

The Resolution Gap 2026

What Customers Actually Want From Customer Service AI

For years, customer service has been optimized around speed: shorter calls, more containment, more deflection. Those things matter, but only if the customer's problem actually gets solved. Ending the call quickly isn't the goal. Solving the problem is.

To test that, we surveyed 1,049 U.S. consumers age 18 and older, fielded via SurveyMonkey Audience in September 2026, asking what people actually expect from customer service AI and how often that expectation is met. The results show a clear, repeated gap between what people are open to and what they've come to expect, starting with the two questions below.

The Resolution Gap

Start here, because it's the reason we did this research at all.

Q1 · TRUE / FALSE

“When calling customer service, I don't care whether I'm talking to a human or an AI, as long as my issue gets fixed.”

True



57%

Q4 · YES / NO

“When you call a company and reach an automated system, do you usually assume you'll end up needing a human before your issue gets solved?”

Yes



90%

Same people, both times. Open to automation, and certain, going in, that it will let them down. That's not distrust of AI specifically. It's that most people still picture the old phone tree when they hear “automated system,” not what's actually possible now.

OUR TAKE

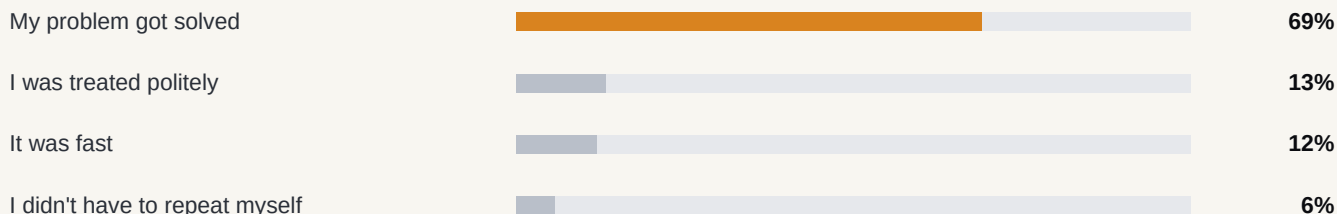
People aren't rejecting AI. They're rejecting the phone tree they've hung up on a hundred times, and most haven't clocked that the two aren't the same thing anymore.

Redefining the Scoreboard

If customers are going to hold companies to a standard, the first question is what that standard actually is.

Q2 · SELECT ONE

“Which of these best describes 'good customer service' to you?”



It's not that the industry doesn't know how to measure resolution. First-contact resolution and CSAT are on every contact center dashboard. But human agents are graded on whether the call resolved the issue. Bots are usually graded on a different scoreboard entirely: containment, deflection, average handle time. Whether the call avoided a human, not whether it solved anything.

OUR TAKE

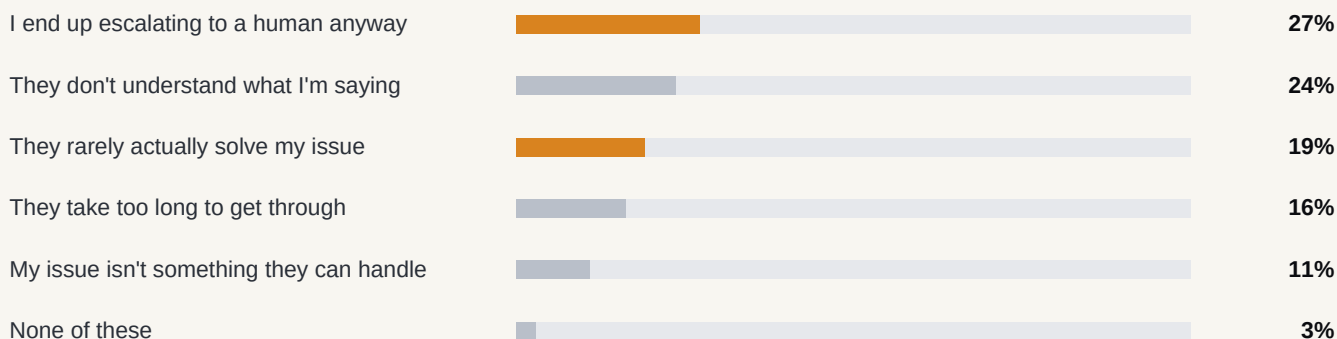
We grade our own people on resolution every day. We just gave the bots a bar they could barely fail, containment instead of resolution, and called that a technology limitation.

The Frustration Has a Name: the AI speed bump

If resolution is the standard customers hold companies to, the next question is where that standard breaks down in practice.

Q6 · SELECT ONE

“What is your biggest frustration with automated phone systems (voice AI or bots) when you call customer service?”

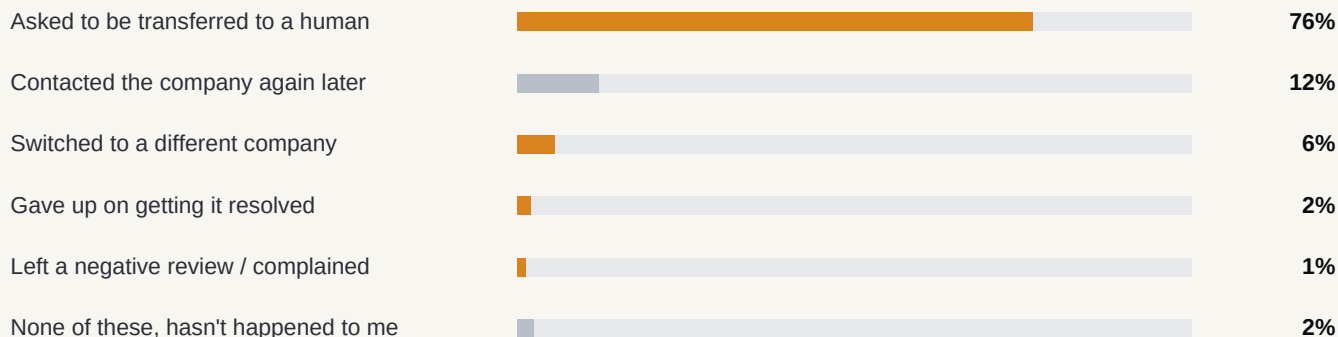


46% describe the AI speed bump: they escalate to a human anyway (27%) or rarely solve the issue (19%). They talk to a person anyway, but only after fighting a machine that adds friction instead of solving the problem.

The behavioral evidence backs that up. Asked what they do next when an AI agent fails to resolve their issue, the clear majority ask for a human on the spot.

Q7 · SELECT ONE

“When an AI customer service agent does NOT resolve your issue, what do you usually do next?”



9% churn or turn negative. 6% switched providers, 2% gave up, and 1% left a negative review or complained publicly. No company should accept that.

OUR TAKE

Containment already counts a transfer to a human as a miss. The real flaw is what it counts as a win: a hang-up. A customer who gives up looks identical, on a containment dashboard, to one whose problem actually got solved.

65% Are Frustrated With Self-Service

There's a version of this argument that blames self-service itself. That's not what our data says. The problem isn't being offered an app or a website. It's being redirected to a channel you've already tried and already know didn't work.

Q5 · SELECT ONE

“When a bot tells you how to solve a problem yourself using another channel like an app, website, or customer portal, what is your typical reaction?”



Most of the friction here isn't about the existence of self-service. It's about being sent back to a door you already knocked on, often the same app or website that sent you to the phone in the first place.

Grade Bots on Resolution

Grade bots the way you grade agents: did the issue get resolved on first contact? Not whether the call stayed off a human's desk.

It's not an accident that containment won. The business case is written in headcount and cost per contact: over 80% of customer service leaders expect to cut agent headcount within 18 months (Gartner, December 2025, 321 leaders surveyed). So the metric that wins is the one that maps to that math, not the one that tells you whether the problem got fixed.

CAA CLUB GROUP · ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

A member stranded roadside used to wait on hold, hoping someone would answer. Today, Replicant's AI agents run the entire emergency roadside call end to end and get a technician dispatched in under five minutes, even with background noise. The first human a member talks to is the tow truck driver. Overall call completion has doubled.

40%
of roadside calls fully resolved without an agent
30% of all calls handled by AI
2x call completion rate
NPS of 82 for AI-resolved calls

DOORDASH · OUTBOUND FOOD ORDERING

A noisy kitchen used to mean a dropped call and a missed order. Replicant's AI agents communicate clearly through background noise and accents, and within six weeks were placing over 35,000 food orders a day.

87%
resolution rate
0-minute hold times

SUNRUN · PAYMENT CALLS

Sunrun's contact center was flooded with routine payment calls, and customers sat on hold. Replicant's AI agents now take payments in seconds, in English and Spanish, around the clock. Stetson Wood, former Director of Engineering over Communications at Sunrun: "We found a true AI partner."

50%
of payment-related calls resolved by AI
4.6/5 CSAT

LARGE TRAVEL COMPANY · CREW ACCOMMODATIONS (OUTBOUND PILOT)

When flights were disrupted, crews needed hotel rooms confirmed fast. In a three-day pilot, Replicant's AI agents made outbound calls to hotels, confirmed flight-crew reservations end to end, and handled proactive support without a human on the line.

84%
success rate in a 3-day pilot

Your customers have already told you what they want: solved, not routed. These companies are already measuring it. Start there.

Methodology

Based on an original survey of 1,049 U.S. consumers, age 18 and older, fielded via SurveyMonkey Audience in September 2026. Margin of error ± 3.0 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Results reflect the panel surveyed and are not weighted to U.S. Census benchmarks.

Every survey statistic in this report is a direct read, or a simple combined read (e.g. 27% + 19%), of a single question from the fielded survey. Figures in "Grade Bots on Resolution" are drawn from Replicant customer case studies and a Gartner survey, separate sources from the consumer survey.

Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and may not sum to exactly 100%.