

## Why Handling Time Is No Longer a KPI You Should Care About

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### What is Average Handle Time (AHT)?

In customer service, AHT is a metric commonly used to assess customer service representative performance, guide problem resolution strategies, and control team time and resources.

AHT measures the actual time your representatives spend conversing with your customers, along with the amount of time they spend on hold waiting for someone to reply - whether on the phone or online - and the amount of time they spend following up afterwards. Taking notes, carrying out necessary actions for the customer, or anything concerning the call can be broadly categorised as follow up.

Although that benchmarks and desired AHT of different industries can differ greatly, overall the formula for calculating your service's AHT is relatively straightforward -

**(AHT = Total talk Time + Total Time on Hold + After Call Work Time / Number of Calls)**

Most businesses collect this data from each section of their customer support service, and use it to grade, assess, and correct the performance of the entire team. However, a successful customer experience strategy is more than what you offer a customer in the very first minute. A returning customer is worth a thousand disinterested ones, and quality always wins.

To demonstrate this, today we'll investigate why focusing upon efficient handling time is a common mistake, and discover some alternatives that will keep your customers loyal for years to come.

### Why can measuring AHT potentially have a negative affect on your CX strategy?

It has long been established that focusing on AHT in your customer experience strategy as a way to increase efficiency can lead to strain, a loss of direction, and other complications for any customer service team, whether online or over the phone. A few of those complications include -

- **Repeat calling.** You are training your representatives to get off of the phone with customers as quickly as possible, which can result in a shorter call time at first, but it becomes much more likely that their customers will need to call back for more information or after becoming frustrated. This consumes even more time and leaves the customer displeased with the service they have received.
- **Measuring your representatives by speed, not outcome.** This is a catalyst for friction between the customer and your representative as one tries to find a satisfactory solution, and the other attempts to simply find a means to an end which will end the call.
- **Customer retention.** If a customer feels interacted with as a person, and has their needs fulfilled, then the likelihood of them returning or doing business with you increases massively. When you are providing a retail customer experience, it is critical that customers choose to remain buying your products and contacting you for support rather than looking for alternatives elsewhere, and when you are a vendor of a service, it is important that they

continue to use your service other than someone else's. It is not conducive to this if as a representative you are discouraged from spending time them and end up making them feel dismissed.

There is also the possibility that a lack of efficiency on the part of your customer service representatives is not causing a low AHT. Other debilitating concerns could easily be -

- **The script you have is either inefficient or confusing.** If a customer is unsure where to go or has to wait too long to find out who will be helping them, then frustration is inevitable. Whether your script is too long or simply does not give enough information, remember that this is the first thing your customers will experience, and it will impact the rest of their experience.
- **Your call routing system is inefficient.** If you send your customer to the wrong department or representative, you could create one of the biggest delays in handling - drastically increasing the amount of time they spend on hold and the amount of times that they will have to repeatedly answer the same questions for new representatives to understand the issue.

## **Benefits to making better use of the time you spend**

When it comes to improving efficiency without sacrificing customer satisfaction, the true issue is not how much time you use, but about using it smartly. Thankfully, there are a few simple steps that you can take to address the issues above so that your company can progress to a stage where it can simultaneously benefit from both efficiency and an excellent customer retention strategy.

- **Factor FCR, or First Call Resolution, into your CX strategy.** With this newer metric that offers a more decisive verdict, we can reduce the likelihood of customers feeling under-informed and having to contact again by focusing on achieving a quality solution the first time, thus avoiding frustration as was mentioned earlier.
- **Using as many tools as possible before the communication even begins.** This can include branching out of telecommunication to involve a digital customer experience or chat function; ideally including artificial intelligence. Also known as a Omnichannel Customer Experience, this practice enables businesses to retain customers and win new ones at a much higher rate, with a study by the Aberdeen Group estimating a 200% difference in retention rate between companies that employ this strategy and companies that do not.
- **Having an intelligent website or communication function available.** By again focusing on Omnichannel Customer Experience strategies, your customers can be directed to the right person the first time without having to wait on hold, and your representatives will have a greater understanding of what to expect from them. In many cases, this enables them to skip parts of the script and immediately begin helping the customer with as few questions and confusion as possible. Some issues may not even need to be forwarded at all, making the handling time zero! Additionally, this will allow you to measure customer satisfaction through post-interaction surveys without involving any questions from the representative themselves.
- **Specialise your teams.** With an intelligent contact direction system, a customer can be directed to a representative who is knowledgeable in their relevant field and knows what to

say and do immediately, thereby reducing the wait time even further in a helpful and constructive way.