EMPOWERING AGENTS FOR THE DIGITAL-FIRST CONTACT CENTER

The Building Blocks for Agent
Engagement and Performance

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CONTENTS
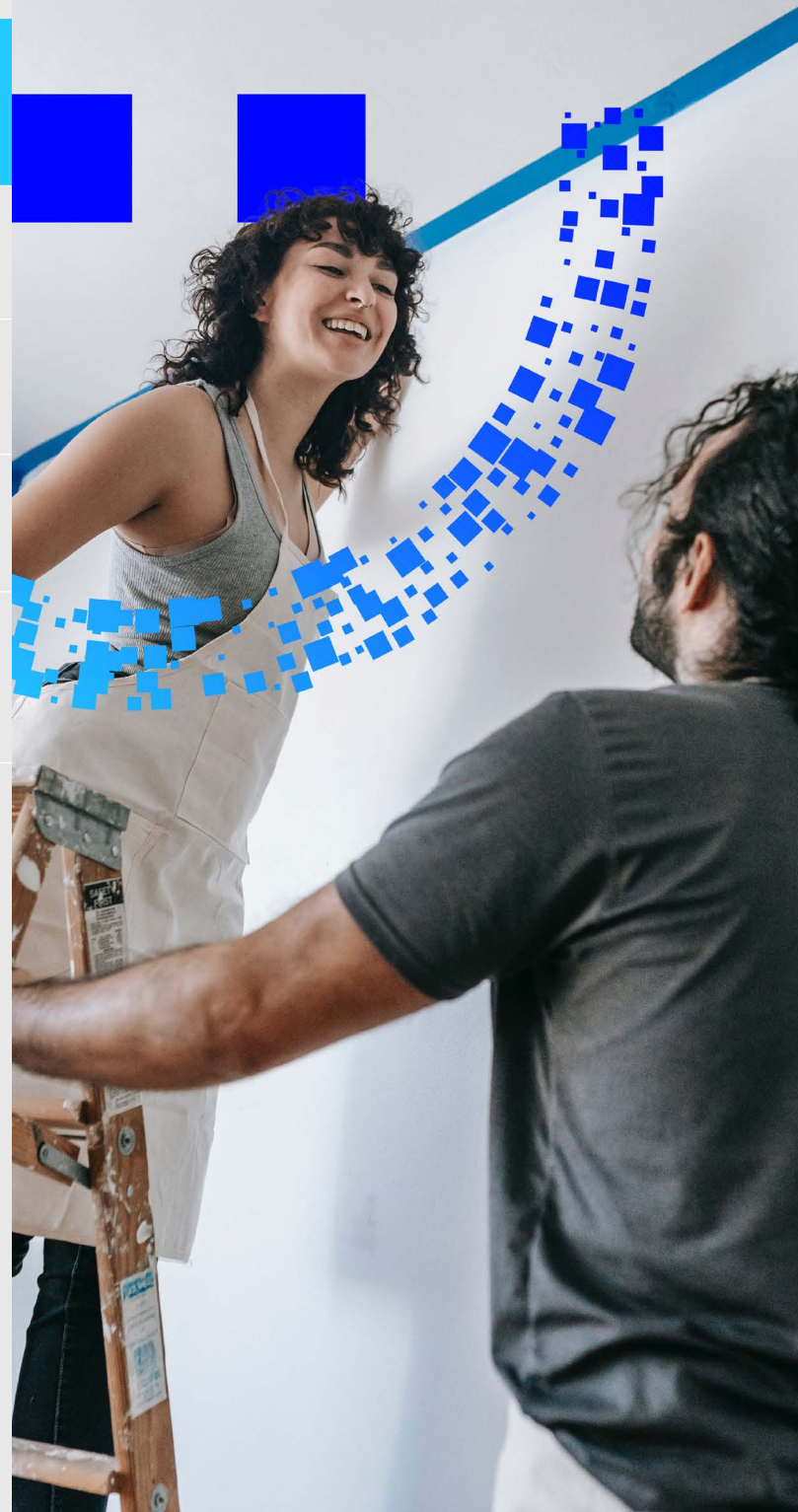
INTRODUCTION:

CX Gains Through Agent Engagement and Empowerment

The pandemic has transformed all of us into digital natives, raising consumer expectations for more streamlined experiences and fueling preferences for digital channels when communicating with a company. The need for more self-service channels doesn't mean that live agents aren't necessary, though—in reality, they are more important than ever.

As contact centers become more digital and more intelligent, agents are juggling more channels and handling ever-more-complex issues. The contact centers that effectively engage and empower these "super agents" are realizing superior CX results, operational efficiencies, and financial outcomes.

For those companies that implement best-in-class practices for agent engagement and performance management, they outperform other companies in terms of customer satisfaction by 70%. They drive results with a 2.3x greater annual improvement in agent productivity, a 2.4x annual improvement in customer profit margins, and a 2.3x annual improvement in customer spend over organizations that haven't implemented these practices. And, in an industry in a chronic labor pinch, companies are able to reduce the amount of time and money they spend recruiting, training, and replacing the agents who serve as the voice of the organization.

"If you're not already deploying an agent engagement and empowerment program, you're missing out on CX gains," says Omer Minkara, vice president and principal analyst at Aberdeen Research & Strategy.

In this eBook, we'll explain the increased demands on the contact center workforce, the impact of super agents in the contact center, and the building blocks to boost agent engagement and performance.[1]

1. Contact center statistics are taken from "State of the Contact Center," Omer Minkara, Aberdeen Strategy & Research, (March 2022). All other content is taken from Omer Minkara and Dana Shalev, "Agent Engagement & Empowerment 2022: Building Blocks to Boost Agent Retention & Performance" webinar (2022).

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Increased Demands on the Contact Center Workforce

While the range of digital channels elevated the importance of agents, it also created new worries and challenges for agents and supervisors alike.

Customers no longer rely on the phone to reach out to the brands they do business with—in fact, 50% of contact centers are using at least nine different channels. What's more, contact centers expect traffic to continue to increase on the following channels:

- 💬 **71% expect traffic increase on live chat: in-app**
- 💬 **67% expect traffic increase on live chat: in-web**
- 🎥 **64% expect traffic increase on live video conferencing**
- 📱 **61% expect traffic increase on mobile: in-app messaging**
- ✉️ **60% expect traffic increase on email**

There's a misconception that with the surge in adopted digital channels, agents are less important. That couldn't be further from the truth: The rise of digital makes agents even more important in this environment.

"If you look at channels where most companies are expecting an increase in traffic, those are all channels that involve agents," says Minkara. "So as much as digital is rising and becoming more prominent, agents are actually becoming even more important."

The ROI of Agent Engagement

Contact centers that implement best-in-class practices for agent engagement and performance outperform those that in a variety of areas:

70%
higher CSAT

2.3x
higher annual gains in agent productivity

2.4x
higher annual increase in customer profit margins

2.3x
greater annual improvement in customer spending

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CONTENTS

Digital channels greatly increase the challenges agents face in their day-to-day work, says Dana Shalev, head of product marketing for WEM at NICE. Consumers today largely prefer to solve their own issues, but many brands' self-service channels aren't quite up to the challenge. And when consumers can't resolve an issue on an unattended channel, they're often frustrated and less patient when they do reach an agent.

Adding to the challenge is the fact that the queries that do get escalated are likely to be more complex—and all the while, the agent needs to manage interactions on a wide variety of channels. The result? An agent that's under greater pressure than ever before.

"As much as digital is rising and becoming more prominent, agents are actually becoming even more important."

Omer Minkara, vice president
and principal analyst, Aberdeen

"A good agent experience will always compensate for a bad digital experience, whereas a good digital experience will not compensate for a bad agent experience. The effect a live agent can have on the customer is priceless."

Dana Shalev, head of product marketing
for WEM, NICE

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Empowering Super Agents in the Contact Center

In an increasingly complex contact center, agent empowerment programs play a critical role in creating and nurturing "super agents"—agents whose roles are elevated and who are making a critical difference in the brand's ability to deliver a differentiated customer experience.

In fact, research by Aberdeen uncovered that contact centers with defined agent engagement and empowerment programs realize superior business results to those without these programs:

- **10% annual improvement in customer retention** *(compared to 5.4%)*

- **7.8% annual improvement in customer effort score** *(4.8%)*

- **9.2% annual increase in customer satisfaction** *(5.4%)*

- **2.6% annual improvement in the number of customer complaints** *(–0.7%)*

The Rise of "Super Agents"

Agents today face increasing challenges:

Uncompromising customers

Constant changes

More complex inquiries

Disjointed remote workspaces

Multiple channels at once

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"Those super agents are doing a better job in creating happier customers," Minkara says. "When they're engaged, when they have a sense of fulfillment, and when they're empowered, agents are not just more productive but they're also really doing their all to solve the customer's problems."

"It's simple math," Shalev says, "as agent empowerment increases, so too does CX success. And that translates into higher customer lifetime value, greater profit margins and average revenue per call, reduced agent overtime costs, and increased cross-sell and upsell revenue."

"You need to invest in those agents, and like any other investment, you don't always see the ROI immediately," Shalev says. "You need to have a longer-run view and think of how healthy your business will be if those front-line ambassadors are happy with their jobs, feel empowered and knowledgeable, and feel that they have a horizon to grow toward."

"If you're not already deploying an agent engagement and empowerment program, you're missing out on CX gains."

Omer Minkara, vice president and principal analyst, Aberdeen

Boosting Agent Engagement and Performance

A few key steps can help you create and nurture the super agents you need to meet the demands of today's digital consumer.

Empower agents with the right information and tools

Leading firms are increasingly focusing on how they empower agents with the right information and tools. The vast majority (82%) of contact centers with agent engagement and empowerment programs proactively supply agents with learning materials to maximize the use of their time.

"Instead of letting agents sit idle, which may not be as productive for the agents or for the business, agents are getting a sense of accomplishment and a sense of belonging while also learning," Minkara says.

Empowering agents with the right tools and information also creates prepared agents, which can save the contact center millions. On average, the contact center has a 38% annual attrition rate. Assuming very conservatively that the cost of attrition is $6,000 per agent, a 500-agent contact center incurs $1.14 million each year in this area. Many contact centers see higher costs than this estimate. The costs, of course, only grow along with the size of the contact center, making agent empowerment a critical business lever.

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Monitor interactions and automate coaching

Another way contact centers are driving improvement is by monitoring calls and interactions to reveal the areas in which agents need guidance. More than 76% of organizations with agent engagement and empowerment programs are doing this. When agents fall behind on their KPIs, two-thirds of contact centers with agent engagement and empowerment programs leverage automation to automatically initiate coaching. Ensuring that the coaching is personalized to the agent—to their preferred time of day and channel, for example—only increases the effectiveness of training.

Offer a formal supervisor training program

"One thing a lot of businesses tend to forget in the conversation around agent engagement and empowerment is supervisors, the folks that essentially are responsible for rolling out those coaching and training programs," Minkara says. "The companies that really excel in this area also keep that in mind."

Among contact centers with agent engagement and empowerment programs, 83% offer a formal supervisor training program to continuously enhance the skills of supervisors and help them empower their agents.

CONTENTS

Smarter scheduling capabilities give agents more control over their time, and ultimately, greater autonomy regarding their schedules:

⊕ **Before:** Allowing agents to specify their availability and preferences while making sure that business needs are also met.

⊕ **During:** Leveraging intelligent automation to provide customized options, such as hybrid schedules and self-scheduling.

⊕ **After:** Giving agents greater control and autonomy with pre-approved breaks and swaps, powerful trading options, offers of extra hours and voluntary time off, and automatic adjustments of breaks and lunches.

Deliver flexibility in work schedules and incentives

Companies are increasingly embracing new, more flexible work arrangements, scheduling preferences, and personalized incentives. Nearly 8 in 10 contact centers with agent engagement and empowerment programs reach out to agents with offers of overtime and voluntary time off (compared to just 53% of contact centers without an engagement program). Most of them (71%) allow agents to submit their scheduling preferences and provide personalized incentives to agents (70%).

> "The number one thing agents are looking for is the ability to have control over their time," Shalev says. "The best solution for organizations is to adopt a very flexible workforce management solution that can provide flexibility before the schedule is created, during the scheduling process and after."

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CONTENTS

CONCLUSION:

Engage and Empower Your Super Agents to Transform Your CX

Digital adoption and AI are among the top priorities driving the contact center's transformation, but the human element remains a key component. The increased usage of digital channels continues to accelerate consumer expectations for instant gratification and frictionless customer experiences; however, the role of the agent has become more important than ever in delivering personalized, top-notch service in the most complex, high-touch interactions. And meeting heightened agent expectations is essential to satisfying escalating consumer demands.

By boosting agent engagement and performance, you can counteract the labor pinch and equip agents to succeed in every interaction, everywhere—empowering super agents, eliminating friction, and reaping the rewards of better CX.

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Empowering Agents for the Digital-First Contact Center

The Building Blocks for Agent Engagement and Performance

About NICE

With NICE (Nasdaq: NICE), it's never been easier for organizations of all sizes around the globe to create extraordinary customer experiences while meeting key business metrics. Featuring the world's #1 cloud-native customer experience platform, CXone, NICE is a worldwide leader in AI-powered contact center software. Over 25,000 organizations in more than 150 countries, including over 85 of the Fortune 100 companies, partner with NICE to transform—and elevate—every customer interaction.

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