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**STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE  
HYBRID WORKING**



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# INTRODUCTION

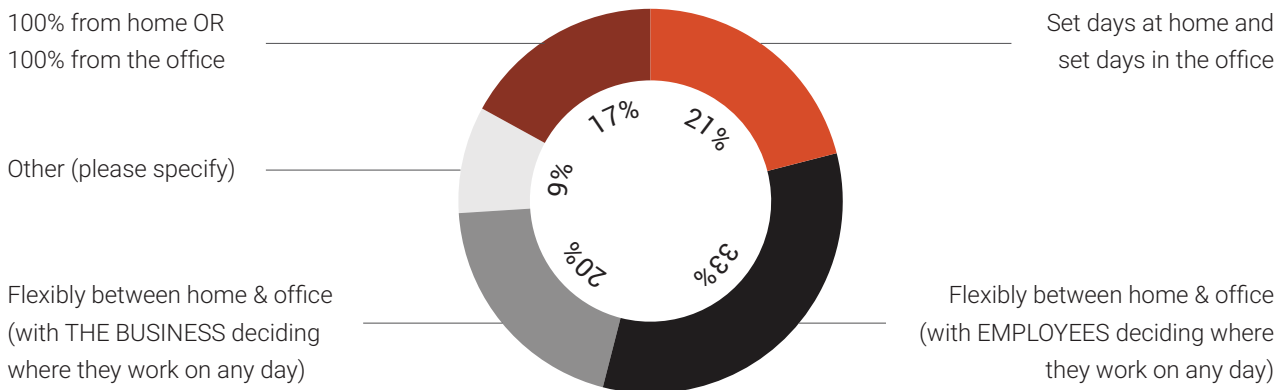
As the UK moves into the post-pandemic period, CX decision-makers are under pressure as never before to meet and exceed consumer demands. This trend is omnipresent across the British economy. It is made even more difficult by the shift in customer management operating models over the past 18 months. The move to a more virtualized delivery platform took many decision-makers by surprise and has become a structural part of how service is delivered to customers across the UK.

In this context, leading British work-from-home CX operator Sensée brought together a dozen executives from across the vertical spectrum to forecast the direction of remote customer management as the country emerges from the COVID19 pandemic. The themes that were discussed ranged from operational transformation to agent management. However, all panelists pointed to significant disruption in UK customer management and, amid these changes, no enterprise can expect a business-as-usual approach to CX moving forward.

# SELECTING THE RIGHT HYBRID MODEL

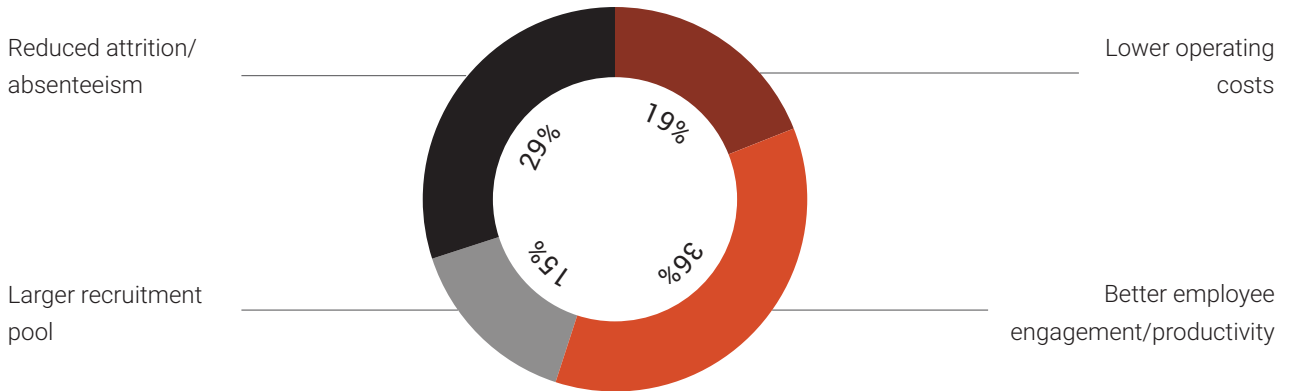
Coming to grips with the delivery of top-quality CX services, using either the home-based model or physical contact centers, is in itself a challenge. However, doing both concurrently is something that very few enterprise customer management experts have experience in. This was abundantly clear in the Sensée roundtable. Nearly all participants acknowledged the stress created by the shift to large-scale homeworking at the outset of the pandemic. Moving forward, aligning on-site and remote delivery will remain a major strategic challenge.

How does your business currently operate 'hybrid working'? Our people MAINLY work:



Moreover, agent preference for work-at-home must be balanced alongside the compliance/culture requirements of the enterprise. Striking the right hybrid balance is critical. One participant indicated that it seems to be an ever-changing dynamic and expressed exasperation at the need to constantly anticipate how the hybrid model will change. Sensée CEO Mark Walton was clear that approaches to hybrid delivery need to be flexible. Some hybrid models will depend to a greater degree on the industry. Regardless, hybrid models will have to be flexible enough to adapt to changing CX norms.

**What is the biggest benefit you expect to realise from hybrid 'home/office' working?**



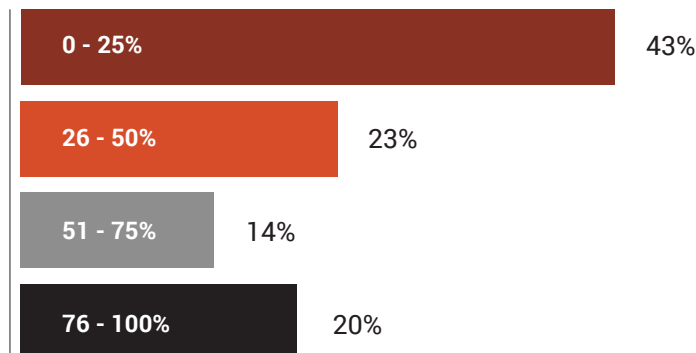
October 2021 online poll: Sensée / Call Centre Helper (Base: 213 respondents)



## TREATING PEOPLE FAIRLY AND CONSISTENTLY

No matter if an agent is based at home, in-center, or a combination of both, there was agreement from all roundtable attendees that team members cannot be overlooked or treated unequally. Specifically, there have been concerns raised that a double-standard may occur that recognizes the achievements of in-center agents above those who work remotely. Participants in the roundtable agreed that credible operators must avoid this risk. Thus, strategies of how best to ensure that remote-agent achievements are recognized and rewarded accordingly are essential. The result will invariably be higher morale and better end-user outcomes.

As of today, what % of your organisation's employees have returned to the office since lockdown ended?



October 2021 online poll: Sensée / Call Centre Helper (Base: 213 respondents)

## FINDING THE RIGHT HOME-WORKER

Unquestionably, recruitment is a key issue in the UK CX space, a sentiment that was re-enforced by those delegates assembled for the virtual roundtable. Also, the most recent Ryan Strategic Advisory Front Office Omnibus Survey indicates that roughly 2-in-5 enterprise contact centers have seen attrition increase the past year. Thus, a strategy to recruit stable, qualified and engaged agents has never been more important. There was a clear sense that as the current workforce shortages show no sign of abatement, and with the shift to hybrid working appearing as a given, finding top-flight agent talent will continue to be difficult.

One attendee stated that a major challenge is reconciling the existing hiring parameters designed for in-center work to accommodate home workers. However, as was pointed out by Sensée CEO Mark Walton, on-site agents and those who work from home tend to have very different backgrounds. Hence, they require separate recruitment profiles and unique hiring strategies. Walton also raised the idea of enlarging the potential hiring pool by incorporating individuals who may be eager to work but possibly unable to access a physical contact center, including members of the disabled community or retirees.





## KEEPING HOME-WORKERS HEALTHY AND MOTIVATED

It stands to reason that once a home-worker has been recruited they need to feel good about what they are doing in order to stay for the long term. Those assembled for the virtual round table agreed, and shared revealing anecdotes about how this can be achieved in a virtual setting. One attendee shared that virtual agents were given the chance to participate in online, low-impact physical exercise sessions. The result was team building via an activity in which everyone can take part that will improve their physical and mental health.

**What is the biggest issue you've faced since moving to hybrid 'home/office' working' post lockdown?**



*October 2021 online poll: Sensée / Call Centre Helper (Base: 213 respondents)*

Equally, Mark Walton also discussed the approach that Sensée has taken to provide remote workers with the chance to access mental health counseling. This is especially the case among virtualized agents who were sent home at the outset of the pandemic. Some found themselves 'proverbial fish out of water.' While still employed in the same job, they had trouble adapting to the remote environment. All attendees agreed that this has become an issue in the CX space and having mental health assistance at the ready is essential.



## CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CX TEAM MEMBERS

Providing equal opportunities for promotion between in-center and remote workers has become a sticking point for many contact center operators. This has proven especially challenging for organizations that have taken on home-based workers only recently. Several participants indicated that their front-line CX ranks worry that promotions or training opportunities may not be as readily available for those who work from home. One participant stated that this has the potential to drive up attrition numbers within their operations. Others candidly admitted that they lack a career progression blueprint for their remote teams. Sensée CEO Mark Walton discussed this delicate matter, providing some ideas on how home-based agents can have access to career advancement, which is crucial in ensuring the retention of agents that can provide high-quality service to end-users.

## FINAL THOUGHTS FROM THE SENSÉE ROUNDTABLE

Moving toward 2022, there is a lot that UK enterprise leaders have to look forward to. A rebounding economy, the reprisal of consumer activity, and the desire on the part of customers to purchase goods and services—all give cause for optimism. However, from a CX perspective, unless an enterprise is prepared for this new era of economic growth, it may encounter challenges.

The roundtable hosted by Sensée clearly showed that as the UK comes out of the pandemic, ensuring the right strategy that incorporates a dynamic and flexible hybrid approach to customer management is vital. Likewise, operators must have processes in place that recognize the successes of all front-line workers, no matter if they service end-users from the office or home. Formulating the right approach around health and wellness is also clear, as is signaling a transparent career path that agents can follow. The result will ensure better staff tenure and end-user satisfaction. Those firms that plan accordingly now are more likely to succeed moving forward.

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