Execs In The Know

CX LEADERS
TRENDS & INSIGHTS

CONSUMER EDITION

PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

The *2021 CX Leaders Trends & Insights Consumer Edition* report marks the first in a new research series created and published by Execs In The Know.

Although preceded and inspired by the Customer Experience Management Benchmark (CXMB) Series, first published in 2012, this new customer experience (CX)-focused research series contains select trending and historical data, but is also built around new definitions, new topics, and an entirely new approach to driving insights.

One aspect of this new approach is to include more voices from those who know the industry best — CX practitioners. As readers peruse this volume, they are encouraged to look for the 13 instances of "Practitioner's Perspective" breakouts. These contain insider insights from some of the best and brightest currently operating in the CX space.

In addition to the inclusion of "Practitioner's Perspectives," readers will also discover an entirely new scheme for channel categorization. In an effort to better reflect today's multifaceted contact center, the previous channel categories of Traditional, Interactive, Mobile, and Social Media have been redesignated as follows:

VOICE-BASED INTERACTIONS
Phone
In-Person
Video Chat

TEXT-BASED INTERACTIONS
Online or Mobile Chat
Email
SMS

SELF-HELP INTERACTIONS
Chatbots
Mobile Apps
FAQs
Kiosks

SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTIONS
Twitter
Facebook
Forums

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

We are thrilled to bring you, our community and readership, an entirely new name and new approach to our bi-annual CX research series – introducing the *CX Leaders Trends & Insights* series. As mentioned in the Preface, this new approach to CX research goes to great lengths to include the perspectives of some of our industry's most innovative and experienced practitioners. It is with sincere gratitude that we thank each and every one of this issue's contributors for their time, insights, and indelible perspectives.

This issue's Practitioner's Perspectives include:

- Janet Sicoli
- Rick Clark
- Deana Perrin
- Bit Rambusch
- Dann Allen
- Vasanth Alli
- Bernie Leas
- Lisa Oswald
- Thomas Siebert
- Jared Benesh
- Carolyne Truelove
- Brigitte Bailey
- Sally McMahon

We'd also like to say thank you to our edition sponsor, Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS), a global leader in digital customer experience and customer journey optimization. Be sure to check out HGS's expert analysis on these results in the Sponsor Commentary on page 6.

Kind regards,

Execs In The Know

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE YOUR VOICE TO THE *2021 CX LEADERS TRENDS & INSIGHTS: CORPORATE EDITION*!

We want to hear your story! Execs In The Know will soon be gathering responses for the *2021 CX Leaders Trends & Insights Corporate Edition*, and we could use your help! Your individual responses will never be shared publicly, and your participation will help broaden this year's insights and results. We'd even welcome the opportunity to feature you in a Practitioner's Perspective breakout!

For participation information, please contact Susan McDaniel at Susan@execsintheknow.com.

METHODOLOGY

Survey data captured June 14–July 13, 2021 using the Google Consumer Survey platform. All results based on a sample size of N=200 or greater.

Google Consumer Surveys reports on the inferred age and gender of anonymous respondents based on the websites users visit, as well as their location based on IP addresses. Income and urban density are then approximated using census data for particular geographic regions. Inferences, as they relate to these categories, may not be available for all survey participants.

Please note that it's possible that Google Consumer Surveys may mis-categorize people. For example, if someone visits websites that are usually frequented by younger people, they may be categorized as younger than their actual age. Similarly, if a household uses a shared computer, we may categorize that "user" based on the combined interests of the household.

Provided the complexities of participant screening questions throughout the study's body of surveys, we present unweighted findings. When targeting an audience representing the adult U.S. internet population, Google Consumer Surveys attempts to find respondents that match the distribution of people in the U.S. by age, gender, and location as reported in the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS). When outliers were observed in the data as they relate to the inferred age, income, gender and urban density, we made an effort to highlight these findings.

About 2020 Results and the Impact on Trending Data

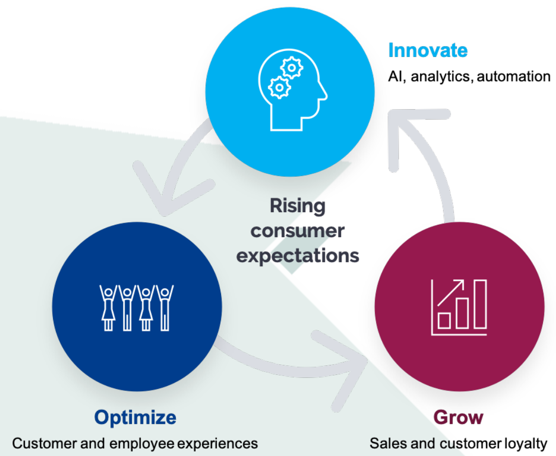
Surveying in 2020 was conducting using an alternative surveying platform and methodology. In some cases, this has resulted in outlier data points and/or breaks in trending data sets. In other cases, some questions were entirely omitted in 2020. In either case, an effort has been made to address these occurrences, and where data is missing, not applicable "N/A" has been utilized.

SPONSORCOMMENTARY

SPONSOR COMMENTARY

CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS HAVE CHANGED

Andrew Kokes
Senior Vice President, Global Head of Marketing, HGS



Whether it's booking reservations using self-service, shopping online with nearly instant delivery, or soliciting assistance from a bar of near-geniuses or squad of geeks, any modern service interaction today is expected to use the digital tools readily available at everyone's fingertips to provide the right answer fast. As consumers, the best digital experiences we have with one company quickly become the defacto expectation we apply to every digital experience with every company we interact with.

According to the Salesforce State of the Connected Customer Report published in October 2020, consumers spend an average of 8 hours and 41 minutes online – that's MORE than they sleep! Today's consumers are less patient, more empowered, and less brand-loyal than ever, and they won't hesitate to share a bad experience. In their minds, if one company delivers a frictionless experience across channels, then every interaction from another company should follow suit.

According to this report, the CX Leaders Trends & Insights 2021 Consumer Edition, in 2021, only 60% of consumers answered yes to the question, "Was your interaction with customer care consistent across all channels?" Although this is a slight improvement from 56% in 2019, a 40% chance for improvement remains. When asked, "Did you share this negative experience with friends, family and/or strangers?" in 2021, the response was at 74%, down from 76% in 2020. However, with the majority of consumers continuing to share their negative experiences – 16% is shared on social media – it's imperative that brands get customer care right the first time across all channels.

THE RISE OF DIGITAL AND UNASSISTED CHANNELS

As consumers continue to seek solutions at their convenience (i.e., not necessarily during typical weekday business hours), they are willing to explore more digital channels and self-service to resolve their issues – but not at the expense of ease of use and effectiveness. While voice care still remains strong, email, online chat, and SMS saw a lift in 2021 from 2019, with SMS spiking 33% from the 2019 baseline.

Unassisted self-help solutions (e.g., notifications, chatbots, digital FAQs, mobile apps) continue to rise, with over 15% of respondents sharing that they have used one or more self-help channels in the past 12 months. With 65% confirming they were trying to fix an issue or find information about a product or service, it's exciting to see that 13% have used self-help to make a purchase or schedule service. Adoption of self-service channels is rising, but ease of use, increased functionality and personalization are required to drive further usage. For exceptional experiences, it's key to either allow consumers to stay in unassisted channels or offer a better channel for them to resolve their issues. While many questions can be answered unassisted, make sure your consumers can connect with you via their channel of choice quickly and easily for the more complex questions.

SPONSOR COMMENTARY, CONT.

MAXIMIZING CUSTOMER VALUE

At HGS, we believe companies must continually be innovating, optimizing, and growing to address the rising expectation of the market. In 2021, consumers still ranked improving the customer care experience as the top opportunity for brands to improve at 53%. Reducing costs has always been important, but to be considered best in class, you must hyper-personalize experiences for both your customers as well as the agents who engage with customers.

It's no longer enough to provide exceptional customer care through an omnichannel experience. Consumers now expect brands to predict what they need next and then proactively deliver it, creating a "wow" experience. This means investing in smarter CX solutions powered by modern data lakes in the cloud and AI-driven automation to create frictionless self-service, intelligently integrating human-assistance at key moments of truth and suggesting the next best actions that empower frontline staff to close the value loop.

Delivering on increased expectations isn't easy, but a smarter, faster integration of balanced Bots&Brains™ can help you build a more loyal consumer base for the future.

BUILD FOR THE FUTURE

While optimizing customer experience, it's critical not to lose sight of the agent experience, especially in a hyper-competitive labor market where businesses must treat frontline employees like consumers, driving loyalty and focusing on their experience. By using our proprietary HGS Work Cloud™ platform, businesses can embrace "the way work was meant to be.™"

The top challenge for every business today is accessing quality talent. In our business, we help companies do this by leveraging our global bench. Automation has become an essential recruiting tool in reaching a vast talent pool to quickly screen potential skilled labor around the world.

The second but equally important element to building for the future is enhancing employee experience. Hiring, training, and retaining employees is the lifeblood of how work gets done at scale. A positive experience and tenure lead to increased customer satisfaction. At HGS, this means staying connected with employees throughout their entire employee lifecycle. Providing flexibility, empathy, and a focus on their mental health and wellness has led to our highest ESAT scores in history.

Third, it's important to ensure productivity across a decentralized workforce. The majority of work processes, originally designed to be performed inside an office, are now conducted remotely. As a result, leadership teams are always looking for ways to ensure that their remote teams continue to be productive and collaborative. HGS has implemented cognitive engagement centers, virtual assistant automation, data-driven resources, and insights and analytics to drive high productivity and customer value.

Finally, optimizing experiences by balancing Bots&Brains™ is essential. Improve working processes by augmenting humans with AI, analytics, and automation to drive proactive notification, frictionless self-service, and intelligent identification of the next best action. Layer in a human element to handle the more complex transactions, which also helps create future processes and decision points to improve automation.

LOOKING AHEAD

The digital experience revolution will always push companies to invent new and better ways to connect and experience their brands. And, as long as someone is raising the bar, consumers will demand that companies must step up to the challenge. In order to compete, they must be customer-centric and make experiences faster and more frictionless.

Customer care professionals must think ahead, creating and designing experiences with proactive engagement at top of mind. Blending technology and intelligently integrating people will add value to each experience, taking customer care to the next level and maximizing customer value.

Andrew Kokes
Senior Vice President, Global Marketing
Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS)

Andrew leads HGS's global marketing strategy and execution, including strategic planning, positioning and vertically targeted growth planning to support delivery of innovative Digital CX solutions for customer-centric, high-growth global organizations. During Andrew's tenure, he has overseen the launch of strategic offerings such as DigiCX®, Bots&Brains™, HGS Work@Home™, and the HGS Work Cloud™.

A part of the customer experience and contact management industry since 1997, Andrew has held leadership roles focused on global sourcing solutions in the U.S., Europe, Latin America, the Philippines, and India. Andrew is also one of the key developers of early Social CRM offerings to drive online conversion and web retention, recognized by Frost & Sullivan with an innovation award and by Nelson Hall as leading the industry with market share adoption.

SURVEYRESULTS

CONSUMER EXPERIENCES

CONSUMER USE

THE MULTICHANNEL JOURNEY

THE UNHAPPY CONSUMER

UNASSISTED SOLUTIONS

CUSTOMER CARE CHANNEL USE AND WHAT IS AT STAKE

NEW QUESTION!

In a new channel framing for 2021, consumer use of Phone remains extremely strong at 48%. This usage seems to be based, in part, on channel effectiveness rather than consumer preference which is evenly split between Voice- and Text-Based as seen in Figure 38.

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

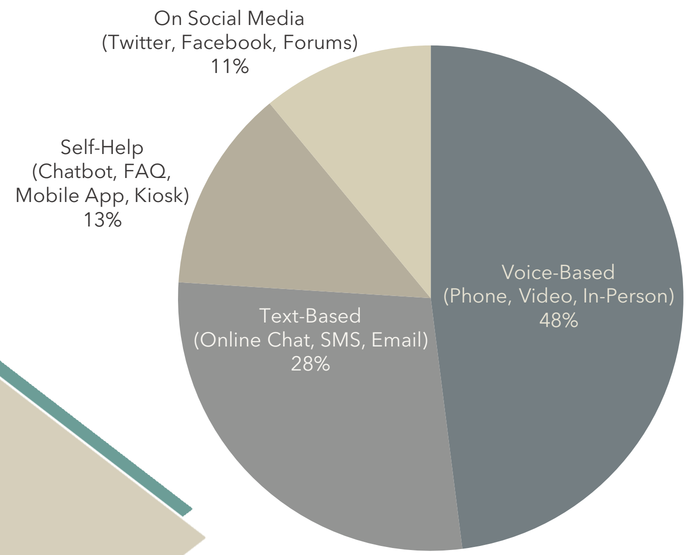


Figure 1

THE WHY

Based on results, it appears consumers continue to gravitate to whichever channel is most effective at solving their issues, regardless of preference.

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

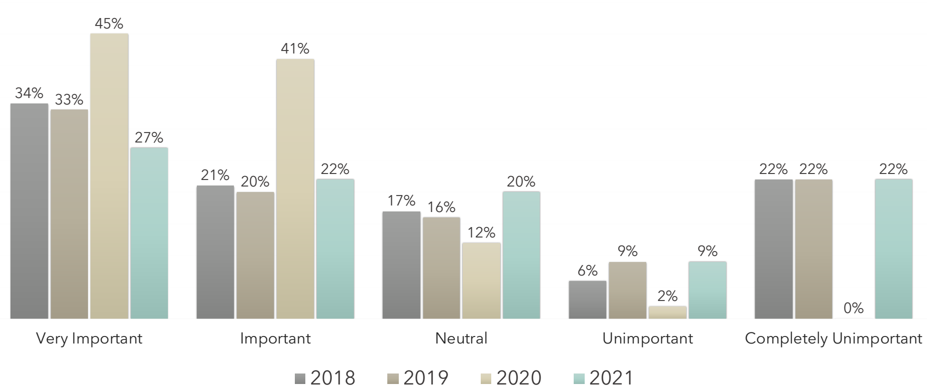


Figure 2

The stakes remain high for CX, with half of survey respondents indicating it is "Very Important" or "Important" in shaping their brand opinion. This is strong support for the idea that **customer experience is an enterprise-wide endeavor, and outcomes matter.**

SOLUTION USE

After two consecutive years of declines, Phone use ticked up in 2021. Aside from 2020 outliers (see Methodology on Page 5 for details on why), Email, Online Chat, and SMS also saw a lift, with SMS enjoying a jump of 33% from its 2019 baseline.

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

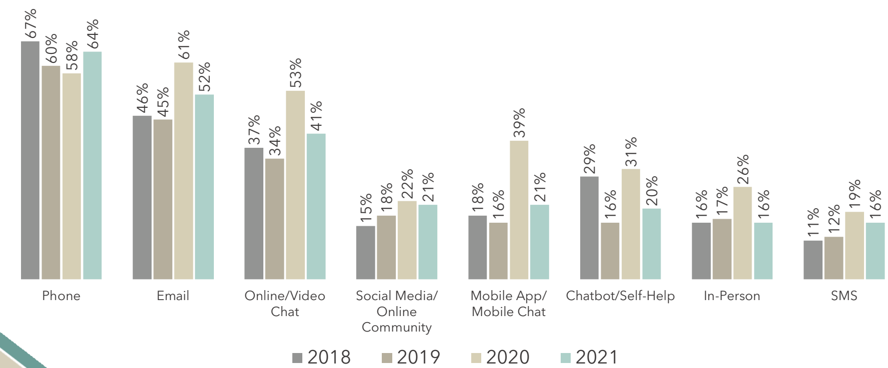


Figure 3

THE WHY

Based on channel preference (Figure 38), it's clear: Consumers are open to new solutions as long as they are easy and effective. To sustain growth in non-voice channels, brands will need find ways to solve for a wider range of issues.

Brands will need to find ways to overcome consumers' negative perceptions and past experiences.

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

Are you seeing any significant changes in which channels your customers are using?

Janet Sicoli
Vice President, Chat and Social Customer Response
SiriusXM

Post-pandemic, we observed a shift in customer channel preference skewing more toward messaging given the initial long queue times in voice. Our messaging contacts have increased from 10% to 30% of our live contacts within the past year and are growing. Web and text messaging provide our customers with the convenience to respond when it is best for them. The asynchronous nature of the channel enables customers to pick up their conversation with an agent where they left off. The convenience for our customers is resulting in higher satisfaction scores, scoring in the 90s for customer satisfaction (CSAT) versus mid-80s. The ability to request proactive agent support for the next day during after-hours has further contributed to increased customer satisfaction Providing customers with messaging as a support channel drives increased customer satisfaction, more convenience, and promotes carrying the brand with them.

SiriusXM SATELLITE RADIO

CONSUMER EXPERIENCES

CONSUMER USE

THE MULTICHANNEL JOURNEY

THE UNHAPPY CONSUMER

UNASSISTED SOLUTIONS

CHANNEL AND SOLUTION USE

NEW QUESTION!

Twenty-four percent of survey respondents (representing the total population) indicated they had used multiple channels to resolve a single customer care issue. Safe to say, **multichannel journeys are a part of the vast majority of customer care engagements.**

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

YES: 24%

NEW QUESTION!

Phone and Email continue to be the centerpieces of such journeys (Figure 5), but consumers are open to new solutions, including those powered by AI. A larger migration to unassisted solutions is possible so long as those solutions prove **effective and easy to use, and provide seamless navigation to a live agent when necessary.**

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

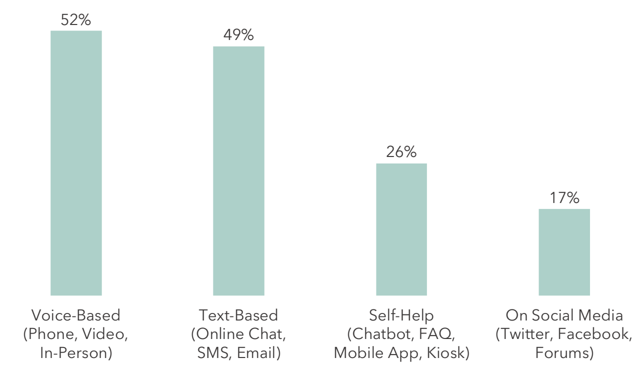


Figure 4

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

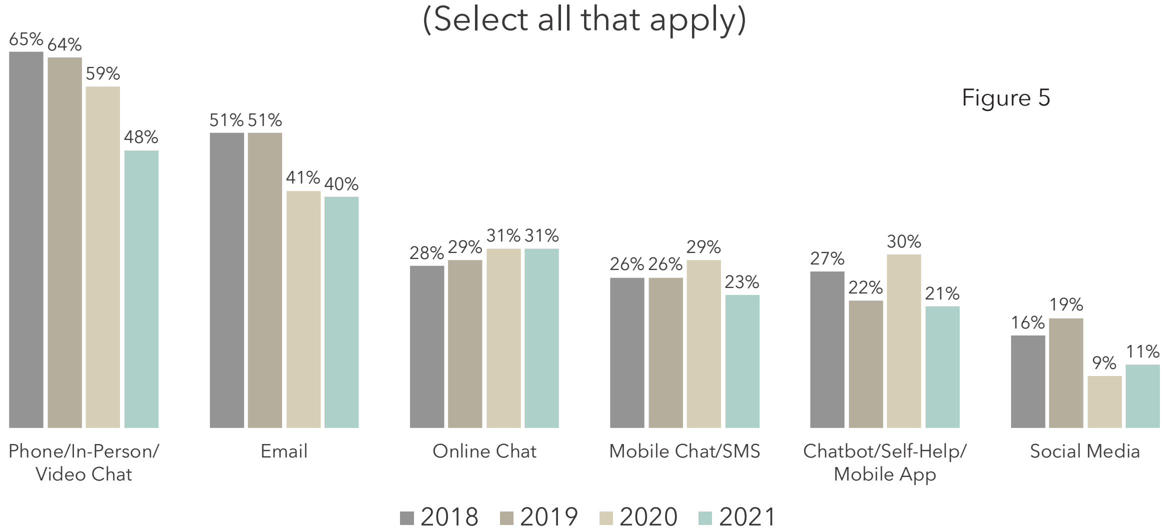


Figure 5

REASON FOR USE

Multichannel is increasingly perceived as a choice for consumers, rather than a forced path.

Sixty percent of survey participants who had taken a multichannel journey in the past 12 months indicated they did so by choice. When consumers choose multichannel (rather than being forced into it), the result is:

- **Improved Resolution Rates (Figure 11)**
- **Higher CSAT Scores (Figure 13)**

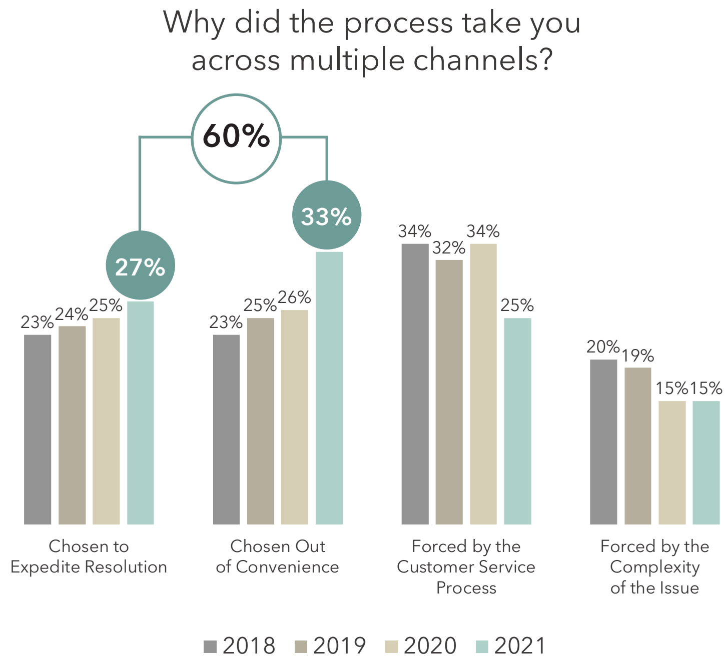


Figure 6

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

How does your organization work to make multichannel a choice rather than a forced path?

Rick Clark
Director of Global Customer Care
Balsam Brands

Designing the multichannel experience to be an option is fundamental to our thought process – forcing the customer to use our preferred channel generates frustration and dissatisfaction and reduces the likelihood that the customer will cooperate in a difficult situation. For example, Balsam's chatbot lets the customer know right up front that they have engaged our "automated assistant," and we offer a few common categories that the customer may click on, or they may enter any question. When an answer is offered, we also include the option to "chat with a live agent," or the customer may continue with the bot. We have found that less than a third of our chatbot customers choose to proceed to the live agent.

BALSAM
BRANDS

MULTICHANNEL END POINTS

Survey respondents were asked to indicate where their multichannel journey both began and ended. Logically, channels with a larger "End" percentage versus "Begin" percentage (such as Phone) offer a higher resolution rate. On the flip side, channels with a larger "Begin" percentage versus "End" percentage (such as Self-Help) offer a lower resolution rate. Based on this reasoning, it is clear which channels are performing best.

In which channels did your multichannel engagement begin/end?

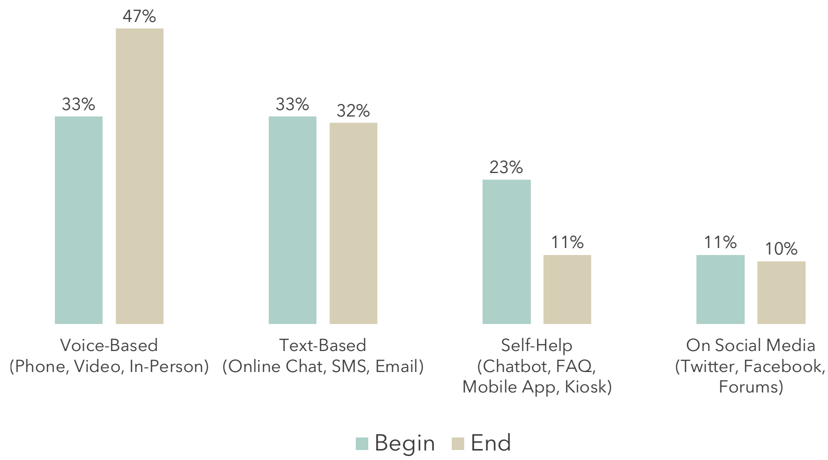


Figure 7

To improve the multichannel experience, brands should consider boosting the resolution rates of Self-Help solutions (including AI-powered solutions like Chatbots) and make it easier to access a live agent.

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

Not every channel will be able to solve every issue, so redirecting needs to be easy. What is your organization doing to help get customers to the right place to solve their issues?

Deana Perrin
Senior Director – Broker, Provider, and Shared Services
Blue Shield of California

This is such an important question to consider when implementing new channels (especially on digital platforms) to protect your customer experience. This is top of mind for my organization as we are working to implement live chat for providers and brokers. Starting at the point of design, it is important to align the contact types to the channel where you can most successfully answer those inquiries. Considering key questions such as: 1) Is the information complex and challenging to understand?; 2) What is the experience you are trying to create for your customer?; 3) Where does your customer prefer to receive service? Once you have identified your channel alignment, move onto your content. By adjusting your customer facing content and being thoughtful about where you place contact information, you can encourage the optimal channel for engagement where they will receive the best experience. Finally, remember that nothing in service happens perfectly in every interaction. You will have customers who are not satisfied with the resolution and require escalation. Its important to be ready to proactively identify when a failure point is occurring and have a plan to escalate volume between channels to ensure you can close the service interaction to the customer's satisfaction.

CONSISTENCY AND OPINIONS ON IMPROVEMENT

Continued improvements in consistency saw 60% of respondents claiming a consistent experience across channels during their multichannel journey in 2021, an all-time high. Brands are headed in the right direction when it comes to creating a consistent multichannel experience, although room for improvement remains.

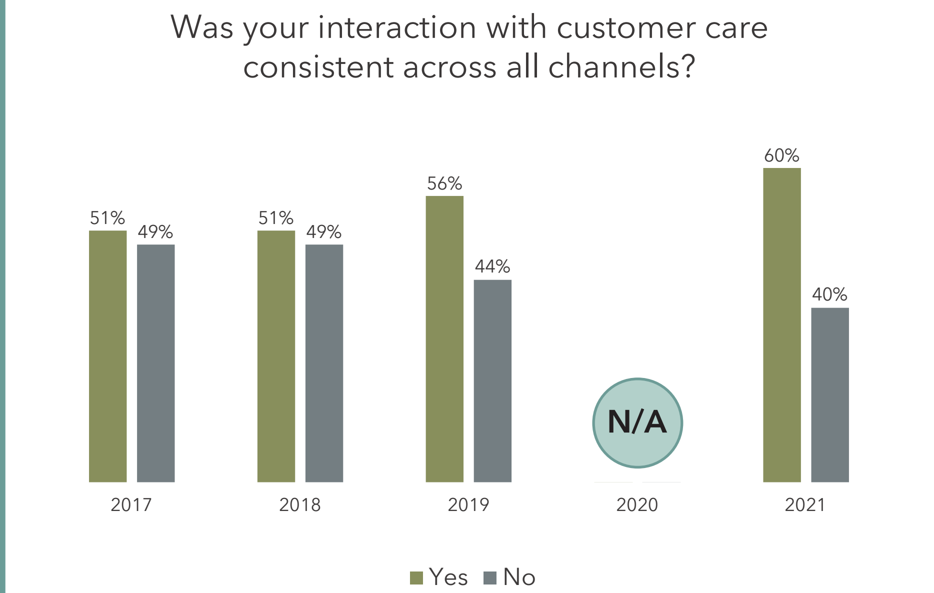


Figure 8

Q: HOW COULD YOUR OVERALL MULTICHANNEL EXPERIENCE HAVE BEEN IMPROVED?

A: HERE ARE SOME ACTUAL RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION OF HOW THE MULTICHANNEL EXPERIENCE COULD BE IMPROVED:

"Make it easier to speak with a representative."

"Allowed me to fulfill my request online, without having to call."

"Have consistent answers from one interaction to the next."

"Passed along the information I had already provided so I wasn't explaining myself twice."

"The multichannel experience was not convenient. If a chat can't provide the solution, they should be clear instead of wasting time."

"A live person would have taken care of problem much quicker."

"My problem was too complicated to resolve over the chatbot or online chat. I think companies have to get you to a voice interaction faster and more seamlessly."

THE WHY

In response to what customer care could do differently to improve the overall multichannel experience, the most common responses were:

- Easier access to a live representative
- Greater resolution effectiveness
- Increased solution capabilities across the multichannel journey

MULTICHANNEL RESOLUTION RATES

The perceived resolution rate for multichannel journeys remained incredibly consistent, as it has since 2015. In seven years' worth of data, reported resolution rates of multichannel engagements haven't deviated from a tight range of 75-77%.

Although this resolution rate lags that of Phone alone, **Multichannel resolution rates have been consistently better than stand-alone unassisted solutions** (Figure 23), which saw a resolution rate of 73% in 2021.

Figure 9

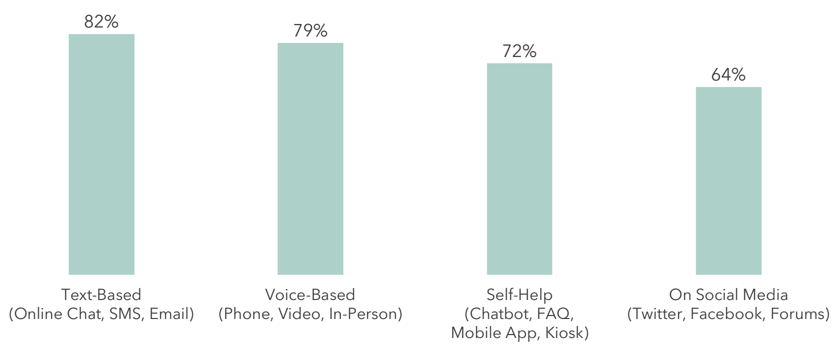


Figure 10

By cross-referencing multichannel endpoints with the question on resolution (Figure 9), it is possible to understand which channels are most effective (and ineffective) at getting results for customers. Clearly, **Self-Help and Social Media channels are most in need of attention.**

Whether a consumer chooses or is forced into a multichannel journey strongly correlates with outcome. When consumers chose to take a multichannel journey (instead of being forced into the journey), **resolution rates are consistently higher.**

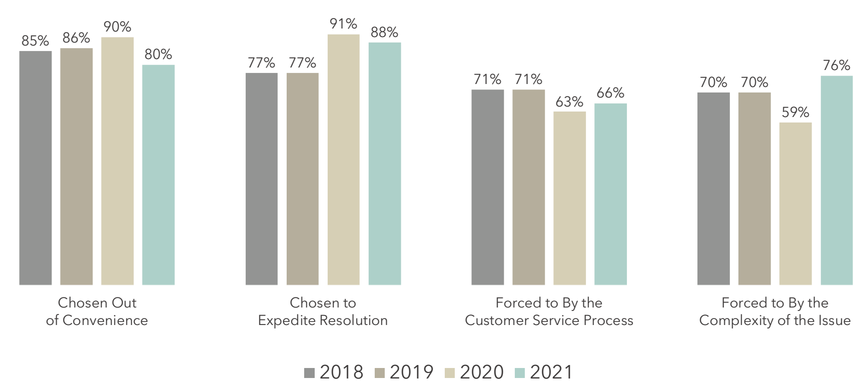


Figure 11

MULTICHANNEL SATISFACTION RATES

NEW QUESTION!

New for 2021 is a five-point scale question aimed at understanding satisfaction, where 41% of respondents indicated a positive multichannel experience. This compares to 39% in 2020 and 38% in 2019. While consistent, such responses show there is room for improvement, with other results indicating opportunities exist in the areas of:

- Improved effectiveness
- Simplified processes
- Resolving for a wider range issues

Overall, how satisfied were you with the multichannel experience?

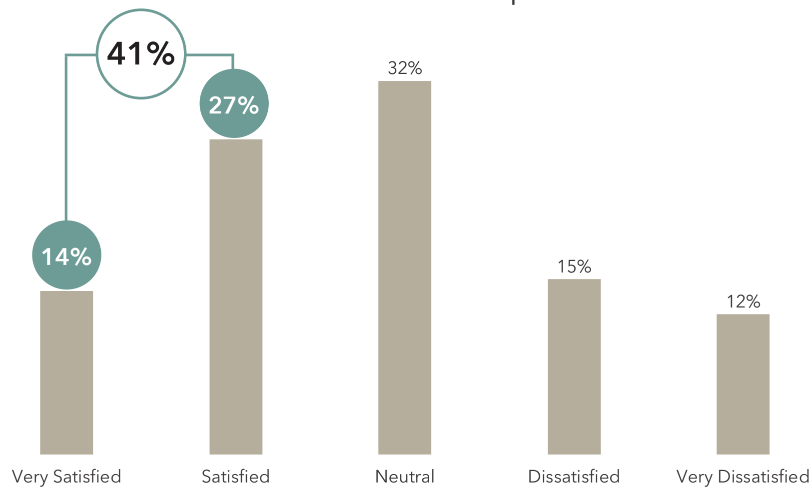


Figure 12

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

How does your organization ensure a high level of satisfaction with the multichannel journey?

Bit Rambusch
Vice President of eServices & Knowledge Management
Dell Technologies

At Dell Technologies, our customers often choose to resolve issues across multiple channels. This means our eServices teams must be ready to meet them wherever they are and deliver the best experience possible. To achieve this, we measure where our engagement with the customer begins and ends and align our data and analytics along the entire customer journey. We deploy consistent, seamless, and frictionless processes that we constantly evaluate and improve. Capturing effective customer journey data allows us to further personalize our service, identify potential points of failure, and recognize areas of opportunity. Maintaining this broad scope helps us get to the heart of creating better outcomes and delivering best-in-class experiences for our customers.

MULTICHANNEL SATISFACTION RATES BY REASON FOR USE

Much like Resolution Rate (Figure 9), satisfaction with the multichannel journey is strongly correlated to consumer choice. When consumers are forced into a multichannel path, resolution rates are typically lower, as is CSAT. The conclusion **– brands need to do everything possible to make the multichannel journey a choice** rather than a forced path.

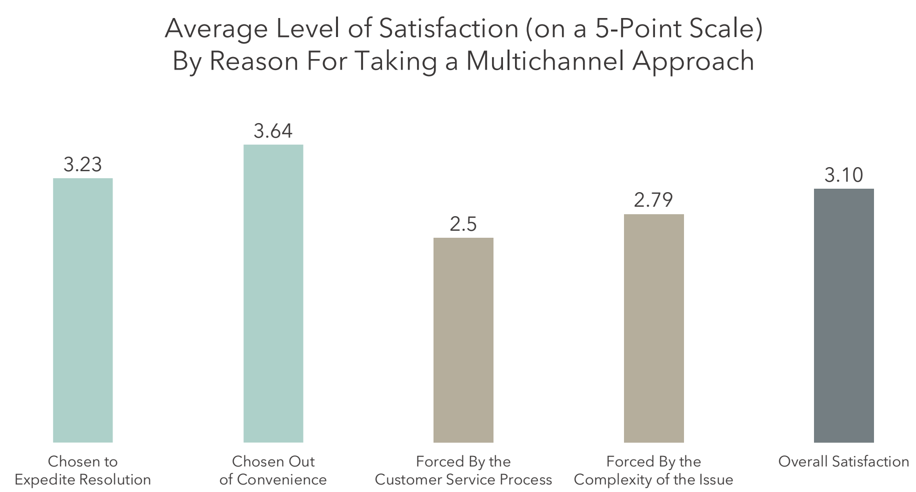


Figure 13

CONSUMER EXPERIENCES

CONSUMER USE

THE MULTICHANNEL JOURNEY

THE UNHAPPY CONSUMER

UNASSISTED SOLUTIONS

INSTANCES OF A NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE AND CAUSE

With exception to 2020 outlier data (details in Methodology on Page 5), the percentage of consumers reporting a negative customer care experience have remained remarkably consistent since 2017, having fallen from a high of 19% in 2015. This is especially reassuring given the various challenges faced by customer care organizations in both 2020 and 2021.

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

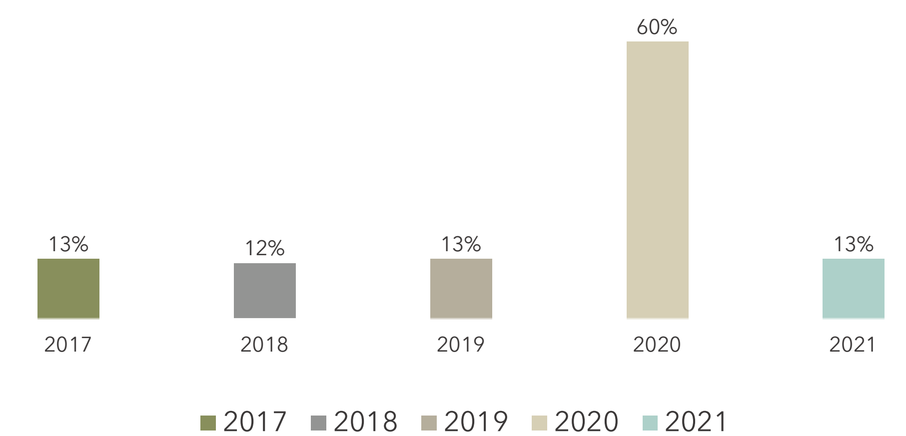


Figure 14

THE WHY

Lack of a resolution and agent-related issues continue to typify most negative customer care experiences. Regarding agent-related issues, these can often be tackled by revisiting and revising best practices in the following areas:

- Recruiting, hiring (including hiring requirements), training, and coaching
- Quality assurance program design
- Tool, process, and policy evaluation
- Agent empowerment and goodwill

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

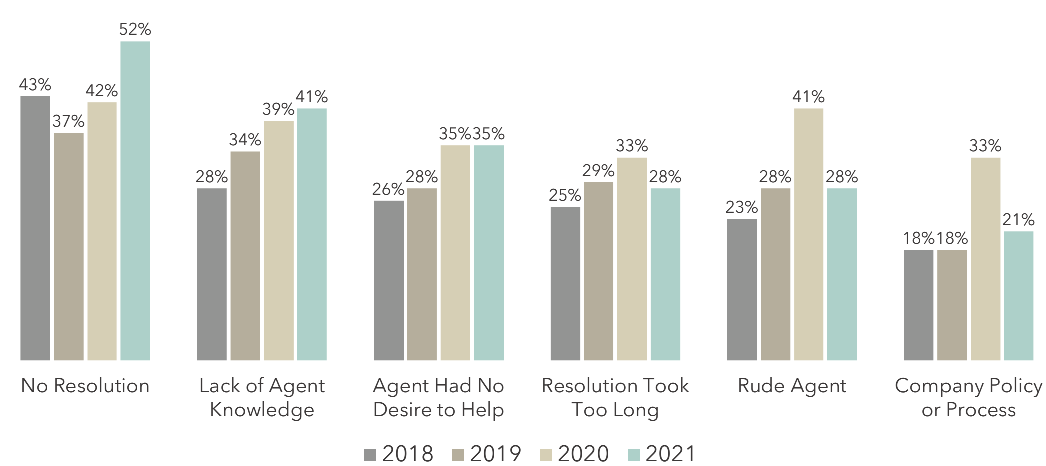


Figure 15

CHANNEL AND SOLUTION USE

NEW QUESTION!

Using a new channel framing, survey results show most negative experiences are occurring in Voice-Based solutions, which makes sense, given they are the most frequently used. Considering frequency of use, it appears that Self-Help is generating an over-representation of negative experiences. This could be related to ease of use and resolution capabilities, as covered in the "Unassisted Solutions" section of this report.

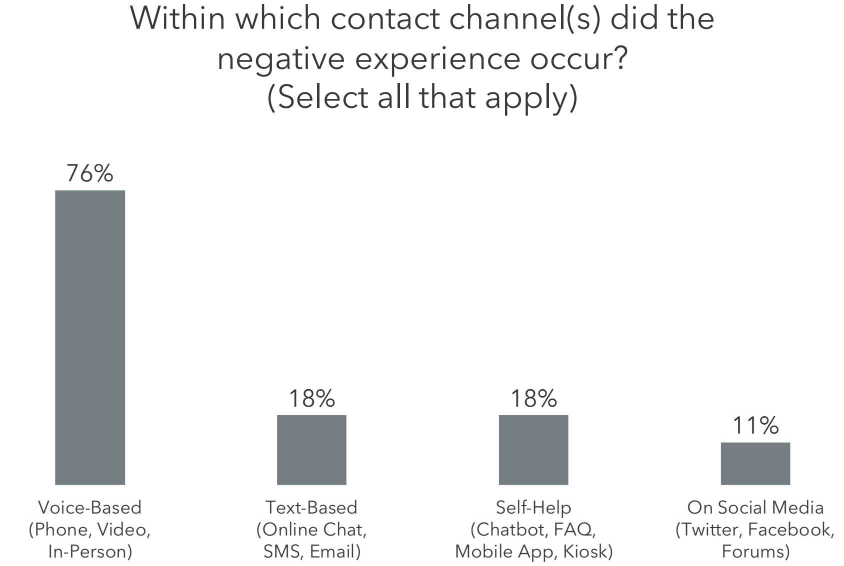


Figure 16

NEW QUESTION!

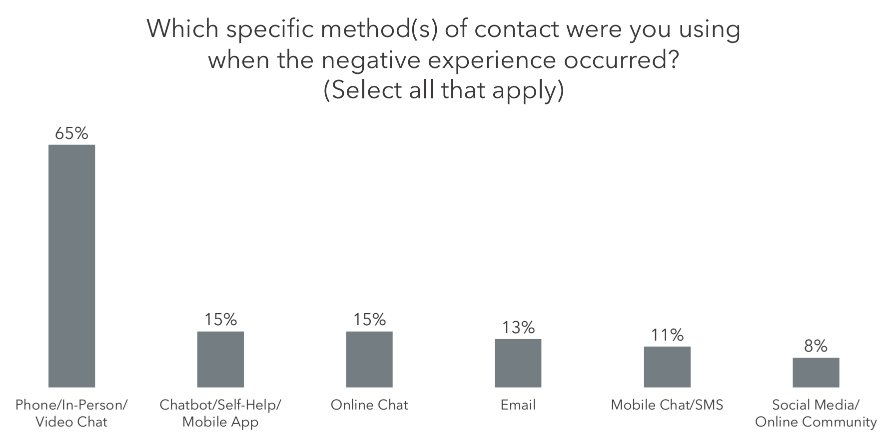


Figure 17

To get a true sense of how individual solutions are performing, it's important to understand the breakdown of overall use (Figure 3). Based on how often solutions are used, it appears **Email produces the fewest negative experience as a percentage of use, followed closely by Online Chat.** At the opposite end of the spectrum, **Chatbot/ Self-Help/Mobile App seems to produce the most negative experiences as a percentage of use.**

RESOLUTION AND SHARING THE EXPERIENCE

With exception of 2020 results (details in Methodology on Page 5), the reported resolution rate among consumers who had a negative experience has, since 2015, generally ranged from 31% to 41%. Results from 2021 match those of 2019, at 31%, which is historically low. This could be reflective of the challenges faced by care organizations in 2021, including staffing challenges.

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

2021 **YES:** 31%
2020 **YES:** 48%
2019 **YES:** 31%
2018 **YES:** 41%

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

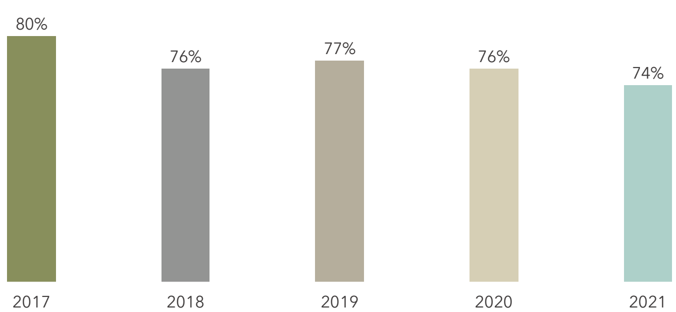


Figure 18

The percentage of consumers who acknowledge **sharing a negative experience with others has trended down**, yet most consumers continue to share their negative experiences with others, highlighting the importance of getting it right when it comes to customer care.

17% of consumers who have a negative experience share on social media, presenting an ongoing **opportunity for brands to monitor for and identify such issues and reach out to rectify the situation.** Doing so publicly, especially via social media, demonstrates a brand's desire to make things right.

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

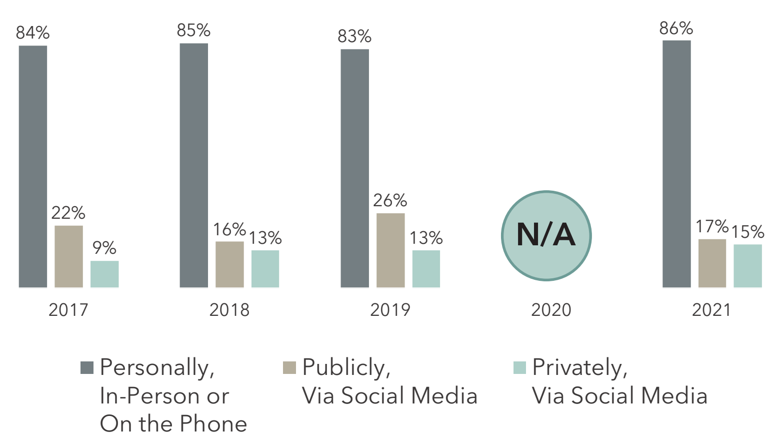


Figure 19

FEEDBACK AND FUTURE IMPACT OF A NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE

After trending up for three consecutive years (2016-2019), 2021 results showed **a significant drop in the opportunity for consumers to express their dissatisfaction** following a negative experience. Providing opportunities for feedback is not only a great way to help individual customers, but can also provide valuable information for improving program processes and policies.

Q: **WERE YOU GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS YOUR DISSATISFACTION VIA A SURVEY OR OTHER FEEDBACK FORM?**

A:
2021 **YES:** 31%
2020 **YES:** N/A
2019 **YES:** 56%
2018 **YES:** 46%
2017 **YES:** 44%

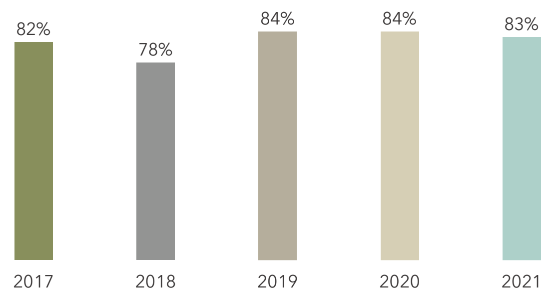
Q: **IF SO, DID YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS YOUR DISPLEASURE?**

A:
2021 **YES:** 61%
2020 **YES:** N/A
2019 **YES:** 77%
2018 **YES:** 67%
2017 **YES:** 67%

Negative customer care experiences continue to have a profound impact on future purchase decisions of most consumers (83% in 2021). These negative impacts remain even if the issue is eventually resolved satisfactorily, as evidenced in a cross-comparison between getting a resolution, but also have a future purchase decision negatively impacted. This demonstrates the importance of getting customer care right on the first attempt.

In 2021, two-thirds of consumers who had a bad experience said their future purchase decisions would be negatively impacted even though they eventually arrived at a satisfactory resolution.

Will this poor experience negatively impact your future purchase decisions?



Answered "Yes"

Figure 20

Cross-comparison of those who indicated their issues were eventually resolved satisfactorily (previous page), but also said the poor experience would still negatively impact future purchase decisions:

2021	2020	2019	2018
68%	N/A	86%	69%

POST-ENGAGEMENT FOLLOW-UPS

Like receiving an opportunity to provide feedback, consumers saw **a decrease in proactive follow-ups in 2021.** Only 16% of consumers who had a negative experience indicated that the offending brand took the time to reach back out.

Although expensive and complicated to manage, **proactive follow-ups can have tremendous impact on whether a negative experience has a lingering influence.** In a cross-comparison between future purchase impacts and receiving a follow-up, respondents were less likely (74% versus 84%) to have their future purchase decisions negatively affected by their poor experience when they received a proactive follow-up, even if that follow-up did not ultimately resolve their issue.

Q: FOLLOWING THE NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE, DID THE BRAND PROACTIVELY CONTACT YOU TO TRY TO REMEDY OR APOLOGIZE FOR THE SITUATION?

A:
2021 YES: 16%
2020 YES: N/A
2019 YES: 17%
2018 YES: 23%
2017 YES: 15%

Cross-comparison of consumers who indicated a poor experience will have a negative Impact on future purchase decisions based on how they responded to receiving a follow-up:

	2021	2020	2019	2018
Among those who receive a follow-up:	74%	78%	63%	66%
Among those who did not receive a follow-up:	84%	84%	89%	83%

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

When things don't go as planned, what do post-engagement follow-ups look like at your organization?

Dann Allen
Customer Experience Executive
Union Bank

We approach this in two ways, depending on if the unhappy customer provides a complaint or feedback through a survey. Resolved complaints are provided in a daily dashboard to front-line managers for review and staff coaching. Using another best practice, managers also reach out to these customers to ensure satisfactory resolution. For about 10% of all complaints, a central Client Advocacy Team also reaches out to customers to ensure satisfactory resolution.

For survey feedback, customers can opt-in for a follow-up. If they do, front-line managers receive real-time email alerts with up to three days to contact the customer to further discuss/resolve the issue. I've used this follow-up approach now at multiple organizations and data shows a positive impact on customer advocacy. Customers with a problem have 60% lower advocacy than those who don't. However, by using post-engagement follow-ups, we can gain back 78% of that lost advocacy!

UnionBank

CONSUMER EXPERIENCES

CONSUMER USE

THE MULTICHANNEL JOURNEY

THE UNHAPPY CONSUMER

UNASSISTED SOLUTIONS

UNASSISTED SOLUTION USE AND REASON

In a section dedicated to the unassisted solution experience, a screening question saw 15% of those surveyed indicating they had used a self-help or unassisted tool as least once in the prior 12 months.

Q: 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?

A: 2021 YES: 15%

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?

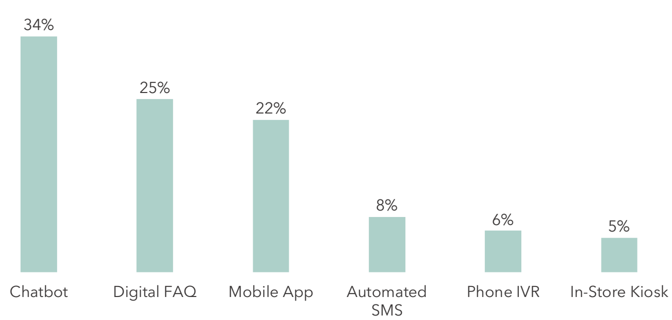


Figure 21

NEW QUESTION!

Among respondents who had used a self-help or an unassisted tool in the prior 12 months, **Chatbots were indicated as the most frequently used solution**, followed closely by Digital FAQ and Mobile Apps. Chatbots saw explosive growth recently, and this grow is expected to continue, thanks to:

- Greater consumer acceptance
- Advancements in Chatbot tech
- Lower costs

NEW QUESTION!

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

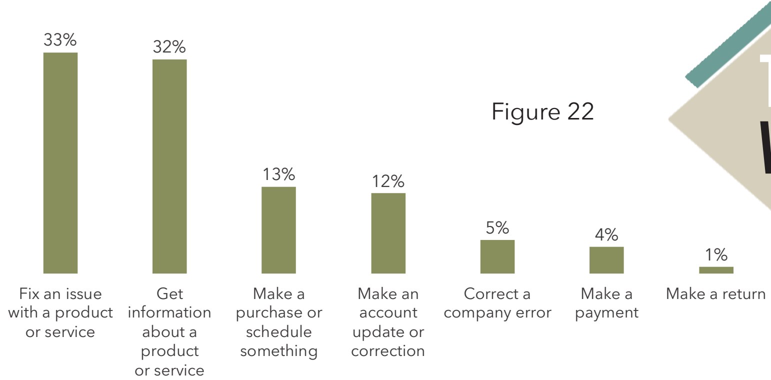


Figure 22

THE WHY

Survey results show about two-thirds of all unassisted engagements occur for just two purposes:

- Fixing an issue with a product/service
- Getting product/service info

Largely, unassisted solution use is driven by functionality. **Improved functionality will lead to greater adoption and accelerated growth.**

COMPLETION AND SATISFACTION RATES

The capabilities of unassisted solutions have improved considerably over the past several years, as has effectiveness. Continuing a strong trend of year-over-year gains, **nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated they were able to complete their task using self-help or unassisted solutions,** an improvement of 16 points compared to when the question was first asked in 2018.

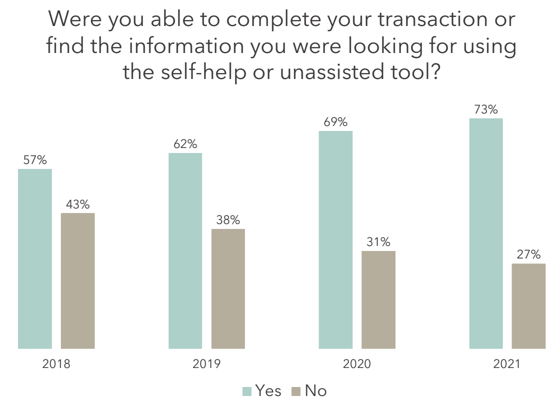


Figure 23

Not only are self-help and unassisted tools getting more effective at resolving issues, they are also becoming more satisfying to use. In 2021, **54% of respondents said they were "Very Satisfied" or "Satisfied"** with their most recent experience, up 14 points from when this question was first posed in 2018.

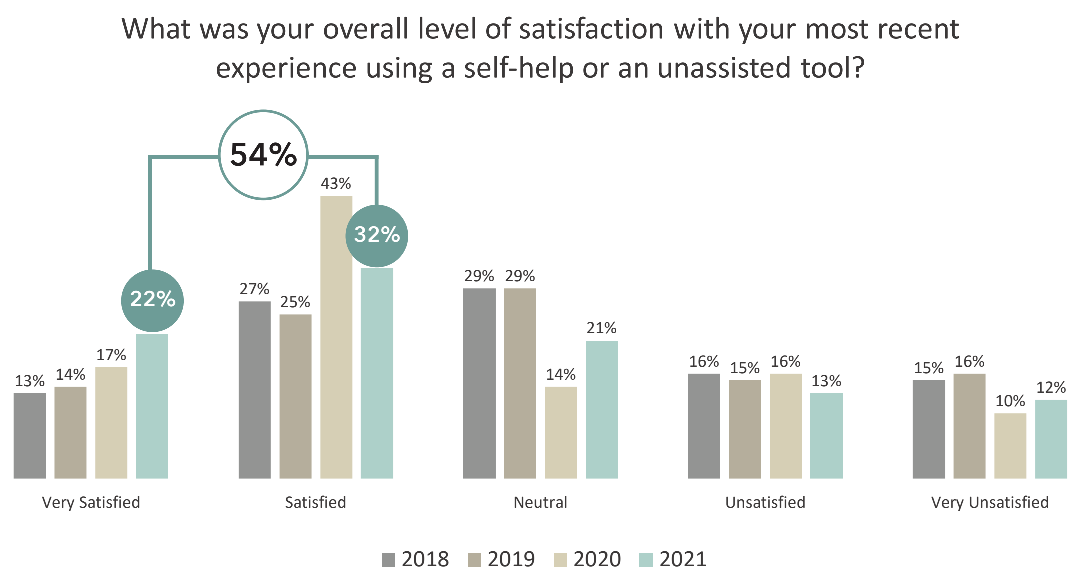


Figure 24

DIFFICULTY AND EASE

NEW QUESTION!

52% of survey respondents described their most recent experience with unassisted solutions as "Very Easy" or "Easy." To be of value, these solutions must be:

- Convenient
- Easy to use
- Effective

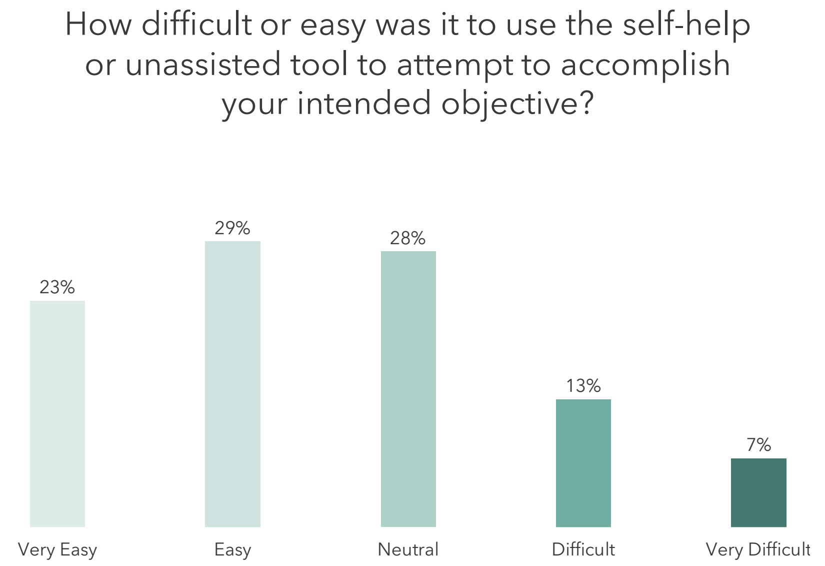


Figure 25

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

How can brands create a world-class unassisted solution that delivers both convenience and a personalized experience?

Vasanth Alli
Chief of Staff &
CX Strategy Lead
Verizon

There are many "reasons" that customers leverage unassisted solutions, but in actuality, there is only one reason – convenience.

Today, brands develop self-serve experiences based on use cases to drive cost out of the business (i.e., digital deflection, chat containment, service efficiency, etc.), thus reducing the overall cost-to-serve. While these are legitimate & sought-after benefits, they are not the primary objective. Instead, these experiences should empower customers to manage their own experience – simply, conveniently, and in a personalized manner. What I like to refer to as a "humanized digital experience."

The key in achieving a humanized digital experience is predicated on data to enable personalization through actionable insights & intents. By understanding your customer (insights) & what your customer requires (intent), these solutions can enable delightful self-serve experiences, whether delivered through chatbots or virtual agents. This ensures your unassisted solution can do more by embedding the human element into the digital experience.

If done correctly, this will drive digital adoption, brand affinity, customer satisfaction/loyalty and, sure enough, lower your cost-to-serve.

FUTURE USE AND IMPROVING EASE

When asked about future use regarding self-help and unassisted tools, **23% percent of respondents indicated they intended to use such solutions less often.** Not surprisingly, individuals who intended to use such solutions "Less Often" provided an average ease score of 2.3 (on a 5-point scale), compared to an average score of 3.4 among the entire survey cohort.

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

NEW QUESTION!

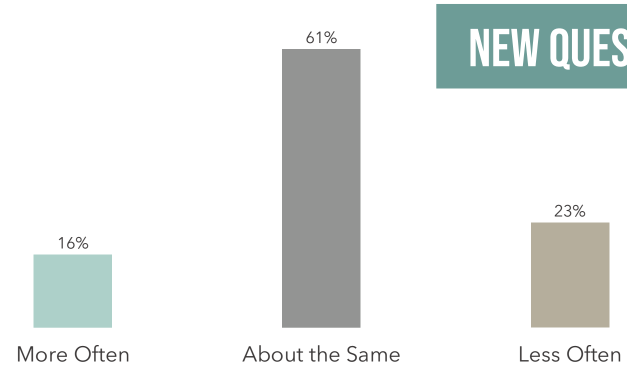


Figure 26

Ease of use is a major factor in determining future behavior and should be an area of focus for brands hoping to encourage adoption of unassisted tools.

Q: WHAT MADE THE SELF-HELP OR UNASSISTED TOOL EASY OR DIFFICULT TO USE?

A: HERE ARE SOME RESPONSES RECEIVED TO THE QUESTION OF WHAT WOULD MAKE SELF-HELP TOOLS EASIER OR MORE DIFFICULT TO USE:

MADE EASY

"Faster than a phone call or email."

"They thought of every possible circumstance I might be interacting with them about."

"They didn't ask a bunch of irrelevant questions. The process was quick."

MADE DIFFICULT

"They didn't have the answer and then had no alternative way to communicate."

"Took too long and never really addressed the specific issue."

"Sometimes it was hard to convey my meaning in writing."

"Cookie cutter answers didn't fit my issue."

THE WHY

Consumers who find unassisted solutions easy to use speak of:

Speed of Help, Convenience, and Superb Functional Design

Consumers who find unassisted solutions difficult to use speak of:

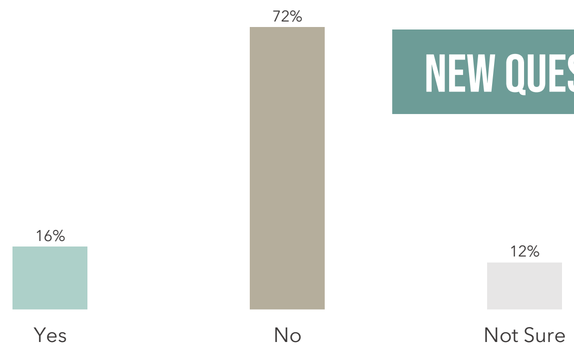
No Access to a Person, Time to Resolve, Lack of Flexibility

PANDEMIC IMPACT

More than a year into the pandemic, and few consumers felt their view or use of self-help or unassisted tools had been changed by the health crisis. That said, consumer use patterns have changed much more than most realize, especially given the strong shift to self-help throughout the economy.

Consumers who said their view/use had changed were eight times more likely to say they planned on using unassisted solutions "More Often." In other words, **changing views on unassisted solutions were overwhelmingly net positive.**

Did the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns change how you view and use self-help or unassisted tools?



NEW QUESTION!

Figure 27

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on how many businesses operate. What new processes has your organization added to help lessen the impact on customers?

Bernie Leas
Vice President Operations
Balsam Brands

The enormous shift of consumers to ecommerce due to COVID strained couriers' (FedEx/UPS) ability to deliver orders in a timely manner. To avoid customer confusion and frustration, Balsam regularly sent update emails to customers informing them of any delays while also letting them know when they could expect delivery. It allowed our customers to receive a status update for their order without the hassle of taking time out of their busy day to contact us, and it gave our customer service team more time to focus on urgent customer needs.

BALSAM BRANDS

IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Q: WHAT CAN COMPANIES DO DIFFERENTLY?

A: THE FOLLOWING ARE A FEW OF THE RESPONSES RECEIVED TO THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION, "WHAT CAN COMPANIES DO DIFFERENTLY WITH SELF-HELP AND UNASSISTED TOOLS TO MAKE THEM BETTER, EASIER, AND MORE ENJOYABLE TO USE?"

"Allow escalation when necessary and better anticipate needs."

"Give people faster and easier access to a live person if they're unable to find the answer."

"Program more scenarios or allow an option to revert to sending a message to an actual person."

"Expand the knowledge base and use customer-submitted questions to guide the expansion."

"Offer them as an option, but not the only option."

THE WHY

The number-one change consumers want to see for self-help and unassisted solutions – **greater ability to seamlessly shift to live help.** This response was closely followed by a frustration with the narrow scope of unassisted solutions.

CONSUMER EXPERIENCES: CONCLUSIONS

SELECT FINDINGS

- **Sixty percent of survey respondents chose to take a multichannel journey rather than being forced into it, the most since the question was first asked in 2016 (Figure 6)**
- **Phone continues to be the most effective channel in resolving issues within multichannel engagements, whereas self-help continues to be the least effective (Figure 7)**
- **Compared to previous years, 2021 saw a significant drop-off in the percentage of "unhappy" consumers who were provided with an opportunity to provide feedback about their experience (Page 26)**
- **Consumers indicated continued improvement when it comes to the resolution and satisfaction rates of self-help and unassisted solutions (Figures 23 and 24)**

Results from this year's surveying continue to support a story of robust growth for multichannel experiences, with one in four adults in the U.S. having used multiple channels to resolve a single customer care issue within the past year. Furthermore, brands have continued to improve the "choice equation," with 60% of all multichannel users having chosen the approach, as opposed to being forced into it. This is worth noting considering current and historical data unequivocally show a very strong positive correlation between improved CSAT and resolution rates and multichannel journeys that are self-selected journeys rather than forced journeys. Consumers continue to value options, even as they seek greater ease, speed, and effectiveness in resolving their customer care issues.

Although the news is very encouraging on the multichannel front, consumers, more than ever before, feel that a failure to get a resolution to their issue is the leading cause of their negative experiences in dealing with customer care. While it's not entirely clear why this is the case, it could have to do with the heavy shift to unassisted solutions that has taken place over the past 18 months, a solution path that continues to improve, but still has a ways to go. One of the best tools for continued improvement in this area is the creation and maintenance of consumer feedback mechanisms, as well as continuous testing and service journey mapping of unassisted and/or self-help pathways of support. More and more, consumers are comparing every experience with their best experience, which means consumer expectations are rapidly evolving.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS BRANDS SHOULD BE ASKING THEMSELVES:

Does our channel strategy do a good job of guiding customers to the most effective channel to solve their issue without forcing a specific journey or path?

Are we maintaining an appropriate level of personalization, even as we invest more in automation and AI-powered solutions?

When journeys don't go as planned, are we providing meaningful opportunities for customer feedback, and are we investing in proactive follow-ups to make critical saves?

CONSUMERPERSPECTIVES

OPINIONS

PREFERENCES

EXPECTATIONS

OPINIONS ON THE STATE OF CUSTOMER CARE

There continues to be very little change in consumer perception of customer care quality. **Although this may be a case of expectations outpacing actual improvement, brands should invest in understanding what a good customer experience looks like to their customers.**

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

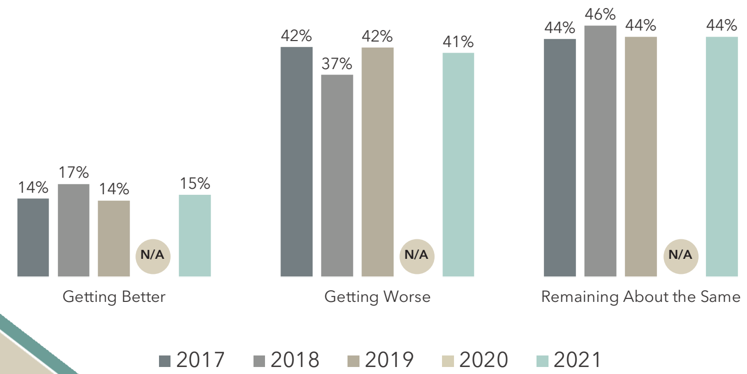


Figure 28

THE WHY

From recruiting, hiring, training and coaching challenges to the rushed expansion of self-service solutions, 2021 has had its fair share of obstacles to overcome.

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

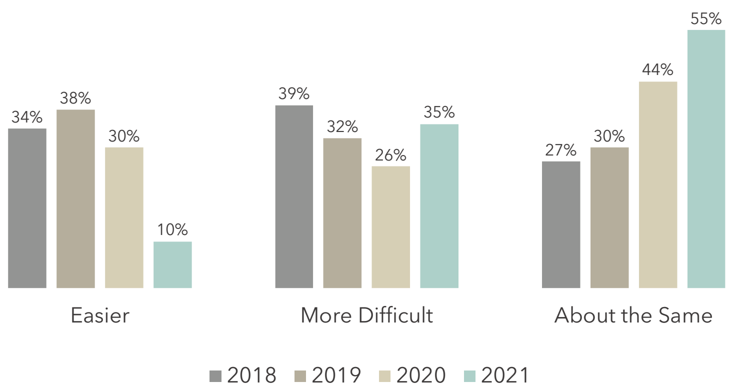


Figure 29

Given the confluence of industry challenges, it seems reasonable that **fewer consumers view issue resolution as getting "Easier," with many consumers shifting over into both "More Difficult" and "About the Same."**

WHAT BRANDS CAN DO DIFFERENTLY TO IMPROVE EASE

Consumers are increasingly less concerned with how they reach customer care and more concerned about what the experience is like. **Reducing wait times and providing more reliable follow-ups have risen to the forefront of what consumers think brands should do differently, as has improving agent skills.**

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

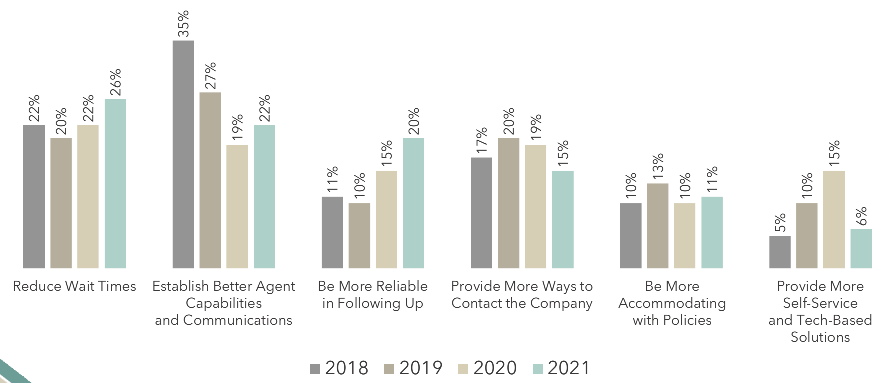


Figure 30

THE WHY

Customers want convenience and speed, but not at the expense of getting the treatment and resolution they feel they deserve.

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

How has your organization responded to shifting expectations to ensure quick and easy access to help?

Lisa Oswald
SVP & Global Head of Customer Service
Travelzoo

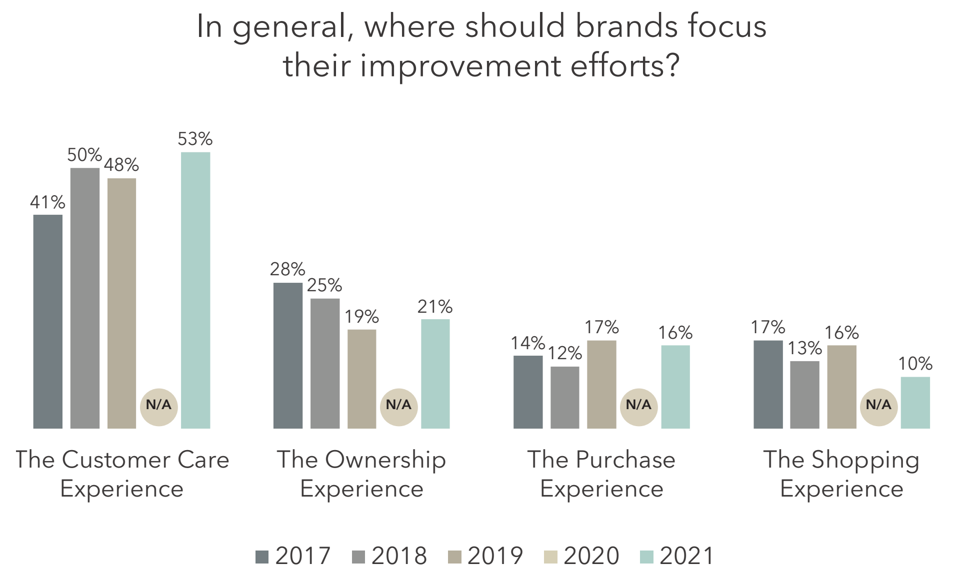
With the massive move to digital during COVID-19, brands have trained consumers to expect immediate gratification. From contactless payments to telemedicine and overnight delivery, speed is the new must-have metric to win. At Travelzoo, we understand our members' need for speed, so we built better online refund tools and made them easier to use. Today, 90% of refunds are done via self-service, compared with just 30% pre-pandemic. Our customers get what they want, without the wait.

TRAVELZOO®

CONSUMER PERSPECTIVES – OPINIONS

FUTURE AND PAST IMPROVEMENTS

Consumers continue to point to "The Customer Care Experience" when asked where they'd like to see brands enact change. This result demonstrates how much **consumers rely on the customer care experience in shaping their opinion of a brand.**



Brands should ask themselves whether their investments align with what's most important to their customers.

Figure 31

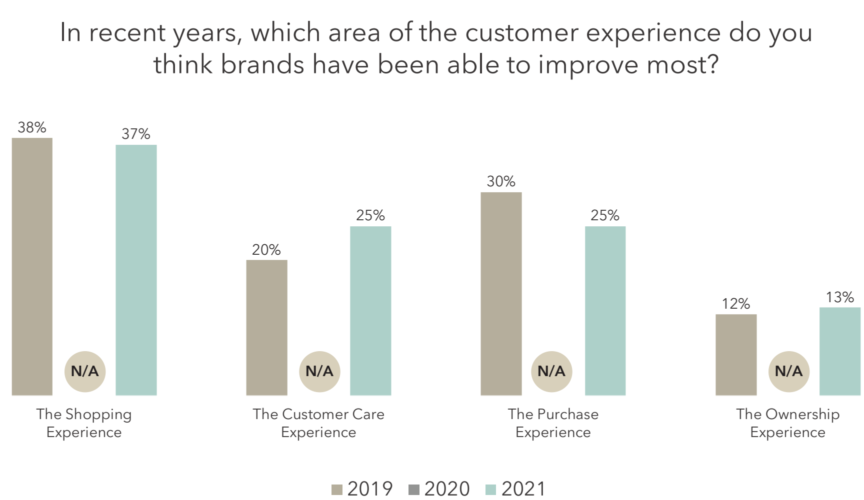


Figure 32

Consumers think brands should be mostly focused on improving "The Customer Care Experience," although results in Figure 32 suggest **consumers feel the focus has been on "The Shopping Experience," although CX has ticked up five points.** This perception may exist due to the explosion and high visibility of shopping apps, streamlined eCommerce websites, and the like.

Future results will reveal how much progress is being made in transforming the areas where consumers want to see improvements.

FIRST-CONTACT RESOLUTION

While most consumers feel their issues are being resolved during first contact, a significant portion (19%) see its occurrence as a rarity. Based on how much consumers value not only getting a resolution, but getting a resolution quickly and easily, speed and ease should be key areas of focus.

Brands should seek to understand what causes some issues to require multiple touch points to resolve, then develop initiatives to better streamline the resolution process.

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

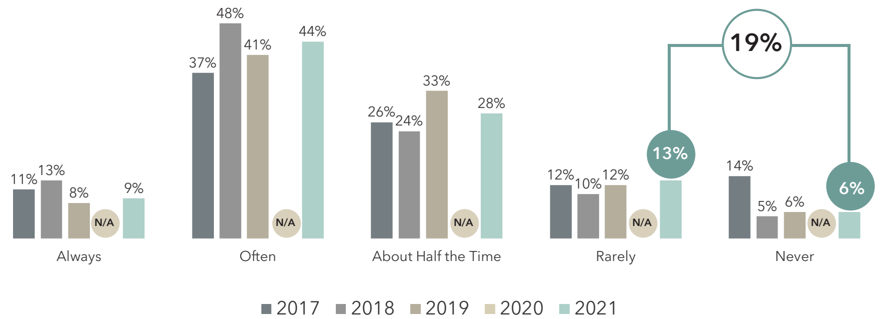


Figure 33

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

How important is First-Contact Resolution (FCR)?

Thomas Siebert
Director National Customer Engagement Sales & Support Center
FinishMaster

FCR is a key metric in well-managed customer care programs (i.e., analogous to "conversion rate" in sales). And, if it's not, it should be. But, a more important (yet less understood) sister metric is "net-FCR," which is defined by the percent of contacts you expect and have enabled agents, via training, policy and tools, to solve on the first contact. An effective program measures and manages both FCR (a macro measurement) and net-FCR by cohort that is based on the "product" or "service," and never "on average." The biggest opportunities for gains come by focusing on solving the "non-FCR" issues by making improvements in the areas of policy, agent tools, agent up-skilling, and program automation.

FINISHMASTER®
Automotive & Industrial Paint

INVESTING TO IMPROVE THE EXPERIENCE

Consumers are extremely consistent in where they think brands should invest. “Creating Better Products and Services” continues to draw the most attention – as much as the next two responses combined.

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

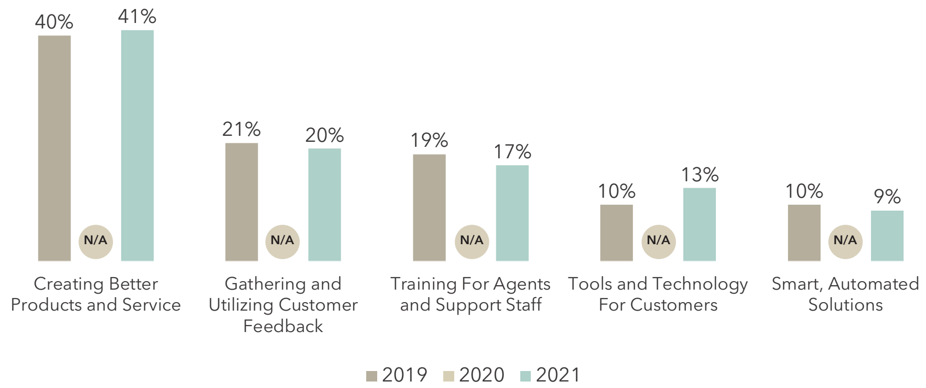


Figure 34

THE WHY

There is the sense that **consumers feel the best way to improve care is to avoid it altogether, owing to better products/service and, logically, fewer issues to begin with.**

PRACTITIONER’S PERSPECTIVE

As a CX leader, how do you share the importance of creating a great experience when pursuing investments for new initiatives?

Jared Benesh
Director, Service Capabilities & Experience
H&R Block

It’s at the center of all conversations – every time. And, from the very beginning, we start with the end in mind. What are the outcomes at the end of this effort? Does this work create a sustainable, long-term pathway, or is it a point-in-time solution? How will we know we’ve been successful? As a leader, I try to instill in my teams that at the center of our work on process, systems, and/or new performance initiatives, the customer’s perspective needs to be the focal point. I ask simple questions, like, “How will this hurt or benefit the experience of the customer?” And, I follow with, “Can we both quantitatively and qualitatively measure our work?” Having teams think through and iterate on the responses to these questions really helps to ground the initiative. Furthermore, it makes telling the story simpler which, in turn, yields a more straightforward path to gaining new investment, or receiving continued investment.

THE IMPACT OF GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE

NEW QUESTION!

In a new question for 2021, consumers were asked about how good customer care influences loyalty. **A full 75% agreed that receiving good care leads to greater loyalty, with 52% agreeing strongly.**

How much do you agree or disagree with the following:
Receiving good customer care makes me
a very loyal customer.

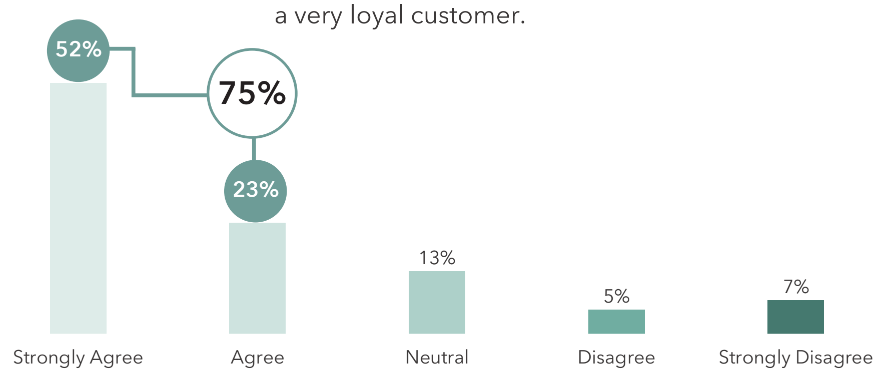


Figure 35

Brands should reassess CX commitment and spend if they want to capture the biggest return on their investment.

NEW QUESTION!

How much do you agree or disagree with the following:
A brand's reputation for good customer service greatly
influences my decision to do business with said brand.

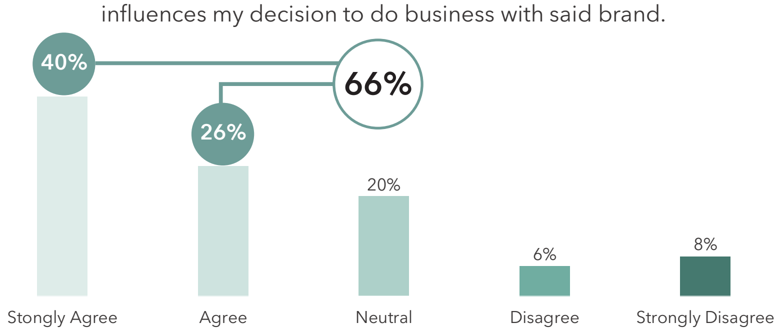


Figure 36

Among brands that strive to excel at care, consideration should be given to how such messaging is conveyed, not only throughout the wider organization, but also to the public.

Personal experience aside, **66% of consumers agree that reputation for good care greatly influences their purchase decisions, which includes 40% who "Strongly Agree" with such sentiments.** Clearly, consumers put a premium on exceptional customer care.

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT AND MOST FRUSTRATING

Not surprisingly, “Getting the Issue Resolved” continues to be the most important aspect of interacting with a brand’s customer care department, and by the widest margin on record.

Which characteristic of an interaction with a brand's customer care department is most important to you?

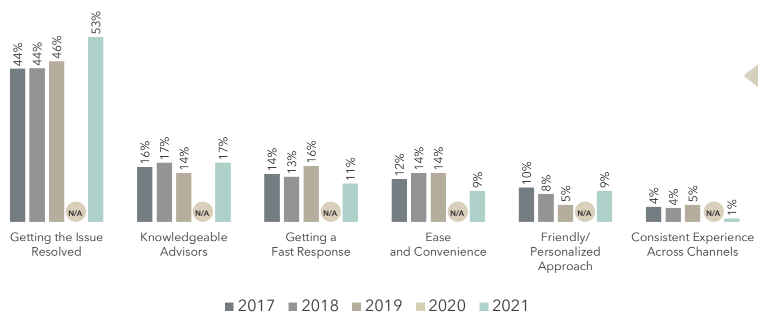


Figure 37

THE WHY

This result shows consumers highly value interaction with agents who can inform and effectively resolve their issues.

Q: WHAT FRUSTRATES YOU WHEN RESOLVING A CUSTOMER CARE ISSUE?

NEW QUESTION!

A:

In a new question aimed at understanding what frustrates consumers regarding care, the two most common responses had to do with:

- Time it took to get a solution
- Difficulty in reaching a live person

Other notable answers included:

- Agents who couldn’t or wouldn’t help
- Agents who had poor communication skills
- Unhelpful company policies
- Lack of accountability

HERE ARE SOME RESPONSES RECEIVED TO THE QUESTION OF WHAT CONSUMERS FIND TO BE THE MOST FRUSTRATING ASPECT OF RESOLVING A CUSTOMER CARE ISSUE:

“Not being able to connect with a person directly and quickly to get the issue resolved.”

“The amount of time it takes to get a response.”

“Getting anyone to actually listen, talk with you (not to you), and actually try to help.”

“Denial of assistance based on company policy.”

“Having to speak to a computer or someone who speaks little English.”

CONSUMERPERSPECTIVES

OPINIONS
PREFERENCES
EXPECTATIONS

CHANNEL PREFERENCES AND FACTORS

NEW QUESTION!

In a new channel framing for 2021, consumers were split in their preferences for Voice-Based and Text-Based solutions.

Not surprisingly, age played a strong role in this outcome, with those 45 years and older preferring Voice-Based solution by a ratio of 4-to-3, whereas those 44 years old and younger preferred Text-Based solutions by a ratio of slightly more than 2-to-1.

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

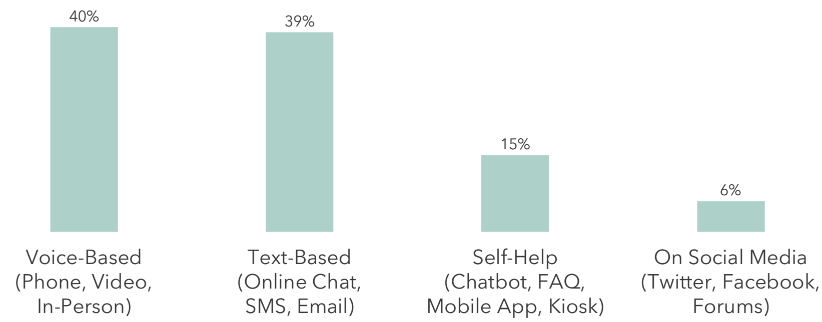


Figure 38

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

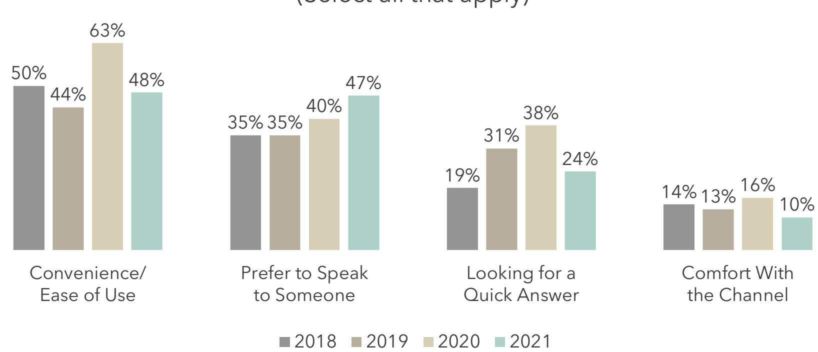


Figure 39

Much like the responses in Figure 38, age plays a big role in determining the cause of channel preferences. “Prefer to Speak to Someone” was indicated by 57% of those 65 years and older compared to only 43% of those 54 years and younger. Furthermore, **those most in search of “Convenience/Ease of Use” fell in the 35-54 years age range, whereas “Comfort With the Channel” was a major consideration for those 55 years and up.**

Brands should understand (and plan for) a shift in preferences based on evolving age demographics. Preferences for Text-Based solutions will only grow as demographics skew younger in the coming years.

CHANGES IN PREFERENCES AND CAUSES

In this year's results, roughly one-third of respondents indicated a change in contact preference. This was the lowest result in four years' worth of data. This **lack of change might be due to the captive nature of 2021,** as well as the fact that a large portion of consumers (43%) had already adjusted their preferences and behavior in 2020, settling into what works best for them.

Q: HAS YOUR PREFERRED CONTACT METHOD CHANGED IN RECENT YEARS?

A:
2021 YES: 36%
2020 YES: 43%
2019 YES: 40%
2018 YES: 38%

Although Figure 40 was presented as an open-ended question, responses received were easily grouped into five distinct buckets. While there were also a small percentage of respondents that named COVID-19 (or the pandemic) as the cause of their changing preference, this factor had much less influence than was the case in 2020.

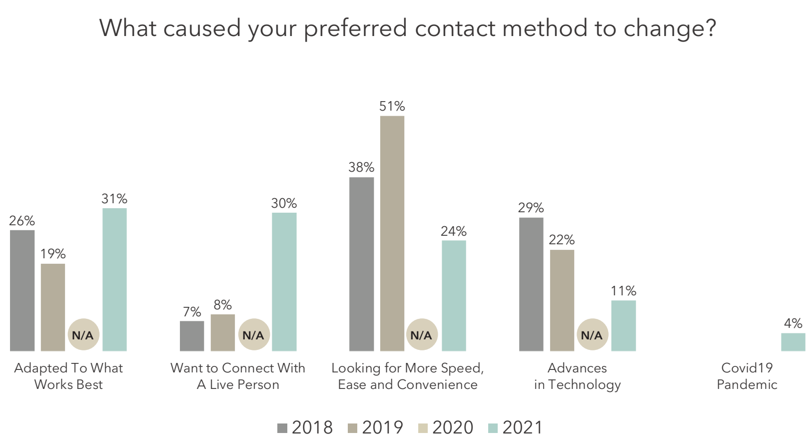


Figure 40

THE WHY

Once again, age played a major factor. Younger consumers gravitated toward speed, convenience, and adaptation to new technology, whereas older individuals sought out options for connecting with a live agent.

INTERACTION PREFERENCES

Historically, preference for Self-Help/FAQ Tools (Figure 41) has ranged from 32-53%. This year, that preference topped 60%, marking 2021 as either an outlier or a sea change. **Moreover, the shift held true across all age ranges. This could be due to the recent investment in unassisted solutions, or perhaps the forced channel-shifting as a result of the pandemic.** At any rate, it will be worth monitoring how these preference evolve in future surveys.

NEW QUESTION!

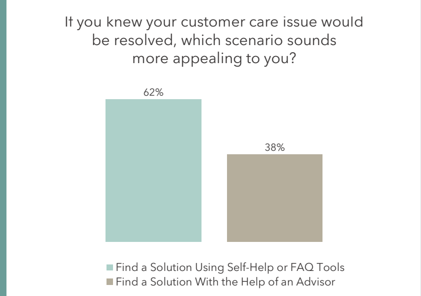


Figure 41

When asked to choose between calling and texting, results were evenly split overall. But, again, age played a factor. For those **ages 18-24, the preference for text was 2-to-1, and for those ages 65 years and older, the preference for a phone call was 2-to-1.3 (or about 50% greater).** Results were evenly split for all other age groups.

NEW QUESTION!

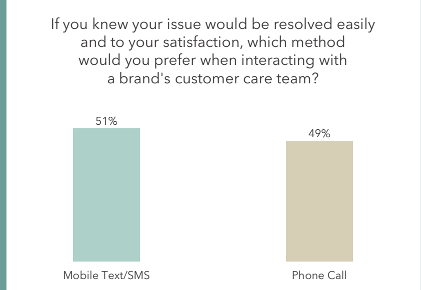


Figure 42

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

What has the introduction of newer self-help technologies and solutions meant for your brand and the experience it is able to provide?

Carolyne Truelove
Head of Global Fan Experience
Fanatics

At Fanatics, we continue to leverage technology and voice of the customer metrics like NPS in our drive toward Elite Fan Experiences. In 2020, data showed us the correlation between Fans who used self-service versus a contact center agent, and high NPS. We implemented three things to improve Fan self-service experiences:

1) Richer FAQs which included video on how to complete a return
2) A front-end "Where is my order" (WISMO) pizza tracker-like tool
3) A Fan Bot which provided the same (WISMO) information, as well as easier access to the most frequently used FAQs

The result was immediate adoption of these tools without promotion, consistent containment of 20%+, increased NPS, reduced contacts per order (CPO), and cost avoidance of $2M+. Fanatics is super excited about continuing to create even richer self-service experiences for our Fans globally.

CONSUMERPERSPECTIVES

OPINIONS

PREFERENCES

EXPECTATIONS

MEETING NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

Brands continue to place lots of focus on the customer care experience and have made meaningful progress. Nonetheless, the percentage of consumers who say their needs and expectations are being met hit an all-time low in 2021.

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

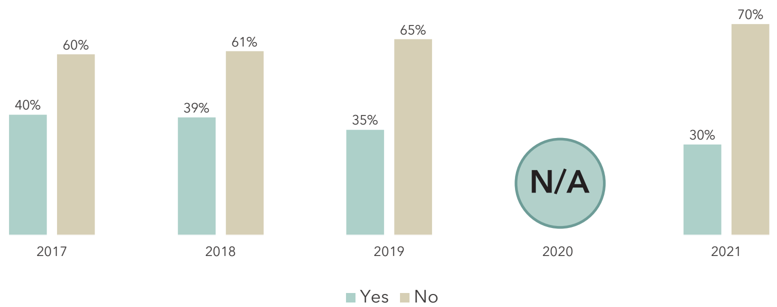


Figure 43

THE WHY

The result in Figure 43 truly points to just one conclusion: rapidly evolving consumer expectations.

Brands need to invest in understanding the expectations of their specific customers, how those expectations are changing, and what the impact is of introducing new channels and solutions.

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

How does your organization seek to understand customer needs and expectations?

Brigitte Bailey
Director, Customer Experience and Solutions
Fulton County Government

Fulton County Government has made significant investments in our customer service drivers that stem around people, infrastructure and metrics, which more specifically allows us to measure how effectively we are delivering service and meeting customer needs and expectations. The organization has a strong commitment to evaluate the customer experience in totality by identifying successes, identifying deficiencies that inhibit service delivery and gaining insight into the unmet needs of our customers. One primary method that has been successful is the use of departmental customer satisfaction surveys and our county-wide resident survey that provides direct feedback into how well we are currently doing, what services our customers would like to see, and what level of service they expect.

Our department's customer satisfaction surveys are distributed in a variety of ways to include electronic, manual, face-to-face, web-links, telephone, the use of satisfaction kiosks; and some are even embedded into employee email signature lines, so customers have the opportunity to provide immediate feedback. Some surveys are administered at the time of service, monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, or annually. We also contract with an outside organization to conduct an annual county-wide resident survey, which is a statistically-based survey and broader in scope. This survey evaluates and measures current and future needs and services based on our County's strategic priority areas. It assesses items such as desired service improvements, preferences for interaction, and customer satisfaction ratings in areas like economic opportunity, cultural and recreational opportunities, facilities, health services, court services, trust, and quality of life, to name a few. Results of these surveys have helped to guide our current and future service offerings, as well as influence adjustments to our business processes. The combination of varying survey methods and their results have benefited our overall operations by providing a mechanism for us to keep our hand on the pulse of our customers' needs and expectations.

FULTON COUNTY

MEETING EXPECTATIONS AND WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT

Although the question of meeting needs and expectations (Figure 43) has been asked for many years, the question to the right is appearing for the first time in 2021. The point of the question is to try and understand what's contributing to the consistent decline in how consumers perceive the ability of customer service to meet their needs and expectations.

Q: HOW CAN THE CUSTOMER CARE DEPARTMENTS OF TODAY'S COMPANIES BETTER SERVE YOUR NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS?

A:

"Having someone answer the phone!"

"Listen to customer before jumping to conclusions."

"Fast, friendly service with empathy."

"Listen, go above and beyond, and accept responsibility."

"By not making so much information dependent on access to technology."

"By having agent be fluent in English and not just read from scripts."

THE WHY

Responses covered a variety of pain points, but, like other open-ended questions, a few themes emerged, including agent communication skills, speed of answer, and access to live agents.

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

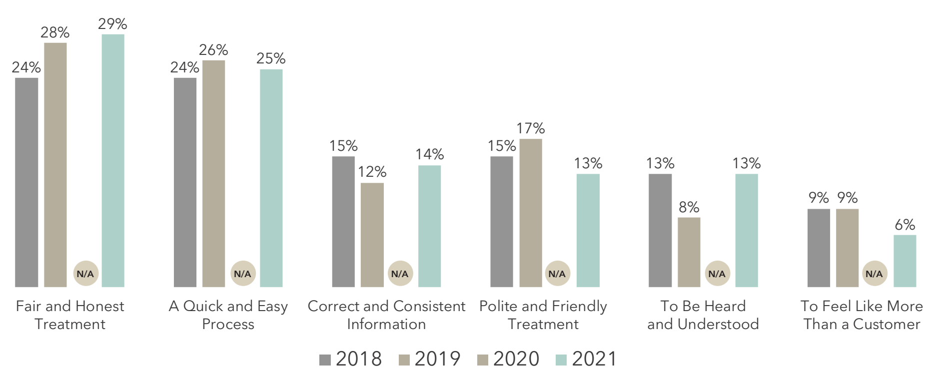


Figure 44

Consumers want to be treated fairly. In fact, "Fair and Honest Treatment" has consistently been the top response in Figure 44. The second most popular response revolves around speed and ease. Although speed and ease are at the top of every organization's score card, the idea of fairness is more nuanced, and really points to policy.

Brands should routinely review customer policies, especially in the context of customer complaints. Some policies may be perceived as unfair, and these should be identified and remedied using customer (and agent) feedback.

CONSUMER PERSPECTIVES – EXPECTATIONS

RESPONSE TIME EXPECTATIONS

Hold times have long been a common complaint when it comes to customer care. Although self-help and automated solutions have helped alleviate some of the pain, brands are a long way off from being able to resolve all issue types using these self-service solutions. Therefore, brands should consider that **the bulk of consumers (62%) would have expectations met if speaking with customer care by phone within two minutes' time, whereas 38% expect the same within one minute.**

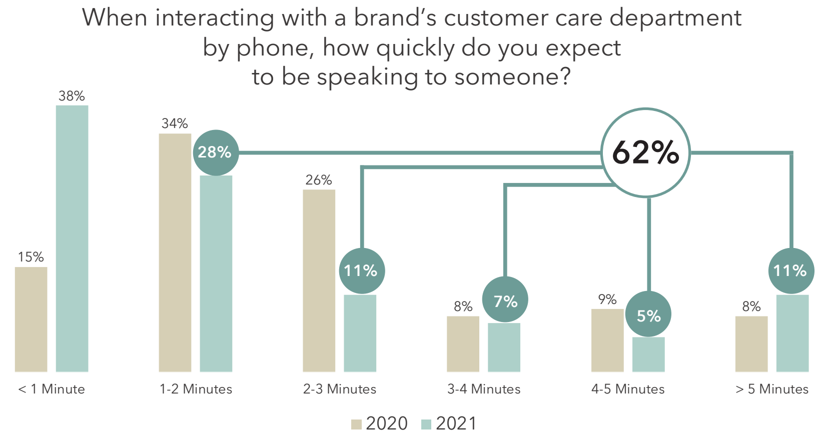


Figure 45

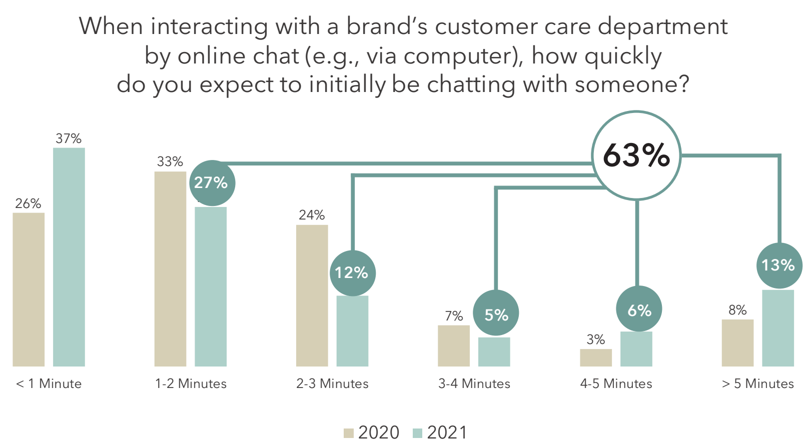


Figure 46

Like phone engagements, online chats have also developed a set of consumer expectations regarding wait times. In fact, wait time expectations for online chat are very **similar to those of phone, with the expectations of 63% of consumers being met when wait times are two minutes or less.** Some brands are addressing this issue with smart bots that can qualify customers and address simple issues and questions ahead of a live engagement, which ultimately reduces perceived wait times.

RESPONSE TIME EXPECTATIONS, CONT.

Compared to phone and online chat, consumers are slightly more forgiving of **SMS response times, with 77% of consumers' expectations being met by a response within five minutes or less.** Furthermore, slightly more than one-fifth (22%) of consumers are even okay with a response taking longer than an hour. This shows many consumers understand the asynchronous nature of SMS and may therefore utilize the channel for issues that aren't entirely urgent.

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

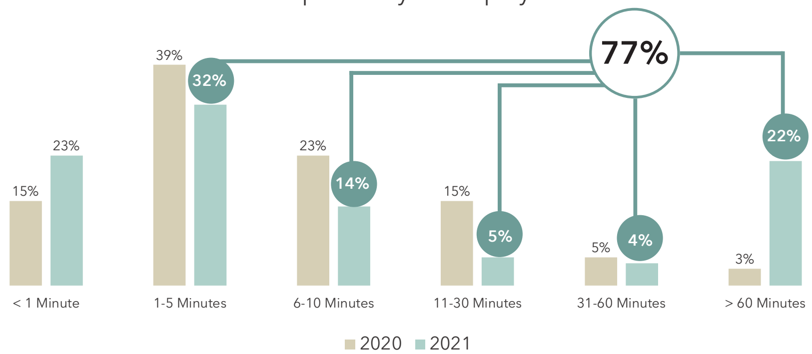


Figure 47

PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

Aside from speed to response, how do you manage expectations via SMS, messaging, and related solutions?

Sally McMahon
SVP Channel Management and Customer Advocacy
SiriusXM

SiriusXM has three simple but effective operational servicing truisms that we consider critical for meeting (or exceeding) customers' expectations. Managing expectations is a proven strategy for increasing customer loyalty and willingness to recommend. First on the list is resolving whatever concerns the customer might have. Second is to make the resolution process fast and easy. And, third is to deliver these capabilities in the channel where the customer chooses to transact.

New to us in 2020 was the opportunity to migrate significant interactions from voice to messaging. As part of this migration, we held the messaging team to the same KPI goals as our voice organization. Even accounting for demographic challenges, the team developed and implemented training, routing, skilling, user experiences, and management techniques that have allowed for these goals to be met. With operation KPIs as table stakes, we will continue to migrate traffic to messaging, increase the satisfaction of our subscribers, and create greater consistency – all key components of a successful service strategy.

SiriusXM SATELLITE RADIO

RESPONSE TIME EXPECTATIONS, CONT.

NEW QUESTION!

Social media response expectations closely matched those of SMS, hinting again at an understanding of the asynchronous nature of the medium. That said, **45% of consumers do expect a social media response within five minutes,** which almost certainly necessitates specialized tools for collecting and categorizing issues and requests in real time. If such tools are not already in place, it'd be wise for a brand to understand the potential for both proactive and reactive engagements, starting with the most popular social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

Figure 48

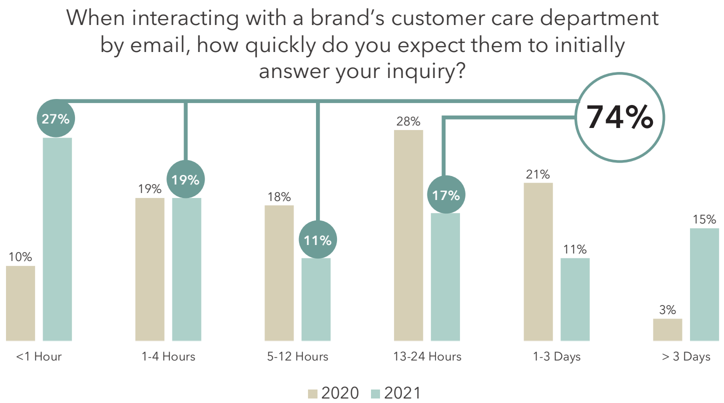


Figure 49

Response expectations vary depending on vertical and channel involved. Brands should seek to understand the response expectations of their customers to create the best possible experience.

Although an email service level target of 24-48 hours has long been the industry norm, consumers are perhaps less patient than they've ever been, thanks to handheld technology and the emergence of a "got to have it now" culture. For those brands that still cling to policies of **responding in 24 hour (or perhaps longer), a full 74% of consumers will be left with unmet expectations.** One good measuring stick for understanding what's working is to look at resolutions rate alongside response times and understanding if response rates go up or down, the longer it takes to respond to a customer.

CONSUMER PERSPECTIVES: CONCLUSIONS

SELECT FINDINGS

- **Only 10% of respondents felt that customer care was getting "Easier" with brands, as opposed to an average of 34% over the prior three years' worth of data (Figure 29)**
- **Fifty-two percent of respondents say receiving good care creates customer loyalty (Figure 35)**
- **Sixty-two percent of consumers would rather resolve their issue using an unassisted solution, versus 38% who would prefer to resolve their issue with the help of an agent (Figure 41)**
- **Assuming both are equally capable of resolving an issue, consumer preference between Voice- and Text-Based solutions is a virtual tie at 40% and 39%, respectively (Figure 38)**
- **Channel preferences were primarily determined by two criteria: "Convenience/Ease of Use" (48% of respondents) and the desire to "Speak to Someone" (47% of respondents) (Figure 39)**

More than ever, consumers are hypercritical of the customer service they receive. In a multitude of results from this year's surveying, consumers have indicated there is ample opportunity for improvement in nearly every aspect of the customer experience. From making customer care easier to better meeting needs and expectations, it's clear consumers are seeking more from the companies that earn their business. Whether this shift is due to the success of those who have disrupted the service industry, altering expectations, or a natural evolution of consumer preference and behavior, the trend is likely to accelerate, and the stakes are high.

Based on results from a variety of open-ended questions, the drivers of this discontent are clear, and the expectations apparent. Consumers don't want hit-or-miss unassisted solutions, roadblocks caused by company-centric policies, or agents that lack both communication skills and the desire to help. Instead, consumers want a customer care process that is easy, quick, and effective. Failing this, they want quick access to a capable, empowered live agent. In fact, engagement preferences remain heavily dependent on demographics, with many older consumers continuing to prefer live agent access as a first resort. In order to shift behavior among this demographic, brands have to nail first impressions with new solutions, providing an experience that is not only easy and effective, but also uniquely accommodating to those who cling to the idea that exceptional customer is a friendly agent picking up the phone on the first ring. Although not an easy or quick shift, a necessary shift for today's channel strategies to meet with success in the future.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS BRANDS SHOULD BE ASKING THEMSELVES:

Are we tracking how preferences are evolving, especially in areas like Text-Based and unassisted solutions, and ensuring we are investing enough to capitalize on current and emerging trends?

Are we doing a good job internally of conveying the criticality of a positive customer experience and its impact on customer loyalty, as well as the bottom line of the organization?

When we roll out new solutions, are we validating the experience across a range of our customer demographics, laying the groundwork for successful adoption from the word, "Go!"?

ABOUT THE STUDY'S AUTHOR

EXECS IN THE KNOW

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 event, Customer Response Summit; virtual CX series, CustomerCONNECT; and private, online community, Know It All "KIA." There are also exclusive, laser-focused engagements like industry briefings, live luncheons, and virtual 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, podcasts, blogs, and much more.

To learn more about Execs In The Know, visit https://execsintheknow.com.

ABOUT THE STUDY'S SPONSOR

HINDUJA GLOBAL SOLUTIONS (HGS)

A global leader in digital customer experience and optimizing customer journeys, HGS is helping build businesses for the future. HGS combines technology-powered services in automation, analytics and artificial intelligence, with deep domain expertise focusing on back-office processing, contact centers, traditional and digital people care, to deliver transformational impact to clients. Part of the multi-billion-dollar conglomerate Hinduja Group, HGS takes a true "globally local" approach, with 42,769 employees across 55 delivery centers in seven countries, making a difference to some of the world's leading brands across nine key verticals. For the year that ended 31st March 2021, HGS had revenues of US$ 753.9 million.

To learn more about HGS, visit https://hgs.cx.

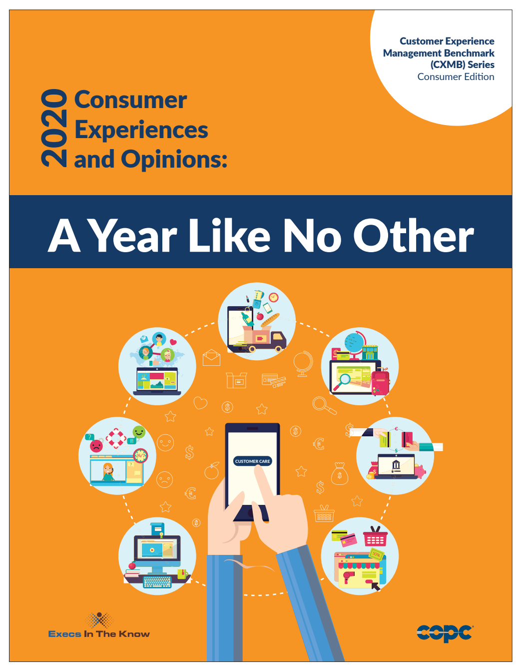
GET PREVIOUS EDITIONS
OF EXECS IN THE KNOW RESEARCH

Although the CX Leaders Trends & Insights Consumer Edition report is the first in a new series of customer experience-related research, Execs In The Know hosts an extensive library of prior research. Included in this library is the Customer Experience Management Benchmark (CXMB) Series, the predecessor of the CX Leaders Trends & Insights series.

To find the latest volume of CX Leaders Trends & Insights, as well as previously published research, visit the Execs In The Know Research landing page:

https://execsintheknow.com/cx-research/

2020 CXMB Series Corporate Edition



2020 CXMB Series Consumer Edition

Look for the next issue of the CX Leaders Trends & Insights, the 2021 Corporate Edition, due out in February 2022.

Execs In The Know

www.ExecsIntheKnow.com