

(WFM)

Working at home: a new model for call centers?





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Clients' expectations are at the heart of HR challenges

A study by BVA and Viséo Conseil's 2nd Customer Service Observatory showed that nearly 80% of French people have used a customer service department in the last 12 months. Their expectations are clear, with their priority on speed and efficiency. In fact, 7 out of 10 French people want to be able to reach their customer service departments 24/7. At the same time, although the French would like for the representatives responding to their questions to be in France rather than abroad, only 18% are ready to pay more to benefit from a service located in the country.

In this context, rethinking the existing economic model has become invaluable. It comes down to reassessing the choice of offshoring in the call center sector, and to proposing new forms of organization that are economical and sustainable, as well as increasing the quality of service. Working at home thereby appears to be an attractive alternative to offshoring jobs, while promoting professional well-being.

What is telecommuting?

Telecommuting is defined as, "any form of work organization in which a job that could have been done in an employer's office is regularly and voluntarily performed by an employee outside of this office, through the use of information and communication technologies, under an employment contract or an amended employment contract."

Art. 46 of French Law no. 2012-387, of March 22, 2012, related to simplifying the law and administrative procedures.

Organizing remote work in the call center sector, traditionally called "homeshoring" or "telecommuting", relies on a network of independent call center agents that work from their homes.

The changes in remote work in France and around the world

Emerging from the United States during the 2000s thanks to the advent of the Internet, working at home arose from the willingness of companies to lower operating costs, while increasing processing capacity, and not having to outsource their activities. This method of operation really became common practice for North American companies in 2004, partly due to technological progress in the means of communication (ADSL and virtual tools). With nearly 200,000 at-home call center

jobs in 2009, compared to 100,000 in 2005, employing WAHAs (Working at Home Agents) seems to have already become the norm. Boosted by companies like JetBlue, Arise International, and Alpine Access, the use of at-home workers concerns over 20% of contact centers on the other side of the Atlantic today.

This new form of work organization is being introduced in Europe with a few years of delay. First becoming established in the English-speaking countries, with companies such as Future Travel or Sensee, which employ over 600 at-home workers, working at home is gradually expanding in Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, and finally in France.

In the area of telecommuting, the idea of the "French exception" truly comes to light. Indeed, we see a tangible gap between the proportion of the working population concerned in France (7%) and in its European neighbors (13%). More specifically, although over 3000 call center agents perform their customer relations profession from home, they represent less than 1 out of 100 call center agents.

Working at home: an alternative to offshoring jobs, while promoting professional well-being.

Some data on how the French work

47 minutes. The home-to-office travel time for a person living in the Paris region.

47 kilometers (29 miles). The distance between the home of a rural employee and his or her office

140. The number of times a worker is disturbed during the day (every 3 min.)

€10,000. The cost of one workspace for a company, per year and per employee

Source: <http://www.telecentres.fr>

The trend in France: According to a 2011 IDC study on computers and telecommunications for new work organizations, only 24% of the 240 companies surveyed stated that they had employees working from home. And, for the 81% of those who responded yes, this way of working concerned less than 10% of their employees, and in half of the cases, was only one day a week . Over the last 12 months, the situation has remained unchanged, as telecommuting is stable in 93% of the organizations, while increasing in 4% of them, and declining in 3% of companies.

Despite the numbers that are slowly changing in France, it is still true that remote work answers the needs of internal departments, agents and clients, to improve the quality of service, while promoting the well-being of agents, and respecting the company's structural constraints:

Finance Department: minimize operating costs and optimize profits;

Marketing and Sales Department: maximize the quality of customer service;

Human Resources Department: are responsible for target recruiting and staff selection in terms of skills, while encouraging agents' satisfaction and motivation, in accordance with their expectations.



Benefits for everyone involved in the call center

Remote work in figures

2000: founding year
300,000 at-home agents in the world
3,000 agents concerned in France
i.e. 1% of agents in France
80% women
Company expenses: -20%
Agents' purchasing power: +10% to +20%

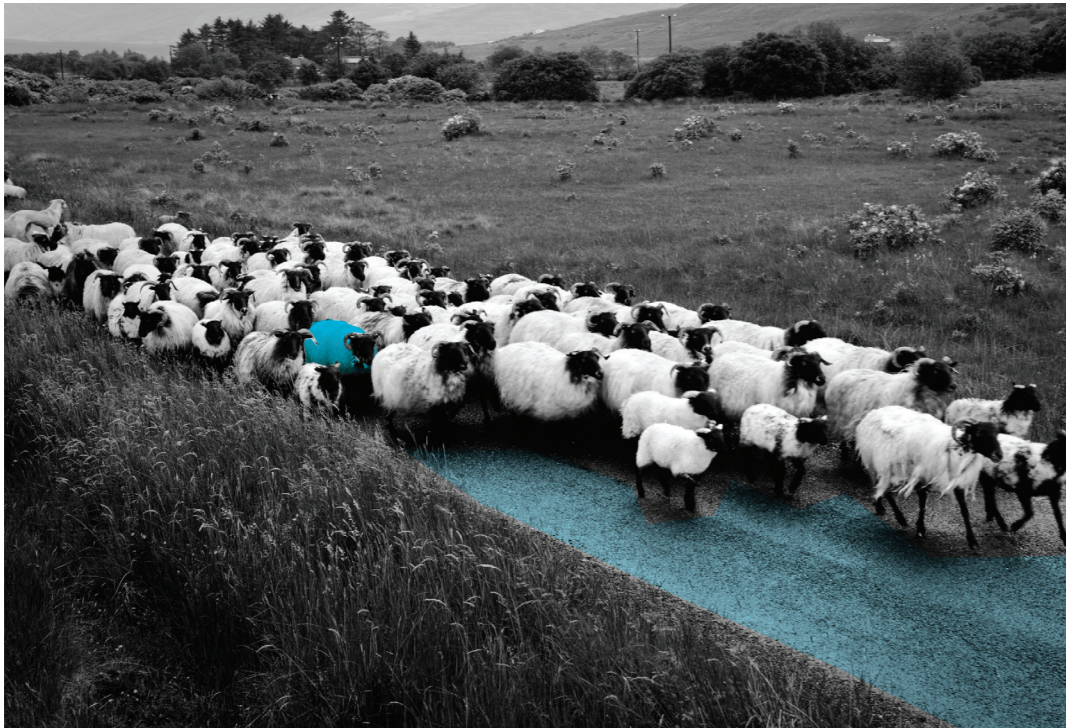
For agents

Optimal work comfort: Achieved in an environment that is calm and favorable to concentration, working at home is proving to be an alternative solution to the lack of privacy and noise, and in general to conditions that are sometimes difficult in call centers with an open space organization.

A way out of the transportation problem: With the elimination of home-to-office travel, agents accumulate daily time savings (at the beginning and end of the day), a financial gain, particularly in maintenance and gas costs for their vehicles, and a considerable reduction in transportation-related stress. Added to the financial and moral economy is the disappearance of the risks of travel accidents.

Additional income and economies of scale: Telecommuting and flexible schedules offer agents the possibility to work at several jobs and to generate additional income compared to their main activity. Thus, in the United States, retired people take advantage of this option to supplement their pension. Finally, working at home contributes to a significant reduction in expenses related to food service, transportation, and potential child care expenses.

Better balance between professional life and private life: Thanks to increased availability and a greater control of their work schedules, agents can more easily reconcile their private and professional lives.



Telecommuting represents a cure for the problem of transportation

Depending on personal circumstances, there is an increase in purchasing power of 10 to 20% for agents that work at home.

For companies

Targeted recruiting and reduction in turnover: With the possibility to recruit without geographical limitations due to the enlarging of the job pool, the candidates are better filtered. More experienced and motivated, they display more interest in being involved in the company. One of the direct consequences is lower turnover and a considerable reduction in initial training costs.

Increased productivity and quality of service: In this context, the motivation and satisfaction of agents are synonymous with service quality. Improvement of the percentage of problems resolved, better pick-up rate, increase in customer satisfaction: the use of remote work opens the door to local customer service, announcing a return to the basics in the area of customer relations.

Cost reduction: Reducing the number of people on site leads to a clear reduction in company expenses: office rental costs, rental fees, as well as infrastructure and hardware investments.

Improving processing capacity: The changeable schedules that result from remote work allow for adapting to variations in inflows and expanding the call centers' hours. Thanks to increased presence during certain periods, it is possible to absorb call peaks during nights and weekends, without necessarily creating overstaffing. At the same time, the company can quickly mobilize a large group for one-off operations. In the United States, it is also possible to cover a larger time period through working with individuals installed in different time zones.

Access an unlimited pool of resources

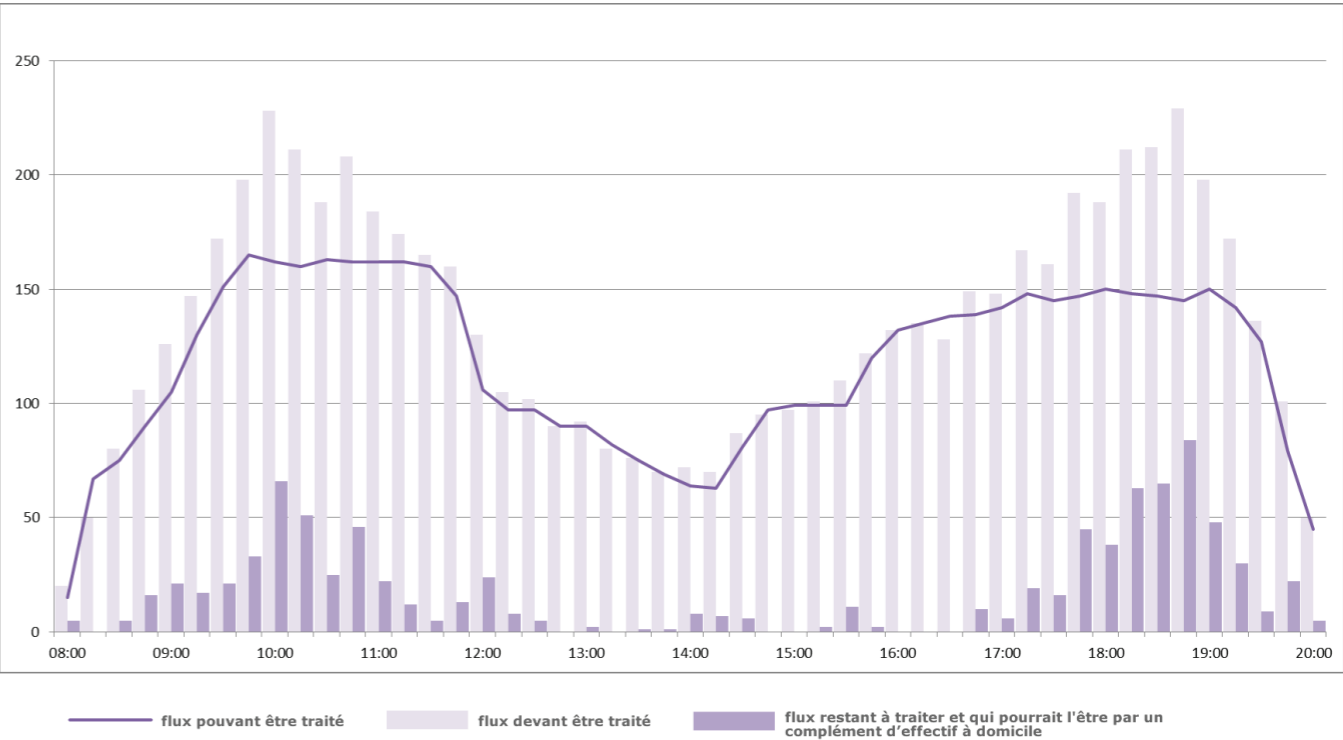
Reduction in absences and lateness: Without travel, there is no longer any dependence on traffic conditions, or the smooth functioning of public transportation. The risk of lateness becomes essentially zero. The same is true for absences, which are a true plague for call centers (reduction of around 75% according to the CEFRIO 2001 colloquium report).

Offshoring vs. Homeshoring*

Low cost of labor	Reduction in company expenses
Longer hours (flexibility in work time, time zones, etc.)	Flexibility in work time (elimination of home-to-office travel)
Ability to process large volumes	Optimizing work and improving the quality of service
Skills for low value-added tasks	Strengthening of agents' technical and relational skills
Salary incentives in the countries concerned by the relocation	Increased motivation and reduction in turnover

* "Homeshoring" here means employed or independent at-home workers

The traditional "double hump" curve, showing the fluctuation of calls during a contact center's standard day.



The start and end of the days are favorable for calling on additional resources, which have some flexibility in schedule to more easily absorb these peaks. Today, at-home call center agents provide this opportunity.

The changeable schedules allow for adapting to the variations in inflows.

For the community

Jobs in remote or disaster areas: Until now, essentially located around large cities, new jobs in the customer relations sector will be soon be found in rural zones or economic disaster areas.

Promotion of hiring disabled people: Working at home contributes to hiring disabled people who have trouble traveling, in particular due to the lack of adjustments required in a conventional plan: access to workstation, ease of travel, etc.

Sustainable development: In France, 250,000 people drive their cars to a call center daily. The reduction in travel thus creates a clear environmental impact. A recent study estimates that around 212 metric tons of CO2 emissions are reduced annually for every 300 at-home workers.



Start the company off in an eco-responsible approach.

Benefits linked to the expansion of telecommuting, organized into 4 themes

LEGAL & POLITICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Political will in Europe (ACE 2002...)- Political pressure promoting a more flexible work organization- Taking telecommuting into account as contributing to a sustainable development policy	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
CULTURAL & SOCIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Strong social aspiration for a better balance between private life and work life- Globalization of companies and increase in multi-site teamwork- Media "buzz" around telecommuting, and lobbying by at-home worker networks and groups around the world- Positive impact on purchasing power	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
EQUIPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Rapid development of ICT- Investments in high-speed infrastructures as part of a territorial planning policy- Increase of high-speed Internet in homes- Decrease in total cost of equipment necessary for telecommuting	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Recognition of advantages related to telecommuting- Communication about telecommuting as a competitive advantage- Development of a global HR policy that promotes well-being at work- Use of telecommuting as a tool to reorganize a company	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>

Weak impact Strong impact

Enlarging the job pool

Promotion of hiring disabled people

- Targeted recruitment
- Reduction in turnover
 - ↳ in initial training
 - ↳ in absences and lateness



Skills

- Experience
- Diplomas
- Languages
- Versatility

Satisfaction global

~~8%~~ 95% ~~9%~~
Quality of service

Companies

Clients

Employees

Increase productivity

Work comfort
Balance private life/work life

Increase in customer satisfaction companies & employees

Work schedules



- Longer hours
- No overstaffing
- Mobilization for one-off operations

Nights & Weekends
7 a.m. - 10 p.m.
Monday to Friday



Managing call peaks



- Additional income
- Increase in purchasing power
- Reduction in company expenses



PC
Telephone
Intranet



VPN
VoIP
High-speed



Document sharing
Instant messaging

Webmail
Videoconference



For agents

Risk of isolation: The full-time confinement of workers to their homes is likely to weaken their contact to the outside, which would increase the feeling of isolation.

Difficult to separate work life and private life: The flexibility in work schedules is sometimes synonymous with encroachment on the private life. In order to prevent excesses, the association between the workstation and living space must be accompanied with clear time and space limits.

Factors leading to a loss of concentration: If good work conditions are not created, the home can become an environment that encourages agents to become scattered, which lowers their productivity: television, telephone, children, etc. Self-discipline and organization are the key words for addressing these factors that lead to a loss of concentration.



An adapted workspace?

For companies

Data confidentiality: Although some companies are still hesitant about the idea of entrusting a part of their customer relations to an outsourcer due to data confidentiality, having confidence in remote workers, who are moreover independent, is even more difficult for them to imagine. In all cases, this necessarily involves increasing computer security and thinking about access to sensitive data.

Regulatory constraints: Calling on remote workers, whether employees or freelancers, implies being perfectly in line with the legislation that governs telecommuting. It is therefore necessary to define a clear and precise legal framework. This is achieved by involving social partners in the approach and setting up legal monitoring of the subject.

Difficult to manage remotely: While there are multiple possibilities for communication (telephone, videoconference, instant messages, etc.), the manager/managed relationship still remains more complicated to direct when the individuals are not physically present. For the manager, the key is to put in place a complex organization for sharing tasks between on-site and remote workers.

Regularly meeting with agents in office: Even if it contributes to lowering the physical presence of agents, remote work does not necessarily free the call center from regularly meeting with them to maintain their skills and training. Weakening the company culture: given that the absence of contact between at-home workers is likely to weaken the company culture, it is best to periodically organize on-site meetings and to also regularly perform retention and communications activities, in order to maintain the feeling of belonging and ensure social cohesion within the company.

The obstacles linked to the expansion of telecommuting, organized into 4 themes

LEGAL & POLITICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Poorly defined responsibility related to insurance- Discrimination of the population within the company- Protection of private life- Reversibility clause at the employees' request- Breakdown and payment of time worked remotely- Absence of public policy (State/legislature) and of promotion
CULTURAL & SOCIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Acceptance as a full-fledged work method- Fear of isolation- Fear of additional work without actual compensation- Global misunderstanding of telecommuting
EQUIPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Protection of exchanged data- Management and maintenance of decentralized networks- Size of investments needed- Transfer to high-speed infrastructures- Perfect control of ICT still incomplete
MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Change to "management by objectives"- Continuing negative perception of telecommuting by managers- Vision of telecommuting as a benefit that is given out arbitrarily- Inexistent training

Weak impact Strong impact

Source: Interviews, analysis by Roland Berger

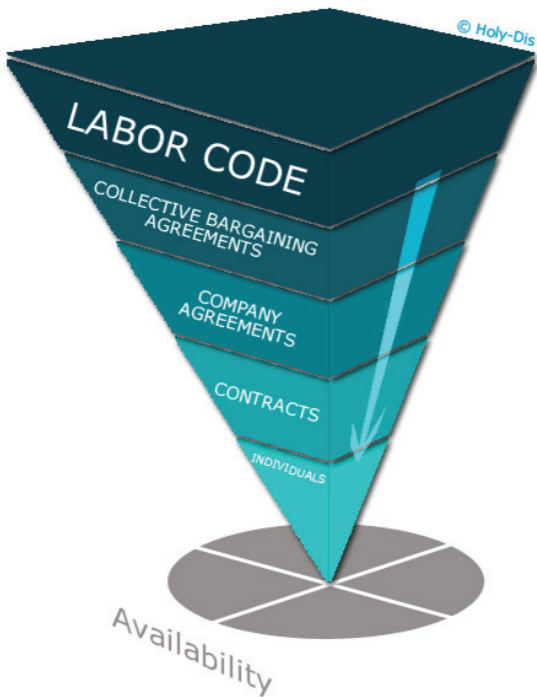
Maintain the feeling of belonging and ensure the social cohesion within the company.

In the call centers in France, the use of at-home employees is regulated by the legislation that governs telecommuting.

- Three texts structure and govern its use:
- European Framework Agreement of July 16, 2002
 - National Interprofessional Agreement of July 19, 2005
 - French Law no. 2012-387 of March 22, 2012 - Article 46 of the Labor Code

They specify the essential components of telecommuting, including its definition, the methods to implement and reverse it, the protection of private life, data security, as well as the provisions related to health and safety.

Excluding the liberal professions, specific employers, and the agricultural sector, these texts nevertheless encompass different forms of regular telecommuting, which meet a large range of situations and practices that are prone to rapid changes.



However, in spite of the undeniable will to regulate this form of work, it is necessary to recognize that the legal situation remains relatively vague, in the sense that working at home is an innovative concept for call centers.

As for independent workers, they are subject to legislation that is specific to service providers, which does not make any special provisions for telecommuting.

Moreover, there is no French case law at this time.

In the area of legislation, the differences between the OECD countries are minor. In fact, in most of these countries, telecommuting is not subject to a public employment policy.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that an increasing number of companies are including telecommuting in their Human Resources policy. There is thus a notable gap between companies' practices, which are moving towards telecommuting and the public policies that are following, more than orienting the movement.

The nature of the legal framework in connection with the proportion of at-home workers for 16 countries of the OECD

COUNTRY	NATURE OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK	% OF AT-HOME WORKERS
Germany	Company-wide and industry-wide agreement.	18.8% *
Australia	Employment contract.	24% *
Austria	Collective agreement, Informative Guide for Companies (2005).	14.2% *
Belgium	National Collective Agreement no. 85 bis of November 9, 2005, made mandatory by royal decree.	30% *
Canada	No law, elements in the Canadian Code (exercise of the right of association by remote workers).	12.3% *
Denmark	Collective agreement required at the confederal and/or sectoral level.	17.4% *
United States	Employment contract.	27.6% *
Finland	National interprofessional agreement (public and private).	32.4% *
France	French Law no. 2012-387 of March 22, 2012 - Article 46 of the Labor Code. National Interprofessional Agreement of July 19, 2005.	8.4% *
Italy	National Interprofessional Agreement of June 9, 2004 and collective agreement.	5% *
Japan	No law. Guide to good practice by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.	24% *
Norway	Decree implementing the law on telecommuting of July 5, 2002. Agreement between social partners of December 2002.	11.6% *
Netherlands	Collective agreements. Framework law for the public service. Telecommuting forum by the Ministry of Transportation.	14% *
United Kingdom	Guide recognized by the social partners.	22.3% *
Sweden	No law. Collective agreements in certain sectors.	26.8% *
Switzerland	No elements in the Code of Obligations.	8.3% *

Sources: Trade missions, CAS operation
* Gartner 2007
** Eurofound 2005
*** National source 2008

3 Several business models

The impact of remote work on organizing and HR scheduling

Due to its complexity, remote work requires a specific HR model, compared to that of call centers with an open space organization. Relying on the calling on resources working from their homes, it requires creating internal procedures to facilitate management.

- Organization of days worked on site
 - Team telephone meetings
 - Remote training
 - Daily communication with a manager
- 100% employees, 100% independents, a mixture of the two, exclusively at home or

working partly on site, there are several business models that integrate the notion of remote work, each having a different impact on the organization and HR scheduling. The choice therefore depends on the operational, technical, HR, and legal constraints of each call center.

Comparison of qualifications of on-site and at-home agents

	On-site agents	At-home agents
Average age	23 years old	38 years old
University diploma	30%	80%
Management experience	<10%	40%

Source: Frost & Sullivan study, 2010

The profile of at-home call center agents

According to a recent study by IDC*, at-home call center agents are mainly women around 30 years old. They already have professional experience and would like to now work from home (they have a child, live in a region with low employment, want to reduce their travel time, have another activity at the same time, etc.). The individual qualities required are autonomy, self-discipline, rigorousness and organization.

Improving the profile and skills of customer relations professionals.





Specialist in call answering, Eodom helps companies manage their customer relations. A contact center that is innovating through homeshoring, the company proposes managing customer relations on the basis of flexibility and the quality offered by virtual contact center technology, and a network of at-home independent agents.

Didier Ferrier - Founder and President of Eodom - <http://www.eodom.fr>



We chose to develop a single homeshoring model that thanks to independent agents, offers our clients the best balance between the quality of the relationship, the cultural proximity of agents, flexibility of use, and economic efficiency, in order to guarantee their satisfaction and loyalty. It is quite certainly a model of the future for customer relations. In fact, it includes another profitable economic model for clients, and eco-citizen values (social role, sustainable development), which guarantee a bright future. Moreover, we note an increasingly large demand for working at home in France. However, working at home cannot be self-sufficient. In order to greatly expand, it must be accompanied by a high-value offer that is profitable for clients, and made possible by independent agents.

"It is quite certainly a model of the future for customer relations."

to acquire greater purchasing power, while avoiding needless travel. In addition, we are championing a high-quality customer service offer, which is characterized by the motivation and choice of our agents for this activity. We have chosen to develop a genuine know-how for selecting independent agents since our creation in this area. We are committed to clearly understanding the motivations of agents in their approach to working at home. We communicate a lot with them during the selection phase, so to create a strong human connection. We obviously complete the selection process by validating their professional skills and ability to work autonomously in a computer environment.

Through its original platform, Eodom is thereby leading a steadily rising population of several hundred agents, and can respond to overflow problems (Eodom Optimum), seasonal activity (Eodom Maximum), and ongoing management of customer relations (Eodom Integral).

Thanks to these strengths, the company has experienced a constant increase in sales: +100% since its creation in 2007. The company was awarded in 2008 and 2009 for its strategy and innovation by the French Association of Customer Relations (AFRC). Eodom meets both the needs of large corporations for client contacts, as well as of rapidly growing companies, actors in e-commerce.

Through its innovative organizational model, Eodom supports social values. Working at home relocates activities to France, and allows independent agents



From the HR viewpoint, calling on freelancers seems to be the least restrictive solution. Indeed, their work can be put together with the work of occasionally employed temp workers, for which the company does not have the administrative burden. The use of independent workers offers more flexibility, but it is more complex to manage from a legal viewpoint.

Changing to a mixed population requires defining distinct scheduling rules, such as the daily work period, break period, quantity of work in a day, the times, as well as the number of days of on-site presence. Moreover, one of the key points to its success is to ensure a permanent connection with the at-home workers, so to avoid isolation and promote the manager/employee relationship. Lastly, this HR model considerably limits the call center turnover and training needs, while contributing towards employee satisfaction.

MeilleurContact is a company specialized in telecommuting for customer relations, founded in May 2009. It has ranked in the top 50 outsourcers in France since November 2010. MeilleurContact designed its social model with permanent contract employees, and a division of work time into 2/3 telecommuting, and 1/3 at a nearby site.



Nicolas Guyart
Co-founder of MeilleurContact

<http://www.meilleurcontact.com>



This model reconciles the best of both worlds: the world of industrial centers, which guarantees the respect of quality processes and performance management, and the world of telecommuting, which guarantees increased flexibility and profiles that are more mature and autonomous. Working partly at home and partly on site enables "Made in France processing, with all the flexibility, quality, and competitiveness necessary for sensitive processes.

Our social model, associated with a working time agreement, allows us to be more flexible and thus closer to the different needs. For example, we have in particular two long breaks in a schedule (in addition to break times), a lunch break up to three hours, an annualization with a low week at 0 hour, the reduction in unproductive time and travel time. Internal and external benchmarks show all the quality indicators (QS, Once and Done, transfer rate, conversion rate, NPS, etc.) are better with our model than in a conventional organization.

Our ambition was to create an innovative social model that enables processing industrial volumes in a state-of-the-art manner for the profession. We chose to place our employees at the heart of our plan by favoring rural and semi-rural zones for our offices, in order to reach a new population that never would have worked in a conventional center. We support their skills development for three months at our nearby site. During the implementation of telecommuting, all the employees spend one-third of their weekly time on site. This organization guarantees the quality of our services, the feeling of belonging, and the team approach.

From a technical viewpoint, MeilleurContact

provides each of its employees after an eligibility test, the equipment necessary for telecommuting (PC and dedicated telephone, tools for managing contacts, Webcam, VPN, identification and authentication tools). Our technology allows for real-time supervision of our services, in order to ensure quality and secure processing, regardless of the location.

In the area of WFM, Timesquare® was chosen to schedule the approximate 450 employees that work at home part time, for three sites located in the South West of France. At least 600 employees will eventually be scheduled from Saint-Laurent-de-Neste, Libourne and Redon. In order to meet the exponential increase, MeilleurContact needed to equip itself with a scheduling tool that was able

"The benchmarks show that all of the quality indicators are better with our model than with a conventional organization"

to manage an industrial-sized activity, while integrating the many specificities of employees working partly at home and partly on site, in a multichannel dimension, with multiple work breaks during the day, responsible for the harmonization agreement on work time related to scheduling.

The new employees benefited from better work conditions (with a lifestyle that is more in line with their expectations, a true increase in their purchasing power, and a continued connection with their company) thus promoting better quality, productivity and flexibility. With permanent contract employees and implementing the practice of working partly at home and partly on site, MeilleurContact is making its contribution to sustainable development.



T-Europe was looking for a model that was likely to ensure the flexibility needed to absorb one-off or uncertain volumes. The primary objective was to develop an appropriate strategy to respond to call peaks, known as the "double hump" curve, a daily challenge for contact centers. The only answer to this operational concern is "working at home". Thanks to its flexibility, telecommuting provides an answer to this problem.

Since 2010, an average of 120 employees have worked from home for variable periods.

Implementing telecommuting was arranged around 4 axes:

- *Technology.* With the change in technologies, using an approach oriented towards virtualization, application sharing, hosting and the use of on-demand.
- *The European and Belgian legal framework.* The references are contained in Collective Work Agreement (CCT) No. 85 of November 9, 2005 concerning telecommuting, modified by CCT No. 85 bis of February 27, 2008.
- *Focus points for legal framework.* The voluntary character, an individual written agreement prior to performing telecommuting, specific work conditions that are identical to the conditions for on-site workers, an adapted work organization, the installation and maintenance of equipment and the management of failures, data protection, health and safety, training and career opportunities, same collective rights as other employees, etc.
- *Work organization.* The organization of at-home workers' labor is subject to the same rules as those applied to agents working on site. A number is made available to at-home workers for technical

malfunctions. Training, like evaluations, are organized at the company's site. In general, the at-home worker spends 4 days at home and one on site. This goal of this model is to avoid the feeling of isolation by the at-home worker.

This implementation required the integration of a new scheduling tool (WFM): Timesquare®.

"A model likely to ensure the flexibility needed to absorb one-off or uncertain volumes."

Thanks to the operational implementation of "working at home", T-Europe now proposes its clients a flexible solution that is unique in Belgium's contact center market. There are multiple benefits of this solution:

- Flexibility and adapting schedules to the reality on the ground. Day and night shifts represent a true gain in terms of customer satisfaction, accessibility, etc.
 - Decrease in absences and late arrivals. Telecommuting also outsmarts the problems related to traffic, social movements, etc. It should be emphasized that absences for the group of at-home workers does not exceed 6%, which is very low for the contact center activity sector.
 - Access to a job with schedules and an environment that are adapted to people who have familial or mobility constraints.
 - Recognition of environmental problems (pollution) and social problems (workers' well-being) by the company.
 - Additional resources likely to enter into production if needed for unforeseeable events.
- At the moment, the only drawback encountered is the willingness of certain employees to work the least amount of time possible at the company's site.

Combine the flexibility of telecommuting with strengthening team spirit, motivation, and social links.

T-Europe helps the companies on a daily basis to improve remote customer relations through different solutions for total or partial externalization.



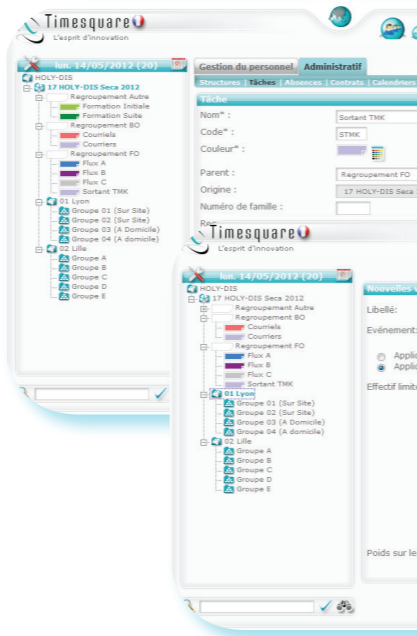
EUROPE

Etienne Carsetti – Chief Operating Officer of T-Europe

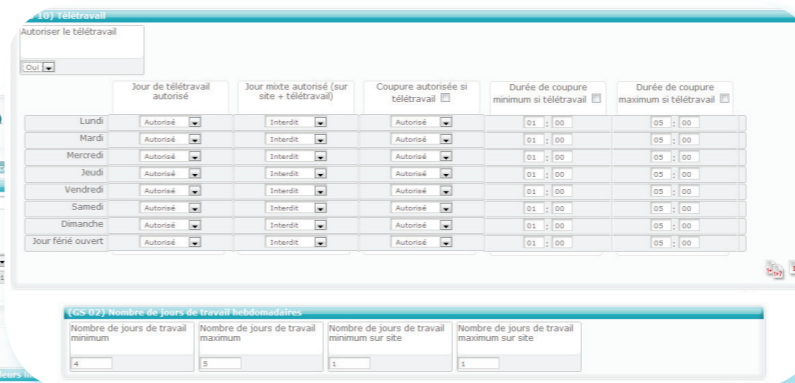
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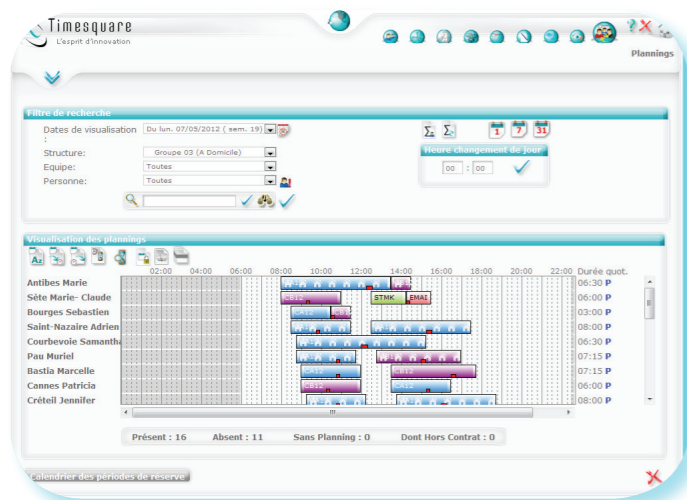
1 Simple information identifies the employees concerned by remote work



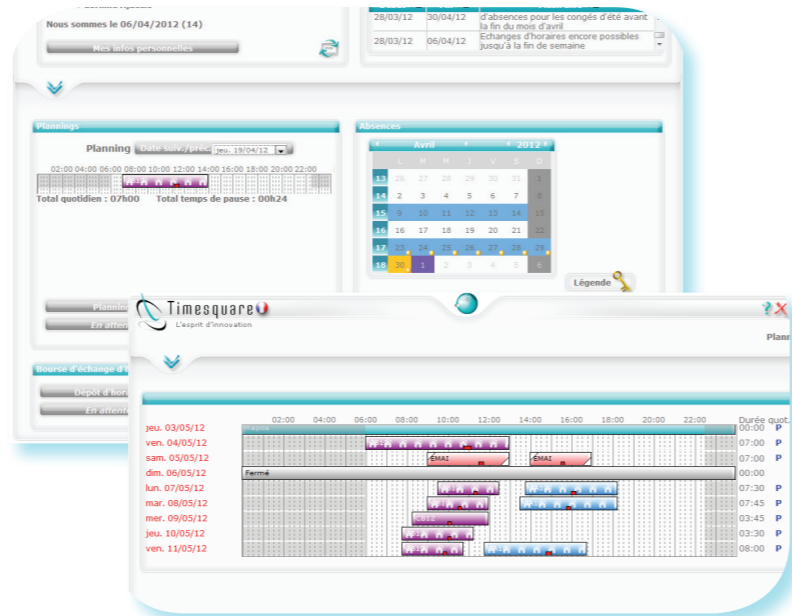
2 Scheduling rules adapted to the activities that may be relocated to homes



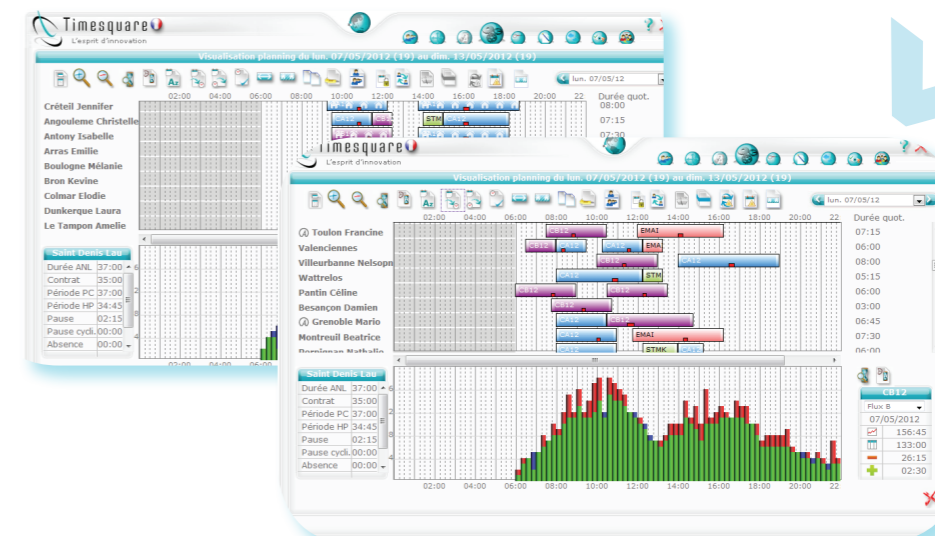
3 Customizable management rules that differentiate on-site and off-site work



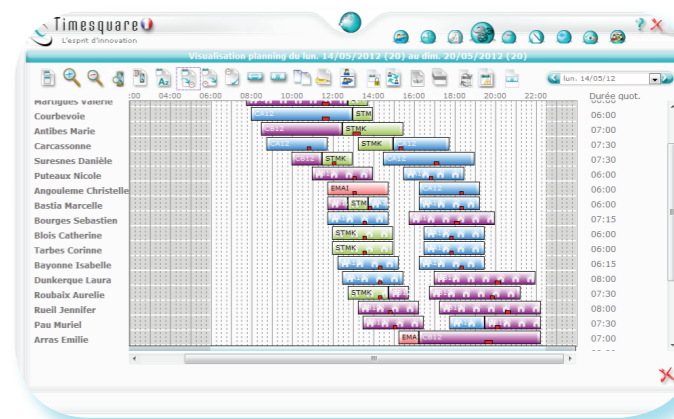
7 A clear vision for supervision



6 A distribution of work schedules facilitated by the ICT for the call center agents



5 Graphs displaying the contribution of remote agents and local call center agents



4 Immediate visualization of the typology of work schedules

A collaborative tool adapted to the working at home model for a standardized distribution cycle

A technological environment at the service of companies

One of the prerequisites for a remote work operation is to install computer tools that manage the distribution of calls, access to business solutions, and the supervision of WAHAs.

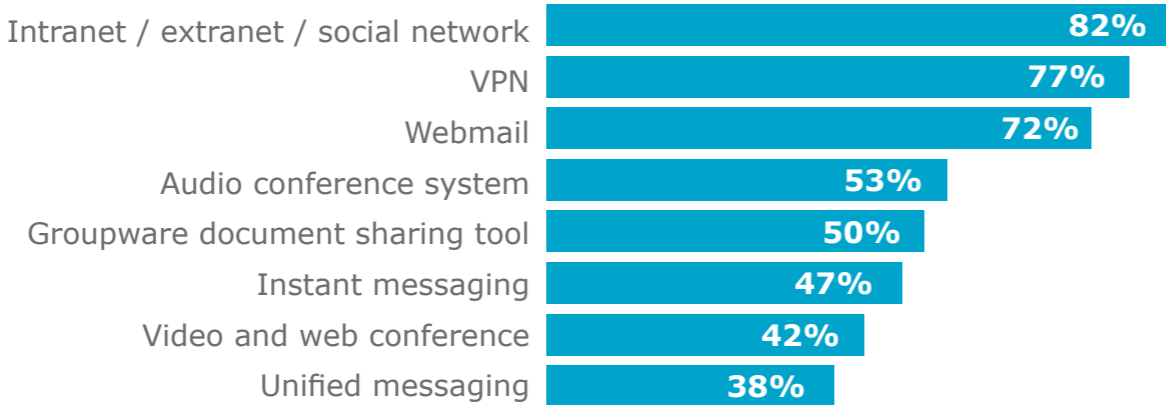
With the spread of high-speed residential Internet, the rise of VPN, as well as the explosion of computers and portable telephones, a large doorway has opened, favoring the development of telecommuting in companies. Moreover, the defining of strict processes and integrating data security tools (firewalls, connection tools, dedicated workspaces, etc.) is making it possible to control risks, and to favor information privacy.

The consistency and reliability of the equipment are essential

The suppliers of materials and specialized software programs have been skilled at adapting their offers in order to equip agent workstations with high-performance tools, in a reliable and secure computer environment. These solutions also offer to managers monitoring and support applications that are in line with the new needs created by telecommuting.

The development of a remote work organization will depend on the ability of the decision makers to have confidence in the model.

Use of telecommuting help tools in companies



Source: IDC France study for Bouygues in 2011

Unifying the two work environments and optimizing call center productivity.

With more than 300,000 users over 80 countries, Altitude Software (Easyphone in France) is one of the leaders in the world market for solutions in managing customer interactions. These solutions allow for a dynamic and unified management of the contact centers/ customer relations centers, repositioning them at the heart of the company's activities.

Its "Altitude uCI" (Unified Customer Interaction) software suite manages large volumes of interactions, in particular in the areas of customer service, help desks, collections, telemarketing, surveys, etc. One of its strengths lies particularly in its ability to speed up the creation of services and campaigns through its Unified Design Studio, Unified Agent Interface, Integration Server, and power features for Routing, Dialing, Vocal Portal, real-time Monitoring and Reporting.

Lydia Nebout
Marketing & Communications Manager
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<http://www.altitude.com>



In the context of the increased growth in homeshoring, companies must be careful about the technological environment they create. Indeed, it must be adapted to meet three essential criteria for homeshoring and telecommuting: perfect control of the agent workstation, VoIP, and provisioning of agents.

Provisioning and perfect control of the agent workstation

From managing HR (managing schedules, training programs, sharing knowledge between agents) to real-time supervision of call centers (call monitoring, voice recording, remote screen sharing, secured access to hosted business applications, remote control of an agent workstation), the chosen software solution must enable the unification of these two work environments, and if possible optimize call center productivity.

Another aspect to remember is that the equipment must offer a high rate of availability and performance. This is the case of the Altitude Software solution. Easycare, one of the French leaders in the call center market that has employees working at home, explains that, "The stability of the Altitude uCI solution, and the performance of its predictive engine, made it possible for us to experience large productivity gains in 2010, for a penetration rate of optimal B2C files up to 80%."

VoIP

In the context of traditional call centers, the creation of new agent workstations is often a source of considerable, costly constraints. However, working at home has the advantage of offering large flexibility in terms of human resources, and it makes it possible to avoid overstaffing. By installing an open-source IPBX (VoIP branch exchange), like the one offered by Altitude Software (Altitude vBox integrated into the Altitude uCI software suite), the contact centers receive a fast and substantial return on investment, in particular when adding on to an agent workstation. This plan also protects existing investments.

"New Generation" contact centers

Working at home is not the only trend that is shaking up the contact center world! The success of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. requires companies to take into account the commercial potential that is offered by these new communications channels, in terms of sales, retention or differentiation. In fact, according to TSIA's 2011 survey, more than 85% of companies have adopted these new channels.

So having a solution that is able to manage and run all the interactions in a unified way, whether they come from conventional media or social media, can be a competitive advantage. The question to first ask yourself is, Do my clients use these types of media? If so, which ones?

The new version of Altitude uCI8 integrates the major innovations that allow contact centers

"New Generation contact centers"

to improve their performance, but also to make the transition to this new generation of "extended" customer service, through: business KPIs, a unified multimedia workflow including social networks as a new interaction channel, campaign optimization, a real-time management portal, etc.

Having perfect control of the components of working at home and the resulting HR organization (skills, scheduling, etc.), is certainly an asset to better adapt to them.





Vincent Vanden Bossche - President of ECCCO

<http://www.eccco.org>

Telecommuting, which refers to a diversity of remote work practices, now has the wind in its sails. Cath Sullivan, Senior Lecturer in psychology at the University of Central Lancashire in the United Kingdom, wrote in an article in New Technology, Work and Employment, that "telework must be defined according to the nature of each project, considering that the nature of telework varies according to the transportation, information and communication technologies, workplace, proportion of decentralized work, and contractual arrangements."

The following categories of at-home workers can thus be identified: Home-Based Telecommuting, Satellite Office, Neighborhood Work Center, and Mobile Work. Today, the expansion of telecommuting offers real alternatives for the contact center sector. For example, 300,000 at-home agents already work for Apple, AT&T or Capital One. Therefore, employers no longer need to invest in large call centers, and employees no longer need to travel to their workplace. With 32.4% in Finland, 26.8% in Sweden, and 22.3% in the United Kingdom, the Scandinavians and English-speaking countries are trail-blazers in the working at home arena. This compares to the countries of the South, which have relatively low averages: 9% in France and 5% in Italy.

This new form of work organization presents a number of benefits: a better quality of life, far from the stress of open-space call centers, the absence of transportation to arrive at work, etc. On the other hand, the physical removal can create considerable anxiety, such as the fear of being excluded or losing

social links due to being far from a work group. Of course, deciding to take the step starts from a process of reflexion and a strategic decision that is extremely important for contact centers. As of today, few of them have clearly understood. One thing is sure: only flexibility can currently save the contact center economic model, which requires both availability for the client, and quality of service provided.

In other words, we must be convinced to 'reverse' the existing economic model. Even if the current model is too limited by the constraints related to regulating work time, the latter may be greatly improved by adopting new forms of work organization.

All the experts agree that by 2020, i.e. tomorrow, the call center as we know it today, will tend to disappear from an organizational viewpoint.

In its place, we are seeing the growth of new forms of work, at home and in hub buildings: the need to group together one or several teams of agents in the same place will become less important, and companies will no longer be required to heavily

invest in real estate and equipment. In short, on the basis on these observations, it seems clear that between now and then contact center agents will be able to work with increasing mobility by using technologies (high-speed wireless, SaaS, etc.) and ad-hoc equipment (laptops, tablets, etc.) in line with our times.

All of this is within easy reach and will promote a completely different professional well-being.

Telecommuting,
supporting the flexibility
of the contact center
economic model.

Speculations on the future of remote work

In spite of major technological advances, in France there is a paradox between the exponential growth of tools that promote putting in place telecommuting in call centers, and the fact that proportionately few centers in France have taken the step.

Indeed, if working at home has been a complete success in English-speaking countries, it is necessary to recognize that it has only just started to be seen in France, where its many benefits run up against cultural, regulatory and privacy obstacles. There are however a growing number of initiatives in this direction, and an increasing number of remote work pioneers appearing in the customer relations landscape. Is the call center world about to become an economic model that promotes the expansion of working at home?

One thing is sure: although today's tools have evolved, the mentalities need to follow the movement. At this stage, it is becoming clear that the development of a homeshoring organization in the coming years will mainly depend on the ability of decision makers to have confidence in the model.

Is the call center world about to become an economic model that promotes the expansion of working at home?



<i>Homeshoring:</i>	The organization of a call center relies on a network of independent call center agents working from home.
<i>HR scheduling:</i>	Creation of resource planning that takes into account personal, organizational, and legal constraints.
<i>ICT:</i>	Information and Communication Technologies.
<i>Nearshoring:</i>	Relocating call center activity from a country's economic centers to rural regions where the employment pool can offer a less expensive labor, and tax benefits.
<i>Offshoring:</i>	Relocating call center activity abroad, essentially for cost purposes, either internally or through an outsourcer.
<i>Outsourcer:</i>	Service provider that has an infrastructure for call processing, and qualified personnel to answer or make calls.
<i>Provisioning:</i>	Automatic assignment of resources to a user station (workstation, telephone, etc.).
<i>Quality of service:</i>	Ability of the call center to meet the different needs of its clients through its features.
<i>Telecommuting:</i>	Any form of "remote work", i.e. the forms of organization and/or performance of work made possible outside of the conventional unity of time and place, through telecommunications and the Internet, for a service or employment relationship.
<i>VPN (Virtual Private Network):</i>	Interconnection of different local networks via a shared infrastructure, the objective being to preserve software security, which can be used inside a local network.
<i>WAHA (Working at Home Agent):</i>	Call center agent working from home.

About Holy-Dis

A recognized player in scheduling and optimizing Human Resources (WFM), and activities in high-stress environments, Holy-Dis designs, publishes and implements its solutions in diverse sectors, such as contact centers, distribution, logistics, and restaurants... Thanks to a culture of customer satisfaction, and strong sectoral, technological, legal, and business expertise, Holy-Dis helps its clients experience significant gains in productivity and cost reductions: 'The right person in the right place at the right time'.

Share your experience with us

Please share with us your experiences and suggestions about our vision to optimize scheduling and remote work for call centers. You can send us an email on this topic at the following address: marketing@holydis.com.

To learn more about Holy-Dis and its solutions, visit the site www.holydis.com.

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