




# A New Approach to Customer Service

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Building better outcomes for  
businesses and customers



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Building better outcomes for businesses and customers

Businesses end up defined by their customer service – whether they like it or not. **86%** of customers have stopped buying from a brand because of a bad customer service experience, and **77%** of customers are likely to recommend a company after a positive one.

Customer service for the digital-first economy deserves as much strategic analysis as any business process in the modern world. Digital businesses need to present a human face, and where that's not possible, a human voice is your next best option.

Younger customers expect automated options, but access to knowledgeable customer service representatives is critical to mass-market appeal.

Our organisation (**Odondo**) is determined to reinvent how customer service is delivered. We have pioneered a distributed approach to scalable, omnichannel customer service delivery. Following the work-from-home (WFH) response to the current health crisis, it's time for all brands to examine their approach to customer service and realign with technological possibilities.



## What this report will deliver

Our goal is to define a new strategic vision for scalable and agile customer service delivery. We will outline a theoretical approach to customer service and a set of actionable steps that will allow you to build or reform a customer service function. We will address the pros and cons of customer service outsourcing and provide a guide for the selection of a strategic partner.

Brands need cost-effective ways to deliver positive experiences on the right channels at the right time. We believe that distributed, outsourced and agile customer service partnerships are the way forward. Although this reform package can be adopted piecemeal, it's the complementary elements that deliver true on-demand flexibility able to match digital agility. We want to make the case for a new set of best practices. Let's get started!





## What do customers want?

Any attempt to rethink a business process requires starting with outcomes. In this case, that means looking at what customers want and how to fulfil those needs.

"Customer wants" are primarily defined by flexibility and personalisation. They want access to knowledgeable agents and automated/rapid solutions to simpler problems. They want the ability to access agents through a number of different channels, and they don't want to have to repeat themselves. More than anything, customers want good outcomes and good experiences.

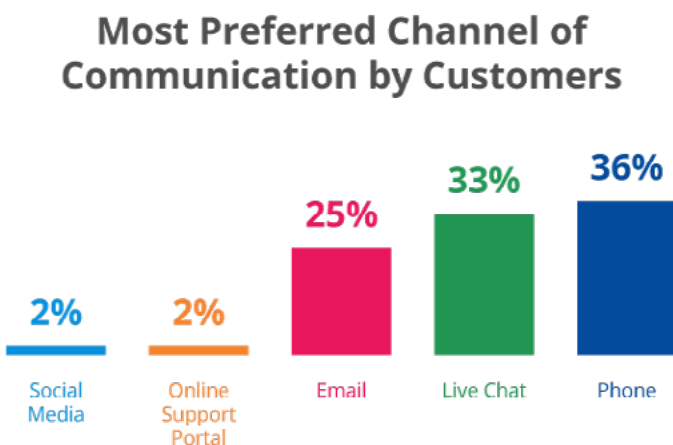




# 1 Contact options and continuity

Customers are not uniform in their communication preferences and you cannot expect every problem to be resolved in the same way. Resetting a password or looking up user instructions do not require the same level of input as resolving a major error – and customers aren't going to want the hassle of a phone call and wait times to simply access their account. But even for major errors, there isn't consensus.

Based on research by [TalkDesk](#), the most preferred channels of communication break down as:



**Pro tip:** These numbers aren't uniform across demographics. For example, **52%** of millennials favour live chat, and a higher proportion of them value a quick response time. But the overall prioritisation of flexibility and options remain.

Phone calls, live chat and email are all dominant choices, and should form the backbone of your customer service capabilities. As we'll get back to, this does demonstrate a preference for access to real "human" customer service agents. But don't forget about the **55%** of customers that value the instant response capabilities of a chatbot – and the possible 30% cost-savings that AI-driven automation can deliver to customer support.

## Multichannel isn't enough

72% of customers view having to explain their problem more than once as bad customer service. 35% of customers want to be able to speak with the same agent on every channel. 67% of customers report receiving conflicting answers from different agents.

Having multi-channel capabilities isn't good enough. Customers want the ability to engage on multiple channels and receive a smooth and consistent experience – they want "omnichannel".

Information captured by automated channels needs to be relayed to agents who take over, and agents should have access to customer information and purchase histories. Customers should be allowed to bounce from one contact point to another, receiving each bit of information in the way that they find most convenient without having to repeat themselves within a bespoke experience.





## 2 Quick response time – 24-7

Part of omnichannel flexibility is access. Admittedly, quick response times and 24-7 support are not as critical for every business. For example, a user might forgive a game developer for not responding to a support query immediately – but a bank or health service provider can't view slow response times as an option. And customers value speed:

- 33% of customers feel positively about a company simply because of a **fast response**.
- Most customers aren't willing to wait more than **2 minutes in a phone queue**, and 13% state that "no hold time is acceptable".
- 58% of millennials expect to be able to **engage with a brand whenever they choose**.
- For online retailers, 40% of customers expect **24-7 customer service**.

With that said, 59% of customers **value a personalised experience** over a fast one. Although you need to be quick, it cannot come at the cost of quality. The trick is providing the right kind of service to each customer – and that comes back to options and continuity between those options.



# 3

## Access to knowledgeable agents



If appropriately linked to an information capturing system, automated tools provide valuable front-line support, delivering fast access and simple resolutions. Automation can enable customer service agents to be more efficient with their time. But automation has not replaced the customer service agent in the eyes of the customer, and some automation capabilities are universally disliked.

### Consider the following:

- 98% of customers find interactive **voice response** (IVR) systems so frustrating that they try to skip them.
- 39% of customers would **rather clean their toilet** than try and get an answer out of an IVR system.
- The **number one** reason that customers dislike calling companies is an inability to talk to a real person – immediately.
- 67% of customers will **hang up the phone** if they can't reach a customer service agent.
- More than **60%** of customers state that a knowledgeable and pleasant customer service representative is fundamental to a positive experience.
- Not being able to **understand a customer service agent** is rated as the most frustrating part of a customer service experience.



At the end of the day, customers want to speak to qualified, real people. Humans crave social interactions. Even if they'd rather talk to that person through a live-chat portal, access to knowledgeable and personable representatives is critical to a successful customer service operation. Figuring out how to align customers with the right representative at the right time is central to our strategic vision for customer service delivery.



**Remember:** there isn't just one form of customer service. Most brands divide their customer service function into four categories — Level 0-3. Just as a refresher:

**Level 0:** Self-service and automated functions — chatbots, FAQ pages, password reset tools.

**Level 1:** Front-line support — newer agents able to solve common problems.

**Level 2:** Problem solving — senior agents able to provide in-depth answers and resolve complex problems.

**Level 3:** Technical support — trained specialists able to resolve the most complex issues and liaison with engineering teams to improve a product.

By segmenting your customer service options along these lines, it becomes easier to respond to issues quickly and with the right level of detail. It also provides a clear path for ticket escalation, and clear channels through which you need to share information.

# 4 Good outcomes – start-to-finish

Customer service is only called "customer service" when something goes wrong. Otherwise, it's considered "customer experience". Ultimately, your customers are more interested in positive experiences than fast access to a call centre. The ideal customer service scenario is one in which customer service support is never needed in the first place. You should:

- > **Provide information:** From the point of first contact through to customer onboarding and ongoing outreach, supply detailed information that will allow customers to solve minor issues and properly engage with your product/service. Create manuals, FAQ pages, explainer videos and more – all easily accessible online.
- > **Proactively problem-solve:** If you identify a problem, don't wait for customer service calls. Get out there and resolve issues. Get in touch with your customers before

they contact you to let them know about a problem and how it's going to be solved.

- > **Build quality:** A high-quality product or service will inherently require less support. The real foundations of a quality customer service strategy is delivering a quality outcome to customers. Don't try and paper over poor foundations with a customer service team.

Customers want quality and simplicity. Ultimately, they want products and services that work, and the easy ability to access information if a problem arises. Self-service channels (and rich information resources) make it easier for customers to engage with your customer service teams – if and when it's necessary. They will also reduce the burden on your customer service agents, allowing you to have a smaller and more effective team.



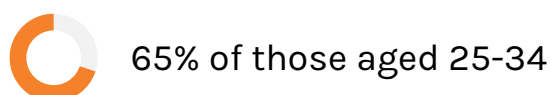
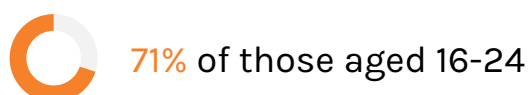
# 5 Bespoke journeys

What customers want are outcomes tailored to their specific needs. A large part of our focus here is the creation of a flexible framework that can be deployed to match a wide range of customer priorities. However, by looking at your specific customers, it's possible to hone in on a more specific set of requirements.

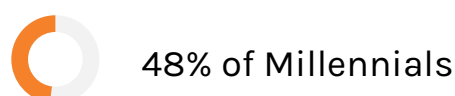
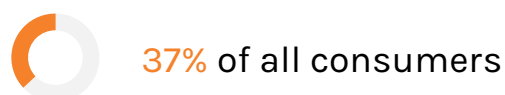
## Customer age

Difference in customer service priorities are most dramatically split along generational lines. Millennials and Gen Z prioritise faster, on-demand interactions done over chat, whereas older customers are more likely to prefer phone calls and personalisation.

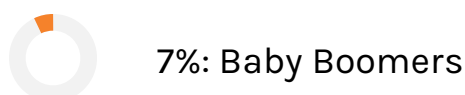
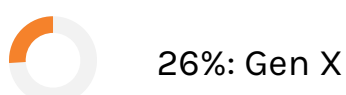
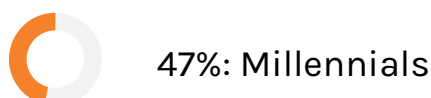
## Customers who highly value quick response times:



## Customer who always start with self-service:



## Customers who have used live chat, social media or texting for customer service:



**Note:** 36% of Gen Z prefer social media for simple support – compared with 5% of Baby Boomers.

**Remember:** 52% of millennials favour live chat over phone calls, and 58% expect the ability to engage with a brand whenever they choose. Ultimately, the younger your customer demographics, the more you should invest in automated and text-based customer service options, and the more detail you need to include in your self-service options.



## Creating a solution that's right for you

Customer service should be tailored to your specific needs. Don't forget that throughout the process of building a strategy.

### Ask yourself questions like:

- What is the average age of my customer?
- Is 24-7 support essential or "nice to have"?
- What volume of customer service calls are expected?
- Does the need for customer support fluctuate regularly? How often/how much?

- Does my product require technical support?
- How are customers trying to engage with my brand today?

### Then ask your customers questions like:

- What are your top three priorities when seeking customer service?
- What is your preferred channel of customer service communication?
- What are the primary issues you have needed customer support to resolve?
- What does good customer service look like to you?



Building a flexible omnichannel experience will allow you to accommodate the needs of every individual customer. However, by finding out more about the specific needs of your average customer, you can prioritise investment and determine what you have to get right, and what you can strive to achieve in the future.

What we want to focus on is how to build flexible foundations that are able to accommodate whatever bespoke journey you identify as most important. And that starts with rethinking how you align customers with knowledgeable agents and sophisticated technology.

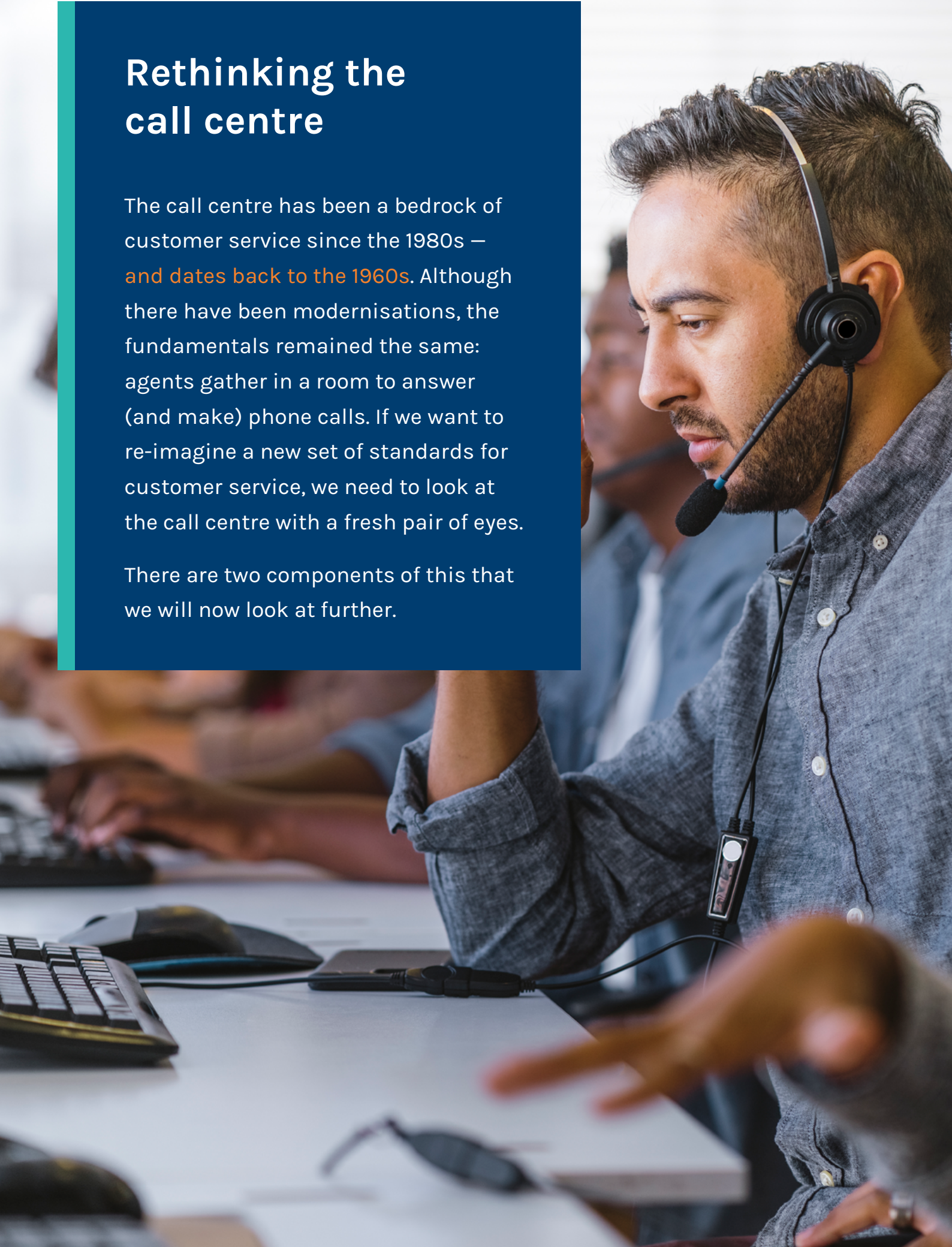




## Rethinking the call centre

The call centre has been a bedrock of customer service since the 1980s – and dates back to the 1960s. Although there have been modernisations, the fundamentals remained the same: agents gather in a room to answer (and make) phone calls. If we want to re-imagine a new set of standards for customer service, we need to look at the call centre with a fresh pair of eyes.

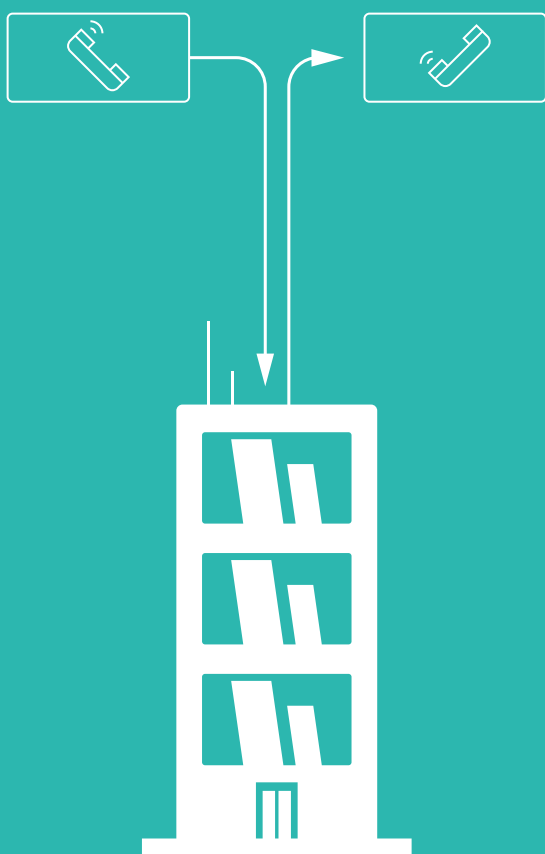
There are two components of this that we will now look at further.



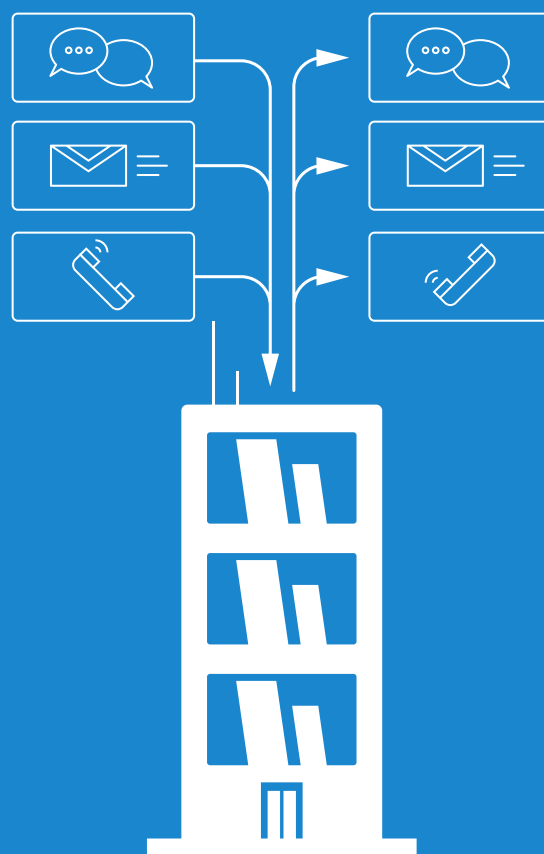


# The call centre vs contact centre

The first step to improving the call centre is expanding the kinds of "service" it's able to deliver. This transformation is already underway and is captured by the term "contact centre".



**Call centre:** A call centre fields inbound calls and makes outbound calls – that's it.



**Contact centre:** A contact centre is multi-channel. Agents are equipped with the tools and training needed to make calls, but also handle live-chat, email support and technical support.

## The omnichannel service centre

Although a "contact centre" is not necessarily "omnichannel", it does enable an omnichannel strategy. By training your agents to provide support through a number of different channels, you improve experience consistency across those different channels. This not only makes it easier to provide channel flexibility to customers, it makes it possible for the same agents to manage a single customer across multiple contact points and channels.



## Distributed customer service

A defining feature of the current era is the embrace of work-from-home policies. For some industries, this is a burden that must be accommodated. For others, it's a liberating trend. The move towards distributing the call centre was already underway, and we believe that this brings transformational benefits to customer service delivery.



## Benefits of distributed customer service

Providing workplace flexibility to customer service representatives improves the desirability of the position and increases business agility. Overheads are reduced and hiring part-time staff is made easier. Fundamentally, the people you are able to hire changes and the ability to retain those staff is increased. You get:

- **Better agents:** Flexibility increases the desirability of the job. That not only means an ability to hire the best customer service agents, but it also opens the door to hiring people who wouldn't have traditionally worked in a call centre – e.g. stay-at-home parents, people with disabilities, retirees. The result is an older average age, more degree educated agents, and more years of experience.
- **Access to the right agents:** Your ability to hire higher-skilled representatives, and then engage with them in flexible ways, means that you can align customers with the right agents at the right time. Rather than being restricted to a fixed pool of in-house resources, calls can be directed based on areas of expertise and experience. You can accommodate multiple languages, match agents with customer demographics, and find agents with specific industry experience or technical backgrounds.
- **Lower costs:** Without having to rent office space, your overheads are decreased. There is less physical infrastructure to maintain, and it becomes possible to pay high-quality agents more while still reducing overall CS costs.

Distributed customer service is the model that **we have embraced**, and the benefits are seen in the results.

### Traditional call centre:



Average age: <25



Degree  
educated: 40%



Years of  
experience: <5

### Distributed call centre:



Average age: >35



Degree  
educated: >75%



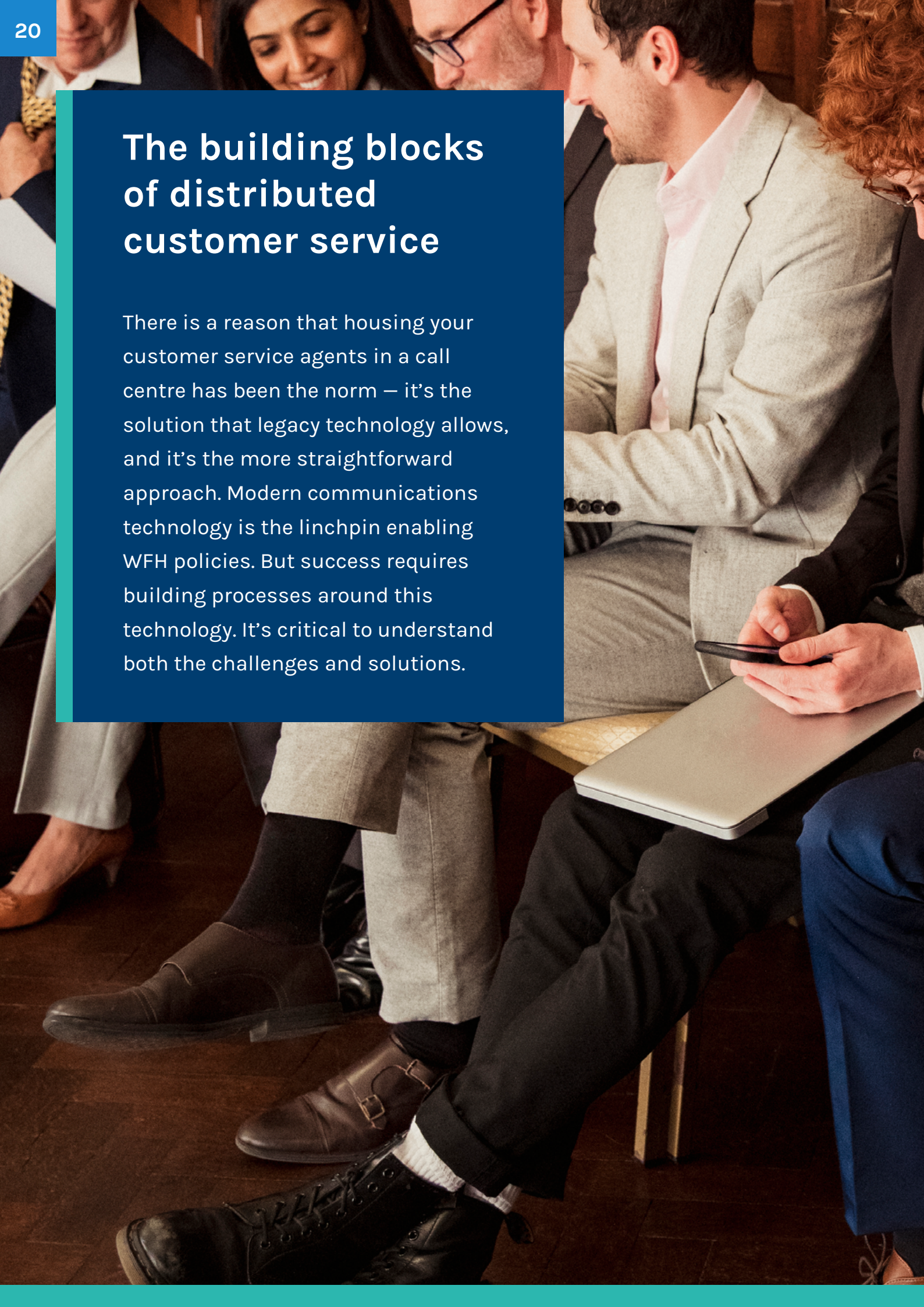
Years of  
experience: >10

A distributed and omnichannel approach better aligns with customer demands and modern customer service expectations. But delivering that outcome is easier said than done.



## The building blocks of distributed customer service

There is a reason that housing your customer service agents in a call centre has been the norm – it's the solution that legacy technology allows, and it's the more straightforward approach. Modern communications technology is the linchpin enabling WFH policies. But success requires building processes around this technology. It's critical to understand both the challenges and solutions.





# The challenges of distributed customer service

Whether or not you're building a customer service function from scratch, or reforming an existing CS operation, there are a number of challenges that you need to keep in mind.

## 1. Recruitment

Finding and recruiting new quality agents is one of the largest ongoing challenges of managing a customer service function. A benefit of distributed customer service is your ability to hire a more diverse range of people. But this creates a problem in and of itself.

Looking to widen the pool of potential agents means contacting people who might not otherwise consider working in customer service. That requires active outreach in order to optimise your ability to take advantage of the benefits of distributed customer service.



**The solution:** Build a dedicated recruitment function within your customer service team, or partner with an agency to either manage your recruitment, or the entire distributed CS function – more on that in the next section.

## 2. Onboarding and training

Work-from-home poses particular problems for training and onboarding new staff. Losing a centralised work environment makes it harder to cultivate a consistent company culture, and creates challenges for new agents looking to easily ask questions and for managers seeking to assess who needs help.

**The solution:** In any distributed workplace, it's essential to create thought-out and detailed employee onboarding and training material. You want self-service resources that staff can use to answer their own questions and clear channels of communication when more advanced help is needed. You should have clear review points and a roadmap outlining your "progress expectations" for new agents and staff.

## 3. Management

Maintaining a consistent culture and operation doesn't just stop with onboarding. You need clear procedures in place to keep agents in communication with management, update techniques and delegate tasks.

**The solution:** You should start with "process" – assigning regular check-ins between staff and management, and clear lines of communication. Communication software (e.g. [Slack](#) or [Zoom](#)) are critical tools for creating a seamless and collaborative remote work environment.

The next step is to consider the unique challenges of customer service operations in a WFH setting. For example, you need a sophisticated CRM to which you can provide remote (permission controlled) access. You need to allow remote agents to access automated logs and create a distributed technological framework for assigning calls, customer service queries and record resolutions.



## 4. Tracking and accountability

Success needs to be measured. The same kinds of KPI tracking and reporting tools deployed within a traditional call centre need to be maintained within a distributed environment. That means developing tools able to record performance and display those results.

**The solution:** You need to consider time tracking, activity logging, call monitoring and performance reporting. The fact that most of this infrastructure needs to be overlaid across personal devices adds to the complication. But, fundamentally, the solution revolves around duplicating the same best practices applied to accountability and reporting within a traditional call centre environment.

Although there are a wide range of metrics worth recording, consider the following stats:

- **First response time:** How quickly customer enquiries can be responded to across different channels.
- **First call resolution rate:** The percentage of queries that are resolved on first contact – this should be tracked across all channels and for specific channels.
- **Average time in queues:** The amount of time customers spend waiting to speak with an agent.
- **Average abandonment rate:** The frequency with which customers leave a queue before speaking with an agent.
- **Service engagement:** The degree to which different channels are engaged with by customers.
- **Ticket escalation rate:** The frequency with which queries are transferred between channels, or moved up level-of-service.
- **CSAT/NPS scores:** Survey scores regarding customer satisfaction with both customer service and brand outcomes.



## 5. Security

Related to tracking and accountability, you need to ensure that your distributed environment is secure. BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) policies common within a WFH setting make this particularly hard. But it's essential that your customer data is kept secure and that you don't fall afoul of any data protection or regulation policies within your geographic area.

**The solution:** Resolving security issues is defined by policy and technology. You may need to invest in data encryption, or the installation of other security measures within the homes of your agents. But, remember, **90%** of data breaches are caused by human error. Ultimately, you need to make sure that you can track and attribute all interactions with customer data on an individual level – this creates a culture of accountability that can ensure diligent protection of customer information.





## The benefits outweigh the costs

Despite the challenges of operating a remote workforce, the benefits outweigh the costs. Most of the obstacles revolve around building the operation – an operation that comes with long-term cost savings and a number of differentiating factors that cannot be replicated using traditional processes.





## Differentiating factors

- 1. Getting the top agents:** 70% of workers would rather work-from-home. That number jumps to 81% for people between the ages of 35 and 44. Telecommuting will allow you to have your pick of agents. It also allows you to hire the best agents, regardless of where they live.
- 2. Diversity of backgrounds:** The flexibility of remote workflows simply provides you access to individuals who would not have traditionally worked in a call centre. Your ability to hire stay-at-home parents, people with disabilities and retirees allows you to create a customer service team with a higher level of education, higher average age, and higher average skill set than would otherwise be an option.
- 3. Flexibility:** Managing staff within a remote framework makes it easier to engage with them on a flexible basis – both for you and those

agents. You can dial-up or dial-down the number of agents based on demand, and align the right agent (with the right skill sets) with the right customers. Effectively, you can hire agents "to order" – ensuring optimal outcomes. Your overall operation becomes more agile, and better able to accommodate change and growth.

- 4. Reduced costs:** Although getting a distributed customer service operation off the ground requires significant investment, it delivers reduced costs over time. Resources saved on infrastructure, ground rent, building maintenance and staff amenities can all be either recouped or re-invested in better agents.

Fundamentally, a distributed approach to customer service provides access to better agents on a more flexible basis – two factors that simply cannot be duplicated from a traditional mindset. Long-term cost savings are an added bonus.

## A hybrid approach

The distributed customer service centre does not have to be adopted "wholesale" to be effective. You could maintain a traditional in-house call centre and simply grow your operation using a distributed model. You could grow particular specialised capabilities within a distributed model, while retaining a traditional call centre for more standard operations.

If we take flexibility and quality of service as the defining characteristics we want to achieve in order to meet the demands of customers, distributed customer service is clearly the way forward. The flexibility with which it can be adopted is only one element that adds to its value.

However, both of these attributes (flexibility and quality) can be taken to a whole new level when paired with outsourced strategic partnerships. If your goal is true "on-demand" scalability, moving closer to a fully distributed (and outsourced) model will serve you well.



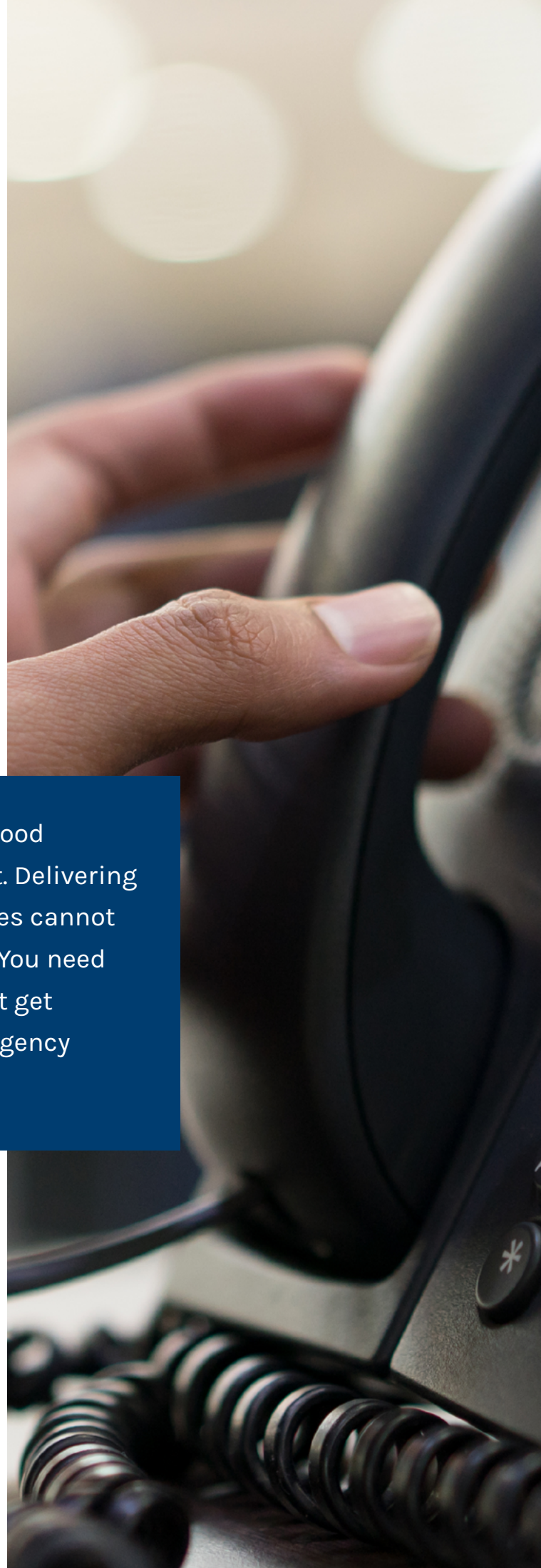


## Optimising flexibility with partnerships

True flexibility is not possible in-house. Ultimately, you will create friction managing the flexibility you are trying to achieve. Particularly when it comes to dialing up and down service levels to match demand, flexible outcomes can only be achieved by having access to more resources than you need most of the time. But this creates redundancies, expense and management challenges.

**Remember:** 86% of consumers "expect good service" and wouldn't pay "more" to get it. Delivering high-quality customer service capabilities cannot come at the cost of competitive pricing. You need agile, cost-effective solutions – but don't get caught up building a customer service agency simply to avoid partnering with one.

The right strategic partnership can deliver on-demand access to quality outcomes. But outsourcing is often overlooked for the wrong reasons. There are both myths and best practices that need to be addressed in order to optimise the customer service outcomes that are possible.



# Outsourcing vs offshoring

The number one factor preventing the embrace of outsourced flexibility is the image of the outsourced call centre – and the poor quality associated with this solution. Essentially, outsourcing and offshoring are not the same thing, and the question of outsourcing vs offshoring should not be addressed at the same time.



- > **Offshoring:** Defined by moving a business process to another country, offshoring can be done in-house or using outsourced partners. The main goal of offshoring is to capitalise on cheaper labour markets, and it's generally accompanied by a depreciation in quality.
- > **Outsourcing:** Defined by the formation of strategic partnerships, outsourcing can be "onshore" or "offshore" and undertaken for any number of reasons – including an increase in quality, better price control, and improved flexibility.

Although offshoring has been a popular solution for keeping costs down within the traditional call centre, it's not an appropriate solution for the modern economy. Strategic use of automated capabilities can reduce call volumes for customer service agents, and increases the need for those agents to deliver high-quality outcomes.

A distributed approach to the call centre is a better way to align cost savings requirements with the need for higher-quality agents. Fundamentally, offshore customer service (either done in-house or outsourced) is a legacy approach. The same cannot be said for outsourcing more generally.



# Why outsourcing works (in general)

Although outsourcing is not always the right decision (for customer service or otherwise), it brings with it benefits that are either impossible to duplicate in-house, or are hard to achieve.

**Remember:** outsourcing can and should be pursued with quality improvements in mind – and it's possible to deliver that outcome while still reducing costs.



## 1. Economies of scale

Prices drop as you scale up production. This is a fundamental principle of the economy, and is **why a chicken sandwich doesn't cost well over £1,000**. The upfront costs of building infrastructure are not recovered as well when operating on a small scale. **59%** of businesses engage in outsourcing to cut total costs.

For example, to build a team of one-hundred or one-thousand, you will still need processes and infrastructure to support recruitment, training, management and technical support.

The same can even be said of a team of ten. But the volume of work those teams can process is divided by orders of magnitude.

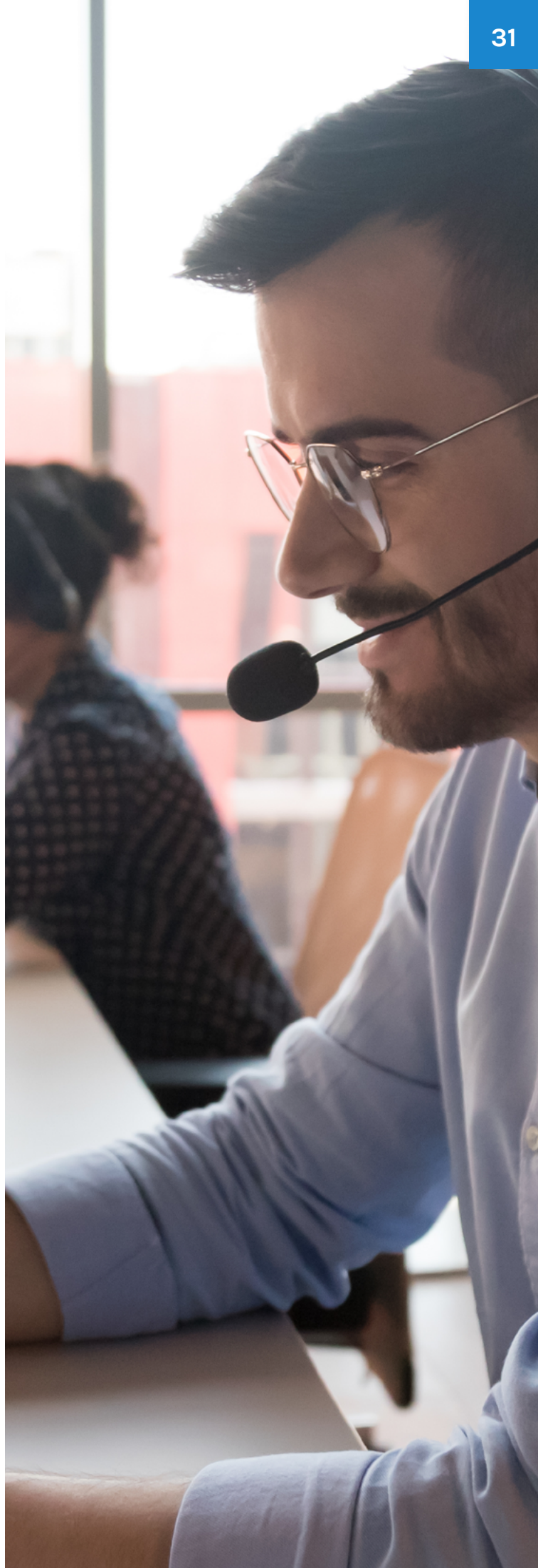
**Why this is important:** Larger customer service functions can operate a lower cost per engagement. Each customer service query answered by a large team will cost less than one managed by a small team. For small-to-medium sized businesses, appropriate use of outsourcing partners delivers better quality at lower costs.

## 2. Specialisation

Related to economies of scale, specialisation allows for expertise. Outsourced specialists focus on one thing. This not only allows for an optimisation of infrastructure investment, it allows for the development of institutional and personal experience in the field.

Why this is important: By delegating tasks to specialists, you're allowed to focus on the core capabilities of your business – reducing customer service issues in the first place. Outsourcing provides access to skill sets that are not readily available within your business, and may be hard to acquire. This benefits businesses of all sizes. Consider these reasons for outsourcing highlighted in a study by [Deloitte](#):

- 57%: Enable focus on core business.
- 47%: Solve a capacity issue.
- 31%: Enhance service quality.
- 28% Access to intellectual capital.
- 17%: Drive broader transformational change.





### 3. Flexibility of access

The things that outsourced partners provide that cannot be duplicated "in-house" is flexibility of access. No matter how an in-house team is structured, nothing can truly be on-demand. Part-time contracts can duplicate some of the flexibility offered by outsourced partners, but it's not possible to only "pay-for-what-you-use" when it's your job to supply those resources.

**Why this is important:** Customer service volumes are never consistent. Problems arise, and then fall away. You will often need more support when launching a new product. When offering 24-7 support, you're likely to receive far fewer calls in the middle of the night. Advanced and technical support are needed less often.

An in-house team would always need all of these resources available in reserve. Outsourced partners will be able to flexibly deploy those resources across a number of clients, and provide you access when necessary. An outsourcing partner will be able to operate more efficiently than an in-house team, and your ability to engage with them on an agile basis doubles that effectiveness.

Ultimately, outsourcing can deliver better outcomes at lower costs, and makes it easier to supply the kinds of "always-on" "omnichannel" options that modern consumers expect. It also makes it far easier to grow an operation with your business, and allows you to control your budget with hard spending limits.



# Outsourcing and the distributed customer service centre

Quality outsourcing and the distributed customer service centre are both strategies aimed at delivering improved outcomes at reduced costs through flexibility. When executed together, these elements complement one another – delivering even better outcomes.

## Areas of complementary overlap

**Agent quality:** Outsourcing is defined by specialisation. When undertaken with quality in mind, the level of institutional and personal experience in a field cannot really be paralleled by in-house teams. Similarly, a defining feature of distributed customer service is access to better and more diverse agents. When brought together, you get better agents and better outcomes.

**Agility:** A primary value of outsourcing is flexibility of access. Work-from-home policies allow for more flexible engagement with agents. Outsourced partners with distributed infrastructure can deliver true "on-demand" access to customer service resources – at lower costs and at higher quality. That means aligning the right agents (with the right skill sets) with the right customers. Critically, this can be done without developing and maintaining a sophisticated and costly recruitment operation – and can be dialled up and down to meet demand.

**Efficiency:** Both outsourcing and distributed customer service increase efficiency. Outsourcing does so through economies of scale and specialisation, distribution does so by reducing overheads and creating more flexible work contracts. The most efficient and cost effective operations will deploy both of these strategies.



## A positive feedback loop

It's hard to pinpoint which of these two elements are more important to the modernisation of customer service. Outsourcing is the older component. But distributed customer service teams are revolutionising how customer service agencies operate – changing who they hire, where they focus, and the kinds of contracts they can offer. Ultimately, distributed customer service is ending the prevalence of offshore outsourcing by providing a combined foundation for a better customer service future.



## Selective partnerships

Outsourcing does not have to be an "all or nothing" option. It can provide flexible access to specific skills or experience – augmenting a robust in-house operation. It's a great overflow option and can fill a critical role in business continuity planning.

Creating flexible and selective partnerships has been an important choice for many companies struggling to accommodate the rapid work-from-home transition required by the current health crisis. This kind of hybrid approach will likely play an expanded role in the future.

Ultimately, outsourcing is about flexibility. Real flexibility can accommodate unique specifics and work around the foundations of an existing solution. It's not uncommon for brands to divide outsourcing along "levels of service" – retaining "brand experts" in-house and outsourcing front-line service. Keep these options in mind when looking for partners and thinking about the kind of solution that's best for you.

## How to pick the right strategic partner

Outsourcing only works if you select the right strategic partnership. Not every customer service agency will deliver the kind of flexible, on-demand access, or quality-driven focus that we have described here.

The wrong outsourcing partner can lock you into subpar results and a lack of flexibility that undermine the main benefits of outsourcing customer service in the first place. When investigating partnerships, consider the following:

### 1. **A distributed/onshore workforce:**

If you want a customer service partner that can help you align with the strategic goals we've outlined here, they will have needed to embrace an onshore and distributed workforce. If not, you are simply engaging with a legacy approach to customer service delivery.

### 2. **Flexible contracts:** Do not engage with customer service outsource providers that will not provide you with on-demand access. Your ability to dial up and dial down your customer service capabilities is a clear differentiating reason to engage in outsourcing in the first place – and should be specified within your SLAs (Service Level Agreements).

Minimum service level requirements are common within the industry. As long as this can be set low enough that

you never overpay for what you use, a minimum requirement is acceptable. However, make sure that your contract allows you to scale up that service level without incurring fees or locking you into expanded services moving forward.

### 3. **Omnichannel options:** You want a customer service partner that will let you deliver on the omnichannel expectations of modern customers. That means email, phone support, chatbots and more – offered 24-7 – across different levels of service. Even if you don't want to engage with all of these options today, you want the foundations in place to scale up your operation when needed. In order for outsourcing partnerships to be flexible, those options need to be in place.



- 4. Development and support:** You want a partner who is willing to help you learn – passing on experience and wisdom to both improve your ability to collect customer information and deliver a holistic and positive customer experience.
- 5. Accountability and transparency:** Customer service partners should be clear about what they will deliver, and transparent about reporting. Make sure that they are willing to provide detailed audits of their performance, access to raw data and call logs, and a willingness to work with you to help you understand what has worked and what needs to be improved.
- 6. Security:** Make sure that any outsourced pattern has robust data security processes in place, and can explain to you how they will keep your customer information safe and secure.
- 7. A willingness to learn your specifics:** An ideal partner will operate as an extension of your business – learning details about your product/service, your customers and how you want to communicate. They should mirror your language and tone, delivering a streamlined experience for customers who would never guess that they are speaking with an outside partner.
- 8. The ability to work alongside your team:** Partners should be willing and able to support an existing in-house operation – working alongside an in-house team to deliver one or more specific outcomes within a CS function that appears seamless from a customer perspective.

You want a strategic partner that is flexible and committed to serving your needs. They should be willing to help you better understand what they are doing and get out of your way when necessary. Agencies that want to work with you, not simply slot you into their operation, are the kinds of good long-term partnerships that can help you grow into the future of customer service.

## A new normal can benefit both customers and businesses

The future of customer service is defined by mutual benefit. Customers want flexible access to fast answers. Businesses want lower costs and happier customers. Distributed and outsourced customer service is able to provide the on-demand and omnichannel services – delivered to the highest standard – to fit both of these criteria.

### Remote workers are more productive

A number of surveys have found that remote workers are **more productive** – taking marginally longer breaks during the day, but spending less total time being unproductive than their office counterparts. Even surveys related to the current health crisis have shown no **real impact to productivity** resulting from the WFH transition, in spite of all of the other turmoil.



### Finding complementary solutions

The gamechanger is combining the efficiency and flexibility of distributed customer service with the efficiency and flexibility of outsourced customer service. The outcome is a quality-driven customer service strategy that is competitively priced and able to match the agile expectations of the digital-first economy.



# What Odondo delivers

Our entire business model is built around executing the ideas we have set out in this report. Pioneering the distributed customer service centre, our service options optimise the benefits of quality-driven outsourcing. With Odondo, you get:

- > **On-demand services:** We provide our partners with unlimited flexibility, able to dial-up and dial-down services to match current demands.
- > **The right agents:** Our rigorous recruitment criteria and distributed service model mean that you will get the most qualified agents available. Flexibility means that we can provide you access to the right agents at the right time. You get the exact skill set and experience needed for your campaigns – accommodating language requirements, demographic profiles, technical/industry backgrounds and more.
- > **Omnichannel options:** Our full-service spectrum allows you to access every customer service channel – when it's needed – within our on-demand framework.
- > **24-7 support:** With our teams working around the clock, your customers will always be able to get help, but you'll only pay for that service when it's necessary – and if it's wanted.
- > **Budget control:** Your ability to control which services you purchase, and in what quantities, allows you to precisely control your budget on a monthly basis.
- > **Help, support, and customisation:** We'll learn your specifics and interact with your customers just like an in-house team. We'll help you develop your in-house skills, and are able to create a bespoke service offering that matches your exact needs – even supporting an existing in-house team.

## Customer service as a growth strategy

Your customer service choices need to be taken seriously. Companies with strong omnichannel engagement strategies have **higher average** customer retention rates. A **good customer service experience** can influence 80% of customers to recommend your brand, and 40% to share their story on social media. When done right, customer service will double as a customer acquisition and customer retention strategy – helping your brand grow.

No matter how you approach the new normal of customer service, it's time to rethink best practices. Customer service defines how brands relate to customers, and building economic and scalable solutions fit for the digital economy is essential. We believe that distributed outsourcing is the key to a positive future. If you want advice about your particular circumstances, **get in touch – we'd be happy to help.**

# Have you future-proofed your customer service function?

Get in touch today to learn more about partnering with an outsourcer to deliver a cost-effective, flexible and scalable customer service offering.

[Tell Me More](#)