

Video Transcript

Average Handle Time: Managing Metrics by BenchmarkPortal

Hello, and welcome to managing metrics, a series of videos highlighting contact center metrics that matter to managers. I'm Bruce Belfiore and this video is on average handle time, also known by its acronym AHT. In this video we will define the metric and its component parts, mention some best practices ranges, discuss how it impacts other KPIs, and note how important proper management of this metric is to your financial and operational success. This video is brought to you by Benchmark Portal, the source for contact center training certification, benchmarking, and consulting. If you like this video please subscribe and hit the like button so that you can keep receiving free content like this video.

Okay, so, let's define average handle time. AHT is a metric that tells you how much time on average each customer interaction takes overall. It is a compound metric that brings together three component metrics. First, average talk time is the time your agent and the customer are talking with each other. Talk time also includes average hold time which is the amount of time agents put customers on hold while they are on that call. To these two metrics is added average after call work time which is time spent after the call to update the customer record or take other actions to complete the customer interaction. The sum of all these three components is handle time.

When we look at AHT across all industries we see that the average is about six minutes. In the tech support sector, that averages almost 10 minutes, while banking clocks in at about 4.5 minutes and in other sectors even less. So, there's a wide variation in AHT based largely upon call types handled in each industry vertical. Also, the top quartile performers in each sector are typically 20 to 30 percent lower than the average for that industry. If you want more specific information on how you compare to others in your industry sector look for our published industry reports, which you can find through the resource links in the description below.

This metric is important because it has a major influence on costs. The longer handle time is the more each interaction costs the company. Here's a simple illustration, a center that moves from a five minute average handle time to four minutes will be twenty percent more efficient. From a high level that center should be able to function with 20 percent fewer head count and thus save 20 percent of its agent budget, a potentially huge amount. Other costs, such as telecom costs, would be reduced as well. AHT also has crucial impacts on operations. It is important for workforce managers once they have forecasted call volumes to multiply those volumes by the average handle time to determine staffing needs. Without an accurate view of handle time the best forecasting in the world risks being off base. It is crucial to

benchmark your average handle time against other centers in your industry that takes similar calls to the ones your center handles. When AHT is higher than the industry average you should look for root causes for that performance gap. Typical areas of opportunity include agent training and call control and call closure, up training supervisors in their coaching skills, and responsive and seamless CRM knowledge management technology which can help control talk time and after call work time. However, do not pressure your agents to close calls prematurely this will only increase callbacks which reduces your first call resolution rate and increases costs, hurt customer satisfaction and loyalty, and it negatively impacts agent morale. As well, instead if you want to optimize handle time getting it as short as possible while still providing great service best practices in screening, training, and coaching agents are among the keys to meeting and beating your competitive peers. Talk to us about certified training of agents, supervisors, and coaches. This can be a great benefit to your operation, saving money and increasing quality.

Now, a question for you on handle time for difficult customer questions. Centers tend to have one of three approaches: instruct agents to search the knowledge base while chatting with the customer, instruct agents to put the customer on hold while they get the answer from the knowledge base or a subject matter expert, or transfer the customer to another colleague who can answer their question, what approach does your center take and do you feel it optimizes handle time? Please share your answer in the comments below. We'd love for you to share your thoughts and ideas with a community of contact center experts who regularly visit us here. You can also find links to some of our other valuable resources in the description below and don't forget to like and subscribe to our channel to get great content delivered to you.

Good luck optimizing your average handle time in a healthy balanced way. I'm Bruce Belfiore, thank you for joining us on this episode of managing metrics.