



In Search of Effortless Customer Experiences

September 2021

Supporting Partner

A CCMA Research Initiative

servicenow[®]

What do customers want from customer service teams?

It's a given that customers want help that is provided quickly, thoroughly, and courteously. Customers also want their interactions to be as effortless as possible. Friction in customer journeys not only upsets customers but adds to operational overhead.

Many organisations and contact centres have embraced the Customer Effort Score as a KPI and over-arching philosophy for customer management. Considerable evidence exists to support this: for example, Gartner research¹ has demonstrated that high-effort interactions lead to channel switching, higher transfer rates and ultimately lowered customer retention.

The exact causes of customer effort are of course specific to individual providers and journeys. However, at the aggregate level there are undoubtedly common root causes that exist across the board. This research addresses these common causes, seeking answers to critical questions.

- What are the common causes of customer effort?
- Are some customers affected more than others?
- What can contact centres do to minimise effort?

Research methodology

Led by the CCMA's Research Director, Stephen Yap, this is a quantitative research study comprising n=2,000 online interviews conducted in the UK from 10-13 August 2021.

The study comprised a nationally representative sample with quotas set by age, gender, and region. The composition of the sample was as follows:

Gender

Male	Female	Other
984	1002	16

Age

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
78	138	169	115	302	404

Region

East Midlands	East of England	London	North East England	North West England	Northern Ireland	Scotland
161	181	281	80	220	60	181

South East England	South West England	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire and the Humber
280	180	100	100	176

¹ <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/unveiling-the-new-and-improved-customer-effort-score/>

Foreword by CCMA

I'm delighted to present this latest CCMA research study, on a topic that is dear to the heart of anyone working in contact centres: minimising customer effort.

Frictionless experiences are a goal for every contact centre and everyone who works in contact centres. You no doubt will already have a detailed understanding of what creates friction and customer effort within your own operation. This research casts the net more widely to explore contact issues among the entire customer population. What are the leading causes of effort? What frustrates customers the most? What are customers' expectations of follow up, should their queries not be immediately resolved?

Answers to these questions and more are contained in this report. I'm particularly struck by the correlation between experiencing contact issues with propensity to switch provider. Correlation is not causation, but I think it's safe to conclude that if we can reduce customer effort, customers will be less likely to churn.

I hope this report gives you insights to help you on your own quest to eradicate effort, and to deliver contact experiences that meet customer expectations.



Leigh Hopwood,
CEO, CCMA

Comment by ServiceNow

As a customer service solution provider and CCMA Platinum Partner, ServiceNow were delighted to be involved in this research study.

For us, the results strongly confirm that when it comes to customer service, organisations typically place most focus on 'engagement', i.e., the front-end experience where the customer connects with the advisor. But customers quite rightly demand successful outcomes, and they don't care how your organisation is structured, or what each team does and is responsible for, they just want their issue resolved, and quickly. Regardless of where or how the request comes in, the ability to resolve queries by connecting to the right department is critical to delivering the right results for customers.

If your contact centre advisors are having to rely on a mix of internal emails, calls and chat sessions to get information or drive actions from colleagues in middle- or back-office teams, then it's going to be very difficult to get things done quickly or well, and impossible to have end-to-end visibility across the entire customer journey in your organisation. Delivering an optimal service experience means you must go further – bringing

together all the people, processes and tools that are involved across your entire organisation. And the only way to resolve customer issues quickly and permanently is to break down information silos and automate processes across teams.

This requires much closer links between customer engagement and service operations, connecting the back- and middle-offices to contact centres and self-service, and avoiding the 'messy middle' that can easily delay customer journeys and negatively impact customer satisfaction. This inevitably involves forging closer ties across the business, removing barriers, and streamlining co-operation between teams. Organisations that invest in the technology that allows them to connect customer engagement with the service operations teams will have the greatest chance of bridging the messy middle. The only way to deliver this is to have the right digital workflow infrastructure in place to enable true cross-team, end-to-end customer service.



David Irvine
Senior Director - Customer Workflows,
ServiceNow UK and Ireland

What are the most common causes of customer effort?

Each contact centre has its own specific types of customer issues and root causes. At the same time, universal issues do exist across organisations and sectors.

Our research included 10 universal issues which are listed as follows, ranked by the percentage of customers who have experienced them in the last 12 months (most common first).

Figure 1: In the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following issues when interacting with a company/organisation for customer service?

Passed to another advisor during a contact/call	27%
More than one interaction/call was required	27%
Told to contact another department	24%
I had to get back in contact for an update	24%
I had to submit information twice or more	21%
Promised an update that was late or never happened	20%
Didn't receive timely or regular communications on my query	17%
Couldn't use my preferred contact method/channel	13%
Wanted to use self-service, but was forced to have a direct interaction with the organisation	10%
Advisor was unable to bring up/locate my details	6%

Base: n=1,197 (interacted with customer service in prior 12 months)

As the table above shows, being transferred between colleagues and departments, and having to re-connect for an update are the three universal issues most frequently experienced by customers in contact with organisations.

What do customers find most frustrating?

Not only is being transferred to another advisor the most common cause of customer effort – it frustrates more people than any of the other common issues. As the below table illustrates, being 'passed to another advisor' easily tops the list of customer frustrations, well ahead of the second most frustrating issue, 'being asked to contact another department'.

The contact issue that causes the most customer frustration is being passed from advisor to advisor

Figure 2: The following is a list of potential scenarios that can occur during customer service interactions. If they happened to you, which would you find the most frustrating? Select up to three.

Passed to another advisor during a contact/call	34%
Told to contact another department	24%
Promised an update that was late or never happened	23%
I had to submit information twice or more	20%
I had to get back in contact for an update	18%
More than one interaction/call was required	17%
Didn't receive timely or regular communications on my query	13%
Couldn't use my preferred contact method/channel	9%
Advisor was unable to bring up/locate my details	9%
Wanted to use self-service, but was forced to have a direct interaction with the organisation	7%

Base: n=2,000

First Call Resolution (FCR), one of the most common metrics used in contact centres, does not appear near the top of the list of customer frustrations. Indeed, the percentage of customers who selected 'more than one interaction/call required' (17%) in their top three most frustrating issues is only half the number who called out 'being passed to another advisor'.

This evidence suggests that while FCR is valuable as an internal operational metric, transfer rates are more relevant to customers.

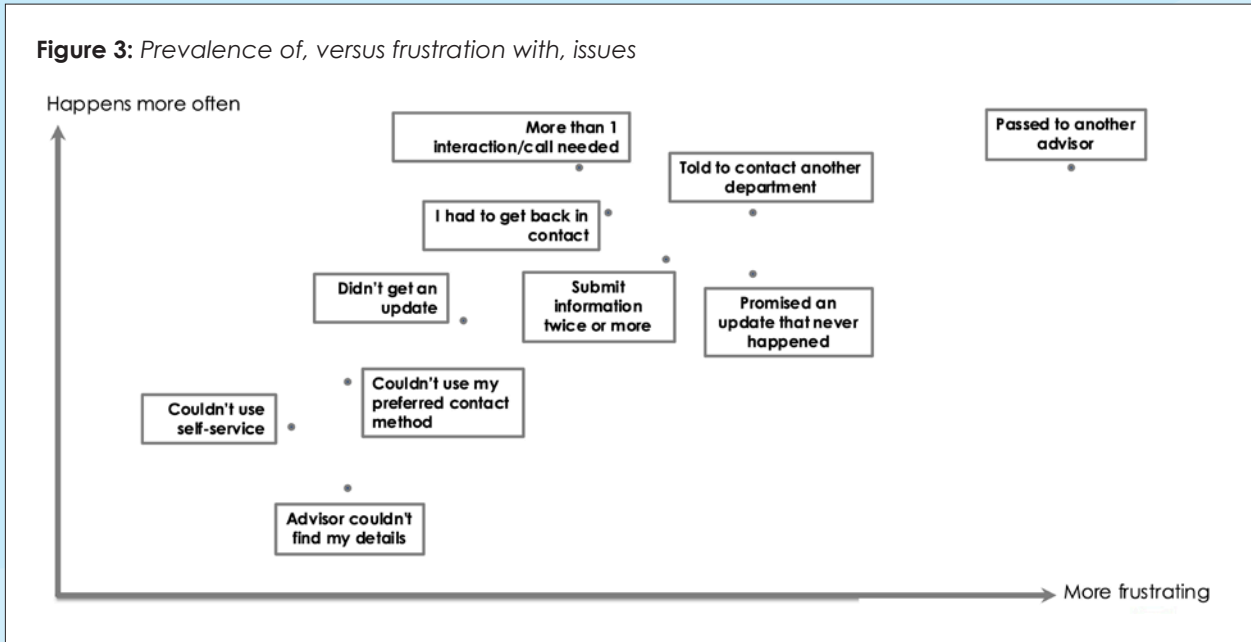
The top three causes of customer effort

By connecting frequency and frustration, it is possible to identify three priority customer contact issues, whittled down from the list of 10.

Priority customer contact issues to be addressed

- 1. Passed to another advisor**
- 2. Told to contact another department**
- 3. Promised an update that never happened**

Figure 3: Prevalence of, versus frustration with, issues



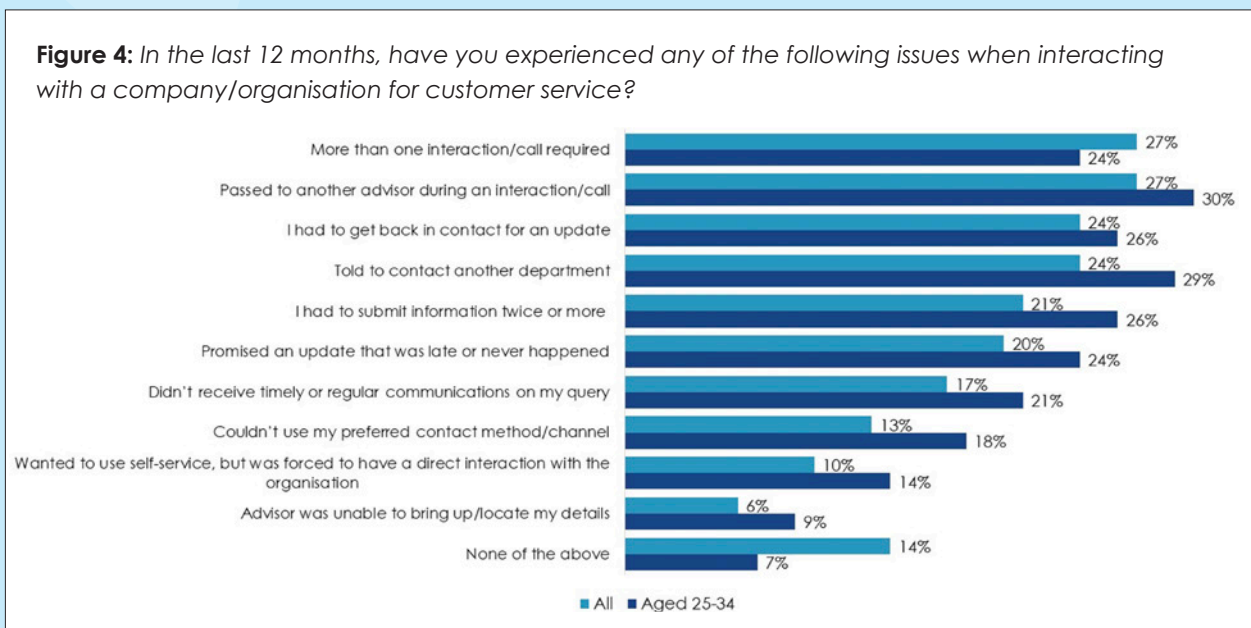
Base: n=1,197 prevalence (interacted with customer service in prior 12 months), n=2,000 frustration

25-34s most likely to report problems during customer interactions

Differences exist between age groups when it comes to customer effort. People aged 25-34 are especially likely to report having experienced issues when interacting with a contact centre. As illustrated in Figure 4 below, 25-34s are more likely to report having experienced 9 out of the 10 universal issues, whereas the proportion of 25-34s who report 'experienced none of these issues' (7%) is half the average (14%).

We interpret these findings as evidence that 25-34 year olds have especially high expectations: being especially digitally savvy, multi-channel capable, knowledgeable about brands, and time poor.

Figure 4: In the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following issues when interacting with a company/organisation for customer service?

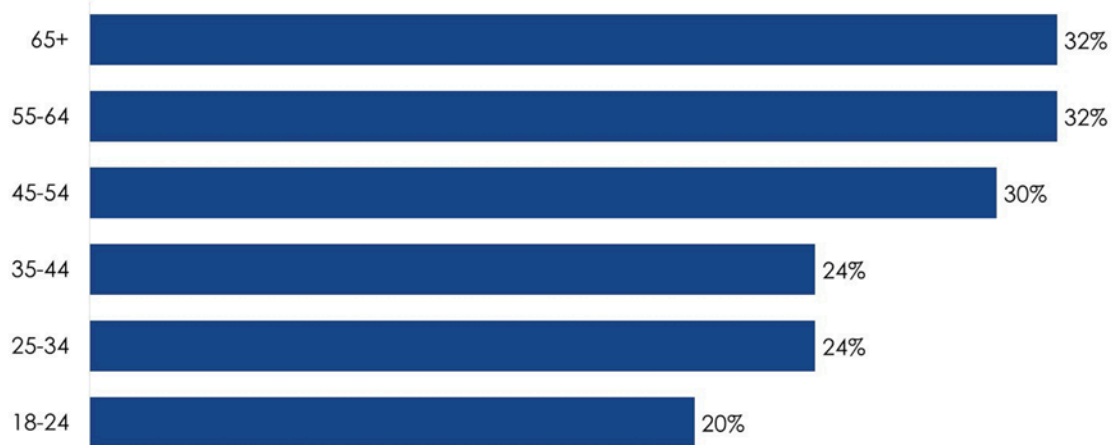


Base: All n=1,197, 25-34 n=242

Mature customers more likely to require multiple interactions

There is one exception to the rule of 25-34 year olds reporting more issues, which is in cases where multiple interactions are required for resolution. This issue is more prevalent among more mature customers, as Figure 5 illustrates. This suggests there is still some way to go to achieve inclusive journey design that fully meets the needs of certain customer groups; there are also implications on average handling time, which is likely to be higher if the customer base skews towards the more mature.

Figure 5: In the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following issues when interacting with a company/organisation for customer service? More than one interaction/call required

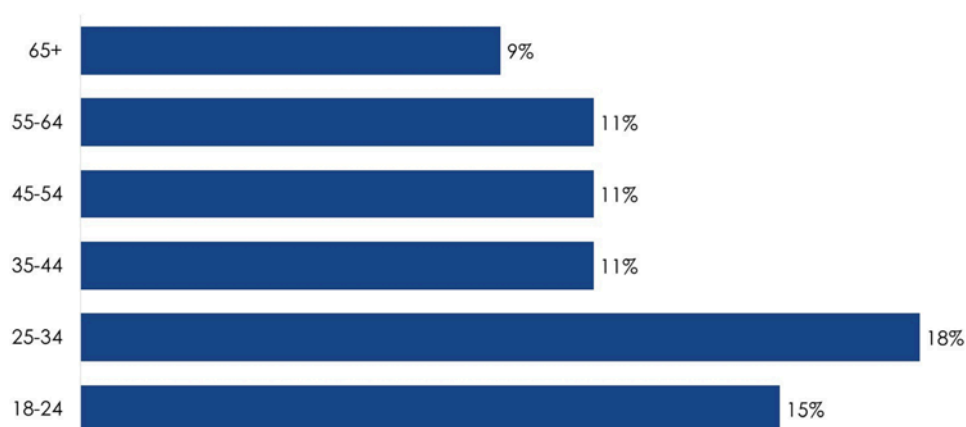


Base: 18-24 n=143, 25-34 n=242, 35-44 n=227, 45-54 n=208, 55-64 n=161, 65+ n=216 (interacted with customer service in past 12 months)

Younger customers more likely to feel forced to use non-preferred channels

While more mature customers overall tend to require more interactions to solve queries, younger ones are more likely to report that they were unable to use the contact channel of their choice. As Figure 6 shows, those aged 25-34 are twice as likely (18%) to report this issue compared with customers aged 65% (9%).

Figure 6: In the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following issues when interacting with a company/organisation for customer service? Couldn't use my preferred contact method/channel



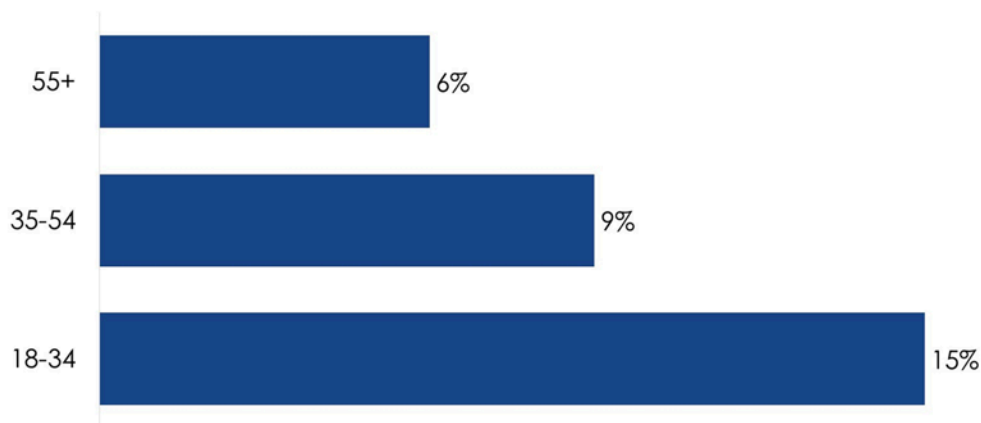
Base: 18-24 n=143, 25-34 n=242, 35-44 n=227, 45-54 n=208, 55-64 n=161, 65+ n=216 (interacted with customer service in past 12 months)

Younger customers more likely to report being denied self-serve options

Previous CCMA research has shown that take-up of self-serve contact options is higher among younger customers. This latest survey builds on that finding, revealing that being forced to use assisted channels in place of self-serve disproportionately affects younger people.

As shown in Figure 7, people aged 18-34 (15%) are more than twice as likely as those aged 55+ (6%) to report 'wanted to use self-service but was forced to have a direct interaction'.

Figure 7: In the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following issues when interacting with a company/organisation for customer service? 'Wanted to use self-service, but was forced to have a direct interaction with the organisation'.



Base: 18-34 n=385, 35-54 n=435, 55+ n=377 (interacted with customer service in past 12 months)

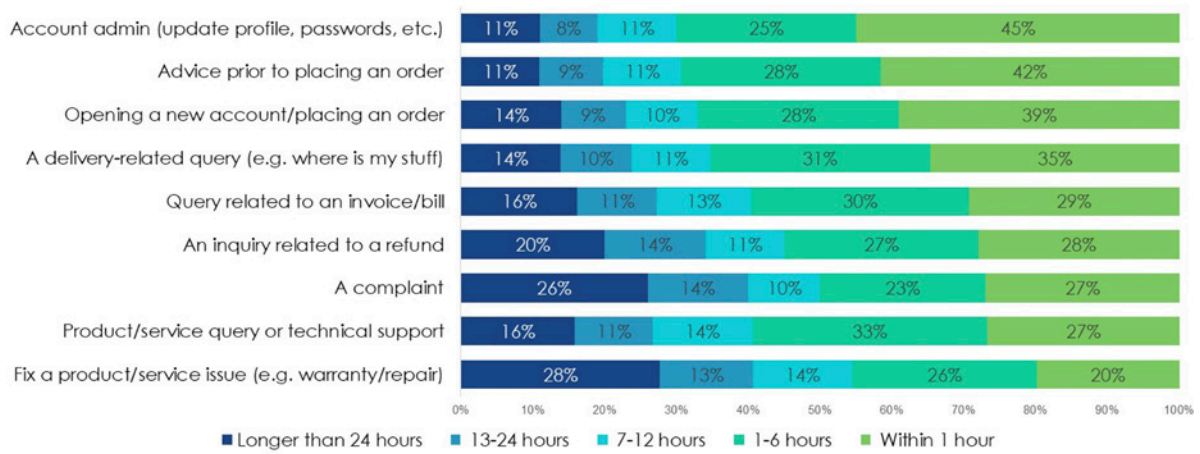
How long is acceptable to wait for an update?

When a query cannot be resolved immediately, the majority of people expect updates to be provided within a few hours.

Most customers expect updates within six hours for most queries

As Figure 8 shows, the most urgent queries requiring the fastest responses are account administration and help with placing an order. There is less of an expectation for technical support and warranty/repair queries to be answered as quickly, but even for these types of queries the vast bulk of customers expect an update by the next business day.

Figure 8: If a provider could not answer your query immediately but promised to update you later, for each of the following types of queries what is the MAXIMUM length of time that you would consider acceptable to wait for an update?

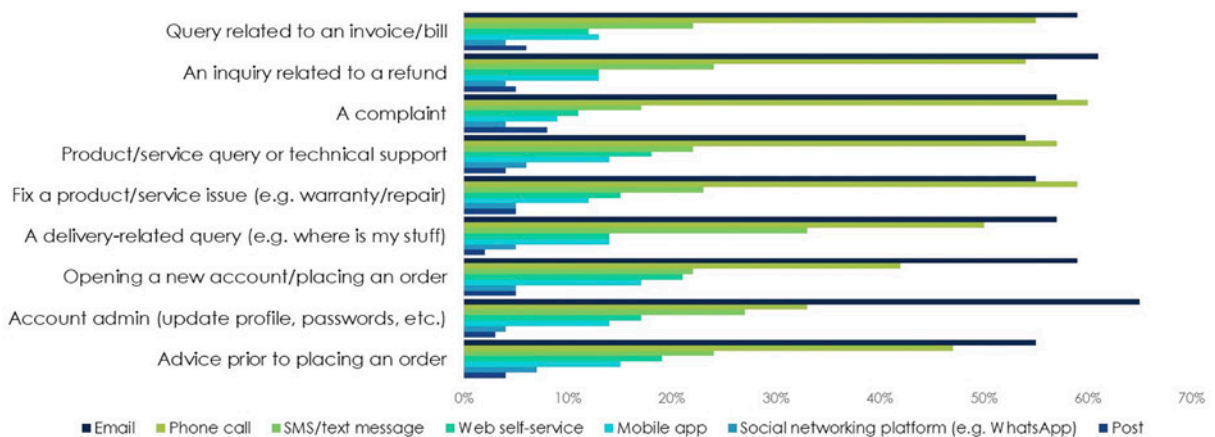


Base: n=2,000

Most people are happy to accept outbound updates via email

One of the biggest topics in channel management is how to migrate inbound email demand to alternative channels with a lower resource footprint. However, when it comes to outbound messages coming from the contact centre, email still has an essential role to play.

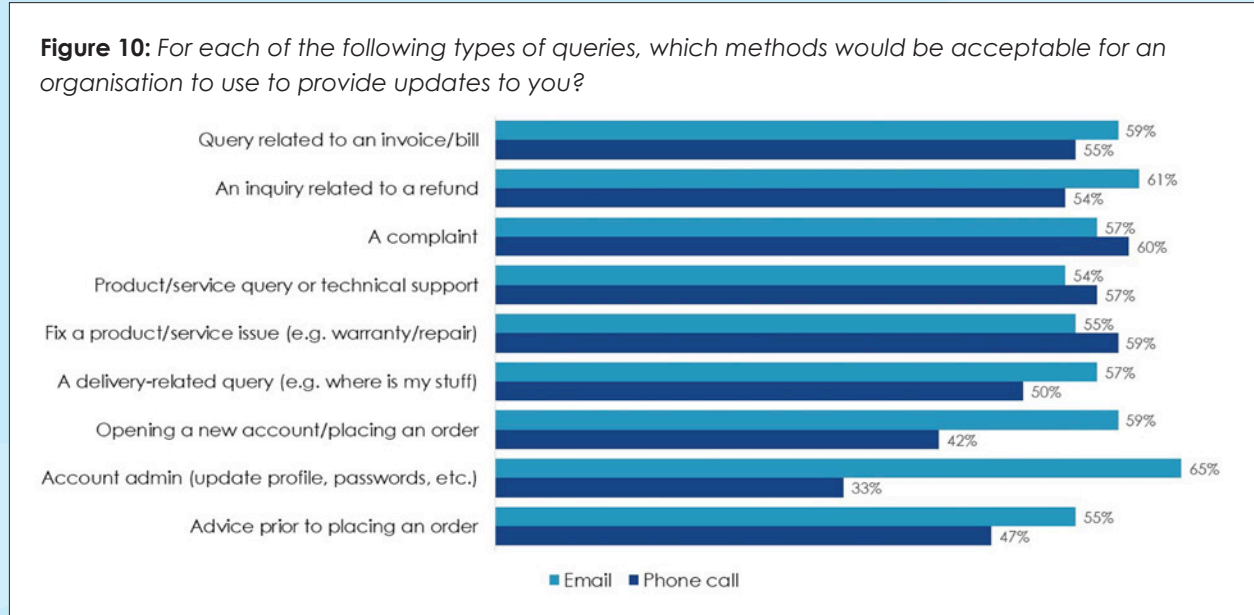
Figure 9: For each of the following types of queries, which methods would be acceptable for an organisation to use to provide updates to you?



Base: n=2,000

The expectation of email versus phone for outbound contact is linked to the nature of the query. For more complex and emotive interactions such as a complaint or warranty/repair question, phone slightly edges email in terms of customer preference. For more straightforward queries such as opening an account or account administration, many more customers would prefer to receive email rather than a phone call.

As Figure 10 illustrates, for a query related to account administration twice as many people would choose an email update (65%) compared to a phone call (33%).

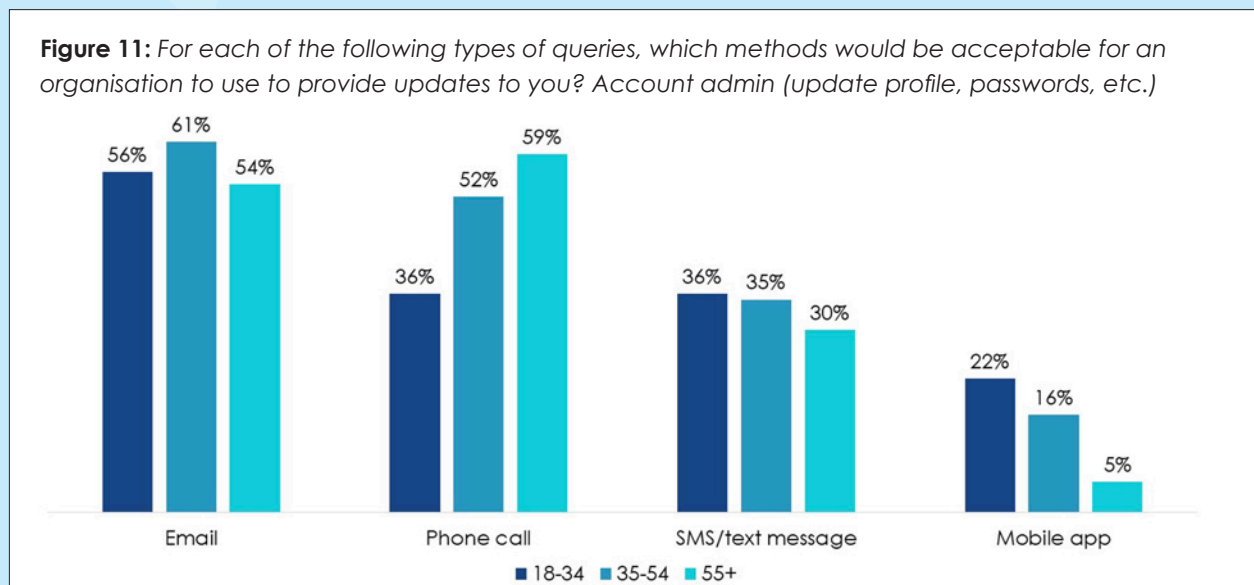


Base: n=2,000

For simple queries such as a delivery update, younger people are turning away from outbound phone

Across all age groups there is high level of acceptance of emailed updates for simple queries. However, preference for outbound phone is noticeably lower among younger people when it comes to receiving a delivery update.

As shown in Figure 11, 54% of people aged 55+ would accept a delivery update via email and 59% would accept by phone. However among people aged 18-34, while a comparable proportion would accept an email delivery update (56%) a considerably lower number would be happy with a phone update on a delivery (36%).



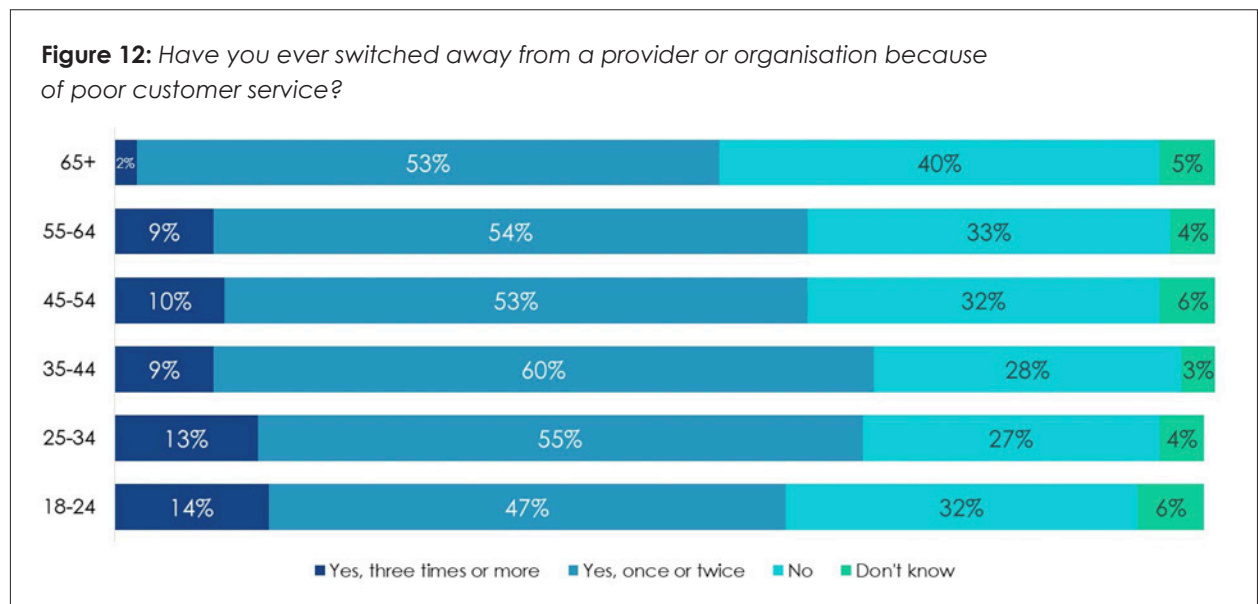
Base: 18-34 n=572, 35-54 n=722, 55+ n=706

Many customers have switched providers due to poor service

This research offers evidence of a close relationship between poor customer service experiences and customer churn. Overall, almost two in every three people report that they have switched providers at least once because of poor customer service.

63% of people have left a provider due to poor customer service

Within every age group more than half report having switched due to poor service, with switching propensity greatest among people aged 25-44.



Base: 18-24 n=231, 25-34 n=341, 35-44 n=361, 45-54 n=361, 55-64 n=302, 65+ n=404

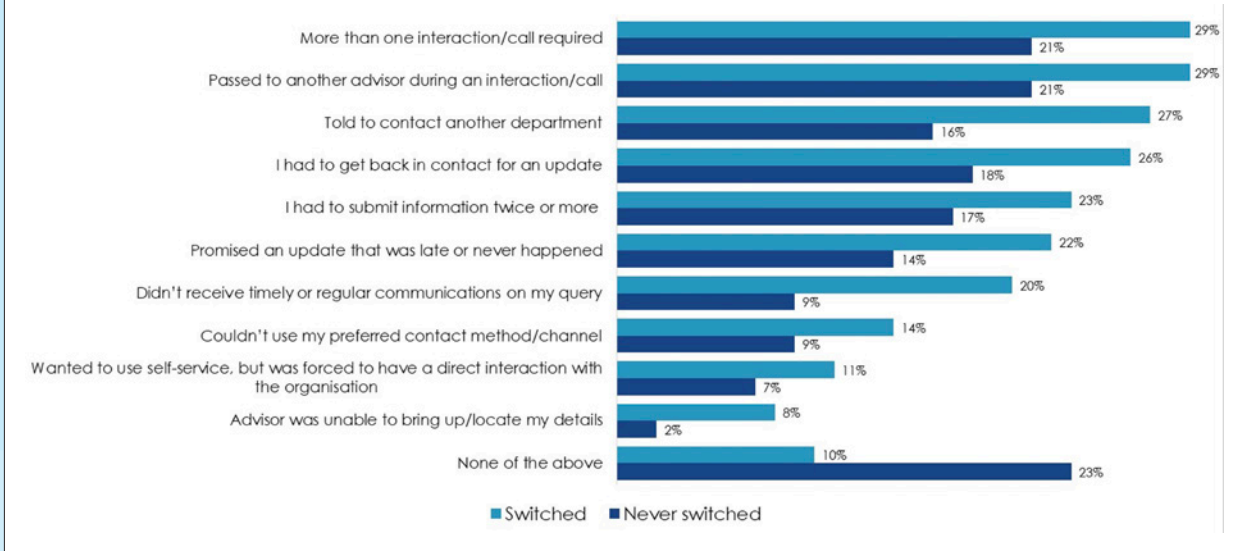
Customer effort correlated to switching propensity

People who have previously switched providers – ‘switchers’ - due to poor service are notably more likely to report having experienced issues when interacting with service providers.

As Figure 13 illustrates, the proportion of switchers who report they ‘didn’t receive timely or regularly communications on my query’ (20%) is more than double the proportion of non-switchers (9%).

10% of switchers report having experienced none of the 10 universal issues in the prior 12 months, compared with 23% of non-switchers.

Figure 13: In the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following issues when interacting with a company/organisation for customer service?



Base: n=867 switched, n=294 never switched (interacted with customer service in prior 12 months)

Do these universal issues lead to switching, or are people with a pre-disposition to switch more likely to report having experienced issues? The answer is likely a bit of both.

This research suggests that addressing these universal issues will not only reduce customer effort and thereby improve the customer experience but may also lead to reduced customer churn. Today's customer has high expectations, are willing to share their experiences with others and are not afraid to vote with their feet. The role that the contact centre plays in the health of the overall organisation has never been more important.

About the CCMA

The CCMA is the longest established association representing the call centre industry in the UK. We support contact centre managers through providing opportunities to network; to openly share best practice and to increase their skills and knowledge through specialist training

Our aim is to offer timely and impartial advice to our members; to keep contact centre leaders in touch with changes in their industry; to provide credible benchmarking information and to help individuals maintain an awareness of the latest trends and developments

Our membership association is not for profit, and our board is made up of people who work full time in the industry in operational roles. We are run by our members for our members.

For more information: www.ccma.org.uk | [@CCMATalk](https://twitter.com/CCMATalk)

About ServiceNow

ServiceNow delivers digital workflows that create great experiences and unlock productivity. Digital workflows are the building blocks for modern customer experiences enabling you to extend service beyond the contact centre and scale operations by automating work across departments.

ServiceNow® Customer Workflows can help you expand capacity via automated self-service, organise resilient operations to address unforeseen circumstances, and manage location-based work efficiently and safely. Solve your customer engagement, customer operations, and field service challenges to ensure your customer service is predictable, even when the world is not.

For more information, please visit: www.servicenow.com/customer-workflows

**Join
us!**

Not a member?

There is no better time to join us. The industry is changing and we are giving our members more opportunities to learn, to network and to support each other.

www.ccma.org.uk/membership



0333 939 9964 | www.ccma.org.uk

@ccmatalk | info@ccma.org.uk