

THE COMPLETE BUYER'S GUIDE TO CALL CENTER OUTSOURCING

*Your Steps to Finding a Business Process Outsourcing Partner to
Deliver a Better Customer Experience at Lower Cost.*

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Welcome to Your Buyer's Guide to Call Center Outsourcing

With competitive and financial pressures at an all-time high, companies must focus on their core competencies. If you're a manufacturer, running a call center might not be your area of expertise. Of you may be looking for a business-process outsourcing partner to help you with some other aspect of your business.

If you're looking for a way to focus on what you do best, without sacrificing quality for your external and internal customers, then it's time to find a business-process outsourcing partner.

But who has time for that?

The TDS Global Buyer's Guide provides you with what you need to know to find the right call center outsourcing partner. This guide is for companies at every stage of the journey, from those just thinking about it to those looking to make existing relationships better, to those on the hunt for a better situation

It can be tough to find honest, authentic, quantifiable information out there, without jumping through a bunch of hoops. That's why this Buyer's Guide is here to help you get started. We'll walk through some of the questions to ask a new call center outsourcing partner and the best way to get the most out of your RFP. We'll tackle real issues like pricing and implementation as well.

We hope this guide moves you further along your journey. Reach out to us if you have more questions. Our sales team is ready to help you get started on your call-center outsourcing project today.

Understand Your Outsourced Call Center Costs

When you're initially talking about outsourcing business processes like customer service, the initial conversations always start with price. Can we do it cheaper? But comparing in-house vs. outsourced resources can be difficult. Pricing is also the most elusive information to find.

Let's take a look at the basics.

The company pays for 100 percent of an in-house agent's time. In the business-process outsourcing model, you pay only for the time the agent is productive for your company. You don't pay for the time the agent waits for the phone to ring, or the time they spend in training or other meetings.

Typically, the outsourcing client pays for about 85 percent of an agent's time.

Here's a real-life example. One of our top agents working at a call center in Indiana costs \$24-\$27 per hour, all in. For an employee, you pay 100 percent of that cost. With an outsourced call center model, using the above productivity projection of 85 percent, that same agent will cost you \$20.40 to \$22.95 per hour. That's an overhead reduction of 15 percent from the start. With our offshore call centers, the math works the same, starting with base salaries of \$13-\$15.

Reduce Your FTE Cost

Business-process outsourcing providers are experts at staffing and technology. That's what we do.

We typically see at least a 5 percent reduction in FTE costs through shared pool options during lower volume hours of operation. Our call center technology increases the efficiency of our agents. We cross train and time shift tasks as needed to ensure a high level of satisfaction with your customer base.

Comprehensive Rate

The rate that TDS Global charges you is an "all in" rate, not ala carte or cost plus or anything else. The hourly or per minute rate includes training and project management costs. It also includes our technology. We keep up to date with the latest software and hardware, as well as security issues so you don't have to. We should the risks associated with human resources and technology management. You get the service you need without the overhead and investments

Calculate Your Call Center Outsourcing Costs		
	In-House Call Center	Outsourced Call Center
Productive Agent Time: Breaks Coaching Wait Time	100%	100%
Supervisor/Manager for Customer Service Agents	100%	0%
Quality Assurance	100%	Included in hourly agent rate
Infrastructure: Workstations/IT Support Telephony Facilities	100%	Included in hourly agent rate
HR Support including: Recruiting Payroll Benefit Management	100%	Included in hourly agent rate

This table gives you a foundation for your business case. But that's just the beginning. We'll talk more about how to choose the best outsourced call-center partner. The best relationships include an element of risk and reward to manage expectations for mutual benefit.

Call Center Outsourcing RFP Timeline

Our message to you is, don't rush the business process outsourcing RFP schedule. The shorter the timeline, the lower quality of RFPs you will receive. Rather than a well thought out document crafted to meet your specifications, you will get a cut-and-paste job. If you're lucky, the low-level employee will have found and changed all the instances of the previous recipient's name.

Preparing a thoughtful, custom response takes intense collaboration on from the vendor. Various departments such as finance, business development, workforce management, and client services must consult and collaborate to develop the necessary details for an accurate response. The relationship must be beneficial to all parties, so it's of benefit to you to allow the vendor to develop a sustainable business plan.

Especially if you have complex business processes, allow enough room in the timeline for a thorough investigation and strategizing. Also build in enough time to review the proposals, negotiate contracts and finalize the deal. Proper implementation will take some time as well, so don't rush it.

Make your RFP process easy to follow and transparent. State when submissions are due and how they should be delivered to you — email, overnight delivery, or online file transfer for large submissions. Electronic delivery allows for maximum time to work on the proposal.

Our experts recommend an overall timeline of at least four weeks to distribute the RFP and collect responses. Allow four to five days for vendors to develop questions, and three days for your team to respond to those questions. Building in more time allows vendors to more creative with their proposals, as gives them the opportunity to customize their program to fit your specific needs.

Call Center Outsourcing RFP Questions

To support your RFP process, we compiled more than 50 questions to ask your vendors. We split them into six key sections: Company Overview, Agent Hiring/Training, Reporting, Project Management, Technology, and Pricing.

COMPANY OVERVIEW

The goal is to validate if the vendor and the scope, stability, and experience to be a long-term partner for your organization.

1. Length of time in business?
2. How many full-time employees do you have?
3. How many call centers do you operate? (Provide addresses & employee count for each one)
4. What languages are supported?
5. What awards or recognition has your company received within the past three years?

Client Service

6. How long are your average client relationships?
7. List your five largest clients and length of the relationship.
8. Would you consider any of your current clients to be a competitor to our company?

Culture

9. How does your corporate culture differ from your competition?
10. Please include your mission statement.
11. How does your corporate culture align with your understanding of our company's culture?

AGENT HIRING & TRAINING

Labor Market

12. Describe your labor pool, including post-secondary education rates and unemployment rates.
13. Describe how your company attracts and retains qualified agents.

Agent Training

15. Describe your training structure (team and facilities) and approach to training new agents.
16. What is unique about your agent-training approach?
17. What is the maximum size of a training class?
18. What percentage of new hires graduate from training to production?
19. What percentage of agents remain with the company six months after training?

Agent Engagement

20. What is your annual agent attrition rate (both voluntary and involuntary turn-over)?
21. How do you engage employees and measure their progress?
22. What percentage of your new hires comes from employee referrals?
23. What is the average tenure of salaried staff? Hourly staff?

Agent Profile

24. How do you profile your agents?
25. How do you test for skills?

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26. Describe the development training that you offer.
27. What percent of agents have some post-secondary education?

REPORTING

Your business processing outsourcing partner will develop a wealth of data about your business, customer behavior and the results of your marketing efforts. Use the RFP process to determine those partners that can go beyond reporting on standard call measures (AHT, ASA, first call resolution, and conversion rates) and have the sophistication to provide business insight and analysis.

Information Services Capabilities

28. Describe your information services team (number of staff, specializations, hours of operation).
29. Describe a case in which your reporting capabilities have supported a client's business objectives.
30. What is your system for alerting clients during situations that may exceed established tolerances (e.g., 150% over forecast in a certain interval)?
31. What reports are a standard part of your quarterly business reviews?
32. Who reviews client reports on a regular basis?

Reporting Customization and Client Access

33. What custom reporting capabilities do you have?
34. Do you a client portal to access reports?
35. Are reports available in real time or near real time?
36. Provide examples of standard and custom reporting.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Understand how your vendor's team will sync with your internal team.

Team Commitment

- 37. How much of the project manager(s)'s time will be dedicated to our project?
- 38. Provide an organization chart and bios of senior leadership and program managers.
- 39. Are members of senior management located on the same site as the location proposed for our program?
- 40. What will senior management involvement be on our account?

TECHNOLOGY

List which technologies that you will supply to use with the vendor, (i.e., your CRM or CTI platform) and describe how the vendor will integrate with those technologies. Be clear in the RFP if the vendor is expected to tap into your platform or provide redundant capabilities.

- 41. Describe your telephony platform and the integration capabilities for our CRM/CTI systems.
- 42. When is the current status of your telephony upgrades?
- 43. Describe your business continuity plans.
- 44. What options do you provide for program-specific redundancy or contingency plans — include details on which options are included in the pricing?

PRICING

For accurate, credible pricing estimates, provide real-world scenarios on call volumes based on different models, such as cost per call, cost per minute, cost per headcount, etc.

Pricing Models

45. List the itemized startup costs and ongoing costs, and the estimated annual cost of the proposal.
46. List the services and features included in the pricing models?
47. What performance guarantees are included in this pricing model?
48. Are there any volume discounts you can provide?
49. Are long distance costs included? If not, describe the direct billing procedures.
50. Will you invest in startup costs or share other costs to achieve a performance bonus later in the contract?
51. Suggest any alternative pricing models within the same volume parameters based on the scenario provided.

It's important to ask the bidders to show their work -- how they arrive at the number can be as revealing as the number itself. Take note of unique services and offering so you can compare the base packages.

10 Mistakes You Should Avoid in Your Call Center RFP

Creating a call center outsourcing RFP can be a real headache. It seems like such an overwhelming task, and there's a lot at stake. Unlike many of your other vendor relationships, you're turning over a vital part of your company's image to a partner. The outsourced call center provider will be the face of your company to many customers. Of course, you want to have complete faith in a provider that you're inviting to become an extension of your team.

Having lived through a number of RFP processes, we wanted to share some of the mistakes from the vendor side that we see companies making all too often.

1. Using a limited procurement tool

Because a business process outsourcing RFP is as much about the relationship as it is the numbers, a limited procurement tool may not be flexible enough to capture the whole picture.

Some tools may not have the flexibility to allow a vendor to be creative in the RFP response. A vendor may want to provide case studies, customer testimonials, images or video of their sites, or anything else that might help them stand out. Use a tool that allows for thinking outside the box just a little.

2. Not limiting response length

Put word count or other limits on the responses to your RFP questions. Otherwise, it may throw your schedule off reading the huge RFP responses from all your bidders. If you're on a fast track, ask for short responses. Align your expectations with the schedule for the selection process.

3. Not targeting questions

Target questions to get the answers you need, but be mindful of repetition. Sometimes asking similar questions in different ways can reveal hidden aspects of the vendor's mindset. Sometimes, it's simply redundant information. Make sure the final version of the RFP is edited for a single point of view.

4. Overlooking employee engagement

Engaged employees are effective employees, so dig into the company's commitment to the employee experience. Ask about metrics and the company's commitment to making sure employees feel valued and empowered to contribute.

5. Not focusing on the right metrics

Each outsourced call center client will use different metrics and service level agreements, so don't spend so much time on things like average speed of answer and other KPIs. Focus on project-based metrics and case studies that align with your strategy and your industry vertical. Ask your bidders for their experience with a project or program that is similar to your requirements, such as whether you need roadside assistance or full outbound sales support.

6. Overlooking technology

Make sure you understand the vendors' technology stack now and their plans for staying up to date in the future. You need to make sure your customers will be served with current technology as the relationship continues.

7. Duplicating RFP templates from other industries

Don't rely on RFP templates from other departments, like using a procurement or warehouse document for the call center. It takes a call center specific RFP to capture the nuances of the operation. Use this guide to develop an RFP to match your needs.

8. Focusing on the wrong people

While it's a good idea to ask for the résumés or CVs of the people who will work on your account, don't get fixated on those individuals. By the time the process is completed, those people may have moved to different positions or out of the company. Instead, focus on the senior managers who will be involved in your account. They are more stable and will set the direction and expectations for the people who work for them.

9. Focusing on short-term metrics

Reporting and metrics will be a vital part of the relationship. Include questions about what reporting they have that can help you make strategic, long-term decision. Ask about feedback that current clients provide about reporting.

10. Not asking about worst case scenarios

Include questions about what happens when things don't go as planned. That may be Black Friday and Cyber Monday surges in customer service. For roadside assistance, winter storms can bring seasonal spikes in activity. Ask how the center will handle these unexpected events.

Choosing Your Outsourced Call Center Partner

With nearly 5,000 outsourced call centers to work with, finding the right partner can be an overwhelming task. If this is your first attempt at using a business process outsourcing vendor it may not be clear what the ideal call center will look like for your company.

Most call centers can fulfill your basic needs. But to create a truly strategic partnership, look for a call center that meshes with your culture and will support your brand's customer service promise.

Here are four steps you can take to develop a deeper understanding of your potential partners.

1. Cultural Fit

Get a sense of the cultural fit, which is admittedly a subjective measure. One of the best ways is to see for yourself. Take a tour of the call center and walk the floor. Observe how managers and employees interact. Look at people's mannerisms and demeanor. Does it feel like a place you or a family member would work?

2. Metrics

Establish metrics candidly and openly. Share what's important to you — Average Handle Time, Speed to Answer, First Contact Resolution, etc. — and talk about what additional measurements can help you accomplish your goals. Talk about call center measures like agent attrition and productivity and how those can affect your program. This honest discussion of expectation will establish the baseline of trust for your relationship.

3. Operational Strength

Assess partners for their core competencies in the basics: managing people, technology, and facilities. Your RFP process should help you understand how they train and schedule agents, integrate and latest technologies and deliver best practices in human resources.

4. Look for Industry Awards

Ask companies to list recent industry and customer awards. Look for listings such as "Best Business Process Outsourcing Partner" or "Best Call Center." Pay special attention to high performance in areas that are a high priority for you, such as "Best Social Media Contact Center."

Next Steps After Selecting an Outsourced Call Center

Signing the contract kicks off a period of intense collaboration leading up to the go-live date and beyond.

While the goal is to have a seamless transition, there will be issues and challenges that arise. The relationship you've built during the RFP and negotiation stages will start to pay off, as the mutual level of trust means everyone has the same goals in mind.

Kick Off Meeting

Everyone on both sides of the project will be excited to go live, ready to start taking calls and moving those KPIs in the right direction.

Ignore that instinct. Start with a detailed kick-off meeting, led by the call center outsourcing partner. Bring your executive sponsor and other high-level management to meet with their opposites from the vendor side.

The vendor side should bring to the table key stakeholders including the program manager, the technical lead, and managers from workforce management, human resources, and quality assurance. This meeting should review expectations and deadlines outlined in the contract and address any last minute issues.

Review Technical Requirements and Planning

As we all know, technology changes constantly, and your customers expect you to stay up to date. Call center technology changes just as quickly. Coordinate your technology requirements with your call center to ensure an uninterrupted flow of information. If there will be an in-house collaboration with the call center, the two systems should integrate seamlessly to ensure a consistent customer experience. Your call center partner should be ready and willing to integrate new customer contact technologies as they become available.

Call Volume Forecasting

Take the time upfront to discuss call volume forecasting. Shortchanging this critical function can lead to poor customer experiences through long hold times and poor problem resolution rates. Both parties must understand arrival patterns and contact volumes can be anticipated the second the phones go live. The forecasts will be an essential part of determining KPIs. Without an accurate forecast, the call center can't staff adequately to manage the call volume. Sometimes overstaffing is as bad as understaffing, as bored agents look for more engaging work.

Agent Selection

Selecting agents with the right profiles will be critical in maintaining your brand image and delivering on your service promises while using an outsourced call center.

Start by understanding the strategy and desired outcomes for your program. Are you upselling? Are you providing technical support or roadside services? The personalities and skillsets should match your goals and objectives. A natural salesperson will get bored following a tech support script to reboot a router. The technical support person — very good at that job — may not have the outspoken nature to sell products or services.

Make sure your partner has a thorough assessment process, including neurolinguistic profiling and behavioral interviewing, along with a thorough skills assessment.

3 Drivers for Success

1. Maintain Consistency Across Touchpoints

Align the customer touchpoints between in-house and outsourced services. For customers, the experience should be the same. They won't care if agents at the outsourced call center can't access their customer data the same way that in-house agents can. For the customer, that's a hard fail.

Customers want a transparent, consistent experience. It doesn't seem so hard, but it can be a real challenge. When you're mapping the customer experience, look beyond transactional steps. Also look at the potential emotions a customer may feel if a critical interaction goes really well or really bad. Remember, people may not always remember what you say or do. But they will remember how you made them feel.

2. Connect With Your Outsourced Team

Your company may have spent years building your culture, focusing on HR and engagement issues and engaging evangelistic customers. Can you transfer that to an outsourced business process partner overnight? It's worth the effort for a long-term relationship. An experienced outsourced vendor will be like a chameleon, reflecting the client's culture.

Look for extensive training programs that help recreate the workplace environment of the clients. A regular exchange of visitors helps create camaraderie and shared culture. It may be hard to identify and articulate what makes your culture unique. Sometimes, people have to experience it for themselves to get it.

3. Metrics & Quality Assurance

Set goals and expectations based on realistic reporting requirements and a collaborative approach. The program should be based on clear objectives that measure efficiency and productivity: average hold times, incident rates and the average length of calls. Top customer experience stats you should consider include Net Promoter Scores and customer satisfaction. Establish baseline expectations and build in risk/reward components to incentivize performance.

Concentrate on metrics that truly impact the customer experience. For instance, concentrating on average handle times can result in a less than satisfying customer experience because the agent will be stressed. Should first call resolution be a key metric, or would you prefer that agents escalate quickly to address difficult service issues? That would require balancing AHT and FCR KPIs to develop the best mix for your program.

Make sure your KPIs will deliver the kind of service that satisfies your customers, not that meets some internal expectation for efficiency. If you're looking for a customer experience that builds brand loyalty that drives revenue, then focus on metrics such as Average Speed of Answer and low abandon rates and less on Average Handle Time. The best service level measurements connect with service goals that enhance your brand promise.

If your metrics are based on a monthly service level, then you have to accept that some days will be below par, even when the overall month meets expectations. Higher levels of service — such as a daily metric — require a deeper commitment.

Don't get bogged down in retroactively managing the metrics. Does it always help to find out why something happened? Focus on moving forward, achieving and exceeding your goals for the majority of the time. Build for the future to ensure your customers will receive a consistently high-quality experience.

Engage in a True Partnership

If you've read this far, you're serious about building a relationship with a call center outsourcing partner. We've talked about the process from the RFP stage through the service level agreement, launch dates, and beyond.

We're happy to help you on your journey. If you like how we think, know that TSD Global has been a leader in the industry since 1989. We will walk with you through the RFP process to deliver a customized solution that will help your business provide a customer experience that enriches your brand. We have proven ourselves time and again with some of the largest companies in the world, and been recognized for our contributions to their success.

Contact us today to learn how our call center outsourcing services can support your business objectives while delivering the "wow" factor to your customers.

Contact us here:

PH: 888-646-6626

<http://tsdglobal.com/contact/>

About TSD Global

TSD Global is an award winning global customer care and back office outsourcing company. They have been called the secret weapon for growth of some of the world's most notable brands and companies. Since 1989 TSD Global has been a leader in helping companies acquire and retain millions of customers for Fortune 50 clients. TSD Global offers a full omni-channel solution including voice, chat, email, and SMS text to some of the largest companies in the US. They support businesses in many growth verticals such as technology, telecommunications, home services, and financial services. TSD Global is based in Indianapolis, Indiana and operates customer experience centers in the U.S. and Philippines.