

# HOW LONG HOLD TIMES AFFECT YOUR CUSTOMERS' EXPERIENCE (AND YOUR BOTTOM LINE)

What really happens when  
you put a customer on hold?

# INTRODUCTION

What if, even though you were ready to read this introduction, you were asked to wait for a minute? What if you had to wait two minutes? You'd be frustrated, right? Or even worse, you might give up completely.

Hold times are a disruption. For customers, hold times can be an infuriating part of trying to contact a company, whether they want to have a simple question answered or a major issue resolved. For agents, hold times can be a stressful necessity that leads to friction-filled first impressions and customer annoyances that are hard to recover from.

That being said, hold times aren't going anywhere. There's always going to be an ebb and flow of contact center needs that is mitigated by asking customers to wait. Still, the question is, what does that mean for your business and how can you handle holds better?

# WAIT A MINUTE— WHAT DO HOLD TIMES FEEL LIKE FROM THE CUSTOMERS’ PERSPECTIVE?

Shep Hyken, a customer experience expert and bestselling New York Times and Wall Street Journal author, has often thought about how to convey the feeling of being put on hold to the crowd at one of his many speaking events. Instead of relying on stats or stories, he says:

“I asked the VP of marketing to the stage in the middle of the speech to deliver a special message. He walked on stage to a nice round of applause. He took center stage and looked at the audience. Once the applause ended, he just stood there in silence, and that silence was, as they say, deafening. He continued to look out into the audience, not uttering a single word, for 90 seconds. The audience became very uncomfortable. I then came back on stage, thanked him, and asked the audience to give him a round of applause as he walked off stage. The audience wasn’t sure what had just happened.

I asked the audience how long he has been on stage. Many of them said three or four minutes. No, it was just 90 seconds.”<sup>1</sup>



## **Did you know?**

90 seconds is the average customer hold time.<sup>1</sup>

# THE IMPACT OF HITTING HOLD

Like it or not, agents putting customers on hold is part of working in a contact center. But when they do it, how often they do it, and how long your customers are left waiting matters—maybe even more than you think. Some of the consequences of keeping customers waiting can include:

**Increased negativity surrounding your brand**

---

**Higher abandoned call rates**

---

**Decreased likelihood of purchase**

---

**More irritated customers**

---

# The impact of hitting hold:

## Red flags and opportunities

1 2 3 4



### **RISK: INCREASED NEGATIVITY SURROUNDING YOUR BRAND**

Patience is a virtue, but it's not a given. Wait time can be a frustrating roadblock for consumers on their journey to getting questions answered or problems troubleshooted. And while at times a slight delay is unavoidable, when it does happen, it's important to make sure it's over as quickly as possible. The longer customers are made to wait, the greater the chances are that they will grow frustrated with your brand—sometimes so much that they spread that negativity when talking to peers or sharing on social media. Nine in ten Americans tell others about their customer service experience.<sup>3</sup>



#### **Did you know?**

The average person will spend 43 days of their life on hold.<sup>2</sup>



### **OPPORTUNITY**

Obviously, minimizing hold time should be the goal—but when you can't do that, it's important to ensure that your staff is trained to treat hold times with care and consideration to minimize customer frustration. Have an apologetic prompt at the ready and urge agents to answer the phones prepared to emphasize and make up for lost time with prompt worth-the-wait service. After all, 35 percent of customers share negative feedback online, but 53 percent of customers share positive comments online.<sup>3</sup>

## **RISK: HIGHER ABANDONED CALL RATES**

When customers are put on hold, there's no guarantee they will wait. Depending on how long your average handling time is, long hold times can lead to an increase in something no contact center wants: abandoned calls. The speed at which customer questions and concerns are handled consistently ranks as one of the most important factors from the customers' perspective. What's more, 57 percent of people report that they've been so frustrated with customer service that they've hung up the phone before coming to a resolution.<sup>4</sup>



When asked the top ways customers think customer service could improve, 40 percent of customers answered “take care of my needs more quickly.”<sup>3</sup>

---

## **OPPORTUNITY**

Being put on hold is frustrating not only because it means service is slowed but because, as a customer, it feels as though your time is being wasted. As a company, put yourself in the customers' shoes and try to waste as little of their time as possible. A modern day solve for this problem is to utilize a contact center platform that integrates with your CRM so customers are quickly and personally identified once an agent becomes available to start working with them to solve their issue. Or some contact center platforms give customers the option to hold their place in the queue and request a call back once an agent does become available. This can curb the tendency for callers to give up on customer service (upping abandoned call rates) and help agents better manage customer expectations—not to mention happiness.

### **RISK: DECREASED LIKELIHOOD OF PURCHASE**

The bottom line is that hold times are annoying. The question is what do they actually mean for your business's bottom line? Although the answer isn't clear cut—every call, customer, and business model is different—one thing's for certain: putting customers on hold doesn't help sales, but it can hinder them. Consider the fact that many customers think being put on hold, especially for an extensive length of time, is poor customer service. And that 33 percent of customers say they would consider switching companies immediately after poor customer service. Beyond that, 60 percent of customers would consider switching after 2–3 instances of poor customer service.<sup>3</sup>

# 60%

of customers say they “changed their mind” about buying something when their attempt to purchase resulted in a poor customer experience.<sup>4</sup>

---

### **OPPORTUNITY**

In some industries, long hold times are expected. In others, they're less common, and even less well-received. If your industry is one where customers expect fast service, easy resolution, and seamless access to live representatives, pay extra attention to hold times and how long it is taking the average customer to get through. If you notice that lengthy hold times are attributing to lost sales and a noticeable decrease in customer service, it may be time to re-strategize using technology and/or up your agent staff.

1 2 3 4



## **RISK: MORE IRRITATED CUSTOMERS**

Happy customers equal happy agents. We know that no agent wants to pick up the line to realize there is an irate or extremely frustrated customer on the other end. It makes all aspects of their job, including identifying the customer, getting to the root of the issue, and providing the right information to solve their issue or claim, all that much harder. After all, it's difficult to make a complete comeback when customers have already been disappointed by a longer-than-expected hold time.

.....

**57%**

of people find long hold times frustrating when calling a business.<sup>5</sup>



## **OPPORTUNITY**

If long hold times are truly impossible to avoid during your business's peak hours, be up front with customers. Nobody likes thinking that an agent is going to answer their call any minute, only to have a half hour go by. By openly and honestly estimating wait times when customers call in, businesses can at least manage customer expectations and hopefully help to minimize the disappointment of eager customers.





## BE PROACTIVE—DON'T PUT THE ISSUE ON HOLD

Hold times are sometimes going to happen. But how your business strategizes to reduce and improve the disruptions in customer service will determine your control over its impact on bottom lines and customer relationships. We've got some tips to help you tackle the issue, instead of simply accepting it.

# IMPROVE HOLD TIMES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

The right technology can't take customers off hold for you, but it can help with the flow of the customer experience. Here are some tech-focused tips to consider when whittling down how long your customers spend waiting:

---

## **Offer more detailed information on how exactly to contact the person they need to speak to.**

Sometimes customers have to jump through hoops to get in touch with the right person, even if they already know who that person is. Not to mention agents end up wasting valuable talk time redirecting customers. Where possible, add additional IVR options, offer shortcuts for callers, and make it as simple as possible to get the right person on the phone.

---

## **Improve your self-service options.**

If customers could help themselves wait less, don't you think they would want the option? Invest in AI options to help handle simple information requests and save more difficult requests for agents. The more things customers can do on their own, the less time your agents will need to spend talking to them.

---

## **Simplify the long list of choices.**

Every customer has been there, listening to an overcomplicated litany of choices trying to figure out which button to press, only to miss the one they were listening for, increasing their hold time, not to mention their frustration. Make it easier on callers by offering directions that are as clear and concise as possible.

---

## **Make it easier for customers to speak to a live person.**

A lot of times, customers are calling about things that can't be handled by technology. Streamline the process by making it obvious how they can connect to a live agent. Then, let customers know how long wait times really are.

---

# STRATEGY SUGGESTIONS

In delivering the best of the best customer service, technology is critical. But technology only goes so far without sound strategy to back it up. As you set up your contact center to better cater to customers and aim to reduce frustrations triggered by hold times, consider these suggestions:

## **Know common contact center bottlenecks and how to avoid them.**

Half of the battle is understanding what you're up against. Somewhere along the line, there's a point where customers are more likely to get stuck, making it hard for other customers to get the customer service they want and deserve. Be proactive by optimizing your technology to avoid bottlenecks. Then, alter your scripts and train staff on brevity so that you can keep customers moving toward where they need to go.

---

## **Consider your industry.**

Some industries have a reputation for long hold times, and customers know to expect them. Still though, you want your company to be above average. Observe industry norms, survey your competition, and work diligently to assure that your contact center isn't the most painful point for consumers.

---

# CREATE YOUR BEST CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE YET

Contact centers can be difficult to lead, but with the right technology and successful execution, they have the potential to make impactful customer impressions that lead to lasting relationships and strong sales. Interested in learning how you can make your customer experience the best it can be? Schedule a demo today to learn more about RingCentral contact center.

[Request a demo](#)

[Visit ringcentral.com](https://ringcentral.com)

**SOURCES:** 1. [hyken.com](https://hyken.com) - 2. [gizmodo.com](https://gizmodo.com) - 3. [businesswire.com](https://businesswire.com) - 4. [icmi.com](https://icmi.com) - 5. [customerservicemanager.com](https://customerservicemanager.com)



## **ABOUT RINGCENTRAL**

RingCentral, Inc. (NYSE: RNG) is a leading provider of global enterprise cloud communications, collaboration, and contact center solutions. More flexible and cost-effective than legacy on-premises systems, the RingCentral platform empowers employees to work better together from any location, on any device, and via any mode to serve customers, improving business efficiency and customer satisfaction. That is the promise of Work as One™. The company provides unified voice, video meetings, team messaging, digital customer engagement, and integrated contact center solutions for enterprises globally. RingCentral's open platform integrates with leading business apps and enables customers to easily customize business workflows. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, and has offices around the world.