

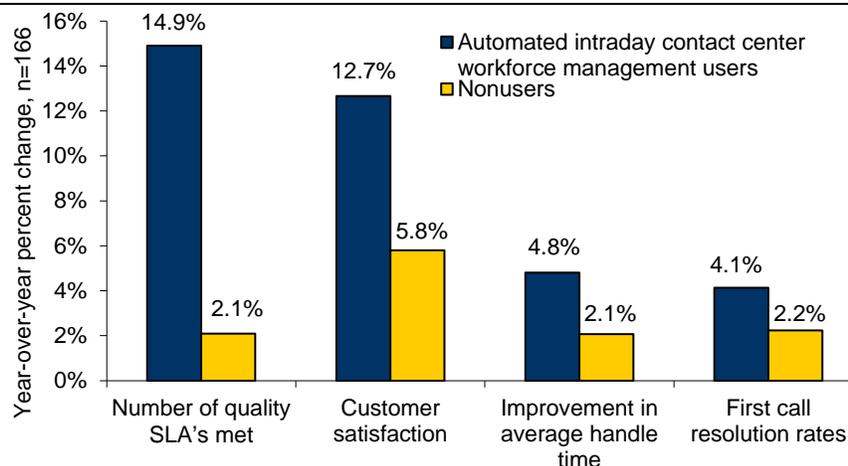
Automated Intraday Contact Center Workforce Management: Bridging the Disconnect Between Downtime and Effective Time

Agent idle time is a reality faced by many contact centers. In fact, Aberdeen's May 2012 study for the, *Contact Center Workforce Management: Optimizing Agent Scheduling and Productivity to Improve Customer Experience Results*, report showed that despite enjoying far better agent utilization results compared to their peers, even the Best-in-Class experience agent idle time (see sidebar). What makes Best-in-Class contact centers unique, however, is the pursuit of a two-pronged approach to both reduce idle time through more agile agent staffing practices, and make idle time more productive by automatically assigning agents with secondary tasks such as training and coaching. Research shows that companies adopting automated intraday contact center workforce management initiatives (hereafter named as intraday management - see sidebar) achieve far better results across several key performance measures, including customer satisfaction and first call resolution rates. This Aberdeen Analyst Insight will demonstrate the business impact of intraday management programs, and provide a roadmap on how to successfully build and nurture these initiatives as a part of existing contact center workforce management efforts.

Smart Intraday Management Drives Performance

Findings reveal that contact centers making smart decisions in managing agent idle time are the ones that are providing agents with training content and other important information during their downtime. Figure 1 illustrates the year-over-year performance impact of this approach in comparison to companies lacking this strategy.

Figure 1: Smart Intraday Management Impacts Business Results



Source: Aberdeen Group, May 2012

Research Brief

Aberdeen's Research Briefs provide a detailed exploration of a key finding from a primary research study, including key performance indicators, Best-in-Class insight, and vendor insight.

Definition: Agent Idle Time

For the purposes of this research, Aberdeen defines agent idle time as the percentage of agent time spent on non-productive tasks where an agent is not interacting with customers or receiving training/coaching.

Definition: Automated Intraday Contact Center Workforce Management

For the purposes of this research, Aberdeen defines automated intraday contact center workforce management as a systematic approach that involves using various business processes and technologies to pro-actively manage agent workforce for optimal productivity and performance results. These initiatives involve sub-categories such as changing agent schedules to address variable customer traffic, and assigning additional tasks during agent idle time.

Average handle time and first call resolution rates are used by more than 75% of contact centers to assess the results of their workforce management activities. The number of Service Level Agreement (SLA) criterion met is a measure used by more than half of all contact centers to ensure quality compliance by assessing their ability to deliver promised/expected service to their customers. As illustrated in Figure 1, automated intraday management users outperform their peers across all these key measures. Furthermore, they also accomplish far greater year-over-year improvement (12.7% vs. 5.8%) in delighting customers, compared to contact centers that are less focused on managing their agent idle time effectively.

Interestingly enough, contact centers with automated intraday management programs also achieve 38% greater (65% vs. 47%) agent utilization results, compared to all others. This means that companies with this capability are more successful in shrinking agent idle time while still empowering their agents with relevant training content to achieve more in less time. This success is built on several pillars that form the core of automated intraday management initiatives. The next section will illustrate an overview of these differentiating factors.

Secrets to Achieving Better Results in Less Time

Aberdeen determined four business processes and four technology tools that are critical drivers in improving quality compliance, gaining operational efficiencies and delivering customer delight.

Key Business Processes

Aberdeen's [Contact Center Workforce Management](#) research shows that the top challenge faced by 48% of all companies with contact center workforce management initiatives is unpredictable customer traffic. Lack of visibility into future customer traffic requires contact centers to be agile in order to address sudden peaks and valleys in customer demand throughout the day. To this point, as illustrated in Figure 2, automated intraday management users are 36% more likely (79% vs. 58%) than all others to incorporate intra-day staffing as a part of their contact center workforce management activities. This enables businesses to create dynamic agent schedules based on changing customer traffic throughout the day. Findings reveal that companies with this process achieve 44% greater (67% vs. 44%) agent utilization rate, compared to those without it.

Maturity Class Definitions

The following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were used to determine the Best-in-Class for the [Contact Center Workforce Management: Optimizing Agent Scheduling and Productivity to Improve Customer Experience Results](#) report:

- √ Current first call resolution rate- Best-in-Class: 74% vs. all others: 51%
- √ Year-over-year improvement in customer satisfaction - Best-in-Class: 21.9% vs. all others: 6.9%
- √ Year-over-year improvement in average handle time - Best-in-Class: 15.7% vs. all others: 1.8%
- √ Year-over-year improvement in agent utilization rate - Best-in-Class: 11.8% vs. all others: 0.4%

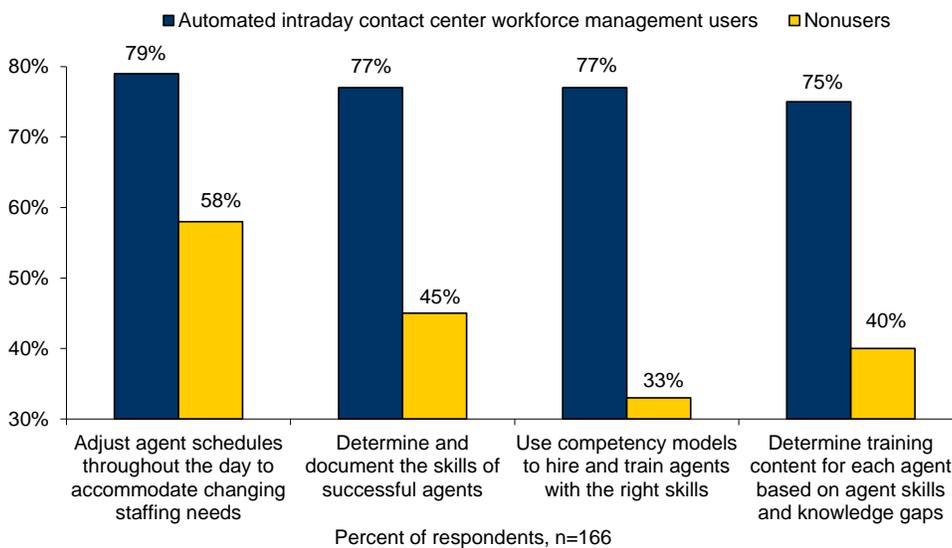
Best-in-Class: top 20% of the aggregate performance scores

Industry Average: middle 50% of aggregate performance scores

Laggards: bottom 30% of aggregate performance scores

Note: All others represent a combined score for Industry Average and Laggards.

Figure 2: Capabilities to Convert Idle Time into Productive Time



Source: Aberdeen Group, May 2012

Once contact centers establish better control on agent idle time through intra-day staffing, the next step is improving agent productivity during idle time. Research shows that 77% of organizations with automated intraday management solutions start by determining the competencies and skills of their most successful agents. This helps these businesses build a profile of their ideal agents. This profile is then used as the key ingredient of several contact center workforce management activities, including agent hiring and training. In addition to being 71% more likely (77% vs. 45%) than their peers to identify the characteristics of their top-tier agents, contact centers with automated intraday management initiatives are also more than twice as likely (77% vs. 33%) than other businesses to use this information as a part of their agent hiring and training activities. Integrating these two processes allows companies to improve the likelihood of hiring and training the right agents. Indeed, research shows that companies using these two business processes in combination are 64% more (74% vs. 45%) likely to be satisfied by their agent hiring and training activities, compared to those without these capabilities.

While using the right criteria to hire agents is important, agent training is a continuous process and thus contact centers should regularly identify the skills and knowledge gaps of their agents and provide related training content and/or information on these areas. Contact centers using an automated system to help agents remain productive through completing training, coaching and communications tasks during idle time are 88% more likely (75% vs. 40%) than their peers to tailor training programs based on agent competency skills. Figure 3 shows that contact centers providing such regular and customized training content achieve 4.6% year-over-year improvement (decrease) in time spent by supervisors assisting contact center agents, compared to 0.4% decline (increase) by those that don't. This

validates the value of continuous training in helping contact centers empower their agents with the skills needed to accomplish their goals.

Figure 3: Customizing Training Content Delivers Better Results



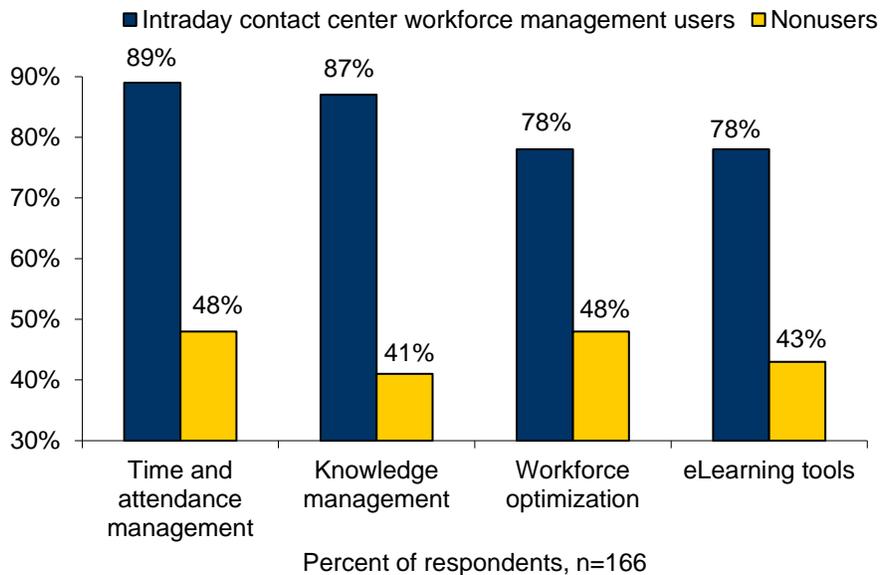
Source: Aberdeen Group, May 2012

Findings from Aberdeen's July 2012 [Contact Center Analytics: How the Best-in-Class Reduce Operational Costs through Contact Center Data](#) research shows that 41% of businesses cite increasing contact center operational costs resulting from inefficient processes as a top challenge affecting their contact center activities. The same [study](#) indicates that 53% of contact centers are deploying dedicated process improvement techniques to streamline their activities. Use of dedicated intraday management tools helps companies pursue this objective by taking a more granular look in managing numerous aspects (e.g. staffing and task management) of their contact center workforce management efforts. It's important to note successful deployment of dedicated intraday management solutions requires contact centers to adopt a holistic approach and ensure consistency between these activities. Failure to do so would result in disconnected intraday management activities, and would negatively impact performance results.

Key Technology Enablers

The business processes highlighted above are critical to help contact centers ensure agent productivity even during downtime. However, it's important to note that contact center activities and customer demands rapidly change and as such, it's a daunting task for most organizations to manually conduct these business processes. Research shows that companies use four key technology tools to streamline and automate the use of capabilities noted above, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Technology Helps Automate Business Processes



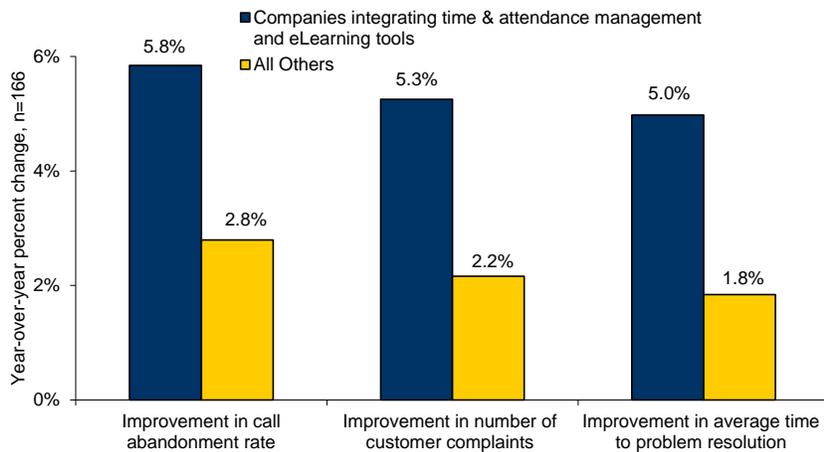
Source: Aberdeen Group, May 2012

Seventy-eight percent (78%) of companies use contact center workforce optimization technology to support their automated intraday management initiatives. This compares to 48% for companies without these initiatives. Contact center workforce optimization tools typically provide companies with wide array of capabilities, including time and attendance management and agent scheduling. While some businesses use these features as stand-alone technology tools, this technology offers companies the ability to use these features within a single platform. Findings from the contact center workforce management study show that companies using this technology are 43% more likely (80% vs. 56%) than all other businesses to achieve Best-in-Class results.

As illustrated in Figure 4, companies with automated intraday management programs are 85% more likely (89% vs. 48%) than their peers to use stand-alone time and attendance management tools. These tools provide contact centers with visibility into agent availability across multiple sites. Data captured through this technology is then automatically exported to be utilized as a part of intra-day staffing activities. This is accomplished by analyzing agent availability and comparing it with real-time updates on customer traffic to balance agent demand and supply. The benefits of time and attendance management tools go beyond balancing agent demand and supply. Companies integrating call distribution data with intraday agent staffing activities can proactively identify periods of low customer traffic and direct agents to work on additional tasks such as customized training and coaching to enhance their competency skills. Research shows that 78% of automated intraday management users make training content available to their agents through e-learning tools. This technology provides contact center agents with an online portal which they can use to access any

relevant training content on-demand during their idle time. Companies integrating e-learning technology tools within their contact center workforce management programs achieve 73% greater (4.1% vs. 2.4%) improvement (reduction) in the number of customer complaints each year, compared to those without these technologies, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Technology-Driven Visibility into Agent Idle Time Improves Performance Results



Source: Aberdeen Group, May 2012

Another important form of training agents is through tribal knowledge. Having identified their most successful agents in correlation with the business process noted above (determining the skills of top-tier agents), companies can then document their recommendations and best practices within a centralized repository. Knowledge management tools help contact centers capture tribal information on best practices, and store it within a centralized database where agents can access during their idle time to learn about best practices to do their jobs better. Best-in-Class companies within the contact center workforce management study deploying this technology 40% more widely (80% vs. 57%) than all other companies, affirming the value of sharing tribal knowledge through technology tools in driving Best-in-Class results.

Key Insights

Agent idle time is a reality across all contact centers. Research shows that approximately one-fourth of agent salaried/paid-time is spent idle (not engaging customers or receiving training/coaching). Considering an average 53% agent utilization rate and \$13.3 average hourly agent pay based on findings from the contact center workforce management study where 82% of respondents were headquartered in North America and Europe, this costs an average contact center approximately \$11,252 per agent each year in unnecessary operational expenses. Achieving Best-in-Class results therefore requires businesses to both minimize their agent idle time and optimize how agents use their idle time.

As illustrated in Figure 1, contact centers automating intraday management initiatives accomplish superior performance across metrics indicating agent utilization and productivity. In addition, they are 50% more likely (24% vs. 16%) than their peers to reduce the overall costs for customer contact year-over-year. Adopting the business processes and technologies highlighted in this document will help companies accomplish similar performance gains by building an infrastructure that would ultimately bridge the disconnect between unproductive agent downtime and effective time.

For more information on this or other research topics, please visit www.aberdeen.com.

Related Research	
<u>Workforce Optimization in the Contact Center: Optimizing Agent Scheduling and Productivity to Improve Customer Experience Results</u> ; June 2012	<u>Social Collaboration Powers Top-Notch Customer Engagement Programs</u> ; February 2012
<u>Customer Feedback Management: Leveraging the Voice of the Customer to Amplify Business Results</u> ; April 2012	<u>Customer Experience Management: Using the Power of Analytics to Optimize Customer Delight</u> ; January 2012
<u>The ROI of Best-in-Class CEM Programs</u> ; March 2012	<u>The Business Value of a Cloud-Based Contact Center</u> ; June 2011
<p>Author: Omer Minkara, Research Analyst, Contact Center, (omer.minkara@aberdeen.com), LinkedIn, Twitter</p>	

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