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3 THINGS YOU
SHOULD KNOW FROM
CONTACTBABEL'S
2011 US CONTACT
CENTER DECISION
MAKERS' GUIDE

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3 Things You Should Know from ContactBabel's 2011 US Contact Center Decision Maker's Guide

Introduction

ContactBabel, a leading analyst firm covering the call center industry that is based in the UK, has just released their 2011 US Contact Center Decision Makers' Guide (2011 Guide). FirstPerson provided sponsorship of the report.

The report covers topics focused on people, process, and technology, based on extensive interviews with 209 contact centers across a broad number of industry groups and agent size. The report provides information on how your peers view the industry, their performance metrics, and how they view the industry's future.

In this short brief, our goal is to highlight three findings based on the survey interviews, summarize those findings, and present our thoughts and comments based on our data and experience. We will cover the following topics:

1. The home agent model
2. What drives agent success on the job?
3. What are effective tools for hiring contact center agents?

This well-researched report from ContactBabel provides data on how the respondents answered questions on these three topics. In our brief, we want to provide some alternative thoughts based on our practical experience and research working with contact center organizations.

The Home Agent Model

The home agent model continues to draw significant interest from call center operators. The attractive economics, labor pool benefits, and political benefits are driving more and more contact centers to establish a home agent model.

In 5 years, 60% of the ContactBabel respondents believe agents will not be centrally located but will be working from home or spread throughout the company.

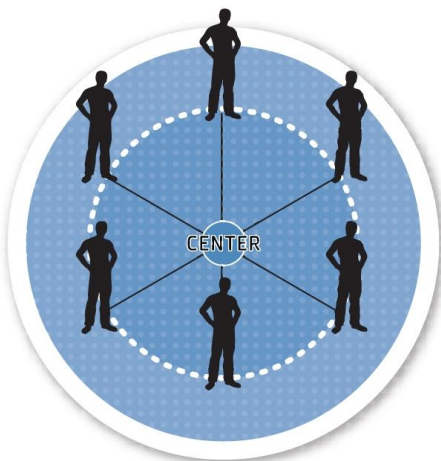
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This growing adoption of the home agent model was confirmed by the ContactBabel research findings. ContactBabel asked decision makers to think about the contact center in five years. One question asked the respondents whether agents will still be centrally located or will they be working from home or spread throughout the company. 60% of the respondents believe that agents will NOT be centrally located but will be working from home or spread out in the company, reinforcing the interest in the home agent model.

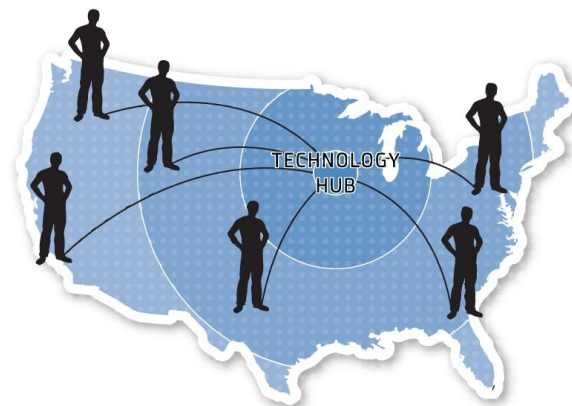
As we have discussed in [previous research articles](#), home agent models can have two structures:

1. Hub model. Home agents work near or around the contact center but usually are within a pre-determined driving distance. This is the model commonly used when high performing agents are promoted from the brick and mortar facility into a home agent position.
2. Virtual model. In this model, the contact center hires agents “virtually” far beyond the labor pool constraints of a hub model. The agent can live almost anywhere the organization can support.

Hub & Spoke Model



Virtual Model



FurstPerson’s research suggests some caution is needed when deciding between home agent models. When FurstPerson compared candidate quality between candidates in a traditionally defined labor pool like a hub model to those in a virtual labor pool, the candidate quality is very similar. But, the data shows that home agent models consistently outperform traditional brick and mortar models. In our experience, the key benefit in the home agent model is the ability to utilize the virtual model because a

larger talent pool of more highly qualified candidates can be reached which pushes the candidate to hire ratio higher allowing for greater selectivity by the recruiting organization.

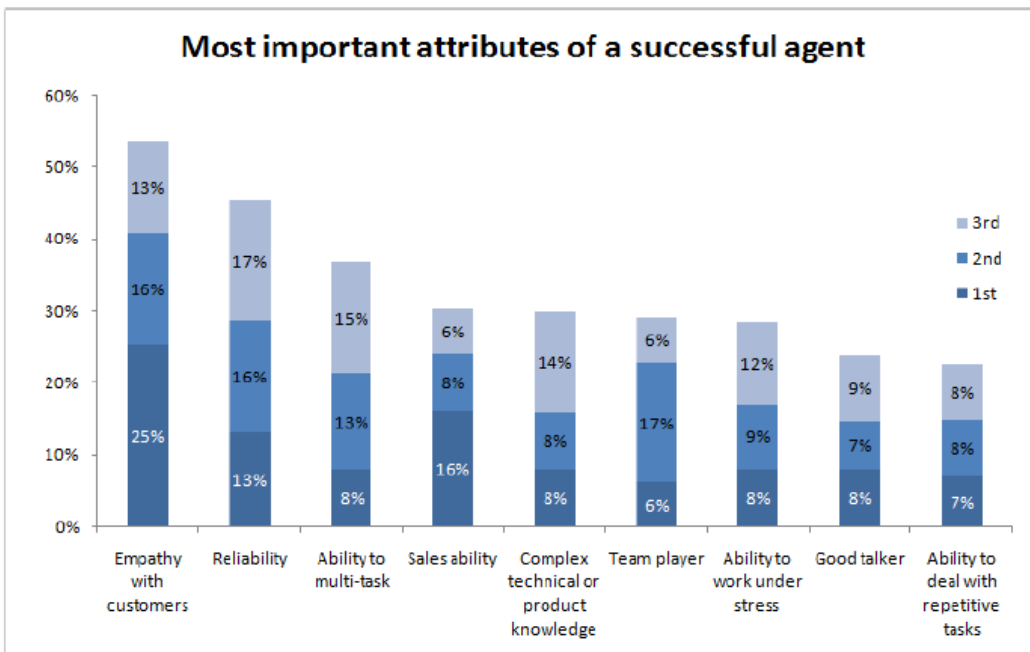
In the ContactBabel report, “most US respondents believe homeworking is an effective ‘carrot’ to dangle before their staff.” In fact, of those that have some homeworking experience, 34% strongly agree that sending agents to work from home would be useful as a performance incentive or reward for the best agents and 43% strongly agree with this statement. These organizations believe that the hub model offers the right home agent structure.

FurstPerson’s concern with this approach is that organizations that stick only with the hub model may be eliminating the key advantage to the home agent model which is the ability to be ultra-selective in who is hired into the organization in the first place. Being able to run a 15 to 1 hiring ratio compared to a 3 to 1 or 4 to 1 for some organizations is a huge advantage and leads to a very highly qualified call center talent pool that will perform at a higher level in production.

Modeling Success on the Job

The ContactBabel Guide also discusses the most important attributes of a successful contact center agent, again based on feedback from the survey respondents.

Figure 125: The most important abilities or characteristics of a successful contact center agent



Source – 2011 US Contact Centers Decision Makers’ Guide – 4th Edition. Page 215.

It is not surprising to see **ability to multi-task** as an important attribute. For example, the 2011 Guide surveyed the respondents on the number of applications that a call center agent must access during a call. 88% of the respondents indicated that agents must access more than one application and 60% have to access more than 3 applications in order to manage a call. For the new hire, being able to multi-task is an important attribute to job success.

In the 2011 Guide, empathy with customers is considered to be the leading attribute for successful call center job performance. While empathy with customers is important, FurstPerson's client driven job analysis surveys (N=1,172) show that compliance is usually rated the top competency. In fact, empathy with customers rarely makes the top ten rankings in the job analysis surveys. FurstPerson's rating is based on subject matter experts within contact center organizations evaluating the competencies that drive successful performance within their respective center.

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FurstPerson's research shows that Compliance is the top competency and is consistently rated in the top four across all major job families / call types.
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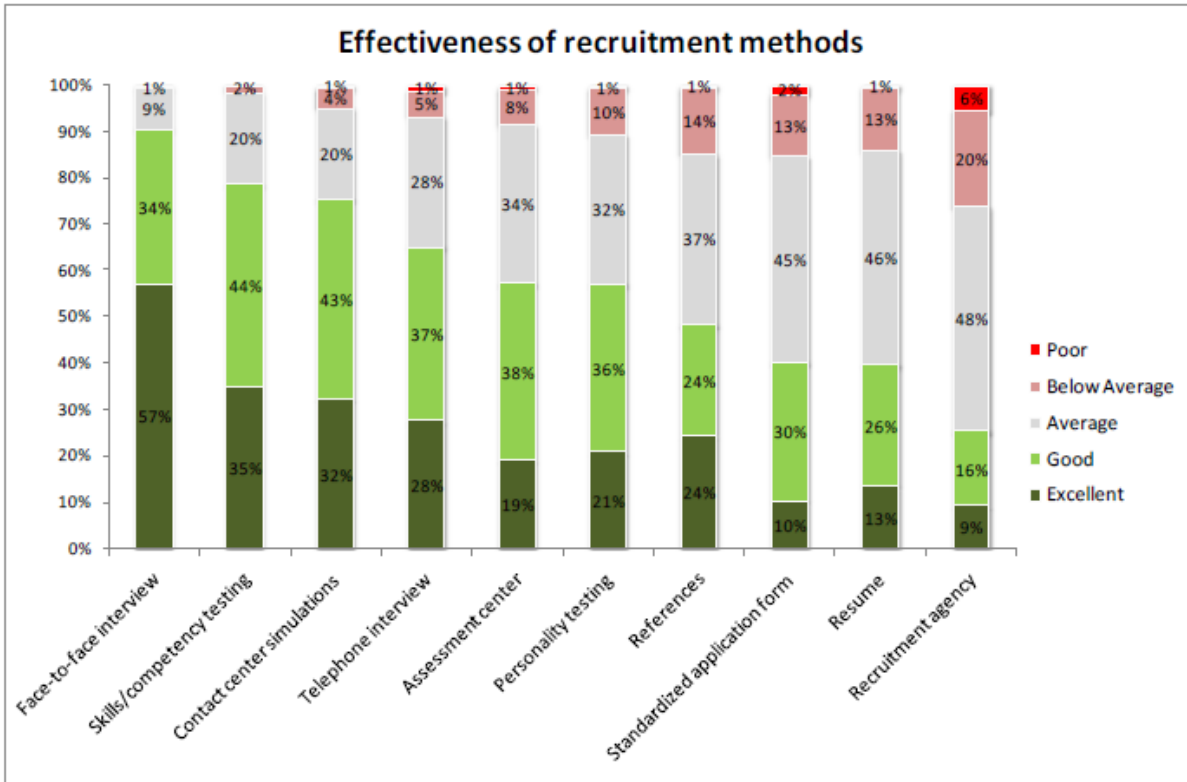
The key point for hiring managers to understand is that a local job analysis conducted using subject matter experts (agents, trainers, supervisors, and managers) provides your organization with the best understanding of the competencies that drive top performance. Creating this foundation enables the right hiring process to be adopted so these competencies are most accurately measured in each job candidate.

Effective Hiring Tools

When an organization builds the hiring process, the effort to link the hiring tools to the competency model is critical. For example, the 2011 Guide points out that 88% of the respondents indicated that agents must access more than one application. Multi-tasking, not surprisingly, was selected as an important attribute (competency) for successful job performance. So, what is the best way to measure multi-tasking – an interview, a personality assessment, a call center simulation? Without matching the right assessment/hiring tool to measure the critical competencies that drive job performance call center hiring managers are at a significant disadvantage to accurately select the right candidates for advancement.

Based on the 2011 Guide, the face-to-face interview was consistently rated as the most effective hiring tool according to the respondents.

Figure 123: The effectiveness of recruitment methods



Source – 2011 US Contact Centers Decision Makers’ Guide – 4th Edition. Page 212.

We have discussed the [role of the interview](#) in previous articles. While the interview is an important tool to develop rapport with the candidate, evaluate oral communication, and provide additional predictive power in certain well-structured formats, FurstPerson research and other well-documented research has shown that the interview is not as effective as certain types of assessment tools like simulations, personality assessments, and cognitive ability assessments. The ideal approach is a combination of these assessments plus an interview.

While the interview is rated as the most effective hiring tool which runs contrary to practical experience and proven research, the 2011 Guide does highlight the critical trend related to contact center hiring:

“By tracking the in-job performance of applicants who scored either well or poorly in pre-job assessments, businesses can improve their ongoing recruitment techniques. For example, agents who have high assessment test scores often have higher revenue-per-call ratios, lower average call lengths and lower attrition rates than those who scored lower in pre-job character and personality assessments. The behaviors, personality traits and characteristics that a top agent is most likely to have can then be identified, and the results fed back into the top of the recruitment process. **This allows the recruitment process to seek out the types of people who have already been proven to succeed in that role.**” (Page 211 from the report.)

Taking the time to conduct an empirically based job analysis and then matching the right hiring tools to evaluate job candidates enables the organization to select talent based on real performance drivers. The net result is better new hire retention and job performance that can be quantified into a business case.

The respondents that identified how a performance driven hiring process using empirical research to drive the hiring model and use of selection tools have highlighted the right approach to call center hiring.

About FurstPerson

What we do:

- Develop and operate web-based pre-hire, employee selection assessments that help customer contact organisations hire and develop the right employees.

Our experience:

- Fifteen years of research and implementation experience working with all major call types including customer care, sales, collections, win back, and technical support.
- Implemented our solutions in over 250 labor markets in the United States, Canada, UK, the Philippines, and Latin America.
- Home agent hiring since 2002.
- Average client is a multi-site, multi-call type organization with complex hiring workflow models and job profiles.
- Developed award-winning assessments featuring interactive simulations.

Differentiators:

- Predictive assessments with demonstrated bottom line results ranging from:
 - Improved new hire performance (up to 40%)
 - Reduced turnover (up to 70%)
 - ROI - \$1 invested yields \$10 to \$20 in return
 - Lower recruiting expense
- Hiring solutions based on empirical research supported by ongoing job and validation analysis.
- Customized solutions leveraging our extensive contact center hiring expertise and industry leading assessment solutions.

To learn more about FurstPerson, please visit our website at www.furstperson.com or email us at info@furstperson.com or call us at 888-626-3412.

