

Flexible work and contact centres

Attracting and retaining talent is an industry challenge for customer contact centres. Providing work location flexibility, such as working from home, is one way companies can realise the benefits of flexible work.

INSIGHTS

- Allowing work from home as an option can help retain customer service staff
- Technology solutions are already available to enable customer contact agents to work from home
- Domestic internet speeds are critical, and should be tested first
- Regular formal and informal face time is important to support collaboration and avoid isolation

Over one third of 150 Australian contact centres surveyed in 2017 offer work from home as an option for longer-serving staff who perform well. Another third is actively considering introducing this option.¹

Working from home (WFH) can give customer contact agents autonomy. This has added value when these employees' roles are otherwise structured by set targets and processes. Autonomy helps to alleviate negative emotions felt by customer service employees doing stressful work².

Concern about accountability can be a barrier for managers to support flexible work models. The KPI-driven role of a customer contact agent removes this barrier, making it easier to track productivity of people working off-site.

Medibank ran a pilot in 2015 to test the potential of introducing work from home. A spokesperson for Medibank said; "Its success has made this an ongoing work option for our longer-serving staff."

Many of these people live in regional locations, beyond easy commuting distance to the central Melbourne contact centre. Employees working from home save time, and find it easier to manage other life changes, such as returning to work after parental leave.

These employee benefits translate into business benefits: "Staff turnover is much lower with our WFH staff than for our Melbourne contact centre. Staff retention and the ongoing corporate knowledge are valuable outcomes for Medibank" said the Medibank spokesperson.

MYOB is another company that supports work from home for some of its customer centre team. The option is offered as an ongoing temporary basis and is reviewed each quarter. Tim Williams, MYOB's Contact Centre Manager, says he has also seen the benefits of staff retention and productivity gains.

¹ [SMAART Recruitment 2017 Contact Centre Leaders Survey](#)

² [Cooper, 2016, The Key to Happiness at Work Isn't Money it's Autonomy, Quartz Journal](#)

Medibank and MYOB have set up their technology systems to enable remote use of their customer service platforms.

In an environment where response times are critical, consideration must be given to internet speeds at home. Performing an internet speed test is a necessary part of setting up people for effective work from home, alongside other assessments such as the suitability of any work space.

Technology tools can support team collaboration and encourage positive communication between team leaders and contact agents who are working from home. Instant messaging, Skype and even video calls using Facetime or similar can help encourage interactivity.

Meeting in person remains important to avoid isolation. Both companies build in regular office time, fortnightly or monthly, for WFH staff.

Working from home is not for everyone, many people want to be part of an ongoing team environment, but it is a valuable addition to a suite of offerings for employees, even those who work in customer contact centres.

For more information on workplace tools, visit the member's only section of the Connect website, connectmacpark.com