



FurstPerson.®

9 Tips For Home Agent Hiring

June 2014

888.626.3412 Toll Free
info@furstperson.com
furstperson.com

888 626 3412 Toll Free 800 229 5881 Client Support furstperson.com

© 2014 FurstPerson. All Rights Reserved. 1

Note: This eBook is adapted from Jeff Furst's presentation at the 2014 Remote Working Summit in Dallas Texas on February 4, 2014.

Background

Moving agents from brick and mortar centers to work at home has been one of the biggest changes in the contact center industry over the last ten years driven by the high returns this workforce model can achieve.

The value proposition of the remote agent model includes a wide range of operational areas:

1. Cost reduction through lower real estate costs
2. Improved productivity and agent performance
3. Higher employee engagement
4. Talent attraction and retention
5. Business continuity
6. Preparation for the workforce of the future

Hiring for home agents requires a different approach than hiring for brick and mortar centers. We will discuss nine tips that can help you with your remote/home agent hiring program:

1. Home agent jobs are different
2. Be careful moving high performers home
3. Select your recruiting model
4. Understand the implications for each model
5. You can be more selective with a virtual model
6. Research states in which to employ your agents
7. Decide between a contractor or employee model
8. Will you provide a computer or not
9. Research flexible work shifts

Tip 1: Home Agent Jobs Are Different

When you are hiring for a home agent role, you are first hiring for a customer care, support, sales, loyalty, or collections role. You must first understand if the candidate fits the hiring profile for these jobs. Then, you must understand if the candidate can perform the job while at home.

Contact center jobs consist of abilities, skills, motivations, and behaviors. FurstPerson research, based on nearly 3,000 subject matter expert (supervisors, incumbents, trainers, and managers) surveys from 16 countries and five continents, uncovered 15 universal competencies (see chart below) that are important to success for six of the most common contact center jobs (customer care, inbound sales, technical support, customer retention, collections and outbound sales), regardless of whether the job is performed in a home or traditional office. These 15 competencies reflect personal responsibility, effective communication, emotional control, as well as comfort with change, technology, and simultaneous work activities.

COMMON CONTACT CENTER JOBS													
COMPETENCIES	CUSTOMER CARE		INBOUND SALES		TECH SUPPORT		CUSTOMER RETENTION		COLLECTIONS		OUTBOUND SALES		
	B&M	W@H	B&M	W@H	B&M	W@H	B&M	W@H	B&M	W@H	B&M	W@H	
Compliance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Listening	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Composure	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Oral Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Dependability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Integrity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tact	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Professionalism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Learning Aptitude	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Accountability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Stress Tolerance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Adaptability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Multi-Tasking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Computer Skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Keyboarding Skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Note: B&M = Brick-and-Mortar contact center environment; W&H = Work-at-Home environment; N/A = no data available.

These 15 competencies are important for both brick and mortar and work-at-home jobs. However, a job candidate that possesses these competencies still needs to also have the right behavioral and motivational

make-up for work at home. The same FurstPerson research also confirmed that **autonomy** and **time management** are two competencies that rate as more important for performance in an at-home environment than in a brick and mortar contact center.

KEYBOARDING SKILLS
COMPLIANCE STRESS TOLERANCE COMPOSURE
ADAPTABILITY **AUTONOMY** ORAL COMMUNICATION
ACCOUNTABILITY PROFESSIONALISM
COMPUTER SKILLS **TIME MANAGEMENT** TACT
MULTI-TASKING INTEGRITY LISTENING
LEARNING APTITUDE DEPENDABILITY

This makes perfect sense, of course. At-home contact center agents are often working alone, without supervisors and co-workers observing their activities (though their performance is usually monitored remotely). Several other customer care agent competencies were also rated higher for home agents than for brick and mortar agents: **Perseverance**, **Multi-tasking** and **Detail Orientation**. Again, these are all characteristics and skills which one would assume to be important for an at-home agent to be successful in their job.

Successful customer care agents working in brick and mortar centers must often share many of the same skills and abilities as those in home-based environments. With regard to behavioral competencies in particular, FurstPerson research shows that the most successful customer care agents in both brick-and-mortar and at-home environments are those who demonstrate compliance with rules and policies. But some key competencies for one environment are not necessarily the same as those for the other environment. When you are hiring customer care agents for a brick and mortar site, finding candidates who demonstrate accountability and openness to feedback in addition to their other key competencies will likely improve their chances for success in your organization. In comparison, candidates who show themselves to be more autonomous, detail oriented and able to manage their time well may outperform other agents in an at-home environment. Thus, the most successful agents in any customer care role will be those who demonstrate the key competencies best suited not only to the customer care job itself, but also those best suited to the

particular environment in which they will work. Taking both factors into account will increase the chances of finding agents who best “fit” your particular customer care role, which can lead to higher overall performance, lower levels of attrition, and a competitive edge in the war for talent.

Step 2: Be careful moving your best performing agents home

If you are considering moving top performers home as either a reward or to pilot a home agent model, you should consider evaluating them for the home agent role. Just because they are successful as a brick and mortar agent does not mean they will be successful in the home agent role. In our experience, many organizations move employees home and then see deterioration in performance because they are not fit for the remote agent role. FurstPerson research, as noted earlier, shows that competencies required for successful brick and mortar performance are not the same competencies required for successful home agent performance. This demonstrates that agents who are successful working in brick and mortar



customer care positions might not have the same success if they performed their jobs from home. An agent’s success in their brick and mortar location may not have required him or her to demonstrate autonomy or perseverance or time management to the extent that he/she would need to in an at-home environment. Contact center organizations should therefore take care to ensure that agents being sent home (often as a reward for successful brick-and-mortar performance) are actually equipped for such an environment; otherwise, what is intended as a reward may actually be setting the agent up for failure.

Before moving agents home, ask the following questions:

- Are they the self-motivated ones that strive to out-perform their peers and their own historical performance because of the satisfaction it brings them, not the praise they may receive from others?

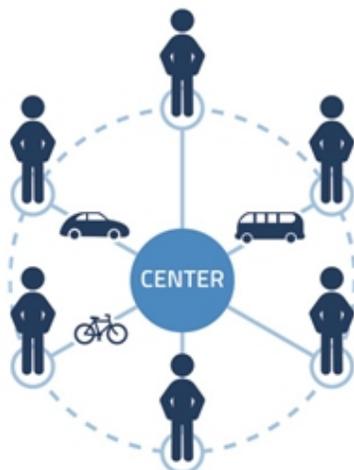
- Are these the “low maintenance” call center agents? Do the supervisors give them little supervision or direction to complete their job responsibilities? Will this still be true when they work-at-home?
- Do these call center agents typically learn new systems, platforms, or programs more quickly than others?
- Do they have a natural interest in technology and can therefore help (not impede) remote troubleshooting?”

Sending successful on-premise agents into an at-home setting without evaluating their readiness for such an environment is like promoting the best agents to supervisory positions without assessing their leadership potential. Certainly on-premise agents can be successful in the at-home space, but if you don't evaluate their potential for success specifically in that environment, you might be setting them up for failure by sending them to at-home jobs.

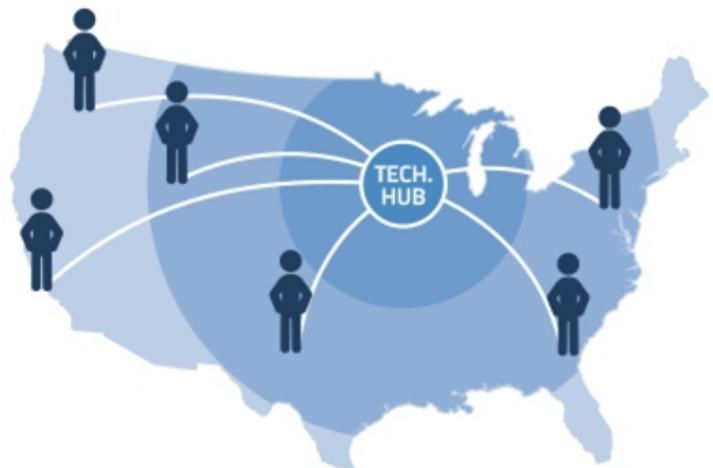
Tip 3: Select Your Recruiting Model

With remote agent models, you have two recruiting models to consider:

HUB & SPOKE MODEL



VIRTUAL MODEL



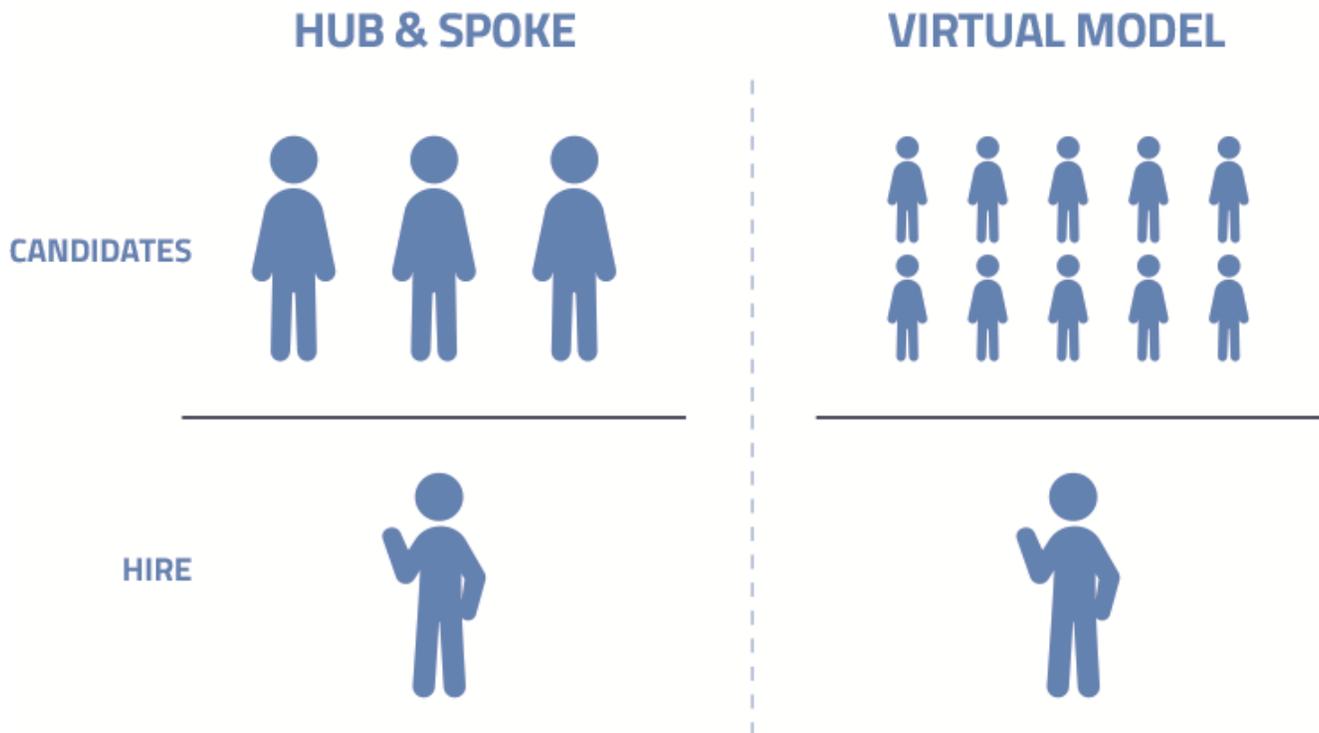
Comparison Table: Hub & Spoke versus Virtual Models

	Hub & Spoke	Virtual
Definition	Means your agents work at home but live within a convenient drive of the brick and mortar center.	Means that agents can live anywhere and you may never meet them.
Key Benefits	<p>Offers pilot option to try out the remote agent concept with minimal effort.</p> <p>All hiring and training can potentially be done at the contact center reducing your learning curve and investment.</p> <p>In-person contact with candidate.</p> <p>Some growth in candidate volume because of the home agent option.</p>	<p>Access to talent anywhere and anytime which improves your ability to source difficult skill sets (i.e. nurses) or the most talented potential agents.</p> <p>Significant growth in candidate volume.</p> <p>Hiring optimization – you can match candidates to all contact center jobs because call types are not tied to physical work locations.</p>
	Hub & Spoke	Virtual
Potential Drawbacks	<p>Increase in candidate volume does not match virtual volume.</p> <p>Stuck with same talent pool associated with brick and mortar center.</p> <p>Cannot fully utilize real estate cost savings.</p>	<p>Very challenging to meet candidates in-person which requires careful recruitment process planning to personalize the process.</p> <p>Requires careful planning, execution, and investment for hiring, training, and front line management.</p>

Tip 4: Understand the Implications for Each Model

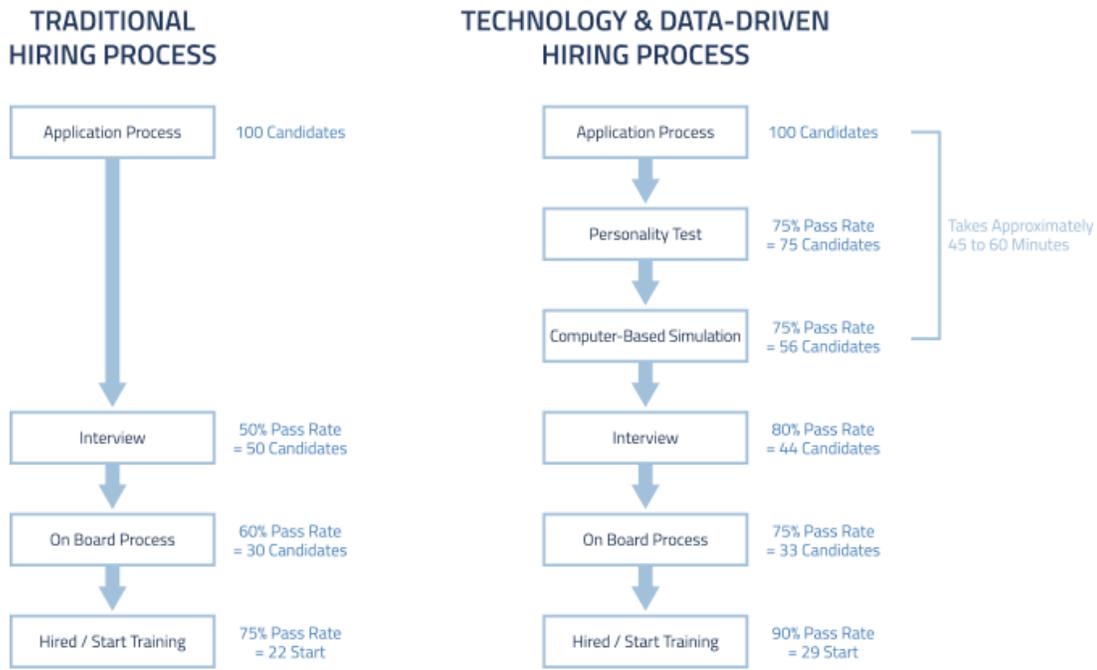
In our view, access to talent is the most critical benefit of the virtual agent model. In a traditional brick and mortar labor market, superior talent for contact center jobs is capped based on population size, competitive influences, and distance. You might be at a 3 to 1 candidate to hire ratio or maybe 4 to 1 or 5 to 1. This limits your ability to select potential top performers. Virtual models allow you to eliminate labor market size

constraints that face a traditional hub and spoke labor pool. For example, many virtual models will generate 10 or more candidates per hire. While this candidate volume is helpful for recruiting purposes, it can create potential recruiting challenges.



For hub and spoke, candidate volume is not as large a concern because it will mirror your brick and mortar volume. However, moving to a virtual model requires you to carefully plan the recruitment process and workflow. You should experience an increase in candidate volume with a virtual model which means you need to consider hiring automation. If you stick with a recruiter led interviewing process, your costs will skyrocket, the candidate experience will be poor, and the candidate and recruiter effort will be significant. Whether it is using assessment tests or some other type of filtering, you should plan to automate the front-end of the hiring process. The figure below highlights a traditional recruiter led model with a technology, data-driven model. While this is an illustration of real world models, notice that the automated approach, backed by data-driven hiring models, reduces the number of interviews from 100 to 56 which saves the recruiting team significant time. Moreover, the 56 candidates at this point have passed two assessments calibrated for performance in this organization.

Figure: Hiring Process Models and Management – Technology Saves Time and Cost



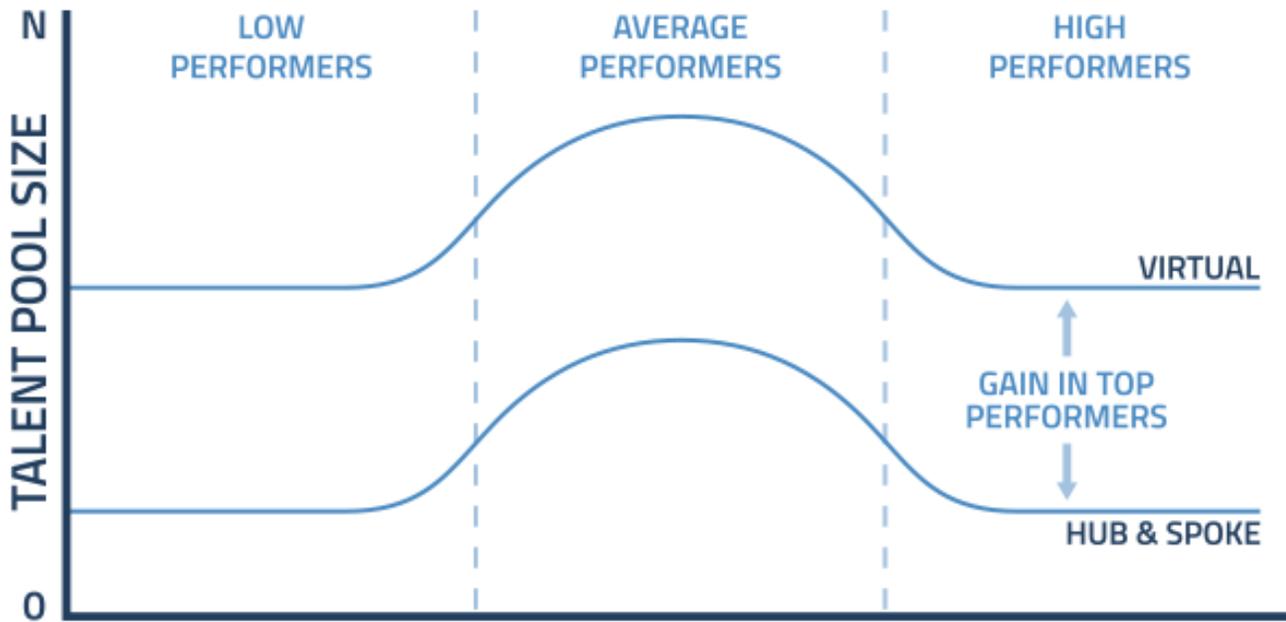
In the example above, the technology and data-driven model has 44 fewer candidate interviews. Using 90 minutes for preparation, interview time, and follow-up notation at \$26/hour/recruiter means that for every 100 candidates using a technology/data-driven model your organization saves \$102,900. Adding interviewing technology can create even more savings.

Tip 5: You Can Be More Selective with a Virtual Model

Why does this matter? It is all about optimizing your hiring process and performance to drive more profit for your organization. Using a data-driven hiring process will demonstrate that the more selective you can be, the more value you can drive in new hire production. This can lead to performance improvements of 20% to 50% for more selective hiring models than hiring models stuck at a 3 to 1 hiring ratio.

The figure below helps illustrate why. The virtual agent model allows you access to an expanded labor pool

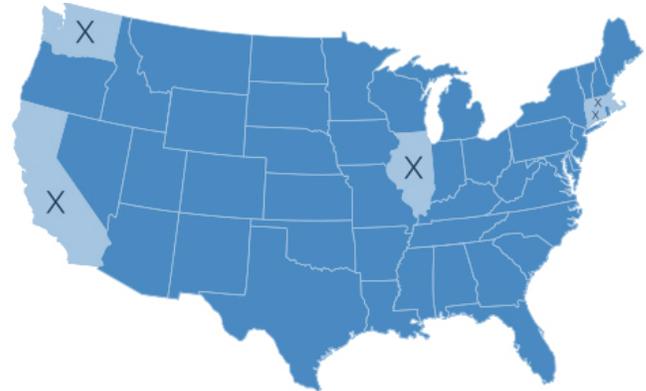
which means you gain more candidates that are potential top performers. With more candidates in the potential high-performer talent pool, you can be more selective. Instead of hiring at a 3 to 1 ratio, many recruiters operating a virtual model can hire at a 10 to 1 ratio or even better. To take advantage of an increased talent pool, you do need to understand what a top performer in your company is like. A data-driven hiring model can help you achieve this insight.



The other key benefit to the virtual model is the ability to optimize your recruiting efforts. For each candidate that completes your process, you can match them to all of your contact center job families and call types. This enables you to save significant recruiting expense, improve the chances of a candidate being hired by your organization, and improve overall fill time.

Tip 6: Research employment laws, costs, and regulations associated with individual states

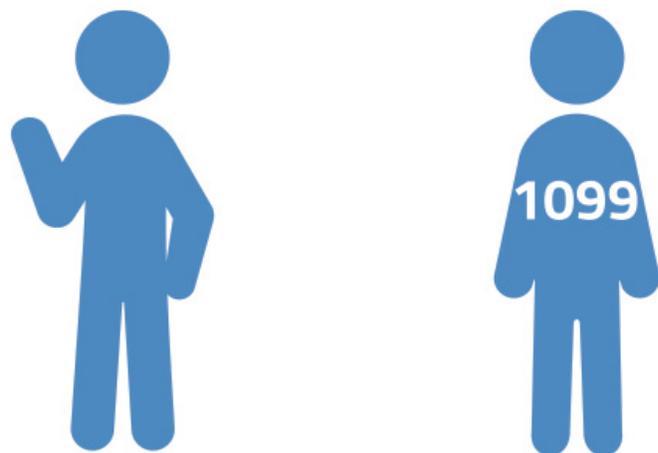
The United States offers mini-labs on employment laws, costs, etc. Several states are now avoided due to excessive costs to employers. California is one state often cited. Changes to minimum wage requirements are also causing some companies to eliminate certain states. Make sure to understand the costs and regulations associated with each state so you can focus your sourcing spend on the most attractive markets and reduce your employment risk.



Some companies set-up recruiting zones that cover large geographic areas but still small enough so that recruiting teams can focus concentrated resources for advertising, local recruiting events, and other creative ways to take a virtual process and create engagement and candidate interaction.

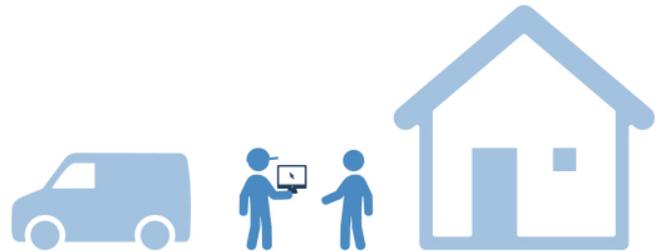
Tip 7: Determine if you should follow a Contractor or Employee Model

Most remote agent programs use an employee only model for many reasons but primarily because these organizations want their home agents to be modeled exactly like their brick and mortar employees. Employing home agents directly eliminates many concerns with independent contractor status and requirements. If you are considering a contractor model make sure to research potential legal issues with this model including searching court cases to understand specific legal risks with a contractor model.



Tip 8: Determine if you will provide a computer or require your employee to provide their own computer

You will need to determine your company policy on providing a computer to the new hire or requiring them to purchase or use their existing computer. This has a number of technical and financial implications including compensation and tax benefits. When the home agent model was just beginning to gain traction in the contact center market, most employers required their employees to provide their own computer. Recruiters used computer diagnostic tools to evaluate the “production readiness” of a job candidate’s personal computer. Now, more companies are providing computers in order to create standardization and reduce compliance risk and costs.



Tip 9: Research flexible work shifts

The ability to match call patterns with worker availability offers companies that embrace home agent models significant financial payback. Increased utilization of split and staggered work shifts at home (often several a day), attracts high-caliber employees to customer contact positions, while sharply matching arrival patterns of voice and non-voice work in very targeted increments. The net result is a significant labor cost savings.



About FurstPerson

Since 1997, FurstPerson has helped global companies with the challenge of identifying reliable, high performing candidates for their customer-facing jobs. FurstPerson may be the only assessment provider that is 100% focused on designing and developing assessment tools for customer contact jobs, spanning contact centers, hospitality, field services, sales, retail, and back-office jobs.

FurstPerson's goal is to change the way leading companies think about, evaluate, and hire frontline talent. After all, the right talent is essential to delivering an extraordinary customer experience. That's why FurstPerson partners with each customer to design a competitively differentiating solution that produces measurable and lasting value.

FurstPerson helps companies through one of three product and service offerings:

- **FurstPerson SmartGuide^(TM)** - Interview platform so that you can deliver Better Interviews Anytime Anywhere^(TM)
- **FurstPerson Express** - Web-based talent selection toolkit designed for small and medium sized businesses
- **FurstPerson Enterprise** - Web-based, customizable talent selection tools and services designed for global firms that have unique hiring needs

Connect with FurstPerson:

