



Case Study

Maintaining service
excellence during
challenging times



Client profile

UK commuter rail company Southeastern runs the train network that connects Kent, London, and parts of East Sussex, one of the country's busiest commuter nodes. Southeastern operates over 1,700 trains a day, carrying more than 400,000 passengers and serving 180 stations.

The experience for those customers is Southeastern's central concern — the company puts the customer at the center of everything they do, delivering consistently excellent standards in customer service while pursuing technical innovation to improve customer experience continually.

Passenger Assist is a national system supported by all train companies that facilitates assistance arrangements for customers with impairments or restricted mobility. Southeastern maintains a team dedicated to assistance in planning journeys and information-sharing on accessibility within the National Rail network's trains and stations. Additionally, they furnish details about timetables, including any service alterations, and check daily on station lift closures to ensure that passengers requiring assistance are promptly notified of disruptions that might affect their travel.



Industry

Rail Service



Footprint

Southeastern's 4,500+ employees oversee services on one of the UK's busiest rail networks, ensuring the safety and satisfaction of the 400,000 customers it carries weekly. The company oversees 1,700 train journeys every weekday and thousands more on weekends, which cover 180 stations and 540 miles of track.

Operational overview

Teleperformance has been working with Southeastern since 2015, managing a 24-hour customer service center and handling all channels of customer contact.

People

The company headquarter, with 10 advisors and 6 support staff, contrasts with the Call Centre's 67 advisors and 16 support staff, while Bangor boasts an additional 7 support personnel.

Support channels

Phone, Chat, Email and Postal Correspondence.

Language

English

Location

London, United Kingdom

Business challenge

Satisfying customers amid a labor dispute

The ongoing rail strikes across the UK, which started in April 2022, are the largest industrial action in the country in 34 years. Southeastern anticipated a spike in the volume of customer support contacts during the disruption. They would need to go above and beyond to maintain service standards: responding to all contacts within 10 working days, answering 80% of telephone calls within 30 seconds, and addressing all complaints thoroughly and providing correct resolutions.

Crucially, Southeastern aimed to maintain the performance of Delay Repay during the strike. Southeastern received an average of 143% increase in Delay Repay claims following the strike, which required its customer service function to expand its bandwidth quickly to maintain the 10-day response standard.

For more than eight years, Southeastern has partnered with Teleperformance, the worldwide leader in outsourced multi-channel customer experience management, in a model of cross-functional collaboration. Teleperformance handles multiple channels of customer contact on behalf of Southeastern, including servicing a 24-hour customer service center, responding to email and chat communication, assisting customers who need help in the station, making bookings for customers, and processing refunds. Teleperformance's 67 advisors and 28 support staff have handled more than 296,000 customer contacts for Southeastern in the last year.

The challenge for Southeastern was to work with its partner to ensure adequate resourcing to handle the higher volume of contact and maintain the utmost standards of customer care during the industrial action. Employing streamlined processes to manage sudden surges is pivotal for success in customer service operations, as overwhelmed systems lead to service interruptions and slowdowns that can badly damage customer satisfaction. Southeastern aimed to prevent any change at all in its usual excellent level of service throughout the strike-related spike in demand.

Solution delivered

Cross-functional collaboration for customer service excellence

Southeastern and Teleperformance collaborated within their partnership to implement various initiatives that would maintain standards and support customers throughout the disruption of service.

Teleperformance applied its T.A.P.[™] framework to the situation to ensure the most operationally efficient response to the challenge. T.A.P.[™] is an approach to business transformation focusing on technology, analytics, and process excellence, which harnesses Teleperformance's expertise in proposing, deploying, and maintaining customer service operations while upholding service levels. The framework leverages Lean Six Sigma methodologies and applies design thinking, industry and functional domain expertise, and technologies such as robotic process automation (RPA), artificial intelligence (AI), and advanced analytics to help teams identify transformation opportunities and adapt to new environments quickly.



**Technology
Analytics
Process Excellence**



The intervention resulted in key changes that allowed Southeastern to meet the challenges of balancing high contact demands with achieving an industry-leading service throughout the strikes:

- **Improved capacity planning to anticipate support needs for peak contact volumes**
This involved increasing staffing over 12 months to avoid long wait times and ensure customer satisfaction during short-notice strike activity.
- **Introduction of flexible contact teams that enabled strategic staff deployment**
These teams, which could handle all contact types, could be deployed in whichever departments needed an additional layer of support due to fluctuating contact volumes.
- **Condensed training for specific needs, shortened from two weeks to two days**
This enabled expedited onboarding of additional staff and provided flexibility in resourcing, as training could target the most-impacted functions, such as Delay Repay.
- **Enhanced Delay Repay automation to handle thousands of additional monthly claims**
The improvement of Southeastern's Delay Repay approval system allowed for higher-volume processing while maintaining accuracy and limiting staffing needs.



Real results

An “exceptional” rating from happy customers

Ramping up their capacity for customer care delivered real business impact:

88%	92%	14%
of customers now rate Southeastern's service as exceptional (14% above the industry average)	rate the Southeastern team's knowledge and professionalism at 5 out of 5	higher net promoter score than the industry average

The assertive action the partnership took to maintain standards during the strikes was key to this success. Despite handling 594,541 customer communications during the strike — 270,943 more than the prior year — the customer service center maintained an average response time of 3 days and 5 hours, far faster than the industry benchmark of 10 working days. Additionally, Southeastern achieved a 100% resolution rate for contact resolution within 10 working days, surpassing the industry average of 83% and giving the company by far the best record on this front of any UK rail company.

As a result of the systems put in place during the strikes, the company had an average resolution time for Delay Repay of 3 days and 11 hours this year.

Southeastern delivered on the vision of providing exceptional customer experiences, sharing data and insights, cultivating a culture that encourages innovation, prioritizing flexibility to move resources among departments, and enabling free-flowing stakeholder communications.

As a result, the company achieved its objective of delivering industry-leading services to customers throughout the strike, with the Rail Ombudsman confirming that Southeastern had achieved total accuracy in fairly resolving complaints. The benefits of the intervention continue to pay dividends, i.e., the enhanced contact management system can automate 20% more claims as compared to manual resolution on an ongoing basis, ensuring that customers will be served well above the industry standard for years to come.

"I am writing to say huge thanks as you were incredibly patient and kind when I was quite clearly upset, flustered and distressed. Please pass my sincere gratitude to the team. I would also like to say how friendly all of your call centre is, always helpful, informative and cheery. The hard work and long hours which they all work is truly appreciated and does not go unnoticed!"

— Southeastern customer

An award-winning partnership

Southeastern's strategy, executed by Teleperformance, received the silver award for best cross-functional collaboration at the 23rd Operational Excellence Ceremony in London, honoring outstanding customer service initiatives. This recognition took place during the European Contact Centre & Customer Service Awards (ECCCSAs), the premier awards program in the European customer contact industry. ECCCSAs, now in its 23rd year, stands as the longest-running and most expansive awards program in this industry, acknowledging top organizations across Europe for their exceptional customer service delivery.



