

2011

A Sivox™ white paper

Call Center Workforce Planning: *Hire the Right Employees with Pre-Employment Simulation Screening*

*Sivox award-winning
voice recognition-driven
simulation training provides an
immersive learning experience that
delivers increased information retention,
significant financial savings, enhanced
call quality and improved productivity.*

SIVOX™

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The average estimated cost to hire and train a new call center agent is \$10-15k. And with agent attrition at an all-time high, it's more important than ever for call centers to hire the *right* employees the *first* time.

Introduction

Today, the average estimated cost to hire and train a new call center agent is \$10-15k. [1] And with agent attrition at an all-time high, it's more important than ever for call centers to hire the *right* employees the *first* time.

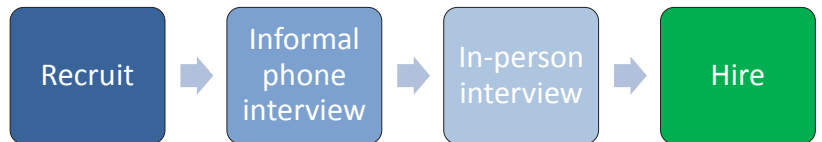
In this white paper, we explore the advantages of using pre-employment screening to assess prospective employees' core competencies. We also examine Sivox simulation software as a proven, versatile solution that call centers may use to identify candidates that will likely perform best post-hire, based on job-specific skills proficiency.

Traditional Hiring Model

First introduced by the *Harvard Business Review*, the term **core competencies** has evolved from meaning what corporations do best to a term that now encompasses job-specific attributes employers look for in candidates during the hiring process.

While individual recruiting processes vary from call center to call center, hiring practices are typically centered around the verbal interview. However, in instances where technical skills assessment is a component in the process, testing usually is administered via a written question-and-answer format. This framework is rather one-dimensional, in that the hiring manager is unable to assess prospective agents' proficiency in essential agent-specific job skills, such as communication, customer service and multi-tasking.

Not having the opportunity to see how prospective employees would serve a customer during a call until after candidates have been hired is yet another limiting factor in the traditional hiring model outlined here:



With agent turnover at an all-time high, the goal of having an experienced staff is one that seems impossibly out of reach for many call centers.

Call center attrition

Data revealed in a recent Accenture survey indicates that call center customers are most satisfied when they interact with experienced agents. [2] Yet, the somber reality is that annual call center employee attrition rates are topping 50 percent. [3] With agent turnover at an all-time high, the goal of having an experienced staff is one that seems impossibly out of reach for many call centers.

Pre-employment Screening

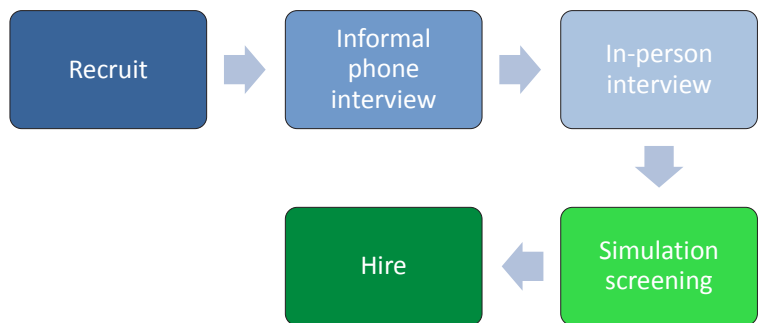
In today's global economy, call center recruiters are tasked with fast and furiously filling agent positions to meet job requisition requests. De-emphasizing lengthy verbal interviews in favor of testing candidates' skills with a competency-driven framework is a more efficient and accurate way to weed out who is the best fit for agent roles.

Pre-employment screening provides candidates with an opportunity to “show what they know” rather than simply talking about their skill set in a face-to-face interview.

Long-term benefits to call centers

Pre-employment screening provides candidates with an opportunity to “show what they know” rather than simply talking about their skill set in a face-to-face interview. Agent skills that often present business challenges for call centers include customer service, communication/language and multi-tasking. Incorporating pre-employment screening into the hiring process has significant long-term benefits, including:

- **Less employee attrition** — Agents are better matched to their roles, and in turn, are more satisfied with their jobs.
- **Improved customer experience** — A direct correlation exists between a call centers’ overall rate of attrition and the quality of its agents.
- **Dramatically reduced AHT (average handling time)** — More competent agents are able to better navigate calls and serve customers more effectively and efficiently.



With its real-time reporting and objective scoring capabilities, Sivox simulation software delivers a fast, cost-effective vehicle with which to evaluate prospective employees' competencies.

The Sivox Solution

Sivox provides candidates with a simulated customer experience without the risk of a negative interaction involving an actual customer. Using Sivox simulation software as a pre-employment screening tool enables hiring managers to assess candidates' communication skills, technical aptitude and other role-specific expertise.

Communication

Listening, speaking and reading/comprehension represent the key competencies in which all call center agents must excel — regardless of the industry in which an organization operates. Weak scores in any one of these areas are generally predictive of candidates' job performance post-hire.

For example: When a candidate does not demonstrate strong listening skills, he or she will likely miss essential customer information during a call. Or if a candidate tests low in reading/comprehension, he or she may be unable to accurately communicate sensitive company policies or critical regulatory compliance information.

Sivox provides simulated customer interactions that enable call centers to test essential agent skills. In the next section, we outline specific assessment capabilities built-in to the Sivox solution.

Sivox evaluates candidates' performance by measuring the response given for each customer statement using its powerful speech-recognition engine.

- **Does the candidate demonstrate required reading fluency?**
Sivox first provides a best practice statement, guiding the candidate to deliver an appropriate response. Then Sivox uses its powerful speech-recognition engine to evaluate candidates' performance by assessing the response given for each customer statement.
- **Is the candidate able to annunciate clearly?**
The speech recognition engine will process the candidate's statements and provide an immediate score, summarizing the accuracy of his or her responses. If the speech recognition engine is unable to decipher the statement due to the prospective employee's accent, it is likely that a customer will not be able to discern the candidate's accent either.
- **Can the candidate hear and comprehend customer's statement, even in instances where customers' accents or dialects are different than the prospective employees'?**
To demonstrate mastery of this proficiency, Sivox enables the candidate to enter data and fully interact with the desktop. In addition to testing listening skills, this assessment also factors in customer accents and dialects that may be unfamiliar to the candidate.

Customer service

In a global survey conducted by Accenture, nearly 75 percent of the consumers polled cited "poor customer service" as the reason they ended their relationship with companies. [2]

88% of the respondents surveyed for a recent report indicated that agents must access more than one application during a customer call, while 60% have to access more than three.

Customer service (continued)

The customer experience extends beyond mechanics and just saying the right words. Conveying genuine empathy and maintaining a positive tone also have a tremendous impact on overall customer satisfaction. In fact, 55% of the companies interviewed for a recent report listed “ability to convey empathy” as the top attribute of an agent’s job-performance success key indicators. [4]

- Does the candidate maintain appropriate tone throughout the call?

Each training exercise is recorded and a report is generated. The report provides coaches with a snapshot of students’ voice/system interaction skills, including data entry and navigation. Additionally, coaches may access students’ recorded dialog segments from the summary which enables them to assess soft skills, such as empathy and tone, as well.

Multi-tasking

According to the 200 companies interviewed for a 2011 guide, 88% of the respondents indicated that agents must access more than one application during a customer call, and 60% have to access more than three. [4]

Consequently, an agent’s ability to multi-task is one of the most important indicators of a call center agent’s success in his or her role. Sivox simulation software provides hiring managers with an accurate predictor of prospective employees’ multi-tasking abilities.

By taking the extra step to pre-screen candidates, call centers provide prospective employees with a more realistic picture of the positions they are applying for.

- Is the candidate's desktop data-entry ability while interacting with the customer at the desired level of proficiency?

Sivox evaluates the candidate's ability to enter basic data during the call. This tests how accurately he or she captures critical customer information such as first and last name, address and phone number. If the candidate struggles to handle basic data entry, then he or she will likely struggle when met with a more complex set of tasks.

Summary

Agents that are more engaged provide a better overall customer experience. By taking the extra step to pre-screen candidates, call centers provide prospective employees with a more realistic picture of the positions they are applying for. This, in turn, can be linked to greater employee satisfaction, which translates to higher levels of agent engagement post-hire.

Additionally, candidates may perceive call centers that pre-screen candidates as organizations that are committed to employees' success, which may positively influence a candidate to select one call center over another, when met with offers from more than one call center.

Sivox introduces an entirely new dimension to objective assessment and scoring. With its real-time reporting and objective scoring capabilities, Sivox simulation software provides hiring managers with a fast, cost-effective vehicle with which to evaluate prospective employees' communication and customer service skills, and multi-tasking abilities.

To view a Sivox demonstration and learn more about how Sivox simulation software can help your call center pre-screen potential employees and positively impact your bottom line, visit www.sivox.com.

Resources

1. Cook, R. (April 30, 2009). "How to Beat Contact Center Churn." www.focus.com
2. Accenture. (November 11, 2011). "2009 Global Consumer Satisfaction Survey." www.accenture.com
3. Beckford, S. (2010). "How to Prevent Turnover in Your Call Center." *Customer Service Manager*. www.customerservicemanager.com
4. ContactBabel. (2011). *The US Contact Center Decision Makers' Guide*. www.contactbabel.com

About Sivox

Sivox™ — the award-winning voice recognition-driven simulation training platform for call centers — provides a richly immersive learning experience that delivers increased information retention, significant financial savings, enhanced call quality and improved productivity. Cost-effective and versatile, additional applications for Sivox include: pre-employment simulation screening; continuing education; and skills certification in the context of industry regulatory compliance and call center employee motivation.