



# WORKING FROM HOME IN THE CALL CENTER INDUSTRY

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## Introduction: How 2020 Changed the Call Center Landscape

Like virtually every industry, the call center community was directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. When offices everywhere were forced to shut their doors and send their employees home call centers followed suit, hopeful that agents had the tools they needed to continue to do their jobs efficiently and effectively. Whereas prior to 2020 there was still a split in the industry in terms of preference between cloud-based and premised-based dialers, at the start of the pandemic those companies that used cloud-based dialers were able to race ahead of the pack and shift the landscape of the call center industry.

A year later, with thousands of employees still working from home, we are taking a look at the factors that optimize a call center agent's work from home experience and how to make the pandemic-induced business model a sustainable option going forward.





## How Cloud-Based Dialers Support Working from Home

Why were companies that utilized cloud-based dialers able to make a smooth transition to working from home? The short answer: The cloud. All of their systems, databases and applications were already housed there, meaning they could be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection without any difficulty. The basic processes, policies and how employees went about their work did not need to change when they went from sitting in an office building to sitting in their houses or apartments because the interface through which they worked did not change either. On the flip side, companies with premise-based systems needed to figure out a way for their employees to continue to access the system,

or at the very least the applications they needed to complete their daily tasks, which likely took some troubleshooting.

In a word, cloud-based dialers offer flexibility. Flexibility to work not only from home, but from any location an employee can tote their laptop and headset that has a strong internet connection. This allowed for a smooth transition at the start of the pandemic and continues to be a fact that fosters calm and relief among companies that utilize cloud-based dialers. It is also the reason that CallShaper has grown by more than 40% since April of 2020—companies are recognizing the need for a cloud-based dialer going forward.



## Optimizing the Work-from-Home Environment

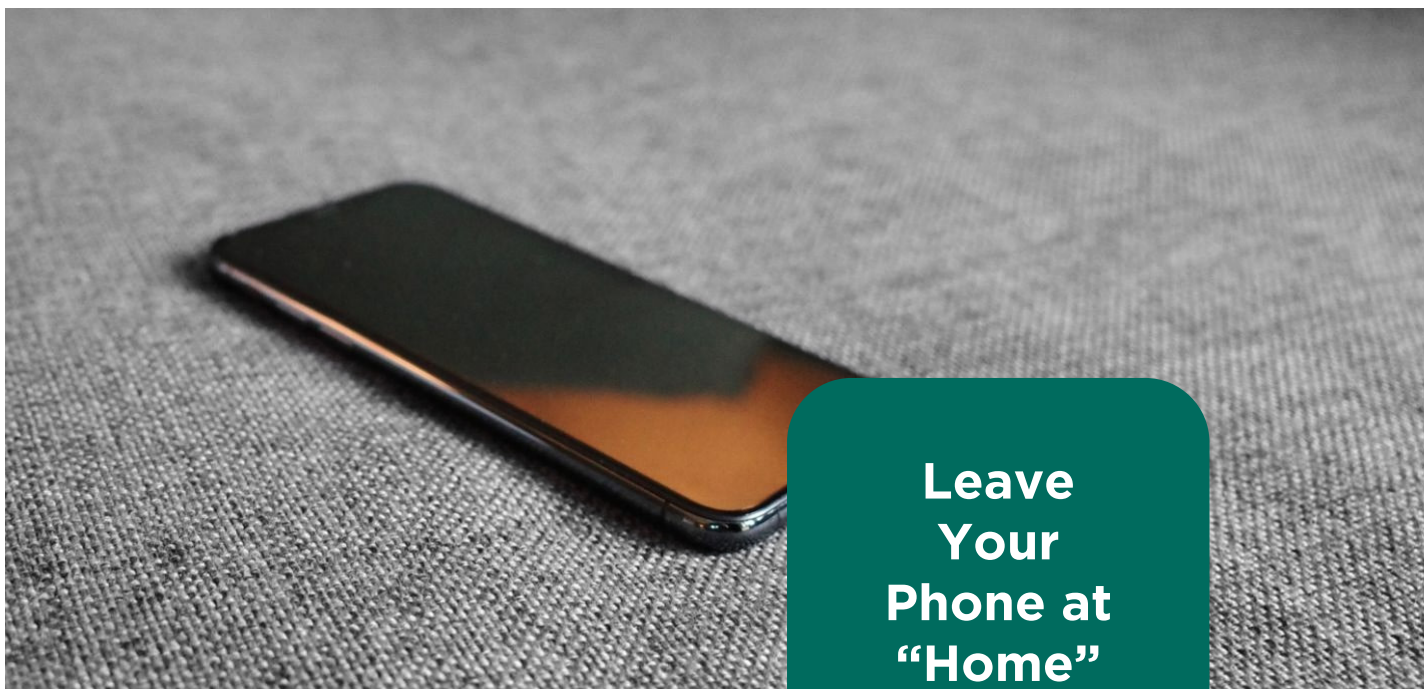
While the use of a cloud-based dialer means that what appears on the agent's computer does not need to change while working from home, one thing that does change drastically is the environment in which the agent is working. Thanks to the way it had faded in popularity over the last two decades, many American homes lack a home office—therefore, many workers were forced to create workspaces in living rooms, bedrooms and kitchens. Nonetheless, there are steps call center agents can take and strategies they can use to optimize their work-from-home environment in such a way that their ability to successfully and efficiently do their job rivals that of if they were in the office. Here are some of those tips and tricks.



## Define Your Workspace

Creating a defined workspace in your home will not only help increase productivity, but it will also serve as a way to differentiate between work time and personal time. This space can be a desk, an office or even a specific seat at your dining room table that is reserved for work only—if you're able to create a space that you don't use for anything else, that is ideal. This space will serve as a home for your work materials and the place where you go immediately

at the start of your shift, just as if you were working in the office. And then when your shift is over, you can leave the space behind and easily transition into your personal time. If you are unable to leave your computer and other work materials in your workspace after hours, try to create a home for them, such as a drawer, side table or even a backpack, where they can be quickly stowed at the end of the day and retrieved at the start of the next.



## Leave Your Phone at "Home"

Even though your home is now your office and vice versa, you should still treat your workspace the same way you treat your office. That means that in order to stay focused on taking calls or any other tasks you need to perform, tuck your cell phone in a drawer or leave it on silent in another room of the house so you aren't tempted to use it. If there are other personal

items that you wouldn't normally have on hand at the office, like the TV remote, make sure those are out of reach as well. This will help you stay focused and maximizing your work time.



A photograph of a person sitting in an office chair, wearing a plaid shirt and grey pants. They are holding their lower back with both hands, indicating discomfort or pain. The background is a blurred office setting. An orange rounded rectangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'Get a Comfortable Chair'.

## Get a Comfortable Chair

Cushy, high-backed office chairs simply don't fit in many work-from-home spaces and countless workers are forced to make do with kitchen chairs or other seating that's already in their home. If this is the case for you, adding a seat cushion and/or a back-support cushion to a basic chair can go far towards improving comfort and eliminating aches and pains caused by sitting for hours on end.

And if a more supportive desk chair is an option, both financially and spatially, it can be a boon towards creating a more comfortable and therefore a more productive work environment—agents that are uncomfortable and cranky or need to stand up and stretch after every other call will not be working as efficiently as they did in the office.





**Stay  
Connected  
with Your  
Supervisor**

CallShaper's call center platform allows agents to instant message with their supervisors, a feature that can do a lot to optimize the work-from-home experience. Using it will not only provide contact with coworkers that may be sorely missed by not being in the office, but it will also show your supervisor that you are attentive and working despite being at home surrounded by potential distractions.



## **Invest in High Quality Headphones**

Speaking of avoiding potential distractions, those can come in the form of noisy roommates, family members, appliances and more. In this case, the headsets used in an office setting may not be sufficient or comfortable in a home setting, in which more and varied background noises may be present. For this reason, headphones that block out any in-home noises while amplifying your voice and the customer on the other end of the line are essential, as are headphones that fit well. The ideal comfortable office set up may be hard to come by, but a headset that fits snugly and works well shouldn't be.



## **Enlist a Wireless Mouse**

An easy-to-use scripting platform is essential for call center agents to do their jobs successfully and efficiently. Being able to move quickly from step to step, to identify necessary rebuttals and answers to questions and to contact their supervisors if needed are all key to building a trusting rapport with the customer over the course of a call. But laptop touch pads may make navigating amongst these steps difficult at best and slow and frustrating at worst. The solution: A good wireless mouse (and mousepad if it's needed, depending on the nature of the agent's workspace). A wireless mouse will eliminate any downgrades in the agent's ability to navigate swiftly through the script and collect information as they go so that the customer will never know that the agent has shifted to a work-from-home environment.



## Staying Productive While Working from Home

As thousands of people have learned over the last few months, working from home is a vastly different experience from working in an office. There are new distractions, new routines and new schedules that can disrupt productivity, limit efficiency and sap brainpower. While this is true in every industry, maintaining focus and productivity can be particularly difficult when you're working for a call center—once you're on with a customer you must be on your game, regardless of what is going on around you. The good news: There are strategies call center agents can utilize that can help them stay on the ball while working from home. Here are some of those strategies.



## Take Screen Breaks



Spending hours on end staring at a screen can take a toll on your energy levels and your ability to focus, not to mention the fact that it also likely means you're spending all that time sitting, which can take a toll on your health (especially if you don't have a comfortable chair, as discussed in the previous section). In order to make sure you have the proper alertness to adequately respond to calls, try to take a five-minute break every hour in which you stand up and walk away from your computer screen. Use those five minutes to look out the window, check in with your family or roommates, refill your water bottle, or simply close your eyes and breathe. Then when you return to your computer and put your headset back on, you will feel refreshed, alert and ready to go.

## Head Outside



The opportunity to go outside during the workday is one you may not have while working in the office or it may have meant going outside onto a narrow, crowded sidewalk—but if you have the option now, take advantage! Getting just a bit of fresh air during the day will feel immediately rejuvenating and provide an instant mood boost that will be apparent to the customers you speak to afterwards. If you can't spend your five-minute breaks outdoors, try heading outside during lunch or even before you start your day during the time you would normally have spent commuting. Exposure to natural light has been study-proven to improve energy, mood, and mental clarity, while simply being in nature rapidly lowers stress levels.

## Snack Smart

With your entire kitchen at your disposal all throughout the day, it can be tempting to grab anything and everything to munch on during work hours. But choosing snacks filled with sugar or processed carbs can sap your energy and induce brain fog, which can negatively affect your work performance. To help you stay sharp, enjoy snacks that are low in sugar and high in protein, such as nuts, trail mix, an apple or celery with peanut butter, or a high-protein snack bar. These will keep your energy levels consistently high, so you'll be presenting the best version of yourself to callers.



## Lean on Your Team



Working from home can feel like being on an island. But you're not alone: You have your fellow agents and supervisors and the support of your cloud-based call center platform behind you. If you are able to, keep in touch with the other agents on your team and/or your supervisor throughout the day. If you are a supervisor, schedule meetings to encourage this team mentality, even if it wasn't something that you did on a regular basis when everyone was in the office together. Reminding people that they are not alone and are all working towards a common goal can help them work from home more productively and efficiently.



## Set Boundaries

Just because you may be working alongside partners, kids or roommates does not mean you are available to them all throughout the day. Making this clear and setting boundaries accordingly is crucial to maintaining focus and productivity. Try making rules around when you are and aren't available to field questions and requests from the other people in your home, such as that if your headset is on, then you can't help. Simple steps like this can help you produce the same level of work you did while you were in the office.





## How Working from Home Fosters Personal and Professional Development Opportunities

It may seem counterintuitive at first, given the fact that everyone is now physically separated from their colleagues, but working from home can actually provide more opportunities to seek out ways to grow personally and professionally. The primary reason for this is that

workers now have one, two or even more hours suddenly free that would previously have been dedicated to commuting to and from the office. While many people may have used this extra time at the beginning of working from home to tend to family duties, set kids up with online school or even sleep a little later, at this point in 2021 routines may have a bit more flexibility. And after all, when you were working in the office you weren't able to do anything house- or family-related during your commute, so why not use it for something personal? Here are some of the development opportunities you may be able to carve out time for thanks to working from home.

## Creating a New Habit



Establishing new habits or routines in the mornings and evenings can be tricky. Mornings often feel too short to get anything done, while fatigue from the workday makes it difficult to muster the energy to do extra tasks after 5:00pm. But having extra time in the morning and the evening is the perfect opportunity to create new habits. Perhaps you've always wanted to start your day with a pour-over coffee or exercise at the end of the day. If you create these habits now and maintain them long enough to feel the effects, you'll be much more likely to find ways to stick with them when (and if) the office reopens. What's more, carving out time for things you want to do that make you happy will set you up to be more productive and in a better mental headspace throughout the workday.



## Taking an Online Course or Webinar

While in-person conferences have not taken place in months, many of the workshops, courses and seminars that were previously only given at such events are now being offered online—and better yet, almost all of them are recorded, so that you don't necessarily need to be available when they are being given live. If you're a supervisor, keep an eye out for workshops or webinars that your entire team can take together as a way to interact, learn new job skills and offer a change of pace for team members. There are also countless courses that individuals can simply sign up for and take on their own time, whether specifically related to the industry or not. These can offer an opportunity to learn a new skill, advance a hobby or just connect with others who have similar interests. It's even better if the skill you learn, like baking or painting, then takes you away from your computer screen during your off hours, which will help you feel fresher when you do need to sit down to work.



## Sharpening Your Mind or Your Body



While interacting with and responding to callers presents an intellectual challenge, as does taking a professional development workshop or webinar, there are things (that may be a bit more fun) that you can do to stay sharp and expand your mind. Reading books, listening to audiobooks or podcasts, doing crossword puzzles or sudokus or writing in a journal can help you foster your personal curiosity. Likewise, incorporating more physical activity into your daily routine through virtual fitness classes or walks around the neighborhood can drastically improve both your physical and mental health. A healthy and curious person is a happy person, and a happy person is a better friend, family member and employee.



The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the look of countless industries, the call center industry among them. While adapting to the work-from-home era had the potential to be a bumpy ride, there are steps that companies and employees could take to make the process smoother. These include: Utilizing a cloud-based dialing platform, taking steps to outfit their work-from-home environment in an efficient and comfortable way, calling on strategies to boost productivity and taking advantage of the opportunities that working from home provides in terms of personal and professional growth. Together, all of these steps make for companies and employees who are happy, productive and performing at their highest potential.