



Customer Communications Global Trend Report 2022



Introduction

In this report, we'll deep-dive into the state of global business communication trends from customers' perspectives, and the important lessons for customer-centric businesses committed to improving service.

Amid ongoing technological change and the global upheaval brought about by Covid, one tool has proven itself to be a stalwart in the world of communications – the phone.

According to our latest research, when it comes to consumers contacting businesses, the phone remains king – with 35% of people naming it as their preferred method of communication.

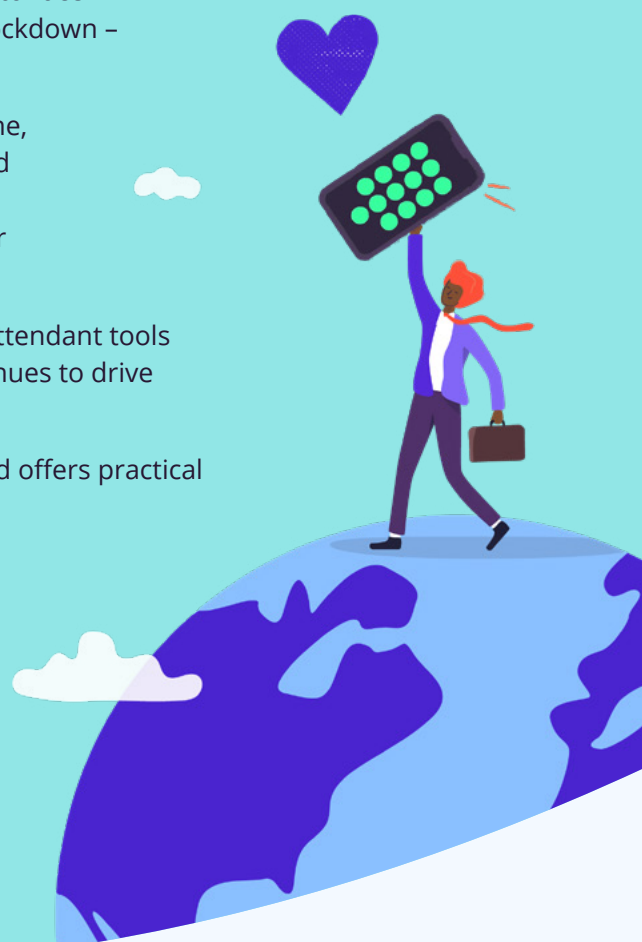
We want real conversations with real people and aside from face-to-face meetings or video calls – which people are quickly tiring of post-lockdown – only the phone will do.

What's more, when people do make the effort to pick up the phone, they expect 5* service – it's an opportunity for businesses to stand out and prove they care. In fact, more than three quarters of consumers say that a great call experience is a powerful customer service differentiator.

Despite this, calls still ring out, messages aren't passed on, auto attendant tools divert callers to the wrong people and annoying hold music continues to drive consumers round the bend.

This report explores the motivation behind calls to businesses and offers practical advice to those looking to transform their customer experience.

For consumers, the number of communication methods available to contact businesses has grown rapidly over the years. We all have our preferred methods - different situations call for different approaches but still, regardless of the global growing reliance on digital, the phone remains king.



The data

Moneypenny commissioned a report conducted by insight-driven research specialists, Censuswide, who surveyed 2,000 UK and US consumers between 27th May and 1st June 2022.

Respondents included an even split between Gen Z (16-24), Millennials (25-40), Gen X (41-56), Baby Boomers 1 (Aged 57-66) and Baby Boomers 2/Traditionalist/Silent Generation (67+). Unless otherwise stated all graphs are sourced from the Moneypenny Censuswide Customer Communications Global Trend Report 2022.

Our channel preferences

35% of people prefer to call when contacting a business, with email the second most popular method at 25%.

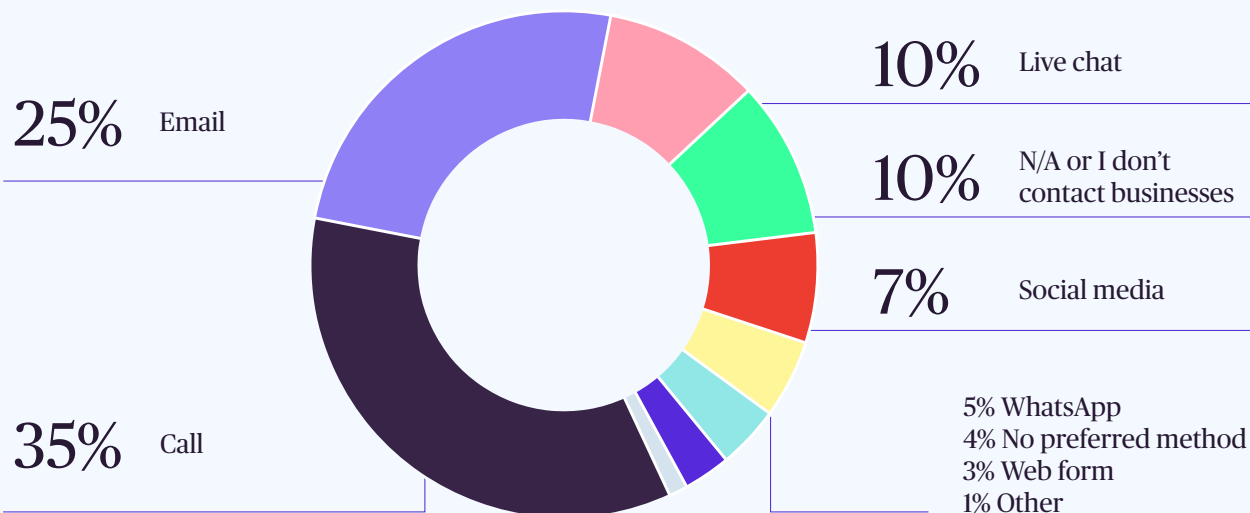
Despite the popularity for phone calls, there's a lack of understanding around the motivation behind customer calls that is plaguing all sectors – a widespread ignorance that's fraying tempers and testing patience.

The businesses that succeed in supporting customers and solving problems over the phone will reap the commercial and reputational rewards.



We asked:

When contacting a business, what, if anything, is your preferred method of communication?



The phone is the most popular method of communication for all age groups, aside from Gen Z who prefer email.



Web form is the least popular option in both the UK and US.

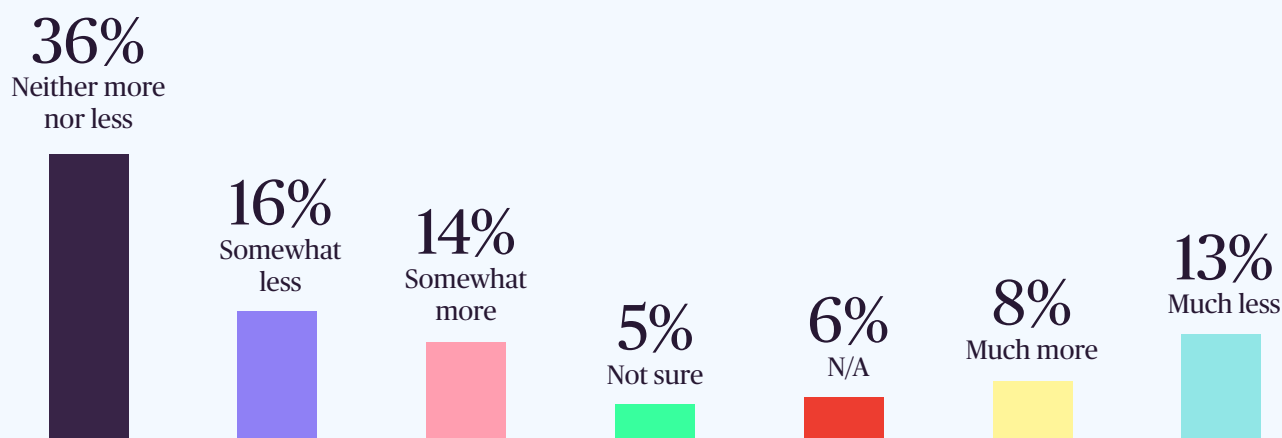
Why bother to call?

Despite preferring the phone, we are all making fewer calls, with almost 30% stating they phone businesses less now than they did three years ago and a further 36% saying their behaviour remains unchanged. So, call volumes aren't increasing, but their value is.

30%
of people make fewer calls to businesses than they did three years ago

We asked:

How much more or less calls to businesses do you make in comparison to three years ago?



Baby Boomers make half as many calls to businesses than three years ago, however for Gen X, there has been no change.

Why have call volumes dropped?



The **rise in the availability of digital channels** over recent years has created a greater willingness to 'self-serve'. As a global population of smartphone users, we're comfortable with finding answers online or via tools such as live chat, before we pick up the phone.



Contact numbers are increasingly elusive as businesses force consumers to use digital methods instead.



We're **time-poor** and **no longer constrained to the traditional 9-5**. People have less time in the day to make calls and seek instantaneous information and quick responses via their smartphones and computers, at all times of day and night.



The switch to remote working has left some **people unsure** about where professionals are based and whether they're available via phone. If the enquiry isn't urgent, they're likely to email first to arrange a call or meeting.



For many, **call experiences have been so poor** that consumers have been conditioned not to call.

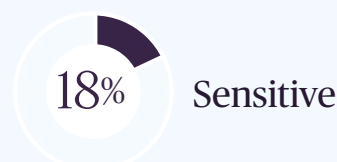
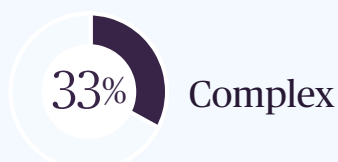
We call when it really matters

Why does the phone remain the favourite method of communication when we have so much choice at our disposal?

There's a strong emotional rationale behind how an individual chooses to get in touch. And with the phone, it's increasingly because they have complex needs that require a blend of expertise, empathy and discussion that simply can't be met any other way. Digital channels such as FAQs, social media and live chat are invaluable but when the reason for calling doesn't fit a chatbot script, or isn't answered perfectly by an FAQ, we pick up the phone.

We asked what, if anything, would make people choose to call a business rather than using other methods. The top reasons were because their query was:

45%
of people spend
longer on the phone to
businesses than they
did three years ago



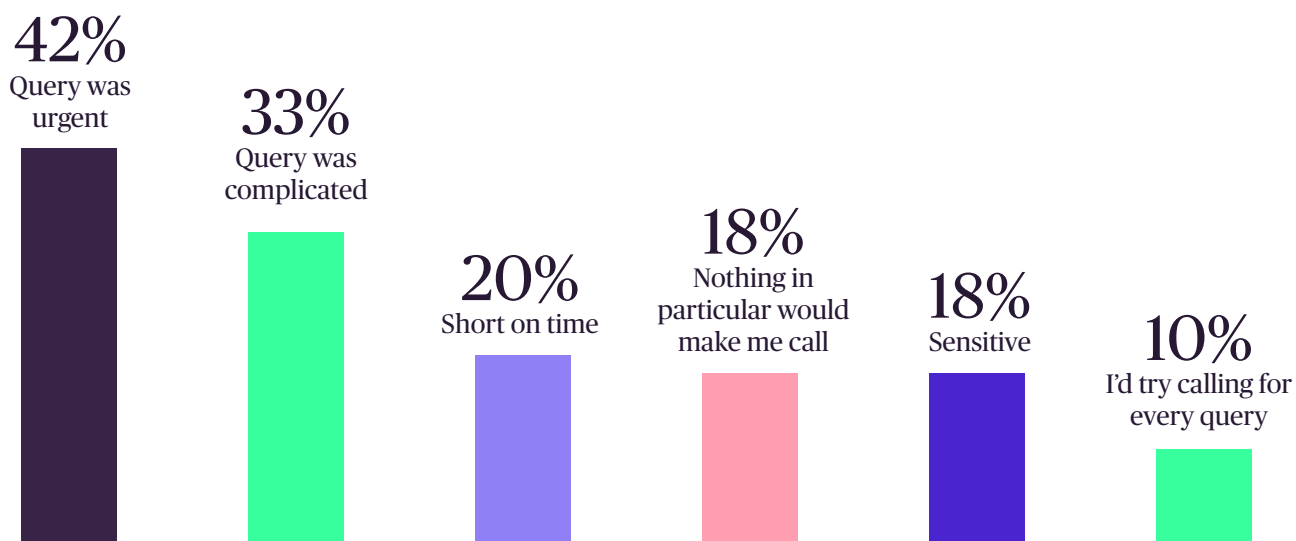
**As a result, the calls we do make are getting longer.
These are the calls that businesses really can't afford to miss.**

This is a crucial point that businesses must understand. The trend is consistent across all generations, with at least 40% of Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X and Baby Boomers each reporting an increase in the amount of time they spend on the phone to organisations. The behaviour is mirrored between the UK and US, and genders too.

The businesses that appreciate the fact that inbound calls are driven by a specific need and give callers the time they need to find a solution, are the ones who will have happier, more fulfilled customers as a result.

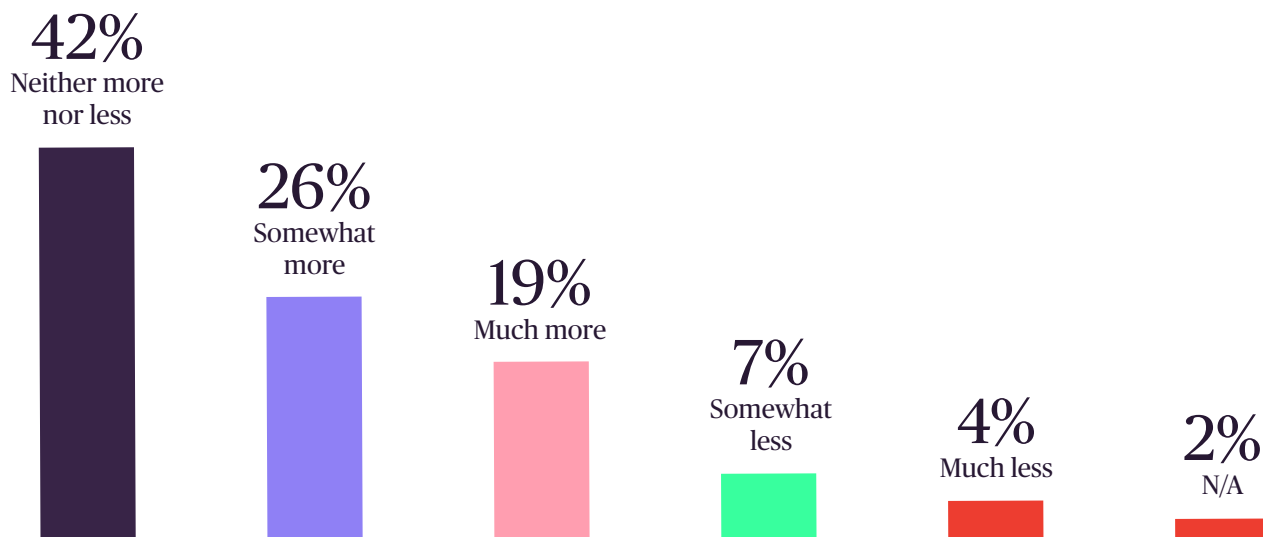
We asked:

What, if anything, would make you pick up a phone to call a business?



We asked:

When you make a call to a business, how much more/less time are you on the call than prior to the pandemic?



We may be making fewer calls, but the ones we do make demand more care and attention than ever before.

Businesses - take note.



Businesses need to give customers what they want



Ensure your availability

Urgent calls require rapid response, so availability is key. Call handlers must be trained to act with efficiency and competence to ensure callers are instantly assured their enquiry is being treated as a priority.

If the resource isn't available in-house to 'act fast', then outsourced telephone answering support can ensure urgent callers aren't left wanting.



Listen carefully

Dealing with **complicated** queries successfully requires a combination of thorough preparation and a focus on listening skills. Call handlers should understand your product, services and processes in detail so that they are equipped to handle complex enquiries. They should also be trained in active listening so that customers feel heard and understood. Responding empathetically, pragmatically and offering a step-by-step solution, gives customers clarity and can ease stress.



Be efficient

If a customer is **time-poor**, they need to log their enquiry and feel confident that it's being dealt with. Providing an instant solution isn't always necessary, but efficient sign-posting to the right information is. This will assure customers that their issue is being handled and they'll be contacted once it's resolved. Seamless follow-up is vital.



Handle with care

Callers are often nervous when contacting a business about a **sensitive** issue, so respect and professionalism must shine through. Handling sensitive situations is about focusing on the customer's needs – empathy and active listening will pave the way for a productive, meaningful conversation.

The impact of a bad call

So we're picking up the phone less, but when we do it's because our issue is urgent, sensitive or complicated.

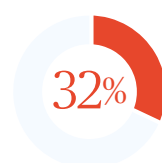
It's perhaps not surprising then that when a caller has a negative experience, the impact is now far greater than it would have been three or four years ago. We asked what actions people take, if any, following a bad call experience:



Take your business elsewhere



Complain to business



Call back and speak to someone else



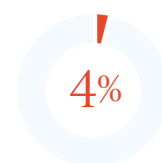
Tell friends and family



Write a negative review



None of these options



Do nothing

A poor call experience can trigger a number of different reactions – all of which are detrimental to a company's bottom line and reputation. First impressions count and bad ones can be difficult – impossible even – to recover from.

What does this mean for business phone calls and those on the front line of customer care?

It's crucial to ensure that the employees responsible for handling calls have the resource and experience to not only answer professionally, but also tune into the emotion of the caller.

Their perception of a caller's spoken, or unspoken, emotions can help to shape their response and could determine whether somebody converts from a prospect to customer or stays a customer.



Baby Boomers are the least tolerant of poor caller experience with half saying they would take their business elsewhere, compared to just 26% of Gen Z.



Baby Boomers make half as many calls to businesses than three years ago, however for Gen X, there has been no change.



US consumers are most likely to call a business back and ask to speak to someone else if they had a bad customer care experience, whilst those in the UK are most likely to take their business elsewhere.



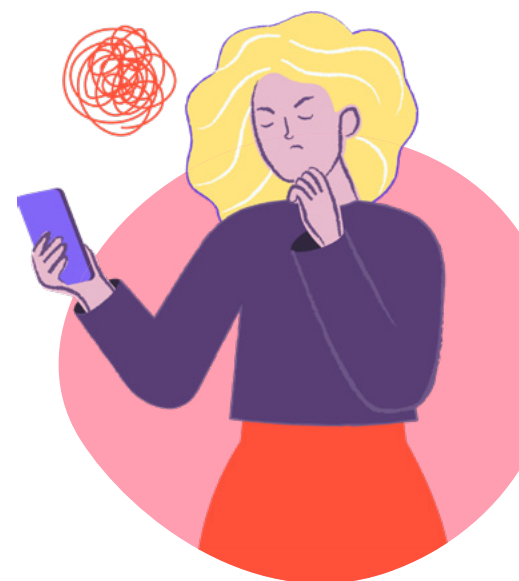
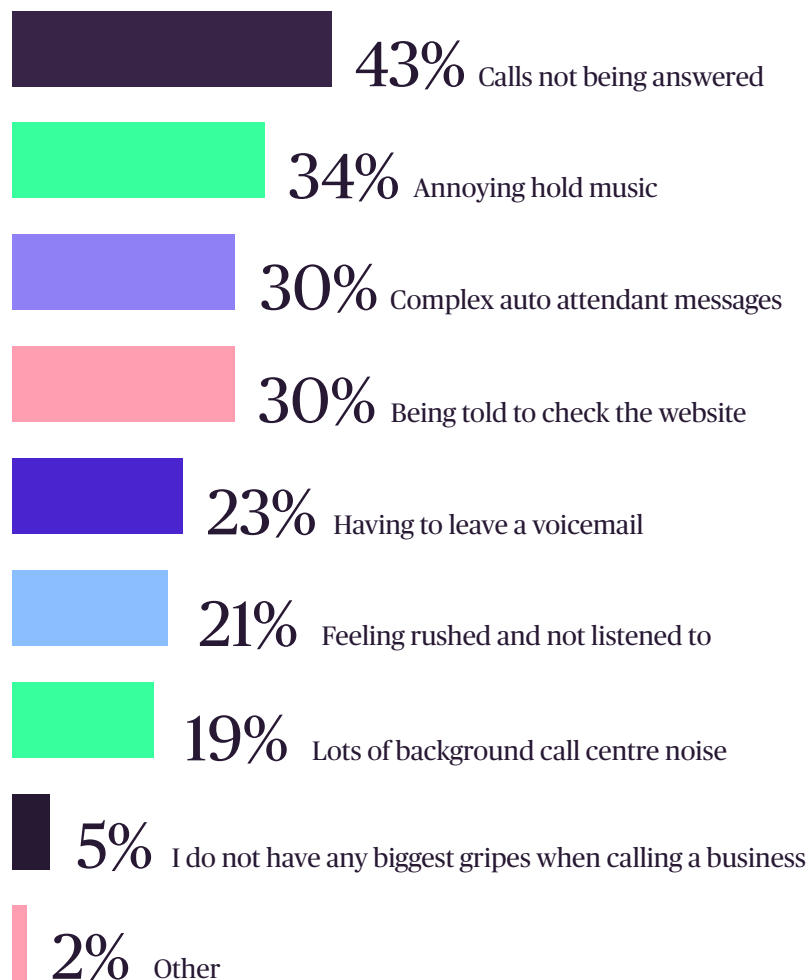
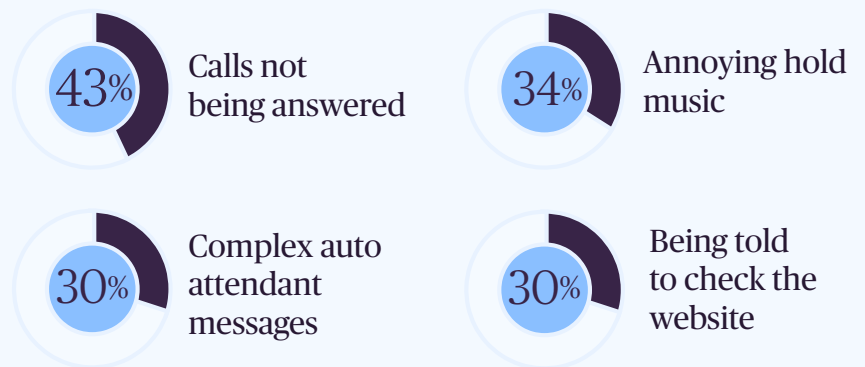
Millennials are the most likely to leave a bad review following a poor caller experience, whereas Baby Boomers are more likely to complain directly.

What makes a bad call?

The telephone has long been a business owner's best friend – the tool that connects them to customers and prospects and one that no workplace can do without.

However, with the rise of digital communication, widespread issues with resource and a new generation of workers that are more au fait with instant messaging and email, are companies slipping into bad habits and unnecessarily frustrating consumers?

We asked people what frustrates them most when they call a business. The top communication gripes were:



Things customers hate

✗ Don't bury your number on your website

90% of people find it frustrating when a business doesn't provide a phone number on their website or makes it difficult to find

Too often, businesses attempt to discourage people from calling by purposefully omitting a phone number on their website. For others, poor website design makes it hard to find.

Either way, it tells customers that accessibility is limited. This is a huge source of frustration to consumers and should be actively avoided. Being accessible, approachable and personable is the first step to delivering quality customer service via the phone.

✗ Use auto attendant messages selectively

Over half dislike auto attendant systems

"Press 1 for sales. Press 2 for accounts" – auto attendant systems are extremely common but that doesn't mean they're best for business. We all know how frustrating it is to get stuck in a loop of selecting different options when trying to speak to somebody – a situation that most commonly sees calls abandoned.

People want to interact with people. Ditch auto attendant systems and offer the human touch or explore more intelligent technologies, such as AI voice recognition.

✗ Answer calls

43% say calls not being answered is their biggest gripe when calling a business

Failing to answer a call is akin to throwing money down the drain. And there's no use relying on voicemail as many people will choose hanging up over leaving a message. Of those that do leave a message, a quarter of them feel frustrated by having to do so.

Ensure you have enough resource – in-house or outsourced – to answer each and every call. Don't let business slip through the net.

✗ Take your time

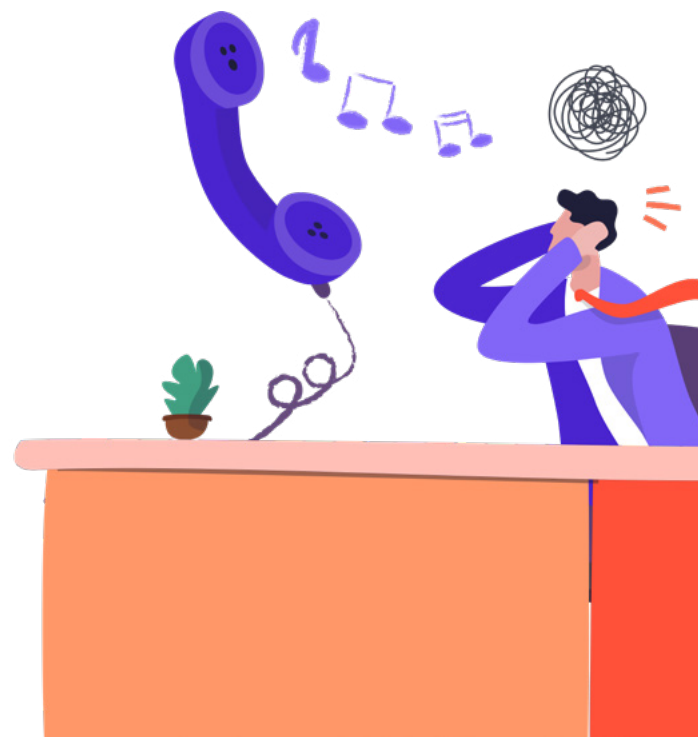
30% hate being told to check a website for information and 21% say they hate feeling rushed and not listened to

This goes back to the importance of being intuitive and displaying empathy. If someone's taken the time to call, respect that by providing them with the information or support they require and listening to what they have to say. Recognise they want to speak to a person and that they've probably already tried to 'self-soothe' via digital channels. Fobbing a caller off or rushing to get them off the phone will leave a sour taste.

✗ Choose hold music wisely

34% hate annoying hold music

The data tells us that people are already in a heightened state of emotion when they call a business – don't intensify the situation by forcing them to listen to annoying music as they wait, or making it hard to hear call handlers over background noise once they get through.



Businesses - mishandle calls at your peril.

It's time to **think differently**.

“

This report perceptively highlights the different generational expectations when it comes to calls – with Millennials embracing live chat for example, and Baby Boomers being the least tolerant of poor caller experience. It also points to how these expectations are evolving within each generation. It is fascinating to see Baby Boomers making half as many calls as they did three years ago, suggesting they're getting general knowledge elsewhere (probably through websites, reflecting their increasing digital engagement and skills) and are therefore only calling with more specific enquiries. This means the call experience itself takes on even greater importance and has to be right and satisfying for the Baby Boomer customer, or else! After all, they are the generation who are most likely to complain.

The telephone as a form of customer experience is not going away. Expectations around call experience are increasing - what is in decline is tolerance for a bad experience.”



Dr Eliza Filby,
Generations Expert and Historian
of Contemporary Values

The power of a positive call

Consumers' love of the phone presents an opportunity – a chance to stand out by delivering positive experiences with every call.

By mastering the art of call handling, businesses can make their phones ring and boost the bottom line in the process. With the right knowledge, telephone communication can be transformed into a vital tool to improve the customer experience, drive revenue and get ahead of the competition.

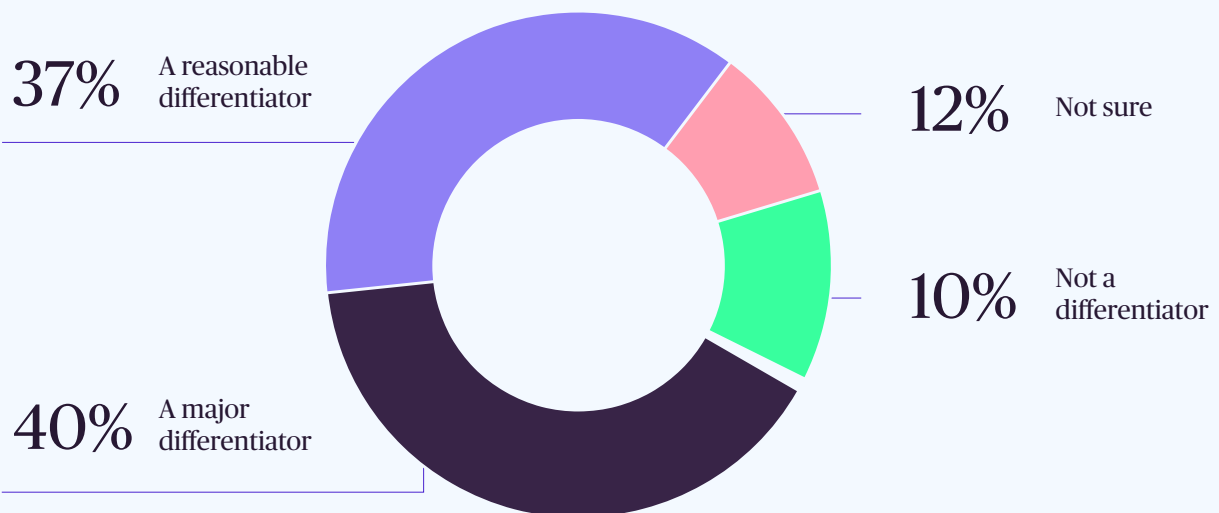
As well as finding out what people dislike, we asked the opposite: how do you feel after a great call, and how much of a differentiator is it?

77%

of people say a great call experience is a powerful customer service differentiator

We asked:

How much of a differentiator is it when the company delivers a great call experience?



Ensuring great caller experiences



Quality customer service inspires trust and builds loyalty, so take the opportunity to have meaningful conversations with your customers and solidify your reputation as a company that cares. Here, Global CEO, Joanna Swash from Moneypenny shares her four tips for success.

1 **Know who you're speaking to**

A genuine understanding of your audience is the first step to delivering great customer experiences. Gather data about who your customers and prospects are, how they contact you and when.

2 **Be available**

We know that people hate their calls going unanswered or having to leave voicemails - substandard telephone service is such a huge source of frustration among consumers, yet it's rife.

Aim to answer swiftly and don't leave callers waiting on hold or stuck in a loop system. If for any reason they're not able to speak to who they need to, leave them feeling confident that their enquiry is valued by taking a friendly and detailed message and be sure to follow up in good time.

3 **Personalise your tone**

You only get one chance to make a first impression so the tone and manner used to speak to customers is key – and different generations will have different expectations. Simple things like smiling when picking up the phone, making pleasant conversation with callers and referring to someone's first name can make a huge difference. As they say, 'people buy from people' and being personable will put clients and prospects at ease quickly.

4 **Be consistent**

Consistency is crucial. Quality of service should never depend on the employee that answers, time of day or situation. Businesses must set a standard and stick to it – always striving to exceed expectations where possible.

As well as providing regular training, design and instigate a company-wide policy that employees can refer back to when required. Include rules around how long it should take to answer the phone, how long callers can be left on hold, desired telephone manner and details that should be taken for follow-ups. If company standards are agreed, there can be no confusion around what's expected.

The digital crossover

Not every query is urgent, complex or sensitive, and in those cases, using digital tools to communicate, such as live chat, chatbots, FAQs and email, provide quick and convenient ways to contact a business.

We know that different people prefer different channels depending on the time and situation. Excelling in one area and lacking in another is counterproductive and a sure-fire way to intensify any existing stress or concern.

To succeed in delivering a great customer experience, businesses must deliver a consistent level of service across every single touch point – on the phone, online and in person.

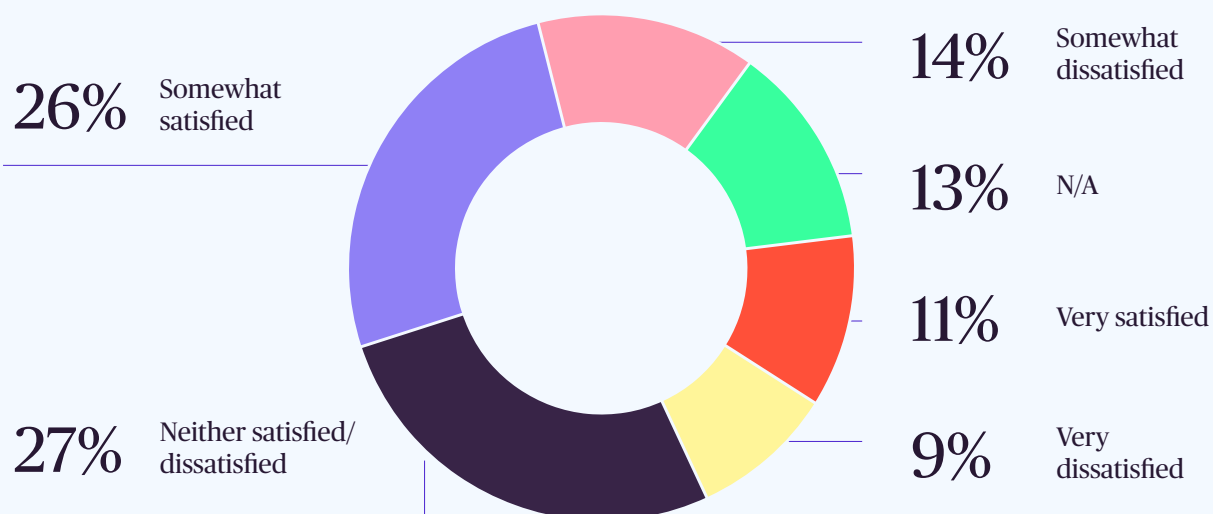
Traditional calls and digital channels must work together – not replace each other.

37%

of people are satisfied with their experiences of solving a query via digital channels

We asked:

Generally, how satisfied/dissatisfied are you with your experience solving an issue via digital channels?



The best digital customer service solutions

More and more businesses are offering digital customer service tools to encourage consumers to interact with their brand regularly, in a range of different ways.

Choice empowers people. It allows customers to choose when, where and how they source support and connect with customer service staff and even other customers.

Mobile apps

Apps put your business into the palm of your customers' hands - literally. They can help you reach and engage with customers in real time and provide a quick and simple purchase or issue resolution experience.

Help ticket systems

For businesses with support teams, help desks allow customers to get a quick and accurate answer to their issue, while tracking the progress from beginning to end.

SMS/WhatsApp support

Like apps, SMS or WhatsApp support allows customers to engage with you on the go - without having to make time or find the privacy for a call.

Live chat

Live chat helps turn a website experience into a tailored, more personable user journey for customers. It enables brands to improve acquisition and retention overnight by helping browsers understand what they offer, in real time.

Chatbots

Chatbot technology allows businesses to enhance customer experience and maximise engagement on their website. It can be used to assist and direct visitors, triage incoming leads, capture valuable data, obtain feedback and much more.

Social media

Social media is an essential tool for businesses of any size. By creating a social media presence and using it to engage with customers and respond to their queries or issues on a timely basis, businesses can generate valuable brand loyalty.



One to watch: live chat

After call and email, live chat is the third most popular method of communication for consumers when contacting a business.

It's growing quickly too and businesses of all sizes across a wide range of industries use live chat software for customer engagement.

For businesses keen to improve and protect their customer experience, convert more leads and bring brand values to life, live chat is a customer service solution that cannot be ignored.

The technology works hand in hand with the phone, giving businesses the chance to show themselves as modern, accessible and relatable whilst also providing a useful way for customers to get in touch without having to make a call.

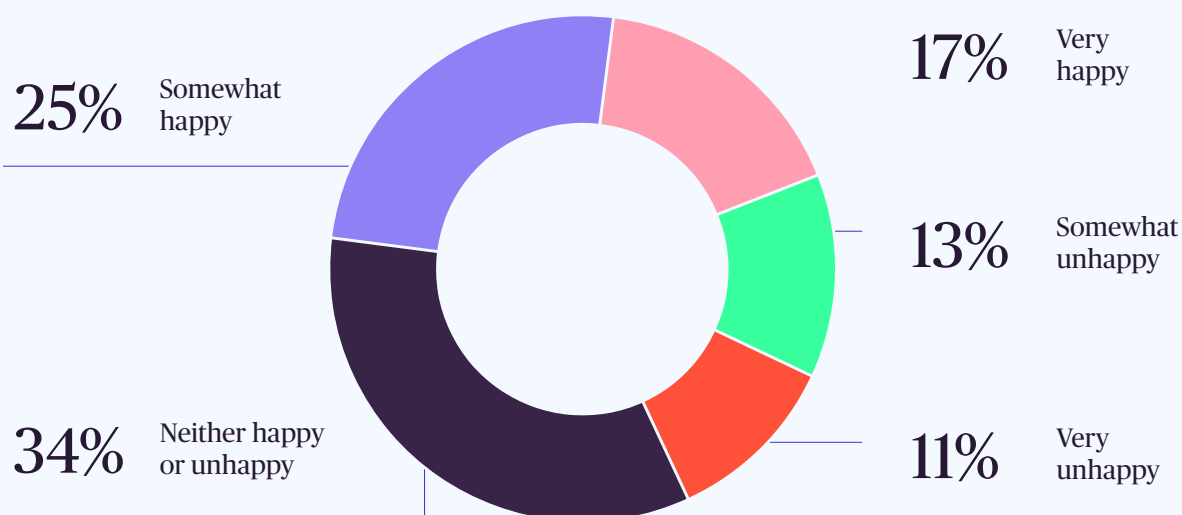
The anonymity factor is perfectly suited to sensitive queries and encourages people to open up more. Live chat also plays into the hands of the impatient or time-poor customer - in the time a business can handle one phone enquiry, it's possible to handle three consecutive live chat interactions.

42%

of people want to use live chat to contact a business or solve a query

We asked:

How do/would you feel about using live chat to contact a business or solve a query?



Live chat is twice as popular among UK consumers than those in the US



Millennials are the most comfortable with using live chat

Delivering a seamless online journey



Moneypenny's Head of Live Chat Strategy, Leanne Teburi-Gibson, shares why live chat is a customer service secret weapon...

1 **24/7 availability**

Live chat is a 24/7, 365 tool, so when a business invests in a live chat solution, they instantly become available around the clock. The ability to capture and handle enquiries outside of office hours and at the weekend can transform a website's ROI. 46% of Moneypenny's chats occur outside the 9-5 – that's a lot of potential business to miss out on.

2 **Streamline customer experience**

Consumers perceive live chat to be efficient and many appreciate the opportunity to ask quick questions, right there and then, whilst browsing online. Live chat triages enquiries by identifying requirements and directing people along the sales funnel to the most appropriate next stage. The solution also securely stores important customer details for employees to refer back to, allowing for a more informed and seamless follow-up.

3 **Boost web conversion**

Research tells us that 57% of customers will abandon a purchase if they can't get their questions answered easily, and live chat can increase conversion by 49%. The technology generates six times more website engagement and encourages consumers who wouldn't otherwise take the time to email or call, to make an enquiry or provide feedback due to its ease of use and speed.

Reporting metrics offer in-depth analysis of performance and integrate with Google Analytics. These can arm businesses with the intel required to deliver the best possible digital experience to prospects.

4 **Offer a human response**

Live chat can encourage a customer to share more detail than they would on a call, particularly on matters of a sensitive nature that require empathy and deeper understanding. Unlike the phone, online messaging gives customers time to consider their responses and pose further questions – whilst still offering the human element they crave.

It's time to give calls the attention they **deserve**

The telephone offers the valuable human connection no other tool can. Short of speaking with someone face-to-face, a phone call is the best way to get a personal response, plus it gives businesses the opportunity to build rapport with prospects and maintain long-standing relationships with customers.

Consumer behaviour is changing and while digital channels are increasing in popularity, inbound calls to businesses are increasing in importance. They come from a place of urgency, complexity and sensitivity and as such, your customers need you more than ever. It really is vital to ensure that all calls are handled with the care and respect they deserve.

The businesses that succeed in delivering positive, tailored caller experiences have the power to capture and hold people's attention, offer support and solutions, stand out from competitors and ultimately, boost their bottom lines.

And, when complementing this level of service with other digital channels, they stand a greater chance of impressing everybody, everywhere, all of the time.

Key takeaways

- ✓ The phone is the most popular method of communication, with 35% of people opting to call when contacting a business.
- ✓ Overall, call volumes are decreasing - only 20% of people make more calls than they did 3 years ago.
- ✓ When people make the effort to call, it's because it matters and their query is usually either urgent, complex or sensitive.
- ✓ The calls we make are longer - 45% of people spend longer on the phone than they did three years ago.
- ✓ To provide well-rounded, slick customer service, great caller experience should be complemented with other digital channels, such as live chat and social media.
- ✓ Excellent call handling is a powerful and valuable business differentiator - more than 75% of consumers say so.
- ✓ Managing calls well is a route to secure business growth, with 36% of people stating they'd take their business elsewhere if they had a bad call experience.



We can *help*

Thousands of businesses rely on Moneypenny to capture every call and live chat, and deliver exceptional customer service on their behalf. If you'd like to know more about the ways we can support you, please get in touch.

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