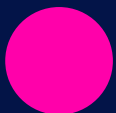




# Recruitment and retention in your contact centre

A guide to recruiting the best talent for your contact centre and managing your workforce effectively to retain staff.



# Recruitment and retention in your contact centre

A recent survey of almost 20,000 employers worldwide found that nearly 7 in 10 companies were experiencing difficulties in hiring, a figure that represents [a 15 year high](#).

In the face of such a challenging recruitment climate, the contact centre industry is in a particularly tough position. Attrition in the UK industry - the rate at which people leave their jobs every year - has been above 20% on average for almost two decades.

That is one person in five leaving their contact centre job every year. And that 20 year average may even understate the current situation, with one US study suggesting

*40% of agents plan on leaving roles within the next 12 months.*

Such high rates of attrition translate into substantial costs for employers.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development outlines [where the costs come from](#). The most obvious ones are:

- Administration of the resignation
- Recruitment and selection costs
- Induction training for the new employee

Hidden costs are more difficult to calculate but more serious in the long term and include the drop in productivity of new employees relative to experienced staff who have left.

Faced with these challenges, how should contact centre operators go about getting new staff and keeping existing ones?



## TOP TIP

Find out our top tips for reducing staff turnover on page 7

# Why is recruitment and retention getting even harder?

There is a widespread perception that contact centres can be a demanding environment to work in, particularly for agents. This has a knock-on effect on recruitment, with recent [UK research confirming](#) that "Entry level roles such as customer service agents and claims handlers are the most difficult roles to fill".

If entry level roles are difficult to recruit for, operators are then hit with the double-whammy of a high turnover of staff. Many of the reasons are long-standing and well-known, including a perceived lack of career progression.

The shift to homeworking in response to the pandemic has added another complication when trying to understand and reduce staff turnover, because younger workers, who are among the most likely to apply for entry level jobs, can be the ones with most to gain from being in an office environment.

The youngest workers, so-called Generation Z (born after 1997), which includes recent school and university leavers, are the cohort who most want to spend time with colleagues and whose mental health is most likely to be affected by the potential isolation of home working, according to [IPSOS research](#).

Isolation from colleagues due to remote working can also have a negative effect on training and staff development.

In a survey,

*77% of agents felt that shadowing experienced colleges and hands-on training with guidance was better than working through a manual.*



## TOP TIP

Relook at your onboarding process and include hands-on shadowing with a colleague alongside training manuals and videos. This helps with team building and makes sure new team members don't feel alone at the beginning of their role.

A high turnover rate of staff can quickly become a never ending cycle. Research has highlighted that:

**70%**

of employees say a friend at work is crucial to job satisfaction.

**50%**

said it gives them a stronger connection to their workplace. When an employee leaves, the chances are that their closest workmates will follow them.

# Recruiting good staff

To recruit good contact centre staff in such a tough environment, it won't be enough to post vacancies on a few jobs sites and wait for the CVs to roll in. Recruitment strategies have to be proactive, and mix and match different approaches.

How will you stand out from other local employers and reach people who might not yet be considering a job as an agent?



## A fresh pair of eyes

There are specialist contact centre recruitment agencies. Why not invite one or two of them in for a meeting, or, more likely these days, invite them to an online meeting, and hear how they interpret the challenge?



## Highlight progression opportunities

One of the main reasons contact centre agents give for quitting is the lack of progression opportunities. However, the contact centre industry does promote from within, and managers who started as agents are not uncommon. Why not tell those stories? Not only are team leader and manager roles often filled by former agents, but there are other parts of the business that agents can move into.



## Turn a perceived weakness into a strength

Contact centres are often seen as stop-gap jobs, but if progression opportunities are properly highlighted, then that can become a strength. Not everyone knows what they want to do after school or university, and a job as an agent is a way to step straight into the world of work, with on-the-job training from the start and a chance to weigh up other roles in the same organisation.



## Flexible working, for those who want it

Working from home has become a fact of life during the pandemic, with two-thirds of operators supporting a combination of remote and on-site working in summer 2021. While flexible working will help you attract and retain staff overall, be aware that it is [less of an incentive for younger workers](#).



## Values matter for younger workers

In 2025, the youngest workers, [Generation Z, will make up 27% of the workforce](#). Business magazine Forbes reports that these new workers are more values driven than their predecessors when considering which companies they want to work for.

# Expert Opinion

**Katy Forsyth, Founder and Director of contact centre recruitment agency, Red Recruitment, shares her top tips for recruiting and retaining contact centre staff.**



Katy is the Founder and Director of Red Recruitment, as well as the Director of the South West Contact Centre Forum. Founded in 2001, Katy's contact centre recruitment business offers both temporary and permanent staffing solutions to businesses across the UK. Katy also provides consulting services to contact centres and was a previous Council Member of The REC (Recruitment and Employment Confederation).

## 1. How can contact centres make sure they attract and retain the right people?

**“** *We've found that when you ask the leaver, the number one reason for leaving is poor training and onboarding.*

Why is this the case? Quite simply because right now there is so much competition from other jobs and other industries that anything less than great onboarding will drive leavers.

Once candidates find a new role, 76% of them **do not** take their CVs off of the job boards, some because they forget, most because they want to make sure their new job is right for them before they do.

Statistics published recently by one of the UK's top 3 job boards, and a leader in contact centre jobs, tells us that,

***contact centre candidates on average get 59 contacts a day from recruiters and secure up to 13 offers.***

That data reconciles closely with Red Recruitment's data.

So, if your onboarding falls short in any way, candidates are very easily tempted out, especially in the early days of the job.

### **Common complaints from candidates about onboarding are:**

- Poor pre-start communication
- Boring days 1 and 2 of training
- Information overload, not interactive enough training
- Too little one-to-one support throughout training
- Poor support from IT with home set-ups

**”**

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## 2. In a crowded market, how can contact centres ensure their job ads stand out?

“ *Be clear, state the obvious, and let money talk!* ”

Let's start with the awkward one - money! Always specify a base salary. A vacancy with a fixed and realistic salary will receive 90% more applications than one that is hidden or negotiable.

Be clear when it comes to location. Google cite location as the single most important factor in ranking a vacancy, so the more specific, the better.

Go with the obvious and use well-oiled job titles. No one is searching for a Sales Ninja!

### Optimise your adverts

Ensuring your adverts rank highly with search engines and job board algorithms is critical to their success. Around 67% of candidates report starting their job search in this way. You'll need to don a marketing cap and utilise the basic principles around search engine optimisation (SEO) to ensure your adverts compete.

Well optimised adverts rely on a good range of 'keywords' spread throughout the advert copy. To compile a list of

keywords, think about the terms your candidates are likely to include on their CV; skills, qualifications, job titles etc. Don't over-saturate your advert with keywords but a select few and subtly stick them on repeat whilst maintaining a healthy ratio of keywords to word count.

### The perks of the job

Candidate priorities are constantly evolving but with job vacancies at a 20-year high in recent months, there has never been a more significant time to familiarise yourself with the employee benefits your company has to offer

Unsurprisingly, homeworking and flexible working top the chart for desirability with application rates up 7,043% on fixed location roles. However, commute times, incentives, relaxed dress-codes, the office environment, company culture, development opportunities and reputation will all resonate differently with candidates, and the more you have to offer, the greater your candidate pool. ”

# Tactics for reducing staff turnover

Once you have found and recruited great people, you want them to stay. Here are some of the ways you can reduce staff turnover.



## Ask people why?

The best way to keep people is to find out why they leave. Conduct exit interviews, and make it as easy as possible for people to be honest, even if you might not like what you hear. That means the exit interview shouldn't be conducted by the agent's line manager, and you should make it clear that the answers won't affect future references.



## Make sure people know how they can progress and learn

Is it clear to agents how they can progress within the organisation? Do they know what is expected of them in order to be considered for new roles? Do they have opportunities to upskill? Make this clear to staff members in order to give them a clear path and something to work towards.

Giving agents opportunities to increase their knowledge and learn new things is vital. A programme of regular training achieves two goals. It helps staff to be more successful, and it shows them that you take their career progression seriously. In an uncertain world, skills are an employee's insurance against obsolescence. Help agents attain new levels of competence and they won't feel the need to find them elsewhere.

## Team building

Employees feeling part of a team is one of the signs of a company with high retention rates. Team building can begin on day one for new employees with a well thought through onboarding process. As new agents settle into their careers, team building should continue. This means making people feel valued and enhancing the social aspects of work.

Time is often tight in busy contact centres, but giving agents opportunities to meet and communicate with their colleagues is essential for morale. With remote working, social breaks in the kitchen and quick conversations across the desk are no longer possible, so it's vital to put regular time aside for colleagues to get to know each other. If having a friend at work is critical to job satisfaction, then opportunities for staff to make social connections can be a driver for better retention rates.

# Tactics for reducing staff turnover



## Improve communication

“ Poor communication of change leading to insecurity is a key driver of attrition. Agents don't like hearing about changes through Chinese whispers and these whispers invariably become much greater issues than they actually are.

'I'm leaving because my hours are changing and I won't like them', 'I'm leaving because I think we're going back to the office in December and I don't want to.'

So often, these are assumptions from rumours, people fearing the worst from little information, assumptions that often turn out to be wrong. Clear communication stops unnecessary attrition. No matter what the message, it's better received if it's delivered in a well-managed way. ”

## — Katy Forsyth

Founder and Director of contact centre recruitment agency, Red Recruitment.



## Show younger workers that values matter to you as a business

You could support local charities and community groups, and why not let agents nominate where the money goes? This needn't break the bank. A donation of new gardening tools for a community orchard, for example, could make a huge difference while creating positive word-of-mouth marketing for your business. And that will help with hiring the right people in the future.

In addition, show that your values also include protecting the wellbeing of your workforce. That might mean appointing a mental health champion, or arranging mental health awareness training. Team leaders should use regular one-to-ones to ask agents about stress and workload, and look out for signs they might be struggling. Show you care about the wellbeing of employees and you'll be rewarded with greater loyalty.



## Give agents the tools to do the job well

It can be frustrating to have the right training and motivation to do a great job, then feel let down by the software you have to use. In one survey 80% of agents said having up-to-date software was critical to their engagement with the job, but only 30% said it was available in their current job. That gap speaks for itself.



# Expert Opinion



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## What are your top recruiting strategies for contact centres to implement in 2022?

**“ 1. Re-model your recruitment process to make sure it's getting the best results given your requirements and the market.**

Consider:

- What will give the best candidate journey to retain talent in the process against stiff competition.
- What about your current process actually adds value to your recruitment decision? Get rid of any unnecessary steps. Long or clunky processes do not succeed in this market.
- How can you make your process quicker? Speed wins in this market.
- What skill set does your contact centre need for 2022 and beyond? Does your process select this?

**2. Look at your social streams for attraction and recruitment.**

Over 50% of today's UK contact centre population are Gen Z who live and work effectively by social media and reviews.

When they are deciding on which job opportunity they prefer they will consider company reviews (Glassdoor etc) and will look at the main company social streams. Judging whether the company is forward thinking, modern and good to its people and the community.

Consider the lead social sites for this generation; Tik Tok, Instagram and even LinkedIn. Modern, up to date video content should lead; this will be most well received and observed.

**3. Observe and train your recruiters**

A simple but effective tip is to mystery shop your recruitment process. Think about how you would feel if you were an entry level candidate with lots of choice.

- Are the processes and the interviewers warm and friendly?
- Do they sell the role and company to you?
- Do you understand what the role is at the end of the process?
- Would you want to stay in the process if you had lots of other options?
- Does the process take too long? How many other options do you get throughout?
- Has the process allowed you to show the best version of you or has it tried to trip you up?

After mystery shopping, train your recruiters to bring out the best in candidates. To welcome them and engage them in the process and make sure the process is supported by great, social communication. Keep in touch by WhatsApp rather than, or as well as email.

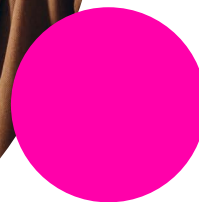
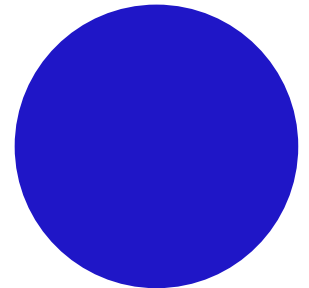
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# Putting it all together

The fact is, recruiting and retaining good agents isn't easy at the best of times, and it may be particularly difficult during a time that some have dubbed the **"Great Resignation"**.

But contact centre businesses can help themselves in this regard, creating the conditions that make them more appealing to a broader range of potential employees. Highlighting opportunities for progression, offering flexible working for those who want it and creating a caring and values-led environment are clearly key ingredients in any recruitment and retention strategy.

In other words, contact centre work may have an image problem, but confound expectations and you can attract and retain the professional workforce your business needs.



# About MaxContact

**MaxContact is a Contact Centre Software provider offering secure, feature-rich and cloud-based customer engagement solutions that drive productivity and efficiency.**

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Our contact centre experts continually develop our inbound, outbound and omnichannel services. All our solutions are based in the cloud and hosted on Microsoft Azure, maximising security and flexibility.

