Omni-Channel
Customer Experience

2015 Call Center IQ Executive Report on the Omni-Channel Contact Center

By Brian Cantor
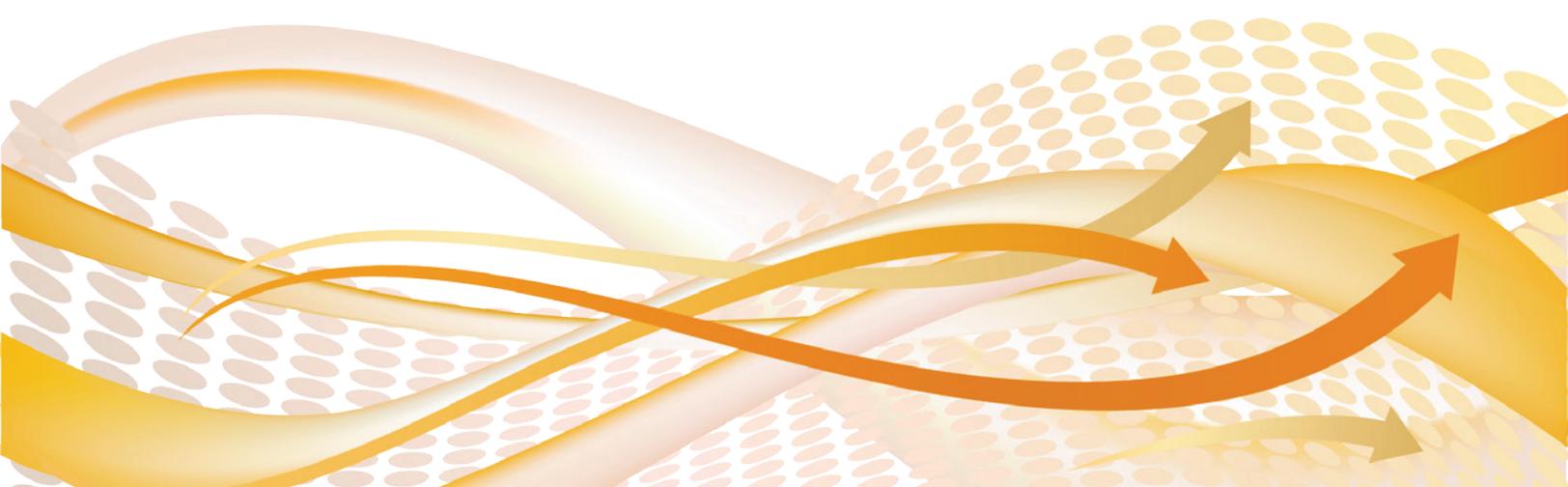
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Omni-Channel Contact Center: A New Conversation

When it comes to the omni-channel revolution, the game has changed.

Today's businesses are no longer debating the importance of the omni-channel customer experience; they recognize it as paramount. Today's businesses are no longer debating the need for an omni-channel contact center; they recognize it as necessary.

In widely embracing the omni-channel revolution, today's marketplace has effectively ended the philosophical debate.

But as one conversation ends, another naturally begins. Simply acknowledging the importance of the omni-channel customer experience and the need for an omni-channel contact center is merely the beginning of the journey. It does not automatically ready a business to successfully make the omni-channel transition.

It, similarly, does not automatically prepare a business to account for the changes associated with this new contact center normal.

In addition to tackling questions related to the channels a business must offer, the staff and performance strategies it must deploy within those channels, the results it must demand and the customer relationships it must cultivate, today's omni-channel believer must also address the evolving role of the contact center. As it interacts with customers in new ways – and across new channels – how does that change its role within the business? How should it?

The **2015 Executive Report on the Omni-Channel Contact Center** works to answer these questions. Upon confirming the aforementioned reality – that businesses do fundamentally accept the omni-channel revolution – it focuses on the inevitable change and associated action. To what extent have today's contact centers begun the omni-channel transition? How will they accelerate the transition – and realization of the related results? How will this effort impact the business?

Fueled by a combination of market research and commentary, this report does not attempt to sell omni-channel to contact center professionals. It is mindful of the fact that they are already bought in.

It instead works to make sense of the transition – and provide a blueprint for achieving the promised results.

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Key Findings

- The top objectives for today's contact centers: increase customer satisfaction, reduce service costs, and drive customer loyalty.

- While the contemporary contact center possesses an array of functions, it most notably represents a business' tool for inbound customer service. 66% of businesses use it in that capacity.

- "Full service in all channels" is one of the most commonly accepted criteria of an omni-channel contact center. Other comparatively widely accepted requirements include channel integration and the development of a 360-degree customer view.

- "Omni-channel" does not fairly describe today's customer management reality, but it does accurately convey a prominent priority. Only 10% of businesses believe their contact centers are omni-channel; a whopping 76%, however, plan to make a more-than-slight effort toward becoming omni-channel.

- Today's businesses are not excelling at any individual capability associated with omni-channel or multi-channel contact centers.

  - "Offering some form of engagement in multiple channels," their highest-scoring capability, holds a performance rating of only 2.79/5.

  - Scores are particularly weak for capabilities often seen as pivotal to the omni-channel environment: channel integration, honoring the customer's preference, and channel spanning. All possess performance scores beneath 2/5.

  - While contact centers have professed a broad commitment to becoming omni-channel, they have not made significant commitments to increasing any specific capabilities or functions.

- "Contact center" may be supplanting the term "call center," but today's businesses still possess reverence for the telephone. Live agent telephony is seen as the most important channel; web-self-service and e-mail are next-most important.

- The company website is the most commonly offered channel, but telephony is the preferred channel for high-touch, full-service interactions.

- Telephony is also one of the most commonly measured channels for all forms of metrics.

- Unsurprisingly, live agent telephony enjoyed the greatest level of performance improvement over the past year. Popular channels like e-mail and IVR also became stronger performers.

- When it comes to performance within specific channels, organizations are most committed to improving telephony, e-mail, self-service and live chat.

- Today's contact centers are beginning to take channel experience – and omni-channel experience – into account when hiring agents.

- Contact centers are also beginning to provide agents with seamless access to omni-channel customer data; significant progress is still required on this front.

- To acquire customer intelligence, businesses rely heavily on direct communication. Customer feedback surveys, for instance, represent voice of the customer sources in 74% of businesses. Businesses rely far less heavily on external communication and behavioral patterns.

- While the voice of the customer plays a role in many organizations, its degree of impact on both overall contact center strategy and channel strategy is moderate. The question most commonly answered by customer intelligence is that concerning which channels to measure, but the voice of the customer plays only a 3.16/5 role in that decision.

- Today's consumers are decently happy with the core experiences they are receiving. While far from perfect, today's support is decently resolute, valuable and accurate.

- Consumers are comparatively less satisfied with the channel-oriented elements of today's customer experience. Businesses believe customers are particularly dissatisfied with channel spanning capabilities.

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Methodology & Demographics

To collect data for the 2015 Executive Report on the Omni-Channel Contact Center, Call Center IQ issued an extensive market research survey to customer experience, contact center, operations, information technology, marketing and business development professionals. The survey was active in July and August 2015; no restrictions were placed on participation.

The respondent sample accounts for a diverse array of company sizes. While 23% of respondents represent organizations with over 5,000 employees and 48% work for companies with at least 500 names on their payrolls, 33% say their businesses employ fewer than 100 staff members.

The same variance exists for contact center size. 43% of respondents say their contact centers seat at least 100 agents; 17% identify the seat count at over 1,000. 46%, however, say their contact centers employ fewer than 50 team members.

Example respondent job titles include "head of US contact centers," "eServices manager," "Vice President, Product Management," "Vice President, Customer Experience," "head of channel support," "director of customer care," "customer care manager," "vice president of business development," "operations manager," "director of marketing," "senior director of contact center solutions," "CEO," "Vice President, Global Omni-channel Operations," "SVP, Client Service," "customer services manager," and "COO."

The Contact Center in an Omni-Channel World

"Omni-channel" is not a simply solution one tacks onto a business. It is not simply a singular strategy one implements within its business. It is a mindset that serves as the framework for an organization's customer experience.

All strategies – and all customer experience touch points – may be influenced and impacted by a transition to omni-channel.

The contact center is particularly subject to that impact. It represents a primary means through which companies engage their customers; as the expectations and parameters of those engagements change, so too must the conception of the contact center.

The very term "contact center," in fact, is a testament to the impact of the multi-channel – and now omni-channel – revolutions. Because customer conversations are not restricted to the telephone, the term "call center" is no longer sufficient. Customers and businesses do not always call to make contact.

The contact center, consequently, represents a perfect focal point for an investigation into the state of the omni-channel revolution.

To begin that investigation, it is important to first establish the appropriate context. In order to understand the impact of the omni-channel revolution on the contact center, we need to understand the roles the contact center plays within the business.

How do organizations use the contact center to engage customers? How do organizations use the contact center to drive business outcomes? What distinguishes an effective contact center from an ineffective one?

The answers to those questions provide grounds for evaluating how the omni-channel revolution has transformed, should transform and will transform the contact center.

Function

The contact center facilitates many forms of engagement – both of the passive and active variety – between businesses and customers.

Its most widespread function is inbound customer service.

Per data from Call Center IQ's annual survey, 66% of businesses use their "contact centers" in such a manner. In addition to ranking as the most popular contact center function, "inbound customer service" is the only duty performed by a majority of contact centers.

Several other duties are, however, performed by substantial percentages of contact centers.

46% of businesses, for instance, use their contact centers to share information with customers and managing customer feedback. 44%, meanwhile, use it for outbound/proactive customer service and customer insight management.

Even the least popular functions – marketing and outbound sales – are still performed by healthy numbers of contact centers. 15% of businesses say they use their contact centers for marketing; 22% rely on the contact center for outbound sales.

Purpose

At its core, the contemporary contact center represents a vehicle for delivering customer satisfaction.

Mirroring data found in the past several Call Center IQ studies, respondents overwhelmingly declared customer satisfaction the most important contact center objective.

The emphasis on satisfaction is not, however, tantamount to a blank check. Businesses undoubtedly want to drive satisfaction, but they expect to do so in a cost-efficient, streamlined manner. They identify reducing service costs as the second-most important contact center objective.

Businesses also expect the customer satisfaction increases to lead somewhere. Customer loyalty, which progresses from customer satisfaction, is seen as the third-most-important objective.
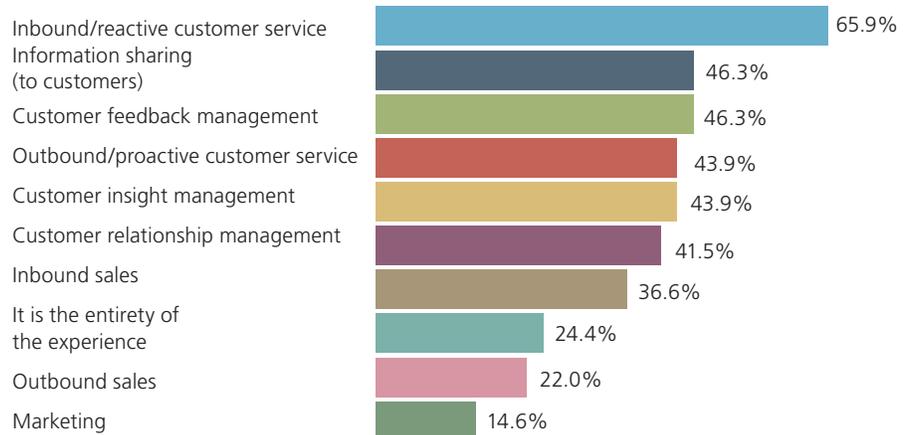
In recent years, contact center professionals have fought vociferously against the "cost center" label. In 2015, businesses expect such professionals to put their money where their mouths are. Not content with cost containment, businesses also see revenue creation as a crucial contact center focus. It represents the #4 objective.

Reducing customer effort, which can potentially impact the aforementioned four objectives, represents the fifth-most-important contact center focus.

Comparatively less important contact center objectives include acquiring insights for marketing, acquiring insights for product development, acquiring feedback about the brand, building customer advocacy, and acquiring feedback.

Q1

Which roles does the contact center play/own in your organization?

Role	Percentage
Inbound/reactive customer service	65.9%
Information sharing (to customers)	46.3%
Customer feedback management	46.3%
Outbound/proactive customer service	43.9%
Customer insight management	43.9%
Customer relationship management	41.5%
Inbound sales	36.6%
It is the entirety of the experience	24.4%
Outbound sales	22.0%
Marketing	14.6%

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Q2

Rank the following contact center objectives in terms of importance.

Least Important ————————————— Most Important

- Increase customer satisfaction
- Increase revenue
- Reduce service/delivery costs
- Acquire customer feedback (products)
- Acquire customer feedback (branding)
- Acquire customer feedback (service/delivery)
- Acquire marketplace insights (for product development)
- Acquire marketplace insights (for marketing)
- Increase customer loyalty
- Reduce customer effort
- Build customer advocacy

Four of the five "unimportant" objectives concern customer intelligence. While businesses are not necessarily declaring intelligence unimportant (feedback and insight management are, after all, common contact center functions), they believe the contact center's primary purpose involves fostering active engagement in a customer-centric and business-centric manner.

By declaring customer advocacy a comparatively unimportant objective, businesses reveal a contentedness with satisfaction and loyalty. A contact center need not drive advocacy to prove its worth.

Expert Perspectives

Michael Mills, CGS
A successful contact center's ultimate objective is to provide a consistent quality of service to its customers, coupled with the ability to drive increased efficiency and productivity within the support environment (i.e., agents, processes, tools). By achieving both of these objectives, the contact center will realize a high level of customer satisfaction and renewable business, coupled with the ability to carry the "bottom line" for its company.

Jeremy Payne, Enghouse Interactive
Ultimately, every business has to make a profit. No organization should concentrate on customer satisfaction at any cost. Available evidence suggests that exceptional customer service typically results in no increase in loyalty or spend from customers and sets businesses up for a fall later down the line. The focus instead should be on providing affordable, consistently good customer service day in, day out, across all channels, creating happy, loyal customers that continue to spend with the business over time.

Greg Moser, Power Objects
We are seeing a shift from the cost center mindset. Today's contact centers now have a laser-like focus in providing a superior level of service, which will retain customers, provide upsell and cross-sell opportunities and provide longer relationships.

Erich Dietz, InMoment
There are a number of objectives depending on your role and position within the company. From a brand level, it's to continue and be a positive extension of the brand experience. From a philosophical level, every employee needs to understand that they are part of the product. From a tactical perspective, it's to pick up the pieces when the customer experience breaks down. In a sales environment, it's to match the right product with the right role at the right time. For outbound sales, it's matching the right people with the right product.

Measurement

Numerous factors affect a business' success in driving customer satisfaction, reducing cost, increase revenue, and growing customer loyalty.

To optimize such factors – and assure a successful pursuit of its goals – a business must adhere to a nuanced performance management strategy. That nuanced performance management strategy begins with the selection of the most appropriate, most informative metrics.

Today's businesses believe the most important metrics are those that assess efficiency and quality.

Asked to rate different metric categories on a scale of 0-5, respondents awarded a mean score of 4.02 to both efficiency metrics (such as average handle time and average speed of answer) and quality metrics (such as accuracy and error/rework rate).

Given a score of 3.88, customer metrics (such as CSAT score and Net Promoter Score) rank as third-most-important. Resolution metrics (such as first call resolution and call back rate), business metrics (such as revenue and market share) and accessibility metrics (such as blockage and uptime) follow with respective scores of 3.82, 3.62, and 3.55.

On the surface, the scores may seem unintuitive. If the paramount contact center objectives are customer satisfaction, cost reduction, customer loyalty generation and revenue growth, why are customer metrics and business metrics not the most important categories?
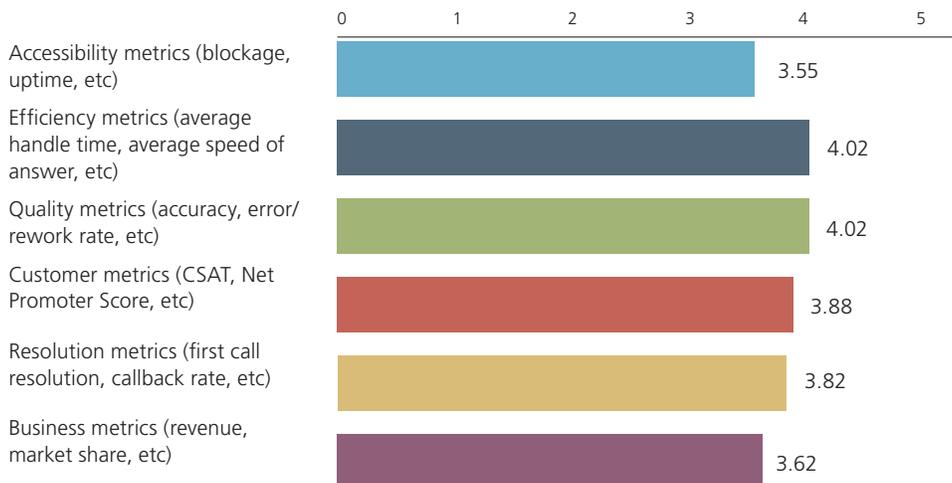
The answer stems from the role metrics play in performance management. While it is true that metrics like CSAT and profit speak directly to a contact center's success in achieving its objectives, they carry limited value from an explanatory standpoint. They reflect the outcome of a totality of factors rather than the success of each individual, intermediary factor.

Metrics like average handle time and accuracy rate, on the other hand, speak more directly to those individual factors (granted, they, themselves, are still products of numerous components). They help to explain why satisfaction rates and costs are the way they are – slow, inaccurate calls are taxing to businesses and frustrating to customers – and thus provide businesses with a de facto plan for improvement.

Organizations do not view customer-oriented and business-oriented metrics as unimportant in absolute terms; they simply see the granular, intermediate categories as more relevant to performance management.

Q3

How important are the following metric categories to your contact center? (0-5 scale)

Metric category	Score
Accessibility metrics (blockage, uptime, etc)	3.55
Efficiency metrics (average handle time, average speed of answer, etc)	4.02
Quality metrics (accuracy, error/rework rate, etc)	4.02
Customer metrics (CSAT, Net Promoter Score, etc)	3.88
Resolution metrics (first call resolution, callback rate, etc)	3.82
Business metrics (revenue, market share, etc)	3.62

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Organizational Relevance

What happens in the contact center does not stay in the contact center.

Respondents confirm that contact center data is used throughout the organization.

90% of businesses, for instance, say their operations departments draw from contact center data. 88% say the same of "other customer service/experience divisions," while 87% witness contact center intelligence fueling marketing decisions. Contact center data is also used by 85% of C-level, sales, and product development teams.

Finance, human resources, and purchasing departments are comparatively less likely to rely on contact center data, but they still do so in many organizations. 70% of finance and accounting departments use contact

center data; the use percentages for HR and purchasing are 62% and 59%, respectively.

The widespread use should not, however, imply significant reliance. News of what happens in the contact center may not stay in the contact center, but it is not necessarily amplified.

While 90% of operations departments use contact center data, respondents scored the extent to which they use the data at a moderate 3.08/5. The also-modest reliance scores for customer service/experience departments and marketing departments are 2.93/5 and 2.85/5, respectively.

Departments like purchasing, human resources and finance barely use the information. Respondent utilization ratings for the three departments are 1.12/5, 1.31/5, and 1.66/5, respectively.

The Omni-Channel Transition

Only 10% of businesses identify themselves as omni-channel. Do the remaining businesses even desire the identification?

The question is not without merit.

Over the past year, just 32% of businesses made more than a slight effort to become omni-channel. 35% made absolutely no effort.

If judged based on historical behavior, the majority of businesses do not come across as ardent supporters of the omni-channel revolution.

If judged based on their future plans, however, the majority of businesses most certainly do aspire to become omni-channel.

Over the next year, a substantial 76% of businesses will make more than a slight effort to achieve omni-channel capabilities. 51% will take solid or significant action in support of an omni-channel transition.

In so clearly stating their intention to take action, businesses are demonstrating undeniable acceptance of the omni-channel revolution.

They are not there yet. They have not necessarily exerted much effort to get there. But they absolutely want to be there.
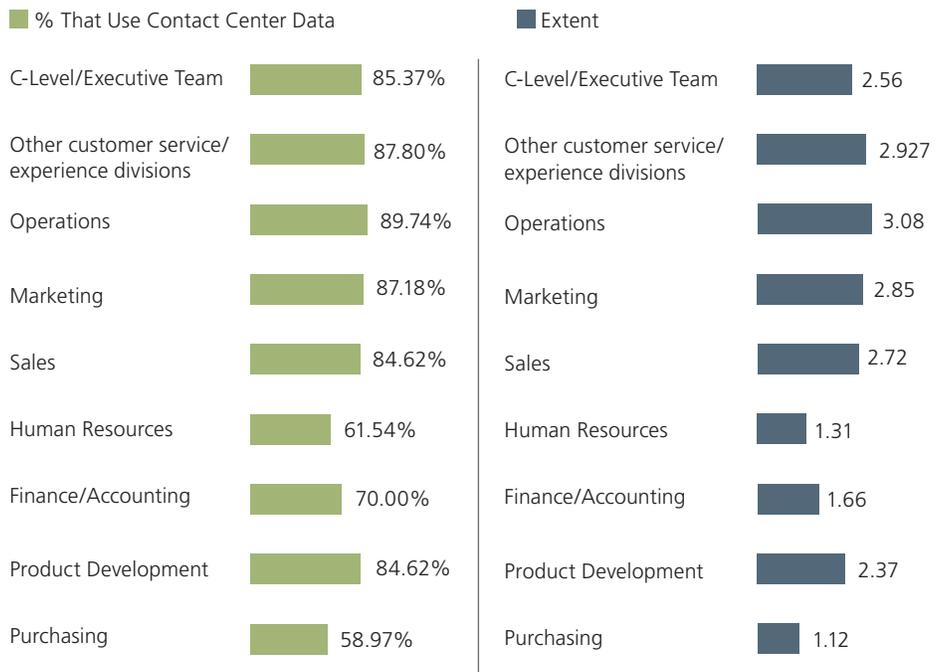
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Defining Omni-Channel

For today's businesses, the omni-channel label is a badge of exclusivity. While 68% of businesses confidently declare themselves multi-channel, only 10% believe they are omni-channel.

Omni-channel is also an aspirational concept. A whopping 76% of businesses will meaningfully attempt to become omni-channel over the next year. It is not, however, a clearly defined concept.

Q4

Which other departments use contact center data/insights? To what extent? (0-5 scale)

■ % That Use Contact Center Data   ■ Extent

Department	% That Use Contact Center Data	Extent
C-Level/Executive Team	85.37%	2.56
Other customer service/experience divisions	87.80%	2.927
Operations	89.74%	3.08
Marketing	87.18%	2.85
Sales	84.62%	2.72
Human Resources	61.54%	1.31
Finance/Accounting	70.00%	1.66
Product Development	84.62%	2.37
Purchasing	58.97%	1.12

Q5

How would you describe your current contact center?

- 68% Multi-channel
- 10% Omni-channel
- 22% Neither
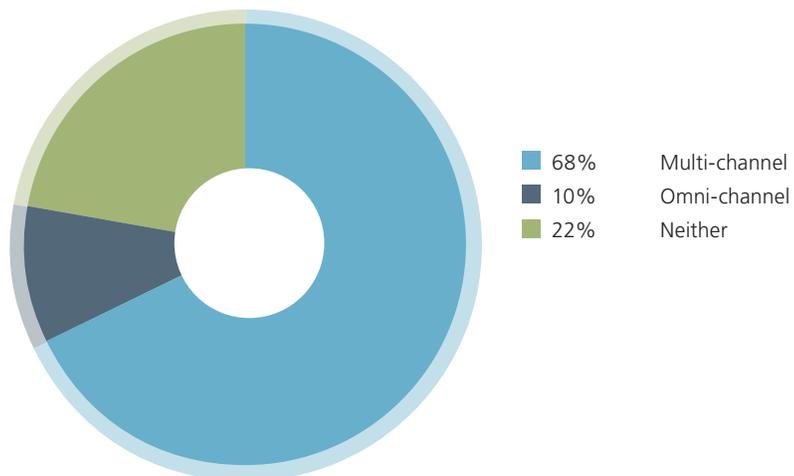
Q6

Have you attempted to become omni-channel over the past year?

%	Category
24%	No attempt, no success
11%	No attempt, some success
0%	No attempt, success
4%	Slight attempt, no success
21%	Slight attempt, some success
8%	Slight attempt, success
0%	Solid attempt, no success
12%	Solid attempt, some success
7%	Solid attempt, success
0%	Priority focus, no success
8%	Priority focus, some success
5%	Priority focus, success
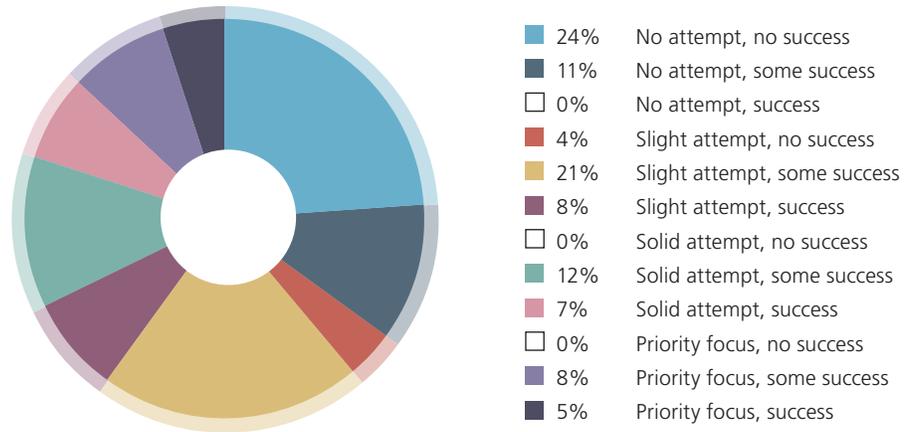
Q7

What kind of attempt will you make over the next year?

%	Category
15%	None
9%	Slight
25%	Some
26%	Solid
25%	Priority
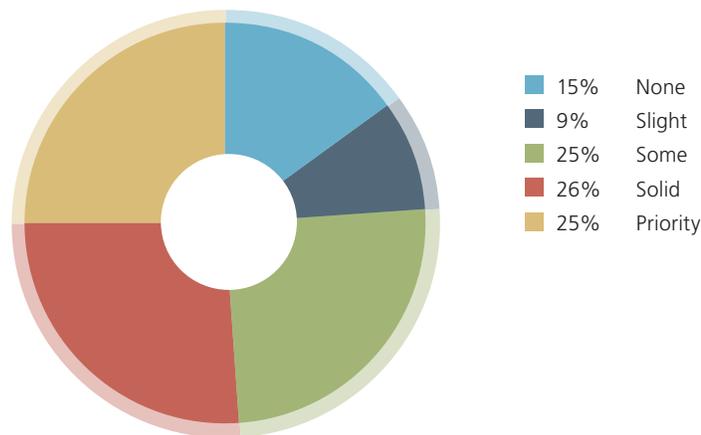
Presented with a list of potential "requirements" of an omni-channel contact center, survey respondents failed to reach a universal consensus on any.

Only three received support from a majority of respondents.

Considered a necessity by 61% of respondents, "channel integration" represents the closest thing to a universally accepted fixture of the omni-channel environment. Advocacy for the channel integration concept is consistent with that expressed in the previous two iterations of Call Center IQ's annual report. When it comes to connecting with today's omni-channel customers, businesses generally believe that channels must be integrated.

Like last year's respondents and report contributors, this year's businesses also ascribe significant importance to the concept of a 360-degree customer view. 56% of businesses, in fact, declare it a mandatory component of an omni-channel contact center.

Omni-channel speaks not simply to what a business is offering but to how the offering is being experienced by customers. A 360-degree customer view plays an integral role in understanding and optimizing that experience.

In previous reports, businesses downplayed the importance of offering engagement opportunities in all possible contact channels. That attitude is changing.

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For 54% of businesses, the omni-channel contact center is one that offers "full service in all channels."

Recognition of that requirement reflects a support for legitimately being where one's customers are. Instead of restricting customers to specific channels – or restricting the type of service customers can receive within a given channel – the business must be able to provide a complete engagement experience in all possible channels.

By accepting that as a requirement, businesses place an additional burden on those constructing an omni-channel engagement strategy. They do not simply have to optimize connectivity within their existing channels; they must expand into previously unchartered territory. They must be everywhere.

Particularly telling about support for "full service in all channels" is that respondents were given the opportunity to select less definitive requirements. They opted not to do so.

Only 15%, for instance, identified "some engagement in multiple channels" as an omni-channel requirement. Full service, in the minds of today's businesses, is a factor that separates the omni-channel contact center from the balance of the pack.

The ability to sometimes honor the customer's channel preference, similarly, represents an omni-channel component in the eyes of only 18% of respondents. Being where the customer is on occasion is not enough; the business must always be there. The only way to make good on that requirement is to provide a full engagement experience in all channels.

While they do not possess majority support, the next-most important requirements include allowing the customer to span channels across separate interactions (48%) and allowing the agent to access customer and transactional data from other channels (45%).

Both are, essentially, data initiatives. No matter where and when a customer previously interacted with the business, data from that previous touchpoint must be instantly available to agents and systems in all touchpoints.

Q8

What are the requirements of an omni-channel contact center?

% of Businesses That Consider It Required
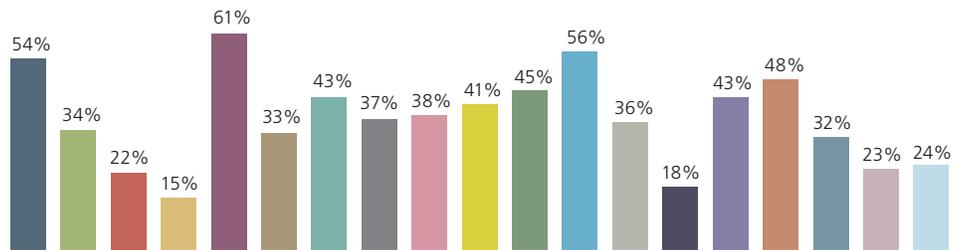
Capability

- Full service in all channels — 54%
- Full service in multiple channels — 34%
- Some form of service/engagement in all channels — 22%
- Some form of service/engagement in multiple channels — 15%
- Channels are integrated — 61%
- Business has dedicated staff for multiple channels — 33%
- Business has dedicated quality/performance management for multiple channels — 43%
- Business has universal metrics that apply to performance in multiple channels — 37%
- Agents handle multiple channels — 38%
- Agents can seamlessly communicate with agents from another channel — 41%
- Agents can access customer/transactional data from another channel — 45%
- Business has a 360 degree view of customer — 56%
- Business can honor customer's channel preference at all times — 36%
- Business can sometimes honor customer's channel preference — 18%
- Customers can seamlessly span channels within single interaction — 43%
- Customers can span channels across separate interactions (and the business always has access to the data) — 48%
- Business proactively engages customers in all channels — 32%
- Business proactively engages customers in multiple channels — 23%
- All channels are managed by the same department — 24%

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Expert Perspectives

Michael Mills, CGS
Omni-channel ensures a consistent, high-quality customer experience regardless of how and where a customer chooses to interact. It ensures that data and context from initial contact carries over to subsequent channels, reducing customer effort, improving the customer interaction and enabling the call center to improve the overall customer experience.

Jeremy Payne, Enghouse Interactive
Integration is critically important in this context. After all, if a customer starts an interaction in one channel and then switches to another, they expect the contextual information available in the first to be passed seamlessly into the second. Organizations need high-quality integration between channels in order to deliver this. Otherwise, they will inevitably have to ask customers to repeat information they have provided in channel A when they switch to channel B which is frustrating for customers and expensive for the business.

Greg Moser, Power Objects
We are seeing a growing desire with our customers to expand into other channels like social, mobility, SMS/Text and portal self-service. Bringing each channel into CRM "Global Case Management" allows for streamlined integration. Universal reporting and key performance indicators can also be generated, which allows businesses to make informed channel decisions based on the "voice of the customer."

Erich Dietz, InMoment
The new requirement will be omni-resolution. What this means is there are multiple departments at a high enough level that can resolve, not just identify, issues in a concise and effective manner.

Assessing Omni-Channel

The majority of businesses agree that omni-channel contact centers offer full service across all channels, integrate those channels and possess a 360-degree view of the customer.

They do not, however, believe those are the only requirements in the omni-channel world. Survey respondents threw significant support – albeit not majority support – behind a host of other options.

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that businesses will attempt to incorporate many functionalities, strategies and capabilities into their omni-channel contact centers. Some businesses will supplement "full service in all channels" with proactive care. Others will pair channel integration with the ability to honor the customer's preference at all times. Others, still, will look to establish a 360-degree view of the customer while situating dedicated staff members within each channel.

That is the real takeaway when it comes to the business' community's current stance on omni-channel. Omni-channel is an imperative to evolve the customer engagement experience. It is a call to consider how the channels a business offers and the service it offers when those channels impact the overall customer experience.

Only 10% of businesses currently identify themselves as omni-channel. The overwhelming majority of businesses, however, want to begin transforming their contact centers into omni-channel ones.

Understanding the extent to which businesses are successfully or unsuccessfully offering certain capabilities will play an invaluable role in understanding why 90% of businesses do not yet believe they are omni-channel. It, when juxtaposed with the business' hierarchy of priorities and values, provides a roadmap for how the organization should go about improving.

The simplest reality is that businesses need to improve all omni-channel capabilities. Asked to score the aforementioned capabilities on a scale of 0-5, businesses did not afford a score of greater than 2.79 to any specific option. Many received scores beneath 2.00.

Businesses awarded the 2.79 score to "offering some form of engagement in multiple channels." Other comparatively high-scoring (but objectively modest-scoring) capabilities include dedicated staff in multiple channels (2.72), agents that handle multiple channels (2.49), dedicated performance management for multiple channels (2.48), and the ability to sometimes honor a customer's channel preference (2.32).

All five options are united by a central theme: multi-channel. While their efforts have not been stellar in absolute terms, businesses feel they have at least enjoyed some success in terms of establishing capabilities in multiple channels. They offer engagement in multiple channels. They staff in multiple channels. They can occasionally honor customer preferences in multiple channels.

Businesses, to at least a moderately successful degree, do not simply engage customers in their call centers. They have begun to establish multi-channel contact centers.

Comparatively weaker or less successful capabilities include allowing a customer to seamlessly span channels within a single interaction (1.41), proactively engaging customers in all channels (1.55), honoring the customer's channel preference at all times (1.67), integrating channels (1.74), and allowing customers to span channels across separate interactions (1.78).

The commonality among those lower-scoring capabilities is omni-channel. All are directly related to a business' ability to not simply offer engagement in all channels but create a cohesive, unified, customer-centric experience across those channels.

Improving the Elements

Businesses know they are not omni-channel. They know they are not excelling at any key element of the omni-channel experience.

They, consequently, are resounding in their commitment to becoming more omni-channel.

They are less clear and intense, however, regarding the specific functionalities and offerings they intend to improve.

Using a scale of 0-5, respondents rated their intention to improve a variety of channel capabilities. Only one option received a score in excess of 3.00.

Developing a 360-degree view of the customer, that option, received a score of 3.03.

Other comparatively high-ranking improvement focuses include offering some form of engagement in multiple channels (2.98), allowing agents to access data from other channels (2.89), offering full service in multiple channels (2.88), and offering some form of engagement in all channels (2.77).

Given that the majority of respondents (57%) believe a 360-degree customer view is a requirement of an omni-channel organization, its comparatively high score is unsurprising. Since a business cannot label itself omni-channel if it does not have a complete window into its customers, achieving one is naturally important.

By the same token, the 3.03 score signifies a fairly modest commitment to improvement.

Businesses are even less committed to improving other similarly essential capabilities. 54% say full service in all channels is an absolute requirement of the omni-channel environment, but the mean commitment to improvement is a mere 2.33.

The modest scores – at least for some capabilities – would make sense if businesses were universally excelling. The earlier data, however, confirms that they are not.

No existing capability possesses a mean score in excess of 2.79

While it is conceivable that businesses would tolerate mediocrity when it comes to unimportant capabilities, their limited commitment to improve spans all options – including elements deemed pivotal to the omni-channel experience.

Channel integration, for instance, represents the most universally recognized requirement of an omni-channel contact center. Acknowledging their lack of status quo success, businesses rate their current integration capability at a mere 1.74.

Businesses know it is important, they know they are not delivering it, but their commitment to improving integration is a mere 2.70.

On the surface, the data exemplifies the distinction between a philosophical commitment and an action plan. Today's organizations are nearly unanimous in their desire to become more omni-channel, but they are far less committal regarding the specific steps they will take to achieve that transition.

The data also speaks to the uncertainty concerning the elements of an omni-channel contact center. Insofar only three strategic capabilities – integration, 360-degree customer views and full-service in all channels – are considered omni-channel requirements by a majority of businesses, it is unsurprising that businesses are indecisive regarding the elements they need to improve. Without knowing which omni-channel investments will produce the greatest return, risk averse businesses will logically dip their toes into numerous ponds but dive into none.

Q9

How would you rate the following in your contact center? (0-5 scale)

Category	Rating
Full service in all channels	1.82
Full service in multiple channels	2.62
Some form of service/engagement in all channels	2.13
Some form of service/engagement in multiple channels	2.79
Channels are integrated	1.75
Business has dedicated staff for multiple channels	2.72
Business has dedicated quality/performance management for multiple channels	2.485
Business has universal metrics that apply to performance in multiple channels	2.13
Agents handle multiple channels	2.49
Agents can seamlessly communicate with agents from another channel	1.99
Agents can access customer/transactional data from another channel	2.15
Business has a 360 degree view of customer	1.83
Business can honor customer's channel preference at all times	1.67
Business can sometimes honor customer's channel preference	2.32
Customers can seamlessly span channels within single interaction	1.41
Customers can span channels across separate interactions (and the business always has access to the data)	1.78
Business proactively engages customers in all channels	1.55
Business proactively engages customers in multiple channels	2.02
All channels are managed by the same department	2.13

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Q10

To what extent will you work to improve the following? (0-5 scale)

Category	Value
Full service in all channels	2.33
Full service in multiple channels	2.88
Some form of service/engagement in all channels	2.77
Some form of service/engagement in multiple channels	2.98
Channels are integrated	2.70
Business has dedicated staff for multiple channels	2.59
Business has dedicated quality/performance management for multiple channels	2.73
Business has universal metrics that apply to performance in multiple channels	2.73
Agents handle multiple channels	2.74
Agents can seamlessly communicate with agents from another channel	2.577
Agents can access customer/transactional data from another channel	2.89
Business has a 360 degree view of customer	3.03
Business can honor customer's channel preference at all times	2.46
Business can sometimes honor customer's channel preference	2.52
Customers can seamlessly span channels within single interaction	2.18
Customers can span channels across separate interactions (and the business always has access to the data)	2.60
Business proactively engages customers in all channels	2.37
Business proactively engages customers in multiple channels	2.71
All channels are managed by the same department	2.34

Granted, uncertainty regarding which elements are most important only explains why businesses are not wholeheartedly diving into a few select ponds. It does not explain why the improvement scores are universally lukewarm, especially given the fact that existing performance scores are so low. For most elements, the improvement commitment manifests as a bell curve: some businesses plan to make no improvement, the greatest percentage is somewhat or solidly committed to improvement, and only a handful plan to make improvement a priority.

That reality – the fact that businesses eagerly want to become omni-channel but plan to only moderately focus on the capabilities that help create an omni-channel organization – is an undeniable contradiction.

Investigating the Channels

Per an emerging school of thought, evaluating omni-channel strictly in terms of channel presence is an exercise in reduction. Omni-channel, this school of thought argues, refers not simply to where a business interacts but to the strategic mindset driving the experience across all of those touch points.

The 2015 survey findings offer support for this notion. By revealing widespread support for concepts like channel integration and 360-degree customer views, the annual study confirms the relevance of cohesion. In the omni-channel era, businesses must possess a unified, consistent view of customers across all touch points. They must also be able to present each customer with a unified, integrated experience across those touch points.

Suppose, however, that a business lacked the capacity to properly engage a customer at given touch point. Perhaps the touch point lacked the proper staff (or staff training). Perhaps the touch point lacked the appropriate resources.

Perhaps the touch point lacked integration with the CRM system.

Whether by limiting the business' view into its customers or preventing the business from offering a singular, consistent, unified experience across all channels, any such shortcoming would damage the entire omni-channel experience.

The omni-channel mindset may encourage a broader, holistic approach to channel strategy, but a single broken channel can absolutely impact that overarching experience. It is for that reason that 54% of businesses firmly declare full service in all channels to be a requirement of an omni-channel contact center.

It is also for that reason that an inquiry into existing channel capabilities – and the manners in which businesses intend to extend and improve those capabilities – represents a fundamental tenet of our omni-channel investigation.

Channel Preference

Just as businesses will philosophically accept that "every customer is the most important customer," they will theoretically recognize every channel as the most important channel.

That attitude, after all, is essential to the omni-channel experience. If the business undervalues – let alone dismisses – a particular channel, the

unified, cohesive, all-encompassing omni-channel experience will falter.

But just as businesses, facing resource constraints, will ultimately prioritize customers with the most obviously high lifetime values, they will ultimately prioritize channels with the clearest relevance to the customer experience.

Whether due to customer demand, marketplace tradition or internal logistics, businesses will indeed adhere to a hierarchy when assessing the importance of each channel.

No matter how contradictory to their omni-channel aspirations, businesses may ultimately take cues from that hierarchy when devising operational strategy and allotting investments.

An inquiry into the state of channel strategy, therefore, requires an understanding of the current channel hierarchy.

That current channel ladder positions live agent telephony on the highest rung.

Asked to rank a variety of contact media in order of importance, organizations deemed live agent telephony to be undeniably most important. They may no longer operate call centers, but they absolutely see calls as more important than any other form of communication.

That does not, however, mean channel priorities are without change. Whereas e-mail and IVR have historically ranked as the next-most important channels, this year's survey identifies a new runner-up. To today's businesses, web self-service is slightly more important than e-mail and IVR (which are third and fourth, respectively).

Live chat registers as fifth-most-important, while mobile self-service follows as sixth-most.

Channels deemed comparatively unimportant include in-product communication, virtual agents, video, secondary social networks, Twitter and LinkedIn.
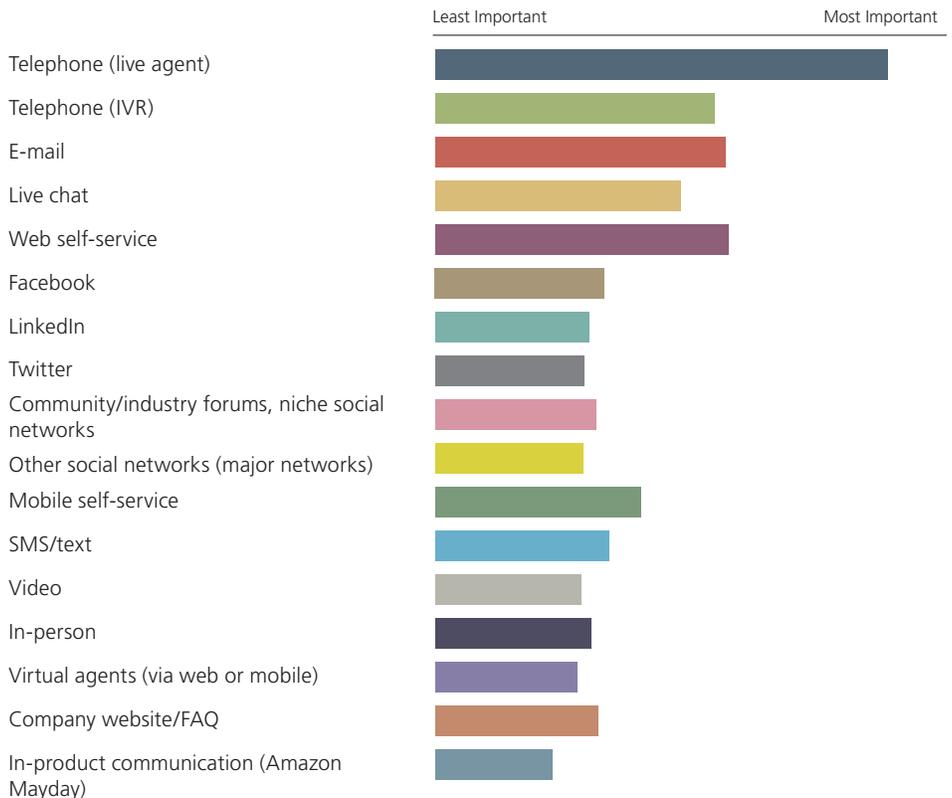
Due to its limited applicability – only select organizations can even conceivably incorporate a "Mayday button" into their products – in-product communication's position at the bottom of the totem pole is intuitive.

Potentially feeling they are sufficiently covered by a combination of live agent support and self-service engagement, organizations do not view the hybrid model – virtual agents – as a particularly pivotal contact center component. Video represents an enhanced form of engagement, and it is not one businesses yet see as necessary to pursue.

Limited support for the social channels, meanwhile, reflects a disparity between hype and perceived importance. Twitter, for instance, is often considered the embodiment of social engagement, which is often a primary component of multi-channel and omni-channel conversations. Today's organizations, however, do not view it as a paramount priority. The same goes for LinkedIn and many other notable social networks.

Q11

Rank the importance of the following channels

	Least Important	Most Important

Telephone (live agent)

Telephone (IVR)

E-mail

Live chat

Web self-service

Facebook

LinkedIn

Twitter

Community/industry forums, niche social networks

Other social networks (major networks)

Mobile self-service

SMS/text

Video

In-person

Virtual agents (via web or mobile)

Company website/FAQ

In-product communication (Amazon Mayday)

Expert Perspectives

Michael Mills, CGS
The mindset is that in a voice-support model, direct communication is the most productive way to learn about the "person" who are supporting. You can hear voice tone (such as expressions of anger and frustration); with chat and email, you cannot pick up on that emotion with just words. With self-help, there is little-to-no interaction between the customer and a live agent.

Jeremy Payne, Enghouse Interactive
Around 80% of transactions are likely to pass straight through the business without issue or concern, enabling businesses to save time and money. Savvy businesses are increasing those savings by leveraging digital channels to address these simple, transactional matters.

Greg Moser, Power Objects
Digital channels can prove very effective if integrated into the global CRM and agent desktops.

Erich Dietz, InMoment
Alternative channels allow us to match the mode and articulate the data in different forms and fashions. They also allow us to reach new customer segments provide those customers with different options for different types of communication. Done well, a blend of new and legacy channels can provide the best possible experience for customers, while achieving the efficiencies and financial gains necessary to run a successful business.

Consumer Perspective
(via Microsoft's 2015 US State of Multichannel Customer Service Report)

Do you expect a brand or organization to offer a web self-service portal or FAQ page?

US	United Kingdom	Brazil	Japan
92% - **YES**	92% - **YES**	98% - **YES**	82% - **YES**

Do you have a more favorable view of a brand or organization that offers mobile self-service?

US	United Kingdom	Brazil	Japan
50% - **YES**	43% - **YES**	86% - **YES**	59% - **YES**

Do you have a more favorable view of a brand or organization that responds to customer service questions, praise or complaints on social media?

US	United Kingdom	Brazil	Japan
50% - **YES**	43% - **YES**	85% - **YES**	44% - **YES**

Channel Engagement

On the one hand, we know businesses possess channel hierarchies. Certain channels – notably those involving telephony, self-service, e-mail and chat – represent the greatest priorities. They, therefore, philosophically recognize that certain channels are more worthy of investment and attention than others.

On the other hand, we know many businesses believe that full service in all channels is a requirement of the omni-channel contact center.

We also know that today's businesses aspire to become omni-channel. They, therefore, philosophically aspire to offer full service in all channels.

The battle between those viewpoints will determine the type of engagement businesses offer within each channel. The outcome will speak to the state of the omni-channel revolution and the shortcomings businesses will most notably need to address.

Utilization

While the company website does not represent the most important customer engagement channel, it does represent the most commonly used one. 91% of businesses rely on a company website/FAQ page to communicate with customers.

In today's age of digital communication, the heavy reliance is unsurprising. If anything, the surprise is that 100% of businesses do not offer at least outbound communication via a website.

Similarly unsurprising is the heavy utilization of live agent telephony and email engagement. Used by 90% of organizations, the two represent the second-most commonly offered contact channels.

In addition to representing two of the most important channels, telephony and e-mail have long been fixtures of the call center/contact center framework.

Not simply a valuable channel, "web self-service" is also a widely utilized one. 76% of businesses provide customers with a web-based self-service option.

IVR, which ranks alongside live agent telephony, email, and web self-service as one of the most important channels, is the fifth-most commonly

offered communication medium. 73% of businesses offer some sort of service through IVR.

Comparatively unpopular channels include in-product communication (22% utilization), virtual agents (25%), video (40%), live chat (42%), and LinkedIn (43%).

Given each channel's perceived unimportance, the low utilization rates for in-product communication, virtual agents, video, and LinkedIn are intuitive. A sense of surprise only exists insofar as more than 20% and 40% of businesses are using in-product communication and video communication, respectively. Since in-product communication is only relevant in certain businesses and video communication represents an enhanced, luxury form of communication in nearly all businesses, the non-trivial utilization levels paints an optimistic picture about the omni-channel transition. Businesses are beginning to offer engagement in all channels – even those deemed particularly unimportant.

The optimism created by the in-product, virtual agent and video utilization rates, however, is countered by the concern stemming from the live chat utilization rate. Per the survey respondents, live chat represents one of today's most important contact channels. Fewer than half of businesses, however, actually offer that form of communication.

Consumer Perspective
(via Microsoft's 2015 US State of Multichannel Customer Service Report)

Which of the following customer service channels do you use on a regular basis?

US	United Kingdom	Brazil	Japan
Telephone – **81%**	E-Mail – **82%**	E-Mail – **87%**	E-Mail – **69%**
E-Mail – **78%**	Telephone – **72%**	Telephone – **84%**	Telephone – **67%**
Live Chat – **64%**	Live Chat – **58%**	Live Chat – **70%**	Website/FAQ – **50%**
Website/FAQ – **62%**	Website/FAQ – **56%**	Website/FAQ – **64%**	Live Chat – **4%**

Interactions and Resolutions

Offering a channel is not, however, tantamount to offering engagement within that channel. An inquiry into the type of utilization confirms that while businesses may communicate – in some form – across a myriad of channels, actual engagement takes place across a smaller palette of media.

Businesses have a particularly narrow list of preferred channels for high-touch, "strategic" matters.

Live agent telephony tops that list. A healthy 62% of businesses say they commonly engage customers in high-touch interactions over the telephone.

While the nature of in-person communication is only practical or relevant in a finite number of cases, it still ranks as a popular destination for high-touch interactions. 39% of businesses say their business regularly engages customers in high-touch, in-person interactions.

37% say the same of their e-mail channel. E-mail communication may not represent a truly live conversation, but it indeed represents a two-way interaction. For a healthy percentage of businesses, those high-touch interactions can be of the strategic, substantive variety.

Live chat is not one of the most commonly used channels, but the businesses that do use it do so to carry out high-touch interactions. 16% of businesses say they use the live chat channel for strategic customer conversations.
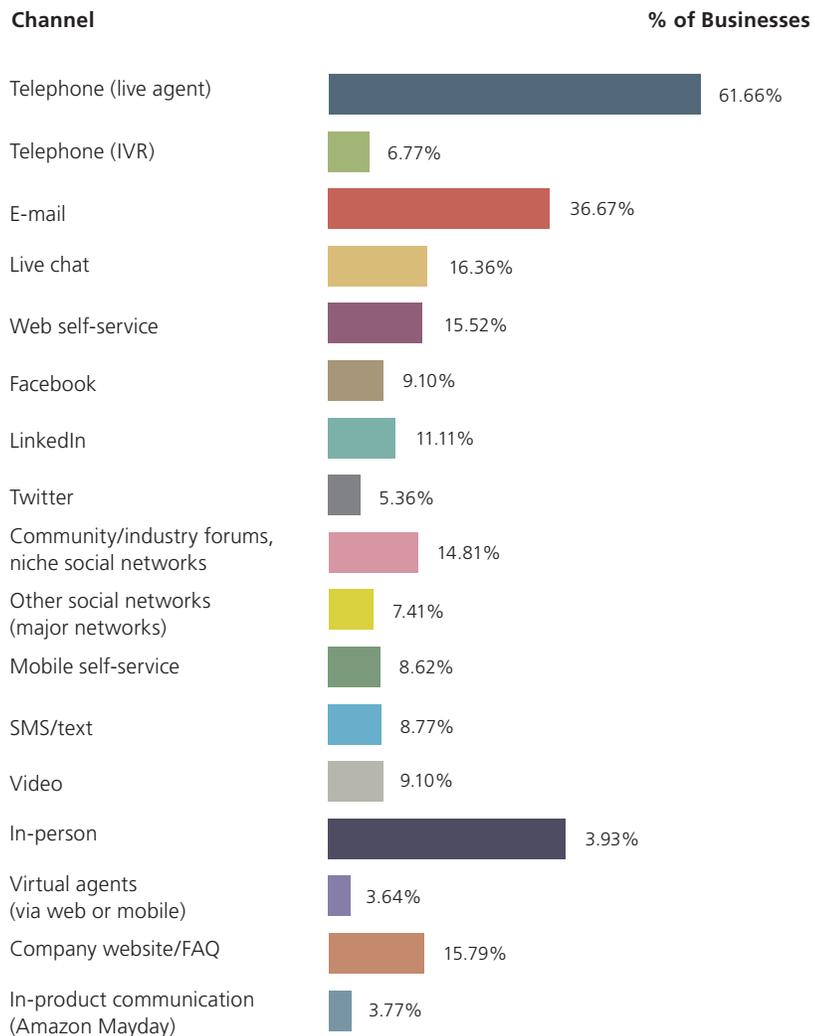
16% of businesses also consider their web self-service and official website interactions to be of the strategic, high-touch variety. While neither channel allows for a conventional, two-way conversation, both can evidently present customers with a robust, high-level, highly engaging form of service.

Indicative of the extent to which they are right-channeling customers, the utilization rate differs when it comes to low-touch interactions.

They may not commonly play host to high-touch engagement, but mobile self-service and IVR do allow customers to actually resolve issues. 31% of businesses say they use mobile self-service to handle transactional matters; 29% say their IVR systems play host to transactional engagements.

Q12

Which channels do you use for high-touch, deep interactions?

Channel	% of Businesses
Telephone (live agent)	61.66%
Telephone (IVR)	6.77%
E-mail	36.67%
Live chat	16.36%
Web self-service	15.52%
Facebook	9.10%
LinkedIn	11.11%
Twitter	5.36%
Community/industry forums, niche social networks	14.81%
Other social networks (major networks)	7.41%
Mobile self-service	8.62%
SMS/text	8.77%
Video	9.10%
In-person	3.93%
Virtual agents (via web or mobile)	3.64%
Company website/FAQ	15.79%
In-product communication (Amazon Mayday)	3.77%

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Expert Perspectives

Michael Mills, CGS
Newer, startup companies are definitely leveraging e-mail and chat more predominately in their call center support requirements than the older, more longstanding global companies. Most of the large enterprise clients today are still relying on traditional voice and email channels and less on chat. However, there continues to be a growing trend toward self-help and self-service portals as a viable option to traditional voice support. That being said, the end-user base as a whole, notwithstanding the millennials in the workplace, prefers a live agent for its support.

Jeremy Payne, Enghouse Interactive
Customers increasingly expect to interact with businesses at any time of day or night. They acknowledge that they might not be able to interact with a human after 'office hours' but anticipate that they could e-mail businesses during working day and receive a prompt response. Equally, they would expect to have access to self-help mechanisms like user forums and customer FAQs, and they may even assume that businesses would have people available in different time zones, responding to chat messages out of normal work time.

Greg Moser, Power Objects
Consumer behavior is driving organizations to adopt multi-channel and omni-channel approaches to support. Millennials are playing a particularly important role; as they continue to enter the job market, the evolving channels like SMS/text, mobile and self-service will continue to expand and mature.

Erich Dietz, InMoment
From a customer perspective, the expectation is that agents can handle any query from the channel of their choice at any time. Customers want to be able to call or reach out at any time and get the support they need and expect. Some companies only use e-mail for after hours, but people may want a more complete form of instant gratification. In terms of another trend, we have noticed that business-to-business firms tend to rely more heavily on email; business-to-consumer organizations embrace chat.

Channel Performance: Measurement

If an omni-channel contact center is one that offers a unified, integrated experience across all channels, logic says that a business should wholeheartedly value – and wholeheartedly offer – each channel. It, consequently, should hold each channel to the same fundamental standard for performance.

In practice, businesses neither wholeheartedly value nor wholeheartedly offer engagement within each channel. It stands to reason, therefore, that they do not actually subject each channel to the same performance rubric.

The annual survey confirms that notion. Today's businesses are not equally committed to measuring – let alone doing so with the same performance metrics – in all channels.

Accessibility
Today's businesses are generally lukewarm on accessibility metrics. Respondents identified the accessibility metrics category as the least important – and least commonly used.

Those who do use accessibility metrics most notably apply them to self-service.

IVR and mobile self-service are the channels most commonly subject to accessibility measurement. Live agent telephony follows in third place, while web self-service and live chat respectively rank as fourth and fifth.

Efficiency
Efficiency metrics like average handle time and average speed of answer are associated with the traditional call center. Sure enough, they are most commonly applied to live agent telephony.

Other channels commonly subject to efficiency measurement include e-mail, live chat, web self-service, and mobile self-service.

The five channels most commonly subject to efficiency measurement are considered five of the most important contact channels. Efficiency, meanwhile, is considered one of the two most important metric focuses.

Quality
Quality metrics, like efficiency metrics, represent the most valuable indicators of contact center performance.

Quality metrics, like efficiency metrics, are most commonly applied to live agent telephony, e-mail, and live chat.

Businesses also find them comparatively relevant for assessing mobile self-service and in-person engagement.

Customer
While not deemed as instrumental to performance management, customer-oriented metrics do ultimately speak to the most fundamental contact center objective: customer satisfaction.

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Unsurprisingly, the customer metrics category ranks as the most commonly applied form of metrics.

Widely used in many channels, customer metrics are most typically applied to in-person engagement.

Live agent telephony follows. Mobile self-service, online communities/forums and web self-service are often commonly evaluated in accordance with customer metrics.

Resolution

Insofar as live agent telephony is most commonly used for high-touch interactions, it, unsurprisingly, is the channel most commonly measured with resolution metrics.

Resolution metrics, in fact, represent the form of measurement most commonly applied to the live agent channel.

E-mail, which is also commonly used in strategic interactions, is also frequently assessed for its impact on resolution metrics.

Live chat, in-person, and mobile self-service, the former two of which represent high-touch, interaction-oriented channels, are also commonly expected to perform well against resolution metrics.

Business

When it comes to the performance management process, business metrics are less valuable than those focused on efficiency, quality, customer, and resolution.

They do still carry relevance.

Nowhere greater is that relevance than in the context of live agent telephony.

Live agent telephony is the communication form most commonly subject to assessment against business metrics. Other channels for which business metrics most often apply are in-person, live chat, e-mail, and Twitter.

Expert Perspectives

Erich Dietz, InMoment
Performance standards as far as communication and interaction are more similar than different. Metrics change depending on function. Sales requires different measurement than IT. Billing measurement differs from that for marketing. The financial services industry is assessed differently than the healthcare sector.

Michael Mills, CGS
If you want to create a consistent and transparent customer experience regardless of the channel, then you will typically need to standardize the service level metrics for email, chat and voice support. Today, the standard response time for emails is 24 hours, where a voice and/or chat response time is in seconds and minutes. There is, however, an exception to this rule. If a client sets priorities for the type of issues that will be initiated by email versus

chat or voice, then there may not need to be standardize service level metrics for all channels in every situation.

Jeremy Payne, Enghouse Interactive
At a basic level, the answer is yes, all channels need their own performance standards. At a higher level, it may be no. If your ultimate, overriding objective is happy, loyal customers that would recommend you and continue to buy from you, those kinds of metrics are likely to be all encompassing.

Greg Moser, Power Objects
Each channel could have a different tactical approach with different granular measurements. At the high-level, however, all should be measured the same way. All channels should be committed to delivering a predictable, repeatable, high-quality experience.

Channel Performance: Achievement

To measure a channel is to confirm one cares about that channel's performance.

The act of measurement does not necessarily confirm that a business cares to improve that performance.

Perhaps the business is measuring a channel strictly to understand its workflow utilization and customer experience costs. Perhaps the business is already content with the performance it measured in that specific channel.

In either case, the channel's relevance to the performance measurement process offers no certain conclusion regarding the business' future plans for that channel.

In order to fully assess a business' channel commitment, it is therefore also necessary to evaluate how performance has changed – and how the business hopes performance will change – within each channel.

Last Year's Focus
At this point last year, live agent telephony and e-mail were business' most widespread and established contact platforms.

Improving performance within both channels was still a comparatively high-ranking priority.

Neither channel, however, represented one of the two highest priorities.

Those honors instead belonged to web and mobile self-service.

Over the past year, respondents say their emphasis on web self-service performance registered at a 1.79 on a -5 to 5 scale. For mobile self-service, the emphasis weighed in at 1.56.

With respective scores of 1.39 and 1.33, e-mail and live agent telephony received the next-greatest increases in performance emphasis. With its increase in emphasis scored at 1.10, live chat represented the fifth-greatest performance priority.
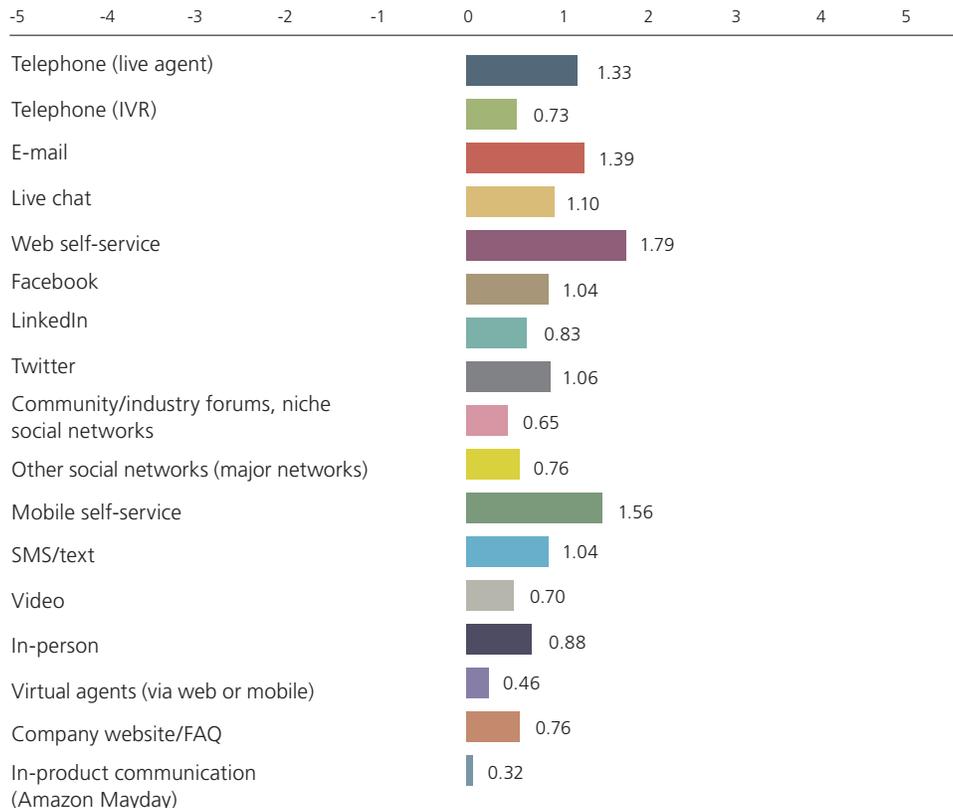
Low-ranking priorities included in-product communication (0.32), virtual agents (0.46), community forums (0.65), video (0.70), and IVR (0.73).

These scores, it is worth noting, assess the extent to which businesses increased their emphasis on performance over the past year.

Consequently, there is nothing inherently unintuitive or contradictory about a high-priority channel like IVR scoring comparatively poorly in this regard. Going into the year, businesses may have already been content with IVR performance scores or with the initiatives they had already implemented to improve those scores.

One can, however, take the low rankings as further proof that businesses do not greatly value channels like in-product communication, virtual agents, and video. Whereas it is logical to accept the possibility that emphasis on performance may asymptote for high-priority, widely established channels, it is unintuitive to assume that in the case of low-priority, unestablished ones.

Q13

How has emphasis on performance changed for each of the following channels? (-5 - 5 scale)

Channel	Score
Telephone (live agent)	1.33
Telephone (IVR)	0.73
E-mail	1.39
Live chat	1.10
Web self-service	1.79
Facebook	1.04
LinkedIn	0.83
Twitter	1.06
Community/industry forums, niche social networks	0.65
Other social networks (major networks)	0.76
Mobile self-service	1.56
SMS/text	1.04
Video	0.70
In-person	0.88
Virtual agents (via web or mobile)	0.46
Company website/FAQ	0.76
In-product communication (Amazon Mayday)	0.32

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State of Improvement

While live agent telephony received the year's fourth-greatest increase in performance emphasis, it received the year's greatest increase in actual performance. Using a -5 to 5 scale, businesses rate the performance increase at 1.98.

E-mail, which received the third-greatest increase in emphasis, enjoyed the second-greatest increase in performance. Respondents score the increase at 1.54.

In a testament to the aforementioned distinction between increase in performance emphasis and ability to actually improve performance, IVR received the third-greatest uptick in results. Despite not markedly increasing their emphasis on IVR performance, businesses realized an increase of 1.21.

Web self-service, the channel for which performance received the greatest increase in emphasis, enjoyed the fourth-greatest increase in actual performance. Respondents rate that increase at 1.16.

Facebook, for which performance increased by 0.98, enjoyed the fifth-greatest improvement. Like IVR, it did not receive one of the greatest increases in performance emphasis.

Channels that comparatively failed to enjoy improvements in performance included in-product communication (0.16), virtual agents (0.30), video (0.38), company websites (0.40), and secondary social networks (0.61).

All five channels – including the commonly used "company website" – carry comparatively low value within the business community. Emphasis on improving performance within each channel, similarly, ranked low compared to that offered for the majority of other contact channels.

The comparatively slight increases in performance, consequently, are decidedly unsurprising. Given the perceived unimportance of each channel, those slight increases are doubtfully upsetting.

Desire to Improve

Businesses know how much value they ascribe to certain channels. They know how they attempted to improve performance within each of those channels over the past year. They know the extent to which that effort paid off.

They, consequently, have a solid framework for deciding how—and to what extent—they intend to improve performance over the next year.

They have decided to help the rich get richer.

Live agent telephony performance, which enjoyed the greatest improvement over the past year, will be the greatest priority over the next year. 58% of businesses say improving live agent phone performance is a priority for the next 12 months.

Identified as a high-value channel and subject to a comparatively great performance emphasis last year, live chat did not enjoy a comparatively significant increase in actual performance. Businesses remain committed to securing that increase; they identify it as the second-highest-ranking priority for the next year. 50% of businesses will make improving live chat performance a paramount focus.
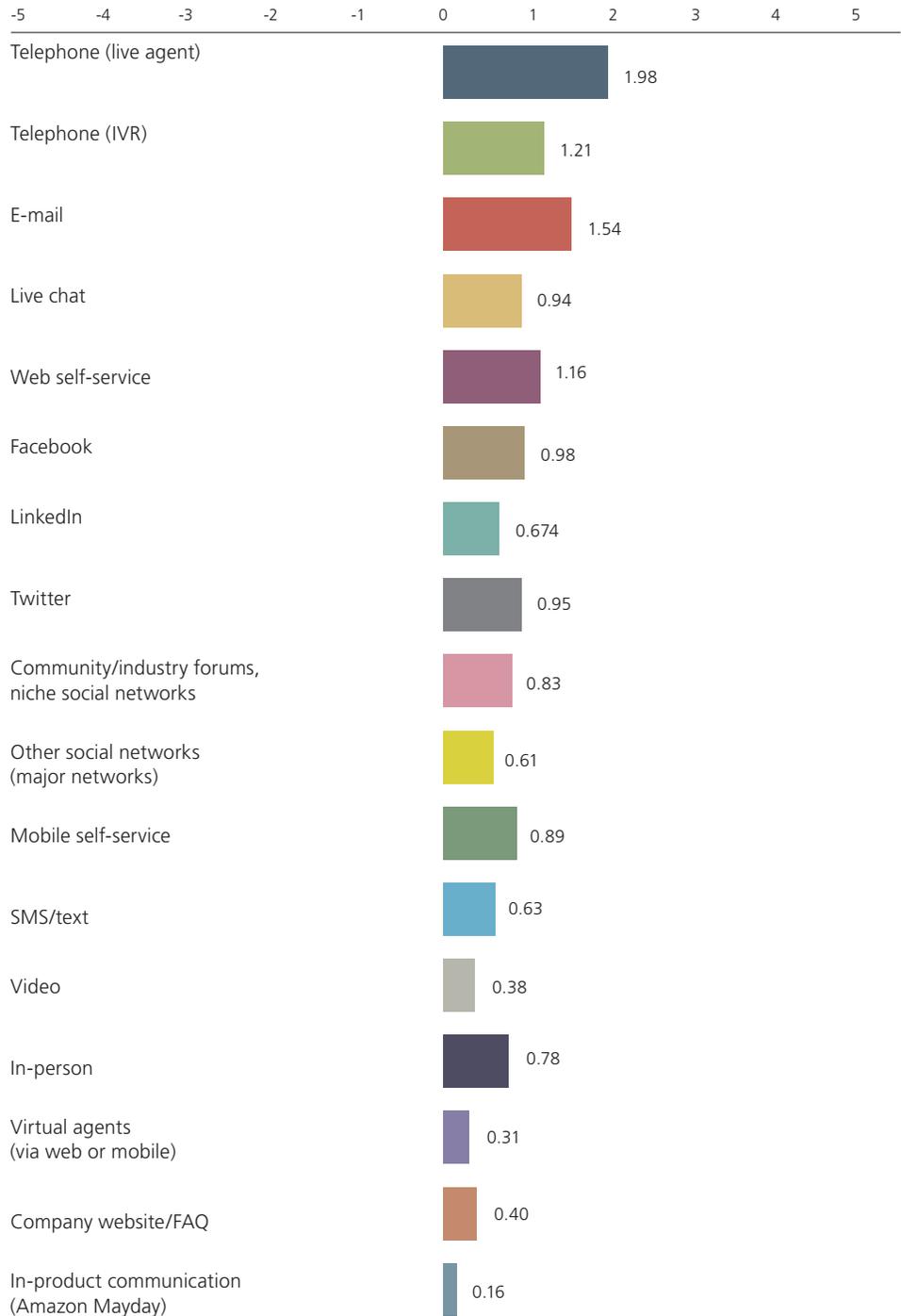
Other improvement priorities will include web self-service (48%), e-mail (35%), and IVR (35%).

The performance tide will not turn in favor of in-product communication and video. They rank as performance improvement priorities for only 3% and 8% of businesses, respectively.

Other low-ranking improvement priorities include secondary social networks (12%), community forums (12%), Twitter (13%), and in-person (13%).
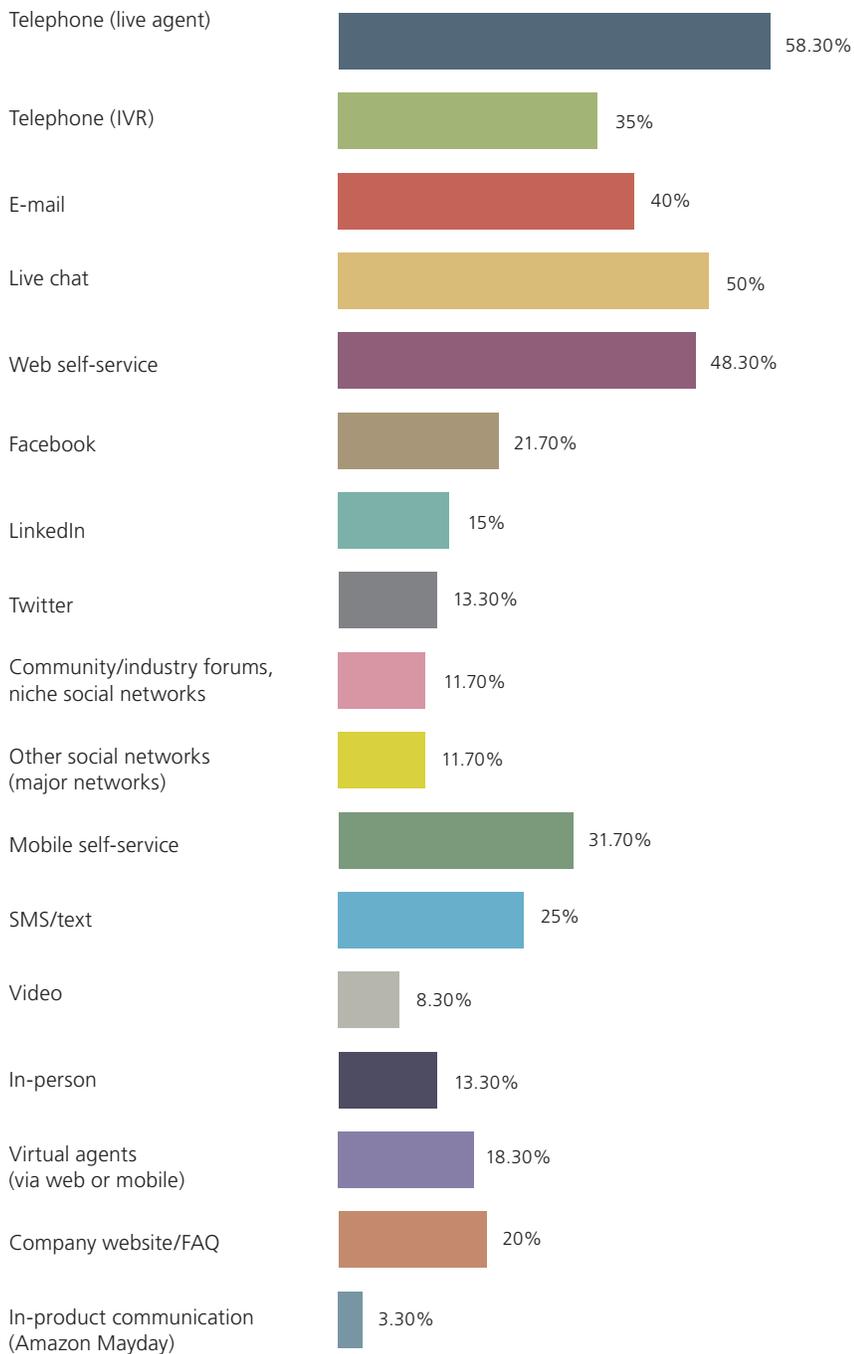
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Q14

Over the past year, how have performance scores changed for each of the following channels? (-5 - 5 scale)

Channel	Score
Telephone (live agent)	1.98
Telephone (IVR)	1.21
E-mail	1.54
Live chat	0.94
Web self-service	1.16
Facebook	0.98
LinkedIn	0.674
Twitter	0.95
Community/industry forums, niche social networks	0.83
Other social networks (major networks)	0.61
Mobile self-service	0.89
SMS/text	0.63
Video	0.38
In-person	0.78
Virtual agents (via web or mobile)	0.31
Company website/FAQ	0.40
In-product communication (Amazon Mayday)	0.16

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Q15

For which channels will performance improvement be a priority over the next year?

Channel	Percentage
Telephone (live agent)	58.30%
Telephone (IVR)	35%
E-mail	40%
Live chat	50%
Web self-service	48.30%
Facebook	21.70%
LinkedIn	15%
Twitter	13.30%
Community/industry forums, niche social networks	11.70%
Other social networks (major networks)	11.70%
Mobile self-service	31.70%
SMS/text	25%
Video	8.30%
In-person	13.30%
Virtual agents (via web or mobile)	18.30%
Company website/FAQ	20%
In-product communication (Amazon Mayday)	3.30%

The Agent Landscape

The most commonly accepted requirements of omni-channel – channel integration, 360-degree customer views, and full service in all channels – make clear the importance of contact center agents.

As the individuals who most notably interface with customers, they serve to demonstrate a business' progress – or lack thereof – in realizing the omni-channel vision. Their ability to seamlessly assist a customer who spans channels reflects the extent to which the business is integrated. Their ability to recognize a customer and his history of sentiments, behaviors and transactions reflects the extent to which the business has established a 360-degree view. Their physical presence in all channels – and ability to actually provide the service a customer is demanding – reflects the extent to which the business offers a complete experience in all channels.

An inquiry into the agent landscape is thus an important component of the larger inquiry into the state of the omni-channel revolution.

Agent Prototype
Today's businesses will assign dedicated agents to certain channels. 80% of businesses, for instance, leverage dedicated personnel to provide live phone support. 71% assign a dedicated team to the e-mail channel.

That does not, however, mean today's businesses believe the best agents are specialized ones.

55% of businesses, in fact, believe the very opposite. They feel today's ideal agent possesses multi-channel expertise. 27% say a specialized agent is more effective, while 18% do not believe there is a difference.

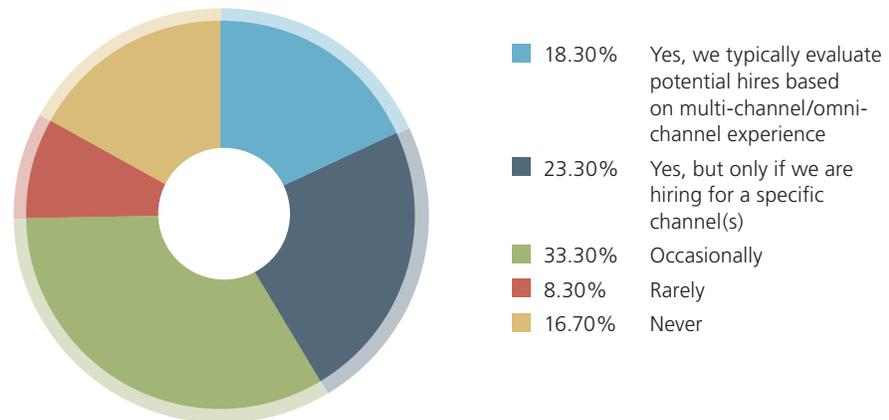Are today's businesses hiring the optimal agent?

Some are.

18% of business say they "typically" make hiring decisions based on a candidate's experience in a multi-channel or omni-channel environment.

33% occasionally hire candidates based on relevant channel experience, while 23% only take channel experience into account when hiring for specialization.

8%, meanwhile, say channel rarely enters the hiring equation. 17% say it never does.

Q16

Do you hire agents based on channel experience?

- 18.30% Yes, we typically evaluate potential hires based on multi-channel/omni-channel experience
- 23.30% Yes, but only if we are hiring for a specific channel(s)
- 33.30% Occasionally
- 8.30% Rarely
- 16.70% Never

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Expert Perspectives

Erich Dietz, InMoment
I wouldn't recommend cross training for all channels. Once you get past 3 or 4 channels, it's hard to achieve mastery. Most contact centers that attempt this end up with a "master of none" and not a "jack-of-all-trades" environment. From an efficiency and operational standpoint, it makes more sense to diversify and have some specialists.

Greg Moser, Power Objects
We have seen all types of ways multi-channel and omni-channel contact centers handle agent distribution; some have dedicated agents per channel, others have overflow for certain channels, and others have their agents trained for multiple channels and skills. The key is to understand the unique components for each channel and to ensure your people are properly trained, the processes are clearly defined, and the technology is properly integrated to provide the superior level of service regardless of channel.

Jeremy Payne, Enghouse Interactive
Many businesses have defined specialists for particular channels. Social media, for example is one such area that demands a specialist skillset. Organizations may also want to draw on a range of domain expertise across the broader connected enterprise. Equally, many contact center agents today will have expertise in one core channel, such as voice, but also have received a level of training in a secondary skillset such as web chat. In general terms, businesses need to spend time understanding their staff, so that they know what skillsets their employees have and when they can use presence-enabled tools to draw on specific available employees with the right skills to resolve a particular customer interaction.

Michael Mills, CGS
Providing a dedicated staffing model for each channel would be cost prohibitive, notwithstanding that your utilization attainment for email would be very low, based on a 24x7 support model. The best practice is to cross train staff to cover all supported channels and to balance the staff across the peak times for specific channels being supported.

Agent Capabilities

Hiring and staffing agents based on an omni-channel mindset mean nothing if the organization does not provide such agents with omni-channel capabilities.

Possessing the ability to support multiple channels is only one piece of the puzzle. The agent must also possess a complete window into the business' customers and the ability to provide a seamless, integrated experience as those customers span channels.

Today's businesses are not completely failing to provide these capabilities. They, unfortunately, are also not completely succeeding in providing them.

15% of businesses say an agent can never access a customer's profile or interaction history – even within the confines of a single channel.

22% of businesses say the agent can only within the same, high-touch channel; an additional 11% say the agent's perspective is limited to the customer's history within a singular, low-touch forum.

28% say the agent has a customer view across some channels, while 17% offer such a perspective across most channels.

7% allow for the coveted view across all contact channels.

An agent's view of a customer is only part of the battle. In order to create a truly seamless, integrated experience, instant access to different channels represents a helpful capability.
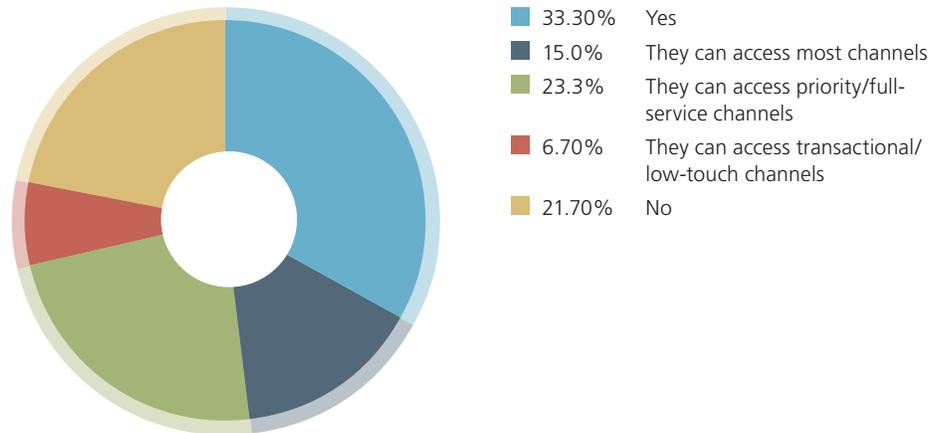
33% of agents possess the most efficient form of that capability.

That percentage of businesses offers agents access to a myriad of contact channels from a singular desktop.

15% provide access to most channels from within one desktop, while 23% provide the agent with a singular source of access to all high-touch channels. 7% only extend the capability to lower-touch, transactional channels, while 22% only allow access to one channel from the desktop.
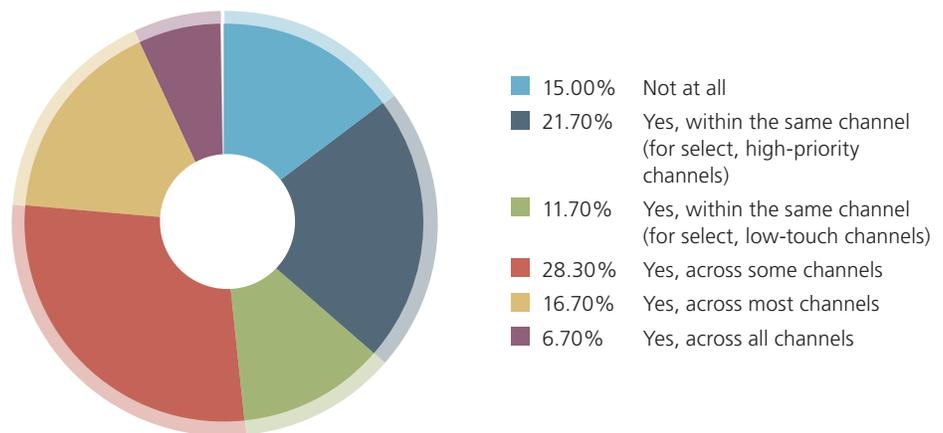
Q17

Can agents access multiple channels from a single desktop?

- 33.30%   Yes
- 15.0%   They can access most channels
- 23.3%   They can access priority/full-service channels
- 6.70%   They can access transactional/low-touch channels
- 21.70%   No

Q18

During an interaction, can the agent access the customer's profile and history?

- 15.00%   Not at all
- 21.70%   Yes, within the same channel (for select, high-priority channels)
- 11.70%   Yes, within the same channel (for select, low-touch channels)
- 28.30%   Yes, across some channels
- 16.70%   Yes, across most channels
- 6.70%   Yes, across all channels

CALL CENTER IQ

The Customer's Perspective

The service experience is designed for and delivered to customers. It is not, however, designed and delivered by them.

The customer experience is a business construct. It is created by business people in business offices and then executed at the business' touch points. The customer has no inherent agency.

A great contradiction often results. Brands will never shy away from an opportunity to espouse the importance of customer-centricity, but they will make contact center decisions entirely from a business perspective. Guided by insular assessments and "best practices" from other business people, customer management leaders will prescribe things for customers. They will impose things on customers.

From an operational standpoint, there is no obvious counter to this scenario. Customers are not employees. They are not part of the organization or directly involved in any investments or strategic decisions. They will never directly design the customer experience.

A business looking to heavily incorporate the customer into its contact center strategy is not, however, completely precluded from doing so. The customer may not live within the walls of its business, but the customer's voice absolutely can ring throughout the entire organization.

While ambiguity surrounds the term "voice of the customer," there is nothing unclear about its fundamental meaning: it is an accumulation of customers' perspectives, sentiments, expectations, and demands. It provides a window into what the customer requires to be satisfied.

Since today's businesses identify customer satisfaction as their most paramount contact center goal, it carries an intuitive and undeniable worth.

That worth is particularly significant in the context of an omni-channel discussion.

Given the relative newness of the omni-channel concept – and the uncertainty surrounding the most urgent requirements – the voice of the customer represents a means of establishing clarity. In the age of customer empowerment, the voice of the customer provides a particularly compelling starting point for those looking to establish or optimize an omni-channel contact center.

Since the omni-channel revolution is bringing contact centers into uncharted territory, the voice of the customer – particularly that in the form of customer feedback and responsive behavior – helps flesh out an understanding of what works and what does not work in today's age. Whereas businesses have decades of data to at least roughly guide them when it comes to the single channel contact center, they are likely still establishing standards for omni-channel performance.

Moreover, the omni-channel revolution also provides an unparalleled level of access to the voice of the customer. The omni-channel environment features an immense number of touch points – and an immense number of circumstances – in which to engage customers. Each of these passive or active engagements represents an opportunity not simply to communicate information to the customer but to learn about that customer.

In theory, omni-channel is both a beneficiary and driver of an increased emphasis on the voice of the customer.

To what extent are today's businesses taking advantage?

Locating the Voice

The customer management landscape provides today's businesses with an array of options for locating the voice of the customer.

Those businesses most commonly locate – and acquire – the voice in customer feedback surveys.

A whopping 74% of businesses say they leverage such surveys to gain insight into the customer's sentiment.

Other popular means of acquiring the voice of the customer include interaction recordings and verbatims (55%), interaction analytics (50%), agent feedback and post-call wrap-ups (47%), and inbound, unsolicited customer feedback (41%).

Four of the five most popular options – surveys, recordings, analytics, and feedback – involve direct communication with the customer. Agent feedback, the fifth, is theoretically the immediate product of direct communication with the customer. All such options effectively take the "voice of the customer" notion literally; they draw insights based on what the customer actually said or expressed during or about the interaction.

In the status quo, businesses are generally less reliant on passive insights drawn from consumer behavior. Only 17% of contact centers, for instance, use changes in customer behavior (such as changes in buying habits) as a source of customer intelligence.

A similarly low 22%, meanwhile, use changes in business metrics as a source of voice of the customer insight.

While a more substantial 40% acquire customer intelligence from changes in customer-oriented metrics, such metrics are not necessarily a passive form of customer communication. Metrics like CSAT score and Net Promoter Score are constructed directly from customer sentiment. In such cases, customers, via what are effectively customer feedback surveys, are explicitly declaring their satisfaction and willingness to recommend the brand.

In terms of active voice of the customer insights, the only comparatively unpopular source is external customer sentiment. External customer comments, such as those shared in social media, represent valid voice of the customer insights in only 22% of businesses.

That finding is relevant – and damning – for the status quo impact of the omni-channel revolution. External customer commentary epitomizes the "always on" nature of omni-channel communication. That "always on" communication does not, however, carry as much weight as traditional feedback surveys and call recording when it comes to informing business decisions.

In addition to suggesting that businesses are not making the most of the omni-channel landscape, the finding also reveals that businesses are bottlenecking their ability to "compete on the customer experience."

Direct customer feedback will often be of the reactionary variety; customers will share what they loved or hated about the particular experience they received with the brand.

While it too includes reactionary insight, external customer sentiment also paints a broader picture of the marketplace.

It reveals bigger picture, unadulterated information about customer wants, demands, and expectations.

Whereas reactionary feedback tells a business whether what it is already doing is successful or unsuccessful, external communication tells a business whether it is doing all that it should or could be doing.

Impact of the Voice
We know where businesses go to hear the voice of the customer. Do they actually listen?

They at least moderately do when it comes to overall contact center strategy.

While not a resounding factor, the voice of the customer is at least a somewhat important factor in 85% of businesses. It makes at least a solid impact in 63% of businesses and a significant one in 28%.

In revealing that the voice of the customer makes a significant impact in only 28% of contact centers, the data dispels the notion of this truly being the "age of the customer." It undermines the idea that today's contact centers all put the customer first.

It nonetheless confirms that businesses pay attention to the voice of the customer when crafting customer overall contact center strategy.

They adhere to a similar approach when designing channel strategy. They listen to the voice of the customer, but they generally do not make decisions based specifically on the customer's input.

Today's businesses most notably use the voice of the customer to determine which channels to measure. By scoring the impact at 3.16/5, businesses nonetheless confirm that the voice of the customer is not the exclusive determinant.
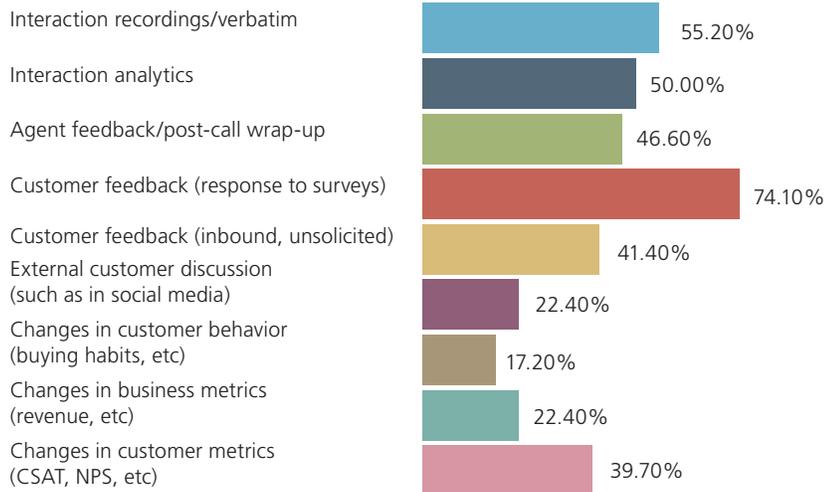
Other strategies comparatively reliant on customer intelligence include the decision of which channels to incorporate into agent training (3.08) and the form of engagement to offer within each channel (3.02). Strategies comparatively less reliant on voice of the customer insight include when to allow engagement within each channel (2.50) and which channels to use (2.90).

The range between the high- and low-ranking options confirms that companies turn to the voice of customer when making most strategic decisions.

They do not, however, make any decision exclusively based on the customer's voice.
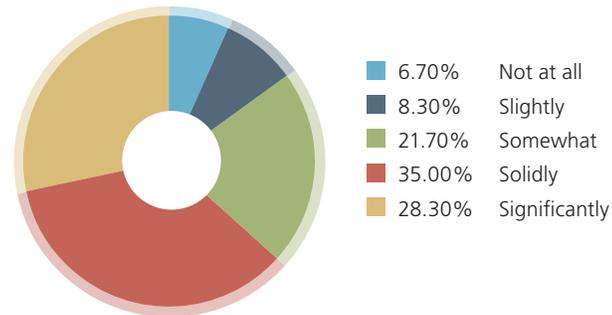
Q19

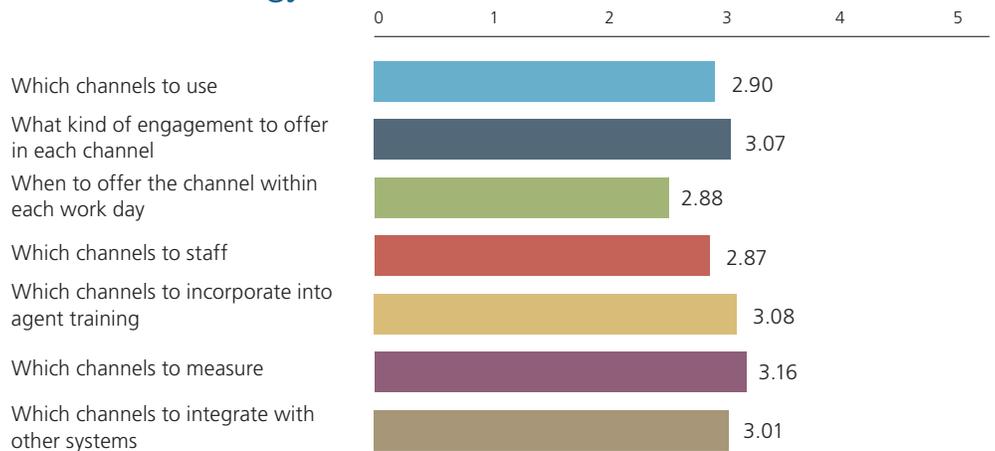## How do you acquire the voice of the customer?

Category	Percentage
Interaction recordings/verbatim	55.20%
Interaction analytics	50.00%
Agent feedback/post-call wrap-up	46.60%
Customer feedback (response to surveys)	74.10%
Customer feedback (inbound, unsolicited)	41.40%
External customer discussion (such as in social media)	22.40%
Changes in customer behavior (buying habits, etc)	17.20%
Changes in business metrics (revenue, etc)	22.40%
Changes in customer metrics (CSAT, NPS, etc)	39.70%

Q20

To what extent does voice of the customer impact contact center strategy?

Percentage	Response
6.70%	Not at all
8.30%	Slightly
21.70%	Somewhat
35.00%	Solidly
28.30%	Significantly

Q21

How does the voice of the customer impact channel strategy? (0-5 scale)

Category	Score
Which channels to use	2.90
What kind of engagement to offer in each channel	3.07
When to offer the channel within each work day	2.88
Which channels to staff	2.87
Which channels to incorporate into agent training	3.08
Which channels to measure	3.16
Which channels to integrate with other systems	3.01

Expert Perspectives

Erich Dietz, InMoment
The two biggest missed opportunities for the insights we gather in contact centers are that they stay siloed inside of our departments and that we don't use the information to make important changes. Most contact centers do a good job of using customer feedback to improve agent performance. However, they rarely take the opportunity to share that information with other departments that have the ability to either improve the root causes that are sending customers to the contact center, or to reinforce and expand what customers love. If we are going to take the time to ask customers for feedback and they, in turn, take the time to share details about their experiences, we shouldn't take that for granted. It's simply bad business.

Jeremy Payne, Enghouse Interactive
With the proliferation of smartphones and other mobile devices and associated GPS technology in use today, businesses increasingly know who their customers are, what devices they are using and where they are in the world. This is all contextual information that can speed up the journey time and allow effortless customer service to take place even faster than before. Quality monitoring platforms used in conjunction with speech analytics solutions can also be key in this context. They help businesses ensure that their customer-facing agents are interacting correctly with customers and using the information gleaned from the process to improve the services they deliver through their channels.

Michael Mills, CGS
Contact centers should be leveraging any and all information that can help their agents perform more effectively and proficiently in delivering a quality level of support to their customers.

Greg Moser, Power Objects
Businesses should leverage data to create a true, meaningful, 360-degree view of customers. Doing so enables them to deliver a truly optimal experience across all channels.

Content of the Voice
While its impact on the customer experience is fairly moderate, the voice of the customer still exists. It still provides businesses with a window into what customers want. It also lets businesses know how customers feel about what is currently being offered.

In the status quo, businesses do not believe their customers are wowed by any experiential element.

They do, however, believe customers are reasonably satisfied with a few elements. Per a survey question asking them to assess their companies' experiences from the perspectives of customers, respondents confirm the greatest level of satisfaction with agent friendliness.

They score that element 4.00/5.

Other comparatively strong experiential elements include the likelihood of achieving a suitable resolution (3.76/5), the value of resolutions being offered (3.68/5), accuracy (3.56/5), and speed (3.36/5).

Low-scoring elements include the ability to span channels within the same transaction (1.96/5), the ability to span channels in future transactions (2.16/5), the ability to transfer without repeating information (2.46/5), proactive care (2.62), and accommodation of channel preference (2.75/5).

Collectively, the scores offer a clear conclusion: when the interaction occurs within the organization's wheelhouse, the business generally delivers for its customers. It provides friendly, valuable, accurate, resolute and efficient care.

That wheelhouse is unfortunately small. If the customer wants to communicate in his preferred channel, span channels, transfer or hear from the business without initiating the engagement, he is far less likely to walk away satisfied.
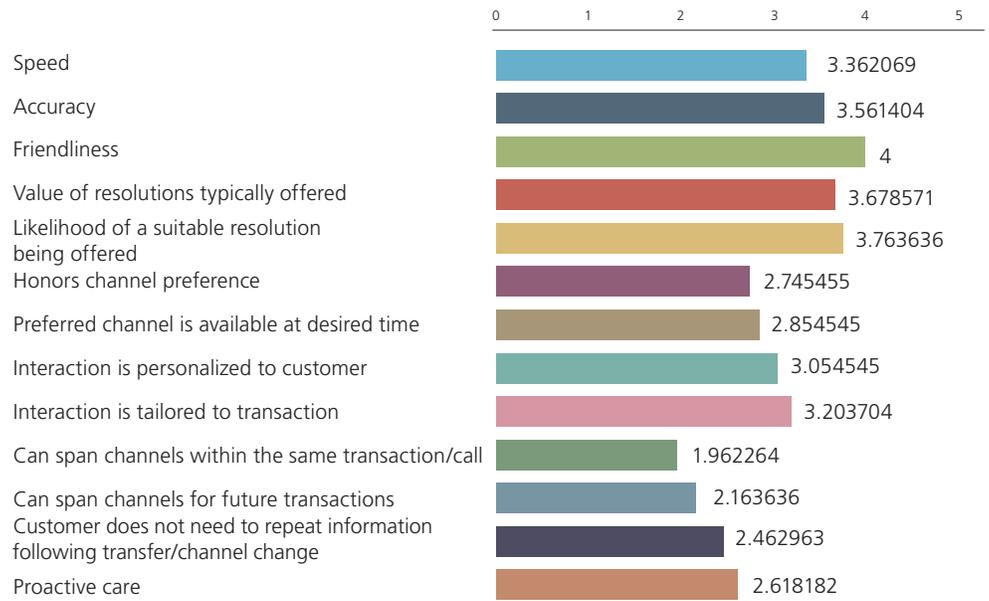
Essentially, today's businesses deliver a solid level of customer support, but they have not yet successfully tailored that support to the omni-channel world.

If the customer adheres to the business' preferred terms of engagement, he will probably get the resolution he desires.

If he expects the business to accommodate his terms and provide a seamless, consistent, integrated service experience across all channels, he will run into some obstacles.
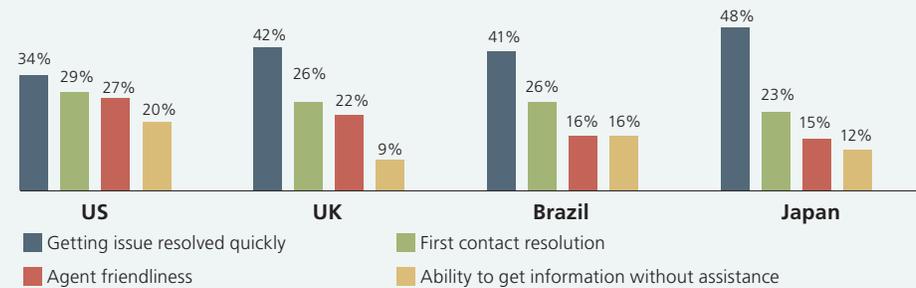
Q22

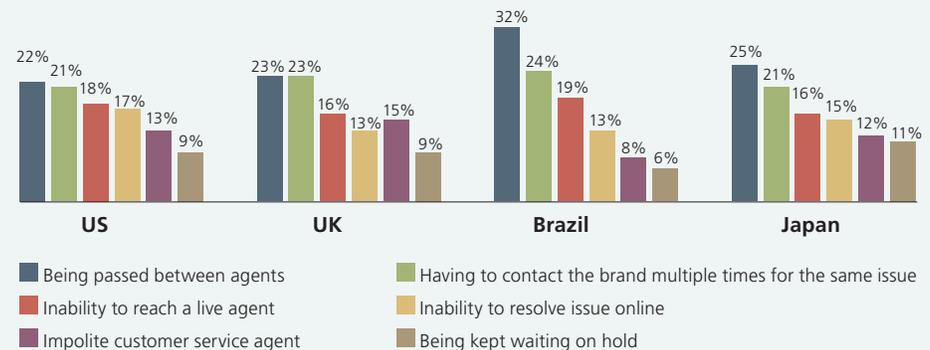## If you were a customer, how would you score your business on the following? (0-5 Scale)

Category	Score
Speed	3.362069
Accuracy	3.561404
Friendliness	4
Value of resolutions typically offered	3.678571
Likelihood of a suitable resolution being offered	3.763636
Honors channel preference	2.745455
Preferred channel is available at desired time	2.854545
Interaction is personalized to customer	3.054545
Interaction is tailored to transaction	3.203704
Can span channels within the same transaction/call	1.962264
Can span channels for future transactions	2.163636
Customer does not need to repeat information following transfer/channel change	2.462963
Proactive care	2.618182

Consumer Perspective
(via Microsoft's 2015 US State of Multichannel Customer Service Report)

What do you feel is the most important element of a satisfying customer service experience?

	US	UK	Brazil	Japan
Getting issue resolved quickly	34%	42%	41%	48%
First contact resolution	29%	26%	26%	23%
Agent friendliness	27%	22%	16%	15%
Ability to get information without assistance	20%	9%	16%	12%

What do you feel is the most frustrating aspect of a customer service experience?

	US	UK	Brazil	Japan
Being passed between agents	22%	23%	32%	25%
Having to contact the brand multiple times for the same issue	21%	23%	24%	21%
Inability to reach a live agent	18%	16%	19%	16%
Inability to resolve issue online	17%	13%	13%	15%
Impolite customer service agent	13%	15%	8%	12%
Being kept waiting on hold	9%	9%	6%	11%

CALL CENTER IQ

Roadmap to Omni-Channel Excellence

Proceed with Caution

The prefix "omni" means all. The majority of today's businesses believe full service in all channels is a core requirement of the omni-channel contact center. All of today's businesses hear rhetoric regarding the importance of serving the customer on the customer's terms.

Collectively, the three realities produce pressure to venture into all contact channels.

Companies should not ignore that pressure. While the omni-channel revolution is about more than location of service, it is absolutely concerned with location of service.

Customers are not simply becoming comfortable with an increasing array of channels; they are developing preferences for non-telephonic channels. Per fundamental concepts like "the customer is always right" and "the customer comes first," accommodating channel preference is pivotal.

In order to successfully do so, businesses ultimately will need to offer robust service in all channels.

The pressure to expand into all channels should not, however, blind businesses to the fact that customer preferences fit into a hierarchy. While channel preference is important, it may not be as important as fundamental care elements like speed, accuracy, efficiency and resolve.

If a company's customer base values those elements more substantially than it does channel preference, delivering those elements represents the business' paramount customer experience priority. Its expansion into new channels cannot come at the expense of such elements.

While shunning new channels is foolish, rushing into those channels is similarly foolish.

When expanding the walls of its customer experience, a business retain – if not improve – its standard of care in all existing channels. It must also apply the standard of care to all new channels.

Appreciate Self-Service

Businesses that are looking to quickly expand their channel offers should pay careful attention to self-service.

Web- and mobile-self-service are widely recognized as important to the contact center experience. The implementation and optimization of self-service options, moreover, carries "win-win" value for businesses.

Self-service channels play a pivotal role in boosting overall contact center efficiency. In addition to being low-touch by definition, self-service channels absorb inquiries that otherwise would have reached live agents. With fewer transactional engagements on their plate, live agents can focus more substantially on the matters that truly require – and benefit from – their assistance.

Customers also benefit from self-service. While live agent interactions have historically represented a pathway to resolution, they also require effort – and have a history of spurring frustration. If customers can independently and conveniently access the information or resolution they desire, they avoid that hassle and frustration. They benefit from a stronger, more customer-centric experience, and their satisfaction improves.

Self-service thus represents an intersection between operational efficiency and customer centricity. Both the contact center and the customer benefit from a lower-impact, less-taxing support experience. Whether guided by cost containment or customer satisfaction, an organization stands to benefit when it effectively deploys self-service capabilities.

"Effectively" is an important qualifier. While self-service can represent a win-win option for businesses and customers, it does not automatically produce a desirable outcome.

When sourcing and implementing a self-service tool, businesses must remain mindful of their core contact center objectives. If customer satisfaction represents one of the priorities, self-service must be implemented with the customer in mind. The business can certainly appreciate

the efficiency benefits of self-service, but the effort to cut costs and reduce volume should not come at the expense of the customer experience.

The system should be user-friendly, and it should be offered when contextually appropriate. Customers should never be forced to use self-service when they would prefer to interact with a live agent.

Self-service technology can help cut costs and reduce interaction volume. It should not be introduced for the sole purpose of doing so.

Establish Unity, Not Uniformity
Customers and businesses both recognize the importance of a seamless, integrated, consistent customer experience. Such an approach is the cornerstone of the omni-channel revolution.

When pursuing such a customer experience, businesses must remain mindful of the distinction between unity and uniformity. Customers should receive the same, complete commitment to service regardless of where they interact. They should receive the same commitment to speedy, accurate, worthwhile care regardless of where they interact.

They should not, however, necessarily receive the exact same experience in each channel.

Customers have reasons for preferring the channels they prefer. They have specific expectations for the channels in which they interact. While these concerns do not often outweigh customers' fundamental desires for effective, resolute customer experiences, they are not trivial. They should not be ignored by businesses.

In pursuit of unity and consistency between channels, businesses should not necessarily strive for uniformity of each channel experience.

The correct approach is to first establish the core of the experience. Businesses must determine what customers see as fundamental to the customer experience. Upon doing so, they must assure that all channels offer those fundamentals. They must also assure that the customer's ability to receive that core value does not change as he transfers between channels, agents and transactions.

Once the business establishes a core, integrated experiential promise, it must then assess the intricacies of each channel. What makes certain customers choose certain channels at certain times? What unique attributes and capabilities exist within certain channels?

The omni-channel business then plays to the strengths – and masks the weaknesses – of each individual channel. It assures that customers who connect in live chat get access to an experience enhanced with the unique elements of the live chat arena. It assures that customers who call for support receive access to an experience that makes the most sense for the telephonic arena.

To support these channel-specific experiences, businesses must also introduce channel-specific performance measures for each environment. If different average handle times are warranted in different channels, the organization – and affected supervisors and agents – need to appreciate those differences at the onset.

Some metrics – particularly those that cover customer- and resolution-oriented outcomes – should not be graded on a curve. CSAT, for instance, is as important in the Twitter support environment as it is in the e-mail channel.

Businesses should, however, distinctly measure performance within each channel. CSAT score may be as an important in social as it is in e-mail, but businesses absolutely must know whether social is as effective at driving CSAT score as e-mail. If not, it gains an understanding of the changes it must make.

Expert Perspectives

Michael Mills, CGS
The one standard across any and all channels is the quality of service being provided and the ability to effectively resolve the customer's issues in a timely manner.

Jeremy Payne, Enghouse Interactive
Customers have a different set of expectations based on the channel they are using. Differences in expectations also emerge based on the age and demographics of the customer. An individual of 60 and over, for example, is more likely than other age ranges also to want to resolve their problem through spoken interaction with a customer service agent. A younger digital native may, in contrast, be looking for a much more immediate answer in an online or mobile environment.

Greg Moser, Power Objects
While a business needs to understand the unique components of each channel, it also needs to enforce a universal performance standard and apply universal key performance indicators.

Erich Dietz, InMoment
Businesses should not assume uniformity; customer expectations vary depending on how compelling the issue is, industry and past experiences with that company. Their expectation for service level, however, is often similar across channels.

Leverage Omni-Channel

Yes, the omni-channel revolution requires ample time, resource and fiscal commitment.

It is not, however, a pure burden on the contact center. It also represents a significant opportunity.

Today's omni-channel marketplace provides businesses with unprecedented access to their customers. Smart businesses use that unprecedented access to cultivate stronger relationships with customers. They also seek – and acquire – previously unknown insights about their past, present and potential customers.

For this to happen, contact centers must establish more robust support offerings within each channel. They must also establish more robust, seamless approaches to knowledge management. They must be in position to secure – and utilize – this nearly bottomless pool of customer intelligence.

"Always on" is not simply a call for 24/7/365 engagement. It also represents the idea that the customer experience is ongoing. Every conceivable passive or active interaction between brand and business represents a component of that experience.

Every conceivable passive or active interaction, therefore, represents a chance to both showcase and strengthen the customer experience.

Expert Perspectives

Erich Dietz, InMoment
The more comfortable a person is talking to you, the more information they'll share. The more data and information you have, the easier it becomes to then personalize the customer experience. I like to think of these new channels and technologies as having the ability to connect, and help us understand and nurture relationships with our customers. Customers don't want to feel like just a number. Show you know the customer by having their experience information readily available – from what happened six seconds ago to what happened six months ago.

Michael Mills, CGS
Today, call centers are leveraging the use of analytics and call-trending metrics to gain a deeper insight into customer issues, and how well the call center agents are addressing the problems being submitted to the call center. Integrating the analytics and call-trending metrics with the knowledge database articles provides the agents with a real-time repository of customer information that will help the agent be more effective the next time that customer calls into the desk.

Jeremy Payne, Enghouse Interactive
Rather than looking at customer service as a cost, organizations increasingly see it as a resource. Companies like TripAdvisor have built an entire business around harnessing customer insight and sharing that with their audience. Organizations now are increasingly asking for follow-up on all aspects of the service they delivered. We are also seeing a proliferation of user forums where customers share experiences and information with their peers.

Greg Moser, Power Objects
Integrating all your channels into a central CRM facilitates high-quality interactions. It allows for effective automation and scripting regardless of channel, which in turn ensues the right information and knowledge is being communicated to customers.

Involve the Business

While the contact center stands to markedly benefit from these omni-channel approaches to customer interaction and customer data management, it need not be the only organizational beneficiary.

By creating a stronger, more perpetual, more intimate relationship between brand and customer, an omni-channel experience can produce insights – and results – that matter to all business units.

It can enable a business to more productively develop its products. It can enable a business to more successfully market and sell its products. It can enable a business to more efficiently recruit employees. It can enable a business to more valuably establish corporate culture.

For this to happen, the contact center must first assure it is taking advantage of the omni-channel atmosphere. It must be engaging customers – whether indirectly, directly, passively or actively – at all touch points. It must be actively learning from customers every time they share anything approximating their "voice."

Once the contact center is able to deliver an omni-channel, customer-centric service experience and foster an omni-channel, customer-minded knowledge management process, the business then must seamlessly integrate the contact center with the rest of the business.

That is correct. "Integration" in an omni-channel world is not simply between e-mail, chat and web self-service. It is also between

the contact center and the sales department. It is between the customer service team and the human resources team.

By eliminating internal seams, the organization effectively turns the entire business into its customer experience department. Not all business units will contribute or benefit from the customer experience in the same way, but all will be connected to each other – and to customers.

We already know today's contact center data is driving business decisions. In the optimized, omni-channel organization, the "contact center" qualifier effectively becomes unnecessary. The data becomes business data, and it is used by every department as part of a broader effort to improve the customer's experience and the organization's bottom line.

We already know today's contact center is engaging customers at a variety of touch points. In the optimized, omni-channel organization, the "contact center" qualifier effectively becomes unnecessary. The touch points become broader customer experience portals, and the entire business is capable of fostering the most relevant and worthwhile form of engagement.

Expert Perspectives

Michael Mills, CGS
As the central repository for all customer call information across all supported channels, the contact center can provide detailed insight into the problems and issues that are impacting a company's network, infrastructure and organization. For example, call center analytics and trending metrics have the ability to show that a large component of end-user issues are related around COTS (commercial off the shelf) products that could be easily resolved through some type of e-learning or training program. The analytics may also contain another set of frequent issues that are focused on the customer network or PC support infrastructure that could be resolved by implementing new technologies or processes. In both instances, the call center management team could communicate these findings to their customers, and simultaneously recommend a point of contact within their internal organizations that specializes in that type of support. In this way, the call center would be empowering the success of the greater business with its customers and with its internal organization.

Jeremy Payne, Enghouse Interactive
Today, the whole company is increasingly involved in customer service and in making sure customers are loyal and happy. Insight can be shared across the organization. Customer complaints about company solutions can be shared with product development; for example, and the marketing department can be provided with information about which campaigns work especially well.

Greg Moser, Power Objects
When successfully communicated across the business, omni-channel insights drive significant reductions in operational expenditure. They also uncover opportunities to drive more revenue through cross-selling and upselling.

Erich Dietz, InMoment
Some of our most innovative clients have formed or participate in cross-departmental action groups charged with identifying and vetting insights, creating action plans to get the information to the right places and people, assigning stewards, and holding the teams accountable to report back to the larger group with their progress.

While the contact center is a hub of customer information, we rarely have the ability to do anything besides perform triage for a problem created in other parts of the business. We can definitely make customers' experiences worse, but when we share information and work across departments to address root causes, we can also be part of a much bigger solution.

The best leaders understand the potential of what contact centers can offer colleagues and customers, and they also have the most strategic and comprehensive view of their business and customers. They also have the level of influence required to get the right resources and support to affect real change. The most important thing to remember, however, is that while the buck must stop somewhere, companies have got to do everything possible to help each manager and employee with the information it takes to fully own the experiences for which they have responsibility.