

The Top Three Strategies for Improving First Call Resolution

Metrics are nothing new to customer service professionals. Most of you are measuring more than your fair share of TLAs (three letter acronyms): AHT, FCR, ASA...the list goes on. However, we'll argue that First Call Resolution (FCR) is the most important of these metrics because it is an important measure of efficiency, effectiveness and customer satisfaction.

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Are you struggling to measure or improve FCR? You're not alone. Despite its importance, it is nearly the hardest metric to measure accurately. One reason for that is that companies tend to view FCR differently. For some companies, a call is considered resolved on the first call if the customer never calls back, regardless of how many times the customer was transferred to other agents. For others, it is only considered resolved on the first contact if the customer talks to only one agent. In this case, if the customer has to be transferred to another agent, that is not considered resolved.

For our purposes, let's view FCR through the customer's eyes, because this metric, more than almost any other, is directly tied to customer satisfaction. How would your customers define it? Most likely, they want to call about an issue once and only once. Personally, if I call a contact centre with an issue, I don't really care how long I'm on the phone – within reason of course – and I don't care if I have to talk with one agent or three. What I do care about is that I made one call and by the end of that call, my issue was resolved. However, if I have to call back two weeks later because an agent said "no problem, sir, we'll get that credit posted to your account within seven days" and ten days it is nowhere to be found on my statement... I'm calling back, very irritated, and in many instances, not doing business with that company again.

By all definitions, if a customer has to call back a second time, that's bad news. It is inefficient, costly and irritating to the customer. And the customer service organisation takes the hit for it, even if it's not the contact centre's "fault", i.e., a customer places an order for a sweater successfully through the contact centre and then fulfillment sends the wrong size, requiring the customer to make a second call. So, FCR is important and relatively simple in theory: a customer calls, your agents solves his or her problem, the customer hangs up and we all live happily ever after. While that may be oversimplifying it, it really shouldn't be astronomically hard to do.

But it seems to be. Why are so many companies across the globe struggling with FCR? The answer is, for a number of reasons:

- **Agents lack knowledge, access and/or authority** – In many cases, agents do not have the correct knowledge, despite many hours of training, to satisfy a customer issue. Or even more common, given the dozens of applications agents need to deal with on each call, they aren't able to quickly access that information. This causes customers to be transferred multiple times and often not ultimately satisfied. Another common hurdle to FCR that we've seen often, particularly with retail companies, is that agents are not given the authority to deal with issues beyond the basic, such as dealing with returns, offering discounts, etc., and then the customer call gets forwarded on and on...



- **Poorly designed IVRs** – Companies have often not thought through the “IVR tree” and customers, frustrated after pressing “2” for customer service, then “3” for order enquiry and then “7” for returns, somehow get dumped into the queue for an agent who does not handle returns, get frustrated and hang up or call back another time.
- **Agent Desktop Complexity** – Remember back in the day, when an agent desktop contained only a phone and a computer with one green-screen application? Those days are long gone. Today, we see agents dealing with literally dozens of applications and tools on every call because the data they need is stored in different applications. Furthermore, many of those applications are incredibly misaligned with the way a call naturally flows, which requires the agents to look at as many as 40 or 50 screens per call. This has a huge impact on an agent’s ability to achieve – or to not achieve – First Call Resolution.

First Call Resolution can be improved by implementing three straight-forward strategies in the contact centre. Using these strategies together is crucial; one deals with culture, one deals with process and the other with technology, and each aspect is as important as the other.

Empower Your Agents

The concept of “agent empowerment” is relatively new but it is gathering momentum. You should make agent empowerment a pervasive element in your culture and empower your agents in several ways. First, make sure you give them all the tools they need to get their job done. It only makes sense that if you are asking agents to deal with customer issues, you give them all of the customer information they need. This includes, training on how to deal with calls and the access to the data necessary to complete customer interactions.

Secondly, and most importantly, you must grant the appropriate level of authority to your agents so they can handle the types of calls they receive. You wouldn’t give a plumber a tool kit that was missing the wrench, and yet so many companies give agents the ability to do everything except what their customers call in for. An example here would be the agent in the retail call centre who gets asked on 90 per cent of his customer calls to complete an item exchange, yet doesn’t have the authority to do that. It’s not good for agent morale, efficiency, effectiveness or customer satisfaction, and it is directly opposed to achieving FCR.

Get Your Customers to the Right Place

... and get them there quickly. Your IVR system is meant to help not only the agents, but the customers too. If you make your IVR access points too generic or vague, or you don’t carefully align them with the majority of your call types, customers will get frustrated and end up in the wrong queue. For those of you who measure First Contact Resolution, nothing will cause an unnecessary transfer more quickly than a bad IVR implementation.



The IVR choices should be simple and intuitive. Customers should get to where they need to be simply and within two or three entries.

Simplify the Agent Desktop

This is by far the biggest step you can take to positively impact all of the performance metrics you're currently measuring. A unified service desktop enables the agent to access process-specific tools and is a single point of access to all the mission-critical applications and tools required to effectively complete a customer interaction.

A unified desktop solution can sit 'on top' of your current applications. It should not be necessary to "rip and replace" your existing applications. A customer service desktop that automates call flows can make call centre agents happier, increase efficiencies and customer loyalty, reduce costs, and basically improve your performance against all of the metrics you are already measuring.

You don't have to continually struggle with First Call Resolution. Empower your agents, design an IVR interaction that minimises misdirected calls and implement a unified desktop solution. You will make life easier for both your agents and your customers and your FCR rates will improve dramatically.



About Jacada

Jacada is a leading global provider of unified service desktop and process optimization solutions that simplify and automate customer service processes. By bridging disconnected systems into a single, intelligent workspace, Jacada solutions create greater operational efficiency and increase agent and customer satisfaction. Founded in 1990, Jacada operates globally with offices in Atlanta, Georgia; Herzliya, Israel; London, England; and Munich, Germany.

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