



THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Remote Working: Best Practices for
Global Contact Centers



“The Coronavirus Outbreak has become the World’s Largest Work-From-Home Experiment” - TIME¹

When WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic in February 2020, lockdowns were implemented in almost all countries and strict social distancing measures were ordered. For customer-facing organizations, there were twin concerns that had a direct impact on each other - *how to keep employees safe and how to ensure uninterrupted customer service*. They were pushed to explore and implement a remote agent contact center model, completely re-think their customer service operations and do so in the shortest of timelines. Nothing could have been more extraordinary and contrasting at the same time.



How? What? Where?

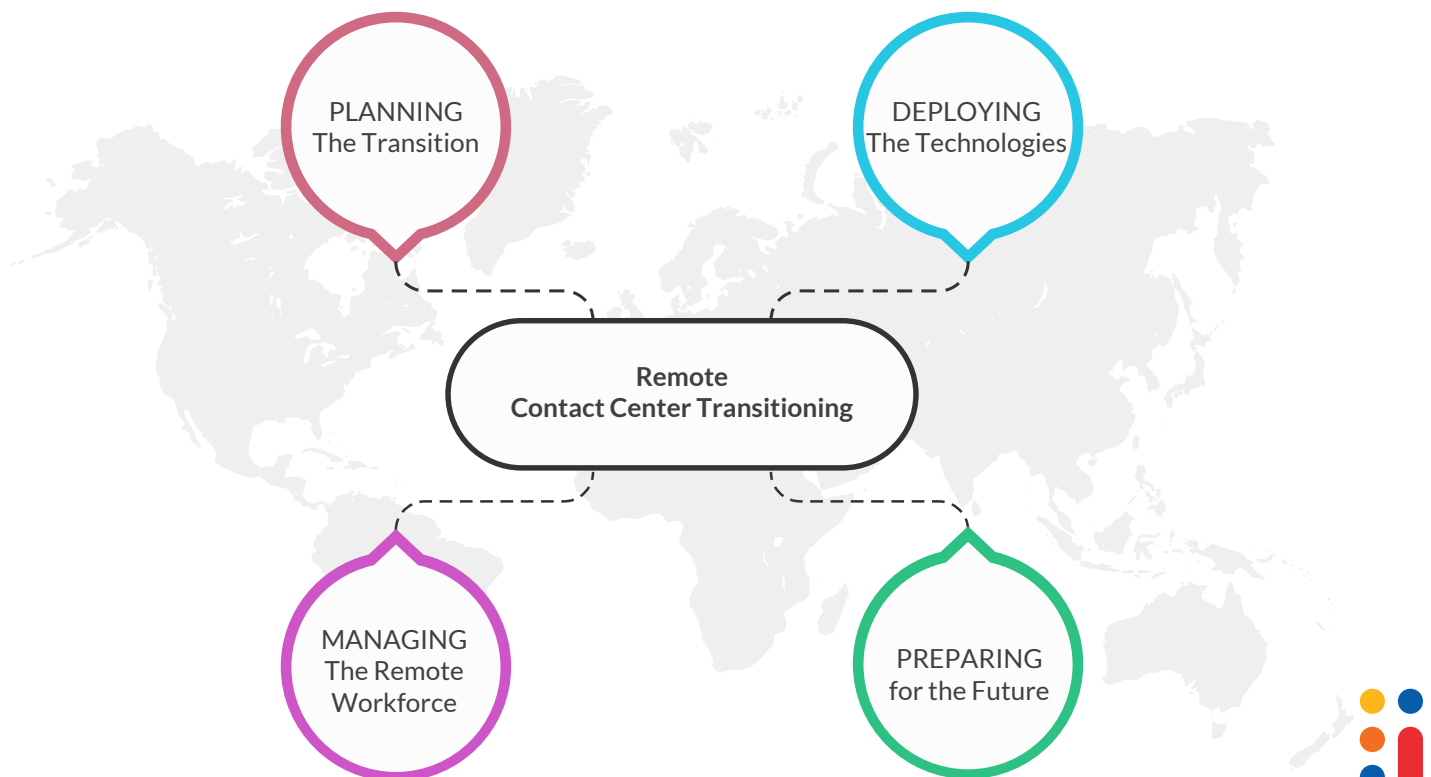
Transitioning thousands of agents from state-of-the-art contact center campuses to individual, residential homes is undoubtedly a herculean effort.

Key concerns in a remote agent model:

1. How can we replicate on-campus advantages like security, compliance and productivity?
2. How do we manage the increase in call volumes without impacting customer experience?
3. How can we leverage contemporary technologies like cloud architecture, AI, automation, virtual agents and chatbots to enhance customer experience?
4. What can we do to keep up employee morale and motivation while they are working from home?
5. Do we need to prepare for remote working as a future-of-work model?

The cornerstones of a successful transition

Hexaware has swiftly and successfully migrated its on-campus contact centers to a virtual model without compromising on critical parameters. Based on our experience, we share our learnings, insights and best practices in four areas.



PLANNING THE TRANSITION

Communicate. Communicate. Communicate

Proactive and regular communication will be more important than ever in the era of remote working. Silence from leaders or gaps in communication leads to anxiety that will harm employee well-being and eventually impact the business. Communications teams should have a calendar for messaging that will go out in an orchestrated manner from the CEO, HR, Operations leaders and supervisors.

Focus areas:

1. Make proactive client communication an absolute priority. Plans, progress, delays, alterations and concerns should be shared promptly, both at the strategic and the operational level. Roadmap discussions with clients should be a fortnightly affair in these extraordinary times.
2. Employee communication should focus on specifics and not generalities. This should cover:
 - Where is the business headed
 - What policies are affected
 - What employees can expect
 - Who to reach out to for questions

Equipment and Infrastructure

Considering that contact center agents are most likely in the age group of 21 to 26 years, not all of them will own laptops or desktops. BOYD (Bring Your Own Device), therefore, may not always be the answer. This will require quickly assessing and making available infrastructure including hardware and communication devices (laptops/desktops and headsets). Broadband connectivity and software licenses will also be required to enable work-at-home (WAH) agents to be connected securely to their supervisors and peers, as well as to CRM applications, through the VPN.

Focus areas:

1. Before making available laptops/desktops at their homes, the devices should be secured against breaches with anti-virus software and multi-level user authentications. Personal internet access to any websites, social media, or applications outside of the business should be barred and local data storage on the device should be disabled.
2. Delivering the devices will also require careful planning to overcome logistical challenges.
3. The geographical location of the agents will impact broadband speed and availability of home wi-fi. In several cases, agents rely on their mobile data due to lack of wi-fi at home.



Reimbursement policies for setting up home wi-fi with requisite speeds will need to be put in place

DEPLOYING THE TECHNOLOGIES

Leveraging the cloud

Off-the-shelf cloud contact center platforms allow businesses to set up fully operational virtual contact centers within days. In addition to assuring capacity and elasticity, cloud solutions include Desktop-as-a-Service (DaaS) and pay-as-you-go VPN services that allow secure access to confidential data on enterprise applications.

Focus areas:

1. Besides speed of transition, flexibility and scalability, the cloud contact center should adhere to critical security and compliance standards like:
 - Security certifications - Service Organization Control (SOC), ISO 27001, Payment Card Industry (PCI) DSS Level 1 and HIPAA (as per client requirements)
 - Compliance with data privacy regulations
 - Remote security monitoring
 - Robust data encryption and firewalls
 - Security incident reporting
 - Track internet access
 - Multi-factor user authentication



Managing compliance

Compliance will also need to be managed with controls at the people and process levels.

Focus areas:

1. Security and data privacy policies will need to be reviewed and updated for WAH agents with people-based controls. These will include custom non-disclosure agreements for the Work From Home model. Employees will need to be trained and familiarized with the updated policies.
2. Process-based controls like data masking, audit trail and access tracing will need to be reviewed for the new remote model.

Getting the best out of AI, ML and NLP

According to Gartner², more than 25% of customer service operations would integrate customer virtual assistants or chatbot technology across channels by 2020.

2020 is here and the pandemic has made it unavoidable for contact centers to seize the power of AI, ML and NLP with greater urgency. Virtual agents built on AI technologies will not only help to manage spikes in call volumes and reduce customer wait times but can also triage urgent calls. When the call intent is analyzed and routed to the most appropriate channel based on urgency, customer experience gets enhanced and staff burden is reduced.

Focus areas:

1. While mobile apps, chatbots, automated FAQs, virtual agents and email automation are there to assist, they ultimately pick up the most relevant answers from your knowledge base. By carefully planning the responses to the most common inquiries, the knowledge base can be primed for enhancing customer experience.
2. Scripting the interaction journey, foreseeing roadblocks and knowing when to redirect the call to a human agent will ensure customer experience does not get impacted with virtual agent technologies.



Operations and CX leaders should develop the knowledge base for virtual agents by anticipating all possible scenarios and questions pertaining to the use case

MANAGING THE REMOTE WORKFORCE

Workforce management

For contact centers, 100% availability of agents is a critical factor for achieving service levels and success. For WAH agents, a blend of creativity and automation technologies will be required for tracking, attendance, schedule adherence, compliance and security. Webcams, bots-enabled MIS reporting and analytics, keystroke monitoring software and remote break/schedule management tools will help to manage agent activities. Operations and HR managers can set up automated alerts on agent desktops to remind them about breaks. Supervisors should let agents know they are available and encourage them to proactively communicate. Setting up buddies for each agent is a great way of letting them know - "We've got your back".

Focus areas:

1. Forecasting call volumes for scheduling and capacity planning will be critical in volatile situations such as those created by the pandemic.
2. Call volume patterns, channel preferences, customer demographics (age, gender, geographic location), type of questions, time of inquiries, etc., can all tell a story and empower operations leaders to forecast accurately and prepare for contingencies by leveraging predictive analytics.
3. While implementing remote workforce management, care must be taken to remember that agents are working under multiple stress factors. Family and friends could be unwell, home conditions may not be entirely suitable for customer calls and lack of peer interaction will affect morale.



Great empathy will be required while implementing and monitoring work schedules and attendance



Employee well-being

COVID-19 and remote working have sprung new challenges for HR leaders like employee well-being, unforeseen absenteeism, virtual hiring and remote training. Employees are now more concerned about their financial security and career outlook. Each area needs a dedicated plan, in collaboration with operations and business. It is a challenge as well as an opportunity for HR leaders to create a new, online paradigm of employee engagement. It is also the time to leverage the exciting plethora of apps to connect with employees and make remote working enjoyable with a blend of fun, motivational, cultural and competitive activities.

Focus areas:

1. More than ever now, mentoring and counseling should become a structured program for WAH agents.
2. Establish open communication channels to address employee concerns and be proactive and transparent about sharing updates regarding changes to business and policies.
3. Businesses should invest in a blend of tools and technologies to enable virtual hiring and training.



Given the uncertainty, HR executives must keep plans and policies flexible and be geared to quickly update them in response to the evolving situation

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Covid-19 is far from over.

Gartner had predicted that by 2030, the demand for remote work will increase by 30% due to a stronger preference for remote work by Gen Z³. The pandemic has made sure that this trend has been advanced by almost a decade! An estimated 16 million U.S. knowledge workers had started working remotely due to Covid-19 as of March 27⁴. That number will be much higher now. Moreover, the preference for remote work by all generations will most likely be very high for all generations and not just for Gen Z.

On May 31, 2020, Dr. Hans Kluge, Europe's top WHO official has warned⁵ that European countries should brace themselves for a deadly second wave of coronavirus infections because the pandemic is not over. Maria Van Kerkhove, a WHO infectious disease epidemiologist, said "all countries need to remain on high alert here. All countries need to be ready to rapidly detect cases, even countries that have had success in suppression... Even countries that have seen a decline in cases must remain ready."⁶

With so much uncertainty, businesses will be forced to look at remote working as a long-term strategy.

Focus areas:

1. C-SAT scores during remote operations should be compared against previous performance. If there are gaps, can they be closed and in how much time?
2. Polls with customers as well as employees will provide insights on what's working and what needs attention.
3. Finally, now is the time to embark on a detailed analysis of the benefits of remote working and how they stack up against the on-campus model. Will the savings from real estate match or hamper the benefits from employee productivity and customer experience?



Eventually, when the pandemic ends and it is safe for office spaces to open up, businesses will want to explore a hybrid model with equal or greater focus on working from home.



Discover TransX – Hexaware’s Touchless Transition Framework

Hexaware has supported its clients across verticals by successfully transitioning its global contact centers to a remote model with minimum disruption. We have a tested and proven model that is already live with 3,000+ FTEs.

If your business needs to build or scale a remote contact center quickly and efficiently, reach out to us at marketing@hexaware.com

REFERENCES

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About Hexaware

We are a global technology and business process services company empowering enterprises worldwide to realize digital transformation at scale and speed. Our platform-enabled strategy – featuring Amaze® for full cloud enablement, Mobiquity™ for digital product engineering, and Tensai® for extreme automation – drives human-machine collaboration to create immersive customer experiences and solve complex business problems. We believe technology is a magical thing, and our purpose is to create smiles through great people and technology.

With corporate headquarters in Mumbai and regional headquarters in New Jersey for North America, London for Europe, and Sydney for APAC, we service customers in over one hundred languages from every major time and regulatory zone. We serve customers in banking, financial services, capital markets, healthcare, insurance, manufacturing, retail, education, telecom, hi-tech & professional services, travel, transportation, and logistics. We deliver highly evolved services in rapid application prototyping, development, and deployment; build, migrate, and run cloud solutions; automation-based application support; enterprise solutions for digitizing the back-office; digital product engineering; business intelligence & analytics; digital assurance; infrastructure management services; and business process services.

Learn more about Hexaware at <https://www.hexaware.com>

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