

Realising the power of AI in contact centres

A deep dive into business and consumer attitudes in the UK and Ireland





Section 1: The key findings

Executive summary

This NTT DATA and AWS survey of 560 businesses and 1,600 consumers is one of the largest surveys combining the views of contact centre leaders and users ever to be carried out in the UK and Ireland. The results from the survey are significant, not just for the quantitative insights they provide on customer satisfaction, but also for the depth and clarity of understanding they give – both on consumer preferences and on how businesses plan to invest in their contact centres. (See [Appendix](#) for full details of survey methodology, scope and scale.)

The survey examines both consumer and business attitudes to the use of emerging technologies, including – but not limited to – Artificial Intelligence (AI). It aims to test how much progress has been made to date and public levels of trust and satisfaction, together with the obstacles to change and the potential for delivering benefits in the future.

Detailed analysis of the results provides us with five key insights, all of them useful in shaping customer experience investment strategies.

1. **Consumers are not opposed to change, but have more trust in traditional methods of interaction.**
2. **Some industries do not understand their customers as well as they think they do.**
3. **New technologies only deliver value when built on a strong foundation of good practice in communications.**
4. **Omnichannel routing (managing all channels through one platform) has greater transformative potential than many business leaders realise.**
5. **The main barriers to change are operational, rather than rooted in – for example – technological barriers or consumer resistance.**

Perhaps the most notable finding is that we see little outright negativity to new technologies from consumers. In fact, most are open to the technologies, provided that there is a real benefit for the consumer. When people were asked their attitudes to **“technology, innovation and use of AI in customer service,”** 46% agreed they were **“excited about new technologies and believe AI will improve customer service,”** while 43% said they were **“generally positive but think AI should be used carefully.”** By contrast, only 3% replied that they **“worry that AI could make service less personal”** and 1% selected **“I prefer to deal only with humans, not AI systems.”**¹ (See graph, p2).

Customers in most industries do not have an instinctive ideological opposition to emerging CX technologies, including different forms of AI, but – as we shall show in this report – they require proof of benefit. They are ready for change, but they are also realistic – perhaps more so than the businesses serving them. This is a distinction we explore below.

While open to advanced technology, our findings show that consumers still value direct contact with a human. The role of soft factors, such as trust and human empathy, remains vital. These are hard to quantify and harder to implement within complex technology landscapes, but customer feedback shows they remain important.

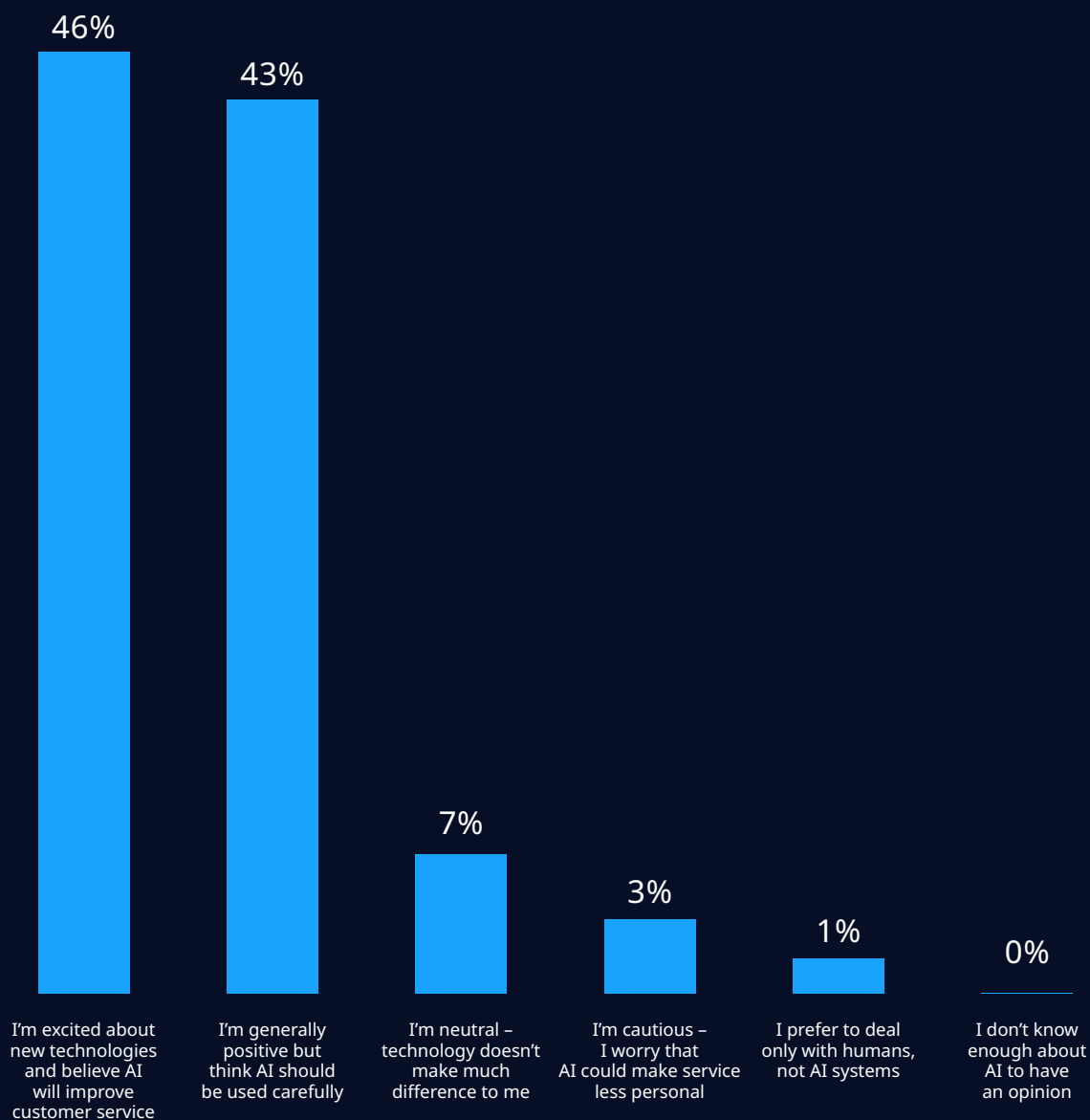
We did not directly ask customers if they would abandon businesses that use emerging technologies for financial savings rather than for improved service delivery. However, the findings suggest there is a real risk of forfeiting customer loyalty if businesses do not convince customers that innovations such as chatbots are of measurable benefit to them (rather than just to the business itself).

Businesses still have work to do if they are to build consumer confidence in, and support for, technology-driven change.

Consumer attitudes to technology, innovation and AI

Consumer survey Q.S5

How would you describe your attitude towards technology, innovation and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in customer service?



Base: All respondents (1,600)

Section 2: Insights

1. Consumers are not opposed to change, but have more trust in traditional methods

People prefer phone and email over chatbots or social media.

Consumers are open to innovation but they also strongly prefer use of three specific 'traditional' channels, all of which involve direct one-to-one contact with a human.²

When asked their top-three communication channels for contacting customer services, respondents were clear in their choices for number 1: 28% said phone, 25% email and 19% live chat with a human.² The fourth placed channel was rated top by just 9% (visiting a physical store or office – another direct human contact) and automated or AI chatbot on the company's website/app

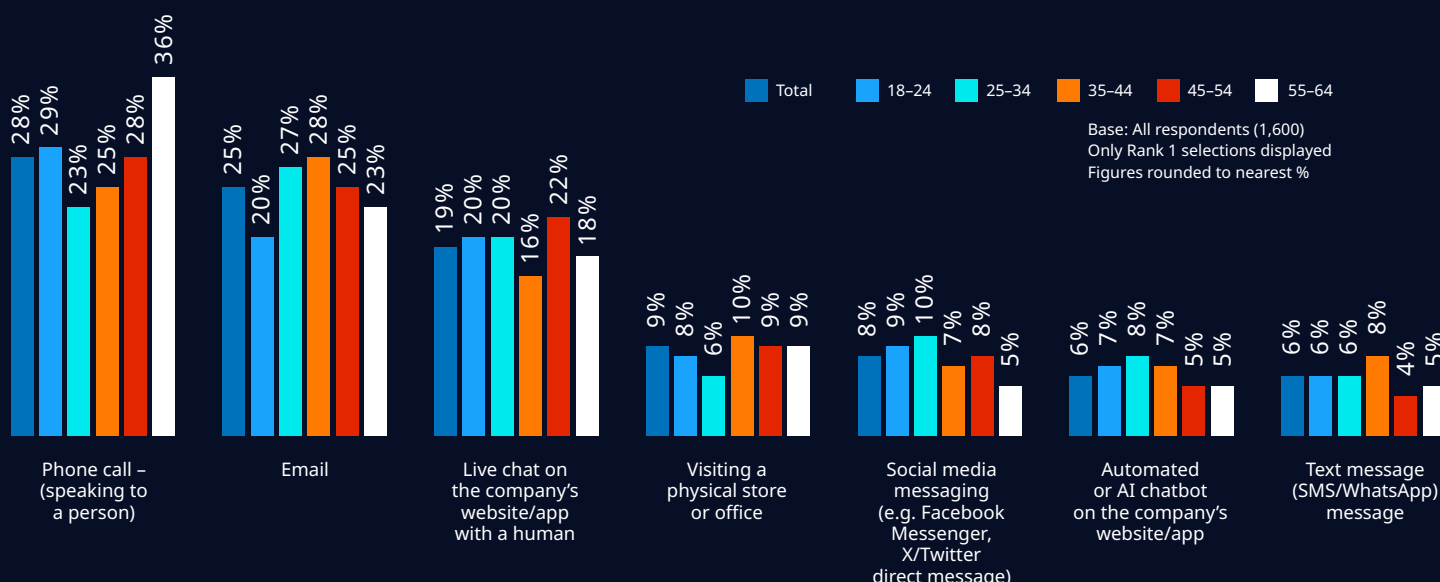
is preferred by only 6% (joint bottom, along with text message or WhatsApp message). There is a clear and significant preference for phone and email (and, to a lesser extent, live chat). Variations due to age are generally small.

When asked which channels they prefer, all age groups prioritise the same three channels, with variations only in order and degree of preference. As the graphic shows, 55-64-year-olds favour telephone; 18-24-year-olds steer around email, preferring telephone or other digital channels; and 45-54-year-olds will give live chat a try – but all these differences are marginal. In the experience of NTT DATA's contact centres experts, the greatest influence on media preference is user need: as interactions become more complex or urgent, users turn to voice – so CX design should respond to the customer journey, not demographics alone.

Consumers' most preferred channel by age group

Consumer survey Q.4

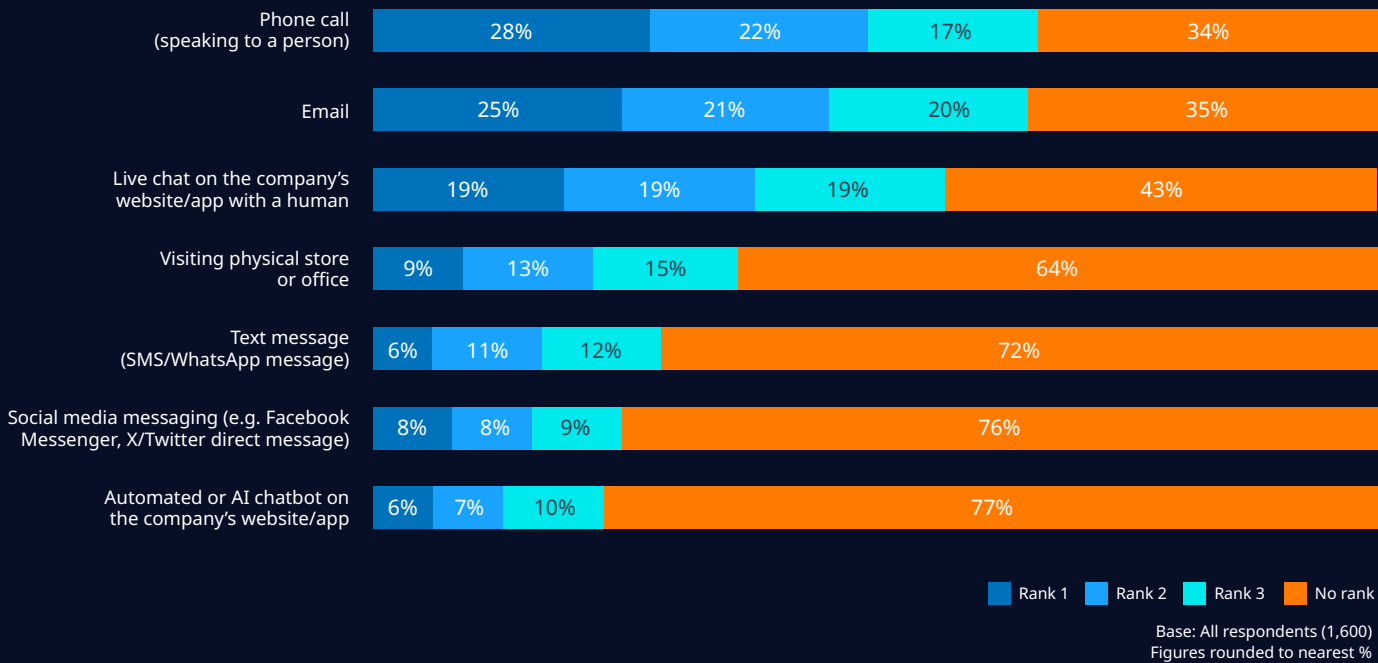
When you need to get in touch with an organisation, please rank your top-three preferred communication channels, from 1 (most preferred) to 3 (third-most preferred).



Consumers’ top-three preferred channels

Consumer survey Q.4

When you need to get in touch with an organisation, please rank your top-three preferred communication channels, from 1 (most preferred) to 3 (third-most preferred).



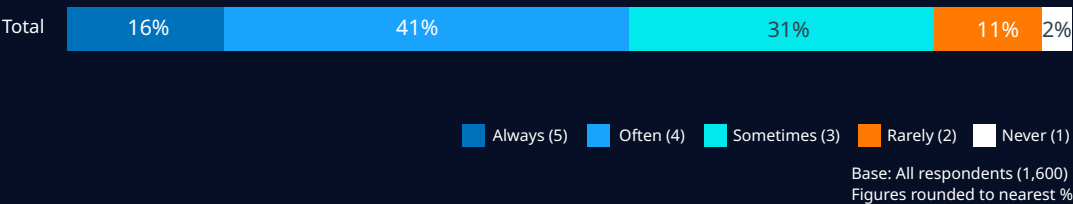
Empathy is essential

When asked how often they have felt dealt with in an empathetic and sincere way, a total of 57% respond positively – saying “always” (16%) or “often” (41%).³ On the ambiguous to negative side, 31% say “sometimes”, 11% “rarely” and 2% “never.” In the excitement to talk about AI and related emerging technologies, it is easy to miss the need for characteristics as basic as empathy, honesty and simple courtesy.

Consumers’ experience of empathy

Consumer survey Q.3

When dealing with an organisation’s customer service over the last 12 months, how often have you felt dealt with in an empathetic and sincere way?



2. Some industries do not understand their customers as well as they think they do

There is evidence of disconnect between some businesses and consumers – and some enterprises are clearly in denial about it.

There are wide variations in consumer-reported satisfaction levels between industries (defined as the percentage of respondents reporting “satisfied” or “very satisfied” when asked: “Thinking about the last time you contacted an organisation in each of the following sectors, how satisfied were you with that overall experience, from

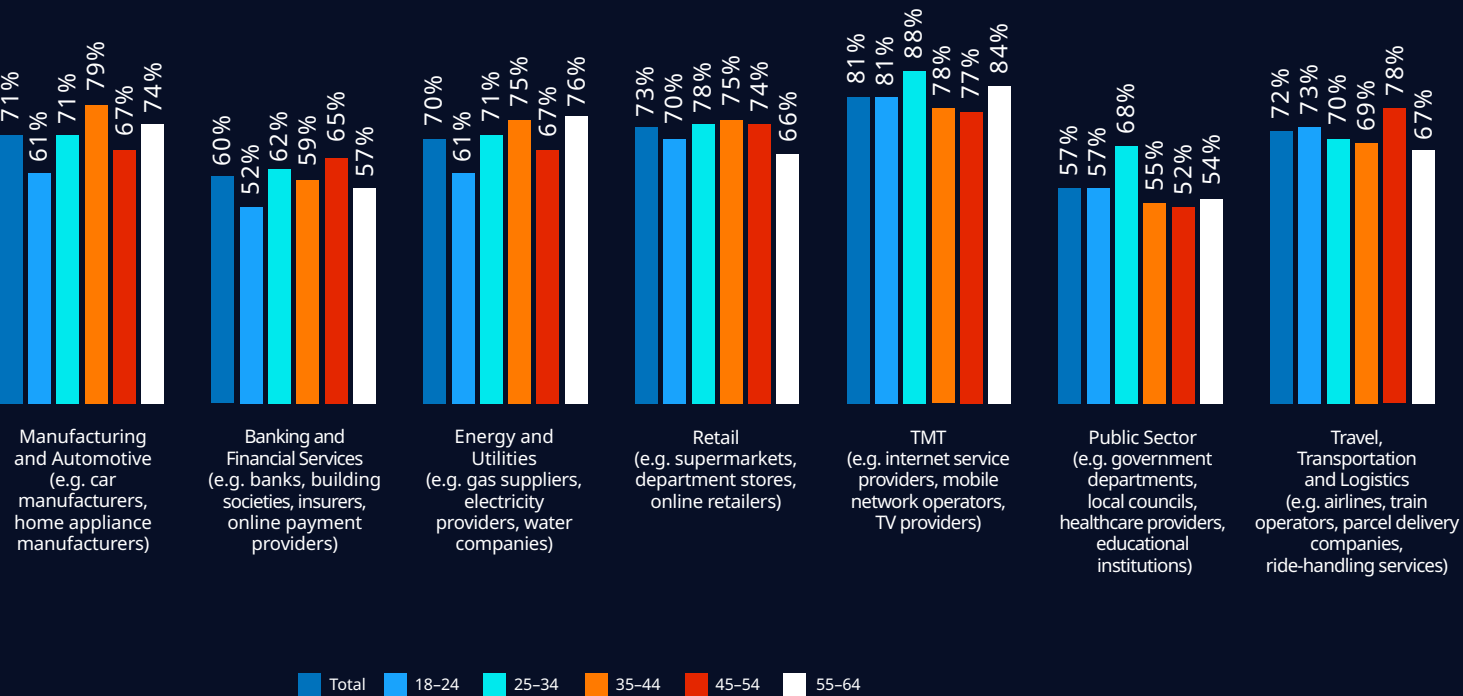
first contact to resolution?”).⁴ They range from a low of 57% (Public Sector) to a high of 81% (Telecommunications, media and technology (TMT)) – a difference of 24 percentage points between the two sectors. This is notable, though perhaps not surprising, given the very different types of interaction that routinely take place here.

It is also interesting that the youngest age group surveyed (18-24) generally report lower satisfaction levels than the average. This is the case across multiple industries: examples include Manufacturing and Automotive (61% against 71%), Banking and Financial Services (52% against 60%) and Energy and Utilities (61% against 70%).

Consumer-reported satisfaction levels by sector and age

Consumer survey Q.2

Thinking about the last time you contacted an organisation in each of the following sectors, how satisfied were you with that overall experience, from first contact to resolution? This includes contact by phone, email, live chat, automated chat, social media, messaging service or visiting a physical store/office.



Displayed are summary figure from top 2 boxes “Very satisfied” or “Satisfied”

Base:	Retail	885
All respondents who have been in touch with an organisation in the sector to ask a question, solve a problem or make a complaint in the last 12 months (total respondents 1,600)	Banking and Financial Services	768
Figures rounded to nearest %	TMT	675
	Energy and Utilities	587
	Public Sector	503
	Travel, Transportation and Logistics	406
	Manufacturing and Automotive	301

An interesting disconnect becomes clear when we compare consumer-reported satisfaction levels with business-reported satisfaction levels (defined as the percentage of business respondents reporting “always” or “often” when asked “After interacting with your contact centre, how often are customers either satisfied or very satisfied”). Our metrics here are not identical, but they are very close – strongly indicating that businesses over-estimate satisfaction levels in every industry except one (Retail). Some of these differences are substantial. (See graph, p9).

Banking and Financial Services has a business-reported satisfaction level of 76%, yet consumers report just 60%; our conclusion is that banks and insurers are misreading their customers’ true levels of satisfaction to a significant degree.^{5,4}

Only in Retail do we see a different picture, with a business-reported satisfaction level of 65% against a consumer-reported level of 73%.^{5,4} This is the one example of a sector in which consumers rate the businesses more highly than the businesses do themselves.

The disconnect between what businesses believe consumers think and feel and what consumers say they think and feel is a real cause for concern. The reason may be problems with the methodologies some businesses use to measure consumer attitudes. Some satisfaction metrics, such as Net Promoter Score (NPS) have become near-ubiquitous across industries, which is evidence of a coalescence of approaches around what are perceived to be industry standards.⁶ The risk of implementing approaches based on what is considered to be the norm, rather than based on an objective audit of an organisation’s particular needs, is that customer satisfaction measurement is ineffective, leading to a misunderstanding of customer priorities and sentiment. It could also be the case that some businesses focus too strongly on the economics of automation and not enough on the realities of satisfaction.

Public Sector has the most accurate understanding of consumer satisfaction levels, with only a very small difference between what consumers and organisations report. Public Sector organisations have a (still very low) business-reported satisfaction level of 59% while the consumer-reported level is 57%.^{5,4} This is the lowest for any sector, but at least the sector has an accurate understanding of the problem.

There is a sense of denial elsewhere, with the biggest gaps between business and consumer perspectives found in Banking and Financial Services (-15 percentage points), Travel, Transportation and Logistics (-8 percentage points) and Energy and Utilities (-8 percentage points).

On the right, NTT DATA contact centre expert Francesco Palma offers a way forward.



Analysis

“The consistent focus on operational metrics, combined with simplistic customer satisfaction tracking, creates a gap between what enterprises believe to be true and the actual experiences of customers. Enterprises must explore better and more integrated ways to track and evaluate customer satisfaction.

For example, current practices often focus on containment and deflection: in simple terms, reducing pressure on human agents by finding ways to keep customers engaged within the digital channels. The survey results suggest this is not a viable long-term solution. Instead, companies need to combine operational KPIs with journey-level measures such as first-contact resolution and post-resolution sentiment analysis.

By using methods such as conversational analytics it is possible to build a better picture of why customers call – and why they call repeatedly to ask similar questions.

The goal would then be to build a more detailed understanding of customer requirements and attitudes before automation, ensuring that new technologies and services are built on strong foundational data related to behaviour, sentiments and intent. In this way we shift our focus and investment in AI-enabled automation – moving away from reducing calls in order to cut costs, towards the use of automation to reduce problems and effectively resolve issues in the first place. That’s the key to securing higher levels of consumer satisfaction, and ultimately better financial performance.”

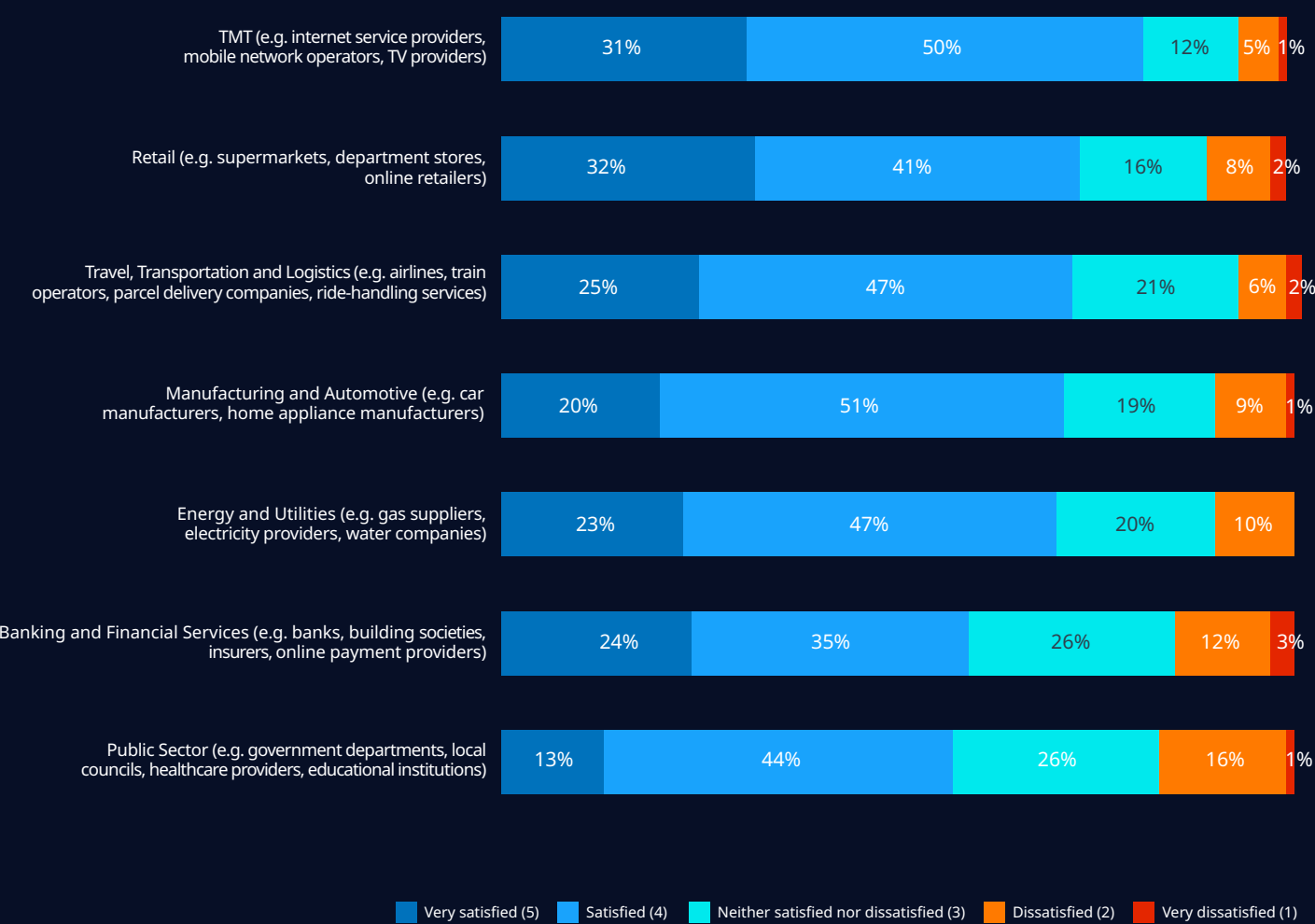
Francesco Palma
Solutions Director NTT DATA CX & AI

Consumer-reported satisfaction by sector

Consumer survey Q.2

Thinking about the last time you contacted an organisation in each of the following sectors, how satisfied were you with that overall experience, from first contact to resolution?

This includes contact by phone, email, live chat, automated chat, social media, messaging service or visiting a physical store/office.



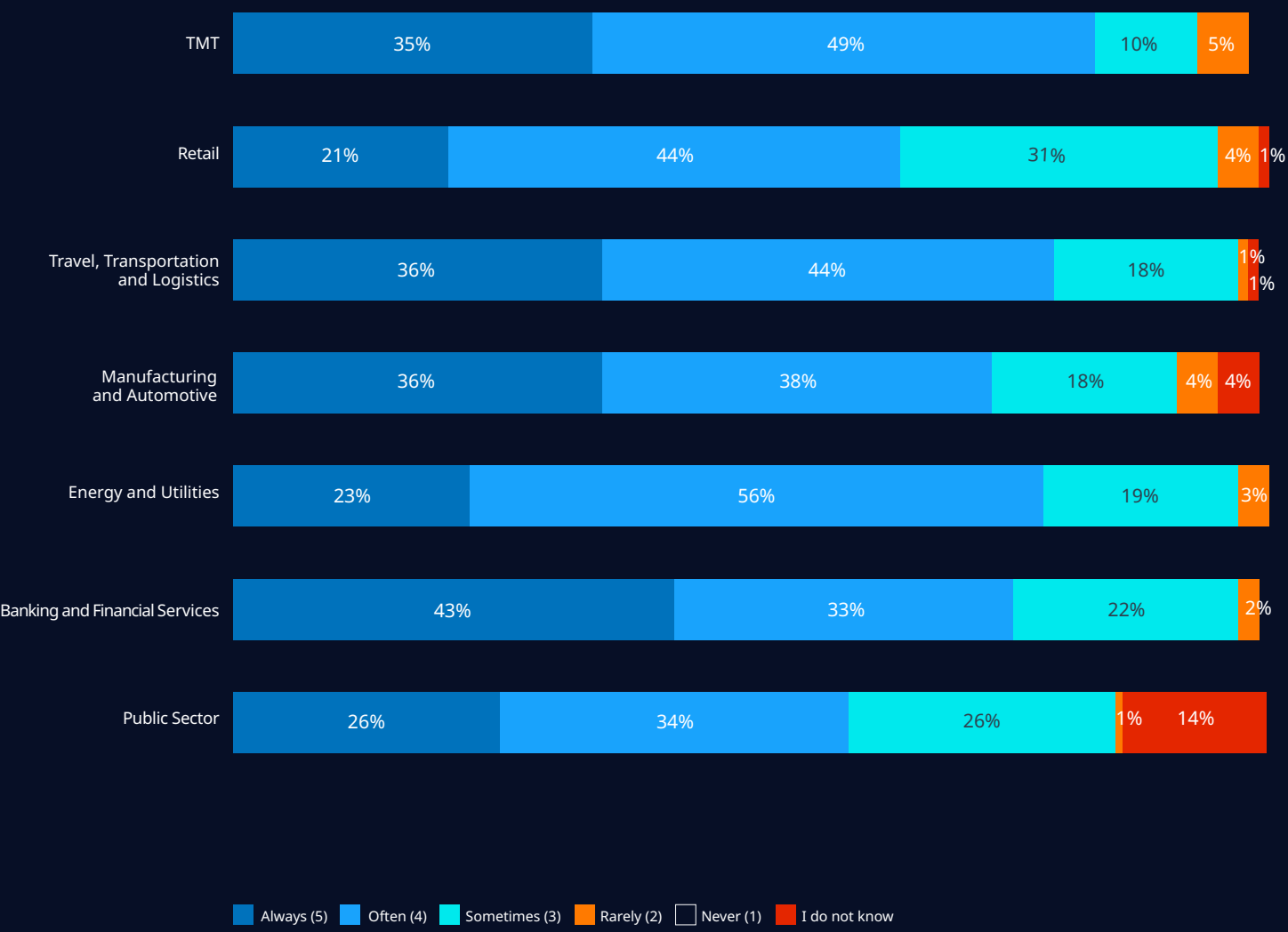
Base:
All respondents who have been in touch with an organisation in the sector to ask a question, solve a problem, or make a complaint in the last 12 months (total respondents 1,600)
Figures rounded to nearest %

Retail	885
Banking and Financial Services	768
TMT	675
Energy and Utilities	587
Public Sector	503
Travel, Transportation and Logistics	406
Manufacturing and Automotive	301

Business-reported satisfaction by sector

Business survey Q.1

After interacting with your contact centre, how often are customers either satisfied or very satisfied?



Base: All	Retail	85
	Banking and Financial Services	87
	TMT	79
	Energy and Utilities	79
	Public Sector	74
	Travel, Transportation and Logistics	80
	Manufacturing and Automotive	76

Figures rounded to nearest %

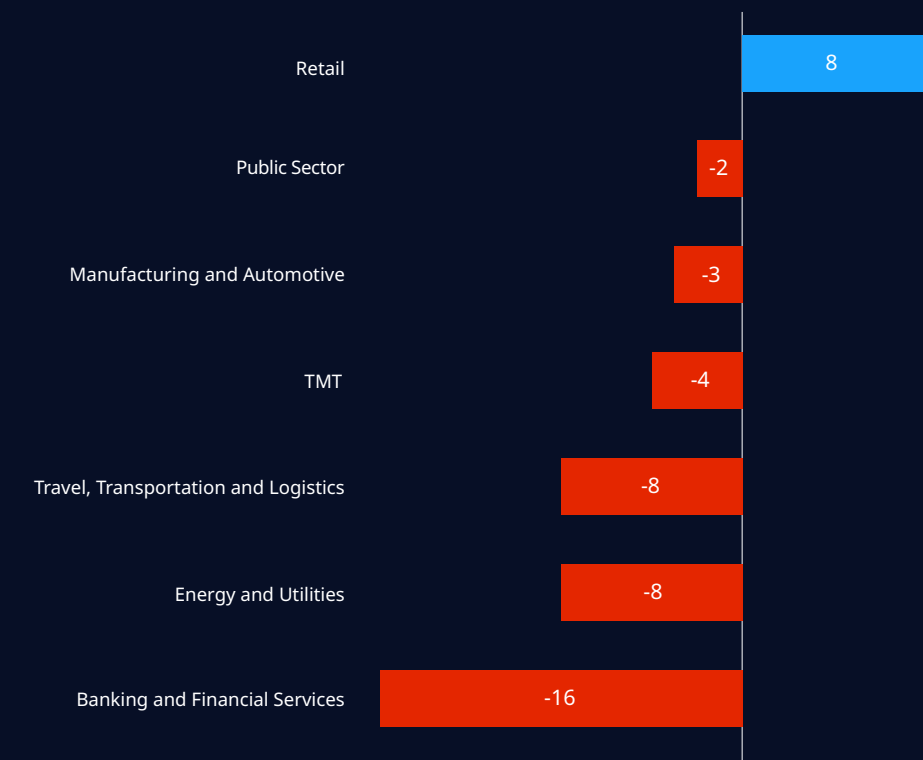
Gap between business- and consumer-reported satisfaction levels (percentage points)

Business survey Q.1

After interacting with your contact centre, how often are customers either satisfied or very satisfied?

Consumer survey Q.2

Thinking about the last time you contacted an organisation in each of the following sectors, how satisfied were you with that overall experience, from first contact to resolution? This includes contact by phone, email, live chat, automated chat, social media, messaging service or visiting a physical store/office.



Displayed are differences between summary data of Q1 top 2 boxes, "Always" and "Often", and Q2 top 2 boxes "Very satisfied" or "Satisfied"

Consumer survey base:
All respondents who have been in touch with an organisation in the sector to ask a question, solve a problem, or make a complaint in the last 12 months (1,600)
Figures rounded to nearest %

Retail	885
Banking and Financial Services	768
TMT	675
Energy and Utilities	587
Public Sector	503
Travel, Transportation and Logistics	406
Manufacturing and Automotive	301

Business survey base:
All (560)

Retail	85
Banking and Financial Services	87
TMT	79
Energy and Utilities	79
Public Sector	74
Travel, Transportation and Logistics	80
Manufacturing and Automotive	76

3. New technologies only deliver value when built on a foundation of robust communications basics

Despite rapid increases in the use of advanced technologies, traditional channels still remain the foundations of good service.

Although consumers are open to the use of new technology, including AI, in customer service, the data suggests they see these technologies as potential enhancements to, rather than replacements for, more ‘traditional’ communication channels, such as phone and email.^{1, 2} There must be a positive balance between technology-driven speed and efficiency on the one hand, with empathy and improved service quality on the other.

We have already seen that, for all sectors and all age groups, the three most important communication channels for customer service delivery remain phone, email and live chat with a human. The order varies, but the channels remain the same. This poses a big challenge for all businesses that are early adopters of technology. Many of these are now proactively introducing different automated channels into their contact centres, yet there is a significant difference in attitudes to these between businesses and their customers. To give just one example, 14% of businesses place automated chatbots as their most preferred channel, compared with only 6% of consumers.^{7, 2} (See graph, p11).

There is a clear distinction, covered in the survey, between automated chatbots, which use pre-defined rules of engagement for response and action, and AI chatbots, which use machine learning to permit a certain level of evolution in their responses. We should also be clear that AI chatbots can be defined as Low Intelligence (LAI) or High Intelligence (HAI). The survey does not make a distinction between these varieties, and we may benefit from further investigation of how these different types of automated chatbot perform.

Based on the survey, we can see that businesses are more likely than their customers to see automated chatbots as useful, with 76% of businesses reporting they have had a positive impact on delivering better outcomes for their customers.⁸ By contrast, 76% of consumers reported interacting with an automated chatbot in the past year, and just over half of these (52%) found them “helpful” or “very helpful.”⁹ The percentage finding them actively unhelpful (“unhelpful” or “very unhelpful”) is notably high at 27%.

The figures are still more concerning when we look at AI chatbots, which 70% of consumers report having interacted with in the past year. Of these, just 43% found them “very helpful” or “helpful” and a remarkable 39% found them “unhelpful” or “very unhelpful” – a worse score than for automated chatbots. This may be explained by the complexity of the tasks executed with the aid of AI chatbots relative to those handled by automated bots. The simpler and more transactional the task, the more likely it can be dealt with using a simple automated chatbot and the smaller the risk of a negative customer outcome.

There are industry variations in usage, with automated chatbots cited as the most preferred channel by 20% of Energy and Utilities business respondents, but only 8% of their Banking and Financial Services peers.⁷

Businesses are clearly keener to adopt chatbots than consumers are, but it is not yet clear whether they are betting that service users will eventually grow to love their bots, or simply feel that the cost advantages outweigh the risk of driving away customers.

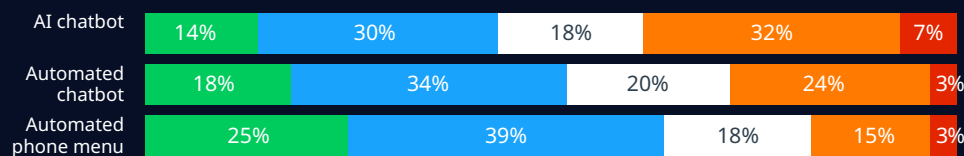
If the latter, they risk a loss of trust, customer loyalty and, ultimately, an outflow of business to providers willing to stick with traditional channels or deploy bots more sensitively.

On page 11, NTT DATA contact centre expert Francesco Palma explains how AI can support empathy.

Consumers’ experience with automated systems

Consumer survey Q.5

Please rate your experience with these automated systems on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “Very unhelpful” and 5 is “Very helpful”.



Base: All respondents who in the last 12 months, have had to interact with an automated system
Figures rounded to nearest %

AI chatbot	1073
Automated chatbot	1223
Automated phone menu	1104

Very helpful (5) Helpful (4) Neither helpful nor unhelpful (3) Unhelpful (2) Very unhelpful (1)

Analysis

“From a customer experience standpoint, the long-term financial benefits of automation are not as obvious as some business leaders believe. Automation brings efficiencies in the short and medium term, but consumer trust can erode over time if they do not actively improve speed and service.

Trust does not appear in operational KPIs, yet it influences lifetime value and churn.

For automation to bring economic benefits in the long run, it is vital also to change the culture and working practices

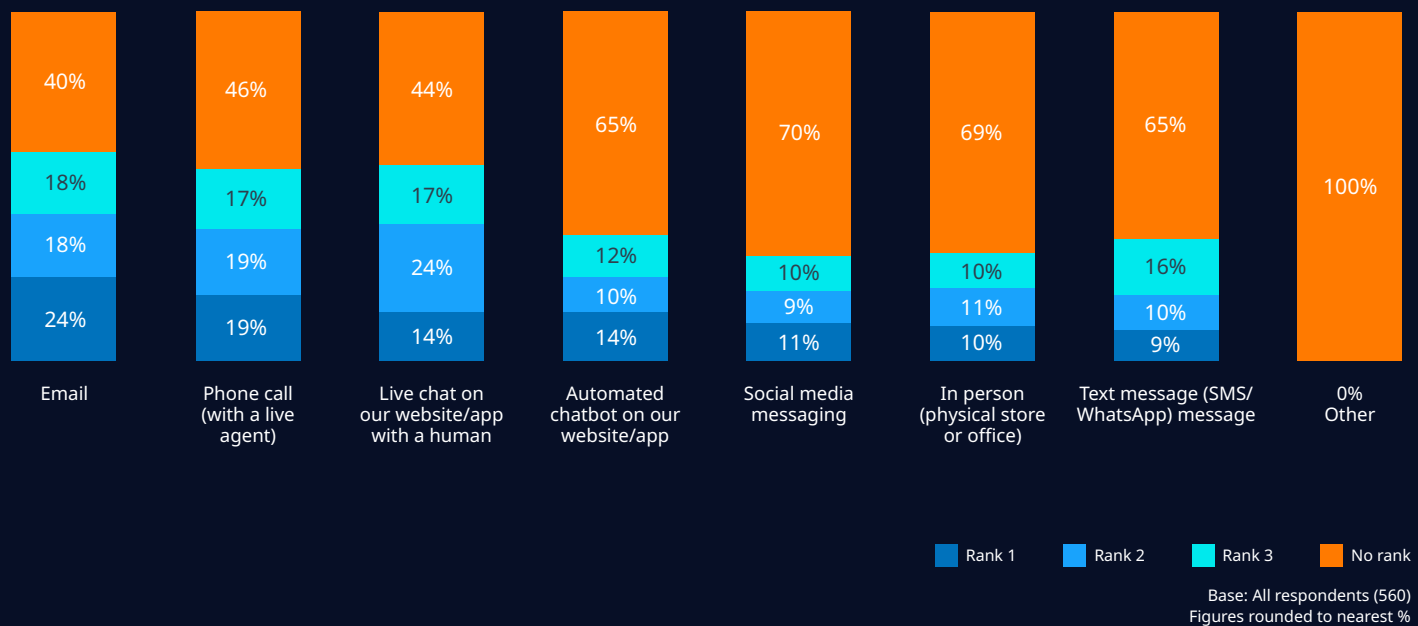
of customer-facing teams to foster customer loyalty. The evolution of contact centres towards AI-native operations requires shifting the perspective from retaining customers to creating communities of loyal brand advocates. A key factor in enabling such a positive change is the ability to focus more strongly on empathy, which is ultimately rooted in deeper levels of understanding. Targeted use of GenAI can help to build deeper, more detailed insights about concerns, issues and requirements. It is possible to create dashboards identifying the underlying issues that are driving customer contacts in the first place.”

Francesco Palma
Solutions Director NTT DATA CX & AI

Businesses’ most preferred customer service channels

Business survey Q.3

What are your organisation’s three most preferred customer service channels?
Rank from 1 (most preferred) to 3 (third-most preferred).



4 Omnichannel routing has greater transformative potential than many business leaders realise

The technology seen as having the greatest impact has only been implemented by 18% of businesses, putting it in eighth place of 10.

As part of the survey, we asked business respondents to tell us, in their own words, about both the top factors that contribute to customer happiness and irritation when interacting with customer service, and the technologies that most excite them. Some businesses explained how they use channels in a balanced and mutually supportive manner, and the rationales they gave for focusing on specific channels are interesting.

Some businesses (Banking and Financial Services respondents, for example) said they prioritise email because they want to have a clear, written record of all key interactions. There may be a need to refer to this trail of emails for legal reasons or to ensure that the proper processes have been followed. Others (some Utilities respondents, for example) use chatbots to ensure a near instantaneous response for issues raised by customers that may be urgent (such as reporting a fault, power outage or leak).

Some businesses said they seek to use multiple communication channels in a coordinated way, illustrating the importance of omnichannel routing: the use of a single platform to direct customers to the channel that best meets their needs.

The agile and coordinated use of channels in this way is not simply a desire but is also often a clear objective, according to some business respondents. The quantitative findings, however, show that what some enterprises say they want to do is not the same as what they actually do.

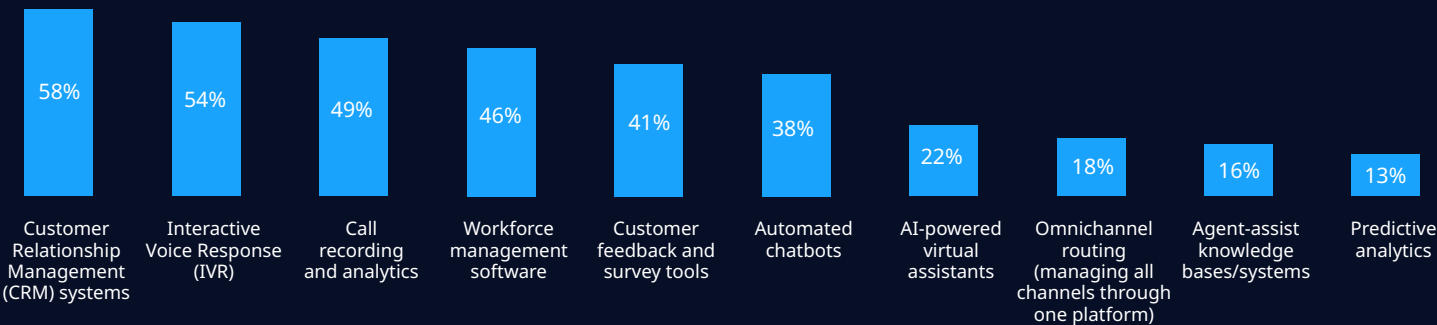
When asked “For each of the following technologies you’ve implemented, what has been the impact on delivering positive outcomes for your customers”, every type of technology investment we tested is credited with delivering either “substantial positive impact” or “some positive impact” by the majority of businesses. The highest scoring technology of all is omnichannel routing (managing all channels through one platform) at 89%.¹² (See graph, p13). However, despite its reported effectiveness, when asked “As of today, which of the following technologies have you already implemented in your contact centre”, only 18% report having implemented it. Looking at the data by sector, Retail is the leader at 25% and TMT comes in last at 11%.¹⁰

While the qualitative insights show that many businesses see the value of using channels in a complimentary manner and the vast majority of respondents who have implemented omnichannel routing technology benefit from it, it is a notably small minority that have made the investment so far. This contrasts with Customer Relationship Management (CRM) which delivers similar impact (88% reported “substantial positive impact” or “some positive impact”) (see graph p13) but is the most common current contact centre technology implementation (58%).

Contact centre technologies that have already been implemented

Business survey Q.4

As of today, which of the following technologies have you already implemented in your contact centre?



Base: All respondents (560)
Figures rounded to nearest %

The next three most common current technology implementations are Interactive Voice Response (IVR) at 54%, call recording and analytics at 49% and workforce management software at 46%.¹⁰ By contrast, the least common are predictive analytics at 13% and agent-assist knowledge bases (centralised, AI-powered repositories of documents that automatically surface relevant information to customer service agents in real time) at 16%; this is despite the value of these foundational technologies in producing well-designed, effective AI-powered solutions. (See graph, p12).

When we look at which technologies businesses are currently trialling, or planning to trial or implement in the next year, we see that they are investing in several emerging technologies. The most common are generative AI for agent assistance (leveraging LLMs to provide real-time,

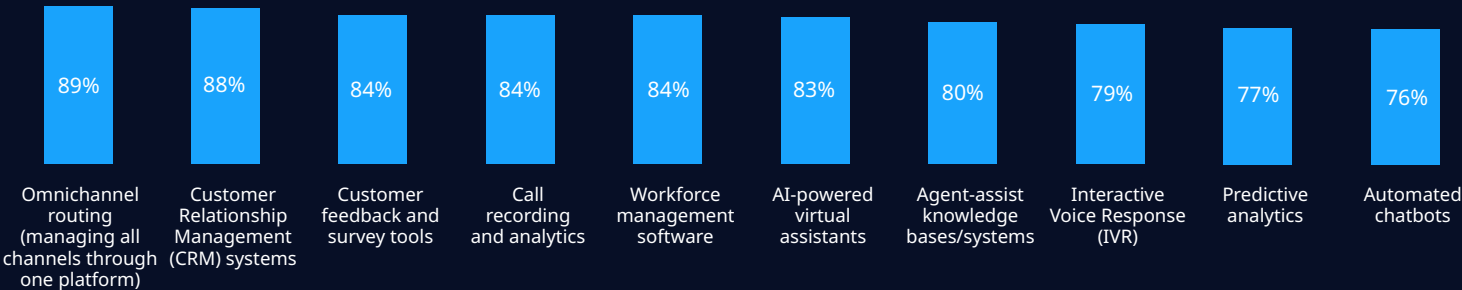
contextual support to human customer service agents) at 55% and real-time voice to text transcription at 51%.¹³ Automated AI agents are on the agenda for 30% of businesses and customer journey analytics are seen as an immediate priority by 25%.¹⁴ (See graph, p15).

The conclusion we draw from this blend of narrative feedback and statistical analysis is that the revolution in use of emerging technologies and AI is still at an early stage. Whilst some technologies such as CRM and IVR are becoming common, other technologies that have truly transformative potential are receiving less attention. This includes both specific technologies that have been proven to deliver high levels of impact (most notably omnichannel routing) and technologies that are foundational to the implementation of the truly AI-enabled contact centre (such as agent-assist knowledge bases and predictive analytics).

Impact of current contact centre technologies

Business survey Q.5

For each of the technologies you've implemented, what has been the impact on delivering positive outcomes for your customers?



Base: All respondents who have already implemented each technology. Figures rounded to nearest %

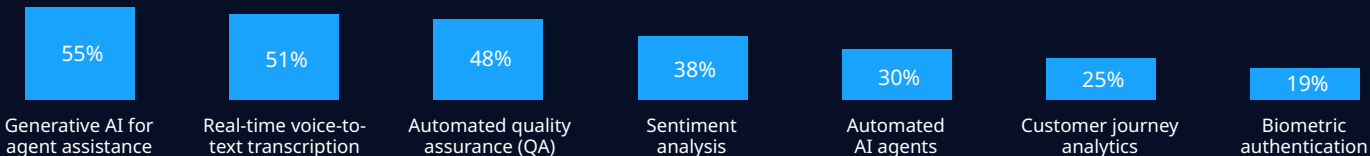
Displayed is summary data from top 2 boxes of responses, "Substantial positive impact" and "Some positive impact"

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems	328	Automated chatbots	214
Interactive Voice Response (IVR)	303	AI-powered virtual assistants	121
Call recording and analytics	275	Omnichannel routing	100
Workforce management software	255	Agent-assist knowledge bases/systems	89
Customer feedback and survey tools	231	Predictive analytics	71

Planned contact centre technology investments

Business survey Q.7

Which of the following technologies are you currently trialling or planning to trial or implement in the next 12 months?



Base: All respondents (560)
Figures rounded to nearest %

5 The main barriers to change are operational

Integration with current systems is the single greatest barrier to AI adoption.

The survey shows that the main barriers businesses face when implementing AI-powered customer service technologies are integration with existing systems (cited as one of the top-three barriers by 52% of respondents), data privacy and security concerns (40%) and lack of internal skills or expertise (40%).¹⁴ (See graph, p15).

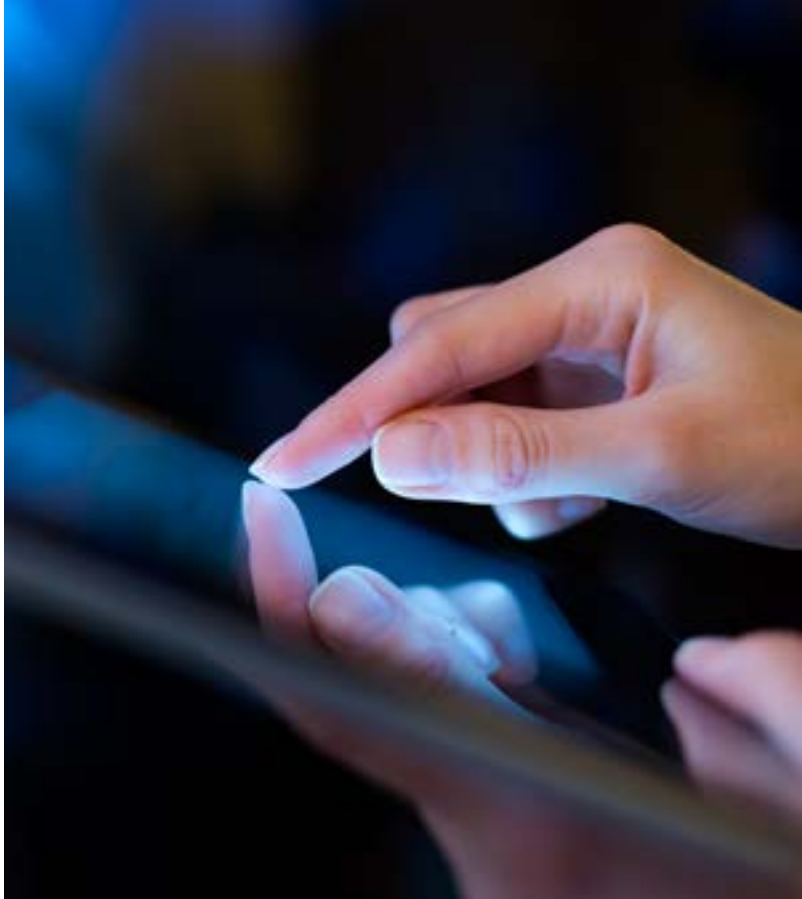
These are all operational problems and are often closely related to each other, with security and skills concerns intimately linked to integration challenges.

By contrast to these practical issues, the survey shows that pushback from customers is the second-least cited challenge at 32% (above the lack of a clear business case or ROI at 28%) with resistance from employees two places higher at 37%. Despite commonly held assumptions that resistance to change is a major barrier to AI implementation, the survey does not support this view.

Interesting variations exist between sectors, particularly when we compare their top-ranked challenges. For TMT business leaders, concerns about integration with current systems are notably high, with 28% selecting it as their number-one barrier; worries about access to appropriate skills are also high, at 20%.¹⁴ For Banking and Financial Services, concerns about data privacy are higher than for any other sector, with 20% ranking it at number one; while for Travel, Transportation and Logistics, budget constraints are the largest single concern, at 23% – not surprisingly, given the low margins and high competition endemic to these industries.¹⁴ (See graph, p15).

The frequent citing of operational considerations as top-three barriers suggests that the speed of adoption is not being slowed by deep ideological, technological or conceptual barriers, but rather by challenges related to their existing technology stacks and staff capabilities. If and when these can be overcome, the path to contact centre modernisation may be a rapid one.

On the right, NTT DATA contact centre expert Francesco Palma explains what needs to change.



Analysis

“Successful adoption of AI in the enterprise ecosystem relies heavily on legacy modernisation.

For example, an organisation may attempt to introduce AI-driven routing, only to discover that customer data sits across disconnected CRM, billing and legacy systems.

Rather than layering AI on top of this fragmentation, a more effective approach would be to start by consolidating customer interaction data into a shared data layer. Some organisations achieve this by creating cross-functional CX transformation pods responsible for both architecture simplification and journey design.

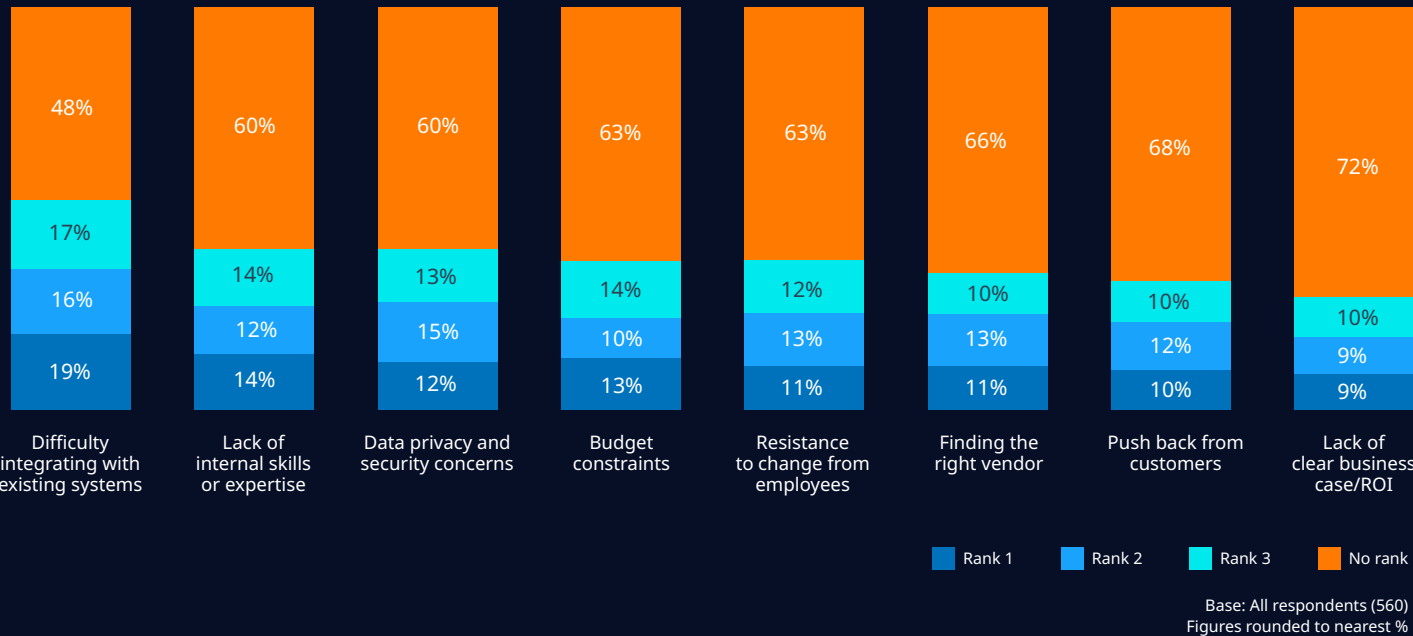
However each individual business wishes to start this journey of transformation, the natural first step is to identify the most urgent underlying legacy issues and deal with them first.”

Francesco Palma
Solutions Director NTT DATA CX & AI

Barriers to AI implementation

Business survey Q.6

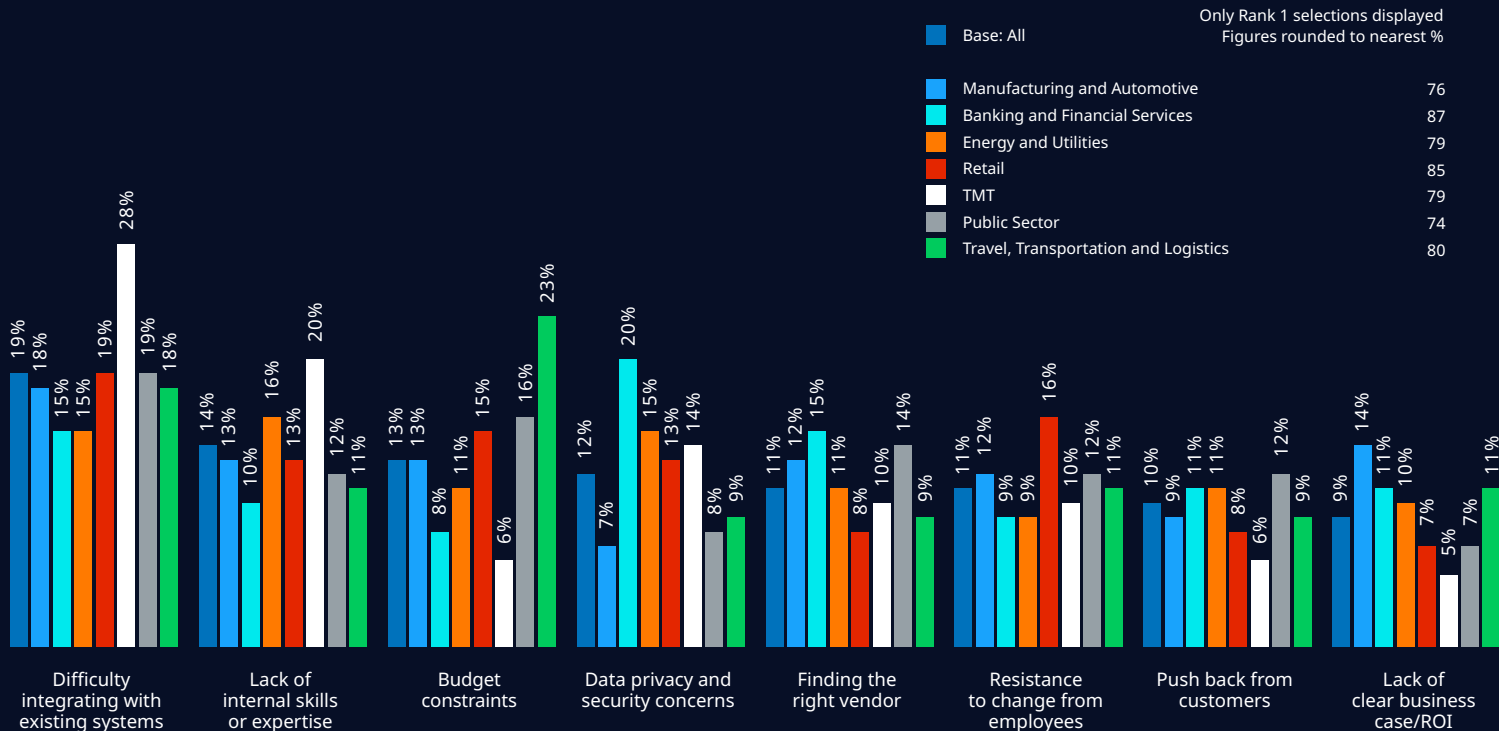
What are the biggest barriers or challenges you face when implementing AI-powered customer service technologies?



Top barrier to AI implementation by sector

Business survey Q.6

What are the biggest barriers or challenges you face when implementing AI-powered customer service technologies?





Section 3: Conclusions

Disconnect between customers and businesses

One of the most striking insights is that some businesses have a very inflated view of customer satisfaction. This is most evident in the Banking and Financial Services sector. In fact, we see that businesses in every sector but one (Retail) over-estimate levels of customer satisfaction – sometimes to a notable degree.

There are clear risks here. Almost all customer service professionals would agree that empathy is a non-negotiable, basic requirement for high-quality, successful service. Yet when asked **“when dealing with an organisation’s customer service over the last 12 months, how often have you felt dealt with in an empathetic and sincere way?”**, only 57% of consumers replied **“always”** or **“often”**. (See graph, p4).

As businesses further develop their strategies for technology implementation, they need to remember that empathy must be demonstrated by their solutions – whether human, automated or hybrid. If they fail to create the perception of empathy, there is a risk that customers will either choose to use alternative communications channels or defect to competitors.

On the right, NTT DATA contact centre expert Francesco Palma explains the role AI can play.

Demographic differences are relatively minor

There are some differences in views between different age groups, but these do not alter the main conclusions, which are true across all groups. The customer service needs of different age groups remain remarkably similar.

For example, we see that both the youngest and oldest age groups surveyed have very similar attitudes to human channels, via their stated preference for telephone as the primary, most liked communication channel. (See graph, p3). The lazy belief that Gen Z is entirely online proves to be untrue.

Old or young, we are all human and want to interact with another person for preference. Of course, there are small nuances in attitude. We should note that the 25-34 age group (not the 18-24-year-olds) is the most open to automated technologies. The conclusion is that demographics matter – but less than we might think, and not always as we might expect.

Analysis

“Organisations are moving fast to enable AI for customer experience and service, yet customer satisfaction or perceived value has not improved.”

The competitive advantage lies in experience design and creating new, unscripted ways for customers to engage with your brand. To achieve such essential differentiation, it is necessary to understand customers in much greater depth than at present. LLMs have the potential to analyse interactions at scale and provide insights that are crucial to driving better service design. Such techniques as conversational analytics, therefore, should form a natural first step – before the rollout of AI-enabled services to customers.

The omnichannel motto has always been: **“Meet customers wherever they are”** – and developing the ability to switch between media and channels with great flexibility and ease is an essential requirement for enhanced customer satisfaction.

Yet that alone will not deliver value without deeper knowledge and sharper, more targeted service design.”

Francesco Palma
Solutions Director NTT DATA CX & AI

There are substantive differences between sectors

Throughout this report we have noted some significant sector variations. Some of the variations can be easily explained by the varying business and regulatory realities across sectors, but others are more surprising.

- **Banking and Financial Services** has the greatest gap between business-reported satisfaction levels (76%) and consumer-reported satisfaction levels (60%), suggesting a fundamental problem with how customer satisfaction tracking is performed in the industry. It is also the most likely sector to see data privacy and security concerns as the biggest barrier to AI-powered customer service technologies (20%), whilst being the least likely to cite lack of skills (10%) as the biggest barrier.
- **TMT** has the most satisfied customer base, with a consumer-reported satisfaction level of 81%. It is also the most likely to see difficulty integrating with existing systems as the top barrier to implementing AI-powered customer service technologies (28%), and the least likely to have implemented omnichannel routing (11%).
- **Energy and Utilities** has a notable gap between consumer-reported and business-reported satisfaction levels (eight percentage points). This may be linked to it being the sector most likely to list chatbots as the number-one preferred channel (20%) – favouring a technology that we have seen is not liked by consumers. This preference for more advanced technologies is supported by the fact that they are the most likely to be trialling customer journey analytics (32%).

- **Public Sector** has the lowest consumer-reported satisfaction level (57%), but this is coupled with the closest match with business-reported satisfaction levels (59%) – suggesting the sector is aware of the challenges it faces. Here, the barriers to implementing AI-powered customer services technologies most frequently cited as number one are difficulty integrating with existing systems (19%), budget constraints (16%) and finding the right vendor (14%).
- **Travel, Transportation and Logistics** has a notable gap between consumer-reported and business-reported satisfaction levels (eight percentage points). It is the most likely to see budget constraints as the number-one barrier to implementing AI-powered customer service technologies (23%), the most likely to have email as the businesses' preferred channel (31%) and the most likely to have already implemented IVR (63%).
- **Manufacturing and Automotive** is the sector with the highest proportion of businesses that have implemented workforce management software (55%). Its companies are also the most likely to be trialling or planning to trial real-time voice-to-text transcription (51%), and the least likely to be planning to trial automated AI agents (18%).
- **Retail** is the only industry where businesses underestimate consumer satisfaction levels (65% against 73%). It is the sector whose businesses are most likely to have implemented omnichannel routing technology (25%), and to prioritise phone as their number-one channel – an advantage, as phone is also the most common priority channel for consumers. They are the least likely to be trialling or planning to trial sentiment analysis (21%).

Below, NTT DATA contact centre expert Francesco Palma explains how AI can make service more empathetic.

Analysis

“Across all demographics and sectors, customers continue to prioritise human contact and emotional reassurance, with only 16% reporting they are always treated empathetically. This feedback serves to strengthen the view that it is vital for each organisation to clearly define and understand what ‘empathy’ means to its customers. That understanding varies between brands and also shows considerable variations across industries and sectors. Empathy in Banking, for example, may be perceived quite differently from empathy in Retail or Public Sector.

This is why we advocate targeted, intelligent use of GenAI – and specifically multiple LLM variants – to analyse current and past interactions in real depth. By building up a detailed picture of the key issues driving customer responses and feedback, enterprises will develop a much more granular understanding of customers and their needs. This, in turn, will enable enterprises to define and understand what empathy in the context of their own business truly means. This is an essential input to the service design process. Once enterprises have clearly understood this, it is vital to design and plan both human operations and automation around this pillar.”

Francesco Palma, Solutions Director NTT DATA CX & AI

Need for realism

Despite the optimism around advanced and AI-driven technologies, there has been only modest progress to date in introducing them. Businesses report that their investments have led to better customer outcomes, yet corresponding consumer feedback is less enthusiastic.⁸ (See graph, p13). This may explain why the longest-established automated system (phone menu) is still rated highest (64% of consumers find it “helpful” or “very helpful”), while AI chatbots are rated 20 percentage points lower in terms of helpfulness.⁹ (See graph, p10).

No one doubts that automated systems, including AI chatbots, are here to stay – and consumer feedback shows that customers are open to advanced technologies. Yet customer satisfaction remains stubbornly low for such solutions, suggesting that businesses need to work harder on finding appropriate use cases and to invest more in delivering added value for customers.

Operational issues are key

The main barriers to the implementation of AI-powered customer service technologies are related to operational issues – including integration, data privacy and internal skills. Businesses may be happy to state that they are fully committed to AI in customer service, but in reality, they are still finding their way.

Access to capability is clearly a major issue, but the perceived difficulty of integrating with existing systems is the biggest problem of all, which may be making businesses reluctant to commit to truly transformational programmes. The patterns we see in the data fit the image of industries that lack confidence to make decisive changes.

Clarity required over the journey

In looking at businesses’ investment plans, we see warning signs over sequencing and foundational capabilities. Technologies and capabilities which we see as essential components of the truly AI-enabled contact centre – such as automated AI agents, sentiment analysis and customer journey analytics – are typically being given a lower priority than we would recommend. Systematic investment requires accurate analysis and a clear strategic vision; many businesses have plenty of work to do in developing the assets required to make well-founded decisions.

Below, NTT DATA contact centre expert Francesco Palma explains how to overcome the barriers.

Priority next steps

Two final requirements stand out:

- 1. Businesses note that integration of AI and other automated solutions into existing environments is a major challenge. There is a need to build technology stacks that are more agile and flexible, and to use AI as a tool to enable better, faster integration.**
- 2. There is a need to build chatbots that truly add value to consumers, in a way they can understand and appreciate. There is a danger that chatbots gain a reputation as simply a cost-saving technique or a barrier to engaging with staff. This could undermine the concept and should be addressed as a priority.**

Analysis

“The main barriers to AI adoption are pragmatic: integration complexity, skills gaps, budget alignment and business case clarity. AI does not replace the need for strategic vision, careful analysis and clear thinking by human leaders within each business.

AI-enabled systems and solutions have the potential to deliver outstanding value, as long as the business context is clearly defined.

First you need to simplify your architecture, consolidate platforms, strengthen data foundations and re-design your customer journeys. Often, tailored, smaller LLMs outperform larger-scale generic LLMs when these components are in place.

If enterprises start from the idea that GenAI will easily and automatically save money, they are likely to fail. By contrast, successful AI users aim to automate their systems as a way to accelerate responses to customers and, by doing so, improve service quality. They will then find that major cost savings come as a result of improved operational efficiency and market competitiveness.

Starting with the right goals, then ensuring that detailed preparation and planning are carried out: these are the real keys to long-term, successful use of AI.”

Francesco Palma
Solutions Director NTT DATA CX & AI

Closing the gap

The data reveals a clear disconnect between how businesses rate their customer service and how consumers actually experience it. Closing this gap is key to maintaining loyalty in an AI-driven world. For support with this, contact NTT DATA and AWS for world-class solutions.



To find out more and arrange a free consultation, get in touch now:
<https://uk.nttdata.com/contact-us>



Appendix

Methodology

The surveys were conducted by Coleman Parkes Research in October and November 2025 using an online methodology.

The consumer survey polled 1,600 consumers in the United Kingdom and Ireland who had interacted with a company's contact centre within the past 12 months. All respondents had recent experience of contacting at least one of the following sectors: Manufacturing and Automotive; Banking and Financial Services; Energy and Utilities; Retail; TMT; Public Sector; and Travel, Transportation and Logistics. Consumers were nationally representative across earnings, employment, gender and age group, from 18 to 64.

The business survey polled 560 senior professionals involved in the planning, implementation, or management of their organisation's contact centres, split between UK (80%) and Ireland (20%). All businesses employed at least 101 Customer Service personnel, with contact centre spend of more than £1 million (or Euro equivalent) per annum. All respondents were decision makers at director level or above. Respondents were split across the following sectors: Manufacturing and Automotive (14%); Banking and Financial Services (16%); Energy and Utilities (14%); Retail (15%); TMT (14%); Public Sector (13%); and Travel, Transportation and Logistics (14%).

Footnotes

- ¹ Consumer survey. Q.S5. How would you describe your attitude towards technology, innovation and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in customer service? Base=1,600
- ² Consumer survey. Q.4. When you need to get in touch with an organisation, please rank your top-three preferred communication channels, from 1 (most preferred) to 3 (third-most preferred). Base=1,600
- ³ Consumer survey. Q.3. When dealing with an organisation's customer service over the last 12 months, how often have you felt dealt with in an empathetic and sincere way? Base=1,600
- ⁴ Consumer survey. Q.2. Thinking about the last time you contacted an organisation in each of the following

sectors, how satisfied were you with that overall experience, from first contact to resolution?

Top 2 Box: Very satisfied and Satisfied. Base=varies by industry (min 301)

- ⁵ Business survey. Q.1. After interacting with your contact centre, how often are customers either satisfied or very satisfied? Top 2 Box: Always and Often. Base=varies by industry (min 74) Base=560
- ⁶ NPS is used by 2/3 of Fortune 1000 businesses
- ⁷ Business survey. Q.3. What are your organisation's three most preferred customer service channels? Base=560
- ⁸ Business survey. Q.5. For each of the technologies you've implemented, what has been the impact on delivering positive outcomes for your customers? Base=varies (min 55)
- ⁹ Consumer survey. Q.5. In the last 12 months, have you had to interact with an automated system, such as a phone menu that asks you to press a number or an AI chatbot on a website? Automated chatbot. Base=1,600
- ¹⁰ Business survey. Q.4. As of today, which of the following technologies have you already implemented in your contact centre? Base=560
- ¹¹ Consumer survey. Q.4. When you need to get in touch with an organisation, please rank your top-three preferred communication channels, from 1 (most preferred) to 3 (third-most preferred). Base=1,600
- ¹² Business survey. Q.5. For each of the technologies you've implemented, what has been the impact on delivering positive outcomes for your customers? Base=varies (min 55)
- ¹³ Business survey. Q.7. Which of the following technologies are you currently trialling or planning to trial or implement in the next 12 months? Base=560
- ¹⁴ Business survey. Q.6. What are the biggest barriers or challenges you face when implementing AI-powered customer service technologies? Base=560

