

NEW BENCHMARKS FOR CUSTOMER CONTACT PERFORMANCE

APRIL 2021 MARKET STUDY



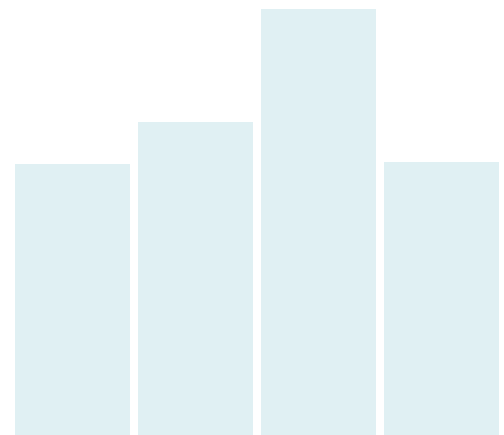
SPONSORED BY:



Radial
a bpost company

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	CCW Digital Market Study: New Benchmarks For Customer Contact Performance
4	Methodology & Demographics
4	About the Author
5	Key Findings
6	Metrics for Today's Contact Center
9	The Future of Work-From-Home
11	Thinking Beyond the Contact Center
13	Behavior in the Omnichannel World
15	Does Omnichannel Drive Customer Satisfaction?
17	Does Omnichannel Drive Results?
19	Opportunities for Agent Improvement
21	Opportunities for Artificial Intelligence
23	Budgeting for Impact
25	Preparing for a Surge
27	Appendix
28	2021 Editorial Calendar
29	Meet the Team



CCW DIGITAL MARKET STUDY: NEW BENCHMARKS FOR CUSTOMER CONTACT PERFORMANCE

What worked yesterday will not necessarily drive success today. It will almost certainly not ensure a fruitful tomorrow.

Customer contact leaders have long recognized this reality. They acknowledged that the strategies, metrics, processes, and investments they leveraged in the phone-only “cost center” days would not guarantee success in the value-driven, omnichannel world. This universal acceptance did not, however, translate into widespread action. Many contact centers remained married to “business as usual,” leading to mediocre agent performance and suboptimal customer experiences.

Always a disappointment, the hazard of complacency became unprecedentedly clear amid the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021. As demands rose, volume surged, complexity grew, and digital utilization skyrocketed, companies gained a front-row seat to the importance of change. If they did not outright struggle to support customers throughout the omnichannel journey, those who rejected change at least failed to maximize the value of their interactions.

As they are no able longer to deny the importance of addressing new customer demands, new agent environments, and new technological innovations, it will be interesting to see how contact center leaders assess and activate contact center performance in the months and years ahead. This Market Study offers a window into that journey.

Fueled by CCW Digital market research, the report uncovers how companies are quantifying performance, faring in the omnichannel world, and rallying people, processes, and technology to transform their contact centers into sources of unrivaled value.



METHODOLOGY & DEMOGRAPHICS

To gather data for the New Benchmarks for Customer Contact Performance market study, CCW Digital conducted a comprehensive survey in March 2021. Targeted at leaders responsible for contact center, customer experience, marketing, information technology, and/or operations strategy, the survey uncovered how businesses are quantifying and maximizing the success of their customer contact functions.

Example respondent job titles included vice president of enterprise contact center, president, chief operating officer, director of digital customer experience, vice president of client services, head of customer success, vice president of call center operations, head of user experience, head of customer engagement, manager of contact center technology, director of service delivery, and chief executive officer.

Respondent companies spanned numerous industries and all company size ranges.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Brian Cantor

Principal Analyst, CCW Digital

Customer Management Practice



Brian Cantor is the principal analyst and director for CCW Digital, the global online community and research hub for customer contact professionals. In his role, Brian leads all customer experience, contact center, technology, and employee engagement research initiatives for CCW. CCW Digital's articles, special reports, commentaries, infographics, executive interviews, webinars, and online events reach a community of over 150,000.

A passionate advocate for customer centricity, Brian regularly speaks on major CX conference agendas. He also advises organizations on customer experience and business development strategies.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1 Contact centers are increasingly adopting a customer-facing view of performance, with metrics like first contact resolution and customer satisfaction score ranking as the most popular success metrics. Other noteworthy barometers include time to resolution, customer effort, and customer retention rate.
- 2 Contact center performance strategies will have to account for at-home work, as the remote model is here to stay. Nearly 40% of companies say the clear majority of their agents will still be working remotely by the end of 2021; only 20% believe most of their agents will spend the typical work day on-site.
- 3 In their quest to achieve greater business value and alignment, contact center leaders anticipate forming stronger connections with the operations, sales, marketing, and information technology teams.
- 4 Digital engagement volume predictably surged in 2020, with the majority of companies reporting increases in their social, live chat, chatbot, and email interactions.
- 5 Granted, the phone is far from irrelevant in today's landscape; a whopping 46% of companies also report growth in traditional call volume.
- 6 Phone, moreover, represents the best-performing channel from a customer satisfaction standpoint. Other positive performers include chat and social media.
- 7 Comparatively poor CSAT performers include messaging, chatbots, and customer communities.
- 8 The majority of businesses have enjoyed some degree of return from their digital transformation investments. Common "wins" include reductions in traditional call volume, better overall CSAT scores, and access to better customer data.
- 9 Improving the knowledge base ranks as the #1 strategy for boosting agent performance. Other key options include using AI to help agents focus on more valuable work, optimizing processes and systems to reduce agent effort, and making better use of analytics.
- 10 Chatbots remain the most popular use case for AI, although knowledge base optimization, quality and performance monitoring, and data analysis are also commanding ample attention.
- 11 As they think about future budgets, the majority of contact center leaders would like to focus more intently on journey mapping and customer experience design. Additional items on the budgetary wish list include employee training and coaching, process optimization, and customer intelligence.
- 12 The majority of companies anticipate a post-pandemic surge in business. To prepare, many will look to reallocate staff, cross-train agents, and redesign customer journeys.



METRICS FOR TODAY'S CONTACT CENTER

In addition to scoring and benchmarking performance, metrics establish the culture and mindset of an operation. Through the metrics they choose to prioritize, leaders send a message about what *matters most* to the operation.

The symbolic value of metrics is increasingly important in the era of customer centricity. Businesses and leaders may trumpet the importance of long-term customer satisfaction over short-term business concerns, but if they continue to prioritize conventional efficiency metrics over customer-facing ones, their message becomes insincere and ineffective.

Granted, efficiency metrics still have immense relevance in the modern contact center. They assist with workforce planning; companies need to know how much work their agents are handling. They help identify comparative strengths and weaknesses between different agents. They also reflect customer experience quality; customers may object to curt calls, but they still greatly value speed.

The most successful palette of metrics will, therefore, help leaders simultaneously communicate the importance of customer centricity and inspire productivity.

In the overwhelming majority of contact centers, this scorecard will include **first contact resolution and customer satisfaction score**. Priorities for 75% of contact centers, they tie as the most important contemporary contact center metric.

Their near-universal support is supremely logical. First contact resolution jointly speaks to the efficacy and efficiency of an experience. CSAT may not directly score efficiency, but it reflects the totality of a contact center's strengths and weaknesses. A low CSAT score, therefore, would indicate a potential issue on the quality and/or efficiency front. An exceptional CSAT score may not rule out quality or efficiency problems, but it would cast doubt on their significance.

Other high-priority metrics include **time to resolution (a priority for 53%), customer effort (47%), and customer retention rate (47%)**.

A ten-hour call that yields a resolution would technically pass FCR muster, but it would most likely not reflect a customer-centric interaction.

Not simply a useful customer satisfaction indicator, time to resolution also represents a vital performance metric in the digital age. For starters, it assesses whether digital channels -- such as self- or agent-assisted chat -- are living up to their promise of convenience. If it takes three times longer to solve a problem in chat than it does over the phone, neither the customer nor business is meaningfully benefiting.

Time to resolution also has relevance for asynchronous interactions. Channels like messaging may involve numerous starts-and-stops; time to resolution can assess the total effort (and thus net efficiency) of the interaction.

The broader customer effort metric serves a similar purpose. Savvy companies will also use customer effort to measure the *non-conversational* parts of their journey. If customers have to spend twenty minutes navigating five different web pages just to reach a live agent, they may be dissatisfied even if the agent is stellar.

If CSAT is essentially a “check” on the importance of operational scores, customer retention rate is a check on CSAT. It lets businesses know whether their experience is strong enough to retain business or merely satisfying enough to prevent complaints.

Granted, retention rate only proves that customers are presently coming back. It does not necessarily confirm customers will *remain* loyal if an appealing competitor comes along.

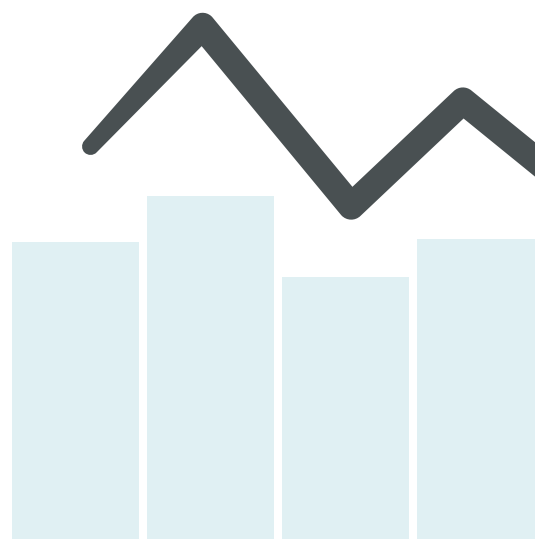
Comparatively low-priority metrics include call deflection (17%), downtime (17%), and transfer rate (18%).

On the one hand, the dismissal is understandable. None of the three is a buzzy metric. None offers a captivating look at how well agents are connecting with customers.

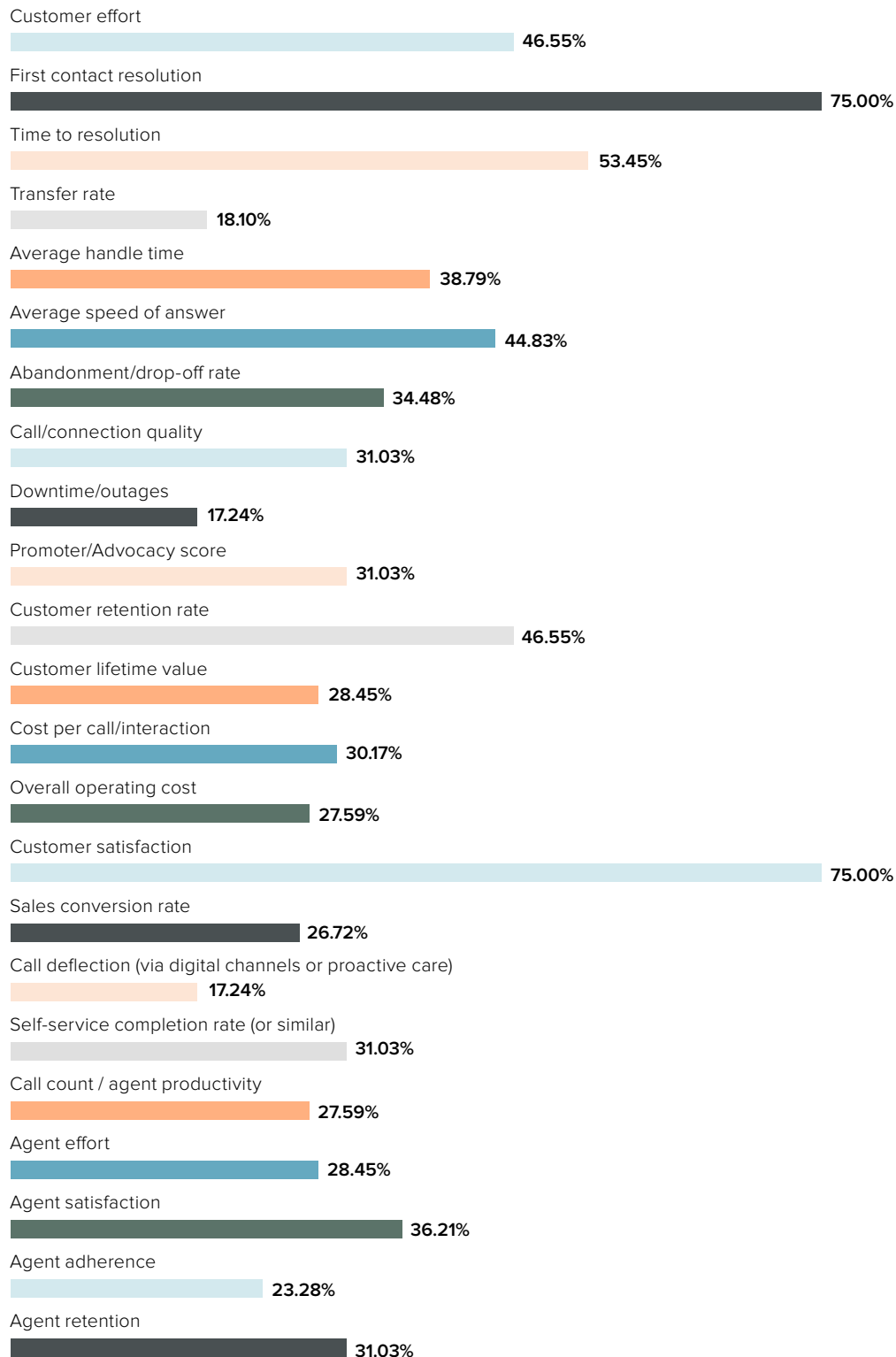
On the other hand, the dismissal is problematic as all three speak to critical issues within the modern contact center. Call deflection is a direct reflection of the quality of digital support, self-service, and proactive engagement. With companies investing so heavily in their digital transformations – CCW Digital’s Future of the Contact Center study identified digital optimization as a top strategic priority – it seems counterintuitive to ignore such a relevant measure.

With two-thirds of companies identifying “poor connections” as a major challenge with the at-home work model, downtime suddenly represents a key success benchmark. It may have appeared antiquated in the contact center of 2019, but it would seemingly have more value in 2021.

For the past several years, CCW Digital’s Consumer Preferences Survey has identified “multiple transfers” as one of the most common and problematic experiential pain points. By underplaying the value of transfer rate, contact center leaders undermine their ability to provide a remedy.



Which metrics are MOST important when measuring/evaluating CX and contact center performance?





THE FUTURE OF WORK-FROM-HOME

Prior to 2020, remote work remained a fringe consideration for many contact centers. It made sense as a “summer Friday” reward or as a way to address seasonal volume spikes, but it was not a standard, year-round operating procedure.

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly changed that reality, literally *forcing* companies to adopt the work-from-home model. Obligatory acceptance quickly turned to enthusiastic embrace, however, when many contact centers began to witness the efficacy of the model. In a mid-2020 CCW Digital survey, a whopping 73% of contact center leaders said they planned to permanently allow at least some agents to work from home.

The question, of course, was whether leaders would stick by their bold declaration once the pandemic subsided. Once a full-time return to the office became possible, would the bright light of work-from-home begin to dim?

With vaccinations on the rise and social distancing restrictions on the decline as of April 2021, the idea of reopening contact centers finally seems viable. Companies are finally regaining their autonomy over where their agents work.

Proving that their support was not merely one of obligation, many *will* continue to support the at-home approach. Per survey data conducted for this market study, the majority of companies believe at least 20% of their agents will be primarily working from home at the end of 2021.

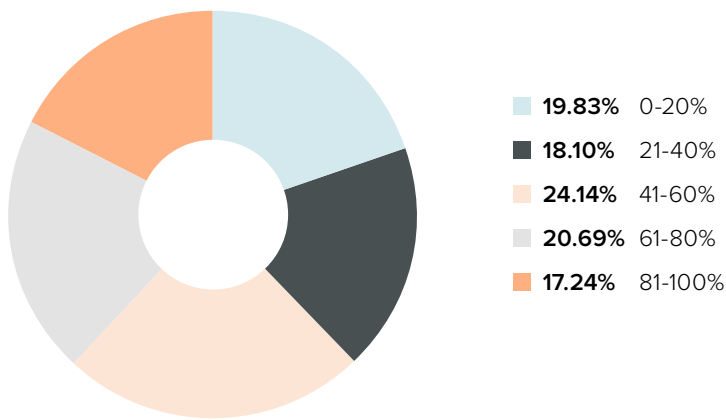
A non-trivial 17% of companies believe at least 80% will be mostly working from home, while 38% expect upwards of 60% to remain in the at-home model.

Only 20% believe most of their agents (80-100%) will be spending the typical work day in the physical contact center.

For those who believe in remote work as a way to attract better talent, improve agent experiences, and optimize resources, the ongoing support for the at-home model is extremely encouraging.

Granted, if companies plan to make remote work a fixture of their contact center operations, they will have to vigilantly address some of the lingering challenges. Issues like poor connections, insufficient collaboration, and suboptimal training may have been tolerable during the pandemic, but they cannot endure as long-term problems.

By the end of 2021, what percentage of your company's CX/contact center employees do you expect to *primarily* be working from home?





THINKING BEYOND THE CONTACT CENTER

By embracing remote work, businesses are removing literal walls from their contact center operation. By improving collaboration with other departments, many companies also hope to eliminate figurative ones.

Believing that the customer experience is an overarching business concern, these organizations want to ensure what happens in the contact center does not stay in the contact center. They aim to unite numerous facets of their business in the quest for customer centricity.

Achieving cross-departmental collaboration is, of course, easier said than done. “Unifying the business” has been a pivotal business objective for many decades, yet “silos” remain one of the most widespread organizational challenges. Companies are, however, confident that they will make meaningful progress on the collaboration front this year.

They are particularly confident about improving the bond with operations. **A substantial 63% of companies, in fact, believe the contact center team will have a stronger connection with the operations team by the end of 2021.**

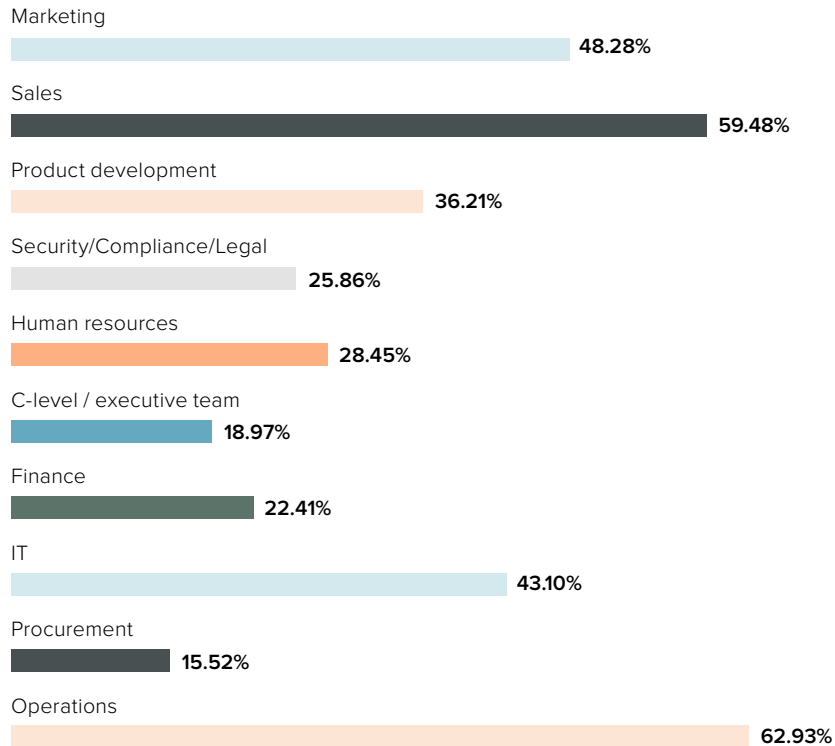
Companies are also optimistic about their **ability to better collaborate with sales (59%), marketing (48%), information technology (43%), and product development (36%).**

As they pursue organizational alignment, savvy leaders will remember that collaboration is a two-way street.

By operating on the frontlines, the contact center has direct access to the voice of the customer. Teams that value that intelligence can dramatically improve their performance; marketers can craft better messages, IT leaders can create better systems, and engineers can develop better products. As they pursue “buy-in,” leaders will stress what other teams have to gain by collaborating with the contact center.

The contact center, meanwhile, benefits when it pays close attention to the overall business’ plans, goals, and challenges. When agents know about a faulty product, a new marketing campaign, or a new sales target, they can adapt their conversations accordingly.

With which of these departments do you feel the contact center will have a stronger collaboration / larger impact by 2021?





BEHAVIOR IN THE OMNICHANNEL WORLD

The customer contact industry spent the past few decades *discussing* the omnichannel experience. It spent the past several years *marveling* at the possibility of delivering stellar experiences through messaging, social media, live chat, and digital self-service.

Only a modest percentage of contact centers had, however, turned the appealing prospect of omnichannel engagement into a customer experience reality.

When the pandemic emerged and volume began to surge, complacency ceased to be an option. Unable to meet customer demand with the phone channel alone, companies had no choice but to bolster their support for digital offerings.

By introducing and publicizing digital channels, companies provided customers with more options for getting urgent support. Customers are seizing the opportunity.

Make no mistake; many companies still experienced surges in phone volume this past year. **Forty-six percent (46%) of organizations report at least some increase in live call volume, and 23% report a significant increase.**

At the same time, these companies *also* witnessed increases in digital support volume. **Social media volume increased for a whopping 65% of companies, live web chat volume rose for 63%, chatbot volume grew for 59%, and email volume escalated for 54%.** Non-trivial percentages of companies also reported volume increases for channels like video chat, helpdesk, and messaging.

Had digital engagement volume not surged, contact centers surely would have experienced an even greater influx of traditional calls. They would have even had a harder time satisfying customers and controlling costs during the pandemic.

The surge in digital volume, moreover, speaks to growing consumer adoption for new channels. Customers are more aware of -- and more confident in -- digital engagement options than they ever have been.

Growing comfort in these channels will, of course, lead to higher expectations and standards for digital engagement. First and foremost, customers will increasingly expect most brands to *offer* digital options. Those that do not provide a multitude of support options, especially for urgent matters,

will instantly lose customer trust. In some cases, they will outright lose business.

Customers will also begin to demand higher-quality experiences in these channels. As digital channels transform from novelty to essential offerings, customers have less reason to grade their experiences on a curve. They will expect digital interactions to end in resolutions, not phone escalations.

Over the past year, how has customer interaction volume changed within these contact channels?

■ Don't offer this channel
 ■ Significantly decreased
 ■ Somewhat decreased
 ■ (Almost) no change
■ Somewhat increased
 ■ Significantly increased

Phone (live agent)



Phone (IVR)



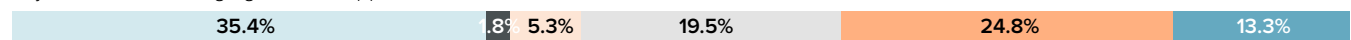
Live video chat



Real-time web chat



Asynchronous messaging or SMS support



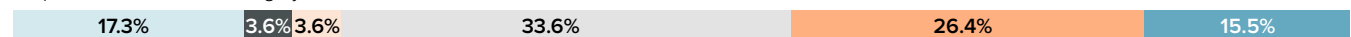
Chat/messaging bots, virtual assistants, or other digital self-service



Social media



Helpdesk / internal ticketing system



Internal fan/customer community



In-person



Email





DOES OMNICHANNEL DRIVE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION?

There are no participation trophies in the era of competing on the customer experience. Companies do not win points for *offering* numerous contact options; they achieve results when they *excel* at their different touch points. If the experience in certain channels is markedly weaker, the company is fundamentally unable to wow customers on their preferred terms. It is not living up to the standard of the omnichannel revolution.

Companies are beginning to make progress toward this goal; the majority of organizations are delivering at least slightly satisfying experiences at all touch points. They have not, however, reached a point of channel consistency. Their digital experiences are, by and large, less effective than their phone interactions.

To assess channel-by-channel performance, CCW Digital asked organizations to share customer satisfaction levels on a scale of “very unsatisfied” to “very satisfied.” CCW Digital subsequently aggregated the responses into a channel satisfaction index, with -1 representing the former and 1 representing the latter. If a company does not offer engagement or track satisfaction within a given channel, it was excluded from its calculation.

Encouragingly, no channel landed on the negative side of the index. Phone and chat, however, were the only to

register higher than 0.50 (equivalent to somewhat satisfied).

Phone, the quintessential contact center channel boasts a satisfaction score of 0.55; 44% of companies say their customers are very satisfied with phone interactions.

Chat holds a satisfaction score of 0.52, with 40% saying customers are very satisfied.

Other comparatively high-ranking channels include **social media (0.41, 31% are very satisfied), email (0.39, 31% are very satisfied), and live video chat (0.39, 28% are very satisfied).** The lowest-ranking channels include messaging (0.21, 19% are very satisfied), chatbots (0.22, 20% are very satisfied), and customer communities (0.25, 16% are very satisfied).

They may not have the same track record as the traditional phone channel, but live chat and email have long played prominent roles in the contact center. Their comparative success is thus unsurprising; if anything, the surprise is that the long-established email channel is not even indexing at the “somewhat satisfied” level.

The comparative success for social media, on the other hand, is encouraging. Social media is a newer channel with less familiar engagement parameters and expectations. Due to their public nature, social interactions also come with larger stakes than traditional one-on-one conversations.

Success in the video chat channel is also promising, but it is worth noting that a far smaller percentage of organizations are actively using video. Video chats are also far more similar to phone calls than text-based digital channels, so the comparative success does not necessarily offer commentary on the overall digital transformation.

Given the ample hype surrounding both options, the comparatively low scores for messaging and chatbots are unfortunate. The messaging number is particularly troubling given that the typical person has been using

SMS and other messaging applications for at least a decade. Companies have a firmer sense of what a great messaging experience entails and thus a clearer blueprint for improving their interactions.

Because customer communities are an opportunity to simultaneously reduce support costs and build brand loyalty, the comparatively low satisfaction score is disappointing. On the other hand, the underperformance is more forgivable since the companies themselves are not solely driving the interactions.

Over the past year, how satisfied have customers been when interacting in the following channels (based on CSAT scores, overall feedback, etc)?

Very unsatisfied Somewhat unsatisfied Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied Somewhat satisfied Very satisfied

Phone (live agent) | 0.55



Phone (IVR) | 0.28



Live video chat | 0.39



Real-time web chat | 0.52



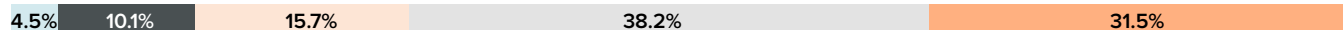
Asynchronous messaging or SMS support | 0.21



Chat/messaging bots, virtual assistants or other digital self-service | 0.22



Social media | 0.41



Helpdesk / internal ticketing system | 0.27



Internal fan/customer community | 0.25



In-person | 0.37



Email | 0.39





DOES OMNICHANNEL DRIVE RESULTS?

Ignoring the customer experience is not an option in today's environment. With 60% of consumers placing more importance than ever on the experience, successful companies have no choice but to prioritize customer interests, demands, and sentiments.

The call to embrace customer centricity is not, however, a call to ignore operational efficiency. Companies can wow customers without hurting their bottom lines. In fact, particularly successful initiatives will simultaneously boost customer-facing and business-facing metrics.

In theory, digital engagement offers contact centers this ability to have their cake and eat it too. By offering more contact options, omnichannel businesses are able to deliver exceptional experiences on their customers' preferred terms. And insofar as digital channels are inherently more convenient than traditional voice options, they can also yield efficiency wins for the overall business.

Granted, these potential benefits of digital engagement are by no means guaranteed. If digital channels are ineffective, understaffed, or insufficiently connected to the overall journey, they will create *more* frustration for customers and effort for the business. Satisfaction scores will fall, and costs will rise.

These benefits are nonetheless readily attainable. The majority of companies have enjoyed at least *some* operational wins in the wake of their digital transformation.

According to CCW Digital survey data, only 18% feel they have not been meaningfully elevating their digital and self-service offerings. A mere 9% have increased their emphasis on digital but have not yet reaped any meaningful rewards.

A whopping 73% of companies, therefore, believe their digital and self-service investments are producing noteworthy returns.

Comparatively widespread benefits include **reductions in traditional call volume (a win for 43% of companies), better overall customer satisfaction scores (35%), access to better customer data (34%), the transition of agents to more complex work (32%), and reduction in overall contact center costs (29%).**

Collectively, the benefits reflect wins on the satisfaction and efficiency fronts. Reductions in calls, transactional work, and contact center costs improve profitability while freeing up resources for more complex, meaningful issues. Better customer data simultaneously helps companies deliver more personalized experiences and eliminate points of friction and inefficiency throughout the journey.

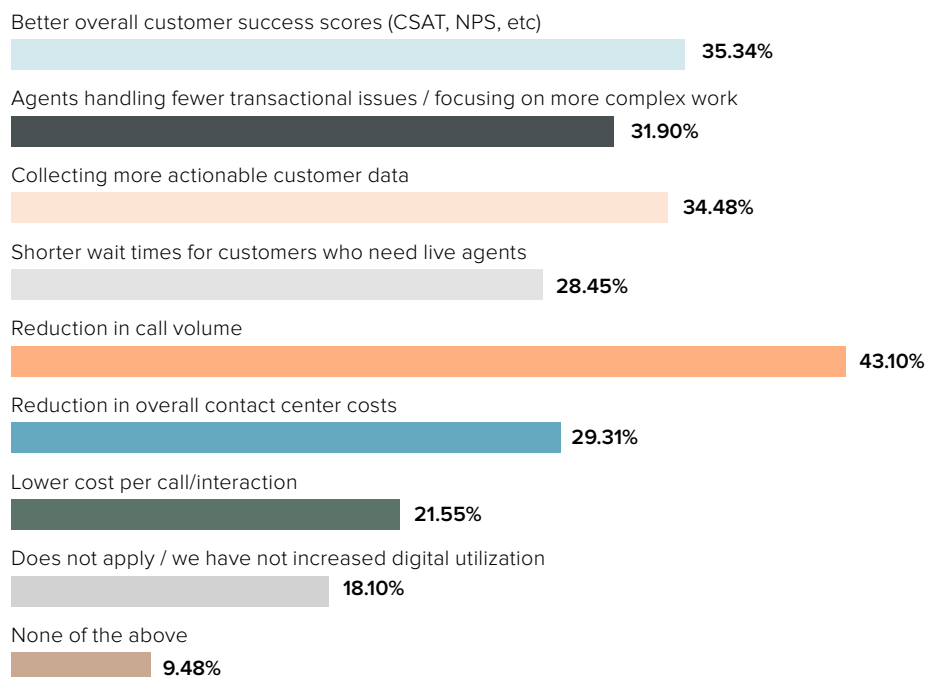
The value of a net increase in customer satisfaction speaks for itself.

The promising results ultimately prove that digital engagement is worth the hype. They should encourage companies to continue investing in new touch points, and continue working to deliver seamless, omnichannel experiences for customers.

They most certainly do not, however, confirm that all work is done. Although most companies are reaping some rewards, the majority are not enjoying *all* potential benefits. There is no inherent reason for that reality; well-functioning digital experiences absolutely should be able to all-at-once deflect calls, reduce costs, improve agent productivity, uncover better customer data, and drive satisfaction.

If they hope to achieve the rewards — particularly in the face of surging spending and rising experience standards — companies cannot yet ease up on the proverbial gas pedal.

Has an increased emphasis on digital engagement and/or self-service produced any of the following outcomes?





OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGENT IMPROVEMENT

In the age of lower-touch, digital communication, the contact center experience no longer rests entirely on the shoulders of the agent. The agent, nonetheless, still plays a pivotal role in operationalizing the company's mission and connecting with its customers. As a result, any effort to improve performance will incorporate strategies for optimizing agent productivity.

A priority for 53% of companies, improving knowledge bases represents the most widespread agent improvement goal.

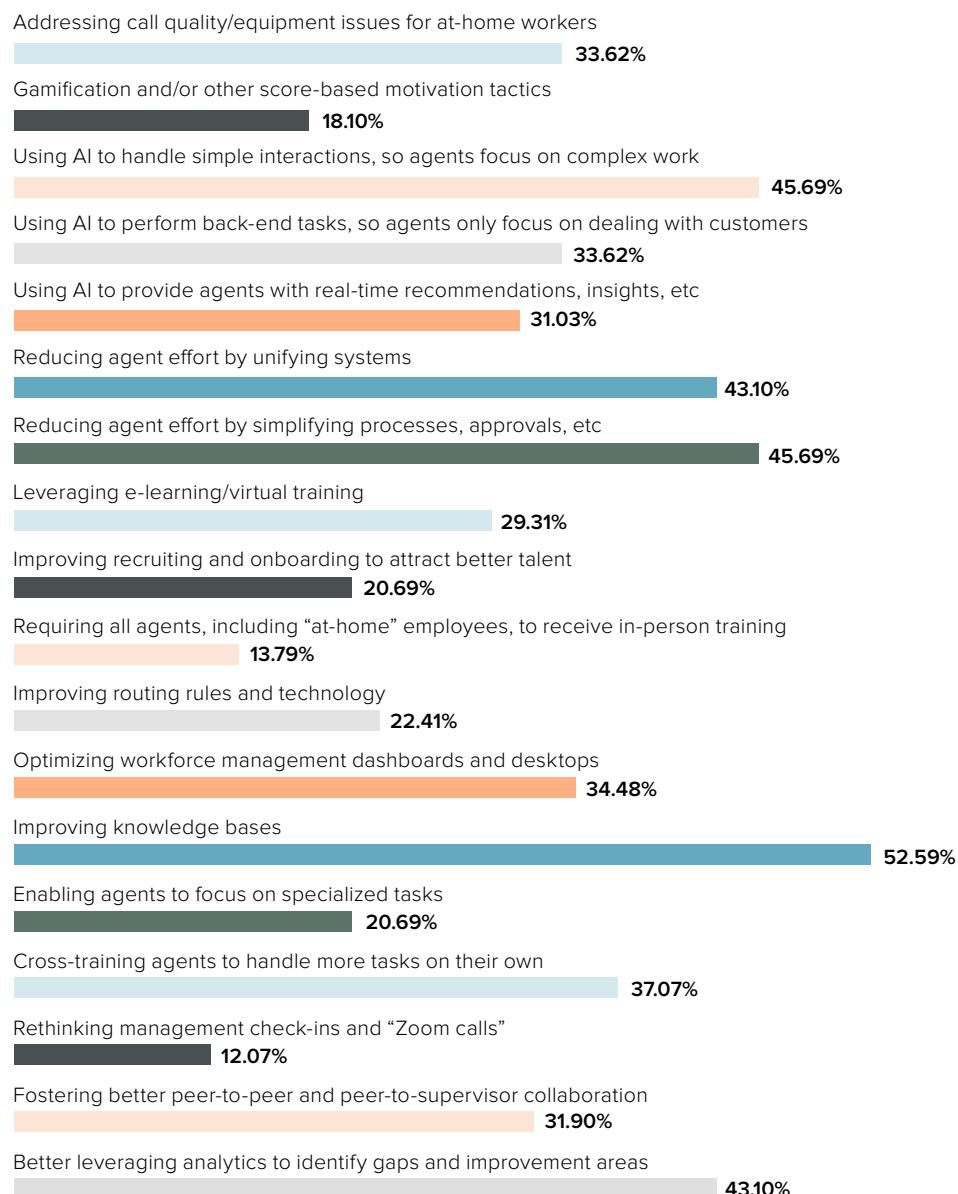
Today's companies are increasingly aware of the correlation between agent effort and customer experience quality. They recognize that customers are increasingly solving transactional problems on their own, thus requiring agents to focus on more complex interactions. They, moreover, know that agents are dealing with this increased complexity, not to mention a plethora of new policies and customer demands, while

working at home and thus away from helpful peers and supervisors. As a result, the knowledge base plays an unprecedented role in agent performance.

Other widespread agent improvement focuses include **using AI for simple interactions to let agents focus on complex work (46%), reducing effort by simplifying processes (46%), reducing effort by unifying systems (43%), and better leveraging analytics (43%).**

Collectively, the priorities reflect a desire to empower agents to *be agents*. Instead of forcing employees to answer transactional calls, waste time on approval processes, bounce through multiple systems, ask redundant identification questions, or endure impersonal training, companies hope to streamline the operational components of their contact center. By doing so, they give agents the time and knowledge they need to productively converse with customers.

Which are your top priorities for improving agent performance?





OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Improving agent productivity is an essential part of improving contact center performance. One of the best ways to improve their productivity is to take some work out of their hands.

Thanks to the rise of artificial intelligence, companies are increasingly able to harness the power of automation. In turn, they are increasingly able to shift agent focus to more meaningful and “human” work.

Granted, not all AI investments are created equal. They are definitely not equally *successful*. CCW Digital’s early 2021 State of Technology market study, in fact, reveals that the overwhelming majority of AI initiatives have failed to generate meaningful success for contact centers.

In their effort to break from that trend, companies will presumably be more strategic in identifying valuable use cases. Being more strategic does not, however, mean they will be contrarian. Many will still focus on more familiar AI applications.

Nearly 59% of companies, for example, identify chatbots (and other AI-driven self-service) as a top AI use case.

Chatbots have essentially been the face of the AI contact center movement in recent years, and their relevance is arguably as great as it ever has been. With companies beginning to fully realize their digital transformations and preparing for the impact of surging volume, efforts to elevate self-service will carry tremendous weight.

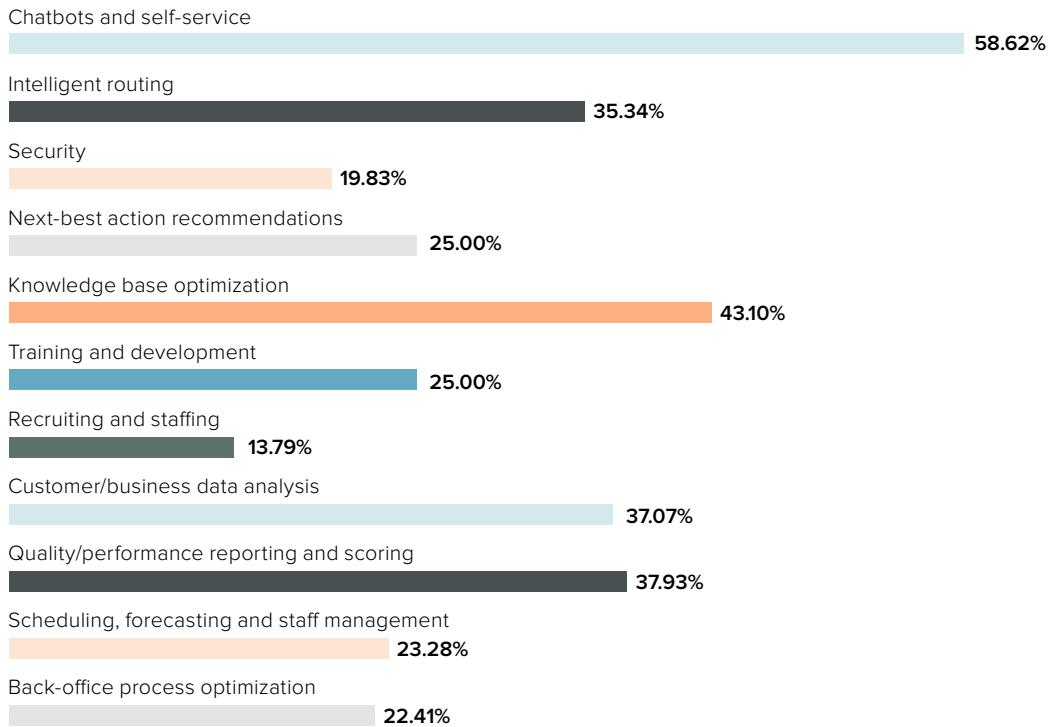
Other AI priorities include **knowledge base optimization (43%), quality and performance reporting and scoring (38%), data analysis (37%), and intelligent routing (35%).**

Given that companies identify knowledge base optimization as a top agent experience priority, it is only logical that they will want to use AI to achieve their goal. Modern AI solutions can enhance every aspect of the knowledge process, from tracking agent behavior, to refining search, to offering live recommendations, to better classifying content, to identifying and reconciling out-of-date or contradictory material.

AI solutions give companies the ability to capture and interpret deep customer data at scale, thus offering obvious value for analytics efforts. This data-crunching prowess is particularly helpful in assessing agent performance and quality in the remote era, since supervisors cannot as easily “hear” their agents’ conversations.

By reducing unnecessary hurdles and transfers, intelligent routing can markedly reduce customer effort and time to resolution. Because it involves accurately matching customers and their issues with the most suitable agent, it also stands to reduce handle time, while improving accuracy, conversation quality, and even agent morale.

Which are your organization’s most important use cases for artificial intelligence?





BUDGETING FOR IMPACT

The “cost center” stigma may no longer be as aggressive, but contact centers do not suddenly have unlimited budgets. They still face the challenge of empowering agents and wowing customers with limited resources. They still face the notorious business burden of doing more with less.

As they better collaborate with other departments and demonstrate their business value, some contact centers are nonetheless gaining more latitude over how they use their resources.

As they build their strategies and business cases, all contact centers can meanwhile benefit from identifying their most urgent improvement areas and opportunities.

Improving customer experience and journey design is the most popular improvement area. Nearly 51% say they would like to allocate more budget to that cause.

Along with gaining a broader appreciation for design thinking, contact centers clearly recognize the importance of reimagining journeys for today’s landscape. Advances in customer intelligence and digital channels allow companies to tailor experiences to the needs of customers and the context of their issues. The majority of contact centers clearly want to seize the opportunity.

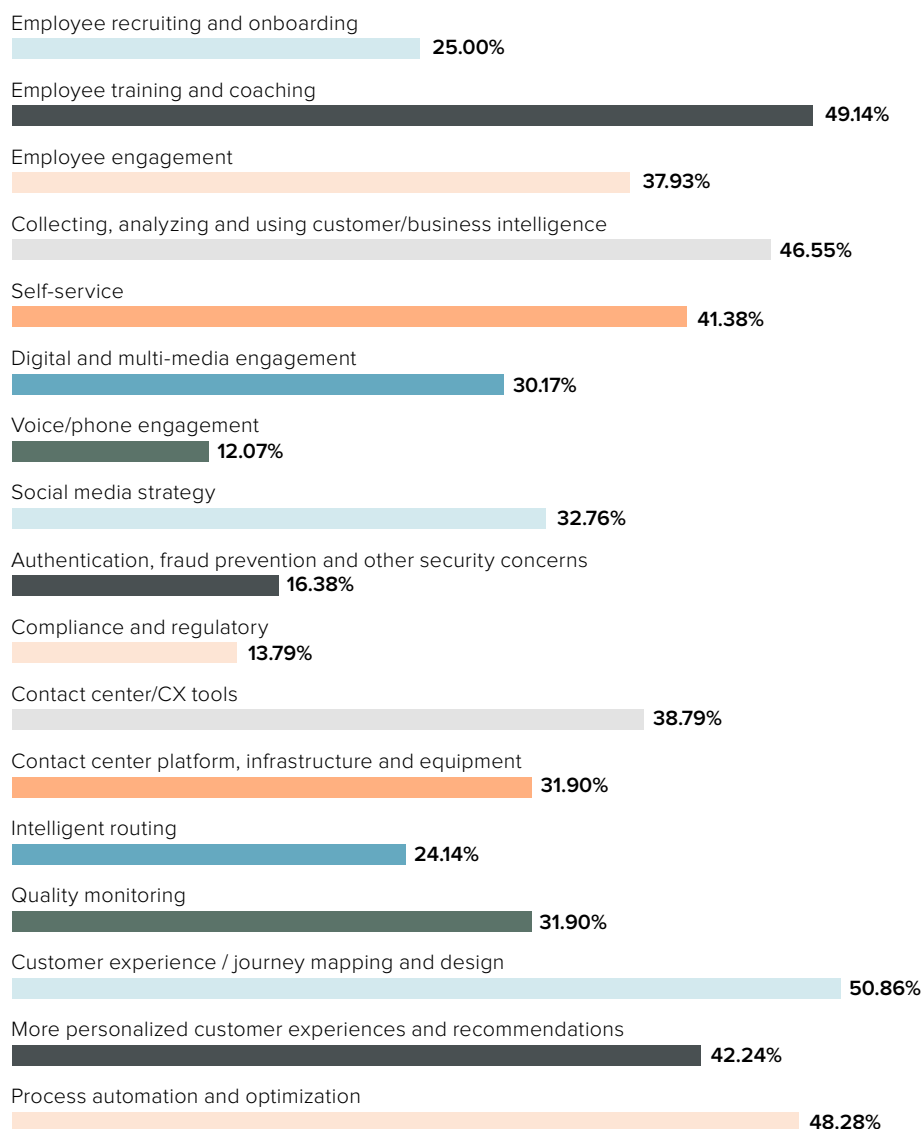
Recognizing the ongoing value of employee development, particularly as agents adapt to new issues, new customer expectations, and new work environments, **49% want to allocate more budget to employee training and coaching.**

Other widespread priorities include **process optimization and automation (48%), collecting and leveraging data (47%), and delivering more personalized experiences and recommendations (42%).**

From self-service, to agent performance, to back-office efficiency, to analytics, automation can streamline all facets of the customer contact operation. As a result, it is one of the best bang-for-the-buck plays in the customer contact space and an obvious candidate for budgetary attention. The broader idea of process optimization expands the value, while also addressing companies' goal of improving agent performance by simplifying workflow.

Data affects the revenue and cost lines, simultaneously identifying ways to build more lucrative relationships with customers *and* eliminating inefficiencies from the experience. Advances in data also make experience personalization more feasible. Organizations that take advantage of the opportunity stand to enjoy further wins in both cost efficiency and customer lifetime value.

In which areas would you like to allocate more of your department's budget?





PREPARING FOR A SURGE

Not all companies endured financial struggle during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the nature of their offerings, some technology and entertainment companies were able to achieve record business.

All, however, can recognize that consumer spending and behavior was limited. Whether due to social distancing restrictions, health concerns, or sudden financial limitations, few consumers engaged in all the commercial activities they would have liked.

Due to those limitations, many economists forecast an upcoming surge in consumer spending. The feeling is that customers will be doing more in-person shopping, eating more restaurant meals, going on more trips, and simply buying more products.

On the surface, this activity would seemingly favor “traditional” brands, such as those in brick-and-mortar retail, consumer goods, hospitality, infrastructure, and manufacturing.

Few, however, believe customers are suddenly going to abandon the digital-driven habits they cultivated throughout the pandemic (many of which were already in-play years before COVID struck). Most types of companies, moreover, will at least slightly benefit from a broader surge in financial opportunity, spending, and consumer confidence.

Any increase in purchasing will, of course, naturally coincide with an increase in customer interactions. If their contact centers are not prepared for this surge, companies will find themselves in a “be careful what you wish for” scenario. They may attract more business, but the experience they provide will not be enough to keep it.

According to CCW Digital’s research, only 13% doubt that a surge is coming. Another 12% anticipate some sort of surge but do not think it will affect their industry.

About 75% of companies, therefore, have reason to consider the surge when building their contact center performance strategies.

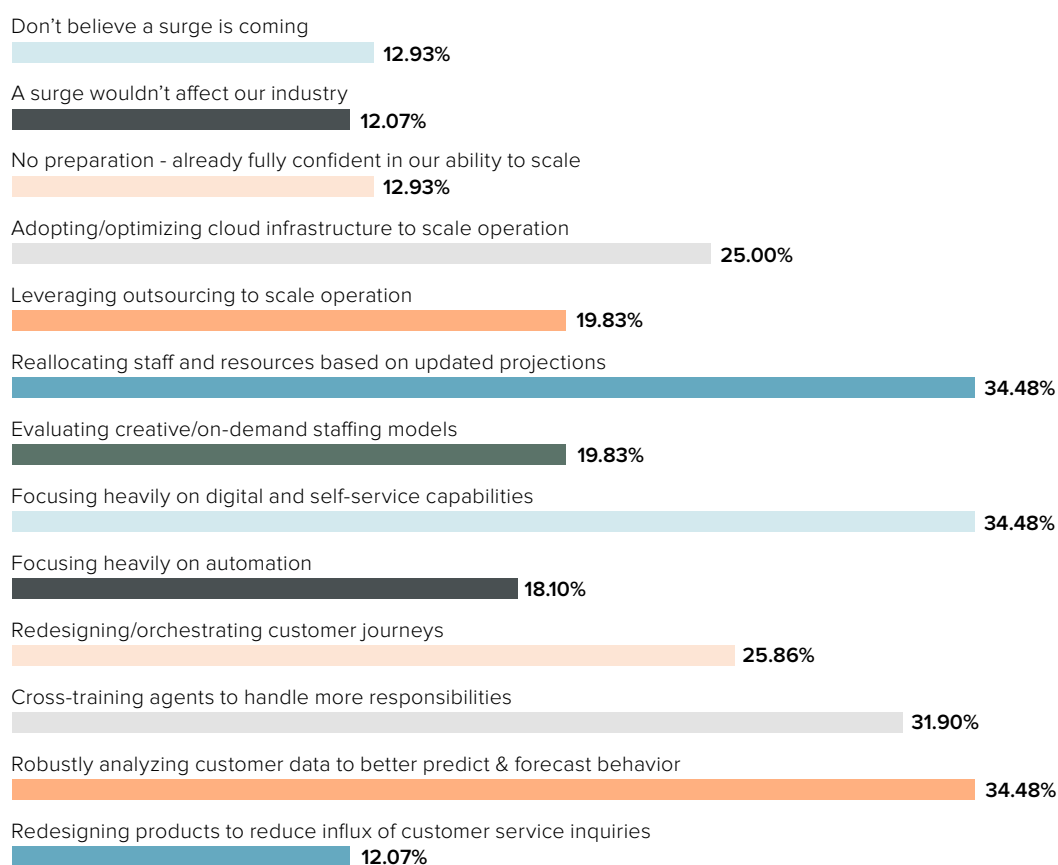
There is no widespread consensus on how to approach the impending volume increase, but there are some fairly popular strategies. **Each on the radar for 34% of companies, reallocating staff and resources based on projections, focusing heavily on digital and self-service, and analyzing data to better predict customer behavior, are the most common focuses.**

Each approach reflects the idea of building a customer contact operation that can support a surge in volume.

Stronger customer data will help companies predict the surge, while the combination of digital engagement and shrewder resource allocation will ensure they rise to the occasion.

Other leading priorities include **cross-training agents (32%)** and **redesigning journeys (26%)**. Both enable customers to get what they want without numerous delays and transfers. They also ensure agents are able to swiftly handle the calls they field, maximizing their capacity while increasing their satisfaction.

How are you preparing for the post-pandemic “surge” in business and customer interactions?



APPENDIX



How Can Customer Data Help Brands and Retailers

Here are 4 insights retailers and eCommerce brands can extract from their customer data and leverage to improve their customer experience.



Seamless Customer Experience for 2021

We'll dig into 5 must-have elements of the modern customer experience and give you some tips on how to deliver it.

2021 EDITORIAL CALENDAR

JANUARY

State Of Contact Center Technology



APRIL

New Benchmarks For Customer Contact Performance



JUNE

Customer Contact Industry Review

TBD

AUGUST

Customer Experience Trends, Challenges & Innovations

TBD

NOVEMBER

Future Of The Contact Center: A Forecast

TBD

FEBRUARY

Strategic Planning For CX Operations

February 9-11, 2021

APRIL

State Of Contact Center Technology

April 6-8, 2021

MAY

New Standards For Customer Contact Performance

May 25-27, 2021

JULY

Modernizing Service Experiences With AI & Digital

July 20-22, 2021

SEPTEMBER

Customer Experience Trends, Challenges And Innovations

September 14-16, 2021

OCTOBER

Business Continuity 2.0

October 26-28, 2021

DECEMBER

Future Of The Contact Center: A Forecast

December 14-16, 2021

MEET THE TEAM



Brian Cantor

Principal Analyst, Director

CCW Digital

E: Brian.Cantor@customermanagementpractice.com



Andy Kuang

Marketing Manager

CCW Digital

E: Andy.Kuang@customermanagementpractice.com



Emily Dunn

Marketing Manager

CCW Digital

E: Emily.Dunn@customermanagementpractice.com



Simon Copcutt

Head of Strategic Accounts

CCW Digital

E: Simon.Copcutt@customermanagementpractice.com



Matt Wujciak

Staff Writer & Editor

CCW Digital

E: Matt.Wujciak@customermanagementpractice.com

