

DHL is using its service to differentiate itself from other package delivery providers, reports the December issue of *Customer Service Newsletter*. In order to make sure its service lives up to claims of superiority, the company must pay close attention to its call center performance.

DHL uses all of the traditional metrics associated with call center performance, but it says it gets its best results by focusing on calls per hour. The following article, based on an interview with Mike Sears, DHL's vice president of customer service, explains why.

— **Editor**
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How DHL measures its customer service performance

The basic metric that DHL uses to measure agent performance is calls per hour. “We have all of the other metrics associated with call center performance — average handling time, for instance — and we’re pretty big on schedule adherence around here,” says Mike Sears, DHL’s vice president of customer service. “But not to the point that we’re running any sort of prison. In fact, we’re probably more laissez-faire than most call centers, just from years of experience running them.”

Calls per hour, says Sears, “goes beyond AHT [average handle time] because it brings in attendance, schedule adherence, and it rewards what we think is good performance.”

“I started in customer service in the late 1980s, when the way you measured performance was AHT, but I quickly realized that wasn’t the right way to do it, and if that’s the way you do it, you can quickly bring disfunctionality to the customer service operation,” says Sears.

AHT seems to take front row in many call centers because “they get it every day and it’s the only number they can hang on to,” says Sears. “They may get monitored once a week, and customer survey results are posted every month, but average handling time is reported every day.”

Strategically, DHL has decided that its productivity gains will come not by driving reps to handling more customers in less time, but by allowing customers to choose alternative channels. “What we try to do with customers when we have them on the phone,” Sears says, “is not only to educate them about DHL, but to educate them as well about IVR and the Web. And if I’m going to do a good job educating the customer about DHL and the IVR, my average handle time is going to go up.”

“As a result, we look more closely at calls per hour, and our range is fairly wide,” Sears says. In addition to calls per hour, rep performance appraisals are based on regular call monitoring by supervisors and attendance.

DHL also uses Convergys, a third-party vendor, to do about 2,000 customer surveys per month, covering the range of call types. “Our agents are pretty focused on our Convergys survey,” says Sears. “That tells us how our customers feel about how our agents are doing.”

DHL can track survey results back to individual reps, but with such a relatively small sample, it doesn’t use these for performance evaluation purposes. “Good, bad, or great, we know which rep did it,” Sears says. “We just don’t give reps any sort of grade based on that.” It does give the department a grade, however, and “we are making it a huge part of our supervisory-on-up performance evaluation.” About 40 percent of DHL’s management incentive plan is impacted by the results of the customer satisfaction survey.

Reps, on the other hand, “are fully aware of what the customer is saying through the survey.” Departmental results are posted, and “we also post the verbatims from those surveys in all of our call centers,” says Sears, and DHL finds these to be a particularly valuable motivational tool. As of now, however, there’s no incentive plan for reps, but DHL is investigating some incentive options at this time.