

# Call Center Services Buyer Guide

[Complete Guide for Call Center Selection](#)

Call Center Types, How to Select Vendor,  
Offshore vs. Onshore & Call Center Glossary



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## Guide to Choosing Call Center Services

**These days it seems nearly every business, whether large or small, is using a call center. Does your business need one, and if so, how do you choose the right type of call center to fulfill your needs?**

The purpose of this guide is to answer your questions about call centers, what types of services they perform, which of the various types of call centers your business might need, and how to select the ideal call center for your business.

### What are Call Center Services?

A call center is a business center that answers telephone calls and completes certain basic transactions for your business. There are many different types of call centers. Some are equipped to handle a very large volume of customer service, sales, or tech support calls on a 24/7 basis, while others specialize in answering calls and taking messages for small businesses during off hours.

Some call centers provide only the basic service of answering calls to your business line and relaying messages. Others will interact with callers to answer questions, provide in-depth customer service, and process transactions.

Some businesses even outsource internal functions such as help desks, sales support, and retail financial support through call centers.

**Below are a few of the services a call center will be able to provide for your business:**

#### **Technical support**

It can be very frustrating for your customers to call for tech support only to find that it's not available outside your company's operating hours. If you have customers in several time zones, this could be even more of a problem. In fact, most customers will expect to be able to get help from tech support even if it's 2am.

#### **Generate and qualify inbound leads**

Professional agents will gather contact data and answer questions from callers inquiring about your services. They will obtain information to help identify your prospects' needs and provide you with high quality, verified leads to pass on to your sales team.

#### **Take sales orders**

You won't miss a single sale when you have call center representatives available around the clock to take orders from your customers. This service is especially vital if you have customers across the country, or around the globe.

#### **Customer service**

Utilizing the skills of call center agents who are specially trained to deal with customer complaints and questions in a courteous and professional manner will enhance your company's reputation and engender customer loyalty.

#### **Process applications**

If your employees spend inordinate amounts of time processing customer credit applications and other necessary forms, outsourcing these tasks to a call center could save time and increase productivity.

#### **Schedule appointments**

Having all of your appointment scheduling handled by a call center can prevent needless schedule conflicts and double-bookings that can occur when your in-house staff has to handle incoming calls and set appointments while trying to perform their other job duties.

#### **Process and manage email**

Checking your email is one of those necessary tasks that can end up consuming too much time. A call center can solve this problem by receiving and processing your emails. Your business contacts will receive notice that their email has been received, and you can personally follow up at a convenient time. The center can also notify you when a high priority email is received so you can respond immediately.

### **Provide live web chat support**

Some customers prefer to get help via chat or instant messaging; response time is usually very quick. Visitors to your website can get immediate answers to questions about your services, receive help with their account, get technical support, and other services, without having to pick up the phone.

### **Provide answering/messaging services**

You can choose the level of answering or messaging service you want; agents can simply take a caller's name and number, or you can have them relay detailed messages and answer questions about your services.

## **Why are Call Center Services important?**

A call center can help a business grow faster, appear professional, and save costs. Call centers are important to many businesses because they answer calls from customers and potential customers. When there is a call center in place to answer calls and perform certain operations (such as customer service or trouble-shooting), employees do not have to be interrupted in order to respond to calls.

### **Types of call centers:**

- **Contact center** - A contact center, also known as customer interaction center is a central point of any organization through which all customer contacts are managed. It is a key part of a company's customer relationship management (CRM). Customers contact companies by calling, emailing, chatting online, visiting websites, faxing, and even instant messaging, which can all be handled through the contact center.
- **Inbound call center** - Exclusively or predominantly handles calls initiated by the customer.
- **Outbound call center** – Call center agents make outbound sales calls.
- **Blended call center** - Accepts incoming calls through automatic call distribution, and also places outbound calls using predictive dialing.

### **Signs your business might need a call center:**

- 1) Your employees are having difficulty completing their work because of frequent phone interruptions. A call center would handle most of these calls, letting your crew stay on task and work more efficiently.
- 2) Your sales team is making paper airplanes. In this case, you need a call center that can funnel plenty of high quality leads to keep your sales people busy, and grow your company.
- 3) You want to close shop at a decent hour, but are afraid you'll miss out on business from late-night callers. With a call center to answer customer questions and take orders, you can sleep well, and stay competitive.
- 4) You want to test run your new sales campaign or customer services before investing in staff and infrastructure.
- 5) Your IT personnel are overwhelmed with calls. A tech support call service could be the answer.

## How should a vendor for Call Center Services be selected?

It is important to determine exactly what you are looking for from your call center. Do you want a company that can help with trouble-shooting? Are you looking for customer service representatives? Here are some things to consider when looking for the right call center vendor:

### Offshore vs. Onshore

The first step is to narrow down your choices by deciding whether your business would be better off using an onshore or offshore call center. There are advantages and disadvantages to each.

### Offshore Pros and Cons

**The lower cost is what motivates most business owners to choose an offshore call center, although there can be some drawbacks, including:**

1. You do not have the opportunity for personal contact with the telemarketers for training purposes. However, many overseas call centers provide teleconferencing so you can connect with agents and be involved with their training, and they also employ highly qualified managers to oversee the training and orientation process.
2. English is the second language for most representatives in overseas call centers, which can result in some communication difficulties. This language barrier can be overcome somewhat if you choose a call center in a country where English is a primary language. Take some time to compare and you should be able to find a company that only employs reps whose English is clear and understandable. Most of your customers will not mind if an agent has an accent, as long as he or she provides excellent customer service.
3. You cannot oversee and manage call center employees in person to be sure your calls are handled properly. Here again, teleconferencing will make up for the distance to a certain degree. You can also perform periodic test calls to see how quickly and how well your calls are being answered.

Recently, many offshore call centers have been working diligently to improve their level of customer service by raising the level of training and competency of their employees.

### Onshore Advantages and Drawbacks

The language barrier is obviously not a problem with an onshore call center. And if you choose a location within easy travel distance to your company, you will have the advantage of a more hands-on training period.

The main disadvantage of an onshore call center is that it will cost you more to use their services. But a price comparison of onshore centers will find some that are lower than others due to being located in a part of the country—particularly the Midwestern United States—where the cost of living is lower.

It would be a mistake, however, to base your decision on pricing alone, as a call center that does not handle your callers' issues well could lead to customer dissatisfaction and loss of customers.

Whether you choose an onshore or offshore call center, your main criteria should be top quality customer service. Agents should be able to handle calls efficiently and quickly, to the satisfaction of your customers.

Agents should listen carefully to a caller's concerns or questions to gain a clear understanding of the problem so they can resolve issues in a professional and efficient manner, and live up to your company's quality and customer service standards.

## Dedicated Agents vs. Shared Agents

Another decision you will need to make is whether your business would be better served by dedicated agents, whose only job is to handle your company's calls, or shared (also known as blended) agents who take calls for multiple businesses.

This decision will require analysis of how much call volume you expect, the amount you are willing to allocate for call center service, and whether your company's services are highly technical or complex.

Using shared agents can cost your company much less than having dedicated agents answer your calls. However, if handling your calls properly will require a high level of knowledge about your services, you might want to consider using dedicated agents whose sole responsibility will be the professional handling of your company's calls. Dedicated agents will acquire detailed knowledge of your company's services in order to better communicate with your customers.

## Narrowing Your List of Vendors

**With these decisions in place, you now need to find the right vendor for your call center services. You will want to find a company that has:**

- An understanding of your particular industry.
- The ability to forecast and schedule for expected call volume.
- Technology such as performance management and data analytics.
- Reporting formats that are compatible with your company's software.
- The ability to make changes and readily adapt to market conditions.
- Above all, excellent customer service.

**Below are a few more things to keep in mind when making your vendor selection:**

### **Purpose**

Analyze your needs to determine the main purpose the call center will serve for your business. This will help you determine, first of all, whether you need a specialized call center or can use one vendor to fill all your communication needs.

If you are looking for specialized services, such as a vendor that will be able to troubleshoot technical issues with your products, then you will need to find a call center service that not only employs IT professionals, but that is also capable of learning your product line.

If you are looking for customer service representatives, make sure you find a call center that is capable of learning about the products that you deliver. By defining what your needs are, you will be able to find the right call center.

### **Price**

Find out how the call center charges you for its services. Does it charge on a monthly basis or annual basis? Will you have to sign a long-term contract? Will you be charged per call? The price of the services may vary a great deal, so be sure to find a call center service that meets your budget and that will not have hidden charges, such as surcharges for message relay.

Some call centers have a pay per use plan, which is ideal if you won't have a high call volume on a regular basis, or if you would like to test out their services before entering into a long-term agreement.

Get various price quotes depending on the workload. Even the busiest of companies hit lulls where the call volume isn't as strong and, conversely, seasonal periods where you can't even keep up with the amount of calls. Make sure the vendor provides you with prices for the various shifts in call activity.

How much you pay can also depend on the amount of direct attention you get from agents. As mentioned before, shared agents will cost substantially less than dedicated agents. You will pay about \$1 per minute for shared agent service or basic answering service.



It is highly recommended that you spend the extra money for a special phone number designated for call center use. If you allow the call center to establish one for you, you will be bound by their restrictions, whereas owning the number will give you the freedom to change providers if necessary.

When making your final choice, it's important to balance cost savings with quality of service. Choosing a provider based on price alone could end up costing your company in terms of reputation and customer loyalty if the center you choose does not match your company's standards for customer service.

## Features

Each call center will offer its own features. Ask about the prices for additional features, as well as a list of options for you to choose from. For example, some call centers will send you detailed messages in an email, while other call centers will call you with the message. Some call centers send you real-time updates when they have responded to a call; others will provide a report of all calls received on a monthly basis.

## Agency Size

To get an idea of the size of call center you will need, determine the amount of call traffic your business currently receives by checking total volume of calls on past phone bills. You should also try to project the volume you expect to receive from planned advertising campaigns. The call center sales representative can usually assist you in estimating your expected call volume.

## Reputation

When you hire an outside resource to field your calls, you are relying on that company to represent your business. Therefore, it is important that the company is professional and respectful to your customers and clients during each call.

In order to find a reliable call center service, do a simple Google search to see criticisms and praises of your top companies. Ask for customer references that verify the call center's reliability and professionalism. Also, ask colleagues for their recommendations.

Listen in on actual calls to observe how the agents interact with customers. Also, notice whether the center manager works with employees to streamline the process and ensure that the agents are providing the best possible customer service.

## Service Level Agreements

**Once you have decided upon a particular call center, you will want to establish the criteria that will be part of your SLA, or service level agreement, with that company. Factors that are important to most companies, and that can be measured for performance include:**

### Percentage of calls answered

Requiring the center to respond to at least a certain percentage of incoming calls will reduce the likelihood of calls being abandoned.

### Average Speed of Answer

The average call should be picked up within a given amount of time, such as thirty seconds, to prevent customer dissatisfaction and frustration.

### Average Hold Time

This would include not only the amount of time a customer waits for their call to be picked up, but also how long they have to wait on hold after the initial contact with a representative.

### Handle Time

Measuring the amount of time it takes from the agent's answering the call to their reaching a satisfactory resolution to the caller's issue will assure efficient call handling and increase customer satisfaction.



Selecting a call center is a major decision for most companies, and one that should be made carefully. At InsideUp, we have selected top, national answering services that can provide high quality live telemarketing at significant cost savings:

## Glossary

### **Agent**

The person who handles calls in a contact center. Also referred to as customer service representative.

### **Business to business**

(B2B) Services provided from one business to another.

### **Call blending**

Combining the flow of inbound calls and outbound calls with other contacts such as email or web transactions to an agent.

### **Call center**

A facility that answers inbound telephone calls and/or places outbound calls. Call centers often provide a full range of related B2B services.

### **Continuity program**

A direct response offer which involves periodically scheduled purchases over time of a set of products or services.

### **CRM**

Customer Relationship Management. A software program that provides integrated solutions for customer service, marketing, sales, and support.

### **Cross-selling**

Suggesting to a customer the purchase of additional services unrelated to the original service or product purchased, but represents an attractive and/or limited time value.

### **Customer service representative**

An agent who handles customer calls and other forms of customer contact involving account inquiries, complaints, or support.

### **Database**

Collection of data organized for quick and easy access.

### **Data mining**

The analysis of trends and associations within customer data.

### **Next available agent**

The systematic routing of the first contact in a queue to the next available agent.

### **Outsourcing**

Contracting with an outside company to handle customer contact.

### **Predictive dialer**

An automated system for outbound calls which directs them to an agent when a live person answers.

### **Queue time**

The time a caller spends on hold waiting for their call to be picked up.

### **Recorded announcements**

An announcement that provides information about products or services, which callers hear while waiting in queue. May provide an estimate of wait time, remind callers what information to have ready, or advise callers to try the call at a better time.

### **Save the sale**

A situation in which an agent attempts to handle a complaint in such a way as to reassure the customer and avoid the return of the product.

### **Screen monitoring**

A monitoring program that allows a supervisor or manager to view an agent's current screen activity.

### **Script**

The written words and points to be followed when handling a contact, used to assist the agent in maintaining focus on the objective of the contact.

### **Up-selling**

Suggesting a value-added purchase, such as a related accessory or a deluxe, more fully-featured model that a customer could add to their original purchase.