

10 Tips to Remember For Choosing the Right Call Center

Businesses of every size are discovering the many advantages of outsourcing labor-intensive cost centers. By delegating inbound and outbound telecommunications operations to a call center, clients not only avoid the costs of labor and benefits, but also the need to recruit and train qualified employees to interact with customers.

This enables clients to focus on core competencies, while the call center focuses on building their clients' revenue base through sales and retention services.

At the bottom line, outsourcing means companies do not have to invest millions of dollars to employ, train, manage, and maintain the latest advances in customer contact/relationship management services, and infrastructures with costly and time-consuming in-house IT and service departments.

While your search for a call center will require extensive research to find the right fit for your company, you should keep these ten tips in mind at all times:

1.) Make sure that the call center you are inquiring about understands your industry fully

If a call center does not understand your business then you will only experience a train wreck with your customers, investors, and your bottom line. Ask the center in advance to tell you what they know about your industry. Get specific details about their past and present experience. Ask for a list of companies in your industry that they have worked with and follow up with those companies yourself to verify the truth.

2.) Don't forget the RFP

Your business needs are unique and there is no one size fits all for every industry. A request for proposal is the best way to group multiple call centers into a comparable list, allowing you to examine strategic goals of the call center, its abilities and shortcomings, as well as price. The RFP will also help you in determining if outsourcing is right for your business.

3.) Keep multiple centers in mind

You've probably ran into a situation where you bought some sort of technology only to take the item home to realize that the faster, less expensive, and more feature able model was right next to it on the shelf. Call centers can work the same way and carefully evaluating your choices is necessary. Don't get duped into a sales person who says they can fill every need you have, because no call center, small or large, can fit every business need. If they could, your business would be a call center.

4.) Don't let the vendor control the outsourcing process

Some contact centers will make the argument that the process of outsourcing is smooth and easy. This is false. Outsourcing will be time consuming and can potentially cost a lot of money-- especially if you allow the center to take full control. Your choice of center should operate like an extension of your business no different from the accounting department, marketing, or production. All extensions of your business work together and answer to whomever in charge. Your call center should do the same and your contract should specify this. Your outsourcing vendor should know your industry and understand how your business operates-- especially since you cannot control another businesses choice. Your call center should keep your strategic goals in mind not theirs.

5.) Don't get caught up in price

The best call center for your business will be one that can complete the task you ask at a reasonable price. Outsourcing is not cheap and anyone offering dirt-cheap prices may not be able to deliver the results you want. However, that doesn't mean that that you should seek out the highest bidder either, as you may pay for things you don't need. Use an RFP to filter and sort through your potential vendors and let them know that others are bidding for the same job. This creates competition that can give you choices that are more qualified at a lower rate. How the center can fit your business should be the first priority and the price second.

6.) Know and understand your key metrics

All call centers record and implement certain policies of their employees' performance. Some centers will give you these metrics all the way down to a particular employee, but most will just cover how the center is performing as a whole; and they should. This is why you outsourced the job to begin with, to avoid micromanaging employees. However, don't let a bunch of numbers confuse you from the big picture-- success. Think of the areas that you find most important to the task and get your call centers to track those areas. Stop and ask questions and get answers on what metrics the call center is using, what those metrics mean, and how did they come up with those numbers. If you can't calculate the numbers manually, then they might as well be lottery picks because they don't mean anything.

7.) Get a grip on security

Call centers are known for having a high turnover and it's not uncommon for half of the people who started on your campaign to be replaced with new faces. Nevertheless, the high turnover also makes your call center choice a big security risk. You can't control what the employees who leave the center do with the knowledge you gave them. It wouldn't be a surprise that your new marketing campaign to gain market share was thwarted by the your competitions deep pockets before you even got a chance. Your call center choice should have set guidelines and practices for dealing with the knowledge their employees take with them. You should also have a non-disclosure clause written into your contract and the penalty for the center if they choose not to keep your trade secrets secret.

8.) Train your center wisely

The call center relies heavily on the information provided by the client to create proper training and QA programs. If the center has not been properly trained and updated on a particular situation, then it is not their fault if it was handled incorrectly. You must provide training and assistance throughout your outsourcing jobs or face losing face with your customers. A call center becomes your face that the customers see and improper training shows that your company doesn't know what you're doing.

9.) Get to know your center

The best way to get the most out of your call center choice is to learn about them inside and out. Know where your calls or task will physically be completed and the environment that your center's agents will work in. Make a trip to your call center choice when you get a chance and evaluate your campaigns performance first hand. Your call center choice should allow you to visit them onsite and most would encourage it. Your center of choice should work as an extension of your business and thus you should know a little about that extension.

10.) Ask yourself if offshoring is right

While offshoring may seem financially practical, it may not be the best choice for your business. Carefully evaluate your needs and if those needs justify a higher cost in your outsourcing project. Face it, there is a stigma in the United States for outsourcing to call centers off shore, and you have to decide if your call center of choice will interact directly with your customers. BPO and other non-critical task can be offshored easily and effectively. However, cold calling your customers with offshore agents may present your company as cheap and unresponsive to the customer's needs. Automated calls can have this same detrimental effect.

Outsourcing to a call center will not be an easy task. It will require time, research, and careful planning and implementation. The challenges you will face can often outweigh any potential cost reduction or efficiency improvements your business meant to achieve. To help prevent lost time, money, and possible customers by choosing the wrong call center, these tips should inspire questions and possibilities to help you in your search for the right call center.

Good Luck.