

What Contact Centres are Doing Right Now

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How do You Compare?

A Call Centre Helper Research Paper

(2021 Edition)

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What We Did

2021 has been a challenging year. Across the industry, contact centres are setting up new working models and facing fresh people, process and technology challenges, as well as those stubborn old issues.

But contact centre leaders have been rising to the test, making bold moves to improve customer, employee and business results.

Luckily, we've been hot on their heels, uncovering new and exciting insights for our comprehensive annual survey.

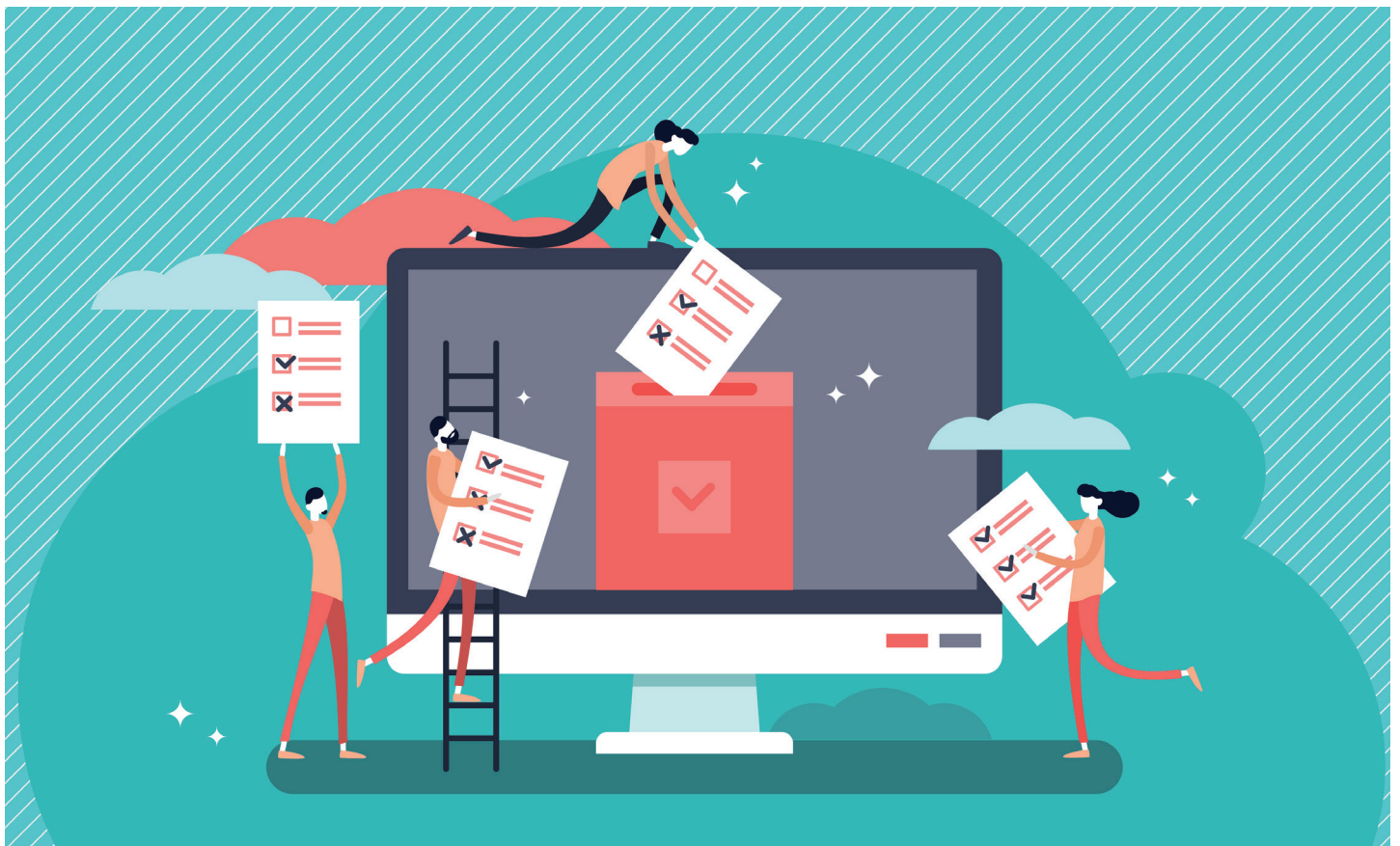
Aiming to seize a snapshot view of what contact centres are doing right now, this survey highlights how the industry is evolving, year after year.

To do so, we surveyed Call Centre Helper readers throughout July and August 2021, collecting and comparing this year's results with data from the previous six years.

Also, we've introduced new, topical questions. These have enabled us to shed light on emerging trends that are impacting contact centres across the globe.

Run in partnership with Akixi, NICE, Nuance, Odigo, Poly and ProcedureFlow, this survey dedicates chapters to critical contact centre arenas such as customer experience, workforce management (WFM) and future innovations.

With 224 contact centre professionals taking part, we've discovered many new insights, which we are delighted to share with you.



Executive Summary

Effortless is the Answer

As the saying goes: *"The best service is no service."* These wise words are being put into practice across the industry, best highlighted by the continued growth of the customer effort metric.

Just last year, 48.2% of contact centres measured customer effort. This year, that figure grew to 55.7%.

Yet this growing trend goes back further. Five years ago, only 35.8% of contact centres calculated customer effort, highlighting the continued focus on making customer experiences easier.

Self-Service Is Delivering Bang for Bucks

To lower customer effort, contact centres are turning to self-service, and it's delivering results.

By far the largest percentage of participants (36.2%) pinpointed self-service as the best technology for delivering maximum value for money.

Interestingly, 62.2% of contact centres also view self-service as a critical growth channel for customer experience, while improving self-service was identified as the most valuable use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within contact centres.

Artificial Intelligence Adoption Soars

More than half of contact centres (51.8%) are now implementing AI technologies.

Solutions such as process automation, chatbots and interaction analytics are proving increasingly popular – especially the latter.

In fact, 24.0% of contact centres are now employing interaction analytics technologies. This figure has grown from 9.2% in just five years.

Add to this the statistic that almost two-thirds of our contact centre professionals (66.5%) believe that the solution is "very exciting" and it seems that the trend is set to continue.

Rotational Shifts Face the Exit Door

One longstanding contact centre practice that appears to be on shaky legs is rotational shifts. Little more than a third of contact centres are now using this shift pattern.

Perhaps the budding focus on creating shifts that match lifestyles is at play here, as no one leads a rotational life.

Also, the growth of shift types that are more conducive to a good work-life balance – such as split-shifts, which 19.5% of contact centres now use – could support this theory.

Gamification Falls Out of Favour

In 2016, 50.2% of contact centres played motivation games to increase employee engagement. Now, that percentage has shrunk by more than half to only 23.6%.

Of course, the pandemic may have played a part. Yet the downward trend was already at play, with fewer than a third of contact centres harnessing the power of games in 2019.

Other classic contact centre initiatives that are being pushed to the wayside include social events, spot prizes and sales commissions.

Efficiency, Efficiency and More Efficiency

While initiatives are changing and technologies are evolving, an obsession with efficiency remains a contact centre constant.

According to 22.9% of participants, efficiency is set to be their top priority for 2022. This makes it the most common primary objective amongst all of the contact centres surveyed.

To put this into context, efficiency topped the list ahead of other key priorities, including engagement and culture, omnichannel and coaching.

Lack of Technology Integration

It seems that contact centres aren't just focusing on simplifying the customer experience but on improving the advisor experience too.

Just last year, 53.0% of contact centres reported that a lack of technology integration was a big barrier to running the “dream” contact centre.

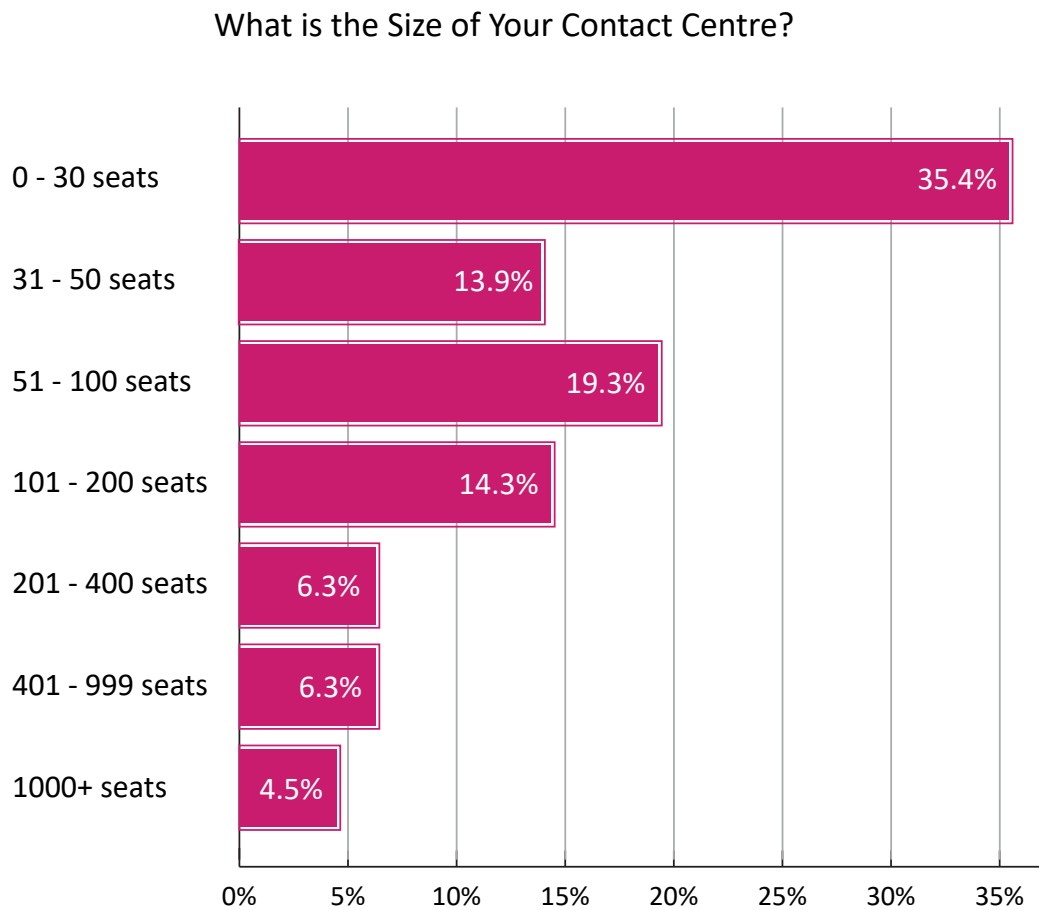
Now, “technology not being joined-up” is only a major issue for 27.3% of contact centres. This signals a significant drop, which may be caused by the industry-wide transition to cloud software.



General – How Does Your Contact Centre Compare?

1. What is the Size of Your Contact Centre?

Participants in this year's survey came from 224 contact centres, of all different shapes and sizes, ranging from 0-30 seats to 1,000+.



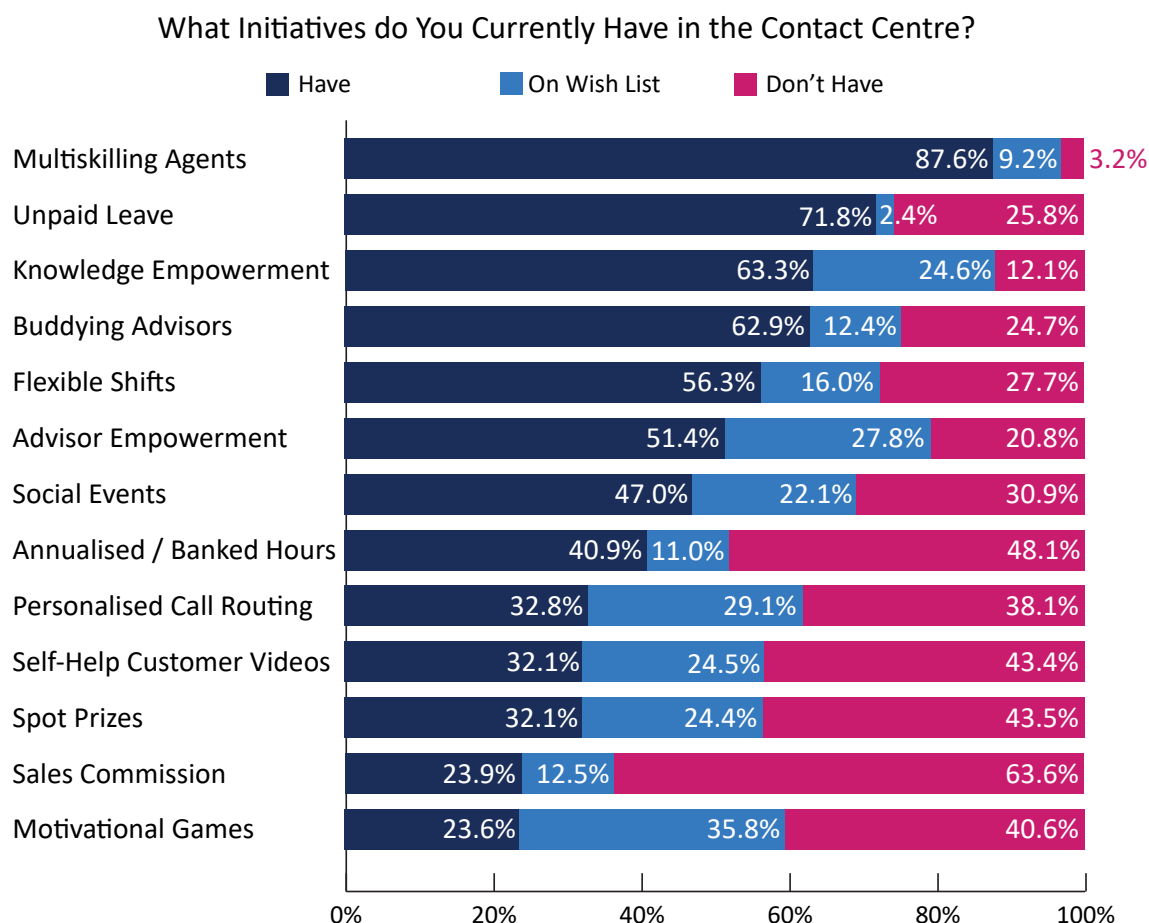
To better inform the results shared in this report, the chart above highlights the different sizes of the contact centres that contributed to our survey.



2. What Initiatives do You Currently Have in the Contact Centre?

Contact Centres Put the Brakes on Prizes and Games

Since our records began, the use of spot prizes and motivational games has been tumbling. This year, it reached an all-time low.



Just 32.1% of contact centres now award prizes and only 23.6% play motivational games. In 2015, these figures stood at 52.8% and 47.1% respectively.

While the pandemic certainly played its part in making it more difficult to run these activities, the year-on-year trend suggests that contact centres are undergoing a fundamental shift in how they inspire performance improvements.

What Initiatives do You Currently Have in the Contact Centre?

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Multiskilling Advisors	90.5%	88.2%	80.4%	84.5%	83.9%	81.7%	87.6%
Unpaid Leave	66.4%	65.2%	70.8%	70.7%	65.5%	68.4%	71.8%
Knowledge Champions	66.2%	63.3%	66.8%	56.6%	63.1%	63.6%	63.3%
Buddying Agents	71.5%	71.0%	70.9%	60.0%	58.1%	60.6%	62.9%
Flexible Shifts	59.7%	61.0%	62.5%	51.8%	58.2%	53.6%	56.3%
Agent Empowerment	61.6%	61.0%	61.0%	48.8%	47.9%	53.0%	51.4%
Social Events	77.3%	77.1%	74.0%	66.6%	64.0%	50.8%	47.0%
Annualised/Banked Hours	30.9%	36.0%	37.7%	36.0%	35.1%	39.9%	40.9%
Personalised Call Routing	38.2%	33.2%	36.4%	30.4%	30.3%	30.2%	32.8%
Self-Help Customer Videos	23.8%	23.0%	23.6%	24.3%	30.9%	27.5%	32.1%
Spot Prizes	52.8%	51.5%	45.4%	44.6%	38.9%	37.4%	32.1%
Sales Commision	36.0%	26.7%	30.7%	27.0%	28.9%	27.9%	23.9%
Motivational Games	47.1%	50.2%	44.7%	38.5%	30.9%	29.0%	23.6%

Work-Life Balance Becomes a Key Priority

In the interest of improving employee engagement, contact centres seem to be shifting their approach to providing advisors with a better work-life balance.

In the past 12 months alone, the use of annualized hours increased by 2.5%, flexible shifts jumped up by 5% and unpaid leave also grew by 5%.

All this perhaps highlights the growing recognition of the link between workforce management and employee engagement.

The Rebirth of Multiskilling

Multiskilling advisors is an activity that fewer and fewer contact centres were willing to run. This downward trend has been evident ever since 2015. Until now.

This year, the percentage of contact centres multiskilling advisors rose dramatically from 81.7% to 87.6%.

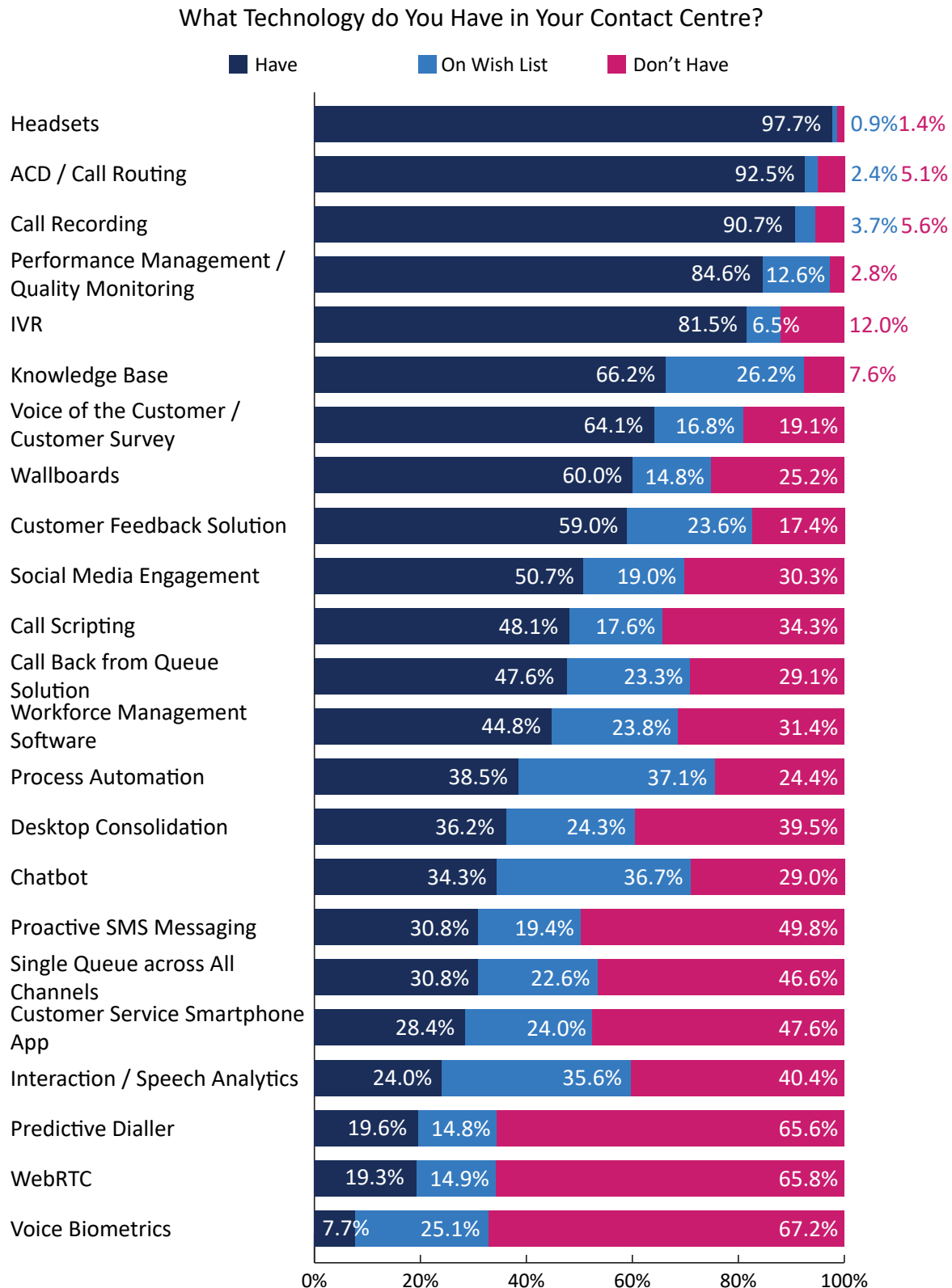
Previously, we've speculated that the increasing complexity of contact reasons – thanks to self-service and automation – has resulted in contact centres training advisors that specialize in one area. So this growth is somewhat of a surprise.

Yet the efficiency benefits in having advisors cover more bases – during such a frantic time for contact centres – could well be at play.

3. What Technology do You Have in Your Contact Centre?

AI-Powered Software Is on the Rise

Process automation, chatbots and interaction analytics are all AI-infused technologies. Each has increased in usage over the past 12 months.



What Technology do You Have in Your Contact Centre?

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Headsets	98.5%	97.9%	98.8%	98.4%	96.1%	97.7%
ACD / Call Routing	90.0%	90.1%	90.9%	89.7%	88.5%	92.5%
Call Recording	85.8 %	87.5%	91.4%	90.3%	89.0%	90.7%
Performance Management / Quality Monitoring Tools	82.3%	83.9%	80.2%	87.0%	83.7%	84.6%
IVR	79.5%	81.6%	86.1%	82.7%	80.2%	81.5%
Knowledge Base	71.6%	75.6%	60.5%	70.5%	71.2%	66.2%
VoC / Customer Survey	N/A	51.5%	48.4%	59.1%	62.5%	64.1%
Wallboards	68.6%	72.9%	74.7%	63.0%	59.6%	60.0%
Customer Feedback Solution	59.8 %	66.6%	58.5%	61.9%	57.3%	59.0%
Social Media Engagement	48.3%	52.9%	52.7%	57.4%	53.2%	50.7%
Call Scripting	46.9%	52.3%	42.5%	51.0%	54.5%	48.1%
Call Back From Queue Solution	N/A	51.1%	41.1%	40.2%	49.0%	47.6%
WFM Software	31.4 %	36.9%	37.2%	49.0%	48.4%	44.8%
Process Automation	36.3%	39.1%	34.6%	31.1%	36.9%	38.5%
Desktop Consolidation	22.3%	33.2%	26.3%	34.7%	40.3%	36.2%
Chatbot / Virtual Assistant	N/A	9.9%	30.7%	14.0%	30.8%	34.3%
Proactive Messaging	N/A	35.5%	28.0%	29.3%	32.7%	30.8%
Single Queue Across All Channels	24.1 %	32.0%	30.7%	26.3%	25.3%	30.8%
Customer Service / Enabled App	N/A	27.9%	20.1%	30.5%	28.7%	28.4%
Speech Analytics	9.2%	13.4%	13.2%	15.9%	21.4%	24.0%
Predictive Dialler	22.0%	22.3%	22.9%	24.6%	23.9%	19.6%
WebRTC	N/A	13.2%	36.4%	12.8%	16.1%	19.3%
Voice Biometrics	5.0%	5.0%	23.6%	5.0%	7.8%	7.7%

So, is the AI revolution finally upon us? Let's not get quite so carried away, as fewer than 40% of contact centres have implemented any of these three technologies.

However, it's worth highlighting that many contact centres also have these technologies "on their wish list", with interaction analytics being a key example.

While only 24.0% of contact centres have implemented the technology, 35.6% wish to. This underlines the significant growth potential of this particular AI tool.

Voice of the Customer (VoC) Technology Continues to Take Over

64.1% of contact centres have now invested in VoC software, increasing from the figure of 62.5% that was reported in 2020.

This growth of 2.6% may not seem like much, but the trend goes back further. Since 2018, an additional 32.4% of contact centres are now using VoC tools to uncover hidden customer insights.

Paired with the growth of interaction analytics – which is also being utilized at an unprecedented rate – and it seems that collecting customer data is a growing trend across the industry.

Social Media Engagement Falls

One technology that appears to be falling out of favour is social media engagement, as contact centres prioritize other critical channels.

According to our research, only 50.7% of contact centres are now using the technology to interact with customers over social channels. In 2019, the percentage was as high as 57.4%.

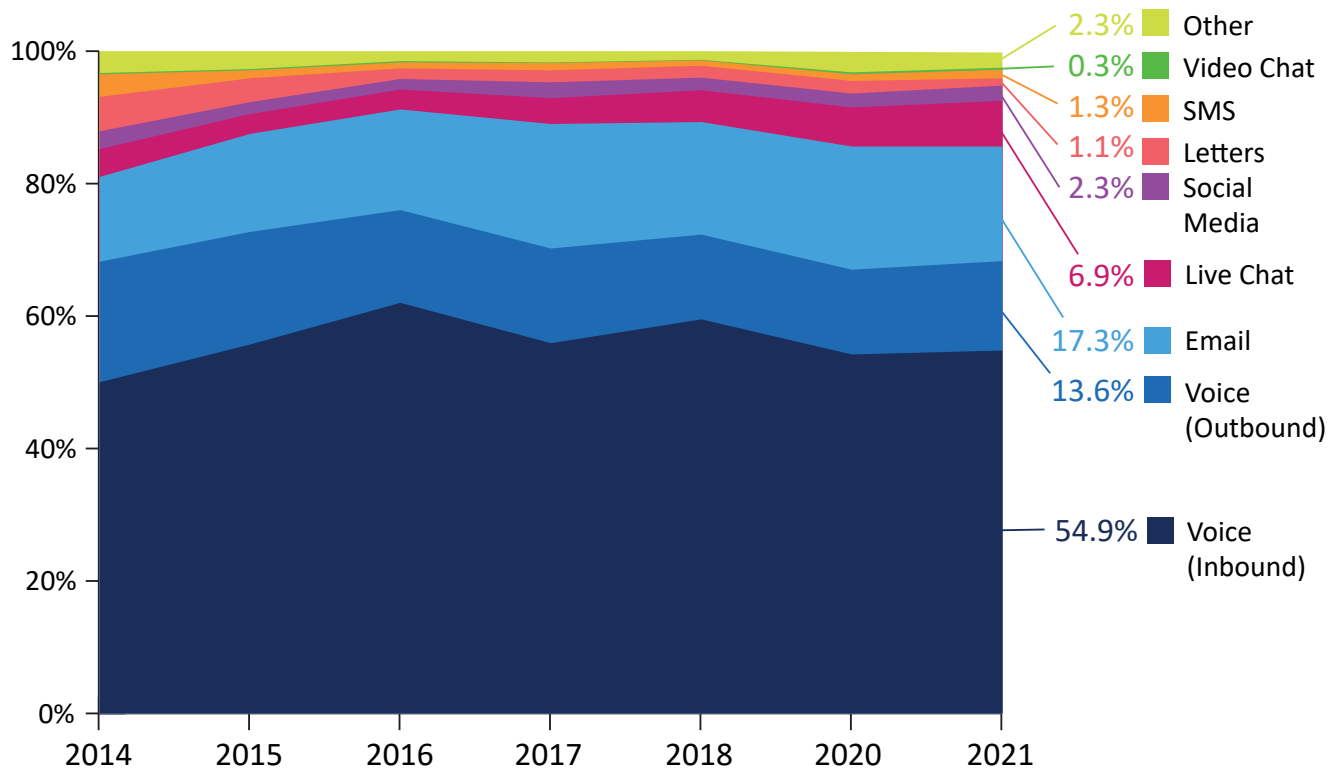
Yet social media engagement is not the only technology to fall out of favour. Call scripting, desktop consolidation and predictive diallers are also being used at a lesser rate than was the case 12 months ago.

4. What is Your Channel Mix?

Live Chat Continues to Prosper

The percentage of contact centre conversations that take place over live chat reached record levels this year, making up 6.9% of total interactions.

What is Your Mix of Contact Channels?



That 6.9% is greatly up on the 3.0% recorded in 2016. This highlights that more than twice as many customers are going through the channel to get their queries answered than five years ago.

Another channel that's enjoying an upsurge in usage is outbound voice, growing by 6.25% in the past year alone. This perhaps indicates that sales teams sense an opportunity, with many physical stores being closed throughout the pandemic.

What is Your Channel Mix?

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2020	2021
Voice - Inbound	50.0%	55.7%	62.0%	55.9%	59.5%	54.2%	54.9%
Voice - Outbound	18.2%	17.0%	14.0%	14.3%	12.8%	12.8%	13.6%
Email	12.8%	14.8%	15.2%	18.8%	17.0%	18.6%	17.3%
Live Chat	4.2%	3.0%	3.0%	3.9%	4.8%	5.9%	6.9%
Social Media	2.7%	1.8%	1.6%	2.4%	1.9%	2.1%	2.3%
Letters	5.2%	3.6%	1.6%	1.8%	1.8%	1.9%	1.1%
SMS	3.4%	1.2%	0.9%	1.1%	0.8%	1.0%	1.3%
Video Chat	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	0.3%
Other	3.3%	2.7%	1.5%	1.7%	1.3%	3.1%	2.3%

Email Starts to Lose Steam

From 2014 to 2020, email became an increasingly popular channel. By last year, 18.6% of contact centre interactions took place via this medium.

As the growth of contemporary digital channels – such as social media, messaging and video – stuttered, more and more customers turned to email to resolve their queries.

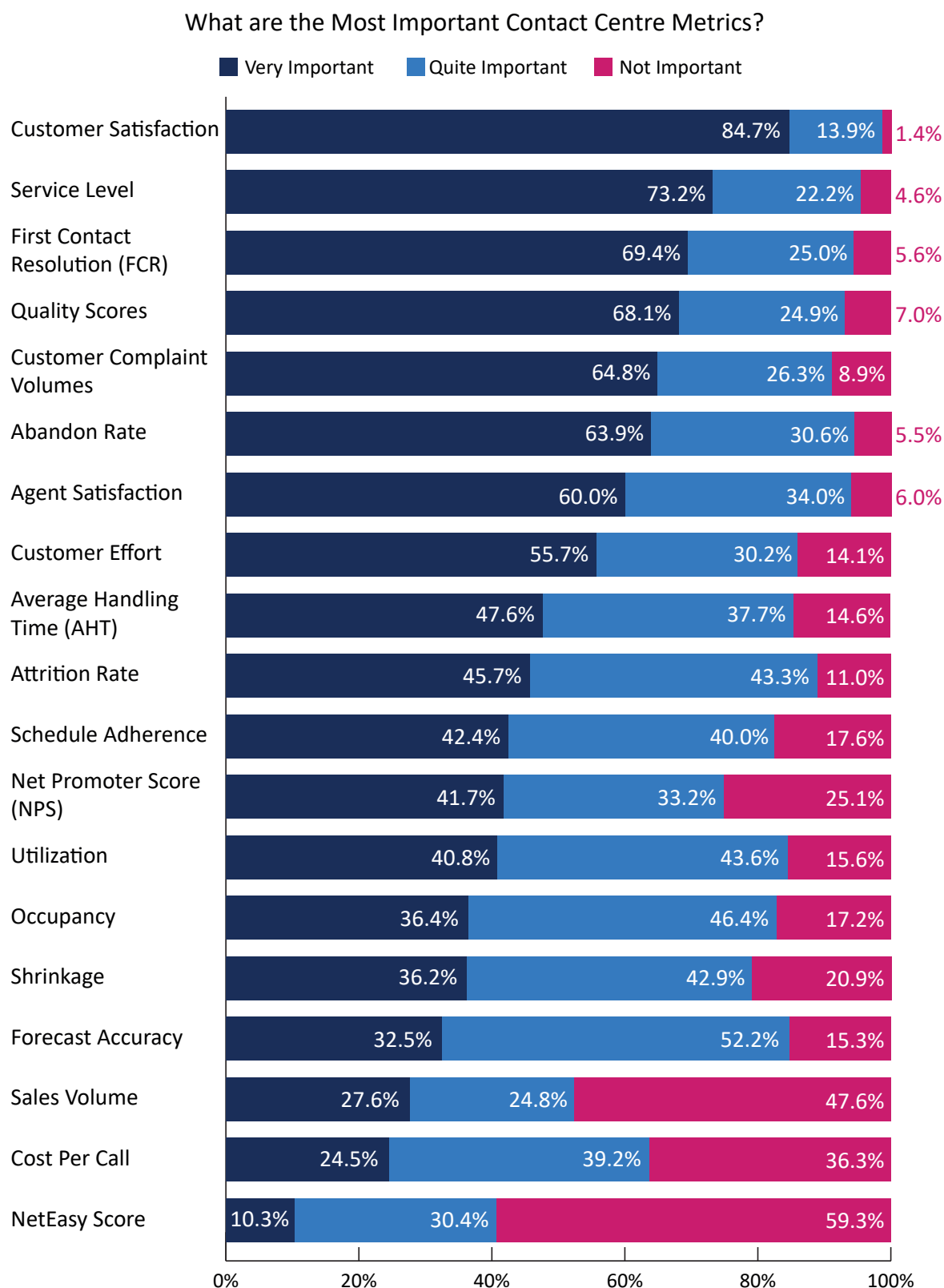
Yet this year, email fell in usage by 7%, breaking the trend. This indicates that contact centres may now be getting to grips with the other channels that sit within their digital mix.



5. What are the Most Important Contact Centre Metrics?

Effortless Is the Future

The percentage of contact centres that consider the customer effort metric to be “very important” has reached its highest rate on record.



What are the Most Important Contact Centre Metrics?

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Customer Satisfaction	91.1%	95.7%	93.1%	89.2%	84.8%	84.7%
Service Level	70.0%	62.7%	61.4%	65.6%	72.0%	73.2%
First Contact Resolution	65.4%	68.0%	69.8%	68.8%	63.8%	69.4%
Quality Scores	68.4%	67.5%	63.9%	65.1%	64.5%	68.1%
Complaint Volumes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	65.7%	64.8%
Abandon Rate	N/A	N/A	N/A	62.0%	59.1%	63.9%
Agent Satisfaction	48.4%	62.0%	63.1%	67.1%	66.9%	60.0%
Customer Effort	35.8%	53.6%	48.9%	47.5%	48.2%	55.7%
Average Handling Time	31.8%	33.2%	31.9%	44.0%	44.2%	47.6%
Attrition Rate	N/A	N/A	N/A	49.8%	46.6%	45.7%
Schedule Adherence	37.6%	47.6%	40.2%	48.6%	43.1%	42.4%
Net Promoter Score	29.6%	36.6%	32.8%	36.6%	39.8%	41.7%
Utilization	N/A	N/A	N/A	44.1%	39.5%	40.8%
Occupancy	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	35.6%	36.4%
Shrinkage	28.5%	30.5%	27.3%	35.7%	35.1%	36.2%
Forecast Accuracy	33.4%	36.2%	37.1%	40.3%	33.9%	32.5%
Sales Volume	29.1%	35.1%	27.2%	27.8%	32.2%	27.6%
Cost Per Call	N/A	N/A	N/A	31.0%	27.3%	24.5%
NetEasy Score	11.4%	21.7%	19.5%	14.8%	14.0%	10.3%

(These are the percentages of survey participants that believed each metric to be “very important” year-on-year)

Within the last year alone, the percentage has risen by 15.6%, taking the total to 55.7%. Compare that to the 14.1% of contact centres that consider the metric to be “not important” and it’s clear that reducing customer effort is a critical contact centre trend.

The growth of First Contact Resolution (FCR) also supports this. This metric is now considered to be “very important” by 8.8% more contact centres than in 2020, highlighting how contact centres are trying to prevent customers from having to make a second call.

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) Tightens its Grip on Contact Centres

Another customer experience metric that’s seemingly growing in value is NPS.

In 2016, 29.6% of contact centres viewed the metric as “very important”. That figure now stands at 41.7%, which highlights how this well-established key performance indicator (KPI) continues to grow.

However, while this is true, customer satisfaction (CSAT) remains the undisputed king of customer experience metrics, with just 1.4% of contact centres viewing the metric as “not important”.

The Rebirth of Average Handling Time (AHT)

In many quarters, AHT was almost becoming a dirty word, as contact centres pressured advisors to cut down their handling times. The result was low FCR rates and stressed-out advisors.

With this being the case, the perceived importance of AHT was – until 2018 – subsiding. Now, however, the metric is enjoying a mini-revival. In fact, 47.6% consider AHT to be “very important”.

Perhaps contact centres are realizing AHT’s importance in staffing calculations? Or maybe safer ways to reduce AHT – such as signposting, screen popping and coaching – are coming to the fore?

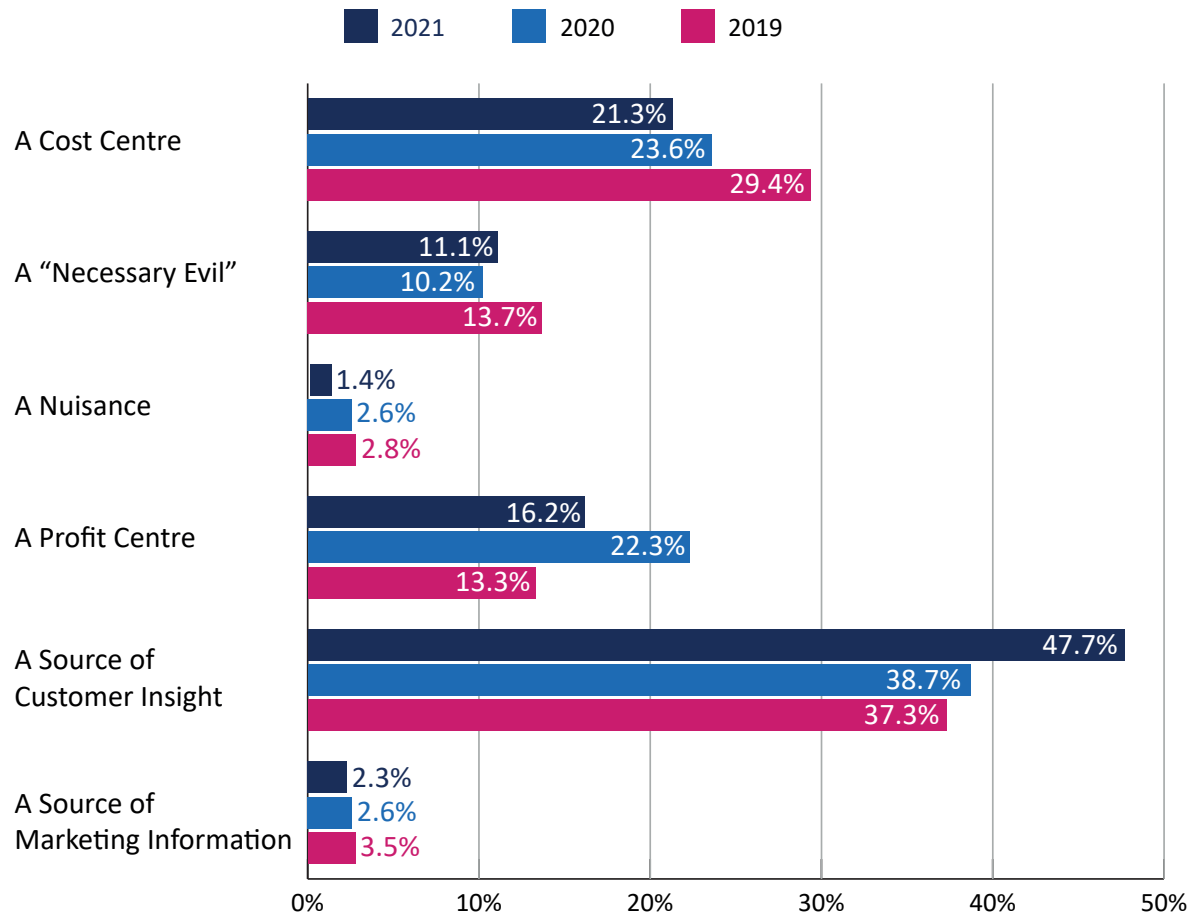
Either way, let’s cross our fingers that advisors aren’t being directly targeted against the metric.

6. How is Your Contact Centre Perceived by the Rest of the Business?

Internal Perceptions of Contact Centres are Improving

The percentage of industry professionals that believe their organization views the contact centre as a “source of insight” grew considerably within the last 12 months.

How is Your Contact Centre Perceived by the Rest of the Business?



While in 2020, 38.7% of participants reported this to be the case, this year that figure rose to 47.7%. This amounts to a growth of 23.3%.

In addition, the percentage of contact centres that responded with more negative answers – such as “a cost centre”, a “necessary evil” and “a nuisance” – dropped sharply.

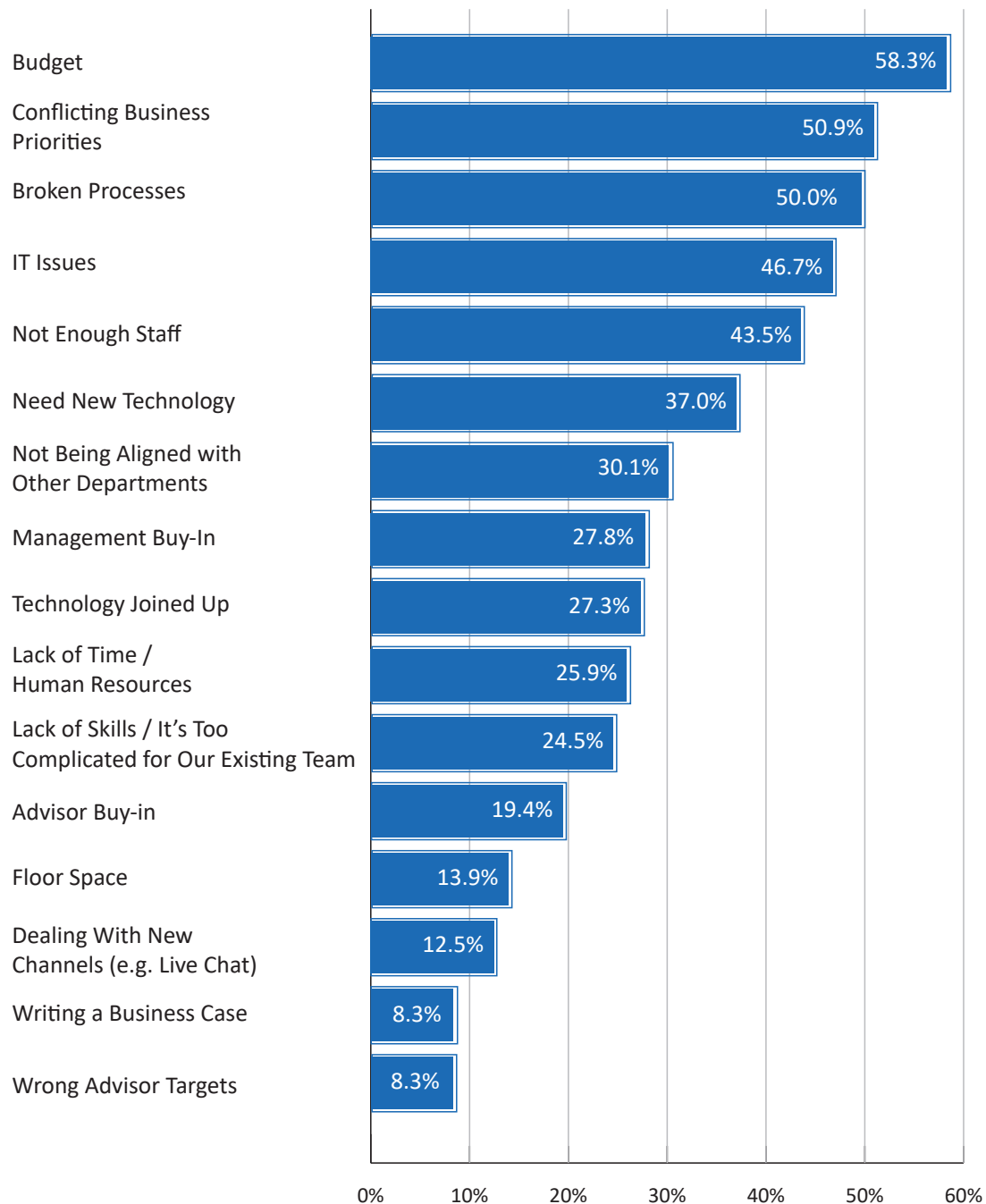
7. Which Barriers Stop You From Running Your Dream Contact Centre?

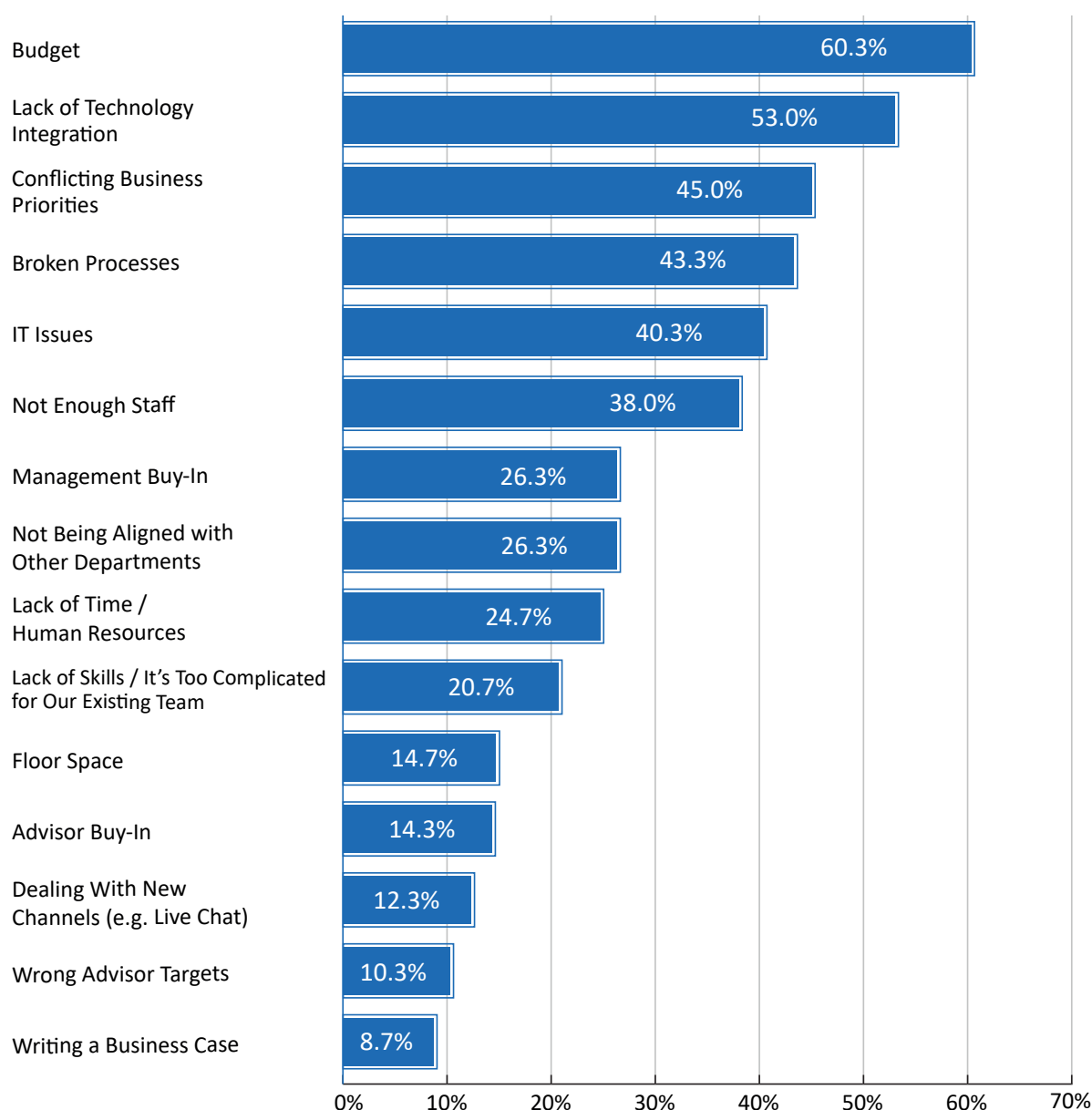
Budget Remains the Biggest Barrier

Unsurprisingly, budget is the biggest stumbling block that's strewn across the path of contact centre leaders, preventing them from running their dream contact centre.

2021 Stats

Which Barriers Stop You From Running Your Dream Contact Centre?





The good news, however, is that a lower percentage of contact centres reported budget as a major issue than in 2020.

Now, fewer than six in every ten operations report that budget is a big barrier, a drop that coincides with the rising perceptions of contact centres within their organizations.

Conflicting Business Priorities are Impacting Over Half of Contact Centres

The second biggest barrier reported was conflicting business priorities, with 50.9% of contact centres underlining this issue.

As tools such as the balanced scorecard faded into customer experience folklore, many businesses seem to be struggling to align their key focuses.

Other common challenges that contact centres are struggling to overcome include broken processes (50.0%), IT issues (46.7%) and staffing limitations (43.5%).

This last issue is particularly alarming, as 14.5% more contact centres are currently experiencing recruitment problems when compared to 12 months ago.

Technology Integrations are Reaching Record Levels

On the brighter side, lots more contact centres are seemingly getting to grips with technology integrations to simplify processes and drive efficiency.

Now only 27.3% of contact centres are suffering from disconnected systems, a figure that – just last year – stood at 53.0%.

The switch to cloud technology as a result of remote working may be a reason for this turn of events, pleasing advisors and managers alike.





Artificial Intelligence

The Artificial Intelligence chapter is sponsored by Nuance Technologies.

Nuance helps organisations deliver intelligent self-service and human-assisted solutions so customers can easily get what they need from your contact centre, website or mobile app – how, when and where they want.

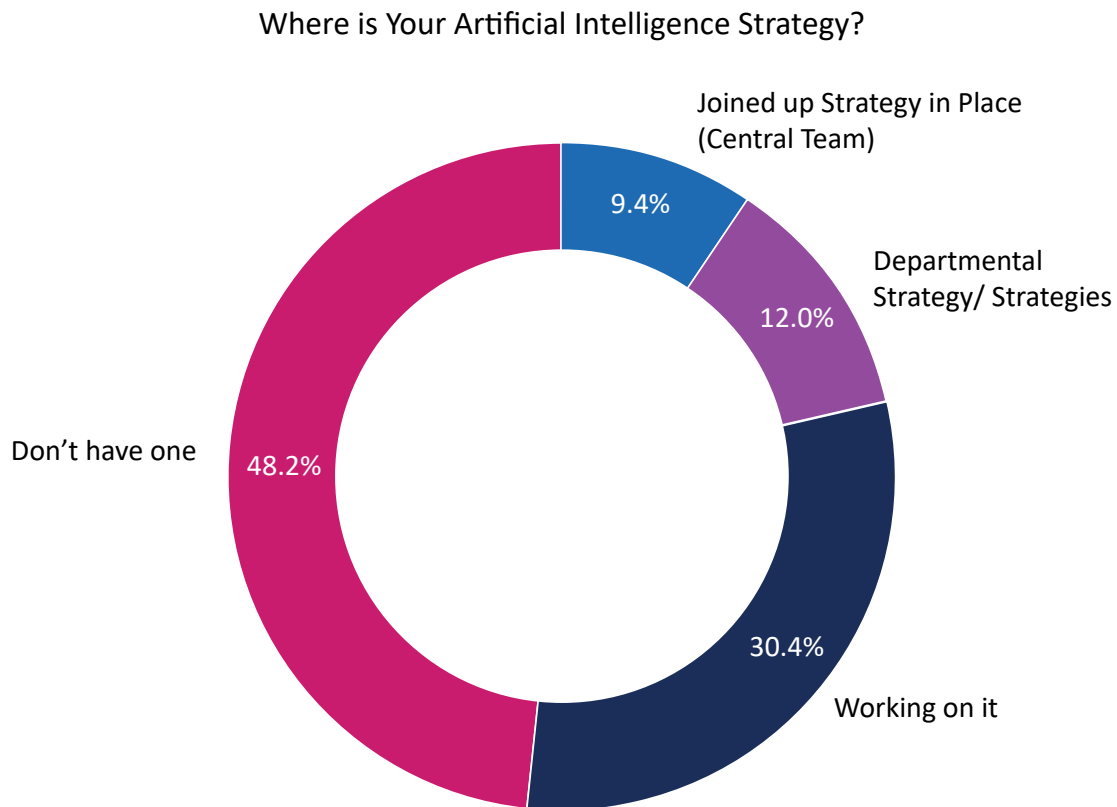
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8. Where is Your Artificial Intelligence Strategy?

More Than Half of Contact Centre Have Created an AI Strategy

The appetite for AI across the contact centre industry is clear, with 51.8% of contact centres already developing a special strategy.



Of course, for many contact centres, this strategy is still in its infant stages – with 30.4% of participants reporting that they were “working on it”.

Yet others are making impressive progress. 9.4% have a joined-up strategy in place, while a further 12.0% have implemented departmental strategies.

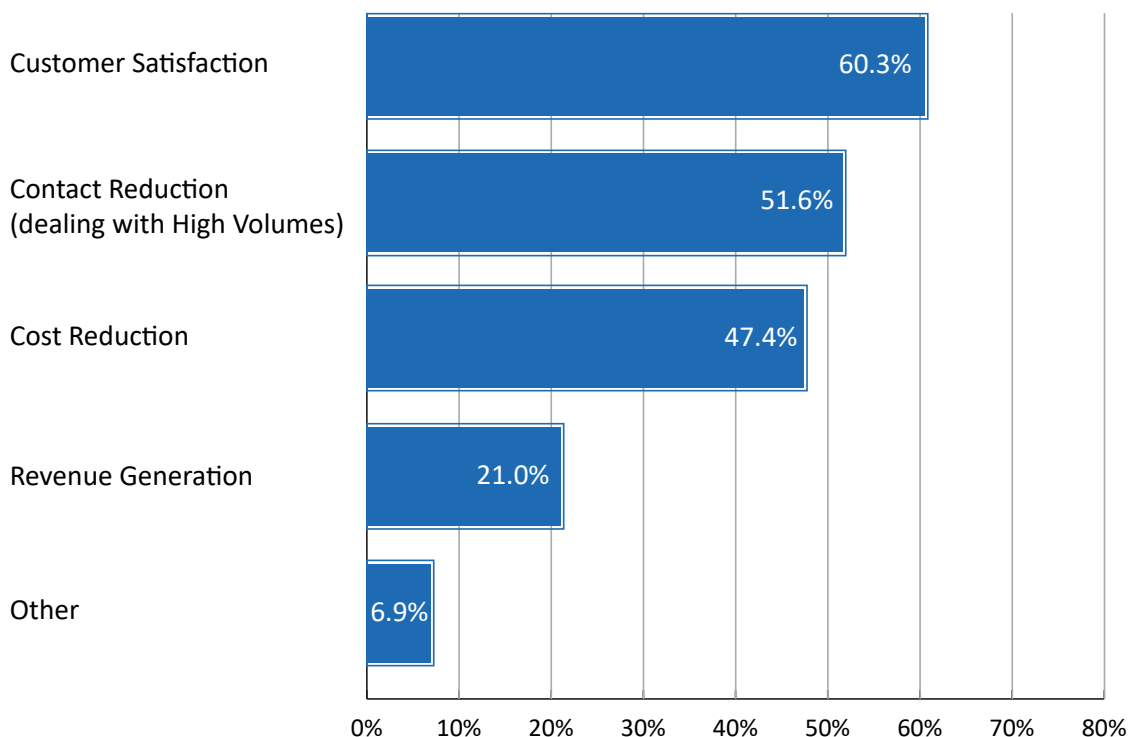
Together, these findings indicate that more than one in every five contact centres has completed a major AI project.

9. What are the Biggest Drivers for Implementing AI?

Customer Satisfaction Is Driving AI Growth

According to 60.3% of our industry professionals, customer satisfaction is a key driver for the implementation of AI technologies. This makes it the biggest motivator for most contact centres.

What are the Biggest Drivers for Implementing AI?



Considering the cost-cutting capabilities of automation technologies, this was quite a surprise. Yet 47.4% of participants also considered “cost reduction” to be a major motivator, while 51.6% identified contact reduction as a key goal for implementing AI.

These findings perhaps indicate that getting the balance right – in terms of both customer and business outcomes – is a significant consideration. Therefore, there is no one definitive driver of AI adoption.

More AI Motivations

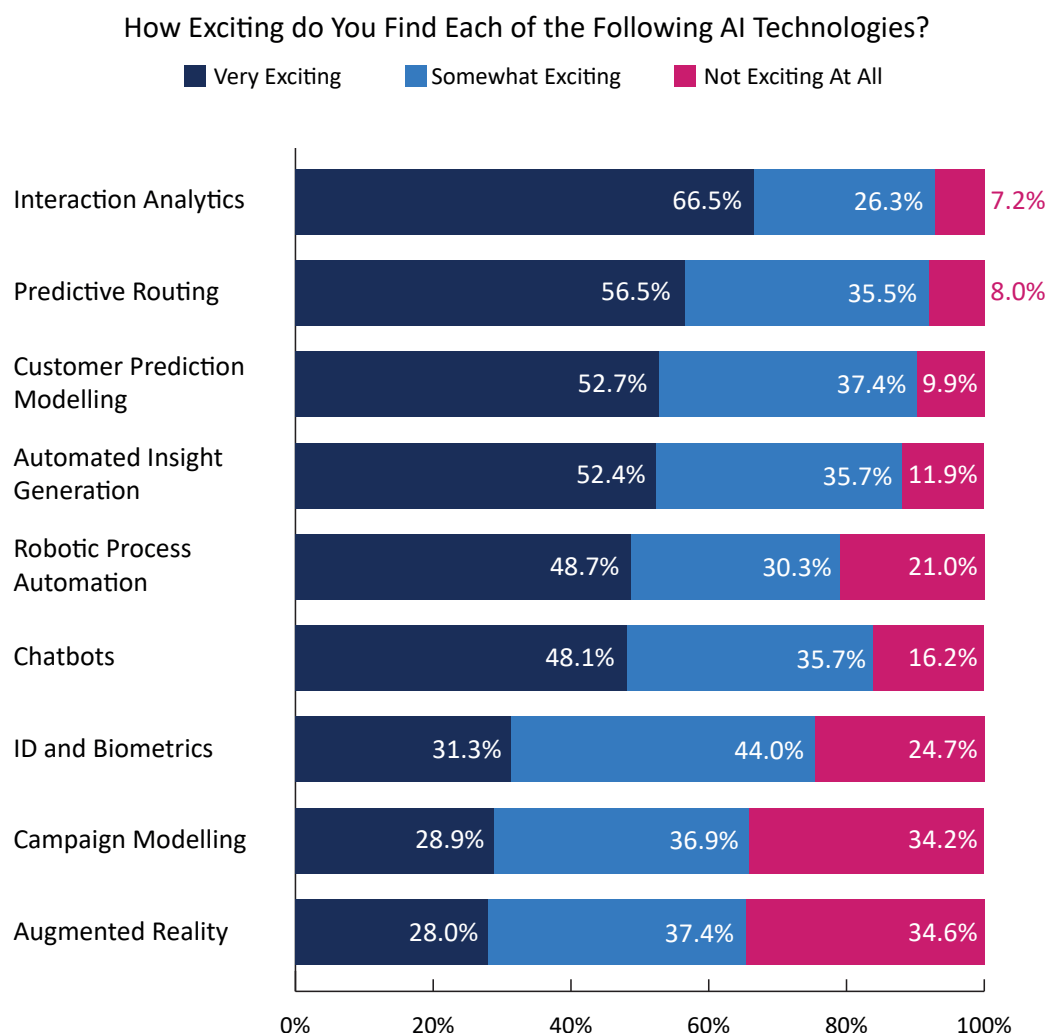
Alongside each of the options presented in the chart, 6.8% of participants pinpointed several other objectives for implementing contact centre AI. These included:

- Boosting customer loyalty/lifetime value
- Creating a better advisor support system
- Improving the employee experience
- Lowering staffing requirements
- Using chatbots to provide another customer service channel

10. How Exciting do You Find Each of the Following AI Technologies?

Interaction Analytics Steals the Limelight

Interaction analytics appears to be the AI-based technology that's best capturing the attention of contact centre leaders.



Almost two-thirds of those surveyed consider the software to be “very exciting”, while a further 26.3% are somewhat excited by its potential.

Other AI-powered tools that over half of participants were very excited by include predictive routing (56.5%), customer prediction modelling (52.7%) and automated insight generation (52.4%).

Augmented Reality Isn't Setting Pulses Racing

One technology that contact centres cannot yet perceive value from is augmented reality (AR).

While AR is being innovatively used in eCommerce, its application within contact centres is not yet setting the world alight.

34.6% of contact centres find AR “not exciting at all”, which is even higher than the percentage that believes it's “very exciting” (28.0%).

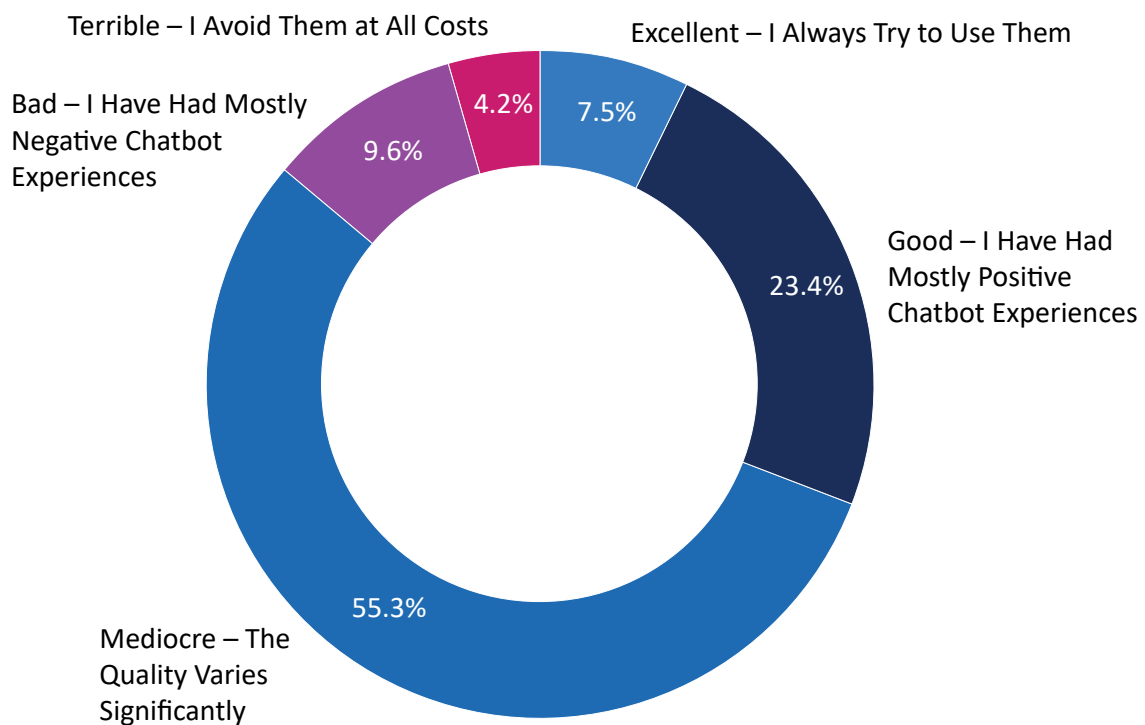
Another AI tool that slots into this category is campaign modelling, with 34.2% of contact centres finding no promise in the technology.

11. What Has Been Your Experience in Dealing with Other Organizations' Chatbots?

Chatbots are a Mixed Bag

Chatbots are undoubtedly a tricky technology to get right. Some contact centres have succeeded, but others have missed the mark.

What Has Been Your Experience in Dealing with Other Organizations' Chatbots?



Such a conclusion can easily be drawn from the chart above, in which 55.3% of contact centres report that their experiences with chatbots have been “mediocre”.

The good news, however, is that 30.9% of respondents have either had good or excellent experiences with chatbots. Compared to the 13.8% that stated their experiences to have been “bad” or “terrible”, that’s a considerable difference.

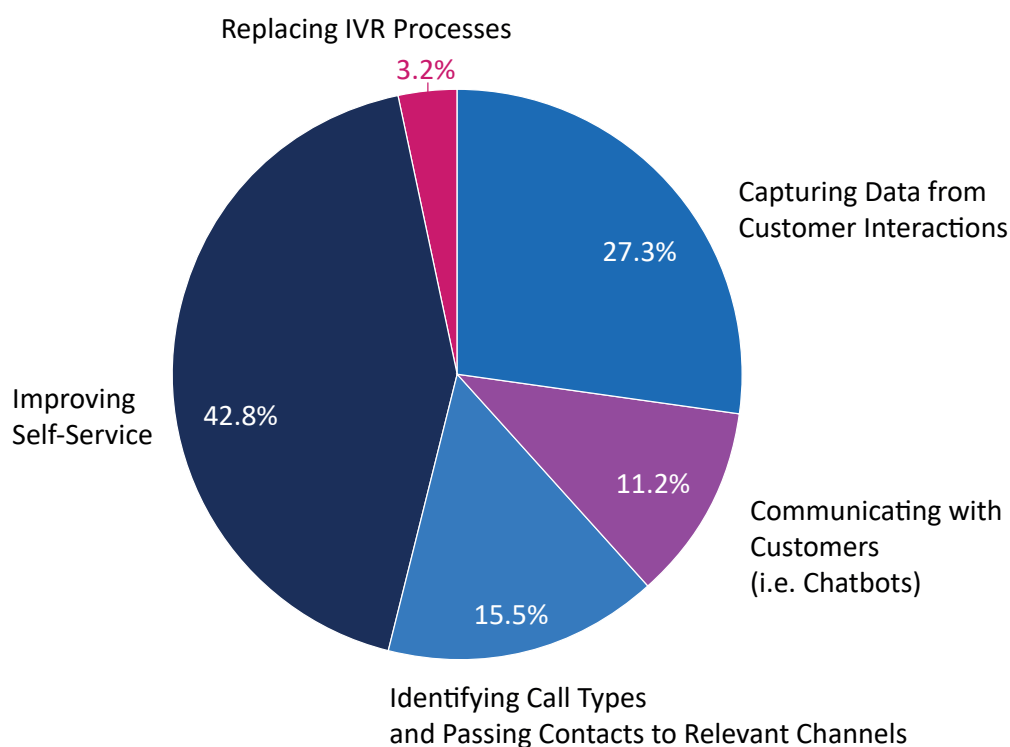
So, while the jury is still out on the overall impact of chatbots on customer experiences, many great models are delivering high customer satisfaction.

12. Which do You Think is the Most Valuable Use of AI in the Contact Centre?

Self-Service AI is Held in High Regard

From a list of five common AI applications, improving self-service was by far and away the most promising use-case, according to our industry professionals.

Which do You Think is the Most Valuable Use of AI in the Contact Centre?



42.8% of those surveyed stated so, a much higher percentage than those who believed that chatbots were the most valuable example of AI (11.2%).

For now, this perhaps underlines that self-service is still viewed as a much more reliable method of reducing contact volumes.

Two other uses of AI, capturing data from customer interactions (27.3%) and identifying call types and passing contacts through to relevant channels (15.5%), also drew significant attention.

Yet using AI technologies to replace interactive voice response (IVR) processes didn't receive quite the same hype, with only 3.2% of contact centres choosing this option.



Customer Experience

The Customer Experience chapter is sponsored by Odigo.

Odigo helps large organisations connect with individuals through world-class, cloud-based contact centre solutions. Our cutting-edge, proprietary technologies enable a seamless, efficient, omnichannel experience for your customers and a satisfying, engaging experience for service agents.

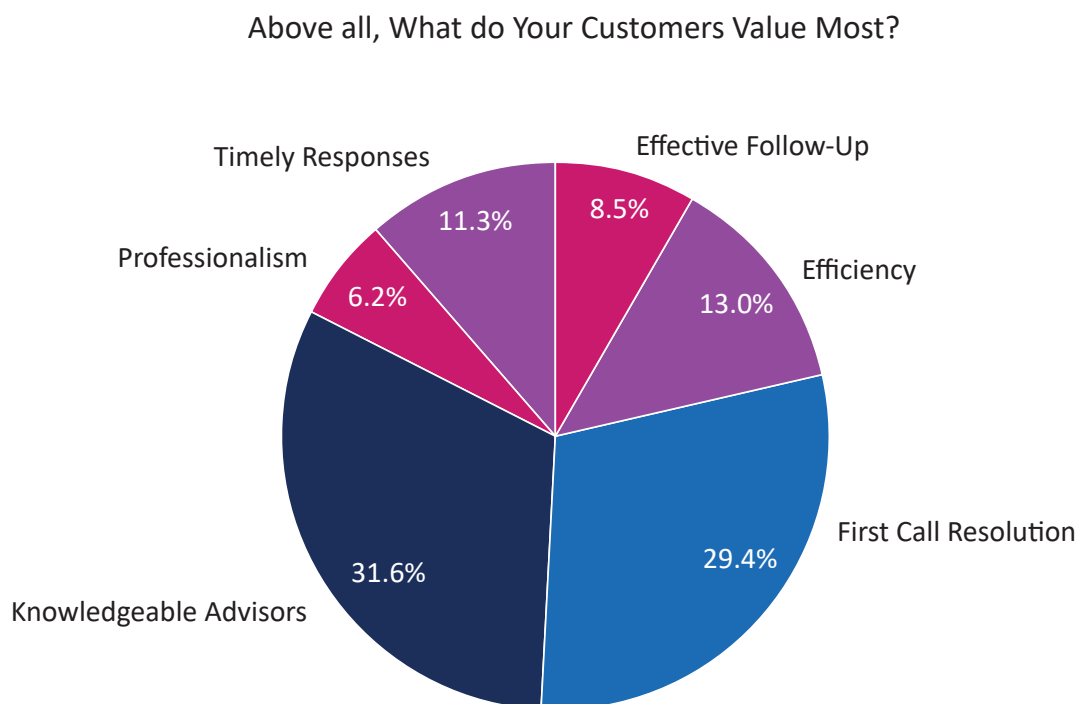
Odigo serves more than 400,000 agents and business users globally. With a 25-year history of industry firsts, Odigo has more than 250 clients around the world.

www.odigo.com

13. What do Your Customers Value Most?

Customers Demand Knowledgeable Advisors

According to the biggest percentage of survey participants (31.6%), knowledgeable contact centre advisors are what their customers crave the most.



Coming in second was First Contact Resolution (FCR), with 29.4% of our contact centre professionals selecting this option.

There is an obvious overlap across these areas in terms of equipping advisors with the ability to combat queries as skilfully as possible.

Combining the two percentages, it can be concluded that six in every ten contact centres believe that customers care most about getting clear resolutions to their queries.

Response Times Ride on the Coat-Tails

An emphasis on meeting service levels has long been a significant strain on contact centres. So it was a surprise to see only 11.3% of our professionals select “timely responses”.

Could this indicate that more contact centres are relaxing their service levels to prioritize resolution? Perhaps it’s to overcome recruitment struggles or unexpected spikes in call volumes?

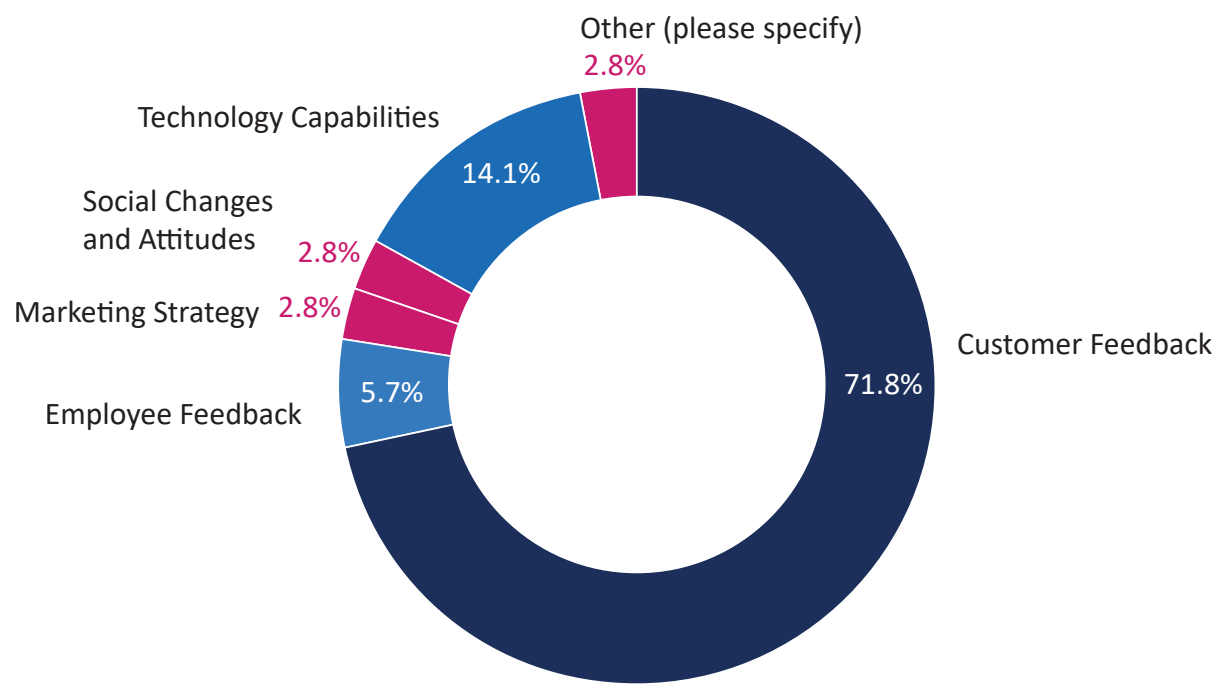
Maybe, but 13.0% of contact centres also selected “efficiency” as their top customer priority, so it’s difficult to jump to such conclusions.

14. What is the Most Important Element in Customer Experience Design?

Customer Feedback Drives Customer Experience Design

71.8% of our respondents believe that customer experience design should be led by customer feedback, making it by far the most popular response.

What is the Most Important Element in Customer Experience Design?



While each of the other considerations is undoubtedly important, feedback is key to understanding the existing journey and identifying pain points.

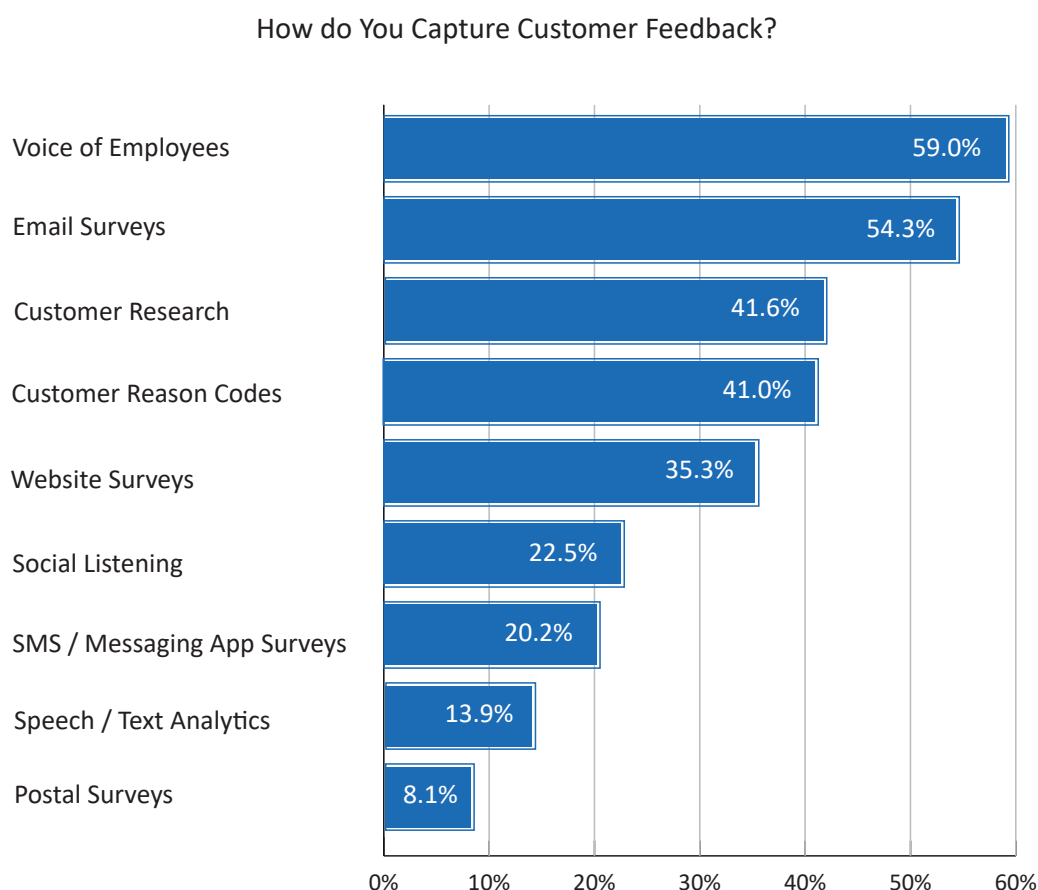
With this in hand, an organization can then create a vision for the future journey and use technology to bring it to life.

However, that isn't the only approach, as 14.1% of contact centres report "technology capabilities" to be the most important element in customer experience design. This made it the second most selected response.

15. How do You Capture Customer Feedback?

Employees are the Greatest Source of Customer Feedback

The most common method of collecting customer feedback in the contact centre is through talking to advisors, with 59.0% of operations doing so.



As they talk to customers all day, advisors know what frustrates them most. Organizing focus groups, running advisor surveys and even engaging in informal discussions can provide great insight. Employees will also enjoy giving you their thoughts, as it's nice to feel listened to.

So, although it topped our list, it's still a surprise to see 41.0% of contact centres shun this feedback method. It is, after all, free and effective.

Fewer Than a Quarter of Contact Centres Collect Feedback via Social Media

Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have introduced their own analytics engines, which make social listening easier than ever.

There are also specialist social listening solutions that make it easy for companies to find out exactly what customers and non-customers are saying about them.

Taking all this into consideration, it was a surprise to see that only 22.5% of contact centres use social listening to gather feedback.

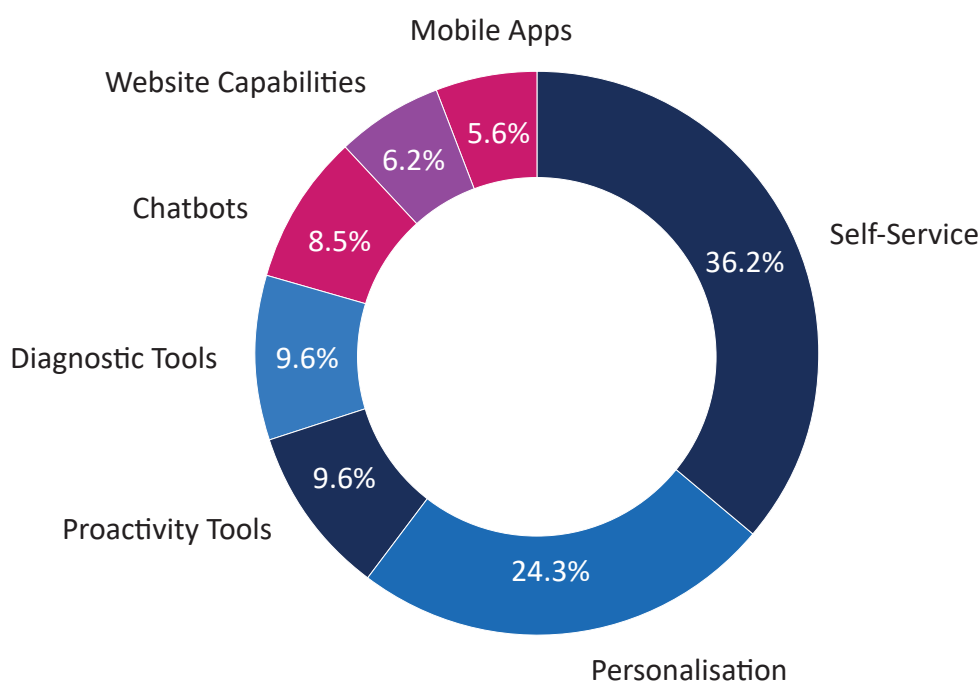
Another technique that placed lower than expected was call reason codes, with only 41.0% of our professionals selecting this option. This perhaps underlines a lack of trust across the industry in disposition data.

16. When Improving Customer Experience, Where do You Think Organizations Can Get Maximum Value for Money?

Self-Service is the Golden Goose of Customer Experience

Well over a third of respondents (36.2%) believe that advancing self-service capabilities within the customer experience will likely achieve the biggest return on investment (ROI).

When Improving Customer Experience, Where do You Think Organizations Can Get Maximum Value for Money?



As the digital revolution takes hold of the contact centre industry, the option not to engage with an advisor appears to be the most attractive, as customers seek simplicity.

Alongside self-service, personalization seems to be another area that's delivering ROI, with 24.3% of contact centres stating that they believe this delivers maximum value for money.

Are Website Capabilities Being Undervalued?

Surprisingly, only 6.2% of contact centres believe that enhancing website capabilities drives the most value for their operation – especially as the smartphone is now most customers' channel of choice.

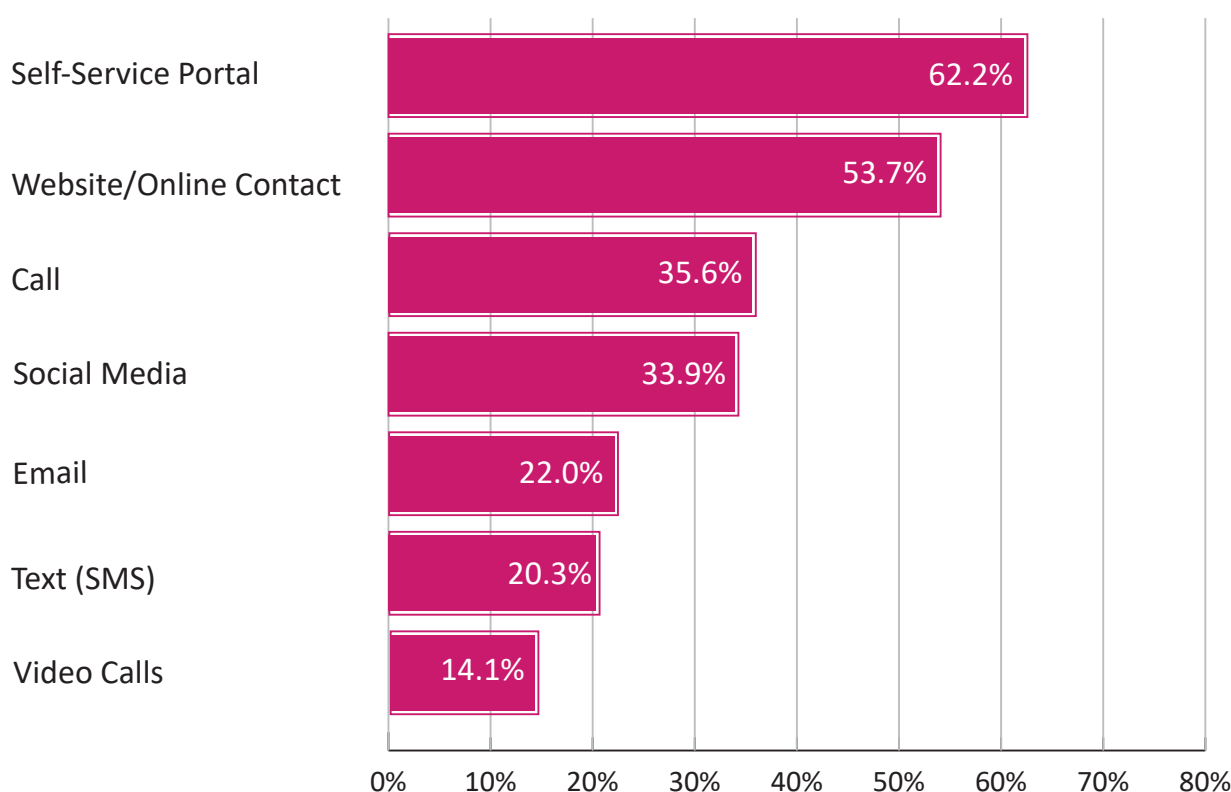
Of course, other answers – such as chatbots and self-service – do have other permutations for the company website, yet the percentage still seems low.

17. What Growth Channels Does Your Contact Centre See as Critical Growth Channels for Customer Experience?

Full Steam Ahead with Self-Service

Supporting our previous findings, self-service seems to be top of the priority list for most contact centres, with 62.2% of participants pinpointing it as a “critical growth channel”.

What Channel(s) Does Your Contact Centre See as Growth Channels for CX?



Also at the top of the list are online channels of contact, set on the company website (53.7%). This will likely include live chat, a channel that more and more operations are now implementing.

Finally, the third most “critical” channel was good old-fashioned phone calls (35.6%). After all, this channel will almost always be the go-to method of contact for emotional or complex problems.

Email Outscores Messaging

With the increased adoption of channels including Messenger, WhatsApp and WeChat, it’s perhaps a surprise to see email above messaging.

In fact, only 20.3% of industry professionals underlined messaging as a critical growth channel. Email, on the other hand, was viewed as such by 22.0% of contact centres.

While the hype surrounding asynchronous messaging platforms has been strong, this research suggests that contact centres are yet to perceive great value from the technology.



Future Innovations

The Future Innovations chapter is sponsored by Akixi.

Akixi is an award-winning company specialising in call and contact reporting and analytics services, so our partners always benefit from the focused support of our dedicated, expert team.

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We are proud to have been recognised within the industry, winning awards for Best Analytics Platform (UC Awards 2020) and Best Call Management Solution (Comms National Awards 2020).

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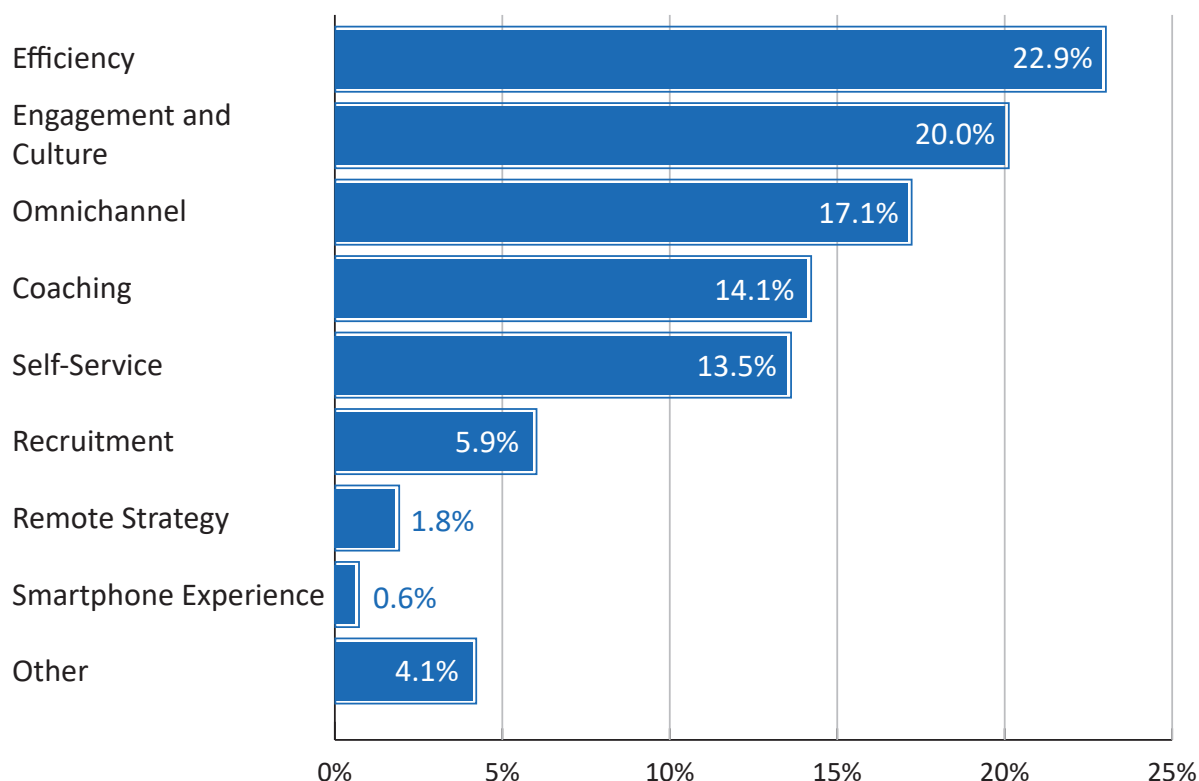
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18. What is Your Primary 2022 Priority?

Efficiency Rules the Roost

As is the case within 22.9% of contact centres, efficiency is the most common goal for contact centres as we head into 2022.

What is Your Primary 2022 Priority?



However, many more priorities also scored highly. For example, 20.0% of contact centres pinpointed engagement and culture, while 17.1% selected omnichannel.

At the bottom of the chart lies smartphone experience (0.6%) and – perhaps more unexpectedly – remote working (1.8%). The latter could highlight that the vast majority of contact centres have now got to grips with their approach to future working models.

More Popular Priorities for 2022

4.1% of contact centres also informed us that they have a different primary priority from those listed above.

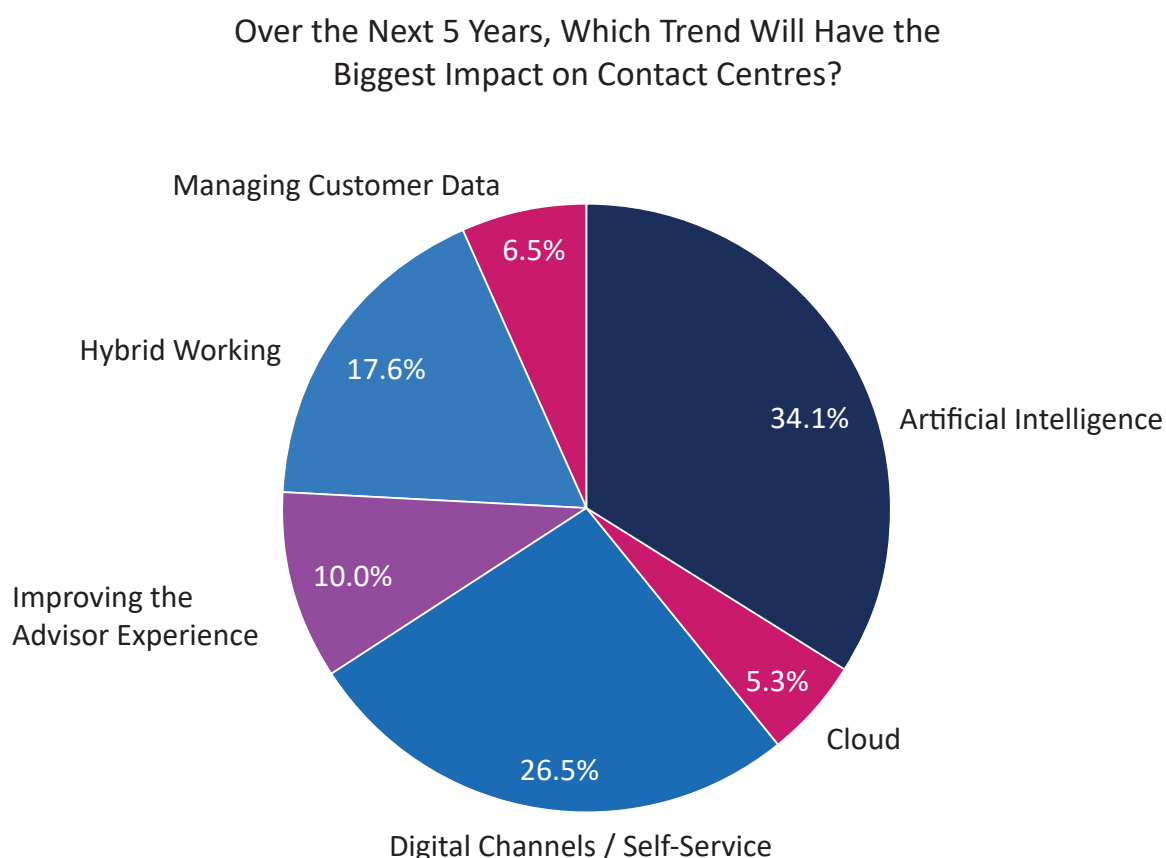
When pressed to share what exactly their key objective was, they put forward the following goals:

- Building better relationships with other departments
- Ensuring employee well-being
- Increasing reporting capabilities
- Improving advisor performance
- Scaling operations to handle growth

19. Over the Next 5 Years, Which Trend Will Have the Biggest Impact on Contact Centres?

AI is Set to Take Hold of Contact Centres

Over a third of survey participants (34.1%) believe that AI will be the biggest trend to impact contact centres within the next five years.



Such a percentage couples well with the earlier statistic that over half of contact centres already have an AI strategy in place.

The second most selected response was “digital channels / self-service”. 26.5% of respondents believe that this trend will have the greatest impact on contact centres.

Cloud Adoption Has Made Its Mark

The lowest percentage to feature within the pie chart is 5.3%. This figure represents the percentage of contact centre professionals that believe “cloud” will be the greatest trend to impact the industry.

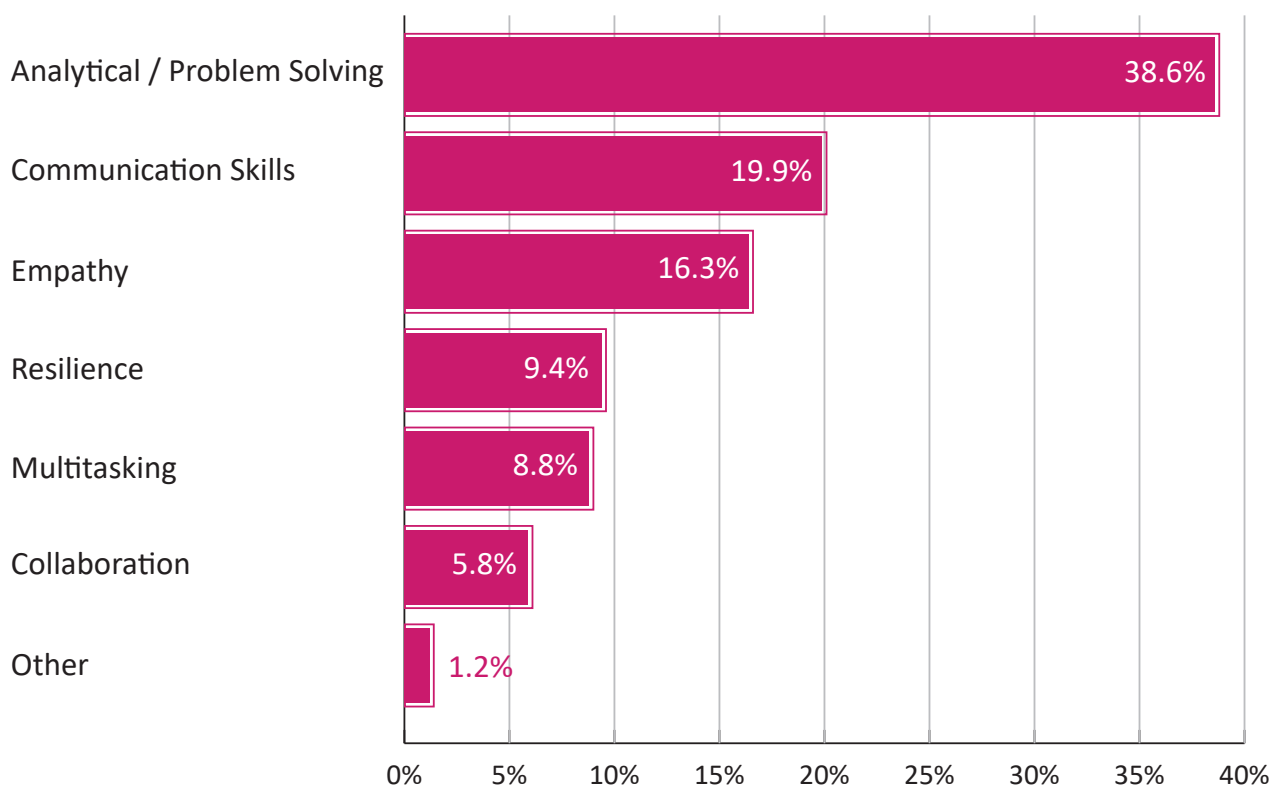
With the rush to remote working in 2020, most contact centres have already moved to the cloud. So, perhaps the technology is now – for most – a contact centre reality.

20. Which Customer Service Skill Will Be Most Important in the Contact Centre of the Future?

Analytical and Problem-Solving Skills Take the Top Spot

Almost four in every ten respondents believe that an advisor's ability to be analytical and to solve problems is paramount to the success of the future contact centre.

Which Customer Service Skill Will Be Most Important in the Contact Centre of the Future?



In fact, 38.6% of industry professionals believe it will be the most sought-after skill, as customer contacts become increasingly complex.

After all, the rise of self-service and automation is eating up all the simple, transactional contacts, leaving advisors with difficult call after difficult call.

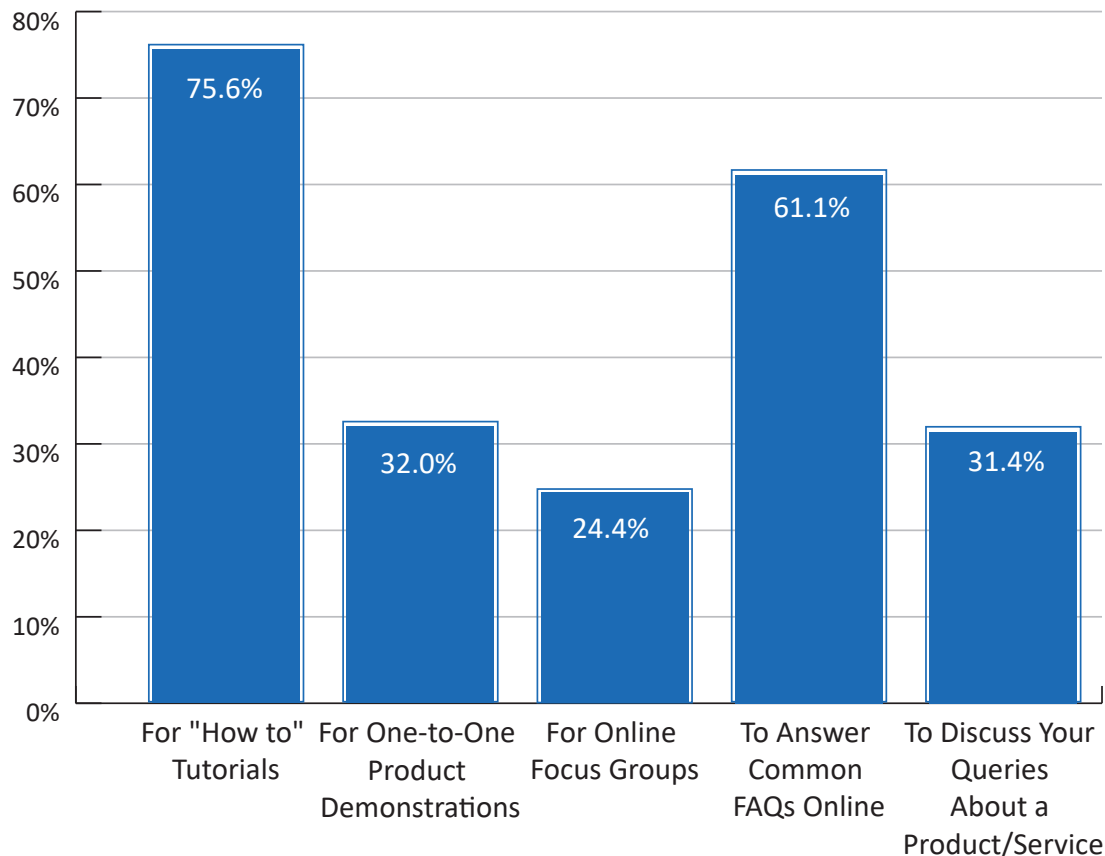
Such a vision for the future has many more implications. It's perhaps also the reason why empathy (16.3%) and resilience (9.4%) were also chosen by several participants.

21. Where Would You Like to See Video Used in Future Contact Centres?

Video Has a Mainstream Future, but Not for Customer Queries

The potential of video seems to have captured the imagination of contact centre leaders, with 75.6% of contact centres interested in using the channel for “how to” tutorials.

Where Would You Like to See Video Used in Future Contact Centres?



Also, 61.1% would like to see videos used to combat common customer queries through placing recorded answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the website.

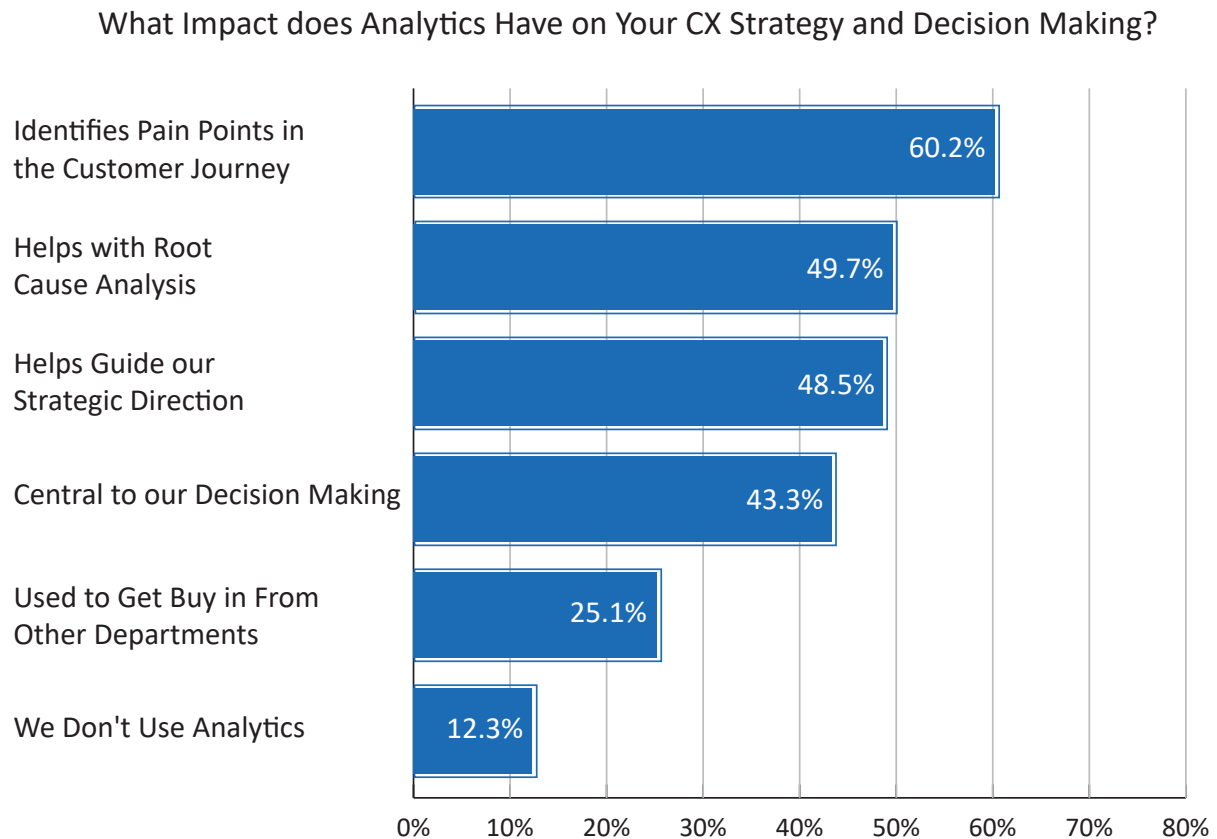
However, percentages drop considerably when it comes to implementing the channel for live advisor conversations.

Less than a third of contact centres would enjoy implementing the channel for one-to-one product demonstrations (32.0%). Even fewer feel the same way about using video to actively deal with customer queries (31.4%).

22. What Impact Does Analytics Have on Your CX Strategy and Decision Making?

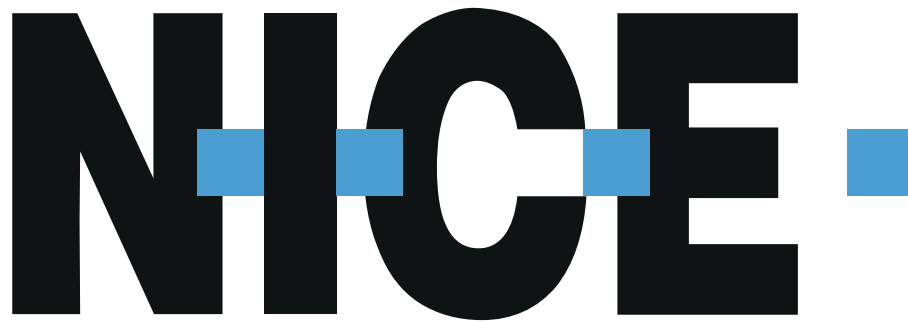
Identifying Pain Points and Root Cause is Where Analytics is Most Promising

Over 60% of organizations use customer experience analytics to identify pain points within the customer journey. This makes it the most common use of the initiative.



The second most common is root cause analysis (49.7%). By combining these top two uses, organizations can systematically find and remove frictions within customer journeys.

Such a finding links in well with the underlying theme that monitoring and reducing customer effort is a key future trend.



Workforce Management

The Workforce Management chapter is sponsored by NICE.

NICE is a global enterprise software provider that enables organizations to improve customer experience and business results, ensure compliance and fight financial crime.

Our mission is to help our customers build and strengthen their reputation by uncovering customer insight, predicting human intent and taking the right action to improve their business. We do this by capturing large amounts of structured and unstructured data (customer interactions, and transactions) from multiple sources. We then apply analytics to this data to provide real-time insight and uncover intent.

Our solutions allow organizations to operationalize this insight and embed it within their daily business processes, empowering them to provide better service, motivate and engage employees and identify potential risk to the enterprise.

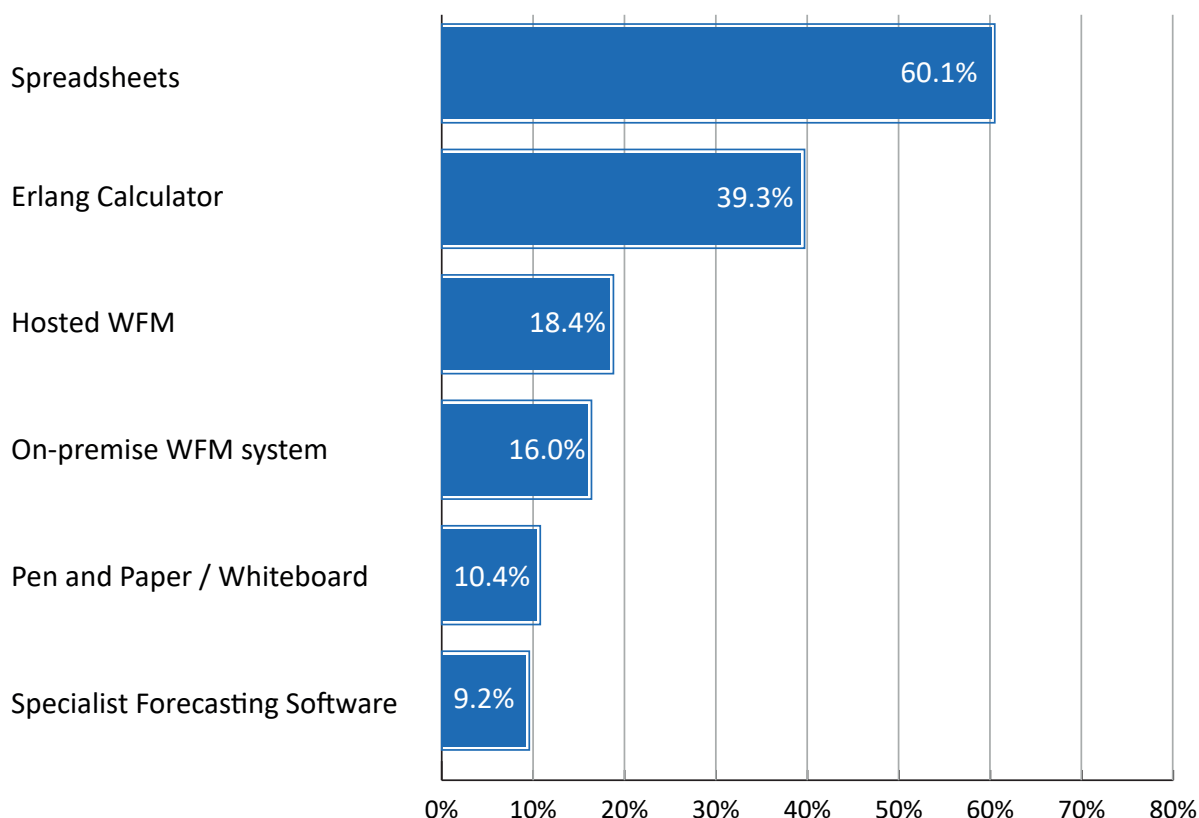
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23. What Equipment do You Use for Forecasting and Scheduling?

Spreadsheets Still Dominate WFM

Most contact centres (60.1%) are still using spreadsheets for WFM. In many cases, this will likely be in tandem with an Erlang Calculator – a tool used by 39.3% of operations.

What Equipment do You Use for Forecasting and Scheduling?



Of course, many will find success in using these tried-and-tested solutions. 10.4% of contact centres have even stuck to pens, paper and whiteboards.

Yet, in large contact centres, these spreadsheets can become difficult to manage, while adding flexibility to them is also a tricky task.

Many WFM Systems Have Stayed On-Premise

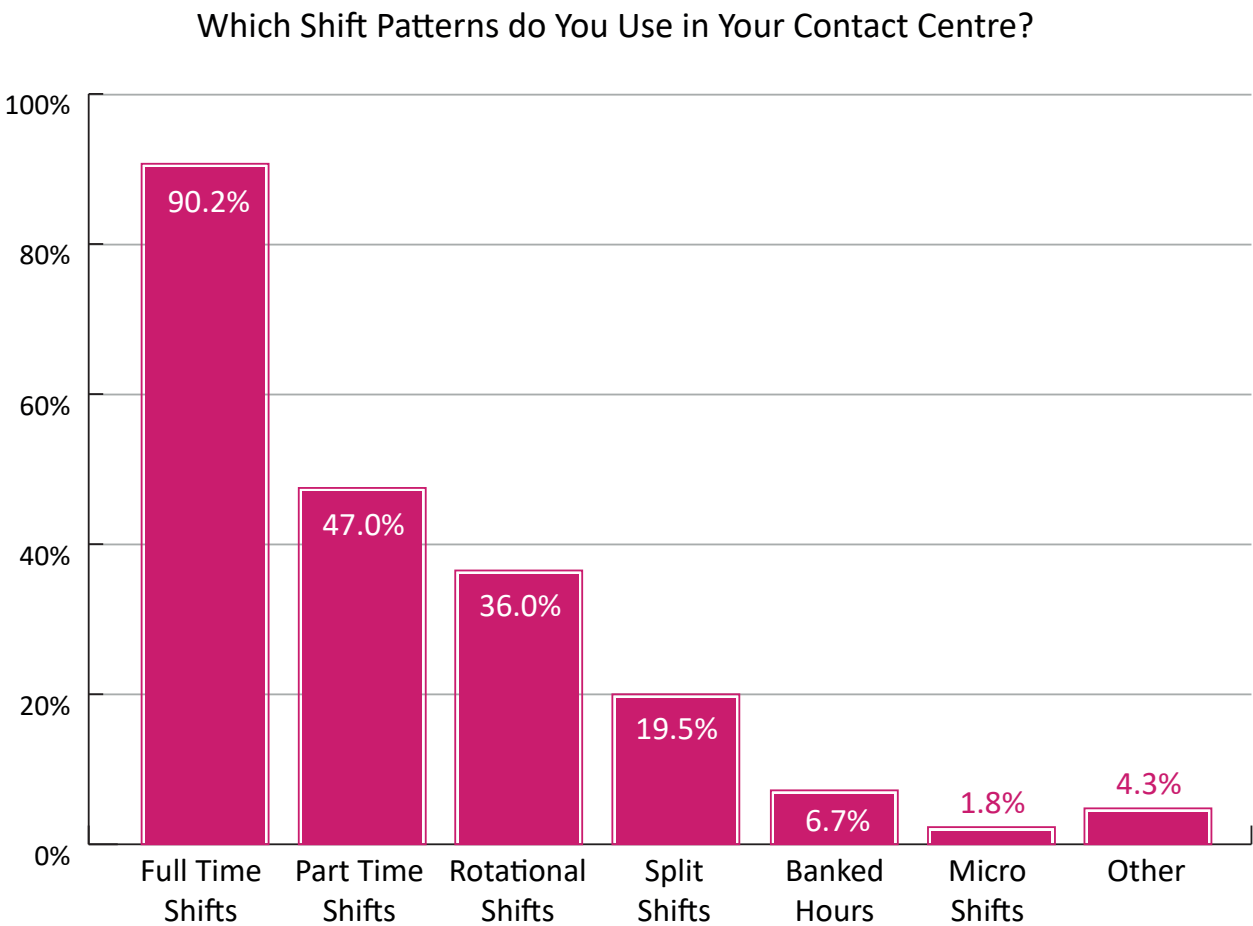
While many contact centres have transitioned to the cloud to pave the way for remote working, many have kept their solutions on-premise.

In fact, almost half of WFM solutions remain planted within contact centre walls. This perhaps indicates a commitment to keeping the resource planning function inside the larger operation, despite the rise in remote working.

24. Which Shift Patterns do You Use in Your Contact Centre?

Little More Than a Third of Contact Centres Run Rotational Shifts

Rotational shifts have long been a point of contention amongst planners, as no one leads a rotational life.



Such contention appears to be shared across the industry, as just 36.0% of contact centres are now implementing the shift pattern within their operation.

While rotational shifts can prove effective in dealing with high contact volumes, it appears that other options are now coming to the fore.

Split-Shifts are a Popular New Shift Pattern

Almost one in every five contact centres are now using split-shifts to get to grips with variations in call volumes forecasted across the day.

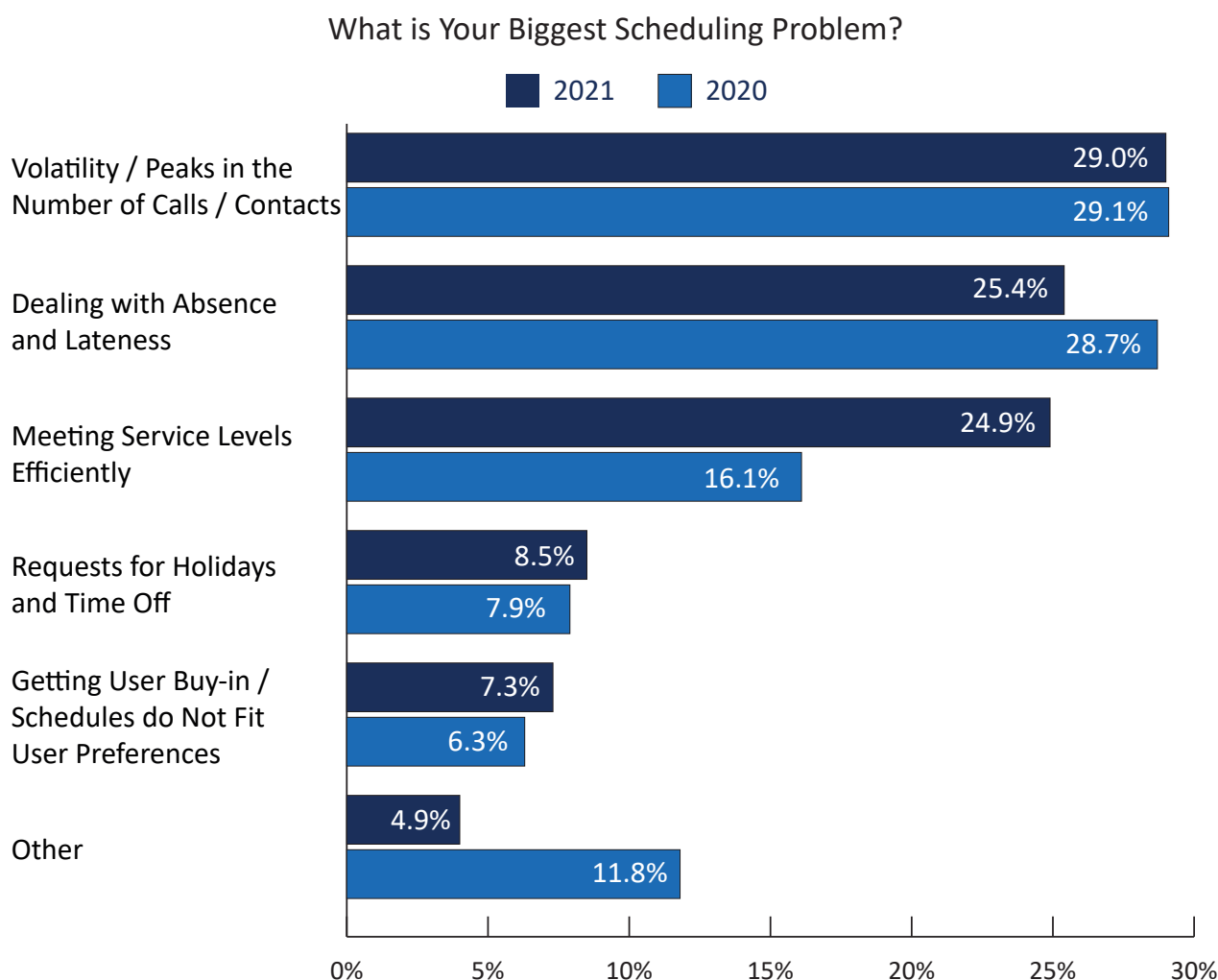
Typically, contact centres will receive two great peaks in contact volumes, with a big drop in the middle of the day. Split-shifts can be used to better meet those peaks, while keeping staffing levels low when the drops occur.

Another popular option – amongst those that selected “other” – was casual shifts. Casual employment means that neither the contact centre nor the advisor has an obligation to the other, but shifts are offered as and when required.

25. What is Your Biggest Scheduling Problem?

Forecast Volatility is Causing Scheduling Havoc

For a second consecutive year, forecast volatility was the biggest problem that resource planners faced when trying to design schedules.



Again, around 29% of participants picked unexpected changes to contact volumes as their greatest scheduling challenge, highlighting the importance of improving forecast accuracy.

The second greatest issue highlighted was also the same as in 2020. But, with only 25.4% of professionals now pointing towards this problem, it seems that contact centres are getting better at dealing with absence and lateness.

Meeting Service Levels is Becoming Increasingly Difficult

The struggle to meet service level targets has increased within the past year, as now 24.9% of contact centres consider it to be their biggest scheduling problem.

Compare this figure to the 16.1% recorded last year and that's a growth of 54.7%.

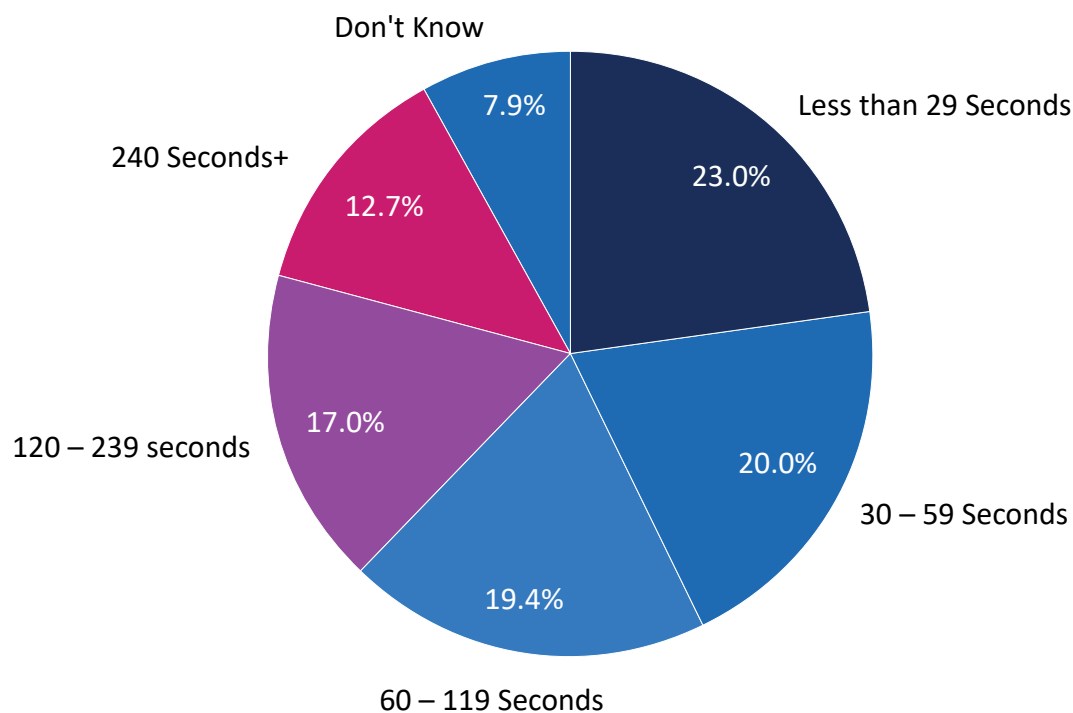
Perhaps this is a knock-on effect of forecast volatility, maybe it reflects attrition and recruitment problems or schedule adherence could be faltering. There are many possible reasons, yet this is – no doubt – a significant cause for concern.

26. On Average How Long do Your Callers Wait Before Abandoning?

Customer Patience Appears to Be at an All-Time Low

43.0% of contact centres report that most of their customers will abandon if they're left in the call queue for only one minute.

On Average, How Long do Your Callers Wait Before Abandoning?



Yet, if we take a closer look, these results become even more astonishing. 23.0% will, in fact, wait for less than 30 seconds.

Also, these percentages could be even higher, as 7.9% of those surveyed didn't know exactly how long their customers' average patience was.

It's worth noting, however, that there is a great discrepancy between the percentages collected, as 12.7% note that their customers will wait for over 240 seconds.

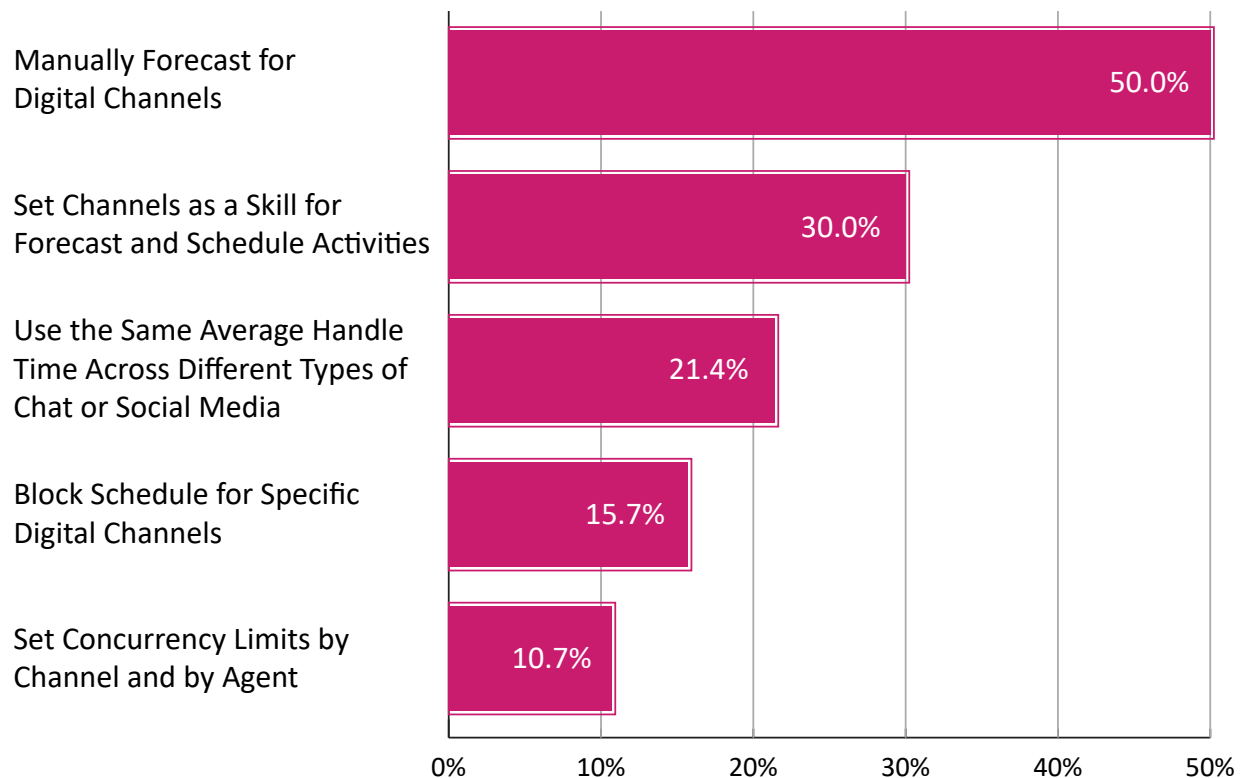
The big variance is perhaps due to the variety of contact centres surveyed. After all, customers looking for technical support will, generally, wait longer than those calling a sales line.

27. How are Digital Channels Managed with Your WFM Solution?

Half of Contact Centres Manually Forecast Digital Channels

50.0% of contact centres manually create forecasts for digital channels. This is despite channels such as live chat and messaging being notoriously difficult to plan for.

How are Digital Channels Managed Within Your WFM Solution?



Why? Well, having advisors manage multiple conversations at once adds another layer of complexity to the planner's job.

To overcome this challenge, 10.7% of operations set concurrency limits by channel and advisor.

Other shortcuts that planners use to plan for digital channels include using the same AHT across different types of chat or social media (21.4%) and block scheduling for specific channels (15.7%).

While these tricks can simplify the planner's job, each can also lower planning efficiency.

Procedure*Flow*

Knowledge Management

The Knowledge Management chapter is sponsored by ProcedureFlow.

ProcedureFlow is a step-by-step visual guide that supports agents as they navigate company processes. With a knowledge management solution that simplifies complex information, employees can spend less time searching and focus on what they do best.

ProcedureFlow helps contact centers improve efficiency and better serve customers by making information easier to find, create, and maintain.

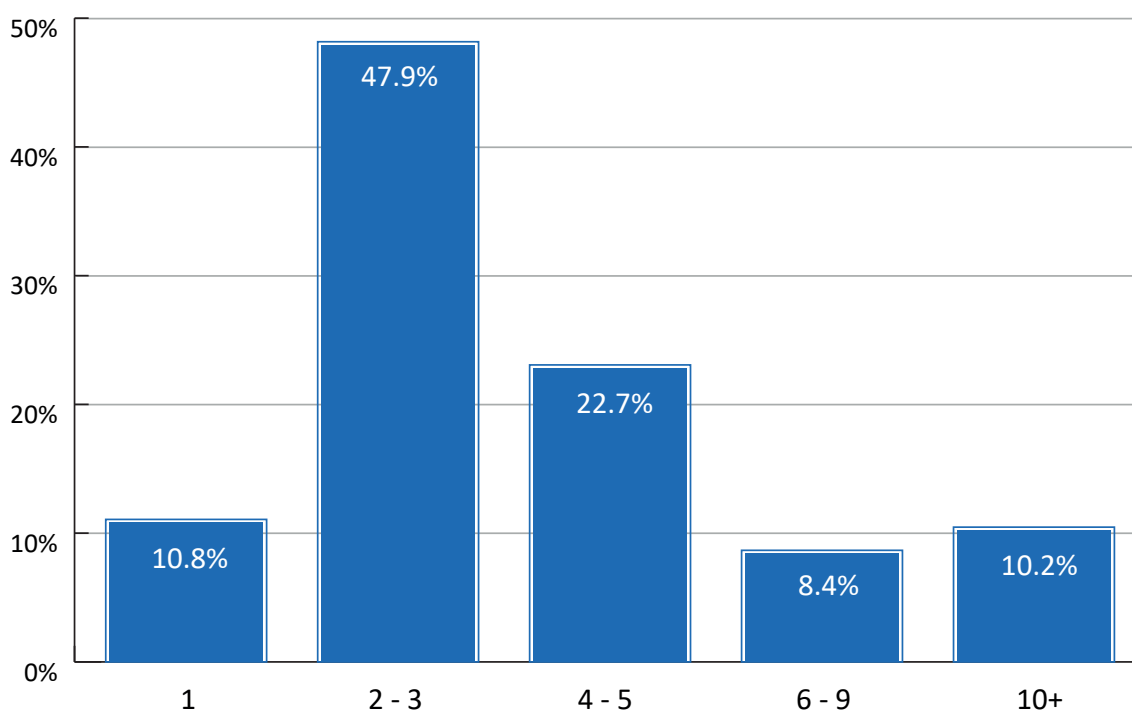
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28. How Many Knowledge Sources do Your Advisors Currently Use?

Only One in Ten Contact Centres Have a Single Knowledge Source

Just 10.8% of contact centres have created a single source of knowledge for advisors to dip in and out of as they respond to customer queries.

How Many Knowledge Sources do Your Advisors Currently Use?



Yet, pleasingly, 47.9% of contact centres have managed to cut their knowledge sources back to only two or three. This removes effort from the advisor experience and lowers handling times.

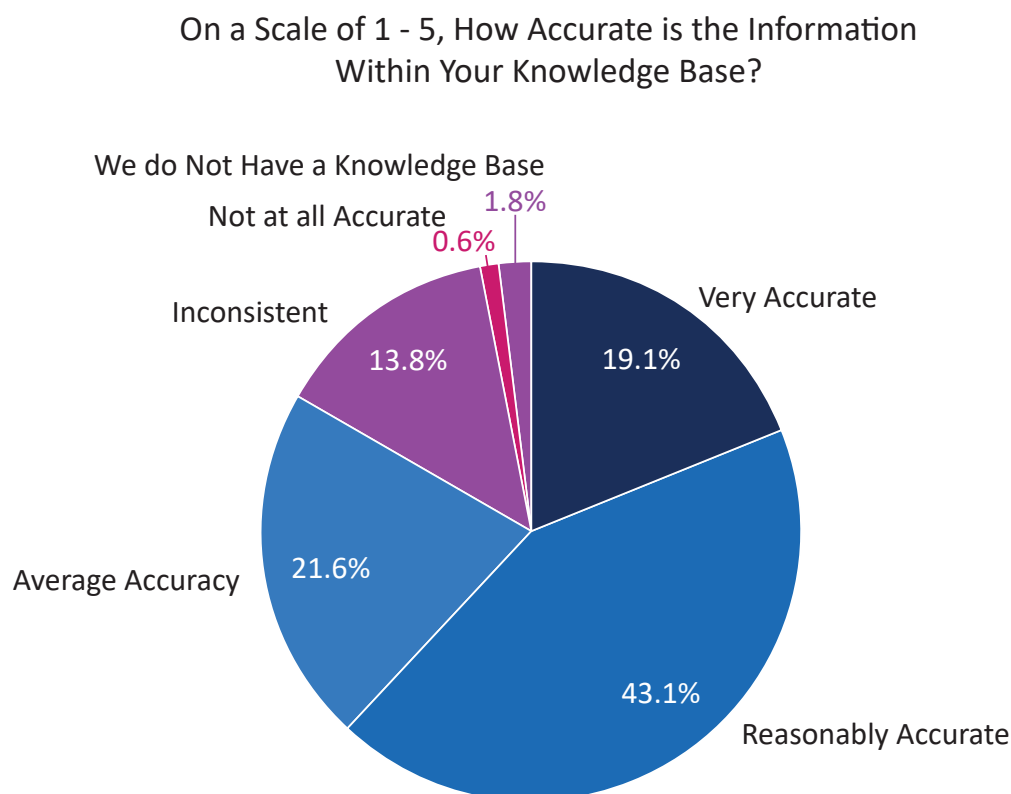
All in all, this means that well over 50% of contact centres ask advisors to delve into – at most – three knowledge systems.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, 10.2% of operations will ask their teams to switch between ten sources of knowledge or more. That's quite a difference.

29. On a Scale of 1 - 5, How Accurate is the Information Within Your Knowledge Base?

Knowledge Base Information is Not as Accurate as it Could Be

Over four-fifths of contact centres admit that the information stored within their knowledge base is not as accurate as it could be.



To be precise, only 19.1% of contact centres informed us that their knowledge base was fully up to date, with very accurate information.

Perhaps this is a worry, as advisors can lose faith in knowledge systems after just one bad experience. Yet 43.1% of participants did state that the information was “reasonably accurate”.

The greater cause for concern is that 13.8% of contact centres have inconsistent standards of knowledge accuracy and a further 0.6% admit that their knowledge is “not at all accurate”.

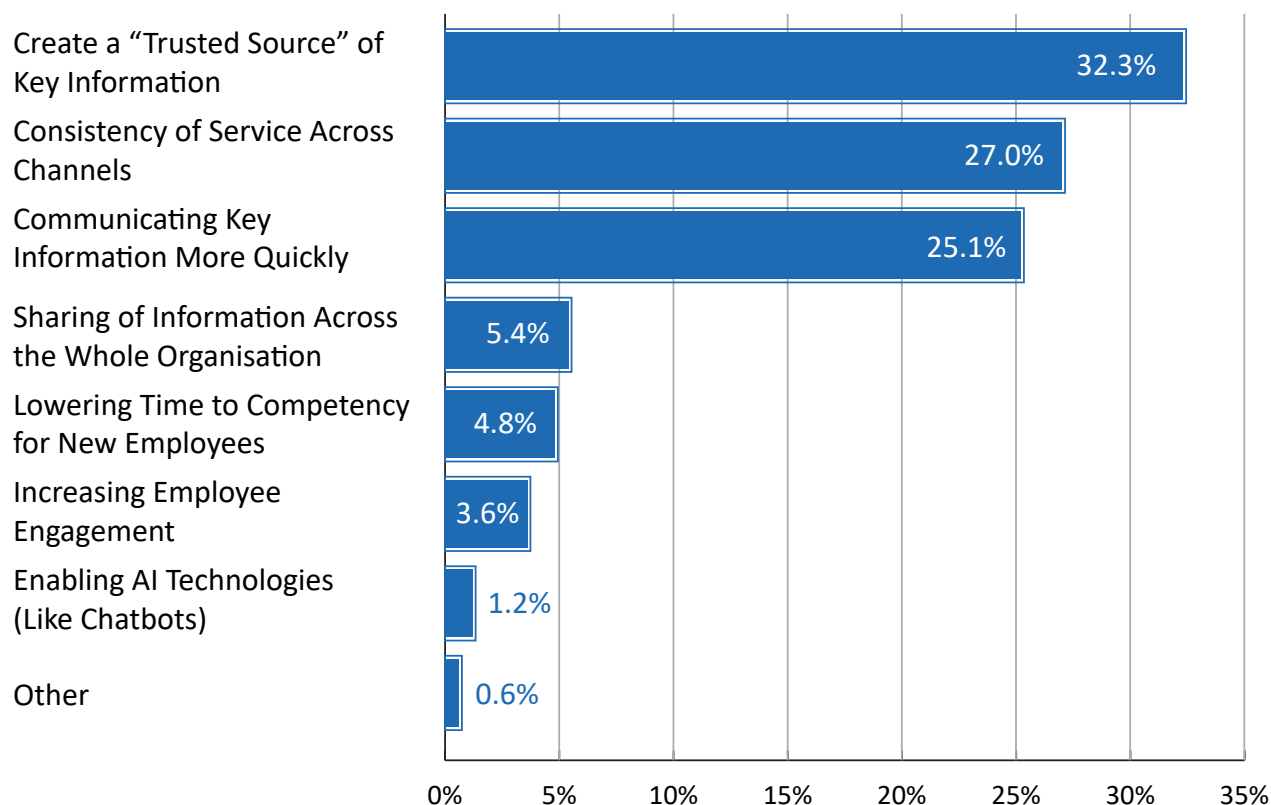
Indeed, across the industry, it seems that better knowledge management practices need to be established.

30: What is the Greatest Benefit of a Good Knowledge Base?

There are Three Clear Knowledge Base Benefits

When asked to choose the biggest benefit of a good knowledge base, respondents identified three clear favourites.

What is the Greatest Benefit of a Good Knowledge Base?



These were: creating a "trusted source" of key information (32.3%), developing consistency of service across channels (27.0%) and communicating key information more quickly (25.1%).

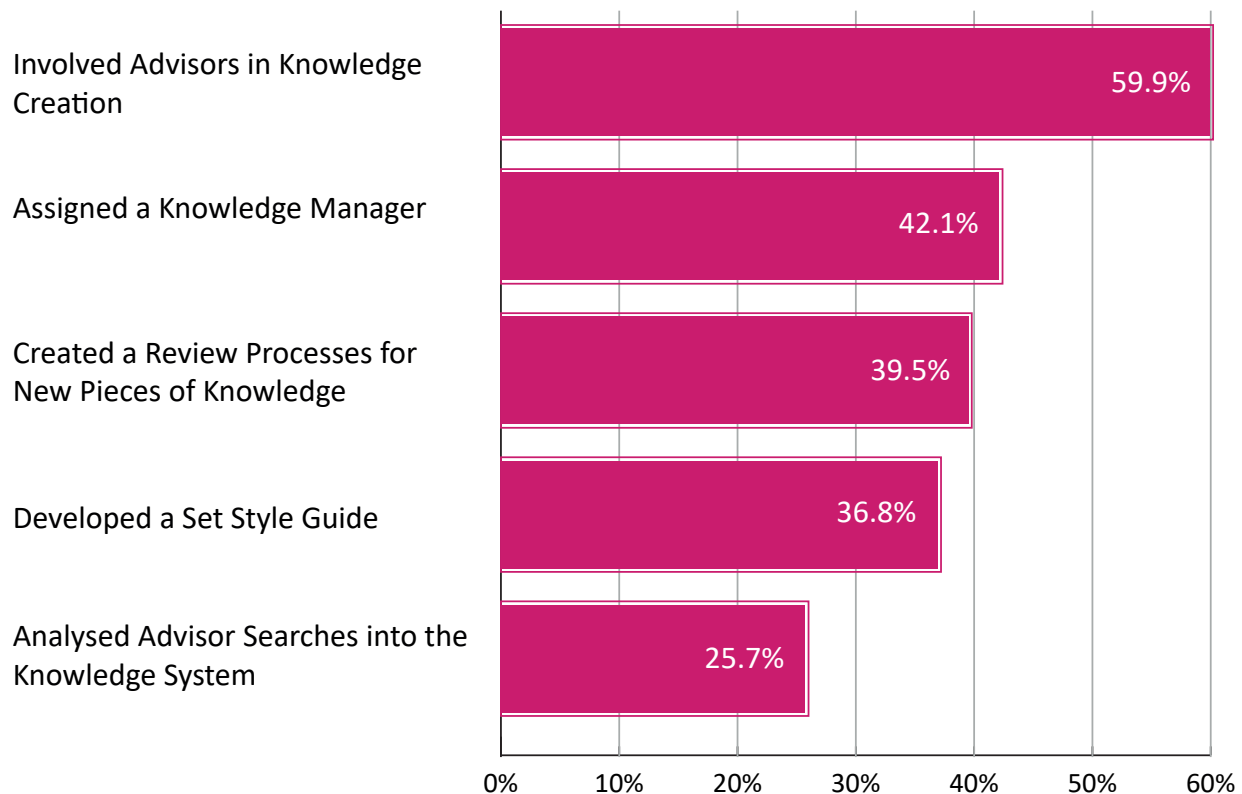
The number-one benefit is particularly interesting, given the results of the previous question. To create a "trusted source" of information, that information must be accurate, something many contact centres are struggling with.

31. As Part of Your Knowledge Management Strategy, Have You...?

Advisors are a Key Part of Knowledge Creation

The best people at simplifying customer responses are experienced contact centre advisors, who know the answers to common queries.

As Part of Your Knowledge Management Strategy, Have You...?



With this being the case, it was great to see 59.9% of contact centres involving their teams in knowledge creation.

An additional 42.1% have also appointed a knowledge manager to analyse content and keep the system up to date.

Style Guides are Seemingly Underutilized

Setting a style guide, so that every piece of knowledge is formatted in the same way, can be very beneficial, as advisors are then able to immediately make sense of the material.

However, little more than a third of contact centres do so, overlooking a potentially simple method of simplifying knowledge content.

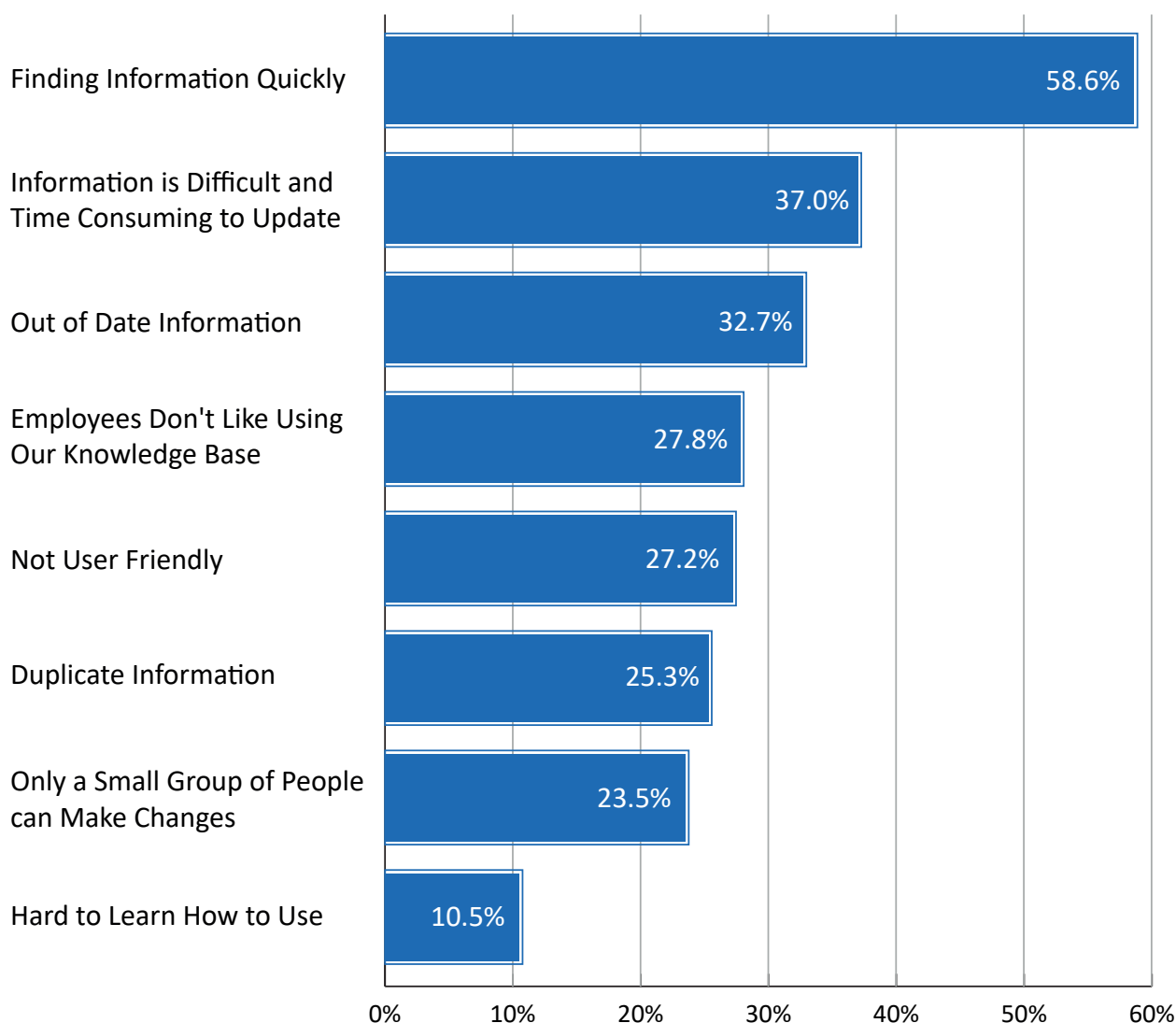
Also, only 39.5% of contact centres have set up a review process for pieces of knowledge. This could be a major factor in why knowledge base accuracy is so erratic.

32. What are the Greatest Challenges in Managing Your Knowledge Base?

Finding Information Quickly is the Biggest Challenge

More than half of contact centres admit that their advisors often fail to find information quickly when using knowledge systems.

What are the Greatest Challenges in Managing Your Knowledge Base?



In fact, 58.6% of contact centres are struggling to combat this problem, indicating that the search function within knowledge bases is causing difficulties.

Other major issues mostly revolve around the quality of content that's stored within the system.

For example, the second and third greatest challenges included information being difficult to update (37.0%) and out-of-date information confusing advisors (32.7%).

These problems bring to life the value of setting up reviews and monitoring knowledge metrics to bolster the system's reliability.



Headsets

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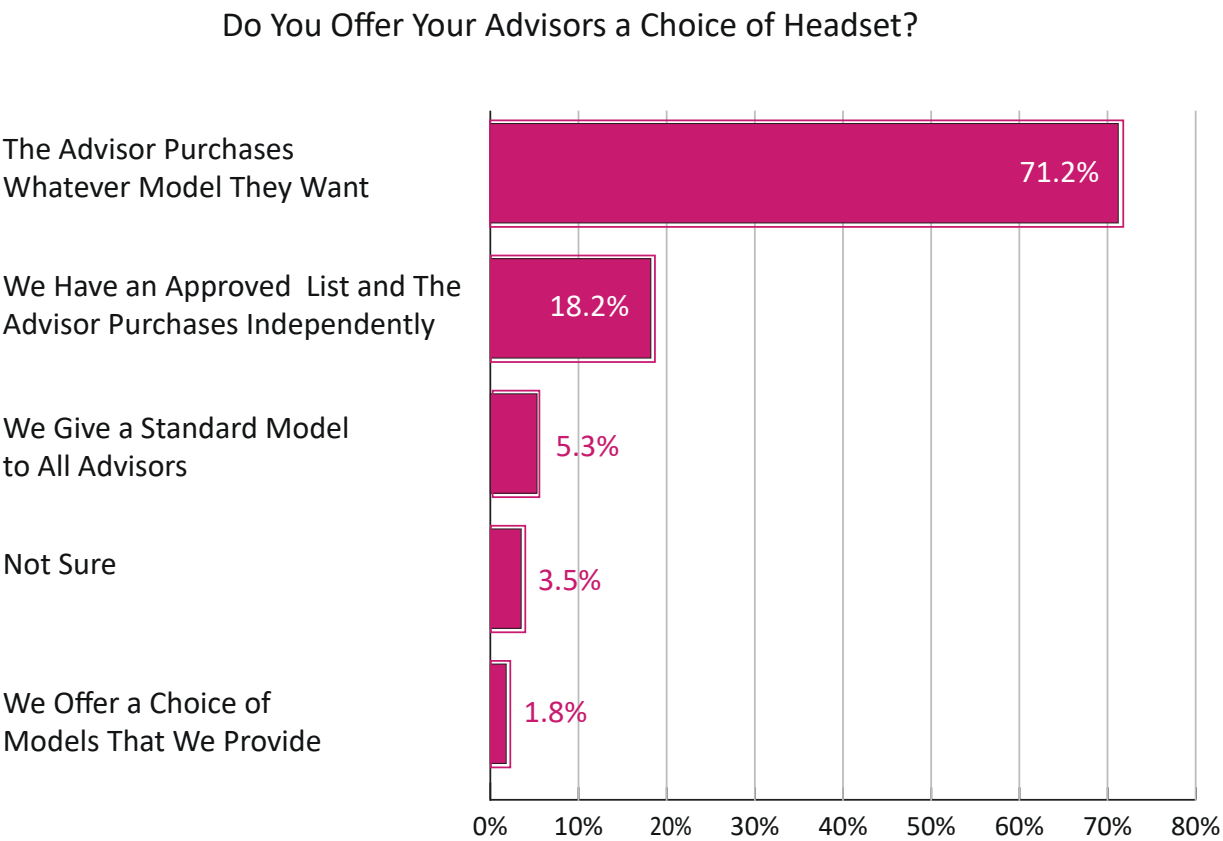
They're pro-grade, easy to use and work seamlessly with all the best video and audio conferencing services. With Poly (Plantronics, Inc. – formerly Plantronics and Polycom), you'll do more than just show up, you'll stand out.

www.poly.com

33. Do You Offer Your Advisors a Choice of Headsets?

Most Advisors Purchase Their Headsets

71.2% of contact centres enable advisors to purchase a headset model that they themselves choose.



In addition, 18.2% of operations have an approved list of headsets, which the advisors purchase independently, while a further 1.8% offer advisors a choice of models that they provide.

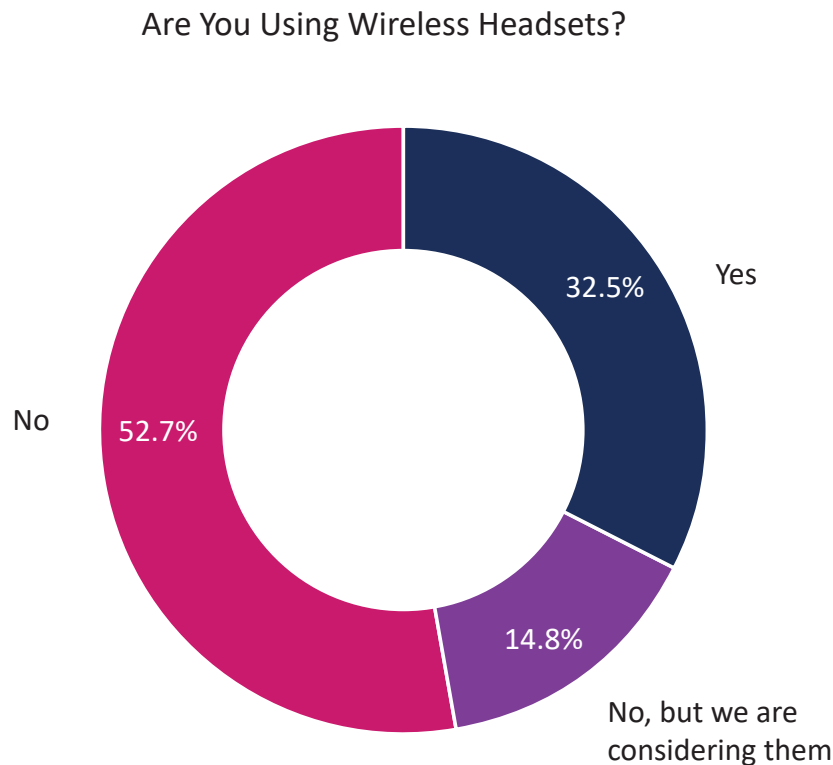
Both of these options can also work well as advisors again get to choose a style that suits them and offers comfort.

The results are, therefore, very promising, yet 5.3% of contact centres still give a standard model to all advisors. If the design is uncomfortable for the advisor, long shifts can prove problematic.

34. Are You Using Wireless Headsets?

The Dawn of Wireless Headsets is Happening, Slowly

More than two-thirds of contact centres (67.5%) are not currently using wireless headsets.



However, 14.8% of these operations are considering switching to wireless models to prevent advisors from feeling tethered to their desks all day.

These figures indicate that the technology is set to become ever more present across the industry, providing potential benefits in improved morale and performance.

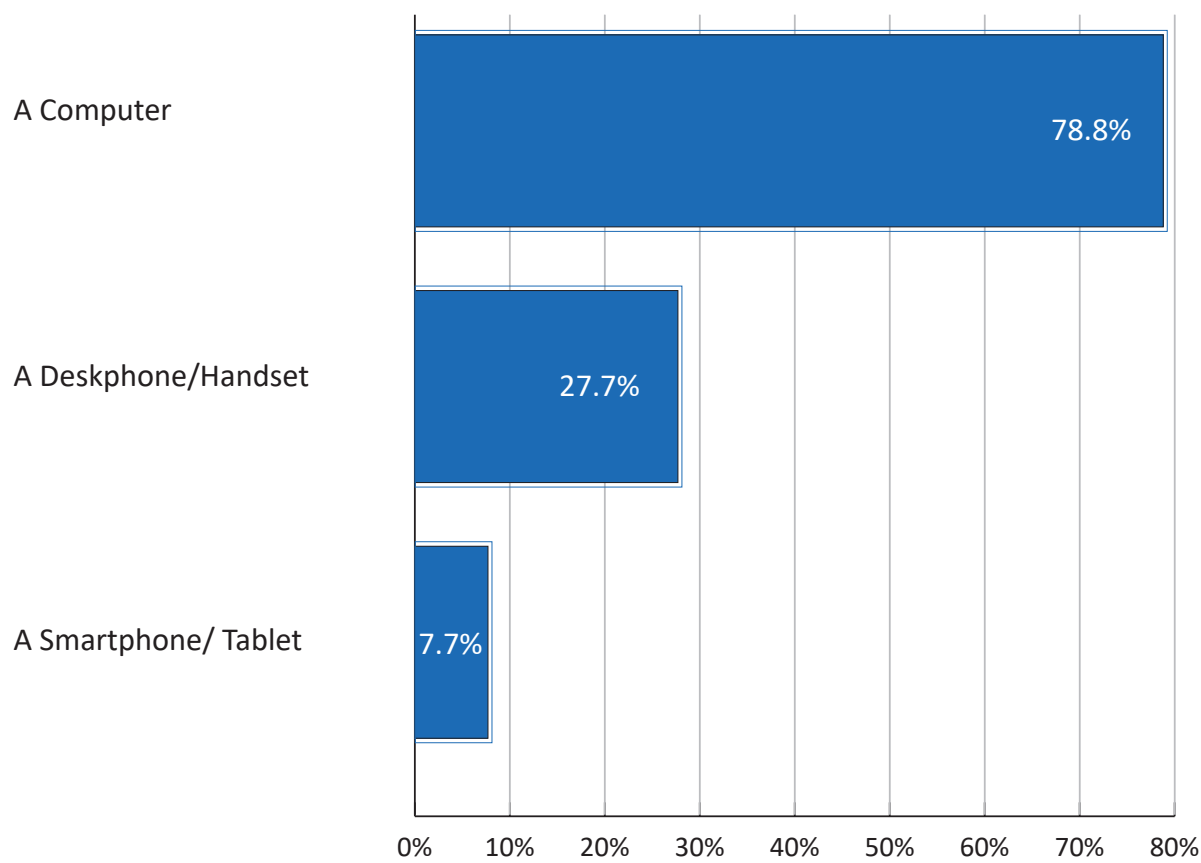
Such performance gains come from the freedom of increased movement when taking calls. Just standing up alone has been linked with increased rapport, as it helps advisors sound more confident and assertive.

35. What Do Your Contact Centre Headsets Connect To?

Audio Tends to Connect Directly to a Computer

As expected, most contact centres (78.8%) use headsets that connect directly to the advisor’s computer. However, some will employ headsets that plug into other devices too.

What Does Your Contact Centre Headset Connect To?



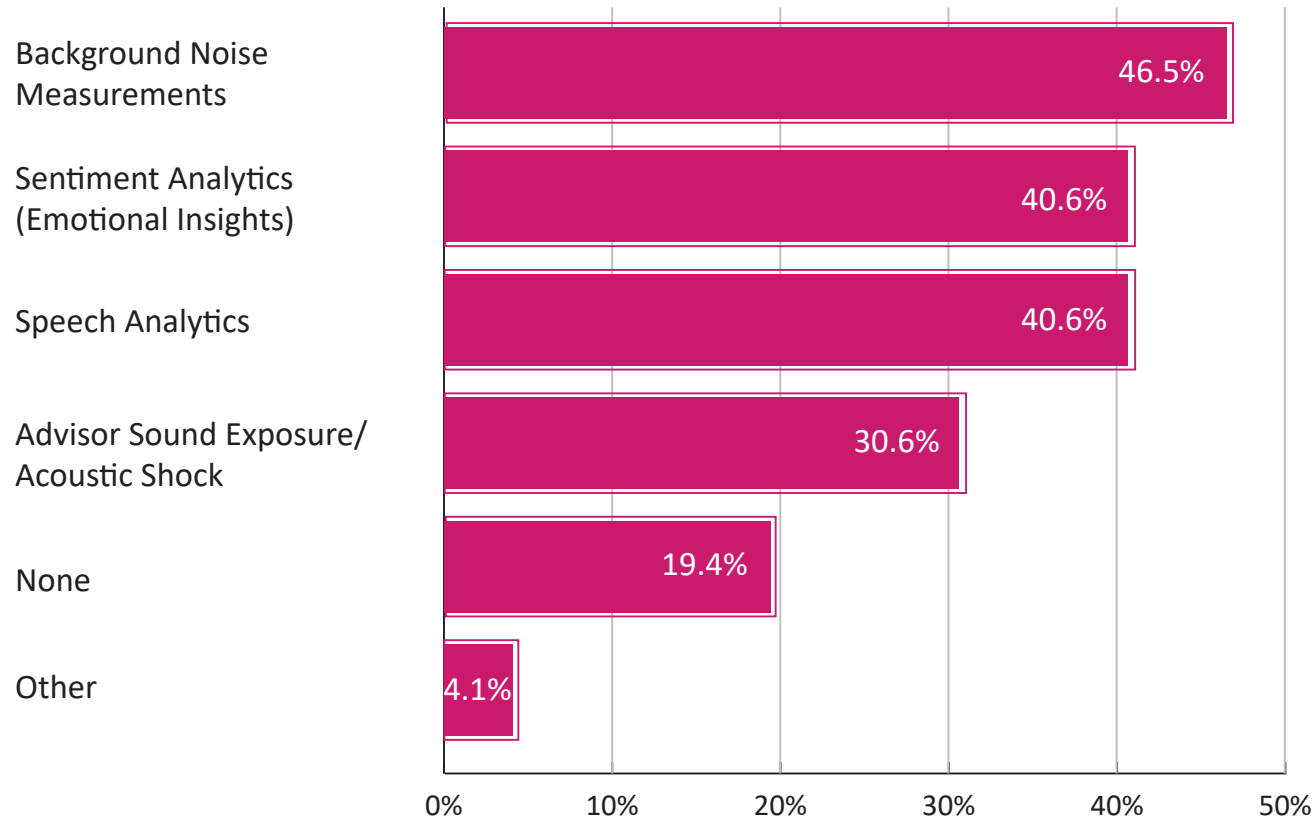
A great example is a handset. 27.7% of contact centres choose headsets that can connect with handsets. This is interesting because if the two figures of 78.8% and 27.7% are combined, the total percentage passes 100%, which indicates that many contact centres choose headsets that can do both. In addition, many wireless headsets function through Bluetooth technology. This also allows headsets to connect with smartphones and tablets, like those employed by 7.7% of contact centres do.

36. What Types of Real-Time Information Would You Like Your Headset to Provide You With?

Background Noise Measurements Interest Many

Background noise measurement is the most favoured form of real-time analytics to come through a headset, according to our contact centre professionals.

What Types of Real-Time Information Would You Like Your Headset to Provide You With?



In fact, a headset with the capability to do so would interest 46.5% of survey participants.

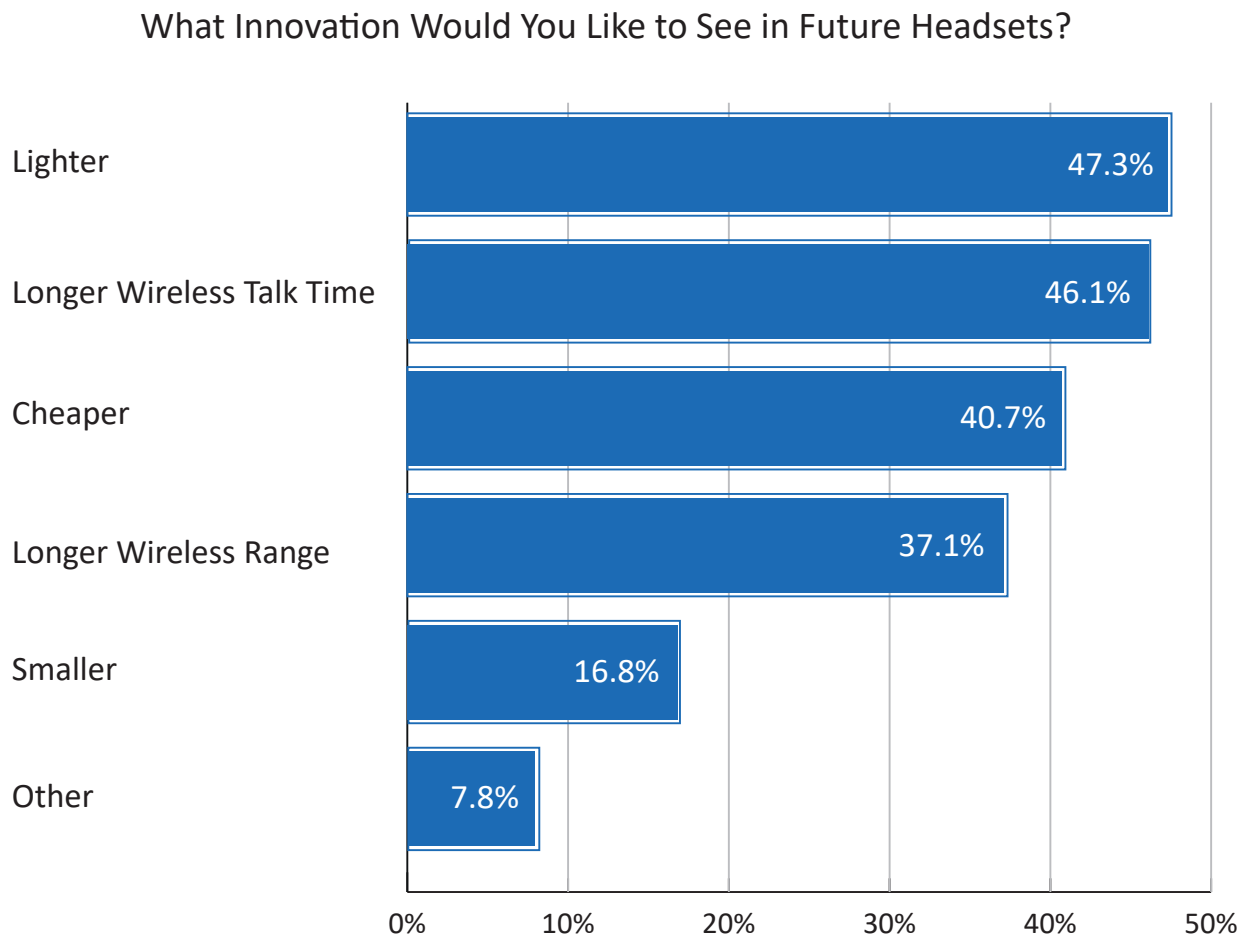
Two further types of real-time information that attracted lots of attention were sentiment analysis and speech analytics.

40.6% of industry professionals stated that they would like to add these capabilities to their contact centre.

37. What Innovation Would You Like to See in Future Headsets?

Lighter Headsets are in Demand

47.3% of contact centre leaders would like to see the future of headset innovation focus on creating lighter models.



With that being said, several other ideas also sparked interest.

For example, 46.1% would like increased battery life in wireless headsets to allow for longer talk time.

Also, 40.7% of contact centres would like headsets to come at a lower price point, while 37.1% would enjoy a longer wireless range.

Other Key Headset Innovations

7.8% of the hundreds of contact centre professionals surveyed wished to highlight other innovations that they believe should dictate the future of headset design. These included:

- Added durability
- Enhanced adjustability for individual users
- Improved noise cancellation
- Increased user comfort

One Final Question....

38. If There Was One Thing That You Could Improve in Your Contact Centre, What Would It Be?

From within the feedback of our contact centre professionals, several answers appeared many times. These included responses such as employing new technology, improving communication across the business and building better business cases.

However, there were also many more intriguing replies, which we've categorized below.

Better Supporting the Team

- Bolstering employee health and safety (both psychological and physical)
- Creating more time for training
- Developing an empowerment framework
- Enhancing recognition strategies
- Establishing an easy-to-use knowledge base
- Having more meaningful conversations with advisors
- Improving shift flexibility
- Increasing salaries
- Proving more opportunities for growth
- Redeveloping our incentive programme
- Re-engaging advisors and improving their skillset

Customer Service Strategy

- Bolstering advisor quality scores
- Dealing with new channels
- Developing a greater customer focus
- Eradicating avoidable contacts
- Improving mindsets for customer service delivery
- Increasing our influence over the wider business
- Mapping customer journeys
- Redesigning processes and systems
- Upskilling advisors



Developing Contact Centre Management

- Bolstering resource planning
- Boosting forecast accuracy
- Bringing in part-time staff from different departments
- Building better upstream processes to remove contacts
- Changing the mindset of senior stakeholders
- Enhancing workflow management
- Improving speed to competency for advisors
- Increasing technology integrations
- Fixing broken processes
- Improving our IT infrastructure
- Lowering attrition
- Refining our recruitment strategy
- Removing business silos
- Training the management team

Improving Remote Work

- Developing a clear communication system
- Enhancing our hybrid working model
- Improving staff engagement scores
- Increasing flexibility for remote advisors
- Managing shrinkage amongst remote teams

Implementing New Technology

- Adding callback functionality
- Automating manual processes
- Building a live chat functionality
- Consolidating advisor tools
- Creating a single view of the customer
- Developing our reporting suite
- Employing virtual assistants
- Enhancing our telephony system
- Implementing a new cloud-based automatic call distribution system
- Improving dashboards to improve senior decision-making
- Investing in real-time speech analytics
- Installing call and screen recordings
- Transitioning to cloud-based technology
- Updating the IVR
- Utilizing WFM software

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