



Why Messaging Apps Are The Future For Customer Service In Housing

In this eBook you will learn:

- How modern consumers want to interact with organisations
- How to introduce automation into customer service
- What is speech driven automation?
- How businesses will be using messaging in the future
- Choosing the right messaging platform for business

Messaging apps like WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger are for many people the preferred way to interact with friends and family.

Messaging is also now also becoming widely used for customer service - particularly for public facing sectors including housing and residential.

This eBook delivers guidance and practical insights into how housing associations and social housing organisations can adopt the convenience and functionality of popular messaging apps to help them deliver exceptional customer service 24/7.

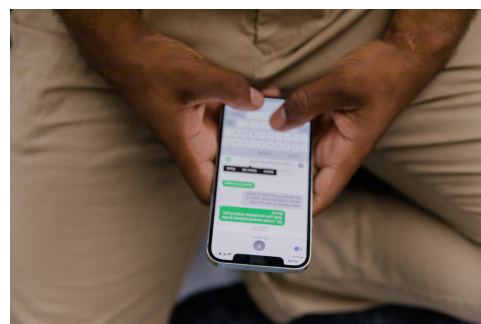


The Rise of Messaging Apps

We have seen in the consumer world how almost every age demographic has taken to conversational messaging/chat Apps because they are quick and easy to use from your device of choice. Many show your availability, if you have read or seen a message and even a person's location. This helps set expectations as to whether they can expect an immediate response or will have to wait for a reply.

For consumers, chat is typically accessed via an App on the phone, such as SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger or through a chat facility on a website or within applications. Gen Z and Millennials are the most prolific users with their time spent mostly on Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok. The messaging apps are quick and simple to use and offer real-time updates and responses.

For business use, conversational messaging can provide new ways for customer engagement that offers a better and more personalised experience than most of the traditional channels. But a simple two way style of chat will only get good uptake if it meets the demands of customers. It needs to have 24/7 service availability, provide self-serve capabilities, send quick or instant responses and offer automation and integration to business systems, and support a wide choice of touchpoints.

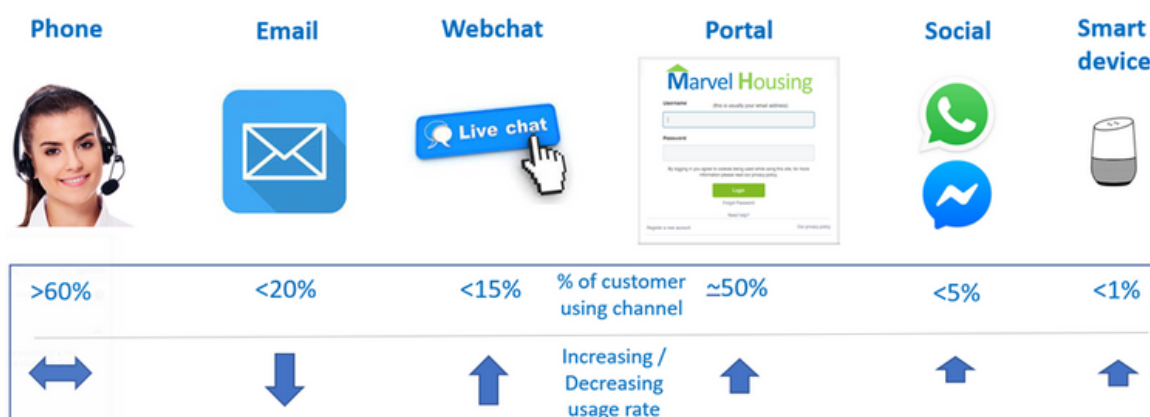


Existing Communications

Historically housing associations had far better communications tools than their customers, but this was turned on its head when Smartphones and Apps became mainstream. Many housing associations are only now rolling out Unified Communications systems that offer calls, messages, availability/location services and video calls that replicate the apps that consumers love. Unfortunately, the chat/messaging, presence and video features are typically only available to internal employees, not for customer communications.

Adding the latest Contact Centre technology addresses some of these gaps by centrally managing voice calls, email, Webchat and possibly social channels. But for customers, in most cases they see no service improvement. They still queue to speak with someone by phone, send an email, fill in a web form, or receive a text message! Only with webchat (or a few with Social channels) do customers get a chat style interface. And in most cases they still wait in a queue to chat with someone.

Customer Communication Channels used in Housing



The channels customers use to communicate and retrieve information. Statistics are the average from across 50 Housing Associations polled in 2023/2024.

Existing Self-Service

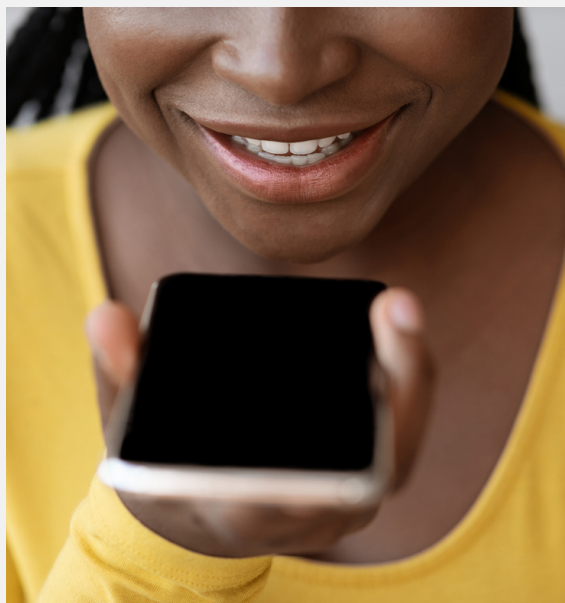
The majority of housing associations now offer a customer portal, which does empower customers to do more themselves but often with limitations due to limited access to back-end data. Depending on the portal provider and the housing applications in place, customers may or may not get access to a good range of services (e.g. repairs, rent, property info, ASB). Typically the portals do not have integral or intelligent knowledgebases, they are not conversational and they can be difficult to access from smartphones. Whilst adoption rates are increasing, many customers choose not to sign up to them or use them regularly.

The Modern Consumer

The always-connected modern consumer is becoming much more demanding and used to instant responses and updates in their personal communications. So much so that their expectations on businesses and brands is that any desired service be available at their moment of need. They have become impatient and if the information they need takes longer than a minute to find or it is difficult to transact or get a response to an enquiry, they often give up.

Many consumers will try to self-serve first, using Search, Knowledgebases, 'How to' Videos and Portals or Apps. But if it isn't quick and convenient they will try webchat (if available), phone in, or even vent their frustrations in a social post. Customer experience has become a key differentiator for keeping customers happy and monitoring service excellence.

Both Apple and Google have developed next-gen messenger offerings for business to consumer use on smartphones that will supersede SMS. Apple Business-Chat and Android RCS (Rich Communication Services) both offer a modern conversational interface that supports text, images, videos, audio messages and more. Although several businesses have introduced them their adoption has been slow to take off for various technical reasons.



Speech Driven Services (Messaging Apps with Speech)

Whilst the majority of users are happy to type or tap their messages, there are a growing number adopting speech functionality, which is convenient and also improves accessibility. Increasingly applications are beginning to add a microphone button next to the text area so that your speech is transcribed as you speak and then can be sent as text.

These new tools are simple and intuitive to use. Some apps are even adding voice notes, where you record your message, edit, and send. It takes seconds to compose, is easy for the recipient to listen to the message and respond (like a modern update on voicemail) and is more personalised.

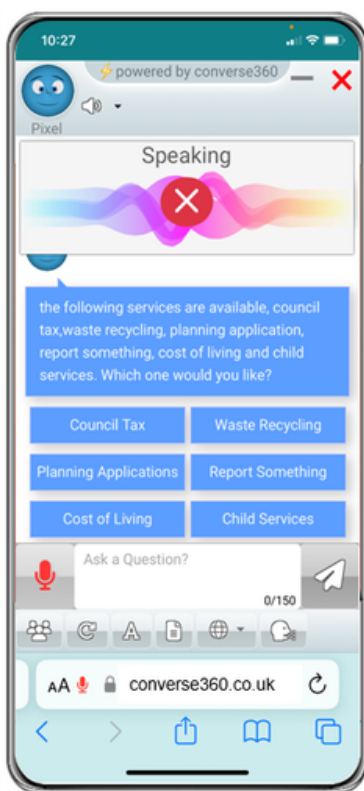
Messaging Apps for Business use

But do businesses want to offer these chat style of interfaces for customer service? Is this the best approach to communicate, transact and provide instant help and support across a diverse range of topics? Will customers adopt multiple media formats including messaging, speech, images, videos?

The answer is a definitive yes. We receive a growing number of requests from businesses that want to use applications like WhatsApp for customer communications. Although it's true that some businesses are using WhatsApp for customer interactions there are many who are reticent to share confidential information across the platform, but still want an easily accessible, simple to use, conversational interface for customer service. With popular messaging Apps general conversations may be fine but sending passwords or personal data that identifies and verifies the user and the exchanging of confidential information or transactions may be best kept away from social messenger platforms. Whether its WhatsApp or any of the apps discussed, it is clear that businesses can benefit from conversational interfaces that offer instant responses to enquiries whether customers are communicating with live advisors or virtual agents.



Introducing Automation to Customer Service



Serving customers with better, faster and more effortless digital experiences requires automation. The most recent research confirms overwhelmingly that customers prefer to self-serve, and mobile messaging is where consumers are spending the majority of their time.

Chat and speech interfaces offer customers instant, informed and convenient responses that solve their problems and save them time. We have seen Chatbots and Intelligent AI Assistants start to offer chat interfaces but with very different levels of success. Some add significant value to a business and can replicate a live advisor, but the majority offer basic FAQs with limited intelligence, no business data connectivity, no hand-off to existing contact centres; therefore effectively operating in a silo.

Only when you choose the right platform encompassing Conversational AI, Generative AI, advanced speech technology, an application integration framework and contact centre connectors can you begin offering transformational services to your customers.

Speech Driven Automation



Smart devices with Speech Assistants have become more common with Alexa, Google Assistant and with Smartphones inbuilt Virtual Assistants such as Siri and Bixby.

Adoption rates have plateaued but new technology is coming soon to greatly expand their capabilities.

Speech is also a more accessible interface for elderly or disabled users as it removes the challenge of typing on a small screen or with a small keyboard.

Many new developments in speech technology are focused on users who struggle to be understood, this will open up new possibilities for future communications. Currently the majority of apps and platforms do not offer speech driven services, but in the future you will see this changing.

Voice Assistants for Business Use

Most Voice Assistants capture their information from the Internet, they aren't connected to business data and they are unable to answer detailed requests about your organisation. Alexa and Google Assistant are the same, unless you set up advanced Alexa skills or equivalent, it will not help customers with their specific personal queries.

The information your customers require may be publicly available on the Internet within your website. But when customers contact your business, it is to find information that they can't readily access, which is likely to be held within a database or business application. If Voice Assistants are to offer a service equivalent to your Customer Service Advisors they will need to access multiple housing applications, to identify / validate the caller and then respond to specific enquiries. An AI-powered or Intelligent Voice Assistant can offer this and more, and are accessible through a phone call or from a chat interface on your customer smartphone. Examples of what an Intelligent Voice Assistant can do include:

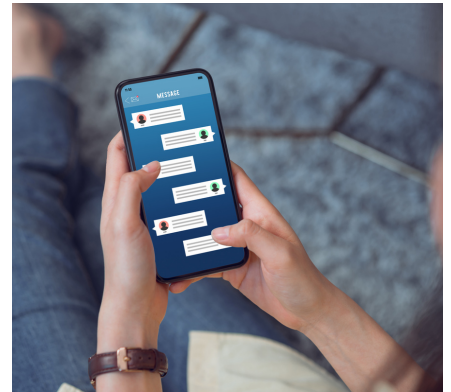
- Act as a virtual operator / receptionist and transfer calls where required
- Answer simple and complex questions
- Identify and security check a customer (using a housing application or CRM system)
- Triage repairs – Confirm, book, amend or cancel an appointment
- Check a rent balance and last payment date, or take a payment
- Confirm a gas service date



How Will Businesses Use Messaging Apps in the Future?

Consumer preference for chat and messaging means that businesses need to consider how best to incorporate these interfaces into their customer service channels. To offer the best experience a chat interface needs to be user friendly, convenient and offer accurate, personalised responses.

Businesses need Apps that have WhatsApp-like functionality, and can be driven by messaging or speech. The ideal customer service messaging solution will automate responses (to offer instant support) and blend self-service, and live service when required.



To deliver useful answers the solution will also need to connect into businesses data to respond with information that is contextual and present it in the most suitable way. Additionally, the solution needs to be easy to manage, with the Customer Service team able to build and edit their own customer workflows without needing to outsource to IT. The easier it is to build these journeys the broader the service can become to support multiple departments.

Choosing The Right Messaging Platform for Your Business

As global messaging platforms aren't customisable and provide less control over personal information and security it's recommended that businesses look for a messaging solution designed specifically around customer engagement. With customer experience in-mind, housing associations should also consider solutions which support multiple dialects, accents and languages - and which are able to return answers on a wide variety of topics with high accuracy. Additionally, consider how the solution will securely retrieve data from multiple housing applications, access the relevant information and present it in a conversational way either visually or over speech.



Futureproof with Adaptive Communications

As well as the chat and voice features discussed, future customer communications need to be 'multi-modal' enabling speech, text or even images, videos or custom content. With dynamic access to customer data held within your systems the context of the conversation can also become predictive and suggest the most likely reason for contact.

In the future customer communications will need to be adaptive; customers may start with messaging, move to speech and then view a video. Interactions will be monitored and analysed and service improvements will be automated.

No-Code and Low-Code

Designing customer journeys, adding the responses and updating company information over-time should not be a technical exercise.

The Customer Service Team are at the coalface daily and understand why their customers are contacting them. They have the knowledge and expertise to answer customer queries and therefore are also ideal administrators of the automation platform. To achieve this, the platform needs to have an intuitive interface that almost anyone can use with a small amount of training.

A **No-Code** interface makes it simple to create and amend responses and build workflows. The workflow builder should offer drag and drop components, including options for call transfer, send email/SMS, capturing data or accessing the APIs that the IT team make available.



Where **Low-Code** interfaces significantly add value is enabling simple connections to all of your business applications. Low-Code functionality enables those with little or no coding experience to use a visual programming tool to create the API's that the customer service team can drop into their flows. Both No-Code and Low-Code tools significantly reduce the cost of running the platform as in-house resources can manage everything.

Can Messaging Apps Improve Customer Service for Housing?

Many digital transformation projects set out with the goal to make things easier or more cost effective for the business rather than improving the service for the customer. Conversational messaging and chat style apps serve two goals making the service better for the customer **and** creating efficiencies for the business. The technology is now available to deliver services in exciting new ways so that customers get a better, faster and easier experience using a digital channel of their choice.

With voice-based services customer calls can be answered instantly rather than being sent into a queue. Starting a chat or messenger session will be instant, informative and also personalised.

Customer portals can be enhanced by adding an Intelligent AI Assistant that can assist and provide answers by tapping into the relevant knowledgebase, for example to report maintenance issues or to book repairs. And for some customers there is even the option to speak with a digital human (life-like avatar) that assists them with their enquiry whilst showing empathy and being courteous.

Customer service automation incorporating Conversational AI, Generative AI, Intelligent Speech Assistants and Virtual Agents have come a long way in recent years and there is now much more to consider when choosing a platform. If you would like to see how many of our customers in the housing sector are using this technology please get in touch.



Next Steps

If you are ready to start on your Customer Service Automation project, or would just like to get some advice we can help:

[See our AI Assistant in action](#) in a housing environment. Follow example FAQ's, simple and complex workflows and see how transactions can use your data to retrieve personalised information.

[Request a personalised live demo](#) where we can show you the most relevant features and functionalities. How you can seamlessly blend automated responses, with live agent hand-off including context and transcripts.

[Read our blogs](#) on a range of topics related to conversational AI, generative AI, Customer Service Automation, Chatbots, Virtual and Digital AI-powered Assistants, and Digital Humans.

Get in touch with our team to learn how next-gen AI can grow your business.

Web: www.converse360.co.uk

Email: info@converse360.co.uk

Tel: 0203 9005 360

converse360 Assist-Me™ Customer Service Automation Platform

converse360's powerful Assist-Me™ Service Automation Platform uses Conversational AI and also Generative AI to make it simple for you to automate complex customer service interactions. It makes delivering personalised services quick and effortless, leaving your customers feeling heard, seen and valued.

Assist-Me™ easily connects with existing applications enabling a seamless customer experience, and the benefits of automation and flexibility across channels.



About converse360

converse360 helps organizations deliver digital customer engagement across any channel that is instant, effortless and personalised. Its Conversational Service Automation platform intelligently blends self-service, assisted service and live service to enable businesses to serve their customers faster and easier, 24/7 at scale.