training to agents not only expands their skill set while adding variety to the service you offer customers, it makes them more well-rounded support professionals. This translates into a continuity of service across interactions, whether customers enter your support queue through webchat or via the phone.



Multi-channel inbox

Customers are communicating on multiple channels — and expect to be recognized across all interactions. Surfacing interactions across all channels provides agents the data they need regardless of communication type.



Knowledge base

A knowledge base is a centralized location to store information about processes and service tasks that can help customers fulfil support needs on their own. Contact centers can implement an AI knowledge base to enhance agent performance. By handling the first interaction with the customer, whether through virtual agents or IVR, AI can streamline escalations. AI can also collect customer data and provide agents with information about who they're speaking to in order to provide a more personalized experience.

66%

of agents say their companies don't provide the right technology to address customer needs⁷.

#1

reason agents underachieve at work is a lack of ownership⁸.

Summary

Harnessing customer data can help you develop deeper profiles and let agents know instantly how to start conversations. The ability to leverage the information that is known about a customer allows agents to proactively offer additional services or look for upsell opportunities. An understanding of call patterns and why and when customers call helps contact center managers with scheduling. Integrating core contact center functions helps to identify customer attrition by getting a handle on at-risk accounts quickly. It will also ramp up first-time resolutions, reduce wait time by adding channel variety, and make it easier to identify agents who consistently dazzle.



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Agent Performance Management 101



In addition to onboarding and initial training, agents want to receive continuous feedback and coaching in order to improve their performance and meet their goals. Implementing systems to allow for easy evaluation, corrections, and recognition go a long way in making agents feel valued and successful.



Focusing resources on agent experience is valuable for your business as well. According to a study by the Association for Talent Development, companies that offer comprehensive employee training programs have 218% higher income per employee than companies without such programs⁹.



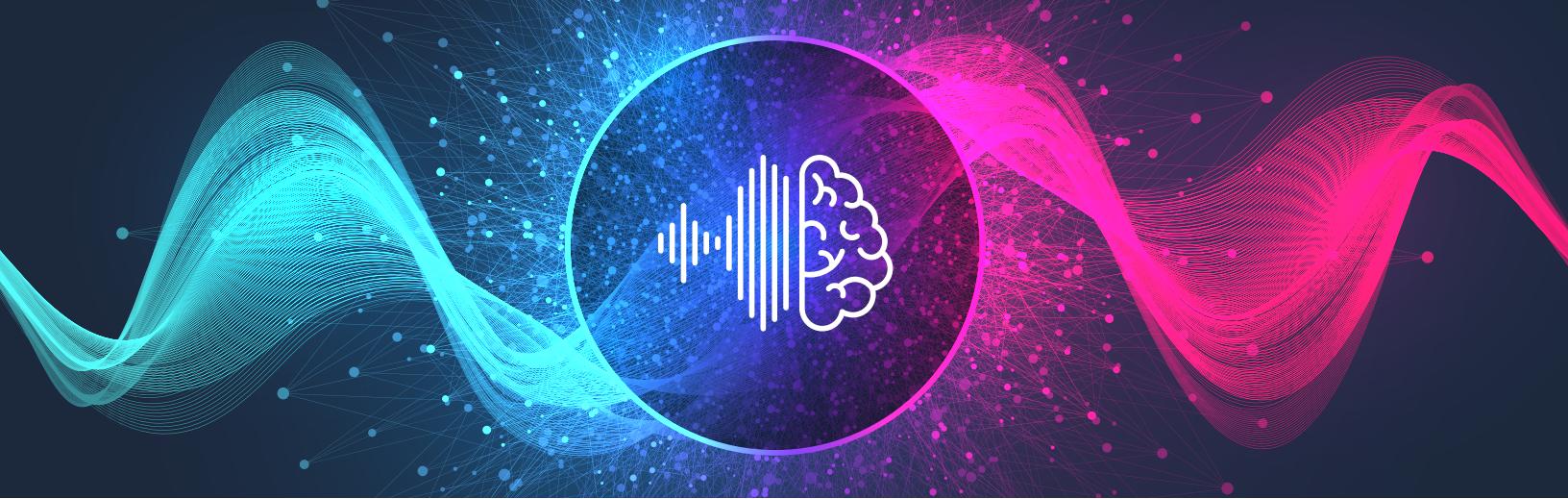
Training and Coaching

The industry average for yearly agent turnover is 44% and a lack of training and development is often cited as a main reason for leaving⁹. Effective training strategies improve performance and compliance standards. Leverage features like screen and voice recording to capture agent interactions, then use AI-powered tools like automated scorecards to assess each interaction based on the customer's sentiment and the outcome of the call. Turn your highest-scoring calls into in-depth training resources that can be distributed amongst teams and used by managers to provide targeted coaching. This not only improves agent skill sets, but boosts their confidence which contributes to greater on-the-job satisfaction.



E-Learning

Provide targeted, effective, and trackable training and coaching to your agents wherever they are. You can assign training tasks by individual agent, team, or entire contact center and then track completion. E-learning is an excellent way to provide on-the-job training in a remote work environment.



Speech analytics

Strong reporting and analytics capabilities are key to providing effective agent training and coaching. Not only do easily accessible metrics help supervisors pinpoint weak spots where agents need more coaching, the ease of the reporting itself frees up more of managers' time that can then be devoted to agent development. Well-trained agents, in turn, are able to provide great customer service. **By overlaying speech analytics reports with traditional performance metrics for 100%, you can uncover, analyze and understand what is driving both poor and exemplary performance and then use targeted, data-driven coaching methods to address outliers and scale best practice.**

Speech analytics also helps overcome employees' concerns about an unfair evaluation process by automatically scoring 100% of conversations that provide objective feedback. The information is made available immediately and allows the agents to feel like they'll be evaluated fairly and consistently. This consistency can give agents the confidence that good work will be recognized and rewarded.



Quality Management

With the reporting tools available with quality management software, you can make evidence-based decisions. Besides reviewing agent performance, you can use the information to better understand your customers' pain points. This can help you think through product messaging or frequently asked questions to help turn some of those contact center calls into self-service opportunities.



Workforce Optimization (WFO)

WFO tools provide you with the reporting and insights to make decisions based on a holistic view of your operations. Use agent scheduling to automate and optimize your contact center workflows. You can also use the above tools (e-learning, speech analytics, etc.) to track customer sentiment and better understand their needs and inform your training and coaching curriculums.

Ultimately, agent performance starts with leadership. Share reporting and insights metrics with your agents to enhance future interactions and performance from your agents. Offer up the training and coaching needed to see improvement and show your agents that you value their success and are willing to invest in them.

Summary

Agent performance starts with leadership. Share reporting and insights metrics with your agents to enhance future interactions and performance from your agents. Offer up the training and coaching needed to see improvement and show your agents that you value their success and are willing to invest in them.



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SUMMARY SECTION

How Do You Measure AX?



We've laid out tools and resources available to improve the agent experience. Once integrated into your contact center, it is important to understand their level of success. With AX and CX so reliant on each other, measuring agent experience is important. In fact, some of the best metrics for AX are customer experience metrics. If customers are happy, it is more likely your agents are performing.

What to measure:

Customer Satisfaction (CSAT & NPS survey scores)

These are the metrics that ultimately determine the success of your contact center. Are the customers happy when they hang up the phone? A net promoter score (NPS) is generally used to determine this metric. CSAT surveys provide feedback on service and call outcomes directly from the customer across digital and voice interactions post-call.

Agent Sentiment

Speech analytics lets you track sentiment for agents and customers, so it can give you a good indication of the manner and tone with which agents are conducting calls which could be reflective of their morale and attitude.

Agent Turnover

Once you've defined the criteria for what constitutes agent turnover (voluntary, involuntary, reason for leaving, promotion) and establish a timeframe, you can determine this metric. High agent turnover can directly impact customer satisfaction and the morale within the contact center.

First-Call Resolution

This metric measures how often a customer issue is resolved in the first interaction. Customers are less likely to churn if they get their issues resolved on the first try. If a customer has to call back more than once, that's time and resources from your agents. If this measurement isn't positive, it's a great signal for areas you'd need to improve within the contact center.

Agent Occupancy

This metric measures the amount of time your agents are either on live calls or finishing up work related to those calls. You can use this metric to understand the productivity and efficiency of your agents.

Average Escalation Rate

This metric provides insight into how well equipped agents are to handle the call they're getting. If escalation rates are high this may be an indication that agents are struggling to find the right information, or lack the training, they need to service customer calls. This could increase the stress levels of your agents, negatively impacting their ability to deliver value to customers.

Average Call Abandonment Rate

Abandon rate is the percentage of calls that are dropped or terminated by the customer. This is an important metric because you won't be able to get the information you need or provide service to the customer if they don't remain on the phone. This is one way to clearly determine the level of customer satisfaction.

Average Handle Time

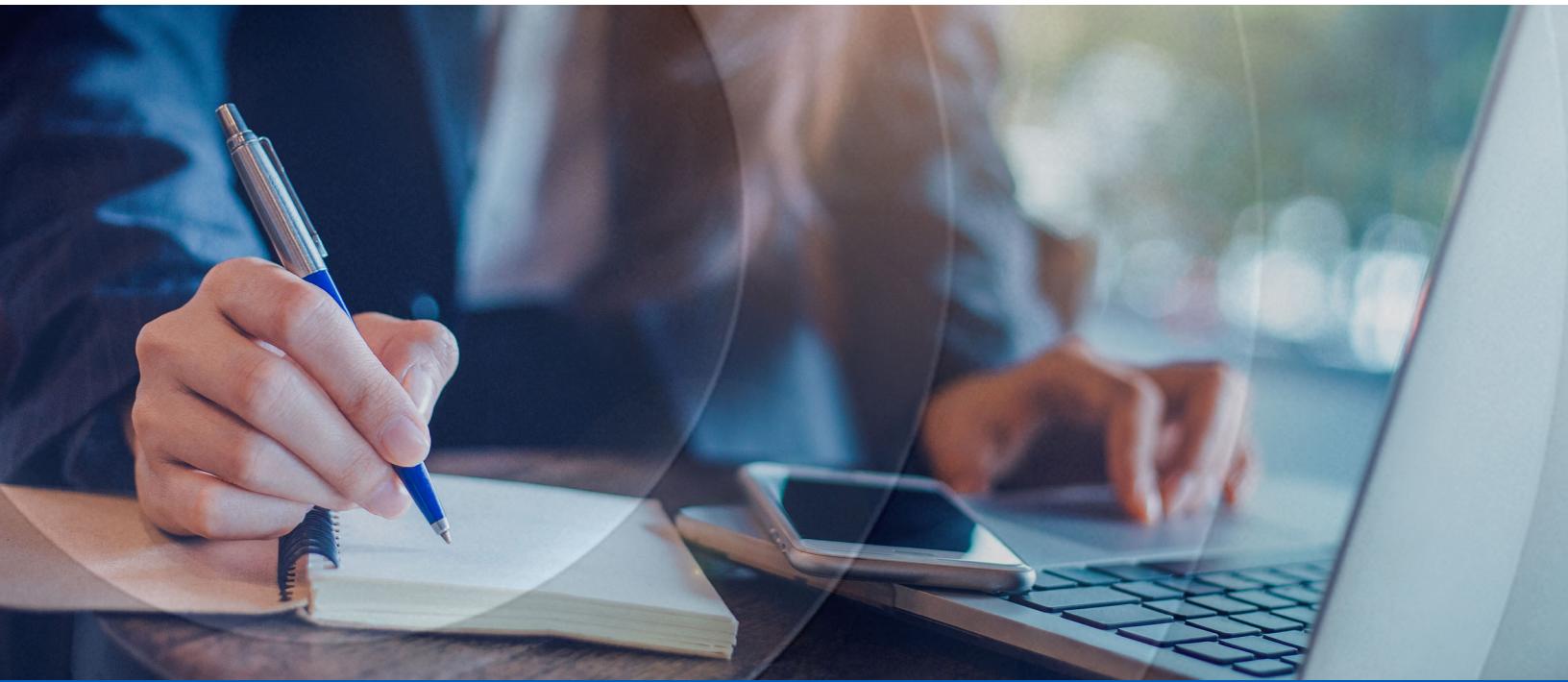
This is the amount of time an agent spends handling customer issues, including post call administrative wrap-up. Generally, this is a metric a contact center would want to keep low in order to provide service to the highest number of customers in a reduced time. You can utilize speech analytics to understand why an agent's handle time is consistently too long or too short. Are they struggling to provide the right answers? Or are they not giving real assistance to the customer?

Average Time in Queue

How long is your customer waiting to speak to someone? Measure average time in the queue to get a sense for your customers' experience. This metric helps contact center managers assess contact center efficiency. If a customer is, on average, waiting too long to speak to an agent, you can think about streamlining an agent's script or adjusting the way an agent interacts with customers.

Average Post-Call Work Time

How long does it take for an agent to do the work after finishing a call? You can often provide your agents with templates or systems that reduce the effort and time to close out a call.



Summary

Improving agent experience and increasing agent engagement is the first move toward a better customer experience. When you think in terms of investing in efficiency, empowerment, and effectiveness you can start collecting agent-focused data that will drive greater customer satisfaction and better outcomes. Much of the information you are already gathering to gauge customer experience can speak volumes about the quality of your agent experience, too.

Fix the Agent Experience and Great CX Will Follow



Don't make short term sacrifices at the expense of long term gains. Investing in the right technology now can yield huge benefits for the future of your contact center, and many of these investments are already part of the digital transformation journey.

Your contact center will be more effective when you provide agents with the comprehensive data they need to do their jobs well and do it right. Strong backend systems like integrated ticketing, peer chat, and automation give managers greater visibility through in-the-moment performance management. This enables coaching and creates actionable data streams that lead to more accurate tracking and guide decision making. The beneficiaries will be twofold, and your entire business will reap the returns.

And of course, your agents will be happier because their work lives will be less complicated, an ease of use that automatically pays forward.



About LiveVox

LiveVox is a next-generation contact center platform that powers more than 14 billion interactions a year. We seamlessly integrate omnichannel communications, CRM, and WFO capabilities to deliver an exceptional agent and customer experience while reducing compliance risk. Our reliable, easy-to-use technology enables effective engagement strategies on communication channels of choice to drive performance in your contact center. Our battle-tested risk mitigation and security tools help clients maximize their potential in an ever-changing business environment. With 20 years of pure cloud expertise, LiveVox is at the forefront of cloud contact center innovation. Our more than 500 global employees are headquartered in San Francisco, with offices in Atlanta; Columbus; Denver; New York City; St. Louis; Medellin, Colombia; and Bangalore, India.

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