Increase First Call Resolution: Eliminate the Top 10 Agent Errors Causing Repeat Calls

Executive Summary

Millions of dollars are lost every year due to unnecessary repeat calls caused by agent error. In a typical large call center, reducing your repeat calls by 25% translates into a savings of $1.36 million annually (based on annual call volume of 10 million). But do you know how to find these errors? More importantly, do you know what to do to fix them?

Most FCR improvement initiatives include a combination of technology and training. The only way to drive results is to make an investment in the right solution, one that provides actionable data and coaches the right agents on the right topics.

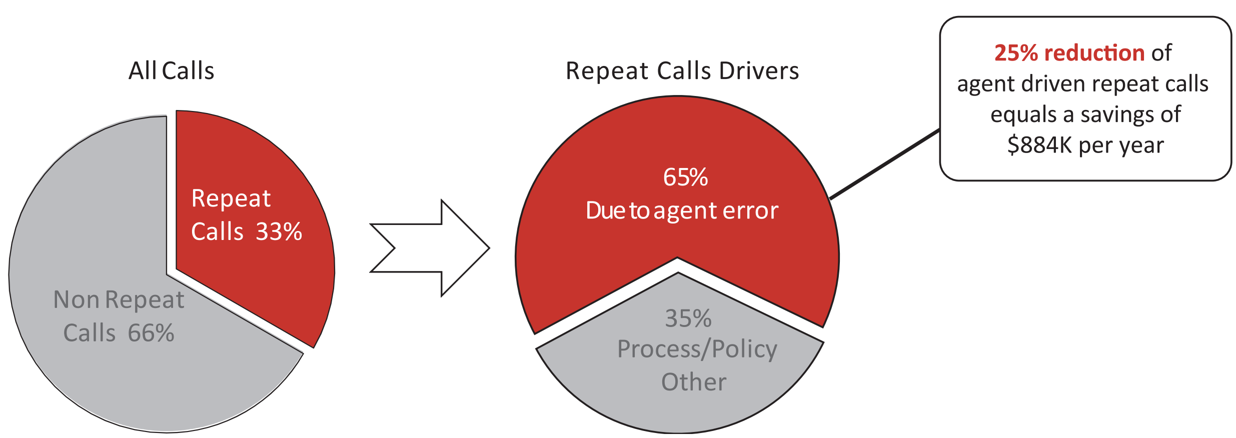
This paper will:

- Highlight the top 10 agent errors causing repeat calls
- Illustrate how different technology solutions identify common agent errors
- Show how facts can change agent behavior to avoid repeat calls

Tackling the Challenges of Repeat Calls with Technology

In today's economy, cutting costs is more important than ever. With the average cost per call hovering around $5 per call, each call reduced or avoided is $5 saved. Lower your call volume and in turn, reduce your call center operational costs. A key lever to reducing call volume is to improve First Call Resolution (FCR) and eliminate repeat calls. For a call center that handles 10 million calls in a year, a 25% reduction in repeat calls translates to an astounding $1.36MM in savings per year.

According to a recent study of repeat call reasons across various industries, 65% of all repeat calls are the result of an error being made by an agent. Reduce 25% of the agent-caused repeat call errors and save $884K per year. Address the 25% of the repeat calls caused by process and policy issues and save an additional $476K, for a total of $1.36MM per year.



Effective and proficient agents who can resolve issues on the first call are an integral part of improving FCR. If an agent doesn't give a confident answer, doesn't set the proper expectations, doesn't follow through on a commitment or simply gives a wrong answer, you can bet that the customer will call back. Not only does it keep your costs high, it also decreases customer loyalty and increases customer churn.

To drive out those errors and repeats, you need a technological solution that is able to:

1. Analyze <u>all calls</u>

2. Identify all first calls that led to the repeat

3. Identify the call reason for every call

4. Tie unresolved calls to the individual agent

5. Display the entire sequence of calls from the customer

The technology solution must deliver actionable data that can be used to effectively coach the agents who committed the errors on the first calls that lead to a subsequent repeat.

While there are many other solutions in the marketplace that attempt to measure FCR and reduce repeat calls (Post Call Surveys, End-of-Call Questions, Speech Analytics), most are only able to achieve limited success. Not only are most solutions constrained because they don't analyze all calls, but they also have great difficulty identifying the first call from the customer that actually led to a callback.

Simply put, if you can't detect the calls that lead to a repeat, and don't know the reason for the initial call, you can't coach an agent effectively to address the common errors. If you don't address the errors, it's difficult to achieve meaningful impact on reducing repeat calls and cutting costs. Only an algorithmic approach that can detect call sequences across 100% of your calls can provide the detailed examples you need to take action with each agent.

Let's examine the most common agent errors and then review how each technology solution addresses them.

The Top 10 Agent Errors that Lead to Repeat Calls

Based on a study conducted by Enkata across various industries and companies, below are the top 10 errors caused by agents that lead to repeat calls. Depending on the FCR solution deployed, some repeat calls are easy to detect, and some may seem impossible to detect.

Repeat calls that are typically detectable by technology solutions

1. Improper transfer

   There is nothing worse than transferring a customer to someone who supposedly can solve a problem, but ends up either not solving the problem, or makes the customer angrier than he already is. A repeat call will definitely take place.

2. Agent told customer to call back

   Amazingly, there are many instances when an agent will explicitly tell a customer to call back. Sometimes, they must do so: "Our systems are currently down," or "Our dispute group is not available until 9am EST." However, there are also many times when the agent explicitly asks the customer to call back when they don't really have to: "Feel free to call us back tomorrow if you still have problems changing your billing address," instead of providing self-service options to the customer.

3. Didn't listen to the customer's request/issue

   Newer agents tend to be so focused on doing the best job possible and remembering the never-ending top 10 lists, that they sometimes miss the reason why the customer called. This doesn't only apply to new agents, however. When an agent is handling his 188th call of the day, regardless of tenure, it's certainly possible for him to lose focus and miss the customer's request.

   Data also supports the fact that many repeat calls result from calls that happen right before the end of an agent's shift or prior to a pre-determined lunch break. Instead of being thorough on the call, the agent makes a hasty attempt to end the call, leaving the issue unresolved, which requires the customer to call again.

Repeat calls that are near impossible to detect with most technology solutions

4. Agent told customer incorrect information

   A poorly trained agent, lack of familiarity with an issue, or frequently changing policies can cause an agent to provide wrong information, and most repeats will be identified since the customer won't be shy about expressing his dissatisfaction with the incorrect information on the next call. Unfortunately, most solutions can't identify the agent who gave the customer this information in the first place.

5. Didn't set expectations properly

   Improper expectation setting is a major driver of repeat calls. For example, if an agent advises Kevin that "You should receive your re-issued credit card within 5 days" when in fact it takes 10 business days for the card to be sent out, Kevin inevitably calls back because he considered the agent to be a knowledgeable and trusted source of information. Of course, he doesn't reach the same agent so unless Kevin names the original agent, it's hard to find out who is setting poor expectations.

6. Did not advise on using self-service tools (Web or IVR)

   Self-service technology has reduced call volumes in a revolutionary way. By giving the customer more flexibility to handle their transactions online or through an IVR, simple calls are greatly reduced and agents are able to spend their time handling more complex calls. But if an agent doesn't pro-actively advertise the self service capabilities, the customer will call back.

   For example, Sonya called her cable company to add HBO. The agent made the change. The agent answered the exact question, but didn't advise her on the ability to make future changes via the company's website.

   Sonya later decided that she wanted to add Showtime as well, so she called back instead of logging onto the website. The agent who added HBO could have easily prevented this repeat call but how do you identify who needs the training?

7. Call next steps were not followed up/didn't follow through on commitments

   Douglas called his healthcare provider to ask about a diabetic assessment claim. The claim was paid incorrectly and needed to be re-processed at the correct co-pay amount. The agent identified that the provider charged the wrong co-pay amount and committed to Douglas that he would call the provider for him to get the issue corrected. Unfortunately, the provider's phone was constantly busy when the agent tried to call and the task eventually fell off the agent's task list.

   Douglas waited and eventually had to call back to check on the claim status, only to find that his issue was not corrected. Short of searching through a task management system to monitor every overdue task, it's hard to know who dropped the ball on Douglas' claim after it is corrected.

8. Customer lacks confidence in agent's answer

   When an agent is asked a question and gives a suspect answer, the customer will lack confidence in the answer and will most likely hang up and call again to get a more definitive answer from another agent.

   Alex called his airline to ask about how many miles were required for a free ticket to fly to the Maldives. Geography wasn't the agent's strong suit and the agent just started the job 3 weeks ago, so he made a guess (out loud) that the Maldives were in Africa and after fumbling for a few minutes, quoted the mileage as such. Alex knew the answer was wrong and pointed it out. The agent tried to recover and ended up quoting Alex the correct mileage to Asia, but because the call was so long and painful, Alex called back right away to get confirm the correct answer.

9. Didn't give the answer the customer was looking for (aka- the "shopper")

   Bill called his credit card company to ask for an APR reduction. Bill called and was quoted 15.5%. However, Bill knew that his friend had made a similar request and received 12.0%. Not satisfied with the agent's answer, Bill quickly hung up and called again to talk to another agent in the hopes of receiving the desired 12.0% APR, and would keep calling until he got 12%.

Of course, Bill never lets on that he has talked to other agents so the calls don't stop until someone finally explains to Bill why he isn't eligible for a rate lower than 15.5%.

10. Answered the question asked, but didn't anticipate the full customer issue

    In the healthcare world, quoting insurance benefits is one of the most complex, confusing, and time-consuming activities that can take place in the call center. There are many different benefits that can be asked about and quoted. The flaw we find in those call centers (applies to non-healthcare call centers as well) is that the agent only answers the question that the customer asked instead of anticipating other benefits.

    For example, Monica asked about the co-pay on a visit to the family doctor for an annual physical exam. The agent quoted the $15 co-pay for each visit. The agent answered Monica's question. However, a blood test typically occurs with the physical, so Monica ended up calling back later to ask about the blood test benefits.

    Had the agent known or thought about other procedures that are likely to occur with the physical exam, he could have quoted it on the first call and avoided the repeat.

There are certainly many more agent-related reasons than this list of 10, but these are the most common. The key is to be able to systematically identify which of these agent errors apply and leverage the data to provide concrete examples for each agent's coaching sessions.

How do you know when a repeat call has occurred?

Indeed this is a tricky topic. There are many methods and solutions which attempt to address this. These include Speech Analytics, End-of-Call Questions, Post Call Surveys and the algorithm-based approach of an Analytics Powered Performance Management system.

In general, FCR solutions that don't leverage a sequence detection algorithm end up with a partial picture of what's happening in the call center. The end result is that repeat call findings are not actionable. To provide concrete examples to agents, you need to:

1. Review and classify all calls

2. Be able to identify the first call that led to the repeat, linking through a consistent call reason

3. Tie the calls to the individual agent who caused the repeat

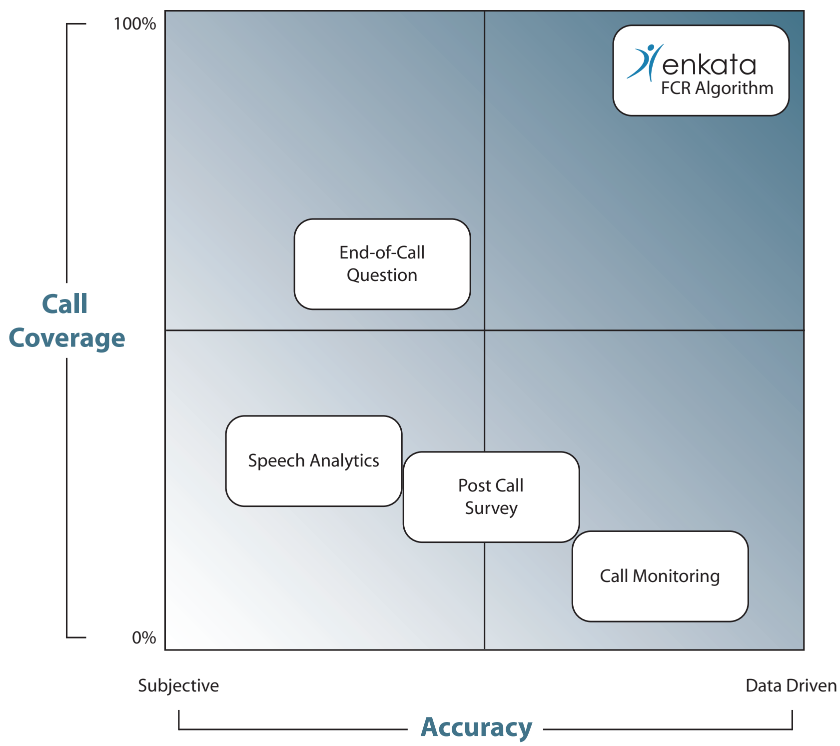
4. Be able to view the entire sequence of calls from the customer to understand the context

A sample of repeat calls may be enough for an executive to believe that the problem is widespread, but it doesn't show you which agents are struggling with which types of errors. Without technology, thousands and thousands of calls have to be manually reviewed, which is obviously a time consuming problem, otherwise the executive will need to take a leap of faith that the few examples represent the masses... and we all know that doesn't happen.

Many FCR solutions can detect repeat calls, but most have significant limitations which revolve around the inability to identify the initial agent error and the agent who made it.

Typical FCR Solution Limitations:

The following chart displays how different FCR solutions rate relative to call coverage and accuracy.



Speech Analytics

The premise of Speech Analytics, as it pertains to defining repeat calls, relies on key word searches. For example, "I called the other day," or "I called before." It relies heavily upon the customer to speak the "right" words or speak in a certain manner for the analytics to key on, which is asking a lot. A call could very well be a repeat of a previous call but unless the customer states the critical key word or makes the right sound, the repeat call will not be identified. For the "shopper" repeat call, Speech Analytics may pick up multiple instances of "lower my APR" but not that it was a repeat call by the same customer. If the query is using the wrong key word, it will be missed. Thus, it's hit and miss and depends on a lot of factors (and luck) to be accurate and actionable.

Another limitation of Speech Analytics is that the identified repeat calls are actually the 2nd (or 3rd or 4th) call in the customer's sequence of calls, not the first. If you consider that most companies, unless under regulatory or compliance constraints, don't record all calls (10-30% on average) and don't store calls for more than 30-45 days, tying the repeat back to the agent on the first call, who really is the one who needs the coaching, is virtually impossible. Hence, the repeat call that is found is not actionable.

Speech analytics vendors point out that with their products, all calls can be analyzed. This may be true. However, the reality is that the price of the software and hardware required to analyze all recordings is extremely costly and in these economic times is unlikely to provide the ROI required for budgetary approval.

End of Call Questions

End of Call Questions do not always accurately represent the true rate of issue resolution. In many cases, the customer will think that the issue was resolved at the time the call ended, but will later realize that it really wasn't resolved. As an example, if the customer received wrong information, he may not realize the information was wrong until some time has elapsed. At the time of the call, the issue appeared to be resolved, but after the call, the customer found out he was given bad information, thus leading to a call back. Or the customer may not answer truthfully for a number of reasons- to get off the phone quickly, avoid hurting the agent's feelings, etc. Regardless of how frequently agents are getting answers to these questions, the data is highly suspect.

Post-call Surveys

For Post-call surveys, only a small portion of calls are surveyed (5%), and only a portion of those surveyed actually respond and respond truthfully (20%), meaning Post-call Surveys yield an analyze-able call population of no more than one percent of all calls- clearly a low and unreliable number.

Just like End of Call questions, at the time the survey is taken, the customer may believe the issue was resolved, only to find out that it wasn't. Thus the 1% is even smaller.

Moreover, customers are likely to respond to the survey only if they've had either a very good experience on the call, or a very bad one. There are many calls "in the middle" which are not tracked and therefore, a large piece of the call volume pie is missing. Due to the bias of the customers in terms of their willingness to respond, you won't get a full picture and therefore, results aren't actionable.

Quality Monitoring

Quality monitoring hasn't been discussed to this point, but has been known to be deployed to measure FCR. However, due to the small volume of calls that are monitored (0.5%, based on average of 4,000 per month), the approach is not actionable at the agent level. This volume is simply too low to accurately gauge an agent's FCR. So not only is call monitoring a labor intensive solution to the repeat call problem, it doesn't paint a full picture of your agent's abilities to resolve issues. It's no wonder that many quality monitoring programs provide results at the team or site level instead of the individual agent level.

Algorithm-based Performance Management

Other solutions try to measure FCR, but they don't provide a path for identifying and eliminating repeat call drivers agent by agent.

As discussed above, only a systematic algorithm-based approach can:

1. Tag every call as a repeat or not

    a. Tagging every call is critical. Gaps in the call data don't give a full picture and won't allow for actionable coaching for the agent who committed the error.

2. Track calls at the agent and call reason level

    a. Being able to automatically assign a call reason to every call provides visibility into which calls are repeat calls and provides granular detail for determining where agents are struggling to resolve customer issues.

3. Sequence the call events to visually represent an end-to-end customer call experience.

    a. Link the first call to the second call (and so on) at the agent level to easily see the customer's contact experience and assess the point of attack.

Analytics Powered Performance Management with a powerful sequence detection algorithm is the only way to comprehensively identify actionable repeat calls with accuracy and precision. Without the above, the attempt yields a partial truth, it can be misleading and is useless in terms of using repeat call data to improve agent performance. Improving operations by providing feedback on a handful of calls simply isn't enough to move the needle in the positive direction.

The most effective way to improve agent performance is to be able to coach them on fact-based findings. Not only will the agent's skepticism disappear, but the agent will have concrete examples of their mistakes to learn from.

Summary of Top 10 Agent Errors by FCR Technology Solution and Detect-ability

Below is a chart that shows the top 10 repeat call reasons and whether or not the solution would be able to accurately detect the call that led to the repeat call.

		Can the Solution Effectively Detect the Call That Led to a Repeat Call?			
	Repeat Call Reason	**Analytics Powered Performance Management**	**Speech Analytics**	**End-of-Call Question**	**Post Call Surveys**
"Detectable with some FCR solutions"	Improper Transfer	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	Agent told customer to call back	Yes	Yes	No	Maybe
	Didn't listen to customer's request/issue	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
"Impossible to Detect Without Analytics Powered CCPM"	Agent told customer wrong information	Yes	No	No	No
	Didn't set expectations properly	Yes	No	No	No
	Did not advise on using website tools	Yes	No	No	No
	Call Next Steps were not followed up/didn't follow through on commitments	Yes	No	No	No
	Customer lacks confidence in agent's answer	Yes	No	No	No
	Didn't give answer customer was looking for	Yes	Maybe	No	No
	Answered the question asked, but didn't anticipate the full customer issue	Yes	No	No	No

Accurately Identify and Address the Agent Errors Causing Repeat Calls

With the latest economic downturn, improving FCR will become even more important since reducing repeat calls will lower the operational costs in your call center and improve customer loyalty and retention.

The key is to select a solution that can accurately track FCR and detect repeat calls at the agent level to attack the most common drivers of repeat calls. By detecting the reasons that led to repeats by an individual agent for a specific call reason, you have the actionable data to accurately and effectively coach each agent on the precise areas where they are making mistakes. To assign FCR and calls reasons to 100% of your calls, with agent accountability, you need a sophisticated sequence detection algorithm.

Many solutions attempt to accurately measure FCR, but the only solution that has proven to significantly reduce repeat calls is Enkata's FCR Business Solution.

About Enkata

Enkata is the market and technology leader in Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) Performance Management for customer operations. Enkata's analytics-powered applications combine best-practice metrics, personalized dashboards, decision analytics and integrated workflow to improve the effectiveness of organizations' contact and claim centers every minute, every day. Fortune 500 companies choose Enkata to maximize the value of every customer interaction, deliver better service, control costs, and generate revenue. For more information, visit www.enkata.com or call (650) 227-6500.