Agent Engagement Improves the Customer Experience

Cloud-Based Workforce Optimization Offers Flexibility of Deployment
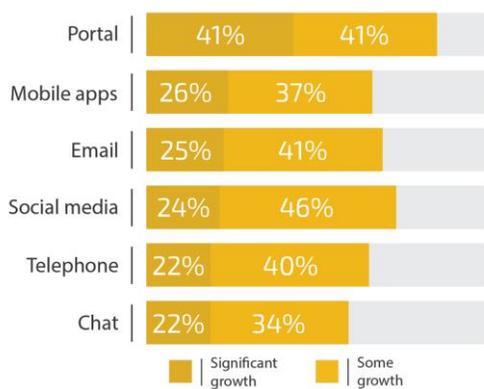
RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

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Customer Experience Challenges

In recent years customers have grown considerably more demanding. They expect responses to their inquiries to be fast, personalized, in context and consistent across channels. Most of all, though, they want their issues to be resolved at the first contact.

Expected Growth in Communication Channels
Despite internet, telephone remains popular

Channel	Significant growth	Some growth
Portal	41%	41%
Mobile apps	26%	37%
Email	25%	41%
Social media	24%	46%
Telephone	22%	40%
Chat	22%	34%

Source: Ventana Research Next-Generation Contact Center in the Cloud Benchmark Research
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Customers also want to be able to use any available channel of engagement, including newer digital ones. However, our benchmark research on the next-generation contact center in the cloud finds that for 92 percent of participating organizations telephone calls remain the most commonly used channel, and many say they expect call volumes to grow over the next two years: 22 percent expect significant growth, and 40 percent expect some growth.

Having to handle more contacts over more channels of engagement with many of those customer requests being more complex increases pressure on agents. Our research shows that not many organizations have prepared their agents to meet these demands: Only about one in three can handle all supported channels (36%) or all types of interactions (33%). To balance customer expectations with goals for efficiency and effectiveness, organizations thus need to update their interaction-handling processes, train agents in multiple skills and provide systems that help agents understand their performance and motivate them to improve in specific areas.
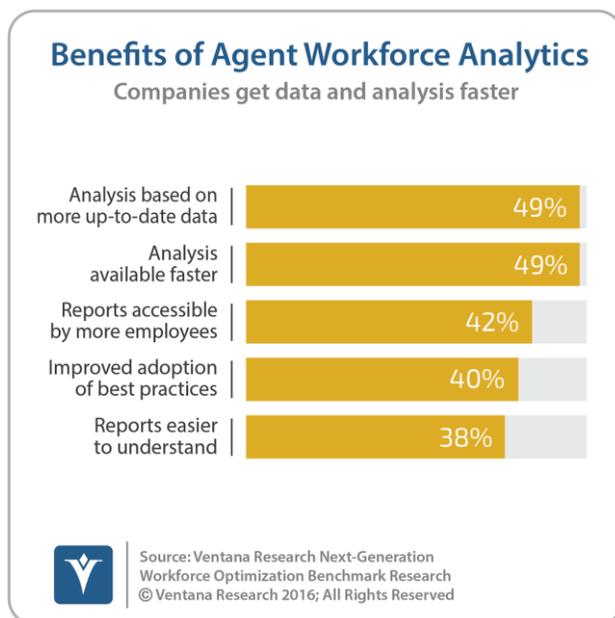
Advanced Systems for Interaction Handling

Many organizations recognize the need to address these issues. Our research shows that among their top priorities are to improve the customer experience, the processes agents use and agent satisfaction. In our research into next-generation workforce optimization more than three-quarters (78%) of organizations said that improving agent performance is key. To achieve these and related objectives, organizations need advanced software that can help them understand their current practices and shortcomings and provide guidance in improving them.

Analytics is the business technology tool that organizations said they expect to have the most substantial impact on interaction handling and agent performance. This software can be used to gain a better view of interaction handling and agent performance, identify good and bad processes, and improve the outcomes of

interactions. Organizations that have deployed analytics identified an average of 3.5 benefits from its use; the two most commonly cited, both by 49 percent, are having analysis based on more up-to-date data and gaining access to analysis sooner.

Benefits of Agent Workforce Analytics
Companies get data and analysis faster

Analysis based on more up-to-date data	49%
Analysis available faster	49%
Reports accessible by more employees	42%
Improved adoption of best practices	40%
Reports easier to understand	38%

Source: Ventana Research Next-Generation Workforce Optimization Benchmark Research © Ventana Research 2016; All Rights Reserved

Two categories of contact center analytics can particularly contribute to improvement efforts. Speech analytics can be used to automate and improve agent quality monitoring by assessing all calls, categorizing them and identifying those to be assessed more closely. It also helps automate the completion of quality monitoring forms, derive quality monitoring scores and identify coaching and training needs.

Desktop analytics can be used to capture the tasks agent use to handle interactions and map the overall process by call type and by agent. It thus can help managers identify best practices, determine the coaching and training needs of individual agents and devise workflow improvements in the way agents use applications to resolve interactions.

Purpose-designed gamification software supports a somewhat different approach to motivate agents. These tools enable managers to set performance targets for agents, assess whether they meet those targets and then reward them in some way. The targets can relate to operational goals such as meeting targets for first-contact resolution rates, sales conversions and average handling times, or completing training and coaching activities. Alternatively they can be based on completing prearranged activities that are presented in the form of games. The rewards can range from performance recognition on a shared Web page (best performing agent, for example), to badges, time off, priority for shift swaps or bonus payments.

To deploy systems to improve employee engagement, organizations increasingly are choosing suites of integrated workforce optimization applications. These typically include interaction recording, quality management, workforce management, e-learning and training. Newer ones frequently offer gamification as an option. Such suites can link workforce optimization processes such as customer feedback to agent performance. They also automate tasks such as scheduling agents for training through workforce management systems.

Workforce optimization suites reduce data entry requirements by automatically transferring data entered into one system to other specified systems in the suite. They can be easier to use than separate applications if they provide a single

modern user interface for all components. Likewise, commonalities in administration can make suites easier to manage. In our research almost half (48%) of organizations said it is very important to use fully integrated systems.

Cloud-Based Workforce Optimization

Whether they opt for advanced workforce optimization systems as individual applications or in suites, organizations can choose between conventional on-premises and newer cloud-based installations. If desired, they can start on premises and migrate to the cloud. While our research shows that organizations increasingly are adopting cloud-based workforce optimization, many still select the means of deployment on a case-by-case basis.

> Our research shows that organizations increasingly are adopting cloud-based workforce optimization.

A variety of cloud-based installation models are available: private, public or hybrid. The private cloud model gives organizations the option to host the systems at multiple internal locations or at the supplier's location. The public cloud option uses versions of the supplier's systems hosted by independent vendors that provide all the hardware and operational resources. As the name implies, the hybrid model allows organizations to have some systems on-premises and others in the cloud. For contact centers a common choice is to keep call recording on-premises and deploy other components in the cloud.

Cloud-based systems offer users a number of benefits. Chief among them are:

- Automatic upgrades to the latest version of the software
- Lower upfront costs
- Lifetime costs spread over the term of the agreement
- Limited investment in hardware
- Faster setup
- Less burden on scarce IT and operational resources
- Access to innovative capabilities as they appear
- Scalability to match demand.

Benefits of Advanced Systems

On average, organizations reported that they have achieved five benefits by deploying advanced workforce optimization systems. Among the top five, most are related to agent performance and operational improvement, but increased customer satisfaction ranks second, cited by 52 percent.

Benefits of Agent Workforce Applications
Deployments deliver significant value

Benefit	Percent
Improved agent coaching	66%
Increased customer satisfaction	52%
Improved quality scores	51%
Improved adoption of best practices	45%
Improved compliance with work schedules	41%

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Our research into agent desktop systems and customer service finds a correlation between agents' satisfaction and their meeting key performance targets: Very satisfied agents meet targets for customer satisfaction, net promoter scores and customer effort scores twice as often as those less fully satisfied.

Our customer and contact center research projects consistently show that many organizations use spreadsheets to manage agent-related tasks, including interaction handling – for example, creating agent work schedules and assessing agent performance. These personal productivity tools limit an organization's ability to manage the increased complexity of these tasks, to connect processes and to derive and track performance metrics. To optimize both the efficiency and the effectiveness of interaction handling, many organizations are adopting integrated suites of advanced workforce optimization systems, including advanced analytics. Our research indicates that advanced workforce optimization systems, whether deployed on-premises, in the cloud or in a hybrid manner, can help organizations improve agent performance and satisfaction, meet business goals and deliver high-quality service that matches customer expectations.

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