



Local Government Call Centre Benchmarking Survey

Results & Commentary

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Rostrvm Solutions Limited
Dukes Court, Duke Street
Woking, Surrey GU21 5RT
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0)1483 744500

F: +44(0)1483 744447

E: enquiries@rostrvm.com

Rostrvm Solutions

<http://www.rostrvm.com>

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1. Introduction

The New Performance Framework for Local Authorities & Local Authority Partnerships sets new indicators for customer contact performance including reducing avoidable contact. But how well are local authorities doing today?

The anecdotal evidence is that commercial call centres are continually enhancing their services - for example telephone calls will be answered in seconds, emails will be responded to in hours - but public sector organisations are lagging behind.

To gain an understanding of the reality behind the anecdotes Rostrvm Solutions conducted a benchmarking survey into the current and future measurement of 'success' in Local Authority call centres.

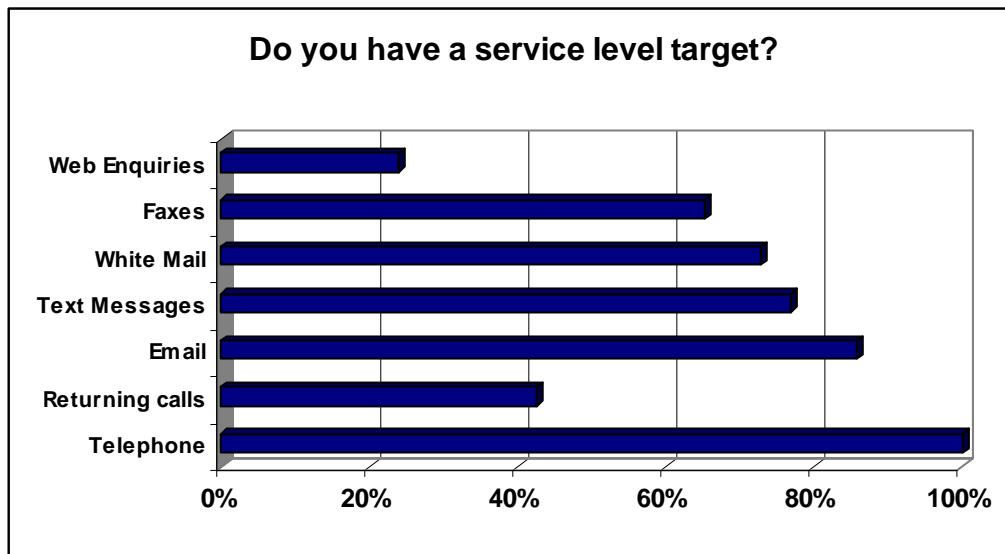
The survey was conducted using a combination of telephone interview and internet survey to provide an indication of how effectively local authority call centres are delivering service to the changing customer.

The survey was planned prior to the consultation related to "The New Performance Framework for Local Authorities & Local Authority Partnerships" and is not directly informed the revised National Indicators. However, where relevant our commentary does reference our understanding of National Indicator 14 (NI 14 : Avoidable Contact).

2. Executive summary

In many ways Local Government customer service centres are leading the way in providing open multimedia access to service with over 90% of surveyed centres offering at least one medium in addition to 'traditional' telephone access.

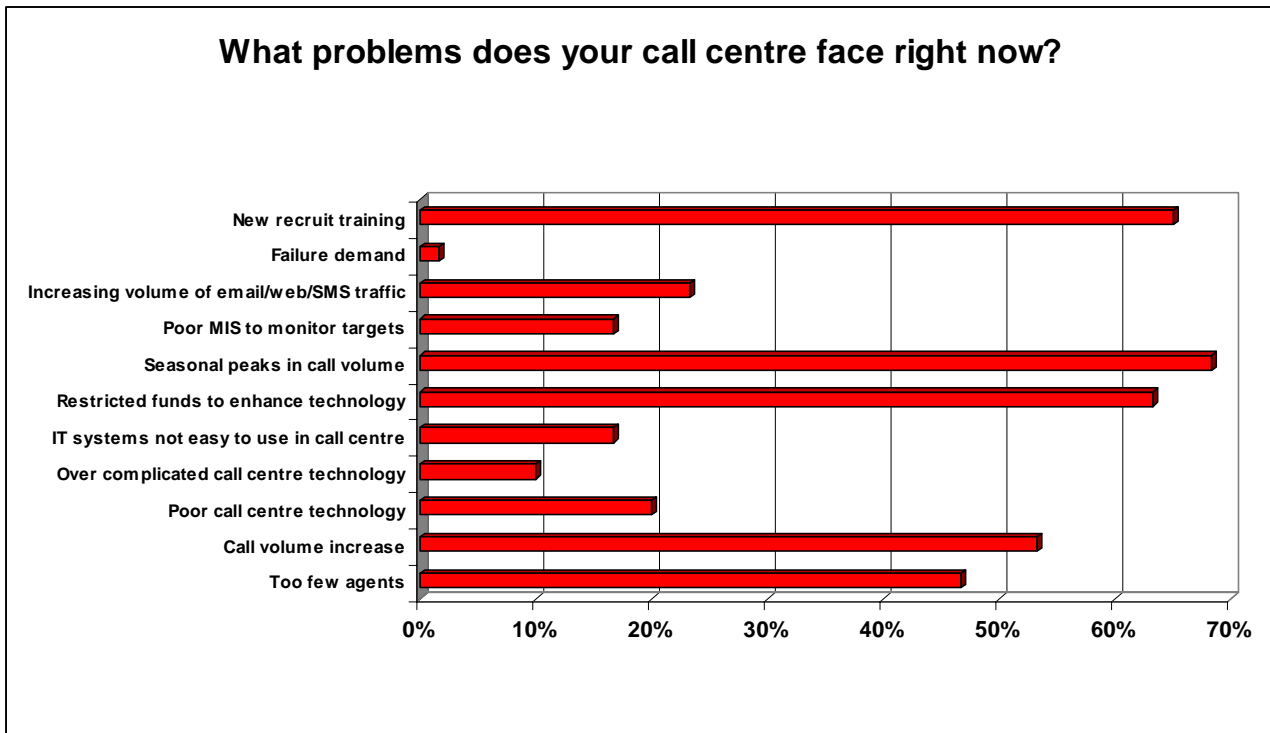
Service level standards are in place setting targets for answering inbound telephone calls, less than half (43%) of survey respondents have a target for returning calls. The question must arise – What will happen if an enquiry necessitates a return call and the enquirer does not have an expectation of when a response will be received? The risk is that the enquiry would be repeated, leading to an avoidable contact.



It is particularly surprising to observe that, whilst 78% of responding centres operate in conjunction with an associated, interactive web site, only a quarter have a target for responding to web enquiries. Looking at this particular area in more detail, for those that have a target the modal value is 24 hours, but with extremes up to 14 days. For comparison, many of Rostrvm Solutions' commercial call centre users recognise the consumer's expectations for internet immediacy. They aim to respond to web enquiries within 15 minutes.

If a web enquiry doesn't receive a response within a few hours will this generate an avoidable contact?

This survey is primarily focussed upon Local Government call centres are addressing Service Level delivery across multiple media. We also took the opportunity to establish what issues are preventing them moving forward?

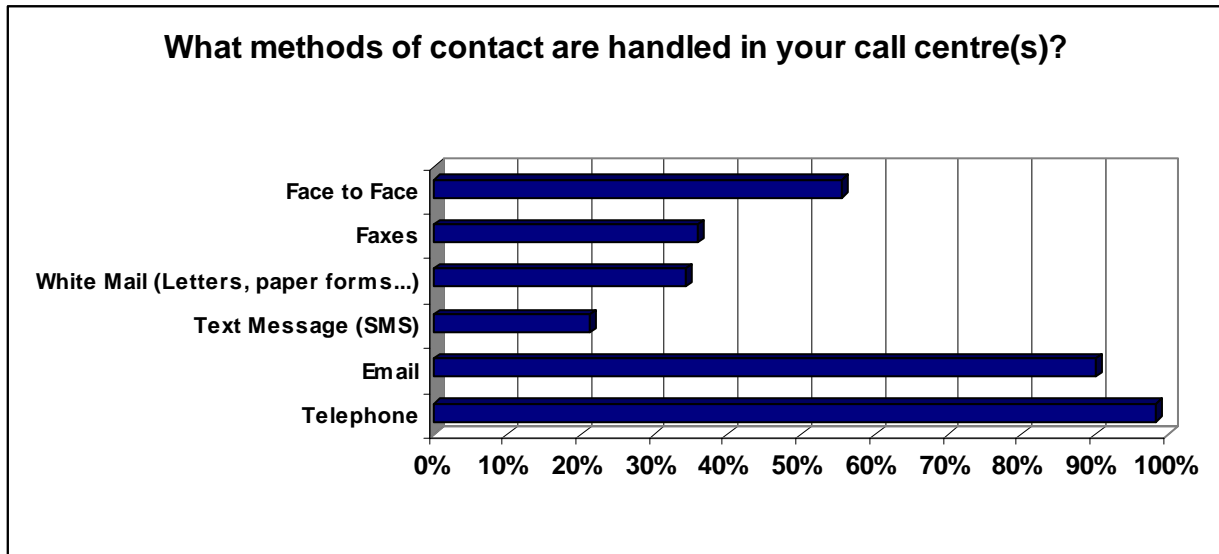


In general the responses reflect issues common to all call centres – meeting increasing demands for service and the consequent requirement for more staff and, in turn, training new staff becomes a challenge. However the results exemplify an issue peculiar to government call centres; the caller is typically seeking to resolve an important issue and the local authority is the only body that can resolve the issue. This means that when call queues are busy – such as after issuing a batch of correspondence - there is a high propensity for callers to hang up and try again later leading to a problem that compounds and, for some centres - drives the operation out of control.

Rostrvm Solutions has worked with local authorities implementing advanced call handling technology to help manage seasonal peaks and improving productivity with tools support to agents and reduce training time. Avoidable, repeat callers are reduced and customer satisfaction is increased.

3. Detailed results and commentary

To establish a base line of the survey identified the types of contact used in local government call centres.



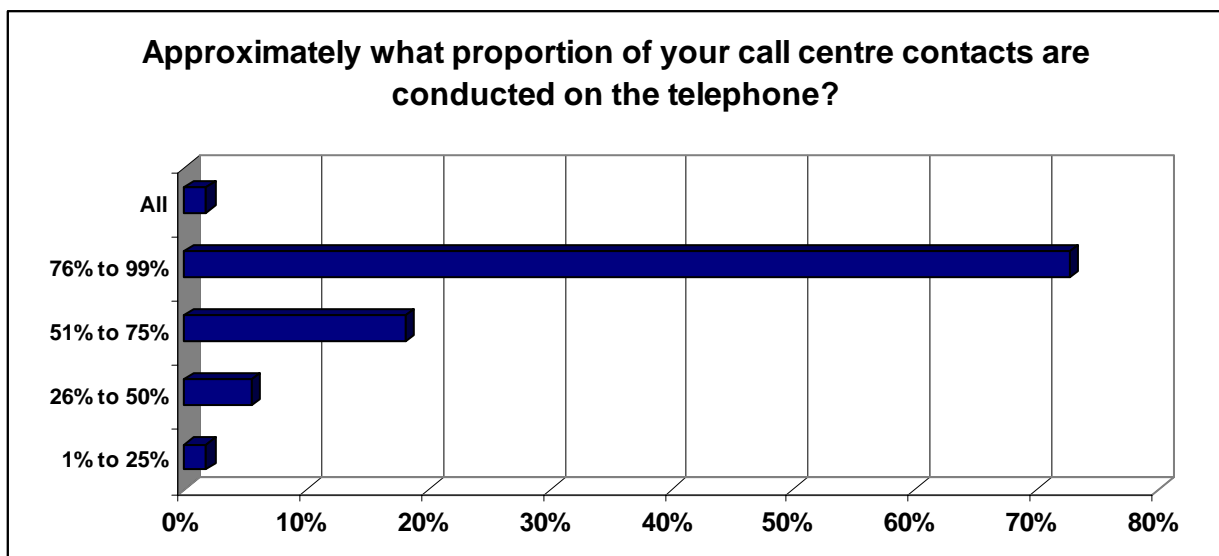
As anticipated almost all survey respondents (98%) handled telephone calls with 90% handling emails.

It was particularly notable that over 55% of respondents reported that face-to-face contact is associated with the call centre.

Rostrvm Solutions commentary: It seems anomalous that 90% of call centres handle email as a written communication method but a smaller proportion deal with White Mail.

What is the impact of multimedia?

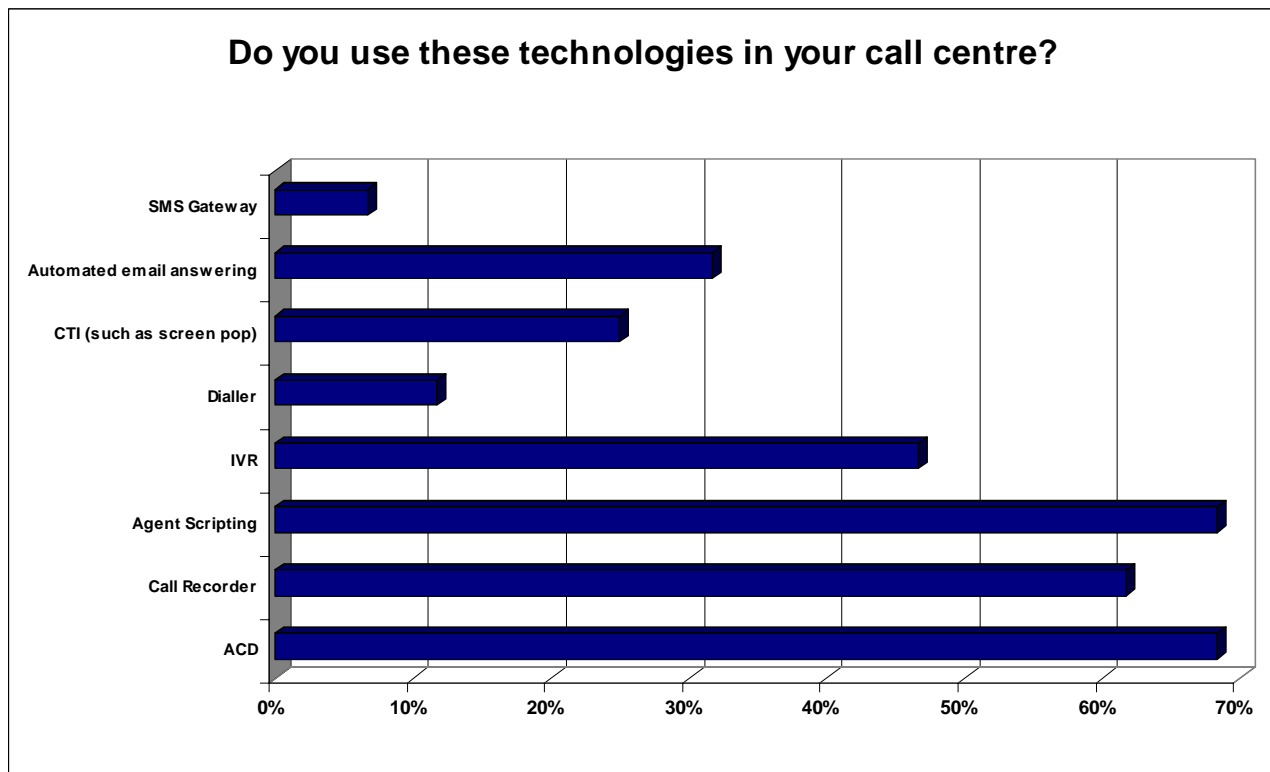
Multimedia access is provided by most of the respondents. But what is the relative impact compared to 'traditional' telephone access?



Rostrvm Solutions commentary: Our results indicate that, whilst multimedia is beginning to impose workload, telephone access is the dominant access method.

Call Centre Technology

The results above showed that almost all (98%) of local government service centres provide telephone access to the service an equally large proportion (98%) also support service access through other media. What technology is used to support the call centre?



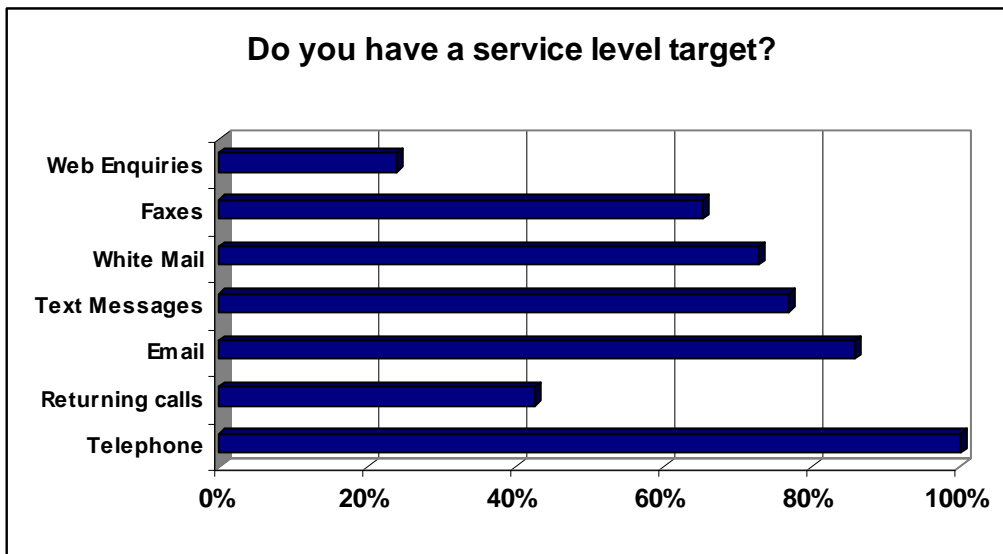
Rostrvm Solutions commentary: The majority (68%) of Local Government Call centres are equipped with core call routing technology such as Automatic Call Distribution (ACD). We were a little surprised that this overall figure appears to be low when compared with general commercial call centres (77%); but when the responses are filtered to remove smaller operations (less than 20 agents) the percentage of ACD equipped centres rose to 83%.

However Computer Telephone Integration (CTI) is the cornerstone technology to bring together telephone-based transactions and computer/text-based multimedia interactions. CTI also provides a key mechanism to bring together transactional and outcome information – such as the volume of repeat callers. Under one 30% of local government call centres take advantage of CTI today.

Are Service Level Targets being set?

Consumer demand for access to call centres using different media is increasing for all centres. This is reported to be a more significant issue for Local Government than for call centres in general; 23% of Local Government call centres view increasing volumes of multimedia traffic as a problem compared with 12% in the general call centre population. Are Local Government call centres setting targets to ensure that the service level is measured across all access methods?

The chart below shows - for those call centres offering access via a specific medium – the percentage operating with a defined service level target.



Rostrvm Solutions commentary: As we would have expected, all of the call centres questioned have a clear target for answering inbound telephone calls and, in the majority of cases, targets exist for handling written traffic, faxes, letters, text messages and email.

It is notable that, whilst all centres have a target for incoming traffic less than half (43%) of survey respondents have a target for returning calls. The question must arise – What will happen if an enquiry necessitates a return call and the enquirer does not have an expectation of when a response will be received? The risk is that the enquiry would be repeated, leading to an avoidable contact. And is this lack of a target due to lack of systems deployed to measure the target?

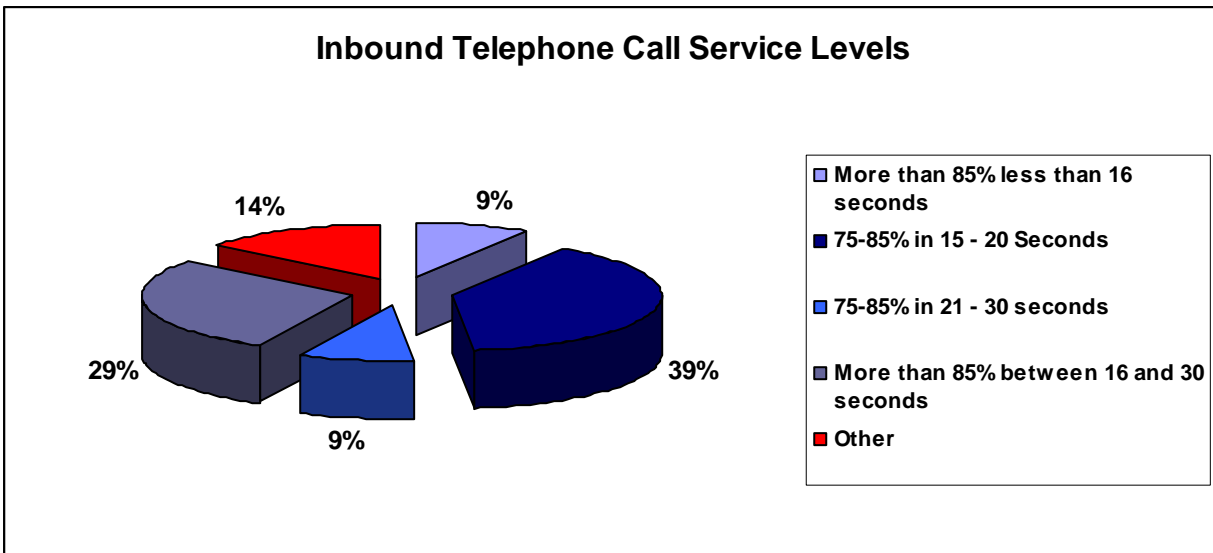
It is particularly surprising to observe that, whilst 78% of responding centres operate in conjunction with an associated, interactive web site, only a quarter have a target for responding to web enquiries. Looking at this particular area in more detail, for those that have a target the modal value is 24 hours, but with extremes up to 14 days. For comparison, many of Rostrvm Solutions' commercial call centre users recognise the consumer's expectations for internet immediacy. They aim to respond to web enquiries within 15 minutes.

If a web enquiry doesn't receive a response within a few hours will this generate an avoidable contact?

Target consistency

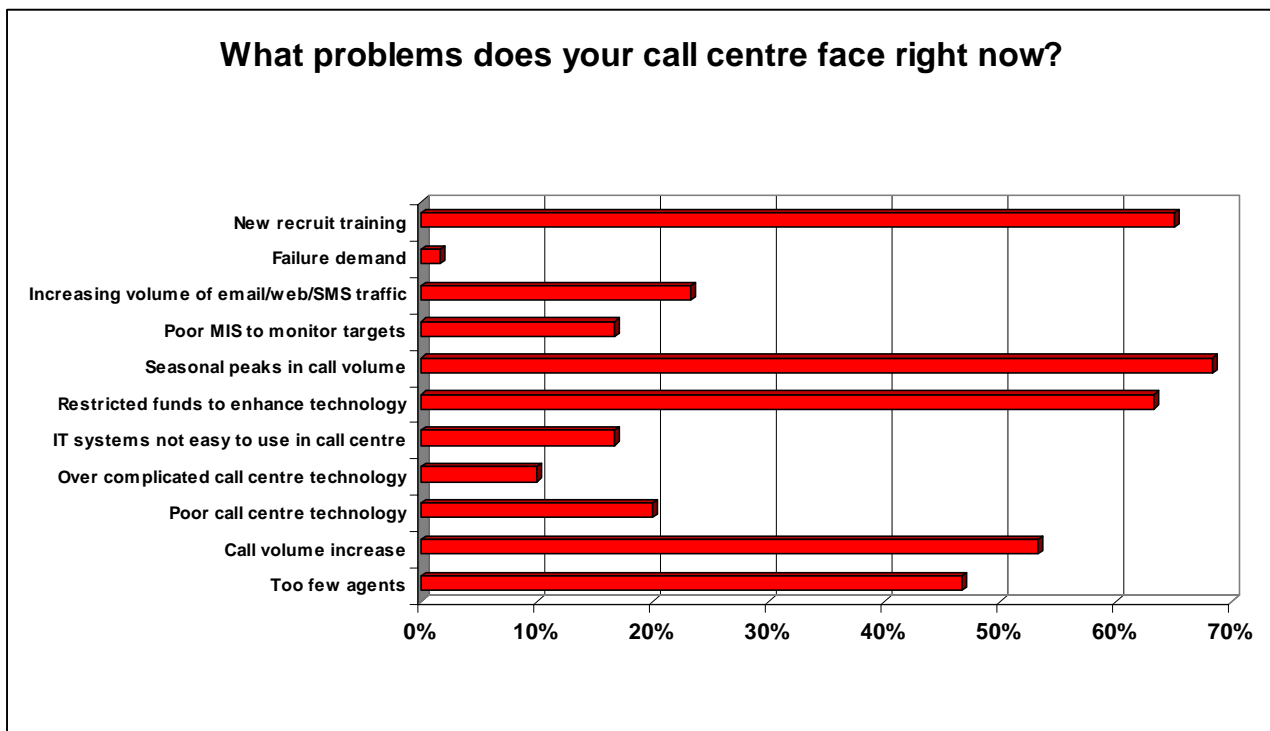
Our survey considered the active targets currently in operation. We expected to find some target variation but we were surprised to find that for the most basic of call centre targets, inbound telephone call answering, from a sample size of 56 we received **31** different responses (after normalising responses for consistency, for example 80% in 15 seconds = 80% in 5 rings).

Grouping broadly similar responses does show some degree of consistency; 86% of the centres have a service level target to answer 75% or more calls in 30 seconds or less.



What is stopping call centres moving forward?

This survey is primarily focussed upon Local Government call centres are addressing Service Level delivery across multiple media. We also took the opportunity to establish what issues are preventing them moving forward?



Rostrvm Solutions commentary: This final chart exemplifies the challenges met by a large number of call centres. In general the chart presents issues common to all call centres – meeting increasing demands for service and the consequent requirement for more staff and, in turn, training new staff becomes a challenge. Enhanced agent support tools, such as Computer Telephone Integration and contact point management tools, such as **rostrvm** CallGuide, can help to reduce agent workload and shorten training time to assist in these areas.

The chart exemplifies an issue peculiar to government call centres; the caller is typically seeking to resolve an important issue and the local authority is the only body that can resolve the issue. This means that when call queues are busy – such as after issuing a batch of correspondence - there is a high propensity for callers to hang up and try again later leading to a problem that compounds and, for some centres - drives the operation out of control.

Separately from this survey Rostrvm Solutions has undertaken detailed analysis of this scenario. On 'normal' days when the call centres are operating well it can be expected that 10-25% of calls received in the centre will be repeat callers. On 'seasonal peak' days over 50% of callers can be repeat callers with many callers making large numbers of call attempts. The 'real' increase in demand is much lower than the perceived increase.

Rostrvm Solutions has worked with local authorities to implement advanced call handling technology to help manage the seasonal peaks. Avoidable, repeat callers are reduced and customer satisfaction is enhanced.

4. Notes

1. In the 2007 Rostrvm Solutions survey "Are call centres ready for the new consumer?" 12% of all call centres – rising to 17% in larger call centres – reported that a current operational problem is "Customers want to use multimedia communications". This report is available at <http://www.rostrvm.com/surveyresults.shtml>.
2. Our survey questioned 69 Local Government call centres with 65 fully completed results. The primary research method was person-to-person telephone surveys supplemented by 7 self-selected direct responses via internet media.
3. The survey segmented responses by call centre size. In general, response results are independent of call centre size.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or comments about this document or require further information about Rostrvm Solutions or our products and services then please contact the person below:

Contact:	Ken Reid
Company:	Rostrvm Solutions Limited
Telephone:	+44 (0)1483 744429
Email:	ken.reid@rostrvm.com

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rostrvm CLIPboard patent Rostrvm Solutions Ltd (registration number 2290193)

Rostrvm Solutions Limited

Dukes Court, Duke Street
Woking, Surrey GU21 5RT
United Kingdom

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