

EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS REPORT

Self-Service, Self-Sabotage

The Critical State of Automation
in Customer Experience

Executive Summary

Delivering exceptional customer experiences consistently and at scale requires businesses to master the convergence of automated and human-assisted interactions. According to our latest survey of consumers, however, the majority of brands have yet to make this a reality. But the problem isn't from a lack of making these services available (78% of consumers interacted with a chatbot in the last 12 months) – it's a matter of ineffectively designing and deploying automation. Consumers overwhelmingly view these attempts at service automation as a source of friction, frustration, and failure.

Does this mean that businesses should abandon their plans for increased automation throughout the customer experience? Absolutely not. When done right, automating customer service interactions can deliver value to customers, service workers, and the businesses bottom line. Yet, right now, the findings of this study indicate that the opposite is true. Businesses are investing significantly in automation but causing harm and creating unnecessary risk. If something isn't done differently, their intentions of creating greater value could actually lead to their undoing.

In this Executive Insights Report, we reveal the ways in which automation is causing brands to lose credibility with their consumers, highlight how businesses can most effectively improve their customer service experiences, and share the potential impacts of automation on the future of CX.

Key Findings

- **80%** of consumers found that using chatbots increased their frustration level.
- **78%** of consumers were forced to connect with a human after failing to resolve their needs through an automated service channel.
- **72%** of consumers felt that using a chatbot for customer service was a waste of time.
- More than half of consumers (**54%**) believe that a phone call with a live agent provides the fastest resolution and best overall customer experience.
- According to consumers, how brands could most significantly improve their customer service experience is by ensuring that problems are resolved on the first contact. (**73%**)



In Moments It Matters Most, People Want Help From People

When it comes to navigating the often nuanced and potentially volatile nature of service interactions, people are still wanting and expecting to get help from people, not machines. After we reviewed the findings of this most recent survey, we can't say we blame them. As you'll soon see, the state of automation in CX leaves consumers reluctant to trust that automation will save them time or ensure a resolution. They have nowhere else to turn but to the channels where a live agent is available to help.

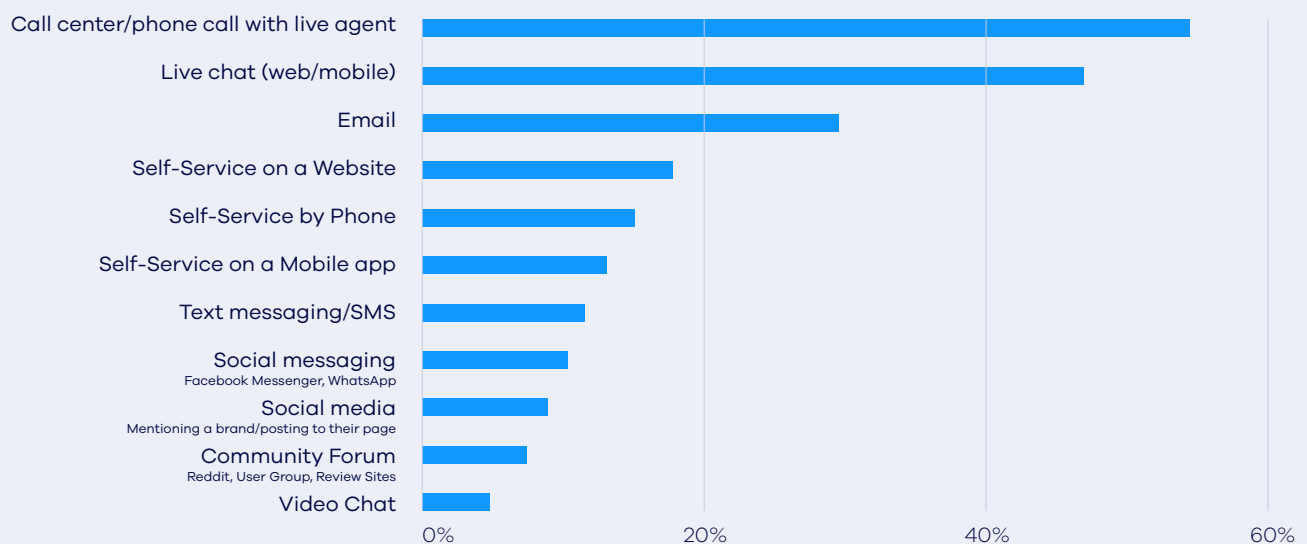
When asked which channels typically provide the fastest resolution and best experience, there were two clear winners: phone calls (54%) and live chat (47%). Meanwhile, less than a third of consumers think of self-service channels as the place to get a fast resolution or a good experience.

Consumers went on to tell us that phone and live chat, the two key channels for fast and effective service, are not as readily available as they hoped. Forty-six percent of consumers want to see greater availability of customer service live chat, while 45% wished for better availability of a phone call with a live customer service agent.

Given that these channels are "table stakes" for many businesses, we were a bit surprised to hear this from consumers. It speaks to the greater challenges that businesses face in effectively staffing their live support channels and illuminates the critical and continued role that humans will play in delivering great customer experiences.

Getting self-service right requires as much an understanding of when and how customers want to help themselves as it does a mastery of ensuring they can get the human-assistance they need, when they need it, too.

Which of the following channels typically provides the fastest resolution and best customer experience?



Most Automation Is Contributing To Bad CX, Not Solving It

Our study of consumers looked at their customer service experiences with brands over the period of July 2021 to July 2022. We asked about both automated and human-assisted interactions and, to no surprise, saw that automation technologies are becoming more and more commonplace.

For example, 78% of the consumers we surveyed had engaged with a chatbot in the 12 months preceding our study. But, is this increased prevalence of automated service offerings (and therefore increasing investments made by businesses), paying off? The consumers in our study would say, “not yet,” as their interactions with automation were often described as anything but helpful or intelligent.

Given that such a high percentage of respondents interacted with a chatbot as the primary type of customer service automation, we dug deeper into the impacts these interactions had on consumers and identified a few key points of failure.

1. The majority of consumers were unable to resolve their needs through an automated customer service interaction. **Sixty-three percent of those surveyed indicated that their interaction with a chatbot did not result in a resolution.**
2. Automation is creating unnecessary complexity and additional burden for consumers. **Seventy-two percent of those surveyed felt that their chatbot interactions were a waste of time.**
3. **Four out of every five consumers said that their interaction with a chatbot increased their frustration level.** Specifically, it was the chatbot’s inability to answer questions or provide the right information that eroded consumer sentiment.
4. **When chatbots failed to resolve the consumers' needs, 78% described feeling forced to escalate to a live agent for assistance.** In other words, in the majority cases right now, automation is creating unnecessary problems for consumers and higher complexity for employees more often than it’s leading to reduced costs, improved efficiencies, and greater customer satisfaction.

This is clearly unsustainable and not the intended outcome of deploying automation. Something must be done to ensure that organizations can reap the benefits of automating customer interactions and deliver more meaningful value to their customers, employees, and stakeholders alike. Let’s explore how businesses can do just that.



Solving Service Friction Points Can Deliver Significant Value

"People will judge you by your actions, not your intentions. You may have a heart of gold – but so does a hard-boiled egg."

Maya Angelou

Here's what we know and are certain of – most businesses don't intend for automation to fail. The goal isn't to add complexity, or create frustration, or drive repeat contacts, and yet, that's where many brands find themselves right now. The solution isn't to stop automating – it's to more intentionally understand, design, and learn from how automation is creating and delivering value or not. The consumers in our study were clear on the ways in which they're looking for businesses to deliver a greater positive impact on their overall experience.

Get it right the first time

Seventy-three percent of consumers believe that having a brand solve their problem on the first contact would have a significant or very significant impact on their experience with that brand.

We've probably all heard the argument for first contact resolution and our study reinforces the importance of making it happen. In terms of automation, this means being very clear about the types of interactions that are best suited for self-service and those which require live employee assistance. One of the fastest ways of learning where you fall short of this today is evaluating your escalations from self-service to employee-assisted interactions.

Ask yourself: What are the most common reasons that people abandon self-service? In what ways did the automation fall short of their expectations? What could you do differently to better assist or effectively resolve this type of interaction in the future? What would it take to get the resources required to make this change?

Make the escalation process quick and easy

Seventy-three percent of consumers think that the ability to speak to a live agent when chatbots cannot solve their problem would have a significant or very significant impact on their experience with that brand.

We shouldn't expect automation to be perfect and we need to have a plan for identifying and helping consumers out when self-service isn't meeting their needs. One of the best ways to do this is by building triggers within your automation solution that proactively offer to connect the consumer with a live employee who can best resolve their need. Equally important is the context from the consumer's interaction with automation (be it a transcript, page view history, knowledge article record, etc.) being provided to the employee who'll be assisting.

As our study shows, consumers are likely to be frustrated that automation couldn't help; the last thing a business should do is amplify their frustration by forcing the consumer to repeat all of the details of their request.

Be accessible

Sixty-nine percent of consumers said that reduced wait times would have a significant or very significant impact on their experience with that brand. There's nothing new about consumers expecting businesses to offer short wait times, but there's a renewed perception that brands are failing to meet this basic requirement. Whether it's a result of staffing shortages, increased contact volumes, or a combination of these and other factors, the state of wait times is damaging the customer experience.

Here's another opportunity for automation done right to come to the rescue. As customers experience success with self-service and gain trust that it will resolve their needs, you'll see volume shift away from assisted channels for those interactions that were otherwise escalating or defaulting away from automation.

Additionally, automation could be deployed within wait queues to capture necessary data, complete authentications, or otherwise help to expedite the interaction once it reaches a live employee. By using automation in this way, you can reduce the consumers perception of their total wait time and improve the average handle time of employee-assisted contacts.

Know (more of the whole story)

Fifty-five percent of consumers believe that if a contact center employee had context from their past interactions with that brand it would have a significant or very significant impact on their experience.

Brands talk a big game about the importance of CX but when you cut down to it, their visibility into the customer experience is typically disparate and limited. That's understandable. Organizations count on a myriad of tools and technologies across departments, functions, and touch points to get work done and the inevitable result is a tangled and disconnected mess of customer data. None of that should make it acceptable.

This disparity of information is at the heart of why we believe the state of automation, and customer experience in general, is in such disrepair. Bad data drives bad decisions which deliver bad outcomes. A foundational part of getting CX right is establishing a better relationship with how your business captures, analyzes, and acts on data. Better customer data means greater opportunities to personalize the experience, anticipate future needs, and address challenges.





This is not a problem that's remedied by one solution or even entirely solvable. There will always be some level of data disparity, the real matter at hand is how well organizations can minimize these information gaps and take action on the insights that matter most. This can only be accomplished by simplifying the places where a business stores information as much as possible and deploying robust automation to mine and prioritize insights from the remaining sea of data.

Be Proactive

Seventy-six percent of consumers said that if a brand proactively contacted them before they even knew they had a problem it would have a positive impact on their experience.

This means that the potentially best way to improve the customer experience, leverage automation, and deliver meaningful results is to conduct proactive outreach whenever possible. We recognize how that's easier said than done.

Doing this well requires a certain level of organizational maturity and operational rigor, as it relies on data, systems, and processes that can identify trends, understand intents, and align resources accordingly, but it is the future of where customer service is heading.

As businesses improve their ability to capture and analyze customer data, and the use of automation expands, expect to see more brands making headlines through their innovative and impactful deployment of proactive service offerings.

Conclusion

Automation will play a critical role in the future success of an organization's overall customer experience strategy. However, for businesses to be successful, they must invest in a strategy that ensures self-service success at scale and creates more meaningful interactions when customers need to speak to a human rather than a bot.

By understanding and addressing their opportunities for automation improvement, businesses can create a strong foundation for any technology, process, or staffing innovations that must come in the future. And, by overcoming these challenges, businesses will realize the financial and strategic benefits of automation done right.

Additionally, by leveraging human-to-human interactions in ways that deliver deeper value and build upon the benefits of automation, businesses can move to proactive communications to anticipate and address consumer needs. This is the future of customer experience and will be critical to the strategy of brands who are able to truly differentiate and win an unfair share of the market in the years ahead.

About This Study

These findings are based on a July 2022 independent survey of 1,682 US-based consumers aged 18 and older.

UJET is the cloud contact center platform for businesses who put trust at the heart of their customer experience. Our one-of-a-kind architecture and award-winning CX Intercloud deliver the most dependable foundation for security, reliability, and scale across cloud contact center operations. With UJET, organizations gain a full voice and digital engagement suite that's equipped with smart device capabilities, powerful AI, and advanced analytics – all intuitively designed to make life easier for everyone involved. From customers and agents to supervisors and executives, UJET delivers meaningful operational efficiency, higher interaction quality, and mission critical stability. Innovative brands like Instacart, Turo, Wag!, and Atom Tickets all trust UJET to enable exceptional customer experiences. So can you. Learn more at ujet.cx.



"UJET is easy to understand and it integrates well with our CRM. It makes it easy for us to contact our clients."

Safety Specialist