

# Achieving Consistent Customer Experiences

Using an Advanced Knowledge Base  
to Gain Business Advantage

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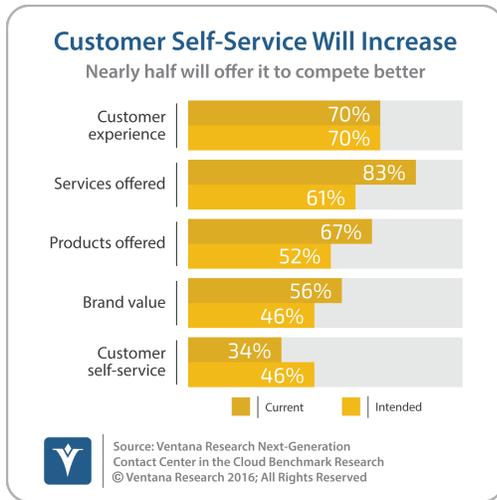


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# The Customer-Engagement Challenge

Our benchmark research into the next-generation contact center in the cloud shows that 70 percent of companies expect to rely on the quality of the customer experience to compete more effectively over the next two years, and 46 percent expect to rely on the effectiveness of their digital self-service. However, the same research shows that as of today, approximately a third (35%) of organizations don't believe their customers are satisfied with the way their interactions are handled.



Several factors negatively impact customer satisfaction, our research finds. Among them are that responses are too slow (in 48% of organizations) and are inconsistent across touch points (41%), and that self-service technologies are too hard to use (37%). Dissatisfaction with how interactions are handled can lead customers to contact the organization repeatedly or try another channel, slowing resolution and increasing costs, and ultimately can result in them ceasing to do business with the company or posting negative comments to social media. Such outcomes can impact organizations' business performance.

Our benchmark research finds that two underlying issues contribute to this situation. First, organizations can have customer data stored in more than 20 different systems. Second, organizations support on average eight customer engagement channels, a mix of assisted (voice, email and postal mail) and digital self-service (website, text messaging, chat, social and mobile app) channels. The combination of these two issues makes it hard for employees to find the information they need to resolve assisted interactions and for organizations to provide consistent responses across all channels, assisted and digital.

It is likely that the adoption of digital self-service engagement channels will further aggravate this situation unless organizations ensure that all systems share the same information sources. This is particularly true in cases where the customer starts on a digital channel, achieves only partial resolution and then transfers to assisted service. Under such circumstances, the customer experience will be degraded if he or she receives different information from that provided on the digital channel.



## Access to Information Is Key

To provide easy access to relevant information and ensure consistency of responses, many companies have implemented a knowledge management system. This is used to create a knowledge base that contains information that employees and digital self-service systems need to resolve interactions. Such

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Nearly half of organizations have implemented a knowledge management system to provide easy access and consistency.

knowledge management systems provide a single source of information that can be used in conjunction with information drawn from business applications to resolve interactions. Our research shows that nearly half (45%) of organizations have implemented such a system, with almost equal numbers using on-premises systems and cloud-based services.

Traditional knowledge management systems, which make up most of the systems currently deployed by organizations, have limited capabilities. They typically support the creation and management of documents that contain frequently used information – for example, product user guides, price lists, answers to frequently asked questions and notes about common issues and

how to resolve them. These documents can be created by a variety of users such as knowledge experts, business users and contact center agents. Employees interacting with customers can use these documents to speed up the handling of interactions and ensure consistency of responses. In addition, they can help those seeking to address the underlying cause of an issue by, for example, updating product information and user guides.

More advanced knowledge management systems use additional sources of data to create informational materials. For example, an analysis of how common service ticket issues are resolved can be used to create informational materials that then can be placed in the knowledge base to help agents quickly resolve similar situations. Advanced systems also offer the opportunity to create content in more varied forms such as images and video files as well as more sophisticated search capabilities so users can more easily find relevant content.

The latest systems automate these processes using artificial intelligence (AI) and machine-learning techniques. These systems learn from past interactions and then create or recommend creation of additional materials that will help resolve future interactions. Also, AI techniques make it possible to recognize how an employee is handling an interaction and automatically present informational materials that will guide him or her toward a successful resolution. Similar techniques can also be built into self-service systems to guide customers through the system effectively



by presenting them with relevant materials – for example, a video showing how to use a product.

## Benefits of a Shared Knowledge Base

Our research finds that organizations that have deployed a knowledge base realize several benefits. First and foremost, organizations see improvements to the customer experience because customers receive the same up-to-date and personalized information regardless of touchpoint. In addition, agent satisfaction improves because the agent must exert less effort finding the information needed to resolve interactions.

A shared knowledge base will likely also lead to increased digital self-service usage as customers become aware they get the same information and responses on digital channels as they do from assisted service. The use of AI techniques will make digital self-service smarter, further improving the customer experience and, as a result, business outcomes. In cases where the customer must transition from digital to assisted service, the transition will be smoother because the employee will be aware of what the customer did on the digital channel.



The most important factor impacting the customer experience in a multichannel world is the consistency of information provided in responses.

From an operational perspective, costs should drop as employees spend less time searching for information and agents can access the information they need in real time during a phone call or chat session. First-contact resolution rates should also increase as employees are able to deliver relevant and consistent responses that address customers' specific requirements.

Analysis of how a knowledge base is used can deliver a broader set of benefits as well. It can, for example, suggest improvements to existing materials and the creation of additional content.

In addition, analysis of what content is commonly accessed can suggest ways to address the root causes of interactions through improvements such as product changes, improvements to services, updates to user guides and changes to back-office processes. Similarly, analysis can help focus agent training to improve their skills in resolving interactions.

The most important factor impacting the customer experience in a multichannel world is the consistency of information provided in responses. A centralized knowledge base, populated with a variety of informational content and supporting all channels, can help achieve this objective and deliver improved business performance.



## About Ventana Research

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