What is an Effective Multilingual Support Strategy?
86% of contact centres receive non-English calls, according to the International Customer Management Institute (ICMI).

Without a documented multilingual support strategy, your contact centre may receive non-English calls, and you may not be aware of it. Without training or tools, agents cannot provide the best possible service to callers who prefer a language other than English. Instead, agents may attempt to speak in English or hang up on the caller; in both cases, these actions may detrimentally affect first call resolution, average handle time, and customer satisfaction.
ICMI’s research revealed that most contact centre leaders see language support as a competitive differentiator, and over 40% of UK contact centres already support languages other than English.

This makes good sense in the UK:

10% of the population has a primary language other than English, preferring to communicate in their native language.

Close to 25% of the economy is based on exports, with after-sales support increasing in importance.

72% of consumers said they would be more likely to buy a product with information in their own language.

ICMI’s research also found that 69% of contact centre leaders believe their non-English contact volume will increase over the next five years.
MULTILINGUAL SUPPORT AFFECTS YOUR CUSTOMERS

Would you rather call a company that speaks your primary language?

Though it may be a small part of your business, most contact centre leads say multilingual support is a competitive differentiator. According to ICMI, 72% of contact centre leaders believe that supporting a customer’s native language increases customer satisfaction, a key factor shown to affect retention, revenue, and other important metrics.

These positive effects on customer satisfaction took many forms. Over 400 contact centre leaders told ICMI that multilingual support improves satisfaction with customer support.

- 71% Positively impacts customers that prefer a language other than English.
- 70% Increases loyalty to the brand.
Language barriers can frustrate customers and employees alike. According to ICMI, 66% of agents become frustrated with language barriers, and 62% are concerned about information being misinterpreted when a bilingual agent or interpreter is not available.

Giving English-speaking staff the tools to overcome these barriers is vital to any effective multilingual support program. Staffing bilingual agents is one popular solution today, but the high fixed costs tend to leave some languages underserved or altogether unserved.

Nearly 60% of contact centre leaders told ICMI that agent productivity and efficiency improved with the introduction of a Phone Interpretation service. 30% saw no change in metrics.

Call centre leaders reported that adding a Phone Interpretation service boosted key metrics, including:

- First Call Resolution (FCR)
- Average Handle Time (AHT)
- Utilization
- Transfers/escalations
- Errors/rework
- Quality of Call
Considerations when developing your multilingual support strategy

Your customers’ preferences dictate use of certain contact channels - what tools do your employees have in each one? Effective multilingual support programs document and scrutinize the tools used in each channel.

**Telephone Channel**

**Bilingual Agents**

68% of contact centre leaders prefer bilingual agents for language support, according to ICMI’s research. It makes sense – contact centres can control the quality, training, and scheduling of bilingual agents. However, bilingual agents come with higher fixed costs – they must be paid whether they actually receive any non-English calls - and other potential issues.

It can happen – a bilingual agent’s amazing communications skills in English may cause the assumption of proficiency in their other language. But customers will notice if an agent speaks informally or has limited vocabulary. Consider having language proficiency testing conducted as part of bilingual agents’ onboarding process. CyraCom offers language proficiency testing via telephone – an agent need not leave the office to get tested.
ICMI offers these recommendations regarding bilingual agents:

- **Hire true bilingual agents** – Obtain professional language testing from an internal or external expert. Consider language proficiency testing for bilingual agents.

- **Provide Cultural Training** – Ensure bilingual agents have working knowledge of cultural nuances for the group(s) of people that share their language.

- **Implement a Support System** – Training, QA, and technology should be adapted or created to function in the language provided to the customer, lest quality suffer without you knowing it.

**Bilingual Agent Bottlenecks**

Of contact centers not offering multilingual support, they cite the following as to why:

- Limited budget (33%)
- Unable to hire multilingual agents (21%)
- Lack resources needed to manage multilingual service (15%)

Phone Interpretation can be a low-cost, pay-per-use alternative or addition to bilingual agents.

More on these tips can be found in ICMI’s larger study on the topic at:
What is Phone Interpretation?

Phone Interpretation can help any English-speaking agent to speak hundreds of languages in seconds via a 3-way conference call with the customer and a live, human interpreter.

Telephone interpretation is paid for by the minute. There are no fixed costs associated with the service like there would be with hiring a bilingual agent.

Almost 80% of contact centre leaders are familiar with Phone Interpretation, but only 35% claim it is standard in their industry.

Phone Interpretation

Of those who track both, 82% of contact centre leaders report that CSAT scores with Phone Interpreters are equal or better than scores with bilingual agents.

Paying by the minute for telephonic interpreters offers several benefits, including:

• Handling new languages seamlessly when expanding to new territories or countries.
• Empowering staff by giving them a tool to communicate with any customer.
• Covering language needs in the event of absences of bilingual agents or periods of higher call volume.
The Company’s contact Center model – Interpreter supervisors have raised stations to provide support to their team members in the rare event help is needed on a call. Center management regularly walks the floor to enforce the Company’s clean desk policy.

You can also expect to pay less overall for phone interpreters, especially for languages that comprise less than 1,000 calls monthly. Compared to the extra costs of recruiting, training, wages, and monitoring for bilingual agents, the per-minute purchasing of Phone Interpretation services is cost-effective in many situations. As one Customer Experience Analyst put it, “Ultimately, providing an interpreter service to our non-English customers helps to resolve the issues, as the nature of our work requires extensive training that would cost more to train bilingual reps.”
CHAT, EMAIL, WEB, AND SOCIAL CHANNELS

An effective multilingual support strategy starts by determining your needs and ensuring each contact channel has tools to provide service, regardless of a customer’s language.

Translation and Localization

Self-service options like FAQs reduce volume in other channels, so translating this information could have similar effects for non-English speakers. You may also explore pre-translating certain responses in written form. That way, an English-only agent can have professional, trusted translations available to route customers to channels with better language support. Likewise, in-language support for these channels can be made more consistent with standardized, translated responses.

WARNING: “free” translation tools may be helpful in certain situations, but they waive all liability resulting from mistranslations. These services also keep all information entered into them, meaning there is no assurance of privacy or confidentiality.

If you are interested in obtaining more details on effective multilingual support or a detailed checklist to work with, email infoeu@cyracom.com
About CyraCom

CyraCom is the leading provider of interpreting services to contact centres and government agencies. Whether by phone, video, mobile app, or written text, CyraCom’s language interpretation services improve customer and employee satisfaction for thousands of organizations. Offering hundreds of languages and operating 24/7, CyraCom’s interpreters are accessible within seconds of selecting a language.

CyraCom relies on large-scale interpreter call centres that are audited under the ISO 9001:2008 standard. More full-time interpreters work for CyraCom than for the United Nations.

CyraCom’s internal audit group aligns our standards with our clients’ in the areas of data security, business continuity, and disaster recovery. CyraCom regularly hosts organizations with confidentiality and privacy requirements to audit the Company’s interpreter contact centres to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations.