



Contact centre outsourcing for Facilities Management

Whether you have your own in-house helpdesk with the latest technology or a team of experienced advisors who know your customers, products and services inside out, the very nature of Facilities Management means you can never be quite sure of demand. You might know when you're definitely going to be busy, even if you can't quantify demand, and you may even know when to expect a lull. But being prepared for both those extremes can mean make or break for your business; the most successful businesses are those which make use of outsourcers to smooth out the peaks and help them manage the unexpected. This 4 step guide offers tips and advice for choosing the right outsourcer to support your service delivery, with the minimum of risk.

Overview

Despite the peaks and troughs of our economy in recent years, the Facilities Management sector has, for the most part, weathered the storm. Despite clients needing to reduce costs, facilities support usually dodges the cost cutting axe as the services provided tend to be business critical. However, no company can afford to ignore its customer care obligations, no matter how entrenched they are in their clients' infrastructure.

The most successful companies have recognised that, to stay ahead of the competition, they have to invest in customer service initiatives that offer true differentiation. Why should their customers continue to buy and recommend products and services if the customer service they receive ranges from, at best, nothing special to, at the very worst, non-existent?

When customers receive a service that is consistent, accurate and helpful no matter when and how they seek support, they will tend to remain your core business. But it is this last point that many businesses struggle with; offering consistent service *whenever and however* the customer makes contact. Putting in place the means to manage every call-out request, service query or new business enquiry has become imperative.

Not many companies have the spare budget to recruit and equip enough staff to work round-the-clock shifts, or from home when inclement weather strikes, but what they do have is access to one of the most buoyant, technologically advanced outsourced contact centre industries in the world with the expertise, staff and technology in place to support and contribute to their growth.

1. Choose an outsourcer with a wide range of industry experience

The technology now used in contact centres is flexible enough to allow a bureau agent to handle a call for a financial services client followed by a web chat request for assistance from a housing association tenant and then manage a call-out for your facilities management mobile contractor. This experience gives your outsourced partner and their agents exposure to best practice from different industries which will help shape the solution for your own contact management requirements. This flexibility stems from the dramatic change in recent years within the contact centre industry; the emphasis on high volume, rapid-fire transactions has gone and the focus is now on creating relationships and becoming a partner to your business. Contact centre agents have become experts in the myriad of channels that customers can choose to use for even the most complex of interactions with any type of businesses. Agent desktops are designed to be intuitive, time-saving and user-friendly so this means your business processes, FAQs and even integration with back office systems can be easily managed by these experts in customer contact, without the need for in-depth knowledge of your technology.

Questions to ask

- Q Who do you work with who has similar requirements to my business?
- Q Who have you worked with for the longest period of time?
- Q What types of calls do your agents enjoy handling?

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2. Choose a provider who can implement a solution with the minimum of delay

An argument often used for dismissing outsourcing as an option for a helpdesk solution is “we wouldn’t be able to set up a service fast enough”. There is a difference between ‘minimum of delay’ and ‘fast’. If a contact centre service outsourcer is promising the Earth for tomorrow, then you probably should worry about how reliable and thorough a service it is going to be. Of course, you may have a disaster recovery situation to manage and the press release is due out tomorrow, in which case speed is of the essence; a good bureau service will be able to quickly set up a simple facility for you to ensure all callers receive a response from a real person, giving you breathing space to manage how the business responds.

But for an on-going helpdesk support and customer service solution, the key phrase is ‘with the minimum of delay’: look for a service provider with defined account set-up and management processes; one which encourages partnership working from day one and expects to include a member of your team in the project management; a provider who won’t need to install new software either at their end or yours to facilitate the service; and, crucially, look for an outsourcer with a pool of long-serving, well-trained and motivated agents who will become part of your team for the long term.

Questions to ask

- Q What is your typical project roll-out schedule for a service similar to mine?
- Q What information and expertise do you need from my business to set up our service?
- Q How long will agents be trained on my account or what training have they received already which will be used for my service?

3. Choose an outsourcer willing to provide real-time access to your service statistics

If you’re considering outsourcing for the first time it might be natural to worry “we’d lose control of our business”. Years ago, outsourcing did involve a great deal of trust. You briefed the agents, you handed over any databases needed and then you hoped it all went according to plan. Today it is very different. With the technology your outsourcing partner will be using, you can, if you so choose, give them access to all the same back office systems you are using so updates are immediate and real-time information on SLAs, account information, servicing history and current issues is available. And it should work both ways; if your outsource partner can access real-time information from your business, then you should be able to see how well they are working for you.

If the information you want on inbound call volumes, specific call recordings or how busy a particular helpdesk line is but “Sue in Customer Services will get that to you on a spreadsheet first thing tomorrow..” you may want to re-think your choice of outsourcer. Because all that information is basic stuff and should be available to you at the drop of a hat and, ideally, via online access. What’s more, most outsourcers’ customer service departments will thank those customers who want this sort of access as it frees up their time to manage the more complex requests that come in.

Perhaps, most importantly, real-time online access means you get to see exactly what your outsource partner is doing for you in terms of calls handled, outbound calls made, call durations, call types received, speed of answer and all the other standard call centre statistics that, after a few months you won’t be so interested in as you will now trust your provider.

Questions to ask

- Q What reports will I get as standard on a daily, weekly and monthly basis?
- Q How do I access my call recordings if I need to check some details?
- Q What will your online access allow me to do for myself?

Look for an outsourcer with a pool of long-serving, well-trained and motivated agents who will become part of your team for the long term

Be sure your outsourcer has the available resource and capacity to rapidly scale-up the service they provide for you

4. Location, location, location – choose an outsourcer with more than one contact centre

'Local' is best for lots of things; food, taxi drivers, the pub. But when it comes to an outsourced contact centre, especially one you may also expect to offer business continuity support, a local provider is probably not the best option, not unless they are part of a network of contact centres in geographically diverse locations. If the snow or flu outbreak or public transport strike has disrupted your own operations, chances are your friendly outsourcer round the corner is also suffering.

By selecting a provider with more than one site where all of those sites use the same technology, then both you and your outsourcer's business and customer service continuity capabilities are virtually guaranteed. Similarly, if your clients are experiencing unprecedented call volumes due to breakdowns and weather related issues, then you need to be sure your outsourcer has the available resource and capacity to rapidly scale-up the service they provide for you at their prime location or can route calls to other locations with a suitably equipped pool of agents ready to step into the fray.

Questions to ask

- Q Can I have a copy of your business continuity plan?
- Q How do you manage unpredicted call volumes?
- Q Do you prioritise calls and what happens to calls that might get into a queue?

Summary

The concept of outsourcing has been around for decades and you can choose to outsource almost any part of your business. Outsourcers are experts in their field and this is especially true for contact centre outsourcers. The majority will have invested considerable sums in their buildings, agents, training programmes and technology with the sole purpose of providing a range of services to the wider business community. Armed with a clear idea of the support you need, but with an open mind to take on board suggestions and ideas and with the right questions to ask of your shortlist of providers, even a small or start-up facilities management business can create the sort of superior helpdesk service that is a differentiator and will help guarantee the loyalty of their customers.

About mplcontact

mplcontact has provided outsourced contact centre services to businesses and organisations of all sizes and in all industries since 1994 and is now one of the UK's leading provider of contact management solutions. We specialise in complex customer service provision, available 24 hours a day from a network of UK contact centres using both dedicated and bureau agents. We operate a geographically diverse network of contact centres, located in Sutton Coldfield, Winchester, Nottingham, Portsmouth and Belfast, meaning unrivalled resilience and consistent service delivery. All our contact centres have multichannel capabilities and the technology we use incorporates standard features such as ACD, CTI, IVR, scripting, database, messaging, workflow, scheduling, reporting and business applications.

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