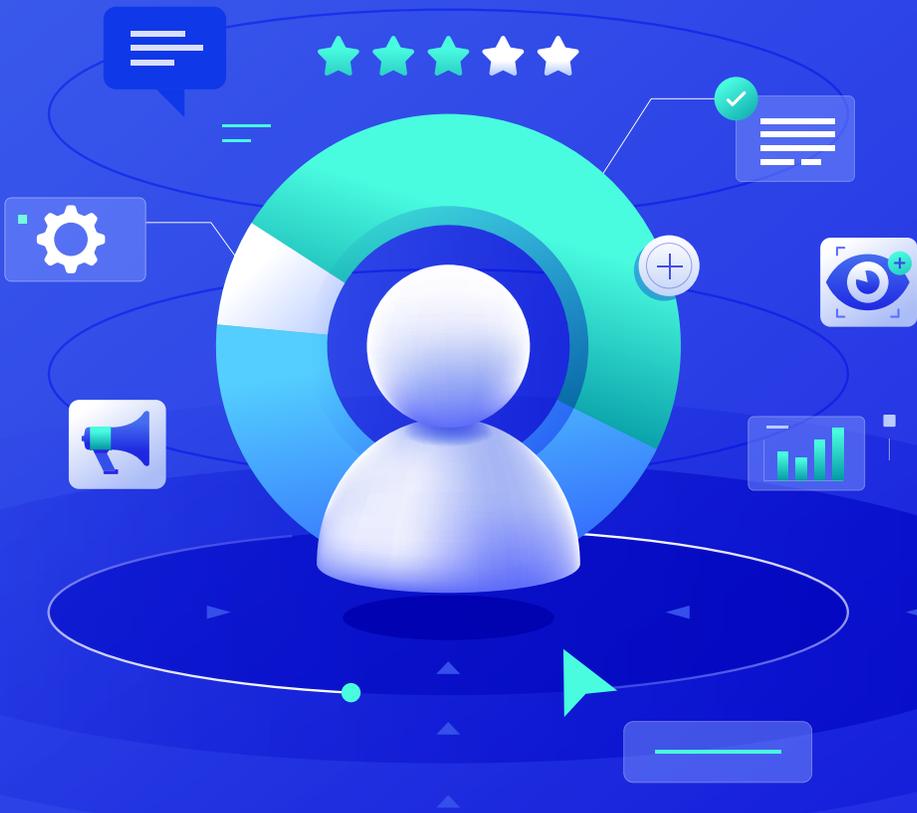


2026 
JANUARY 
MARKET STUDY

EMERGING CONTACT CENTER TECHNOLOGY



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Emerging Contact Center Technology: An Introduction

Three-in-five consumers feel the customer experience *regressed* in 2025. The majority of contact center employees, meanwhile, faced overwhelming sources of frustration and inefficiency – and demonstrated insufficient levels of productivity and engagement.

What will it take to right the ship in 2026? How will organizations cultivate engaging contact center environments and, in turn, deliver satisfying customer experiences?

Mindset alone is not the answer. Contact centers have *long* embraced concepts like “competing on the customer experience” and “being where their customers are.” They have long celebrated the importance of operational culture, famously noting that “happy agents equal happy customers.”

Unfortunately, they have lacked an appropriate mechanism for turning these customer-centric ambitions into customer experience actualities. They did not establish a framework for sufficiently empowering human employees to make personal, lasting, and lucrative connections. They did not adequately build an engine for fueling frictionless, personalized, predictive, and proactive care at scale.

Success, then, will come from locating and leveraging the appropriate tools and solutions. It will come from harnessing the power of emerging contact center technology.

How can contact centers identify, implement, and optimize the right solutions? What strategic and operational challenges will they have to overcome? What metrics should they use to evaluate and calibrate their success? And what precise role will AI – and other emerging technology categories – play in this journey?

Citing exclusive and extensive industry research, this Market Study answers those questions.

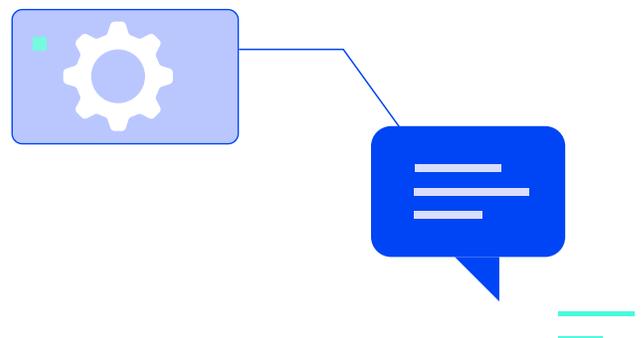


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Methodology & Demographics

To illuminate the Emerging Contact Center Technology landscape, CCW Digital conducted a survey in January 2026. The survey polled leaders responsible for customer contact, customer experience, operations, and information technology on their overarching visions, investment plans, and top challenges.

Example respondent job titles included head of customer experience, director of support centers, vice president of customer care, chief information officer, director of guest experience, global customer service director, director of operations, and vice president of patient services.

Respondents represent companies of most industries and size ranges.

About the Author

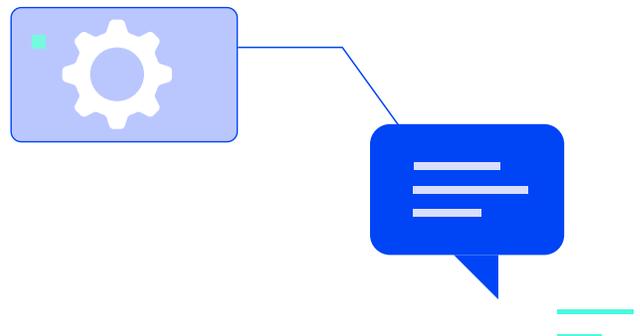


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Brian Cantor is the Principal Analyst and Director for CCW Digital, the global online community and research hub for customer contact professionals. In his role, Brian leads all customer experience, contact center, technology, and employee engagement research initiatives for CCW. CCW Digital's articles, special reports, commentaries, infographics, executive interviews, webinars, and online events reach a community of over 180,000.

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Key Findings

- 1 For customer contact leaders pursuing new technology in 2026, the top objectives are improving customer service and experience outcomes, elevating data and intelligence quality, and managing efficiency.
- 2 Numerous industry trends, especially the pushes for proactive personalization, AI-assisted shopping, and frictionless engagement, are also shaping technology investments and strategies.
- 3 Beyond emphasizing the aforementioned outcomes, technology providers can connect with buyers by offering attractive pricing models, compelling platform integration, and low-code customization.
- 4 Product demos, one-on-one sales conversations, partner endorsements, and industry reports are the most effective vehicles for communicating that value.
- 5 When it comes to technology investments, leaders know they need to demonstrate ROI quickly. More than 90% are accountable for results in the first year; roughly half expect that within the first six months.
- 6 Aligning with the recent finding that trust is the top customer experience differentiator, security, privacy, and compliance capabilities rank as leading considerations for customer-facing AI investments.
- 7 Personalization, seamless AI-human handoffs, and multichannel communication also rank as key focuses.
- 8 For agent-facing AI, attention is centering around employee training and simulations, workflow optimization, and agent assist.
- 9 Any investment into the technology will hinge on optimizing the AI framework; only 22% feel they have a fully unified technological and strategic ecosystem.
- 10 With data ranking as a top technology goal, AI analytics solutions are accordingly commanding substantial attention. Predictive insights, omnichannel quality measurement, and root cause analysis are leading opportunities.
- 11 Organizations are seriously considering a wide array of emerging technologies; chief examples include AI quality monitoring, real-time sentiment analysis, journey mapping and orchestration, and workflow monitoring.



A Means to a Customer-Centric End

Some call them solutions. Some call them tools. Some call them initiatives.

All such terms underscore the reality that customer contact technologies are *means to an end*. They are instruments for achieving goals rather than the goals in and of themselves.

Navigating the emerging technology landscape, therefore, requires an understanding of the why behind these solutions. What are leaders hoping to achieve with their new solutions?

For those leading customer contact operations in 2026, the #1 answer is improving “customer service and experience” metrics. All but 3% identify this type of outcome as a priority, with a whopping 71% calling it a top objective.

Consistent with the idea that “data is one of the contact center’s greatest export,” improving data and intelligence ranks as the #2 technology priority.

There is an intuitive connection between these outcomes. By using technology to uncover better data, an organization will simultaneously better understand what customers want from their service experiences – and what drives the need for service in the first place. By adapting technology to this intelligence, the organization will move the customer satisfaction needle – and build better connections.

The push for customer-centric technology is not, however, merely a “feel good” endeavor. Improved efficiency and cost management is also a top technology priority (on the radar for 97%, and a top priority for 56%). Though not quite as top-of-mind as cost containment, positive commercial value – conversions and revenue – also factors into ROI calculation for 87%. Nearly 32% call it a top priority for their technology investments.

As a focus for 96% and a top priority for 45%, the employee experience is of significant interest as well.

Clearly, customer contact leaders are not investing in technology for technology’s sake. They expect it to strengthen business intelligence, elevate employee experiences, and strengthen customer connections.

While pursuing this ROI from emerging technology, customer contact leaders are also mindful of emerging *trends* that are shaping the engagement landscape. In some cases, cognizance of these trends is playing a major role in technology decision-making.

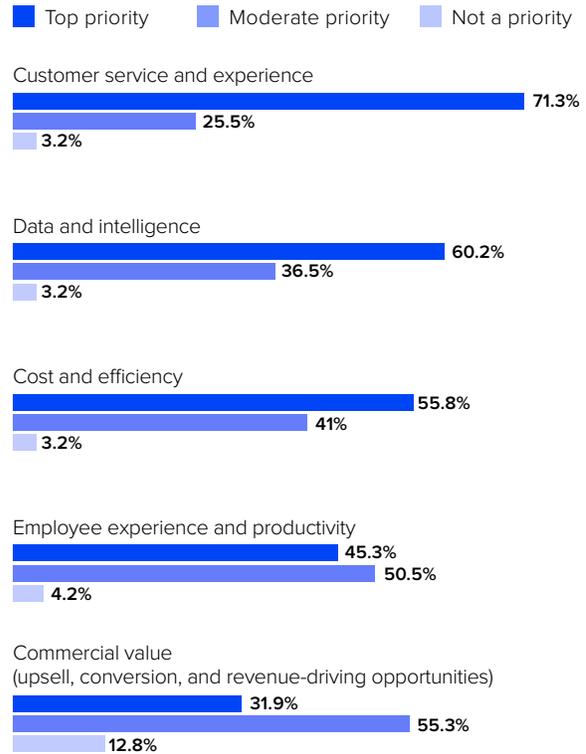
Nearly 58% of leaders, for example, say the emphasis on personalized, predictive, and/or proactive care is shaping their technology strategy. More than 45% feel their technology investments should account for the rise of AI-automated and assisted shopping.

The community’s emphasis on AI “customers” will be a compelling one to track. Whereas there is already ample focus on automated *shopping* (someone using an AI assistant to book a flight, for example), the trend may evolve to include automated *service* (where an AI agent autonomously connects with technical or billing support on behalf of the customer).

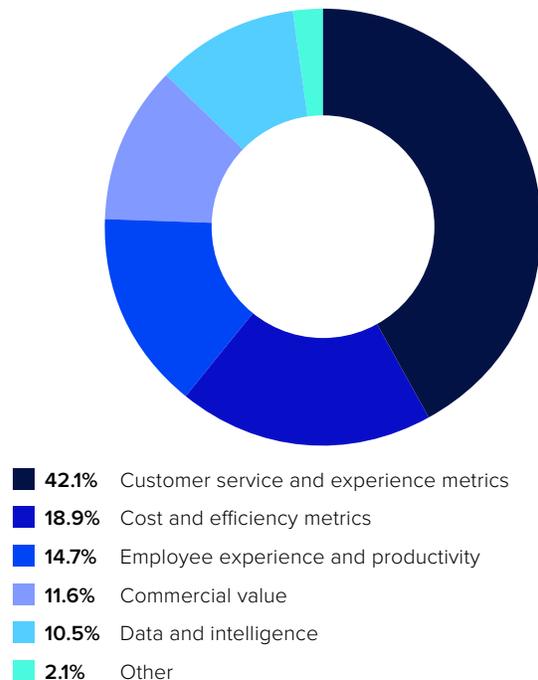
Trends emphasizing frictionless experiences (43%) and empathetic experiences (41%) are also shaping technology decisions in many organizations.

Collectively, these speak to a longstanding theme in customer contact strategy: the inability to cut corners. In factoring concepts like personalization and empathy into their decision-making, leaders are contending that technology should augment humanity. Building solutions to reduce friction and accommodate *automated* engagement, meanwhile, speak to the importance of simplicity, consistency, and convenience.

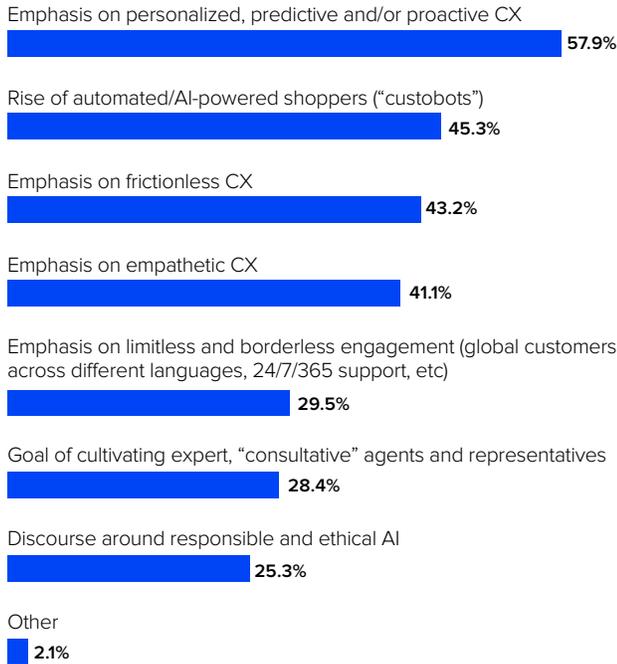
Where do your technology investment priorities lie in 2026?



Think about the typical AI solution you evaluated over the past 2-3 years. What would you say it was most intended to influence?



Which of the following trends or directives are impacting your technology investment strategy?



FROM IDEA TO INTENTION: WHAT HELPS TECHNOLOGY PRODUCTS RESONATE?

As they navigate the technology landscape, buyers will routinely encounter products that promise to impact customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, intelligence quality, and employee engagement.

Not all of these products, however, will be the right *fit* for an organization.

To determine whether a solution aligns with its philosophical principles, strategic vision, and operational framework, leaders will instead look to other factors. By signaling the likelihood that the solution will actually *work as expected* within the contact center, these factors play a crucial role in piquing interest – and driving purchasing intentions.

Pricing is *particularly important* during the evaluation process; 61% of leaders say an attractive pricing model captivates their interest.

A testament to the enduring impact of cost (money does not grow on trees, after all), the emphasis on pricing also aligns with CCW Digital’s finding that 71% of contact centers cited high or unpredictable cost as an ongoing AI challenge. Moving forward, they clearly want to pursue solutions with more affordable and transparent cost structures.

Other notable buying factors include integration with popular technology platforms (which piques interest for 60% of leaders), low-code and/or otherwise easy customization (47%), and proven security and compliance (46%).

“Silos” have long inhibited contact center performance; by gravitating toward integration-friendly products, leaders are hoping to mitigate this issue moving forward. Seamless customization capabilities allow organizations to tailor solutions to purpose *without* cultivating a significant amount of new technical knowledge.

Further underscoring this desire for integration, 40% of leaders – a plurality – say they have shifted toward unified contact center solutions over the past three years. More than 27% of leaders are *exclusively* looking at consolidated offerings in 2026; only 11% say the same of point solutions.

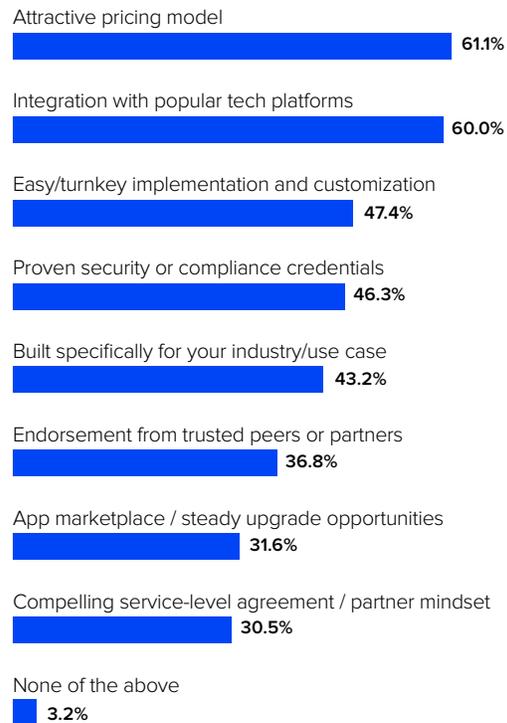
The emphasis on compliance-minded solutions, meanwhile, aligns with CCW Digital’s finding that security and privacy is the *top priority* for brands looking to differentiate their experience in the age of AI.

Along with preferences on *what* attracts them, contact center technology buyers have a hierarchy on *where* to look.

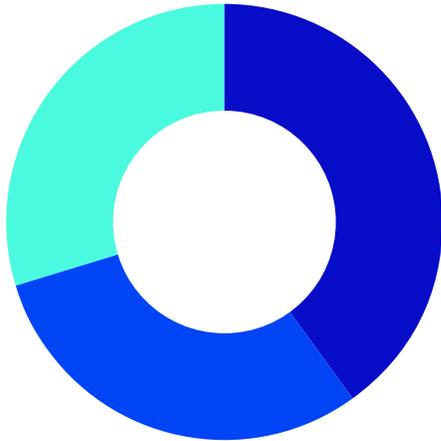
Today’s leaders are most drawn to sensory experiences; 64% say product demos or visualizations command their attention and interest.

Proving that the evaluation process is a multi-faceted one, many leaders also rely on one-on-one sales conversations (an attention driver for 56%), endorsements from existing partners and providers (52%), and research reports and case study content (45%) to identify solutions worth exploring.

Once you start evaluating new contact center/ CX technologies and vendors, which of the following features, offers, or promises tend to pique your interest?

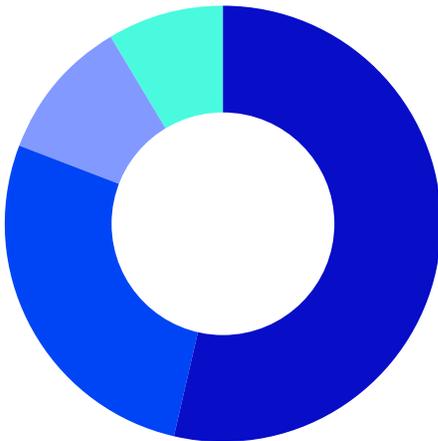


Which best describes your overall contact center/ CX technology evolution over the past 3 years?



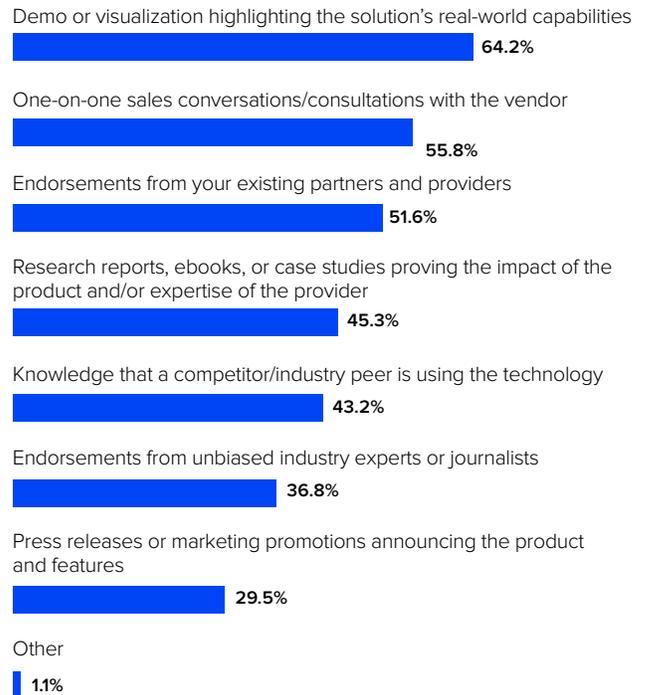
- 40.0%** We have moved from disparate tools, products, and programs toward more consolidated contact center products (e.g. CCaaS)
- 30.5%** We have maintained the same balance of disparate and consolidated tools
- 29.5%** We use more disparate contact center products, tools, or programs than we did 3 years ago

Which best describes the type of contact center/ CX technology solutions you are most likely to pursue and purchase in 2026?



- 53.7%** Both technology suites and point solutions; we're evaluating all technology options
- 27.4%** New technology suites/consolidated offerings
- 10.5%** Individual point solutions/tools
- 8.4%** No plans to evaluate or purchase new tech

Which of the following are effective at putting new technology categories or solutions on your radar and/or initiating a sourcing process?





Are There Too Many Cooks In The Evaluation Kitchen?

Customer contact leaders know *why* they want to invest in emerging technology solutions. They also know *what* assurances they want to receive from vendors.

Turning these preferences into purchases is not, however, as simple as snapping their fingers. All technology initiatives are subject to decision-making frameworks, which can involve active and passive input from numerous stakeholders.

Presently, that list of stakeholders is very long. Senior customer contact leaders play at least an active influencer role in 89% of organizations, with 42% registering as an ultimate decision-maker. The numbers are similarly significant for IT leaders (83% play at least an active influencer role, 35% are final decision-makers) and C-level

executives (79%, 47%). Functional contact center leaders (78%, 20%) also have a powerful seat at the table.

And though they are not *quite* as integral, auxiliary department leaders (60%, 16%) and frontline employees (51%, 19%) are still very much involved.

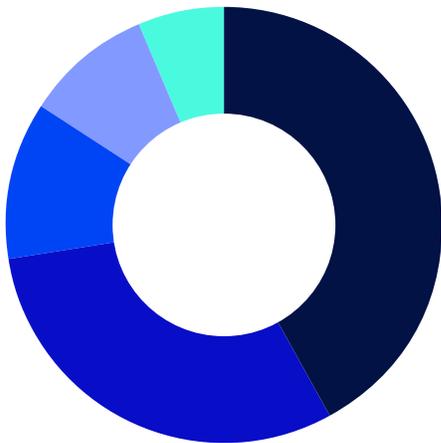
A glass half-full take would underscore the value in bringing so many distinct voices to the table. By listening to so many voices and perspectives, the organization can surface the full gamut of potential needs and demands – and foster true collaboration on the best possible solutions.

The glass half-empty perspective, however, would question whether there are too many cooks in the proverbial kitchen. The possibility of different stakeholders having *conflicting* perspectives – such as IT pushing for a “familiar” solution even though agents and supervisors feel it is significantly harder to use – could stall the sourcing process, while creating internal rifts and hostilities.

Input from *external* stakeholders further complicates matters. All but 12% of organizations give a voice to business process outsourcers, existing technology providers, and/or partners in at least some cases. Nearly 37% substantially rely on these partners for selecting the specific tools to buy, and 6% grant them control over the entire, end-to-end sourcing process.

Given their vast experience evaluating, implementing, and optimizing solutions, input from these partners can be *invaluable*. However, they still represent another cook in the aforementioned kitchen – and thus still carry non-trivial risk of further complexity.

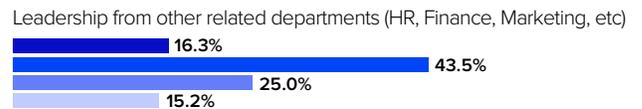
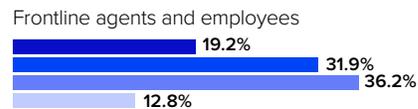
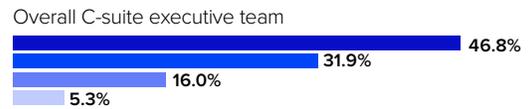
How do your existing business process outsourcers, business partners, or technology providers impact your technology sourcing and purchasing decisions?



- 42.1%** We consider their recommendations alongside input from other stakeholders
- 30.5%** We determine technology needs ourselves, but we rely on them to recommend the specific solutions
- 11.6%** We mostly make our tech decisions independent of their guidance
- 9.5%** It is entirely dependent on use case
- 6.3%** They initiate most/all sourcing discussions and recommend the specific solutions

Rate the extent to which the following influence your contact center/CX technology purchasing decisions.

- Decision-maker (they play a role in final sign-off and purchasing)
- Active influence (they directly share thoughts and feedback during tech evaluations)
- Passive influence (we aim to account for their needs but do not actively solicit or review their fee or feedback)
- Little or no influence





Evaluating the Past Before Embracing the Future: A Technology Scorecard

As they look ahead to future technology initiatives, contact center leaders may also look back on past investments.

Did previous solutions perform as intended? Did vendors deliver on their promises? Did any unintended consequences emerge? The answers to these questions could affect how businesses set ROI expectations, how they prioritize certain features and capabilities, how they develop implementation plans, how they collaborate with vendor partners, and so many other strategic considerations.

WAS 2025 ABOUT SAYING HELLO OR WAVING GOODBYE?

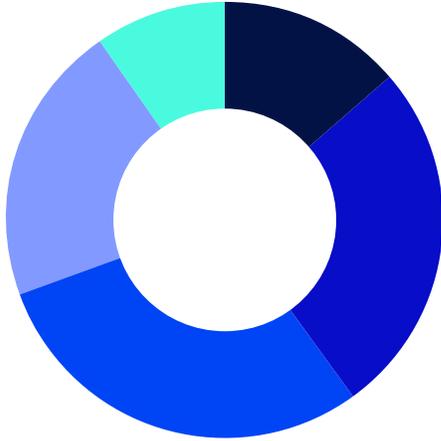
Whether 2025 was a year of meaningful transformation is a subjective matter. Whether it involved some change, however, is almost objectively, universally true.

A significant 60% of contact centers added multiple new technologies to their stack in 2025, with more than 30% introducing at least three.

Adding three new solutions may not constitute a shopping spree, but when one considers the cost, scope, and impact of many contact center and customer experience solutions – especially given the growing trend toward consolidated offerings – it can still amount to a significant level of change.

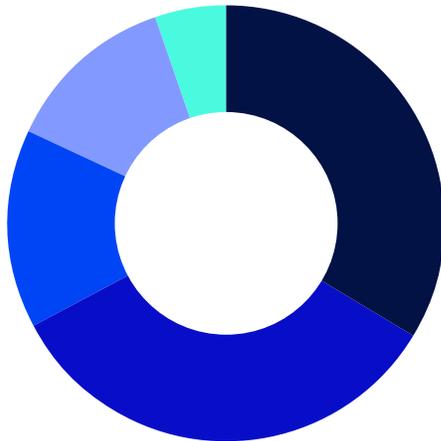
Although leaders were more inclined to *add* to than *subtract* from their technology stacks, they were not averse to waving goodbye in 2025. More than 66% eliminated at least one solution, and 33% abandoned or sunset multiple technologies in 2025.

How many new contact center/CX products, tools, or programs did you introduce to your tech stack in 2025?



- 13.7% 0
- 26.3% 1
- 29.5% 2
- 21.1% 3
- 9.5% 4+

How many contact center/CX products, tools, or programs did you eliminate/sunset in 2025?



- 33.7% 0
- 33.7% 1
- 14.7% 2
- 12.6% 3
- 5.3% 4+

GO HARD OR GO HOME

Change is commonplace, and it is not happening in an environment of indifference. Customer contact leaders are holding their technology investments accountable for generating a near-immediate return.

More than 90% of leaders, in fact, expect their new solutions to demonstrate a quantifiable impact within the first year. More than 46% anticipate that impact within six months.

Philosophically, this expedited evaluation window may elicit concern from those who see “patience as a virtue.” It may trouble those who caution against “boiling the ocean” and seeking “overnight change.”

But because new technologies have largely been delivering on expectations, it is *not* discouraging technology adoption. It is *not* preventing investments from transcending the pilot phase.

Nearly 51% say their recent technology purchases are generally living up to their expectations – including the aforementioned factors like price, integration, customization, and security. Just over 46% have seen mixed results, with only 3% wholly disappointed with their investments.

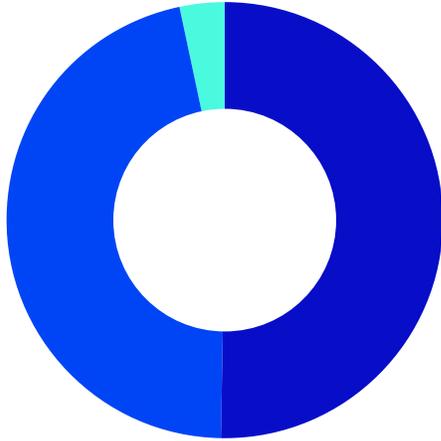
Accordingly, only a small percentage of organizations have abandoned even one-quarter of their technology pilots due to insufficient or negative proof of impact. Just 3% have abandoned the majority.

In theory, this level of contentment *could* mean that leaders will be less inclined to pursue aggressive technology initiatives in 2026 and beyond.

In reality, however, leaders know there is still *plenty* of transformation left to achieve. Cornerstone metrics related to customer satisfaction, cost efficiency, data quality, employee engagement, and revenue generation still have *ample* room for improvement.

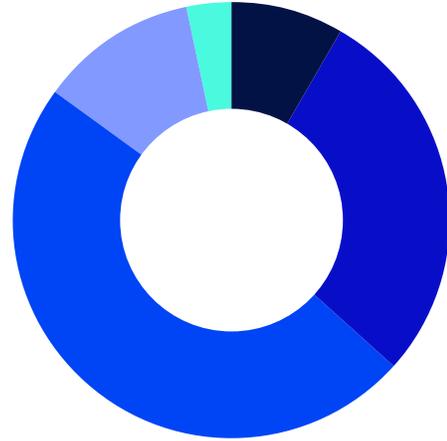
The rise of AI, moreover, is radically impacting the customer contact landscape. It is uncovering new opportunities, prompting new questions, and introducing new challenges. Continuing to pursue new solutions – albeit with some of the same decision-making and evaluation strategies that have been working in recent years – is the logical action.

Consider your technology purchases from the last 2-3 years: have these solutions delivered as expected on those criteria?



- 50.5% Yes, our technology is generally living up to expectations
- 46.3% Our technology is excelling in some of these areas but underperforming in others
- 3.2% No, our technology is generally falling short of expectations

Over the last 2-3 years, what percentage of technology projects/pilots were abandoned or greatly overhauled based on insufficient (or negative) proof of impact/ROI?



- 8.4% 0%
- 28.4% 1-10%
- 48.4% 10-25%
- 11.6% 26-50%
- 3.2% More than 50%



Emerging AI Technology: The Best Solutions Will Strengthen Trust and Foster Human Connections

AI has become the centerpiece of customer contact strategy; more than 90% of leaders entered the year planning to maintain or increase their investments. It has also become the centerpiece of contact center innovation; the sector's largest technology vendors *all* heavily use AI in their product offerings and *reference* AI in their marketing copy.

At the heart of efforts to enhance self-service, which itself ranks as a *top* customer service priority, AI will play a pivotal role in the future of customer interactions. By impacting customer behavior, contact volume, and overall workflow, it also has an inherently transformative role on the employee experience. The widespread availability of *agent-facing AI* will only enhance that impact.

An assessment of customer- and employee-centric AI, therefore, represents a cornerstone of any inquiry into the overall contact center technology landscape.

TRUST: THE KEY TO MORE EFFECTIVE AI SELF-SERVICE

According to CCW Digital's 2025 Consumer Preferences Survey, only 15% of customers trust AI chatbots to solve their problems. Most, in turn, still expect access to live agents; difficulty accessing those human employees now ranks as the #1 customer pain point.

As they work to enhance their AI self-service offerings and combat this resistance, contact center leaders are placing particular importance on security.

The "ability to meet industry standards for compliance, privacy, and security" ranks as the #1 focus for customer-facing AI investments; 67% call it a top priority. An additional 27% view it as a moderate priority.

Security now ranks as the #1 way for brands to differentiate their experiences; the growing emphasis on trust and compliance is also one of the most influential strategic trends. These factors explain why security, privacy, and compliance capabilities are so important to brands sourcing customer-facing AI.

AI's ongoing and unpredictable evolution further highlights the importance of security and compliance. Contact centers will be using a rapidly maturing type of technology to handle a rapidly expanding set of customer inquiries. The ability to monitor and mitigate potential security and regulatory risks will be critical for achieving customer buy-in and alleviating boardroom worries.

By identifying personalized and predictive engagement as the most influential industry trend, leaders provide another argument for investing in security-minded AI solutions. Personalized self-service conversations, obviously, involve the use of more data – and thus require more data safeguards – than static FAQ or generic IVR solutions.

Personalization is not, however, merely a justification for investing in security. It also constitutes its own AI priority, with 58% calling “the ability to personalize support experiences” a top focus for customer-facing investments. Nearly 38% view it as a moderate priority.

Factors like supporting seamless handoffs between AI and human agents (top priority for 51%, moderate priority for 41%), autonomous action capabilities (top priority for 49%, moderate priority for 44%), the ability to operate across multiple channels (top priority for 49%, moderate priority for 36%), and natural language understanding (top priority for 44%, moderate priority for 47%) carry similar significance.

The emphasis on seamless handoffs honors the fact that many customers – across all demographics – still prefer access to a live agent. It recognizes the reality that many businesses are still certain that *some interactions* will need human oversight. It promises to cultivate further AI trust, since consumers say “easy access to a live agent” is the #1 way to get them to try a self-service platform.

It also reflects support for the fundamental idea of omnichannel philosophy, which argues that customers should dictate the terms of their interaction. The emphasis on multichannel AI aligns with that same notion.

And whereas “omnichannel” and “multichannel” have historically been synonymous with calls to expand from telephony into digital environments, *voice* remains very much part of the modern technology conversation.

Consumers thus far have a more favorable reaction to voice AI than they do text-based chatbots, and businesses are clearly taking notice. A healthy 40% see voice as a critical part of their existing operation and future technology roadmap. Another 14% plan to greatly expand their voice offering moving forward.

The balance may not see voice as a top concern for *new tech* investment, most still view voice as essential within their existing operation. That means that any customer-facing AI investment should at least *connect* with what is happening in traditional phone and/or spoken-word interactions.

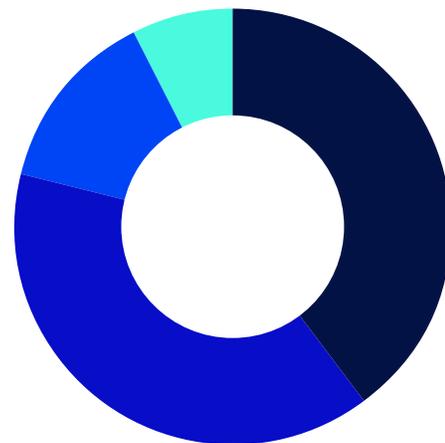
Pursuing more autonomous solutions, such as agentic AI, will empower self-service to actually provide resolutions. It thus empowers actual efficiency and scalability gains.

An emphasis on conversational AI addresses the #1 reason consumers ditch self-service for live agent support: a difficulty articulating their issue.

Far bigger than the engine for autonomously handling individual customer support interactions, AI is impacting the overall end-to-end journey. AI investment strategy accounts for this reality.

Nearly 53% of organizations, for example, are pursuing opportunities for memory-based AI engagement that can act and communicate based on customers’ past behaviors, preferences, and conversations. More than 47% are redesigning experiences to accommodate fully automated or AI-assisted shoppers, and 43% are redeveloping web and marketing copy to be more accessible for AI models. Four-in-ten businesses are rethinking their AI disclosure policies.

To what extent are you considering the voice experience when sourcing new contact center/ CX technology?

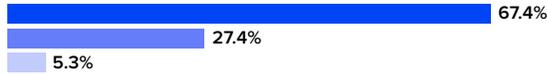


- 40.0% It is a top operational priority; we are actively sourcing solutions to improve the voice CX
- 38.9% Voice is important in our existing CX operation, but it is not a priority for new tech investment
- 13.7% We have not historically prioritized voice, but we plan to increase investment moving forward
- 7.4% We do not prioritize and/or are deprioritizing voice in our CX operation

Consider your goals for customer-facing AI in 2026, such as self-service chatbots and AI agents. How important are the following features and outcomes?

- Top priority
- Moderate priority
- Not a priority

Ability to meet industry standards for compliance, privacy, and security



Ability to personalize support experience to individual customer and context



Ability to support seamless handoffs to and from "human-in-the-loop"



Ability to operate across multiple channels



Ability to take autonomous action to process transactions and/or resolve support inquiries



Conversational/natural-language capability



Ability to intelligently route customer to the most suitable human agent



Amid the growth in consumer familiarity and adoption of public AI platforms like ChatGPT, Gemini, Meta AI, and Grok, will you prioritize any of the following initiatives in 2026?

Ensure self-service demonstrates recognition of individual customers and memory of past interactions and communication preferences



Accommodate customers who use AI to automate or assist with shopping and purchasing



Rewrite marketing copy, scripts, policies, and knowledge content to be easily searched and interpreted by AI



Rethink disclosures for how, when, and/or why AI is being used in the customer journey



Hire and/or train agents for fluency in effective AI prompting and searching



None of the above



THE TECHNOLOGICAL BALANCE: HOW AI AND HUMAN AGENTS CAN EMPOWER EACH OTHER

Upon developing a more secure, personalized, and autonomous self-service environment, the organization will meaningfully transform for human employee responsibilities.

Since certain issues will be fully handled by AI, the types of inbound inquiries they handle will change. And since more customers will be *starting* in AI even when their issue cannot be fully automated, they will be reaching agents with different sentiments – and different expectations.

An emerging technology strategy accounts for two dimensions of this evolution. First, it empowers an organization to redesign employee journeys and workflows. It also leverages AI to make human employees better at their new tasks.

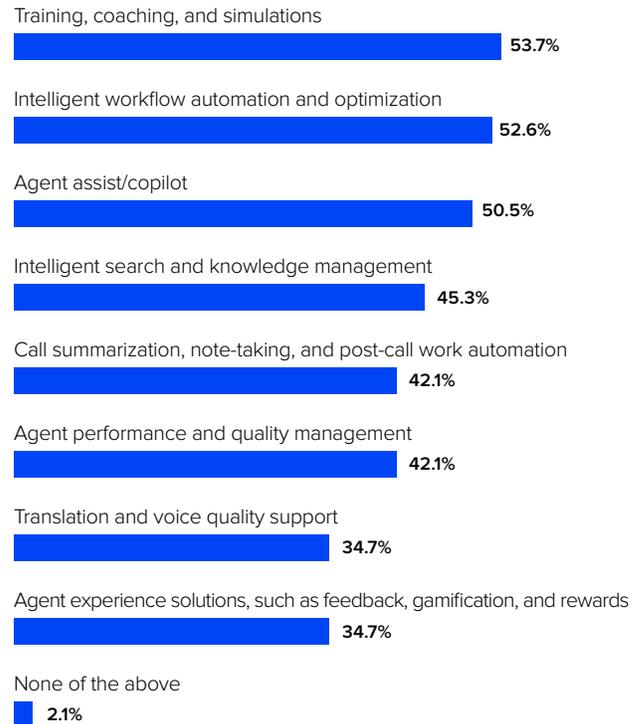
Befitting this landscape, AI related to employee training and simulations (54%), workflow optimization and redesign (53%), agent assist and copilot (51%), and intelligent search and knowledge management (45%) rank as key investment priorities for 2026.

The push for training solutions aligns with the reality that only 22% of today’s agents are *fully prepared* for how the rise of customer-facing AI will impact their day-to-day roles and responsibilities (articulated through clichés like “AI for simple issues, humans for complex ones”). Whether they need to establish more AI fluency, more comfort demonstrating “soft skills,” or both, coaching-oriented AI can be the solution.

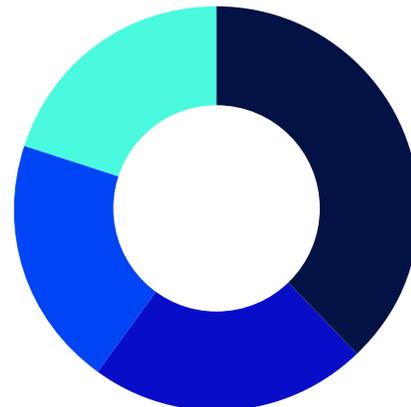
Granted, AI’s success in automating *predictable* interactions naturally means agents can expect a more *unpredictable* workflow. Workflow optimization and redesign solutions can help manage the impact of this shakeup, but they cannot guarantee that human agents will only handle tasks for which they received ample training. They certainly cannot guarantee that customers will not *enter* these interactions with an elevated standard for personalization, consultation, and proactivity.

Agent assist and knowledge management solutions become critical in this scenario, instantly closing lingering gaps in agent training – and instantly guiding them to tailor conversations to nuance and context.

Which of the following employee-facing AI initiatives will you prioritize in 2026?



Are your human employees currently prepared for the impact of AI on customer contact?



- **37.9%** Our agents are comfortable using AI technology but will require additional skills and training to handle their new tasks and responsibilities
- **22.1%** Our agents are fully equipped to use new AI solutions and handle new types of customer interactions and workflows
- **20.0%** Our agents are equipped to handle new types of interactions and workflows, but they require additional training and familiarity with AI tools and systems
- **20.0%** Our current agents are not yet ready for AI-powered customer contact; they will require new skills, competencies, and tech familiarity

INTERNAL LIMITATIONS, EXTERNAL ELEVATIONS: ESTABLISHING AN AI FRAMEWORK

Contact centers' AI hierarchies may be intuitive, but without a framework for successful implementation and optimization, they will be little more than wish lists. They will not be sources of true, organization-wide transformation.

Only 22% of organizations say they have an integrated AI technology framework with an end-to-end vision for governance, measurement, and insight-sharing. This means that 78% have a suboptimal environment.

About one-quarter say they have a cohesive vision but have not built the optimal technology framework. An equivalent percentage say the reverse; they feel their tools and technologies are connected, but they do not have an integrated AI strategy.

The remaining 27% concede their existing AI framework is either fundamentally immature – or wholly fragmented.

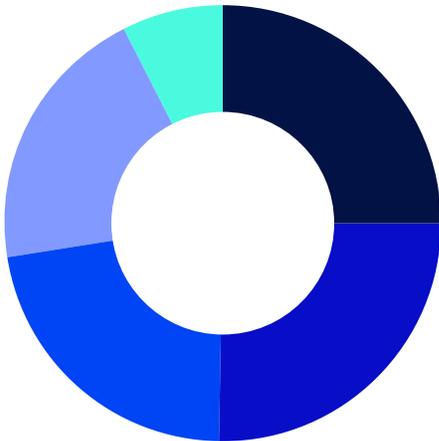
While optimizing these internal frameworks, many companies will rely on input from the solution community. Vendors that function as true partners – and not just technology merchants – can provide guidance not only on optimizing and unifying AI implementations but tailoring them to specific purposes and industry use cases.

When thinking about their existing AI providers, 26% of contact center leaders do sense a truly consultative partnership. They receive significant expertise and customized operational guidance from their vendor.

About 45% believe their vendors are experts, but only insofar as it relates to the broader contact center technology ecosystem. They do not, for example, turn to these vendors for unique industry compliance or audience relation needs.

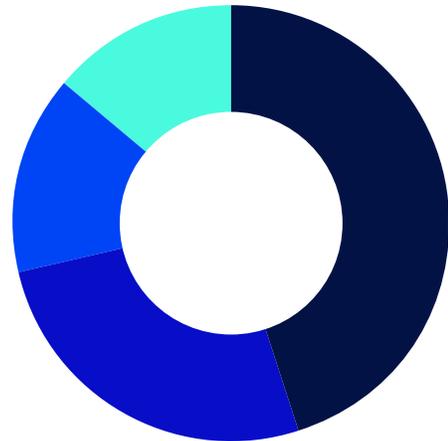
Just shy of 14% feel the “partnership” is limited to the specific product itself, and nearly 15% do not even feel they received support for the product. Their vendor’s only role was literally selling the technology.

How would you describe the current state of your AI environment?



- 25.3% We have a cohesive vision for AI, but the technology framework is not fully integrated
- 25.3% Our AI tools are largely integrated, but we do not yet have a unified AI strategy or vision
- 22.1% We have an end-to-end strategy for AI governance, measurement, and insight-sharing, as well as an integrated technology framework
- 20.0% Our AI approach is fragmented; we have some individual projects and pilots, but no unified framework or strategy
- 7.4% We have not yet made meaningful investment into AI

Consider your most recent AI technology purchase or implementation. To what extent has the vendor functioned as a “partner”?



- 45.3% They have demonstrated expertise of their technology and general contact center/CX trends, but customization for our unique/industry needs has been limited
- 26.3% They have demonstrated significant expertise of our operation and industry and work closely to customize the solution for our unique needs
- 14.7% They sold us the technology; implementation and optimization have been our responsibility
- 13.7% They supported the implementation and optimization of their product, but they have not provided any additional guidance or recommendations
- 13.7% They have not provided any additional guidance or recommendations



The Data Directive: Contact Center Intelligence That Will Drive A Lasting CX Impact

The contact center is the gateway between a business and its customers, which means it has direct access to critical intelligence. It knows who customers are, what they want, where they want to engage, and how they feel and behave.

These insights are critical to customer experience and broader business strategy. Uncovering intelligence, therefore, represents an increasingly popular way for a customer contact team to affirm its positioning as a “value center.” It also explains why “improving data and intelligence” ranks as the #2 priority for new technology investments, beneath only customer service and experience enhancement.

The right technology enables a contact center to turn the data it can *theoretically* access into intelligence it can *practically* implement.

And just like different data sets have different relevance for this purpose, different data solutions will have different resonance for a technology purchase.

For those buying data and intelligence solutions, improving predictive and proactive engagement represents the top priority. A substantial 60% call it an objective for their purchasing decisions.

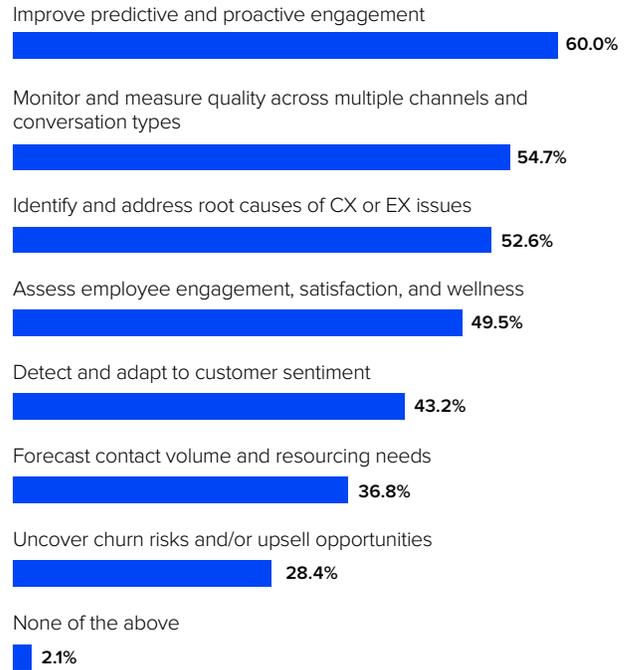
Consistent with the finding that “personalized and proactive engagement” is the most influential industry trend, the emphasis on predictive intelligence solutions has a clear ROI story. Businesses that can better anticipate customer needs and intentions will reduce unwanted calls, boost efficiency, and strengthen conversion rates. All have a clear impact on the bottom line.

Measuring quality across channels (55%), identifying and addressing root causes (53%), and assessing employee engagement (49%) also rank as top goals for data investments.

Omnichannel quality monitoring and deeper employee engagement assessment speak to the evolving customer contact landscape. With customers interacting in new environments in new ways, an ability to develop a standard, “single source of truth” about the experiences they are receiving becomes paramount. And with the rise of AI dramatically changing agent workflows and expectations, an enhanced assessment framework will provide vital insights into how their experiences – and thus levels of satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty – are being affected.

The case for root cause analysis mirrors that of predictive and proactive engagement; the more a business knows about *why* issues are happening, the more it can do to proactively address them and shift focus to more lucrative, value-generating activity.

Which of the following represent goals for your intelligence/analytics investments and strategy in 2026?





The Next Wave: Tomorrow's Technologies That Are Attracting Enthusiasm Today

Today's customer contact leaders see technology as a means to an end. The best innovation honors that principle, yielding solutions that clearly signal their ability to address lingering challenges or unlock emerging opportunities for value.

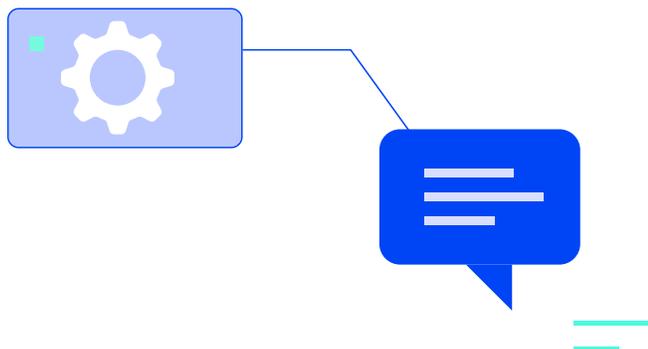
Enhanced, AI-powered quality monitoring (49% have clear investment plans, 45% have theoretical interest), real-time sentiment and intent analytics (48%, 46%), customer journey mapping and orchestration (47%, 48%), and workflow monitoring (45%, 49%) are making the *strongest* cases, but the reality is that many types of technology are on the radar.

Interest levels in categories like training and simulation technology, fraud and security solutions, and feedback and reputation management are nearly as significant.

The takeaway here is simple: contact center innovation is moving in the right direction. There are dozens of tools that have a clear, ROI-driven purpose – they exist to make customers better, employees more productive, and operations more effective. They are not simply showcases for exciting functionality or overly gimmicky features.

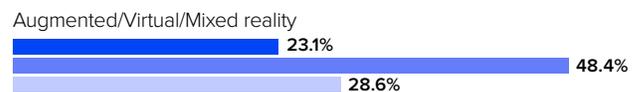
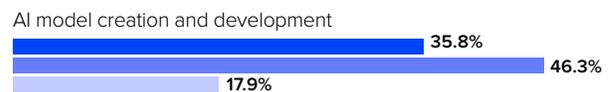
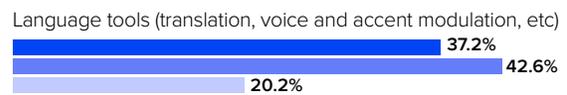
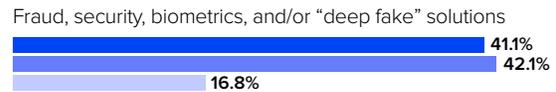
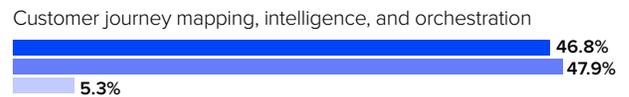
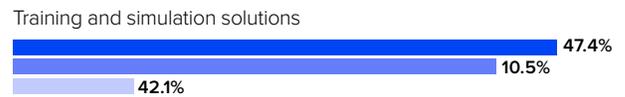
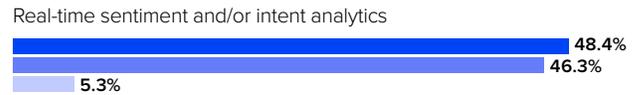
This does not mean all solutions are created equal. It does not mean all solutions are priced in a way that is feasible or built in a way that is practical. Price and integration capability, in fact, represent major differentiators.

It does, however, mean that contact center leaders cannot settle for the “passenger seat” on their technology journeys. They need to ensure that they are surfacing the challenges for which technology can be the solution, and then crafting operational, systemic, and strategic frameworks that will be conducive to *enablement* rather than *restriction*.



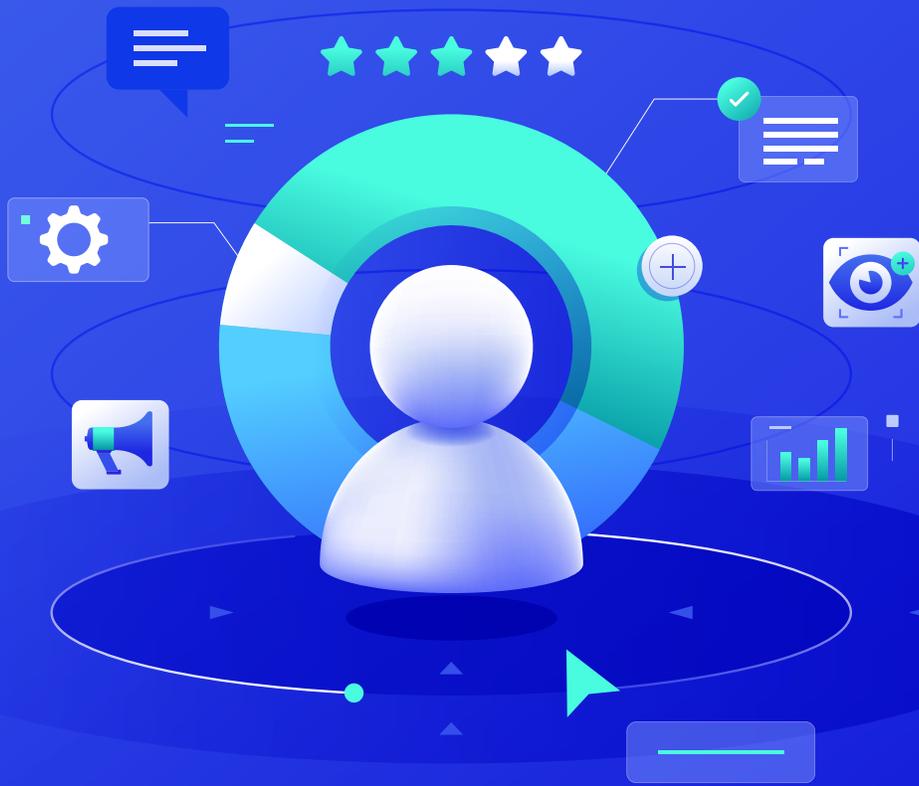
Are the following technology categories on your radar for the next 2-3 years?

- We are already investing or have clear plans to source/evaluate
- We are potentially interested but have no clear plans
- No, this is not a focus for us



2026 January Market Study

PRACTICALITY GUIDE





DATAMARK

America's Premier *Outsourcing* Partner

Partnership Over Product: How Technology Providers Are Shaping CX

Contact center technology sits between CX leaders whose ideas drive the industry forward, and customers whose needs involve increasingly high standards and expectations. But assessing and implementing contact center technology is more than choosing a product: it is embarking on a partnership that will have resounding effects on operations. After the last few years of AI hype, rapid transformation, and a disappointing lack of ROI, today's contact center leaders are faced with the reality that our technology selection process has become outdated.

However, this does not mean the industry is slowing down: 92% of contact center leaders are actively evaluating contact center technology or plan to purchase new technology in 2026, with 81% of leaders saying they're receptive to new product suites.

CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS KEEP RISING, WITH NO END IN SIGHT

Customer expectations are shaped by market leaders, not by industry averages. As soon as consumers experience faster resolution, proactive communication, or seamless self-service from one brand, that interaction becomes the new baseline. Customers do not compartmentalize expectations by industry; they carry them everywhere. When other brands fail to meet those expectations, loyalty erodes quickly. Customers do not get sentimental—they move on, because they know the technology enabling better experiences already exists.

For many customers, “better” increasingly means more personalized, more proactive, or even predictive experiences. These expectations are directly influencing investment decisions. In fact, initiatives focused on personalization, proactivity, and predictive engagement now influence investment strategies for 57% of contact center leaders. More broadly, 43% of leaders prioritize frictionless CX, while 41% emphasize empathetic CX.

This data underscores a critical shift: CX investments are no longer about experimentation. They are about meeting baseline expectations at scale, without introducing friction, delays, or security concerns. The challenge for leaders is delivering on these expectations consistently, across channels, without overwhelming agents or budgets.

GROWING WORKFORCE INSTABILITY

At the same time customer expectations are rising, the contact center workforce remains under strain. Attrition, burnout, and hiring challenges continue to disrupt operations, creating instability that directly impacts the customer experience.

Agents are expected to handle increasingly complex interactions, often while navigating fragmented systems, inconsistent knowledge bases, and rapidly changing policies. When tools fail to support agents effectively, the result is longer handle times, repeated customer contacts, and rising frustration on both sides of the conversation.

Workforce instability is not just an HR problem—it is a CX risk. Every time an experienced agent leaves, institutional knowledge evaporates. New hires face longer ramp times, while customers experience less consistency and more friction. Without deliberate investment in the agent experience and consideration for agents’ day-to-day, even the most sophisticated CX strategy will struggle to succeed.

TECHNOLOGY DISHARMONY AND SHORT-TERM THINKING

Technology was meant to simplify CX delivery, but for many organizations, it has had the opposite effect. Years of reactive purchasing, point solutions, and rushed implementations have resulted in fragmented ecosystems that are difficult to integrate and even harder to optimize.

Early technology partnerships often shape the future of the contact center in unintended ways. Initial design decisions, data models, or AI training inputs can introduce bias or rigidity that becomes increasingly difficult to unwind over time. When technology is layered on without a cohesive strategy, leaders end up managing tools instead of outcomes.

Compounding this challenge is growing skepticism. After years of inflated promises about AI, automation, and digital transformation, contact center leaders are demanding evidence—not theory. In 2025 alone, a third of leaders eliminated two or more contact center technology contracts, signaling widespread dissatisfaction with existing configurations and a lack of confidence in long-term value.

DESIGN EXPERIENCES FOR CUSTOMERS, NOT METRICS

One of the most impactful shifts CX leaders can make is refocusing experience design around customer outcomes rather than internal metrics alone. While KPIs remain important, optimizing for handle time or deflection in isolation often creates unintended friction.

Proactive engagement plays a critical role here. By anticipating issues before they escalate, organizations can reduce inbound volume while improving customer satisfaction. Intelligent routing, outbound notifications, and guided resolution allow problems to be addressed earlier, often before customers feel compelled to reach out.

Self-service is another area where intent matters. Smarter self-service, paired with intentional human escalation, allows routine tasks to be automated without stripping empathy from complex or emotional interactions. The goal is not to avoid human contact, but to ensure that when customers do need an agent, that interaction is informed, efficient, and meaningful.

ANCHOR EVERYTHING IN TIME-TO-VALUE

In today’s environment, time is one of the most valuable currencies in CX. Leaders are under pressure to demonstrate impact quickly, not years after implementation. This reality demands a shift away from overly complex, long-term builds toward solutions that deliver value incrementally.

Faster, better-informed interactions are enabled by real-time knowledge access and continuously updated content that reflects product, policy, and industry changes. When agents have immediate access to accurate information, customers avoid repetition, misinformation decreases, and resolution times improve.

Anchoring decisions in time-to-value also forces greater discipline in technology selection. Solutions that integrate easily with existing platforms and offer turnkey implementation are increasingly favored, not because they are simpler, but because lengthy on-ramps have proven to be expensive, disruptive, and risky.

ESTABLISH LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS— WITH VENDORS AND AGENTS

As CX technology matures, long-term value is emerging as the true differentiator. In 2025, the shift from theory to evidence became unmistakable. Leaders are no longer willing to tolerate vague roadmaps or unproven capabilities. Instead, they are prioritizing partnerships that deliver measurable outcomes.

This is reflected in expectations: 91% of contact center leaders expect new technology to make an impact within one year of implementation, and nearly half expect results in under six months. Technology partners are no longer just vendors—they are trusted advisors. In fact, 31% of leaders rely on their technology partners for recommendations on new products, and 79% say those recommendations carry significant weight in sourcing decisions.

Notably, leaders place more trust in vendor partners than in endorsements from industry analysts or journalists. Today, 72% of leaders view their providers as true partners that offer industry expertise and implementation guidance, while 26% say their partners actively customize solutions to fit unique business needs.

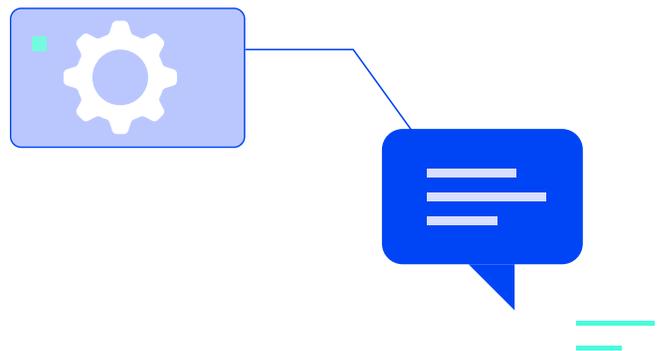
Equally important is fortifying the agent experience. Failing to prioritize agents is one of the greatest threats to a brand's CX foundation. Agents provide invaluable insight into how technology is actually used—not how it is intended to be used. When their perspectives are ignored, adoption suffers and value erodes.

Empowering agents with intuitive tools, clear guidance, and a voice in technology decisions improves retention, accelerates proficiency, and ultimately leads to better customer outcomes.

BUILDING CX FOR WHAT COMES NEXT

The challenges facing CX leaders are not temporary. Rising expectations, workforce instability, and technology complexity are defining features of the modern contact center. The organizations that succeed will be those that design experiences for customers—not metrics—anchor decisions in time-to-value, and build lasting partnerships across their ecosystem.

In a world where customers know what is possible, delivering anything less than efficient, empathetic, and trustworthy experiences is no longer an option.





Beyond Innovation Theater: The Reality of Contact Center Tech in 2026

Enterprise contact centers are entering 2026 under intense pressure. Rising labor costs, high customer expectations, and the complexity of serving global audiences are forcing leaders to rethink how technology supports service delivery.

New research from a global survey of 819 enterprise CX leaders shows a clear shift. AI-powered tools are no longer viewed as future investments. They are near-term requirements.

Yet most contact centers are stuck in transition. They rely on a patchwork of human services, hardware, and software that treats symptoms rather than fixing the root problem. The data suggests the next phase of CX innovation will be defined by one priority: modernizing voice infrastructure to remove friction from live interactions.

THE PRESSURE FACING CONTACT CENTERS IN 2026

Voice support remains one of the most expensive and operationally complex parts of customer experience. Enterprises face growing cost pressure, especially in onshore markets, while customers expect faster, clearer, and more consistent service across regions.

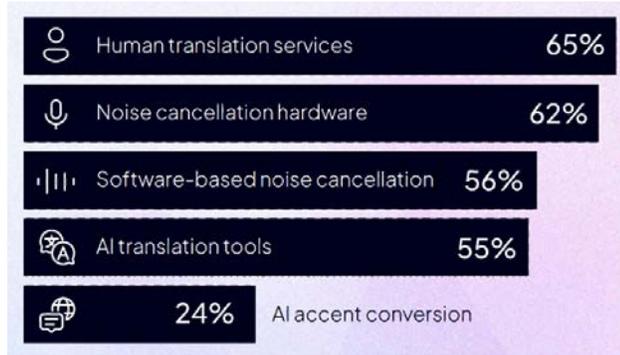
Globalization has expanded talent pools, but language and accent barriers still slow conversations and erode trust. At the same time, agents are asked to manage more tools, more channels, and higher call volumes with fewer resources.

AI is increasingly seen as the answer. But how it is deployed matters.

WHERE CONTACT CENTERS ARE TODAY: A VOICE STACK IN TRANSITION

The survey data shows that most contact centers are actively trying to fix voice issues, but many rely on solutions that do not scale well.

Today's voice technology mix includes:



This mix reflects both effort and inertia. Leaders recognize that voice is a problem, but many solutions remain labor-heavy or hardware-heavy. These approaches add cost, introduce delays, and fail to deliver consistent results across languages and regions.

THE HIDDEN COST OF LAYERED VOICE SOLUTIONS

Most contact centers operate with layered solutions built over time. While this approach keeps operations running, it creates hidden costs.

Customer experience suffers when calls are disrupted by background noise or delayed by handoffs to human translators.

Agents face growing complexity. Instead of focusing on the customer, they manage tools, workarounds, and interruptions.

Quality becomes inconsistent. What works well in one language or geography often breaks down in another.

Costs stay high. Hardware requires maintenance and replacement. Human services scale linearly with volume. Managing multiple systems adds operational overhead.

The result is a fragile voice stack that struggles to adapt as demand grows.

WHAT'S COMING NEXT: SHORT-TERM AI ADOPTION TRENDS

Despite these challenges, the market is moving quickly.

Among contact centers not currently using certain technologies:

- 44% plan to deploy AI accent reduction within 12 months
- 40% expect to add noise cancellation technology
- 36% are evaluating AI translation tools

Most of this adoption is planned within the next 6 to 12 months. This signals a market actively modernizing its voice stack, not experimenting at the edges.

Organizations that delay risk falling behind peers that gain speed, reduce costs, and improve service quality during this transition period.

THE BPO SHORTCUT

The data shows that many enterprises plan to access AI through external partners:

- 48% expect to access AI via BPO partners within three months
- 35% plan to buy from third-party AI software vendors
- 32% plan to build custom or proprietary solutions

BPOs are seen as the fastest path to AI adoption. While this can accelerate deployment, it comes with tradeoffs. Over-reliance on partners can limit flexibility, slow iteration, and reduce control over core CX capabilities.

BPOs are becoming a leading path for AI adoption—offering speed and scale. The opportunity is to pair that with long-term flexibility and innovation.

Enterprises that take more direct ownership of AI tools may be better positioned to move faster and adapt as needs evolve.

THE 2026 EXECUTION STACK: THREE AI PILLARS THAT MATTER

As AI adoption shifts from experimentation to execution, three capability areas stand out.

Speech Assist

Speech Assist focuses on real-time communication clarity. This includes noise removal, voice isolation, accent clarity, translation, and adaptation to different speech patterns.

When both sides can hear and understand each other clearly, conversations resolve faster and feel more human.

Agent Assist

Agent Assist tools support agents during live interactions. They summarize calls, capture actions, surface contextual guidance, provide real-time coaching, and reduce multitasking.

This allows agents to stay present with customers instead of managing systems.

Speech Analytics

Speech Analytics transforms conversations into insight and the voice channel into a data center. At scale, it helps teams identify friction points, product gaps, and performance trends that inform continuous improvement.

Together, these capabilities remove friction in real-time and drive tangible impact in deployment.

BUDGET REALITY: WHERE THE PAIN IS MOST ACUTE

Voice support remains heavily labor-driven:

Over 50% of companies spend the majority of their voice budget on onshore live agents

In contrast, offshore agents, automation, and AI services account for smaller portions of spend. This imbalance highlights a clear opportunity. If language and accent barriers can be addressed effectively, enterprises can reduce reliance on expensive onshore labor while maintaining service quality.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR CX LEADERS

The data points to several clear conclusions:

- AI is entering a mainstream deployment phase
- Accent and language gaps remain a major, unresolved challenge
- BPOs are filling the AI gap for now, but ownership matters
- Cost pressure will continue to push investment toward AI-powered voice tools

AI is no longer hype in customer experience.

The organizations that act now, especially by modernizing their voice infrastructure, gain an advantage in service quality, efficiency, and talent flexibility.

In 2026, the fastest path to CX impact starts inside the conversation.

To learn how Krisp can help you modernize your voice support with real-time voice AI, visit krisp.ai/contact-center.

ABOUT KRISP

In an era where **72% of consumers trust companies less than they did a year ago**, delivering exceptional customer experiences is critical. Krisp's Voice AI addresses this challenge by enhancing clarity, efficiency, comprehension, and engagement in every interaction, leading to improved CSAT, FCR, and reduced operational costs.

From AI-powered **noise cancellation to real-time accent conversion and voice translation in 80+ languages**, Krisp ensures every call is clearer, faster, and more effective.

Real-Time Voice AI. Real Results.

- 25% increase in FCR
- 10% reduction in average handle time
- 30% reduction in cost
- 26% boost in sales conversions
- 78% decrease in noise complaints
- 25% increase in agent satisfaction
- 8% boost in CSAT
- 20% decrease in calls abandoned

“At Everise, we believe the future of CX lies in empowering people with the right technology. We are proud to partner with Krisp to further our shared vision of amplifying the human touch with real-time AI. Together, we’re helping enterprises meaningfully elevate every customer experience. This is innovation with impact – and it’s the future of CX.” — **Sudhir Agarwal Founder and CEO**



Why Thumbtack Chose Maven AGI: A Q&A on Investing in Agent-Based CX

INTRODUCTION

We sat down with Thumbtack's VP of Commercial Operations, Lin Zhao, to pick his brain about how he vets enterprise AI solutions and the pivotal factors that led him to Maven.

You spent six months evaluating the space that Maven is in. What was happening in the broader AI landscape that made you take the time to go deeper?

There's this belief that emerging generative AI LLM technology will tremendously benefit the customer experience. Part of that belief is that it will provide accessible, effective support for all customer questions, 24/7. At Thumbtack, we share that vision. We spent quite a bit of time intensely studying the AI space to make sure we picked a solution that could live up to that.

You clearly saw an opportunity in the space, but was there also a problem or pain point you were solving for?

It came down to wanting to debunk negative associations with chatbots. When people hear "chatbot," they often

have a negative reaction because, in the past, bots haven't been very smart or helpful. Talking to one can feel like a waste of time. You just want to speak to a real person.

But with advances in large language models and conversational AI, things have improved. Bots can now provide more natural, human-like responses and genuinely helpful answers. Plus, they can support customers at any time, no matter how late it is or how long the queue is.

At the end of the day, AI helps us deliver a smoother, more satisfying experience for the homeowners and the small businesses we serve.

How did you decide what really mattered in a sea of AI hype and fast-moving promises? How did you structure your evaluations to stay grounded in your team's needs?

We started with a large list of over 50 key players in the space and worked closely with our technology team to evaluate them. We had really clear rubrics for both tech integrations and customer experience possibilities.

When we whittled down the lists, we ran multiple demos and had robust conversations to land on the finalists. Then quickly, we conducted a proof of concept using real customer data to determine which solution fit our needs.

What were the hard questions you asked every vendor, and how did those questions evolve as you learned more?

We focused on three main areas. First, we looked at the tech integration capabilities and whether the technology was mature enough for our complex systems.

Second, we assessed how vendors approached the customer experience. Were they just trying to get people off the contact lines as quickly as possible, or did they share our focus on truly helping customers?

Finally, we considered whether their solutions could grow with us and extend beyond support to create new touchpoints across the customer journey.

Being able to deliver a full-funnel experience seems crucial here. Can you describe how you think about the customer journey and which touchpoints you plan to prioritize at Thumbtack?

Many support leaders see the customer journey as starting when someone reaches out for help. At Thumbtack, we see it a little differently. The journey actually begins the moment a customer interacts with our app or platform.

Every engagement, whether it's a positive experience or a confusing one, is part of that journey. By the time a customer contacts support, they're already well into this process.

That's why we focus on supporting their needs from the very first touchpoint, offering guidance, education, and helpful tips throughout their experience with our product. And, of course, if an issue arises, we're still there to offer quick, effective help right when it's needed most.

After you completed the evaluation process, how did you decide that Maven was the right partner for Thumbtack?

A few things. First and foremost, Maven shared our vision of using AI agents not just for support, but also for customer success and sales enablement. We knew they would help us enhance the entire customer journey and show up for our customers at every touchpoint.

Second, we love their team. They're so passionate about the space and so responsive to our questions. They also execute at lightning speed.

Finally, the proof was in the pudding. When we put Maven's AI agents head-to-head with the top players in the space, the tool consistently delivered the most human-like and effective customer experiences while resolving issues faster.

Our internal CSAT assessment showed them to be 15%+ better than everyone else. Knowing they would help us deliver the best outcome for our customers gave us the confidence to move forward.

What advice would you give to other operators who are just starting to evaluate AI solutions?

Don't just trust the demo. Look under the hood at the vendor's tech maturity and integration capabilities. If possible, run true comparisons to see how their product performs against others. Several vendors might appear similar in demos, but proof of concept helps you spot clear differences in resolution rates and customer satisfaction.

Also, don't get distracted by flashiness. It's tempting to flock to whoever raises the most money or spends the most on marketing. But it's more important to ensure the vendor's vision and growth stage align with yours. This is the true indicator of their willingness to form a partnership and adapt their product to meet your evolving needs.

That's great advice. Looking ahead, what are you most excited about now that all this is in motion?

I'm excited to be able to give our customers the answers they're looking for exactly when they need them, at scale. I also know Maven's been a great partner in looking at how we may unlock a lot of net new use cases across the funnel, and I can't wait to see how those play out for us.

ABOUT MAVEN

Maven fuels businesses to scale great customer experiences. Our platform lets you build AI agents yourself or have us build them for you. Think of it as your smart operating system that connects your tools, streamlines workflows, and delivers consistent experiences everywhere customers interact with you. Maven's agents are accurate, effective, and safe. They learn your business, plug into your existing tech setup, and improve over time. It's our practical approach to Business AGI, starting with what matters most: making great customer experience effortless to scale.

Founded in 2023 by executives from HubSpot, Google, and Stripe, Maven AGI began by transforming customer service with autonomous agents capable of resolving up to 93 percent of inquiries. Today, organizations like Clio, Ibis, Tripadvisor, and Click-Up use Maven to bridge silos across support, sales, and operations, replacing broken handoffs with dynamic, context-aware workflows.

Maven AGI is backed by Lux Capital, M13, Dell Technologies Capital (DTC), SE Ventures, E14 Fund, and Cisco Investments. The company is also supported by advisors from OpenAI and Google.

Learn more here: mavenagi.com



Separating CX Technology Value From Hype in 2026: How Contact Center Leaders Turn Insight Into Action

INTRODUCTION: A DEFINING YEAR FOR CX TECHNOLOGY

2026 marks a clear inflection point for customer experience technology. For most contact center leaders, the debate is no longer whether to invest in AI, analytics, or automation. Those investments are already underway. The more pressing — and more difficult — question is now operational:

Which technologies deliver sustained, measurable value, and which ones create activity without impact?

Over the last several years, CX leaders have navigated an unprecedented wave of innovation. Platforms promise deeper listening, faster automation, and increasingly accurate prediction. Yet despite growing technology spend, many organizations continue to see only incremental gains in customer satisfaction, efficiency, and agent performance. Pilots proliferate and dashboards multiply, but outcomes lag.

This growing gap between experimentation and execution has sharpened expectations. Leaders are no longer interested in proofs of concept. They are seeking technologies that translate insight into action, reduce friction across teams, and materially improve decision-making. In 2026, separating CX technology value from hype is no longer optional. It is a strategic requirement.

WHY CX TECHNOLOGY OFTEN FAILS TO DELIVER RESULTS

The challenge is not a lack of data or tools. It is the way intelligence is generated and operationalized.

First, many CX programs still rely on partial and lagging signals. Surveys, NPS, and post-interaction feedback typically reflect a small percentage of total interactions and often arrive days or weeks after the customer experience. This leaves leaders managing by hindsight while emerging risks go undetected.

Second, insight remains fragmented across functions. CX teams focus on satisfaction, operations teams track efficiency, and technology teams manage platforms, often without a shared, objective view of what customers are actually experiencing. The result is misalignment and slow decision-making.

Third, analytics frequently stop at surface-level themes. Leaders may know what customers are frustrated about but not why issues persist or which process steps create the most friction. Without root-cause clarity, improvement efforts stall.

Finally, automation often outpaces understanding. AI-powered self-service and bots are deployed broadly without evidence-based guidance on which interactions are appropriate for automation. Many organizations see volume deflection without corresponding gains in satisfaction or trust.

These dynamics explain why CX leaders are increasingly skeptical of new technology claims, even as AI investment continues to rise.

FROM LISTENING TO UNDERSTANDING: THE EVOLUTION OF CX INTELLIGENCE

Earlier generations of Voice of the Customer programs focused on listening, capturing structured feedback through surveys, scorecards, and sampled call reviews. While useful, these approaches were limited by scale, speed, and subjectivity.

This marks a clear division between CX leaders and the rest of the market. While many organizations still rely on partial views of the customer, advanced teams are analyzing every interaction across voice and digital channels in near real time. Advances in AI now make it possible to process massive volumes of unstructured data across every channel — calls, chats, emails, and text messages — without relying on agent-selected codes or manual tagging.

This evolution defines a new class of CX intelligence that is:

- **Comprehensive rather than sampled**, analyzing 100% of interactions instead of 2–5% of call reviews or survey responses
- **Predictive rather than reactive**, surfacing satisfaction, churn risk, and effort signals during or immediately after interactions
- **Operational rather than observational**, designed to inform coaching, automation strategy, and process change

For contact centers, this represents a fundamental shift. Every interaction becomes a data point. Every conversation becomes an opportunity to improve experience, efficiency, and outcomes.

What Practical CX Intelligence Looks Like in Practice

Despite similar marketing language across vendors, practical CX intelligence is defined less by features and more by how insight is used.

At a minimum, leaders should expect answers to questions that directly inform action:

- Why are customers contacting us *right now*?
- Which interaction types drive repeat contact, dissatisfaction, or churn?
- Where do policies, documentation, or system handoffs break down?
- Which journeys are safe to automate, and which require human empathy?

iQor's Insights iQ™ next-generation analytics illustrates how this approach is operationalized. Rather than relying only on surveys or partial samples, the platform analyzes 100% of voice and digital interactions, processing billions of conversational data points each week. AI models automatically detect intent, sentiment, effort, and risk directly from customer language without requiring agents to classify calls.

This creates a unified, real-time view of the customer experience that can be shared across CX, operations, sales, and technology teams. Predictive indicators such as satisfaction, churn likelihood, and customer effort are generated directly from interaction data, eliminating survey lag and reducing bias.

Importantly, this intelligence is designed to be used, not just viewed. In practice, this insight becomes an operational backbone for the contact center. The same interaction intelligence informs targeted coaching and agent development, fuels Voice of the Customer programs, and guides process and policy changes that reduce repeat contact and friction. It also enables earlier identification and management of customer complaints, supports automated quality management (AQM) at scale, and provides objective visibility into compliance and risk across 100% of interactions.

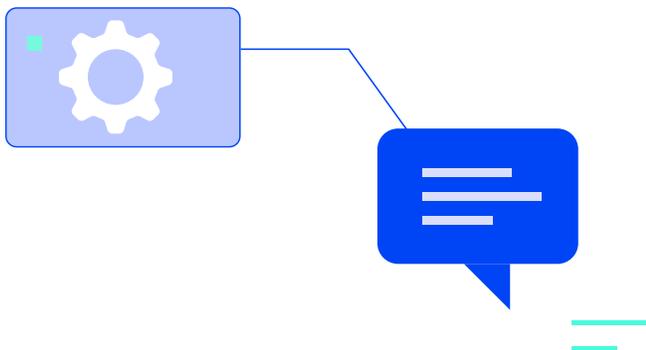
“It starts with asking, ‘What are you solving? What can be solved? And would it be worth solving? And where can we partner with our clients?’ We took a massive step back, put together our strategy, and spent a lot of time with the stakeholders to figure out what are the key challenges that we want to solve.” — iQor CXBPO™ Chief Digital Officer Prabhjot “Pj” Singh

TURNING INSIGHT INTO MEASURABLE IMPACT

The true test of CX technology is whether it drives action and measurable results. When applied effectively, Insights iQ delivers tangible outcomes across contact center operations.

- **Sales and retention performance:** By analyzing interaction-level drivers of success, organizations have improved save and conversion outcomes without increasing handle time. In several environments, data-driven scripting and targeted coaching informed by interaction insights have delivered double-digit to 30x improvements in save rates while increasing conversion performance by more than 40% in targeted sales motions.
- **Agent performance and speed to proficiency:** Replacing subjective call sampling with full-interaction analysis enables more precise coaching. Teams leveraging AI-driven insights and simulated role play have reduced time-to-proficiency by up to 50% while lifting CSAT and NPS among previously underperforming agents.
- **Quality and compliance:** Analyzing every interaction — rather than 2–3% samples — provides objective visibility into quality, compliance, and risk. Organizations have improved QA precision from low double digits to 80%+ accuracy in detecting agent-driven issues, enabling faster intervention and more consistent outcomes.
- **Operational efficiency:** Root-cause visibility into repeat contact, documentation gaps, and handoffs has enabled organizations to reduce avoidable volume and improve efficiency. In complex environments, unified interaction analytics have contributed to 20–25% gains in operational efficiency, alongside reductions in overtime and overstaffing.

Across these use cases, the common thread is execution. Insight becomes valuable only when it informs action and when results are tracked continuously.



WHAT CX LEADERS SHOULD DEMAND FROM TECHNOLOGY IN 2026

As the CX technology landscape continues to expand, leaders evaluating solutions should apply a disciplined lens. Several criteria are quickly becoming table stakes:

- **Full interaction coverage:** Intelligence derived from samples will always miss critical signals.
- **Predictive, timely insight:** Lagging indicators limit agility and slow decision-making.
- **Root-cause clarity:** Knowing why issues occur is essential to fixing them.
- **Cross-functional usability:** CX intelligence must serve operations, sales, digital, and technology teams, not just one function.
- **Low-friction, secure deployment:** Solutions should minimize integration burden while meeting enterprise security and compliance requirements.

When these criteria are met, CX technology becomes a strategic asset, supporting decisions, guiding execution, and aligning teams around a shared source of truth.

CONCLUSION: ACTING ON INSIGHT, NOT INSTINCT

The CX leaders who succeed in 2026 will not be those who adopt the most tools but those who act most effectively on what their customers are already telling them.

The hype surrounding AI is giving way to a more disciplined focus on outcomes. Contact centers are moving beyond passive listening toward intelligence that informs decisions, guides execution, and drives measurable results.

Separating CX technology value from buzzwords requires clarity, evidence, and operational rigor. When insight is grounded in every interaction and translated into action, technology fulfills its promise, not as a replacement for human judgment but as a powerful enabler of it.

ABOUT IQOR CXBPO™

iQor CXBPO™ is a trusted partner in intelligent customer experience solutions for global brands and a portfolio company of Mill Point Capital. With 47,000+ employees across 11 countries, iQor combines three decades of expertise with AI-driven innovation to optimize performance across the entire customer lifecycle. Through its three delivery pillars — CXBPO, Growth as a Service, and infinityAiQ — iQor delivers scalable solutions that drive acquisition, engagement, and retention. Powered by data intelligence and a people-first culture, iQor transforms customer interactions into measurable growth. Recognized as a Great Place to Work® and a leader in CX excellence, iQor empowers brands to grow smarter. Learn more at [iQor.com](https://www.iqor.com).



The Agentic Enterprise: When Technological Unity Drives Human Connectivity

In today's era of intensely competing on the experience, increasing customer satisfaction is not enough.

Standout brands are looking to do more than merely answer questions and deliver timely resolutions. Instead, they aim to turn one-time buyers into long-term, loyal advocates. They seek deep, meaningful, human connections.

These ambitions may seem lofty, but they are readily attainable in the era of artificial intelligence (AI) technology. By establishing an agentic enterprise – one in which agentic AI solutions operate across a cohesive, unified contact center framework – the organization will democratize the data and vision needed to deliver frictionless, personalized, predictive, and proactive engagement. Every employee will be empowered, and every customer will be delighted. Journeys will be as convenient as they are human-centric.

The ability to build an agentic enterprise cannot, however, be taken for granted. The reality is that many of today's contact centers utterly lack the necessary framework, and without taking steps to unify their environment, AI investments will actually exacerbate friction and inefficiency. They will weaken customer connections.

After exploring the consequences of a fragmented environment, this briefing reveals four steps to transforming a disconnected contact center into a wholly unified agentic enterprise.

A FRAGMENTED REALITY: DISCONNECTED TECHNOLOGY MEANS DISSATISFIED CUSTOMERS

The "frictionless experience" may be the aspiration, but it is not the actuality. Thanks to fragmentation at

all phases of the customer contact operation, today's customer and employee experiences are notoriously inefficient, inconvenient, and impersonal. Contact channels operate in isolation, databases exist in conflict, and team collaboration is insufficient.

Rushed AI implementations have only exacerbated this fragmentation; just 22% have a cohesive framework for these solutions.

Ultimately, customer contact leaders identify “disconnected tools, technologies, and systems” as the #1 inhibitor to success in 2026. The consequences of this fragmented ecosystem are clear and significant.

Consequence #1 | Obscured business intelligence

Thanks to their disconnected environments, many contact centers lack the singular, 360-degree view required to understand challenges and initiate improvements.

Recent CCW Digital research confirmed that only 16% have been able to successfully address the “root causes” of their recurring issues. As a result, just 12% have made meaningful progress in *eliminating* these issues from their interaction queues.

Unable to even remedy *ongoing matters*, fragmented contact centers will surely struggle to anticipate future needs or capitalize on emerging trends.

Consequence #2 | Inhibited employee performance

Beyond affecting high-level strategy, a fragmented customer contact ecosystem directly thwarts employee performance.

Nearly three-quarters of contact center leaders say their agents spend too much time looking up knowledge and customer data. More than 60%, meanwhile, say that the very process of accessing contact center tools requires undue effort.

This effort prevents human employees from properly focusing on issues – or connecting with the customers they are supporting. It also risks creating the kind of frustration that leads to employee dissatisfaction and churn.

Consequence #3 | Bottlenecked AI adoption

In theory, effective AI initiatives are the solution to the aforementioned problem. They represent a way to simultaneously automate repetitive tasks and empower agents to more adeptly perform higher-value, more complex work.

In practice, fragmentation prevents organizations from making the most of their AI investments – and thus prevents them from using the technology to boost productivity. An alarming 70% of contact centers have faced integration challenges when deploying AI.

AI that is deployed on a broken foundation ultimately amplifies the cost of fragmentation. It leads to inconsistent, impersonal self-service. Customers consequently reject that option, instead choosing to escalate to human support. And since the employee-facing AI solutions also lack access to a single source of truth, they are unable to supply human representatives with the knowledge prompts, sentiment insights, and “next-best action recommendations” required for more efficient, consultative support.

Consequence #4 | Dissatisfied customers

Collectively, the aforementioned challenges undermine the customer experience.

Without access to the right data and knowledge, self-service options are neither able to adapt to context nor provide meaningful resolutions. They function as little more than fancy FAQ pages, doing little to inspire customer confidence or optimize workflow.

The majority of customers, unsurprisingly, face “difficulty explaining their issue” when interacting with self-service platforms. Just 15%, as a result, trust chatbots for customer support issues.

Affected by convoluted workflows, human employees are unable to tailor conversations to individual customer needs. They, too, function as generic script readers – and ultimately fail to deliver the kind of support that drives growth in satisfaction, loyalty, and lifetime value.

BUILDING THE AGENTIC ENTERPRISE: EVOLVE FROM UNPRODUCTIVE EXPERIENCES TO UNBREAKABLE CONNECTIONS

“Silos” have long been associated with the customer contact operation, but their existence is not inevitable. By addressing foundational challenges and then harnessing the power of agentic AI technology, organizations can create an integrated customer contact operation that produces frictionless, personalized, predictive, and proactive experiences for customers.

Key steps to the transformation are as follows.

Step #1 | Align your enterprise around meaningful metrics and outcomes

It is easy to say that “technology is a means rather than an end.” Driving meaningful action, however, requires defining and then rallying the organization around that end goal.

“It is key to begin with the long-term vision of what you are building, and focus on the value for customers, the enterprise, and the employees. That vision should be compelling and exciting enough that it builds anticipation and eagerness. Focus on the business outcomes by defining the metrics that matter to the business ... then work backwards and take baby steps to test and roll out technology.” - Nirmal Mukhi, Chief Architect at ASAPP

This long-term vision should include a clear, audience-driven standard for how the organization defines a successful customer experience. Upon analyzing and understanding where customers want to connect, how personalized they want such connections to be and, ultimately, what they want to achieve, the business can determine the best metrics of success, as well as the systems and insights required for getting there.

It can also determine the optimal balance of automation technology and human ingenuity and then begin implementing systems and designing journeys accordingly.

Step #2 | Build infrastructure to create a singular “voice of the brand”

Actualizing the aforementioned vision is not the sole responsibility of a single customer contact team. It is an organization-wide imperative that requires cross-departmental buy-in and collaboration.

Indeed, it hinges on the development of a singular voice of the brand. All communication and designs – whether of the sales, marketing, service, or product variety – must demonstrate a clear recognition of what the customer wants and a consistent commitment to an exceptional experience.

To achieve this singular voice, successful organizations will adopt *unified* customer contact systems that align all tools, channels, knowledge bases, and customer records.

“CX leaders would be wise to continue pushing investments in making core enterprise systems AI-ready, for example, by improving knowledge base quality, strengthening API documentation, and adopting standard protocols like MCP (Model Context Protocol) for their agents. They should be unafraid to make radical changes in technology stacks; for example, platforms good at workforce management aren’t prerequisites for running highly performant contact centers of the future, where personalized automated concierge-like experiences are likely to be at the front line for most conversations.” - Nirmal Mukhi

Once that framework is in place, the brand can standardize outbound communication and democratize intelligence across all departments, teams, channels, and touch points. It can also make informed decisions about which tasks to automate, while accurately forecasting how those automation initiatives will impact human workflow.

Step #3 | Deploy autonomous AI agents with robust conversational capabilities

Integrating the customer contact framework creates an opportunity to use automation in a meaningful way. Seizing the opportunity requires the right AI technology.

This ideal technology, above all, possesses conversational capability. It uses natural language understanding and generative AI to allow customers to communicate on their own terms – and then craft personalized, contextually relevant responses.

An accompanying pivot from large to small language models enhances the value of this AI, leading to automated engagement that is tailored to the unique intricacies of a business, its customers, and its regulatory concerns. Since the resulting experiences will feel more natural, intuitive, and supportive, customers will be more inclined to engage.

“When executing, focus on the design of an experience - the tone and feel, and how proactive the AI system is. Customers may be reluctant to work with a robot that says, “How can I help you?” but may be less reluctant to work with one that says, “I have the claim you filed yesterday open, how can I help?” - Nirmal Mukhi

Given their inherent conversational capabilities, voice solutions are particularly suitable for this dynamic.

“Voice bots using generative AI will demonstrate their ROI and contact centers will evolve to use these at scale.” - Nirmal Mukhi

Not simply about improving individual interactions, conversational AI solutions are the key to better understanding customers. By capturing and analyzing customer sentiments, intentions, and expectations in their *own words*, these solutions uncover vital intelligence that can be used to improve future self-service experiences, optimize agent hand-offs, and drive cross-departmental improvement. Rather than offering a biased portrayal of

how they react to a predetermined set of menus and prompts, the data will provide an unfiltered look into what customers are truly demanding.

The best customer-facing AI, of course, does more than simply *understand*. It also *acts*. Powered by agentic AI, it makes informed, autonomous decisions on processing transactions, resolving support issues, and/or facilitating hand-offs to specialists.

Confident that they can receive an actual resolution, customers will begin to see AI agents as a legitimate support option. They will choose to use self-service for many issues, creating the operational efficiency contact centers have long desired.

When they do escalate, they will encounter agents who themselves are benefiting from the power of AI. Armed with real-time context, sentiment insights, next-best action recommendations, and freedom from administrative tasks, these employees are empowered to focus on hearing and adapting to the actual voice of the customer.

Step #4 | Unlock AI-human collaboration

Achieving an agentic enterprise is not about deploying discrete agentic AI solutions. Rather, it is about fostering an environment of seamless, complementary collaboration between all AI and human agents.

At the interaction level, this involves ensuring a human is in the loop for customer-facing AI deployments. The AI can and should handle most of the actual conversation, but when a particular request requires special approvals, outside-the-box thinking, or a high level of emotional empathy, the available human can provide the necessary support. This dynamic maximizes the efficiency of the operation, elevates the quality of customer resolutions, and minimizes risk of non-compliant or inconsistent decision-making.

It lets AI and humans each do what they do best.

“Today humans are reflexively thought of as a backstop for the AI. Instead, mature human-in-the-loop capabilities can allow humans to be integrated into aspects of an automated workflow driven by an AI concierge, where they can supervise or sign off on high-risk actions, as an enterprise might do for a junior employee running that workflow.” - Nirmal Mukhi

Operationally, agentic AI solutions are in constant contact with each other – and with human employees – to ensure data flows smoothly to all functions and touch points.

“For the enterprise, the next evolution of AI will be the transformation of the enterprise from one with technology silos to an agentic enterprise. A single agentic brain will connect agents across the enterprise - from the contact center to business intelligence, marketing, and sales - to power customer experiences that are personalized, proactive, and effective.” - Nirmal Mukhi

It essentially turns the promise of a singular customer experience vision into a reality. Everything a given department, human employee, or AI agent needs to perform will be available in real-time – and automatically translated into a language, visual, or action recommendation that they can understand in the moment.

Data silos and inconsistencies will be a thing of the past. The entire organization will finally revolve around customer centricity.

FINAL CONSIDERATION: THE RIGHT PARTNER WILL ELEVATE YOUR AGENTIC ENTERPRISE

In the agentic enterprise, AI is not limited to low-risk, low-complexity use cases. It is deployed throughout the organization, navigating highly complex processes, acting on highly sensitive data, and ultimately delivering high-value outcomes.

Given the high stakes, savvy customer contact leaders will look for more than an innovative technology provider. They will instead gravitate to a legitimate partner that is committed to learning the nuances of an organization, fleshing out its short- and long-term goals, and optimizing technology accordingly.

The right partner also accounts for the emerging risks of the AI age, such as conversational accuracy, regulatory compliance, and data security.

Signposted not only by its cross-industry expertise but *real results*, ASAPP represents a highly capable partner.

[Example success stories are available here.](#)



NiCE

From Innovation to Maturity: The Next AI Journey

The term emerging technology has become suddenly common. A phrase that once felt like an extraordinary occurrence, has now become a regular part of the contact center lexicon. That is not to say that technology is no longer innovative or exciting, it has just become integrated in the everyday of the contact center.

When it comes to emerging technology, contact center leaders are focused on a few areas: they are working to deliver AI-powered experiences that feel intuitive, seamless and personalized. But they are also working to leverage AI more effectively, reaching a level of maturity that has yet to be accomplished.

In 2026, it is not just about implementing the newest, latest and greatest tools, it is about leveraging technology with intention. Moving past the buzz to achieve maturity over continuous innovation.

Philipp Heltewig, Chief AI Officer at NiCE shares, “We’ve experienced so much rapid advancement in the last three years, it’s easy to forget that innovation is not the same as product maturity and experience.” When it comes to next steps, contact center leaders should be focusing more on outcomes than buzzy new tools. According to CCW Digital research, when asked about critical KPIs for AI investments, 83% of leaders shared that improved interaction quality was the goal.

This is the key — securing greater quality interactions and moving beyond the ‘next-best-thing’ mindset. By focusing on the technology that adds value to experiences over unnecessary, over-the-top features, organizations will begin to see real results.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGY TRENDS IN 2026

When thinking about the future of experiences, we are quick to look at new technology. In the age of AI, we are always asking ‘what’s next?’ and working to understand how technology will drive change. However, we are now at a time of unprecedented innovation. It is no longer enough to just think about what’s next, it is critical to prepare for this future and ensure that the current tools in place will align with your burgeoning tech stack.

Heltewig shares that there are likely two scenarios that organizations will follow when it comes to technology in the next few years.

“I think we’ll see two parallel developments as it concerns AI. Firstly, the young vendors from the last two years will continue to play feature catch up, bringing some new perspectives and ideas but still lacking the years of experience and expertise that bring the details and functionality seasoned CX practitioners need,” states Heltewig.

Based on the level of advancements we’ve seen in the last few years, this is a likely reality. Without guidance from experts, it can be difficult to move at the pace needed while innovating intentionally. Contact center leaders are not averse to this approach either, as high as 69% stated that their decision to invest in adding or improving digital options was driven by their competitors. This strategy, or lack thereof, is concerning as customers expect more intentional interactions.

On the other hand, seasoned technology providers will be working to enhance their current technology, not just barrel ahead. Heltewig shares, “Veteran vendors will continue to dig deeper and refine their solutions for enterprise needs and trust at scale.”

The refinement process will include managing orchestration not just models, leveraging answers tied to approved knowledge and establishing more predictable behaviors across use cases. This level of maturity gives organizations the confidence to rely on technology as a means to secure customer trust.

LEADING WITH OUTCOMES, NOT TOOLS

To proceed with a more intentional CX technology strategy, organizations must look to secure outcomes over hype. As we continue in the age of AI and the newness wears off, it is essential to understand how the technology will impact experiences and what it is in the position to actually deliver.

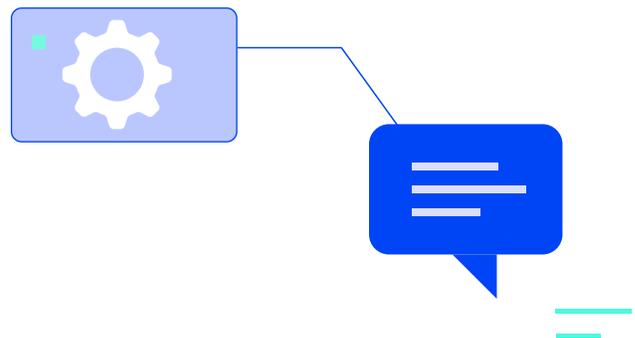
According to CCW Digital research, contact center leaders have left much of this up to interpretation. As few as 16% of leaders shared that they are in the position to fully measure outcomes and can attribute impact to specific initiatives or technology with precision.

If organizations cannot point to the root cause of efficiency gains, improvements or wins, then how can they understand how technology is actually impacting the experience?

This illustrates a lack of preparedness that can set organizations up for failure when it comes to long-term innovation goals. In 2026, then, it will be critical to lead with outcomes and set realistic goals that can be measured consistently. From there, organizations can work to implement technology that can actually make a clear impact.

“Going forward, the best solution won’t be the newest frontier model or feature of the week. It’ll be the one you know how to use effectively and that evolves safely going forward. Thus, the confluence of product, enterprise and user maturity will play a large role, in contrast to the past where deploying AI at all was already a giant step forwards,” Heltewig states.

While in the past the AI journey felt far-fetched, it is now a necessary step to achieve CX outcomes. The more critical piece is ensuring that this technology is leveraged to its fullest capacity, driving meaningful change and prompting a more human-centered experience.



THE PEOPLE SIDE OF EMERGING TECH

This market study aims to cover technology trends, features and next-steps. But it does not ignore the people side of innovation. Without recognizing the needs of the individuals actually using these tools, technology can end up becoming a nuisance.

Contact center agents are often conflicted by excitement for supportive new tools and fear of long-term change and replacement. This point of contention can hold CX teams back; if agents are not utilizing the technology effectively, then results will be minimal.

Most contact center leaders share that AI is, in fact, not meant to be a replacement but a companion; a tool that can enhance the agent experience and give them the insight needed to deliver better service. In other cases, AI can execute end-to-end workflows and take major processes off of the agent's plate.

Heltewig shares that this has become a challenge when it comes to AI deployment. "One of the biggest barriers for those who have already deployed AI is whether they use it as an assistant or decision maker, in other words assertive vs. authoritative or 'helping' vs 'handling.'" NiCE states.

While leaders are working to achieve these realities, many are far beyond actually delivering on either strategy. According to CCW Digital research, 73% of leaders shared that agents are still navigating too much friction in their current systems, tools and processes.

To shift toward a more mature AI strategy, leaders must think past the assistive phase. Heltewig notes that it is a common first step, "But this leaves AI moving at the pace of human judgement. That's AI that augments, that assists, that accelerates. But true transformation comes with authority, AI that can act and decide, not that iterates on legacy processes. It's not about faster ticket summaries; it's about fewer tickets."

In the past, this may have been seen as a threat to human centered support, but in reality it lends itself to a more dynamic and personalized experience. When routine work is consistently resolved by AI, agents can better leverage empathy, judgement and, ultimately, build trust.

AI MATURITY: WHERE TO START

As mentioned, NiCE believes that organizations should start with outcomes, not tools. To begin, leaders should look to 3 to 5 metrics that must move in the next 12-24 months. By understanding where they want to move the needle, they can adapt technology to support this journey.

For example, if the organizations wants to improve cost per contact, CSAT, containment and agent attrition they must pilot technologies that score high on:

- **Value** – attack high-volume, repeatable use cases with clear impact
- **Success** can be clearly measured and demonstrated
- **Readiness** – can be safely piloted in 8–12 weeks with existing data, channels, and a clear owner
- **Risk & reversibility** – strong guardrails, easy rollback, and limited brand exposure

Heltewig shares, "Prioritize "adjacent possible" use cases first (agent assist, AI search, summaries, a few high-volume intents) and treat everything else as phase 2 or 3: track and learn, but don't race to implement until your operating model and governance are ready."

When to wait:

- Processes are undocumented, constantly changing or require a lot of tribal, undocumented knowledge
- Data access is unresolved
- No owner exists for quality and outcomes

In terms of preparing long-term, NiCE recommends that leaders treat AI as part of the workforce, with clear roles and metrics, and governance, including transparency, auditability and human-in-the-loop controls.

With so few organizations in the position to actually measure the impact technology is having, it is essential to begin tracking what matters to ensure that AI is a strategic asset rather than a trivial experiment.

"Ultimately, emerging contact center technology only matters if it holds up under real-world pressure. Leaders who act now are not chasing trends; they are building flexible CX foundations that scale quality instead of chaos, adapt as technology evolves, and earn trust as AI takes on greater autonomy," Heltewig states.

This sentiment is key; with so many new tools out there, it is essential to focus on the foundational elements of success. By prioritizing real needs and implementing technology that can be flexible, secure and stable, organizations will see long-term success. At the end of the day, it is about securing real resolutions for customers and delivering meaningful support, and this can only be achieved with intentional CX strategy combined with effective technology.

Company	Challenge	Solution/Result
<p>Lufthansa</p>	<p>Lufthansa faced overwhelming customer inquiry volume and its existing chatbot couldn't scale, so the airline unified customer service on a single AI-powered automation platform, enabling rapid response, greater flexibility, and reduced reliance on IT without increasing costs or staff.</p>	<p>Lufthansa chose Cognigy to rapidly build scalable AI Agents, enabling consistent support during traffic spikes. Integrated across web and SMS with multilingual, real-time translation, the solution boosted efficiency and customer satisfaction through fast, reliable, personalized self-service.</p> <p>Handles >16 Million conversations yearly, with peaks up to 375,000 per day.</p>
<p>Toyota</p>	<p>Toyota faced customer support overload from routine inquiries and lacked a way to proactively alert vehicle owners when warning lights indicated maintenance. Many owners ignored these warnings, risking safety and missed service needs.</p>	<p>Toyota deployed NiCE Cognigy to run 25+ AI Agents on chat and phone, including "E-Care," which automatically contacts owners when their car has warning or error lights, allowing seamless appointment booking and dealer notification with full context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ On-board IoT integration of AI Agents in vehicles ■ Informs vehicle owners via outbound call ■ Offers a service appointment ■ Forwards details via SMS or email ■ Informs car dealerships simultaneously <p>95% of drivers book appointments with the AI Agent</p> <p>98% customer satisfaction with AI service</p>
<p>ARAG Insurance</p>	<p>ARAG faced high call abandonment caused by long hold times and the limitations of traditional IVR systems. Calls needed to be routed to the correct business department based on the customer's claim. Manual routing and self-service gaps slowed down resolution and increased customer frustration.</p>	<p>ARAG deployed an AI Agent on voice with intelligent routing and phone self-service. The AI routes callers to the correct department and agent. Routine requests, such as updating personal details are handled through self-service. This significantly reduced waiting times and improved call efficiency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Eliminated long hold times with intelligent routing ■ Automated routine phone inquiries ■ Improved call efficiency and customer experience ■ Scaled phone self-service securely <p>KPIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1 minute AHT reduction per call ■ 100% automation of routine interactions ■ Handles thousands of calls daily

Company	Challenge	Solution/Result
<p>Essent</p>	<p>Essent handles around 1.6 million customer interactions per year, primarily via phone. Over 700 customer service agents respond to a wide range of inquiries, from energy bills to solar panels. Previously, agents relied heavily on helpdesk support to find information. This increased handling time and operational effort.</p>	<p>Essent deployed Agent Copilot combined with Knowledge AI. The AI Agent provides real-time answers during conversations and guides agents through applications and payment procedures. Service requests are supported directly within the agent workflow. Live handovers remain available when needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Supported agents with instant knowledge access ■ Reduced dependency on internal helpdesk teams ■ Improved response speed and accuracy ■ Scaled customer service efficiently ■ Live Agent handover when necessary <p>KPIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ \$2,000,000 savings per year ■ 85% of helpdesk queries fully automated ■ Substantial NPS increase
<p>Mister Spex</p>	<p>Mister Spex needed to modernize its phone-based customer service and replace a traditional IVR system. Existing processes required agents to manually capture contact reasons and perform verification, increasing call times. At the same time, the team had limited prior experience with voice bot development.</p>	<p>Mister Spex deployed an AI Agent on voice to replace the existing IVR and take over skill-based routing. The AI independently handles verification and WISMO requests while routing complex cases to the correct Genesys queues. Transfer data such as intent and verification results is passed directly to agents at handover.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Replaced traditional IVR with AI-driven voice automation ■ Automated verification and WISMO at scale ■ Enabled faster resolution and improved agent efficiency <p>KPIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 70% automated ID&V ■ 78% of return label requests fully automated ■ 50% of WISMO inquiries fully automated ■ 30 second per call AHT reduction



Future-Proofing Your Contact Center AI Strategy

THE AI RECKONING IN THE CONTACT CENTER

The conversation around AI in the contact center is entering a critical new phase. After years of rapid adoption, many enterprises are discovering that while AI has proliferated across routing, bots, analytics, workforce management, and QA, measurable business outcomes have not kept pace. AI initiatives that promised step-change improvements have instead introduced new layers of complexity, fragmented decision-making, and limited visibility into what is actually driving results. As a result, 78% of contact center leaders now say their technology stack is suboptimal—not because it lacks intelligence, but because that intelligence is scattered across disconnected systems. AI has created more metrics, more tools, and more decisions, but not enough progress. The core issue is not AI maturity or adoption—it is the absence of a system designed to make, optimize, and measure decisions across AI in service of better outcomes.

In the next year, most global contact centers will not only be constrained by past AI decisions—they'll be actively searching for ways to course-correct, recover value, and catch up to peers who got AI right. Rather than doubling down and trying to resolve these new problems with new AI tools, contact centers leaders are feeling the pressure to look more holistically at what AI has delivered and where it has missed the mark thus far. "In a crowded contact center technology market, leaders are no longer differentiating vendors based on feature depth alone. The technologies that win are those where innovation clearly drives results—platforms that integrate into the existing ecosystem and enable outcomes to improve continuously over time," says Chris Karp, Chief Growth Officer at Afiniti. This represents an important development in how technologies are assessed; finally, the practical application of them holds significant weight in discussions of ROI.

What is becoming clear is that the problem is not a lack of innovation—it is a lack of orchestration. Most AI is applied locally, optimizing individual tools or workflows, while few organizations can optimize decisions globally across the entire contact center ecosystem. Without a centralized way to connect data, decisions, and outcomes, improvements in one system often create unintended trade-offs elsewhere, preventing meaningful progress at scale.

“In the rush to adopt AI, many organizations add new point solutions to legacy environments—upgrading tools without upgrading how decisions are made. The result is a more advanced stack that still underperforms, leaving an optimization gap at the center of the customer engagement strategy.”

WHY MANY AI STRATEGIES ARE STALLING

Now that contact center AI has reached a level of maturity, leaders must evaluate technology decisions differently than they did over the past several years. Features and capabilities are no longer sufficient indicators of value. Instead, the defining question has become whether AI measurably improves outcomes that matter to the business. As organizations look ahead to 2026, three systemic failure modes will determine whether AI investments compound value—or continue to stall.

LOCAL OPTIMIZATION IS COMPROMISING GLOBAL OUTCOMES

Finding technology solutions with promise is just the tip of the iceberg. Only 22% of contact center leaders believe their AI environment is fully integrated within an end-to-end strategy; with the majority admitting that their AI vision is not completely cohesive. This gap created by the urgency to leverage the powerful capabilities of AI enabled many unforeseen consequences—such as faster handle times that reduce resolution quality or increased automation that drives downstream escalations. Over time, these trade-offs compound, introducing hidden risk to revenue, customer trust, and the organization’s ability to scale AI effectively. Now that the consequences have begun to manifest, the imperative is to deliver measurable value and transformation with global outcomes in mind.

“AI is being applied locally but few organizations can optimize decisions globally. Improvements in one system often create trade-offs in another, preventing alignment across customer experience, operations, and business outcomes.”

AN OVER-ROTATION TOWARD COST CUTTING IS CAPPING GROWTH AND LONG-TERM VALUE

The wave of transformation that brought AI and automation into the contact center over the past three years has been heavily focused on cost savings. 86% of contact center leaders cite budget management as an influence for implementing more customer-facing technology. However, a singular focus on cost fails to account for differences in customer intent, context, and expectations. Instead of optimizing for when automation enhances value versus when human engagement is critical, many organizations apply AI uniformly, limiting their ability to deliver a truly differentiated customer experience.

This narrow focus also fails to generate sustainable ROI on its own. While cost pressure has driven adoption, efficiency gains alone do not translate into long-term impact. The consequences are evident in project outcomes: 15% of contact center leaders report abandoning a significant portion of technology initiatives—at least 1 in 4—due to an inability to prove value. Together, these results highlight a structural issue: optimizing for efficiency alone places a ceiling on AI’s impact, constraining growth even as technology investment increases.

“Many contact centers are still structured primarily as cost centers, even as AI expands their potential to drive revenue, retention, and growth. Without intelligence designed to optimize the long-term value of each interaction, efficiency gains plateau and upside remains unrealized.”

INSIGHT WITHOUT EXECUTION IS ERODING ROI

Contact centers are collecting more data than ever before, yet many struggle to translate insight into action quickly enough to matter. Data remains fragmented across systems, governed inconsistently, and updated at different cadences—making it difficult to join operational signals with business outcomes in real time. Only 51% of contact center leaders believe all of their technology is living up to expectations, despite significant investment in analytics and AI.

The core issue is not a lack of insight, but a lack of decision readiness. When data is not consistently identified, prioritized, cleaned, and governed across systems, AI tools are unable to reliably inform real-time decisions. Opportunities to improve experience, protect revenue, or intervene with high-value customers often pass at the exact moment value is created or destroyed—because insight is not connected to real-time decisioning.

Without a unified approach that connects data directly to decisioning and execution, organizations risk continuing to invest in intelligence that looks sophisticated on paper but fails to deliver meaningful business impact in practice.

WHAT HIGH-PERFORMING CONTACT CENTERS ARE DOING DIFFERENTLY

High-performing contact centers are moving beyond point optimization to a model known as **Outcome Orchestration**—where data, decisions, and actions are continuously aligned across the entire contact center to drive measurable business impact. By introducing platform-agnostic intelligence that sits above existing infrastructure, they unlock more value from what they already have and ensure decisions are aligned to measurable business impact. Taking a more comprehensive and holistic perspective on how AI adds value to an organization will allow leaders to achieve the dual goals of cost savings and improved customer experiences. This approach can be realized through the following two initiatives:

HOW LEADERS SHOULD EVALUATE AI GOING FORWARD

Technology is now expected to orchestrate outcomes—connecting data, decisions, and actions across the contact center. Afiniti applies a practical decision framework to help leaders identify where AI can deliver durable value—before investing in new tools or use cases.

First, ask whether automation is warranted:

- **Volume:** Does this activity occur frequently enough to matter?
- **Value:** Is there a meaningful business outcome tied to doing it better?
- **Pain:** Is it difficult or costly to manage with manual rules or human intervention?

Then, ask whether AI is the right approach:

- Is the problem **pattern-based and data-driven**?
- Is it **time-sensitive**, where delays degrade outcomes?
- Does it require evaluating **many variables or trade-offs simultaneously**?

These questions should offer guidance on making the big-picture idea of AI application more quantifiable. When asked about what influences contribute to authorization technology decisions, leaders from the C-suite, IT, and the contact center, as well as customers and frontline agents, are all taken into consideration. And because these roles all bring a different perspective to the assessment, an analytical approach is essential.

INVEST IN SOLUTIONS THAT CLEARLY FIT INTO THIS MATRIX

AI delivers its greatest value when it is used not as a point solution, but as a decisioning layer that orchestrates outcomes across all three levels—ensuring improvements translate into measurable business impact, not just local efficiency gains. 91% of contact center leaders expect to see results from a technology investment within one year, with 13% expecting results in under 90 days. Recognizing that hype around AI's potential has created an exaggerated sense of urgency, there is still truth to the idea that heightened customer expectations will eventually lead organizations across all industries to compete on the user experience.

Roughly 80% say their existing tech stack is now a barrier to scaling AI, rather than a foundation for it. Intelligence exists across the stack, but it is fragmented—and outcomes remain stubbornly static. For the 60% of leaders whose top focus in 2026 is data and intelligence investment, it is imperative that the new initiative both adds value and extracts value from the current data environment.

A centralized intelligence platform, like Afiniti Outcome Orchestration, is the most seamless way to catalyze the power of the existing tech without risking another suboptimal integration. By continuously learning from interaction data, Outcome Orchestration optimizes decisions across the entire contact center. This is how to unlock the greatest value of the entire technology ecosystem, with intelligent oversight that breaks down data silos. This centralized intelligence layer is indispensable— as enterprises move beyond the AI hype, solutions that can drive measurable ROI are paramount.

A heightened standard for organization-wide intelligence is transforming how experiences are designed, executed, and measured. Technology solutions that can operationalize this intelligence across systems—not just surface insight—will be the true differentiators behind the scenes. Afiniti's portfolio is built for this shift, anchored by Afiniti Intelligence as the core decisioning platform that continuously learns from interaction data and powers a unified suite of solutions. That intelligence is expressed through Afiniti Orchestrator, which optimizes decisioning across routing and business rules; Afiniti Pairing, which matches customers with the agents best suited to serve them in real time; and Afiniti Agents, which provides outcome-optimized virtual agents. Together, the suite ensures every interaction is guided by shared intelligence and optimized toward measurable outcomes.

Success stories follow

AT&T + AFINITI – LEVERAGING AFINITI PAIRING

Why Afiniti?

AT&T wanted to improve customer experience and drive revenue by optimizing call center interactions. With millions of customer conversations each year, they needed a solution that could intelligently route calls to maximize efficiency and conversions.

What we did?

Afiniti partners with AT&T to apply AI-powered call routing that drives customer retention and incentivizes sales. By intelligently matching customers and agents, Afiniti helps AT&T reduce churn, improve save rates, and boost broadband and phone sales

How we delivered value?

By leveraging Afiniti’s AI-driven call routing, AT&T significantly improved operational performance and customer experience, while delivering measurable revenue growth across service and sales interactions.

“When we can go in and handle 80% of our calls with Afiniti ON and 20% OFF, we have a big impact on the customer experience and the ability to generate revenue.” — **Jenifer Robertson, EVP & General Manager**

Real Results

- **7-year** Partnership
- **750k+** Incremental units delivered to date
- **\$1b+** Lifetime value delivered to date
- **Seamless** Integration

CAESARS + AFINITI – LEVERAGING AFINITI PAIRING

Why Afiniti?

Caesars Entertainment sought to enhance customer experience and drive revenue growth through improved call center performance. They needed a solution that could intelligently route calls to maximize conversions

What we did?

Afiniti’s AI routing technology was implemented across Caesars’ internal centers and two BPO partners to optimize room reservations and teleservices operations

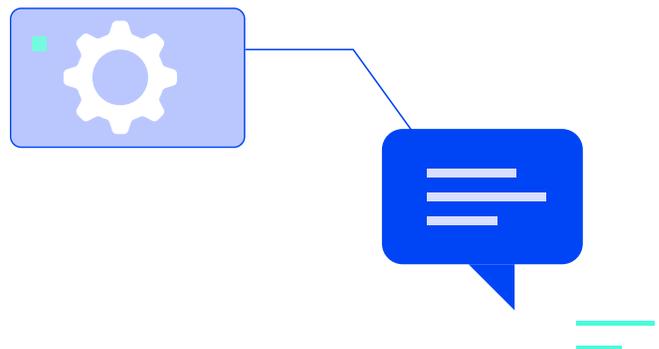
How we delivered value?

By leveraging Afiniti’s AI-driven call routing, Caesars improved conversion rates and operational efficiency

“When we are having Afiniti use their AI routing to route the call, we are seeing an uplift in our conversions and an uplift in conversions is an increase of revenue.” — **Jonathan Arnold, VP of Teleservices Support Operations**

Real Results

- **15-year** Partnership
- **200k+** Incremental units delivered to date
- **40m+** Lifetime value delivered to date
- **Seamless** Integration



Appendix

afiniti

-  Afiniti
-  Afiniti Pairing

ASAPP

-  The Generative AI Agent 100: 100 use cases for contact centers by industry
-  A CX leader's guide to getting value from AI agents

iQOR
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-  Insights iQ | iQor CXBPO
-  Transform Customer Retention With AI-Powered Predictive Insights

krisp

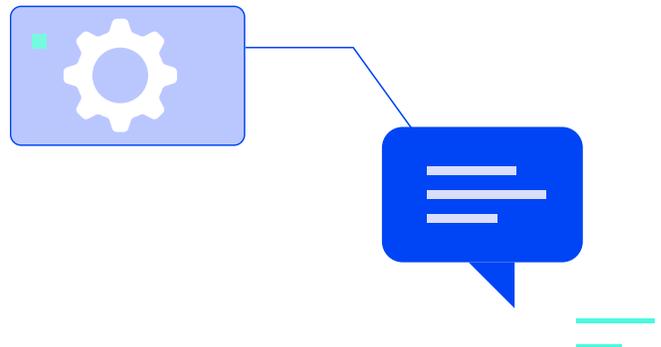
-  Krisp
-  How TTEC reached 85+ NPS with Krisp Accent Conversion

Maven AGI

-  Mastermind Case Study
-  Clickup Case Study

DATAMARK
America's Premier *Outsourcing* Partner

-  BPO Buyer's Guide
-  Reframing the Frontline Complexity Capability and the Rise of the Cognitive Contact Center Agent



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JANUARY

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AUGUST

Modernizing Service Experiences With AI & Digital

NOVEMBER

Redefining Customer Contact: Trends, Challenges, Opportunities

Vertical Market Studies:

MARCH

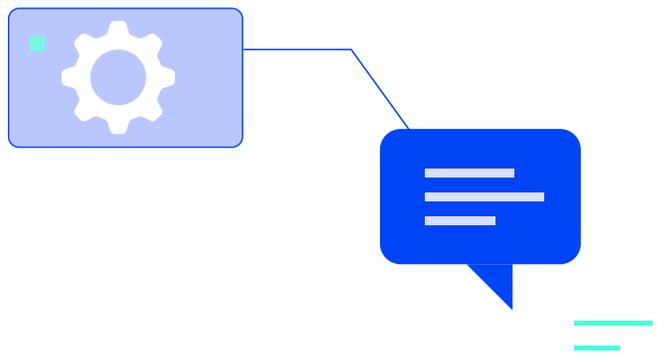
Rethinking Banking, Finance, & Insurance in the Age of AI

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