The Inner Circle Guide to the Voice of the Customer

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CallMiner

"The Inner Circle Guide to the Voice of the Customer (UK edition)

CONTENTS

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Your daily contact centre interactions are a goldmine of Voice of the Customer insights just waiting to be unearthed. CallMiner's Eureka platform makes doing to easy. Gain an unparalleled view into conversations, identify and measure VoC through not only the words spoken, but the manner in which they are spoken. Discover the answers to important CX and VoC questions you would have never thought to ask!
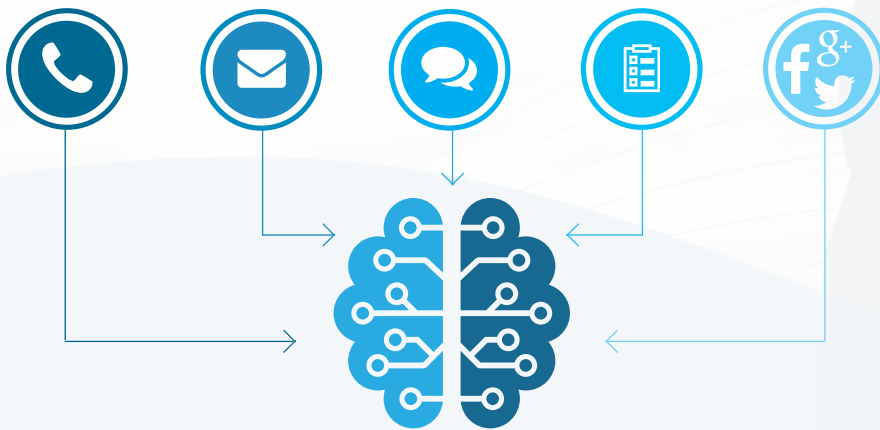
Improve your visibility into, and understanding of Voice of the Customer.

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- Gain insights about CX, product, sales, marketing & more
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CallMiner

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CallMiner is a speech analytics platform that drives business improvement by connecting insight to tangible action. We use the power of A.I. to scale human understanding, analyse interactions at the deepest levels, identify patterns and root causes, and reveal opportunities.

We believe that business improvement starts with a deep interest and curiosity in people. How do we detect a customer's true emotion, and how do we act on it to shift a business's culture and steer it on the most successful path? We aim to close these gaps through innovation, but the heart of our work lies in humanity: understanding, followed by action. We apply this same principle within our culture, promoting an attitude of kindness, compassion, genuine interest, and respect for one another.

Highlighted by multiple customer achievement awards, including six Speech Technology Magazine's Reader's Choice Award, CallMiner has consistently ranked number one in customer satisfaction.

Learn more about our customer engagement and speech analytics solutions to help your business:

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The Inner Circle Guides are a series of analyst reports investigating key customer contact solutions. The Guides aim to give a detailed and definitive view of the reality of the implementing and using these technologies, an appraisal of the vendors and products available and a view on what the future holds.

The Inner Circle Guides are free of charge to readers. Research and analysis costs are borne by sponsors - solution providers in the specific area of study - whose advertisements, case studies and thought leadership pieces are included within these Guides.

Other subjects include The Inner Circle Guides to:

- AI, Chatbots & Machine Learning
- AI-Enabled Self-Service
- Cloud-based Contact Centre Solutions
- Contact Centre Remote Working Solutions
- First-Contact Resolution
- Fraud Reduction & PCI DSS Compliance
- Interaction Analytics
- Omnichannel
- Outbound
- Workforce Optimisation.

These can be downloaded free of charge from www.contactbabel.com.

Solutions providers have **not** had influence over editorial content or analyst opinion, and readers can be assured of objectivity throughout. Any vendor views are clearly marked as such within the report.

As well as explaining these solutions to the readers, we have also asked the potential users of these solutions whether they have any questions or comments to put directly to the report's sponsor, and we have selected some of the most popular to ask. These branded Q&A elements are distributed throughout the report and give interesting insight into real-life issues.

Please note that statistics within this report refer to the UK industry, unless stated otherwise. There is a version of this report available for download from www.contactbabel.com with equivalent US statistics and findings.

Voice of the customer (VoC) is a research method that tries to quantify customer needs and requirements. It is driven by the capture and analysis of data provided by customers – both structured and unstructured, through surveys and interactions – and is used for improving and developing products and services, improving the customer experience, identifying training needs and fixing suboptimal processes within the business.

While the original VoC projects focused upon developing new products and improving those already in existence (often asking for the opinions of non-customers or ex-customers), recent years have mainly focused upon the interactions and opinions of existing customers particularly around the experience of the service that they are receiving and their attitude towards the brand.

Customer surveys have been an integral part of most businesses for many years. Recently, there has been a great increase in the number of organisations using large-scale analysis of call recordings as well as using formal surveys of customer experience to offer the customer a chance to feed-back, and the business to learn.

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

The definition of what a VoC program can be very wide, from simply sending alerts based on key words derived from a survey, to more complete solutions that directly contribute to contact centre optimisation and overall CX improvement.

As a rule, VoC is an ongoing, iterative process involving:

- Capture: gather customer feedback and associated data

- Analyse: develop insights into trends and themes, and understand root cause

- Act: close the loop by addressing negative issues at an individual and process level

- Measure: check to see that any actions taken have had the required effect.

The following section looks at why VoC has become so important in many companies, as the factors upon which many businesses now choose to compete can only be optimised through a full understanding of customer requirements and their experience interacting with the organisation.

HOW DO ORGANISATIONS COMPETE?

The fundamental purpose of a commercial organisation is to maximise profit for its shareholders. There are two main ways in which this is achieved: through increasing revenue and reducing cost.

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

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

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

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

Factor	1st	2nd	3rd
Quality	48%	44%	7%
Price	19%	19%	63%
Customer experience	33%	37%	30%
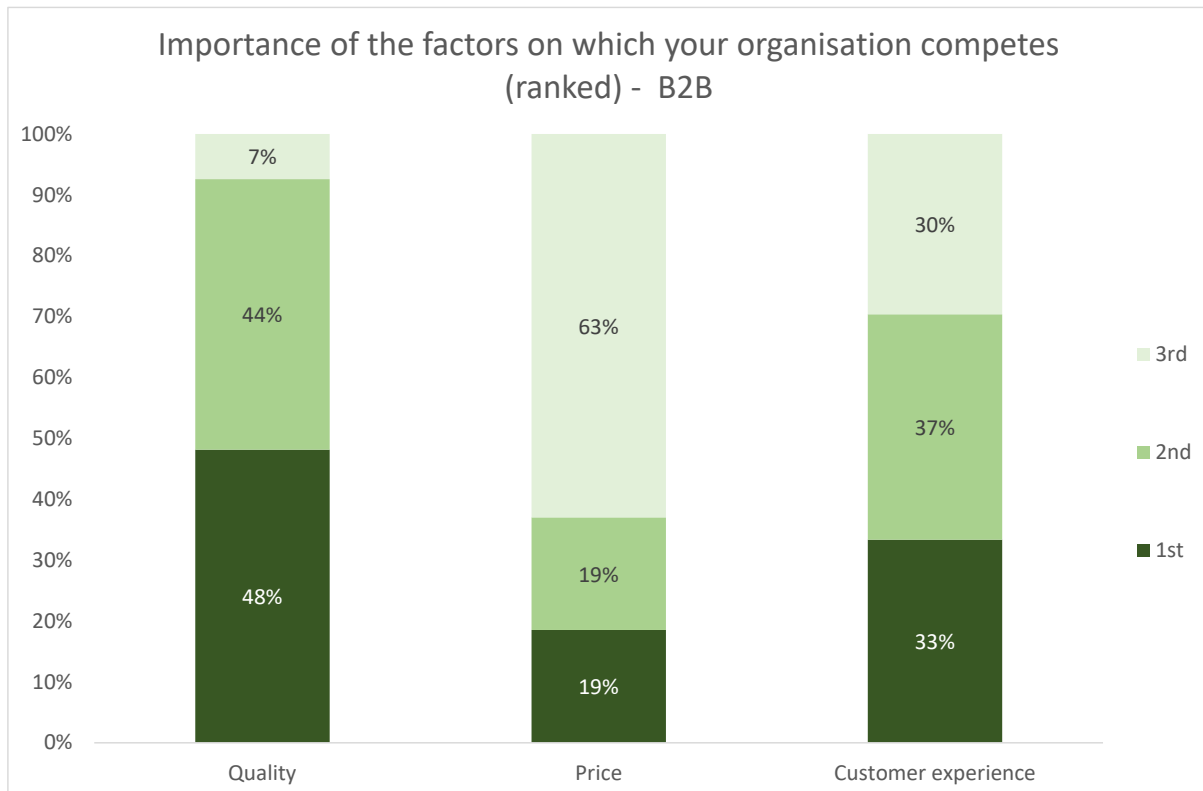
Respondents to a survey of 200 UK businesses were asked how their organisation competed, ranking three factors in order of importance: quality, price and customer experience.

As competition on price tends to mean lower profit margins for all of the companies in that sector, it is unsurprising that only 19% of B2B respondents placed this factor in first place (although this is a rise on last year's figure of 4%). 27% of B2C companies stating that their organisation competed primarily on price, which can be explained by the generally greater price sensitivity amongst consumers rather than businesses.

48% of B2B organisations, and 31% of B2C respondents stated that their primary competitive factor was quality. Interestingly, 41% of B2C respondents stated that customer experience was their primary means of gaining competitive advantage.

For around 40% of all businesses to say that customer experience, rather than price or quality, was the main factor upon which they wish to compete in the market can be seen as being very significant and indicative of the mindset of senior business leaders in the UK: many organisations are now seeing customer experience as being the key to profitability. However, it remains to be seen how the upcoming economic challenges will alter strategies.

Figure 2: Importance of the factors on which your organisation competes (ranked) - B2C
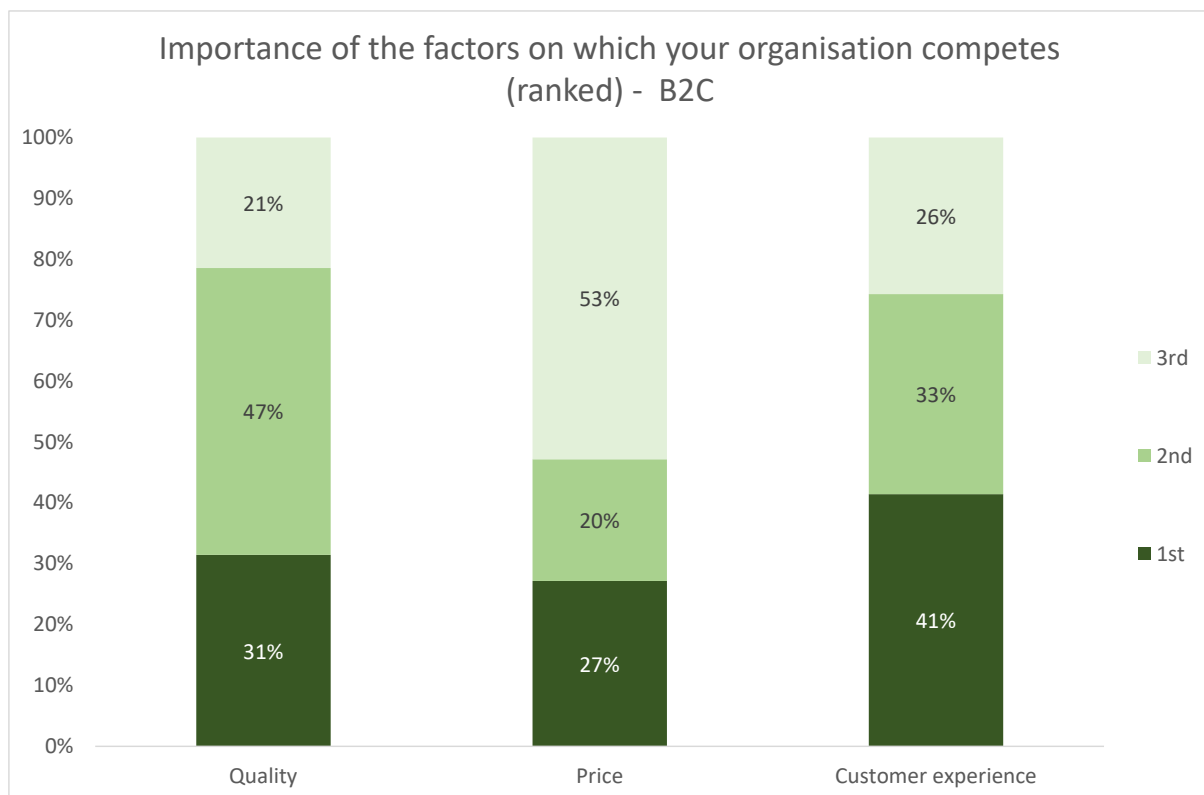
Having shown that companies place a great deal of importance on customer experience, it is clear that VoC programmes can act as a way to improve this competitive edge.

Successful VoC programmes rely upon consistent, ongoing and accurate data from all points throughout the customer journey. Businesses should beware of assuming in advance that certain elements of the customer's experience are either optimal or leave room for improvement, instead gathering and analysing actual data and acting upon the results, leaving preconception behind.

While VoC might be thought to focus upon improving customer experience, it goes much further than simply improving the quality of customer interactions, helping to:

- quickly identify and prioritise potential issues with the brand or product

- understand the gaps in functionality or performance for products and services, allowing the development division to prioritise and focus on improvements and developing winning solutions

- improve customer loyalty

- support a culture of continuous improvement within the business

- identify underperforming business processes in order to optimise them

- understand which attributes and behaviours drive revenue and profitability

- focus upon giving customers what they want in terms of experience as well as product/service

- understand how the customer base views the business compared to your competitors

- make business decisions that align with what customers truly value and are willing to pay for

- develop communication strategies based upon what customers most value, and personalise messages based on customer segments / personas to increase engagement

- identify gaps in employee skills and behaviour, and improve these with training and coaching

- identify unhappy customers and those in danger of churn, giving your business a chance to win them back.

Acting on the findings of a VOC program can increase the engagement between the business and the customer: if customers feel that not only have they been asked their opinion but the business has then acted upon it, they are more likely to feel a true sense of collaboration, leading to them becoming advocates and ever more closely engaged with your brand. This ongoing and strengthening attachment means that customers will buy more products and services, for a longer period, are less likely to be price sensitive and may refer the business to family and friends.

It is important to link VoC insights to business outcomes: for example, if customers complain about price, and yet their loyalty and conversion rate is still very high, reducing the price based on customer feedback may simply have the undesired effect of decreasing revenue.

Many VoC programmes are reactive, gathering data and customer opinion after the event through a mixture of surveys and historical analysis of captured voice and text. Organisations can identify trends and patterns across products, customer groups and channels, and then allocate resource to any which look to be causing problems. Some businesses also use a proactive approach, looking to understand potential issues and communicate with their customers before they contact the business.

It is impossible to give every area of the customer journey and experience the same amount of focus, resource and investment. Businesses will need to prioritise their efforts on the areas which look most likely to provide the greatest gain but which will not require excessive amounts of extra resource which are unlikely to be granted to a new and unproven project. As with many technology-related initiatives, businesses should focus upon the low-hanging fruit to begin with, demonstrating a clear and unambiguous return on investment before looking to roll out the project further.

It is not enough for the purpose of a VoC project to be simply about understanding what the customer is saying. There need to be actionable and quantifiable results, perhaps around improved customer loyalty, annual spend or reduced cost of service, and these goals should be set out before the project begins. Simply wanting to improve NPS or customer satisfaction ratings misses the point of VoC: directly measurable improvements to the bottom line.

In terms of technology, the VoC platform should have the capabilities to integrate feedback from all types of survey data (including structured and unstructured), and to link these with metadata from elsewhere, including CRM and financial systems, preferably in real-time. It is particularly important that customer feedback from various channels can be integrated, analysed, viewed and shared between all relevant departments, rather than operating within the silos that are still prevalent within many businesses.

Apart from surveying tools, a robust VoC platform will often include much of the following functionality:

- reporting and dashboards that are organised to provide relevant information in a timely fashion to the correct people/departments, and which are aligned with the agreed business objectives of the VoC project

- capabilities to include CRM and other metadata to enrich the analysis of customer feedback through customer segmentation and classification

- automated alerts to enable closed-loop analytics, both from the perspective of handling individual customers and also to identify rapidly growing situations which need a swift response at scale

- speech and text analytics which can provide large-scale analysis, identification and thematic categorisation of free-text comments and open-ended questions, which will also often use natural language understanding and sentiment analysis

- the most sophisticated solutions will involve AI-enabled predictive analytics which can help to forecast the changes in outcomes depending on alterations in suboptimal processes.

When starting a VoC program, there are five key steps to consider aimed at helping organizations advance from implementation through to results.

1. **The "Why"** – Establish what you expect to achieve by capturing an outside-in perspective.
2. **The "How"** – Capture your customers' perspective beyond surveys with speech analytics auto-scoring for focus. Include unsolicited feedback via contact centre conversations that cover every voice and text-based interaction.
3. **The "Action"** – Establish a governance framework that includes root cause analysis, action triggering and how insight is shared.
4. **The "Visibility"** – Engage senior leadership with education that emphasizes conversational insight coupled with data-supported rigor.

The "Win" – Don't boil the ocean. Target an easy insight to action opportunity to start.

VoC projects are often undertaken as part of a wider customer experience programme. ContactBabel recently carried out research with over 200 UK businesses to understand how well their organisation currently supported their customer experience programmes. The results were not particularly positive in terms of CX technology, and 45% of respondents were lukewarm about the number of dedicated CX employees available.

On the positive side, more than half of respondents stated that the organisational culture was moving towards customer-centricity and 60% commended their executives' commitment, so it appears as though it is the execution of CX improvement rather than the acceptance of the concept itself which needs to be improved.

Figure 3: How well does your organisation currently support your CX programmes?

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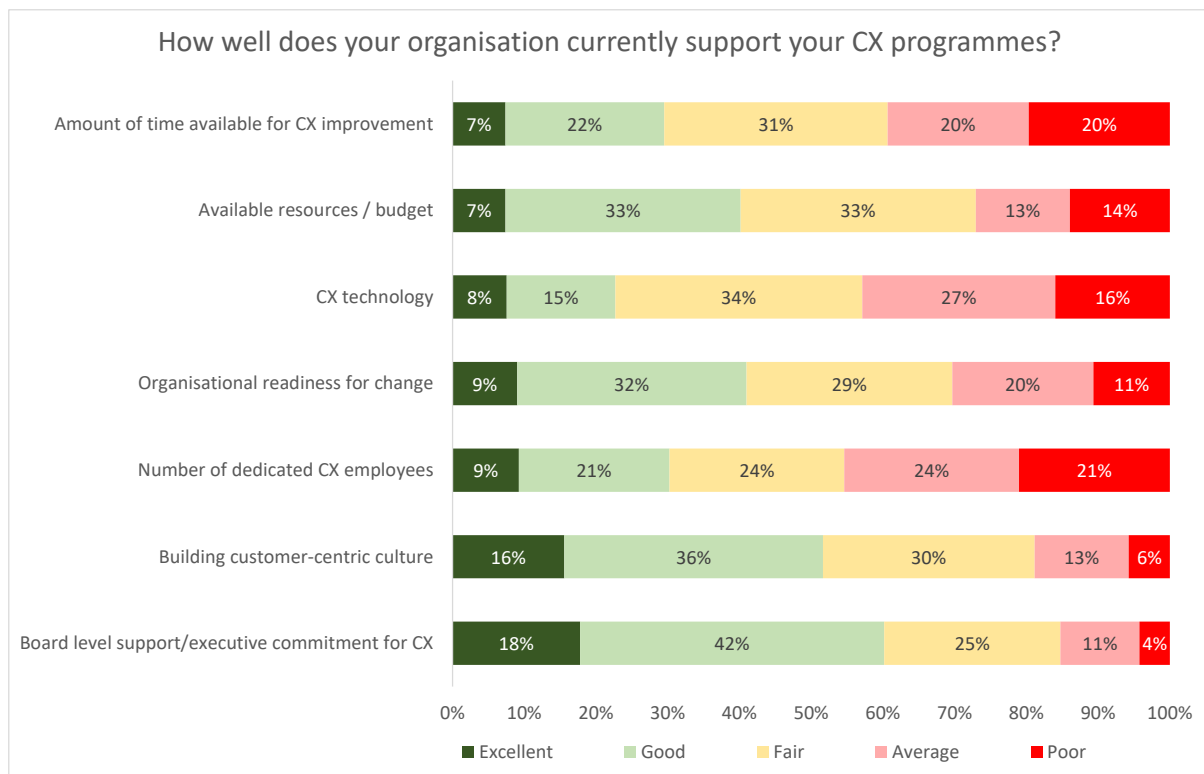
Many large organisations now have a full-time VoC team, with around half of large organisations having a team of 1-5 VoC employees, and only a very small minority not having any dedicated staff.

The tasks of the central VoC delivery team can be considerable and will include many of the following:

- identify key customer experience metrics that the VoC project should measure and improve

- define, understand and update the key customer issues that the VoC project is aiming to alter

- work with internal and external resources to capture relevant VoC data

- create regular dashboards and reporting for executive sponsors, relevant departments and stakeholders

- recommend improvements to processes identified within the VoC programme

- track any quantifiable changes in key metrics and outcomes as a result of these recommendations.

However the success or otherwise of the VoC programme does not depend solely upon the size of the project team. Like many large-scale, cross-functional projects, VoC requires support from numerous sources which may be involved at each customer touchpoint, such as:

- a high-level executive sponsor

- a dedicated VoC programme manager

- team members with cross-departmental/functional capabilities

- a programme steering group made up of senior stakeholders from relevant departments (e.g. CX, marketing, operations, contact centre, finance, etc.).

A question was asked to survey respondents about who in their organisation was responsible for customer experience. This question looks at how seriously CX is being taken, and how capable organisations will be of driving radical CX programmes which are likely to impact on many existing fiefdoms.

The chart below shows clearly that small organisations are far less likely to have a dedicated customer experience professional working within them. Even in the very largest organisations surveyed, only 18% had a CX professional at board level, although there is often representation for CX at very senior management level: VoC and wider CX programmes are still in the acceptance phase for many organisations, and perhaps require several senior sponsors.

Figure 4: Level of highest CX professional in the organisation, by company revenue
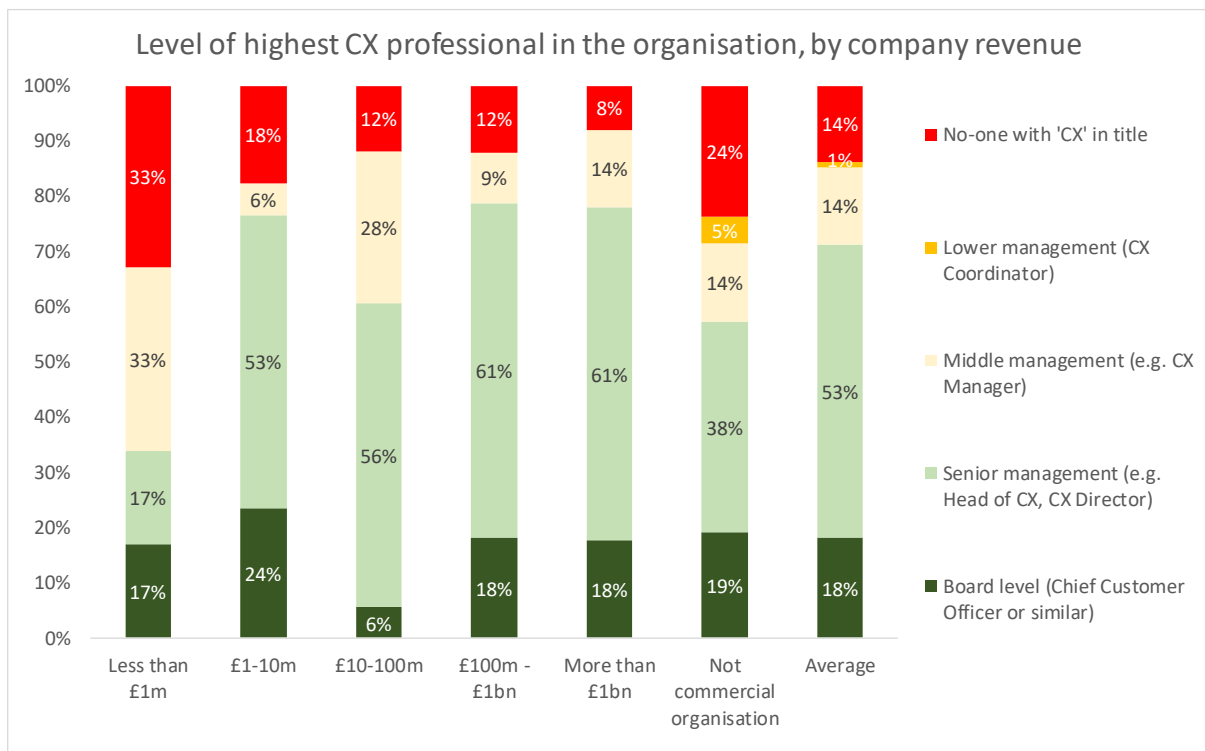
It is important not to add irrelevant or apathetic stakeholders to the VoC programme as they may not see the advantages to their part of the business, and as is always the case, the larger the committee, the longer any decisions will take to be made.

In order to get a better understanding of how the role of CX management is seen within an organisation, the question was asked to those survey respondents that had dedicated customer experience management professionals, to whom within the organisation that person directly reported.

As expected, the top CX professional within organisations with small revenues will tend to report directly to the CEO as there will be a relatively flat structure in place. This tendency to report to the most senior member of the company decreases as organisational revenue increases and new layers of management emerge, although it is worth noting that 40% of respondents with more than £1bn in revenue reported that their most senior CX professional still had a direct report to the CEO.

However, in larger organisations – and especially those which are not commercial operations – many senior CX professionals report to the head of operations, with around 1 in 7 reporting to other C-level executives and 10% reporting to the head of marketing.

Figure 5: If applicable, who does the most senior CX professional report to? (by revenue)

If applicable, who does the most senior CX professional report to? (by revenue)

20
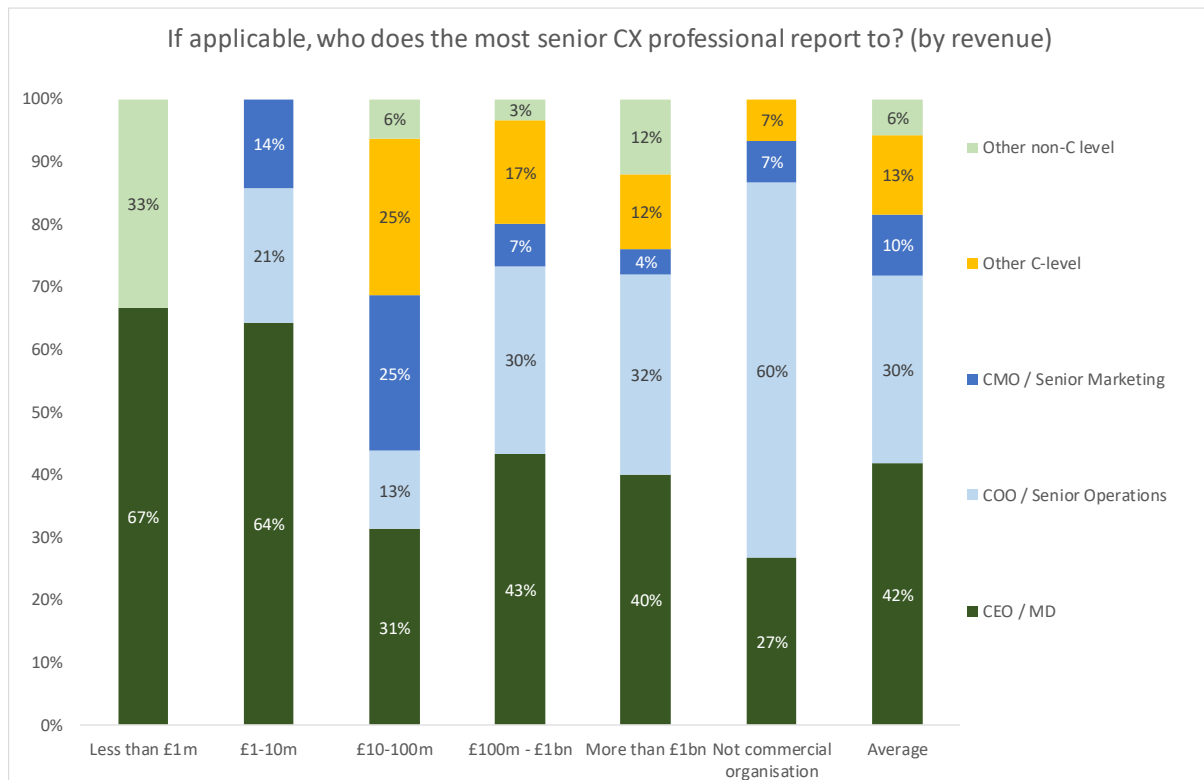
Departments that should have a stake in VoC include:

- **C-suite**: insights from VoC should help to form the company's strategic vision, and fully understanding the attitudes, experiences and requirements of large groups of customers will provide the evidence and insight of the changes required to best to achieve this goal. However research has shown that while the majority of senior executives will receive regular updates about the overall VoC programme, and get feedback and scores from the programme, less than one-third use these insights to guide their own decisions. This common inability to use VoC recommendations will necessarily weaken any message given elsewhere in the organisation by C-suite executives that these initiatives are vital to the future of the company

- **Customer contact**: VoC provides both tactical opportunities to re-engage with disaffected customers in near real-time, as well as understanding at a macro level where the customer contact operation is succeeding or failing and what customers value most in their interactions with the business

- **Product development**: VoC is useful for identifying strengths and weaknesses in existing products and services, and is also very useful for identifying the issues that customers wish to overcome, allowing the product development department to create solutions to address these

- **Marketing**: by understanding what is most important to customers, the marketing department will be able to align its messaging accordingly. The success or otherwise of marketing campaigns cab also be judged, and depending upon any questions asked and data gathered, competitive information including insights into what makes best-in-class can be understood and assimilated

- **Sales**: this competitive information can also be used by sales department to address objections. Deep analysis of sales success and ongoing purchases can correlate particular customer attitudes, opinions and sales techniques with likely outcomes, allowing the sales team to adapt accordingly

- **Finance**: as VoC can be a expensive and ongoing investment, the finance department needs to understand the potential ROI of increased customer engagement and loyalty, not only today but also in the future

- **Training and HR**: identifying and attributing specific employee behaviours with VoC opinion and sales outcome can identify best practice which can be fed into the training programme, especially for customer-facing employees.

A VoC programme should focus on businesses' most urgent and important pain points: for example, decreased loyalty, increased cost of service, reduced profitability and lower share-of-wallet. Certainly at the initial stages, businesses should look to discover "low-hanging fruit": areas where a substantial number of customers are reporting issues which can be handled relatively easily, quickly and cheaply.

The business has to identify the variables that can change these outcomes positively (e.g. first-contact resolution or improved customer engagement), and discover the processes and behaviours that would have the greatest positive effect on these if they were changed for the better. By tracking any alteration in the variables as processes are changed, a chain of causality can be established and any improvements quantified.

Firstly, the required business outcome should be agreed, for example, an improvement in customer retention. Note that a target such as "improved NPS" is not a business outcome, but merely an indicator of customer sentiment that may suggest a business outcome, and organisations should, for example, look to prove a positive correlation between NPS and customer retention rate to such an extent that they can quantify improvement in loyalty and thus revenue that a single point of improvement in NPS is associated with.

Next, businesses should benchmark their current customer feedback metrics alongside business metrics such as share of wallet, customer retention rate, average products per customer, etc.

Running a VoC project targeted at key points along the customer journey should identify areas of potential improvement. Carrying out optimisation initiatives should then move the dial on customer feedback metrics, which will eventually filter into quantifiable business outcomes. In some businesses, it may be possible to run a 'control and experiment' type of test whereby improvements are carried out on discrete areas of the business (e.g. specific branches), whereas others carry on with business as usual. This can provide strong quantitative evidence for the positive effects of the VoC project and any associated changes to business processes.

VoC projects also show the priorities for improvement: given the choice between training agents to be more empathetic or to focus upon reducing queue times, both options would seem to be potentially positive for the customer experience and thus business outcomes. However, both cost time and money, and businesses would benefit from being able to know which one is more likely to be more profitable: finding out from a VoC programme which is valued the most by the customer would enable the effective allocation of resources and business effort.

To help with the socialisation of the project, particularly in the early stages of the VoC programme, businesses should look to gather real-life, anecdotal evidence of improvements and how these have impacted upon specific customers. While these customer stories may not feed into a statistical ROI model, they can prove persuasive when shared with senior executive sponsors who can then see a real and practical outcome.

Looking in more depth at the return on investment for customer interaction analytics, this can come from numerous sources, depending upon how the solution is used. Analytics offers both the avoidance of a specific cost, (including the reduction of a risk in the case of compliance), and an increase in revenue:

Cost reduction:

- Reduction in cost of unnecessary callbacks after improving first-call resolution rates through root cause analysis of reasons for repeat calls

- Avoidance of live calls that can be handled by the identification and implementation of improved IVR or website self-service functionality through considering customers' comments on their experience of using this channels

- Reduced cost of QA and QM as a driver for training, as customer feedback can identify agents and areas requiring improvement

- Understand customer intent. For example, an insurance company received a lot of calls after customers had bought policies from their website. Analysis was able to show that customers were ringing for reassurance that the policy had been started, meaning the company could immediately send an email to new customers with their policy details on it, avoiding the majority of these calls

- Identifying non-optimised business processes (e.g. a confusing website or a high number of callers ringing about delivery) and fix these, reducing customer effort and improving loyalty.

Revenue increase:

- Increase in sales conversion rates and values based on dissemination of best practice across agents as identified by positive customer feedback and improved business outcomes

- Optimised marketing messages through instant customer evaluation, including sentiment analysis

- Reduced customer churn through closed-loop customer rescue

- Quicker response to new competitor and pricing information through capturing customer comments and sentiments about competition

- Some businesses assign a revenue value to an improvement in customer satisfaction ratings or Net Promoter Score®

- Understand and correlate call outcomes, using metadata and call analysis to see what works and what doesn't.

Text analytics can be a cheaper alternative to full interaction analytics, and basic solutions can extract most of the meaning from call transcripts, although detailed categorisation and customer segmentation may be lacking. This application is considered in some detail later in this report.

Sharing feedback, especially with voice examples, ignites VoC awareness and action.

- **We do THAT to our customer!** – Distribute audio examples that compel outside-in understanding far beyond any written description.
- **Percent Silence** – Use speech analytics to identify training or process issues via silence gaps from customers or agents.
- **Pulse** – Interaction analytics to score every voice and text-based conversation will visualize a pulse of CX for trend perspective and prediction.
- **Emotion** – Benchmark emotion with data-supported metrics to encourage senior management investment support as a key loyalty driver.

Remembered vs. Actual – Use speech analytics to compare every survey response with its associated interaction for outlier Brightstar or bottom box performance examples.

From the company's perspective, successful VoC programmes have certain things in common, including:

- being seen as a strategic necessity for the future of the company

- being actively supported by the highest echelons of the business

- providing actionable insights, the implementation of which leads to measurable change

- making insights accessible to relevant departments, teams and individuals relatively effortlessly

- mixing structured and unstructured data from all parts of the customer journey and across channels to provide a holistic view

- does not rely on conventional wisdom, but is purely data-driven

- supports closed-loop feedback, allowing dissatisfied customers and broken processes to be addressed in near real-time.

USING CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

The chart below takes into account the survey respondents' opinions of the effectiveness of each method of gathering customer insight.

Respondents tend to rate customer experience research calls and emails fairly highly, with 29% of those using this method of customer feedback finding it very effective and with only 4% ineffective.

Call analytics – which in this case also includes supervisors analysing call recordings as well as the use of automated speech analytics solutions – also gets considerable approval (with 55% of those using this method stating it to be very effective). IVR/SMS surveys are seen as somewhat less useful.

Despite the higher incidence of their use, neither the informal nor formal gathering of insight directly from agents are judged as especially useful, with 16% stating that they are ineffective compared to 28% very effective, although formal meetings are seen more positively than in past years' research.

Figure 6: Effectiveness of methods for gathering customer insight

Effectiveness of methods for gathering customer insight

- Team meetings with supervisors who pass on agent insights: Very effective 14%, Somewhat effective 61%, Ineffective 22%, We don't use this method 4%
- IVR or SMS (i.e. automated, near real-time surveys): Very effective 16%, Somewhat effective 30%, Ineffective 10%, We don't use this method 45%
- Projects studying the customer journey: Very effective 17%, Somewhat effective 50%, Ineffective 5%, We don't use this method 28%
- Speech analytics (i.e. of recorded calls): Very effective 22%, Somewhat effective 14%, Ineffective 4%, We don't use this method 60%
- Formal process for gathering agent comments: Very effective 22%, Somewhat effective 43%, Ineffective 13%, We don't use this method 21%
- Customer experience research calls and emails: Very effective 23%, Somewhat effective 54%, Ineffective 3%, We don't use this method 20%

Legend: ■ Very effective ■ Somewhat effective ■ Ineffective ■ We don't use this method

Clearly, there is not yet a general feeling that any technique of gathering feedback is consistently providing high-quality insight. This may well be more to do with what is done (or not done) with the data, rather than being a fault in the data gathering process itself.

KEY VOC METRICS

Most VoC programmes will look at similar metrics which will be looked at within this section: Net Promoter Score (NPS), Customer Effort Score and Customer Satisfaction rating. This report will also consider the importance of first-contact resolution rate, which is of vital importance to creating customer satisfaction within the customer contact environment.

However, this presumes that these factors are the actual drivers of the desired outcome: for most businesses, increased profitability. While it certainly makes sense that an improvement in these metrics will impact positively on the bottom line, causality cannot be automatically assumed. It should also be noted that there are many other attributes that go towards changing these business outcomes, and assumptions that these are the correct attributes to track should also be considered critically by each company.

The VoC programme can, through listening to and understanding a wide variety of customers, identify potential attributes that are lacking and upon which improvement can be focused. If these attributes do indeed alter the key metrics, and these key metrics presage an improvement in profitability, then it should be possible to confirm causation from, for example, a reduced onboarding time which lowers customer effort, which increases products-per-customer, which helps profitability.

We will consider these metrics briefly before looking at them in more depth in the next sections:

Net Promoter Score (NPS)®[1]: a relationship metric, highlighting customer loyalty and the relationship with the company and brand over the long term, often seen as a board-level metric.

Customer Effort Score (CES): customer effort has been very closely linked with successful financial outcomes. Usually seen as a transactional metric and measured immediately after customer interactions. It is useful for determining failures at a systemic or process level.

Customer satisfaction scores (CSAT): unlike NPS, there is no single methodology for measuring customer satisfaction. Often used transactionally – e.g. "how satisfied were you with this interaction today?" – CSAT is a very flexible metric that can be pointed at many touchpoints in the customer journey (for example, "How satisfied were you with the onboarding process / the way your call was handled today / the product which you have just bought", etc.). This metric is useful for gauging the success or otherwise of specific outcomes.

First contact resolution (FCR): a contact centre-specific metric, but one which has been shown over many years of our research to be the single most important factor influencing customer satisfaction with the contact centre. It is a win-win metric: businesses with high FCR may reduce the cost of service, and as less customer time and effort is required, it is also positive for the customer experience. It is also important to note that high FCR is not in itself positive: many contact centres with little effective self-service will answer simple questions correctly first time, but this will increase service cost and disappoint customers who would prefer to use self-service. See "The Inner Circle Guide to First-Contact Resolution" for more information.

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

NET PROMOTER SCORE

As customer experience benchmarks change from company to company – there is no generally accepted customer satisfaction rating or quality score that allows direct comparison between organisations – only NPS easily allows head-to-head comparison across companies.

NPS is an index ranging from -100 to 100 that measures how likely customers are to recommend a company's products or services to others. The question asked to customers is:

- "On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend this company's product or service to a friend or a colleague?"

- Based on their rating, customers can then be grouped into in 3 categories: detractors, passives and promoters. 'Detractors' score lower than or equal to 6, 'Passives' score 7 or 8 and 'Promoters' answered 9 or 10.

- NPS is determined by subtracting the percentage of customers who are detractors from the percentage who are promoters. For example, if 50% were promoters and 10% detractors, the NPS would be 40. This allows businesses not only to focus upon increasing the proportion of people that actively like and evangelize about the company, but also to bear in mind those at the opposite end of the spectrum who are lukewarm or negative.

NPS is seen as a very valuable metric in the customer experience world, as it is simple, easily measurable, trackable over time and comparable across all businesses. However, it is a descriptive metric in that it cannot explain **why** a customer feels positively or negatively towards a business. An NPS question is often followed with an open-ended request for the customer to explain why they gave this score.

The following chart comes from a 2020 ContactBabel survey of over 200 UK businesses.

Respondents to this survey generally reported a mix of Net Promoter scores, with a survey-wide average of 33 (down from 49 last year), which may be to do with the drop-off in customer service widely experienced due to the pandemic.

Those in the manufacturing industry reported the highest average scores, with retail & distribution and TMT the lowest.

Figure 7: Net Promoter Score by selected vertical market

Net Promoter Score by selected vertical market

Finance	49
Manufacturing	63
Public Sector	30
Retail & Distribution	22
Services	25
TMT	16
Average	33
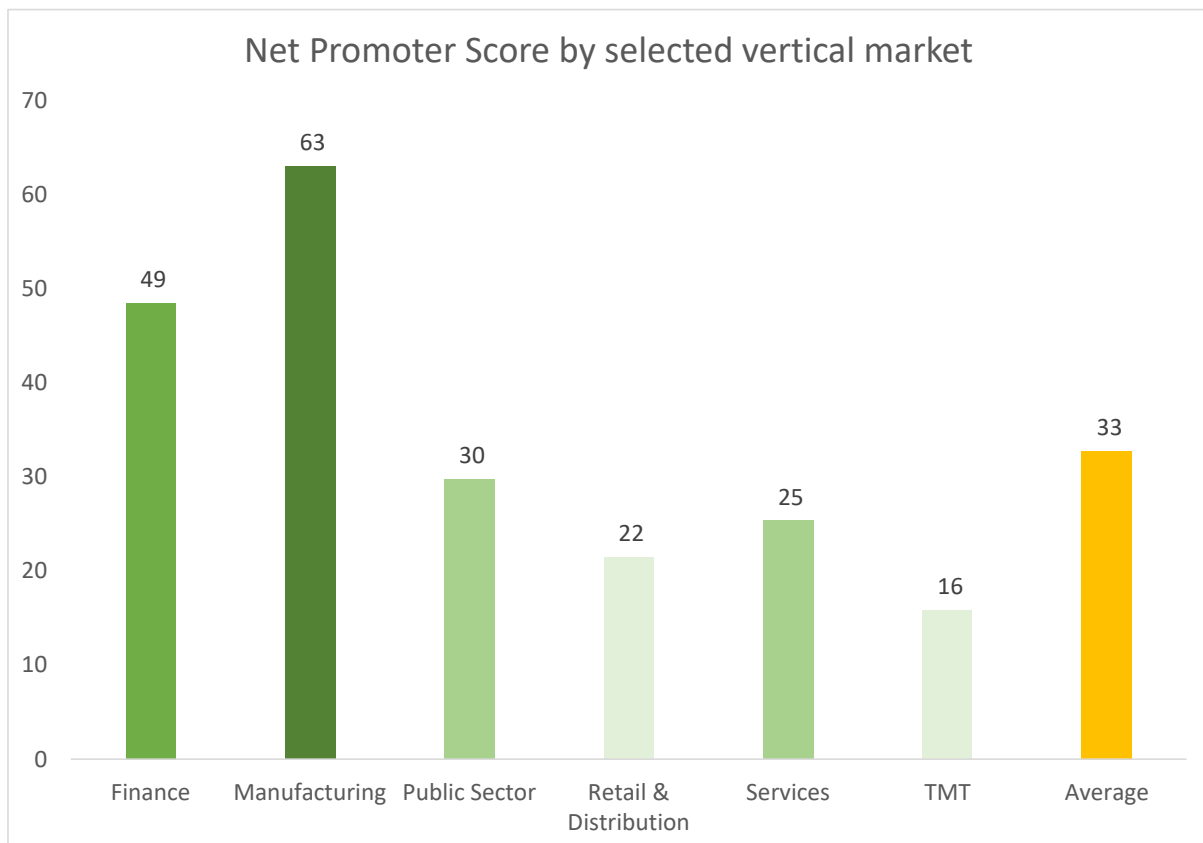
CUSTOMER EFFORT SCORE

Customer effort scores look to understand the ease or otherwise with which the customer has interacted with the company on a particular occasion. Often, there will be a five-point scale running from "very easy" to "very difficult", which can be converted into a quantitative metric. Various methods of calculating customer effort scores and pitfalls to avoid can be found within this referenced article.[2]

Large-scale customer experience surveys have shown that customer effort is a good predictor of future loyalty, far more so than customer satisfaction, and as such it is a useful metric to benchmark.

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[2] https://www.callcentrehelper.com/how-to-calculate-customer-effort-94671.htm

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION RATING

Customer satisfaction ratings are often gathered immediately following an interaction with the company, and can be used to discover issues with processes, products or even specific contact centre agents in order to identify potential areas requiring improvement. They are often paired with open-ended follow-up questions.

CSAT (customer satisfaction) scores do not have a fixed and widely accepted scoring system, but are more wide-ranging. Businesses may decide that they want to track the proportion of customers who report being "very satisfied", score them at 5 out of 5, etc.

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

29% of respondents were more than 10% below their target, although 32% were above it.

Figure 8: Customer satisfaction score – actual and target

Customer satisfaction score – actual and target

- More than 20% below target 10%
- 10-20% below target 19%
- Less than 10% below target 32%
- On target 7%
- Above target 32%

FIRST-CONTACT RESOLUTION

VoC programmes help to identify the characteristics and outcomes of interactions that customers most value, rather than simply ensuring compliance. ContactBabel research has consistently found that first-contact resolution is most highly prized by the majority of customers, placing traditional contact centre metrics such as call duration or even average wait time into the background. Many contact centres are still measuring and rewarding agents based upon metrics and behaviours that are not aligned with a modern customer-centric outlook. Quality scoring tools and processes must be flexible enough to encourage and reward the agent characteristics and skills that support the overall organisation's aims, rather than seeing the contact centre existing in a vacuum where productivity is all that counts. The scoring criteria should be re-evaluated a regular basis, and to make sure that scores are fair and consistent across the contact centre, there should be regular re-checks of calls already scored by other supervisors or QA staff. There is also an increasing use of automated scoring using interaction analytics, which is described later in the report.

THE VIEW FROM THE BUSINESS

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

Figure 9: What do you believe is the importance of these factors to a customer when contacting your organisation?
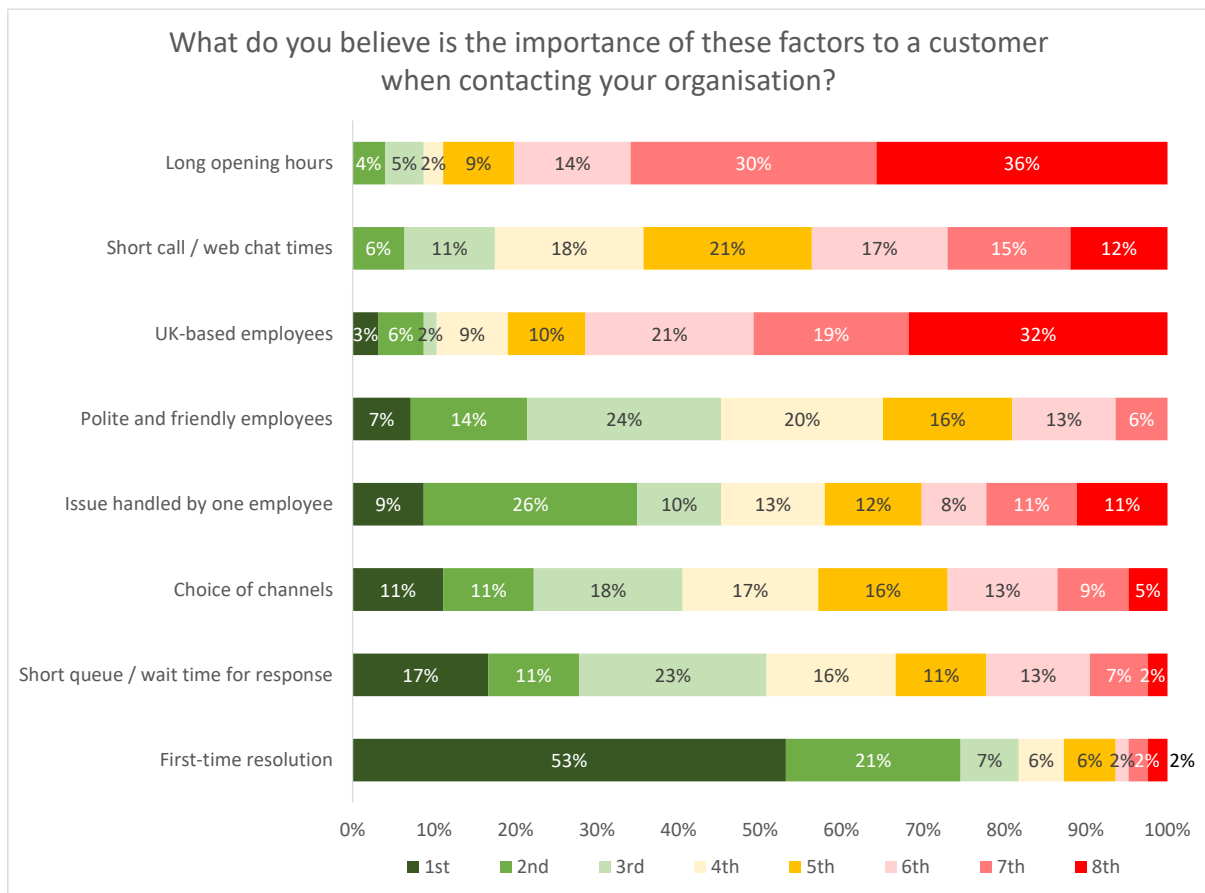
ContactBabel commissioned the research firm Aurora Market Research to carry out a survey of 1,000 UK consumers. One of the purposes was to identify any differences in opinion between organisations and customers about what were the most important customer experience factors when contacting an organisation.

As such, consumers were asked to state which were the top three most important factors to them when contacting an organisation, with the same factors presented to them that had been offered to organisations within the business survey which most of this report is based upon. Figures below are expressed as the percentage of each age group that expressed an opinion.

As with the previous chart which looked at businesses' views on what was important to customers, first-contact resolution is seen as the primary factor for individuals as well.

Figure 10: What are the top 3 most important factors to you when contacting an organisation by phone or digital channel? (by age range)

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

Factor	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Long opening hours	22%	30%	22%	14%	14%	8%
Short call/web chat times	26%	29%	22%	20%	12%	9%
Issue handled by one employee	23%	28%	27%	33%	32%	41%
A choice of ways to communicate	49%	35%	27%	29%	26%	22%
Polite and friendly employees	50%	35%	38%	31%	38%	41%
UK-based employees	25%	28%	44%	51%	57%	63%
Short queue/wait time for response	41%	50%	57%	59%	60%	58%
Your question/issue is solved first-time	59%	58%	61%	61%	59%	59%

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

For example, 41% of the youngest age group (16 to 24 years old) stated that having a short wait time for a response was one of their top three most important factors, whereas 58% of the oldest age group (over 65 years old) placed this in their top three.

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

- both businesses and consumers agree that first-contact resolution is the most important single factor impacting upon customer experience when contacting a business

- a short queue/wait time for response is also seen as being a vital part of the customer experience

- having UK-based employees is seen as far more important to customers than businesses believe.

When considering these findings from the perspective of the various age ranges, the importance of first-contact resolution is very similar across all age ranges, which is a change from previous years when older demographics felt this to be much more important.

The requirement for UK-based employees has dropped considerably this year, especially amongst the younger demographic. There is also a pattern that older age-groups are less likely to be happy with being passed between agents.

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

However, the youngest age group are not willing to sacrifice courteous service for time saved, as 50% of this cohort place 'polite and friendly employees' in the top three factors, making it their second most-important factor. This may be because the youngest age group have the least experience of dealing with businesses and contact centres, perhaps lacking some of the confidence that comes with years of speaking with businesses, and to have a friendly and approachable agent seems to be valued very highly.

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

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

- The contact centre is handling simple and repetitive calls that could be moved to self-service, or which could be addressed on a website and through better marketing communications

- Callers are dropping out of self-service to speak with agents because the self-service application is failing in its task and should be re-engineered

- Unclear marketing communications are causing customers to call

- Calls are being received that are actually driven by mistakes from elsewhere in the enterprise.

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

See ContactBabel's "The Inner Circle Guide to First-Contact Resolution" for more information.

The most widely used customer experience benchmark is the general customer satisfaction rating, which is used by 97% of respondents. First-contact resolution rate is used by 81%, NPS 73%, customer retention rate 72% and agent quality scores 82%. Customer effort score is much less widely used, however is still in place in 53% of respondents.

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

60% of respondents that used it stated that they believed that the customer effort score was a useful indicator of customer experience, being the highest-rated metric. CSAT was very close behind it.

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

NPS was rated the lowest, with 44% stating that it was very useful, but 19% saying it was of little or no use. This is a notable finding, as NPS is one of the metrics most favoured by C-suite executives, as the chart on the next page shows.

Figure 11: Usefulness of CX benchmarks

Usefulness of CX benchmarks

Benchmark	Very useful	Somewhat useful	A little useful	Not useful	DON'T USE THIS METHOD	Don't know
Net Promoter Score	32%	28%	9%	5%	27%	
Customer Effort Score	32%	19%	2%		47%	
Customer retention rate	39%	21%	9%		28%	3%
First-contact resolution rate	40%	34%	4%	4%	19%	
Quality score	43%	28%	10%		18%	1%
Customer satisfaction score	57%	32%	6%	3%		2%
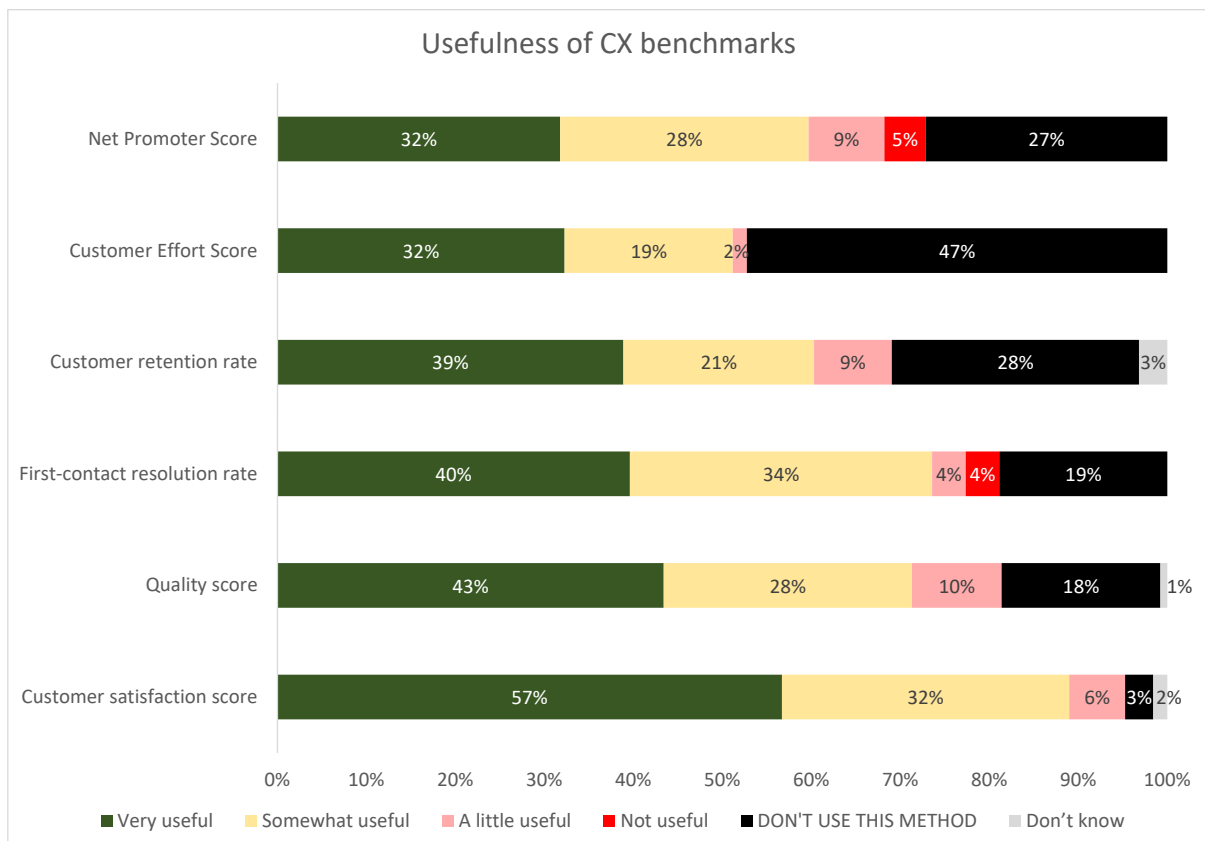
Survey respondents were asked to pick a single customer experience metric upon which their board or senior management team most judged the success or otherwise of the customer experience programme.

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

Interestingly, despite customer effort score being stated earlier as the most useful CX benchmarking metric, only 2% of respondents stated that it was the CX metric considered most important by the senior management team.

Of even greater note is the fact that first-contact resolution rate was identified as being the key CX metric for senior management by only 7% of respondents, despite both the customer and business survey results earlier in this report showing clearly that first-contact resolution was the most important factor in influencing customer experience.

Figure 12: CX metric upon which the Board / senior management most judge the success of the CX programme

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

- Customer retention rate 11%
- Overall revenue / sales 11%
- First-contact resolution rate 7%
- Quality score 3%
- Cross-sell / upsell rate 1%
- Customer Effort Score 2%
- Customer satisfaction score 24%
- Net Promoter Score 24%
- Cost per service interaction 17%
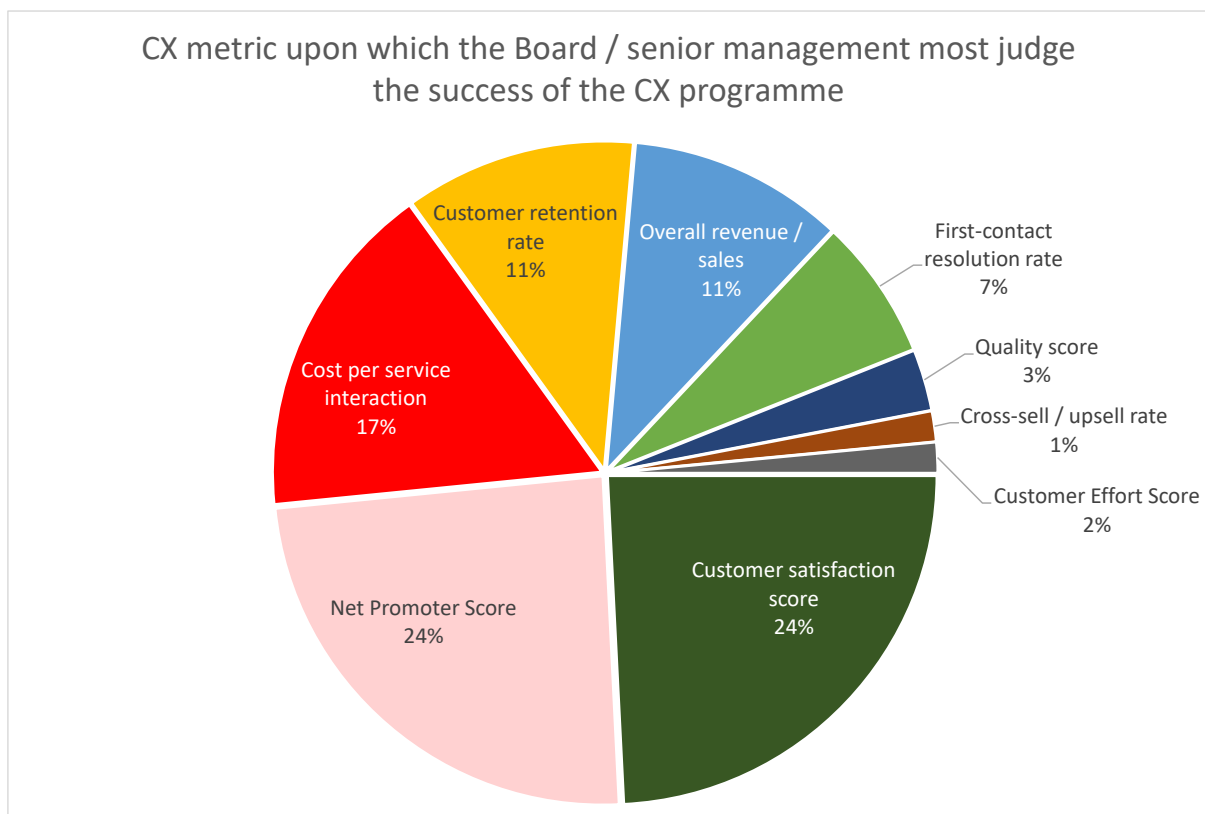
The following chart shows how small, medium and large organisations (as grouped by revenue) view the importance to the senior management team of each customer experience metric.

Larger operations are much more concerned about NPS, with 43% of respondents from the £100m+ group placing it first, and 29% of the £10m-£100m respondents also doing so.

Small operations are far more likely than large organisations to rate their cost per service interaction as being the most important metric, and 29% place overall revenues first.

Non-commercial organisations focus strongly on customer satisfaction scores, and are also most likely to use first-contact resolution as their no.1 CX-related metric.

Figure 13: CX metric upon which the Board / senior management most judge the success of the CX programme, by organisation revenue
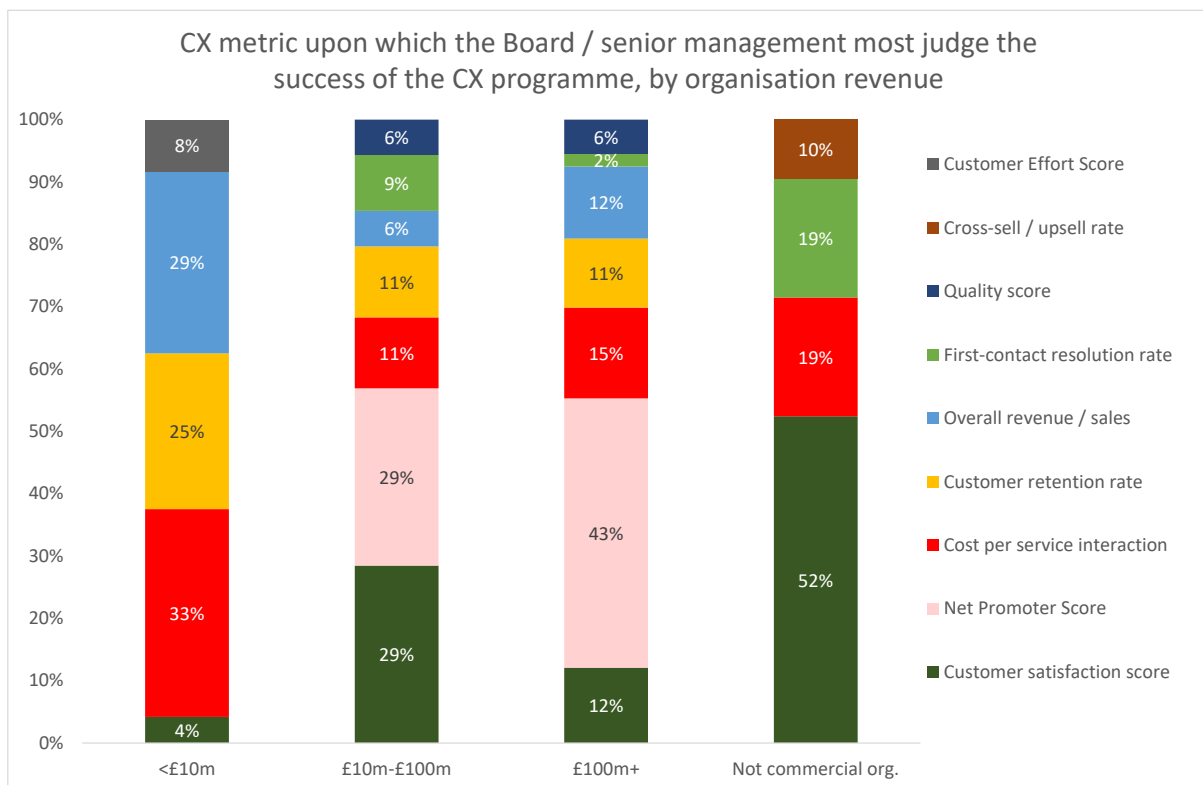
Superior customer feedback solutions go beyond offering simple survey functionality, consolidating all data, comments and other relevant input across many channels so as to provide actionable output to relevant parties. Such solutions do not simply quantify structured data, but can also capture and analyse unstructured data such as verbatim comments, web chats and social media posts to provide deeper, sentiment-rich results.

While direct feedback from customers is vital, the most sophisticated VoC programmes will also consider indirect feedback: for example, how the customer is using the product and how they communicate with the company. Using the two forms of feedback together can give a more rounded approach: a negative customer satisfaction score in itself means very little, but when placed in the context of multiple support requests about the same issue, or numerous negative social media comments, the cause of the negativity can be discovered even if the customer does not choose to provide any specific information to the business.

Customer feedback solutions can identify the key areas highlighted by structured or unstructured data, and analyse the impact on business-related metrics such as customer loyalty, churn and advocacy, allowing the business to prioritise any actions required.

Reporting tools and dashboards then provide relevant up-to-date insight into VoC programme results to those individuals or departments that require it.

SURVEYS

Surveys are at the heart of most VoC programmes. Most fall into one of two main categories:

- Relationship: provide feedback on customer satisfaction, loyalty, engagement and brand

- Transactional: provide information about a specific customer interaction.

Relationship-based surveys may best be done every few months or annually, on a rolling basis so that there is continuous feedback and the success of any changes to processes can be gauged. Some businesses send out surveys that cover the customer experience in great depth, looking at specific touchpoints within the customer journey, and the surveys can be many dozens of questions in length. Other businesses will keep things far shorter, perhaps only including an NPS question along with a free text option that allows the customer to give verbatim answers. As these are done relatively infrequently, businesses such as insurance companies which rely upon annual renewals may send these surveys out a few weeks before a renewal decision is needed, and the answers from the customer may then initiate a customer rescue process if necessary.

Transactional surveys are driven by events and key touchpoints in the customer journey, although there should be processes in place to make sure that a customer receives a reasonable number of survey requests so as not to cause survey fatigue, and also to avoid any excessive weighting towards customers who contact the business very frequently.

More sophisticated VoC programmes will have a way to link transactional and relationship surveys. For example, at a very basic level, the NPS of a customer who has indicated that they are happy with a product but unhappy with the amount of onboarding effort they have to make could show what they really value from a company.

It is of vital importance that businesses understand what they are trying to accomplish before they send out the survey. For example, is it about:

- Understanding the effectiveness of individual contact centre agents?

- The customer perception of a new product?

- How loyal customers are?

- Where new customers heard about us?

- Whether there are any processes or interactions that customers are finding particularly challenging?

- Whether customers are advocates for the company, or merely satisfied?

Every question asked should have a purpose that is relevant to what the survey is trying to achieve. Survey fatigue is a very real problem, and the mindset of most customers is that they do not owe the business their time, especially to answer long-winded, obtrusive or irrelevant questions.

Many companies pay lip service to listening to their customers, but do they actually hear what their customers say? And more importantly do they act upon it to change or improve their processes? There is no point in generating an expectation which the business has no intention of fulfilling. Don't ask the customers for feedback if there is no intention of using it to make the service provided substantially better.

Formal surveys of customer satisfaction offer the customer a chance to feed-back, and the business to learn. Setting up surveys involved various elements which should not be overlooked, including:

Defining the purpose and objectives of the survey

- Deciding the approach
- Developing the questionnaire
- Carrying out the survey
- Collating the data
- Analysing the results
- Presenting the findings - and acting upon them.

The point of a survey is to discover what the company is doing wrong, where improvements can take place, how the company is perceived against its competition and how it can improve. It is important to view the survey from the customers' perspective, rather than checking boxes that just relate to internal company metrics, which is self-serving. Surveys should also be ongoing, to check whether real improvements are being made after the issues have been identified.

Survey forms should be simple and quick to complete, but if possible should carry enough weight to allow the company to change its processes and behaviours if that is what is required, using a mixture of objective questions that can be segmented and scored, as well as free text, especially in telephony questionnaires, where customers can be encouraged to add real value.

For surveying customers' experience of the contact centre, the key to success is to keep the survey fairly short, with a maximum of around 5 questions, which can be range-based (e.g. "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree", "strongly agree", etc.), a simpler 'Yes/No' option and a free-text, 'any comments' question. These questions may include:

- Was the call answered quickly?
- Was the agent polite?
- Were you satisfied with the response?
- Was this the first time you had called about this matter?
- Do you have any comments you would like to make?

Opinion is split on whether surveys should identify specific agents, as although major outlying training and behavioural problems can be identified, many operations are keen to avoid the 'Big Brother' feeling of spying on agents, and prefer to emphasise that surveys are done to identify broken processes, not to criticise individuals.

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

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

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

- Clearly determines the purpose and aims of the survey

- Considers adopting a variety of question types. Scored questions enable a business to produce statistically significant and representative data. Free comments allow the gain of real insight into customers' perception of service

- Selects an experienced company to set up and host the survey. Businesses will benefit from their expertise and knowledge and avoid potentially costly errors

- Ensures that the survey can be carried out throughout the day, including peak times, to gain a true picture of the customer experience

- Makes sure that the results of the survey can be collated and analysed in a wide variety of ways. It is pointless to amass information if it cannot be evaluated and the results disseminated usefully

- Has procedures in place to act upon the information that it finds. The survey may have uncovered some broken processes in the service which need attention. It will also inevitably throw up disgruntled customers whose specific concerns need addressing. In this instance, the survey platform should provide some mechanism for alerting and following-up to ensure that dissatisfied customers are escalated to the appropriate staff in a closed-loop manner

- Adopts a unified approach across the business to assessing and monitoring customer satisfaction. If a business continues to reward agents based on traditional call performance metrics, it is merely paying lip service to good service. If agents are rewarded based on customer satisfaction ratings, it will increase agent engagement and retention at the same time as improving the service it offers to customers.

In order to get a wide and representative understanding of your customer base, the business should use customer personas (e.g. gender, age, socio-economic, product/service ownership, etc.) in order to make sure that the views of all types of customer are being considered.

Businesses should also look at the appropriate moments to gather feedback: consider survey at key milestones along the customer journey, particularly at points that have been identified as causing stress or issues in the past. For example, a bank may wish to solicit feedback from customers who have just completed a complex mortgage form in order to discover any specific issues which they had.

However, it is important not to over-survey customers: some companies request feedback even after the simplest of customer interactions, creating survey fatigue. It is also important to match the depth and complexity of the survey with the specific actions that the customer had taken: asking a five or six question survey with open-ended questions after the customer had carried out a simple IVR session seems overkill.

In the case of transactional surveys, time is of the essence: as a general rule, these types of survey should be sent to customers as soon as possible, certainly within 24 hours.

The next sections of this report look in greater depth at how to run customer feedback surveys.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey questions can fall into two categories: closed and open.

Closed questions are useful for quantitative analysis which allows metrics to be tracked over time, and is particularly useful for evaluating the effectiveness of any changes put into place. For industry-wide metrics such as NPS, this also gives the opportunity for external benchmarking.

However, closed questions do not give much opportunity for insight: they are more about the "what" rather than the "why". Open-ended questions, while they are more difficult to quantify, allow the customer to express themselves fully, and explain why they have given a good or bad quantitative rating. Many companies use a dynamic survey technique that involves offering a open-ended question if the closed question preceding it scored particularly well or poorly, asking the customer why they gave that particular rating.

While survey questions will obviously differ between businesses and the type of insight that they are seeking, some questions may be particularly suitable for specific types of feedback:

Contact centre performance

1) Have you tried to contact us about this issue previously? If so, how?

> This is a useful question in order to gauge first-contact resolution rates and also the success (or otherwise) of alternate channels. This is likely to impact significantly on customer effort.

2) Have you tried to use self-service to solve this issue?

> Again this question looks at customer effort, and the effectiveness or otherwise of channels other than telephony.

3) Was your problem solved entirely and to your satisfaction?

> This provides data for first-contact resolution rates, and is a useful question for a transactional survey. First-contact resolution, as is shown elsewhere in this report, is vitally important for high levels of customer satisfaction and customer experience.

4) Would you recommend a company to your family/friends?

> This is an NPS question, and is more of a relationship-based survey question rather than simply about a single transaction. However, it is often asked at the end of an interaction.

5) On a scale of 1 to 5, how much effort was required for this request to be handled?

> The data from this answer provide the base for the Customer Effort Score, which has been found to correlate positively with loyal customers and repeat business. While on the face of it this is a transactional question, customer effort has been shown to affect long-term business relationships, and as such is one of the key metrics that many VoC programmes will try to capture.

6) Are you satisfied by the way your agent handled your call/web chat today?

This is a customer satisfaction question which refers specifically to the actions of the agent rather than the overall outcome of the interaction (for example, even if the customer has been rejected for a loan on the call, it is theoretically possible to be satisfied with an agent's assistance and behaviour). While on the face of it, this is a useful metric for getting the customer's view of an individual agent, it should be noted that in practice some of the lower scores may actually refer to the outcome rather than the agent.

Strategic / competitive questions

1) What do you look for in a company/product/service?

This can be used as an ostensibly disinterested, neutral introductory question that does not put the customer under any pressure to praise or criticise the company.

2) Are you positive, neutral or negative towards the following companies?

This question can show which are your most dangerous competitors, particularly if more insight can be driven through follow-up questions which may be open-ended. It is useful for identifying non-traditional competitors that you may not even be aware are seen by your customers as an alternative to your company.

3) How can we improve?

While this is a particularly open-ended question, it gives the customer free rein to talk about anything that particularly concerns them, rather than having to take them by the hand and lead them through a structured survey before they can express what's really on their mind. While many of the answers may not be immediately actionable, these answers may help set longer-term strategic goals. Some businesses may have premium clients who are far more profitable than others and whose loyalty is key to future success, and trying to act upon (or at least respond personally to) these specific comments may provide a strategic advantage.

The numerous methods of directly surveying customers include:

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

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

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

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

However, email does allow immediacy and offers a customer a chance to express themselves more fully, rather than simply with numerical scores. This method also has the advantage that it can be fully automated, but there is a danger of ending up in spam folders.

Detailed person-to-person interviews have an important role to play, particularly where the feedback generated can be compared side-to-side with feedback by other methods. Having quantitative and qualitative data provides valuable feedback that can't be achieved by adopting a single surveying method. This can be surveyed over the telephone, face-to-face or through email, and can also be done on a one-to-many basis e.g. using focus groups. While this is possibly the most expensive survey method, it gives the opportunity for detailed follow-up questions.

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

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

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

Micro-surveys: these very short requests for feedback (e.g. one or two questions) can be placed at key points within the customer journey where it is suspected that there is a customer disengagement. Simply asking the customer whether it was easy to do what they have just done, or how satisfied they are with a particular process can quickly identify any suboptimal issues, and when blending this with CRM and other meta data, will be able to identify specific customer groups which are having problems.

Social media: many social media sites now allow businesses to create rapid-response polls, and while these will be self-selective rather than representational (i.e. the customer has to be on Twitter at that time in order to take the survey), there are quick, cheap and easy way of taking the temperature.

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

The table below shows that email is by far the most widely-used survey method, with a minority of companies using the other methods.

Figure 14: Methods of gathering customer surveys (in contact centres using surveys)

Method	% of respondents using this method that survey customers
Email	54%
Live agent	33%
IVR	27%
Web form	24%
SMS	15%
Other	25%

When considering the volume of surveys collected by each method, email is the most popular with 32% of surveys being collected in this way. Email allows a mixture of quantitative numerical data to be collected, along with qualitative comments which may highlight issues that would otherwise be unknown. It also has the advantage of immediacy and can be fully automated, requiring little or no additional input from the business. Web forms also allow this mix of numerical and written data to be collected, but the timing of offering the surveys during a web browsing session can be difficult to get right.

Despite the cost, outbound survey calls carried out by live agents are used in 23% of cases, which allow a depth of qualitative information to be collected from which insights can be drawn.

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

Figure 15: Proportion of customer surveys gathered by method

Proportion of customer surveys gathered by method
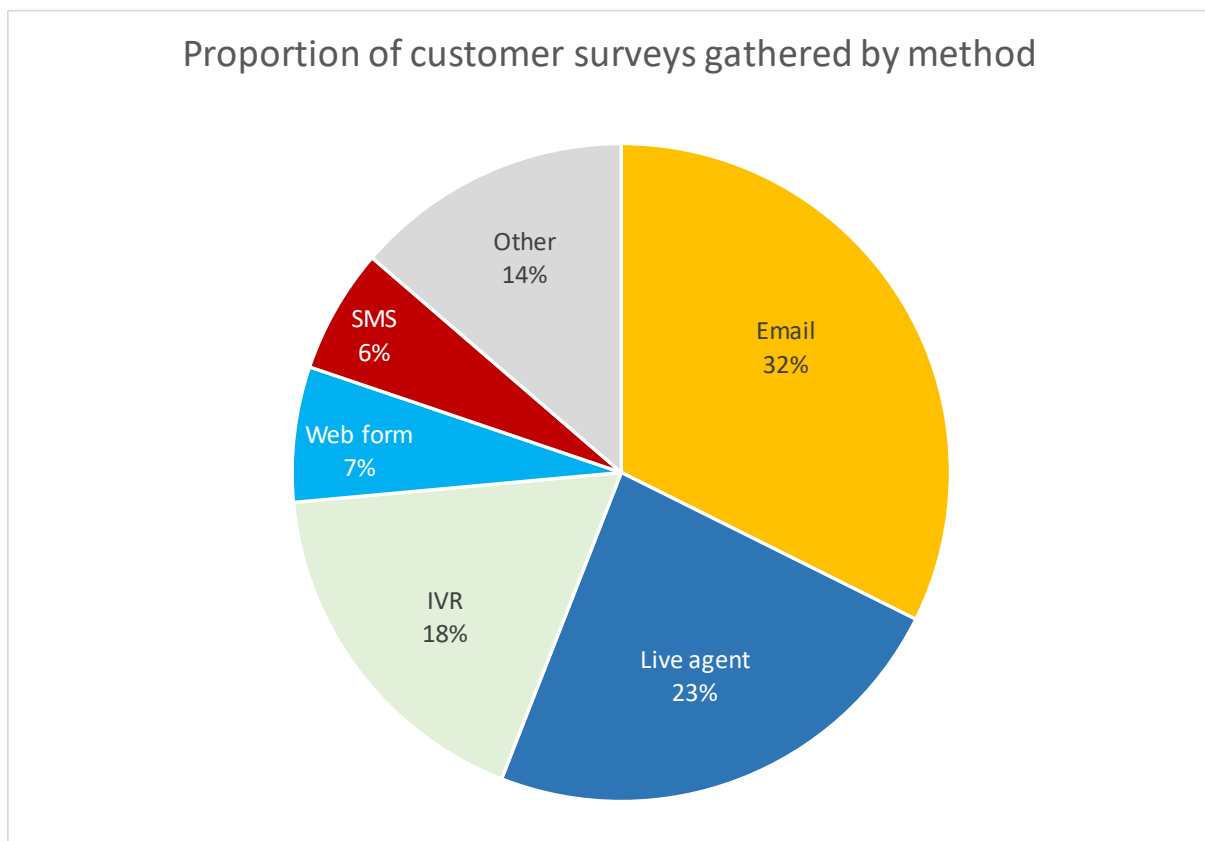
Survey response rates can be improved by:

- keeping surveys as focused as possible, and only asking questions that are relevant to the customer and also about the area of the business that you are actually trying to improve

- using personas to tailor communications techniques and survey questions that will be interesting to this particular subgroup

- asking complex or sensitive questions at the end of the survey so as not to put customers off

- doing pilot A/B tests and altering the way surveys are presented, the title of the email, etc. to see if response rates differ hugely

- sending out surveys at an appropriate time of day/week, and also depending on the type of survey (e.g. transactional surveys should be sent out shortly after the interaction, while relationship surveys may have a trigger such as shortly before renewal date)

- personalise the survey invitation. Consider using the customer's name, or if possible and relevant, a relevant product or service that they have purchased, or some other element of their customer history

- use reminders and consider incentives, especially for B2C surveys

- send out a précis of results, even to those that did not take the survey. This shows that as a business you listen to customer feedback, and if the results are interesting, non-participants may be more likely to take the survey next time.

MYSTERY SHOPPING

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

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

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

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

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

PERSONALISATION

Personalising surveys through demonstrating the knowledge of what a customer has just done with you, their past purchase history and of course their name, can go a long way towards engaging them to take part in the survey. Just as importantly, irrelevant surveys should be excluded (e.g. asking a customer about the quality of a service call made months ago, or asking younger customers their opinion on pension annuities).

The concept of 'personas' is closely linked with personalisation: a persona in this case referring to a group of people who may have similar demographic attributes, product purchase history or other important things in common. Similar and relevant survey questions can be asked to specific personas, allowing understanding of what a specific type of customer or user is experiencing, and allowing more actionable insights to emerge.

Personalisation is also a matter of which channel is chosen by the business to offer the survey to the customer. The use of the customer journey map and customer personas should help to identify the relevant touchpoints at which appropriate survey may be offered.

There is also the opportunity to use personalisation to drive further customer engagement and positivity towards the brand. For example, a customer giving a high NPS score may then be invited to give an online review in a third-party website (e.g. Google or TripAdvisor), or to receive a cross-selling offer.

The use of AI-enabled conversational chatbots means that personalised logic and branching can be employed so that only relevant questions are asked to customers based upon their previous answers and customer history. This not only improves the customer experience and engagement, but allows businesses to ask a wider spread of questions to the people who can actually answer them.

The personalisation of survey email's title can improve open rates and participation. While the simplest way of doing this is to include the customer's name within the title (e.g. "Steve, let us know what you think about Company X"), a more effective and less cliched method may be to use a relevant product or service name instead (e.g. "Tell us what you thought about your recent flight to Spain"). This method also allows personalised surveys to be pre-populated with relevant information taken from the customer's record, increasing the level of customisation and demonstrating to the customer that you believe their time is important through reducing their effort.

Personalisation can also be used depending on the reason for the survey being sent out. For example, surveys asking about the quality and effectiveness of the last interaction with the business should be sent out almost immediately while it is still fresh within the customer's mind, whereas in an e-commerce environment, the company should give enough time for the product to be delivered before asking the customer for feedback, if they are looking to understand the overall effectiveness of the buying process.

While structured data that is gathered through the means of formal surveys is certainly quantifiable, businesses should be wary of accepting results at face value. Only a small sample of customers can be surveyed, due to either the danger of survey fatigue for relationship surveys, or in the case of transactional surveys, because only those who have recently communicated with the company can be surveyed.

Survey response rates should also be taken into account. Unless there is a 100% response rate (which there never is), it is impossible to get an entirely accurate picture. Response rates can differ hugely depending on the customer group being surveyed, their engagement with the company, the complexity of the survey and its relevance to them at the time.

It is also the case that structured data surveys run the risk of creating polarised results: those who are delighted with the company and those who are very disappointed by its performance are much more likely to take surveys than those who are ambivalent or lukewarm.

Combining structured data from formal surveys with unstructured data gathered from customers' verbatim comments – whether gathered from social media, online forums or through the application of speech analytics to recorded calls – is far more likely to provide a more accurate view of customers' voices.

Voice of the employee (VoE) programmes are part of the workforce engagement management suite, aiming to understand how employees feel about their work and the organisation with the end goal to understand and improve outcomes for employees and the business. They can be used alongside VoC programmes to optimise the wider customer experience through improving employee engagement.

Some of the purposes of VoE include:

- improving employee performance and retention

- identify areas of underperformance in the organisation

- understanding and addressing the causes of boredom and burnout in front-line employees

- improving employee motivation and aligning them with business strategy and culture

- as happy employees directly affect performance and customer experience, making the workplace and culture more pleasant will benefit everybody.

VoE programs can survey employees through tailored questions in order to gather insight about current levels of engagement by role, team, department, etc. Not only do front-line employees appreciate being listened to, but to be able to see any changes and improvements made as a result of their comments is very motivating. Employees can also be asked to give feedback through less formal channel, for example through suggestion boxes, open door policies or supervisor meetings.

Employees are also able to add to the VoC programme through identifying particular customer patterns such as frequently asked questions or escalations, or through identifying technological or process barriers to service.

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

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

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

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

ANALYTICS

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

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

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

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

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

Analytics allows businesses to seek out key words and phrases, such as competitors' names or any instances of pricing, or to gather feedback after a marketing campaign goes out. Some businesses are actively using speech analytics to uncover competitive intelligence as well. For example, one wholesaler uses analytics to identify when competitors' pricing information is mentioned on a call, and passes this back to the commercial team to revisit their own pricing structure.

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

Business Intelligence

Some businesses carry out detailed and sophisticated analytics looking at a combination of variables, in order to seek out correlations. For example, a business may discover that a combination of two issues mentioned by the customer on a call, as well as the mention of a competitor's name is correlated with an extremely high churn rate. In these cases, businesses may choose to use real-time monitoring to trigger a customer offer to be made if these factors are identified within the call, or may use post-call historical analytics in order to trigger a post-call event, such as an email, phone call or text message offering incentives to remain loyal to the company.

Customer Intent

No other contact centre solution apart from customer interaction analytics can provide a solid understanding of **why** customers are calling. Categorising types of calls, and then analysing them for the occurrence of similar types of words and phrases can give an insight into the reasons for customers' calls. For example, a category such as 'sales' might be analysed for patterns, and it is discovered that the words 'delivery' and 'website' are mentioned in a disproportionate number of them. Listening to some of these conversations, it may be found that the website does not highlight delivery times effectively enough, leading to unnecessary calls to the contact centre, rather than the customer purchasing on the website.

The automatic categorisation of calls, based on the types of words and phrases that typically get used within these types of calls, is a starting point. Analytics solutions can then add non-audio data, such as desktop activity or account status, and the tracking of word usage compared with its historical use (e.g. a 300% rise in the use of the phrase "can't log-on" after a software upgrade) can quickly indicate and identify issues that can be handed to the relevant department much more quickly than typical inter-department channels could usually manage. Regular references to competitors and their products can be captured, analysed and passed to the marketing or pricing teams to provide them with real-life, rapid and accurate information upon which to base decisions. This categorisation gives a starting point for analysis, meaning that businesses can listen to the right calls rather than getting them randomly or employing large numbers of people to get insight from customers' calls.

Alongside direct customer surveys, VoC analytics solutions can also gather insight from recorded digital and voice channels. Aggregation of customer surveys and analytical results can identify the root cause of any issues identified, and provide actionable insight for changing processes and/or agent handling techniques. VoC should be seen as a continuous process, rather than a one-off project, and ongoing analysis allows the use of a closed-loop system, whereby identified issues can be actioned and continuously checked to make sure that the problem does not reoccur.

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

Figure 16: Usefulness of analytics for improving CX
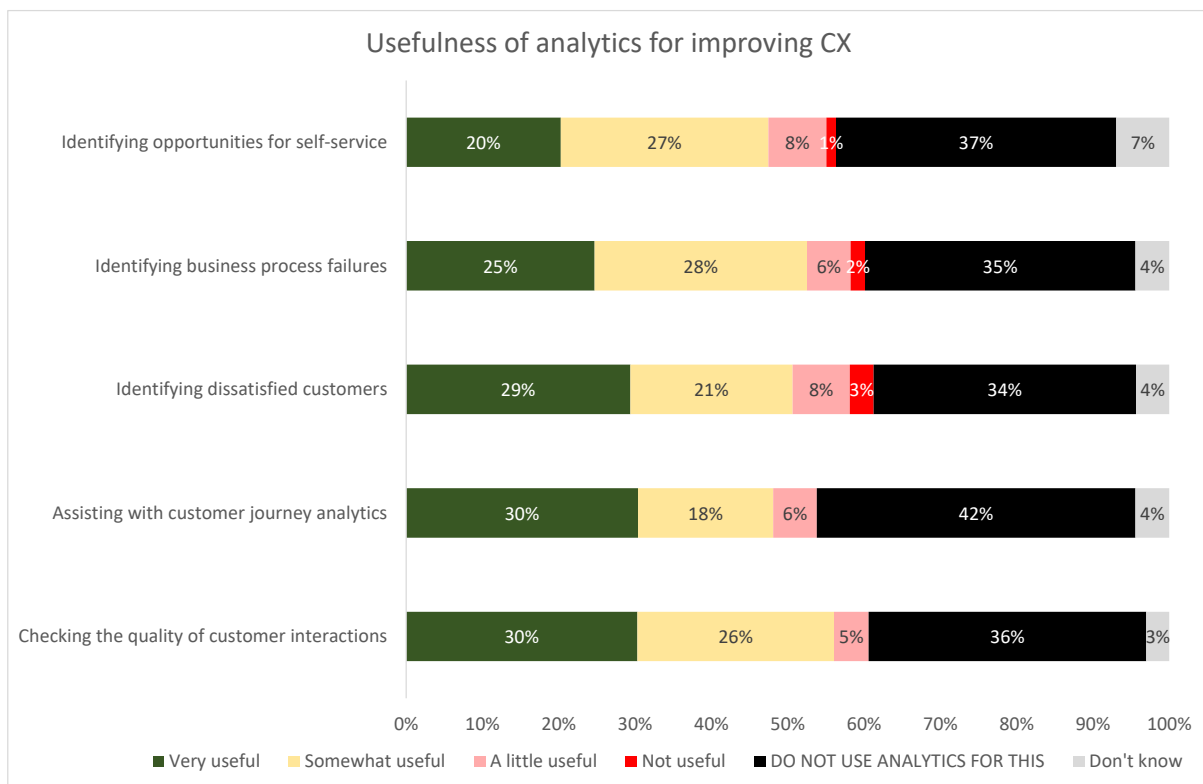
The overall conclusions were surprisingly consistent: in most analytics use cases, a little less than half of respondents stated that it was 'very useful' with a similar percentage saying that it was 'somewhat useful'.

Assistance with customer journey analytics gained the greatest proportion of very positive responses where used.

Being able to use metadata – such as call outcomes, the product being discussed, the nature of the customer, etc. – as well as analysing the call itself, can reveal patterns that would otherwise be very difficult to identify. Optimal agent behaviour and training can be identified and replicated, using insights that would otherwise be unavailable.

Measuring Voice of the Customer:
Data-Driven Strategies to Unlock Insights

As customers expect every experience to be more personalised, there's one thing that every organisation can benefit from understanding better: the **Voice of the Customer (VoC).**

VoC aims to identify the expectations, likes and dislikes of previous, current and prospective customers regarding products or services with an outside-in perspective. It's an essential component to the customer experience (CX). Without it, an organisation can't truly comprehend what its audience wants and expects. To unlock the power of VoC, organisations need to enter the next generation of listening.

To create a positive CX, brands need to listen to their customers throughout every conversation. Speech analytics provides unique VoC insight by monitoring conversational behaviors with focus that's created from categorisation, tagging and scoring of 100% of interactions with customers. This provides the deep level of understanding needed to create positive customer interactions every time.

Research indicates that consumers will use up to nine channels to contact a supplier to try and get the result they want. This has created a complex landscape with **multiple channels** through which customers can express their voice – whether online or on the phone – and companies must be prepared to hear and analyse it all.

Listening to the VoC on each of these channels can help reduce frustration among callers and in turn, improve CX and brand reputation. The right speech analytics technology provides you with the power to go beyond just analysing calls by extending analysis to other channels for things like text analysis and social listening.

Further, VoC doesn't only reveal insights about the contact centre in order to improve CX. It reveals insights about other departments inside the organisation to help shape CX strategy and tactics to impact the bottom line. Data from understanding VoC can inform the marketing team as to what messaging or campaign is producing inquiries, the sales team as to what offers or pitches the most persuasive, the communications team as to what's producing buzz on social media, the product team as to which items to fix or update, and so much more.

These kinds of insights not only help organisations better serve customers, they help influence the Voice of your Brand (VoB) at the front line. When organisations know exactly how customers feel and what they want, they're able to improve agent performance and deliver the best CX possible, as well as deliver business intelligence across the enterprise.

In order to achieve this level of insight, organisations need to do more than just analyse interactions based on solicited feedback, such as surveys. Instead, the key to success is combining the solicited feedback from surveys with unsolicited feedback gathered from speech analytics for a genuine "before, during and after" picture of the experience.

In bringing these two together, **VoC measurement** goes beyond telling you what you already know. It can uncover the secrets behind every interaction to gain a new level of understanding and intelligence in real time. Receiving intelligence that could change the outcome of a call, during the live call, makes a profound difference for the brand and customer alike with improved agent performance, increased upsell opportunities, better CX and ensured compliance.

VoC is the foundation of meaningful and results-oriented experiences. To take full advantage, organisations must measure more effectively and gain a greater depth of understanding of customer voices. When done correctly, it can provide immediate and powerful insights that improve the customer experience and overall business performance.

Initial training

Solution providers offer courses for both technical and operational staff, targeted at specific user roles and responsibilities, including end-user, reporting, performance management, administration, and maintenance. There is often a choice of on-site or remote training. Ongoing support after implementation is standard for the industry.

Some solution providers recommend that there are always at least two or three people who are trained initially, due to job shifts and attrition. It may be the case that customers do not have anybody appropriate on-site to understand how to work with the output, so managed services is a good stopgap solution in this case.

Some solution providers offer packages that include pre-selected phrases relevant to that particular type of business, which means the initial discovery and implementation time is reduced somewhat.

Vendors offering a complete workforce optimisation solution may have developed a new quality framework to assist customers to change and optimise their business processes in such a way that will get the most out of their WFO solution, with the analytics solution being one of several key elements. Analytics – including speech, text, desktop and customer journey – promise to deliver actionable insights at the organisational and individual level. Closer integration of the WFO modules means that a virtuous circle of positive feedback can be established: quality management discovers broken processes and agent training needs; workforce management and predictive analytics will feed into the recruitment and training programs; gamification impacts upon performance; customer journey analytics not only considers the contact centre, but also the back office.

Ongoing resource

Vendors' opinions on the requirement for a full-time, dedicated speech analyst differ widely. Some of those offering solutions based on a phonetic speech engine state that an existing business analyst or member of a quality assurance team will be able to handle analytics as well, yet others state that the more a customer can put into the solution (e.g. a full-time speech analyst), the more they will get out of it.

The complexity and sophistication of the solution is only one element to this: of more importance is what the business wishes to get from customer contact analytics - managing compliance and improving the QA/QM process is likely to require less full-time support than an ambitious cross-department project to investigate and optimize business processes.

Vendors comment that centres with under 250 seats may see analytics handled by the existing QA team, those with up to 1,000 seats will often have analyst resource in-house already, and super large operations, possibly dotted across several sites, will almost always use at least one dedicated speech analyst.

Requirements for end-user resource depend to some extent on the delivery method: a managed service, by its nature will not require any resources apart from a business-focused liaison contact; a cloud model requires a business owner to specify needs and be able to gain insight from the system; a full CPE deployment is more likely to require two points of contact, one technical and the other business-orientated.

If businesses decide to have dedicated analyst resource, they may come from a specific business unit that is using analysis (for example, collections), the quality management team or an existing analyst function. It has been noted that people with a journalistic, enquiring nature may be best suited for this role, as understanding business transformation is key, rather than being technically skilled. It is recommended that they have a certain seniority within the company so that their insights carry authority.

Having said that, for some solutions, a technical resource may also be required to write queries and create reports although most solution providers have worked hard to make the presentation layer easier to use for business users and have delivered major improvements in recent years.

Customer contact analysts will write queries, listen to calls, carry out qualitative analysis and communicate and influence departments and business areas. By far the largest amount of time is spent analysing data and communicating findings elsewhere, with only around 15 to 20% of an analyst's time said to be spent listening to calls. Of course, the purpose of the implementation makes a great difference to this as well.

Solution providers have tried to simplify and improve the usability of the analytical interface, aiming to get actionable performance-based information out of systems with less effort and training required. Along with new user interfaces, there are widespread efforts to help business users build queries, make changes to the system, write their own bespoke reports and interpret the output, trying to move away from the need to have a technical person sitting between the end-user and the solution. Some solution providers have developed their own templates or playbooks from their experience of helping other businesses achieve specific goals, which businesses can use to get quick wins within their own initial implementation.

Making the use of customer interaction analytics easier for non-technical people will make it more likely that the solution is used by other departments to address some of their own issues, such as hiring and candidate screening, determining which students are likely to drop out of a course, and detecting fraud (whether internal or external), as well as general commercial issues.

Analytics' understanding of the nuances and deeper levels of human communication is still being expanded, and solutions go far beyond simply looking for relevant keywords or phrases, or other content-heavy words, taking into account all of the words being used as well as the structure, pacing, flow and tone of the conversation.

Agents, especially those with higher levels of empathy and experience, should be able to identify the emotions of the callers, so using technology for sentiment detection could seem to be an unnecessary elaboration. However, the use of analytics means that the sentiment and emotion of millions of calls can be assessed against their ultimate outcome in order to identify in real-time situations that have a higher likelihood of a negative outcome and to act before it is too late.

Emotion or sentiment displayed on calls can be extremely difficult to track accurately and meaningfully, as everyone has their own way of expressing themselves, words and feelings may not match up, or external irritations not related to the topic of conversation may intrude. Many vendors argue strongly that detecting emotion on each call is a useful tool – for example, by passing irate customers to a supervisor – and further developing their ability to detect voice-stress on a call in order to flag these to a supervisor, with some real time monitoring solutions measuring indicators such as speed of speech, volume, use of key word triggers, instances of talk-over or silence, etc.

There is another viewpoint, taken by those that offer solutions based on the analysis of masses of recordings, that says that the real value comes from looking at very large samples of data to identify those agents, processes and circumstances where emotion (often negative) runs highest, and taking into account the outcome of the call as well. While sentiment detection has had a relatively low profile for many solution providers in the past, recent years have seen many vendors add this to both their real-time and historical analytics solutions.

Against this however, is the feeling that this is one thing that humans can do far better than machines: do agents really need to be advised on a call when somebody is being sarcastic, or is upset? It may be that sentiment detection is more suitable for large-scale historical analysis of calls, where emotional content can be correlated with the outcome of the call, and the spoken use of a word can be ambiguous when seen as text (for example, in the use of sarcasm).

Another viewpoint is that real-time sentiment analysis may be useful for offshore agents who have a different cultural and first-language background to that of the caller.

Some solution providers have recently noted that it is not only what we might consider the keywords within the conversation that indicate sentiment (e.g. "upset", "disappointed", "recommend"), but also the filler words (for example, if the inclusive "we" changes to "you", which may indicate estrangement from the brand.

Real-time sentiment analysis can identify stress, which may be an indicator that fraud is taking place, prompting the agent to take the caller through more detailed levels of security in order to prove their identity. This can be used in association with voice biometrics and/or phoneprinting, in order to identify the callers requiring stronger authentication.

REAL-TIME ANALYTICS

Some solution providers suggest that 'real-time analytics' should perhaps be more accurately referred to as 'real-time monitoring and action'. Analysis ("a detailed examination of the elements or structure of something[4]"), refers to the discovery and understanding of patterns in data, and is currently something that had by definition only happened post-call when all data are fully present. Real-time monitoring on the other hand, looks for and recognizes predefined words, phrases and sometimes context, within a handful of seconds, giving the business the opportunity to act. However, AI can be trained to understand intent and recognise patterns through immersion in vast quantities of historical data, so that when a call is taking place, it can draw upon this knowledge and provide advice or action that has proven successful previously, moving towards the actual provision of real-time analytics.

AI assists in real-time speech analytics through applying the results of machine learning that have been carried out on large quantities of previously recorded conversations, providing:

- agents with the understanding of where their conversational behaviour is falling outside of acceptable and previously successful norms (such as speaking too quickly or slowly, or in a monotonous fashion)

- an assessment of the meaning of non-verbal cues such as intonation, stress patterns, pauses, fluctuations in volume, pitch, timing and tone in order to support sentiment analysis

- understanding the actions and information that have been seen to provide successful outcomes in previous similar interactions, and relaying this to the agent within the call.

For some businesses, real-time analytics is an important and growing part of the armoury that they have to improve their efficiency and effectiveness. There is potentially a great deal of benefit to be gained from understanding automatically what is happening on the call, and in being able to act while improvements are still possible, rather than being made aware some time after the call of what has happened.

Real-time analytics can be used in many ways:

- monitoring calls for key words and phrases, which can either be acted upon within the conversation, or passed to another department (e.g. Marketing, if the customer indicates something relevant to other products or services sold by the company)

- alerting the agent or supervisor if pre-specified words or phrases occur

- quality checking the agent for speech clarity and speed and notifying them of any changes to be made

- offering guidance to the agent on the next best action for them to take, bringing in CRM data and knowledge bases to suggest answers to the question being asked, or advice on whether to change the tone or speed of the conversation

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[4] http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/analysis

- escalating calls to a supervisor as appropriate

- text analytics can also be used on inbound interactions such as emails, running an AI triage system to assess the priority and urgency of each request in order to handle these more effectively and in an appropriately timely manner

- detecting negative sentiment through instances of talk-over, high stress levels, negative language, obscenities, increased speaking volume etc., that can be escalated to a supervisor

- triggering back-office processes and opening agent desktop screens depending on call events. For example, the statement of a product name or serial number within the conversation can open an agent assistant screen that is relevant to that product

- making sure that all required words and phrases have been used, e.g. in the case of compliance or forming a phone-based contract

- suggesting cross-selling or upselling opportunities.

Many solution providers have worked hard to bring to market new or improved solutions to assist with real-time analytics, and recognition of key words, phrases, instances of talk-over, emotion and sentiment detection, pitch, tone, speed and audibility of language and many other important variables can be presented on the agent desktop within the call, triggering business-driven alerts and processes if required.

The speed of real-time analytics is crucial to its success: long delays can mean missed, inappropriate or sub-optimal sales opportunities being presented; cancellation alerts can show up too late; compliance violations over parts of the script missed-out may occur as the call has already ended. However, it is important not to get carried away with real-time analytics, as there is a danger that businesses can get too enthusiastic and set alert thresholds far too low. This can result in agents being constantly bombarded with cross-selling and upselling offers and/or warnings about customer sentiment or their own communication style, so that it becomes a distraction rather than a help.

The effectiveness of real-time analytics may be boosted by post-call analytics taking place as well. For example, by assessing the outcomes of calls where specific cross-selling and upselling approaches were identified and presented to agents in real time, analysis can show the most successful approaches including the use of specific language, customer type, the order of presented offers and many other variables (including metadata from agent desktop applications) in order to fine-tune the approach in the future. Additionally, getting calls right first-time obviously impacts positively upon first-call resolution rates, and through picking up phrases such as "speak to your supervisor", can escalate calls automatically or flag them for further QA.

Combining AI-enabled real-time and post-call analytics, along with sentiment analysis, can quickly identify large groups of dissatisfied customers that may be complaining about the same thing, providing actionable insight to the business within minutes or hours, rather than days.

Real-time analytics offers a big step up from the traditional, manual call monitoring process, and is particularly useful for compliance, debt collection, and for forming legally binding contracts on the phone, where specific terms and phrases must be used and any deviation or absence can be flagged to the agent's screen within the call. Finance, telecoms and utilities companies – and indeed, any business where telephone-based contracts are important – are particularly interested in this.

Figure 17: Usefulness of real-time analytics
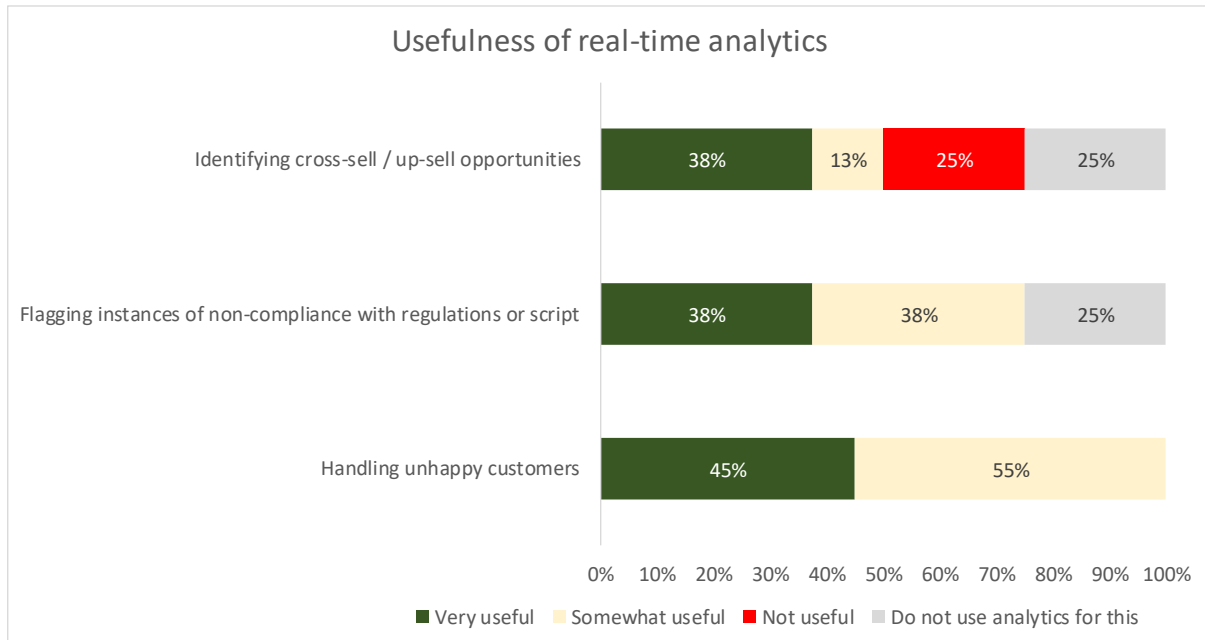
Figure 17: Usefulness of real-time analytics

As with speech analytics, text analytics can be used historically or in real time. It can be applied to interactions between customers and agents (as in the case of email, web chat or social media contact), or by looking at customer feedback, whether on the business's own website or on third-party sites. Unlike speech analytics, text analytics does not require a speech recognition engine to identify the words being used, but the general principles and opportunities are similar. Much of the data analysed by text analysis is unstructured (i.e. is not found in traditional structured databases), such as emails, web chats, message boards, RSS feeds, social media etc. The collection and processing of this data may involve evaluating the text for emotion and sentiment, and categorises the key terms, concepts and patterns. Solutions using AI-enabled natural language processing rather than keyword spotting are far more likely to 'understand' the sense of the text and to provide actionable insights.

The analysis of structured data is very useful for quantifying customer feedback, but it is in the unstructured data such as free-form text that businesses gain real insight: understanding **why** customers feel the way they do. While it is possible for a VoC department to consider unstructured textual responses manually, for a large organisation it would be extremely expensive, resource-intensive and time-consuming to do this: automated text analytics is a clearly more effective way of considering all textual customer feedback, as well as being able to consider sources outside of the company, such as social media. Additionally, using automated text analysis rather than relying upon human decisions means that there is more consistency in categorising the nature of the customer feedback. Categorisation of unstructured textual data is vital to make any insights actionable, as business managers can view the most important issues at a glance, rather than having to read through many hundreds or thousands of comments.

Historical text analysis is useful for business intelligence, whether about how the company and its products are perceived, or the effectiveness of the customer contact operation. It is important to note that many uses of historical text analysis work best when they are used shortly after the comment is made, rather than weeks or months afterward: an issue that is commented upon by many customers may need to be acted upon rapidly. For example, confusion about a marketing message, complaints about phone queues, or a case of system failure which prevents customers from buying on a website need to be identified and handled as quickly as possible. For longer-term issues, such as gathering suggestions on new functionality for a product release, such urgency is less important.

Most large companies will have formal customer satisfaction and feedback programmes, and also will monitor third-parties such as TripAdvisor or Yelp, which provide structured data in the form of scores, and efforts should be made to identify the most important data sources. Text analytics helps to dig deeper into the actual unstructured comments left by customers, which are otherwise very difficult and time-consuming to categorise and act upon, especially where there are many thousands of comments.

Industry-specific vocabularies can be used to identify and understand more of the relevant comments, and place them into the correct context. Solutions should go beyond identifying key words or phrases: the sentiment of the whole comment should be considered (for example, "loud music" in a shop may be exciting to one customer, but irritating to another). Many comments are mixed-sentiment, and may also mix a 5-star review with some more critical comments, which the analytics solution will have to take into account: the comments are where the real value is found, with both positive and negative insights available to be understood.

Perhaps the most obvious potential contact centre use of AI-enabled analytics is in handling digital enquiries, where web chats generally take far longer than phone calls (due to agent multitasking, and typing time) and some email response rates can still be measured in days. As the cost of web chat is broadly similar to other channels such as email, voice and social media, there is considerable room for increasing efficiencies and lowering costs.

Real-time text analytics can be used to assist agents when answering emails or handling web chats, or to identify customers at risk based on feedback comments they have left, initiating an action aimed at alleviating their problem immediately. Some solutions actively monitor feedback as it is being given, using logical branching based on the customer's responses in order to ask more relevant questions. For example, a customer mentioning a particular product may be asked where they first heard of it, or bought it from.

Using real-time text analytics for agents means that they can be provided with suggested responses which have been shown to provide high levels of contact resolution, or cross-selling success. It is particularly useful for less-experienced agents, and in cases where there is a rapidly developing situation which agents may not be aware of: incoming requests from customers can be analysed to identify and predict issues that other agents (or managers) can be made aware of through real-time alerts.

Just as with speech analytics, text analytics solutions aim to categorise comments and interactions to provide actionable insight about a discrete part of the business (e.g. a specific product or store; the online sales experience; the politeness or otherwise of the contact centre staff, etc.). The analytics solution should be able to identify the many different ways that people refer to the same thing in order to categorise correctly and make sure that the actual importance of the issue is represented fairly and accurately. Categories can be created automatically by the analytics application, and/or through the input of business experts, and should be revisited regularly to make sure they are still addressing the reality of the business.

CUSTOMER JOURNEY ANALYTICS

In the long-term, the use of customer contact analytics will improve the customer journey as many business process improvements will be enabled by the complete understanding of what is happening each step of the way, whether within the customer interaction cycle, or in one of the other processes occurring elsewhere within the organisation.

Businesses that understand the reasons that customers are contacting them are able to staff and train agents appropriately, provide feedback on company products and services to relevant departments, and identify suitable self-service opportunities. They are also able to understand the various levels of customer effort required at each stage within the interaction process.

While it is impossible to quantify ROI upfront, there is a strong argument that "you don't know what you don't know". An individual agent may not notice that a new trend is happening until they receive several calls about it, but even if they are proactive, they may not receive that type of call again for several hours or even days. Analytics and closed-loop feedback identifies trends across the entire operation as they happen, instead of waiting on agents to realise something out of the ordinary is happening.

However, there is no guarantee what will be found, and few businesses will initially implement analytics in the hope that optimising the customer journey and hopefully gaining insight will save costs and increase revenue. Many solution providers comment that early adopters of analytics – who often started with compliance and agent quality assurance – are now looking at how they understand sales effectiveness, marketing campaigns and process improvements. Longer term, understanding and optimising each part of the customer journey will be a key use of analytics.

Customer journey analytics aims to gather together the various data sources, channels, triggered processes and customer touchpoints involved in the customer interaction in order to optimise the overall customer journey. By fully understanding the customer experience, businesses can identify and rectify inefficiencies, helping to break down the boundaries and siloes between channels and between the front office and the back office.

Customer journey analytics goes beyond the measurement of individual interactions and touchpoints. Sophisticated analytics solutions use data inputs from multiple sources, both structured and unstructured, in association with journey maps, which are produced by employees in multiple roles within the organisation who document how various processes currently work and how they could be optimised.

This is particularly the case in larger businesses which are increasingly looking at the effectiveness of back office processes that can impact upon whether the customer has to contact the business multiple times.

Customer effort and engagement is very dependent upon the effectiveness with which channels work together, as well as the level of first-contact resolution. Proactively engaging the customer at the appropriate time within the customer journey has an opportunity to reduce the effort required for the customer to fulfil their interaction completely. As part of a wider omnichannel engagement, businesses must seek to understand how and why customers prefer to engage with them, optimising the flow of information throughout any connected processes and channels so that the organisation becomes easy to do business with.

Respondents using a customer journey project reported generally positive outcomes. 57% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the contact centre does not have the influence to change the area that is causing the problems.

Although only 22% of respondents state that they do not fully understand where in the wider business things are breaking down, 41% find that they have difficulty in following and understanding the customer journey across departments, with 33% struggling to follow it across channels.

Figure 18: Customer journey projects: an assessment

Customer journey projects: an assessment
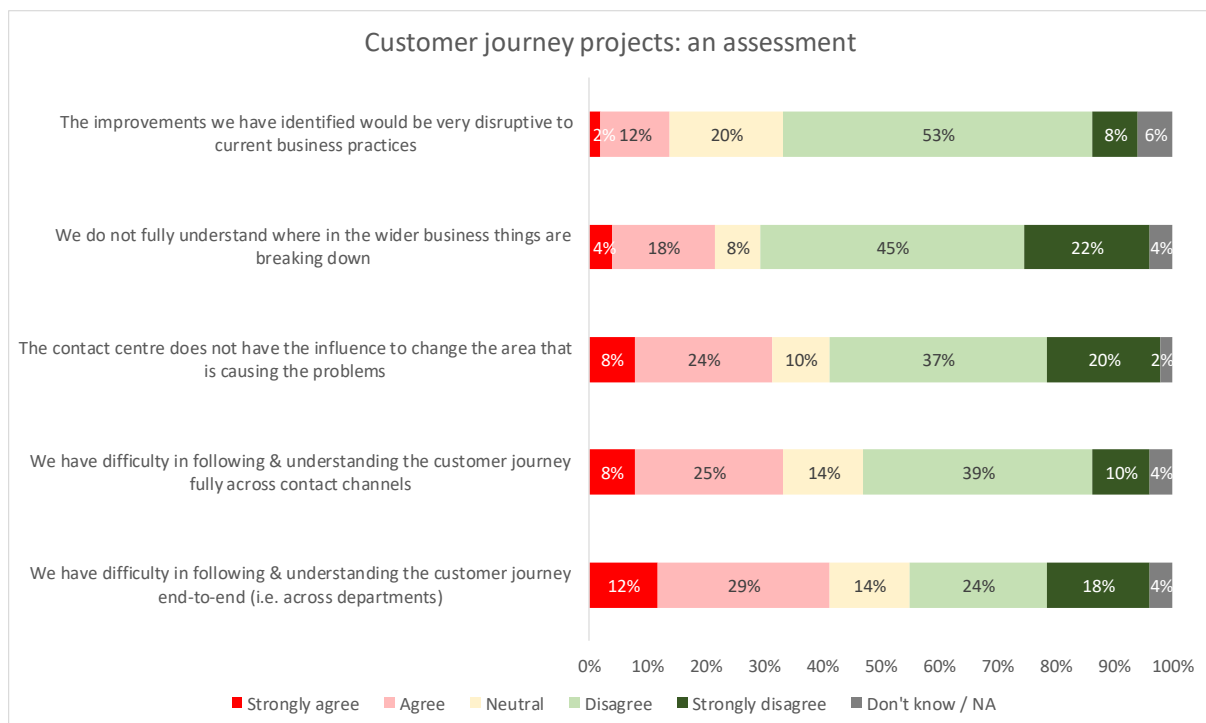
There is an increasing requirement for multichannel analytics, including email, text chat, IVR and web browsing sessions, to get the full picture of the customer's real journey in a single interaction and identify and improve any sub-optimal channels. Improving self-service optimisation is often a quick win that can provide immediate economic benefit to businesses: in the UK, a mean average of 10% of calls that go into an IVR system are 'zeroed-out' - rejected by the customer in favour of an operator - and in the US, 17% fail the self-service test.

Businesses using customer interaction analytics to review these failed self-service sessions and any customer comments made about them can categorise them into groups in order to improve the processes at a macro-level. Common findings from the analysis of these calls is that the IVR system was poorly worded, menu choices were not intuitive, or did not match current service choices. Other failures occur through mistakes in IVR routing, and there may also be problems with a lack of customer awareness that various activities can be carried out by self-service.

Integrating desktop data analytics into speech analytics allows businesses to tag valuable data automatically - such as account ID, product name and order value - from CRM, helpdesk and other servicing applications to recorded interactions. This additional desktop data can be used to enhance automated classification, which allows more targeted and efficient analysis centred on key business issues, such as customer churn, differences in call handling patterns between employees, frequency of holds/transfers associated with order cancellations and upselling and cross-selling success rates.

The use of desktop data analytics also allows the business to see what the agent is doing on the desktop (for example, are they spending too much time in particular applications, are they navigating the screens in the most efficient way, etc.), and for them to understand how much time is being spent in each section of the call.

The next step is to get rid of the silos between channels, allowing the customer to be identified at the beginning of their 'journey', and for the business to be able to analyse the efficiency and effectiveness at each stage, whether mobile app, website, self-service application or live call. The end goal is for businesses to understand where customers make their choice, where they drop out, and where the profit is within the multiple processes along the customer journey.

Many solution providers refer to 'the customer journey' as one of the major places where analytics will surely go in the longer term, once businesses have used analytics to handle shorter-term, more operational issues. Longer-term, future customer contact is likely to become along polarised lines: for everyday, mundane tasks, the customer will choose the website or mobile app for self-service, leaving the contact centre to deal with those interactions which are complex or emotive for the customer (as well as there being demographics for whom the contact centre will continue to be primary). With the website becoming the first port-of-call for many customers, the analysis and understanding of the success (or otherwise) of pre-call web activity is a valuable source of knowledge about how effective the main portal to the business is being, as well as being able to give businesses greater insight into why people are calling.

Manually analysing thousands of web sessions and linking them with specific customers and their phone calls is impossible, so there is a great potential for bulk analysis. Adding in relatively minor channels such as social media, web chat, SMS and email makes the mix more complex, and more potentially suitable for AI-driven automated analysis. It is also certainly worth mentioning that some solutions also analyse the customer's pre-call use of self-service via IVR, providing the agent with a background on the caller's recent experience and offering the chance to improve self-service process failures.

Including social media, email and text chat into the analytics equation is increasingly important, and while many vendors have multichannel/omnichannel analytics within their overall customer contact analytics solution, this functionality is not yet used to anywhere near the same extent as speech analytics. This lack of uptake in multichannel analytics may have many reasons:

- the social media channel is often the responsibility of the marketing function within a business, whereas customer contact analytics - being focused on speech at the moment - is usually under the remit of the customer contact operation, meaning that harmonious, integrated analysis across channels is that much more difficult

- for most businesses, interaction volumes for email, chat, social media and other non-voice channels are far lower than for speech, so consequently there has been less urgency in analysing these

- there may not be a single unified view of the customers' interactions across channels, as is the case in a siloed operation

- it can be more difficult to identify customer in non-voice channels such as text chat or casual web browsing, so the depth of insight available may be that much less.

Having said that, most solution providers seem quite definite that multichannel/omnichannel analytics will grow in importance. While being able to optimise customer contact within each siloed channel, or being able to monitor the quality of an email or chat agent in the same way that businesses are now using analytics to improve the performance of a phone-based agent is useful, the real key is to include all of the stages along the customer journey. For example, understanding where potential customers drop out; the overall effort that the customer has to put in; the point at which buying decisions are made; bottlenecks in processes; the suboptimal points where customers get confused and have to place a call into the business: these are the promises that customer journey analysis makes.

There will come a time when all data generated within a business will be able to be cross-correlated to provide insights not only to the customer contact department but also to parties such as marketing, operations and finance, so they have greater insight about issues such as price elasticity and revenue maximisation. The ability to prove to senior management that the actions and insight held within the contact centre has a distinct and measurable impact on the entire company – and as such is not simply a cost centre – is likely to improve its visibility and credibility which should help to create a long-term holistic view and assist further investment.

The 'tell-me-why' and discovery modes of customer contact analytics will improve over time as better accuracy and more powerful processing provides richer and more joined-up data for analysis, and the inclusion of customer feedback from non-voice channels show the full picture of customer contact and its intent. There will also be major efforts to link analytics to proving profitability, including identifying "moments of truth" (points at which buying decisions are made, and long-term loyalty can be won or lost), and being able to predict and manage customer churn.

DISCOVERY

'Discovery' is a term often used within the customer contact analytics industry, and refers to a deep, automated analysis of trends, patterns and results which are identified by the speech analytics solution rather than the knowledge or insight of the human operators. Discovery will help users to find calls that are similar to each other, perhaps through similar groupings of words or phrases, and explore these links to discover the issues driving them.

The ability to see trends - to know that the instances of the words 'website' and 'password' have increased by 2,000% this week compared to the norms of the past 6 months - quickly identify likely pain points for the customer and potential broken processes. The continual tracking and analysis of similar information or categories over time also allows a business to see whether the remedial action that they put into place has actually worked.

Many solutions offer automated discovery and this is an area that will always be improving and becoming more subtle and effective, having huge potential benefits for businesses.

Of course, any analysis where the direct beneficiary is not the contact centre must be properly aligned to the organisation's objectives and strategy, encouraging changes to be made to areas that have already been earmarked as needing improvement. Otherwise, if the focus is not aligned with strategic goals, information merely becomes 'nice to know', rather than actionable.

Customer interaction analytics has the ability to tear down the virtual wall between the contact centre and other areas of the business, meaning that the business intelligence extracted can be shared and valued by parts of the organisation that otherwise have little to do with the contact centre. With the historical and ongoing difficulty in getting the business to value the customer contact operation fully, this can only be a good thing politically.

Text analytics can be used within discovery mode to assess not only data held within the company, but also in unstructured, third-party environments, such as social media, comments on websites and public forums, in order to learn and deliver proactive service before it is even requested.

Some real-life examples of where analytics has delivered improvements include:

- an insurer improved first call resolution by over 6 percentage points by understanding and correcting how agents respond to specific types of denied claims issues

- Identifying the types of low-to-medium complexity calls that could be handled less expensively but still effectively via self-service channels. The result can be either reduced headcount or extended service hours

- improved sales conversions by 41% and collections revenue by 20% by identifying the skills that differentiated top performing agents from bottom performing agents, and then focusing training and coaching programmes on those key skills

- analysing and fixing back office processes that were generating unnecessary repeat calls and driving poor customer satisfaction

- highlighting the five key customer queries and developing FAQs for agents, which significantly reduced average handle time on these calls

- reducing call volume by 2% by identifying and fixing issues with the password reset process

- identifying opportunities in verbatim customer feedback to address specific customer segment needs, increasing sales by 30% the following year

- categorising all customer calls by reason for the call and any subtopics, measuring agent performance (handle time, customer satisfaction rating, and issue resolution) by call type. Identified the type of calls that had excessively high handle time due to sub optimal customer identity verification, and improved coaching and training decreased handle time by an average of 36 seconds, saving $5 million per year

- determining that 57% of calls could be handled through a self-service web portal, but the customers were not aware that they could do this online

- quality program was transformed by providing targeted data on the major reasons for customer dissatisfaction

- discovering that only 2% of calls taken at night were critical, reducing headcount on the night shift

- reducing QA headcount from 40 agents to fewer than 10 by implementing automated scoring on 100% of calls.

Predictive analytics is a branch of analysis that looks at the nature and characteristics of past interactions, either with a specific customer or more widely, in order to identify indicators about the nature of a current interaction so as to make recommendations in real-time about how to handle the customer.

For example, a business can retrospectively analyse interactions in order to identify where customers have defected from the company or not renewed their contract. Typical indicators may include use of the words "unhappy" or "dissatisfied"; customers may have a larger-than-usual volume of calls into the contact centre; use multiple channels in a very short space of time (if they grow impatient with one channel, customers may use another); and mention competitors' names. After analysing this, and applying it to the customer base, a "propensity to defect" score may be placed against each customer, identifying those customers most at risk. Specific routing and scripting strategies may be put in place so that when the customer next calls, the chances of a high-quality customer experience using a top agent are greater and effective retention strategies are applied.

AI can be applied across the entire customer journey, including sales, marketing and service, helping organizations understand customer behaviour, intent and anticipating their next action. For example, an AI solution may find a pattern amongst previous customers that they are likely to search for specific information at a particular point in their presales journey, and proactively provide this information (or an incentive) to the customer before they have even asked for it. AI can also help with customer onboarding through predicting which customers are likely to require specific assistance.

Machine learning will allow AI to go beyond simply what they have been programmed to do, seeking out new opportunities and delivering service beyond what has simply been asked of them. Through understanding multiple historical customer journeys, AIs will be able to predict the next most-likely action of a customer in a particular situation, and proactively engage with them so as to avoid an unnecessary inbound interaction, providing a higher level of customer experience and reducing cost to serve.

AUTOMATED VOC SCORING

In a traditional contact centre, supervisors and quality assurance staff can only listen to a small fraction of customer calls in order to check agent quality and performance. Using speech analytics means that all calls can be scored against specific criteria and desired behaviours.

In the VoC world, analytics can be used to predict metrics such as NPS for each call without having to ask the customer to take a survey. Detractors can be quickly identified and the customer rescue process put into place immediately, closing a virtual loop. The process can be refined by comparing this virtual NPS with some actual scores given by customers to make sure that there is a good level of predictive accuracy. Additionally, if an actual score is low, automated scoring can check to see whether this is as a result of agent behaviour or another cause.

Apart from being able to handle promoters and detractors appropriately, this gives a far larger pool of data from which to gain business insight, especially from those customers who will rarely complete a survey even if asked. There are also considerable savings to be made by avoiding expensive market research.

 The majority of contact centres are using call recording at all levels of agent populations. For most, this goldmine of intelligence is already paid for, yet exists as an ignored asset. Contact centres of all sizes can realize value by applying speech analytics to this existing resource by revealing actionable insight from customer and agent behaviours.

- **Data-supported coaching** – When automated scoring with speech analytics focuses on VoC, the headcount for manually auditing some small percentage of calls can be reassigned.
- **Unsolicited** – Using speech analytics, CX teams gain enormous insight with 100% coverage of feedback from every contact centre conversation.

OMNICHANNEL VOC

The UK contact centre industry has now strongly embraced the various forms of non-voice customer communication, and any VoC programme has to take these into account, as well as voice interactions.

However, these channels have emerged at different times, meaning that many businesses may have multiple customer feedback solutions focusing only on a single channel e.g. social media or email. This leads to a siloed approach to the VoC which does not provide a holistic or accurate view of the customer's experiences or opinions.

The following chart shows the current proportion of customer interactions by channel in the UK. While relatively new channels such as social media and web chat have attracted a great deal of attention, particularly the former through its possible amplification effect, it should still be clear that voice remains the main way in which customers communicate with businesses.

Figure 19: Inbound interactions by channel

Inbound interactions by channel

- Telephone (self-service) 4.9%
- Email 18.5%
- Web chat 3.6%
- SMS 0.5%
- Letter 2.1%
- Social media (customer service) 3.1%
- Fax 0.1%
- Telephone (live agent) 67.2%
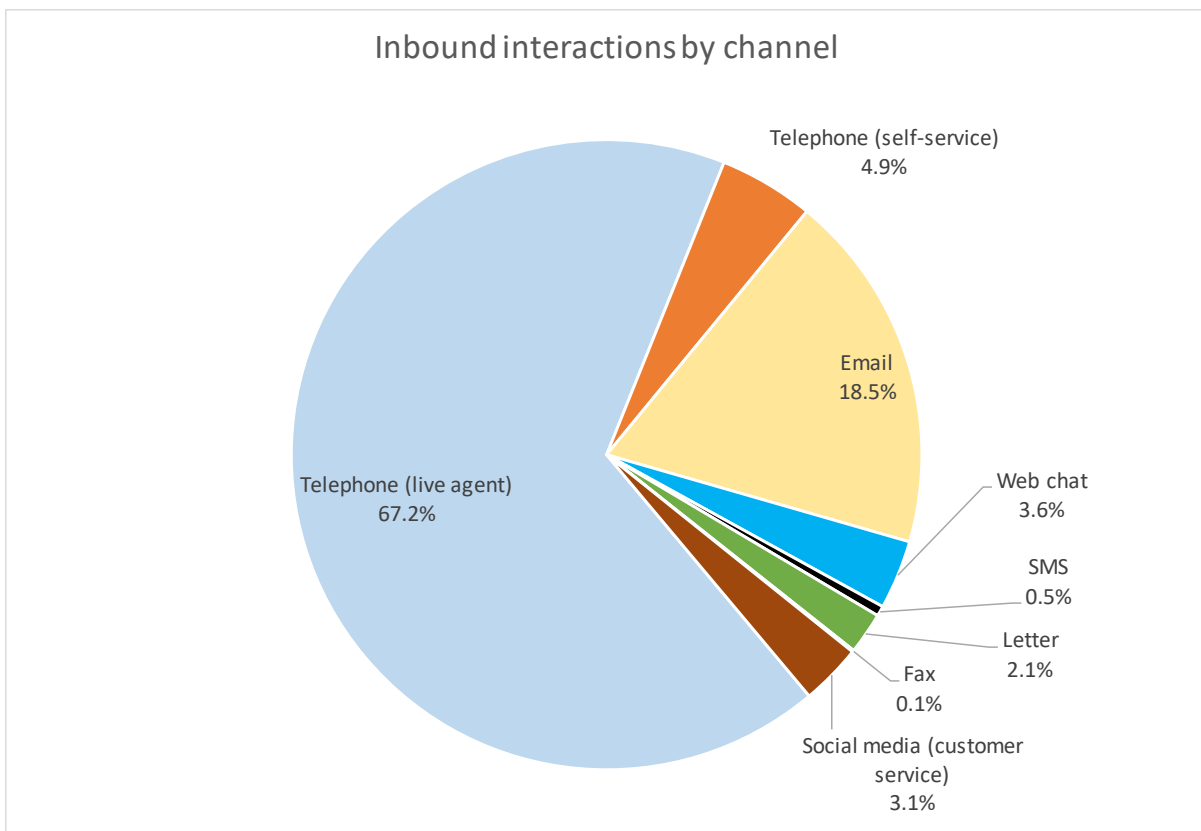
The proportion of live inbound interactions by telephone dropped to 65.3% in 2017, its lowest recorded level, in line with a long-term gentle downward trend. 2019's figure of 67.2% is very similar to 2018's figure of 67.0%.

The proportion of telephony self-service interactions remains stubbornly low, despite expectations of its future rise.

The email channel increased significantly in 2017, after being around 15% for a number of years. 2018 saw a slight falling-off (down to 19.5%) and 2019's figure of 18.5% suggested that email may have peaked.

Web chat and social media grew slightly once again, but are minor channels on a industry-wide basis.

Looking at vertical market figures, agent-handled calls are most important to respondents in the public sector, transport & travel, housing and services sectors, with manufacturing and retail respondents reporting lower levels of telephony.

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

Telephony self-service seems strongest in the utilities sector as usual, although insurance has a higher than usual finding this year.

Web chat is developing a much stronger presence in retail, so as to encourage and close online sales, but is still a way off being a major channel for any other vertical market.

The utilities sector report being ahead in terms of social media customer contact, although most vertical markets show some interest in this channel.

Figure 20: Inbound interactions by channel, by vertical market

Vertical market	FS	HS	INS	MAN	OS	PS	RD	SVCS	TMT	TT	UTILS	Mean
Telephone (live agent)	60%	76%	63%	35%	68%	82%	53%	72%	62%	82%	60%	**67.2%**
Telephone (self-service)	8%	1%	12%	0%	1%	5%	4%	0%	5%	7%	11%	**4.9%**
Email	16%	16%	14%	58%	19%	8%	31%	19%	30%	7%	11%	**18.5%**
Web chat	4%	3%	6%	1%	6%	2%	8%	6%	4%	1%	3%	**3.6%**
SMS	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	**0.5%**
Letter	7%	0%	2%	1%	2%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	7%	**2.1%**
Fax	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	**0.1%**
Social media (customer service)	4%	3%	2%	4%	4%	2%	3%	3%	0%	3%	8%	**3.1%**

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

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

Having said that voice is still key channel for customers, there is little doubt that other channels will continue to grow significantly. Although not shown in these charts, web self-service is increasingly a major way in which customers communicate with companies and form opinions about their brand. In many cases, the customer journey will begin on a website before possibly diverting into a live or automated service channel. As such, any VoC platform should be able to take insights and data from every channel and present it in a user-friendly yet comprehensive manner.

The next section looks at customer channel preferences for communicating with businesses, and this is an important area for VoC projects to consider as significant insights into the mind of the customer can easily be missed. For example, if a customer has a preference to use self-service for a particular type of interaction, yet cannot do so because the functionality is not available on the website, they may end up calling the contact centre and speaking with a live agent. At the end of the conversation, the customer may be asked whether their query had been resolved successfully and whether they were satisfied with how the agent had handled the call. The customer may then give a high satisfaction rating, which the business would be pleased to receive. However, if the question were not asked about whether the customer actually **wanted** to call the contact centre in the first place, their latent dissatisfaction would not be apparent. In such cases, the customer is not as happy as they appear, and the business is having to bear the cost of a live call when they would be financially better-off if they had offered an automated self-service solution on the website.

Some types of interaction are better suited to specific channels, and various demographics have clear thoughts about how they would prefer to communicate with the business, and this is explored in some detail in the following section.

Analytics can help organisations identify which KPIs are actually most important to their business by correlating various performance and operational benchmarks against required business outcomes, such as understanding which operational KPIs and/or agent behaviours are linked with high levels of contract renewals or NPS scores.

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

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

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

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

HIGH EMOTION INTERACTIONS

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

The most popular option was to email the organisation, with 46% of respondents choosing this method, the same as in 2019. The second most popular, at 19%, was phoning the contact centre, and web chat also made a strong appearance, with 17% respondents choosing this as their preference.

There was a strong pattern based on the age of the survey respondent and their preferred channel: the older demographics were far more likely to pick up the phone, although email was popular with all age groups. Web chat was a very popular option with the 25-44 age demographic, outperforming the telephony channel.

8% of the youngest age groups would choose social media, which is a major finding for businesses serving these customers.

Figure 21: Preferred method for contacting a company (high emotion interaction), by age range

Preferred method for contacting a company (high emotion interaction), by age range
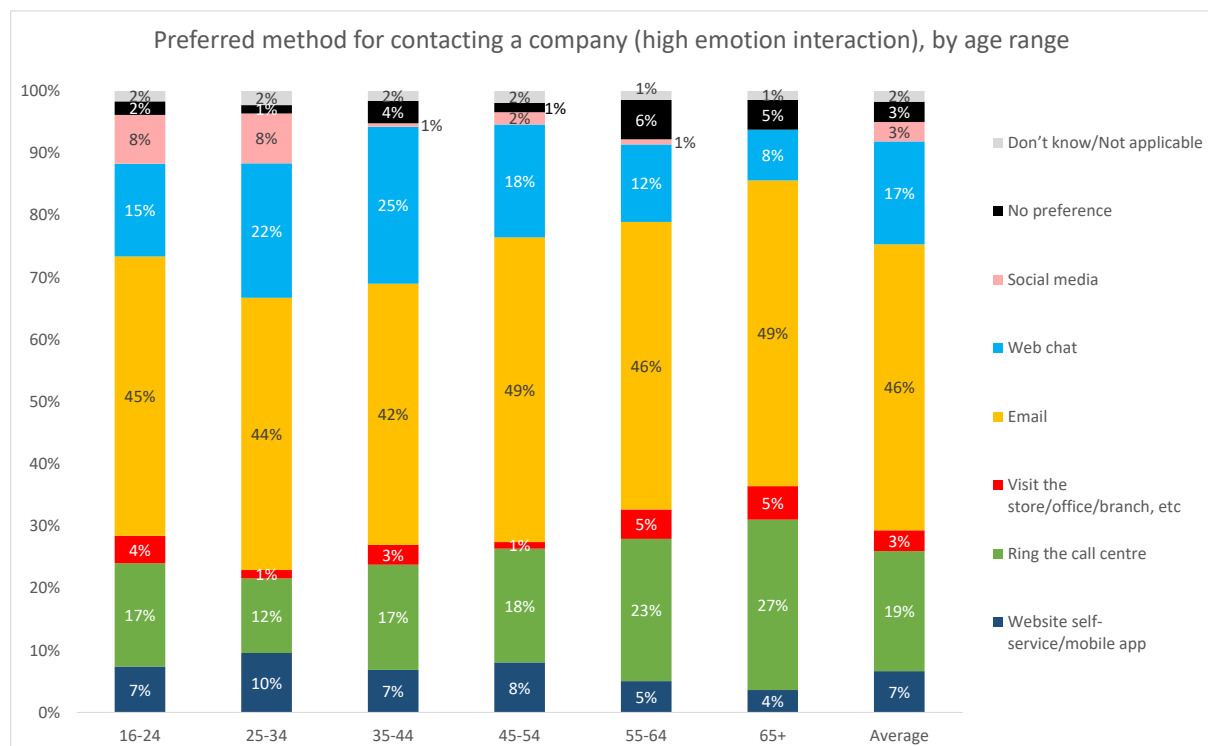
When considering the preferred method for contacting a company with a high emotion interaction, web chat was popular across all socio-economic groups, although email was by far the most popular choice for all. C2DE respondents were more likely than ABC1s to choose telephony.

There was also a slight correlation between higher socio-economic groups and the increased use of web self-service.

Figure 22: Preferred method for contacting a company (high emotion interaction), by socio-economic group
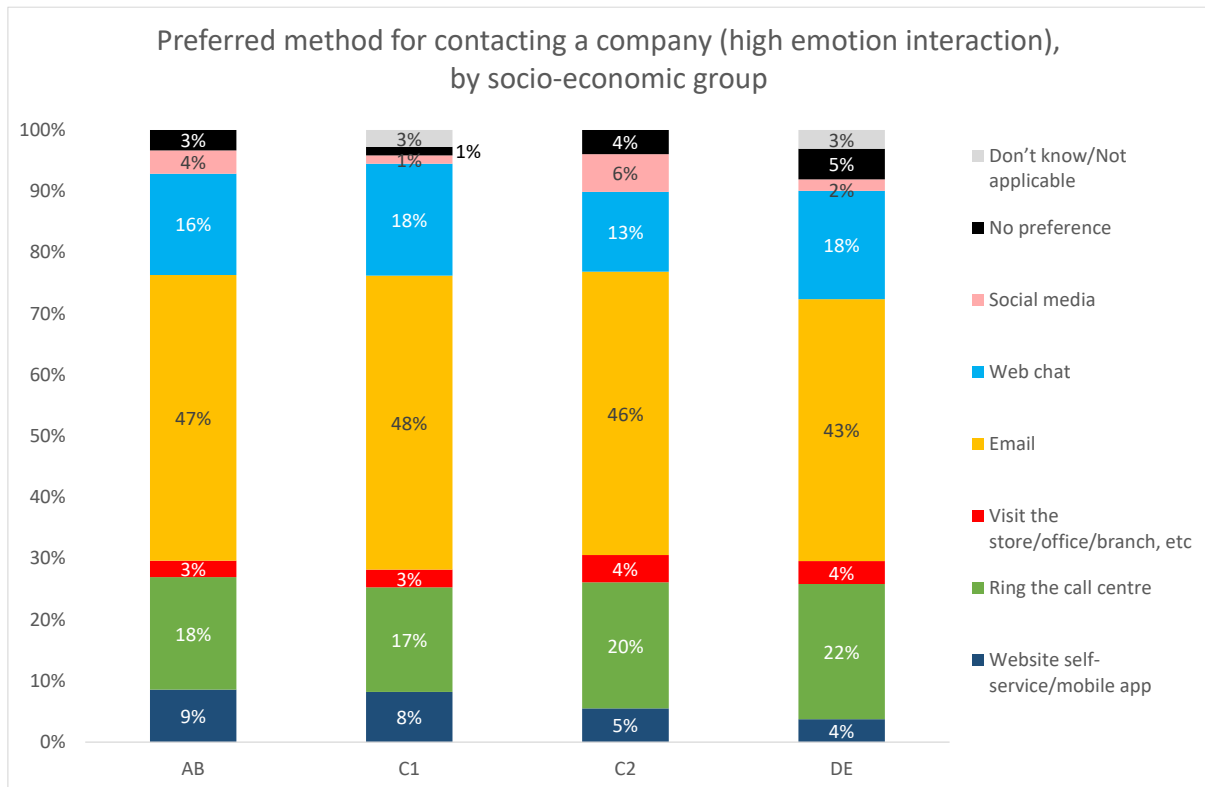
HIGH URGENCY INTERACTIONS

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

By far the most popular channel was that of web self-service/mobile app, with all age groups choosing this as their no.1 option (although the youngest group were as likely to select email as an option, which seems strange for an urgent request).

Amongst older demographics, calling the contact centre was seen as a preferred option by fewer respondents than last year: 12% of the 65+ cohort chose this as their no.1 option last year, compared to 12% this year, perhaps driven by the poor telephony service levels recently.

Email, social media and web chat were generally restricted to younger demographics, and despite the immediacy offered by these channels, few respondents stated that these would be their preferred method of interaction even in high urgency cases.

**Figure 23: Preferred method for contacting a company (high urgency interaction), by age range**

Preferred method for contacting a company (high urgency interaction), by age range
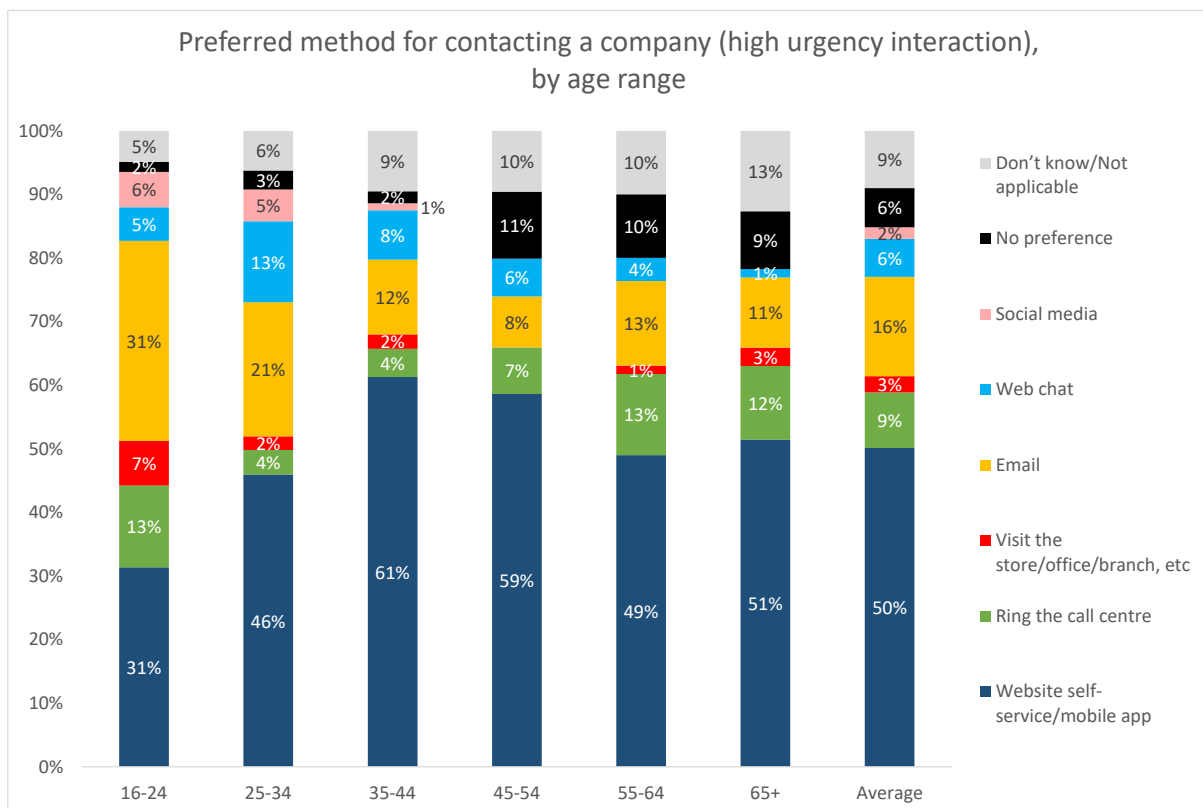
When considering socio-economic groups, web self-service was by far the most popular option for AB respondents, with the contact centre having some support with DE respondents.

Figure 24: Preferred method for contacting a company (high urgency interaction), by socio-economic group

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

Group	AB	C1	C2	DE
Don't know/Not applicable	5%	6%	8%	18%
No preference	4%	8%	5%	8%
Social media	3%		2%	2%
Web chat	6%	6%	5%	8%
Email	15%	12%	23%	14%
Visit the store/office/branch, etc	3%	2%	2%	4%
Ring the call centre	5%	8%	10%	12%
Website self-service/mobile app	60%	58%	45%	34%
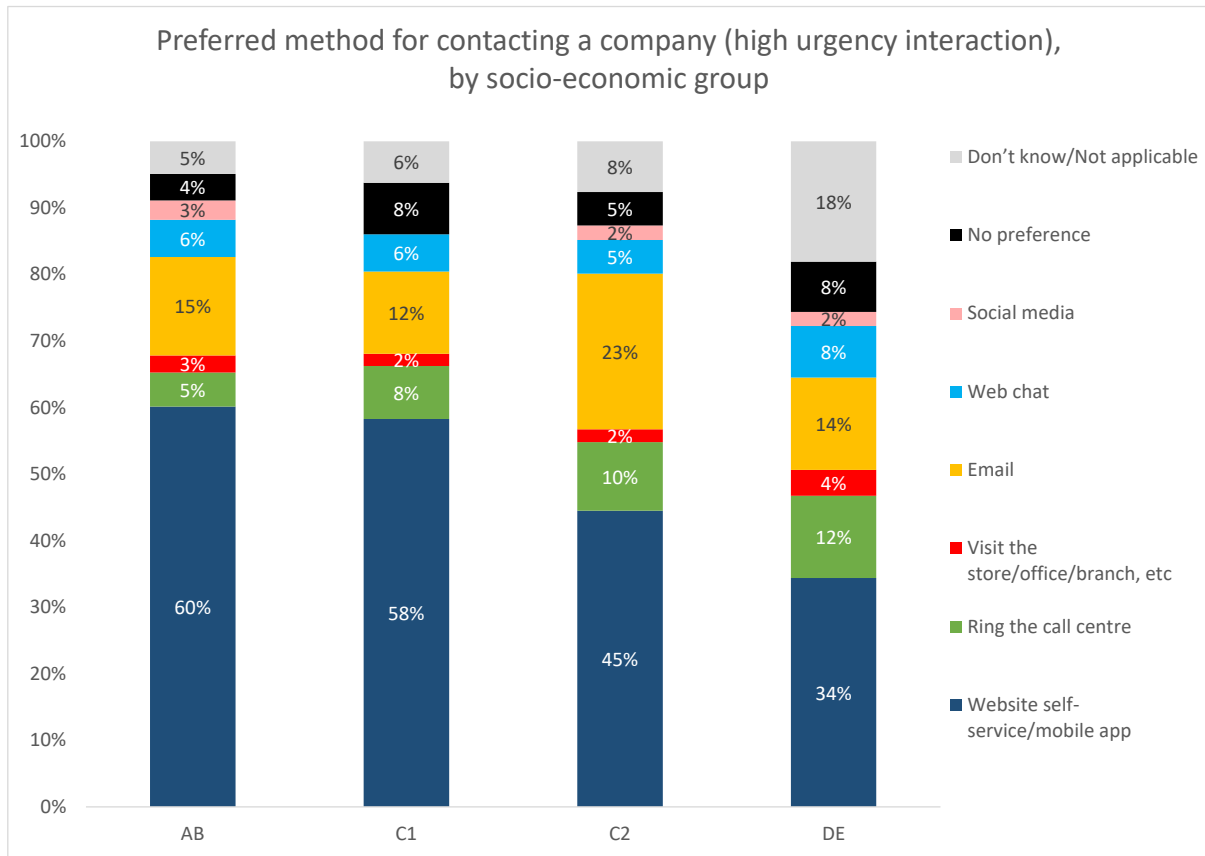
HIGH COMPLEXITY INTERACTIONS

For highly complex interactions, such as getting expert guidance with a tax form or mortgage application, the most popular contact choice was a physical visit to an office or branch, which was much more popular with the older demographic. However, this option is far less popular than last year, when 37% of the 65+ cohort chose this as their primary channel for complex requests. This is likely to be due to the reluctance of customers to make unnecessary visits in a time of pandemic, particularly as the experience would likely to be different than what they are used to.

It might have been expected that the next most-personal channel would have grown in popularity as a result, but telephony remains the same at 16%, and actually loses ground in the older demographics. This may be because customers have experienced considerably worse telephony service levels recently, and are actually looking for alternatives.

Web self-service is now a much more popular option for complex interactions than it had been last year, with the 14% of the 65+ group choosing it as the primary channel, compared to only 7% in 2019, and all age groups expressed more interest in self-service.

Web chat was also seen as an appropriate primary channel for complex interactions by a significant minority of the under-55s, whereas email is generally much less popular than it had been for high emotion interactions, possibly due to the probable requirement for back-and-forth communication, although again this was rated highly by the youngest age group, who perhaps haven't yet had to do many of this type of interaction. 8% of this group also considered social media to be their primary channel in this case.

Figure 25: Preferred method for contacting a company (high complexity interaction), by age range
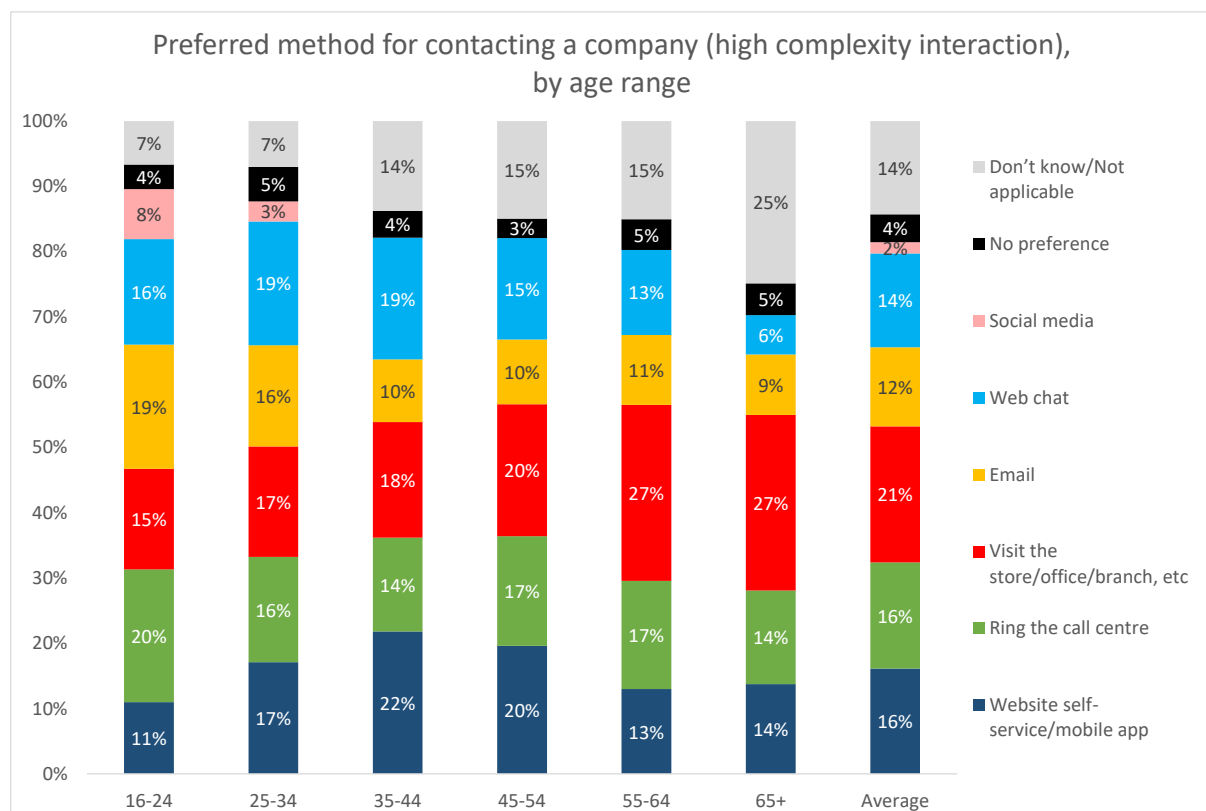
AB respondents are somewhat more likely to attempt to solve the problem through web self-service and DEs were less likely to choose web chat.

It should be noted that 26% of the DE respondents did not know how they would prefer to contact a company in this particular case, or believed that this scenario did not apply to them.

Figure 26: Preferred method for contacting a company (high complexity interaction), by socio-economic group

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

	AB	C1	C2	DE
Don't know/Not applicable	7%	12%	12%	26%
No preference	2%	4%	6%	5%
Social media	2%		2%	2%
Web chat	16%	16%	15%	10%
Email	13%	11%	13%	12%
Visit the store/office/branch, etc	21%	24%	20%	17%
Ring the call centre	17%	18%	13%	15%
Website self-service/mobile app	21%	14%	19%	11%
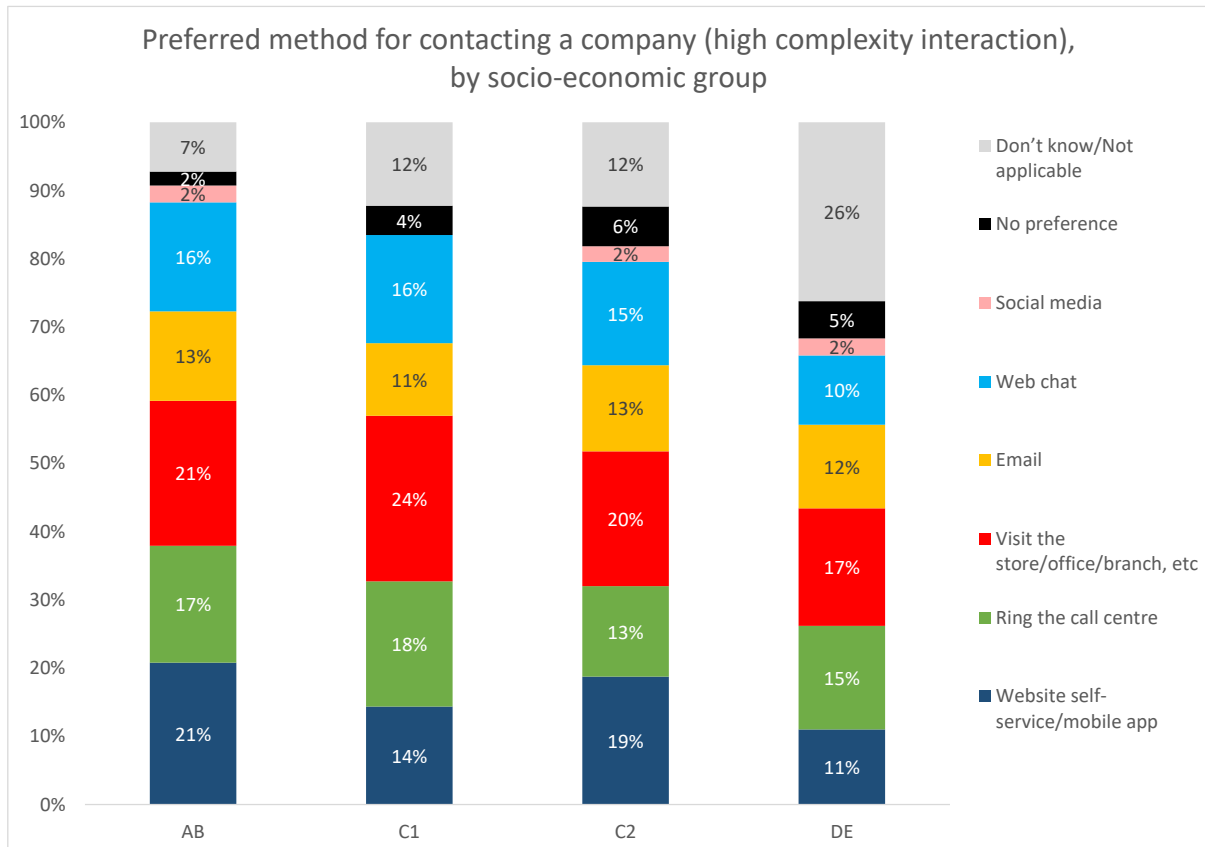
The following sections look at response / wait times for voice and the three main non-voice channels (email, web chat and social media) in order to give businesses a reasonable idea about what is normal within the industry, and what customers have come to expect. Our research has shown that excessive queue / wait times is a major aggravating factor in negative customer experience, and these data may be useful in identifying potential problems within existing operations, as well as indicating what a superior experience looks like for a customer.

CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS: EMAIL

While it is not suggested that businesses should aim to answer an email in the same amount of time that it takes to handle a phone call, all interactions should adhere to consistent business rules, and to act quickly if service levels slip. Too often, contact centres are so used to managing the telephony queue that they neglect non-voice interactions, with digital channel response times (mostly email) being sacrificed to meet telephony service levels. Although there have been steady improvements in response rates in recent years, these seem to have tailed off somewhat.

In 2015, reported email response handling times reversed the improvements of recent years, especially in the all-important 'less than 1 hour' segment. This year, the proportion of emails answered the same working day has dropped to only 54%, while those taking more than 1 day has grown again to 34% (although 12% of respondents simply do not know). Taking longer than one day to answer an email runs the risk of the customer losing patience, and going elsewhere or phoning the contact centre, placing a greater cost burden on the business than if they had just called in the first place.

Figure 27: What proportion of emails are answered successfully and completely within these timescales? (2009-19)
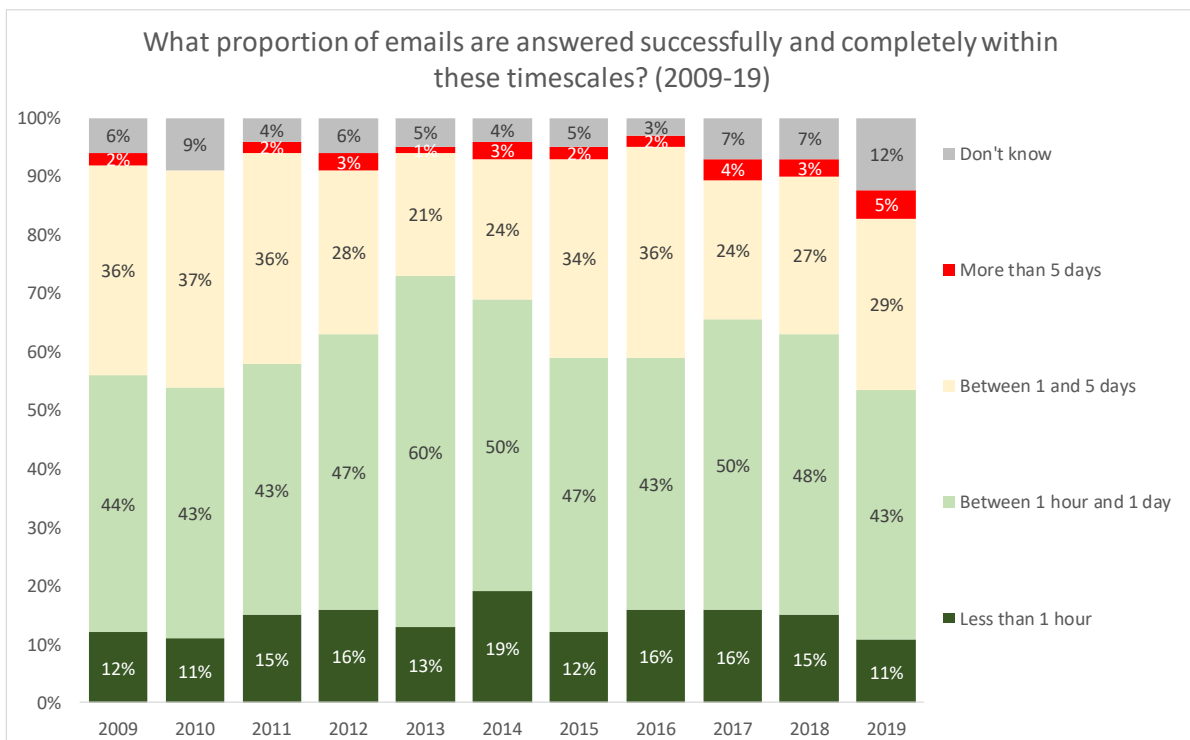
CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS: WEB CHAT

Survey respondents indicate that the typical wait for a web chat session is usually a little less than that of a phone call.

21% of respondents have an average wait time for web chat of lower than 10 seconds, with a further 31% stating that the average wait time is 10-20 seconds. Maintaining this level of accessibility for customers will reinforce their positive experiences of web chat, and will encourage customers to keep using the channel, not only when contacting a specific business, but also in general.

It is reasonable to expect that a channel being presented as an alternative to phone would have similar service level expectations and reality. If only 13% of web chats take longer than 1 minute to initiate, then we can expect customers to flock to this channel enthusiastically, as these service levels are generally superior to that of voice, although web chats will tend to take longer.

Figure 28: Average wait time to interact with web chat agent vs average speed to answer phone call

Average wait time to interact with web chat agent vs average speed to answer phone call

	Phone	Web chat
More than 60 seconds	17%	13%
31-60 seconds	20%	16%
21-30 seconds	10%	19%
10-20 seconds	25%	31%
Less than 10 seconds	28%	21%
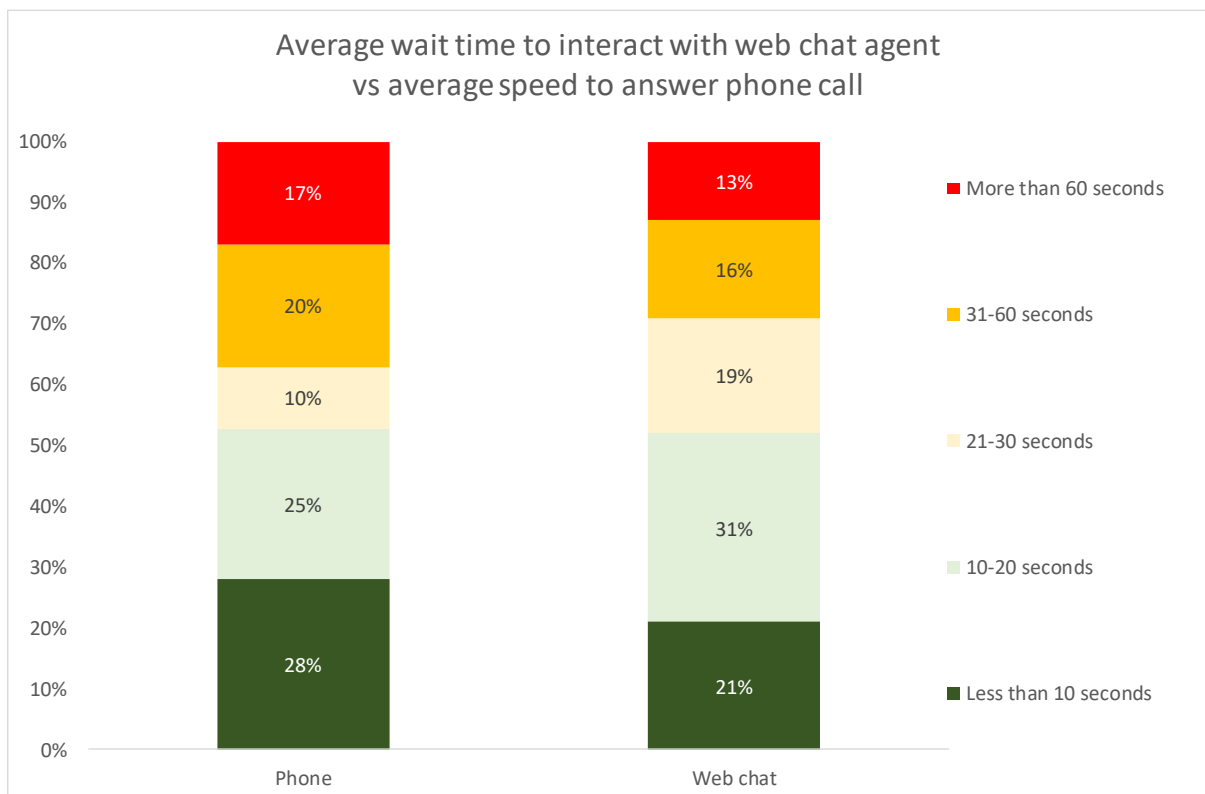
CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS: SOCIAL MEDIA

There is some debate about the best way to handle social media inquiries. While it is possible for requests via social media to be analysed (often by keyword spotting), prioritised and then routed to the agent team most capable of dealing with these specific inquiries, it is not just the same as a phone call or web chat. Some customers can expect an almost instantaneous response, with the attendant pressure that such a service level places upon the organisation, but this is generally unfeasible.

Target response times for handling a social media customer service request are somewhere between a phone call / web chat on the one hand (i.e. a maximum of a few minutes), and an email on the other (i.e. the same working day).

41% of respondents try to answer within the hour, but 35% state that they will probably take longer than an hour but less than a day. 24% of this year's respondents do not have a service level target at all.

Figure 29: Target response times for handling a customer service request via social media, 2015-19
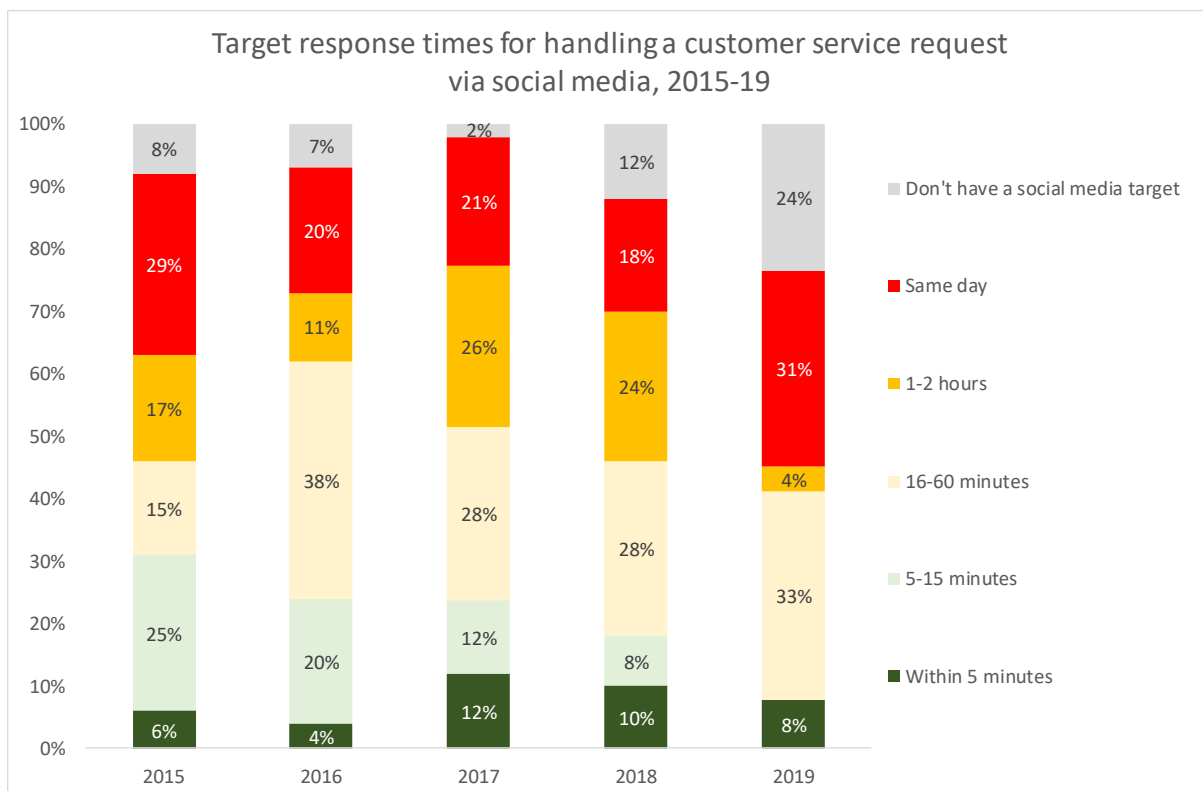
Average speed to answer (ASA) is another of those traditional statistics which has always been measured, and there is a strong case for keeping it at the forefront of how contact centres measure their success. Speed to answer plays a vital part in improving the customer experience, and also feeds into other performance measures such as call abandonment rate.

However, contact centres should also keep a close eye on "longest call waiting" statistics to get a fuller picture of the pre-call experience that customers are having. Some contact centres reduce their speed to answer figures by not counting the time taken for the caller to deal with IVR or listen to announcements before speaking with an agent: it is our opinion that the call should be measured from the moment the caller dials the last digit to the moment the agent answers the phone. Of course, not everyone sees it that way, but your customers certainly do.

As an aside, past ContactBabel research[5] has indicated that callers believe that they wait for an average of 11½ minutes to speak with an agent. As average speed to answer has actually been around 30-40 seconds for many years (it is a little higher this year), this statistic does not make sense, particularly in the light of the average time to call abandonment being well under 2 minutes (i.e. the vast majority of callers would actually have hung up long before 11½ minutes).

Our conclusion is that the "11½ minute" figure is collected from people's subjective view, rather than anyone waiting by the phone with a stopwatch. Also, people tend to remember the times they had to wait a long time, rather than the times they were answered straightaway. Regardless of the reality, speed to answer does affect customers' perceptions of the business.

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[5] Source: ContactBabel analysis of ICM Research data interviewing 1,004 UK adults on behalf of Vicorp.

The utilities sector has the highest median ASA, although a few insurance respondents report very significant wait times for customers, which drags that sector's mean average up well over the 2-minute mark.

Respondents from the TMT (technology, media & telecoms) and outsourcing sectors in particular seem to have speed to answer under control.

Figure 30: Average speed to answer, by vertical market

Average speed to answer, by vertical market

Vertical Market	Median	Mean
Average	20	50
Outsourcing	9	14
TMT	10	19
Transport & Travel	14	54
Retail & Distribution	15	18
Services	16	23
Public Sector	20	47
Insurance	28	141
Housing	34	85
Finance	37	39
Manufacturing	40	29
Utilities	100	106

Seconds
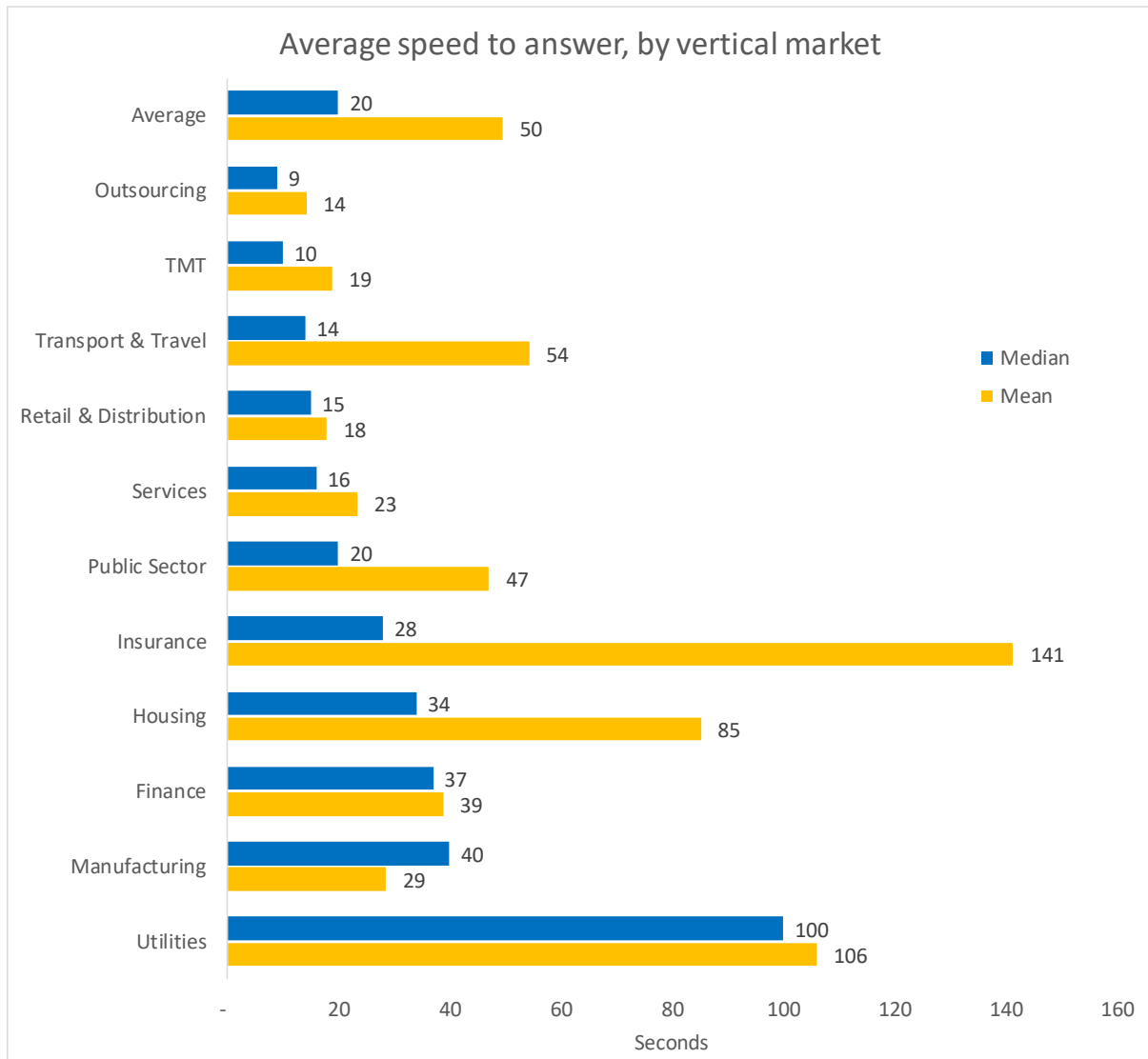
MOMENTS OF TRUTH

It is important to remember that similar types of customer interaction may require very different handling depending on circumstances. For example, a query about product delivery may be a small part of a wide-ranging research process carried out by a particularly thorough prospective customer, or may be asked by a customer who has just realized they've forgotten about an important birthday and needs immediate, accurate information.

McKinsey talks about the 'moment of truth' in customer interactions[6], often occurring when the customer has an unexpected problem or has a high emotional stake, when long-term loyalty and customer advocacy can be won or lost depending on the outcome and the way in which it is handled. Businesses and their representatives should be aware that these relatively rare occurrences offer great opportunities. Recognizing and handling these moments of truth appropriately – moments which are defined as such by the customer, not the business – will have a far greater long-term impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty than the dozens of competently-handled, forgettable interactions that may have happened previously.

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

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

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[6] http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organisation/our-insights/the-moment-of-truth-in-customer-service

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

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

END-USER QUESTION 4: HOW CAN VOC HELP US FIND WHERE THE PROBLEMS ARE WITHIN THE ORGANISATION?

Applying analytics to every voice and text-based interaction identifies challenges at scale.

- **AI Discovery** – Unsupervised machine learning within capable speech analytics auto-correlates unexpected meaning by customer and agent speakers with volume of mentions.
- **Voice of the Brand** – Contact centre agent engagement including, scoring for ownership, empathy and more with auto-scoring reveals issues with priority across the organization.
- **Customer Journey Mapping** – Speech analytics with automated multichannel touchpoint mapping pinpoints issues for customers or agents.
- **Process Gaps** – Outlier blocks of silence in conversations captured with speech analytics reveals process challenges.
- **Work from Home** – Speech analytics identifies agent challenges such as telephony issues, background distraction and technology challenges expressed within conversations.

The main purpose of VoC programmes is not simply to understand what the customer wants, but also to be able to deliver targeted improvements based on their views. Without actionable and practical insights, any VoC project will only provide information rather than knowledge.

Successful VoC projects need to move between three main phases, as shown by the example below:

1. Comment: "This product is too expensive and complicated"

2. Potential issues:

    a. Customer does not feel that they are getting good value from the product

    b. Customer does not feel confident in using the product

    c. Customer is paying for unnecessary features

3. Potential actions:

    a. Market this as a premium product, associating price with quality

    b. Provide better product education materials and make them easily available

    c. Offer differing price points depending on the level of functionality required.

In the example above, the original customer comment could actually referring to a number of underlying feelings about the product and the company. A simple customer survey would simply gather the comments and report them back to the business, which would then have to decide which of the three potential issues and actions were actually driving this customer's dissatisfaction, spending time and money on a solution which may not be addressing the customer's actual concern.

When implementing a VoC project and platform, a business should be aware that they may well have to ask follow-up questions and survey many different types of customer persona before they are able to choose an action with any level of confidence.

The most successful VoC programs expand their listening posts with insight to action proof-of-performance.

Most Successful

- **Scope & Impact –** Speech analytics on every customer interaction adds objective metrics that identify volume and intensity of an issue.
- **Trust** – Data-supported VoC insight makes speech analytics the source of customer truth.
- **ROI** – Root cause insight linked to results drives speech analytics VoC support.

Pitfalls

- **Limited Listening –** Reliance on survey response alone without contact centre conversational awareness, including emotion.
- **Lack of Corporate Visibility** – VoC behavioural insight beyond the contact centre is frequently not shared.
- **Lack of Governance** – VoC insight to action is exclusively anecdotal and/or reactive.

CLOSING THE LOOP

In the context of VoC, 'closed-loop' means that businesses are able to respond directly to customer feedback, usually of the negative type. This offers the opportunity to rescue the customer relationship, and research has shown that a huge amount of loyalty can be created from handling complaints effectively: customers realise that mistakes can be made, and resolving these by going above and beyond what most companies will do creates an extremely positive impression.

This is not to say that closed-loop feedback is simply about handling detractors: customers who provide neutral or lukewarm comments can also be contacted and hopefully turned into promoters. Some businesses even go so far as to thank customers for positive comments, strengthening their engagement with the company. A large part of closing the loop is not only to act upon customer feedback, but to be seen by the customer to be doing so: actively valuing their thoughts and opinions can only be seen as positive.

While closed-loop feedback is commonly used to address individual failures in process or interaction, businesses should also consider aggregating them in order to identify the areas which received the most complaints, enabling the business to focus upon improvements and gather more data from these points in the customer journey to make sure that any issues have been fully resolved.

Closed-loop feedback starts with automated alerts: as surveys are completed, real-time alerting capabilities will immediately identify and inform teams of customers in need, while assigning ownership for follow-up. It is vital that these alerts happen in near real-time while the customer is still engaged (albeit often negatively) with the company. Decisions need to be made on what the triggering threshold is for these automated alerts: perhaps a specific range of NPS or CSAT scores, or for those companies scanning through unstructured data, a long comment with a negative sentiment will indicate considerable frustration and disappointment with the company which should be addressed immediately. Businesses may also want to include customer-specific data such as lifetime value in order to prioritise and allocate resource effectively, and to make all of the customer information and history available to the agent.

Once the alert has been raised, it needs to be allocated to a team member or group which will reach out to the customer. A callback manager is an interactive system that enables callback teams to conduct detailed case reviews and disposition follow-up activities for eventual root-cause analysis. Many of these will allow the setting and tracking of targets such as a certain proportion of complaints being resolved within a specific time period.

Rather than just dealing with negative customer feedback on an individual basis, it should be aggregated so that patterns begin to emerge. A systematic aggregation process can identify positive and negative trends and communicate this as necessary.

Superior case management solutions provide root-cause exploration tools to enable back-end analysis of the customer's initial concern, enabling operational support teams to proactively uncover, track and mitigate systemic problems. This may be connected with a specific point in the customer journey (for example, onboarding); an issue with a particular demographic; a response to a new piece of marketing; or even be connected to a specific agent who may require further training.

Tips for closed-loop feedback:

- use the CRM system to identify and prioritise high-value customers so that they can be dealt with quickly and on a personal level

- consider prioritising customer rescue attempts based on the amount of effort and force of emotion that they have displayed: a customer writing multiple sentences containing a great deal of sentiment has put more effort into displaying their displeasure compared to someone who has scored a 6 on an NPS survey but not made any other comment

- it is also the case that unstructured written comments are far more likely than an NPS figure to indicate the customer's specific issue and any potential resolution. This is not only useful for handling this specific interaction, but will also provide valuable information allowing the business to classify complaints by particular customer journey touchpoints or business processes

- empower agents with the information and authority to handle complaints effectively, which will include giving them access to the CRM system and any customer history

- gather macro-level data on where complaints and negativity are coming from, carry out root cause analysis, and focus business improvements on these areas

- a set of best practices / templates can be created and shared with the team so as to respond to feedback at scale, and to give them greater confidence by using what has worked before

- promote continuous communication with the customer, keeping them informed about the ongoing status and letting them know if the company changes processes based upon their feedback. This can also be socialised with a wider customer base to demonstrate that the company does listen, care and act based upon their customers' opinions

- any changes to processes or user experience that comes from listening to customer feedback can be shared with customers to show that their voices valued, and to encourage them to continue to suggest ways in which the business can improve.

COMPLAINT ANALYSIS & FAILURE DEMAND

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

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

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

> "A failure to do something - turn up, call back, send something…causes the customer to make a further demand on the system. A failure to do something right - not solve a problem, send out forms that customers have difficulty with and so on - similarly create demand and creates extra work. Failure demand is under the organisation's control, and it is a major form of sub-optimisation."[7]

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

One way in which this can be achieved is to unify and automate the agent desktop, bringing in the relevant data automatically, depending on who the caller is and what they want. At the end of the call, the correct data is written back to the relevant places, and the correct processes kicked off automatically, meaning that the right departments will be provided with the right information, thus reducing the risk of failure demand, unnecessary calls and irate customers. This also takes the pressure off the agents to remember which systems to update and how to navigate through them within the call (which causes long delays, negatively impacting customer satisfaction), or in the wrap-up, which risks agent forgetting to do things, and also decreases agent availability, increasing the queue length, and decreasing customer satisfaction.

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

In cases where multiple processes have to happen in order for the customer's requirement to be met, automated outbound messaging to the customer, whether by email, SMS or IVR is likely to reduce the number of follow-up contacts that the customer feels that they have to make.

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

On average, 7.9% of survey respondents' calls were complaints, and of those calls, 82% were not about the contact centre itself (or its staff), but rather 'failure demand', caused by a breakdown of process elsewhere in the organisation.

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

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

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

A clearer upward trend can be seen when looking at the proportion of calls that are complaints in general, from less than 4% in 2010 to around 8-9% more recently. There may be multiple reasons for this: businesses may be failing the customers more often; customers may have become more demanding; or customers may have moved away from the traditional form of complaint – the letter – and prefer to use the phone to complain instead.

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

Figure 31: Proportion of calls received that are complaints / target of complaints (mean average), 2010-20

Proportion of calls received that are complaints / target of complaints (mean average), 2010-20

	% of calls that are complaints	% of complaints about the contact centre
2010	3.9%	13%
2011	4.0%	10%
2012	5.1%	23%
2013	6.3%	20%
2014	7.5%	21%
2015	7.4%	20%
2016	9.5%	16%
2017	9.2%	15%
2018	8.9%	15%
2019	8.7%	14%
2020	7.9%	18%
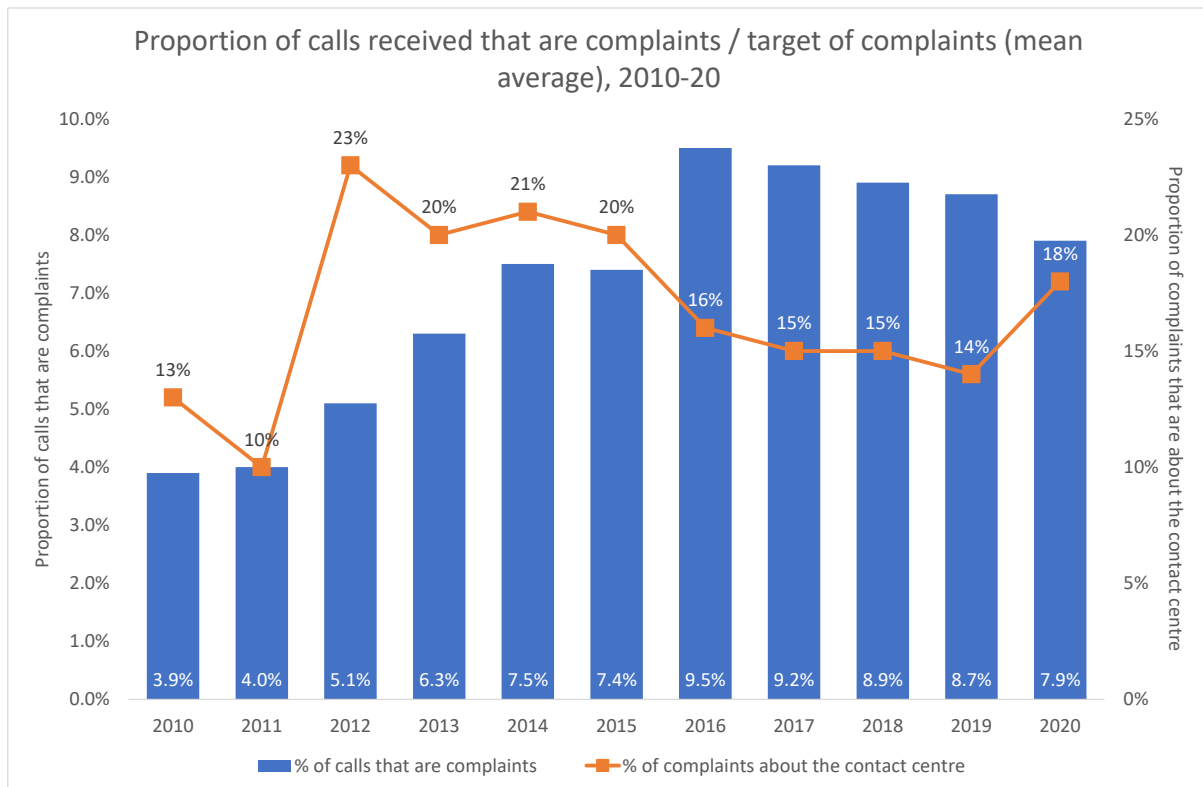
Combining the two sets of data on the previous chart – the proportion of calls that are complaints, and the proportion of complaints that are about the contact centre (rather than the wider business) – gives the following chart: the proportion of calls that are complaints about the contact centre. This is a figure that contact centre decision-makers should be interested in, as these complaints not only cost money to handle, but are in large part avoidable in the first place.

Since 2012, the figure of contact centre complaints is relatively steady at around 1.5% of inbound calls. This may not seem particularly high, but with 7.0bn inbound calls per year and typical cost per call of £4.53, handling the 1.4% of calls that are complaints about the failings of the contact centre costs the industry almost £450m per year.

Figure 32: Proportion of calls that are complaints about the contact centre, 2010-20

Proportion of calls that are complaints about the contact centre, 2010-20
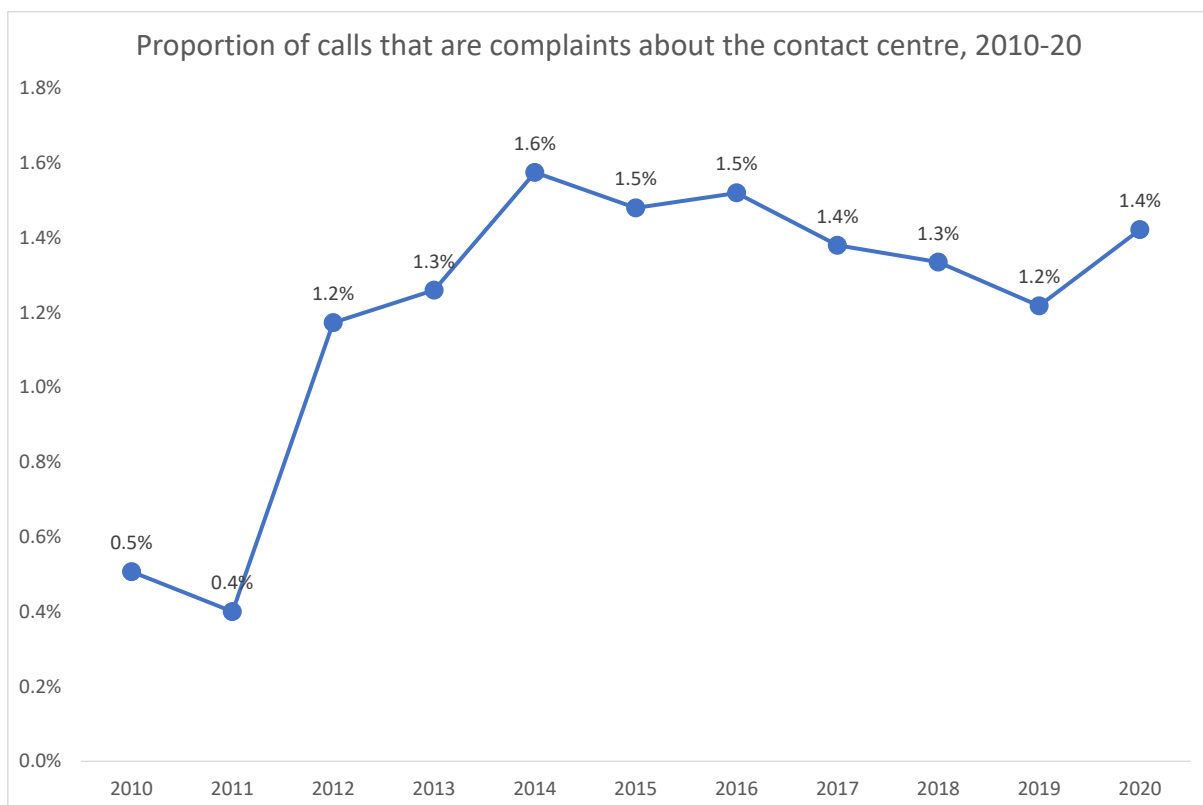
The following chart shows how survey respondents handle customers that are identified as being dissatisfied.

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

Figure 33: How is a dissatisfied customer contacted? (by B2B / B2C)

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

	B2B	B2C
Make an outbound call	79%	70%
Flag them as dissatisfied on the CRM system	46%	19%
Send letter / email	33%	44%
Send SMS / message	8%	15%
Do nothing	8%	19%
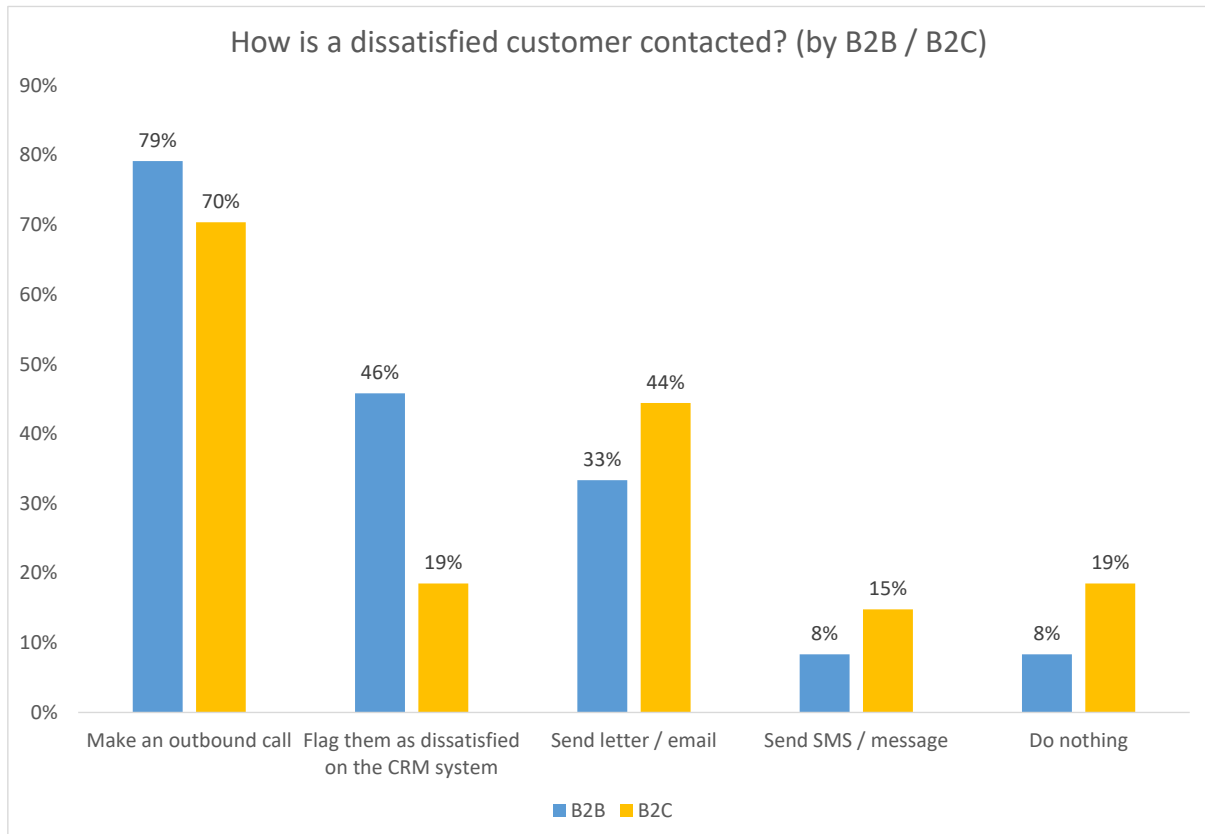
SHARING VOC INSIGHTS

A key element to a successful VoC project is the ability to share data and insights with relevant parties in a timely fashion.

Most VoC platforms provide a mixture of decision-making dashboards, regular email reports and automated alerts which can be customised depending upon the target audience. Role-based reporting allows the definition of the type and frequency of report delivery based on responsibility, title, geography and more.

The platform may provide real-time insight through text analytics, zeroing in on key issues from multichannel survey feedback. Example call recordings may also be provided, drilling down and providing detail on IVR & live call recordings for additional insight.

A good VoC dashboard should include specific key features:

- for executives, 'at a glance' top-line performance in a broad context, with indications and colour codes on whether metrics are improving or deteriorating. Adding operational and financial data alongside VoC metrics will help maintain their attention and show the link between the VoC project and business outcomes which is vital to retain their long-term support

- the ability to drill down through the data to understand these top-line figures more fully

- role-based access and customised dashboards, displaying only data relevant to the job role or the goals of the department, so as to save unnecessary time trying to find appropriate information

- regular reporting by email or SMS, including triggering alerts in real-time if major changes are seen

- an opportunity to view verbatim comments based on a specific area: for example, the marketing department may wish to track customer feedback after a campaign has gone out in order to improve future messaging. In such cases, the automatic categorisation of comments by the VoC platform will be very useful in saving time and focusing on the right areas.

The role of VoC in providing a base of facts to direct the coaching and training team should not be overlooked:

- 'In-The-Moment' coaching tools: as surveys are completed, real-time alerting capabilities will identify when a frontline employee is in need of immediate coaching intervention

- Performance ranker: the performance ranker helps managers develop weekly and monthly coaching plans by outlining strengths and weaknesses for each employee, while identifying opportunities for peer-based knowledge sharing

- Behaviour playbooks: playbooks with scorecards help managers coach to specific behaviours by outlining how to best demonstrate each behaviour, showcasing best-practice examples and suggesting sample role-plays.

Businesses should also consider showing top-line indicators such as NPS and CSAT to contact centre agents, and they consider adding verbatim comments and customer stories to encourage and guide positive behaviour and empower agents. Providing financial or other awards based upon the sorts of metric should also be considered, although it is very important that this does not encourage behaviour that is aimed only at improving metrics, such as begging customers for high ratings.
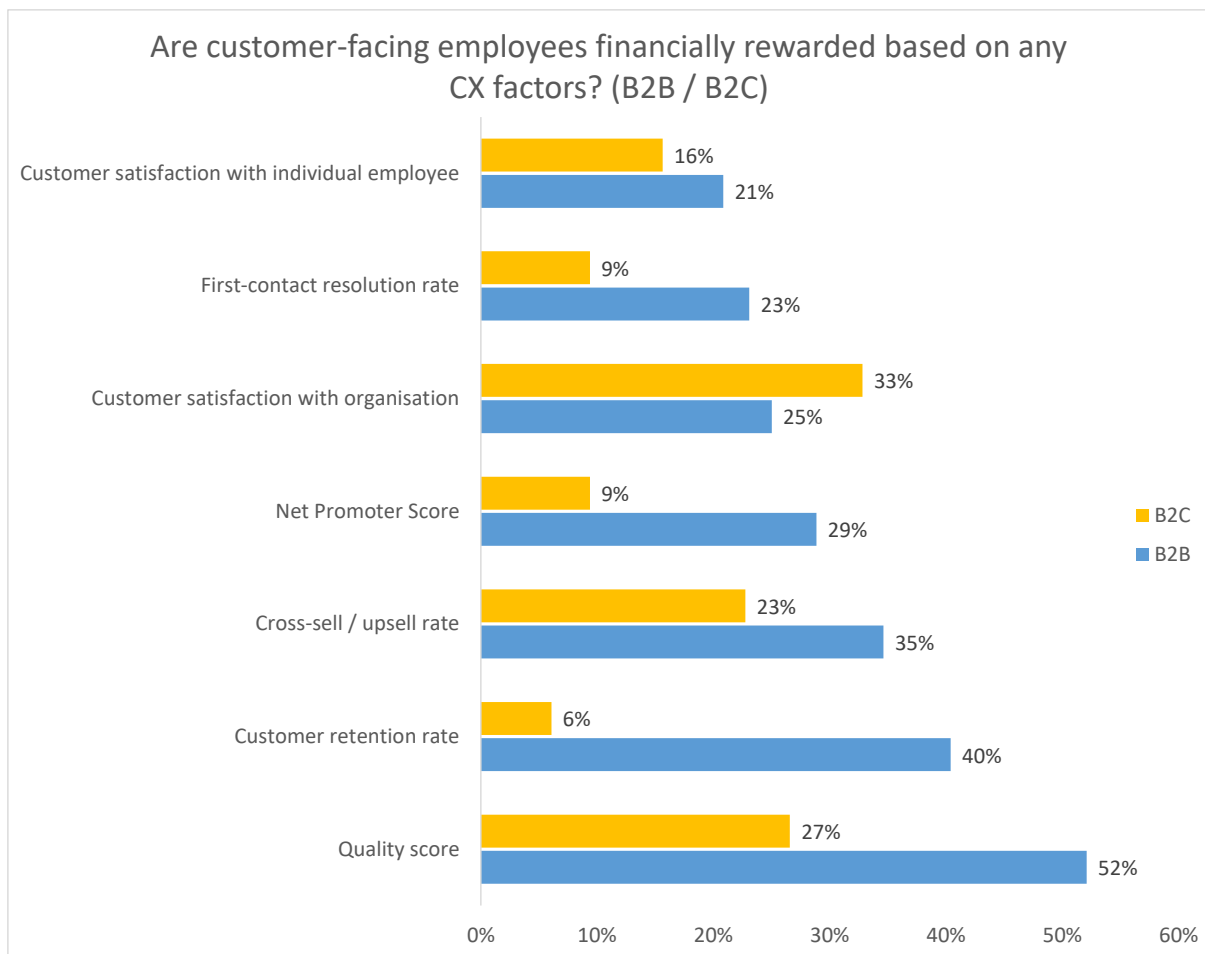
Survey respondents were asked if their customer-facing employees were financially rewarded based on any customer experience factors.

B2B respondents report a greater use of staff reward based on all of the key CX metrics presented in the survey except general CSAT, with quality score and customer retention rates again being the most rewarded.

B2C organisations may use general customer satisfaction as a basis for reward, although this is done in only 33% of cases.

It is disappointing and surprising to see the lack of importance placed by the B2C sector upon rewarding high first-contact resolution rates or customer retention rates, despite their overwhelming importance to the overall customer experience programme.

Figure 34: Are customer-facing employees financially rewarded based on any CX factors? (B2B / B2C)

Are customer-facing employees financially rewarded based on any CX factors? (B2B / B2C)

Factor	B2C	B2B
Customer satisfaction with individual employee	16%	21%
First-contact resolution rate	9%	23%
Customer satisfaction with organisation	33%	25%
Net Promoter Score	9%	29%
Cross-sell / upsell rate	23%	35%
Customer retention rate	6%	40%
Quality score	27%	52%

With so many touchpoints along many customer journeys, it can be difficult to know where to focus on gathering structured customer feedback, as asking customers' opinion at every single stage of the journey can appear obtrusive and needy, apart from seriously risking survey fatigue. Structured customer feedback in itself can only provide the "what", rather than the "why". Adding the analysis of unstructured customer feedback can look more closely at the reasons behind any negative ratings, but gathering, categorising and analysing this information is extremely difficult without a solution specifically designed for this purpose, which obviously comes at a cost and needs to be managed by dedicated employees.

Many companies now use a very significant number of channels to offer service and communication with their customers. They may well be a patchwork of customer feedback solutions that look only at a single channel e.g. social media, and these need to be integrated to provide a holistic view of the customer's voice. It is also the case that many VoC projects are data-heavy and insight-light: if executive teams are overwhelmed with statistics rather than actionable solutions based upon proven hypotheses, they are likely to lose enthusiasm and support for the project will drop away.

In a cross-departmental project such as VoC, it can be very difficult to maintain the same levels of enthusiasm, support and knowledge in all of the stakeholders. This is particularly the case as VoC should be seen as an ongoing process, rather than a one-off project with a single result. Over time, the initial focus of the project may be lost as stakeholders compete to have their issues answered, and it requires a senior project champion who is fully on board with a strategic necessity of VoC to be able to keep the project pointed at the areas that can give the greatest positive business outcome.

There is also the very real problem of survey fatigue. This is particularly the case in a cross-departmental project where stakeholders are interested in different things, and could squabble amongst themselves about what should be measured next, potentially leading to an excessive amount of surveys being offered to customers which will have a severely negative effect on response rates.

One of the major inhibitors to VoC success is an overreliance upon metrics. While many senior executives are very interested in NPS in particular, there is a real danger that the weekly or monthly report showing how such metrics have changed becomes merely something to glance at rather than using the insights gathered in order to change processes and approaches strategically.

Significant inhibitors to a successful VoC initiative

- Lack of integration across customer feedback solutions, with different databases and historical tools being used rather than a single VoC platform

- Difficulty in getting departments to cooperate with each other

- Wording of survey questions and their ratings may be different across departments

- Lack of support from executive sponsors

- Difficulty in proving return on investment

- Customer feedback does not drive quantifiable change to customer experience or business outcomes

- Excessive focus upon data gathering and collation rather than gaining business insight

- Under-resourcing and lack of budget and skills / capabilities within the VoC team

- Lack of focus / excessive expectations about what the VoC project is trying to achieve and the possible timescales

- Difficulty in getting enough survey results

- Inability to collate unstructured feedback into a form that is usable

- Executive reluctance to act upon VoC insights.

The inhibitors to using analytics for the VoC project can also be considerable. As not all customer interaction analytics projects are the same – using different types of technology to address specific business issues – it is not the case that there are one or two easily identified inhibitors to implementation. However, most come into one or more of the categories: cost; complexity; business value; and change management.

Cost

There is a widespread belief that customer interaction analytics is an expensive option and there is little consistent message from the vendor community as to what ongoing costs might be expected. Some aim for customers to become self-sufficient as soon as possible; others offer ongoing support and upgrades as part of a monthly subscription fee; some state that some projects may be extremely complex, and will require a considerable amount of expertise - whether in-house or through a cloud-based approach - in order to maximise return on investment. Quite simply, there is no 'typical price' for customer interaction analytics: it depends on what you want to do with it.

As such, solution providers offer various options of pilots and proofs of concept based around delivering tightly defined results in a specific area, at a fixed cost, as well as various real-life ROI calculators. Most note that proving cost savings through QA/QM improvement is easier than through business intelligence, although the improvements in profitability for the latter are potentially much higher.

Complexity

A major inhibitor to analytics uptake is a belief within the company that their environment is not yet ready for analytics, in that they may still not have a reliable recording environment or an optimized QM or QA process. Some potential customers want to improve their recording environment, including having stereo recording and full metadata, and if the telephony system is at end-of-life, this can also delay a decision. As analytics is usually not a simple plug-and-play application, there can be frustration with understanding where to start. With other, potentially more urgent projects taking up IT resource, it is easy to let initial enthusiasm and vision drift to one side.

Solution providers are becoming better at hiding the complexity of analytics, improving the presentation layer (using 'wizards' or simple text entry options to write queries, for example), without losing the power and functionality, and this democratisation of customer contact analytics is likely to encourage greater uptake and usage. In recent years, the graphical user interfaces of analytical tools have improved hugely, encouraging non-technical staff and management to understand and share insights. In an omnichannel environment, businesses gain most understanding not only from the insights which each channel can provide, but also what the overall picture looks like, thus understanding the customer journey. In a multivendor environment, it can take longer to get all of the pieces fitted together, which can be a problem for smaller and under-resourced technology departments.

Concerns over business value

Some businesses consider that their existing call recording and manual quality monitoring processes are sufficient, and fail to understand the potential business value of customer contact analytics. In such cases, it is possible to demonstrate how automating existing processes can improve quality and performance, while reducing the time and cost necessary to carry out QA/QM processes, and in fact this is one of the major initial purposes that analytics solutions are used for.

However, for an organisation to make an investment in customer contact analytics where the end goal is improving business processes and finding out what is sub-optimal in the customer journey, proving business value to everyone's satisfaction can be extremely difficult: trying to quantify the unknown is by its very nature impossible, and requires something of a leap of faith.

Change management and business culture

Solution providers and successful users of analytics solutions point out over and over again that analytics is not a self-contained solution: it identifies the areas in which businesses can improve their agent's capabilities, their business processes, their customer's experience and their contact centre performance.

Customer interaction analytics is a change enabler. Whether a business has the will or capability to act upon the insight that analytics can give them is not a matter for software companies, but something for the business to address itself. This is particularly the case with wider business insights, which are likely to cross over several departments and 'fiefdoms', and for large organisations where inertia and resistance to cultural change can be enormously important. Analytics can open a can of worms, and businesses need to consider whether they actually have the will to act upon what is discovered. Perhaps the greatest challenge for organisations is to be able to manage the change that analytics can demand: does it have the right people and attitude; is it willing to act; is there a person with the responsibility and enthusiasm to do what needs to be done, regardless of where it takes them?

The choice of whether to implement customer interaction analytics should not be left to the IT department, or even the business users, except perhaps in clearly defined cases of QA automation or compliance monitoring. Solution providers are beginning to offer executive-level consulting programmes that help companies to structure their processes and strategies to take advantage of the findings of analytics, and before any implementation takes place, businesses should try to anticipate possible insights and outcomes in order to prepare for change.

VoC is an ongoing, iterative process – capture, understand, act and then capture again – but it is also evolutionary: not all VoC programmes have the same level of maturity or effectiveness.

Immature VoC projects focus excessively on gathering data, choosing metrics and deciding where to place their surveys within the customer journey. Those with somewhat more sophistication look more at the analytics of the data, closing the loop and understanding insights about effective and broken processes within the business, although there may be limited cross-department and cross-channel integration.

Mature VoC projects become to look more holistic, with strong executive sponsorship, continuous improvement, integrated channel feedback, employee engagement and the specific reporting of actionable insights to relevant departments. Leading companies can point to ways in which this customer insight feeds into all activities within their business, from tactical and operational process changes right through to product development and strategic direction.

In future, reporting tools will have to continue to improve both in terms of speed and agility but also user-friendliness as more departments and product owners within a business will want to understand what customers are thinking and saying in order to improve. There will also be a greater emphasis placed on insights and suggested actions being pushed out proactively to relevant business owners, rather than waiting for them to access a weekly report, for example.

This growth in cross-departmental functionality will be matched by a continued increase in the number and complexity of data sources: unstructured and unsolicited feedback continues to mushroom and these verbatim and honest comments will become an even more important part of gaining actionable insights. Text analysis/mining, using natural language recognition, will become available for all sizes of business.
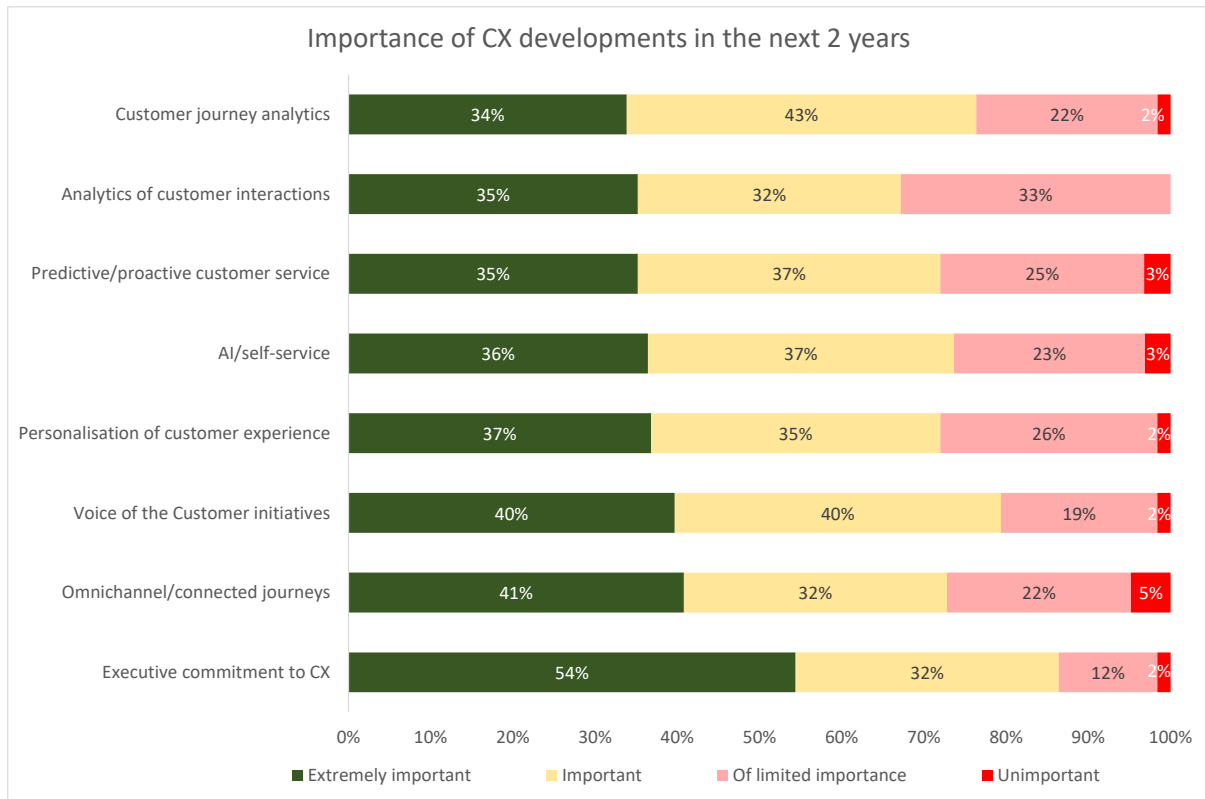
As front-line, customer-facing employees undoubtedly have a great deal of knowledge and insight about the customers to whom they talk all day long, we can expect more sophisticated techniques and solutions be developed for understanding the Voice of the Employee.

Structured and formal feedback in the guise of customer surveys will remain popular, although analysts and businesses expect this to decline in importance somewhat. In a world where more and more businesses are looking to hear the customer's voice more clearly, survey fatigue is a very real inhibitor to gaining the requisite feedback. There will be an increase in personalisation based on the customer's history: for example, rather than receiving a standard transactional survey asking if they were satisfied with the last interaction, the survey may look at what the customer was actually trying to achieve, and ask a series of focused and relevant questions around that particular activity.

If survey response rates continue to decline, the use of automated scoring for customer interactions will become vital for gaining insight into top-level performance metrics such as NPS, and we can expect to see solution providers improving the accuracy and sophistication of these tools.

Looking at the wider CX environment, of which VoC is a part, survey respondents were asked their opinion on how important various customer experience developments would be to their organisation in the next two years.

Figure 35: Importance of CX developments in the next 2 years

Importance of CX developments in the next 2 years

Development	Extremely important	Important	Of limited importance	Unimportant
Customer journey analytics	34%	43%	22%	2%
Analytics of customer interactions	35%	32%	33%	
Predictive/proactive customer service	35%	37%	25%	3%
AI/self-service	36%	37%	23%	3%
Personalisation of customer experience	37%	35%	26%	2%
Voice of the Customer initiatives	40%	40%	19%	2%
Omnichannel/connected journeys	41%	32%	22%	5%
Executive commitment to CX	54%	32%	12%	2%

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

Digital and mobile usage is encouraging customers to self-serve within their channel of choice. The challenge for now, and in the future, is what happens when self-serve fails. VoC programs must consider this outside-in customer impact to identify and improve CX with this context in mind.

- **Employee Experience –** Customers are "coming in hot" unable to self-serve. Agents need to be more emotionally aware of their customers, as well as solve more complex problems.
- **The Unexpected** – AI-fuelled speech analytics will reveal unanticipated meaning from customer and agent conversations for unique VoC insight.
- **Emotion** – Speech analytics makes emotion a benchmarkable metric for optimizing customer service and CX with VoC intelligence.

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