



# Study: Contact Centers

*Consumers WANT Increased Automation*



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Abby Phone

## Study Finds Consumers Want Increased Automation in the Contact Center

A study conducted by Forrester Consulting revealed that consumers rate automated telephone customer service higher than live agents for certain straightforward interactions. In 5 out of 10 posed scenarios, consumers preferred automated telephone customer service systems over live agent interactions for tasks like prescription refills (66 percent rated automation highly, compared with 52 percent for live agent), checking the status of a flight from a cell phone (61 percent versus 49 percent), checking account balances (59 percent versus 36 percent), store information requests (55 percent versus 37 percent), and tracking shipments (53 percent versus 47 percent).

The survey, titled, "Driving Consumer Engagement with Automated Telephone Customer Service," also revealed that automated telephone systems are an expected and accepted customer service channel, with 82 percent of U.S. online adults having used an automated touchtone or speech recognition system to contact customer service in the past 12 months. That figure trails behind only live agent interactions, with which 93 percent of consumers have engaged.

In the survey, consumers provided their level of interest in a variety of specific proactive notification options within five different industries. The aggregated results of the industry-specific questions show that a strong majority of consumers are interested in at least one proactive notification alert via their choice of email, voice message, or text message. Consumers were most open to notifications related to the travel industry (93 percent), which include such things as flight status updates and confirmation of reservations for flights, hotels, and car rentals. Eighty-eight percent of consumers were interested in notification from a financial services institution, with strong interest in transaction confirmations. With regard to healthcare, consumers strongly favored appointment reminders — something that could be adopted in a variety of other industries as well, such as utilities or professional services.

"The contact center plays a crucial role in retaining consumers, yet less than half of U.S. consumers report being satisfied with their customer service experiences," said Micky Tsui, Nuance's senior vice president and general manager, Enterprise. "As the research shows, there is a lot of room to improve customer service. Today's enterprises have the opportunity to differentiate themselves by considering their customers' needs and providing intuitive speech applications that improve customer loyalty at every touch point."

## **Other key findings:**

**Consumers' satisfaction with customer service leaves a lot of room for improvement.** Only 49 percent of U.S. online adults report being satisfied, very satisfied, or extremely satisfied with companies' customer service in general.

**Consumers who frequently contact customer service from a wireless phone are relatively more amenable to automated telephone customer service channels.** About one-third (32 percent) of consumers regularly use a cell phone to contact customer service. The data indicates that in nearly all scenarios, mobile customer service users rate using automated telephone customer service systems higher than those consumers who do not regularly contact customer service using a cell phone. This is significant due to Forrester's expectation that the number of wireless-only households will continue to grow, reaching 19 percent of all U.S. households by 2013.

**24/7 availability of automated telephone customer service is a key attribute in consumers' minds.** Seventy-seven percent of consumers pointed to 24-hour, seven days a week availability as a reason they value automated telephone customer service systems. Another 40 percent valued that they didn't have to wait on hold for a live agent, while 31 percent cited the ability to obtain information quickly.

**Consumers today are overwhelmingly interested in proactive customer notifications across a variety of industries.** For each of the five industries included in the survey, consumer interest in receiving some form of proactive notification was very strong, ranging from 80 percent (for cable television operators and telephone companies) to 93 percent (for travel-related companies).

**Opt-out, accurate software and logical call flows are essential components of a "great" automated speech-enabled customer interaction.** Sixty-seven percent of consumers claimed that having the ability to speak to a live agent at any time is necessary to consider an automated speech-enabled customer service interaction a "great experience." Systems can be enhanced by improving the accuracy of the software and employing thorough and logical call flows.

According to Forrester's study, when it comes to evaluating a great experience with automated speech recognition customer service systems, two-thirds of consumers value having the ability to speak to a live agent at any time. Forty-two percent of consumers value the ability of the speech recognition system to understand them the first time a response is spoken, and 39 percent of consumers prefer not to have to repeat themselves. Similarly, when asked to identify what would improve speech recognition customer service experiences, the top choice (75 percent) of consumers was to offer the option of speaking with a live agent throughout the interaction. Being understood the first time (63 percent) and improving menus to direct callers to the appropriate destination (45 percent) round out the top three answer choices.