

# Improving Customer Experience Through Automation





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# Introduction

The average person in the UK contacts brands nine times a month with customer service queries, making nearly half a billion interactions across the UK economy, every month. And the number and complexity of these queries is rising, with 47% of consumers contacting companies more than five years ago, according to consumer research undertaken for Eptica.

Successfully managing these growing volumes is crucial to the bottom line. **Unhappy customers leave, sharing their experiences on social media and hitting revenues.** At the same time, brands need to increase their efficiency if they are to operate within tightening customer service budgets.

Artificial intelligence-based automation is key to delivering both the improved customer experience (CX) that consumers demand, and the productivity that companies are striving for. Whether it is automatically providing answers through customer facing self service systems and chatbots, or empowering agents by routing digital queries

to the right person, and arming them with recommended answers and templates, automation is central to success. By deflecting routine queries and increasing productivity it frees up agents to focus on more complex, detailed queries where human skills such as empathy are best deployed, boosting engagement and brand reputation.

**This guide outlines the findings of Eptica's consumer research and provides a best practice guide for organisations to transform how they automate customer service, benefiting both CX and their bottom line.**

47% of consumers are contacting companies

more than five years ago



# Infographic

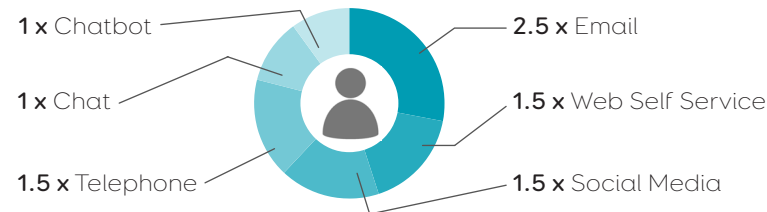
## Consumers are contacting brands more

Compared to 5 years ago:



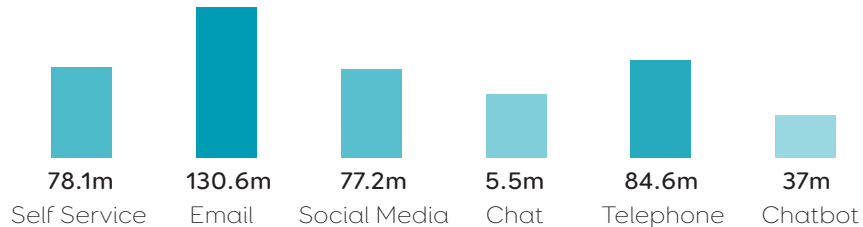
## Contact across multiple channels

9 contacts per person, per month on average:



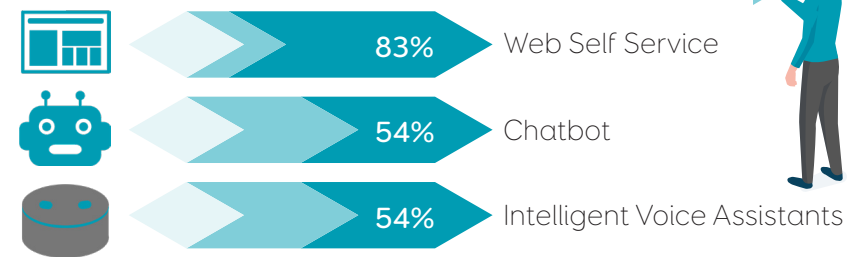
## Across the UK Adult Population

463.5 million monthly contacts from 52.4m UK adults:



## Consumers are happy to help themselves

They want to use automated options for faster answers:



% already use or are willing to use these channels

## £1.227 billion - the monthly cost to brands

Reducing routine contacts by 10% would save over £122 million...

	Cost per interaction	Monthly Total
Web Self Service	Negligible	n/a
Email	£3.37	£440.44m
Social Media	£3.07	£236.98m
Chat	£3.82	£211.99m
Telephone	£4.00	£338.31m
Chatbot	Negligible	n/a

Source: Contact Babel 2017 UK Contact Centre Decision Maker's Guide (p.241)

...that's £1.46 billion per year!



## 4 Key Research Findings

- 1 Customers are interacting more with brands
- 2 Customers want a multichannel approach
- 3 Costs are rising
- 4 Consumers are happy to help themselves

# 4 Key Research Findings

## 1 - Customers are interacting more with brands

Nearly nine in ten (88%) consumers said they now contact companies the same amount or more often than they did five years ago. Nearly half (47%) have increased the volume of contacts they have, while 16% more than doubled the number of interactions they have with brands compared to 2013. On average they interact with brands nine times per month, though 14% say they contact companies on over 15 occasions.

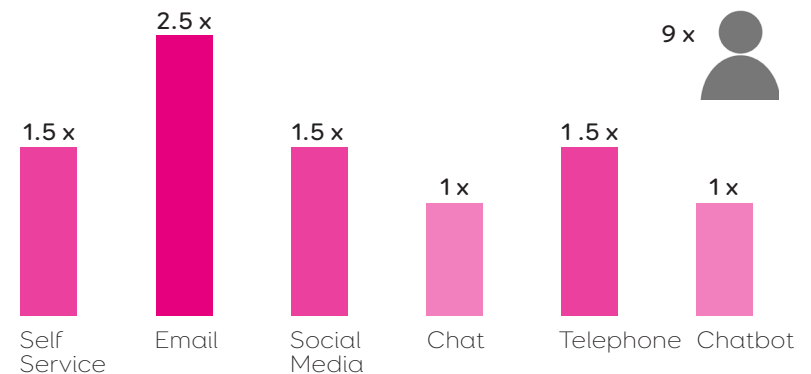
Adding to this, they want improved service – and are willing to switch to rivals if it is not delivered. **72% of respondents in a previous Eptica study said their expectations were continually rising**, while 91% of people are annoyed if they don't receive satisfactory responses to their queries, making them less loyal.

All of this puts an increased strain on company customer service teams, many of whom have seen a minimal increase in resources over the last five years. Essentially, they need to do more with less.

## 2 - Customers want a multichannel approach

While consumers contact companies nine times per month on average, this is split relatively equally across multiple channels. This demonstrates that they want to use the channel that best fits their particular needs, at that particular time. Brands therefore cannot afford to deprioritise individual channels (such as moving agents from answering the phone to focusing on emails), as it will impact customer satisfaction and lead them to defect to other brands.

Average contacts per person, per month:



# 4 Key Research Findings

## 3 - Costs are rising

Extrapolating the figures from Eptica’s research to the wider population demonstrates the sheer scale of customer service in the UK. There are 52.4 million adults in the country<sup>1</sup> - if every one of them contacted brands nine times per month, that totals 463.5 million interactions across the economy.

This is not only an enormous amount, but brings a significant cost to brands. Using figures from Contact Babel’s 2017 UK Contact Centre Decision Maker’s Guide<sup>2</sup> illustrates this:

	Total # of monthly interactions	Mean Average Cost	Total Monthly Cost to Handle
Web Self Service	78.1 million	Negligible cost	Negligible cost
Email	130.6 million	£3.37	£440.44m
Social Media	77.2 million	£3.07	£236.98m
Chat	55.5 million	£3.82	£211.99m
Telephone	84.6 million	£4.00	£338.31m
Chatbot	37 million	Negligible	n/a

<sup>1</sup> Source: Office of National Statistics

<sup>2</sup> Source: Contact Babel 2017 UK Contact Centre Decision Maker’s Guide (p. 241)

**Added together, the total monthly bill for interacting with customers for UK organisations is an eye-watering £1.227 billion.** While clearly many of these contacts are vital to customer relationships and help generate sales and future loyalty, brands need to look at how they can deflect unnecessary interactions onto low cost automated channels such as self service and chatbots, without impacting the overall experience.



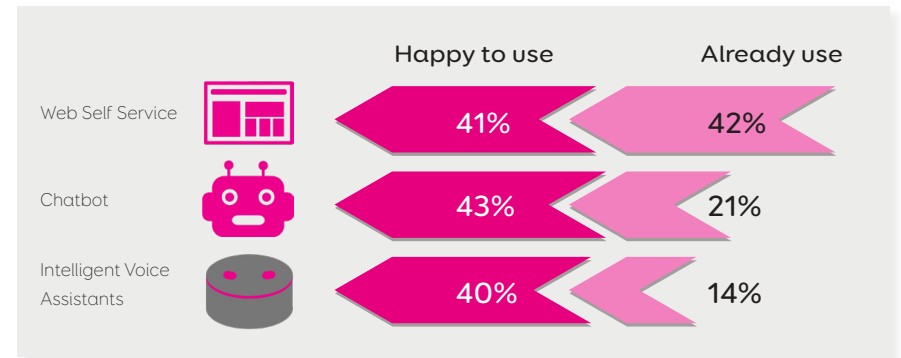
## 4 Key Findings

### 4 - Consumers are happy to help themselves

Building on the need to deflect more basic interactions, the Study found that consumers are eager to embrace self service channels that deliver answers more quickly and don't involve waiting for a response from a human agent. Over eight in ten (83%) already use or are happy to use web self service systems on company websites and 64% say they are open to interacting with automated chatbots to receive answers.

They are even keen to explore intelligent voice assistants, such as Amazon's Alexa, Google Home and Siri from Apple. The majority (54%) were happy to ask brands questions through these services, and in fact 14% of respondents already did so.

#### Do you use/are you willing to use these channels?





# Automation Best Practice to improve efficiency and customer experience

Eptica's research shows that consumers are willing to help themselves in order to get faster responses, particularly for routine questions.

When you combine this with the cost benefits of deflecting queries from manned channels and improving agent productivity through AI, the business case for automation is clear.

However, for your customer service to remain relevant and high quality, you should focus on these five best practice areas:

- 1 Make life easy for customers
- 2 Innovate - use the latest technology
- 3 Put knowledge at the heart of your strategy
- 4 Balance efficiency and customer experience
- 5 Support agents through automation

# Automation Best Practice

## 1 - Make life easy for customers

One of the key reasons that consumers want to use automated channels is that they are quick and easy. Essentially, they suit today's time-poor lifestyles, by reducing customer effort and helping them get what they want faster. Therefore, make it easy to find and access self service options on your website, and integrate them with other channels.

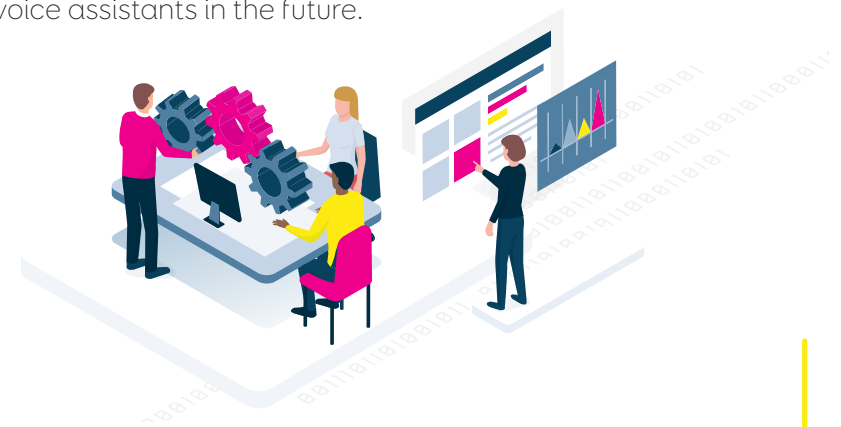
For example, if a consumer is filling in a web form to ask a question, analyse their query using AI and automatically offer them a relevant response via self service. This could avoid them needing to make contact, giving them faster, better service and deflecting a query that would otherwise have to be answered by agents.

Ensure self service is consistent with the rest of your customer experience, matching branding and tone when it comes to answers, and remember that customers increasingly want to have a conversation with your brand. Therefore, make it simple and seamless to escalate from self service to agent-based channels, without consumers needing to repeat themselves.

## 2 - Innovate - use the latest technology

For automation to be effective, it has to support a high quality customer experience. Therefore, look to use technologies that can make your life easier and help your agents deliver better service.

Artificial intelligence is key to successful automation – use it to analyse customer queries to provide relevant, consistent answers on self service and chatbots and embrace text analytics to help your agents understand what customers are saying within digital interactions. **Implementing an AI-powered multichannel customer experience platform now will also provide a solid foundation going forward** – making it easy to add new channels such as intelligent voice assistants in the future.



# Automation Best Practice

## 3 - Put knowledge at the heart of your strategy

Automating processes will only deliver limited benefits if you do not base your strategy around knowledge. Collect and centralise the information needed to respond to queries in a single knowledge base and make this available across every channel. Agents can then automatically be provided with information when responding to queries, while customers benefit from consistent answers on self service channels.

A centralised knowledge base is also simpler to maintain than multiple, channel-based stores. Start by collecting knowledge from within your teams, and make it easy to incorporate customer and agent feedback. Analyse what people are asking - this will ensure that it will continually learn and improve, fuelling automation and a better customer experience.

## 4 - Balance efficiency and customer experience

Don't see automation as solely about cutting costs - it has to be within the wider context of your customer experience strategy. For example, by deflecting routine queries to self service, you can free up agents to focus on more complex tasks where they can add greater value to the customer relationship.

**Look to create a balance between automation and the human touch.** That means you shouldn't force customers to use automated channels - always give them a choice if they prefer to make contact in other ways and have the resources in place to support this. Ensure that there is human involvement in your automated channels. For example, simply analysing incoming emails and automatically sending answers selected by the system does not deliver optimal service - you can avoid mistakes by routing suggested responses to an agent for checking first. Extend transparency to new channels - be clear that your chatbots are not human-powered, so that consumers understand that they are not talking to a person.

# Automation Best Practice

## 5 - Support agents through automation

As we have stressed, automation isn't just about customer-facing channels. It will benefit your agents as well, augmenting their skills with the automatic delivery of information to help them respond better.

Essentially, empowering agents allows them to spend more time serving customers, rather than searching for information, building a more human brand for your company. Automated knowledge bases also help reduce training time and increase confidence, as agents are provided with relevant information that means they quickly get up to speed, are more productive and more engaged with customers, whatever the channel.



Empowering agents allows them to spend more time serving customers

# Case Studies - Best Practice by Sector

## Retail - Cosmetics

With a turnover of €1.28bn, L'Occitane Group is a leading global manufacturer and retailer of natural and organic cosmetics and well-being products.

*"Eptica supports us by making our service representatives more productive, as they are able to answer queries faster and more consistently through the solution and the centralised knowledge base. We can automate more interactions, such as using web self service, when customers want to find their own information. This has led to a 50% reduction in the number of requests per year."* Anne-Sophie Pouyau, Head of International & European Customer Service, L'Occitane en Provence.

**L'OCCITANE**  
EN PROVENCE

## Travel

Leading low cost airline AirAsia relies on Eptica's customer experience platform to power its online customer service. Through Eptica, AirAsia has been able to achieve a 40 percent reduction in contact centre costs, despite dramatically increasing user numbers.

*"With an ever increasing number of people turning to the web to book their holiday we needed a solution that would allow us to engage with our customers through whichever channel they wanted."* Kamarulzaman Ahmad, Regional Head of Strategy, Innovation and Customer Experience.





# Case Studies - Best Practice by Sector

## Insurance

Carole Nash is the UK's largest motorcycle insurance broker. Dedicated to meeting the needs of motorcycle owners, it covers bikes of all types, from superbikes and vintage machines to mopeds.

Eptica Email Management allows Carole Nash to handle the 3,000 monthly emails that it receives - with half the number of agents that it would need if it did not have Eptica.

*"Eptica allows us to route queries to agents with a specific skillset, and they can then respond quickly through a combination of pre-written templates and the information contained within the Eptica knowledge base."* Paul Greenwood, Operational Change Manager, Carole Nash.



## Public Sector

NHS Business Services Authority provides a range of critical central services to NHS organisations, NHS contractors, patients and the public. It handles 3 million calls, 300,000 emails and has 2 million hits on its self service knowledge base every year.

*"Value for money is integral to our operations. We are able to point our customers to Eptica Self Service on our website, meaning we can direct resource to where the customer really needs it. By using Eptica more than half of our customers are able to find the information they need without needing to contact us through another channel."* Anna Dobson, Service Delivery Manager, Patient and Contact Centre, NHS Business Services Authority.



## Case Studies - Best Practice by Sector

### Utilities

A British energy supply company uses Eptica's AI-based technology to analyse incoming customer email enquiries and pass them to the best available agent using powerful workflow. The platform automatically searches its centralised knowledge base to find the most relevant answer, instantly providing the agent with a recommended answer that they can then review, personalise and send.

Using Eptica has helped the utility to increase productivity dramatically, reducing the time it takes to answer queries while enforcing consistency through the promotion of approved responses, which is vital for regulatory compliance.



EPTICA

### Retail - Fashion

Ranked as their favourite brand by French women in 2018, Camaïeu has become a leading international fast-fashion retailer, with 1,000 stores located in more than 15 countries.

*"We benefit from Eptica's full multichannel conversational platform. Self Service has helped us dramatically reduce the number and cost of incoming customer service messages, while offering 24/7 service to our customers. Eptica's AI helps us automate across all channels through key features such as intelligent routing and automatic suggested answers, facilitating the daily work of agents and increasing their productivity. Agents can now concentrate on the higher added-value demands and on the personalisation of the customer experience." Isabelle Cardot, Customer Service Manager.*

CAMAÏEU

# Conclusion

As the Eptica Automation Study shows, brands need to cope with an ever-increasing volume of customer interactions, across more and more channels. At the same time customer expectations are continually growing – they want faster, more comprehensive answers to more queries than ever before. And all of this has to be delivered efficiently and effectively in an era of static budgets.

Being able to deal with these pressures is crucial to providing high quality customer experience that will win and retain consumer trust and deliver bottom line revenue growth.

Adopting an effective automation strategy is therefore key to supporting your CX goals. AI-based automation reduces customer and agent effort, speeds up responses, increases consistency and frees up agents for more detailed queries. It enables brands to meet customer needs at the same time as boosting productivity and enabling them to do more with less.

## Note on research

For the 2018 Eptica Automation Study, 1,000 UK consumers were surveyed online in Q3 2018 via Toluna.

Whatever your sector or size, now is the time to investigate how automation can transform your customer service operations.



# 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 Group, New Look, Dixons Carphone, Crédit Agricole, Co-operative Energy, Domestic & General, Ageas Insurance Solutions, Hastings Direct, TUI, Debenhams, Capita, RSPCA and Birmingham City Council.

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 organisations 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 insights that guide brands and their operations.

Eptica has offices in Paris, Reading, Boston and Singapore.

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