

## FORECAST FOCUS



### Choosing the Right Workforce Management Metrics

By Tiffany LaReau Human Numbers

*Are you using the most effective WFM metrics for your contact center environment? Four key metrics that can generate notable improvements.*

Most call center managers are familiar with the term “eighty-thirty” because it represents a common service level goal, which breaks down into a literal definition of: 80% of calls answered within a 30-second threshold.

Although there is no industry standard to benchmark service levels, there are definitely universal factors that drive both the percent answered, as well as how fast they are answered. The 80/30 service level goal became widespread among centers because it is a number that feels like it would represent adequate levels of being productive without a lot of leftover, inefficient overstaffing.

The problem with the 80/30 service level is that it became outdated too fast, and stopped producing the right results. For example, once call centers started handling webchats and emails, they turned into *contact* centers, and the 80/30 rules no longer applied. When contact centers began benchmarking themselves against their competition in the same industry, service levels got competitive. And when customers’ patience and tolerance levels became a factor, service levels migrated again, finding the right balance between the customer’s happiness level versus the proper financial budget levels.

The evolution into a mature, world-class contact center does not stop here. Making good choices on what service goal to use is a great place to start, but you can generate even more improvements by turning a critical eye to other metrics. The following are a few examples, along with key considerations as you work with your reports.

#### **Forecast Accuracy**

The deviation of the forecast from the actuals represent how the caller behavior is changing compared to the forecast basis. When

measuring this deviation, the first thing to consider is the frequency of the forecast/forecasting process. Interval data should be reforecasted weekly, while daily and weekly data should be reforecasted every 15 days, and monthly data should be reforecasted once per month. Anything less frequent is going to produce less accurate results, and this becomes very visible when compared with a forecasting baseline.

The desirable forecasting accuracy percentage will be relative to both the length of time being reviewed, and the size of the group. Bigger chunks of time have more averages to smooth things out, so they should have stricter goals. Monthly results should be tighter than weekly or daily numbers, and interval results should have the most flexibility of all. Larger volume groups, especially older ones with more stable call drivers, should produce tighter results than small groups with unknown external factors.

#### **Handle Time**

Handle time is a metric that tells a great story about current affairs in the center. There are really four discretionary components to handle time (see the graphic below).

Ring time is important because if the call goes through an IVR and now it’s ringing at someone’s desk, it’s still being counted as part of the toll cost, so the center is paying for it. If one agent answers his call on the second ring, but another answers on the sixth ring, that difference in service should be captured (especially if they ring out). This doesn’t apply to centers using auto-answer, but it is helpful to isolate problems if the abuse is intentional. Hold time also tells its own story, and it may need to be isolated, too.

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You can pull extra value out of forecasting handle time by applying seasonality—on a big-scale by comparing winter to summer, and on a smaller scale by comparing first shift to third shift. Even the day of week can impact handle time, at least for weekend versus weekday.

Handle time is a combination of both the callers' behavior and the agents' behavior. In some cases, both of these can be altered through education, self-service tools or service level results. When a customer is not spending time on the front end of the call complaining about how long it took to get to a human, the talk time may be lowered. On the other hand, if self-service tools are put into production to handle all the "easy" calls, talk time may increase. The ability to comprehend what handle times are saying is key to understanding the nature of the call center agent's culture. Handle times are also a big factor in determining the next metric, schedule adherence.

### Schedule Adherence

Schedule adherence is a trickier metric to deal with because it can be open to a lot of interpretation. The first step is to decide how to write the calculation. There are several options.

Option 1: Compare the total logged in time to the total scheduled time. If someone is scheduled to work eight hours, did they only log in for 7.5?

Option 2: Compare the times logged in to the times agents were scheduled to be logged in. Better than Option 1, because it combines the total login time plus the arrival and departure times.

Option 3: Compare the times logged in to the time scheduled to be logged in, but add some leniency for centers with AHT over five minutes. Even better than Option 2, because, after all, do you really want an employee hanging up on a customer in the middle of a call just because it's time for their scheduled break?

To determine the leniency factor here, take your AHT and multiple it by 1.5. That is the "grace period" to allow before dinging someone on the schedule adherence rate. So, for example, if AHT is eight minutes, and someone is scheduled to go to lunch

at 1 p.m., but he gets stuck on a call, his schedule adherence does not begin to count against him until 1:12 p.m. In my experience, using this 1.5x method has reduced the amount of manual exceptions that I had to enter for the reason "still on call" by 99%. Getting your WFM software to recognize these custom thresholds is another story.

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### Abandons

Abandoned calls are tricky because they can add a layer of deception when they are completely absorbed at the Calls Offered level without any prior cleaning. A caller may abandon for any number of reasons, for instance:

1. They accidentally misdialed and realized it once they heard the automated recording;
2. They got impatient and tried another form of contact;
3. They were interrupted while waiting for an agent to answer, so they hung up;
4. They were forced to abandon because the center didn't have enough trunks open to handle the volume;
5. They had a technical phone problem that disconnected them; or
6. They got impatient and decided to call back later.

Callers abandoning for reasons 1 and 2 are not going to show up again as an "answered call" later on. But callers abandoning for reasons 3, 4, 5 and 6 are likely to show up again as a repeated call. And depending on the urgency of their request, they may have multiple abandon attempts before being answered.


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There is a semi-linear effect of abandons versus ASA (average speed of answer). The abandon effect demonstrates that longer ASAs result in more abandons. If you can determine the ratio of that effect for your specific call group, it will help you to decide how to properly clean the abandons, resulting in more precise forecasts.

I don't know of any call reports that distinguish between the reasons for abandons yet. I've heard people say that it's a bad practice to forecast abandons, but it is reasonable to expect that a small percentage of abandons are outside of your control (e.g., Reason 1, misdials; and Reason 3, they were interrupted by their doorbell). It's even an accepted practice in some centers to exclude this small percentage of abandons from being measured in their service level goals (I'll go into more detail about this in next month's article on service levels versus ASA).

Knowing the abandon effect rate will give you another mathematical element to validate your staffing needs. The next time someone asks you to tell them what would happen if they took away three headcount, you will be able to show the full impact of staffing decisions (and lack of decisions). 

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Online Resource

This issue is available online at: [September 2010, Contact Center Pipeline](http://www.contactcenterpipeline.com/t-CCP201009.aspx)

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