

Executive Brief

# 4 ways AI can improve agent engagement and retention

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page consists of a funnel shape. The funnel is formed by a series of arrows pointing upwards and outwards, starting from a narrow base at the bottom and expanding as they go up. The arrows are colored in a gradient from dark red at the bottom to light blue at the top.

**There are roughly 3 million customer service agents working in the United States.** According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 2% of the U.S. workforce was employed in customer service as of May 2020. Yet this field has one of the worst employee retention rates in the country, with some 1.2 million people leaving their positions each year.

CX organizations often experience an annual agent churn rate of 40%, with some hitting 100% or more. Even before the “Great Resignation” employee retention was a critical issue for contact centers. Recruiting, hiring, and training agents is a major expense for companies of all sizes.

Along with the direct operational costs associated with onboarding, there are indirect expenses to high churn. Well trained, happy agents provide better experiences for customers which builds loyalty. But an ever-changing staff without adequate training can negatively impact customer satisfaction, reducing CLV or making it difficult to attract new customers.

Large companies offering consumer goods or services spend millions (sometimes billions) of dollars each year on the contact centers that serve their customers. The labor cost for agents represents the biggest investment here, often 80-90% of total costs.

CX: THE HUMAN FACTOR, ASAPP, 2021

As it becomes increasingly difficult to draw and retain talent, companies see agent engagement as a paramount concern. Agents are moving to companies that prioritize employee well-being. They want to be empowered, both with the right tools to do their job and the proper support from management. To maintain a productive, motivated workforce, more consideration must be given to improving the agent experience.

### A smarter way to stem attrition

So how do companies approach the task of making agents’ jobs better? It starts with deeper insights into every aspect of their work. From there, teams can address the challenges they face and find opportunities to streamline workflows. Next, the right training is crucial, both with onboarding new agents and continued guidance as they progress or procedures change. They also need the best tools possible to do their job, with technology that supports instead of overwhelms.

Forward-thinking companies are now engaging artificial intelligence to address all of these needs. In addition to automating tedious tasks, AI can provide in-depth insight into agent interactions and the opportunity for real-time guidance. All of this increases agent satisfaction simply by letting them focus on what they are there to do—help customers.

**This brief will highlight how AI can improve agent engagement and retention with better:**

- 01 Insights
- 02 Training
- 03 Guidance
- 04 Automation

**The first step to improving the agent experience is understanding it.** CX leaders need insight into every step of every workflow. Here is where AI-driven analytics offers significant benefits. With the right system, organizations can learn from every customer interaction, identifying where and how to improve processes and better support agents—all through machine learning.



Sophisticated machine learning can provide in-depth insight into every agent interaction, analyzing words and actions to show exactly how they handled each request. With full visibility into agent activities, companies can better understand the behaviors of top performers and help monitor new agents as they get up to speed.

This not only highlights where team members hit challenges, but pinpoints opportunities to use automation to streamline processes. It also enables managers to closely monitor workloads and ensure no one gets overwhelmed.

#### A new perspective on metrics

Metrics have long been a source of stress for agents, as they push to hit antiquated benchmarks. Often, performance is judged solely on these numbers, or based on a small sampling of call recordings or contact transcripts, which fail to tell the whole story.

There is pressure on agents to perform well and hit their KPIs in order to maximize opportunities for advancement, however most feel the current process of metrics-based measurement works against them. With the comprehensive view provided by AI, leaders can more accurately gauge individual agent performance.

“ Every call center has their own metrics. And everyone wants to be best in class, it’s what a lot of companies say... it doesn’t really mean anything. If you have to force those metrics, you can’t really fully help a customer because you have to be within those metrics.

SARAH, AGENT WITH 7 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE  
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### AI-driven insight to elevate performance

By engaging AI to analyze every interaction as it happens, leaders get an in-depth understanding of how each agent is serving customer needs. They can see which team members are succeeding, who might need help, and why, all with both real-time and historical perspective.

AI-driven analysis can also provide a more complete view of customer sentiment—even predicting CSAT and NPR scores. This benefits agents, who are typically assigned full responsibility for these metrics. In most cases, CSAT is determined entirely by post-contact surveys, which tend to be completed by upset customers.

An AI-driven approach helps managers better measure overall customer satisfaction, without relying on survey results. With all of this data, CX leaders can then analyze different customer intents, spot trends, and uncover correlations to better inform operational improvements.

## The right training is essential in reducing agent churn.

To be set up for success, agents need onboarding that helps them ramp quickly, combined with continued coaching that builds proficiency and prepares them to address any customer need confidently. Lack of proper training has been identified as a key cause of poor agent performance and engagement, ultimately leading to dissatisfied customers and employee burnout.



The insights provided by AI can prove extremely helpful in both initial and ongoing training efforts. Advanced machine learning can analyze the words and actions of every agent during every interaction.

By understanding how top agents handle different customer requests, the system can inform best practices to share in training new hires, so they learn how to handle various scenarios. This streamlines onboarding and reduces time to proficiency while building competence and confidence.

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“ I just feel like the companies that take the extra time to actually train you how to do your job, the people are typically happier.

JAMES, AGENT WITH EXPERIENCE IN SEVERAL INDUSTRIES  
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### Powerful practice during onboarding

Ultimately, agents want to help customers. Reducing ramp time and giving them concrete skills to handle requests sooner is invaluable when it comes to engaging new agents.

Thanks to the availability of data on past interactions and advancements in natural language processing, some companies are now using AI services that simulate customer scenarios to help with onboarding. This enables them to train agents in more dynamic, real-world settings before they get on an actual call or chat.

### More coaching, more often

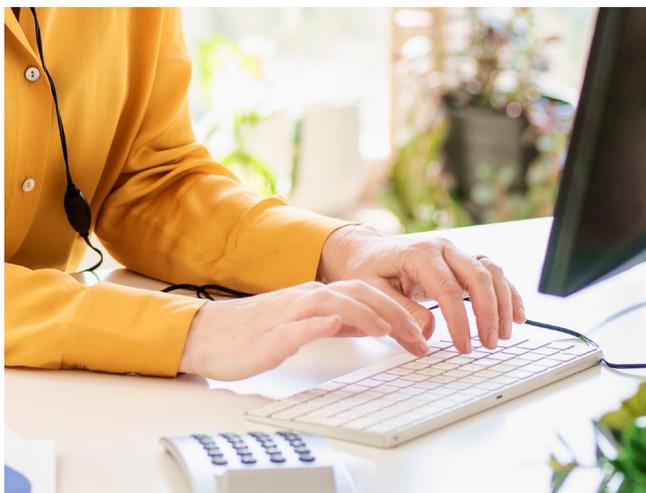
Once new agents are up to speed, a key factor in maintaining job satisfaction is continued coaching and career progression. Most agents, like all professionals, are eager to advance their skills and be successful in their roles. Traditionally, agents might receive feedback on an interaction long after it took place, with supervisors reviewing only a sampling of call recordings or transcripts.

AI makes real-time visibility possible for CX leaders. This gives them the ability to provide much more timely coaching. Additionally, analysis of historical data from all interactions can help leaders see patterns by topic, agent, team, and/or other vectors to identify broader coaching opportunities.

Agents who feel they received sufficient training report a more positive experience all around. And better trained agents are more engaged. They become strong company brand ambassadors as they solve customer problems and upsell products and services.

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**Effective support helps minimize attrition.** Agents who are not receiving the assistance they need to succeed are more likely to experience burnout. This is why offering multiple levels of support is so important. In addition to driving opportunities for real-time feedback, AI can guide agents by suggesting what to say and do during customer conversations based on machine learning from every agent interaction.



Most in the CX industry are familiar with the term “agent assist.” This is typically used to describe a feature that reads the intent of a customer request and provides relevant information to help answer it.

Generally, vendors use a combination of very basic machine learning and manual scripting to achieve this, delivering suggested responses or knowledge base articles to save incremental time and effort. There are, however, more advanced agent assist offerings which are fully AI-driven—and support agents at a much higher level.

“ And because there’s just so much information that you have to filter, it would be great if there was some kind of software or robot there with you, helping you find the answers, suggestions of what to say.

JANET, AGENT WITH 4 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE  
 CX: THE HUMAN FACTOR, ASAPP, 2021

### Driving success with real-time AI support

This approach integrates AI-driven capabilities throughout agent workflows, to offer real-time guidance at every step of each customer interaction. Powered by robust machine learning, these capabilities can help agents and improve productivity in a number of ways.

One is with dynamic messaging suggestions, predicting the best thing for agents to say based on past analysis of top performers and how the conversation is currently unfolding. Another is by automatically retrieving and displaying necessary or helpful information throughout the interaction. This type of support builds confidence in frontline teams, especially new agents, as they continually receive recommendations that reduce response time, increase accuracy, and help drive optimal results.

### Human guidance when it matters most

As discussed, a key factor in agent engagement and retention is coaching that extends past onboarding. Agents want guidance that helps them improve at each stage of their progression at the organization. With real-time visibility into every interaction, managers are better equipped to offer relevant feedback and support.

AI-driven analytics can even alert leaders to coaching needs the moment they happen, so they can proactively correct behaviors and provide guidance. This is particularly useful as more agents work from home in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The more hands-on approach can help agents from feeling disconnected, when they lack the ability to easily turn to a coworker or supervisor for advice in person.

**Productive agents are happier agents.** They need technology that supports and drives efficiency. Many today are faced with an unwieldy assortment of applications that can make completing tasks difficult, adding stress. With the insights provided by AI-driven analytics, organizations can see exactly where inefficiencies are slowing agent success, and identify where automation might help improve processes.



Automation is typically considered an all-or-nothing proposition—customers either fulfill their needs through self-serve OR an agent. More progressive CX teams see the opportunity to engage automation in new ways to help support agents, not replace them.

These organizations are using AI to increase agent productivity by augmenting their efforts with automation throughout workflows. This is particularly beneficial for handling repetitive tasks that take up a significant portion of agents' time without directly solving customers' problems.

In a survey of 506 customer support agents, the majority claimed to spend a lot of time on things that don't directly solve customers' problems, citing these common tasks:

- **71%** - Asking for customers' information
- **60%** - Searching through a knowledge base
- **38%** - Writing disposition/summary notes for records
- **15%** - Requesting authorization from a manager

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### **Integrated automation streamlines workflows**

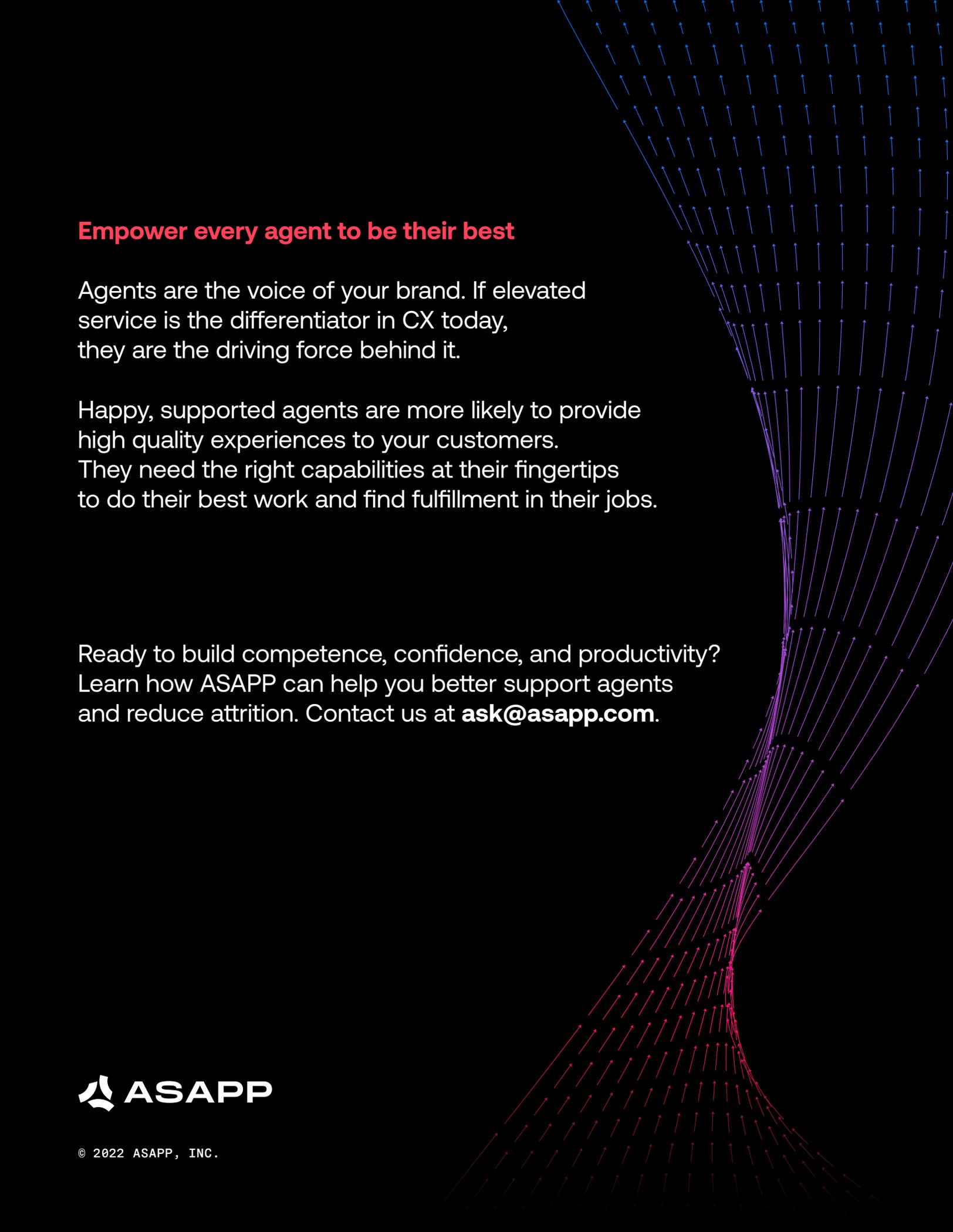
Engaging AI to handle routine tasks not only improves productivity, it helps increase agent satisfaction. Agents are freed from tedious work during every interaction, like collecting customer billing information or searching for data in other systems.

AI can also reduce post-interaction work, automating time-consuming tasks that agents dread, such as producing summary notes. Streamlining every aspect of agent workflows enables them to fully concentrate on what they actually want to do—make customers happy.

### **Better insights for better self-serve**

To further reduce agents' workload, AI can help companies improve their self-serve capabilities. By analyzing every customer interaction, machine learning models can identify opportunities for independent automation and suggest how to optimize those flows.

Successful self-service means fewer conversations escalating to an agent filling their queue, and less angry customers making repeat contacts after failed attempts to solve an issue on their own.



## Empower every agent to be their best

Agents are the voice of your brand. If elevated service is the differentiator in CX today, they are the driving force behind it.

Happy, supported agents are more likely to provide high quality experiences to your customers. They need the right capabilities at their fingertips to do their best work and find fulfillment in their jobs.

Ready to build competence, confidence, and productivity? Learn how ASAPP can help you better support agents and reduce attrition. Contact us at [ask@asapp.com](mailto:ask@asapp.com).

