

Three Critical Ways AI and Automation Can Drive Contact Center Efficiency

How taking a hybrid approach to automation can improve contact center operations and customer experience

Introduction

When it comes to contact center operations, there's a certain level of automation that drives efficiency. However, there are specific interactions – such as those with a vulnerable customer or a complex issue – that still require the human touch, and always will. That's why more organizations are embracing what is being called hybrid automation, where artificial intelligence (AI) is applied to specific tasks and processes.

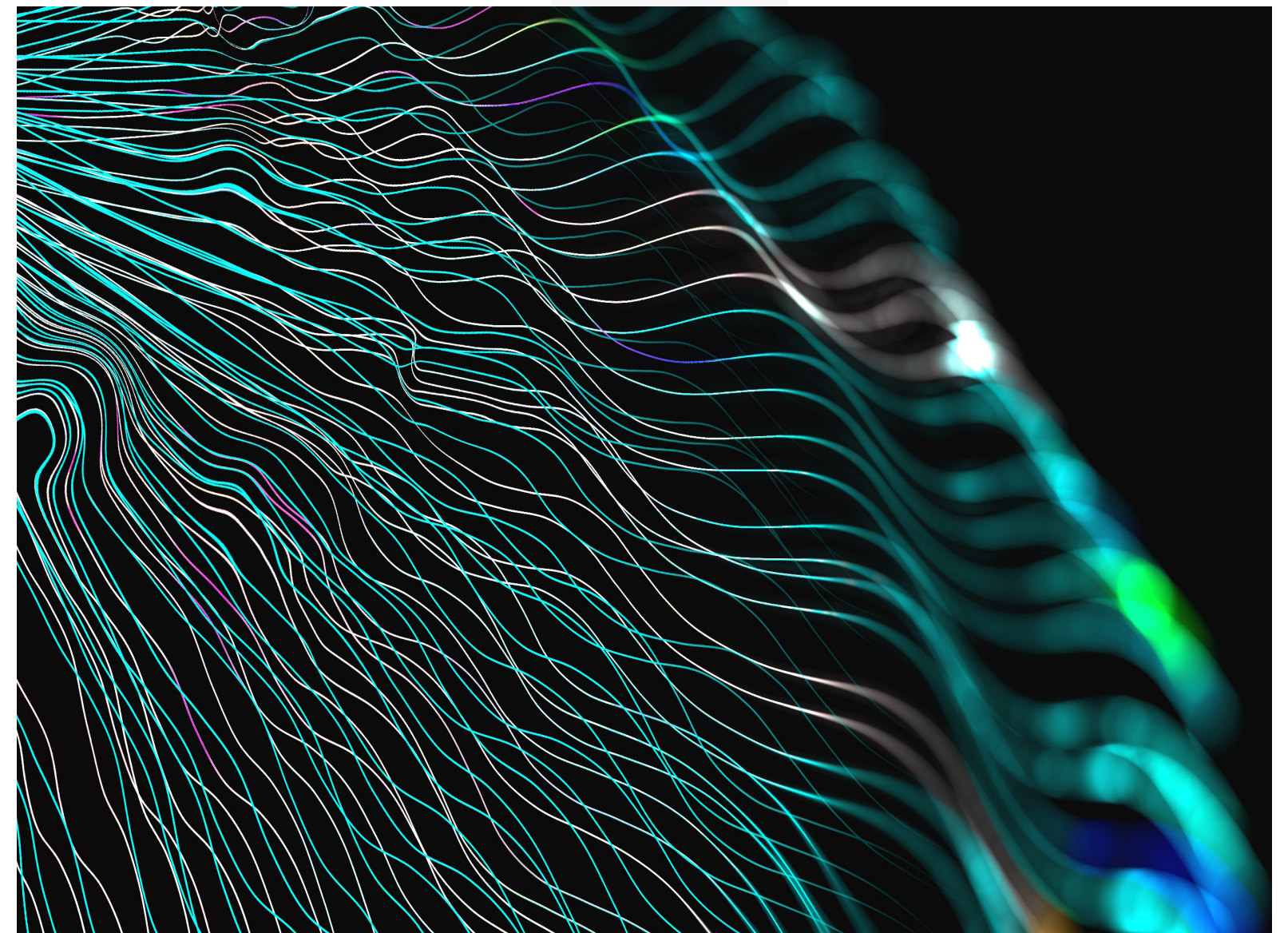
When most of us hear of automation or AI in the contact center, we tend to instinctively think chatbots or virtual agents and the automation of certain customer interactions, but there is so much more. Especially when you consider that most contact centers that are executing some type of quality assurance (QA) program, for example, are doing so manually. Most contact centers are only reviewing a small fraction of their customer interactions for factors such as silence, script adherence, proper escalation handling, and more.

With high volume interactions and geographically distributed teams, automation can make a number of your contact center efforts easier, including:

- 1. Driving operational efficiency and streamlining QA**
- 2. Increasing compliance and reducing risk**
- 3. Improving coaching opportunities for both supervisors and agents**

While AI-driven automation can help in all of these areas, it shouldn't rule the entire contact center. Key performance indicators (KPIs) such as empathy scores and productivity scores can certainly serve as a singular data input, but they shouldn't be viewed as the be-all-end-all for human-centric interactions and tasks. "Soft skills" for agents, like empathy, cannot always be measured, and shouldn't be automated away.

Read on for three areas where automation and AI can drive the most impact on your operational efficiency and QA, compliance, and training.



1. Operational Efficiency & QA

Every contact center has its specific KPIs. These give teams common goals to strive for, and can help managers determine top performers or hone in on areas for improvement. At the top level, contact center teams are often focused on these metrics, which are primarily obtained through customer surveys:

- **Reducing customer effort:** Customer Effort Scores (CES) tell teams how much work a customer had to do to interact with their support team or company as a whole, or to make a purchase.
- **Improving satisfaction:** Customer Satisfaction Scores (CSAT) show how satisfied a customer was with a specific product, service or customer support interaction.
- **Improving Net Promoter Scores (NPS):** NPS scores indicate how likely customers would be to recommend a company, product or service to another person.

Drilling a layer deeper, many contact centers wish to know more about their everyday interactions with customers. Some of these data points include:

- **Contact drivers:** Contact drivers help teams understand why customers choose to reach out, based on the customer's perception of a certain issue or situation. By understanding contact drivers at scale, your organization has the potential to identify customer trends or patterns that might be indicative of a bigger issue.
- **Silence detection:** Silence isn't always a bad thing (in fact, some situations warrant silence, such as allowing time for customers to respond). However, exceptionally long silence times can indicate that an agent is struggling with a customer interaction or isn't properly handling post-call administrative work.

- **Average handle time (AHT):** Again, long calls or customer interactions aren't always negative. Building a customer relationship takes time, and depending on your organization type, longer calls might be the norm. However, most organizations want their customers to achieve a resolution as quickly as possible. If calls are going longer than they should, AI fuelled analytics can help break down what might be going wrong.



What's a common thread among the second set of metrics? They can't be obtained through solicited feedback; they must be analyzed through unsolicited feedback. That means omnichannel customer interactions with your brand, such as contact center calls, chats, social media posts, and more. To uncover this data, many organizations focus on manually reviewing customer interactions for QA and efficiency improvements. This approach is highly inefficient, and only covers a small percentage of customer interactions.

AI-powered tools, such as conversation intelligence solutions, can help you scale your analysis of common operational efficiency and QA metrics and uncover trends and patterns in 100% of customer conversations. Taking that practice a step further, your organization can correlate different datasets to gain a deeper understanding of why certain trends are taking place (e.g. cause of customer churn).

Real-world examples



Hoist Finance: The power of silence

Hoist Finance wanted to drill down into the causes of long silence times on calls, knowing that in the debt resolution world, sometimes the real value in understanding customer interactions lies in silence. Silence can hold a variety of meanings to different organizations. It can show that an agent is listening, emphasize a point, give a customer time to consider an offer, or signal an issue or need for process improvement.

For example, one agent had a high volume of silence at the end of his calls, after the customer had already hung up. It turned out that he was taking notes after the call had wrapped up, which was negatively impacting his scores due to unnecessarily long silence times. Once he became aware of this behavior, his silence times immediately reduced.

In the first three months of 2021 alone, the company experienced a 46% reduction in silence time, and agents have become aware of more strategic ways to use silence to improve CX. Once they found simple ways to modify behaviors, the team identified further benchmarks for what “good silence” looks like in the beginning, middle, and end of calls.



Gant Travel: Redirecting supervisors' time to strategic areas

Before implementing conversation intelligence, corporate travel agency Gant Travel was only able to monitor 2% of its customer/agent interactions, making it difficult to accurately measure performance or effectively coach agents. Automating the QA process redirected supervisors' time. Before, supervisors spent an hour on each call monitored – locating the call, listening to it and filling out the QA scorecard.

They also addressed disputed quality scores which equated to approximately 20% additional rework. At this rate, Gant Travel was only able to QA two to five calls per agent per month. With conversation intelligence, there has been a 400% increase in frequency of feedback. In addition, insights brought greater consistency among supervisors, uncovering inconsistencies in scoring across all supervisors that wasn't previously apparent. Deeper analysis revealed the progress agents were making in key areas. Agents now have time to review their customer interactions and supervisors work alongside their team in a much different capacity, leveraging data strategically for more effective coaching and training.



Radial: Expanding Insights outside the contact center

In the past, outsourced ecommerce technology and services company Radial relied on feedback from customer surveys to determine how to optimize CX. Having conducted surveys for over a decade, the team was finding diminishing value in the survey results. Typically, the feedback only reflected very positive or very negative interactions, leaving a huge gap of coverage for middle-of-the-road conversations. When Radial evaluated survey data alone, the team would see a decrease in CX KPIs, without any context into why there may be issues or dissatisfaction among customers. When mining all interactions across channels with conversation intelligence, the team has been able to identify opportunities for improvement at the agent level or with overall client programs and promotions. These insights have helped the team gain a more robust view of CX, and has given them the intelligence needed to act quickly to mitigate potential negative impacts.

Beyond its contact center, Radial distilled targeted, specific and measurable process improvements from customer insights. For example, as last mile local delivery has been increasingly adopted by retailers, there was client interest in understanding the CX improvements associated with order delivery service. Radial conducted sentiment analysis on customer interactions and shared key opportunities with the client. These insights enabled the client to engage with their transportation partner to make improvements to the delivery process.

2. Compliance

Many industries must meet strict regulations (financial services and healthcare, for example). Contact center teams must ensure they are compliant with these regulations. Nothing can slip through the cracks or your organization could risk fines, reputational damage, and more.

As described above, manually reviewing or only listening to a portion of customer interactions isn't always effective. This is particularly important in payment collections settings, where scripts must be followed to the tee. For example, **Mini-Miranda rights** must be recited verbatim to inform consumers when a debt collection attempt is being made.

As with QA, AI and automation can help you scale compliance adherence reviews, and can check for compliance in areas that aren't specifically regulations-focused. For example, many organizations check that agents are complying with certain marketing or sales scripts. Not only does this practice save time, it can redirect your supervisors' attention to more strategic tasks.

Real-world examples



Hollis Cobb: Complying with HIPAA, Mini-Miranda and Reg F

Since Hollis Cobb works to collect debt on behalf of healthcare organizations, its agents need to comply with a variety of regulatory requirements including HIPAA for healthcare data privacy, PCI/PHI for payment processing, and more. Agents must follow protocol for calling customers and leaving voicemails.

For example, agents must validate they're speaking with the right party and avoid divulging information related to a procedure or purpose of a visit to a hospital or doctor. Non-compliance with certain regulations could potentially cost the organization in the form of lawsuits, fines, and reputational damage.

Manually reviewing these agent interactions wasn't effective or efficient. With more than 600 employees working the phones every day, it became impossible to listen to every call. Randomized checks only surfaced so much, and left a high likelihood for mistakes to fall through the cracks.

From Mini-Miranda Rights to Regulation F debt collection requirements, agents must adhere to strict verbiage to meet compliance standards. These standards can change quickly, and agents must be able to adapt with the appropriate changes to their scripts for patients. For example, after a voicemail requirement change in 2019, agents could no longer leave messages saying that they were collecting a debt for medical reasons. The Hollis Cobb team quickly reacted to this change, equipping agents with a new script to reflect limited context messaging. The team tracked adherence to these new rules, and effectively addressed any issues with agent compliance. Hollis Cobb follows a similar process whenever a new compliance change goes into effect.

As a result of implementing this new process with conversation intelligence, complaints and lawsuits related to compliance dropped – saving Hollis Cobb and its clients potential fines or reputational damages. In fact, the company's legal settlement costs as a percentage of revenue (proxy measure for compliance program effectiveness) decreased by nearly 95% over a six year period.



Ensuring compliance with marketing offers

A leading nutrition company had an ambitious sales goal to improve agent compliance for offers marketed to both new and existing customers. Contact center agents had a rotating set of scripts used to upsell existing customers on marketing offers, such as one-off products, or recurring supplement refill subscription programs. In addition, the marketing team wanted to A/B test certain offers for different demographics, such as loyal customers vs. new customers.

Previously, there had been no clear way to determine agents' compliance with these scripts, other than relying on the limited reports from the company's external contact center partner. Without this information, there was no way for the team to provide feedback to improve specific agents' performance with offers, or change the offers to be more relevant to the customers' needs. Given that many agents had transitioned to a work from home environment, this level of coaching was critical to their success and continuous improvement.

Today, a conversation intelligence-driven approach to agent feedback and offer personalization has helped the company improve their sales and marketing effectiveness. Agents are motivated to achieve compliance with their offers, and conversion rates for customers keep improving. Supervisors and team leads are grateful for the ability to quantify the impact that certain agents were having on the numbers.

By taking a deeper look at top performers' transcripts, they have been able to replicate some of the tactics that make these agents so successful. What's more, the team has been able to correlate data like offer close rates with metrics such as percentage of silence, hang-ups, or shorter call times, making it easier to detect potential technical issues on the agents' side.

Before conversation intelligence, the contact center supervisor might listen to an agent's calls twice a week. With 150 agents, the chances of catching a non-compliance event was relatively slim. Now, the company automatically attaches a compliance rate to each agent, which helps supervisors share expectations on compliance and conversion rates with agents, and empower them with data-driven coaching.

The marketing team can also compare compliance rates with conversion rates to determine the effectiveness of the offers themselves. For example, if agent compliance increases, but conversion rates remain flat, they know that they need to make an adjustment to the offer.



3. Coaching and Training

It can be difficult to scale one-to-one coaching and highly relevant, small-group training topics across large, distributed teams in a contact center. In your fast-moving environment, it's likely your supervisors have many direct reports that handle hundreds of customer interactions per day.

For example, high performers often slip through the cracks and don't get the feedback they need. Supervisors may simply say, "You're doing a great job," yet don't provide the acknowledgment or insights these agents need to stay motivated and at the top of their games. That can lead to dissatisfaction, disengagement and churn among your most valuable employees.

What's more, analyzing data at scale can help you drive deeper understanding of customer behaviors, wants and needs. Combining qualitative and quantitative data can result in novel insights that improve agent coaching. It's even possible to combine contact drivers (or the motivations behind why a customer is reaching out) with customer journey mapping, satisfaction, and retention metrics.

Additionally, combining conversation intelligence with customer journey mapping can better forecast and predict customer behavior based on data gained through historical interactions and similar messaging at various touchpoints.

AI-driven coaching isn't just about identifying areas for improvement – a major part of coaching is cross-pollinating agents' positive behaviors. Calling out positive accomplishments can help your top-performing agents feel more validated and successful in their jobs.

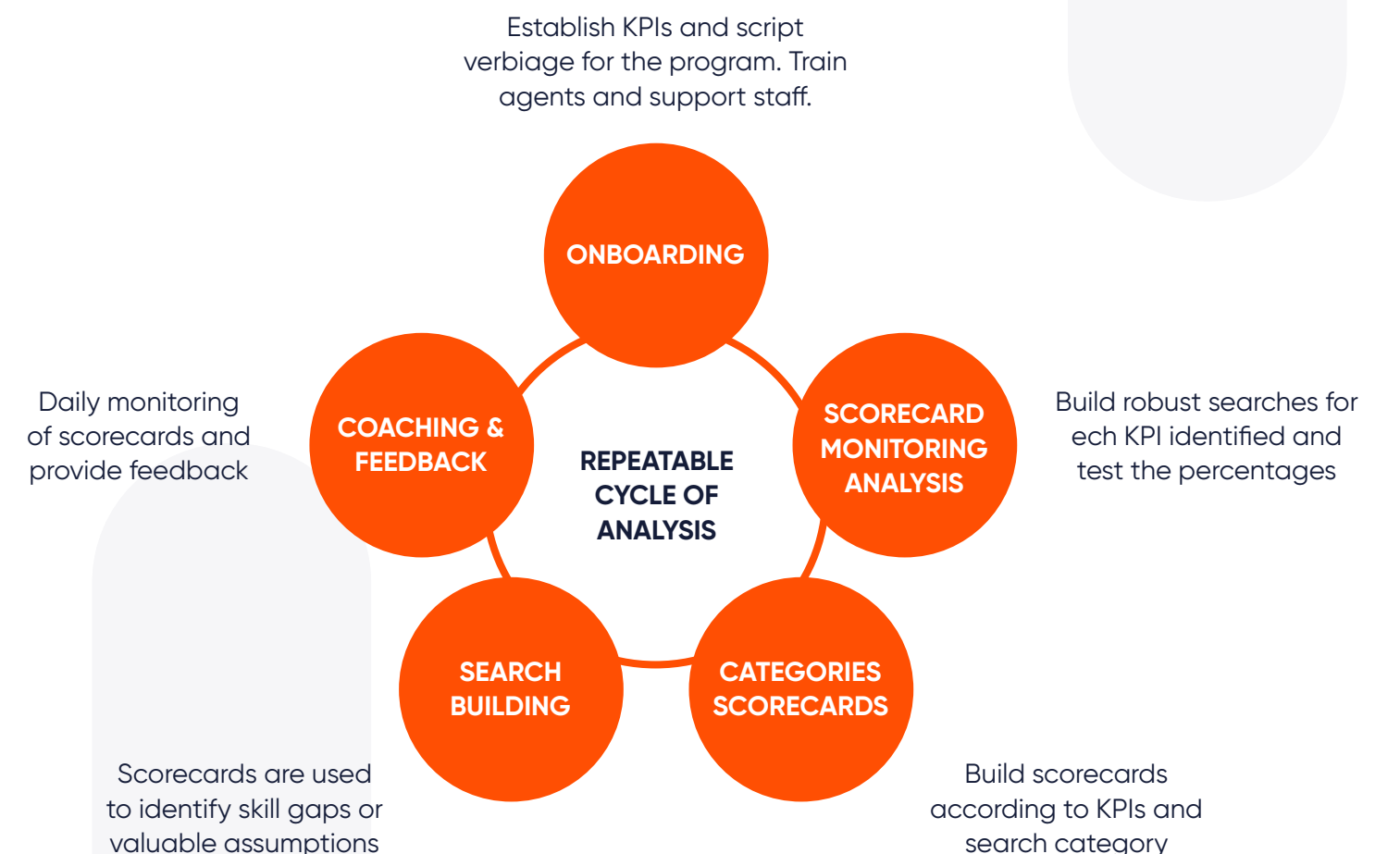
Real-world examples



Qualfon: Data-driven insights lead to coaching and overall business improvements

Business process outsourcing (BPO) provider Qualfon's agents often focus on sales on behalf of their clients. These agents receive commission for certain accounts. As part of an effort to continuously improve the sales process, the company transitioned to a consultative selling approach. This approach focuses on agents acting more like advisors than salespeople and providing recommendations to prospects based on their specific needs.

Prior to this change, agents had no agility for customer conversations – the company had one way of doing things, and it was done that way on every call. The team lacked a sales strategy based on targeted information. To create a process of continuous improvement, Qualfon defined specific components of a call that could be measured with conversation intelligence.



Extensive use of agent performance scorecards enabled Qualfon to recognize agents that performed well, identify areas for improvement and provide targeted coaching. Once agents saw the amount and quality of data on which they were being evaluated, they quickly came to trust the scorecard results and buy into the new approach. The scorecards and other insights from the conversation intelligence platform became an extremely valuable part of Qualfon's ongoing quality improvement efforts.

Previously, it would take new agents approximately eight months to achieve full sales potential, and now they reach that in the third or fourth month of employment. In the initial pilot of conversation intelligence, Qualfon documented a 31% improvement in process adherence across its workforce in just four months. At the beginning of the measurement period, scorecards showed agents satisfied all the process requirements for a call 61% of the time. After analysis and targeted coaching enabled by conversation intelligence, their team was following the correct process on an average of 80% of calls.

Using the same agent performance scorecards, the sales team can see who is performing the strongest based on proven sales principles. Managers can also see who needs more support. By quickly focusing on issues with targeted coaching, the team has experienced near- immediate improvements that show up the next day in agents' sales numbers. Over time, the team has achieved over 95% accuracy on these scorecards, making them a valuable resource for evaluations.

Not only have these efforts reduced escalations to managers, but agents are also more likely to handle customer calls with care and focus on accuracy since they know the data and insights exist to see where issues occur. By understanding what is happening in all customer calls, Qualfon and its agents maintain focus on delivering a high-caliber customer experience on every call. Insights uncovered with conversation intelligence help managers effectively coach team members, regardless of where they are located.

Beyond the sales team alone, Qualfon is working to explore more ways to use AI-driven analysis across different departments to improve the customer experience. For example, the marketing team leverages data to understand customers' most frequently asked questions. Using this information, the team can design more effective campaigns that proactively address these questions and clarify confusion around issues such as pricing.



Home services leader relies on positive reinforcement

A major home services provider designed an effective sales and support agent training program. The company analyzed its sales operations data using conversation intelligence to determine trends in what worked best for conversions when customers reached out with questions or issues with the platform.

Using this data, the provider found that successful sales representatives relied on empathy and understanding the customer's situation to prevent customer churn. By analyzing the conversations of these successful representatives, the management team devised a strategy to coach every employee for empathy, and reward successful outcomes.

Specifically, managers trained each person to use more empathetic statements, and provided new tools that empowered sales representatives to be more effective in their real-time customer interactions. Rather than working off of data on what went wrong, using what went right was far more motivating for employees.

As a next step, the company is feeding data into the conversation intelligence platform to determine attrition and retention trends by hire date of each agent across their salesforce. They're comparing this data against sales KPIs, such as customer close rates. As a result, they'll be able to see job satisfaction trends, such as when agents are burning out. From there, managers can provide further coaching or move an agent into a different role that's more suited toward their strengths and interests.

The value of hybrid automation

Not everything in your contact center can (or should) be automated. It's important to give agents room to develop empathy skills and relate to customers on the human level. That's where hybrid automation comes in. By using conversation intelligence and AI to automate selected functions, and rely on your team's people skills to manage the rest, not only will you drive efficiency improvements, but you will deliver better customer outcomes and experience.

Ultimately, the right combination of AI-driven automation and human-to-human skills can help your contact center not only meet its KPIs, but become memorable in the mind of the customer. These types of connections forge long-term customer loyalty, inspire brand advocacy, and can even lead to organization-wide business improvements.



About CallMiner

CallMiner is the global leader in conversation intelligence to drive business performance improvement. Powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning, CallMiner delivers the industry's most comprehensive platform to analyze omnichannel customer interactions at scale, allowing organizations to interpret sentiment and identify patterns to reveal deep understanding from every conversation.

By connecting the dots between insights and action, CallMiner enables companies to identify areas of opportunity to drive business improvement, growth and transformational change more effectively than ever before. CallMiner is trusted by the world's leading organizations across retail, financial services, healthcare and insurance, travel and hospitality, and more.



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