



*Ten Steps in  
Evaluating a Life Sciences Contact Center*

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## Ten Steps in Evaluating a Life Sciences Contact Center

In today's new marketplace, many biopharma companies are moving toward a fully integrated, highly customized, multichannel message delivery mix instead of limiting their efforts to just a siloed field sales team. This multichannel message delivery approach typically involves a field sales team plus some combination of personal and non-personal message delivery channels, and often includes inside teams of sales and/or service representatives. Leading biopharma executives are also recognizing that it's not necessarily best to "own" all message delivery functions internally. For some functions, outsourcing is more efficient, more flexible, and less risky. In keeping with these two important trends (ie, blended message delivery and strategic outsourcing), our industry is rediscovering outsourced contact centers.

Selecting the right multichannel partner for your life sciences contact center program is no simple task. How do you identify qualified suppliers? What criteria should you use to make your final selection? Based on 15 years' experience as a life sciences contact center, we've identified 10 key steps in evaluating contact centers in order to select the one that best suits your needs.



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### Success Step #1:

## Ask For 1 to 3 Current or Recent Client References and Contact Them

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Although some biopharma companies hesitate to provide feedback on their experiences with suppliers, this continues to be the gold standard for screening potential partners. With gentle urging, most contact centers should be willing and able to provide at least one client reference. Questions to ask a contact center's current/recent clients include: Were the center's team members accessible and responsive? Did they understand your specific need and design a program to meet that need? Did they deliver what they promised on time and on budget? Did they achieve the results you expected? Have they participated successfully in integrated multichannel programs? **Most important question: Would you hire them again?**

### Success Step #2:

## Validate the Company's Financial Stability

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The best way to determine a company's financial strength is to review their financial reports. You can start by asking the contact center for their latest income statement and balance sheet. However, because many firms are reluctant to release financial data, it's often necessary to look elsewhere. For publicly traded companies, go to [finance.google.com](https://finance.google.com), and enter the company name in the top-of-page search box. You'll find company news, brief financial statements, upcoming investor events, and direct links to the company's latest SEC filings.

Gathering data on privately held companies is more difficult, but certainly not impossible. The Library of Congress provides solid guidance on its [Business Reference Services](#) page, and [privco.com](https://privco.com) offers fee-based data access. As a last resort, use surrogate markers: How long has the company been in business? Is their staff growing? Have they done recent work for high-profile clients? **Bottom line: Are you comfortable that they have the cash flow and stability to support the ebb and flow of a dynamic contact center?**

### Success Step #3:

## Check for Signs of Strategic Leadership

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A 21st century biopharma contact center is not a call center of old. Today's environments must support dynamic and engaging dialog with healthcare professionals and other stakeholders, coordinate activity with field representatives, and generate next-level eMail, fax, and direct mail promotion. Therefore, you need a contact center with expertise in biopharma inside sales, as well as multichannel communications.

People—especially contact center representatives and their managers—are the lifeblood of contact centers. The most important challenges facing a contact center are hiring top-quality staff, ensuring a good job fit, and helping representatives remain engaged, motivated, and loyal.

The best single marker of employee satisfaction is the annual turnover rate, because it reflects a composite of hiring, job fit, and motivation. According to benchmark statistics from Contact Center World, the average

annual turnover rate for healthcare/pharmaceutical contact centers is 31%; a top-performing contact center should have a rate lower than the average. One additional step: review managers' resumes; the management team should have long and successful records of contact center experience.

#### Success Step #4:

### Visit the Contact Center to Observe and Talk With the Employees

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Make personal visits to the contact centers you are evaluating. If that isn't possible, spend at least 30 minutes talking on the phone with two or three contact center representatives. These one-on-one discussions may be your truest measure of a company's operations.

General observation targets:

- Is the facility clean and well kept?
- Does the workflow seem smoothly organized?
- Do the employees appear cheerful and engaged?

Questions to ask contact center representatives:

- How would you describe the company's initial training and project-specific training?
- How does the company encourage innovation and creative problem solving?
- How does the company promote teamwork among employees?
- How does the company measure the success of its inside representatives?
- How does the company reward individual achievements and contributions?



**Success Step #5:****Focus on the Contact Center Representative Training Programs**

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High-quality training is vital to contact centers—especially those in the biopharmaceutical and life sciences arena. Talk with the head of training; strive to understand his or her philosophy, qualifications, and commitment. Then ask to see examples of each of the three main phases of training: (1) initial employee training focused on equipment, skills, etiquette, technique, etc; (2) project-specific training focused on project goals, the product's features and benefits, competition, etc; and (3) ongoing skills training.

**Success Step #6:****Examine Center Systems to Assess Quality, Consistency, and Productivity**

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Contact center senior managers recognize that consistent high performance is built on planning, documentation, and control processes. In high-performance contact centers, managers document and review representatives' production and quality scores on a weekly basis.

**Success Step #7:****Ensure That *Outbound* Calls Are an Integral Part of the Center's Expertise**

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You're hiring a life sciences contact center in order to proactively engage busy healthcare professionals that may be difficult to reach with field sales personnel. Expertise in outbound calling, therefore, is essential to the success of most programs. Unfortunately, the vast majority of contact centers specialize in *inbound* calls; only 20% conduct primarily *outbound* calling.



**Success Step #8:****Verify That the Staff and Systems Are Capable of Handling Your Project**

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The average contact center has just 77 seats, yet conducts multiple projects simultaneously. It is crucial that the center you select can manage its workflow and volume so that your project is successful. It may be wise to consider hiring a large contact center (100+ seats) to ensure adequate capacity. Do they have multiple locations? Can they support remote workers? How do they support all time zones? Can they physically separate teams? Do they understand how to integrate with your sample provider, SFA systems, etc?

**Success Step #9:****Confirm That Contact Center Representatives Are Biopharma-Qualified**

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Reaching and persuading healthcare professionals is tough. Be certain that your contact center representatives know how to get past gatekeepers to reach doctors and are fluent in the language of the life sciences industry. Check on the availability of specialized personnel; some top-performing biopharma contact centers have several different levels of representatives, including field-qualified representatives and full-time teams of pharmacists, nurses, and other healthcare professionals. Ask the contact center for statistics; if you're not convinced, listen to some live calls.

**Success Step #10:****Be Sure You Understand the Pricing Model**

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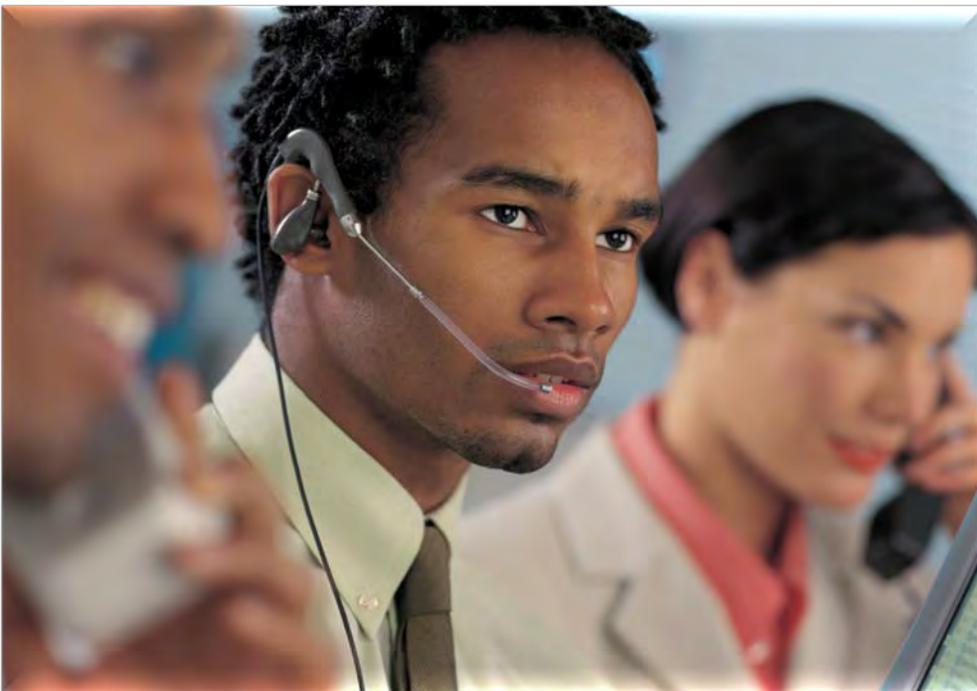
As you work with a contact center to develop a project's goals and terms, be sure that the deliverables are clearly spelled out. Pricing will be based on a host of factors, including the education, training, and experience level of the representatives deployed; quantity of targets; definition of completed calls; estimated number of attempts to achieve completion; quality of data, etc. Understand exactly what is included before you commit.

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## Conclusion

It's important to remember that the contact center you hire becomes the voice of your company, so this decision demands careful attention. By following these 10 steps, you can be more confident about making a wise and well-considered selection.

NOTE: Looking for a comprehensive overview of the contact center industry? Contact Babel, which provides research, analysis, and business recommendations to CRM and contact center solution providers, has published [The US Contact Center Decision-Makers' Guide 2012](#), the largest and most comprehensive study of all aspects of the US contact center industry.



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