

The Executive Guide to Improving 6 Call Center Metrics



Table of Contents

1. Customer Satisfaction (CSat)	4
The reason we're all here. This metric should always be top of the list when looking at the overall effectiveness of your call center. All other metrics impact CSat.	
2. Service Level	8
One of the oldest and most revered contact center metrics, service level measures your ability to handle call volume and is directly tied to satisfaction.	
3. First-Call Resolution (FCR)	10
FCR tells you how often your agents can resolve a customer's problem themselves. It's a measure of their effectiveness and key to improving customer loyalty.	
4. Employee Satisfaction (ESat)	13
Often overlooked, this measure of employee engagement will directly impact your other metrics because unhappy and disengaged agents are unhelpful agents.	
5. Average Handle Time (AHT)	16
This metric has caught a lot of flak but only because it has been abused. In the right hands, AHT can be a powerful tool to optimize your call center.	
6. Abandonment Rate	19
One of the surest signs that your call center is failing to deliver. Lowering abandonment rate can have a big impact and is easier to do than you may think.	



Introduction

Measuring and improving metrics is at the core of a call center executive's role. Your call center operates in a stressful environment where **good quality metrics** lead to a higher standard of customer service. This guide will help you improve 6 key contact center metrics for better performance and future success.



SECTION 1

Customer Satisfaction (CSat)

DEFINITION

The level of satisfaction customers have with an organization and their products and / or services.

HOW TO IMPROVE

Your mission as a call center is to keep service costs low, while maintaining high caller satisfaction.

THREE WAYS YOUR CONTACT CENTER CAN IMPROVE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION.



Keep employees **happy**



Resolve calls the first time



Eliminate hold time and use call-backs



Keep employees happy

Keeping employees cheerful depends on a number of factors including: a well-developed company culture, access to user-friendly and intuitive tools & technology, and ensuring that employees have a voice inside your organization. Ultimately, engaged employees will create satisfied customers.





Resolve calls the first time

If you ask customers what frustrates them the most, nearly half (42%) will say, “having to speak with multiple agents and start over every time”. Resolving customer issues the first time is the single biggest way to improve customer satisfaction. Studies reveal that caller satisfaction ratings will be 5-10% lower when a second call is made for the same issue.



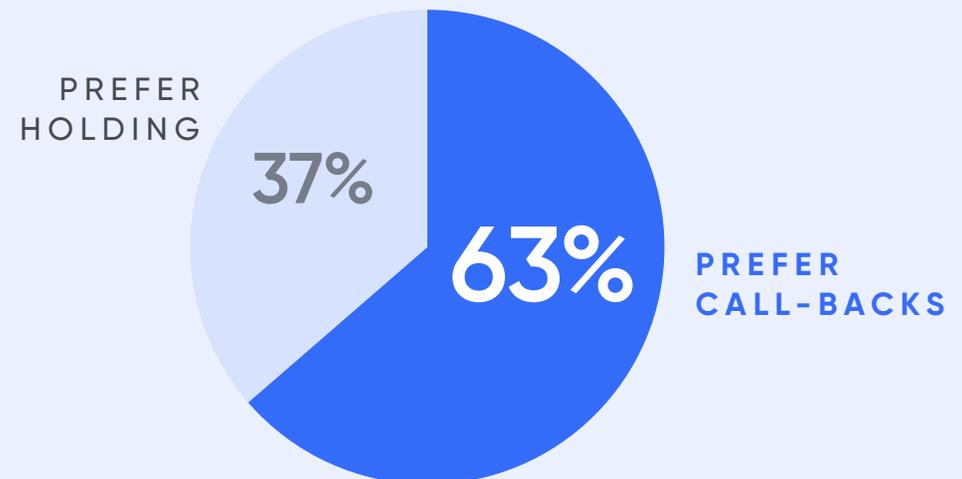


Eliminate hold time and use call-backs

Eliminating the need for customers to wait on hold not only increases customer satisfaction; it also reduces costs for call centers. Forcing callers to wait in queue drives up telco costs and, unfortunately, causes many of them to hang up and end the conversation before it even begins.

In fact, 60% of customers will abandon a call after just one minute of hold time. Instead, contact centers could offer callers the option to receive a call-back. According to SoftwareAdvice.com, 63% of customers prefer a call-back to waiting on hold.

CUSTOMER PREFERENCES FOR CALL-BACK VS. WAITING ON HOLD



SECTION 2

Service Level

DEFINITION

Also called telephone service factor (TSF). Service level is expressed as X percentage of contacts answered in Y seconds.



HOW TO IMPROVE

Your target service level should be based on what your call center can reasonably achieve, given your staffing level and the expected call volume.

Let's say you have assembled the necessary data, how exactly do you get from staffing numbers and call volume numbers to service level numbers?

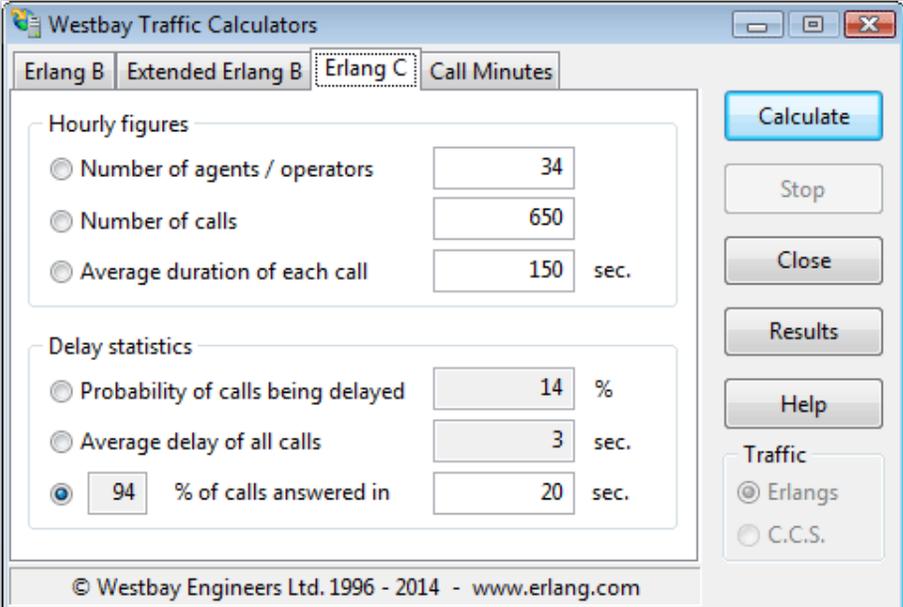
The answer is with the lost art of Erlang, used to determine the number of agents required to staff a call center, given a desired call volume and probability of queuing.

Erlang calculator

If you're not working with an Erlang calculator, you're ignoring a powerful tool for optimizing your capacity scheduling. Fortunately, there are many easy and free online tools you can use to help you with your service level calculations.

Armed with an Erlang calculator, you'll be able to draw insights from your data and make more efficient use of your team's time and resources.

Another way to quickly improve service level is by offering your callers the option to receive a call-back. This will help you to smooth out call spikes by diverting calls to off-peak periods.



The screenshot shows the 'Westbay Traffic Calculators' application window. The 'Erlang C' tab is selected. The interface is divided into two main sections: 'Hourly figures' and 'Delay statistics'. The 'Hourly figures' section has three radio buttons and input fields: 'Number of agents / operators' (34), 'Number of calls' (650), and 'Average duration of each call' (150 sec). The 'Delay statistics' section has three radio buttons and input fields: 'Probability of calls being delayed' (14 %), 'Average delay of all calls' (3 sec), and '% of calls answered in' (94) with a corresponding input field (20 sec). On the right side, there are buttons for 'Calculate', 'Stop', 'Close', 'Results', and 'Help'. Below the buttons, there is a 'Traffic' section with radio buttons for 'Erlangs' (selected) and 'C.C.S.'. At the bottom of the window, the copyright information reads: '© Westbay Engineers Ltd. 1996 - 2014 - www.erlang.com'.

Category	Parameter	Value	Unit
Hourly figures	Number of agents / operators	34	
	Number of calls	650	
	Average duration of each call	150	sec.
Delay statistics	Probability of calls being delayed	14	%
	Average delay of all calls	3	sec.
	% of calls answered in	94	
		20	sec.

SECTION 3

First-Call Resolution (FCR)

DEFINITION

The percentage of calls that don't require any further agents to address the customer's reason for calling. The customer does not need to contact the organization again, nor does anyone within the contact center need to follow up.

HOW TO IMPROVE

Let's say a call center gets 100,000 calls per month. If the cost per call is \$10, and 30% of calls are repeat calls, the cost of the repeat calls is \$300,000 per month. A mere **10% reduction** would yield a savings of \$30,000 per month or \$360,000 per year. Make the cost of a call \$25, and the annual savings would be \$900,000.

UNFORTUNATELY, THERE'S NO SILVER BULLET TO IMPROVING THIS METRIC. YOU NEED TO **FOCUS ON THREE AREAS:**



People



Process



Product



People

In order to speed call resolution rates, be sure your agents have good listening skills, are focused on solving the right problem, and employ top-notch troubleshooting skills.

They need to sound confident, anticipate related questions that callers might have, and follow-through on the commitments they make to the customer.



Process

No matter how good you think your processes are, they could probably still be optimized further. One simple way of identifying these areas for improvement is to sit with your agents and watch them handle calls.

You want to look for anything that hinders access to information or technical limitations your agents experience that forces them to escalate a call.

Make sure your team has access to all the information they need to resolve customer inquiries, and are empowered to make decisions for the customer themselves, and you should see your FCR rate fall.



Product

Are you having quality issues? Is something continuing to fail time and time again? Are people calling back about the same failure issue? If so, what can you do to fix it?

If you're hearing a lot of the same complaints, or your noticing that customers are having the same problems using your product, you should probably pay attention.

Customer complaints and feedback are a treasure trove information on how to improve your product.

Listen to the types of complaints that are driving repeat calls and examine your people, processes, and product to see what you can do to improve first call resolution.

SECTION 4

Employee Satisfaction (ESat)

DEFINITION

Used to describe whether employees are happy and fulfilling their desires and needs at work.

HOW TO IMPROVE

With all the focus on customer service, some organizations miss the mark with their own employees. The number one way to keep your customers happy is to keep your employees happier! Keeping call center agents engaged can be a real challenge, given the repetitive nature of the job and the metrics-based approach used to track performance.

Happy employees also mean a lower percentage of agent churn. High turnover results in inflated call center costs and a loss of qualified agents.

SIMPLE CHANGES IN TEAM CULTURE AND JOB QUALITY CAN EASILY IMPROVE EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION.



Perform satisfaction surveys



Provide career development



Offer great benefits and work-life balance



Recognize employees for a job well done



Perform satisfaction surveys

Any business that's concerned with staff turnover or improving employee satisfaction needs to take regular feedback surveys from staff.

There are lots of free templates for these, and it's if you want truly honest, useful feedback from your team, it's important that you make them anonymous.

And if you're proud of your employee satisfaction rate, you could even take part in one an Award such as the [Great Places to Work™](#) scheme.



Provide career development

One of the main reasons people leave their job is the lack of career development opportunities.

If you're serious about keeping your best agents, you need to give them a reason to stay. That means defining a clear career progression pathway and setting out what's needed from them to reach milestones on that pathway from the start.



Offer great benefits and work-life balance

Benefits and work-life balance are becoming increasingly important to the younger generations. You don't necessarily have to pay the highest salaries if you offer your team the flexibility and security that other employers can't.

Extended health benefits are a great start. Flexible and remote working arrangements, childcare and wellness stipends are also incredibly powerful way of increasing agent satisfaction.



Recognize employees for a job well done

One thing that's very easy to forget — especially in a contact center — is to reward your employees for a job well done.

This doesn't need to be formalized bonuses, although they're a great addition to your benefits plan. It can be as simple as a 'High-Five' scheme, where employees give each other shout-outs for great work.

On a more personal note, giving employees praise publicly for great customer interactions, and also in a more structured manner in periodic reviews, can also go a long way towards improving agent satisfaction and creating a more positive workspace.

SECTION 5

Average Handle Time (AHT)

DEFINITION

The sum of average talk time plus average after-call work for a specific time period.

HOW TO IMPROVE

Many contact center managers have made the mistake of trying to 'improve' AHT by making it shorter.

At first, this seems to make sense. The shorter the Average Handle Time of a call, the lower the cost of the call, and the more calls you can fit in an hour.

But pressure to reduce AHT actually has an **inverse effect** on FCR, CSat, NPS, and ESat, which eliminates and increase in margins gained by rushing customers through calls.

HERE ARE A FEW WAYS TO ACTUALLY
'IMPROVE' AVERAGE HANDLE TIME
IN YOUR CONTACT CENTER.



Coach your agents



Use **skill-based** routing



Invest in AI & automation



Be **flexible**



Coach your agents

Effective coaching ensures that the skills, techniques, and methods taught during training are practiced and applied during actual customer interactions.

Set up an ongoing agent coaching program, pairing new agents with your best and brightest; their passion and competency should rub off!

One key aspect of coaching agents to improve Average Handle Time (improve not reduce) is to train agents to empathize, and to anticipate questions. This doesn't mean jumping to conclusions about what a customer wants, but rather getting them to think ahead, and offer customers a connected or follow-up solution, before they realise they need it.



Use skill-based routing

Contact center software has improved in leaps and bounds over the last few years. Many of the newer platforms have built-in AI that's capable of anticipating a customer's needs and routing them to the best possible agent to solve that problem.

The better and more experienced an agent is at solving that particular problem for a customer, the faster they will be able to resolve their issue without compromising the quality of service.

This method relies on you having specialist agents, or at the very least, a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the members of your team, so you can tell the software where to direct them.



Invest in AI and automation

If you want to improve the efficiency of your contact center operations, automation is your best friend. Invest in technology that streamlines your processes and makes things easier for both your agent and the customer.

You could try using a chat-bot that gathers customer information prior to a call or a smart knowledge base that responds to customers inquiries and prompts agents with useful or relevant information.



Be flexible

Many start-ups have found success because of their ability to pivot — to be flexible — about what they're selling and how they do things.

If you want your contact center to thrive in the years ahead, you have to ensure that flexibility or adaptability is one of your core values.

The more flexible you are with how you provide your service, the more you empower your agents to use their best judgement for the best of the customer, the faster they'll be able to get to a resolution, and the happier the customer will be with it.

SECTION 6

Abandoned Calls

DEFINITION

The caller hangs up before reaching an agent.

HOW TO IMPROVE

Call Abandon Rate is important because it speaks directly to customer dissatisfaction and the negative impact that has on customer loyalty. A high call abandonment rate is a sure sign of customer frustration.

Luckily, reducing your abandon rates is proven to provide improved customer satisfaction and a better call center experience.

REDUCE ABANDONED CALLS BY:



Keeping the caller **informed**



Knowing your **numbers**



Offering a **call-back** solution



Keeping the caller informed

IVRs get a bad rep because they're misused.

Instead of using your IVR to irritate customers with bad music or repetitive messaging, try to use it to keep them informed of the situation and manage their expectations.

If hold-times are an issue, consider preparing customers by placing a message in the IVR or ACD informing them of the estimated wait time.

This reduces customer's apprehension and will subsequently lower their desire to abandon the call.

If the wait time is too long, you should offer them the option of a call-back.



Knowing your numbers

Call detail reports provide you with a wealth of information and insight into your calls. By knowing who abandoned a call, when they called you, and how long they waited before hanging up, you can make informed decisions on how to resolve the situation.

Some key reasons to keep in mind when examining your data are:

- **Hold time is too long**
Offer a call-back
- **Bad hold music**
Change your playlist to or drop-it completely
- **Annoying messaging**
Reduce message frequency and increase content variety

Offering a call-back solution

As we've mentioned a few times already, the quickest and easiest way to drastically reduce your abandon rate is to offer **your customers a call-back**.

When agents are swamped with calls and hold time is too long (or at any time) you can offer customers the option to 'Press 1' to receive a call-back.

If they accept, their call is transferred to Fonolo, who waits on hold until they reach an agent, freeing them up to spend their time on something else. When they reach the front of the queue, we call the customer back and connect one happy customer to one happy agent.

In fact, offering customers a call-back has become so widespread that it is quickly becoming a consumer expectation.

For a more in-depth look, read:

[The Smart Contact Center Manager's Guide to Handling Spikes in Call Volume](#)

