

The Three Customer Service Megatrends In 2022

Customer Service Leaders Build Resilient Strategies In A Changed World

March 15, 2022

By Christina McAllister, Max Ball, Eric Bellomo with Ian Jacobs, Nick Monroe, Hailey Colin, Peter Harrison

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Summary

Agility, resilience, and flexibility continue to be essential to long-term contact center strategies that can anticipate and adapt to change. As a customer service leader, your workforce is at the center of this. The pendulum is swinging from automation to increasingly important touchpoints powered by human agents. This report reveals the top three customer service megatrends that customer service leaders must pay attention to in 2022.

Customer Service Leaders Are Planning For Change

It's time to say goodbye to "the new normal." The world has changed, and there's no going back. Henry Mintzberg, a Canadian academic in the areas of business and management, [suggested](#) that when organizations' strategic orientations move out of sync with the current environment (perhaps as a result of a pandemic), a strategic revolution must take place, where organizations change quickly in an attempt to regain stability. We are undoubtedly in the middle of a strategic revolution. The last two years have been about agility — the ability to react quickly to rapidly changing realities. Contact centers shifted thousands of agents home, and many organizations launched new digital channels to meet customer demands. The need for agility will continue, but there is a tangible shift: Customer service leaders must now take the opportunity to build lasting strategies that anticipate a changeable tomorrow.

If 2021 marked a major emphasis on automation, expect the pendulum to swing back toward a renewed focus on the agent touchpoint. For customer service leaders, the next year will be an opportunity to shed legacy thinking and reinvent themselves for a new tomorrow (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Three Customer Service Megatrends In 2022



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1. Companies Are Future-Proofing Their Customer Service Stacks

The pandemic has left many companies feeling exposed, as their tech stacks proved insufficient to meet rapidly shifting business needs. The past two years marked a rapid shift toward digital channel and cloud adoption as work went virtual and companies focused on supporting customers digitally and remotely. Longstanding assumptions about how companies procure technology were upended: Regulations relaxed, processes changed, and people adapted. Companies now find themselves reconciling hasty investments in (often necessary) point solutions with post-pandemic priorities. To build a strong foundation that enables adaptability, resilience, and agility, companies are:

- **Prioritizing flexible and modular technology.** Stray away from monolithic suite vendors, and choose platforms with modular capabilities and flexible APIs that enable you to adapt to changing business needs with a consistent, scalable foundation. Solutions with increasingly open, modular, and consumable offerings (including support for app ecosystems) enable enterprises to select best-in-class capabilities instead of forcing them into vendor lock-in.

In 2022, customer service leaders will be busy developing roadmaps and identifying the technology building blocks to take them through this next phase of transformation.

- **Restructuring digital experiences to strategically support text-based channels.**

The world has gone asynchronous. Consumers have long used asynchronous channels socially, but with a [shift to hybrid work](#), these channels are the obvious choice for communicating with colleagues as well. Consumers accustomed to the convenience of asynchronous channels expect the same convenience when engaging with brands, and many brands do this well, especially on third-party channels like Messenger and WhatsApp.

In 2022, customer service organizations will accelerate adoption of asynchronous messaging by adding first-party channels (web and mobile apps) to the mix.

Customers don't see channels the way a contact center does — they just see one brand. Customer service leaders should blur the boundaries between channels and offer more ways for customers to switch seamlessly between channels within single interactions. The Verizon Wireless mobile app provides a multitude of channels for customers to engage the business, but Verizon has also integrated channels so customers can move seamlessly from one to another (for example, starting with a voice call and transitioning to chat) or reengage later.

- **Connecting contact center and unified communications for enhanced CX.** Many contact center managers want to reduce the 20-plus vendor relationships they struggle with. A combined unified communications and contact center platform simplifies vendor management and system architecture — and reduces costs. A shared telephony infrastructure can enable collaboration across the organization and provide flexible options for customers to connect with a company. For example, contact center agents can seamlessly connect with internal subject matter experts to resolve customer inquiries. In distributed organizations, customers can call a local office, branch, or store and be connected to the contact center when no one is available locally.

In 2022, more organizations will extend contact center solutions with unified communications and vice versa. This helps agents tap domain-level expertise outside the walls of the contact center or expand the customer service frontline by pooling customer-facing employees in brick-and-mortar locations and contact center agents together.

2. Activation Of Unstructured “Dark” Data Is Driving CX And EX Orchestration

It would be difficult to find a contact center that is not sitting on a veritable treasure trove of data. The question is no longer about collecting enough data — it’s about ensuring that the data is usable and liberated from company silos to create new streams of value. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, [52% of companies](#) accelerated their AI adoption plans. In 2022, being “data driven” must become more than just a slogan — the next wave of business transformation will hinge on activating “dark” data (data that organizations collect but do not effectively use) to drive differentiated experiences for both customers and employees. This is not a simple problem, but many pandemic responses proved that silos are not as rigid as they once appeared and that collaboration breeds more progress than disunion. Organizations that wish to take advantage of this data will:

- **Enable cross-departmental collaboration on AI initiatives.** The pandemic has made clear that investing in effective strategies for data use and AI will enable organizational agility and resilience. Many enterprise AI applications are poorly integrated and limited to single business units. These siloed AI initiatives fail to deliver value.

In 2022, companies will take a more strategic and collaborative approach to AI initiatives. They will centralize their data and AI functions to maintain consistent ownership and stewardship of company data while facilitating broader AI adoption

through close partnership with business stakeholders. Scotiabank's Global AI Platform, for example, powers the [AI-driven technology C.MEE](#) that analyzes data across all customer touchpoints (branch, contact center, mobile, online) and delivers personalized and relevant banking experiences. These types of AI platforms are built with collaboration capabilities at the forefront, allowing employees across the organization to cocreate and build upon existing successes.

- **Activate employee data to transform employee experience.** The pandemic-driven increase in remote work and digitalization has led to a parallel increase in employee-generated digital exhaust (data collected from digital platforms as employees use them). Previously offline conversations are now digitized, recordable, and analyzable, providing organizations with new streams of operational insight. For years, contact centers have recorded agent-customer interactions, and advanced teams have leveraged this data to provide AI-driven recommendations for agent performance improvement.

In 2022, contact centers will analyze internal transcripts (agent-supervisor or agent-agent) to identify opportunities to formalize “tribal knowledge” that was previously accessed via shoulder-tap or side conversations. Organizations with integrated CRM and communication platforms (for example, Microsoft Dynamics and Teams or Salesforce and Slack) will connect employee interaction data with customer data to enable intelligent swarming. For complex support tickets, platforms will connect agents to the right resources based on skills and availability, and the system will track the results and generate recommendations for process improvements.

- **Design AI-powered agent workspaces that facilitate human-machine collaboration.** Despite investments in self-service capabilities like chatbots, human-assisted channels still lead in usage and customer preference. Contact centers must now turn their focus to improving customer experience at the point of contact with an agent, which demands renewed investment in agent-facing tools. [Next-gen agent workspaces](#) are infused with AI and must enable close human-machine collaboration — standalone or bolt-on AI capabilities no longer suffice.

In 2022, companies will leverage [conversation intelligence](#) solutions to anticipate agent needs and provide timely advice and suggestions. Agent workspaces will become increasingly adaptive and personalized; for example, ASAPP's AutoCompose capability learns from each agent and surfaces personalized recommendations based on the agent's preferred communication style. A word of caution: Solving these problems is about more than just selecting the right vendor. [Data-fueled products](#) require close collaboration between design and data

science teams to deliver effective and intuitive user experiences.

- **Combine cross-departmental data to create new CX value.** Customer data is often locked within company silos, which makes it difficult to deliver meaningful and personalized customer experiences. In 2022, companies will combine data in new ways to unlock opportunities for AI to deliver anticipatory and highly personalized customer experiences. For example, when customers call in, contact centers can greet them with an AI bot that will predict the reason for their call and find the best path to resolution. Marrying speech data with customer contact data will allow companies to do root cause analysis; a customer calling multiple times for the same issue is likely a process problem, not an agent performance problem.

3. Initiatives To Humanize The Contact Center Are Front And Center

Being a contact center agent has never been more difficult. Call volumes have increased, and while bots are taking some of the heat, that leaves the toughest calls for your agents to handle. Contact centers are seeing [turnover rates of 58%](#), according to a study by ICMI; other sources have published figures of 80% or higher. The “Great Resignation” is empowering agents to find employment elsewhere. Contact centers that don’t focus on significantly improving the agent experience will suffer far more than those that do. Stabilizing the contact center is not a technology shift. It requires a change in culture: moving away from an overly cost-conscious view of the function to a more holistic understanding of the value that good customer service brings. In 2022, companies must do the following to change the culture of their contact centers:

- **Shift the ownership of efficiency metrics.** Chatbots and knowledge bases are sweeping low-complexity inquiries out of the contact center, leaving the more complex and emotionally charged conversations for human agents. Historically, contact centers have taken a micro view of agent efficiency — holding each individual agent accountable to drive down average handle time. Contact centers with a myopic goal of cost reduction risk high turnover, demoralized agents, and poor customer interactions.

In 2022, customer service leaders will transition away from agent-owned efficiency metrics and instead incentivize agents to focus on resolution and customer satisfaction. Fantasy sports company FanDuel empowers its agents to prioritize customer satisfaction and resolution above efficiency — its agent enablement team is responsible for finding efficiencies that benefit all FanDuel agents. Driving improvements at a process or technology level for the full program creates lasting efficiency gains that do not force agents to choose between speed and

experience.

- **Address the underlying causes of agent burnout.** Contact centers must treat agent burnout as the primary risk for turnover as workers [leave jobs en masse](#) amid the ongoing Great Resignation. Turnover is [infamous](#) in customer service, and the cost of backfilling [is rising accordingly](#). Furthermore, as the pandemic continues to disrupt our daily lives, agents are continually stressed by long call queues and frustrated customers. Without an end in sight, agents who feel separated from their teams, overworked, or simply burnt out are liable to enter a worker-friendly job market.

In 2022, contact center leaders will lean on existing digital tools to help reconnect agents and combat turnover. Simple engagements, like a weekly highlight of top performers, can help incentivize agents and simultaneously disseminate best practices. Similarly, borrowing practices from other functions, like daily scrum sessions, can foster a spirit of teamwork and help remove impediments to challenging cases. In addition, invest in management training practices that can help managers more effectively handle agent schedules and performance.

- **Foster career development for agents.** Contact centers continue to fail agents by underinvesting in, or simply neglecting, career and skill development beyond the contact center. Seventy-five percent of contact center agents [stay two years or fewer](#), and this brief tenure is partly attributable to high-volume, firefighting customer interactions that inhibit long-term skill development and keep agents in high-churn roles.

In 2022, customer service leaders will take critical steps to support agent career development. They should first align the goals of the contact center with those of the broader organization so agents can tether their performance to business-critical objectives. Second, develop horizontal and vertical career plans with side projects or lunch-and-learn programs, for example. [Companies like Drift](#) have significantly improved retention, satisfaction, and internal mobility by expanding agent training, role specialization, and agent advocacy. This, in turn, yields better experiences for agents and customers alike.

Supplemental Material

Companies We Interviewed For This Report

We would like to thank the individuals from the following companies who generously gave their time during the research for this report.

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