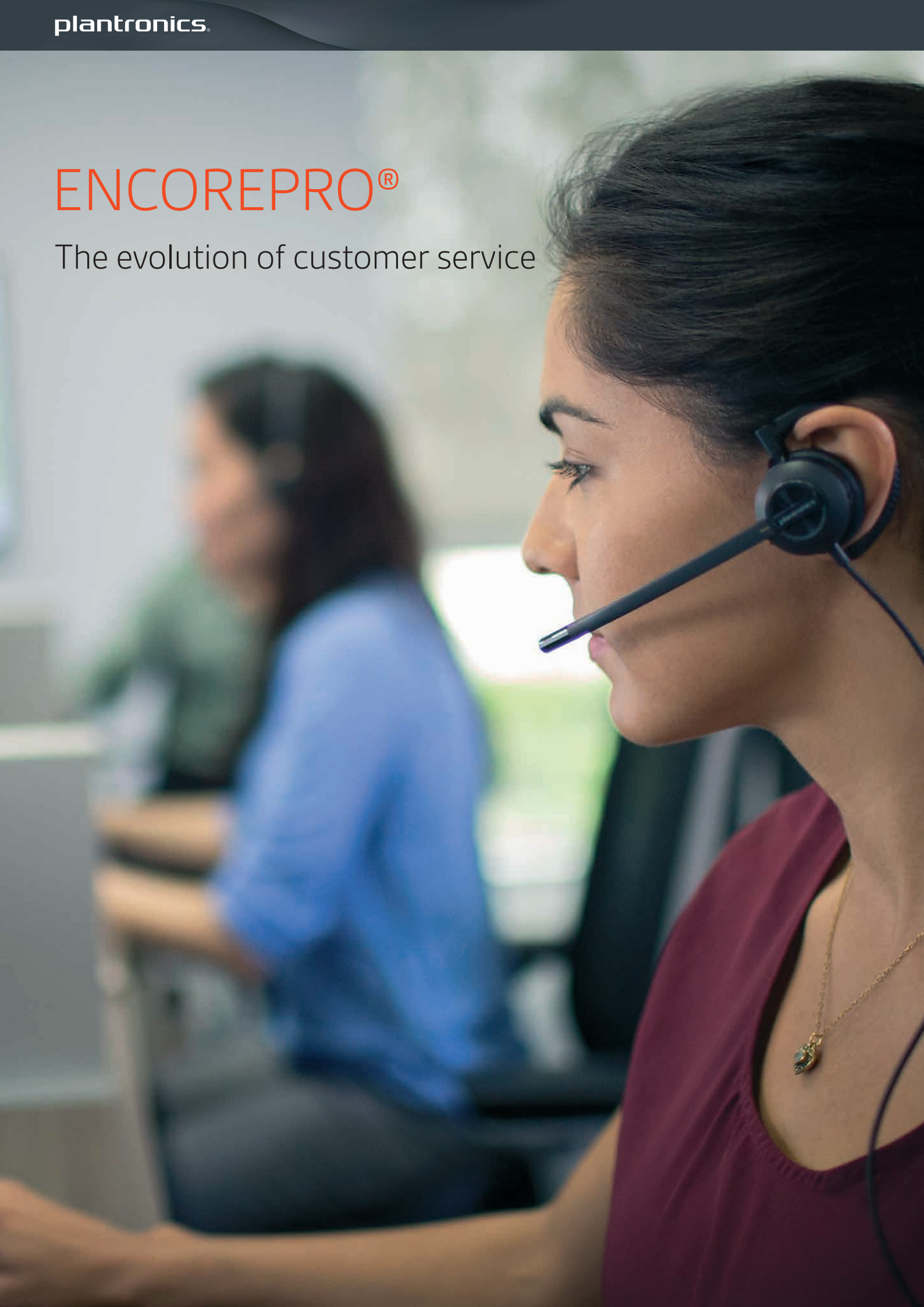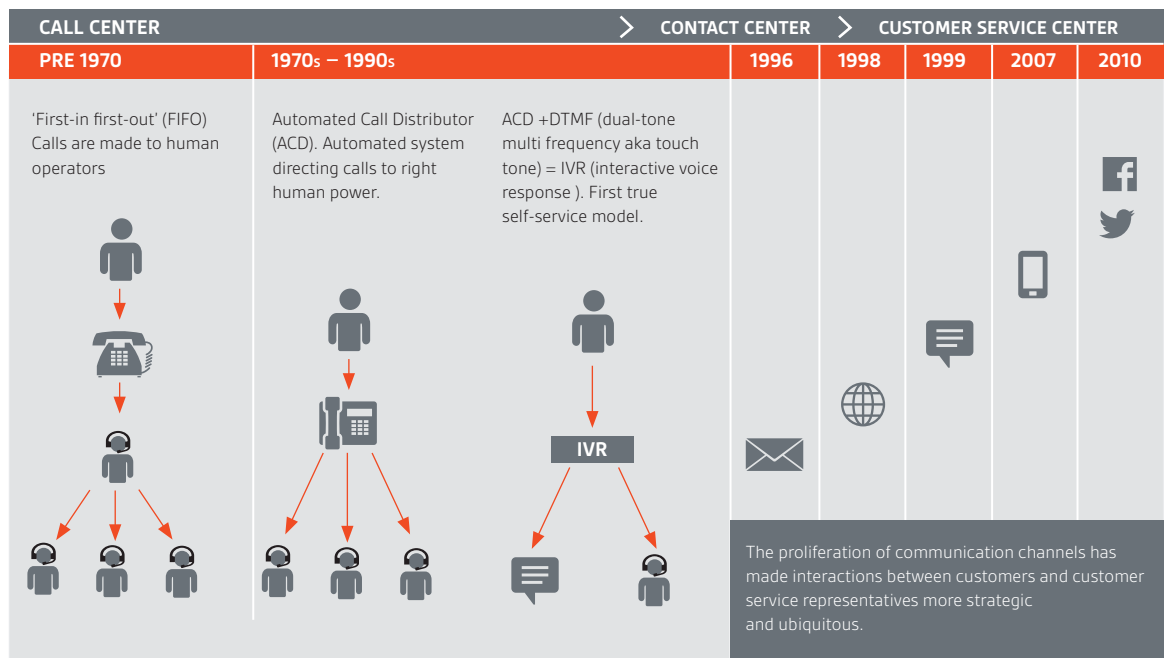# ENCOREPRO®

The evolution of customer service

The modern customer service center

The relationship between customers and customer service representatives (CSRs) has changed and the shift is having profound business implications. Modern customer service centers must adapt to the needs of their increasingly digitally literate, impatient and "mobile first" customers. Put simply, customer service matters more than ever.

CALL CENTER			CONTACT CENTER		CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER			
PRE 1970	**1970s − 1990s**		**1996**	**1998**	**1999**		**2007**	**2010**
'First-in first-out' (FIFO) Calls are made to human operators	Automated Call Distributor (ACD). Automated system directing calls to right human power.	ACD +DTMF (dual-tone multi frequency aka touch tone) = IVR (interactive voice response). First true self-service model.						

IVR

The proliferation of communication channels has made interactions between customers and customer service representatives more strategic and ubiquitous.

Customers' power to escalate a bad experience with your brand

While technology advanced rapidly, customer service strategies remained largely unchanged until the early 1990's. It was not until high-performance computing moved from the mainframe to the desktop and eventually into customers' pockets that business reacted by transforming low-value, high-volume transactions into a self-service model. However slow in arriving, this change has had lasting and significant effects.

55%

"The number of consumers preferring automated self-service has doubled to 55% in the last five years".[1]

75%

"The number of survey respondents that said self-service is a convenient way to address customer issues".

40%

The number of customers who contact a call center after they have looked for answers to their questions via "self-service".[2]

While it may be their first call, in a world of multi-channel customer service, it's not their first step.

By the time your CSR answers a call, it's possible that your customer has gathered more information than your CSR can possibly know and has likely exhausted other routes to resolve their concern. Your company's reputation pivots around that phone call, because it could be the last contact a customer makes with you. Every interaction in the customer service center has become a high-stakes opportunity to deepen − or recover − a customer relationship.

98%

When Dimension Research surveyed 1,046 people in a 2013 study, 62% of business-to-business customers reported that they purchased more products or services from a B2B company because of a positive customer service experience.

98% share bad experiences with others and 45% of them use social media to air their grievances.

That one call from your customer is not only likely to be challenging and complex, but the outcome can be shared far and wide. Because of this, poor customer service poses a serious risk to your brand. You need to assume that every call is an escalation. To respect the journey your customer has taken prior to speaking with your CSR, you should leverage technology and business processes, without allowing the technology to impede the relationship between your customer and your CSR.

PREPARING YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

Customer service executives have to perform a balancing act more precise − and more risky − than ever before. They need to attract and retain talent, create a superior customer experience and increase revenue while reducing costs. The strategies of the past 20 years, outsourcing and technology hyper-investment, won't work in this rapidly changing market. You need a more nuanced business model that builds upon incremental improvements in three key areas.

Your People   Your Places   Your Processes

Attract and retain the right people

Despite the strategic importance of the customer service center, negative perceptions still proliferate. Management often views this department as an isolated, complex environment, treating it as a cost center. Frequently under pressure, employees become easily disenchanted and suffer high attrition rates that add up to a significant financial impact.

Research from Chris Bracken of Call Me! IQ reports that "Large call centers average 49% annual attrition [and] call centers focused on outbound dialling average more than 60% annual attrition". Bracken's research also indicates that the a average turnover cost is $3,500 per representative.

For larger call centers (more than 1,000 CSRs), that number climbs to $4,000 per representative. Based on Bracken's numbers, Trostle & Associates estimates that a 1,000-seat call center experiencing an industry average 70% annual turnover wastes about **$2.8 million per year on turnover costs**[5].

By taking steps to improve turnover rates in their customer service organization, companies can experience direct and dramatic boosts to their bottom lines. How? By recognizing that customer service centers serve as routes to market and that the people who staff those centers deserve to be treated as superheroes. After all, they can determine whether you retain or lose a customer.

In order to increase employee satisfaction and reduce turnover, you need to invest in your CSRs in three ways:

- **Enable:** They are the voice and ears of your brand. CSRs need to focus on the customer at all times, so you should eliminate distractions, no matter how small. Customer service centers are cluttered with IT — multiple monitors, keyboards, desk phones, mobile phones — all of which increase noise levels. Provide your CSRs with premium devices that minimize background noise so they can stay on task and keep your customers engaged.

- **Empower:** Trusted associates stay longer. Throw out the scripts — train CSRs to fully resolve customer problems and give them the best tools to do their job. Remember, your customers' journey through self-service means that they arrive at your CSR's position with more information. Train CSRs how to ask customers to share their experiences, and how to learn by listening, questioning, and thinking.

- **Protect:** CSRs are your most valuable asset. Healthier employees are happier employees, so look for ways to minimize fatigue and boost satisfaction, such as providing work-from-home programs. Also, recognize that the customer service center can be a high-stress environment. Hearing fatigue can occur over the course of long work days. Beware of consumer-grade headsets that are tuned for music rather than speech. Proper acoustic tuning removes noise that is not audible to the human ear and simultaneously boosts higher frequencies that make fricatives[1] easier to discern.

" Large call centers average 49% annual attrition-[and] call centers focused on outbound dialling average more than 60% annual attrition."

1 Fricatives are consonants that are formed by impeding the flow of air somewhere in the vocal apparatus so that a friction-sound is produced. For instance, the 'f' in fine or the 'ch' in Bach.

Create a better customer experience

The customer service center can be a busy, noisy and complex space in which to work. When CSRs have to repeat information because they can't hear clearly, everybody loses. Customers also don't want to overhear the private information of others. Not only does this demonstrate a lack of respect but can also cause them to lose confidence in your company.

When designing your customer service center, keep in mind the ABCs of a sound strategy:

- **Absorption:** Absorb noise with materials and technologies that capture and suppress distracting sounds.
- **Blocking:** Block noise with techniques that prevent distracting sounds from reaching unintended listeners.
- **Cover:** Cover noise by raising the background sound level using a sound-masking system.

The seating plan and physical materials in your customer service center strongly affect noise volume. Strategic placement of people and the use of the right materials can absorb and block noise. In addition, by introducing white noise into the workspace, you can mask or cover other sounds and render extraneous voice audible but not intelligible.

Modern headsets incorporate noise-canceling technology and multiple microphones. Through proper boom placement, you can direct the microphones to select and amplify a CSR's voice and simultaneously recognize and cancel external noises such as loud speech, keyboard clatter or mechanical noise. With the right technology, you can make your customer service center a better place to work and ultimately enhance customer experiences.

Simplify processes to reduce costs and add value

Processes that impede rather than enhance thwart even the strongest superheroes. Your tools and process should complement, simplify and assist CSRs' efforts. When thinking about the processes in your center and the way they affect customer interactions, remember the three "A's".

- **Anticipate:** Anticipate problematic outcomes before they happen by understanding how your processes should flow and the challenges your customers might face.
- **Automate:** Automate your information systems to get the right information to the right CSR in an effective manner.
- **Activate:** Activate superior customer experiences by empowering your CSRs with the tools they need in a work environment that enables rather than distracts.

Forget the old metrics — great customer service is about effectiveness, not efficiency. You should take every opportunity to reduce complexity and provide a more seamless customer experience. Where possible, automate the flow of information and the systems that support your CSRs. Think about how your IT systems interoperate and the information those systems can share — everything from your CRM software to the CSR workspace — and use this information to activate new experiences for your customer service managers, your CSRs and your customers.

Platform for the future

Over the last 50 years the customer service center has evolved from interacting with customers primarily over the phone, to providing inbound and outbound services over multiple channels that include voice, video, web chat, email, and social media. The customer has become more powerful and more mobile.

But the change is only beginning – what lies ahead requires preparation and experience. Businesses need to be prepared to move forward today or be left behind by their competitors.

Customer service has changed. Its importance to the rest of the organization has never been greater.

Most businesses have already incorporated the customer service center as a route to market, realising it complements their physical and online presence by helping people get information and take action in real-time. The next step is to push the customer service function deeper into your organization.

Customer service has changed. Its importance to the rest of the organization has never been greater. As a result, poor audio quality poses a greater risk to your brand than ever before. Yet a significant challenge doesn't necessarily require a single, significant solution. Rather, the answer lies in looking at how you can make small improvements in many ways – to your people, your places and your processes. Plantronics has helped businesses accomplish these goals for the past 46 years and as a result, our customers enjoy a level of excellence unmatched in the industry.

Anything else is just a headset.

For more information, visit our portfolio of solutions for the modern customer service center.

www.plantronics.com/us/solutions/contact-center/

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