How to build
an award winning contact centre

Technology

People

Process

Customer

sabio
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“We need to make an emotional connection between our front line staff and customers – it’s all about delivering a memorable service engagement.”

Stuart Dorman
Head of Consultancy, Sabio

“For organisations, the number one priority is to provide agents with clarity about the kind of experience you actually want delivered.”

Lyn Etherington
Customer Services Expert, Judge of ECCCDSA and Top 50 awards

“We reward our people for their customer advocacy, and that’s got our agents thinking like our customers.”

John Connolly
Head of Innovation, British Gas, European Call Centre of the Year, 2010

“For organisations looking to build an award-winning customer service environment, reclaiming leadership is an essential step.”

Gary Fowler
Senior Operations Consultant, Sabio

“Rather than place so much emphasis on the CV, why don’t contact centre recruiters simply start with a telephone interview?”

David Payne
Contact Centre & Customer Experience Expert, Judge of ECCCDSA

“Ideally we prefer candidates that have had no previous call centre experience.”

Matthew Kemp
Customer Services Director, Lebara, Large Contact Centre of the Year, 2012

“Sabio’s specialist workforce optimisation practice proved invaluable in helping us to drive an integrated workforce strategy.”

Barry Ibbetson
Head of Corporate Contact Centre, Leeds City Council

“Organisations are clearly experiencing real friction between their demanding compliance processes and an ongoing commitment to providing consumers with a positive customer experience.”

Kenneth Hitchen
Founding Director, Sabio
Introduction: How to build an award winning contact centre

In this eBook, Sabio assesses the elements required to build an award winning contact centre. Each chapter explores the challenges highlighted during Sabio’s interviews with Senior Contact Centre professionals at the CCA convention which have been categorised into four main challenges, People, Process, Customer and Technology.

In order to answer these main areas of concern Sabio has drawn together insight from award-winning customer service organisations, Sabio Consultants and acknowledged industry experts.

The following pages uncover best practice tips and ideas gathered from Sabio events, practice leaders and customers that can help identify applicable approaches for your contact centre challenges.
Background: Peer Research on the Real Challenges for 2014

What would senior contact centre professionals reveal about their biggest challenges at work for the year ahead?

We surveyed delegates at the CCA Convention and have sifted through the data to help us all gain visibility of the trends and challenges shared within our industry.

The diagram shows the main challenge categories identified by the research, with:

- Change Management and Business Insight representing a combined 37% of the challenges revealed
- Technology and budget only accounting for a combined 13% of foreseen challenges
The People Perspective

Optimising staff performance in the contact centre
Background: Target Operating Model

Applying Sabio’s Target Operating Model for contact centre performance reveals that staffing issues and agent optimisation remain key concerns, and a major issue for organisations looking to optimise their customer service.

The research shows a significant disconnect between the kind of service levels that customers increasingly demand and the reality being delivered in the contact centre.

Getting the right agents on board and empowering them to deliver remain the key priorities for contact centre management.

People Challenges

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<td>Incoming training quality</td>
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Introduction: The people perspective

In our first chapter we are focussing on the people side of the business, examining the key staffing related issues that were highlighted by leading contact centre professionals at a recent CCA Convention.

Our response to these challenges incorporates feedback from award winning customer service organisations, Sabio consultants and acknowledged industry experts.
Staff engagement

ECCCSA Judge, David Payne believes that it’s really important for organisations to ‘nurture the new’.

Just take the induction process, for example. Too many induction training programmes for new staff spend most of the time focused on topics such as IT systems, health and safety and office admin, leaving very little space for essential factors such as soft skills and the techniques needed to talk with different types of customers.

It’s of course important to get new staff up to speed, however contact centre management also needs to remember to develop their more experienced staff. If all the training emphasis is placed on induction, it’s hardly surprising if existing staff feel less valued and start to investigate other employment options. To address this, organisations need to think about retention programmes across the whole contact centre, as well as more active succession planning techniques.

David Payne feels that existing staff have an important role to play in mentoring and supporting new staff, and that they also can add value by serving as advocates in the community and beyond.

Given that staffing is clearly the largest element in any contact centre’s budget, it’s surprising how little emphasis many organisations place on improving staff engagement – whether that’s involving:

• Getting new staff up to speed
• Developing your experienced staff or
• Developing your team leaders

Team Leaders are the backbone of the contact centre. The fastest and most effective way to improve your contact centre agents is to improve the quality of your Team Leaders – and these coaching skills need to be taught.

Staff engagement is critical for our business – with over three million inbound conversations a year, we see each of these as an opportunity to reinforce the Lebara brand. That’s why we look carefully at levels of agent engagement, and focus particularly on tracking engagement by supervisor or team leader.

Matt Kemp, Customer Services Director, Lebara
Empowering agents!

Empowering agents means developing staff so that they have the ability to deliver excellent customer experiences.

Whatever customer measure organisations use, it’s essential that the focus is on what’s driving those numbers – rather than concentrating on the numbers themselves. For organisations, the number one priority is to provide agents with clarity about the kind of experience you want delivered – and that needs to be reinforced by behavioural training and coaching.

Lyn Etherington, ECCSA and Top 50 judge

For British Gas, a key part of its Cardiff contact centre’s success was to help its agent team start thinking like customers.

We reward our people for their customer advocacy, and that’s got our agents thinking like customers – so we’re completely aligned with our goal of being number one for customer service.

John Connolly, Head of Innovation British Gas

Central to the success of this kind of approach are two key factors – trust and emotional intelligence. At British Gas, John Connolly knows that at least 95% of the team wants to do a great job – “so we trust them to get on with their jobs without drowning them in targets. We also recognise that agents won’t do their best work when someone is standing over their shoulder and measuring their every move.”

Lebara also empowers its agents to move from basic service experience to the more rewarding delivery of positive customer experiences.

At Lebara we call this ‘experience design’ approach SMILE, standing for the agent characteristics we’re looking to achieve: Supportive, Moment of Connection, Individual, Laugh and Empathy.

Matt Kemp, Customer Services Director, Lebara

According to Lyn, agents not only need to get the basics right – being friendly, polite and efficient – they also need to deliver on the service differentiators that distinguish best practice contact centre performance, including:

- Empathy
- Proactivity
- Responsiveness
Tapping the talent pool

When considering broader contact centre performance, it’s really important for organisations to get the right people on board.

It’s surprising how many contact centre operators still begin the recruitment process with a traditional CV sift – without necessarily considering how effective this is as a tool for predictive performance.

David Payne cited research from Schmidt & Hunter, highlighting that the kind of information typically provided in CVs – job experience, biographical data, education details and personal interests – were actually the sort of data sets that were least likely to predict future successful contact centre performance.

Different organisations clearly have their own approaches that they feel delivers what works best for their business. For example, at Lebara Matthew Kemp believes that assessment centres have a key role to play.

Rather than place so much emphasis on the CV, why don’t contact centre recruiters simply start with a telephone interview? They’ll certainly learn a lot more about a candidate this way than by reading their CV!

David Payne, ECCCSA Judge

To get the right people on board, it’s worthwhile developing a comprehensive ‘attraction strategy’, that looks beyond factors such as salary, benefits and working environment to address key issues such as:

- The selection process
- On boarding
- Induction
- Training
- Transition to the frontline

Ideally we prefer candidates that have had no previous call centre experience – that way they can begin working in the Lebara way, and don’t have to unlearn habits gathered from previous roles. We also always ensure that our existing agent teams get the final say, as they have a great sense of who will really work well for us.

Matt Kemp, Customer Services Director, Lebara
Leadership development

Research continually shows the importance of developing emotional intelligence within the contact centre, yet too many organisations persist in operating customer service environments where the dynamics are still largely process-focused.

Earlier we talked about how agents respond to positive leadership, yet it is still rare for contact centre staff to get the direction they deserve.

That’s why at Sabio we believe the line manager role is so important in the contact centre – and so difficult to get right. Contact centres still tend to promote agents to the team leader position, and this role is usually their first management role, they’re inexperienced and they’re often short of role models.

And because management training is limited, new team leaders tend to simply follow what their predecessors or other team leaders tell them. Statistics are often the only thing they know how to interpret and control, so that’s what they focus on.

With this self-reinforcing cycle, it’s all too easy to see how poor contact centre cultures can develop. Gary Fowler from Sabio believes that organisations should start by giving their team leaders some proper training.

Leading vs Managing

There’s an important distinction between leadership and management:
• Leaders do the right things
• Managers just do things right

Leadership is all about motivation and inspiration, however managers just want to control processes – often unsubtly.

How do agents respond? You only have to listen:
• “Nothing’s ever good enough for my team leader”
• “I’m fed up with being monitored”
• “I’m job hunting!”

It’s all too easy to see how poor cultures can develop. Reclaiming the term leadership is an important start in getting a contact centre back on track. For organisations looking to build an award-winning customer service environment, it’s an essential step – particularly given the clear link between the customer experience offered and improving Net Promoter Scores.

Gary Fowler, Senior Operations Consultant, Sabio
Homeworking

Homeworking makes it easier for contact centres to use annualised hours and split shift techniques more easily – where employees need to work more in the busy periods but less in quieter times – and even in two hour blocks to address peaks.

Homeworking can also make it easier for agents to adhere to these split shift patterns, as they don’t have the time or costs associated with travelling to work.

The flexibility of homeworking and hours is appealing for many employees, and these staff are more likely to stay as an employee for longer periods – potentially extending the profit from the company’s original investment in each agent’s training.

Initially targeted as a contact centre productivity measure – with organisations targeting gains of between 10 and 20 percent through the use of flexible working and split shifts for example – homeworking can also play a key role in an organisation’s business continuity strategy. Traditional DR (disaster recovery) approaches are based on the presumption that if a contact centre can’t function, then its operations and agents need to move to alternative premises. In extreme weather, however, this won’t necessarily work, and homeworking can provide a useful back-up.

When Yahoo recently banned staff from working from home, the decision and reactions to it again placed homeworking at the top of the agenda.

This ongoing debate has a continued impact on the contact centre, where home-based agents represent a significant element of the agent population, and can deliver major benefits in key areas such as:

- Flexibility
- Protecting investment in agents & training
- Business continuity

It’s important for customer service operations to take full advantage of the technologies and solutions that can help them alleviate pressure in their contact centres. With the thin-client distribution of existing contact centre applications running at less than £1,000 per agent, there’s really nothing to stop organisations getting involved with home working.

Stuart Dorman, Head of Consultancy, Sabio
Staff retention

When ContactBabel asked contact centre managers what were the key issues concerning them, their top three turned out to be:

- Improving CSAT – 8.3%
- Decreasing costs – 7.3%
- Improving staff morale – 7.1%

What was interesting is that very few managers actually referenced staff attrition/retention as a key concern – despite it being a day-to-day reality for most contact centres, and a major contributing factor to the three issues cited above.

Despite recognised research from PwC into the cost of attrition suggesting that replacing a lost employee can cost up to 100% of their annual salary, it seems that contact centre decision-makers are still choosing to ignore what is realistically the largest potential target for improving their cost positions.

One factor that could explain this oversight is the relative drop in attrition rates during the current economic downturn. While rates might have fallen from the 35% heights of 2008, today’s 20% attrition rate should still be a serious concern.

In addition to the cost of replacing lost employees, attrition can also have a significant negative impact on overall contact centre performance. Factors to consider here include:

- Increased recruitment and training costs
- Increased time to competence – leading to increased transfer rates, queue times and call lengths
- Increased pressure on the remaining team members

This of course leads to decreased staff morale, lower average competency levels and a poorer quality of customer experience.

We all need to do lots more to create the right environment for our contact centre staff to develop. A major focus at British Gas is on encouraging our team members to develop and find a role they love – so we provide a clear progression from Advisor to Advocate to Expert to Trainer Expert to Team Manager. Giving our people a reason to remain engaged has helped lead to a significant reduction in staff attrition.

John Connolly, Head of Innovation, British Gas
Training quality

A contact centre’s people are its most important asset. Organisations spend significant resources on recruiting staff, empowering agents with the right techniques and developing approaches to help improve staff engagement.

Given this commitment, it’s also critical that customer service organisations protect this asset by investing in the right levels and the right quality to ensure continuous improvement.

Developing your team is one of the key functions of an effective contact centre manager, and that means creating the right training programmes for both agents and their team leaders.

So how do we do this? Start by equipping front line staff with all the information and tools they need to serve customers, and also trust them to make the right decisions.

When you’re looking into the characteristics of top performing customer service organisations, it’s increasingly clear that the best have agents that are able to deliver personalised experiences for customers.

“\textit{We’ve been able to establish a clear link between engaging our people with improved customer measures – specifically in terms of our NPS performance, reduced customer complaints and a fall in customer churn}.”

John Connolly, Head of Innovation and Best Practice, British Gas

Gary Fowler, Senior Operations Consultant, Sabio

Stuart Dorman, Head of Consultancy, Sabio

Lyn Etherington, ECCCISA and Top 50 Contact Centres judge
Develop your employees

To address some of your people challenges Sabio offers a range of role specific, flexible training.

Sabio Training provides a consistent, high standard of on-going education targeted at the use of technology solutions we implement, best practice operational process and professional contact centre training including team management and customer services skills.

Sabio recognises the importance of education throughout all roles in the business. An investment in education:

- Improves Retention
- Aids succession planning
- Increases staff engagement
- Delivers increased performance

Each course has been designed to enable learning in the most effective and convenient method for you.

- On site at your location
- At Sabio Training Centres based in London and Glasgow
- Online at the Sabio Virtual Campus

Sabio offers a wide variety of instructor led courses tailored to our customer needs, ranging from:

- Reporting across IQ/CMS/AACC
- Applications to end user
- Train the trainer
- Voicemail courses
- Advanced System Administration
- ACD and Vectoring courses
- Avaya Workforce Management
- Intraday Management
- Customer Management
- Customer service skills
- Team leadership
- Best practice operations

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The Process Perspective

What today’s best practice contact centres are doing to optimise their customer service processes.
Background: **Target Operating Model**

Using Sabio’s Target Operating Model for contact centre performance reveals that current industry focus on Process and operational challenges is a key concern – only trailing customer issues as the top priority.

The research shows that contact centre management are faced with the challenge of improving service levels while trying to balance the reality of managing reduced budgets. Many respondents cited the need to act on insight and innovate as still important, however there were also concerns that operating in this kind of environment can raise issues in terms of risk management.
Introduction: The Process Perspective

In our second chapter we are focusing on the process challenges highlighted by leading contact centre professionals at the CCA Convention.

Our response to these challenges incorporates feedback from award winning customer service organisations with best practice advice from Sabio consultants and acknowledged industry experts.
Managing reduced budgets

When it comes to managing in a world of reduced budgets, there’s no substitute for improving operational efficiency.

According to the latest ContactBabel UK Contact Centre Decision Makers Guide, after improving CSAT decreasing costs are a key concern for contact centre managers. With the pressure to reduce costs and deliver a superior customer experience, organisations clearly need to focus on driving both interaction quality and efficiency.

“Measuring ‘In Flight’ performance is hard enough, so continuously improving it – from both a qualitative and operational perspective – is even harder”

Stuart Dorman, Head of Consultancy, Sabio

For contact centre managers there are six key areas that merit continual attention:

1. Effective call routing
2. Addressing multi-channel contact
3. Task optimisation
4. Knowledge management
5. Addressing desktop distraction
6. Helping agents to add value
Managing reduced budgets

1. Effective call routing
   Simply routing calls correctly can deliver significant operational savings - whether through skills-based routing, customer ID using IVR, or more advanced call steering where customers use natural language to detail their reasons for calling.

2. Addressing multi-channel contact
   Organisations need to move beyond manual contact distribution, however standalone email or social media solutions don’t address the core option. Adopting a true universal queue approach can deliver real results.

3. Task optimisation
   Instead of just training agents for key tasks, start mapping high priority tasks through tools such as desktop applications – and track task completion as part of your QM process.

4. Knowledge management
   Don’t bombard agents with product information and cheat sheets – look at context-sensitive knowledge databases that only deliver information that’s relevant to each customer call.

5. Addressing desktop distraction
   Too many applications mean that agents have to be IT specialists rather than customer service experts – investigate approaches that streamline the agent desktop.

6. Helping agents to add value
   Support agents with processes and applications that help them complete tasks more quickly and leave them with enough time to identify and address cross-sell and up-sell opportunities.

Lebara Mobile – voted Large Contact Centre of the Year at the European Contact Centre and Customer Service Awards 2012 – prides itself on its engaged employees and amazed customers. According to Lebara’s Matthew Kemp:

“We've defined the Lebara brand by moving from offering service to delivering positive customer experiences. However you can deliver service excellence while controlling your budget. We answer over three million calls a year, and have increased our Net Promoter Score to 65%, but we’ve done it efficiently, reducing our cost to serve by some 20%.”

Matthew Kemp, Customer Services Director, Lebara Mobile
Acting on insight

It’s important for contact centre management to act on insight, but they should also face the fact that they’re not always right!

The reality for today’s managers is that the contact centre industry has grown up. Staff are wiser to traditional methods of technology monitoring, and if you measure by numbers you’re likely to end up with agents who carry out their jobs in the same way.

All the evidence from best-of-breed contact centre operators is that investing in staff to create truly engaged employees will always deliver more to the bottom line. It’s no longer all about command and control.

A Centerserve research study described the ‘Culture Disconnect’ in many contact centres, with agents describing culture as relationships, while their managers defined it around contests and prizes.

When asked what are their top motivators, agents highlight:
- Positive leadership
- Interaction with their co-workers

“It’s clear that true agent motivation needs to be earned with strong leadership and a more people-centric culture. Managers need to ask if the incentives they’re creating are actually supporting contact centre goals or interfering with them.”

Stuart Dorman, Head of Consultancy, Sabio

Many contact centres seem to get the balance wrong, giving staff different goals and failing to reward co-operation.

We spend a lot of time creating agent teams, and then forget about them when we set individual targets. True contact centre success can only be achieved with alignment.
The contact centre that British Gas runs in Cardiff has won 25 external awards over the last five years, including European Call Centre of the Year in 2009 and 2010. When asked about the secret of their success, British Gas is quite open:

"Steal with pride! Why re-invent the wheel?"

John Connolly, Head of Innovation, British Gas

For John this means actively seeking out best practice from acknowledged customer service leaders across a range of sectors such as Amazon to zappos.com.

The drive for innovation at British Gas Cardiff reflects a significant customer service journey, from a time when attrition was particularly high and one in ten calls were complaints.

John was convinced that having the right culture and agent engagement was essential if service levels were to improve.

British Gas Cardiff is determined not to stop innovating – providing they stay concentrated on programmes focused on team development and driving emotional intelligence. Innovation highlights include:

- A concierge service to support agents
- A well-being programme
- Subsidised gym membership
- Sports and social club
- Getting agents involved in the design of their new contact centre
Innovating

“We’ve built up a reputation for innovation at British Gas Cardiff, however at the heart of what we do is still a very simple bold goal – we want to be number 1 at customer service. Everything flows from that”

John Connolly, Head of Innovation, British Gas

Examples include:

• Adapting agent conversation to match customer personality types
• Using psycho linguistic techniques and magic words such as ‘enjoy’, ‘love’, ‘proven’, ‘delighted’ and ‘easy’
• Making use of best practice technology such as customer feedback and speech analytics

While these activities help to build a British Gas Cardiff community and support agents in being able to focus on their role, John Connolly and the team have also introduced programmes to drive real improvements in customer service.

“Sabio’s focus as an organisation is to help contact centres to develop – regardless of where they are in their stage of maturity.

Working with Sabio through our team of consultants, seminars and thought provoking blogs can help to inspire and drive innovation in your contact centre.”

Stuart Dorman, Head of Consultancy, Sabio
Risk management

At a time when social media can quickly make unsafe data practices front page news, the requirement to improve security processes and prioritise data security is essential if businesses are to convince their customers that contact centres are a safe place to do business.

- Security
- Data Protection
- PCI DSS compliance
- Business continuity
Risk management

Security

Consumers are more worried than ever about the security of their personal identity and payment card data – and not just in their online transactions. The latest Sabio/Avaya survey reveals that customer concerns about fraud are directly impacting business volumes, with 38 percent of respondents saying that call centre fraud stops them making purchases. Many customers see the contact centre as an increasingly insecure channel – particularly for customer-not-present payments. However, at the same time as wanting better security, consumers also value convenience and speed. Those organisations that successfully address these two seemingly inconsistent demands will prove an increasingly important service differentiator.

PCI DSS compliance

Despite a lengthy campaign to increase awareness, it’s surprising how many customer service organisations are still nowhere near achieving compliance with the PCI DSS payment card industry data security standard. Designed as a set of 12 requirements to secure and protect customer payment data, working towards compliance allows organisations to not only operate more securely, but also improve their operational processes. Merchants found to be non compliant with PCI DSS will face fines and fraud costs from VISA and MasterCard, so there’s considerable risk associated with failing to secure card data, not least the threat of increased merchant fee percentages for non compliance.

Data Protection

Building the right operational processes to ensure the highest standards of data protection needs to be a key priority for contact centre management – particularly given the increased focus on the contact centre as a fraud risk. Our research shows that the contact centre is where many consumers suspect that security breaches occur, with half of them believing that personal data collected by agents is a real concern. Organisations need to address their own data protection and security processes if customers are to be reassured.

Business continuity

Traditional disaster recovery approaches tend to be based on the presumption that if a contact centre can’t function, then its operations and agents will need to move to alternative premises. However in extreme weather – such as the kind of heavy snow or floods we have experienced lately – agents won’t be able to get into either site, so there’s a renewed incentive to look again at homeworking, both as an additional resource and as a business continuity model in tandem with best practice self-service and automation techniques.

“Consumers are becoming increasingly security savvy, so it’s important that organisations do everything they can to rebuild confidence in traditional transaction methods. Technology will play a key part here, but it’s still essential for businesses to make sure they have the right operational processes in place to reduce risk.”

Stuart Dorman, Head of Consultancy, Sabio
Data Analytics

When British Gas’ John Connolly talks about putting customers at the heart of everything that they do, he is serious. “We measure and reward our team on what’s right for our customers. We used to have 16 different targets to measure our people, and that wasn’t getting us any closer to our goal of being number 1 at customer service. Now we only measure our contact centre teams on two things – Customer Advocacy and Right First Time.”

Too many contact centres still rely on traditional numerical indicators as a measure of their customer service standards.

It’s generally recognised that metrics such as...
- Service Level Adherence
- Average Handling Time (AHT)

...only tell one side of the story – how good an agent is at turning up and whether they can close out a customer call within a given time limit.

These measures say nothing about:
- How good agents are at dealing with customers, or
- Whether customers were ultimately satisfied with the service offered.

John also spoke of the need to ‘trust your people’. He recalled how at British Gas they went from 16 different metrics to just one that measured customer advocacy on the frontline – so that all agents were aware of their individual net promoter scores. He was also keen to stress the need to be realistic about measurement recognising that, while there will always be a small proportion of agents that are underperforming, there’s no need to manage the majority on the same basis.
Unfortunately it’s often only the hard metrics that senior contact centre management takes note of. At Sabio we have worked with many organisations that are keen to take a more customer-focused approach but still have concerns that AHT will get out of control. Our experience is that while AHT may increase initially, it soon settles back to normal levels after a few weeks. This is exactly what British Gas found when they followed this strategy.

It’s smart to still track these numbers as a management tool, but they do very little to inspire or incentivise agents.

Research has shown that agents perform best when they’re given a framework where they can succeed, and where they’re recognised for their contribution.

Lyn Etherington, Judge of the European Call Centre & Customer Service Awards and Top 50, feels that for organisations to evolve their operations towards award-winning status...

“There needs to be a clear focus on delivering excellent customer experiences. It’s really important to be clear about what you expect agents to do – there shouldn’t be any room for confusion.”

To support this, Lyn identifies key areas of focus for effective contact centres:

1. Establish a clear stated customer promise that agents can believe in, and that agents deliver against.
2. Define what this promise should look like from the customer perspective – use this to drive agent behaviour and performance metrics.
3. Make sure that contact centre management communicate the importance of the customer experience.
4. Ensure that the customer experience offered aligns with your organisation’s corporate priorities.
5. Measure and reward the delivery of excellent customer experiences.
“Award-winning contact centres are built on a number of key foundations”

Gary Fowler, Senior Operations Consultant, Sabio

- Core technology
- Clearly defined KPIs and SLAs
- Effective processes and procedures
- Focused training, communication and rewards

However, running through all these areas are the critical elements of Culture & Engagement that so many contact centre operators still overlook. We see this, for example, in the area of staff attrition, where – according to ContactBabel – four of the top five reasons given by contact centre operators for staff leaving are:

- Excessive pressure or stress
- Low pay
- Repetitive work
- Lack of promotion or development opportunities

Unfortunately the top reason given is still ‘just not the right person for the job’. Despite attrition representing the single area of contact centre spend that could potentially yield the biggest improvement; we’re still effectively blaming the agent rather than addressing underlying areas of concern. If we’re really serious about understanding contact centre trends, managers need to put the time in to really understand what’s going on.

To help contact centre managers achieve greater operational success, Gary Fowler offers seven key tips:

1. Make sure your contact centre management are both visible and accessible
2. Ensure you have an active and ongoing dialogue with your agents – providing it’s open and honest
3. Spend time linking your incentives and rewards to quality performance and the right customer engagement measures
4. Be consistent in your management targets
5. Place an increased focus on developing your frontline managers
6. Empower your frontline staff – don’t be a control freak
7. Try and identify team managers who are mentors – your best ones will serve as role models and live your values
The Customer Perspective

What award winning contact centres are doing to create effortless customer satisfaction
Background: Target Operating Model

Using Sabio’s Target Operating Model for contact centre performance reveals that current industry focus on Customer challenges far outweighs the focus on Technology.

The research shows that customer challenges represent by far the largest area of concern. Over a third of responses focus on the key challenges that organisations face, including increasing levels of customer engagement and improving multi-channel service.

Customer Challenges

- Increasing customer engagement
- Improving multi-channel service
- Increasing CSAT scores
- Easier to do business with
- Board level focus on NPS
- Gather more feedback
- Self-service quality and uptake

37%
Resolving Customer Challenges

- Increasing customer engagement
- Improving multi-channel service
- Increasing CSAT scores
- Gathering more feedback
- Self-service quality and uptake
- Become easier to do business with
- Focus the Board on NPS
Increasing customer engagement

To increase customer engagement Lyn Etherington, a leading adviser to the Top 50 Call Centres for Customer Service programme advises that it’s important to establish some of the key characteristics of a successful customer service centre:

- At its heart is a core stated ‘customer promise’ – and a definition of desired customer service experience that links to this promise.
- Everyone involved in the customer service process needs to know and share what this experience feels like.
- Contact centre staff must understand the behaviours that will deliver the desired customer experience.

In practice this means that callers are:

- More likely to get through in less than 30 seconds
- Less likely to encounter a traditional IVR
- Typically aren’t put on hold or transferred
- Usually have their issues resolved first time

Describing criteria for delivering better personalisation, top performing organisations invariably concentrate on three areas of focus:

- Behavioural basics
- Behavioural hygiene factors
- Behavioural differentiators

In terms of basics, better performing organisations always get this right – saying thank you, using their own and the customer’s name, and following correct on hold and transfer procedures.

They also concentrate on getting ‘hygiene’ factors right, with agents coming across as friendly, polite and efficient. With these foundations in place, top performing service providers build on this by concentrating on the more complex issues such as communicating empathy, being proactive and taking ownership. They ensure that promises are always kept – factors that can really differentiate a service offering and provide a lasting customer experience.

The Right Culture

The right culture and agent engagement is essential if service levels are to improve. At British Gas, for example, in a contact centre environment where customers typically only call up when they have a service or pricing issue, there’s a real requirement for the operation to deliver a greater degree of emotional intelligence.

That’s why it is so important for the British Gas team to extend its engagement process to agents. British Gas’s Head of Innovation and Best Practice, John Connolly, says that “Agents know more about customer conversations than we do. That’s why we run a programme that really unlocks our agent expertise. Last year alone we had some 2,460 ideas for improvement and over 1,000 agent posts sharing best practice ideas.” For John, however, ideas aren’t enough. “It’s great that our agents make suggestions, but they also need to know that we act on them. That’s why at British Gas, every agent suggestion leads to a 15-minute discussion with the agent involved.”
Improving multi-channel service

The customer journey is changing with the internet now almost as universal as other utilities such as electricity, gas and water. Ease of web access means connectivity and interaction now takes place in many forms:

- Traditional Web
- Social media
- Multi-media
- Dedicated customer service apps
- Mobile-optimised websites

“The contact centre sits right at the heart of this shift. How organisations respond has significant implications for both the effectiveness of customer engagement and long-term business success.”

Stuart Dorman, Head of Consultancy, Sabio

Smartphones and mobile apps open up new opportunities for customers. The latest apps give users the opportunity to bypass traditional IVR channels and deal directly with the right person.

- Optimise your website for mobile devices
- Ensure that key customer tasks are easy to achieve on the web
- Do you have regular contact with customers? A mobile app may work well for you
- Use web chat to allow your customers to stay online and complete their task
- Virtual assistants and knowledge bases can help customers to help themselves
- Make it easy for customers to click through and speak to an advisor if they need to
- Publish queue times on the web and call the customer back if you are busy
Increasing CSAT scores

Customer service and contact centre staff who took the CCA survey were keen to find out how they could really start to put initiatives such as Net Promoter® Score (NPS) and Customer Effort Score (CES) metrics to work to gain customer loyalty and improve performance.

As part of our Award Winning Contact Centre programme, Sabio consultants have looked at the factors that actually drive improvements in customer recommendations. When examining NPS scores, it’s important to remember that while improving the customer experience is an admirable aim, organisations also need to consider whether the activity actually delivers a bottom line improvement.

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<th>Being realistic about Net Promoter® Score</th>
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<td>Experience suggests that increasing CSAT and NPS scores does typically lead to commercial improvements, however it’s important to be realistic. The structure of the NPS score – with Promoters scoring 9-10, Passives 7-8 and Detractors 1-6 - actually means that the NPS bar is set very high.</td>
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High scores of around 80% are typically only set by global brand leaders such as Apple or Disney.

“It’s important to be realistic. An NPS score of around 60% is actually pretty good, but to keep your score improving and win more promoters you should focus on four key tips:”

Lyn Etherington, Customer Services Expert

1. Focus on what’s driving the numbers, not the scores themselves
2. Develop your staff to deliver excellent customer experiences
3. Be clear about the experience that you want to deliver – and reinforce it with behavioural training and coaching
4. Concentrate on reducing factors that are driving detractors and causing customers to make more effort
Become easier to do business with

In highlighting the issues that help drive customer recommendations, four factors are key:

- Brand relationship
- Product/Service satisfaction
- The touch point experience
- Ease of doing business

Of these, ease of doing business and the touch point experience are of particular importance for those looking to optimise the customer experience provided, with a particular emphasis on simple, efficient and reliable processes where contact centre staff demonstrate a strong degree of warmth and understanding.

To make it easier to do business, organisations need to:

- Reduce the effort that customers have to make when dealing with a business
- Prevent customers from having to repeatedly contact an organisation to resolve an issue
- Make sure that customers don’t have to re-explain their service issues
- Remove the need to switch from a Web service session to the phone
- Limit the amount of times that customers have to expend moderate to high effort to resolve issues
- Stop customers being transferred between agents or departments
Focus the Board on NPS

By all means recognise the importance of customer service measures such as Net Promoter and Customer Effort scores – however you have to make sure you view these metrics in parallel with other corporate goals.

Successful centres need to measure carefully to make sure they deliver good customer experiences, and they need to reward those team members that get it right consistently. The good news, however, is that widespread interest in NPS places the customer’s opinion firmly on the management agenda – particularly in those organisations where managers are bonused on NPS performance.

That’s why business leaders need to:

• Clearly associate themselves with the success of their CSAT scores and their customer service centres
• Be able to communicate the importance of the customer experience in everything they do
• Recognise that customer service is central to all their organisational priorities
Gathering more feedback

When studying what Net Promoters and Net Detractors actually said about the service they received, the differences are dramatic.

"What this feedback – and other research into the provision of Loyalty Building Experiences – show is that customers are invariably very clear in outlining what they consider to be high quality service and also when it comes to setting their expectations. We recommend reading the Harvard Business Review article titled ‘Stop Delighting Your Customers’ which suggests that, rather than spend time trying to delight customers, organisations should instead focus on providing a satisfactory solution to their service issues."

Lyn Etherington, Customer Services Expert

That’s why customer feedback is an essential contact centre process, however it’s what you do with it that distinguishes best practice organisations. There are multiple ways of collecting feedback – by SMS, email, and callback, for example – however it’s essential not just to collect scores, but also to capture customer comments and anecdotes to really gain a sense of what customers really think.

"A closed loop approach is important here, with feedback circling back to individual agents as part of quality monitoring and performance management activities."

Stuart Dorman, Head of Consultancy, Sabio

Comments from NPS Promoters:
- ‘Understood me’
- ‘Nothing was too much trouble’
- ‘Took time for me’
- ‘Listened’
- ‘Quick’
- ‘Explained it all’

Comments from NPS Detractors:
- ‘Took too long’
- ‘Kept being passed around’
- ‘Lack of knowledge’
- ‘Repeated myself’
- ‘Took ages to get through’
Self-service quality and uptake?

It is clear that self-service plays a key part in delivering great customer service. In fact, self-service is often the preferred choice for many consumers.

“Mobile applications in particular have opened a new frontier in customer service that offers a rich and highly convenient channel for customers to engage with your organisation. If designed well – these interfaces can be fun to use and provide your customers with another excuse to play with their mobile devices!”

-Stuart Dorman, Head of Consultancy, Sabio

The key to successful self-service is a laser focus on usability. This applies to customer engagements over the web, voice self-service, mobile web, apps, kiosks and tablet computers. Customers will seek the most convenient channel to fulfil their need and will not tolerate processes that are too difficult. At the first sign of complexity - customers will ‘channel switch’ to the phone or – worse still - email.

That’s why business leaders need to:

- Have a laser focus on usability across all customer touch points
- Constantly review where customers are dropping out of automation and implement improvements
- Ensure that mobile customers are catered for. If you have regular customers then consider a mobile app
- If you have a complex offering, use smart and refined voice self-service to understand customer identity and intent and route accordingly
The Technology Perspective

Why there’s never been a better time for organisations to unlock the power of transformative technology in their customer contact operations
Background: Target Operating Model

Using Sabio’s Target Operating Model for contact centre performance reveals that there’s never been a better time for organisations to harness innovative technologies – particularly web-based innovations – to manage their customer engagement processes more effectively.

But it’s still important to get the balance right – it’s no longer enough simply applying technology to handle customer demand – you’ve now got to be actively challenging it, from a customer, people, process and technology level.

At a time when organisations are continually asking even more from their customer service teams, the pressure is on to do more with less. Not surprisingly, contact centre management are turning to technology to help secure the results they need, balancing their efforts between:

- Leveraging existing technologies
- Managing disparate systems
- Adopting new technologies
Maintaining the status quo is no longer enough

Whether you’re working in the public or private sector, the one constant is that customer expectations are changing fast – particularly given the dramatic growth in smartphone and tablet usage, and in consumer take-up of new channels.

Simply maintaining the status quo is no longer enough. As consumers we are increasingly familiar with the standard of best practice customer engagement and service delivery offered by today’s award-winning service providers, and – not surprisingly – we look for similar service levels from our other providers.

Organisations need to move quickly to address these challenges, and recognise the potentially transformative role that technology can play in enabling improved service performance levels.

There’s never been a more exciting time for customer service organisations to leverage technology to support their activities, by combining a number of key factors.

These factors combine to remove many of the previous barriers that effectively prevented smaller contact centres from enjoying the technological benefits available to larger operations.

- **Falling costs** – tech costs reducing, Moore’s Law implications on cost/performance
- **Architectural shifts** – SIP Trunking cutting traditional telecoms costs; Virtualisation enabling more cost-effective IT deployment and applications management
- **Fierce market competition** – evolving competitor landscape helping to drive down overall solution costs while positively impacting value
- **Cloud technology** – increasing agility and de-risking deployments
Sabio’s 12 key contact centre technologies

In this eBook we focus on 12 key technologies that Sabio’s Consultancy team believes are ideally placed to unlock benefits for customer contact operations.

While each of these has a role to play, we recognise that no two organisations are the same. That’s why our team of industry experts, with real-life experience of running award-winning contact centres, take the time to assess your current situation before identifying which technologies can best help develop your people, processes, and – more importantly – your customers.

- 01 Web-enabled technologies
- 02 Knowledge Management
- 03 Virtual agents
- 04 Optimised ‘Contact Us’ strategies
- 05 Increased role of smartphones and tablets
- 06 Social media
- 07 Effective call steering
- 08 Improved contact centre security
- 09 Customer feedback
- 10 Speech analytics
- 11 Effective performance management/employee engagement
- 12 Role of Big Data
Today’s consumers are smarter than ever, using multiple digital channels to interact, connect, share and shop. Digital is now the default starting point for most customer journeys, with a growing proportion engaging with organisations via mobile devices.

However, smart consumers also demand the highest standards. They increasingly expect seamless, omnichannel delivery.

That’s why it’s critical to engage these customers effectively – helping them to resolve their issues quickly via the same channel, providing resolution within a single interaction and delivering consistently high quality experiences across all channels.

Done right, fully optimised web service delivery can deliver benefits for both customers and service providers. BT, for example, supports 23% of its online sales using web chat, with online engagement removing the need for subsequent phone calls in 43% of cases.

This kind of performance improvement doesn’t happen by chance. By applying the latest real-time behavioural techniques to monitor online interactions and offer live chat while you have the visitor’s attention, organisations can significantly improve their online performance.

60% of consumers who like to interact with brands do so through multiple channels – Forrester

51% of online consumers will give up immediately or after just one attempt to seek help before an online purchase is abandoned – LivePerson
02 Taking Knowledge Management to the next level

It’s important that organisations don’t underestimate the importance of effective Knowledge Management – particularly when it comes to addressing customer queries online.

At international mobile telephony specialist Lebara, the Help section of the website is powered by near real-time knowledge base updates from the contact centre.

“We’ve invested in an award-winning contact centre, so it makes sense for us to share our agent expertise as quickly as possible with our web visitors. By optimising our knowledge base updates we’ve seen a significant reduction in call volumes, and increased web traffic as our customers’ ability to self-serve has increased.”

Matt Kemp, Lebara
03 Reducing customer effort with virtual agents

Regardless of the technologies involved, it’s essential that organisations focus on creating effortless customer journeys. When it comes to successfully challenging contact centre demand, one innovation that is set to make a real difference is the use of Personal Assistants such as Nuance’s ‘Nina’ offering.

Unlike personal assistant technologies i.e. Apple’s Siri, Nina is a virtual assistant for the enterprise – serving as a task-oriented assistant with real domain expertise thanks to knowledge base integration.

Questions answered by Nina are effectively deflected away from the contact centre - leaving agents free to concentrate on more complex customer interactions.

The Intelligent Virtual Assistant market is set to grow by 39% a year through 2016 - TechNavio
04 Challenging demand with Embedded Service

Illustrating its power, organisations are increasingly deploying Embedded Service on their websites to streamline engagement.

At every stage the goal is to pre-qualify the query – ideally resolving it with further relevant information before reaching the contact stage.

Chat is made available depending on resource availability, and users are asked to submit their number for callback when using the phone option.

Adopting such an approach requires a well-integrated customer contact infrastructure, but the benefits are significant in terms of challenging demand – effectively turning the contact process on its head.

Amazon’s ‘Contact Us’ page, for example, asks customers what help they require, the reason for contact, and which contact channel they would prefer to use – from a choice of e-mail, phone or chat.
05 Supporting an increasingly mobile customer base

With smartphone penetration in the UK now running at over 60%, the reality for today’s customer service organisations is that a large proportion of their callers are now connecting via highly sophisticated mobile devices.

Today’s smartphones and mobile apps open up new opportunities for customers - with the latest mobile-optimised channels effectively giving users the opportunity to bypass traditional IVR processes and get on with completing their interactions.

Best practice organisations are already taking advantage of these capabilities, offering mobile apps that deliver increased control to customers. British Gas, for example, has launched an app that has already overtaken IVR to account for over 15% of meter readings. Another organisation – Kiddicare – takes advantage of QR codes to link to showcase videos for in-store viewing.

The best apps are those that also leverage the power of the smartphone, perhaps featuring capabilities such as:

- Barcode and QR code scanning
- Videos for product showcases
- Additional security options
- Context-specific features based on location, time and customer history

“Mobile web front-ends are playing a key role in challenging demand – potentially cutting 10-15% of overall contact centre traffic volumes”

Stuart Dorman, Head of Consultancy, Sabio
06 Deploying social media-enabled processes

While voice continues to be the primary touch point for many customers, organisations are increasingly relying on the contact centre to manage other key channels such as social media. While Marketing may be able to handle individual Twitter or Facebook messages, they simply aren’t structured to handle customer contact in volumes.

The key to success here is ensuring that agents have the tools in place to resolve issues quickly – regardless of where or how the initial interaction arrives. If a customer’s in an airport, for example, and tweets for help the speed of response is critical – as is having access to the full context of a customer’s interaction with the organisation.

The challenge now is for organisations to take advantage of the power of social media to drive real performance improvements.

At Kiddicare, a social media-based initiative to implement community-powered support has demonstrated the power of social-enabled capabilities within customer service. To date the project has helped secure a 30% reduction in calls and emails into the contact centre.
07 Getting call steering right for customers

Anything that can be done to streamline the experience by reducing the number of internal transfers – and applying intelligence to each stage of the process – will contribute directly to an improved customer experience.

Web-enabled technologies such as mobile apps as well as techniques such as callback can also play a key role in accelerating the traditional IVR process – particularly during the critical period between pickup and answer.

When designing call steering solutions, it’s essential to place customer usability at the heart of any solution. This can be done by:

- **Getting IVR right – and having it right at the front of the interaction**
- **Refining touchtone menus**
- **Using speech recognition technology**

Bad IVR can undo multiple productivity gains, often leading to increases in transfer rates of up to 30%.
08 Addressing the compliance/customer service disconnect

Recent research conducted by Sabio confirms that call centres are often caught in the middle – tasked with improving customer engagement, yet also subject to increasingly demanding corporate security compliance monitoring.

We don’t believe it has to be an either/or issue – indeed the application of innovative technology ensures that you can achieve compliance while still delivering a level of service that’s seamless for the customer.

It’s an approach that has already been put to good use by Barclays Wealth UK, which has been using voice biometrics to streamline authentication when clients call the bank. Customers are asked if they want to enrol in the authentication system, and a recorded voiceprint is produced upon their agreement. The solution not only satisfies the bank’s compliance officers, but has also generated significant savings in terms of agent time.

“Organisations are clearly experiencing real friction between their demanding compliance processes and an ongoing commitment to providing consumers with a positive customer experience”

Kenneth Hitchen, Sabio

It’s clear that there’s a growing conflict between an organisation’s compliance operation and its customer service function: whether that’s security and fraud prevention in the financial services sector, or PCI adherence in the retail payments industry.

• Six million consumers end relationships with organisations each year due to call centre security concerns

• 51% say that they’re put off from using a provider if there are too many passwords and security details needed

• 55% would be happy using voice biometric technology when checking an account balance
09 Acting on customer feedback

Capturing customer feedback is an essential process – but it’s what you do with the information collected that really distinguishes best practice organisations.

There are multiple ways of collecting feedback – by SMS, email and callback, for example – however it’s essential not just to collect scores but also to capture customer comments and anecdotes to really gain a sense of what customers actually think. Operating a closed loop is important here, with feedback circling back to individual agents.

“Our investment in technology is driven by one thing – making life effortless for our customers. We capture feedback on 10% of our calls at an advisor level, and our agent teams can hear what customers said about their service within seconds”

John Connolly,
Head of Innovation and Best Practice, British Gas
10 Repeat call analytics

One of the fastest ways to drive up your First Contact Resolution is to carefully study repeat calls and establish the precise reasons that are causing customers to keep calling back.

This kind of analysis – particularly when combined with speech analytics – can quickly help you zero in on the issues and processes that are impacting your business – often identifying broken processes or competitive offers that may not have surfaced previously.

Whether it’s repeat calls, held calls or transferred calls, it’s important to know what’s driving your less successful interactions. Exploiting the rich source of intelligence in your existing interactions can unlock insights that contribute directly to:

- Reducing failure demand
- Reducing the cost of serving customers
- Improving the overall customer experience – driving up loyalty and performance
- Targeting those employee characteristics that have the greatest value
11 Driving employee engagement

Award-winning contact centres understand the importance of employee engagement, and increasingly track the close correlation between engagement scores and NPS performance.

Technology has a clear role to play in enabling engagement, whether through tools such as customer feedback or speech analytics, providing it is focused on making life effortless for customers.

Lebara has also found that investing in its best practice contact centre has proved a smart move, with award-winning service leading to lower call volumes, a reduced cost to serve and improved customer loyalty – collectively realising a 200% ROI on its contact centre investment.

“The link between engaging our people and our overall performance is in no doubt. As our engagement scores rise we’re seeing a clear drop in attrition, absence, customer complaints and customer churn.”

John Connolly, British Gas

Lebara echoes this, with its determination to evolve its customer journey from service provision towards actually making customers’ lives better.

“We need amazed customers to recommend us to their friends and family – it’s those Smile moments that will keep our NPS improving”

Matt Kemp, Lebara
12 Unlocking the power of Big Data

We’re clearly gathering more data than ever before, but often it’s unstructured. Indeed because of the siloed structure of many contact centres, we’re busy gathering data but not always enabling the analysis necessary to generate meaningful business and customer insights.

Big data approaches and technologies are ideally placed to help organisations unlock the value inherent in their unstructured data, turning information into actionable insights that can contribute directly to enhancing contact centre performance and improving the customer experience offered.

While the IT world has been busy hyping Big Data, the contact centre world has been busy collecting huge volumes of data and putting it to work where possible. Today’s contact centre generates incredible amounts of data, with sources including:

- ACD data
- CRM systems
- Call and screen recording
- Customer feedback
- Speech analytics
- Social media inputs
- External database content from vendors such as Experian
Helping you to improve customer service through innovation and technology

... brings technology alive for our customers using best in class solutions from organisations such as Avaya, Verint and Nuance

... has a track record of successfully delivering technology solutions

... has one of the strongest and most experienced teams of specialist voice self-service designers and developers in the UK

... provides a variety of seminars throughout the year to support the sharing of best practice.

With the skills, knowledge, experience and creative thinking of our people, we can help you to exploit technology to improve your customer service.

... can help you exploit Workforce Optimisation technology to efficiently manage your staff, improve customer feedback and engage your staff

... has a unique intelligent approach to supporting your communication technology environment – leaving you to manage your business

... has a team of cutting edge consultants that can help you get more out of your technology, refine your processes, engage your employees and delight your customers!
Summary: Become an Award Winning Contact Centre

By grasping the insight gained in Sabio’s recent survey of contact centre executives and focusing change initiatives on elevating current performance on the specific topics identified around customer related challenges, you can both effectively and efficiently achieve...

**Increasing customer engagement**
- Improving multi-channel service
- Increasing CSAT scores
- Become easier to do business with
- Focus the Board on NPS
- Gathering more feedback
- Self-service uptake

**award winning performance**

Then... combine your progress with new focus on the other areas of Sabio’s target operating model and you can achieve...
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