

# Choosing the Right BPO Partner

*Unpacking the important metrics beyond price and language*

JOHANNESBURG, GAUTENG, SOUTH AFRICA, September 22, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- More organisations of all sizes are choosing to outsource their business services than ever before. Experienced outsourcers that have been doing so for years are upping the ante, and there is a marked increase in first-time outsourcers who are looking to achieve greater efficiencies and improve customer experience across their operations. The drivers behind the big increase in offshoring are diverse, and they bring many complexities in the journey to finding the best-fit BPO partner.



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“While the consequences of the pandemic may have been a catalyst that fast-tracked a shift to outsourcing, I don’t believe they are temporary or fleeting. There is a significant shift of organisations outsourcing more of their non-core processes and skills requirements in the long term to obtain the operational and labour efficiencies they need in a massively competitive environment. Skills shortages in countries like the US are a significant driver, while many businesses want to avoid the capex on inhouse functions, processes and infrastructure to manage their growth while still facing a volatile market and economy,”

explains Clinton Cohen, CEO of [iContact BPO](#), a South African-based BPO provider servicing predominantly international markets. iContact BPO is part of the Alefbet Holdings group which owns numerous collections and customer service BPO providers.

“The multichannel and ‘always-on’ client service platforms that became mainstream in the last two to three years as businesses now serve customers from across the globe are also here to stay - from in-person to whatsapp and e-mail, chatbots, online to service agent. Businesses are

under massive pressure to manage such a diverse service eco-system not only in terms of the tech, but also the financial and human capital that underpins it. There are very few businesses that can handle all these diverse functions and processes inhouse, and the move to outsourcing is a complex process with many moving parts. There are critical objectives to be set in the 'how and why' of outsourcing your non-core processes, and then finding the best BPO partner to deliver on your objectives and performance metrics," adds Cohen.



Tariq Alinur - BrainCX

Some of the objectives behind outsourcing include achieving greater operational efficiencies, cost reductions, labour arbitrage, accessing value added-services and better technology, improving customer service and experience, enhanced data and analytics capabilities and managing business continuity risks. Once these objectives are clearly defined and measurable, the most challenging part of the strategy is finding the right BPO partner to fulfil on your objectives and targets – both in terms of its operational and technical capabilities, as well as having the right culture-fit for your business and customers. One of the ways of managing the complexity in this process is to work with a specialist third-party facilitator who would be responsible for setting up the outsourced offshore office and operations and recruiting the right BPO partner to meet the defined objectives.

iContact BPO has worked closely with [BrainCX](#) – a customer experience (CX) and digital transformation consultancy - and believes that having an experienced partner that can align the objectives and CX needs of the client, with the right BPO partner in terms of capabilities and culture, is invaluable, notably for businesses entering into outsourcing for the first time, and for those that have complex, multinational outsourcing strategies.

"A trusted outsourcing facilitator will have extensive experience in different markets and geographies with many BPO providers and can provide referrals and partner selection options that integrate with your technology outsourcing and digital transformation strategies. When embraced strategically, such a facilitator puts in the hard yards both in terms of expertise, market reach and time to help your business expand sooner with a proven outsourcing strategy and process, avoiding the hurdles and pitfalls along the way," adds Cohen.

Research conducted by Knowledge Executive on behalf of GBS World surveyed over 360 global business buyers from Australia, Canada, the UK and the US, and revealed that finding the right

BPO provider is anything but straightforward. It often takes buyers between three (48%) and six months (7%) before they find a right-fit supplier. Just over 56% of respondents in the GBS World research indicated that they struggled to shortlist just five best-fit service providers.

Tariq Alinur, CEO of BrainCX, a US-based CX strategist and digital transformation expert that provides such outsourcing facilitation to some of the largest brands around the globe, explains that when a client is building their outsourcing model, there needs to be a strategy and road map that underpins how this process unfolds, and how the stated objectives translate into operational excellence. Outsourcing can be an intimidating process and the shift is not cut and dried or simple.

Recently, BrainCX (BCX) and iContact BPO worked together in landing a large North American Telecommunications company in an outsourcing bid to South Africa – a significant win for Cape Town's burgeoning BPO industry.

With many years of experience on both sides of being a client and a provider, Tariq Alinur shares some of the most important considerations that he looks for when finding the best BPO partner for his clients.

"Channel Competency is the first consideration - it's important that your BPO provider has the experience and technical skills sets to deliver on the type of channel you need to deliver on your customer experience objectives. Ideally if you're wanting Whatsapp and chat support, you'd want to see a track record in these channel competencies.

"Certain businesses may have specialized outsourcing needs which is where industry vertical expertise comes in - think screening of medical records, insurance claims processing, research and surveys and so on. It's ideal to seek out the expertise of a niche BPO provider that not only specializes in such functions, but also has direct experience in servicing clients in the same industry vertical, bringing proven experience and hard-earned hindsight to the table.

"Language and Accent matters. Some countries are very accent-challenged, and while the language requirement may be English for example, other factors to consider is whether the agents speak clearly and whether the accent is comprehensible. This is not about getting rid of accents or being accent agnostic, but rather about comprehension. One of the reasons why South African BPO providers perform so well in North American markets is that the accent – although not American – has a strong British influence and is clear and easily understood.

"Cultural Affinity refers to whether the agents of your BPO provider are able to build a rapport with the customers they serve, and able to pick up and run with the many cultural nuances of your market. A significant advantage that South Africa has in its favor that goes far beyond the factors of linguistics, technology, and economics, is the empathy and work ethic of its people. When it comes down to customer experience and cultivating a culture of empathy, South Africa's call center agents are well advanced in this vital customer service skill. There is also an easy

cultural fit with certain figures of speech, euphemisms and terminologies of the US, European, UK and Australian markets.

"Talent and Human Capital are important and this refers to who the people are that will be providing the service and support, what the level of training competence and quality assurance is and the level of experience and commitment of the supervisory and operations teams. It is important to understand what your BPO provider's process is for recruitment and training and handling attrition and retention of agents. It is vital to have a solid understanding of the sophistication, experience and commitment of the management team that will be running your outsourced operations.

"The next consideration is flexibility and how important this is in terms of systems, processes, management style, technology and so on, versus a BPO provider who adheres strictly to a fixed playbook of how they operate. This becomes a key consideration, especially for a first-time outsourcing foray. Typically, when a client is building their outsourcing model for the first time, the needs and technology requirements are not always distinctly defined - there is a need to build the strategy on a 'discovery' basis. In such a scenario, you would look to work directly with experienced and collaborative executive teams that are willing and capable of building a CX model tailored to your business needs, rather than enforcing a pre-determined playbook that may not be a good fit. Your BPO provider needs to have a passionate and vested interest in your success!

"Look at the real value, not the price! The value-added services that the right BPO provider brings to the table can prove immeasurable and goes way beyond the basic metric of 'price'. The data and analytics capability and AI now available in contact centres is cutting edge and provides incredibly deep insights for customers to act upon. Consider the speech-to-text capabilities and sentiment analysis that now allow BPO providers to deliver quality assurance to clients at levels never seen before. Other crucial 'value' adds come to mind, such as advanced digital tech, productivity management tools, Software-as-a-Service (SaaS), innovation in process and training, compliance, data security and hands-on leadership which go well beyond the commoditized services of price and language capabilities alone.

Finally, proximity and distance have become less important. Many customers still prefer to work with vendors in the near shore, and there is a perception that closer is better. The reality however is that once a program is launched, it's very rare that the client needs to visit the provider's location. The pandemic experience proved this without a doubt. What is important is whether your BPO provider has a solid track record and experience in managing, training and supporting your operations remotely, no matter where they find themselves in the world. The important considerations should be around whether they have the right infrastructure and tools to communicate effectively, and proximity is becoming less of an issue than ever before.

"The success of every client-BPO partnership is underpinned by delivering strong offshoring fundamentals, bringing together the best of customer experience, economics, quality BPO

services, rapid scale when needed, high service levels and an absolute commitment to the operational performance metrics that matter most to your shared business model. Partnering with the right BPO partner will reduce costs, improve CX, grow the bottom line, and most critically, provide the scale and support needed to act rapidly wherever, and whenever market opportunities arise," concludes Alinur.

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