



## CASE STUDY

# SYKES' Training Revamp Makes Retailer's Holiday Season Ramp-Up Much Merrier

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Each year, without fail, the holidays arrive at the same time. Every parent, significant other and retailer should be prepared. But most of all, every retail customer care department should be OVER prepared. A major global brand partner recognized the importance of a high-performing support team and presented SYKES with the challenge of creating just that. See how redesigning our seasonal onboarding training program helped this brand top their overall brand experience with the beautiful bow of stellar customer service

## BRAND PARTNER

SYKES' brand partner is a global retail leader, providing a wide range of products — grocery, pharmacy, apparel, lifestyle and home, electronics, etc. — at affordable prices. With more than 11,200 stores in 27 countries and a substantial e-commerce presence, the brand achieves annual total revenue of \$5.3 billion (USD) and employs 2.2 million associates worldwide. SYKES provides home-based customer service agents for this brand through our proprietary SYKESHome system.

## CHALLENGE

Due to holiday season business needs, our brand partner sees an increase in call volume from October to December as shoppers purchase last-minute holiday gifts. SYKES annually ramps up to support the large headcount needed to handle the holiday influx of contact regarding order placement and status, refunds, cancellations and more.

However, onboarding a large number of agents on an expedited schedule negatively affected performance, and SYKES was tasked with resolving this problem. As the brand partner re-aligned average handle time (AHT) and quality assurance (QA) goals to improve the customer experience, SYKES had to adjust accordingly to meet and exceed those expectations.

## OUR APPROACH

We leaned on a deep dive analysis of our ramp-up processes to determine gaps and opportunities for improvement. The major detractors identified for AHT were a lack of hands-on experience and limited advance access to the brand's systems. The gaps affecting QA scores included lack of empathy, missed call flow steps, call transfer issues, call refusal and avoidance of escalated calls, extended hold times, proper account documenting, and more.

An in-depth review of our training curricula helped us address these issues by implementing the following improvements:

	<b>CALL SIMULATIONS</b>		<b>ADDITIONAL CALL SHADOWING</b>
<b>Top call drivers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hands-on experience with call types and potential resolutions</li> <li>• Empathy/de-escalation practice</li> </ul>		<b>Experienced agents</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate a full, successful call</li> <li>• Validate necessary use of best practices</li> <li>• Inspire discussion and understanding of call flow</li> </ul>	
	<b>SANDBOX ENVIRONMENT</b>		<b>DAILY ACTIVITY PACKAGES</b>
<b>Practice environment similar to brand's production system</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hands-on experience</li> <li>• Advance access to actual production environment</li> <li>• Practice notating accounts</li> <li>• Build confidence in learned skills</li> </ul>		<b>Games, reflection questions, quizzes, etc.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce education and practiced skills</li> <li>• Address new or continual areas of difficulty</li> <li>• Refresh brand/product knowledge</li> <li>• Identify areas in which individuals require additional coaching</li> </ul>	
	<b>NESTING HUDDLES</b>		<b>JOB AIDS</b>
<b>Coverage of additional and emerging trends/topics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-classroom training/coaching</li> <li>• Proactively address emerging challenges</li> <li>• Retroactively address gaps in training curricula</li> </ul>		<b>Quick-reference content</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline best practices and call flow topics</li> <li>• Address common challenges</li> <li>• Reinforce training content and practice</li> </ul>	
	<b>AGENT FEEDBACK</b>		<b>FEEDBACK TO BRAND</b>
<b>Coaching based on agent questions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce positive behaviors and skills</li> <li>• Encourage open communication and collaboration</li> <li>• Provide constructive criticism and solutions</li> <li>• Inspire agent growth and retention</li> </ul>		<b>Transparency with brand</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate program challenges</li> <li>• Discuss areas where the brand can improve processes</li> </ul>	

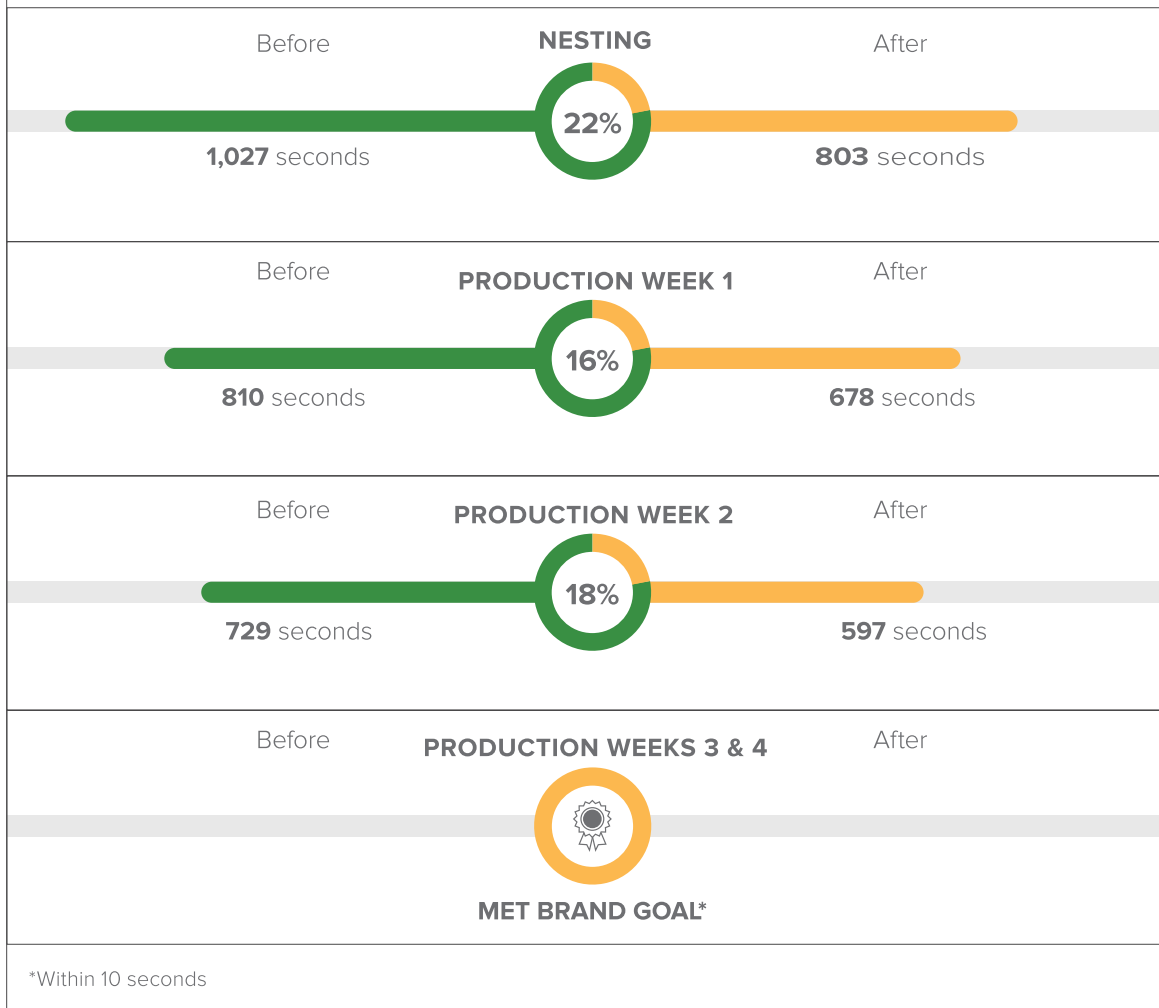
## RESULTS

SYKES measured the effectiveness of these improvement efforts based on a YOY comparison of AHT and QA scores for the first five weeks of new-agent production — one nesting week and weeks 1–4 of live production. The challenge of rapid ramping/onboarding combined with the brand's adoption of a different QA form that increased performance goals (by 13 percent and 9 percent for nesting and production weeks, respectively), meant that our approach needed to achieve immediate and dramatic results.

SYKES' training redesign delivered the desired results. Though the shift to a new QA form made an apples-to-apples comparison in that area impossible, our holiday ramp-up class of 886 new agents surpassed the QA score goal all five weeks, scoring 16 percent above goal in the fourth week of production.

Despite increased call volumes affecting the number and effectiveness of call simulations available to agents, AHT decreased significantly in the nesting week compared to the previous year. Performance improved each week, coming within 10 seconds of the brand's AHT goal by the third week of production.

## AHT — Weekly Results: % Improved YOY, 2017 v. 2018



**TOP VENDOR** for AHT while handling highest call volume in second month of peak season



**TOP VENDOR** for CSAT in first month of peak season



**15%** YOY increase of agent retention in seasonal onboarding class



**QA** — Exceeded increased goal all five weeks

- Reached **97%** by Production Week
- Exceeded new goal by an average of more than **10%**