iQor

The Ultimate Guide to
Outsourced Seasonal Staffing
in the BPO Industry

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Introduction

For most businesses who partner with a BPO provider, busy seasons require the extra support of seasonal staffing. This is especially true for contact centers that need to increase staff to meet the demands during peak holidays and other event-driven periods. But in order to successfully get through these busy seasons, companies need the right combination of technology, people, and recruiting and training strategies so they can manage high contact volumes and increased customer interactions without sacrificing quality—or their bottom line.

> **In this three-part guide, we dive into the details of what the right combination of tools, people, and strategies looks like so you can partner with your next BPO partner with confidence.**

Customer Experience (CX) Technology

1

The Right Technology for Busy Season Contact Center Staffing

When it comes to keeping up with seasonal staffing, organizations need CX technology to manage contact volumes and easily scale their customer service teams. **We found that there are five key technology solutions every contact center should have during peak holiday and event-driven seasons:**

Workforce management (WFM) solutions to automatically manage seasonal staffing and scheduling.

Intelligent IVR solutions that can automate low-level inquiries and allocate calls to the right agent with the necessary skillsets.

Interaction analytics that can record 100% of interactions and provide insights in near real-time.

Chatbots and self-service tools to speed up the customer journey and improve first contact resolution rates.

Cloud-based infrastructure that enables dynamic allocation of digital tools to agent workstations.

Workforce Management Automation

Workforce management (WFM) solutions allow contact center managers to create schedules, track staffing needs, and schedule shifts with ease.

For peak interaction volumes, the ideal WFM tool for seasonal staffing should be able to:

- ✔ Automate scheduling based on real–time contact and staffing data
- ✔ Monitor staff variances
- ✔ Identify near–term operational challenges
- ✔ Provide full visibility into performance and reporting
- ✔ Automatically analyze data to know what type of coverage you need at a given time

Contact center operations can quickly adjust routing to account for busy periods or staff shortages by monitoring staffing variances in real–time and identifying near–term operational challenges. Automated WFM tools can also automatically communicate with contact center managers and frontline employees to reduce overstaffing, meet service levels, and adapt rapidly as staffing issues arise.

The most rewarding benefit of a WFM tool is that it provides increased productivity and employee morale since intelligent scheduling helps prevent burnout by balancing out shifts. This leads to an improved customer experience over time.

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Interaction Analytics

A contact center without interaction analytics during peak contact volumes is like a pilot flying blind. Interaction analytics, also known as speech analytics, is a critical tool needed to analyze performance metrics during busy times of the year. It helps teams identify and respond to trends, optimize customer service levels, and maintain quality assurance.

The right speech analytics platform will include features such as:

- ✓ Recording of 100% of calls

- ✓ Automatic speech recognition

- ✓ Live chat analytics

VALDI is iQor's proprietary speech and interaction analysis platform that uses cloud computing, machine learning, and artificial intelligence. It mines every available recorded interaction between agents and customers. Interaction analytics software like VALDI helps analyze audio data and provide immediate feedback on customer tone, sentiment, emotion, and even the stress in a customer's voice.

Another advantage is that it can provide agents with a distinct edge in cross and upsell efforts. Contact center employees can leverage data captured during a call to identify upsell and cross-sell opportunities. Organizations can analyze the data further to identify which types of scripting or conversations lead to more sales for a positive impact on your bottom line.

Intelligent IVR

<u>An intelligent interactive voice response (IVR) solution</u> is a phone automation system that automatically connects customers to the right customer service representatives. This solution eliminates long wait times, reduces abandonment rates, and improves contact center efficiency.

The right IVR solution for busy holidays and seasonal rushes will include features such as:

Personalized routing of calls to the right agent based on call type, skill, and availability

Automated pre–recorded messages that can help manage high contact volumes

Support for multiple languages with text or spoken prompts

Easy integration into CRM systems

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Chatbots and Self–Service

When high call volumes occur, chatbots are an essential tool. Chatbots provide instant responses and self–service solutions without any human intervention from a contact center employee.

To get the most out of a chatbot solution during peak call volumes, look for features such as:

The ability to take customers through a series of steps on their own without human intervention

The ability to generate automatic responses based on a set of predetermined criteria

Conversational AI to learn, remember and respond to customer input

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Cloud–Based Infrastructure for Dynamic Allocation

With dynamic allocation, you can launch your support teams to any scale you need. Whether it's for voice or non–voice interactions, the right cloud–based solution should be able to push the required tools to an agent's desktop seamlessly –– no matter where they are in the world.

Summary

Contact centers are the backbone of any company providing customer service for anything from sales to support inquiries. But when it comes to holidays and event–driven volume, frontline employees are put under extreme pressure to meet demands year after year. Tools like **automated WFM solutions, interaction analytics, chatbots, intelligent IVR systems** and more can help mitigate the risk of under and over staffing, burnout, and dips in customer satisfaction.
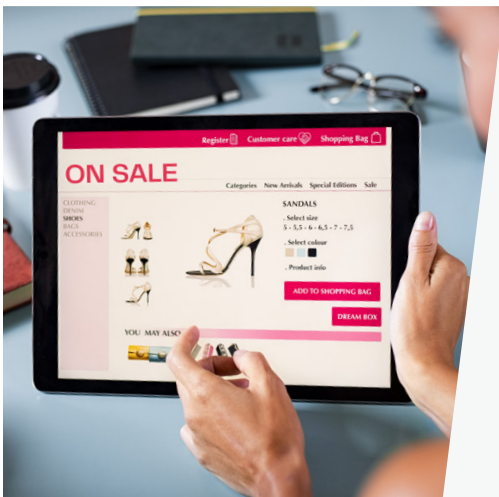
Are you ready for the next big holiday, product launch or promotional event?

Let us help you optimize your seasonal staffing needs with the digital tools and irresistible people that give your customers the best experience ever.

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Recruitment, Training, and Retention

2

How to Recruit, Train, and Retain Employees for Busy Season Contact Center Staffing

For businesses, it is a normal expectation to bring in extra support for seasonal staffing. This is especially true for contact centers that need to increase staff to meet the demands during peak holidays and event–driven periods. But for this hiring process to be successful, companies need the right combination of technology, people, and recruiting and training strategies so they can manage high contact volumes without sacrificing quality or their bottom line. **In part one, we focused on CX technology. In part two, we'll dive more into hiring, training, and retention strategies. This section shows you:**

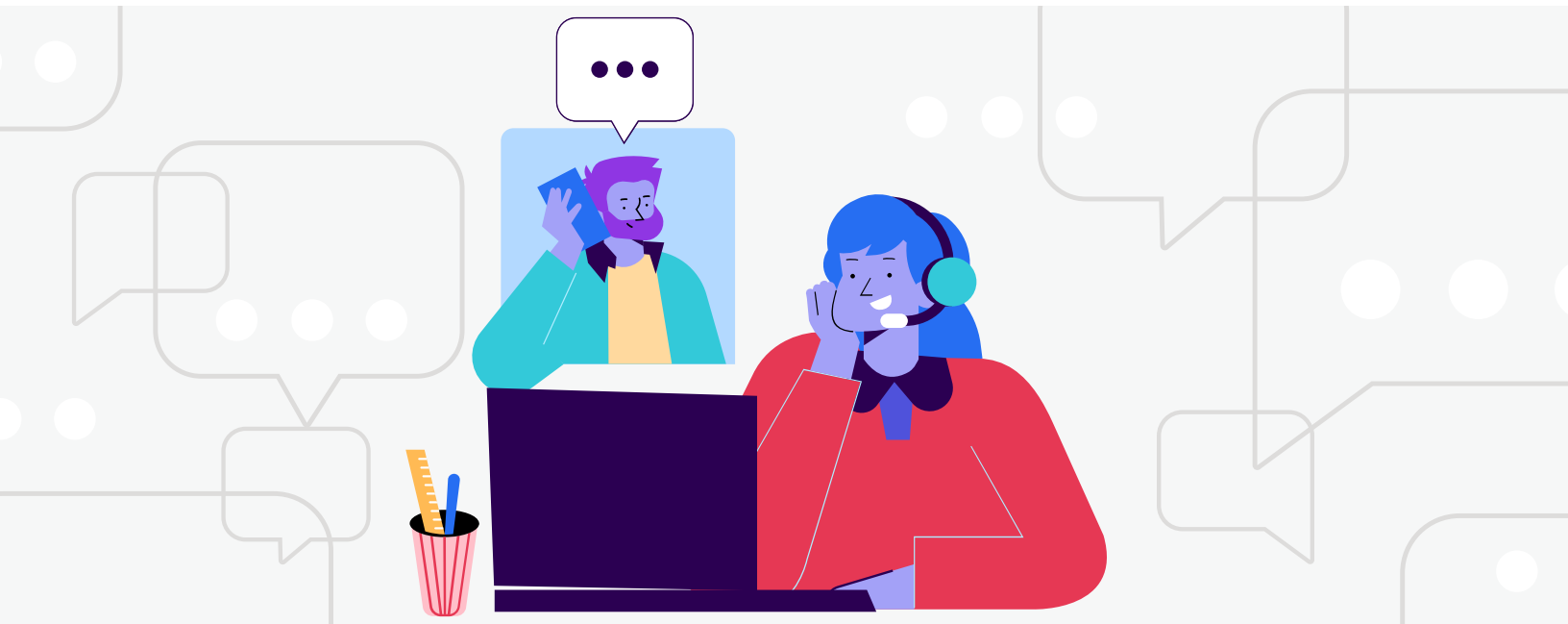Training strategies and tools to increase speed–to–proficiency

Recruiting techniques to find the best–fitting employees fast

How to retain seasonal contact center employees

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# Recruiting Techniques to Find the Best–Fitting Employees Fast

To bring in as many candidates as possible, your BPO partner should be able to recruit as many qualified contact center agents as possible—fast.

Here are three ways to hire right and hire fast:

1 **Leverage your pool of candidates, referrals, and social channels.**

Make sure your BPO partner is drawing upon their existing pool of pre–qualified candidates, employee referrals, and recruitment automation capabilities. Recruitment technology can be integrated into social media channels like Facebook to find and engage with candidates automatically.
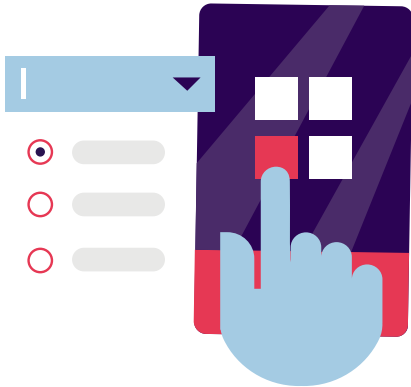
2 Automate pre-screening.

From there, you can send an automatic mobile link to a customized pre-screening questionnaire. If the candidate meets the criteria, a recruiter can reach out to them within the hour via text message and phone call to notify them of the opportunity to proceed.
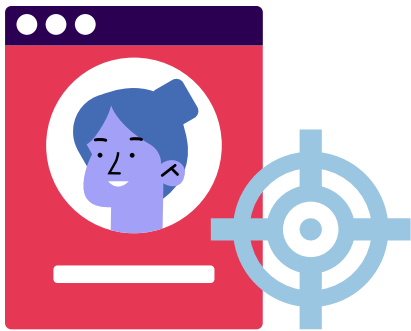
3 Track candidates like they're your best leads.

One key difference in our recruiting process is that we track candidates like we would sales leads. We then staff our recruiters accordingly to contact every pre-screened candidate and ensure we get them set up for interviews as soon as possible.

Once the candidate finishes the final round of interviews

(in-person or virtual), they are extended an offer and can be on-boarded for training that same day. In combination with our private cloud technology, this recruiting system allows your company to ramp up agents in any location instantly.

iQor deployed this methodology for an eCommerce client and was able to successfully hire 1,500 customer support agents in just two months.

Training Strategies and Tools to Increase Speed-to-Proficiency

When it comes to seasonal staffing, speed-to-proficiency is everything. The trouble is, in-person settings may provide the best method for high-complexity skills, but time-to-proficiency is longer. On the other hand, eLearning has proved to be a great way to add speed, but only works best for low-complex skills. So, when it comes to increasing speed to proficiency, we recommend incorporating a blended-learning strategy to accelerate learning and train employees at scale.

A blended learning approach combines digital with traditional classroom training to provide a fast track to an agent's proficiency.

Blended learning offers companies opportunities to:

Give learners a head start in the learning process

by delivering low-complexity skills training through virtual courses. Small courses and microlearning modules can also deliver pre-training without overwhelming the employee.

Cover medium-complexity skills

by using eLearning courses as a bridge between specialized instructor-led sessions. For example, learners attend an Instructor-Led Training (ILT), then complete an eLearning course that reinforces the skills learned in the classroom before moving on to the next session.

Reinforce high-complexity skills

through self-paced, virtual practice sessions. High-complexity skills are first covered in-person and are then available through an eLearning module so employees can accelerate the skill transfer.

How to Retain Seasonal Contact Center Employees

Now more than ever, employees expect more from their employers. So, reducing turnover is going to take more than a few performance-based incentives. Companies will need to deploy an employee-centric approach that celebrates successes, promotes transparency, and shows proof that the company values and appreciates their workforce.

Use employee-centric data analysis

At iQor, we've found that better recruiter hires coupled with increased employee engagement result in improved retention. That's why we track retention by many attributes, including recruiter, lead source, work type, and geography to analyze winning retention combinations and where we can tweak areas for success. Our recruiting teams also employ a simulation and talent prediction toolset to better understand a potential recruit's strengths and characteristics.

We utilize a recruiting analytics tool to enable operations and human resources to report on each recruiting source, applicant, hire, and retention rate at 30 and 60 days, by location and by the program. Sites identify successful recruiting sources and will target future recruiting dollars in those areas. This analytics tool allows us to predict future turnover and take proactive steps to improve retention and targeted marketing.

Celebrate Success

Celebrate employees' achievements through regular events such as giveaways, contests, and celebrations to foster employee engagement and morale. We like to then take it a step further and host activities such as music festivals (pre-COVID). Currently, we host our global iQor Recognize Awards, which are celebrated virtually throughout the year, to recognize exceptional employees and celebrate achievements.

Surveys

Surveys are great tools for gauging contact center agents' level of satisfaction and helping you find out the best ways to improve their work environment.

Don't be afraid to ask often. At iQor, we push a satisfaction survey out every week through our employee portal with a simple five (5) – star question "How's life for you at iQor?" The results are confidential and roll up to provide each line of business a score between one and five. The trend enables us to measure the impact of change and identify opportunities for more engagement and retention.

Keep work-at-home an option

According to Gartner, seventy percent of customer service and support employees want to continue to work at home (WAH) at least once a week after the pandemic ends. Despite growing concerns for the future of organizational culture from some service leaders, Gartner data indicates that WAH has not posed too great a challenge. In fact, most customer service employees who work remotely say that organizational culture has remained relatively unchanged – and more than 7 out of 10 think it's improved since their shift to WAH.

Summary

Finding the best-fitting employees fast, building a solid talent pipeline, and retaining employees throughout the busy season can be a challenge. Organizations need to go beyond the standard practices and start using **automation, data, and employee-centric strategies** to better impact their contact center operations. If you're outsourcing seasonal staff during peak times, look for a partner that can imbed this mindset across recruiting, training, and retention strategies so that you can navigate spikes in customer care volumes with confidence in your teams and in your bottom line.

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Supporting Work–at–Home Seasonal Employees

3

A PWC survey found that 83% of employers say the shift to remote workers has been successful for their company.

And when it comes to supporting seasonal staffing with a virtual, work–at–home workforce, there are many things a contact center needs to get right. From a highly supportive onboarding process to extensive training and ensuring an active and engaged team, companies need to provide the whole package for their employees while meeting or exceeding service levels for their clients.

In parts one and two of this guide we discussed best practices for contact center technology, recruiting, training, and retention. **In part three, we focus on the third aspect that is a new critical component of seasonal staffing: Work–at–Home.**
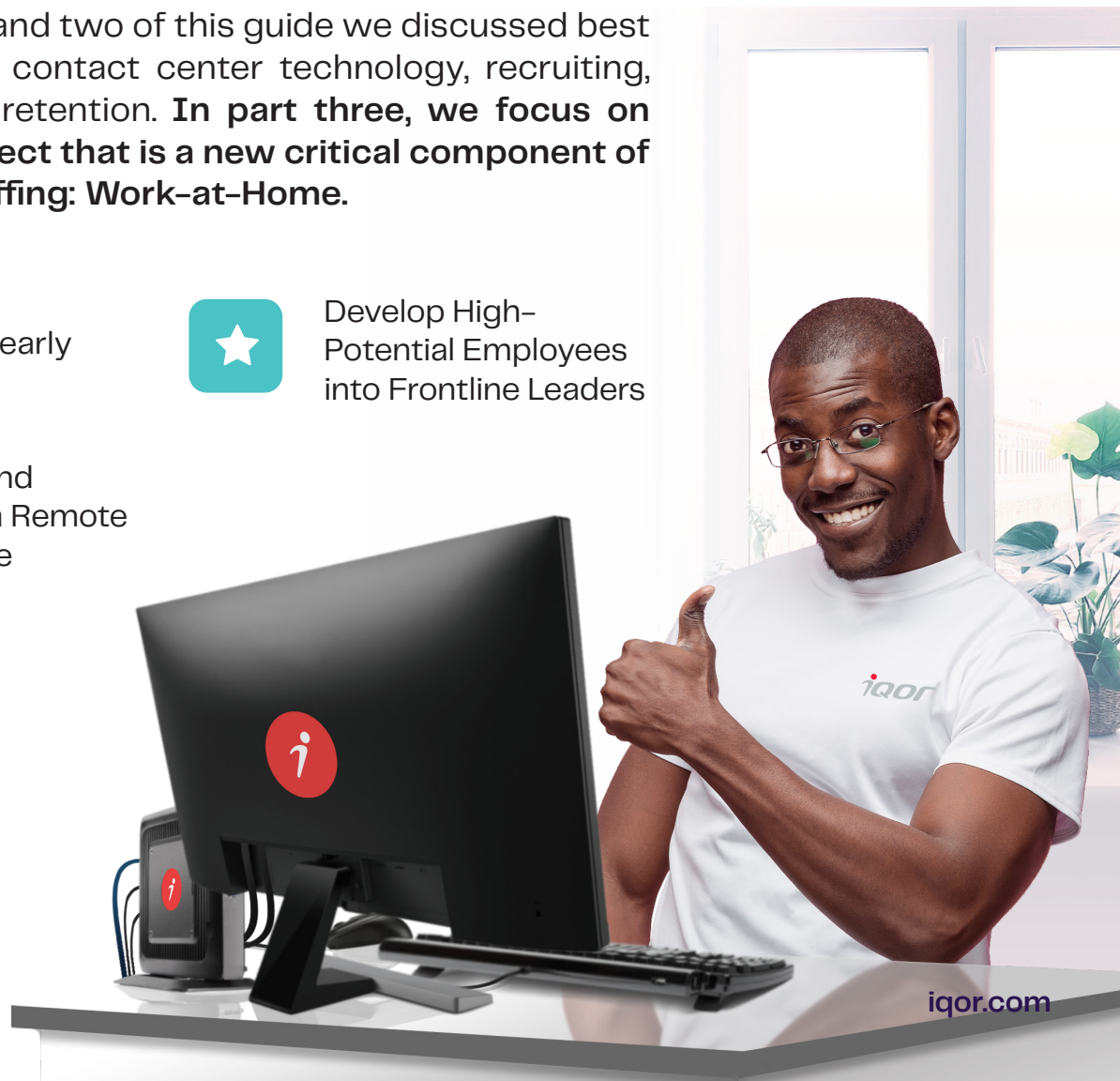
Onboard early

Develop High–Potential Employees into Frontline Leaders

Engage and Support a Remote Workforce

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Supporting Work–at–Home Employees for Seasonal Staffing in the BPO Industry

Work–at–home employees in the BPO industry face many unique challenges, including isolation, lack of office socialization, and distractions at home or from family members. On the other hand, they have some distinct advantages such as greater flexibility for time management and decreased stress due to the short commute to their at–home desk.

BPO companies can improve their seasonal, virtual staffing by fostering a culture of engagement and communication. To do this, they need to engage employees in the same way as their onsite counterparts: supporting them with technology while ensuring a positive work–life balance, career development, and engagement.

Here are three ways to achieve the high level of support that your work–at–home employees need. ▶

1 Onboard Early

Building a solid onboarding process is crucial for cultivating a cohesive, productive, and engaged workplace. Yet, according to Gallup, only 12% of employees strongly agree that their organization does a great job onboarding new employees.

Additionally, 76% of new hires felt less equipped to do their job compared to 85% of tenured employees. In other words, new hires need extra support when they work remotely.

> **Onboarding is more than going through a logistical checklist: computer, check; headset, check; internet, check. It's making sure your new team member gets onboarded as soon as possible, has the support they need, and is engaged early and often.**

Essentially, you want to mitigate the potential of stress and confusion from the get-go. This ensures your newest members feel valued, are well-prepared, and ready to head into training knowing that their new company has their back, even from afar.

Welcome to iQor!

Thank you!

At iQor,

many of our work–at–home employees have their entire recruiting and onboarding experience through a virtual setting. And when it comes to being hired for a busy peak season, it can be intimidating and overwhelming for new recruits. To put our employees at ease and help them feel their best for our client's customers, we provide extra time and support resources:
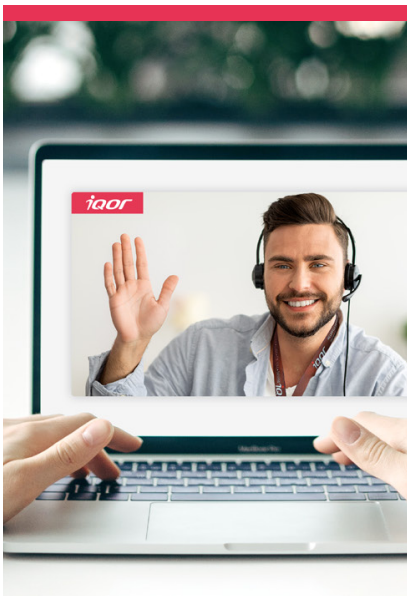
Prepare Employees' Setups Early.

We onboard our contact center agents one to two weeks before product training. This gives new employees plenty of time to transition into our culture, form relationships, and prepare their equipment setup.

Bring Your Own Device Support (BYOD).

With our private CX cloud and secure remote worker technology, employees can quickly turn their personal device into the same, secure, compliant desktop they'd find in the physical contact center environment.

Increased Service Desk Staff.

We add extra staff to our service desk to help our new seasonal employees through their onboarding and BYOD setup, so employees always have the support they need 24/7.

2

Develop High-Potential Employees into Frontline Leaders

One of the biggest challenges BPOs face in managing the high influx of seasonal employees is ensuring compliance and quality. At some point, the amount of employee-to-management support ratio becomes too unbalanced, and seasonal employees end up feeling lost, confused, and undervalued, leading to a dip in customer satisfaction and struggling KPIs. And in a virtual environment, it's even harder to keep up that one-to-one connection.

We address this issue by developing our year-round employees into leaders that could provide extra support to seasonal employees.

As discussed in Part Two: Recruiting, Training, and Retention, we begin developing high-potential frontline agents for leadership roles about two to three months before a seasonal ramp.

> Our leadership training programs teach frontline employees vital leadership skills, including performance management, increasing engagement, and best practices for managing a virtual workforce.

3

Engage and Support a Remote Workforce

When it comes to a remote customer service workforce, always remember that engagement is critical to keeping employees happy and feeling supported.

> According to the Harvard Business Review, 62% of employees believe working remotely positively impacts engagement, yet only 5% are likely to stay at their company long-term.

This gap offers an opportunity for companies to be creative in boosting their engagement efforts. Being a genuinely engaging employer requires a strategic approach and long-term commitment to your workforce. In other words, you may need more than virtual happy hours and occasional one-on-ones. It's in your best interest, though. When organizations invest in their remote employees, they have happier, more productive employees on board for the long term.

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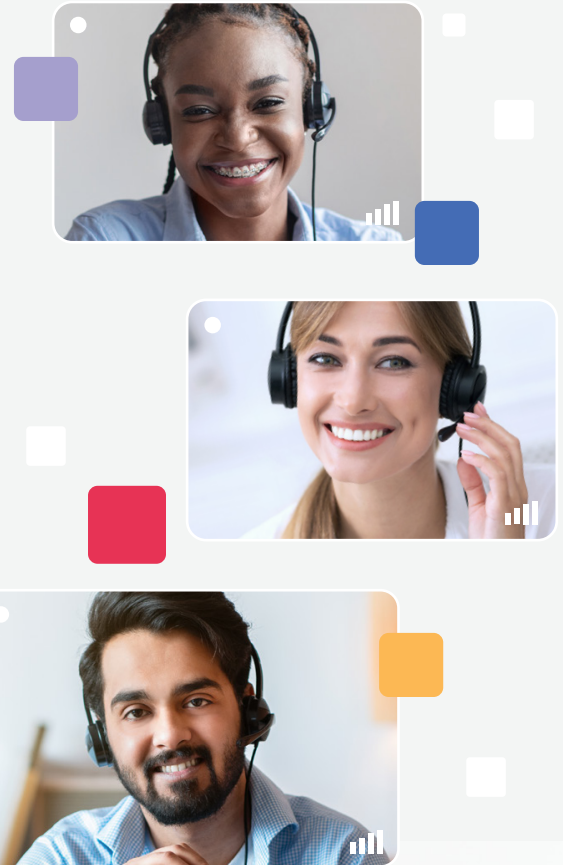
Ways to Engage

Theme days.

Video conferencing fatigue is real. Keep it fresh and engaging with theme days. Incorporate employees' favorite sports teams, fun hats, superheroes, etc., so team members can show off their personalities. This activity has been very successful in a customer care program at a major airline client, resulting in a 100% participation rate.

Photo contests.

Drive competition, creativity, and comradery with themed photo contests. Some examples include Father's Day, Pride Month, and July 4th.

Celebrate success with virtual awards.

One study found that employee recognition is a top driver for employee engagement. Use your employee communication platform to allow team members to congratulate and call out their coworkers in real-time. We do this through virtual "high-fives" and also host year-round iQor Recognize Awards.

Offer a mix of remote and in–house work options.

Research shows that employees enjoy a mix of remote and in–office work. Gallup found that the optimal engagement boost was when employees worked from home 3–4 days out of a five-day workweek. Going into the office helps employees feel connected to their coworkers, build relationships, and collaborate. At the same time, the majority of the days spent working remotely helps employees stay focused, productive, and less stressed.

Designate an engagement team and plan events early so you are always prepared and have creative ideas flowing throughout the year.

Be neighborly.

Welcome and check–in on WAH employees with goodie baskets, care packages, and food delivery services.

Leave the work–talk at the office every so often.

Conduct weekly touch–bases where work talk is off limits! At least for part of it. Put employees at ease and just chat. We found that casual discussions foster inclusiveness, engagement, and comradery.

Respect boundaries.

Show you care by setting healthy boundaries around employees' schedules, assignments, and performance expectations—check–in on them to chat about their families, hobbies, workload, and mental and emotional health.

Ask for feedback often and listen!

A simple weekly survey is one way we stay on top of our employees' happiness and engagement. Continuous feedback allows us to make positive impacts quickly, resulting in more personalized retention and engagement strategies.

Bonus Tip:
Get Involved!

Do you want contact center employees to form a deeper connection to the brand they are supporting?

Provide a welcome video so employees can connect with a human face and develop more of a brand connection. iQor found that programs where our clients collaborate and increase their visibility into the contact center result in higher retention, engagement, and better customer experiences.
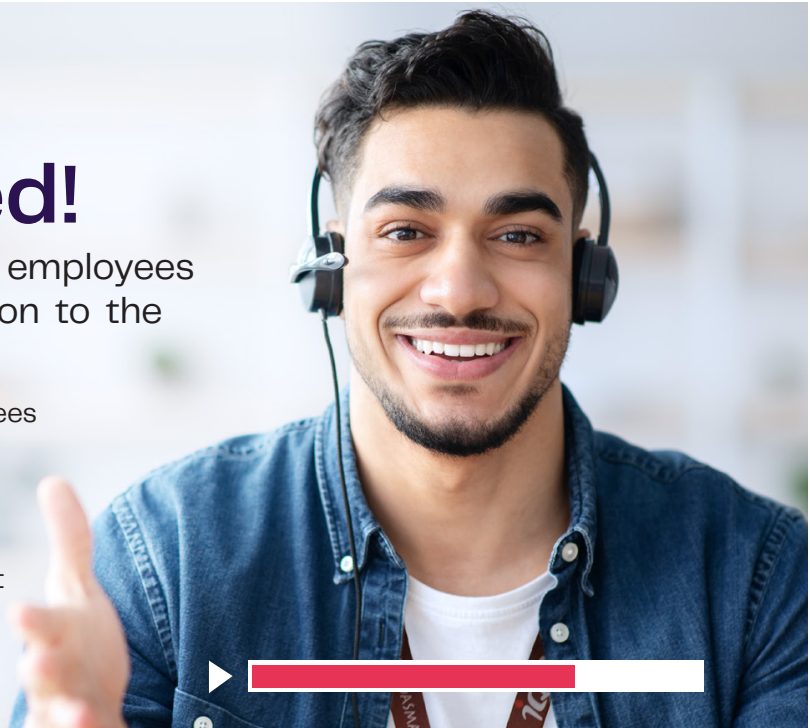
Summary

A contact center that wants to support peak seasonal staffing with a virtual, work–at–home workforce has to address all the details covered in this guide. From **providing an excellent onboarding process and extensive training to ensuring the team is engaged and active,** there are many things you need to get right to succeed. No matter what strategies you put in place to support work–at–home employees, remember to show how much you value their dedication and provide creative solutions that reduce stress, encourage engagement, and build strong company relationships.

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Conclusion

Most businesses selling direct to consumers experience seasonal spikes in customer engagement whether it's associated with holidays, events, product launches or other reasons. With proper planning and selection of a BPO partner, you can be ready.

> **The advantage to being ready is to maximize the positive customer experiences you want to deliver and to mitigate stress that can be associated with seasonal increases in customer engagement.**

The three pillars covered in this guide for optimal seasonal staffing demands with an outsourced BPO partner are proven at iQor. With more than 20 years' experience in delivering outsourced customer experience services, we've honed these practices into standard operating procedures. Regardless of who you choose to partner with, a BPO should have the expertise it takes to implement peak seasonal staffing and support without blinking. When these practices are standard, everything goes smoothly.

Our best advice is to be prepared even for unexpected spikes in demand for customer engagement. Get in touch with us to speak with a customer experience expert. Our team is experienced, consultative and eager to help.

Get in touch today to speak to a Customer Experience expert.

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