



How to reduce
customer service

response times

Guide



Enghouse
Interactive

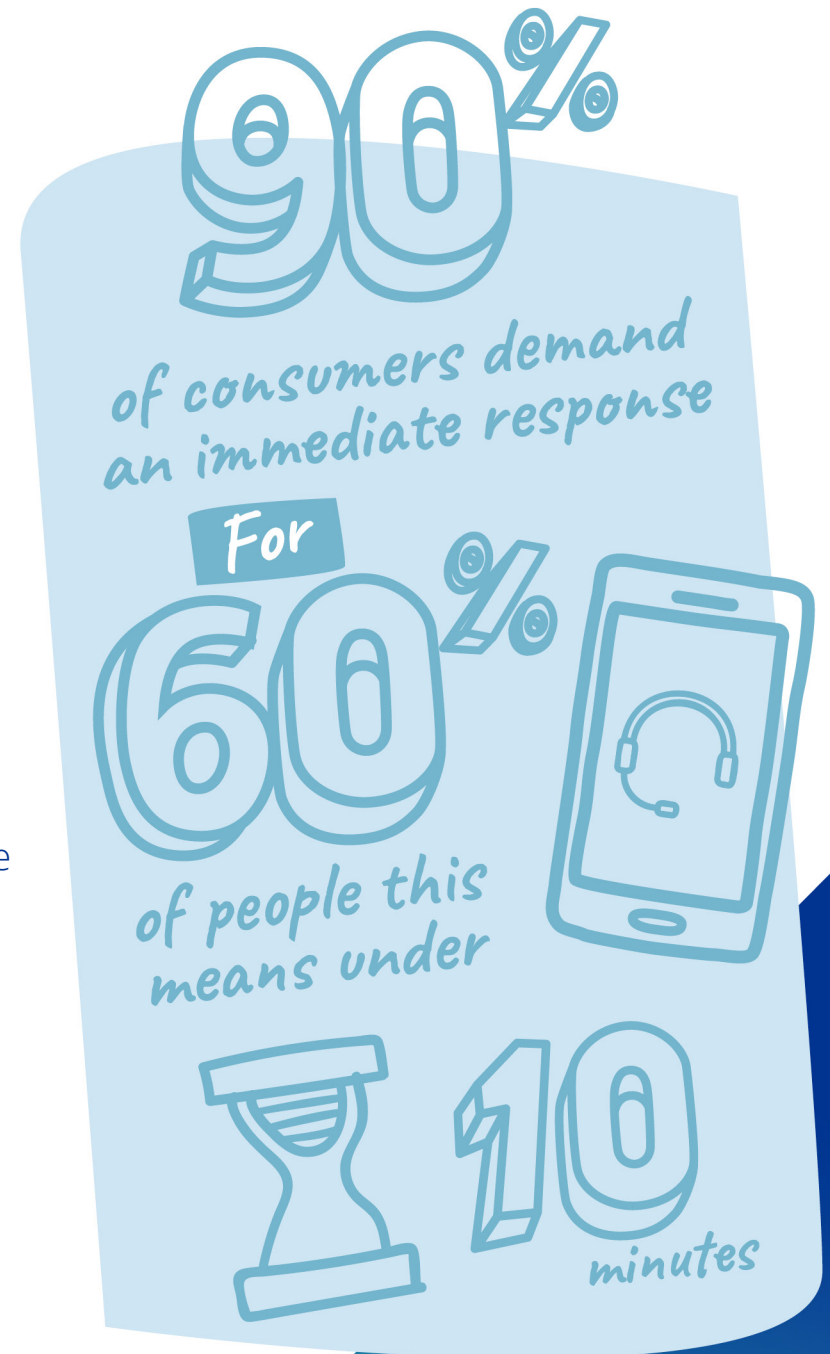
Customers expect *rapid responses*

Getting a fast, accurate answer to their query is the number one priority for consumers when making contact with an organisation. Multiple studies, such as the **ContactBabel 2022 UK Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide** and **Enghouse Interactive's own research** back this up.

Whether it is on the telephone or digital channels, consumers expect to receive rapid responses. And their idea of rapid is continually shrinking. **90% of consumers demand an 'immediate' response to their question** and for **60%** of people this means under **10 minutes**.



Being forced to wait has a major impact on customer satisfaction, contributing to lower CSAT scores, higher churn, and a poor corporate reputation for service.



So what's stopping organisations from delivering the quick turnaround that customers demand? Multiple factors are involved. Companies are faced with a **growing number of enquiries**, many of which are increasingly complex. These are coming in through a **widening range of channels**, all of which need to be resourced effectively from often fixed budgets.

How can contact centres reduce response times? This eBook sets out a range of techniques that can help hard-pressed customer service teams effectively meet changing consumer demands through **fast, consistent and accurate answers**.

At a basic level, contact centres use two main metrics to measure success at responding to and answering customer service enquiries.



First Response Time (FRT) – the time elapsed between a customer raising a query, whatever the channel, and receiving a response from your business. Automated replies (such as acknowledgement emails) don't count as a response in this instance. Average FRT time can be measured using the equation below:

Average First Response Time

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Total first response time in a time period

Total first responses during the period

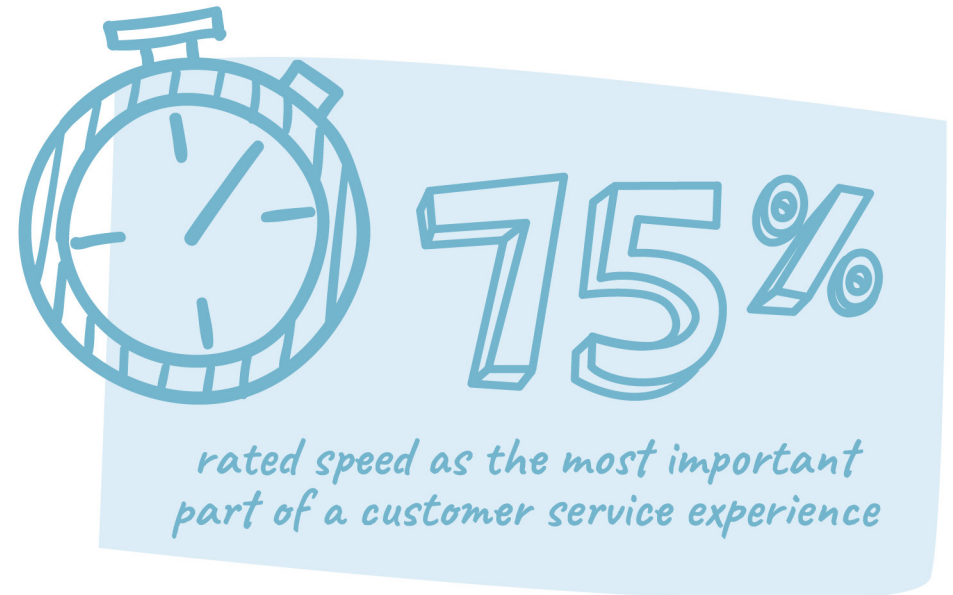
First Contact Resolution (FCR) – the number of queries that are successfully answered first time, without the consumer needing to make contact again, or wait for an agent to get back with further information. Average FCR rates can be calculated as a percentage by measuring the total number of interactions and how many consumers must then get back in contact, whatever the channel.

FRT and FCR measure different aspects of dealing with incoming enquiries. FCR focuses on resolving a query, while FRT covers the initial time to answer. While being able to resolve an issue at the first contact is crucial to providing exceptional support and positive customer experiences, it is also **imperative to keep the time it takes your agents to provide a first response to your customers to an absolute minimum.** The eBook focuses on why and how to achieve this.

Why are fast response times *essential*?

There is a direct link between fast response times and happier, more loyal customers. **75% of consumers rated speed as the most important part of a customer service experience.** Bear in mind that **76% of consumers surveyed by Enghouse Interactive said they'd leave a company after just one bad experience** and the potential revenue cost is enormous.

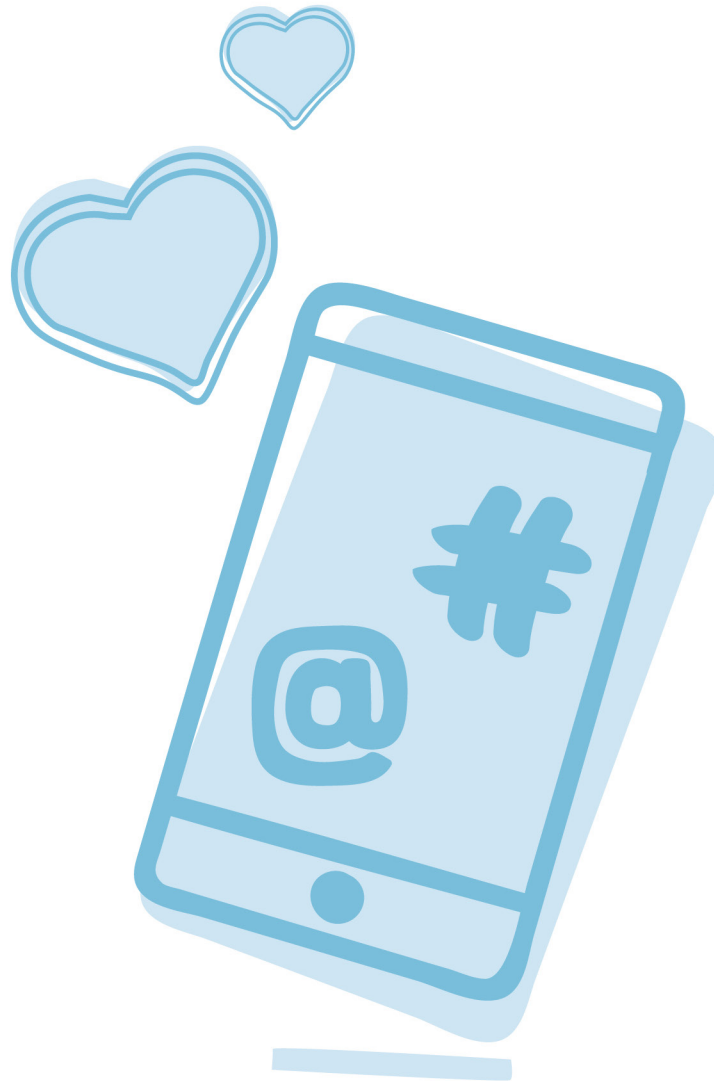
Slow responses also impact whether customers convert. Imagine you are buying a last-minute birthday present and are choosing between two products from different companies. You have questions about both – the one that reacts first is likely to clinch the sale, showing the direct link between speed and increased profits.



Failing to respond quickly also increases your contact centre team's workload.

If consumers don't get an answer on the first channel they try, they might switch to another, more expensive one, such as moving from social media to the phone. Not only does this double contact volumes but it also adds substantially to your costs.

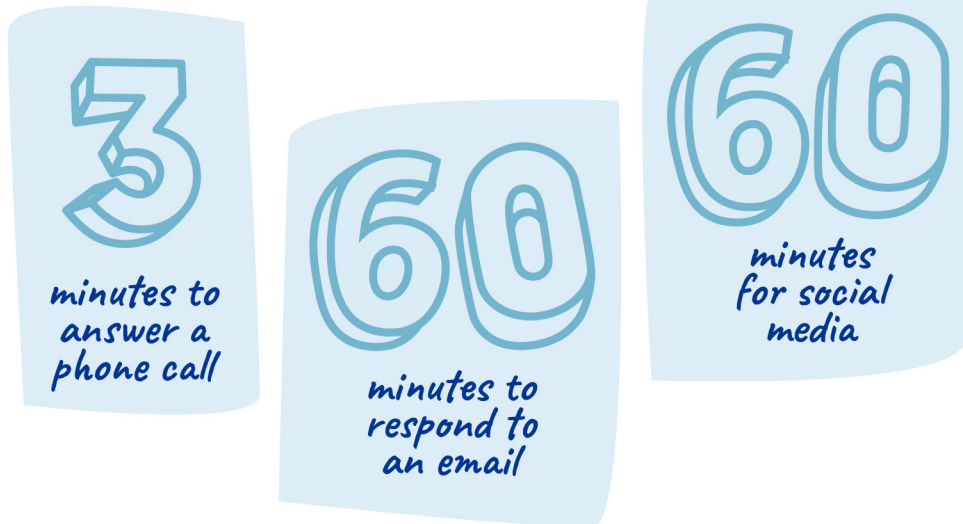
A fast, clear reply, even if it doesn't solve the problem first time, is likely to prevent multiple contacts.



Today, customers expect more from the organisations they deal with, and if they don't receive the fast, personalised and high-quality service they are after they will tell their friends, family, and the wider world through social media. All of this impacts corporate reputation, making it more likely that potential customers won't consider your products or services when they are looking to buy.

Seven effective and easy-to-implement techniques to *reduce response times*

We've discussed the need for speed when it comes to FRT, but it is worth reiterating how high the bar is set for response times, as these recent benchmarks show:



Many organisations struggle to achieve these – for example, the average time to respond to an email is over 12 hours (that's 720 minutes!). **29% of respondents to the Enghouse survey said they'd had to wait more than a week for a response from a business, with 70% listing being on hold for a long period as their biggest frustration.** Adopting these seven key techniques can increase First Response Rates with all the benefits that brings:

1 Deflect to digital channels

Often consumers don't actually want to have to contact you at all – they just want to get an **answer to their enquiry**. They are happy to use digital channels such as web self-service if that solves their problem. Deflecting queries in this way delivers four key benefits:



The **customer is happy** as they have got the information they need.



They can **get answers 24x7** without having to wait for your contact centre to be open.



By deflecting routine queries your overall contact volume reduces, **freeing up agent time** to get to more complex interactions.

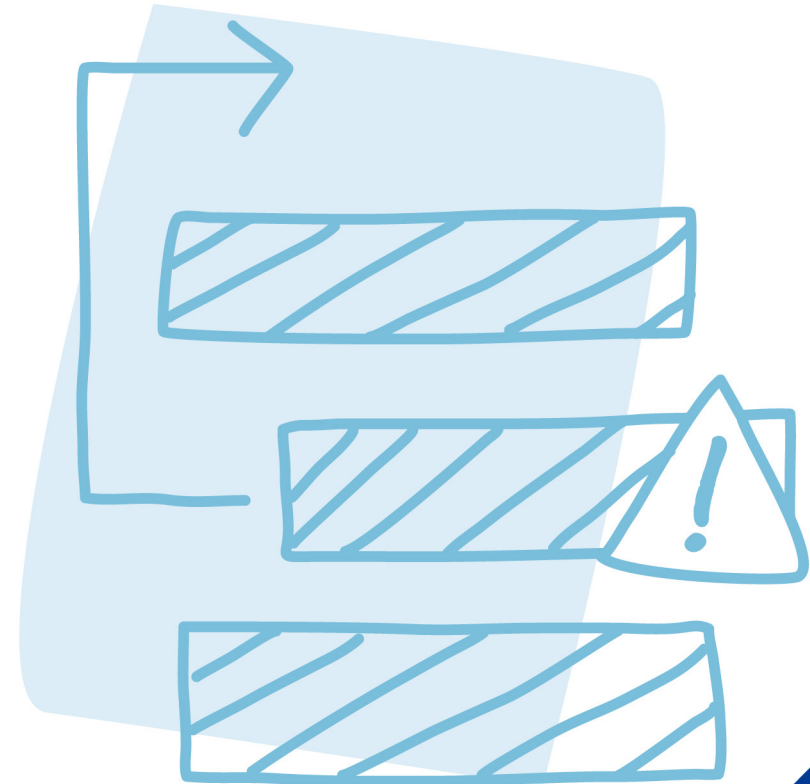


It **increases efficiency**. A self-service interaction has a negligible cost, whereas a phone call costs an average £5.42 and email £4.02, according to **ContactBabel**.

2 Use triage to prioritise

Every incoming interaction is important to the customer. However, some are more time-critical than others. For example, when a tenant contacts their housing association to book a regular service for their boiler, their need is clearly not as urgent as if the same tenant calls to say their boiler has stopped working in the depths of winter.

Businesses are advised to use a triage system to classify and prioritise incoming interactions to deal with critical queries first. This could be through IVR or by using AI to analyse digital communications for keywords or terms that meet specific criteria. They can then be dealt with in a pre-defined order, based on their urgency.



3 Deliver automatic responses that provide answers

On digital channels such as email, **customers want to know that their query has been received** and that help is on the way. Sending an **immediate acknowledgement** enables you to deliver this reassurance, while you can also use this as an opportunity to outline:


- Opening hours for the contact centre.
- Expected response time.
- Where they can find more information online, such as self-service, FAQs, instruction manuals or helpful videos. Nudging them towards these resources may mean the customer can solve their problem themselves, before you even respond.

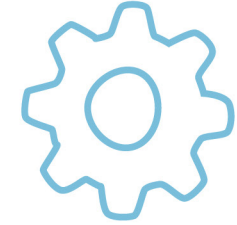



4 Support agents to be more efficient


Reducing the time agents spend on each interaction has two benefits. It **increases First Contact Resolution rates**, which has a direct impact on **customer satisfaction**, while freeing up agent time to deal with a **greater volume of queries**, thus ensuring faster responses for more people. **Empowering agents also increases their job satisfaction**, contributing to improved retention rates.


Good examples of how you can better support agents include:

 Providing a **continuously updated knowledge base**, enabling them to find relevant, consistent information when they are on a call with a customer or dealing with a digital query.



 Arming them with **pre-drafted templates** and responses to common enquiries that they can simply personalise and send. By using AI to analyse incoming digital queries you can even automatically provide the most relevant template to the agent when they are answering emails, without them having to search for it.

 Implement **text shortcuts** for commonly used words or phrases, such as sign-offs or terms and conditions. This speeds up response times while also ensuring greater consistency.

 **Linking automatically** to other business systems, such as CRM, so that agents have access to full customer records, giving them context and a complete history of previous interactions, thus reducing call time.

5 Enable collaboration across the business

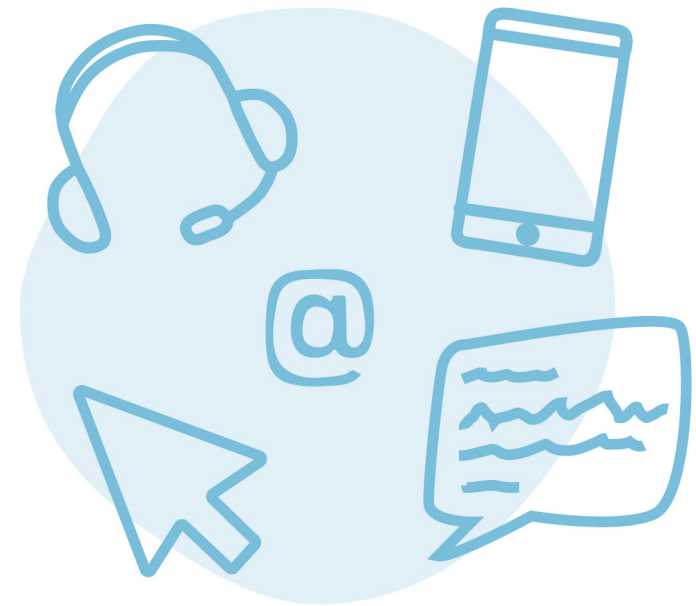
Dealing with more complex queries often benefits from information or input from **back-office experts**. By using **collaboration tools** such as Microsoft Teams agents can **automatically connect to these experts**, such as through chat and presence indicators, in real-time, to solve customer queries faster, increasing FCR rates and enabling them to successfully handle more interactions.



6 Leverage an omnichannel strategy

More and more customers want to use a **range of channels** to make contact, taking into account the nature and urgency of their enquiry. Rather than forcing them to pick up the phone, for example, **offer them the chance to use other channels**. As well as **deflecting via self-service** options, look at chatbots to deliver automated responses, live chat instead of the telephone or even messaging apps such as WhatsApp to provide direct contact.

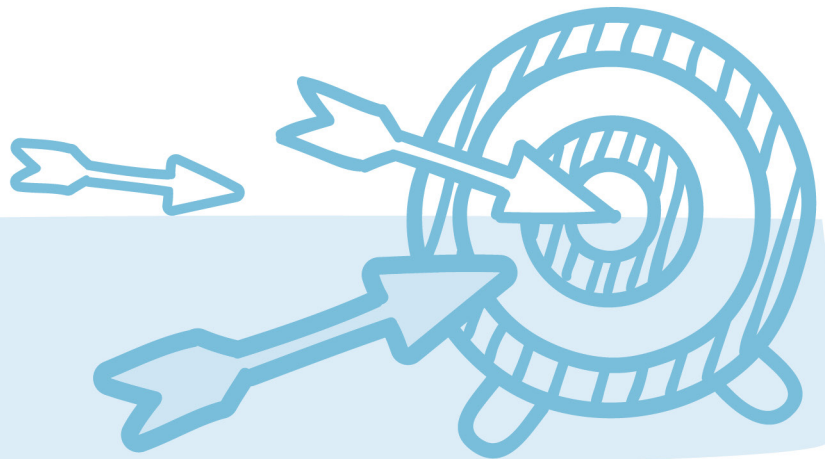
Omnichannel doesn't just **improve customer satisfaction**, but also decentralises customer service. Rather than a small number of channels being overwhelmed by enormous volumes of queries, it **spreads the load** between them, making it easier to respond quickly. Training agents to work across multiple channels also means that resources



can be easily shared, with **advisors instantly switching to the channels** where they are most needed at that time. Using **intelligent skills-based** routing enables you further to improve the time to both answer and resolve an issue, whatever the channel, by directing incoming enquiries to the best-suited, available advisor.

7 Set realistic goals

The first step to delivering the service levels that customers want is to **understand current performance** and how it can then be improved. Therefore, start by outlining and measuring the **KPIs** that matter, such as average **FRT**, average handling time (**AHT**), **FCR** and **total resolution time**.



Use these insights to constantly improve performance, increase efficiency and bring down First Response Times.

Analyse in detail how you are performing against these **metrics and targets**, both overall and by channel. Drill down into data by asking **questions** such as:

- Are there particular areas which are taking longer to respond to or require **multiple interactions**?
- Are customers making contact about **routine** topics that could be deflected to **self-service** or **chatbots**?
- Where could **training** on an individual or contact centre-wide basis make a difference?
- Do we need more **resources** on specific channels or at specific times?

Fast resolutions are key for a successful service delivery

Customers expect response times to keep falling and will judge you against the best, whatever sector you are in. That means you need to **always look to improve**, harnessing technology and techniques to deliver the speed customers want. However, bear in mind that **consumers won't trade speed for quality** – you have to be both faster and successfully answer their query. **Improvement is a continual process** – but the benefits are clear when it comes to happier customers, more efficient operations and greater sales.

However strong your service delivery currently is, now is the time to look at your first response time metrics and put in place a strategy to keep reducing them as you move forward.



About Enghouse Interactive

We are the world's most reliable customer contact technology provider. Our global brand is built on our track record of consistently honouring our commitments to our customers, our staff and our shareholders.

Enghouse Interactive, a subsidiary of Enghouse Systems Limited (TSX: ENGH) is a leading global provider of customer contact software and service solutions that deliver enhanced customer service and transform the contact centre from a cost centre into a powerful growth engine.

Our practices and solutions enable businesses to leverage meaningful, daily customer interactions to extract key insights used to deepen customer loyalty and uncover new opportunities to add value, profitably. Supporting over 10,000 customers, in 120+ countries, Enghouse Interactive works within any local regulatory environment and supports any telephony technology, whether cloud-based or deployed on-premises, ensuring that our customers can be reached by their customers – anytime, anywhere and via any channel.



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