



spark
response

**The ultimate guide to
appointing an inbound
contact centre for retail
and eCommerce.**





Introduction

Thanks for downloading our ultimate guide to appointing an inbound contact centre for retail and eCommerce.

This guide is specifically for brands, retailers, and eCommerce stores who are considering outsourcing a customer service function.

We hope to help you in your journey to appointing a trusted, professional, contact centre partner for years to come.

This guide will cover the key things to look for in a partner, from basic operating hours, to complex factors such as company culture, and any potential fit with your own.

A person is shown from the chest up, holding a white smartphone with both hands. The person is wearing a light-colored, textured sweater. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor setting. A large purple rectangular overlay is positioned in the upper half of the image, containing white text. The overall image has a soft, purple-tinted aesthetic.

**WHY ARE YOU APPOINTING AN
INBOUND CONTACT CENTRE?**



Why do brands outsource?

In the retail sector, outsourcing a customer service function is typically done so to achieve any number of operational or service based benefits. Some of those benefits include:

- Cost savings
- Efficiencies
- Increased levels of customer service
- Time to focus on core business
- Extended operating hours
- Added expertise
- Increased flexibility
- Safety net to cover peak seasons
- Ability to grow the team

Depending on your own situation, one or more of these reasons may apply. However each reason will throw up different factors or processes to take into account when choosing a possible partner.



What do brands outsource?

Brands and retailers have various contact centre requirements. Many of which are outsourced to gain the benefits we've previously covered. Those services include:

- Order Call Handling
- Fraud Prevention
- Returns Management
- Order Related Customer Support
- Pre Purchase Product Support
- Technical Support
- Complaint Handling
- Product Registration
- Sales Support (up sell, cross sell)

For obvious reasons, it's important when appointing any possible provider that they have experience in those service areas. Complaint handling is an entirely different skill set to cross selling products for example, so ensure the team are well suited to



WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A
PROVIDER :
INFRASTRUCTURE



Services. For any retail business, it's imperative that a potential partner can offer the service channels your business requires. Different providers naturally offer different services. Some contact centres simply offer telephone support, whereas others offer email, phone, live chat, and social media support. In today's multi-channel world, choose a provider who can meet your needs not just right now, but who can cater for growth both in scale, and in channel support over the next few years.



Availability. When do you require contact centre support? From 9am—5pm Monday to Friday? Or 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. Again, think of your needs next year, and in 5 years time. Many contact centres simply operate a 9-5pm service. A good provider will offer customisable hours to meet your needs. Offering a 24/7 service is all well and good, but take the time to understand your contact volumes across the 24 hour period. If call volumes between 10pm and 8am are minimal, is it really worth opening through the night? How else can you resolve those customer queries?



Technology. Depending on your business and contact centre requirements, you may require an external provider to integrate with your own systems such as CRM, order management, complaints log or eCommerce platform. Alternatively you may require the provider to provide a CRM or reporting system which meets your needs. It's important to know from the start what your expectations are with regard to technology, so that you can immediately identify suitable providers.



Operations. Depending on call volume, an outsourcer should be able to offer an operating model which offers flexibility in a cost effective manner in any scenario. Do they offer a bureau environment, a shared resource across various clients, or do they simply offer a dedicated model, with a number of advisors purely handling your project. Many providers offer a hybrid model of bureau plus dedicated teams to meet high or low demand efficiently and cost effectively.



Pricing. Ultimately price will affect the decision making process immensely. But it shouldn't be the main factor in driving a decision. Synergy, culture, experience, and quality of service are all equally important. When considering price, make sure you identify all costs, from any set up or integration fees, to account management, systems and reporting fees or licencing, plus minute rates hourly rates, training rates and any other activity charges.



Scalability. For many retail businesses seasonality in contact volumes is common. At Christmas for example, contact volumes typically increase. The same may apply around Black Friday, Mothers Day, and other key retail dates. Can a potential partner scale their team to meet demand often at short notice? Are they flexible enough to react to daily or weekly fluctuations in contact volumes. If your store ran a 50% off everything offer which drove a 25% increase in contact volumes, could they cope?



WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PROVIDER : CULTURE



Experience. Not all retailers are the same. Not all contact centres are the same. It's therefore important to match up the type of retail customer service you require, with an outsourcer who is experienced in that service area. For example is your requirement purely order call handling, or is there an up sell, cross sell requirement? Does the contact centre have this experience? Is your requirement related to complaint handling? If so, does the contact centre have experience, and do the advisors have the soft skills necessary to carry out the role?



Culture. Building a close working relationship with any service provider is essential. For this reason we'd strongly recommend visiting each potential provider as early as possible. Meet the team, listen to calls (where possible), and take the time to really get to know the business. Try to see a fit between your own culture and theirs, and if you can see that relationship lasting for up to 3 years or more. Also try to establish the average tenure of the advisors, and the churn rate. This should give you a good insight into the culture of the business. Remember a low tenure and high churn rate will directly effect the way your project is handled.



Location. Is location important? That ultimately depends on the business. The trend over the past 10 years has been to outsource to overseas countries for lower labour rates. However poor feedback from customers has driven the desire to bring customer service functions back to the UK. How closely you want to be involved with any partner may have an influence on the location of the contact centre. If you plan on visiting any partner on a weekly or monthly basis, ensure they are easy to get to. Also take accents into account. Various studies have shown the North East accent to be friendly and welcoming, whereas the Scottish accent is reassuring.

Now what?

So you've listed all the factors most important to you, and what you're looking for in a provider. The next step is to find a suitable provider. First off, ask for recommendations from other businesses in your retail space, or contact them to ask who they partner with.

Failing that, Google's a good start, plus make use of contact centre industry sites such as contact-centres.com or callcentrehelper.com.

Then we'd suggest going through the following process to select your partner:

1

After compiling an initial shortlist of potential suppliers, spend time viewing their websites, reading any case studies and white-papers to assess their experience. Also check their financial status and company info via sites such as DueDil.

2

Create a final shortlist. Send each provider a detailed brief, and take the time to give them as much info as they need for them to produce an accurate proposal. Remember though at this stage most proposals will be indicative, until the finer details are discussed.

3

Remove those suppliers which you don't feel can meet your requirements. Arrange to visit the remaining centres. There really is no better way to assess a supplier's suitability than by meeting the team and seeing the facility first hand.

4

By this stage, you should be down to two or three possible suppliers, based on the criteria you have set. A second visit to each supplier with other members of your team is a useful final stage, as by this point, it's likely the cultural factors will be most important.



Spark Response is one of the UK's most respected providers of contact centre and order fulfilment services to brands and retailers. With 30 years experience in delivering award winning inbound and outbound contact centre services to the retail sector, choose Spark Response to deliver excellence in customer management.

