
Everything You Need to
Know About **Call Center**
SERVICE LEVEL

CALL CENTER





The all-in-one call center software for small and medium businesses.

Business phone and inside sales software for support, sales and marketing.

- Browser-based call center software that takes 5 minutes to setup.
- Integrate with your business tools (CRM, Helpdesk).
- Call monitoring and reporting (real-time and historical).

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// INTRODUCTION //

Service level measures the accessibility of a company to their customers and the company's ability to plan for call volume fluctuations and execute their staffing strategy. It has been found to be directly tied to customer service quality and inbound call center performance thus is often the cornerstone of inbound call center manager's metrics toolkit.

Service level is defined as the percentage of calls answered within a predefined amount of time ("*target time threshold*"). It can be measured over any period of time (i.e. 30 minutes, 1 hour, 1 day or 1 week) and for each agent, team, department or the company as a whole. Service level is both a:

GOAL (A.K.A. "*service level objective*" or "*service level target*")

Managers can set a **service level objective** which is the maximum number of callers that wait in the queue before they are answered in a specified amount of time. For instance, this goal might be to answer 90% of incoming calls in 30 seconds or less.

Service level objectives are denoted as:

$$\frac{\text{the percentage of calls answered}}{\text{target time threshold}}$$

So a 90/30 service level objective means that the goal is to answer 90% of calls in 30 seconds or less.

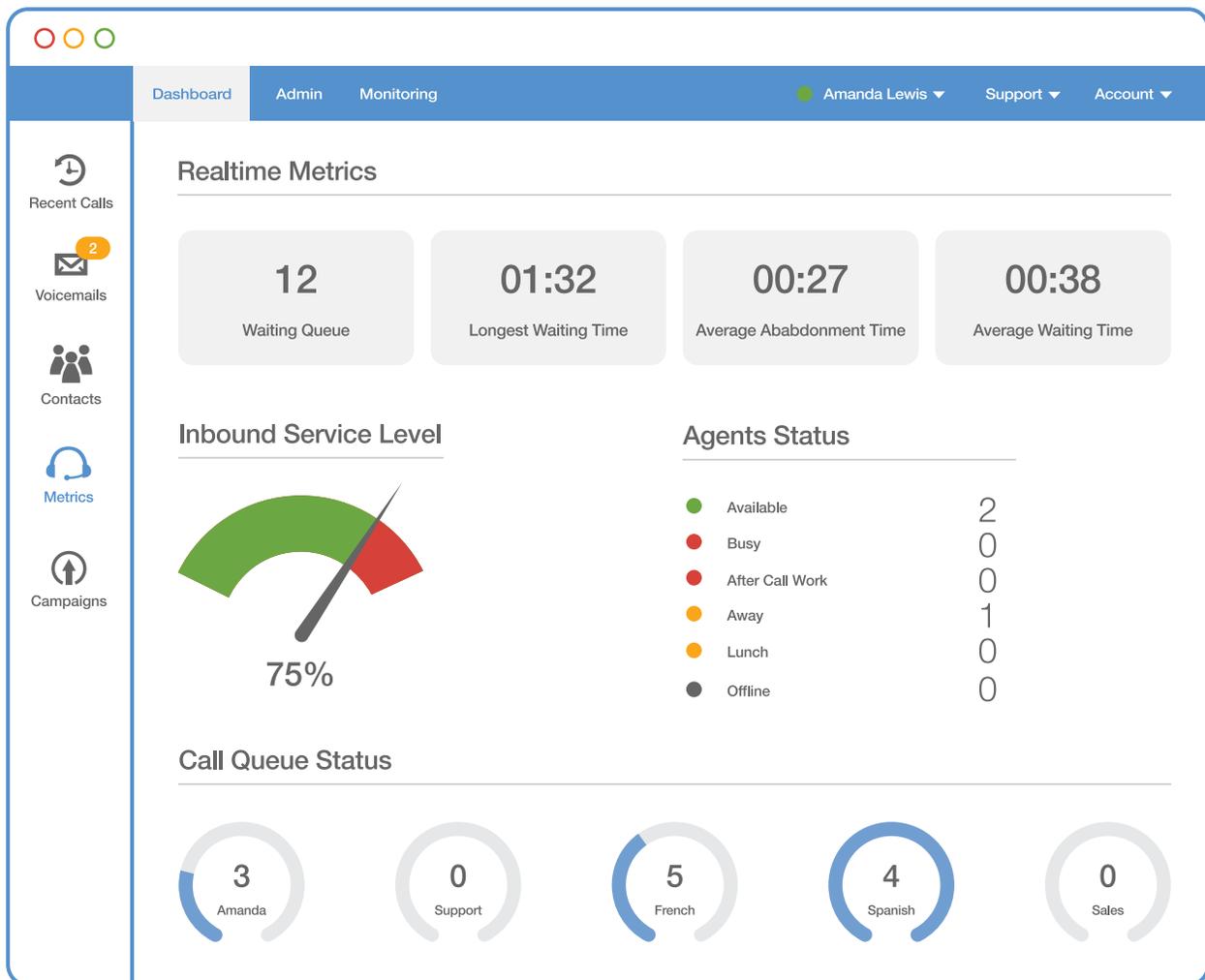
PERFORMANCE MEASURE (A.K.A. "service level")

After setting a service level objective, managers will then measure their team's performance in reaching that goal (measured as "service level") in increments (i.e. hours, days, weeks, months, quarters or years). For example, a company's service level between 9:00am and 9:30am is measured to be 80% if they answered 800 calls within 30 seconds or less and 200 calls after the callers waited for longer than 30 seconds.

Service level (as a performance measure) is denoted simply as the percentage of calls that were answered in the predetermined time threshold. So in the previous example, the service level is 80%.



Service level has been touted as one of the most important KPIs as it is intimately tied to customer service quality and overall performance of the call center.



Thus, managers and decisions-makers should take a systematic approach to *selecting a service level objective*, measuring their team's service level performance and acting on this data when making key decisions.

This e-book provides everything a call center manager, agent or executive needs to know about service level.

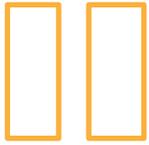
It take a comprehensive approach to *defining service level*, giving tips on how to select a service level objective, explaining how to calculate service level, discussing causes of low service level and providing suggestions on how to enhance service level.

01 // SELECTING A SERVICE LEVEL OBJECTIVE

Many call center managers will reference the 80/20 rule when asked about their call center service level objective. The 80/20 rule, as applied to call center service level, states that 80% of calls should be answered in 20 seconds or less. This standard came from a 30 year old AT&T study that found that *most callers would hang up after 20 seconds after trying to reach an agent*. Although this study was important in paving the way for service level standards today, it was of course, conducted before IVRs, ACDs, waiting queues and recorded greetings. Thus, the 80/20 rule is not an accurate industry standard.

In fact, there is no industry standard for service level. This is because call volume and service level fluctuate based on the company's product stability, marketing efforts, team, budget and customers and so no two companies are alike, even if they are within the same industry. Thus, companies should set their **service level objectives** based on careful consideration of the following factors, rather than rely on an "*industry standard*":

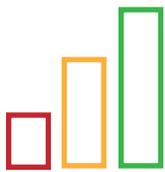
1. CUSTOMER NEEDS



Your customer's needs have a large impact on how long they are willing to wait in a queue before their call is answered.

For instance, a customer who would like a *quick answer to a simple question* is more likely to abandon their call after a long wait than one that would like a more comprehensive and thorough answer to their more complex question. Acceptable hold times will vary based on your customer's needs, thus service level objectives should be calculated with this in mind.

2. CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

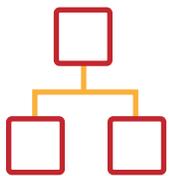


Your customer's expectations when they call your company also have a large influence on how long they are willing to wait before their call is answered.

In some industries, it is the *norm to expect long hold times* (i.e. airlines, credit card companies, etc.) and callers will typically wait longer to speak to a representative when calling these companies. Customer's expectations are also influenced by their previous interactions with your company.

So if their calls are typically answered quickly, they will maintain that expectation each time they call your company. Thus, when selecting a service level standard, it is important to analyze service levels within your industry as well as the business impact of failing to meet your customer's expectations.

3. CUSTOMER PRIORITIES



Analyzing your customer's priorities is imperative when selecting a service level objective. Some customers are willing to sacrifice the quality of the interaction for more expedited service.

Some are willing to wait for an agent who can better meet their needs. For example, customers who call a company are more likely to wait longer for a special promotion than when they call for information about the product they purchased. By understanding your customer's priorities, you can more effectively select a service level objective based on this information.

4. CUSTOMER PATIENCE LEVELS



Taking customer patience into consideration is crucial to determining service levels. To do this, you should determine how long customers are willing to wait before service quality is affected and before they hang up.

You should also consider whether or not these numbers are different for *high value customers* vs. *lower value customer*. This is a difficult domain to assess, as it can vary by person-specific factors such as personality, mood, age, employment status and amount of free time in their day as well as other factors such as the time of day, type of company, etc. To gain a better understanding of your customer patience levels, you should [create customer profiles and analyze customer demographic data](#).

5. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION



Customer satisfaction should be one of the main priorities of any inbound call center operation and thus should be taken into consideration when selecting a service level objective.

To make sure customer satisfaction is accounted for when calculating service level, you should analyze how callers respond to longer wait times and how longer wait times affect customer satisfaction, loyalty and brand image. You should also consider what the added lifetime value of customers is when service level is enhanced. By taking these factors into consideration when defining a service level objective, you can be sure that your service level metric is tied to customer satisfaction.

6. ALTERNATIVE CONTACT OPTIONS



Customers that interact with companies that offer support via chat, email, phone and in person are more likely to abandon calls in long wait queues (and thus seek an alternative method to contact your company)

than customers that interact with companies that only offer phone support. Your service level objective should take this into consideration, especially when considering the impact of abandoned calls on your service level calculation.

7. AVAILABILITY OF THE COMPETITION



When customers have the option to hang up and call your competitor during long wait times, you should take this into consideration when calculating a service level objective.

If your company is customer-centric and you would like to gain a competitive advantage in your industry, *beating other major players on service level is a great start.*

8. EMPLOYEE WORKLOAD



Knowing what your workforce can tolerate will help you determine a more appropriate service level objective. You should consider how your service level objective and corresponding staffing strategy will affect employee workload, productivity and satisfaction.

9. EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION



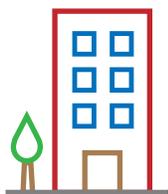
Your employees' satisfaction can make or break a call center operation. Thus, making sure that they are not experiencing the repercussions from angry callers who waited in long queues or overwhelmed from *strict scheduling is essential* when selecting your service level objective.

10. BUSINESS GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



If your business goal is to reduce customer churn rates, increase customer satisfaction and increase the lifetime value of your company, than your service level objective should reflect these goals.

11. CORE VALUES OF THE COMPANY



Customer-centric companies that aim to provide top-notch customer support should have higher service level standards than those that are not. Taking the core values of your company into consideration when selecting service level objectives is therefore extremely important.

12. AVERAGE CALL VOLUME



When selecting a service standard, it is imperative to take into consideration your average call volume. It is more common to impose a stricter standard for departments with lower call volumes that are fully capable of answering all calls that come in (i.e. that are staffed accordingly and are available to take the calls), than those with higher call volumes.

13. VALUE OF THE CALL



Service level standards should be adjusted for the value of the call. For instance, sales calls are typically more valuable (as they have the potential to generate revenue) and thus sales teams may have a stricter service level standard than departments that field lower value calls (i.e. technical support departments).

14. BUDGET



One of the largest influencers on service level is budget. In general, more agents are required to meet higher service level objective. Additionally, investing in technology that is dedicated to providing more optimal service (i.e. better call center software) should be factored into your budget. *Thus, taking your budget into consideration when calculating your service level objective is imperative.*

Service level objectives should be selected with all (or most) of the aforementioned factors in mind. When careful consideration is taken to define the service level that best suits your company's needs, you can be confident that the metric you analyze day in and day out is accurately measuring what you intend it to measure.

02 // CALCULATING SERVICE LEVEL

Once you have analyzed your customer base and decided which factors should influence your service level objective, you should then define how you will calculate service level. When service level is carefully defined and measured consistently over time it can be used to make data-driven decisions that can have a positive influence on your company. *The following are step-by-step instructions to help guide you through this process.*

1. DECIDE HOW YOU'LL CLASSIFY ABANDONED CALLS



Deciding how you will classify abandoned calls is crucial to ensuring that service level is accurately assessing what you would like it to. *There are three ways to classify abandoned calls:*

» MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

In this method of calculating service level, abandoned *calls are considered missed opportunities to connect with a valued customer. Thus, they will negatively impact service level.* This method of calculating service level is most common with companies that maintain a customer-centric approach, value customer service, and generate revenue from sales calls.

» COUNTED

In this method, *callers that hang up before the predefined time threshold will be counted as a "call offered" and will positively influence the service level calculation.* This method is common within adequately staffed call centers with short wait times. These companies assume that abandoned calls are unavoidable and since their wait times are low, they can assume that an abandoned call is not due to an angry customer but rather a customer that was busy or lost cell phone service and will call back. *Thus, these calls should not negatively impact the service level calculation.*

» IGNORED

This approach assumes that *abandoned calls are unavoidable and thus should not be considered in the service level calculation. Thus, these calls do not*

affect service level, either negatively or positively. This method takes a more general approach to exclude calls that were both abandoned while waiting for less time than the service level threshold and more time than the service level threshold.

2. DEFINE A FORMULA



After you have decided how to classify abandoned calls, you should define a service level formula, based on this classification. This is essential to ensuring that service level is measured consistently over time. *A few examples of service level formulas are as follows:*

$$\text{Service Level} = \frac{(\text{total calls answered} + \text{total calls abandoned}) - (\text{calls answered} + \text{calls abandoned after threshold})}{\text{total calls answered} + \text{total calls abandoned}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Service Level} = \frac{\text{calls answered within threshold} + \text{calls abandoned within threshold}}{\text{total calls answered} + \text{total calls abandoned}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Service Level} = \frac{\text{total calls answered within threshold}}{\text{total calls answered} + \text{total calls abandoned}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Service Level} = \frac{\text{total calls answered within threshold}}{\text{total calls answered} + \text{total calls abandoned after threshold}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Service Level} = \frac{\text{total calls answered within threshold} + \text{total calls abandoned before the threshold}}{\text{total calls answered} + \text{total calls abandoned}} \times 100$$

3. DECIDE ON A TIME INTERVAL



Deciding on a time interval is crucial and will significantly influence your service level calculation. When deciding on a service level threshold, you should consider all (or most) of the factors listed in the ["Selecting a Service Level Standard" section](#).

4. DECIDE WHEN THE TIME INTERVAL STARTS



After you have chosen a time interval, you should define when it starts. *Some suggestions are:*

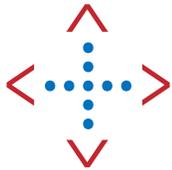
- When the caller selects their final option in the IVR
- When the call enters the ACD for a specific agent or department
- After the waiting queue greeting has ended
- After a predetermined time interval (i.e. 5 seconds after the caller enters the queue)
- As soon as the phone rings

5. DECIDE ON A SERVICE LEVEL OBJECTIVE



Once you have defined your service level and time interval, you are ready to select a service level objective. Again it is important that you do so with the domains listed in the ["Selecting a Service Level Standard"](#) in mind.

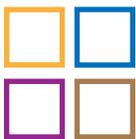
6. DECIDE ON A MEASUREMENT INTERVAL



Once you have selected your service level objective, you can now decide on the measurement interval. Some call centers are constantly measuring service level (i.e. each 15 seconds, minute, 10 minutes, 30 minutes or hour) in order to adjust their staffing accordingly.

These call centers will have a more accurate assessment of service level as the day progresses. Other call centers prefer to assess the service level of the past week, just to ensure that they are meeting their goals. This type of measurement approach is helpful for call centers that don't make timely staffing decisions based on service level, but rather use it as a rough estimate of performance for the past week. Of course, the longer the measurement interval, the more difficult it can become to pinpoint periods of problematic service levels. *It is therefore essential that careful consideration should be taken when selecting a measurement interval.*

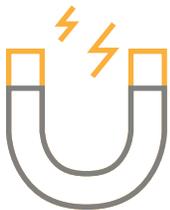
7. DECIDE WHICH TEAM, AGENT AND DEPARTMENT TO COLLECT DATA FROM



Some call centers are only interested in the service levels of a certain department (i.e. customer support) whereas

others would like to *analyze service levels across the company as a whole*, as well as for each department, team and agent in order to better understand how their company is performing. Of course, these may change over time, depending on your company's needs.

8. DECIDE HOW TO COLLECT THE DATA



[Call center software](#) that allows you to accurately measure service level in a way that is meaningful to you is crucial. Most ACDs will collect data based on the number of calls that had a service level event within your predefined time period:

- The call is answered
- The call is abandoned
- The caller waits longer than the predefined service level threshold without hanging up or being answered

After you decide how to classify abandoned calls, you can better understand how to account for each call type in your service level calculation.

9. ANALYZE THE DATA



Many call center software solutions will automatically analyze service level for the predetermined time period you selected. This makes tracking service level as simple as opening that tab on your software.

10. DISPLAY THE RESULTS



Agents and managers can only make data-driven decisions based on service level metrics when they have access to that data in real-time. Make the results visible by displaying them on agent dashboards, on TV monitors within your call center and within daily feedback reports for maximum impact.

11. ACT ON THE RESULTS



Data is useless unless it is used to make decisions that will help you reach your goals. As you monitor service level, make decisions based on this data.

Route overflow calls to at-home agents, ask in-house agents to work late during a rush and plan agent breaks so that service level isn't compromised. *These are all simple examples to help you improve service levels when they are declining.*

12. REPEAT THE PROCESS



Companies are fluid and so should their service level objectives. It is important that you are constantly reassessing your customer's needs and expectations as well as whether or not service level objectives are in line with your company values and business goals. *Adapting overtime is essential to this process.*

Following the 12 aforementioned steps will go a long way to helping you measure your service level accurately and consistently. If after doing so, your service level remains low, check out the section below for common causes of low service level.

03 // CAUSES OF LOW SERVICE LEVEL

There are many factors that can contribute to a decline in service level. In order to make effective decisions to enhance service level, you must first understand what factors affect it. *Below are the 10 most common causes of low service level:*

1. LOW SCHEDULE ADHERENCE



Schedule adherence is a benchmark that measures whether or not agents show up to work on time, start fielding calls when expected, take breaks at appropriate times and go to lunch according to schedule.

Low schedule adherence affects service level because when the number of agents fielding calls is different from what is expected, the team will be less capable of handling call volume changes.

2. HIGH ABSENTEEISM



Absenteeism is defined as the number of days an agent doesn't come to work due to illness and unauthorized absences. High absenteeism rates results in fewer agents fielding calls and an inevitable decline in service level if management cannot make adjustments accordingly.

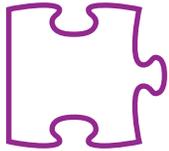
3. CALLS TAKE LONGER THAN EXPECTED



When calls take longer than expected, more agents will be tied up with callers and service level will decline. When your company has product issues (i.e. your website goes down, there is a bug in your software, your new product

is glitchy, etc.), training issues (i.e. agents aren't fully prepared to meet customer's needs), when unexpected events occur (i.e. your servers go down due to a power outage, your sales team can't be in the field due to a natural disaster, etc.) or when you have many new agents fielding calls, *calls will take longer than expected and service level will decline.*

4. INACCURATE CALL FORECASTING



Call forecasting is a complex task that requires taking into account call history, company promotions, product bugs, seasonal rushes, day of the week, time of day, holidays, etc.

It is critical for staffing and scheduling and will have a large impact on service level. If call volume is higher than predicted, *there will not be enough agents on staff to field all calls and service level will decline.*

5. LESS THAN OPTIMAL SCHEDULING



Scheduling agents is also a complex task that involves taking into account vacation days, sick days, historical call volume and promotions as well as amount of time spent on calls, breaks, after call work, providing support on different

channels (i.e. chat, email, phone, social media, etc.) and in meetings. When scheduling doesn't take into consideration all factors that might affect agents while they are at work as well as accurately predict call volume fluctuations, scheduling may be less than optimal and service level will likely decline. Additionally, *the more strict and rigid the schedule, the less likely staff will be able to handle changes in*

call volume and service level will decline. Having some flexibility in scheduling is very helpful when call volume increases unexpectedly and having a few more hands on deck is all that is needed to keep service level high.

6. HIGH AGENT ATTRITION RATES



Agent attrition is the percentage of call center agents who leave their position (i.e. are fired, quit or promoted) during a given period of time. [High agent attrition rates](#) can negatively impact service level for two reasons:

- when a large number of agents leave their position, it becomes *challenging for management to fill their positions*, the number of agents fielding calls declines and as a result, so does service level;
- when management fills their positions with new agents, *they take longer to resolve issues*, longer to finish after call work and in general are less efficient than more seasoned staff, thus service level will decline.

7. UNPLANNED CALL FLUCTUATIONS



When call volumes and durations fluctuate during the day in a pattern that is unpredictable or unanticipated, adjusting staff to accommodate these fluctuations can be challenging.

Call centers that don't have agents on call to handle overflow calls or that are more rigid in their scheduling (i.e. agents don't easily accommodate these fluctuations by skipping breaks or staggering lunch times) are less likely to handle these call fluctuations and service level will decline.

8. UNSCHEDULED MEETINGS



Call centers, like any workplace, are not immune to the occasional, last-minute emergency meeting. When these unscheduled meetings occur, this takes agents off the floor and service level will decline.

9. LONG AFTER CALL WORK (WRAP-UP) TIME



After call wrap up time is the amount of time that an agent takes to finish all tasks associated with the call. These tasks may include updating the database, helpdesk or CRM; completing paperwork; collaborating with a colleague; sending an email; updating a calendar, etc.

Agents who are engaging in after call work are typically not available to field calls until they finish. Thus, long after call wrap up times will decrease the number of agents available to field calls at any given time and service level will decline.

10. LESS THAN OPTIMAL CALL CENTER SOFTWARE



Call center software can have a major impact on service levels. Call center software that is difficult to navigate, doesn't integrate with business tools, doesn't have an efficient call routing system, has less than optimal waiting queue configurations or that doesn't have real-time reporting can cause even your best agents to be less efficient and effective. The more time they spend updating multiple business tools; trying to transfer the call to the

correct department; searching through your CRM, helpdesk or back office solution for information about the customer or trying to figure out which call to take from the waiting queue, they less available they will be to field calls and service level will decline.

The 10 factors listed above can all have a major impact on service level. If your company is guilty of one or more of the above factors, check out the section below to help get back on track to achieving your service level objective.

04 // HOW TO ENHANCE SERVICE LEVEL

Service level is an important KPI that measures the degree of accessibility of a call center to their customers. Service level can have a large impact on service quality, and as a result, revenue. It is therefore imperative that management constantly measure service level over time and engage in preventative or reparative tactics to help enhance service level when it slips. *The following are 18 tips, tools and techniques that will allow you to enhance service level.*

1. OPTIMIZE WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT



Workforce management involves forecasting call volumes, scheduling the optimal number of agents to work at any given day or period of time throughout the day, creating schedules for each agent and making adjustments to the workforce as needed. This is a complex task that involves taking into account:

- Historical call volume trends
- Target service level
- The number of agents available (i.e. accounting for agents arriving late, absenteeism, sick days, vacation days, etc.)
- Upcoming marketing campaigns, product promotions and product launches
- Time agents spend on calls and after call work
- Time spent providing support on different channels (i.e. chat, email, phone, social media, etc.)
- Breaks, trainings and meetings

It is also essential that managers build in some flexibility when scheduling their workforce and anticipate that unplanned events will happen (i.e. agents call in sick, have to leave early, take longer breaks than expected, require more training, etc.) and that call volumes will fluctuate as they are somewhat unpredictable.

When workforce management is not optimized, it can have a large impact on both service level and the company's bottom line. Understaffing results in fewer agents fielding calls, longer wait times and a decline in service level. Overstaffing results in more available agents, shorter wait times and an increase in service level, however overstaffing is more costly and can negatively impact the budget. Thus, optimizing workforce management is the key to enhancing service level.

2. OPTIMIZE OCCUPANCY RATES



Occupancy rate is the percentage of time that agents are performing work-related duties (i.e. talking with customers, performing after call work like updating databases, sending emails, etc.) vs. the total time that they are logged in. An example of an occupancy rate equation is:

$$\text{Occupancy rate} = \frac{\text{total call handling and after call work time} - \text{idle time}}{\text{total logged in time}}$$

Occupancy rates are typically inversely proportional to service level. High occupancy rates indicate that agents are less available to field calls, callers wait longer and service level declines. Low occupancy rates indicate that agents are more available to field calls, calls are answered immediately and service level increases.

Occupancy rates that are too high (i.e. over 90%) are indicative of an extreme workload for agents. This typically results in increased [agent stress](#), decrease agent effectiveness, decreased agent satisfaction and increased agent turnover. Occupancy rates that are too low are typically indicative of less than optimal workforce

management and can increase costs (as more agents are on staff than necessary), increase agent boredom and decrease agent satisfaction. Thus, management should strive to create a balance between optimizing occupancy rates and service level.

3. INCREASE SCHEDULE ADHERENCE



While workforce management is essential to ensuring that the optimal number of agents are scheduled to field calls, service level will not improve unless the agents adhere to their designated schedules.

When agents take longer on breaks, take their lunch at an unscheduled time or spend time at their desk on non-work related tasks (i.e. checking social media sites instead of fielding calls) fewer agents will be available to field calls than planned and service level will decline.

It is essential that managers constantly monitor schedule adherence and make staffing adjustments accordingly. Management should also expect that agents will not completely adhere to their schedule 100% of the time and taking this into account when making staffing decisions. These changes will positively impact both occupancy rates and service level.

4. IMPROVE CALL FORECASTING



Predicting the overall volume and the arrival patterns of calls throughout the day can be a challenging task. This involves analyzing historical ACD data (i.e. call volume, handle times, arrival patterns, etc.) as well as taking into account:

- Upcoming marketing campaigns and product promotions
- Repeated events (i.e. dates customers are charged, billing due dates, etc.)
- Product launches, glitches, bugs, etc.
- Market fluctuations and industry trends, events and activities
- Weather patterns, natural disasters, power outages, major events (both local and global), etc.
- Holidays, days of the week, time of the day

The more comprehensive your call forecasting, the more accurate your workforce management and scheduling and service level will improve.

5. REDUCE AGENT ATTRITION



Agent attrition is the percentage of agents that leave their position (i.e. quit, fired or promoted) during a period of time.

Decreasing agent attrition rates will ensure that your team will be more proficient with handling calls, navigating your business tools and up-to-date on the ins and outs of your company and product. This will increase their overall efficiency and effectiveness, customer satisfaction and their availability to field calls. *Taken together, all the aforementioned factors will contribute to enhancing service level.*

6. ENABLE AGENT CALL-BACKS



When waiting time is increasing and service level is declining, a quick, in the moment solution to increasing service level and customer satisfaction is to enable agent call-backs.

Call center software that informs the caller of the anticipated wait time and provides them the option to opt out of waiting in the queue and receive a call-back from the agent can dramatically improve

service level. When implementing this tool, it is important for managers to correctly classify the call (i.e. answered vs. abandoned) so their service level performance metric is accurate.

7. ENHANCE FIRST CALL RESOLUTION (FCR)



Enhancing [FCR](#) can significantly increase service level. When callers are routed to the most appropriate agent to meet their needs and their agent resolves their issue without transferring them, not only is the customer more satisfied (and less likely to callback about the same issue) but the agents within the team will be more available to field calls. *Both factors, more satisfied customers and more available agents, will enhance service level.*

8. ENHANCE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION



Customers that are not satisfied with the service they receive are more likely to callback about the same issue, to ask to be transferred to an agent with more experience or to ask to speak with a manager. All of the

aforementioned scenarios can lead to an increase in average handle time as well as the volume of calls and if workforce management doesn't take these factors into consideration, service level will decline. *Thus, enhancing customer satisfaction can dramatically improve service level.*

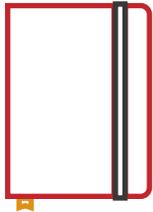
9. PROVIDE MULTI-CHANNEL SUPPORT



Offering support via email, chat, self-help guides and FAQ posted online can reduce the volume of inbound calls to your call center.

When offering multi-channel support, it is important to respond to support request via chat and email in a timely manner. Otherwise, customers are likely to also call your support center, two tickets will be open for the same issue, productivity will decline and so will service level (as valuable time will be diverted from answering calls to replying to a redundant support request).

10. ENHANCE AGENT COMPETENCY



Agent competency has a direct effect on service level. Competent agents are more likely to resolve the caller's issue quickly and comprehensively, increase customer satisfaction, decrease the likelihood that the customer will callback and decrease the likelihood that the call will be transferred or escalated to a manager.

Additionally, competent agents are more efficient and accurate with data entry when updating business tools, thus reducing after call work time, increasing their availability to field calls and enhancing FCR when the caller calls back about another issue (as the information in the system will be up-to-date for the next agent). Finally, skilled agents will also reduce the workload burden on other departments (i.e. tech support, sales, etc.) as they will be more likely to meet these basic needs without having to transfer the call. Taken together, the more competent the agent or team, the higher the service level.

11. EMPLOY ON-CALL AGENTS



No matter how comprehensive your workforce management strategy, there is inherent variability in call volume and schedule adherence within a call center.

Managers should prepare for this by employing a workforce of on-call agents, or cross-training agents within the company to field different types of calls (i.e. support, IT, etc.). [Hiring an at-home workforce](#) of on-call call center agents can be a very cost-effective solution to this problem. Additionally, utilizing [browser-based call center software](#) that has pay-as-you-go options and charges per hour of usage can also be extremely useful when employing an at-home workforce of on-call agents.

12. ACCURATELY MEASURE SERVICE LEVEL



Only when service level is [carefully defined and accurate](#) measured is it useful. It is important to analyze how your team measures service level and make changes when necessary.

13. TRACK SERVICE LEVEL OVER TIME



The key to making data-driven decisions to enhance service level is to track changes in service level, both in the moment and over time. Having [call center software](#)

that allows you to customize your service level time threshold, track service level over discrete time periods that are most meaningful to your company and monitor changes in service level in real-time is essential to this process.

14. LEARN FROM CHANGES IN SERVICE LEVEL



Monitoring service level over time and analyzing changes will allow you to engage in more effective troubleshooting, make data-driven decisions and enhance workforce management. All will go a long way to enhancing service level.

15. EDUCATE YOU ENTIRE TEAM ABOUT SERVICE LEVEL



It is essential that you train your team about:

- What service level is
- How service level was defined
- How service level is calculated
- What their service level objectives are

- How they can meet their service level objectives
- What happens when they fail to meet their service level objectives (i.e. recruit more staff; ask them to stagger their breaks, etc.)
- What happens when they meet their service level objectives (i.e. bonus, leave early, longer lunch break, etc.)

By doing so you are increasing the likelihood that they will make in the moment decisions that will enhance service level and may also lead to an increase in schedule adherence as *they will develop more insight into workforce management.*

16. TIE AGENT FEEDBACK TO SERVICE LEVEL



If you measure agent or team performance based on service levels, giving them concrete evidence to support your feedback is extremely effective in eliciting change in their behavior or when offering a [reward](#). Agents that know what is expected of them (i.e. service level objectives are clear), who can make changes in their

approach to answering calls based on readily available service level data and who's performance evaluation is tied to concrete data (such as service level) will be better equipped to make strategic changes that will positively influence service level for their department and your company as a whole.

17. ENHANCE SELF-SERVICE OPTIONS



Allowing customers to help themselves can drastically increase service level as it will reduce call volume and free up more agents to answer calls quicker. One strategy is to use a self-service IVR.

You can upload pre-recorded messages (about your business hours, directions to the office, etc.) into the [IVR](#) that will answer some of the most common (and simple) questions. Automating the customer support process frees up your agents to handle more complex calls and increases service level. *Another strategy is to enhance your FAQ, resource library and user-friendliness of your website.* When your customers can easily find the answers to their questions online, they will be less likely to call your company. Taken together, these two methods will significantly reduce call volume and free up agents to field more important calls, thereby increasing service level.

18. OPTIMIZE CALL CENTER SOFTWARE



Optimizing your [call center software](#) can go a long way in increasing service level. By implementing software that has:

- A comprehensive ACD to accurately measure call volume, handle time, calls received and calls abandoned
- An effective IVR to partially automate the support process and decrease call volume
- Skills-based routing to increase customer satisfaction and enhance FCR
- Real-time and historical reporting so agents and managers can keep track of changes in service level
- An easy to use interface so agents have the most relevant information at their fingertips
- Integrated business tools so agents don't have to waste time updating the same information into different business tools
- Browser-based technology so on-call agents can work from home
- Pay-as-you-go pricing so you are only charged for on-call agents when they work

You will dramatically increase the efficiency and effectiveness of your team and service level will increase.

The 18 aforementioned tips, tools and techniques will go a long way in ensuring that your team is optimizing service level. Enhancing service level can have a large impact on service quality, company reputation and revenue, thus it is an important KPI to measure and work to optimize overtime.



// CONCLUSION //

Service level is one of the most important KPIs to track and act on over time. It is intimately tied to customer service quality, call center performance and the management team's ability to execute their staffing strategy.

It should therefore be the cornerstone of any customer-centric company's inbound call center metrics toolkit.

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