



Outsource After-hours Buyer's guide

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CONTEXT

Outsourcing to reduce costs and get cheaper services for customers is just not enough anymore. Companies know that **Customer Service has become a strategic matter**. According to a Gartner study, 89% of companies now compete primarily on customer experience (1). Outsource to experts to bring added value to your services.

Every interaction with customers is intrinsic to the well-being and the perception of the brands. Whether it comes from a prospect who requires guidance in its purchase journey or an existing customer looking for help, each interaction is essential.

Even more since the COVID pandemic, customers expect the companies to be very reactive (2). They want instant responses to their questions. **ANYTIME. Business continuity 24/7 has never been so important.**

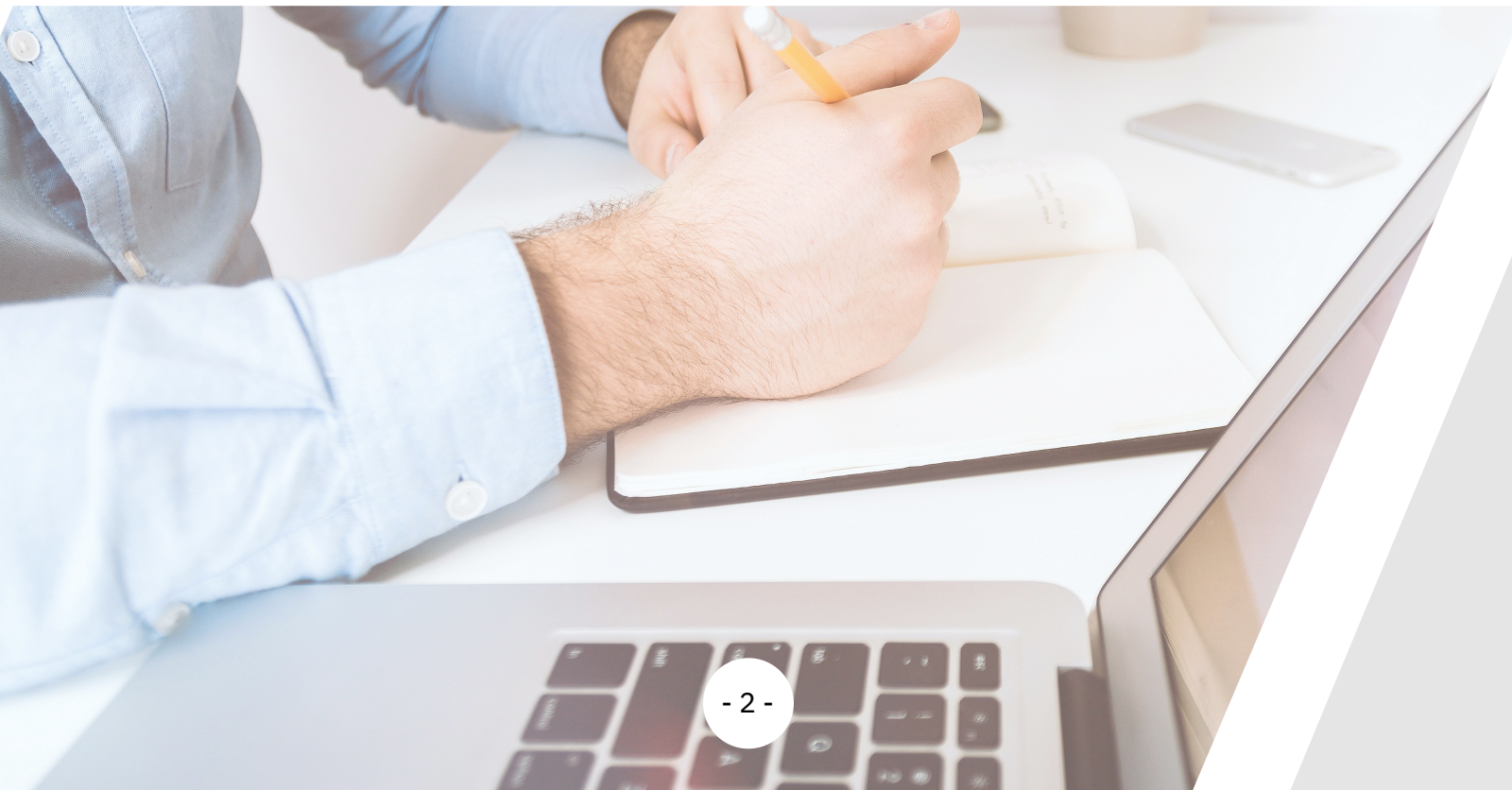
A handy tool to manage an after-hours outsourcing relationship successfully

A business relationship without proper governance may turn out to be costly because of renegotiations, redelivery, and finally, customers' loss. This guide compiles best practices from industry actors' practical business experience and may help you reach a beneficial outsourcing arrangement.

The present buyer's guide aims at facilitating the setting-up and the management of an outsourcing relationship between:

- An **Outsourcing Party**, on the one hand. A Customer Support Department, or a Contact Center seeking to provide after-hours solutions to customers
- A **Service Provider**, on the other hand.

It may assist you in the due diligence process when choosing a Service Provider and negotiating a successful outsourcing agreement. It may also contribute to improving the quality of services offered by the Service Provider.



PART 1

WHAT IS AFTER-HOURS SERVICE AND WHY DO YOU NEED IT?

A. What is after-hours service?

Let's define the service clearly and constructively.

Outsourcing the after-hours activities of your contact center makes your business stay open 24/7/365. You will be able to provide around-the-clock support to your customers in their preferred channels; without wasting your resources doing it.

Your contact center can outsource during after-hours all the channels it handles:



Phone calls



Emails and tickets



Live chat



Social media



Letters (scan) and faxes



The after-hours team's work scope can include triage and resolution of tier-1 issues, ticketing in your help-desk system, and escalation of critical problems.

According to industry benchmarks, business continuity is considered when the response rate to calls is at least 80% of answered calls in 20 seconds, and eventually, when 95% of calls are answered.

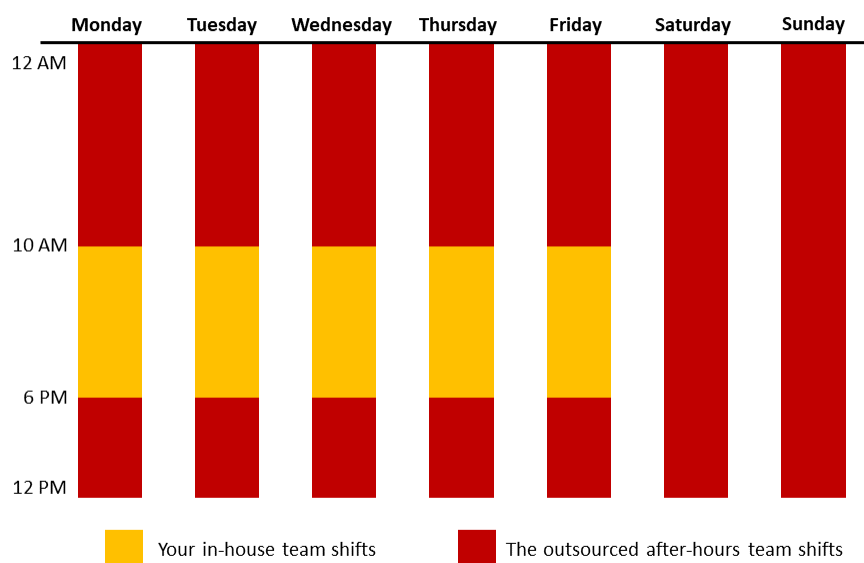
B. How does it work?

When your in-house support staff finish their shifts and leave your Contact Center, the outsourced after-hours team takes over.

This team is composed of **Agents**, managed by **Team Leaders** and (live-)monitored by members of a **Quality department**.

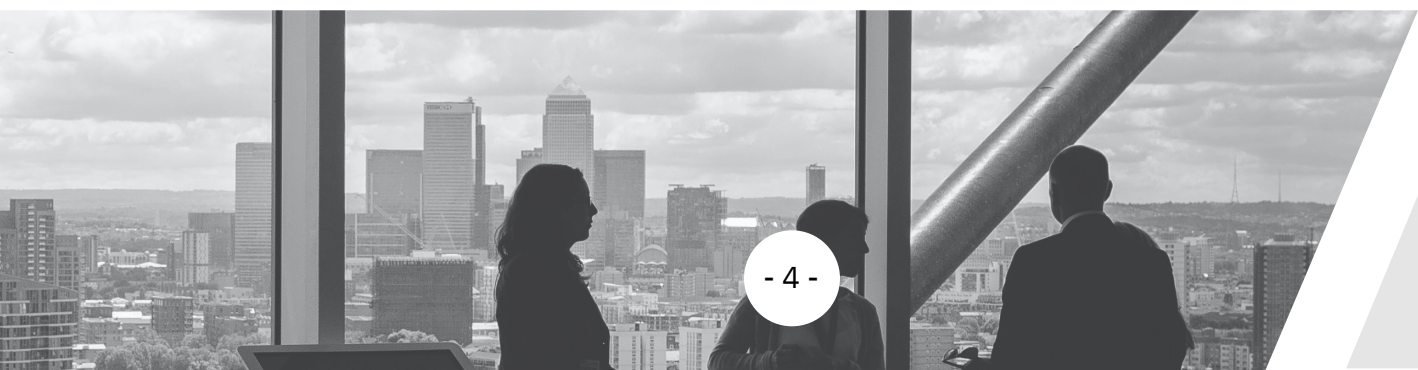
The after-hours team handles your inbound customer interactions:

- After the working hours of your in-house teams, including overnight
- During weekends and/or national holidays.



As for cloud-based interactions, the Outsourcing Party grants the Service Provider users access to emails, social media, live chat, and VoIP accounts. The most technical part involves the transfer of inbound calls to the outsourcer.

For further information, check the [Roadmap to outsource in 5 steps / Technology](#) part (page 18).



C. What should you expect when outsourcing after-hours?

1. Positive outcomes for your Contact Center

Take advantage of 100% of your **sales opportunities** by synchronizing with your customers' hours: 55% of US online adults are likely to abandon their online purchase if they cannot find a quick answer to their question (3).

Furthermore, interacting with customers and prospects 24/7 may provide brands with a tangible competitive advantage.

Night shifts are usually harder to manage. Night shifts or rotating shifts can often disturb an employee's sleep cycle and lead to health problems, so companies must set up significant guidelines to regulate night shift or rotating shift work. Worker fatigue is a theme carefully scrutinized by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (4).

Night shift workers report lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment than evening workers. Consequently, **night shifts' employee turnover rates are up to 3 times higher** than during regular working hours (5).

Maintaining a Contact Center opened 24/7 implies a **high rate of fixed costs**, with a relatively lower volume of inbound interactions. Outsourcing the after-hours allows you to propose a continuity of service 24/7 to your customers at an affordable cost.

An entirely in-house managed 24/7/365 service is likely to deter your contact center's overall **performance KPIs**, such as the Occupancy Rate of Agents, the number of Handled Calls per agent. Finally, you would be facing a higher Average Cost per Inbound Call.

Additionally, outsourcing the after-hours activities of your contact center would:

- Allow your in-house teams to focus on the day's calls and begin their working day with a clean inbox or social media
- Maximize the chances for cross-selling and upselling.

2. Positive outcomes for your customers

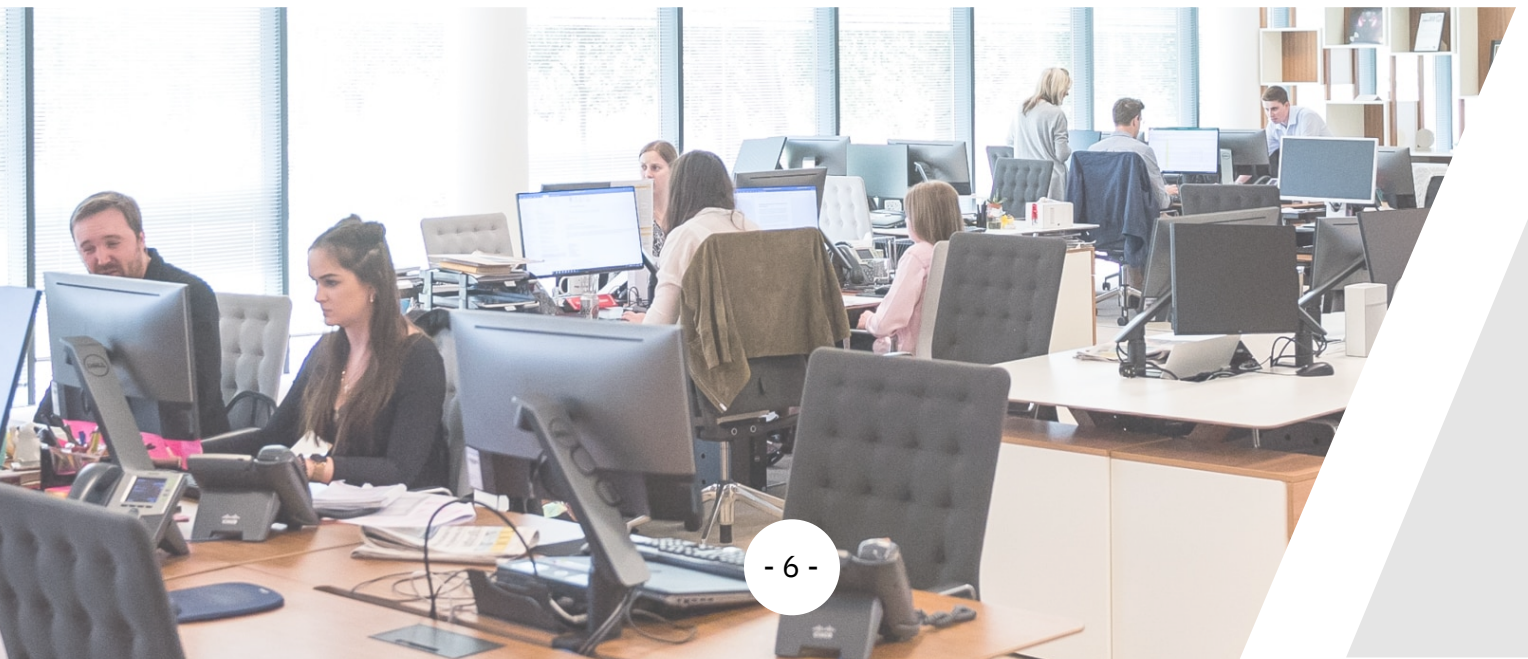
Customers are more and more willing to get instant responses to their questions. They want to receive the right support at the right time, anytime. After-hours service develops a close and on-going relationship with your customers and positively influences their **satisfaction**, the longevity of the relationship, and their level of loyalty.



The volume of interactions during night or weekend shifts is usually lower than usual working hours, but the nature of those interactions also changes. They tend to be more **urgent or critical**. Typically, a client who calls in the middle of the night does so because he needs an urgent response or immediate assistance.



The urgent aspect of the interactions occurring at night is why automated messages, even from intelligent conversational bots, are not enough. To be solved adequately, customers' interactions at night tend to be needier in **human intervention**.





PART 2

HOW TO MAKE A SUCCESS OUT OF THE AFTER-HOURS OUTSOURCING?

A. Choose the correct Service Provider

Choosing the best Service Provider to outsource the after-hours of your Contact Center requires a couple of preparatory steps. As the Outsourcing Party, making the optimal choice implies to express your needs, to define your required SLAs, and the criteria of selection that matters for you. Finally, once you have made your choice on one Service Provider, it is highly recommended to conduct due diligence before signing a contract.

1. Define your needs and the objectives pursued by the outsourcing

Even before contacting outsourcers, you should define and express your needs as clearly as possible. The more articulated and detailed your expressed needs, the more Service Providers will answer it adequately.

Make sure to detail each of the following points in your expressed needs:

- A description of the activity
- The listing of required channels of interactions
- The specification of after-hours shifts (schedule)
- The calendar of national holidays to substitute your in-house teams
- The additional languages required (oral and written required levels)
- The required Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and KPIs. Being the Outsourcing Party, you are the one who best knows the most critical KPIs to the mission.



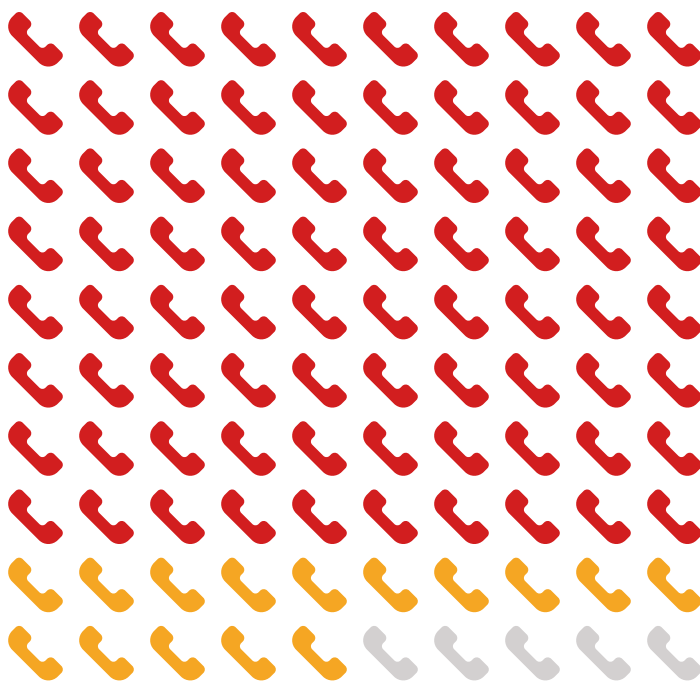
It is always useful to attach **a history, and if possible, a forecast** regarding volumes of interactions to your expressed needs.

2. Define your SLAs: an industry benchmark

Customer satisfaction research has demonstrated a positive correlation between faster response times and higher customer satisfaction. According to Forrester Research, 77% of customers say valuing their time is the most important thing a company can do to provide them with good customer service (6). Defining the correct SLAs for the outsourcing of after-hours activities is crucial: they have to be demanding enough to satisfy your customers and, at the same time, realistic enough to be achieved by the service provider.

To help you define the SLAs of your mission, we collected the figures that are commonly managed in the Contact Center industry and compiled them into an infographic. Each brand and each channel has its specificities, so you shall decide the SLAs for calls, emails, live chat, and social media moderation that best suit your customer's expectations.

SLAs FOR INCOMING CALLS



80% OF CALLS ANSWERED WITHIN 20 SEC.

95% OF CALLS ANSWERED WITHIN 60 SEC.

MARGIN OF ERROR 5%

The adherence to achieving the targeted **Average Handling Time (AHT)** is specific to each mission. According to Call Centre Magazine, the industry standard AHT is 6 minutes and 10 seconds (7).

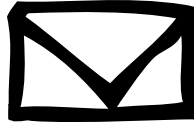
You should target at least the following quality quality benchmarks:

- **First Contact Resolution:** around 80% of resolved cases, but that KPI is likely to vary a lot according to your industry
- **A maximum of 5% of monitored calls with critical errors**
- **A maximum of 10% of monitored calls with non-critical errors**

SLAS FOR EMAILS

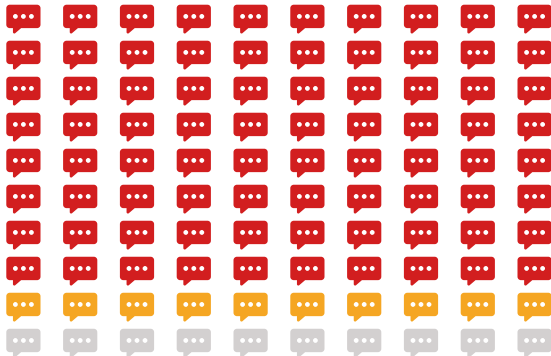


97% OF YOUR
EMAILS



ANSWERED
WITHIN **2 HOURS**

SLAS FOR LIVECHAT

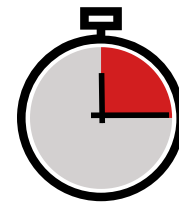
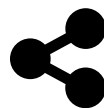


80% OF CHATS ANSWERED WITHIN **30 SEC.**
90% OF CHATS ANSWERED WITHIN **60 SEC.**
MARGIN OF ERROR **10%**

SLAS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA



90% OF MESSAGES
+ COMMENTS



MODERATED
WITHIN **15 MIN.**

*moderated means that each comment or message will be reviewed, tagged for sentiment analysis or replied when needed. If the moderator is not aware of the answer, he/she informs the customer that he will get back to him/her ASAP and look for the response from the informed responsible.

10 CRITERIA TO SELECT THE BEST SERVICE PROVIDER



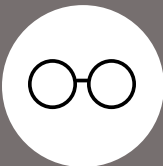
1. TRUST

Trust the people that will be your voice in front of your customers



2. EXPERTISE

Skilled specialists with track-record experience



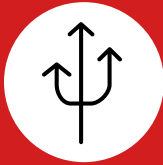
3. TRANSPARENCY

Good and frequent communication and real-time access to the calling tools



4. COST-EFFECTIVENESS

The service provider should be able to reduce the costs



5. FLEXIBILITY

In billing models and be able to adapt to your characteristics.



6. CLIENT PORTFOLIO

A wide client portfolio is great indicator of confidence.



7. IT INFRASTRUCTURE

Ensure total compatibility with your infrastructure and IT tools.



8. DATA PRIVACY

Respect for data privacy and compliance with local laws



9. CYBERSECURITY

Protocols to prevent from cyber attacks



10. CAPACITY TO SAY NO

Saying YES to all of your requests often result in empty promises

4. Run an efficient Due Diligence

The Outsourcing Party shall perform due diligence to **ensure the Service Provider has the capacity and the will to perform the after-hours outsourced activities in compliance with your standards and requirements**. Due diligence consists of reviewing all relevant business documents, records, business processes, and financial conditions to assess the risks and viability of an agreement with the Service Provider in question.

The Service Provider should designate a risk manager (sometimes named compliance officer) to evaluate the internal control processes and assess operational and regulatory risks. The due diligence should be transparent and documented in a report before the formalization of the contractual agreement.

Banks or third party references can be involved in the due diligence process.



The Due Diligence is the last phase before the contract. You can still **negotiate** the required aspects and then approve the final condition from the selected provider.



B. A roadmap to outsource in 5 steps



01.
Prepare an
efficient
contract



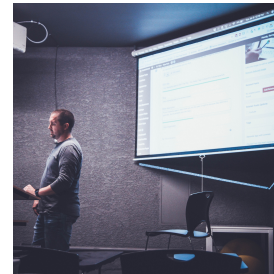
02.
Set up
productive
**operational
processes**



03.
Transfer your
interaction
with the
right **IT**



04.
Build solid
initial and
continuous
Training



04.
Ensure a
healthy
system of
reporting

1. The Contract



The contract is the mainframe agreement that regulates and establishes the fundamentals on which both parties will build their workflow. The Service Provider usually redacts it, and then it is revised and amended by the Outsourcing Party.

An efficient and complete contractual agreement shall cover a description of the outsourced service, a Technical part, an Administration part, and finally, a Financial part.

1.1 A description of the outsourced service

The description of the service should include:

- A description of the activity
- The channels of interactions included in the scope of work
- A schedule of shifts and a calendar of national holidays to substitute your in-house teams
- The languages in which the service shall be performed.

1.2 Technical part of the contract

The required SLA and KPIs. The Service Provider is more likely to achieve the performance targets with a complete definition of SLAs and how KPIs will be measured (ex: AHT, first call resolution metric, etc.).

A separate subsection of the agreement should outline the performance requirements in detail. This subsection should be subject to and governed by the terms and conditions of the main outsourcing contract. The contract should contain warranties and indemnities related to the Service Provider's performance of the outsourced services.

Description of the quality monitoring and escalation plans. The level of monitoring, assessment, inspection and auditing required by the contract should be proportionate to the risks involved and the outsourced activity's size and complexity. Ensure the continuous monitoring and assessment of the Service Provider's performance to take any necessary corrective measures promptly.

Specification of Disaster Management & Recovery plans. The contract should include the Service Provider's obligation to inform the Outsourcing Party of any changes in circumstances that could impact the outsourced service's performance. The Service Provider must notify the Outsourcing Party in case of delivery breaches immediately.

The agreed terms for Data Protection and Confidentiality.

In terms of Data Protection, the contract should:

- Define the confidential information that will be handled by the Service Provider
- Contain the obligations to protect and keep such information confidential, specifying the regulatory requirements applicable to client confidentiality (ex: RGPD for customers in Europe)
- Require the Service Provider to notify the Outsourcing Party of the security measures implemented
- Prohibit the Service Provider and its agents from using or disclosing the Outsourcing Party's proprietary information or the Outsourcing Party's customers, except as necessary to provide the contracted services.

1.3 Administration part of the contract

A description of the required outsourced workforce. The contract shall include a precise sizing of the Service Provider's team dedicated to the outsourced mission and its evolution according to the changes in volumes of inbound interactions. It should also describe the agents' particular skills, how they will be selected, endorsed, trained, evaluated, and coached.

Information and reports ownership. Description of deliverables by the Service Provider and their frequency.

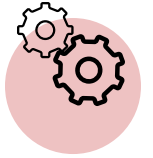
Contract duration. The Outsourcing Party should be prepared to take remedial action if the Service Provider's performance is inadequate and the minimum quality levels are unmet.

The contract should contain clear corrective measures available and termination conditions if the outsourced services' performance is unsatisfactory or in case of breach of warranties or other contract breaches. The contract should contain mechanisms to resolve disputes that might arise, including the choice of applicable law and competent jurisdiction.

1.4 Financial part of the contract

The Financial part of the contract shall include at least the following elements:

- An evaluation of the contract value
- The currency
- The billing cycle
- The payment timeframe and methods
- An annual revision based on the inflation rate.



2. Operational Processes

Once the contract is agreed and signed, both parties can focus on the set-up and the operations more in-depth.

2.1 Manage your current personnel with care

Once employees find out your company intends to outsource, they wonder whether they will be affected and may feel offended. The Outsourcing party needs to **avoid fear and rumors to spread fast**, as they usually tend to. The best approach then is to be forthright with all staff and partners, disclosing information only once decisions have been made. Clear and complete communication is vital to facilitate the transition. Uncertainty is a worst-case scenario, so make sure everyone understands what to expect.

In case you already perform a 24/7 customer support and want to outsource the after-hours activity, you should identify key employees in those areas and recruit them to other areas of your company. Do not ask the current staff to train those who will be replacing them as their emotional response will not result in proper training.

2.2 Hold a Kick-off meeting.

It's a 2-4 hour meeting that may take place online. A kick-off meeting's primary objective is to get everyone involved in the project, energized (kick-off!), and aligned. By the end of the session, they should understand their roles, the common goals, and deliverables.





Before the meeting, both parties should identify and agree on a **Single Point of Contact** (SPOC) at the Service Provider's side and an **Account Manager** on the Outsourcing Party's side. They will serve as conductors of the project and reference persons.

A fruitful kick-off meeting **agenda** should include:

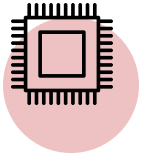
- A "nice and easy" presentation of the mission and the partnership, and a round of introductions of each member
- A shortlist of the project's objectives, shared documents and deliverables
- A project planning that includes all the details that can be known at this stage
- A clear definition of how success will be measured
- A review of potential risks combined with ideas on how everyone can be involved in making sure they won't impact the project
- A definition of the communication tools and processes between the teams.

When finalizing that meeting, the Account Manager shall gather the collected data and information to create a **Project Charter** and share it with all stakeholders. Furthermore, he/she shall set-up a **Service Manual**, which includes the agreed scripts and top 20 questions with their ideal answers.

The SPOC will supervise the definition of the **Standard Operating Procedure** (SOP) and ensure the Account Manager's approval.

2.3 Ongoing relation

The Outsourcing Party should continuously monitor and review the Service Provider's performance to ensure the outsourced activity meets the requirements and proper internal control. The SPOC and the Account Manager shall hold **regular meetings** to review and discuss the Service Provider's performance. Such meetings should be documented and reported transparently to the Management.



3. Technology

When considering outsourcing your contact center's after-hours activities, you need to check a few points to ensure the interactions are transferred from your in-house facilities to the Service Provider in a seamless way. You have to ensure the business continuity from a technical and financial point of view:

3.1 Evaluate the costs of call transfers

To transfer calls, you can either implement a Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) or a SIP Trunk Transfer. A SIP trunk enables all calls to be local calls by carrying them over the internet, avoiding the costs of international or long-distance calls.



If your Private Branch Exchange (PBX) solution allows it, prefer the **SIP trunk option**. It reduces the associated costs while allowing an unlimited number of concurrent calls (or only limited by your bandwidth capacity).

3.2 Synchronization of queues

If there are still queuing calls on your system when your staff ends their shift, make sure to transfer them to your vendor, as well. Do not limit the transfer of calls to new entering calls, but include all the calls in the queue when the after-hours service takes over.

3.3 Access to your tools

Enabling a Service Provider to answer your customer's queries, you shall also consider giving your tools access to ensure the same quality of answer. If one of your critical tools is down and prevents the Service Provider from working, **someone from your IT team should be able to answer and support in solving the issue, whatever the time**. Hence you shall have someone on-duty from your IT designated as a SPOC during these after-hours time slots.

4. Training

Training is mission-critical in after-hours outsourcing, as the team does not have the possibility to escalate issues on the spot and must strive to solve the issues during the first call. It requires solid initial training and regular, continuous training sessions covering soft skills, cultural differences, and brand voice. Ideally, it also includes an individualized coaching program.



4.1 Initial Training.

As the Outsourcing Party, you can perform a **screening** of the agents before starting the initial training to check their language fluency level and accent, attitude, or anything you estimate essential in the mission's ongoing.

The initial training is crucial to reduce the learning curve. To best serve your customers, the support team a comprehensive training session regarding:

- Your company, the brand's tone of voice, and the customer's personas
- In-depth knowledge of the product or service offering
- The tools and required software (CRM or ticketing system, for example)
- The scripts and top 20 most common questions
- The processes for information, resolution, or escalation
- Additional cultural elements and soft skills.

The SPOC will supervise the definition of the **Standard Operating Procedure** (SOP) and ensure the Account Manager's approval.

For instance, for a company selling deep-frozen products delivered to families in Europe, it is necessary to train the outsourced offshore agents on food habits and gastronomy. They become able to propose the appropriate mix of products and recipes for improved customer experience.

Contact center agents' **soft skills** are fundamental as their purpose is to make the customers confident they will receive the necessary support to solve their problem. Appropriate soft skills training will develop the support team's abilities to listen, quickly digest information, and convert it into responses.

A **role-play** is an active learning and a powerful evaluation technique. Performed when finalizing the initial training, real cases' simulations demonstrate the agents' technical and soft-skills abilities to solve complex inquiries. It is preferable to be held in the (online) presence of an outsourcing party's representative, who finally validates the agents that will be part of the outsourced support team.

4.2 Continuous training.

A **knowledge database** is an essential tool in assisting the support team, helping them give fast and correct answers. It is continuously improved with new cases to reduce the Average Handling Time and improve the First Call Resolution..

The support team must undergo **periodic trainings** (one per month, trimester, semester, or year), that include:

- **Skills or competence updates.** It is a good practice to conduct a half-year performance review, along with corresponding training, as skills can erode if not maintained over time. Running periodic training keeps the team aligned, fresh, and doing their best.
- **Motivation and team-building.** Working in customer service is tough and challenging. It is essential to keep healthy and motivating relationships between the team members with routine team-building activities. It helps the team focus on their jobs.

Sometimes, it is necessary to perform **on the spot training** because of a crisis, product recall, a significant rebranding, or a specific advertising campaign. In times of crisis, full transparency with the support team is encouraged as they are on the frontlines. They need to be prepared to take calls, answer questions, and solve any conflicts.

5. Follow-up on delivery, reporting structure to management

Communications must function on every level and be able to give rapid feedback.

Before the production starts, the SPOC shall submit the performance reports' templates to the Account Manager for validation. Together, they will determine the frequency and delivery process of those reports.

Here are the main types of reports in an after-hours outsourcing mission.



5.1 Calls Report

The reports include the offered calls, answered calls, abandoned rate, average waiting time, AHT, LCR, and IVR routing accuracy reports.

5.2 Agents Performance Report

The reports will cover the main KPIs for each agent, including the login information, answered Vs. unanswered calls, average waiting time, utilization, AUX time, AHT, adherence to schedule, etc.

5.3 Tickets/transactions Reports

This report shall provide a detailed analysis of inbound interactions per channel, per type (information, queries, complaints, etc.), AHT, average waiting time, etc.

5.4 Quality Reports

It is essential to report quality indicators to enhance the Outsourcing Party's satisfaction and its customers, measured through NPS, Critical & non-critical errors backlog time, First contact resolution, etc.

Reports can be available daily, weekly, and monthly in different formats (MS Excel, MS Word, PDF, etc.).

On-the-floor personnel and team members shall see live reports displayed, which shall also be accessible remotely for the outsourcing party.

CONCLUSION

Outsourcing the after-hours of your contact center activities can turn out to be very productive for your business, for your internal organization, and even more for your customers.

It may take some time to select the Service Provider that will fit best with your needs, so **resist the urge to hire the first party you contact**. They may end up being the right decision, but you should always take the time to **compare** their strengths with other providers.

This guide helps you investigate Service Provider' options according to their capabilities to deliver results and efficient set-up processes to start the operations and maintain a healthy relationship with your provider of after-hours service.

Enough with the theory, and let's transform those guidelines into actions to jump ahead in the project management phase. At **NAOS Marketing**, we can help you one step further, so do not hesitate to contact us.



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Contact us:

sales@naos-marketing.com

+1 (929) 469-5121

www.naos-marketing.com