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**16**

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**2019**

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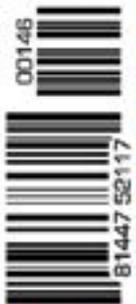
PUBLISHING  
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# THE TOP CONTACT CENTER TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2019

**fondo**

DIRECT EDITION

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## INTRODUCTION

It's a bird. It's a plane! No, it's the top contact center trends to watch for in 2019. And we've got you covered.

So many storylines, so little time. And as in any classic comic book, the storylines are familiar and sometimes predictable, but we foresee them taking captivating turns in the new year.

As the sun sets on 2018, contact center superheroes should watch for the plots, characters, and villains within them. As always, we keep watch of trends and issues pertinent to contact centers, continuously shifting due to technological advancements; mergers and acquisitions in the SaaS space; the realigning of customer service and experience priorities on the part of brands; and more.

Going forward, what will these trends be? Look no further ... we have you covered!

**In this white paper, you'll read about several significant subplots in 2019:**

- **Gamification in the Contact Center**
- **Investing in Agents**
- **Voice-Powered Technology (VPT)**
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI): Hero or Villain?**
- **Cracking Down on Hold-Times**
- **Social Media as a Contact Center Touchpoint**

Understanding these trends will help strengthen your contact center game, and give you "hero status" with both customers and employees. Read on about these industry issues and trends so that you can power-up and defy the odds in 2019.

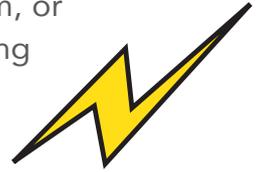


**1**

**STORYLINE:  
GAMIFICATION**



While much has changed in the last decade, one storyline will remain constant: Contact center teams will continue to bravely face [surges in call volume](#). Especially during these moments of crisis, agents are likely to become taxed and frustrated when they feel that the infrastructure doesn't support them, or when they feel there is no overall incentive to fight the good fight. Keeping them engaged is one thing, but turning them into "heroic employees" is another, especially in 2019 (and beyond).



Like any good adventure, managing a contact center has a unique set of challenges, employee attrition being high on the list (contact center turnover was as high as [33% a few years ago](#)). While the cause of the high turnover rate is [debatable](#), managers can help keep agents motivated via [gamification](#), which is the introduction of interactive, game-like principles into different contexts. By adding playful elements such as competition, rewards, and recognition in your contact center, you can facilitate and reward learning, creativity, and social and personal growth.

#### **You should consider gamification if:**



- Your agents are having trouble adapting to a new technological solution in your contact center and they need to study up (and fast);
- Your agents are burning out and employee turnover is at an historic high;
- Customer complaints about poorly-trained or unresponsive agents have become the norm rather than the exception; and/or
- You want a clearer understanding or microscopic snapshot of how engaged your call agents actually are.

#### **Gamification can potentially:**

- Lower contact center employee attrition and boost productivity;
- Improve upon a flawed or outdated training model;
- Make for better customer experience via interactions with educated agents;
- Motivate your team to set high goals (or even vie for promotion) via healthy competitions; and/or
- Vastly improve the culture of your contact center and the overall perception of your business.



And remember: As a contact center manager, anything that benefits customers, agents, and your overall infrastructure benefits you. Only you can control the heroic arc of your brand's storyline!

**2**

**STORYLINE:**

**INVESTING IN  
AGENTS**

**HOLD ON, I'M COMING!**





'Saving the day' for contact center agents will be a predominant quest in 2019. **While companies are ultimately fixated on the bottom line, they will increasingly acknowledge that agents form the backbone of their business. It's time to treat them right.**

Being a contact center agent is mentally-taxing work, and can certainly take its toll if support (either managerial or psychological) is unavailable. While customers are entitled to feeling frustrated when ignored or delayed, contact center agents grapple with abusive calls on a daily basis. Unfortunately, some contact centers still insist on a no-hang-up rule (agents are penalized for ending a call) in order to improve or sustain metrics, and do not offer morale or psychological support to front-line agents who live through some [horrific experiences](#) on the job. Just like in many industries, **contact centers have their own workplace hazards, and a focus on best practices for dealing with them in a humane way will improve a contact center by leaps and bounds.** The problem is so serious and widespread that [petitions and movements to bring awareness to the subject](#) have emerged. Valiant contact center managers should make improving this culture their mission.

Contact center culture will get a much overdue upgrade in 2019 – it is an investment that needs to be made. As Richard J. Snow of Ventana [writes](#), **“research shows that for over three-quarters of companies 90 percent or more of their contact center operating budget is allocated to keep existing processes and systems running”, rather than improving agent support and bolstering contact center resources.** Overhauling a legacy budget is also a challenge for those resistant to the idea of change, be it technology, investing in an expansion of the contact center workforce, or allocating funds for education and training for agents. But lagging behind the times will eventually frustrate customers, and agent turnover could reach an all-time high.

For contact centers to survive and thrive, they must do one thing, and soon: **Weigh the short-term cost against the long-run cost.** Give agents the right tools, and they will finish the job, happily.

**3**

**STORYLINE:**

**VOICE-POWERED  
TECHNOLOGY  
(VPT)**

**BLA BLA**



Voice-powered technology (VPT) has grown exponentially in the past few years, and will continue to grow by leaps and bounds into 2019. On its journey, it has become more sophisticated and intelligent, and has evolved to sound and behave more like a real human would. As such, many are asking whether VPT is a threat or an asset to contact center employees. However, there isn't much to fear according to a [report](#) from McKinsey, predicting that VPT will not eliminate contact center jobs but, rather, positively transform them. In any case, VPT will support many successful contact center strategies in 2019, in a few impressive ways:



- **Reporting and Data Analysis:** Listening technology is now sophisticated enough to recognize keywords and report with great accuracy on the nature of calls. This data can be compiled into reports that give management a sense of a) key customer pain points; and b) how efficient agents are at resolving complaints. With VPT taking care of reporting and data analysis, agents can focus on what any customer service employee will tell you is the most important task: Assisting the caller.
- **Customer Self-Service and Phone Call Automation:** Rather than have agents handle easily-solved requests, automated systems can be programmed to help customers resolve simple issues via self-service. This strategy frees up agents' time to handle more complex issues that VPT would not be able to address.
- **Customer Satisfaction and Employee Coaching:** Perhaps one of the most interesting applications of VPT in contact centers relates to software that monitors the tone and emotion of the speakers on a call. For example, [Cogito](#) is an example of software that monitors voice speed, pauses, and volume. Using this information, the software can both alert the agent to signs of a dissatisfied customer and offer tips on how to handle the situation.

To achieve the best customer service results for customers, contact center teams must learn to use both technology and people in smarter ways, creating symbiotic relationships that benefits customers and offers them timely resolutions to their queries. With these smart systems in place, both employees and customers can enjoy increased satisfaction levels. It's a win-win.



**4**

**STORYLINE:**

**ARTIFICIAL  
INTELLIGENCE:  
HERO OR  
VILLIAN?**



If you work in the contact center universe, then you know this truth intimately: The most epic battle of late has been the debate over whether AI will take over human agents in contact centers. And the battle rages on.



For those fretting over the ongoing [decline in labor force participation](#), especially outside urban centers, what's happening in customer service should actually be encouraging. More human-to-human jobs can be done remotely due to 1) improvements in technology; and 2) the willingness of consumers to interact that way. Contemplating the eventual fate of humans in the customer service process leads to some spicy conversations. This is partly because a) terminology around AI is problematic; b) objective data is sparse; and c) there are multiple overlapping questions. This year, consider the various overlapping issues at work in this ongoing robot-versus-human trend, namely:

- **Local vs. Global:** It's long been true that a focus on boosting self-service capabilities (with or without AI) is going to yield some reduction in agent demand. One way to think about this is that we can have local successes in agent-reduction, while at the same time, see an opposite trend when looking at the data in aggregate (i.e. looking at employment stats, call center seats sold, toll-free numbers issued, and so on). Both things can be true.
- **Balance of Forces:** Think of self-serve optimization (with or without AI) as a force for lowering agent demand. Then consider that there are forces pushing the other way as well, namely: More transactions moving online (ecommerce is still only 10% of total retail) and new categories ramping up (tele-health, education, and government services). So, this is a "balance of forces" question. Some people move out of town, but more people move in, so the population still grows.

This is certainly a compelling story, one worth following in 2019. Who is the villain? Who is the hero? What's going to happen next? It all remains to be seen, but we predict that all involved will hold victor status. The contact center world has enough room for both humans and artificial intelligence ... we think.



**5**

**STORYLINE:**

**CRACKING DOWN  
ON HOLD TIMES**



He-Man had the right idea when he held aloft his sword and transformed into his mightiest self. "I HAVE THE POWER!" While we're not all Eternia-born superheroes like him, we can still aim to be the masters of our own universes and harness the unshakable power to satisfy our customers.



During peaks in call volume, it becomes increasingly challenging for customers to have their problems solved quickly and efficiently. They are often placed in "on-hold purgatory", which causes a surge in impatience. Putting customers with complex cases on hold for (what seems like) eternity is a weak move. But how can we in the contact center world harness our energies and rightfully proclaim that we have the power to deliver exceptional service to our customers?

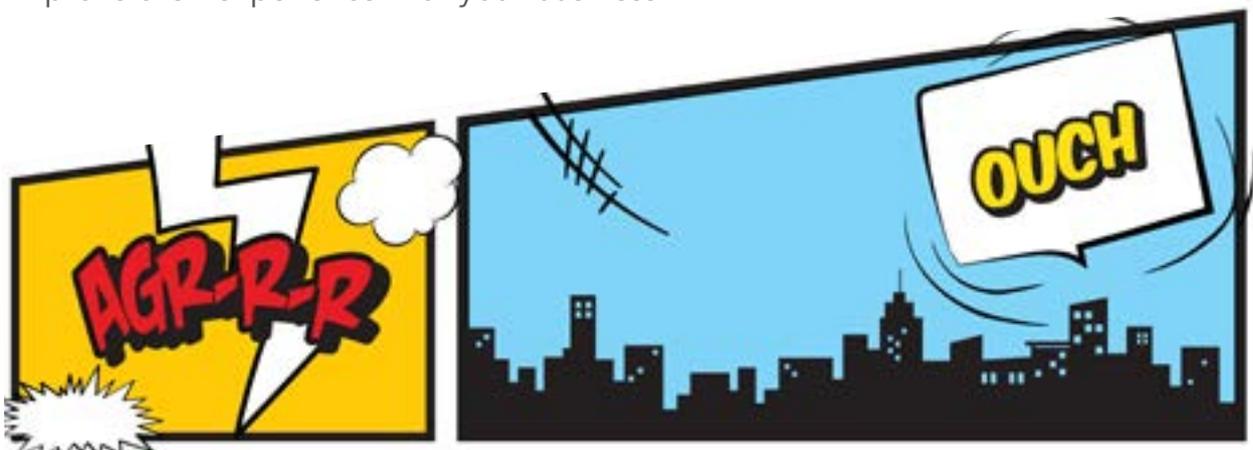
It's very simple, really, and there's no cartoon sword involved either: Call your customers back.

As we at Fonolo [see every day](#), giving customers the choice to opt-in for a call-back rather than wait on hold (either as soon as possible or at a future scheduled time) positively affects how your contact center operates and your brand's future successes, as call-backs will:

- **Smooth out spikes in call volume**
- **Lower abandon rates**
- **Improve overall customer experience and satisfaction**
- **Improve overall contact center agent experience**
- **Lower telco costs**
- **Help companies realize a positive ROI**



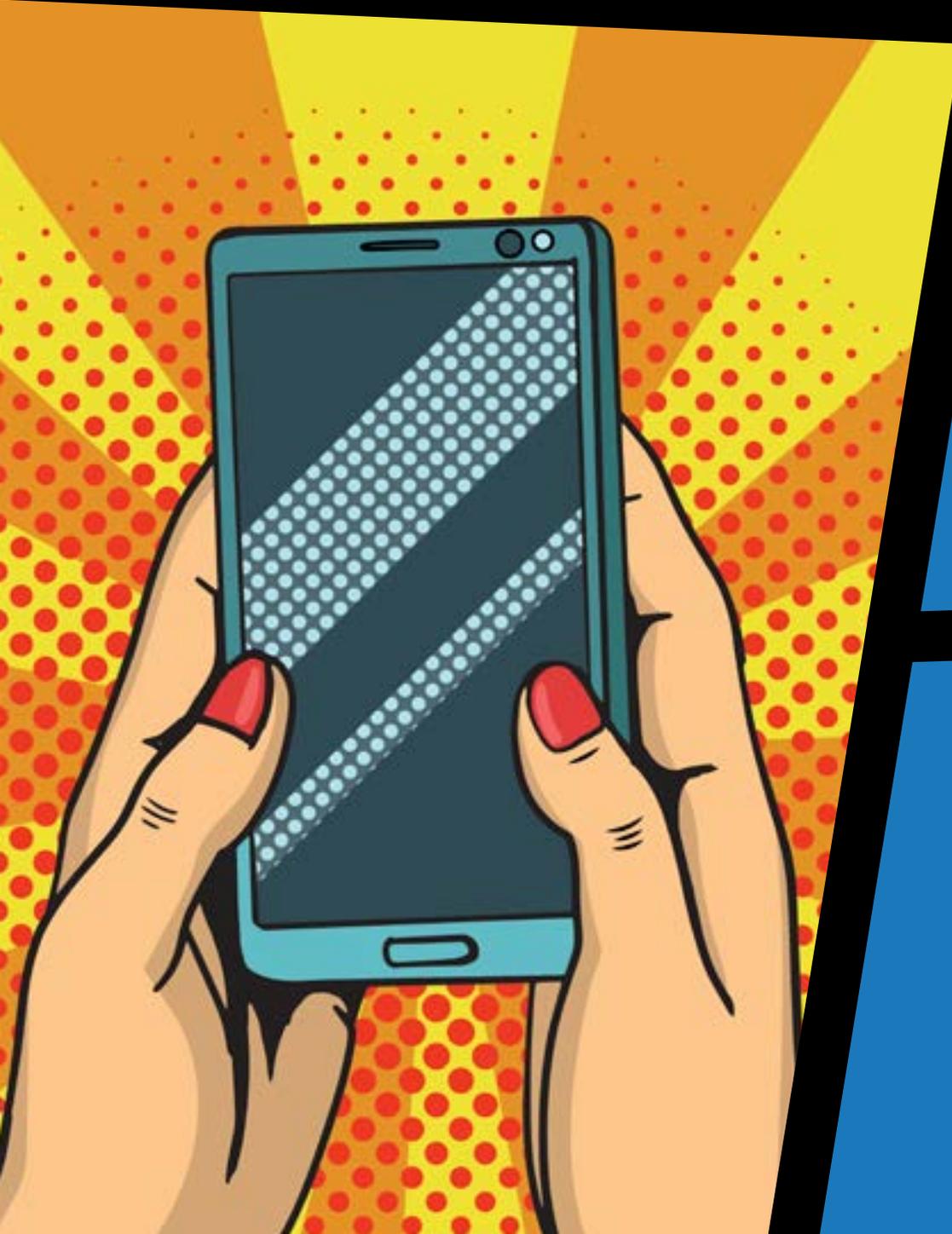
Call-back technology is dynamic, and different solutions exist that can meet the distinct demands of individual contact centers. The key to finding the right fit? Offer call-back options to your customers on their preferred channel(s) to vastly improve their experience with your business.



**6**

**STORYLINE:**

**SOCIAL MEDIA  
AS A CONTACT  
CENTER  
TOUCHPOINT**



As early as the 19th century, “[tweet](#)” was a charming term in the English language, evocative of the gentle vocal stylings of small birds. Now it refers to the music of [a rather different beast](#). Twitter, among other social platforms, has in recent years become a mighty digital megaphone for many frustrated (or conversely, happy) customers.



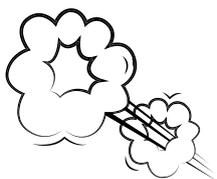
In addition to monitoring and responding to customer support requests in a timely fashion, companies can employ social media in other ways that will boost overall customer experience. Using social media as a form of customer support will remind you of some important overarching customer service themes:

**Be Timely:** When a customer reaches out to you on a social channel (be it to your [support-specific](#) Twitter handle or via your Facebook business page), it’s important to resolve their query or issue upon first contact. Social media platforms (luckily) have the ability to provide real-time updates; this is useful especially in times of crises (product recalls, cancelled flights or trips, and other critical pieces) for businesses that are service-based and for which time is of the essence.

**Be There:** Consumers will, more often than ever, turn decidedly towards social platforms and [make their experience public](#) when they feel ignored, the idea being that brands will act with more urgency when socially shamed. So: Don’t ignore your customers, online or otherwise.

**Be Human:** While it’s the latest craze to implement chatbots into the social media/customer support space (such as [Facebook’s](#) enabling of chatbot support via Messenger, or Apple’s “[Business Chat](#)”), [human beings](#) are key to your support solutions. It is crucial to employ full-time social media managers as part of your customer service “Justice League” who can look out for unanswered consumers, product issues, or burgeoning PR catastrophes.

What can center us in these complex times is remembering the fundamentals of customer service: timeliness, availability, and personability. Getting these things right will give your customers something (good) to Tweet about.



# **T** O BE CONTINUED...

In 2019, contact centers have the power to nurture relationships with customers for life. But harnessing this power requires an investment in time and research, in order to meet the ever-evolving customer-service needs of modern consumers. This year, that means keeping close watch over crucial contact center pieces like gamification, agents, voice, AI, call center technologies, and social media as a support channel. Each of these trends will remain storylines now, and in the future. To 2019 and beyond: **Excelsior!**



## Fonolo: Call-Back Solutions for the Call Center

With Fonolo, your customers will never wait on hold again, regardless of where the conversation begins – web, mobile or inbound call. Our cloud-based technology easily hooks into your existing call center infrastructure, with minimal impact to your business processes.

### JOIN US FOR A LIVE DEMO

Learn how Fonolo can help you lower abandon rates, reduce costs and improve the customer experience.

**[REGISTER NOW!](#)**

### WHY CALL-BACKS

- **Lower** Abandonment
- **Smooth** Out Call Spikes
- **Shorten** Handle Times
- **Improve** the Experience



Say call-backs are *"highly desirable"*



*Average reduction in abandoned calls*



**Ricardo Mejia, VP Centralized Services, First Service Credit Union**

"With Fonolo's system in place, members can press '1' to request a call-back from the next available rep, or they can press '2' to schedule the call at a later time. This has ultimately given our members more flexibility to receive a call at a time that is most convenient for them."