Top 10 CX trends to power your 2026 strategy

Expert insights to lead the AI-powered future

The 2026 CX outlook

We've entered a defining moment for customer experience. AI is no longer a distant promise; it's reshaping how brands and consumers connect every day. Consumers already expect service that is instant, intelligent, and personal. They measure every brand against the AI experiences they use daily. When CX falls short, the gap is noticeable and unforgiving. Closing that gap is now a leadership priority.

Leading with confidence in this new era requires more than incremental change. It takes a unified AI platform—one foundation where intelligence powers every workflow, every interaction, and every decision. A platform that compounds value over time, turning data into intelligence and intelligence into outcomes at enterprise scale.

The payoff is clear. Employees are elevated by AI that augments their strengths. Customers enjoy faster, more personal, and more consistent service. And businesses become more efficient, more profitable, and more loved.

"Leaders who connect intelligence across the enterprise will define the AI era – maximizing ROI and turning every interaction into action, every decision into growth, every moment into loyalty."

Scott Russell
Chief Executive Officer, NiCE

Top 10
strategic insights

Trend #1

AI-first CX becomes the dominant model for customer engagement

Trend #2

Human-centric AI redefines how brands earn trust at scale

Trend #3

Agentic AI and LAMs displace the traditional agent desktop

Trend #4

End-to-end orchestration emerges as the core CX capability

Trend #5

Workflows become the new applications

Trend #6

AI agents collapse silos between front and back office

Trend #7

Connected intelligence fuels real-time insights for agentic systems

Trend #8

Systems of engagement replace systems of record

Trend #9

Experience memory compounds AI value across customer journeys

Trend #10

AI observability becomes mandatory for C-suite buy-in

TREND #1

AI-first CX becomes the dominant model for customer engagement

Customers today expect their needs to be met instantly, in ways that feel personal, relevant, and even exceed their expectations. As everyday searches now begin with AI-generated answers, so too must every service journey begin with AI.

For CX leaders, this means a new dimension of service that's more intelligent, more conversational, and powered by agentic AI capable of real action. Managing proactive engagement across synchronous and asynchronous channels, automation, and human expertise all at once requires more than disconnected systems can support.

Crucially, **AI-first is not AI-only**. It's AI and people working together, with AI handling complex tasks while humans focus on the moments that build lasting loyalty.

> Gartner® predicts that by 2029 Agentic AI will autonomously resolve 80% of common customer service issues without human intervention leading to a 30% reduction in operational costs.[1]

Take action:

**Lead with proactive, conversational AI as your first responder**

Design customer journeys that start with AI, not menus or hold times. Use conversational and agentic AI to proactively engage, personalize at scale, and adapt in real time. Ensure AI works alongside people, taking on complex tasks while humans focus on high-value moments. This balance of AI-first, not AI-only, delivers service that is fluid, scalable, and always available.

Capabilities to look for

- Deliver always-on, conversational engagement across every channel

- Anticipate intent and act proactively with real-time context

- Empower agentic AI to resolve tasks and drive fulfillment

- Blend AI and human expertise seamlessly in shared interactions

- Scale complex conversations with enterprise-grade reliability and reach
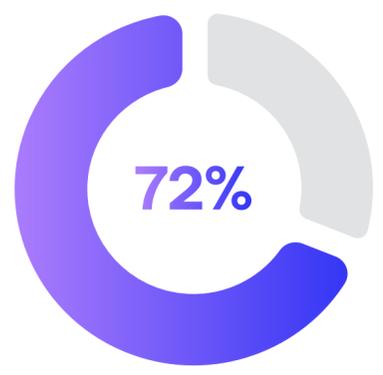
72% of consumers say they have experienced benefits from AI and automation in customer service.[2]
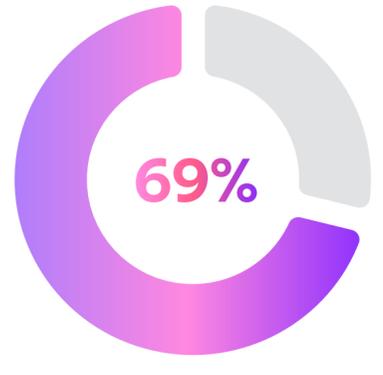
69% of consumers trust companies that use AI as much or more than those that don't.
NiCE Global Happiness Index 2025

72%

69%

> "AI resolved 41.1% of interactions without requiring live agent support, underscoring the effectiveness of AI in **managing a significant portion of customer inquiries autonomously.**"

Metrigy Research Corp
AI for Business Success 2025-26

[1] Gartner Press Release, "Gartner Predicts Agentic AI Will Autonomously Resolve 80% of Common Customer Service Issues Without Human Intervention by 2029," March 5, 2025
[2] NiCE Global Happiness Index 2025

TREND #2

Human-centric AI redefines how brands earn trust at scale

Human-centric AI amplifies the best customer experiences provided by the top agents and replicates these for the future. What employees deliver during their most engaged hours can now be available 24/7, making consistent, personal, and reliable experiences the standard for every touchpoint.

For CX leaders, the opportunity extends the strengths of their teams rather than replacing them.

The real power lies in the virtuous cycle: AI learns from context, improves with every interaction, and becomes better at simplifying tasks, anticipating needs, and enhancing outcomes. Trust is earned when AI continually improves experiences—not just for consumers, but for employees too.

Take action:

Augment teams with AI that continuously improves

Shift your AI strategy toward augmentation, not automation alone. Capture the best of employee expertise, scale it 24/7, and improve it with every interaction. Build a framework where AI learns from context, builds memory over time, anticipates needs, automates tasks, and reduces effort for employees and consumers.

Capabilities to look for

- Retain context across journeys with memory to personalize every future interaction

- Provide real-time guidance that adapts for agents, supervisors, and leaders

- Automate complex workflows with human-in-the-loop expertise

- Combine general and domain-specific intelligence seamlessly

- Continuously improve outcomes by learning from live interactions

"AI users achieve **5.5 times greater** year over year increase in **employee engagement.**"

Aberdeen Research
Create More Authentic Customer Experiences with AI

"Our research shows that when people trust AI, they're both **happier with a service and happier overall.** Still, human connection matters. To deliver true customer service happiness, brands must seamlessly **blend automation with the human touch.**"

Scott Russell
CEO, NiCE
NiCE Global Happiness Index 2025

TREND #3

Agentic AI and LAMs displace the traditional agent desktop

We're entering a new era of automation where AI doesn't just assist agents, it acts as one. Powered by Language Action Models (LAMs), agentic AI moves beyond chat to execution where it can plan, decide, and complete tasks across systems while removing handoffs and lag.

This shift is turning the traditional agent desktop upside down. Instead of endless menus, clicks, and toggling across applications, goal-driven AI delivers outcomes directly. Updating a payment method, processing a refund, or generating post-call notes now happens instantly. For CX leaders, the impact goes beyond productivity, it reinvents how work gets done across the enterprise.

> "77% of agents are handling complex issues all or most of the time, which causes burnout. Companies are using AI to determine when an agent needs support. AI can determine when the agent needs a break, which links to lower turnover rates."
>
> **Robin Gareiss, CEO and Principal Analyst, Metrigy in MIT Technology Review Insights: The connected customer, 2025**

Take action:

Replace static desktops with AI that delivers outcomes directly

Rethink the agent desktop as a dynamic AI layer that responds to requests in natural language and executes tasks end to end. Instead of menus and clicks, empower agentic AI to plan, decide, and complete work across systems instantly. For CX leaders, the opportunity is to collapse processes, reduce effort, and free employees to focus on the moments where human judgment creates the most value.

Capabilities to look for

- Eliminate manual navigation with AI that completes tasks across applications
- Respond to natural language requests with accurate, immediate outcomes
- Collapse multi-step workflows into single autonomous actions
- Provide transparent oversight so humans stay in control of results
- Continuously improve speed and accuracy with adaptive learning

> "Standing on the shoulders of generative AI and other AI practices, agentic AI heralds yet another wave of progress. **AI agents hold the promise to create great value** for organizations, in particular by moving the needle of automation even further. Where conventional automation approaches — including workflow automation and RPA — could not go before, AI agents open the door to automation that is less brittle and uniform, and more resilient and contextual. **An increasing number of complex processes and human tasks can now be (semi)autonomously carried out by AI agents.**"
>
> **Gartner®**
> When to Use or Not to Use AI Agents, June 2025[1]

[1] Gartner®, When to Use and Not to Use AI Agents, Pieter den Hamer, Leinar Ramos, Erick Brethenoux, 25 January 2025

TREND #4

End-to-end orchestration emerges as the core CX capability

Great service doesn't happen in a channel, it happens across all of them, seamlessly, simultaneously, and with purpose. Orchestration aligns people, processes, AI, and systems in real time, turning fragmented interactions into fluid, end-to-end experiences.

As CX becomes more complex, orchestration becomes the unifying force, routing intent, assigning actions, and resolving issues before they escalate into problems. No more disconnected tools or reactive support.

This is about designing experiences with precision and purpose. For enterprise leaders, orchestration is the key to scaling personalization, reducing friction, and delivering service that adapts in the moment. Orchestration is not another layer. It's the new connective tissue of CX.

Take action:

Design proactive strategies that adapt outcomes in real time

Pinpoint where customers get stuck, then rewire your workflows to respond, adapt, and move forward automatically. End-to-end orchestration aligns AI, human agents, and systems around customer intent from the very first signal. It anticipates needs, activates the right resource, and resolves issues before friction builds—without delay, without disconnects. The result: faster outcomes, less effort, and service that moves as fluidly as your customers do.

Capabilities to look for

- Trigger workflows instantly from customer intent, regardless of their channel starting point

- Automate fulfillment from request to resolution, not just with knowledge or answers

- Share intelligence across systems so every action improves the next

- Extend orchestration into existing systems with open, flexible integration hubs

- Unify disconnected tech through event-driven automation

"Ultimately, **the real value comes from how everything is orchestrated.** The magic happens when AI agents and human agents work as one, **powered by shared context, data, and insights.**"

Opus Research
The Future is Now for AI in CX

39% of North American CX professionals report AI-led automation has increased proactive issue resolution in their contact center.

Omdia,
The State of Digital CX 2024: Survey Analysis

39%

TREND #5

Workflows become the new applications

Manual work is becoming the exception, not the norm. In 2026, work won't wait on apps—it flows through intelligent, automated workflows that move across channels and systems without manual steps.

These aren't static forms or scripted steps. They're dynamic processes built to run end-to-end, instantly. Workflows now do what applications once promised: deliver speed, precision, and scale.

For CX leaders, automated outcomes unlock new efficiencies. No more toggling across tools. No more scaling with headcount. Just smart, fluid automation that keeps work moving forward.

"AI-powered tools standardize processes, reducing agent variability and enhancing service consistency across touchpoints. This uniformity elevates customer experience, builds trust, and meets evolving expectations while minimizing errors and improving overall satisfaction."

Omer Minkara, Vice President, Principal Analyst at Aberdeen Strategy & Research, NiCE's: The State of CX Report

Take action:

Prioritize workflow automation where speed and precision matter most

Identify the processes that still rely on manual effort or slow, step-based tools. Replace them with intelligent workflows that move seamlessly across teams, systems, and channels. Don't replicate old processes—redesign them for automation. The result is faster outcomes, fewer errors, and a foundation that adapts as quickly as your customers do.

Capabilities to look for

- Initiate workflows from customer intent, not manual inputs

- Automate decisions and actions across systems, not just channels

- Adapt workflows dynamically based on behavior and results

- Orchestrate work across humans, AI agents, and tools

- Build once, reuse everywhere, with no-code flexibility

"**Workflows are the new apps.** Forget simple automation. We're entering the era of **AI-native automation**, where AI handles complex workflows that require judgment. An AI that **doesn't just listen to a customer call but understands the intent**, updates the backend systems, and routes the follow-up autonomously."

Dave Michels
Founder of TalkingPointz

TREND #6

AI agents collapse silos between front and back office

Customer experience doesn't end at the contact center, and now, neither do your AI agents. Today's agents operate across the full enterprise, resolving issues, updating records, and triggering fulfillment without handoffs or delays. The result? A shorter path from intent to outcome, and a smarter, more connected experience every time.

AI no longer just assists frontline teams; it now orchestrates work across domains. This is end-to-end intelligence, where every part of the enterprise contributes to faster, smarter CX. Whether in the front or back office, the lines completely disappear when insights can move seamlessly across the enterprise.

For leaders, this means faster resolution, fewer blind spots, and a new level of service where the whole business contributes to better experiences.

"The market for agentic AI is slated to expand from USD 7.06 billion in 2025 to USD 93.20 billion by 2032."

Report by MarketsandMarkets on Agentic AI in Customer Experience

Take action:

Extend AI agents to resolve across systems and departments

Audit where customer requests still require back-office handoffs, delays, or manual follow-ups. These are opportunities for AI agents to step in. Perhaps it's to resolve cases, update records, or automatically trigger fulfillment. The more AI agents can do autonomously, the more seamless your service becomes. Extend their reach, and let them complete the job.

Capabilities to look for

- Resolve complete customer needs across departments without human handoffs

- Trigger actions across CRM, billing, fulfillment, and support systems

- Unify context from every channel, team, and workflow

- Operate autonomously across front, middle, and back office

- Accelerate resolution by acting on real-time enterprise data

"Agentic AI… goal-oriented behavior with adaptive decision making opens an opportunity to improve the productivity of all team members—from front to back office and knowledge workers."

Forbes Business Development Council
How Agentic AI Is Enabling The Next Frontier Of Innovation For Banks

"Agentic AI systems promise to transform many aspects of human-machine collaboration… from **dynamically reconfiguring supply chains to engaging in realistic interactions with customers.**"

Harvard Business Review
What is Agentic AI, and How Will It Change Work?

TREND #7

Connected intelligence fuels real-time insights for agentic systems

Fragmented AI tools create more silos than solutions with duplication, missed opportunities, and diminished results. CX leaders are learning that more AI does not equal more intelligence. True transformation comes from connected intelligence: every interaction, every workflow, every AI capability feeding into one unified platform.

When intelligence compounds across the enterprise, the value multiplies. Insights from billions of interactions don't just stay in silos—they cascade across agents, systems, and processes. This is how AI becomes exponential. One insight informs another, one model makes the rest smarter, and CX gains speed, scale, and precision in return.

> "**49% of organizations** cite slow service due to fragmented data, pointing to **lack of unified customer insights** for connected intelligence across all touchpoints."
>
> **Omdia,**
> **The State of Digital CX 2025:**
> **Survey Analysis**

Take action:

Unify intelligence to multiply value across every interaction

Stop treating AI as isolated features. Build a connected foundation where every signal makes the next smarter. When data, actions, and decisions are shared across the platform, intelligence compounds—and impact accelerates. CX leaders gain faster resolution, deeper personalization, and a flywheel that keeps improving over time.

Capabilities to look for

- Consolidate AI, data, and workflows into one unified platform

- Share intelligence across front, middle, and back-office operations

- Apply real-time insights to guide both humans and AI agents

- Continuously compound value as every interaction informs the next

- Extend intelligence seamlessly into existing systems through open integration

Blue Cross of Idaho

Connected intelligence in action on CXone Mpower's unified AI platform for Blue Cross of Idaho

39%	more efficient interactions
87%	faster talk time for specialized calls
$250k	annual savings

> "With NiCE's data integration, automation, and real-time guidance, **we knew we'd hit a gold mine.**"
>
> **James Mills**
> IT Supervisor, Blue Cross of Idaho

Read the case study >

TREND #8

Systems of engagement replace systems of record

Systems of record store structured data: transactions, profiles, and case notes that document what happened. Systems of engagement capture unstructured data including conversations, sentiment, intent, and context that explain how and why it happened. Structured data tracks the transaction, while unstructured data tells the story.

For AI, the story is everything. Systems of engagement fuel real-time intelligence. They surface the "dark data" — signals hidden in voice and text—that LLMs can mine to predict intent, personalize experiences, and guide decisions as they unfold. This unstructured data becomes the fuel LLMs and LAMs use to anticipate needs, personalize journeys, and guide decisions in the moment.

This shift moves CX beyond record-keeping. Systems of engagement don't just track what happened—they shape what happens next.

> "If agents, human or automatic, don't have the right data at their disposal, there is little they can do to solve non-trivial issues."
>
> **Laurent Philonenko,
> Managing Partner, DeepTech Group
> Contact Centers Confront Competing Priorities – and the AI Wolf at the Door**

Take action:

Turn unstructured interactions into the fuel for AI innovation

Move beyond static fields and case notes. Your richest CX intelligence lives in conversations, context, and nuance. Systems of engagement capture the real substance of customer interactions across every channel. With AI, that unstructured data becomes a living resource powering prediction, personalization, and strategy in real time. Don't just store the past. Let your engagement data drive the future.

Capabilities to look for

- Capture voice, text, and sentiment across every interaction

- Transform unstructured data into structured insights for AI use

- Apply LLMs to mine context and predict intent in real time

- Feed engagement data back into AI for continuous improvement

- Extend intelligence across the enterprise, not just the contact center

Marriott International eliminated 11 vendor solutions with CXone Mpower consolidating its tech stack and gaining powerful interoperability.

> "We've heard from agents all the way up to senior vice presidents that this was the **best transition to a new technology product they've ever seen at Marriott.** Statements like those don't happen without a good partner like NiCE."
>
> **Kristina Heidesch**
> Director of Customer Engagement Centers, Marriott

Read the case study ›

TREND #9

Experience memory compounds AI value across customer journeys

The best service begins with memory. Persistent experience memory spans channels, sessions, and time, capturing not just facts, but preferences, emotions, and intent. Both human and AI agents tap into this context to engage with greater continuity, build more personal connections, and respond with confidence. Over time, each interaction adds to a growing intelligence, so that experiences become smarter, decisions sharper, and outcomes more consistent.

For enterprises, this is how service shifts from transactional to transformational. When memory is built into the system, loyalty compounds, friction fades, and experiences feel more human, because they are. Intelligence that remembers is intelligence that earns trust.

> "Compounded intelligence goes beyond supporting service. It learns from top employees and outcomes to grow smarter over time. Every interaction through CXone Mpower sharpens insights, boosting intelligence across your organization. Imagine the CX impact six months from now—or a year."
>
> **Andy Traba ,**
> **Vice President, Product Marketing**
> **NiCE**[1]

[1] Article: 5 reasons memory is key to AI-powered experiences

Take action:

Build memory that carries context across time, teams, and channels

Disjointed tools can't remember what matters. To build true experience memory, start with a unified platform that spans interactions, systems, and teams. Point solutions drop context, fragment journeys, and forget what came before. But when memory is embedded in a single architecture, AI gets smarter, agents gain clarity, and customers feel consistently known—every time. Lasting loyalty is built on what you remember, not just how you respond.

Capabilities to look for

- Retain memory across time, channels, and all customer touchpoints

- Empower AI with cumulative, real-time customer intelligence

- Activate memory within a unified platform, not fragmented tools

BOSE

> "**Increasing our quality and our speed to resolution were the top opportunities**, because we all know that when a premium brand resolves a customer's issue, they feel warm and fuzzy. And when the customer sees that a brand is proactive about that resolution, it makes them feel that **every dime they spent was worth it.**"
>
> **Ryan Stanard**
> Global Director of Customer Enablement and Engagement

Read the case study ›

> "The next generation of AI systems will be more human-like in their ability to learn, adapt, and remember in ways that go beyond pattern recognition. **Memory is the missing link... solving it will reshape the future of AI.**"
>
> **Forbes Technology Council**
> Beyond Transformers: How Memory Architectures Are Reshaping AI

TREND #10

AI observability becomes mandatory for C-suite buy-in

As AI moves from experimentation to enterprise-wide adoption, visibility becomes non-negotiable. Leaders need more than results; they need assurance. AI observability tracks performance, bias, drift, and accuracy in real time, providing the transparency needed to scale AI with confidence.

Without it, AI remains a black box. With it, AI becomes a strategic asset.

For the C-suite, observability is no longer optional. It ensures business continuity, reduces risk, and enables governance at scale. In a world run by automation, you can't lead what you can't see, and you can't trust what you don't understand.

Take action:

Track what AI does so you can trust what it delivers

Treat observability as essential infrastructure, not an add-on. Build in monitoring from the start to track accuracy, bias, latency, and model drift. C-suite trust requires more than outcomes. It demands clarity. When AI decisions are visible, defensible, and measurable, innovation can scale without sacrificing control.

Capabilities to look for

- Track model performance, bias, drift, and latency in real time

- Track decisions across workflows with full transparency and traceability

- Surface explainability across the system, models, and decision levels.

> "Data observability is no longer just a technical upgrade – it's a business-critical capability for organizations aiming to thrive in an AI-powered world… [it is] the foundation for data trust, and data trust is a must for AI. Leaders must act now to ensure their data fuels decisions, innovation and growth."

Forbes Technology Council
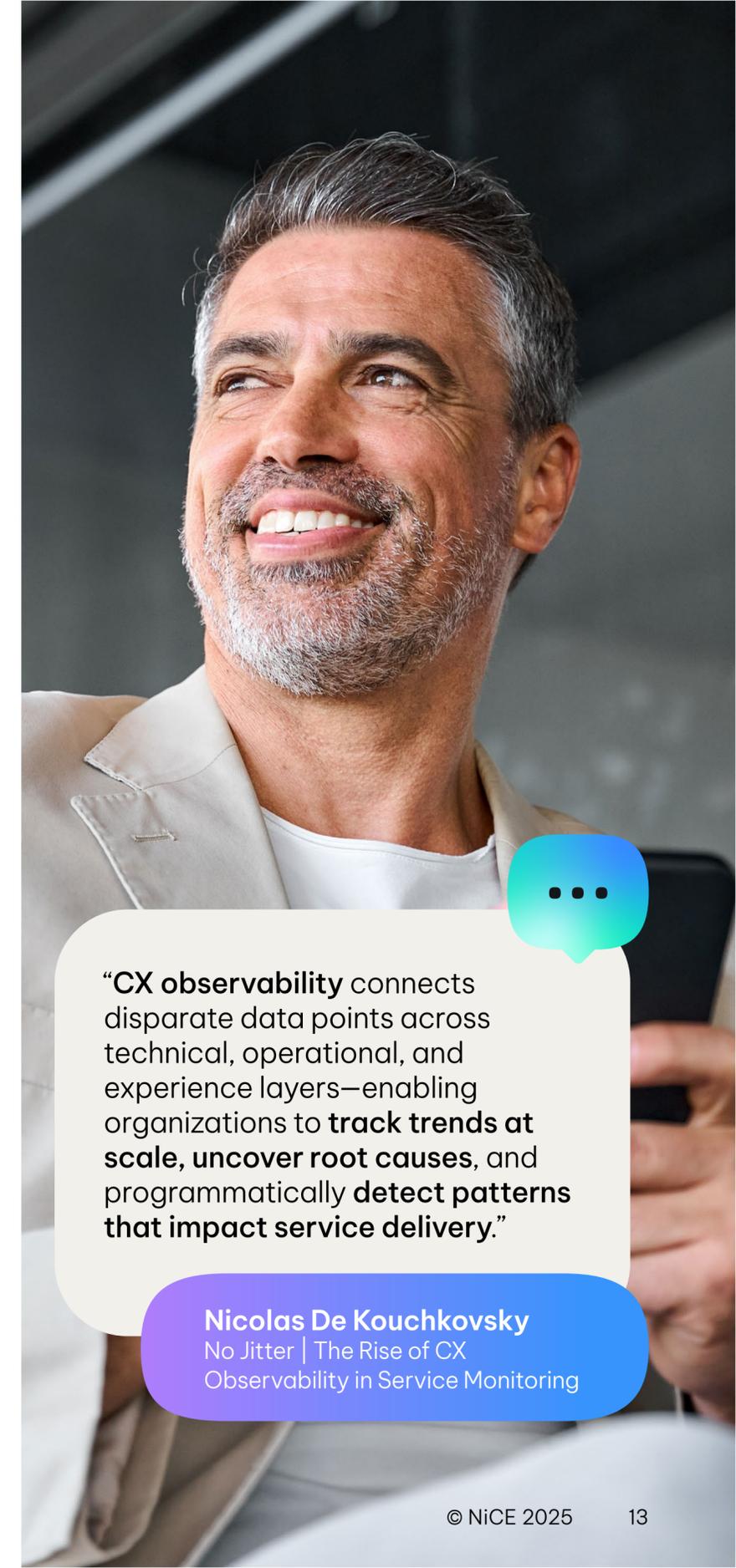Why Data Observability Is A Strategic Imperative

> "**CX observability** connects disparate data points across technical, operational, and experience layers—enabling organizations to **track trends at scale, uncover root causes**, and programmatically **detect patterns that impact service delivery**."

Nicolas De Kouchkovsky
No Jitter | The Rise of CX Observability in Service Monitoring

How NiCE can help

NiCE CXone Mpower is the AI platform for customer experience. Built in the cloud, it replaces legacy limitations with speed, scale, and innovation. It drives AI transformation across the enterprise by automating service from intent to fulfillment, augmenting the workforce with real-time intelligence, and orchestrating workflows on one unified platform.

With AI at the core, CXone Mpower delivers transformation that compounds value over time. Every interaction, workflow, and decision makes the next one smarter, driving measurable ROI through growth, efficiency, and loyalty.

Only NiCE unites generative and CX-specific AI, orchestrated in real time to apply the best intelligence for every use case. This connected intelligence flows across the most complete CX suite in the industry, powering transformation with precision and scale.

Unlike fragmented Frankenstacks or on-prem systems, CXone Mpower is open, extensible, and observable by design. It's the foundation for thriving in the exponential age of CX, where only a unified AI platform can deliver real transformation at scale.

▷ Watch CXone Mpower demos
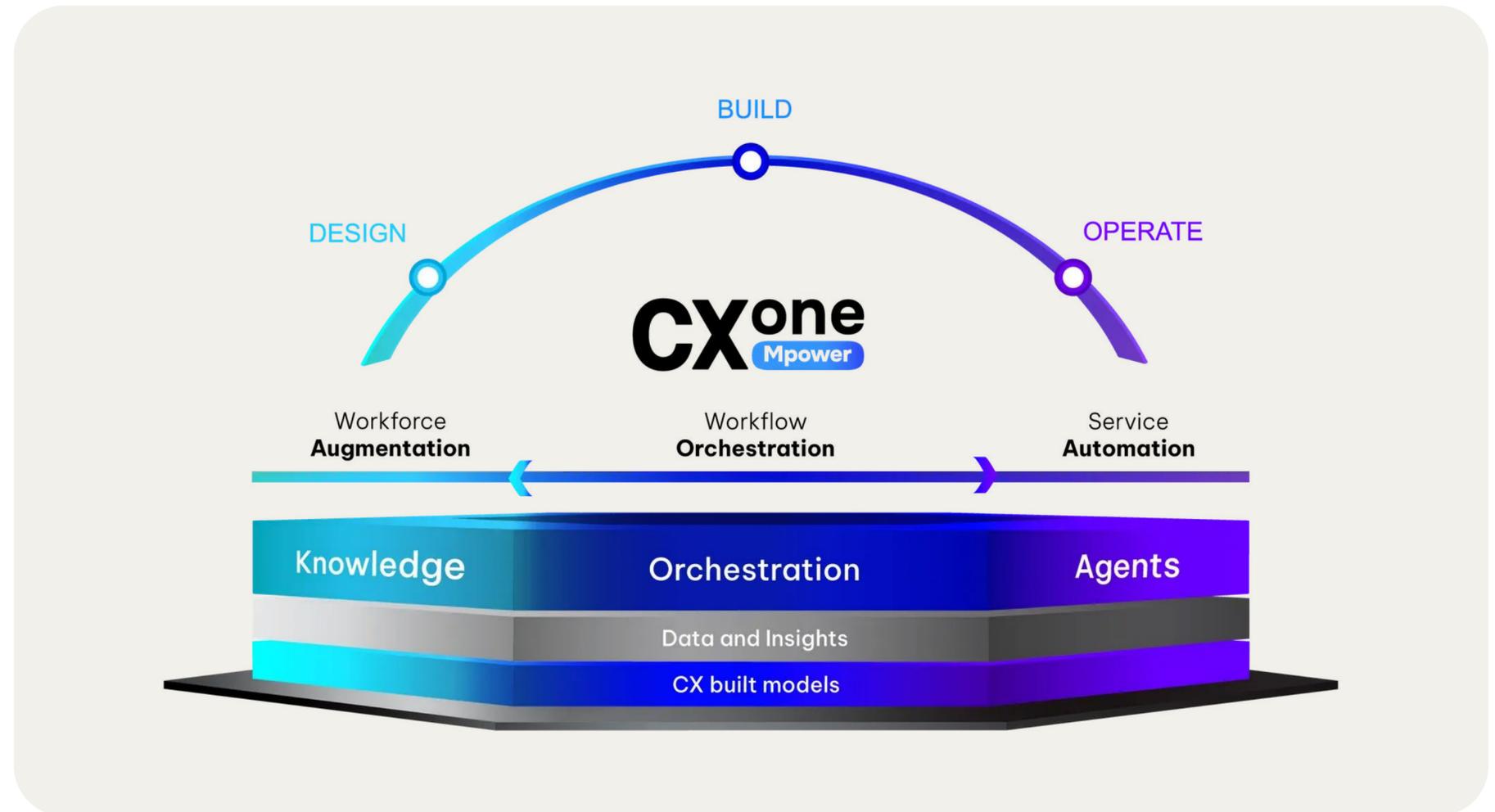
"AI-first is the defining shift of our time. Traditional operations cannot keep pace with the exponential consumer. The future belongs to enterprises that embrace a unified AI platform, one that learns, adapts, and compounds value with every interaction. With CXone Mpower, leaders can elevate experiences, empower employees, and drive outcomes that make businesses more efficient, more profitable, and more loved."

Scott Russell
Chief Executive Officer, NiCE

CX 2026 TRENDS

Ready to lead CX in the AI era?

Leading customer experience in the AI era requires more than vision – it takes the right foundation. NiCE CXone Mpower is the AI platform built for customer experience. From real-time orchestration to proactive resolution, your business moves faster with less effort. Whether it's a seamless self-service resolution or a perfectly prepared agent, every moment is powered by AI that performs, adapts, and earns trust.

Speak to an expert ›

About NiCE

NiCE is transforming the world with AI that puts people first. Our purpose-built AI-powered platforms automate engagements into proactive, safe, intelligent actions, empowering individuals and organizations to innovate and act, from interaction to resolution. Trusted by organizations throughout 150+ countries worldwide, NiCE's platforms are widely adopted across industries connecting people, systems, and workflows to work smarter at scale, elevating performance across the organization, delivering proven measurable outcomes.

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