NEW WORLD. NEW EXPECTATIONS. ARE YOU PREPARED TO WIN?

A Contact Center Playbook for Delivering an Exceptional Customer Experience

Build a Winning Customer Experience for the Next Normal

2020 will be remembered for two things above all others: the global pandemic and Vonage releasing our ninth and tenth Global Customer Engagement Reports in the same year.

OK, maybe our reports aren’t as well known, but the data we collected should be on the radar of any contact center or CX leader looking for an edge in the high-stakes arena of customer service. We surveyed 5,000 consumers around the world about their communication preferences in January 2020 and again in August.

The first survey gave us valuable insights into how fragmented the global consumer communication landscape was even before COVID-19. The second showed how much the pandemic had reshaped consumer behaviors and preferences. Video exploded. Voice calls dipped. SMS gave way to social messaging apps. Email held steady.

Is your contact center ready to serve the customers whose communications preferences have changed so dramatically? It better be. If you have a 2021 goal to improve Net Promoter Score, customer satisfaction score, average handle time, or first call resolution, or if true customer experience management is a priority for your contact center, then this report is for you.

On your mark, get set …
Stay Ahead in the Omnichannel Race

Specialists have their roles to play in any sport, but in the customer engagement game, doing only one thing well is not good enough. The same is true for a winning contact center in 2021: The growing number of service interactions demands a more flexible approach.

In 2020, channel preferences around the world got more fragmented, as customers adopted even more channels and methods for connecting with businesses. To get a complete picture of their preferences, we asked customers to not only choose their favorite method for connecting with businesses but to rank their top three choices. Here are the results from both surveys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Favorite Method</th>
<th>January ‘20</th>
<th>August ‘20</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice call</td>
<td>Mobile phone call</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Landline phone call (including VoIP)</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone call via messaging apps</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Call directly from a webpage or mobile app</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>-6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Live chat, or messages inside a mobile app</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chatbot</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messaging</td>
<td>SMS text message</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Messaging via non-SMS apps</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Video chat</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Commenting on social posts</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter by post</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Push notification</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Q: What are your favorite ways to connect with a business or service provider?*

Voice calls are still the preferred way to contact a business, but focusing only on the top choices misses a key benefit of omnichannel customer engagement. The second and third choices revealed a broad range of favored methods, everything from video chat to chatbots to push notifications.
The modern contact center has to be able to deliver omnichannel service on the customer’s terms, which is why Vonage Contact Center (VCC) features a host of omnichannel capabilities—including support for voice, email, live agent, web chat, live message, SMS, video chat, SOS, and social channels. VCC maintains a unified business logic and single source of truth for intelligent routing across all channels.

All the different communication methods in people's top three shows that customers are willing to use the available communication method even if they would prefer a different one.

So, not only will people accept an alternative channel if an interaction still meets their needs, but not offering other channels practically guarantees a poor customer experience.

The takeaway? Offering only voice in your contact center won't cut it in the new normal.

**CHANNEL MOVERS**

WhatsApp became the favorite messaging app to text businesses (chosen by 32%), while SMS fell to second spot (preferred by 23%).

Customers continue to warm up to AI, preferring chatbots 1.5x more today than they did before the pandemic.

Two-thirds of consumers worldwide are video chatting more now than they were seven months ago.
Make a Gameplan to Anticipate Your Customers’ Needs

While offering multiple channels is vital, that alone isn’t enough: They have to be the right channels. Think about your customers’ needs: What types of interactions do your agents usually have, and how time-sensitive are they? Are they service issues that require immediate responses? In this case, if your phone lines are busy, chat or messaging are probably better secondary channels to offer than something like email. Does your contact center get a lot of simple inquiries? A chatbot that can help with self-service might be the way to go.

To really win at CX in 2021, you need to be thoughtful about what channels you offer, and when. As you’ll see later on in this report, one of the top global frustrations for customers is when there aren’t enough options to contact a business to suit their needs at the time.

Here are customers’ channel preferences for different types of business interactions. Complexity and urgency have a heavy influence on channel choice. Note that while voice often remains the top preference, we’ve seen that during 2020, preferences for other channels have increased, and we know people are increasingly willing to use other channels when a live agent isn’t available via phone. We expect that trend to continue.

**Consumer Channel Preferences by Scenario**

- **When you need to speak to someone urgently**
  - Voice call (64%)
  - SMS (10%)
  - Social messaging app (10%)

- **Asking for simple information quickly and conveniently**
  - Voice call (34%)
  - SMS (25%)
  - Social messaging app (24%)

- **Receiving a live status update about a product or service**
  - SMS (26%)
  - Voice call (20%)
  - Social messaging app (19%)

- **Solving a complex problem or making a complaint**
  - Voice call (54%)
  - Social messaging app (14%)
  - Video chat (12%)

- **Discussing sensitive or personal information**
  - Voice call (52%)
  - SMS (12%)
  - Social messaging app (12%)

- **When you want the most personalized experience**
  - Voice call (43%)
  - Video chat (17%)
  - SMS (14%)

Q: There are many different reasons you might contact, or be contacted, by a business or service provider. How would you prefer to connect in each of the following scenarios?
Besides intent, what do you know about that customer? Attributes such as age and location will also factor into a customer’s channel preference and expectations. And we haven’t even addressed the considerations of industry-specific scenarios. Here is how customers prefer to connect with businesses in different scenarios across industries.

### Channel Preferences by Scenario

#### Financial Services

- Discussing and viewing investment options with your financial planner or advisor
- Getting step-by-step advice about a banking service (e.g. online mortgage or loan application)
- Receiving and replying to updates about your account balance, transfers, or account activity
- Looking for answers to basic questions such as the status of an application, balance inquiries

#### Healthcare

- Consulting a doctor or specialist about a non-emergency condition
- Speaking with a therapist for a counseling session
- Making an appointment or receiving and replying to updates about an appointment
- Describing your symptoms about a non-emergency condition to in order to be matched to the correct service

#### Retail Ecommerce

- Shopping for an expensive or specialized item with the help of a retail sales advisor
- Receiving and replying to order updates and track deliveries
- Asking simple questions such as store locations, shipping information or returns policy, or completing basic actions like reordering or returning an item
Great coaches put their players in the best position to succeed. The goal should be the same for your contact center team: The agents on the frontlines of your customer experience must be empowered with everything they need to deliver great service and to do it with a smile—only happy agents can deliver exceptional CX.

VCC’s cloud solution empowers agents by facilitating flexible/remote working and keeping them in the CRM desktop to avoid multiple screens. Other user-friendly features include:

- Voice controls in ContactPad
- Click-to-dial
- Screen pops
- Voicemail drop
- Auto-logging calls and recordings
- ... and more

To meet all these customers’ various needs, you need a flexible contact center solution that enables you to update business call flows and routing rules in real-time.

With AI-powered dynamic routing, Vonage Contact Center lets you leverage updated CRM customer data for personalized experiences. Details such as a customer’s inquiry priority, history with a particular agent, and region can help you make smart routing decisions in real time.

Vonage Contact Center also uses artificial intelligence to enhance the CX on every interaction.

- **AI** engages callers in natural language, delivering enhanced self-service interactions and empowering virtual assistants to reduce hold times, lower average handling times, and increase customer satisfaction.

- During the call, VCC leverages Google Contact Center AI (CCAI) to offer real-time speech analytics and recommend knowledge-based articles or next-best actions.

- After the call, **Conversation Analyzer**, the Vonage speech analytics tool, generates actionable insights at scale, based on agent and customer discussions.
Customer preferences may be radically different, but no one enjoys repeating themselves or waiting for a call response that never comes. And the stakes couldn’t be higher. According to a recent PWC customer experience study, a third of customers who love your brand will leave after just one bad experience. Subject them to several frustrating interactions, and abandonment jumps to 92 percent.

The deep integration with Salesforce, ServiceNow, and Microsoft Dynamics makes Vonage Contact Center a perfect choice for tackling the top customer frustrations. Every interaction the customer has is stored in the CRM. Their history is available to agents each time they connect, and you can even use it to make a routing decision—for example, to an escalation or a VIP team. Customers no longer need to repeat themselves.

To avoid the frustration of unanswered calls, Vonage AI virtual assistants can help with peak calling periods or even off hours. VCC can also offer queued callbacks, scheduled callbacks, self-service/IVR options, call overflow to third parties, dynamic overflow routing, and the option to leave a voice message.

Of course, VCC also has the capability to recognize when a customer is stuck in a chatbot or voicebot conversation and can automatically escalate the call to a live agent who will get all the context to help resolve the issue promptly.

 Customers who love your brand will leave after just one bad experience.

—PWC Future of Customer Experience Study

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### Clear the Biggest Communication Hurdles—or Lose Customers

When engaging with businesses or service providers, customers the world over are frustrated most by two CX gaffes.

1. **59%**
   - When I have to repeat myself to different people

2. **56%**
   - When I call in and no one is available, but there are no other channels available to get help

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### Global Gripes Galore

After the universal top two frustrations, regional variations started to appear in customers’ selections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frustration</th>
<th>APAC</th>
<th>LATAM</th>
<th>N. America</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>EMEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When there aren’t enough options to contact a business to suit my needs at the time</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I receive a message update but I can’t reply directly</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I’m using an app but I have to open a separate one to contact someone</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I can’t switch between different communication channels</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Delivering an Exceptional Customer Experience

Delivering an **outstanding customer experience** is like competing in the decathlon—a multidisciplinary challenge played out over time, across channels and scenarios. It’s the combined performance of all customer interactions that ultimately sets your organization apart and wins the adoration of your fans.

**Vonage, for the Win**

With Vonage’s **cloud contact center software** and flexible global platform, it’s now easier than ever to deliver outstanding customer engagement across a worldwide customer base.

Vonage offers an **integrated experience** that unifies the contact center with the rest of the organization on the same communications platform. This enables agents to collaborate with experts across your entire organization to most effectively resolve customer issues.

**Get Started**

Vonage Contact Center

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Get Started