Execs In The Know

2024 CX LEADERS TRENDS & INSIGHTS

CONSUMER EDITION

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH: ACT

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PREFACE

Consumer preferences and behaviors continue to shift in the customer experience (CX) space. This *2024 CX Leaders Trends & Insights Consumer Edition* report provides invaluable insights into the current state of CX and highlights key trends that are reshaping how companies interact with consumers.

In an era where customer expectations are continuously evolving, the ability to adapt and innovate is critical to maintaining a competitive edge. The results in this report underscore several pivotal shifts and continuing trends in consumer behavior, such as the increasing more toward text-based solutions from voice-based ones (though Voice is still incredibly substantial) and the growing demand for faster, more straightforward customer service processes, all with a live agent within easy reach. These insights are not just statistics – they are indicators of where CX is headed. Furthermore, the results in this report underscore the importance CX in shaping business-critical elements like brand opinion and customer loyalty.

One of the key takeaways from this research is the growing use and preference for text-based solutions, which has outpaced voice-based solutions for the second consecutive year. This trend highlights the consumer's desire for convenience and efficiency in their interactions with companies. However, it also reveals opportunities for improvement, particularly in the design of multichannel experiences, as well as agent quality and access. The data suggests that while many consumers successfully use self-help tools, a significant portion still finds these solutions either too difficult or ineffective. This is creating friction when companies deploy strategies to deflect volume into self-help solutions that often fail to provide an adequate resolution. Addressing these challenges, particularly as it applies to AI-powered self-help, will be crucial as companies seek to optimize their care offerings, reduce customer frustration, and improve the overall experience.

Additionally, several new findings in an entirely new "Views of Agents" section highlight the importance of things like empathy, empowerment, and ethical treatment. Consumers are not only looking for quick resolutions, but also value the ability to reach a live person when needed, and expect empathy from agents during the resolution process. Consumers feel agents need to adapt to the changing CX environment. These findings suggest that companies should invest in training and empowering their customer service teams to handle complex issues with understanding and compassion. As organizations plan their future strategies, this research serves as a guide, helping them focus on what truly matters to consumers – delivering a seamless, empathetic, and effective customer experience that builds trust and fosters loyalty.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

It is our pleasure to once again bring the customer experience (CX) community this special volume of industry research. This volume is the seventh under the CX Leaders Trends & Insight banner, which sprouted from the Customer Experience Management Benchmark (CXMB) series or research reports, first published by Execs In The Know back in 2012.

In addition to the series' tried and true topics of multichannel, self-help, AI, consumer opinions, etc., this year's research also contains a brand new section devoted to consumers' views on CX agents (page 62). In it, readers will discover how consumers value things like empathy, treatment of employees, and gain an understanding of where consumers think companies should focus in training agents. It is our hope that this new selection of questions provide a basis for future strategies as agent quality becomes more important than ever.

We'd also like to take a moment to thank the CX leaders who contributed a Practitioner's Perspective to this volume of research. These unique insights provide additional meaning and context to the results contained in this research, and these contributions are invaluable.

Practitioner Perspective contributors include:

John Caldwell (page 14) target

Lisa Oswald (page 51) TRAVELZOO

Nick Price (page 56) Angi

Andrew Pine (page 64) JAGUAR LAND ROVER

Lisa Diehl (page 65) freshpet

Finally, we'd like to extend a warm thank you to our volume partner, ACT. Be sure to check out the special Partner Commentary by Hunter Croft, President and CEO of ACT, in which he shares his views on the essential role of the Total Experience. You can find the commentary on page 5 of this report.

Kind Regards,

Execs In The Know

Please contribute your voice to the 2025 Corporate Edition!

We want to hear your story! Execs In The Know will soon be gathering responses for the 2025 CX Leaders Trends & Insights Corporate Edition report, and we could use your help. Your individual responses will never be shared, and your participation will help broaden the coming year's insights and results.

For information on how you can participate, please contact Susan McDaniel at Susan@execsintheknow.com.

PARTNER COMMENTARY

PARTNER
COMMENTARY

The Essential Role of the Total Experience in 2024

By Hunter Croft, President and CEO, ACT

The 2024 CX Leaders Trends & Insights survey highlights critical findings that demonstrate the importance of a holistic approach to the modern customer experience. The findings clearly indicate that a successful strategy in 2024 must go beyond individual touch points and instead focus on the integration of CX with the Employee Experience (EX), Multichannel Experience (MX), User Experience (UX), and Digital Experience (DX) for a seamlessly orchestrated Total Experience overall. Below, we briefly explore what the survey data reveals about the interplay between these experiences and why organizations should adopt a Total Experience approach when addressing current consumer trends and expectations.

THE CHALLENGE OF CUSTOMER CARE AUTOMATION

Automation in customer service is no longer a futuristic concept; it's a present-day reality that continues to gain momentum. From interactive voice response (IVR) systems to AI-driven chatbots, these technologies promise to resolve customer issues efficiently, 24/7. However, reliance on automation can lead to unintended outcomes, such as consumer frustration, reduced customer satisfaction, and a decrease in overall loyalty. The 2024 CX Leaders Consumer Report highlights that 52% of consumers feel frustrated when they are unable to reach a human agent after interacting with automated systems (page 14). This statistic underscores the importance of striking the right balance between automation and human interaction. The survey also shows that in live interactions, "poor agent quality" remains a top pain point for consumers as well (page 14). The Total Experience bridges this gap by integrating DX with other experience elements, ensuring that digital channels are supported by successful human interactions when necessary.

THE ROLE OF DATA IN CX

One of the most telling findings of the 2024 survey is that 42% of consumers find the most frustrating aspect of customer care to be the difficulty in reaching a live person. This frustration underscores the importance of effective Customer Experience management within the Total Experience. Siloed data and traditional reporting methodologies can exacerbate these issues, as they often fail to capture the nuances of customer interactions across channels. As a result, when a customer finally does reach a live agent, they expect the agent to already have knowledge of and/or access to information about their experience and prior interactions. Unfortunately, many agents face the daunting task of navigating multiple disparate systems to resolve the customer's inquiry, resulting in friction for both customer and agent alike. By prioritizing the orchestration of customer interactions and ensuring that data is integrated across all touch points, the Total Experience helps businesses reduce these blind spots, making it easier for agents to provide customers with the help they need, deliver personalized service, and improve overall satisfaction (page 63).

EX AND ITS IMPACT ON CX

A common oversight when examining the drivers of a positive customer experience is the employee experience. The survey highlights a crucial connection between EX and CX. The Total Experience emphasizes the importance of a motivated, well-trained, well-supported workforce to deliver high-quality customer interactions. By investing in EX and mapping the end-to-end employee experience, businesses can identify and remove process friction and better equip their contact center employees to meet customer needs, leading to improved outcomes for both customers and the organization (page 21). These tools enable the organization to impact customer experience in real time by placing the agent in a position to successfully address the customer's request.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MX

The survey highlights a need for better channel integration to ensure a seamless customer journey. Many customers start with self-help tools but often require voice-based interactions for resolution, pointing to the need for a cohesive Multichannel Experience strategy, offered by the Total Experience. Notably, only 38% of CX leaders measure across all channels, with 78% not comparing single-channel to multichannel journeys — creating blind spots that hinder a comprehensive understanding of the customer journey (page 18). A strong MX strategy offers the following benefits:

1. **Seamless Channel Integration and Enhanced Problem Resolution:**
MX allows customers to transition smoothly across channels without losing context, ensuring consistency in information and service quality. This seamless integration is crucial for resolving complex issues, as the survey indicates that many customers require voice-based support after starting with self-help tools. Addressing these gaps in channel integration ensures that all relevant information is accessible across channels, leading to more efficient problem resolution and a more cohesive customer journey (page 19).

2. **Consistency in Customer Interactions:**
MX ensures consistent messaging and service standards across channels, building trust and reliability. The survey emphasizes the importance of this consistency to avoid customer frustration and loyalty erosion (page 19).

3. **Personalized Interactions:**
MX integrates data across channels to enable personalized service, addressing customer frustrations, especially when automated systems fail. The survey shows 52% of consumers are frustrated when unable to reach a human agent, highlighting the need for context-aware interactions (page 14).

4. **Brand Loyalty:**
A strong MX strategy fosters brand loyalty by delivering a seamless, satisfying experience across all channels, encouraging customers to remain loyal (page 19).

DX AND ITS CHALLENGES

Despite significant investments in self-help digital tools, the survey shows that 58% of consumers feel their issues are too complex to be resolved by self-help solutions alone. Additionally, traditional metrics like Average Handle Time (AHT) and First-Call Resolution (FCR) may not fully capture customer frustrations, particularly those involving complex, multichannel journeys. This underscores the importance of integrating DX with UX and MX to provide a comprehensive solution that not only meets functional needs but also captures and addresses customer sentiment and emotional cues (page 43). A well-designed DX strategy offers the following benefits:

1. **Foundation for Modern Customer Interactions:**
DX is often the first point of contact for customers. A positive DX can set the tone for the entire journey, while a poor one can quickly turn customers away (page 14).

2. **Consistency Across Channels:**
Consistency in DX across channels is key to maintaining brand integrity and preventing customer frustration. The survey underscores that inconsistency leads to negative experiences (page 19).

3. **Personalization and Customer-Centric Design:**
Personalized digital experiences are crucial for customer satisfaction. The survey reveals that customers expect tailored interactions, making personalization a key element of a strong DX strategy (page 43).

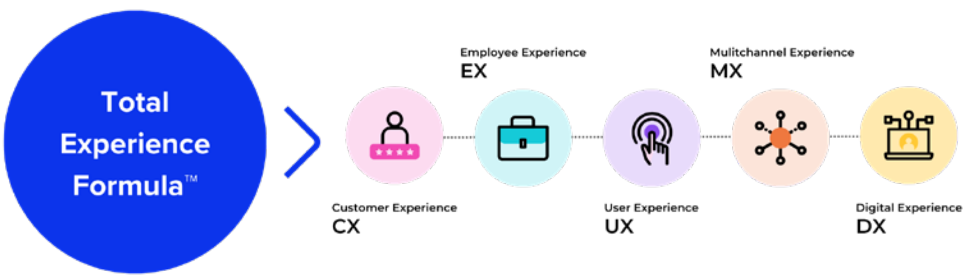
4. Data-Driven Insights:
DX allows for the collection of valuable data that can be used to refine strategies and better meet customer expectations. The survey highlights the importance of leveraging these insights (page 43).

5. Integration with Human Interaction:
DX is most effective when integrated with human support, allowing customers to transition seamlessly between digital and human interactions. The survey supports the need for this balance (page 14).

6. Impact on Overall Customer Satisfaction:
Ultimately, DX significantly influences overall customer satisfaction. A seamless, intuitive, and responsive digital experience can enhance customer satisfaction by meeting their needs quickly and effectively. Conversely, a poor DX can lead to frustration, dissatisfaction, and negative perceptions of the brand. In the Total Experience, DX is a key driver of customer satisfaction, working alongside other elements to create a holistic and positive experience. The survey underscores that DX is a key driver of customer satisfaction, with seamless and responsive digital experiences enhancing overall satisfaction (page 43).

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS: TECHNOLOGIES TO ELEVATE THE TOTAL EXPERIENCE

ACT has adeptly tackled the challenges highlighted in the 2024 CX Leaders Trends & Insights survey by leveraging advanced AI-based tools that enhance every aspect of the Total Experience. Our AI-powered solutions optimize the agent experience by integrating and aggregating data across all touch points, providing a unified view of customer interactions, and a single-pane-of-glass dashboards to solve for the complexity of the agent Employee Experience. This integration allows us to draw real-time insights from customer experiences, and directly influence Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) real-time. By employing these sophisticated technologies, ACT ensures that both automated and human interactions are seamlessly orchestrated, resulting in a more cohesive and responsive service experience for our clients.



CONCLUSION: THE TOTAL EXPERIENCE FORMULA™ — A HOLISTIC APPROACH FOR 2024 AND BEYOND

The 2024 CX Leaders Trends & Insights Consumer Edition survey provides compelling evidence for the need for a holistic approach to customer experience. The Total Experience Formula™ integrates the critical components of EX, CX, MX, UX, and DX, creating a seamless and effective strategy that addresses the full spectrum of customer needs. By adopting this approach, businesses can not only meet the expectations of today's consumers, but also set themselves up for long-term success in an increasingly complex CX landscape.

ACT

Hunter Croft
President and CEO

Hunter Croft leads vision, strategy and business growth for Advanced Call Center Technologies (ACT), a global, employee-owned leader in total experience delivery. Hunter joined ACT in 2003 as SVP of Sales and Operations and played a primary role in propelling the business from 300 employees to more than 12,000 employees internationally. He was instrumental in transforming the company from a PE-funded entity to 100% employee-owned as a strategic decision to differentiate on employee experience and create even greater value for ACT's clients. Prior to joining ACT, Hunter led operations for Penncro Associates, leading growth from 100 to more than 2,000 employees through organic expansion and new client acquisition. Before that, he held various leadership roles in financial services and lending firms, driving operational transformation and excellence for his clients. He is passionate about creating outstanding customer experiences by employing a "total experience" approach to service delivery.

SURVEY **RESULTS**

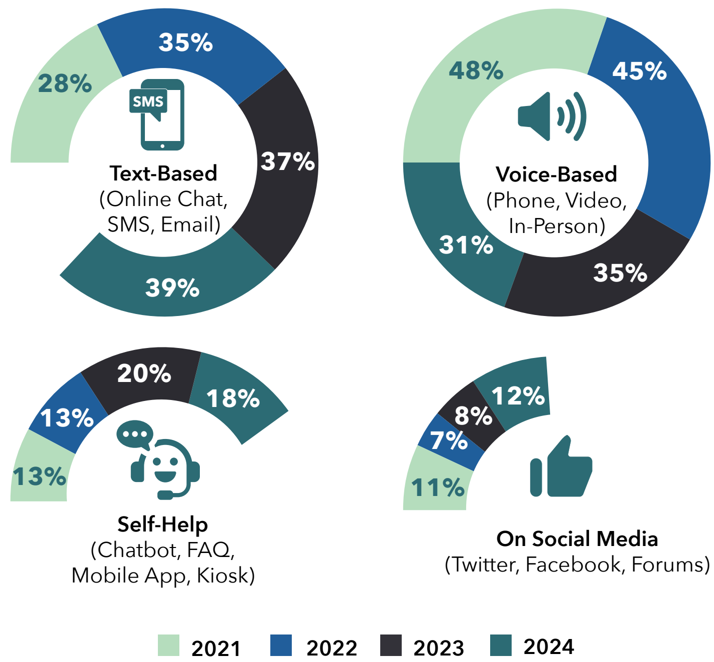
CONSUMER **EXPERIENCES**

- Consumer Use
- The Multichannel Journey
- The Happy & Unhappy Consumer
- Self-Help Solutions
- AI-Powered Solutions

CONSUMER USE

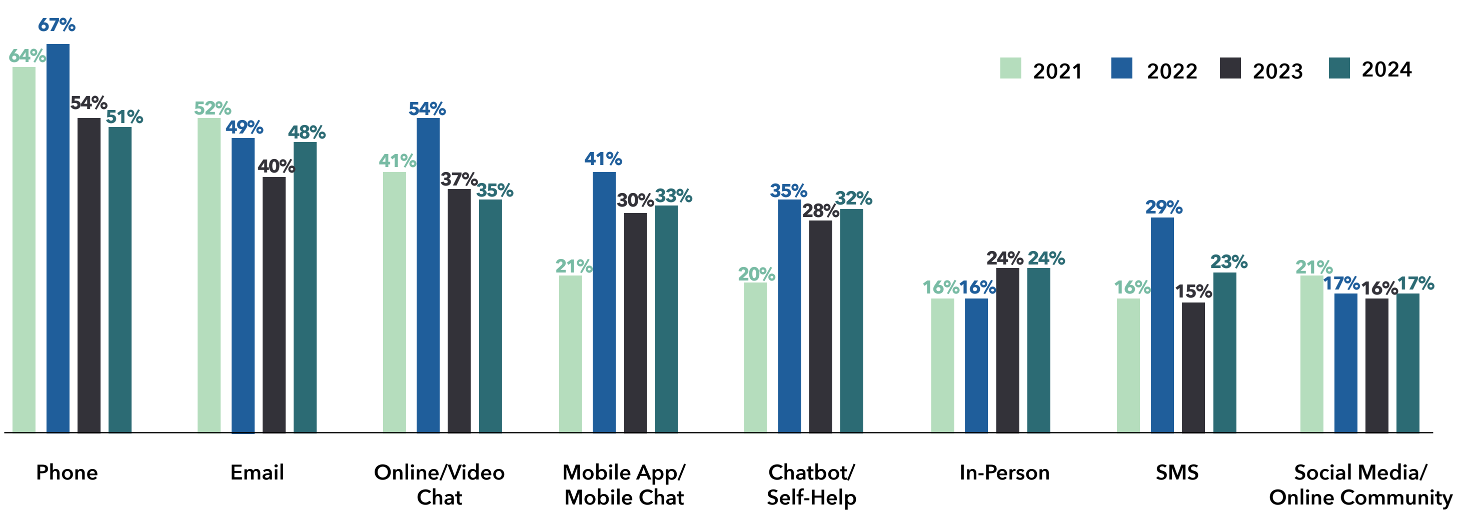
In a trend first established in 2021, consumers continue to migrate their customer care channel use away from Voice-Based solutions and toward Text-Based solutions. Based on results at right, the solutions that appear to be the largest beneficiaries of this shift include Email, Mobile Chat, and SMS, with the largest reductions continuing to take place within the Phone channel. Although consumer preference for Text-Based solutions continues to grow at a steady pace, overtaking Voice-Based solutions, Voice-Based remains significantly more popular than either Self-Help or Social Media customer care solutions. Furthermore, it's possible Voice-Based solutions remain strong because it is often a solution that gets results when other solutions fail (page 19).

Within the past 12 months, which method of interacting with customer care have you used the most frequently?



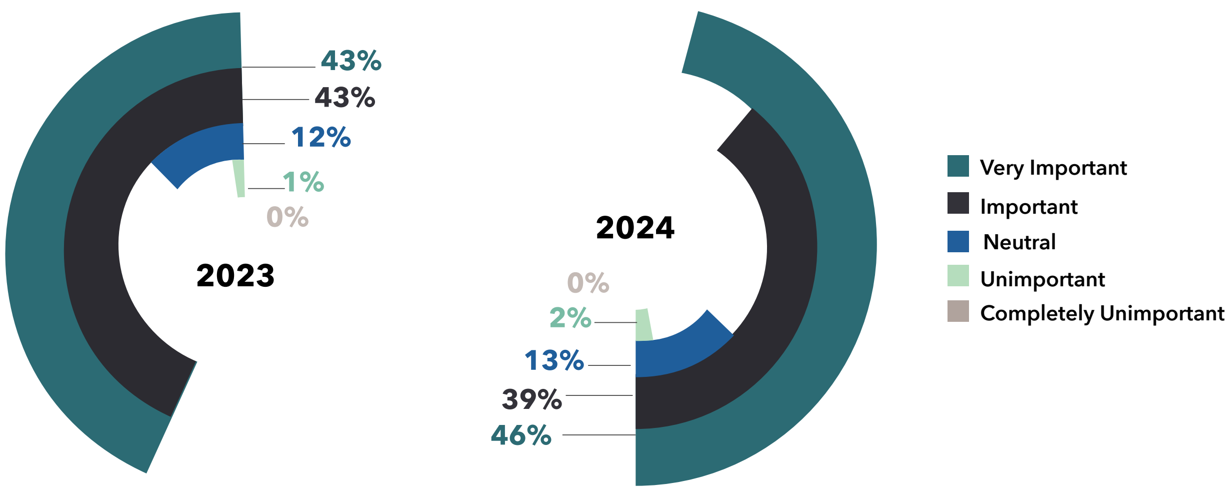
In a result that provides greater context for the above, use of the Phone as a channel of care continues to slip among consumers, though it remains the most widely used channel among consumers. Furthermore, the migration away from Phone appears to have slowed and possibly stabilized in recent years. Among solution gainers, both Email and SMS popped with strong year-over-year gains of eight points each, followed by Chatbot/Self-Help and Mobile App/Chat, with each registering year-over-year gains of four and three points, respectively.

Within the past 12 months, which solution(s) have you used to engage with a brand's customer care department? (Select all that apply.)



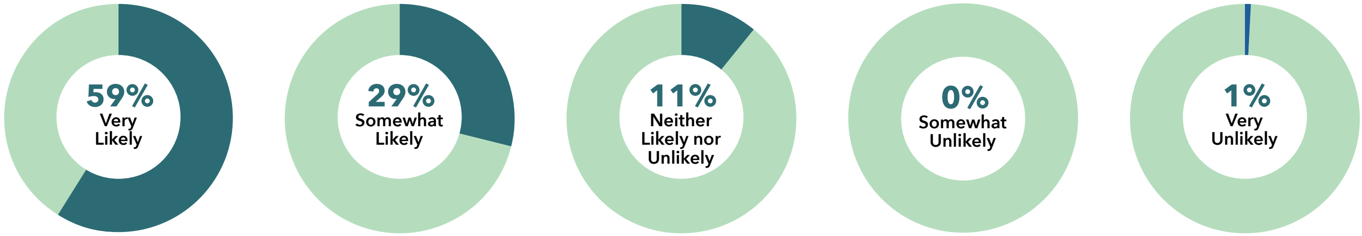
The importance consumers place on customer care in shaping their opinion of a brand remained elevated year-over-year, with 85% of consumers considering the impact to be "Very Important" or "Important" compared to 86% the prior year. Also worth noting is the minuscule number of consumers (only two percent) that consider the customer care experience either "Unimportant" or "Completely Unimportant." Combined with results on page 51 that further illustrate how highly consumers value quality care, brands might want to consider if their customer care and experience departments are properly positioned and resourced within their organizations. It's also worth noting that consumers seemingly care deeply about the customer care experience, regardless of the economic climate and the slowing of consumer spending that arrived in 2024.

How important is your experience with a brand's customer care department in shaping your opinion of that brand?



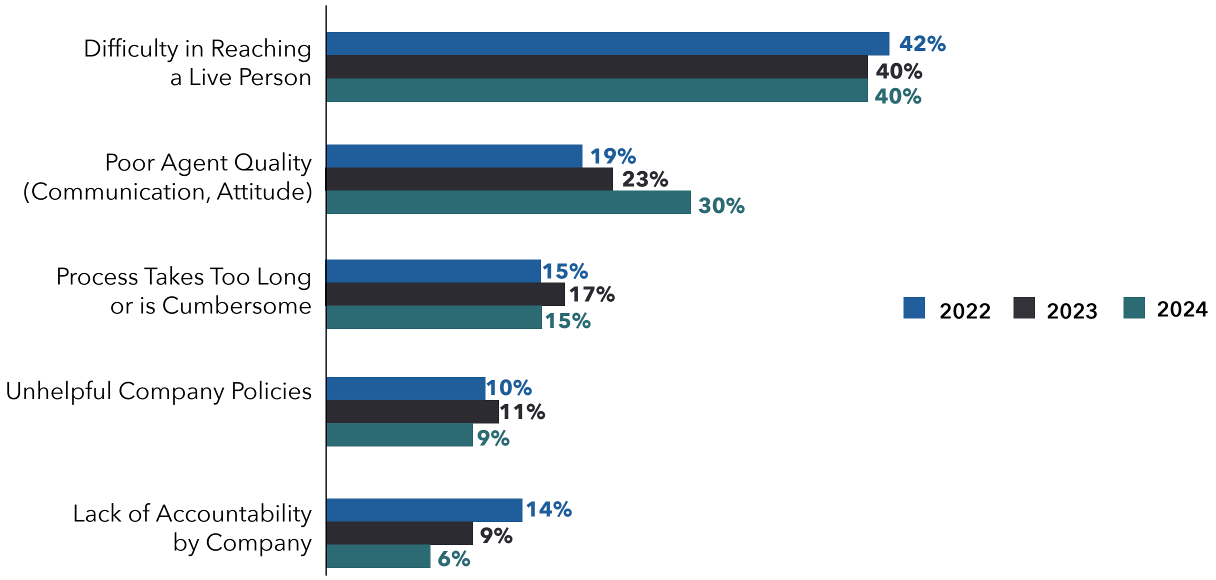
In a new question for 2024, consumers were asked how a positive customer care experience might impact their loyalty as a customer. All but 12% of respondents indicated their loyalty would be "Very Likely" or "Somewhat Likely" increased by a positive customer care experience, demonstrating the importance of care in driving revenue and retaining customers. Just like the importance of care, it's likely consumers see a strong correlation between care quality and customer loyalty regardless of economic headwinds.

How likely is it that a positive customer care experience will increase your loyalty as a customer?



Although "Difficulty In Reaching a Live Person" remains the predominant frustration among consumers, CX leaders should be paying attention to the upward trend of "Poor Agent Quality" as a top frustration, which is likely due to inadequate agent training to handle the rise in more complex issues. Communication is a key concern among consumers, as established in several other results in this year's research (pages 54, 64, and 67). To address this rising concern, CX leaders should consider what is being prioritized when it comes to agent hiring, training, and coaching. As more transactions are automated, leaving more complicated interactions to be handled by agents, clear communications and superb problem-solving skills become more and more critical.

What do you find to be the most frustrating aspect of resolving a customer care issue with a brand?



Consumers are challenged in reaching a live person. What does your organization do to ensure a live agent is easily reachable while still providing effective self-help options?

"We've all been part of the 40% of customers mashing buttons just trying to get to a live person for help, and it can be tempting to look at automated solutions and even channel routing through the lens of how it makes things easier for us.

But if we start with the question "What's best for our guests?" it will lead us to a much better solution. For us it starts with a relentless focus on the guest and having a clear servicing strategy. These two foundational elements paired with clear measures of success are critical to set the stage for customers to have a frictionless experience.

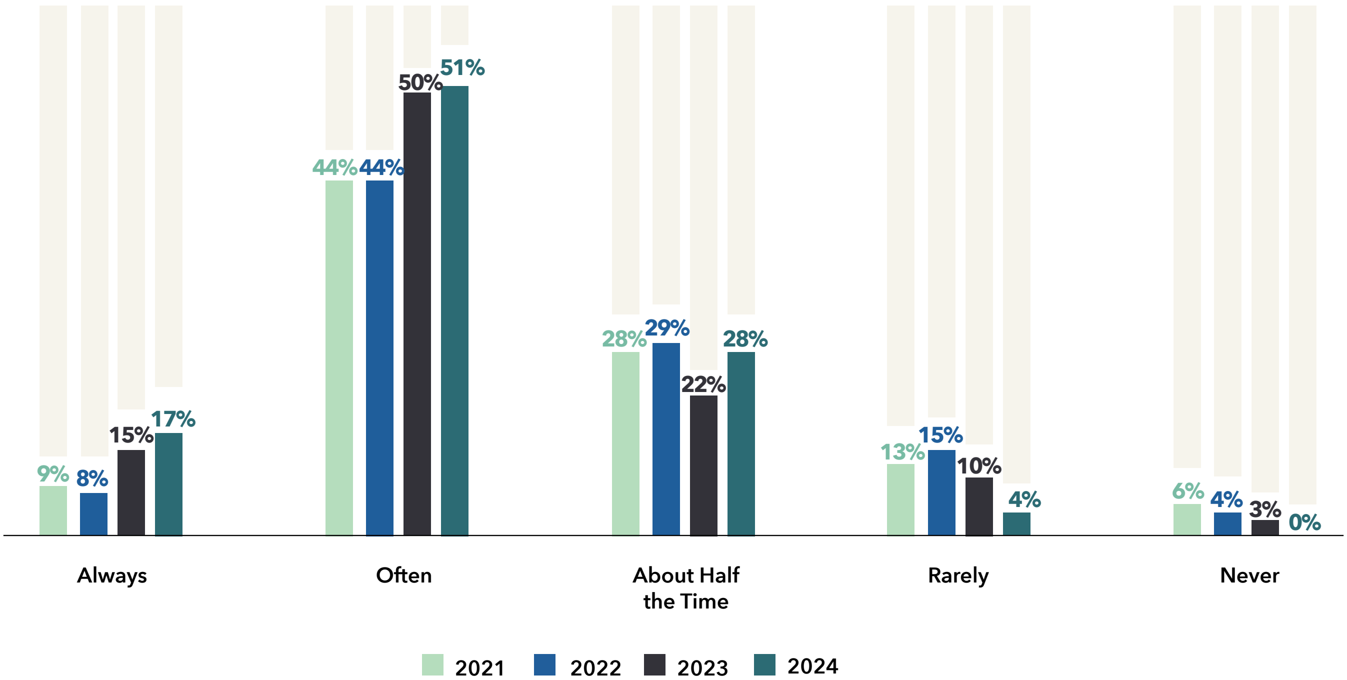
A couple metrics we use to help guide us are transfer and containment rates. These are both signals that there is friction in the system and our customers are telling us they didn't get to the right spot. Routing contacts in a way that gets a guest to the right solution should be a continuous improvement journey that begins and ends with what the guest is telling us."

target

John Caldwell
Senior Director, Team Member Service Centers

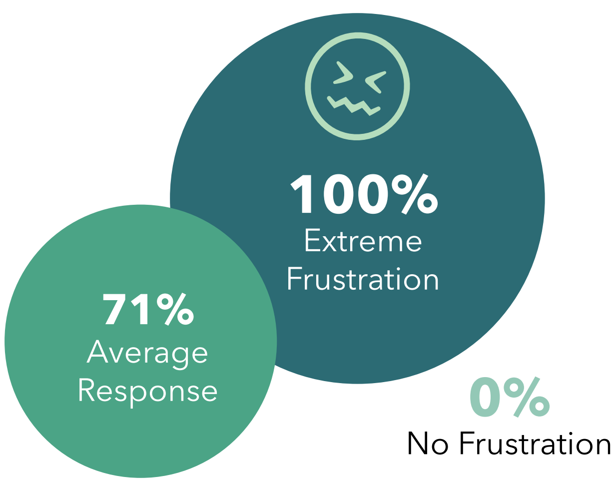
For the second consecutive year, companies seemingly improved how they were performing when it comes to first contact resolution (FCR). Not only did the percentage of consumers who responded negatively fall for the second consecutive year, those who responded positively also increased over that same span of time. Increasing the percent of engagements that result in an FCR is an effective way to reduce customer frustrations and improve customer satisfaction scores. It also worth considering if these results have been positively impacted by more effective self-help solutions which are more frequently guiding customers to that first contact resolution experience.

How often are your customer care issues resolved during the first instance of contacting a company's customer care department?



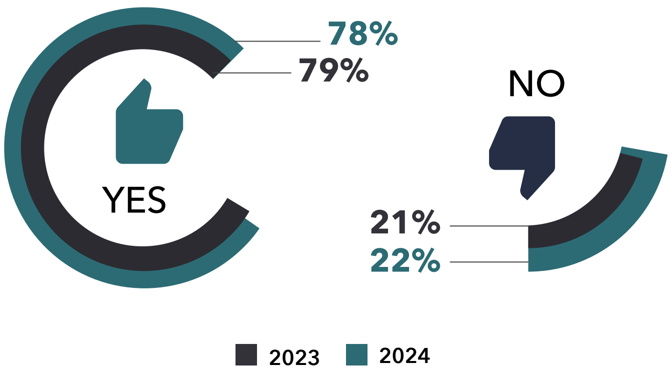
How frustrated are you by having to repeat information (account or personal) in trying to resolve a customer care issue?

In gauging the frustration of consumers in having to repeat information when trying to resolve a customer care issue, the average response received was 71. Furthermore, nearly 20% of all respondents provided a response of exactly 100. Brands would do well to develop processes of authentication that are easier and more streamlined, while maintaining the necessary security standards.



THE MULTICHANNEL JOURNEY

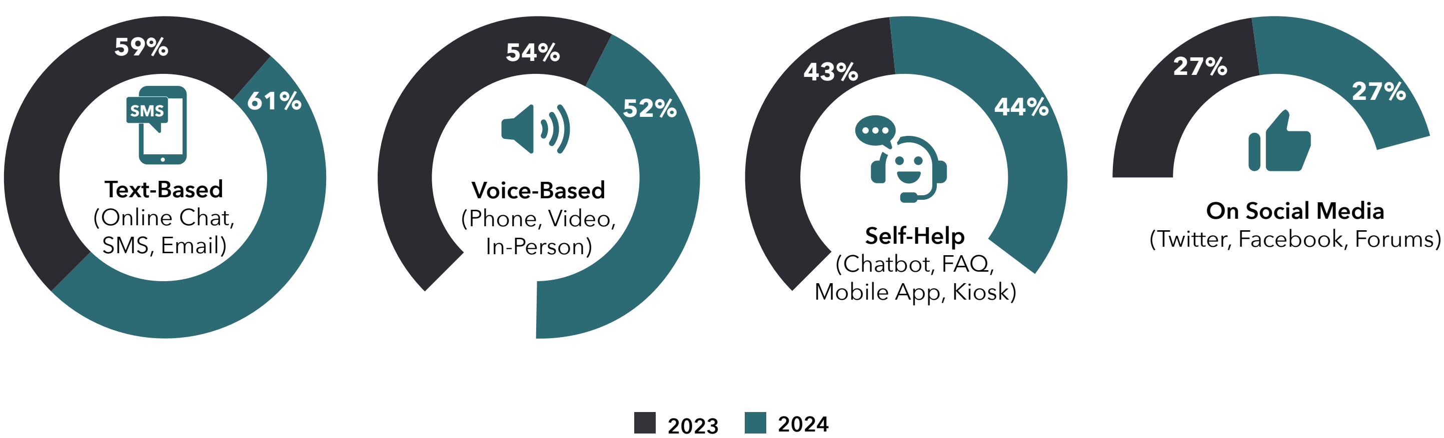
Within the past 12 months, did you use multiple channels (like phone, email, and social media) to resolve a single customer care issue?



The percentage of consumers who have taken a multichannel journey in the previous 12 months remained steady year-over-year, at 78%. Considering that this question was asked of the general population, some of whom might not have had any customer care issues in the previous 12 months, it's safe to say multichannel journeys are the predominant customer care journey in today's landscape. The reason for this is likely multifold, but certainly impacted by consumer impatience and the practice of launching simultaneous engagements across channels to see which can provide the speediest resolution, abandoning the other engagement efforts once a resolution is reached. This becomes a waste of company resources and customer efforts. Because of this, and in an effort to create parity and consistency, brands might consider a close examination of their multichannel experience through the lens of key criteria like ease, consistency, and resolution rate. Brands should also give consideration to how experiences and data are coordinated and shared across channels.

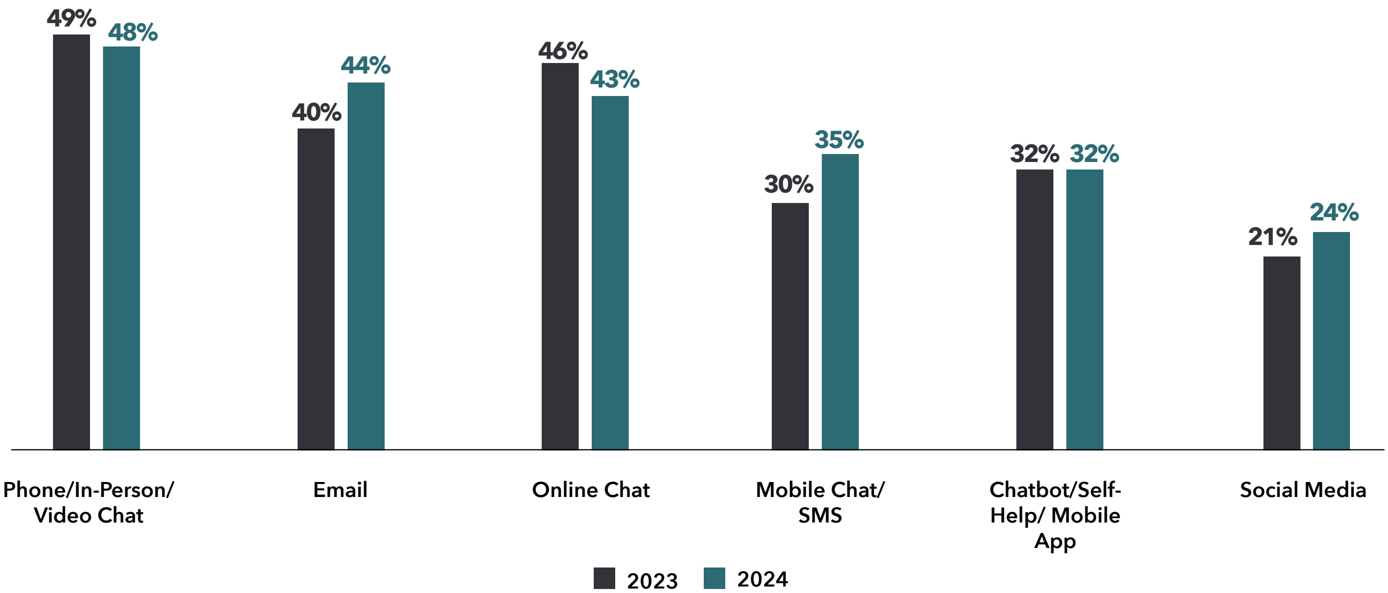
Multichannel journeys continue to span broadly across channel types, with a continuing trend describing slightly fewer phone calls and more Text-Based and Self-Help engagements. Based on results on the following page, it's clear that Phone remains the predominant solution, but quick gains are being made by Text-Based solutions like Email, Mobile Chat/SMS, and even social media.

In which ways did you interact with the brand as a part of your multichannel customer service experience? (Select all that apply.)

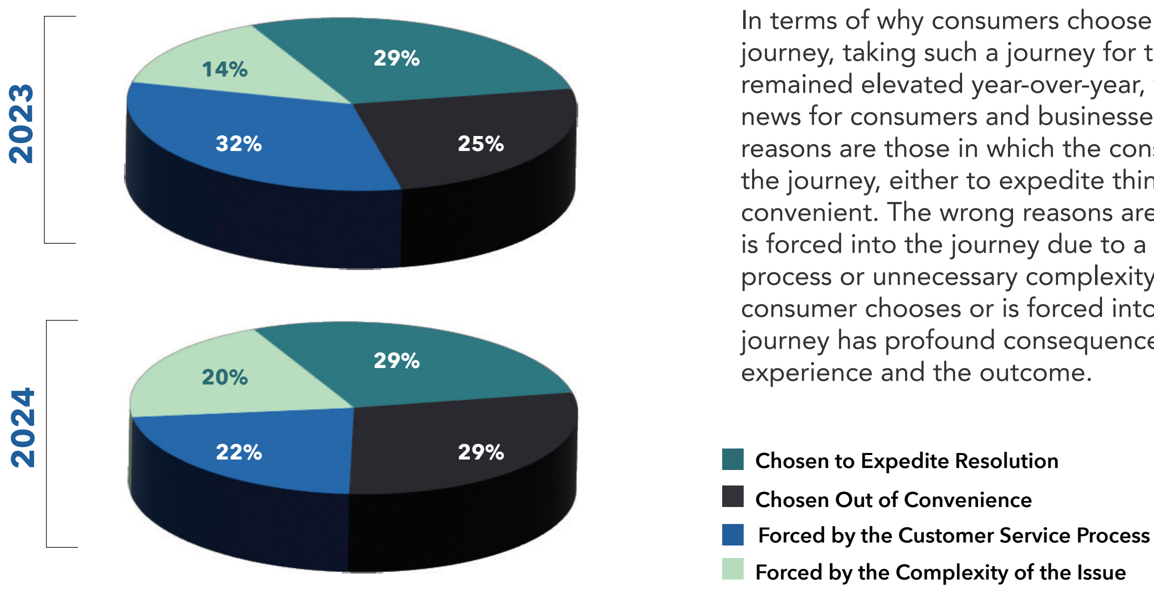


The solution breakdown below strongly reflects results on the previous page that show a slight decline in consumer use of Voice-Based solutions and a slight increase in use of Text-Based solutions. The most significant year-over-year gains occurred in Mobile Chat/SMS and Email, which saw gains of five and four points, respectively. It should also be noted that Phone use is highly concentrated in older demographics, with 63% of those 60 years and older indicating Phone as a part of their multichannel journey, compared to only 47% of those ages 18 to 44.

Which specific solutions did you use as a part of your multichannel customer care experience? (Select all that apply.)



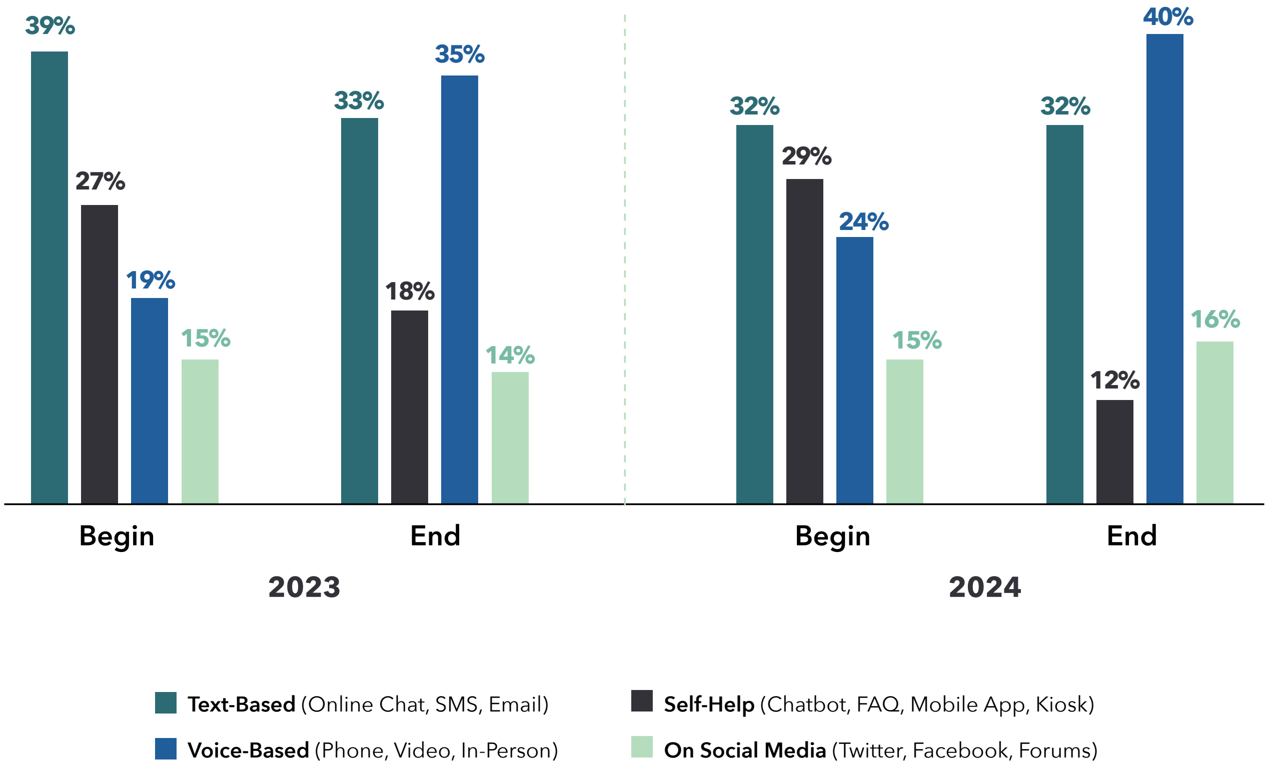
Why did the process take you across multiple channels?



In terms of why consumers choose a multichannel journey, taking such a journey for the "right" reasons remained elevated year-over-year, which is good news for consumers and businesses alike. The "right" reasons are those in which the consumer chooses the journey, either to expedite things or because it is convenient. The wrong reasons are when a consumer is forced into the journey due to a poorly designed process or unnecessary complexity. Whether a consumer chooses or is forced into a multichannel journey has profound consequences on both the experience and the outcome.

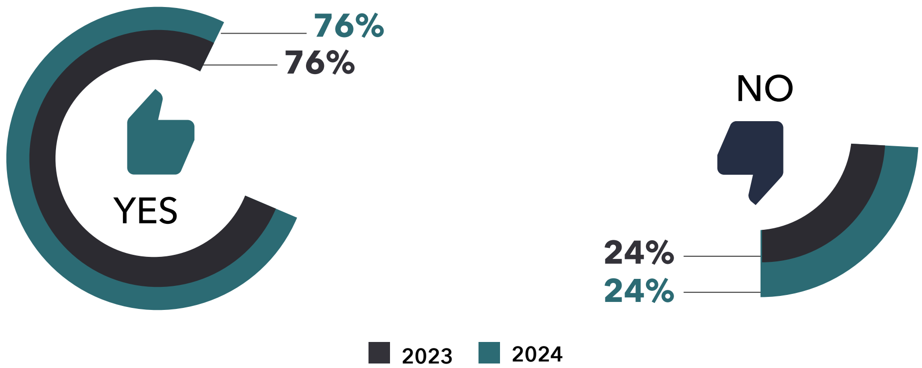
By examining where multichannel journeys begin and end, it's possible to get a sense for which channels are providing the most efficient path to resolution, and which are lagging. For instance, in the case of Voice-Based channels, far more journeys tend to end on this channel than begin there, meaning people ultimately end up in a Voice-Based channel to get a final resolution. Conversely, far more journeys start in Self-Help channels than end there, meaning consumers tend to move away from Self-Help channels to achieve a resolution.

In which channel did your multichannel engagement begin/end?



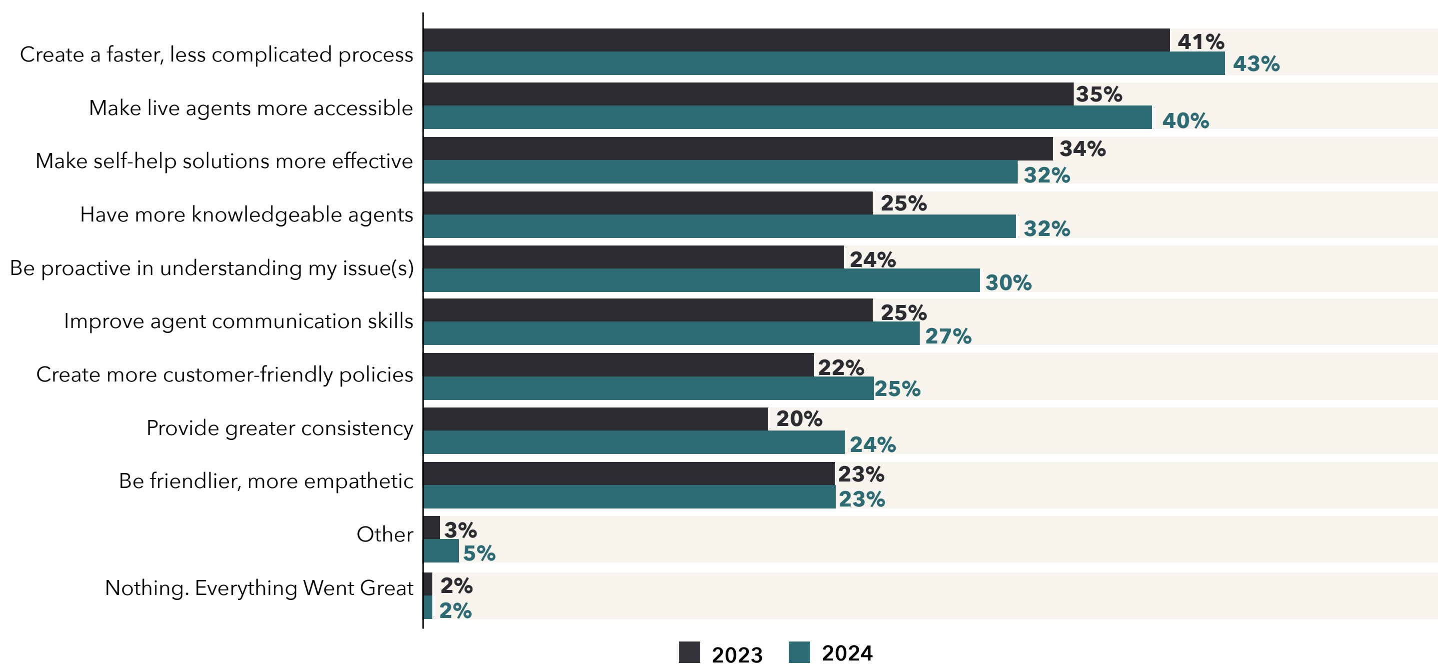
The consumer's impression of channel consistency remained steady year-over-year, with 76% of survey respondents indicating they had a consistent customer care experience across channels. Though there were no declines in this area, businesses should be striving to make gains in this area. While consistency is not what's most important among consumers, it typically ranks high, and has now gained in importance two years running (page 72).

Was your interaction with customer care consistent across all channels?



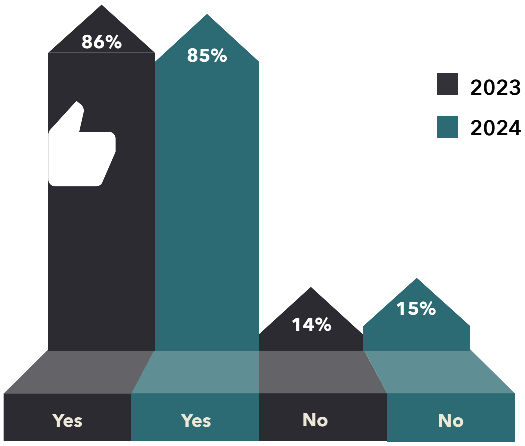
In a result that seems to suggests consumer expectations are on the rise for the multichannel experience, only one result seemed to make strides forward based on a falling year-over-year result: "Make Self-Help Solutions More Effective." All other markers of improvement were either up or flat year-over-year. This is good news because channel effectiveness is one of the top barriers of adoption. If a channel can't ultimately resolve an issue, all other aspects of that experience (speed, ease, etc.) are moot. Consumers simply won't use channels that can't resolve their issues, which is why many multichannel journeys take place to begin with.

What could the customer care team you interacted with have done differently to improve your overall multichannel experience? (Select all that apply.)



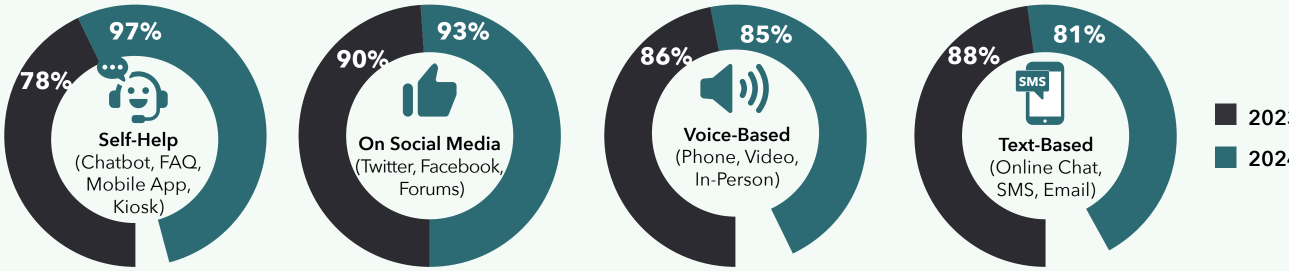
According to survey respondents, the resolution rate for the multichannel journey hangs around the mid-80s mark, as was the case in 2023. While this resolution rate likely outperforms all individual channels (with exception of perhaps Phone), it should be noted that the very cause of a multichannel is often the very pursuit of a resolution. In other words, consumers who take the time to move from channel to channel are usually pretty determined to see their issue through to a resolution. This fact alone might artificially inflate the resolution rate of the multichannel approach.

Was your issue ultimately resolved?

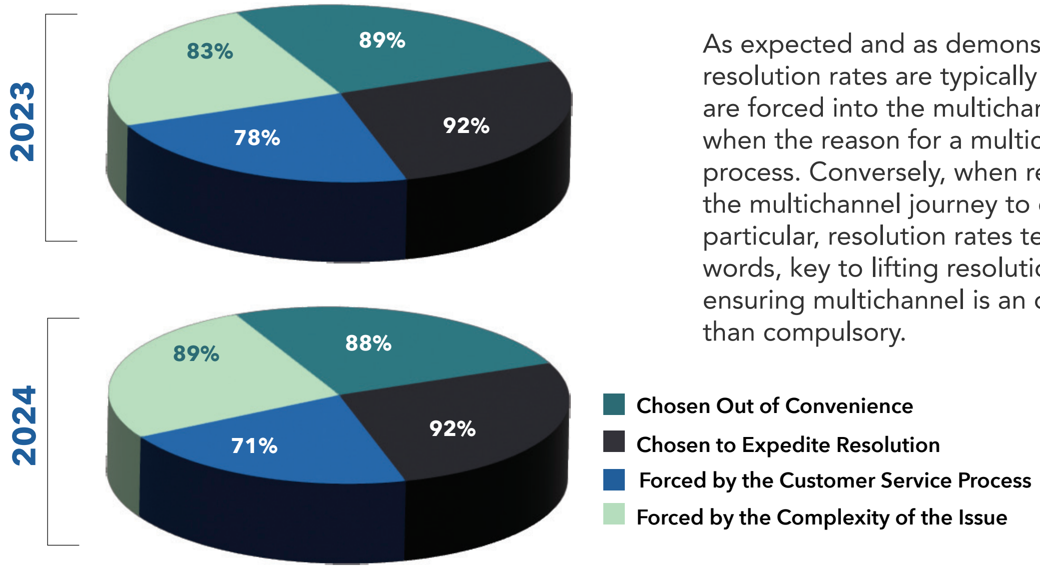


When cross-referencing the resolution rate against the specific end points of a multichannel journey, an interesting phenomenon arises. One might expect channels like Phone and Online Chat to outperform since these channels inherently have high resolution rates. Instead, rates are lower than those that are traditionally resolution-challenged. What is likely happening is the most difficult issues are being escalated to Voice- and Text-Based solutions where they fail to resolve only because they are the most complicated and challenging issues and agent quality is unable to overcome the complexities of the issues.

Resolution Rate % Based on the End Point of Multichannel Engagement



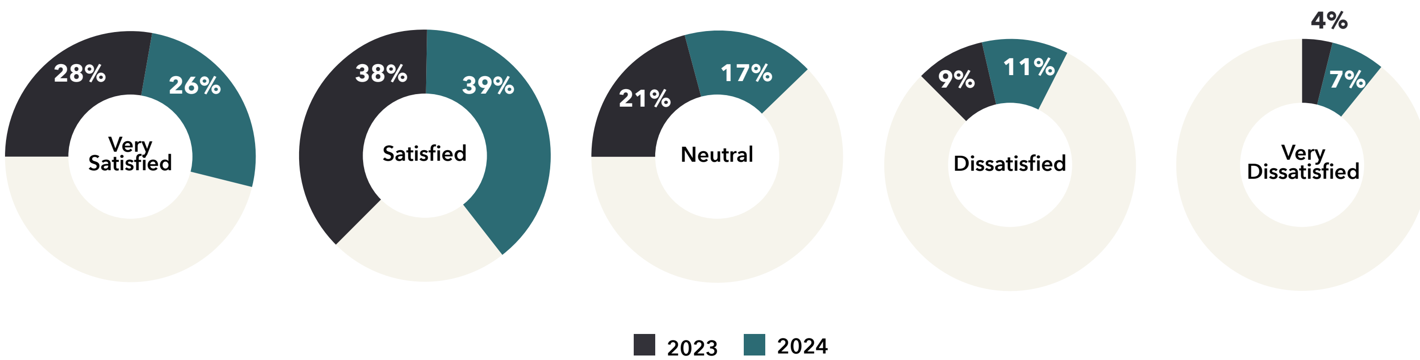
Resolution Rate % By Reason For Taking a Multichannel Approach



As expected and as demonstrated in the past, resolution rates are typically lower when respondents are forced into the multichannel journey, particularly when the reason for a multichannel journey is the process. Conversely, when respondents self-selected the multichannel journey to expedite a resolution in particular, resolution rates tend to be higher. In other words, key to lifting resolution rates higher might be ensuring multichannel is an option for consumers rather than compulsory.

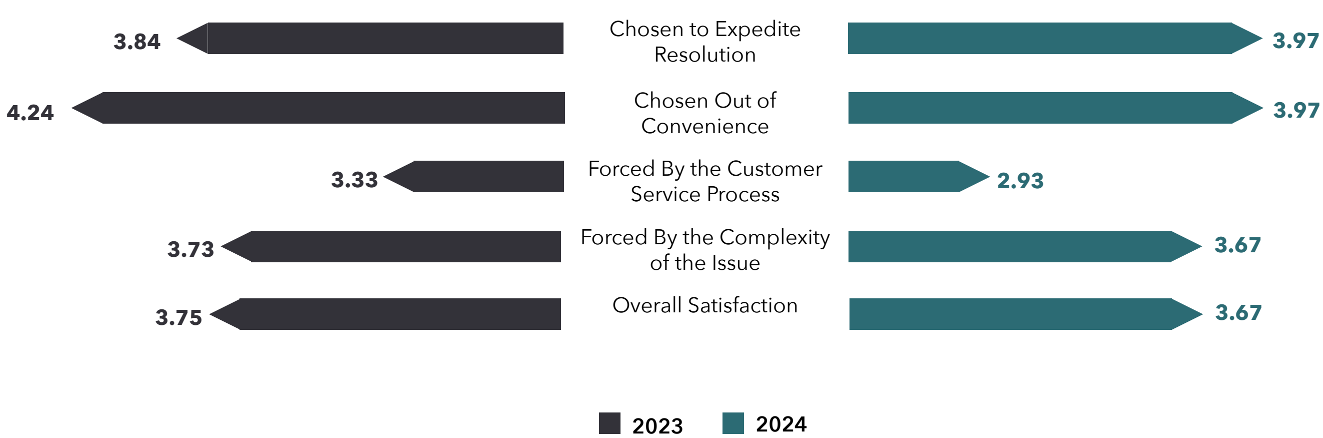
Dissatisfaction with the multichannel journey grew year-over-year, supporting results on page 20 that suggest consumer expectations are rapidly evolving. Although the year-over-year changes were modest, they are consistent and decisive in their direction. This result further reinforces the notion that brands should carefully review the multichannel experience offered by their customer care process, especially if those journeys are sometimes unavoidable. Better cross-channel coordination, consistency, and resolution parity are all key in creating a better multichannel experience.

Overall, how satisfied were you with the multichannel experience?



Like resolution rates, there is a relationship between the reason for a multichannel journey and the resulting satisfaction of the experience. In 2024, survey respondents who opted for a multichannel journey expressed satisfaction levels that were significantly higher than those who were forced into the journey. This further supports the notation that brands can likely achieve higher CSAT scores by ensuring multichannel journeys are a choice rather than a forced experience.

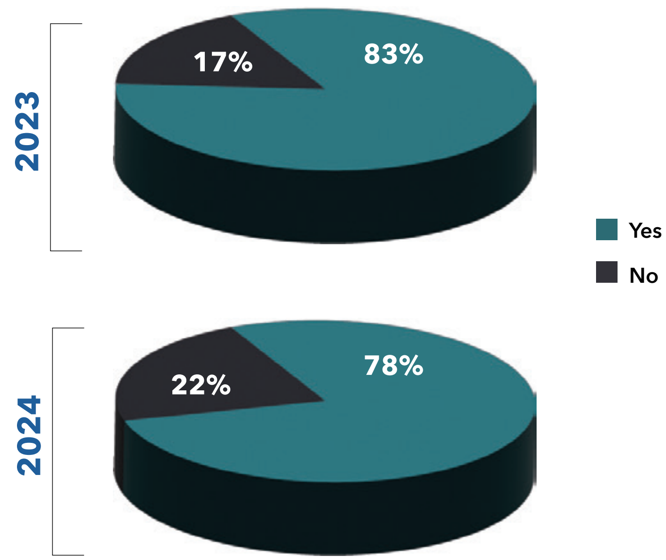
Average Level of Satisfaction (on a 5-Point Scale)
By Reason For Taking a Multichannel Approach



THE HAPPY & UNHAPPY **CONSUMER**

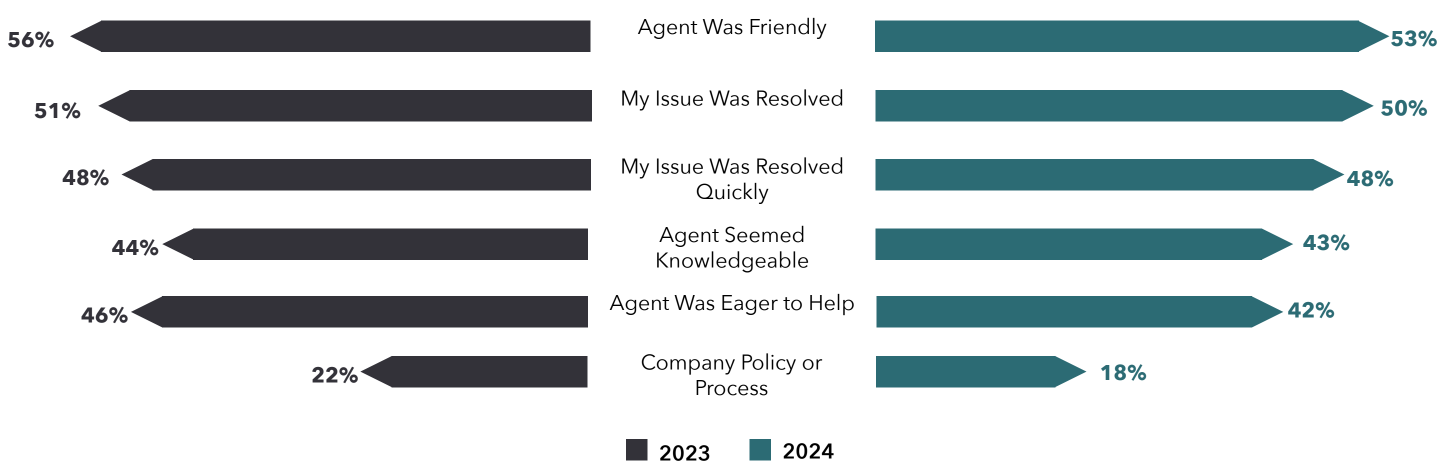
Seemingly, the percentage of consumers who had a positive customer care engagement in the prior 12 months fell year-over-year. And while there is no pinpointing the cause of this slight shift, it should be noted that this question wasn't presented to consumers who were screened for having an interaction in the 12 months prior. So, it could be the case that fewer consumers had an interaction at all, which would naturally lower these results. That said, it could be an emerging trend worth tracking.

Within the past 12 months, have you had a positive experience when interacting with a brand's customer care department?



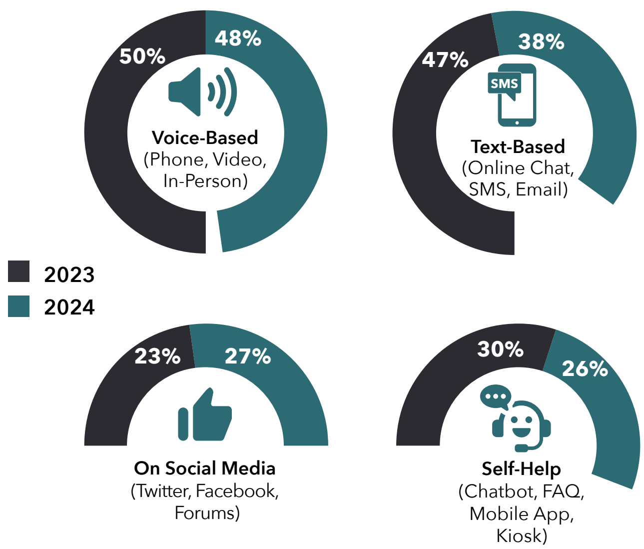
Not only did fewer consumers indicate they had a positive experience in the 12 months prior, the specific cause(s) of that positive experience also saw slight declines almost across the board. The steepest drop came for "Agent Was Eager to Help," declining four points year-over-year. Like the above results, the results below are necessarily indicative of lack of performance and fall within the margin of error for the surveying that was conducted. Nonetheless, it's instructive data in understanding which type of elements lead consumers to having the perception of a positive experience.

What made the experience positive? (Select all that apply.)



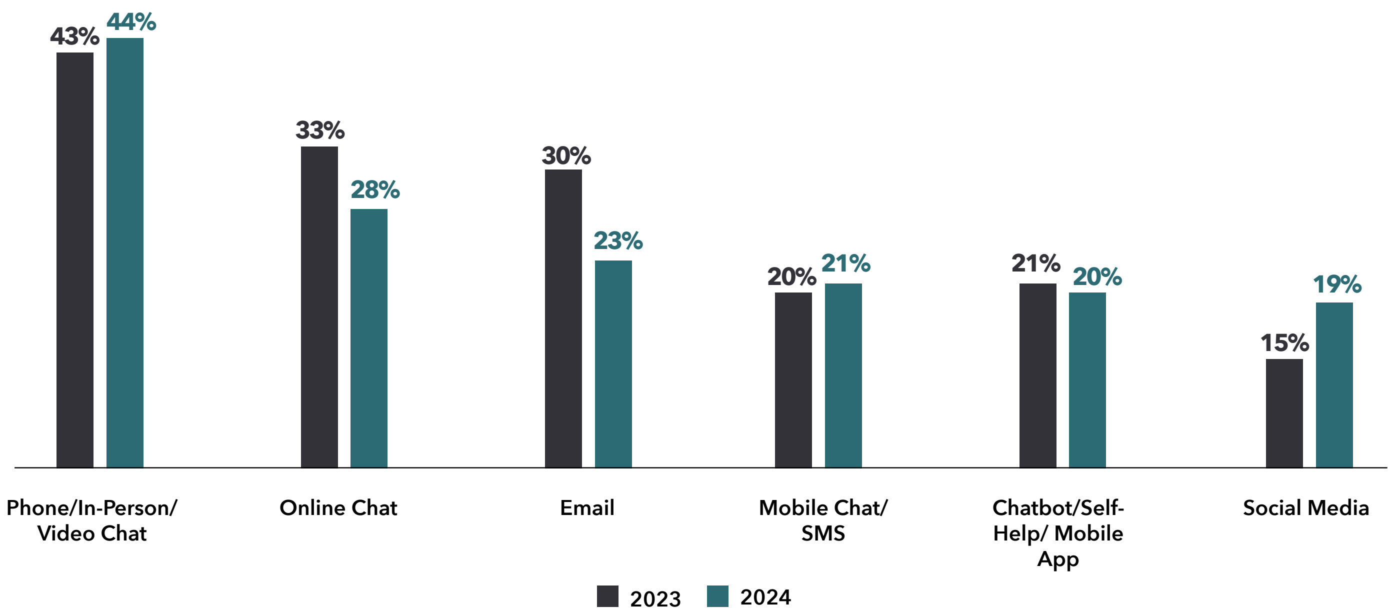
Like other results in the Happy Consumer section, there were year-over-year declines in which channels the positive experiences occurred, with the exception of Social Media, which increased four points year-over-year. The bulk of positive experiences continue to occur in Voice-Based channels, which makes sense, given the channel's strengths in terms of effectiveness and the ability of live support to provide unrivaled levels of empathy and personalization.

Within which contact channel(s) did the positive experience occur?



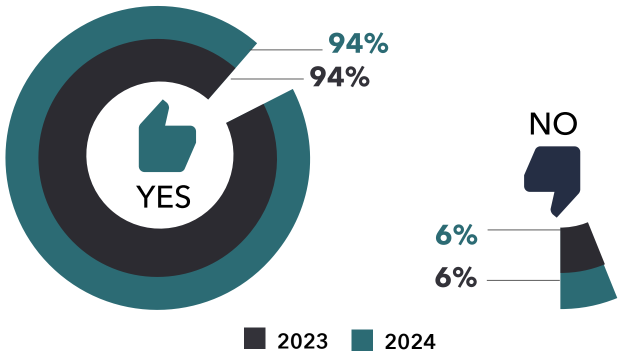
When looking at specific solutions used by consumers when they experienced a positive engagement, Online Chat and Email were two solutions that took the biggest tumbles, falling seven and five points, respectively. It's worth stressing that these results are not necessarily reflective of overall use. In that regard, Email experienced year-over-year gains in use (page 12), though Online Chat underwent a small year-over-year decline in use. Instead, these results reflect which solutions are creating positive experiences for consumers among a particular survey cohort.

Which specific method(s) of contact were you using when the positive experience occurred? (Select all that apply.)



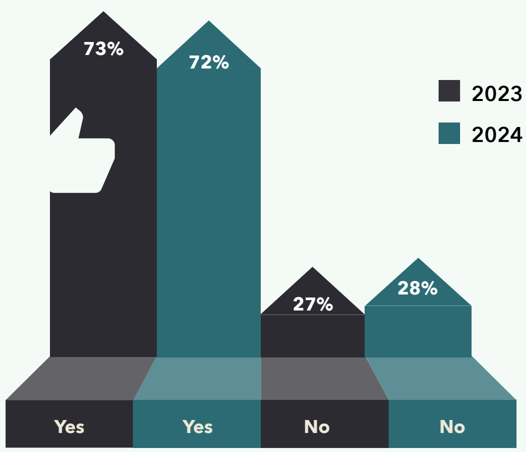
Accepting the customer care experience was positive, was your issue also resolved to your satisfaction?

Resolution rates among consumers who had a positive experience were quite high, as could be expected. Comparatively, consumers who had a negative experience indicated a satisfactory resolution only 59% of the time (page 32). Presumably, such experiences were positive (or negative), largely based on the outcome of the interaction, highlighting the importance of providing a satisfactory resolution.



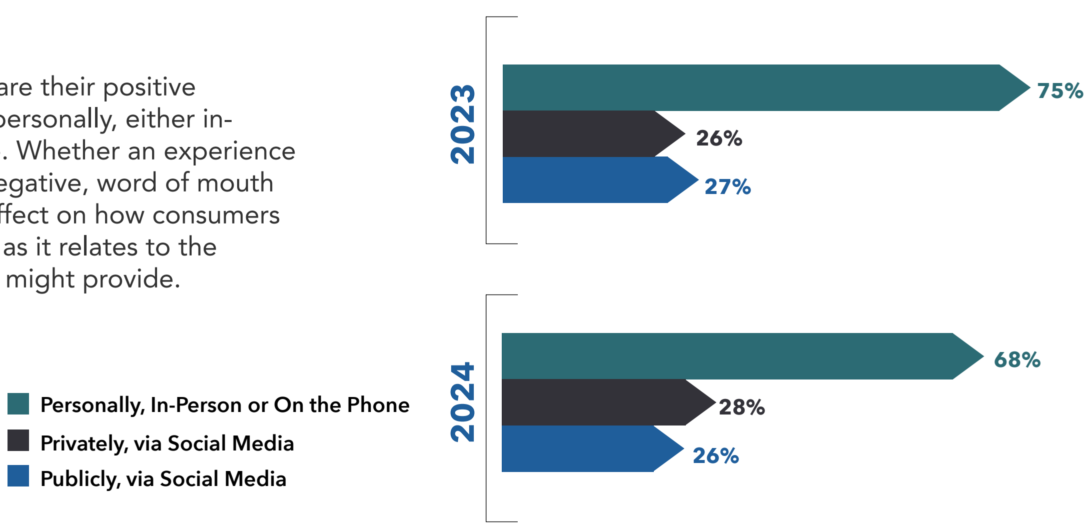
Did you share this positive experience with friends, family and/or strangers?

The likelihood of a consumer sharing a positive experience remained high year-over-year, with nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents indicating they have shared their experience with friends, family, and/or strangers. Comparatively, 78% of survey respondents shared their experience when it was negative (page 33).



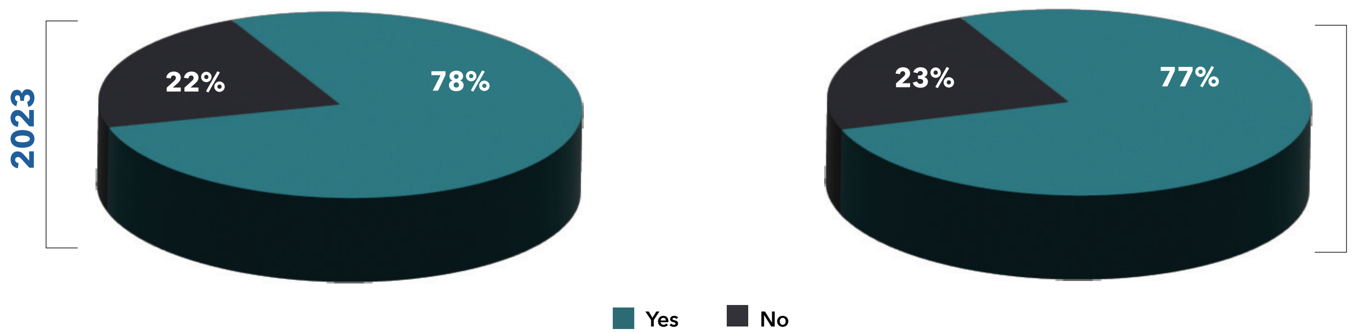
If yes, how did you share the experience? (Check all that apply.)

Among those who did share their positive experience, most did so personally, either in-person or over the phone. Whether an experience is ultimately positive or negative, word of mouth can have a tremendous effect on how consumers view a brand, particularly as it relates to the quality of care that brand might provide.

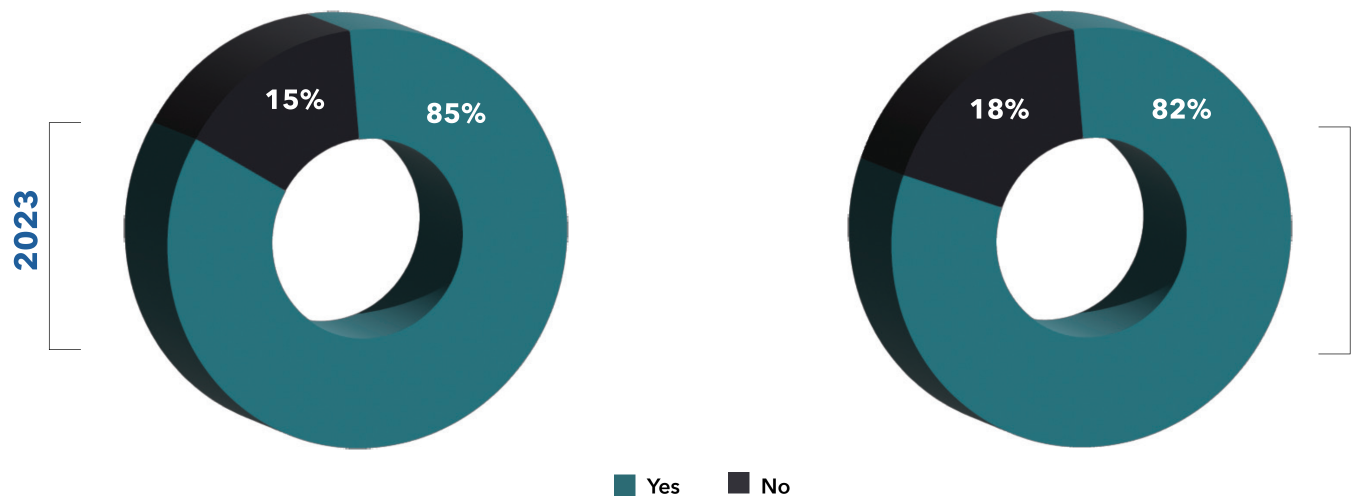


Most consumers who experienced a positive customer care experience (77%) were given the opportunity to express their satisfaction through some form of feedback following their experience, and the overwhelming majority (82%) chose to do so. Comparatively, only 57% of consumers who had a negative experience were provided the same feedback opportunity, and 83% chose to provide that feedback (page 34). These results suggest significant biases continue to exist in when and how companies collect feedback from consumers. To truly understand real-world pain points, companies should, if anything, be targeting those consumers who have had a negative experience, as opposed to those who had a positive experience.

Were you given the opportunity to express your satisfaction via a survey or other feedback form?

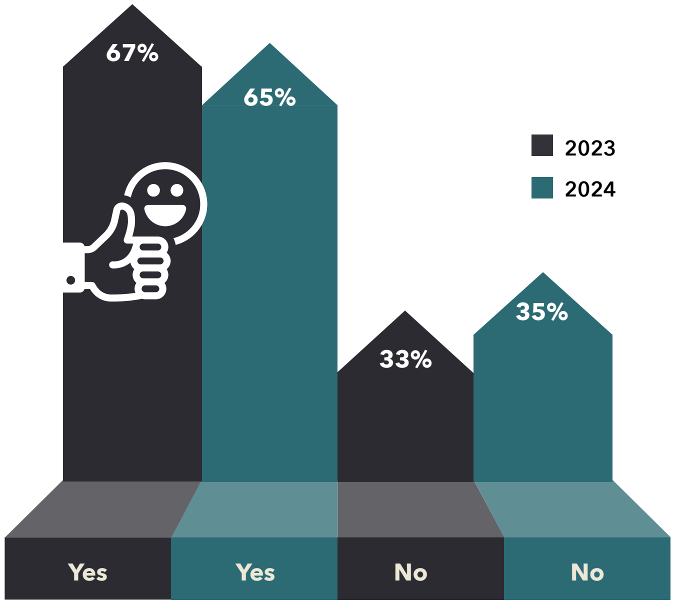


If so, did you take advantage of the opportunity to express your pleasure?



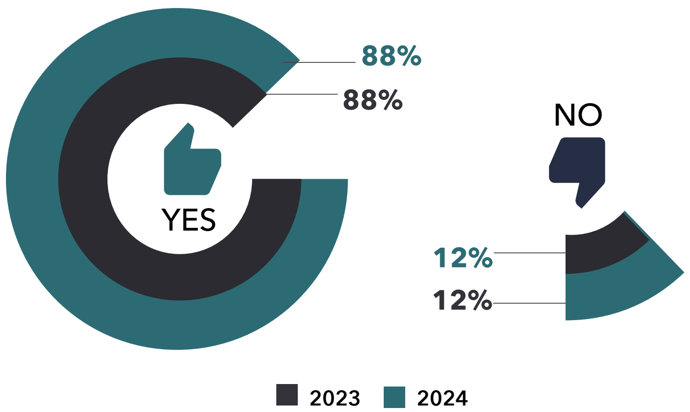
Like results on the previous page that demonstrated a strong bias toward positive experiences in collecting feedback from consumers, a similar bias exists when it comes to proactive follow-ups. While 65% of those who had a positive experience received some form of follow-up, only 38% of those experiencing a negative interaction received a similar proactive follow-up (page 35). Given the impact on things like future purchase intent (i.e., brand loyalty), brands should consider pointing their proactive follow-up resources toward those who had a less than positive experience.

Following the positive experience, did the brand proactively contact you to ensure your issue was resolved and offer further assistance if needed?



Positive customer care experiences strongly correlate with positively impacted future purchase decisions. In fact, for the second year in a row, 88% of survey respondents indicated that the positive experience would positively impact their future purchase decisions. This stresses the importance of creating exceptional experiences, creating a feedback loop of the opportunity for more great experiences.

Will this positive experience positively impact your future purchase decisions?

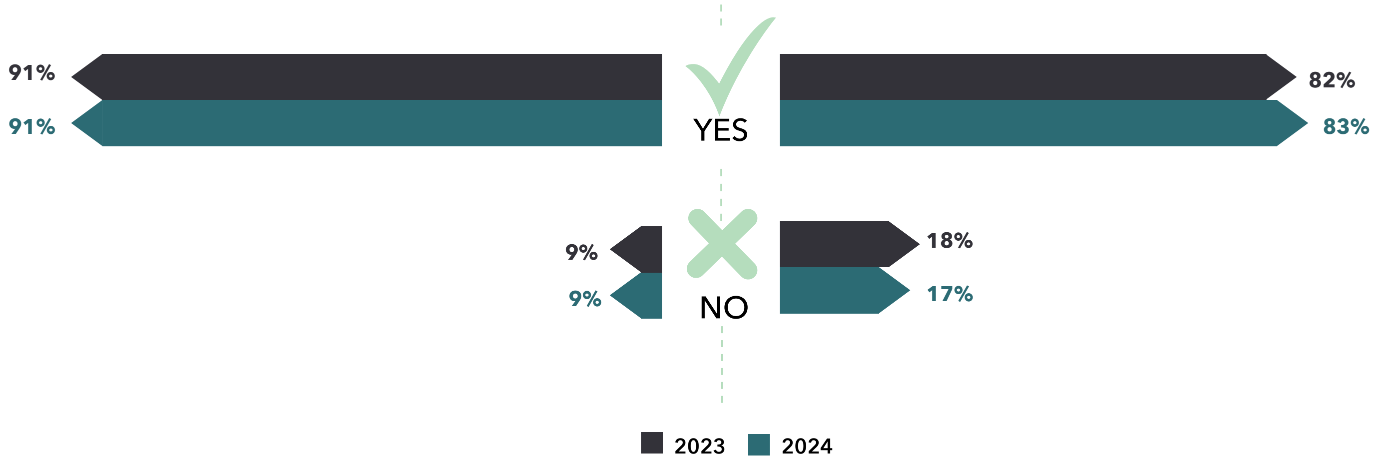


While most consumers who had a positive customer care experience will have their future purchases decisions positively impacted regardless of their proactive follow-up status, a cross-reference of results shows that a proactive follow-up does lead to a moderate bump (eight points) in the positive impact of the experience.

Proactive follow-ups not only lead to an improved loyalty outlook, but create additional opportunities for positive brand engagements, as well as a chance to upsell/cross-sell.

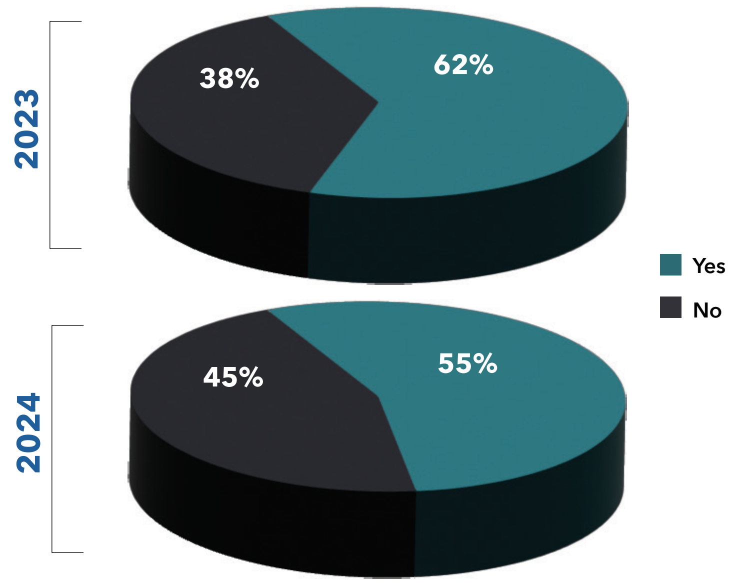
Percentage of consumers who were proactively contacted and said the overall experience will have a positive impact on their future purchase decisions.

Percentage of consumers who were not proactively contacted and said the overall experience will have a positive impact on their future purchase decisions.



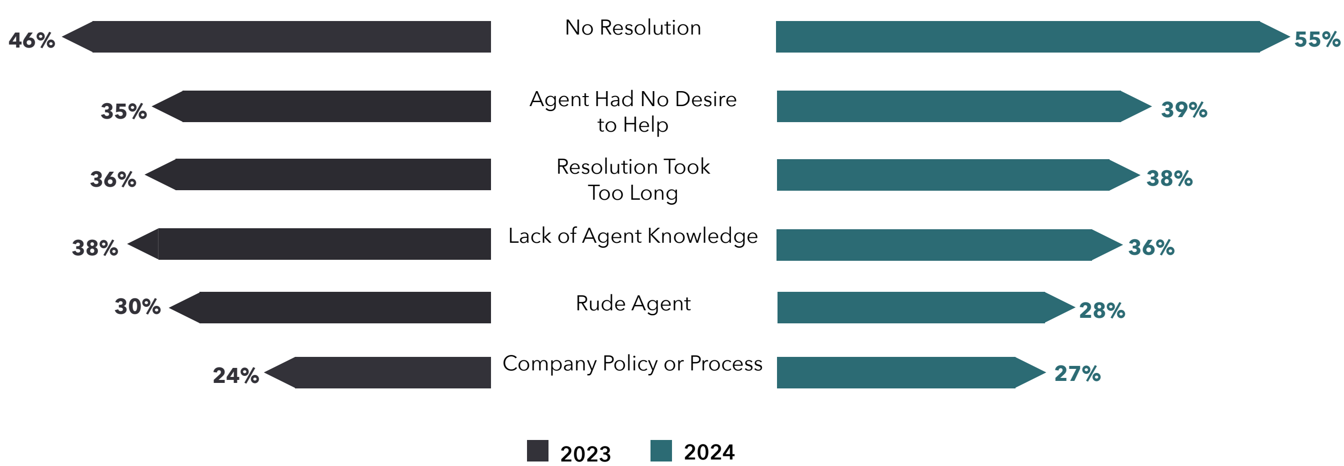
Slightly more than half of survey respondents (55%) indicated they had a negative customer care experience within the previous 12 months, down seven points from the prior year. This year-over-year drop also matches a drop in positive experiences (page 24), which could be further indication of a drop in overall customer care engagements, which could be the case as more self-help solutions come online.

Within the past 12 months, have you had a negative experience when interacting with a brand's customer care department?



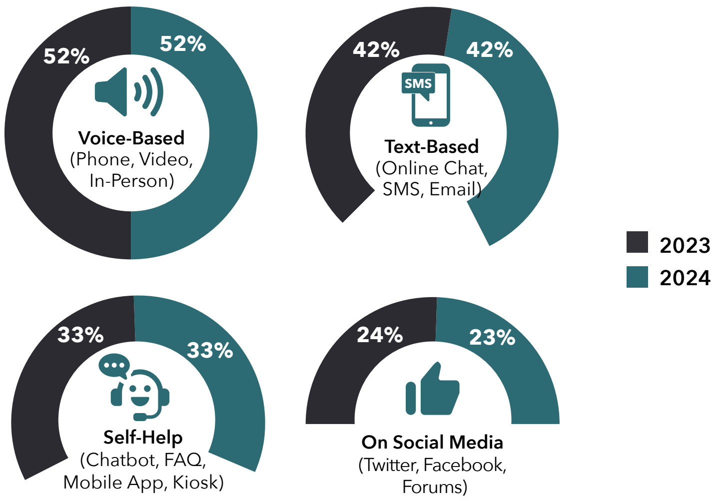
The drivers of negative customer care experiences remained mostly consistent year-over-year, with lack of resolution remaining the top cause. Agent-related issues (lacking when it comes to a desire to help and knowledge, specifically) also figured prominently for the second year on a row. Agent-related issues are likely to become more prominent in negative customer care experiences not because of any issues related to agent quality, but because as more automated/self-help solutions come online, more complex issues will increasingly be left to live agents to handle.

What made the experience negative? (Select all that apply.)



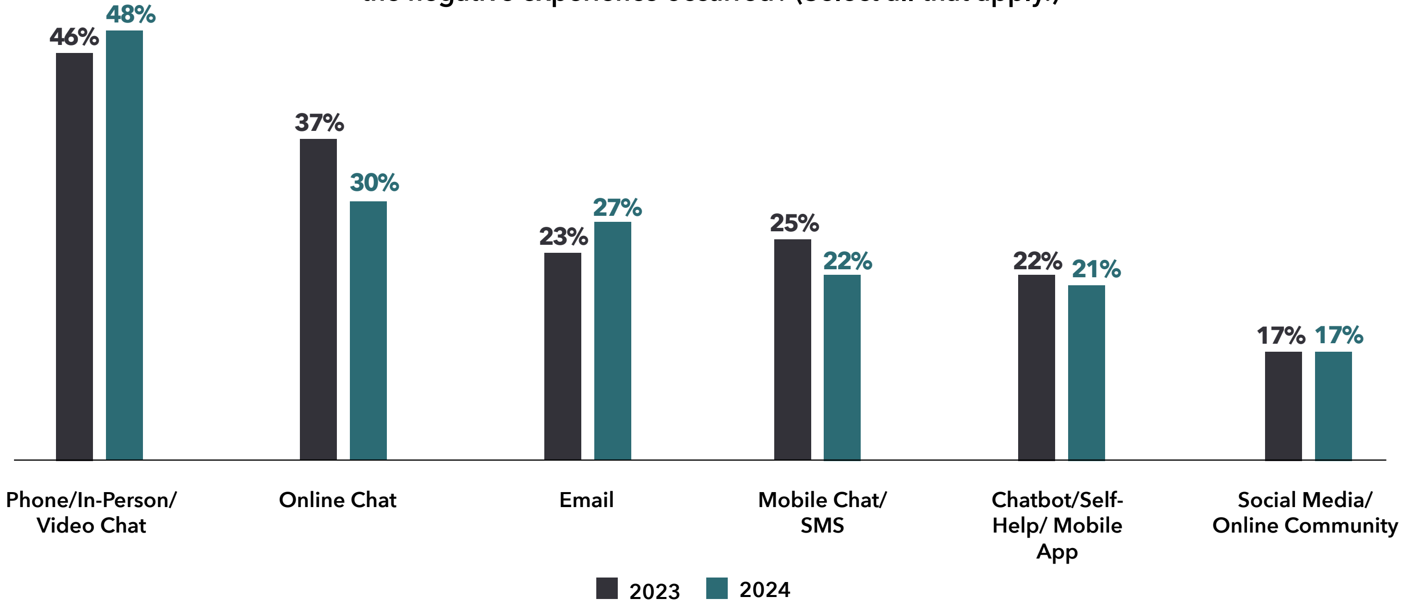
Less an indication of channel quality than channel use, a slight majority of survey respondents (52%) indicated their negative experience happened in a Voice-Based channel. Based on overall channel use, it's safe to say most of these negative experiences occurred over the phone, as further supported by results below. It could also be the case the Voice-Based channels handle a disproportionate number of complex issues, as more and more transactional (i.e., simple) interactions are automated.

Within which contact channel(s) did the negative experience occur? (Select all that apply.)



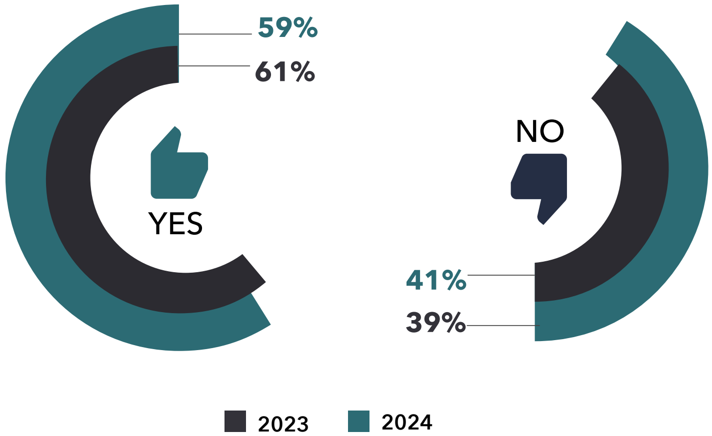
The mix of specific solutions where negative experiences have occurred remained consistent year-over-year, with most taking place within primarily three solutions: Phone, Online Chat, and Email. Like the results above, this is not necessarily a reflection on the quality of these solutions, but an indication of their overall use among consumers with Phone, Online/Video Chat, and Email being the three most used solutions among all consumers (page 12).

Which specific method(s) of contact were you using when the negative experience occurred? (Select all that apply.)



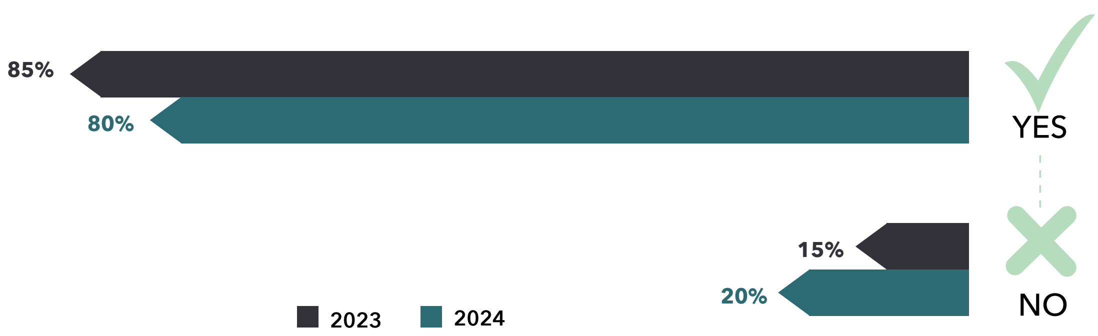
Even though the customer service experience was negative, was your issue eventually resolved to your satisfaction?

Even with an overall negative experience, more than half (59%) of survey respondents indicated their issue was eventually resolved to their satisfaction. This result strongly suggests simply resolving an issue is not enough to maintain happy, loyal customers. The entire experience needs to be positive from the start, while also resulting in a satisfactory resolution. Simply resolving the issue is not enough for today's consumer.

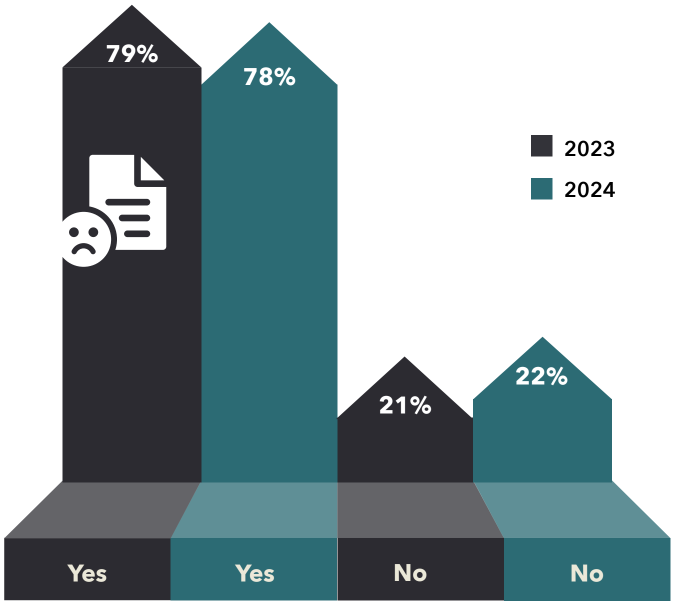


Taking the results above one step further, when a cross-reference was made between consumers who eventually had their issue resolved satisfactorily with the impact on future purchase decisions, it was discovered that eventually achieving a satisfactory response greatly diminished the long-term negative impact. Among all consumers experiencing a negative engagement, 88% indicated a negative impact on future purchase decisions compared to 80% of those who eventually achieved a satisfactory resolution. This result stresses the point that even if the initial interaction is less than ideal, there is still an opportunity to recover and lessen the long-term impact on future purchase decisions.

Percentage of Consumers Who Had Their Issue Resolved to Their Satisfaction but Still Indicated a Negative Impact on Future Purchase Decisions.

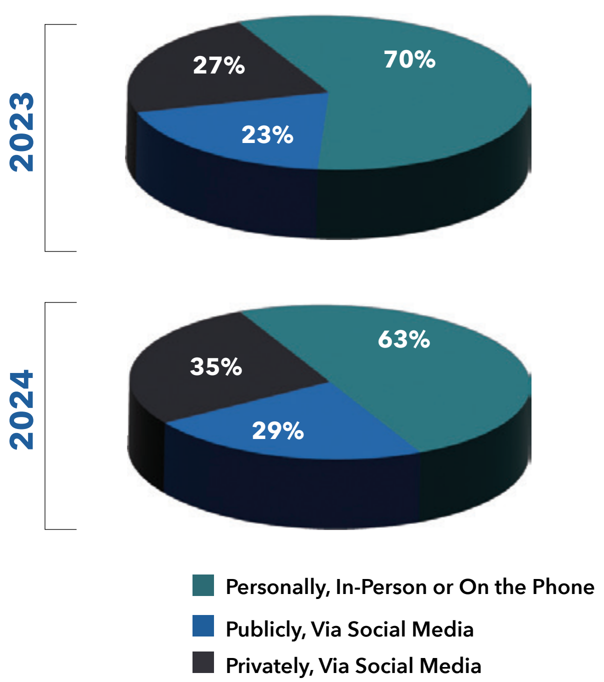


Did you share this negative experience with friends, family and/or strangers?



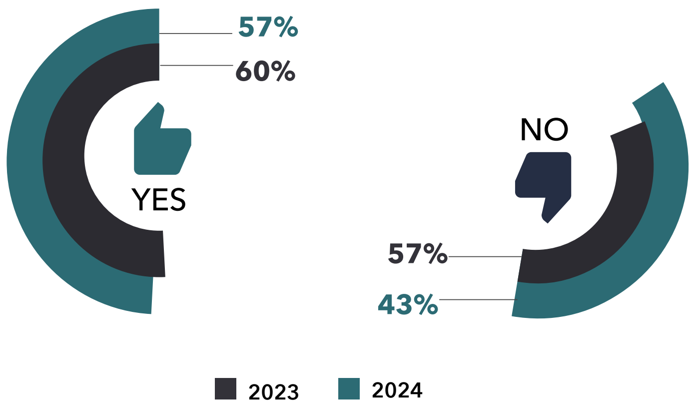
The percentage of consumers who share their negative customer care experiences (78%) was consistent year-over-year and remained slightly higher than those who share their positive experiences (72% in 2024, page 26). Although word of mouth can impact different brands and verticals in different ways, the reverberation of a single negative experience is apparent in how frequently consumers are willing and able to share those experiences.

If yes, how did you share the experience? (Check all that apply.)



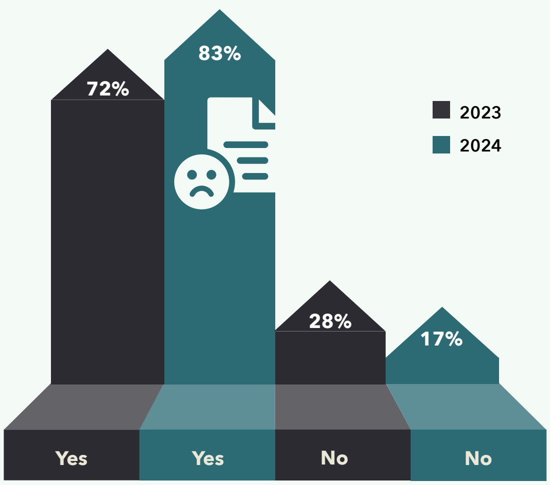
In terms of sharing their negative experiences, consumers most often share with friends and family directly, outside of social media. But year-over-year, this method of sharing has lost ground to sharing that occurs over social media, both publicly and privately. Brands should take note of this change and watch to see if a trend is emerging. Negative (and positive) views on social media can have a compounding effect, and brands should consider having a social media engagement policy in place if they don't already.

Were you given the opportunity to express your dissatisfaction via a survey or other feedback form?



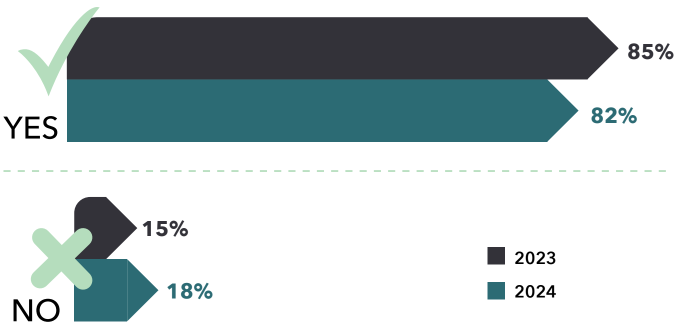
Although there was a slight dip year-over-year, most consumers who had a negative customer care experience (57%) continued to be provided with a means to offer feedback. And while this number could (and probably should) be higher, it is worth noting it is far less likely for such a feedback opportunity to be provided to consumers having a negative experience versus a positive one. Among consumers having a positive experience, 77% were provided with a feedback opportunity (page 27).

If so, did you take advantage of the opportunity to express your displeasure?



When provided with an opportunity to express their opinions on a negative experience, most consumers will do so. This is true regardless of whether the experience was positive or negative. In fact, consumers experiencing a negative interaction are just as likely to provide such feedback as those having a positive experience, and which 82% indicated they provided such feedback (page 27).

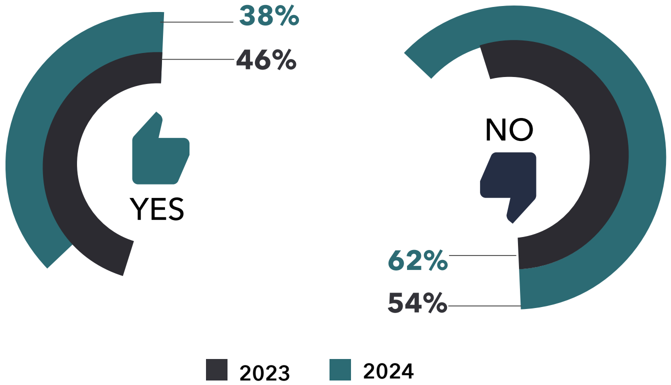
Will this negative experience negatively impact your future purchase decisions?



Negative experiences continue to significantly impact future purchase decisions, though they have slightly less impact on future purchase decisions than positive experiences, which lead to positive future purchase intent 88% of the time (page 29). Negative experiences have an impact not just on the individual who had an issue, but on friends and family who hear about the negative experience, and sometimes before a resolution is even achieved.

This year's results show only 38% of unhappy consumers received a proactive follow-up while having a negative experience. Comparatively, 65% of those who had a positive experience received a proactive follow-up (page 28). Although proactive follow-ups traditionally have a positive impact on future outcomes, recent results suggest something is amiss in how future purchase decisions are impacted, as shown below. If brands choose to proactively follow up after a negative experience, they will need to be careful in how they strategize their approach to get the best long-term outcome.

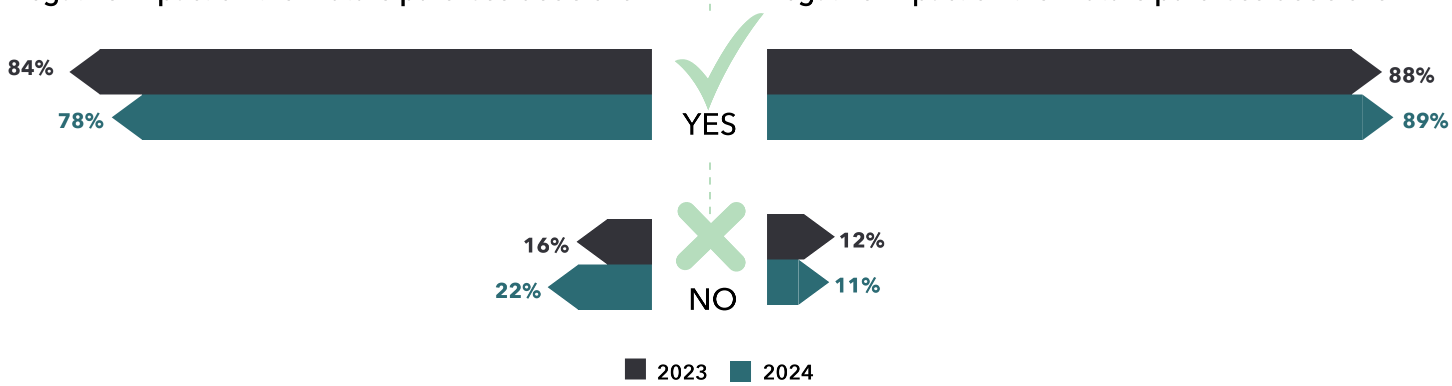
Following the negative experience, did the brand proactively contact you to try to remedy or apologize for the situation?



Interestingly, for the second year in a row, proactive follow-ups have had a counterintuitive effect on future purchase decisions, with those who receive a proactive follow-up being more likely to have their future purchase intent negatively impacted. This phenomenon could be the result of the approach taken in the follow-up, with not enough emphasis on repairing the customer relationship.

Percentage of consumers who <u>were not proactively contacted</u> and said the overall experience will have a negative impact on their future purchase decisions.

Percentage of consumers who <u>were proactively contacted</u> and said the overall experience will have a negative impact on their future purchase decisions.



COMPARING POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Consumer Experiences — Comparing Happy & Unhappy Consumers

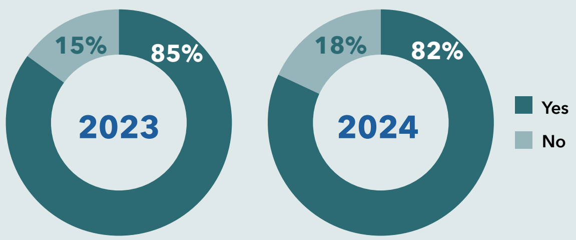
Year-over-year results comparing consumers who had a positive experience with those who had a negative experience yield a few interesting insights. First, it's clear that customers who have a positive experience are more likely to be provided the opportunity to offer feedback. Furthermore, proactive follow-ups seem to reinforce positive outcomes while also reinforcing negative outcomes. Because of this, brands should consider their approach to proactively following up with customers who had a negative experience. Such follow-ups should be aimed at ultimately resolving the issue, while also attempting to restore loyalty.

HAD A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

Were you given the opportunity to express your satisfaction via a survey or other feedback form?

2023 – YES	2024 – YES
78%	77%
2023 – NO	**2024 – NO**
22%	23%

If so, did you take advantage of the opportunity to express your pleasure?



Will this positive experience positively impact your future purchase decisions?

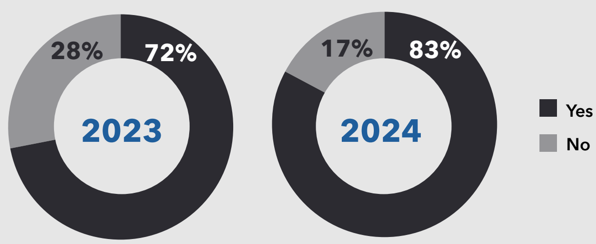
	2023	2024
YES	88%	88%
NO	12%	12%

HAD A NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE

Were you given the opportunity to express your dissatisfaction via a survey or other feedback form?

2023 – YES	2024 – YES
60%	57%
2023 – NO	**2024 – NO**
40%	43%

If so, did you take advantage of the opportunity to express your displeasure?



Will this negative experience negatively impact your future purchase decisions?

	2023	2024
YES	85%	82%
NO	15%	18%

Cross-comparison of consumers who indicated their positive/negative experience will have a positive/negative impact on future purchase decisions based on receiving a proactive follow-up:

	POSITIVE EXPERIENCE LEADING TO A POSITIVE IMPACT (2023)	POSITIVE EXPERIENCE LEADING TO A POSITIVE IMPACT (2024)	NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE LEADING TO A NEGATIVE IMPACT (2023)	NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE LEADING TO A NEGATIVE IMPACT (2024)
Among those who receive a follow-up	91%	91%	88%	89%
Among those who did not receive a follow-up	82%	83%	84%	78%

2023 2024

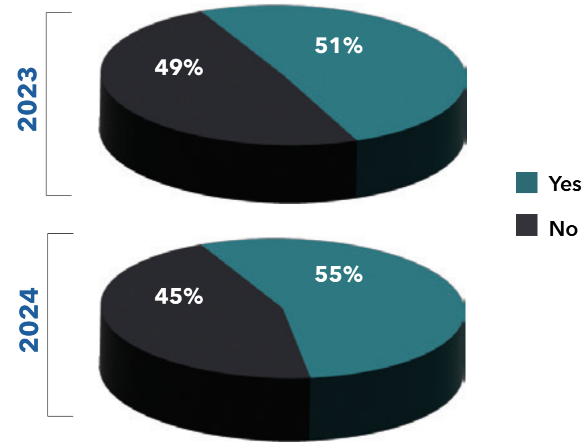
SELF-HELP SOLUTIONS

UNASSISTED USE AND REASON FOR USE

Consumer Experiences — Self-Help Solutions

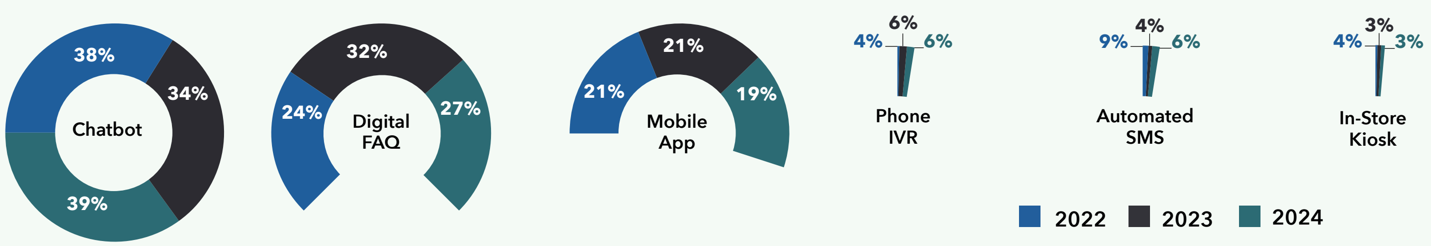
Have you used a self-help or unassisted tool (like a chatbot or an online FAQ) to find an answer, make a purchase, or resolve a customer care issue within the past 12 months?

Use of self-help solutions grew modestly year-over-year, with 55% of survey respondents indicating they had used such a solution in the past 12 months (a four-point increase over 2023 results). Undoubtedly, this number will only grow in the coming months and years. Brands should be careful about how well they nurture and support these investments, which means constant monitoring of the performance of and experience provided by self-help solutions.

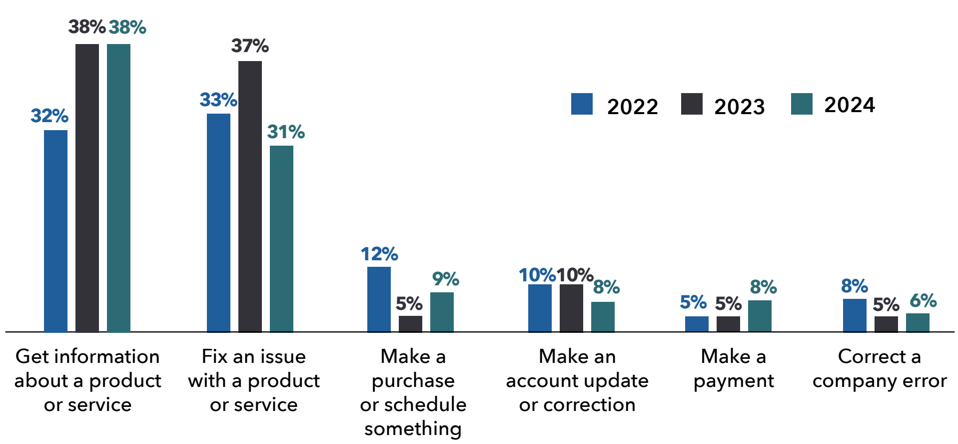


Based on the solution results below and the use results above, it's safe to say that most of the growth in self-help solutions over the past 12 months has occurred among two specific solutions: Chatbots and Automated SMS. There was also a noticeable drop-off in the use of Digital FAQs, possibly indicating higher levels of functionality and effectiveness in solutions like chatbots.

Thinking about your most recent attempt to answer a question, make a purchase, or resolve an issue using such tools, which self-help or unassisted tool did you use?

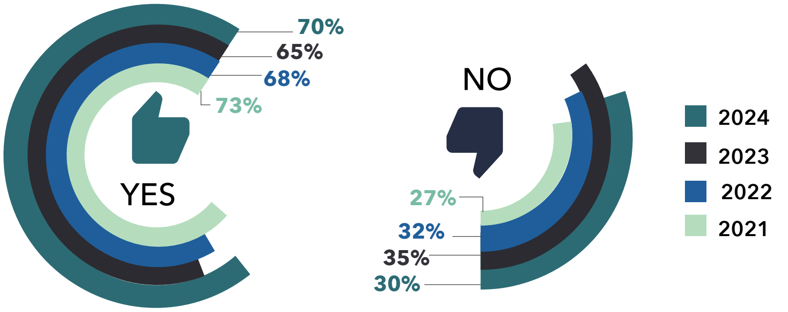


What were you trying to accomplish with the self-help or unassisted tool in your most recent engagement?



The purpose for which consumers use self-help remained fairly consistent year-over-year, with "Getting Information" and "Fixing an Issue" remaining way out in front as the top two use cases. Although "Fixing the Issue" is a common use, it's still the case that many complex issues still can't be resolved using a self-help solution, as illustrated in the result on the following page. Because of this, brands should invest the resources to understand where the gaps are when it comes to resolving specific issues via self-help, then work to close those gaps.

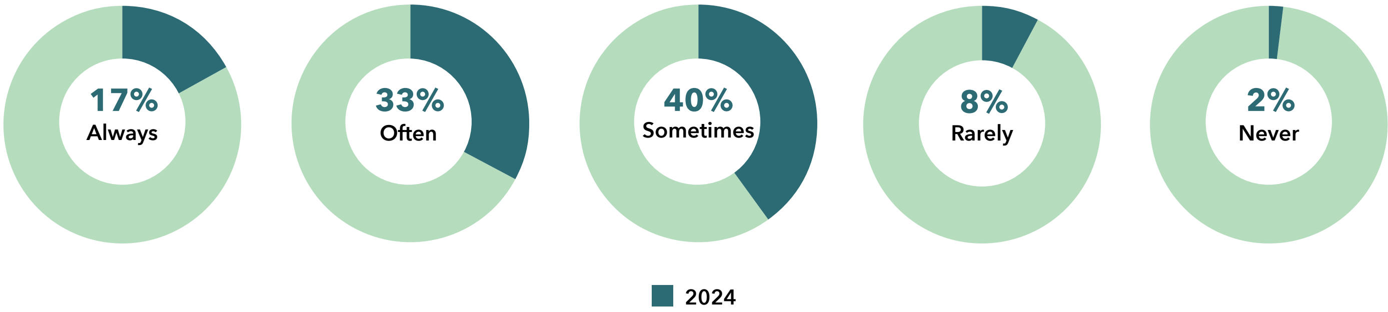
Were you able to complete your transaction or find the information you were looking for using the self-help or unassisted tool?



The resolution rate of self-help solutions ticked up year-over-year, increasing five points to 70%. Although an improvement, the resolution rate of self-help solutions lags more traditional channels like Phone and Email and is a full 15 points behind that of a multichannel approach, which offers a resolution rate of 85% based on this year's results (page 21). This is an indication that brands might need to do a better job of guiding customers to the best channel based on their specific issue, while also analyzing their existing self-help tools for gaps in effective issue resolution.

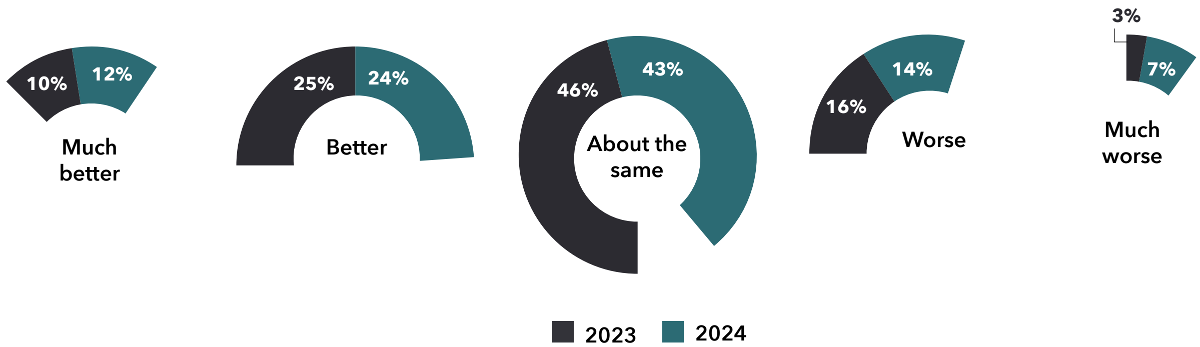
In an entirely new question aimed at understanding the issue of self-help abandonment, half of respondents indicated they abandon self-help solutions "Always" (17%) or "Often" (33%) because they either faced too much difficulty or were unable to resolve their issue. This, plus the fact that another 40% of consumers indicate they "Sometimes" abandon self-help solutions should be cause for concern, as the inability for self-help solutions to resolve an issue is a top cause of difficulty (page 41).

How often do you abandon a self-help solution because it's either too difficult to use, or it's unable to help you resolve your issue?



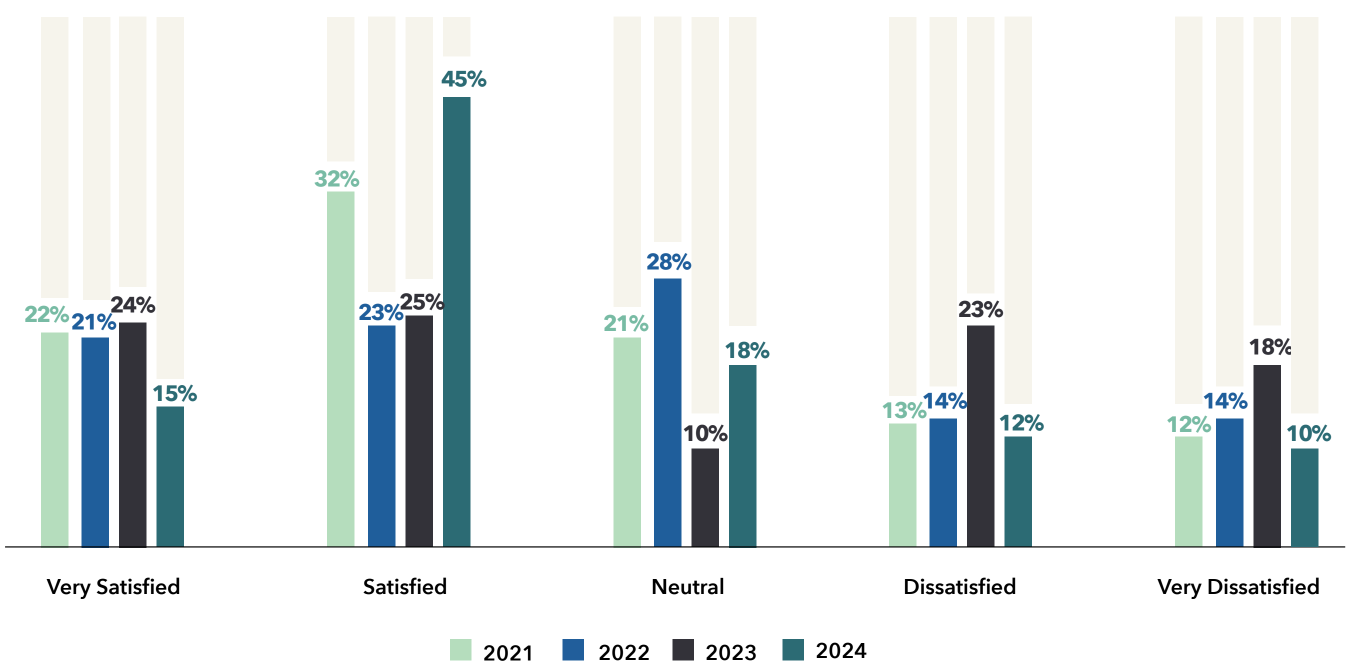
For all intents and purposes, consumers indicated that the quality of self-help solutions was essentially flat year-over-year. When consumers think about the sorts of things that improve the self-help experience, top of mind is ease, effectiveness, and ability to easily reach a live agent (page 43). To truly move the needle on self-help quality, brands will need to make improvements in these key areas.

Have you noticed whether or not self-help solutions have gotten better or worse in recent years?



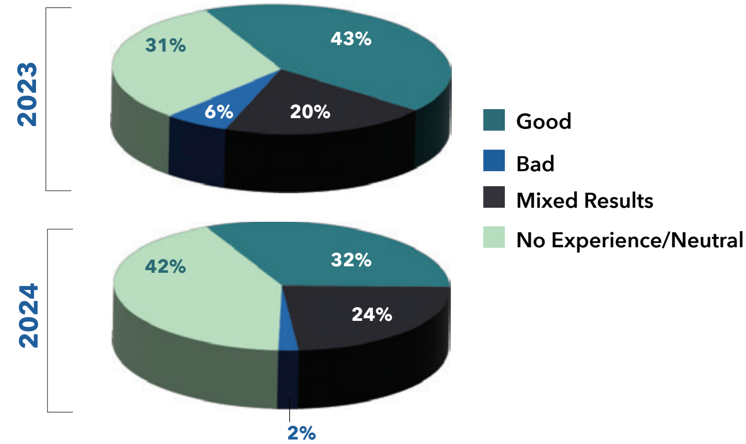
While satisfaction levels took a nine-point year-over-year dip at the top end of the scale (Very Satisfied moved from 24% to 15% year-over-year), the Top Two Box percentage overall saw a dramatic lift in 2024. In the most recent surveying, 60% of survey respondents indicated they were either “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied” compared to a total of only 49% in 2023. Furthermore, the bottom two box numbers strongly retreated in 2024, with a total of “Dissatisfied” and “Very Dissatisfied” falling from a combined 41% in 2023 to just 22% in 2024. These results provide strong evidence that either self-help solution quality is improving, or consumer expectations are falling more in line with the reality of self-help solutions. It’s also worth noting that the question below is reflective only of the most recent self-help interaction, not an overall impression like the above question, or select results on the next page.

What was your overall level of satisfaction with your most recent use of a self-help or unassisted tool to find an answer, make a purchase, or resolve a customer care issue?

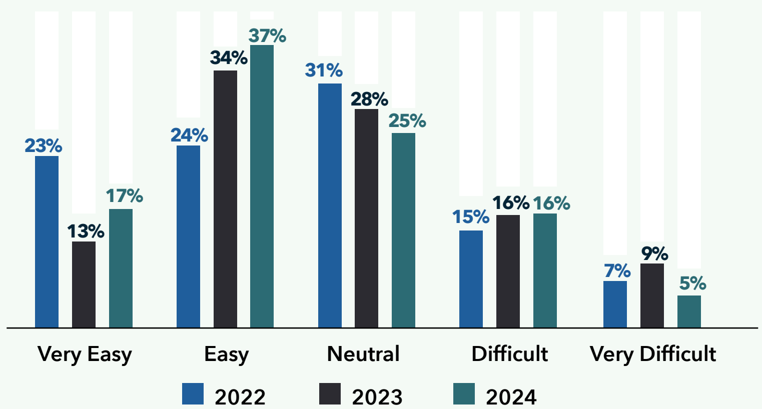


In a result that is somewhat contradictory to results on the previous page, fewer survey respondents described their overall self-help solution experience as "good." Worth noting is that the result on the previous page reflects impressions only from the most recent self-help interaction, which could influence the impartiality of results, whereas the result at right is a cumulative impression.

Please describe your experiences using self-help solutions (chatbots, IVRs, FAQ, mobile apps) to resolve customer care issues. Are the experiences good, bad, or other?



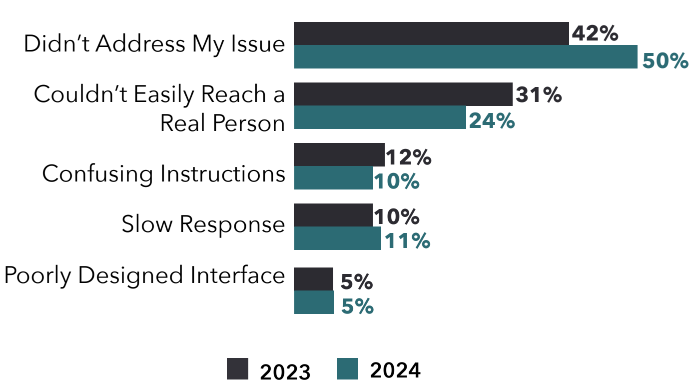
How difficult or easy was it to use the self-help or unassisted tool to attempt to accomplish your intended objective?



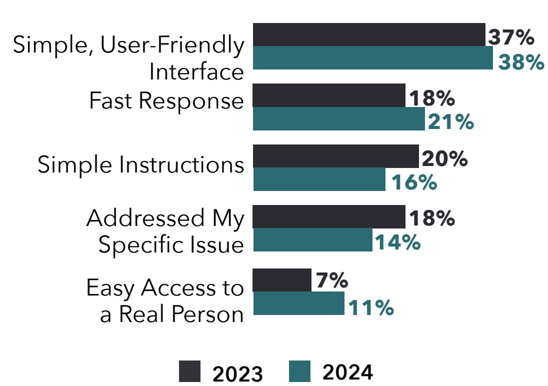
In a result that further supports the notion that self-help solutions are improving, 54% of survey respondents indicated that their most recent use of a self-help customer care solution was either "Very Easy" or "Easy" compared to 47% the prior year. The percentage of consumers indicating "Very Difficult" also hit a multiyear low at just 5%.

In examining what might have made a self-help customer care experience positive or negative, very similar year-over-year results are revealed with "Didn't Address My Issue" continuing to lead the way when it comes to difficult use, and "Simple, User-Friendly Interface" typifying easy self-help solution experiences. To shift more experiences into the positive category, brands should consider focusing on expanding the capabilities of self-help solutions without overcomplicating their use.

Thinking about the previous question, what made the self-help or unassisted tool difficult to use?

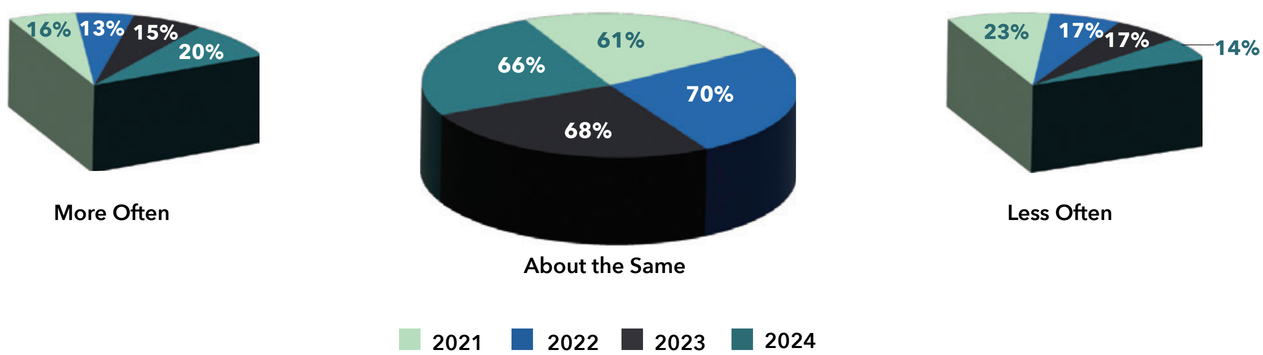


Thinking about the previous question, what made the self-help or unassisted tool easy to use?



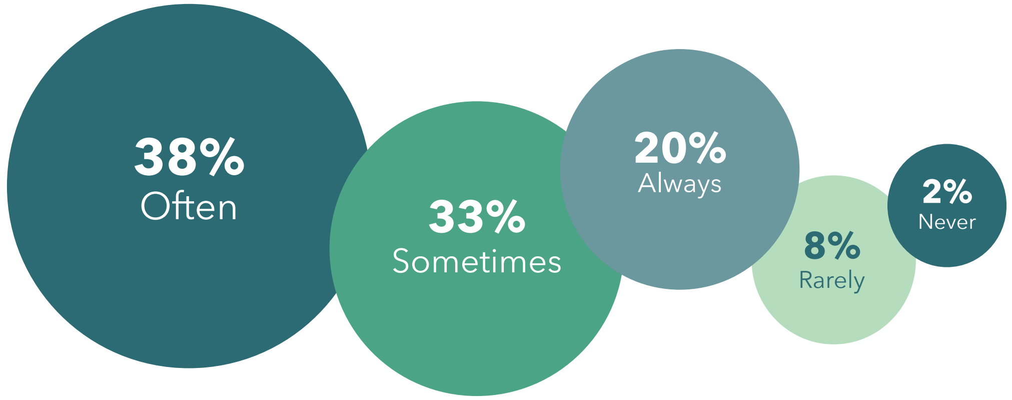
In this year's surveying results, the largest percentage of consumers (20%) plan on using self-help solutions more often in the future since data was first collected in 2021. Furthermore, the fewest percentage of consumers (14%) plan on using self-help solutions less often in the future. These results bode well for what is hopefully the start in a shift of consumer acceptance for self-help solutions, undoubtedly brought about by both changing perceptions and better performing solutions. But companies should lose sight of the importance of coordinating consistent experiences across channels as many consumers continue to prefer tranditional chaanels for various reasons.

Do you plan on using self-help or unassisted tools more often or less often in the future?



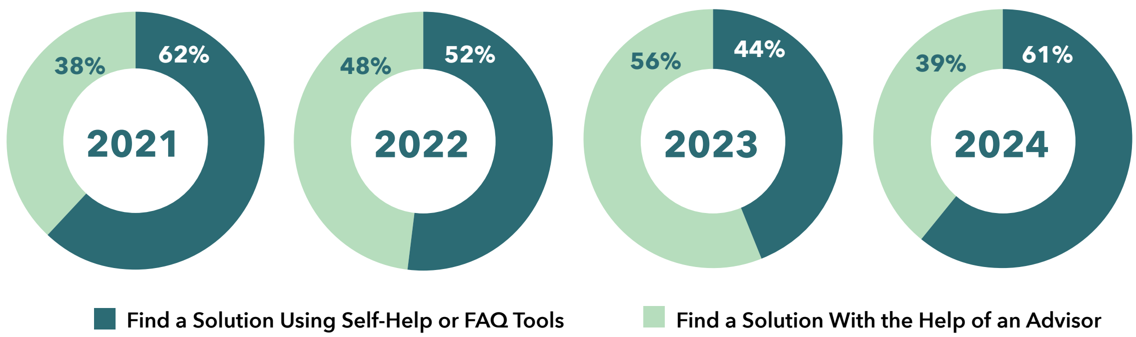
In a new question for 2024, 58% of consumers feel their issues are "Always" or "Often" too complex to be resolved by self-help solutions, while only 10% of consumers feel that's the case either "Rarely" or "Never." The inability of self-help to resolve for more complex issues has been omnipresent since the launch of the very first solutions. While brands are striving to address this issue (which takes time), a more immediate approach might be to help guide customers to the channel best suited to meeting their needs regardless of how complex their customer care issue is.

How often do you feel like your customer care issues are too complex to be resolved by a self-help or automated customer care solution?

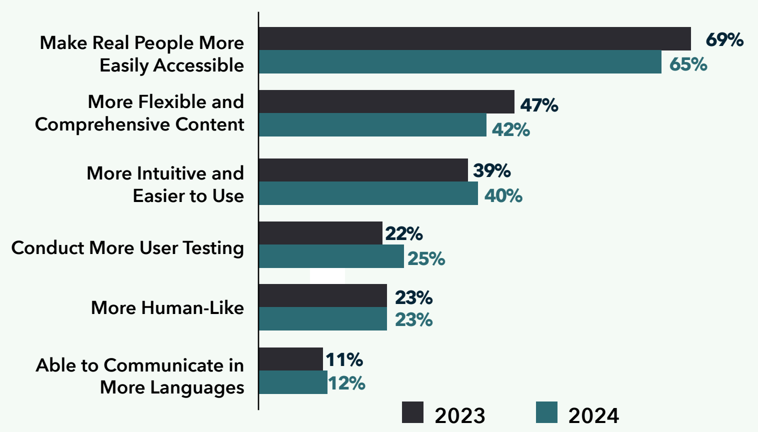


In a return to results most resembling those from 2021, most consumers would prefer to use a self-help solution, assuming their issue can and will be resolved using such a solution. This shows that in many cases the issue with adoption is not one of willingness on the consumer's part, but an issue of resolvability on the part of the self-help solution. If resolution rates and self-help capabilities are elevated, it's likely that many more consumers are ready to adopt such paths in resolving their customer care issues.

If you knew your customer care issue would be resolved, which scenario sounds more appealing to you?

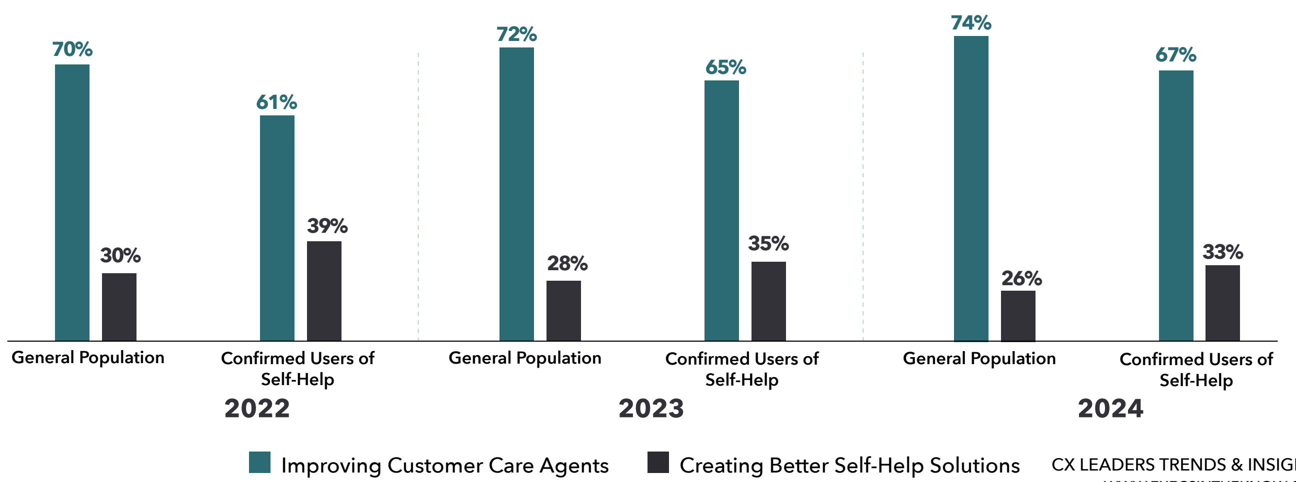


What can companies do differently with self-help and unassisted tools to make them better, easier, and more enjoyable to use?

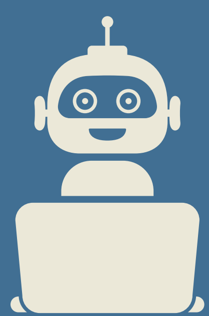


Outside of greater accessibility to live assistance, consumers are looking for higher levels of issue resolvability and an easier, more intuitive user experience from self-help solutions. That said, most consumers, whether users of self-help solutions of otherwise, would rather see companies direct their limited resources toward agent training as opposed to developing better self-help solutions.

In your opinion, should companies focus more of their resources on improving their customer care agents or on creating better self-help solutions?

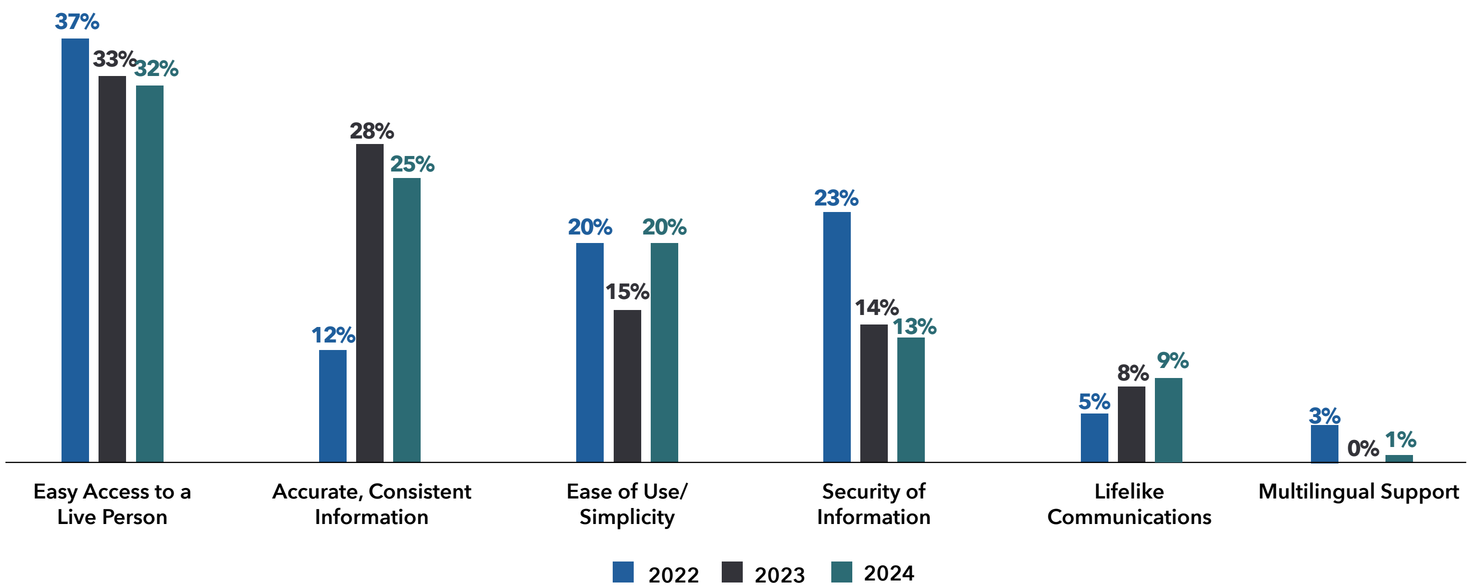


AI-POWERED SOLUTIONS



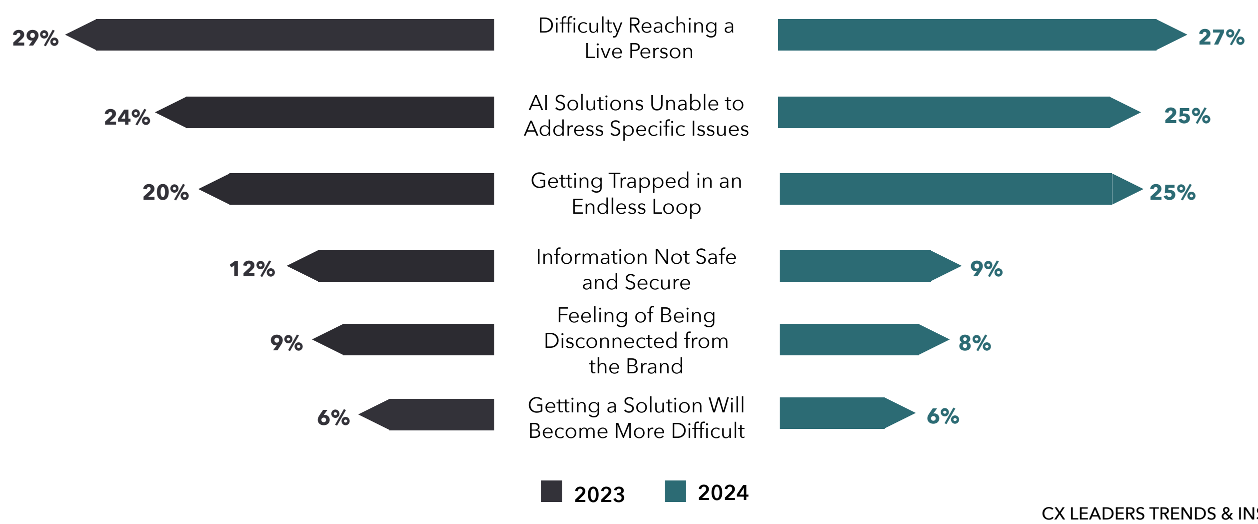
As observed in the self-help section (pages 41 and 43), easy access to a live person is a primary concern for consumers. It's safe to say that one of the chief reasons for this is how challenged self-help and AI-powered solutions have historically been in resolving complex issues. Consumers are often willing to try new and emerging solutions if they are confident such solutions can resolve their issue (page 43). But in the absence of such confidence (which can only come from positive and successful experiences), consumers want to be assured of easy access to a live person. For three years running, it has consistently been what's most important to them.

When resolving a customer care issue using a solution powered by artificial intelligence (AI), which is most important to you?



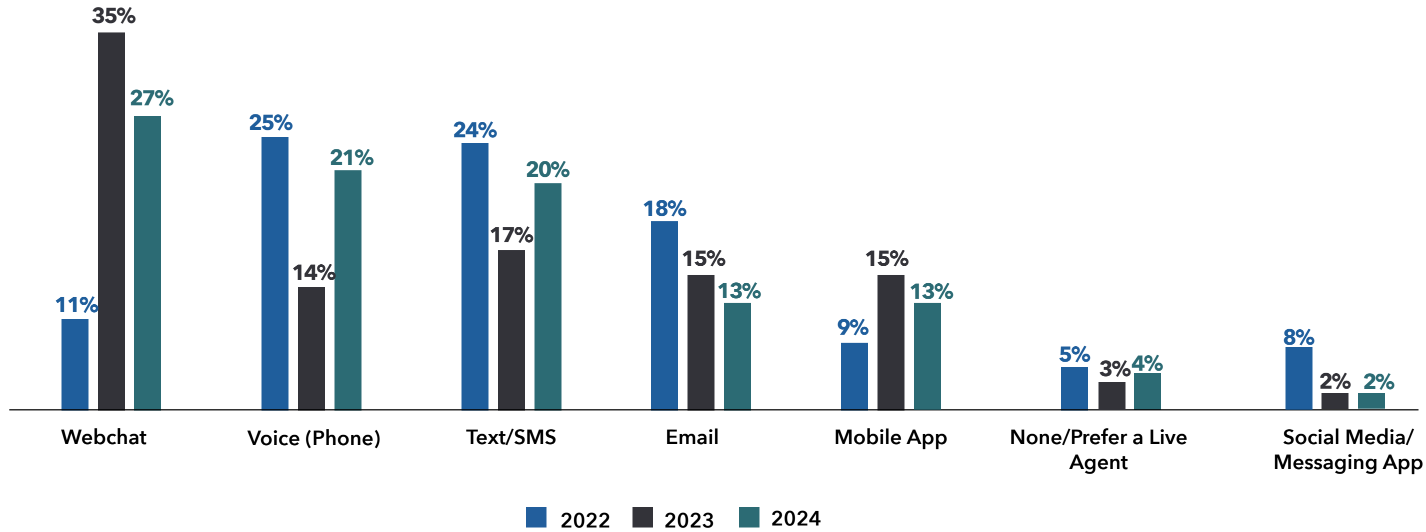
As highlighted above, difficulty reaching a live person isn't only top of mind in terms of what's most important when utilizing an AI-powered solution (above). It's also a top concern (below). In fact, the top three concerns highlighted below are all somewhat related to the notion of reaching a live person. When an AI solution is unable to provide a resolution, reaching a live person becomes an essential and critical part of the resolution process. Furthermore, getting trapped in an endless AI loop implies that a live person is difficult to reach. Brands should consider journey mapping their AI solutions to not only understand which issues such solutions can effectively address, but also to understand how easy it is to reach a live person should the AI solution fail in resolving a specific issue.

What's your biggest concern with companies increasingly relying on AI solutions for customer care?



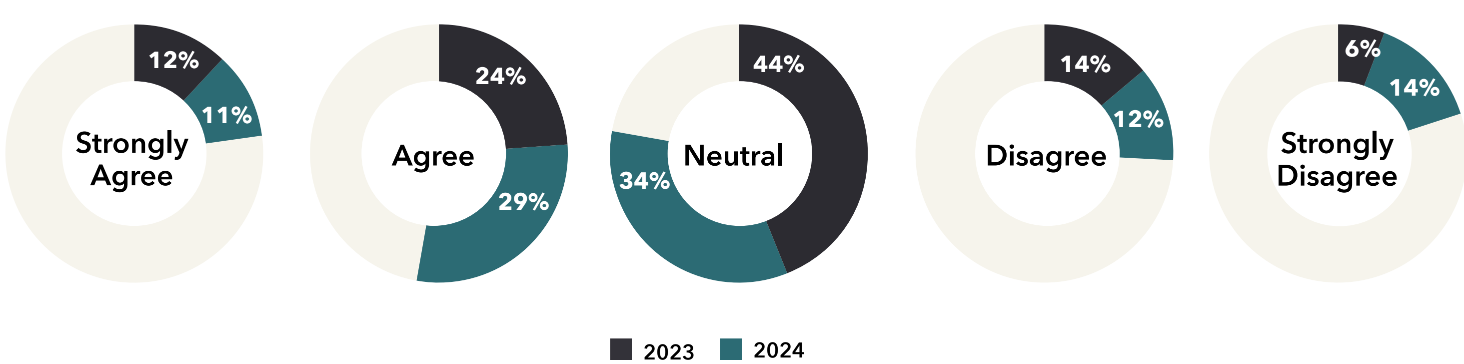
After a significant year-over-year rise in consumer preference for AI-powered Webchat (from 11% in 2022 to 35% in 2023), consumer preference for the solution cooled in 2024, falling eight points. Still, Webchat remains the most preferred AI-powered solution among consumers for the second straight year. Interestingly, Voice (Phone) saw strong year-over-year gains in preference, up seven points. As new technologies evolve, analytics strengthen, and generative AI matures, it's likely that consumer preferences will begin to align with preferred non-AI-powered solutions (page 58), especially as effectiveness is equalized between AI-power solutions and those that are not AI-powered.

If you had to engage with an AI-powered customer care agent (non-human) to resolve an issue, which would be your preferred method of engagement?



In this year's results, consumer sentiment lost ground on neutrality regarding whether AI-powered solutions would ultimately benefit their experience in the future, with the "Neutral" response falling 10% year-over-year. Combined positive sentiment ("Strongly Agree" and "Agree") grew by four points year-over-year, while combined negative sentiment ("Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree") grew by six points. Even though there was slightly more growth in negative sentiment, 40% of consumers have overall positive sentiment toward the future of AI versus 26% having overall negative sentiment.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: AI-powered tools and solutions will greatly benefit my customer care interactions with brands in the future.



CONSUMER EXPERIENCES — **CONCLUSIONS**

Key Findings:

- The trend of consumers using Text-Based solutions more frequently than Voice-Based solutions continued for the second year in a row. Use of Text-Based solutions continues to grow, while use of Voice-Based solutions continues to fall (page 12).
- Consumers' top two suggestions for improving the multichannel experience include creating a faster, less complicated process (43%) and making agents more accessible (40%) (page 20).
- Seventy percent of consumers were able to complete their transaction using self-help, the highest in the past three years of data, yet 50% of consumers say they "Always" or "Often" abandon because the solution was too difficult or ineffective (page 39).
- Seventy-one percent of consumers felt their customer care issues were "Often" or "Sometimes" too complex to be resolved by self-help or automated solutions (page 42).
- "Difficulty Reaching a Live Person" continues to be the biggest concern for consumers when it comes to AI (27%), followed closely by "AI Unable to Address Specific Concerns" (25%) and "Getting Trapped in an Endless Loop" (25%) (page 45).

Results in the Consumer Experiences section of this report reveal continuing shifts in consumer preferences and behaviors in their interactions with customer experience (CX) channels. Notably, the trend of consumers favoring text-based solutions over voice-based solutions has persisted for the second consecutive year, with text-based solution usage continuing to rise year-after-year three years running, while voice-based sees continued declines in use over the same period. This shift highlights a growing consumer preference for convenience, speed, and flexibility, something text-based solutions excel at. This underscores the importance of continuing to invest in and optimize text-based channels, particularly unassisted text-based solutions like chatbots and AI-powered messaging apps, all to meet consumer demand and shifting behaviors.

However, the data also indicates that there is still considerable room for improvement in the multichannel experience, which often includes both Text-Based and Voice-Based interactions. Consumers have identified the need for faster, less complicated processes and greater agent accessibility as top priorities for enhancing their CX journeys. In fact, agent accessibility is a top concern across findings. To address these concerns, companies may need to consider redesigning customer service workflows, improving user interfaces, and enhancing the availability and responsiveness of support teams.

While self-help solution continues to peak, with 70% of consumers successfully completing their transactions without live assistance, there are still significant challenges to address. Half of the surveyed consumers reported abandoning self-help tools because they found them too difficult or ineffective, and 71% felt that their issues were too complex for automated solutions to resolve adequately. These findings suggest that while self-help tools are becoming more popular, they must be refined to handle a broader range of customer issues effectively. Enhancing the user experience of these tools and providing clear, intuitive guidance could help reduce abandonment rates and improve overall satisfaction.

Moreover, the ongoing concerns around AI and automated customer service highlight a critical area for CX organizations to master. The difficulty of reaching a live person, AI's inability to address specific concerns, and the frustration of getting trapped in an endless loop remain significant pain points for consumers. To mitigate these issues, organizations should focus on creating seamless transitions between AI-powered and human support, ensuring that customers can easily reach a live agent when needed, while continuing the push to make AI systems better equipped to handle more nuanced customer care engagements. By addressing these concerns and continuing to innovate in the direction of consumer behaviors, CX organizations can enhance their service offerings, improve the experience, build stronger relationships and, ultimately, drive loyalty.

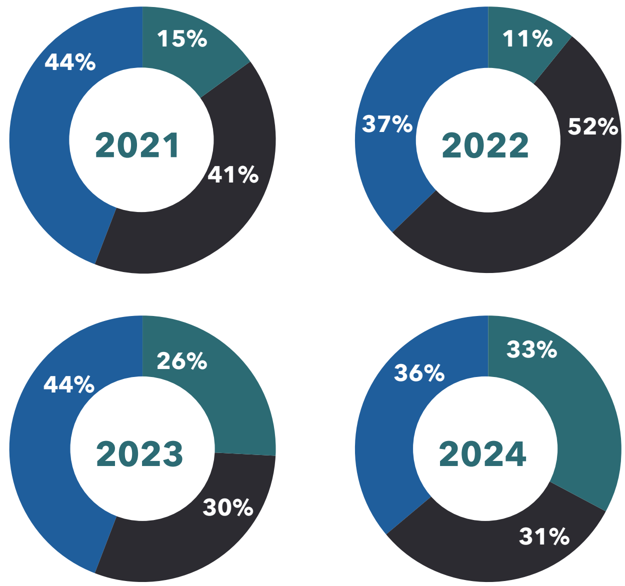
CONSUMER **PERSPECTIVES**

- » Opinions
- » Preferences
- » Views on Agents
- » Expectations

OPINIONS

In general, do you think that companies are getting better or worse at providing good customer care?

When it comes to whether customer care is getting better or worse, results from this year's surveying tracked well against last year's advances in the percentage of consumers who see care as getting better. This seems to suggest care quality hit a low during the worst of the global pandemic in 2021 and 2022 and has since been steadily improving. To continue this trajectory, brands should continue to focus on keeping their customers at the center of their strategies, especially as it applies to rolling out new technologies.



Getting Better
Getting Worse
Remaining About the Same

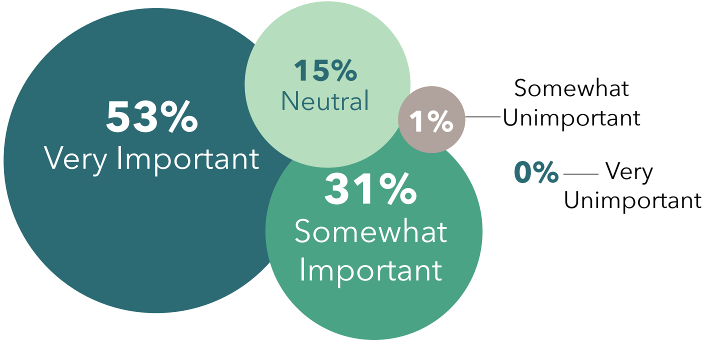
In a result that seemingly clashes with the findings above, consumers feel the resolution process has gotten a little more difficult year-over-year. This could be owed to the fact that there has been an acceleration in the deployment of AI-powered self-help solutions, many of which are still going through a maturation process that leaves the current experience wanting. As consumers become more familiar with these solutions, especially in understanding their capabilities and limitations, and as such solutions improve in their effectiveness, it's likely the customer care experience will become easier and easier for consumers.

Do you feel that resolving customer care issues with brands has gotten easier or more difficult in recent years?

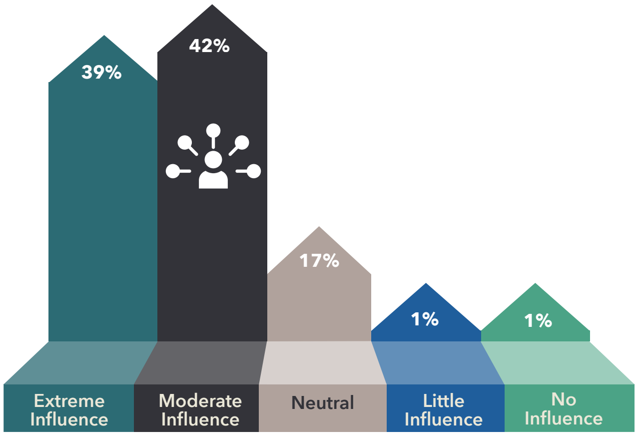
Easier
More Difficult
About the Same

In a pair of questions new for 2024, consumers were asked about their thoughts on the influence of customer care and CX within organizations. Overwhelmingly, consumers consider this influence to be important. In fact, the percentage of consumers who felt CX influence to be "Very Important" or "Somewhat Important" totaled out at 83%. Taking this idea one step further, consumers also strongly believe that this influence should be a powerful force at organizations, with 81% of consumers saying CX and customer care should have either "Extreme Influence" or "Moderate Influence." Almost no consumers (2%) felt CX and customer care should have "Little Influence" or "No Influence." While this is an opinion companies have been warming to in recent years, there is still work to be done in convincing senior leadership and the wider organization of the central importance of CX and customer care. In this way, the consumer perspective seems to be forward-thinking compared to the current reality at many organizations.

How important is it for customer care and customer experience organizations to have influence within a company?



How much influence do you think customer experience and the customer care organization should have within a company?



In what ways does emphasizing care internally benefit customers, and why is it important to empower the care organization?

"The results of this survey question are puzzling. Why do only 53% of consumers believe it's 'Very Important' for customer care organizations to have influence within their companies?

When customer care leaders have influence across the organization, consumers benefit in numerous ways: they receive products tailored to their needs, face fewer disruptions, and enjoy personalized service. They experience greater reliability, faster issue resolution, and more flexible service options. This leads to greater convenience, time and cost savings, and peace of mind. Ultimately, consumers feel valued by the companies they choose to do business with.

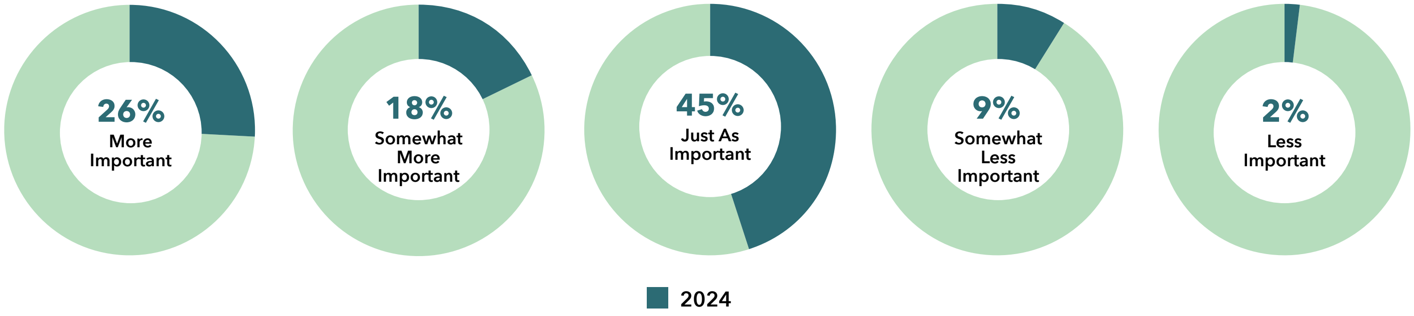
As CX practitioners, we know there's only one correct answer: It is absolutely essential for customer care to have a strong voice within our organizations. Customer care is a strategic asset that drives loyalty, informs product development, and directly impacts the bottom line. Failing to position ourselves this way, or capitalizing on our role, is a disservice to both our companies and our customers.

Perhaps consumers have grown so accustomed to subpar service they doubt leaders' ability to drive meaningful change. It's time to step up and demonstrate why customer care should be at the forefront of organizational strategy. Let's turn that 52% into a unanimous 100% next time."

Lisa Oswald
SVP and Head of Customer Service
TRAVELZOO®

In a result that echoes the sentiment found on page 51, consumers continue to loudly proclaim the importance of CX. Only 11% of survey respondents felt CX should be less important than other company priorities like product/service improvements and reducing costs. In today's contact center, effective focus on the customer experience means investment in things like agent training, listening to the customer (VoC), advancing center technologies, and a strategy of continuous improvement.

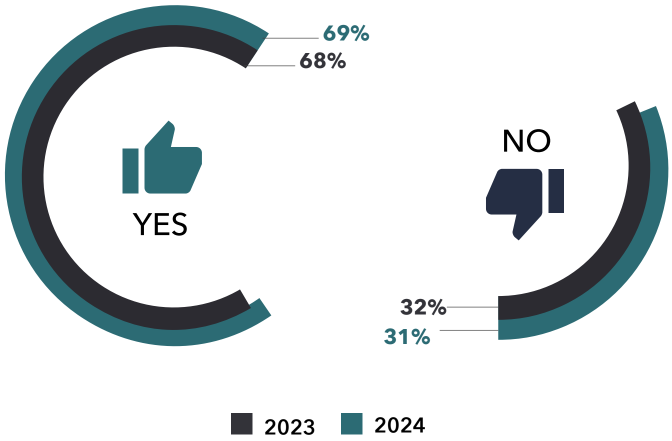
How important is it for a company to focus its resources and energies on improving the customer experience versus other priorities like product improvements and cost reductions?



For the second year in a row, the top option among consumers for creating an exceptional customer care experience was for companies to listen to their customers. While Customer First CX strategies have been commonplace for several years, Voice of the Customer (VoC) programs are still evolving or altogether absent at far too many organizations.

What do companies need to do right in order to create an exceptional customer care experience?

Would you be willing to pay a little more for a product or service if it meant you'd get world-class customer care support?



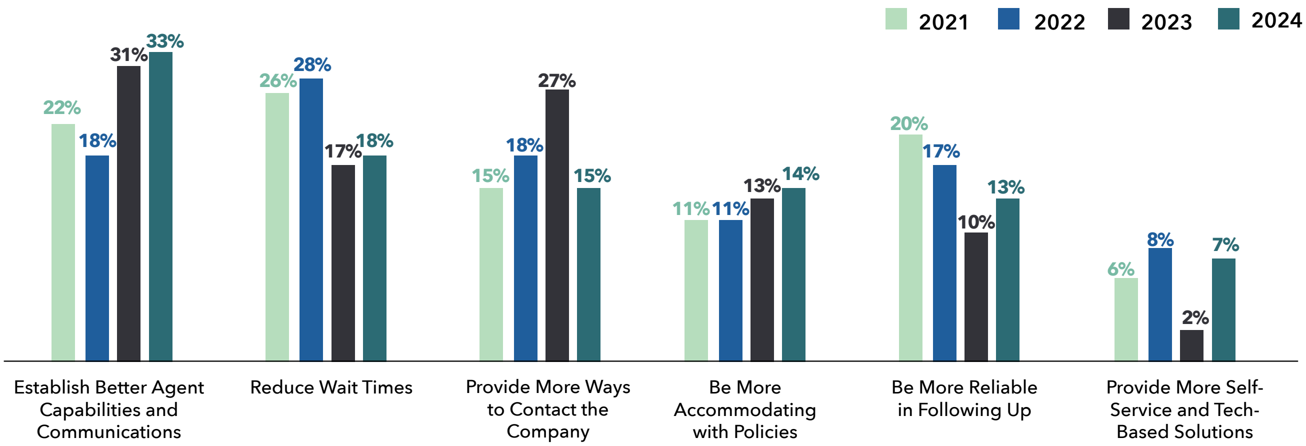
Further stressing the importance of customer care among consumers, nearly three quarters (69%) would pay more for a product/service in exchange for quality care. Although this is a sentiment familiar to leaders within the space, it's a message that ought to be shared throughout the organization, as the notion carries with it not only strategic implications, but financial ones as well.

CREATING AN EASIER PROCESS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONALIZATION

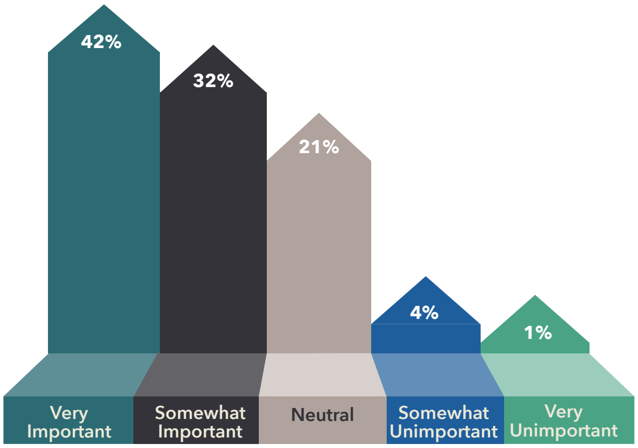
Consumer Perspectives — Opinions

Even in an age of increasing automation and reliance on tools like AI, the human in the loop still matters. This is evidenced by the fact that 33% of survey respondents think better agents are the key to unlocking an easier customer care resolution process. Interestingly, the only response to have fallen year over year was "Provide More Ways to Contact the Company." This may be an indication to some companies that it's time to pivot focus away from expanding channel variety to optimizing the ones already in place.

What can brands do differently to make the resolution process as easy as possible?

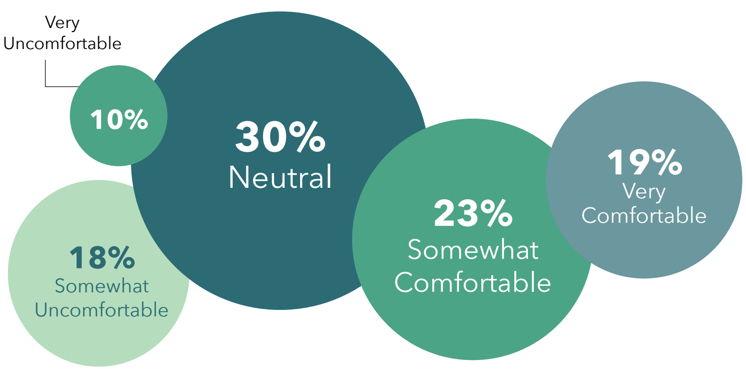


In dealing with a brand to resolve a customer care issue, how important is it for them create a personalized experience for you?



In another pair of new questions for 2024, consumers provide interesting if not conflicting results on the topic of personalization and the use of demographical information. On the one hand, most consumers (74%) feel a personalized experience is important to one degree or another. On the other hand, less than half of survey respondents (42%) are comfortable with the idea of brands using information like age or income to create personalized experiences. This leaves information like customer history, which can also be well utilized to create experiences and processes that cater to individuals. Brands should consider the value that can be found in understanding how much their own customers might value a more personalized experience and strategize accordingly.

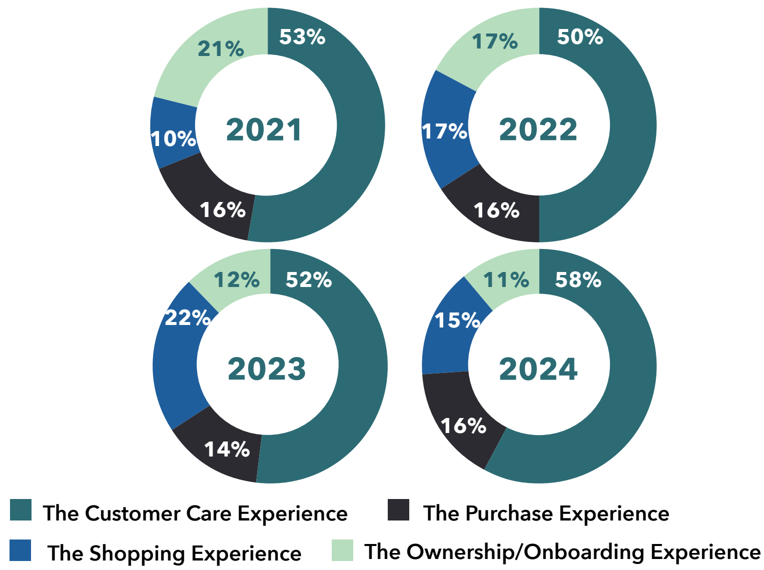
How do you feel about brands using demographics (like age or income) to personalize customer care experience?



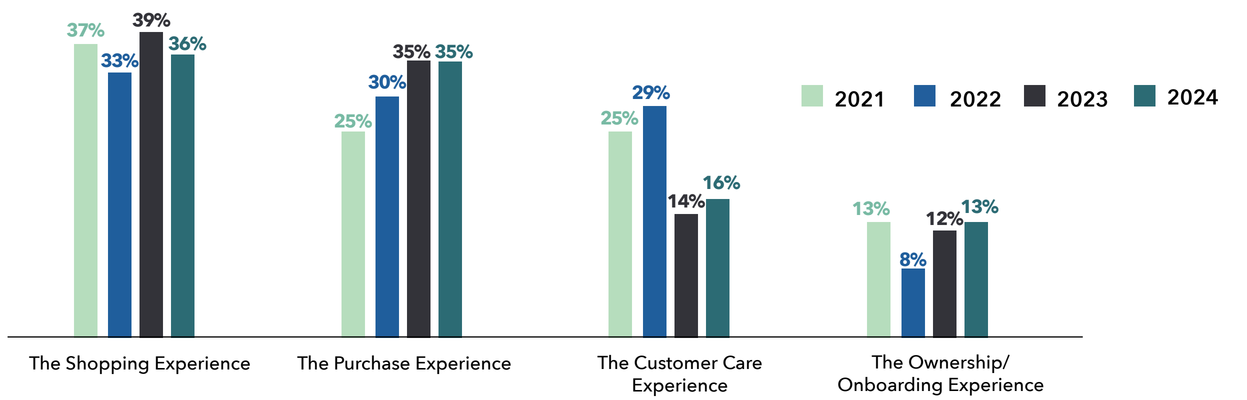
Just as highlighted on page 52, consumers are wise to the value of an exceptional customer care experience, with most prioritizing its improvement over every other experiential component of the brand-consumer relationship. These results have been remarkably consistent since this question was first asked back in 2017.

And while 50% or more of consumers have consistently pointed to the Customer Care Experience as the ideal place to focus improvement efforts, it appears brands have either not gotten the message or haven't been effective in their efforts, as only 16% of consumers point to the Customer Care Experience as the area where most improved. In fact, the Shopping Experience is where consumers think brands have been most effective in making improvements.

In general, where should brands focus their improvement efforts?

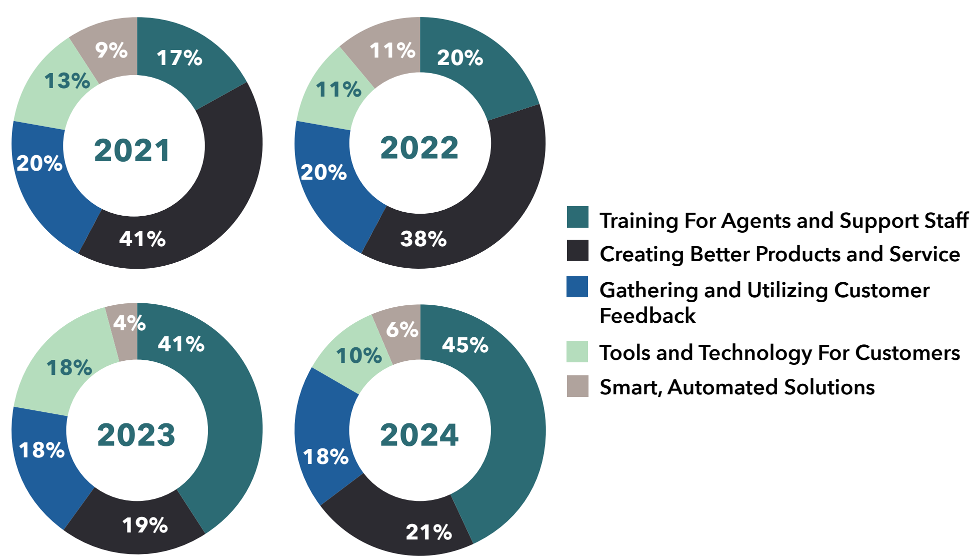


In recent years, which area of the customer experience do you think brands have been able to improve most?



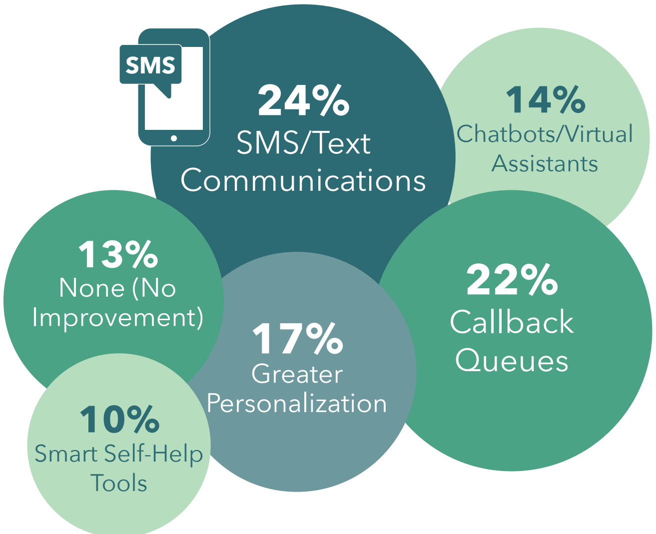
Again, just like on page 54, consumers want to see brands focus their investment efforts on improving the human component of their operations. At the same time, fewer than one in 10 survey respondents (6%) feel brands should be investing in smart, automated solutions, which certainly implies AI-powered solutions, customer-facing or otherwise. This is likely due to more complicated issues finding their way to agents, while less complex interactions are swallowed up by a slew of already existing automated solutions. More complicated issues require a specialized set of skills, including better problem-solving, communication, and understanding of sometimes nuanced company policies and guidelines.

In your opinion, where should brands be investing in order to most effectively improve the customer experience?



Consumer Perspectives — Opinions

Which of these customer care innovations has most improved your customer care experiences in recent years?



In a new question designed to understand which contact center technologies consumers value most, SMS/Text rose above the rest of the field, edging out Callback Queues. Notable is the fact that the top two vote getters among consumers is somewhat older technology compared to things like chatbots and enhanced personalization. It may be the case that newer innovations have not yet had a chance to mature and achieve their full potential.

The industry has made many innovative moves over the past decade. When it comes to CX innovation, what's next for your organization? What has you excited?

"At Angi, we have found success experimenting with service channels beyond email and phone lines. Initiatives that have boosted customer satisfaction include callback queues, 24/7 persistent digital messaging, and lightweight chatbots that encourage self-service. Looking ahead, we're excited to leverage SMS to better support our customers, especially the professionals on our platform who often contact us while traveling between job locations.

Our long-term vision is to enable seamless, cross-channel conversations, ensuring we're there for our customers wherever and whenever they need us. To achieve this, we must also focus on upgrading the agent experience, equipping them with the right context to handle these persistent interactions efficiently.

Alongside these channel innovations, we are incredibly excited about the recent breakthroughs in AI and Large Language Models (LLMs). Though this technology is still in its "early innings," we're laser-focused on developing use cases and activating it in the right way to enhance our support operations. For us, this means first prioritizing safety and reliability by reviewing and validating the outputs of generative AI features, keeping the support agent in the loop, and maintaining high standards for quality and efficiency of care for our customers.

The generative AI features that we've piloted thus far have been focused on assisting support agents with specific components of case handling, such as reply suggestions for chat agents, and case summarization after closure. We've found that there are instances where these features do meaningfully improve the agent's experience. However, there is a long way to go before they are broadly, consistently applicable, due to issues with reliability (AI lacking the right context, retrieving incorrect information, or hallucinating), and high latency for outputs during live interactions (agents spending 10+ seconds waiting for AI suggestions to generate).

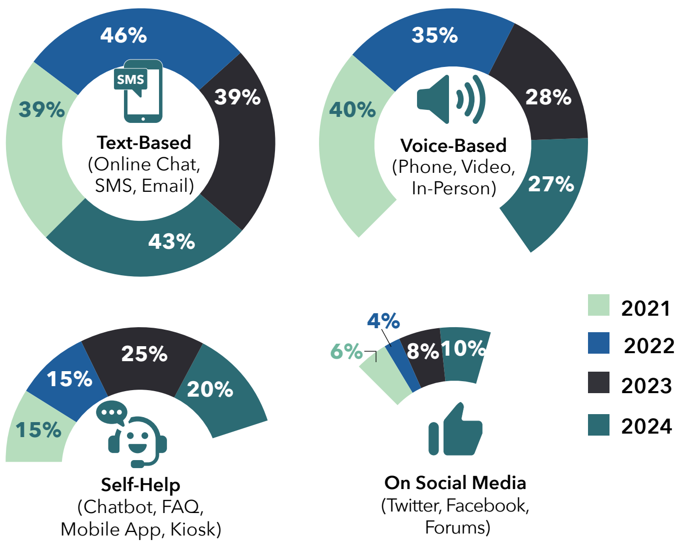
Piloting these tools for internal users first has been a great way to gain experience with the generative AI, and build confidence across the organization that this technology can be used safely to further advance our customer care operations. We're excited to continue expanding our adoption as its safety and performance improve."

Nick Price
Senior Manager, CX Strategy & Operations

PREFERENCES

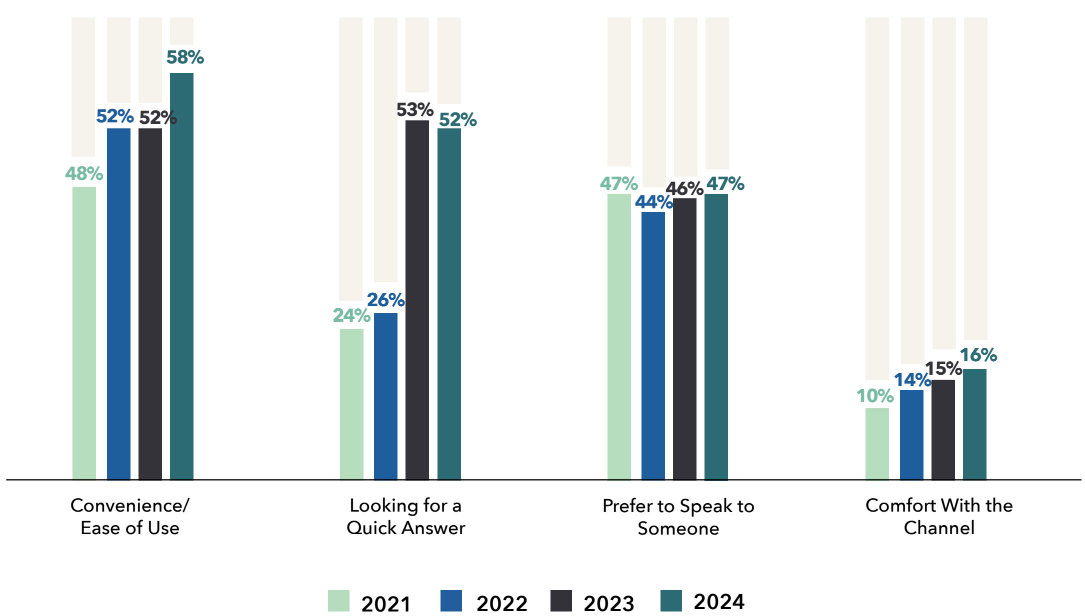
There was little in the way of dramatic changes among consumers' channel preferences year over year. Channels stacked up just as they have in the previous two years, with Text-Based solutions still leading the way. What is notable is the fact that Text-Based solutions further strengthened its lead over Voice-Based solutions by five points, achieving the biggest lead seen in any year. Self-Help solutions also saw a five-point drop, amounting to a 20% pullback.

If you knew your customer care issue would be resolved regardless of contact channel, which would be your preferred contact method?



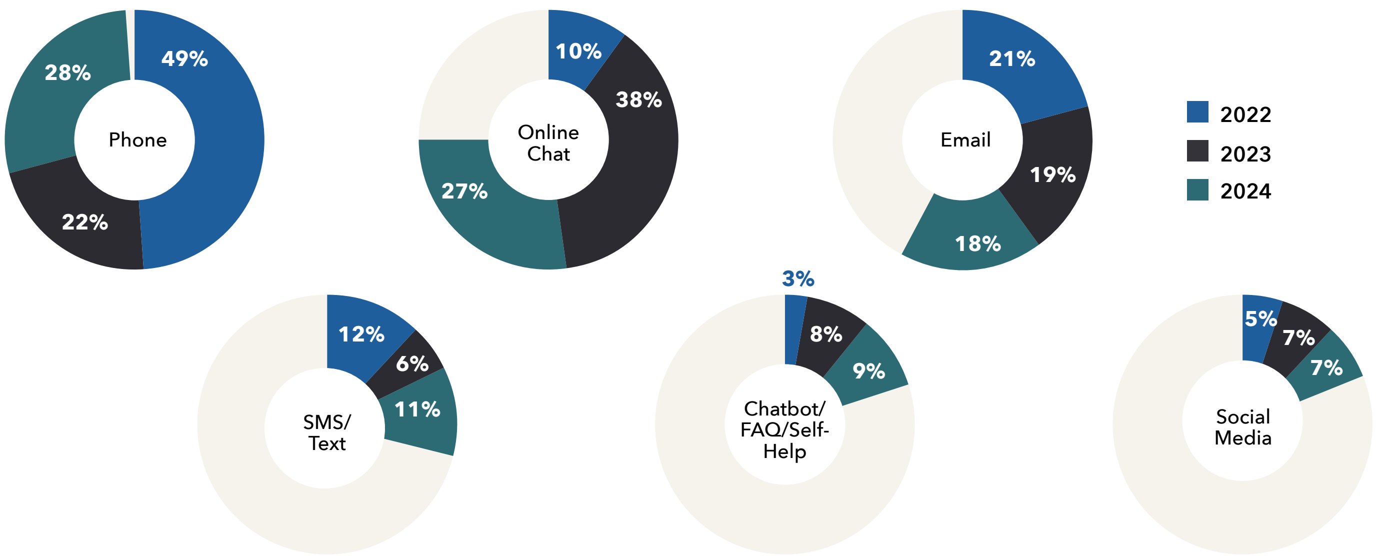
Consumers continue to value ease, speed, and the ability to connect with someone when it comes to getting customer care. Interesting to consider is the strong influence of age on the "Prefer to Speak to Someone" result. Only 32% of those ages 18 to 29 indicated speaking to someone as a factor in their channel preference compared to 56% of those ages 60 and older and 49% of those ages 45 to 60 indicated. This data point alone is enough to warrant consideration for using a customer base's age makeup when determining future channel strategies.

What are the biggest factors in determining your preferred channel of care? (Select all that apply.)

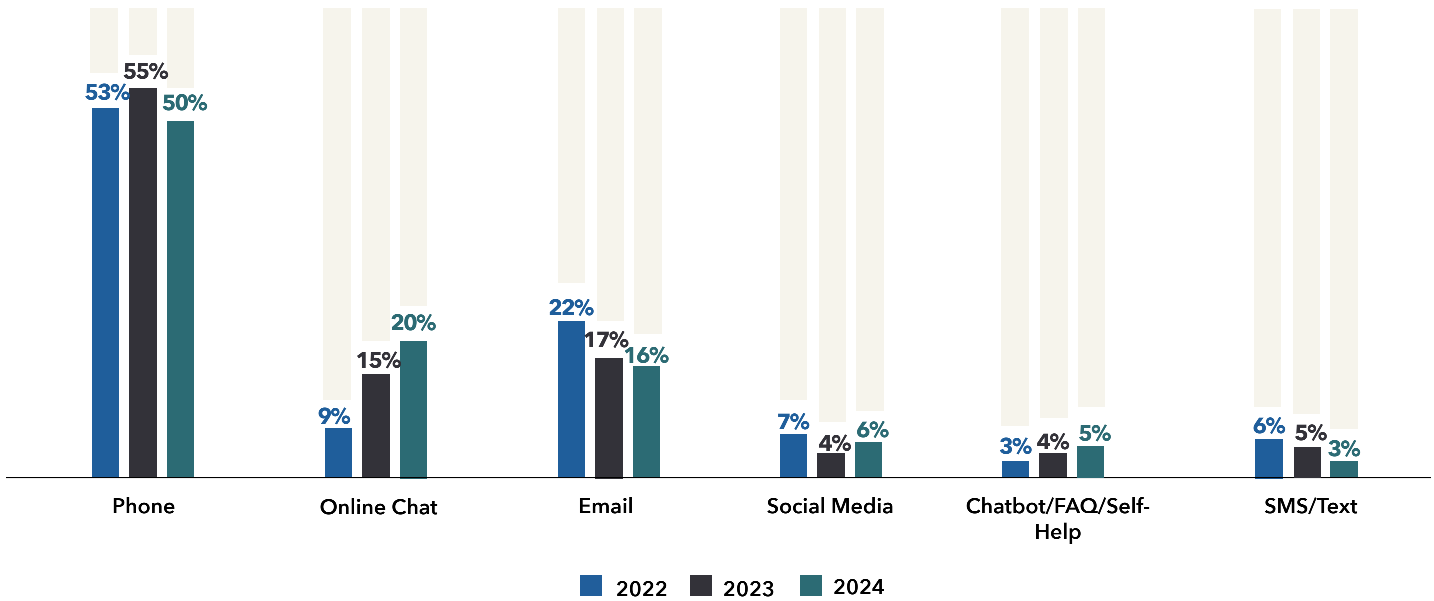


Overwhelmingly, consumers continue to skew heavily toward Phone when their customer care issues are complex. The real question is, does this result have more to do with consumers wanting a high-touch, human-to-human interaction, or more to do with consumer mentality that no other solution is capable of handling complex issues? If the latter, companies might want to consider to what extent there is a basis for the mentality and ask themselves if there is growth in the solutioning capabilities of channels other than Phone. This seems to be the case with Online Chat, which sees steady growth in preference for complex issues. Also worth noting is the steady decline in email preference, with two years of declines whether an issue is deemed simple or complex.

If you had a SIMPLE, transactional customer care issue to resolve with a brand, which is your preferred channel of care?

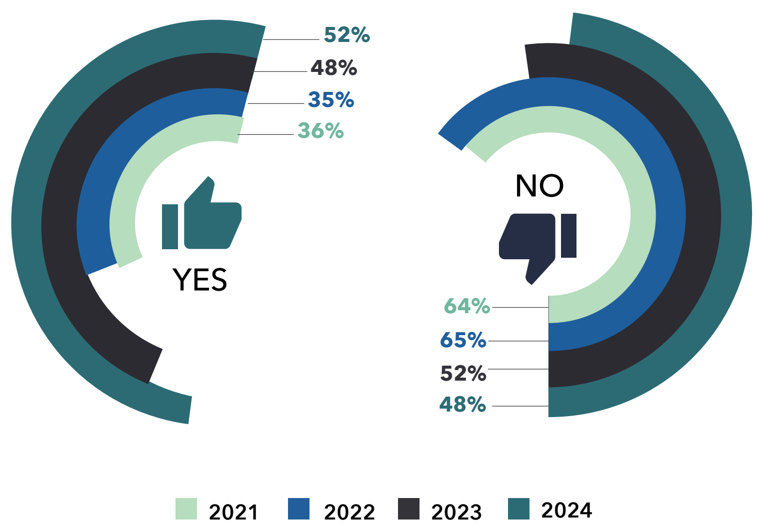


If you had a COMPLEX customer care issue to resolve with a brand, which is your preferred channel of care?



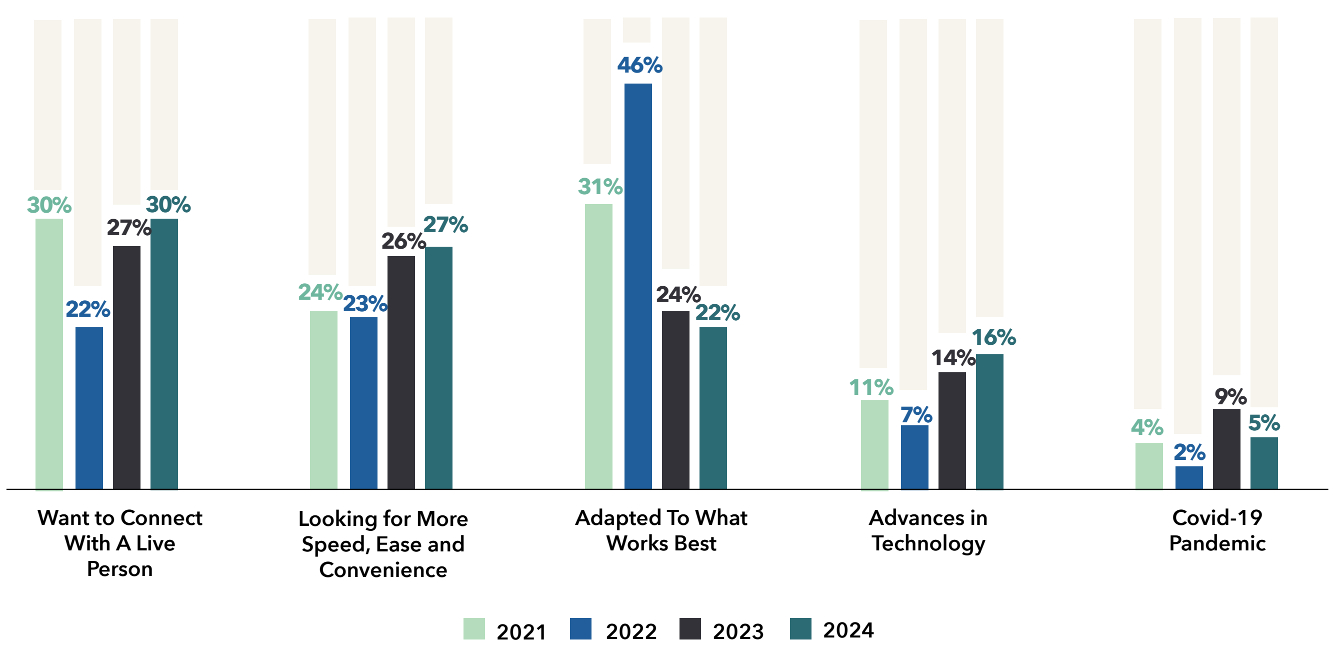
Has your preferred contact method changed in recent years?

Results from 2024 showed more change in channel preferences than at any other point in the data going back to 2018, when only 38% of respondents indicated a change in preferred channels in recent years. Certainly, there has been an explosion in options in the past several years, and consumers have responded with changing individual preferences. Based on results on page 58, it appears Self-Help has contributed to much of the change, as has a continuing shift toward Text-Based solutions.



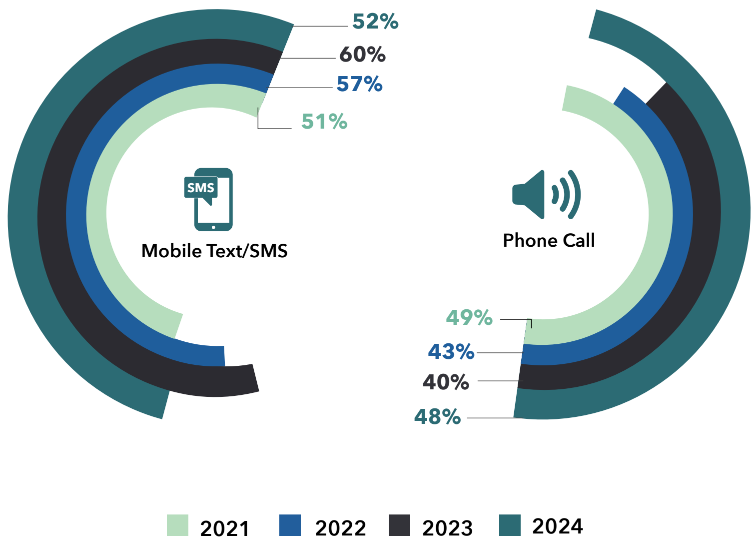
Desire to connect with a live person is once again the leading cause of consumers shifting their channel preferences, though the quest for greater speed and ease also factor large. Greater acceptance of things like AI-powered solutions also seems to be gaining after what may be owed to lackluster rollouts of early versions of the technology during the height of the pandemic. There was also continues to be less movement based on what works best, low-key indicating that perhaps all channels are working better than in previous years.

What caused your preferred contact method to change?



Although consumers' preference for phoning remains subordinate to their preference to text, there was greater parity between the two than in the prior two years when the preference for texting was far more pronounced. Naturally, the desire to call is synonymous with the desire to speak with a person, as AI-powered Voice-Based support is not widely available. As such solutions do become more available, it will be interesting to understand if channel choice undergoes further change.

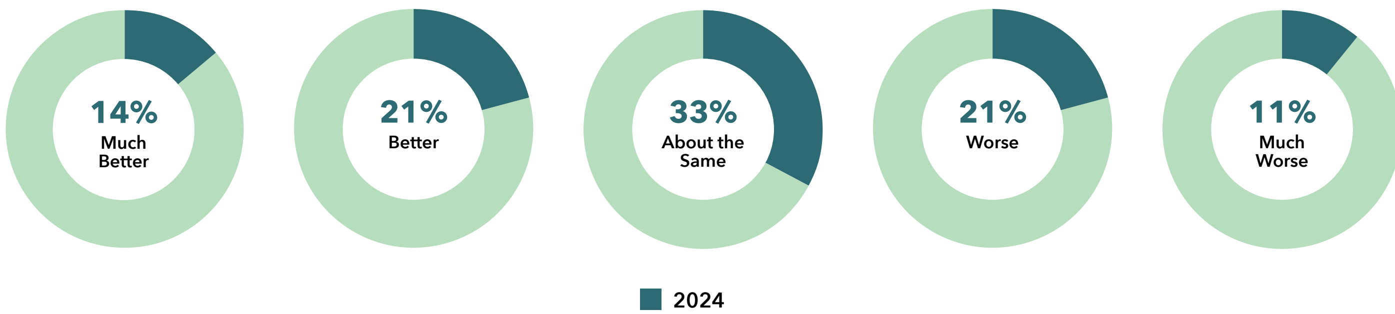
If you knew your issue would be resolved easily and to your satisfaction, which method would you prefer when interacting with a brand's customer care team?



VIEWS ON AGENTS

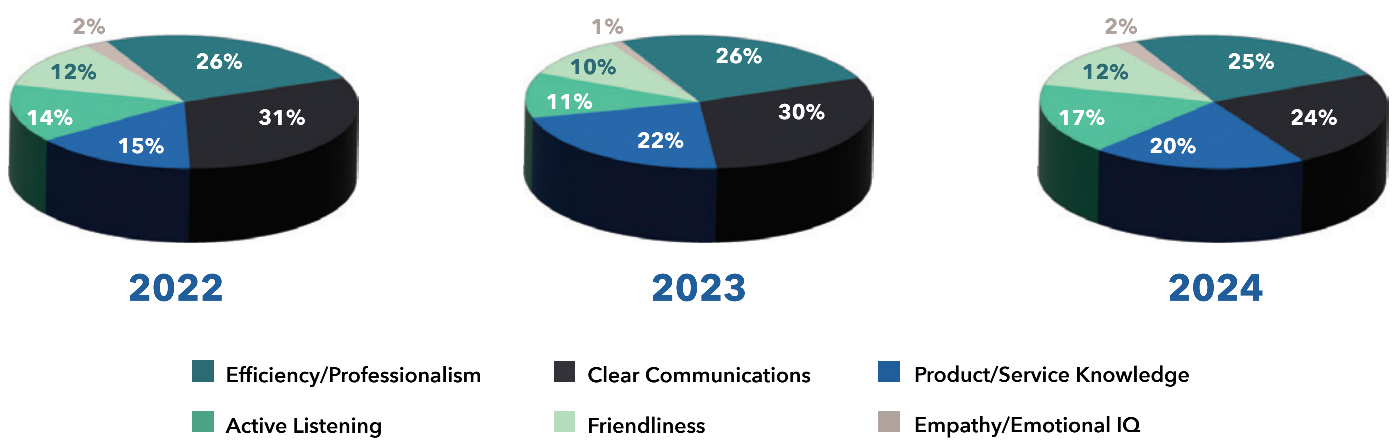
In a new section focused on customer care agents, ten entirely new questions are kicked off by the topic of agent on-the-job performance. In inaugural results, more consumers think agents are getting better than worse. This is good (and could be better), especially considering how strongly consumers feel resources should be devoted to improving agent quality (page 43), with 33% of consumers saying better agent capabilities and communication is the key to unlocking an easy customer care experience.

Do you think customer care agents have gotten better or worse at their jobs over the past 3-4 years?



Although this agent-focused section contains ten new survey results concerning customer care agents, not all agent-related results are reflective of new questions. In a question first asked in 2022, consumers continue to value Efficiency/Professionalism and Clear Communications over other, more emotive soft skills like friendliness or empathy. That's not to discount the importance of empathy as a set of three empathy-related questions shown on pages 65 and 66. But certainly, at a minimum, consumers are looking for the sorts of attributes that lead to a quick and efficient resolution.

When talking to a customer care agent to resolve an issue with a product or service, what's most important to you?

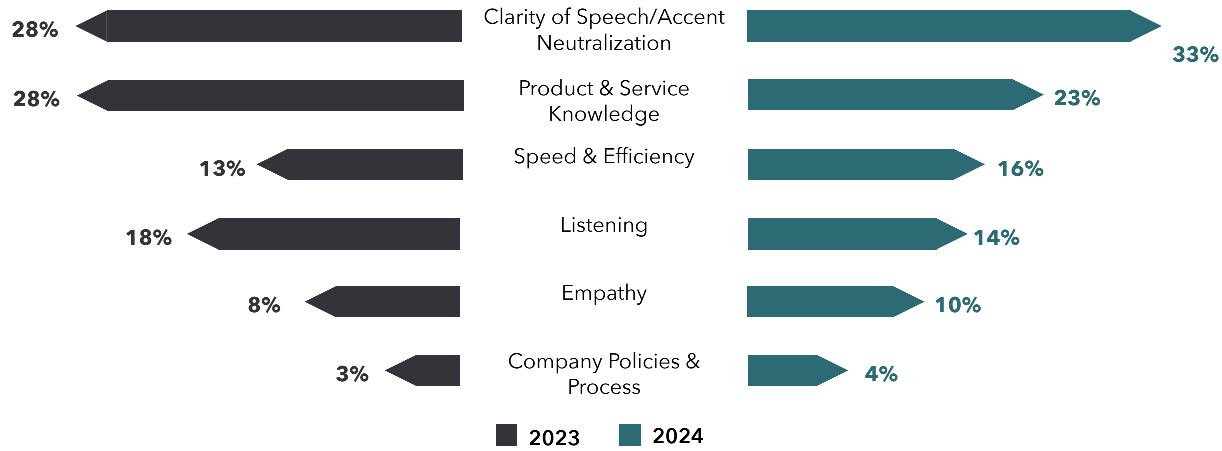


AGENT TRAINING AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Consumer Perspectives — Views on Agents

As demonstrated on the previous page and in the results below, clear communication is of primary concern for consumers, as well as communication in general with categories like "Listening" and "Impersonal Responses" also garnering a fair share of responses. Along with things like journey mapping and performance monitoring, brands should consider conducting communication-specific audits and reviews having consideration for this, like accent, listening and comprehension, communication style, and emotional tone.

In which area should companies focus their resources when it comes to training customer care agents?



Customer feedback is just one of the ways in which brands identify improvement opportunities for agents. How does your organization use other vehicles (such as QA or specific metrics) for uncovering improvement opportunities for agents?

" Jaguar Land Rover's focus on enhancing agent performance and customer experience involves a multi-faceted approach that balances several critical elements. Here's a breakdown of some of the key areas and how they contribute to overall success:

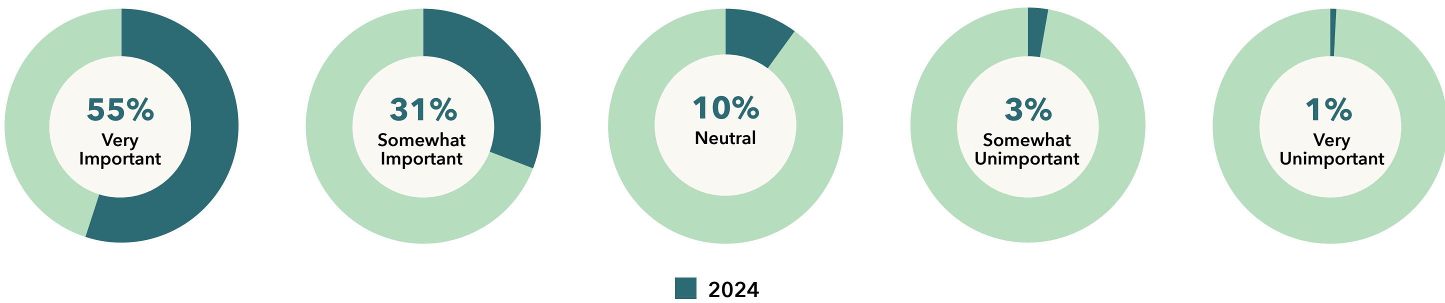
1. **The Broader Customer Experience** - Understanding the full customer journey — from initial contact to post-case follow-up — is essential. By examining each touch point, Jaguar Land Rover can better evaluate and optimize how the contact center influences the overall customer experience. This comprehensive view helps in identifying opportunities to add value or address gaps, deliver consistency across touch points, and deliver long-term value and impact.
2. **Actionable Customer Feedback -** Consistent, relevant feedback is important to understanding customer pain points, needs and expectations. Making that feedback actionable and implementing continuous process improvements to the overall experience for customers, agents, employees and partners is critical. Just "knowing" isn't enough.
3. **Quality Experience Management (QEM)** - Shifting our focus (in what was previously known as "Quality Assurance") from compliance and adherence to generating meaningful outcomes and building authentic relationships with customers drives better interactions and increased Customer Satisfaction.
4. **Agent Satisfaction** - Recognizing the link between agent satisfaction and customer satisfaction, Jaguar Land Rover focuses on creating a positive work environment leading to higher job satisfaction and increased tenure which in turn contributes to a more experienced and effective team.

By focusing on these areas, Jaguar Land Rover ensures that our contact center operations not only meet but exceed expectations, leading to better outcomes for customers and a more engaged and motivated workforce. "

Andrew Pine
Head of Consumer Affairs and Customer Relationship Center

As more and more simple customer care interactions become automated, and more complex issues become a larger portion of agents' day-to-day workload, empathy has become an increasingly important soft skill for agents. This notion is reinforced by a set of three new questions, all aimed at understanding consumer perspectives on empathy. Accordingly, 55% of consumers find agent empathy to be "Very Important." Clearly, empathy is a soft skill that should be high on the list for refreshed hiring requirements, especially for brands that are heavily investing in the automation of low-effort engagements.

How important is it for customer care agents to have empathy for you during your issue?



In what way is empathy emphasized at your organization? Are agents trained on empathy? Hired for empathy, or a combination of both?

"At Freshpet Consumer Care, I seek candidates who possess a blend of qualities. During interviews for our front-line teams, I prioritize assessing personalities to ensure they fit with our team and genuinely care about our mission. Empathy is intrinsic and can't be taught, but core principles can be.

Our training begins with "360 Degrees of Empathy," which focuses on creating effortless and deeply human experiences for our consumers. This approach unifies and strengthens our team's mission, ensuring a consistent consumer experience across all consumer touch points.

The four pillars of 360 Degrees of Empathy consist of the following:

1. **Use Super Hearing:** Practice active listening and anticipate challenges before they occur.
2. **Find Direct Paths:** Value our consumers' time.
3. **Make Wise Decisions**: Conduct thorough research and use available resources to find answers.
4. **Don't Forget to be Human:** Acknowledge consumers and be authentic.

Additionally, inspired by an exceptional CX professional, we incorporate the "4 Rs" in every interaction:

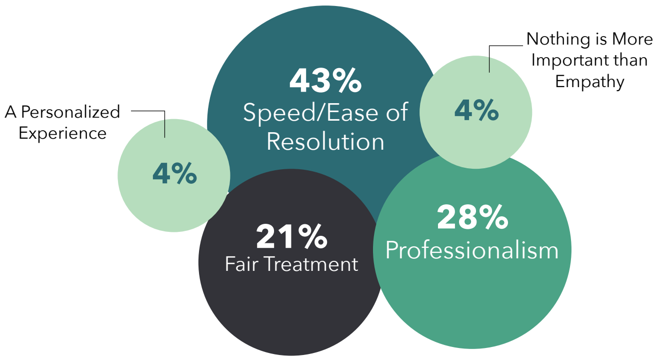
1. **Respect:** Treat the consumer in a professional and respectful manner.
2. **Remorse:** Apologize for the experience and express empathy.
3. **Restitution:** Offer compensation to make it right, if applicable.
4. **Resolution:** Ensure the consumer's issue is resolved on the first contact.

This comprehensive approach ensures our team consistently delivers outstanding consumer care. With AI technology handling many basic tasks in consumer care, when consumers need to speak with a human, empathy remains the top priority, followed closely by resolving their issue."

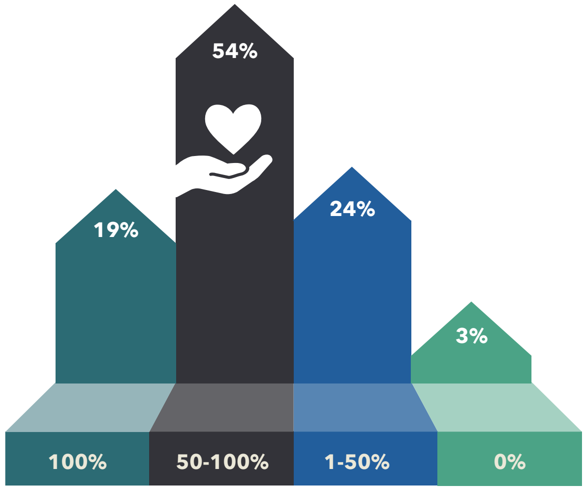
Lisa Diehl
Director, Customer Care

freshpet

Which of the following is more important to you than empathy in resolving a customer care issue?



Compared to Speed, Ease of Resolution, Fair Treatment, etc., in what percentage of your engagements do you think empathy is the most important characteristic?

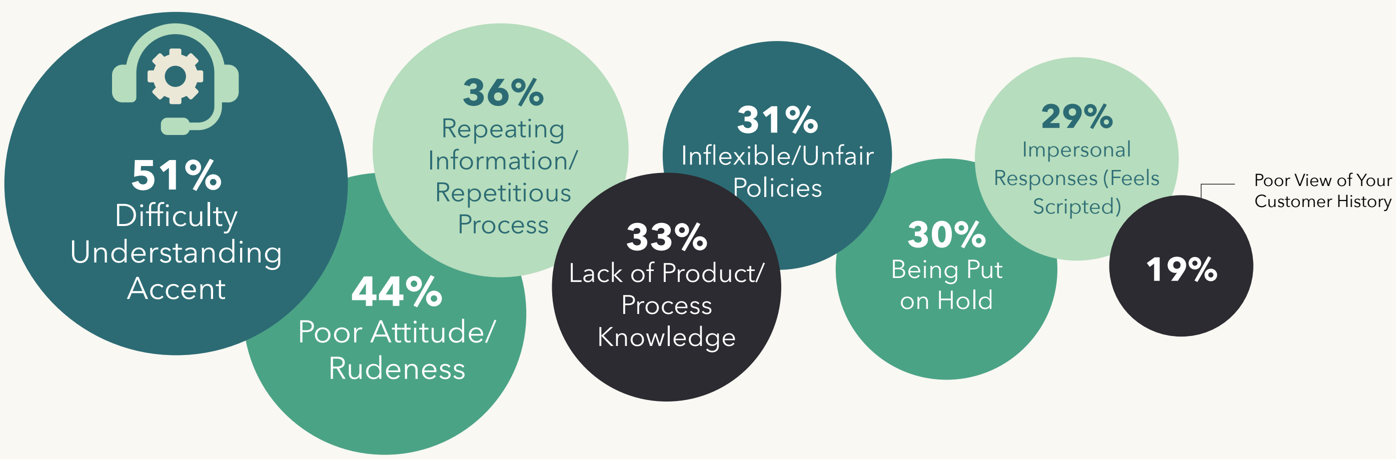


In a pair of results that are somewhat contradictory in nature, only 4% of respondents indicated that nothing is more important than empathy (left). At the same time, 19% of respondents felt empathy was the most important thing in 100% of their engagements (below). Regardless, what is evident is that empathy is a consideration for consumers when it comes to engaging brands in a customer care capacity.

Although empathy is a difficult skill to measure, there are ways for a company to understand how it is performing using Voice of the Customer (VoC) analysis, or even direct surveying of the customer. And, of course, empathy can be more important in some scenarios than in others, so every brand ought to consider understanding the importance of empathy among their specific customer base.

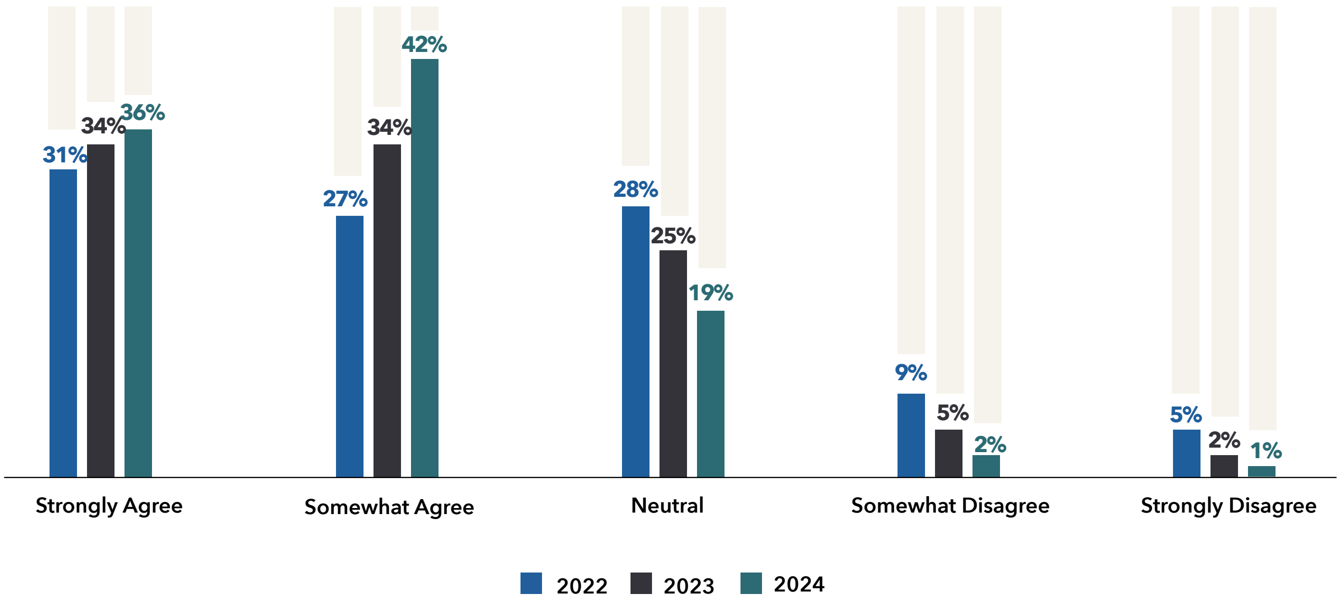
Again, communication-related issues rise to the top when consumers are asked what they might find most bothersome when interacting with someone to resolve a customer care issue. Coming in a close second is agent behavior, specifically around attitude and rudeness. This raises an interesting discussion about what companies can train to versus what they should hire for. As more complex issues bypass automated solutions, consumers won't only be looking for greater issue resolution and problem-solving skills, they'll also be looking for the right attitude in helping to address these increasing complex customer care issues.

Which of the following characteristics do you find to be most bothersome when speaking to someone to resolve a customer care issue? (Select no more than three.)



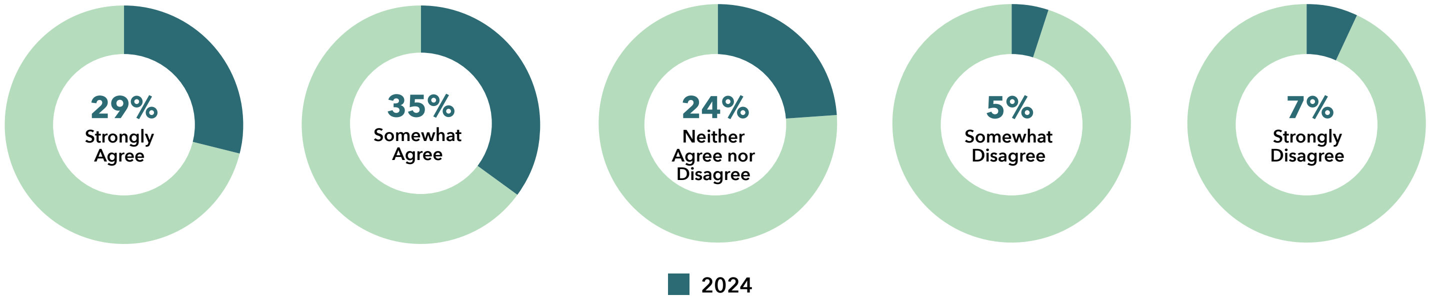
In a question first asked in 2022, consumers continue to firmly indicate that passion among customer care agents is important. In fact, consumers have never more strongly agreed, with 78% either indicating they "Strongly Agree" or "Somewhat Agree" compared to a combined 68% in 2023 and 58% in 2022. In other words, the stated importance of agent passion has grown by an average of ten points year-over-year.

How do you feel about the following statement: It is important for customer care agents to be very passionate about the brands they represent.



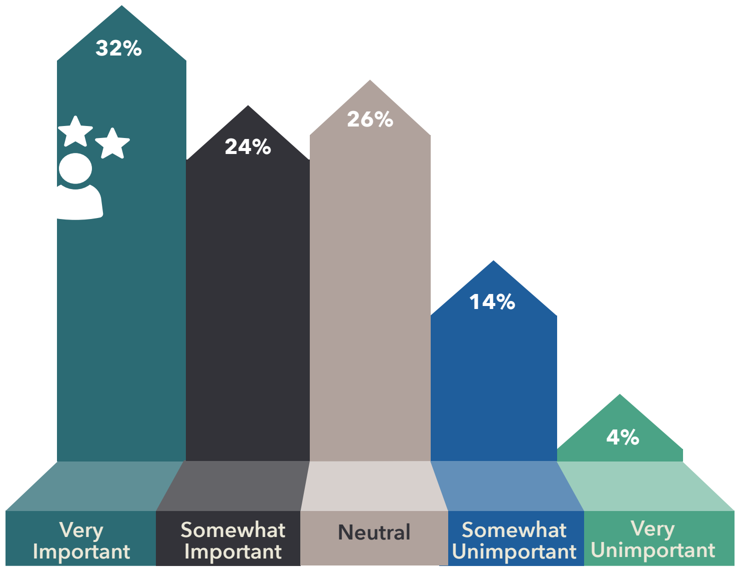
In yet another new question, survey respondents were asked about whether they'd be willing to pay a little more for products and services if it meant better pay and treatment for employees. Results echoed a similar result on page 53 in which 69% of respondents said they'd be willing to pay more for world-class customer service. On the issue of employee pay and treatment, a combined 64% of respondents either "Strongly Agree" or "Somewhat Agree" with paying a little more to ensure a more rewarding experience for employees.

How do you feel about the following statement: I would be willing to pay a little more for a product/service if I knew it meant employees would be paid more and treated better.



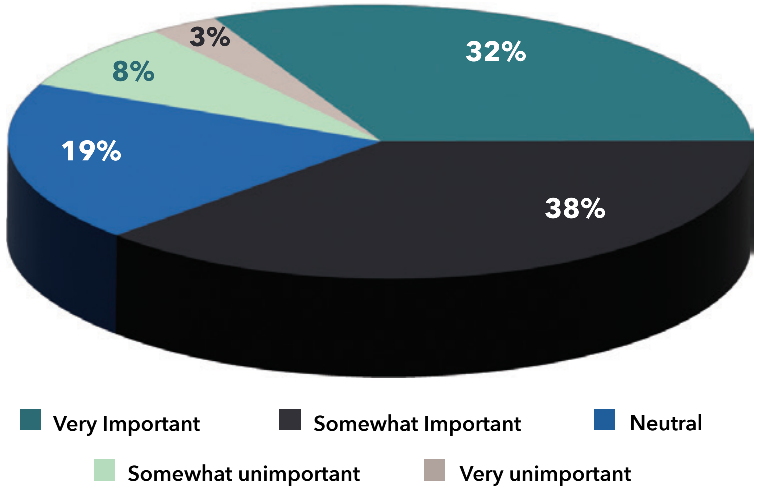
Traditionally, white glove and concierge-like service was reserved for premium brands. But the fact is, consumers value dealing with the same customer care agent in each interaction regardless of brand or category. Same-agent assigning and other smart routing strategies might be a strong fit depending on several factors. If they are a good fit, such strategies can help boost CSAT and loyalty and give customers a sense they are valued and important as they work through their issues.

In dealing with a brand, how important is it for you to deal with the same customer care agent each time?



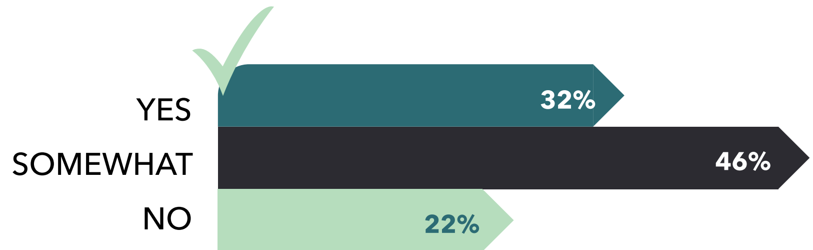
Hand in hand with the above result, consumers also find it very important for agents to have a complete picture of their prior dealings with a brand. Commonly referred to as a 360-degree view of the customer, a comprehensive view of the customer can help reduce noise in the resolution process, convey the value of a particular customer, and help agents establish a rapport with individual customers. Such a complete view also gives agents important back information, empowering them to create a more personalized experience for customers.

In dealing with a brand to resolve a customer care issue, how important is it for the agent to know you, your customer history, purchase history, and the details of any prior interactions you've had?



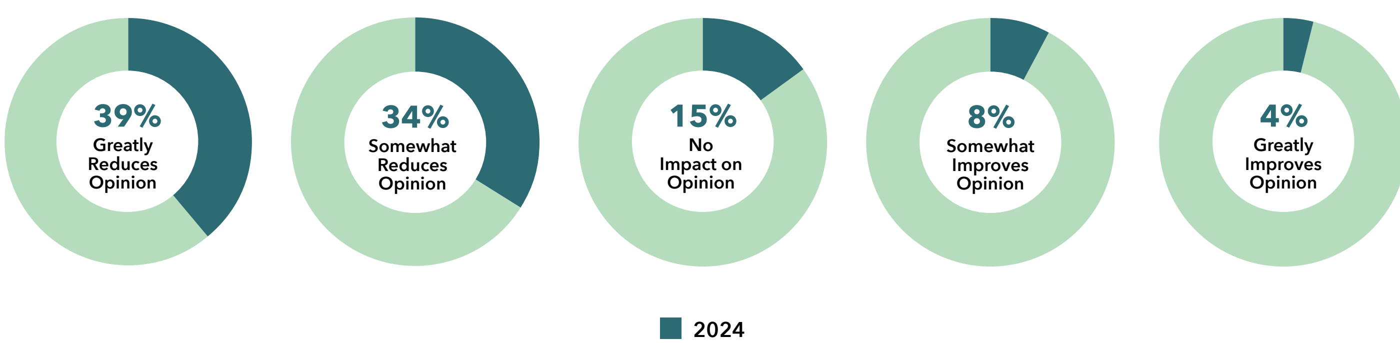
Empowered agents bring several benefits to customers, including reduced wait times, more abundant and generous goodwill, more meaningful acts of advocacy and, of course, a stronger bond with the brand resulting from the aforementioned. While about one-third of consumers feel brands are generally doing a good job of empowering agents, slightly more than one in five feel the opposite. If agent empowerment is a program objective, brands should consider what sort of individuals thrive when empowered and gear hiring requirements for those attributes.

Do you feel companies generally do a good job of empowering their customer care agents to act in a way that benefits you as a customer?



Consumers are firm in their opinion of automated deflection, and it's resoundingly negative. In fact, 73% of consumers indicate the use of technology to deflect away from live assistance either "Greatly" or "Somewhat" reduces their opinion of the company deploying such technologies. This may, in part, be due to the current experience with automated solutions. In other words, consumers might be more open to deflection once such solutions provide a better, more effective experience in resolving issues.

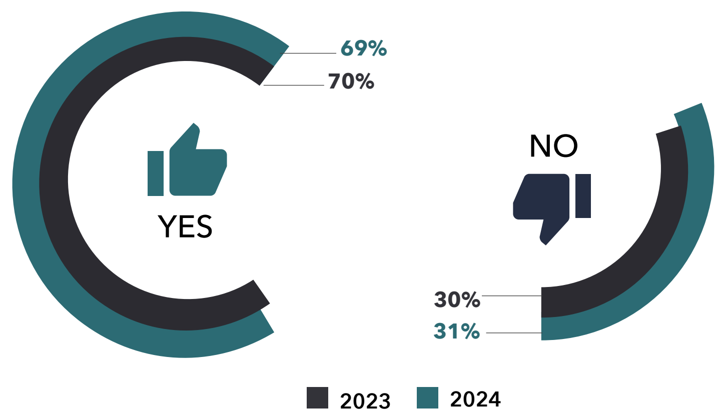
What impact does it have on your opinion of a company when they use technology and automation to deflect you away from a live agent until all other options have been exhausted?



EXPECTATIONS

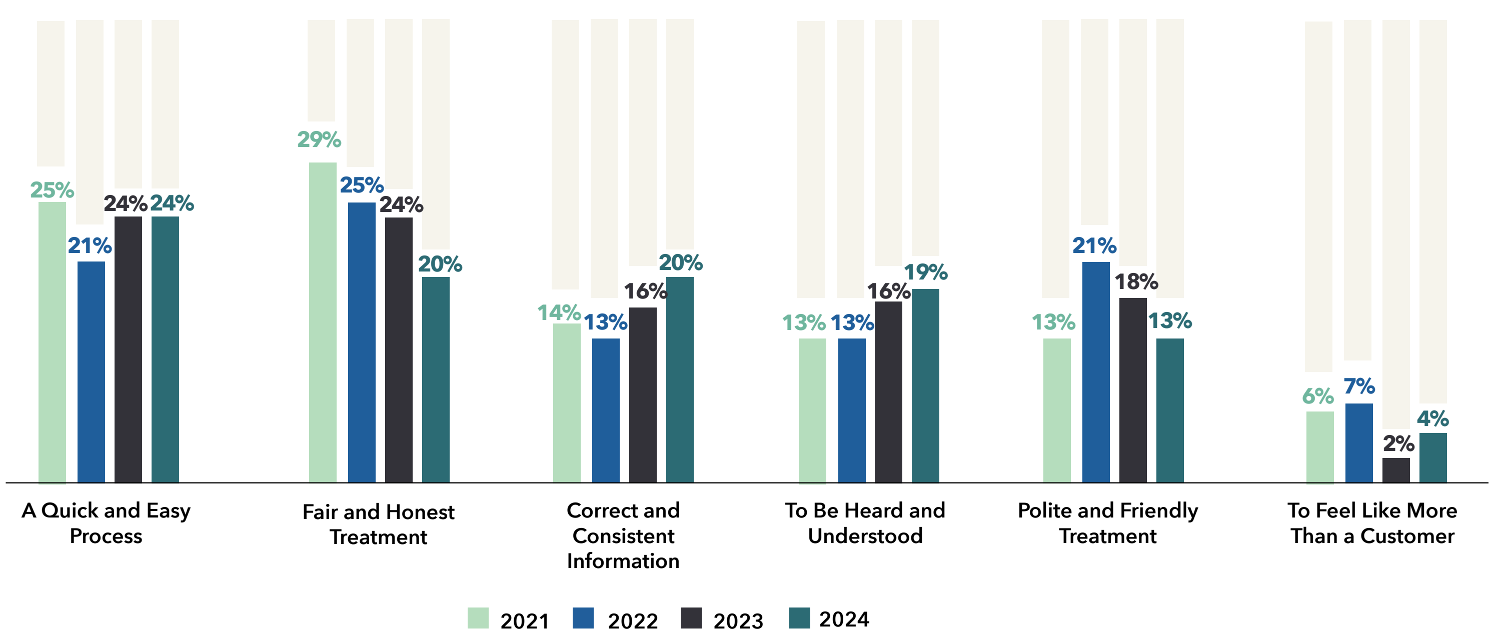
For the second consecutive year, most consumers feel customer care departments are generally doing a good job of meeting needs and expectations. In terms of what those needs and expectations are, they can be boiled down to primarily three elements: ease of process/speed of resolution, fair treatment, and access on a preferred channel. If a brand knows how they are performing in these key areas and match that performance to customer expectations, they put themselves in a prime position to transform the customer care experience into customer loyalty.

Do you feel that the customer care departments of today's companies are generally meeting your customer service needs and expectations?



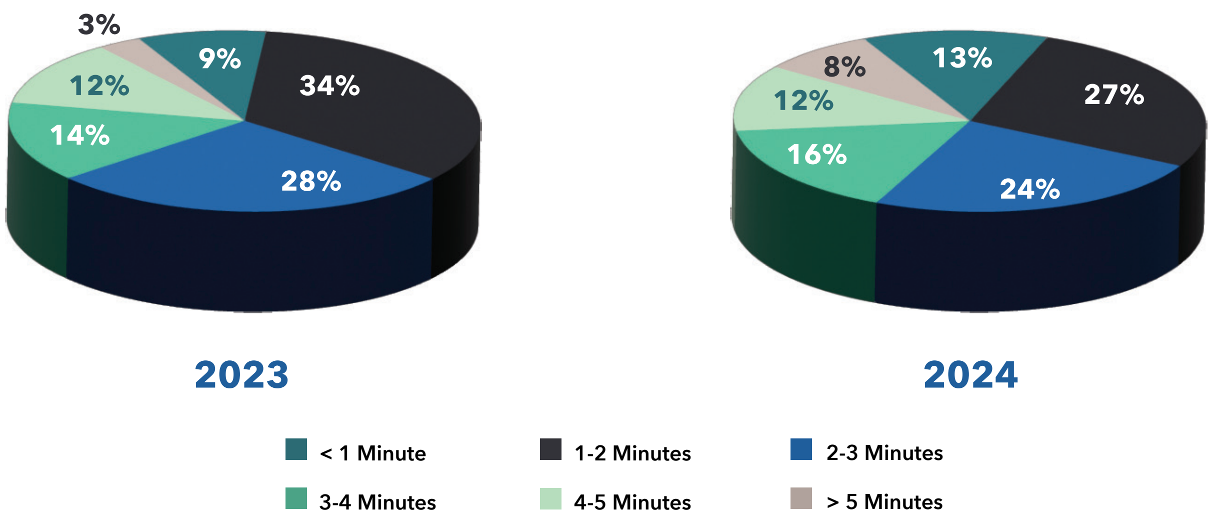
In addition to a "Quick and Easy Process" and "Fair and Honest Treatment," in 2024, consumers have also pointed to "Correct and Consistent Information" and "To Be Heard and Understood" as elements of import. The latter, which is ultimately an issue of communication, has also been highlighted elsewhere in this report, particularly on page 53. As issue complexity takes up a larger portion of agent engagements, clear communication will be critical to providing a satisfactory experience.

Aside from getting your issue resolved satisfactorily, what is most important when dealing with a large brand to resolve a customer care issue?



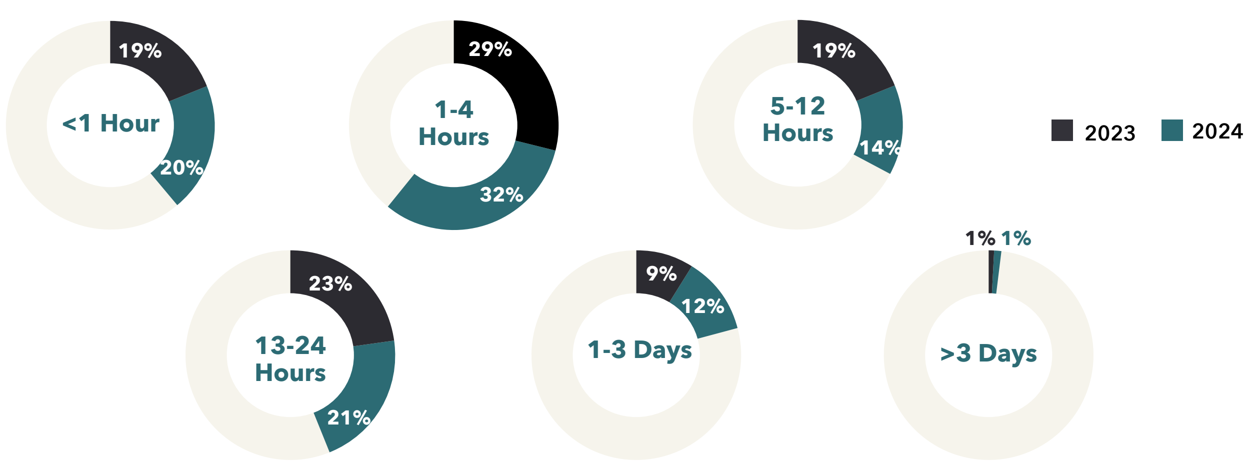
Response expectations for Phone were consistent in the way they stacked year over year, with the highest percentage of survey respondents continuing to expect to be speaking with someone in one to two minutes. Based on these results, if a brand can establish a voice connection on an incoming call within two minutes, that brand would be meeting the expectations of at least 60% of consumers.

When interacting with a brand's customer care department by phone, how quickly do you expect to be speaking to someone?



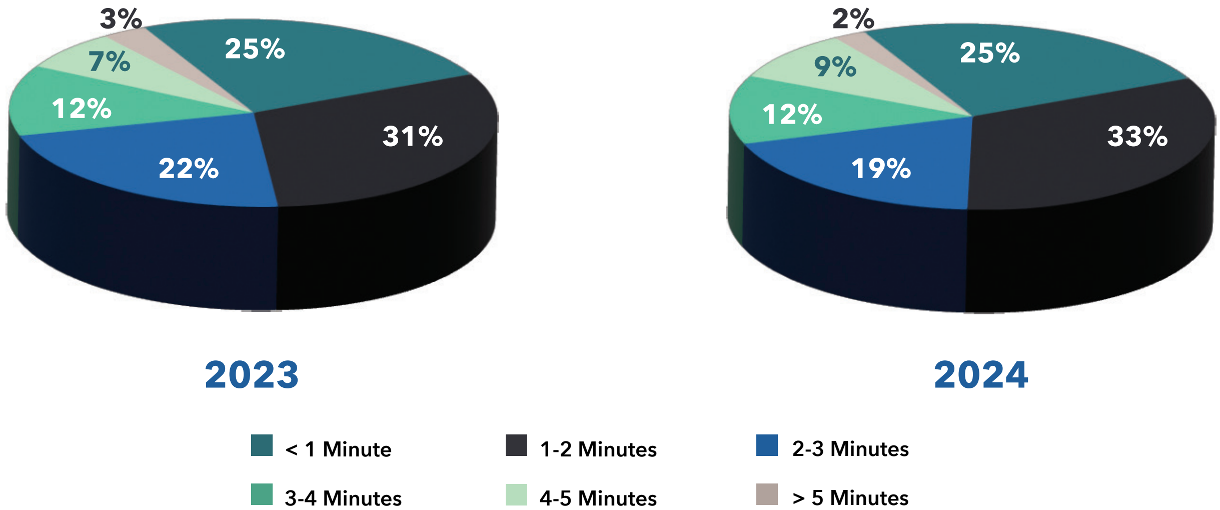
Like the above, year-over-year results stacked similarly for email response expectations. Again, more survey respondents expect an email response in one to four hours compared to all other time frames. Interestingly, email was the only solution which underwent a fall in preference for both simple and complex issues (page 59) yet experienced an overall increase in use. This data could be interpreted as consumers sometimes using email not because they want to, but because they are forced to for whatever reason.

When interacting with a brand's customer care department by email, how quickly do you expect them to initially answer your inquiry?



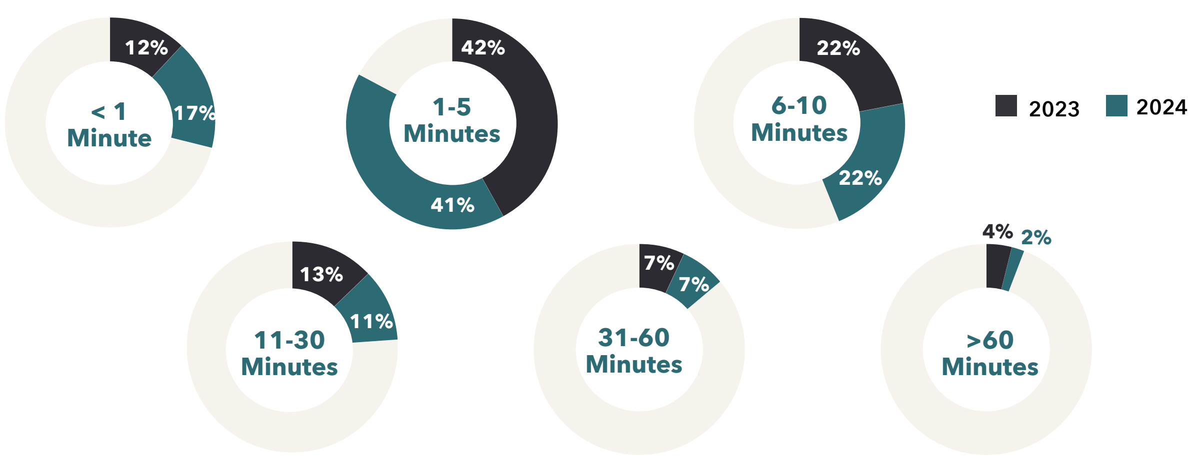
Like phone and email before it, online chat response expectations held in range, with more consumers expecting a response in one to two minutes than any other response time frame. Compared to phone (which had the second loftiest response expectations), 58% of respondents expected a response in two minutes or less for online chat compared to 40% for phone. In other words, consumers expect the speediest response to come while using online chat.

When interacting with a brand's customer care department by online chat (e.g., via computer), how quickly do you expect to initially be chatting with someone?



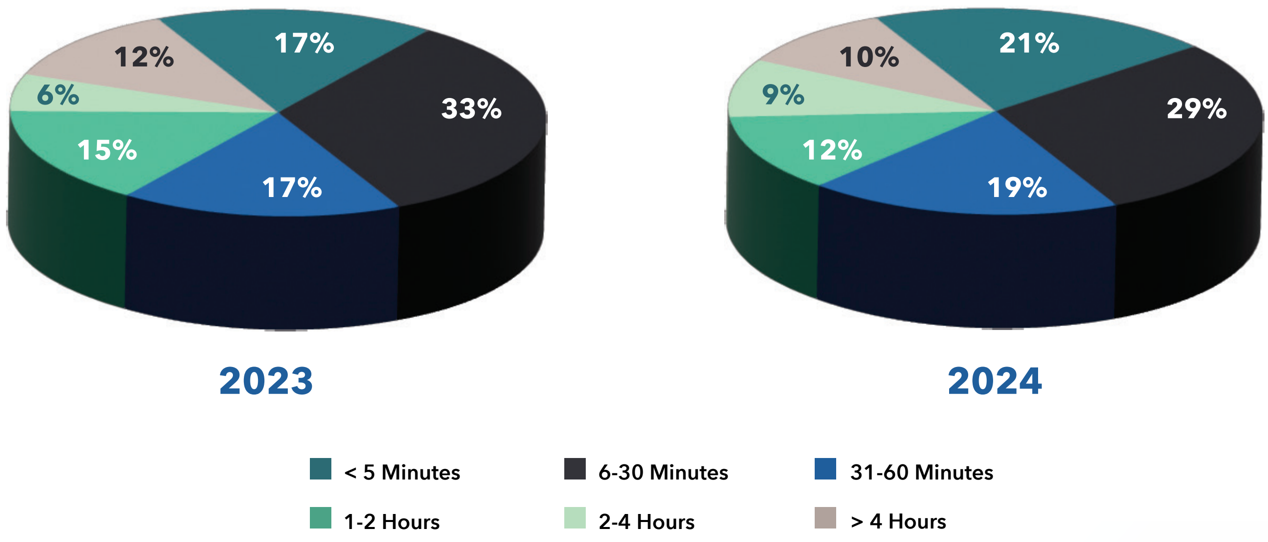
Response expectations were slightly heightened for the SMS solution year over year, with a five-point increase in the percentage of consumers who look for a response in less than a minute. In fact, now nearly one in five (17%) of consumers expect a response in less than a minute, and at least 42% of respondents would have their response expectations met if a brand is able to respond in six minutes or less.

When interacting with a brand's customer care department by SMS, how quickly do you expect them to initially respond to your inquiry?



Only email had less restrictive response expectations than social media/online forums/message boards. That said, expectations did grow by four points year-over-year in the less-than-five-minutes category year-over-year (from 17% to 21%), with a similar fall in the six to 30 minutes segment (down four points). If brands are able to respond in 30 minutes or less, they meet the expectations of at least 50% of consumers.

When interacting with a brand's customer care department via social media or an online forum/message board, how quickly do you expect an initial response?



CONSUMER PERSPECTIVES — **CONCLUSIONS**

Key Findings:

- When asked if companies are getting better or worse at providing good customer care, 33% of consumers said "Better," the highest percentage in four years' worth of data (page 50).
- Fifty-three percent of consumers think it's "Very Important" for customer care and CX to have influence within a company, while another 31% think it's "Somewhat Important." Furthermore, 39% of consumers think that influence should be "Extreme" (page 51).
- Fifty-two percent of consumers had a change in their preferred contact method in recent years, the highest percentage in seven years' worth of data. Wanting to talk with a live person continues to be the leading cause of that change (page 60).
- Eighty-six percent of consumers feel it is either "Very" or "Somewhat" important for agents to have empathy during the resolution process, while only four percent think it "Very" or "Somewhat" unimportant (page 65).
- Sixty-four percent of consumers "Strongly" or "Somewhat" agree with the idea of paying a little more for products/services if it meant better pay and treatment for employees (page 68).

Results in the Consumer Perspectives section suggest a positive shift in consumer perceptions of customer care, with 33% of respondents stating that companies are getting better at providing good customer care — the highest percentage in four years. This improvement in consumer sentiment reflects the growing efforts by organizations to enhance their customer service strategies with a customer-first approach and underscores the positive gains that can be made by investing in customer care, especially in improving agents. However, there remains a significant opportunity for companies to further strengthen these perceptions by continuing to improve service quality and consistency across all touch points.

Brand new survey results for 2024 highlight the critical role of customer care within an organization with a slight majority of consumers (53%) believing it is "Very Important" for customer care and CX to have influence within a company, with another 31% viewing it as "Somewhat Important." What's more, 39% of consumers feel that this influence should be "Extreme," indicating that customers recognize the impact that strong customer service can have on their overall experience. These findings suggest that organizations should prioritize elevating the role of CX and customer care within their corporate structure, ensuring that these functions have a voice in strategic decision-making processes and the resources necessary to effect change.

Despite advancements in self-help and AI, many consumers still prefer direct interactions with live agents, especially when complex issues arise. Fifty-two percent of consumers reported a change in their preferred contact method in recent years, primarily driven by a desire to speak with a live person. This underscores the ongoing need for human empathy in customer interactions. In fact, an overwhelming 86% of consumers feel that empathy is either "Very" or "Somewhat" important during the resolution process. For CX organizations, this emphasizes the importance of training and empowering agents to demonstrate empathy and understanding, as these qualities significantly impact customer satisfaction and loyalty.

And in yet another entirely new finding for 2024, consumers indicate they are acutely aware of the importance of ethical treatment of customer service employees, with 64% of respondents agreeing that they would be willing to pay more for products or services if it meant better pay and treatment for employees. This suggests a growing consumer expectation for companies to not only provide excellent customer service but also to treat their employees fairly and ethically. Organizations that align their business practices with these values may find themselves with a competitive advantage yielding greater trust and loyalty among customers. By focusing on what matters most to customers, companies can create a more positive and meaningful customer experience.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Execs In The Know brings together customer experience (CX) leaders from across industries in an effort to advance the conversation and set a new agenda for delivering amazing experiences for consumers. As a global community of the brightest minds in CX, Execs In The Know provides opportunities to learn, share, network, and engage to innovate. Operating under the motto, "Leaders Learning From Leaders," Execs In The Know facilitates many opportunities for community engagement, such as its bi-annual national Customer Response Summit and private, online community, Know It All "KIA." There are also exclusive, laser-focused engagements like industry briefings and executive roundtables. Execs In The Know also guides and informs the industry with a rich tapestry of CX-related content that includes *CX Insight* magazine, industry research, webinars, blogs, and much more.

To learn more about Execs In The Know, visit www.execsintheknow.com.

ACT is a U.S.-based business process outsourcing provider and global leader in customer care. Our approach is founded on a winning formula – that the best solutions integrate Employee Experience (EX) + Customer Experience (CX) + User Experience (UX) + Digital Experience (DX) + Multi-experience (MX) for an outstanding Total Experience (TX) overall. As a 100% employee-owned company, we have placed Employee Experience at the center of our business strategy because we know that engaged employees ensure the best customer outcomes. As shareholders in the business, our Employee Owners have a personal interest in delivering value to our clients, and their motivations are uniquely aligned to our clients' success.

We have more than 27 years' experience helping our partners drive growth and brand loyalty by providing amazing experiences across every touch point and channel of the customer journey. We serve many of the world's top companies spanning a wide range of verticals, including numerous Fortune 50 clients. We offer a broad range of leading-edge technologies and custom solutions tailored to your business needs to make every unique customer connection count.

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METHODOLOGY

This report, the 2024 CX Leaders Trends & Insights Consumer Edition, was developed using a multi-module, multi-cohort series of consumer surveys conducted on the SurveyMonkey online surveying platform. Consumer surveying occurred across seven unique survey modules from June 10 through June 14, 2024, using SurveyMonkey Audience, a survey panel targeting platform. Sample sizes for individual questions ranged from 273 to 547. All respondents were U.S.-based individuals ages 18 years or older.

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