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Pay rise for you and more agents are on the way, says new study

AVERAGE pay for call centre managers has increased by nearly three per cent to £36,020, says a new study. However, salaries vary widely depending on region, type of operation and industry sector.

In London, managers can expect to earn £44,300 while those in East Anglia and Northern Ireland report salaries which are £13,000 lower. And those in financial services earn £11,000 more than those in outsourcers.

The figures are from the eighth edition of The UK Contact Centre Decision-Maker's Guide, an annual report by ContactBabel, based on its survey of 205 call centres.

Respondents expect to hire more people in the next 12 months, an average reported growth of 6.8pc. Those who expected more recruitment totalled 44pc against 19pc expecting a further decline.

And the average induction course has risen by 60pc to £1,900.

The report's author, Steve Morrell, said: "It is often said that the first cuts to be made in a recession are in training and marketing budgets, as the negative results of these will be felt sometime in the future rather than immediately. The 2009 training budget figures bore that out, with a dramatic drop in training expenditure, but this trend seems to be in reversal now.

"In terms of expected agent growth figures for 2011, public sector respondents are unsurprisingly the least bullish, along with the transport & travel and utilities sectors. The majority of retail and distribution, outsourcing, finance, telecoms, media, technology and services respondents expect significant increases in headcount."

Most call centres have seen a decline in attrition, from 24pc to a new low of 16pc, as people become more fearful for their jobs, and opportunities elsewhere dry up. As in previous studies, large call centres suffer the highest attrition, at an average of 29pc. Those with fewer than 50 seats report an average attrition figure of 10pc.

Mr Morrell cautions: "The recession has reduced attrition greatly over the past two years, but contact centres must understand that this is nothing more than a temporary respite.

"With no structural change to the industry, its recruitment and training methods, management techniques or job types, the same problems will emerge as the economy picks up, and anecdotally, attrition rates are said to be increasing again."

"In fact, the seeds of attrition are sown before the agent even starts work. With many contact centres reporting attrition in the first three months to be over 50pc of their annual staff turnover, and the most popular explanation for an agent leaving the role is that they were temperamentally unsuited to the job, a case can be made that attrition is actually a problem caused by the recruitment process."

Email now accounts for 10.2pc of all customer-to-business communications, with 86pc of call centres now accepting customer emails. It is most used by retail and distribution (17.1pc) and telecoms, media and technology (15.9pc).

Perhaps due to the confidential nature of most customer enquiries, the finance sector is by far the least likely to use email communications (2pc).

Telephone use stands at 83pc, comprising 77pc handled by live agents and 6pc by self service.

Mr Morrell said: "Email response handling times have shown a slight improvement on 2009, with the proportion answered within one hour going from 10pc to 12pc, and those answered the same working day going from 35pc to 44pc.

"However, taking longer than one day to answer an email runs the risk of the customer losing patience, leading them either to phone the contact centre – with the attendant extra cost to the business – or worse, go to another company entirely.

"It is very concerning that the retail and distribution sector has the greatest proportion of respondents taking longer than 24 hours to answer an email (48pc), perhaps as a result of the higher-than-average volumes that the sector receives.

"Many of these emails will be sales-related, and the poor performance is exacerbated by the relatively low levels of investment in email systems in many retailers."

He suggests investment in modern email management systems or the use of a third party.

Another suggestion is a "text chat" box to aid customers buying from web sites. Mr Morrell says that having the ability to immediately clarify a point – such as the exact product specification or delivery times – with an online agent could make the difference between winning and losing a sale.

- The full report, containing over 300 pages and 160 graphs and tables usually costs £295, but is available this year free of charge from the ContactBabel website (www.contactbabel.com).

- In a report due out in January, ContactBabel says that the UK now has 5,630 call centres with 10 or more seats. There are 1,041,500 jobs and 631,250 seats. It forecasts that another 100,000 jobs will be added by end-2014, following a loss of more than 35,000 jobs in 2009. UK Contact Centres in 2011: The State of the Industry costs 1,095, plus VAT.

- See also page 14 of this issue. There will be more on pay and conditions in call centres in the next issue of Call Centre Europe.

News **Briefs**

WATER TENDER

Thames Water is planning to replace its 70-plus analogue telephone systems with a managed IP service. In a tender document, the company says it has about 3,000 fixed telephone users and about 3,500 mobile phone users across 140 sites.

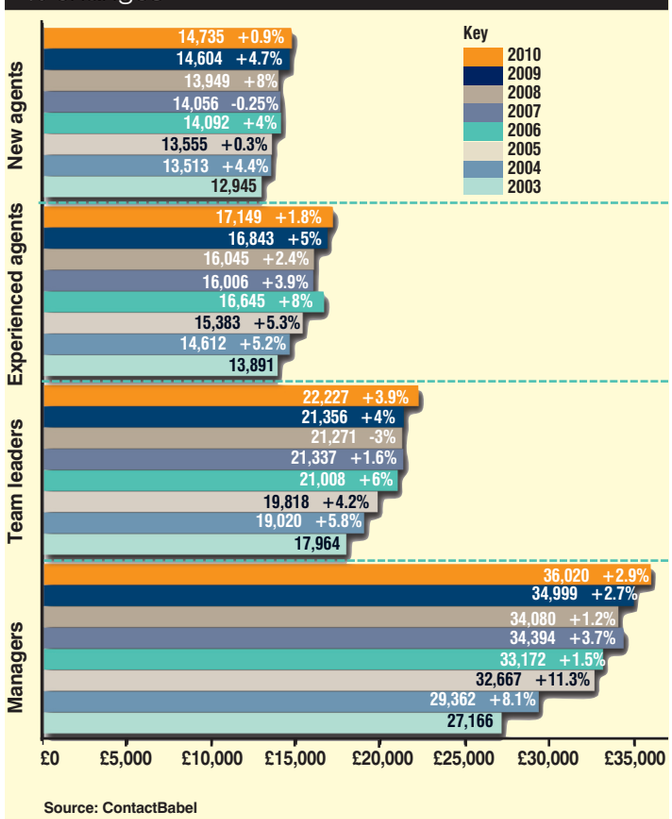
The tender invites bids for three lots, including managed call centre technology for 800 call centre users and provision of SIP trunking and fixed line voice and fax minutes over SIP. It says that any agreement would be for up to seven years.

A spokeswoman said: "We are reviewing a number of options to strengthen our customer services capability and enhance our customer experience."

NEW OUTSOURCER

Ventrica, a new outsourcer, is hiring staff for its 134-seat call centre in Southend. It was founded by Dino Forte, MD, who was a co-founder of Converso Contact Centres. He said clients included a software firm and a cosmetics company.

Call centre salaries, 2003-2010 (£p.a.) and % changes



Source: ContactBabel