NICE·CXone CONTACTBABEL

The state of contact centre transformation in the new digital world

The State of Contact Centre Transformation in the New Digital World

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The effects of the pandemic have greatly accelerated the pace of change in contact centres, and there is no going back to how things were. Deprived of the ability to visit physical stores and offices, customers turned to the contact centre and companies' websites to answer their queries.

The drive to unify these sources of knowledge and assistance is urgent and growing, becoming the digital contact centre, which can predict customer's requirements, be proactive in delivering the correct information and make relevant knowledge available to whichever employee or automated system needs it, when they need it.

The agent role in the digital contact centre has already expanded to handle complex matters but will also be needed to support the customer throughout their entire journey, from pre-sales advice, to onboarding, fulfilment, issue handling, customer recovery and post-sales support. These capabilities cannot come at the expense of letting costs run out of control: agents will be supported with AI virtual assistants on the desktop to advise the next best action, provide all relevant information and carry out customer sentiment analysis. Automated bots will help with handling repetitive tasks and delivering proactive outbound contact with customers to reduce unnecessary calls to the contact centre.

The agent community will not return en-masse to centralised working. The distributed model of hybrid office / home working will remain, with gig workers and other knowledge workers in the organisation added to the mix, supported by flexible, scalable cloud-based solutions.

The contact centre will act as a front door for a digitally-transformed business. It's no longer just a place to respond to customer issues, but now has the power to build customer relationships that last, driving better business outcomes than ever before.
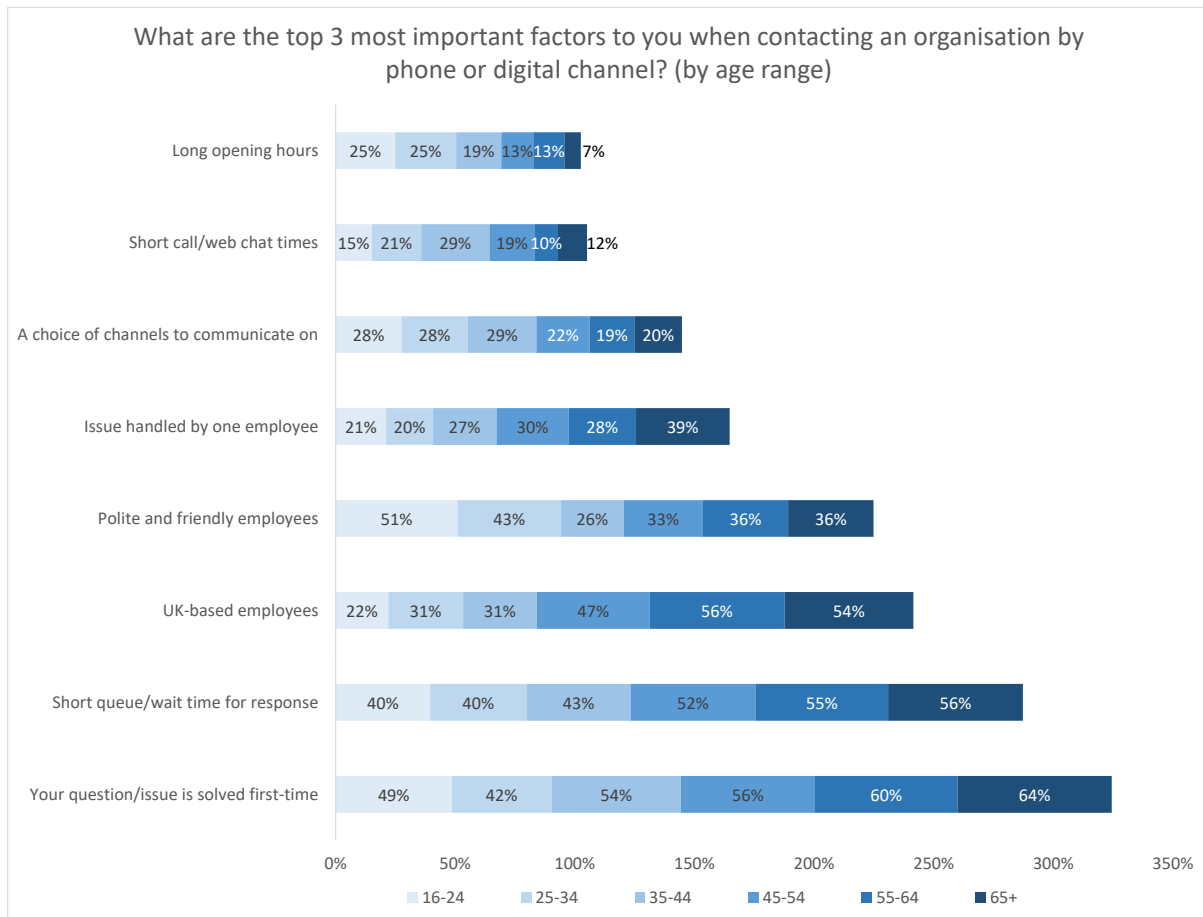
This White Paper considers three ways in which the digitally-transformed contact centre will improve organisations' capabilities and outcomes through:

- Impacting the Entire Customer Journey

- Expanding the Agent Role

- Gaining Operational Improvements.

What do customers really want when contacting an organisation? The chart below shows that the need to get their issue resolved first-time is most important – which is something the live telephony channel excels at – but many customers value a short wait time almost as much, and this is something which telephony cannot guarantee.

Polite and friendly employees are widely appreciated too, and the older generations particularly value UK-based agents.

What are the top 3 most important factors to you when contacting an organisation by phone or digital channel? (by age range)

Factor	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Long opening hours	25%	25%	19%	13%	13%	7%
Short call/web chat times	15%	21%	29%	19%	10%	12%
A choice of channels to communicate on	28%	28%	29%	22%	19%	20%
Issue handled by one employee	21%	20%	27%	30%	28%	39%
Polite and friendly employees	51%	43%	26%	33%	36%	36%
UK-based employees	22%	31%	31%	47%	56%	54%
Short queue/wait time for response	40%	40%	43%	52%	55%	56%
Your question/issue is solved first-time	49%	42%	54%	56%	60%	64%

It's interesting to see how customer attitudes have changed since 2018, with the pandemic being a major driver for this. The table below shows how consumers have altered their views on what they really value when communicating with an organisation by comparing data from 2018 and 2021.

Figure 1: Change in factors affecting CX, 2018-2021

Factor affecting CX	Change in % of consumers stating this as a top 3 CX factor
Polite and friendly employees	24%
Issue handled by one employee	14%
Your question/issue is solved first-time	12%
Short queue/wait time for response	4%
A choice of ways to communicate (e.g. phone, email, self-service, social media, etc)	-1%
Short call/web chat times	-4%
UK-based employees	-9%
Long opening hours	-46%

Perhaps the most noticeable change are the relative rise in importance of having polite and friendly employees, and the decline of the importance of longer opening hours.

The pandemic has had the effect on many people of reducing their confidence and driving the need for reassurance that human contact brings. As this report will show later, empathy and emotional intelligence are becoming even more important ingredients in the customer contact mix. The finding that polite and friendly employees are valued more than ever further strengthens the need to support agents with the right training and system support.

Having issues dealt with first time and handled by the same employee – removing the need for customers to repeat themselves, especially when changing communication channels – have also grown in importance to customers. This requirement is driving the move to an omnichannel contact centre, with a single view of the customer across channels.

The decline in the requirement for longer opening hours suggests that not only do customers not particularly want to talk to an agent at antisocial hours, but also perhaps that they are using self-service effectively at the times when the contact centre is closed, with chatbots playing an increasingly larger role in customer interactions.

The rise in the use of chatbots (shown later in this report) means that more customers are happy to use self-service to solve their own issues. The most sophisticated chatbots or virtual agents encourage the visitor to engage with them using natural language, rather than keywords. The virtual agent will parse, analyse and search the knowledge base for the answer which is deemed to be most suitable, returning this to the customer instantly.

Sophisticated AI-enabled chatbots look for the actual intent behind the customer's question, trying to deliver a single correct answer (or at least a relatively small number of possible answers), rather than a list of dozens of potential answers that may contain a keyword. It may also try to exceed its

brief by providing a list of related questions and answers to the original question, using machine learning to predict what the next question may be and provide this answer as well.

When the virtual agent application (whether AI-enabled or not) has low confidence that it has returned the correct result, it is able to escalate the customers query seamlessly to a live chat agent, who then has access to the self-service session history, enabling a greater chance of a successful resolution without repetition.

It's crucial for businesses to understand that the digital customer journey begins before the customer reaches out to an agent. They have often browsed your website, used your app or interacted with your chatbot, and they expect that if they have tried to communicate with you digitally that anyone they then contact in your organisation will already know this.

The following chart shows the proportion of inbound interactions by channel since 2006, with predictions shown until the end of 2024. The most obvious thing to note is that telephony has declined from 90% to around 65%, and that email has risen considerably, followed in recent years by web chat and to a lesser extent, social media. Non-telephony communication accounts for over one-third of inbound interactions into UK contact centres, showing that the capability to handle both voice and digital communication effectively is vital for businesses as that's what their customers want.

Inbound interactions 2006-2024
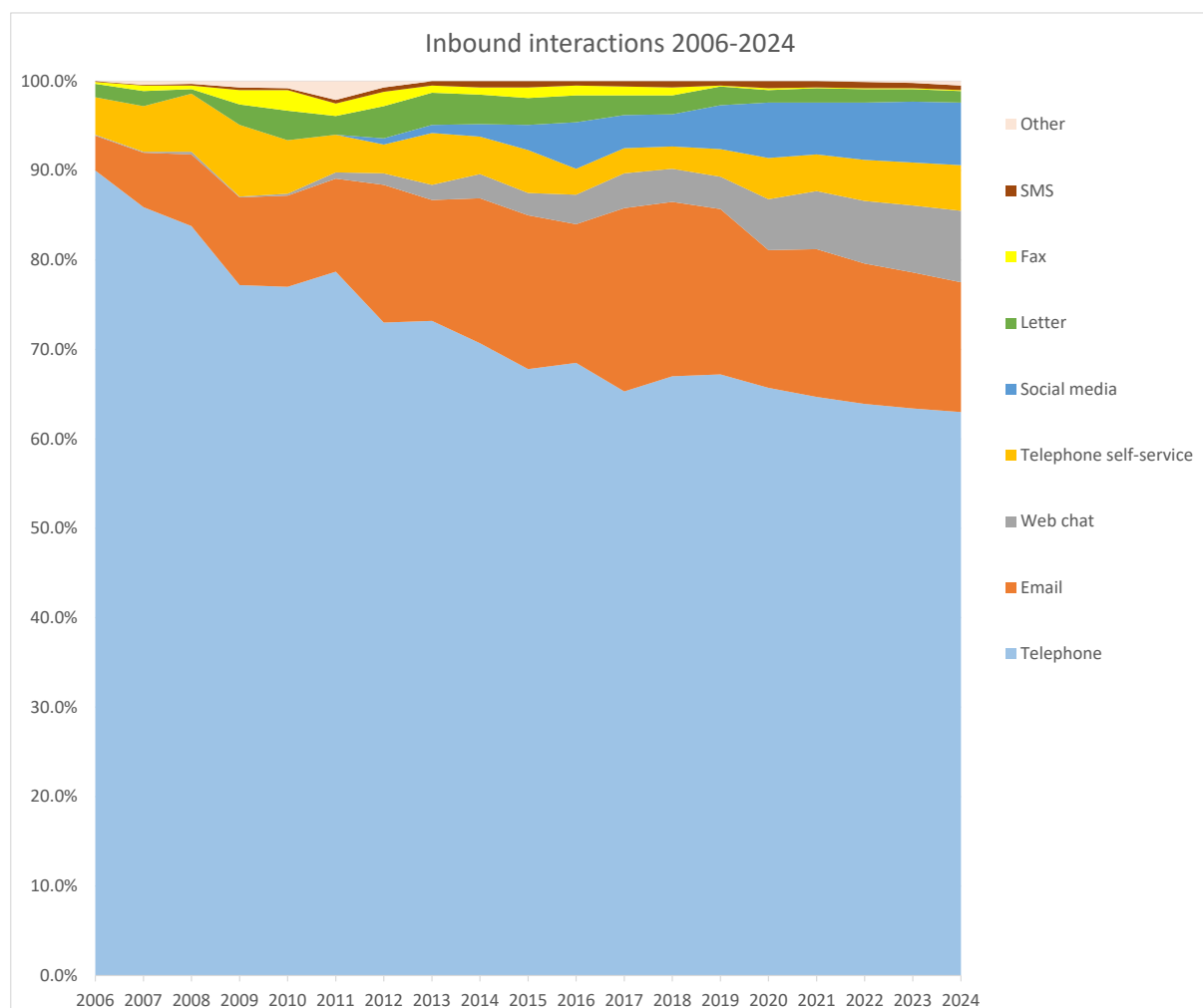
It's important to note that while the proportion of telephony has declined, it's still the most used customer communication channel by a long way. It's familiar, ubiquitous, flexible and effective. So why are customers using digital channels with such enthusiasm?

Some customers will feel more comfortable speaking with an agent, while others prefer to handle their own issues if possible. But the main motivation for channel choice is the nature of the enquiry – the customer considers: "How can I do what I need to, with the least effort?" – and the answer is different depending on what they are trying to achieve.
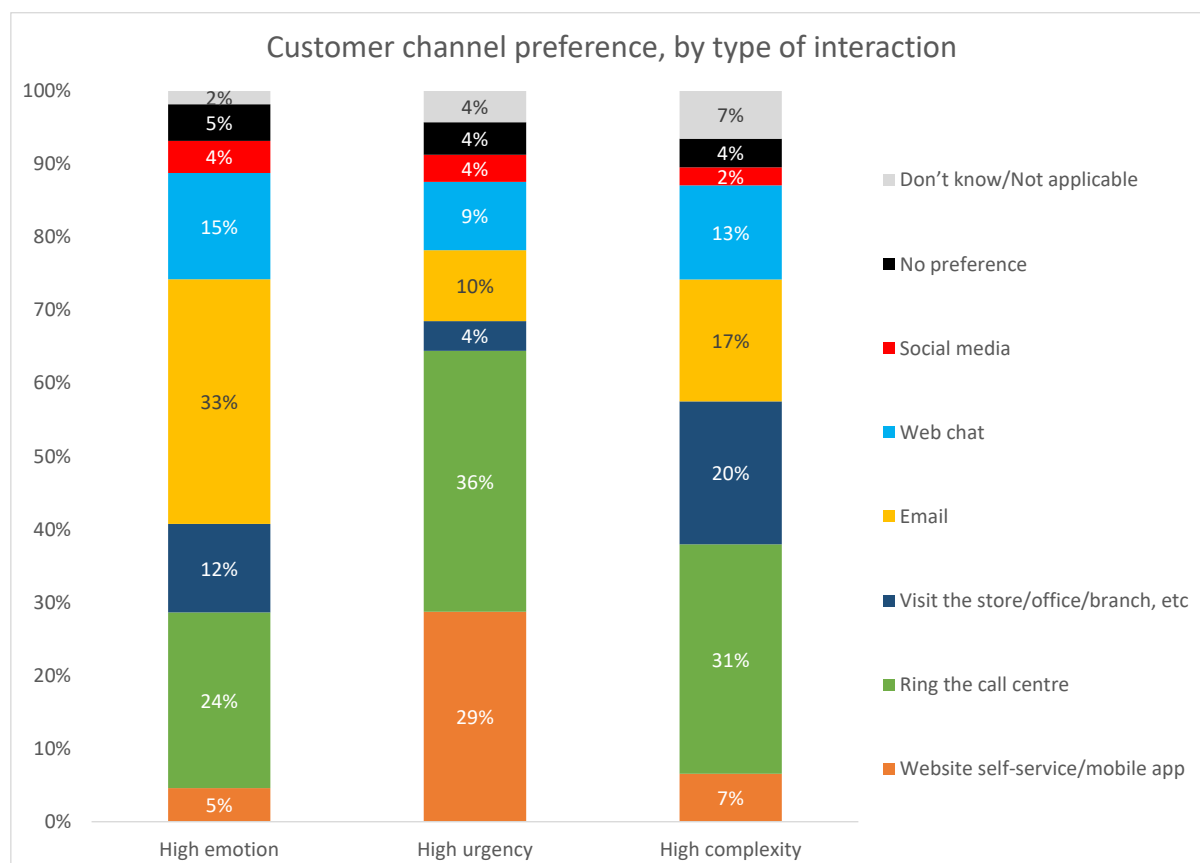
The mixture of the urgency, complexity and emotional importance of the interaction drives channel choice: for a customer calling a bank, a simple balance request and an urgent call about the progress of a mortgage application are very different types of call, and should be treated as such.

A survey of 1,000 UK consumers carried out for ContactBabel looked to understand which would be the channels of preference in cases of high emotion, urgency and complexity, through presenting survey respondents with three scenarios:

High emotion: for example, a complaint or having to return an incorrect item that they were looking forward to receiving.

High urgency: for example, checking the arrival time of a plane or train from which they are meeting someone.

High complexity: for example, difficulties completing a tax return or mortgage application form.

Customer channel preference, by type of interaction

	High emotion	High urgency	High complexity
Don't know/Not applicable	2%	4%	7%
No preference	5%	4%	4%
Social media	4%	4%	2%
Web chat	15%	9%	13%
Email	33%	10%	17%
Visit the store/office/branch, etc	12%	4%	20%
Ring the call centre	24%	36%	31%
Website self-service/mobile app	5%	29%	7%

Despite the preference for telephony in all three of these scenarios, the channel doesn't have a majority in any of them. Emotional issues and complaints often drive the use of email, while web chat is a popular channel with younger customers, and self-service is often used for urgent matters.

The general fact remains that customers often don't want to pick up the phone, and yet – with 65% of inbound interactions still being through telephony – they do. The challenge for businesses is being able to understand not only how their customers want to engage with them, but also why and when.

Customers choose specific channels based on what's easiest and most effective for them. They know that if they pick up the phone that their request is most likely to be handled successfully. However, they also suspect that they will probably have to wait in a queue for an undetermined amount of time when they can't do anything else, and that this may not be convenient for them.
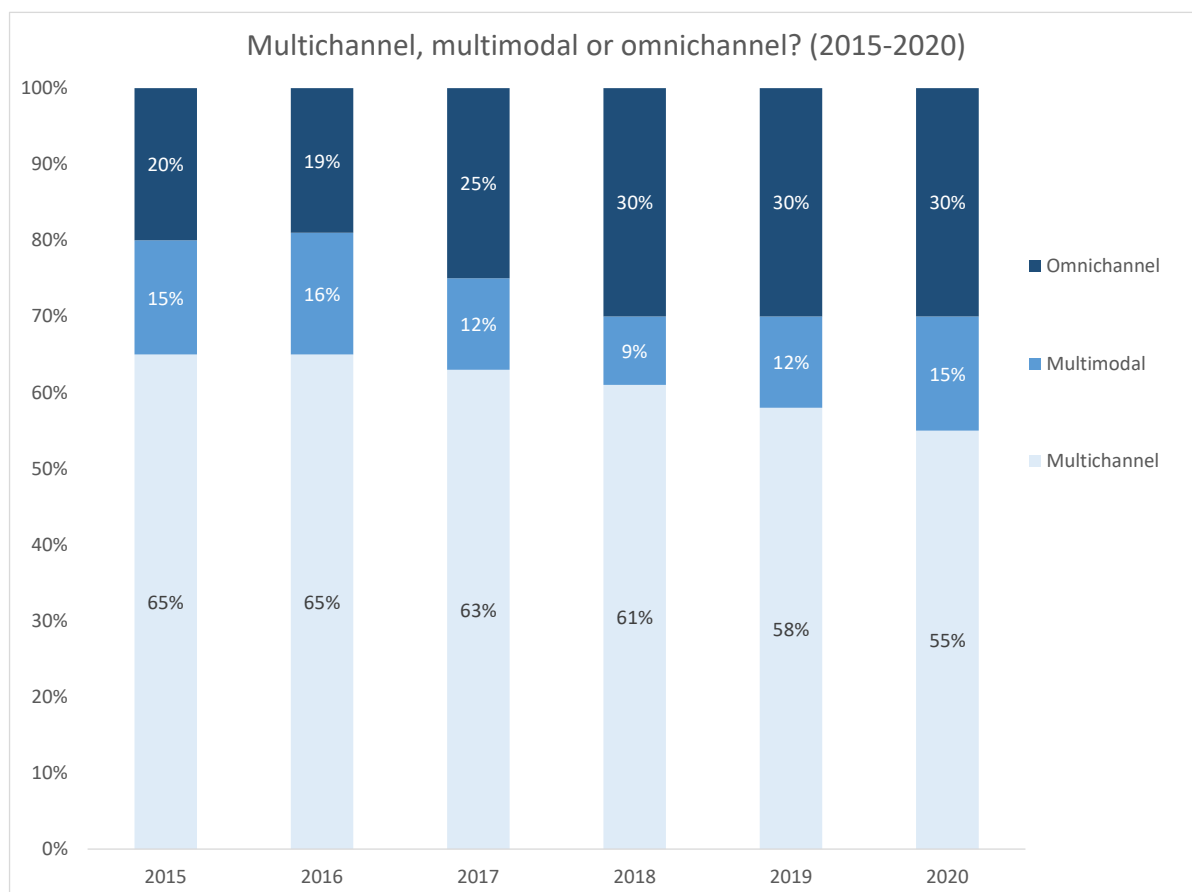
Consequently, customers will try live digital channels (where response times may be quicker), or asynchronous alternatives like email or messaging, where they can 'fire-and-forget', coming back later in the day to receive a response from the business.

This mix of channels, customer types and requirements means that managing customer communication has become messy.

The contact centre of today acts as a hub for all types of customer interaction, but for most organisations – and their customers – it's still a long way from being perfect.

Contact centres which offer multiple communication channels to customers were asked to place themselves into one of three categories:

- **Multichannel**: "We offer a choice of channels to customers (i.e. several of voice, email, social media, web chat), from which they can use one in a single interaction. If they change channel, the context and history is lost"

- **Multimodal**: "We offer a choice of channels, and customers can use more than one in the same interaction (e.g. an agent can send an email or SMS to a customer while they are talking on the phone)"

- **Omnichannel**: "We offer a choice of channels, and can use more than one over multiple interactions, while retaining the history and context of the original enquiry. Relevant information follows the customer across channels and interactions".

Multichannel, multimodal or omnichannel? (2015-2020)

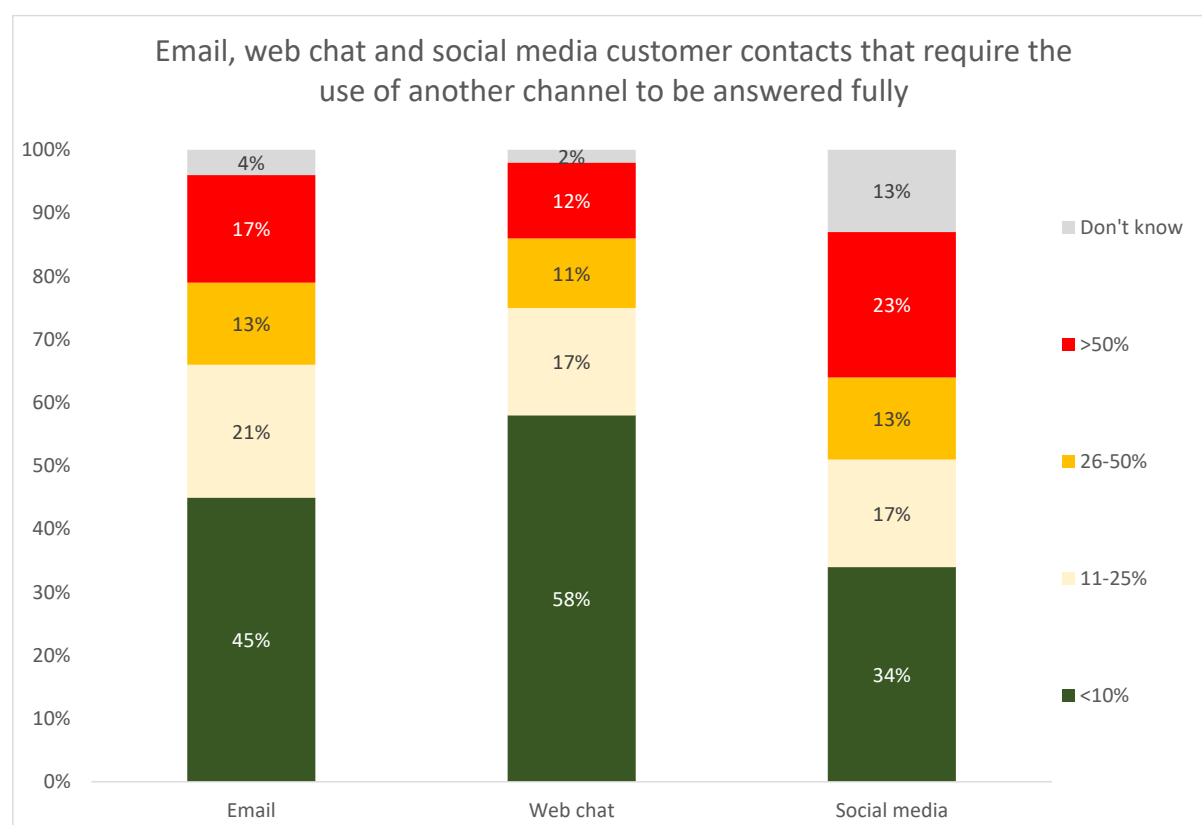| Year	Omnichannel	Multimodal	Multichannel
2015	20%	15%	65%
2016	19%	16%	65%
2017	25%	12%	63%
2018	30%	9%	61%
2019	30%	12%	58%
2020	30%	15%	55%

The previous chart shows the self-assessed capabilities of contact centres handling customer interactions through multiple channels.

Only 3 in 10 of our survey respondents were confident that customers were able to contact (and be contacted) through any channel – switching between them during the interaction as appropriate, while taking any relevant data and history along with them – with a single, unified view of the customer's journey being available to the agent.

Yet as the following chart clearly shows, a joined-up, seamless omnichannel approach is a necessity. Many customers who start their journey on a digital channel will have to use another channel – but not necessarily the phone – in order to complete the action successfully.

58% of survey respondents state that web chat interactions can be handled entirely over that specific channel more than 90% of the time – which is very positive – but 1 in 8 say that another channel will be needed in more than half of cases.

For email and social media, there's a much higher likelihood that additional channels will need to get involved.

Email, web chat and social media customer contacts that require the use of another channel to be answered fully

	Email	Web chat	Social media
Don't know	4%	2%	13%
>50%	17%	12%	23%
26-50%	13%	11%	13%
11-25%	21%	17%	17%
<10%	45%	58%	34%

So, if multiple channels are likely to be needed, what impact will this have on customer experience?

How important to customers is not having to explain issues across channels? (2015-20)
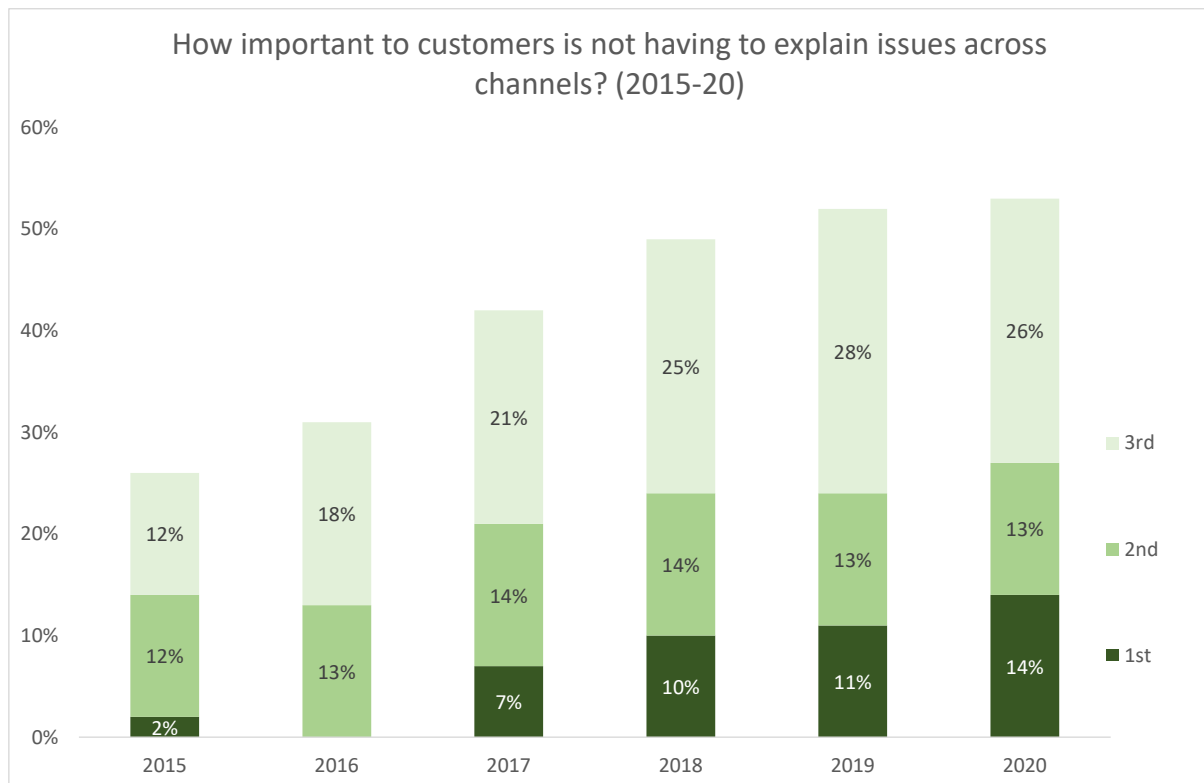
The chart above shows the most important factors influencing customer experience, from a choice of eight options. There's a clear picture that shows customers are increasingly more likely to not want to have to re-explain their issues and actions once they move between channels. If they have to do so, it's going to be negative for them, even if the issue is finally resolved. And of course, the longer and more drawn-out the process, the more expensive it will be for the business.

It's important to note that having to use another channel doesn't necessarily mean anything's wrong with a channel or process. Customers at different stages in their journey will need different things – they may research online, clarify something quickly with web chat, deal with a minor issue on the app and then need the reassurance of talking to a live agent.

The challenge is to make sure that the journey is seamless and joined up, its history accessible to all of the agents and applications that need it and to provide consistent and accurate information across channels.

So where is the agent left in this? Many years ago, their job was far simpler: to answer as many calls as quickly as they can, being measured mainly on internal cost-based metrics. The digitally-transformed contact centre requires far more from them, and the skills and capabilities that they need are only going to increase.

An example of how the agent's role is changing can be seen in the chart below, which shows the average service call duration since 2004.

The increase from 3.7 minutes to 6.1 minutes reflects the increasing complexity of the typical call: the agent is no longer mainly just an organic interface between the customer and the organisation's systems, simply reading things off a screen.

As easier enquiries are handled through self-service (web self-service in particular has risen massively), the average complexity of phone calls has increased, requiring more time to be resolved successfully.

In addition, there has been a move away from judging contact centre success mainly by call throughput and call duration, towards metrics which impact more on the customer experience: for example, first-contact resolution rate, NPS and customer satisfaction.

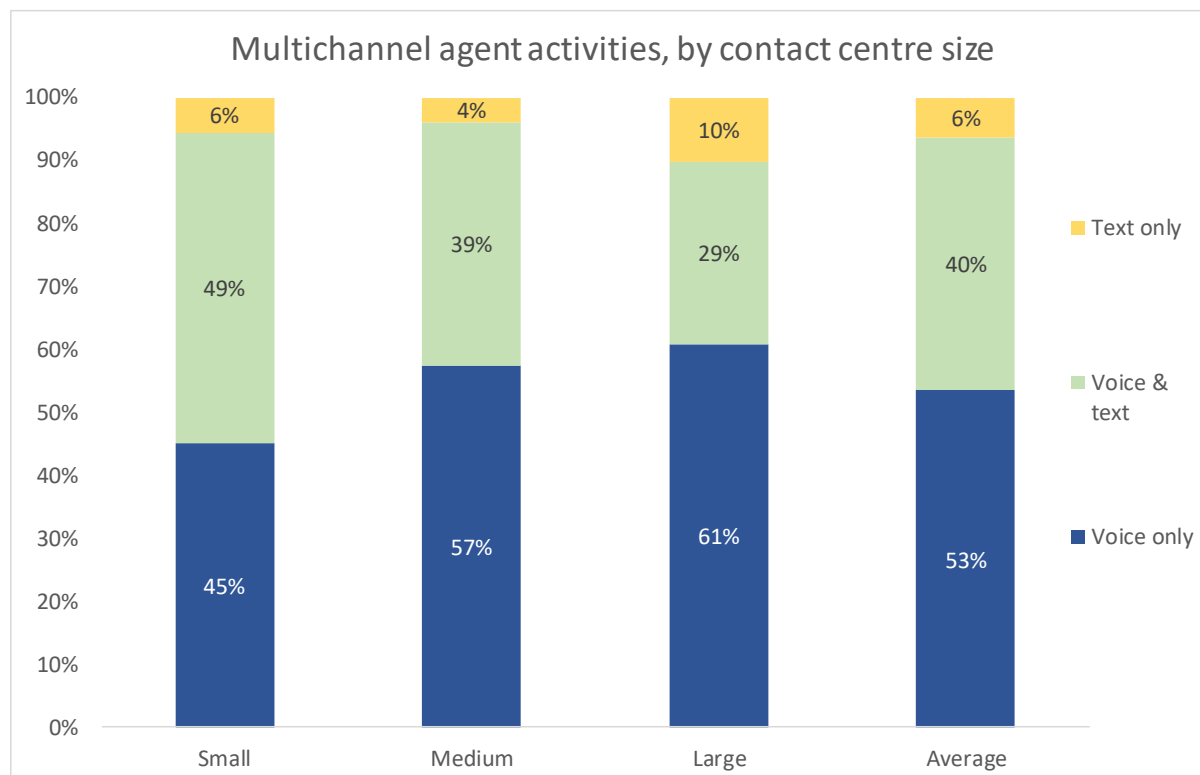Average service call duration, 2004-2020
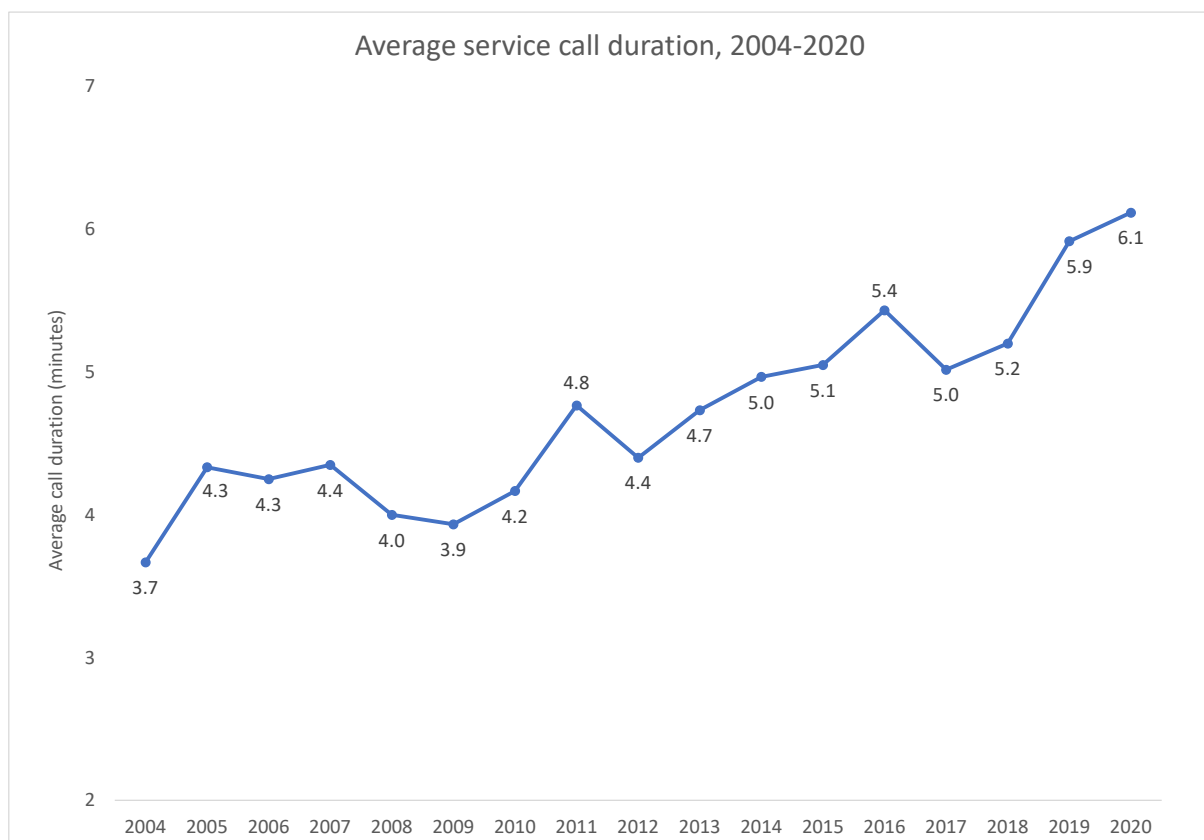
The agent of today has many different roles, and is involved in onboarding, ongoing service, post-sales support, technical support, upselling and cross-selling, and acts as a gateway to the rest of the organisation, including fulfilment, distribution and access to knowledge workers elsewhere.

Added to this, many agents are expected to be able to handle enquiries across multiple channels: the earlier chart showed the growing customer requirement for explaining their issue only once.

There is no general agreement within the industry on how best to deal with digital channels, although there are genuine reasons to encourage digital/voice blending. On one side, there is a case made that letting agents answer non-voice interactions makes the job more interesting for them, lowering attrition and improving skills. The other side to this says that the skills required by digital agents are different from voice agents, and that it is difficult to find the agents to do both jobs. However, of those contact centres which use voice/digital blending, only around 1 in 5 have experienced problems finding the right staff for these types of role, a figure that has decreased each year.

In medium (51-200 seat) and large (200+ seat) contact centres, over half of agents handle only voice, with around 5-10% handling text only (including email, web chat and social media).

As has been found in previous years, smaller contact centres – which tend not to have the depth of resource available to operate a dedicated single channel teams – are more likely to have agents moving between voice and text interactions as required. This approach, whether ad hoc or through a more formal blended approach, has been proven many times in past years' data to be positively correlated with improved agent attrition. This is not to claim causality, but that a variety of work may impact positively upon agent engagement and attrition rates is a point to consider seriously.

Multichannel agent activities, by contact centre size

Contact centre size	Text only	Voice & text	Voice only
Small	6%	49%	45%
Medium	4%	39%	57%
Large	10%	29%	61%
Average	6%	40%	53%

There are good reasons both from the customer and business point of view for more agents to be encouraged to help customers regardless of the channel being used, but this too adds complexity and difficulty to the agent's job, moving it even further away from the historic role of answering the telephone and getting through the call as quickly as possible.

Yet even the most capable and experienced agent cannot be expected to know how to handle every type of interaction across every channel offered. The digital contact centre of the near future will have live agents working alongside AI to augment their knowledge, suggest next best actions depending on what has worked previously, and to take over some of the heavy data lifting needed, especially in the post-call phase.

Organisations are very enthusiastic about agent/AI collaboration, and the following chart shows that the vast majority expect AI to augment agents, not replace them. As findings later in this White Paper show, this partnership is not just limited to telephony, but also to digital channels such as web chat, email and messaging as well.

Views on the role of artificial intelligence in the contact centre
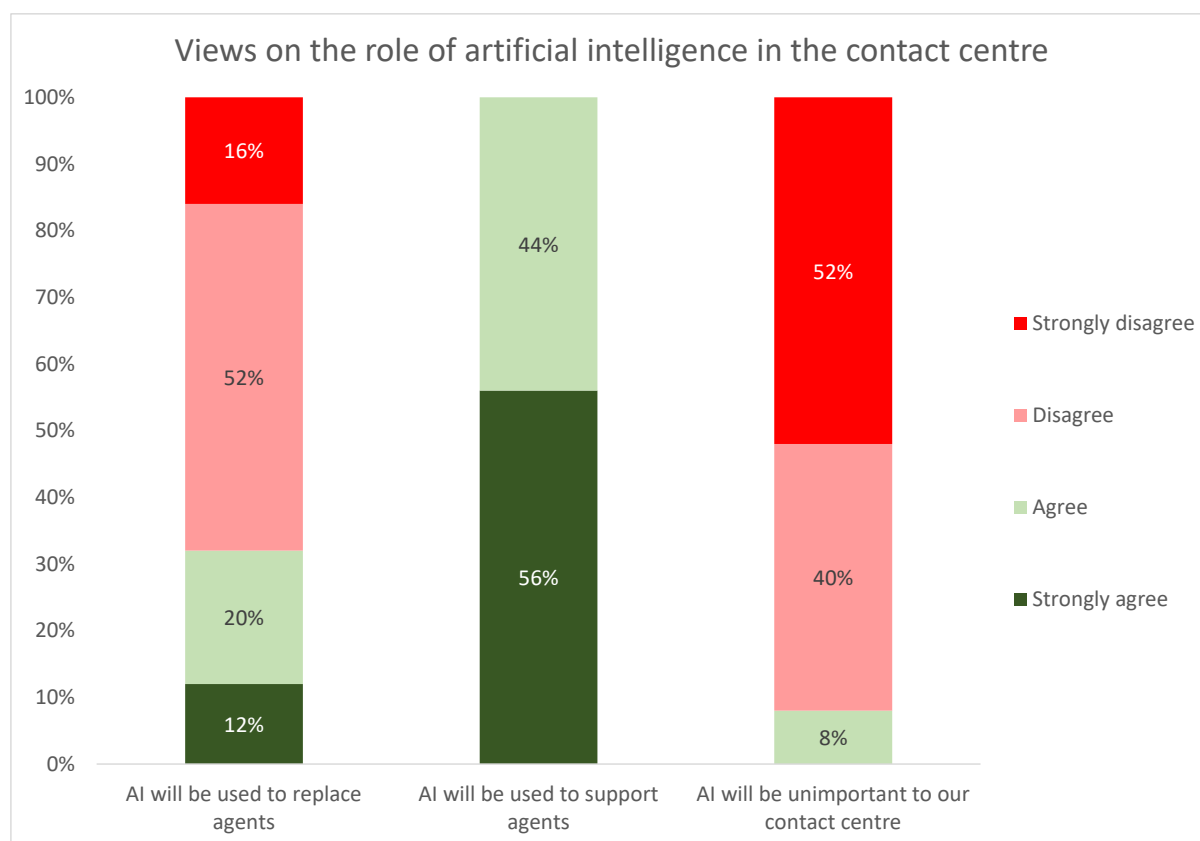
While AI and robotic automation can speed up and even take over processes that the agent would otherwise have to do, it will not just be used to make things happen more quickly, but also to help the agent understand what's happening in the call or digital interaction.

Sentiment analysis is a way of quantifying customer and agent emotions within interactions, whether on the phone or through an alternate channel, for the purpose of uncovering processes, behaviours and situations which cause strong levels of positive or negative sentiment that could

affect business outcomes and customer experience. Using analytics and large data sources, AI can identify and inspect the types of interaction that have major impacts on customer sentiment and ultimate outcomes.

Agents, especially those with higher levels of empathy and experience, should be able to identify the emotions of the callers, so using technology for sentiment detection could look like an unnecessary elaboration. However, the use of analytics means that the sentiment and emotion of millions of calls can be assessed against their ultimate outcome in order to identify situations in real-time that have a higher likelihood of a negative outcome and to act before it is too late.

AI also offers an opportunity to provide timely and effective support to every agent as necessary, actually within the interaction, providing the agent with suggestions about next best action, pull up relevant information from the knowledge base, make suggestions based on customer history and sentiment about optimal cross-selling and upselling opportunities, and even the style of conversation that this customer may prefer. This has a positive impact on first-contact resolution as well as customer engagement, and is of particular use to less experienced agents and for unfamiliar subject areas.

This extra level of direct support is becoming particularly important due to the stratospheric rise of remote working, which makes it harder for agents to access support in real time.

The following chart shows the growth in remote working: in 2019, 57% of respondents did not use any homeworking, a figure which was zero in 2020 and 2021. It is interesting to see that there is expected to be only a very gradual decline in remote working over 2021. While this is likely to be a factor of the uncertainty surrounding the future and may change once confidence in public health is re-established, our research suggests that remote working is here to stay, often as a hybrid model.

Proportion of agents homeworking, 2019 - 2021
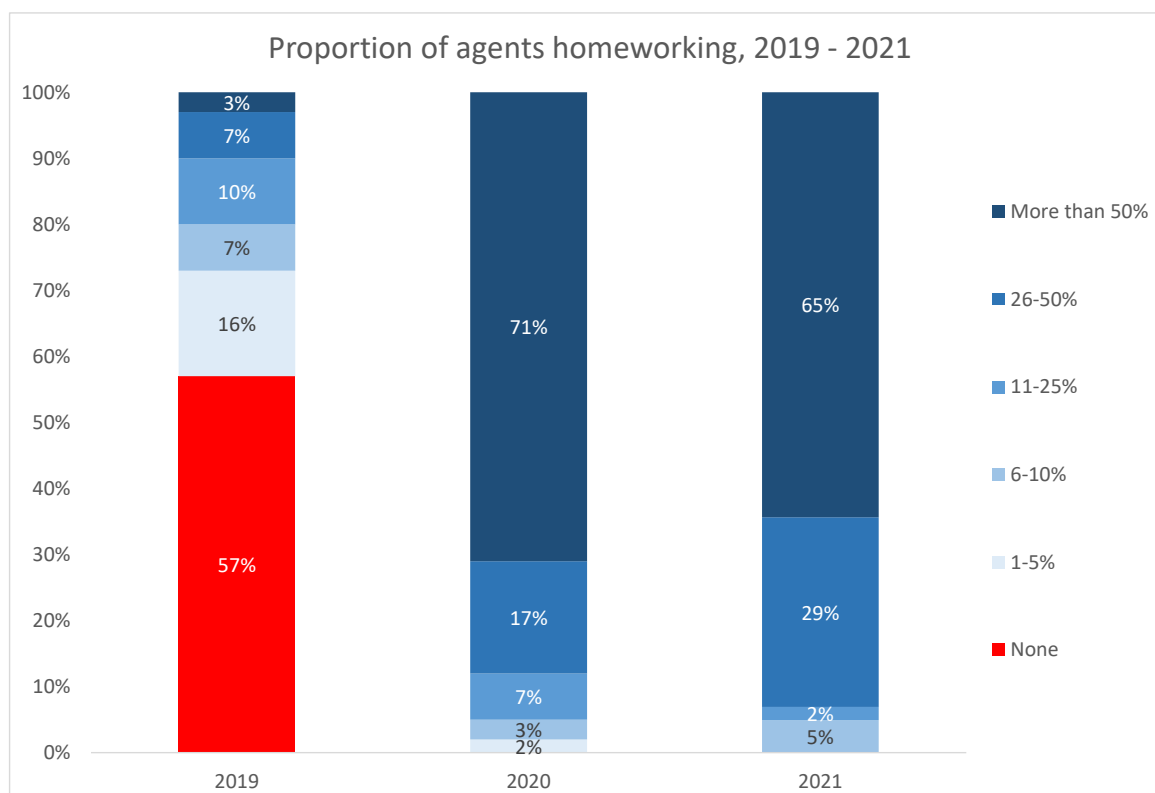
One way for organisations to help remote working agents is through the use of team collaboration tools. 98% of UK businesses use these, with the greatest advantage coming from having one-to-one communication with employees (rather than group communications). Around half of businesses have integrated their team collaboration tools with customer-facing applications such as their contact centre applications in order to link third-parties into a customer conversation and achieve quicker resolutions.

Added to this complexity, the typical agent now has to handle multiple types of inbound calls, often needing to be an expert in sales, service, technical support, order handling, cross-selling / upselling and troubleshooting.

So today's agent has to contend with remote working, handling multiple channels, interacting with customers who don't want to be passed around and having far more complex and wide-ranging responsibilities.

On top of this, organisations are moving away from measuring their success based on purely internal metrics, and are instead focusing on customer experience, loyalty, lifetime value and advocacy.

These positive outcomes are often driven by customer emotion rather than simply being satisfied with the competency with which a request is handled, so agents have to bring more to the interaction than might usually be expected.

McKinsey talks about the 'moment of truth' in customer interactions[1] often occurring when the customer has an unexpected problem or high emotional stake, when long-term loyalty and customer advocacy can be won or lost depending on the outcome and the way in which it is handled. Recognising and handling these moments of truth appropriately – moments which are defined as such by the customer, not the business – has a far greater long-term impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty than the dozens of competently handled, forgettable interactions that may have happened previously.
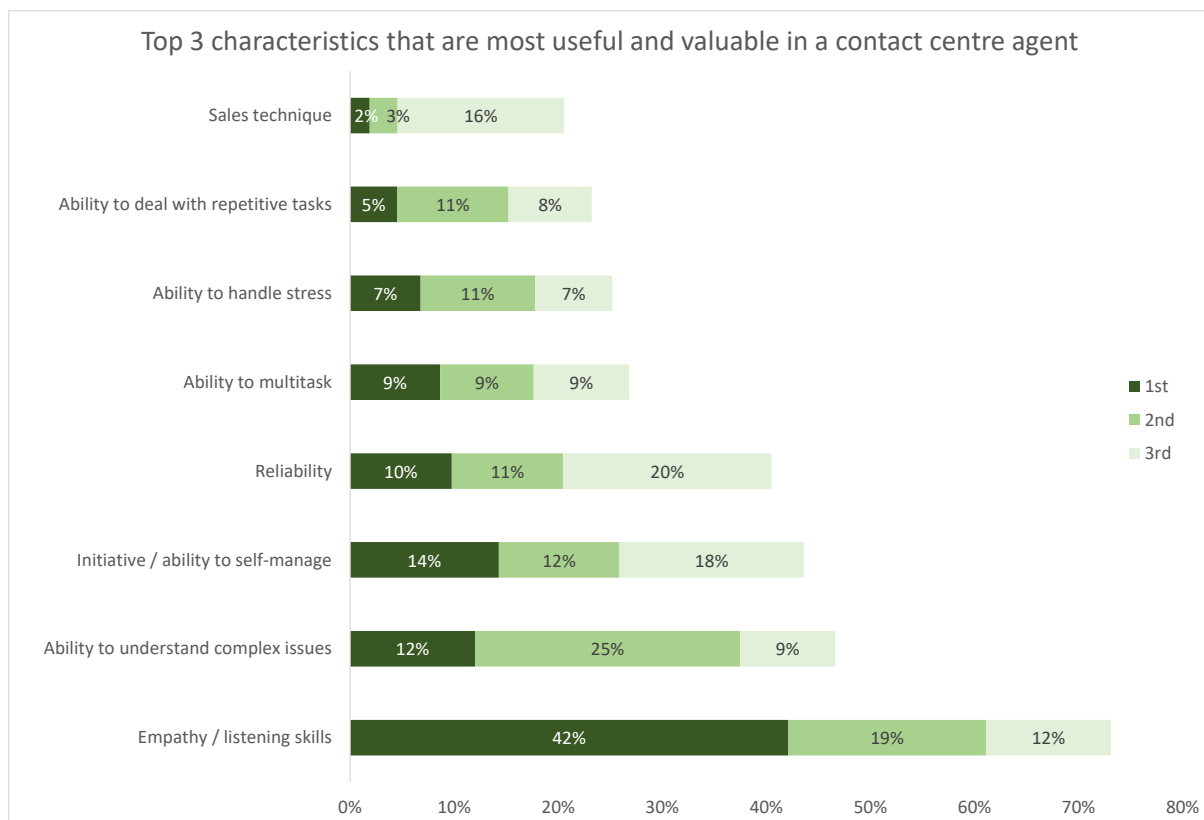
As part of this, agents need to display empathy and have the emotional intelligence to recognise what the customer is feeling and to react accordingly while maintaining the authority to control the interaction. This means that there's a lot for the agent to think about, even before they get around to trying to answer the customer's query.

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[1] http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organisation/our-insights/the-moment-of-truth-in-customer-service

Our surveys show that by far the most important characteristic for an agent to have is empathy – the ability to listen, understand and help customers – which was placed in no.1 position by 42% of respondents. Of course, empathy is only really useful when the supporting systems and processes allow and empower the agent to handle the interaction as they need to: there is no use in valuing empathy in an agent if they are not permitted to spend the time required to fulfil the customer's request, or the systems prevent them from achieving their goal.

An ability to understand complex issues is also very valued, and will increase in importance as self-service handles more of the straightforward customer requests, leaving the more complex work for human agents. Initiative and self-management is also seen as vital, and is of particular value in remote working environments where self-starting is an asset and where outside help may be more difficult to access.

The organisation can help support agents through integrating data from various sources including the CRM system, knowledge base and back-office systems into a single unified application on the agent's desktop. Having all relevant, accurate and personalised information to hand within the call will allow the agent to concentrate on serving the customer better, building rapport and allowing them to resolve the query quickly and at the first time of asking.

Top 3 characteristics that are most useful and valuable in a contact centre agent

Characteristic	1st	2nd	3rd
Sales technique	2%	3%	16%
Ability to deal with repetitive tasks	5%	11%	8%
Ability to handle stress	7%	11%	7%
Ability to multitask	9%	9%	9%
Reliability	10%	11%	20%
Initiative / ability to self-manage	14%	12%	18%
Ability to understand complex issues	12%	25%	9%
Empathy / listening skills	42%	19%	12%

Research[2] has shown that repeat business and high levels of NPS are more associated with positive emotion than with a successful outcome or low levels of customer effort. The 'peak-end' rule is key here: a psychological finding where we recall a memory based upon how we felt at a peak (or trough) moment which biases the memory of the overall experience. The "end" element to the peak-end rule states that how we feel at the end of the process will also disproportionately affect how we view the overall experience.

In the contact centre environment, this means creating positive and memorable experiences when the opportunity arises, and always looking to turn negatives into positives.

It's important to note that some of the most memorable and positive customer experiences can come as a result of a previously negative experience, when a customer is that such a low ebb that having an agent deliver a positive outcome can actually create such a peak of emotion that the outcome is remembered in a far more positive sense than if it had been handled competently and effectively throughout.

Recruiting agents with the right sort of behavioural characteristics and then training them well is a good start, but having sentiment analysis and AI to support the agent in what may be their 40th or 50th interaction of a difficult day can make all of the difference too, reminding them to finish the call on a positive note, and suggesting solutions that have worked well in similar situations in the past.

Also, providing the freedom for agents to act in way appropriate to the situation is vital – for example, if a high-emotion interaction happens on social media, but can't be handled on that channel (e.g. it needs to go through security, or is too complex and lengthy for a non-voice channel) – the agent should be given the license to place an outbound call to that customer in real-time, rather than advise them to call the contact centre. While this will impact upon the social media channel's service levels while the agent is away from it, the moment of truth offers the opportunity to lock-in that customer's loyalty. For contact centre operations traditionally run on a structured command-and-control basis, this may sound chaotic, but businesses have to decide if the occasional relaxation of their own procedures is an acceptable trade-off for providing the customer with something that they truly value. Agents need to be given carte blanche to deliver in moments of truth, and the training and support to recognise when this is happening.

The result of supporting agents across multiple channels, giving them the freedom and confidence to act in the customer's interests and supporting them with appropriate data and technology, will deliver improved customer outcomes and better operational metrics.
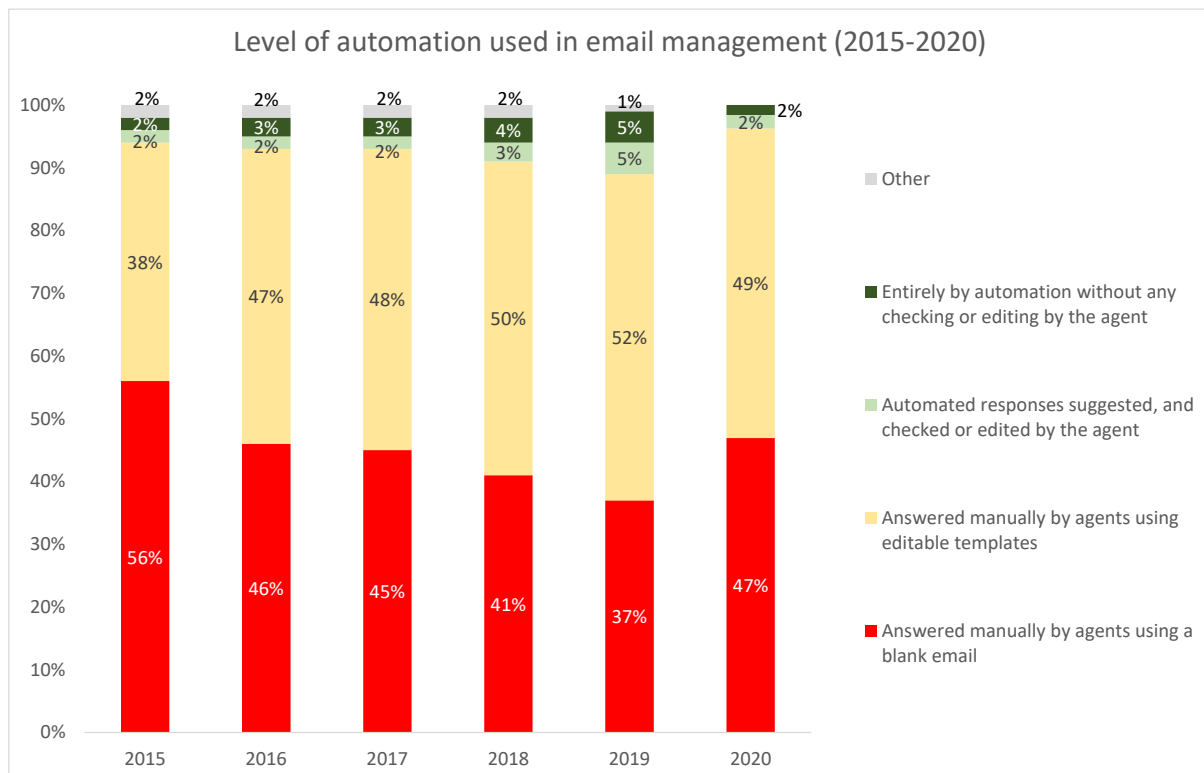
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[2] Temkin Group
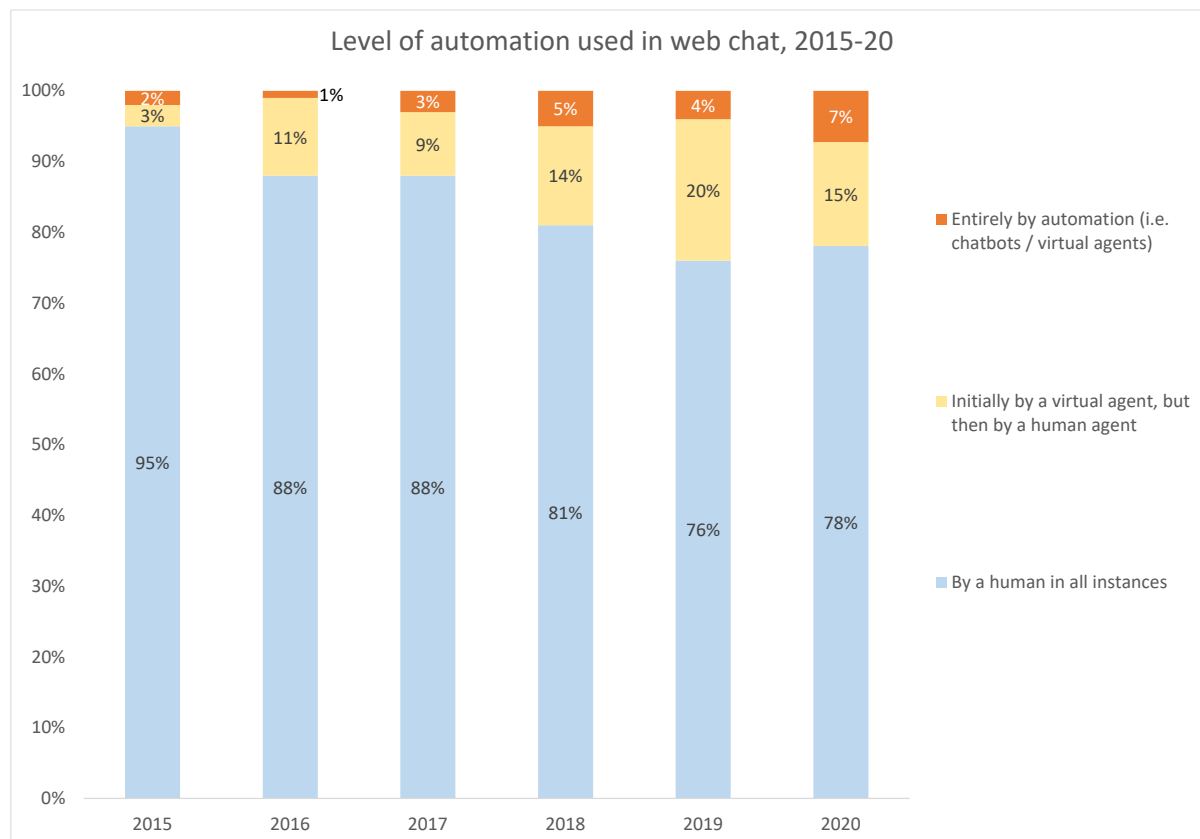
GAINING OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

Those companies implementing digital transformation in their businesses can expect to see competitive advantages.

As has been shown, customers will use multiple channels as they see fit and are becoming less tolerant of having to repeat issues across these channels. Unless digital channels work together seamlessly and are supported through automation where appropriate, costs will spiral out of control and any potential savings will be lost.

The chart below shows the level of automation used for email management. Over the past six years, there has been movement towards assisting agents through providing them with editable templates which speed up the building of email content, but there is still very low use of automation / AI.

Level of automation used in email management (2015-2020)

Year	Answered manually by agents using a blank email	Answered manually by agents using editable templates	Automated responses suggested, and checked or edited by the agent	Entirely by automation without any checking or editing by the agent	Other
2015	56%	38%	2%	2%	2%
2016	46%	47%	2%	3%	2%
2017	45%	48%	2%	3%	2%
2018	41%	50%	3%	4%	2%
2019	37%	52%	5%	5%	1%
2020	47%	49%		2%	2%

This can be compared to the level of automation used in web chat. Although the majority of web chats are still carried out manually by agents, the proportion of web chats involving virtual agents (chatbots) has increased very significantly.

Level of automation used in web chat, 2015-20

| Year	By a human in all instances	Initially by a virtual agent, but then by a human agent	Entirely by automation (i.e. chatbots / virtual agents)
2015	95%	3%	2%
2016	88%	11%	1%
2017	88%	9%	3%
2018	81%	14%	5%
2019	76%	20%	4%
2020	78%	15%	7%

The next chart looks at the effect that this has had on the operational costs for these channels.

Cost per inbound call has risen steadily over the time period studied (2014-2020), at a rate of around 5-10% per year in most cases. This is commensurate with the increase in call durations shown earlier in this White Paper.

Digital channel costs vary much more widely. While some of this inconsistency is due to the relatively low number of survey data points available for these channels (especially social media), there has been a fairly steady rise in email costs – a channel which as shown previously has low levels of automation – and a significant drop in cost for web chat and social media in the past two years.

While it is perhaps too early to state with perfect confidence that the increased levels of automation in web chat are driving down the cost, it seems very likely that there is a positive link between the two.
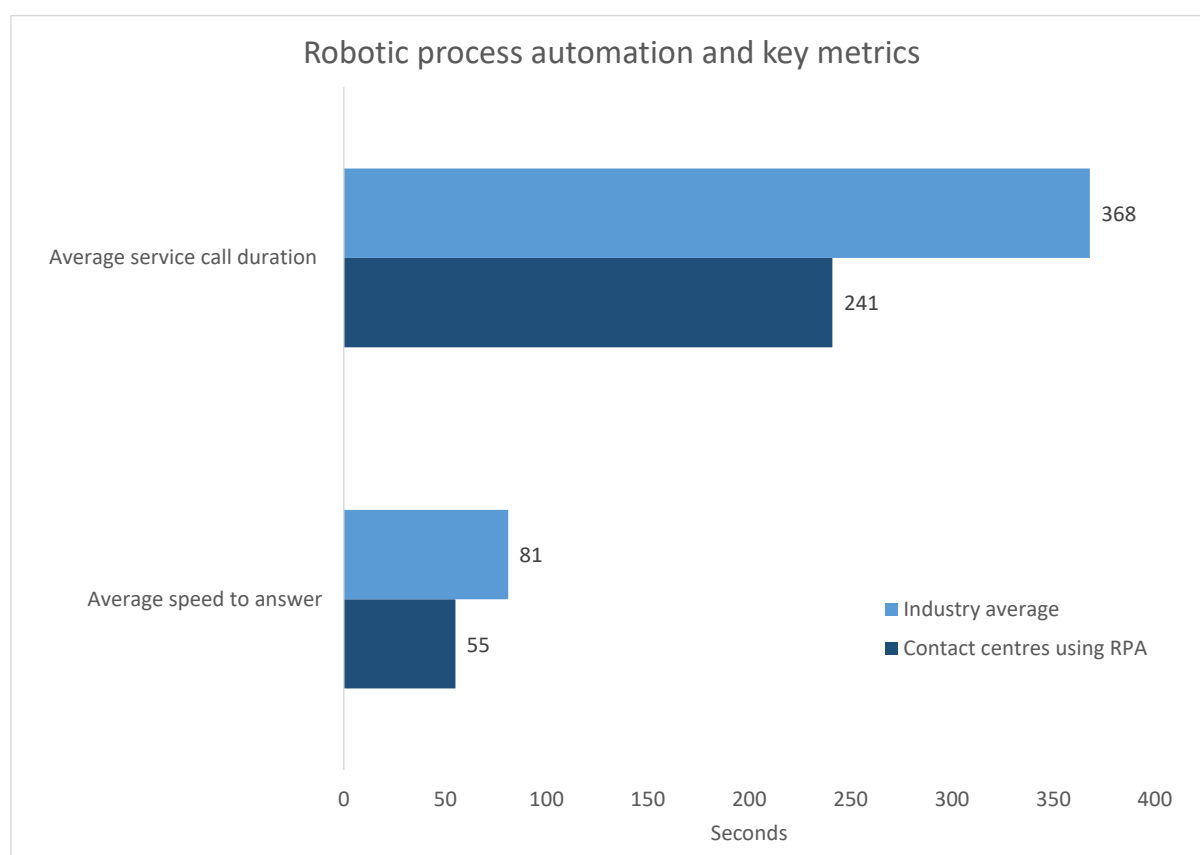

Cost per inbound interaction, by channel (2014-2020)
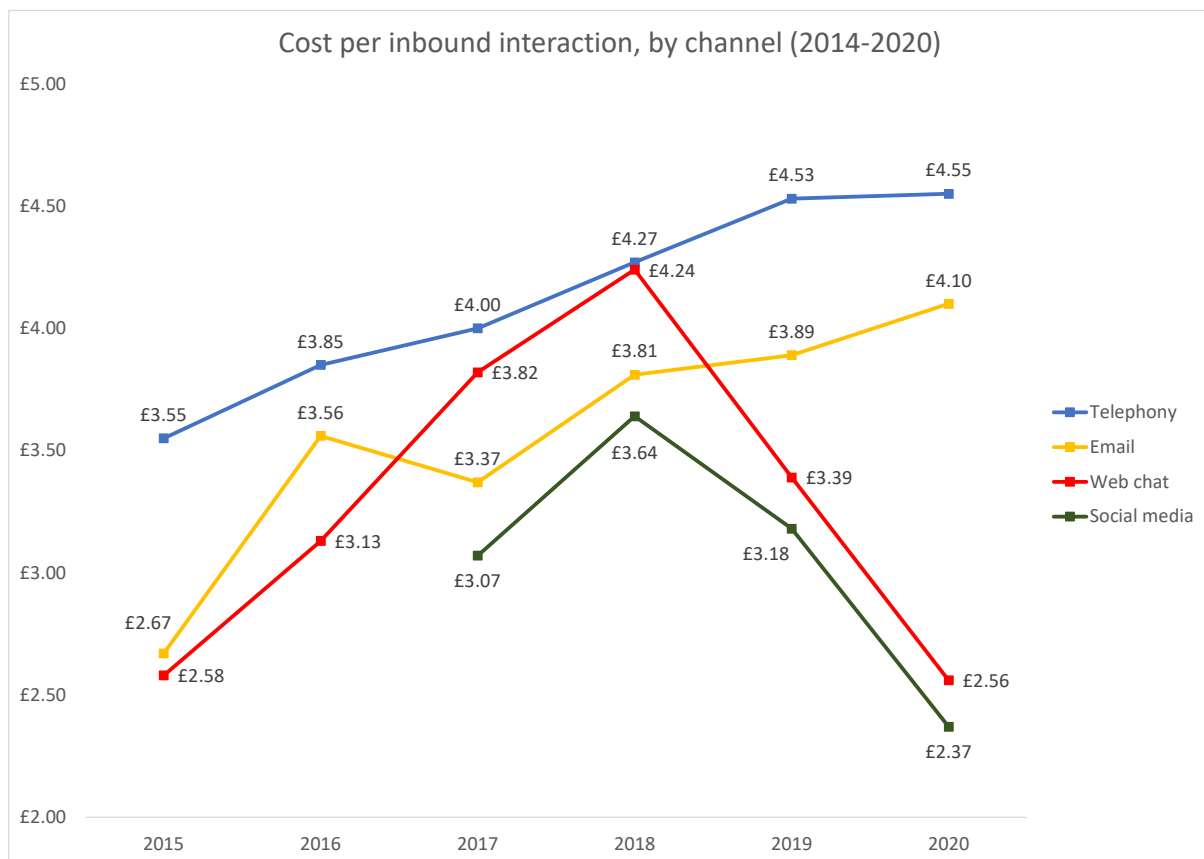
Interestingly, US figures don't follow the UK, as web chats seem to be used for different things there: the US has a 36% higher incidence of web chats lasting longer than 10 minutes, which may well be pushing up the average cost. The US also has a lot more web chats that require the use of another channel to be answered fully, suggesting that web chat is used for more complex and difficult enquiries than in the UK.

It's important to remember that the digitally-transformed contact centre will still be answering a lot of phone calls, and that these account for the bulk of the activity and costs in most operations.

A subset of agent desktop automation, robotic process automation (RPA) consists of digital software agents / bots that handle repetitive, rules-based tasks at high speed, with great consistency and accuracy. The RPA workforce acts in the same way as human agents, working at the presentation layer level rather than requiring deep integration with systems, replicating the work that live agents would be doing, but more quickly, consistently and without requiring any rest. RPA agents can input data, trigger processes, pass work onto other bots or humans as rules dictate and replicate data across multiple applications without making any copying mistakes.

The following chart indicates that RPA reduces average service call duration, which in itself improves speed to answer as agents are available to take the next call more quickly.

Robotic process automation and key metrics

- Average service call duration: Industry average 368, Contact centres using RPA 241
- Average speed to answer: Industry average 81, Contact centres using RPA 55

(Seconds)

Further gains in telephony cost are possible through optimising other channels. By analysing the customer journey and where the processes are sub-optimal, the digital organisation can learn where customer pain points are located, and improve them.

For example, the chart below shows the proportion of calls from customers who have tried to answer their own queries on the website, but have failed to do so.

In the UK, an average of 18% of inbound calls come from such customers. Industry-wide, this accounted for £5.4bn of cost in 2020, and for a typical 250-seat contact centre, this amounts to over £2m each year.

Proportion of callers that have tried to answer own queries through web self-service before calling

- More than 50%: 6%
- 26-50%: 14%
- 11-25%: 38%
- Less than 10%: 42%
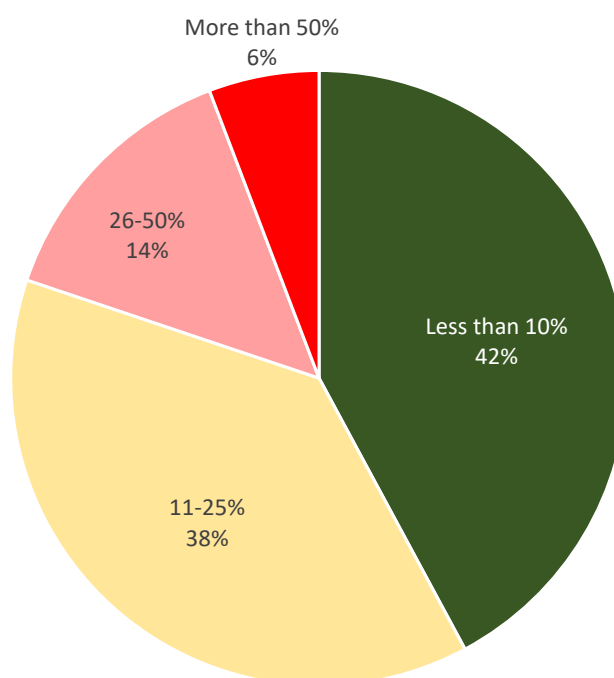
An even greater saving can be made through analysing why customers are calling and proactively reaching out to them with the required information.

Survey respondents estimate that an average of 24% of calls could be avoided by proactively engaging the customer, equating to £7.3bn industry-wide in 2020, a cost of £2.73m each year for a typical 250-seat operation.

Proportion of calls that could be avoided by proactive customer engagement, by contact centre size
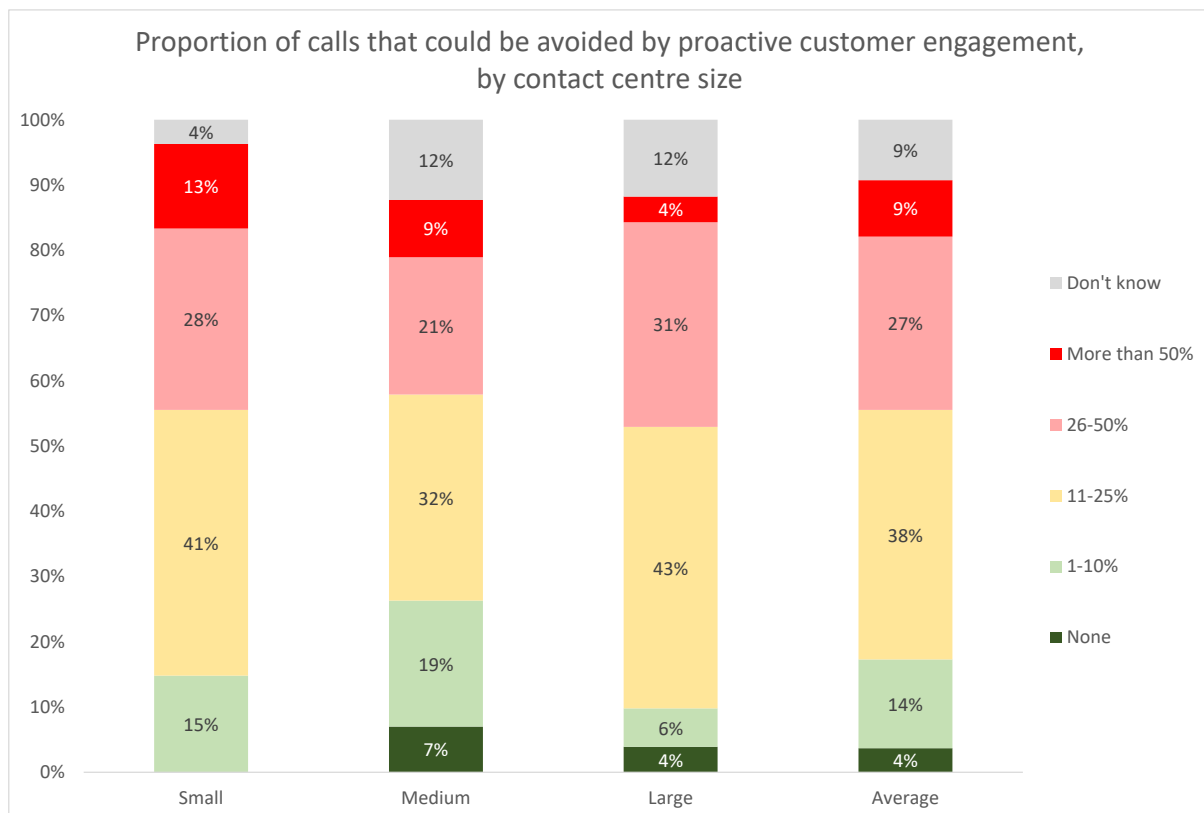
Organisations should look to analyse the type of interactions that they receive into their contact centre, and to see if there is a cost-effective way of proactively handling these. The opportunity is certainly there for the industry as a whole to manage the inbound demand more effectively than is being done so at the moment.

To implement a digitally-transformed contact centre which can handle and add multiple channels, provide a single view of the customer and support agents and knowledge workers elsewhere in the enterprise means that flexibility, integration and scalability are key. Cloud-based contact centre solutions support powerful functionality that can be managed easily, regardless of the location.

Contact centres which have actually implemented a cloud-based solution have generally found that it has delivered significant advantages.

55% of respondents stated that cloud-based solutions had given a cheaper overall cost of ownership of their contact centre technology, although 12% disagreed, usually not strongly.

80% experienced more powerful extended functionality in a cloud-based environment, with only 3% disagreeing that this was the case. This figure has increase year on year as solutions have matured and developed.

71% of respondents stated that cloud made it easier to make changes to the system, with only 14% disagreeing.

Have cloud-based solutions made any difference to your contact centre?
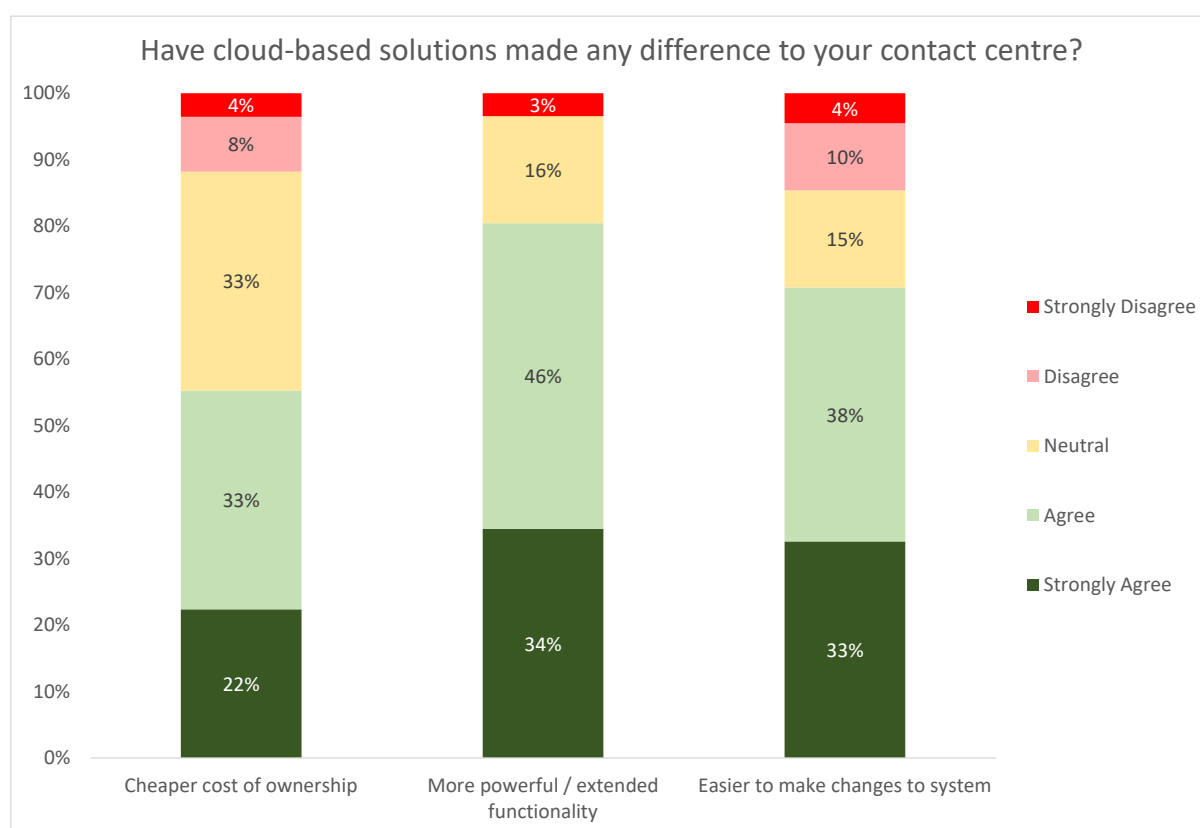
A flexible, easy-to-manage contact centre platform helps agents and management by giving them the right tools to connect with customers across newer digital channels and to understand their digital journeys better. The digitally-transformed contact centre will drive faster response times, manage costs and improve customer outcomes.

ContactBabel is the contact centre industry expert. If you have a question about how the industry works, or where it's heading, the chances are we have the answer.

The coverage provided by our massive and ongoing primary research projects is matched by our experience analysing the contact centre industry. We understand how technology, people and process best fit together, and how they will work collectively in the future.

We help the biggest and most successful vendors develop their contact centre strategies and talk to the right prospects. We have shown the UK government how the global contact centre industry will develop and change. We help contact centres compare themselves to their closest competitors so they can understand what they are doing well and what needs to improve.

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