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The Contact Center KPIs That Matter Now

Shifting performance indicators for modern customer expectations

The customer contact center is evolving rapidly. The gradual progression of automation has hit hyperdrive as AI- and ML-driven technologies have become more accessible and mainstream. Consumers have quickly fallen into line with these changes, expecting faster, more efficient customer service and the ability to solve more complex issues in a self-service manner.

The role of human agents is shifting, too. More Tier 1 and even Tier 2 issues can be handled by Intelligent Virtual Assistants (IVAs). Mundane information and intent gathering can be handled by IVAs before the handoff, enabling agents to quickly get to the heart of the matter. At the same time, new behind-the-scenes roles are opening where agents assist IVAs in the background, improving understanding and making decisions that are beyond IVA's scope.

In this changing landscape, how should organizations measure success? Do the old metrics still apply? How can companies ensure that the No. 1 goal — a stellar, easy customer experience — stays at the center, while still seeking OpEx gains?

In the following pages, we'll look at contact center KPIs in the age of AI and how they are evolving to meet today's, and tomorrow's, needs. Joining us in this exploration of KPIs for customer care in the age of AI is **Candy Digges, Senior Vice President of Customer Success at Interactions.**

Candy has an eye on the past, present, and future. She's worked in every level of customer care and account management and held prior leadership roles at Genesys, Angel.com, and XO Communications. At Interactions, Candy leads the customer success and account management teams, ensuring that Interactions clients across industries reap the maximum value of their IVA solutions. From this experience, Candy can offer unique insights into what a successful IVA implementation looks like, how companies can continue to maximize the IVA investment over time, and how to measure the results.

Former KPI stars are now ensemble players

How important are traditional contact center KPIs still?

For decades, containment and average handling time (AHT) have been the stars of the KPI show. These measurements, while critical, only tell part of the story — that of operations and cost.

The second half of the story, customer experience, has been left to Net Promoter Score (NPS) and customer satisfaction scores (CSAT), which calculate the likelihood a customer will recommend a business and their satisfaction after an interaction, respectively.

Now, with improved ways to consolidate and analyze historical and current data, businesses can bring these data sources together for a holistic view, better insights, and experience-changing actions.

Instead of focusing on deflecting escalations or getting callers off the phone as quickly as possible, contact centers should consider if they're using the data they have to be proactive and anticipate common customer queries. Ask yourself: How are you giving callers the ability to self-service without going to an agent? Are you providing the right channel for the right inquiries? How easy is it for customers to complete common tasks? Are you giving your agents repetitive mundane calls that could be automated instead of keeping them challenged and fulfilled?

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Customer Effort Score: A newer player

What else should contact centers be tracking for a more holistic view and proactive insights?
While Customer Effort Score (CES) has been a buzzy topic for several years, it's not always implemented into contact center data tracking. The CES is a simple measurement that can be gathered by asking customers to rank the ease of their interaction directly after they have finished, whether that's on a call, via chatbot, or on your website.

Gartner research shows that customer effort is 40% more accurate for predicting loyalty than CSAT scores are. The benefits cascade to more traditional KPIs as well. Low-effort customer interactions decrease up to 40% of repeat calls, 50% of escalations, and 54% of channel switching.[1]

> Customer effort is the next generation of customer satisfaction. It's another layer to look at. Innately, people want to choose the easiest path to get something done. If you start mapping out your customer journey and you have five common tasks and one takes 25 minutes and four transfers, that's something you need to revamp or automate.

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👤 **Customer reviews**
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[1] https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/unveiling-the-new-and-improved-customer-effort-score

Rounding out CES data

How can you pinpoint sources of friction for customers?

While CES is a critical measurement of customer ease that should at least be on par with CSAT and NPS, if not rising higher in importance, it can't be actioned without broadening your view. Businesses must pair CES survey responses with other data, such as call listening, AI-driven sentiment and trend analysis, and more traditional metrics like call length and abandonment. With all of this data in hand, you can look for trends and areas of improvement.

By digging deeper into both call specifics and broader call trends, you can find areas of improvement throughout your customer journey, from your IVA's trained intents and dialogues to agent playbooks to other self-service options like chat and website FAQs.

Call listening in particular is critical. How much did the caller struggle? How many times did they have to repeat themselves? Were they given the wrong information by the IVA or the agent? What were the wait times like? How many times did they get frustrated? Why could the IVA or agent not complete their request faster?

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To improve the customer journey, ask yourself:

- What **got in the way** of an easier and faster resolution?
- Does your IVA need **to be trained on this intent?**
- Are callers wording their intent in an **unexpected way?**
- Did your agent have the **resources needed to provide a quick, accurate solution?**
- Are customers **facing inconsistent information or processes** across channels?
- Have you **gotten agent input** on these issues?
- Are **new issues popping up** due to new product features or changes?
- How are you **implementing and tracking improvements** based on this information?

Repeat calls are a good thing

Are any other common KPIs shifting due to AI and IVAs?

With the rise of advanced IVAs with improved understanding and the ability to handle more transaction types, telephone calls are becoming a preferred means of self-service for many customers. While call-backs within 48 hours likely means the first call wasn't resolved, repeat calls over a longer duration, like a month, are a great indicator of IVA performance and customer ease. It also provides an opportunity for personalized service that makes tasks even easier for callers.

By analyzing customer call patterns, such as monthly payment calls, you can leverage personalization and integration with your payment system to enhance the customer experience. For instance, the IVA can offer predictive handling by saying 'I see you called last month to make a payment. Your next payment is due in five days. Would you like to make that payment now?' It goes back to using the data you have to be proactive in providing great, easy service.

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Changes in the contact center

How are metrics shifting when it comes to agents?
Traditionally, contact center agent success has been measured by Average Handle Time, Agent Utilization Rate (percentage of time spent on specific tasks), First Call Resolution, and customer scores like CSAT and NPS. Management also tracks Cost Per Call, Call Arrival Rates, and agent churn to ensure centers are operating efficiently and agents are satisfied.

But as IVAs and AI transform customer contact centers, how are these measurements shifting? Let's first look at how agent jobs are changing.

More advanced IVAs can handle Tier 1 and even Tier 2 issues. Only the most complex calls get escalated and IVAs streamline the hand-off, having already verified the caller's identity and intent, so that the agent doesn't have to make the customer repeat themselves. The next advancement, still in the works, is live AI sentiment analysis, which will inform the agent of the customer's mood before interacting.

Second, with back-end system integration, it's easier to provide agents the data they need for personalized upsell and cross-sell offers. Finally, a common entry point for Gen AI in the contact center is automated call notes that the agent can then edit and verify faster than if they'd written them from scratch.

All of this adds up to a change in focus for agent metrics. Live agent calls may lengthen on average, as they're only receiving the most complex issues. However, they can save time with IVA hand-off and Gen AI call notes. This may lead to less focus on Average Handle Time and more importance placed on Customer Effort Score, First Call Resolution, and even Revenue Per Call as agents are given the space and information needed to better engage customers.

> Revenue is just one more lens. Most agents are incentivized by call volume and speed. It's not about how well the customer was served. They're not encouraged to take an extra moment to really understand the customer, to use the data they have to create proactive engagement. But imagine if they looked at each customer's portfolio or buying history and could suggest things that further the ease of doing business with you?

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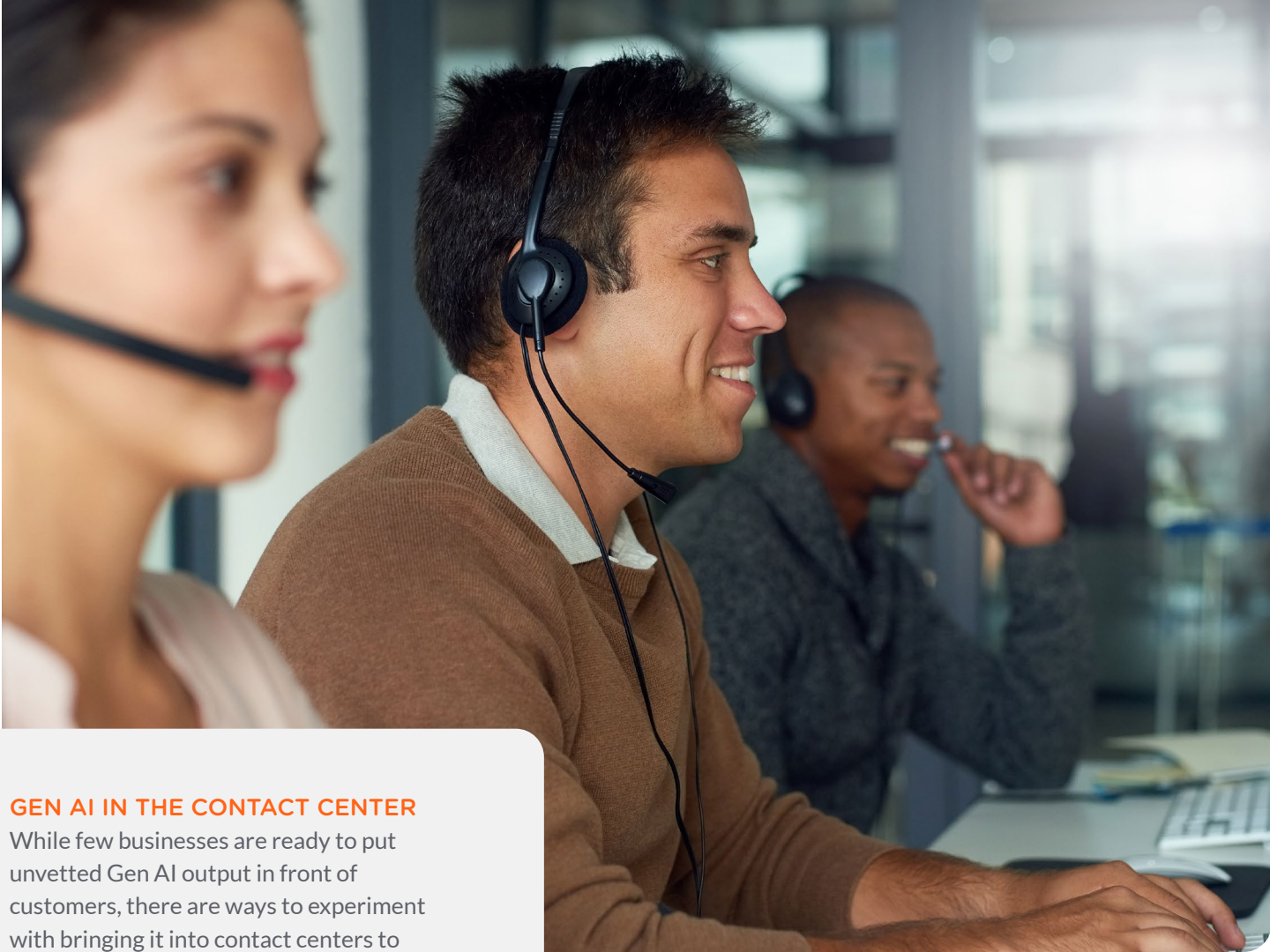
GEN AI IN THE CONTACT CENTER

While few businesses are ready to put unvetted Gen AI output in front of customers, there are ways to experiment with bringing it into contact centers to streamline work.

- Generating social media posts and replies that are checked by someone before publishing.

- Compiling post-call notes that are edited and approved by the call agent.

- Writing initial drafts of customer service FAQs and agent playbooks.

- Using Gen AI-driven analytics platforms that allow for natural-language questions and deeper dives into data.

Measuring automation success

How can KPIs be used to help improve IVAs and automation?
Many of the KPIs previously mentioned — First Call Resolution, Customer Engagement Score, repeat calls over a longer period of time, lower escalation rates — can indicate the success of your IVA. Even an increase in calls can be a good sign. If the calls are about intents easily resolved with the IVA, that can demonstrate that customers have adopted calls as a self-service option.

But what should you track to specifically improve IVA performance? While the AI and ML that power IVAs are perpetually learning and improving understanding, the systems also provide a trove of call data you can mine for trends in call drop-offs, escalations, and other issues. With this information, contact centers can continually improve the call paths and business rules that guide their IVA.

One particular way that Interactions improves IVA success is by tagging "no match" intents. If the Interactions IVA doesn't understand a customer's intent due to noise, an accent, or unusual phrasing, the IVA asks the caller to hold for a moment. In the background, a Human Intent Analyst listens to the intent and selects a menu option or types in data to provide the IVA the information it needs to continue the call. However, sometimes calls still must be escalated to a live agent; in these cases, the analyst tags the intent as a "no match."

Without this human touch — a capability unique to Interactions — most contact centers can't track "no match" intents. At Interactions, we can analyze "no match" intents to uncover and quantify patterns. We bring this analysis back to clients to determine if there's a need for new business rules to expand the IVA efficacy and keep more calls contained, which improves contact center costs as well as the customer experience.

At Interactions, we enhance IVA performance by leveraging KPIs like First Call Resolution and Customer Engagement Scores and uniquely tracking 'no match' intents through Human Intent Analysts. This approach enables us to refine call paths, introduce new business rules, and ultimately improve both cost efficiency and customer experience.

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Managing modern KPIs

What are some tips for tracking all of this information?

In all corners of business, AI and automation are boosting organizational efficiency and bettering customer experiences, while providing new types of data to slice, dice, analyze, and drive actionable insights. Yet many organizations find it challenging to gain the full value of this data, whether due to time, resources, or skills. So how can CX and contact center leaders keep pace with evolving KPIs?

The key is to work with an IVA partner, not just a vendor. At Interactions, we engage with clients as often as weekly to help them not just analyze their call data, but to discuss other developments that may affect call volume and intents. Because we power millions of conversations each month across several verticals, we have unique methods for drawing out insights from IVA call data.

Our team's expertise means that our customers don't need people who understand the metrics at this depth because we do. We aim to always be one step ahead of where our customers are. We mine news, blogs, and other sources to anticipate our customers' next moves — and what their customers will be asking. When will there be a new product release? When can we expect to see a spike? How can we address these concerns that are coming up in forums or on socials? This not only improves the contact center, but can be shared cross-functionally.

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CONCLUSION

IVAs powered by intelligent automation, AI, and ML, and the introduction of Gen AI into the contact center, are shifting the very nature of the contact center. For some customers, the phone has become a valuable self-service option. Duller work, like gathering account numbers and having customers repeat their issues, is being automated for agents, who can instead really dig in to help the customers who need it most. And the data being generated by IVAs, in conjunction with other contact center and customer data sources, can fuel improvements throughout the business.

While traditional KPIs aren't being phased out, now they are just one part of the story. "If you do all these things the right way — you leverage AI, you implement a Customer Effort Score, you look at the entire customer journey, you peel out the metrics that are most important to your business — you're going to see improvements in not just the core contact center metrics, but the IVA, customer ease, and across all your customer journey touchpoints," says Digges. "It's all one big symbiotic relationship."

Learn if your organization is ready to benefit from a modern IVA.

Take our quick 60-second assessment

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ABOUT INTERACTIONS

Interactions provides Intelligent Virtual Assistants that seamlessly assimilate Conversational AI and human understanding to enable businesses to engage with their customers in highly productive and satisfying conversations. With flexible products and solutions designed to meet the growing demand for unified, omnichannel customer care, Interactions is delivering unprecedented improvements in the customer experience and significant cost savings for some of the largest brands in the world. Founded in 2004, Interactions is headquartered in Franklin, Massachusetts with additional offices worldwide.

For more information about Interactions, contact us:

866.637.9049
interactions.com