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# Call Centers & Contact Centers

## Industry Guide

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## Call Centers & Contact Centers Office Furniture — What You Actually Need

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Call centers are high-density, high-throughput environments where furniture takes more abuse per square foot than almost any other office type. The math is simple: agents sit for 8-hour shifts, 250+ days a year, and every piece of furniture is used by multiple people over time. Here's what holds up and what doesn't.

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### The Must-Have Pieces — Density First

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#### Agent Workstations

Call center desks typically run 48–60" wide per agent — tight enough for high density, wide enough for dual-monitor + headset + notepad configuration. Panel-based systems (cubicle walls at 42–53" height) reduce noise transmission between agents and provide visual privacy. Alternatively, open benching with acoustic privacy screens (18–24" high) is increasingly popular for newer contact centers that want a more collaborative visual. Panel systems reduce noise better; benching reduces cost per seat by 20–35%.

Surface depth of 24–30" is the standard — you need room for two monitors, keyboard, mouse, and headset controller without cluttering the workspace. Built-in or add-on cable management is essential given the headset cable density in these environments.

#### Agent Seating — The Make-or-Break Purchase

This is where call center operators most commonly underinvest and pay for it in replacement costs and absenteeism. Agent chairs need to be: BIFMA X5.1 certified for 8-hour continuous use, adjustable (seat height, lumbar, arm height minimum), and fabric-upholstered with commercial-grade pilling resistance. 24-hour-rated operator chairs are worth the extra cost in environments with overnight shifts or continuous 24-hour operations.

Budget \$200–\$400/chair minimum for agent seating. Below \$200 in a call center environment means replacing chairs every 12–18 months rather than 5–7 years.

#### Supervisor & Team Lead Stations

Raised supervisor stations (desks elevated 4–6" above agent floor level) are traditional in call centers for sightline management. More modern contact centers are moving away from this to supervisor desks at standard height with better visual monitoring tools. Either way: larger desks (66–72"), better chairs, and a configuration that allows supervisors to quickly reach nearby agent clusters.

#### Break Rooms & Rest Areas

High-density environments need proportionally larger break rooms. Agents need genuine mental breaks away from the floor. Commercial cafe tables and stacking chairs in the break room; durable and easy to clean. Locker storage (half-height) near the entry for agent personal items — bag storage at the desk creates clutter and safety hazards.

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## Acoustic Design — Non-Negotiable

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A call center without acoustic treatment is a productivity and quality disaster. Every hard surface (concrete floor, glass walls, laminate panels) reflects sound and increases reverberation time.

- **Panel heights of 42–53"** absorb a significant portion of voice noise between agent positions
- **Acoustic ceiling tiles** with NRC (Noise Reduction Coefficient) of 0.7–0.9 in all agent areas
- **Fabric-covered acoustic wall panels** on hard exterior walls — add these if you're in an open/industrial space
- **Carpet or commercial carpet tile** rather than hard flooring — significantly reduces reverberation
- **Target ambient noise level:** 60–65 dB in the agent area is the practical target for acceptable call quality

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## The Rules You Can't Ignore

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- **BIFMA certification for all seating.** This is non-negotiable in a commercial-use 8-hour shift environment.
- **Ergonomic standards.** OSHA VDT guidelines apply to call center agent positions — seat height, monitor distance, keyboard height. Adjustable seating and workstation height aren't optional.
- **ADA accessibility.** A percentage of agent positions must be accessible — 27" knee clearance, adjustable height, accessible path to position.
- **Fire egress from high-density floors.** Call center density packs a lot of people into a floor plate — confirm fire egress compliance with your local fire marshal before finalizing the layout.

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## What Most Buyers Get Wrong

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- **Buying cheap chairs and replacing them constantly.** The math always loses: a \$130 chair replaced every 18 months = \$870 over 7 years, vs. a \$350 chair that lasts 7 years. Plus the disruption of constant replacements.
- **Ignoring acoustic design.** Noise is the number one quality complaint in call center operations. Acoustic panels and carpet are infrastructure, not decoration.
- **Undersizing break rooms.** In a 200-seat call center, 25–30 people are on break at any given time. A break room that holds 12 creates queuing problems and stress.
- **No locker storage plan.** Agents bring bags, lunches, and personal items. Desk storage is inadequate. Half-height lockers near entry are the standard solution.
- **Panel heights that don't match noise reduction goals.** 36" panel heights look modern but provide minimal acoustic separation. 42–53" is the functional minimum for meaningful noise reduction between positions.

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## How to Stretch Your Budget

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Category	Per-Seat Cost Range	Notes	
Panel-based workstation	\$600–\$1,800/seat	Includes panels, surface, file pedestal	
Benching workstation	\$350–\$700/seat	Lower cost, less acoustic isolation	
Agent task chair	\$200–\$400 (8-hr)	\$350–\$600 (24-hr rated)	Don't go below \$200 — replacement cost math always loses
Acoustic ceiling panels	\$3–\$8/sq ft installed	ROI in call quality and agent productivity	
Half-height lockers	\$150–\$350/unit	One locker per 2 agents minimum	

## Your Quick Shopping List

- 48–60" agent workstations — panel-based (better acoustics) or benching (lower cost)
- BIFMA X5.1 agent task chairs — 8-hour rated, adjustable lumbar, commercial fabric
- 24-hour-rated operator chairs if you run overnight or continuous shifts
- Supervisor desks at 66–72" with better ergonomic seating
- Acoustic ceiling tiles (NRC 0.7–0.9) throughout agent floor
- Fabric acoustic wall panels on hard exterior walls
- Carpet tile flooring (if not already — pull up hard flooring if budget allows)
- Commercial cafe tables and stacking chairs for break room
- Half-height lockers — 1 per 2 agents near floor entry

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