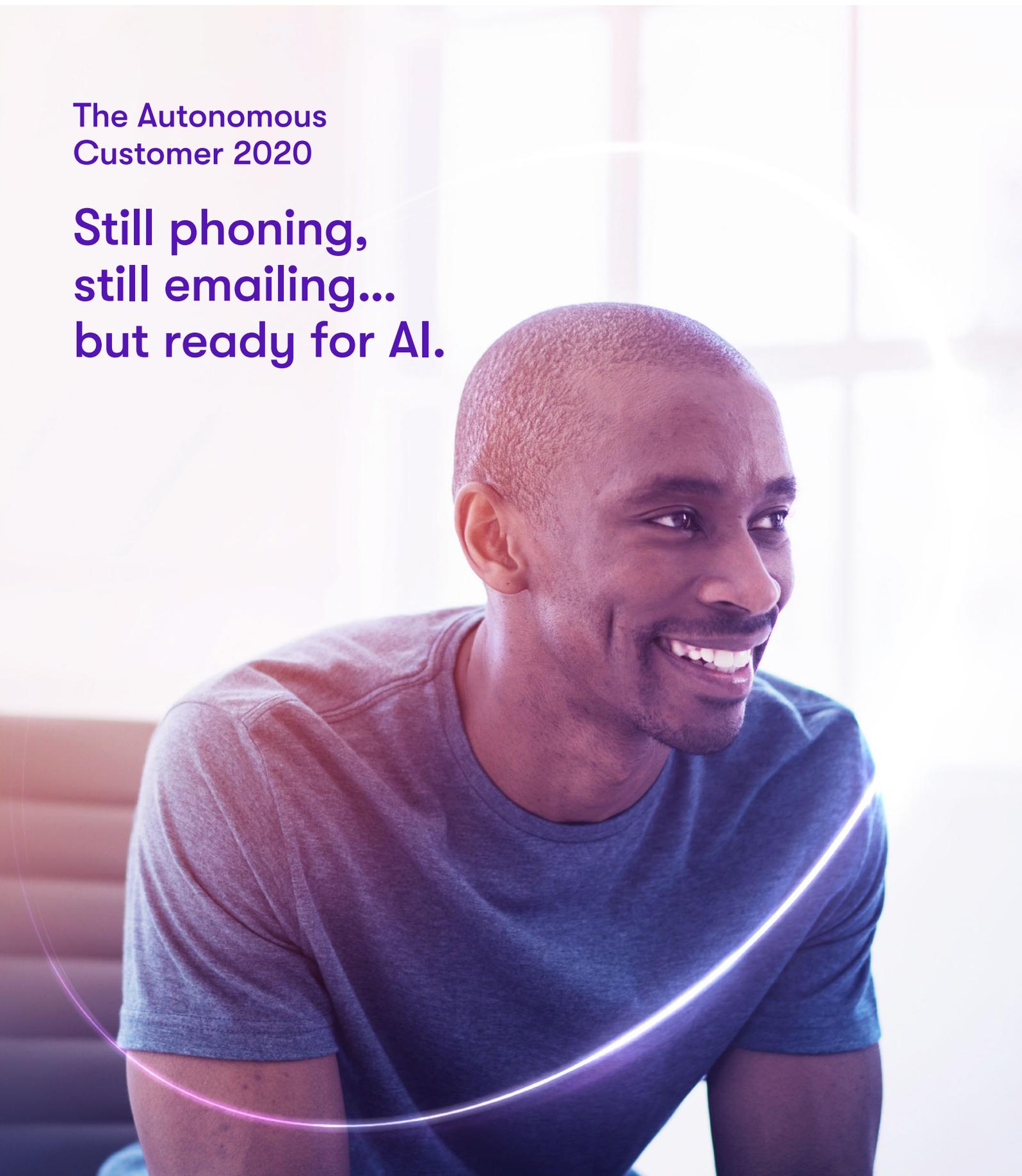




The Autonomous
Customer 2020

Still phoning,
still emailing...
but ready for AI.



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Foreword

Who knew? It turns out that the future isn't at all what we expected. Ten years ago, we started tracking consumer contact behaviour through our global Autonomous Customer research. Back then, we might easily have imagined the contact centre of 2020 as an automated flow of digital bots and channels powered by AI, helping customers to help themselves. Sure, there'd be the odd phone call or email – probably from the older generation – that required a human being to respond, but most customers would prefer smart self-service. Wouldn't they?

We were wrong: that's not what customers want after all. Far from dying out, speaking to an agent on the phone remains the most important form of customer contact for young and old. Closely followed by that 50-year-old technology, email. Organisations have repeatedly tried to direct customers to self-help alternatives. But people aren't having it.

Today's autonomous customers expect the contact centre to offer everything going. Alongside the phone, and email, they want to be able to use messaging channels such as WhatsApp and Messenger. Social media? Yes, but largely as a last resort. Video? Not so much. The good news is that people are willing to engage with chatbots and are positive towards AI. But the loudest message is that whatever the channel, human agents should be in the loop, to handle tricky issues and keep an eye on automated interactions.

Worryingly, just one in five people rate their digital experience of large multinational organisations as excellent. Clearly, there's a lot of ground to make up. Enterprises must make some complex strategic decisions. What's the right mix of channels for your business? Where should you deploy AI? How should you structure the customer journey? There's so much choice and the wrong decisions will impact the business.

I'm sure you will find these research findings interesting. If you would like to discuss how we can help you address some of these challenges, we'd love to welcome you to one of our [Customer Experience Centres](#) around the globe.

Andrew Small
Digital Solutions Director, BT



Overview

Today's informed, savvy, autonomous customers know what they like – easy interactions – and will reward companies that give them that experience. However, not enough organisations do. Consumers think that AI could help.

Telephone remains the favourite communications channel, followed by email, but messaging is catching up, especially for younger consumers. The asynchronous interaction of email and messaging works in today's culture of partial attention. Social media is not popular for service issues.

If digital transformation is to be successful, enterprises must give consumers a choice of channels plus more help online, especially for complicated or emotional matters.

Consumers want their online interactions to be convenient, seamless and personalised. And they understand that AI can help deliver that experience. There's a real opportunity for businesses to use AI for more proactive, outbound communications that can prevent problems and provide customers with timely information that makes their lives easier.

For the enterprise, there can be no quick wins. Developing the right channel strategy is an enormous challenge. Nearly nine out of ten consumers would like organisations to always offer different channels to meet their needs. It's different strokes for different folks and decisions must be based on a deep understanding of the customer experience across their whole journey. Which is easier said than done.

“What's clear is that introducing one channel doesn't displace another. The more channels you add, the more channels customers will use – sometimes juggling several simultaneously if they're in a crisis.”

Dr Nicola Millard, Principal Innovation Partner, BT

8 in 10 customers expect organisations to use **AI for transformational proactive notifications**.

41% say in the last year they have **stopped partly or completely** using two or more brands because of **poor customer experience or service**.

3 in 4 buy more from companies that make it **easier to do business** with them.

Only **21%** rate the **digital experience** of large multinational organisations as excellent.





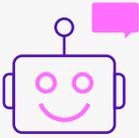
Five trends for 2020

1. Person to person phone calls are still the most used channel.

More people than ever are choosing to phone the contact centre and speak to an agent. **Three in four** of us called a contact centre over the last 12 months, making voice calls the most used channel. These days, even Amazon has call centres. Our research suggests that when the going gets tough, we want to talk to another human being. And it's not necessarily the older generations – the top callers are actually 25 to 34 year olds.

74% of respondents **phoned a contact centre** last year (64% in 2015). 

53% say agents **don't always know** what's on their website (59% in 2017).

81% think **human agents should check** the more complicated responses of chatbots (74% in 2017). 

Organisations must continue to invest in person to person voice channels. Consumers would also like to get an automatic ringback if they lose mobile signal, to talk to the same person each time and be able to share their screen or a video with the agent.

However, most contact centres are still finding it difficult to cope with the peaks and troughs of incoming calls. Can emerging voice technologies (along the lines of Siri, Google Assistant and Alexa) provide a solution? There's certainly a lot of excitement around 'person to machine' voice services powered by AI, and consumers are very open to using voice services for simple queries. But from past experience with interactive voice response (IVR), we can be sure that consumer enthusiasm for voice technology won't survive poor implementation.



expect organisations to use **AI and automated voice services** to answer simple queries from customers (67% in 2017).

“For years commentators have been saying ‘the phone is dead’ and it very clearly isn’t. Why? There’s a couple of possible explanations. The phone is popular because it works, especially as an escalation channel. And newer digital alternatives don’t always work as well as they should. It’s just easier to make a call instead.”

Dr Nicola Millard, Principal Innovation Partner, BT

Organisations need to invest in person to person (P2P) phone, it's the most used channel for customer support in a digital world but cannot be implemented poorly.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Do we understand when / why our customers contact us by phone? How can we use this information to design better customer journeys before this channel is used?
- How can we use new technology to cope with contact centre demand and deliver the best customer experience?
- How can we use other technologies (webchat, IVR) to complement our phone service and improve our response?
- Does our current technology have the intelligence to get customers talking to the right agents where necessary?

2. Messaging has arrived but proceed with caution.

It'll come as no surprise to see messaging growing in popularity as a customer contact channel. Messaging (whether WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, SMS or local services such as China's WeChat) is such a part of our personal lives that we want that easy communication with those we buy from. Digital native, app-only banks such as Monzo, Starling and Revolut embed messaging into their services. And it's not all WhatsApp – note that SMS communication is very much alive and kicking and email still occupies second place in the chart.

Part of the appeal of these types of messaging is that they let consumers communicate with the contact centre in an asynchronous way. Serial conversations fit into lives where human attention is continuously shared among many activities.

It's easy to look at the recent explosion in messaging and assume that adoption will be rapid. However, with all new communications technologies we tend to see a rush of early adopters then slower growth before it takes off in the mainstream. Look how long it took for organisations to offer email communication – and there are plenty who still don't.

Messaging is definitely a must-have channel but it requires high quality implementation. If you build an app it should have messaging built in. And if your market is younger people, they'd like to see you use emojis in email, webchat and social media responses.



58% say that being able to **look at the screen** makes webchat more useful (49% in 2015).

55% like webchat because they have **a record of the conversation** (48% in 2015).

 **47%** of 16-34 years olds would be happy making a **secure payment over webchat** or messaging.

48% prefer to use **webchat** rather than the phone to contact an organisation when they are on their website.



Global consumers want asynchronous interaction whether AI or human driven, but long-term success is not guaranteed.

Questions to ask yourself:

- **How asynchronous is our messaging strategy? Can our customers easily switch between different channels when they contact us?**
- **Are our messaging channels secure and futureproof? Can we take secure payments over webchat or messaging?**
- **Have we adopted the messaging services our customers are using most frequently? Can they reach us on the channels they prefer?**
- **How could we leverage messaging channels to proactively contact our customers – for example, in outbound communications?**



3. Consumers not using social media for contact (except as a last resort).

Technology which is popular in consumers' personal lives does not always work well in business communications. Back in 2017, the research suggested that it was time to give social media communications the same status as other channels.

Since then, it's become clear that social media is not a channel of choice for most customer service interactions. When people do use social media, it's often as a last resort, to reinforce a complaint. No-one really wants to air their troubles in public, and organisations encourage people who do contact them on social media to get in touch via direct messages or the phone.

Similarly, consumers have been reluctant to use video channels for customer service. Millions do make video calls in their personal life, and there is some evidence to suggest that it might develop as a channel for obtaining health advice. Perhaps video's role as a customer service channel is yet to come. For the time being, investing in customer interaction applications for social media and video chat can go on the back burner.

“It's not a surprise to see consumers use video less. It's a technology that only makes sense where there's a visual component to the interaction, like healthcare for example. We'll see niche applications for video emerge in due course.”

Dr Nicola Millard, Principal Innovation Partner, BT

In 2019, **29%** of people used **social media** to get **customer service** from a company, down from 38% in 2017.



Of course, social media plays a major part in marketing to and engaging customers.

57% say they get ideas for **buying new products and services** from **social media**.

39% use social media to **read other people's comments** about brands, products and services.



Developing customer interaction applications for both social media and video chat will not always be successful.

Questions to ask yourself:

- **What sort of customers / issues come through social media?**
- **How can we better maximise the benefits of social media for our organisation beyond the contact centre (e.g. in marketing)?**
- **How seamless is the process for customers to contact us on social media and transition to our dedicated customer contact channels?**
- **Would my customers be interested in video being used to improve the customer experience? How can we implement video in a useful manner?**
- **How suitable is our current contact centre infrastructure and environment for video communications (including video endpoints)? What demands will video communications make on our network and how can we prepare for that?**

4. Identification, verification, payment: business must solve the trust problem.

General issues of trust around data and keeping it safe are real concerns. Consumers want everyday actions such as identification and payments to be both easy and secure. And they think organisations should do more.

It's not as if we haven't seen all these problems before: "It takes too long to identify me", "It's irritating to keep repeating my details", "I worry about security when giving my card details over the phone". Businesses must step up and sort this out, otherwise they will not be able to give customers the great experience they want.

Consumers are quite ready to embrace – and trust – new technologies if they can solve these issues. For example, they quite like the idea of using voice biometrics for identification and verification. As we know, the general public will reward those organisations that make it easy for them.



60%



say it takes **too long to identify** them when they phone call centres.

81%



would like **voice biometrics** for Identification and Verification (ID&V).

67%



say they are often asked to **repeat their account details** on the same call which is irritating.

50%



would have bought more over the phone if **payments were secure**.

Consumers want low effort personal data security, ID&V and payments for business success. How can you make security effortless for your customers?

Questions to ask yourself:

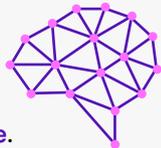
- Do we have a complete understanding of which customer data comes into the contact centre? How do we ensure the security and privacy of that data?
- Are our customers becoming irritated / frustrated completing ID&V when they call us? How do we implement voice biometrics throughout our customer contact strategy to improve this experience? What other alternatives are there?
- As customers are demanding an asynchronous experience how do we make security and personal data requirements as easy as possible? How can we manage storage and access of data in the contact centre between channels?
- What are the current security limitations of our contact channels, are we able to take payments with Payment Card Industry (PCI) and Data Security Standard (DSS) compliance?

5. Consumers are ready to experience outbound services powered by AI.

It's quite a tipping point: around the world, eight in ten consumers expect organisations to use AI for proactive notifications that can forewarn or prevent service issues. Likewise, they are keen to see AI being used to remotely monitor the status of goods and services they buy, or even intervene in contact centre calls to sort things out. For some time, people have expected that the more information they provide, the better the service should be. AI makes this trade-off finally doable.

87%

want to be informed when there is a problem with their **product or service**.



82%

say it would be good if organisations used **AI to monitor** the condition of products and services.

This positivity towards AI-based services is a huge opportunity for innovation and differentiation and has the potential to move customer interactions from reactive troubleshooting to more thoughtful, personal outbound services that genuinely make people's lives easier. Indeed, this shift will characterise the future for customer experience strategy, to be about identifying and meeting needs before they arise, whether that is a contract about to expire, a price change or an available upgrade.

Outbound care: eight in ten global consumers expect organisations to use AI for transformational proactive notifications.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Along our customer journey how well do we understand our customer's pain points, motivators, preferences, and needs? How can we use this data to be more proactive in our customer contact strategy?
- How are we using AI to proactively anticipate and address customer issues? Are we informing our customers when there is a problem with their product or service they don't know about?
- Is our outbound care strategy integrated with the communication channels that will be monitored by our customers the most, i.e. email, SMS and instant messenger?
- How do we securely share knowledge and data about customer issues across the business so that we can identify / rectify common problems and improve the customer experience?





Customer experience is everything in the digital economy

People want every interaction to be engaging, personal and effortless – enjoyable, even. Which is why it's so important for companies and brands to understand consumers' preferences and priorities, and how they might change throughout every twist and turn of each customer journey.

Technologies come and go but the message from autonomous customers is unchanging: "Make it easy, make it secure, and we will reward you". To this end, consumers are ready to accept technologies such as AI and biometrics, and hand over personal information if it means that life online is easier.

There's a big question around trust in our society: trust in government, trust in business, trust in technology. It's clear from this recent research that companies must learn how the consumer determines trust, so they can build trustworthy products and services in response. Getting customers to trust you is more than

technology choices. It is also about developing the right processes, supported by real people with great skills. But it's tough and it's complicated and time is short.

Digital transformation is happening at speed. Inaction is not an option. Consumers faced with a less-than-exceptional experience will be quick to take their custom elsewhere. Prudent businesses will turn to technology partners who can help them think through the customer journey, make the right technology choices and co-create the best channel strategy for the future.

"Strategically, you can add as many channels as you like but you must be confident you can manage them effectively. Customers rarely conform to the business case."

Dr Nicola Millard, Principal Innovation Partner, BT

BT – a global customer experience partner

Our experience and capability make us an accomplished global partner for enterprises embarking on a digital overhaul of their customer contact experience.

As much as anything, we're a hands-on practitioner, having managed **large scale digital migration** in our own consumer business as well as for our customers across many industry sectors. Today we support more than tens of thousands of customer agents around the world. We have teams of people who have done it before, equipped with automated tools and services. They'll help you make the right choices for your customer contact strategy, and bring your global cloud contact centre platforms, channels and applications together.

We **look at the customer experience** from every angle, uncover the detail of interactions between people and services, so we can really understand what consumers go through when they contact you, where the hiccups might be. Only then can we begin to work out what's best in terms of channels, processes and people for your business. And we'll innovate, co-create and test everything with you – even down to the colour and look of the agent's desktop.

Our **commercial models are fit for the digital age**. We provide our services on a 'turn it on, turn it up, turn it off' model, so that you can make rapid changes to service provision but keep a lid on costs. It also makes testing and trialling new services more affordable.

Find out how BT can help you to transform your customer experience [here](#).



Methodology

This research is based on a survey of 6,000 consumers across twelve countries – Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Netherlands, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, the UK and the USA – in August 2019.

The research involved online consumers and matched the nationally representative population structure of each market.

It's the latest in a research series carried out by Davies Hickman Partners since 2010 for BT and its partners. Eight of the markets researched in 2017 are the same as those researched in 2015. These form the basis of the trend data. The research, data and views in this report have been prepared in good faith but BT, Cisco and Davies Hickman Partners do not accept responsibility for any actions or otherwise taken by those acting on the recommendations, advice and content contained in this report.

Find out how BT can help you to transform your customer experience [here](#).

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