



# 2019 eCommerce Customer Service Experience Study

Revealing the expectations, experiences,  
and impact of eCommerce customer service



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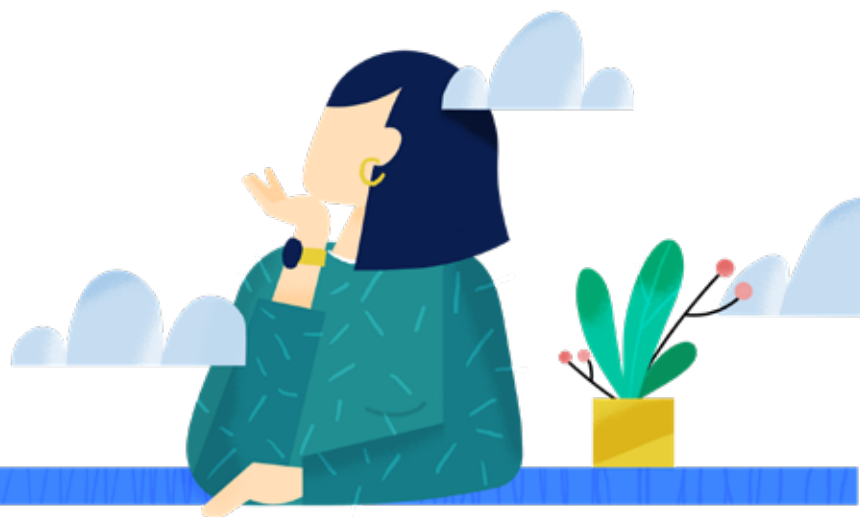
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# ABOUT THIS STUDY

## Purpose

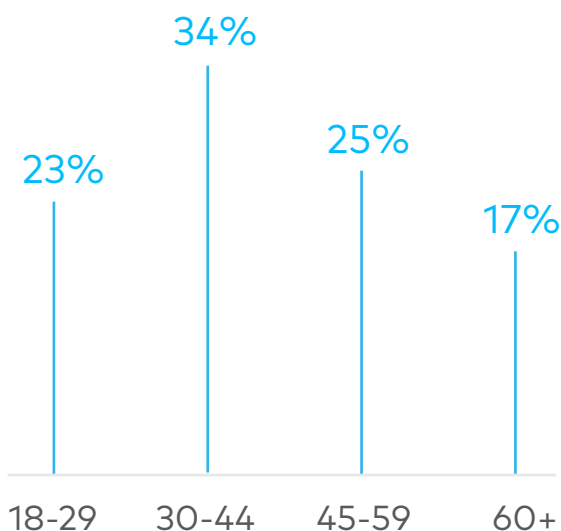
This report was designed to analyze the expectations and experiences online shoppers have when seeking customer service — as well as the potential business impact of those factors.

## Methodology

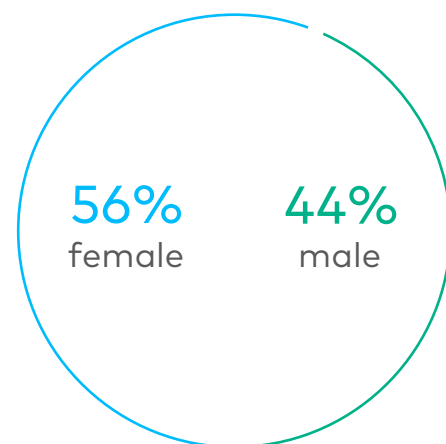
Data in this report comes from a February 2019 survey of 750 U.S. shoppers who, within the prior 12 months, sought customer service related to an online purchase. Aircall conducted this online survey with the assistance of a third-party market research firm. Due to rounding, some percentage totals within the report may not equal 100%.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Age



### Gender



# CUSTOMER SERVICE USAGE

## Which issue(s) did you seek customer service for?



Effective customer service starts with a clear understanding of **why customers seek service** in the first place. Great teams analyze demands first, then supply fitting solutions.

According to our surveyed online shoppers, the two service scenarios that eCommerce brands would be wise to prioritize are **Return/Exchange** requests and **Delivery Status** inquiries.

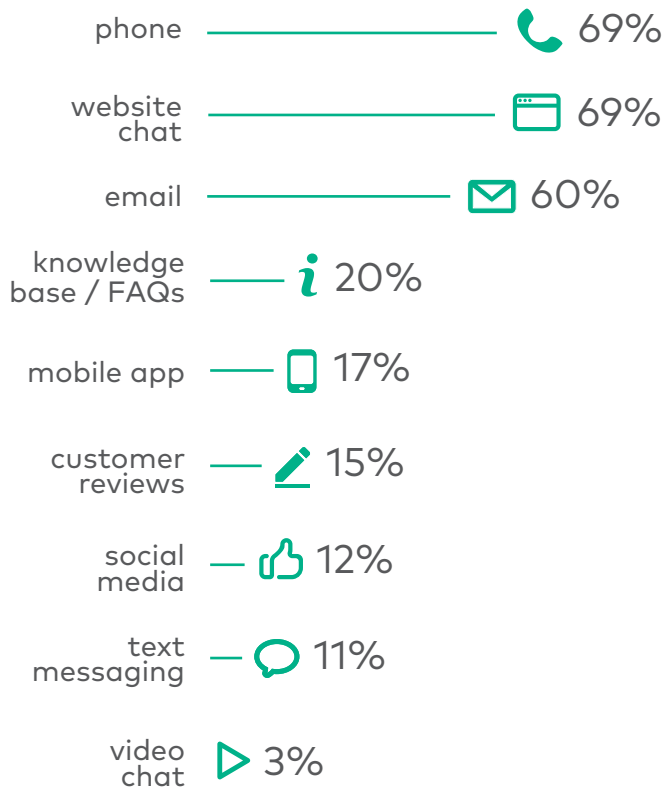
The two strictly financial matters, **Billing** and **Cancellation**, were slightly less common reasons to reach out for service. Meanwhile, inquiries related to basic **Product Info** and **Account Updates** were even rarer.

### TIP FOR YOUR TEAM

As eCommerce brands review their response protocols around each scenario, it's also important to consider the role of self-service. With clearer product return policies and smarter delivery tracking tools, for example, what percentage of current customer inquiries could you potentially deflect?



### Which customer service options have you tried using to resolve an issue?

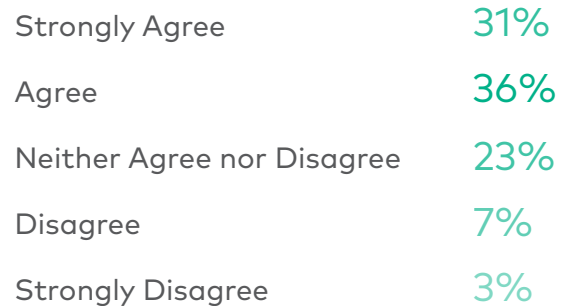


### TIP FOR YOUR TEAM

Once again, the data suggests many eCommerce brands likely have room for improvement when it comes to offering customers appealing self-service solutions. The good news is, the clear preference shown by two out of three customers makes your case for further investment clear.



### I prefer brands that create self-help resources for their customers. (ex. FAQs, tutorials)



In addition to understanding the common motivations for customer inquiries, brands will naturally want to know **which channels** those inquiries are most likely to come through.

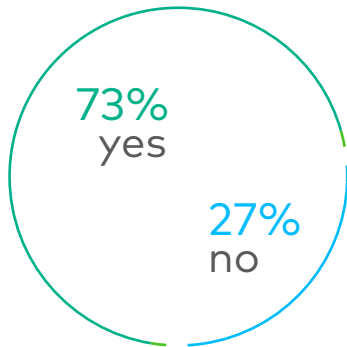
According to our surveyed online shoppers, **Email, Phone, and Website Chat** are still the avenues to address first. These three channels were consistently the most popular picks across all age groups — but there were some variations worth reporting.

Shoppers 45+ were slightly more frequent (+11 percentage points) **Phone** users than Shoppers 18 - 44. Additionally, the most avid segment of **Website Chat** users (30 - 44) were separated by the least avid segment (60+) by a margin of +27 percentage points.

Beyond these core channels, only **Knowledgebase/FAQs** and **Customer Reviews/Forums** were used by more than 20% of surveyed shoppers. Contrast this, though, with the finding that 67% said they prefer or strongly prefer brands that create self-help resources for their customers.

Lastly, the relatively low usage of **Video Chat, Mobile Apps, Text Messaging, and Social Media** among all surveyed shoppers likely indicates that the bulk of customer service experiences are still won or lost in the more traditional channels.

*Have you ever used more than one customer service option while resolving an issue?*



Channel choice has often been described as context-dependent. Customers tend to use a range of different channels to address a range of different issues.

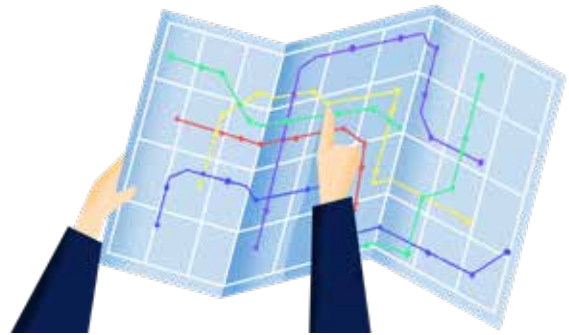
It was no surprise, then, to see 91% of surveyed online shoppers say they prefer or strongly prefer brands that offer multiple customer service options.

But there's also the growing phenomenon of **customers using multiple channels** to address a single issue. In fact, nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of those surveyed say they have.

These multichannel habits—now held by a strong majority of consumers across age groups—will continue to have wide-ranging implications for eCommerce brands.

*I prefer brands that offer multiple customer service options?*

Strongly Agree	58%
Agree	33%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	7%
Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	1%



### TIP FOR YOUR TEAM

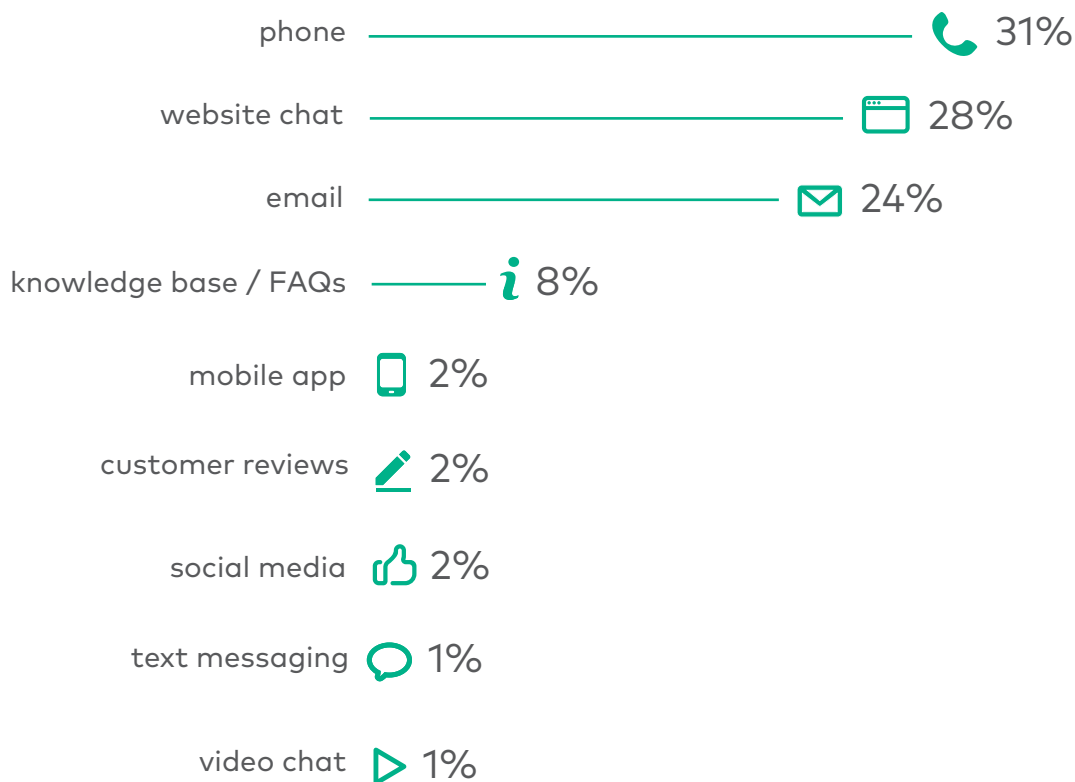
Be cautious as you try to find the right balance between quantity and quality. Granting customers the choice of multiple channels is only valuable if you're able to deliver positive experiences at each of those touchpoints. (ex. Don't be the brand with an average reply time of five days on Twitter.)



# CHANNEL PREFERENCES & PERCEPTIONS



*For **general** customer service issues, which option do you usually try first?*

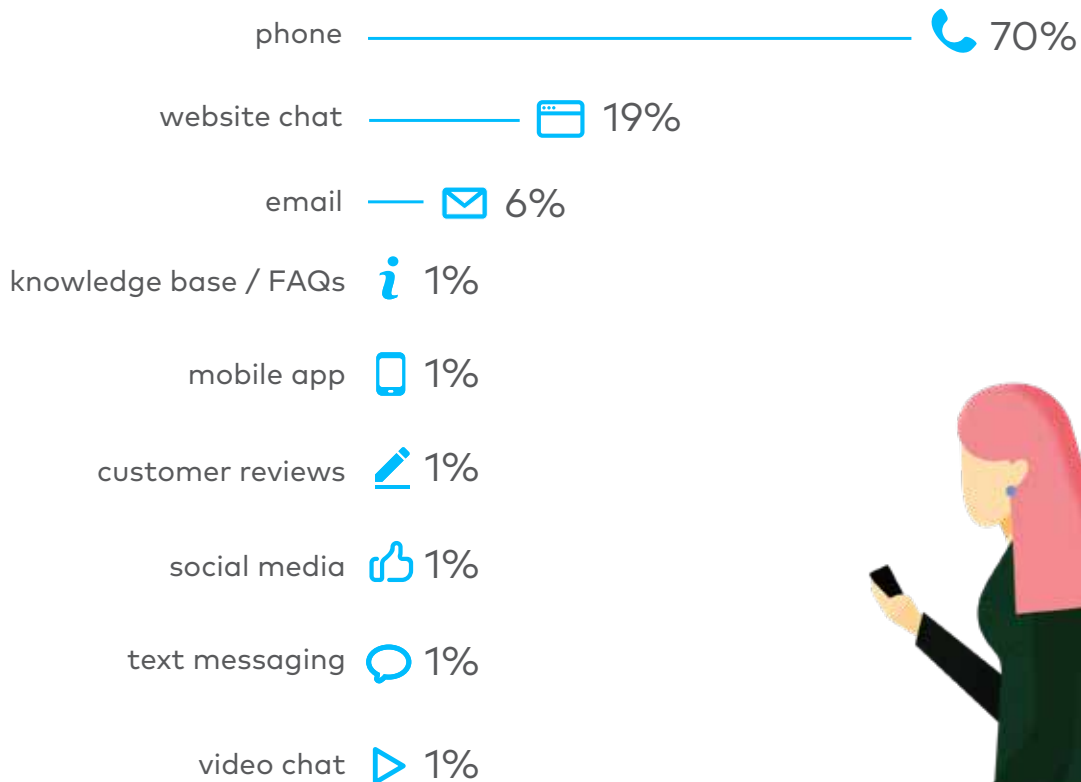


Just because a customer ends up seeking service through multiple channels doesn't mean that was their original plan. Ideally, the **channel they try first** will provide all the answers they're looking for.

For general customer service issues, it seems there's no single "channel of choice." While 31% of surveyed online shoppers preferred to try the **Phone** first, that option enjoyed only a slim lead over **Website Chat** (29%) and **Email** (24%).

And while those options filled the top three spots for all age groups, there were notable variations in ranking order. Shoppers 18 - 44 generally preferred to try **Chat** first — with Shoppers 30 - 44 actually preferring both **Chat** and **Email** at slightly higher rates than **Phone**.

*For **urgent** customer service issues, which option do you usually try first?*



### TIP FOR YOUR TEAM

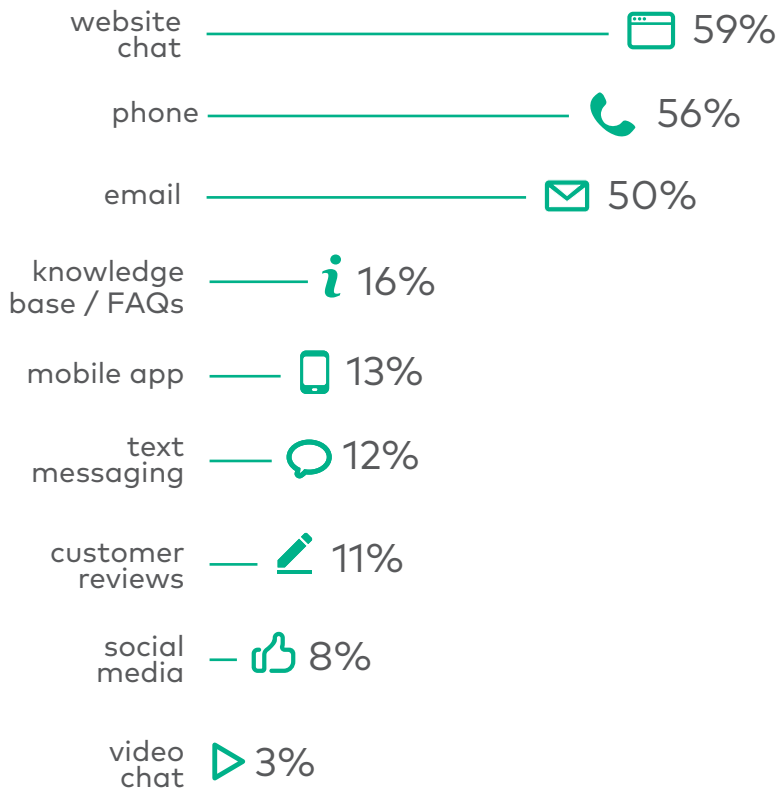
Urgency implies two critical things: A sense of importance and a need for speed. And when your customer's issue checks both boxes, chances are they'll want access to a live agent.



For urgent customer service issues, though, the consensus was much clearer. More than 70% of all surveyed shoppers preferred to try the **Phone** first — with all age groups in agreement.



### Which customer service options do you feel are easy to use?



#### TIP FOR YOUR TEAM

Whether it's varying how you display customer service options or upgrading the enabling technologies, any measures that promote an easier user experience will likely be welcomed by your customers.



If preferences drive behavior, then what drives those preferences?

One answer: **Perceptions.**

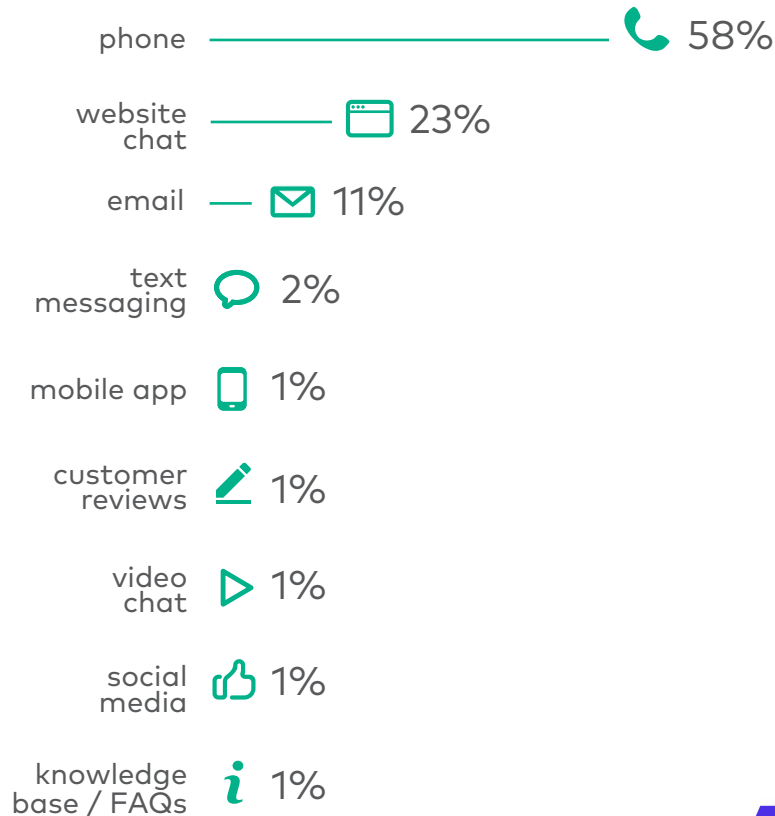
How customers feel about a certain channel not only influences their initial selection, but their eventual experience as well. And the two feelings we were most curious to study were **perceived effort and effectiveness.**

All age groups agreed on the first dimension, reporting that **Website Chat** (59%), **Phone** (54%), and **Email** (50%) feel like the easiest channels to use.

The sharp decline in ease-of-use ratings for the remaining channels closely mirrors the earlier results regarding channel usage. This correlation strongly implies that perceived effort is indeed a predictor of channel selection. Easy channels get chosen.

Perhaps the more surprising finding, though, was that no single channel was able to win over more than 60% of surveyed shoppers. That suggests that most eCommerce brands likely have significant room for improvement when it comes to reducing customer effort.

### *Which customer service option do you feel is most effective for resolving issues?*



While perceived effort reflects how easy customers feel it is to get started, perceived effectiveness conveys how they believe the interaction is likely to end. Because ultimately, the end goal of every customer service conversation is resolution.

Nearly 60% of surveyed online shoppers agreed that the **Phone** is their most effective option for resolving issues — a feeling shared across all age groups.

#### TIP FOR YOUR TEAM

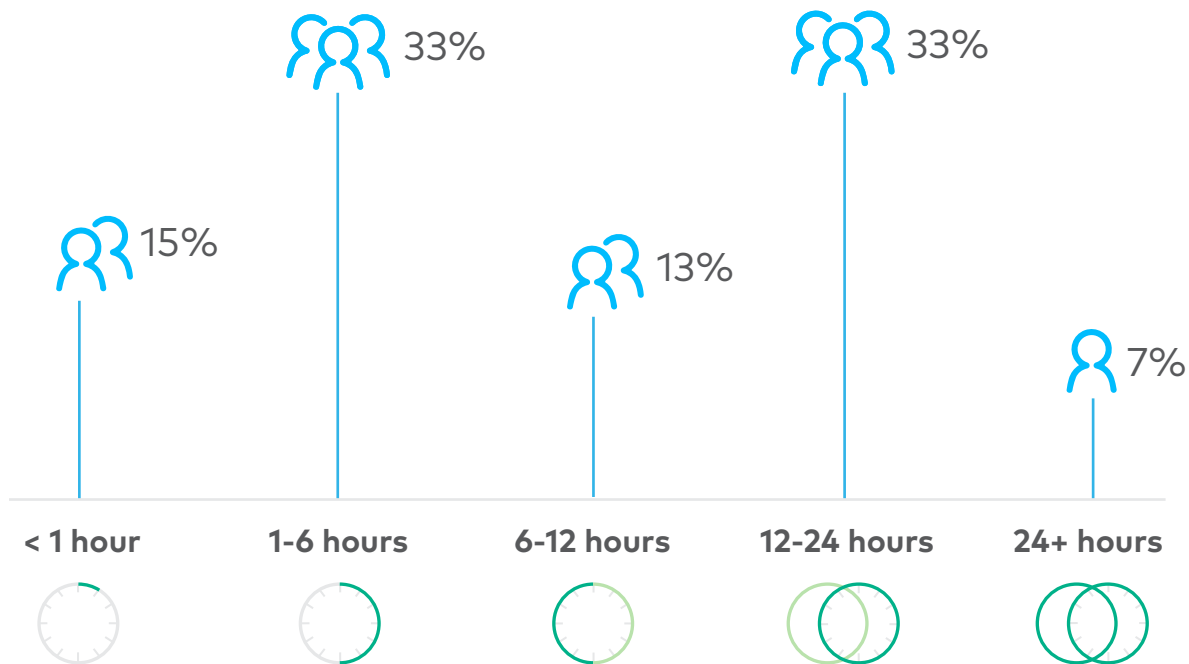
The strength of support for this very traditional channel may come as something of a surprise for eCommerce brands used to serving tech-savvy customers. However, it seems the uniquely personal and accountable qualities of a live, verbal conversation still appeal to modern shoppers.



# CUSTOMER SERVICE WAIT TIMES



*When contacting customer service via email, how soon do you expect a reply?*



No analysis of customer service experiences would be complete without addressing the element of speed. Companies are conditioned to assume that modern shoppers expect instantaneous support. But is that really true?

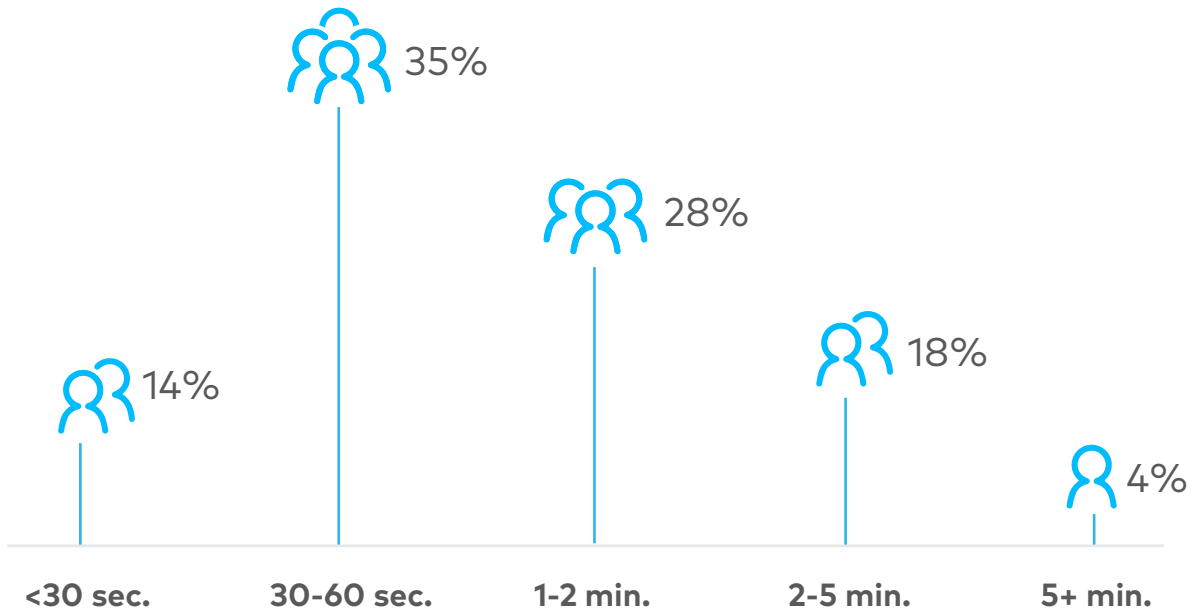
To get a better sense of how patient customers really are, we surveyed their **wait time tolerance** across the three core channels.

When contacting customer service via email, approximately half of our

surveyed online shoppers said they expect a reply within 6 hours. However, only 15% set their standard at 1 hour or less.

This may be welcome news to overstretched support teams, as the findings suggest they may have more time to craft responses than they think. But the data also confirms that nearly all customers (94%) will expect to see their inquiries addressed within 24 hours.

*When contacting customer service via chat, how long are you willing to wait for a response?*



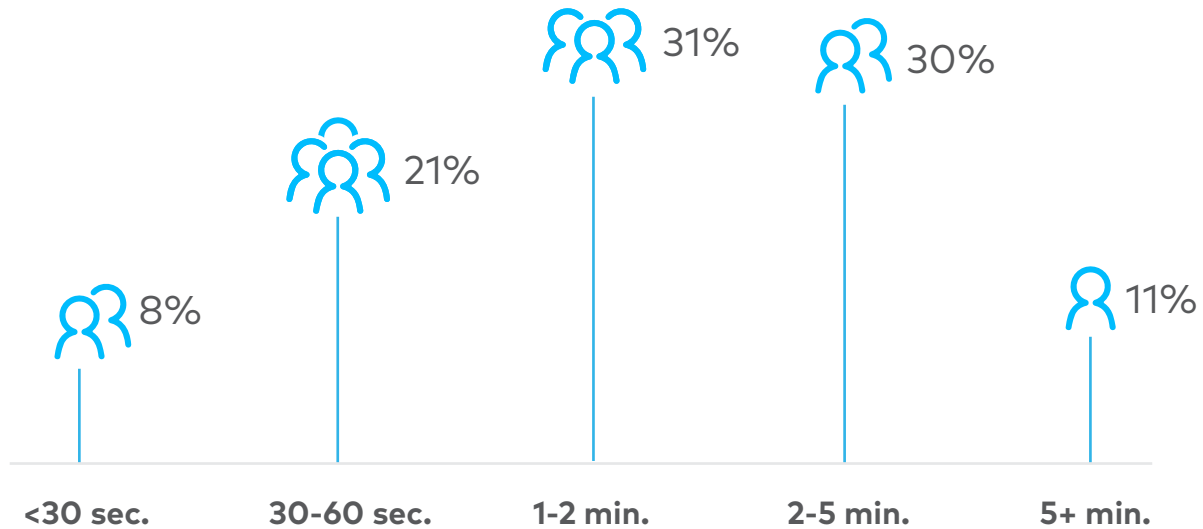
Considering chat is often an avenue for simpler inquiries and quicker responses, survey participants were given a more urgent time scale to consider here than with the prior question.

Nearly 80% of shoppers said that they expect their chat responses in 2 minutes or less — including the 49% which set their wait time thresholds at 1 minute or less.

Once again, though, only 15% opted for the fastest available option. But the relative urgency of the channel was still underscored by the implication that 96% of surveyed shoppers would likely have abandoned their chat conversation by the 5-minute mark.



*When contacting customer service over the phone, how long are you willing to wait before speaking to a human?*



The data around phone calls reflected a slightly more patient attitude. Only 29% of surveyed shoppers expected to speak with a customer service representative in 1 minute or less. After 2 minutes, however, that figure rose to 60%. And after 5 minutes, the data suggests only 11% would still be waiting on the other end of the line.

It's also interesting to note that there were no significant variations between age groups. Across email, chat, and phone, all surveyed shoppers showed remarkably similar patience patterns.



### TIP FOR YOUR TEAM

By combining this data on wait time tolerance with findings from earlier in the report, we can already make a few plausible assumptions on channel differences:

- **Email** is a popular, fairly easy option for making non-urgent requests
- **Chat** is a popular, easy option for getting fast answers to simpler requests
- **Phone** is a popular, fairly easy option for resolving complex, urgent, and/or sensitive requests

# CRITERIA FOR GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPERIENCES



## What is the most important quality of good customer service?



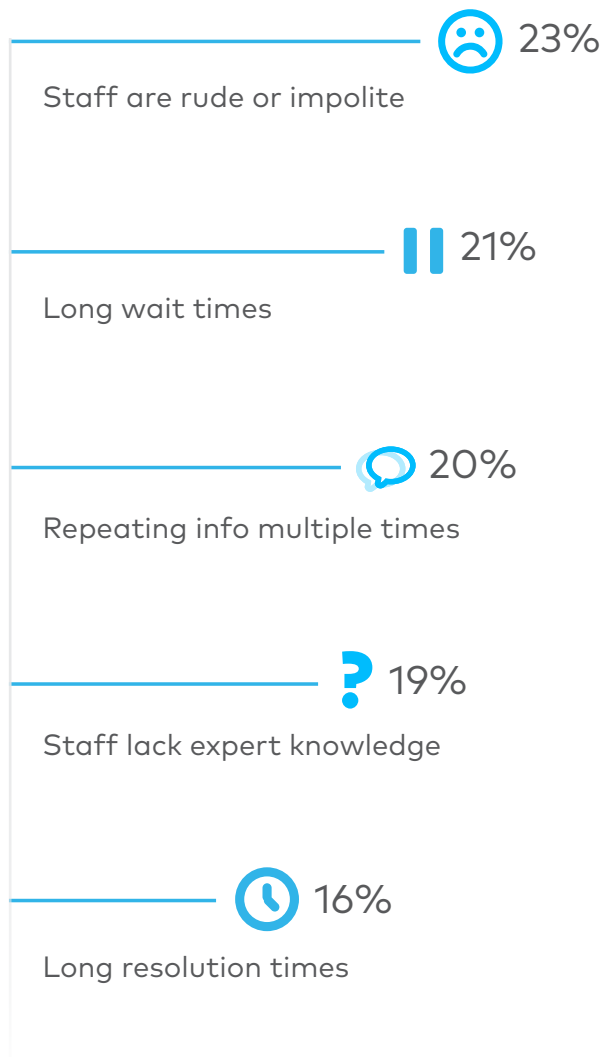
Accurately aligning your channels to the habits and preferences of your customers will put your service staff in better position to provide a good experience. But that begs the question: What exactly are the **criteria for a good experience?**

According to our surveyed online shoppers, the most satisfying thing a brand can do is resolve an issue during their first interaction. They're willing and able to try multiple channels if needed, but a **first contact resolution** is the preferred experience across all age groups.

There were some subtle variations regarding the other service traits, though.

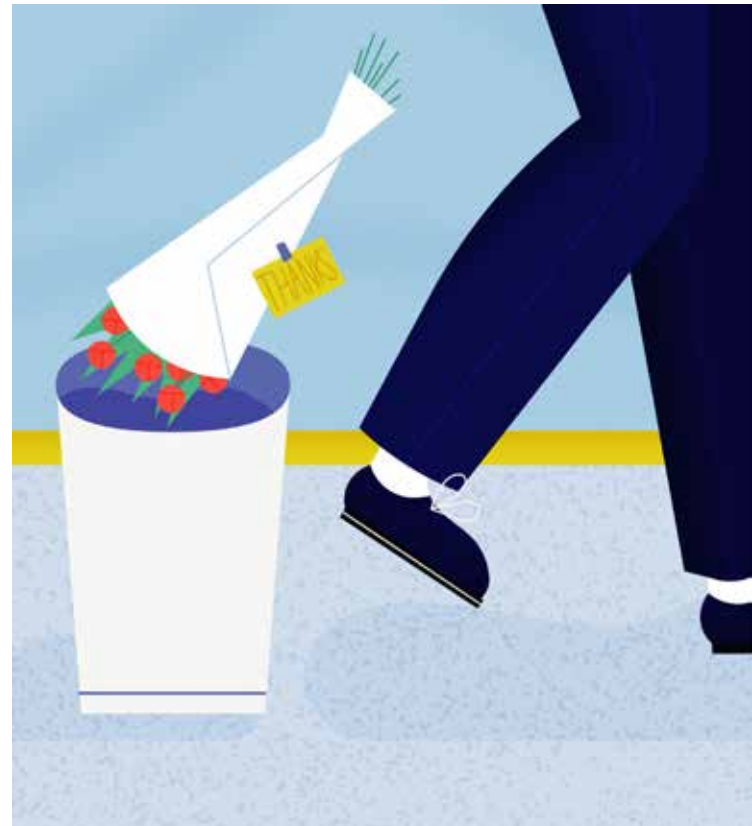
The older a surveyed shopper was, for example, the more likely they were to claim **staff knowledge** as a desirable quality. The reverse was true, however, when it came to courtesy. The younger a surveyed shopper was, the more likely they were to identify **kind and friendly staff** as a desirable quality.

## *What is the most frustrating part of bad customer service?*

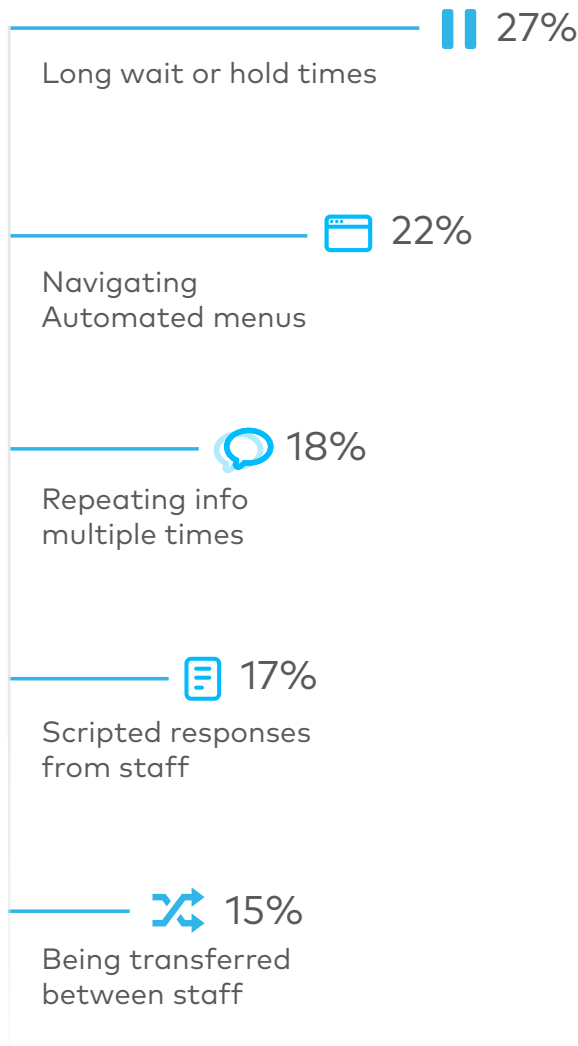


Sometimes the straightest path to customer satisfaction is simply avoiding the things they like least. So we also wanted to explore potential customer service frustrations as well.

This time there was no clear standout among the listed options. The most and least frustrating customer service traits were separated by less than seven percentage points.



## *What is the most frustrating part of contacting customer service over the phone?*

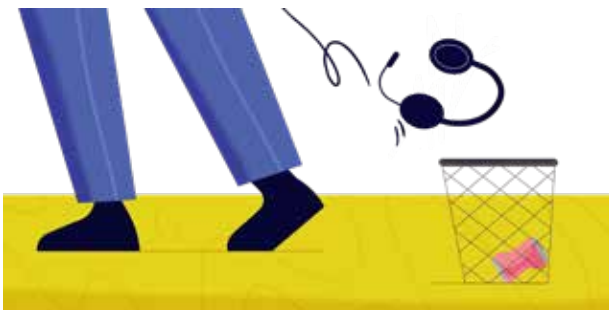


Our follow-up question focused specifically on phone calls returned only slightly more conclusive data. **Long wait or hold times** and **navigating automated menus** were deemed the most frustrating traits by our surveyed shoppers, but by relatively slim margins over the competing options.

### TIP FOR YOUR TEAM

The clearest directive here for eCommerce brands would be to focus your efforts on first contact resolution. Because although the data in this section may not be as overwhelming as others, it does align with the earlier evidence that today's shoppers are fairly patient — so long as you make their experience worth the wait.

1st ✓





# CONSEQUENCES OF CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPERIENCES

*Following a very **positive** customer service experience, which actions are you more likely to take?*



Service teams have a direct and obvious impact on customer experience. But what their colleagues in other departments don't always appreciate is the indirect **consequences for the business** as a whole.

Following a very positive experience, for example, our surveyed online shoppers said they'd be more inclined toward several pro-business behaviors. Nearly 70% would be more likely to **continue buying from the brand** and nearly 60% would **recommend the brand to close personal contacts**.



*Following a very **negative** customer service experience, which actions are your more likely to take?*



Of course, there are always some colleagues (and companies) who aren't motivated by positive reinforcement. So we also made sure to explore the negative scenario as well.

Nearly two-thirds of surveyed online shoppers said they would be more likely to **stop buying from the brand** following a very negative customer service experience. Similarly, 59% suggested they would be more likely to **share the experience with close personal contacts**.

The most interesting findings of all, however, could be the fact that surveyed shoppers were more likely to take to **social media** and **online review** sites after a bad experience than a good one.

### TIP FOR YOUR TEAM

Most customer service teams have plans for dealing with their most vocal critics, but far fewer have plans for identifying and elevating their most vocal supporters. Those brand promoters are a precious resource — and surely one colleagues across departments want to hear about!



# LOOKING FORWARD

## CUSTOMER SERVICE MAKES (AND BREAKS) BRANDS



If your business is only looking at CSAT scores and average reply times, it's underestimating the role of customer service. From the personal recommendations that build brand reputations, to the reviews shoppers research before checkout, customer service experiences have the power to push away potential revenue or pull in repeat purchases.

## SELF-SERVICE IS STILL DEVELOPING



Self-service is by no means new, but the wide gap between interest and usage suggests most eCommerce brands still haven't found the right recipe. It's important to remember, though, that every minute invested in this area could spare your team hours worth of future support requests.

## RETHINK SPEED



Customer A receives a chat response within 20 seconds, but it takes two other channels and two more days to resolve their issue. Customer B dials in and waits on hold for five minutes, but 10 minutes later their issue is resolved. Which experience is faster? And more importantly, which experience is your strategy currently designed to deliver?

## MULTICHANNEL IS A MUST...



You may not be able to predict which channel customers will choose in every service scenario, but you probably can predict which brand they won't choose if you insist on only providing one support option.

## ...BUT WALK BEFORE YOU RUN



Phone, email, and chat still play the most pivotal roles in remarkable customer service experiences. Mastering these three first will take you further than overextending your channel mix and watching conversation quality decrease as a result.





Aircall helps eCommerce support teams have the kind of conversations that create lifelong customers. Our call center software easily integrates with your CRM, Helpdesk, and other critical business tools, giving agents all the context they need to deliver superior service.

For more insights into the issues customer support leaders care about the most, visit

[aircall.io/blog](https://aircall.io/blog)

