

# Consumer Electronics: Hiring and Training the Right People is Key to Customer Satisfaction

Reduced costs and better customer service begins with excellent staffing

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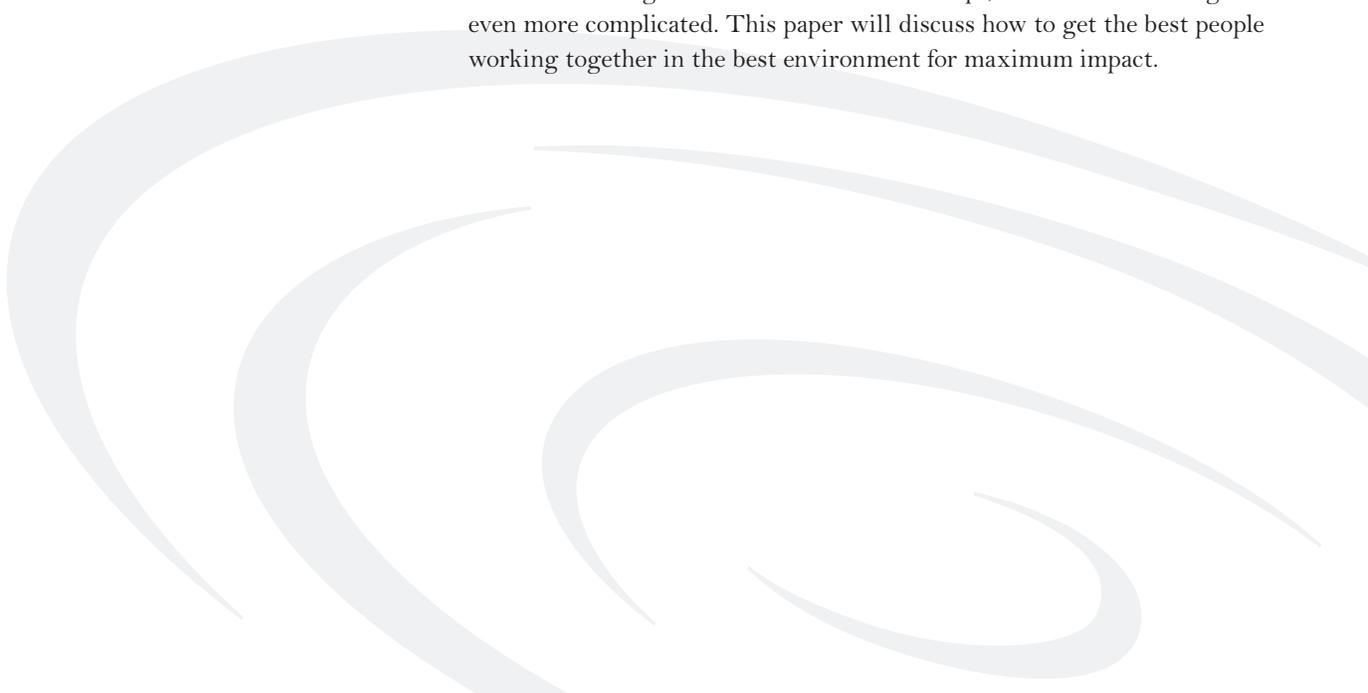
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## Introduction: The future is here

Imagine a big glass room filled with the newest and best consumer electronics. People wearing branded gear pace back and forth, speaking to customers through headsets, while others type into several different chat screens simultaneously. Others are working on equipment, trying to replicate problems as they talk through issues with customers or type into chat logs. In the break room, there's a couch where staff can relax and get to know the latest products, everything from 4K TVs to laptops. It's not a movie set, it's a new approach to customer engagement and it's delivering high-quality results.

Consumer electronics make up 24% of the electronics industry. The world of consumer electronics today is one of hyper-connectivity. Customers don't just want to know how to use their new TV, they want to use it with their new speakers, using their smart devices to control them and they want all their equipment to work together. With the advent of the "internet of things" and the smart home concept, customer care will get even more complicated. This paper will discuss how to get the best people working together in the best environment for maximum impact.

A large, abstract, light gray graphic consisting of several overlapping, curved, swoosh-like shapes that sweep across the bottom half of the page.

It may seem like overkill to have so much **attention to detail**, but providing support for today's complicated electronics requires **intelligence, flexibility** and a **host of soft skills**.

### Recruitment: It starts with hiring the right person

This industry requires a different kind of agent, a universal agent, who can navigate the complex landscape of interconnected consumer electronics. It's also important for the new recruit to have the correct level of skills. The people hired need to have enough tech skills to advise customers, balanced with adaptable communication skills. Those hired also need the ability to adapt to the customer's personality and have the people skills to navigate through difficult customer interactions. Too little of either and the agent will fail to meet customer expectations. Recruiters also have to make sure to find talent willing to work enough hours and cover all shifts.

One of the tools we use to profile job skill sets is Kenexa Prove It, an assessment tool that tests applicants to see if they have relevant job skills to be effective in the role. In some cases, the client will specify which assessment they want their agents to have, such as Excel skills, auditory comprehension or typing speed. It has more than 1,500 pre-made assessments, and the option to create new tests that are a combination of several others. We can customize, for example, if a client wants to make sure that all of their agents have a pre-existing familiarity with smart phones, or with the client's own products. Some clients require agents to have a minimum score in certain skills or abilities.

It may seem like overkill to have so much attention to detail, but providing support for today's complicated electronics requires intelligence, flexibility and a host of soft skills. An agent's role can be challenging. For example, one of our clients has the goal of 90% or better rating on the Customer Satisfaction Survey, and a 90% first call resolution goal. The client wants an Average Handle Time (AHT) of about 14 minutes. Yet many calls (for example, to set up a new smart TV) can take upwards of an hour. That means that the reps have to make up the time difference by speedy resolution on other issues, while still meeting the high overall satisfaction standards.

We continually strive for improvement. As the landscape of consumer electronics changes and becomes more complicated, we will adjust accordingly. After we've selected for the correct skill set, we test to see where our model should be tweaked, then adjust and test again. Once we've hired the right people, the next step is to make sure they have the training they need to succeed.



## Training: Building the skills for success

Efficient training is a balance between speed and thoroughness. While every day spent in training is an added cost, it's crucial that every person has sufficient skills to meet the customers' needs. It's also important that we fold training into every part of our process, not just for new hires, but to continually improve our people's skills.

With one client, we started one device at a time. First we trained our new people on tablets, and when they were proficient, we put them on the phones with supervision. After a couple of weeks, we trained them on TVs, and then had another round of nesting. Nesting, taking live calls at a lower volume, is crucial, because it allows more opportunity for the trainers and supervisors to coach the reps. Details matter. For example, in a new center, we arranged the training pods in a U-shaped format so that the trainers could see all the monitors. This way the trainers could spot and correct errors as they occurred.

For our staff offshore, we have a tool called Ascentify Neurolanguage. This is an interactive program that has courses ranging from basic communications skills such as spelling, grammar, and pronunciation to more advanced courses on empathy, small talk, and handling irate customers. It features the latest in speech-recognition technology, so that users can practice their oral language skills and get real-time, individualized feedback. If they are handling U.S. customers, we can also train them in U.S. culture, such as holidays, family structure and the average high-tech American home.



## Monitoring: Making sure the lessons are taking root

Excellence in training is an ongoing process. Here, too, specialized tools give customer delivery centers an edge. We use a tool called Panopto which records our training sessions for future use. This means that both trainers and trainees can access lessons at any time. From our reference library of courses, representatives can repeat any training to help address areas they find personally challenging. The recordings are not a complete substitute for live teaching and presentation sessions, which always come first. Our work at home agents, and people who missed initial training sessions, can even remotely access the content.

We don't just rely on self-assessment to determine training needs. When our people engage with customers, all of the calls are recorded and surveys are sent out to the customers afterwards. At the end of each day, in the event that a survey comes back with scores below target, it triggers a discussion between the agent and the trainers to assess what training opportunities exist and how the process could be improved. Again, details matter. Errors that consistently happen across calls can trigger changes in how the material is taught in the first place.

In this way we've learned the value of more focused, specialized training: no more taking people off the phone to teach them something they already know. With quarterly assessments, we can figure out who needs training or a refresher course and on what skills. We also measure their progress before, during, and after to ensure each course is effective. This laser precision allows us to reduce costs through lower attrition and more satisfied employees who drive higher CSATs—all of which save money for our clients.

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## Cross training: Reducing attrition and saving costs

An important way to retain our talent is to offer people the training that will continually guide them toward more challenging career paths. Keeping the talent motivated and interested reduces attrition which reduces costs. In addition, cross-skilling and multi-skilling has the secondary benefit of improving the flexibility of a customer contact center.

Combined with a telco system which can re-route calls during peak periods, cross-skilling and multi-skilling allows for more flexibility during peak times. We can also prioritize calls, for example, making high-end sales first priority, and care (returns) lower priority. This has proved invaluable during peak periods, such as Black Friday/Cyber Monday, which, for one of our clients, provided 40% of their volume. We've helped clients reduce the average unit cost by 23.3% through delivery excellence by successfully managing the fluctuations in work volume.

Having agents who understand more than just their little niche has unexpected benefits. For example, one of our clients had a parts and accessories department that sold mostly very low cost widgets. Because screws are such a low-cost, specific item, the cost of sale was comparatively higher than bigger ticket items. However, we were able to look at all the departments holistically, and saw this as an opportunity to upsell. People call in for screws because they own one of the client's products. Knowing which product the customer already owns is a prime opportunity to educate and convince the customer about the merits of similar, higher-value products. With one of our clients, we were able to increase the upselling revenue from \$72,188 to \$340,899, in one month, just by upselling in the parts and accessories department.

Another way in which we helped the client benefit from this holistic approach happened in the care (returns) department. We took the data gleaned from the returns department and cross-analyzed it with the original point of sale. Although not every original sale originated through us, the ones that did provided valuable insight. After investigating, listening to recordings and engaging in data analysis, we were able to reduce the amount of returns. Information gained from analyzing returns led to better sales, which led to fewer returns. This focus on savings allowed us to save money for our client. We saved \$346,692 by taking the rate of returns from 8% to 4%, just by improving the way we sold.

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## Conclusion: Bringing it all full circle

Our people are our greatest resource. A focus on hiring the right talent and using training to fully engage them reaps long-term rewards. When agents are trained about the products, they are better able to provide the excellent service today's consumers expect. People develop a much deeper knowledge about features and troubleshooting when they have hands-on access to the products.

Finding the right people, hiring the right personalities, training swiftly, and offering refresher courses and career-enriching education are ways to set a company apart. Making sure that all departments have good communication with one another and that the people serving customers have adequate cross-training and multi-training makes the most of the birds-eye view a company gets from having all the customer delivery centers housed under one banner.

We learn and grow from the work done by people who talk to the customers every day. Every improvement we make hinges on having the right people to implement changes at the front line. All our tools, training, and experience lead to that most-important moment, the person on the headset pacing back and forth in the high tech customer delivery center, figuring out how to solve the customer's problem and make them happy.

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