

A large, decorative graphic consisting of multiple overlapping, wavy lines in shades of orange and yellow, flowing from the top left towards the right side of the page.

Selecting the Right Call Center Partner

Nine Tips for Success

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Building Relationships with Healthcare Providers and Patients

Pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and medical device companies are focused on developing and selling innovative products that improve the lives of patients. A significant need for the industry is to communicate and build relationships with healthcare providers (who prescribe products) and patients (who use these products). Providing these “on-demand” communication services to healthcare providers and patients requires significant financial and staff investment to operate a call center.

A more efficient and practical solution is to partner with a pharmaceutical call center to provide these services. Pharmaceutical call centers focus on building relationships with healthcare providers and patients in a timely, efficient, and compliant manner. Using a pharmaceutical call center partner allows the industry to stay focused on developing innovative healthcare treatments and products. While the pharmaceutical call center partner provides highly trained personnel, operational efficiencies, and flexibility to “scale up” or “scale down” the services utilized for a particular product depending on lifecycle stage and market conditions.

In the following pages the services a pharmaceutical call center can provide will be shared, as well as the primary challenges clients have in selecting a call center partner. The focus of this White Paper is to share nine (9) key areas that should be evaluated when searching for a pharmaceutical call center partner. Following this process and evaluating these areas will provide a short list of qualified potential partners that are most likely to be a good fit for your program needs and company culture.

Pharmaceutical Call Centers Build Relationships

Pharmaceutical call centers provide pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and medical device companies with additional resources to communicate and build relationships with healthcare providers and patients. In particular, pharmaceutical call centers can support industry to...

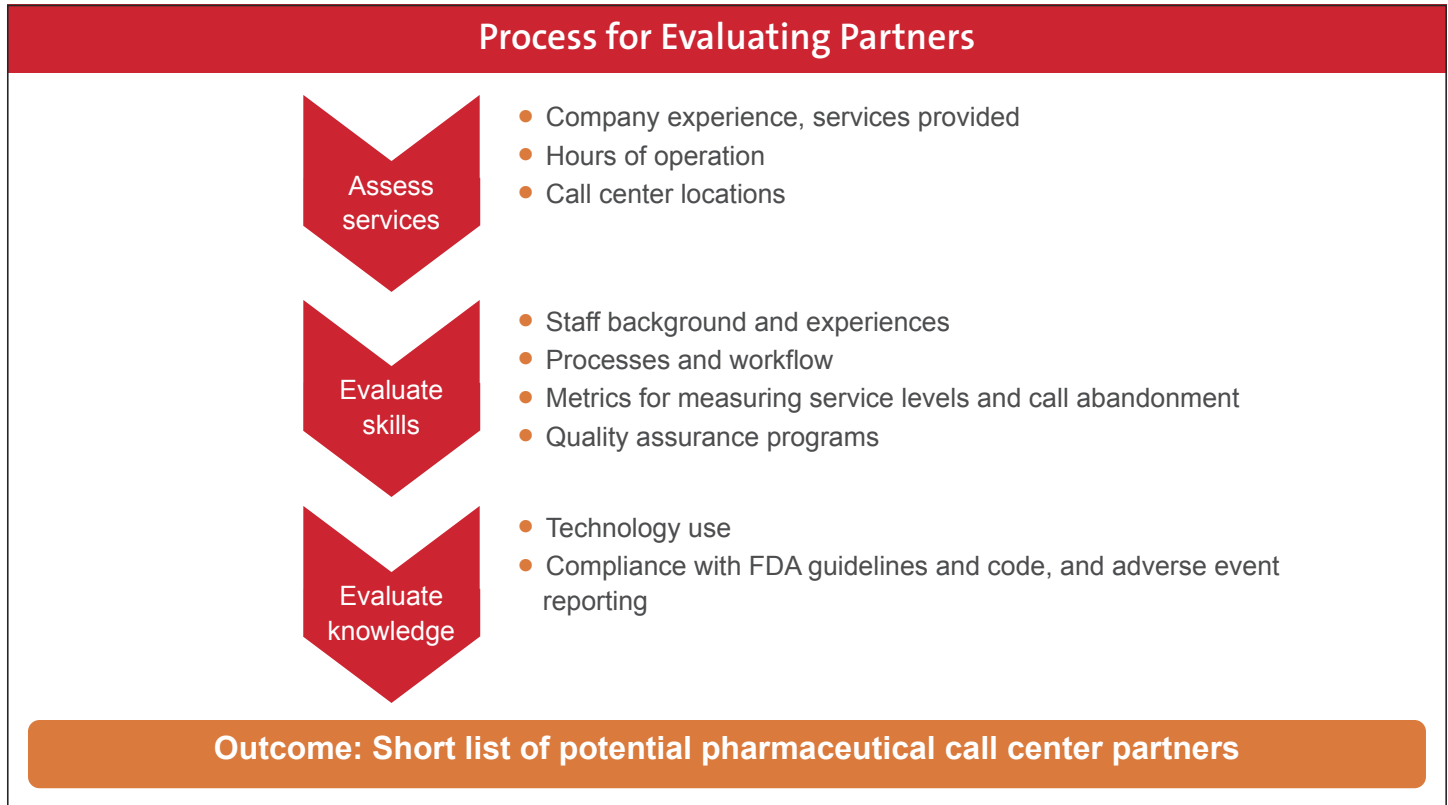
- *Provide tele-detailing to healthcare providers and their offices to support field-based sales representatives. Activities can include...*
 - *Processing sample requests and setting appointments*
 - *Supplementing field-based promotional activities for new product launches or to maintain a voice in the market during a competitor's product launch*
- *Increase patient adherence to treatments and clinical trials*
- *Provide on-demand support to answer healthcare provider and patient questions about specific treatments*
- *Increase patient referrals to clinical trials*

There are two (2) primary challenges clients cite when selecting a call center partner, and they are...

- *Concern with identifying the “right” call center partner to interact with healthcare providers and patients on behalf of the company and product. It is critically important that the pharmaceutical call center partner appropriately portray the company image and follow their code of conduct and governance policies.*
- *Selecting the “right” or “best” call center partner. Engaging a partner in these services is a long-term commitment, and selecting the “wrong” partner can cost the product and company valuable time and money.*

9 Key Areas to Evaluate for Call Center Partners

Finding and selecting the “right” call center partner is a challenging task. The figure below depicts the process for evaluating potential call center partners.



The nine (9) areas identified above are reviewed in the following pages. An evaluation of these key areas will ensure the most critical areas are reviewed and highlight the most qualified pharmaceutical call center partners.

1. Company experience—Identify companies with an established track record in providing pharmaceutical call center support. This is best done through research and referrals from trusted colleagues. Unfortunately there is not a repository, listing, or annual awards program for call center operators that provide specialized services for pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and medical devices companies.



The best way to identify companies with the right experience is through research and referrals from colleagues. When conducting research, review trade publications and look for interviews and quotes from company representatives. Additionally, many companies have materials such as case studies, white papers, webinars, or podcasts that outline their experiences on their websites. Reach out to trusted colleagues for honest assessments of their experiences with pharmaceutical call center partners.

Selecting the Right Call Center Partner

2. Hours of operation—Pharmaceutical call centers are most valuable when they are available to interact with healthcare providers and patients. Begin with an assessment of the operating hours your program needs. The operating hours for pharmaceutical call centers vary widely, and it's critical that they align with your needs. Not all programs need 24/7 operating hours and not all pharmaceutical call center partners provide this option.



When evaluating potential pharmaceutical call center partners, understand if they can provide 24/7 operating hours. If the pharmaceutical call center can provide 24/7 operating hours, understand how (ie, what staff levels) and where (ie, location) the calls will be handled during the late night and early morning hours. Additionally, the program may not need 24/7 operating hours initially, but over time the needs may change and it's an advantage to have this option available.



Be rigorous in your evaluation of the operating hours your program needs. Know where your calls are originating. Identify the specific region(s) and time zone(s) the majority of your calls are coming from and staff to meet those times.

3. Call center locations—A critical capability to evaluate with potential pharmaceutical call center partners is the number of call centers and where they are located. The number of call centers and their location helps determine if they have the capacity to provide the level of service needed. Additionally, ask about opportunities to “scale up” or “scale down” services as the program needs change over time.



When evaluating call center locations outside the US, understand what services these operators provide and if they are fluent in the primary languages needed for your call center program. Additionally, understand how information is shared between the call centers, and what training the operators receive in FDA and compliance issues.



When evaluating potential pharmaceutical call center partners ask about their data management systems. Experienced call center partners will have multiple storage facilities and back-up systems in place to ensure data security and continuity, as well as consistent use of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and guidelines for technology at all sites.

4. Staff backgrounds and experiences—The formula for success is to have the right staff answering the right questions. It's all about providing value efficiently to the healthcare provider or patient on the telephone. Most pharmaceutical call centers tier operators based on skill and experience (ie, both clinical and operator). In general, experienced operators without clinical training will handle general questions that are generated from advertisements or educational materials. Operators with clinical experience as case workers will generally handle inquiries that are clinical in nature, such as about a clinical trial. Operators with specialized clinical experience such as Nurses and Pharmacists will handle questions that are strictly clinical in nature such as assessing potential adverse events, questions about drug interactions, etc.



When evaluating a potential pharmaceutical call center partner there are four (4) key questions to ask about their staff...

1. *Backgrounds and experiences*
2. *How do they determine what staff will handle what types of queries*
3. *The training program each operator completes before they begin to answer calls*
4. *Retention and turnover rates with staff. Low turnover and staff retention is a sign of a well-run pharmaceutical call center partner*

An experienced pharmaceutical call center partner will have all of this information available and will happily provide it.

5. Processes and workflow—Pharmaceutical call centers have SOPs in place, as well as call flows for each program. Potential partners should be willing to provide information on their SOPs. Call flows should provide a detailed schematic of how the calls will be managed and the actions prompted by specific responses to specific questions. Also, if interactive voice response (IVR) technology is used this should be clearly identified on the call flow.

The benefit of using an experienced pharmaceutical call center partner is that they have experience working as a team. All of the operators, no matter what tier, are responsible to act according to the company's guidance policies. However, experienced operators that work as a team can spot trends or potential problems quickly. These early warnings are invaluable and can save time and provide insight for a needed change or modification in the program.



When evaluating potential pharmaceutical call center partners, look for companies that are willing to modify their SOPs to meet your program needs and company governance and conduct policies. Also, ask what circumstances prompt "special actions" and how easily this information is accessed and implemented. Additionally, look for a partner that will work with you to develop a customized call flow for your program well in advance of the program launch.

6. Metrics for measuring service levels and call abandonment—There are several industry standards for measuring the effectiveness of a pharmaceutical call center. Service levels, call abandonment, and call center up time are three (3) of these standards. However, be aware when evaluating these metrics that individual pharmaceutical call centers define and report these metrics in a wide variety of ways.



Ask for the definition of each parameter when interpreting metrics from a pharmaceutical call center partner. For instance, how long is the time frame for measuring service levels and at what point is a call considered abandoned? Knowing the definitions each company uses will help you understand what metrics are being measured, and if these definitions match your expectations.

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7. Quality assurance programs—Understand the quality assurance programs the pharmaceutical call center partner has in place. Quality assurance programs are critical to continuous process improvement for pharmaceutical call centers. Ask for details on the type of quality monitoring the pharmaceutical call center partner uses and how often operators are monitored. Frequency of monitoring for individual agents is likely to vary based on the operator's experience level (ie, new operators are usually monitored more frequently) and their past monitoring evaluations. Also, ask if quality monitoring data is used to improve training programs, and if quality monitoring information is used for individual coaching sessions with operators.



When you are evaluating quality assurance programs for pharmaceutical call center partners, look for pharmaceutical call center partners that design customized quality assurance monitoring for each program. In particular, these programs should include customized questions, scoring metrics, and guidance for operators on what metrics are expected.

8. Technology use—Technology is a key component in delivering call center programs and it is a part of everything a pharmaceutical call center does. Technology allows live interactions that are aligned with client governance and conduct policies. For technology to enhance efficiency it must be easy to use and provide operators with instant access to program documents such as questions, call flow processes, and a customer relationship management (CRM) system to document each call including date and time of the call, questions, resources provided or referred to, and the operator handling each call.



When you are evaluating pharmaceutical call center partners, ask about their technology and their ability to integrate with your systems. In particular, it's an added bonus if they can integrate with your CRM platform. Integrating the pharmaceutical call center data into your CRM platform increases efficiency and saves time by eliminating manual integration of this information.

9. Compliance with FDA guidelines and codes, and adverse event reporting—Compliance with FDA regulations and codes, and company policies governing adverse event reporting and privacy are key issues for sponsors designing call center programs. Because of the importance of compliance issues this is a key area that pharmaceutical call centers manage on a daily basis.



When you are evaluating pharmaceutical call center partners, ask about their SOPs for handling compliance issues. Ask specific questions that are likely to occur with your program. Additionally, ask for their recommendations on how you should handle FDA compliance requirements for your call center program. Their recommendations will provide you with a sense of how they handle FDA compliance issues, and how seriously they take these issues. Ask yourself if their recommendations are consistent with how your organization would most likely act.



An experienced pharmaceutical call center will design their SOPs to comply with FDA regulations and your company's compliance and governance policies.

Assessing Partner Fit

Finding and selecting the “right” call center partner requires careful evaluation and is a time-consuming process. Evaluating the areas listed above is the first step in determining if a company has the experiences and business processes in place to successfully develop and implement your program. Equally important is to find a collaborative and experienced pharmaceutical call center partner. Characteristics to look for when interacting with potential partners include...

- **Approachability**—can you comfortably discuss questions and concerns, and are they open to your feedback
- **Consultative**—do they listen to your challenges and provide viable suggestions for overcoming them
- **Flexibility**—are they willing to look at and develop new options, or are they inclined to “stick with” what they have always done
- **Partner mindset**—do they work with you as a partner or act as a vendor and “order taker”

Closing Thoughts

Pharmaceutical call center partners are an invaluable resource in building relationships with healthcare providers and patients. With each telephone conversation they are strengthening the relationship the healthcare provider or patient has with the product and company. This paper outlined nine (9) critical areas to evaluate when looking for potential pharmaceutical call center partners. Ultimately, following this process will provide a short list of qualified potential partners that are most likely to be a good fit for your program needs and company culture.

How We Do It...

We work with our clients to understand the program goals, expectations, and return on investment. Once we have a clear understanding of these measures, we discuss with our clients realistic and attainable metrics for a program. Frequently we review the metrics from similar programs we’ve conducted in the past to provide additional benchmarks. A key learning from our experiences is to have these conversations when first working with a potential client.

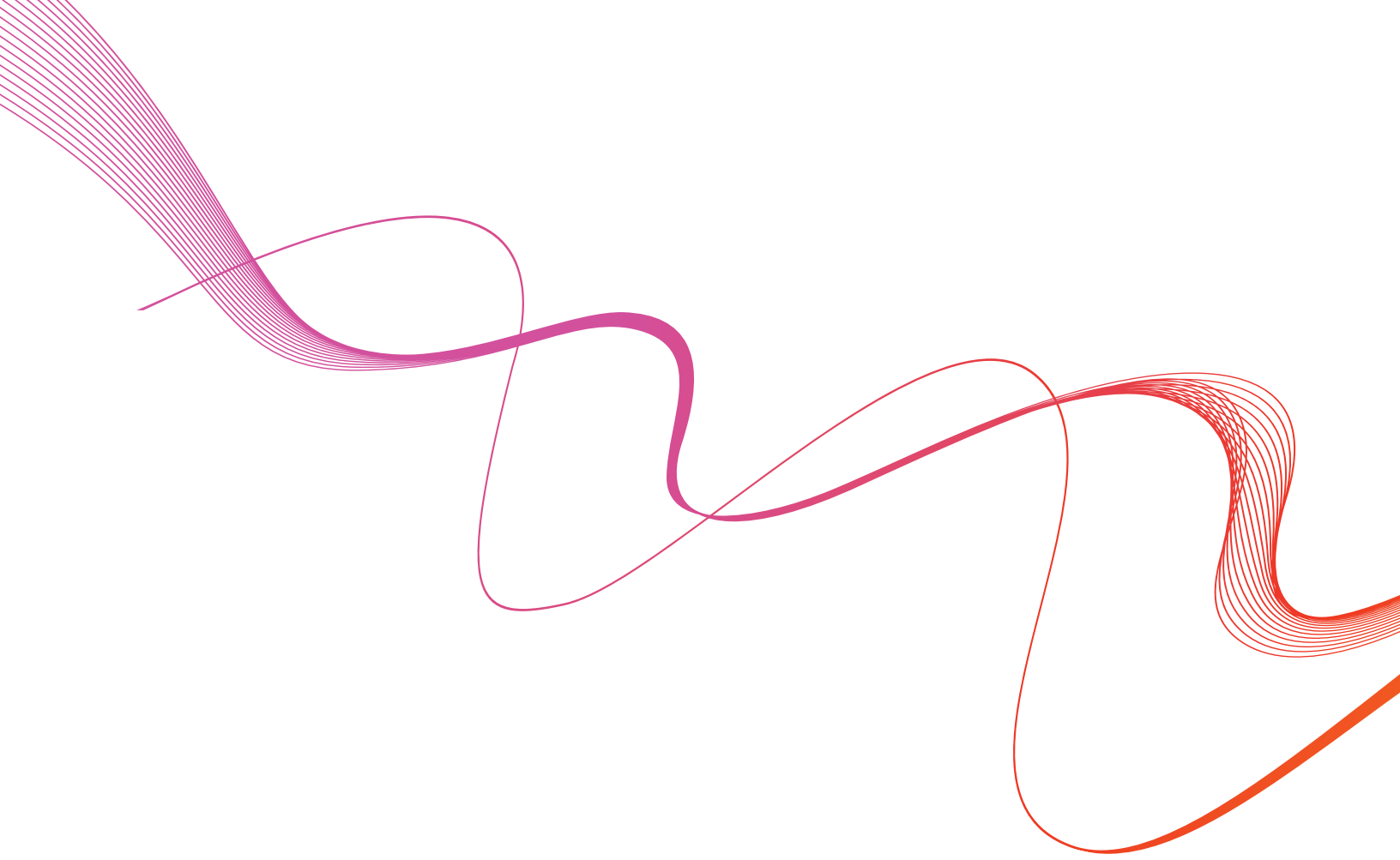
We take quality assurance monitoring very seriously and we believe our clients should have unfettered access to this information. We have developed an industry-leading secure web-based portal to report all of our quality assurance activities. We develop individual scorecards on our operators, and share this information with our clients on the secure web-based portal. We also believe strongly that clients should have input on how frequently and how we monitor our operators. We hold calibration and monitoring sessions regularly with our clients so they can be assured we are providing high-quality service to their customers and representing their brand and company appropriately.

Our system provides each caller with a unique identifier. This identifier remains with a specific caller and within each record. The unique identifier provides an opportunity to analyze data in a number of ways and allows us to track the conversations with the caller over time.

About Tunstall Americas

Tunstall Americas is a leading provider of independent living technologies and 24/7 healthcare communication services to connect individuals, caregivers, and healthcare providers to empower better health. Tunstall Americas provides innovative products and services to enhance patient engagement, improve outcomes, and increase operational efficiencies for hospitals, medical centers, health systems, providers, payers, and life science companies. We are focused on helping build and maintain relationships with patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers to drive engagement and knowledge, support patient adherence, and empower patients to take charge of their health. We work closely with each client to develop customized solutions to deliver exceptional results. We are in a unique position to support patient engagement and adherence through our broad solutions including personal emergency response and telehealth devices that can be used in the home-setting, and 24/7 monitoring and on-demand personal services to provide support, information, and educational materials to patients, caregivers, providers, and payers. For more information, visit www.tunstall.com.

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