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Get It Right: Deliver the Omni-Channel Support Customers Want

What contact centers can do now to bridge the digital customer service gap

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bold360

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METHODOLOGY

This paper was written by Ovum in collaboration with Bold360. The research and analysis contained herein is based on original, independent research by Ovum.

As a follow-up to a similar survey and study done in 2014, Ovum carried out a survey of 300 contact center managers and 400 customers across North America, Europe, and Australia and New Zealand. Responses were gathered through a web- and telephone-based survey program in April and May 2016. The survey reviewed the importance of customer service in keeping customers loyal. It looked at customers' omni-channel expectations and discovered gaps in the solutions that customers need compared with the mobile and web support tools that businesses are providing. The survey spans all sizes of business and major industry categories, including both public and private sector. Where applicable, the 2014 study findings are used in this report to highlight significant changes in findings and to point out emerging trends over the past two years.

INTRODUCTION

Customers today have access to information across a variety of channels and devices. They are more mobile than ever, more frequently contacting businesses using smart devices rather than a landline, and readily utilizing mobile applications and the web for support. Contact centers are now supporting a variety of channels but need to do further work to ensure that customers can resolve their issues and get support across digital channels.

Today there is a discrepancy between customer behavior and contact center support. Customers are readily using digital channels to search for information but are often unable to resolve issues across these channels. Contact centers need to better track digital behavior and deliver integrated support offerings that meet the demands of the connected, mobile customer. They must incorporate responsive websites and create a more seamlessly integrated mobile support application. Many show investment in these technologies, but they must ensure that customers can quickly find answers with minimal effort and reach agents for urgent queries when needed in order to improve resolution rates. They must reduce customer effort across mobile and web channels to ultimately enhance customer loyalty and satisfaction.

KEY FINDINGS

- Customers are more empowered than ever with access to information across social networks and websites. Research shows that 82% of customers surveyed have stopped doing business with a brand following a bad experience. Businesses need to ensure that customers remain loyal by improving customer experiences and support options.
- Seventy-two percent of customers search for information online before calling a contact center. And yet only 50% of contact centers are tracking this digital behavior. Contact centers need to deliver an integrated and seamless process for customers as they cross from self-service to agent-assisted service. Customers should be able to resolve their issues online whenever possible, and agents should be empowered with customer behavioral data in order to ensure faster resolutions.
- Sixty-two percent of customers believe it takes five or more different interactions before they resolve their issues, whereas more than half of contact center managers believe customers typically get answers within one to two touchpoints. Contact centers need to truly understand digital support interactions in order to deliver more effective service.
- The percentage of customers using mobile applications for support has increased from 64% in 2014 to 83% in 2016. In addition, the percentage of customers using mobile websites for customer service has increased from 57% to 64% during the same period. And today for the first time, the number of customers calling via smartphones is greater than the number using landlines to reach a contact center. Contact centers should keep this in mind when designing support experiences, tailoring outbound messages to the connected customer, and considering adding visual interactive voice response (navigating through an IVR using a touchscreen), mobile chat, and in-app self-service to create a smoother mobile experience. Live chat usage is also on the rise. The percentage of customers using live chat on a mobile site or application has increased from 33% to 44% in the last two years.
- Despite improvements in the number of channel choices, 50% of customers are still frustrated with automated response systems, and 43% are dissatisfied with the amount of time it takes to reach a representative. Many believe these issues have worsened over the last two years. That helps explain why 40% of customers turn to the web to find answers to their support inquiries. When asked which channel they would choose to resolve various support issues if they knew they could get a resolution on the first attempt, 78% of customers selected a channel other than voice.
- Priorities for contact center managers in 2016 include adding support for digital channels and improving internal processes and response times. They know customers are more digital than ever and want to use social media and live chat to connect, but they must ensure that these tools are not only available but also effective for delivering fast resolutions.
- Customers are beginning to understand connected devices, the Internet of Things (IoT), and the Support of Things (SoT) and welcome the related potential to resolve technical issues faster. Many businesses already offer connected devices and services and are likely to invest in making support improvements using remote support options in the coming years.

CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND EXPECTATIONS

82% OF CUSTOMERS WILL LEAVE AFTER ONE BAD EXPERIENCE.

Today's customers have greater access to information and services across the web, and as a result they are empowered to make decisions about the brands with which they do businesses.

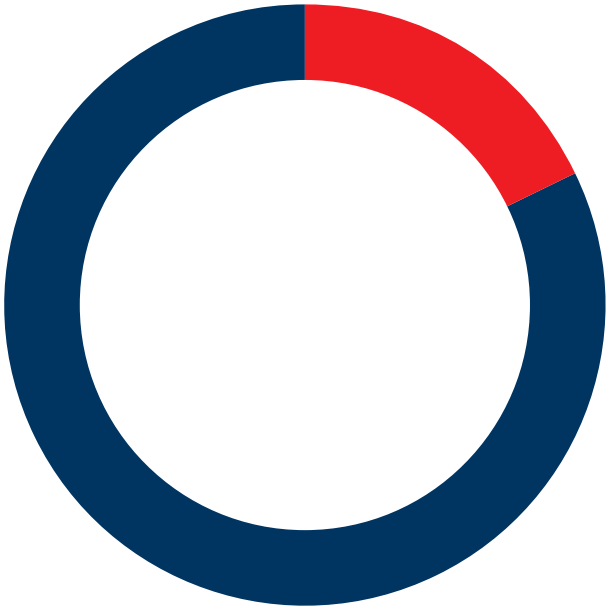
This means that when they have a negative experience with a brand, they can more readily switch to another provider. A bad experience could be anything from long hold times to unresolved issues or difficulties using products and services. When surveyed, 82% of customers stated that they have stopped doing business with a brand following a bad experience (Figure 1). This number has risen from 76% of those who were surveyed in 2014, an increase of 6 percentage points in less than two years.

Customers today are more savvy than ever and have higher expectations. Businesses need to remove friction when a customer reaches out for support, in order to build a more loyal, satisfied customer base, rather than risk losing a customer because support does not meet expectations. Put simply, a business should do everything in its power to avoid negative customer experiences because the consequences can be financially debilitating and long-lasting.

FIGURE 1

82% OF CUSTOMERS HAVE STOPPED DOING BUSINESS FOLLOWING A BAD EXPERIENCE

Have you ever stopped doing business with a company following a bad customer experience?



Yes: **82%** No: **18%**

Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400

CUSTOMERS BELIEVE ACCESS TO AGENTS HAS WORSENED

Despite increasing channel choice, customers believe it is becoming more difficult to get in touch with live representatives; 44% believe the time taken to reach a customer service representative has worsened, and 45% stated that the ability to reach the right customer service representative to answer their queries has worsened over the last two years (Figure 2).

These results are similar to the survey from 2014 in which 48% said they believed the amount of time required to reach live agents had worsened. While it is tempting for a customer service operation to shift service from a live agent to an automated interaction, businesses must remain aware that not providing the customer with the ability to reach a live agent when required is a detriment to their overall service ratings.

Contact centers have focused on expanding channel options for customers, a fact clearly noted by customers; 35% of those surveyed believe this has improved alongside the availability of information on forums.

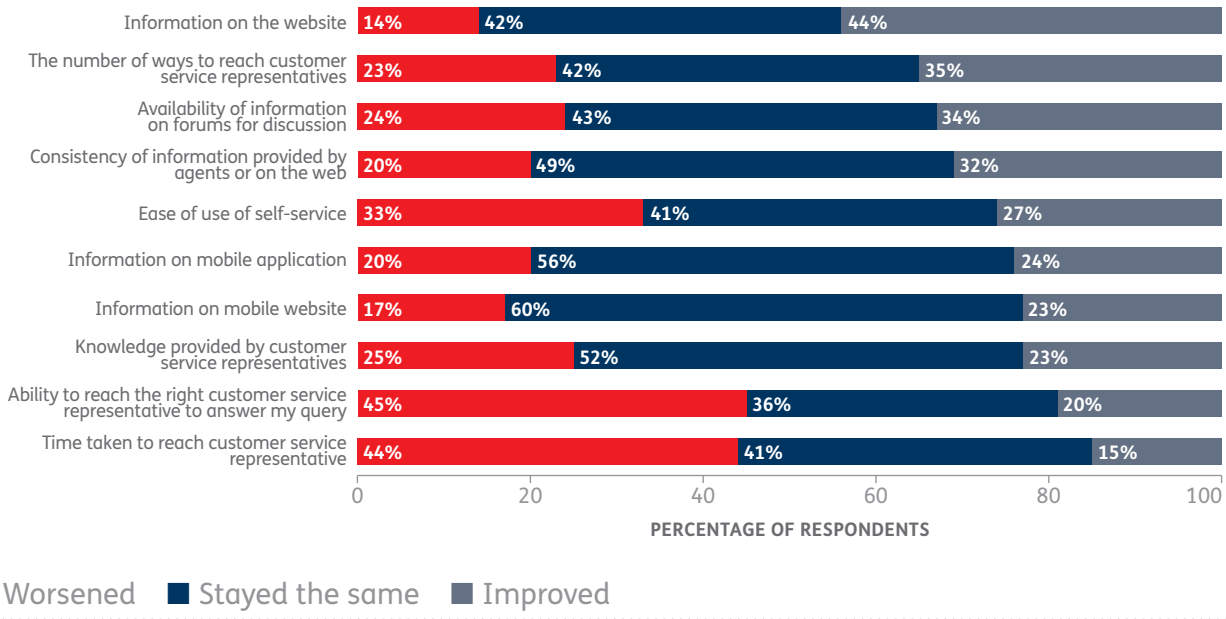
However, contact centers still have work to do to improve these channels. Results indicate mixed customer experiences for self-service, with slightly more customers believing it has worsened rather than improved. Similarly, mobile applications and websites have been overlooked – despite the fact that customers are increasingly drawn to using mobile for both voice calls and digital communications. A business without a strong mobile strategy puts itself at risk for greater customer churn.

45% of customers believe the ability to reach the right representative has worsened over the last two years.

FIGURE 2

CUSTOMERS BELIEVE THE ABILITY AND TIME TO REACH A REPRESENTATIVE HAS WORSENED OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS

How have the following aspects of customer service changed in the last two years?



Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400

CUSTOMERS ARE STILL FRUSTRATED BY AUTOMATED TELEPHONY AND WAIT TIMES

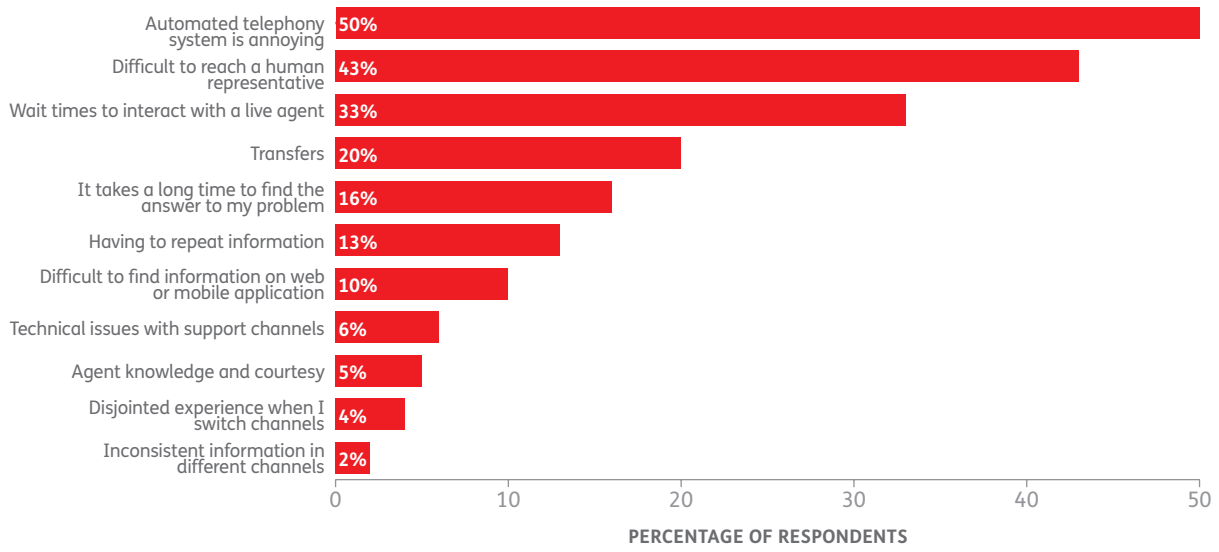
When asked their top two issues with customer service, respondents most often selected automated telephony systems and difficulty reaching a representative. In fact, the number of customers stating that annoying automated telephony is their top issue has increased from 43% in 2014 to 50% in 2016 (Figure 3). Clearly, the problem is not getting better or going away any time soon. Customers still need to use an IVR to reach an agent, and these systems desperately need to be updated in line with modern capabilities, including visual menu options, callbacks, and even personalized menus that better recognize customers.

The 2016 findings, shown below, are worse than the 2014 results, which showed that only 38% (versus 43% today) found it difficult to reach a human, 43% (versus 50%) found automated telephony systems annoying, and 31% (versus 33%) complained of long wait times to interact with agents. While we are sure businesses are aware of their customers' negative perceptions and the shortcomings of automated systems, contact center operations, driven mainly by economics, seem to be implementing more automation. With a generation of millennials demanding businesses cater to their needs, much work needs to be done to personalize these experiences in an effort to reduce wait times and meet customer expectations.

FIGURE 3

AUTOMATED TELEPHONY AND WAIT TIMES ARE AMONG CUSTOMERS' TOP ISSUES

What are the top two issues you experience with customer service?



Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400

CUSTOMERS WANT BETTER ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON DIGITAL CHANNELS

When asked what they would improve in customer service, the majority of customers agreed they want faster response times and better access to support channels. Increasingly, customers are going to the web to search for information, and when they can't find it, they expect immediate access to live agent support in their moment of need. Sixty percent said they want easier access to web support channels, such as social media, communities, and live chat, above all other choices (Figure 4). Faster access to live representatives was the second choice, selected by 53% of the respondents.

It is clear that customers want to find answers themselves, coinciding with the earlier statistic showing that they are searching for answers on websites and mobile devices before calling a contact center. This points out that, if implemented properly, using channels such as web, social media, and live chat would be well-received by customers. However, until that time comes, businesses must continue to reduce the agent response times within their customer care environments.

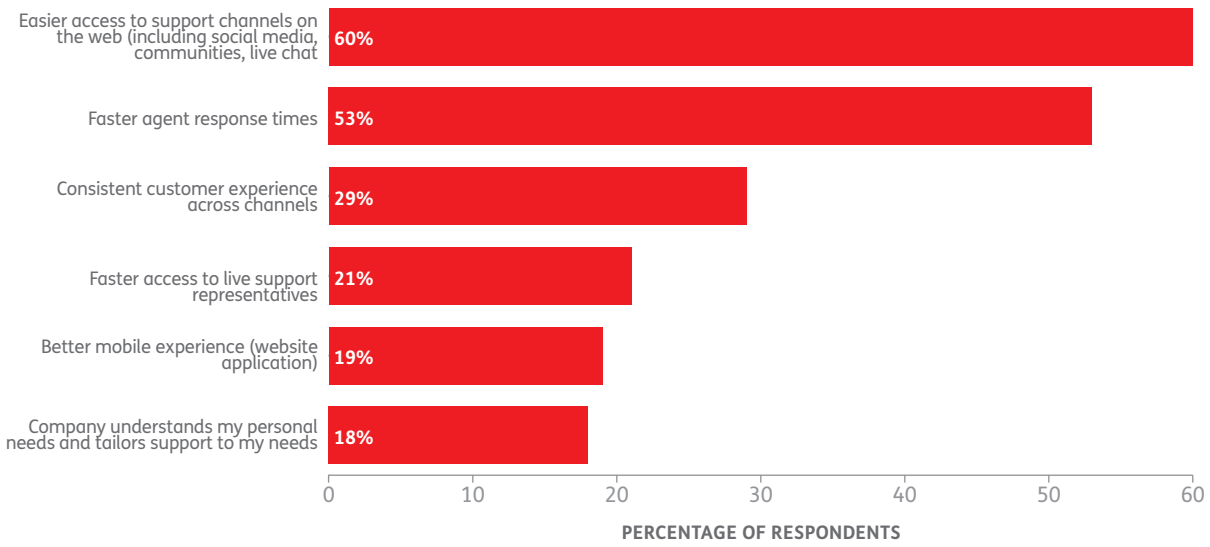
60% of customers want easier access to web support channels, and 53% would like faster agent response times.

Yet, customers still value live agent assistance, particularly for important queries such as technical issues or suspected fraud. Agent response times could include interactions in any channel, from chat to social media to phone; as long as customers get faster resolutions, their experience will be improved.

FIGURE 4

CUSTOMERS WANT EASIER ACCESS TO SUPPORT ON THE WEB

If you could choose two things for organizations to improve in customer service, what would they be? (Select two.)



Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400

CUSTOMERS EXPECT RAPID RESPONSES ACROSS ALL CHANNELS

Out of all the channels, customers expect the fastest response to questions on live chat. Forty-five percent of customers said they expect a response in less than one minute for live chat, compared to 35% for phone within the same time frame (Figure 5). Surprisingly, expectations for SMS are lower, with only 51% of the respondents expecting a response within 30 minutes. This channel has not been used much for customer service except for automated outbound notifications.

As the prevalence of social media grows, customer expectations for this channel are also increasing, with 59% expecting a quick response within 30 minutes. Often emails and community questions can be more complex and less urgent, explaining why expected response times are longer time periods. It should not be assumed that simply shifting customers to a new channel (web, social media, chat, SMS, etc.) removes the need for a timely response from the company. The customer's expectations for these newer digital channels, in many cases, have already been formed, and these expectations are continuing to grow.

45% expect a response to live web or mobile chat in less than 1 minute.

FIGURE 5

LIVE CHAT IS VIEWED AS THE FASTEST WAY TO GET A RESPONSE

How quickly do you expect a response in the following channels?

	< 1 min	1–10 mins	11–30 mins	31–60 mins	1–2 hours	2–24 hours
Live web or mobile chat	45%	51%	2%	0%	1%	1%
Email	1%	12%	17%	18%	19%	35%
Social Media	18%	24%	17%	12%	11%	18%
Phone	35%	60%	4%	1%	0%	0%
Customer communities	10%	25%	15%	15%	11%	24%
Video Chat	13%	37%	27%	17%	5%	2%
SMS	6%	25%	20%	14%	10%	25%
In-app support	44%	52%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400

THE MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR CONTACT CENTER MANAGERS

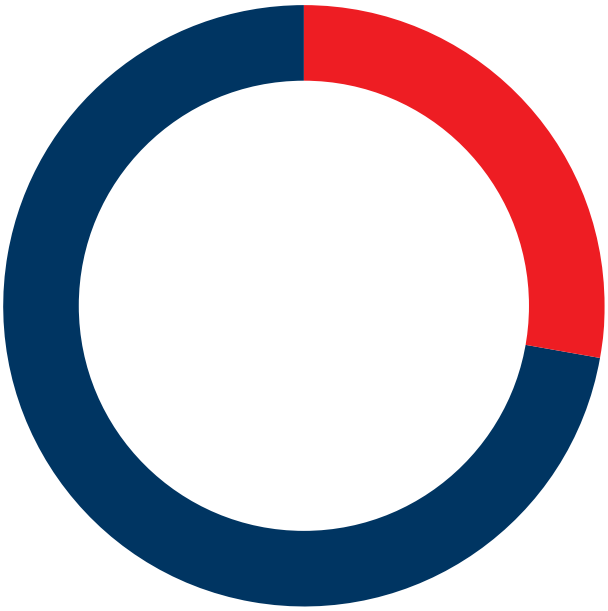
CUSTOMERS ARE INCREASINGLY USING THE WEB TO FIND RESOLUTIONS BEFORE CALLING CUSTOMER SERVICE

Seventy-two percent of customers now search for answers online before calling a contact center. This has increased from 61% who said they used the web before calling a contact center two years ago.

FIGURE 6

72% OF CUSTOMERS USE THE WEB TO FIND INFORMATION BEFORE CALLING A CONTACT CENTER

Do you look for information on the web or mobile application/site before reaching out to a live service representative?



Yes: **72%** No: **28%**

Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400

CUSTOMERS ARE MORE INFORMED

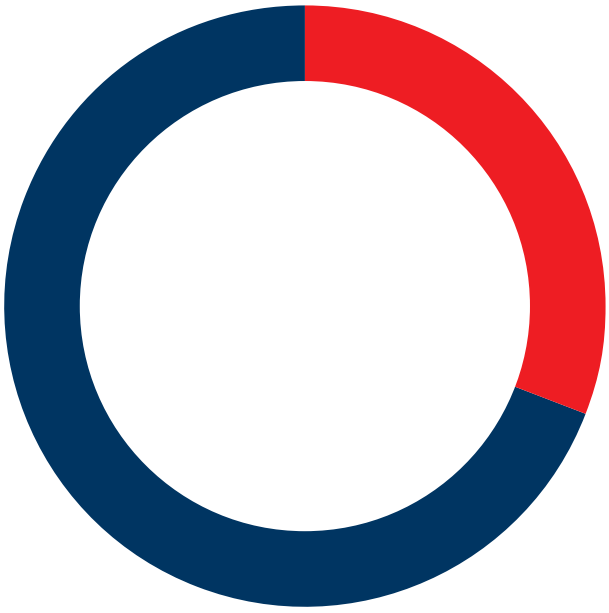
Customers calling contact centers are seeking an increasing amount of information from multiple sources before and during their agent interaction. Seventy-two percent of respondents use the web to access information prior to calling a contact center (Figure 6). In addition, more than two-thirds said they use a website or mobile application to search for relevant information while on a call with a customer service agent (Figure 7).

Therefore, businesses must ensure that their agents are more prepared than ever before to field customer inquiries. Agents are expected not only to provide answers to simple questions, but also to add value and more information to the customer's knowledge base and to be prepared to reach deeper into databases and other information sources to satisfy customer needs. Advanced technologies such as co-browsing, MMS, and visual IVRs enable agents to be better prepared to meet the advanced requirements of more demanding customer expectations.

FIGURE 7

MORE THAN TWO-THIRDS OF CUSTOMERS ARE ON A WEBSITE OR APP WHILE ON A CALL WITH AN AGENT

Do you use a company website or mobile application to search for relevant information while on a call with an agent?



Yes: **69%** No: **31%**

Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400

FEWER THAN HALF OF THE SURVEYED CONTACT CENTER MANAGERS TRACK CUSTOMERS' DIGITAL BEHAVIOR

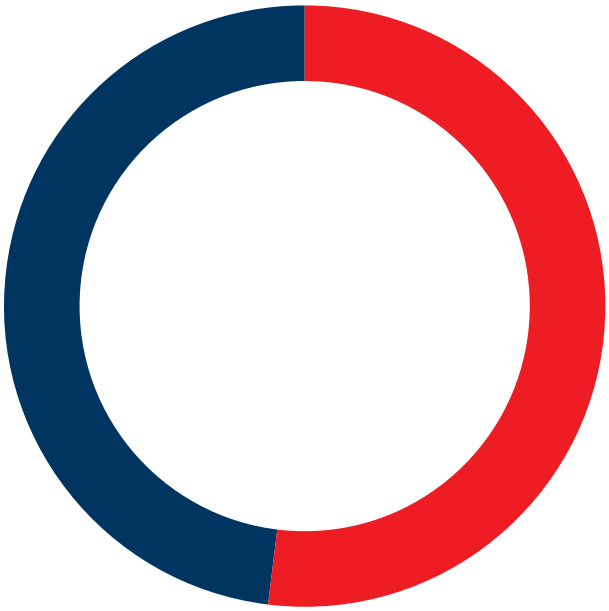
Despite the modern customer's growing dependence on multiple sources of information before and during agent interactions, a surprisingly low number of contact center managers actually track a customer's digital behavior before that person reaches out to the company. Therefore, they know very little about the customer's journey before receiving their call. Only 48% of contact center managers reported capturing and actually using information about customers' digital activity to improve interactions (Figure 8).

This means that a majority of contact center managers (and their agents) are unaware of a customer's issues before they pick up a call, making them less prepared to help than they could be, had they known about previous attempts to get information or solve a problem. It logically follows that customers will have to repeat information multiple times during a journey through customer service – which 13% of customers mentioned as one of the most frustrating issues they have with contact centers and customer service in general.

FIGURE 8

LESS THAN HALF OF CONTACT CENTER MANAGERS ARE TRACKING DIGITAL BEHAVIORS

Do you track whether customers search for information on the web before they call the contact center?



Yes: **48%** No: **52%**

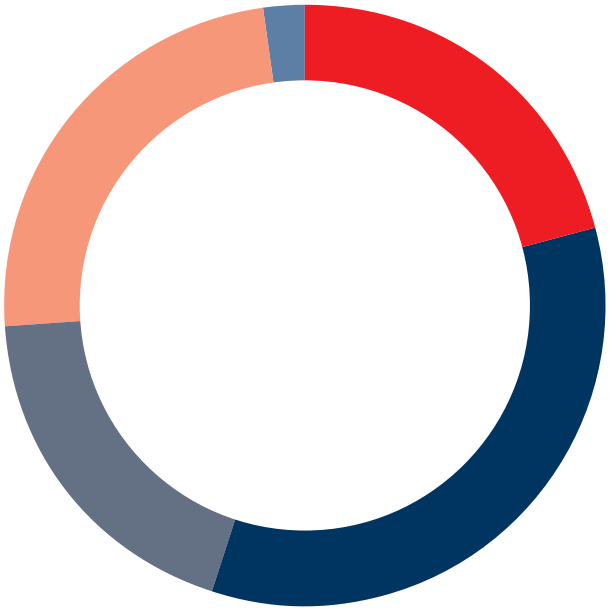
Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400

Furthermore, our research shows that of the contact center managers who do track online behavior, fewer than half (43%) believe that customers are carrying out web and mobile searches regularly – very frequently or most of the time (Figure 9). This is contrary to what customers report (Figures 6 and 7) about their search behavior or during calls with agents. By not leveraging the customer's digital behavior, contact centers are missing an opportunity to provide a personalized service experience. Contact center managers should ensure that they have visibility into their customers' online research behavior in order to better prepare their agents and develop their applications. It is never a good practice to have customers interacting with agents who have no knowledge of the customer journey. Managers and agents must continue to stay abreast of their customers' online behaviors and preferences to ensure a satisfying service experience.

FIGURE 9

CUSTOMERS OFTEN SEARCH THE WEB BEFORE CALLING THE CONTACT CENTER

If you track whether customers search for information online, how frequently do your customers search for information on the web before they call the contact center?



- 0-24% (Rarely): **21%**
- 25-49% (Sometimes): **34%**
- 50-74% (Most): **19%**
- 75-100% (Very frequently): **24%**
- N/A: **2%**

Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400

CUSTOMERS BELIEVE IT TAKES MORE THAN FIVE INTERACTIONS BEFORE GETTING A RESOLUTION

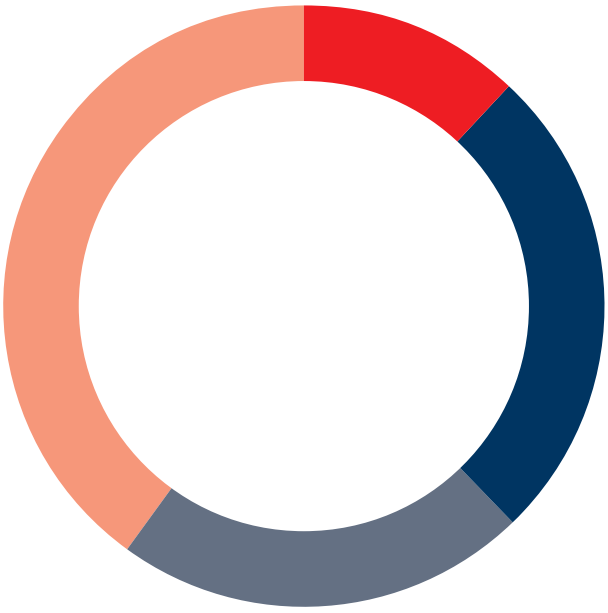
When asked, 62% of customers said it takes more than five different touchpoints before they get a resolution (Figure 10). However, 54% of contact center managers believe that customers can get a resolution in one or two attempts (Figure 11), revealing a massive disconnect between actual customer effort and contact center managers' perception of that effort. This misconception can account for errors in gauging first contact resolution (FCR), an increasingly important measurement of customer satisfaction.

54% of contact center managers believe customers can get a resolution in 1–2 attempts

FIGURE 10

THE MAJORITY OF CUSTOMERS SAY A RESOLUTION REQUIRES MORE THAN FIVE ATTEMPTS

On average, how many attempts does it take before you find a solution to your problem?



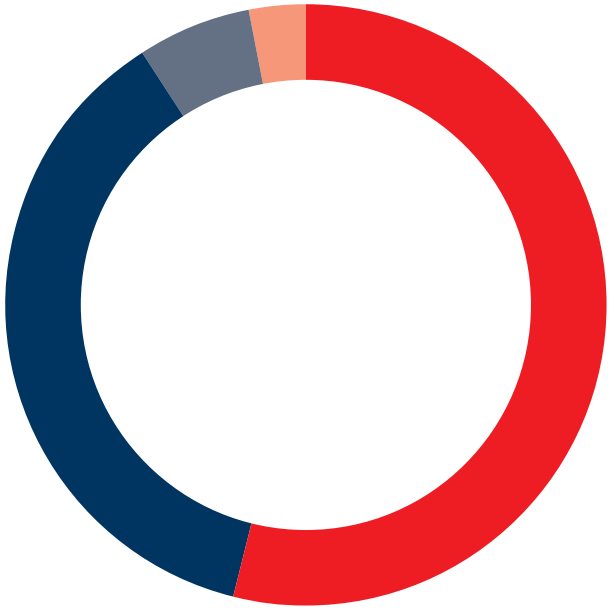
- 1-2 attempts: **12%**
- 3-4 attempts: **26%**
- 5-6 attempts: **22%**
- >6 attempts: **40%**

Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400

FIGURE 11

MOST CONTACT CENTER MANAGERS BELIEVE A RESOLUTION COMES WITH FEWER THAN THREE ATTEMPTS

How many interactions or touchpoints on average do your customers use before getting a resolution to their query?



- 1-2 attempts: **54%**
- 3-4 attempts: **37%**
- 5-6 attempts: **6%**
- >6 attempts: **3%**

Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 300

62%

of customers believe it takes 5+ interactions before getting a resolution

CUSTOMER ISSUE RESOLUTION USING LIVE CHAT AND MOBILE CHANNELS IS INCREASING

Fewer than 20% of customers have success resolving issues on web pages, mobile applications, and social media. Contact centers need to improve information and assistance across web channels, as well as provide customer guidance over which types of information can most easily be found in a particular channel. This would increase the use of these lower-cost, more-efficient channels while diverting many live agent calls, which tend to be a more expensive option for the enterprise.

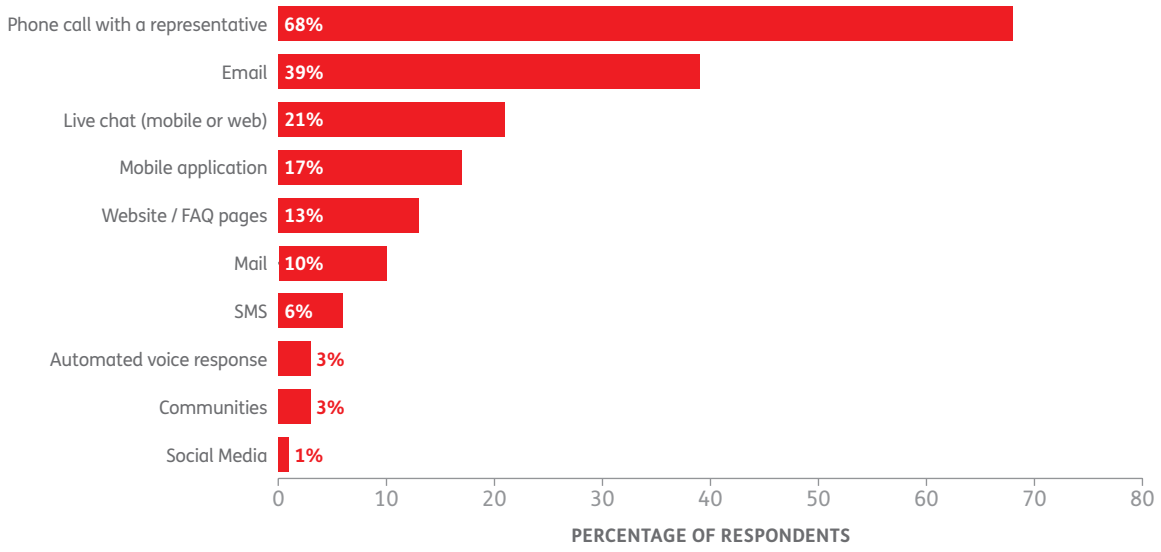
On the contrary, resolutions in live chat and mobile are increasing. Live chat was pinpointed as the third most popular way to resolve an issue after phone and email, with 21% of customers having resolved issues this way (Figure 12). Resolutions via mobile apps are also on the rise, jumping from 7% in 2014 to 17% in 2016. This represents a significant shift toward mobility as a method of successfully resolving customer service issues. Customers favor channels where they have access to a knowledgeable agent, and chat (mobile or web) helps them quickly start up a two-way interaction without leaving the web page or mobile application. Businesses should focus on improving resolution rates across all social media and digital self-service tools in addition to chat, as customers will continue to use these channels to search for information and to resolve their issues quickly.

Sixty-eight percent of those surveyed are still able to resolve their issues with a phone call – a downward shift from 75% in 2014 (Figure 12). Although it's still a significant channel, digital channels continue to chip away at phone calls as the most reliable choice for resolving customer issues.

FIGURE 12

AFTER PHONE AND EMAIL, CHAT IS THE MOST RELIABLE CHOICE FOR RESOLVING ISSUES

When reaching out to customer service, through which channels have you had the most success resolving your issues on the first attempt?



Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400 (Multiple responses allowed)

THERE IS A DRAMATIC SHIFT TO MOBILE DEVICE ACCESS

MORE CUSTOMERS ARE CALLING FROM SMARTPHONES THAN LANDLINES

Mobile is clearly becoming a priority for customers. Not only are they using mobile applications, but they are making more calls from their mobile devices. A higher percentage of customers (58%) makes calls from mobile/smartphones than landlines (41%) today (Figure 13). The biggest change is the percentage of customers using mobile applications to reach customer service – 83% today versus 64% in 2014. Businesses must ensure that their websites are mobile-friendly and that mobile applications exist to enhance their customers' experiences when seeking support from mobile devices.

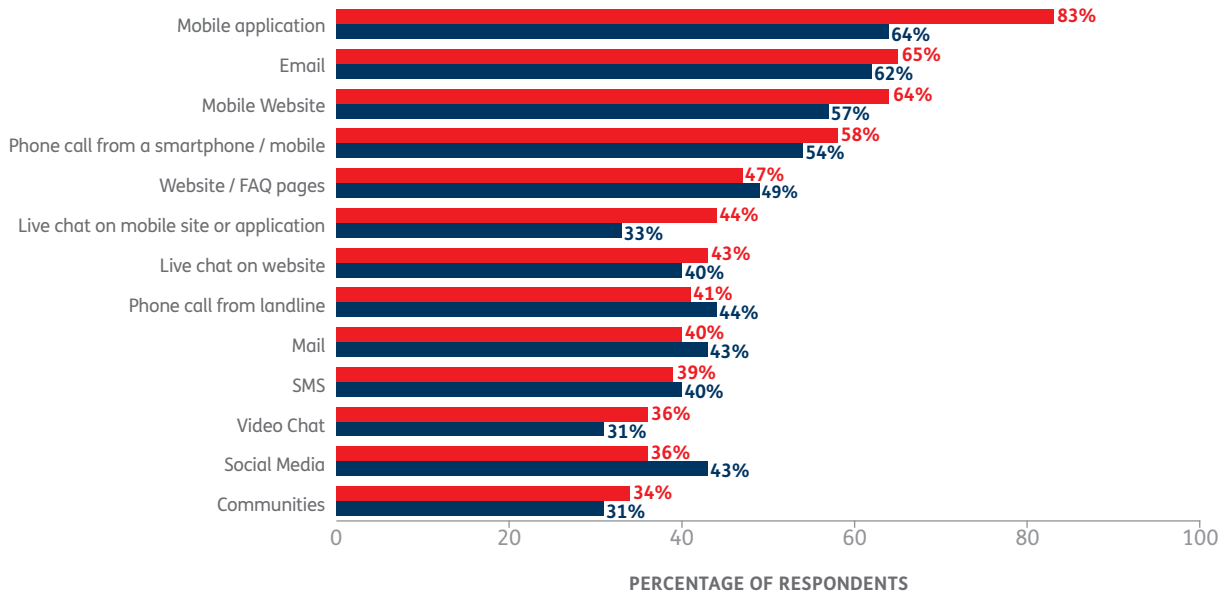
83% of customers use mobile applications for support – up from 64% in 2014.

Customers using live chat (website or mobile) has risen 11 percentage points since 2014.

FIGURE 13

MOBILE, WEB SELF-SERVICE, AND CHAT ARE GROWING RAPIDLY FOR CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Which of the following support methods do you typically use to reach a business with customer support questions? What did you use two years ago?



Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400 (Multiple responses allowed)

CUSTOMERS USE MANY DIFFERENT SUPPORT CHANNELS

Customers are using a broader range of channels today, with some claiming to use at least nine channels to reach customer support. Personal preferences come into consideration, as well as the fact that mobile applications, chat, and self-service are improving and making it even easier to attain customer service and resolve issues across a broad set of customer options. The average number of channels used by customers to access customer service has doubled from three to six. This is due to a combination of things, including the increase in available channel types, channel quality improvements, the customer's perception of channel availability, and the customer's desire for personal choice.

86%

of customers use 5+ channels for support.

CUSTOMERS WOULD CHOOSE SELF-SERVICE IF THEY KNEW THEY COULD GET RESOLUTIONS ON THE FIRST ATTEMPT

On average, across all types of customer support scenarios, if customers knew they could get a resolution to their issues on the first attempt, 78% would choose a channel other than a phone call (Figure 14). The technical resolutions category was the outlier – 51% of customers stated that they would prefer to use a phone call for resolving technical issues, which was the highest preference for phone out of all scenarios. This is most likely because these problems can be complex and are often urgent – for example, in the case of a broken phone or laptop.

Channel preference is also related to the urgency of an issue or ease of access to self-service.

For example, when asked about changing a reservation, only 12% of customers would choose to use voice if they knew other channels would help them find a resolution. Likewise, live chat is the preferred channel (33%) for answering general support queries. When asking customers about their ideal channel choices, it is important to remember that each customer has different preferences and priorities. Businesses need to be cautious not to overcommit to channel adoption just to meet changing consumer preferences. The focus should be to provide fast and frictionless access to information and service (self-service channels or agent assisted) and determine the best channel to meet the customer needs.

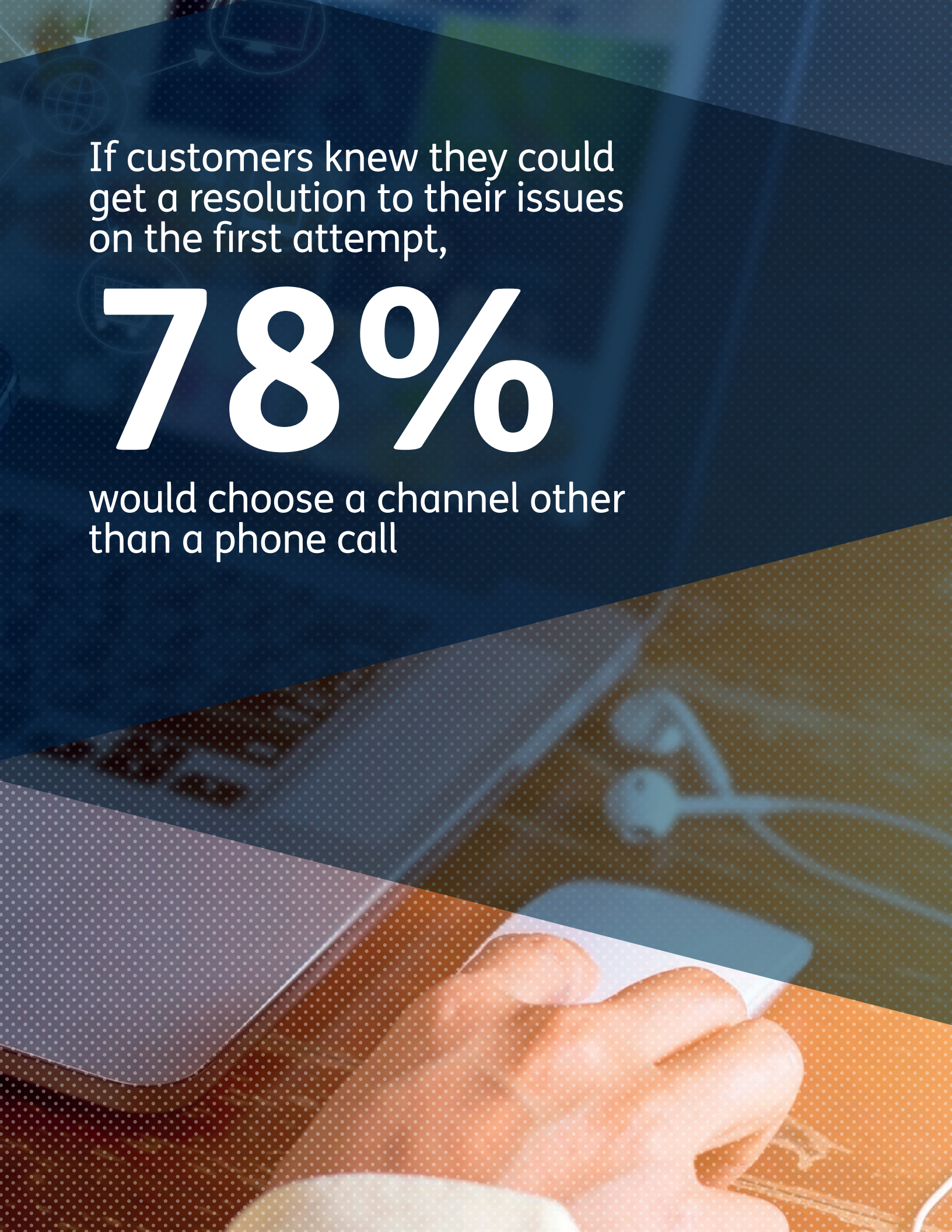
FIGURE 14

FOR THE MAJORITY OF SCENARIOS, CUSTOMERS PREFER NON-VOICE CHANNELS

Which channel would you prefer to use if you knew you could get a resolution on the first attempt?

	Phone call	Email	SMS	Mail	Website	Mobile app	Live chat	Communities	Social media
Technical issue with product or device	51%	22%	6%	4%	6%	4%	7%	0%	1%
When purchasing items on the web	16%	27%	4%	4%	22%	13%	9%	3%	4%
Service outage & restoration	26%	19%	7%	8%	14%	9%	8%	5%	5%
Billing question	38%	18%	8%	6%	8%	5%	13%	1%	4%
Suspected fraud	26%	19%	5%	14%	8%	8%	8%	9%	4%
Cancellation	14%	27%	20%	15%	10%	6%	3%	2%	5%
Change a reservation	12%	21%	17%	9%	8%	16%	11%	1%	7%
Make account modifications	8%	24%	6%	18%	18%	12%	6%	0%	9%
General support questions	6%	8%	1%	0%	19%	22%	33%	4%	8%

Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400



If customers knew they could get a resolution to their issues on the first attempt,

78%

would choose a channel other than a phone call

CONTACT CENTER INVESTMENTS AND PRIORITIES

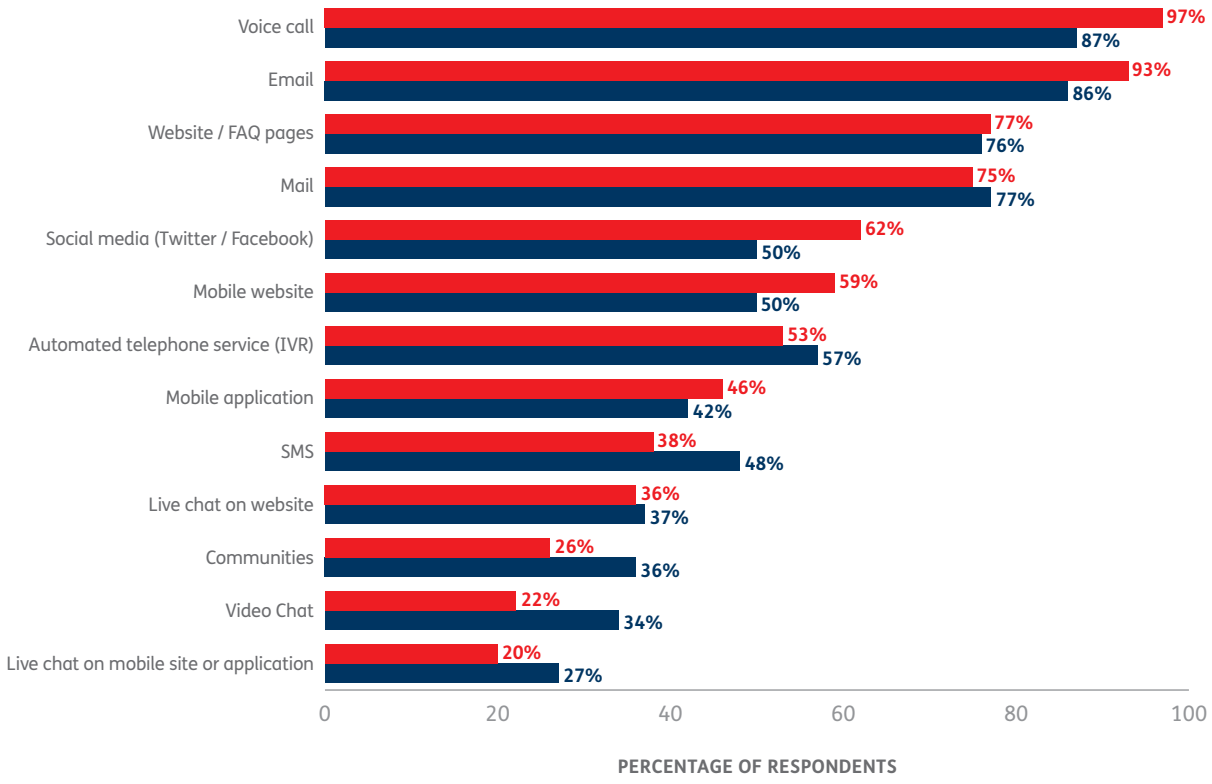
CONTACT CENTERS ARE BEHIND IN ADOPTION OF MOBILE SUPPORT CAPABILITIES

Contact centers have been keen to adopt new channels, and more than 60% have invested in social media. However, despite an increase in the number of contact centers offering mobile website and applications for support (Figure 15), this number does not reflect high customer usage and strong preferences for mobile support capabilities. Although mobile applications are best utilized by businesses that have regular customers carrying out self-service (namely retail, banking, telecommunications, healthcare, and travel organizations), contact centers will soon realize that the future is increasingly driven by mobile devices, and customers need integrated capabilities across devices. Centers should plan new implementations accordingly.

FIGURE 15

CONTACT CENTERS STILL SEE EMAIL AND VOICE AS THE ESSENTIAL SUPPORT CHANNELS

Which of the following support channels do you currently offer for customer service? What did you offer two years ago? (Please select all that apply.)



Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 300

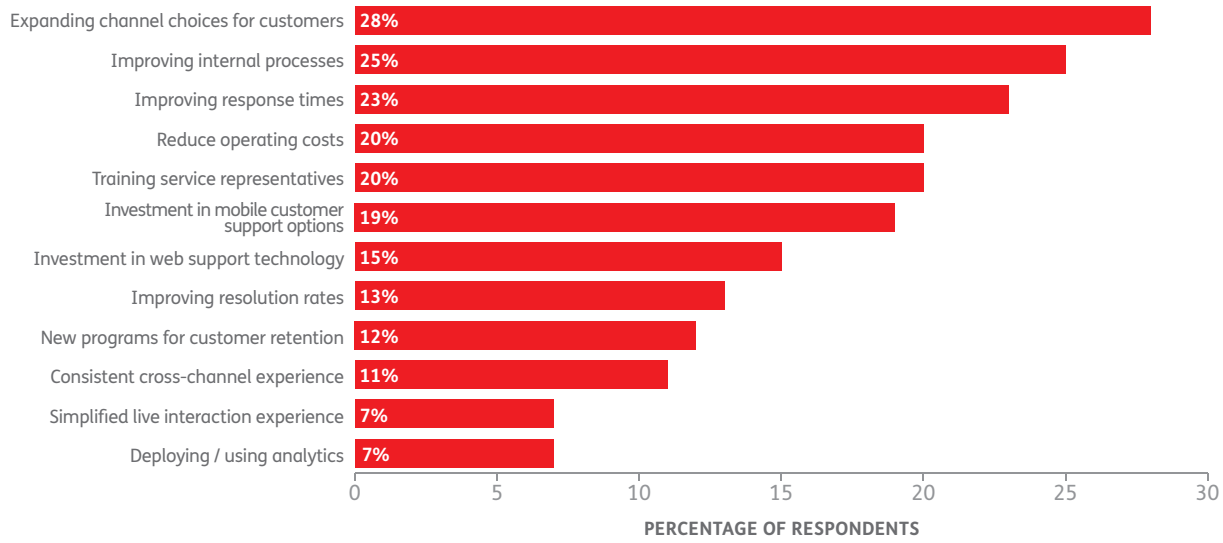
EXPANDING CHANNEL CHOICES IS A TOP PRIORITY FOR MANY MANAGERS

Expanding channel choices for customers and improving internal processes are now the top priorities for contact center managers (Figure 16). Improving response times, the third item in the rankings, continues to be a priority as contact centers seek to become more efficient and improve customer satisfaction. This is a change from 2014, when training service representatives (29%) was the highest priority.

FIGURE 16

MANAGERS WANT TO EXPAND CHANNEL CHOICES AND INTERNAL PROCESSES

What are the top two priorities for your support organization over the next two years? (Please select two.)



Source: Ovum global contact center manager survey, n = 300

CONTACT CENTERS PLAN TO INVEST IN LIVE CHAT AND WEB SELF-SERVICE

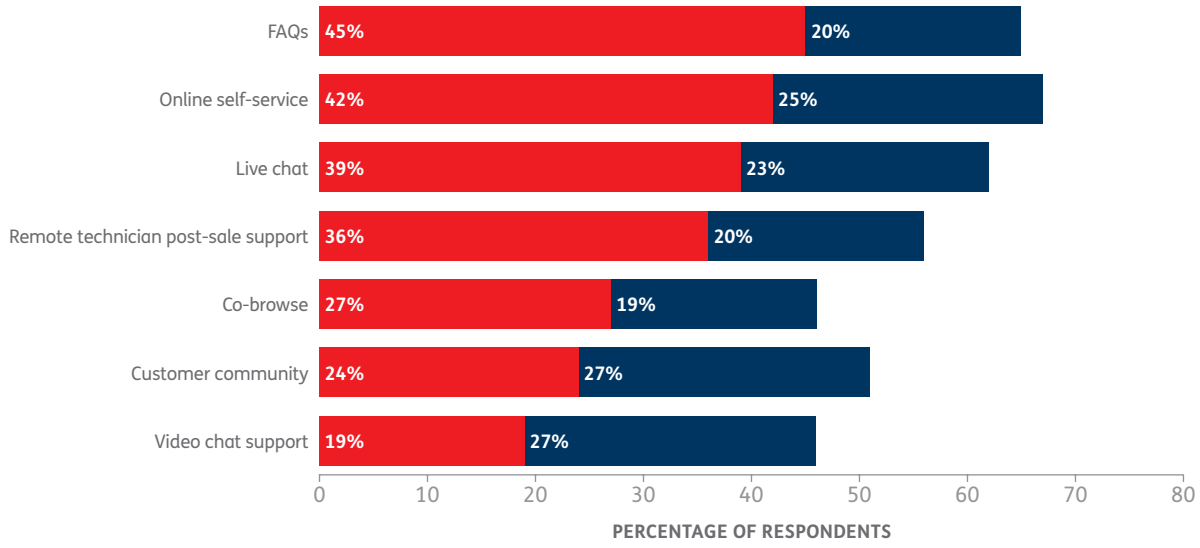
Businesses are realizing the value of chat and other digital channels in allowing customers to find answers quickly without leaving their web or mobile sessions. Investments in FAQ pages, online self-service, and live chat are high on the list of priorities for investment in 2016 and 2017, with more than 20% of contact center managers stating that they will invest in these channels (Figure 17). This suggests a business strategy to drive customers out of the contact center (i.e., live phone support) and into web support, where they will likely try to self-serve on the first attempt. Of course, contact center managers should keep in mind that these new channels and resolution paths should not preclude maintaining a strong voice channel program, at least for the next several years, or until customers grow more comfortable with self-service and not having to access a phone-based agent on their first attempt.

Video chat support and customer communities have the largest percentage of planned investment for 2016/17.

FIGURE 17

CONTACT CENTERS WILL CONTINUE TO INVEST IN SELF-SERVICE AND LIVE CHAT

Which web support tools do you offer and/or plan to invest in for customers?



Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 300

More than

20%

of contact center managers will invest in live chat in 2016/17.

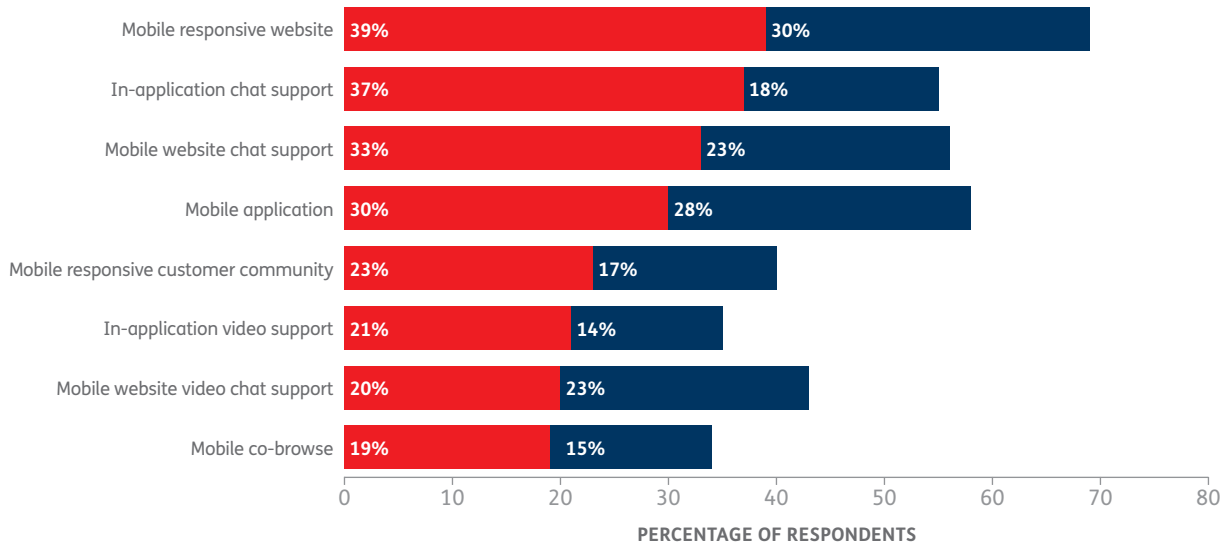
MOBILE SUPPORT IS A HIGH INVESTMENT PRIORITY FOR CONTACT CENTERS

As indicated in Figure 15, the provisioning of mobile websites and mobile applications is increasing year over year within contact centers. Contact center managers are also prioritizing 2016/17 planned investments around mobile applications and mobile websites. When asked about investments in mobile, contact center managers identified their top priorities as follows: mobile responsive websites (30%) and mobile applications (28%), followed by mobile live chat (23%) and video chat (23%) (Figure 18). These investment plans reveal a strong desire on the part of contact center managers and their companies to deliver a consistent mobile experience for visitors across their mobile website and related applications. Maintaining these mobile footprints will be crucial and must be made a priority given other potential distractions, including unpredictable budgets, other technology investments, and changing customer preferences.

FIGURE 18

CONTACT CENTERS ARE PRIORITIZING MOBILE WEBSITE AND APPLICATION INVESTMENTS

Which mobile support tools do you offer and/or plan to invest in for customers?



Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 300

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION (CSAT) AND FIRST CONTACT RESOLUTION (FCR) REMAIN POPULAR METRICS

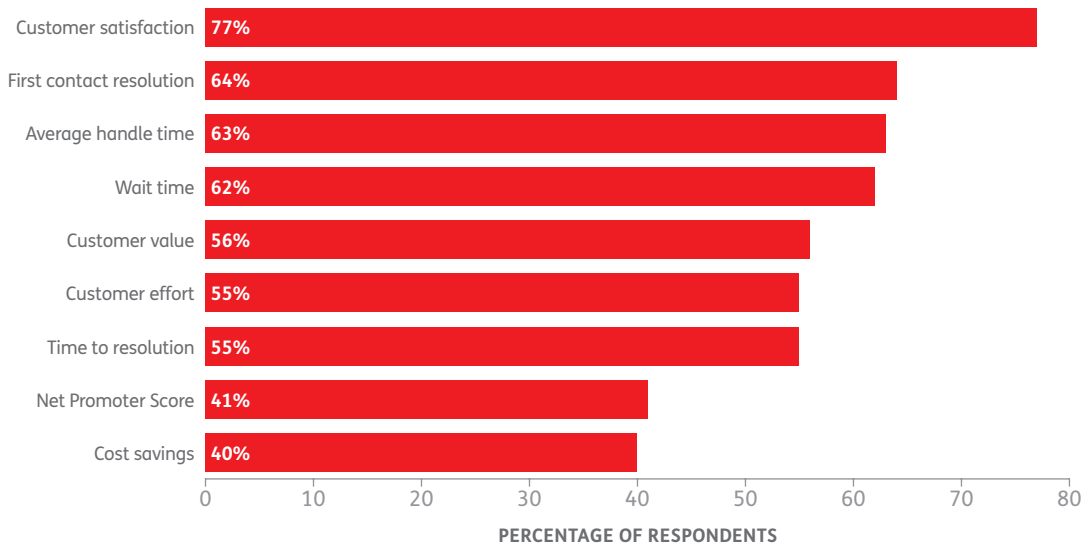
The latest survey is consistent with the 2014 survey results. In 2016, 77% of managers are tracking CSAT (vs. 76% in 2014), and 64% reported tracking FCR (vs. 63% in 2014) as the highest priorities for measuring customer experience (Figure 19). Contact center managers continue to track a full range of metrics, but it is clear customer satisfaction and reducing the total number of calls to resolve the same issue are consistently top KPIs. These results confirm the importance of good, consistent experiences and rapid problem resolution to ensure customer loyalty and boost CSAT where and whenever the customer requests support. In addition to improving customer satisfaction, reducing customer churn and improving FCR are valuable expense-reduction items for all companies, which should be used to gain the support of the enterprise's finance department.

77% of contact center managers track customer satisfaction. 64% track first contact resolution.

FIGURE 19

CSAT REMAINS A PRIORITY FOR CONTACT CENTERS, BUT THEY MUST DO MORE TO ENSURE LOYALTY

Which metrics do you currently use to track customer experience?



Source: Ovum global contact center manager survey, n = 300 (Multiple responses allowed)

CONTACT CENTER CHALLENGES

OUTDATED TECHNOLOGY IS A CHALLENGE FOR MANY CONTACT CENTERS

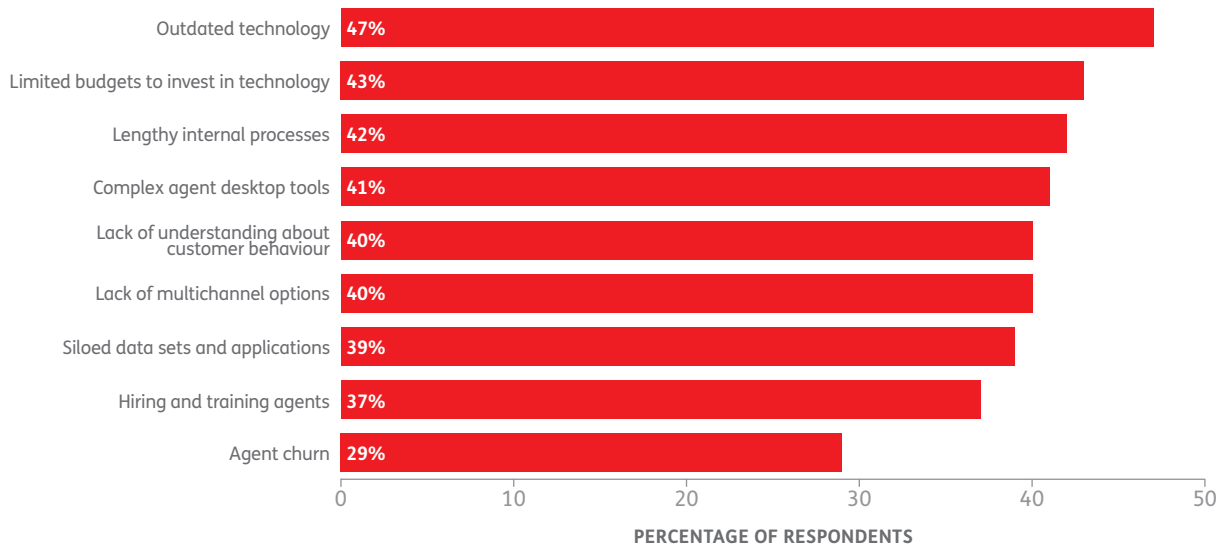
Customer service managers believe technology is becoming increasingly important for delivering positive customer experiences and assisting customers in getting issues resolved. This is a critical issue as the switch to digital channels is happening much faster than contact centers seem able to manage.

Forty-seven percent of managers cited outdated technology as their biggest challenge in delivering great customer service (Figure 20). Companies that have moved from seeing the contact center as an expense to progressively seeing it as a revenue driver and effective customer-retention tool have been the most successful in prioritizing technology investments in their customer service environments. Contact center managers should capitalize on this strategy as often as possible by exposing upper management to the benefits of excellent care in terms of customer longevity and increased sales.

FIGURE 20

TECHNOLOGY IS A LIMITING FACTOR FOR MANY CUSTOMER SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Which challenges do you currently face in delivering great customer experiences? (Select all that apply.)



Source: Ovum global contact center manager survey, n = 300

47%

of contact center managers believe outdated technology currently inhibits their ability to deliver a great customer service experience

MANAGERS RECEIVE THE MOST COMPLAINTS ABOUT TECHNICAL ISSUES

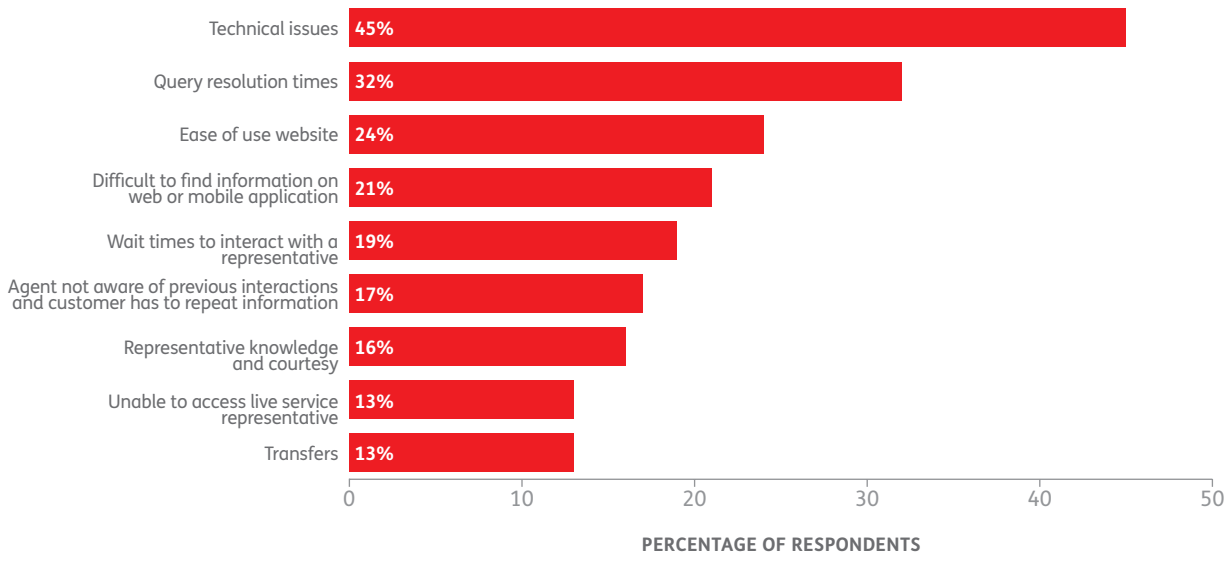
Technical issues are the most common complaint among consumers (45%), followed by query resolution time (32%) (Figure 21). The complaints about technical issues underscore the fact that, although companies may put energy into training representatives, without the right underlying technology, customers may still have bad experiences. It is important to invest in technology to support agents, provide them with up-to-date information, and ensure that customers can easily find information on their own.

While customers previously stated that wait times and overall access to representatives were highly rated issues for them, contact center managers ranked those points lower on their list. Once again, this reveals a discrepancy between customers' expressed issues and managers' perception of their customers' top issues. Therefore, we can conclude managers often do not align their priorities with customer requirements, but more often focus on what they perceive the issues to be without having a true understanding of the customer's point of view. Closing this perception gap should be a top priority for all customer care managers.

FIGURE 21

MANAGERS RECEIVE THE MOST COMPLAINTS ABOUT TECHNICAL ISSUES AND RESOLUTION TIMES

What are the most common complaints about customer service?



Source: Ovum global contact center manager survey, n = 300 (Multiple responses allowed)

SUPPORT OF THINGS

CONTACT CENTERS CAN HELP CUSTOMERS RESOLVE TECHNICAL ISSUES FASTER USING CONNECTED DEVICES

Support of Things (SoT) can be described as the future of customer experience, where companies are looking to reinvent the way they support their customers in a world that includes Internet-connected devices (e.g., thermostats, kitchen appliances, fitness trackers, etc.). These devices are connected directly to the Internet without direct human input, and many companies are using Internet of Things (IoT) technology to give their products the ability to report or transmit performance data. It also gives companies massive amounts of data about their customers and affords them the ability to personalize the experience, proactively alert customers of issues and/or diagnose issues via remote support.

CUSTOMERS WANT TO RESOLVE TECHNICAL ISSUES FASTER

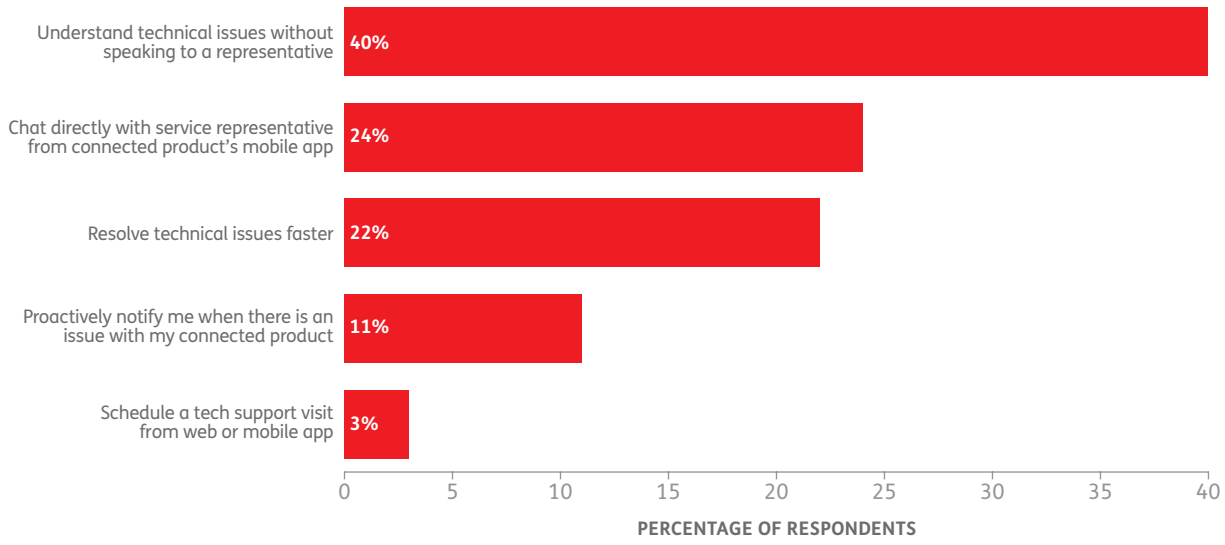
When asked whether they would be willing to connect their devices to the Internet, 12% of customers said they have already done so. Many are using smart watches and fitness trackers, giving them an indication of how useful connected devices can be. A further 23% said they would be willing to do so if it would result in better customer service.

The IoT and the related SoT are still very early in awareness and adoption by most users. In fact, 46% of customers said they didn't believe it to be necessary or would be uncomfortable with connecting their devices. That will likely change over time. When asked about potential benefits, 40% said they would like to understand technical issues without speaking to a representative (Figure 22). Other benefits associated with IoT including the ability to chat directly from mobile app (24%) and resolve issue faster (22%) are consistent with customer usage of mobile devices, chat and the desire to problem solve issues on their own.

FIGURE 22

CUSTOMERS BELIEVE CONNECTED DEVICES WILL HELP THEM RESOLVE TECHNICAL ISSUES FASTER

Which two of the following benefits would be most useful to you by connecting your products to the Internet?



Source: Ovum global customer survey, n = 400

35%

of consumers currently use Internet-connected products, or are willing to, if it would result in better customer service

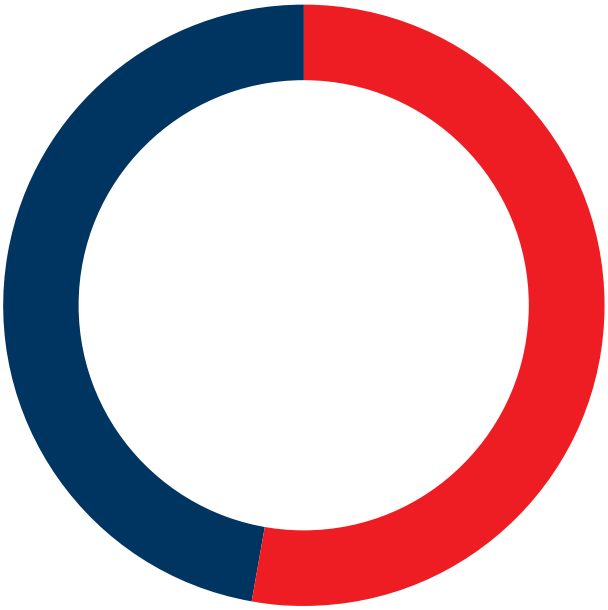
MANAGERS REALIZE THE BENEFITS OF SUPPORTING CONNECTED DEVICES

Forty-seven percent of the surveyed contact center managers said their organizations are supporting or selling Internet-connected products (Figure 23). Of those who do not, 51% said they envision adding connected capabilities to their products in the future – 5% in 2016, 22% in 2017/18, and 24% at some future time (Figure 24). The imminent increase in connected products indicates a clear trend toward supporting these devices. All of the surveyed managers are aware of how the Support of Things can be beneficial to their organizations, understanding that remote technical diagnosis is just one advantage. When asked about benefits of connected products, 43% stated that being able to chat directly with a customer on a mobile device is most useful (Figure 25). Businesses should focus on increasing the customer's awareness of the benefits and value of the IoT and SoT in order to bring the customer's perception on par with their own beliefs and foster the understanding that IoT and SoT will enhance customer service in many ways that will benefit the customer.

FIGURE 23

MOST MANAGERS DO OR WILL SUPPORT INTERNET-CONNECTED PRODUCTS IN THE FUTURE

Does your organization sell or support Internet-connected products?



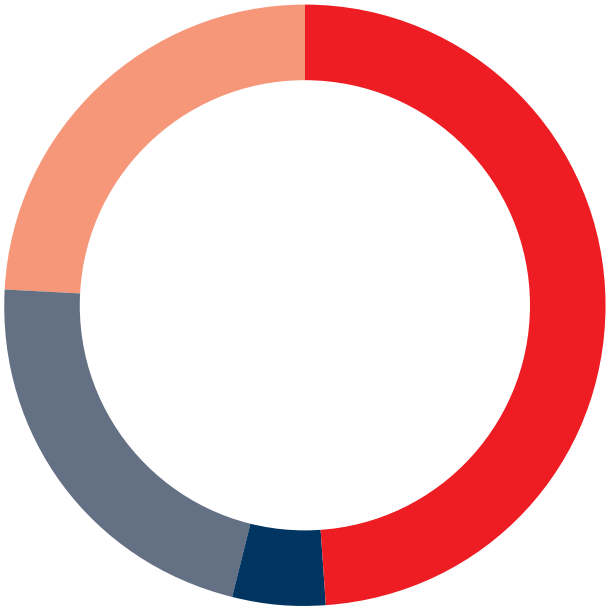
Yes: **47%** No: **53%**

Source: Ovum global contact center manager survey, n = 300

FIGURE 24

MOST MANAGERS PLAN TO SUPPORT INTERNET-CONNECTED PRODUCTS IN THE FUTURE

If not supporting today, do you envision adding connected capabilities to your products in the future?



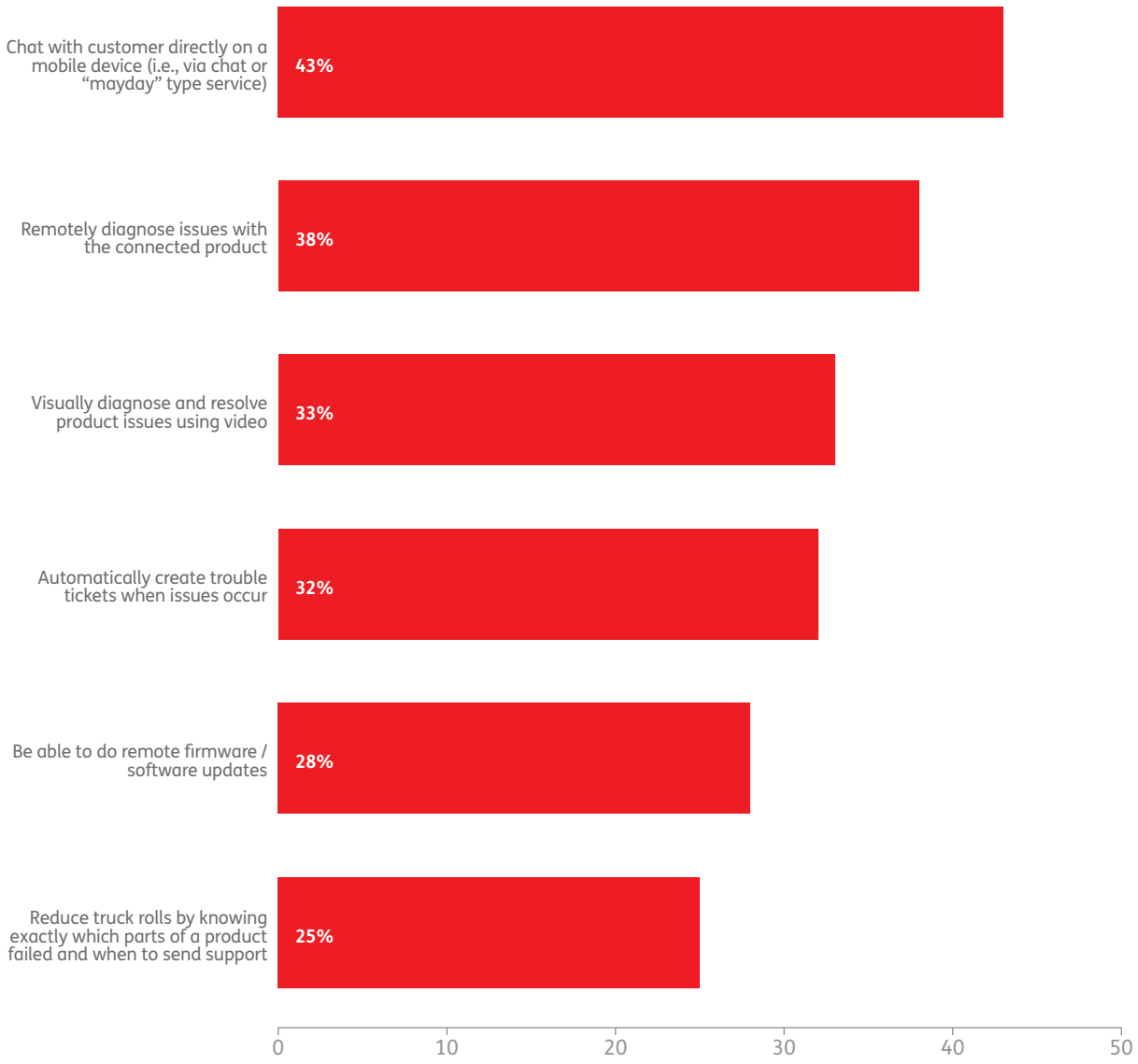
No plans: **49%**
Yes in the next year: (2016): **5%**
Yes in the next couple of years (2017-2018): **22%**
In the future but not sure when: **24%**

Source: Ovum global contact center manager survey, n = 158

FIGURE 25

MANAGERS FULLY REALIZE THE BENEFITS OF THE INTERNET OF THINGS

Which of the following benefits would you gain by having remote access to a customer's product?



Source: Ovum global contact center manager survey, n = 300 (Multiple responses allowed)

CONCLUSION

Despite efforts to shore up their customer engagement and support operations, a sizeable perception gap remains between customers and contact center managers when it comes to the quality of customer support provided. Contact center managers are largely unaware of the number of customers who search the web for resolutions prior to and during calls with agents, and only half the managers track customer web usage related to service issues. In addition, managers believe issues are resolved within one and two attempts while, 62% of customers report using more than five touchpoints to get a problem resolved.

Contact center managers are moving swiftly to expand their mobile support capabilities in response to customer behavior. For the first time, the number of customers seeking customer service via smartphones exceeds those using landlines. Additionally, there has been an upward trend in the use of mobile websites and apps for customer service over the past two years. Contact center managers must treat mobile customers differently when planning and designing mobile support experiences.

Simultaneously, businesses are moving toward increased web-based, self-help experiences, driven by consumer behavior and a desire to reduce or contain the use of traditional phone support. Making this transition to web-based self-service without leaving the customer with a feeling of diminished support from the enterprise is a tricky task. Live chat is an ideal solution to mitigate this risk. The percentage of customers using live chat on a mobile site or application has increased from 33% to 44% in the last two years due to increased accessibility and the technology's ability to provide fast access to a live representative during a web or mobile experience. Businesses will be rewarded with higher customer satisfaction and retention, increased revenues, and improved margins.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

CUSTOMERS

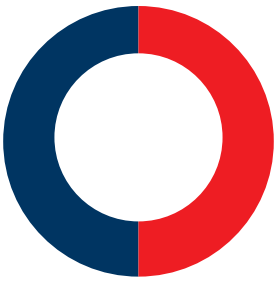
REGION

- Australia & NZ: **25%**
- US: **37%**
- Europe: **38%**

AGE

- 18-30: **25%**
- 31-45: **25%**
- 46-60: **25%**
- 61-80: **25%**

GENDER



- Male: **50%**
- Female: **50%**

European countries include:
Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

CONTACT CENTER MANAGERS

REGION

- Australia & NZ: **20%**
- US: **40%**
- Europe: **40%**

COMPANY SIZE

- <500 employees: **39%**
- 500-1,000 employees: **21%**
- 1,000–2,000 employees: **22%**
- 2,000–5,000 employees: **18%**

INDUSTRY

- Telecoms: **33%**
- Financial services: **18%**
- Retail: **17%**
- BPO/outsourced contact center: **17%**
- Government & education (public sector): **5%**
- Other: **17%**

CONTACT CENTER SIZE

- < 50 CSRs: **23%**
- 50–99 CSRs: **17%**
- 100–249 CSRs: **18%**
- 250–499 CSRs: **14%**
- 500–999 CSRs: **14%**
- 1000+ CSRs: **14%**

European countries include:
Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Job titles include:
contact center manager/director, customer care/support center manager/director, marketing/e-commerce manager, head of customer experience, and digital channel strategy manager.

Other industries include:
professional services, manufacturing, and healthcare.

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We hope this analysis will help you make informed and imaginative business decisions. If you have further requirements, Ovum's consulting team may be able to help you.

For more information about Ovum's consulting capabilities, please contact us directly at consulting@ovum.com

BOLD360

Bold360 is an intelligent customer engagement solution that provides businesses with actionable customer insights to efficiently deliver richer and more personalized experiences in real time. Bold360 provides the digital channels and tools needed to engage and support consumers as they seamlessly move across self-service and agent-assisted channels like chat, email, messaging and social, while presenting agents with the full context of those interactions through a single pane of glass. Bold360 improves contact center efficiencies and delivers better customer experiences that build loyalty, advocacy and grow share of wallet. For more information, visit www.bold360.com.

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