

# 2017 Agent Performance Survey Final Report

## Survey findings reveal contact centers slowly evolving

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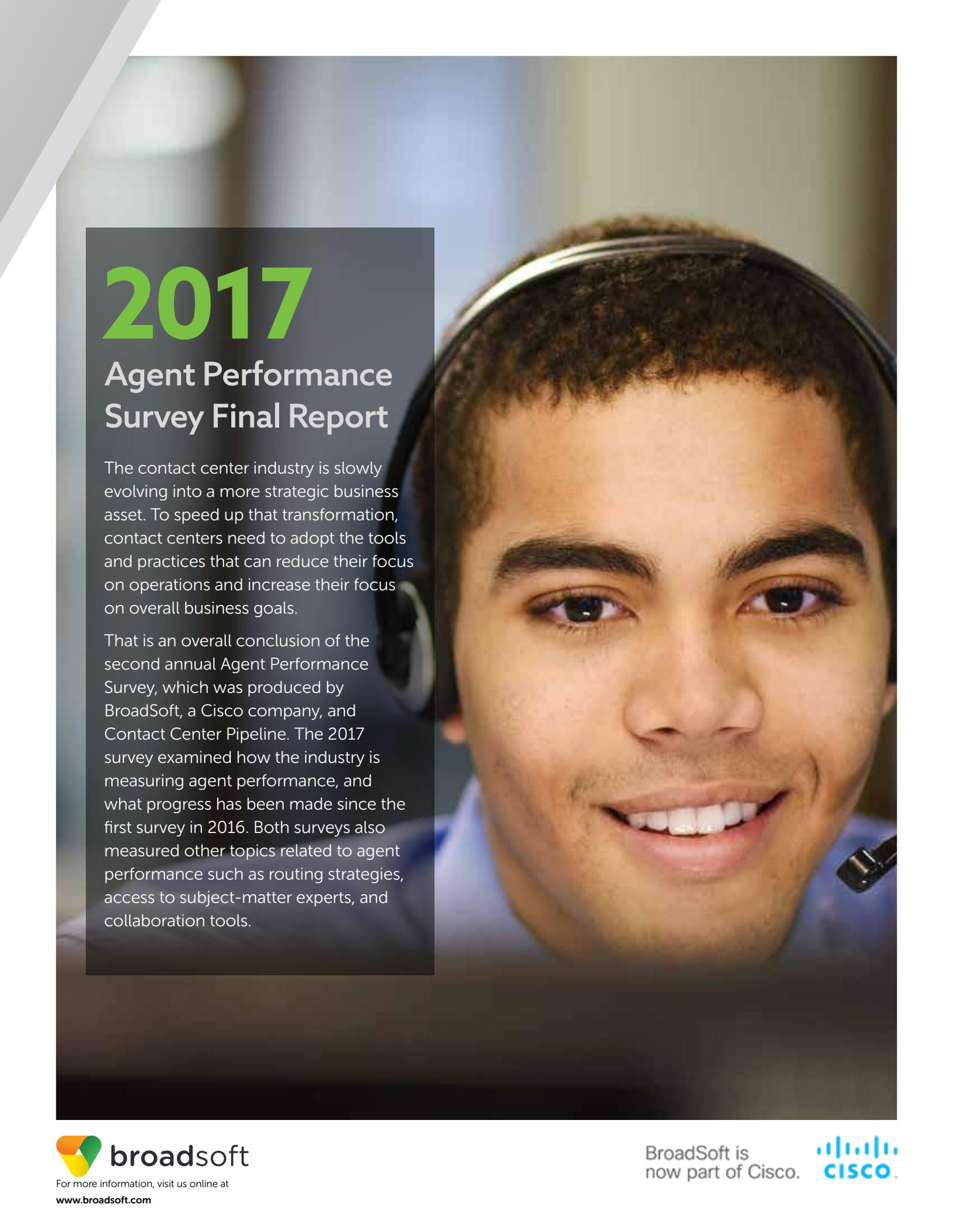
a Cisco company, and Contact Center Pipeline. The 2017 survey examined how the industry is measuring agent performance, and what progress has been made since the first survey in 2016. Both surveys also measured other topics related to agent performance such as routing strategies, access to subject-matter experts, and collaboration tools.



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AGENT PERFORMANCE  
SURVEY FINAL REPORT



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## Executive Summary

The survey results indicate that the industry is struggling with measuring and evaluating agent productivity and performance. Responses show progress in some areas, with substantial room for improvement in others.

Compared to the 2016 results, companies participating in this survey reported that they are:

- Tracking a broader set of KPIs, which suggests a lack of industry consensus regarding which KPIs are most important
- Continuing to focus on operational KPIs instead of strategic business-related ones such as revenue and conversion by agent
- Mainly tracking call quality, although using this KPI less often than previously
- Developing in-house automation tools to integrate data from multiple systems, but not particularly satisfied with the results
- Mainly tracking agent performance through daily reporting instead of real-time, weekly, monthly or quarterly reporting
- Reducing their reliance on the “next-available-agent,” “most-idle-agent” and “round-robin” criteria for routing
- Increasing the use of online chat as a way for agents to collaborate with subject-matter experts

We believe this data indicates an opportunity for contact centers in competitive businesses to set themselves apart by optimizing their operations and agent productivity around business-oriented KPIs.

## Methodology

More than 200 respondents participated in the survey, which took place in the second half of 2017. Respondents spanned a wide variety of industries, including financial services, healthcare, consumer products and professional services. Slightly more than half the respondents (52%) are contact center managers or higher-level executives. Many (30%) oversee multiple teams within the same site, and 40% oversee multiple sites.

The contact centers are more focused on customer service and tech support than on sales. Fully 75% of the contact centers provide service; 44% provide tech support; and 35% are focused on sales. All these numbers are up substantially from the 2016 responses of 43%, 23% and 23% respectively.

In 2017, we had more respondents from multi-function, multi-site contact centers than the previous year, which may affect some of the results. Table 1 shows how the respondents broke down between the number of agents under their direct responsibility and the number within their companies as a whole.

	Direct responsibility	Company-wide
50 agents or less	52%	39%
51 to 100 agents	17%	11%
101 to 500 agents	20%	21%
More than 500 agents	11%	29%

**Table 1: Responsibilities of respondents from multi-function, multi-site contact centers**

Most respondents (59%) are not responsible for outsourced agents. Of those who are, 16% are responsible for outsourced centers with fewer than 50 agents, 9% for centers of 51 to 250 agents, and 16% for centers of 251 or more agents.

### KPIs to Measure the Performance of Individual Agents

It appears that the industry hasn't really determined which KPIs are most important. In this survey, respondents reported that they are using more KPIs than in last year's. In that survey, more than 70% of the respondents claimed to use eight of the KPIs. This time, no single KPI received that high a rating.

The wide range of KPIs may reflect the fact that more respondents are managing multi-function, multi-site contact centers. The larger and more diverse the center, the more difficult it is to track and standardize on KPIs.

Today contact centers focus mainly on operational KPIs, which are easier to track than business KPIs. In fact, five of the top six KPIs are operational (e.g., call quality, attendance, average handle time, number of calls, and adherence to schedule). The only top KPI that is business-oriented is customer satisfaction.

And, while the total number of KPIs has increased, the number of business KPIs being used has decreased. For example, compared to 2016, "first-call resolution" went down from 78% to 38%. Fewer centers reported using the number of sales (down from 47% to 19%) and total sales (down from 42% to 15%) to determine agent productivity.

As the industry becomes more mature, we expect it will become more sophisticated in its use of KPIs. We are seeing some trends in that direction. Compared to the 2016 results, operational KPIs are considered less important. For example, "call quality" is still regarded as the most important KPI, but the percentage of respondents using it to track agent productivity dropped substantially from 94% in 2016 to 66% in 2017. This is possibly because companies are moving away from the "voice-of-the-customer" gold rush of the past few years and trying to find other KPIs of value.

Figure 1 illustrates the results. Note: we do not have comparative information for all the KPIs listed because we increased the number of choices in 2017, and allowed respondents to write in their own KPIs. This accounts for some missing percentage values for 2016.

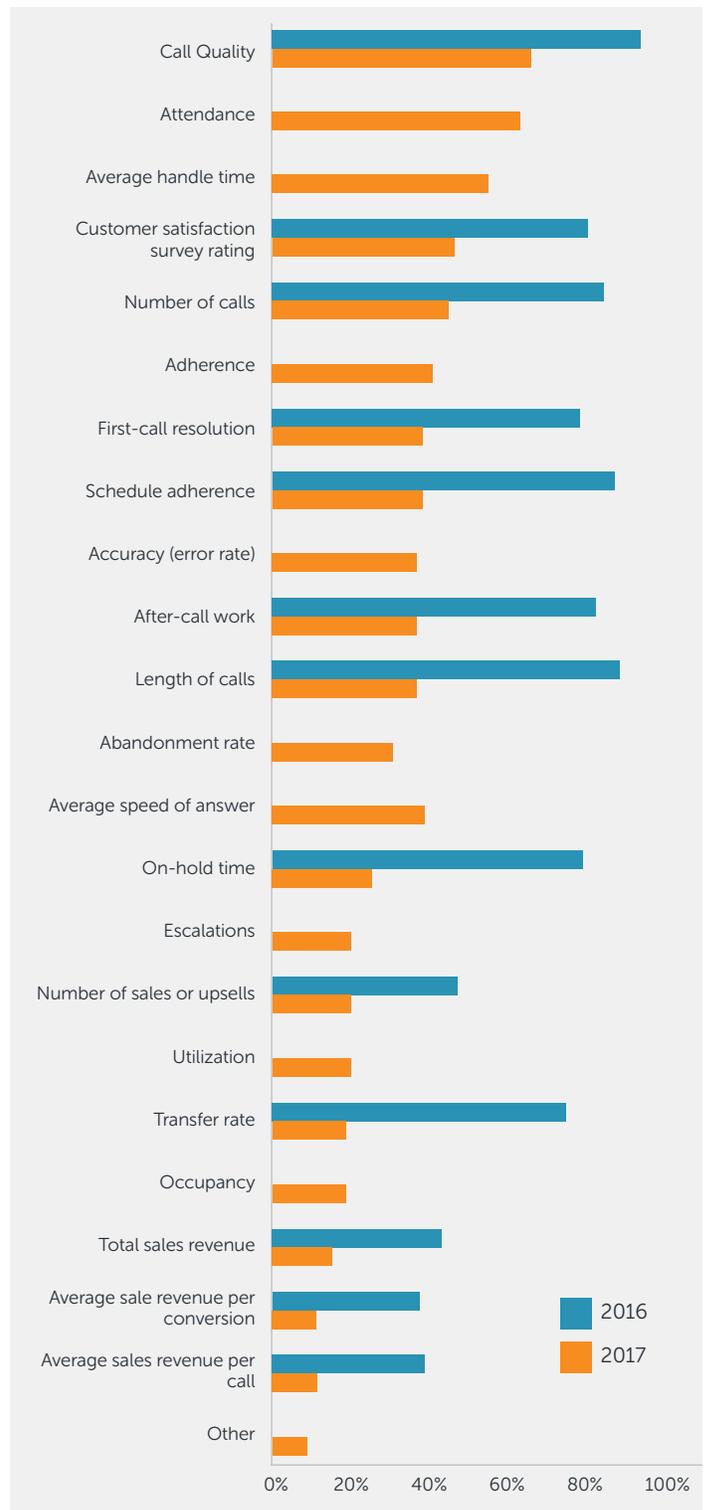


Figure 1: Which of the following KPIs do you use to measure the performance of an individual agent?

### Systems and Applications for Tracking and Measuring Agent Performance

Compared to 2016, there was little difference in the use of Automatic Call Distributors (ACDs), quality monitoring, workforce management or order entry systems for tracking agent performance. The big difference is that fewer companies reported using Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems.

This could partially explain why fewer business KPIs are being tracked. The CRM tracks the business impact of the contact (e.g., sales, upgrades) beyond what wrap-up codes capture. Companies that are not using a CRM are missing important information and consequently lack a major data point to track business KPIs.



Figure 2: Which contact center system(s) or application(s) do you use to track and measure agent performance?

### Integrating Data from Multiple Systems or Applications

Almost all the respondents (91%) said they use multiple systems to track performance. Compared to 2016, fewer companies are integrating that data manually (down from 44% in 2016 to 34% in 2017) or are using automated reports (down from 29% to 24%). The only significant increase between the two surveys is that more companies are developing their own systems, such as data warehouses, to integrate the data (up from 18% to 22%).

Figure 3 illustrates how the 91% of respondents who use multiple systems integrate data from those systems.

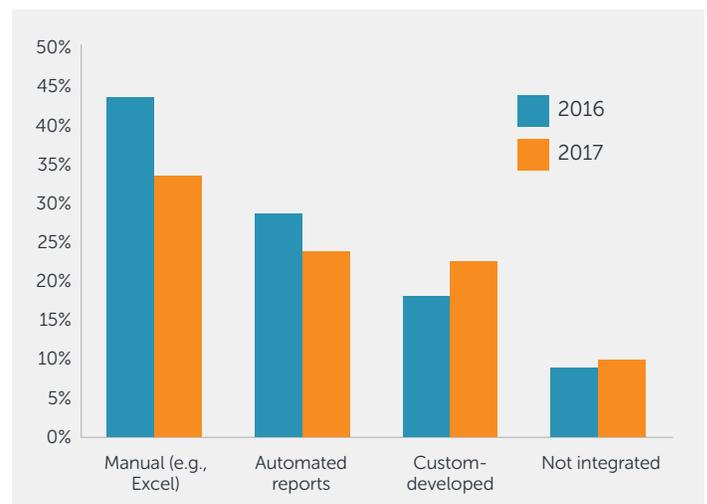


Figure 3: How do you integrate the data from multiple tracking and measurement systems?

### Effectiveness of the Tracking and Measurement Systems

In 2017, only 22% of respondents thought their tracking and measurement systems were “very effective” and 35% thought they were “somewhat effective”. These represent significant declines from the 2016 survey, which had results of 27% and 59% respectively.

Even more disheartening, 41% thought their systems were “not very effective” or “not at all effective”. It appears that, in spite of additional automation, few respondents think their systems are doing the job.

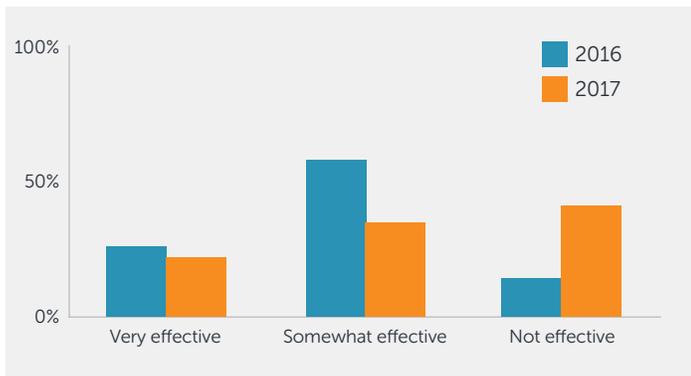


Figure 4: How effective do you feel your systems, applications and processes are at tracking and measuring agent performance?

### Frequency of Tracking and Measuring Agent Performance

Compared to 2016, the number of respondents tracking agent performance on a real-time basis went down slightly (from 23% to 20%), while a few more are tracking performance on a daily basis (up from 37% to 39%). There was little change in the number of respondents tracking on a weekly or monthly basis.

It appears some companies are struggling with real-time reporting beyond basic operational metrics such as the number of calls or size of the queue. One possible reason this number was slightly lower in 2017 is that many respondents came from multi-site contact centers, where real-time reporting is more challenging. Also, many respondents are trying to integrate reporting systems, some of which might not be able to analyze data in real time.

However, the technology does exist for multi-site, real-time tracking of agent performance. So this is clearly an opportunity for improvement.



Figure 5: How frequent is your process for tracking and measuring agent performance?

### Ease of Tracking and Measuring Agent Performance

Tracking agent performance has always been a high priority in the contact-center business, but it is still not considered “very easy” by most.

The majority of respondents described their process as “somewhat easy,” while more described their process as “difficult” than “very easy”.

Compared to 2016, there was a slight decline (4%) in the number of respondents who said it was “very easy”. This may be the result of having to manage multi-function and multi-site contact centers.

All in all, these results are positive, although there is always room for improvement.

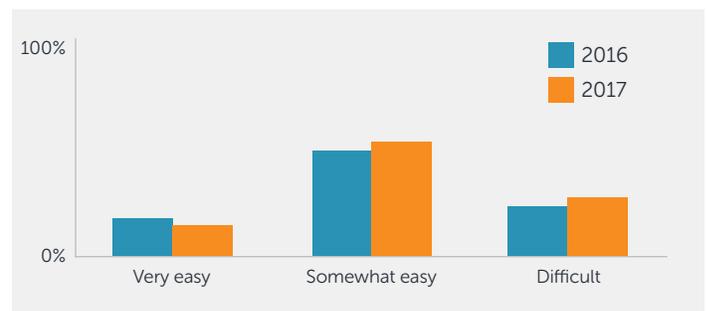


Figure 6: How easy is your process for tracking and measuring agent performance?

### ACD Method Used to Match Agents and Customers

Results to this question were more scattered in 2017 than the previous year, with no method being used by more than 60% of the respondents.

The good news is that, compared to 2016, fewer companies are using the “next available agent” (down from 87% in 2016 to 54% in 2017), “most idle agent” (down from 68% to 21%), and “round robin” criteria (down from 59% to 9%). These are dramatic changes.

The other good news is that more companies are using the “best available agent” criteria. The problem is that too many companies do not use the correct metrics to evaluate its agents, as we will discuss later in this report.

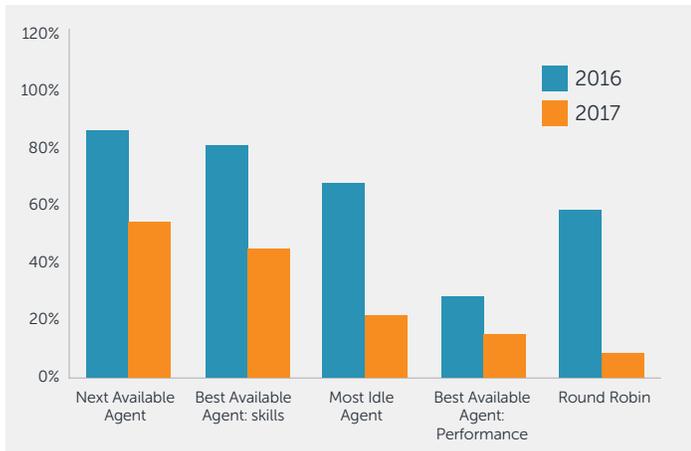


Figure 7: How does your ACD determine how to match an agent and customer caller?

### Routing Options Ranked by Precedence

This year, we asked the respondents that used multiple matching (or routing) methods to rank them in terms of precedence. Most respondents first use the “next available agent” criteria, followed closely by the “best available agent”. “Round robin” took last place, with only 4% of the respondents giving it top priority.

Figure 8 shows the overall dominance of each method with a score of “4” indicating it was given most precedence. Since this was a new question in 2017, we don’t have trending information.

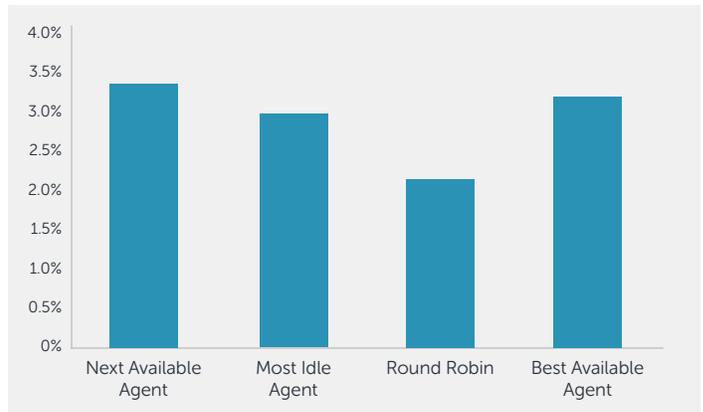


Figure 8: If multiple routing options are used, please rank based on which take precedence.

### Level of Satisfaction with the Ability to Connect Customers to Agents

Only 20% of respondents in 2017 are “really satisfied” with their ability to connect customers to agents. However, many (44%) are “satisfied”.

As positive as these numbers are, contact center managers should not settle for being “satisfied”. The goal is to be “very satisfied” with how the operation is contributing to the business.

This was a new question, so there is no trending information.

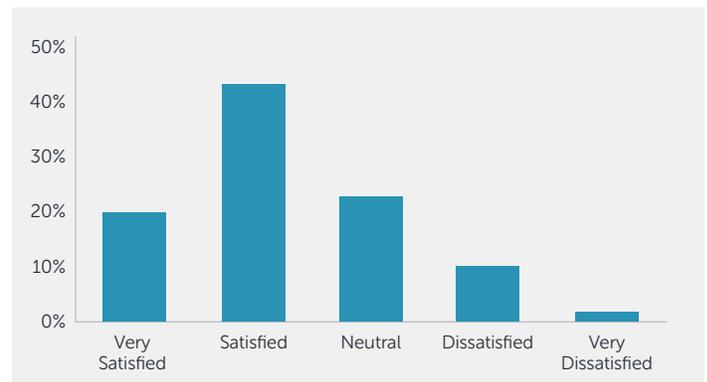


Figure 9: How satisfied are you with your current ability to connect customers to agents?

## Methods of Determining the “Best Available Agent”

Respondents are using multiple ways to define the “best available agent”. Unfortunately, more than half are still using “training” (down from 75% in 2016) and 50% are using the “predefined skills assigned to agent at the manager’s discretion” or “predefined skills assigned to agent based on other process” (up from 44%) criteria. Skills-based routing is probably so popular because most systems support that routing algorithm. However, skills-based routing can be subjective and could easily miss some of the most valuable agents. Someone has to decree that the agents have these skills. The “best agents” might not look that way because of a number of factors, including manager bias.

Analytics-based performance evaluation takes the opinion out of the equation and lets companies look at their agents’ performance objectively. And, on a positive note, more organizations are paying attention to performance-based criteria. Specifically, more respondents consider “historical performance data” (up from 12% in 2016 to 18% in 2017). This is encouraging even though the number is still low.

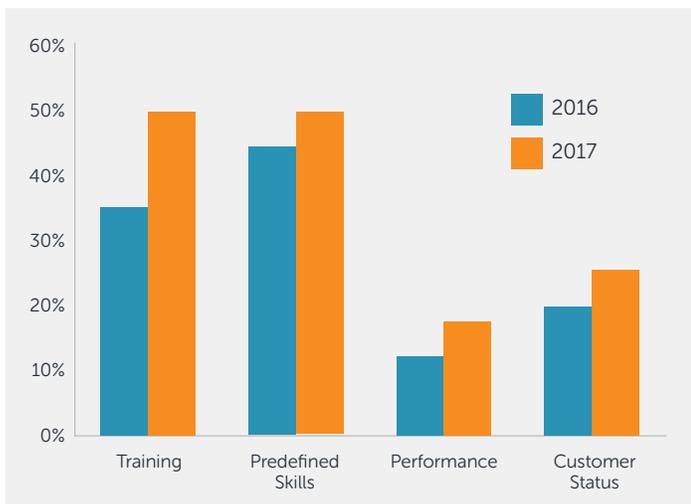


Figure 10: If you selected any of the best available agent routing options, how do you determine the best available agent?

The key takeaway? Most contact centers are not state-of-the-art in terms of determining the best available agent. If

a contact center is going to be a strategic business asset, it must adopt routing strategies based on objective agent performance data and customer value criteria.

## Updating Predefined Skills Options

Most organizations update their agent skills monthly or quarterly. In our experience, 90 days of statistical performance data is optimum for performance-based routing. If you consider longer time frames, the statistics become too “flat” to be of much value. Shorter time frames can be too heavily influenced by temporary factors such as sickness or family issues.

This was a new question so there is no comparative information.

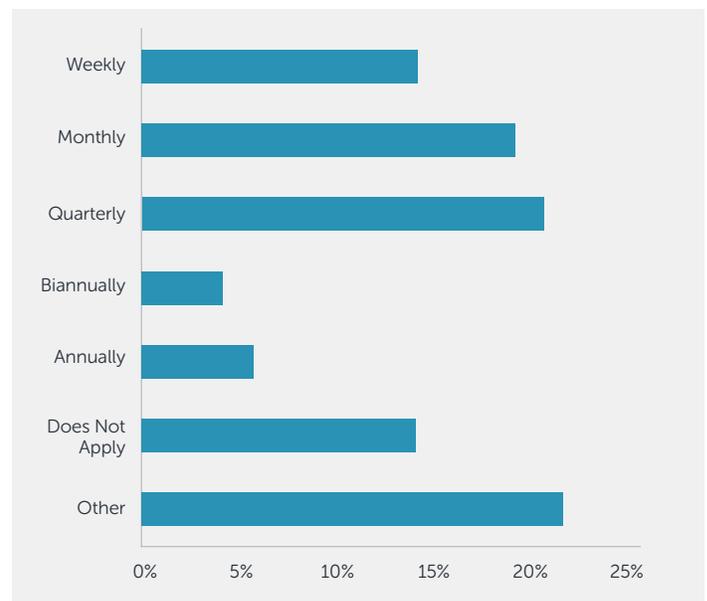


Figure 11: If you selected one of the predefined skills options, how often are they updated?

## Quality of the Access Agents Have to Subject-matter Experts

Most contact centers reported that their agents can access subject-matter experts outside the contact center. However, only 11% of respondents rated that access as “excellent,” and 58% rated it as “good”. As shown in Figure 12, these results are down from 13% and 68% respectively in 2016.

This is not a good trend because on-demand access to subject matter experts is one of the best ways to increase first-call resolution, and the technology to do this is available from innovative contact center vendors.

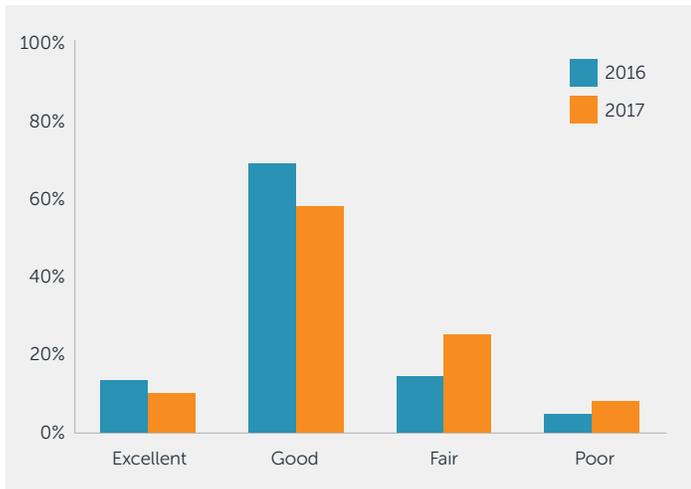


Figure 12: How would you rate the quality of the access your agents have to subject-matter experts outside the contact center?

### Visibility into the Availability of Subject-matter Experts

Fewer respondents in 2017 reported that they have "complete visibility" into the availability of the subject matter experts (down from 15% in 2016 to 9% in 2017). More reported they had "limited visibility" (up from 32% in 2016 to 38% in 2017). The other categories were almost

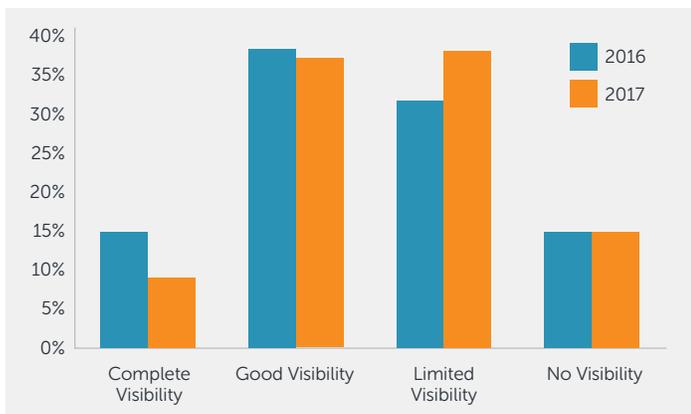


Figure 13: How well are your agents able to see the availability of these subject matter experts when they need them?

identical year over year, with the majority of respondents reporting that their agents have "limited" or "good" visibility into the availability of subject matter experts.

### Speed of Collaboration Between Contact Center Agents and Subject-matter Experts

The speed in which collaboration occurs has changed and it is a mixed picture. The number of respondents reporting "almost instantaneous on-demand" collaboration went down slightly (from 36% in 2016 to 33% in 2017). Similarly, the number reporting "asynchronous" collaboration decreased from 24% to 15%.

Both the "real-time and continuous" and "significantly delayed" categories went up to 19% in 2017 from 14% in 2016. However, the number of respondents reporting that collaboration is "non-existent" also increased this year.

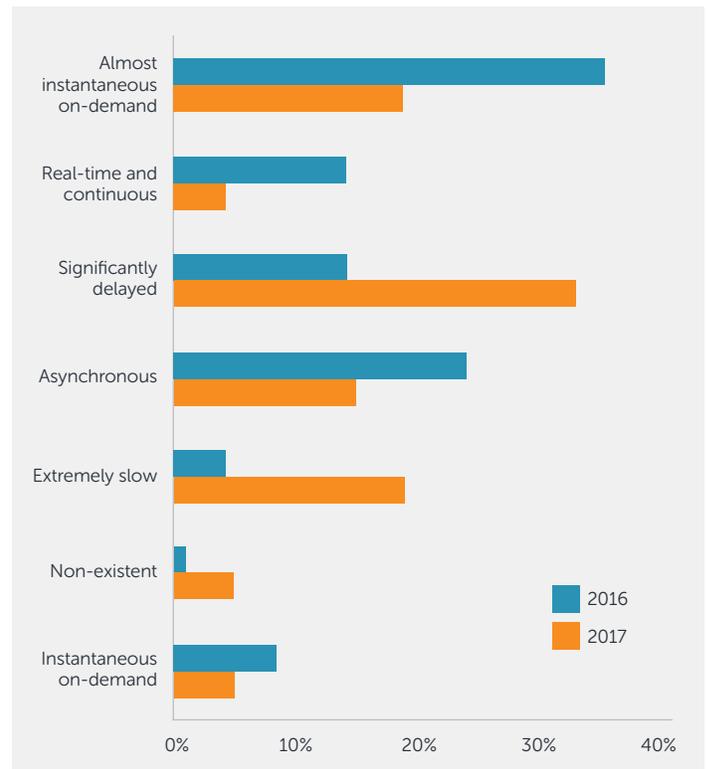


Figure 14: How would you categorize the swiftness of collaboration between contact center agents and these subject-matter experts?

## Methods Agents Use to Collaborate with Subject-matter Experts

Agents mainly use email, phone and chat to collaborate with experts. Year over year, there was little difference in the percentage of respondents using email (~77%) and phone (~69%) for collaboration. The use of video chat actually decreased. Online chat is becoming more popular for collaboration, going from 56% in 2016 to 62% in 2017.

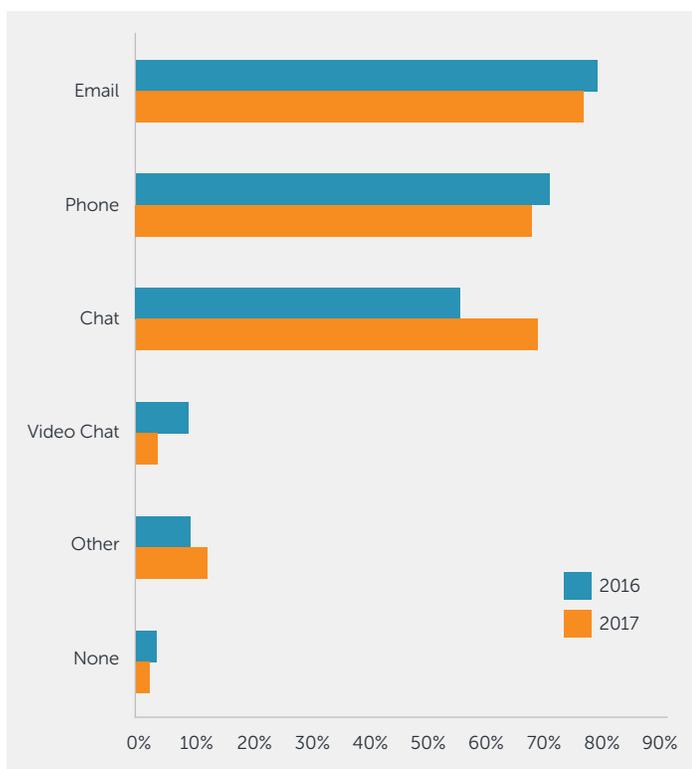


Figure 15: Which methods do your agents use to collaborate with these subject-matter experts?

## Key Takeaways

Contact centers are in a state of flux. As the industry matures, it is struggling to determine how to measure its performance and increase its strategic importance to the business.

It is possible that some of the changes we have seen year over year stem from the nature of the respondents. This year more multi-site, multi-function centers were represented. This may skew some results, as measurement and evaluation are more difficult when spread over a large organization.

That said, it appears that contact centers are slowly moving away from an operational focus to a more strategic business focus. We believe that transformation should be expedited. Otherwise companies are missing opportunities to transform their contact centers into assets that can sell, upsell, and retain customers. We believe that the companies that take advantage of these opportunities and make their contact centers more strategic will reap greater bottom-line rewards.

Specifically, we consider the following to be the major takeaways from this report:

- There is no industry consensus regarding which KPIs should be tracked for agent performance. Companies are tracking a broad set of KPIs. All these are important to some extent, depending partially on the nature of the business. Our recommendation? Pick five KPIs that matter to your business and track them. And make sure at least one of those KPIs is business-oriented. (See next bullet.)
- Companies are still focused on operational KPIs for agent performance (e.g., call quality and attendance) instead of business ones (e.g., revenue and conversion by agent). In the process, companies are missing the opportunity to track KPIs that are more tied to business success. This is unfortunate, because the technologies that make that tracking possible are available today.
- Call quality is still the most popular KPI, although fewer respondents are using it to measure agent productivity. That may simply reflect the fact that these companies are focusing on other KPIs, since analyzing the voice-of-the-customer data can be time-consuming.

- Compared to 2016, fewer companies are using the “next available agent,” “most idle” agent or “robin round” methods to route callers to agents, and more are using the “best available agent” criterion, which is defined in a variety of ways. These are positive developments.
- However, fewer companies are routing those contacts based on agent performance. By implementing routing strategies based on statistical agent performance data, organizations can take a major leap forward.
- Companies with multiple systems and/or multiple sites are working to automatically integrate the data from these systems. Yet apparently many of these companies are not satisfied with their initiatives to date.
- More companies are reporting on agent performance on a daily basis, and fewer are reporting in real time, even though the technology exists to track real-time data, even for multiple sites. This is a substantial opportunity for improvement.
- Online chat is becoming a more important way to collaborate with subject-matter experts.

### About Broadsoft

BroadSoft is the technology innovator in cloud communication, collaboration, and contact center solutions for businesses and service providers across 80 countries. We are the market share leader for cloud unified communications with a secure and trusted platform chosen by the world’s leading service providers. BroadSoft Business empowers users and teams to share ideas and work with purpose to achieve breakthrough performance.

For contact centers, BroadSoft offers CC-One, an omni-channel cloud solution that uses predictive analytics to lower operating costs and improve business outcomes, transforming the contact center into a strategic business asset. Whether you are a new business creating your first contact center, a medium size business looking to improve contact center operations, or a large enterprise needing visibility and control over multiple contact center sites and systems, BroadSoft has a contact center solution for you.



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