



Be Gutsy at Work

How to Get Hired as a Home-Based Customer Service Agent

by: Tory Johnson

The home-based [customer service industry](#) is exploding, which means the need for people to answer inbound phone calls for big businesses from the privacy of their home offices, instead of overseas or in traditional call centers, is greater than ever. Companies who hire virtual customer service agents such as Alpine Access, Arise, and LiveOps tell us that they will hire 10,000 more agents combined, between now and December, to prepare for the holiday rush and new clients signing on.

In addition to being a self-starter with strong customer service skills and computer proficiency, there are some specific skills currently in big demand. Companies look for bilingual agents, [health-care](#) agents, licensed [insurance](#) agents, and tech support. Exceptional sales and customer service experience continue to be in high demand, as well.

Agents earn between \$8 and \$20 an hour, sometimes higher for specialized skills and for commission incentives. You are responsible for providing and maintaining your own computer, land line and high-speed Internet service, just as you would for any home-based business. Those costs are not covered or reimbursed.

There are **five key tips and tricks** to keep in mind to get hired:

Treat virtual interviews just like in-person interviews. You can't be any less professional, just because you're not sitting across the desk from an [interviewer](#). No background noise like crying babies, barking dogs, or TV.

The interviewer is judging your phone and typing manner, because your voice will be the virtual face of the company. Give yourself 60 minutes of uninterrupted time to do it right.

Practice the scripts. The decision-makers tell me that one place where people stumble during the application process is the voice test. Applicants are required to read a script with enthusiasm, which can be very difficult. If they can't do it effectively, they're often rejected. Here are two sample scripts used during the application process, so try them -- and perfect them on your own before applying:

"As a thank you for purchasing the Mini Oven today, Widget Company has a very special offer that includes additional accessories for your Mini Oven that you wouldn't want to be without! This accessory package includes two additional nonstick baskets and the nonstick Round Rib basket. "We are also including a 240-page cookbook with over 200 mouth-watering recipes for your Mini Oven. This accessory package has a value of \$162, but you can have this package today for only \$39.95." (Courtesy of [LiveOps](#))

"Thank you for calling the Auto Center. How may I help you? You are locked out of your car? Oh, I am sorry to hear that. May I ask for your membership number? Thank you, Mr. Brown. May I have the year, make and model of your vehicle, and where you are located? A dispatcher will contact you within 15 minutes with an estimated time of arrival. Is there anything else I can help you with, Mr. Brown? Thank you for calling the Auto Center." (Courtesy of Arise Virtual Solutions)

Be flexible about scheduling. Express a willingness to work at least 15 hours a week, and be willing to start on nights and weekends. Offering to take the less popular shifts makes you more attractive to a prospective employer. Once you've proven your abilities, you should be able to improve your schedule. But first, get your foot in the door.

Demonstrate a comfort level with technology. If you're great on the phone, and you've got exceptional sales or [customer service](#) experience, but you're not so hot on the computer, fix that before applying. If you get flustered when too many programs are open at once, consider taking a computer course at a local community college so you can improve your online comfort level and confidence. This is computer-based work, so you can't overlook this step.

Shop around. Check out a few of the [companies](#) in this industry to see which might offer the best fit for you. Don't be discouraged by companies that require you to incorporate, versus those that don't. Geographical needs and availability may also impact your decision on which company to join. Think long term about where you'll have the most opportunity for success.

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