Five9 Customer Service Index 2021: The (Hopefully) Post-Peak Pandemic Edition – Survey Results
Introduction

Saying that 2021 was a unique year would be quite an understatement. As the COVID-19 pandemic continued, both businesses and consumers began accepting the “new normal.” Work from home became the norm, as well as online shopping, curbside pickup, and more. Contact centers and customer service representatives were under more pressure than ever before, with increasing customer demands for fast, reliable service.

Customer expectations are forcing organizations to evaluate the way they provide service and customer care. Today’s customers demand a consistent experience regardless of location or device and expect organizations they do business with to be responsive and effective. Going beyond merely servicing customers, companies need to focus on customer satisfaction and providing a positive customer experience, resulting in long-term customer loyalty.

To help businesses better understand the current state of customer service, Five9 partnered with Zogby Analytics to survey consumers about the State of Customer Service and Support. Now in its fifth year, the Customer Service Index provides data and insights to help businesses better meet their customers’ changing needs and expectations. Surveying 2,048 consumers
ranging in age from late teens (18) to those in their 70s, Zogby Analytics’ and Five9’s research revealed that in the COVID-19 era, customer service is more important than ever.

This year we’ve added an international flavor with the addition of several European countries – including France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the U.K. to identify global attitudes, regional variances and trends. As we’re still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, survey respondents were asked about changes in their attitudes and behaviors in the past year.

Taking steps now to improve customer service throughout the customer journey will help your organization improve the overall customer experience, ultimately leading to greater frequency of repeat purchases, increased revenues, and reduced costs.
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In many cases, the survey results highlight key differences based on geography and age. Organizations that serve different age groups, as well as multinationals serving various countries and regions, need to be aware of their customers’ preferences, as one size of customer service does not fit all.

**Customer Experience – Rising to the Challenges**

The past year continued to be extremely challenging for all types of businesses and organizations, as well as for consumers. Customer service was greatly impacted due to the COVID-19 crisis, as it was often more difficult and time consuming for consumers to get the information and responses needed in a timely manner.

**Customer Service Still Lacking**

The good news is that despite the many changes businesses and consumers were forced to contend with, customer service experiences have essentially stayed the same over the past year. In fact, 44 percent of survey respondents worldwide feel that their contact center experiences since the start of the pandemic have stayed the same with no change, and 23 percent feel that their experiences have slightly or greatly improved, while 25 percent feel that things have gotten slightly or much worse.

Organizations know that they can differentiate themselves by providing stellar customer experiences, but many have either not invested in the right technologies and platforms, haven’t provided the proper training and incentives to engage their customer service agents, or are still using outdated metrics that focus on saving money rather than satisfying customers. Whatever the reason, many organizations may not be doing enough to delight customers and improve the customer experience.
A Poor Experience Threatens Future Business

Customers are unlikely to remain loyal after a bad customer service experience. Compared with 2020, the percentage of U.S. respondents who are very likely to continue doing business after a negative customer service experience decreased from 18 to 11 percent, while those very unlikely to do so has increased from 31 to 35 percent.

Businesses Making it Hard for Consumers

Rather than make it easy for customers to reach out to the contact center, too many companies don’t provide easy access to customer support. Just over one-quarter of respondents can easily find the information they need to reach out to a contact center, while the rest acknowledge that it’s more difficult or time consuming than it should be. Customer service and support phone numbers should be readily available on company websites, providing options for ways to reach an agent or get the information needed.

Channel Choices

Options abound for today’s digital consumers, and businesses must provide the consumers’ preferred channels for reaching out for customer service. The phone continues to be the leading channel of choice across all age groups, followed by email and online chat.

Phone interactions are especially preferred among older respondents, but all age groups surveyed also prefer the phone – especially when interacting about an urgent or sensitive customer service issue.

Find the Right Answer

Surprisingly, while consumers don’t want to have to wait a long time to reach a representative, they don’t mind spending more time interacting with an agent if it results in getting the information or answer they’re looking for. When it comes to great customer service, the most important factor is the ability to solve a problem or issue the first time.
Changing Expectations

By now it’s clear that the majority of consumers have adapted to the new ways of engaging with businesses. The way businesses and customers interact today is vastly different from just a few years ago. Online shopping, digital channels for customer engagement, and very limited face-to-face interactions are the norm. New demands, expectations, and interaction methods are causing organizations across all industries to re-evaluate their customer service practices.

Today’s consumers generally have one or more mobile devices and various ways to connect online. The new “digital consumers” have more choices than ever when it comes to who they do business with and how they prefer to interact with these businesses. With an array of mobile devices at the ready, consumers can easily connect and communicate with each other and with businesses. Thanks to the Internet, it’s fast and easy to research and purchase goods and services, and when something goes wrong, to complain and get problems resolved.

The contact center remains the front door for businesses, and organizations need to provide contact centers and representatives with the right tools and technologies to provide fast and efficient service to customers.
Background

For the fifth year, Five9 commissioned Zogby Analytics to conduct an online survey of consumers. This year, responses were collected from consumers in seven countries: the U.S., Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the U.K. Respondents ranged in age from late teens to those in their 70s. Where applicable, this report highlights survey result variations based on geography, age, or where there are interesting trends. (Note: The 2020 survey was U.S. and Canada only, so the comparisons only include responses from U.S. respondents).
What Makes for a Good or Bad Customer Experience?

Many factors come into play that can make or break the customer experience. With new tools and technologies continually being introduced, businesses have the opportunity to enhance the customer experience and improve customer loyalty.

The key to a good customer experience is actually pretty simple – provide customers with the information they need and answer their questions. When asked about which factors have the most impact on creating a good or positive customer service experience, the number one response was “getting the right answer from a representative, even if it takes more time” (33 percent). While respondents don’t like having to wait a long time to reach a customer service representative, they are more than willing to have the actual interaction take a longer time if it results in getting the right answer or information. At the same time, customers want to interact with a representative who can answer their question quickly (26 percent).

Chart 1: Good Customer Service Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rep gets right answer, even if it takes more time</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have to wait long to reach rep</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep can answer my question quickly</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep has information about me and my history</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep is proactive and reaches out to me</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Customers don’t like having to wait long to reach a representative (20 percent), although those in Italy are the least patient (31 percent) while those in the U.S. aren’t as bothered (17 percent). Providing customer service representatives with the tools they need to provide the right information and answer customers’ questions correctly is the most important thing businesses can do to provide a positive customer experience.
With the right tools and technologies, organizations can meet consumers’ needs and provide the capabilities that make for a great customer service experience. For example, by providing customer service agents with information to solve consumers’ questions and issues, such as FAQs, suggested responses and agent assistance using artificial intelligence, the ability to reach subject matter experts within the organization, and so on, organizations can provide first contact resolution (FCR) and increase customer satisfaction.

Alternatively, there are several factors that help to create a bad customer experience. With minimal difference between respondents in North American and Europe and between respondents in 2021 vs. 2020, the biggest factor is getting passed from one representative to another (34%), followed by having to wait too long to reach a representative (26%).

Integrating contact center capabilities with an organization’s unified communications and telephony capabilities lets agents reach out to subject matter experts and others outside of the contact center who can provide them with the information they need to respond to a customer’s question or solve their problem. Empowering agents with the right information and the ability to solve customers’ issues without passing them to other agents and departments reduces customer frustration.

Chart 3: Bad Customer Service Experience, 2021 vs. 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get passed from one rep to another</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to wait long to reach rep</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cue/on hold system not helpful</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep cannot answer my question quickly</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep doesn’t have information about me</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents in Canada are the most upset about getting passed from person to person to resolve an issue (49 percent), while those in Italy are more forgiving about that issue (17 percent), while waiting a long time to reach a representative is Italian consumers' top concern.
Customer Service Experiences

Despite the many challenges businesses and organizations faced in the past year, including adapting to a work-from-home environment in many cases, the overall impact on customer support was minimal. Interestingly, attitudes about customer service experiences were extremely mixed, with no clear trend one way or the other. 44 percent of survey respondents worldwide feel that their contact center experiences since the start of the pandemic have stayed the same with no change, and 23 percent feel that their experiences have slightly or greatly improved, while 25 percent feel that things have gotten slightly or much worse. These findings however were not universal. The majority of respondents in Germany (56 percent) found no change, as did those in Italy (52 percent). Survey respondents in the U.S. and Spain were most likely to find improvements (28 percent and 29 percent, respectively), while those in the U.K. experienced worse customer support (38 percent).

Businesses and organizations should be commended for their customer support efforts, as call volumes greatly increased for many industries. Since mid-2020, online shopping – and online returns – replaced the in-person experience, leading to more contact center inquiries regarding damaged or delayed packages. Increased interaction volume led to longer hold times. Most organizations had transitioned to a Work from Home (WFH) environment, which continued to impact service quality in some situations. Despite the challenges, the fact that 23 percent of respondents felt that their experiences improved is quite impressive.

Comparing the responses from U.S. respondents from the previous year, when we were in the midst of the pandemic, the results are essentially unchanged. While businesses continue to adapt to the impact of the pandemic, the impact on customer service is minimal.

Solid Improvements in Spain While Things Got Worse in the UK

Only 16 percent of respondents in Spain felt that their customer service experiences were slightly or much worse in the past 12 months, compared with 38 percent of those in the U.K. Conversely, 35 percent of those in Spain felt that their customer service experiences had slightly or greatly improved, while only 16 percent of those in the U.K. felt their experiences improved.
Chart 6: When you’ve reached out to a business’ contact center for customer support over the past 12 months, do you feel your customer service experiences have been worse?
More than Ever, Poor Customer Service Impacts Future Business

A poor customer service experience can have a negative impact on a consumer’s relationship with a business. Only seven percent of total respondents indicated that they were very likely to continue doing business with a firm based on poor customer service, while 14 percent are somewhat likely to continue doing so. Once again, the reaction varied by country. For U.S. respondents, see chart on left, only 11 percent are very likely to continue doing business with a company, which is down from last year’s 18 percent.

Conversely, almost three-quarters (72 percent) of respondents are somewhat or very unlikely to continue doing business with a company after a poor customer service experience. Those in Spain are least likely to continue doing business with a company, with 48 percent very unlikely, while those in Germany are a bit more forgiving, with 31 percent very unlikely to do so.

Respondents in the U.S. have become more discriminating in the past year, as those who are very likely to continue doing business after a negative customer service experience decreased, and those unlikely to do so has increased. Compared with 2020, the percentage of U.S. respondents, who are very likely to continue doing business after a negative customer service experience decreased from 18 to 11 percent, while those very unlikely to do so has increased from 31 to 35 percent.

Age seems to make a slight difference, as those respondents in the various geographies very likely to continue doing business with a company after a poor customer service experience range from only one percent of those 65 years and older, to 13 percent of those aged 30-49. The likelihood of continuing to do business after a poor customer service experience decreases as age increases, as 82 percent of those aged 65 and over are somewhat or very unlikely to continue doing business, followed by 79 percent of those 50-64, 67 percent of those 30-49, and 60 percent of those 18-29.
Brand Loyalty

Customer service and brand loyalty are often tightly correlated – if a customer receives good customer service, they’re more likely to stay loyal to that brand or company. Conversely, bad customer service can result in lost customer loyalty and lost business.

The challenges of the past year have resulted in lost business for many brands and organizations, as 30 percent of survey respondents indicated that they have left a brand they were previously loyal to. The highest portion of customers leaving brands was in Spain (40 percent) and the U.K. (39 percent), while those in Germany were more loyal, as only 20 percent left a brand. For most companies, losing 30 percent of their customers would be detrimental, and businesses need to do what they can to retain customer loyalty and goodwill.

Fortunately, the number of customers that left brands in the past year isn’t as high as it could have been, as 60 percent of customers remained loyal to brands, with 10 percent unsure. For the most part, consumers were somewhat forgiving during the pandemic, recognizing that companies and brands were facing many challenges – from reduced hours and staff shortages, to supply chain issues. Additionally, many brands stepped up to the plate and did what was needed to improve the customer experience and retain customers. The biggest losers were retail and consumer products in the U.K. and Canada, followed by banking and financial services in France and Spain.
Contacting Businesses

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted many areas of our lives as we were forced to socially isolate. One of the biggest changes was the need to do many things online, as we could no longer go to brick-and-mortar stores and businesses. While we expected that the increase in online shopping would lead to increases in the need for consumers to reach out to businesses for information and updates such as package delivery status, whether or not an item was in stock, and various troubleshooting issues, this was not necessarily the case.

When asked if they've been contacting businesses more often during the past 12 months to get updates on purchases, deliveries, etc., 69 percent of survey respondents noted that they did not contact businesses any more than in the past, while only 27 percent contacted businesses more, with 4 percent unsure. Respondents in Spain were the most likely to contact businesses more (36 percent), while those in Italy and France were least likely (19 and 20 percent, respectively). One possible explanation for this is that companies are doing a better job of being proactive and reaching out to customers with the information they may need before customers have to contact them. Businesses have been using various tools, such as SMS/text messaging and providing status updates on their websites, reducing the need for customers to reach out for this information.
Customer Service Channel Preferences

Thanks to modern technologies, consumers have a variety of options when it comes to interacting with businesses for customer service issues. With digital channels such as email, online chat, and social media, consumers can reach and interact with businesses using their channel of choice. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and others have become places to vent and complain if and when there are issues.

With all of these options in today’s omnichannel world, the phone remains the number one preferred channel of choice across all geographies and age groups. While many have predicted for some time the demise of the phone or voice channel for customer service, the survey results show that regardless of age, just over half of the respondents (51 percent) prefer to interact with a company over the phone when interacting with a business for general customer service issues. Email is the second preferred channel (23 percent), followed by online chat (12 percent).

Email is often a better interaction method when the consumer is in a noisy environment and a phone call wouldn’t be practical, or when the customer needs to provide photos or documents to the customer service representative or want to maintain a record of the interaction. Despite longer response times, email inquiries can provide more detailed information, and customer service representatives can spend more time researching for the correct information.

Increasing in popularity, online chat is a real-time alternative to email that lets customers and representatives share information such as documents or web page links, making it especially easy to interact while a customer is on a company’s website. Chat sessions are real time like phone calls but can be more time consuming than sending an email, requiring interaction between the consumer and representative (or chatbot in some cases).

Consumers in Canada are most likely to pick up the phone for general customer service issues (60 percent), while those in Germany are least likely to do so (42 percent). Alternatively, German consumers are more comfortable with email than those in other countries (34 percent), while Canadian and Spanish consumers less likely to use email (19 percent). Web chat remains the third most popular channel choice, with 11 percent of consumers surveyed opting for this channel. Consumers in the U.K. are the most likely to use web chat (20 percent), while those in France are least likely (eight percent).
Chart 9: What is your preferred channel of choice when interacting with businesses for general customer service issues?

The key take-away is that consumers have varying preferences, and it’s important to provide options.
Preferences by Age

It is important to point out that Millennials, Gen Xers, and Baby Boomers have different preferences when it comes to customer service. Despite predictions warning of the demise of the use of the phone to access customer service, the phone still remains the number one preferred channel of choice – even with the youngest age groups.

While pundits have proclaimed that younger generations generally are averse to making phone calls, preferring text, email, and chat, the phone is still the preferred way of interacting with a company for customer service, with 40 percent of 18-29 year olds, 45 percent of those 30-49, 58 percent of 50-64 year olds, and 62 percent of those 65 and older opting for the phone. Not unexpectedly, the preference for the phone increases with age groups.

Surprisingly, all age groups chose email over chat as their second choice when asked about their preferred channel.

Social media remains an untapped channel, with only five percent of respondents preferring this option. Not surprisingly, the preference for social media as a channel decreased with age, going from 11 percent of 18-29 year olds to six percent of 30-49 year olds, down to 1 percent for those 50 and above. While we expected texting to be the channel of choice for younger generations, only 5 percent 18-29 year olds prefer using text. We expect this number to greatly increase in the next few years.

Web chat usage could be greatly increased if organizations followed best practices and made it a more user-friendly channel. The same is true for messaging apps like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, as well as social media channels like Twitter and Facebook. While these channels can be extremely useful for customer service interactions, they’re often not properly staffed and response times can range from minutes to hours.

Businesses are well advised to support multiple interaction channels, providing customers with choices and options. As noted, email may be appropriate in some situations, while chat or the phone are appropriate in others.
Phone Increasingly Preferred for Urgent and Sensitive Issues

When an issue isn’t pressing or time constrained, consumers may be more willing to send an email, knowing that they’ll receive a response within 24 hours. But what happens when a customer service issue is urgent or the subject matter is sensitive – which is the preferred channel for interacting with a company for customer service? No surprise – the preference for the phone increases from 50 percent to 65 percent overall. While email, social media, and other channels may be appropriate for most questions and interactions, if a customer service issue is urgent and an immediate response is required, or the subject matter is sensitive, such as for health care or financial matters, the phone is the go-to channel of choice.

Respondents in Canada are most likely to prefer the phone (77 percent), followed by those in Spain (72 percent).

Surprisingly, email remains the next preferred option. Despite the lack of immediate responses for email inquiries (often 24 hours or more), consumers can send lengthy, detailed emails with attached photos and documents, making it easier to share important information with the organization.

Age continues to play a role, as the preference for using the phone increases with age – from 48 percent of 18-29 years to 76 percent of those 65 and over. The opposite is true for email preference, as 18 percent of 18-29 year olds prefer using email, down to 10 percent of those 65 and over.

Ideally, web chat would be more appropriate for urgent issues, but in many cases, the web chat capabilities companies provide are not optimized, making it a frustrating experience. While more real time than email, web chat is still an asynchronous channel, and sometimes there’s a large delay between when the customer enters information about their question or issue and the web chat agent or customer service representative responds. This can be addressed by following some best practices, including better staffing of agents to support web chat interactions, as well as limiting the number of simultaneous interactions an agent is supporting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Web Chat</th>
<th>Social Media</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Company FAQs &amp; Help Sites</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Media

With the increasing popularity of social media platforms, some consumers are turning to Twitter and Facebook, as well as messaging apps like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, as customer support channels. More businesses are beginning to monitor their social media pages and respond to customer complaints when appropriate. However, consumer interest in social media platforms as a customer service channel is still limited.

Social media and messaging remain an untapped channel, as many businesses don’t provide customer service using social media services and apps. For the most part, consumers don’t think about reaching out for customer service via social media channels, as most companies don’t support or promote it. In other cases, consumers may reach out to a business over social media, but either don’t get a response, get a delayed response, or are told to send an email or call the 800 number. This hinders more prevalent use of social media for customer service. Companies that “do social media right” have benefited from reduced costs compared with phone-based agents, similar to online chat. However, because of the public-facing aspect of social media, many businesses have shied away from it.

The opportunity for social media to play a more prominent role exists. A quarter of the total respondents are more willing to use social media platforms for customer service since a year ago, while 19 percent remain the same, although 36 percent remain unwilling to do so and 20 percent are even less willing than a year ago.
Of the respondents that are more willing to use social media, Spain leads with 31 percent, followed by the U.S. Those who are less willing are led by France and Italy.
Age certainly plays a role, as 40 percent of those 18-29 are more willing to use social media, compared with 34 percent of 30-49 year olds, 14 percent of 50-64 year olds, and 9 percent of those 65 and over. Surprisingly, 24 percent of 30-49 year olds are not willing to use social media for customer service.

It’s important to provide the options that your customers are looking for. With 25 percent of total customers, including a high portion of those 18-49 indicating they prefer social media, companies that do not offer customer service over social media channels may be missing out, and not able to “meet their customers where they are.”

Chart 13: Willingness to use social media platforms for Customer Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>More Willing</th>
<th>Less Willing</th>
<th>Not Willing</th>
<th>About the Same</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Device Usage

Channel preference is partly driven by which device is being used for engaging with organizations for customer service issues. If using a home or work phone, web chat, text, email, or other digital channels aren’t feasible. Alternatively, if using a tablet or computer, email may be the best choice, while those using a smartphone have many more options available to them.

As expected, the majority of survey respondents use their smartphones to interact with organizations for customer service. With 60 percent of all respondents using smartphones, Italy led the way with 67 percent, followed by the U.S. with 65 percent. The home or work phone was the second most-used device. Customers in Canada are more likely than their counterparts in other countries to use the home or work phone (48 percent), while only 26 percent of U.S. respondents use the home or work phone. Computers are used by just under one-third of the respondents, while tablets are used by only 10 percent.

Mobile apps have become the norm, with organizations and businesses of all types offering mobile applications with a variety of capabilities. Yet not all apps include the ability to engage with customer service, or do not promote the capability. While less than 10 percent of respondents engage directly with a business from within their mobile app, this number is expected to increase as more and more businesses make these capabilities available to customers. Spain is ahead of the curve, with 12 percent of respondents engaging through mobile apps, while Canada is lagging with only four percent of respondents engaging through these apps.
Video and Virtual Agents

New interaction channels are emerging, including video and virtual agents. Video interactions allow either one-way or two-way video, enabling agents and customers to see each other, and in some cases, to share photos, videos, and documents. This can be extremely helpful in a variety of situations, such as when a customer needs to show an insurance claims agent the damage to a car after an accident, or needs help assembling a product.

Virtual agents, enabled by artificial intelligence technology, machine learning, and advanced speech technologies, enable customers to get answers and information quickly and easily without having to speak with a live agent. Ideal for basic inquiries and transactions, virtual agents are still new and not widely deployed, but are increasing in popularity.

When asked about their interest in using virtual agents/chats when interacting with a contact center agent, responses were mixed.
Chart 15: When reaching out for customer service, would you want to use virtual agents/chats to get answers and information quickly without having to speak with a live agent?

Overall, 36 percent of respondents stated they use virtual agents/chats when available. Respondents in Spain are most open to using virtual agents/chats (49 percent), while those in France are least likely to use them (23 percent).
Usage also varies by age with 44 percent of respondents ages 18-29; and 45 percent of those 30-49 using virtual agents. Only 33 percent of those 50-64 and 19 percent of respondents over 65 do so. Those 65 and over are not interested in using virtual agents/chats.

The same question was asked about using video to interact with a contact center agent. In the “Zoom era” when people of all ages and all geographies became comfortable using Zoom and other video conferencing technologies to interact with relatives, friends, church groups, book clubs, etc., we expected the interest in using video for customer service to be higher. Businesses and consumers can both benefit from being able to share visual information such as short instructional and how-to videos, photographs of damaged packages or car accidents, and various types of documents. A picture tells a thousand words and being able to share photos and other types of images is much faster and easier than trying to explain a problem to a customer service agent, or explain a solution to a customer.

Surprisingly, a higher percentage of respondents are not willing or interested in using video to interact with an agent. Even when given the option of being able to see the agent but not have the agent see the customer, responses were still below expectations.
When interacting with a contact center agent, would you want to use video with the agent?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>FR</th>
<th>GE</th>
<th>IT</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would do a video call where I can see the agent and the agent can see me</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would do a video call where I can see the agent, but the agent cannot see me</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t want to see the agent, but I’d like to be able to share videos as needed with the agent to provide more information about my issue/question</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would not use video call</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Canadian respondents are least interested in using video, while those in Spain are most open to two-way video where both the agent and customer can see each other.
Once again, age plays a role. While 39 percent of the overall survey respondents would not use video, that number is skewed towards older respondents who are less interested in using video. A full 70 percent of 18-29 year old respondents are open to using video calls to interact with agents, while 42 and 47 percent of 30-49 and 50-64 year olds are open to video, with only 33 percent of those 65 and over interested in using video.

Expect that as video interactions and virtual agents/chats become more common and used by more organizations, consumers will become more open to using these options. However, organizations need to carefully identify the best ways in which to use these technologies. For example, most consumers do not want to interact on live video with agents for personal and security reasons. However, if they could access instructional videos or share videos of damaged packages received, for example, this could help expedite resolving their issues. Organizations need to carefully identify the best use cases for using video for customer care.

Similarly, many consumers are reluctant to use virtual agents as they can often be frustrating to use and do not provide the necessary information due to limitations in what they are capable of doing. Companies need to do a better job of showing the value of virtual agents and chat. In many cases, they also need to do a better job of informing customers that chatting with a virtual agent is available as an option and can be faster than waiting on hold for a live agent. Customers need to know that they have an option of interacting with a virtual chat agent, which can provide the answers and information quickly and effectively, while eliminating hold time.

As the technology improves, and as organizations better understand best practices in how to use virtual agents, consumers will likely turn to these AI-based agents for 24/7 information access and for basic inquiries and transactions.
Finding Information

An unfortunate reality when it comes to customer service is that some companies still make it difficult for customers to reach the contact center and agents. Pointing customers to FAQs, online communities, and other online resources, many companies don’t provide easy access to customer support. In fact, a company called Get Human was created to help consumers find the phone numbers to reach customer service for many phone companies, banks, cable companies, and others. It’s an unfortunate reality that this type of service is needed.

Survey respondents were asked how challenging it is to find the information they need to reach out to the contact center, and the results were disappointing. Sadly, the results haven’t improved since last year’s study.

Just over a quarter of respondents can find the information they need easily, while the rest either struggle with finding it, don’t always find it, or find it but it takes time. There are slight differences across age groups. Respondents aged 30-49 seem to have the easiest time finding the information (33 percent) compared with 27 percent of those 18-20, 27 percent of those 50-64, and 14 percent of those 65 and over.

Clearly there’s a disconnect between consumer preferences and ease of access – in many cases, customers are trying to call and connect with a business, but the business is making it difficult to do, which may result in lost business. Organizations need to do a better job of making the information more easily accessible to customers so they can reach out to contact centers when they need to without having to spend time and energy on this task. Providing easy-to-find contact information for the various interaction channels is an easy fix for improving the customer experience.
Conclusion

Consumers are more demanding than ever, and today’s savvy digital consumers know that if a business doesn’t meet their expectations, there are many others that will. With more and more companies focusing on the customer experience, customer service plays a key role.

However, there’s much work to be done. Unfortunately, it appears that many survey respondents have come to expect less-than-great customer service. With 25 percent acknowledging that their contact center experiences have gotten worse in the few months, and only 23 percent finding that their experiences have gotten better, there’s much room for improvement.

Customer service is a strategic advantage to business. Organizations can gain loyal customers with good customer service and can lose customers with just one bad customer service interaction.

Organizations need to step up and do what’s right for their customers – or pay the price. By using modern tools and technologies to help improve speed of answer, speed of response, first contact resolution, and personalized service, organizations can improve the customer experience throughout the customer journey, resulting in loyal, satisfied customers.
For More Information

If you'd like more information about this survey, Five9, or the Five9 Customer Service Index 2021: The (Hopefully) Post-Peak Pandemic Edition – Survey Results, please contact us at CustomerIndex@Five9.com and follow us on Twitter @Five9.