

White Paper

Taming Contact Center Workload



How can you keep escalating workload from affecting ***your*** callers?

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Contacts centers are more complex—and critically important—than ever. Over the last twenty years, contact centers have expanded their scope to encompass a diverse set of roles and services—from inbound contact centers, scheduling centers, and technical support, to outbound notification centers, sales, and billing operations.

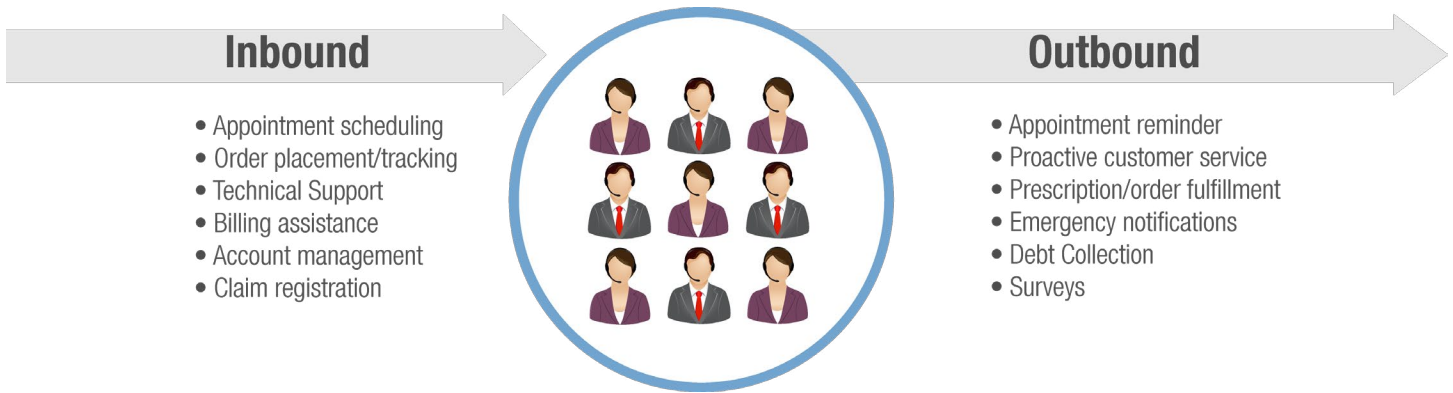


Figure 1. Contact Center operations continue to grow more complex as they add services.

More contact centers than ever.

Demand for contact center services is on the rise. Why? There are many possible drivers for this growing demand. Organizations are increasingly focused on delivering high-quality customer experiences. Customers want faster service. New marketing and advertising initiatives may drive inbound inquiries. There’s also a strong trend towards onshoring contact center services. Whatever the reason, contact center staffing levels are rising at a considerable rate.

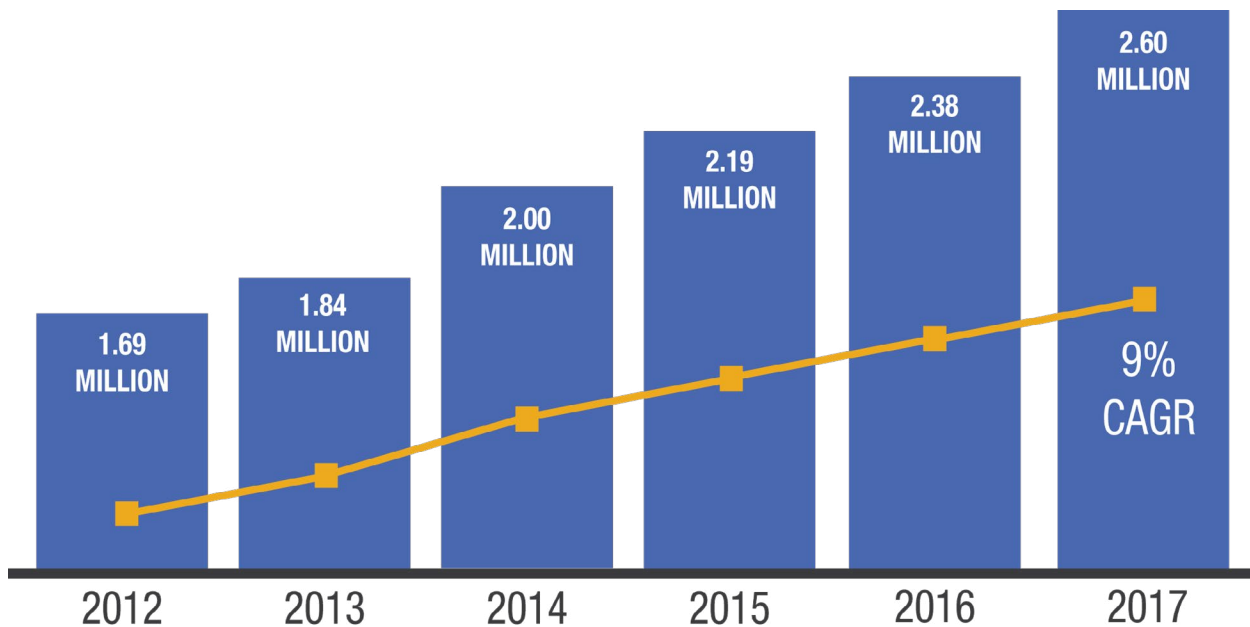


Figure 2. There are 41,500 contact centers in the United States alone, employing more than 2,595,990 workers, a 9% Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) over 2012.

It's important to note that the growing use of digital communication channels (email, text, social, chat, etc.) to engage with customers and satisfy their needs hasn't decreased the workload in the contact center. In fact, expanded channels and our *always on* culture have only added considerable workload to the contact center. New channels require infrastructure investment and ongoing management. Plus, they require constant monitoring and lightning-fast response—just like the most commonly used interaction channel, the telephone.

Higher workload creates friction.

Excessive workload in the contact center has far-reaching repercussions that can negatively impact customer satisfaction, staff morale, and operations. Peak call periods and unexpected spikes in interactions will always be a challenge at contact centers. However, the constant onslaught of a high workload is a daunting day-to-day reality for many contact center professionals. Even the most experienced and battle-hardened agent or manager will find it hard to deliver excellent service to callers when facing these common challenges:

Stress. Relentless queues and interactions, complex requests, upset customers, and other influences create a stressful, unhealthy atmosphere—one that can lead to depression, high blood pressure, and other health issues. Stress at work can filter into home and family life, amplifying the problem even more.

Conflict. Stressful environments inevitably lead to increased personnel conflict in the contact center, due to short tempers, personality issues, resentment, or other detrimental dynamics. In short, a pressure-cooker environment brings out the worst in any group of individuals, even those who are completely committed to their work.

Errors. Maximum workloads increase errors and mistakes in the contact center—impacting appropriate scheduling, infrastructure management, customer interaction, notation, call resolution, and much more.

Reduced Productivity. A continuous, non-stop workload can eventually cause burnout for even the most committed and hard-working contact center employee—regardless of their role.

Systemic affects on contact center communities.

While traditionally contact center workload discussions center on agent performance and the corresponding impact on customer satisfaction and revenue generation, agents are by no means the only community that can suffer from high workload. There are also managers, IT resources — and most importantly, **callers** — to take into consideration. Lack of perspective on caller workload is so common, in fact, that many of the solutions put in place to relieve stress on the contact center actually just transfer the burden of effort on to callers.

Here's how high workload affects a broader set of roles within the contact center:

Callers. The impact of workload on callers is significant. Though they are the ultimate customer, callers who dial into—and rely on—your contact center, are often overlooked when examining contact center workload. They shouldn't be. The voice channel is frequently jammed with customers—who waste time and effort on hold queues, get frustrated with limited menus and options, have to repeat their requests over and over, and generally experience customer dissatisfaction. For many, calling into some organizations can be seen as a dreaded chore rather than a quick and painless exercise, causing irreparable brand harm.

Agents. Higher workload can complicate and stress out this primary customer-facing contact center role. Contributors include unceasing call queues, irate callers upset from waiting on hold or dealing with frustrating IVRs, strict interaction and call resolution processes, and higher service level mandates coming down from managers.

Managers. Vital to an efficient contact center, managers are also adversely affected by higher workloads, which complicate scheduling, reporting, customer satisfaction scoring, hiring and firing, government policy adherence, and other important managerial duties.

IT Resources. It’s easy to overwhelm an already-burdened IT department, especially when other projects and tasks can take precedence. Additions to their workload include adding new communications channels, shifting infrastructure requirements, security concerns, hardware and software maintenance—plus solution management and ongoing tuning tasks.

To put these factors into perspective, let’s take a quick look at a sample call process and the different types of workload at play -- even for just the initial portion of the call:

	Action	Workload Impact
1.	Caller selects service line to dial into	Caller may need to query websites, Google search, bills, and more to find the right number.
2.	Caller dials into service line	Caller may encounter hold times, or slow and unresponsive auto attendant menus and traditional (and frustrating) push-button IVRs.
3a.	Caller interacts with live agent	<p>Caller may have dialed into wrong line, and will have to repeat request to multiple agents.</p> <p>Agent must triage caller’s need (which may be for a different service line or skill), and may face continuously high call loads leading to stress and lost morale.</p> <p>Manager must staff sufficiently to meet peak call load demands, while pushing staff to meet or maintain service level targets.</p>
3b.	Caller interacts with auto attendant or IVR	<p>Caller may endure menus, instructions, or push button IVRs, and may not be able to reach the appropriate resource; high potential for caller opt-out or selecting the first option and connecting to an incorrect resource.</p> <p>Agent must deal with callers irate from long IVR interactions, and may have to triage the call and transfer to the correct service line or destination.</p> <p>Manager may contend with caller complaints and demoralized agents.</p> <p>IT Staff must manage and maintain auto attendant or IVR through ongoing tuning, pronunciation verification, and directory management.</p>

What can ease the burden?

Higher workloads aren't going away. Customers expect more, now. And their demands will only increase. Luckily for today's contact centers, new solutions can help streamline contact center operations and interactions, deliver better experiences to customers, and ease workload for all.

Speech self-service solutions—not the frustrating phone trees of traditional IVRs—bring a broad array of benefits to the contact center that reduce the many types of workload.

These solutions enable callers to simply say their request in their own words, then quickly get them to the answer they need or the agent who can help them best. Callers no longer must choose from a limited numbers of potentially misaligned options that may not cover their specific request. Faster and more simple engagement with callers increases self-service rates, reduces the call load to agents, and can reduce the critical measurement of average handle time (AHT). With advanced but simple-to-use speech self-service solutions, callers no longer refuse to engage or dive for the 0 button.



Figure 3. Speech self-service solutions benefit callers *and* the contact center.

With these powerful benefits at work in your contact center, workload for all parties becomes more manageable, caller experiences become a brand asset, and contact center capacity increases. Leading contact centers are already using these proven solutions every day to make their operations more efficient, dependable, and smooth. It's a win-win for all roles involved—and for your overall organization.

Consider the benefits speech self-service solutions can bring to the aforementioned workload communities:

Callers. Callers experience fast-and-easy interactions, no menus or options to wade through, immediate self-service or connection to the right agent, and fewer transfers and repeating of information. They get exactly what they need —faster and easier than with the frustrating phone trees and limited menus of traditional IVRs.

Agents. Reduced hold times and no frustrating IVRs mean less time defusing irate callers and faster call resolutions for agents. And with 30-50% less calls to deal with, service levels can be reached with existing staff, who can enjoy a calmer and less frantic work environment.

Managers. Lower call load and streamlined operations mean that managers can stop worrying as much about staffing, hiring, and turnover. Faster and easier interactions significantly reduce complaints in your contact center. And greater reporting and analytics help managers make informed decisions that foster further improvements.

IT Resources. Outsourced speech self-service removes the burden of solution management from busy IT staff. Business continuity applications keep the voice channel (and the contact center) open in the case of emergencies or unforeseen events, allowing IT to breathe a little bit easier

Tame escalating workloads now.

Contact centers are complicated, time-dependent, mission-critical operations vital to customer satisfaction. So nothing is going to take all the work out of their workload. But taming workflow can eliminate the pressure and make work (and life) easier for all personnel. Speech self-service solutions make it happen with technology that reduces workload for agents, managers, IT—and the most important group, your callers.

To learn more about the benefits of outsourced caller self-service for enterprise, contact Parlance at 1-888-700-6263, visit www.parlancecorp.com, or email info@parlancecorp.com.

About the Author

Mark Bedard is Director of Marketing at Parlance — caller advocates on a mission to make it easier for callers to engage with today's busy organizations, enterprises, and businesses.



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