

State of the Agent Report 2024:

GenAI's Rise in
the Contact Center

CRESTA



Introduction

“AI is coming to replace all of our jobs.”

Heard that one before? Many have. That is the prevailing thought amongst most people. Is it true for contact center agents? So much so that they would go as far as hating AI? Well, that’s what we wanted to understand – how agents actually feel about AI.

In 2024, the role of the contact center agent continues to evolve in significant ways, largely driven by technological advancements in generative AI. A significant number of customer interactions happens through contact centers, making them a vital area for investment – yet, companies are

struggling to make the necessary leap to actually assess the macro changes and invest in the right places. Despite allocating **up to 75%** of their total operating budgets to agent staffing, training, and salaries, many companies still fail to maximize the return on this substantial investment.

Strategically investing in agents is essential to not only reducing costs in the long term, but also to retaining the best talent. Companies that can better identify the drivers of agent happiness and longevity have a competitive edge in avoiding the costly attrition that a mass exodus of agents can have on a business’s bottom line.

In the last few years, the power of generative AI has come increasingly into focus, and it’s no longer surprising that this powerful technology has the potential to profoundly change the way that agents work in the contact center. In this study, we explored the impact of generative AI on contact center agents and understood from their perspective, in their words and by the numbers, how they feel about it, and what actually helps them excel. What may surprise you is what agents had to say about the impact of AI and the meaningful and lasting engagement it unlocks. Read on to learn more.

Executive Summary

Uncovering the opportunity

Of the agents who are already equipped with AI, **81%** feel that they can comfortably identify when to shift an interaction from a service focus to a sales one

Over **80%** of them also report comfort with both upselling and cross-selling products.

Personalized metrics

Agents say they want more data-driven, personalized insights based on their performance metrics, with **75%** demanding more visibility into the data that's being used to judge their performance.

More confident new agents

Using AI to support new employees **halves** the average onboarding phase

Make or break

Seventy-nine percent of agents said having access to good software makes or breaks whether an agent is good at their job.

Four in five (**81%**) agents report that they perform better in their role because of the technology that has been made available to them

More effective coaching

Less than half (**49%**) of contact center agents say they've received effective on-the-job coaching.

Those who have experienced more personalized coaching through generative AI say it's nearly **three times** more effective than those who go through a "one-size-fits-all" coaching process.

Methodology

Cresta conducted this research using an online survey prepared by Method Research and distributed by Cint among n=1,000 contact center agents in the United States who are full-time employees that interact with clients daily via telephone or live chat resolving customer service inquiries or issues. The sample included distinct groups of agents using AI tools at work and agents not using AI tools at work to compare their experiences, meaningfully. The sample was split equally between gender, with a spread of age groups, employment length, and industries. Data was collected from April 4 to April 23, 2024.

Job security and distrust? Agents want to use AI

The prevailing narrative surrounding AI is often dominated by concerns that this technology will displace human jobs, stirring up widespread uncertainty and distrust about applications in the workforce. However, this pervasive storyline tends to overshadow the benefits that generative AI brings to an organization, enhancing job performance and actually creating new opportunities for skill development and innovation.

Our research reveals a much more nuanced story from the agents' perspective, highlighting the ultimately positive impact of generative AI on their roles. We found that employees with the proper tools and resources actually experience more success than their counterparts with limited resources and access to technology. **Nearly two thirds of agents (65%)** report wanting to use real-time AI hints and suggestions during



their customer interactions. In fact, **79% of agents** say that good software makes or breaks whether an agent is good at their job, and **four in five (81%) agents** report that they perform better in their role because of the technology that has been made available to them.

These perspectives on AI go beyond the agents' view of performance, though, extending to the lens through which

agents view the companies they work for. **89% of agents who use AI** say that their company is prioritizing investing in technology to support them at work, compared to only **57%** of the cohort not using AI. Agent respondents were asked to indicate their degree of happiness in their role, and those who were unhappy were nearly **twice as likely** to say that their company's lack of investment in new technology is inhibiting their success.



People said that the invention of computers would take work away from humans. And in some cases, it did. In other cases, it created opportunities for humans to put aside more tedious, manual work and instead focus on putting their creative and complex thinking skills to work.

Those who adopt AI and commit to learning how to use it to enhance their skill set are the ones that will thrive amidst this technological shift. And that's what we saw reflected in our research.

Contrary to the common narrative of AI displacing jobs, generative AI not only enhances job performance and creates new opportunities for skill development, but also creates a competitive advantage for businesses.

Brinks Home has deployed Cresta's generative AI platform to influence more traditional metrics and use cases across the contact center, including quality management and average handle time - but have also seen an impact on recruitment and hiring.

“When recruiting top talent, the sales market is highly competitive, but we have an advantage with the resources we’ve invested in for our Sales Center. While most candidates aren’t familiar with generative AI, they’re intrigued. They recognize the value in using this tool and see the returns as we help set them up for success. We frame it as: imagine receiving the answers to the test as you’re actually taking it. That’s what we’re able to provide with this platform.”

- David Garza, Vice President of Sales and Sales Operations at Brinks Home.

Elevating agent satisfaction: AI's role in retaining talent

High turnover rates have long plagued contact centers, with incredible costs. Contact center turnover is nearly triple that of other industries, around **30-45%** annually, but **even jumping to as high as ~80% in the last few years**. Costs continue to compound with the fact that the cost to replace a contact center agent **averages an upward of \$10k - \$21k**. Costs aside, the impact of attrition can have other far-reaching consequences, including negative impact on customer experience, brand perception, and morale among the whole agent population.

There are myriad factors driving agent attrition: pay and office location, to name a few, but the data consistently shows that the agents who stay in their jobs - and feel happy about it - are the ones who are best equipped with the right toolset to make themselves successful.

Additionally, most companies report that employee satisfaction (ESAT) has a direct correlation with customer satisfaction (CSAT), which means making your employees happier will help you retain, upsell, and build the relationships that result in customer loyalty.

Early attrition, wherein the agent leaves in the first six months, is heavily influenced by poor onboarding and results in a tremendous sunk cost of recruiting, hiring, and training with nearly zero return on investment before the agent departs. Currently, **less than a third of agents** say that their training and onboarding was excellent. A further **35% of unhappy agents** say their company's leadership isn't prioritizing investing in technology that actually supports them at work.

Contact center
turnover is nearly

3x

that of other
industries

This is an area where AI technology can be particularly impactful. On average, it takes call center agents roughly **four weeks** to feel competent doing their jobs; our research found that using AI to support new employees - such as through truly personalized training and coaching - halves the onboarding phase. On the flip side of that, agents who are given one-

size-fits-all training and coaching are **2x more likely** to change companies within the next six months.

This investment in AI technology not only retains talent but also enhances employee satisfaction, leading to higher customer loyalty and better overall performance.

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

Cox Communications partnered with Cresta in 2019 to empower agents in a newly remote world. Sales managers were able to reduce new hire ramp time by 2 weeks and increase their agent manager ratio from 10 agents per manager to 14 since managers were coaching more effectively. After implementing Cresta with all new hires, the team consistently reached a range of **100-200+% of their revenue attainment goals.**

 Agents with one-size-fits-all coaching



are **2x** more likely to change companies

AI unlocks new skills...and your bottom line

Increasingly, leaders in today's contact centers are expected to execute on the service-to-sales motion, converting cost centers into profit centers - in fact, **nearly three in four agents** say that their company leadership encourages them to move from solely providing customer service to actively selling. Fundamentally, they are two distinct motions that leadership is asking one contact center agent to do.

The skills required are different: from answering questions to asking the right questions to uncover the upsell opportunity. This can be a massive unlock on a company's P&L, but the agents need a bridge in order to get there. The reality, however, is that many of these agents are not supported with the technology and resources that they need to do so.

AI enables agents to comfortably upskill on the job in real time, preparing them to make proactive sales in addition to providing more strategic and effective customer support. Of the agents who are already equipped with AI, **81%** feel that they can comfortably identify when to shift an interaction from a service focus to a sales one, and **82%** of them also

report comfort with both upselling and cross-selling products. With AI-powered technologies, prompts, and hints, agents are best positioned to understand the best times to make an offer, what to recommend through personalization, how to overcome specific objections - and ultimately make the close.

"They could implement an AI that gives me suggestions on how to get a customer back on the right track if I feel I am losing somebody."

- Agent, survey participant



81%

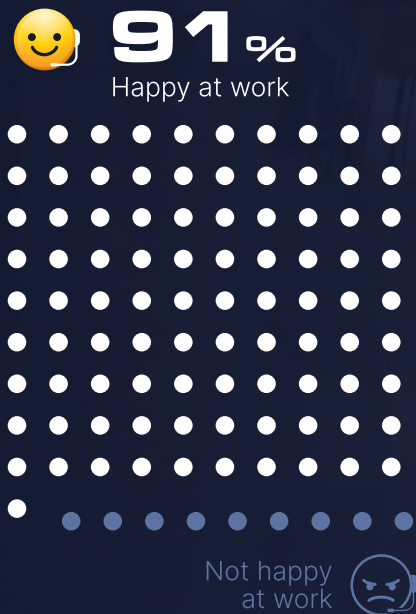
of agents using AI feel they can comfortably identify when to shift an interaction from a service focus to a sales one

Beyond sales, generative AI also transforms coaching in contact centers, a process that has traditionally been very manual, time-intensive, and based on random sampling. **Less than half (49%)** of contact center agents report receiving highly effective coaching at work. Digging in further reveals that agents who have personalized coaching, such as what can be enabled through generative AI, say it's nearly **3x more effective** than those who instead receive 'one-size-fits-all' coaching.

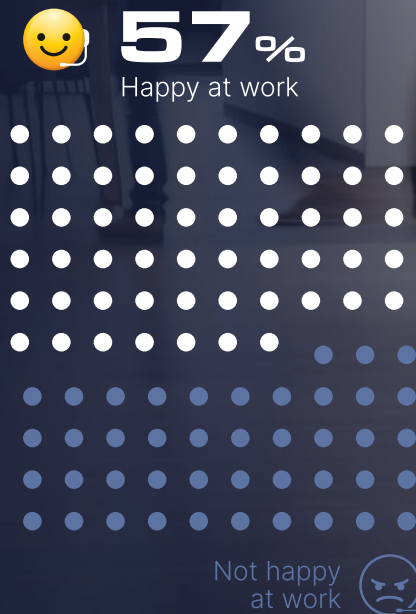
Agents want more data-driven insights that are personalized based on their performance metrics and needs; **75% of agents** actively seek more visibility into the data that's being used to judge their performance. The impact of improved coaching also has ripple effects: **91% of agents** with personalized coaching report that they're happy at work, compared to only **57%** of those with standard, randomized coaching. And perhaps the most impactful ripple effect is felt by customers: **Nearly all (95%)** agents using AI report that they are able to quickly and efficiently resolve customer issues.

Integrating generative AI in contact centers not only empowers agents to effectively transition from service to sales but also transforms coaching by providing personalized, data-driven insights in real time. This results in improved agent satisfaction and performance, leading to more efficient customer issue resolution and ultimately transforming cost centers into profit centers.

Personalized coaching...



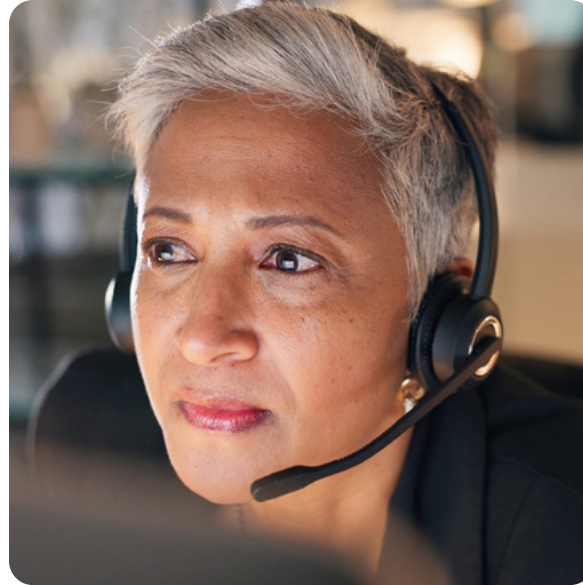
One-size-fits-all coaching...



Conclusion

As our research reveals, with every piece of data we reviewed, agents overwhelmingly want to be equipped with AI tools. AI not only enhances job performance but also improves agent satisfaction and reduces agent attrition, making it a critical investment for the future of contact centers.

For decision-makers overseeing contact center operations, the message is clear: integrating AI is not just beneficial but necessary. Business leaders should not be afraid of AI for fear that their teams won't adopt the solution - rather, they will embrace the technology. They might even thank you.



“I think an AI-driven technology that would be most helpful at this point would be one that could quickly summarize a customer’s history and give recommendations on what their preferences were and providing a pathway for them to use our services more efficiently while suggesting additional services they may find rewarding.”

- Agent, survey participant



About Cresta

Cresta makes every customer interaction excellent. Cresta turns real-time intelligence into real-time action to make the contact center smarter – and every agent and manager more productive. Powering customer experiences for companies like CarMax, Vivint, Intuit, and Porsche, Cresta is real-time AI for the real world. Follow our [blog](#) and connect with us on [LinkedIn](#) and [X](#).

To learn more about how Cresta is transforming the agent experience at leading companies, schedule a [personalized demo](#) today.

CRESTA

Reinvent the contact center,
with enterprise-grade generative AI