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CUSTOMER CONTACT INDUSTRY REVIEW

JUNE 2021 MARKET STUDY

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CUSTOMER CONTACT INDUSTRY REVIEW

By the summer of 2020, the customer contact community had wholly adapted to a world dictated by the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing. Most employees were working remotely. Many customer interactions were taking place in digital media. Concepts like "business continuity" and "operational agility" were transforming from hollow buzzwords into corporate imperatives.

As the summer of 2021 commences, pandemic-fueled concerns and restrictions are significantly easing. Business leaders are subsequently facing two key questions:

1 How did the past year *permanently* change the way contact centers function?

2 How will the goals of the contact center evolve moving forward?

As they navigate these questions, customer contact leaders will debate numerous topics. They will redefine standards for effective customer and employee experiences. They will reconsider how they define—and cultivate—essential agent skills in the era of automation and digital engagement. They will assess the long-term viability of at-home and hybrid work models. They will analyze and adapt to permanent changes in customer behavior. They will reorchestrate their journeys to better capitalize on digital platforms.

CCW Digital's Customer Contact Industry Review offers a research-driven look at these deliberations. By exploring topics related to operational strategy, employee empowerment, digital transformation, and customer experience design, it simultaneously offers a window into the current state of the customer contact function and a preview of future transformation.

METHODOLOGY & DEMOGRAPHICS

To acquire data for the Customer Contact Industry Review, CCW Digital conducted a comprehensive survey in May and June 2021. Targeted at leaders responsible for contact center, customer service, customer experience, marketing, operations, and/or information technology, the survey identified the biggest priorities and challenges in the world of customer contact.

Example respondent job titles included associate vice president of client operations, head of customer support, customer care manager, head of customer change, chief operating officer, chief financial officer, chief executive officer, vice president of care, director of customer service, director of contact center, head of global support operations, senior vice president, and IT manager.

Respondent companies spanned numerous industries and all company size ranges.

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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   Companies increasingly recognize the contact center as a "value center." Nearly 68% of companies view their customer contact team as more valuable now than it was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2   65% of companies believe the customer experience has become more important since COVID-19, and 63% say the same of the employee experience.

3   Employee well-being is the #1 focus for today's contact center leaders, with 70% identifying it as a challenge that "keeps them up at night."

4   Other top leadership priorities include addressing changing customer behaviors and demands, rethinking the work environment, and reducing customer effort.

5   22% of companies say remote employees are more productive than on-site agents; 7% say the opposite. Most companies, therefore, do not see a significant productivity difference between the two models.

6   As far as today's companies are concerned, empathy is the most important quality for contact center agents.

7   Other essential qualities include friendliness, fluency in all channels, comfort handling different types of interactions, and a flair for dealing with complex products and processes.

8   Improving the knowledge base is the most popular strategy for empowering agents.

9   Other top agent empowerment focuses include improving training and coaching, harnessing the power of AI, and providing a 360-degree customer view.

10   Companies identify accuracy and relevance of information as the #1 sign of a great customer experience.

11   Additional priorities include speed, convenience, providing self-service options, and honoring channel preference.

12   Key digital experience priorities include training staff for interactions in new channels, optimizing AI and self-service opportunities, and improving integrations between touch points.

CUSTOMER CONTACT HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT

For years, business leaders have been discussing the importance of "competing on the customer experience." The competition has never been more intense.

A whopping 65% of companies currently place more importance on the customer experience than they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 1% believe the customer experience has become less important.

What caused companies to become more passionate about customer centricity?

First and foremost, they know *customers* are placing a greater emphasis on the experiences they have with brands.

Due to social distancing and product shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers began to interact with new brands — in new ways. They also got to witness how different companies handled pandemic-related support issues, such as high call volume, digital engagement, financial challenges, and service cancellations.

With a front row seat to different experiences, consumers gained a better ability to distinguish those who *serve* from those who merely *sell*. As a result, 60% now say the customer experience impacts their purchasing decisions more than it ever has.

To downplay the customer experience, therefore, would be to squander an opportunity to attract and retain business.

COVID-19, moreover, reminded companies not to take business for granted. Customer bases and revenue streams can decline or even disappear on a moment's notice. Brands that cultivate organic loyalty through great experiences, however, are at least creating a line of defense against *preventable* customer churn.

As the customer experience becomes a bigger focus, the contact center is unsurprisingly gaining prominence within most organizations. **Nearly 68% of companies view their contact center/customer contact team as more valuable now than they did prior to the COVID-19.**

Emphasis on agent satisfaction is also on the rise. **Almost 63% of companies say they presently value the employee experience more than they did prior to last year.**

The growing focus on employee experience is predictable, given that customer contact leaders have long trumpeted the correlation between agent and customer satisfaction. Improving the agent experience is, essentially, a prerequisite for elevating the customer experience.

The employee experience statistic also speaks to the extent to which work environments transformed amid the COVID-19 pandemic. With social distancing spurring a sweeping, immediate transition to remote work, many companies had to rethink the way they hired, trained, and engaged their employees.

If there is a surprise in the research, therefore, it is the fact that 37% of companies *did not* increase their emphasis on the employee experience. There are, however, two potential explanations for the statistic:

1 Because employee engagement was already such a big priority, there was little room for a meaningful "increase" amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 Companies recognize that they have less control over the *day-to-day experience* facing at-home agents. And so even though these businesses may be spending more time on areas like virtual training and engagement, they do not group these activities under the "employee experience" banner the same way they would office culture or workplace technology.

Does your organization value customer and employee experiences more or less than it did prior to this year?

Less Important   No Change   More Important

Customer Experience

1.23%
33.33%
65.43%

Employee Experience

4.94%
32.10%
62.96%
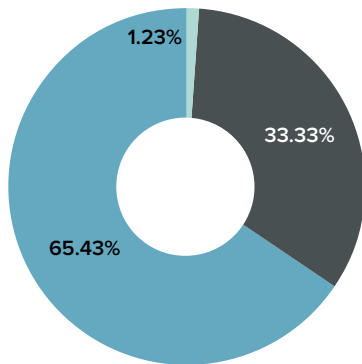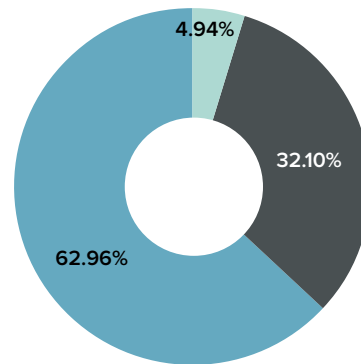
How has your organization's support for the contact center/customer contact function changed over the past year? (Support as defined by budget, decision-making power, resources, etc)
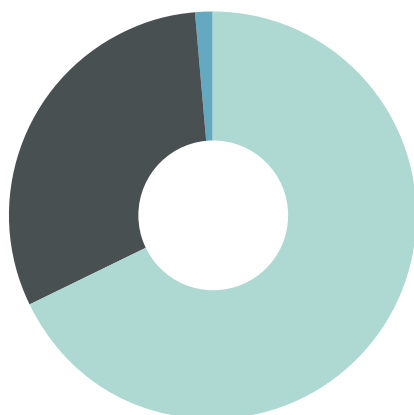
67.90% Contact center is seen as more valuable

30.86% No change

1.23% Contact center is seen as less valuable

WHAT KEEPS CUSTOMER CONTACT LEADERS UP AT NIGHT?

The contact center has never played a more prominent role within businesses, which means the stakes for customer contact leaders have never been higher.

Given these stakes, successful contact center leaders face pressure to expertly prioritize their attention and initiatives. Which strategies are most worth leveraging? Which investments are most worth pursuing? Which solutions are most worth implementing?

As leaders consider their biggest priorities, an overwhelming majority are focusing on employee well-being and engagement.

More than 70% identify employee well-being as a top priority, making it the #1 focus for today's customer contact leaders.

An enduring focus for leaders, employee engagement has become a particular challenge in the era of remote work. With less day-to-day (let alone face-to-face) exposure to their employees, it is harder to identify potential engagement and well-being challenges. Eighteen months of health fears, financial challenges, and social isolation issues increased the likelihood of sentiment issues – and thus exacerbated the situation.

Distancing measures may be easing as of June 2021, but society's "return to normalcy" will only introduce new employee engagement challenges. As the option to return to the contact center emerges, leaders will have to make decisions about the optimal work arrangement moving forward. Their choice will have ramifications for both employee engagement *and* mentality.

Those supporting "hybrid" or employee-choice models, for instance, will have to ensure those still working remotely do not feel disconnected from their teammates. Those asking employees to regularly come into the office, meanwhile, will have to address the potential sentiment impact on those who have grown comfortable working from home and avoiding a daily commute.

Navigating the new normal and selecting the best possible work environment, in fact, represents a pressing leadership concern in its own right. **Forty-eight percent (48%) of leaders identify the transforming work environment as an issue "keeping them up at night."**

Other top leadership concerns include **addressing changing customer behaviors and demands (49%)**, **reducing customer effort (43%)**, **better collecting and using customer data (41%)**, and **training agents in the new normal (41%).**

Given the surging emphasis on customer experience, it comes as no surprise that leaders are working to understand and adapt to changing customer preferences. A more robust approach to customer data will help leaders navigate these changes; once they figure out what customers really want in today's marketplace, leaders can then focus on delivering those experiences in the most seamless, frictionless manner possible.

Insofar as leaders have long sought improvements to their agent development strategies, training predictably remains top-of-mind in today's customer contact landscape. After all, leaders have to prepare agents – who are working in unprecedented environments – to address new customer needs in new channels.

Keeping You Up At Night: Which of the following issues are top of mind for you and/or your organization?

Contact center work environment (remote vs. on-site vs. hybrid, etc)
48.15%

Employee well-being and engagement
70.37%

Best opportunities for AI in the contact center
35.80%

How customer behaviors and demands are changing in the post-pandemic world
49.38%

Accounting for growing digital / mobile engagement
24.69%

New standards/expectations for contact center agents
30.86%

New standards/expectations for contact center leaders
20.99%

"Competing on the customer experience" (matching the CX standard of leaders from even outside your industry)
35.80%

Ongoing fusion of customer service / sales /marketing
28.40%

Better collecting - and better using - customer data (such as intent, sentiment, etc)
40.74%

Reducing customer effort (repetitive questions, fragmented journeys, etc)
43.21%

Reducing agent effort (convoluted processes, slow systems, etc)
38.27%

Proving the "value" of contact center investments
20.99%

Rethinking contact center systems (such as migrating to the cloud)
25.93%

Training teams in the new normal (new agent expectations, new work environments, etc)
40.74%

The service experience "beyond" the contact center (field service, in-person support, etc)
20.99%

Relationships with outsourcing firms and other partners
22.22%

Dealing with the expected "surge" in consumer spending (and thus a correlated rise in support)
14.81%

Offering cutting-edge experiences (augmented reality, real-time delivery tracking, etc)
27.16%

Cost/budget issues
28.40%

Better aligning with other departments (strategically)
23.46%

Better aligning contact center/enterprise systems and tools
20.99%

Privacy/data/security concerns
25.93%

Regulatory/compliance issues
19.75%

Driving revenue/sales
22.22%

REMOTE VS. ON-SITE WORK: DOES IT MATTER?

In identifying employee engagement as their #1 priority and the changing contact center environment as their #3 focus, leaders have made one thing abundantly clear. They are carefully assessing the impact of remote work.

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, customer contact leaders grew immensely bullish about the concept. Upon seeing that employees were able to get their work done *and* virtually engage with their peers, they began making bold declarations about the practice's future within their operations. In a Summer 2020 CCW survey, 73% said that they planned to *permanently* allow at least some employees to work from home.

This optimism, however, came with an obvious caveat. It was easy to see the upside to remote work during a global health pandemic, when returning to the office was a literal impossibility. But would the enthusiasm endure once social distancing measures eased?

There are numerous facets to the discussion, as on-site and remote work programs each offer unique advantages and disadvantages. The core of the conversation, however, involves the idea of productivity.

When remote work was the only option, companies potentially had to accept a relaxed standard for employee performance. Now that companies have more freedom to select the optimal working conditions, they no longer need to make any sacrifices or compromises. They have every right to select the plan that will yield the greatest possible productivity.

Admittedly, companies *may* still choose to consider other factors when making their decision. Demanding a full return to the office may alienate some workers who have grown comfortable working from home. Alternatively, limiting access to the office may alienate those who are looking to get back into society and rekindle their social contact.

Productivity will surely be a big part of the equation, however, and its impact will likely grow over time. Indeed, the long-term viability of remote work hinges on a key question: are remote workers as productive as those in the physical contact center?
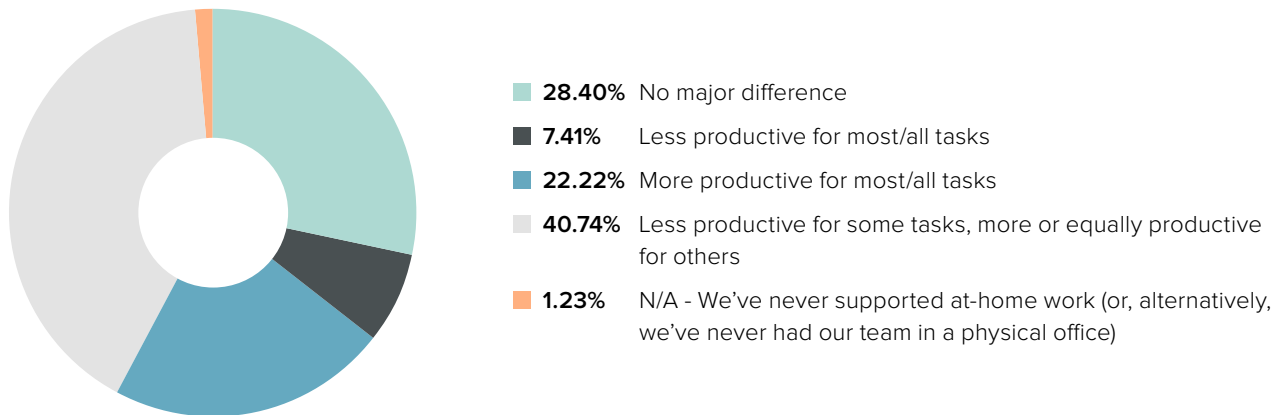
From what the majority of companies have observed, the differences are not significant. **Twenty-eight percent (28%) report no productivity differences whatsoever**, while **41% say at-home agents are less productive for** *some tasks* **but more or equally productive for others.**
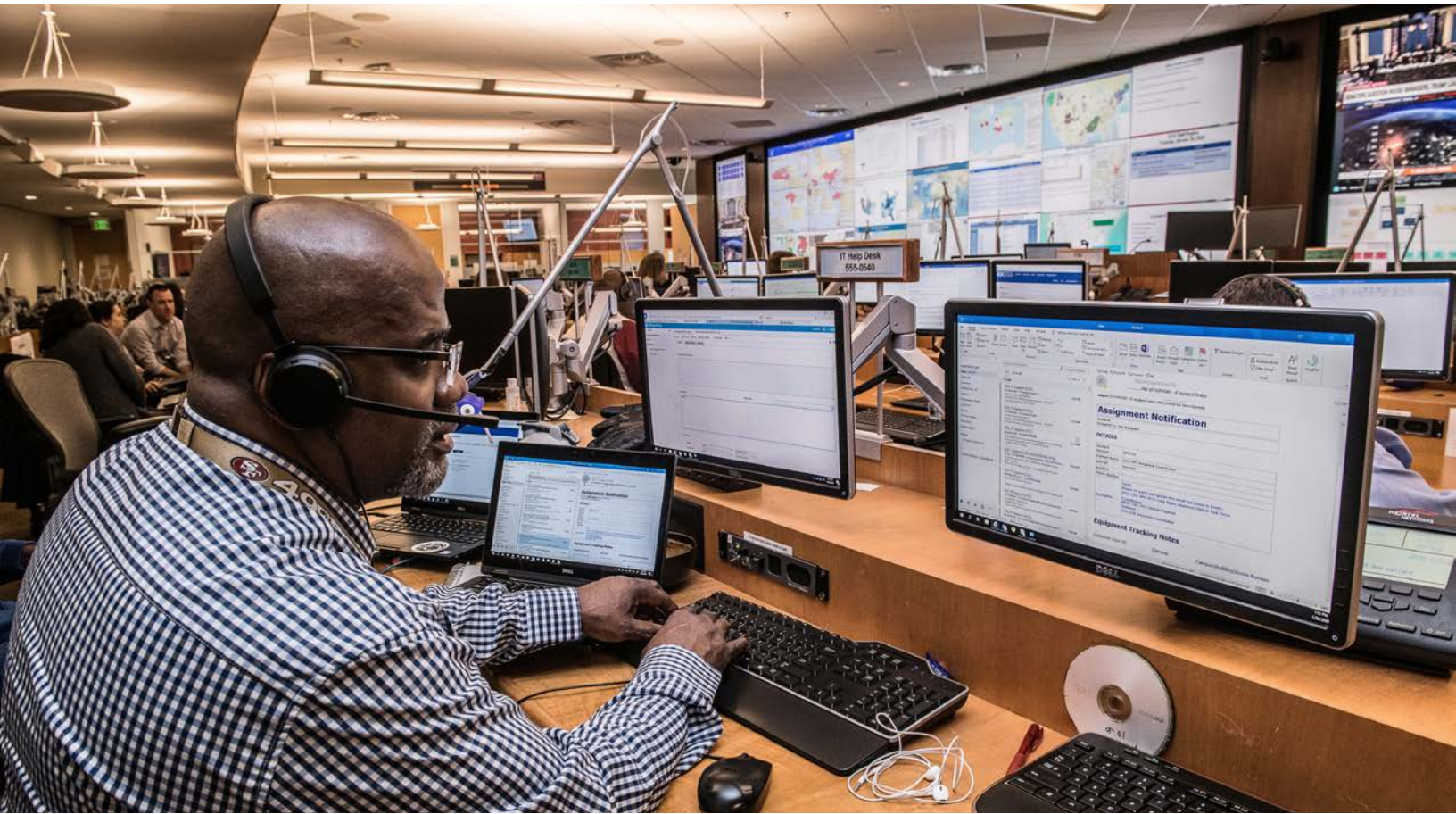
Of the companies that have seen dramatic differences, the majority are bullish on the value of remote work. **Twenty-two percent (22%) of companies say remote employees are more productive for most or all tasks; only 7% feel their at-home agents are largely less productive.**

When push comes to shove and pandemic concerns completely settle, it is certainly possible that many companies will still mandate a return to the office. It is certainly possible that some of the 73% who said remote work would be a fixture of their contact center operations go back on their word. Tradition, after all, can be a tough thing to break.

Based on observational data, however, there is little reason to believe remote work will wholly vanish from the limelight. Clearly, remote workers are proving capable of meeting serious productivity standards — not just those relaxed for the social distancing era.

Compared to when they're in the office/contact center, how productive are employees when working remotely?

28.40% No major difference

7.41% Less productive for most/all tasks

22.22% More productive for most/all tasks

40.74% Less productive for some tasks, more or equally productive for others

1.23% N/A - We've never supported at-home work (or, alternatively, we've never had our team in a physical office)

WHO IS THE CONTACT CENTER AGENT OF THE FUTURE?

Regardless of where they work, contact center agents will continue to serve as customer-facing ambassadors for brands. They will continue to help brands walk their customer-centric talk.

Given their vital role, agents will require the ability to *meet the evolving needs of today's customers* and *thrive in today's evolving customer contact environments.*

There may not be a "superagent" who can expertly help every conceivable company delight every conceivable customer, but there are definitely qualities that signal an agent's likelihood of success.

As far as today's companies are concerned, empathy is the most important quality for contact center agents. **Sixty-eight percent (68%) believe empathy, defined as the ability to understand customers' intentions and sentiments, is an essential quality for agents moving forward.**

Always a coveted quality, empathy became particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dealing with unprecedented circumstances and unconventional support needs, customers required agents who could truly understand – and relate to – their issues on a human level.

Empathy, more broadly, aligns with the notion that "AI will increasingly handle simple tasks, shifting agents to more complex ones." Insofar as contact center agents will primarily focus on unique customer issues, their ability to see through customers' eyes and adapt accordingly will be paramount.

Contrary to common misconception, the call for *empathy* is not necessarily a call for agents to consistently engage in lengthy, warm-hearted conversations. Many customers specifically want quick and simple resolutions; in those cases, the empathetic behavior would be to understand their urgency, respect their time, and provide fast support.

Granted, warm conversational ability is still important. **Sixty-three percent (63%) of companies view friendliness as an essential**, making it the second-most coveted agent quality.

Other high-ranking qualities include **comfort communicating in all channels (57%)**, **comfort handling different types of interactions (52%)**, and **comfort with more complex products and processes (52%)**.

Each quality speaks to the customer contact community's belief in a digitally driven, AI-heavy experience landscape.

Whereas digital channels have historically functioned as low-touch options for simple issues, they are increasingly becoming customers' *default preference.* Some customers will expect to handle most or all issues in digital environments, which means agents will have to be capable of engaging in meaningful conversations – and delivering

high-value support – in these new media. Those uncomfortable with digital lingo or behavior will struggle in this landscape.

Phone skills will nonetheless remain crucial, as many customers will continue pursuing voice interactions.

Regardless of channel, agents will increasingly focus on complex interactions moving forward. In many cases, they will be supporting customers who *first* attempted to solve their issues in low-touch or self-service environments.

Since customers have already gone through different touch points *and* are expecting higher-caliber agents, hold times and transfers will become particularly unacceptable. The ability to handle a full gamut of complex issues will help agents function as a "one stop shop" resource for customers and eliminate these experiential "pain points."

Moving forward, which qualities are essential for customer contact employees/ agents to possess?

Comfort interacting in all channels
56.79%

Friendliness / Ability to delight and "connect" with customers
62.96%

Empathy / Ability to understand customer intentions and sentiments
67.90%

Ability to de-escalate customer anger without supervisor guidance
48.15%

Ability to handle different types of interactions (billing questions, tech support, sales, etc) without guidance
51.85%

Ability to handle unpredictable/unusual customer questions without guidance
44.44%

Comfort working remotely, at least occasionally
40.74%

Comfort coming into the physical contact center, at least occasionally
23.46%

Flair for non-interaction tasks, such as analyzing data, reviewing customer feedback or "tuning" chatbots
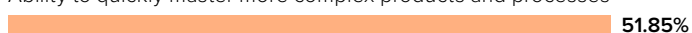**29.63%**

Proven experience/expertise with your specific industry or product category
24.69%

Flair for collaborating with peers (in-person and/or via remote tech)
24.69%

Ability to quickly master more complex products and processes
51.85%

EMPOWERING AGENTS TO EMPOWER CUSTOMERS

Some agents are innately spectacular, but none can operate entirely independently. All require support from the business in order to interpret information, navigate processes, and connect with customers.

Successful companies embrace this responsibility and *empower* their agents to perform.

There are numerous ways to strengthen agent performance, but for today's companies, none is more vital than improving and streamlining the knowledge base. **Fifty-two percent (52%) of companies identify knowledge base optimization as a priority for their empowerment strategies.**

Whether by slowing agents down or arming them with incorrect or outdated information, ineffective knowledge management solutions have always undermined contact center performance. Their impact has become significantly greater, however, as agents shift to more complex work. As they move away from repetitive questions they can answer by heart and into unpredictable ones, they will rely on the knowledge base to provide support. If the knowledge search process is not simple — and, ideally, guided by artificial intelligence — the agent will be destined to provide slower and potentially less accurate support.

Other key agent empowerment focuses include **improving group training (48%)**, **improving one-on-one coaching (40%)**, **using AI for simple issues so that agents can focus on complex work (39%)**, and **providing agents with a 360-degree customer view (37%)**.

Training and coaching have consistently ranked as top contact center priorities, but few companies had mastered them even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. By adding remote work to the equation, especially at a time when agents will be handling a greater diversity of issues, the pandemic only heightened the urgency of improving agent development.
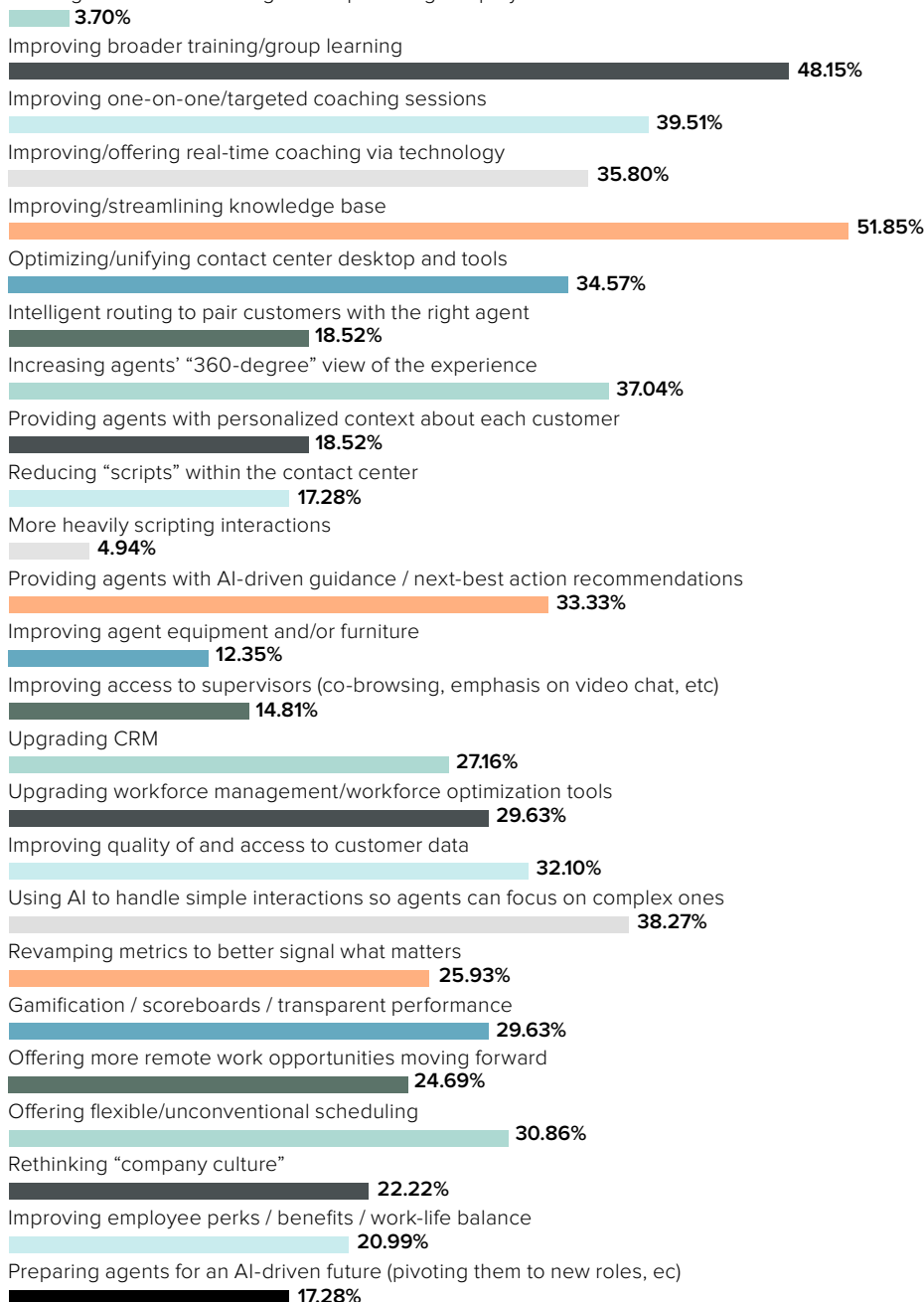
Agent-centric companies will pursue group training activities that are more robust, more efficient, *and* accommodating of the fact that agents may be in different environments. They will simultaneously look to offer more actionable and personalized coaching even though leaders will have less direct face time with team members.

The goal of "using AI for simple issues so agents can focus on complex ones" does not simply speak to customers' demand for convenient self-service options. It also has ramifications for agent productivity and happiness. The more time agents can devote to *meaningful work,* the more effective and engaged they will be.

With customers seeking more empathetic, more personalized care across all touch points, agents will be more reliant than ever on 360-degree customer views. By providing such a window into the experience, companies empower agents to meet the needs of today's omnichannel customers. They also free agents of the burden of looking across multiple screens just to answer questions, leading to satisfaction and retention gains.

Which of the following will you prioritize in your effort to "empower" employees/agents?

Nothing - We're not focusing on "empowering" employees
3.70%

Improving broader training/group learning
48.15%

Improving one-on-one/targeted coaching sessions
39.51%

Improving/offering real-time coaching via technology
35.80%

Improving/streamlining knowledge base
51.85%

Optimizing/unifying contact center desktop and tools
34.57%

Intelligent routing to pair customers with the right agent
18.52%

Increasing agents' "360-degree" view of the experience
37.04%

Providing agents with personalized context about each customer
18.52%

Reducing "scripts" within the contact center
17.28%

More heavily scripting interactions
4.94%

Providing agents with AI-driven guidance / next-best action recommendations
33.33%

Improving agent equipment and/or furniture
12.35%

Improving access to supervisors (co-browsing, emphasis on video chat, etc)
14.81%

Upgrading CRM
27.16%

Upgrading workforce management/workforce optimization tools
29.63%

Improving quality of and access to customer data
32.10%

Using AI to handle simple interactions so agents can focus on complex ones
38.27%

Revamping metrics to better signal what matters
25.93%

Gamification / scoreboards / transparent performance
29.63%

Offering more remote work opportunities moving forward
24.69%

Offering flexible/unconventional scheduling
30.86%

Rethinking "company culture"
22.22%

Improving employee perks / benefits / work-life balance
20.99%

Preparing agents for an AI-driven future (pivoting them to new roles, ec)
17.28%

WHAT DOES A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC EXPERIENCE ENTAIL?

At the end of the day, the contact center operation is a vehicle for successfully connecting with customers. Every strategic decision, whether related to people, process, or technology, ultimately represents an effort to build a better experience.

An inquiry into the customer contact industry, therefore, requires an effort to define customer centricity. What type of experience will prove most resonant with customers in 2021 and beyond?

Above all, a great customer experience involves the sharing of accurate and relevant information. **Nearly 72% of companies identify accuracy and relevance as crucial customer experience qualities**, making it the #1 quality.

When it comes to this finding, the only surprise is that some companies *did not* identify accuracy and relevance as priorities. It is hard to imagine these organizations are *downplaying* the importance of sharing proper information with customers; more likely, they believe it is too fundamental to celebrate as the hallmark of a great experience.

After all, information quality is the absolute foundation of a great experience. Although some customers surely appreciate highly conversational or lightning-fast service in their preferred channels, all ultimately want to receive the most accurate and/or most valuable outcome.

Companies do, of course, acknowledge that convenience matters. **Over 70% believe that speed is essential to the success of a customer experience**, and **67% say the same of effortlessness.**

Not simply respectful of the idea that "time is money," an emphasis on convenience addresses some of the most notorious customer contact pain points. CCW Digital research has repeatedly confirmed issues like long wait times and multiple transfers as top sources of customer frustration. Companies that can free customers of these issues, naturally, stand to win satisfaction and loyalty.

Offering self-service for simple support issues (58%) and **allowing customers to interact in the channel of their choice (57%)** represent the #4 and #5 qualities, respectively

As a pathway to convenience, self-service naturally ranks as a top customer experience facet. The relevance of web and mobile self-service options is particularly growing as customers become more digitally savvy and more averse to phone calls and other synchronous interactions. Rather than seeing modern self-service as a brush-off (the way they might have previously viewed notoriously convoluted IVRs), they recognize it as a way to *avoid* the inefficiencies of traditional customer service and solve problems on their own terms.

Part of allowing customers to solve problems on their own terms, of course, involves honoring channel preference.

Companies are clear that customers have final say when it comes to channel; whereas the majority of companies believe in honoring customer channel preference, only 22% believe right-channeling customers to the best possible environment is a customer-centric option. Indeed, it is the customer – not the business – that determines the "right" venue for a particular issue.

Which of the following do you believe are essential to a great customer experience?

Accurate, relevant information
71.60%

Fast support (minimal handle times/waiting/transfers)
70.37%

Easy support (minimal effort/friction during the journey)
66.67%

Personalization Definition #1 | interactions are always warm and uniquely tailored to the customer
46.91%

Personalization Definition #2 | personal data is used to enhance journey, but interactions may still be transactional/low-touch
33.33%

Customer can always interact in the channel of their choice
56.79%

Customer may not always get to choose channel, but they'll always be easily guided to the right agent / touch point
22.22%

Self-service option available for simple issues
58.02%

Self-service option available to at least start resolving most issues
38.27%

Agents never say "no" without proposing a compelling alternative
19.75%

Agents/bots can consistently "predict" why customers are engaging
20.99%

Frequent use of proactive care for expected/avoidable issues
23.46%

Customers have opportunity to share feedback
46.91%

Customers have transparency into how their feedback is used
23.46%

Relationship-minded care (customers know agents' names, can request them in the future, etc)
23.46%

Customers receive consistent messaging even when speaking to different agents/teams
38.27%

New technologies/processes always have a *clear* benefit to customer
29.63%

BRINGING CUSTOMER CENTRICITY TO DIGITAL CHANNELS

The days of greeting customers in one channel but then "right-channeling" them to a more conventional environment are over. Today's companies resoundingly believe that customers, not businesses, dictate where interactions take place.

To make the notion a reality, companies will have to elevate their experiences in all channels. They cannot get away with simply *allowing* customers to engage in multiple channels; they have to deliver exceptional service at all touch points.

As the typical contact center has far more experience with phone interactions, the call to embrace omnichannel is ultimately a call to improve digital capabilities. Indeed, "improving digital experiences" repeatedly ranks as a top objective in CCW's executive surveys.

Real improvement, of course, requires more than nebulous sentiment. It hinges on concrete planning and execution. An important step on the road to digital excellence, therefore, is establishing a set of priorities.

A focus for 51% of companies, training staff to handle digital interactions represents the most universal priority.

Companies acknowledge "comfort in all channels" as an essential agent quality, and they clearly accept the responsibility of creating that comfort. They recognize the value – and urgency – of ensuring agents can deliver empathetic, effective care at every conceivable touch point.

Other digital priorities include **determining the best use cases for AI and self-service (49%)**, **improving integrations between channels (42%)**, **adding new channels (38%)**, and **establishing metrics for digital (37%)**.

As they prepare agents to converse digitally, companies are also embracing the power of automation. They know that digitally fluent customers appreciate self-service opportunities that are deployed at appropriate moments of truth. They also recognize that the rise of digital communication is opening the door to a wealth of new customer insights; AI that can help capture and analyze these insights will lead to more efficient journeys, and more personalized interactions.

For as much as companies want to deliver amazing experiences within digital channels, companies accept that some customers *will* need to transfer to other environments. When they do, customer-centric organizations aim to ensure the process is as seamless as possible. Integrating channels contributes to this goal, helping customers quickly move to a new channel without having to repeat information they have already shared.

Before a company can elevate or integrate channel experiences, it obviously has to offer the given channels. Many companies are consequently focusing on adding channels, an effort that ensures they will "be where their customers are."

Customer-centric organizations, of course, know that they cannot half-heartedly introduce new channels. Customers expect great experiences at all conceivable touch points, which means "adding channels" is not as simple as buying software or checking some boxes in an omnichannel contact center solution. It requires companies to immediately plan for the types of interactions they will be handling in the environment, and the types of resources and systems they will need to succeed.

Digital experiences cannot be *lesser* in the omnichannel era, but that does not mean they have to be *identical* to traditional phone interactions. The reality is that all channels have their own quirks. They are also more likely to attract certain customers and drive certain behaviors.

Naturally, this means leading companies will want to rethink their approach to performance management. Whereas "outcome" metrics like customer satisfaction and loyalty will likely apply in all cases, traditional "phone metrics" like average handle time will have far less relevance in asynchronous messaging.

Beyond thinking about the best way to measure performance *within* each channel, leading organizations will also focus on how the emergence of one channel impacts performance in another. If, for instance, customers began to primarily handle "simple" issues via digital self-service, phone agents will spend more of their time on complex interactions. Average handle time for phone calls will consequently rise, but it will not necessarily be reflective of a decline in performance.

When it comes to improving the digital experience, which of the following are priorities?

Digital is not a focus; we remain mainly committed to phone / in-person
4.94%

Adding new channels
38.27%

Determining metrics for digital channels
37.04%

Better allocating staff/resources to digital channels
25.93%

Training staff to handle digital interactions
50.62%

Determining the best use of AI and self-service
49.38%

Improving integration/connection between channels (to create an "omnichannel" experience)
41.98%

Addressing security/privacy challenges in digital environments
29.63%

Better collecting and leveraging customer data at digital touch points
35.80%

Ensuring all channels are controlled by (or working in concert with) the contact center/CX team
34.57%

Providing agents with omnichannel tools and 360-degree views of the journey
32.10%

Re-orchestrating journey map to account for rise of digital channels
22.22%

Understanding (and addressing) the new types of support challenges that arise in digital
34.57%

Strengthening e-commerce capabilities
19.75%

Designing better experiences for mobile devices/customers
32.10%

Re-training "phone" agents based on how digital may impact their workflow (ex - simple issues in digital, complex in phone)
20.99%

Taking advantage of "distinctly digital" capabilities, such as mobile app experiences, proactive messaging, geo-targeting, seamless authentication, etc
33.33%

PRACTICALITY GUIDE

CCW | CUSTOMER CONTACT WEEK DIGITAL

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE CASE STUDIES, EXPERT TIPS, AND PRACTICAL EXERCISES THAT YOU CAN BRING BACK TO THE OFFICE.

USU

WHEN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IS SMARTER, AGENTS AND CUSTOMERS ARE HAPPIER

Volume is high and resources are thin, necessitating intelligent self-service options. Agents are facing pressure to improve efficiency *while* working from home *and* handling more complex inquiries. Customers are seeking personalized interactions in all channels. Both brands and consumers say the quality of the customer experience is more important than ever.

Collectively, these realities paint a very intimidating picture of the customer contact landscape. The stakes of performance have never been higher, yet threats to success have never been greater.

There are, however, powerful steps contact center leaders can take to address these challenges and make customer centricity a reality. The most notable such step is rethinking one's approach to knowledge management.

In naming knowledge optimization the #1 way to empower agents, the customer contact community clearly understands its value. It recognizes the need to arm employees — and customers — with seamless access to intelligence that can answer their questions and resolve their issues.

Few within the community, however, have perfected their approach to knowledge management. Thwarted by poor strategy, obsolete technology, and fractured internal communication, the typical knowledge framework adds more friction — and less support — to customer and agent journeys.

This briefing will reveal how to overcome these lingering challenges and then provide recommendations for adopting an empowering, frictionless, omnichannel approach to knowledge management.

WHERE KNOWLEDGE GOES WRONG

Before exploring opportunities to elevate their strategies, it is important to understand why knowledge management is ineffective within the typical organization. Companies clearly understand the importance of knowledge management, so their lack of success is more attributable to strategic *mistakes* than it is inactivity.

Failing to Unify Systems

At its core, omnichannel is about providing a seamless, consistent experience across all touch points. Such an experience is only possible when *internal systems* are fully unified.

When it comes to knowledge, the typical organization does not achieve such unity. Different teams and channels maintain unique sources of knowledge, leading to inconsistencies throughout the experience. These inconsistencies are particularly evident when customers attempt to self-serve.

"The biggest challenge to facilitating a great self-service experience is being able to integrate multiple channels and information to create one, single source of digitized, automated truth," explains Chris Rall of USU. "For example, if you make a policy change on your website, how do you ensure that the same information is updated on every channel so that your customers get the correct answer wherever they ask?"

Ignoring The Audience

"Read the room" and "know your audience" are two popular bits of wisdom. These ideas have, unfortunately, been absent from many knowledge management strategy sessions.

When creating their knowledge bases, far too many organizations neglect to consider *who* will be accessing the content. They do not account for the specific context and language agents will use when searching for answers to customer questions. They certainly do not consider how customers may frame their inquiries when using self-service tools.

In turn, customers and agents struggle to efficiently find the right answers even when those answers absolutely exist within the knowledge base.

Forgetting Usability

In addition to ignoring language preferences, some companies outright forget to consider the overall *user experience* of their knowledge systems. They do not evaluate whether their knowledge bases are easy to access, navigate, search, and update.

In turn, their knowledge bases become havens for outdated content, poor user interfaces, improperly tagged entries, and ineffective search processes. Customers and agents cannot get the information they need, and team members cannot make meaningful improvements.

Squandering the Technological Opportunity

In theory, knowledge is an *asset* to help agents and customers reach faster, more relevant resolutions. In practice, it often becomes an obstacle on the pathway to great customer experiences.

The breakdown occurs, in large part, because companies do not achieve the optimal dichotomy between human work and technological support.

Instead of pursuing AI-driven solutions that analyze behavior, flag out-of-date or conflicting content, predict future searches, reclassify entries, support multimedia, and facilitate real-time updates, companies have been opting for static "databases" that do little more than store records. The burden of monitoring, reconciling, and tagging content — tedious work that any contact center leader would deem "unproductive" — falls squarely on the shoulders of employees. These employees are therefore squandering time they should be using to create valuable content and converse with customers.

Since human employees are also fundamentally worse at these tasks than AI-driven machines, the quality of these knowledge bases ultimately suffers. Frontline agents will, in turn, spend undue time pouring through records, further hurting their ability to connect with customers.

"Your agent's core value is their humanity and their emotional intelligence," says Rall. "If they have to spend most of their effort trying to work around software issues in an outdated system, then you inherently reduce both the value of your agents and the potential value that they can deliver to customers."

RETHINKING KNOWLEDGE IN TODAY'S OMNICHANNEL WORLD

The bad news: due to the aforementioned challenges, knowledge management solutions are proving counterproductive in today's landscape. They are making it *harder* for customers and agents to get the answers they need, when and where they need them.

The good news: with a combination of proven best practices and innovative technology, companies of all sizes can achieve more intelligent knowledge frameworks that lead to happier agents and customers.

Recognize Emerging Knowledge Needs

Rather than working in isolation based on past conventions, customer-centric companies tailor their knowledge management initiatives to current realities facing customers and employees. In 2021, those realities include the rise of digital engagement and remote work.

Digital engagement unlocks more data and increases operational agility, but it also introduces more touch points and customer inquiries — and thus creates more *risks* for fragmentation in the knowledge process. Successful companies will ensure they are accounting for the entire omnichannel journey, not just select channels or issues, when building their knowledge bases.

"Omnichannel is a big industry buzzword, but the reality is companies need the tools and processes to meet customers where they want to be, which more than ever is via digital channels," details Rall. "The pandemic fast-tracked this priority front and center. Both agents and customers now require the flexibility of being able to access an accurate knowledge base from anywhere, on any communication channel."

An omnichannel approach to knowledge also accounts for the rise of digital self-service options, including chatbots. As customers increasingly look to solve problems on their own terms, they will not have an experienced agent to advise them on the right lingo or search process. The knowledge management framework will have to be intelligent and customer-centric enough to let customers communicate — and seek support — in their own words, on their own terms.

Because at-home agents are working independently of their peers and supervisors, they have less opportunity to seek real-time assistance. They are consequently more reliant than ever on knowledge bases, which means companies have an imperative to increase the scope of available content. Entries that seemed unnecessary when subject matter experts were under the same roof may prove essential for those working autonomously.

"Once most businesses went remote with an indefinite time frame, tribal knowledge had to be quickly and accurately documented for the team so that everyone globally could access the same information efficiently," explains Rall.

Create Single Sources of Customer Contact Truth

If companies do not align their systems and teams, they will routinely fail to achieve consistent access to and use of knowledge bases. This fragmentation will also trickle down to customers, thwarting their ability to receive optimal support in their chosen channels.

Unifying the customer contact function, therefore, represents a prerequisite for effective knowledge management. Companies need to integrate their systems, connect their teams, align their processes, and coordinate their analytics efforts in order to create single sources of truth.

At that point, they can be confident that *anyone* searching for knowledge will get the most accurate, up-to-date information, regardless of where, when, or why they are searching.

They can be equally confident that any changes made by one team will be instantly available to the entire business. Indeed, *all* parties will be working together to create the most robust, efficient knowledge system possible.

Adopt an AI-Driven Knowledge Solution

A single source of truth is a valuable framework on which to implement a knowledge management solution. Not all systems, however, are capable of leveraging this framework in the most effective, customer-centric, and agent-empowering manner.

The best solutions integrate with all major contact center platforms and then harness the power of AI to streamline the entire knowledge management journey. They incorporate predictive analytics to assess how customers and agents are searching for available knowledge. They use dynamic search functionality to not only enhance the quality of results but even recommend entries and "next-best actions" at key moments of truth. They support multilingual and multimedia content to provide the most actionable knowledge possible. They also include intuitive editors to streamline the process of adding and updating content.

By improving the quality of knowledge, AI-driven platforms *also* empower other technology use cases within the customer contact function. Chatbots, for example, become more effective, creating even more agent experience and productivity benefits.

"AI enables human agents to do what they do best and provide top value to your customers," says Rall. "At the same time, AI lets the software do what it does best — delivering consistency, saving time through automation, handling complex or simple, repetitive tasks. This means that when a customer encounters a real problem and needs to talk to someone, agents are available. And this is where agents can let their true value shine, building loyalty through customer experience and humanizing the brand."

Intelligently Orchestrate Customer Journeys

Although CCW Digital research consistently reveals "improving knowledge management" as a top contact center priority, it is ultimately a means to an end. It is a pathway to better agent performance and *better* customer experiences.

Given this reality, successful businesses will not optimize their knowledge solutions in a vacuum. They will instead coordinate knowledge management initiatives with their overall customer experience design.

Leading platforms facilitate this orchestration process. Knowledge solutions like USU, for example, empower contact centers to create dynamic decision trees that advise bots (and even agents) on how to navigate particular customer intentions — and which knowledge entries will prove most valuable.

As they analyze usage (and corresponding CSAT metrics) over time, they can make on-demand adjustments to these decision trees. They can also begin redesigning their journeys, and incorporating intelligent routing, to put customers on a clearer pathway to the right agent or bot.

SMART KNOWLEDGE YIELDS HAPPIER CUSTOMERS

When companies pair the appropriate knowledge management framework with cutting-edge technology, they improve agent productivity, enhance self-service, and optimize customer journeys.

These benefits can have a tangible impact on key customer contact performance indicators, as has been confirmed by numerous brands that have worked with USU Knowledge Management. Example success stories follow.

Company: Volkswagen AG

Challenge:
Providing accurate and on-demand roadside assistance for automotive 12 brands, in dozens of languages all over the world, integrate the process into Salesforce and ensure consistent quality of service.

Solution & Result:
Integrated USU Knowledge Management with Salesforce CRM and ticketing, 2500+ decision trees built for automated troubleshooting in 25 languages, Customer vehicle data and location are sent to knowledge base to provide agent with an instant overview and solution before answering call

Company: e470

Challenge:
Agents relied heavily on physical documentation and multiple systems for support data. Content maintenance required significant effort and dealing with increasing call volume was a serious concern.

Solution & Result:
USU Knowledge Management deployed in the cloud, all support data centralized into a single system, e-learning used for all training and custom dashboards used for alerts, news, and updates.

Company: DATEV eG

Challenge:
Increasing volume and complexity of service requests requiring more individual service, difficulty handling volume with existing staff and need to launch and integrate chatbots into existing infrastructure.

Solution & Result:
Deployed 40+ chatbots for specific customer service processes with rapid, context sensitive support via intelligent Q&A technology. Significant workload reduction for employees and the opportunity to easily create and launch new bots as needed.

krisp

3 KEYS TO CUSTOMER-CENTRIC VOICE EXPERIENCES

The rise of digital has not spurred the fall of voice. CCW Digital research confirms that many companies have seen significant *increases* in voice-based interactions over the past year.

As smart devices reaffirm the importance of verbal communication—and as companies encounter a post-pandemic surge in customer engagement—voice volume will remain significant in the months and years ahead.

"Customers still demand responsive voice-based customer service," declares Robert Schoenfield of Krisp. "They expect the interaction to be secure, efficient and professional."

Self-service and low-touch digital engagement are becoming increasingly popular for simple matters, but voice-based customer service remains the default medium for complex issues. It is within these oftentimes challenging interactions that companies can best demonstrate their abilities to effortlessly empathize with customers, personalize conversations, and provide exceptional support. Indeed, voice-based interactions are an opportunity to achieve significant competitive differentiation and build lasting customer loyalty.

How can companies deliver customer-centric voice-based experiences amid growing volume and complexity? This briefing examines three key factors for success.

KEY #1 | UNDERSTANDING WHAT CUSTOMERS ARE SAYING

Customers primarily communicate using mobile devices in noisy environments. They do not necessarily know industry jargon or corporate lingo. They are rarely familiar with specific company policies and processes. They may not have vast public speaking experience or training. They often engage with brands while in a heightened emotional state.

Collectively, these factors point to one reality: it can be difficult to understand what customers are saying during voice interactions, making the job of a customer service agent even harder. Agents sometimes cannot even hear what customers are saying, let alone recognize the specific context, intentions, and sentiments behind their requests. These obstacles make it difficult for them to provide the kind of efficient and personalized support that their customers ultimately expect.

This challenge will only intensify as customers increasingly turn to voice for specific, complex, or unpredictable issues. If agents struggle to understand customers who are asking basic, transactional questions, how will they possibly respond to issues for which there is no precedent? How will they even know what part of the script to follow?

There are two ways that brands can address this challenge:

1) Leverage advanced speech recognition and natural language understanding tools

For many customers, the voice-based customer service experience begins by communicating with an interactive voice response (IVR). Because these self-service tools have notoriously been difficult to use, voice-based conversations have historically begun on the wrong foot.

Fortunately, advances in speech recognition and natural language understanding technology stand to make the next-generation IVR a more effective, customer-friendly entry point for service interactions. By leveraging AI technology to not only recognize what customers are saying but also interpret the true intent behind their words, these technologies can become more effective at solving customer problems. And if they cannot solve a customer's problem outright, they are capable of steering them to an agent who can help and also providing the agent with valuable background context to resolve the problem as quickly as possible.

"When done well, IVR is an efficient way to identify the customer and identify the issue prior to an agent engaging in a voice call," explains Schoenfield. "Speech recognition and IVR need to work near 100% of time, otherwise customer frustration increases beyond the initial reason for calling and CSAT will be adversely impacted."

Speech recognition technology also helps companies gather more actionable intelligence—well beyond the voice-based interaction alone. When companies can accurately spot trends about why customers call—as well as where those calls tend to go awry—they can make meaningful improvements to their customer journey design and agent training.

2) Leverage noise-cancelling technology to hear customers better

Speech recognition technology cannot work if the system cannot actually *hear* what the customer is saying. The same goes for agents, whose ability to provide fast, empathetic, and accurate support is rendered moot when customers are inaudible.

Modern, AI-powered noise-cancelling technology alleviates this issue by improving the audibility of customers who may be using low quality devices, reliant on poor connections, calling from noisy areas, or simply unable to communicate loudly and articulately. This technology, in turn, makes it possible for the agent to create a more customer-centric connection.

"For real-time calls between the customer and an agent, it is imperative that the cloud-based platform supports noise cancellation and other voice quality enhancements," recommends Schoenfield.

KEY #2 | ENSURING HIGH-CALIBER AGENT COMMUNICATION

Poor voice quality does not simply prevent agents from understanding customers. It also prevents customers from properly understanding agents.

In the *best* case scenario, customers will have to listen carefully to know what the agents are saying. In the worst case, the inaudibility of the agent can send a clear message that the company is unprofessional and does not value its customers. And depending on context, some customers may begin to develop fears about the security or privacy of their conversation or personal data, especially if they can hear other people in the background.

Longtime challenges for agents using legacy telephony in busy contact center environments, poor sound quality and background noise have become major issues during this new era of remote work. Two-thirds of companies cite poor connections as a *major challenge* facing at-home agents. And insofar as the majority of companies expect at least some agents to work remotely moving forward, the threat of subpar agent audibility—and, therefore, its potentially negative impact on the customer experience—has never been greater.

"Once up and running, the biggest customer complaint was about noise originating from the agent's home environment," adds Schoenfield. "Within the home, there were children, pets, and doorbells. If living in an urban area, neighbors and street level noises, such as sirens, become problematic. And in some rural areas, as in parts of the Philippines, customers complained about roosters in the background. All of the above scenarios were real and translated to customers feeling as though there was a lack of privacy in their conversation with the agent.

This potential threat to customer effort and perception, of course, says nothing of the experiential impact on agents. When agents struggle to hear or be heard, they will end up exerting more effort—and enduring more frustration—throughout the customer interaction. This can have a big impact on both customer satisfaction and agent churn.

"[When background noise was an issue], lower CSAT scores followed in addition to the agents feeling anxious and unprofessional, knowing that their home-based noises were being heard by their customers," notes Schoenfield.

AI-powered noise cancellation can solve this problem as well. Whether by correcting for lower-grade equipment, eliminating in-office background noise, or minimizing at-home distractions, this technology ensures that agents can stay focused on the customer conversation while maintaining a high level of professionalism.

KEY #3 | EMPOWERING AGENT PERFORMANCE

Once a company establishes a line of communication between agents and customers, the next step is to ensure that agents are consistently communicating the most valuable and relevant information possible.

As the Market Study confirms, this *empowerment* initiative hinges on improving agents' access to data through unified contact center platforms, intuitive knowledge bases, and 360-degree views. With actionable insights about customers and their journeys, agents can stop stressing over what to say and, instead, spend more time focusing on how best to say it. They can start building meaningful connections with customers, which is truly the biggest advantage that voice-based customer service conversations have over low-touch text interactions.

AI-powered noise cancellation and speech recognition play critical roles in the empowerment effort. First and foremost, they empower both agents and self-service tools to collect more accurate, actionable insights from calls. This intelligence can subsequently enhance CRM and knowledge systems, thereby providing agents with everything they need to support customers effectively.

When voice-based customer service interactions are more audible, agents are also able to quickly solve problems while establishing lasting customer trust.

CUSTOMER-CENTRIC VOICE EXPERIENCES ARE A REALITY

Clear communication is a prerequisite for creating a more customer-centric voice experience. When companies eliminate background noise, device limitations, and other distractions, they help agents hear customers better, respond to all inquiries accurately and effectively, and capture actionable data.

Thanks to its AI-powered echo and noise cancellation solution, Krisp is making clear voice and sound quality an attainable and easily scalable reality for both on-site and remote contact center teams.

"Krisp works seamlessly with all cloud-based platforms and with all headsets to enhance the voice quality as experienced by customers and agents," says Schoenfield. "Krisp removes background noise, minimizes room echo, and delivers rich HD voice quality—both at home and in the contact center. Later this year, Krisp will be updating its AI application to include personal noise cancellation and virtual video background. This will allow supervisors and other agents in a contact center to have open conversations without the risk of those voices being heard or seen by customers on other calls. This is breakthrough AI."

Krisp's technology has been guiding leading companies on the road to customer centricity. Example case studies follow.

Company: Concentrix

Challenge:
Customer complaints and agent stress working from home in the Philippines, India, US and other countries due to background noise in urban and rural areas.

Solution & Result:
Krisp deployed, customer satisfaction increased, customer complaints decreased, agent stress level reduced
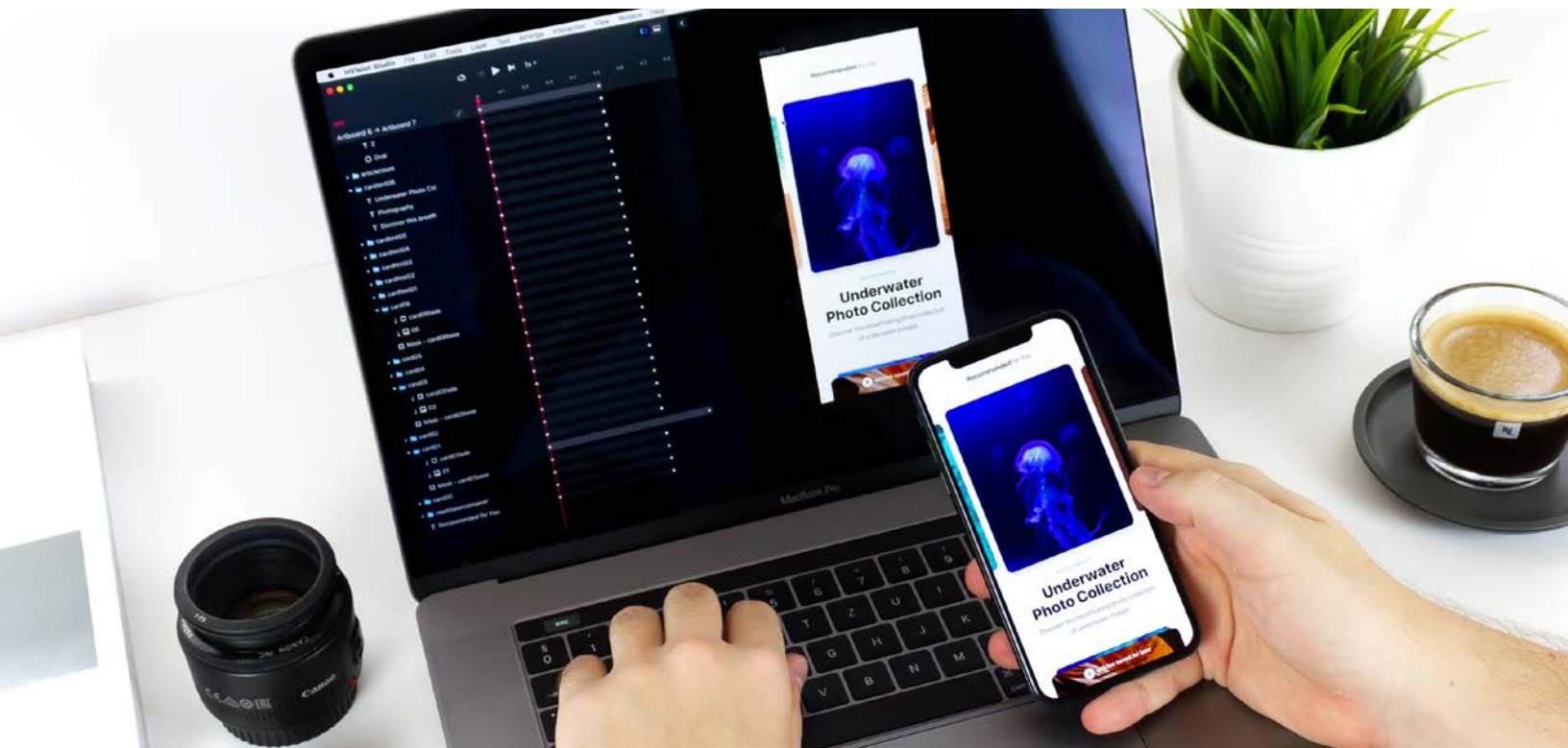
Company: Transcom

Challenge:
Voice quality issues related to background noise at home and in contact centers globally

Solution & Result:
Krisp deployed, customer satisfaction increased, customer complaints decreased, agent stress level reduced

MOXTRA

RETHINKING MOBILE EXPERIENCES: 4 STEPS TO SUCCESS

As mobile devices become the default communication option for customers, digital volume and expectations are rapidly rising. Customers no longer applaud brands for merely offering chat and messaging opportunities. They *expect* frictionless, personalized, predictive, and proactive digital interactions each and every time they engage.

Many brands have unfortunately proven unable to meet these standards, yielding customer satisfaction scores that trail those for the traditional voice channel.

Not simply ineffective from a customer-facing standpoint, many companies' digital experiences are riddled with inefficiencies. These pain points create undue friction throughout the journey, leading to greater agent frustration, higher operational costs, and ultimately less profitability.

Companies can, however, swiftly overcome these challenges. By following a four-step process, they can turn their digital journeys into havens for customer centricity. They can simplify processes, collect actionable intelligence, personalize interactions, and ultimately build customer loyalty.

This briefing will reveal the four key steps, empowering companies of all sizes to elevate mobile engagement.

#1 | DESIGN MOBILE EXPERIENCES ON CUSTOMERS' TERMS

Make no mistake, successful digital experiences can yield significant efficiency benefits for the operation. When customers are handling simple matters via low-touch or self-service options, they are freeing voice agents to focus on complex work. Volume stays manageable, and the return on employee time exponentially grows.

Companies will not get to reap these operational benefits, however, if they do not tailor their mobile experiences to actual customer demands. If their journeys require customers to engage in unfamiliar or otherwise convoluted behaviors, they eliminate any potential value of digital channels. In the best case scenario, customers will revert back to costly traditional options like voice-based phone support. In the worst case scenario, they will switch to competitors that offer a more seamless, digitally friendly experience.

"Implementing digital solutions is beneficial for a business to grow and thrive, but it also keeps the customer's best interest in mind," contends Leena Iyar of Moxtra. "When innovating for the customer with forward-thinking technology and implementing a digital strategy that appeals to how the new generation of thinking expects to conduct business, businesses are setting the standard that they are willing to adapt and meet the needs of their customers – first and foremost."

In today's landscape, the optimal experience involves offering immediate, seamless access to support on customers' terms. Ideally, this access will come via an intuitive mobile application that customers can use with no learning curve or delay.

"Over the past decade, smartphone apps have come to define the way we interact with a huge range of popular services from Uber to Venmo to Instacart," explains Iyar. "Today, we're seeing mobile apps migrating to an even higher level. This development is, in part, due to the increasing ubiquity of mobile broadband and the rise of the internet of things. More than ever, people expect digital experiences that are seamless and accessible no matter where they are. User satisfaction and experience are the main drivers of these branded app developments that engage customers wherever, whenever, and businesses that ignore them do so at their peril."

The key to successful mobile apps is that they offer a potent combination of familiarity and specificity. Customers are already incredibly comfortable with leading apps and processes for purchasing products, syncing accounts, ordering food, uploading images, hailing cabs, and sending messages. They do not want to re-learn these functions for each of the different businesses with which they engage.

They do, however, want to ensure the application is a worthwhile, full-service gateway to the brand. If they cannot access details specific to their account or issue support requests specific to the brand and its processes,

they gain no value from the mobile experience. In turn, they view the brand as behind the times — and indifferent to their needs and preferences.

According to the Customer Contact Industry Review Market Study, accurate information, fast support, easy support, self-service options, and recognition of customer channel preference are the top signs of a great customer experience.

Successful mobile applications embody all these principles, yielding digital experiences that are about *adding value* to the customer journey as opposed to merely deflecting calls or chasing industry trends.

#2 | UNIFY CUSTOMER-FACING EXPERIENCES

Mobile experiences are predicated on the idea of convenience. They allow customers to gain access to valuable engagement options with minimal effort.

A convenient mobile experience is only possible when the application provides all relevant information and engagement options in a single, seamless interface.

Indeed, the best applications do not ask customers to jump across multiple systems depending on whether they want to get product information, make a purchase, dispute a bill, or receive technical support. They do not require customers to re-authenticate credentials as they move to different stages of the journey. They do not expect customers to repeat information as they escalate from self-service to agent assistance.

Instead, they bring the entire experience into a customer "portal" that lives in the mobile application.

"Providing clients with a convenient customer experience offers them complete, 24/7 access to your company, which is not only the future of business, but the new normal," declares Iyar. "Businesses need to start thinking about leveraging centralized OneStop Customer Portal Apps to ease the burden on management, security, and improve the customers' experience and satisfaction."

Although the core mobile application itself will be rich with customer-centric features, it does not operate in a vacuum. It, instead, supports integration with other major communication platforms, contact center tools, knowledge bases, and data systems to ensure customers have seamless access to every detail about their accounts, every insight about company products and processes, and every option for pursuing meaningful engagement.

Innovative managed solutions already offer this best-of-both-world scenario, granting businesses (and their customers) access to crucial mobile features, essential integrations, and regular updates based on changing customer demands and preferences.

"Client Portals must be designed and implemented with future functionality and growth in mind. Integrations with other mission-critical digital assets are also important to maintain a seamless user experience," adds Iyar. "Deploying a digital strategy on a platform that is built to scale and evolve alongside technological advances is critical to future-proofing business practices. This is far easier to achieve with a managed solution that is regularly updated in accordance with customer demands, instead of a highly complex and expensive custom-made platform."

#3 | UNIFY EMPLOYEE-FACING EXPERIENCES

What happens behind-the-scenes directly impacts what happens on-stage. Indeed, a company cannot deliver a seamless, customer-centric *customer experience* if its employees face friction and fragmentation. They, too, require an intuitive, omnichannel experience.

"One of the biggest barriers to enabling more secure and efficient client communications is the constantly increasing complexity and diversity of today's technology," says Iyar. "With more systems and apps than ever before, continued technological development has left many businesses with a fragmented infrastructure that is notoriously hard to manage and protect."

Fortuitously, implementing OneStop customer portals will *also* have a positive impact on the employee experience. By centralizing mobile customer interactions in a single interface, the company instantly addresses challenges related to data fragmentation and customer security.

"By centralizing all customer-facing operations and keeping all interactions in one place, digital portals can simplify security and give organizations a transparent overview of mission-critical processes," shares Iyar. "Instead of trying to protect and manage emails, text messages, video conferences, and document signage across a whole range of different platforms, a digital portal should offer everything all in one place. From a security perspective, this means consolidating all the single points of failure into one system that can be protected easily and comprehensively."

Successful companies will concurrently look to unify broader enterprise systems, such as their CRM, knowledge bases, contact center platform, and analytics solutions.

By arming mobile users with instant access to the most up-to-date company and customer records, a unified contact center enhances the value of customer portals. There will be no risk of portal users accessing incomplete or inaccurate records, and therefore no possibility of the mobile experience proving inferior.

Since agents will have instant access to review all customer records and communicate in all channels, there will similarly be no risk of undue agent friction or inefficiencies. Agents will be able to support all customers, regardless of when, why, or where they choose to connect.

A singular view of the customer contact function, moreover, provides *all* departments with an equitable insight into customer journeys. When all teams can instantly spot pain points, understand customer feedback, and monitor performance, they can work collaboratively to design more customer-centric products and service experiences.

#4 | COMMIT TO JUST-IN-TIME SERVICE STRATEGY

Unified contact center platforms offer a framework for building a more cohesive, omnichannel customer experience. OneStop customer portals provide a mechanism for connecting with customers in a convenient, mobile-friendly environment.

These benefits are merely theoretical, however, until the company adopts the just-in-time service principle.

"Now that people can stay connected everywhere they go, it is more important than ever to provide customers and their agents with a just-in-time service experience," declares Iyar. "Today's economy is increasingly service-focused, with personal consumption expenditures for services now approaching 50%. Applied in the context of services, just-in-time refers to the ability to deliver services, such as customer support, in minimal time by being readily available through digital channels."

The entire premise of customer centricity, specifically within the context of omnichannel engagement, is about delivering what the customer wants, when and where they want it. That notion implies that a customer — not the business — sets the rules of engagement. The customer — not the business — decides when it makes sense to make a purchase or ask a question, and where they would like the business to fulfill this request.

In some cases, customers will seek an *immediate*, real-time conversation with a live agent. In others, they will prefer to engage in an asynchronous, start-and-stop conversation with a support representative. In a completely different set of use cases, they will aim to resolve the issue or perform the task entirely on their own.

Mobile customer portals and omnichannel contact center platforms facilitate this type of framework by making it easy to incorporate live chat, asynchronous messaging, chatbots, and phone escalations into the same, user-friendly platform. Companies nonetheless still have to do their part by allocating sufficient personnel and resources, while providing self-service tools with access to the best possible intelligence.

They subsequently have to establish metrics that specifically assess just-in-time performance. Measures related to availability, wait time, number of messages per resolution, and self-service containment help to reveal whether the company is fulfilling its commitment to being available wherever, whenever, and however the customer wants.

CUSTOMER-CENTRIC MOBILE EXPERIENCES - A PORTRAIT

Working in partnership with Moxtra, leading organizations are delivering mobile experiences that embody the notion of customer centricity. Offering the convenient experiences customers want on a platform they prefer, these brands are enjoying significant increases in metrics related to mobile engagement, customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and revenue.

Example success stories follow.

Company: CitiBank

Challenge: CitiBank was looking to provide a mobile solution to consumers with a personalized and an intuitive banking experience, in a way that would transform how customers think about banking. CitiBank wanted to enable their customers to collaborate seamlessly with their Relationship Managers (RMs) from anywhere and at anytime.

Solution & Result: Citi Hello is a OneStop Portal for customer engagement, with 1000+ internal users supporting 120,000 clients. Citi Hello saw incredible adoption with 80% engagement on mobile and a 200% increase in productivity. Over 220 million USD worth of transactions took place on Citi Hello in the first year.

Company: Balfour Homes

Challenge: Balfour Homes recognized the importance of adopting technology to complete their business procedures and further streamline communication with clients. While the world shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, Balfour Home's looked for a solution to complete transactions and carry on with business as usual through their app — while maintaining a level of human connection that is expected from a brokerage during the home building process.

Solution & Result: They launched their Moxtra-powered OneStop Customer App, Balfour Homes — Digital Broker, and reduced their 2-3 week buying process down to just 24 hours. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Balfour Home's sales jumped 2,000% and soared from $1.5 million to $40 million in a matter of months with the implementation of their app, powered by Moxtra's Customer Collaboration Platform.

Company: Hendrick Automotive Group

Challenge: Hendrick Automotive Group was looking to provide a just-in-time service experience for their customers, while facilitating seamless service repair and leasing processes across their vast dealer network.

Solution & Result: Hendrick's app is deployed at headquarters and selected nearby subsidiaries to extend their sales and service repair workflows onto digital channels. Through their OneStop App, B2B sales are interactive and precise, from anywhere. Sales conversations are centralized in virtual deal rooms, and interactions are conducted over powerful messaging and can be escalated to real-time when necessary. Their virtual branch has enabled a seamless ePaper trail, organized recordkeeping system, and continuous communication for accelerated business processes. The results are increased efficiency, lowered costs of doing business, and customer convenience.

HOW TO EMPOWER THE NEXT-GENERATION AGENT

While dealing with health and financial concerns throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, customers also began to interact with new brands — in new ways. Upon witnessing a clear distinction between brands that focus on *connections* and those that merely process transactions, customers developed higher standards for brand interactions. Moving forward, they will seek out companies that understand their needs and design experiences accordingly.

To meet these growing customer expectations, contact centers will require a higher standard for their agents. As the Market Study reveals, the ideal agent of the future will routinely demonstrate empathy, friendliness, comfort in all channels, and a propensity for handling complex interactions and processes.

No longer a mere script reader or transaction processor, this next-generation agent is a dynamic performer ready to solve unusual problems and connect with diverse, demanding customers.

"Given the growing complexity of calls, agents must have interpersonal skills, problem solving capabilities and a high degree of empathy," explains Vern Fernandez of Jabra. "As brand ambassadors, competing for customer loyalty, contact center agents can be a point of differentiation and investment for a business."

Inherently intimidating, this lofty standard is emerging at a time when contact center agents are also facing significant uncertainty. There are questions about the environment in which they will be working. There are concerns about their access to high-quality telephony. There are doubts about their access to relevant training, coaching and day-to-day support. There are issues using core contact center systems.

To successfully empower agents to reach a higher standard, contact center leaders will have to minimize the impact of this uncertainty. They will have to provide each agent with the tools, support, and guidance to engage in personalized conversations and build powerful customer connections.

This briefing will reveal how to empower the next-generation of agents, regardless of where they are working.

TRAIN AND SUPPORT THE NEW STANDARD

Customer contact leaders can discuss the importance of empathy and human connections. They can latch onto clichés about "AI handling simple issues so that agents can focus on complex ones." These standards will not become a reality, however, until leaders take meaningful steps to guide agents in the right direction.

This, first and foremost, involves tailoring recruiting and coaching efforts to the new standard.

Rather than hiring to "fill seats," customer-centric leaders will recruit agents with a proclivity for thinking critically and communicating cordially. Rather than simply training employees to read scripts, master company policies, and use existing tools, leaders will coach them to emphasize human connections in their interactions. This includes advising them on how to ask the right questions and demonstrate empathy, while empowering them to "go off script" in the event the customer has an unusual issue or request. It also involves prioritizing metrics that speak to customer satisfaction and loyalty.

When leaders know that their contact center teams have the optimal skill sets and are focusing on the right standard for customer centricity, they can focus on amplifying these abilities through better equipment, richer customer and company data, and stronger contact center platforms. When agents can easily access and communicate accurate data, they can focus more intently on demonstrating humanity in their interactions.

Given the recent proliferation of remote work, successful leaders will additionally build a culture of autonomy. They will ensure agents are comfortable performing tasks and supporting customers without constant supervision and face-to-face guidance. Proper recruiting, training, and systems help bring this independence to fruition.

ESTABLISH A CLEAR DIRECTION FOR WORK-FROM-HOME

The Market Study confirms employee engagement and the future of work-from-home as two of the biggest focuses for today's contact center leaders. The priorities are interrelated, as a company's approach to the work environment will have an enormous impact on employee satisfaction and productivity.

There is no easy, let alone one-size-fits-all, model for the future of the contact center. Many companies still value the idea of an on-site work experience and have been re-opening their doors as social distancing measures ease. Work-from-home nonetheless proved its viability during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many employees have developed a preference for spending at least some of their work days at home.

"Jabra surveyed contact centers in December of 2020," says Fernandez. "The majority of agents still work at the office and expect to continue working at the office in the future. Despite the current workplace, the preference of the CC agents is to work (more) from home an average of 3.2 days per week. This will create more demand for a flexible contact center environment."

Whether it finds value in the hybrid model or prefers a primarily on-site or at-home approach, a successful company understands the importance of establishing a clear, transparent direction. After all, a company's approach to the work environment will have *considerable* ramifications for the future of the contact center.

At-home and on-site models, for example, each present different challenges and opportunities for training and performance management. A shared physical environment may be more conducive to real-time training and quality monitoring, but an independent environment will allow agents to more intently focus on key tasks. Physical contact centers foster a sense of camaraderie among team members, but remote work may have experiential benefits for those who oppose commutes and want to spend more time with their families.

Those adopting a hybrid model, moreover, will want to consider which agents should perform which tasks in each environment, and then develop the corresponding schedules, workflow allocations, routing rules, and performance metrics.

Beyond informing operational decisions, setting any clear decision for the work environment instantly heightens employee appreciation. Although it is true that some employees are partial to at-home and others may prefer working alongside their peers, all seek transparency from their leadership. When they feel "in the loop," agents develop more loyalty for the company — and perform better.

SUPPORT AGENTS WITH HIGH-CALIBER HEADSETS

Regardless of where they work, agents will encounter potential distractions and other risks to call quality. On-site agents will deal with considerable background noise and distractions from peers. At-home agents may lack stable connections or comfortable workspaces free from street noises, pet sounds, roommate chatter, and appliance volume.

Given the importance of successfully connecting with customers, companies cannot allow these risks to materialize. Indeed, they have an imperative to provide agents with user-friendly, high-caliber, noise-cancelling headsets that ensure a high standard of conversational quality regardless of Internet, device, or environmental limitations.

With voice interactions growing not only in volume but complexity, the upside to strong audio equipment is enormous.

It allows agents and customers to understand each other, even when dealing with background noise and other distractions. This audibility increases the likelihood of warm, accurate conversations. It also boosts sentiment for agents and customers, who no longer have to repeat themselves or struggle to determine what the other party was saying.

"The importance of a headset has never been more paramount," declares Fernandez. "Heavy investments can be spent on contact center infrastructure, but fall short on the device an agent wears. Many contact centers let agents choose whatever headset they want to represent the voice of their brand. Using any headset can lead to poor customer experiences, longer average handle times, lower CSAT and NPS scores. There are varying degrees of noise cancellation, comfort and analytics available. Agents should be able to hear and be heard in order to solve customer issues. They need a professional headset the way a carpenter needs a professional hammer or a chef needs the sharpest knife."

By improving audibility, higher-caliber equipment additionally assists with capturing better recordings and more accurate insights from each call. Companies can leverage this actionable intelligence to identify root causes, optimize customer journeys, strengthen IVR and other AI applications, and improve employee training.

"Clear voice, without false positives, is data that can be used to maximize investments in speech analytics, translation applications or even biometric applications to authenticate agent identity," says Fernandez. "These are all applications that can lower overall expenses and risk over time."

ACHIEVING CUSTOMER-CENTRIC CONVERSATIONS

Whether driven by weak connections, obsolete devices, or background distraction, poor audio quality fundamentally undermines customer conversations. It prevents customers from effortlessly pursuing resolutions, while thwarting agents' efforts to provide accurate information in a friendly and efficient manner.

At a time when standards for agent performance are higher than ever, these issues cannot persist. Companies need to empower employees, not deter them, in their quest to demonstrate empathy and advanced problem solving capabilities. They also need to ensure that the limitations of an agent's work environment do not trickle down to the customer.

With its industry-leading headset offerings, Jabra is helping companies overcome these challenges. It is helping them turn agent empowerment — and ultimately customer-centric experiences — into an achievable reality.

"Jabra helps keep agents engaged by providing headset technology that makes it easy to help customers," touts Fernandez. "This means audio is clear and focused, noise is cancelled, volume levels are consistent and agents can wear the headset all day."

Example success stories follow.

Company: Moneypenny

Challenge: Transitioning from desk phones to softphones using the Twilio Flex platform, Moneypenny sought headsets that offered seamless compatibility and a high-caliber of call quality.

"We strive to deliver the best customer experience, through crystal clear voice conversations at every interaction, so choosing the best headset was vital," explains product manager Alyce Green.

Solution & Result: After testing a range of headset offerings, Moneypenny selected Jabra Engage 50 for its agents. Beyond strong sound quality and comfort, the product integrates with Twilio Flex, offers custom status lights that are visible physically and within the contact center platform, and noise cancellation with sidetone functionality to ensure agents can clearly hear themselves -- but not background distractions.

"The free, open Jabra Software Developer Kit (SDK) works across operating systems, enabling Moneypenny to seamlessly integrate Jabra Engage 50 into our platform, with great support from Jabra," adds head of technical architecture Oliver Kelly. "Our receptionists now work on a fully integrated platform powered by superior sound, which improves the experience for both customers and receptionists."

Company: Tabcorp

Challenge: After adopting GenesysCloud to create a more flexible, scalable contact center, Tabcorp wanted to amplify its success with stronger headsets.

"Choosing the right headsets was important to ensure we delivered the best possible experience for our contact center staff and provided our customers with the best sounding calls possible," remarks contact center strategy project manager Daniel Burn.

Solution & Result: Tabcorp selected the Jabra Engage Series of USB headsets, which offer the ideal mix of comfort and sound quality.

"The quality of the audio provided by the Jabra headsets is first class, enabling our agents to more efficiently service our customers and drive the achievement of our metrics around customer satisfaction and call resolution times," trumpets Burn.

Company: Amazon Connect/Jointex

Challenge: As it deployed the Amazon Connect omnichannel contact center solution, PLUS Jointex sought a line of lightweight headsets that would ensure excellent call quality and be comfortable enough to wear all day.

"High durability was also essential," says CRM manager Reiko Sugiyama. "Previously, we had tested cheaper headset brands but performance was poor and they broke very quickly. We wanted headsets that would last at least 2 to 3 years, so we needed a trusted professional-grade model."

Solution & Result: Jointex selected the Jabra Biz 2300, which integrates with Amazon Connect and offers optimal durability, comfort, and quality.

"Call quality has noticeably improved with the Jabra Biz 2300," declares Sugyiama. "The improved listening experience and ease of use contributes greatly to the operators' motivation. The headset functionality is obviously important, but good looks and design are too."

Thanks to the increase in conversation quality, Jointex is also yielding higher-value call recordings. The company, in turn, can glean valuable customer and agent intelligence.

twilio

MAKING OMNICHANNEL PERSONAL | HOW TO DELIVER CUSTOMER CENTRICITY IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

When a company commits to personalizing its customer experiences, everyone wins. Customers benefit from empathetic, efficient, accurate interactions in their preferred channels on their desired terms. Agents gain the ability and data to engage in productive, "human" conversations at all touch points

Consequently, the business enjoys greater profitability, thanks to an increase in customer loyalty and decreases in operational inefficiency and employee churn.

One look at today's customer contact landscape, however, reveals that *aiming* for personalization and *delivering* personalization are two vastly different things. Companies may understand the importance of customer-centric engagement, but their experiences remain impersonal, inefficient, and ultimately ineffective.

"Less than 1 in 4 businesses say they are investing successfully in omnichannel personalization," reveals Timothy Ricther, Principal Product Manager, Twilio. "Yet 69% of surveyed consumers expect personal and consistent experiences with companies across channels. So yes, there is a disconnect."

The absence of personalization is particularly conspicuous in the digital world. Customers have demonstrated an increased preference for channels like messaging, online help desks, chat, and social, but CSAT scores are markedly lower than those for the traditional phone channel. Digital inadequacies become even more glaring — and more frustrating — when customers attempt to move between different channels.

Why is personalization so elusive in the digital world?

The answer is *not* due to the comparatively "low-touch" nature of digital channels. Digital technology actually affords companies an unprecedented opportunity to learn about customers and tailor experiences accordingly. The issue, instead, stems from mistakes in how companies are approaching their customer engagement efforts.

This briefing will empower companies to correct those mistakes, resulting in experiences that are richly personal throughout the entire omnichannel journey.

UNDERSTANDING PERSONALIZATION

Personalization is *not* a synonym for lengthy, over-the-top conversations. It is not a call for all agents to ask all customers about their pets, vacation plans, and favorite sports teams.

Instead, it is an imperative to use data about customers' profiles, histories, intentions, and sentiments to anticipate needs and design contextually relevant experiences. In many cases, the ideal experience will not be a *lengthy* phone call but a quick, convenient digital interaction.

Customers trying to reset passwords, pay bills, process returns, or modify food delivery orders, for instance, doubtfully have any desire to "talk it out" over the phone. They instead want seamless access to self-service tools that present their relevant account or order information in a simple visual menu. Forcing them to speak to a live agent would be the *impersonal* thing to do, unless the customer *prefers* to escalate. In that case, personalization ensures that the customer — and all relevant data — seamlessly moves to the new agent and/or touch point.

Given this definition, it is easy to see why digital channels actually strengthen an organization's potential to personalize experiences. Beyond bringing the interaction to the platforms customers prefer to use in their everyday lives, digital channels simplify the process of authenticating their profiles and recognizing their intentions. In turn, they allow companies to anticipate needs and present relevant options without needing to ask a plethora of qualifying questions.

Because live agents — particularly live phone agents — will not have to handle as many of these transactional issues, they can devote more time to the customers who do require more in-depth, conversational support. Indeed, personalized digital experiences open the door to more engaging phone calls.

WHY EXPERIENCES ARE IMPERSONAL

Personalization requires seamless access to all data, and a coordinated effort to use such data when designing experiences. Due to six common mistakes, many companies are unable to establish the necessary framework.

1 Not collecting enough data at each touch point

Many companies find themselves face-to-face with a simple reality: they cannot design based on data they do not have. Unable to collect actionable insights from all touchpoints, these organizations can neither develop rich customer profiles nor understand their different intentions. In turn, they are unable to sufficiently adapt their journeys to the customers' needs.

2 Not doing enough to connect channels

Omnichannel engagement hinges on the ideas of seamlessness and consistency. Customers should be able to easily move between different channels, and their data should always accompany them. They should never have to *repeat* information.

Just 18% of companies, however, say they have successfully built this "omnichannel" framework. The majority of companies have fragmented channels, ensuring customers will endure friction as they move from touch point to touch point. Worse, these companies will have incomplete or inconsistent views of each customer, further limiting their ability to personalize interactions.

"Many companies have been unable to overcome these challenges because they are limited by their legacy vendor technology," declares Richter. "That is, limited, siloed channels, inability to make changes, and inability to capture and activate customer data to aid in personalized interactions."

3 Not providing sufficient context across channels

In addition to recognizing customers, personalization hinges on understanding and empathizing with their issues. A company needs to know exactly what a customer wants to solve, and exactly why it matters, in order to provide personalized support.

Few companies, however, are successfully providing this *context* to different agents in different channels. As a result, these agents will have no sense of what progress the customer has already made on an issue and thus no sense of how to proceed. In the best case scenario, they will waste time repeating questions and re-confirming information. In the worst case scenario, they will engage in tone-deaf conversations that ignore the customer's present sentiment.

"Usually, agents will have some form of 'screen pop' with CRM context or other to help them with the customer's inquiry, but they can't easily scroll up to see history of previous interactions in the same thread," explains Richter. "Same for the customer: they have no view to prior interactions, like they are used to when texting with friends and family. This lack of context of prior interactions stalls efficiency when dealing with the matter at hand."

4 Not making data universally available to all teams

In addition to a seamless flow of customer data and context, personalization hinges on cohesion between all relevant channels and teams. If different channel teams do not share the same mindsets and objectives when it comes to *using data* to enhance experiences, the journey will still feel fragmented to customers. They will not feel as "recognized," let alone as valued, at all touch points.

5 Not training for personalization

Success is not just about the data and tools a company has but how it uses them. Not all companies recognize this distinction. They invest heavily in omnichannel contact center platforms that provide 360-degree windows into the experience, but they do not coach agents on how to *use* this data to tailor experiences in all channels. Agents continue to read generic scripts and enforce antiquated processes, erasing any sense of personalization.

6 Not establishing sufficient digital standards

Some companies possess all the necessary capabilities for personalization, but they make no effort to bring it to fruition. This shortcoming is common in digital channels; companies inherently view them as "deflection tools" or "waiting rooms" and thus fail to elevate the experiences. They fail to provide "full service" experiences that empower customers to get the support they need wherever they want it.

In some cases, the limitations are the product of poor technology. Companies force customers to use homegrown platforms that lack the functionalities customers value in their everyday lives.

"Chat experience with a company is often inferior to consumer chat apps we are all accustomed to," says Richter. "[Their platforms have an] inability to attach photos, videos, or files; proprietary chat app on website vs. convenience of SMS, WA, etc."

MAKING PERSONALIZATION A REALITY

The aforementioned challenges are common and significant, but they are not insurmountable. With a combination of proven technologies and best practices, companies can improve their data collection, unify their contact center platforms, and make personalization a reality throughout the omnichannel journey.

Establish and Activate Robust Customer Profiles

When a company *knows* its customers, it can more readily personalize their experiences. Modern analytics solutions and customer data platforms facilitate this process, empowering companies to develop robust profiles for each customer. This data can then be presented, in actionable form, to agents and self-service platforms during key moments of truth.

"Companies need a system of capturing, curating, and presenting first party customer data," explains Richter. "This can come from a customer data platform that not just gathers raw data through an API feed, but governs it, synthesizes it, and activates it for proactive and predictive customer experiences."

When optimizing their data platforms, leading companies will ensure agents have access to the *right* context for given issues and customers. This enhances their ability to personalize conversations and resolutions, and even upsell or cross-sell targeted products, all while respecting a customer's likely emotional state.

"Allow agents to not just see that the customer had a phone interaction last week and a chat interaction the week before, but to see the actual contents (transcript) of those interactions," recommends Richter.

Design Digital Experiences Based On Actual Customer Preferences

Not simply useful within specific interactions, robust customer data helps companies understand overarching customer behaviors and preferences. Successful companies will use this intelligence to design the digital experiences their customers actually want.

This includes ensuring digital channels — both self-service and agent-led — are capable of supporting the actual issues customers are facing. Escalation may still be necessary in some cases, but it should not be *inevitable* in most.

When escalation is necessary, these platforms facilitate seamless transitions to new channels. Ideally, customers can continue their conversation with the same agent to maximize personal relevancy and minimize inefficient repetition.

"At the basic level, consider embedding click-to-call functionality within webchat so that agents can offer customers a phone number in the chat thread to seamlessly migrate from a digital interaction to a voice interaction, with the same agent," recommends Richter.

Successful companies will additionally ensure their digital offerings include the capabilities customers have come to expect, and demand, in their everyday lives. From geolocation, to proactive alerts, to seamless logins, to multimedia content, they will harness the power of *digital* to provide the most relevant, personalized, valuable experiences possible.

By monitoring and learning from how customers use these capabilities and engage with these experiences, successful companies will then recalibrate — and simplify — future interactions.

"Companies need to deliver feature parity with messaging apps consumers are used to using with friends and family," adds Richter. "That is, in webchat, SMS, or WhatsApp channels, ability to attach files, photos, videos, ability to have a persistent threaded conversation with the company for context on both the customer and company side."

Commit to Omnichannel Engagement

Fractures within customer journeys and contact center systems do not merely create inefficiencies. They fundamentally thwart a company's ability to personalize experiences.

Wholeheartedly embracing the idea of omnichannel, therefore, represents a crucial step on the road to customer centricity.

This process, first and foremost, includes implementing modern, omnichannel contact center platforms that empower agents with 360-degree views of the experience and single sources of truth for all knowledge and intelligence.

"Structure agent user interfaces to give them visibility to all prior interactions a customer has with the company, regardless of whether it was a phone call, chat, or email," advises Richter. "This way, the agent has instant access to all the prior interactions, and contents therein, the customer has had, and can acknowledge those past interactions, and establish customer trust."

In addition to providing agents with omnichannel data, these platforms allow agents to instantly *converse* in different channels without opening new systems. This facilitates a scenario in which individual agents can cover most or all channels, allowing them to stick with customers who need to escalate to new environments

Not simply about unifying the agent experience, omnichannel platforms also seamlessly incorporate bots and automation platforms. This integration will elevate self-service by ensuring the AI is drawing accurate knowledge and CRM data. It also yields a smoother escalation process, ensuring all context from the bot flows directly to the live agent.

OMNICHANNEL PERSONALIZATION IN PRACTICE

Thanks to advances in contact center and digital engagement technology, the idea of a personalized, omnichannel experience is not a pipe dream. It is a reality.

By partnering with Twilio, standout brands are empowering customers to engage on their own terms, while helping agents provide more meaningful support along the way. Example success stories follow.

Company: Shopify

A multinational e-commerce company that offers online retailers a suite of services to simplify the process of running an online store for small merchants.

Challenge: Shopify had outgrown its patchwork contact center for managing customer relationships and needed a custom, flexible, and scalable solution that could be easily updated and support a remote agent workforce

Solution & Result: Launched thousands of Shopify agents on Flex in only 4 months, with a team of 5 developers

Company: QVC Italy

A leading home shopping entertainment channel

Challenge: QVC Italy had a voice only outdated contact center system and needed to quickly add digital channels and support a remote workforce

Solution & Result: 5 days to deploy Flex and add additional channels, such as WhatsApp and SMS.

Company: Chime Bank

Digital banking is on the rise, and Chime is leading the pack. Chime uses a host of Twilio-powered solutions to help deliver an unrivaled customer service experience and build customer loyalty.

Challenge: Provide a personalized member support experience and iterate quickly using analytical insight.

Solution & Result: Chime's Twilio usage started with programmable messaging, and evolved to a highly personalized interactive voice (IVR) solution built using Twilio Studio, for all levels of inbound support.

12 percent increase in customer satisfaction scores

VoiceOps

THE NEW WORLD OF CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS DEMANDS A NEW WAY OF COACHING AGENTS

Customers expect a lot these days: an end-to-end omnichannel experience that is consultative, personalized to their needs, and seamless. The majority of consumers admit that their standards for a good experience are higher than ever before.

At the same time, the operational challenges for contact centers are becoming ever more complex and unpredictable due to societal issues like the COVID-19 pandemic, an explosion of advanced technologies, and shifting employee expectations. In today's competitive environment - across any industry - it's not enough to merely maintain performance. Companies need to constantly be looking for ways to build additional competitive advantage. This is tough in the commoditized

world of contact centers. What will move the needle more than just an incremental amount?

Contact centers need to become strategic operations that can flex, adjust, and adapt. They need to be able to learn and grow with the organization's and customers' needs. This is deep strategy development that will impact how every level of employee at the contact center is enabled, and it won't be accomplished by mere technology adoption. Gone are the days when running a contact center was a cookie cutter proposition.

The only way for contact centers to achieve the level of strategic and operational readiness described above is to make sure the team working in the contact center is

ready to do so. The success of the business depends on the ability of the contact center agents to meet the needs of customers no matter what their environment or the disruptions that might occur.

COACHING CAN (AND SHOULD) BE A SUPERPOWER

Developing a strong, effective coaching program that itself is able to adapt to evolving challenges will ensure that agents are ready for anything (even the unexpected). Great coaching will provide a competitive advantage not just through better customer experience, but higher conversion rates, lower attrition costs, reduced performance gaps, and better speed to proficiency, among other key benefits.

In a way, this boils down to a simple truth that seems obvious but is often overlooked amid the noise of today's technology and the pace of economic change: *making people better at their jobs is the single most effective investment contact centers can make to ensure sustained competitive advantage.*

TRADITIONAL CONTACT CENTER COACHING DOESN'T WORK

Unfortunately, current coaching programs aren't working as well as they should be. Most coaching is inefficient, creates lack of trust, big performance gaps, and zero visibility for leadership. Coaches aren't equipped with the data, workflow, or training they themselves need to do a good job. Let's dig into three key problem areas for most coaching programs:

Problem 1: Inefficient Coaching Workflows

Coaches are often overloaded, sifting through mountains of call data and firefighting call escalations daily. Call analytics tools are rife with errors and only incrementally better than having no tool at all. Many coaches are former agents themselves, which means they probably haven't received any actual coaching training.

Too often, contact center managers end up in an unfortunate and familiar cadence: only able to coach on one call per agent per week, knowing that this is unlikely to address the real areas needing improvement, and lacking the enablement to create a more efficient process.

Problem 2: Poor Coach-Agent Relationships

The workflow described above makes it impossible for coaches to effectively coach or have valuable and consistent conversations with team members. Agents become frustrated with inadequate feedback, not trusting the guidance they do get from coaches since it's based on incomplete context (such as only one call at a time). Agents are left unable to understand where and how they can improve.

In addition to producing a disconnected and unhappy work environment across the team, a poor coach-agent relationship directly affects top-line business metrics such as attrition, speed to proficiency, and (of course) performance.

Problem 3: No Visibility for Leadership

Most contact center leaders struggle to understand what's actually going on across teams. Who's getting coached when, on what, and how? More importantly, is the coaching that's happening having an impact on the business? Who's doing the best job coaching, and why?

Considering the hours each week that contact center managers spend coaching (especially given the inefficient workflow described above), coaching programs are too expensive for leadership to be left in the dark as to their effectiveness.

THE SOLUTION IS COACHING ENABLEMENT

Tackling the problems detailed above requires two important elements: a strong coaching strategy and effective coaching technology. These two pieces make up **coaching enablement,** and most contact centers don't have them.

A Strong Coaching Strategy

Developing a coaching strategy should begin with identifying the ROI metrics of the coaching program. These will be lagging indicators of the program's success, such as conversion rate increases, CSAT scores, ramp time decreases, or attrition decreases.

The next step is to map the customer experience to key skills and behaviors that make up a successful conversation. Good conversation builds strong relationships that add value for companies and customers, but it's hard to achieve good conversation at scale across a team. Mapping these key skills and behaviors is a critical step towards implementing a behavior-based coaching approach that will enable better conversations.

Finally, the coaching strategy should include clear expectations about the cadence, format, and personnel involved in the team's coaching. Coaching, unlike the initial training most agents receive, should never end. A good coaching program provides consistent, ongoing attention to every agent regardless of tenure or performance. This is partly because of the constantly evolving nature of customer and business needs, and partly because of the fact that people just forget training. They need it to be consistently reinforced over time.

This coaching must be done in a targeted, customized way for each team, each call type, and each objective. It's not easy to get away from the mindset of call scripts and keyword matching, but it's possible to do it efficiently, especially if there is also good technology to enable both employees and the coaches who are upskilling them.

Effective Coaching Technology

Good coaching technology is essential to successfully execute and evaluate coaching programs at contact centers. Effective coaching platforms guide leaders in mapping conversations to key skills and behaviors. This is done with a combination of advanced technology and strategic professional services.

Coaching technology also provides simple yet customized coaching workflows and packages for managers, compliance officers, and other stakeholders. With a good coaching solution, it's clear to everyone involved what they should be doing each day to have the most impact on agent performance. Coaches know which calls to coach on, which behaviors to reinforce, and who needs stronger feedback. The most effective technologies incorporate asynchronous comments and in-person sessions to help agents focus on what most needs improvement.

Importantly, good coaching technology leverages high quality, trustworthy data to provide visibility into the metrics that really matter throughout the contact center organization. These metrics include (but are not limited to) those described below:

- **Behavior adherence:** How often are agents performing the skills and behavior they should be on calls? (Note: the *eligibility* is critical here - for example, a 'Payment Timeline' behavior would not be eligible if the customer is paying in full.)

- **Workflow adherence:** Are managers sticking to the coaching program as designed?

- **Performance trends:** What is the change in agent performance over time?

- **Team alignment:** Does everyone across the team understand and buy into the skills, behaviors, and coaching workflows?

- **ROI:** Are the business metrics identified as part of the coaching strategy showing positive impact?

THE IMPACT OF COACHING ENABLEMENT

Done right, building a coaching enablement program with strong strategy and effective technology will create a cascading effect of better conversations, stronger relationships, and improved performance. This will lead to greater customer loyalty, higher revenue, lower attrition costs, and greater productivity across the contact center.

Finally, coaching enablement will transform a contact center team into a strategic force on the front lines of the business, able to adapt to shifting customer demands and unpredictable economic and societal trends to grab and maintain competitive advantage.

BRANDED CALLING

The Next STIR/SHAKEN Frontier

neustar.

TELECOM: IT'S THE NEW WILD WEST.

Has a "government agency" called you trying to get your personal information? Or maybe your long-lost "grandchild" is begging you to send money to get them out of jail. Then, there's the fake small businesses looking for Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funds, and, of course, the COVID-19 scammers hoping to earn fast cash wherever they can.

THERE'S A NEW SHERIFF IN TOWN.

Congress, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and the Department of Justice (DOJ) are taking measures to restore law and order through legislation and regulations like STIR/SHAKEN call authentication. While it's a major step towards curtailing call spoofing and robocalling, it's just the tip of the iceberg in terms of transforming the phone channel.

Rather, it's the idea of combining branded calling with STIR/SHAKEN that's really generating excitement.

Providing a personalized, branded experience by adding logos, targeted messaging, and more—backed by an assurance that the call has been authenticated — gives customers, prospects, and partners a reason to answer the phone, improves the customer experience, and enhances engagement.

BRANDED CALLING IS THE NEXT FRONTIER

Displaying images and other contextual information on phone call has been technically possible for a while. However, without the ability to verify the identity of the caller or ensure that the phone number is not being spoofed, a branded call experience simply lets fraudulent calls become...more attractive and convincing fraudulent calls. And possibly more likely to succeed.

What Do They Have in Common?

They all rely on the phone channel for call spoofing, robocalls, scams, and fraud. Voice carriers, businesses, and consumers alike are scrambling to take back control of a vital communications channel. But, without new technologies and processes to authenticate calls – coupled with thoroughly vetted data about who's calling – we simply can't guarantee a trusted calling ecosystem.

Some solutions in the market are beginning to offer branded calling experiences using proprietary authentication technologies.

Could they work? Perhaps. But it requires that everyone implement this proprietary technology.

Is that possible? Yes, but not only are the integrations proprietary and don't scale, the ability to show up across multiple carriers and phone models are similarly isolated and don't scale either.

Branded calling offers a way for enterprises to get calls answered and protect their brand; for carriers to safely deliver calls; and for consumers to once again trust that they can answer the phone.

What Does Branded Calling Look Like?

ENTERPRISE / BRAND	E-BUSINESS CARD	POST-CALL ENGAGEMENT	OUTBOUND CALLS

(FUTURE STATE)

ENTERPRISE / BRAND

CALL FROM:

Company Name
1 (800) 555-1234

LOGO

Call Purpose

Personalize the mobile screen for contextual and branded call experience.

E-BUSINESS CARD

CALL FROM:

Company Name
1 (800) 555-1234

Caller Name
Caller Title
Company Address

Call Purpose

Provide personalized identification for specific departments and/or business reps.

POST-CALL ENGAGEMENT

CALL LOG

Company Name
1 (800) 555-1234

History
☑ Date 1   Call Purpose 1
☑ Date 2   Call Purpose 2
☑ Date 3   Call Purpose 3

📞 1 (800) 555-1234
    Caller - Wireless number

🌐 View website

🔔 Set a reminder

Provide post-call context for past and missed calls, such as callback numbers, websites, and more.

OUTBOUND CALLS

YOU CALLED:

Company Name
1 (800) 555-1234

Customer Service

INFO / OFFER

Inform customers who they are calling. Allow businesses to personalize information, such as the department reached.

PANNIN' FOR GOLD WITH BRANDED CALLING.

With branded calling, enterprises can leverage the mobile screen to add context to each call by including visual cues such as: logos, images, e-business cards, targeted messaging, and more –giving customers, prospects, and partners a good reason to answer the phone.

While branded calling tells the called party who's calling, the STIR/SHAKEN component verifies that the number, and the data, have not been spoofed. Neustar's working to make branded calling more efficient and productive for everyone by addressing several pain points.

- **Verification:** It signals that a business and the phone numbers that it uses have been vetted, so its identity is legitimate.

- **Authentication:** Each call uses digital certificates known as STIR/SHAKEN to sign and certify that the caller ID has not been compromised.

- **Branding:** It shows the brand's logo or identity, which helps aid recognition and recall.

- **Context:** It gives the user the information they need, including the reason the business is calling.

Early adopters using branded phone call technology to tell their customers who is calling have improved answer rates on first-call attempts by over 56%.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS.

The branded calling design builds upon the STIR framework for secure telephone identity. In its most basic form, the enterprise provides branded calling, which is then typically vetted by their voice service provider who is familiar with them. The Originating Service Provider (OSP) attests the caller information and includes it in a PASSporT Identity token, with a digital signature.

That data is then passed along and presented to the called party through software on their mobile phone, or through an app.

With "basic" STIR/SHAKEN, the OSP attests to their customer's right to use the calling number and has records about their customers and calling numbers.

But when it comes to branded calling, service providers must also vouch for the content their

customers provide. Without any records, or a way to confirm that data, it's impossible for service providers to accomplish that. How can they know that the enterprises, itself, and their branded calling are real?

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS– AUTHENTICATION WITH BRANDED CALLING.

An enterprise looking to offer a branded call experience can also choose to work with a solutions provider like Neustar to verify that they are a legitimate business and certify that they have the right to use all the phone numbers to place calls.
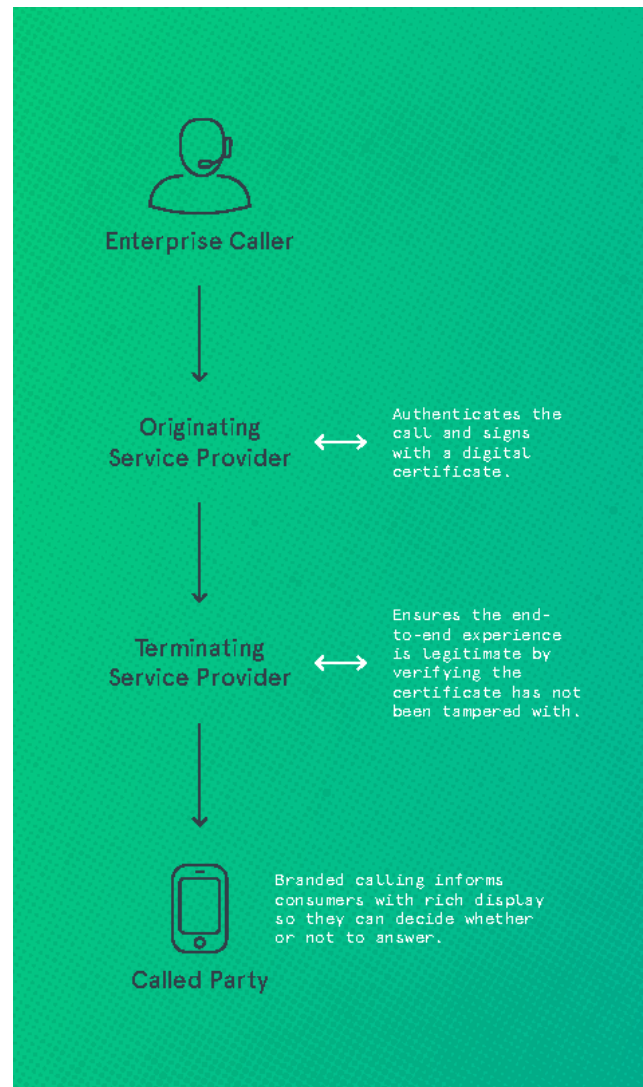
Rich, Branded Call Data.

Once validated, the enterprise can then add branded calling such as brand name and logo, as well as specifying the various calling reasons for the phone numbers, using a centralized caller identity management portal. And they can get STIR/SHAKEN verification as well.

Authentication.

When the enterprise places a call, Neustar's call authentication solution signs the call and passes the STIR/SHAKEN PASSporT along with the branded calling, which is presented to the called party through software on their mobile phone.

The authentication of the call, assembly of the rich content, and presentation to the user takes place in the blink of an eye.

Enterprise Caller

↓

Originating Service Provider ⟷ Authenticates the call and signs with a digital certificate.

↓

Terminating Service Provider ⟷ Ensures the end-to-end experience is legitimate by verifying the certificate has not been tampered with.

↓

Called Party — Branded calling informs consumers with rich display so they can decide whether or not to answer.

With this feature, enterprises get complete control over how their brand is presented, with the added assurance for the consumer that the call has not been spoofed.

Lasso That Data Down through Vetting.

A critical step for carriers or enterprises is to validate their business details, assign a legitimate call purpose, confirm ownership, and associate caller data to each telephone numbers used to make outbound calls.

A third party like Neustar can ensure this information is registered, closely monitored, and updated across the vast ecosystem of voice service providers, call analytics programs, and mobile apps.

The Vetting Process Is Also Multi-Faceted and Includes:

Enterprise Vetting
Verify legitimacy of the corporate entity and its business purpose.

Telecoms Vetting
Verify TN ownership and chain-of-custody with carrier and caller ID ecosystem.

Call Campaign Vetting
Understand calling use cases, phone numbers in use, caller name, and calling strategy.

Vetting Fallout
Iterative exception process to address registration failures of entities, TNs, and campaign strategies.

Call Behavior Vetting
Verify calling behavior conforms to registered information; reconcile with analytics call treatment and consumer feedback.

There are many questions that need answers to vet enterprise customers before allowing them into a trusted ecosystem, including:

- Are you a valid business that can be trusted by others?
- Do you have the right to use these telephone numbers, and are they valid?
- What is the intent of these calls?
- Are there any issues to be resolved with the reputation of your telephone numbers?
- Do you have the right to use the images and logo you provide?

Circling the Wagons.

In spite of efforts by authorities, carriers, and enterprises to embrace new regulations and technologies like STIR/SHAKEN for the greater good, without a serious commitment by all parties to join forces in vetting customers and verifying legitimate traffic, bad actors will continue to destroy trust in the phone ecosystem.

The use of branded calling coupled with authentication can help solve that problem. But it also offers brands the opportunity to get creative with the phone channel, reach customers, and improve the call experience. Your customers do want your calls. They just don't know it's you calling.

Keep In Touch, Ya' Hear?

Learn how our Branded Call Display solution – part of our Trusted Call Solution suite – and our experts can help you get creative and get calls answered.
Visit **home.neustar/bcd** to learn more

CALABRIO

STATE OF THE CONTACT CENTER 2021: CLOUD IS HERE. *WHAT'S NEXT?*

INTRODUCTION:

An Inflection Point in Cloud Transformation

As the COVID-19 crisis accelerated the digital transformation timeline across the business world, one estimate suggests we collectively crammed 5.3 years of digital transformation activity into the first half of 2020. Contact centers grew more critical to business success as organizations relied on them to nurture customer relationships through fluctuating service levels and an evolving world of work. This forced contact centers in every segment to become more agile in their operations and more flexible with their technical infrastructure, pushing the contact center world across a major inflection point.

Calabrio's State of the Contact Center 2021 report found that more than three-in-four contact centers made full or partial moves to the cloud. An astounding 68% of those cloud migrations happened over the last year during the pandemic, which helps illustrate the urgency of becoming cloud-proficient. After all of this 2021 activity, one-in-four contact centers are now fully cloud-based — a substantial jump from less than a year ago, when a Calabrio 2020 survey found just 1 in 10 had fully moved to the cloud.

The Cloud Inflection Point

3-in-4 contact centers have **MOVED TO THE CLOUD**	**68%** of cloud migrations occurred **during the last year**
2020	**2021**
1-in-10 contact centers were **FULLY CLOUD-BASED**	**1-in-4** contact centers are now **FULLY CLOUD-BASED**

Entering the Cloud-Smart Era

With the Cloud Transformation fully here in the present, the modern multi-channel contact center has entered a Cloud-Smart Era. This next phase of cloud transformation moves from a reactive approach — solving urgent business problems with cloud-based solutions — to more proactive strategies for achieving key business goals. The paradigm around the value of the cloud has shifted: No longer narrowly focused on efficiency or cost-reduction strategies, contact centers are increasingly looking to leverage the inherent agility, flexibility and computing power of the cloud to do more — and be ready for whatever comes next.

The next phase of the cloud-powered contact center is focused more on what and how than where, because the where will increasingly become a given: in the cloud.

The Calabrio State of the Contact Center 2021 report dives deep into this inflection point in the cloud transformation of the contact center, revealing seven key insights:

- **KEY INSIGHT #1:** The cloud drives strategic business value — not just cost-optimization.

- **KEY INSIGHT #2:** The cloud powers an analytics-driven approach.

- **KEY INSIGHT #3:** Cloud-powered solutions make AI & ML practical.

- **KEY INSIGHT #4:** Cloud-powered agility helps contact centers meet rising customer expectations.

- **KEY INSIGHT #5:** Agents are happier in the cloud.

- **KEY INSIGHT #6:** Cloud security fears ebbing — but data loss fears limit migration.

- **KEY INSIGHT #7:** Seeing is believing in the value of the cloud.

The Value of the Cloud

"Being able to have people work remotely and be able to have the access to all things they need to do their jobs most accurately and competently." – Team Leader, USA

ABOUT THE CALABRIO STATE OF THE CONTACT CENTER 2021 SURVEY

Methodology + Audience

Conducted a 5-minute online survey with 273 contact center employees, who are employed in a managerial role, in the USA, UK and DACH, across varying industries. Twenty-one of the contact center employees were contacted through Calabrio's customer database.

121 USA MANAGERS   **52** UK MANAGERS   **100** DACH MANAGERS

MANAGER TITLES

- **30%** Manager
- **21%** Team Leader
- **14%** Head Of Call Center
- **12%** Customer Services Director
- **8%** Operations Manager
- **<5%** Trainer/Coach/Reporting/Analytics/Workforce/ Quality Manager

INDUSTRIES

- **19%** Financial/Banking (n=51*)
- **17%** Utilities (n=47*)
- **16%** Retail/Apparel (n=43*)
- **14%** Healthcare (n=39*)
- **14%** Distribution (n=37*)
- **4%** Airlines (n=10*)
- **16%** Other (n=44*)

Defining Cloud Transformation

Full Cloud	Partial Cloud	On-Premise
All systems deployed within a public, private or hybrid cloud.	Some systems deployed within public, private or hybrid cloud — some systems still on-premise.	All systems still deployed through conventional on-premise model.

KEY INSIGHT #1:
The cloud drives strategic business value — not just cost-optimization.

The last wave of cloud migration in the contact center world was largely reactive. Organizations looked to migrate to cloud solutions to solve urgent problems — such as achieving greater flexibility and scalability, reducing or freeing up CapEx, or (with the pandemic) rapidly enabling a decentralized, remote workforce. Plenty of cloud migration in this first wave was also reactive to the undercurrent of pressure. Many knew they needed to be in the cloud, but they had yet to develop a strategic plan that articulates what they want to do when they get there.

75% of contact centers say the **CLOUD ENABLES MORE STRATEGIC & BUSINESS-ORIENTED OPERATIONS**

The Calabrio 2021 survey shows that the pandemic quickly propelled contact centers out of this reactive phase: 75% of contact centers now recognize that the being in the cloud isn't just a cost-efficiency or flexibility play — it enables them to be more strategic and make smarter business decisions.

All the well-established benefits around operational efficiency are still on the table, but they've increasingly become table stakes for modern, forward-thinking contact centers. Now, contact centers are looking first at what they want to achieve — targeted CX enhancements, integrating VOC analytics across the business, or improving agent engagement, to name a few — and building cloud-powered solutions and workflows around those strategic priorities.

Finding the "Next" in the Cloud

One surprising and seemingly contradictory finding: While full-cloud contact centers are the most likely to preach the benefits cloud capabilities like advanced analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning, 68% of full-cloud contact centers believe they've achieved the full potential of their cloud solutions. This brings the obvious question, "How do you know?" This report explores the likely answer to that question: Contact centers need to leverage cloud-powered analytics, AI and ML tools to identify and explore the "next" opportunity in the cloud.

KEY INSIGHT #2:
The cloud powers an analytics-driven approach

Calabrio's 2020 State of the Contact Center: Evolving World of Work report saw contact center managers recognizing an intense and growing demand for analytics insights to help the business take action—especially amid the rapidly changing environment of the early months of the pandemic. A full 90% said they expected analytics demand to grow — from the executive suite, in particular. But half said they didn't have the analytics insights they needed — on CX, agent satisfaction and performance, and operations and costs — and 1-in-3 said they weren't doing any VOC analytics.

7-in-10
cloud-powered contact centers say CLOUD-SOLUTIONS ARE ENHANCING ANALYTICS INSIGHTS FOR CUSTOMER & EMPLOYEE DATA

The 2021 report shows that cloud-based solutions are directly helping contact centers rise to meet these demands. Nearly 70% of cloud-powered contact centers say that cloud-based solutions are helping them improve their analytics capabilities — for both customer and employee data. Notably, contact centers that remain on-premise are having a much harder time recognizing just how much the cloud could accelerate their analytics efforts.

In this new Cloud-Smart Era, analytics will increasingly become a driving force in the contact center. Cloud solutions will continue to make it easier for contact centers to finally unlock the tremendous trove of value within their VOC and employee data. As those analytics insights become more accessible, they will not only power smarter decision-making within the contact center, but also gain greater visibility and impact across the business, helping drive customer-centric decision-making.

KEY INSIGHT #3:
Cloud-powered solutions make AI & ML practical.

Gartner and other analysts have been tracking adoption and utilization of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) for decades. Gartner, in particular, has even created a "Hype Cycle" graphic to visually represent the progress of these technologies.[1] The Hype Cycle speaks to the longstanding disconnect between the promise and potential of AI and ML — and how realistic and achievable that value is viewed by businesses. Fortunately, Gartner sees the pandemic as a force-accelerator in the movement toward realizing the potential of AI and ML, noting in a recent report that "AI is starting to deliver on its potential, and its benefits for businesses are becoming a reality."[2]
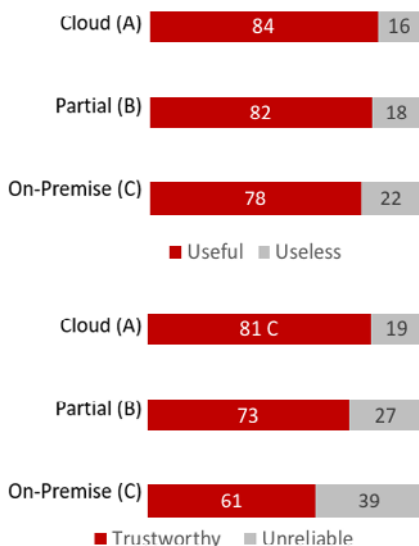
HALF of cloud-powered contact centers are already using cloud-based solutions to IMPROVE UTILIZATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Cloud-powered solutions make AI:

- EASIER
- MORE USEFUL
- MORE TRUSTWORTHY
- MORE REALISTIC

AI-SOFTWARE PERCEPTIONS (%)

Q267. Select the statements below that best describe how you feel about AI software today?

	Useful	Useless
Cloud (A)	84	16
Partial (B)	82	18
On-Premise (C)	78	22

	Trustworthy	Unreliable
Cloud (A)	81 C	19
Partial (B)	73	27
On-Premise (C)	61	39

	Realistic	Unrealistic
Cloud (A)	81	19
Partial (B)	77	23
On-Premise (C)	72	28

	Easy	Complex
Cloud (A)	45	55
Partial (B)	51 C	49
On-Premise (C)	36	64 B

Cloud solutions democratize and industrialize AI.

Calabrio's 2021 State of the Contact Center report echoes Gartner's findings: Half of cloud-powered contact centers say their cloud solutions are helping them advance their utilization of AI and ML technologies to drive value in their organizations. Furthermore, the cloud is dramatically changing perceptions about the practicality of these technologies. Cloud-powered contact centers view AI as significantly more useful, easier to use, and more trustworthy than those not yet in the cloud — and they also see the future promise of AI as more realistically achievable than on-premise contact centers. Once again, it's clear that on-premise contact centers have a harder time seeing this potential and remain stuck in the early stages of the Hype Cycle.

These findings reflect what Gartner calls the "democratization" and "industrialization" of AI.[3] Democratization is making AI more usable and user-friendly. No longer do contact centers need to hire AI experts to implement and use AI tools. Cloud-based solutions offer AI-driven tools that are intuitive for any user and can be made accessible across other business units in the organization. Industrialization makes AI more practical and scalable, enabling contact centers to build AI into core workflows and rapidly catch up to the early AI adopters.

[1] https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/2-megatrends-dominate-the-gartner-hype-cycle-for-artificial-intelligence-2020/

[2] https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/2-megatrends-dominate-the-gartner-hype-cycle-for-artificial-intelligence-2020/

[3] https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/2-megatrends-dominate-the-gartner-hype-cycle-for-artificial-intelligence-2020/

KEY INSIGHT #4:
Cloud-powered agility helps contact centers meet rising customer expectations.

Calabrio's 2020 Evolving World of Work report found rising customer expectations challenging contact centers in many ways. Customers increasingly want more channels, particularly video conferencing; they expect quicker response times, but prefer human agents over chatbots; and they need help with increasingly complex questions, but also have higher expectations for emotional empathy.

The 2020 survey saw more than 90% of contact centers investing in adding channels and other technologies to meet these rising expectations. And the 2021 State of the Contact Center report found that the majority of contact centers — whether fully or partially cloud-based or on-premise — did implement significant measures to meet rising customer expectations: adding new channels and using analytics, business intelligence (BI), and personalization tools to enhance the customer experience. **But their success in these measures was directly related to their cloud maturity.** In particular, contact centers with full-cloud solutions were nearly twice as likely to have successfully implemented new capabilities like social channels, chatbots and BI platforms.

Full-cloud contact centers are NEARLY 2X AS LIKELY to have implemented SOCIAL CHANNELS CHATBOTS BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE PLATFORMS

There's little doubt customer expectations will continue rising, and the 2021 survey shows that cloud-smart contact centers are much more confident in their ability to adapt to this ever-changing landscape. Two-thirds of on-premise contact centers say they feel limited by their current infrastructure, and even half of partial-cloud contact centers report that their technology is a barrier. By contrast the vast majority of full-cloud contact centers aren't worried that their technical infrastructure will be a limiting factor in their ability to meet and exceed changing customer expectations.

2-in-3
On-premise contact centers

&

HALF
Of partial-cloud contact centers

FEEL LIMITED BY THEIR CURRENT SOLUTIONS

KEY INSIGHT #5:
Agents are happier in the cloud.

The 2020 Evolving World of Work report found contact center managers increasingly seeing the value of employee engagement — in terms of its impact on both CX and the bottom line from a cost-optimization standpoint. Last year, 92% said they were planning to maintain or increase their investments in Workforce Engagement Management (WEM) solutions. Fast-forward to 2021, and 9 in 10 contact centers say they're actively using employee engagement data to evaluate and improve their CX.

In particular, the 2021 survey found that WEM and WFO solutions are the most popular targets for cloud transformation. And cloud-powered contact centers (full or partial) say the cloud has directly increased employee engagement in their organizations. Cloud-based solutions are helping contact centers provide agents with the flexibility and scheduling control they want, the real-time performance feedback they crave, and better tools, training and information to be more successful in their jobs.

9-in-10
contact centers are USING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT DATA TO ENHANCE CX

Top Ways Cloud-Based Solutions Drive Employee Engagement

- Enabling flexible, remote working
- Providing performance transparency & rapid access to metrics
- Delivering better data insights to understand & support employees

KEY INSIGHT #6:
Cloud security fears ebbing — but data loss fears limit migration.

Security *in* the cloud has traditionally been the top concern and barrier to cloud migration. That fear is rapidly ebbing, as contact centers increasingly recognize that the cloud is almost always *more* secure than legacy on-premise models. With security technologies — and security threats — growing more sophisticated every year, it's becoming more difficult and costly for individual organizations to build and manage their security infrastructure fully in-house. Leading cloud vendors deliver on the value of the as-a-Service model, providing cloud solutions with built-in, state-of-the-art security that is continuously updated in real time.

Most contact centers have become LESS FEARFUL OF CLOUD SECURITY over the last five years.

3-in-4
contact centers say DATA SECURITY IS NO LONGER A BARRIER TO CLOUD MIGRATION

Indeed, our 2021 survey found that only 1-in-4 contact centers say that security is the main barrier to cloud migration. **In fact, half say their overall outlook on cloud security has become *less fearful* over the last five years.**

Uncertainties around cloud migration drive data loss fears.

Today, the biggest barrier to cloud migration data security *in* the cloud is the potential for data loss in the move to the cloud. The other major barriers to cloud migration are similarly focused on the "how" of the move to the cloud — concerns about cash flow and lack of expertise and resources to manage the migration. These practical, logistical and administrative concerns likely play into data loss fears. If a contact center is not comfortable with what the process of migration will actually require, or not confident it has the resources to meet those requirements, it's natural to worry that something might be lost or go awry along the way.

Contact centers are 2X more worried about losing data loss in the migration TO the cloud than data security IN the cloud.

Top Barriers to Cloud Migration

- Fear of data loss
- Legal/regulatory uncertainties
- Lack of resources (budget, IT expertise, staff time, etc.)

Just as cloud vendors understood the need to raise awareness of greater security in the cloud, leading cloud vendors now recognize the need to allay data loss concerns through awareness of the cloud migration process itself. Best-in-class cloud vendors are educating contact centers on how they combine technology and best practices to ensure a smooth, seamless migration experience — leveraging hard-earned expertise along with pre-built connectors to drive assured integrations. The simplicity and security of migrating systems and data to the cloud is indeed a foundational driver of the shift to the Cloud-Smart Era.

KEY INSIGHT #7:
Seeing is believing in the value of the cloud.

Looking across all the data gathered in the 2021 State of the Contact Center report, a clear trend emerges: Contact centers that have moved to the cloud (fully or partially) have a completely different perspective on the benefits, advantages and potential of cloud solutions — while those still fully on-premise remain much more skeptical. The data show that seeing really is believing when it comes to the value of the cloud:

- **Value of Cloud-Powered Decision-Making:** Cloud-powered contact centers say the cloud is helping them be more strategic and make smarter business decisions.

- **Value of Cloud-Powered Analytics:** Cloud-powered contact centers see more value in customer and employee data analytics — including AI- and ML-driven analytics tools — and see that value as more accessible and achievable.

- **Value of Cloud-Powered Collaboration:** Cloud-powered contact centers see how cloud solutions have empowered their remote, decentralized workforces, giving employees flexibility while enhancing communication and collaboration.

- **Value of Employee Engagement:** Cloud-powered contact centers are more likely to realize value from employee engagement and empowerment initiatives, seeing how the cloud enables more flexible work arrangements, offers more transparent performance feedback and delivers better information to agents.

- **Value of Cloud Security:** Cloud-powered contact centers are less fearful of data security concerns and *more* likely to see how the cloud is making their data and systems more secure.

- **Value of Cloud Agility:** Cloud-powered contact centers are more likely to add additional channels — including social and chatbots — and more confident in their ability to meet future demands.

This "seeing is believing" trend suggests that remaining on-premise contact centers — and those slowly moving toward partial-cloud solutions — will struggle to gain momentum to accelerate their cloud transformations unless they take at least small steps in migrating workflows to the cloud.

But this trend also holds a powerfully relevant insight for those actively seeking Cloud-Smart strategies: The 2021 survey showed that many cloud-powered contact centers believe they've achieved the full potential of their cloud-based solutions.

Yet, the data suggests that many of these contact centers have significant unrealized opportunities in the cloud — from AI- and ML-driven analytics, to cloud-powered WEM and other future-proof, agile strategies. Just as on-premise contact centers struggle to fully see the value of the cloud because they haven't experienced it, those already in the cloud won't recognize all their unrealized cloud potential *until they begin exploring it.*

LOOKING AHEAD:
Leading in the Cloud-Smart Era

The 2021 survey data shows we've clearly crossed a major inflection point in the cloud transformation of the contact center, with 3-in-4 contact centers now leveraging cloud-based solutions. We've also turned a corner in perception and understanding: Contact centers recognize the strategic value of the cloud, and cloud security is no longer a major barrier to migration. In short, it's no longer a question of *if*; rather, the *how* of the move is now the big hurdle.

At the top level, contact centers are trying to determine the best roadmap for migration — whether to pursue a revolutionary all-in jump to full cloud, or a more evolutionary move to partial or hybrid cloud. The logistics also present major hesitation points: Contact centers worry if they have the resources, expertise and budget to migrate — and they have significant business continuity concerns, as they can't afford significant service interruptions and certainly can't afford to lose critical business data in the move.

These concerns will continue to be relevant for all contact centers in 2021 and beyond. As most continue making their way toward full-cloud, and more begin moving between clouds, jumping to better, faster, smarter cloud solutions, all will need to seek out cloud solution vendors that can provide both the expertise and the technology to allay these concerns and ensure fast, seamless migration.

Seeking out competitive advantage in the cloud

While fears will always linger, the defining characteristic of the Cloud-Smart Era will be the shift from a reactive, somewhat fearful approach to a proactive, growth-minded strategy for cloud migration. The operational value — flexibility, scalability, cost-effectiveness, etc. — of the cloud is now beyond question. The next phase will focus on targeting unique, strategic advantages with things like cloud-powered VOC analytics, AI-powered WEM, and true BI platforms. It's clear that seeing is believing when it comes to the value and potential of cloud solutions. Those still hesitant to make the jump to the cloud would be wise to begin experimenting with partial cloud solutions, so they can see what their cloud-powered peers already know, before they fall too far behind.

But those already in the cloud — even the most innovative early adopters — cannot risk complacency. Just being in the cloud is no longer a strategic advantage, but rather table-stakes for survival. To be Cloud-Smart, every contact center needs to proactively seek out new value in the cloud. And those strategies need to focus on high-impact business outcomes, from deepening their use of embedded analytics tools to extracting and using insights from their employee data, to putting AI and ML to work to power the next-generation customer experience.

APPENDIX

CALABRIO

📄 **Calabrio WFM ROI Calculator**

📄 **Business Recovery Accelerator Kit**

Khoros

📄 **The 2021 Guide to Building Customer Trust: 6 ways to increase brand loyalty and create customers for life**

📄 **6 reasons your customers hate your chat:And how to fix it**

VoiceOps

📄 **The Benefits of Behavior-Based Coaching: Build Trust and Create a Consultative, Customer-Centric Team**

When companies transition to behavior-based coaching, they create a more effective feedback loop for employees that improves two essential relationships in the customer lifecycle: coach with rep, and rep with customer.

📄 **Always Be Coaching®**

An inspiring, practical webinar and podcast series about making call center coaching your superpower.

COGNIGY

📄 **Contact Center Automation: Everything You Need to Know**

📄 **Why AI is the Customer Service of Tomorrow**

neustar

📄 **The Enterprise Call Experience: Finance**
How Improving the Call Experience Reverses Revenue Loss

📄 **Are Robocalls and Fraudsters Ruining Your Brand?**
Seven Steps to Get Calls Answered and Restore Trust in the Phone

krisp

📄 **Krisp.AI Blog**

📄 **How Krisp helps BPOs increase productivity of home-based and in contact center agents.**

twilio

📄 **Cloud Platform: The Next Generation Approach For Contact Centers**

📄 **Twilio Flex: The Most Flexible Cloud Contact Center**

USU

📄 **Knowledge Management Buyer's Guide**

A knowledge management solution ensures that knowledge is always up-to-date, quality-assured, and available from a single source of truth. Based on your individual use case, see how to evaluate vendors and features and maximize ROI.

📄 **Best Practices for Writing Knowledge Base Articles**

E-WRITE's Leslie O'Flahavan explains everything you need to know to write knowledge base articles that people will read willingly and use easily.

qualtrics^{XM}

📄 **Improving agent effectiveness to increase retention and improve customer satisfaction**

📄 **ROI of Customer Experience 2020**

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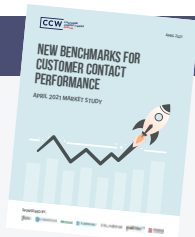
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State Of Contact Center Technology

APRIL

New Benchmarks For Customer Contact Performance

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Customer Contact Industry Review

AUGUST

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Future Of The Contact Center: A Forecast

December 14-16, 2021

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