



# What Contact Centres are Doing Right Now

How do you compare?

**A Call Centre Helper Research Paper**

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## What we did

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Between March and May 2014, Call Centre Helper readers were invited to take part in the '5 minute contact survey' - run in partnership with NewVoiceMedia.

The aim of the survey was to capture a snapshot view of exactly what contact centres are doing right now.

Almost 500 contact centre professionals took part, with the majority (55%) of respondents being based in the UK, and we're delighted to share the results with you.

This survey provides valuable insight into the fundamental framework of the contact centre, covering everything from which channels are the most popular to how many people have implemented homeworking.

## Executive Summary

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The past few years have witnessed a revolution in the way that customers choose to communicate.

This has been enabled by the multichannel experience, which has gathered increasing momentum since the birth of social media. It is now possible for an individual to boycott the phone completely, and instead live chat, tweet and even video chat their way through to the customer service team.

### The phone still handles around 68% of all contact centre communications

Despite the increasing number of options available, the survey has revealed that the phone is still holding prime position within the contact centre industry - handling around 68% of all contact centre communications. By comparison social media channels handle just 3%.

In spite of this sharp contrast, there is no denying the fact that social media has changed the face of customer service. Consumers can no longer be kept at bay with a maze of IVR messages or ignored completely without consequence. There is a new generation of customers at large - armed with a smartphone and a Twitter account - and failing to keep them happy could put you out of business.

### Email has been growing rapidly

Email is another channel that is growing rapidly in the communication revolution, with approximately 26% of contact centres naming email as their fastest growing channel of 2013. In contrast only 10% named webchat.

These results indicate that there is a widespread reluctance to move away from traditional channels, however it is uncertain whether this is being driven by customers or contact centre managers.

## Mobile apps are gaining popularity

The industry is still evolving to meet the needs of the modern customer. This is reflected in the gaining popularity of mobile apps - with the end goal of connecting the customer directly to the contact centre.

The survey findings reveal that 30% of contact centres offer a mobile app, while a further 28% were planning on introducing one in the near future.

This is great progress to see, as 7 out of 10 people now own a smartphone.

## Personalisation strategies are becoming mainstream

Contact centres are also acknowledging the need to improve their relationships with their consumers, in order to avoid negative publicity on Twitter and other social media channels.

This is being achieved in part through the adoption of personalisation strategies. The survey revealed that the most popular method for achieving this is to route high value customers to specialist team - in use in 42% of contact centres.

## Homeworking is still a minority sport

Unfortunately homeworking still has yet to make serious headway in the industry. In spite of recent technological developments making it a realistic option, 59% of contact centre professionals admitted that they do not have a homeworking strategy and have no plans to implement one.

Of the remainder, 19% said they had already deployed a homeworking strategy, 5% are piloting such a scheme and a further 16% are considering one.

This suggests that, while there is room for growth in this field, it may be a long time before homeworking becomes the norm.

## Geographic numbers make up the bulk of all numbers used

Further findings revealed that the most common type of phone number in use in the UK is the caller-friendly 01 or 02 National rate geographic numbers (e.g. 01753, 0207) - with 50% of contact centres using them.

However a range of other numbers are also in use across the industry - from 03 national rate non-geographical numbers (being used by 19% of contact centres) to 0845 numbers which are used in 39% - despite a change in the law from June 2014<sup>1</sup>.

## There is still a lot of room for progress

Overall the survey reaffirms the fact that the consumer is very much at the helm of the 2014 customer service experience, and that contact centres are making positive changes in response to this.

However there is still definite room for progress as the contact centre moves forward into 2015, especially in areas such as video chat, mobile apps and homeworking.

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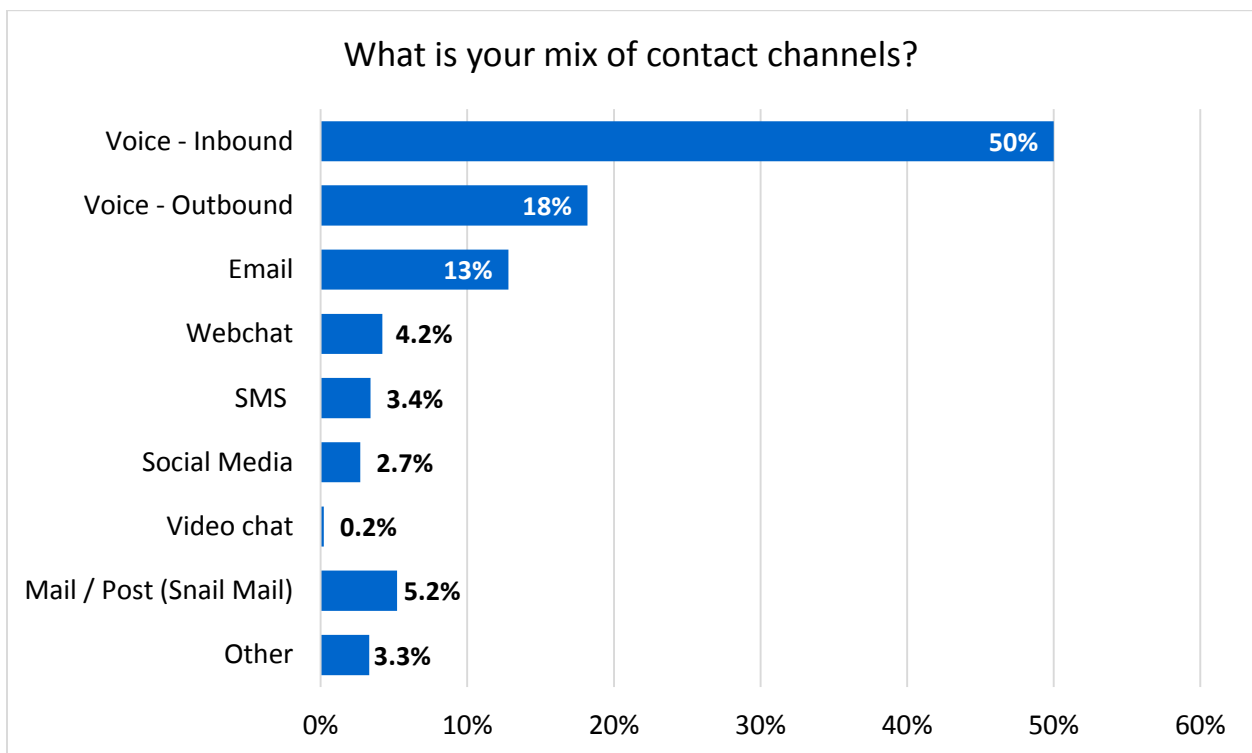
<sup>1</sup> From 13th June 2014 in the UK it will not be legal to provide an 0845 number to an existing customer for customer service.

## How does your contact centre compare?

### What channels are contact centres using?

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It is no secret that the growth of social media has had a marked effect on the psyche of the consumer. No longer will they lay low until an issue is finally resolved, instead they will shout through any channel available until the whole world knows how badly you are treating them. This obviously puts a lot of pressure on companies to have the technology and agents in place to handle all channels well.



In spite of this however, voice is still the channel of choice for most contact centres - handling around 68% of customer contact (50% inbound, 18% outbound). With social media holding a surprisingly meagre 2.7%.

Whether this reflects the customers demand for voice contact, or a failure on the part of the contact centre to properly manage channels such as Twitter is uncertain. Either way, it appears that voice isn't on its way out just yet.

Following voice, email proved to be the next most popular channel - handling around 13% of all customer contact. While mail/post, webchat and SMS each handle less than 6% of the overall contact centre traffic.

## Video chat is the new kid on the block

Another channel which has been making the headlines in recent months is video chat, due in part to the bold customer service strategies adopted by Schuh and Amazon.

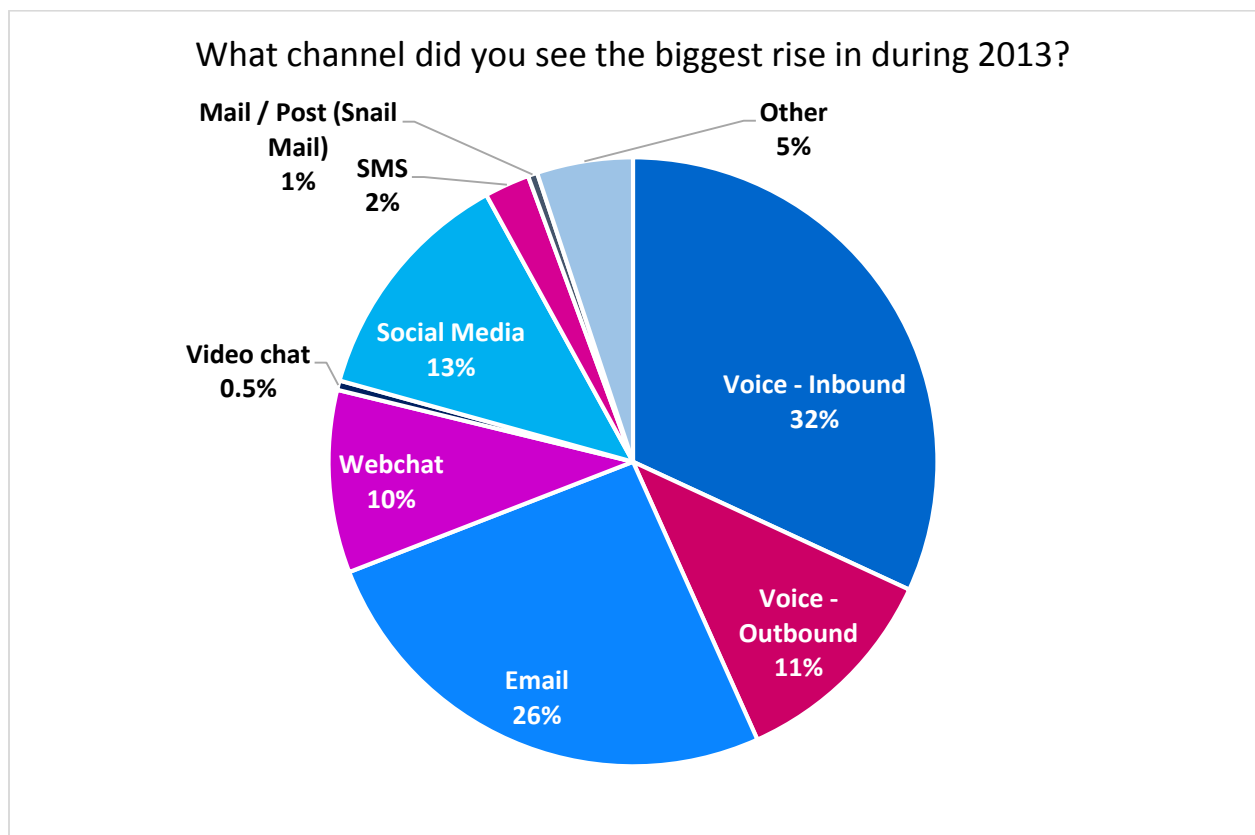
Despite the fact that we have recently witnessed huge leaps forward in the capabilities of video technology, this channel is still handling a miniscule amount of contact centre traffic - with an average of less than 0.2%.

## Which channels are growing the fastest?

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The first call centres emerged in the 1950s, operating with one channel - the phone. Since then the call centre has evolved dramatically and is now more commonly referred to as the contact centre. This is in response to the many different communication channels which are now available to the 21st century consumer.

This has brought about new challenges for contact centre managers, as they struggle to please their customers while spreading their resources thinly across multiple channels.



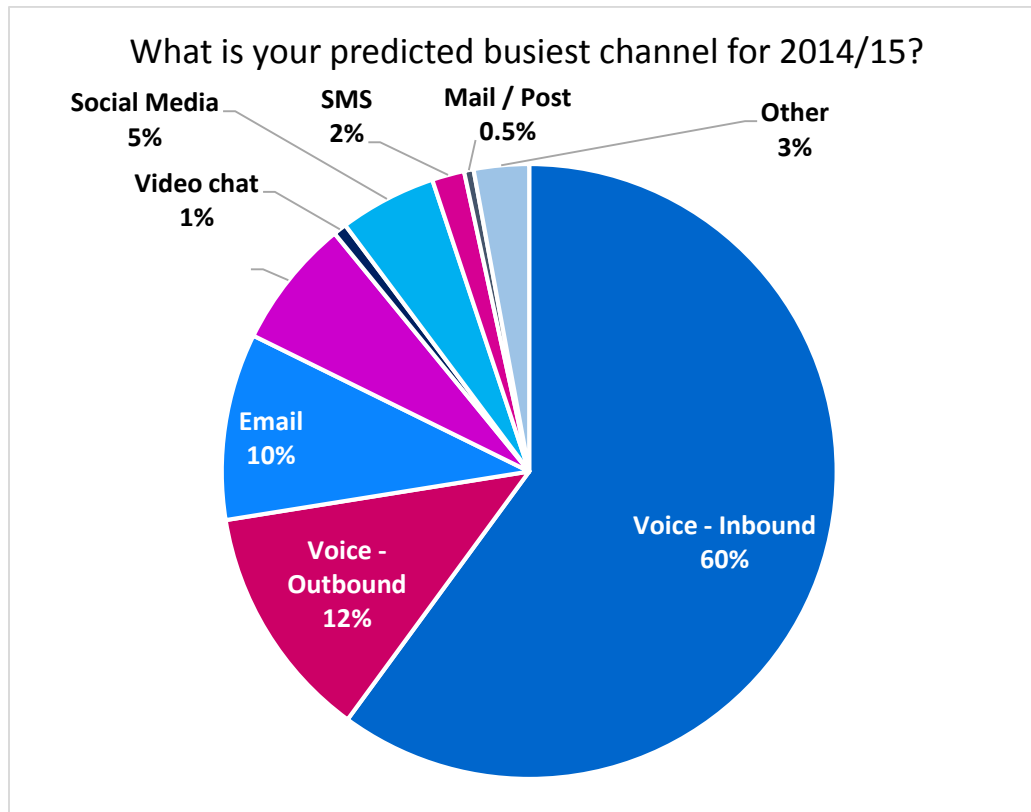
As the chart demonstrates, approximately 26% of contact centres named email as their fastest growing channel of 2013, while 13% named social media and 10% named webchat. Inbound voice continues to hold a dominant position - with 32% of contact centres naming it as their fastest growing channel of 2013.



By comparison, SMS, Mail and video chat didn't make much of a dent in 2013 - with less than 5% of contact centres identifying these channels as the fastest growers.

## Email, webchat and social media may have reached their peak in 2013

The survey also asked 'What is your busiest predicted channel for 2014/2015'.



When cross-comparing the fastest growing channels of 2013 and with the predicted busiest channels of 2014/2015, it appears that there will be an increased focus on voice and video channels in the coming months. While email, webchat and social media will take more of a back seat.

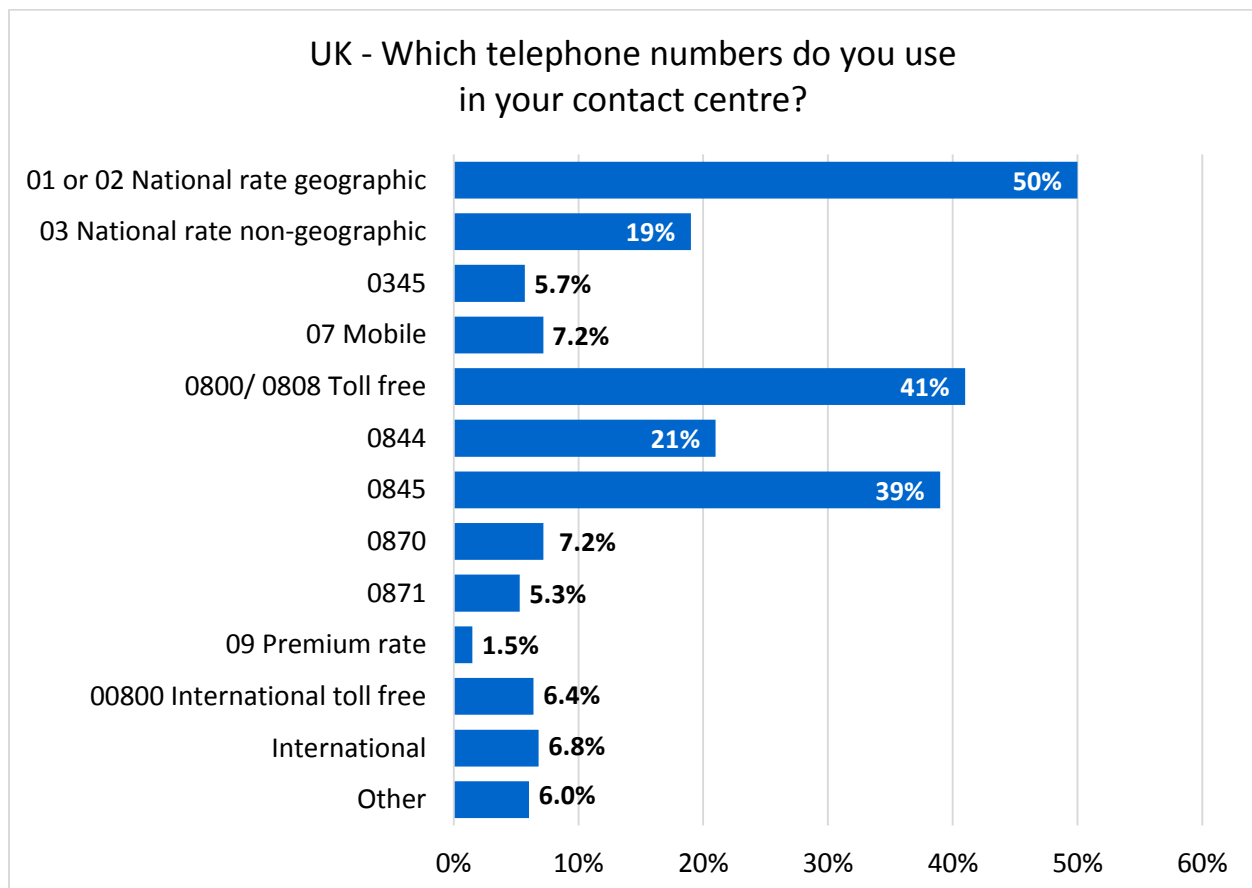
The results also reiterate the fact that voice is and should continue to be a dominant channel in the contact centre.

## Which numbers are contact centres providing for their customers?

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The findings revealed that the most common type of phone number in use in the UK is the caller-friendly 01 or 02 National rate geographic numbers (e.g. 01753, 0207) - with 50% of contact centres using them. While a further 19% of contact centres are using 03 National rate non-geographic numbers (e.g. 0300, 0303), and 41% are using toll-free numbers such as 0800.

In addition, similar percentages continue to use 0845 (39%) and 0844 (21%) numbers - despite a change in the law from June 2014<sup>2</sup>.



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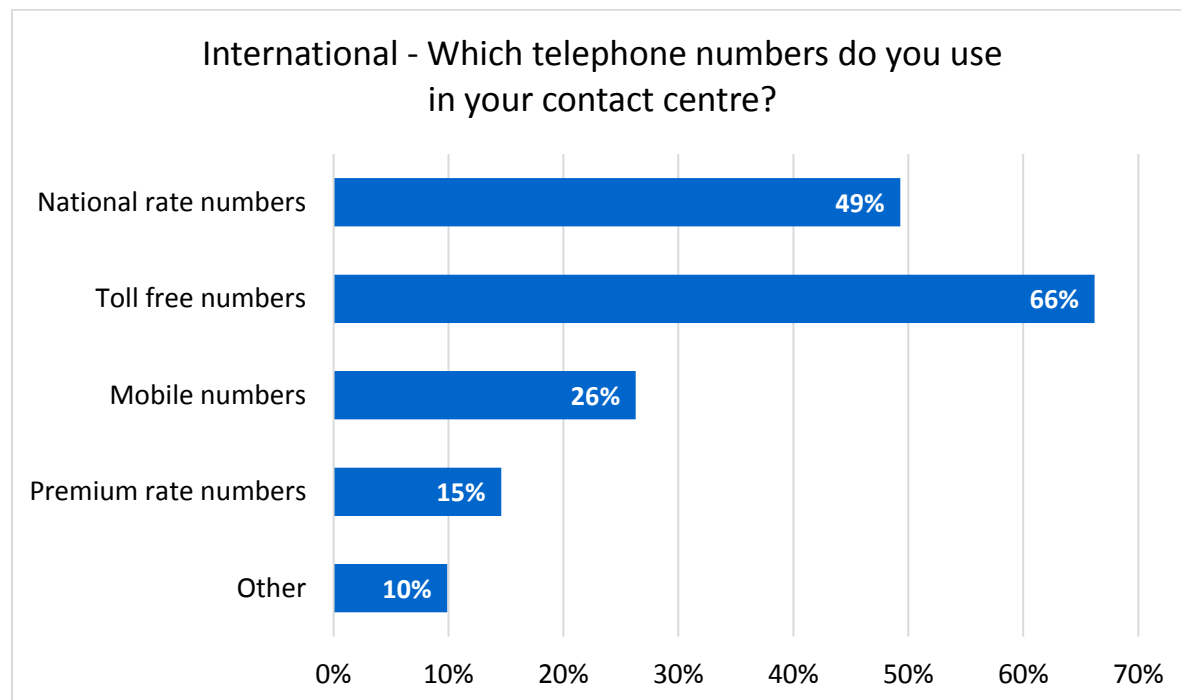
<sup>2</sup> From 13th June 2014 in the UK it will not be legal to provide an 0845 number to an existing customer for customer service.

By comparison less than 10% of contact centres admitted to providing:

- 07 Mobile numbers - 7%
- 0870 - 7%
- International numbers - 7%
- 00800 International toll free numbers - 6%
- 0345 - 6%
- 0871 - 5%
- 09 Premium rate numbers - 2%

## Globally there is a preference for toll free numbers

Globally however, toll free numbers are the most popular - with 66% of contact centres proving them. While national rate numbers come in at a close second with 49%, followed by mobile numbers (26%) and premium rate numbers (15%).



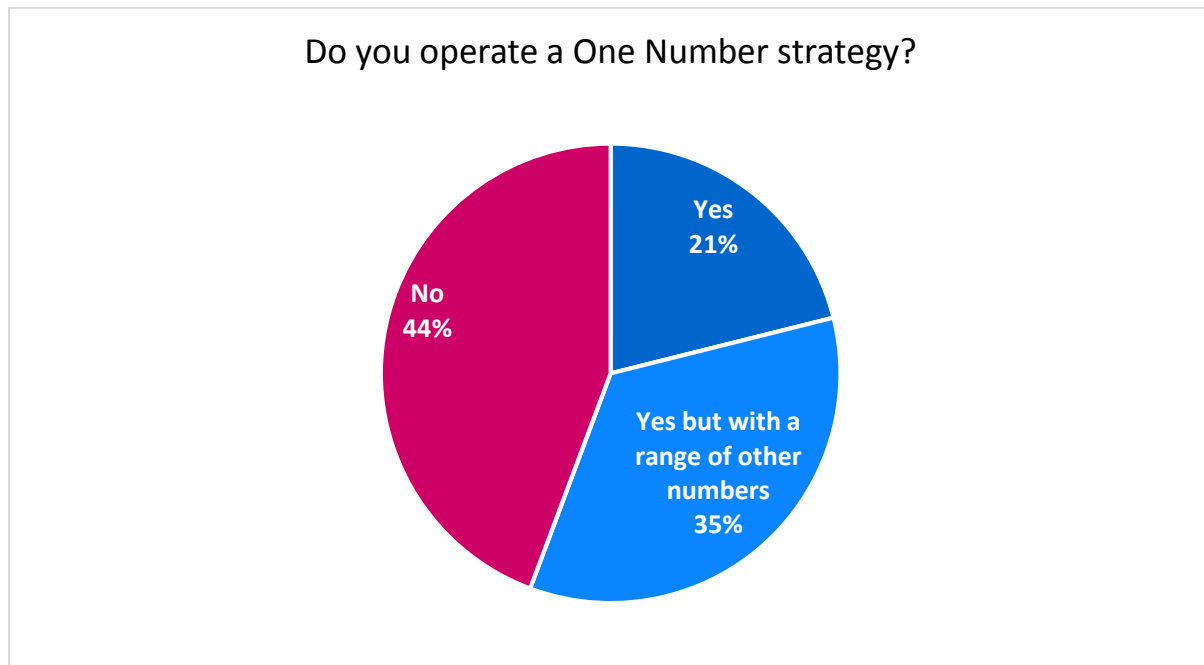
This shift in preference could be explained by the amount of UK businesses working off-shore, as toll free numbers allow for the necessary international calls to be made at no extra cost to the consumer.

## One Number Strategy

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### Only 21% of contact centres operate a true One Number strategy

Participants were also asked whether they operated a One Number strategy in their contact centre.



There is divided opinion on One Number strategies, as a true One Number strategy often sees customers navigating a complex IVR system to get through to the right department.

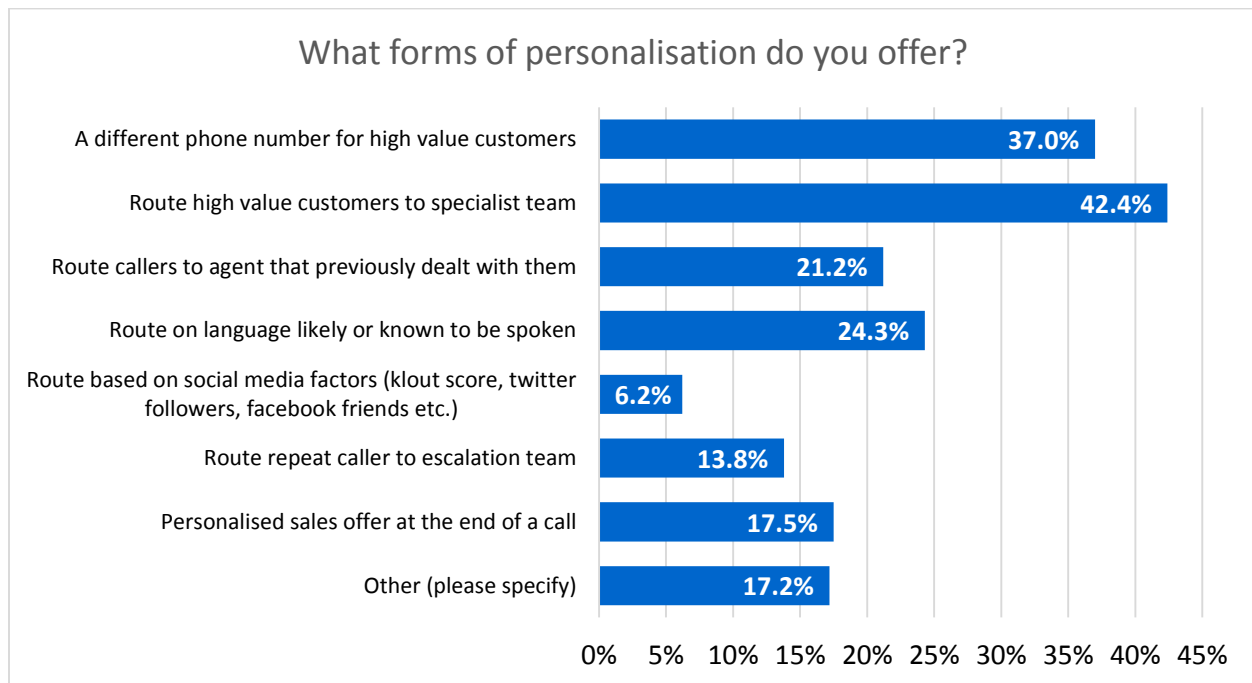
However, large organisations (such as banks) operating without a One Number strategy could risk their customers being overwhelmed with a list of hundreds of phone numbers.

The findings revealed that only 21% of contact centres operate a true One Number strategy, while 35% said they operated a One Number strategy with a range of other numbers, and 44% said that they didn't operate one at all.

## What forms of personalisation do contact centres offer?

Good customer service can make or break your business. Personalising the customer experience is just one way to ensure repeat business year after year.

The survey findings revealed that most popular personalisation strategy is to route high value customers to specialist team - in use in 42% of contact centres. This was closely followed by providing different phone numbers for high value customers - in use in 37% of contact centres.



Further findings (in descending order of popularity) revealed:

- 24% route on language likely or known to be spoken
- 21% of contact centres route callers to agents that previously dealt with them
- 18% personalised the sales offer at the end of a call
- 14% route repeat callers to escalation team
- 6% route callers based on social media factors (e.g. Klout Score, Twitter followers, Facebook friends etc...)

There is a lot of opportunity to think outside the box when it comes to personalising the customer service experience.

Here are a few ideas that other contact centres are trying...

- *"We make sure that callers can speak with the same person when we call them back."*
- *"We have a dedicated executive assigned to certain clients."*
- *"We provide a unique telephone number for larger clients so we can personalise our greeting."*
- *"We have different queues for each of our different pharmaceutical products."*
- *"We prioritise calls and emails which come through from loyalty club members."*

While it is clear that the majority of contact centres are taking creative steps to improve the quality of their customer service, 11% admitted to not having a personalisation strategy at all.

## Has your contact centre branched out into homeworking?

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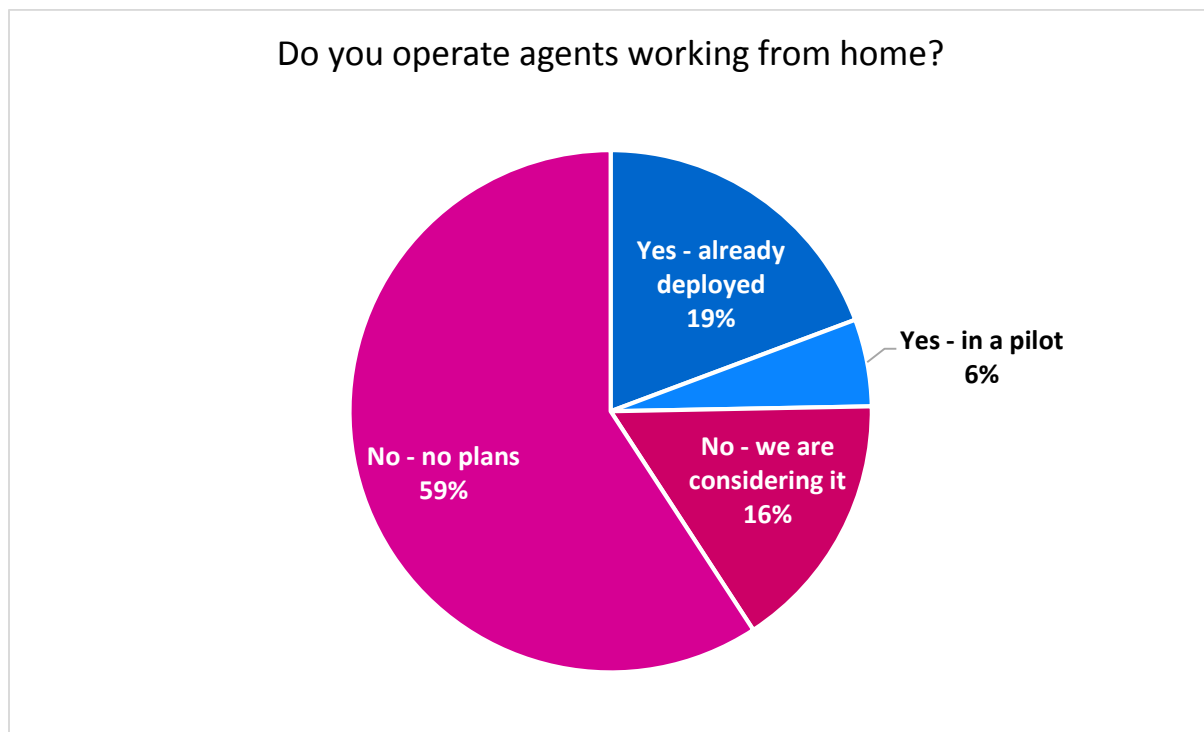
Recent technological developments, particularly the cloud, have made homeworking a realistic option for the contact centre.

Enabling homeworking agents can allow businesses to expand without the need to purchase new (and costly) premises.

This is because cloud technology allows you to virtualise your contact centre and create a single environment independent of the location of agents. This removes the need for your business to be tied to a physical location.

This can even extend to working across different countries and time zones to provide extended hours of service.

An effective homeworking strategy can also help to protect a contact centre in the event that their offices flood or agents are stranded at home by the snow.

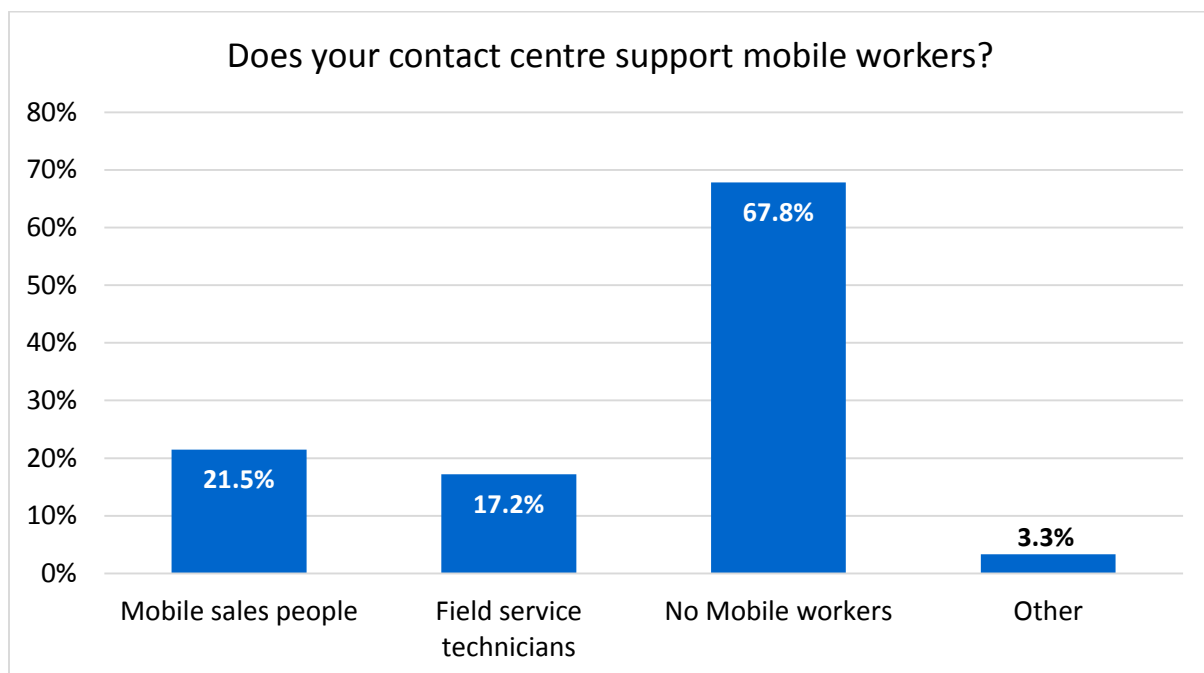


When asked whether they currently operated a homeworking strategy, 59% of contact centre professionals admitted that they do not have a homeworking strategy and have no plans to implement one.

Of the remainder, 19% said they had already deployed a homeworking strategy, 5% are piloting such a scheme and a further 16% are considering one.

This suggests that there is room for growth in this field and that contact centres are beginning to see the benefits of enabling homeworking agents.

Similar findings were revealed with regards to contact centres supporting mobile workers - with 68% admitting that their current strategy does not support mobile workers.

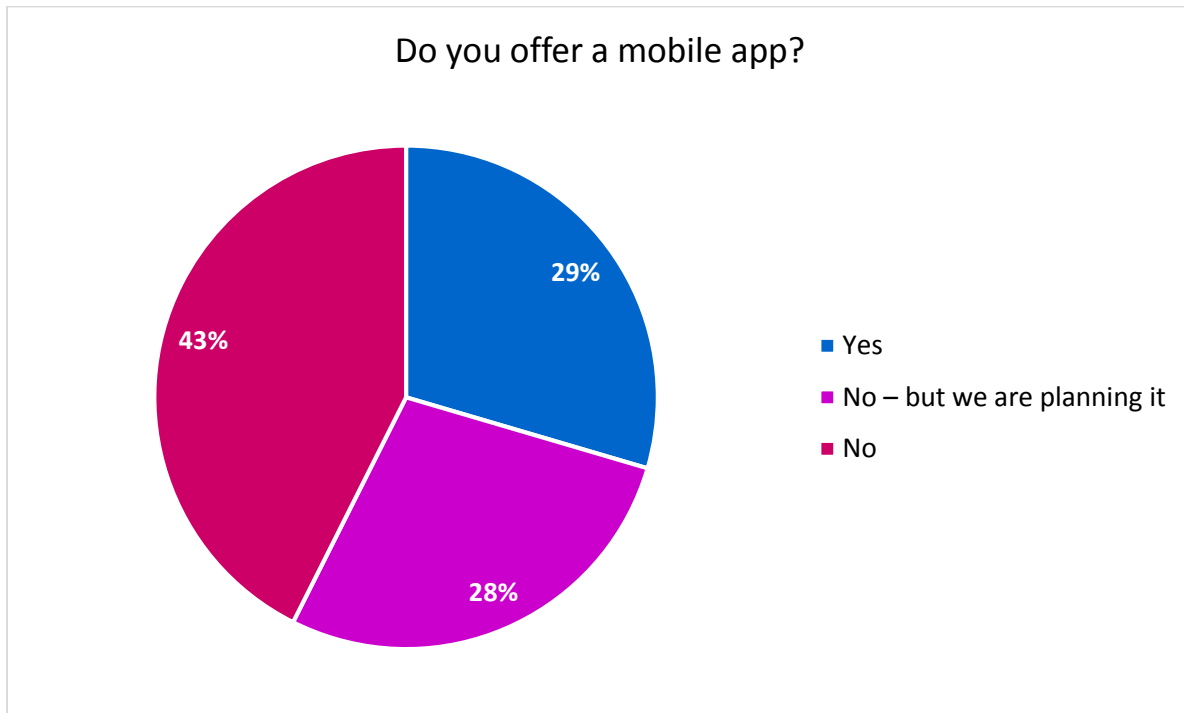




## Does your contact centre offer a mobile app?

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Another emerging trend is the use of mobile apps to connect customers directly to the contact centre.



The survey findings revealed that 30% of contact centres offer a mobile app, while a further 28% were planning on introducing one in the near future.

However, 43% said that they didn't offer a mobile app and had no plans to implement one. This is especially worrying given that 7 out of 10 people now own a smartphone.

## About NewVoiceMedia

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NewVoiceMedia powers customer connections that transform businesses globally. Their award-winning cloud customer contact platform connects organisations with their customers worldwide, enabling them to deliver a personalised and unique customer experience and drive a more effective sales and marketing team.

With a true cloud environment and proven 99.999% platform availability, NewVoiceMedia ensures complete flexibility, scalability and reliability.

Spanning 40 countries and five continents, NewVoiceMedia's 250+ customers include: Topcon, PhotoBox, DPD, Lumesse, QlikTech and Cunningham Lyndsey.

For more information visit [www.newvoicemedia.com](http://www.newvoicemedia.com) or follow NewVoiceMedia on Twitter @NewVoiceMedia.

