

THE VOICE OF THE *UK CONSUMER*

What customers really want
from Contact Centres in 2025



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What do UK consumers want from contact centres in 2025? With businesses across sectors facing stiff competition, tough regulatory scrutiny and growing expectations around customer service, it's a crucial question. Companies that get it right can expect to be rewarded with higher customer satisfaction scores and growing loyalty.

To help answer it, we commissioned an independent survey of over 1,000 UK consumers to gauge their likes and dislikes when interacting with contact centres. All of our respondents had interacted with a contact centre within the last 18 months. The survey was carried out in February 2025.

Our findings are presented in this report, alongside key trends and actionable insights pulled from the data. Highlights include:

- 42% of consumers have switched providers due to poor contact centre experiences, and 38% have considered it
- 25-34 year olds are more than twice as likely to embrace AI in customer service than over 55s
- 70% of consumers prefer human agents when explaining specific situations
- 53% strongly prefer email as the initial contact method for outbound campaigns
- 55% abandon calls due to excessive wait times

In short, consumers expect prompt and efficient contact centre services, and display a distinct preference for human interactions. The opportunity and challenge for contact centres is to exploit the benefits of technology while retaining (and enhancing) the human touch where consumers value it most.

In the rest of this report we'll present this unique data and discuss what it means for consumer preferences in 2025. We'll offer tips and advice that can be used by any contact centre to better align their services with what consumers really want.

AI AND AUTOMATION OPINIONS ARE DIVIDED

In 2025, nearly 45% of consumers in our survey say they are comfortable interacting with AI-powered chatbots or virtual assistants. On the flipside, nearly 36% remain uncomfortable.

Dig deeper and clear generational and gender differences emerge.

Nearly two thirds (65%) of 25-34 year olds are comfortable with AI, but barely more than a quarter (27%) of over 55s. More men are comfortable with AI than women (48% to 41%). Consumers in cities tend to be happier using the technology than those who live in the country.

AI Performance - More to be Done

As these figures suggest, AI is yet to revolutionise the contact centre experience. While just over 36% say AI and automation have improved their experience, nearly as many (32%) think they have made things worse. Again, younger people and men are most positive.

The main frustration with AI and automation tends to focus on the obstacle they present to human contact.

Nearly 22% of respondents say there are too many steps before reaching a human agent, while 20% are frustrated by AI's lack of understanding in specific situations.

Other bugbears include limited response options and having to repeat information. Here, too, older people and women tended to view AI in a less favourable light.

65%

of 25-34 year olds are comfortable with AI.

27%

of over 55 year olds are comfortable with AI.

MAKING AI WORK

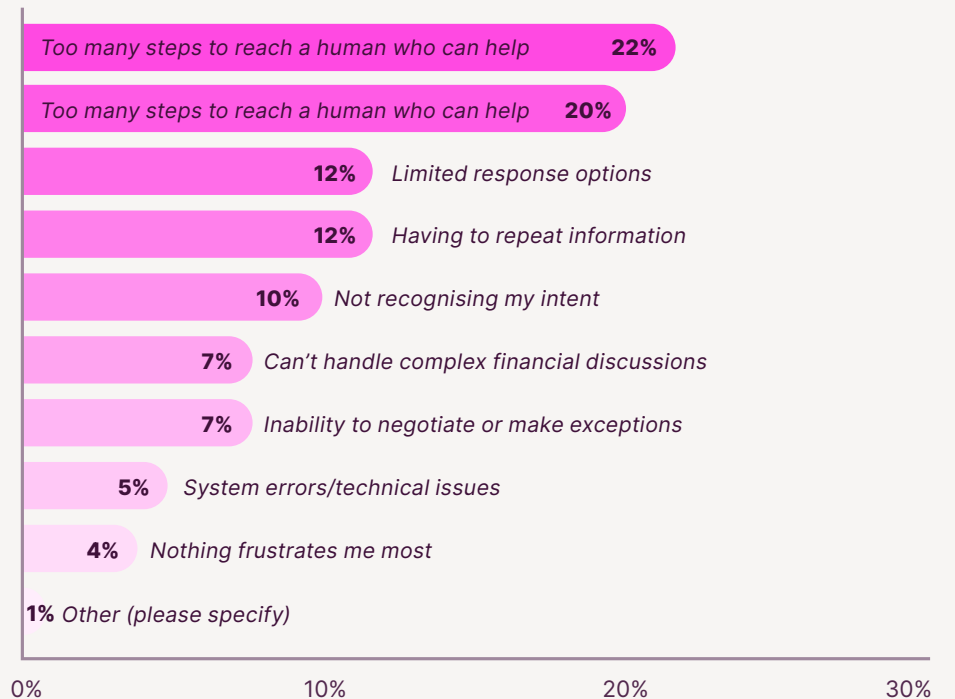
How to Meet Customer Expectations

There's an ambivalence here about AI that presents contact centres with both challenges and opportunities.

The data suggests four ways to make AI work:

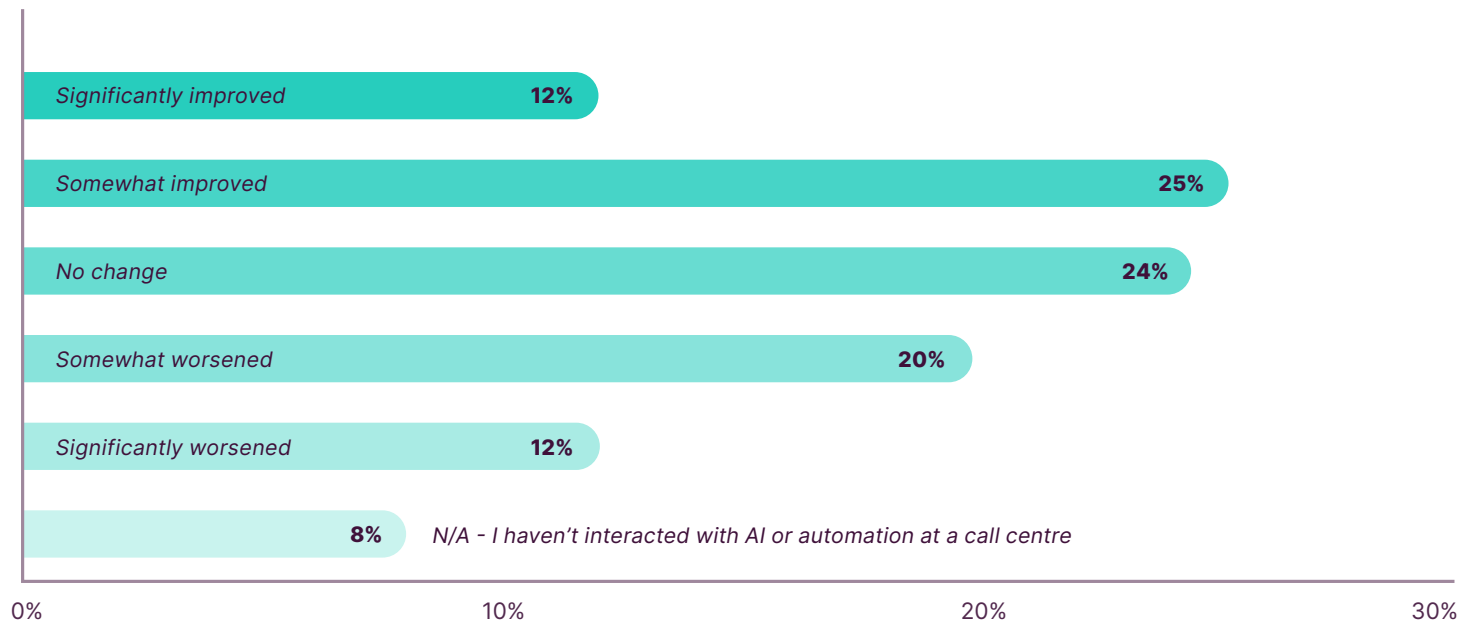
1. **Consumer comfort with AI is likely to increase over time.** Until then, some customers need to be introduced to it gently. In the first instance, use AI to answer routine enquiries or as part of a triage service, gathering basic information and directing customers to the right agents.
2. **Be transparent.** Make it clear when customers are interacting with an AI system and reassure them about how their data is being used.
3. **Implement easy paths to human contact.** Make it clear at the start of an interaction that a human agent is available if required.
4. **Don't focus on chatbots alone.** If you serve a more elderly customer base, your AI investment might be better spent elsewhere. AI is extremely useful in many other ways, from helping agents answer queries to quickly analysing calls for keywords and compliance. Utilise AI in the way that best suits your business needs.

What frustrates you most about automated customer service interactions, if anything? (e.g. AI-powered virtual assistants/chatbots)



AI's Impact on Experience

Do you believe AI and automation (e.g. AI-powered virtual assistants/chatbots) have improved or worsened your experience with call centres in the past 12-18 months?



36%

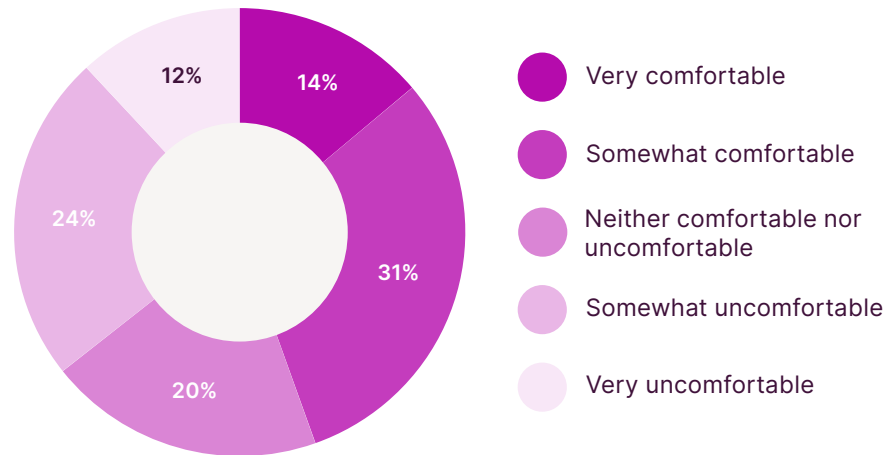
Improved (net)

32%

Worsened (net)

How Comfortable are we with AI?

How comfortable or uncomfortable are you at interacting with AI-powered chatbots or virtual assistants instead of a human call centre agent?



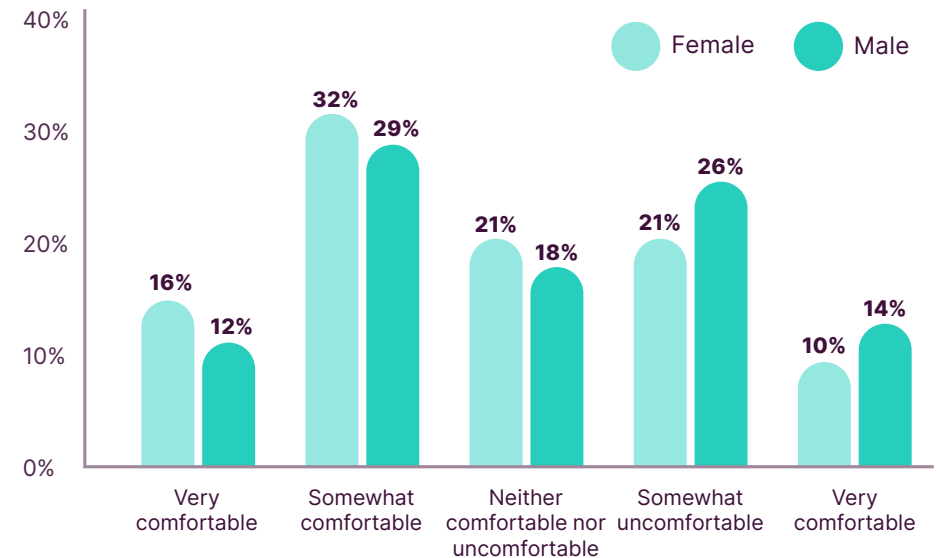
45%

Comfortable (net)

36%

Uncomfortable (net)

How comfortable are different genders with interacting with AI?



41%

Comfortable (net)

41%

Uncomfortable (net)

48%

Comfortable (net)

31%

Uncomfortable (net)

How Comfortable are we with AI?

How comfortable are different age groups interacting with AI?

Age	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Very comfortable	20%	31%	16%	9%	5%
Somewhat comfortable	33%	34%	38%	37%	22%
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	23%	12%	22%	20%	21%
Somewhat uncomfortable	14%	19%	18%	23%	31%
Very uncomfortable	11%	5%	5%	10%	20%

WHEN ONLY A HUMAN WILL DO

In the AI era, your agents remain the bedrock of your service. A large majority of respondents to our survey (70%) want to speak to a human when explaining specific situations. Emergency situations (67%), complex account queries (65%), making a complaint (61%) and negotiating terms (59%) are also occasions when the majority of consumers prefer human contact.

Again, the generational divide is clear, with over 55s significantly keener on human interaction than younger groups, though all respondents view it positively. There are also regional variations, with Norwich showing the highest preference for human contact (94% for specific situations).

Why consumers call

Despite the alternative channels available, consumers continue to phone contact centres for a number of reasons. In our survey, over 36% said they found it easier to explain their situation to a person, and a similar number simply preferred it. Other drivers of voice calls included the complexity of an issue and the need for an immediate response.

Again, age and regional patterns emerge. The over 55s prefer to call, and 51% of consumers in Liverpool prefer human interaction, the highest in the country.

Digital channels have some way to catch up. Less than 3% of respondents never call contact centres and exclusively use digital channels. A significant number - over 9% - report previous bad experiences with digital channels.

Balancing technology and humanity

Digital channels - properly implemented - can make contact centres more efficient, giving agents more time to spend on complex or difficult calls. So how do you get the balance right?

1. **Employ digital channels and self-serve** for routine enquiries and repetitive tasks that frees agents for more complex issues and emergencies. For example, basic payments and account enquiries are routine transactions that most consumers will comfortably manage themselves.
2. **Maintain strong human support** for complex matters and emergency situations. When consumers want a quick response, they want to talk.
3. **Make sure there's a clear escalation path from self-serve and digital channels to human agents.** Consumers will be more accepting of self-serve if they know they can easily transfer to a human agent if something goes wrong.

“Technology works best when it enhances human capabilities rather than replacing them. The most successful contact centres in 2025 will be those that deploy AI strategically for efficiency while investing in their human agents’ soft skills and product knowledge.”

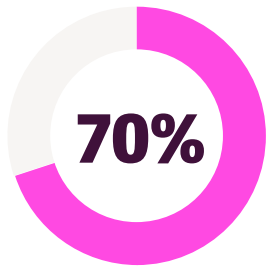
This hybrid approach enables operational leaders to automate routine processes while equipping agents with tools that help them deliver more personalised, high-value interactions, leading to better business and customer outcomes.”

Ben Booth
CEO, MaxContact

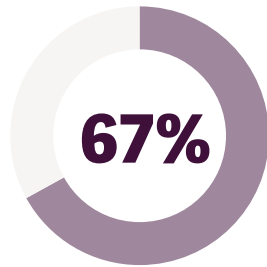


Humans vs. Self-serve

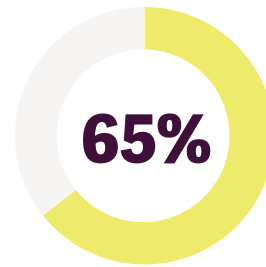
In what situations do you prefer to speak with a human agent versus using self-service options, if any?



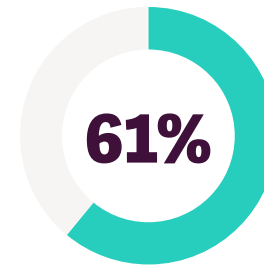
When I need to explain my specific situation



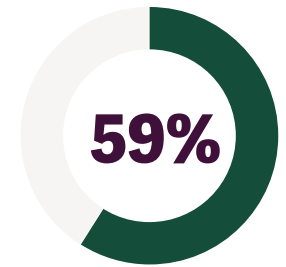
Emergency situations



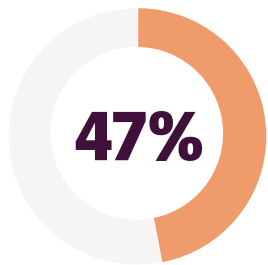
Complex account queries



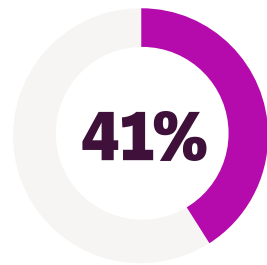
Making a complaint



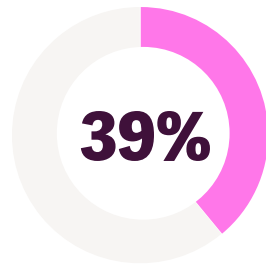
When I need to negotiate terms



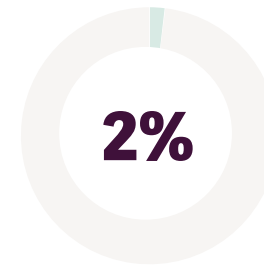
Making/discussing payment arrangements



When I'm experiencing financial difficulties



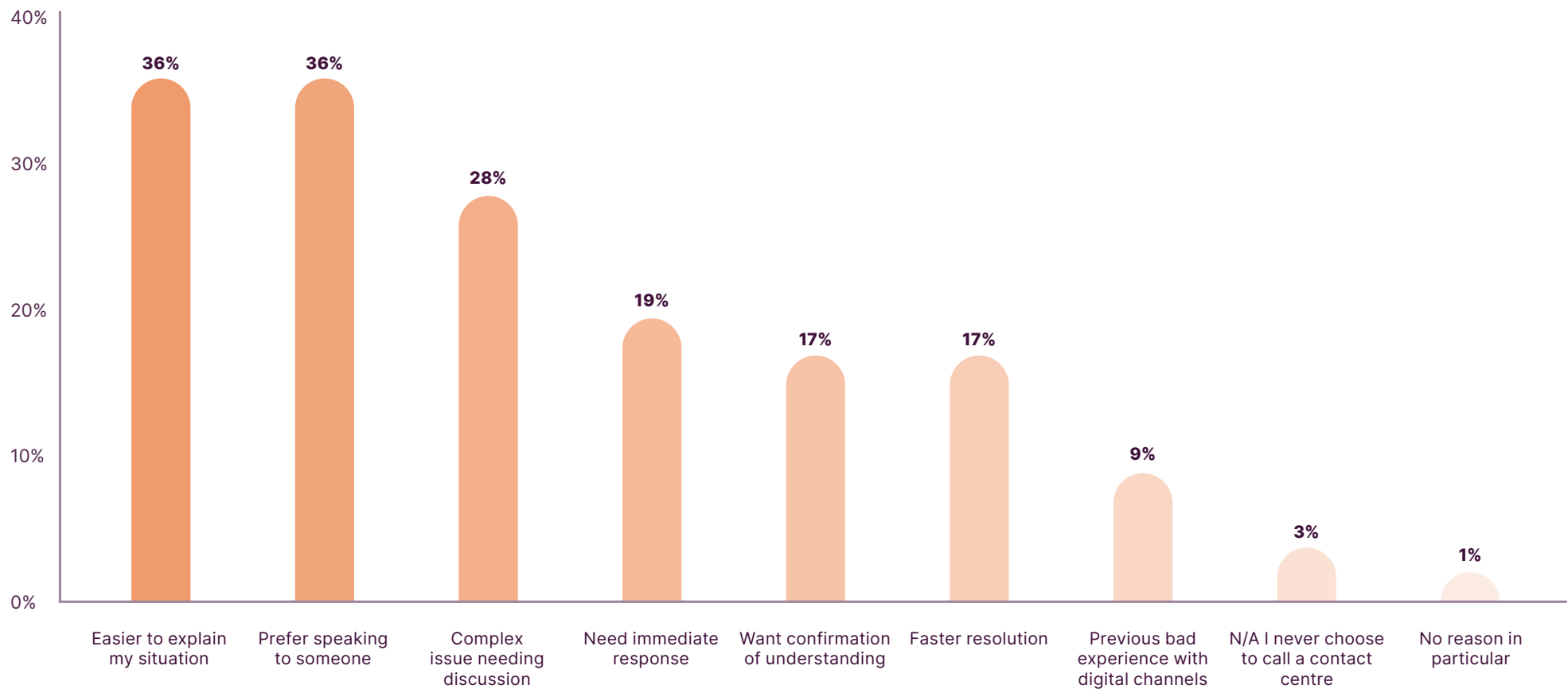
Discussing new products or services



No situations

When does voice really matter?

If you choose to call a contact centre rather than use digital channels (e.g. webchat, email, social media), what, if anything, are your main reasons for this?



MAKING THE MOST OF OMNICHANNEL

Consumers prefer phone calls for outbound communications if the matter is urgent or involves a financial dispute. For most other issues - account updates, new offers, appointment scheduling and more - they prefer email.

For example, for important account updates, 39% of our respondents chose email as the channel they found most effective, with phone calls some way behind on 26%. For new offers, 49% chose email. Phone calls were strongly preferred for urgent matters, with 67% choosing this option.

Perhaps surprisingly, WhatsApp and social media were preferred by only a very small minority of respondents in any situation.

Proactive contact preferences

When are consumers happy for businesses to proactively get in touch? According to our survey, the most acceptable reasons for proactive contact are payment/billing matters (47% choose this option), account updates (41%) and service renewal reminders (34%).

Younger consumers were most accepting of proactive contact (51% accept it for billing matters).

Resolution speed is key

Ultimately, customers want their issues resolved in the most efficient way. The fastest channels in terms of resolution are phone calls (60% of our respondents chose this option), webchat (13%) and email (9%), according to our survey.

In terms of age, over 55s strongly prefer phone calls for fast resolution (71% find them most effective), but only 43% of 18-25 year-olds agree. The combined effectiveness of digital channels (webchat, email, app, social media) totals 32%.

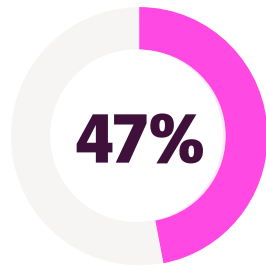
Customer channel preferences

Which channels do you find most effective for different types of communication?

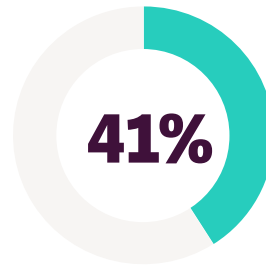
	Important account updates	New offers/opportunities	Routine service information	Appointment scheduling	Follow-up communications	Urgent matters	General updates	Unpaid bills or financial disputes
Phone call	26%	14%	16%	28%	23%	67%	15%	40%
Email	39%	49%	45%	30%	45%	11%	48%	27%
SMS/text	9%	9%	11%	18%	11%	8%	9%	6%
WhatsApp	5%	4%	6%	5%	6%	4%	4%	5%
Social media messaging	3%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%	4%	2%
App notification	11%	9%	11%	9%	5%	3%	12%	5%
Letter	6%	5%	6%	4%	4%	2%	5%	9%

The top proactive communication opportunities

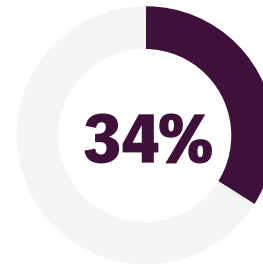
When is it acceptable for companies to contact you proactively, if ever? (Select all that apply)



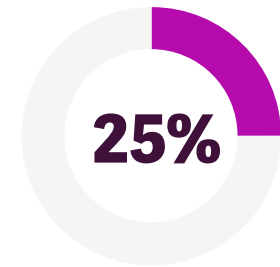
When I need to explain my specific situation



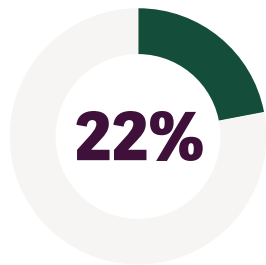
Emergency situations



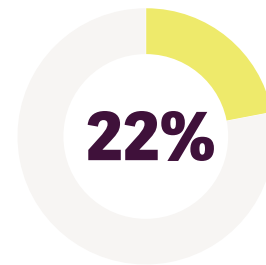
Complex account queries



When I need to negotiate terms



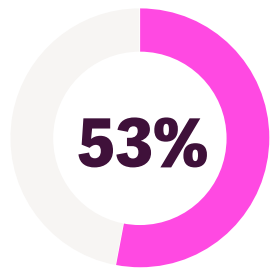
Making/discussing payment arrangements



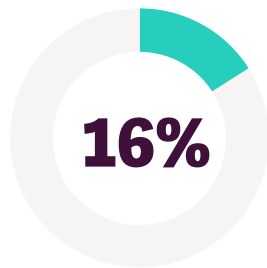
When I'm experiencing financial difficulties

Passive Outreach is Preferred

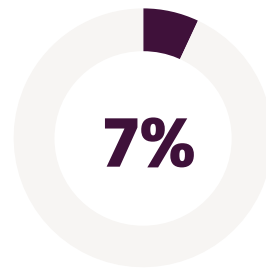
What, if anything, is your preferred initial contact method for outbound communications (when a company calls, messages or emails you)?



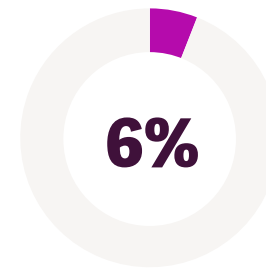
Email



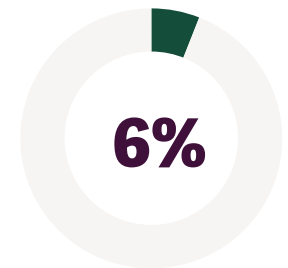
Direct phone call



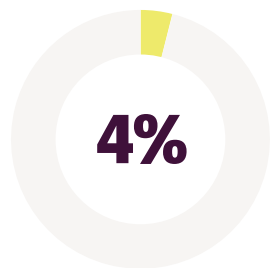
Text message



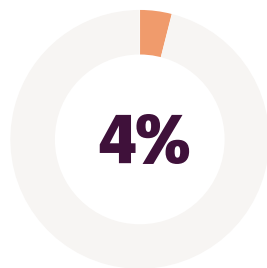
Letter



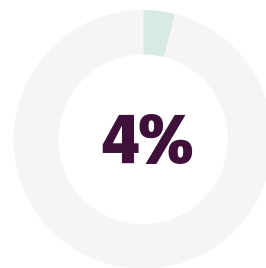
App notification



WhatsApp/
messaging apps



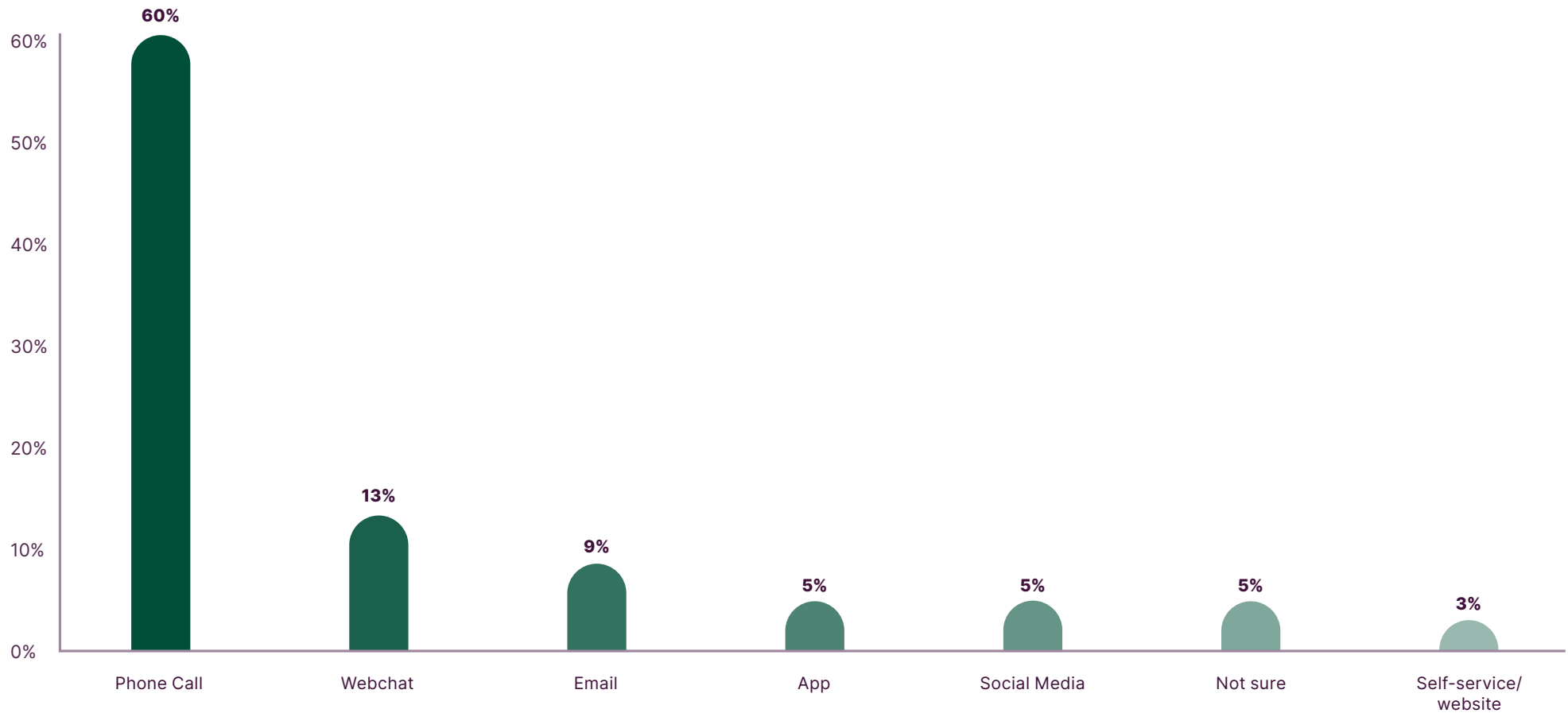
No preferred method



Social media

The Fastest Route to Resolution

Which call centre channel typically resolves your query fastest, if any?



Exploring Your Channel Options

What insights can we take from this data?

1. **Develop a strategic channel approach based on the type of message you want to convey** (a standard account update versus a missed payment, for example) customer demographics and resolution requirements.
2. **Prioritise phone calls for urgent and complex matters and disputes.**
Email should be the primary channel for routine matters and initial outbound contact. Social media and messaging apps should be secondary channels (for reminders, perhaps, or for targeted promotional purposes, if appropriate), at least for the time being.
3. **Proactive contact should focus on priorities and urgent matters,** and businesses should be careful with promotional outbound activities. Only around a fifth of consumers (22%) say proactive contact is acceptable for new offers, so accurate targeting is necessary.

“What stands out in this research is the difference between which channel customers prefer to be contacted on verses the most effective channel to get the customer outcomes. At MaxContact, we’ve found that businesses often chase the latest communication channels, and customers prefer communication to be passive – unless it’s urgent – but a holistic approach is needed.

The key is building an omnichannel strategy that thoughtfully routes interactions to the appropriate channel based on urgency, complexity, customer demographic and preference. Our platform enables this strategic approach, ensuring customers get the right service through the right channel every time.”



Ben Booth
CEO, MaxContact

MAXIMISING CUSTOMER RETENTION

How do contact centres keep customers happy in 2025? It's a crucial question, because 42% of our survey respondents have switched providers due to poor contact centre experiences, and 17% have switched multiple times. A further 38% have considered switching.

Age is a factor here. Younger demographics, who have grown up in an era of easy switching, are more likely to do so. In the 25-34 group, 60% have switched providers.

Customers are becoming more demanding, and contact centres are struggling to keep up. The jury is split on whether contact centres have improved, with 37% saying they have and 35% reporting a decline. Younger groups and consumers in Greater London are most likely to report improvement.

Hanging up

When customers abandon calls before resolution, something is clearly wrong. Most commonly, our survey respondents abandon calls because of excessive wait times (55% choose this option), an agent's inability to understand their situation (35%), multiple transfers (34%) and having to repeat information (26%).

Older age groups are more frustrated by long wait times, while younger groups are less likely overall to abandon calls.

Interestingly, 42% of our respondents would be willing to pay for premium support that guaranteed shorter wait times, with younger demographics and those in Greater London most keen.

Stopping the Switch

How do contact centres boost customer satisfaction, reduce call abandonment and stop consumers switching? Our data suggest some clear answers.

1. **Customers will not accept long wait times or poorly informed agents.** Effective workforce management can ensure reasonable agent/call ratios and shorter wait times. Call monitoring can identify gaps in agent knowledge, and speech analytics can be an excellent use of AI for this purpose.
2. **The careful use of self-serve and digital contact channels** can ensure quick resolution times for basic and routine enquiries, freeing up agents and reducing the time consumers spend in call queues.
3. **Interactive Voice Response (IVR) can also help reduce wait times**, quickly connecting customers with the best person for their purposes and allowing them to schedule callbacks and avoid queues.
4. **There is a market for premium support, particularly among young professionals**, if businesses with contact centres can demonstrate a clear value proposition.

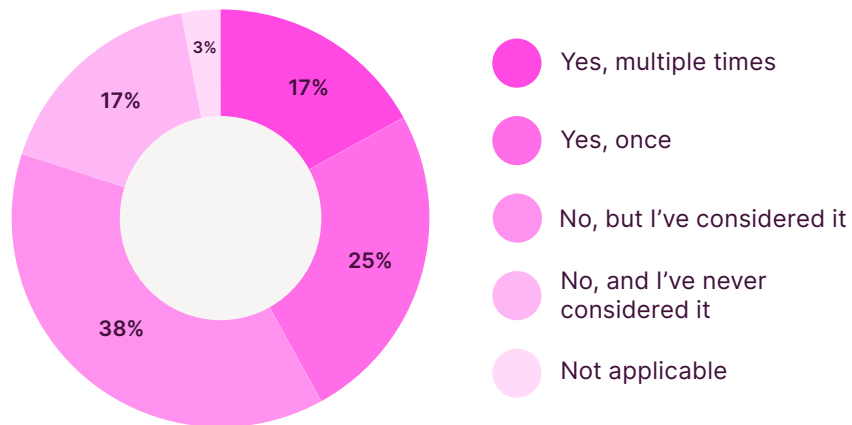
“The statistics on customer switching behaviour should serve as a wake-up call for businesses still treating their contact centres as cost centres rather than revenue generation or retention. At MaxContact, we see contact centres as critical touchpoints that can make or break customer loyalty.

That’s why we’ve designed our solutions to focus on reliability first, with features that eliminate call drops, reduce wait times, and ensure agents have the information they need to resolve issues quickly and completely.”

Ben Booth
CEO, MaxContact



Have you ever switched service providers (internet, phone, banking, etc.) due to poor contact centre experiences?



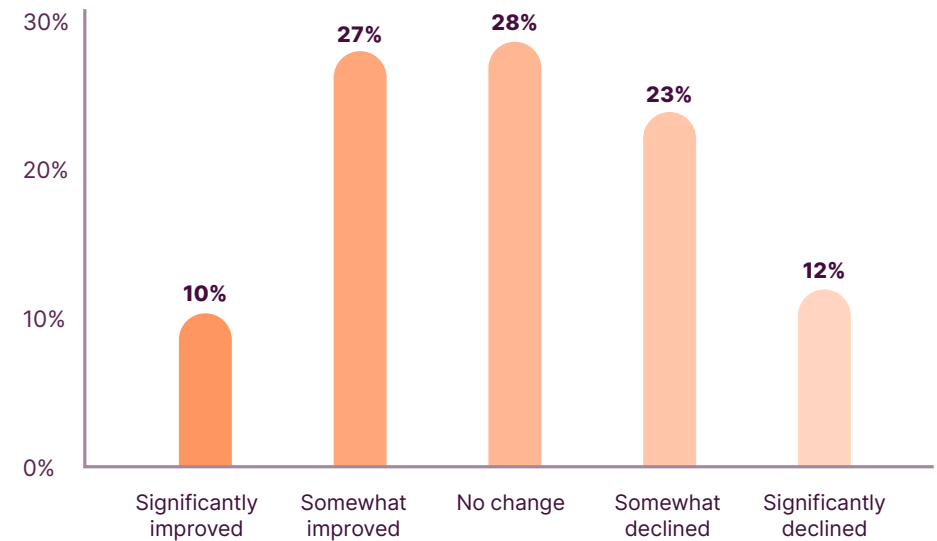
25%

Yes (net)

36%

No (net)

Do you think call centre service quality has improved or declined in the last five years?



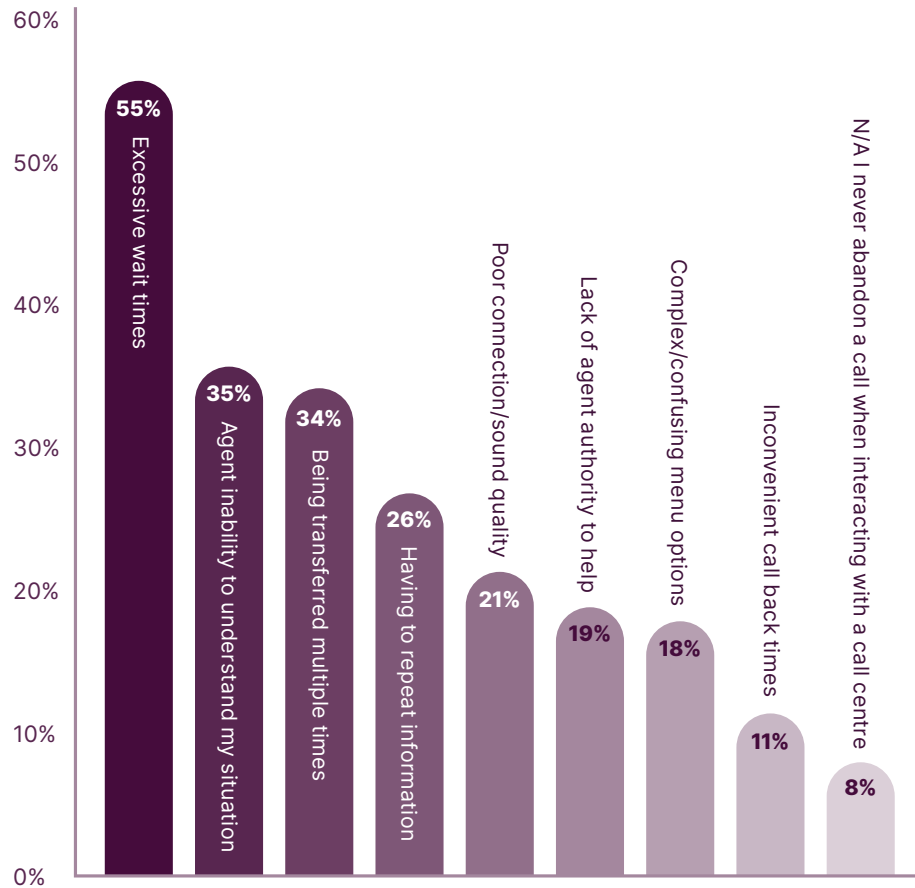
35%

Declined (net)

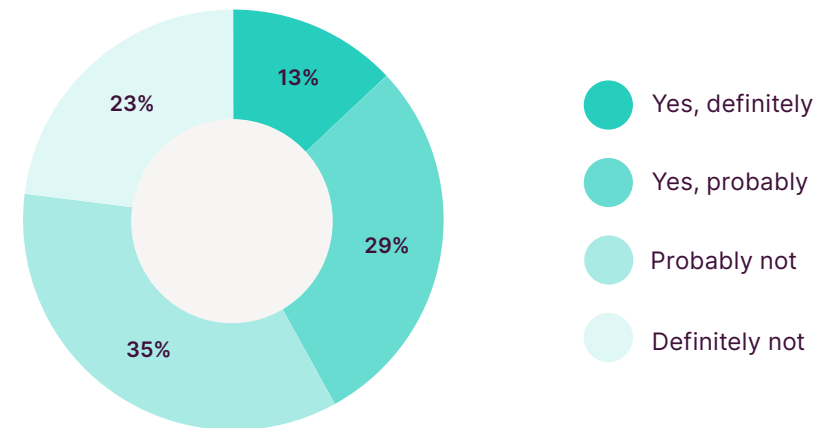
37%

Improved (net)

What are the most common reasons you abandon a call when interacting with a call centre, if any? (Select up to 3)



Would you pay extra for premium customer support that guarantees a shorter wait time?



58%

Yes (net)

42%

No (net)

DELIVERING EXCELLENCE

Minimal wait times are essential to good customer experiences, but many consumers see it as the least they should expect. How do contact centres take customer satisfaction to the next level?

Technical reliability is a good place to start. Nearly 27% of our respondents say they are disconnected frequently or always, and 16% cite this as the most irritating thing that can happen during a call. Younger consumers report more dropped calls than older peers.

Underwhelming service

If disconnecting calls is the top irritant, it is far from the only one. Nearly 16% of consumers in our survey are frustrated by agents not understanding their issues, 12% by multiple transfers and 10% by long periods of silence. There are gender and regional nuances but, overall, only 3% say there is nothing particularly irritating about calling companies, suggesting clear room for improvement.

Trust building

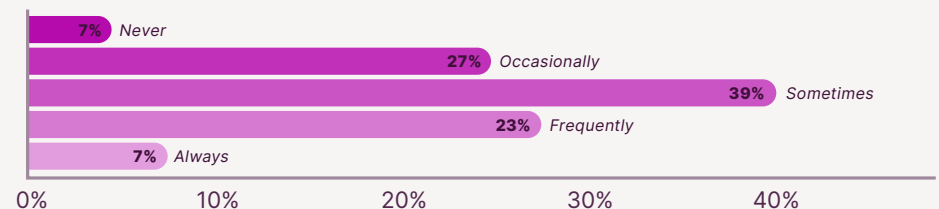
We've looked at what frustrates customers, but what builds trust? In our survey, agents that understand customer needs was the top choice (49%), followed by clear identification and purpose (42%), a professional communication style (42%) and the ability to make decisions and offers (35%). Older age groups (55+) are most focused on agents understanding their needs (58% choose this option) and clear identification (52%).

How to make the difference

Delivering contact centre excellence will mark you out in a crowded field. Our data suggests areas to focus on, most of which boil down to a single core principle: respect your customers' time.

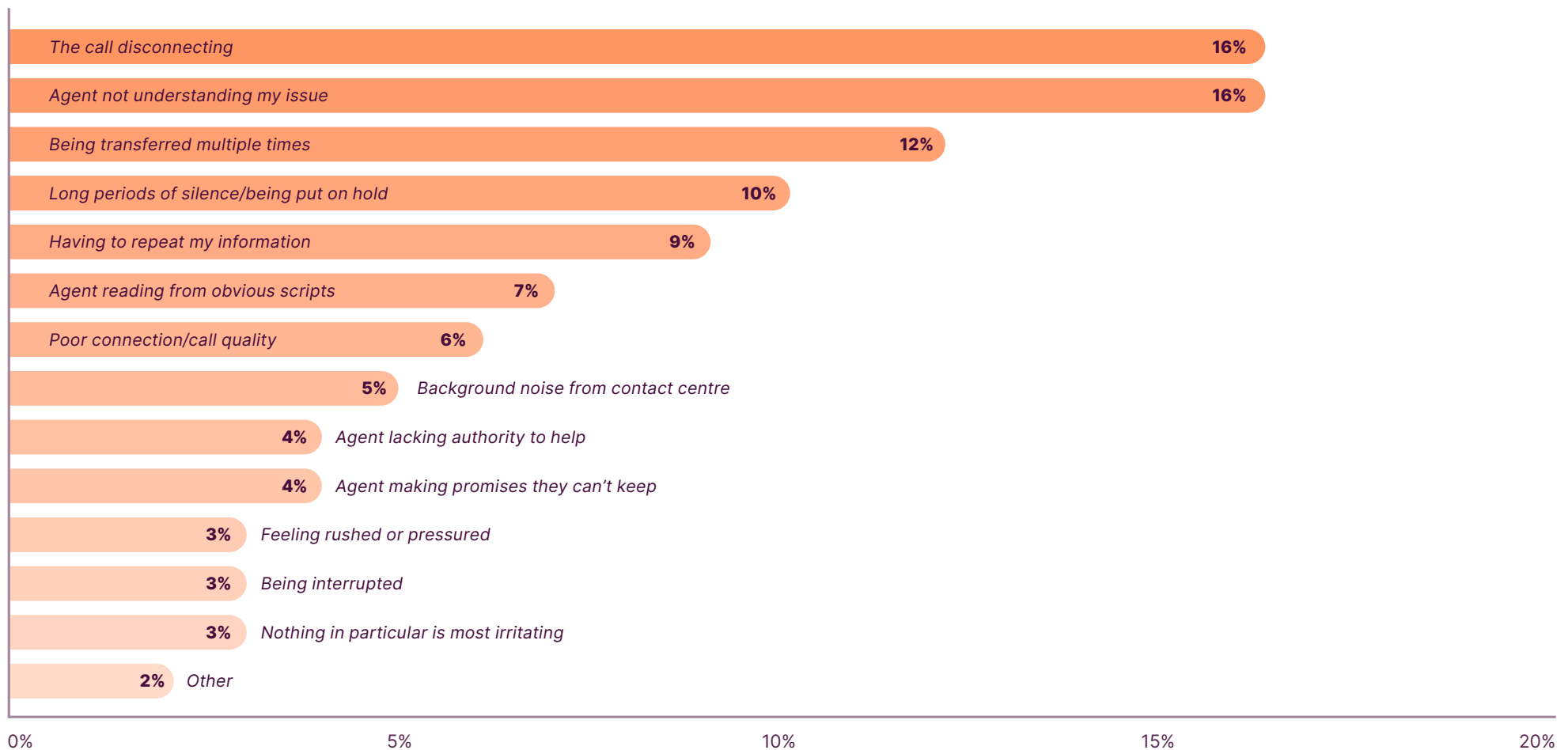
1. **Ensure the reliability of your contact centre technology.** A disconnected call represents both a missed opportunity and a frustrated customer.
2. **Agents with an understanding of customer needs** are more helpful and resolve issues at first contact (a key contact centre metric) more often. Give agents the right training and refresh their knowledge regularly.
3. **Adopt clear identification protocols** and other professional comms standards.
4. **Intelligent call routing** can help make sure customers are directed to the right agent first time, reducing transfer frustrations.

How often, if ever, do you get disconnected from a phone call with a call centre that's not due to your own connection?



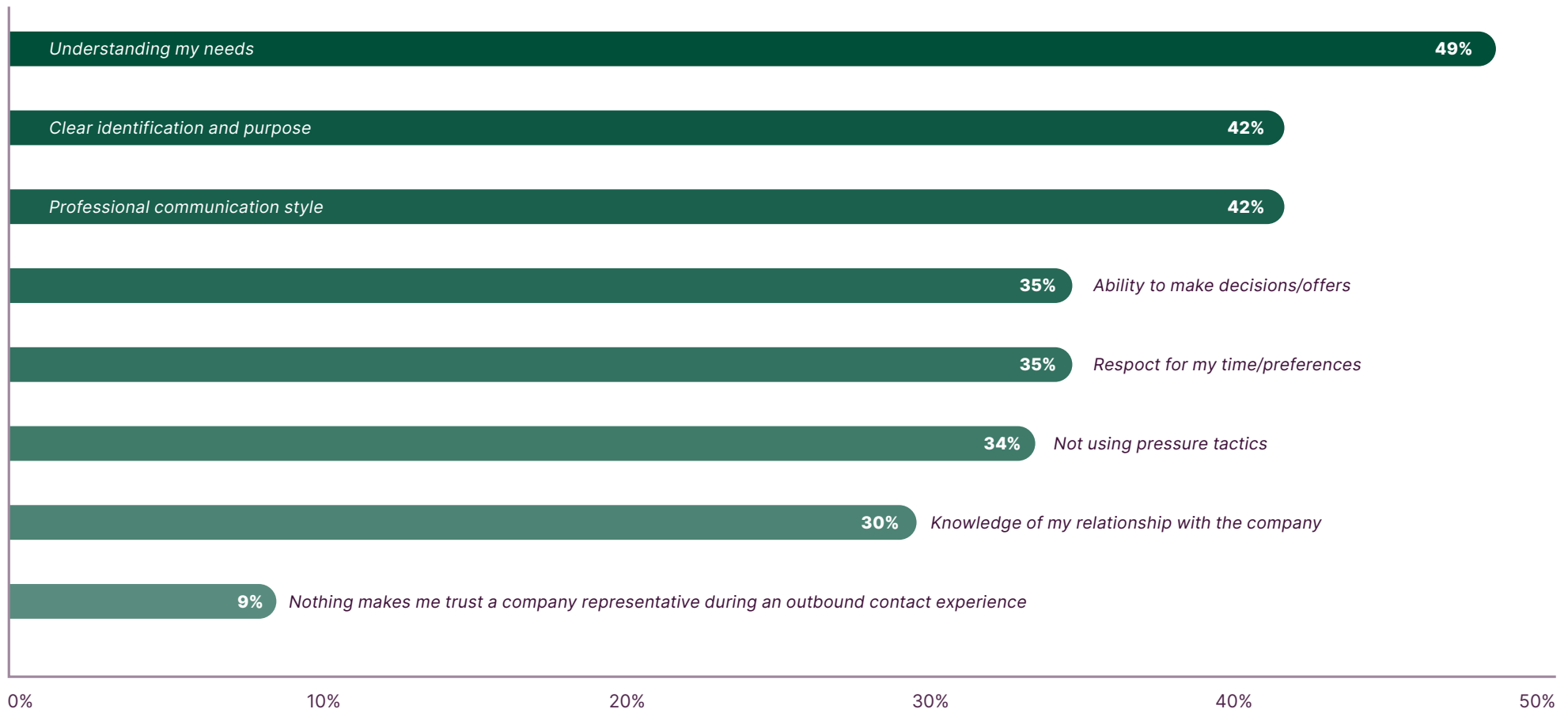
Causes of Concern

What's the most irritating thing that can happen during a call with a company, if anything?



Trust Building in Customer Conversations

What makes you trust a company representative during an outbound contact experience (when a company calls, messages or emails you), if anything?



ENSURING BETTER FEEDBACK

Reviewing has become an integral part of the customer experience. According to our survey, 60% of consumers are likely to leave a review after a positive experience. Even more (66%) are likely to review a bad experience. Women and younger people are more likely to leave reviews, whether positive or negative.

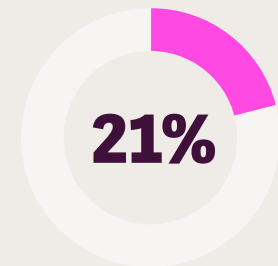
Brands under the microscope

We asked our respondents about the brands that had given them the best and worst customer experiences over the last 12 months.

Amazon leads the best performers list, and Virgin Media leads the worst performers list, followed by Sky, British Gas and BT.

Some brands feature in both the best and worst performers list, showing the challenge large scale brand has in consistently offering great experiences. This could be driven by any number of things, however it's crucial to mystery shop your customer journey and regularly listen to feedback. Especially in a world where every experience can add to a tarnished reputation - hampering business growth.

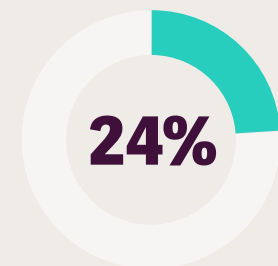
How likely or unlikely are you to leave a company review based on a good contact centre experience?



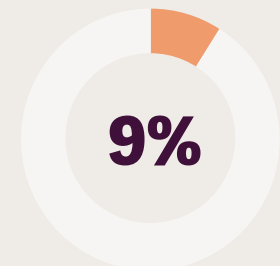
Very likely



Somewhat likely

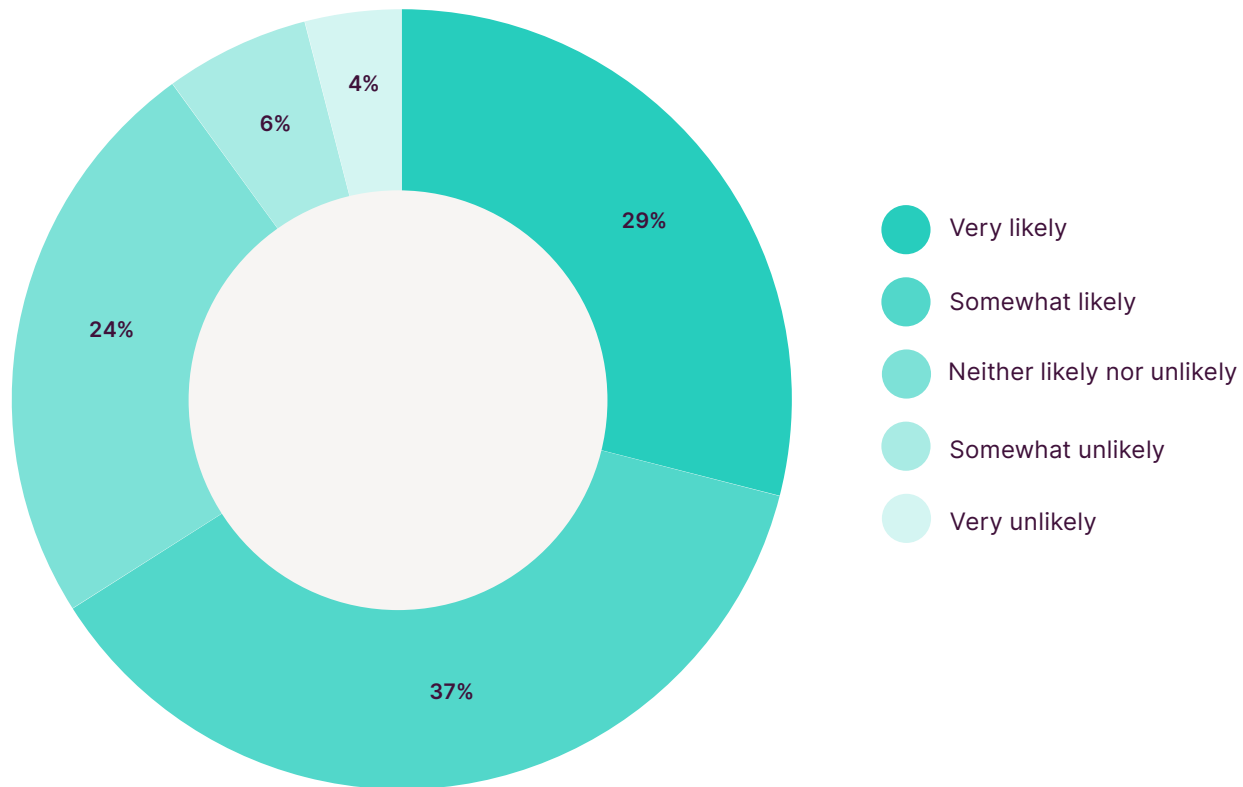


Neither likely nor unlikely



Somewhat unlikely

How likely or unlikely are you to leave a company review based on a bad contact centre experience?



60%
Likely (net)

16%
Unlikely (net)

Learning lessons

Perhaps the most important insight here is that customer experience is highly inconsistent, giving businesses that regularly provide positive experiences a real opportunity for differentiation.

1. **Customer feedback should drive improvement.** Make it easy to leave feedback and analyse the data thoroughly. Then use it to improve contact centre performance.
2. **Focus on identifying recurring themes and pain points.** Prioritise the most pressing concerns first and, if possible, follow up negative feedback with customers to explain how their complaint is being addressed.
3. **Don't forget to collect and scrutinise positive feedback too.** Doing more of the things you get right is just as important as improving the things you get wrong.

“The inconsistency in customer experience across major brands reveals a significant opportunity for differentiation. Organisations that can deliver consistently excellent service will stand out in increasingly crowded markets. At MaxContact, we believe this consistency comes from having the right combination of technology, process and people.”

Our platform provides analytics to identify patterns in both positive and negative feedback, allowing businesses to systematically improve their operations and elevate the customer experience beyond what their competitors can deliver.”



Ben Booth
CEO, MaxContact

FUTURE-PROOFING YOUR CONTACT CENTRE

In 2025, consumers still want to talk to humans, but they also want quick and efficient interactions that are respectful of their time. They want reliable connections, informed agents and simple customer journeys. They're becoming more comfortable with AI chatbots and assistants, but only for routine tasks.

These findings can inform your technology investment priorities:

- **AI and automation should be used to lighten the load of human agents**, but the technology must include clear human escalation paths. AI will probably be able to do a lot more in future, but we're not there yet, and consumers may punish businesses that push AI too far too fast.
- Any technology investment should focus on call reliability. **Disconnecting** calls is still a major consumer frustration. With outbound dialling, make sure your system balances speed and agent availability to avoid dropped calls.
- **Make the customer journey simple.** Endless transfers between departments and agents make consumers wary of communicating with your organisations. A good system can triage calls and direct them to the team or individual most likely to be able to help. Customer interactions should also seamlessly switch between channels (from chatbot to agent, for example) to create smooth customer experiences.

Our findings also have workforce planning implications:

- **When matters are complex or urgent, customers want to talk to a human.** But not any human. Your agents need to understand problems and how to fix them. Prioritise continuous training and use CRM integration and AI to personalise conversations. Technology-driven efficiency can free agents to spend longer with customers and dig deeper into issues.
- **Train agents to be both more knowledgeable and more empathetic.** Customers can be angry, anxious or frustrated. In these situations, an emotionally intelligent agent can make all the difference.
- **A balance has to be struck between automated systems and having agents on the phone.** The perfect balance will be different for different businesses and sectors, but it's one you should strive to achieve, using all the data and experience at your disposal.

Demographic considerations are tricky - but worth factoring in:

- **Our survey shows significant variations in age and gender preferences and suggests one or two obvious demographic patterns.** Younger people are more comfortable with AI and digital channels. Older consumers and women are more likely to want to talk.



CONCLUSION

What consumers want in 2025

Customers want contact centres to make it easy for them, and if that means technology doing more of the heavy lifting, so be it. But they also want to know that a human agent is available if they need one.

Our survey of over 1,000 UK consumers leans towards conclusions that are more common sense than rocket science. You need enough well trained agents to handle complex queries quickly. Consumers who wait an age in a call queue will review your service accordingly and post the results on social media. AI is useful rather than groundbreaking in terms of customer experience, at least at the moment.

Still, technology has a huge role to play in keeping customers happy. Self-serve for routine tasks and queries is increasingly accepted. Automation also eases the burden on agents and lets them spend more time talking, so train your human resources to be empathetic experts rather than general call handlers.

In addition, good contact systems can monitor agent performance, help identify gaps in knowledge and use data to more effectively balance agent numbers with consumer needs.

Oh, and make sure your call technology is reliable.

How will you know that you've got it right? Ask your customers to comment. Invite feedback and identify trends. The very best way to make customers happy in 2025 is to learn, adapt and improve.

ABOUT MAXCONTACT

With MaxContact's cloud contact centre platform, you can have more conversations, improve customer experience, and make data-driven decisions to drive growth.

Blend outbound, inbound and omnichannel functionality, use AI insights to improve performance and give customers the efficient and informed interactions they demand in 2025.

For more on how MaxContact can improve your contact centre performance, visit our website or get in touch.

