

CUSTOMER CONTACT INDUSTRY REVIEW

JUNE 2021
MARKET STUDY



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Customer Contact Industry Review
4	Methodology & Demographics
4	About the Author
5	Key Findings
6	Customer Contact Has Never Been More Important
8	What Keeps Customer Contact Leaders Up At Night?
10	Remote vs. On-Site Work: Does It Matter?
12	Who is the Contact Center Agent of the Future?
14	Empowering Agents to Empower Customers
16	What Does A Customer-Centric Experience Entail?
18	Bringing Customer Centricity to Digital Channels
22	The New World of Customer Expectations Demands a New Way of Coaching Agents
25	Appendix
26	2021 Editorial Calendar
27	Meet the Team

CUSTOMER CONTACT INDUSTRY REVIEW

By the summer of 2020, the customer contact community had wholly adapted to a world dictated by the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing. Most employees were working remotely. Many customer interactions were taking place in digital media. Concepts like “business continuity” and “operational agility” were transforming from hollow buzzwords into corporate imperatives.

As the summer of 2021 commences, pandemic-fueled concerns and restrictions are significantly easing. Business leaders are subsequently facing two key questions:

- 1 How did the past year *permanently* change the way contact centers function?
- 2 How will the goals of the contact center evolve moving forward?

As they navigate these questions, customer contact leaders will debate numerous topics. They will redefine standards for effective customer and employee experiences. They will reconsider how they define—and cultivate—essential agent skills in the era of automation and digital engagement. They will assess the long-term viability of at-home and hybrid work models. They will analyze and adapt to permanent changes in customer behavior. They will reorchestrate their journeys to better capitalize on digital platforms.

CCW Digital's Customer Contact Industry Review offers a research-driven look at these deliberations. By exploring topics related to operational strategy, employee empowerment, digital transformation, and customer experience design, it simultaneously offers a window into the current state of the customer contact function and a preview of future transformation.

METHODOLOGY & DEMOGRAPHICS

To acquire data for the Customer Contact Industry Review, CCW Digital conducted a comprehensive survey in May and June 2021. Targeted at leaders responsible for contact center, customer service, customer experience, marketing, operations, and/or information technology, the survey identified the biggest priorities and challenges in the world of customer contact.

Example respondent job titles included associate vice president of client operations, head of customer support, customer care manager, head of customer change, chief operating officer, chief financial officer, chief executive officer, vice president of care, director of customer service, director of contact center, head of global support operations, senior vice president, and IT manager.

Respondent companies spanned numerous industries and all company 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 150,000.

A passionate advocate for customer centricity, Brian regularly speaks on major CX conference agendas. He also advises organizations on customer experience and business development strategies.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1 Companies increasingly recognize the contact center as a “value center.” Nearly 68% of companies view their customer contact team as more valuable now than it was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2 65% of companies believe the customer experience has become more important since COVID-19, and 63% say the same of the employee experience.
- 3 Employee well-being is the #1 focus for today’s contact center leaders, with 70% identifying it as a challenge that “keeps them up at night.”
- 4 Other top leadership priorities include addressing changing customer behaviors and demands, rethinking the work environment, and reducing customer effort.
- 5 22% of companies say remote employees are more productive than on-site agents; 7% say the opposite. Most companies, therefore, do not see a significant productivity difference between the two models.
- 6 As far as today’s companies are concerned, empathy is the most important quality for contact center agents.
- 7 Other essential qualities include friendliness, fluency in all channels, comfort handling different types of interactions, and a flair for dealing with complex products and processes.
- 8 Improving the knowledge base is the most popular strategy for empowering agents.
- 9 Other top agent empowerment focuses include improving training and coaching, harnessing the power of AI, and providing a 360-degree customer view.
- 10 Companies identify accuracy and relevance of information as the #1 sign of a great customer experience.
- 11 Additional priorities include speed, convenience, providing self-service options, and honoring channel preference.
- 12 Key digital experience priorities include training staff for interactions in new channels, optimizing AI and self-service opportunities, and improving integrations between touch points.



CUSTOMER CONTACT HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT

For years, business leaders have been discussing the importance of “competing on the customer experience.” The competition has never been more intense.

A whopping 65% of companies currently place more importance on the customer experience than they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 1% believe the customer experience has become less important.

What caused companies to become more passionate about customer centricity?

First and foremost, they know *customers* are placing a greater emphasis on the experiences they have with brands.

Due to social distancing and product shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers began to interact with new brands — in new ways. They also got to witness how different companies handled pandemic-related support issues, such as high call volume, digital engagement, financial challenges, and service cancellations.

With a front row seat to different experiences, consumers gained a better ability to distinguish those who *serve* from those who merely *sell*. As a result, 60% now say the customer experience impacts their purchasing decisions more than it ever has.

To downplay the customer experience, therefore, would be to squander an opportunity to attract and retain business.

COVID-19, moreover, reminded companies not to take business for granted. Customer bases and revenue streams can decline or even disappear on a moment’s notice. Brands that cultivate organic loyalty through great experiences, however, are at least creating a line of defense against *preventable* customer churn.

As the customer experience becomes a bigger focus, the contact center is unsurprisingly gaining prominence within most organizations. **Nearly 68% of companies view their contact center/customer contact team as more valuable now than they did prior to the COVID-19.**

Emphasis on agent satisfaction is also on the rise. **Almost 63% of companies say they presently value the employee experience more than they did prior to last year.**

The growing focus on employee experience is predictable, given that customer contact leaders have long trumpeted the correlation between agent and customer satisfaction. Improving the agent experience is, essentially, a prerequisite for elevating the customer experience.

The employee experience statistic also speaks to the extent to which work environments transformed amid the COVID-19 pandemic. With social distancing spurring a sweeping, immediate transition to remote work, many companies had to rethink the way they hired, trained, and engaged their employees.

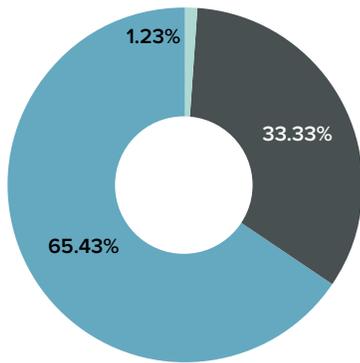
If there is a surprise in the research, therefore, it is the fact that 37% of companies *did not* increase their emphasis on the employee experience. There are, however, two potential explanations for the statistic:

- 1 Because employee engagement was already such a big priority, there was little room for a meaningful “increase” amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2 Companies recognize that they have less control over the *day-to-day experience* facing at-home agents. And so even though these businesses may be spending more time on areas like virtual training and engagement, they do not group these activities under the “employee experience” banner the same way they would office culture or workplace technology.

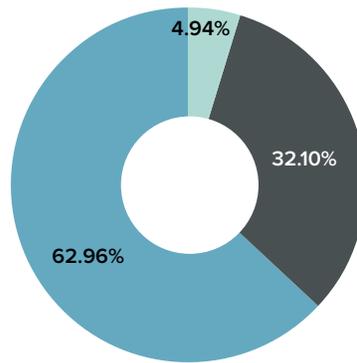
Does your organization value customer and employee experiences more or less than it did prior to this year?

■ Less Important ■ No Change ■ More Important

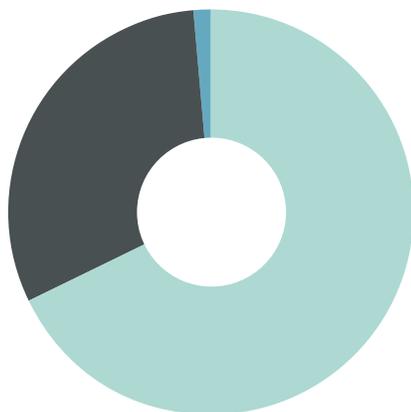
Customer Experience



Employee Experience



How has your organization’s support for the contact center/customer contact function changed over the past year? (Support as defined by budget, decision-making power, resources, etc)



- 67.90% Contact center is seen as more valuable
- 30.86% No change
- 1.23% Contact center is seen as less valuable



WHAT KEEPS CUSTOMER CONTACT LEADERS UP AT NIGHT?

The contact center has never played a more prominent role within businesses, which means the stakes for customer contact leaders have never been higher.

Given these stakes, successful contact center leaders face pressure to expertly prioritize their attention and initiatives. Which strategies are most worth leveraging? Which investments are most worth pursuing? Which solutions are most worth implementing?

As leaders consider their biggest priorities, an overwhelming majority are focusing on employee well-being and engagement.

More than 70% identify employee well-being as a top priority, making it the #1 focus for today's customer contact leaders.

An enduring focus for leaders, employee engagement has become a particular challenge in the era of remote work. With less day-to-day (let alone face-to-face) exposure to their employees, it is harder to identify potential engagement and well-being challenges. Eighteen months of health fears, financial challenges, and social isolation issues increased the likelihood of sentiment issues – and thus exacerbated the situation.

Distancing measures may be easing as of June 2021, but society's "return to normalcy" will only introduce new employee engagement challenges. As the option to return to the contact center emerges, leaders will have to make decisions about the optimal work arrangement moving forward. Their choice will have ramifications for both employee engagement *and* mentality.

Those supporting "hybrid" or employee-choice models, for instance, will have to ensure those still working remotely do not feel disconnected from their teammates. Those asking employees to regularly come into the office, meanwhile, will have to address the potential sentiment impact on those who have grown comfortable working from home and avoiding a daily commute.

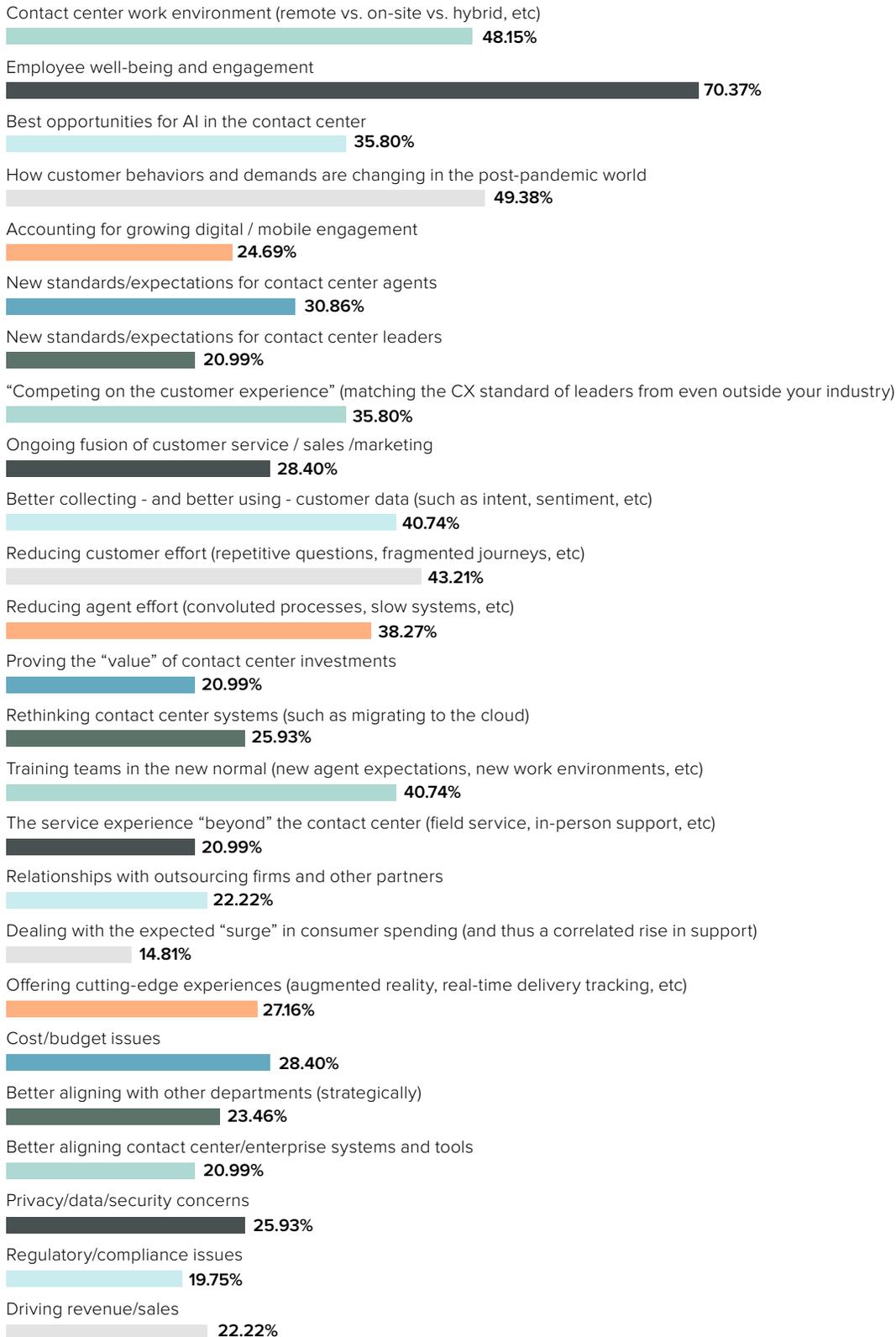
Navigating the new normal and selecting the best possible work environment, in fact, represents a pressing leadership concern in its own right. **Forty-eight percent (48%) of leaders identify the transforming work environment as an issue "keeping them up at night."**

Other top leadership concerns include **addressing changing customer behaviors and demands (49%), reducing customer effort (43%), better collecting and using customer data (41%), and training agents in the new normal (41%).**

Given the surging emphasis on customer experience, it comes as no surprise that leaders are working to understand and adapt to changing customer preferences. A more robust approach to customer data will help leaders navigate these changes; once they figure out what customers really want in today's marketplace, leaders can then focus on delivering those experiences in the most seamless, frictionless manner possible.

Insofar as leaders have long sought improvements to their agent development strategies, training predictably remains top-of-mind in today's customer contact landscape. After all, leaders have to prepare agents – who are working in unprecedented environments – to address new customer needs in new channels.

Keeping You Up At Night: Which of the following issues are top of mind for you and/or your organization?





REMOTE VS. ON-SITE WORK: DOES IT MATTER?

In identifying employee engagement as their #1 priority and the changing contact center environment as their #3 focus, leaders have made one thing abundantly clear. They are carefully assessing the impact of remote work.

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, customer contact leaders grew immensely bullish about the concept. Upon seeing that employees were able to get their work done *and* virtually engage with their peers, they began making bold declarations about the practice's future within their operations. In a Summer 2020 CCW survey, 73% said that they planned to *permanently* allow at least some employees to work from home.

This optimism, however, came with an obvious caveat. It was easy to see the upside to remote work during a global health pandemic, when returning to the office was a literal impossibility. But would the enthusiasm endure once social distancing measures eased?

There are numerous facets to the discussion, as on-site and remote work programs each offer unique advantages and disadvantages. The core of the conversation, however, involves the idea of productivity.

When remote work was the only option, companies potentially had to accept a relaxed standard for employee performance. Now that companies have more freedom to select the optimal working conditions, they no longer need to make any sacrifices or compromises. They have every right to select the plan that will yield the greatest possible productivity.

Admittedly, companies *may* still choose to consider other factors when making their decision. Demanding a full return to the office may alienate some workers who have grown comfortable working from home. Alternatively, limiting access to the office may alienate those who are looking to get back into society and rekindle their social contact.

Productivity will surely be a big part of the equation, however, and its impact will likely grow over time. Indeed, the long-term viability of remote work hinges on a key question: are remote workers as productive as those in the physical contact center?

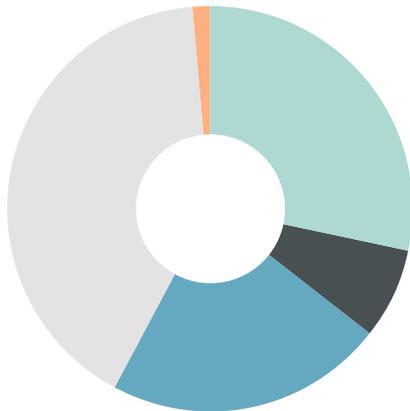
From what the majority of companies have observed, the differences are not significant. **Twenty-eight percent (28%) report no productivity differences whatsoever**, while **41% say at-home agents are less productive for some tasks but more or equally productive for others**.

Of the companies that have seen dramatic differences, the majority are bullish on the value of remote work. **Twenty-two percent (22%) of companies say remote employees are more productive for most or all tasks; only 7% feel their at-home agents are largely less productive**.

When push comes to shove and pandemic concerns completely settle, it is certainly possible that many companies will still mandate a return to the office. It is certainly possible that some of the 73% who said remote work would be a fixture of their contact center operations go back on their word. Tradition, after all, can be a tough thing to break.

Based on observational data, however, there is little reason to believe remote work will wholly vanish from the limelight. Clearly, remote workers are proving capable of meeting serious productivity standards — not just those relaxed for the social distancing era.

Compared to when they're in the office/contact center, how productive are employees when working remotely?



- 28.40% No major difference
- 7.41% Less productive for most/all tasks
- 22.22% More productive for most/all tasks
- 40.74% Less productive for some tasks, more or equally productive for others
- 1.23% N/A - We've never supported at-home work (or, alternatively, we've never had our team in a physical office)



WHO IS THE CONTACT CENTER AGENT OF THE FUTURE?

Regardless of where they work, contact center agents will continue to serve as customer-facing ambassadors for brands. They will continue to help brands walk their customer-centric talk.

Given their vital role, agents will require the ability to *meet the evolving needs of today's customers and thrive in today's evolving customer contact environments.*

There may not be a “superagent” who can expertly help every conceivable company delight every conceivable customer, but there are definitely qualities that signal an agent’s likelihood of success.

As far as today’s companies are concerned, empathy is the most important quality for contact center agents. **Sixty-eight percent (68%) believe empathy, defined as the ability to understand customers’ intentions and sentiments, is an essential quality for agents moving forward.**

Always a coveted quality, empathy became particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dealing with unprecedented circumstances and unconventional support needs, customers required agents who could truly understand – and relate to – their issues on a human level.

Empathy, more broadly, aligns with the notion that “AI will increasingly handle simple tasks, shifting agents to more complex ones.” Insofar as contact center agents will primarily focus on unique customer issues, their ability to see through customers’ eyes and adapt accordingly will be paramount.

Contrary to common misconception, the call for *empathy* is not necessarily a call for agents to consistently engage in lengthy, warm-hearted conversations. Many customers specifically want quick and simple resolutions; in those cases, the empathetic behavior would be to understand their urgency, respect their time, and provide fast support.

Granted, warm conversational ability is still important. **Sixty-three percent (63%) of companies view friendliness as an essential**, making it the second-most coveted agent quality.

Other high-ranking qualities include **comfort communicating in all channels (57%), comfort handling different types of interactions (52%), and comfort with more complex products and processes (52%)**.

Each quality speaks to the customer contact community's belief in a digitally driven, AI-heavy experience landscape.

Whereas digital channels have historically functioned as low-touch options for simple issues, they are increasingly becoming customers' *default preference*. Some customers will expect to handle most or all issues in digital environments, which means agents will have to be capable of engaging in meaningful conversations – and delivering

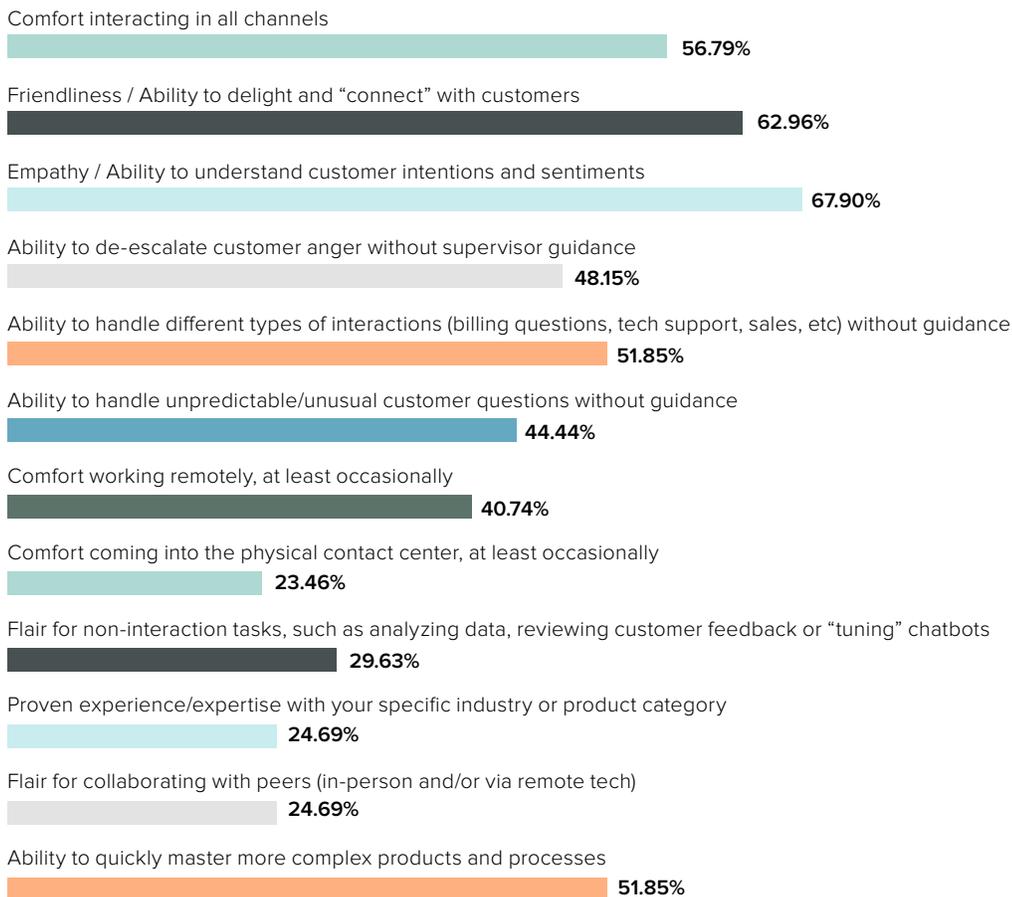
high-value support – in these new media. Those uncomfortable with digital lingo or behavior will struggle in this landscape.

Phone skills will nonetheless remain crucial, as many customers will continue pursuing voice interactions.

Regardless of channel, agents will increasingly focus on complex interactions moving forward. In many cases, they will be supporting customers who *first* attempted to solve their issues in low-touch or self-service environments.

Since customers have already gone through different touch points *and* are expecting higher-caliber agents, hold times and transfers will become particularly unacceptable. The ability to handle a full gamut of complex issues will help agents function as a “one stop shop” resource for customers and eliminate these experiential “pain points.”

Moving forward, which qualities are essential for customer contact employees/agents to possess?





EMPOWERING AGENTS TO EMPOWER CUSTOMERS

Some agents are innately spectacular, but none can operate entirely independently. All require support from the business in order to interpret information, navigate processes, and connect with customers.

Successful companies embrace this responsibility and *empower* their agents to perform.

There are numerous ways to strengthen agent performance, but for today's companies, none is more vital than improving and streamlining the knowledge base. **Fifty-two percent (52%) of companies identify knowledge base optimization as a priority for their empowerment strategies.**

Whether by slowing agents down or arming them with incorrect or outdated information, ineffective knowledge management solutions have always undermined contact center performance. Their impact has become significantly greater, however, as agents shift to more complex work. As they move away from repetitive questions they can answer by heart and into unpredictable ones, they will rely on the knowledge base to provide support. If the knowledge search process is not simple — and, ideally, guided by artificial intelligence — the agent will be destined to provide slower and potentially less accurate support.

Other key agent empowerment focuses include **improving group training (48%), improving one-on-one coaching (40%), using AI for simple issues so that agents can focus on complex work (39%), and providing agents with a 360-degree customer view (37%).**

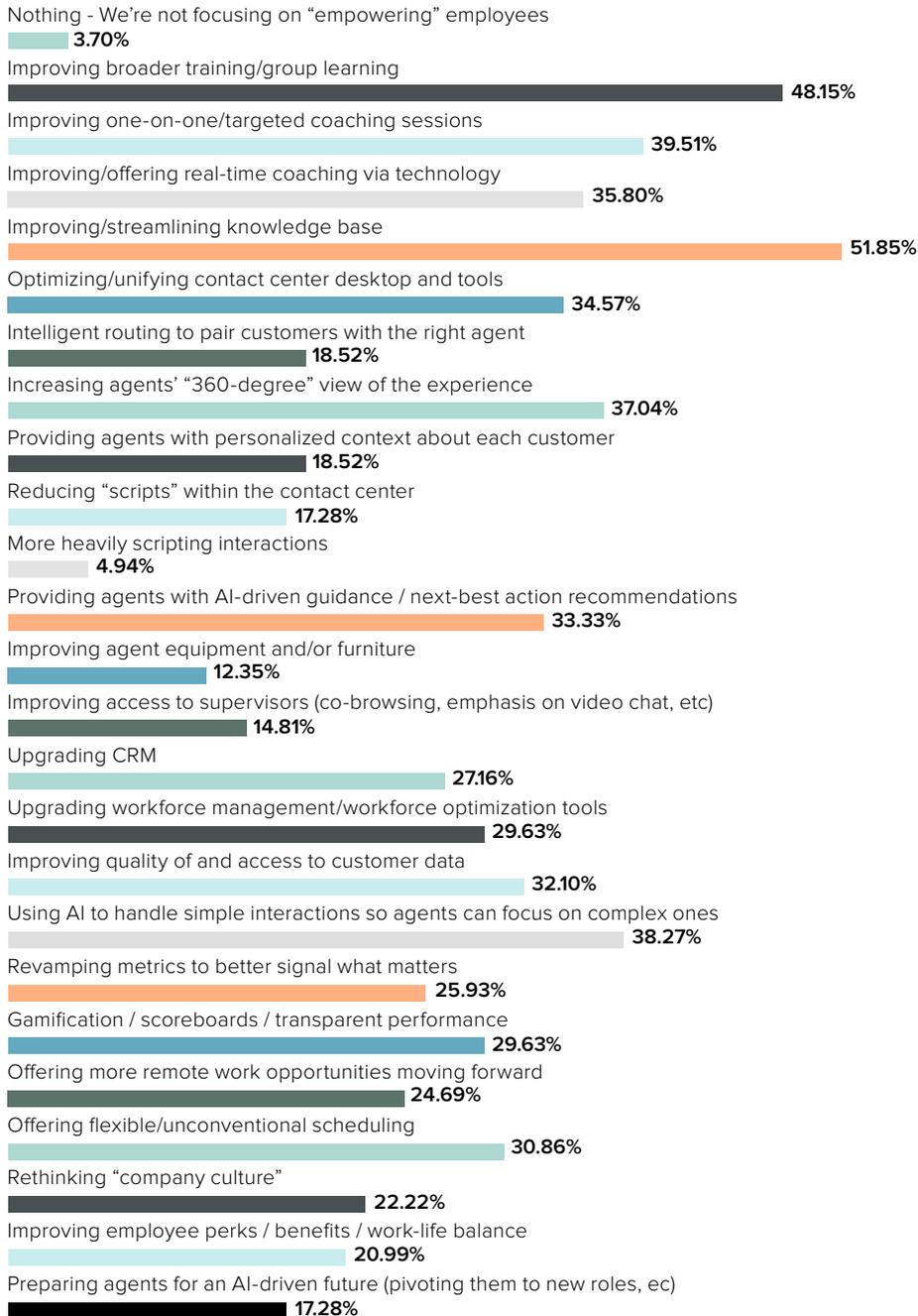
Training and coaching have consistently ranked as top contact center priorities, but few companies had mastered them even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. By adding remote work to the equation, especially at a time when agents will be handling a greater diversity of issues, the pandemic only heightened the urgency of improving agent development.

Agent-centric companies will pursue group training activities that are more robust, more efficient, *and* accommodating of the fact that agents may be in different environments. They will simultaneously look to offer more actionable and personalized coaching even though leaders will have less direct face time with team members.

The goal of “using AI for simple issues so agents can focus on complex ones” does not simply speak to customers’ demand for convenient self-service options. It also has ramifications for agent productivity and happiness. The more time agents can devote to *meaningful work*, the more effective and engaged they will be.

With customers seeking more empathetic, more personalized care across all touch points, agents will be more reliant than ever on 360-degree customer views. By providing such a window into the experience, companies empower agents to meet the needs of today’s omnichannel customers. They also free agents of the burden of looking across multiple screens just to answer questions, leading to satisfaction and retention gains.

Which of the following will you prioritize in your effort to “empower” employees/agents?





WHAT DOES A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC EXPERIENCE ENTAIL?

At the end of the day, the contact center operation is a vehicle for successfully connecting with customers. Every strategic decision, whether related to people, process, or technology, ultimately represents an effort to build a better experience.

An inquiry into the customer contact industry, therefore, requires an effort to define customer centricity. What type of experience will prove most resonant with customers in 2021 and beyond?

Above all, a great customer experience involves the sharing of accurate and relevant information. **Nearly 72% of companies identify accuracy and relevance as crucial customer experience qualities**, making it the #1 quality.

When it comes to this finding, the only surprise is that some companies *did not* identify accuracy and relevance as priorities. It is hard to imagine these organizations are *downplaying* the importance of sharing proper information with customers; more likely, they believe it is too fundamental to celebrate as the hallmark of a great experience.

After all, information quality is the absolute foundation of a great experience. Although some customers surely appreciate highly conversational or lightning-fast service in their preferred channels, all ultimately want to receive the most accurate and/or most valuable outcome.

Companies do, of course, acknowledge that convenience matters. **Over 70% believe that speed is essential to the success of a customer experience**, and **67% say the same of effortlessness**.

Not simply respectful of the idea that “time is money,” an emphasis on convenience addresses some of the most notorious customer contact pain points. CCW Digital research has repeatedly confirmed issues like long wait times and multiple transfers as top sources of customer frustration. Companies that can free customers of these issues, naturally, stand to win satisfaction and loyalty.

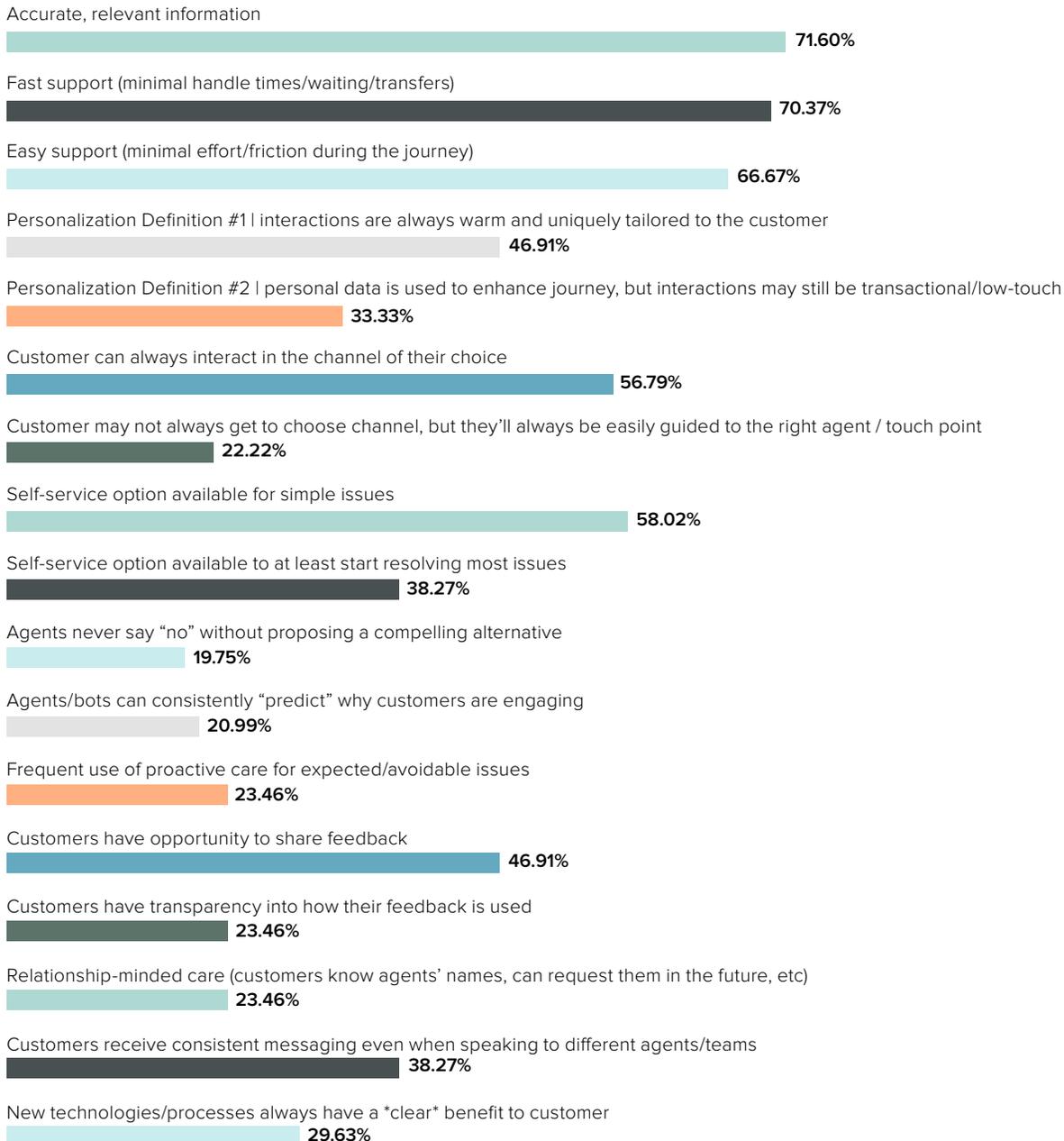
Offering self-service for simple support issues (58%) and allowing customers to interact in the channel of their choice (57%) represent the #4 and #5 qualities, respectively

As a pathway to convenience, self-service naturally ranks as a top customer experience facet. The relevance of web and mobile self-service options is particularly growing as customers become more digitally savvy and more averse to phone calls and other synchronous interactions. Rather than seeing modern self-service as a brush-off (the way they might have previously viewed notoriously convoluted IVRs), they recognize it as a way to *avoid* the inefficiencies of traditional customer service and solve problems on their own terms.

Part of allowing customers to solve problems on their own terms, of course, involves honoring channel preference.

Companies are clear that customers have final say when it comes to channel; whereas the majority of companies believe in honoring customer channel preference, only 22% believe right-channeling customers to the best possible environment is a customer-centric option. Indeed, it is the customer – not the business – that determines the “right” venue for a particular issue.

Which of the following do you believe are essential to a great customer experience?





BRINGING CUSTOMER CENTRICITY TO DIGITAL CHANNELS

The days of greeting customers in one channel but then “right-channeling” them to a more conventional environment are over. Today’s companies resoundingly believe that customers, not businesses, dictate where interactions take place.

To make the notion a reality, companies will have to elevate their experiences in all channels. They cannot get away with simply *allowing* customers to engage in multiple channels; they have to deliver exceptional service at all touch points.

As the typical contact center has far more experience with phone interactions, the call to embrace omnichannel is ultimately a call to improve digital capabilities. Indeed, “improving digital experiences” repeatedly ranks as a top objective in CCW’s executive surveys.

Real improvement, of course, requires more than nebulous sentiment. It hinges on concrete planning and execution. An important step on the road to digital excellence, therefore, is establishing a set of priorities.

A focus for 51% of companies, training staff to handle digital interactions represents the most universal priority.

Companies acknowledge “comfort in all channels” as an essential agent quality, and they clearly accept the responsibility of creating that comfort. They recognize the value – and urgency – of ensuring agents can deliver empathetic, effective care at every conceivable touch point.

Other digital priorities include **determining the best use cases for AI and self-service (49%), improving integrations between channels (42%), adding new channels (38%), and establishing metrics for digital (37%).**

As they prepare agents to converse digitally, companies are also embracing the power of automation. They know that digitally fluent customers appreciate self-service opportunities that are deployed at appropriate moments of truth. They also recognize that the rise of digital communication is opening the door to a wealth of new customer insights; AI that can help capture and analyze these insights will lead to more efficient journeys, and more personalized interactions.

For as much as companies want to deliver amazing experiences within digital channels, companies accept that some customers *will* need to transfer to other environments. When they do, customer-centric organizations aim to ensure the process is as seamless as possible. Integrating channels contributes to this goal, helping customers quickly move to a new channel without having to repeat information they have already shared.

Before a company can elevate or integrate channel experiences, it obviously has to offer the given channels. Many companies are consequently focusing on adding channels, an effort that ensures they will “be where their customers are.”

Customer-centric organizations, of course, know that they cannot half-heartedly introduce new channels. Customers expect great experiences at all conceivable touch points, which means “adding channels” is not as simple as buying software or checking some boxes in an omnichannel contact center solution. It requires companies to immediately plan for the types of interactions they will be handling in the environment, and the types of resources and systems they will need to succeed.

Digital experiences cannot be *lesser* in the omnichannel era, but that does not mean they have to be *identical* to traditional phone interactions. The reality is that all channels have their own quirks. They are also more likely to attract certain customers and drive certain behaviors.

Naturally, this means leading companies will want to rethink their approach to performance management. Whereas “outcome” metrics like customer satisfaction and loyalty will likely apply in all cases, traditional “phone metrics” like average handle time will have far less relevance in asynchronous messaging.

Beyond thinking about the best way to measure performance *within* each channel, leading organizations will also focus on how the emergence of one channel impacts performance in another. If, for instance, customers began to primarily handle “simple” issues via digital self-service, phone agents will spend more of their time on complex interactions. Average handle time for phone calls will consequently rise, but it will not necessarily be reflective of a decline in performance.

When it comes to improving the digital experience, which of the following are priorities?

Digital is not a focus; we remain mainly committed to phone / in-person

4.94%

Adding new channels

38.27%

Determining metrics for digital channels

37.04%

Better allocating staff/resources to digital channels

25.93%

Training staff to handle digital interactions

50.62%

Determining the best use of AI and self-service

49.38%

Improving integration/connection between channels (to create an “omnichannel” experience)

41.98%

Addressing security/privacy challenges in digital environments

29.63%

Better collecting and leveraging customer data at digital touch points

35.80%

Ensuring all channels are controlled by (or working in concert with) the contact center/CX team

34.57%

Providing agents with omnichannel tools and 360-degree views of the journey

32.10%

Re-orchestrating journey map to account for rise of digital channels

22.22%

Understanding (and addressing) the new types of support challenges that arise in digital

34.57%

Strengthening e-commerce capabilities

19.75%

Designing better experiences for mobile devices/customers

32.10%

Re-training “phone” agents based on how digital may impact their workflow (ex - simple issues in digital, complex in phone)

20.99%

Taking advantage of “distinctly digital” capabilities, such as mobile app experiences, proactive messaging, geo-targeting, seamless authentication, etc

33.33%

PRACTICALITY GUIDE



**CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
CASE STUDIES, EXPERT TIPS,
AND PRACTICAL EXERCISES
THAT YOU CAN BRING BACK
TO THE OFFICE.**





THE NEW WORLD OF CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS DEMANDS A NEW WAY OF COACHING AGENTS

Customers expect a lot these days: an end-to-end omnichannel experience that is consultative, personalized to their needs, and seamless. The majority of consumers admit that their standards for a good experience are higher than ever before.

At the same time, the operational challenges for contact centers are becoming ever more complex and unpredictable due to societal issues like the COVID-19 pandemic, an explosion of advanced technologies, and shifting employee expectations. In today's competitive environment - across any industry - it's not enough to merely maintain performance. Companies need to constantly be looking for ways to build additional competitive advantage. This is tough in the commoditized

world of contact centers. What will move the needle more than just an incremental amount?

Contact centers need to become strategic operations that can flex, adjust, and adapt. They need to be able to learn and grow with the organization's and customers' needs. This is deep strategy development that will impact how every level of employee at the contact center is enabled, and it won't be accomplished by mere technology adoption. Gone are the days when running a contact center was a cookie cutter proposition.

The only way for contact centers to achieve the level of strategic and operational readiness described above is to make sure the team working in the contact center is

ready to do so. The success of the business depends on the ability of the contact center agents to meet the needs of customers no matter what their environment or the disruptions that might occur.

COACHING CAN (AND SHOULD) BE A SUPERPOWER

Developing a strong, effective coaching program that itself is able to adapt to evolving challenges will ensure that agents are ready for anything (even the unexpected). Great coaching will provide a competitive advantage not just through better customer experience, but higher conversion rates, lower attrition costs, reduced performance gaps, and better speed to proficiency, among other key benefits.

In a way, this boils down to a simple truth that seems obvious but is often overlooked amid the noise of today's technology and the pace of economic change: *making people better at their jobs is the single most effective investment contact centers can make to ensure sustained competitive advantage.*

TRADITIONAL CONTACT CENTER COACHING DOESN'T WORK

Unfortunately, current coaching programs aren't working as well as they should be. Most coaching is inefficient, creates lack of trust, big performance gaps, and zero visibility for leadership. Coaches aren't equipped with the data, workflow, or training they themselves need to do a good job. Let's dig into three key problem areas for most coaching programs:

Problem 1: Inefficient Coaching Workflows

Coaches are often overloaded, sifting through mountains of call data and firefighting call escalations daily. Call analytics tools are rife with errors and only incrementally better than having no tool at all. Many coaches are former agents themselves, which means they probably haven't received any actual coaching training.

Too often, contact center managers end up in an unfortunate and familiar cadence: only able to coach on one call per agent per week, knowing that this is unlikely to address the real areas needing improvement, and lacking the enablement to create a more efficient process.

Problem 2: Poor Coach-Agent Relationships

The workflow described above makes it impossible for coaches to effectively coach or have valuable and consistent conversations with team members. Agents become frustrated with inadequate feedback, not trusting the guidance they do get from coaches since it's based on incomplete context (such as only one call at a time). Agents are left unable to understand where and how they can improve.

In addition to producing a disconnected and unhappy work environment across the team, a poor coach-agent relationship directly affects top-line business metrics such as attrition, speed to proficiency, and (of course) performance.

Problem 3: No Visibility for Leadership

Most contact center leaders struggle to understand what's actually going on across teams. Who's getting coached when, on what, and how? More importantly, is the coaching that's happening having an impact on the business? Who's doing the best job coaching, and why?

Considering the hours each week that contact center managers spend coaching (especially given the inefficient workflow described above), coaching programs are too expensive for leadership to be left in the dark as to their effectiveness.

THE SOLUTION IS COACHING ENABLEMENT

Tackling the problems detailed above requires two important elements: a strong coaching strategy and effective coaching technology. These two pieces make up **coaching enablement**, and most contact centers don't have them.

A Strong Coaching Strategy

Developing a coaching strategy should begin with identifying the ROI metrics of the coaching program. These will be lagging indicators of the program's success, such as conversion rate increases, CSAT scores, ramp time decreases, or attrition decreases.

The next step is to map the customer experience to key skills and behaviors that make up a successful conversation. Good conversation builds strong relationships that add value for companies and customers, but it's hard to achieve good conversation at scale across a team. Mapping these key skills and behaviors is a critical step towards implementing a behavior-based coaching approach that will enable better conversations.

Finally, the coaching strategy should include clear expectations about the cadence, format, and personnel involved in the team's coaching. Coaching, unlike the initial training most agents receive, should never end. A good coaching program provides consistent, ongoing attention to every agent regardless of tenure or performance. This is partly because of the constantly evolving nature of customer and business needs, and partly because of the fact that people just forget training. They need it to be consistently reinforced over time.

This coaching must be done in a targeted, customized way for each team, each call type, and each objective. It's not easy to get away from the mindset of call scripts and keyword matching, but it's possible to do it efficiently, especially if there is also good technology to enable both employees and the coaches who are upskilling them.

Effective Coaching Technology

Good coaching technology is essential to successfully execute and evaluate coaching programs at contact centers. Effective coaching platforms guide leaders in mapping conversations to key skills and behaviors. This is done with a combination of advanced technology and strategic professional services.

Coaching technology also provides simple yet customized coaching workflows and packages for managers, compliance officers, and other stakeholders. With a good coaching solution, it's clear to everyone involved what they should be doing each day to have the most impact on agent performance. Coaches know which calls to coach on, which behaviors to reinforce, and who needs stronger feedback. The most effective technologies incorporate asynchronous comments and in-person sessions to help agents focus on what most needs improvement.

Importantly, good coaching technology leverages high quality, trustworthy data to provide visibility into the metrics that really matter throughout the contact center organization. These metrics include (but are not limited to) those described below:

- **Behavior adherence:** How often are agents performing the skills and behavior they should be on calls? (Note: the *eligibility* is critical here - for example, a 'Payment Timeline' behavior would not be eligible if the customer is paying in full.)
- **Workflow adherence:** Are managers sticking to the coaching program as designed?
- **Performance trends:** What is the change in agent performance over time?
- **Team alignment:** Does everyone across the team understand and buy into the skills, behaviors, and coaching workflows?
- **ROI:** Are the business metrics identified as part of the coaching strategy showing positive impact?

THE IMPACT OF COACHING ENABLEMENT

Done right, building a coaching enablement program with strong strategy and effective technology will create a cascading effect of better conversations, stronger relationships, and improved performance. This will lead to greater customer loyalty, higher revenue, lower attrition costs, and greater productivity across the contact center.

Finally, coaching enablement will transform a contact center team into a strategic force on the front lines of the business, able to adapt to shifting customer demands and unpredictable economic and societal trends to grab and maintain competitive advantage.

APPENDIX



The Benefits of Behavior-Based Coaching: Build Trust and Create a Consultative, Customer-Centric Team

When companies transition to behavior-based coaching, they create a more effective feedback loop for employees that improves two essential relationships in the customer lifecycle: coach with rep, and rep with customer.



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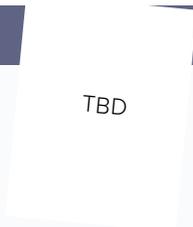
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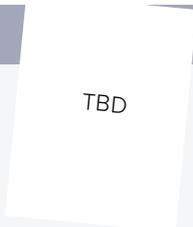
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