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FORRESTER OPPORTUNITY SNAPSHOT: A CUSTOM STUDY COMMISSIONED BY CALLMINER | MARCH 2021

Welcome To The Era Of The Proactive And Empathetic Contact Center

The pandemic significantly increased consumer use of online commerce and digital channels and forced brands to rethink the core labor models that had powered their contact centers for decades. Forrester predicts that digital channel usage will only continue to climb.¹ As customers self-serve simple requests, phone has become the new empathy channel — leaving customer service representatives (CSRs) to deal with more complex and emotionally charged customers than ever before.

CallMiner commissioned Forrester Consulting to explore how the adoption of self-service channels, along with pandemic disruptions, altered contact center strategy in the long term. We found that firms are investing more heavily in improving the CSR experience, including adopting AI and automation technologies to empower CSRs to be the “empathy agents” that customers require.

Key Findings



Contact center leaders prioritize enhancing the human experience — that is, improving CSR experience to improve customer experience (CX).



CSRs must become “empathy agents” as voice becomes the empathy channel of choice for customers.



Supporting CSRs to provide the intended experience requires positioning the right advanced technology in the right place in the customer journey.

Brands Adopt Advanced Technologies As CSR Experience Improvement Takes The Spotlight

The pandemic caused a massive upheaval in daily operations, requiring contact centers to accelerate their digitization, automation, and artificial intelligence (AI) strategies. It also elevated the importance of customer service to nurture customers, retain, and increase their loyalty and grow revenue.² As such, in addition to accelerating their digital transformation efforts (57%), 65% of decision-makers have increased their focus on improving the CSR experience.

“Which of the following contributed most to the changes you experienced at your organization in 2020?”

(Showing top ranked)

● Rank 1 ● Rank 2 ● Rank 3



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“How have the changes you’ve experienced in 2020 impacted your organization’s long-term contact center management approach?” (Select all that apply)



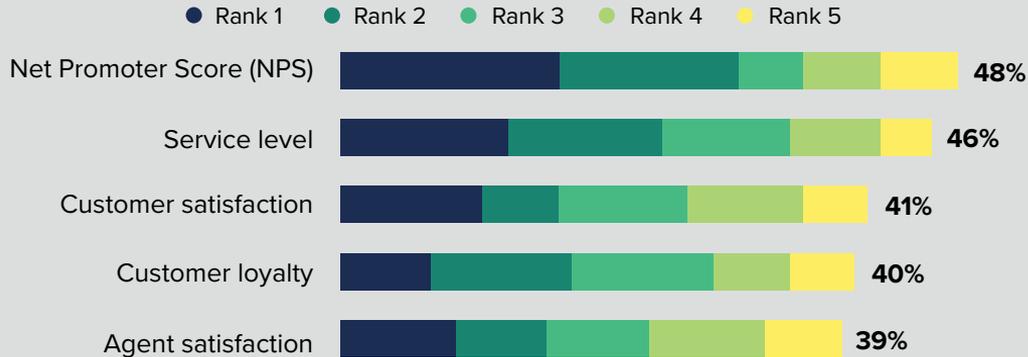
Base: 310 NA and EMEA decision-makers responsible for contact center technology purchase decisions at their organizations

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of CallMiner, February 2021

CX Is The North Star For CSR Improvement Efforts

Seventy percent of respondents agree that a good customer-agent experience often deescalates a bad brand experience. As decision-makers prioritize improving the employee experience for CSRs, they do so to ultimately drive a better CX. As such, the KPIs that matter most to senior stakeholders are Net Promoter Score (NPS), service level, customer satisfaction, and agent satisfaction.³

“Which call center KPIs matter most to your senior stakeholders?” (Showing top ranked)



70%

“A good customer-agent experience often deescalates a bad brand experience.”
(Showing agree/strongly agree)

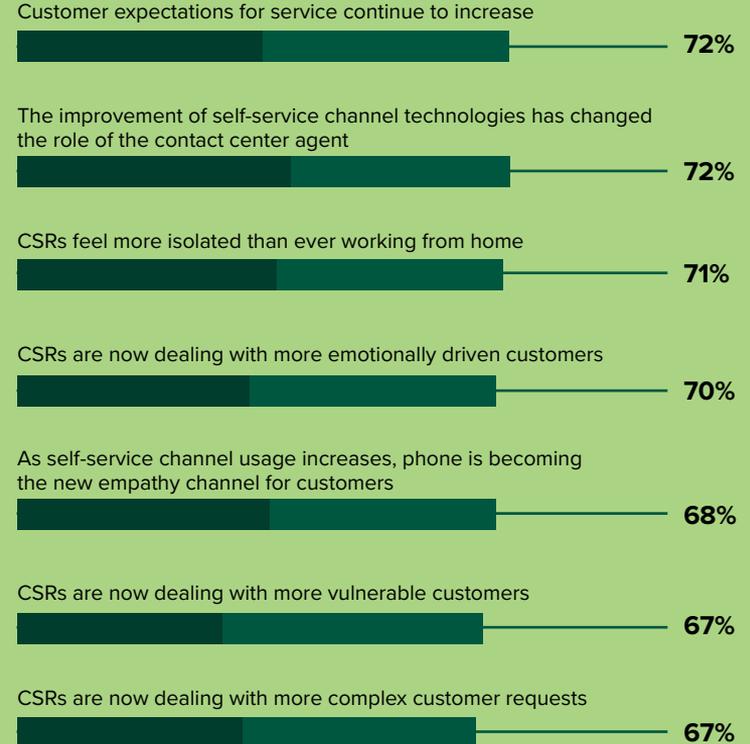
Voice Is The New Empathy Channel, Requiring CSRs To Be Empathy Experts

The role of CSRs and their managers has fundamentally changed. First and foremost, they must now be “empathy agents.” While customers prefer self-service for simpler service inquiries, they prefer voice interactions for escalations and dispute resolution. In these moments, they seek human connection.

During the pandemic, contact centers saw unprecedented spikes in call volume from devastated customers.⁴ Sixty-eight percent of respondents agree that phone has become the new empathy channel for customers, and most agree that CSRs are now dealing with more complex customer requests (67%) and emotionally charged customers (70%) than ever before. And because of the pandemic, many CSRs are doing so in isolation.

“Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.”

● Strongly agree ● Agree



Training For Empathy Requires Brands To Better Understand Customer Emotion And Needs

Training for empathy is difficult, as CSRs struggle to anticipate customer needs (57%) and consider, interpret, and even measure a customer's dynamic emotional state (56%). Fifty-three percent of decision-makers also struggle to understand a customer's full journey.

Adopting more advanced contact center technologies can help CSRs better understand where the customer is in their journey, but contact center leaders must be careful to avoid common pitfalls that lead to less-than-optimal customer experiences. This can happen when companies lack an end-to-end customer service journey overview, misjudge technology capabilities, and/or position technology as a replacement for humans.⁵

“How challenging are the following to improving CSR experience today?”

● Very challenging ● Challenging

Anticipating the dynamic needs of our customer base in a world of accelerated change



Providing CSRs the work-life flexibility they need



Anticipating and interpreting a customer's emotional state



Recruiting new talent



Training CSRs to deal with more complex and emotionally charged conversations



Understanding a customer's full journey



Performing root-cause analysis when measuring CSR performance



Supporting CSRs now that they are working remotely



Supervisors Lack The Resources They Need To Train And Support Empathy Agents

Supervisors also need tools and insights to understand how best to help their CSRs navigate this new reality — and how to effectively do so remotely. In the past, many contact center supervisors relied on “walking the floor” to hear customer-CSR interactions and provide coaching. Decision-makers say they struggle to support their supervisors now that they are physically separated from their teams (57%). As CSRs are dealing with more calls with emotionally charged customers, business leaders struggle to provide supervisors the support they need to help their CSRs manage stress (59%), assist them in responding to dynamic customer needs (62%), and deliver continuous coaching and feedback (60%).

“How challenging are the following to supporting contact center supervisors today?”

● Very challenging ● Challenging



64%

Supporting supervisors now that they are working remotely



62%

Training supervisors to help their CSRs respond to dynamic customer needs



60%

Providing supervisors with the ability to deliver continuous agent performance feedback



59%

Training supervisors to manage stress and/or help their CSRs manage stress



58%

Evolving processes around the rapidly changing needs of our customer base



57%

Supporting supervisors effectively when they are physically separated from their teams

A Future-Proof Contact Center Prioritizes Empowering CSRs And Leaders With The Right Insights

The distributed workforce is here to stay. In fact, 67% of decision-makers say their organizations will retain some form of a remote and/or hybrid contact center. Therefore, as business leaders invest in future-proofing their contact centers, they’re prioritizing empowering CSRs and their supervisors to address customer needs effectively and empathetically. This includes supporting them with the right behavioral insights. Through the power of AI, CSRs can quickly and accurately gauge customer emotion and be guided in real time with next-best-action advice. Supervisors can drill into key areas of improvement to help CSRs navigate customer conversations, as well as ensure customer service success metrics align to CX and other enterprise KPIs.

67%

“Our organization’s shift to a remote and/or hybrid contact center is — at least in part — here to stay.”
(Showing agree/strongly agree)

→ The new contact center is designed to be more human.

“Where must you invest to future-proof your contact center?” (Showing top ranked)

● Rank 1 ● Rank 2 ● Rank 3 ● Rank 4 ● Rank 5



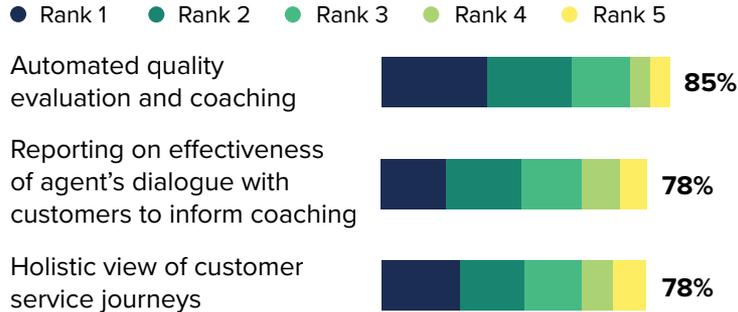
Smart Adoption Of Automation And AI Fosters Better Decision-Making And Experiences

Decision-makers turn to automation and AI to persistently guide agents to become empathy experts with data-supported analytics. Automating quality evaluation enables more effective and efficient coaching opportunities for CSRs and their supervisors. Maximizing the ROI of automation and AI requires a holistic view of the customer service journey.

Business leaders seek to improve CSR experience and apply behavioral data to optimize decision-making to future-proof their contact centers, with the ultimate goal of driving improved customer loyalty and experience to achieve a competitive edge. In fact, Forrester's research has shown that even incremental improvements in CX can lead to millions in additional revenue from customers.⁶

“What would make coaching/training more effective?”

(Showing top ranked)



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“What benefits have you realized/would you expect to realize if you invested in future-proofing your contact center?”



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Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of CallMiner, February 2021

Conclusion

The pandemic fundamentally upended the standard ideas of customer service. Widespread remote work, a boom in digital interactions, and increased automation left voice-based conversations as the “empathy engines” for brands. To effectively arm CSRs for these emotionally driven interactions, brands need:

- **Data on customer journeys and interactions.** Brands will find it difficult to provide emotionally resonant interactions if they don’t understand what customers are trying to do and how they feel about the interaction.
- **New tools for supervisors and agents.** Supervisors struggle without the line-of-sight sense they used to have in contact centers. Brands must equip supervisors and agents with tools like automated quality evaluation and coaching to ensure that the empathy engine can function smoothly.

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Contributing Research:

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Development and Delivery
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Methodology

This Opportunity Snapshot was commissioned by CallMiner. To create this profile, Forrester Consulting conducted an online survey of 310 North America- and EMEA-based contact center strategy decision-makers. Respondents represented CX (55%), operations (23%), marketing/advertising (16%), and sales (5%) roles. All respondents at least influenced contact center strategy and were involved with evaluating contact center technology. The custom survey was completed in February 2021.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Source: "Predictions 2021: Customer Service," Forrester Research, Inc., October 19, 2020.
- ² Source: "The Three Customer Service Megatrends In 2021: Post-Pandemic Customer Service Excellence," Forrester Research, Inc., January 25, 2021.
- ³ Net Promoter and NPS are registered service marks, and Net Promoter Score is a service mark, of Bain & Company, Inc., Satmetrix Systems, Inc., and Fred Reichheld.
- ⁴ Source: "The Three Customer Service Megatrends In 2021: Post-Pandemic Customer Service Excellence," Forrester Research, Inc., January 25, 2021.
- ⁵ Source: "How AI And Automation Drive Better Customer Service Experiences," Forrester Research, Inc., February 16, 2021.
- ⁶ Source: "The ROI Of CX Transformation," Forrester Research, Inc., January 22, 2021.

ABOUT FORRESTER CONSULTING

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Demographics

GEOGRAPHY

US: 44%
UK: 17%
Canada: 11%
Ireland: 10%
France: 9%
South Africa: 9%

RESPONDENT LEVEL

C-level executive: 17%
Vice president: 35%
Director: 48%

CONTACT CENTER SIZE

51 to 200 employees: 1%
201 to 500 employees: 41%
501 to 1,000 employees: 25%
1,001 to 5,000 employees: 26%
More than 5,000 employees: 7%

INDUSTRY (TOP 5)

Technology and/or technology services: 12%
Telecommunications services: 10%
Retail: 9%
Media and/or leisure: 9%
Financial services and/or insurance: 9%

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