



# What do customers want from a contact centre?

**An insight into managing customer calls**

A Whistl Guide

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# Introduction

Whistl has conducted a study of the UK population, to understand customer views on contact centres, to prepare this guide on how your businesses can create a strong contact centre.

Customer service is vital to your business and can underpin your company's reputation. Understanding how to support and help your customers can be most easily appreciated by reviewing each available contact option your customers have, with your business.

Contact centres are often the first point of contact for your customers' interactions and by knowing more about your customer's expectations could help shape your customer service offering.

Our study gives an insight into what the UK's preferences are for contact centres, allowing more businesses to tailor their offering to meet the expectations of their customer base, increase customer loyalty and avoid losing customers to your competitors.



# Do you really know your customers?

**Who are your customers, and do you really know their wants and needs? Would all your customer-facing staff be able to tell you?**



In a complex world, one thing that ties customer-facing companies together is the service levels that they can offer. Since 2019 the UKCSI has reported on five dimensions of customer satisfaction. These variables can be used to gain a better understanding of your customer base, allowing you to better formulate the customer experience you provide and strengthen the relationship you can have with them.

## **The 5 Dimensions of Customer Satisfaction**

### **1. Experience**

The quality of customers' experiences and interactions

### **2. Complaint Handling**

How organisations respond and deal with complaints

### **3. Customer Ethos**

Customers' perception of an organisation's level of service and care of them

### **4. Emotional Connection**

How the organisations promote feelings of trust and reassurance

### **5. Ethics**

Reputation, openness and transparency

“Customer insight has become more critical to the customer experience”

Source: UK Customer Satisfaction Index (January 2020)

# Insight into what your customers want

We have outlined some of the key insights from our research to enhance the analysis of your own customer base.

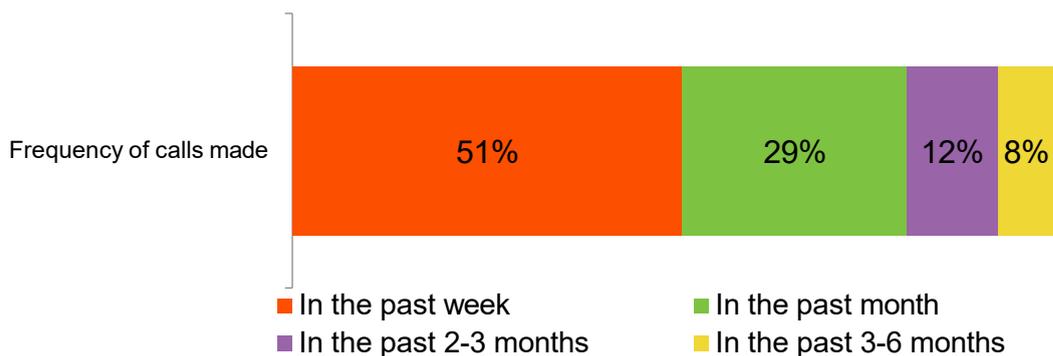


## FREQUENCY OF CALLS

80% of consumers say they have made a call to a contact centre in the last month.

## Customers are calling frequently

Over half have called in past week, 80% in past month



Based on Total Sample (n=1,000)

## SECTORS CALLED

Unsurprisingly, the most called sectors are daily service providers: media providers, utility suppliers, and financial organisations featured in the top three.



TV, internet and telecoms companies receive the most calls (42%), followed by utility suppliers (29%) and financial organisations (24%)

## GENDER AND AGE

When it comes to understanding your customer base, the following gender and age insights can help your business manage calls received.

Men are significantly more likely to call the following companies than women:

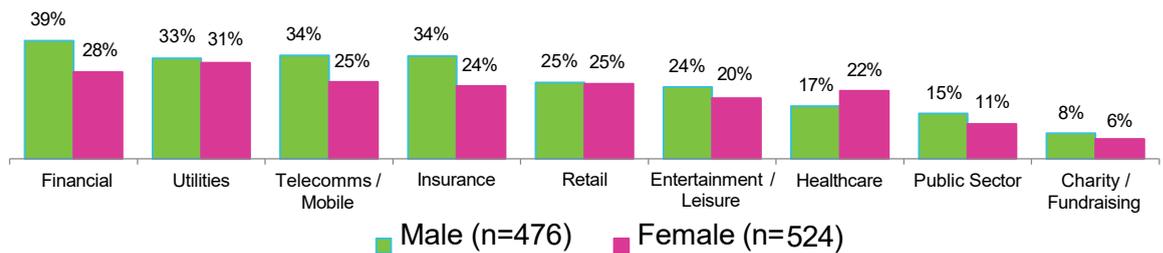
- Financial
- Utility
- TV, Internet & Telecom
- Public
- Entertainment

More women made calls to the Healthcare industry, as well as:

- Retail
- Insurance
- Travel
- Charities

## Most called sectors

From a prompted list



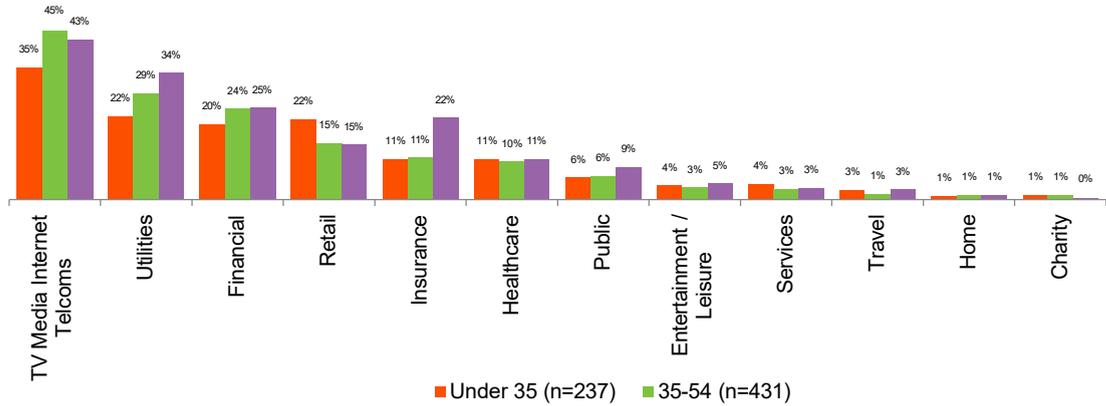
*On average, men have called 2.3 company types in past 6 months, women have called an average of 2.0 types Based on Total Sample (n=1,000)*

The frequency of calls and call volumes will vary based on your business sector, in addition to other variables such as the age of the caller. Therefore a clear understanding of your customer profile and any bias due to age could allow for a clearer indication of the likely call trends for your business.

The likeliness of calls being made to utility companies was seen to increase with age. Calls to the retail sector were much higher among those aged under 35. The 55+ age group reported being more likely to contact Insurance companies compared to those in the 34-54 age group and the under 35's.

When reviewing the fast-moving TV, Internet and Telecoms sector, those aged 35 - 54 made more calls to these organisations.

## Sectors called



Based on Total Sample (n=1,000)



Once a business understands its customer base, it can then take the next step in recognition of what their customer base values and defines a good contact centre.



# What defines a good or bad contact centre?

Contact centres have the task of dealing with multiple customers on a daily basis. To ensure that calls and contacts are dealt with effectively, contact centres must create the right culture.



The culture of your business should be reflected within the contact points that your customers have with your company. Whether this is an internal receptionist, or an outsourced contact centre team, the emphasis must be on the 'doing the right thing' for the customer. This may mean taking a deeper look at the current external perception of the organisation, including how customers view your principles of trust and loyalty.

These areas create an emotional impact on your customers before they have even made contact with someone within your business. If the consumer's perception of trust and loyalty is not reflective of where the business should be, then your contact centre team could be on the back foot when dealing with queries.

## THE BEST CONTACT CENTRES

Call agents who are patient and organised create the right balance of empathy and proactive support for a resolution. The most efficient agents develop creative problem-solving techniques to diffuse a challenging situation, but remain determined to help their customers achieve their goals.

	Overall	Men	Women
A quick resolution	38%	42%	35%
A positive attitude/willingness to help	31%	25%	36%
Friendly and polite	22%	16%	27%
Quick to answer	20%	22%	19%
Listen / understand	16%	18%	14%
UK contact centre / not foreign	9%	9%	9%
Personal service	9%	5%	11%

Our research showed that men valued 'quick resolution', 'quick to answer' and 'listening/understand what I need' more than women. Women favoured 'a positive attitude / willing to help', 'friendly and polite' and 'personal service' more than men.



They listen to my concern or issue and treat me with respect

...always very knowledgeable and offer good helpful solutions



## THE WORST CONTACT CENTRES

Businesses must avoid keeping their customer on hold for too long by offering a smooth and easy process to gain access to a call agent. Once a customer reaches the agent they require a quick resolution from an agent who has a good understanding of the business and the customers' needs. With a genuine desire to assist, the call agent must display empathy and have a good rapport with the customer.

	Overall	Men	Women
<b>Took too long to answer / on hold</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Unhelpful / didn't resolve the issue</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Difficult to understand / poor English</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>Going around in circles / transferred to different people</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Rude / arrogant agents</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>23%</b>

Both men and women find unhelpful contact centres and those that keep them waiting on the line the most annoying. For men, language issues are in 3rd place; for women, it's being sent round in circles without achieving anything. Women also found 'Going around in circles' and 'rude/arrogant agents' more disagreeable than men.

**“ Takes too long to speak to a person if you even can.  
Automated, pushbuttons, go round in circles, cut you off ”**

**Offshore call centre staff who don't fully understand English  
and who say anything to be able to close the call.**

## CREATING THE RIGHT TEAM

Our research supports the findings of the [UKCSI January 2020 Report](#), that having the right team of people, with the right attitude, with the right knowledge and experience is key.

**Organisational culture is the foundation of excellent service**

**Excellent service is built on experiences emotions and ethics**

**Employee engagement has become more central to customer experience and more challenging to achieve**

Source: UK Customer Satisfaction Index (January 2020)

The contact centre industry is susceptible to a high staff turnover so organisations need to work hard to retain its greatest asset: people.

**RECRUIT** – Identify what is needed from the contact centre team and recruit the right personalities and characteristics, starting at the application and interview process.

**INVEST** – Invest in your employees, with the right development and education to ensure that there is a progression for individuals. This investment in staff will result in more experienced teams for the business. Investment in the right technology will support your team in achieving their goals more effectively and efficiently.

**ENGAGE** – Continuously work with the human resource, training and leadership teams to review the business culture and commitment to employees. Benefits such as health insurance, flexible working and employee discounts play a key part in retaining staff.

**OPEN** – Regular opportunities for two-way communications and reviews will highlight areas for improvements and issues that need to be addressed. Be open with sharing information that individuals need to carry out their duties to the best of their abilities.

These steps will help to acquire and retain a stable, knowledgeable and skilful team of contact centre agents.



**Ensuring the customer receives a quick resolution is the ultimate goal but a positive and willing attitude from the call agent is also vital.**

# Are you making it easy for your customers to contact you?

## If your customers need to contact you, are there peak periods for their calls?



If your customers need to contact you, are there peak periods for their calls?

Understanding customer trends and associated behaviours could allow your contact centre agents to be more effective when dealing with calls.

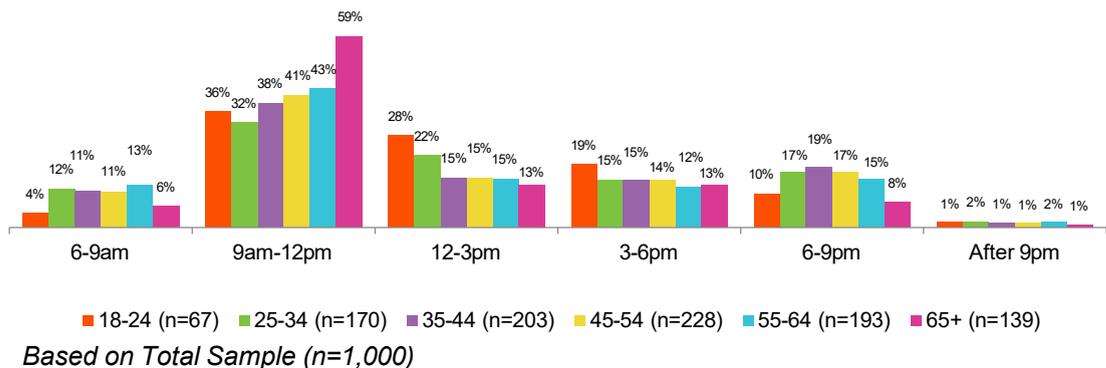
Evaluate the flow of your business and understand customer trends to manage the level of staffing. As well as the time of day, companies will be affected by the day of the week or seasons which affect not only the number of calls received but also the type of calls received.

Think about the number of staff required, but also the roles and experience required to handle the enquiries you are likely to receive.

### PREFERRED TIME TO CALL

9 am until 12 pm noon is the most preferred time to call

## Preferred Time of Day for Calling



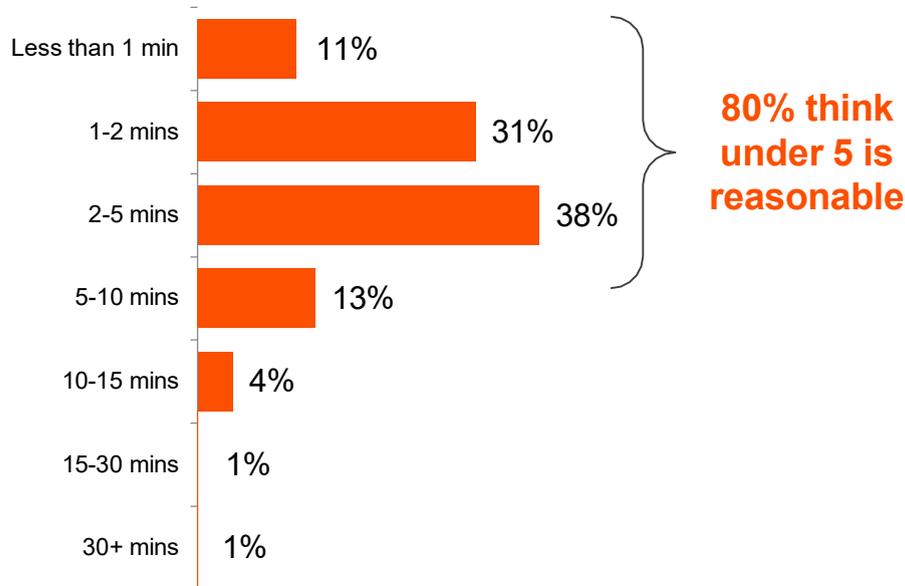
The 9 am to 12 pm slot is the preferred time for all ages, but especially among the older group, with 59% of those aged 65+ preferring to call at this time. 12 pm to 3 pm is the 2nd most preferred time to call for those who are younger (18-34) and older (55+). For those aged between 35-54, 3 pm to 6 pm would be the 2nd option.

## REASONABLE TIME TO STAY ON HOLD

Call volumes can vary based on the business sector, seasonality and other factors, which can impact the length of time a customer stays on hold. So how long is considered a reasonable period of time to stay on hold?

80% consider anything less than 5 minutes to be a reasonable time to be on hold.

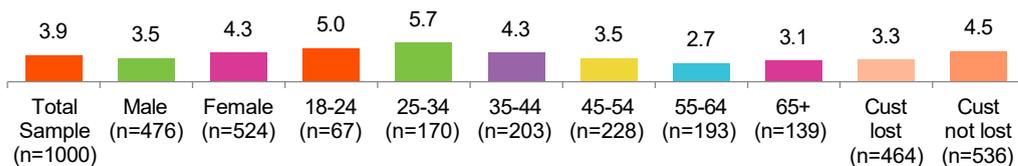
## Reasonable Time On Hold



Based on Total Sample (n=1,000)

An acceptable time on hold is lower amongst men (mean 3.5 mins) and the older generation (mean 2.7 mins for 55-64-year-olds).

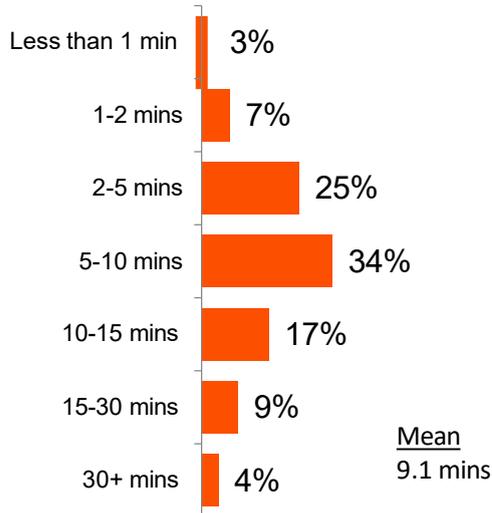
## Mean Reasonable Time on Hold (mean # mins)



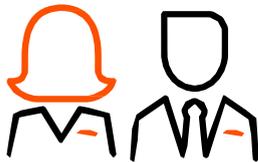
### TIME ON HOLD BEFORE HANGING UP

64% reported they would hang up after being on hold for 5 mins or more.

## Time on hold before hanging up

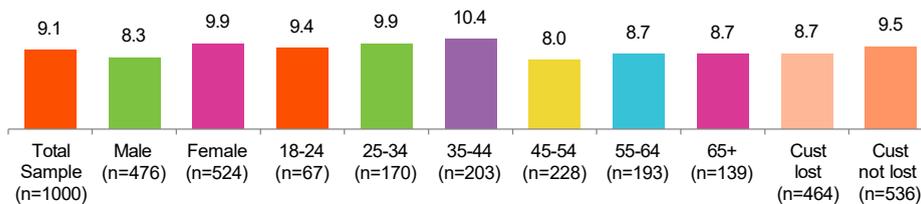


Based on Total Sample (n=1,000)



Men are more likely to hang up quicker than women, waiting only 8.3 minutes, with the women counters waiting 9.9 minutes.

## Mean Reasonable Time on Hold Before Hanging Up (mean # mins)



Ensure you have enough staff to handle calls at peak times to avoid frustrating waiting callers.

# Create useful interactions with your callers

## Do you callers find your technological support features helpful?



With increased technological advancements, contact centres have more options available to use, guiding callers to the right department or managing call volumes with more automated services. However, how many of these aspects do callers actually find useful?

Assess what benefits each call centre integration offers your customer before investing and installing a feature that frustrates rather than facilitates the customer journey.

### **PUSH-BUTTON Vs. VOICE OPTIONS**

Voice recognition, or voice response has evolved greatly over the years. It provides the customer with the opportunity to state the reason for their call with the system comprehending the response.

However, our survey found that customers don't find this a simple or easy function with a staggering 86% of customers preferring push-button options to voice options.

This more traditional option of keying in the number through the handset was the preferred method across all ages and gender.

**“ The 'voice command' function is awful  
I was constantly being put through to the wrong department  
due to the voice recognition inability to function properly ”**

**“ Voice response recognition is poor  
My bank uses an AI machine that does not understand Irish  
accents so you spend 30 minutes on the phone with a robot  
that doesn't understand you!!!! ”**

## MOST ANNOYING ASPECTS OF CONTACT CENTRES

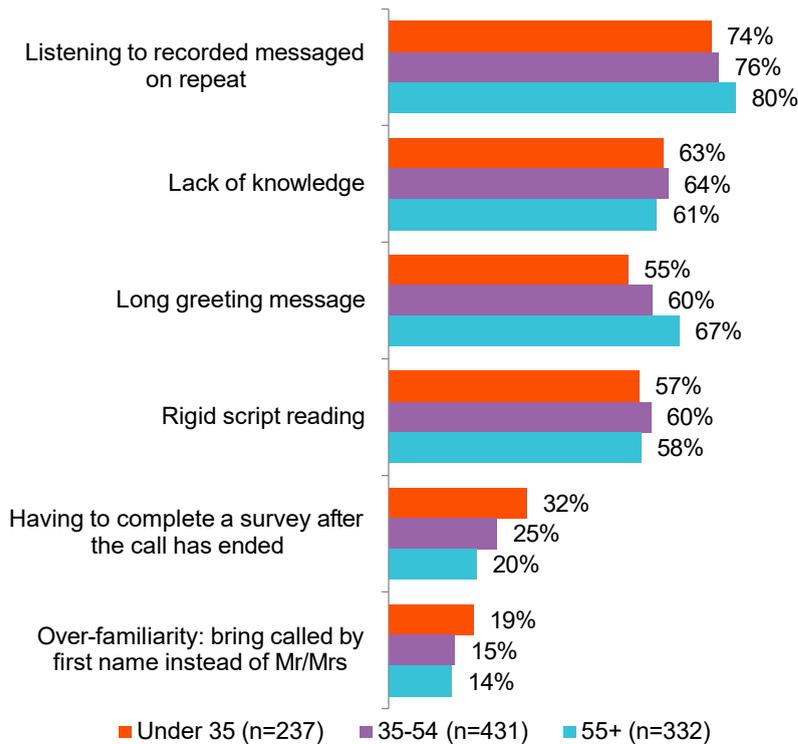
When evaluating what your callers would find helpful when trying to contact your organisation, it is also good to understand what communication techniques are considered to be annoying or unhelpful.

Our research has uncovered that there were four standout annoying aspects of contact centres.

1. Listening to a recorded message on a loop
2. Lack of knowledge
3. Long greeting message
4. Script reading

Listening to repeated messages or long messages was more annoying for those over 55 years than those who were younger.

## Most annoying aspects by age



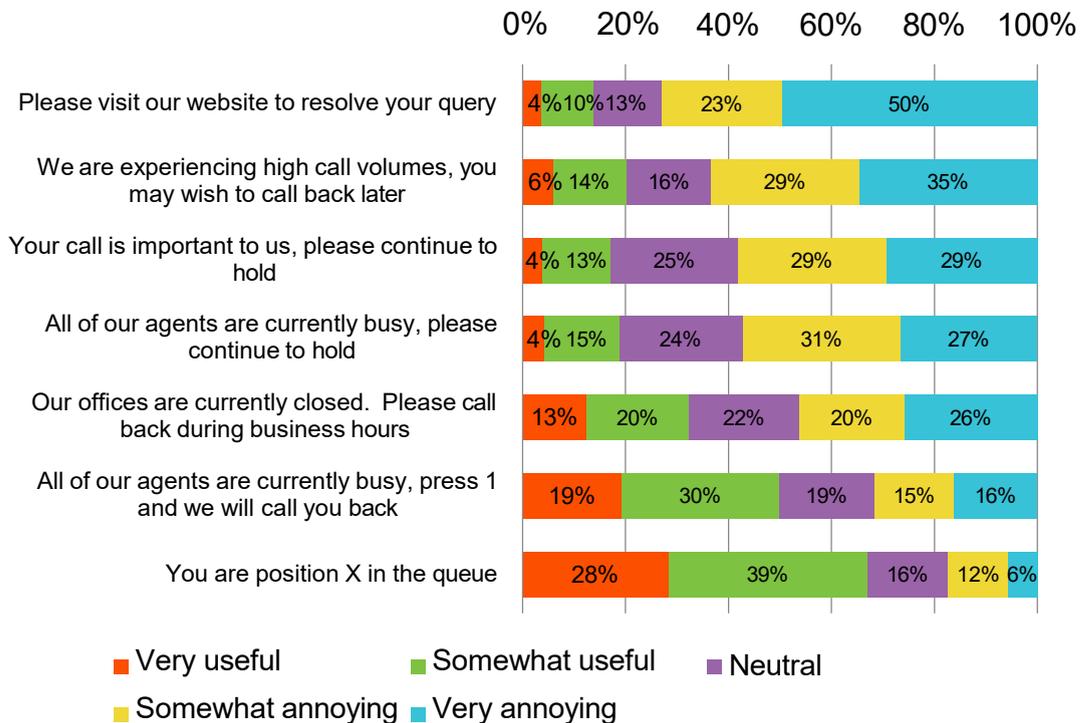
Based on Total Sample (n=1,000)

## ON-HOLD MESSAGES

The waiting time before a customer connects to an agent is usually unavoidable, but this must be kept to a minimum. Try to utilise the waiting time by providing the customer with useful information.

Letting the customer know their position in the call queue and allowing them to select a call back are welcome features. However, messages directing customers to your website or asking customers to call back will leave them angry and irritated.

## On-hold messaging



Based on Total Sample (n=1,000)



**Keep call waiting times to a minimum or utilise the waiting time by providing useful information. Avoid annoying repeated messages or 'voice-command' functions.**

# Offer alternative methods to contact

**In a connected digital world, consumers want to contact organisations at differing times of the day and through a variety of channels.**



How does your business market contact methods and are the options easy to find? In a world of unlimited choice, do your customers have the flexibility to select the method that works best for them? When a choice of contact methods are offered, do those choices cater to your customer's needs?

Organisations should offer the range of channels necessary for their sector, taking into account their customers preferences in order to improve communication.

With a wide range of communication channels on offer in today's connected world, the UKCSI reported that customers who are able to use their preferred contact channel with an organisation are more satisfied with their overall customer experience than those who are not able to.

	% of customers	Customer satisfaction index (out of 100)
Customer who used their preferred channel	80%	78.5
Customers who did not use their preferred channel	5.2%	61.5

Source: UK Customer Satisfaction Index (January 2020)

Customers who wish to make a complaint or report a problem wish to do so by phone but less likely to opt for using social media, writing a letter, sending a text or using a mobile app.

Channel used	% of customers for problems or complaints	% of these customers (not their preferred channel)
Phone	30.5%	15%
In person	25.7%	6.9%
Website	17.3%	17.8%
Email	15%	18.7%
Webchat	4%	12.4%
App	2.5%	26.3%
Text	2.1%	45.8%
In writing (letter)	1.6%	31.4%
Social Media	1.3%	21.7%

More than 10% (not their channel preference)

More than 20% (not their channel preference)

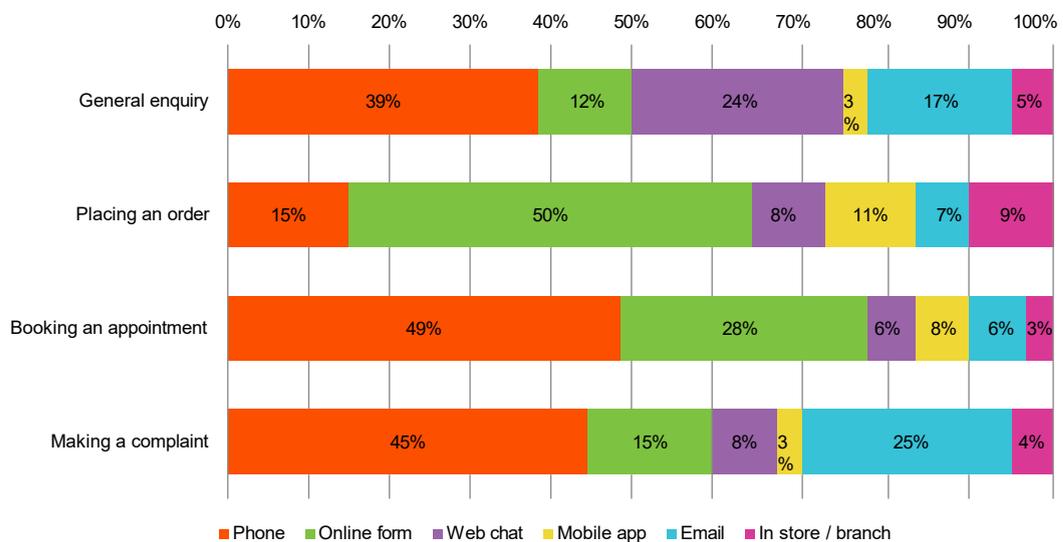
Source: UK Customer Satisfaction Index (January 2020)

When the UKCSI reviewed all channels used when reporting problems or complaints, they also found the highest majority used the phone with just over one-third of consumers using this channel, though 15% of these stated it was not their preferred channel choice.

The findings from the UKCSI were supported by our findings with 45% of our respondents selecting the phone as their preferred choice of contact when making a complaint and 25% choosing to email.

When it comes to booking an appointment, 49% would call a contact centre with 28% going online. 39% of customers that had more general queries, said they'd pick up the phone, and 24% opted to talk through a webchat. To place an order, 50% opted to go online with only 15% wanting to place a call.

## Contact method most likely to be used



Based on Total Sample (n=1,000)

### CONTACT PREFERENCE BY AGE

Within our research findings, we did see shifts in the preferences by age. With the more direct contact channels of phone calls and sending emails being more popular with the older age groups. Going online, using a mobile app or web chat were more popular contact methods with those aged 18-34.

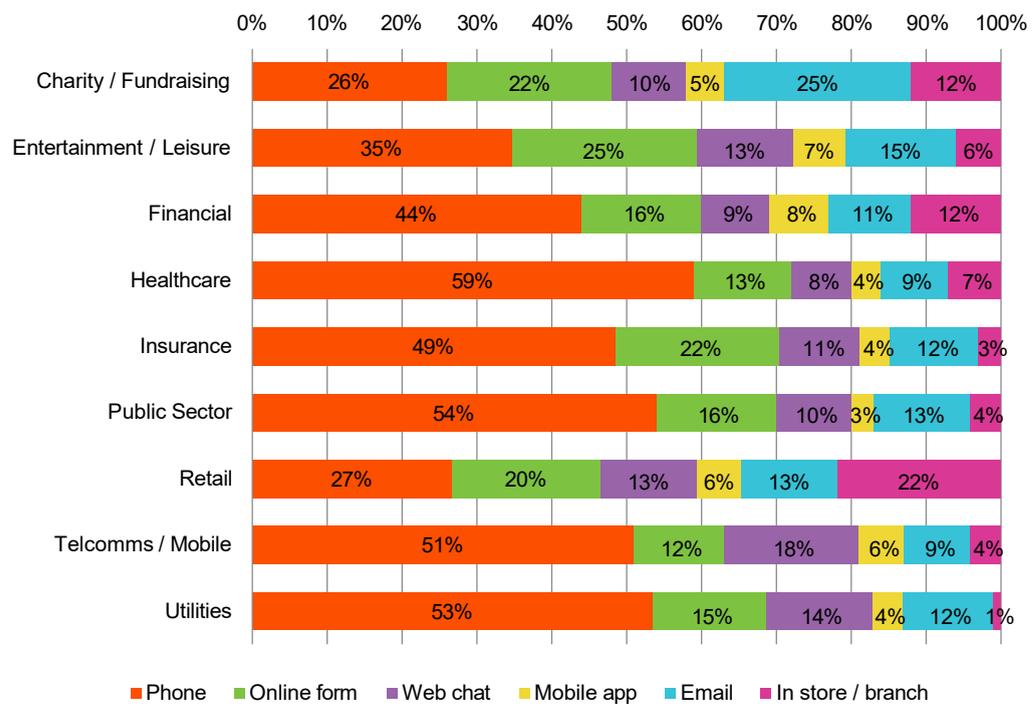
## CONTACT PREFERENCE BY SECTOR

The sector being contacted also impacted how customers want to get in touch.

More than 50% would prefer to pick up the phone to contact companies in the Healthcare; Public; Utilities; Telecom/Mobile sectors.

Customers wanting to get in touch with the Charity or Retail sectors were more likely to use a diverse range of methods.

## Contact method most likely to be used (Industry sector)



Based on Total Sample (n=1,000)



**Allow customers to self-help by promoting the right communication channel for the nature of their enquiry, easing pressures on the contact centre.**

# Customer Satisfaction and Retention

## The effect of poor service on customer retention



Customer retention should remain a key performance indicator for any profitable organisation. Retaining your customer base and creating strong connections will ensure more trust and improved loyalty.

**Achieving consistently high levels of customer satisfaction delivers better financial results**

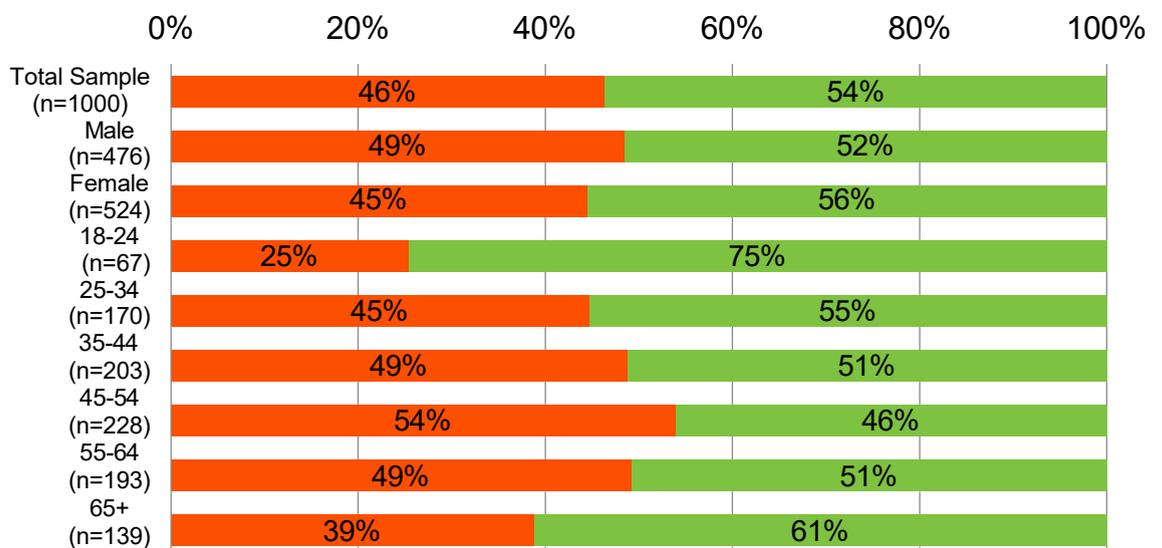
**Focusing on customer service creates opportunities to improve productivity**

**Achieving a 9 or 10 out of 10 for customer satisfaction boosts trust and reputation**

Source: UK Customer Satisfaction Index (January 2020)

Almost half of the consumers claim to have stopped buying from companies as a result of a bad contact centre experience. Amongst the responding base, the older demographics are more likely to stop buying with 54% of those aged between 45-54 versus 25% aged 18-24.

## Call centre experience turning customers away?

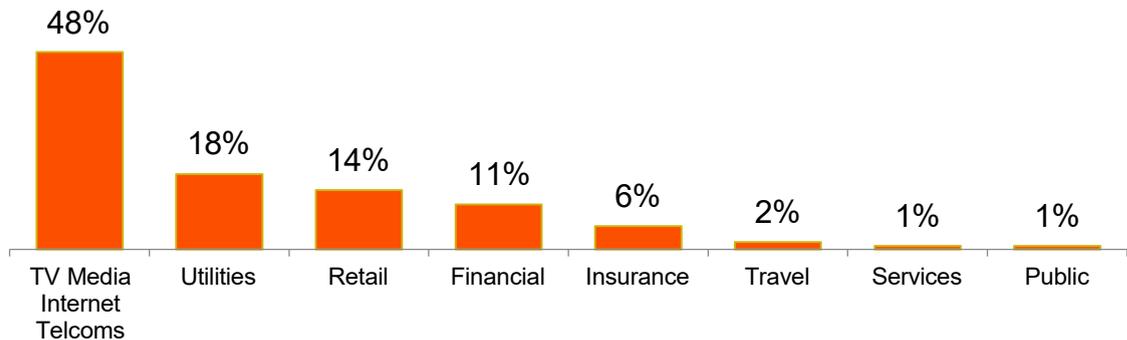


- Yes, have stopped buying because of poor call centre experience
- No, have never stopped buying because of poor call centre experience

The daily service industries have the strongest correlation with vulnerability. Almost 50% of customers most likely to terminate relationships with companies offering TV, Internet and telecoms services if they have bad experiences.

## Poor call centre experience and lost customers

(Industry sector)



46% (n=464) said they stopped using a company/organisation based on a poor call centre experience

23% (n=229) mentioned the company/organisation/sector: %s below are based on these 229 respondents

**“ I was transferred between various different agents and wasted over an hour trying to solve my problem only to then have one of the last agents hang up on me mid-conversation. I switched banks ”**



**Organisations must recognise the importance of each individual call to keep that customer loyal.**

# Conclusion

Our research-based guide has highlighted that across all ages, gender and industry sectors customers are still picking up the phone to connect to an agent in a contact centre.

Managing customer calls in a timely and effective manner will help retain your customers and strengthen your relationship.



## WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT

Make the contact centre process easy and smooth, allowing the customer to speak to the right person with the right answer. Have procedures in place which allow a swift response and resolution. Customers want answers from agents who are willing to help. Avoid customers having to be on hold for too long and being bounced around different departments. Drop the repeated hold messages and rigid script reading in favour of useful information.

## TRAINING CALL AGENTS

Recruit, nurture and maintain the right people. They need to understand the customer as much as they need to understand your business to do their best. Ongoing training will equip your contact centre team with the information and skills they need to provide a great service. As well as having the knowledge they are required to be patient, calm and ready to help.

## SUSTAINED QUALITY

Set KPIs and SLAs for your business and regularly monitor, report and analyse results to achieve the best results. Aim to fully understand the results and your performance in order to continuously improve customer service. Highlight areas of improvement by keeping up to date with communication trends. Be alert to changes in customer behaviours and requirements.

# How Whistl can help your business

Here at Whistl, we can provide tailored customer service solutions for your business needs. Whether you require a dedicated team for all enquiries, your office has reached capacity, or you need help managing peak periods, our inbound customer service management could be the solution to all these challenges.



When outsourcing your contact centre services to Whistl you receive the very best in support and customer service, as we work to be an extension of your business. We mirror your brand guidelines and ethics to ensure that our connections you're your customers are aligned to the relationships you would look to create directly.

By outsourcing some or all of your contact centre solutions to Whistl you gain access to both a wealth of customer service experience and improved technologies. Whistl works across all business sectors and can manage all your customer interactions, across relevant channels, whilst providing your business with a seamless experience, for every single customer.

Gain more understanding of your customers' interactions with your business with tailored reporting. Whether you need to understand more on the patterns of contact, the reasons for contacts or how to improve trust or financial returns, Whistl is on hand to support your business with insight for guidance and improvements for your customers' experience.

## WHAT SOME OF OUR CUSTOMERS SAY:

“ The support Micro Scooters get from Whistl is truly amazing. They completely share our ethos of putting our customers first. They've also helped us hugely understand our customers through advanced reporting and systems. They're an invaluable part of our team and most importantly, we know our customers are in good hands. ”  
**J. Easter, Head of Customer Service, Micro Scooters**

“ Whistl has been our trusted partner for over 14 years providing our online and retail business with the flexible, reliable support we need to allow us to concentrate on growing the business. We know our customers are safe in their hands! ”  
**Dick Jude, General Manager at The Noble Collection**

“ We have been thrilled with the service that we have received over the past year. The team works as an extension of Elder employees by managing all inbound new-care enquiry calls, live-chat and also making outbound calls to people who have registered their interest online. Not only do they convert over 95% of calls to appointments with our sales team, but also provide fantastic customer service whilst doing so. ”  
**Mitchell Greenham, National Sales Manager, Elder**

# Research Methodology

The basis of this guide was developed using a research study of a representative sample of 1,000 UK adults, from a nationwide online panel.

The respondents were screened on the frequency of an outgoing call made to companies or organisations.



## FACTORS ANALYSED

**AGE RANGES:** The age range of those sampled is 18 to 65+. Generational differences were found within the survey with older age groups preferring to call rather than email, use web chat or mobile apps to contact organisations.

**GENDER:** Gender differences were also found when looking at expectations. Men value a 'quick resolution' more than women. Women appreciated 'a positive attitude' more than men.

**SECTORS:** The industry sectors focused on within our research were:

Financial Insurance  
Retail  
Entertainment & Leisure  
Healthcare  
Public sector

Charity & fundraising  
Utilities  
TV, Internet & Telecoms  
Travel

# Thank You

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