



The UK Customer Experience Decision-Makers' Guide 2023-24

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The 2023-24 UK Customer Experience Decision-Makers' Guide

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Analyse

Every conversation on every channel

Augment

Every agent interaction

Automate

Customer interactions



'Snap-in' integration with:

AVAYA

GENESYS

8x8

Five9

aws Connect

Mitel

NEC

- ✓ Real-time transcription
- ✓ AI fueled conversational analytics
- ✓ Real-time voice next best action
- ✓ Real-time voice compliance
- ✓ Real-time sales up-sell / cross sell
- ✓ Automated agent QA/QM & coaching
- ✓ Automated sentiment detection
- ✓ Automated customer intent detection
- ✓ Automated customer effort detection
- ✓ Conversational Assistant

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 Contexta360™

Contexta360 advanced automation and analytics radically improves the interaction between customers and organisations across human-to-human, human-to-machine, voice, video, chat, email and app channels.

We optimise every interaction with our AI-fuelled automated conversational analytics, real-time agent and conversational assistants.

Flexible and scalable, Contexta360 is an easy-to-use, open and secure SAAS solution. Our adaptable 'infrastructure agnostic' solution drives a new level in accuracy, performance and value from incumbent systems such as Genesis, Avaya, Mitel, 8X8, NEC, AWS-Connect plus many other systems.

Our team of highly skilled software developers and computer scientists are fanatical about artificial intelligence, speech analytics, data science and natural language understanding. We help organisations to capture millions of conversations across all channels in multiple languages with incredible speed and accuracy.

Our solution enriches and analyses interaction insight, such as intent, friction, sentiment, plus many more. Automated business triggers capture why customers are engaging and accurately analyses and measures how organisations are responding.

We believe that every organisation can drastically improve their customer interaction journey with Contexta360. Our solution allows organisations to scale hundreds of millions of interactions a year.

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The "*UK Customer Experience Decision-Makers' Guide (2023-24 – 6th edition)*" is a major annual report studying the CX strategy, performance, operations and technology aspects of UK organisations.

Taking a random sample of the industry, a detailed structured questionnaire was answered by 209 senior CX and customer contact professionals between June and August 2023. Analysis of the results was carried out in August 2023.

Additionally, a survey of 1,000 UK consumers was carried out in June 2023 in order to understand their attitudes to elements of businesses' CX programmes and what they understand a positive customer experience to be.

ContactBabel is grateful for the support received from the sponsors of the report. Complete editorial independence has been maintained at all stages, and readers can be confident about the objectivity of the report's findings.

Third-party White Papers, case studies and thought leadership pieces may also be referenced to assist readers who may wish to look more in-depth at specific areas or to gain another viewpoint.

SEGMENTATIONS

Looking at headline figures for CX statistics gives a certain level of insight, but only with a clear understanding of how and why metrics differ between operations can readers see where they stand compared to their competitors.

As such, key statistics have been segmented in many different ways where relevant and possible:

- by vertical market (industry sector)
- by contact centre size (overall UK agent positions)
- by annual revenue
- by organisational type (e.g. B2C or B2B)

Vertical markets:

- Financial Services (inc. Banking & Insurance) – 42 survey respondents
- Housing - 16
- Manufacturing - 10
- Outsourcing / Telemarketing / BPO - 24
- Public Sector / Government - 26
- Retail & Distribution - 33
- Services - 28
- Technology, Media & Telecoms - 21
- Utilities - 9

Contact centre size bands:

- Fewer than 50 seats - 60
- 50-200 seats - 62
- 201-1,000 seats - 55
- More than 1,000 seats - 26
- No contact centre - 6

Annual revenue:

- Less than £1m - 8
- £1-10m - 17
- £10-100m - 58
- £100m - £1bn - 45
- More than £1bn - 25
- Not applicable, as not commercial organisation - 26
- Don't know / prefer not to say - 30

Organisational type:

- B2B - 68
- B2C - 136
- Neither / unsure - 5.

HOW IMPORTANT IS CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE TO ORGANISATIONS?

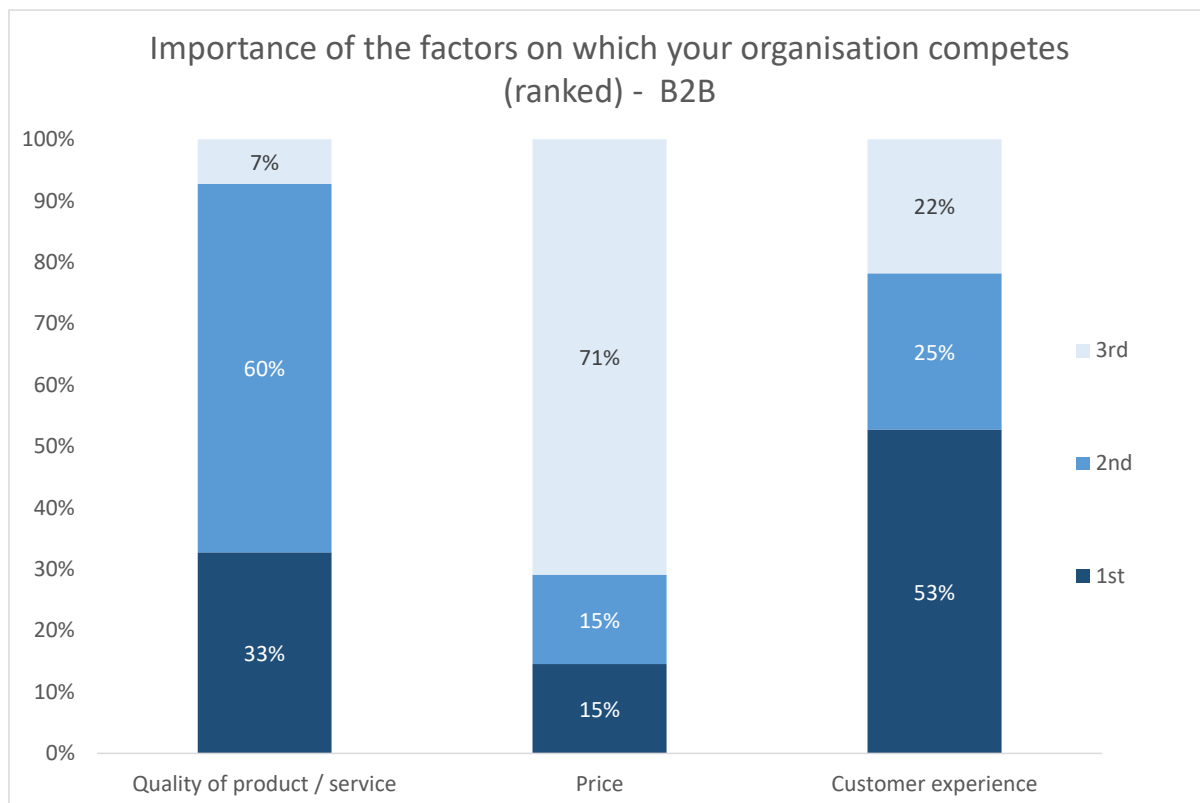
HOW DO ORGANISATIONS COMPETE?

The fundamental purpose of a commercial organisation is to maximise profit for its shareholders, with the two main ways in which this is achieved being increasing revenue and reducing cost.

In the past, the majority of business focus has been upon the variables over which there could be a large measure of control, such as managing the internal cost of production and service provision, employee salaries, price setting and sales resource allocation. More recently, the increasing use of technology in almost every part of an organisation has created an unprecedented amount of data that may be analysed. At the same time, large-scale advertising and widespread use of the Internet has made customers more aware of alternative products and services, meaning greater price competition and the need for companies to differentiate in ways that don't damage their bottom-line.

The main ways in which organisations have competed to win business is either through a low cost product or service, or through selling goods of a higher quality (whether real or perceived) which allows greater flexibility in pricing. More recently, as the customer is increasingly held at arm's length to the business (through the use of home shopping, contact centres or websites), the overall customer experience has become a battleground upon which to win customer favour.

Figure 1: Importance of the factors on which your organisation competes (ranked) - B2B



Survey respondents were asked how their organisation competed, ranking three factors in order of importance: quality, price and customer experience.

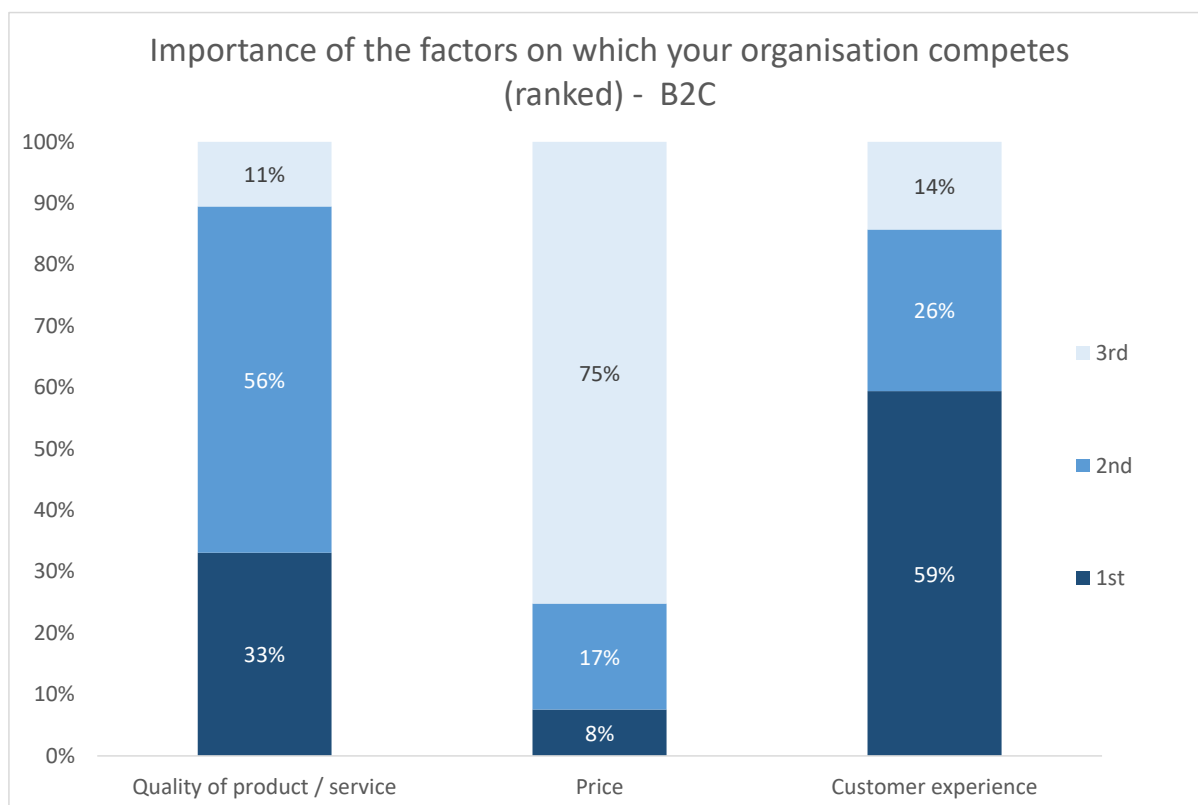
As competition on price tends to mean lower profit margins for all of the companies in that sector, it is unsurprising that only 15% of B2B respondents placed this factor in first place. The B2C figure is even lower, with only 8% stating that their organisation competed primarily on price. As the country is struggling through a cost of living crisis, it is notable to find that businesses are not in general considering price reduction to be a major strategy, perhaps as many producers of goods are also impacted by inflation passed on from their suppliers, and even services companies are experiencing wage inflation which limits their ability to cut prices.

33% of both B2B and B2C organisations stated that their primary competitive factor was quality.

53% of B2B and 59% of B2C respondents stated that customer experience was their primary means of gaining competitive advantage, figures which have been growing year on year and which are now at their highest-ever point.

For more than half of all businesses to say that customer experience, rather than price or quality, was the main factor upon which they wish to compete in the market can be seen as being very significant and indicative of the mindset of senior business leaders in the UK: many organisations are now seeing customer experience as being the key to profitability. However, it remains to be seen how ongoing economic challenges will alter strategies.

Figure 2: Importance of the factors on which your organisation competes (ranked) - B2C

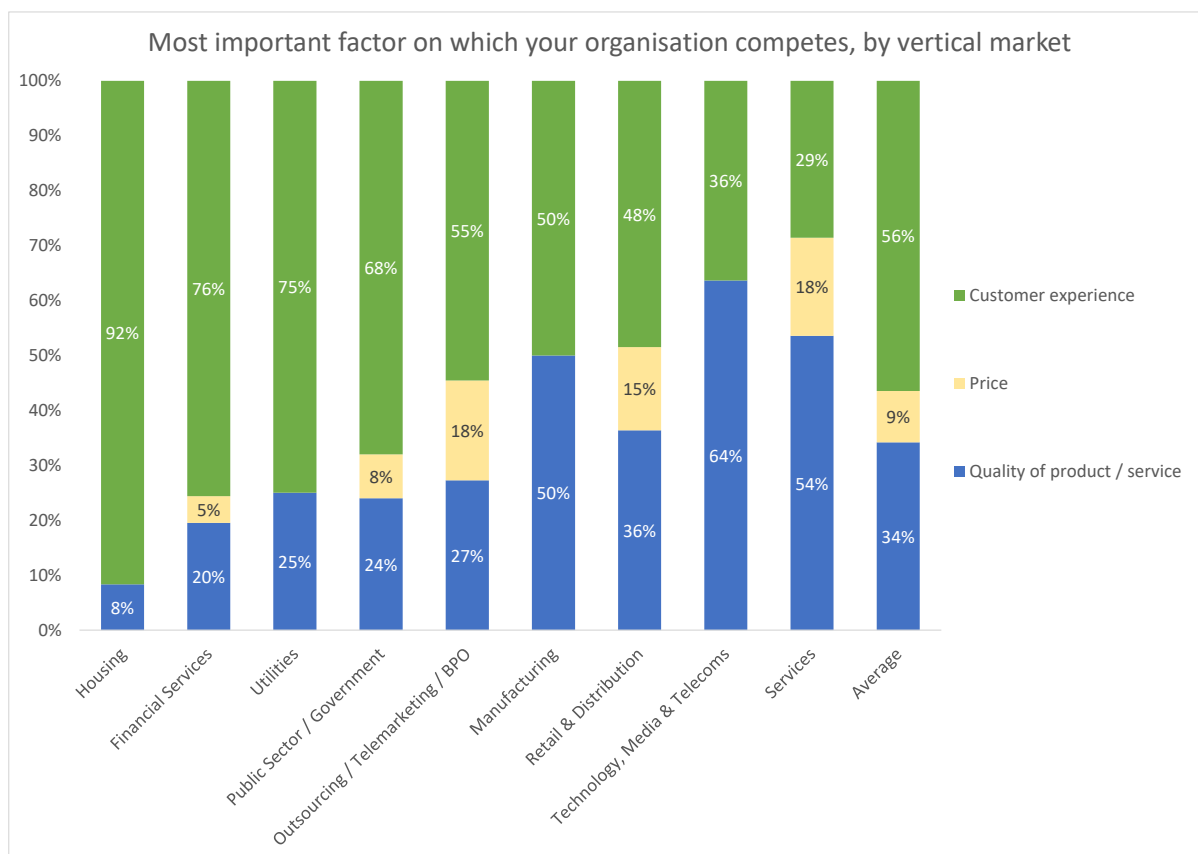


It is important to bear in mind that due to the increased segmentation of data, sample sizes for each vertical market are considerably smaller than those in the previous B2B/B2C analysis. However, it is interesting to speculate how the nature of the actual business may impact upon competitive differentiators.

92% of housing respondents and 76% of financial services organisations stated that customer experience is their key competitive differentiator: in service-focused sectors, 'quality' is often an intangible concept, and housing customers are already in situ and are unlikely to move supplier.

While the outsourcing sector also wishes to compete on quality and customer experience rather than cost, due to the importance of maintaining its profit margins, some survey respondents have chosen the route of ultra-competitive pricing.

Figure 3: Most important factor on which your organisation competes, by vertical market

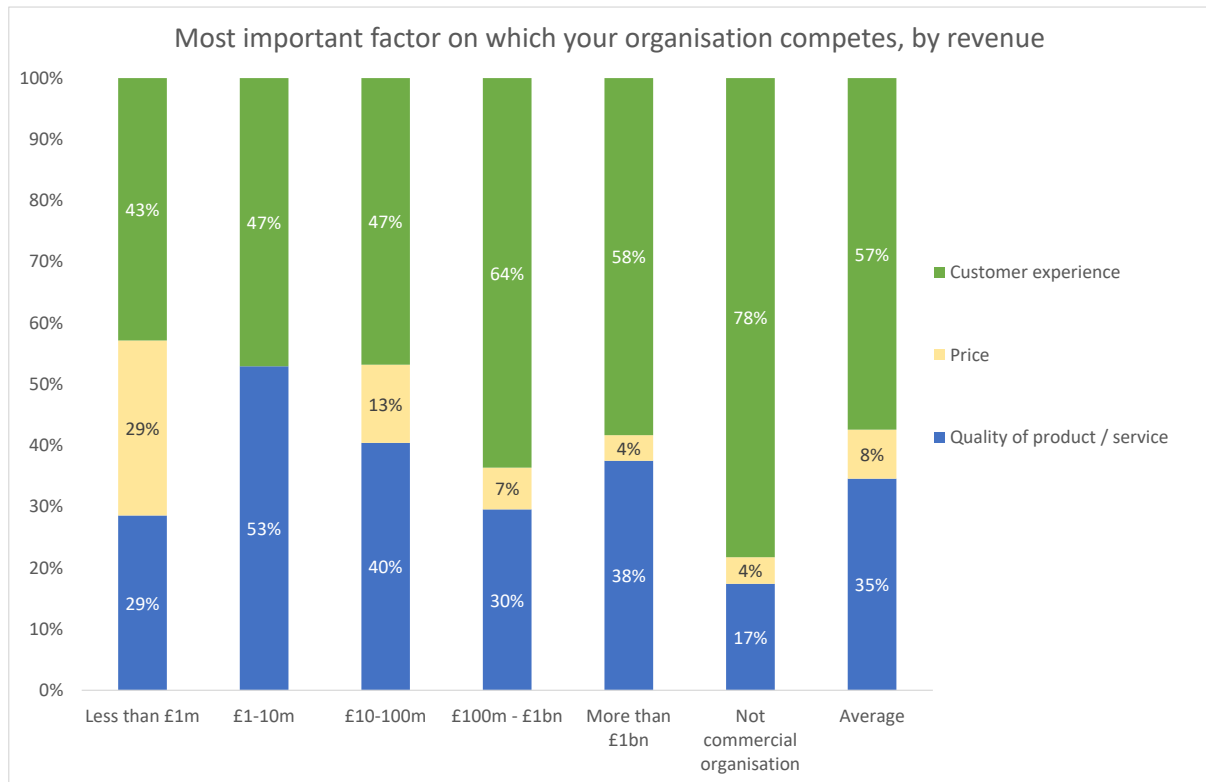


The retail & distribution sector competes more frequently than average on price, particularly in low-cost, commoditised products that make up the bulk of many retailers' sales. A successful model of internet-based retail relies upon self-service, and although this is an important part of the overall customer experience, many consumers will visit the site in the first place looking for the lowest price for a product that they have already decided to purchase. However, this figure is considerably lower than it has been in past years.

Looking at competitive factors by company revenue, it seems that this year, the smaller businesses are the most likely to be competing on price, with the largest operations surveyed focusing on customer experience.

Those businesses which are not commercial organisations, such as public services, focus mainly on customer experience.

Figure 4: Most important factor on which your organisation competes, by revenue



CX BUDGET, ROI & INVESTMENT

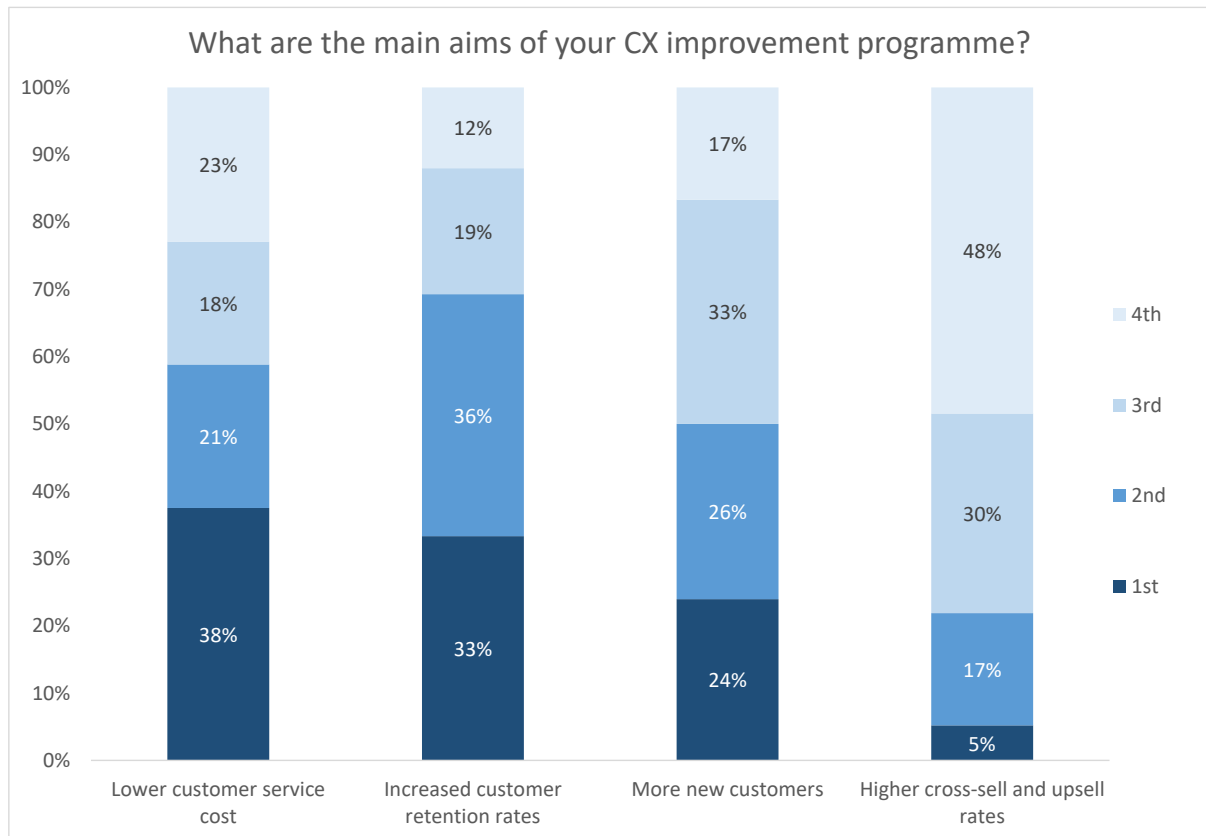
MAIN AIMS OF THE CX IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Survey respondents were asked to rank in importance the main aims of the customer experience programme from the following options:

- to increase customer retention rates and loyalty
- to reduce the cost of serving the customer
- to increase the number of customers they had
- through cross-selling and upselling, to increase the revenue per customer.

69% of respondents placed increase customer retention rates in the first or second position, suggesting that one of the long established aims of CRM – customer loyalty – is a major target for most companies’ customer experience programmes. This figure has grown year-on-year.

Figure 5: What are the main aims of your CX improvement programme?

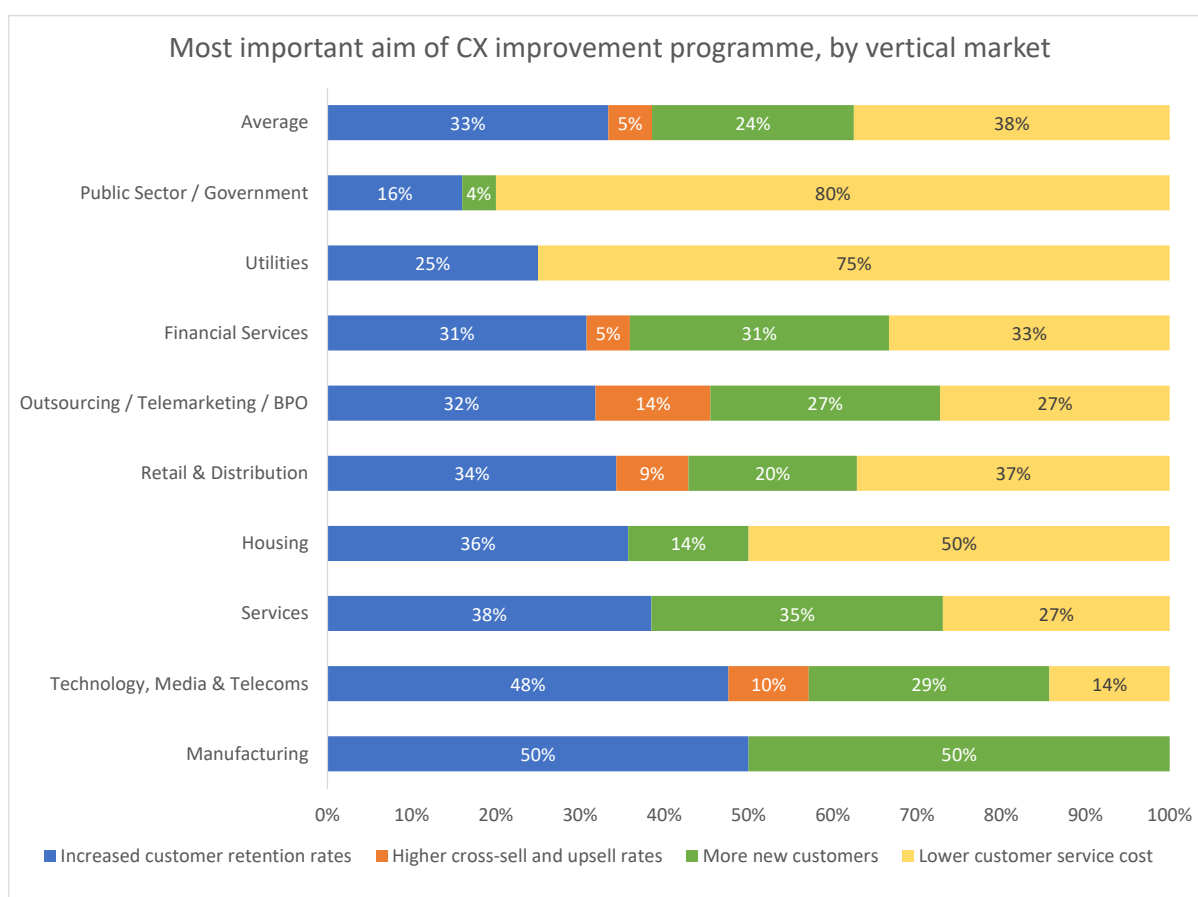


While caution should be applied when looking at the vertical market figures below (due to the relatively small sample sizes in some of the sectors), there are a few interesting conclusions that can be drawn.

The public sector, as a non-commercial vertical market, focuses its CX improvements on reducing the cost of service without lowering quality, often through self-service options. This is also important for the utilities sector.

The outsourcing sector is most likely to value cross-selling and upselling, and the manufacturers surveyed are again keenest on winning new customers.

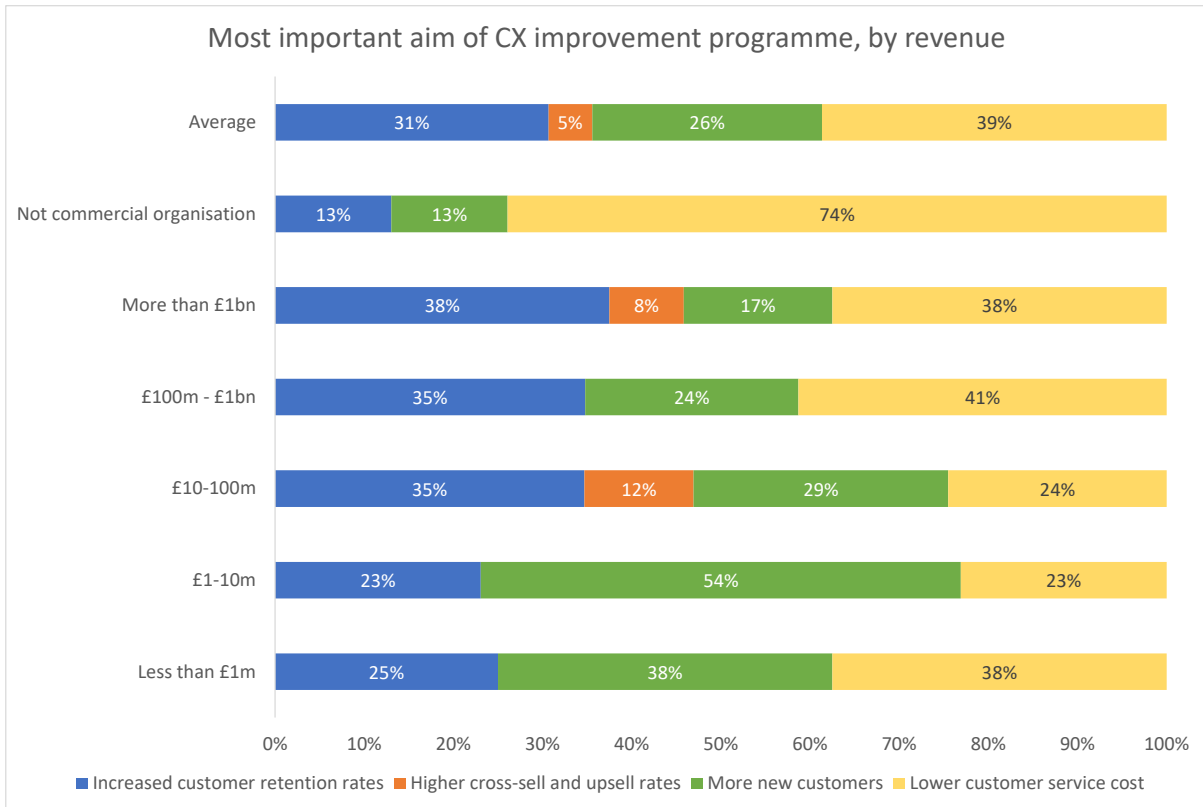
Figure 6: Most important aim of CX improvement programme, by vertical market



When considering respondents segmented by revenue, perhaps the most noticeable finding is that those which are non-commercial place more importance on reducing the cost of service through their CX improvement programme.

Increasing customer retention rates and loyalty is stated to be the one of the most popular primary aims of the CX improvement programme by the largest organisations, while those in smaller companies are most likely to place greater emphasis on winning new customers.

Figure 7: Most important aim of CX improvement programme, by revenue



CX INVESTMENT: PEOPLE, PROCESS, TECHNOLOGY

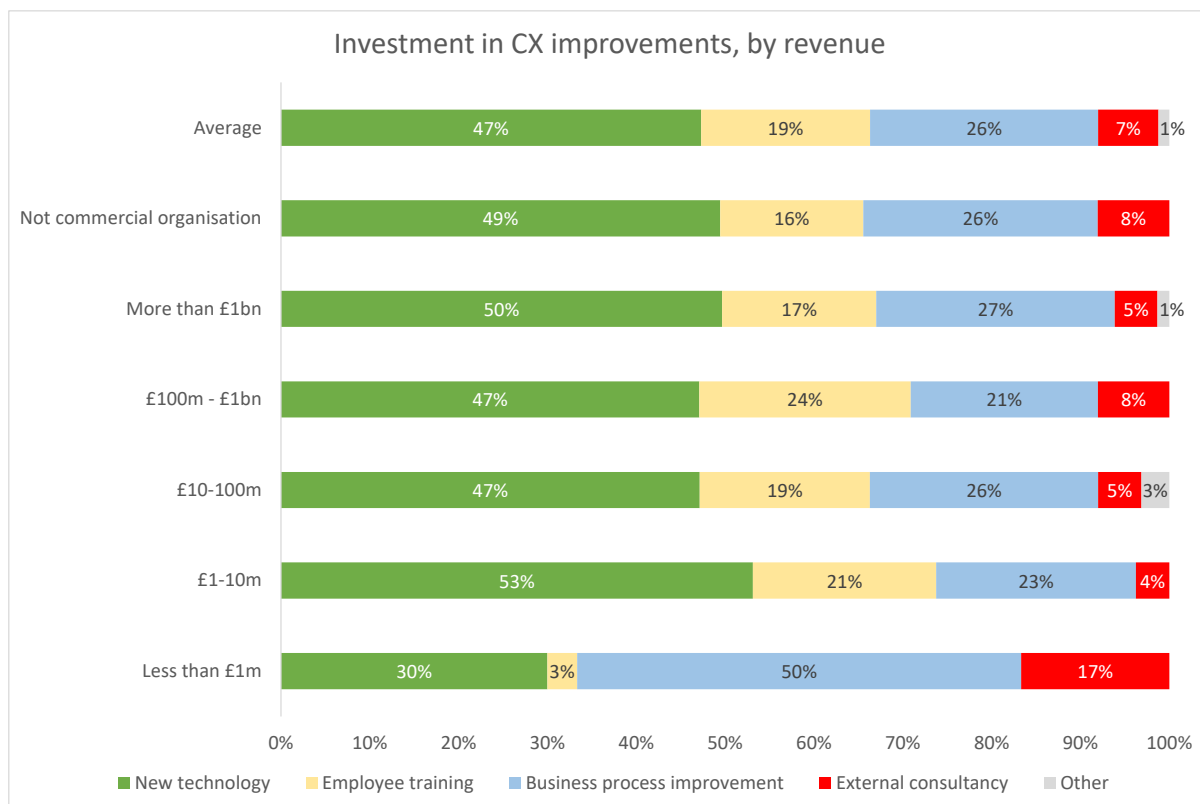
Respondents were asked to describe the allocation of their investments in customer experience improvements, considering new technology, training of employees, business process improvements and fees paid to external consultants.

‘Other’ spending includes:

- Benchmarking
- Customer research
- In-house development on existing platforms
- Integration
- Internal consultancy.

Across the whole of the survey respondent base, investments in technology were considerably higher than that of investment in business process improvements. This is especially noticeable in smaller companies, except for the <£1m survey respondents this year.

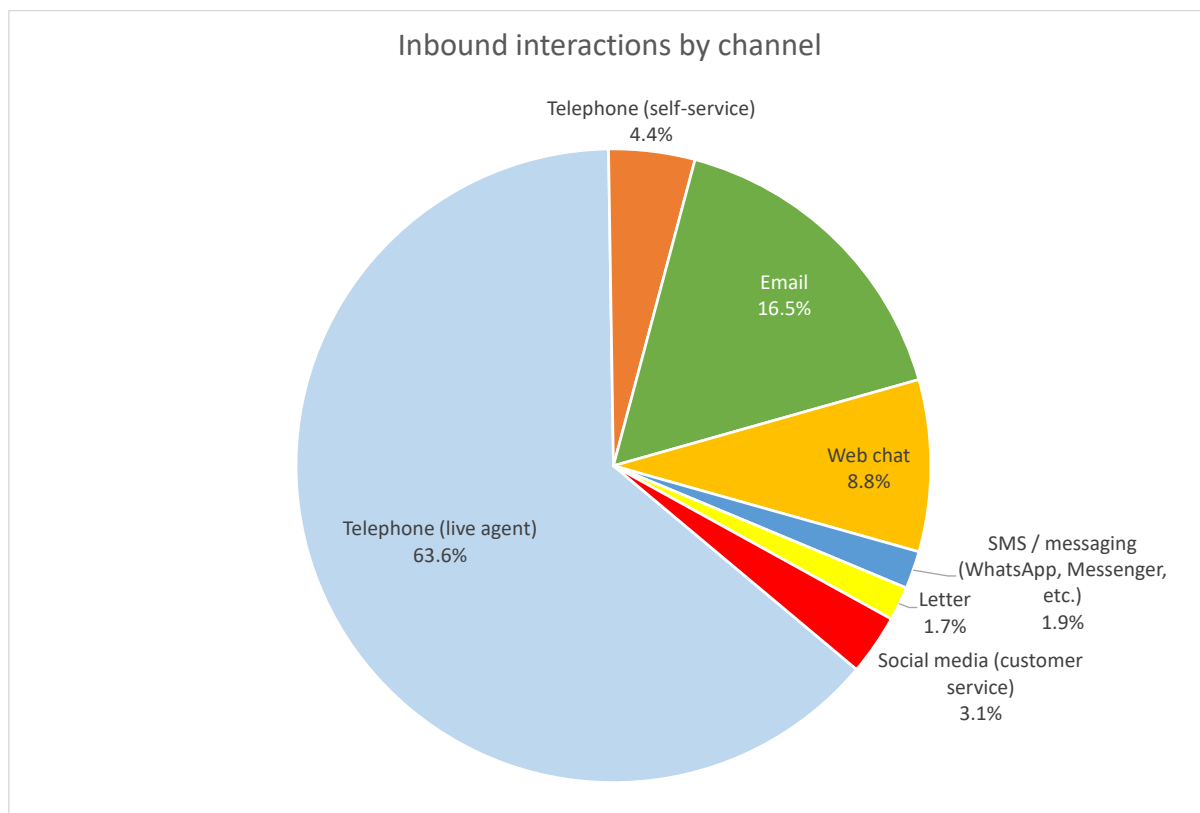
Figure 8: Investment in CX improvements, by revenue



CX INVESTMENT: CHANNEL FOCUS

Before looking which channels are receiving the most CX investment, it is important to put omnichannel into perspective.

Figure 9: Inbound interactions by channel (year-end 2022)



The proportion of live inbound interactions by telephone dropped to 65.3% in 2017, its lowest recorded level, in line with a long-term gentle downward trend, and after a slight rebound in recent years, it is now at 63.6%.

The proportion of telephony self-service interactions has risen from 4.9% in 2019 to 6.2% in 2020 and 2021, in line with the growth of self-service across other channels, but has dropped this year.

The email channel increased significantly in 2017 to around 20%, after being around 15% for a number of years. It is still the largest digital channel, although it has seen a slight drop this year.

Web chat has grown strongly after being only 3.6%, and 8.8% is the highest figure on record. Social media’s figure has returned to being just above 3% after a brief period around the 5% mark.

SMS / messaging has grown to 1.9%, driven in large part by a rise in WhatsApp / Messenger rather than standard text messages. This is up from 1.2% in 2021.

Looking at vertical market figures, agent-handled calls are most important to respondents in the housing and insurance sectors, with manufacturing respondents (usually working in B2B environments) and retail (which uses email and web chat) reporting lower levels of telephony as usual.

Email is well represented in most vertical markets, with the manufacturing, retail and services sectors the highest.

Telephony self-service seems strongest in the utilities sector as usual, and the public sector respondents report a higher-than-usual finding this year.

Web chat is developing a very strong presence in retail, so as to encourage and close online sales, as well as handling service queries.

The manufacturing sector reports being ahead in terms of social media customer contact, although this may be a one-off statistical blip.

Figure 10: Inbound interactions by channel, by vertical market

Vertical market	FS	HS	INS	MAN	OS	PS	RD	SVCS	TMT	TT	UTILS	Mean
Telephone (live agent)	72%	78%	79%	53%	65%	69%	50%	49%	54%	69%	60%	63.6%
Email	8%	18%	15%	24%	14%	12%	21%	29%	17%	13%	8%	16.5%
Web chat	8%	1%	4%	8%	9%	4%	23%	13%	3%	8%	5%	8.8%
Telephone (self-service)	7%	0%	0%	5%	6%	12%	1%	0%	8%	4%	13%	4.4%
Social media (customer service)	1%	2%	1%	10%	3%	3%	4%	1%	6%	3%	4%	3.1%
SMS / messaging	0%	0%	1%	1%	3%	0%	1%	7%	3%	3%	6%	1.9%
Letter	4%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	10%	1%	5%	1.7%

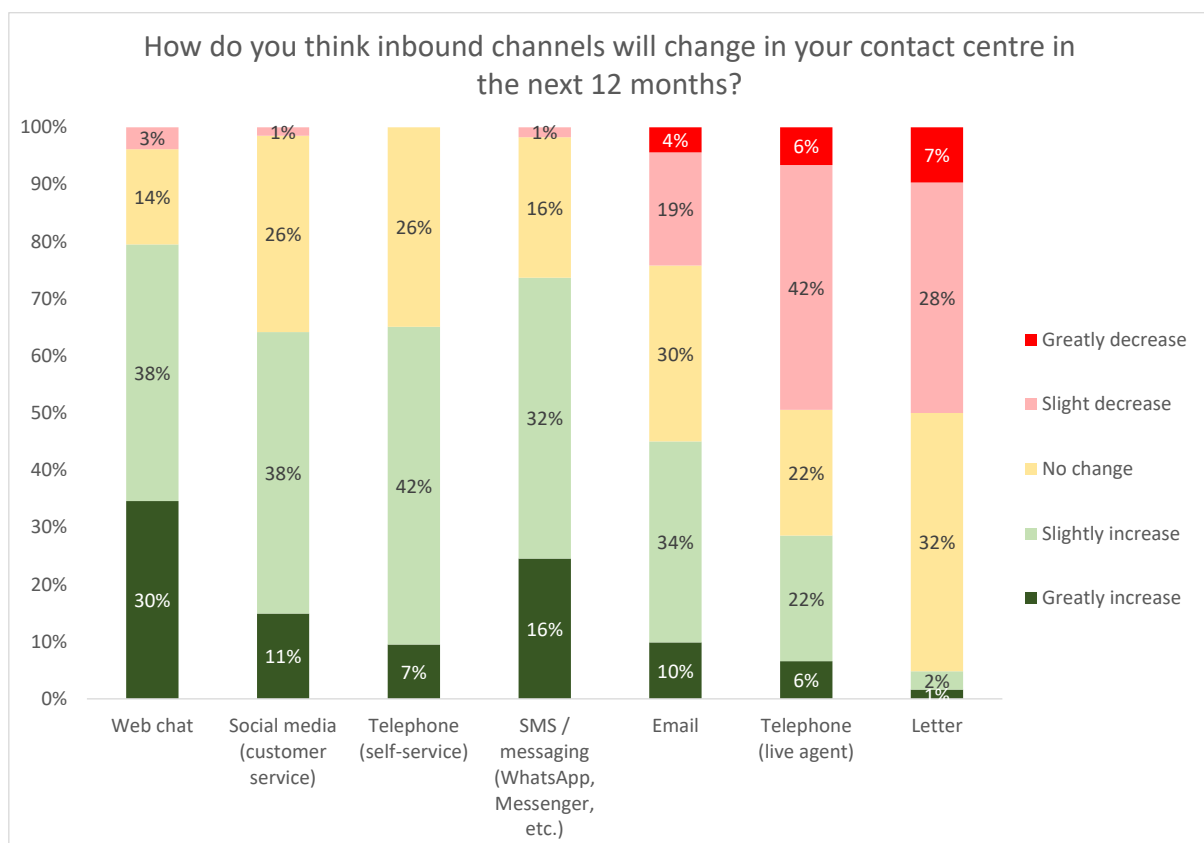
NB: "0%" refers to a number lower than 0.5%, rather than necessarily a zero value.

Care should be taken when considering vertical market statistics, as the research sample size may be small. Use only as an indication of relative importance.

"Fax" has been removed as a channel as volumes are now too small to measure accurately.

As not all of the same respondents take part in this survey every year, a jump or drop in the usage of a minor multimedia channel could be an industry-wide phenomenon or a case of a handful of early adopters skewing the results, which is certainly possible where only a few use a channel, and where mean averages are used. As such, a question is asked to respondents about how each inbound channel will change, so being able to judge if any alterations in the use of channels is due to real changes at a contact centre-level, or is more of a statistical blip caused by a different set of respondents providing data each year.

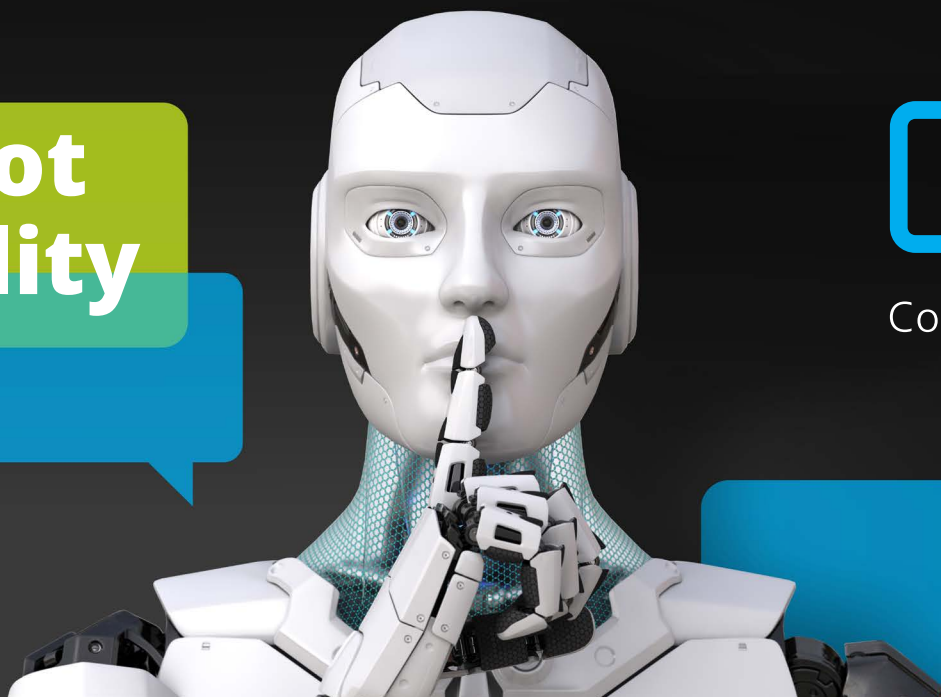
Figure 11: How do you think inbound channels will change in your contact centre in the next 12 months?



As usual, the traditional media of letters will have a net decline in our respondents' eyes, although this still has its place in the likes of the insurance, medical and manufacturing industries. More respondents believed the live telephony channel volumes would drop (48%) than thought they would rise (28%), a finding that has grown for some years. This trend in the industry is explored in the next chart.

Strong growth is once again expected in web chat and social media customer service interactions (and SMS / messaging), with email volumes still predicted to grow although at a much lower rate than previous years. Telephony self-service is expected to grow once again this year, with its twin benefits of customer convenience and low cost still very much relevant. New approaches, such as visual IVR, are likely to encourage further use of self-service. Although not shown on this chart, around half of respondents offer an app or mobile service option for customer service.

Robot Reality



In 1980, Hazel O'Connor released a song called Eighth Day. This was, in essence, a song about technology advancement and how it was going to affect the human race.

Four decades later, much of what was predicted has come to pass. In a world where humans once did everything, machines and technology have become the driving force behind a great deal of what we do.

One such development has been the rise of the chatbot. These robots have been promoted as a way to free up human staff to focus on tasks that add value by giving the repetitive tasks to the bots; thus saving money and optimising processes.

What is a chatbot?

In case you weren't a fan of 1980s' punk music, what is a robot or, more relevantly, a chatbot? Well, a chatbot is an application that automates tasks or simulates conversations. The software is programmed to read messages (emails, text messages, chat conversations) and answer them in a short period of time, thanks to a combination of different pre-templated responses. This is not artificial intelligence, which refers to devices that imitate or replace human cognitive features. Most chatbots do not possess artificial intelligence, although this would make things more interesting!

This all sounds great. These chatbots are available 24/7, in real time; they can handle all my communication channels; and they can automate my business processes. Hazel was right, there is no need for humans!

Well, no. Research has taught us that current bot technology still has many limits.

Not-so-smart technology

Chatbots are making their way into our contact centres, pitched as the Holy Grail, and their market share is increasing rapidly. However, in the main these chatbots are a single decision tree and are menu driven. After trying to use them to do anything that is not contained in their very strict structure, the customer very quickly says: "Just put me through to an agent."

79% of callers prefer human contact rather than interacting with a bot.*

The current chatbot offering is falling short: it isn't smart enough; it doesn't have enough programmed templates to replace human core business knowledge; and it isn't conversational. This has a negative impact on customer experience and will lead, in most cases, to the human agent being re-engaged to deal with the customer frustration that the bot has created. This, in turn, leads to longer call-handling times, poor customer experience and demotivated agents. So where are the cost savings and business optimisations?

Intelligence-led approach

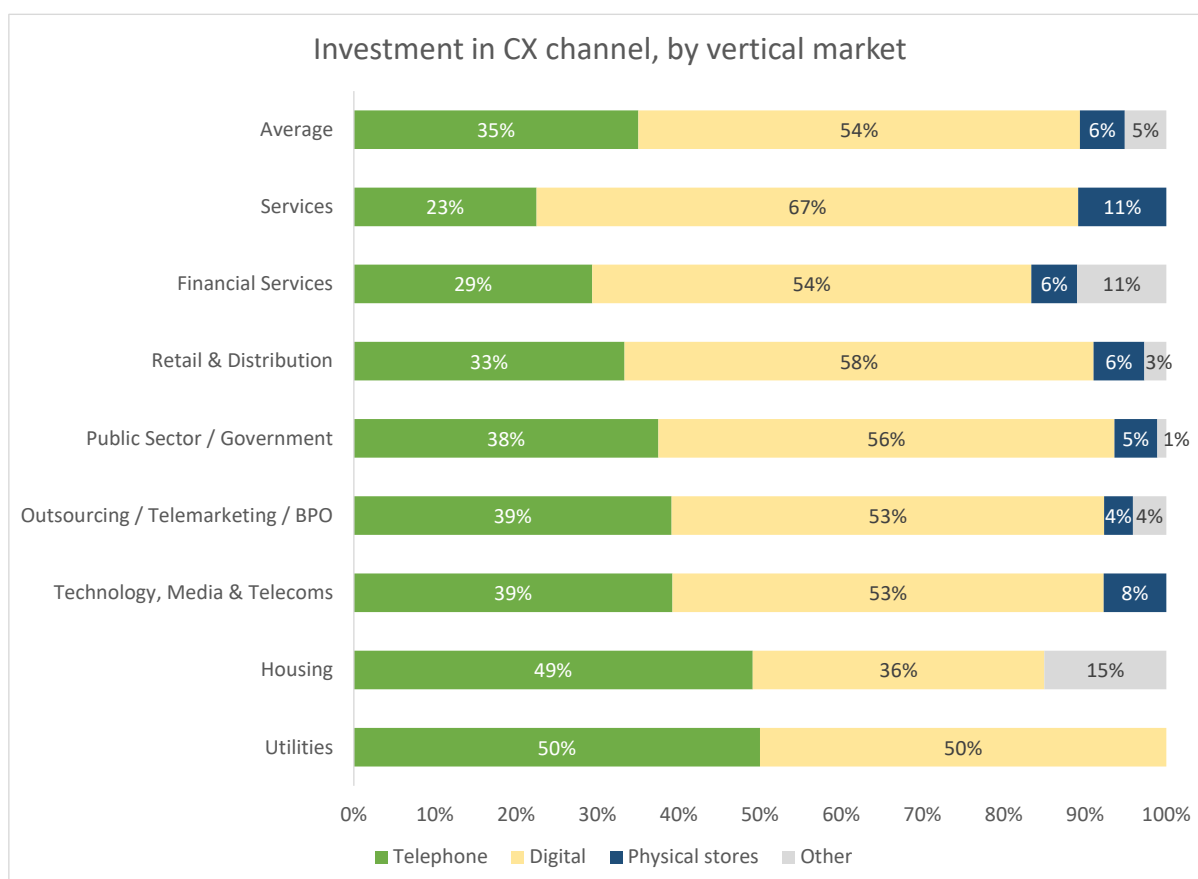
If you want to take full advantage of the benefits of chatbot technology, you need to be able to spot where things go wrong so the chatbot can be programmed to deal with these issues or immediately pass the customer on to agent if they cannot. Conversational intelligence software can give you the vision you need to analyse every conversation in every channel, ensuring your contact centre is efficient and effective, while giving a great customer experience and maintaining staff morale.

SOURCES: TNS Sofres

The previous chart's real message is that channels aren't being replaced, but rather augmented, and businesses have to accept that they need to develop an omnichannel approach, as that's what their customers are expecting. This means that the pressure to unify the view of the customer across channels is a challenge that isn't going to go away.

Turning to how customer experience investment is spent by channel, it is easy to see that for the majority of vertical markets, digital channels such as email, web chat, website and social media receive far more attention and investment than the traditional telephony channel, despite the former accounting for around 25% of inbound interactions (excluding web self-service), compared to around 70% coming through telephony (whether live or self-service). The utilities sector is the only one this year where telephony investment is not lower than digital investment.

Figure 12: Investment in CX channel, by vertical market



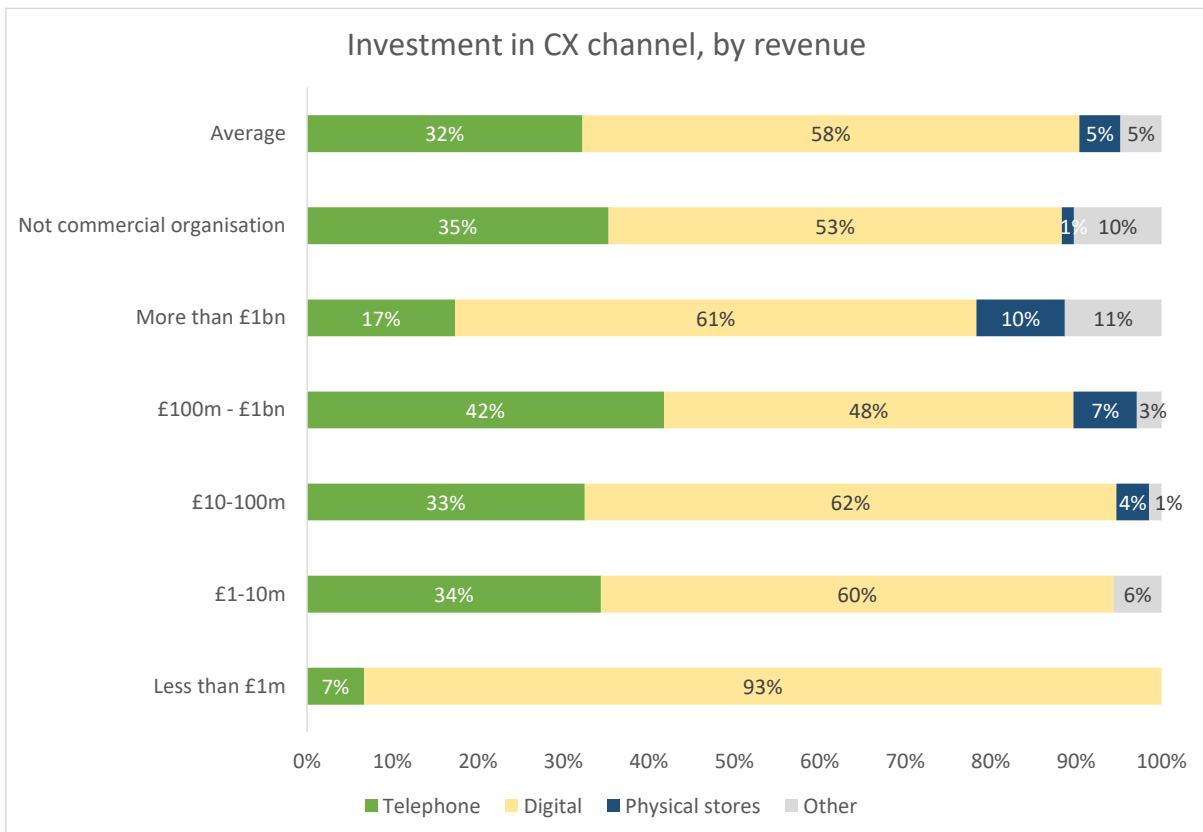
Reported 'other' expenditure includes:

- AI
- Back Office processes
- CRM
- Front-end and platform software
- Infrastructure
- Process automation
- Third-party integration.

The chart below shows that many smaller businesses are embracing the digital channel as a way to give themselves a level playing field when competing against much larger organisations. Respondents with less than £1m in revenue state that 93% of their CX investment is going into digital channels, and in £1bn+ companies, 61% of CX investment is spent on digital channels.

It is also noticeable that non-commercial organisations are spending proportionally more on their telephony than most other respondents, perhaps as many are behind the technology curve, although even this sector is still spending considerably more on digital customer experience.

Figure 13: Investment in CX channel, by revenue



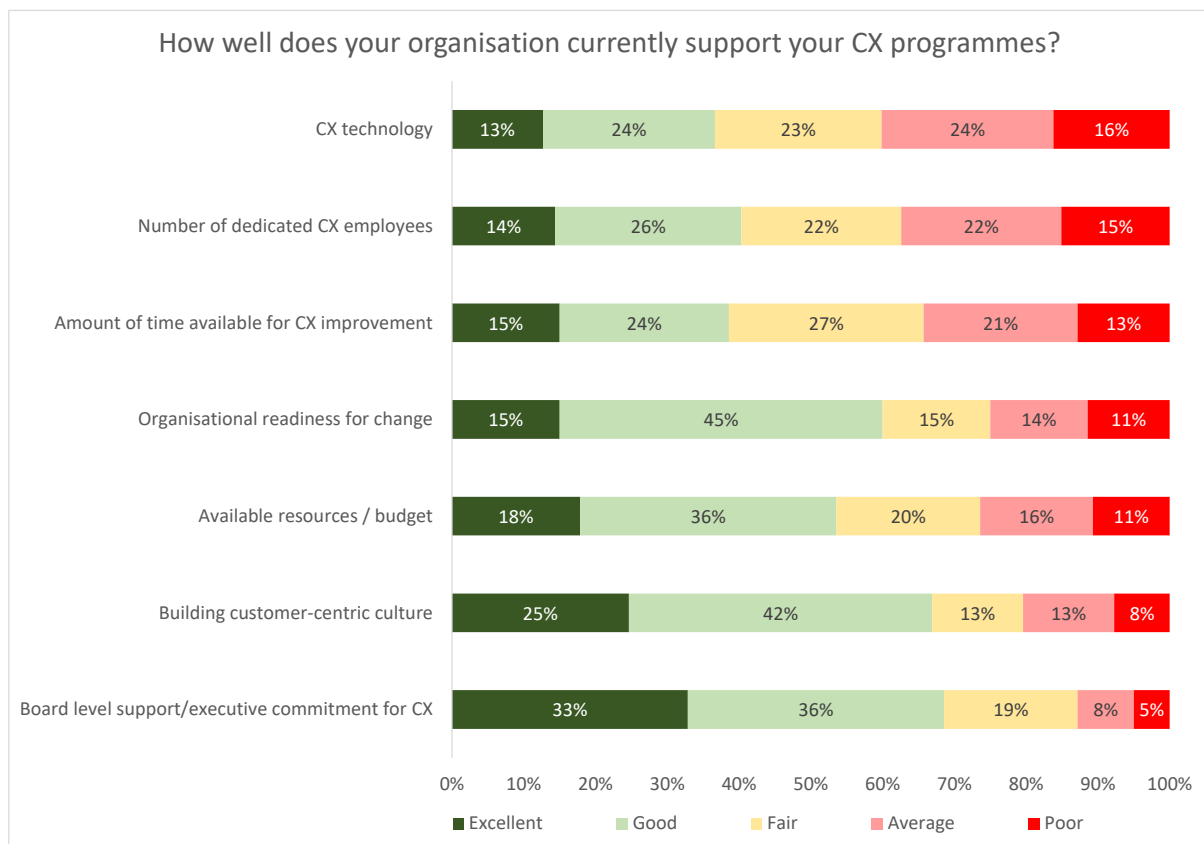
CORPORATE SUPPORT FOR THE CX PROGRAMME

Respondents were asked how well their organisation currently supported their customer experience programmes. In the main, the results were not entirely positive, with 40% of organisations stating that their CX technology was either poor or average, 37% being lukewarm about the number of dedicated CX employees, and 34% being quite negative about the time available for CX improvements: figures which have all increased since last year.

On the positive side, two-thirds of respondents stated that the organisational culture was moving towards customer-centricity and almost 70% commended their executives' commitment, so it appears as though it is the execution of CX improvement rather than the acceptance of the concept itself which needs to be improved.

Having said that, the widespread finding that there were not always enough time and resource for CX improvement shows that having a customer-centric culture does not easily or necessarily translate into actual action to improve CX.

Figure 14: How well does your organisation currently support your CX programmes?

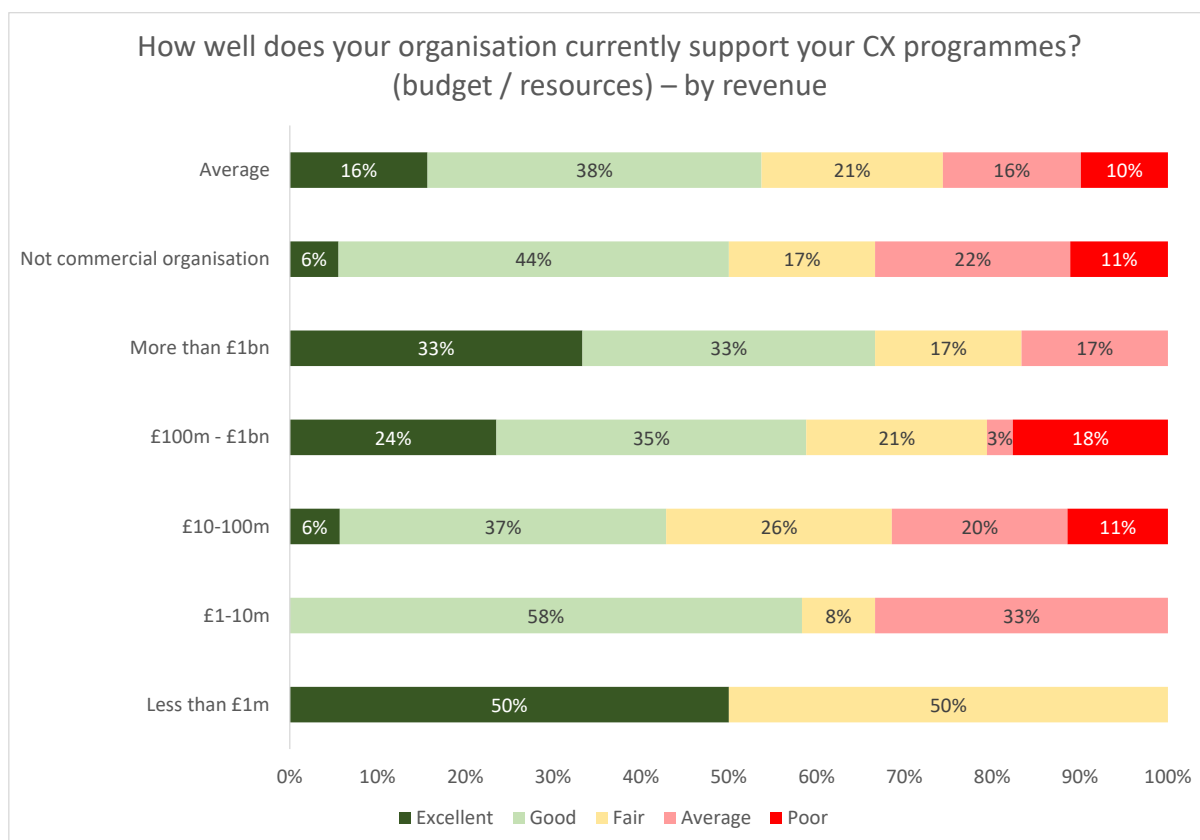


It is worth investigating organisations’ support of their CX programmes in a little more depth within the next two charts, which look at the availability of budget and resources when segmented by revenue, and the impact of contact centre size on CX technology.

Looking first at the availability of budget and resources for CX programmes when considering the revenues of the organisation, we might expect to see that smaller organisations with less revenue would have greater problems in allocating budget and resource to support their CX programme.

However, this is not the case this year, with all of the smallest companies feeling that their budget was sufficient for their CX requirements.

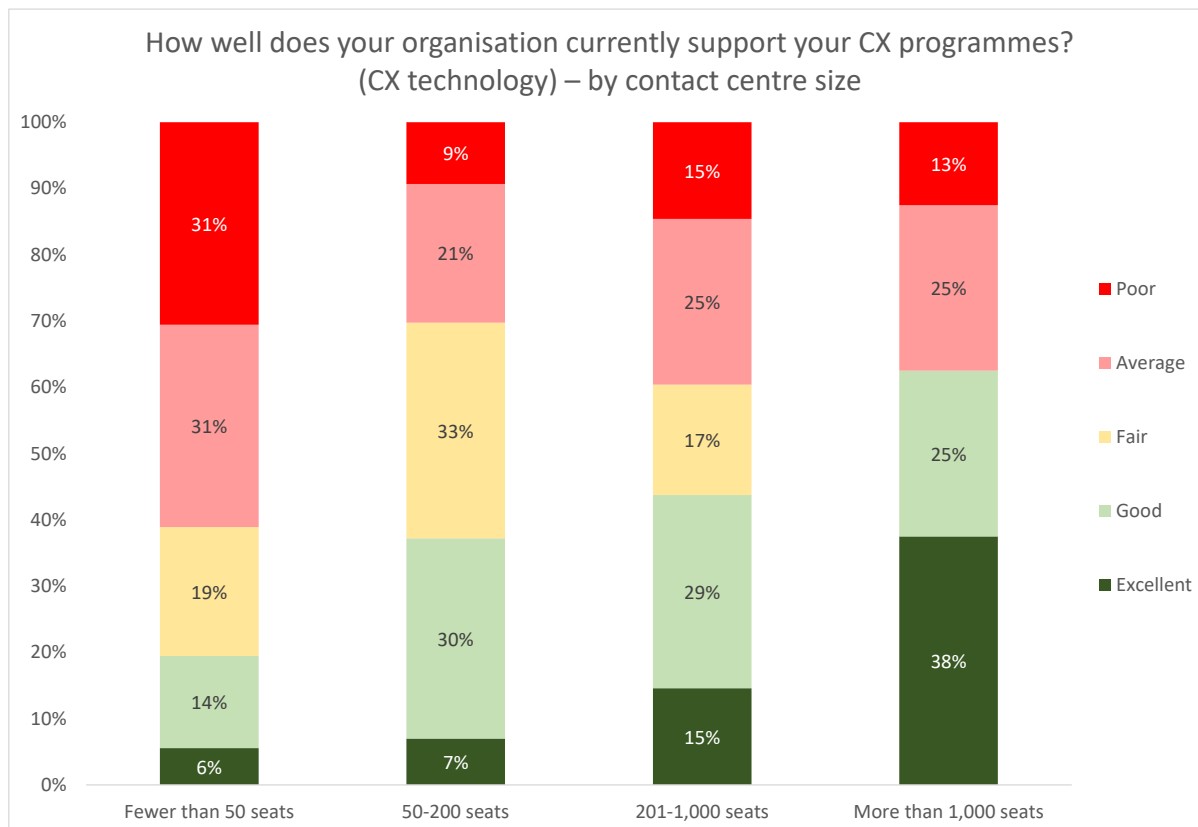
Figure 15: How well does your organisation currently support your CX programmes? (budget / resources) – by revenue



When considering the capability of customer experience technology by the size of the contact centre, there are very significant proportions of all contact centre-owning respondents who ranked their CX technology as being poor or average, particularly those with smaller operations.

While 38% rated their CX technology as excellent, even those within the largest contact centres cannot be said to be uniformly delighted with the technology that they have in place.

Figure 16: How well does your organisation currently support your CX programmes? (CX technology) – by contact centre size



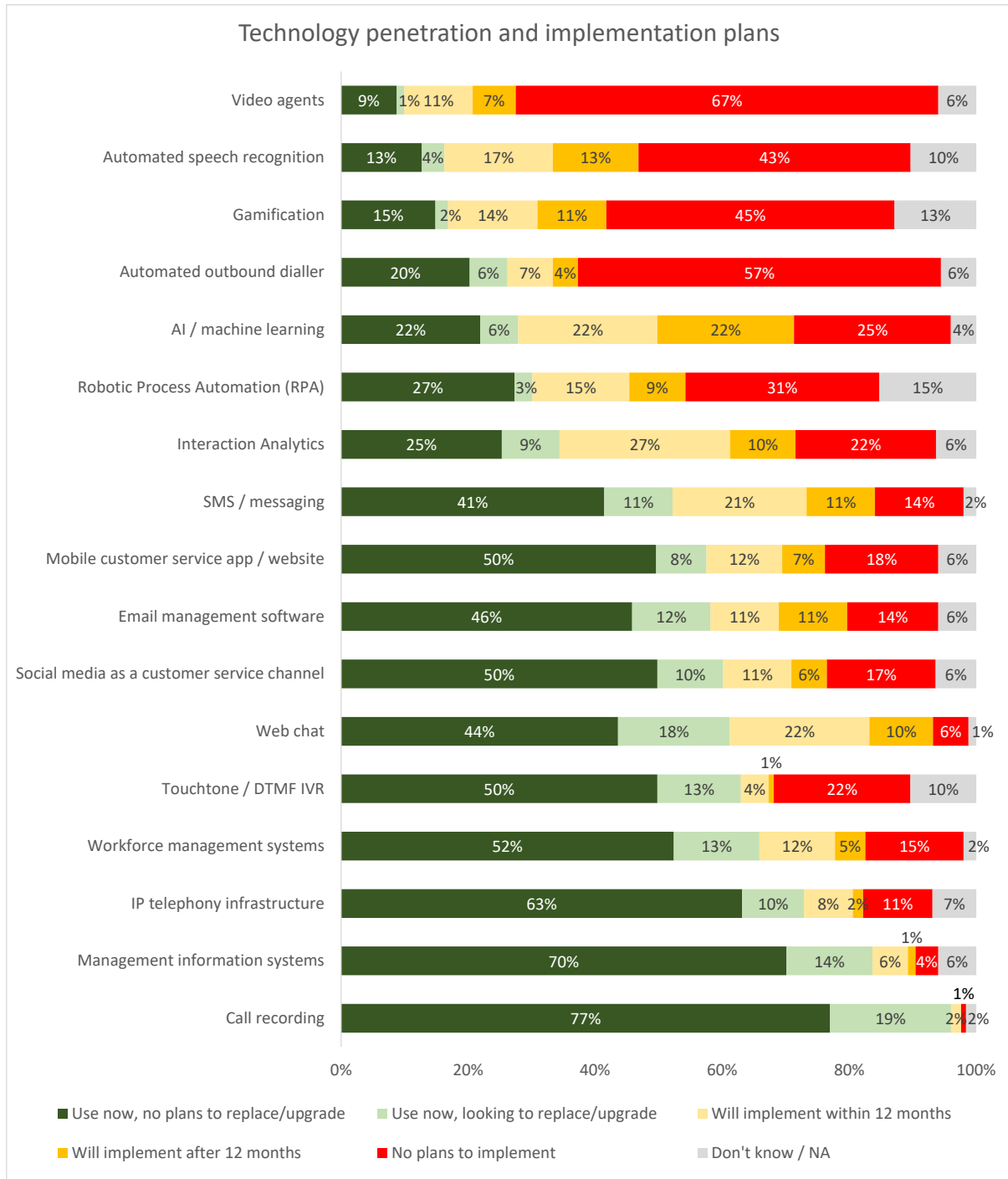
The next section of this report looks in depth at the use of some of the technologies supporting customer experience – in particular within the contact centre – and the plans that organisations have for investing in these in the near future.

TECHNOLOGY

CURRENT AND FUTURE USE OF CUSTOMER CONTACT TECHNOLOGY

The following chart shows respondents' current and future use of specific contact centre solutions at the end of 2022, and should be used to identify the relative use of technology and the most likely planned areas of investment.

Figure 17: Technology penetration and implementation plans



Web chat, touchtone IVR, call recording, workforce management and management information systems are amongst the most likely to be upgraded or replaced in the next year. Many legacy call recording solutions are moving to the cloud, removing the need for on-site storage and maintenance, security management and improving operational flexibility, and the opportunity to upgrade recording systems while implementing analytics is also being taken by many contact centres. In terms of expected new implementations, AI and interaction analytics dominate, with messaging, speech recognition and RPA also receiving serious interest. There is also significant interest in video.

Recognising that the reality of contact centre investment does not always match the intention shown in the previous chart, the following table gives closer analysis of IT investment priorities.

Figure 18: Top 5 most important areas of contact centre IT expenditure in the next two years (proportion of contact centres placing solution in their top 5, 2015-22)

Technology solution	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Omnichannel (i.e. getting channels to work together)	42%	50%	55%	41%	56%	51%	51%	49%
Artificial Intelligence	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	43%	42%	50%	47%
CRM / Agent Desktop Software	48%	56%	53%	63%	43%	32%	40%	36%
Web Self-Service	12%	18%	19%	32%	36%	36%	36%	35%
Workforce Management	19%	29%	24%	17%	18%	27%	28%	33%
Performance & Quality Management	26%	25%	25%	14%	29%	29%	27%	32%
Web Chat	38%	31%	29%	28%	33%	33%	25%	28%
Management Information Systems	30%	25%	22%	25%	31%	26%	24%	28%
Homeworking	14%	9%	11%	26%	16%	28%	31%	22%
Email Management	41%	37%	31%	27%	23%	25%	30%	22%
Back-Office Integration	39%	45%	48%	31%	22%	22%	20%	20%
Desktop Automation & Analytics	19%	25%	27%	22%	13%	18%	17%	20%
Cloud	18%	17%	16%	25%	22%	18%	21%	18%
Interaction Analytics	9%	8%	13%	17%	19%	16%	15%	18%
Telephony Infrastructure (including IP)	10%	12%	7%	13%	8%	10%	12%	16%
Telephony Self-Service (DTMF IVR, Automated Speech Recognition, Visual IVR)	8%	12%	14%	25%	21%	18%	13%	14%
Social Media	21%	20%	18%	27%	12%	7%	9%	13%
Hardware (including PCs & servers)	19%	13%	12%	14%	5%	8%	7%	9%
Gamification	8%	9%	11%	6%	9%	8%	8%	7%
Interaction Routing (including ACD/CTI-like functionality)	17%	14%	14%	3%	3%	5%	6%	7%
Call Recording	19%	6%	12%	16%	10%	12%	11%	6%
Outbound Automation	6%	5%	5%	6%	4%	1%	1%	6%
Voice Biometrics	4%	3%	3%	6%	7%	3%	4%	5%
Virtual Contact Centres	7%	10%	8%	2%	3%	7%	7%	3%
Video/Web RTC	0%	4%	2%	0%	0%	5%	4%	3%
Headsets	7%	3%	2%	2%	4%	5%	3%	2%
Mobile Service	15%	13%	19%	13%	9%	8%	3%	1%

The percentages in the previous table are based on the proportion of respondents over the past five years placing the specific solution within their top 5 from a list of 27 possible contact centre solutions (AI was only added as an option in 2019). By showing this historical data, patterns will emerge showing the solutions that are gaining the most interest over the years, and those which are losing their appeal.

Omnichannel – which has been defined within this part of the survey as getting the various channels to work together – is placed within the top 5 priorities by 49% of respondents this year. The various supporting applications, such as web chat and email management systems still have significant proportions of respondents placing them within the top 5. The interest in social media as a customer contact channel has dropped dramatically since 2018, although there is more interest than usual shown this year.

CRM (including improvement to the contact centre agent desktop and contact management system, as well as company-wide CRM) was in no.1 position for a number of years, although it lost its no.1 spot in 2017 to omnichannel. Artificial intelligence cements its place towards the top of the chart, with almost half of respondents choosing this as a top 5 priority for them.

After some years of relative stagnation, interest in web self-service has grown significantly since 2018, driven in large part by the promise of artificial intelligence and chatbots providing a superior self-service experience than had previously been the case.

Back-office integration has dropped in importance again this year, and is now the 11th highest priority rather than the 4th, as it had been for some years. While respondents are still very aware of the need to underpin the entire customer contact infrastructure – both front and back office – with a robust, stable and non-siloed infrastructure that allows a single view of the customer, the resurgent interest in omnichannel and new enthusiasm for AI-enabled self-service has pushed this down the list.

After a major interest in homeworking in 2020 and 2021, it has lost some ground in 2022, being seen as a top 5 priority by only 22% of survey respondents.

Some of the ‘traditional’ contact centre applications – MIS, WFM and performance management have all grown in importance this year.

EFFECT OF TECHNOLOGY ON THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

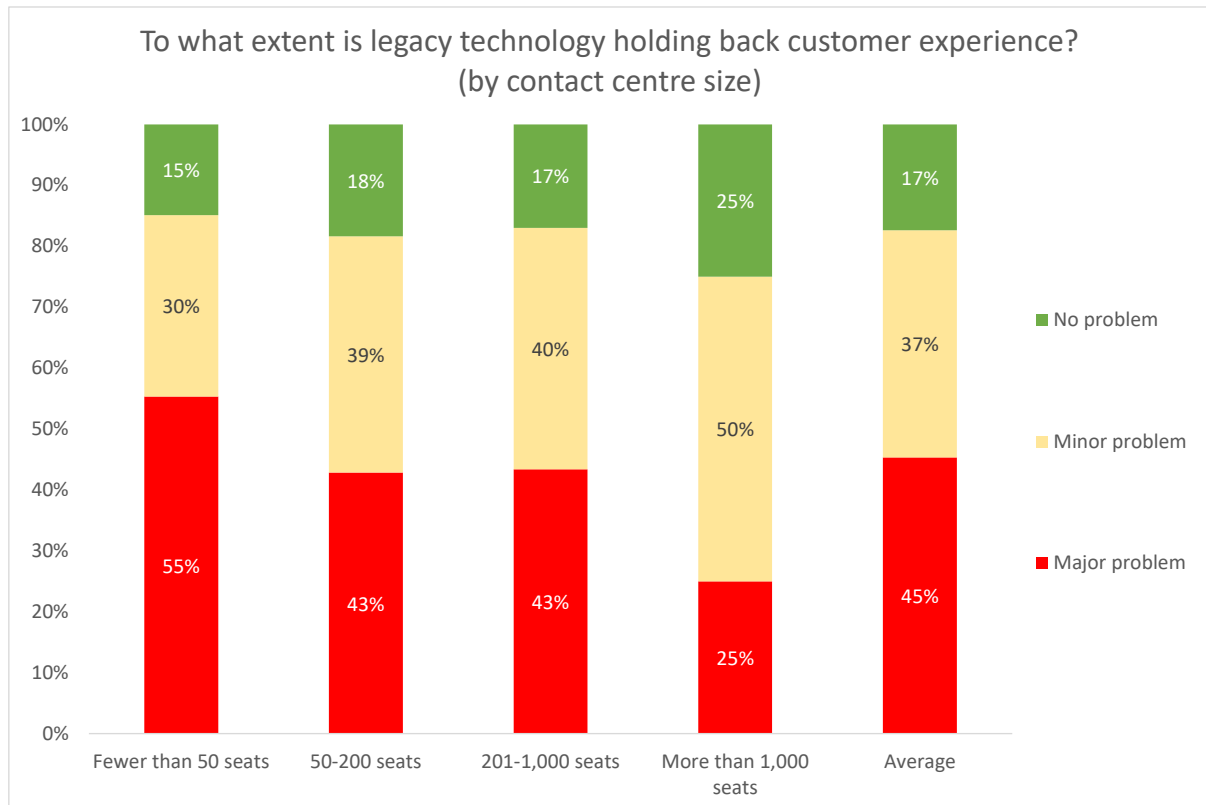
ARE TECHNOLOGY ISSUES HOLDING BACK CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE?

Respondents were asked about the extent to which technology challenges were affecting their ability to improve their customers' experience.

Legacy technology is reported to be a major problem by 45% of survey respondents, the same as last year. This is much more likely to be the case in smaller contact centres.

While there has been a very significant move to cloud – supported recently by the need for remote working – it is clear that there is still a long way to go before businesses can fully develop their CX-supporting technology.

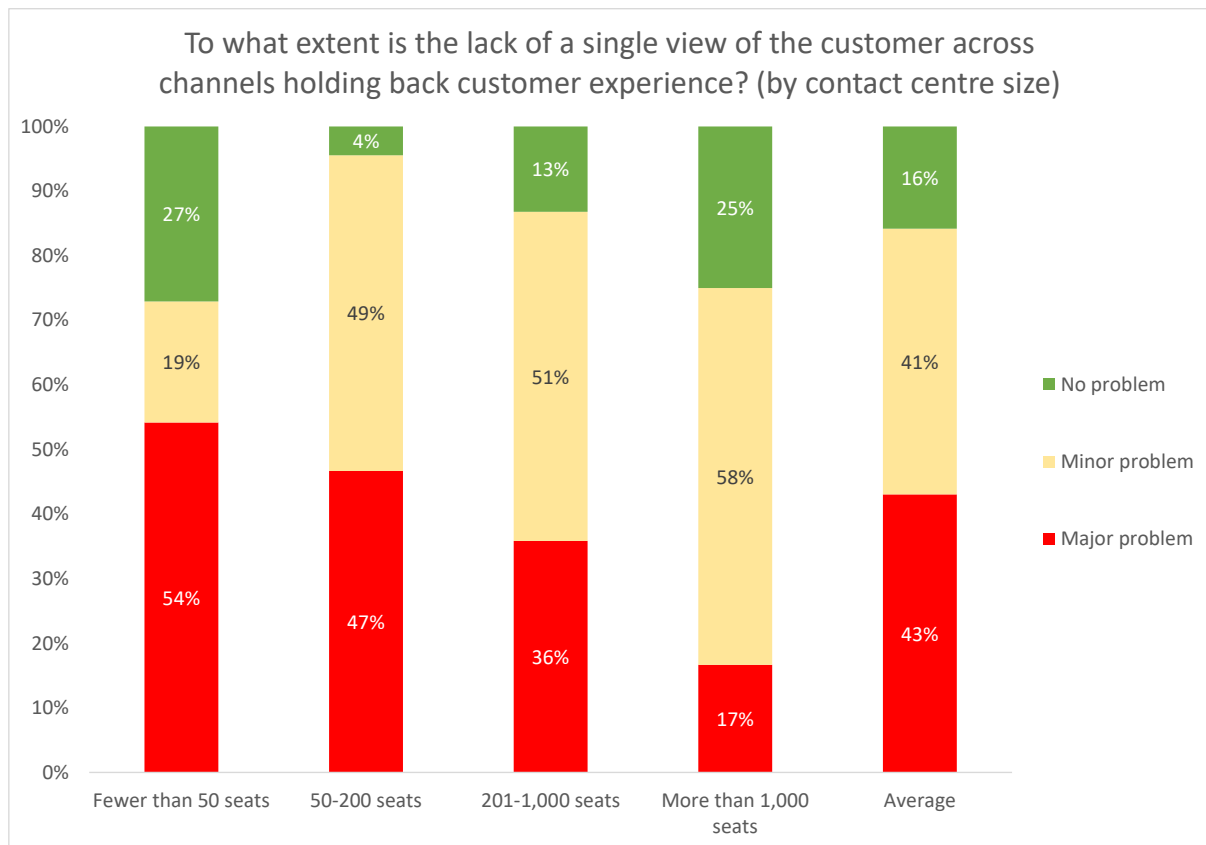
Figure 19: To what extent is legacy technology holding back customer experience? (by contact centre size)



43% of survey respondents also state that not having a single view of the customer across channels or enough IT resource or budget are also major problems for them. Those in smaller operations were also somewhat more likely to feel this.

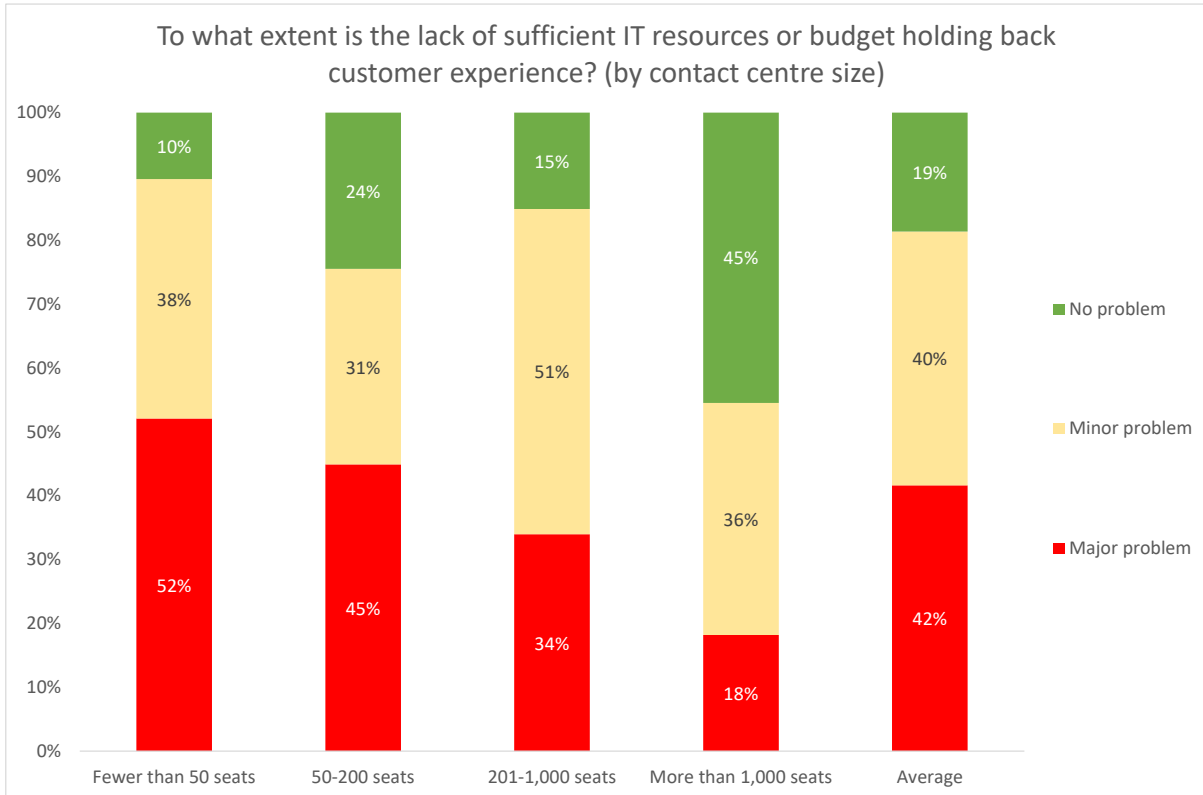
Not being able to view the customer across channels means that the full benefit of omnichannel contact cannot be achieved, and that unnecessary time and effort are being spent by the customer, with sub-optimal results for all concerned.

Figure 20: To what extent is the lack of a single view of the customer across channels holding back customer experience? (by contact centre size)



A lack of IT budget for CX-supporting technology was a major problem for 42% of respondents (an increase from 32% in 2022), with the smallest contact centre operations once again feeling this the most.

Figure 21: To what extent is the lack of sufficient IT resources or budget holding back customer experience? (by contact centre size)

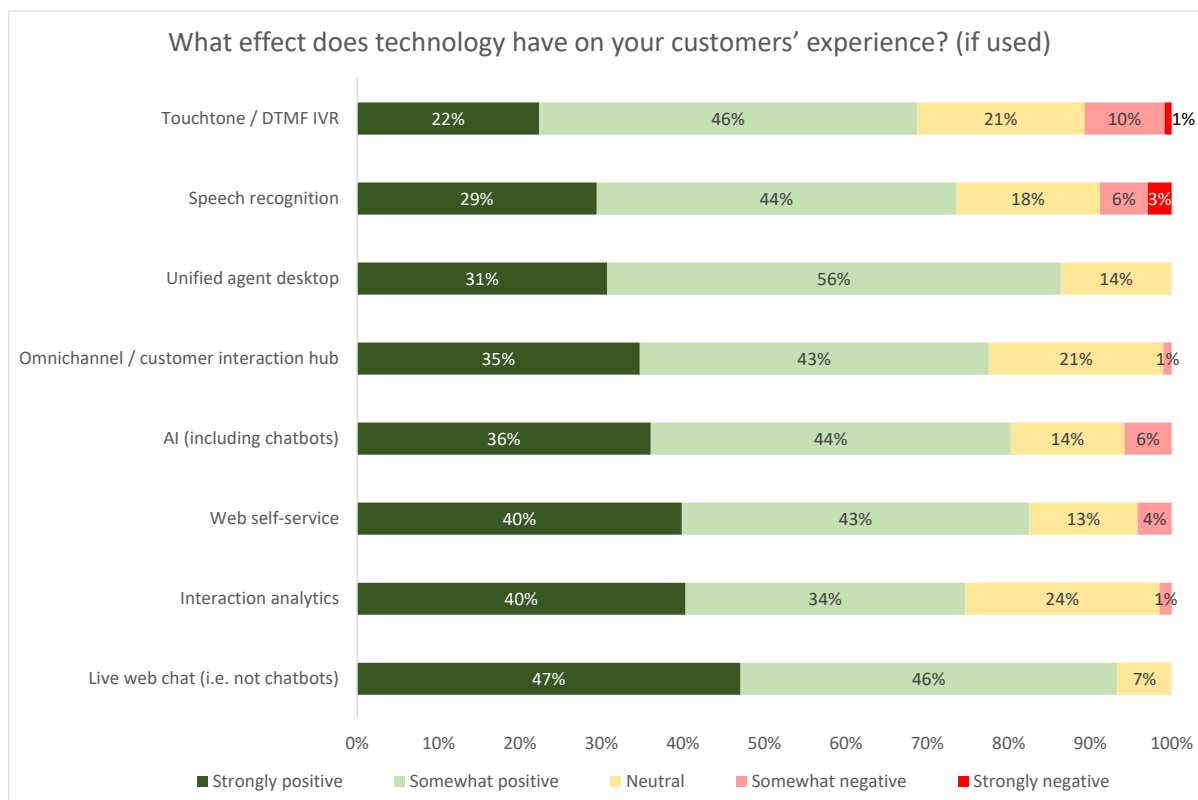


DOES CX TECHNOLOGY AFFECT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE?

The following chart looks at the effect that organisations believe specific technologies have on their customers’ experience.

Generally, they are seen as providing a positive experience for customers, although touchtone IVR and speech recognition usually have a somewhat more polarising view, with a significant proportion of respondents being either neutral or negative about these technologies’ impact on CX, which is also the case for interaction analytics. (Only survey respondents that actually used these technologies were included in this analysis).

Figure 22: What effect does technology have on your customers’ experience? (if used)



Web chat offers an organisation a chance to cut costs through running more than one chat session at a time with customers, using the time that a customer spends reading and replying to an agent’s response to deal with other customers concurrently, with 2 or 3 chats being seen as sustainable.

Web chat is often used as a ‘point of crisis’ channel, for example, to convert an online shopping basket into a sale by providing timely service, or if a visitor is paused on a web page too long, perhaps as they can’t find what they are looking for. In such cases, there are two main benefits to the business to provide text chat: revenue maximisation, and the avoidance of unnecessary calls.

Web chat can also act as a safety net for the customer if an online self-service attempt fails. An analogy can be made with voice self-service, where a failed session is often ended with the customer ‘zeroing-out’ (pressing zero to get in touch with an agent). Failed web self-service sessions may end with a phone call being made, but the use of web chat can avoid a number of these, which is a cost saving for the business and better for the customer as well.

Survey respondents using live web chat usually see it being extremely positive for customer experience, and this is borne out by the results of the customer survey later in this report. Although chatbots don’t get quite the same level of positive response of live web chat, 80% of businesses using them say that they have a good effect on CX.

Web self-service is also seen as being of positive benefit to the customer experience, and as the cost per automated support session is estimated to be between 40 and 100 times cheaper than a live call to an agent, it has significant benefits to the business too.

Many customers will visit a website first; if they cannot find what they’re looking for immediately they will try self-service; if the self-service experience does not give them what they want immediately and accurately, they will either call the business or go elsewhere. In cases where the customer is tied into an existing business, this will result in a higher cost of service and decreased customer satisfaction. In cases where the web visitor is only a potential customer, a failure in the self-service process on a website will mean the almost-certain loss of a sale. In all cases, providing effective web self-service options – with a clear path to escalation to a live agent, along with any contextual customer specific information – is in the best interests of the business.

Despite the rapid growth in the use of web-based services, the importance of the voice channel has not diminished to the extent predicted by some commentators:

- Customers still find voice the most convenient, flexible and quickest communication channel in many instances, especially in older demographics and for complex and high-emotion enquiries
- Customers’ expectations continue to rise. Not only do they seek out competitively priced goods and services, but they require quick, efficient service as well
- The general level of awareness of identity theft as a real issue has also grown, and the voice channel still provides customers with the greatest level of confidence.

Many calls are not suitable for self-service, as the customer may have multiple requests, the call is of a complex nature or be from someone who wants to speak with a human agent. Small businesses may have such a low volume of calls that self-service is not cost-effective. If customers don’t want to use IVR, they will “zero-out” (press 0 for a live agent, or try to find a similar shortcut) – in the UK, around 15% of IVR calls are abandoned in this way. If businesses don’t offer a live agent option to an irate and frustrated caller, they won’t need to worry about providing customer service to them in the future, as they’ll go elsewhere.

Businesses using **omnichannel** are very positive about the effect on customer experience.

Recent years have seen the word 'omnichannel' introduced as describing the goal of customers being able to contact (and be contacted) through any channel – switching between them during the interaction as appropriate, while taking any relevant data and history along with them – with a single, unified view of the customer's journey being available to the agent.

For true omnichannel, the platform, infrastructure, applications and resources need to be available to identify, route and switch interactions between agents and channels seamlessly, while keeping all relevant data gathered in the course of the interaction: larger operations are more likely to have had the investment made to deliver this sort of experience.

A key aim of omnichannel is to provide a consistency of customer experience, and this requires access to the same master dataset and also the same knowledge bases and business logic. There must be real-time data flow and updates between channels and databases: without this, consistency is impossible.

One of the main irritants for a customer is having to contact the business on numerous occasions, often through different channels, about the same issue. Omnichannel promises a way in which this experience can be made less painful and more effective for both customers and businesses, by providing a single view of the customer's journey – not just that particular interaction, but the entire experience – so that agents do not have to repeat questions and can treat the customer's request more effectively.

Unified desktop: Many of today's contact centres use complicated, multiple applications, often only loosely linked, which require skilled and experienced agents to navigate and manage interactions with customers successfully at the same time. Even after the call is completed successfully, each system may need specific inputs from the agent in order to start the required back-office processes or to keep each database consistent with the others. The result is that even though a contact centre may be staffed with experienced, hard-working and skilled staff, its overall performance is suboptimal, leading to lower profits, customer satisfaction and unnecessary costs, as well as downstream service issues.

The variable capability of agents is also a contributory inhibitor to quality improvements, profit maximisation and an optimised customer experience. One possible solution is to look at an overall unified desktop environment that includes dynamic scripting, as well as understanding agent training needs through an integrated solution including call recording and analytical functionality, delivering up-to-date performance metrics and in-call information supporting cross-selling and upselling offers.

The rapidly growing addition and use of new channels is only making this need more urgent. Role-based performance dashboards and real-time reporting of analysis means that insight into the contact centre's efficiency and effectiveness can be shared immediately with relevant business users without the need for high levels of user expertise and experience. Although the unified desktop can be seen as an internally focused technology, the vast majority of respondents believe that its ability to provide in-call support to agents and reduce downstream errors has a very beneficial effect upon customer experience.

Interaction analytics can be used in many different ways to address various business issues. This is an advantage – it is hugely flexible – but it can also make its message to the market more complicated. However, depending upon how interaction analytics is used, it can assist in:

- agent improvement and quality assurance
- business process optimisation
- avoidance of litigation and fines
- customer satisfaction and experience improvements
- increases in revenue and profitability
- improvements in contact centre operational performance, and cost reduction.

Like most contact centre applications, analytics can be used to cut costs, but its promise goes far beyond this. No other contact centre technology provides the business with this level of potential insight that goes far beyond the boundaries of the contact centre and can offer genuine and quantifiable ways in which business processes can be improved.

Amongst the survey respondents which use interaction analytics, there is a general feeling that it impacts somewhat positively upon the customer experience, although perhaps not quite to the same extent as customer-facing technology such as web chat. As a large amount of interaction analytics is done historically, the immediate benefits to the customer may not be as apparent.

Despite the wider and more powerful functionality that **automated speech recognition** (ASR) gives to an IVR system, significant inhibitors are present. It is generally acknowledged that speech recognition can be considerably more expensive to implement than DTMF IVR, and is also likely to require significant, highly-paid in-house resource to fine-tune and operate it going forward. Some solution providers note that the majority of businesses' interest in moving from DTMF to speech recognition comes when the existing telephony self-service legacy system is approaching end-of-life.

Speech-based IVR is particularly useful in cases where very long lists of items such as place names or surnames may be chosen, for which the more structured DTMF IVR is unsuited. The success or otherwise of speech-based IVRs is very affected by how callers are encouraged to use the service. It has been the case that some speech implementations have actually made life more difficult for the customer, who may not have the confidence that the system will understand their natural language request and provide very short, one-word answers; if nothing is given in the way of prompts or examples, callers may give too little or too much information as they are unsure of the sophistication or capabilities of the system, and this may be a reason for high self-service abandonment rates. Using prompts such as “describe in a few words why you are calling us, for example ‘to start a new mortgage application’” can be useful in setting ground rules for successful use.

Survey respondents are generally quite positive about the effect that speech recognition has had on the customer experience.

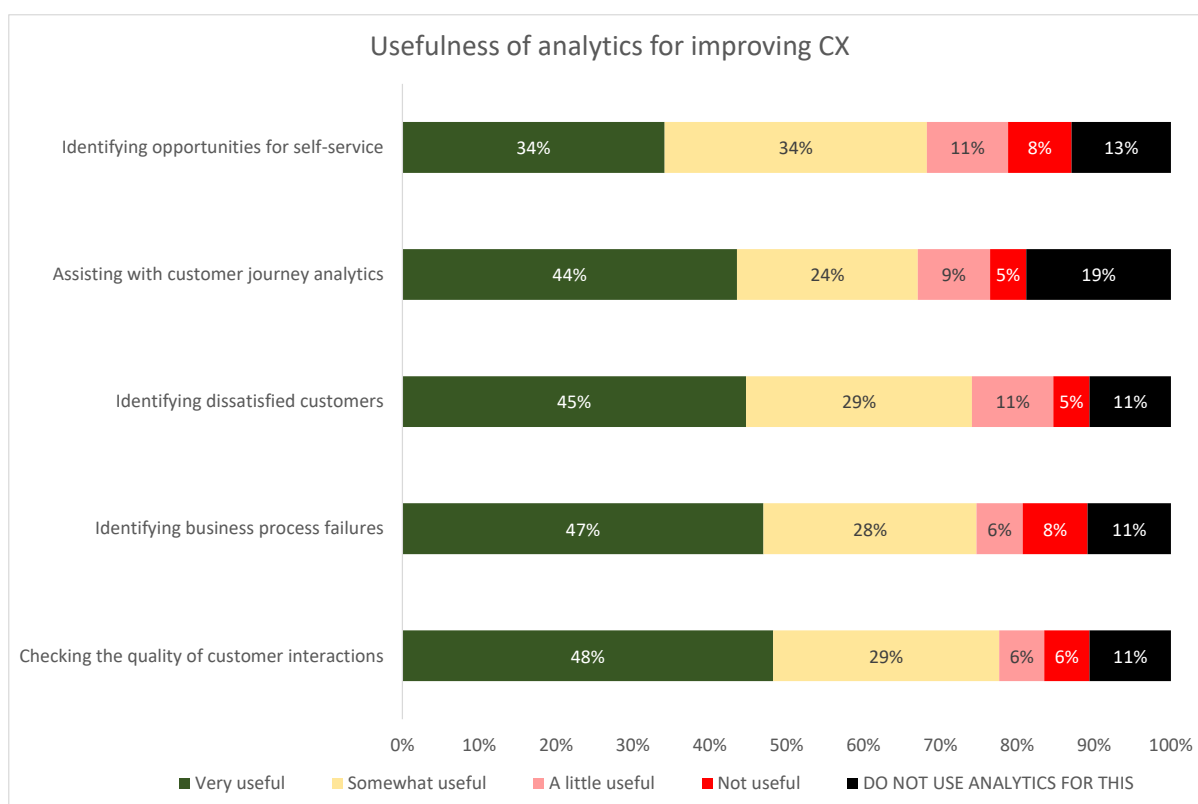
The feeling amongst respondents is that **touchtone IVR** is a little less beneficial to the customer experience, despite its widespread prevalence. IVR was typically implemented as a cost-saving measure, rather than something to improve the customer experience, and although visual IVR promises to benefit both business and the smartphone-owning customer, its uptake is currently low.

THE ROLE OF ANALYTICS IN CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Customer interaction analytics offers huge opportunity to gain business insight, improve operational efficiency and develop agent performance. In fact, the list of potential applications for this technology is so high that businesses could be forgiven for being confused about how to target and quantify the potential business gains.

Organisations using analytics were asked how useful the solution was for improving various aspects of the customer experience, either directly, or through improving internal processes which then had a impact upon the overall customer experience.

Figure 23: Usefulness of analytics for improving CX



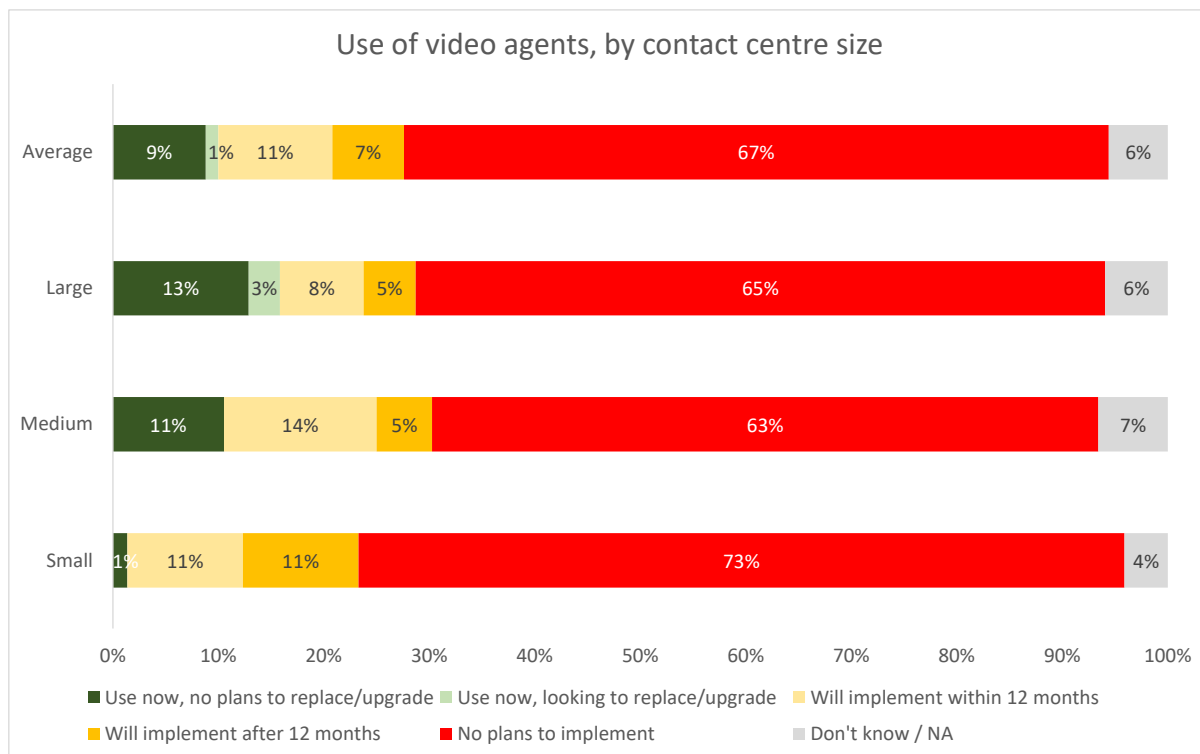
The overall conclusions were surprisingly consistent: in most analytics use cases, over half of respondents that used analytics for the stated purpose said that it was ‘very useful’ with around 30% saying that it was ‘somewhat useful’. These figures are somewhat more positive than has been the case in the past.

CURRENT AND EXPECTED USAGE OF VIDEO

While only a small minority of survey respondents are using video in their contact centres today, a further 11% plan to do so within 12 months.

Larger contact centres, often driven by the uptake in the usage of video during the pandemic, are most likely to be using video agents now.

Figure 24: Use of video agents, by contact centre size



Looking at the possible advantages of video, 62% of business survey respondents believed that video agents could offer more personalisation and empathy on the call, with only 15% disagreeing. 56% of businesses agreed that being able to demonstrate products and solutions was a driver for video, but only 32% thought that video agents could reduce the premises costs (through working at home), with the same proportion disagreeing.

Looking at the inhibitors to video, 56% of business respondents stated that they did not think their agents would welcome being on camera. 43% believed the same about customers (although for one-way video, this would of course not be an issue). Relatively few respondents believed that video technology was too expensive, or that the background and environment would be difficult to manage professionally.

Further comments from survey participants were mainly along the lines of video not being appropriate for their type of business (for example, as agents could feel additionally pressured and stressed on difficult and emotive calls), and that some customers prefer face-to-face meetings for sensitive or complex issues. It was also stated that video was more often currently used in sales or account management roles rather than customer service.

A ContactBabel survey of 1,000 UK consumers looked at whether the widespread use of video calls during lockdown had changed people’s perceptions of this channel.

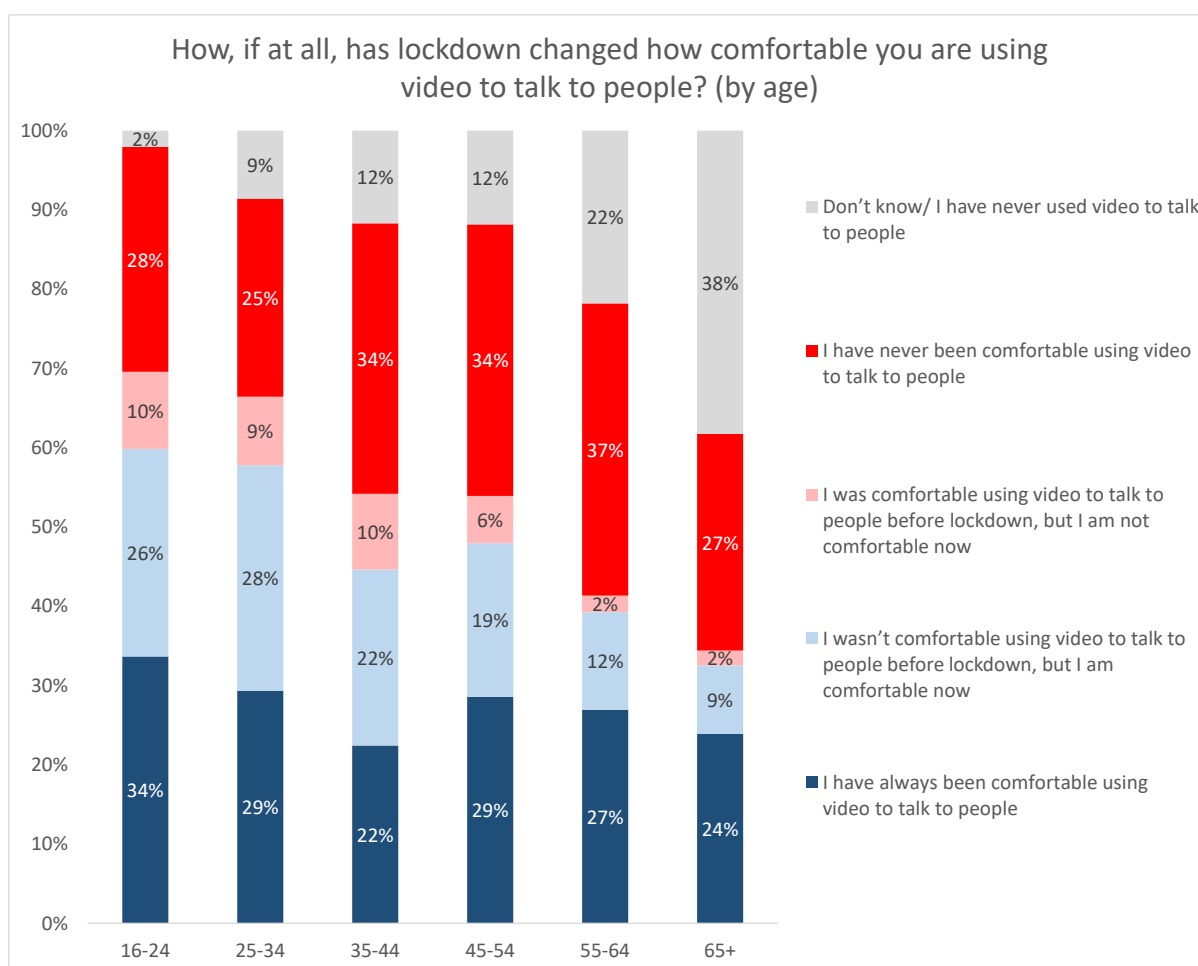
27% of respondents have always been happy to use video, with 19% stating that lockdown has made them comfortable with doing so now. 6% used to be happy to use video, but have changed their minds, and 31% have never liked doing so. 18% had no opinion or had never used video calling.

Looking at the differences by age group, younger people are somewhat more likely than older ones to say that they have always been comfortable using video, probably as a result of the social media apps that many of them use regularly. These younger age groups are also far more likely to have become comfortable with this over lockdown.

However, there is not a huge difference between age groups when considering those who do not like video: for example, 38% of the youngest age group, compared to 39% of the 55-64 age group.

Only 29% of the 65+ age group state that they do not like video, but this low figure can be explained by the fact that there are many people in this cohort who have not used video at all to communicate with people.

Figure 25: How, if at all, has lockdown changed how comfortable you are using video to talk to people? (by age)

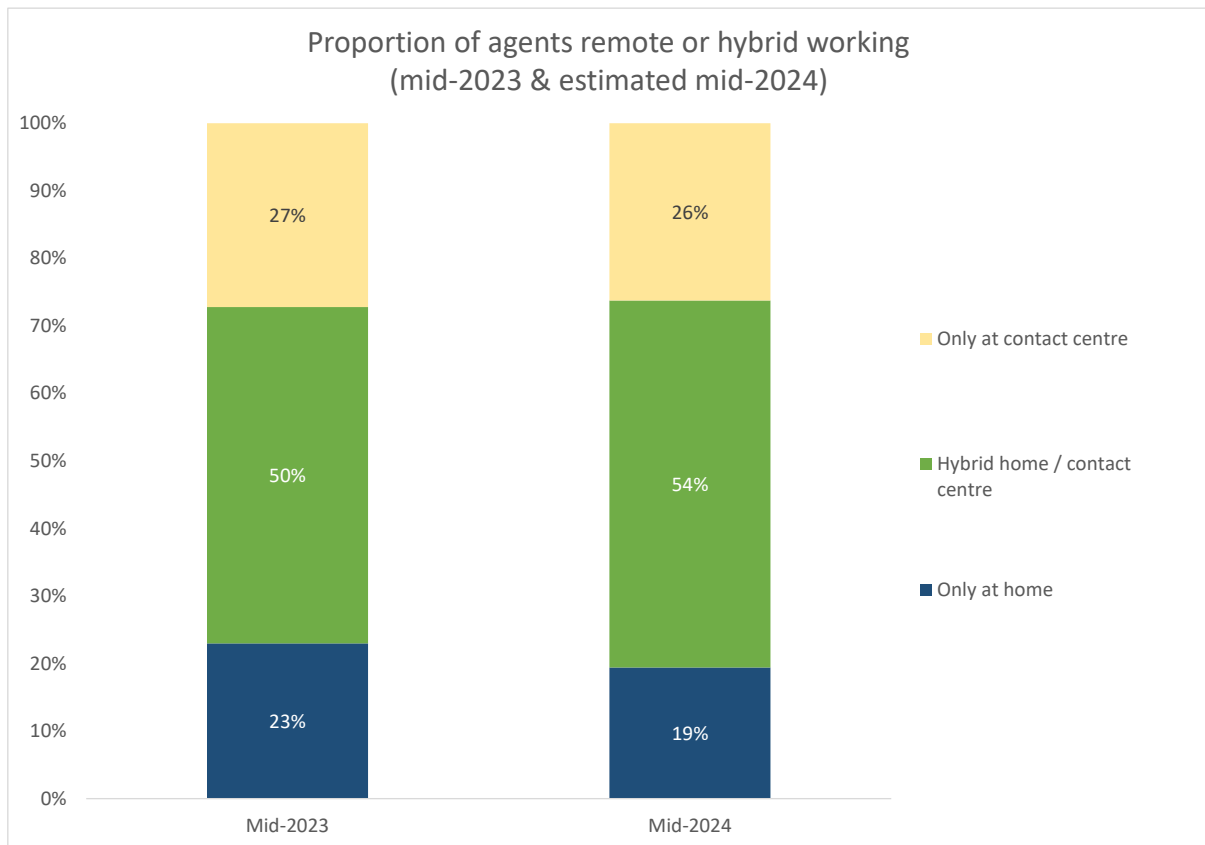


REMOTE & HYBRID WORKING

The survey looked at the current use of contact centre remote working, and businesses' expectations for mid-2024, with the figures below splitting out hybrid working from full-time remote working.

Around 3 in 4 agents are still working remotely to some extent at the moment, and businesses expect that there will be little change by mid-2024, although there will be some movement from fully-remote working to a hybrid model.

Figure 26: Proportion of agents remote or hybrid working (mid-2023 & estimated mid-2024)



WHAT DOES CX MEAN TO A CUSTOMER?

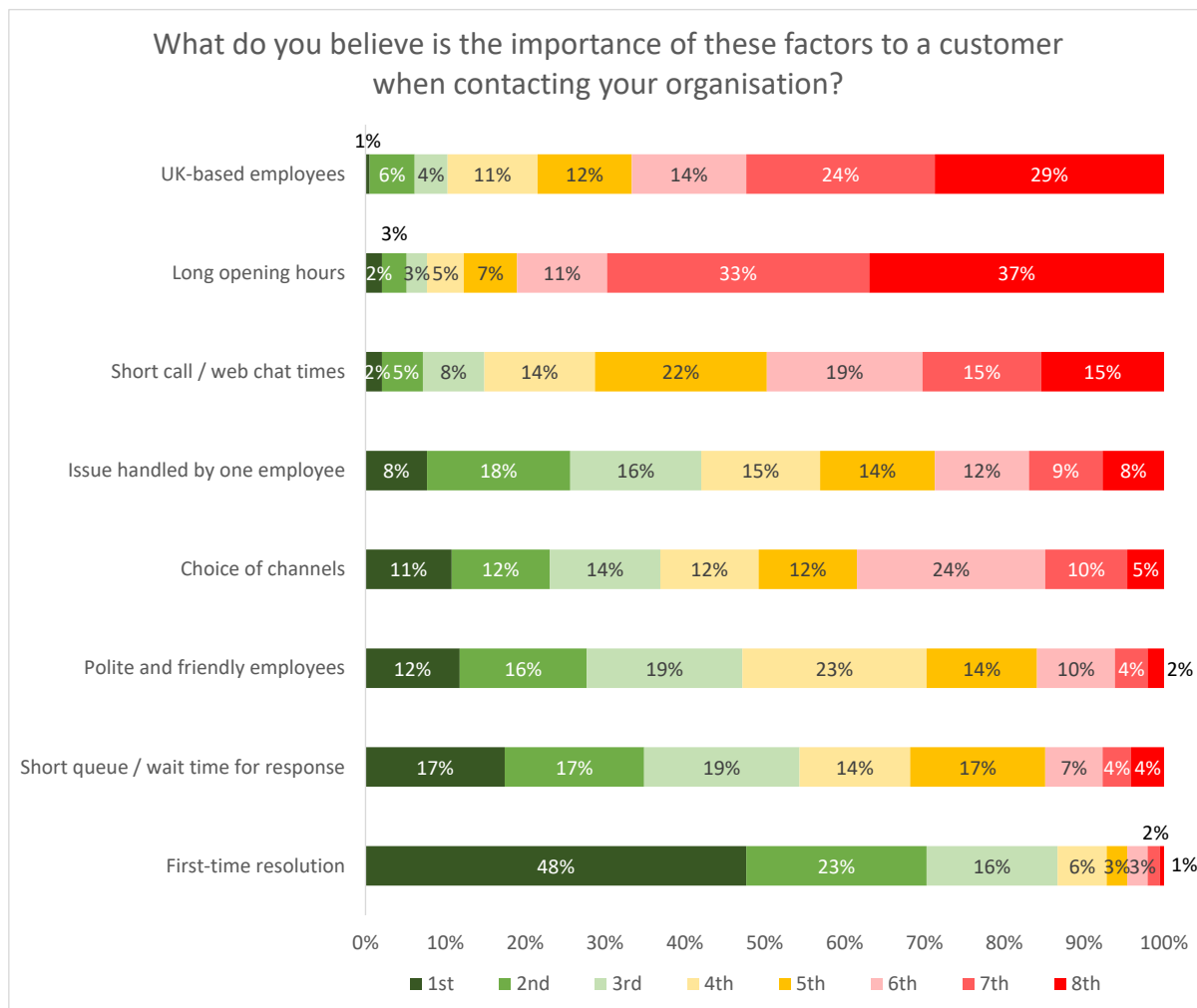
It is difficult for an organisation to be confident about which of the many elements that go towards a great customer experience are actually the most important, and consequently should receive the greatest investment and resource.

This section looks at the importance of key factors which occur within the customer experience when a customer contacts an organisation, from the perspective of the business and also from the customer.

THE VIEW FROM THE BUSINESS

Organisations were asked to rank by importance eight factors that could be said to impact upon customer experience.

Figure 27: What do you believe is the importance of these factors to a customer when contacting your organisation?



As with many past ContactBabel surveys, first-time resolution was clearly seen as being the most important factor impacting upon customer experience, with 48% of respondents ranking it in first place, and a further 39% placing it within the top three.

A short queue time or wait time for a response was also seen as being important, being ranked in the top 3 by 53% of respondents, with polite and friendly employees being ranked in the top 3 by 47% of organisations surveyed.

Having the issue handled by a single employee was placed in the top 3 by 42% of respondents, with a choice of channels making the top 3 for 37% of respondents.

The following section considers these elements of the customer experience from the perspective of customers themselves, and there are some significant differences of opinion between organisations and customers on what impacts the most on customer experience.

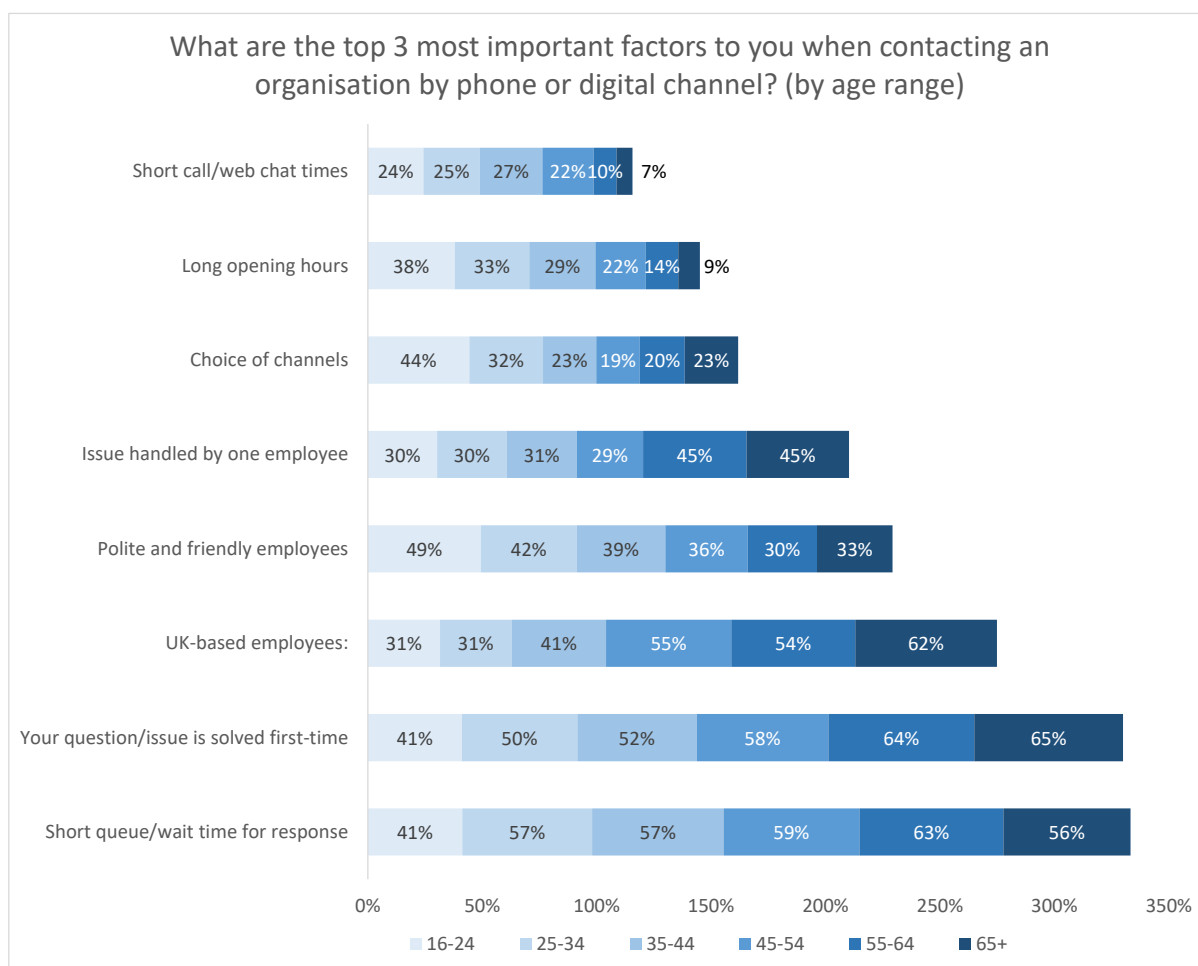
THE VIEW FROM THE CUSTOMER

ContactBabel commissioned the research firm [Aurora Market Research](#) to carry out a survey of 1,000 UK consumers. One of the purposes was to identify any differences in opinion between organisations and customers about what were the most important customer experience factors when contacting an organisation.

As such, consumers were asked to state which were the top three most important factors to them when contacting an organisation, with the same factors presented to them that had been offered to organisations within the business survey which most of this report is based upon.

Figures below are expressed as the percentage of each age group that expressed an opinion.

Figure 28: What are the top 3 most important factors to you when contacting an organisation by phone or digital channel? (by age range)



The previous chart shows the importance of various customer experience factors as an aggregated bar chart, segmented by age so as to show the factors that were of most importance to customers in each age range. Aggregating the results allows an understanding of which factors were placed in the top three overall, while also providing insight on age-related opinion.

For example, 41% of the youngest age group (16 to 24 years old) stated that having a short wait time for a response was one of their top three most important factors, whereas 56% of the oldest age group (over 65 years old) placed this in their top three.

This consumer research has some interesting findings when comparing consumer attitudes to businesses' beliefs:

- both businesses and consumers agree that first-contact resolution and short wait times are the most important factors impacting upon customer experience when contacting a business
- long opening hours are seen as more important by customers than businesses
- having UK-based employees is seen as far more important to customers than businesses believe, particularly for the older generation.

When considering these findings from the perspective of the various age ranges, the importance of first-contact resolution is the most important to most of the older age ranges, although of lesser importance to the youngest cohort.

The requirement for UK-based employees is much less important for the younger demographics, although still very important for older customers. There is also a pattern that older age groups are less likely to be happy with being passed between agents.

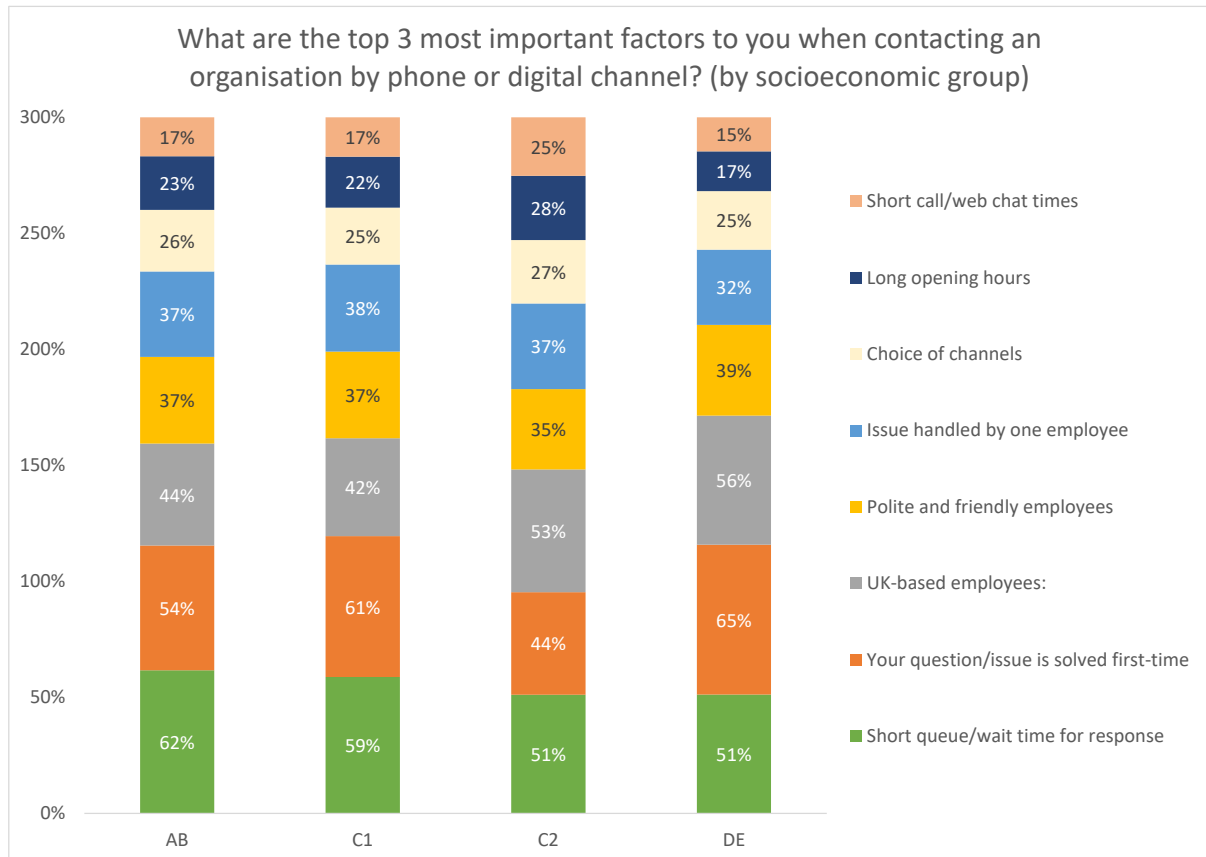
Younger customers place far more importance than the older generation on longer opening hours, and is more likely to value having a choice of ways to communicate with the organisation. Further evidence for younger age groups' valuing of its time can be seen in relatively high importance being placed upon short call/web chat duration compared to the oldest generations.

However, the youngest age group are certainly not willing to sacrifice courteous service for time saved, as 49% of this cohort place 'polite and friendly employees' in the top three factors, making it their most important CX factor. This may be because the youngest age group have the least experience of dealing with businesses and contact centres, perhaps lacking some of the confidence that comes with years of speaking with businesses, and to have a friendly and approachable agent seems to be valued very highly.

When segmenting the consumer data by socio-economic group, the AB segment seems to value short queue times somewhat more than other groups.

UK-based employees are more important to C2DE respondents.

Figure 29: What are the top 3 most important factors to you when contacting an organisation by phone or digital channel? (by socioeconomic group)



WHAT DO CUSTOMERS ACTUALLY GET WHEN CONTACTING AN ORGANISATION?

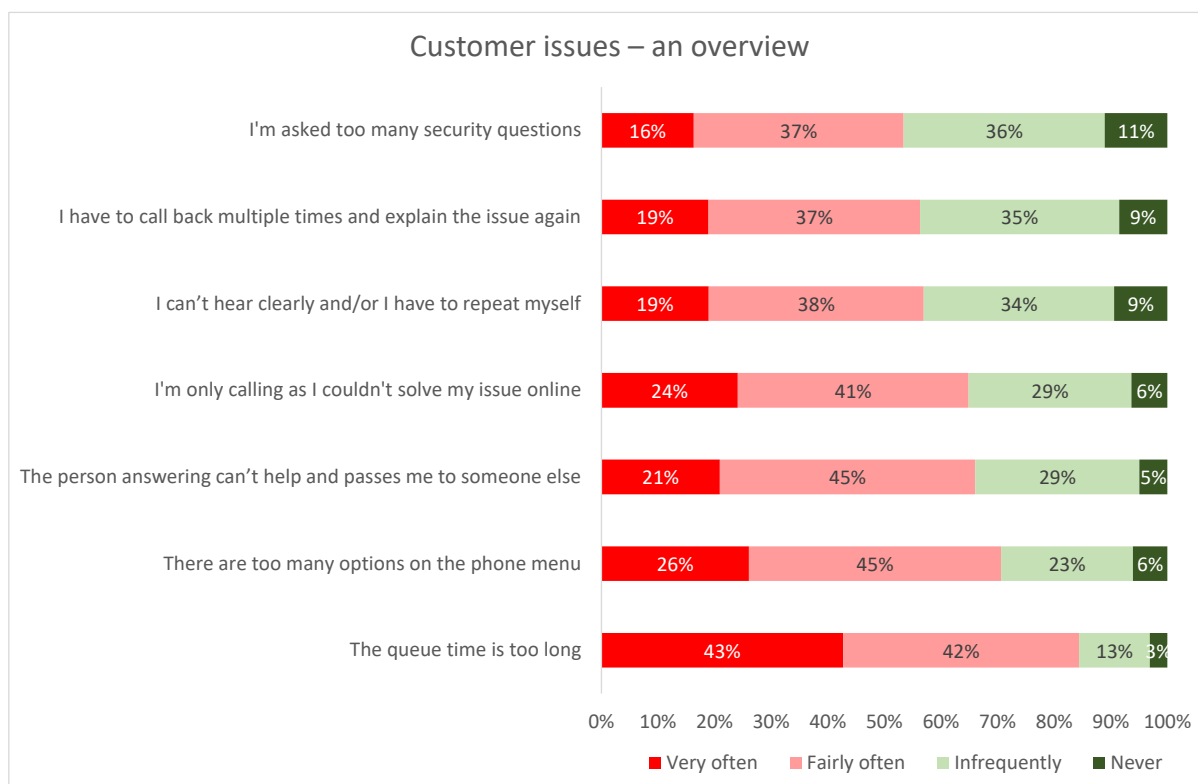
The previous section of the report looked at what customers want when they're contacting an organisation, but what exactly do they feel that they receive?

The general view across the customer survey is that they hit roadblocks fairly often. The standout finding – which won't come as a surprise – is that 85% of survey respondents felt that the queue time was too long very often or fairly often. As the following section will show, this has got considerably worse in recent years and is something that the industry needs to deal with urgently.

More than a quarter of respondents often feel that IVR menus are too complicated, and two-thirds state that they very or fairly often get passed around the contact centre, and that they are only calling because they've tried and failed to get their issue resolved online.

Of interest is that 57% of customers report that they can't hear clearly, or have to repeat themselves very or fairly often, with a similar proportion stating that they have to call back multiple times and that they are asked too many security questions.

Figure 30: Customer issues – an overview



The following sections look in more detail at customers' actual experience and opinions of the two main drivers of CX – first-contact resolution and long wait / queue times.

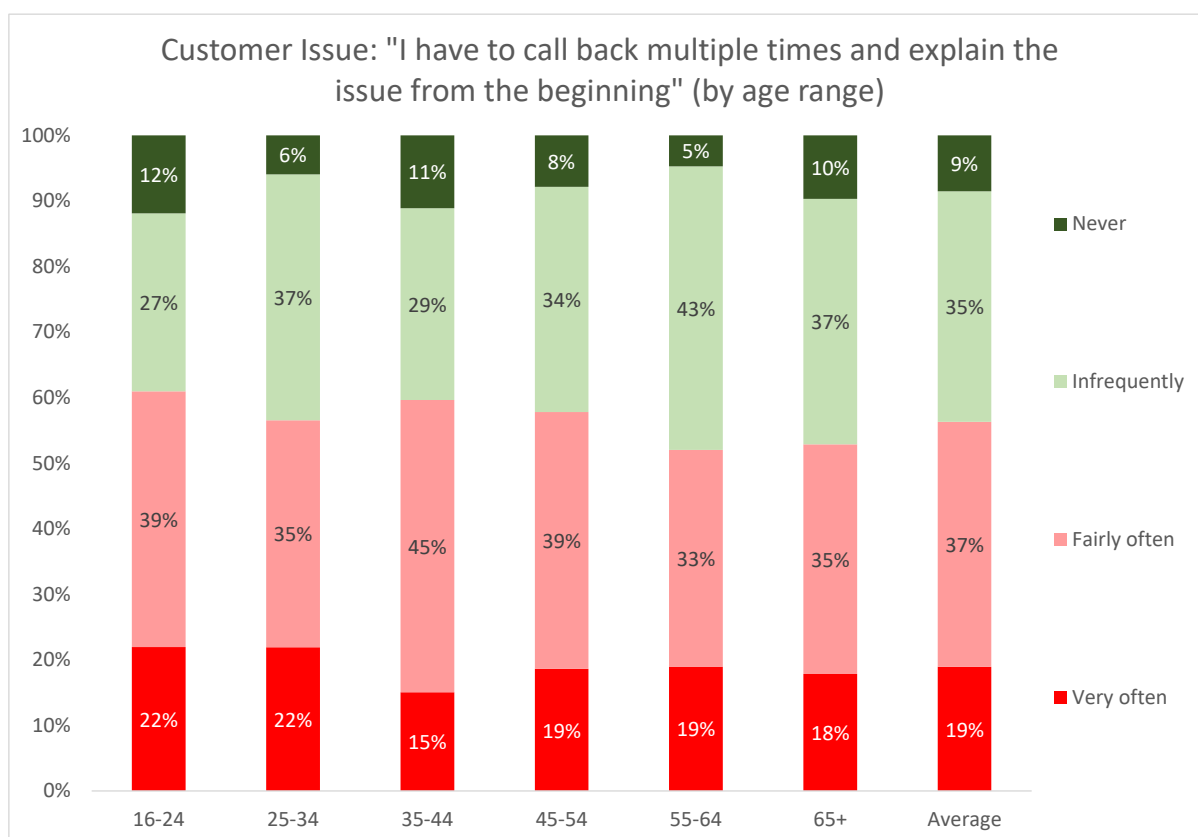
FIRST-CONTACT RESOLUTION & THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Our customer survey showed that first-contact resolution (FCR) was vital to the customer experience, particularly amongst older customers.

Looking at how often customers felt that they experienced having to call back multiple times, younger customers were slightly more likely to feel that they had to do this, although the majority of respondents from all age groups stated that they had to do this very often or fairly often.

As first-contact resolution is such a key to customer experience, organisations should be focusing their attention on identifying and resolving the issues that cause repeat calls, as it impacts not only on cost but also strongly on customer satisfaction.

Figure 31: Customer Issue: "I have to call back multiple times and explain the issue from the beginning" (by age range)



Both the surveys of organisations and customers show clearly that first-contact resolution is the primary driver of positive customer experience. Yet first-contact resolution rates are not simple to understand, but have to be viewed in context. An improving business may well see its FCR rate actually decline after it implements process improvements, which is counter-intuitive, but if the business had been handling live calls that were more suited to self-service or avoidable through better marketing communications, getting rid of these 'easy' calls entirely will make the FCR rate decline. If many calls are about the same issue, and are answered quickly and accurately, it improves FCR rates, but of course piles up cost and impacts negatively upon other performance metrics, such as queue length and call abandonment rate.

Businesses should consider the reasons for these unnecessary calls, rather than just focusing upon a single metric, as high first-contact resolution rates may actually be masking underlying problems:

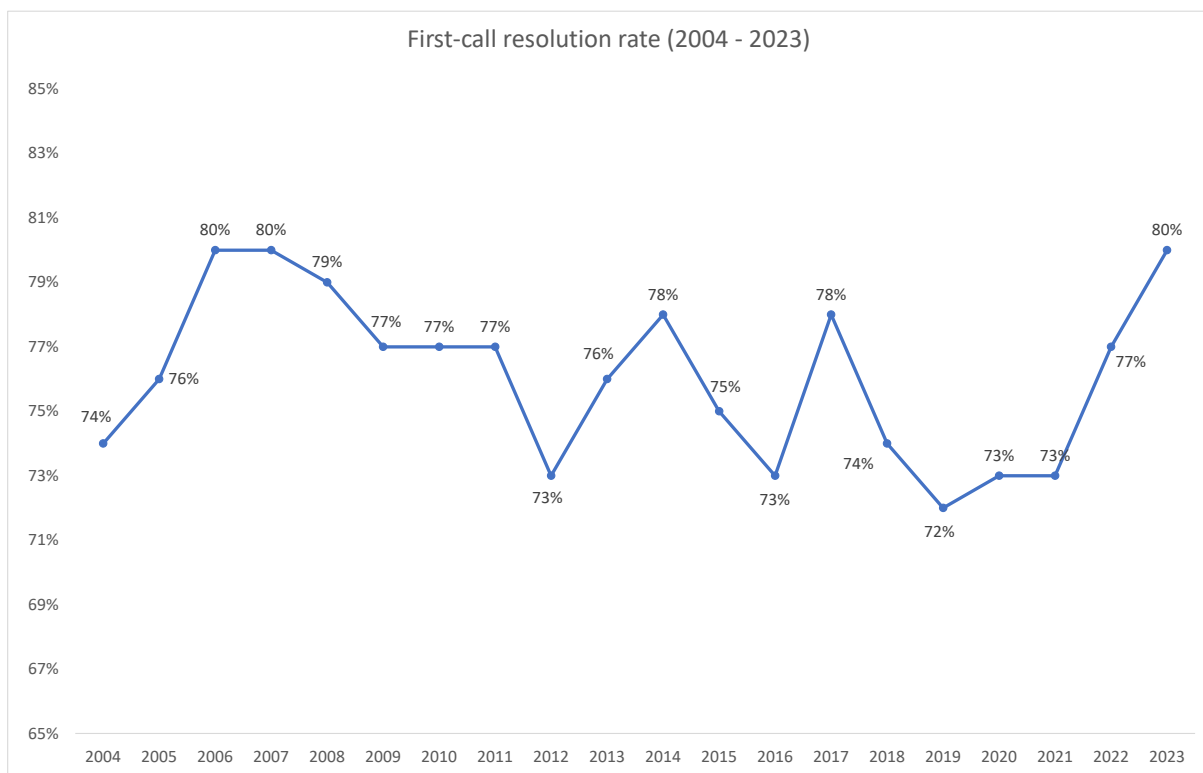
- The contact centre is handling simple and repetitive calls that could be moved to self-service, or which could be addressed on a website and through better marketing communications
- Callers are dropping out of self-service to speak with agents because the self-service application is failing in its task and should be re-engineered
- Unclear marketing communications are causing customers to call
- Calls are being received that are actually driven by mistakes from elsewhere in the enterprise.

When businesses begin stopping unnecessary calls at the source, those left are usually of a more complex nature. This will lower first-call resolution rates initially, allowing a clearer picture of what is really happening in the contact centre to emerge, which can then be addressed more fully.

FCR was actually declining slightly until recently: as the easier interactions go to self-service (especially online), the contact centre is left with more difficult and varied tasks – through email as well as phone – which can also be very complicated to categorise effectively using the current tools available to most. It is too early to say whether the recent improvement is a definite trend.

As the contact centre adapts and invests in better ways of handling customer requests, first call resolution rate increases and parity resumes. The exodus of ‘easy’ work to self-service channels may not be quite balanced by immediate balancing improvements in knowledge sharing and other agent support processes that would mean stable first call resolution rates.

Figure 32: First-call resolution rate (2004 - 2023)



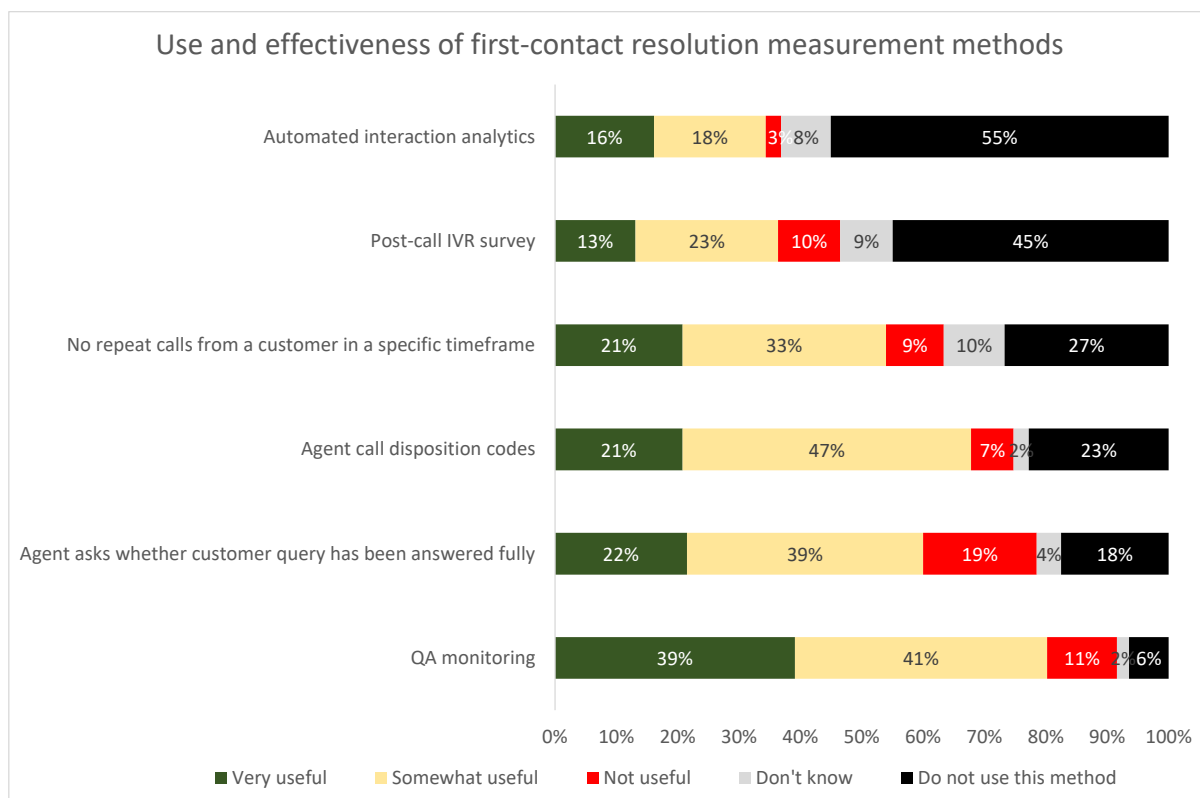
The first-contact resolution rate is an important metric to study, being concerned both with the customers' experience as well as avoiding unnecessary calls. However, it is very difficult to measure effectively, with no single best practice method of getting definitive statistics that are directly comparable to the rest of the industry. This difficulty is shown by the fact that seven or eight years ago, perhaps half of contact centres responding to this survey did not collect FCR performance at all (this year's non-responding figure is only 11%, which is an ongoing improvement).

Of those that do, there are various ways to measure, or at least closely estimate, first-contact resolution rates, all of which are seeing increasing use:

- Agents provide opinions on whether the call was resolved completely, including tagging the interactions with a disposition code at the end of the call (used by 77% of respondents)
- Tracking of issues shows if they are re-opened (73%)
- Supervisors monitor calls and score based on their opinion (94%)
- Customers can be asked their views by the agent (82%) or through an IVR survey (55%)
- Analytics of interaction recordings can be used to see whether the call was actually resolved or more interactions were needed (45%).

The accurate tracking and actionable insight of FCR is one of the biggest challenges to the contact centre industry: it is key to customer satisfaction and cost management.

Figure 33: Use and effectiveness of first-contact resolution measurement methods

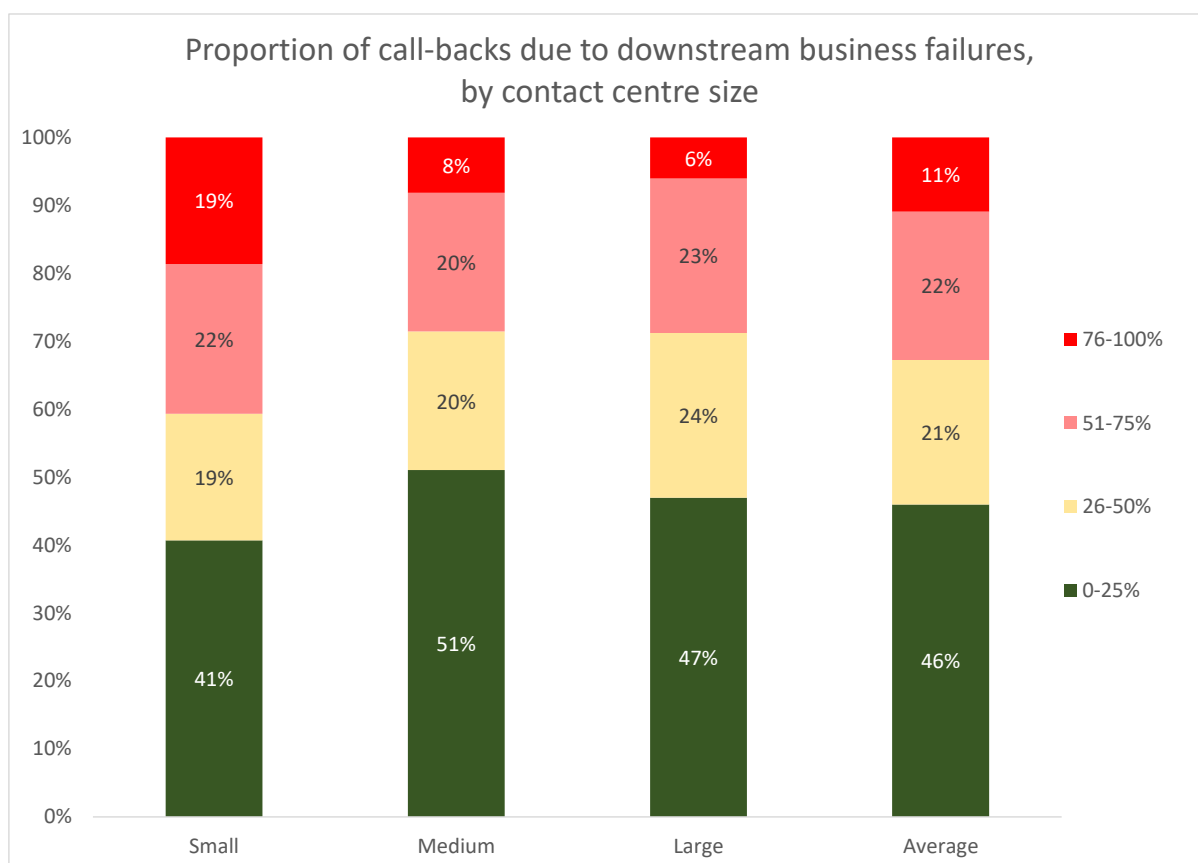


QA monitoring, the most widely-used form of gathering first-call resolution information, is seen as reasonably effective, but automated analysis of call recordings is considered as effective by those respondents that use this method of calculating first-contact resolution, with 40% of users that had an opinion finding it very useful. Other methods have their supporters and detractors, with tracking repeat calls and agent disposition codes also being quite well thought of.

The majority of contact centres who track first-contact resolution do so **only** based on the initial interaction itself: that is, they do not check whether the action or business process initiated by the contact has been followed through successfully. Most complaints received by a contact centre are about the failings of the wider business (usually around 80-90%), so focusing entirely upon the work done within the contact centre is missing the point of measuring first-contact resolution.

The following chart shows that one-third of respondents report that the majority of their call-backs are due to failures in downstream processes and actions (or lack of them), showing that there is a need for joined-up processes between the front and back-office as well as between channels.

Figure 34: Proportion of call-backs due to downstream business failures, by contact centre size



However, even if FCR can be measured successfully and accurately, this figure is still not necessarily actionable: we do not always know why some calls are not resolved first-time. Without a greater level of insight, contact centre managers may not be addressing the real issues that are impacting on customer satisfaction and the effectiveness of the operation, which interaction analytics can help with.

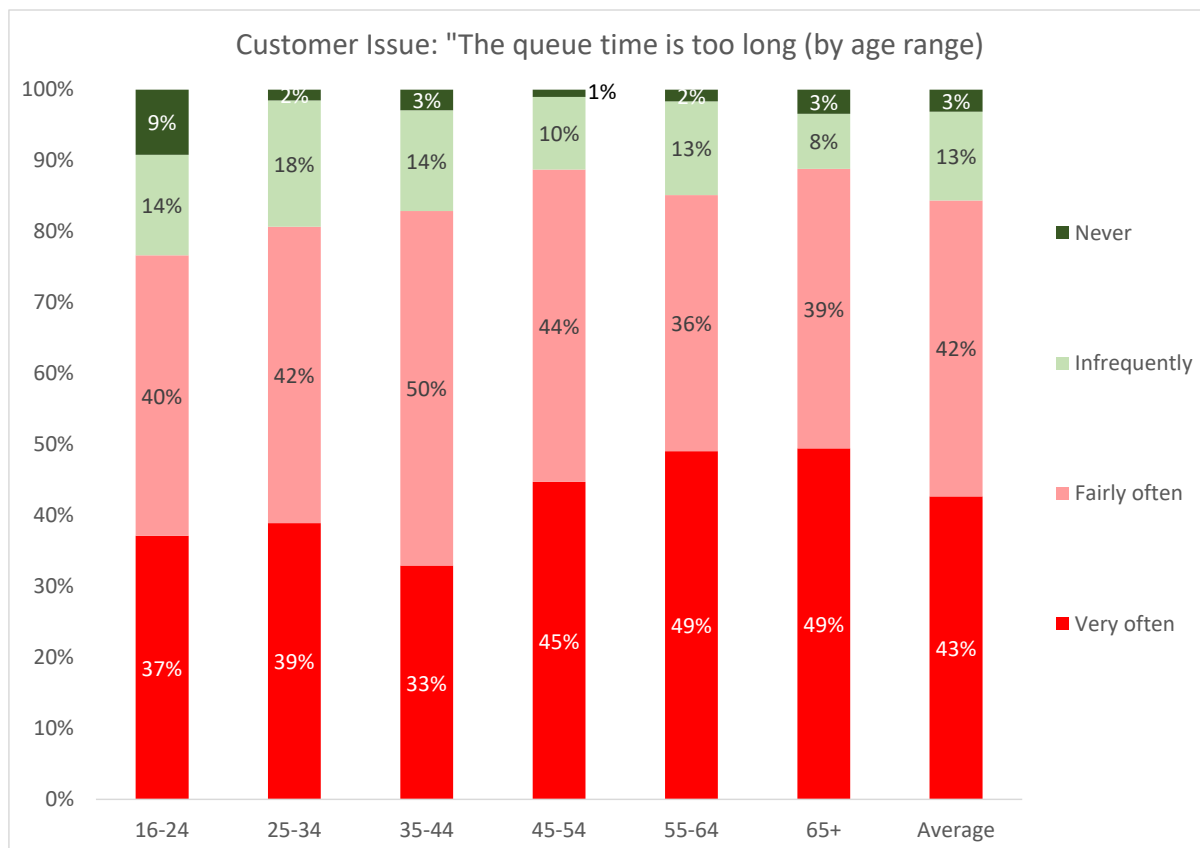
The recent ContactBabel report, "[The Inner Circle Guide to First-Contact Resolution](#)", looks in depth at how to measure and improve FCR.

QUEUE / WAIT TIMES

There is no great surprise that the most widely reported customer issue is that the queue time / speed to answer is too long.

Looking at segmentations by age group, older customers are more likely to report long queue times happening very often, with almost half of over-55-year-olds stating this to be the case.

Figure 35: Customer Issue: "The queue time is too long" (by age range)



As the following charts show, customers are not imagining that the average speed to answer is excessive: the industry statistics bear this out.

Speed to answer plays a vital part in improving the customer experience, and also feeds into other performance measures such as call abandonment rate: obviously, the longer the queue, the more people will abandon the call.

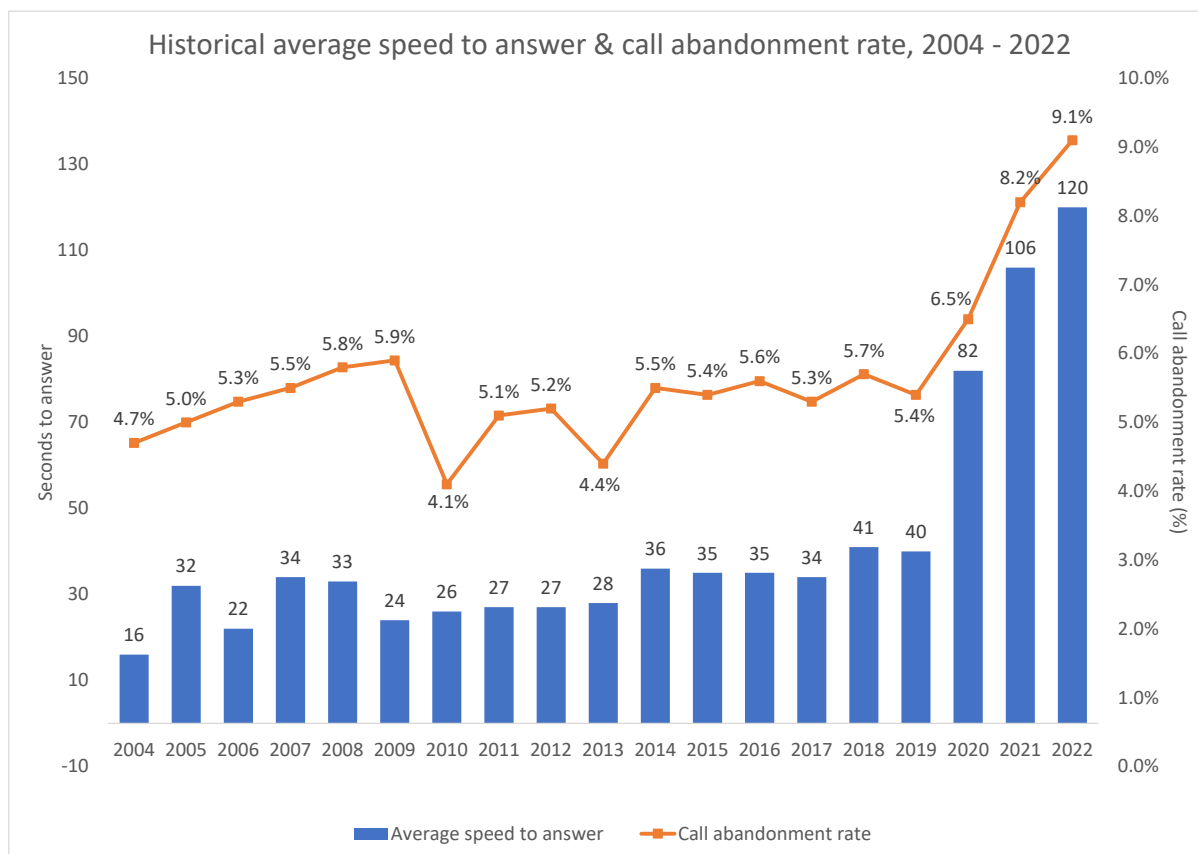
The following chart shows historical figures for average speed to answer and call abandonment rate.

From 2009 onwards there has been a gradual increase in average speed to answer, with a spike to 36 seconds in 2014 which remained quite steady until 2018’s jump to 41 seconds. There has been a huge uptick in 2020 and 2021 caused by pandemic-related working practices and an increase in demand experienced by some businesses, which is even stronger in 2022 despite a return to some sort of normality.

Call abandonment rate did not historically show any upward trend, with all but three of the 16 survey results showing data between 5% and 6% between 2004 and 2019. 2020’s abandonment rate was up by 20% and is almost certainly linked to the changes in speed to answer, with 2022 being the highest yet recorded.

This is clear proof that customers are not overexaggerating their frequent experiences with long queue times. Some sectors – utilities, public sector and housing in particular – are reporting extremely long queues, and this needs to be looked at urgently.

Figure 36: Historical average speed to answer & call abandonment rate, 2004 - 2022



Further detail and analysis is available in the [“Exceeding UK Customer Expectations”](#) report.

OMNICHANNEL AND THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

LIVE OR AUTOMATION?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a wide-ranging term for technology solutions which appears to emulate human cognitive capabilities through the ‘understanding’ of complex, natural language requirements, in order to reach its own conclusions and develop itself based on what works and what doesn’t. Machine learning refers to the ability of software to evolve based on measuring its performance and success, without input from humans.

Within the customer contact space, there is a great deal of interest in how AI & machine learning can work to deliver a superior customer experience at every hour of the day, across channels, leveraging the vast amounts of data that are available to many large organisations. Supported by the speed and availability of affordable processing power, and the enormous amount of structured and unstructured data available, the opportunity exists for AI to take customer contact far beyond what is feasible now.

AI for customer contact is currently best known for chatbots, a computer program that runs automated tasks and simulates conversation with the customers. It may be given a human avatar and personality characteristics, and includes natural language processing, dialogue control, access to knowledge bases and a visual appearance that can change depending on who it is talking to, and the subject of the conversation. Chatbots are often found in the web chat channel, but the functionality can be used in any other digital channel, such as social media, email or even voice self-service.

As AI can be given access to all of the relevant data a company holds on its customers, as well as unstructured data held elsewhere (for example, forums or social media channels), it has a far wider source of knowledge from which to draw compared to human agents. In theory, an AI with sufficient sophistication could make human agents all but unnecessary, but for the foreseeable future, AI looks mainly to be used to work alongside its human colleagues.

In order to gauge the level of acceptance and expectation around fully-automated customer contact, UK organisations and consumers were asked whether automation or human assistance would be preferable to the customer base in circumstances where the customer effort, time and outcome were **exactly the same**.

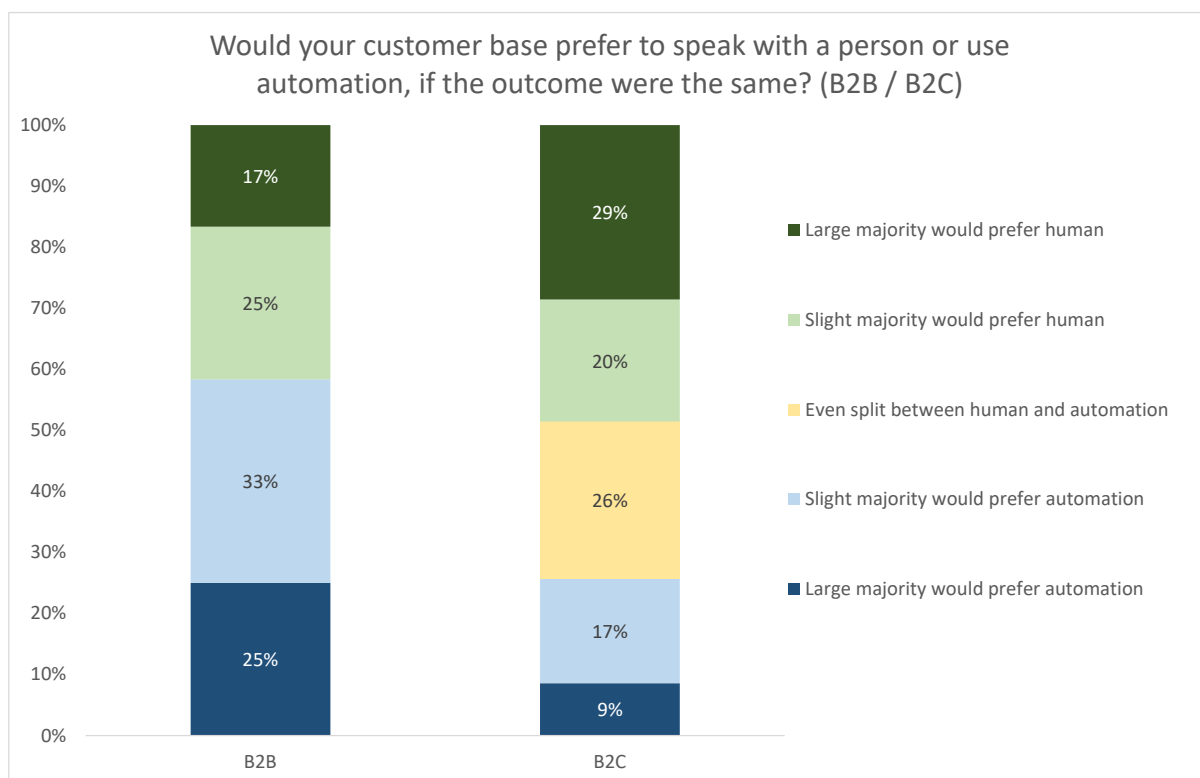
Although the question is quite hypothetical – automated channels usually require far less effort and time than human interaction, but often cannot deliver the same functionality – the findings were quite surprising considering the popularity and recent uptake of automated self-service.

THE VIEW FROM THE BUSINESS

Overall, the organisations surveyed for this report had a slight tendency to believe that their customer base would prefer to speak to a person rather than use automation, even if the outcome and effort were the same.

B2B respondents were somewhat more likely to think that their customers would prefer to use automation, and that B2C respondents’ customers would prefer to speak with a live agent.

Figure 37: Would your customer base prefer to speak with a person or use automation, if the outcome were the same? (B2B / B2C)



At a vertical market level, those in the retail, manufacturing and public sector were most likely to believe that human contact would be preferred, with many of those in utilities, finance and outsourcing believing that their customers were more likely to choose automation.

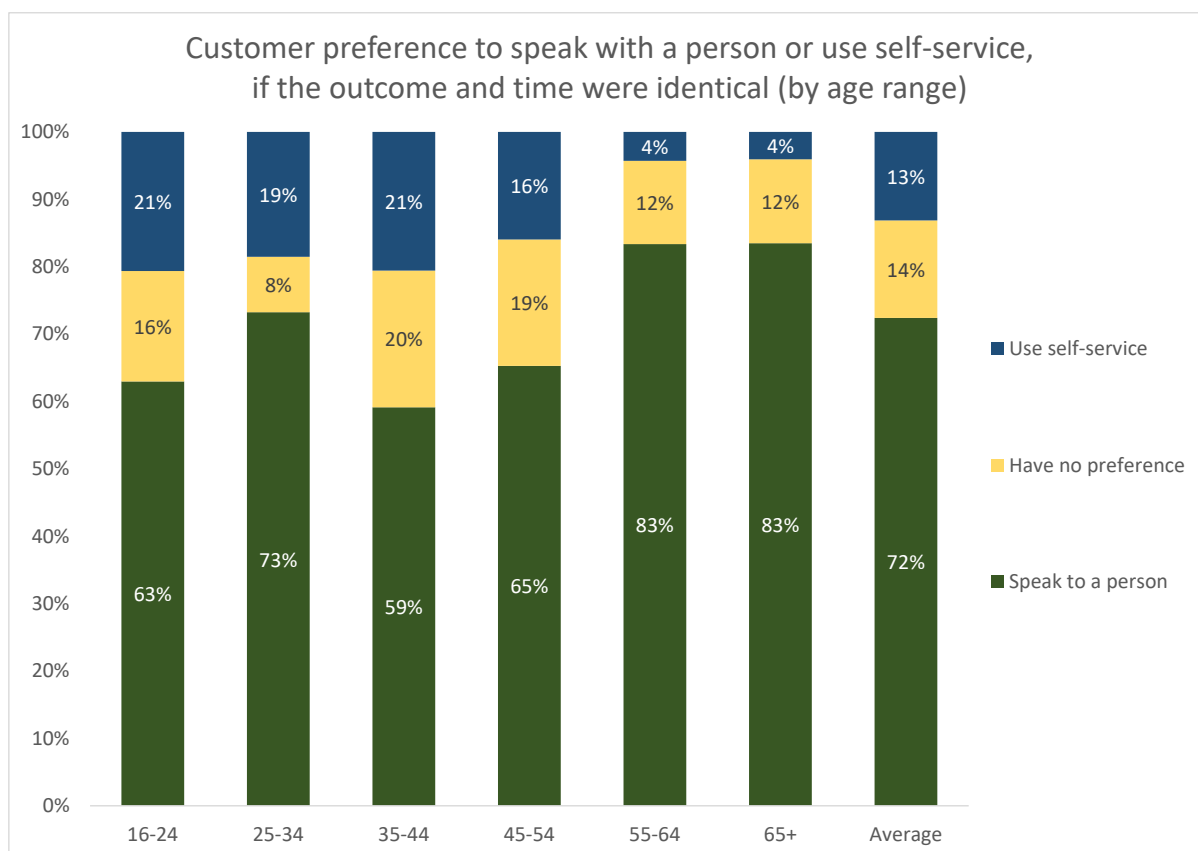
THE VIEW FROM THE CUSTOMER

When the same question has been asked of customers, it was found that the customer base was much more strongly in favour of speaking to a human employee than businesses had believed.

Looking at the age group of the customer base, older demographics feel more strongly about human contact, with only 4% of over-65s preferring to use automation, compared to 21% of 16-24 year-olds. This fits in with the previous findings that this section of the customer base places more value on their time, whereas the older demographic prefers to have their issue resolved first-time by a single employee. Having said that, every age group expressed a strong preference to speak with a human agent.

Bearing in mind that this question emphasised that the outcome and customer effort/time **would be identical** in each case, the results show that the customer base at present is not yet at a stage where automation is generally seen as being even on equal terms with human contact, let alone the preferred method of contact with a business, and that the human touch is still very much valued.

Figure 38: Customer preference to speak with a person or use self-service, if the outcome and time were identical (by age range)



Further analysis of this data showed that 69% of men preferred to speak with a person, compared to 73% of women.

At a socio-economic level, there was virtually no difference between respondent sets.

OMNICHANNEL: THE CONSUMER'S CHOICE

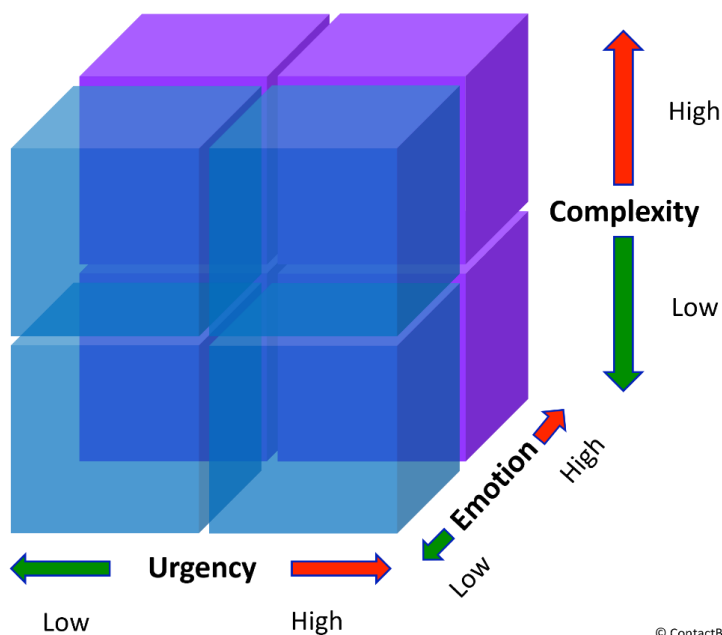
There are two main factors that influence contact centres within any vertical market: the commercial activity within that sector, and customers' requirements and preferences for contacting organisations. It is not only the nature of the specific business vertical market that needs to be considered. The urgency, complexity and emotional importance of the interaction is perhaps at least as important as the nature of the business that is being called: for a customer calling a bank, a simple balance request and an urgent call about the progress of a mortgage application are very different types of call, and should be treated as such.

The Customer Interaction Cube (below) is a structure developed to categorise the different types of customer interactions that businesses have to handle, considering the urgency, complexity and emotional input of the interaction from the customer's perspective.

Businesses could use this to analyse their volumes of each type of interaction, cross-referencing it with other variables such as the time of day these types of interaction are received, and the customer demographic preferences seen elsewhere in this report in order to support the relevant channels through the promotion of alternatives to live calls, and the correct levels of resourcing.

Doing this will not only improve the customer experience, but also reduce the cost of service through anticipating the likely resourcing required and even proactively engaging with the customer on lower cost channels first.

The Customer Interaction Cube



© ContactBabel

Using this 2x2x2 cube as a structure, there are eight types of interaction, a combination of either low or high urgency, complexity and emotional input. Our hypothesis is that each of these eight interaction types may best be suited to specific channels, and that both business and customer could benefit from matching channel with interaction type.

The examples shown below of various scenarios and the channels most suitable for these are suggestions, and will differ between customer types, businesses and vertical markets, but may offer a tentative framework for readers to build their own scenarios. It should be noted that the results of the customer survey that follow this section suggest that different age groups and socioeconomic segments have their own views on how they prefer to contact a business in each of these cases. Primary and secondary channels are suggested, but will differ between organisations and customer types.

Figure 39: The Customer Interaction Cube and suggested associated channels

Emotional importance	Urgency	Complexity	Examples of interaction	Primary channel	Secondary channel
Low	Low	Low	Meter reading; casual product research	Self-service	Web chat
Low	Low	High	Instructions on how to program a TV remote; find out about proposed planning / house building	Email	Phone
Low	High	Low	Top up mobile credit; check payment has been made	Self-service	Phone
Low	High	High	Details of how to make an insurance claim; understand mobile roaming charges before imminent trip abroad	Web chat / self-service	Phone
High	Low	Low	Book train tickets for important engagement	Self-service	Phone
High	Low	High	Complaint about incorrect billing	Phone	Email
High	High	Low	Simple question about imminent desired purchase (e.g. delivery, personalisation, return policy)	Web chat	Phone / social
High	High	High	Household emergency advice; 999	Phone	Web chat

There are many other variables that could be considered alongside these that will impact upon the suitability of channels:

- Demographics
- Ownership of smartphone / broadband impacts upon channel availability
- Time of day (i.e. is this an out-of-hours enquiry? Is the customer at home, at work, or travelling?)
- Whether the request is specific to an account, or a generic issue (i.e. is it necessary to pass through security first?).

While the 2x2x2 cube can help businesses to estimate the current and potential volumes and resourcing required to serve the customer base, it is important to remember that similar types of customer interaction may require very different handling depending on circumstances. For example, a query about product delivery may be a small part of a wide-ranging research process carried out by a particularly thorough prospective customer, or may be asked by a customer who has just realised they've forgotten about an important birthday and needs immediate, accurate information.

McKinsey talks about the 'moment of truth' in customer interactions¹, often occurring when the customer has an unexpected problem or has a high emotional stake, when long-term loyalty and customer advocacy can be won or lost depending on the outcome and the way in which it is handled. Businesses and their representatives should be aware that these relatively rare occurrences offer great opportunities. Recognising and handling these moments of truth appropriately – moments which are defined as such by the customer, not the business – will have a far greater long-term impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty than the dozens of competently-handled, forgettable interactions that may have happened previously.

Although the 2x2x2 cube gives some indication of the types of interaction that are more likely to be 'moments of truth', which businesses may choose to be handled by their more experienced and empathetic agents, they are by their nature difficult to predict. Current real-time speech analytics solutions can indicate a measure of stress in the customer's voice, flagging this up to the agent within the call, but agents should be in any case capable of recognising this without technology. In any case, if the customer has already tried two or three other channels without success, even the most competent and empathetic agent will find it difficult to turn the moment of truth around positively.

However, the 'peak-end' rule, a psychological finding where we recall a memory based upon how we felt at a peak (or trough) moment as well as how we felt at the end of the situation biases the memory of the overall experience, and gives live agents a chance to rescue even particularly poor customer experiences.

For more information on this and other customer engagement methods, please download "The Inner Circle Guide to Customer Engagement & Personalisation", free from www.contactbabel.com.

¹ <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organisation/our-insights/the-moment-of-truth-in-customer-service>

For this reason, a true omnichannel approach is vital which offers the same high level of service and knowledge through each channel. Equally important is the freedom for agents to act in way appropriate to the situation – for example, if a ‘high-emotion’ interaction happens on social media, which can’t be handled on that channel (e.g. it needs to go through security, or is too complex and lengthy for a non-voice channel), the agent should be given the license to place an outbound call to that customer in real-time, rather than advise them to call the contact centre. While this will impact upon the social media channel’s service levels while the agent is away from it, the moment of truth offers the opportunity to lock-in that customer’s loyalty. For contact centre operations traditionally run on a structured command-and-control basis, this may sound chaotic, but businesses have to decide if the occasional relaxation of their own procedures is an acceptable trade-off for providing the customer with something that they truly value. Agents need to be given *carte blanche* to deliver in ‘moments of truth’, and the training and support to recognise when this is happening.

This is not to say that ‘moments of truth’ necessarily have to be handled by a live agent. The popularity of self-service runs deep in the customer base, and the only reason that many customers abandon self-service at the point of crisis in order to ring the contact centre is only because self-service cannot deliver what they need. If companies focused their efforts on providing more sophisticated and reliable self-service applications, there is no reason why these could not deliver at least as much customer benefit at these moments of truth.

For example, if a passenger misses their plane, they are then likely to engage in a long and complicated discussion with a live agent (either at the airport or in a contact centre), involving alternatives, connections and payments. If, on missing the last call for the plane, the customer were immediately provided with an SMS or email detailing the various options available to them, which they could then select and rebook at once, this would be more convenient for the customer and significantly reduce the cost of service to the business. Perhaps more importantly, the customer would feel that the airline is looking out for them, creating long-term loyalty out of the negative experience of missing a plane.

The survey of 1,000 UK consumers carried out for this report attempted to understand which the channels of preference would be in cases of high emotion, urgency and complexity through presenting survey respondents with three hypothetical scenarios:

High emotion: notifying a company that an incorrect item has been sent to them. This was chosen as a high emotion interaction as being sent an incorrect item is often frustrating, as not only has the desired product not arrived, but the customer is then left with the problem and effort of returning the item. This is not a particularly complex interaction, and in many cases will not be particularly urgent.

High urgency: checking the arrival time of a flight that the customer is meeting. This is likely to be an urgent interaction as it is very time-sensitive. Complexity is very low - as the required information is simply a time - and in the majority of cases, should have a fairly low emotional impact.

High complexity: receiving guidance on completing a mortgage application or tax form. This is likely to be a complex and long interaction, but is unlikely to have high levels of urgency or emotional response.

HIGH EMOTION INTERACTIONS

Consumers taking the survey were asked to imagine that a product they had ordered from a company had arrived but was incorrect. In this circumstance, they were asked which would be their preferred method for contacting the company to notify them that this was the case.

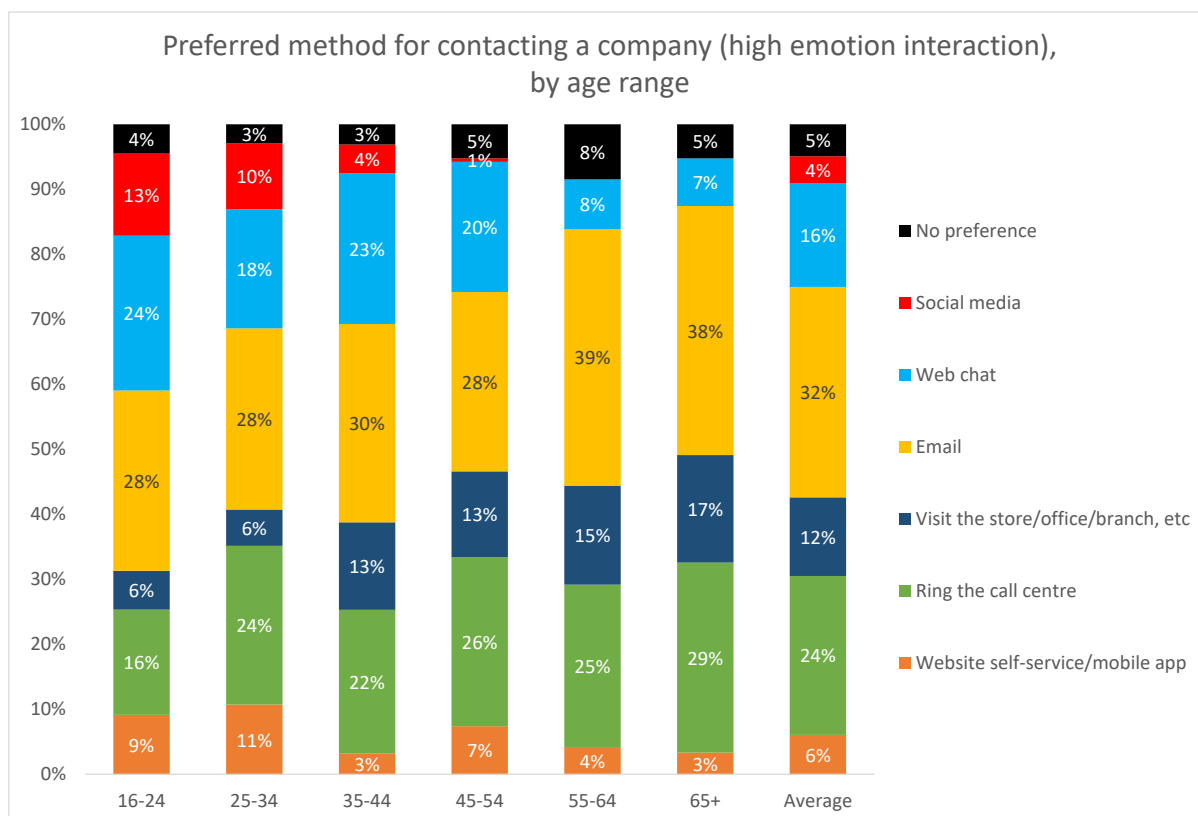
The most popular option was to email the organisation, with 32% of respondents choosing this method. The second most popular, at 24%, was phoning the contact centre, and web chat also made a strong appearance, with 16% respondents choosing this as their preference.

There was a strong pattern based on the age of the survey respondent and their preferred channel: the older demographics were the most likely to pick up the phone or to email.

Web chat was a very popular option with the younger demographics, and has actually overtaken the telephony channel for the 16-24 year-old cohort.

13% of the sub-25 year-old age group would choose social media, which is a major finding for businesses serving these customers.

Figure 40: Preferred method for contacting a company (high emotion interaction), by age range

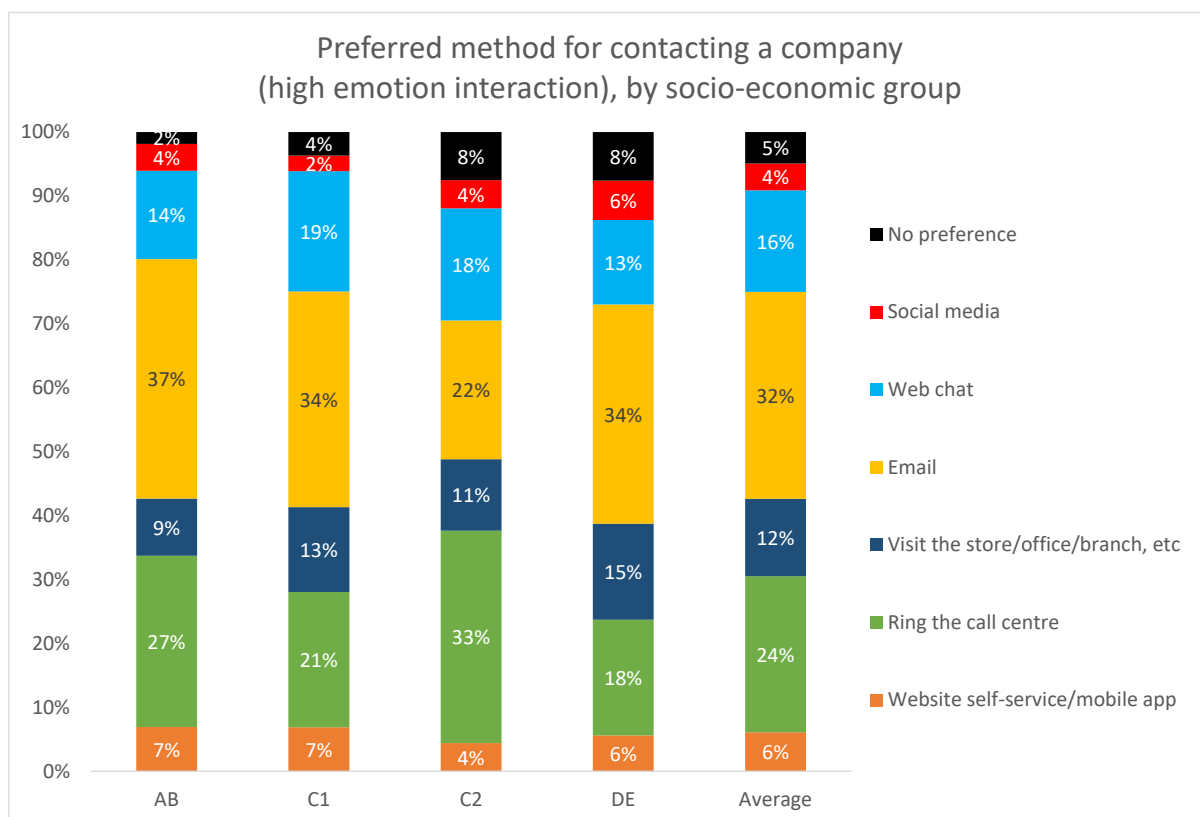


When considering the preferred method for contacting a company with a high emotion interaction, web chat was popular across all socio-economic groups.

Email was a most popular choice for all groups, although the C2 segment sees a jump in those choosing telephony.

Patterns of channel preference are far stronger by age rather than socio-economic group in this case.

Figure 41: Preferred method for contacting a company (high emotion interaction), by socio-economic group



As this research has been running annually for six years, it now has enough history to look at how channel preferences are changing.

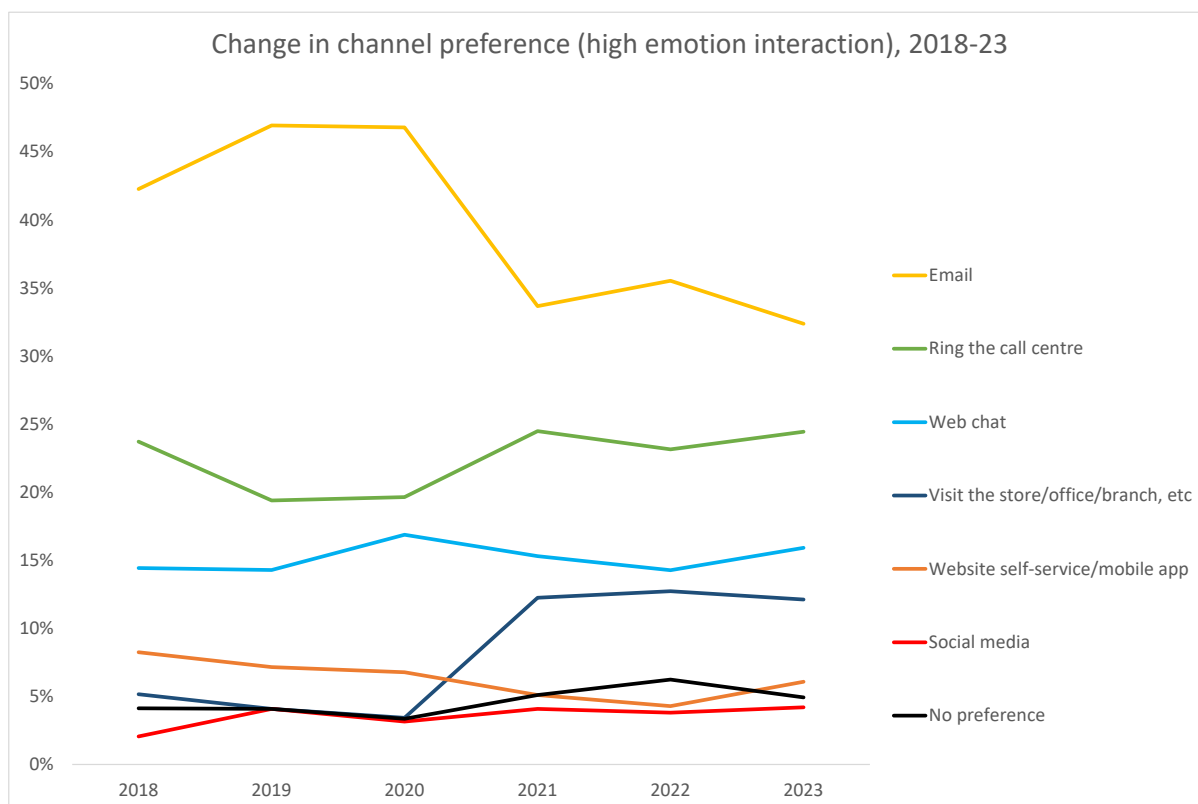
The pandemic has clearly made a significant (and seemingly lasting change) to how customers prefer to interact with businesses.

This is perhaps least dramatically shown in the chart below, which shows how customers prefer to handle high emotion interactions.

Although there has been a drop in the proportion of customers choosing the email channel, there has not been the attendant increase in telephony that can be seen in other interaction types, although there has been a rise in the preference for face-to-face interactions.

It should be noted that research for the customer survey is usually carried out in early Q2 of each year, and that 2020's figures consequently do not show the full impact of the first pandemic lockdown. Statistics from 2021 onward are taken from customers who have experienced the decline in service levels that was undeniably present in many companies due to the pandemic.

Figure 42: Change in channel preference (high emotion interaction), 2018-23



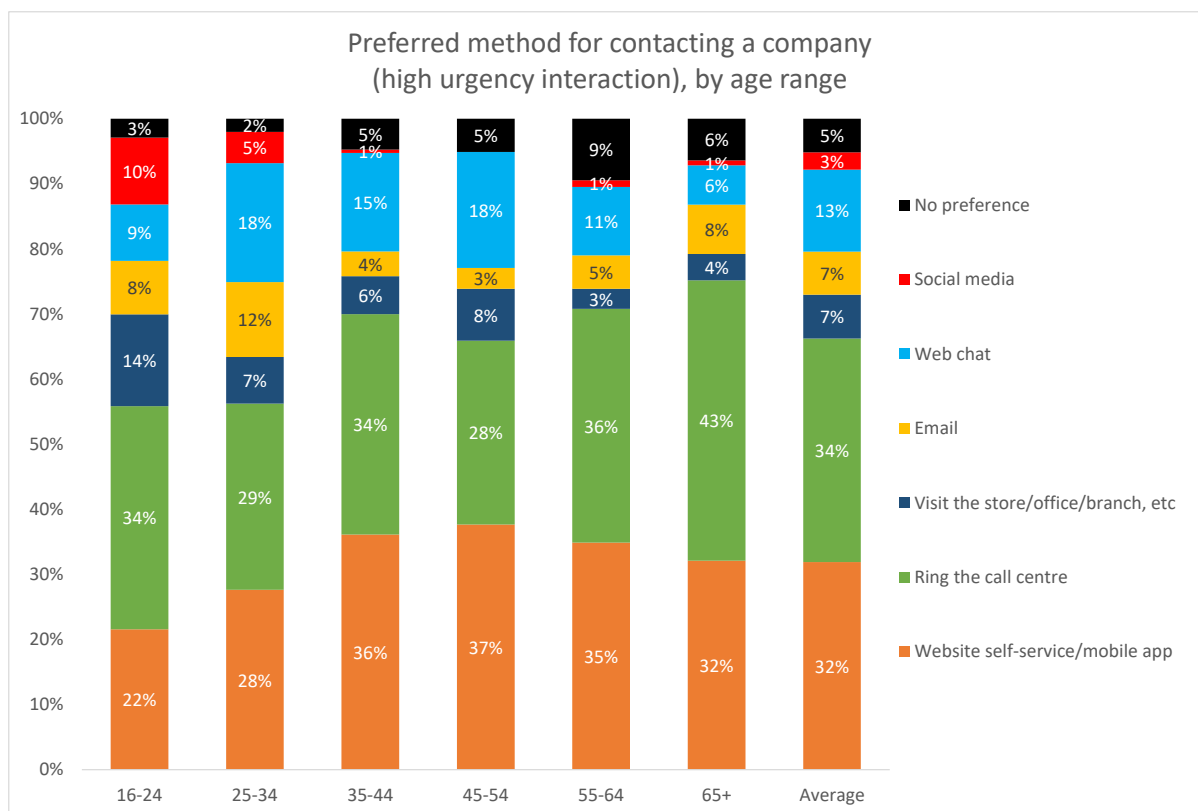
HIGH URGENCY INTERACTIONS

Survey respondents were asked which would be their preferred channel of choice in a situation where they were meeting somebody from a plane and needed to confirm the time at which to be at the airport.

The most popular channel was that of telephony, with most age groups choosing this as their no.1 option. This is quite a change on pre-pandemic findings, which put web self-service as clearly the most popular channel of choice, and may be a reflection of customers' greater requirement for the reassurance and confidence that the phone channel provides.

Email, social media and web chat were more likely to be preferred by younger demographics, but not exclusively by any means.

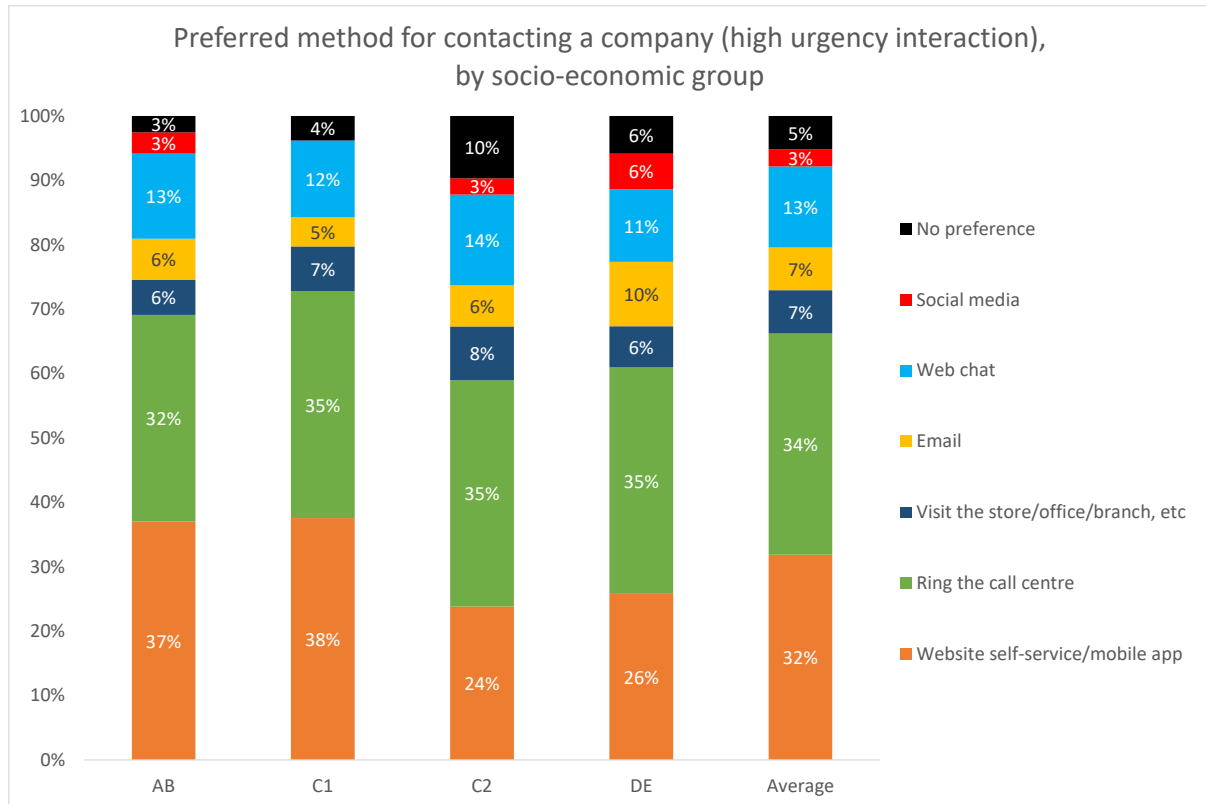
Figure 43: Preferred method for contacting a company (high urgency interaction), by age range



When considering socio-economic groups, web self-service was the most popular option for ABC1 respondents, with C2DE respondents preferring telephony.

There is little difference across groups when considering preferences for digital channels.

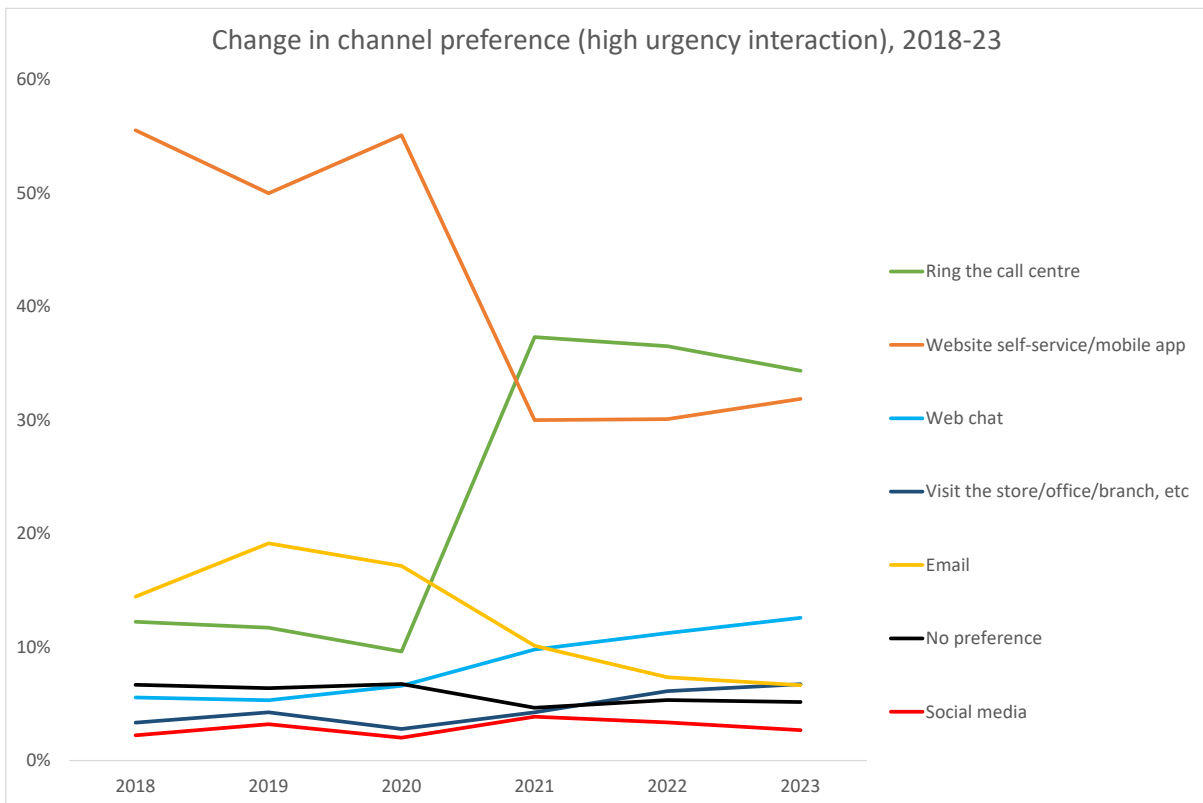
Figure 44: Preferred method for contacting a company (high urgency interaction), by socio-economic group



The effects of the pandemic can be seen clearly: live telephony has replaced web self-service as the preferred channel for urgent interactions, despite the massive investments put in place by many businesses to achieve the opposite effect.

It is not possible to state with complete confidence why this should be, but it may be that many customers have experienced very poor levels of customer experience from some companies that struggled in the pandemic and afterwards, and that they have reverted to the channel that they associate with confidence, flexibility and resolution: telephony.

Figure 45: Change in channel preference (high urgency interaction), 2018-23



HIGH COMPLEXITY INTERACTIONS

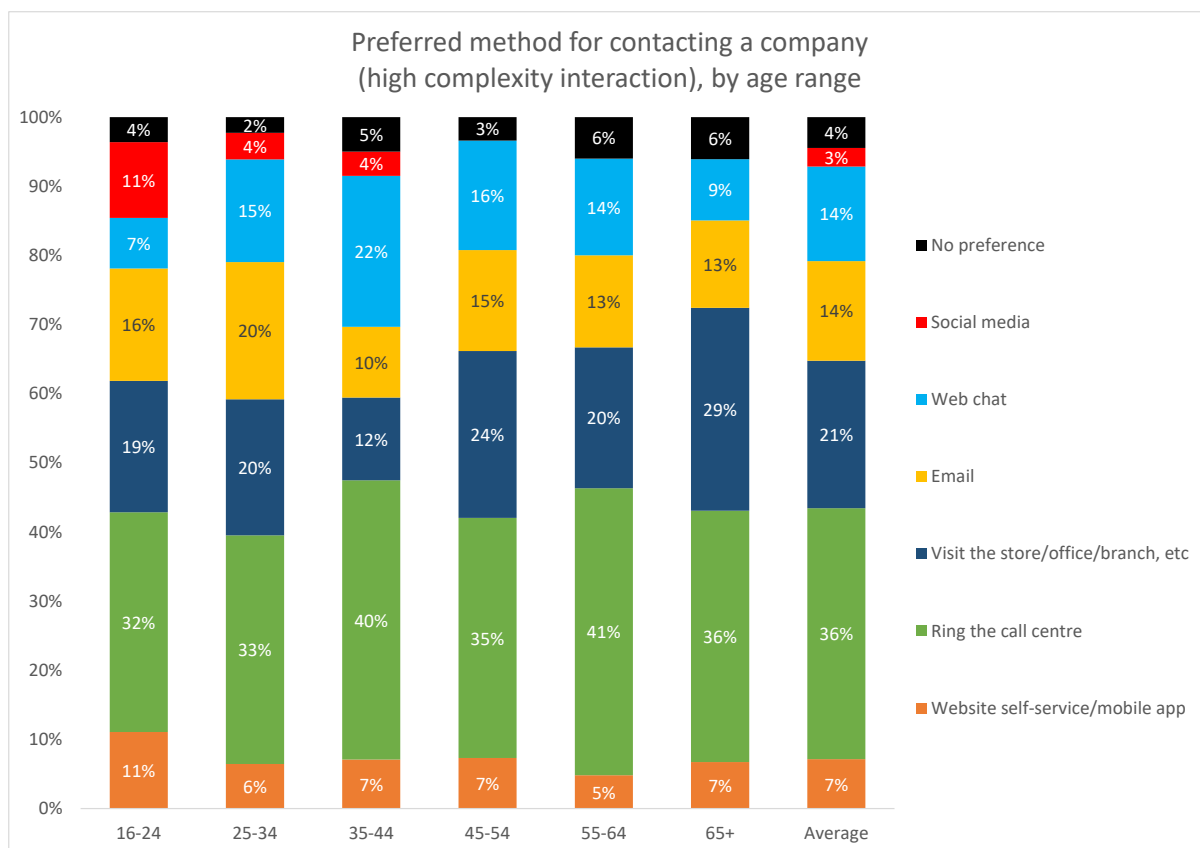
For highly complex interactions, such as getting expert guidance with a tax form or mortgage application, the most popular contact choice pre-pandemic had been making a physical visit to an office or branch, which was much more popular with the older demographic.

However, this option has dropped in popularity, probably due to the customers getting out of the habit of making unnecessary visits during the pandemic, particularly as the experience would likely to be different than what they are used to.

It might have been expected that the next most-personal channel would have grown in popularity as a result, and telephony has risen from 16% in 2018 to 36% in 2023.

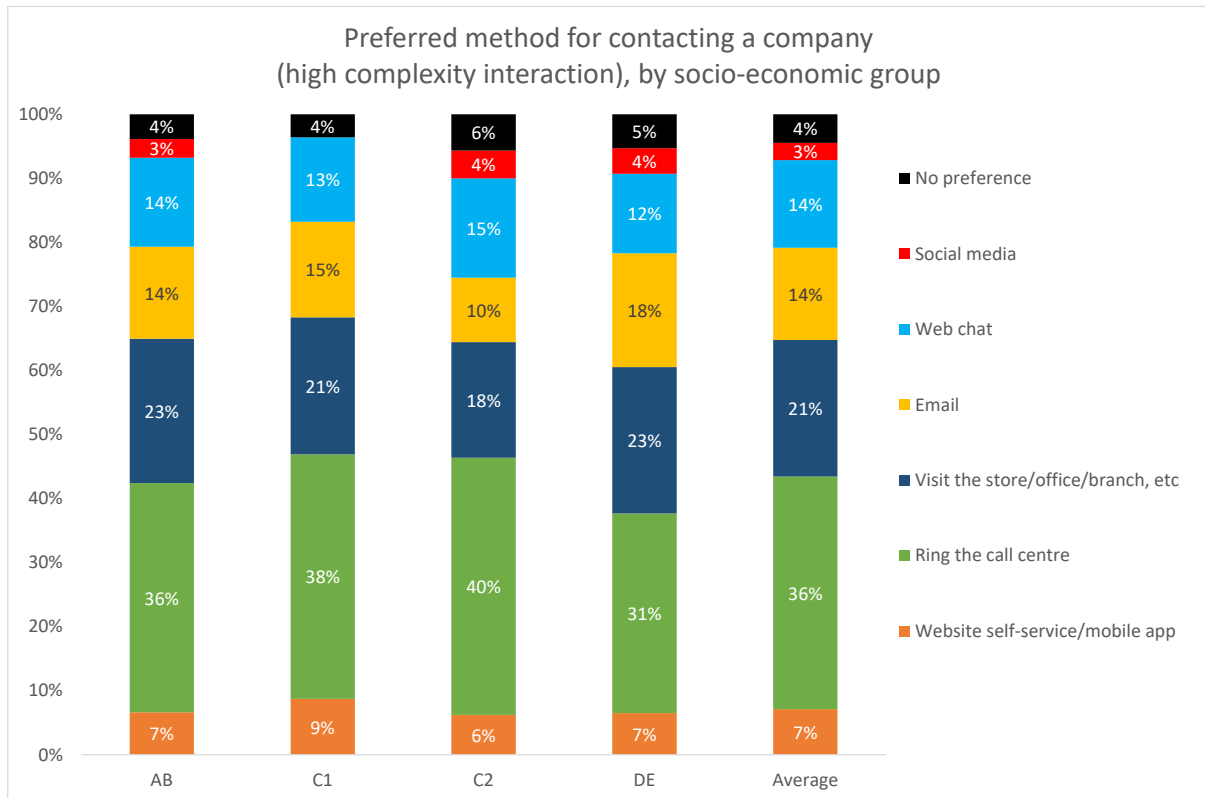
Web chat was also seen as an appropriate primary channel for complex interactions by a significant minority of 25-54 year-olds, whereas email is generally much less popular than it is for high emotion interactions, possibly due to the probable requirement for back-and-forth communication.

Figure 46: Preferred method for contacting a company (high complexity interaction), by age range



Telephony is the most popular choice for all demographics who have a complex query, but apart from this, there does not seem to be much of a pattern.

Figure 47: Preferred method for contacting a company (high complexity interaction), by socio-economic group

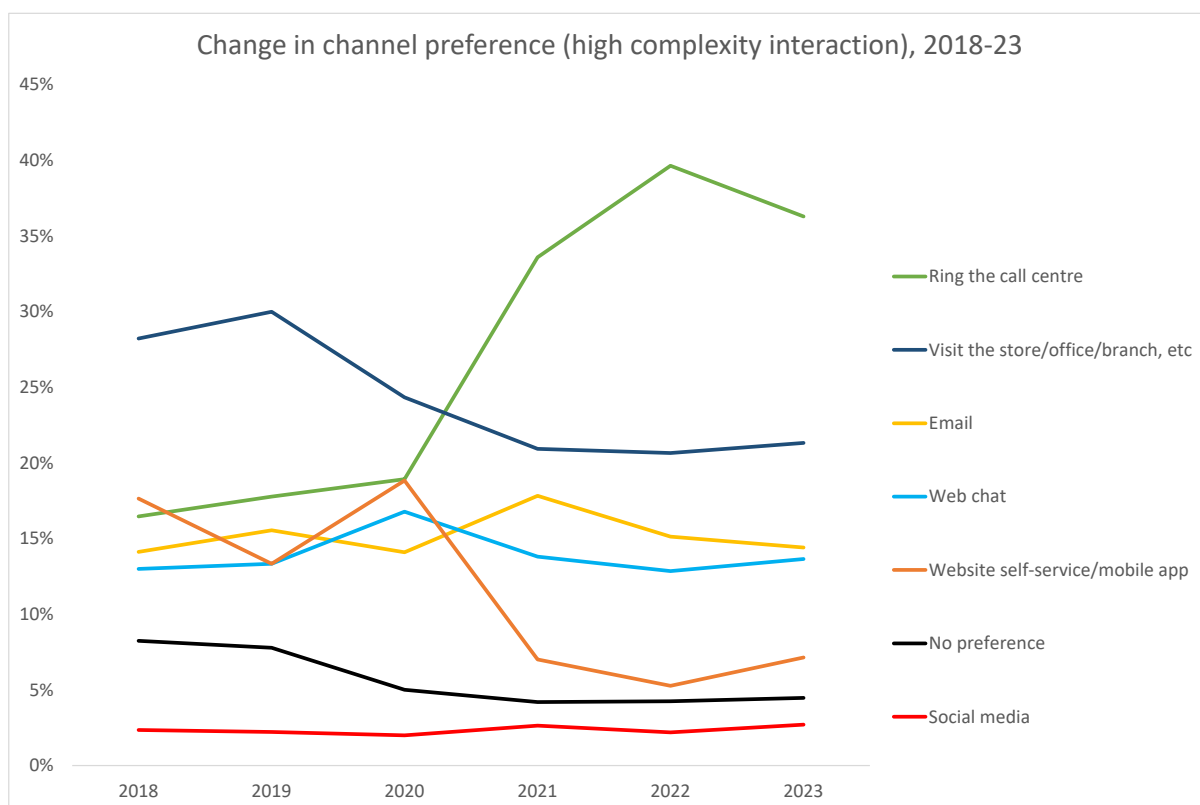


As with urgent requests, the preference for telephony jumped hugely during the pandemic and has remained high, probably for the same reasons.

Web self-service has seen the greatest drop in preference, with customers preferring to be reassured by an actual person: this is borne out by the relatively low drop in face-to-face communication, as if this was simply a matter of not wanting to risk these situations for health purposes, then telephony would have replaced face-to-face.

It seems as though customers – possibly through their own unsatisfactory experiences – have formed an opinion that they simply want to be talked through their complex issue rather than try and fail to do so using self-service.

Figure 48: Change in channel preference (high complexity interaction), 2018-23



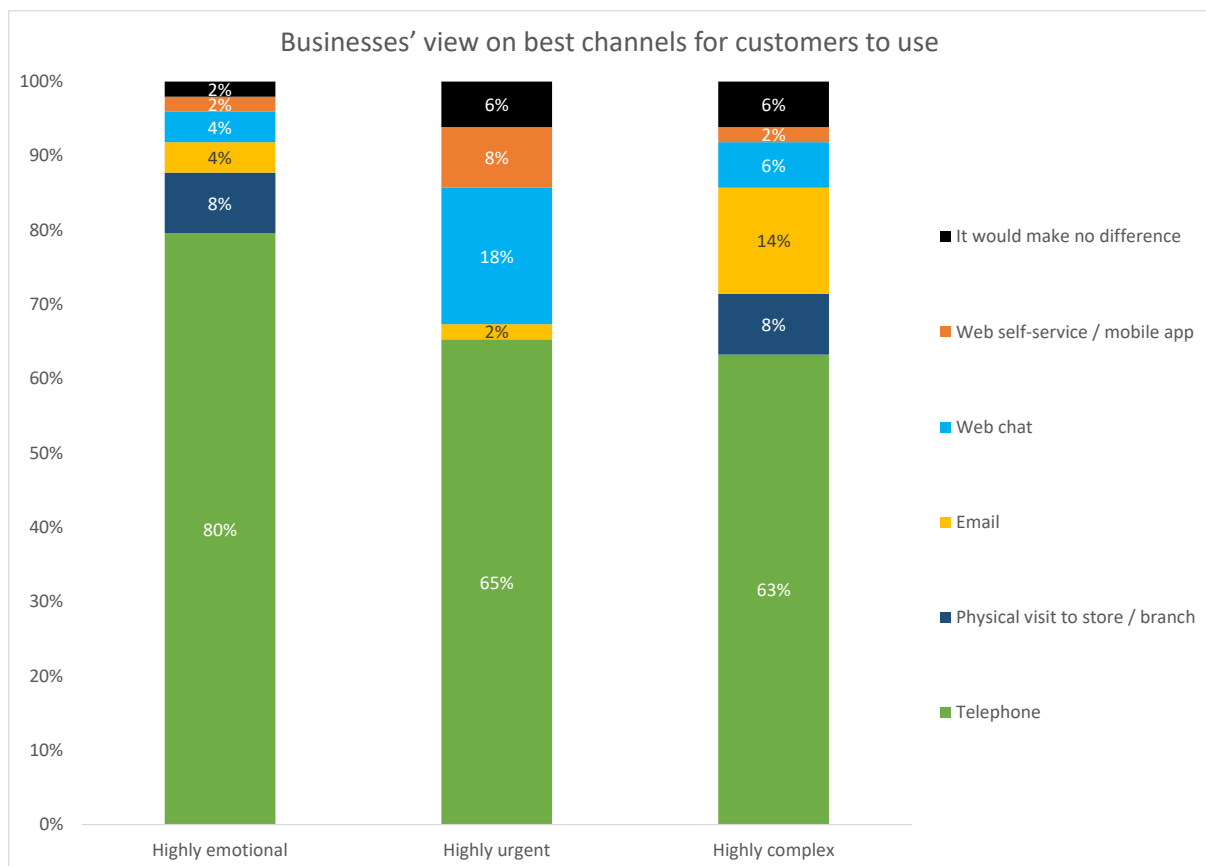
THE VIEW FROM THE BUSINESS

Businesses were asked their views on what they thought the best channel for customers to use would be for each of the three scenarios (high emotion, high urgency and high complexity).

Telephony was seen as very much the front runner, with the majority of businesses stating that customers would be better off picking up the phone for any type of interaction.

Email was seen as appropriate for complex interactions (which most customers disagree with), and web chat (and to a lesser extent, web self-service) for urgent issues was also seen as a possibility.

Figure 49: Businesses' view on best channels for customers to use



CX BENCHMARKING

To improve customer experience, it is necessary to be able to measure it. There is no single best method or benchmark to use for doing so that applies equally to every company or type of customer base, but many organisations will use a mixture of data sources and methods to approach the issue from various angles.

CUSTOMER SURVEYS

Customer surveys have been an integral part of most businesses since time immemorial. Recently, there has been a great increase in the number of organisations implementing “Voice of the Customer” programmes, often based around large-scale analysis of call recordings, but the more traditional, direct methods of understanding customer experience and requirements are still very much present.

The numerous methods of directly surveying customers include:

IVR: at the end of the call, and after agreeing to do so, the customer may be passed through to an automated IVR system, which typically asks a mixture of open and closed questions which can be answered with a combination of touchtone and speech. This has the benefit of immediacy in that the caller will be able to give an accurate assessment of the call and the agent. Additionally, the business may be alerted in near-real-time to any major problems through pre-programmed automated SMS or email alerts.

The speed and ease with which an agent-invited IVR survey can be implemented gives it a distinct advantage over a survey conducted via outbound calls. The resources and staff time required to make outbound calls often mean that they are conducted erratically and rarely during peak times which undermines the quality and usefulness of the data collated. As agent-invited IVR surveys are automated, they require little staff input and can monitor customer satisfaction whenever the contact centre is open.

Outbound automated surveys are becoming more prevalent. After the call has been concluded, the caller's number may be put into an outbound dialler's queue, which calls them and offers an IVR survey. The speed with which this call-back is made is crucial to the take-up rate of the survey, with up to 70% acceptance rate if the call-back is in minutes, but perhaps only 10% if the call is made over 48 hours later.

Written: some businesses ensure that a system-generated email is sent to the customer soon after an interaction takes place, often requesting detailed feedback through open-ended questions. Typically, more customers who have had a poor experience will bother to complete the questionnaire, skewing the figures, and although some good and detailed learning points can emerge, it's perhaps only appropriate if the customer has engaged very deeply with the business on a number of recent occasions (e.g. completing a mortgage application) or with a demographic that has more time available to them, especially older people.

However, email does allow immediacy and offers a customer a chance to express themselves more fully, rather than simply with numerical scores. This method also has the advantage that it can be fully automated.

Detailed person-to-person interviews have an important role to play, particularly where the feedback generated can be compared side-to-side with feedback by other methods. Having quantitative and qualitative data provides valuable feedback that can't be achieved by adopting a single surveying method.

Web forms are becoming increasingly widely used as an increasing number of customers visit a website initially to see if they can find the information or resolve the issue themselves. Online survey invitations that pop up within a couple of seconds of entering a website are widely used, although many customers find them intrusive as they have not yet found the information that they require. Using a little more intelligence around when to offer the survey to the customer provides far higher take-up rates and more accurate, informed feedback.

Outbound: the contact details of a proportion of incoming callers can be passed to a dedicated outbound team, who will call the customer back, often within 24 hours, to ascertain the customer's level of satisfaction with the original call. Sometimes customers will find this intrusive, while others will welcome the chance to provide feedback. Additionally, certain companies employ outside agencies to survey customers regularly, which may be useful in benchmarking exercises, since they will apply a more formalised and structured approach to data gathering and presentation. The automated option as mentioned in the IVR section above should also be considered as an option.

SMS: Text messaging has the advantage of immediacy of sending and also of reporting on the results. It is a cheap way of carrying out surveys, and can be linked to a specific agent, allowing the contact centre to use this information for agent performance as well as satisfaction with the business. However, SMS does not support particularly detailed questioning, and businesses will have to collect mobile numbers if they do not already have them. However, take-up rates are better than many other forms of feedback (at around 25-35% on average), and younger and more time-poor customers are more likely to respond, providing a wider universe of responses across demographics. This form of survey can allow the contact centre to identify very unhappy customers and schedule an outbound call to deal with the problem.

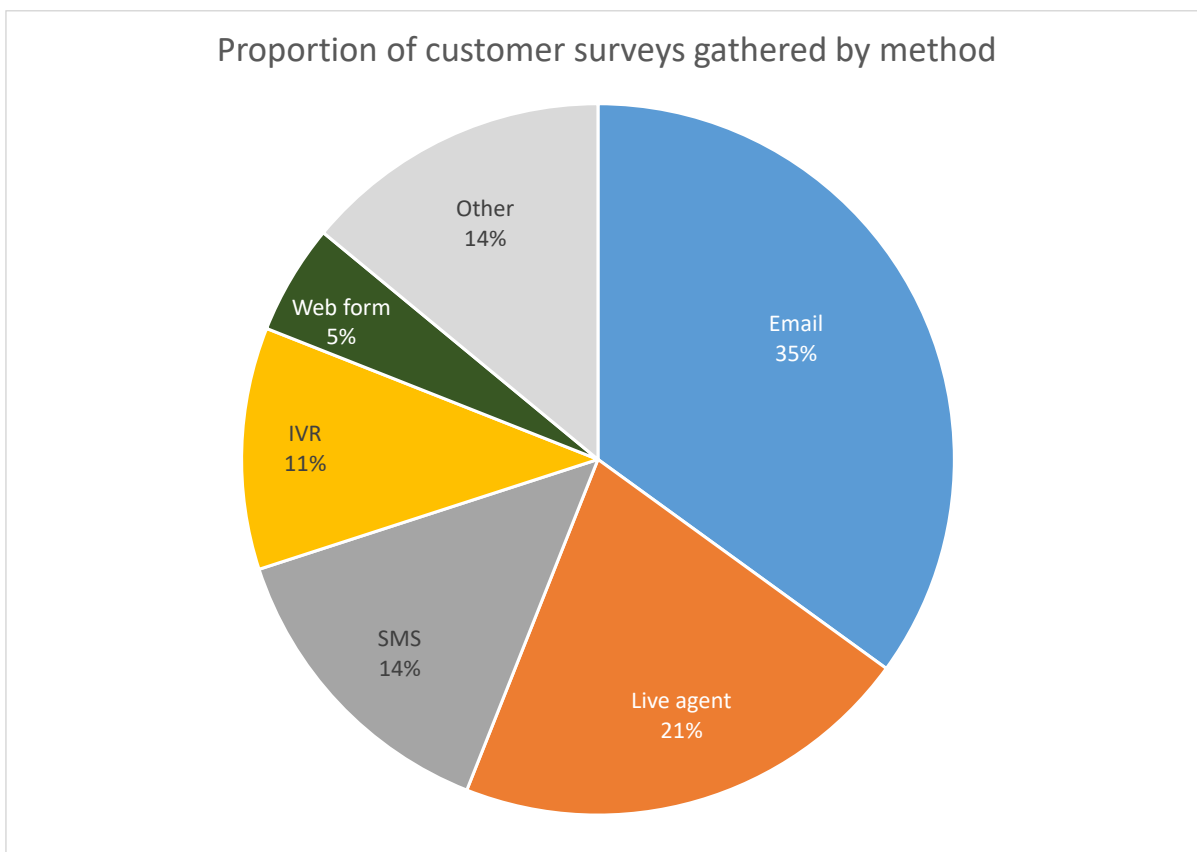
Different customers will prefer to be surveyed in different ways and a survey platform should have the flexibility to support IVR, web, text and written surveys and collate the results in a unified reporting system. Not only will this mean that businesses are increasing the number of customers accessed, but a different quality of feedback and level of insight will be received from each approach.

When considering the volume of surveys collected by each method, email is most popular, with 35% of surveys being collected in this way. Email (usually leading to an online form) allows a mixture of quantitative numerical data to be collected, along with qualitative comments which may highlight issues that would otherwise be unknown. It also has the advantage of immediacy and can be fully automated, requiring little or no additional input from the business. Web forms also allow this mix of numerical and written data to be collected, but the timing of offering the surveys during a web browsing session can be difficult to get right.

Despite the cost, outbound survey calls carried out by live agents are used in 21% of cases, which allow a depth of qualitative information to be collected from which insights can be drawn.

Both SMS and IVR are more positioned towards gathering quantitative information, often aligned to NPS.

Figure 50: Proportion of customer surveys gathered by method



Regardless of whether or not surveys identify specific agents, a key to customer feedback success is whether the survey implemented is considered by agents as just yet another form of monitoring, or a genuine attempt to help them provide better service in the long run. Agents tend to respond well to successful customer satisfaction improvement initiatives as they usually make their job easier and more rewarding.

Keep the survey process simple, focus on agent engagement and act quickly to provide positive feedback to the team. It's more important to get the survey adopted as a positive part of the company's customer service strategy than it is to design the academically perfect survey that has a negative impact on the morale of the team.

It is vitally important before beginning to survey customers, that a business:

- Clearly determines the purpose and aims of the survey
- Considers adopting a variety of question types. Scored questions enable a business to produce statistically significant and representative data. Free comments allow the gain of real insight into customers' perception of service
- Selects an experienced company to set up and host the survey. Businesses will benefit from their expertise and knowledge and avoid potentially costly errors and missed insight
- Ensures that the survey can be carried out throughout the day, including peak times, to gain a true picture of the customer experience
- Makes sure that the results of the survey can be collated and analysed in a wide variety of ways. It is pointless to amass information if it cannot be evaluated and the results disseminated usefully
- Has procedures in place to act upon the information that it finds. The survey may have uncovered some broken processes in the service which need attention. It will also inevitably throw up disgruntled customers whose specific concerns need addressing. In this instance, the survey platform should provide some mechanism for alerting and following-up to ensure that dissatisfied customers are quickly escalated to the appropriate staff
- Adopts a unified approach across the business to assessing and monitoring customer satisfaction. If a business continues to reward agents based on traditional call performance metrics, it risks not supporting the right behaviours needed to produce superior customer experience. If agents are rewarded based on customer satisfaction ratings, it will increase agent engagement and retention at the same time as improving the service it offers to customers.

EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

Voice of the employee (VoE) programs are an integral part of the workforce engagement management suite, aiming to understand how employees feel about their work and the organisation with the end goal to understand and improve outcomes for employees and the business.

Some of the purposes of VoE include:

- improving employee performance and retention
- identify areas of underperformance in the organisation
- understanding and addressing the causes of boredom and burnout in front-line employees
- improving employee motivation and aligning them with business strategy and culture
- as happy employees directly affect performance and customer experience, making the workplace and culture more pleasant will benefit everybody.

VoE programs survey employees through tailored questions in order to gather insight about current levels of engagement by role, team, department, etc. Not only do front-line employees appreciate being listened to, but to be able to see any changes and improvements made as a result of their comments is very motivating.

Team and individual development plans can then be published, progress tracked and results shared. VoE survey findings can provide insight to other parts of the WFO suite (e.g. coaching/eLearning, and also gamification and performance), and also be connected to other metrics including absence, attrition and customer-focused scores.

VoE helps organisations understand what their best-performing employees are thinking and engage with them to keep them loyal. It is important for any VoE programme to be set up so as to be able to release actionable insight: not just answers to questions such as ‘How engaged with the business are you?’, but also **why** this is, how it can be improved and what effect on the business will this have. VoE in the contact centre should answer questions around whether agents have all the tools they need to deliver a successful customer experience and whether they are encouraged and empowered to own the customer’s issue or feel as though they are managed and judged solely by internal metrics.

Many contact centre employees are finding that the calls they are now handling are becoming increasingly complex, as many of the simplest interactions are being resolved through self-service. Where support systems and training have not been upgraded accordingly, this can lead to stress and demotivation as not being able to help customers effectively is a very negative experience. This issue is only likely to get larger over time, particularly as customer expectations are always rising.

Successful VoE is a long-term, ongoing project rather than simply being a snapshot of a moment in time, and it is important to create buy-in at the top of the organisation by sharing the goals and insights with senior management and linking any results to improvements in business performance.

COMPLAINT ANALYSIS

Complaints are a potentially rich environment for businesses to understand where they are going wrong, and which issues are in danger of turning a customer into an ex-customer. For many businesses, each complaint is dealt with on a case-by-case basis, with little in the way of categorisation or structure being put in place formally, and little chance of communicating findings in an actionable way to the relevant department.

Speech analytics gives businesses a chance to quantify the reasons that customers complain, identifying the most important factors, assessing trends and spikes, and providing hard recommendations based on every call taken. Real-time analytics allow businesses to track words and phrases related to complaints (such as 'supervisor', 'manager', 'complain', 'unhappy' etc.), allowing escalation to a supervisor, or screen-pop to the agent to provide them with a revised script or suggestions of how to handle the call. Emotion detection and sentiment analysis may also be used to identify unhappy or wavering customers within the call, updating supervisors who can then intervene or advise the agent accordingly.

John Seddon uses the term “failure demand” to describe calls that are created by the inability of the business’s systems to do something right for the customer:

“A failure to do something - turn up, call back, send something...causes the customer to make a further demand on the system. A failure to do something right - not solve a problem, send out forms that customers have difficulty with and so on - similarly create demand and creates extra work. Failure demand is under the organisation’s control, and it is a major form of sub-optimisation.”²

Seddon cites the instance of the bank where failure demand created almost half of the calls which they had to deal with. Another classic example of failure demand is where emails go unanswered, leading to calls being made (first-stage failure demand). Later, the email will be answered, unnecessarily, as the customer already has their answer or has gone elsewhere (second-stage failure demand). This redundant work will then impact on other (still live) messages in the email queue, creating a vicious circle of failure demand. Redesigning and restructuring the way in which work flows around the organisation, putting the contact centre at the heart of it, rather than treating it as a separate silo, will go much of the way to reducing unnecessary contacts. The customer ends up getting a better service from the whole company, not just the contact centre.

One way in which this can be achieved is to unify and automate the agent desktop, bringing in the relevant data automatically, depending on who the caller is and what they want. At the end of the call, the correct data is written back to the relevant places, and the correct processes kicked off automatically, meaning that the right departments will be provided with the right information, thus reducing the risk of failure demand, unnecessary calls and irate customers. This also takes the pressure off the agents to remember which systems to update and how to navigate through them within the call (which causes long delays, negatively impacting customer satisfaction), or in the wrap-up, which risks agent forgetting to do things, and also decreases agent availability, increasing the queue length, and decreasing customer satisfaction. In cases where multiple processes have to happen in order for the customer’s requirement to be met, automated outbound messaging to the customer, whether by email, SMS or IVR is likely to reduce the number of follow-up contacts that the customer feels that they have to make.

² *Freedom from Command and Control: A better way to make the work, work*, John Seddon

Information on failure demand can be gleaned from the contact centre, which can also hold huge amounts of knowledge about customers' views of the products, services, competitors and company. Feedback loops can be established to push information and insights upwards to those who can make a difference in product development, process improvements and customer strategies. Interaction analytics offers businesses the chance to mine huge amounts of data and find patterns and reasons in a timely fashion, and it is vital then to act upon this knowledge, proving to both customers and agents that the business takes them seriously.

On average, 7.3% of survey respondents' calls were complaints, and of those calls, 80% were not about the contact centre itself (or its staff), but rather 'failure demand', caused by a breakdown of process elsewhere in the organisation.

However, the contact centre has to deal with the fall-out, and further failures within the complaints procedure (or lack of it) can see customers calling into the contact centre again and again, becoming more irate each time, despite the real problem lying outside the contact centre.

There is also the case that there is a blurring of responsibility between the contact centre and the rest of the business so that lines of demarcation over where the fault lies can be difficult to find. For example, a telecoms provider that has taken an order for a new line has to rely on the rest of the organisation to provision and deliver this correctly. If the agent takes the contact email down incorrectly, the customer will not receive any information about their order, which may have a query on it. When the irate customer rings in to complain, the problem may appear to be with the back-office processes where the order has halted, but the fault actually lay with the original agent. Whether this is tracked or reported on correctly is not a certainty, so any analysis of the split between contact centre / back-office complaints should be treated with caution.

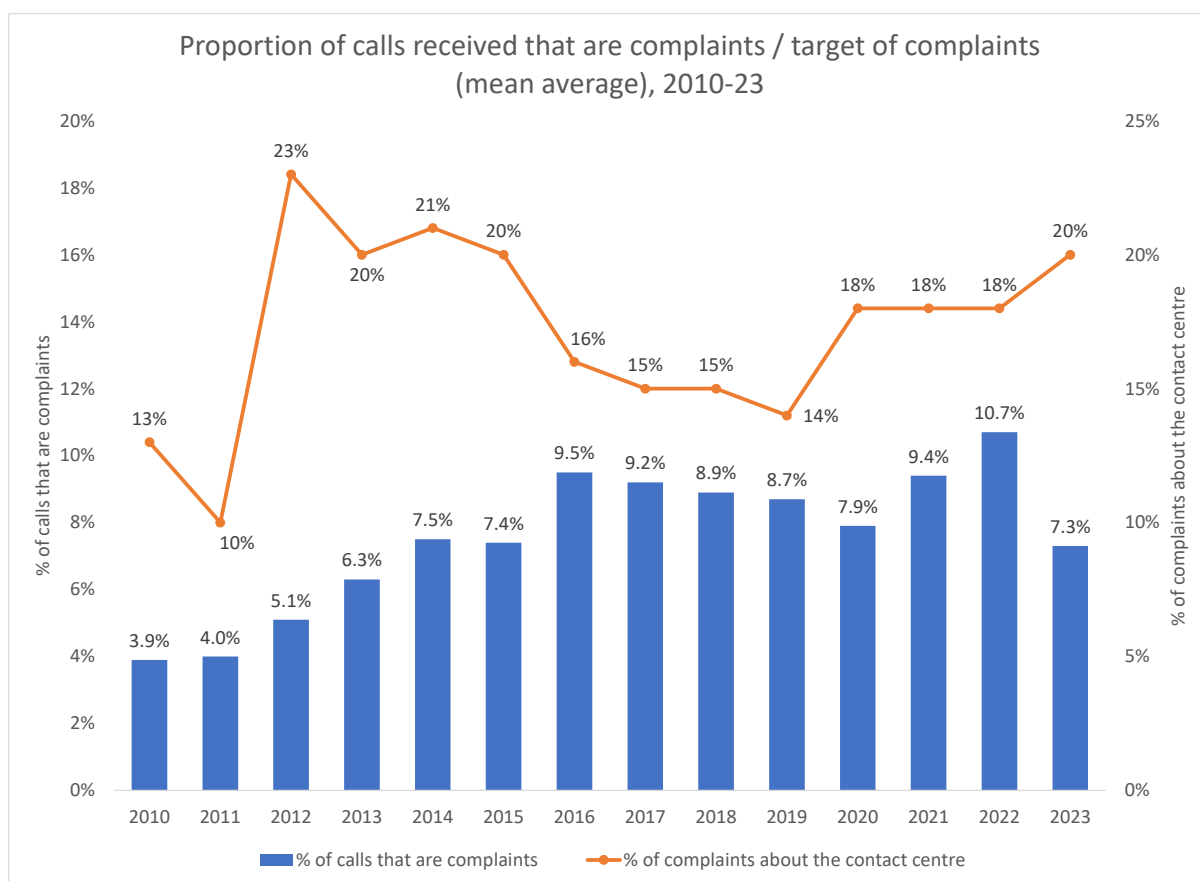
There is also a real risk especially within large contact centres that a single agent does not have the capability or responsibility to deal with the customer's issue, which may reach across various internal departments (e.g. finance, billing, provisioning and technical support), none of which will (or can) take on full responsibility for sorting out the problem.

A clearer upward trend can be seen when looking at the proportion of calls that are complaints in general, from less than 4% in 2010 to over 10% more recently (although there has been a significant drop in 2023).

There may be multiple reasons for this: businesses may be failing the customers more often; customers may have become more demanding; or customers may have moved away from the traditional form of complaint – the letter – and prefer to use the phone to complain instead.

Certainly, many contact centre decision-makers state that the most effective channel to use for complaints is the telephone, and it may be that customers have found this out for themselves over the past few years.

Figure 51: Proportion of calls received that are complaints / target of complaints (mean average), 2010-23

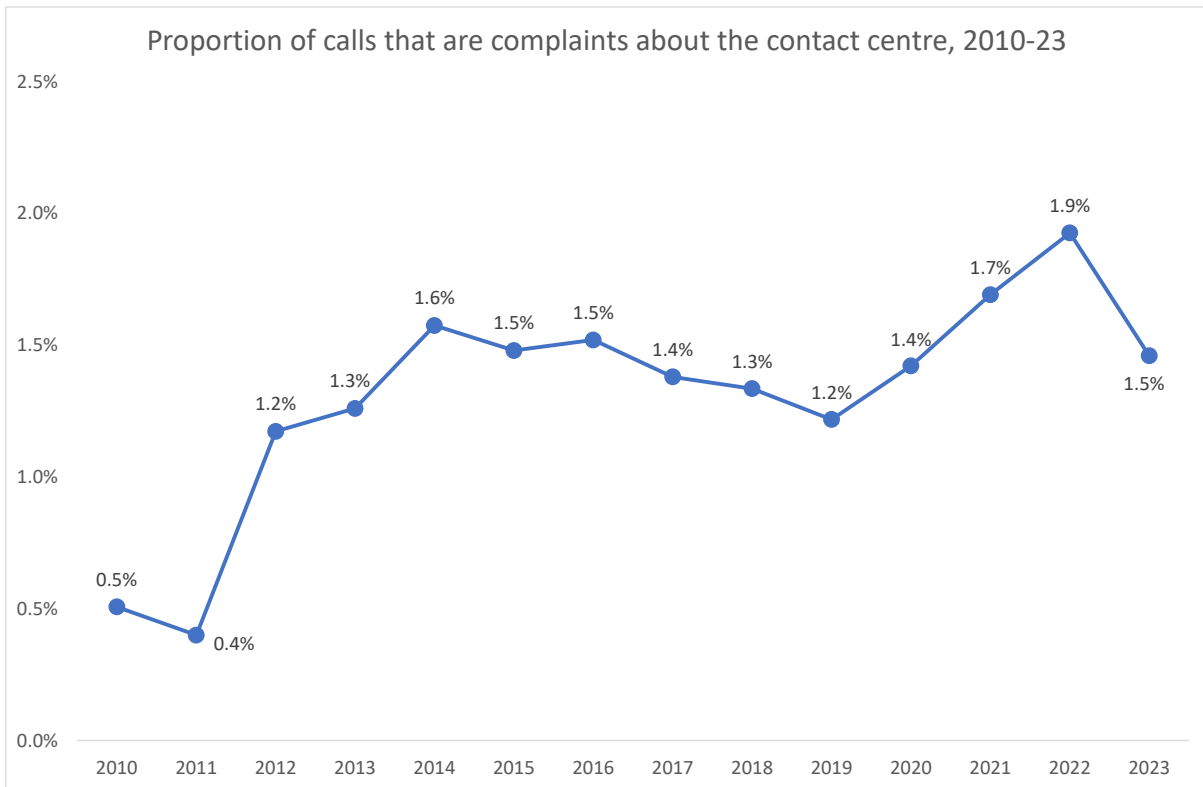


Combining the two sets of data on the previous chart – the proportion of calls that are complaints, and the proportion of complaints that are about the contact centre (rather than the wider business) – gives the following chart: the proportion of calls that are complaints about the contact centre. This is a figure that contact centre decision-makers should be interested in, as these complaints not only cost money to handle, but are in large part avoidable in the first place.

Since 2012, the figure of contact centre complaints is relatively steady at around 1.5% of inbound calls, although the figure grew in 2020-22.

This may not seem particularly high, but with 7bn inbound calls per year and typical cost per call £6.26, handling the 1.5% of calls that are complaints about the failings of the contact centre costs the industry around £650m per year.

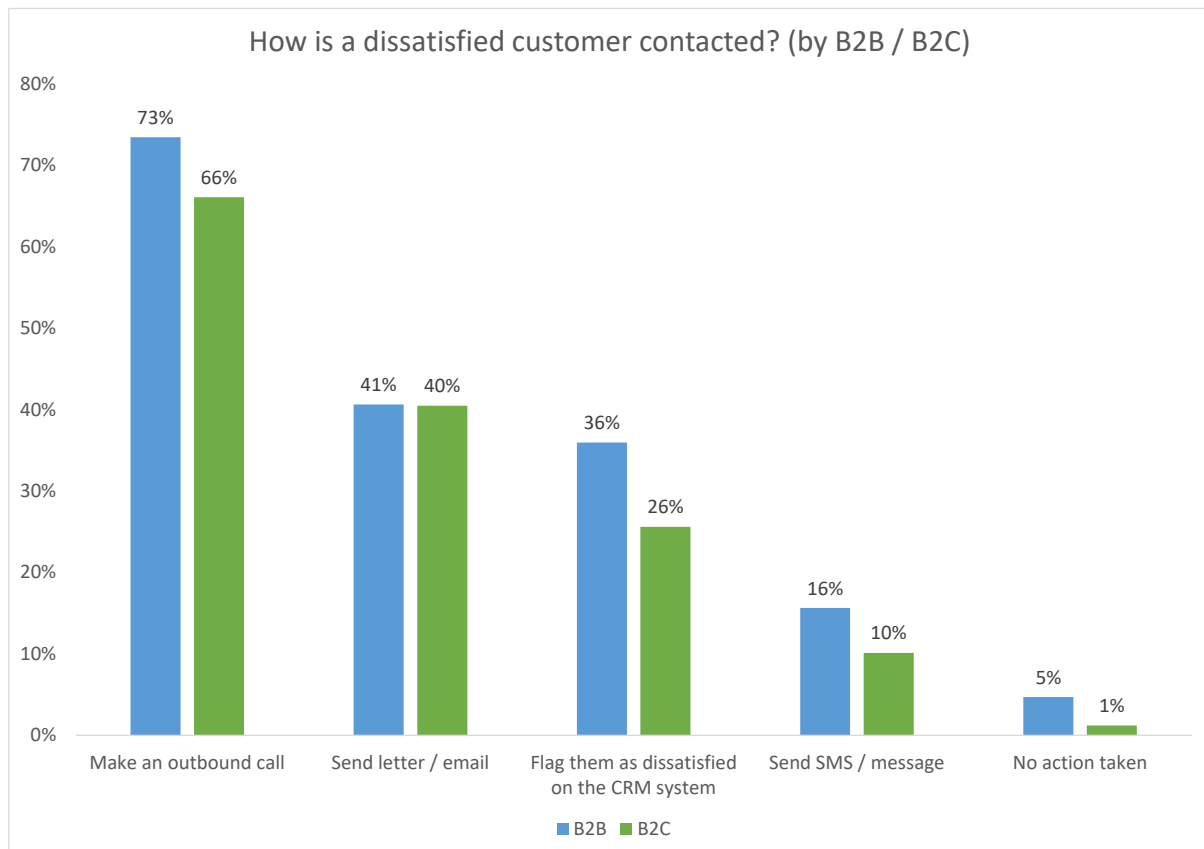
Figure 52: Proportion of calls that are complaints about the contact centre, 2010-23



The following chart shows how survey respondents handle customers that are identified as being dissatisfied.

It is heartening to see that very few organisations choose to do nothing in these cases, with a majority making an outbound call. Sending a letter or email is also quite a popular choice.

Figure 53: How is a dissatisfied customer contacted? (by B2B / B2C)



Other comments on how complaints were handled include:

- We will acknowledge the complaint immediately, responding via an email or letter (depending on contact details available) and then respond fully within 2 weeks
- There may be a statutory process that must be followed which may dictate telephone or written communication. Due to the environment and vulnerable customers/citizens some responses will be tailored to mean their needs and may be more than one contact method.
- We invite them to complete an online form
- We provide coaching for the advisor if the dissatisfaction was due to the customer's interaction with the advisor (e.g. providing an incorrect solution, not updating the customer etc.)
- Return using route that caller originally used to initiate conversation with our services
- We send a response publicly on social and survey tools
- We are currently trialling a detractor outbound campaign to identify the root cause of their dissatisfaction.

INTERACTION ANALYTICS

There has been a great increase in customer satisfaction surveys in recent years, with the widespread uptake of the Net Promoter®³ score (NPS) being a good example of companies' desire to learn what their customers actually think about them. However, research has shown that a 'satisfied' customer isn't necessarily a profitable or loyal one, and the results of customer surveys, particularly the written or telephone-based variety (the latter of which, despite its limitations and expense, is still seen as the best method), are carried out at a time when any feelings about the original interaction may have changed or dissipated, are prone to inaccuracy, delay and lack of detail.

With all of the methods of customer surveys, the questions are fixed in advance, and if the right questions aren't asked, the level of actionable insight is low. In many cases, a business might know that x% of its customers are satisfied, and y% dissatisfied, but it still has no real idea why this is, or even how it will impact upon their profitability.

As an addition to customer satisfaction surveys, customer contact analytics allows a business to gather customers' views within the interaction itself - guaranteeing immediacy and accuracy - and can be applied across 100% of calls, rather than focusing on the outlying 'very dissatisfied' or 'delighted' customers.

Furthermore, through widespread and detailed analysis of what the call is about, the type of language or messages used in the call, how the customer was handled, and the eventual outcome, businesses will be able to learn how to improve their customer retention and satisfaction in real-life, bypassing the standard metric (e.g. "83% of customers are satisfied") and getting to the root causes of satisfaction or dissatisfaction and sharing the results with the rest of the operation.

Some solutions use historical analysis of call characteristics, agent behaviours and interaction outcomes to estimate customer satisfaction or Net Promoter® scores on every call, and can also predict the attrition of customers based on what they have said and what has happened within the call, allowing the business to act swiftly. Other solution providers use this type of analysis to help online educators predict which students will pass the course, and which will drop out, meaning they are able to target proactive assistance as required.

³ Net Promoter, Net Promoter System, Net Promoter Score, NPS and the NPS-related emoticons are registered trademarks of Bain & Company, Inc., Fred Reichheld and Satmetrix Systems, Inc.

VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER ANALYTICS

Recently, there has been a great increase in the number of organisations implementing “Voice of the Customer” (VoC) programs, increasingly based around large-scale analysis of call recordings, as well as using formal surveys of customer experience to offer the customer a chance to feed-back, and the business to learn.

VoC programs strive to capture customer feedback across multiple channels of engagement (IVR, live agent, email, etc.), while enabling closed-loop strategies to support customer retention, employee development and omnichannel experience optimisation. VoC programs typically trigger alerts with role-based delivery via the use of text and speech analytics, offer statistical modelling services to pinpoint root causes, and digitally track progress and results with case management.

The definition of what a VoC programme includes runs the gamut across vendors from simply sending alerts based on key words derived from a survey, to more complete solutions that directly contribute to contact centre optimisation and overall CX improvement.

Examples of more complete VoC programme features include:

Closed Loop

- **Automated Alerts:** as surveys are completed, real-time alerting capabilities will immediately identify and inform teams of customers in need, while assigning ownership for follow-up
- **Callback Manager:** an interactive system that enables callback teams to conduct detailed case reviews and disposition follow-up activities for eventual root-cause analysis
- **Case Management:** root-cause exploration tools enable back-end analysis of the customer’s initial concern, enabling operational support teams to uncover, track and mitigate systemic problems proactively.

Coaching

- **In-The-Moment Coaching Tools:** as surveys are completed, real-time alerting capabilities will identify when a frontline employee is in need of immediate coaching intervention
- **Performance Ranker:** the performance ranker helps managers develop weekly and monthly coaching plans by outlining strengths and weaknesses for each employee, while identifying opportunities for peer-based knowledge sharing
- **Behaviour Playbooks:** playbooks with scorecards help managers coach specific behaviours by outlining how to best demonstrate each of them, showcasing best-practice examples and suggesting sample role-plays.

Reporting

- **Real-time Insight** – text analytics zeros in on key issues from multichannel survey feedback
- **Role-based Reporting** – define type and frequency of report delivery based on responsibility, title, geography and more
- **Call Recording** – drill-down detail includes IVR and live agent call recording for additional insight.

VoC programs are frequently ongoing engagements with results measured by internal CSAT scores, NPS benchmarks and efficiency improvements.

Alongside direct customer surveys, VoC analytics solutions can also gather insight from recorded digital and voice channels. Aggregation of customer surveys and analytical results can identify the root cause of any issues identified, and provide actionable insight for changing processes and/or agent handling techniques.

VoC should be seen as a continuous process, rather than a one-off project, and ongoing analysis allows the business to operate a closed-loop system, whereby identified issues can be actioned and continuously checked to make sure that the problem does not reoccur.

MYSTERY SHOPPING

Mystery shopping is often used by retailers in order to measure and confirm that the experience a customer has with an organisation is one which the business actually intends them to have. Mystery shopping does not have to happen within a physical store, as it is also possible to carry out these activities with the contact centre or online.

Businesses may wish to make sure that specific actions are being carried out consistently, such as greeting a customer or asking if they need help with packing their purchases, and can also be useful more subjectively to understand the general feeling that the customer has about communicating with the business.

Mystery shopping is generally better suited to B2C organisations, as B2B mystery shopping may require specialist information and can be an extremely complex sales process, involving ratification of a potential customer's identity and *bona fides*.

While mystery shopping has a part to play in understanding customer experience, the fact remains that the actual mystery shopper is not a real customer, and is acting based on specific instructions given to them by the company.

Additionally, customer experience data will be taken from a relatively small sample size of mystery shoppers, rather than a larger proportion of the customer base which can be accessed through surveys or analytics.

THE USE OF CX BENCHMARKING METHODS

The chart below shows the use and effectiveness of the methods of gathering customer experience covered earlier in this chapter.

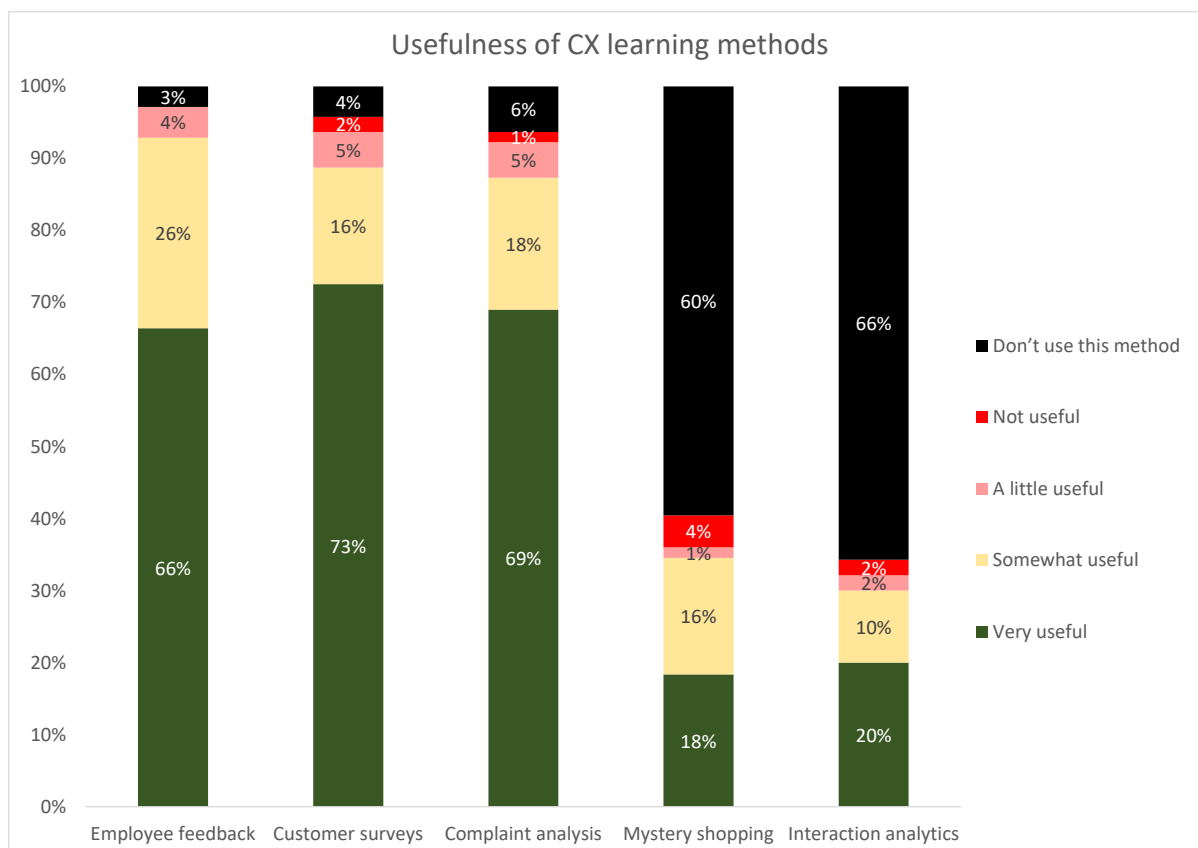
The vast majority of respondents use customer surveys, employee feedback and complaint analysis in order to learn about customer experience, with a minority using speech analytics and 42% using mystery shopping.

Direct customer surveys were said to be the one of the most effective methods of gathering customer experience data, with 76% of **respondents who use this method** stating that it was very useful. Employee feedback (68%) and complaint analysis (73%) were also seen as very useful.

There was a lack of a generally agreed view on how effective speech analytics and mystery shopping were: while 59% of those who use speech analytics to understand customer experience data found it very useful, 12% stated it as being of little or no use. However, it is worth noting that these figures are far more positive than they have been in the past, suggesting that businesses and solutions are becoming better at using analytics for this purpose.

Respondents reported a somewhat mixed picture with mystery shopping, with 45% of those using it stated that it was very useful although 13% found it of little or no use.

Figure 54: Usefulness of CX learning methods



Businesses were asked which of five quantifiable benchmarks that they use in order to measure customer experience and satisfaction.

- Net Promoter Score®, otherwise known as NPS, is an index ranging from -100 to 100 that measures how likely customers are to recommend a company's products or services to others. The question asked to customers is:
 - "On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend this company's product or service to a friend or a colleague?"
 - Based on their rating, customers can then be grouped into in 3 categories: detractors, passives and promoters. 'Detractors' score lower than or equal to 6, 'Passives' score 7 or 8 and 'Promoters' answered 9 or 10.
 - NPS is determined by subtracting the percentage of customers who are detractors from the percentage who are promoters. For example, if 50% were promoters and 10% detractors, the NPS would be 40. This allows businesses not only to focus upon increasing the proportion of people that actively like and evangelise about the company, but also to bear in mind those at the opposite end of the spectrum who are lukewarm or negative.
- Customer effort scores look to understand the ease or otherwise with which the customer has interacted with the company on a particular occasion. Often, there will be a five-point scale running from "very easy" to "very difficult", which can be converted into a quantitative metric. Various methods of calculating customer effort scores and pitfalls to avoid can be found within this referenced article⁴
- Quality scores differ from company to company, but are based on interaction scorecards on which employees are scored over a number of calls or interactions each week or month, and include factors such as compliance, quality of greeting and call termination, cross-selling and upselling attempts, fluency of communication and other factors deemed important by the business
- Customer retention rates are generally based on the percentage of customers renewing contracts, and are typically used by businesses within contract-based industries, such as insurance and telecoms
- CSAT (customer satisfaction) scores do not have a fixed and widely-accepted scoring system, but are more wide-ranging. Businesses may decide that they want to track the proportion of customers who report being "very satisfied", score them at 5 out of 5, etc.

⁴ <https://www.callcentrehelper.com/how-to-calculate-customer-effort-94671.htm>

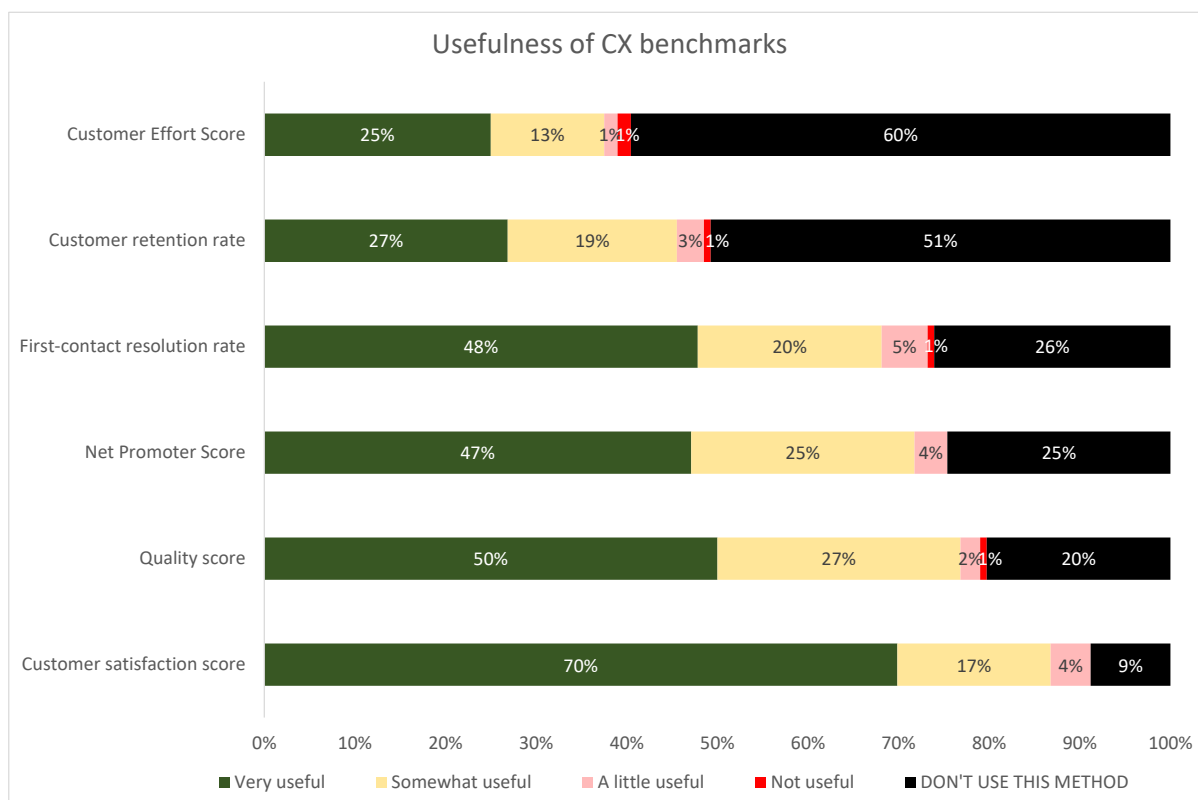
The most widely used customer experience benchmark is the general customer satisfaction rating, which is used by 91% of respondents. First-contact resolution rate is used by 74%, NPS 75%, customer retention rate 49% and agent quality scores 80%. Customer effort score is much less widely used, however is still in place in 40% of respondents.

Respondents that used these customer experience benchmarks were asked to rate how useful they were.

77% of the respondents **that used it** stated that they believed that customer satisfaction score was a useful indicator of customer experience, being the highest-rated metric.

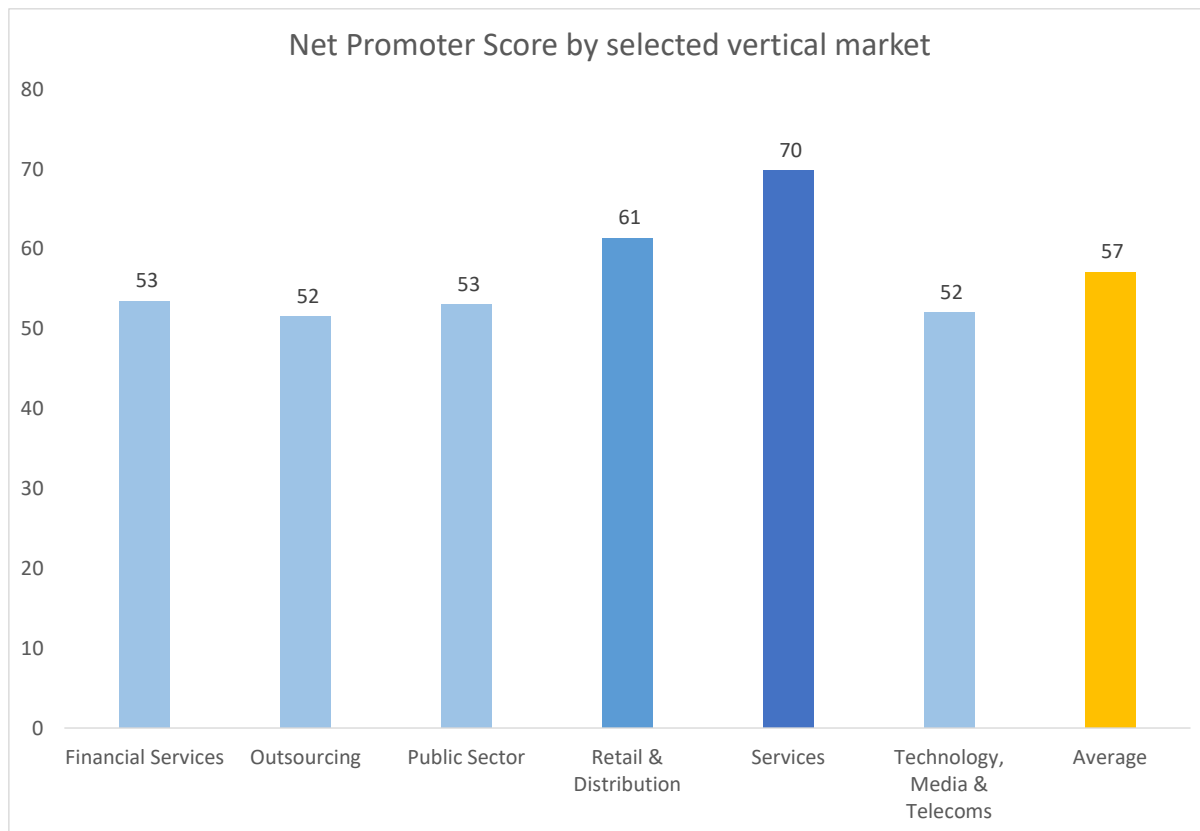
Most of the other customer experience benchmarks received very similar scores, with most respondents stating that they were ‘very useful’, and lower proportions stating that they were ‘somewhat useful’.

Figure 55: Usefulness of CX benchmarks



As customer experience benchmarks change from company to company – there is no generally accepted customer satisfaction rating or quality score that allows direct comparison between organisations – only NPS easily allows head-to-head comparison across companies, although there were not enough responses from each vertical market to be able to give a full picture.

Figure 56: Net Promoter Score by selected vertical market



Respondents to this survey generally reported a mix of Net Promoter scores, with a survey-wide average of 57 (last year’s figure was 49).

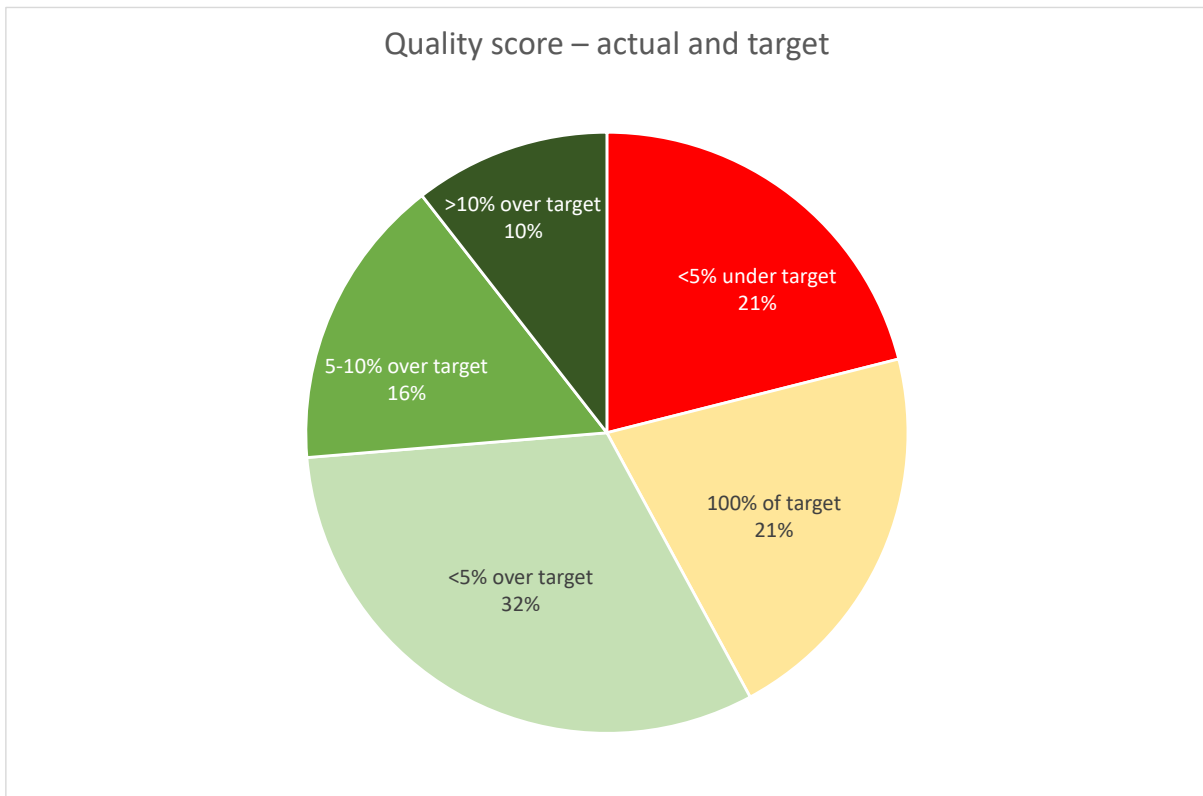
Those in the services sector reported the highest average scores.

Looking at quality scores, the fact that there is no single industry-wide quality measurement score made head-to-head comparisons impossible. Instead, each set of responses was judged on whether it was above target, at target or below target.

While 21% of respondents are currently missing their quality target, none of these are more than 5% below where they want to be.

58% of respondents report beating their target quality score.

Figure 57: Quality score – actual and target



In the same way as with quality scores, customer satisfaction scores are not necessarily directly comparable between organisations. However, where possible, the data was normalised as a percentage although this should be treated with caution.

Only 12% of respondents were more than 10% below their target, with 66% above it, an improvement on previous years.

Figure 58: Customer satisfaction score – actual and target



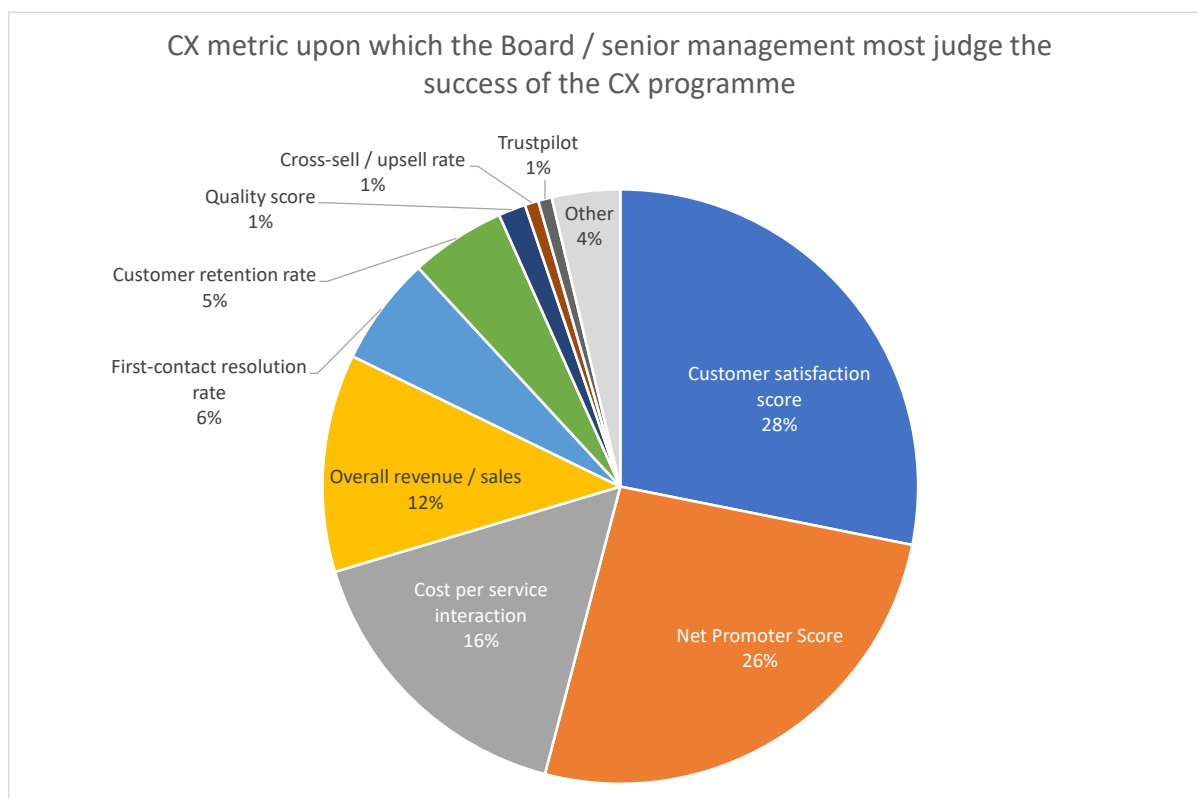
Survey respondents were asked to pick a single customer experience metric upon which their board or senior management team most judged the success or otherwise of the customer experience programme.

There was a wide mix of responses, with NPS and customer satisfaction score accounting for 54% of responses.

Of note is the fact that first-contact resolution rate was identified as being the key CX metric for senior management by only 6% of respondents, despite both the customer and business survey results earlier in this report showing clearly that first-contact resolution was the most important factor in influencing customer experience.

The 'other' category includes in-house customer service success measurements and a combination of performance-related factors.

Figure 59: CX metric upon which the Board / senior management most judge the success of the CX programme



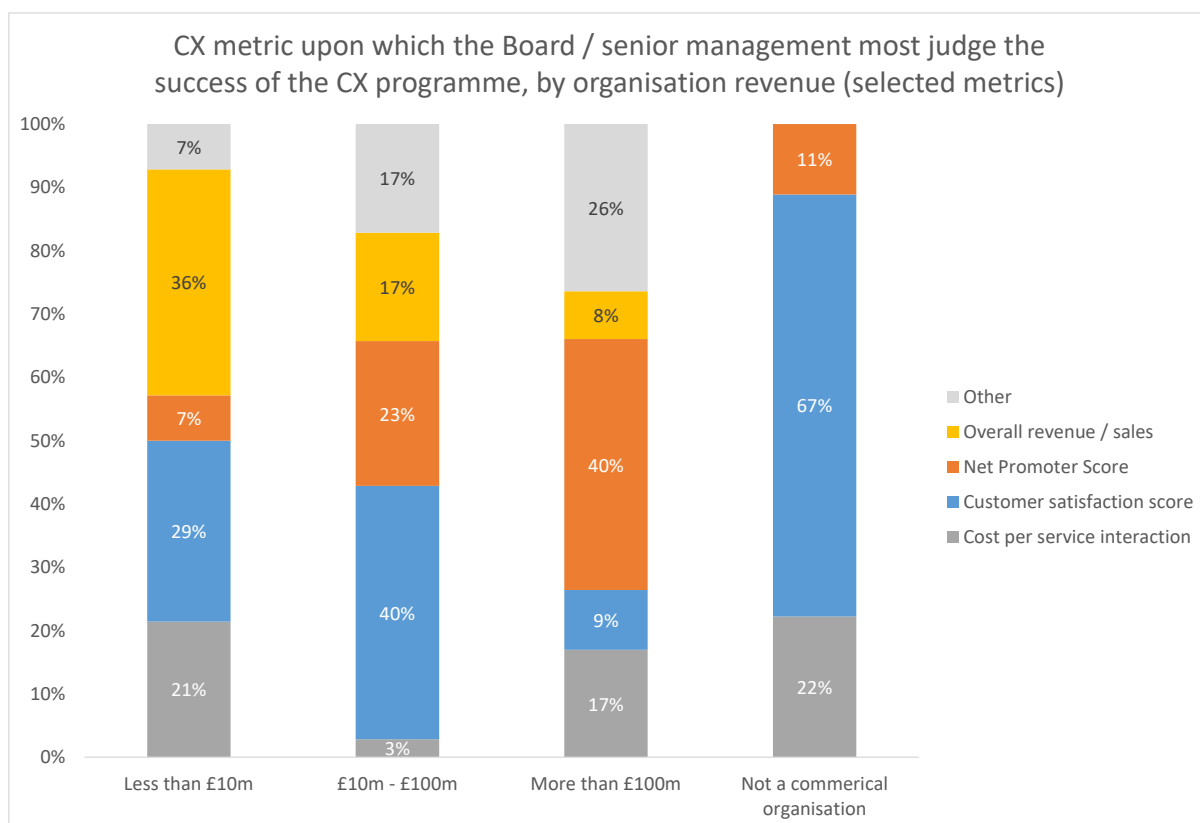
The following chart shows how small, medium and large organisations (as grouped by revenue) view the importance to the senior management team of each customer experience metric.

Large commercial operations are most concerned about NPS, with 40% of respondents from the £100m+ group placing it first.

Non-commercial operations are far more likely than others to rate their customer satisfaction first.

36% of the smallest organisations focus mainly upon their overall revenue.

Figure 60: CX metric upon which the Board / senior management most judge the success of the CX programme, by organisation revenue (selected metrics)

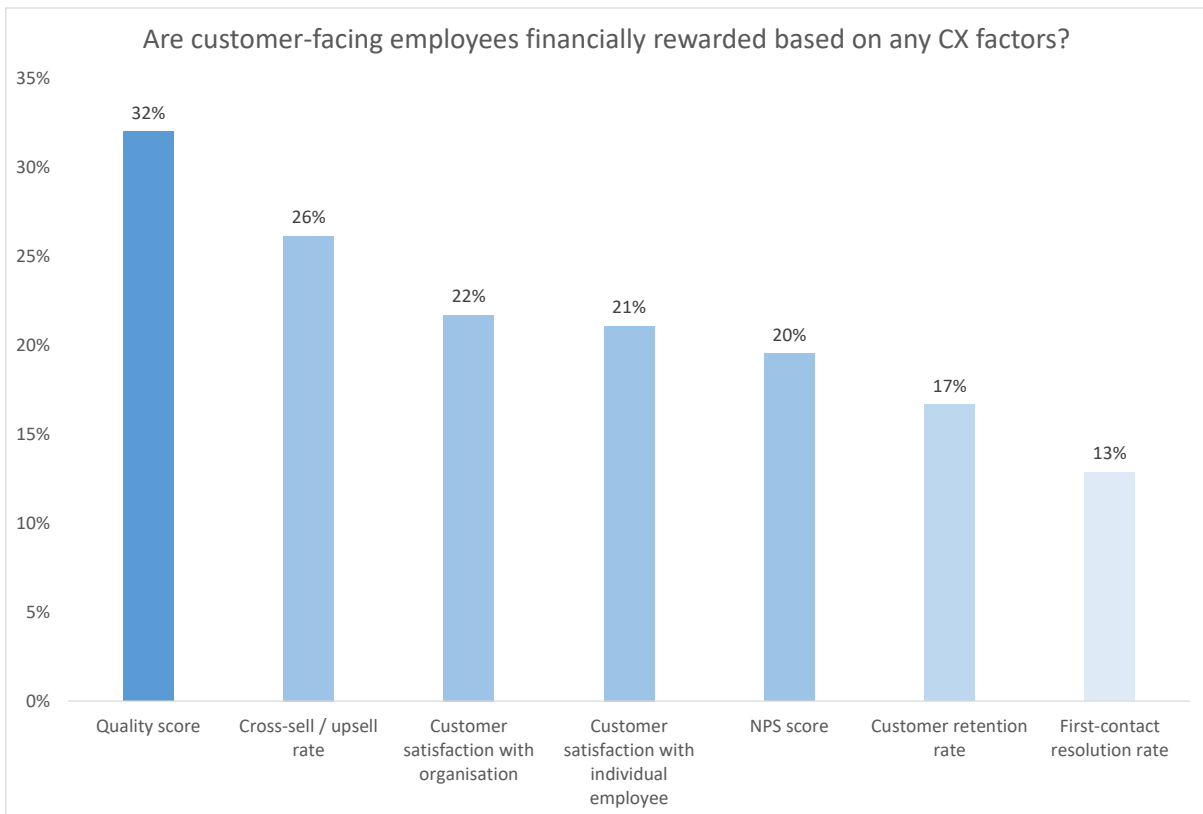


Respondents were asked if their customer-facing employees were financially rewarded based on any customer experience factors.

32% of businesses reward agent based on quality scores, and over one-quarter do so based on the cross-sell / upsell rate.

It is disappointing and surprising to see the lack of importance placed by respondents upon rewarding high first-contact resolution rates despite its overwhelming importance to the overall customer experience programme.

Figure 61: Are customer-facing employees financially rewarded based on any CX factors?



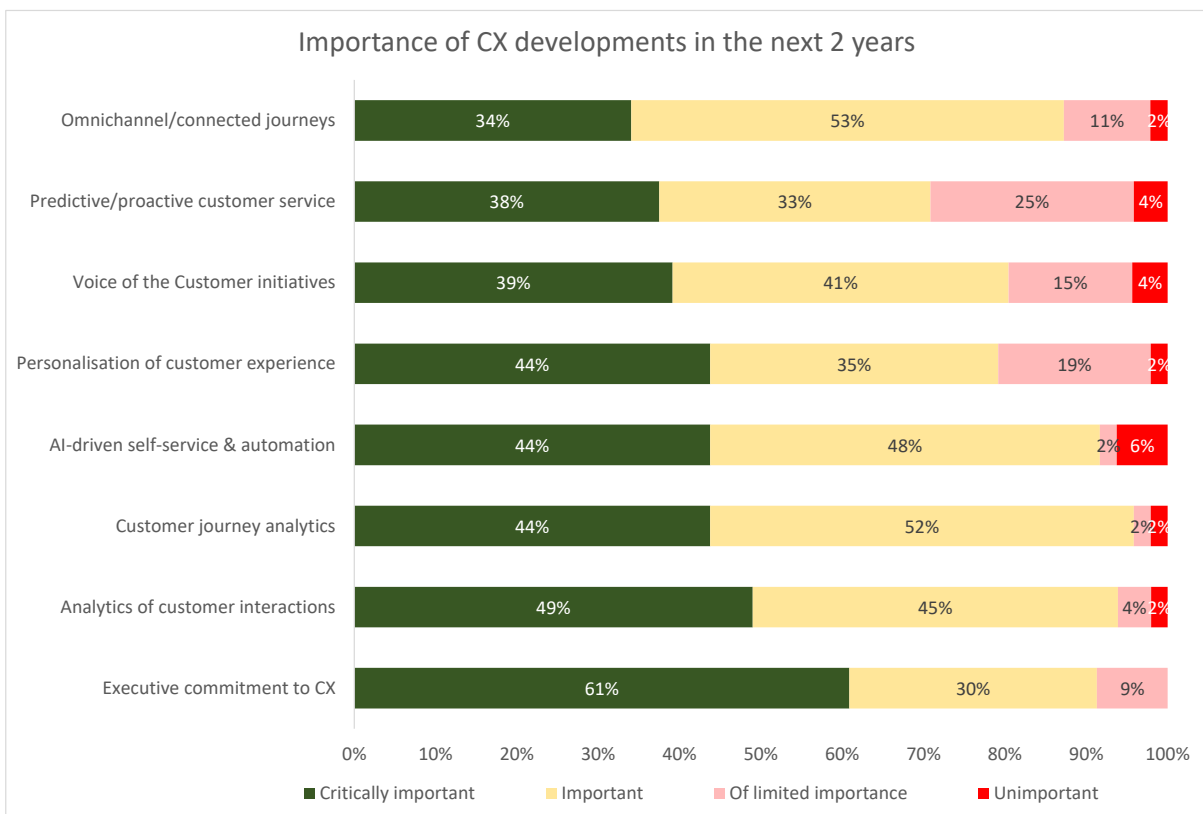
CX FUTURE STRATEGY

THE IMPORTANCE OF CX DEVELOPMENTS

Survey respondents were asked their opinion on how important various customer experience developments would be to their organisation in the next two years.

Perhaps the most striking finding was that the most important factor determining the future success of the customer experience programme was not technology-related, but rather a requirement for the continuing and strengthening executive commitment to improving customer experience, without which the multi-departmental CX initiatives could not hope to succeed.

Figure 62: Importance of CX developments in the next 2 years



CONCLUSION: CX STRATEGIES

The business and consumer surveys carried out in the course of the research for this report show that while improving the customer experience is high on the agenda for many organisations, most businesses are still a long way from where they want to be.

The key findings of this report can be summarised, and various strategies suggested for maximising the customer experience while improving profitability and managing cost:

- Customer experience is widely seen by both B2B and B2C businesses as being an increasingly important competitive factor, with fewer respondents than ever wanting to compete primarily on price
- a key aim of customer experience improvement is cost management, although improving customer retention rates is seen as being vital component as well
- the main investment in customer experience improvement programmes is focused on technology, with business process improvements and employee training receiving similar amounts of support as each other
- live telephony is still by far the largest communication channel used by customers, comprising around 65% of inbound interactions. Email is second with around 20%, although web chat and social media have risen strongly
- however, despite the prevalence of telephony, the majority of customer experience investment is going into digital channels
- CX technology was said by many survey respondents to be under-supported in that it did not give a single view of customers across channels, and many businesses (especially smaller ones) reported that they were being held back by the restrictions of legacy technology and inadequate budgets
- technology is not the only roadblock to CX: a lack of time and resource for CX improvements were also seen as being important
- businesses believe that the most important customer experience factors to a customer are first-contact resolution, short wait times and having a polite and friendly agent answer the phone. Having issues handled by a single employee is also seen as important, and can be linked to first-contact resolution rates
- from a consumer perspective, first-contact resolution and short wait times are also seen as being key to a positive customer experience. However, consumers also place far more emphasis on having UK-based employees to talk to than businesses believe
- most consumers still have a preference for live agent interactions rather than automation, even if self-service is done well. This is especially the case in complex or strongly emotional issues

- depending on the nature of an interaction – whether emotional, urgent or complex – multiple channels will need to be offered to the consumer base, especially live telephony, email, web chat and web self-service
- there are significant differences in channel preference by age and socio-economic group, so businesses should look to see which their own customer base prefers and in which circumstances, so that support and investment can be planned accordingly
- there has been a steep rise in customer preference for telephony for all types of interaction, starting during the pandemic, but still very much present today
- interaction analytics is becoming increasingly useful in collecting and acting upon CX data, but is only used by minority of businesses
- an improved customer retention rate is seen by businesses as being the a key CX outcome. However, only a very small minority of respondents stated that customer retention rate was seen as the most important CX metric by their senior management team
- first-contact resolution rate is almost completely ignored as the primary indicator of the success of the CX improvement programme, despite both businesses and consumers indicating that it made the greatest difference to the actual customer experience
- a small minority of companies rewarded customer-facing staff based on customer retention rates or first-contact resolution, which were stated to be the two of the most desirable outcomes of a successful customer experience programme
- the executive team’s commitment to the CX improvement programme is seen as being more important than any business process or technology investment: without the former being in place, the latter simply won’t happen.

The surveys show that the telephony channel must be strongly invested in and supported, not only in the present day, but also into the foreseeable future. While digital channels and AI-based automation give the promise of a lower cost of service which is attractive to businesses, consumers state that they are currently more comfortable with live agent service, especially telephony-based, so there is no expectation that live telephony will become unimportant at any time in the foreseeable future. The pandemic has only increased the value of this channel to the customer, providing reassurance and confidence.

Over time, the customer base will become more technologically sophisticated and comfortable with using automation, but businesses should be aware that this is a long and ongoing process and that dramatic changes in the short term are unlikely to have a positive effect on customer experience.

Organisations should consider rewarding agents for behaviours that support customer retention and improved first-contact resolution rates: something which is rarely done, despite the acknowledged importance of these metrics to the success of the customer experience programme and the business itself.

The findings of this report should encourage businesses to find out more about their own customers' preferences, and give an insight into what they actually value within an interaction. In this way, CX investments can be focused upon the areas and solutions that are valued most highly by customers, thus increasing retention rates and individual customer profitability while keeping service costs under control.

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