

A photograph of three customer service agents in a modern contact center. A woman in a white blazer is on the left, talking on a headset. In the center, a man with glasses and a light blue shirt is also on a headset, holding a pen over a desk. On the right, a man with a beard and a light blue shirt is smiling while holding a headset. The background shows large windows and office equipment.

# How to deliver customer experience in the 2020s

**A strategic approach to CX in the contact centre**

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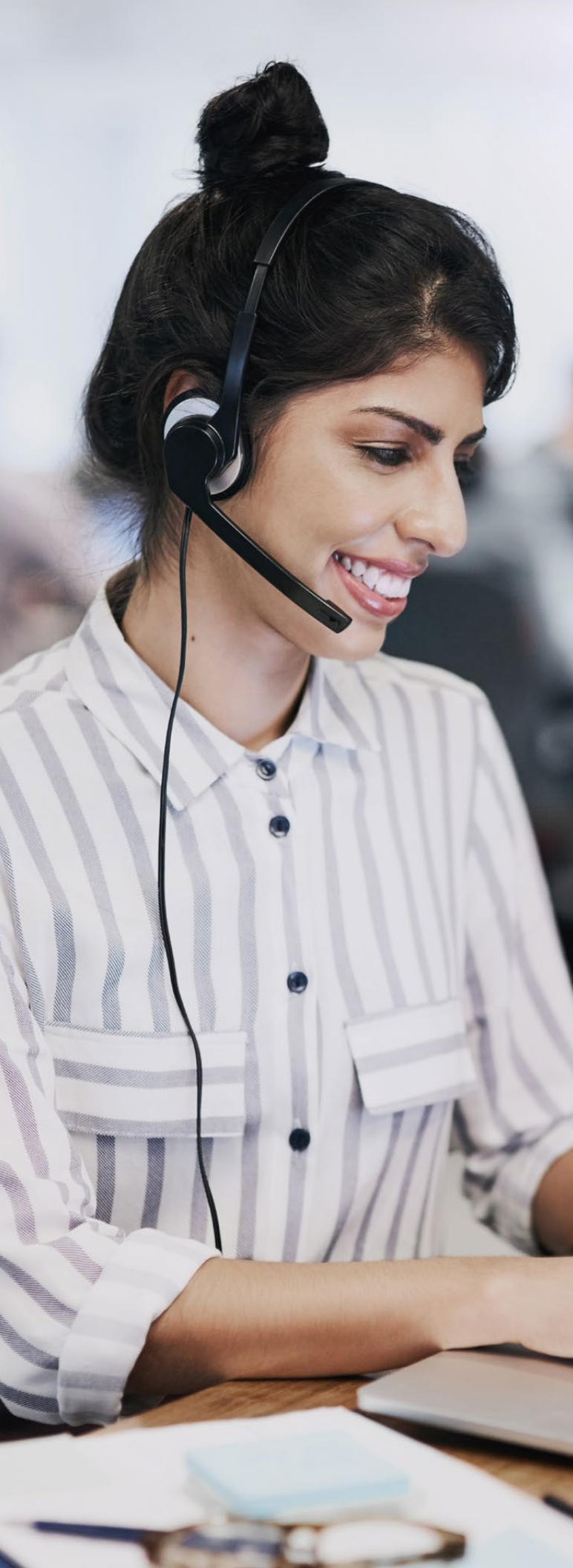
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# Introduction

Customer expectations have been steadily rising for years, while tolerance for experiences that fail to meet these expectations has been heading in the opposite trajectory.

Research by the Institute of Customer Service for its [UK Customer Satisfaction Index \(UKCSI\)](#) reveals that customer satisfaction has declined for the past five surveys, reaching its lowest level since January 2015.

The measures that underpin the UKCSI (the attributes of customer experience that are most important to customers) reveal that customers perceive that there have been significant drops in the quality of interactions, the standard of complaint handling and the extent to which companies build experiences around their needs.

That's not to say that companies don't recognise the value of satisfying customer experiences. A global survey of [600 executives conducted by Frost & Sullivan and Genesys](#) revealed that 61% of contact centres either agree or strongly agree that their CX initiatives are crucial in enabling them to retain a competitive advantage.

Yet the figures tell a different story – a large study [by PWC](#) highlights that only 49% of consumers feel they're getting a good customer experience from companies.

Against this backdrop of rising customer expectations, the customer service landscape is being reshaped by new technologies, platforms, channels and customer preferences. Some of these trends can potentially make it easier for organisations to meet expectations, while others will demand significant adaptation. And it will ultimately be how organisations respond to these factors that will determine their customer experience success – and as such, their commercial success – in the coming decade.

In this report, we'll examine what the key trends are and how contact centres can respond to ensure that they are best positioned to not only meet customer expectations in the coming decade – but surpass them.



## Digitalisation of customer service

Making sure that your business is available on a customer's preferred digital channel is critical. The UKCSI research, for instance, demonstrates that customers who used their preferred channel for interacting with an organisation are far more likely to be satisfied with an experience than those who did not – with customers on their channel of choice ranking their experience an average of 78 out of 100 on the Customer Service Index, compared with a rating of only 61 from those forced to use an alternative channel.

And while the voice channel remains important for most organisations, there has been a shift towards digital channels in recent years – a trend that is set to become more pronounced as the decade progresses.

Indeed, by 2022, [Gartner](#) forecasts that nearly three-quarters (72%) of customer interactions will involve digital technologies such as messaging, mobile applications and chatbots, up from 11% in 2017.

Therefore, it is little surprise that so many call centres are prioritising digital growth and plan to keep it a priority as the decade progresses.

In the Genesys and Frost & Sullivan report [Midsized Call Centres Take a Digital-first Approach; Cloud Solutions to Power Customer Service in 2019](#), 'new digital channels' was the most popular response by some margin when executives were asked what their customer engagement priority was for the coming year.

Brendan Dykes, director of product marketing at Genesys, believes that the increasing interest in digital assistant products and asynchronous messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger will mean these are the digital channels most likely to be adopted by contact centres in the short-term, while the emergence of voice will mean voiced self-service will also grow in prominence.

"Automation will be the next big game-changer in the coming 10 years," he forecasts. "For contact centres, these are good areas to be thinking about – 'how can we actually take on board some of these platforms to use them for our customer experience?'"





## The importance of omnidigital

The growth of digital does not only require contact centres to adopt new channels, but to also consider how these will be integrated into their wider service ecosystem. Customers no longer think of channels, instead choosing the platform or method that is most convenient – while also expecting the option to triage to another channel (such as a live agent) if their first effort does not solve their issue.

Customers have come to expect their interactions to be seamlessly joined-up across all of the touchpoints, whether online or in-store, in person or assisted by a bot.

To deliver this omnichannel, seamless experience requires the centralisation of channel management, so that agents are able to deal with any channel through a single tool. But with Genesys and Frost & Sullivan research indicating that only 2% of European centres have full cross-channel integration for seamless omnichannel CX, and the rest admitting to having little to no integration across channels, there is work ahead for many organisations if they are to avoid creating a patchwork of disparate, disconnected platforms.

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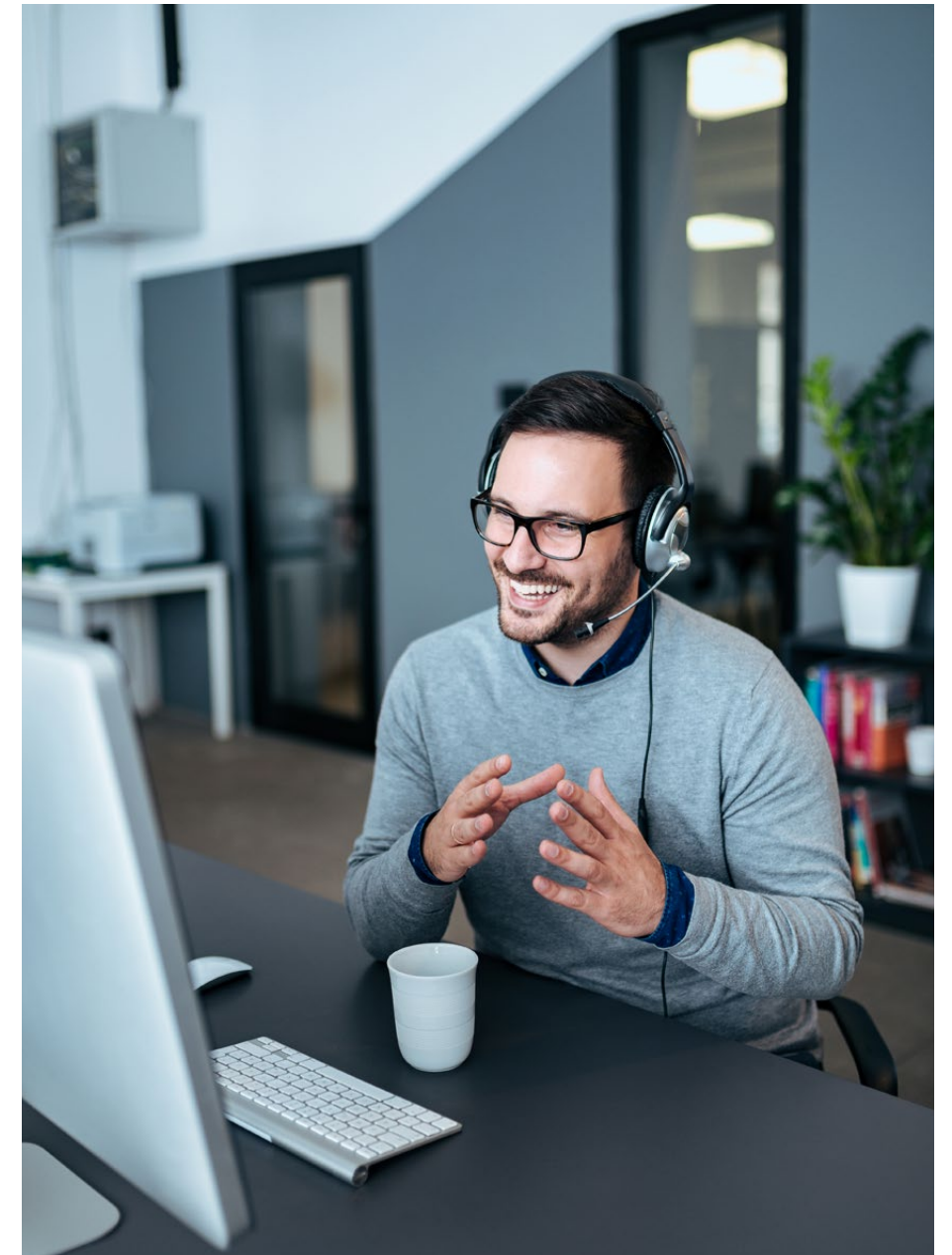
## *One in three European contact centres believe that a lack of systems/applications integration is hampering their omnichannel goals.*

Dykes notes that because many contact centres don't have the IT organisation structured around them in the same way they would if they were a larger enterprise; their digital expansion has been achieved through the acquisition of a series of point solutions.

“They might be using a different platform for chat, for SMS, for email handling and so on, and now they're trying to bring this all together and deliver a consistent omnichannel customer experience, allowing customers to move from one channel to another without them getting lost or having to repeat themselves,” he explains. “However, they can't because they have bolted together a Frankenstein's monster of architecture, resulting in a broken experience.”

Fortunately, there are platforms available to contact centres that enable them to have that complete connected journey, and the emergence of new cloud-based technology solutions enabling brands to deliver a more joined-up experience for customers is a significant development for the industry.

According to the Genesys and Frost & Sullivan report, one in three European contact centres believe that a lack of systems/applications integration is hampering their omnichannel goals – and almost half believe that the flexible scalability, ease of use, and ability to add new capabilities mean that hosted/cloud CX solutions are attractive options. Indeed, cloud represents the most cost-efficient path to modernisation for those mid-sized call centres looking to scale at pace.







## AI-powered support

Of the new digital channels being added, undoubtedly the area where there is the most excitement and hype as we move into the 2020s is the field of AI-enabled platforms.

[Research suggests](#) that most (93%) business executives believe AI has a very or somewhat positive impact within their industry (up from 69% in 2018), with the journey to becoming an AI-driven enterprise representing a big part of the digital transformation journey for many organisations, as they seek to increase revenue, optimise operational efficiencies, and reduce operational costs while simultaneously increasing customer satisfaction.

While adoption of the likes of messaging AI, bots and virtual assistants is presently fairly low, Frost & Sullivan found that a large number of contact centres are planning to support them in the next two years, with nearly 64% of respondents reporting that they expect to apply artificial intelligence to engagement channels.

Core to these AI ambitions is the ability of AI-powered bots and assistants to effectively manage low-level queries. This ensures that customers have a low-effort experience in resolving their issues, while also increasing productivity, as more enquiries are quickly solved, as well as freeing up live agents from routine queries to handle more complex calls.

Given the growing maturity of AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants, [Gartner is forecasting](#) that 15% of all customer service interactions will be handled solely by AI by 2021 – a 400% increase from 2017.

And this adoption will be largely powered by the cloud, with a [study by Deloitte](#) suggesting that 70% of those companies using AI obtained these capabilities through the cloud. The research adds that cloud-based AI software and services make it easier for companies to benefit from AI, accelerating their adoption and spreading their benefits. And it concludes that in the coming year the penetration rate of enterprise software with AI built in, and cloud-based AI development services, will reach an estimated 87% and 83% respectively.



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Even agents, once fearful of the impact that AI could have on their livelihoods, have started to become more receptive to the tech as awareness of the support that it can provide has grown. In a [poll of 7,000](#) service staff, 60% felt that AI would complement their activities and help them work more effectively, while two-thirds reported that chatbots would help speed up existing business processes by dealing with routine matters, thereby enabling them to focus on the more complex issues that require human intervention. A further 62% also said AI would make their job simpler. Meanwhile, the proportion of respondents that reported they were concerned that the technology could replace them was a mere 15%.







## Reskilling agents

[Research by the CIPD](#) has forecast that automation and AI will have a net upskilling effect on UK jobs – replacing low-skilled jobs while inspiring the creation of new, more highly-skilled positions to work in tandem with AI. And nowhere is this more apparent than in the frontline of customer service.

With rising deployment of AI software and robotics to cater for simple queries and requests, agents are increasingly the domain to deal with more challenging customer interactions – whether that be more complex queries, or more emotional callers. This will demand that agents possess a much richer skillset.

The Customer Contact Association's report [The Future of Work and Automation in CX](#) surveyed 800 customer service executives about these changing service requirements, identifying some of the skills that are most important to the service agent of 2020.

83% reported that agents will need to possess quality problem-solving skills, as service staff will be required to tackle more complex queries, while, as a consequence of the progressively omnichannel environment, 85% of those questioned felt that agents will also need to be more skilled at handling multichannel interactions.

All of which means that there is pressure on service departments to adapt the skillsets of their teams in the coming decade – something that 69% of those surveyed by the CCA believe represents their biggest challenge going forwards.

## *Organisations must offer training options that can fit into their workforce's changing demands.*

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To further complicate matters, training itself has become more complex. Traditional training cycles, with agents logging out of their computers and joining a standard classroom, aren't ideal anymore. Organisations must offer training options that can fit into their workforce's changing demands. This might mean sending training to agents' mobile phones or inserting training automatically onto agents' desktops for them to access when there's a lull in call volumes.

Fortunately, contact centres are able to capitalise on the emergence of new workforce engagement management (WEM) tools that not only deliver training in a flexible and engaging way to employees, but can also incorporate real-time data from quality management, operational management, and knowledge management systems. By combining agent performance management tools with operational and quality management data, organisations can:

- Analyse and replicate the skills, knowledge, and attributes of top performers, and close the performance gap of your workforce through integrated performance management capabilities.
- Increase speed-to-competency for new and existing employees and improve employee engagement, which provides better customer experiences and reduces costs.
- Give employees customised training, career mapping for future roles and real feedback with the training team.

According to the [Dimension Data 2019 Global CX Benchmarking report](#), 49.5% of companies are still using static knowledge management systems, even though e-learning deployments have doubled and become the training method of choice. So there is plenty of scope for half of today's businesses to improve the way they deliver training – and prepare for the upskilling requirements on the horizon.







## Keeping agents engaged

As the upskilling of agents transforms them into higher-value employees, organisations will have to consider a range of employee experience improvements that will be necessary to retain them – after all, having invested time and resources in training up these staff, it would be costly to then lose them to a competitor.

The Gartner 2020 Agenda Poll reports that 56% of service leaders agree that they will face difficulty retaining high-quality reps in 2020. And with estimates by Temkin Group suggesting that only 33% of staff are highly engaged, contact centres will certainly need to ramp up their employee engagement efforts, if they are to retain the new breed of skilled agents.

Commenting on the findings of the Gartner 2020 Agenda Poll, Lauren Villeneuve, senior principal at Gartner, [has noted](#): “To engage and retain reps, Gartner recommends that organisations define and measure rep engagement, provide reps a clear path for career progression, encourage feedback, reward contribution, and create a network judgment climate in which reps feel trusted and influential.”

Having the right tools in place to help staff do their jobs is also crucial to keeping them engaged and enabling them to deliver a satisfying customer experience. Indeed, when Deloitte conducted its [Global Human Capital Trends](#) report a few years ago, it concluded that having the correct “enabling infrastructure” was the top driver of employee engagement globally.

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In its [Contact Centre Employee Engagement playbook](#), Genesys shares the following examples of how technology can support agents while also driving engagement:

- Implementing a universal queue to route effectively and offer variety in the employees’ workday.
- Providing a desktop application that helps unify the employees’ workflow.
- Providing a clear career path by using a development portal.
- Enabling employees to influence their schedule through a single workforce management portal.

And the good news for contact centres – of all sizes – is that solutions to simplify work for stressed-out staff and engage the next generation of high-quality reps have never been more accessible.







## Differentiation through service experience

Despite the challenges associated with upskilling and changing channel preferences, contact centres should be viewing these shifting sands as an opportunity to create competitive differentiation.

The digitalisation of service is likely to make human service interactions all the more important, enabling organisations to strengthen customer relationships and add value on more complex and emotive interactions.

However, for agents to turn complex/emotive interactions into superior customer experiences, potentially across

multiple channels, they will not only require specific training, but also the right technical support.

The good news is that a significant proportion of the growing AI investment hasn't only been to automate routine queries, but also to provide this agent assistance. Indeed, Ovum research suggests that the deployment of AI for real-time agent assistance is the second most common application of artificial intelligence (reported by 50% of respondents) after the automation of routine tasks (reported by 60%).

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AI can improve agent performance in a host of ways, providing them with support to find the right responses quicker, prompting them to provide cross and up-sell offers and predicting the best responses to customer queries in any digital channel. At those companies that have AI providing agent assistance, many report that it has helped their agents improve the prioritisation of their work, increased first contact resolution rate and CSAT or NPS, raised agent morale and reduced call volume and handling time. Overall, Genesys research indicates that 64% of UK employees report that they already feel AI has made them more effective at their jobs.

This “hybrid workforce” of human and AI enables contact centres to combine the efficiency of bots with the empathy of agents, and a growing number of organisations have already adopted this blend to enable them to drive operational efficiencies, improve customer engagement and ultimately surpass service expectations.

“We’re going to replace a lot of the mundane work with automation,” says Dykes. “And what’s left will be the harder enquiries that require more emotional intelligence and managing complexity and that’s when agents will need to have the technology to support them. And that means a combination of human and bots working together to resolve the customer’s problem.”







## Key takeaways

The customer service landscape will change dramatically during the coming decade and if contact centres are to ensure that they are capable of not only meeting customer expectations, but surpassing them, they will need to prepare and adapt.

The following page provides a few key takeaways for your organisation to consider when it comes to best responding to the trends outlined in this report.

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*The customer service landscape will change dramatically during the coming decade.*



# *Organisations must build their channels on the foundations of a single unified system.*

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## **1. Find a platform that enables the seamless integration of new digital channels**

Many contact centres are using multiple platforms instead of utilising a single platform that integrates all channels (voice, text, web chat, websites, email, social media, mobile and forums).

But in order to deliver a connected customer journey, organisations must build their channels on the foundations of a single unified system.

With an open, flexible and scalable platform in place, businesses are also best placed to be able to seamlessly integrate intelligent automated self-service such as bots with the crucial human touch provided by live agents.

## **2. Embrace AI for both customer-facing and agent-facing assistance**

With a single unified platform that is cloud-based, contact centres have the freedom to deploy AI-powered platforms without prohibitive costs, while also ensuring that these chatbots and virtual assistants are augmented and supported by live agents, to whom customers can be triaged in the event of unpredictable requirements. The perfect hybrid of human and digital.

## **3. Harness the latest WEM tools to support upskilling and reduce attrition**

Agents will require a new set of skills in the coming decade, and the next generation of workforce engagement management (WEM) tools are perfectly suited to not only ensuring that training is optimised to their unique requirements, but also to keep these high-value agents engaged to ensure they remain a committed part of your highly-skilled workforce.

## **4. Capitalise on the cloud**

To meet rising customer expectations, contact centres should explore the cloud. With many organisations concerned that their lack of internal IT expertise could hamper efforts to support new channels, the adoption of cloud solutions can provide a quicker and simpler way to achieve systems and applications integration.





## About Genesys

Genesys® powers 25 billion of the world's best customer experiences each year. Our success comes from connecting employee and customer conversations on any channel, every day. Over 11,000 companies in 100+ countries trust our #1 customer experience platform to drive great business outcomes and create lasting relationships.

Combining the best of technology and human ingenuity, we build solutions that mirror natural communication and work the way you think. Our industry-leading solutions foster true omnichannel engagement, performing equally well across all channels, on-premise and in the cloud.

Experience communication as it should be: fluid, instinctive and profoundly empowering.

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Sharing news, advice and resources on topics ranging from customer engagement to CRM and the contact centre, MyCustomer is a vital hub for business leaders aiming to enhance every facet of the customer experience they deliver.

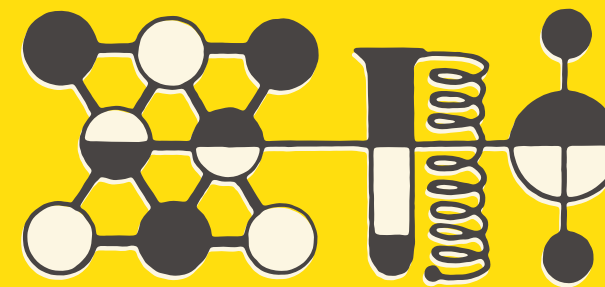
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