

The Changing Face of Chat

How it can bring value to your customers and your business



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Introduction

Failing to deliver?

While it has been around for some time, **the importance of chat to customer service is accelerating**. The combination of its ease of use, particularly now that consumers are familiar with messaging apps, its real-time nature and ability to have a conversation all contribute to its growing popularity. **65% of consumers surveyed by Eptica say they are happier using chat now compared to 5 years ago.**

At the same time it delivers major benefits to companies as agents can handle multiple chats at once, pushing up productivity. No wonder that 50% of companies are using chat, with an addition 24% introducing it in the next year.

However, consumer expectations of chat are changing. They no longer see it as a novelty and now want a more joined up, personalised and always-on service. Just 15% are always happy with the chat experience.

Yet companies are not delivering - only **22% of those evaluated by Eptica had chat available when surveyed, despite 49% claiming to offer it.**

What is the current state of chat and how can brands bridge this emerging gap between consumer expectations and reality? Based on real-world research with consumers and brands, this guide **evaluates chat in the UK, and provides best practice advice** to help companies transform their chat to drive loyalty, efficiency and greater revenues.

Methodology:

The Eptica 2017 UK Chat Study evaluated the state of chat in two ways:

- By surveying 1,000 consumers on their attitudes to chat, and whether current service levels met their needs.
 - By testing 100 leading UK companies on their ability to respond to questions asked via the chat channel, measuring speed, accuracy, context, personalisation and empathy.
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The state of UK chat

Does chat meet consumers expectations?

65% happier
using chat than
5 years ago

68%
like it because
it's real-time



85%
often unhappy
with the
experience

80%
often unhappy
with the speed



60%
says agents don't have
the right information



60%
want more companies
to offer chat



Do you prefer to use chat instead of:



68%



67%



72%

Only 16%
always get a
personalised experience



84%



69%






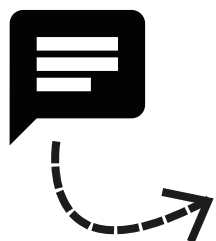
always have to queue
or companies don't
have chat working

54%
often have
to repeat
themselves



The state of UK chat

Do you want to be offered...	Yes	Not sure	No
Chatbot 	24%	28%	48%
Chat via Facebook Messenger/WhatsApp 	33%	32%	35%
Video chat 	30%	24%	46%

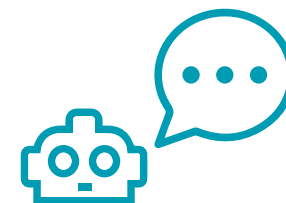


72%

say chat drives greater loyalty



What do you think about chatbots?



24%

will always use a chatbot

77%

want to chat with a human for more complex queries



33%

would use a chatbot on



Facebook Messenger



WhatsApp

The state of UK chat

When it comes to performance and consumer attitudes, the Eptica 2017 UK Chat Study highlights four significant areas:

1 - Consumers value chat - and are increasingly demanding it

Chat has very much come of age – consumers see it as a mainstream channel and expect to be offered it. **Over 68% say they will use it rather than the phone, email or social media** to communicate with brands, and 60% believe more companies should use chat.

68% say its strongest feature is the ability to hold a real-time conversation with a brand, compared to the delayed nature of communications via email or social media. With consumers having less and less time – yet more and more questions, **chat fits exactly with their needs and expectations.**

Importantly, chat equally benefits brands. **72% of consumers say they are more loyal to a company after a good chat** experience while the fact that agents can routinely handle two or more chat sessions simultaneously increases efficiency. This moves chat from a "nice to have" to a business imperative.

2 - Brands are failing to meet consumer expectations

As a technology chat is very easy to install – a brand can add a service to its website within minutes. However, technology alone is not enough – the key to chat success is integrating it with other systems and resourcing it effectively.

1 - A lack of knowledge

60% of consumers say agents don't have access to the right information.

2 - A lack of resource

69% often/always have to queue or find chat is not working. This is backed up by real-world evaluation – 55% of companies that offered chat didn't have it working when tested.

3 - A lack of context

54% of consumers have to repeat themselves on chat, rather than brands using their previous interactions to deliver personalised service.

The state of UK chat

The Eptica Chat Study shows that the majority of companies are simply not meeting consumer expectations. **Just 15% of people we surveyed said they were always happy with the experience** and only 20% were always happy with the speed.

3 - Future communication: Why you need chatbots AND humans

Over the past 18 months **much has been written about chatbots**, automated artificial intelligence-based programs that deliver tailored information to customer queries, either through the web or messaging apps. This has led many commentators to predict the end of human involvement in chat, with all questions automatically answered through chatbots.

However, what comes out from the research is that **brands must take a blended approach to chat and chatbots**. While **nearly a third (29%)** of consumers are happy to use a chatbot for simple answers,

77% want to chat with a human when they have more complex questions. Brands therefore need to offer both types of chat if they want to respond to the full range of customer requests and adapt to the different levels of expectations across the consumer journey.

4 - Proactive chat works, in context

Chat can be deployed both reactively, when triggered by the consumer, or proactively, triggered by the brand itself, such as when someone has been on a page for a certain amount of time. While many consumers complain about chat windows that pop up as soon as they land on a page, our research shows that **they do appreciate proactive chat when they are having difficulties completing a transaction**.

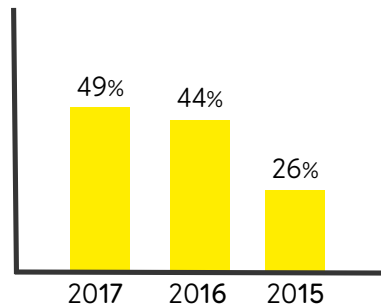
Nearly two thirds (64%) said they want to be offered proactive chat when they are stuck - **yet only 46% feel they are offered it when they need it**. Again, this demonstrates a gap between consumer expectations and the service they are currently offered.

The evolution of chat use by brands

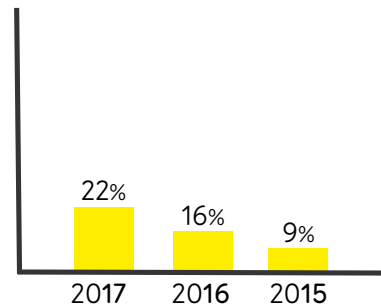
Based on evaluating 100 brands annually over the past 3 years

Chat - Brand practices over time

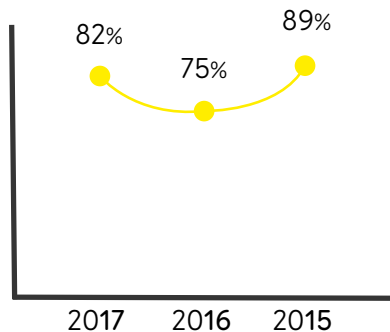
Chat offered



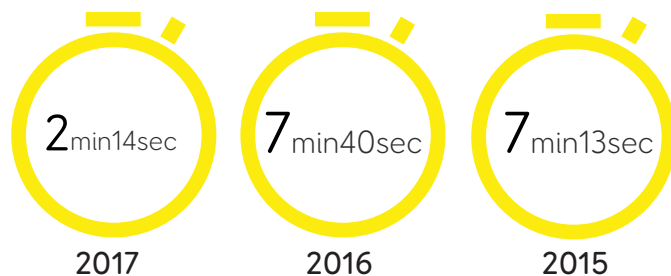
Chat working when tested



Accuracy

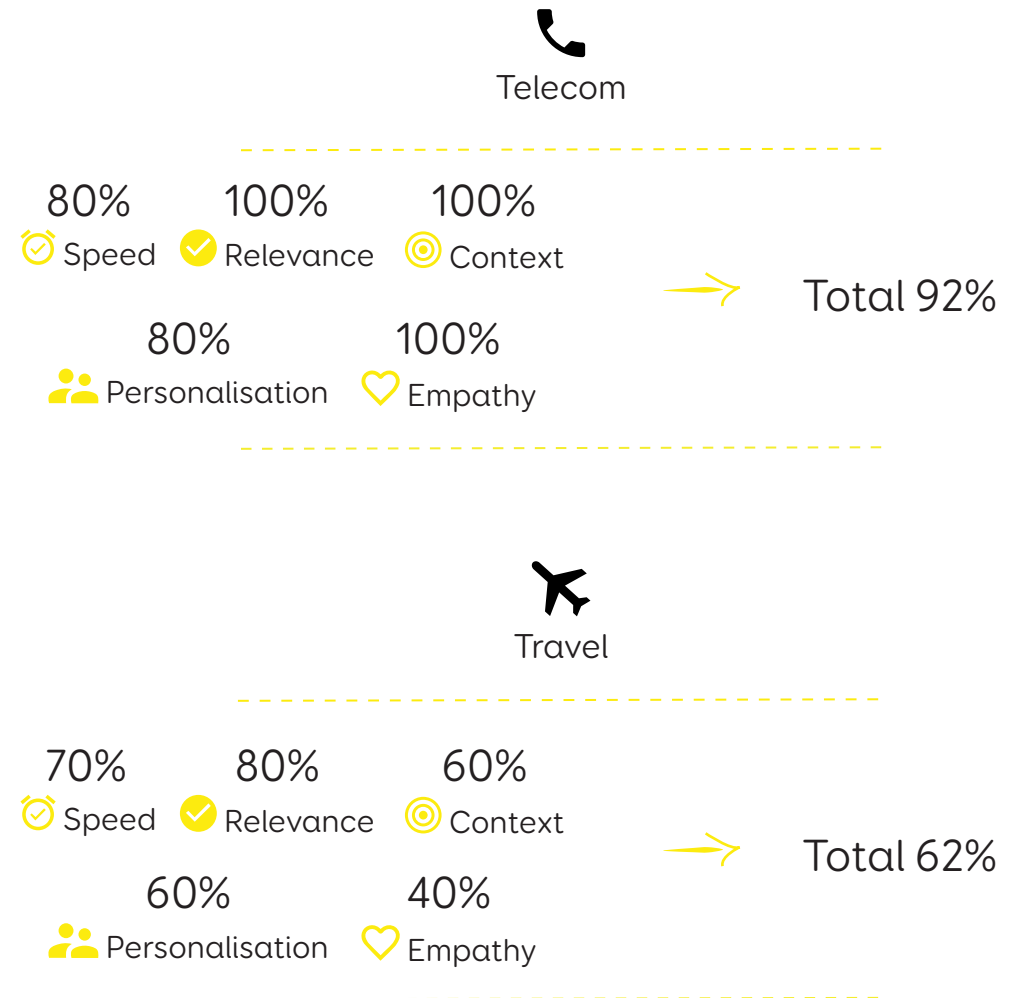


Average time to answer:



Conversation Quality - selected sectors

Retail sectors were solely evaluated on speed and relevance

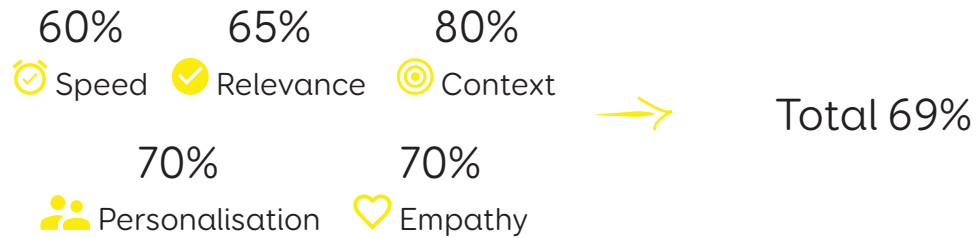


The evolution of chat use by brands

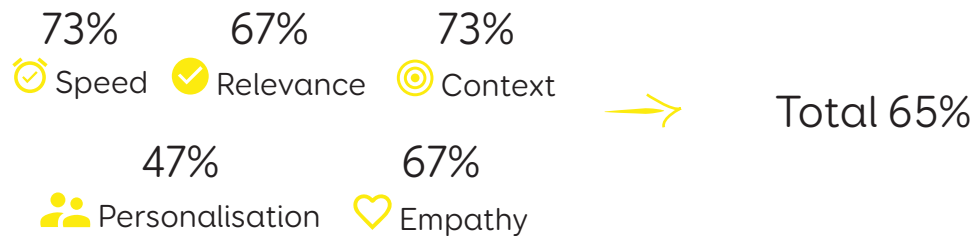
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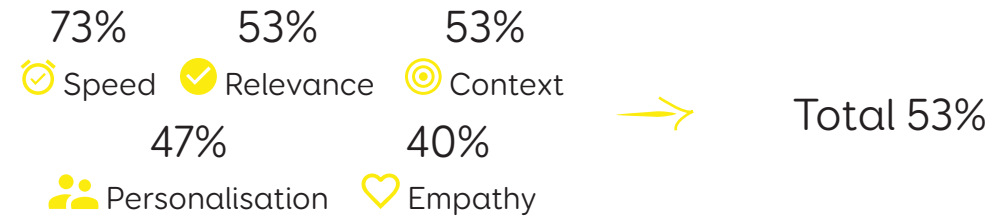
Utility



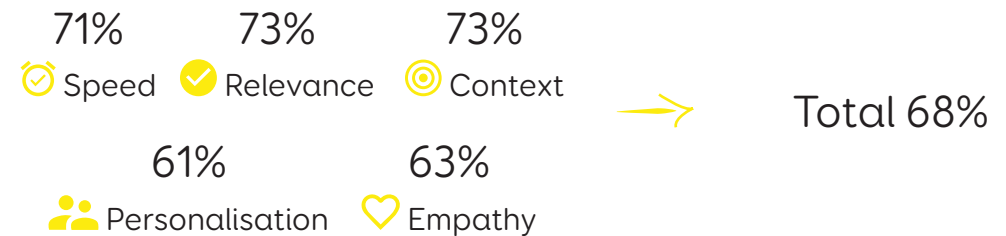
Bank



Insurance



Overall



Quality was measured by analysing every chat response received against five key criteria:

1. **Speed** - how quickly was it provided, with higher marks awarded for faster responses
2. **Relevance** - how relevant was the response and did it answer the question?
3. **Context** - did it show understanding of the whole question or respond solely to part of it?

4. **Personalisation** - was it personalised to the respondent?
 5. **Empathy** - did it show real empathy with the consumer's needs?
- Each was marked on a scale of 0-5, with 5 being the maximum (100%).

Implementing chat best practice to address digital CX expectations

To meet changing consumer expectations, brands need to ensure that they are focusing on five key best practice areas:

1 - Fully integrate chat within your business

Standalone chat systems simply create another customer service silo, separate to your overall CX infrastructure. **This leads to additional costs, inconsistent answers and an inability to link and escalate to other channels.**

Ensure that your chat solution is closely integrated with your CX platform as well as connecting to other systems, such as e-commerce, that can feed in vital customer information and allow you to see the entire customer journey. This will provide invaluable context of what consumers have done before beginning a chat session and **will ensure that you don't force them to repeat themselves.**

2 - Put knowledge & Natural Language Processing at the heart of chat

Most companies have invested in a single, centralised knowledge base to support digital channels such as self-service, email and social media. **Extend this knowledge base to support chat agents so that they can deliver more consistent, informed responses.** Use artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as **Natural Language Processing (NLP)**, to automatically analyse consumer questions and then recommend relevant answers to agents.

By augmenting staff knowledge, this will also boost productivity as they can answer more quickly, without needing to search around for information from other sources, and can focus on personalisation and building empathy with consumers.

While knowledge is important now to successfully deploying chat, it will become even more vital when you introduce chatbots or automated responses. Without access to up to date knowledge and use of AI, chatbots will simply fail to deliver the consistent, accurate answers that customers demand.

Implementing chat best practice to address digital CX expectations

3 - Resource chat correctly

When visiting company websites, it is obvious that chat is often switched off when resources are tight. For example, **60% of consumer electronics manufacturers evaluated by Eptica advertised chat on their websites, yet when tested later none had chat available**, or restricted its use to existing customers.

Chat is now an intrinsic part of what customers expect from brands. Therefore, not providing it or making them wait in long queues **undermines the entire customer experience, damaging brand reputation, loyalty and hence revenues**. Invest in scalable technology that makes it easy for agents to handle increasing chat workloads, and consider multi-skilling existing agents so that they can cover chat as well as other channels.

4 - Put the customer first

Across every channel, consumers expect personal, informed service from brands, and chat is no exception. They **want help and support when they need it, on their channel of choice**. Therefore set rules that maximise the help offered at key points in customer journey through proactive chat, and **ensure you can provide co-browsing and 'remote control' functions** such as form filling that guide consumers through any issues they have on the customer journey. And make sure that your chat is accessible through any device - **52% of consumers want mobile friendly chat**, so check and test that your system enables this.

Implementing chat best practice to address digital CX expectations

5 - Look to the future

While chat has already evolved quickly, its development is still accelerating. **Explore new areas such as chatbots and video**, and look at incorporating chat into channels such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp if this fits with your customer base.

But before embarking on chatbot projects **make sure you have the infrastructure and knowledge in place to support them**, and offer a clear means of escalating to human agents where required.

While just **30% of consumers said they want to be offered video chat**, it does have advantages for many businesses, for example showing how to connect, set-up or even build products through the power of video.

Conclusion

Consumer expectations around chat have come a long way over the past five years, but many companies are **failing to deliver the level of personalised service that customers want** on the channel. It is therefore time for companies to change their approach to chat, and to **treat it as a key component of customer service**, integrated with the entire customer experience platform and knowledge base, rather than seeing it as a standalone addition.

Consumers increasingly want to communicate in real-time through chat, **meaning that brands need to support the channel with the right resources and knowledge**, backed by the latest technology. Building a strong chat infrastructure, integrated with the business, is **vital to delivering the levels of customer service that consumers demand**, on a channel they are increasingly turning to. Companies therefore need to focus on chat if they are to deliver on consumer expectations in ever-more competitive markets.



About Eptica



Eptica is a leading **European technology company** specialising in **intelligent platforms for digital customer experience**. Eptica provides **conversational and collaborative solutions** powered by AI.

Founded 16 years ago by Olivier Njamfa, Eptica supports brands to make digital **CX the key link in the value chain**, ensuring their customer service delivers value to consumers and across their business.

Globally, more than **450 organisations across all industries** rely on our solutions on all digital channels, including **self-service & knowledge base, email, chat and social media. We enable millions of individuals to engage in meaningful conversations with brands improving daily lives for everyone**. Customers include AXA, L'Occitane, Dixons Carphone, Crédit Agricole, Domestic & General, AirAsia, Hastings Direct, TUI, Debenhams, Capita and Ageas Insurance Solutions.



Specialising in **Natural Language Processing (NLP)**, Eptica makes **the best use of AI and cognitive technologies for CX**, enabling brands to improve:

- 1 - Customer satisfaction
- 2 - Competitiveness: equipping organizations with bots that automate simple tasks and provide decision support tools to enhance agents, generating greater productivity and allowing agents to focus on more complex conversations and enabling sales
- 3 - Customer knowledge: generating customer intelligence insights that guide brands and their operations.

Eptica has offices in Paris, Reading, Boston and Singapore. Follow us on Twitter: @Eptica.

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