

How to minimize misdirected contacts

The Call Center Learning Center is excited to announce a new "how to" tutorial series for call center managers and supervisors. This tutorial series will pull from Prosci's research-based toolkits and best practices reports. Module 1 provided guidelines on how to determine what to measure in your call center. This module addresses how to minimize misdirected contacts to your center. Module 3 will focus on how to increase the percentage of calls resolved in one contact. Module 4 will help you learn how to give effective feedback from quality monitoring. Module 5 will conclude the series with how to determine selection criteria for a technology vendor.

Controlling call center costs

In today's competitive marketplace, organizations are regularly reducing budgets and looking for ways to cut costs. Call centers are not exempt from these cutbacks. In fact, many call center managers and supervisors are often tasked with determining how to increase call center efficiency and reduce costs without sacrificing productivity, quality and customer and employee satisfaction.

Controlling or reducing the cost of call center operations can be accomplished by addressing three drivers, as shown in Figure 1.

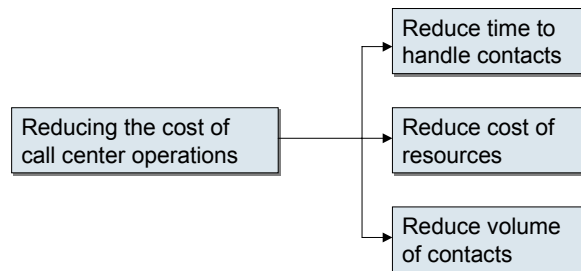


Figure 1 – Drivers to reduce call center costs

There are three strategies for reducing contact volume, including:

- Eliminating reason to contact
- Minimizing misdirected contacts
- Reducing repeat contacts

This tutorial specifically focuses on one of the primary areas involved in reducing volume of contacts - how to minimize misdirected contacts.

Minimizing misdirected contacts

Some fraction of your contacts are most likely misdirected contacts intended for some other part of the organization. These contacts not only add to the queue but they also take time away from handling other contacts. Five methods to minimize misdirected contacts are illustrated in Figure 2 and include the following:

1. Provide clear contact information on **statements** and **bills**.
2. Provide clear and accurate contact information on **marketing** and **product** documentation.
3. Make **menus** in voice response system easy-to-use.
4. Ensure accurate and easy-to-use phone **directory** listings.
5. Reduce inter-company **transfers**.

Each method to minimize misdirected contacts is addressed in-depth in the following sections.

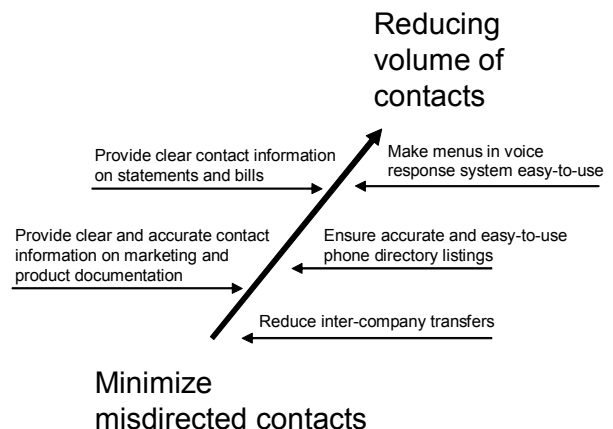


Figure 2 – Methods to minimize misdirected contacts

1. Provide clear contact information on statements and bills

Problem: Bills and statements list contact information for customers. What many companies do not realize is that these bills and statements may be the only (or most convenient) contact numbers the customers have. Even when the reason to contact you is not about the bill or statement, customers will still use these contact methods provided on the bills or statements. This results in misdirected calls and unnecessary transfers for your call center (and other call centers in the company).

Solution: Provide clear contact information categorized by the type or reason for the call on all bills and statements. This also applies to other items provided to customers, including for example, credit cards, quick reference cards, and health care cards.

Gather the following key information when using this cost control method:

- Collect copies of the statements and bills that your customers receive. What contact information is provided? What potentially creates confusion for customers?
- Are customers directed to a particular place in your organization depending on their question or concern, or are they directed to a general contact number?
- Who has general ownership and accountability for appearance and design of statements and bills?

2. Provide clear and accurate contact information on marketing and product documentation

Problem: Misdirected calls are generated when marketing materials and product documentation does not clearly and accurately provide contact information.

Solution: Contact information on marketing materials and product documentation should clearly delineate not only the options for customer support but also separate the contact information based on the reason the customer is calling. For example, technical support contact numbers may be different than sales or order status. This requirement is especially true for Web sites. The "About Us" or "Contact Us" Web page should follow these same requirements for clear and accurate contact information based on the reason the customer is contacting you.

Gather the following key information when using this cost control method:

- Collect copies of the marketing and product documentation that your customers receive, including print-outs of your Web pages. What contact information is provided? What potentially creates confusion for customers?
- Are customers directed to a particular place in your organization depending on their question or concern or are they directed to a general contact number?
- Who has ownership and accountability for appearance and design of product and marketing documentation?
- Who has ownership of your Web site?
- Evaluate your "about us" or "contact us" pages on your Web site. What contact information is provided? Is this what you expected your customers to see?

3. Make menus in voice response system easy-to-use

Problem: Automated routing with voice response systems is an effective and cost-efficient way to route calls. However, poorly designed menu systems and scripts can result in misdirected calls and frustrated customers. Customers may often "opt-out" of VRU systems if they are poorly designed.

Solution: Design your voice response menu with your customers in mind. What are the most frequent reasons that customers contact your center? Make sure those choices are clearly available in the menu. If your call center regularly receives calls that should be directed to a different call center within the company, give customers the option to connect to that center or provide them with the correct number to call. By addressing these misdirected calls in the menu, it will save time and money that your agents would have to spend transferring the call or doing work outside the scope of their regular job responsibilities.

Gather the following key information when using this cost control method:

- Do you use voice response menus?
- When did you last audit your voice response system?
- Rate your menus in your voice response system (use focus groups, in-house surveys, consultants, etc.). 1=impossible → 5=best-in-class
- What are the top three destinations for customers using the voice response system? Are these destinations available in the first menu?
- How often are the customers opting out of the IVR (e.g. using 0) to speak to an agent?
- How do your customers rate your system? Have customers complained that it is difficult to navigate the menu system (beyond the typical "I don't like talking to computers")?

4. Ensure accurate and easy-to-use phone directory listings

Problem: Telephone directory listings that are too general or provide only partial listings generate misdirected calls. Many call centers do not review the telephone book listings as this is controlled by a different part of the business. However, the call center remains the target for misdirected callers. When is the last time you have reviewed your telephone listings against where you would like your customers to call?

Solution: Provide the caller with a general number that connects to an automated routing system (like a voice response system) or a general operator service. If a single number is not available, then phone listings should be constructed so that the caller will have the greatest likelihood of reaching the correct department the first time (without a transfer taking place). Also check with local and long-distance directory assistance companies. Many times these listings are different than local phone books.

Gather the following key information when using this cost control method:

- When did you last audit your phone directory listings?
- Do the phone directory listings reflect what you want your customers to hear?
- Rate your phone directory listings. 1=poor → 5=best-in-class
- What percentage of individuals using the directory listing reach their intended party without requiring an additional transfer?
- Who has ownership and accountability for phone directory listings?

5. Reduce inter-company transfers

Problem: Call centers receive many contacts that are intended for another department or organization.

Solution: Many solutions for avoiding misdirected calls have been addressed in the previous four methods. However, another solution is to simply handle the inquiry and not transfer the call. More and more businesses are employing universal agents that have the skills, knowledge and system access to handle multiple types of contacts, eliminating the need to transfer a call.

This "one-stop" concept promotes customer satisfaction as inter-company transfers are a primary complaint area. Contact handle times may increase for some call centers since each agent will have less total experience with each type of call than if you used specialist groups who take the same types of calls over and over. Generally, however, the total cost will be less and customer satisfaction higher if the inquiry is resolved with the first contact.

Gather the following key information when using this cost control method:

- What percentage of calls do your agents transfer to another department in the organization?
- Do you currently utilize "universal agents"?
- What are the top five types of calls that agents currently have to transfer? Could any of these be handled by the agent?

- Consider the implications of using a universal agent approach. Are there additional costs in training and system support? How will this impact customer satisfaction and handle times?
- What are the root causes for customers reaching the wrong departments?

Call Center Cost Control Roadmap

Minimizing misdirected calls is only one channel for reducing expenses in your call center. The [Controlling the Cost of Call Center Operations Toolkit](#) provides over 50 initiatives that you can use to cut costs in your center that make up Prosci's Cost Control Roadmap shown in Figure 3. This toolkit will help you develop a **cost reduction plan** that includes quick-hits for short-term operations and process changes, mid-term tactics for system and process changes and long-term strategies involving other organizations.

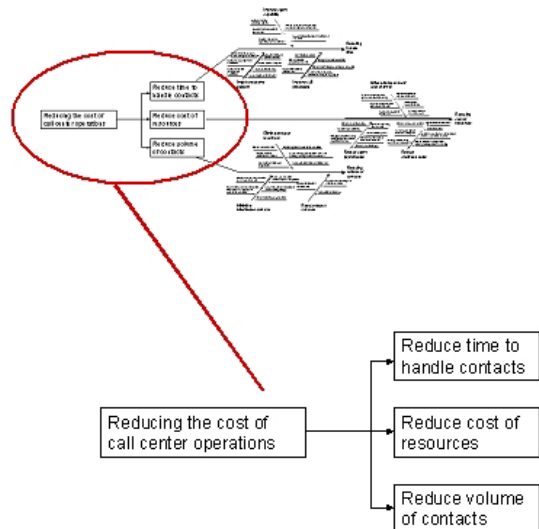


Figure 3 - Prosci's Cost Control Roadmap

Resource guide

Benchmarking Reports and Management Toolkits

[Controlling the Cost of Call Center Operations Toolkit](#)

Provides a systematic approach to reducing your call center costs. With this toolkit, you will critically examine multiple channels for reducing expense. The outcome is a set of identified and prioritized cost saving initiatives that are most suited for your contact center.

[Call Center Measurement Toolkit](#)

How to measure and improve call center performance; an excellent guide to developing a performance measurement system with concrete recommendations for improving call center performance.

[Call Center Best Practices - Operations Edition](#)

Benchmarking report - Over 240 call centers from around the world share how they have improved service quality, productivity and customer satisfaction. This report shares lessons learned by call center managers regarding their most effective management practices. It includes industry benchmarking data for 10 key performance measures.

[Call Center Business Performance Packages](#)

Find a call center package to meet your needs and save 20-25% off the list price!

[Call Center Planning and Design Toolkit](#)

A comprehensive guide to call center strategy, planning and design; an excellent resource for new contact center start-ups, existing call center improvement and future planning with detailed templates and planning roadmaps.