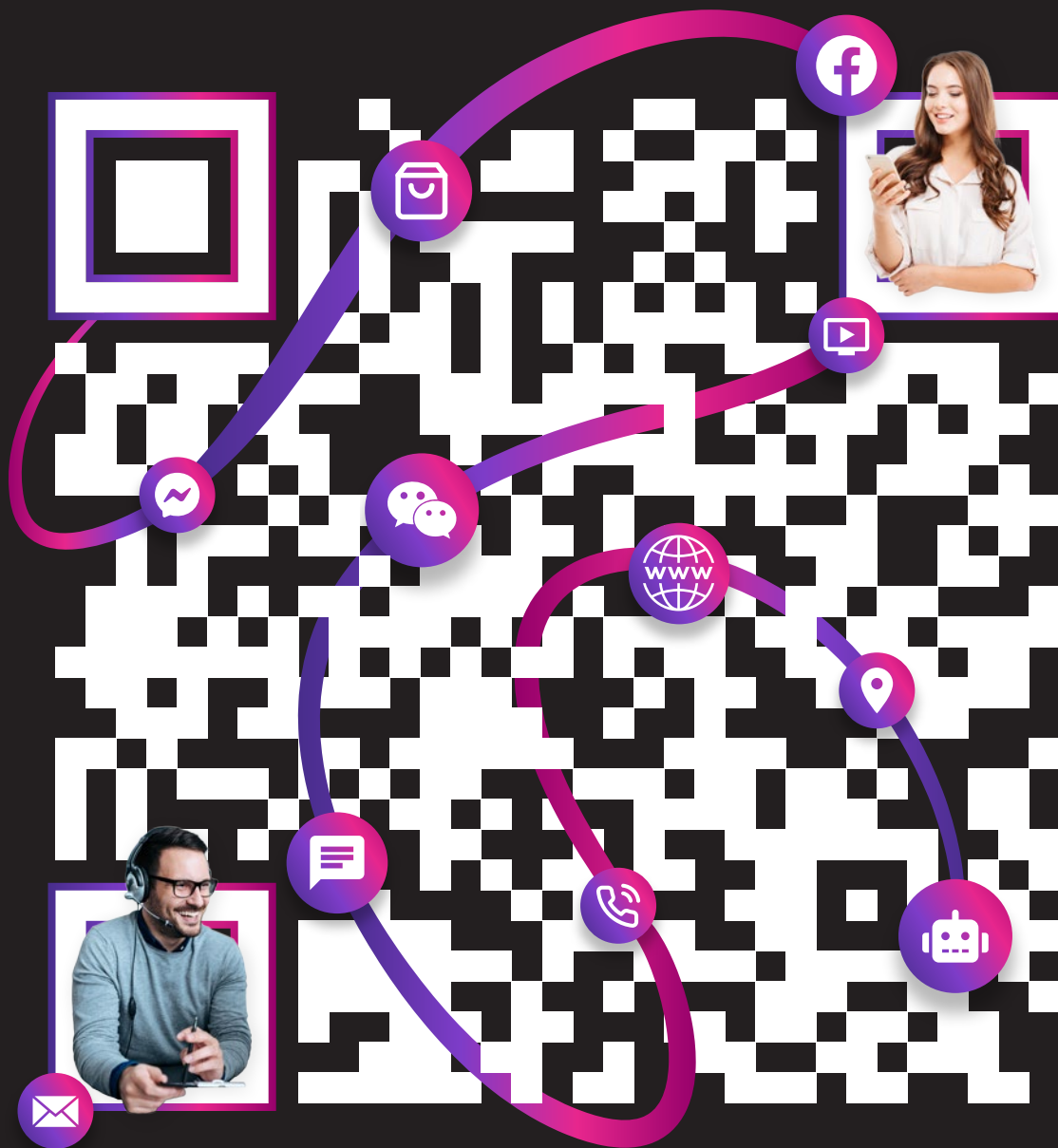



Cultivating a future-proof customer journey strategy

Integrating changing customer preferences into a seamless phygital-first experience





Preface: The contact center helps digitally transformed businesses thrive.....	1
Meet your customer experience experts.....	3
Customer-centered phygital experience.....	4
Today's new customer experience reality.....	6
Customers are more digital.....	6
Today's customer journey is more complex.....	8
Changing customer behavior and expectations.....	10
Search is the start of the customer experience.....	13
The click-and-mortar phygital future.....	16
How to succeed in today's new reality.....	18
Know your customer.....	20
Reorient full business around the customer.....	22
Empower agile agents of change.....	24
The path to differentiated CX is the contact center.....	26
Sources.....	28

Preface:

The contact center helps transformed businesses thrive

When the pandemic forced a seemingly overnight exodus from in-person to online, consumers and businesses were thrust five years forward in digital adoption.¹ Contactless consumers spent more time online and their eCommerce spending surged.² As businesses tried to adjust to a new, digitally prominent reality, they exposed gaps in their technology and service channels, operational weakness, policy shortcomings, and insufficient staff skillsets.³ To survive, 84% of decision makers invested in new workflow and processes, 78% in new technology,⁴ and 85% of CEOs accelerated their digital transformation initiatives.⁵

• **85%** of CEOs accelerated their digital transformation initiatives⁵

In most instances, improving customer experience was either a primary driver or key benefit. Customer experience is the biggest way companies are differentiating:

• **73%** of consumers say a differentiated experience is what inspires their loyalty⁶

CX isn't just a competitive edge—it's necessary for survival. Consumers are increasingly impatient with brands that don't deliver on their expectations. Imagine one-third to one-fifth of your business walking away for good. That can happen after one bad experience.⁷

This is why the contact center is core to transformation initiatives. For transforming businesses, the contact center enables a reorientation around digital-first customer preferences, values, and behaviors. The contact center can't be one touchpoint for support at the end of a journey; it's the hub of experience throughout the customer's end-to-end journey. It's the means for scaling always-on, differentiated, and personalized omnichannel customer experience.

To better understand today's landscape and how to find CX inertia amidst changing customer behavior, we've enlisted the help of three leading CX thought leaders, consultants, and analysts. In the coming pages, we'll explore the transformed contact center's opportunity for enabling tomorrow's customer journeys, including:

- Shifting consumer behavior and expectations
- Using technology to enable digital-first omnichannel customer experience
- Understanding an increasingly complex customer journey and integrating customer preferences into your experience strategy
- And, succeeding in this new reality

With expert advice and insights, you'll understand the role of the contact center in enabling customer experience for larger business outcomes and how to gain the most value from transformation. Keep reading to take the CX lead and better actualize customer relationships that last.



Meet your customer experience experts



Jeannie Walters

Founder and CEO,
Experience Investigators



Jeannie's role as Founder and CEO at Experience Investigators and Certified Customer Experience Professional (CCXP) promotes one mission: To Create Fewer Ruined Days for Customers.™ Hundreds of companies, from small businesses to Fortune 500s, have relied on Jeannie's expertise to consult, train, and speak on how to improve customer loyalty and retention, employee engagement, and overall customer experience. Jeannie's writings have appeared in Forbes, CustomerThink, The Future of Customer Engagement and Commerce, and My Customer, as well as university-level textbooks. She was named in the Huffington Post as one of the "Top 100 Most Social Customer Service Pros on Twitter," in the Online Marketing Institute's "Top 20 Digital Marketing Strategists," one of DemandLab's "5 Women Who Are Leading the Charge in B2B CX," and as "One of the Top Customer Experience Influencers to Know" by CXPA.



Jo Boswell

Founder, Sentio-B



As the founder and director of UK-based Sentio-B, a customer experience consulting firm, Jo provides CX transformation expertise and coaching services to global organizations across a range of sectors. She advises customer experience leaders on becoming more customer-centric by using data, insight, and technology to improve customer experience, as well as how to achieve the necessary internal alignment to support change initiatives. At her previous 27-year career in several leadership roles at British Airways culminating in Head of Customer Value Management, Jo was the driving force behind the airline's "Know Me" initiative, a successful cross-functional transformation strategy. Jo's clients benefit from her first-hand experience, and specialization in transforming the customer experience and delivering personalization at scale.



Charlene Li

Founder and Senior
Fellow, Altimeter



As founder of the disruptive analyst firm Altimeter and graduate of Harvard Business School, Charlene has cultivated two decades of expertise on digital transformation, leadership, customer experience, and the future of work. She has been named one of the most creative people in business by *Fast Company* and helps organizations disrupt the mold of their industries by providing business leaders with executive support, speaking, training, and advisory and board work. Charlene is also a distinguished author of six books, including the *New York Times* bestseller *Open Leadership*, and co-author of the critically acclaimed book *Groundswell*. Look for her latest book, bestseller *The Disruption Mindset*.

Customer-centered phygital experience

When QR codes first started circulating in Western markets around 2010, the rollout was more shtick than success.

QR codes, or quick response codes, were originally invented in Japan by a Toyota subsidiary in 1994 as a manufacturing process improvement to track cars and parts. They are scannable square-shaped, pixelated patterns that store and encode readable information like barcodes. However, QR codes hold 7,000 characters where barcodes can only have 20. This bridging of the physical and digital worlds represents a phygital experience, or one that marries online and offline characteristics for a better experience.

Phygital experience, or one that marries online and offline characteristics for a better experience.

But when QR codes first rolled out in Western Markets around 2010, marketers and advertisers who saw potential in extending the physical through digital didn't quite think through their application. They were used senselessly and inconveniently, like in underground subway stations without internet or on billboards where drivers had fleeting opportunity to scan them (assuming their hands weren't already occupied driving). On top of clunky attempts that added no value for the consumer, the experience was cumbersome. Users had to download a separate QR-code reader app to scan them.

Experience is why for a full decade, QR codes were too much effort to be more relevant than a punchline. Even in 2017 when Apple released a reader built into the iPhone camera, it still wasn't enough to redeem their reputation. But then the COVID-19 pandemic happened, and QR codes became relevant.

In fact, as of the most recent 2020 data, 83% of the population has scanned QR codes, and are scanned weekly by more than 40% of consumers in the United States and UK.⁸

QR codes enabled a CDC-recommended contactless experience: restaurants replaced paper for digital menus, hotels initiated and improved the check in process for guests, and major retailers used QR codes for cashierless checkout and loyalty programs. QR codes became a necessary conduit between humans and information they needed easily, quickly, in the moment.

What's more interesting about the decades-long, pre-pandemic history of QR codes, is that while Americans and Brits metaphorically eyerolled QR codes' presence, Asian markets ubiquitously adopted them. QR codes supported—and continue to support—some Asian markets' networks of digital payments. They helped track inventory and were used by business owners who couldn't afford alternative payment methods. They acted as modern business cards linking first impressions to websites and portfolios of work. And even brides wore them around their neck to collect paperless gifts from guests.⁹

There are a few differences in the failed and successful Western adoptions. Widespread digital adoption of better technology and Wi-Fi, plus rapidly shifting consumer behavior forced businesses to reimagine and accommodate an elevated customer experience. The initial Western rollout didn't focus on the consumer need, didn't seek to make their lives effortless, and technology didn't support a seamless adoption. In Asia, technology enabled the customer experience and put customers' needs first.

What's the lesson for CX leaders in this example of phygital customer experience? Successful digital experiences rely on technology and CX initiatives will fail unless they prioritize the customer's needs.



Today's new customer experience reality

Customers are more digital

One reason QR codes saw rapid second-wave adoption in Western markets was because of increased consumer and business digital adoption. In fact, from November 2020 through April 2021, McKinsey and Company saw 70 million more people across Europe use digital services for the first time.¹⁰ This is the equivalent of fast-forwarding digital growth by five years.¹¹

Digital adoption relates to increased use of online tools and technology and digital channels, like email, website, chat, social media, mobile app, text, and chatbots or virtual agents.

Jeannie Walters has spent two decades working on CX transformations with leaders from Verizon to Allstate Insurance. She explains the pace:

"We provided customers with more digital options—we had to in some cases," Walters says.

But these changes in digital adoption and consumption were not limited to younger, digital native generations like millennials and Gen Z. Digital transplant generations started going online to buy groceries, make appointments, and stay connected to families. Walters specifically mentions baby boomers showing the largest influx in digital engagement:

"Some of them thought, 'I'm never going to be a digital customer,' but guess what? Now they love it," she says.

Online use and spending are unlikely to change: two-thirds of consumers have tried new kinds of shopping, and 65% intend to continue this path.¹²

What this means is that your company doesn't have just one front door for customer experience—you have more than 30 primarily digital channels and counting.

Emerging digital channel trends for the next five years

- Voice will not disappear, but voice interactions will continue to decrease in favor of text, email, and social media channels for millennials, Gen Y, and Gen Z. Gen X considers it a last resort channel.¹³
- There's an increasing popularity and focus on messaging services, like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and WeChat.¹⁴
- Social channels wax and wane faster than traditional channels, so it's likely some will be less popular than they are today, others might be more popular, and there will likely be new channels.
- Digital interactions will become richer, with added visuals, images, and video.¹⁵

To future-proof your contact center, it's important not to simply offer digital channels for the sake of it. Not all channels are created equal, and sometimes enabling agents to add or switch channels without losing context is much better than forcing an interaction into a channel that is not the best option for the customer's issue anymore.

When applicable, direct consumers to the best channel to resolve their issue. For a couple of examples on what this looks like, one company might direct consumers to digital channels in their IVR, or another might publish average wait times for different channels on their website, enabling consumers to make an educated choice.

Contact center leaders wanting to future-proof their CX should evaluate seamless [next-gen omnichannel](#) options where they can flexibly add and integrate a breadth of social channel offerings, and even "bring-your-own channel" to accommodate virtually any digital channel.

Let's take a closer look at how widespread digital adoption impacts the buyer journey.

Today's customer journey is more complex

Every journey is different. And although customers are preferentially increasing digital channel usage, their journeys aren't contained to digital channels alone.

Let's consider the car buying process of two different consumers: One customer might take months preparing for purchase. They look at annual consumer ratings to compare options, watch YouTube videos to evaluate car features remotely, interact with a mobile app for appointments and inventory availability, visit multiple lots where they meet with a few reps, and test drive multiple options across several months before making a purchase.

On the other hand, another person might leave for the grocery store, stop at a lot on a whim, test drive one car, and perform a quick search to negotiate pricing. But ultimately, they went out for groceries and came home with a new car.

These two customers have different buying journeys, yet they both use a variety of offline and online channels. So even if customers are preferentially increasing digital channel usage, their journeys aren't contained to digital channels alone.

“Customers don't think of themselves as digital customers. We still have to think of the rest of their journey in order to support their digital journey in the best way.”



Jeannie Walters
Founder and CEO, Experience Investigators

Because of the increased digital adoption, customer journeys have seen big changes. After all, your customer's journey doesn't begin or end with a single moment of customer service.

How we think about the Customer Journey

Wrong



Awareness

Familiarity

Consideration

Purchase

Loyalty

Contact Center

For support interactions at end journey

Right



Awareness

Familiarity

Consideration

Purchase

Loyalty

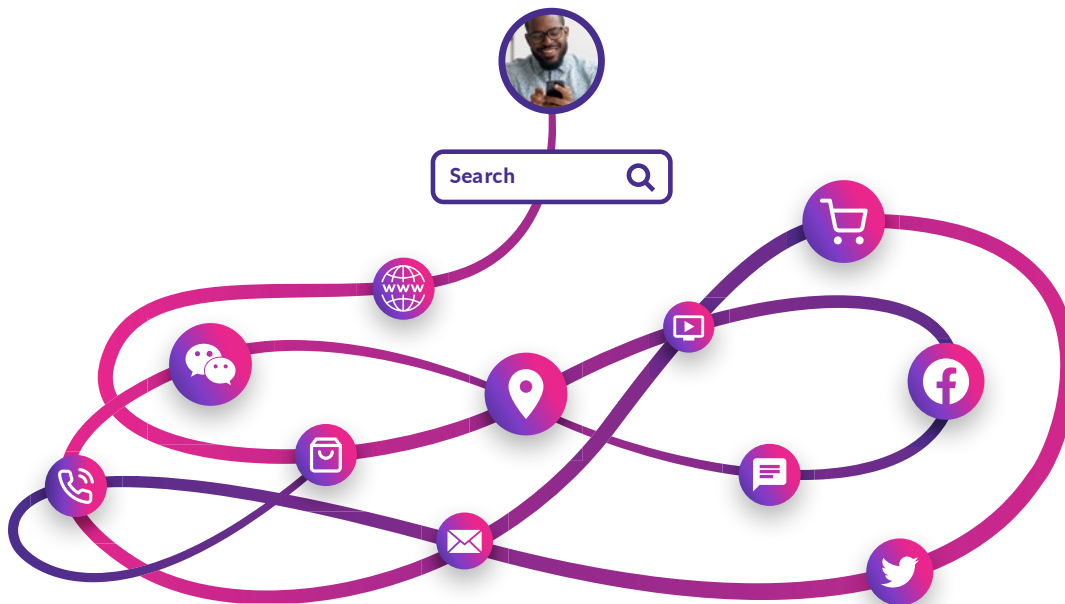
Contact Center

Support end-to-end buyer journey

Consumers interact with companies across on- and offline channels on many devices.

They have more choices—and are better informed. And this leads to increasingly more sophisticated buyers and buyer’s journeys where the path between a buying trigger and purchase gets complicated. Much so, that Google’s calling the place between the buying trigger and the purchase the “[messy middle](#).”¹⁶

There is no typical customer journey. Linear and predictable journeys are obsolete.



The contact center is no longer just a place to respond to customer issues at the end of the journey—it’s the front door for customers to engage with your business.

With customers’ increased use of digital channels and online devices, focusing on isolated channels or touchpoints a customer makes with a business and its products is problematic.

“Instead of thinking about, ‘What’s it like to order something on our website?’ What we need to be able to answer is, ‘What is it like to be a customer?’” Walters says.

Each micro-moment is as important as the sum of interactions. It also means contact centers can drive more value and business outcomes than ever before.

91% of customers say good service makes them more likely to make another purchase¹⁷

Given this larger role and opportunity for the contact center, it becomes much more critical to understand the end-to-end journey. Having a 360-degree view of each and all customers in an integrated place helps make sense of the digital footprints.

Changing customer behavior and expectations

Gone are the days when all you needed to do to sell a product was put it on a shelf. Businesses not only have to go online to reach customers, but they also must work harder to maintain them. Digital adoption set the bar higher for consumers who gained more choices and experienced higher quality interactions.

Customer experience thought leader and consultant Jo Boswell has been at the forefront of customer expectations and digital transformation throughout her 27-year career with British Airways where she led the company's integration of physical and digital customer experience before leaving in 2017 to found CX consultancy, Sentio-B. Boswell notes an industry-agnostic trend for businesses who are now competing on global levels:

"The Amazons, Netflix, and Ubers of this world have set a whole new level of standards and expectations for customers," Boswell says.

“ Now, we judge every organization around the best experience we're used to receiving in our everyday lives, and consumers are much less forgiving if an organization is unable to deliver on their needs.



Jo Boswell
Founder, Sentio-B



Today's consumers have an abundance of choice in a borderless and boundless digital landscape. This means any bad interaction risks your business:

• **32%** of global consumers will walk away after one bad experience¹⁸

Customers decide whether to engage with businesses, often based on how the business supports their needs and expectations:

• **66%** of customers expect companies to understand their needs and expectations¹⁹



Many customer expectations and behaviors were already on-pace and accelerated during 2020, but now the CX bar is lifted. In fact, 59% of customers say the pandemic raised their standards for customer service.²⁰

The thought of competing with leading digital innovators like Amazon to achieve higher customer expectations might seem daunting. But, CX thought leader, author, and founding Senior Fellow of Altimeter, Charlene Li, has some advice:

“Customer expectations are ridiculously sky high in some ways, but at the same time what they are asking for is really common sense,” Li says.

Customers want to shop when they want, how they want, and where they want. And they expect to do so without effort—especially on digital channels.

Although successful CX might look different for every company, there’s a few foundational musts on which the bar rests.



7 common-sense customer expectations for today

E

Effortless

Consumers should be able to complete interactions with little friction and effort.

97% of customers have backed out of a purchase because it was inconvenient to them²¹

X

Xenial

Xenial means being a good host. Customers expect empathy and want to be known and understood. Companies should strive to anticipate their needs and customize with real-time, contextually relevant content and responses according to customer preferences and needs.

87% of companies say customers expect omnichannel personalization²²

P

Purpose-driven

Consumers want to support brands that support what they value. Companies should stand for more than just the products or services they sell, and the brand promise needs to directly connect to customer experience.

8 in 10 consumers say purpose is at least as important as CX²³

E

Efficient

Consumers want a company accessible when they need help. They expect simple and quick resolution, minimal wait or hold times.

82% of customers expect to solve complex problems by speaking with one person²⁴

C

Consistent

Consumers expect the same quality across channels.

80% of customers expect the same level of service regardless of where they engage²⁵

T

Transparent

Consumers want to trust that companies are who they say they are, that their private data is safe, and the information they receive is accurate.

86% of consumers want more transparency over how their personal information is used²⁶

S

Seamless

Consumers want a connected cross-channel journey where they don't have to start over or repeat information in each channel. Interactions should easily elevate to agent, customer historic data should travel with customer, and the customer should be able to jump from various channels as they prefer.

96% of customers expect companies to make it easy without the need to repeat information²⁷

Search is the start of the customer experience

The contact center needs to be available anywhere throughout the customer journey. This means supporting customers long before an agent-assisted interaction is necessary, starting where most customers start their journeys—with search. Across the retail, travel, and finance industries, customer web search is a dominate channel throughout all phases of the buyer's journey.²⁸

“Search is the first stop on the consideration journey – and sometimes the only stop. This raises the stakes for companies to show up well in search because if impatient consumers find a thorough and suitable solution, they will hit the buy button with confidence,” Li says.

Whether they're a prospect or an existing customer, and whether they're searching Google, your app, website, asking Siri, or using a chatbot interface, customers prefer and expect to surface the right answer, in the right place, at the right time:

• **66%** of customers use a search engine like Google to find solutions to issues²⁹

• **68%** of customers would rather use self-service channels—like knowledge bases or customer portals—for simple questions or issues³⁰

But currently, businesses aren't delivering. In fact, Gartner found 70% of customers use self-service channels during their resolution journey, but only 9% are wholly contained in self-service.³¹ Meaning: they aren't getting the fast, low-effort resolution they expect.

To provide a quick resolution and better contain their self-service, businesses should control the consumer experience on their digital properties like website, chatbot, or mobile app. This also means using Google as an entry point for support. Businesses should surface answers the customer is seeking, and ensure the answers appear as close to the top search results as possible.

The way to achieve this is through a centralized, public-facing support article repository, [or knowledge base](#). Beyond just a collection of FAQ or help articles, an intelligent knowledge program is an ongoing process of creating, capturing, distributing, optimizing, and sharing information. It's most successful when it's mobile-responsive, easily indexed by Google, capitalizes on AI and automation, integrates across web, app, chatbot, and other communication channels, and supports employees and customers.

To build a knowledge base, businesses should identify the most common inquiries and product offerings most frequently needing support. Customer search data in tandem with self-service adoption or success rate can help identify opportunities for better accuracy, effectiveness, or to fill any gaps in existing information.

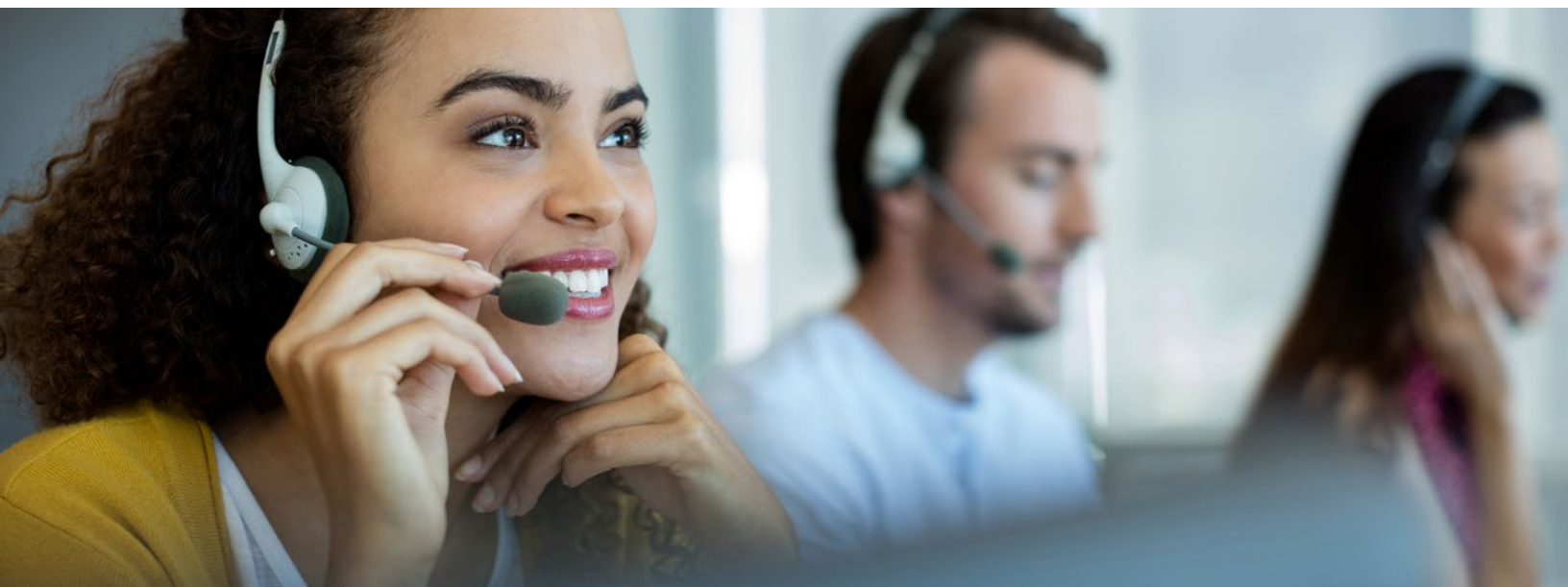
“Piecing together disparate search keywords into a coherent picture is nearly impossible without AI,” Li says. “This advanced technology creates the opportunity to understand where your customers are in their journey from the very first moment they engage with you, regardless of channel.”

Speaking of channels: one cost-efficient and quick way to provide an experience that meets customers wherever they are is by using an integrated [chatbot or virtual agent application](#) to make it easier and more convenient for the customer to get support, information, or content they need. These bots should be placed in touchpoints of the journey where the customer is already seeking self-service, such as on social media channels, web chat, or mobile apps.

To get even higher resolution and self-service containment from your chatbot while also lessening the load on agents, upgrade your chatbot to a virtual agent. These intelligent, AI-powered chatbots can be built and integrated with the foundational knowledge base you establish, so that the chatbot can find and provide the most relevant answer the customer is seeking.

Customer self-service needs to be sized to fit your customer experience needs and goals. To double check you’ve covered the bases, we’ve provided a checklist on the following page.

And we’re still just at the start of the journey.



Checklist for achieving successful customer-first self-service

- Enable customers to search for and access information they need in channels and locations where they prefer 24/7 before an interaction becomes necessary
- Pull from a single source of truth where knowledge is always up-to-date and written in the language customers use
- Understand where the user is coming from, and offer recommendations for where they'll need to go next
- Provide value by linking contextually related content and providing context on why the suggested answer is the best fit
- Personalize experiences to show only the most relevant content by using conditional content and dynamic permissions.
- Identify when self-service isn't the best channel and proactively suggest the ideal path to a resolution
- Optimize mobile-responsive knowledge content so customers can find what they need when searching your website or using search engines



Looking for more self-service advice and best practices?

Download your copy of
“Effortless service, happier customers.”

Get it now

The click-and-mortar phygital future

So far, we've established that the full journey is important. And it's not just digital interactions that matter.

For instance, while 62% of customers prefer shopping online and using curbside pickup,³² Google's findings indicate 36% of retail customers prefer shopping in physical stores for the benefit of seeing and feeling the product or for favorable pricing or deals.³³

Most people will continue booking their travel online, and online banking transactions will continue to increase, but some consumers will still gravitate toward in-person financial transactions where they prefer getting information or advice from staff, or don't trust providing their financial information online.³⁴

Even digital native retailers have started opening physical locations. From Warby Parker, Wayfair, Amazon, and Google, eCommerce finds value in click and mortar. Some other examples of phygital experience include:

- [Google Store](#) customers bring in hardware for in-store repair and interact and experience physical technology in a museum-like space.
- [Amwell](#) is a telehealth provider that offers on-demand, next-day appointments via video where doctors are available 24/7 and is covered by most insurance providers.
- [Amazon Go](#) stores with "just walk out," contactless pay technology are enabled with AI-powered sensors that detect when customers remove and return products to shelves.
- Capital One evolved physical branches into [Capital One® Cafés](#) that offer co-working spaces, workshops, and education.

What this data suggests is that CX should be digital-first, but not strictly digital. Boswell shares a future prediction:

"Given the huge shift to digital channels that we have seen, I think we will see an increase in customer offerings that blend the digital and physical," she says

Customers want to browse, buy, and fulfill their orders from anywhere, anytime. They expect the convenience and instant gratification of digital with the personalized reassurance of physical interactions. And with the increasing investments in AI, automation, and integrated cloud technology, there's a larger blurring of boundaries between physical and digital channels.

To find the most agility, companies will need to continually evaluate and reinvent how to keep customers engaged through elevated phygital experiences. With increasing digital transformations, AI, automation, and integrated cloud technology make the seamless blurring of boundaries more accessible.

Phygital experience by the numbers

- **55%** of customers ask digital assistants for help or information while they're shopping in a physical location³⁵
- **63%** want video in lieu of customer support chat³⁶
- **67%** of customers want telehealth and digital doctor visits³⁷
- **69%** of consumers expect to use AR and VR to visually sample products³⁸
- **70%** of customers say buy online pickup in store (BOPIS) improved their experience³⁹
- **73%** of customers prefer to visit a company's website before contacting customer service⁴⁰
- **88%** excellent is what retail customers rate contactless pay experience⁴¹

How to succeed in today's new reality

So far, we've covered and made sense of a dichotomy of rules for today's new reality: The full journey matters, but so does every touchpoint. Customers are digital-first, but aren't strictly digital customers. There's foundational CX expectations for success, but CX success is specific to each company.

Today's new CX reality



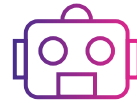
Journeys aren't linear



Customers are digital-first



Journeys start with search



Customers want self-service



Customers want phygital experience

But if you're like most customer experience leaders, meeting next-generation omnichannel that supports customers' increasing use of digital channels and penchant for self-service and hybrid experience poses big challenges:

27% Only 27% of businesses give themselves an excellent rating in seamless omnichannel⁴²

The strategy for overcoming the challenges and future-proofing your CX across physical and digital channels relies on three foundational pillars:

How to succeed in today's new CX reality



Know your customer

Reorient business around the customer

Establish an agile and empowered workforce

Companies hoping to stay fit for the future should prioritize its people, systems, processes, data, and technology around the customer. Transformation of tools and technology make it easier to know your customer, to support an agile and empowered workforce, and support integration of business processes, people, and systems in support of a customer-obsessed business.



Know your customer

Is meeting the shortlist of seven expectations good enough?

“Good enough is the minimum, but great is what we’re going for,” Walters says. “It’s important to start with the customer’s perspective, not the channel they happen to use.”

A great customer experience depends on knowing who your customers are, how they behave, what their needs are, and why. Cloud and AI-powered technology make a complete, 360-degree view of customers possible.



Customers want to be recognized for who they are and where they are on their journey.



Jeannie Walters

Founder and CEO, Experience Investigators

The goal should be to know your customer so well that no matter where they are coming from, you can anticipate where they will need service.

Understanding how customer preferences evolve or where their experiences fall short is critical for determining where to invest resources for improvement. The insights learned can help support every department from research and development to sales and marketing.

Delivering and responding to changing customer expectations means continuously evaluating real-time customer data and integrating these needs, which is why cloud contact center technology becomes an important factor in delivering experience. Amidst unpredictable shifts in customer behaviors, technology enables businesses agility and offers CX inertia.

In fact, businesses that doubled down on enterprise technology investments, like cloud and AI, to support customer expectations are growing 5X the rate of laggards.⁴³

The advances in AI and technology make it easier to both capture and understand the “big data” we’ve been talking about for a decade.

“We have access to all this amazing data so we can build a customer journey map based on all interactions and channels instead of just one,” Walters says.

Journey maps can help identify customer experience issues and opportunity and can be used cross-organizationally to maintain alignment on CX priorities. This is an essential exercise companies should consistently and regularly evaluate and update. More so, companies need to turn the insight into action.

For digital-first customers, new KPIs are needed to measure success—for instance, response times vary by channel and complexity. First contact resolution is increasingly important because any interaction that can't be resolved on the first attempt can indicate an opportunity for improvement. Customer feedback, customer effort, sentiment, satisfaction, and NPS scores can work in parallel with each other.

But measurement isn't one-size-fits-all.

"There's not one magic metric," Walters says. "It all needs to funnel up to the strategy."

With the changes in customer behavior, there's no better time to map the journey.



Access a customer journey map template and Jeannie Walter's expert guidance for metrics that matter when mapping digital-first journeys in this mini guide.

[Download now](#)

Here are some other ideas for capturing data to help you understand your customer:

- Enable a customer listening or voice of customer program that uses customer feedback, sentiment, social media, reviews, polls, and other data
- Invest in full-journey customer insights, including web search data
- Use true omnichannel technology that can support a real-time view of the full customer journey in any channel
- Formalize a feedback mechanism to get input from frontline agents

For many companies, accessing and using this data is a daunting challenge.

• **15%** Only 15% of companies have a unified view of customer data and the ability to make use of those insights⁴⁴

So, most importantly, companies need to take action based on these insights.

And the barriers to using this data aren't always what you'd expect.

Reorient full business around the customer

This customer-first strategy is something analyst, author, and CX thought leader Charlene Li speaks a lot about. What she's found is that companies that successfully center their focus on the customer make strides in digital transformation, employee engagement, and diversity and inclusion.

"More than anything else, are you customer obsessed? Do you constantly think about the customers?" Li asks.

Companies can track customer behavior across many channels and devices. On average, companies use 16 different technology applications leveraging customer data and 25 different data sources for generating customer insights and engagement.⁴⁵ This is why 77% of executives state their technology architecture is becoming very critical or critical to the overall success of their organization.⁴⁶

The right technology enables easier management and application of customer data. But technology is only part of it.

"It has never been an issue of listening to the voice of customers," Li says. "It's about making sure that the right people inside the organization can hear that voice of the customer and translate that voice to trusted employees and team members."

Where Li finds businesses commonly fail at delivering common sense customer experience is in staying attuned and responding to customer needs. She believes understanding what customers need is a practice in empathy, of walking in their shoes and looking from their perspective. Businesses absorbed in their siloed infrastructure are too busy tripping on their own feet. Customers don't interact with each channel or business unit; their relationship with the business is singular. Businesses that don't unify their operations become estranged from customer expectations.

"If you want to begin a digital transformation and create disruption, then create a counsel inside of your organization of customer-obsessed people," she says.

If everyone from the executives down to the front-line agents begin prioritizing what's best for the customer, the experience misalignment in what businesses think they deliver and what customers say they don't begin to close. To do this, businesses need to listen, and create and improve processes to respond to unmet customer needs.

• **53%** of leaders say organizational silos are the largest barrier to improving customer experience⁴⁷

It's not just about having a centralized, single view of the customer's full journey, it's about implementing an organizational structure to make use of those insights. Just as the QR code adoption history exemplified and Li speaks to here, digitizing the experience isn't enough. Businesses must adopt customer-first thinking, and transform the full business—people, systems, processes, and technology—around the customer. For many, getting to that place starts with careful change management, where the processes and people are considered as much as the technology.



Empower agile agents of change

If the contact center is the hub of customer experience, agents are the beating heart. They are the front line to customers throughout the end-to-end journey and their insight should be used to help support your customer experience strategy.

“Agents are the canary in the coal mine,” Walters says. “They are hearing things before we see the numbers, so giving them mechanisms for feedback is really important.”

It’s important to remember that feedback isn’t always negative. Walters advises sharing positive customer feedback.

“We don’t share positive feedback enough, and by recognizing and celebrating those situations, we’re also training agents on how it can be done and turn those positive moments into best practices.”

For contact centers at digitally transformed businesses, agents are no longer supporting break-fix customer support issues at the end of journeys. They’re helping customers coming from a variety of channels at every place of their journey. With AI and automation supporting self-service, it means the interactions agents are supporting are much more complex.

● **77%** of agents say their role is more strategic than two years ago⁴⁸

“Instead of thinking about these roles as responsive, we need to think about how we can empower our agents,” Walters says.

It’s also an important aspect for customers:

● **41%** of customers say perception of employee experience is important to them⁴⁹

This evolved agent role means there’s a stronger need for interpersonal skills, and with wider support for everything from fulfillment to product information, it will require a formalized onboarding, and on-going training and coaching mechanism that can support them. And agents would agree.

● **55%** of agents say they need better training to do their jobs well⁵⁰



The right tools and technology can help make it easier to support evolved agents. The right tools support a workforce that reflects digital demand through aspects like Forecasting and scheduling models, as well as seamless asynchronous digital channel support.

An AI-powered knowledge base and internal facing chatbot with robotic process automation will act as a catch all for any issues an agent doesn't have the tacit knowledge to answer. AI-powered, real-time interaction guidance using sentiment analysis can help guide an agent on behavioral changes they can make to improve satisfaction in the moment, coaching them on hard-to-train interpersonal skills. This infrastructure of training and technology is necessary for improving CX:

• **70%** of executives say positive agent experience leads to improved CX⁵¹

Agents' biggest motivation for working in customer service is helping the customer,⁵² and to keep them engaged, the agent experience should mirror the customer experience in terms of effortless, seamless, and empowered self-service.

The path to differentiated CX is the contact center

If it hasn't been made clear yet, there's a ripe opportunity for the contact center to support the end-to-end customer journey in today's new reality of customer experience. Not synchronizing the technology, systems, processes, and people around the customer, and treating the contact center as the means for successful CX will penalize your growth.

The contact center is no longer a cost-center. It's a profit center that's critical to the bottom line, driving larger outcomes than ever before.

In fact, organizations that use the right technology to revamp their CX strategy see a:⁵³



**15-20% increase
in customer
satisfaction**



**20-40%
cost reduction**



**20% improved
conversions**

But don't take our word for why CX matters to your organization, trust our experts:

- "Customers are experiencing the brand and telling others about their experiences—whether the organization is intentional about customer experience or not. Those organizations that plan and deliver meaningful experiences drive better business results through higher retention rates, lower service costs, and more customer referrals. The results don't just stop there—employee retention and happiness also increase if customer experience is done well. There are literally no areas of the business that aren't positively impacted by understanding customers, providing a more seamless experience for them, and creating a customer-first culture." —Jeannie Walters
- "Today's consumers expect a more personalized and easy experience and they will migrate to brands that are able to deliver that consistently. A superior customer experience is vital for creating an emotional connection with customers, which ultimately drives customer loyalty and advocacy." —Jo Boswell
- "Magic happens when every aspect of your strategy, process, and culture aligns around delivering an exceptional customer experience—it becomes a flywheel that drives the organization to higher levels of performance." —Charlene Li

There's no better time to start, as the gap between leaders and laggards of CX keeps getting wider. Since 2018, the top quintile of CX leaders grew more than 300 billion and the laggards lost the same equivalent.

In CX, the right technology matters. Cloud-based, next-gen omnichannel isn't a competitive edge—the customer experience it offers is necessary for survival, resilience, and success in the continually changing digital-first era.



Move at the speed of the customer

If you're ready to be the beating heart of your company's CX and build lasting customer relationships, then watch a demo to see how NICE CXone can help and speak to one of our digital experts now.

[Speak to a digital expert](#)

[Watch demo now](#)

Sources

- ¹ McKinsey & Company: [Five Fifty: The Quickening](#) (2020)
- ² Google: [Rethink Ready: Spotting the Signals](#) (2020)
- ³ Salesforce: [State of Service, 4th Edition](#) (2020)
- ⁴ Salesforce: [State of the Connected Customer, 4th Edition](#) (2020)
- ⁵ Deloitte: [For CEOs, 2021 is the year of hope](#) (2021)
- ⁶ IDC: [The Future of Customers and Consumers: Creating Loyalty through Digital Transformation](#) (2020)
- ⁷ PWC: [Experience is Everything: Here's How to Get it Right](#) (2018)
- ⁸ Statista Research Department (MobileIron): [QR Code Sentiment Survey Results](#) (2020)
- ⁹ CNN: [Why China can't get enough of QR codes](#) (2017)
- ¹⁰ McKinsey & Company: [Will new digital habits stick in our post-pandemic world?](#) (2021)
- ¹¹ McKinsey & Company: [The next normal arrives: Trends that will define 2021—and beyond](#) (2021)
- ¹² McKinsey & Company: [The next normal arrives: Trends that will define 2021—and beyond](#) (2021)
- ¹³ NICE: [CXone Transformation Benchmark, Consumer Wave](#) (2020)
- ¹⁴ Statista: [Mobile messenger apps – Statistics and Facts](#) (2019)
- ¹⁵ Salesforce: [State of Service, 4th Edition](#) (2020)
- ¹⁶ Google: [Decoding Decisions: Making sense of the messy middle](#) (2020)
- ¹⁷ Salesforce: [State of the Connected Customer, 4th Edition](#) (2020)
- ¹⁸ PWC: [Experience is Everything: Here's How to Get it Right](#) (2018)
- ¹⁹ Salesforce: [State of the Connected Customer, 4th Edition](#) (2020)
- ²⁰ Salesforce: [State of the Connected Customer, 4th Edition](#) (2020)
- ²¹ National Retail Federation: [NRF's Winter 2020 Consumer View](#) (2020)
- ²² Deloitte: [2020 Update: A promise of growth and a path of complexity](#) (2020)
- ²³ Accenture: [Growth: It Comes Down to Experience](#) (2021)
- ²⁴ Salesforce: [State of Service, 4th Edition](#) (2020)
- ²⁵ Salesforce: [Trends in integrated customer experience](#) (2020)
- ²⁶ Salesforce: [State of the Connected Customer, 4th Edition](#) (2020)
- ²⁷ NICE CXone: [Customer Experience \(CX\) Transformation Benchmark](#) (2020)
- ²⁸ Google: [COVID changed the consumer journey, but what's likely to stick?](#) (2021)
- ²⁹ Accenture: [Next Generation Customer Service](#) (2019)
- ³⁰ Salesforce: [State of the Connected Customer – Third Edition](#) (2019)
- ³¹ Gartner: [Does Your Digital Customer Service Strategy Deliver](#) (2020)
- ³² Futurum Research/SAS: [Experience 2030: Pulse Report](#) (2020)
- ³³ Google: [COVID changed the consumer journey, but what's likely to stick?](#) (2021)
- ³⁴ Google: [COVID changed the consumer journey, but what's likely to stick?](#) (2021)
- ³⁵ Futurum Research/SAS: [Experience 2030: Pulse Report](#) (2020)
- ³⁶ Futurum Research/SAS: [Experience 2030: Pulse Report](#) (2020)
- ³⁷ Futurum Research/SAS: [Experience 2030: Pulse Report](#) (2020)
- ³⁸ Futurum Research/SAS: [Experience 2030: Pulse Report](#) (2020)
- ³⁹ National Retail Federation: [NRF's Winter 2020 Consumer View](#) (2020)
- ⁴⁰ Accenture: [Next Generation Customer Service](#) (2019)
- ⁴¹ Google: [COVID changed the consumer journey, but what's likely to stick?](#) (2021)
- ⁴² NICE: [CX Transformation Benchmark, Global Business Wave](#) (2020)
- ⁴³ Accenture: [Make the leap, take the lead](#) (2021)
- ⁴⁴ Salesforce/Harvard Business Review: [Making Customer Experience the Heart of the Enterprise](#) (2021)
- ⁴⁵ Deloitte: [How to win on customer experience](#) (2020)
- ⁴⁶ Accenture: [Technology Vision 2021](#) (2021)
- ⁴⁷ Salesforce/Harvard Business Review: [Making Customer Experience the Heart of the Enterprise](#) (2021)
- ⁴⁸ Salesforce: [State of Service, 4th Edition](#) (2020)
- ⁴⁹ KPMG: [Customer Experience in the New Reality](#) (2020)
- ⁵⁰ Salesforce: [State of Service, 4th Edition](#) (2020)
- ⁵¹ Forbes insights: [The Experience Equation: How Happy Employees and Customers Accelerate Growth](#) (2020)
- ⁵² ICMI: [State of Agent Experience and Engagement](#) (2019)
- ⁵³ McKinsey & Company: [Service industries can fuel growth by making digital customer experiences a priority](#) (2020)



With NICE, it's never been easier for organizations of all sizes around the globe to create extraordinary customer experiences while meeting key business metrics. Featuring the world's #1 cloud native customer experience platform, CXone, we're a worldwide leader in AI-powered contact center software. Over 25,000 organizations in more than 150 countries, including over 85 of the Fortune 100 companies, partner with NICE to transform—and elevate—every customer interaction.



Contact Us

tele | +1 866.965.7227
intl | +44 (0) 207.002.3000
email | info@NICEinContact.com
web | www.NICEinContact.com

© NICE All rights reserved