



Voice Is Power

Harnessing the potential of the voice channel for exceptional customer experience



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The inventor of the telephone,
Alexander Graham Bell, said:

**“The telephone will be used
to inform people that a
telegram has been sent.”**

Little did he know just how impactful
his invention would be.

Decades later, the telephone remains pivotal in both
personal and business life. For a company, the voice
channel represents an opportunity to directly build
emotional, human connections and customer rapport.

Picking up the telephone is still perceived as the next best thing to
face-to-face communication. In an increasingly digital environment,
some may suggest its importance is falling, but we believe it's now more
relevant than ever. There's no other channel that provides the instant
gratification of discussing and solving a problem over the phone,
voice-to-voice, human-to-human. In fact, according to eConsultancy,
61% prefer phone over email, live chat, online knowledge base and
“click-to-call” support automation.*

So before writing it off as an outdated or obsolete channel and focusing
all of your investment on the latest digital trends, consider harnessing
the voice channel – there's a huge amount of power in a voice.

In this eBook, we delve into the potential of telephony as part of a wider
service strategy, supporting your ability to win new business and
retain clients.



Voice as a cornerstone

Customer service is now a 24/7 business. While the voice channel has huge benefits, it must work in collaboration with other channels to provide a seamless omnichannel approach to customer communication.

With digital tools so readily available, customers are taking control of which platforms and channels they choose to interact with; and while everyone is different, they still want the choice. Today's customers do not want to be forced to one channel or another, instead requiring a variety of options depending on the type of enquiry or issue, ready to support them when and where they need it.



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of customers believe talking to an agent who lacks knowledge is one of the most frustrating aspects of poor customer service

When the voice channel is integrated with modern CRM technologies and optimised with intelligent telephony systems, it has the capacity to be an important cornerstone of customer experience. Powerful knowledge management tools can turn agents into super agents. In fact, 36% of customers believe talking to an agent who lacks knowledge is one of the most frustrating aspects of poor customer service.*

With the right tools and knowledge base, agents have the context to offer tailored solutions to each customer. It is here that the channel has the unique opportunity to offer something different yet work in collaboration with other customer experience channels.

If this level of service is provided across every channel, from browsing the website to picking up the phone, customers feel supported rather than prescribed to, which helps secure loyalty and trust in the brand.





Get the basics right

It is reported that two thirds of customers prefer trying to solve basic issues on their own.

However, if omnichannel is not implemented as a strategic, consistent approach across all communication channels, i.e. the website is badly designed or the chatbot is counter-intuitive, customers can get frustrated and resort to picking up the phone after all.

These frustrated customers can be served by a knowledgeable and patient agent, however their query might have been resolved earlier and more efficiently with a more considered customer journey strategy and the requested information available via other channels.

Making information readily and proactively available to the customer, reduces the need for them to contact the service centre and frees up agents to deal with more complex or emotionally charged issues. These might include guiding a customer through a large purchase or solving a technical issue, both of which benefit from a human connection.

Service channels should complement each other, supporting customers at every stage of their journey. Ensuring the customer can easily find a choice of effective service channels is the quickest route to customer satisfaction and business growth.



Customers on hold keeps business at bay

Agents often have to deal with complex customer issues. However, those issues can be magnified if that customer is frustrated by the experience of getting through to the agent in the first place.

Badly managed queues and being placed on hold is poisonous for any prospering customer experience; with 27% saying being on hold for too long is a reason to switch to a different provider.*

Innovation is providing tools to help alleviate these frustrations. During queueing, interactive voice response technology (IVR) can segment and differentiate customers, routing them to the most appropriate agent.

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Queue position announcements keep the customer informed rather than discouraged and lessens the chances of call abandonment. Convenient call back technology frees customers to get on with their day, removing the frustration of being on hold for long periods of time. Virtual placeholders track the customers' queue position and launch an outbound call at the agreed time, routing the customer to the most appropriate agent available.

When the caller gets through, hold times can be minimised even further with wireless headsets. Agents can walk around, taking the caller virtually with them in the search of helpful information.

When businesses reduce the stress and frustration for customers of being on hold the voice channel can be a powerful champion of convenience; and it is convenience that lies at the heart of excellent customer service.



The voice channel is where you can get personal

Everyone likes to feel special and there are key areas in a service strategy where businesses have the opportunity to do just that. One of those areas is the voice channel where people connect on a human-to-human level.

A skilled service agent can adapt the conversation to suit the customer and directly address concerns with a personalised response. It's worth getting right, because feeling unappreciated is the number-one reason customers switch away from products and services according to research.*

Customers no longer have the patience for being manually re-routed and listening to robotic multiple choice systems; they want to talk to one agent, who is knowledgeable, skilled and able to provide a service that is tailored to them.

No two phone calls are the same and each offers the business a chance to deepen the relationship with the customer. Some companies are moving towards a 'concierge-style' service model where integrated CRM telecom systems come into their own. The emphasis lies with the customer, enabling the agent to see the full interaction and service history and customise the conversation with real context. Details and data at the agent's finger-tips empower them to offer the most appropriate solution. Any new or additional information should be captured and feed back into the knowledge management system to further enrich the agents' pool of resources.

Harnessing technology and the human-nature of voice enables businesses to personalise the service experience. Each call and resolution is centred around the customer and their needs rather than the businesses, moving from a prescriptive experience to one far more likely to drive loyalty.



Listening is just as important as talking

Whilst customers want to feel special, they also want to know they are being heard. The voice channel is only matched by communicating face-to-face in its ability to listen and empathise with customer concerns and issues.

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of customers believe the most valued characteristic of a contact centre is the agents' ability to listen and empathise

All other static service channels offer one-way communication, but voice gives the business a chance to listen.

One of the most prized traits of a call centre agent is their ability to identify with a caller; research suggests that 61% of customers believe the most valued characteristic of a contact centre is the agents' ability to listen and empathise.* These distinctly human traits cannot be matched by artificial intelligence or the written word.

Training agents in soft skills such as empathy, listening, patience and respect is as important as investing in technology infrastructures. It is via their agents that a business can show they care, evoking trust and loyalty on the part of their customer.



The voice-approach differs between generations

Many young people have seen the birth and rise of digital channels such as the web and social media. It is now so ingrained into their daily culture that 'googling' a problem is preferable to picking up the phone.

Gen Z

avoid speaking on the telephone, but they do prefer a personalised service which is authentic and individual

Meanwhile, older generations have a tendency to become highly frustrated when they don't have access to a voice channel; when something goes wrong they want to speak to a human, not be served by a machine.

Knowing your customer and the different expectations between the generations is becoming increasingly important in delivering great customer experience. For example, while generation Z (those born since 1996) avoid speaking on the telephone, they do prefer a personalised service which is authentic and individual. Other age demographic groups rely more on call centre agents, trusting them to know their full contact history and solve issues far quicker.

Customer data has never been so important and the channel's ability to adapt is central to its future.



Getting customer experience right via the voice channel requires investment and the price is steep if executed badly.

A report suggests that almost 90% of customers stopped doing business with a company after a poor service experience.* Customers can feel frustrated if they're passed around, the agent doesn't have their interaction history available, they're not treated as an individual or not shown enough empathy.

Get it right however, and the rewards are high. Research produced by Gartner shows that 89% of businesses will soon compete mostly on the basis of customer experience.** This implies that other factors such as price and product are less important than the 'experience' of buying from, and communicating with, a business or retailer.

As technology improves, competition mounts and customer expectations change, the voice channel continues to present a huge opportunity as the backbone of optimal customer service experience. Utilising the channel to its full potential requires investment; developing seamless call routing, knowing the customer in detail, resolving problems in a single interaction and agents trained in soft skills. Paired with the human-centric nature of voice, the channel has the power to significantly drive customer satisfaction, brand loyalty and boost future sales.



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[**https://blogs.gartner.com/jake-sorofman/gartner-surveys-confirm-customer-experience-new-battlefield/](https://blogs.gartner.com/jake-sorofman/gartner-surveys-confirm-customer-experience-new-battlefield/)