RIGHTNOW GUIDE:
First Contact Resolution

First of a series

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TARGET AUDIENCE

This guide is intended for the following audiences.

- RightNow Sales – Account Executives, Solutions Architects, Solutions Consultants, Customer Success Managers, etc.
- RightNow Professional Services – Program Managers, Project Managers and Consultants
- Clients – Executive Management, Contact Center Management, Customer Service Management

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW/ABSTRACT

This white paper is the first of a three part series addressing one of the key performance measures in the Contact Center: First Contact Resolution or FCR. It is important to note that we have expanded the scope from the commonly referred to First Call Resolution since we believe it should be measured for all contacts regardless of channel. In this paper, we begin by defining FCR and provide industry statistics from a few expert sources including the average FCR achieved by RightNow customers in 2009. In addition, we’ll review different insights on the various methods companies use to measure FCR.

The second paper follows up with an FCR improvement strategy, providing a framework for developing your own Customer Experience improvement program. We feel it’s worth noting that FCR should not become the primary focus or measure to indicate a successful Customer Experience; it’s another analysis measurement used with customer feedback, quality monitoring, and other key operational performance indicators for organizations to refine processes.

The third paper will close out the series with a few case studies from our customers and share their stories as we tracked their progress through the year. In addition, we’ll provide an executive level summary of findings from the 2010 FCR benchmark study.

In the numerous conversations we have with our clients when helping them map out application functionality to satisfy their business requirements, which will enable them to achieve the desired results with the RightNow CX solution, the subject of First Contact Resolution as a measure for success is mentioned with increasing frequency. Among all other success measures, it is this measure in particular that generates more provocative discussions on how to measure and ways to improve, primarily because so many other measures are impacted by and have impact on FCR. Based on our client discussions and from our collective experience, we consider FCR to be one of the most critical key performance indicators for how well the organization is servicing the customer’s experience as well as overall operational efficiency. The remainder of this guide digs into the causes and effects that have impact on this measure as well as sharing insights from other industry experts.
UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Though First Contact Resolution is a powerful and valuable metric because it serves as a key performance indicator for both customer experience and operational performance and efficiency, it’s also one of the most difficult measures to correctly assess. Many organizations find FCR particularly challenging to measure effectively when it comes down to the customer’s perspective on whether their inquiry was resolved to their satisfaction. Consequently, we’ve started this guide by providing a few definitions for FCR as well as insights within the following sections to help you define and measure it effectively for your organization.

According to our research, First Contact Resolution has been defined by industry experts quite simply, when the customer’s inquiry or problem is resolved in one contact.

According to International Customer Management Institute (ICMI), First Contact Resolution (FCR) is the percentage of initial calls that do not require any further contacts to address the customer’s reason for calling. The customer does not need to contact the call center again to seek resolution, nor does anyone within the organization need to follow up. Ideally, First Contact Resolution should be defined from the customer’s perspective.

\[
\text{FCR} \text{ is both an efficiency measure and an effectiveness measure. It is a leading indicator of customer satisfaction because customers want their support requests resolved immediately. FCR is also important to the support center because high FCR saves money.}
\]

\text{Source: Kristen Robertson}

As with most metrics that help drive operational performance improvement, organizations need to work through their own definition, develop an appropriate framework to measure it consistently and syndicate it across business units and sites (outsourced vendors specifically) in order to maintain integrity.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM THROUGH BEST PRACTICES

Some experts believe FCR is a customer oriented metric that should apply only to live contacts within the phone channel and is calculated as the percentage of contacts resolved on first interaction with the customer; while others believe that calls requiring a callback, or transferred to another source of support, or escalated to a manager or other support group do not qualify for first contact resolution. Our analysis casts further light on these differences of opinion.

It’s not realistic to think every interaction can be resolved on first contact. For most organizations, there will always be issues that require further research, work or help. That said, to see FCR improvement, it is essential to assess many facets of the operation that contribute to the customer’s contact experience, such as processes, technology, agent training and coaching programs, and carefully review for issues or barriers to the customer; inhibitors to higher FCR.
An alarming 70% of all FCR initiatives fail to result in a change the customers notice due to poor execution.¹

A Formula for First Contact Resolution

We’ve standardized our reports using the following formula as the basic starting point for calculating FCR when using the RightNow CX, the customer experience suite:

FCR Formula = (# resolved incidents closed on the first contact) divided by (total # incidents) * 100%

In the following section we discuss a couple of factors that organizations should consider when measuring FCR. If the conditions outlined are found to exist, it would be advisable to adjust the formula by removing or subtracting the types of contacts which require repeat calls.

1. Analyze Repeat Contacts Across all Channels for Root Cause Analysis

Analyze your repeat contacts across all the interaction channels – not just the phone channel. Organizations concerned only with repeat inbound calls, for instance, risk missing the broad spectrum of valuable insight from the interactions occurring across other channels.

Root cause analysis will help to identify reasons why customers issues aren’t getting resolved on first contact or why they cross channel. Once problem areas are identified, determine why calls are not being handled properly the first time, and fix the source of the problem. Research tells us that more than half of phone contacts have a self-service interaction related to them either before or after the call. Additionally, 25 percent of customers who use the Web subsequently use a full-service channel to complete a transaction.

2. Analyze Customer Profiles for More Predictive Contact Patterns

The more an organization knows about its customers and their contact behaviors, the better they can provide superior levels of service. Analyze the customer’s interaction patterns for repeat contacts in order to develop better customer profiles and a more personalized customer experience, which will contribute to first contact resolution, since customer’s cite one of the highest reasons for repeat contacts is that they were not satisfied with the response they received; even if it was the correct response. For instance, with RightNow CX, an organization’s technology infrastructure can be tightly integrated and is designed to leverage their customer’s information as well as access back office data to provide more intelligent service automation and routing to agents with the appropriate service skills equipped with information about where, what, and when the customer has previously interacted with the organization for information in attempts to resolve an issue on their own, and be empathetic while providing guidance to the customer for the next interaction. This is the real-time aspect to knowledge at the moment of truth.

Through analysis of data from systems like RightNow CX, which can analyze transactional data as well as data from different data sources for historical analysis, companies will likely find very relevant information about its customers contact behaviors and preferences. If you’re like most companies we work with, it will become readily apparent that there are A.) Contact types that cannot be resolved in a single contact and B.) There are segments of

¹ Weber Associates
customers who will call back because their issue cannot be resolved in a single call for a variety of reasons.

For some companies, a majority of customer contacts will only utilize the phone channel for certain types of issues or inquiries that may be perceived as unable to be self-resolved online or who may fear conducting unsecure transactions online. For a given number of contacts, it’s possible that there are specific issue types which are more complex or perhaps have business processes which require two or more calls to resolve on average rather than one. For this population of contacts if unable to be broken down further to reduce repeat contacts, consider special routing to a different tier of agents skilled to handle more complex issues within the first contact and minimize need for additional repeat contacts. For call types or issues unable to be resolved in a single call, provide the customer with as much detail about the process to resolve the issue within the first inbound contact and be sure agents follow outlined processes in order to ensure the customer has a good experience.

By contrast, companies may have customers extensively utilize online functionality, but always require assistance for a specific type of issue or problem. For the population of these contacts, a common practice to facilitate resolution when the customer escalates to an assisted contact is to provide the customer with the information he or she will need in order to work through the issue with the assistance required to solve the problem.

A customer’s engagement with an organization can take them across many channels - simply booking an airline ticket might involve the internet, voice, e-mail and face-to-face service at different points of the transaction. Adam Faulkner suggests that businesses should “aim to ensure that their service is personalized and consistent across the entire transaction irrespective of the channel,”

FCR measurement goes hand in hand with contact reason tracking. After identifying the customer channel preference behavior for specific contact types, as part of the overall strategy for improving FCR, it will also be worth noting or listening to the customer’s feedback when delivering self-service content either through IVR or online via the web. It’s critical to review the way in which content is delivered by channel and measure its effectiveness on specific customer segments so as to better understand exactly when contacts will escalate to an agent-assisted channel.

3. Review Policies and Processes
After reviewing contact patterns and customer profile analysis, what will jump out will be inefficient or ineffective processes.

Organizations looking to improve FCR should view this as an opportunity for continuous improvement and conduct process and policy evaluations. Identify the corner cases where corporate policy may contribute to repeat calls but cannot be changed. In these cases, consider subtracting these call types from the FCR calculation. There may also be processes which contribute to repeat calls in the same way. If unable to be revised, consider subtracting these types of repeat calls from the FCR calculation. For example, as a corporate policy, a manager approval may be required when customers seek to have charges waived or credit above a specific dollar amount. For these contact types, escalation above the initial tier is likely to occur and subtracted from the first contact population.
Now that we’ve defined, provided a formula for measuring First Contact Resolution, and offered some keys to measuring, we’ll briefly discuss why First Contact Resolution is important and what the impact is to the contact center.

**Why Is First Contact Resolution So Important?**

Among companies surveyed by the Ascent Group in their recent benchmark study, they indicate First Contact Resolution is considered to be one of the five most important operational metrics in the call center. It is a measure of how effectively the contact center performs at handling customer requests the first time, and is a function of many factors, including the complexity and types of transactions handled, the experience of your agents, the quality of agent training, and the tools your call center agents use.

According to Ascent Group, the following are the top five KPI’s for contact centers:

**Top Five KPI’s**
1. Cost Per Contact
2. Customer Satisfaction
3. First Contact Resolution Rate
4. Agent Utilization
5. Aggregated Contact Center Performance

Many contact center organizations may measure FCR correctly but due to business rules may close incidents before the customer considers their issue closed. The impact to the business in this type of scenario is very high. If an organization thinks it is solving calls at a First Contact Resolution rate but not actually doing so on first contact, this would result in an artificially high FCR. This would have impact on cost per resolution, customer satisfaction, agent attrition, future conversion rates, retention, and loyalty. In many situations when an organization has inflated FCR, we find they also have difficulty taking definitive corrective action to reduce the repeat contact rate or worse, the action may not address the root cause of repeat contacts. We’ve provided the measurement definition, which can be configured for a window of time (within 24 or 48 hours after incident closure) to re-open incidents when customers repeat contact on the same issue.

According to a recent study by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), half of customers with unresolved issues are at risk of defection, or have already decided to leave.

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2. 3 Ascent Group, *Call Center Strategies 2010*
According to research conducted by ICMI, the vast majority, approximately 93.8%, of the 298 contact center professional respondents indicated FCR was an important measurement to track for operational performance. Source: ICMI 2008

In addition to many organizations having FCR within their top five key performance indicators this year, as organizations begin to dig into Root Cause Analysis to define ways to improve customer resolution, two primary areas benefit the organization; internal efficiency measures and external effectiveness measures such as Customer Experience or Customer Satisfaction.

1. Internal Efficiency Impact

Though there are several factors affected by FCR within Operational Efficiency, for this paper we’ll focus on only a few that are readily quantifiable and can help build a business case for an improvement program such as cost of repeat calls.

**Cost of Repeat Contacts**

Let’s say you’re currently measuring FCR at 65%, which according to several industry benchmark reports appears to be within average range in the call center industry, understand that 35% of your total contact volume is coming from customers who call back because their issue wasn’t resolved on the first contact. The figure below shows a potential cost scenario to the contact center.

The above chart utilizes the same cost impact principles from Dr. Jodie Monger in the paper, *First Call Resolution – It's Impact and Measurement*, published by Customer Relationship Metrics, but also takes into account the increased cost for escalated contacts beyond the initial repeat contact. For an organization with a little over 673k repeat contacts, analysis will show the distribution percentage of repeat calls. Based on the
example above, if one were to break-down the number of repeat contacts as percentages, it would become clear that the higher the number of repeat contacts required to resolve an issue will cost substantially more than issues resolved on First Contact. When consulting with our customers, we suggest similar analysis be performed to identify the low and high range of percentages of repeat contacts (i.e. outliers), identify the root causes and develop an improvement strategy. After conducting the cost impact analysis and establishing a realistic improvement target with periodic performance measurements or baselines to track trending, one can then incorporate the benefit into a business case to help justify the investment to improve.

In later sections we provide additional examples to further illustrate the effects on operating costs associated with an FCR improvement strategy.

*Increase Opportunities to Sell*

The research shows that customers’ needs must be resolved before the Customer Service Representative (CSR) has earned the right to move on to any sort of sales activity and expect a shot at success. If the CSR moves to the cross sell too early, the customer is irritated and feels that the organization is pushing its own needs rather than serving his or her needs. The fundamental customer relationship is undermined.

*Improve Employee Satisfaction*

For organizations we work with that have low FCR, we find they often have low employee satisfaction (ESAT) and high turnover. Stress is high on the employee who handles the second and third call from that customer whose issue wasn’t resolved the first time. In a recent study by ICMI and TalentKeepers, Agent satisfaction currently stands at 31%, the lowest level in years. The third most common cited reason for these poor agent attitudes, behind pay and opportunity, is repetitive work. Recruiting and training costs run an average of US$6,400 per replaced agent; and at 30% annual turnover, that can be a substantial cost to operations. First Contact Resolution averages 68%, with the 32% remainder reflecting repeat calls that have largely unnecessary added expense.¹

2. **External Effectiveness Impact**

*Improve Customer Experience*

Just how much FCR directly impacts satisfaction varies in what’s been published. For instance, Service Quality Measurement Group (SQM) offered a statistic based on their customer performance over a 5-year period - 1% improvement in FCR, yields a 1% improvement in customer satisfaction. One of our partners, Convergys offered a more conservative ratio published in their White Paper on FCR, based on the analysis of 1.2 million surveys for 27 customer care programs and approximated a 6.25:1 ratio FCR improvement to satisfaction.

¹ ICMI, Member Research Report, *First Contact Resolution*, 2008
Findings from ICMI's FCR study provide support of high correlation between FCR and customer satisfaction: 75 percent of respondents that reported an increase in FCR over the previous 12 months indicated a resulting increase in customer satisfaction.

We’ll cite one more case for adding FCR to the CSAT improvement program – a study conducted by research consulting firm Customer Relationship Metrics found “caller satisfaction ratings for the company in general and for the CSR will be 35 to 45 percent lower when a second call is made for the same issue.”

Although FCR is acclaimed to be highly correlated to customer satisfaction, the jury is still out on what the correlative ratio to customer satisfaction is exactly. Based on what we’ve seen with our customers, we suspect the ratio will vary widely from company to company based on industry and how the FCR measurement and execution strategy has been implemented.

Within the FCR measurement framework in this paper, we’ll review a few methods to better understand the correlation between FCR and customer satisfaction.

**TOP FACTORS IMPACTING FIRST CONTACT RESOLUTION**

So far we’ve discussed the importance of measuring FCR effectively and its impacts on customer satisfaction and the business. Alright, so just add it to the list of other Key Performance Indicators to measure. Not so fast. As we’ve already highlighted there are a few challenges to measuring it accurately and consistently. Here’s another statistic we found which we thought was enlightening.

*Despite 65% of contact center staff saying that FCR is what customers want, only 35% both measure and then report the figure to their Board. According to new survey results released from Panviva.*

Even though FCR may be one of the KPI's monitored, the numbers reported may be too high for reasons such as too short a measurement window for counting possible repeat calls (less than 24 hrs.) or inaccurate or limited survey responses to prove statistically accurate; not to mention all the other challenges we’ve discussed through this guide. Let’s review a few of the barriers organizations have removed along the path to FCR nirvana in order to help boost the confidence level in the reported rates.

According to a study conducted by Dimension Data last year, the top factor affecting FCR was access to customer information and systems data. Resolution to problems was also attributed to poor agent capabilities, accounting for over 60%. Shortly behind agents, 50% of all repeat calls are process or training driven – business processes are not in place to meet the customer’s need, and agents have not been given the training required to meet the customer expectations that have been set by marketing or elsewhere in the business.\(^5\)

\(^5\) Frost & Sullivan
According to a recent benchmarking study by Ascent Group\(^6\) the most common method in use today for measuring FCR is to calculate data from customer management (CRM and CIS) systems. Although these are the same systems Dimension Data has cited as reasons a contact may not be resolved on first contact, the opportunity for FCR improvement lies within the data stored in these systems, which will help an organization learn more about their customers as well as their escalation tendencies from self-resolve to assisted service. In other words, within each of the barriers to achieving higher FCR lies the opportunity to find the solution.

In case you’ve skimmed through previous sections of this guide, it’s worth noting that analysis of customer’s contact or interaction data is fundamental to improving FCR. Companies need to fully harvest the data points from the different systems with which customers conduct their transactions. What to measure from these different systems will be the focus of the next section.

\(^6\) Ascent Group, 2009, *First Call Resolution: Customer Perception is Reality*
WAYS TO MEASURE FIRST CONTACT RESOLUTION

According to research from The Ascent Group, the number of companies actively measuring First Contact Resolution has increased and those who have been measuring longer than a year, have seen improvement.  

“Sixty percent of companies measuring FCR performance for more than one year reported improvement in their performance. Those reporting improvement ranged from 1 to 30 percent with an average annual gain of 2 percent.”

According to The Ascent Group, majority of respondents to a recent study on FCR indicates 75 percent rely on a multi-measure approach to gauge first call resolution. Customer Satisfaction Surveys account for 44 percent and Call Statistic Calculations 32%are the most frequently used methods in measuring First Call Resolution.

How are companies measuring FCR?

We thought it would be helpful to share a year over year comparison of the different ways organizations have indicated they measure FCR based on 2009 and 2010 studies performed by the Ascent Group. A brief review from the FCR measurement comparisons from prior year indicate the following top two methods of measurement have been found to help organizations gain a higher degree of confidence in the FCR rates reported from their systems:

1. Interaction Analysis
2. Recent Contact Surveys

Source: Ascent 2010 Contact Center Strategies compared to 2009 First Call Resolutions: Customer Perception is Reality
Additional noteworthy shifts from previously reported methods, Agent logging and tick sheets had fallen to the lowest method used, just behind post-call surveys at only 2% and Case Management or CRM system dropped to the fourth most popular method behind the ACD ANI match or Call tracking.

**HOW RIGHTNOW MEASURES FCR**

RightNow CX is a business solution comprised of software, best practices and services designed to provide our clients a 360° view of their customers’ interactions regardless of channel chosen by that customer. What makes us powerfully unique is our ability to give the contact center agent complete and total information of that customer’s activity in a succinct and complete contact record every time that agent encounters that customer.

Our research identified four primary ways our customers measure First Contact Resolution — One directly applies from the RightNow 8 Steps Methodology, the fifth step, Listen to your Customers. Using our customer feedback solution, customers can use event, annual or post transaction surveys to not only validate but to narrow down on root cause analysis for FCR. This brings us to three additional measurement approaches that deliver internal approximations of FCR. While each has its uses, ultimately, it’s the customer’s evaluation of the issue or contact resolution that will matter most. In an attempt to ensure the customer’s issues have been completely resolved within their first contact, some companies will end the call with the agent asking the customer how well their issues and concerns were resolved. Measure and track FCR performance. It’s a key driver of continuous improvement and a key determinant of customer satisfaction. If you don’t measure it you can’t improve.

FCR must be measured in a quantifiable manner. This provides the insights required to most accurately understand FCR, the cost-effectiveness it’s delivering, and to validate whether or not improvement is realized over time. RightNow CX offers two business intelligence solutions to achieve this. These solutions are RightNow Analytics and RightNow Enterprise Analytics. These solutions will track the closure of every incident and provide related KPI’s such as FCR. The following example shall serve to illustrate how FCR would be measured within the RightNow solution. Through the course of an initial contact, the agent would inquire whether the proposed resolution to the customer’s issue worked or not for the customer and the customer responds to the agent to confirm their problem has been resolved in this contact, the agent will close the incident with a status of resolved. In this example, this incident would be counted positively toward FCR. However, should the customer make another contact (within a specified window of time) and indicates the problem is unresolved, the agent would reopen the incident, resulting in the incident substracted from the previous FCR count. The RightNow report calculates FCR as follows:

\[
\text{Total Incidents opened} = \text{FCR}\% \\
\text{Total Incidents resolved} - \text{Total Incidents reopened}
\]

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Our plan will be rolled out in subsequent papers as we take this proposed method of measuring FCR to several customers who will work with us on a team to establish benefits and impacts of measuring FCR in our proposed manner. We will compare this way of measurement to other existing ways our customers are measuring FCR today and determine which is more effective, accurate and meaningful.
CONCLUSIONS/SUMMARY

First Contact Resolution benchmark:
Over the next two quarters, we will work with a number of RightNow customers to implement this new report and quantifiable way of measuring FCR in their contact centers. Our process is as follows:

- Benchmark current customer methodology for measuring FCR if one exists.
- Benchmark current number of repeat callers to the center and work with customer to determine costs of those repeat calls.
- Implement the FCR report as detailed in this guide.
- Meet weekly for 4 weeks with customer to review progress in measuring FCR and to measure progress of repeat calls against benchmark.
- Report and feedback to customer on FCR measurement against benchmark and repeat caller numbers and costs versus benchmark information.

We document our progress through these studies to share experiences from the studies in subsequent Guides and to ultimately report on results of the new FCR measurement.
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ABOUT RIGHTNOW TECHNOLOGIES

RightNow (NASDAQ: RNOW) is helping rid the world of bad experiences one consumer interaction at a time, seven million times a day. RightNow CX, the customer experience suite, helps organizations deliver exceptional customer experiences across the web, social networks, and contact centers, all delivered via the cloud. With more than eight billion customer interactions delivered, RightNow is the customer experience fabric for nearly 2000 organizations around the globe. For more information, please visit www.rightnow.com.

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