

ebook

# The Benefits of Prioritizing the Agent Experience

Why putting the agent first has real value for  
contact center operations



# Introduction

The internet is flooded with content about AI-powered self-service and automation due to the value they bring and their ability to empower customers to complete activities on their own. But at the same time, we must recognize that agents are, and will continue to be, the backbone of your contact center and customer experience.

So it's no surprise that workforce engagement as a concept, and workforce engagement management (WEM) software, have been regular conversation topics amongst contact center leaders, analysts, and software vendors for over a decade.

But despite the fanfare, most contact centers have yet to experience much real change. As recently as 2022, **less than 30 percent of contact center agents** feel empowered to perform their jobs well.

With a focus on workforce management (WFM) and quality management (QM), could it be that these discussions are centered on the wrong disciplines? Or could it be that while the

benefits of WFM and QM are critical, they overlook one crucial element of agent engagement—the agent experience and how they actually get work done?

We believe that scheduling and recording software in themselves don't engage agents. You engage agents by improving how they actually perform the invaluable work of interacting with customers.

Many of today's contact center agents are digital natives, and by 2030, millennials and Generation Z will comprise **74% of the workforce**. They've grown up with technology permeating every facet of their lives, and they expect their tools at work to be just as intuitive and engaging.

That's why your contact center software—and how it impacts your agent experience—plays a critical role in agent engagement. And why it's critical that we empower agents with tools that are as good as—if not better—than the technology they interact with in their daily lives to make their jobs efficient and rewarding and set them up for success.



# Agent engagement starts with agent-first software design

Contact center culture, processes, and policies are pivotal to agent engagement, but many leaders overlook the role of tools and technology in their agent satisfaction and retention. When agents were asked about the most significant drivers of frustration, **41% stated disconnected systems that were difficult to use.**

That's because most contact center vendors design for the needs of administrators and management rather than agents. Too often, the agent

interface is an afterthought and a product of various solutions cobbled together over time. This creates inefficiency in the agent and customer experience alike.

So, what does an agent-first design look like? Read on to learn five key attributes of effective agent-first contact center software.







## 1 - Elevates the agent experience

First and foremost, agent-first design focuses on elevating the agent's experience. Designing software for the actual end user—the contact center agents who spend nine to five and sometimes longer each day using the platform—involves making all design decisions through this vital lens: "Does this design make it easier or better for the contact center agent?"

When the answer to this question is a consistent “yes,” the agent’s software experience will be simple, unobtrusive, and gratifying. Characteristics of an elevated agent experience include:

- **Fingertip data access:** Agents have access to all relevant information needed to assist the customer in one place. If you shadow your agents and observe lots of screen toggling, clicking, or copying and pasting within a single interaction, this is a red flag.
- **Seamless omnichannel interaction support:** Agents have a consistent interface and experience regardless of the channel they’re engaging with customers on. That means they can handle **voice, chat, and other digital channels in the same interface** and even interact with the same customer across multiple channels simultaneously without starts and stops.
- **Intuitive, user-friendly interface:** An agent’s workflow is logical and requires little more than common sense to learn. If agents need hours of training to handle interactions, your contact center software doesn’t have an agent-first design.



## 2 - Integrates with necessary tools

Empowering agents with fingertip access to data—as stated in number one—requires **integration** across tools. An agent-first contact center platform makes it easy to integrate important systems, like customer relationship management (CRM) and collaboration tools, payment processing systems, enterprise resource planning (ERP) platforms, and more.

Even more critical, agents shouldn’t need to know that what they’re seeing results from a bunch of integrations. It just happens like magic in the background to arm them with the data and insights they need to service customers effortlessly.





### 3 - Empowers agents to self-manage their performance

An agent-first design motivates and empowers agents to take ownership of their success and performance outcomes. How? By including real-time metrics and performance feedback right within their interface.

Agents don't want to learn about performance shortcomings once they're too late to fix, or worse yet, be kept in the dark altogether. They need to understand what's expected and how they're doing against goals in the moment—especially in a remote or hybrid work environment.

A well-designed agent-first contact center platform includes native performance management capabilities. Performance management shouldn't be an expensive add-on; it's an essential core component of agent-first design and a key to enabling agents to deliver a successful experience time and time again.



### 4 - Enables precision-based routing

Agents should ideally only receive interactions that they're capable and trained to handle. Failing to do so can make agents feel discouraged, overwhelmed, and disengaged. An agent-first contact center design makes it easy for leaders and administrators to flexibly configure sophisticated routing logic so agents receive the interactions they're best suited to support.



### 5 - Provides actionable data and reporting to coach agents

An agent-first design includes actionable data and reporting so supervisors have insights to coach and improve agent performance. Reporting must be relevant and support the decision-making of all involved. It should keep management attuned to agent and operational performance, help supervisors spot performance issues, and guide trainers on who and what to train.



# The Benefits of an Agent-First Focus

Agent-first is more than a feel-good term or marketing jargon meant to elicit warm and fuzzy feelings. Contact centers experience tangible, quantifiable benefits.



## Reduce handle times

An agent-first design makes handling customer interactions easier, more efficient, and faster. In one example, handle times dropped 28% for a hospitality events outsourcing company after implementing Sharpen, resulting in an ROI north of 300%.



## Improve first contact resolution (FCR)

First contact resolution (FCR) has been an important contact center metric for years, and it's not going anywhere. Today's customers expect more but have less patience with the need for repeat contacts than ever. An agent-first design empowers agents to solve customer inquiries completely and correctly the first time, reducing FCR.



## Accelerate agent onboarding

The time to train new agents decreases by as much as 50% with agent-first designed systems. Logically, an easy-to-use system enables agents to learn and contribute to business outcomes more quickly.



## Reduce agent turnover

Sharpen customers report lower agent turnover, which they attribute to less agent frustration with their core platform. Annoyances and extra steps in an agent's workflow contribute to agent dissatisfaction in their jobs every day. If those frustrations are eliminated, your agents are more likely to stick around.

# Put the agent first with Sharpen

Adopting an agent-first approach when designing and selecting contact center software seems like a no-brainer. But unfortunately, it's still not the norm. That's why solvable challenges like low agent engagement and retention still keep contact center managers up at night!

It's time for a change—and Sharpen can help.

With Sharpen, you can empower your agents with intuitive tools, interfaces, and insights designed specifically to improve and optimize their experience. The result will be more engaged and productive agents and happier customers.

Meet with Sharpen



## About Sharpen

As your partner in performance, productivity, and empowerment, Sharpen delivers better outcomes: better outcomes for customers, agents, and your business. Our contact center platform is intentionally designed and masterfully engineered for a seamless, intuitive experience across the board for a CX difference you can see—and feel.

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