

# bright.

Improving customer service

## The Performance Management Guide

How to make sure you are getting the most out of your contact centre.



[www.brightindex.co.uk](http://www.brightindex.co.uk)

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## 1. Introduction

Performance Management (PM) has taken on a wider meaning over the last few years. Traditionally it is defined as an operational process to measure, in a structured way, the productivity of a contact centre, i.e. the centre's efficiency. More and more PM has begun to encompass employee engagement and the contact centre's impact on customer satisfaction and behaviour, to ensure management understand the centre's effectiveness as well as its efficiency.

In this guide we take a closer look at how to measure and achieve effectiveness, how different areas drive each other, how to improve internal and external status and how to align contact centre targets to the organisation's overall goals.

We believe our industry needs to take a more holistic approach to PM and that there are inherent dangers in examining the different areas in isolation. This guide has been designed to try and help you adopt this holistic approach and ultimately to simplify your performance management.

In the process we will try to dispel some commonly heard myths, provide insights from some of the UK's leading practitioners and share some often counter intuitive findings. The basis for this comes from analysing the top performers from 800 contact centre reviews and what differentiates them, as well as looking at correlations between the three areas above (we call them "the key 3") resulting in industry first research.

The main things you will have gained after you've finishing reading are:

- Knowing what the most relevant areas are to measure, manage and why
- An updated insight into how these areas drive each other
- Access to a range of tools taking the pain out of your everyday work



Mats Rennstam



Stephen Jacobs

## 2. Why Performance Management.

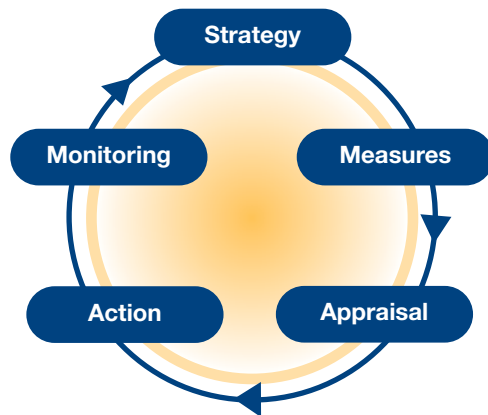
### 2.1 Easy versus relevant.

If forced to point to one thing where people have gone wrong in the past we would point to measuring (and thus managing) what's easy to measure and not necessarily what is relevant to measure. A classic example of this is the 80/20 calls answered service level target that so many organisations still have. Very few centres reach this mark (the average is 55% of calls answered within 20 seconds\*) and yet it persists driven, we believe, by senior management's desire to have one number to focus their efforts on. More importantly; most centres genuinely believe achievement of this target is key to delivering customer satisfaction but when measuring\* what impact a 30 seconds shorter hold time has, we see that it hardly affects c-sat at all. Just a small dip in FCR (First Contact Resolution) or employee engagement however sends customer satisfaction through the floor.

Before setting targets for any operational metrics however, the strategy needs to be clear; what is our overall purpose and what factors will affect this strategy? It's the combination of not choosing KPIs that drive strategy and a lack of data on how those KPIs affect each other that makes many centres work very hard yet only become efficient, not effective. This is enforced by using those KPIs in appraisals. If the measures aren't driving the right targets we are driving the wrong things; you get what you measure.

In seminars, Mike Havard often quotes an old joke about a man who comes across a friend on his knees under a pub lamp post. When asked what he is doing there he replies he is looking for his car keys that he lost down the road. "Then why are you looking here?" The friend looks up perplexed and says "Because it's light here of course".

Not only is measuring what is easy to get out of our ACDs and other systems often wrong but what we spontaneously think is our job (e.g. driving customer satisfaction as opposed to behaviour) might not actually be what is right in terms of the strategy needed to maximise the contact centre's contribution to the organisation's target.



### 2.2 Building internal and external status.

As we will show there are some KPIs that aren't just of use for measuring your centre's performance but are also great tools to increase your status within the organisation and even improve our industry's reputation. Why is this of importance?

#### Internal status

In order to get the necessary funds to maintain and invest in your centre you need to improve your internal equity and market yourself effectively inside the organisation. You can achieve this by using your KPIs to prove your value to the different stake holders around your company and speak their language. What metrics would a financial director be interested in (your targets for becoming more cost efficient?), the marketing director (how you measure and drive customer satisfaction and behaviour?) and the CEO (how you can



CCA®

feed back information to all other departments supporting them in their development?).

We normally sit on a fantastic amount of information that doesn't make its way to the rest of the organisation (read an example of this in Donna Fluss' book "The real time contact centre"). If we succeed in both providing and proving value to the rest of the organisation we will receive more attention, protect our budgets and, it'll be a lot more fun at work.

## External status

It is alarming to see the industry's attrition figures getting worse and worse. This is one area where we are all in the same boat and need to act together to make a change. When reviewing centres we see a vast amount of engaged and ambitious staff really wanting to do a great job. But how do they feel when they know their family and friends read horror stories (often based on flawed statistics) about call centre sweat shops or watch TV commercials with battery hens?

We need to get better at proudly marketing our industry to the outside world and communicating fact not fiction. For example if we exclude outsourcing companies, neither attrition nor absence is worse at in-house centres than other sectors\*. The average centre is actually performing significantly better now than 2 years ago, the volume and complexity of calls have however increased at an even faster rate.

### Key points

- Measure what drives strategy not what is easy to measure
- Measure wider: not just efficiency but effectiveness
- Use the results to increase internal and external status
- Limit the number of KPIs, select a few and focus on these

### Jonny Pearce, Editor Callcentrehelper.com comments on measuring the right things.

The real secret with performance management is to measure the right things, not just the easiest things to measure. ACD stats for example are easy to measure but give misleading answers. Measuring the number of calls per agent will reward the curt employee and penalise the employee who builds rapport with customers. Measuring service level (% of calls answered in 15 seconds) encourages agents to shorten calls and not to solve callers' problems.

Look for real performance measures, like customer satisfaction levels, complaint volumes, staff attrition and numbers of repeat calls. It is harder to measure but will really pay dividends in the long term.

## 3. The Most Relevant Things to Measure and How.

### 3.1 Performance

Performance, when defined as productivity, is the most common area of measurement. Most centres measure the same things; abandonment rate, hold time, calls per agent, calls per day etc. As previously mentioned however there is no rule book for choosing your KPIs due to different companies having different strategies. The list below is what our research shows the best the performers are measuring, however it is only when measuring areas 3.2 and 3.3 in parallel that they get the full advantage. For example; call wait time only becomes useful as a measure when you also measure the customer satisfaction in relation to the same calls. That way you can see how low (and thus cost efficient) you are able to reduce your call wait time. That is the difference between standard performance measuring and a fuller holistic way of measuring. Another good example is average handling time (AHT). Yes this is a good tactical metric for managing individuals (for instance when you want to see how you can improve sales and FCR) but it shouldn't be a KPI because the AHT in itself doesn't drive strategy, it drives the KPI. When we break down agents AHT versus sales and FCR figures we do not see a correlation, different agents have different ways of reaching higher FCR and conversion rates.

Most common performance metrics amongst high performing contact centres:



Comments on a selection of metrics:

**Self service:** At the same time as you hear friends complain about endless IVR menus, in our benchmarking we see that the top performing centres have a high percentage of self service calls. Customer like self service when it's set up correctly and there is the option to speak to a live agent. We however saw a worrying trend increase of 16% to 22% of abandoned calls in self service from 2007 to 2008\* indicating that consumers are growing tired of poor scripts.

**Hold time.** Contrary to what you may read in the media or remember experiencing from your last call to your telecoms provider; the average hold time is approximately two minutes\*. The problem is that during a year this fluctuates significantly and that there are a group of centres averaging 10 minutes hold time on average and it's those experiences that we remember.



**Agents per team leader.** In search of differentiators amongst the top performers we analysed 800 reviews and saw that the centres with 8-15 agents per coach (or team leader) had a significant better result on all of the other key metrics\*. Above 15 the results dropped dramatically but under 8 the results stayed the same.

**Utilisation level.** The spread of outcome here is symptomatic to the wide range of performance levels in our industry. In 2008 the lowest utilisation level (incoming calls and talk time compared to the resources assigned to handle them) in the Bright Index benchmark was 16% and the highest 172%. In the first case the centre has extreme over capacity, in the latter the agents start every day knowing that they will hardly be able to handle half of the calls coming in. Both are equally demotivating and neither cost efficient.

A recommended level is between 70 and 80%. At 100% we start seeing negative effects on absence and attrition (n.b. don't mistake this metric for average talk time per agent and day which rarely goes over 70%).

### 3.2 Employee satisfaction and engagement

Of course we want happy staff but although general satisfaction affects their behaviour it is how engaged they are with the customers that affects customer satisfaction and behaviour. FCR and hold time used to be seen as the top customer satisfaction drivers but from our customer satisfaction surveys carried out in parallel with monitoring delivered service levels; we see that an additional 30 seconds hold time has little affect on satisfaction but only a small dip in agent engagement sends it through the floor.

Most relevant employee evaluation metrics:

#### Employee satisfaction

- Recognition
- Achievement
- Support
- Engagement
- Knowledge

The key metric here is engagement but to drive that you need to measure the three key drivers of motivation and engagement:

1. Achievement
2. Recognition
3. Development

### 3.3 Customer satisfaction & behaviour

Most relevant customer survey questions:

#### Customer satisfaction

- General satisfaction
- First contact resolution
- Perceived engagement
- Perceived competence
- Sales or other action

Most companies already measure customer satisfaction on an enterprise level but the problem with this is that it is not accountable. Asking customers what they feel when they hear your brand name will not help us drive change in the contact centre. Instead you need to be able to link the feedback to a recent call to your centre and break it down to agent or minimum team level.

#### 360° feedback to agents

When doing automatic post calls surveys and feeding back the results to the agent they have created themselves, we have seen metrics like FCR and customer satisfaction go through the roof. Yes there is an element of competitiveness but also for the first time an agent can actually see that they are making a difference. They can also experiment with the way they handle customers and see what effect that has on their scores; for instance if they make an effort to sound happier and more upbeat on calls and that translates into better customer satisfaction scores then they are going to repeat that behaviour. Thus, sharing the results down to the agent level helps create a self developing and learning organisation.

#### How to kill the Goose: Golden Rules of Customer Feedback

Guy Fielding, Director of Research and Development, horizon2.

The basic issue for any customer feedback tool is the customer's motivation to respond. We are asking customers to do something for us, which involves them in costs (time, effort, phone bill, thinking about the questions we have asked, giving us information). The powerful dynamics of exchange and reciprocity say that if we want customers to do this, and go on doing this, then there has to be some payback to the customer for their gift giving. But at the moment the exchange is very one-sided. The customer does all of the giving, organisations do the receiving, but what do they offer in return? What can we do, and what must we do to tackle these issues? First of all we have to recognise that in exchange we have to offer them something equally valuable, and that the more personally relevant, immediate and tangible this is the better.

Read the continued article at [www.brightindex.co.uk](http://www.brightindex.co.uk) under Research.

Dr. Guy Fielding is a Chartered Psychologist specialising in interpersonal and organisational communication. He applies this expertise to helping organisations improve their communication with their customers.

We have deliberately not used net promoter score (NPS) as one of the key metrics despite its seemingly inexorable rise in popularity. Although this is a key metric for many companies and intuitively makes sense; Reicheld's initial findings have never been replicated and thus proven. Additionally a low NPS score suggests a business has a problem, it doesn't tell you where, in your organisation, let alone your contact centre, that problem exists. Companies like Cape Consulting and Horizon2 have taken this a step further though and help you link to actual outputs and how to improve them.

Asking about general satisfaction is actually a more useful tool for identifying problems somewhere else in the organisation. If all your performance metrics are good, especially if they hold up when benchmarked, then you know that it is the product or another area of the business that is at fault. However, this type of insight must be taken further and fed back to the appropriate department.

One of the major bonuses with breaking down customer satisfaction to team and agent level is finding the most effective agents, as opposed to just efficient, and then being able to replicate their behaviour.

One company which has got this down to a fine art is Vodafone.

#### **Jane Hext, Customer Services Director at Vodafone comments on using automatic customer satisfaction surveys to drive change**

Ensuring that performance management effectively motivates our people to put our customers first has been at the heart of transforming our culture in Vodafone. We have seen tremendous benefits from running daily real time customer satisfaction surveys sufficient for all advisors and teams to receive direct feedback from customers that they've spoken to which can be used to coach their skills development.

The feedback and engagement from our advisors is overwhelmingly positive because they see us prioritising customer feedback far above traditional contact centre productivity metrics.

The trick for all of us is trying to find a win-win performance management system. We have found that our people feel motivated and eager to know how our customers felt about their conversation, we gain valuable insight from the aggregated outcomes of the surveys and of course our customers appreciate that we care, as evidenced by the higher than normal response rate and volunteering of information.

#### **3.4 Linking the three**

By measuring the "Key 3" areas simultaneously a new world will open up. As soon as you see a movement in one area you can go back to the other two to see what caused it, because they are intrinsically linked. If you in addition to this also break down the results to a team or agent level you will have a very powerful tool helping you for example:

- Find out how far you can turn down your service levels without affecting c-sat
- Finding the most effective agents as opposed to most efficient
- Finding correlations; what drives sales, FCR, customer satisfaction etc

#### **Anne Marie Forsyth, Chief Executive CCA, comments on looking beyond traditional measurements.**

For many, measuring customer satisfaction is an essential part of an organisation's day to day management. Who can accept unhappy customers in a world of 'Watchdog' media coverage, Web 2.0 feedback and CEO demands that the 'customer comes first'? And how can service be improved if we don't measure what's broken?

For the sceptics, loyalty or repeat spend are more important measures. Satisfied customers are known to defect, so some advocate the use of the Net Promoter Score. Others say CRM systems will (finally) capture the information needed to understand individual customer relationships with organisations; satisfaction will be one of many measures.

The CCA Industry Council debate on this topic focused on the need to identify the role and purpose of customer satisfaction measurement. Trying to improve customer satisfaction to the level of delight may be inappropriate if price is the key driver in the marketplace.

Learn more at [www.cca.org.uk](http://www.cca.org.uk).

CCA - the professional body for customer contact



## 4. Benchmarking.

### 4.1 Why benchmark?

Measuring and following up the relevant KPIs will tell you how much better or worse you are doing since the last time you measured. It won't tell you whether the resultant figure is good or bad. This can only come from external benchmarking; comparing you to peers and other centres out there.

Very often you will be surprised by the findings. It is very easy to misjudge our own performance and think that we are worse at many more things than we actually are or that we excel when compared to peers. A benchmarking exercise helps you prioritise and optimise time, budget and resources where they are really needed.

Benchmarking against your own sector is of course of biggest initial interest, they have the same challenges as you do. Don't disregard the total average though; not many bank customers call banks other than their own. They will however call their Telecom / Utility / Health service's centres and that's where they will form their overall opinion on what good customer service is!

### 4.2 Methodologies

Different types of benchmarking and what to look out for.

What are the different types of services on offer, what differentiates them and what are the most important criteria to consider when choosing one?

Benchmarking has been getting a bad name in the UK due to sometimes lax approaches resulting in unreliable data and non comparable results. Benchmarking can play a crucial role in helping us raise our game but it must follow a few simple but imperative rules. Above all it must be:

#### Reliable

Rigorous quality assurance of the data entered must be in place. Take a simple thing like cost per call. Some centres measure salaries only, others add on rent, IT costs, tea/coffee, training, recruiting etc. There must be one set way of calculating the KPIs in order to be able to compare apples with apples.

#### Applicable

The participants should be benchmarked against peers with the same challenges as themselves. If competitors are of a different size or have different opening hours, they should be able to benchmark against those types of peers as well.

#### Relevant

The benchmarking should of course measure what is relevant for both the customer and for the centre. It is, for example, strange how few centres measure first contact resolution. Yet this is the most important KPI for the customer.

## 4.3 UK benchmarking guide

Helping you find the benchmarking solution best suited to your specific needs.

CONTENT	Bright Index	Mgmt consultancy original research	CCF Top 50	Contact Babel	Merchants	Public sector's PMF report
Your own most relevant internal KPIs analysed and benchmarked	✓	✓	x	x	x	x
Employee and customer satisfaction measuring	✓	✓	x	x	x	x
Post report workshop and bespoke recommendations	✓	✓	x	x	x	x
GAP analysis	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x
Robust (+10 peers) sector averages	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Quality assured data gathering	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x
Bespoke report of results	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x
Plus 10 years of performance measurement experience	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x
Fee returned if no ROI within 6 months	✓	x	x	x	x	x
Extensive PR of your participation	x	x	✓	x	x	x
Motivational awards do	x	x	✓	x	x	x
	9	6	5	2	2	1
FEE % of calls *	££ 100%	£££ 100%	££ 0.03%	£ 100%	£ 100%	0 100%

Based on interviews with participants. Any corrections made available at [www.brightindex.co.uk](http://www.brightindex.co.uk).  
\*Average UK CC handles 1M calls annually, divided by calls per participant the survey findings are based on.

Although we admittedly favour our own benchmarking methodology, we have tried to benchmark our service both fairly and objectively.

A few comments on methodology:

- Off the shelf reports can be a good low cost starting point but they will not give you bespoke recommendations and you can't choose your peer group.
- Management consultancy firms will give you great models and structured recommendations; however they are very expensive and often based on a handful of companies' data.
- Mystery shopping is great for monitoring how agents sound and behave but they do not tell you why it's happening. If you however take the analysis further you can make a significant impact on agent engagement and thus customer satisfaction. We advocate ongoing schemes as too few calls might be misleading. If a centre handles 1M calls per year, and employs 100 advisors then for example 500 mystery calls (0.05% of calls) will not allow you to break it down making it accountable and drive change. etc.

#### Key points - Benchmarking

- Only through external references do you know how good or bad your results really are
- Benchmark efficiency KPIs against peers and quality KPIs against everyone
- Make sure the benchmarking supplier are comparing apples with apples and have a big enough sample

## 5. Managing Outsourcing Relationships.

All of the points for managing in-house performance above apply equally to outsourced operations. The difference is that you might not get access to all the data, or you might not be interested in the metrics behind the scenes, but you should. The closer and more transparent partnership you can form the more you will get out of your outsourced solution; the more effective the outsourcer's operation is, the more cost efficient it will be for you.

The technology solutions available today in performance management will let you have access to all of the Key 3 areas, real-time, even though you are not on site.

If you are an outsourcer you should embrace benchmarking. This will allow you to show to the client that you are outperforming in-house centres on costs (most are) and doing well on metrics like FCR which is often a client's biggest worry. When making comparisons (for example cost per call) it is extremely important however that the benchmarking supplier knows what they are doing and compares apples with apples. When paying an outsourcer; everything is included but most in-house centres don't factor in things like finance, utilities, IT costs or even telephony because it's paid for centrally.

### Key points – Outsourcing

- Apply the same rules for performance management as for and in-house centre
- Form a transparent long-term relationship
- Be extra sure you are comparing apples with apples

## 6. Managing Home Working Agents.



Home working has been discussed for many years but now seems to be rolling out very quickly due to the major advantages in lower costs, wider recruitment area, lower attrition etc. There are however even more traps to look out for than advantages. Most commonly discussed are health and safety rules and security around consumer data. Another issue is how you manage these agents and keep them motivated.

Monitoring the metrics we have discussed above is not a problem in most cases due to new technology solutions. There are however a number of things unique for home working to take into account.

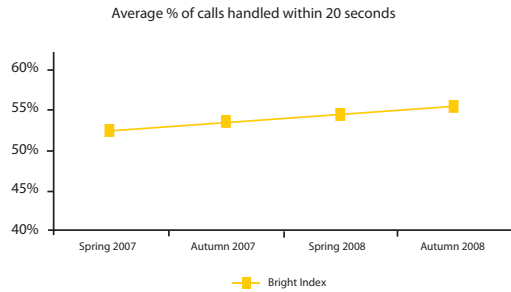
### Carl Adkins, founder and MD of Infinity list his top 7 home working recommendations:

- Make sure all staff has access to the same systems. This will simplify training and trouble shooting.
- Use the same team leaders for monitoring in-house and home agents to assure same levels of quality.
- Home agents' enthusiasm often dips after two months. Schedule recurring work days at the call centre to increase the feeling of belonging to the same team.
- Be clear about technology requirements from start (e.g. Windows XP and minimum 512kb broadband) not just competence, voice etc.
- Make sure that no information is saved on the agents' home computers to protect data.
- Put in place call recording and supervisor monitoring of home agents' calls as well as in-house staff.
- Allow agents to communicate with each other. You can do this simply by allowing them to use Skype, Yahoo! Messenger or Windows Live for internal communication. It increases the sense of belonging and a team leader can support the agent via chat even when he or she is speaking to a customer.

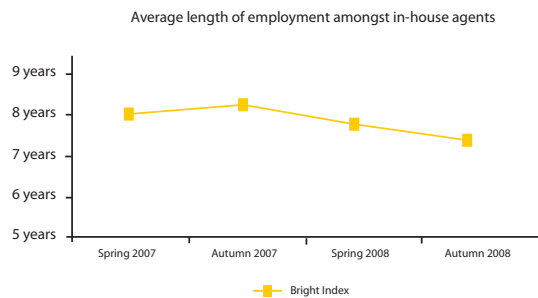


## 7. Sample of UK Trends & Findings 2009

As mentioned previously centres are generally improving from year to year but still struggle because of the increase in call volume and complexity. However there are many misconceptions around our most common KPIs which can be misleading. We touched on the service level 80/20 rules that originates from system suppliers default reporting settings and not what customers demands or companies prefer to deliver.



Attrition is another area where our industry often suffers from the media clustering in-house and outsourced centres. Outsourcers often have shorter projects and will thus automatically have a fluctuating demand for staff. If we lift out in-house centres only, they have a very long average length of employment.

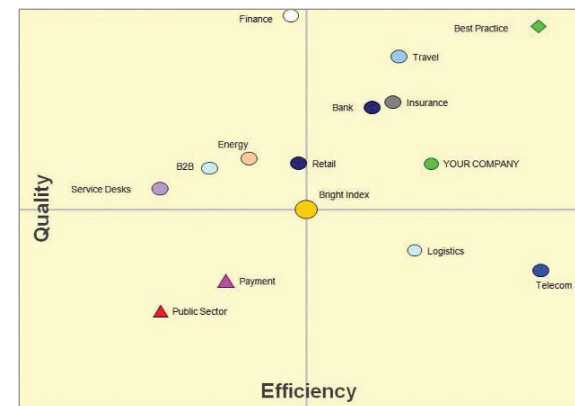


\*Bright Index encompass more than 100 reviews of centres' performance annually. Fifty KPIs are tracked based on data that a Bright consultant gather together with the client directly from their systems. The sample size, the quality assurance methodology and the recommendations based on the findings makes it the most reliable, relevant and actionable bespoke benchmarking of contact centre performance available in Europe.

Staff engagement is something that we have proven has a much greater impact on customer satisfaction than average hold time. Seeing that most service levels, on average, are pretty ok we are left with two reasons for the decline in customers giving us top scores; agent behaviour and engagement on the phone or, the customer's mindset. We have seen examples of the contact centres and agents doing a fantastic job but they still get bad feedback because the customer's mind was made up about the experience before they made the call. Something we must address collectively.



These were just an excerpt of the 50 KPIs we have been measuring since 2000. Note that industry averages are just that, there are vast differences between sectors (types of centres, queries, size etc). If you are interested in your specific sector or a specific KPI, you will find our contact details on the back page. Or, find out how you compare against everyone else.



## 8. Performance Manager's Checklist.

A quarterly checklist to help make sure you are monitoring the right things and driving development forward.

Have I this quarter..	Y/N	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measured what drives strategy and not just what's easy to measure.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measured wider: not just efficiency but effectiveness.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used the results to increase internal and external status.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited the number of KPIs to a few and focused on these.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitored and improved staff engagement.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measured customer behaviour as well as satisfaction.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linked the three to find how they drive each other.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broken down measures to team and agent level so that they can be used to drive change.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Benchmarked my most important performance KPIs with peers and national averages.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Benchmarked staff and customer satisfaction.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compared efficiency KPIs against peers and quality KPIs against everyone.</li> </ul>		

## 9. About Bright - You get what you measure!

After over 800 reviews of contact centres and service desks, Bright has seen that three areas in particular need to be monitored continually: internal performance, employee engagement and customer satisfaction. These drive each other as well as directly affect your bottom line!

To be able to drive change however it is not enough to simply measure internally, it is only when you compare externally that you see how you're really doing. The Bright service suite includes all three areas of measuring as well as benchmarking and recommendations.

### • Performance benchmarking

Gives companies the most reliable, relevant analysis and benchmarking of internal contact centre performance available. Every year 100 participants get 50 internal KPIs analysed and benchmarked by a senior consultant as well as receive a GAP analysis and recommendations on how to improve. (Bright Performance Index™)

### • Employee engagement measuring

Monitors staff satisfaction, engagement and support. Not only all areas that drive customer satisfaction are measured but the factors that affect these areas so that management get a hands on toll to drive change. (Bright Employee Index™)

### • Customer satisfaction measuring

Measures customer satisfaction and actions in real time. Post call automatic surveys broken down to team and agent level. Management have access to instant results, agents see their own results creating a self developing and self learning organisation. (Bright Customer Index™).

### • Intelligent reporting

All three modules above presented real-time in a user friendly dashboard with different levels available for managers, team leaders and agents. (Bright Navigator™)



Read more at [www.brightindex.co.uk](http://www.brightindex.co.uk).

### Examples of clients

Barclaycard, EON Powergen, Nokia, EDF, RSA, Vodafone, Prudential, Telegraph, BUPA, Volvo, Eurocard, Michelin, IKEA, H&M, 3, Skandia, RSA and numerous public sector clients.

# bright.

Improving customer service



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