



# The forecast is cloudy with a chance of AI

Our new Autonomous Customer 2021 research looks at how consumer behaviour has changed and how handling complex and impassioned conversations with people under pressure has affected agents.

Creating a seamless performance means understanding your audience's ever-changing needs, choosing the right tools, partners and systems, orchestrating this effort across global touchpoints, systems, people and processes, and adjusting on the fly, to create a best-in-class show for every customer.

Today we are launching our new [Connect your customer at every level](#) campaign. It will tell the story of how our Customer Contact services can help you create wonderful experiences for your customers with a feast for the eyes that builds over time.



During this past year consumers have truly gone digital, changing how we interact with businesses for good. As shopping centres shut and we stayed at home, millions of people shopped for goods and services online – many for the first time. Almost overnight, companies and their contact centres had to adapt to a vast surge of customers streaming through their virtual doors.

With so much up in the air, we commissioned a special run of our regular Autonomous Customer research to explore consumer behaviour and expectations during this time of turbulent change.

It revealed that many organisations still have a way to go to find a contact centre set up that'll provide a great customer experience. Outdated technology and management practices are holding them back – and consumers are suffering, often left frustrated and disappointed by their dealings with businesses.

Eight in ten consumers reported having a problem with service in the last six months and three quarters said they find dealing with customer service issues 'tiring and exhausting'. They're just not getting the easy, convenient and secure service they want.

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## 80%

say they could not purchase a product or service online, make changes, choose a delivery slot, or pay for an order

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So, what's the best pathway for organisations wanting to deliver an outstanding customer contact experience?

### Put people first – not technology

As a technology provider, you might expect us to focus straight in on the technology and how it can make a difference. And it's true – there's so much brilliant technology around, it's easy to get pulled into it. But we believe you have to start by understanding the people aspect of the equation first.

When it comes to contact centres, 'people' means a complex set of stakeholders, reaching beyond the obvious consumers and agents, to supervisors and wider interests in the business such as IT and the digital team. Taking all these stakeholders with you on a change journey and keeping them on board all the way is extremely challenging.

However, by solving the problems people face, it'll be clear what you need the technology to do and decisions about it will almost be made for you.

So what do we know? Consumers are really clear on what makes a great customer service experience – a convenient choice of contact channels that keep all data and interactions secure, and make things easy. They don't want to wait; they want speedy resolutions, and they expect to only explain their issue or give their details once. It's a tall order.

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## 63%

want to be able to switch from chat to a voice or video call seamlessly

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And don't forget your agents in all this. They're on the receiving end of those customer expectations and want to be able to meet them – but they're struggling. During the pandemic they report getting queries that are more difficult to answer, and say wait times are increasing in the face of growing demand. They're frustrated by lengthy log on processes, having to switch between multiple screens and slow running systems.

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## 69%

Agents say customers are more likely to ask questions which are difficult to answer (during pandemic)

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### It's a transformational challenge

Fixing these issues goes beyond implementing new technology. You're looking at a significant transformation focusing on how you work if you're truly going to get maximum benefit from your tech investment. Don't underestimate the scale of the transformation we're talking about.

Security is a huge hurdle to get over: is it ever possible to be secure and offer a great consumer experience? The key is delivering security that doesn't require too much effort, for both consumers and agents. We believe biometric verification is the way forward now that it works more reliably; it's a quick and easy process for the user and it holds down costs.

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## 58%

like the idea of organisations using technology like AI to identify me by my voice and save time on the call

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Organisations are telling me that their agents will be working from home for the foreseeable future, which means they're having to reinvent their security to cope with this set up. This is a significant transformation that involves providing homeworking agents with the bandwidth and capabilities they'd get in the office via SD-WAN to the home or dedicated broadband circuits to the home for exclusive work use.

### The right technology in the right moment

Technology that's genuinely transformational does more than just work – it's liked by both consumers and agents because it addresses their issues. It absolutely has to be an enabler; people's needs must come first.

In fact, success only comes when you apply the right technology in the right moment in a way that improves the experience all-round and, as a bonus, keeps costs down. Going on holiday, for example, shows how the technology a consumer wants to use shifts according to where they are in the process.

Their contact preferences change depending on their motivation, context and attitude. 'Visionary' consumers are happy to use any channels out there that will help them achieve their goal, so someone excitedly exploring possible destinations will embrace leisurely video contact with an agent. 'Utilitarian' consumers simply want straightforward service channels that let them tick off their 'to do' list. So, if someone just wants to check flight times, they'd opt for a quick self-service option. And 'Customers in a crisis' want a contact channel that provides a rapid solution to a problem so, if someone's got an urgent issue with their hotel, they're more likely to want the reassurance of traditional face-to-face or telephone contact with a knowledgeable and empathetic agent.

You must be clear on why you're putting in the technology, and understand what happens either side of it. Take the use of AI-powered chatbots in contact centres. It sounds like an ideal way of deflecting calls from agents.

But customer satisfaction can take a massive knock if the consumer needs to escalate their issue to a human agent and that agent doesn't have the details. If you consider what happens either side of the technology, you'll make sure your people are 'augmented agents', prompted by back-office bots with the full context of the interaction so far and suggestions for next steps.

### Contact centres in a time of accelerated change

2021's contact centre is operating in a complex context. Consumerisation is pushing expectations ever higher as people expect all the technology, apps and functionality they have in their personal sphere to be available when dealing with businesses.

An intelligent cloud contact centre journey needs to balance choice, security and experience with speed and value. We understand everything that goes into a customer's experience, considering what people, think, feel and do at every stage.

We can help you transform your customer experience in a modular way.

### Connect your customer at every level

Our research highlights five key insights that you need to address to help make things easy and effective for consumers and agents:

- The shift to online raises the bar for customer service
- Convenience, choice and security remain non-negotiable
- Consumers make life hard for the contact centre agent
- Agents wish for updated core technologies and to be equipped for working from home
- The importance of keeping customers in the loop with smart services.

**Get the full picture of what consumers expect from contact centres today, download our [Autonomous Customer 2021 whitepaper](#).**

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**Andrew Small**  
Digital Solutions Director

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