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Contact Centre AI, Customer engagement

Which channel should you use? UK customers have their say

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15 December 2020



When do your customers want to speak to a human agent? When would they prefer to self-serve or rattle off a tweet? ContactBabel's new report examines how the channel preferences of UK consumers shift in a variety of common scenarios, from seeking an urgent piece of information to navigating a complex application. Read on to explore the study's fascinating – and sometimes surprising – results.

A customer's preferred choice of service channel isn't set in stone. It changes depending on the issue they're looking to resolve. And that's why ContactBabel's new research makes such interesting reading for CX leaders.

For this year's edition of its regular report, The UK Customer Experience Decision-Makers' Guide, the analyst surveyed 1,000 UK consumers to discover exactly how their channel preferences shift according to the nature of the interaction.

Respondents were presented with three different service scenarios – one highly emotional, one highly complex and one highly urgent. For each, they were asked to select their preferred channel from a list including phone, email, web chat, messaging, social media, web self-service/mobile app, and visiting a branch or store.

ContactBabel then sorted its findings by age, comparing each demographic to the overall average. While some of the results are unlikely to surprise you, there are certainly a few that might.

High emotion interactions: the wrong delivery

You've just received a delivery, but it's not what you ordered – how do you contact the company to sort it out? That's the high-emotion scenario ContactBabel put to UK consumers. It's unlikely to be a complex interaction, and it doesn't need to be resolved immediately, but if you've been looking forward to the parcel, there's a good chance you're feeling annoyed.

Interestingly, even in our super-connected world, nearly half of all respondents (46%) said they would choose to contact the company via email. Phone and web chat were the next most popular, at 19% and 17% respectively.

Less surprising is the demographic split. The survey found that older consumers were the most likely to ring the call centre – 27% of over 65s said that they would pick up the phone, compared to just 12% of those aged 25-34. With social media, it's the opposite story. No one over 65 wanted to reach out via Twitter or Facebook, whereas social is the channel of choice for 8% of those under 34.

High urgency interactions: the airport pick-up

You've agreed to pick up a friend from the airport, and you want to check their arrival time. This ContactBabel's second scenario – a simple, unemotional request, but one which needs an instant answer.

In this situation, exactly half of all respondents would prefer to self-serve through a website or mobile app. Almost 1 in 10 would call, and just 1 in 50 would turn to social media.

But the results also varied significantly across different age demographics. Even for this comparatively simple, urgent interaction, 31% of the youngest age group (those aged 16-24) said they would prefer to send an email. That's almost double the average across all respondents. This group was also less keen to find its own answers through website self-service or a mobile app than any other demographic.

High complexity interactions: the mortgage application

For its third scenario, ContactBabel asked UK consumers what channel they would use to get help with completing a complicated form – while applying for a mortgage, for example, or paying tax.

Its findings suggest that, when faced with such a complex task, most of us still prefer to have another human being literally by our side, helping us through. Making a physical visit to the store, office or branch, prove the most popular option, chosen by 21% of respondents.

But – it's a fairly even split among the top channels. Phone, website self-service/mobile apps, web chat, all achieved between 14% and 16% of the vote. And again, social media divides the generations, with 8% of those aged 16-24 choosing the channel, compare to a 2% overall average.

The ultimate 'moment of truth'

Knowing how to serve any individual customer, based on their personal preferences, immediate needs and current circumstances is the foundation of great customer experiences. While surveys like this one can never provide all the answers, they do reinforce value of finding them.

ContactBabel's report hammers this opportunity home by referencing McKinsey's 'moment of truth' in customer interactions. This occurs when a customer faced an unexpected or highly emotional problem, like a lost credit card or a canceled flight. If you can spot these moments and deliver a quick, sensitive resolution, you're likely to with long-term loyalty and advocacy. Drop the ball, and you could lose a customer for life.

Happily, equipping your contact centre to spot these moments, and drive the right outcomes, is getting easier. Interaction analytics can help you spot when and where they're taking place. Virtual assistants can route customers to the right agent for their needs. Biometrics can seamlessly authenticate even a stressed and forgetful customer, based on the sound of their voice. And AI can equip agents with the information they need about customer's journey so far.

Find out more

In this blog post, we've only scratched the surface of the ContactBabel study. To see the full breakdown of customer channel preferences – and explore a wealth of additional insights – take a look at the full report.

Tags: Retail

More Information

Download the ContactBabel report

Dive into ContactBabel's landmark report, and get the insights you need to transform your customer experience strategy.

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About Sebastian Reeve

Seb Reeve is a customer experience industry leader who is always seeking to provide thought-leadership, lateral-thinking and decision-support for Fortune 1000 Enterprises who are both his customers and partners. Reeves has more than fifteen years of experience in deploying technologies to improve the user experience. In his current role at Nuance as EMEA Director of Product Management and Marketing, he is responsible for defining and evangelizing the Nuance customer care proposition across Europe, the Middle-East and Africa – sharing how companies can create extraordinary automated experiences which their customers actively choose to use rather than simply tolerate and complain about, promoting best practices in AI and Machine Learning to the world of Customer Experience.

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