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CX Insight

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Trust Connection

Why trust, transparency, and human understanding are defining the future of CX

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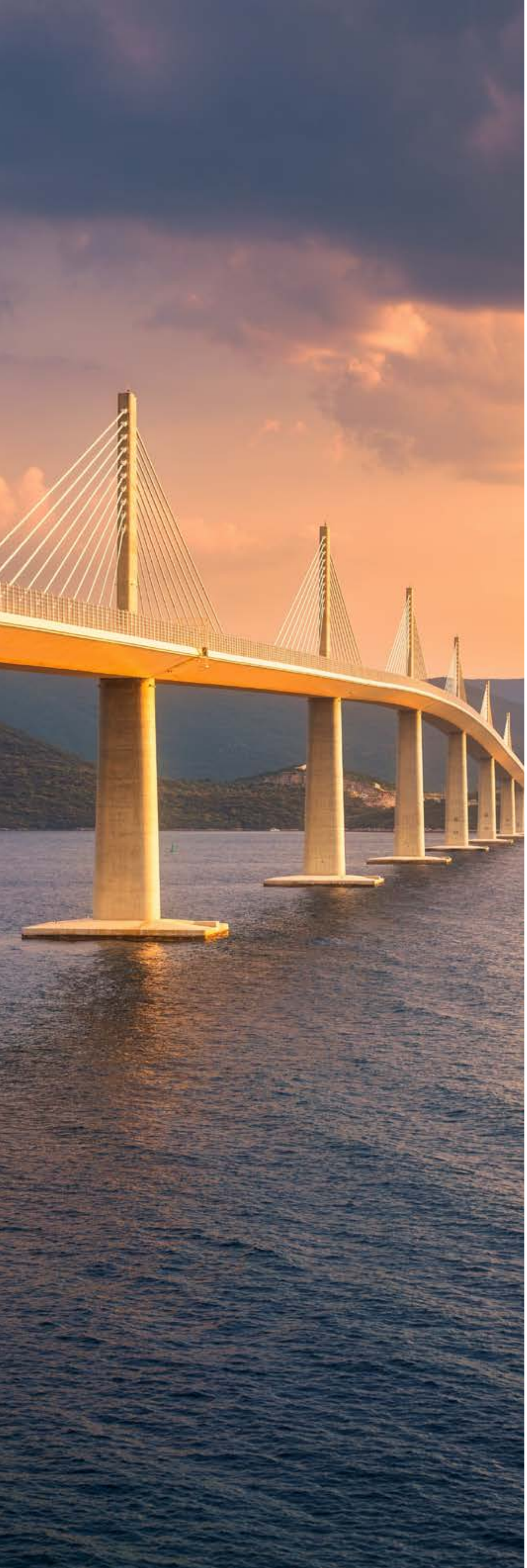

in this issue

CX Insight

AN EXECS IN THE KNOW PUBLICATION

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Welcome

to the July 2026 issue of *CX Insight* magazine, an Execs In The Know publication.

This July issue is about the part of transformation that doesn't always show up on a roadmap: the people asked to carry it.

Every CX leader we talk to is living the same tension right now. AI is moving faster than almost any technology shift our industry has seen, and the pressure to adopt it is real. But the brands pulling ahead aren't winning because of the platform they chose. They're winning because they've figured out where technology belongs, where human judgment is non-negotiable, and how to bring their people along for the ride.

Our featured article, *Leading Transformational Change*, tackles this head-on. The data shows most transformation efforts still fall short, and it's rarely the technology that trips them up. It's trust, culture, and leadership that hasn't caught up to the pace of change. We look at why routinizing change, not just inspiring it, is what separates organizations that adapt from those that stall, and why the connection between employee experience and customer experience is closer than most transformation plans account for.

That same thread runs through the rest of this issue. We dig into what responsibilities AI should actually own versus where humans remain essential. We also explore why trust, more than speed or effort scores, is becoming the real currency of customer loyalty.

In our Brand Spotlight, we hear from AMC Global Media on using AI to remove friction without losing the empathy fandoms expect, and in our KIA Spotlight with Casio, we learn why the post-sale experience is where a brand's promises are actually tested. Our case study with Cisco shows what it looks like to build an AI feature the right way: starting from a real customer pain point, validating relentlessly, and earning trust before scaling.

Taken together, these stories point to the same conclusion. The technology will keep arriving. The organizations that thrive will be the ones whose leaders and teams can absorb it without losing the trust of the people doing the work or the customers on the other end of it.

Thank you for being part of our community. We hope this issue gives you something to bring back to your own team.

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Leading Transformational Change

Why the biggest challenge in CX isn't technology; it's leading people through it.

by Execs In The Know

Customer experience (CX) leaders have spent the past several years navigating an unprecedented pace of disruption. Artificial intelligence (AI), evolving customer expectations, economic pressure, and constant organizational change have forced businesses to rethink not only how they serve customers, but how they operate internally. Yet while technology often dominates the conversation, many transformation efforts continue to fall short for a much simpler reason: organizations underestimate the human side of change.

The most successful CX transformations aren't defined by the platforms organizations implement, but by the trust they build, the cultures they cultivate, and the leaders who help employees adapt with confidence. In this article, we explore why leading transformational change has become one of the most critical capabilities for today's CX executives, and how organizations can build the resilience needed to keep both employees and customers engaged through continuous change.

Transformation Isn't Optional

There was a time when transformation meant a defined project. A start date, an end date, a steering committee, a champagne toast when the new system went live. That era is over. Gartner's research on organizational change[1] describes today's environment plainly: change is no longer episodic or contained within a single initiative. It has become a continuous condition, one that requires new mindsets and new approaches to leadership rather than a new phase-gated plan.

That shift matters more in CX than almost anywhere else in the business. Customers don't experience your org chart. They experience the sum of every decision your company makes about people, process, and technology, all at once, in real time. When transformation becomes permanent, CX becomes the place where every unfinished change shows up first.

Most CX leaders already understand what needs to change. The technology decisions, the journey redesigns, the AI use cases: these are the easy part to name. What's genuinely hard is leading the people who have to make the change real, day after day, while still answering the phone, still working the queue, still facing the customer who has no idea any of this is happening.

The Biggest Barrier Isn't Technology

If you've sat in an executive board meeting in the last few years, you already know this. The conversation starts with a platform decision and ends with a conversation about culture, trust, and whether the frontline believes any of this will work.

Gartner's HR practice put a number on the problem, and it's a sobering one. Only 32% of business leaders say the last change they led actually achieved healthy adoption among employees,[2] meaning employees acted on the change, did so in a reasonable timeframe, and weren't left burned out or disengaged in the process. Even more telling: the same research found that 79% of employees report low trust in organizational change. Not skepticism about one project. Low trust in the very idea that change, in general, will be handled well.

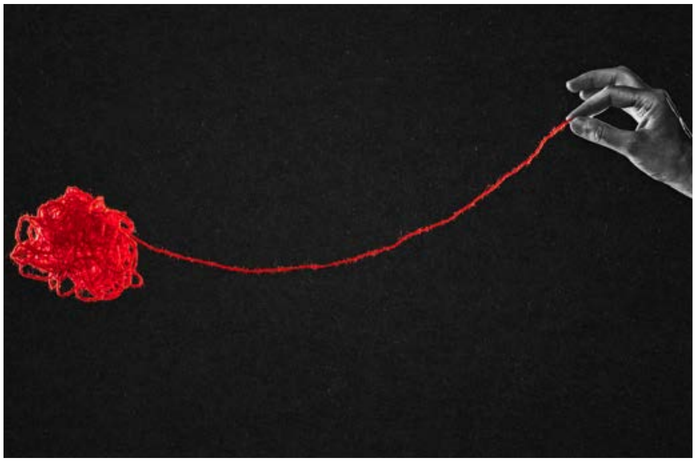
McKinsey's long-running research on transformation tells a similar story from a different angle. Across years of surveying executives, the finding hasn't moved: roughly 70% of transformation efforts fail to hit their goals,[3] and the reasons cited most often have nothing to do with the technology itself. Insufficient aspiration, weak engagement across the organization, and underinvestment in building the capabilities people need to work differently top the list.

So why do so many CX transformation plans still open with a technology roadmap and treat the people plan as an appendix?

Why Leaders Must Become Change Leaders

Here's the uncomfortable part for a lot of executives: being good at running a customer experience organization and being good at leading people through disruption are not the same skill. You can be excellent at journey mapping, service design, and workforce planning and still watch a transformation stall because you led it the way you'd lead a steady-state operation.

Leaders instinctively try to inspire adoption. They paint the vision, they hold the town hall, they roll out the new mission statement. That approach works, but only in an environment of high trust. When trust in change is already low, which describes most large organizations today, the inspirational approach falls flat. Gartner's recent modeling found that when change trust is low, only about a quarter of changes led primarily through inspiration achieve healthy adoption.[4]



What works instead is what's called "routinizing change": helping employees treat change as a normal part of how work gets done rather than a disruptive event to survive. That's a fundamentally different leadership posture. It means less time spent on the big vision speech and more time spent helping people build the habits and instincts to handle whatever comes next, because something always comes next.

This isn't a new idea, even if the language around it is new. John Kotter's classic *Harvard Business Review* research[5] on why transformation efforts fail identified the same root cause three decades ago: companies skip the hard, unglamorous work of building genuine buy-in and communicating a vision people can act on, and they pay for it later. Kotter's research found that well over half of the transformations he studied stumbled in the very first phase, largely because leaders underestimated how difficult it is to move people out of their comfort zone.

Thirty years of AI platforms, automation waves, and reorganizations later, that first phase is still where most transformations quietly die.

Managing Up: Translating Vision into Reality

Leading transformation means managing in every direction, not only guiding teams through change, but helping executives understand what it takes to make change successful. CX leaders increasingly find themselves in the middle: translating ambitious business goals into realistic plans, connecting emerging technology to meaningful outcomes, and creating the focus teams need to execute effectively.

A critical part of this role is influencing the C-suite with clarity and perspective. As AI and transformation continue to dominate executive conversations, CX leaders must help shift discussions from what technology can do to where it can create measurable value. The strongest leaders bring forward customer insights, operational realities, and frontline perspectives to help executives make informed decisions about where to invest, where to experiment, and where to hold back.

That also means setting realistic expectations both above and below. Transformation rarely happens as quickly or as simply as initial enthusiasm suggests. New capabilities require time, testing, process changes, training, and adoption. Leaders who establish a shared understanding of what success looks like, what resources are required, and what challenges may arise create stronger alignment and reduce the risk of disappointment later.

In the current AI landscape, CX leaders also play a critical role in translating hype into reality. With new tools and possibilities emerging every day, organizations can easily fall into the trap of chasing innovation without a clear purpose. Effective leaders help teams and executives separate meaningful opportunities from distractions by asking practical questions: Does this solve a real customer or business challenge? Does it improve the employee experience? Are we prepared to support the change required to make it successful?

Perhaps one of the most important responsibilities of a transformation leader is protecting teams from initiative overload. When every new priority is positioned as urgent, employees are left navigating competing demands with limited capacity. Strong leaders create discipline around prioritization, helping organizations determine what matters most, what can wait, and what may need to stop altogether. Saying “not yet” can be just as important as saying “yes.”

The role of the CX leader is not simply to accelerate change. It is to create the conditions where the right changes can succeed.

Trust as the Foundation for Transformation

Trust isn't a soft metric you check at the end of an engagement survey. It's the operating condition that determines whether every other part of your transformation plan will work.

Think about what you're asking your frontline teams to do. Learn a new tool while still hitting service levels. Adopt a new process while the old one hasn't fully been retired. Trust that the leadership team asking for this has their best interest in mind, even after the last three initiatives asked the same thing and delivered mixed results at best. That's the emotional backlog that happens when employees are managing overlapping, concurrent transitions, not a single clean change.

What would it take for your frontline team to believe the next initiative is different?

Building that belief isn't about a better internal communications plan. It's about consistency between what leadership says and what leadership does when the transformation gets uncomfortable. Does the organization actually reward the behaviors it's asking for, or does it quietly keep measuring people against the old model while asking them to act on the new one? Employees notice that gap faster than any dashboard will show it to you.

Keeping Customers at the Center During Change

It's easy to lose sight of the customer when the internal work of transformation gets hard. But the connection between how your employees are experiencing change and how your customers experience your brand is not theoretical.

Harvard Business Review's reporting on this connection is worth sitting with. Research that traced Glassdoor employee satisfaction scores against the American Customer Satisfaction Index found a direct statistical relationship: a one-star improvement in employee satisfaction correlated with a meaningful improvement in customer satisfaction,[6] and the effect was more than twice as strong in service-heavy industries like retail, travel, and financial services, where employees and customers interact constantly.

That's the part of transformation planning that's easiest to skip and most expensive to skip. A confused, exhausted, undertrained employee cannot deliver a great customer experience no matter how good the new platform is. Customer experience has also stopped being the sole property of the CX team. Cross-functional ownership of CX makes the case that standout experiences today are built through collaboration across departments that used to operate in silos, not through a single team's heroics. If engineering, operations, and frontline service aren't aligned during the transformation itself, the customer will feel the seams.

Lessons from Organizations Getting It Right

The organizations pulling this off share a pattern, and it isn't a bigger technology budget.

McKinsey's research on successful transformations found that companies willing to move people, not just process and technology, saw dramatically better outcomes. Organizations where senior leaders replaced team members who weren't genuinely committed to the change saw a 29% success rate, compared with just 6% where leadership kept uncommitted people in place.[7] The same research found that dedicated change agents, employees given real time and mandate to model new behaviors for their peers, had an outsized impact on success, and were twice as likely to report success in shifting organizational culture specifically.

Notice what's missing from that list. No mention of the technology stack. The differentiator was leadership's willingness to address the human side of the equation directly, even when it was uncomfortable.

> *The kindest thing you can do for your people is stop promising them things will settle down, because they won't — change is the job now. Leaders who level with their teams about that, and then help them get good at it, build organizations that bend instead of break.*
>
> — **Lisa Oswald,**
> Senior Vice President and Global Head of Member Services at Travelzoo

Turning Strategy into Action

While every transformation journey looks different, successful organizations tend to share a few common practices.

Begin by taking an honest assessment of where your organization stands today. Identify the operational, cultural, or technological barriers preventing progress, and determine where meaningful change will create the greatest impact. Effective transformation starts with a clear understanding of the gap between the current state and the future vision.

Next, broaden the conversation beyond internal teams. Customers, partners, suppliers, and other stakeholders often provide valuable perspectives that strengthen transformation efforts. Bringing these voices into the planning process creates greater alignment and increases the likelihood of long-term success.

Finally, never overlook the employee experience. Every transformation ultimately succeeds or fails through the people responsible for delivering it. Organizations that invest in listening to employees, addressing persistent pain points, and creating an environment where teams feel supported are better positioned to sustain change long after the initial rollout.

Building a Culture That Embraces Change

If change is now permanent, culture has to be built for it, not retrofitted after the fact. That means training people's instincts, not just their task lists. Gartner's framework calls these "change reflexes," core skills practiced often enough that they become second nature rather than a special skill deployed only when a big initiative launches. Recent research identified six of these reflexes as having the greatest impact on healthy adoption, and found that employees build them through small, everyday practice, not through a single training session tied to a single rollout.[8]

For CX leaders, this reframes the job. Building a change-ready culture isn't a project you launch alongside the AI rollout. It's an ongoing discipline, closer to how you'd think about coaching a team's fundamentals than how you'd think about a change management checklist attached to a single initiative.

What would your organization look like if adapting to change was simply part of the job description, for everyone, all the time?

The New CX Leader Skill Set: Building the Capacity to Lead Through Change

Leading transformation requires more than a strong strategy. It requires leaders who are willing to continuously evolve themselves. The pace of change, particularly around AI, means yesterday's expertise is not enough. CX leaders must become lifelong learners, actively building their own understanding of emerging technologies, evolving customer expectations, and the capabilities their organizations will need next.

That starts with investing in themselves. Leaders do not need to become technical experts in every new tool or trend, but they do need enough knowledge to ask better questions, challenge assumptions, and make informed decisions. Staying curious and informed allows leaders to distinguish between meaningful innovation and short-lived hype.

They must also create systems for knowledge sharing across their organizations. Transformation cannot depend on a handful of experts or a single innovation team. Leaders need to build environments where teams can learn from one another, share what is working, surface challenges, and develop new skills together. This may mean creating communities of practice, identifying internal champions, investing in training, or bringing in outside expertise when needed.

At the same time, successful transformation requires leaders to remain nimble without becoming reactive. The organizations that thrive will not be the ones that chase every new development, but the ones that can quickly evaluate change, make thoughtful decisions, and adapt when circumstances evolve. Speed matters, but speed without direction creates confusion and change fatigue.

This is where community becomes an invaluable resource. No CX leader is navigating this level of disruption alone, and some of the most valuable insights come from peers who are solving similar challenges in real time. Engaging with industry communities, exchanging perspectives, and learning from others' successes and missteps can help leaders make better decisions while avoiding the temptation to operate in isolation.

The future of CX leadership will belong to those who can balance curiosity with judgment, urgency with intention, and innovation with the human needs of the teams they lead.

> *The most successful change leaders don't just communicate the vision, they help people see themselves in it. In my experience, resistance to change is often resistance to uncertainty. When leaders consistently connect the 'why,' listen to concerns, and show employees how change helps them better serve customers and grow professionally, people move from feeling impacted by change to becoming advocates for it.*

— Ebrahim Hyder,,
Vice President, Customer Service at Michael Kors

The Future Belongs to Adaptive Organizations

The organizations that will win the next decade of CX aren't the ones with the most advanced technology stack. They're the ones whose people can absorb the next change, and the one after that, without burning out or checking out. Technology will keep accelerating. The half-life of any given tool or platform keeps shrinking. The only durable advantage left is an organization that can metabolize change faster than its competitors, without sacrificing the trust of the people doing the work or the customers on the receiving end of it.

CX leaders don't get to opt out of transformation. The technology will keep coming, the reorganizations will keep coming, and customer expectations will keep rising regardless of what's happening internally. The leaders who separate themselves aren't the ones with the cleanest roadmap. They're the ones who understood, going in, that the roadmap was never really the hard part. The technology was always going to arrive. The only real question was whether leadership had built enough trust to ask people to carry it.

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3. https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/transformation/our-insights/perspectives-on-transformation

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Customer Assurance: Why Trust Wins

In an era of AI, automation, and rising expectations, trust has become every organization's most valuable asset.

by Execs In The Know

A traveler calls an airline because a flight got canceled. The agent is polite, the rebooking takes 90 seconds, and the case closes with a five-star survey. Three weeks later, that same traveler switches to a competitor. Nothing in the transaction went wrong. Something in the relationship did.

This is the paradox sitting at the center of customer experience (CX) today. For 20 years, the industry chased two words: faster and easier. CX leaders built self-service portals to cut wait times, trained agents to resolve issues in a single call, and measured success against effort scores and speed-to-resolution dashboards. The industry got good at it. Really good. And yet customer trust keeps declining anyway.

So why do so many customers still feel unsettled, even when the numbers say the experience worked?

Why Speed and Convenience Are No Longer Enough

Here's the truth: efficiency was never the finish line. It was the entry fee. Gartner's research on the Effortless Experience[1] found that customer service interactions are nearly four times more likely to create disloyalty than loyalty. Read that again. The very function built to save relationships is, more often than not, the place where they quietly end.

That statistic should stop every CX executive mid-sentence. It means the industry solved the wrong problem. We made transactions faster without making customers feel safer. We removed friction without replacing it with confidence.

PwC's 2025 Customer Experience Survey[2] puts numbers to the gap. More than half of consumers, 52%, say they stopped buying from a brand after a bad experience with a product or service. Nearly nine in ten executives believe customer loyalty has grown in recent years. Only four in ten consumers agree. That is not a measurement error. That is a leadership blind spot, and it has a direct line to lost revenue.

Speed and convenience still matter. But they were always table stakes, not differentiators. The differentiator now is something quieter and harder to manufacture: whether a customer believes, before anything goes wrong, that your company will do right by them when it does.

What Customer Assurance Means

Customer assurance is the feeling a customer has when they know they are understood, protected, and genuinely cared for in every interaction, not just the ones that go smoothly. It is not a satisfaction score or a resolution metric. It is the quiet confidence that a company will do the right thing even when no one is watching.

Think of it like sunlight. Customers should not have to search for it or question whether it will show up tomorrow. It is simply there, steady and reliable, whether the interaction is routine or the moment everything falls apart.

This isn't another CX program. It's an operating philosophy that aligns policies, AI, employees, communications, governance, and recovery around one outcome: increasing customer confidence before, during, and after every interaction.

This is a shift in what excellence means. It moves the goal from transactional satisfaction to lasting relationship. It shifts the operating question from "how fast did we resolve it" to "how confident did the customer feel in our hands." Automation still matters, but accountability matters more. Resolution still matters, but reassurance is what customers actually remember.

Customers don't stay because nothing goes wrong. They stay because they trust what happens when it does.

Does your organization know the difference between a customer who is satisfied and a customer who is assured? Most don't, because most have never measured for it.

The Business Case for Assurance

Trust is not a soft metric; it is a financial one. *Harvard Business Review's* research on customer engagement[3] found that despite decades of investment in engagement and loyalty programs, employee trust levels sit at an all-time low and engagement has fallen to the bottom of a 20-year range. Meanwhile customers have grown more demanding and more willing to walk. They expect immediate fulfillment and effortless recovery, and they leave quickly when those expectations go unmet.

The research is clear on what moves behavior. Incremental improvements in satisfaction do not change how customers act. Behavior shifts only when an experience crosses a real emotional threshold, one built on control, consistency, and warmth delivered by people who feel supported enough to offer it.

Assurance also carries a premium customers are willing to pay. PwC has found that consumers value clear, honest communication and proactive issue resolution as top drivers of trust, and that trust directly predicts whether a customer forgives a mistake or walks away for good. Clarity reduces friction before friction becomes a complaint. Consistency reduces the anxiety that turns a small hiccup into a canceled account. Confidence reduces churn in ways that no discount or loyalty point ever will.

What would change in your CX strategy if the primary key performance indicator (KPI) wasn't resolution time, but the confidence a customer carries out of the interaction?

Where Assurance Breaks Down

Assurance rarely fails in the big, visible crises. It fails in the small, unremarkable moments companies stopped paying attention to.

Billing and policy. A confusing invoice or a policy that changes without warning tells a customer the company is not paying attention to them, even if the underlying charge is correct.

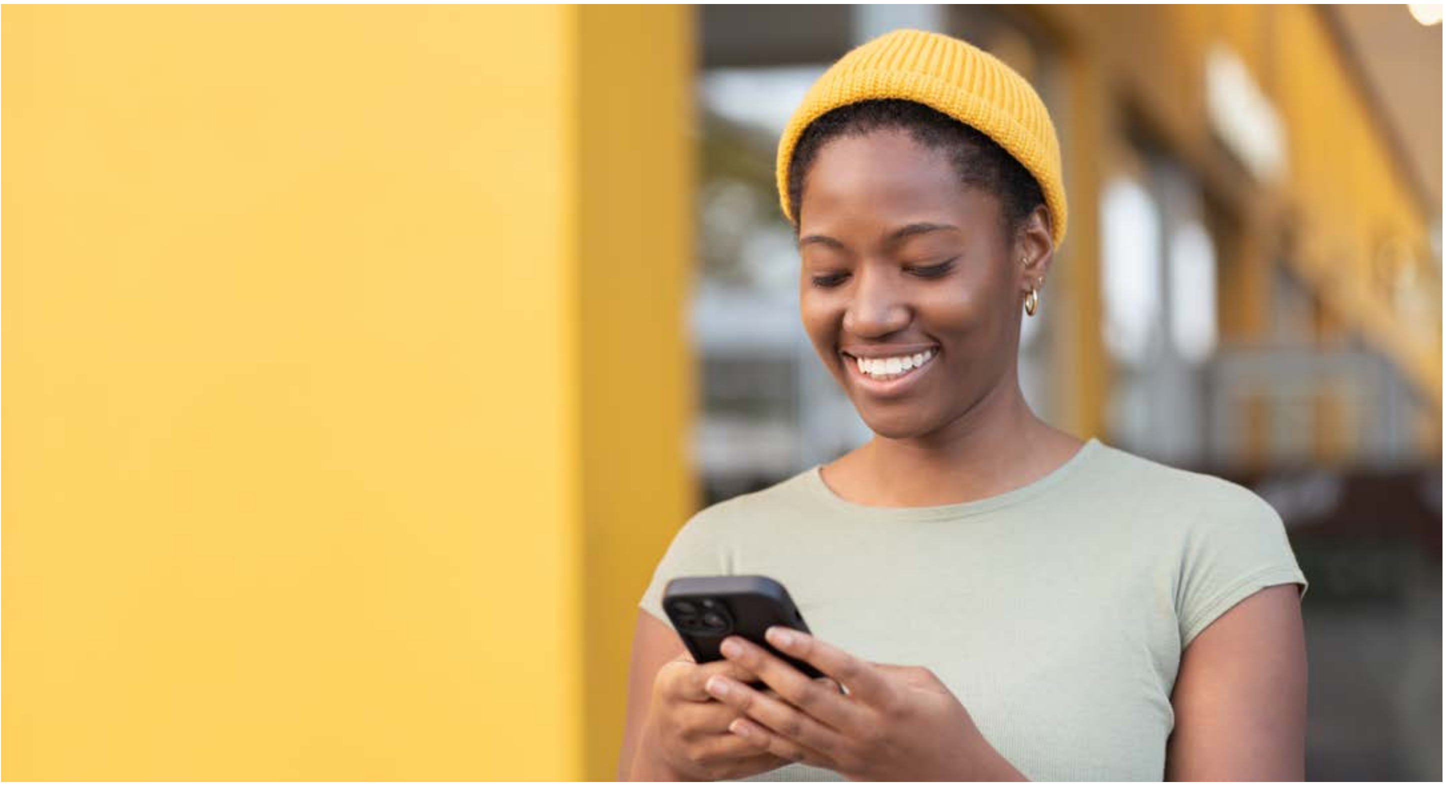
AI and automation. Salesforce's State of the AI Connected Customer research[4] found that only 42% of customers now trust businesses to use AI ethically, down from 58% in 2023 — a 17-point collapse in two years. That decline shows up in what customers now expect as a baseline: 71% want a human to validate AI-driven decisions, and 73% want to know outright when they're interacting with an AI agent. Together, the three numbers trace the same erosion from different angles: less faith in AI's judgment, less willingness to let it act alone, and less tolerance for not being told. Deploying AI without transparency does not just risk a bad interaction. It actively erodes the trust the rest of your CX organization spent years building.

Handoffs. Every transfer between channels or departments is a moment where a customer has to re-explain themselves and re-establish that someone actually understands their situation. *Harvard Business Review's* research on anxious customers[5] found that people under stress specifically want a human, and that routing anxious customers to self-service technology to save cost tends to reduce both satisfaction and trust.

Outages and service failures. These are not the exception to assurance. They are the test of it. A company that has spent years building efficient service can lose the relationship in a single outage if the recovery feels evasive or scripted.

Recovery. How you show up after the mistake matters more than the mistake itself. Customers do not expect perfection. They expect ownership.

What do your escalation paths communicate to a customer? If the honest answer is "we're not sure," that is your first assurance gap.



Five Operational Practices That Build Assurance

1. **Design for clarity before you design for speed.** Map the moments where customers most often ask, "Wait, what does this mean?" Fix the language and the policy before you fix the handle time.

2. **Make transparency the default in every AI deployment.** Tell customers when they are talking to an AI agent. Build in a visible path to a human. This is not a compliance checkbox. It is now a documented trust requirement, not a preference.

3. **Empower frontline teams to act, not just to follow scripts.** PwC's research consistently shows that policies which reduce friction and give employees room to make a judgment call produce more forgiveness and higher satisfaction after something goes wrong.

4. **Treat recovery as its own discipline, not an extension of resolution.** Build recovery playbooks that address the emotional repair, not just the technical fix. A refund without acknowledgment is not recovery; it's a transaction.

5. **Invest in employee experience as a CX lever, not an HR initiative.** Employees are not just the delivery mechanism for assurance. They are the source of it. A team that feels unsupported cannot manufacture warmth or consistency, no matter how good the technology behind them is.

What to Measure

Resolution time and customer satisfaction (CSAT) will not disappear from your dashboards, and they shouldn't. But they were never built to capture confidence, and it shows.

Consider adding a measure of pre-interaction confidence: do customers believe, before they ever contact you, that you'll handle a problem well? Track transparency perception specifically around AI and automated touchpoints, not folded into a general satisfaction number. Track forgiveness rate after a service failure, meaning the percentage of customers who stay after something goes wrong, not just the percentage who were satisfied with the fix. And track internal trust alongside customer trust.

If your employees don't trust leadership or the tools they're given, that gap will show up in every customer interaction whether you're measuring for it or not.

Why Leading CX Teams Are Treating Trust as a Strategic Capability

The next era of CX will not be defined by who can remove the most friction. It will be defined by who can create the most confidence. As AI, automation, and digital channels reshape how customers interact with brands, the organizations that win will be the ones that understand technology is not the source of trust. It is the amplifier of it.

Customer assurance requires a different leadership mindset. It asks CX executives to look beyond individual interactions and evaluate the entire relationship: Do customers understand what is happening? Do they believe decisions are being made with their best interests in mind? Do they feel supported when things go wrong? Those questions move CX from a function focused on efficiency to a business discipline focused on trust, loyalty, and long-term growth.

The organizations that win over the next decade won't simply automate more interactions. They'll build systems customers can believe in. And building assurance into the operating model won't just create better experiences; it will create stronger relationships that can withstand disruption, mistakes, and changing expectations. In a market where customers have more choices than ever, trust is no longer something brands earn after the experience; it is the reason customers choose to stay.

JOIN US IN SCOTTSDALE

Customer assurance is at the heart of the conversation the industry needs to have right now, and it's the one we're having at CRS Scottsdale, September 30 through October 2, at The Phoenician.

The conference theme is *Customer Assurance: Leading the Next CX Advantage*, and we've built sessions around the question this article raises: what does it actually take to earn a customer's confidence, not just their satisfaction?

You'll hear from CX leaders who are already redesigning their journeys, their metrics, and their teams around assurance.

Learn more and register for CRS to be part of the conversations shaping what comes next in CX.

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I am super excited about attending CRS this fall in Scottsdale, where we will focus on customer assurance. The reason this is important to me as a leader is that my team will be attending and will have the opportunity to learn about all of the elements that are related to customer experience and the trust that we need to provide for our customers, which assures them that we are providing the right level of service.

Carolyne M. Truelove
Vice President, Customer and Operations Excellence at American Airlines

What Responsibilities Should AI Own?

Explore how CX leaders can define what AI should own, where humans remain essential, and why trust and governance are critical to AI success.

by Execs In The Know

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) to support the customer and employee experience has accelerated from inquiry and investigation to an operational imperative. The economics, expectations, and unprecedented advancement have catapulted AI from an optional and limited innovation experiment to an absolute requirement that shapes trust, operational efficiency, and competitive advantage.

Worldwide spending on AI is forecast to total $2.59 trillion by the end of 2026, a 47% increase year-over-year.[1] The rapidly expanding scope of this transformative technology and its impact on customer-facing organizations reveals the critical need to define ownership. What should AI actually own?

Organizations that are not focused on answering this question increasingly struggle to meet service expectations and control costs; however, those tackling it are strengthening the most practical way to deliver the speed, personalization, scale, and efficiency that customers expect. As with any operational requirement, CX leaders have an incredible opportunity to set the strategy and chart the course to define AI ownership.

The New AI Leadership Challenge

A critical part of embracing this new AI leadership challenge is recognizing that the technology is advancing faster than organizational decision-making. Unlike other technology implementations, the perpetual and dynamic acceleration of AI makes defining ownership, accountability, and governance somewhat fluid yet essential to success. Leaders need to set clear boundaries between AI and humans, specifically in defining new operating models and employee skills.

Instead of the traditional approach that includes standardizing or digitizing an existing process and follows predefined steps on a specific and predictable schedule, AI implementation is more dynamic. An AI operating model can interpret language, identify intent, generate recommendations, execute tasks, and improve over time. The model must be adapted to include stronger governance, human oversight, continuous testing, model monitoring, feedback loops, and clear boundaries.

Similarly, employees need different skills. Instead of standard training to learn a new interface in a traditional deployment, AI requires employees to learn how to work with an intelligent system that continually improves. Employees must have an enhanced skill set that includes AI literacy, critical thinking, and judgment. Prompt development, data interpretation, exception handling, and the ability to validate outputs are also critical skills for employees using modern AI tools. Leaders must take a cross-functional approach to ensure training, monitoring, and coaching are aligned around the critical new skills employees need to succeed in an AI-enabled operating model.

Where Should We Draw the Line?

Organizations must intentionally define which interactions are best handled by AI, which require human judgment and empathy, and how the two should work together to deliver the best customer outcome. As CX leaders work to strike this delicate balance, an excellent starting point is to understand what tasks customers are comfortable allowing AI to handle.

The voice of the customer will help reveal what customers value, where the frustration points are, and which interactions require empathy, judgement, and trust-building from their perspective. Industry leaders must use these signals to represent the customer and better understand their journey to and through the service experience. That data is critical input to operational planning as it defines the interactions that customers support AI resolution as well as those that need a human agent to resolve.

As development and deployment of AI assistants rapidly move forward, routine inquiries, summarization and insight generation, and transactional support have become table stakes. The best use cases are high-volume, repeatable work, including account updates, password resets, and order status checks. More advanced uses, such as proactive service interventions, automated quality auditing, and knowledge management that updates in near real time based on live interactions, are also sound choices for AI assists to handle.[2]

These types of interactions are more transactional and occur when a customer needs to solve an issue quickly, making them comfortable dealing with machine support. More complex use cases that further increase efficiency and deliver proactive service are being tested and deployed, but leaders recognize that relationship-sensitive interactions should remain in the human agent queue. Human involvement is critical in empathy-driven interactions, complex problem resolution, high-risk contacts, escalations and exceptions, and moments where trust must be built or restored.

Many organizations ask whether AI can perform a task. The better question is whether customers want AI to own that moment. Seventy-one percent of consumers feel neutral or better about AI-powered agents serving as the first point of contact during a customer care interaction.[3]

AI ownership isn't about assigning work to machines. It's about defining accountability.

Trust: The New CX Battleground

In an AI-enabled environment, trust is both an equalizer and a competitive advantage. Customers must believe AI is being used to support their needs in transparent and responsible ways to improve their experiences. Customers are not just evaluating outcomes; they are examining how those outcomes are being achieved.

Employees also need to understand this to build their confidence in the technology and processes so they can represent the brand promise during human-assisted interactions. For both groups, building trust increases the likelihood of engagement, self-service, and acceptance of AI-driven support.

The relationship between AI adoption and brand trust requires an intentional and well-planned operational shift. Organizations must now treat AI trust as a foundational business requirement rather than a mere compliance issue; without this shift, the full value of AI cannot be realized.

Trust underpins two critical outcomes:

1. It enables organizations to realize value from AI investments by supporting sustained adoption and integration into core workflows.
2. It is essential if organizations are to successfully manage an expanding and evolving risk landscape.[4]

This trust-forward approach empowers organizations as it becomes a competitive differentiator, allowing brands to improve results with promotion and use of responsible AI. When organizations lead with trust, the brand promise

comes to life, increasing consumer confidence, building deeper relationships, improving loyalty and spend, preventing legal liabilities, and driving additional innovation. A first step to achieving these benefits is building a strong governance practice.

Governance, Accountability, and Risk

CX leaders understand the importance of governance to create clear accountability and mitigate risk. A structured governing framework identifies operating rules, practices, and processes to control the organization and AI-powered initiatives. In the current AI era, the importance of governance has become even more important to the operational plan.

AI governance identifies the standards and guardrails that need to be in place and ensures that systems are safe and ethical. An effective governance approach and plan should balance efficiency gains with CX improvements and business risk. Some of the core elements of an AI governance plan include:

Plan Element	Description
Purpose and prioritization	Aligns the business around why AI is being used, the problems it will solve, the criteria for prioritization, and the measures of success (e.g., improved self-service, reduced handle time, fewer repeat contacts).
Human boundaries	Defines the protocols for human vs. machine, escalation paths, approval thresholds, and moments of truth that require human intervention.
Risk and compliance controls	Identifies hot spots with privacy, security, bias, and regulations as well as potential AI weaknesses, such as inaccuracies, hallucinations, and drift.
Data governance	Pinpoints internal and external data that AI can access, ways to protect that data, and data quality measures.
Roles and rights	Names the AI owners across the organization, including sponsors, approvers, monitors, creators, and decision makers.
Transparency and trust	Establishes communication protocols with customers on the use of AI and how to get to a human.

Importantly, AI governance is not just about ensuring compliance; it is also about sustaining ethical standards as AI is used. Over time, AI models can drift and lead to lower quality, reliability, and experiences for customers and employees.[5] Governance plans must include triggers to ensure that when things go wrong, humans are notified and have the authority and skill to resolve issues.

Redefining the Human Role

As AI transforms the technology stack and operational model, leaders have an opportunity and a responsibility to define how it reshapes CX teams, roles, workflows, and the skills employees need to succeed. This work starts with a simple question: what work should remain human?

CX leaders must now decide where AI should lead, where humans should lead, and how the two work together. Defining these boundaries is a strategic and governance imperative and will differ from organization to organization. However, core elements of the work to redefine the human role remain the same:

1. Not every interaction should be automated
2. Customer trust must be a top priority
3. AI requires oversight

As work to redefine the teams, workflows, and skills advances, a key principle must guide this effort: human access and availability is an imperative. Organizations must design and offer ways for customers to reach a human agent if they feel the need, particularly in high-stakes interactions. The best customer service operations combine capable self-service with transparent access to human agents. When customers have access to human support but never need to use it, their trust in the brand grows.[6]

What CX Leaders Are Discussing Right Now

The topic of AI ownership, governance, and trust is on the minds of CX leaders around the globe. As AI reshapes our industry, the real advantage comes from learning alongside a diverse peer community. Execs In The Know, and particularly our KIA community, gives leaders a place to deepen their knowledge, challenge assumptions, and sharpen ideas together. AI is evolving too quickly for any one brand to discover, test, learn, and deploy in isolation. Leaders need to compare strategies, pressure-test ideas, share lessons learned, and understand what is actually working when it comes to AI ownership (and all else AI!).

Some key insights and questions are emerging across the CX community:

- Training agents to handle AI-related complaints
- Measuring AI resolution rates
- Using AI automation in customer and guest care
- Generating customer insights and summarization tools using AI
- Measuring CSAT for AI interactions
- Applying contact drivers and operational metrics to AI

Being part of the conversation in CX leader communities helps organizations accelerate

AI adoption. The dialogue can turn isolated exploration and experimentation into shared learning, practical governance, stronger workforce readiness, and more confident decision-making, particularly when it comes to defining roles and responsibilities for ownership.

Ownership Will Define the Future

As AI becomes more deeply embedded in CX, trust cannot be treated as a byproduct of good service; it must be designed, governed, and measured as a core feature of experiences. Customers still look for consistency, honesty, and predictability across every interaction, but AI introduces a new trust equation: organizations must be clear about when AI is being used, how it supports the experience, and where humans remain accountable. This is particularly important in sensitive or high-stakes interactions, where transparency can determine whether AI helps or hurts.

If the relationship is the product, then trust is not optional; instead, it is the foundation that makes AI-enabled customer and employee experiences credible. This is a leadership issue, not a technology conversation. Leaders already teach human agents how to build trust, and they must now apply the same discipline to AI agents through governance, quality, communication, and culture. In this era of CX, culture is driving trust, quality is revealing it, and trust is the equalizer and a competitive advantage.

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Execs In The Know

CASE STUDY

Making Answers Easier to Find for Millions of Users

Cisco tackled one of its biggest customer pain points by using AI to improve findability, showing that the best AI initiatives start with customer problems, not technology.

by Jyotsna Khandekar, Director of Product Management at Cisco

Every AI initiative promises transformation. The ones that succeed usually begin somewhere much less glamorous: a persistent customer frustration.

For Cisco, that frustration was findability. Millions of users relied on Cisco Community to troubleshoot issues, but long discussion threads and inconsistent post titles made it difficult to find answers quickly.

This case study explores how Cisco resisted the urge to implement AI for AI's sake. Instead, the team started with a friction point users had been raising for quite some time, then designed, validated, and deployed an AI solution that prioritized trust, accuracy, and customer value from day one.

CHALLENGE

Cisco Community is one of Cisco's most heavily used destinations, visited by millions of users every year. But for a long time, the biggest pain point our customers reported was findability — simply getting to a relevant answer quickly.

The problem was structural. When customers post questions and answers, titles are inconsistent and often uninformative, and popular threads can run to 10 or more replies. Someone in the middle of troubleshooting a live network issue doesn't have time to read an entire thread just to work out whether it's even relevant to them. They need a fast, relevant answer.

This wasn't a single complaint or a spike in one quarter. It came through clearly and consistently in the ways we listen to customers: our surveys, a feedback form on Cisco Community itself, and one-on-one customer interviews at events like Cisco Live, alongside the overall customer satisfaction signal on the site. Findability was, time and again, the friction point customers cited. It was a widespread, well-understood problem across a user base in the millions.

Importantly, this became an AI project because of the problem, not the technology. We didn't set out to "add AI" to the Community. We already knew findability was one of our biggest pain points, and we recognized that AI could finally solve it quickly and at scale. Problem first, technology second.

> *This became an AI project because of the problem, not the technology. We didn't set out to 'add AI' to the Community. We already knew findability was one of our biggest pain points.*

SOLUTION

Rather than dropping a generic summary paragraph on top of every thread, we designed a structured summary built for fast scanning. Each summary is organized into clear sections: what the issue is (including the product and any error message), whether there's an accepted answer, any recommendation from experts or VIP community members, and a final section for other important information.

The intent is that, within a few seconds, a customer can understand the issue, see whether there's a solution, decide whether the thread is relevant, and scroll down to read the full discussion only if they want more. We also added a deliberately minimal thumbs-up/thumbs-down control directly in the interface to gauge whether the summary was helping.

Trust shaped the design from the start. Because our team sits in operations and manages Community as a platform, we are not the in-depth experts on Cisco's products, their error messages, or their solutions, so we couldn't fully judge on our own whether an AI-generated summary was accurate. That drove a deliberate decision: bring in the people who could. We were especially careful because a customer arriving at Community is already dealing with a problem; an inaccurate or misleading summary would only add to their frustration, so guarding against hallucination and inaccuracy was central.

We also built in economic discipline. For threads that are already trivially simple – for example, a straightforward question with a single, obvious accepted answer – we deliberately don't generate a summary, because it adds no value and isn't worth the infrastructure cost. Our original thinking had been to summarize every post; ruling that out for low-value threads was one of the clearest tradeoffs we made.

EXECUTION

From "let's try this" to the first board going live took a little over a quarter, deliberately paced, because we validated before we scaled.

> *Autonomy without boundaries isn't innovation. It's risk.*

We started by identifying the boards for the pilot phase, then reached out to product leaders, who nominated specific testers from their domains. We ran a kickoff with those testers, and each product leader reviewed roughly 20–30 posts in their area, comparing the output and flagging any discrepancies in the summaries. To keep the evaluation rigorous, we tested two different implementations of the summary output – using different techniques and prompts – and asked the testers which produced better results.

That expert review directly improved the product. Two clear examples: when an accepted answer linked to an official Cisco document, our early summaries didn't surface that link, and testers told us that having the official documentation accessible right from the summary really matters to customers. Similarly, the summaries were sometimes omitting the specific software version name, which is often critical context for a networking issue. In both cases, we tweaked the feature to capture that detail. Testers also flagged instances of inaccurate information, which we addressed before expanding.

> *The goal isn't to remove people as fast as possible. It's to know exactly where human judgment matters most, and design for it.*

A practical lesson came from the process itself. Our validators were senior people doing this on top of their day jobs, so we were careful not to waste their time. We hit some friction early. Product leaders don't normally have access to the testing environment, which is owned by IT operations, and we had to work through access and logins before testing could really begin. Rather than bombard testers with emails, we ran one-on-one working sessions to show them how to test quickly. That kept them engaged and made the whole process faster for everyone.

Underneath all of it was a simple principle: the goal isn't to remove people as fast as possible; it's to know exactly where human judgment matters most, and design for it. On this build, that meant putting product experts precisely where their expertise was irreplaceable.

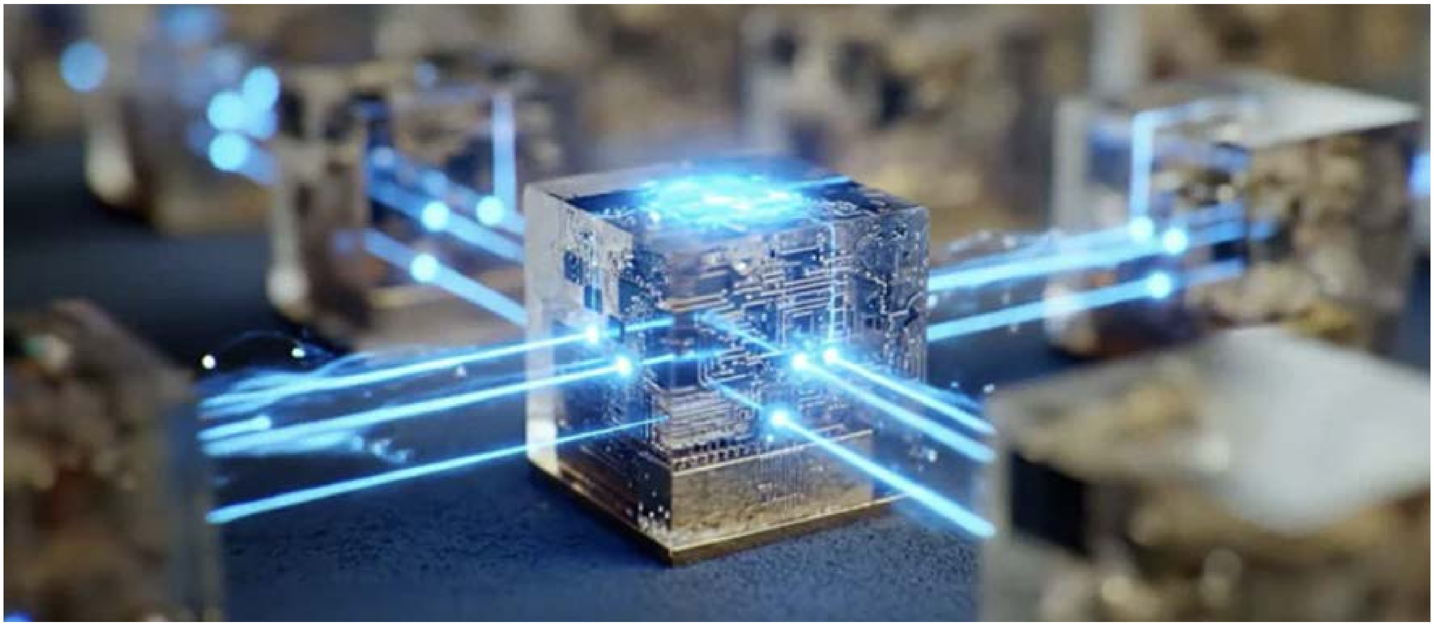
IMPACT

It’s deliberately early to make big claims. We won’t say overall CSAT has improved yet – that needs at least a quarter of data before we’d responsibly state it, and we’re not going to over-claim ahead of the evidence.

What we can point to is the early signal, and it’s encouraging: on the boards where the summaries are live, we haven’t seen a single negative comment, thumbs-down, or negative sentiment so far. The feedback has been consistently positive – spontaneous reactions like “nice summary” and “good summary,” along with thumbs-up on the interface. These are unprompted, in-the-moment responses, which are exactly the kind of signal we watch for before expanding.

> *Build trust in from the start. Don't bolt it on at the end.*

The thesis behind the feature is straightforward: act on what customers have told us and remove the friction they've described in our surveys and interviews – reducing time-to-answer and directly addressing the findability pain point. That's what we're building toward, and it's how we'll judge success. As the rollout matures, we're targeting measurable outcomes like CSAT and time-to-answer.



WHAT'S NEXT

Availability is expanding to more discussion boards, guided by the same two things that have guided us throughout: a validation-first approach and the feedback signal. We expand as we confirm accuracy and see positive sentiment, while gathering feedback and testing the remaining boards in parallel with broader availability planned in the coming months.

From here, the direction is toward more relevant, helpful experiences that directly address customer pain points. Now that we have AI, the goal is to solve more and more real customer problems with it, but the discipline stays the same. We're not embedding AI for its own sake; we look for where it's truly needed and genuinely improves the experience, rather than adding it because we can.

> *Customer first. Technology second. Innovation follows.*

Community is a good example of where that balance matters. Even as we add AI, we're intentional about preserving what makes Community valuable in the first place: the human-to-human interaction. Customers come to connect with peers who've solved the same problem, and they look forward to that. Our aim is to use AI to reduce friction and help people find answers faster, while protecting that sense of community and human connection rather than replacing it.

It's also worth being clear about where this sits: the AI summaries are an early step – a focused implementation that addresses a pain point customers have consistently raised. But it's part of a much broader shift.

Across the industry, and at Cisco, the direction is moving toward more agentic AI experiences – systems that don't just surface information but take on more of the work on the customer's behalf, in a more personalized way. Our summaries work reflects the foundational discipline that makes that future possible: earning trust, validating accuracy, and keeping humans at the center as the capabilities grow more advanced.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Two lessons stand out. First, lead with the customer problem, not the technology. Start with customer value, a real pain point you understand deeply, then ask how AI can solve it, and solve it faster. Customer first, technology second, and innovation follows. On this project, we didn't set out to "use AI"; we started with a friction point we'd heard about for quite some time and recognized AI could finally solve it.

Second, build trust from the start – don't bolt it on at the end. How much rigor you need depends on what you're building, who it's for, and at what scale. When you're launching something to millions of users who are already dealing with a problem, you cannot afford to lose their trust in the process. That's why we validated accuracy with the right experts, guarded against hallucination, and rolled out gradually rather than all at once. Autonomy without boundaries isn't innovation, it's risk. Explainability, validation, and human oversight aren't overhead; they're what let you move fast without breaking the very trust you're trying to earn.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jyotsna Khandekar is a Director of Product Management at Cisco, where she leads customer-facing digital platforms and AI initiatives that serve millions of users at a global enterprise scale. Her portfolio spans Cisco Community – where customers turn to peers to solve problems – and the digital infrastructure that delivers the right insight to the right customer at the right moment, driving adoption and helping customers realize the full value of their investment.

With 17 years in technology – roughly a decade in product management – Jyotsna brings an unusually horizontal view of how a business actually works. She has built products for internal sellers in the go-to-market domain, for partners in the commerce domain, and now in customer experience – giving her a rare end-to-end perspective on the full customer and revenue lifecycle. Her foundation was built at Tata Consultancy Services, where large-scale delivery sharpened her instincts for building systems that hold up in the real world.

Beyond her product portfolio, Jyotsna leads her organization's transformation to AI-native product management – moving an entire practice from manual to AI-assisted to AI-native ways of working. She was also a judge for the 2026 Globee Awards for Technology.

She holds a Bachelor of Engineering from VJTI, Mumbai University, and completed product management studies at Berkeley. At the heart of it all is a conviction she has carried since writing her first lines of code: stay curious, keep learning, and keep the customer at the center of every decision.

Interested in taking part in a future Case Study feature and sharing your story? **Visit our Get Involved page.**

Execs In The Know

ROI has never been more critical.

Yet few brands have a highly standardized way to measure it.

Of those CX leaders surveyed ...

86%
say demonstrating ROI is Extremely or Very Important

4%
say they have a highly standardized approach for measuring ROI for CX

75%
expect AI and Automation to deliver the strongest ROI over the next 24 months

New research from Execs In The Know reveals many of the real-world challenges facing CX leaders as they strive to prove ROI on their CX initiatives.

INSIDE THE REPORT

Discover how today's CX leaders are:

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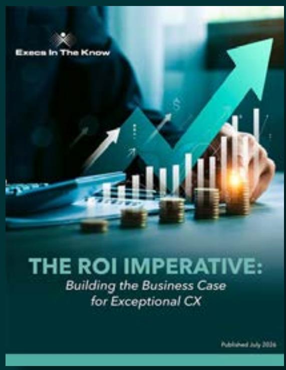

Stop Modernizing Your Contact Center.

Start Resolving Now.

The only choice isn't rip-and-replace or wait for your vendor. The fastest path to AI is adding resolution on top of whatever you already run.

by Marnie Skehan, CX Strategist, Vapi

Ask a CX leader how they plan to modernize the contact center, and you tend to get one of two answers. Rip out the platform and migrate, or wait for the platform vendor to ship the AI they keep promising. Both make sense. Both are slow. Both are gargantuan undertakings. Both approaches delay the full return on investment from AI.

Now ask yourself, which parts of the customer's problem can you resolve, end-to-end, by placing a layer of AI within or on top of the system you already run? That's something you can take action on in your workflows and customer journey that doesn't require any migration.

Let's look at the migration path.

Replacing a large contact center platform is one of the hardest enterprise IT projects there is, and the reason isn't any single integration. It's that you have to re-imagine everything the old system already did, and reach critical feature parity before you can move anyone over. Years of call recordings and interaction history have to be considered. Routing, reporting, workforce management, and compliance flows all have to be re-created and re-tested. Hundreds or thousands of agents have to be retrained. Large global rollouts run in phases, region by region, and routinely stretch across several years, and for most of that window, you run the old and new systems in parallel and pay for both. The migration becomes the project, some spanning three to four years, and the customer experience improvements you wanted wait behind it.

Now the waiting path.

Plenty of contact centers have already moved to a modern cloud platform and assume modernization is handled. But customization on a shared multi-tenant platform is limited, and pushing it too far can collide with the SLA terms you are paying for. So you wait for the vendor to build Voice AI into the suite, or to acquire it. The pace of change is set by the core system and the vendor behind it, not by you.

Resolution is a separate path

It helps to be precise about what modernization is for. For twenty years, contact centers optimized to keep people out of the queue. Deflection and containment were the scoreboard. A call resolved in the IVR counted as a win, even when the customer hung up unsatisfied and called back an hour later, compounding costs. The better measure is resolution: how much of the customer's actual problem gets handled, on their terms, via self-service or with tandem care with a valued human.

That is the shift for which agentic AI is built. Gartner projects that by 2029, agentic AI will autonomously resolve 80% of common customer service issues[1] without human intervention, with a 30% reduction in operational costs. These are not bots that answer a thin question and then fragment the call across channels. With the power of Voice AI, they act: verify identity, check an order, process a return, update a record, then confirm the outcome in natural voice.

AI is not automatically cheaper, and Gartner has been clear that the cost case weakens for the most complex interactions. That's not an argument for waiting, though. Automate the routine, repeatable work first, where the economics are clearest, and keep people on calls where empathy, understanding, and complexity demand human discernment.

Resolution is the part customers actually notice. SQM Group's 2025 benchmark puts the average contact center's first contact resolution at about 70%. So roughly a third come back, often more than once. Those repeat contacts cost you twice, as your agents or systems have to handle the same issues twice, and again in lost loyalty from the customer. According to Gartner, 96% of customers who have a high effort interaction like this become disloyal to your brand.

Modernize in layers.

My recommendation: add Voice AI optimizations with care and discernment, focusing on where they have the greatest impact without disrupting your existing human interface. This might be in front of a specific customer journey as we did prior with IVR, natural language processing, and voice or chat bots.

Pick one workflow that is high-volume, repetitive, and rules-based. Maybe one of these:

1. After-hours capture.
2. Order and shipping status.
3. Password resets.
4. Authentication before a transfer.

Route that traffic at a Voice AI agent that connects to the relevant systems of record, does its best to resolve the request end-to-end, and elegantly transfers to a human agent at any time. The handoff is where you maintain your quality goals. Done well, the agent receives a structured summary: who the customer is, what they verified, what they already tried, and what they actually want. The human agent receives a warm transfer with context, rather than starting cold. Visibility through reporting and analytics traces the complete journey.

Beginning with a simple workflow, either internally or in production, is just fine as you move towards adopting AI Voice Agents. Managing risk here is quite similar to the flows we have designed in the past for other interaction automations. And measurement matters. You can compare resolution rates, average handle time, containment, transfer metrics, and cost per interaction. The numbers either move or they do not, and you find out in days or weeks rather than at the end of an exhaustive pilot program. It is truly platform agnostic as well. The same AI Agent workflow architecture works whether the core is a legacy premise stack, a multi-tenant Cloud system, or a mix of everything else. The key is to begin small, learn the power and efficiency on a small scale, and then adopt more complex workflows that genuinely deliver the ROI without compromising quality and customer loyalty.

Avoiding the projects that fail

A layered approach also protects you from the most common way these efforts die. Gartner predicts more than 40% of agentic AI projects will be canceled by the end of 2027,[2] citing escalating costs, unclear business value, and weak risk controls. Part of the noise is what Gartner calls “agent washing,” vendors rebranding old chatbots and scripts as agents. Of the thousands of vendors claiming agentic capability, Gartner estimates only around 130 are the real thing. Most buyers are still early: in a Gartner poll of more than 3,400 attendees, only 19% reported significant investment in agentic AI, while 42% called their investment conservative. That is not a reason to sit out. It is a reason to start with intention and learn before the stakes are high.

The projects that survive tend to share a few traits. They start with one use case that has a clear return. They measure resolution, not activity. They build in governance from the start, with defined escalation paths, data controls, and human review for the cases that need it. A narrow first deployment gives you all of that almost for free. You prove value, set the guardrails, conduct low-cost A/B testing, and earn the organizational confidence to expand, without betting the whole operation on a single launch.

The question to ask your team

The framing most teams inherit is "which CCaaS, and when." It is the wrong question, and it stalls real progress for years, whether you are facing a migration or waiting on a vendor. The better question is smaller and answerable now. Which single workflow could we resolve, end-to-end, with AI in the next quarter, on top of the platform we already run?

Pick that one. Measure whether it actually resolves the customer's problem. If it does, do the next one. The contact centers that pull ahead over the next few years will not be the ones that picked the right platform first. They will be the ones who started resolving more customer demandsneeds sooner, with whatever they had.

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About the Author

Marnie Skehan is a CX Strategist at Vapi.

vapi

Vapi is the enterprise platform for building and monitoring voice agents at scale.

For more information, visit vapi.ai.

Execs In The Know

From Investment to Impact: Rapid-Fire AI Use Cases for Customer Experience

July 23, 2026 • 1 PM - 2:30 PM ET

Every AI Success Story Starts with One Question:

WHAT ACTUALLY WORKED?

Most CX leaders have already invested in AI. Far fewer know which use cases consistently deliver value and why.

This virtual Rapid-Fire Use Case event moves beyond product demos to examine real implementations across customer experience. Each presentation explores the business challenge, implementation approach, measurable outcomes, and lessons learned.

If you're responsible for AI strategy, customer operations, or contact center performance, this is an opportunity to learn from organizations putting AI into practice today.

67% of contact centers now use some form of artificial intelligence – up from 31% in 2022. Yet only 7% of CX leaders say they are very effectively meeting their AI objectives.

Source: *2026 CX Leaders Trends & Insights: Corporate Edition report*

Walk away with:

- Proven AI use cases from across CX
- Implementation insights you won't find in a product brochure
- Lessons learned from real deployments
- Live access to ask the experts your questions

This session is reserved exclusively for customer experience leaders at end-user corporate organizations.

Learn More and Confirm Your Seat

BRAND SPOTLIGHT

Creating Seamless Streaming Experiences Through Trust, Technology, and Empathy

Nicholas Solomon
Vice President of Customer Service
AMC Global Media

How AMC Global Media is using customer insights, AI, and human-centered service to remove friction and strengthen viewer loyalty.

by Execs In The Know

For streaming companies, the customer experience extends well beyond the moment someone presses play. Every interaction, from discovering new content and managing subscriptions to resolving technical issues, shapes how customers perceive the brand. In a market where viewers have countless entertainment options, delivering a seamless experience has become just as important as producing compelling content.

In this Brand Spotlight, Nicholas Solomon, Vice President of Customer Service at AMC Global Media, shares how his team is combining AI, Voice of the Customer insights, and empathetic service to reduce friction, strengthen loyalty, and ensure customer support enhances rather than interrupts the viewing experience.

Execs In The Know (EITK): You lead and manage end-to-end customer journeys at AMC Global Media. How do you define a great customer experience in the world of streaming and entertainment today?

Nicholas: At AMC Global Media, we create a great customer experience by removing friction at every moment that matters from discovery and sign-up through playback, account management, and ongoing engagement. In today's crowded streaming landscape, customers have multiple choices, so reliability and simplicity are table stakes. The experience needs to just work across devices, platforms, and brands - without forcing customers to think about logins, entitlements, or where to go for help.

Equally important is empathy at scale as we deal with emotions from customers when they contact us. When something goes wrong, a great customer experience is meeting customers where they are, resolving issues quickly, and making them feel heard. We use customer feedback, contact drivers, and voice of the customer insights to collaborate with cross-functional teams to continuously improve customer experience.

Finally, great CX in entertainment is about earning loyalty over time. Solving the immediate issue is expected; building trust is the differentiator. We do that through consistency, transparency, and thoughtful design that puts the ***customer first***. When it works, the experience feels seamless, and the brand connection grows stronger, allowing the content to shine.

> **Solving the immediate issue is expected. Building trust is the differentiator.**

EITK: Entertainment brands often have incredibly passionate audiences. How does that fandom shape the way your customer service organization approaches support and engagement?

Nicholas: Fandom fundamentally changes the role of customer service. Our audiences aren't just customers; they're deeply involved in the stories, characters, and worlds that we create. That means that every interaction carries emotional weight, and we approach support with empathy, context, and respect for that passion, recognizing that any technical issue or billing question can feel like an interruption to something personal. The goal is to remove ourselves from equation-solving issues quickly, communicating transparently, and letting the content lead. When we do that well, we move beyond problem solving and build enduring trust and loyalty.

EITK: AMC Global Media is home to some incredibly passionate fan communities built around iconic shows and storytelling. How does your team think about supporting those fandoms and ensuring the customer experience lives up to the emotional connection viewers have with the content?

Nicholas: At AMC Global Media, we know fandom is emotional, not transactional. Our responsibility is to honor that connection by delivering support that's empathetic, seamless, and respectful of the viewer's time. That focus has real impact. Last year, as we reduced friction across high volume journeys, CSAT rose from 69% to 82%, and NPS doubled, reinforcing how strongly fans respond when the experience protects their connection to the content. When support stays out of the way, trust and loyalty grow.

EITK: Contact centers are evolving quickly as technology and AI reshape the landscape. How are you thinking about the balance between automation, self-service, and the human touch for AMC Global Media customers?

Nicholas: We foresee utilizing AI to remove friction, not replace our human agents. Automation and self service are ideal for fast, high volume need-like account changes or common technical issues where customers value speed and simplicity. But when a situation is complex or emotional, human touch matters. Our approach is intentional: use AI to handle the routine, give agents better context, and ensure customers can always reach a knowledgeable human when it matters most.

We use AI to remove friction, not replace our human agents. Technology should handle the routine so people can focus on the moments that matter most.

EITK: From your perspective, what role should the contact center play in the broader customer journey, not just resolving issues, but shaping the overall experience?

Nicholas: In my opinion, the contact center should act as both a safety net and a feedback loop, protecting the experience in the moment while informing how we design our streaming services and platforms in the future. Beyond resolving issues, our teams identify friction, emotional moments, and unmet expectations across the customer journey. Those insights feed directly into product, UX, and communication decisions, helping us eliminate repeat pain points and improve self service. When done well, the contact center doesn't just react; it shapes a more seamless, intuitive experience that strengthens trust, loyalty, and long term engagement.

EITK: What are some of the most important capabilities you look for when building and developing a high-performing customer service team?

Nicholas: We look for team members who combine empathy, strong judgment, and operational rigor. The most effective customer service organizations are deeply customer centric, comfortable using data and technology, and empowered to solve problems end to end while continuously learning and improving.

We prioritize skills like active listening, sound judgment, technical fluency, data literacy, clear communication, and ownership so agents can resolve issues confidently, adapt in real time, and continuously improve the customer experience.

EITK: Streaming services generate a wealth of customer data. How does your team use insights from customer interactions to improve experiences across the organization?

Nicholas: Customer interactions are one of our most powerful insight engines. We aggregate feedback from support inquiries, surveys, and digital channels to identify friction, prioritize product improvements, and refine communication. Those metrics are shared across product, engineering, and marketing to guide roadmap priorities, improve self service, and clarify customer communication. By closing the loop between what customers experience and how we build, we continuously elevate the quality of the end-to-end streaming experience.

> **Our audiences aren't just customers; they're deeply invested in the stories, characters, and worlds we create. Every interaction carries emotional weight.**

EITK: Technology continues to transform the service environment. Are there any tools, platforms, or innovations that have meaningfully changed how your team operates?

Nicholas: Recent innovations have significantly enhanced our operations. AI-powered chat and guided self-service tools now resolve common issues more efficiently, reducing customer friction.

Unified Voice of the Customer (VoC) and survey platforms provide real-time sentiment insights across brands. Simultaneously, agent-assist tools deliver greater context and consistency, empowering teams to focus on complex, high-value interactions. Collectively, these advancements are transforming our support model into one that is more proactive, scalable, and centered on delivering exceptional customer experiences.

EITK: In a fast-moving industry like entertainment, expectations change quickly. How do you ensure your customer experience strategy continues to evolve alongside customer behavior?

Nicholas: In entertainment's dynamic landscape, we continuously evolve our customer experience strategy by leveraging real-time data, monitoring behavioral trends, and fostering a culture of innovation. Through agile methodologies and cross-functional collaboration, we stay ahead of shifting expectations, ensuring our services remain relevant, engaging, and aligned with our viewers' needs.

We stay ahead of shifting expectations by driving innovation that not only meets but anticipates viewers' engagement.

EITK: In the streaming world, the customer experience extends far beyond watching the show. It includes discovery, subscriptions, billing, and technical support. How do you ensure those moments work together to create a seamless experience for viewers?

Nicholas: In streaming, a seamless customer experience means making sure every touchpoint, from discovery to billing, works in harmony. We ensure this happens by integrating intuitive interfaces, real-time support, and proactive outreach. For example, live chat resolves technical issues instantly, while AI-driven help centers guide users through subscription or billing questions. Our support teams monitor digital and social channels to address concerns quickly, and we use customer feedback to refine processes. Every interaction is designed to be smooth, responsive, and viewer-centric.

> **The contact center shouldn't just resolve issues. It should shape a more seamless, intuitive customer experience that strengthens trust, loyalty, and long-term engagement.**

EITK: Looking back at your career, what leadership lessons have most shaped how you lead customer service teams today?

Nicholas: Looking back, the most impactful leadership lesson I've learned is the importance of empathy and active listening. Leading customer service teams requires understanding both customer needs and the team's challenges. Early in my career, I realized that empowering team members and fostering a culture of trust leads to better performance and customer satisfaction.

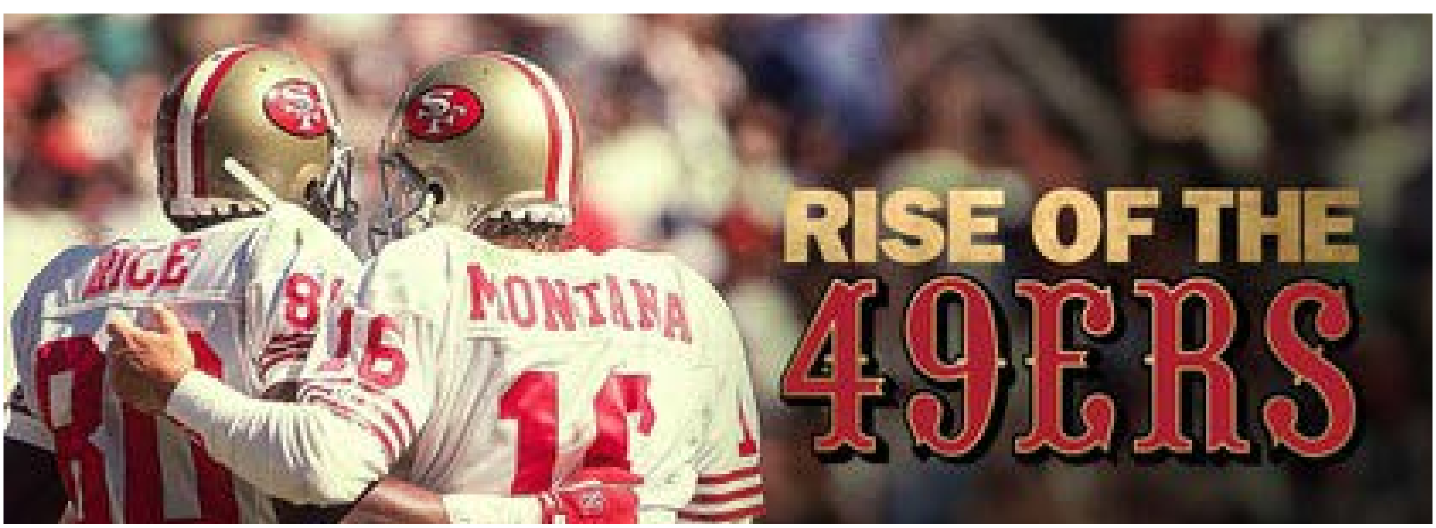
I've also learned that clear communication, adaptability, and leading by example are essential. By staying close to the frontline experience and continuously learning from both successes and setbacks, I've been able to build resilient, motivated teams that consistently deliver exceptional service.

As Maya Angelou said, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

EITK: For CX leaders across our community, what advice would you share about building a customer service organization that can deliver both operational excellence and memorable customer experiences?

Nicholas: To build a customer service organization that delivers both operational excellence and memorable experiences, start by investing in your people. Empower them with the right tools, training, and trust. Create a culture where feedback fuels improvement and empathy drives every interaction. Balance metrics with meaning. Efficiency matters, but so does the human touch. When your team feels valued, and your customers feel heard, excellence is the outcome, and loyalty is the legacy.

> **When your team feels valued and your customers feel heard, excellence is the outcome, and loyalty is the legacy.**



About AMC Global Media

AMC Global Media is home to many of the greatest stories and characters in TV and film, and the premier destination for passionate and engaged fan communities around the world. The company creates and curates celebrated series and films across distinct brands and makes them available to audiences everywhere. Its portfolio includes targeted streaming services AMC+, Acorn TV, Shudder, Sundance Now, ALLBLK, HIDIVE, and All Reality; cable networks AMC, BBC AMERICA (which includes U.S. distribution and sales responsibilities for BBC News), IFC, SundanceTV, and We TV; and film distribution label Independent Film Company. The Company also operates AMC Studios, its in-house studio, production, and distribution operation behind acclaimed and fan-favorite original franchises, including The Walking Dead Universe and the Anne Rice Immortal Universe. AMC Global Media is headquartered in the United States, with international operations in Iberia, Latin America, Central Europe, the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand.

About Nicholas

Nicholas Solomon is Vice President of Customer Service at AMC Global Media, where he leads end-to-end service delivery across the company's brands, improving CSAT by 45% and NPS by 35 points while reducing cost to serve by 40%. A visionary leader known for building high-performing global teams, driving operational excellence, and mentoring diverse talent, Solomon previously scaled Disney+ across 130 countries in 25 languages and built global command center operations at Amazon and Aegis. He combines strategic P&L management with a people-first approach, consistently turning complex service organizations into efficient, customer-centric operations that deliver measurable results and lasting stakeholder value.

Execs In The Know partners with brands that provide outstanding customer service (CX) experiences. The Brand Spotlight Series showcases innovations and solutions to CX challenges faced by today's leading brands.

Thank you to Nicholas Solomon and the AMC Global Media team for contributing to this Execs In The Know Brand Spotlight.

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Execs In The Know

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The Service Standard: Building Customer Trust the Casio Way

Why Casio believes the post-sale experience is where brand trust is truly earned.

Mike Begala
General Manager Service
North America
CASIO

by Execs In The Know

For a brand that has spent decades engineering products people trust, from the calculator that changed how the world computes to the G-SHOCK that redefined what a watch could withstand, Casio has always understood that the real test of quality comes after the sale. That conviction shapes everything about how the company approaches post-purchase support across North America today. Casio sees every repair request, warranty claim, and support call as an opportunity to reinforce the same promise embedded in every product it makes: that choosing Casio means choosing a company that stands behind what it builds, long after the box is opened. We sat down with Mike Begala, General Manager of Service North America, to hear how that philosophy plays out on the ground every day.

Execs In The Know (EITK): As General Manager of Service North America, what does your role encompass today across the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, and how do you define success for your organization?

Mike: My role is to ensure that every customer interaction after the sale reflects the same quality, reliability, and trust that people associate with the Casio brand. Across North America, my team oversees technical support, repairs, parts, warranty programs, service operations, and customer care. While the specifics vary by market and product category, our mission remains consistent: make it easy for customers to get the help they need and feel confident in their decision to choose Casio.

Hitting service metrics is important, but I pay just as much attention to what happens after an interaction is over. Did we make it easy for the customer? Did we solve the issue right away? Would the customer choose Casio again? It is no longer about pure metrics and just handling the calls; it is making sure every customer interaction ends with them satisfied and wanting to do more business with us in the future.

Some of the best feedback we receive is when a customer tells us they felt taken care of. To me, that's what great service is all about. If someone comes to us with a problem and leaves feeling better about the brand than when they started, we've done our job.

EITK: You oversee all post-sales support for Casio's North American product portfolio. What does delivering a strong post-sales experience mean for a brand like Casio?

Mike: For a brand with Casio's history, the post-sales experience is where we reinforce the promises we've made to the customer. People buy from Casio because they realize our products fill a need in a way that's fun, easy, or enjoyable. When they need support, they should encounter these very same qualities.

A strong post-sales experience means providing clear information while minimizing friction. The customers should feel that we value their time and understand their needs. Every interaction is an opportunity to build confidence and demonstrate that our commitment to quality doesn't end at the point of purchase.

"Some of the best feedback we receive is when a customer tells us they felt taken care of. To me, that's what great service is all about. If someone comes to us with a problem and leaves feeling better about the brand than when they started, we've done our job."

EITK: Casio serves customers across a wide range of products and needs. How does your team balance operational efficiency with delivering a support experience that still feels responsive and human?

Mike: That's one of the most important challenges facing customer service organizations today. Efficiency matters because customers expect quick answers and seamless experiences. At the same time, people don't want to feel like they're navigating a system designed solely for speed, otherwise they will only feel like they're being rushed out the door.

Our approach is to use technology to simplify routine tasks while empowering our teams to focus on situations where empathy and personal touch make the biggest difference. Self-service options can be incredibly valuable when customers want immediate information, but there are times when they want to speak with someone who understands their issue and can guide them to a solution. The goal is to provide both and to make the transition between digital and human support feel effortless.

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EITK: In a category like watches, where durability, reliability, and trust matter so much, what role does customer support play in reinforcing confidence in the brand?

Mike: We take the same approach to customer service as we do with our product research and development: one step at a time. We know we can't get it right 100% of the time, but we strive for that expectation. Each small failure is a step toward the overall success, and as Ibe-san, the father of G-SHOCK, has taught us, we never give up along the way. We also want to convey confidence that the customer made the right decision. A sense of excitement and engaging conversations help to build stronger long-term relationships.

EITK: From the Casiotron to G-SHOCK, Casio built its watch reputation on innovation and reliability. How does your service organization help reinforce those same brand qualities after the sale?

Mike: We are continuously looking for ways to improve support processes and make service more convenient for customers. Innovation is about adopting new approaches and new customer servicing technology and never resting on your laurels. Reliability is sometimes as simple as staying knowledgeable about the latest Casio products, ensuring our teams are expertly trained to troubleshoot issues when they arise. Both brand qualities ensure customers know what to expect every time they interact with us. The combination of these two principles has always been central to the success of Casio.

EITK: Casio's history is rooted in solving real customer needs through electronics and innovation. How does that origin story continue to shape the expectations customers bring to the brand today?

Mike: Customers come to Casio with high expectations, and that's a good thing. The brand has spent decades building a reputation for reliability, so people expect our products to perform and to outlast similar products from other brands.

That said, unexpected things can happen along the way.

When the Kashio brothers first built the world's first all-electric calculator, they had to fly it to Sapporo for its debut with a key investor. When they rolled the calculator, which was the size of a small desk, onto the plane, they realized it was too big to fit inside. They had to cut the critical upper section from the relays and spend the entire night reassembling the parts once they landed.

It wasn't perfect. After the repair, the calculator could only add and subtract, as the multiplication and division functions could not be fixed on-site. But they had impressed their investor anyway, and it was enough to secure the funding they needed to mass-produce the calculator.

The service experience should reflect this same tenacity to solve issues. Things may not always be perfect, but we will go above and beyond to make sure we get them as close to perfect as possible. That's an important part of maintaining the trust the brand has earned over time.

We are mindful about how our decisions impact people. Before we undertake a new customer-focused project, we always ask, "Will this help or hurt the customer experience with Casio?" A plan that considers the long view is far better than racing into a solution with short-term gains that may impact our long-standing customer relationships.

> ***You can teach systems and processes, but it's much harder to teach someone to care about the customer experience. Empathy sounds easy, but we are seeing more cases where it is a learned skill.***

EITK: As a member of the KIA Community, what value have you gained from being part of a peer network of customer experience leaders, and how has that shaped your thinking or approach?

Mike: The biggest value of the KIA Community for me has been the opportunity to learn from other customer experience leaders. No two organizations are exactly alike, but many of us face similar challenges with customer expectations, technology, and employee engagement. It's always interesting to hear what's working for others and where they're seeing success. Those conversations have given me ideas to bring back to my own team and reminded me that some of the best lessons come from different perspectives.

With technology changing so rapidly, it is an even greater benefit to accelerate your knowledge from those who have been there and done that before. KIA is truly a community where people care about sharing and helping others succeed.

Thank you to Mike for his leadership, participation, and insights. To connect with Mike or participate in the wider conversation, consider joining the "Know It All" (KIA) Community. The KIA Community is a private, online community designed exclusively for CX Leaders at consumer-facing brands. Come learn, share, network, and engage to innovate.

Want to learn more about the KIA online community? Click here.

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"There is incredible value in sharing and receiving information from others with no reservations or liability. Why solve it on your own when others can save you valuable time? Everyone is willing to help and contribute."

– Michael Begala, General Manager Service North America at Casio America, Inc.

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Leading with Impact Starts with People

At Execs In The Know, we know mental health is not separate from workplace culture. It shapes how people lead, connect, perform, and feel supported every day.

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