2014
WHITEPAPER

ICMI®

"Press ❶ for English"

Language Interpretation Services Benefit Customers and Contact Centers

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"Press 1 for English"

Language Interpretation Services Benefit Customers and Contact Centers

Today's customers want more, demand more, and deserve more. Add another layer of complexity: a broader array of non-English speaking customers that have expectations like longer hours of operation, cultural nuances, and multiple languages.

Let's dig into the concept of multilanguage support.

Just as organizations cannot expect customers to tolerate single-channels, nor can they expect customers to be English-speaking-only either. Asking a caller, "Do you speak English?" or requesting that they find an English-speaking family member to continue the conversation, simply isn't an acceptable level of service anymore. Can you imagine calling your favorite five American brands and being told to "Press 1 for English," only to find that your language isn't even supported?

How do you adapt to these evolving customer expectations without jeopardizing the day-to-day operations of the contact center?

In Q1 2014, the International Customer Management Institute (ICMI) and Voiance Language Services, a subsidiary of CyraCom, asked the customer service community to disclose their primary challenges of 2014. 443 contact center leaders replied from every role and level within the customer service organization, and two key initiatives emerged from their responses:

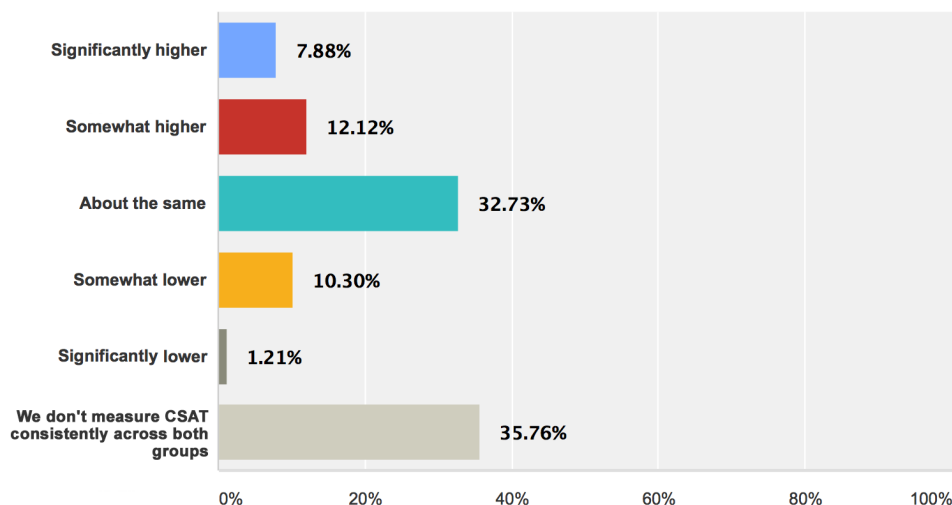**1** *Maintaining or improving customer engagement*

2 *Growing agent productivity and efficiency*

Good news: proper execution of multilingual support positively influences customer engagement and agent efficiency and productivity!

How? For many contact centers, it will mean partnering with a language interpretation service.

If you are concerned about the quality of language interpretation services, consider this research finding: 82% of contact centers already using interpreters and consistently measuring customer satisfaction across all agents say that CSAT scores for their external interpreters are better or equal than for their internal bilingual agents! Even when we factor in those respondents who don't consistently measure CSAT across both groups, the external interpreters still perform better or equally 53% of the time! As one customer experience director in the financial services industry said, "Interpreters are like having an agent for every language, except I don't internally need the management, processes, or reporting in every language too!"

How do the CSAT scores for external interpreters compare to those for your internal agents?

Response	Percentage
Significantly higher	7.88%
Somewhat higher	12.12%
About the same	32.73%
Somewhat lower	10.30%
Significantly lower	1.21%
We don't measure CSAT consistently across both groups	35.76%

▶ Why the Focus on Multilanguage Support?

"When you first hear about businesses that need language services, you probably think of companies selling goods and services abroad," says Jeremy Woan, Voiance's Chairman and CEO. "You'd be right, but don't overlook demand for interpreters and translators right at home."

Research shows that the United States is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world with 80% of foreign-born Americans speaking a language other than English. The U.S. Census of 2011 shows that 21% of the U.S. population aged five and over speaks a language other than English at home, and greater than 9% are unable to speak English well enough to transact business over the phone, which causes significant complications for both the customer and the agent in a service interaction.

The U.S. government defines this segment of the population as Limited English Proficient (LEP). These individuals do not speak English as their primary language and they also have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. 86% of contact centers acknowledge that they have customers who are not native English speakers, with only 66% providing any type of support.

Do you have customers who are not native English speakers?

No
13.95%

Yes
86.05%
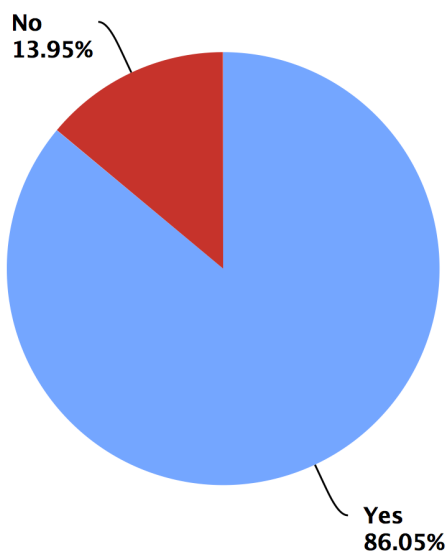
Do you formally offer non-English customer support options?

No
34.48%

Yes
65.52%
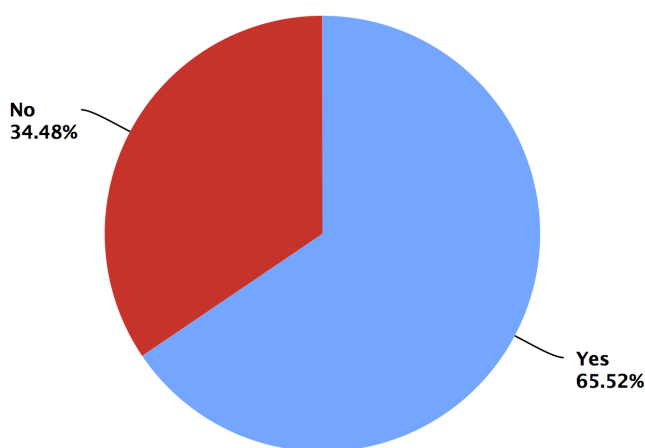
It's clear that language presents a complex challenge, and ICMI's research indicates that it will be an increasing area of focus for most companies seeking to capture brand loyalty and improve the customer experience. Those already grappling with this issue have discovered translation services, internal bilingual agents, or interpreters to bridge the language gap.

▶ Customer Expectations for Multilanguage Support

Only a third of survey respondents unquestionably said that customers do not expect service in their native language when contacting an American brand! While an almost equal number (35%) said it depended on the culture or country of origin, another 32% felt that the expectation for multilingual support was there. The point to consider is - companies could have upwards of 67% of their non-English speaking customers wanting and expecting customer service in their own language!

Do customers generally expect service in their native language when contacting an American brand?

Yes
31.65%

Depends too much
on the culture or
country of origin
35.44%

No
32.91%
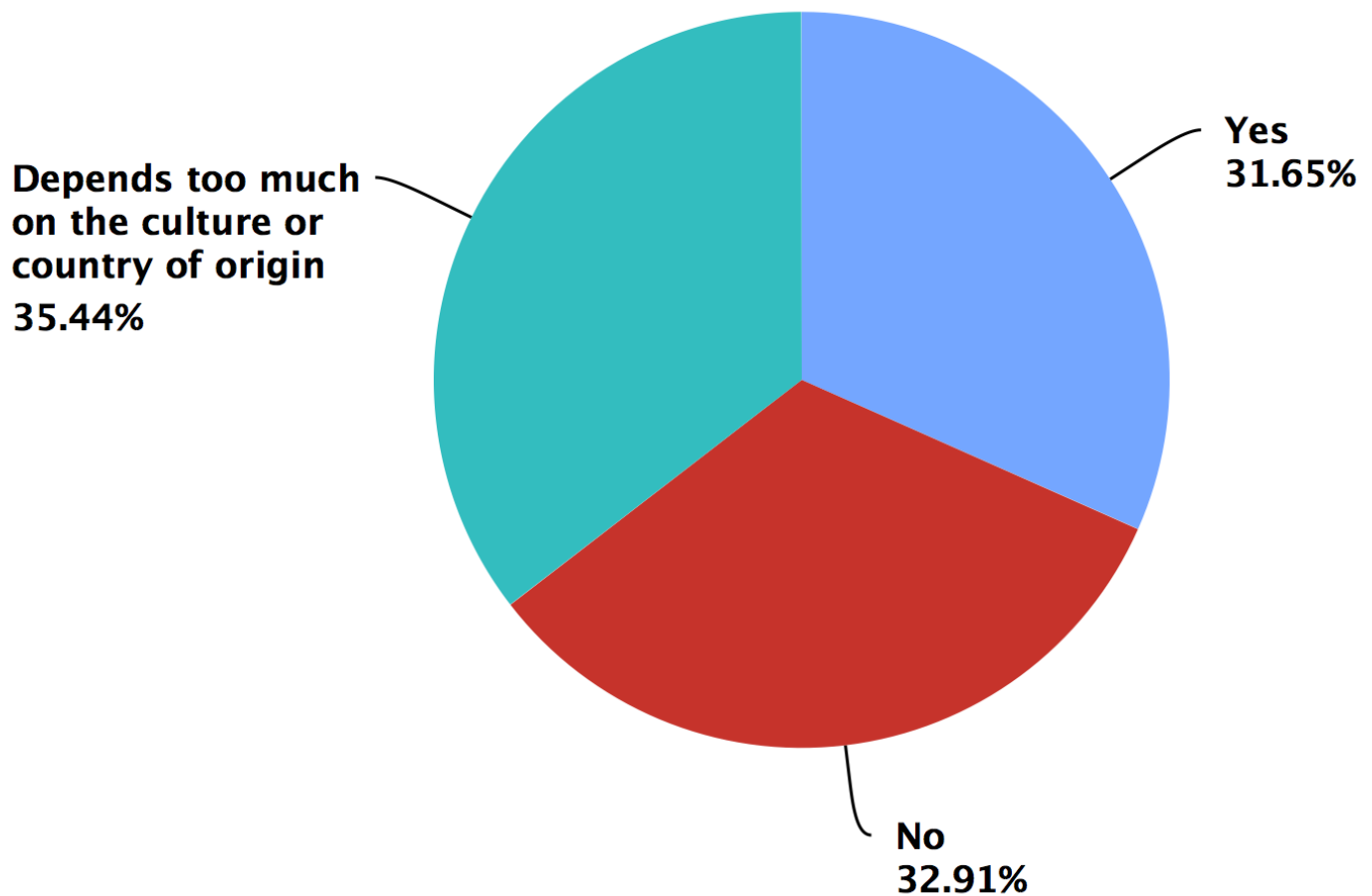
"We can always do better," shared one manager of a national nonprofit. "Callers in our region speak more than 100 languages and finding qualified help to assist all those callers in their language is a challenge. When we are able to help, I think we meet their expectations well."
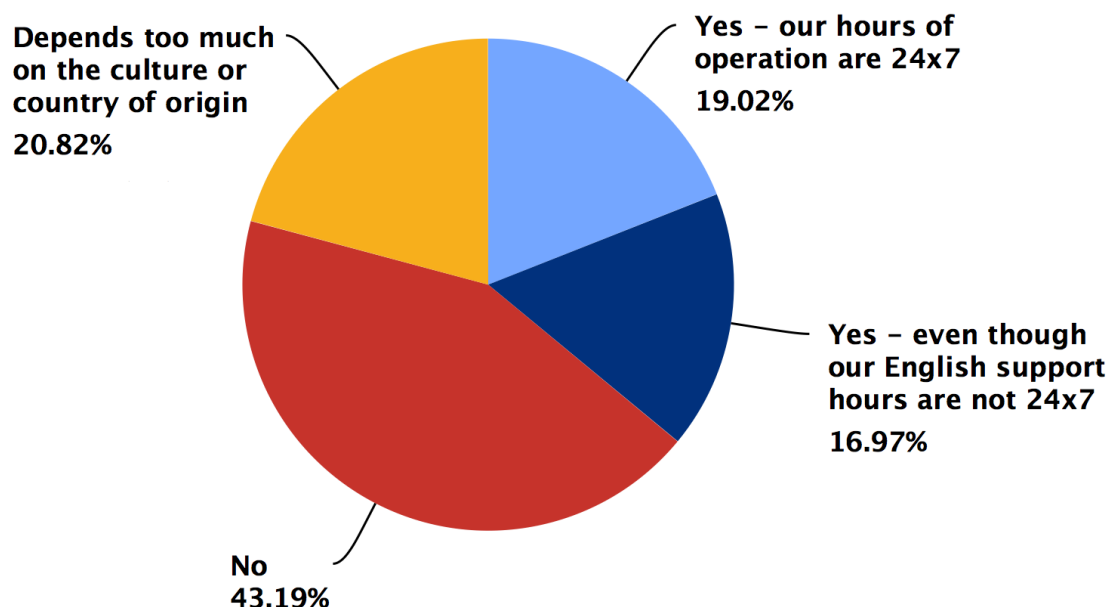
It's not solely about the language expectations though. Cultural nuances and hours of operation also differ across non-English customers.

Do customers generally expect their cultural nuances to be recognized when contacting support of an American brand?

Depends significantly on the culture or country of origin
36.48%

Yes
34.44%

No
29.08%
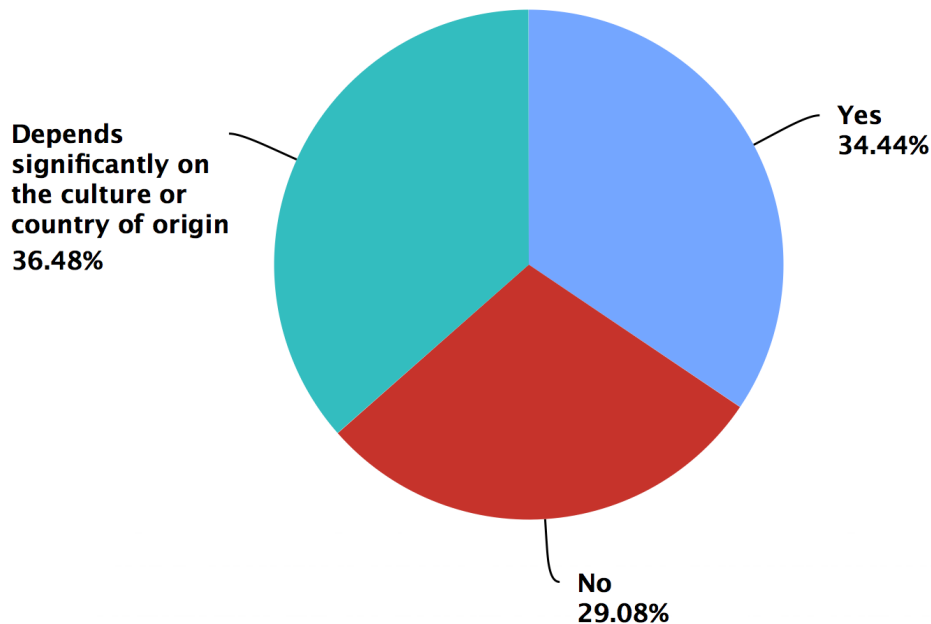
Finally, we asked contact center leaders if their non-English speaking customers expected 24x7 support. Round-the-clock care can challenge many organizations, and adding additional languages other than Spanish can make it more complex. Although 43% say non-English speaking customers do not expect 24x7 services in their native language, a full 36% say they do.

Do customers generally expect 24x7 support in their native language when contacting an American brand?

Depends too much on the culture or country of origin
20.82%

Yes – our hours of operation are 24x7
19.02%

Yes – even though our English support hours are not 24x7
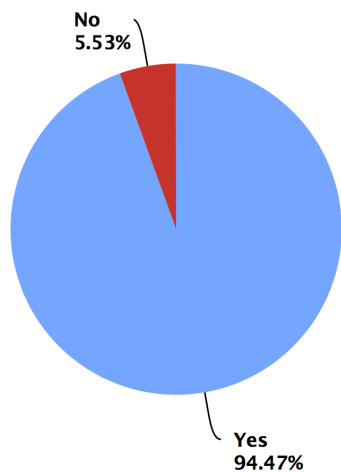16.97%

No
43.19%

It is here that organizations frequently cite partnering with language translation services or third parties to assist in the volume and hours of operation expectations. "We primarily rely upon our own multilingual agents to assist customers in their native language, and use the interpretation service as a back-up so that we can provide assistance round the clock," says the CSO Quality Service Coach Lead for a B2B fleet management company.

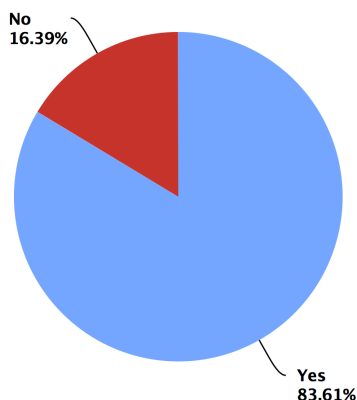## CONTACT CENTER CHALLENGE 1: *Maintaining or improving customer engagement*

"Our callers trust us more, and think we are providing more accurate information when we speak to them in their native language," says a call center manager for a national non-profit.

Almost 95% of organizations have stated that customer engagement and loyalty are priorities for them, while 84% of companies recognize a linkage between customer experience and engagement. 76% of companies believe that providing support in a caller's native language improves the overall experience.
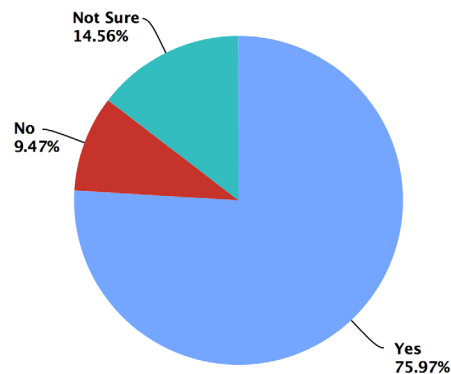
| Is customer engagement/loyalty an important priority in your organization?	Has your organization recognized linkages between customer service (the contact center) and customer engagement/loyalty?	Does providing support in a person's native language improve the overall experience for the customer?

No 5.53%

Yes 94.47%

No 16.39%

Yes 83.61%

Not Sure 14.56%

No 9.47%

Yes 75.97%

The majority also feels that language support affects customer loyalty. One survey respondent noted, "...it is a Good to Great differentiator that improves stickiness." Most feel the impact of language support falls somewhere between somewhat and very important to brand loyalty. One respondent stated, "Customers seem to like it, and then they tell others! As we add more native speakers to our growing list of employees, we find that callers speaking that language increase within 6-12 months."

How would you rate the impact on a customer's loyalty to your brand if you are unable to provide support in their native language?
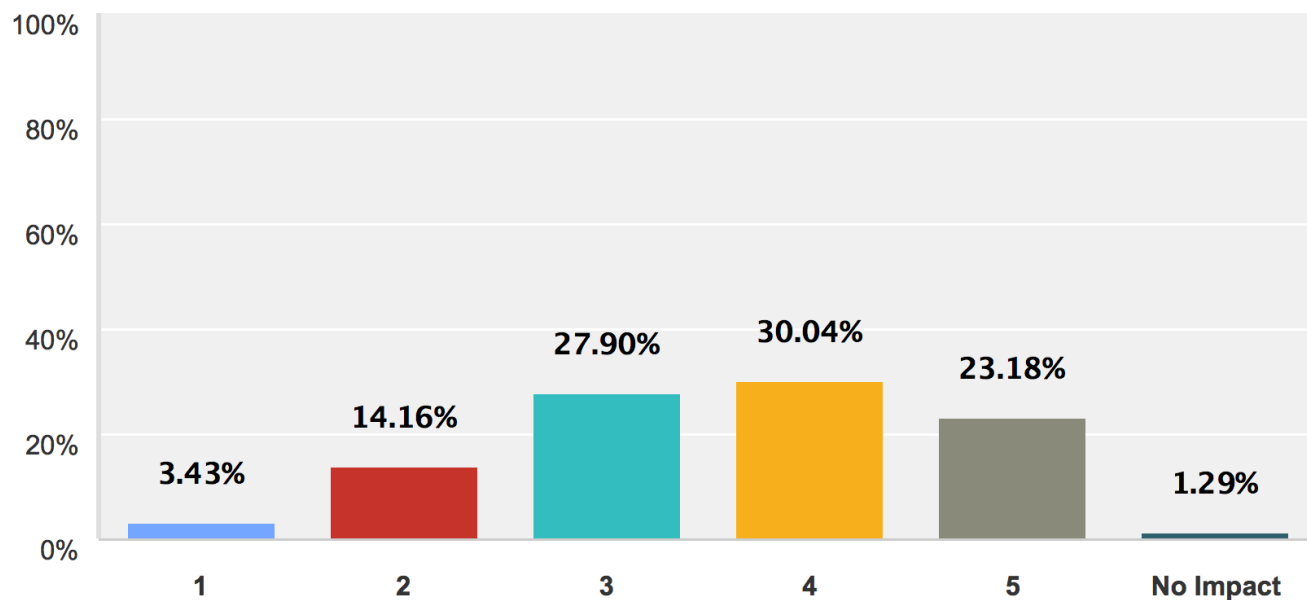
A larger majority of respondents (72%) felt that support in a customer's native language increased satisfaction with customer support. And if those customer languages weren't available? Then over 80% of respondents felt that there would be a moderate to strong impact on customer satisfaction.

How would you rate the impact on customer satisfaction (CSAT) if you are unable to provide support in their native language?
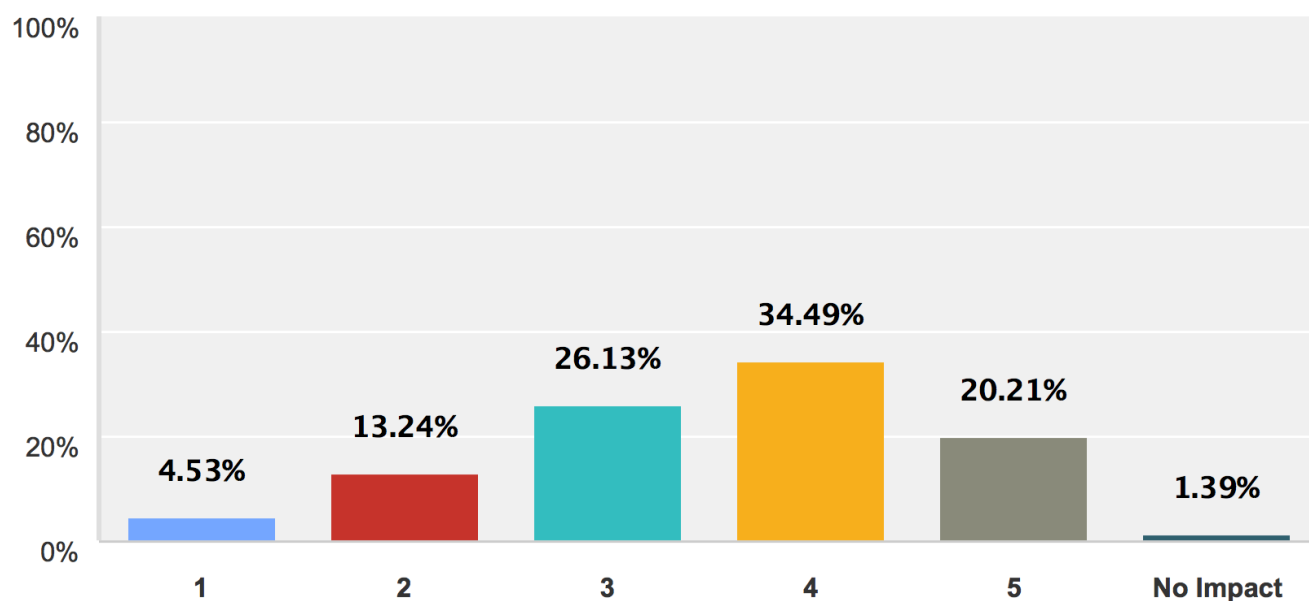
Thus, ICMI observes that language services are correlated with customer engagement and satisfaction, and to customer loyalty. As contact centers strategize ways to achieve improved customer engagement, they should highly consider multilanguage support as an investment.
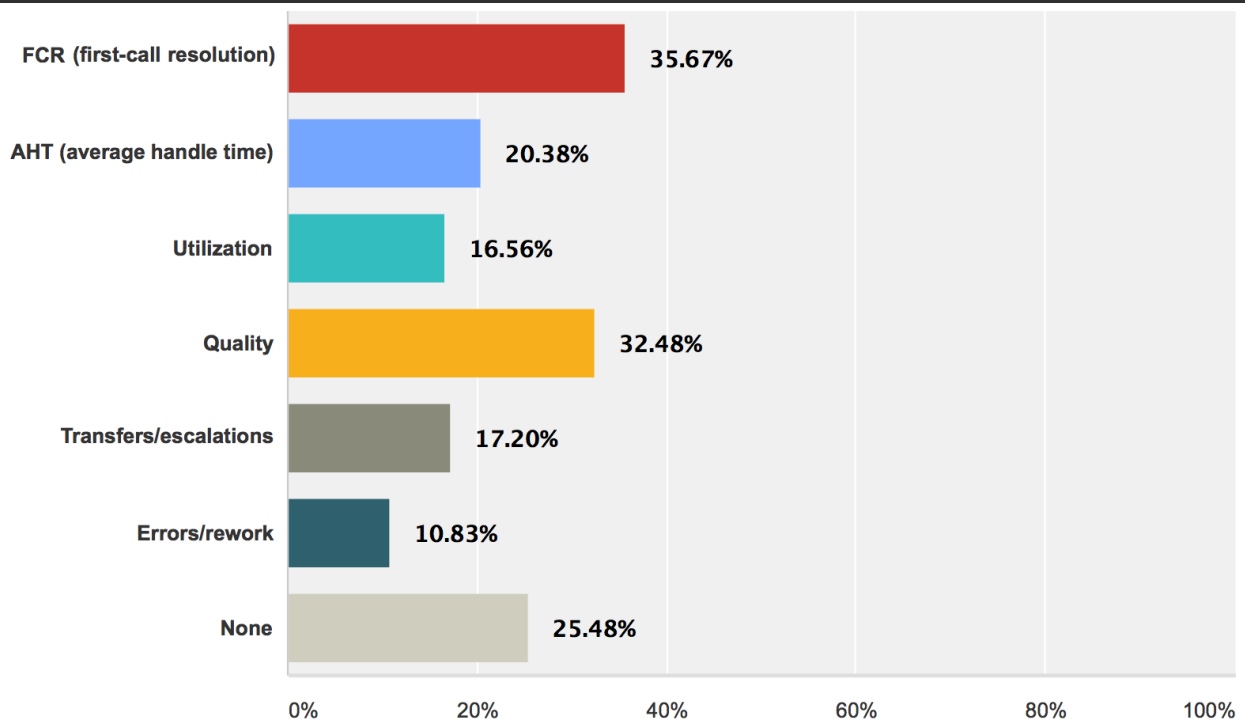
CONTACT CENTER CHALLENGE 2: *Growing agent productivity and efficiency*

The impact of multilanguage customer support isn't solely limited to the customer experience; multilingual support also benefits the agent.

Multilanguage support, and specifically the addition of 3rd party interpreters, may be an investment worth pursuing for both customer and agent satisfaction. 58% of respondents to this survey said that their internal agent productivity and efficiency either improved somewhat (47%) or greatly (10%) once they partnered with a language interpretation service.

Language services positively affected several agent KPIs, as contact centers saw higher first contact resolution (FCR) and better call quality. In fact, 75% of respondents saw a progressive improvement to agent KPIs upon adding language interpretation services.

What agent KPIs/metrics have been POSITIVELY affected by adding language interpretation services?

KPI/Metric	Value
FCR (first-call resolution)	35.67%
AHT (average handle time)	20.38%
Utilization	16.56%
Quality	32.48%
Transfers/escalations	17.20%
Errors/rework	10.83%
None	25.48%

One of the nation's top 10 health insurance companies recently underwent a rigorous Process Improvement Project and identified several contact center areas to either improve or maintain. Many of their discoveries impacted the millions of non-English speaking members that utilize their health plan services and need to contact support.

Two key initiatives involved the agent:

1 *the maximization of internal staff resources, and*

2 *the need to contain costs and increase efficiency.*

These agent productivity and efficiency goals were ultimately part of their main intention - to provide non-English speaking members with the same high quality service as their English-speaking customer base. Instead of finding a solution that was "good enough," the company worked to ensure a "good-to-great" solution.
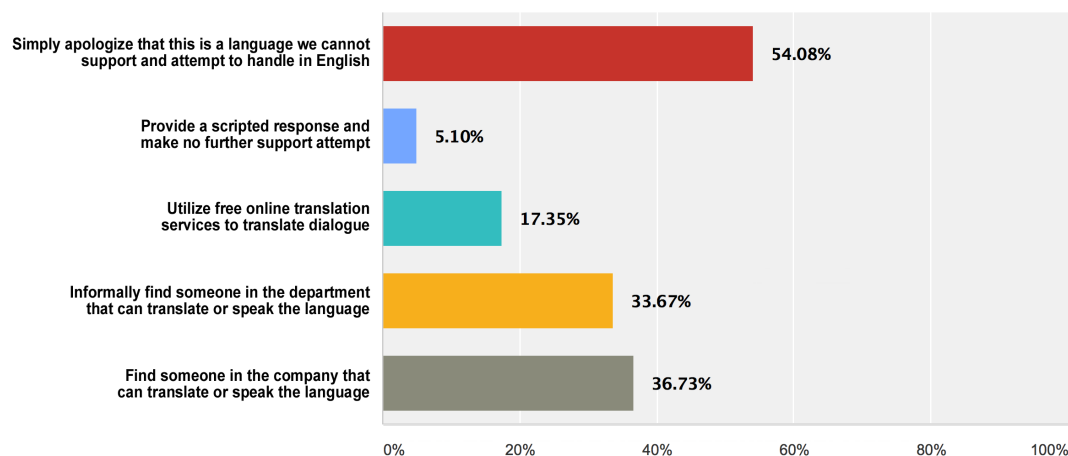
Part of that solution involved a partnership with a language interpretation service. Within a month of implementing their Process Improvement Project for language services and switching to a top tier interpretation provider, their quality, productivity, and service levels improved.

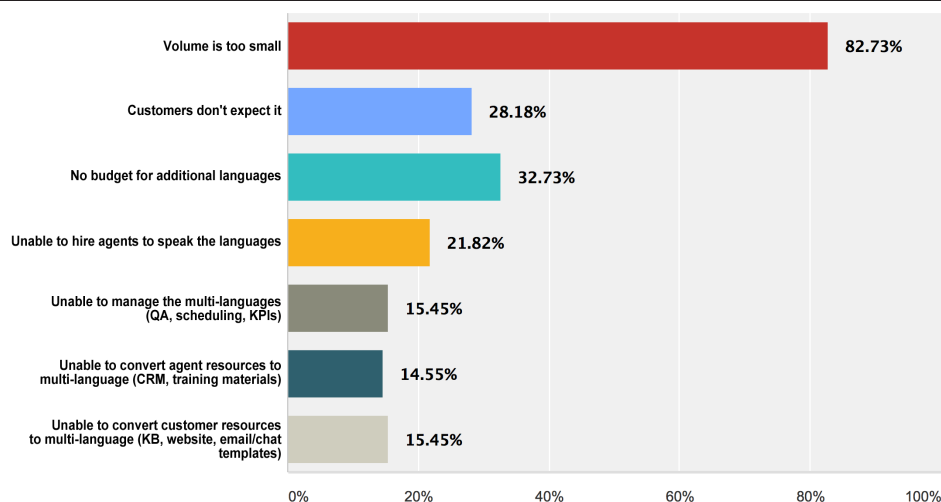# ▶ The Difficulty of Providing Multilanguage Customer Support

It's doubtful that any contact center leader will describe a non-English-speaking customer's interaction with an English-speaking agent as ideal. Over half of contact centers have agents simply apologizing that the customer's language is unsupported and assistance is subsequently poorly attempted in English. In just over a third of situations the agent either attempts to find someone in the company (37%) or the department (34%) that can translate or speak the language. In fortunately fewer interactions, the agent utilizes free online translation services (17%) or provides a scripted response where no further support attempt can be made (5%).

How do you provide customer service to customers that do not speak a language you formally support?

Response	Percentage
Simply apologize that this is a language we cannot support and attempt to handle in English	54.08%
Provide a scripted response and make no further support attempt	5.10%
Utilize free online translation services to translate dialogue	17.35%
Informally find someone in the department that can translate or speak the language	33.67%
Find someone in the company that can translate or speak the language	36.73%

The benefits of a multilingual customer support strategy seem abundantly clear! So why isn't everyone providing multilanguage support? Most contact centers perceive their volume to be too small (83%). To a lesser degree, contact centers also cited a limited budget (33%), lack of customer expectations (28%), the inability to hire multilingual agents (22%), internal constraints to manage operations (16%), or a lack of resources to convert materials to another language – whether for the customer (16%) or the agent (15%).

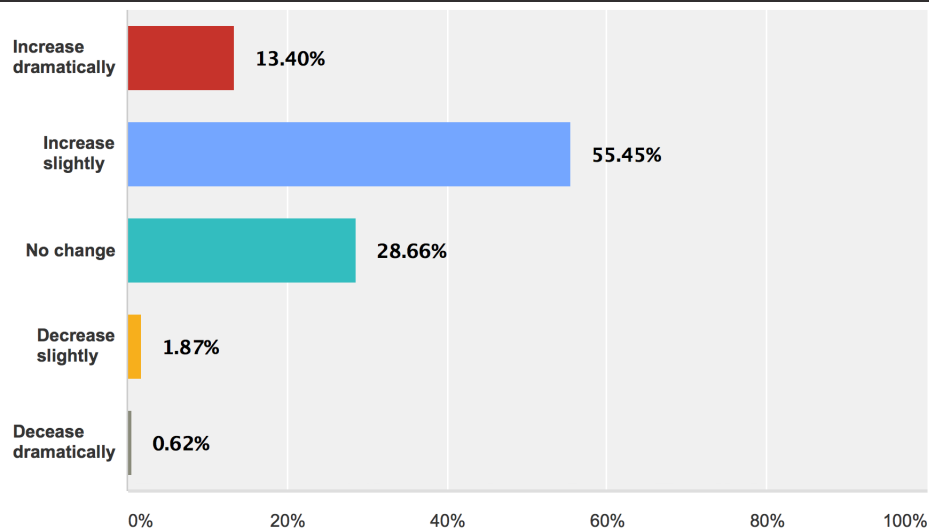## What reasons inhibit you from formally offering multilanguage support?

Reason	Percentage
Volume is too small	82.73%
Customers don't expect it	28.18%
No budget for additional languages	32.73%
Unable to hire agents to speak the languages	21.82%
Unable to manage the multi-languages (QA, scheduling, KPIs)	15.45%
Unable to convert agent resources to multi-language (CRM, training materials)	14.55%
Unable to convert customer resources to multi-language (KB, website, email/chat templates)	15.45%

Other contact centers utilize "pay-for-use" services or ask customers to transition to a different channel where support may be possible. "We have a voicemail set-up for customers to leave messages," said a retail call center director. "A non-dedicated bilingual agent will call back when call volume allows."

Conclusion:

The Benefits of Multlilanguage Support

Customer expectations are changing, and the demand for language support is growing. 69% of contact centers expect that within the next three years, their non-English speaking customer base will increase either slightly (56%) or dramatically (13%). While 29% don't anticipate a change, less than 3% actually expect this segment of their customer base to decrease.

Do you expect the number of non-English speaking customers to change over the next 3 years?

Increase dramatically	13.40%
Increase slightly	55.45%
No change	28.66%
Decrease slightly	1.87%
Decease dramatically	0.62%

Their customers are evolving mainly because their companies or brands are instigating it - 40% say it will be because their company is actively pursuing new demographics or geographic markets, 35% claim it is due to emerging channel platforms like social and mobile expanding their reach, and 33% cite new marketing campaigns.

"The domestic market is surprisingly robust—and growing," says Voiance's Woan. "U.S. multicultural and non-English speaking markets represent trillions in purchasing power – larger than most countries. Since customers overwhelmingly prefer service in their native language, organizations have every market incentive to provide high-quality language support."

When we asked the group of respondents still in the language interpreter consideration phase, "What is the primary reason you are considering language interpretation services?" a solid third of them responded with 'higher customer satisfaction'.

1 *Higher customer satisfaction (CSAT)*

2 *Ability to scale customer base AND competitive differentiation (tie)*

3 *Higher agent satisfaction*

Whether your company requires multilanguage customer support now or in the foreseeable future, a partnership with a language interpretation service provider just may be the best approach.

To understand the full potential of multilanguage support and a language interpretation service, ICMI recently released "The Growing Need for Multilanguage Customer Support Research Report and Best Practices Guide". The data was derived from a Q1 2014 survey conducted by ICMI and underwritten by Voiance Language Services. The new study focuses on measuring the importance of multilanguage services across geographies and industries, understanding how contact centers are currently supporting non-English language customers, and determining how multilanguage support improves the overall customer experience as well as agent productivity.

▶ About This Whitepaper

This whitepaper was made possible by the underwriting support of Voiance Language Services (www.voiance.com). ICMI research sponsors do not have access to research participant information, including individual survey responses

▶ About ICMI

The International Customer Management Institute (ICMI) is the leading global provider of comprehensive resources for customer management professionals - from frontline agents to executives - who wish to improve contact center operations, empower contact center employees and enhance customer loyalty. ICMI's experienced and dedicated team of industry insiders, analysts and consultants are committed to providing uncompromised objectivity and results-oriented vision through the organization's respected lineup of professional services including training and certification, consulting, events and informational resources. Founded in 1985, ICMI continues to serve as one of the most established and respected organizations in the call center industry.

▶ About Voiance Language Services

Voiance Language Services, LLC is a leading Phone Interpretation provider to contact centers. Operating a network of secure interpreter contact centers with over 1,000 seats, Voiance offers 24/7 Phone Interpretation in over 200 languages, Translation and Localization in over 100 Languages, and Video Remote Interpretation. Voiance's parent company CyraCom International, Inc. has been in business since 1995 and is the largest provider of Phone Interpretation with operations solely in the United States.