

MYSTERY CALLING

Dialing up your contact
center performance

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IPSOS VIEWS

GAME CHANGERS





Driving a positive customer experience across all channels is critical to any organization. Despite the growing use of new digital technologies, the telephone experience can still be a make-or-break moment for many customers. For the majority of large, multi-channel organizations, the contact center is key in ensuring that callers receive a great telephony experience as consistently and efficiently as possible. This experience will ultimately drive greater customer loyalty, higher profits, and better returns for shareholders.

Increasingly, contact centers are handling inquiries that customers are either unable to undertake face-to-face or are unwilling to conduct digitally; inquiries which are often complex in nature and can, therefore, have a significant impact on the brand if handled poorly. Contact center agents have a huge responsibility to deliver customer experience which matches the expectations set by the brand promise.

Ipsos research¹ shows that almost half (48%) of customers who had suffered a poor contact center experience were dissatisfied with how their issue was addressed. Three in ten of those (dissatisfied with resolution) reported that, as a result, they would stop using the company in question, or use it less.

Avoidable customer churn at the hands of contact centers is estimated to cost US business, alone, \$136 billion per year.²

While many contact centers function well, there is room for improvement. The focus of this paper is to look at the techniques employed to evaluate contact center performance and, in particular, the role of mystery calling in helping to drive organizational performance improvements.



HOW DO ORGANIZATIONS MEASURE CONTACT CENTER PERFORMANCE?

There is a plethora of ways in which organizations measure contact center performance. These include:

- Customer feedback/voice of customer (VoC) surveys.
- Call listening.
- Operational metrics.
- Artificial intelligence (AI) analytics, e.g. real-time speech analytics (RTSAs).
- Call recorded mystery calling.

All of these methodologies have their strengths and weaknesses, and understanding these will allow organizations to use them effectively. The following provides a brief overview of each one.

Figure 1 Comparing measurement options

	Customer Feedback/VoC Surveys	Call Listening	Operational Metrics	AI Analytics	Mystery Calling
Represents voice of the customer (CX/selling focus)	●				●
Covers detail of call content (compliance focus)		●		●	●
Provides logistical metrics (efficiency focus)			●		●
Measures predefined inquiry type (e.g. simple vs. complex)					●
Allows for specific customer profile assessment	●				●
Captures date/time analytics	●	●	●	●	●
Suitable for high volumes	●	●	●	●	●
Enables competitor benchmarking	●				●
Delivers tactical/agent level feedback	●	●	●	●	●
Provides strategic direction	●		●	●	●

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK/VOICE OF CUSTOMER (VOC) SURVEYS

These are direct surveys with customers – in this case, those calling a contact center – to evaluate their experience. A range of techniques can be used, such as IVR-based surveys immediately following a call, to surveys undertaken at a later time, via SMS, for example. These can provide invaluable insights at both a tactical and strategic level, enabling the tracking of performance over time on key metrics, and identification of problem areas and key drivers of performance.

CORE STRENGTH: The true voice of the customer and, where sample sizes permit, the opportunity to provide agent-level feedback, as well as more strategic direction.

WEAKNESSES: May bias towards customers with polarized opinions; those reporting either poor (more likely to respond), or, indeed, extremely good experiences. Such results can, of course, still be extremely valuable, especially when used for tracking purposes.

CALL LISTENING

Call listening is undertaken by most, if not all, contact centers. Typically, internal personnel – usually team leaders or quality managers – listen to actual calls (live or recorded) and provide feedback and coaching to individual agents to improve performance.

CORE STRENGTH: Detailed feedback at an agent-level, covering factors such as script adherence and compliance.

WEAKNESSES: Not an independent assessment; lacking aggregated, strategic insights. No real customer view.



OPERATIONAL METRICS

Again, operational metrics are used by virtually all contact centers to objectively assess factors such as drop-out, waiting time, and average handling time (AHT).

CORE STRENGTH: Detailed, objective metrics aimed at driving efficiencies.


WEAKNESSES: No detail about the actual content of the call, nor do these metrics represent the customer view.

AI ANALYTICS

Essentially, this is high-volume call listening undertaken by artificial intelligence (AI), based on analyzing individual customer-agent discussions. By identifying key words and phrases, this approach is able to determine factors such as complaint levels, first contact resolution (FCR), and customer sentiment. However, despite the advantages of AI, it is impossible to understand exactly what a customer is feeling without asking them.

CORE STRENGTH: High-volume analytics of actual conversations.

WEAKNESSES: Cannot provide the true voice of the customer. While the technologies are improving all the time, and at a rapid rate, there are still such analytics failing to live up to the hype; failing to deliver the nuanced feedback promised, or, indeed, providing misleading data, such as the under- or over-reporting of complaints.



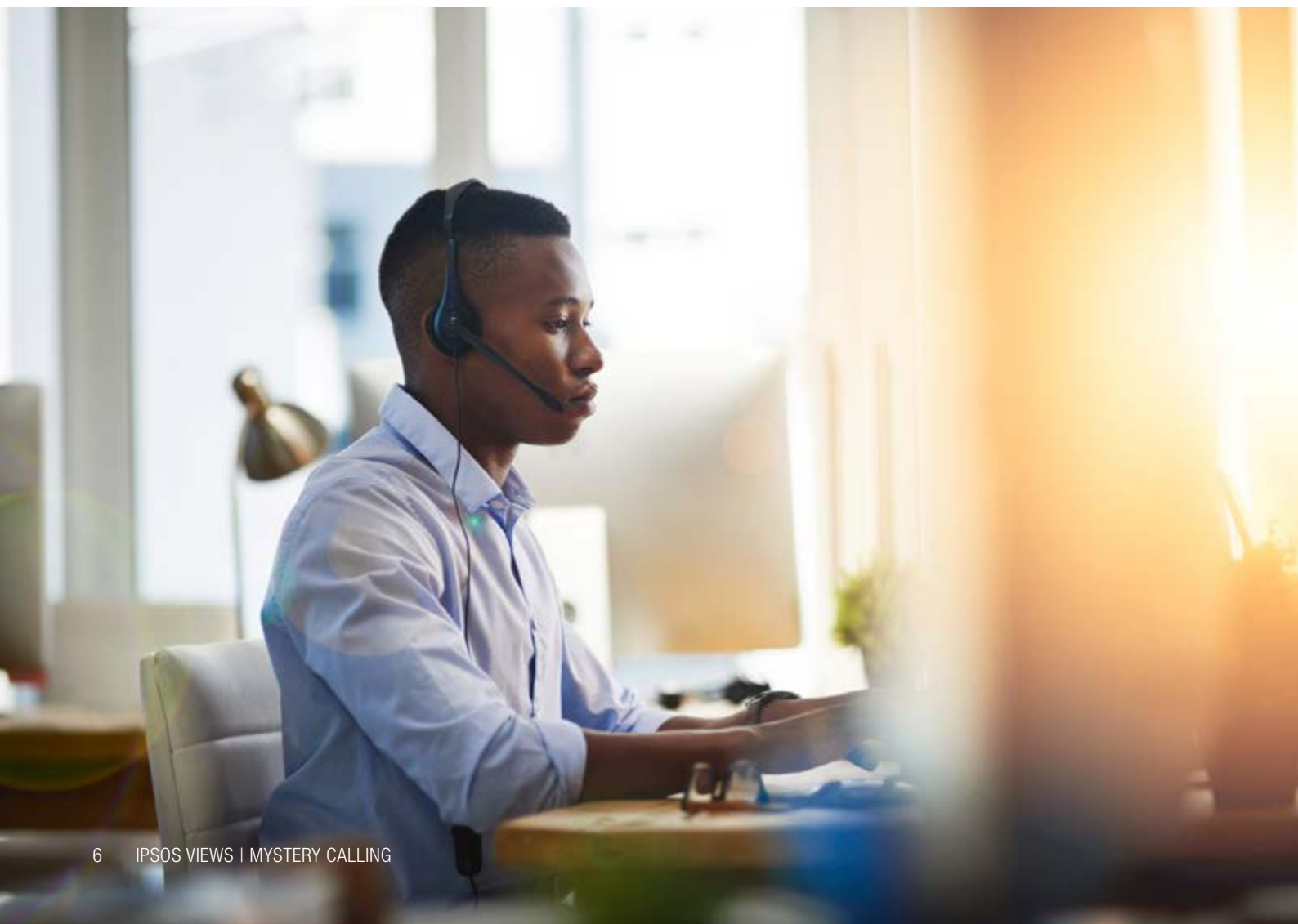
It is naive to think that any one of these methodologies in isolation will meet all evaluation needs and, therefore, understanding how each method complements and adds to the others is key.

THE CASE FOR MYSTERY CALLING

Mystery calling has developed significantly in recent years and has become an integral part of the measurement ecosystem of many organizations, whether that is evaluating a particular channel, or as part of the omnichannel journey evaluation. Mystery calling is unique in enabling organizations to measure the following:

- The customer experience, sales behavior, process efficiencies, and compliance.
- The full end-to-end contact center customer journey from dial-up, through transfers, to call conclusion.
- Detailed, objective feedback of observed agent behaviors, logistical metrics (AHT, on-holds/transfers, IVR systems and waiting times), *and* the more subjective customer view.
- In-depth analytics around the customer experience delivered and an understanding of why agents might behave in different ways.
- A competitor benchmark, where required.

Of course, mystery calling needs to work in conjunction with other measurement methodologies, and a truly effective mystery calling program will be designed around the insights from these approaches; for example, from the VoC program which determines what truly matters to the customer and what will drive the desired customer outcomes. Only by doing this will mystery calling provide the feedback which will allow organizations to improve the handling of customer inquiries and complaints, deliver the desired sales experience, and ensure that agents are compliant and that customer communications are handled as efficiently as they can and should be – in short, to deliver customer experience which will drive improved acquisition rates, share of spend, retention, advocacy, and operational efficiency.



DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE MYSTERY CALLING PROGRAM

There are a number of factors that must be considered when designing an effective mystery calling program in order to ensure that actionable insights are delivered.

SHOPPER PROFILING AND SCENARIOS

For the vast majority of programs, real customers are required, and while their inquiries may not be 100% “genuine,” scenarios will generally be “everyday” scenarios that customers undertake. Therefore, the feedback is as real as possible. A further advantage is that mystery calling also enables the testing of more specific, often niche, inquiries.

No other approach allows both the customer type *and* the scenario to be pre-defined, however, again, it is important that profiles and scenarios are framed around data from other sources, which indicate where challenges lie.

We advise including at least a couple of different scenarios that should be resolved on first contact; as FCR is a strong driver of a positive customer experience. Companies that empower their contact center agents to answer questions swiftly, correctly, and with conviction help win and retain customers.

It is becoming increasingly common to use mystery calling for understanding omnichannel customer journeys, where a customer may begin their inquiry via one channel (e.g. digital), but change to a second or third channel (e.g. telephone) – and the scenarios for testing should be designed accordingly.

THE FEEDBACK MECHANISM AND QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

Mystery calling makes use of very detailed questionnaires – far more detailed than an actual customer would be willing, or indeed able, to complete. This is feasible because: (a) mystery callers know what they are assessing in advance; (b) they can take detailed notes during the conversation; (c) the questionnaire is answered during/directly after the call.

It is important to reiterate that questionnaires must be focused on the factors that matter most. Customer experience-based mystery calling studies should be built around key drivers (as identified from customer feedback), while the likes of compliance or sales-based mystery calling studies should focus more on scripting and specific agent behaviors.

Mystery calling results are increasingly based on analysis of covert recordings of the conversation. The recording of mystery calls allows for true validation *and* is more appropriate for highly detailed analyses, particularly relating to factors such as compliance.

Finally, it is imperative that questions relating to both the shopper profile (e.g. demographics, brand relationship, product holding) and operational metrics (e.g. FCR, IVR routing, call lengths, day of week, time of day) are included, so deep-dive analytics can be undertaken, providing answers to both the “what” and “why.”

SMART SAMPLE DESIGN

Smart sample design is often dependent on budget and, while mystery calling can be a cost-effective measurement tool, this is still a factor to consider. The key things to take into account with sampling design are as follows:

- The size of the contact center operation/number of agents.
- The number and location of individual contact centers.
- The number and nature of scenarios being tested, which may impact day and time calling quotas.
- Whether competitor calls are appropriate or necessary.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but a sufficiently robust and representative sample is necessary for undertaking detailed data analytics.

ANALYTICS

To truly understand: (a) the experience from the customer's point of view; (b) what drives that experience; (c) how factors impact on those drivers, the mystery calling questionnaire, as outlined above, needs to be designed around key drivers and include profiling/logistical metrics. These allow for in-depth analyses pin-pointing problem areas and recommending areas for improvement. In addition, where other internal factors can be included (e.g. locations, agent-level data), an even more detailed understanding of performance can be gained.

Of course ideally, as well as standalone analysis, mystery shopping data should be interrogated as part of a wider data set, including the likes of that from VoC surveys, operational metrics, and indeed financial data, with the goal of building a detailed end-to-end picture of the health of the contact center and the return on investment of improvement initiatives.

IMPACT

A well-designed mystery calling program will deliver business impact at both a tactical and strategic level.

By assessing the full customer journey (both objectively and subjectively), clients are able to understand how operational metrics affect agent performance; and how agent performance impacts the customer. Feedback can be delivered at an individual level to improve performance, as well as being used strategically to drive improvements in operational processes, to ensure that agents are working to the best of their ability across the organization.



UNDERSTANDING THE FULL CUSTOMER JOURNEY TO HELP DELIVER A GREAT CONTACT CENTER CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

SCENARIO

A **major public transport company** wanted to understand where improvements were needed across their contact centers to ensure a great customer experience.

METHODOLOGY

A monthly program of mystery calling, across a wide range of customer inquiries.

RESULTS

Identified specific pain-points including those relating to an ineffective IVR system and poor agent performance. This led to operational system changes and specific training focused on common customer inquiries; resulting in an uplift in performance both in terms of efficiency gains and customer satisfaction.

DRIVING COMPLIANCE

SCENARIO

A **major bank** wanted to ensure that colleagues in contact centers – and branches – were handling inquiries in a compliant fashion. Non-compliance would result in heavy fines and damage corporate and brand reputation.

METHODOLOGY

A program of mystery calling, assessing a range of “financial crime” scenarios, using our mystery callers with experience in this area.

RESULTS

The bank was able to determine levels of compliance and training needs, thus mitigating potentially serious business risks and financial exposure.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF INEFFICIENT AND POOR CALL HANDLING

SCENARIO

A **regulator** wanted to evaluate contact center performance in terms of customer service delivery and efficiency.

METHODOLOGY

An extensive mystery calling program using both typical and unusual/complex customer inquiries to assess helpline service.

RESULTS

Identified inefficiencies caused by unresolved inquiries and overly lengthy calls. The client was able to pinpoint and act on the required training needs, so delivering an improved helpline customer experience, with greater efficiency.

SUMMARY

Are your contact centers consistently delivering great customer experiences which meet your brand and service promises?

- How are you performing in terms of the factors that drive the desired customer behaviors? And what is driving that performance? Are there inconsistencies across the organization?
- How do full omnichannel customer journeys work in practice? And, where is investment needed to ensure a seamless process?
- Are you maximising your sales opportunities while on the phone with customers and prospects?
- Are agents compliant in their interactions with customers, both in terms of meeting brand promises and regulatory requirements?
- How does your contact center perform in the market context and what can you learn from best-in-practice operators?
- How do contact centers perform relative to others in the organization, and what can you operationalize for best-in-practice methods moving forward?

A well-designed mystery calling program will deliver insights that can lead to improvements in all aspects of contact center performance: driving up sales, retention, and advocacy on the back of great customer experience, while protecting the bottom-line thanks to compliant behavior and efficient processes.



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FURTHER READING

<https://www.ipsos.com/en/designing-better-mystery-shopping-programme>

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