

NOVEMBER MARKET STUDY

FUTURE OF THE CONTACT CENTER



Intro

Another year of customer-centric rhetoric has unfortunately accompanied another year of customer experience disappointment.

For all the talk about competing on the customer experience, all the hype over the transformative potential of AI, and all the excitement over predictive intelligence, today's experiences remain reactive, generic, inefficient, and unwelcoming.

Less than 15% of consumers feel brands are sufficiently personalizing customer interactions. The majority continue to endure long wait times on the phone, while remaining wholly underwhelmed by AI-driven chatbots. Nearly 60% are facing undue difficulty getting refunds or make-goods when things go wrong.

Unsurprisingly, just 4% believe the experience meaningfully improved in 2023.

These damning stats, meanwhile, say nothing of the numerous *employee experience* challenges that remain prevalent in contact centers.

As 2024 arrives, will brands do anything to escape this pessimistic landscape? Will they take steps to harness the right data and technology to empower employees and wow customers? Will they craft a future in which the promise of customer centricity is not undermined by inconsistent visions, ineffective systems, and inefficient processes?

To answer these questions, CCW Digital conducted in-depth research into the future of the contact center. Encompassing lingering challenges, exciting ambitions, and honest predictions, the findings inform this exclusive Market Study.

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Methodology & Demographics

To conduct its inquiry into the Future of the Contact Center, CCW Digital issued a survey in October and November of 2023. All leaders in contact center, customer experience, customer intelligence, operations, and marketing roles, the respondents represented companies of all sizes and most major industries.

Example respondent job titles included vice president of contact center operations, regional director of operations, voice of the customer manager, chief customer officer, head of operational excellence, senior vice president of client experience, director of customer relations, senior director of customer success, vice president of customer experience, director of client delivery, chief operating officer, director of patient access centers, and associate vice president of customer service.

About the Author



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Brian Cantor is the principal analyst and director for CCW Digital, the global online community and research hub for customer contact professionals. In his role, Brian leads all customer experience, contact center, technology, and employee engagement research initiatives for CCW. CCW Digital's articles, special reports, commentaries, infographics, executive interviews, webinars, and online events reach a community of over 150,000.

A passionate advocate for customer centricity, Brian regularly speaks on major CX conference agendas. He also advises organizations on customer experience and business development strategies.

Key Findings

- 1 The typical contact center is not yet perfect, but most leaders believe they made considerable progress in 2023. Comparatively significant improvement areas include agent engagement, cross-departmental collaboration, and cost management.
- 2 Contact center leaders do not believe agent turnover is inevitable; a whopping 52%, in fact, believe they can *significantly* boost retention in the coming years.
- 3 Top employee experience focuses include training and development, internal collaboration, and culture-building.
- 4 As part of their employee training efforts, leaders plan to prioritize empathy and soft skills, complex product mastery, and personal career development.
- 5 Contact center leaders do not feel phone communication will fade away in the coming years, but they anticipate far bigger volume gains in web self-service, live chat, and messaging.
- 6 As web self-service becomes more prominent, contact center leaders will have to determine which issues are most suitable for chatbots to handle. Presently, the typical contact center leader is comfortable allowing customers to make appointments or process basic transactions in chatbots. There is less agreement, however, on whether these bots should be able to initiate account changes, issue refunds, or make exceptions to policies.
- 7 Although nearly 90% of contact centers will emphasize some degree of cost-cutting in the next two years, they are not taking their feet off the innovation pedal. Key investment focuses include customer-facing AI, customer analytics and intelligence, and knowledge management.
- 8 While investing in AI solutions, contact centers will account for challenges like data protection, UX design, and case study evaluation.
- 9 Key customer intelligence goals include better monitoring quality, better identifying agent knowledge gaps, better determining employee engagement, and better predicting customer needs.
- 10 Moving forward, contact center leaders are most optimistic in their ability to better empower agents, reduce wait times, and strengthen proactive engagement.



Looking Back on 2023: Did The Contact Center Improve?

Given that only 4% of consumers noticed improvements in their experiences with brands, one would be hard-pressed to call 2023 a successful year for the customer contact community. The typical contact center has a long way to go when it comes to empowering agents and delighting customers.

That sobering reality does not, however, mean contact centers made *no* progress in 2023. It does not mean there is *no* cause for celebration.

A whopping 84% of contact center leaders believe they markedly improved their approach to agent engagement over the past year. Other noteworthy improvement areas included collaboration with other departments (70%), cost management (70%), and omnichannel engagement (66%).

Of the four biggest improvement areas, three speak to long-standing contact center ambitions.

The idea of “happy agents = happy customers,” for example, has become as synonymous with customer contact as phrases like “the customer is always right.” Unfortunately, progress in cultivating happy agents, let alone *productive ones* who can truly wow customers, has long eluded the customer contact function. The notion that brands are finally making strides on this front is especially exciting in today’s climate, given that work environments are greatly changing and the standard for agent performance is greatly increasing.

Complaints over “silos” are notorious in all business circles; any progress in eliminating the disconnect between the contact center and other departments is thus immensely impressive. It is also quite timely, as contact centers will require a powerful relationship with IT to navigate today’s exciting but complex technology climate, as well as a strong bond with teams like marketing and sales to ensure a consistently stellar customer experience.

CCW Digital research has consistently shown that hype over the idea of omnichannel was not translating into reality. The typical customer experience has remained fragmented, inefficient, and inconsistent – and arguably even worsened – in the years since omnichannel became a popular term. By finally beginning to unify their channels, however, brands move closer to creating predictive, personalized, seamless customer journeys that foster long-term loyalty.

Cost containment, the fourth progress area, has not necessarily been a loudly broadcast trend in recent years. After all, the typical contact center has been arguing for its place as an *investment that creates value*. Still, given that operational inefficiencies can adversely impact customer and employee experiences, there is conditional merit to efforts that eliminate undue costs and boost productivity. And given the extent to which economic uncertainty has defined business dialogue over the past year, successful cost management is likely scoring contact center leaders points with senior leadership.

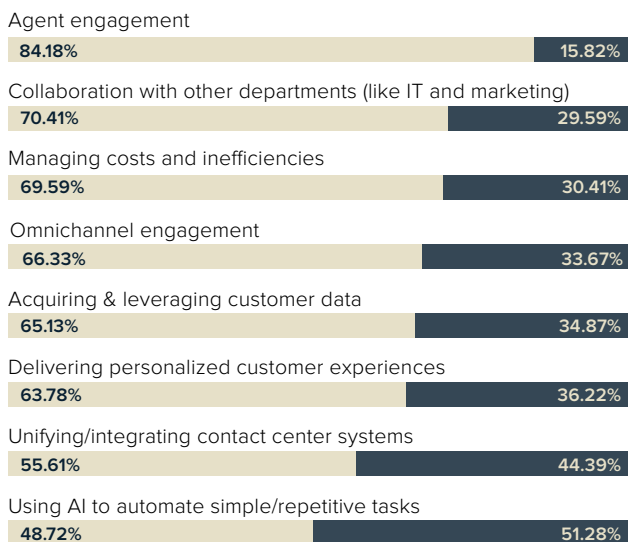
But declaring “mission accomplished” in *any area*, let alone on the efficiency front, would be premature and irresponsible. To illustrate this point, consider the following findings:

- 82% of contact center leaders still feel agents are spending too much time on inefficient processes and internal tasks within the contact center
- 80% of contact center leaders still feel agents are spending too much time handling matters that should be addressed in self-service

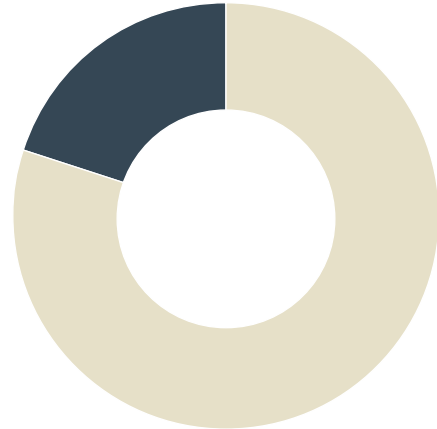
Not simply a sign of suboptimal productivity, these inefficiencies can have an adverse impact on the agent experience. Agent effort, especially that directed toward low-value tasks, is the enemy of employee satisfaction.

Over the past year, do you feel your contact center has improved in the following areas?

■ Yes ■ No



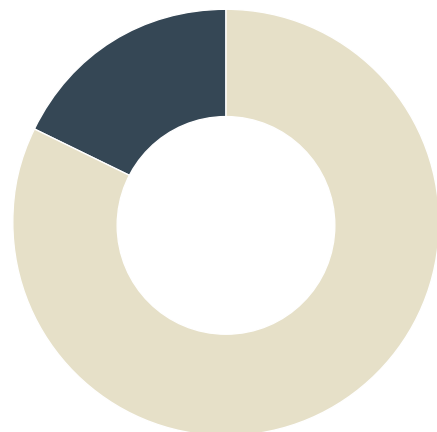
Over the past year, do you feel your contact center/CX agents spent too much time handling issues that customers SHOULD have been able to address using self-service (bots, IVR, etc)?



■ 80.20% Yes

■ 19.80% No

Over the past year, do you feel your agents spent too much time handling administrative / back-office / process work that should have been automated or simplified with AI and other modern contact center technology?



■ 82.23% Yes

■ 17.77% No



The Future of Agent Engagement

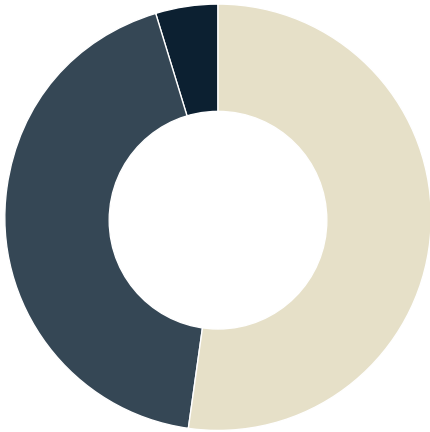
2023 might have been a positive year for agent engagement initiatives, but contact center leaders are not deluding themselves into thinking their work is done. They know they are only at the beginning of their effort to cultivate a more empowering, engaging, agent-centric contact center.

Although the journey to a truly stellar agent experience may be challenging, contact center leaders are confident it will be worthwhile. Many, in fact, believe it could pay dividends in the next 1-2 years.

A healthy 95% of contact center leaders believe *they* can positively impact agent retention in that timeframe; 52% have faith in a *dramatic* increase.

Of course, it will take effective action to turn this optimism into progress. If contact center leaders invest in the wrong agent experience initiatives – or, worse, succumb to half-hearted measures – agents will not stay, let alone perform at their highest capacity. The contact center operation will suffer, as will the customer experience.

Do you feel improving employee retention is a realistic contact center goal for the next 1-2 years?



- **52.28%** Yes - I believe we can meaningfully increase employee loyalty & retention
- **43.15%** Somewhat - I believe we can marginally increase retention, but accept that some turnover is inevitable
- **4.57%** No - Many agents will always see the contact center as a short-term "job" rather than a long-term career

TOP EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE PRIORITIES

As leaders pursue greater employee engagement and retention, training and development is taking center stage. A whopping 88% call coaching a top priority for the next 1-2 years, making it the #1 agent experience focus moving forward.

An inherent way to increase engagement, immerse employees in the business, provide more face time, and generate better performance, coaching has particular relevance in today's climate. With AI-driven automation increasingly absorbing repetitive, familiar, and transactional tasks, many agents will be shifting their attention to more consultative and analytical work. A stronger coaching program will not only empower agents to thrive amid this evolution but gain clarity and confidence in how their workflows and career trajectories will change.

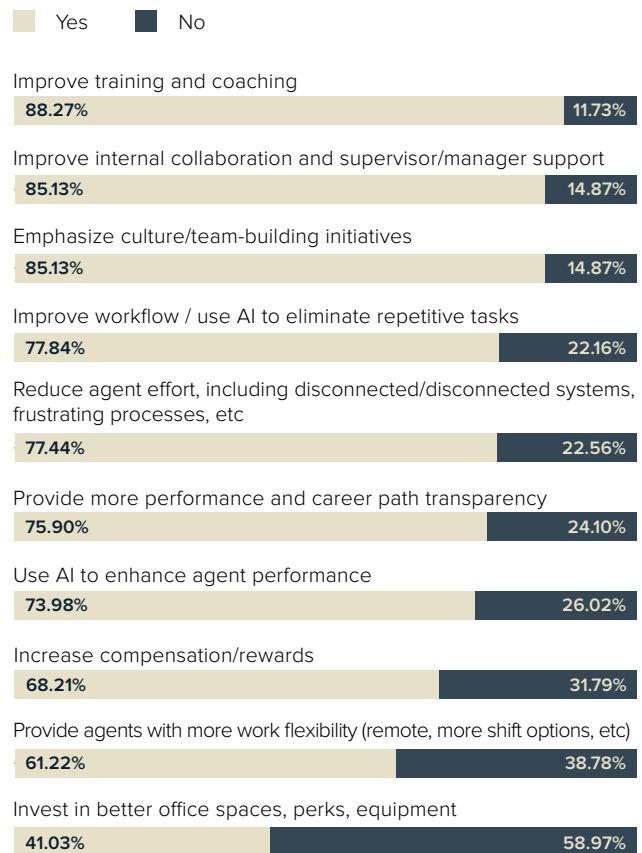
Other leading employee experience priorities include improving internal collaboration and manager support (85%), strengthening culture and team-building (85%), and reducing agent effort (77%).

The rise of remote and hybrid work has placed a special spotlight on each of these three areas.

Though popular, superficial "culture" gestures like office pizza parties and ping-pong tables were never meaningful drivers of agent satisfaction. And for as little as they meant in the past, they are even less consequential now that agents are spending far less time in the physical contact center. Drivers of agent effort like difficult systems, inefficient workflows, cumbersome processes, and poor training have a far greater impact on the agent experience.

This reality does not, however, mean that *culture* is unimportant in today's environment. If anything, building a culture of camaraderie and collaboration needs to be a more deliberate effort, since peer communication does not happen automatically in the era of remote work. If the business is not *actively* working to connect colleagues, build relationships, and generate shared values, it stands no chance of maximizing agent engagement or performance.

Will your contact center/CX team prioritize the following employee experience initiatives in the next 1-2 years?



TOP TRAINING PRIORITIES

Training ranks as the #1 employee experience initiative for the next 1-2 years, and no development focus matters more than empathy and “soft skills.”

As contact center leaders ask agents to not only focus on more complex work but achieve more supportive and human connections with customers, 90% plan to focus on soft-skill training.

This statistic does not wholly negate the concept of “hiring the smile and training the skill” – the best contact centers will still seek naturally personable and supportive people – but it does underscore the evolution of agent work. The agent of the future will not simply be reading off scripts or restating policies, as AI-driven bots are perfectly capable of such repetitive work. Instead, the agent will be *humanizing* these policies and adapting to unique customer concerns and emotions. Empathy, creativity, and quick decision-making, therefore, are becoming *skills* that even the most naturally friendly and charismatic employees will have to learn.

Granted, the best agents will not *strictly* focus on emotionally resonant conversations. They will also have to solve more challenging and unpredictable problems, thus necessitating a mastery of more complex topics and processes. To fulfill this need, 87% of contact centers plan to emphasize complex product and issue training.

Other top training priorities include personal career development and collaboration skills (85%) and comfort with new technologies and systems (80%).

In a sense, these two priorities go hand-in-hand. Because automation technology is shifting agents to more complex work, contact centers will require agents who have a better understanding of – and commitment to – the greater business. It thus becomes imperative to treat the contact center as a *career* and ensure agents are getting the support and guidance they need to become more capable, collaborative leaders.

Of course, this long-term focus only becomes possible or relevant if agents receive vital training on the automation tools meant to streamline their work and augment their performance.

Will your organization prioritize the following competencies when training contact center/CX agents and/or supervisors in the next 1-2 years?





The Future of Customer Communication

The term “contact center” emerged as recognition that customer interactions were no longer restricted to phone calls. Over the next 1-2 years, leaders believe it will become even more appropriate.

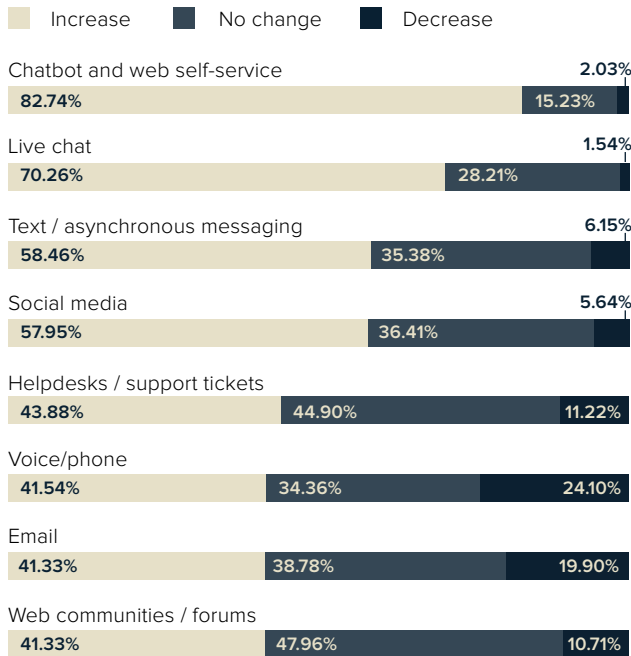
No, contact center leaders do not feel that the traditional voice channel will fade away. In fact, a greater percentage of leaders expect phone volumes to *increase* rather than *decrease* (41% vs. 24%) going into 2025.

The typical leader, however, is far *more confident* that digital volumes will increase in the coming years.

A substantial 83% anticipate an increase in chatbot and other web self-service volume, while 70% forecast growth in live chat. The majority of leaders – 58%, to be specific – also expect growth in volume for asynchronous messaging and social media interactions.

Granted, anticipating growth in channel activity and elevating channel performance are vastly different things. CCW Digital research confirms that the traditional phone call convincingly ranks as the most trusted customer service option. If brands are expecting this significant shift toward digital communication, they will have to improve staffing, user experiences, and resolution quality in channels like chat, text, and social.

Over the next 1-2 years, how do you expect contact volume to change in the following channels?



PUTTING THE SERVICE IN SELF-SERVICE

The need to elevate performance is especially significant when it comes to web self-service. Brands are investing heavily into AI-driven chatbots and expect such options to see the greatest increase in contact volume, yet consumer trust in web self-service is a paltry 20%.

As brands look to increase confidence in self-service, they will have to empower their chatbots to actually solve problems. If bots simply regurgitate knowledge entries or stall customers before human employees become available, they reinforce the notion that self-service is merely a deflection mechanism. They affirm the idea that the *best support* comes from live agents.

The idea of empowering bots to solve more problems, of course, invites a pivotal question: are contact center leaders actually comfortable letting bots provide meaningful support? Are they comfortable letting AI analyze unique customer situations and provide tailored resolutions?

Going into 2024, the answer is a cautious yes.

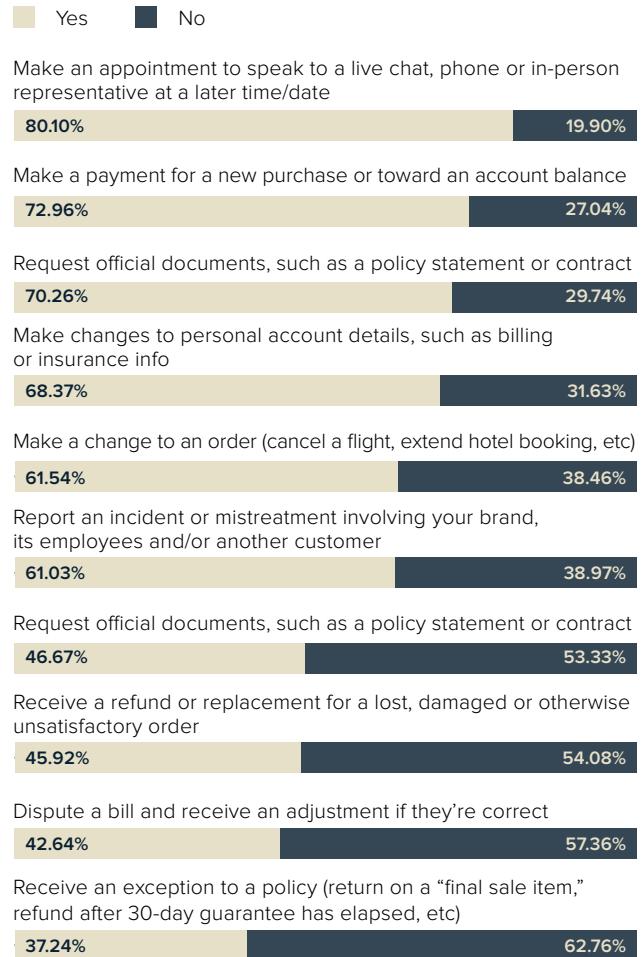
Contact center leaders still believe chatbots are best-suited for a concierge role; 80% are comfortable letting these tools make appointments to speak with live agents. When it comes to letting bots handle business on their own, leaders are most comfortable with straightforward transactions: making payments (73%), requesting official documents (70%), and making changes to account details (68%).

They are comparatively less comfortable letting bots handle account cancellations and renewals, refunds and replacements, billing dispute resolutions and credits, and policy exceptions. But while the majority of businesses are not yet willing to let bots handle these interactions, a non-trivial percentage of businesses *are* open to it.

If these optimistic businesses can turn their comfort into action and create bots that actually provide resolutions, they will differentiate themselves by offering a valuable service option for customers – and an appealing workflow dynamic for agents who can *truly* focus on the highest-value, most compelling interactions.

The key, of course, will be rigorously training and tuning their bots to offer productive support *without* too greatly heightening the risk of inaccurate communication, non-compliant support, or overly costly resolutions.

Would your company let customers handle the following issues/intentions entirely in a chatbot or self-service platform (absolutely no agent assistance or approval)?





Top Initiatives for the Contact Center of the Future

More than two-thirds of leaders felt they better contained contact center expenses in 2023, and that cost-consciousness will not disappear in the next two years.

Nearly 89% of leaders say they will prioritize some degree of cost-cutting leading into 2025. More than 31% will make cuts across the board, while 34% will invest heavily into the contact center operation but trim spending at the customer experience level. Just over 23% will take the reverse approach, prioritizing the customer experience while reducing internal costs.

This cost-consciousness will not, however, thwart investment into innovative technologies and initiatives. A healthy 73%, for example, say they plan to increase investment into customer-facing AI in the next 1-2 years.

Other key investment priorities include customer analytics and intelligence (73% will increase their investment),

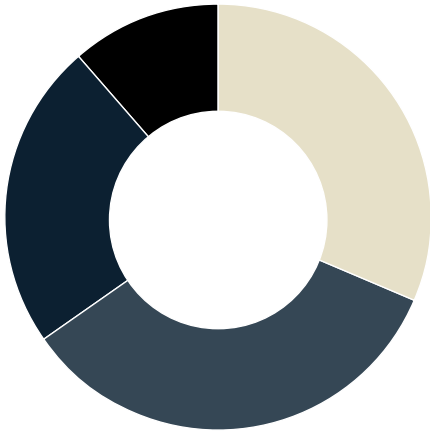
knowledge management (72%), and customer journey management and orchestration (71%).

Given that they are forecasting significant growth in digital contact volume, the investment into customer-facing AI and journey orchestration makes perfect sense. AI will make self-service options more effective, while better journey management will ensure companies can integrate their numerous digital touch points into a seamless, cohesive experience for all customers.

Knowledge management will simultaneously empower better chatbot experiences *and* help agents more swiftly and accurately address increasingly complex customer inquiries.

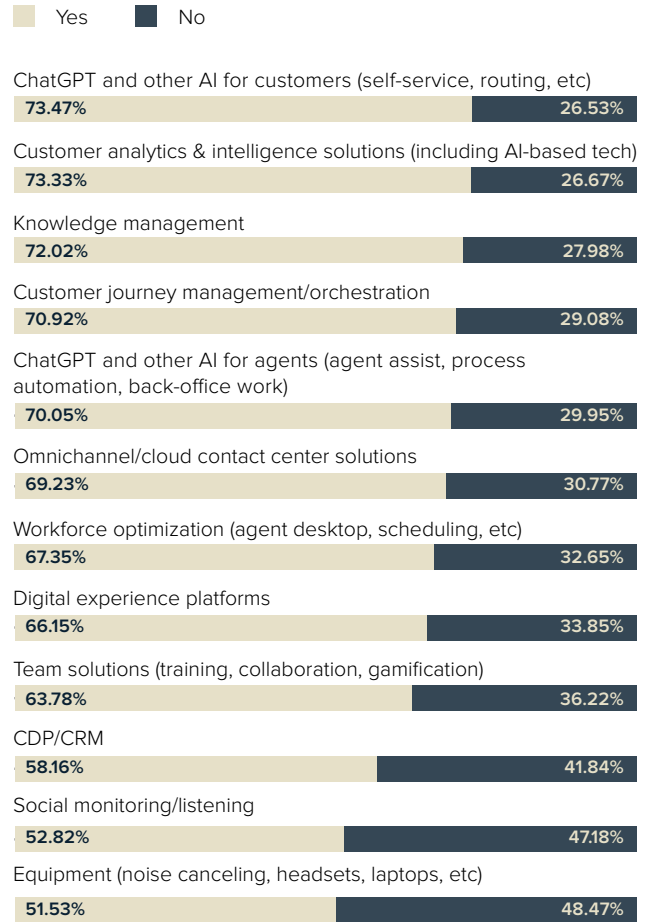
Customer analytics and intelligence will help brands glean more insights from these ever-complex journeys, and in turn empower them to anticipate and proactively tailor experiences to customers' needs and wants.

Do you expect your contact center to become more cost-conscious in the next 1-2 years?



- 31.47%** Yes, we will cut costs for all key areas - CX, technology, agents, operations
- 34.01%** We will invest heavily into improving contact center operations/tech but try to reduce CX costs
- 23.35%** We will invest into an exceptional CX but reduce internal contact center operations/tech costs
- 11.17%** No, we will increase our spend on all major facets of the contact center and CX

Will you increase your investment into the following initiatives/solutions over the next 1-2 years?



THE EVOLUTION OF CUSTOMER-FACING AI

As they increasingly implement customer-facing AI, brands will have to account for a plethora of new risks, challenges, and considerations.

In the eyes of today’s contact center leaders, the biggest risk concerns data management. More than 81% see data protection and security as a pivotal AI consideration – and the concern is likely to only grow bigger as brands empower bots to engage in more personalized conversations and handle more meaningful customer interactions. Ensuring that the bot can meet standards not only for security and privacy but also industry-specific compliance will be essential for elevating self-service from “static FAQ pages” to immersive, conversational experiences.

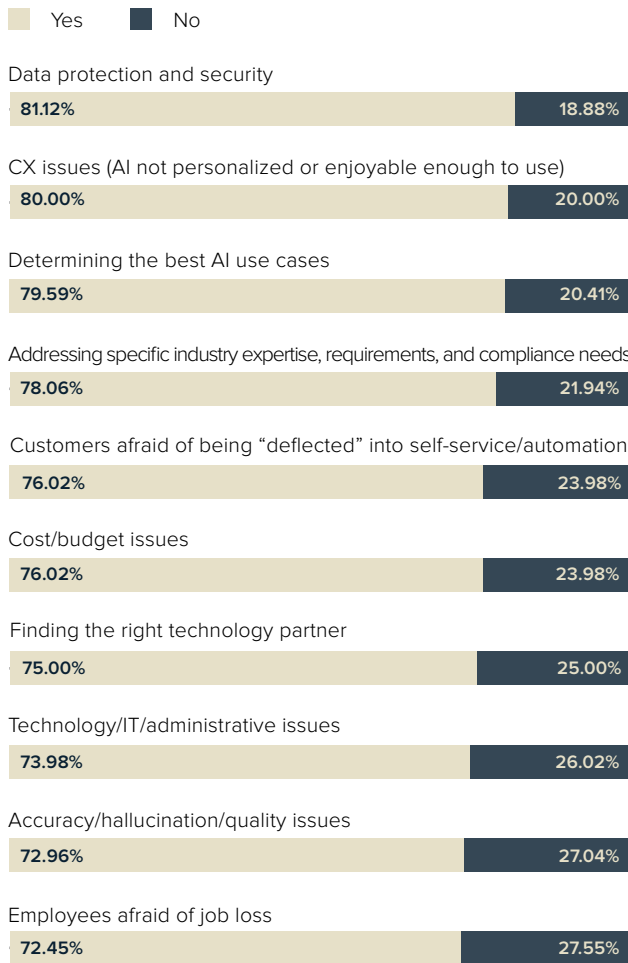
Other top considerations include customer and user experience challenges (80%), determining the best AI use cases (80%), and addressing specific industry needs (78%).

As they become the gateway to the customer experience journey, bots will grow to utterly define the customer’s perception of and confidence in the brand. Ensuring that the bot is easy to use – and capable of supporting and generating natural, multi-lingual, relevant conversation – will go a long way in affirming the brand’s desire to connect with rather than deflect the customer.

Underscored by the previous section (“Putting the service in self-service”), the growing power of AI solutions is forcing businesses to think critically about which use cases to automate. Whereas the decision was previously rooted in capability (could AI even handle such an inquiry?) it will soon become a matter of customer centricity (should AI handle such an inquiry?).

Similar to the emphasis on data challenges, the focus on industry nuances and complexities speaks to the greater role AI-driven engagement options will play in the contact center of the future. If a bot is going to be handling high-stakes customers and situations, it needs to demonstrate knowledge of and respect for the intricacies of specific business, industry, and customer norms and expectations.

In order to make the most of AI investments in the next 1-2 years, will you have to overcome the following obstacles?



ELEVATING CUSTOMER DATA

Customer intelligence can positively transform the contact center in a seemingly limitless number of ways. Savvy leaders will, however, introduce limits. Beyond helping them zero-in on the right analytics solutions, these limits help them prioritize the right takeaways and actions.

As they look to the future of the contact center, leaders believe quality control represents the most urgent intelligence need. Nearly 79% see quality and accuracy of agent communication as a top intelligence priority.

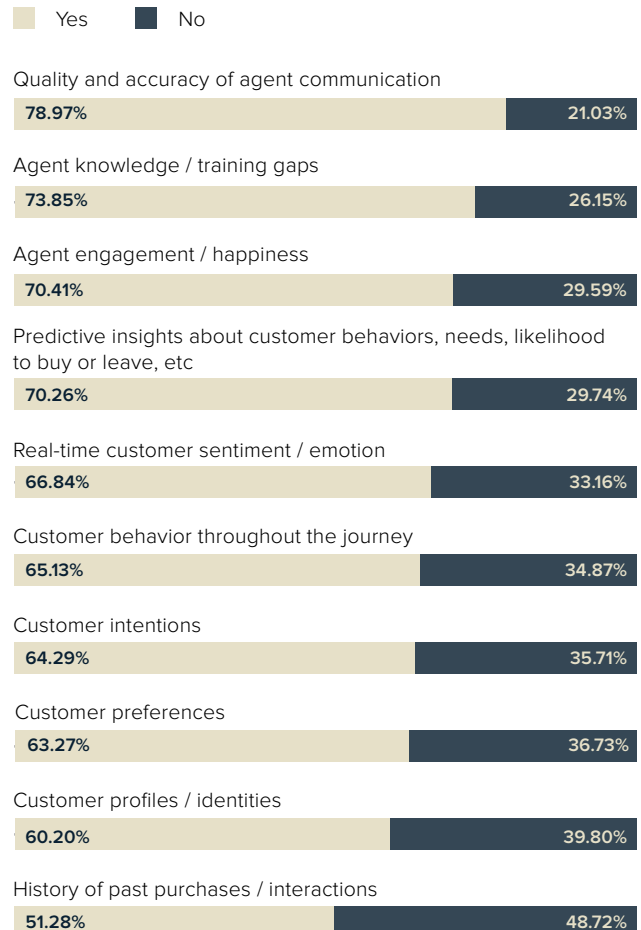
Other urgent intelligence focuses include agent knowledge and training gaps (74%), agent engagement and happiness (70%), and predictive customer insights (70%).

All concerning agents, the three biggest priorities are the consequence of two major shifts within the contact center landscape:

- Agents are increasingly working remotely, making it harder for leadership to assess quality, knowledge, and satisfaction concerns in real-time. These leaders are consequently wholly reliant on hard data and analytics to monitor and manage performance.
- Agents are increasingly dealing with complex issues, raising the stakes of knowledge or quality gaps. Robust intelligence is essential for assessing (and, ideally, proactively remedying) concerns that could prove costly for the business and its relationships with customers.

The emphasis on predictive customer intelligence, meanwhile, speaks to the desire to simultaneously increase efficiency and personalization. When brands can anticipate why customers are getting touch and how they will feel about particular outcomes, they can streamline journeys, eliminate repetitive questions, and provide more relevant and valuable resolutions.

Do you URGENTLY need to improve access / use of the following forms of customer/contact center intelligence in the next 1-2 years?





Vision for the Future of the Contact Center

Contact center leaders can acknowledge their limitations. They can identify their solutions and priorities. They can account for complications and considerations.

But the ultimate goal of these endeavors is not to win a participation trophy. It is not to show that they are taking customer and agent centricity seriously. It is to create a more robust, empowering, customer-centric operation. It is to create a contact center that is better in the future than it is in the present or was in the past.

Will the aforementioned initiatives lead to this ideal outcome in the next 1-2 years?

If the goal is to elevate all facets of the contact center, the answer is likely no. If the goal is to markedly improve some crucial tenets of the customer contact operation, the answer is more encouraging.

Customer contact leaders are particularly confident that they will empower agents to easily access the data and knowledge they need to deliver exceptional support. More than 41% feel this statement will *definitely* be true of their contact center in the next 1-2 years, while another 47% feel they will make some progress.

Confidence in this goal is unsurprising given that agent training, knowledge management, and customer intelligence represent major investment priorities.

Leaders are also fairly confident in their ability to help customers get the support they need without long wait times or repetitive questions (39% say they will definitely achieve this, while 48% will make progress). This optimism, too, stems from leaders' investment priorities. The joint emphasis on self-service and digital channels (to mitigate volume concerns) and predictive intelligence (to make conversations more efficient) should support faster, more convenient customer journeys.

Predictive intelligence will also fuel proactive engagement, which is why 32% believe they will definitely be thriving on that front and an additional 49% feel they will make some progress.

As they continue pursuing an omnichannel experience and investing into cloud contact center solutions, an equivalent 32% believe they will definitely unify all major contact center tools and systems into a single pane of glass. Another 45% expect to make progress toward this unification.

By the end of the next 1-2 years, do you expect the following to be true of your contact center/CX function?

- Yes, this will be 100% true
- We'll make progress, but won't get all the way there
- No, this will remain a challenge area

Agents can easily access the data and knowledge they need to deliver exceptional support



Customers can get access to the help they need without long wait times or repetitive questions



All major contact center tools/systems are available in a single pane of glass / platform



We are making effective use of proactive engagement



Our channel experiences are all great, enabling customers to get stellar support wherever they want



Agents are going "beyond the call" and contributing to areas like bot tuning, knowledge creation, & customer feedback analysis



Most of our communication and experiences are personalized to individual customer needs & preferences



Customers are very comfortable using our self-service options for most issues



We are seeing meaningful ROI from our AI investments



We have a 360-degree, highly predictive view of our customers



Our channels / touchpoints are connected in a fully seamless, omnichannel journey



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23



PRACTICALITY GUIDE





The Power Duo: Achieving Customer Service Excellence through AI and Human Collaboration.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In today's "you'd better" business landscape, customer service emerges as a critical differentiator. Consumers expect streamlined and personalized support across all channels in every interaction with a brand. Caught between reducing costs and elevating performance, organizations turn to artificial intelligence (AI) to optimize their contact centers.

As AI becomes increasingly prevalent, however, it's crucial to recognize the enduring value of human interaction. There has to be a blend of AI-enabled machines and intelligent agents (IA), who pick up where technology leaves off.

Think of it as e-mpathetic customer experiences, where $AI \times IA = CX+$. A bankable equation of high-tech efficiency and innate compassion for superb, ever-so-grateful service.

This paper explores the importance of balancing artificial intelligence and human collaboration in contact centers to improve experiences, satisfaction and business performance.

The Evolving Contact Center Landscape

A report by Deloitte reveals **85% of businesses believe that customer service plays a central role in brand differentiation**. Contact centers have transformed from cost centers into strategic hubs for customer engagement, becoming a vital component of an organization's customer experience strategy. As AI technologies gain prominence, they empower contact centers to become powerful drivers of customer centricity and service excellence.

Role of AI in Customer Service

AI-powered tools like chatbots, virtual assistants and analytics have become integral to modern customer service operation. In turn, they revolutionize the way businesses interact with their customers. They also offer cost-effective ways to deliver superior service. A Harvard Business Review study reveals **companies using AI for CX saw an increase in customer satisfaction rates of up to 10% and a reduction in overall service costs of up to 25%**. These numbers make it a strategic investment for organizations aiming to stay competitive in a customer-centric market.

The Human Touch: Why It Matters

AI has revolutionized customer service by automating routine tasks—but goes only so far. A PwC survey reveals **75% of customers crave more personalized experiences**, emphasizing the importance of human interaction. Even as AI advances, human agents remain indispensable for handling complex inquiries, offering empathy and building trust. A Salesforce report corroborates this, stating **73% of customers trust brands more when they offer human interaction in their services**. The human touch complements AI, fostering bonds and brand loyalty. All the while, enhancing problem-solving capabilities vital for sustaining customer relationships.

Finding the Right Balance

Balancing AI and live agents in customer service is, dare we say, e-ssential. While AI-driven chatbots are predicted to handle most interactions in the future, the ideal solution lies in a harmonious collaboration leveraging both AI and human strengths. A study by MIT Sloan Management Review confirms this, stating **companies integrating AI and human interaction reported a 60% increase in customer satisfaction**. This paper provides insights and best practices for businesses to achieve a desired balance, optimizing operational efficiency and customer satisfaction.

2. THE CURRENT STATE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

The Importance of Customer Service

Great service is a cornerstone of business success, profoundly influencing customer retention, brand reputation and revenue growth. Data from Microsoft shows a remarkable **96% of customers regard customer service as a key determinant in their loyalty to a brand**.

This further research underscores the link between customer service and preference, demonstrating that **loyal customers can contribute up to 10 times their initial purchase value over their lifetime**.

In contrast, poor customer service can be financially devastating, particularly in today's digital age where customer opinions can spread rapidly. Businesses that prioritize great service can enhance customer retention and brand value, gaining a distinct competitive advantage and driving revenue growth.

Common Customer Service Challenges

Navigating the complex landscape of customer service presents a myriad of challenges, each with far-reaching implications.

- **High Volume of Inquiries:** Fluctuating numbers of inquiries across diverse channels are a hallmark of modern customer service. In fact, research from Zendesk indicates **customer service inquiries via chat have surged by 85% over the last year alone**, underlining the challenge of managing increased volume.
- **Inconsistency:** Stability in responses and service quality is equally pivotal, as a **mere 1% increase in consistency can lead to a 100% increase in customer satisfaction**.
- **Long Response Times:** Responsiveness cannot be overstated either, with a CCW Market Study finding **66% of customers frequently endure long wait times**.
- **Personalization Challenges:** Customized customer support is beset by complexity, with only **13% of consumers feeling brands are delivering highly personalized experiences**.
- **Agent Burnout:** Neglecting agent well-being also bears repercussions, as it's estimated **employee turnover costs a company between 30-50% of an entry-level employee's annual salary**. And high turnover interrupts sustained CX.

3

Key Advantages of Blending AI and Human Interactions in Customer Service



1. Boost Customer Retention

To keep customers engaged, harness AI for quick resolution and human touch for empathy and personalization.



2. Elevate Brand Reputation

Ensure your brand's reputation with consistent, thoughtful responses. Combine AI's accuracy with attentive agents to make sure all customer interactions reflect your brand's values every time.



3. Drive Revenue Growth

Foster loyal customers who become brand advocates and refer new business. Providing outstanding customer experiences (CX) directly influences brand loyalty. That, in turn, impacts a brand's ability to leverage customer support in the market.

Cost of Poor Customer Service

Poor customer service comes at a price most companies don't ever want to pay. Research shows **52% of consumers have switched brands due to poor customer service experiences**. Such churn is not only detrimental to immediate revenue but also the long-term profitability of a company.

The cost of subpar service extends beyond immediate financial implications. It encompasses lasting damage to brand reputation and the potential loss of valuable customers. In this context, investing in robust, customer service strategies of AI X IA become not only beneficial, but vital, for sustaining customer loyalty and safeguarding brand equity.

Impact of Customer Service on Brand Loyalty

Exceptional customer service can foster strong brand loyalty. Customers who feel heard, valued and supported are more likely to become brand advocates, driving organic growth through referrals. A survey by HubSpot Research reveals **93% of customers are likely to make repeat purchases from companies that offer excellent customer service**.

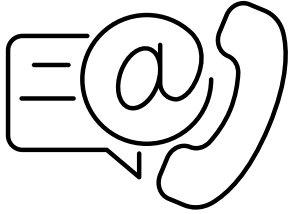
The power of positive experiences extends beyond repeat business, as delighted customers become brand advocates. In fact, a study by Nielsen finds **92% of consumers trust recommendations from friends and family above all other forms of advertising**. The quality of customer service directly influences brand loyalty and, by extension, a brand's ability to leverage the powerful force of customer advocacy in the market.

3. RISE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

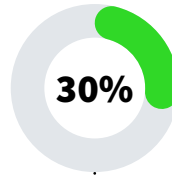
AI in Contact Centers: A Revolution

AI technologies revolutionize contact centers by automating routine tasks, enabling predictive analytics, and improving operational efficiency. AI-driven automation is a keystone of this modernization, **as it has been shown to reduce customer service costs by up to 30%**.

AI-driven analytics empower contact centers to not only meet, but exceed, these expectations through data-driven insights. In practice, this translates to streamlined operations, improved customer satisfaction and a competitive edge in the market. The emergence of AI as a central player in contact center operations heralds a new era of efficiency and customer centricity, redefining industry standards.

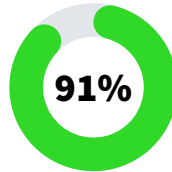


The AI Revolution in Contact Centers



Reduction in Customer Service Costs

AI technologies are changing contact centers by automating tasks, improving efficiency, and reducing costs. AI-driven analytics empower centers to exceed expectations, improve satisfaction, and stay competitive.



Consumers Demand Personalization

AI algorithms transform experiences by delivering personalized recommendations at scale. AI's capacity to create customized solutions enhances customer engagement and fuels business growth.



Improvements in Customer Acquisition

AI-powered analytics are vital to businesses, providing insights into customer behaviors, and facilitating informed decision-making and personalization. Data-driven companies outperform competitors in customer acquisition and retention.

How AI Enhances Efficiency

AI, in its various forms, significantly augments contact center efficiency, as evidenced by research and industry trends:

- **Automation:** AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants excel at accelerating routine inquiries. A Forrester report indicates **businesses can achieve a 29% reduction in customer service costs through chatbot automation**, allowing human agents to focus on complex issues where their expertise shines.
- **Self-Service:** Automated, self-service options empower customers to find answers on their own. Data from Harvard Business Review shows 81% of customers attempt to resolve issues themselves before contacting a live agent. Offering robust, self-service solutions reduces call volume, enhances customer satisfaction, and improves operational efficiency.
- **Scalability:** AI solutions are inherently scalable. As contact centers experience fluctuations in call volume, AI can seamlessly adjust to handle high call volumes—without incurring additional costs. In fact, according to Deloitte, **AI-driven scaling can reduce customer service costs by 20-40%**.

AI's automation, self-service capabilities and scalability are pivotal in two ways:

1. Optimizing contact center efficiency.
2. Providing cost-effective solutions that align with the evolving demands of customers and businesses alike.

Personalization at Scale

AI algorithms are reshaping customer experience by providing personalized recommendations at scale. Research shows **91% of consumers prefer brands that offer relevant suggestions**, highlighting the power of artificial intelligence in enhancing customer engagement and loyalty. Companies like Netflix have seen significant growth and retention due to their AI-driven recommendation systems. Personalization is not restricted to product suggestions. Epsilon reports **80% of consumers are more likely to purchase when offered personalized experiences**. AI's ability to deliver tailored solutions boosts customer experience, engagement and business growth.

Predictive Analytics and Data-Driven Insights

AI-powered analytics are a game-changer for businesses, providing crucial insights into customer behavior and facilitating informed decision-making. Research shows **data-driven organizations significantly outperform in customer acquisition and retention**.

AI's predictive capabilities, as noted by Salesforce, enable companies to anticipate customer needs, **a factor expected by 64% of consumers.** Using AI analytics enables businesses to tailor their offerings and marketing efforts to meet customer expectations, proving vital in today's customer-centric, data-driven landscape.

4. THE HUMAN ELEMENT: WHY IT'S IRREPLACEABLE

The Empathy Factor

The power of human agents lies in their ability to connect with customers and provide authentic support. The CCW Market Study: "CX Trends, Challenges and Opportunities" finds **95% of customers still value access to live agents.** This empathy-driven human touch is key to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Research indicates **customers' perceived treatment influences 70% of buying experiences.** Human agents are unmatched in creating emotional bonds that transcend transactions. Such relationships cultivate not only satisfied customers but also dedicated advocates, which fuel organic growth through referrals.

Complex Customer Inquiries

Complex customer inquiries sometimes require human analytic skills, critical thinking and creativity, which AI cannot today fully replicate. A survey by Deloitte reveals **48% of customer service inquiries demand such intricate problem-solving that they can't be**

sufficiently handled by automation or self-service. In instances where cognitive abilities are crucial, AI lacks the capacity. Human agents excel at adapting, analyzing and providing desired outcomes.

Brand Advocacy and Trust

Human agents' ability to build rapport with customers fosters stronger brand advocacy and loyalty. Edelman's Trust Barometer reveals a **58% decrease in consumer trust in businesses over the past year,** highlighting the importance of human interaction as a trust-building tool. Salesforce reports **73% of customers trust brands more when they can interact with a human agent.** This trust, bolstered by the assurance of speaking to a knowledgeable person, is key to building enduring customer relationships and driving brand advocacy. This is something AI cannot replicate.

The Emotional Connection

Human agents' ability to navigate sensitive and emotionally intense exchanges with empathy is crucial in sectors like healthcare, finance and crisis intervention. Deloitte's study underlines the **importance of human interaction in these industries, where emotional complexities are common.** AI systems struggle to replicate the innate human qualities of compassion. Human agents stand out in their ability to establish genuine connections during sensitive or volatile situations, leading to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Their capacity to offer emotional support remains an irreplaceable quality.

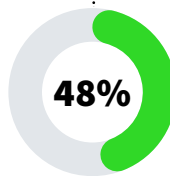


The Human Element: Why It's Irreplaceable



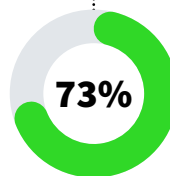
Consumers value access to live agents.

These agents forge emotional connections, creating advocates and driving organic growth.



Certain customer inquiries require intricate problem-solving.

Human agents excel in adapting, analyzing, and providing desired outcomes.



Consumers trust brands more when they can interact with a live agent.

Human contact builds enduring relationships and drives brand advocacy.

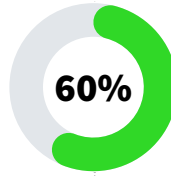


The Right Balance: AI and Human Collaboration



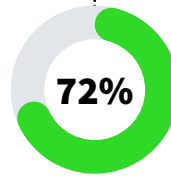
Added Value

Contact centers that use a hybrid model deliver 3.7 times more value than relying solely on AI or humans. Balancing AI and live agents optimizes efficiency and maintains the human touch, aligning with customer preferences.



Improved Agent Productivity

AI provides real-time data, historical context, and solutions, improving agent productivity by up to 60%. Real-time decision support enhances issue resolution and boosts customer satisfaction.



Improved Agent Satisfaction

AI reduces agent work, alleviating burnout. More than 70% of customer service reps report that AI helps lessen their workloads. Enhanced satisfaction leads to improved service quality.

5. BLENDING AI WITH INTELLIGENT AGENTS

The Hybrid Model

Contact centers that use a hybrid model, combining AI and intelligent agents, are the most effective. Deloitte reports **businesses using this approach achieve 3.7 times more value than those relying solely on AI or humans.** This dual approach optimizes operational efficiency while preserving the human touch, aligning with customer preferences. A balance between AI and human interaction is crucial for excellent customer service, improved efficiency and fostering enduring customer relationships.

The Evolution of Customer Interactions

Contact centers are transforming into omnichannel hubs thanks to AI's ability to ensure consistency and efficiency across various communication channels. Microsoft's study reveals **90% of customers expect consistent experiences across all contact channels.** Companies using AI in their service operations have seen a significant increase in customer-retention rates. The rise of omnichannel interactions underscores the importance of balancing AI and human interaction in customer service, enhancing efficiency and customer satisfaction.

Enhancing Agent Performance

The combination of AI tools and human service reps significantly enhances agent performance. According to McKinsey & Company, **AI-enhanced support can reduce call times by 10-20% and increase efficiency by 50%.** This efficiency results in improved customer service. Gartner predicts by the end of 2023, **30% of customer service interactions will be influenced by real-time analytics provided to agents.** The optimal blend of AI and human interaction is key to boosting agent performance, which ultimately benefits contact centers and customers.

Real-time Decision Support

AI assists agents by providing relevant data, historical information and possible solutions in real time, enhancing their problem-solving abilities. Research shows **AI tools can improve agent productivity by up to 60%.** This productivity boost is attributed to AI's ability to deliver pertinent data, historical context and potential solutions to agents on the spot. AI's real-time decision support enhances agent analytical abilities, leading to more efficient issue resolution and higher customer satisfaction.

Improving Employee Satisfaction

AI technologies significantly reduce agent workload by handling routine tasks. This, in turn, increases job satisfaction and reduces burnout. A Harvard Business Review survey reveals **72% of customer service reps reported that AI helped lessen their workload.** This reduction can mitigate industry-wide concerns like agent turnover and improve overall work experience. AI's role in customer service enhances morale and customer service quality.

6. CUSTOMER-CENTRIC AI SOLUTIONS

Intelligent Virtual Assistants

Intelligent virtual assistants (IVAs) offer personalized, self-service options, helping customers find information to solve problems. Powered by artificial intelligence, IVAs can customize answers. This not only enhances the customer experience but also frees up live agents to focus on more complex inquiries, optimizing overall service quality.

Chatbots and Automated Self-Service

Chatbots handle routine inquiries, triage support requests, and provide instant responses, which improves efficiency. The right balance between chatbots and human interaction enhances resource allocation, ensuring complex issues receive the human expertise they require while ordinary tasks are streamlined through automation.

Speech Analytics

AI-driven speech analytics analyze customer-agent conversations to identify sentiment, issues and areas for improvement. These analytics dissect customer-agent conversations, identifying sentiment, pinpointing issues, and highlighting areas for improvement. This data-driven approach improves the balance between AI and human interaction, ensuring both resources are harnessed to deliver outstanding service.

Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis tools gauge customer emotions to help agents tailor their responses and caring support. This enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty, underscoring the importance of a deliberate approach that marries AI-driven insights with IA empathy for outstanding experiences.

Knowledge Management Systems

AI-powered knowledge bases provide agents with easy access to up-to-date information, ensuring accurate and consistent responses. This alignment between AI-driven knowledge and intelligent agents emphasizes the necessity to maximize customer-service quality through the harmonious collaboration of technology and human interaction.

7. CASE STUDIES

Case Study: The Power of Human Empathy in Calming Customer Storms

- **The Problem:** In December 2022, a national airline faced a catastrophic operational failure due to extreme weather and software issues. Millions of holiday travelers were stranded. With emotions running high, the airline confronted an overwhelming backlog of 250,000+ customer support tickets, each representing a distressed traveler.
- **The Solution:** Recognizing customers' emotions were in turmoil, Working Solutions deployed more than 1,000 service experts in just three days. These agents underwent intensive training not only to resolve issues but also to provide the emotional support urgently needed. In this high-pressure environment, the human touch made all the difference. Agents exceeded expectations, resolving an average of 15 cases every hour with an impressive accuracy rate of over 95%. Agents didn't just close cases. They provided comfort and understanding in times of distress.
- **The Impact:** By focusing on the emotional needs of customers, Working Solutions agents didn't just clear the backlog. They also calmed distraught travelers. Human empathy in customer service is indispensable, especially in moments of crisis. In times where technology alone cannot provide the comforting reassurance that only a human agent can deliver.

Case Study: The Undeniable Need for Human Interaction in Customer Service

- **The Problem:** Intuit, a client of Working Solutions, had set out to reduce human-handled customer interactions by 40% for the 2022 tax season by improving their chatbot capabilities. The company predicted that upgrades to chatbot capabilities, intended to provide faster and more efficient support, would drive more traffic to this channel. After implementing chatbot improvements, Intuit faced an unforeseen challenge. Customer behavior did not align with their predictions. Many customers were not comfortable with chat-based interactions. In some cases, chat support fell short of meeting their needs. It became evident human intervention was crucial.
- **The Solution:** Working Solutions adapted to the situation, scaling up to handle 38% of the additional call volume generated by Intuit customers seeking human interaction. Our agents' ability to provide empathetic, personalized support bridged the gap between technology and customer satisfaction.
- **The Impact:** This case study highlights a critical lesson: Even in a digital age, there are situations where customers overwhelmingly prefer talking with a live agent. Intuit's experience demonstrates the importance of balancing technology with human touch to meet customer expectations and ensure exceptional service.

8. TRENDS AND PREDICTIONS

Future of Contact Centers

Contact centers will continue to evolve, with AI playing an increasingly central role in delivering exceptional customer experiences. Deloitte predicts by 2025, **AI-driven contact centers will handle 95% of customer interactions**, marking a significant shift in the industry. While AI's role is set to grow, it's important to remember the need for human interaction remains pivotal for complex inquiries, emotional support and building lasting customer relationships. The future lies in striking the right balance.

Growing Role of AI

AI's increasing sophistication is set to revolutionize customer service. McKinsey reports by 2030, **AI could contribute up to \$13 trillion to the global economy**, largely through enhanced productivity and personalization in customer interactions. This growth in these capabilities will empower human agents by offloading routine tasks, allowing them to focus on complex inquiries, empathy and creativity. And ultimately, delivering outstanding customer experiences. The synergy between AI and human expertise is poised to redefine service excellence.

Human-AI Synergy as a Competitive Advantage

The harmony between AI and human interaction is a strategic differentiator. Harvard Business Review highlights **companies leveraging AI to augment human capabilities experience a 60% increase in customer satisfaction, outpacing competitors**. This synergy reshapes the landscape of customer service, with businesses achieving higher levels of customer satisfaction, loyalty and market competitiveness by capitalizing on the strengths of AI and human expertise.

9. BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTING AI AND HUMAN COLLABORATION

Identifying Customer Inquiries Suitable for AI

Balancing artificial intelligence and human interaction in customer service requires careful analysis of customer needs. By understanding the complexity of these inquiries, businesses can determine which are suited for AI automation and which require involvement of live agents. Such judicious resource allocation optimizes AI benefits while preserving essential human touchpoints.

Training and Skill Development

Investing in comprehensive training programs is crucial for agents to effectively integrate with AI technologies. Agent education should cover technical proficiency in AI tools and soft-skills development.

A holistic skillset enhances agents' adaptability, enables effective collaboration with AI, and addresses diverse customer needs. Combined, all these things promote great service.

Measuring Success

Establishing robust key performance indicators (KPIs) is essential for effective AI implementation in customer service. These indicators provide insights into AI's impact on customer satisfaction, agent performance and operational efficiency. This data-driven approach quantifies AI effectiveness, identifies improvement areas, and refines AI-human collaboration. Together, they raise overall service quality.

Continuous Improvement

Exceptional customer service requires continuous improvement post-AI implementation. This involves regular assessment, refinement, adaptation of AI algorithms, and agent training to stay aligned with evolving customer needs and technology. A dynamic approach to customer service processes, focused on AI-human synergy, reinforces a competitive edge in delivering superior customer experiences.

10. CONCLUSION

The Ongoing Evolution of Contact Centers

Contact centers are ever evolving to meet modern consumer expectations, with a focus on integrating AI and human collaboration. As technology advances, customer service shifts toward increased efficiency, more personalization and prompt solutions. Organizations are counting on AI to simplify tasks and offer data-driven insights.

Complex inquiries, however, still require the caring touch of live agents. Integrating the promise of artificial intelligence with proven human expertise is a must for exceptional customer service. To that end, AI strengths should be leveraged to enhance human capabilities. This synergy ensures agility and adaptability in meeting dynamic consumer demands.

The Imperative of Human Interaction

As AI evolves, human interaction remains critical for superior service, providing empathy, problem-solving and trust-building. While artificial intelligence automates, the human touch differentiates customer experiences. Both play a role. Live agents' ability to connect emotionally, understand complex issues, and adapt to unique needs nurture customer relationships. In short, intelligence—both in technology and agents—is a must for brand success.

The Path Forward

The future of contact centers is marked by a harmonious blend of AI and human agents, driving not just efficiency but exceptional experiences. This dynamic balance enhances customer centricity, with centers evolving from being valued problem-solvers to brand advocates that build the business.

By leveraging AI's capabilities alongside human creativity, they lead in the ever-changing customer service field. This commitment to delivering the best customer experiences positions future-ready contact centers as models of service excellence in the customer-focused era.

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Appendix



Infographic: Five Myths about GigCX: Dive into insights about the growing GigCX landscape.



Video: Optimize CX Success – AI + IA (Intelligent Agents): Industry leaders share insights on how they are effectively harnessing the power of AI and live agents to enhance performance and drive business growth.



2023 Editorial Calendar

APRIL

Customer Contact Industry Review

MAY

Generative AI & Chatbots For Customer Contact

JUNE

CX Trends, Challenges & Opportunities

AUGUST

CCW Nashville Presents: Modernizing Service Experiences With AI & Digital

SEPTEMBER

Contact Center of 2030

NOVEMBER

Future of the Contact Center

FEBRUARY

Strategic Planning For CX Operations

February 9-11, 2023

APRIL

State Of Contact Center Technology

April 6-8, 2023

MAY

New Standards For Customer Contact Performance

May 25-27, 2023

JULY

Modernizing Service Experiences With AI & Digital

July 20-22, 2023

SEPTEMBER

Customer Experience Trends, Challenges And Innovations

September 14-16, 2023

OCTOBER

Business Continuity 2.0

October 26-28, 2023

DECEMBER

Future Of The Contact Center: A Forecast

December 14-16, 2023

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