

A man with short, spiky hair and glasses, wearing a blue and white checkered button-down shirt, is sitting at a desk in an office. He is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. In the background, there is a window with several sticky notes (yellow, green, and blue) attached to it, and a desk lamp. A smartphone is visible on the desk in front of him. The overall scene is a professional office environment.

8 Contact Center Trends to Watch in 2020

Introduction

As another calendar year winds down and the hope of a new year comes into view, it's typical for businesses to reflect on the successes and challenges of the last twelve months. It's also common for industry experts to reveal their list of predictions for the year to come. In truth, no one can guarantee what the next year will hold—particularly in a rapidly evolving industry like the contact center. Over the last decade, many of the contact center's future trends predictions have revolved around Artificial Intelligence (AI), omnichannel technology, digital transformation, a growing focus on employee experience, and the evolution of analytics. While many of those trends will continue to transform the ways we work and interact with customers, the year 2019 brought better understanding, and the year 2020 will bring more opportunity for refinement.

How will your contact center prepare to serve the customers of 2020, the next decade, and beyond? In this eBook, we'll arm you with the research you need to inform areas of investment, and quick tips you can use to improve your contact center's performance now. The ultimate goal: staying ahead of the competition. What will 2020 bring for the industry? Keep reading for eight trends to watch.





Trend 1: An Increased Demand for Personalization

“Customers seek immediate and fulfilling access to the companies they do business with, over the devices of their choice—and they will not hesitate to click to competitors’ sites if they feel they are not appreciated. The balance of power has profoundly shifted to customers, and personalization, as a result, has become a critical differentiator.”

—Forbes Insights

As highly targeted, personalized service has become the norm in the B2C space (think Netflix, Spotify, and Amazon), B2B customers have grown to expect the same. And according to a study from [Evergage](#), personalization has now become a crucial part of the customer journey as the primary driver of brand loyalty. 96% of marketers believe personalization strengthens customer relationships, and [61% of businesses say customization has helped them improve the overall customer experience](#).

What does this growing demand for personalization mean for the contact center? According to [2019 Gartner research](#), it’s now or never. Brands risk losing more than one-third of their customers due to inadequate personalization efforts. As the gateway to customer communications, the contact center has the opportunity to lead the charge.

What are some practical ways the contact center can deliver personalized service? Here are a few examples:

- Ensure agents have access to customer data before the contact is routed to their queue—this should include purchase history, past contacts, channel preferences, etc.
- Train frontline employees to use customer names during conversations, and to listen actively and respond with empathy. While templates can be a helpful guide for agents, rigid scripts give off a robotic vibe, counter to the personalized experience customers desire.
- Collect and use customer contact preferences for outbound support. Pay attention to channel preference, time zones, etc.
- Leverage internal knowledge to setup internal subject matter experts, so agents can reach out for help in real-time and get instant access to answers that meet their customers’ needs.

Jonas Stanford, Director of Customer Success at Unbounce, reiterated the need to empower frontline customer service agents with real-time customer data in a [blog post for 8x8](#):

“Most companies gather useful information about their customers but rarely make this information available to the support teams that help these customers,” said Stanford. “Giving customer service teams access to detailed customer information at the point of contact will allow support staff to understand a customer’s needs before they even begin speaking with the customer, resulting in shorter calls and an overall more [personalized customer experience](#).”

Another piece of the personalization puzzle? AI. Which brings us to the next trend to watch in 2020.

Trend 2: All Eyes on AI

You'd be hard-pressed to find a 2020 prediction piece that doesn't mention AI. The implications, particularly for the contact center, are striking. In 2019, 8x8 commissioned a contact center study in partnership with Hanover Research, and as expected, AI was top of mind for both IT and contact center leaders. According to the findings, more than three-quarters of IT leaders believe AI is revolutionizing contact center capabilities in multiple ways, including handling customer calls and mundane tasks without human involvement.

Does this mean the bots are taking over, and contact center agents will become a thing of the past? Not necessarily. The same study found that while companies expect AI to replace service jobs soon, they see this positively and do not necessarily translate this to total job decline. 74% think AI will handle mundane tasks, freeing human agents for more complex problem-solving in the next five years. And interestingly enough, half anticipate an increase in customer service agent jobs at their company.

Overall, most companies agree that AI will have a positive impact on their contact center in the next five years. In particular,

construction, architecture, and retail industries are most interested in investing in AI-powered solutions to improve their contact center efficiency. Healthcare, on the other hand, is the most hesitant to adopt AI. Only half of the respondents in the healthcare field said their business plans to invest in AI in the near future.

How might AI impact your contact center in 2020 and beyond? 8x8's customer experience and contact center expert, Jeremy Watkin expects rapid change, but cautions contact centers to develop a strategy before diving in headfirst.

"When we look at Natural Language Processing (NLP) and machine learning, which are both members of the AI family, it's important to recognize that, while there's certainly excitement around automating everything, that also takes a ton of work, time, and data," he says. "What you're more likely to continue to see are applications with these technologies built-in that continue to learn and make significant gains in efficiency, slowly automating some of the low hanging fruit in the process."

Another compelling solution made possible by AI? Speech Analytics, which we'll cover in trend number three.





Trend 3: The Contact Center Will Realize the Full Power of Speech Analytics

According to 2019 Hanover Research, 80% of contact centers say they have immediate plans to migrate to cloud-based call analytics. While speech analytics is not a new offering, it's one that contact center leaders have struggled to understand and use to its full potential. In our opinion, that's about to change.

"Now is the time for executives outside the contact center to reap the benefits of speech analytics," said Dan Miller, Lead Analyst and Founder, Opus Research. "Increasingly, companies are realizing the value of analyzing all conversations, not just those that are managed through the contact center. For example, valuable insights can be gleaned by analyzing interactions between an inside sales team and their prospects."

If you're interested in leveraging the full value of speech analytics, be sure to read this [Opus Whitepaper: Beyond the Contact Center: Unlocking Business Insights with Speech Analytics](#). In the meantime, consider a few of the ways speech analytics can enable better agent performance, better business insight, and improved customer experience.

- **Look for keywords/phrases to signal common customer issues**
By analyzing the interactions that lead to escalations, you can identify why customers are asking to

speak to a manager or why agents are passing off customers to a supervisor. You may find that a bit of extra coaching can solve the problem—that's on the contact center to fix. Alternatively, you may find a more significant process or policy issue, or unclear marketing message that is to blame.

- **Look for phrases that indicate the need for pricing changes**
Chances are your customers have already told you whether they'd be willing to pay more for your services. Are you listening?
- **Identify the top causes of customer churn**
By analyzing interactions that lead to a customer cancellation, you can uncover the top reasons why customers leave. Better yet, you can prevent it from happening again in the future.
- **Understand buyer behaviors**
Flagging product-related keywords can give your product team a treasure trove of data to use as they iterate new products or refine existing offerings.

Beyond personalization, AI, and speech analytics, where else should contact center leaders invest resources? According to Hanover Research, social media and webchat support are here to stay, which brings us to the fourth trend.

Trend 4: Offering Social and Webchat Support Will No Longer be Optional

For more than a decade now, experts have predicted a rise in social media customer service. Are those predictions finally coming to fruition? According to 2019 Hanover research, more contact centers than ever are seeing customer demand for social media support. 85% of companies surveyed said they'd seen an increase in social media outreach. Webchat is on the rise, too, with 80% of companies reporting a higher volume of inbound chat inquiries. What does this mean for contact centers in 2020 and beyond?

Digital channels like social media and chat are no longer nice to have or ahead of the curve. They are imperative for the modern customer. The most successful brands won't just use social media or chat to communicate with their customers—they'll use those

channels to listen to customers, proactively improving the business and the customer journey.

Whether social media falls under your contact center's ownership, is outsourced, managed by the marketing team, or some combination of all of the above, it's essential to make sure that anyone servicing your customers via social media uses a consistent brand voice. It's also critical to ensure the platform your agents use to serve customers via social media or chat integrates with your CRM, giving all areas of the business a complete view of the customer, and giving your agents more context.

If your business is seeking to improve its social media customer care operation, consider these five tips from 8x8's Erica Marois:





1 Establish a Clear Strategy.

Decide who should respond to what kinds of messages—marketing or customer support? Once you’ve established who should respond, you must also consider when to respond and how to determine which inquiries are most important. It may be impossible to respond to every mention of your brand, so consider prioritizing these types of messages:

- Urgent requests
- Gratitude
- Negative sentiment
- FAQ
- Technical questions

2 Listen.

This means not only monitoring brand handle mentions, but also setting up alerts to monitor conversations about your brand, mentions of your competitors, and support indicators.

3 Triage.

When not adequately organized and delegated, incoming social media inquiries can be overwhelming, and customers can feel neglected.

- Convert social messages in trouble tickets
- Prioritize messages based on sentiment
- Automatically re-route if messages go unanswered
- Tag messages for other people or departments when appropriate

Essentially, treat social as you would any other customer service channel.

4 Respond and Follow-Up.

Once you’ve strategized, listened, and triaged, it is time to respond and react! A few ground rules:

- Respond promptly
- Don’t give customers the runaround
- Be human
- Provide links thoughtfully
- Always respond publicly

5 Measure.

Most contact centers have KPIs in place to measure success in traditional contact channels, and social should not be the exception. So how should you measure success with social media support? A few KPIs to consider:

- Average response time
- Average handle time
- Percent response
- Customer sentiment

As the contact center takes a more active role in managing social media, new industry career paths are emerging. But it’s not just due to social media. There’s more and more convergence between the contact center and customer experience, too, which brings us to the fifth trend to watch.

Trend 5: Blurred Lines: Contact Center and Customer Experience Continue to Converge, Fostering Better Collaboration

Now, more than ever, businesses recognize the tremendous value the contact center brings. According to [2019 Enterprise Connect research](#), nearly 75% of survey respondents said that their enterprises recognize contact center investment as important or highly important to the overall business. As such, they're investing in their contact centers. In large part, customer experience is powering this trend.

What will this mean for contact center professionals in 2020? More opportunities for career advancement and a greater need than ever to break down organizational silos. As companies invest more in improving the customer experience, more eyes will land on the contact center—a critical part of the customer journey. The businesses that succeed will find better ways to collaborate, operating in fewer silos to deliver a genuinely integrated and collaborative experience.

To break down silos, you must first understand why they exist in the first place. Chris Hanna, Founder of [Evolving Management](#), reveals the common causes of organizational silos in [this infographic](#). In summary:

- Connections and communication are often not strong
- Leadership encourages departments to compete with, or distrust, one another

- Many people have no appreciation for what other teams do or how they work
- People work towards different (and often competing) goals
- Teams and individuals are measured differently
- Functions are more comfortable operating individually

In the next decade, contact center directors and customer experience chiefs must work together to communicate the same mission, encourage better collaboration, and align metrics and goals. Shared technology can help, but shared leadership is also critical. Over the next few years, we expect to see more and more contact centers fall under the same reporting lines as customer experience. And many pundits expect to see marketing fall in line with the customer experience. In the end, this should mean more strategic, deliberate, and positive customer experiences for the businesses that embrace the convergence.

The good news? This convergence will bring new career paths to the forefront, better preparing contact centers to respond to the future of work trends, including the desire for better growth opportunities. We think the future of work will become a reality in the next decade, which is why it's next on our list of trends to watch in 2020.





Trend 6: “The Future of Work” Will Become the Present

What is the future of work? It first emerged as a business trend in 2017, and since then has evolved to mean many things. The generally accepted definition, as articulated by Deloitte, is “The technological advances, demographic shifts, and consumer pulls that are fundamentally changing the way people work and the way organizations design jobs and environments.”

When it comes to technology, we’ve covered AI, speech analytics, and digital communication channels. We’ve also covered customer expectations. The next piece? The way we work and design working environments. What are some of the most significant shifts we’ve seen this year?

Our recent research with Enterprise Connect revealed these trends:

- 63% of contact centers support Work From Home (WFH) programs for their agents
- 40% expect the number of agents to increase over the next 12 months. As contact centers grow in size, flexibility with WFH programs and WEM/WFM solutions becomes more critical to ensure your enterprise is equipped to meet customer demands.
- Factors noted as highly important by survey respondents are: agent training/coaching capabilities, advanced analytics on customer engagements, workforce management/workforce optimization tools, and CRM integration

Another force changing the makeup of contact center employees? As of September 2019, [10,000 Baby Boomers \(the generation born between 1946 and 1964\) are retiring each day](#). In the year 2020 alone, more than 3.65 million Baby Boomers will leave the U.S. workforce. Who’s taking their place? Generation Z (aka digital natives). This generation values flexible work, nontraditional schedules, and career growth. How can contact centers use this knowledge to shift the way they recruit new talent and design experiences to keep them around? 8x8’s customer experience expert, Justin Robbins shares this advice:

“As I think about the generational shift that’s happening in our workplace, I see nothing but opportunity for the contact center. One of the fundamental challenges in these dynamic environments is the volatility and predictability of inbound contacts. Traditional approaches to brick and mortar cubicle farms and the complications of staffing these offices can leave many of these organizations woefully understaffed. But, if companies are willing to lean into the preferences of Generation Z, now is the perfect time to address this challenge. By deploying remote employees, offering flexible shift availability, and utilizing effective collaboration technologies and techniques, organizations stand to have a workforce that is more nimble and engaged than ever before.”

As digital natives begin to fill the leadership pipeline, they’re also demanding better technology, which may explain why cloud adoption is expected to increase significantly in the year ahead. This brings us the trend number seven.

Trend 7: Cloud-based Applications Will Grow in Popularity

According to Hanover research, more than 70% of companies not currently using cloud-based applications intend to migrate to the cloud within two years. According to research from McKinsey, enterprises that move to the cloud can expect to reduce their IT incidents by 70% and reduce IT overhead costs by 30-40%. For businesses looking to reduce technical debt and realize a quick return on investment, cloud adoption makes a lot of sense. But before diving in headfirst, we suggest asking these questions to ensure you select the right partner to navigate you through the process.

8 Questions to ask before you undertake a cloud migration:

- 1 Do we stay on-premises, or move to the cloud, and will it be risky? (Spoiler: yes, you should move to the cloud! Find out more here: <https://www.8x8.com/uk/blog/cloud-communications-made-easy-8-questions-you-need-to-ask>)
- 2 What policies, capabilities, and certifications are in place to ensure our data is kept private and secure?
- 3 With a growing distributed workforce and increasing disruption possibilities, what capabilities are in place to ensure business continuity?
- 4 What is the cloud deployment model that ensures quick and complete service delivery?
- 5 How do we reliably measure our performance, and gain insight into the customer experience?
- 6 With customers driving innovation, how can a partner keep up with that and enable us to deliver?
- 7 How do I reduce the complexity and cost of our current network infrastructure?
- 8 How difficult is it to integrate communications into our systems of records?

If your contact center is considering a move to the cloud in 2020, be sure to attend an 8x8 demo. You can [learn more and register here](#). Cloud-based contact centers will be best equipped for digital transformation, the final trend that we see taking hold in 2020.





Trend 8: The Contact Center Will Become a Critical Part of Digital Transformation

The term digital transformation has been used widely in prediction pieces for many industries over the last several years. The reality? The contact center has been left behind. Could 2020 be the year that changes?

First, let's start with a definition. Here's how [Salesforce defines digital transformation](#):

Digital transformation is the process of using digital technologies to create new—or modify existing—business processes, culture, and customer experiences to meet changing business and market requirements. This reimagining of business in the digital age is digital transformation.

In their opinion, digital transformation starts and ends with the customer, meaning the contact center belongs at the forefront of the evolution. This [Forbes article by Alok Kulkarni](#), Co-Founder, and CEO of Cyara, perfectly illustrates why it's so important to involve the contact center in digital transformation.

"I often see an "enthusiasm imbalance" when it comes to digital channels versus traditional voice channels, and I strongly caution CX leaders not to overlook the contact center," said Kulkarni. "The reality is that calls are simply not going away. Despite the array of digital channels and common efforts to decrease call volume, inbound call volume is generally holding steady. In fact, a recent study showed that more than [60%](#) of respondents expected live agent phone calls to either remain the same or increase."

To deliver on digital transformation, contact centers need the right technology. The 8x8 Contact Center enables businesses of all sizes to handle all customer needs on any channel of communication at a fraction of the price. And the solution enables businesses to deliver the best possible customer experience by empowering agents to do more, with less effort, and with greater accuracy.



Bringing It All Together

While it's impossible to predict with certainty all the factors that might impact our industry over the next twelve months, it's essential to look to research and trends to make educated guesses and plan for the future. The businesses that don't approach customer service with an eye on what's next will fall behind.

Looking to 2020 and beyond, we're keen to see how personalization, AI, speech analytics, social media, customer experience, the future of work, the growing adoption of cloud, and the emergence of

digital transformation will all shift the contact center industry. And we're prepared to help you face all the changes that lie ahead. The 8x8 Contact Center is the first of its kind, merging collaboration capabilities with the contact center in a single unified interface. This suite of products delivers Omnichannel Routing, Analytics, Quality Management, and Workstream Collaboration on a single platform.

[Learn how we can help you find your center.](#)



About NSL Telecoms

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