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Handling non-English Calls:
Reducing Costs and Increasing Efficiency

A study by the Center for Customer Driven Quality
Additional analysis prepared by Voiance Language Services

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Background

According to the 2000 US Census, 47 million people in the United States speak a language other than English at home; 21 million of these people speak English less than very well. In order to acquire, retain, and grow this diverse customer base, US contact centers are adapting their operations to handle non-English calls.

In March 2010, Voiance Language Services sponsored a study by researchers at the Center for Customer-Driven Quality (founded at Purdue University) who conducted a survey using a non-random sample of US-based customer contact centers. In all, 230 contact centers which support non-English calls participated in the study.

The objective of this study was to establish data points on operational issues related to the handling of non-English calls, thereby providing a resource for better, fact-based decision making. Although every attempt has been made to ensure the reliability of the information contained herein, some inaccuracies may exist. For this reason, Voiance neither assumes responsibility for nor certifies to the accuracy of any of the reported data.

Key Survey Findings

Motivation to support non-English calls

Primary motivation for providing foreign language support	Survey Response
Customer service / satisfaction	68%
International operations	11%
Increased revenue opportunity	10%
Regulatory requirement	6%
Other	5%

Key Performance Indicators

The following are key performance indicators used by call center managers to evaluate the operational efficiency of handling non-English calls.

Key performance indicator	Survey Response
Call volume by language	51%
Average handle time	42%
Average speed of answer	39%
Cost per call	30%
First-call resolution	26%
Post-call satisfaction survey	18%

## How are non-English calls being handled?

In recognition of the variety of methods used to support non-English calls, the survey asked participants to identify the methods they were currently using. The table illustrates some of the methods used by contact centers to support non-English calls.

Methods used for support of non-English calls	Survey Response
In-house bilingual agents	65%
Outsourced bilingual agents	12%
Over-the-Phone Interpretation (OPI)	66%

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Contact Centers Using Over-the-Phone Interpretation (OPI)

The pie chart demonstrates how the 66% of contact centers who use OPI (see previous table for "Methods used for support of non-English calls") may use the service in conjunction with another method in order to meet organizational objectives such as increasing efficiency, reducing costs, or meeting service level targets.
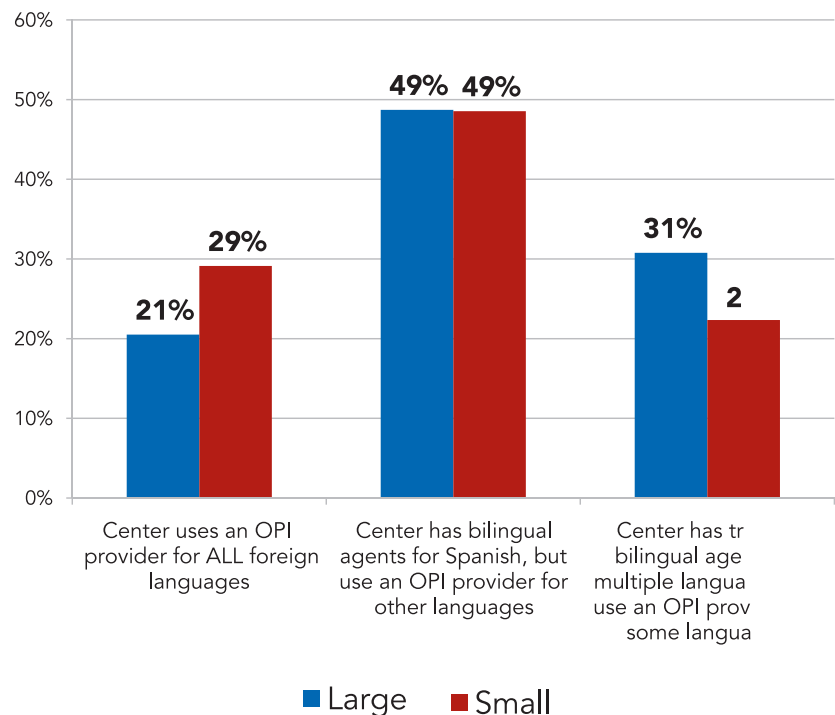
Pie chart: 27%, 49%, 25%
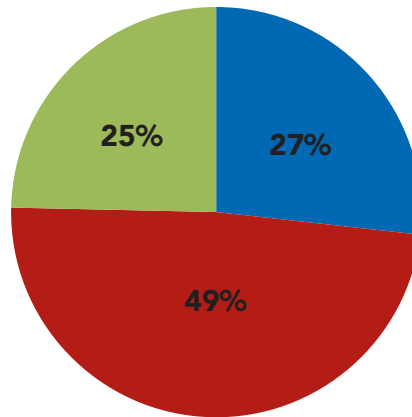
- Contact center uses an OPI provider for ALL foreign languages
- Contact center has bilingual agents for Spanish, but uses an OPI provider for other languages
- Contact center has bilingual agents for multiple languages, but uses an OPI provider for some languages

Additional Analysis: Large and Small Center Differences

Analysis of call center size can reveal superior tactics/strategies at various levels of scale. In the survey, contact centers with more than 200 seats were considered "large"; approximately 30% of the participants were from large contact centers. Among small contact centers surveyed, about 45% had more than 50 seats but less than 200; the rest of the contact centers surveyed had 50 seats or less.
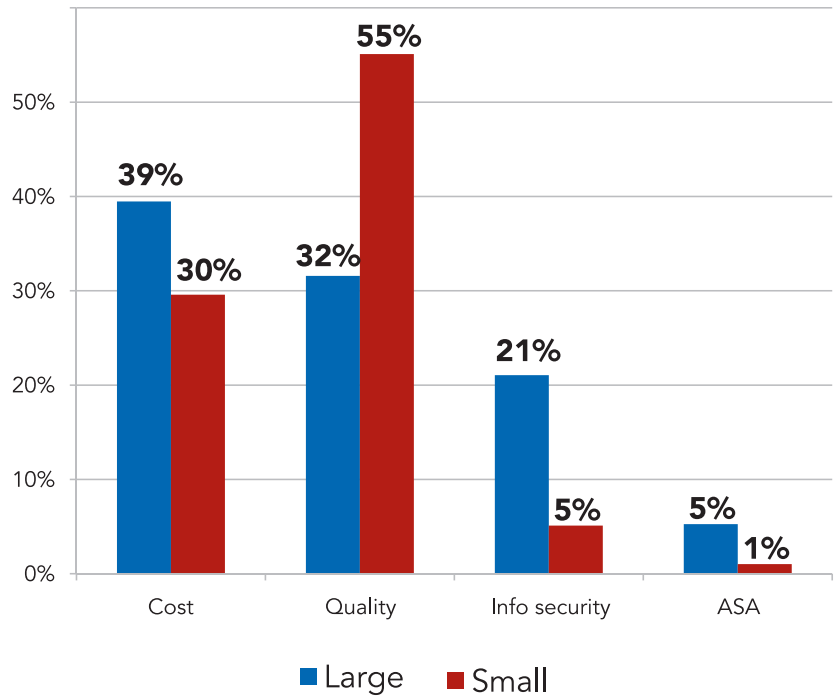
How are non-English calls being handled?

The chart demonstrates that in regards to the use of OPI, small contact centers are more likely to rely on OPI for all languages, while it is still more likely for both large and small contact centers to have at least some bilingual agents.

Bar chart:

	Large	Small
Center uses an OPI provider for ALL foreign languages	21%	29%
Center has bilingual agents for Spanish, but use an OPI provider for other languages	49%	49%
Center has tr bilingual age multiple langua use an OPI prov some langua	31%	2

Legend: ■ Large ■ Small

Primary concerns regarding OPI

For the majority of survey participants, the primary concerns regarding the use of an OPI service were cost and quality considerations. More large contact centers were focused on cost, while the majority of small contact centers chose quality as their primary concern.
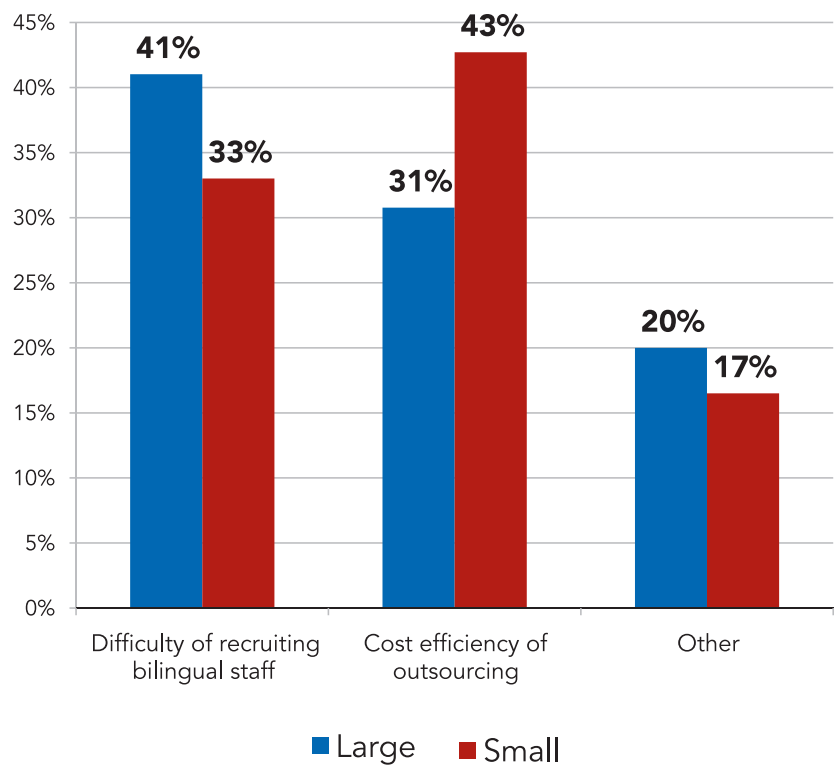
Interestingly, information security was also chosen by many large contact centers as their primary concern; 50% of those who chose information security were contact centers in the insurance or financial services industry.

Chart: Primary concerns regarding OPI

Concern	Large	Small
Cost	39%	30%
Quality	32%	55%
Info security	21%	5%
ASA	5%	1%

Legend: ■ Large ■ Small

Primary reason for using OPI

While there are many considerations for choosing to provide OPI, the chart demonstrates that the primary reason for most large contact centers is the challenge of recruiting bilingual agents, while the majority of small contact centers are more focused on cost efficiency.

Other reasons for using OPI which were cited by survey participants included: the ability to support all languages, speed of connection, addressing volume spikes, emergencies, and handling non-English calls during off-peak hours.

Chart: Primary reason for using OPI

Reason	Large	Small
Difficulty of recruiting bilingual staff	41%	33%
Cost efficiency of outsourcing	31%	43%
Other	20%	17%

Legend: ■ Large ■ Small

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About Voiance

Voiance Language Services provides multilingual support in over 150 languages to companies operating customer contact centers. Voiance operates U.S. based interpreter centers and a state-of-the-art telecommunications infrastructure, providing clients with security, reliability and the ability to connect to an interpreter on average in 15 seconds or less.

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