

A photograph of four call center agents (three women and one man) wearing headsets and working at computers. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark blue filter. The agents are smiling and looking towards the camera.

THE SPOKEN 2015 CALL CENTER REPORT

The Spoken 2015 Call Center Report is presented by Spoken Communications, provider of the unique Spoken Contact Center as a Service cloud platform preferred by outsourcers.

The Spoken 2015 Call Center Report focuses on determining how customers view organizational efforts to improve the contact center customer experience and on recommending action items to bring contact center initiatives and customer expectations into alignment.

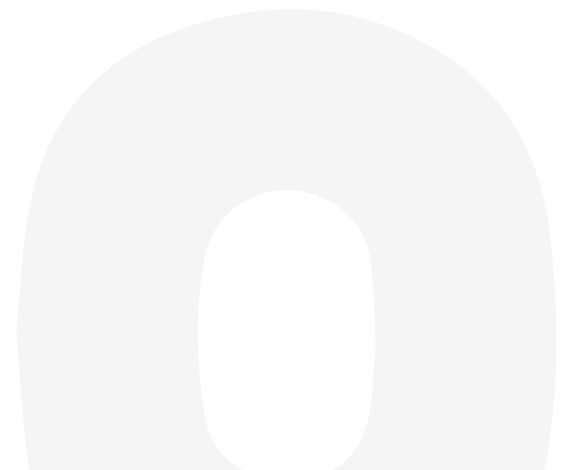
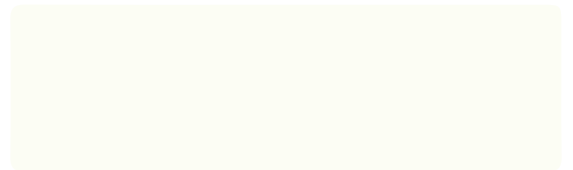


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
Part 1: Key drivers of positive and negative customer experiences.....	4
Takeaway #1: Agent empowerment drives positive customer experience.....	4
Takeaway #2: Improve IVR and CTI to reduce negative experiences.....	5
Part 2: How customers share their experiences.....	7
Takeaway #3: Unhappy customers are more likely to share their experiences publicly.....	7
Sharing positive experiences.....	7
Sharing negative experiences.....	7
Part 3: Customer channel preferences.....	9
Takeaway #4: Traditional channels still dominate the call center.....	9
Top two channels.....	9
Takeaway #5: Customer preference dominates first channel choice.....	10
Drivers of first channel choice.....	10
Drivers of second channel choice.....	11
Third channel preference.....	11
Takeaway #6: Channel preference drives brand loyalty.....	12
Conclusion.....	13

INTRODUCTION

The modern call center operates on metrics. Metrics can drive agent recruiting, training and performance. Metrics such as Net Promoter Score, First Call Resolution, Customer Satisfaction Score and Average Handle Time are often used in order to measure the quality of the customer experience.

However, the metrics that the call center industry applies to evaluate success are often quite dissimilar to the metrics the customers themselves would use to rate interactions. In the Spoken 2015 Call Center Survey, we asked customers who use call centers a series of questions about their perceptions, practices and attitudes towards their past call center experiences.

Our goals were to drill down into the mind of the customer to discover not only behavioral patterns but also preferences as well as what drives both. Then, we sought to present the data, along with some conclusions drawn from it and recommendations as to how the modern call center can take advantage of that data to improve operations, allocate resources and prioritize initiatives.

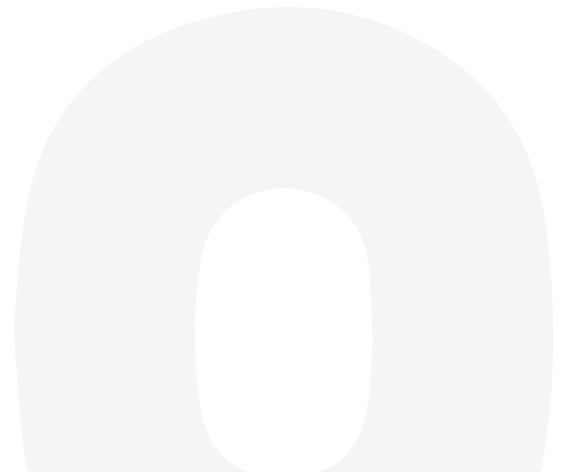
Survey respondents were 53% male and 47% female, all employed full time and all within the United States.

The survey questions comprised three main sections:

- Key drivers of positive and negative call center experiences
- How and when customers share positive and negative call center experiences
- Customer channel preferences and the drivers thereof

The Spoken 2015 Call Center Report looks to discern how customers view our efforts to improve the customer experience within the call center and make recommendations to align call center initiatives with customer expectations.

As the call center modernizes, customer expectations and preferences will continue to evolve. And we're excited to be part of this exciting industry. If you haven't already taken advantage of the Spoken Call Center as a Service platform, we invite you to join our community and help us innovate even further. If you're already a call center aficionado, be proud—you're helping to transform the customer experience through your work.



PART 1: KEY DRIVERS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Takeaway #1: Agent empowerment drives positive customer experience

In the world of contact centers, metrics are rigorously applied to measure the length of the call, the success of the call, the efficiency of the agent and the overall customer experience. However, the metrics that call center managers apply to evaluate success are often quite dissimilar to the metrics customers would use to rate interactions. How often do our customers rate call center interactions as positive, and why?

Top Discoveries:

- 48% of customers report positive call center experiences
- The top factor for a positive experience (70%) is the agent's ability to resolve the issue

In the Spoken 2015 Call Center Survey, we asked customers how often they had a positive experience when contacting a call center for service or support. And while the public at large often enjoys complaining about call center service, the survey revealed that 48% of respondents reported having a positive experience with call centers always or most of the time. Overall, nearly half the time, customers do walk away fairly happy from their call center experiences.

Delving deeper, when asked to rank factors contributing to a positive call center experience, 70% of respondents ranked the agent's ability to resolve the issue in the

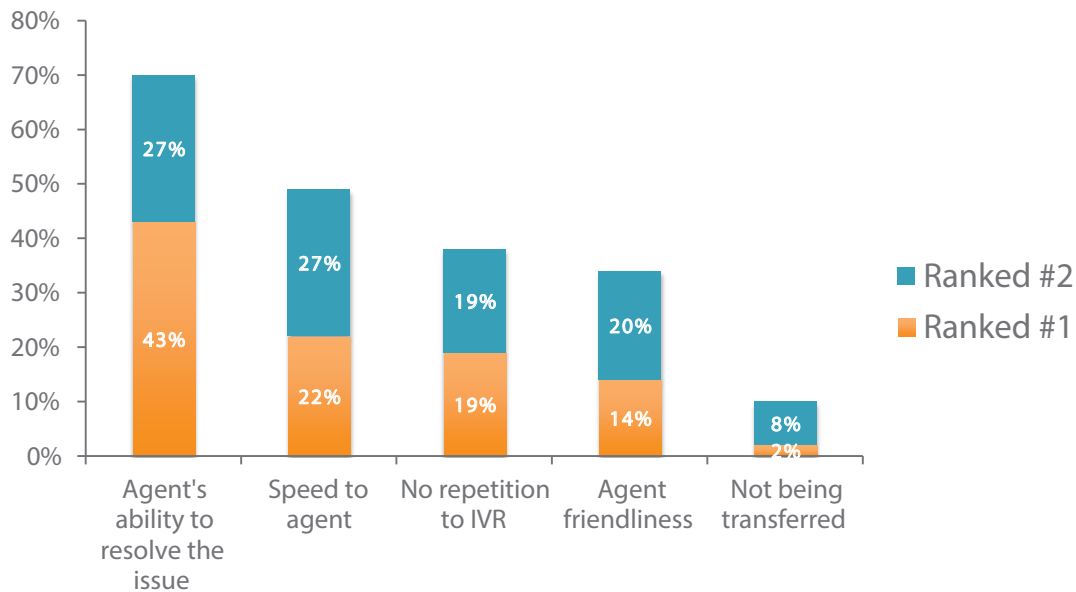
top two factors affecting their satisfaction with the call. Speed to agent, something that is often measured with the call center metric Speed of Answer, came in second, with 22% of respondents ranking it first and 27% ranking it second in importance. A smooth Interactive Voice Response (IVR) experience came in third, with 19% of respondents ranking it first and another 19% ranking it second. Agent friendliness (14% ranking first and 20% ranking second) and avoiding transfers (2% ranking first and 8% ranking second) brought up the rear.

The responses confirmed a key tenet for call center executives: the front line agents are the most valuable tools in the enterprise toolbox for an amazing customer experience. Technology is best used to assist in the process, but for great results, customers are rather pragmatic. They want agents who are empowered to solve the issue rather than reading from a script or transferring to a supervisor. In short, the best way to ensure a positive customer experience is to train, reward and empower agents to solve customer issues. The agent's empowerment ranked even higher than speed of response, an indication that customers might be willing for the call to take a bit longer, as long as the end result is issue resolution.

Recommended Action Items:

- Develop a strong recruiting policy
- Devote substantial resources to training and coaching
- Empower agents for success

Top reasons for a positive call center experience



Takeaway #2: Improve IVR and CTI to reduce negative experiences

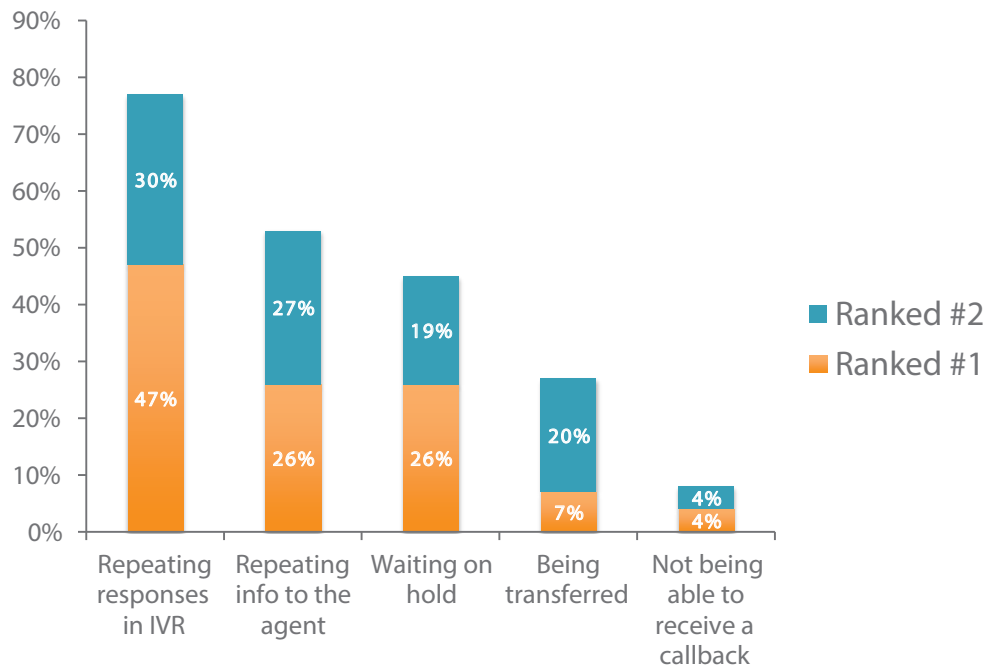
With 52% of respondents reporting negative call center experiences, it's important to also reveal areas for improvement in the call center process. Respondents were asked to rank which of five factors most commonly created a negative call center experience. The goal was to determine which factors have the biggest impact on the caller experience and make general recommendations for improvement. Factors relating to IVR and computer-telephony integration (CTI) topped the list.

Top Discoveries:

- 77% of customers rank bad IVRs as the top contributor to a negative experience
- 53% of customers rank repeating information to the agent as a top contributor to a negative experience

Not surprisingly, 77% of respondents ranked "repeating responses to the IVR" as the first or second most important factor in creating a negative call center experience. The next most important factor is also IVR-related: "repeating information to the agent already given to the IVR." A combined 53% of respondents ranked that factor in the top two, with 26% rating it first and 27% rating it second. Interestingly, waiting on hold, something that most call centers work diligently to measure and avoid, came in third overall, with a combined 35% ranking it within the top two factors for a negative experience.

Reasons for a negative call center experience



From this data, one can conclude that while the key factor for a positive customer experience lies with the agents, the key factors for a negative experience lie with the technology.

An overwhelming portion of respondents reported time-consuming experiences with the IVR, an issue that can easily be addressed with frequent design reviews as well as some recent technological advancements. Call centers should set up frequent reviews of the IVR call flow in order to target opportunities to provide a smoother caller experience. Additionally, it's wise to test new Automated Speech Recognition (ASR) engines with new call flows to ensure the highest level of automated speech recognition for callers, which can reduce the need for callers to repeat responses. Finally, consider using a tool that compensates for ASR inaccuracies and avoids the need for callers to repeat responses.

Regarding the need to repeat information to the agent already given to the IVR, it is apparent that many call centers have yet to invest in computer-telephony integration (CTI) in order to collect and digitize the voice

responses recorded by the IVR and then populate the agent's screen with the gathered information. Most call centers ignore CTI because it can be complicated to implement, depending upon the systems used. However, this survey reveals that implementing a solid CTI strategy can improve a key factor in customers' negative call center experiences, possibly setting your call center above that of your competition.

In conclusion, while agents are the key factor in providing a positive experience, survey respondents announce loud and clear that the factors contributing to a negative call center experience lie with the technology. Improving your technology can reduce negative experiences and even improve the bottom line.

Recommended Action Items:

- Implement twice yearly IVR call flow reviews
- Test new ASRs with current call flows
- Consider tools that can improve ASR accuracy
- Develop a CTI plan with agent screen pops

PART 2: HOW CUSTOMERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

Takeaway #3: Unhappy customers are more likely to share their experiences publicly

After exploring the factors contributing to both positive and negative call center experiences, the next step is to analyze how customers share information related to those experiences: how will the customer experience affect the brand image?

In the past, if customers had complaints about service, they might send a letter or an email, both private forms of communication. However, in the age of social media, it's important to be aware of all the channels for customer feedback, both public and private, in order to gain an awareness of how your public brand can be affected by a private call center experience.

Top Discoveries:

- 78% of customers will share a positive experience with others, while 91% will share a negative one
- 50% will share a negative experience on social media, but only 32% will share a positive one

Sharing Positive Experiences

In the Spoken 2015 Call Center Survey, we asked customers how often they told others about a positive experience with a call center. Seventy-eight percent (78%) gave a yes answer, including always and sometimes. When asked how they tell others about a positive call center experience, 97% reported doing so via random conversation, including phone calls, text messages, emails and in-person interactions, all of which were private. As

for public sharing, 18% reported also sharing through Facebook; 8% through blogging or online comments and 5% through Twitter.

Despite the growing prevalence and participation in social media, most satisfied customers will only share their positive anecdotes and recommendations in an untrackable, private format. However, 32% overall positive sharing via social media is not an insignificant number. Positive experiences shared on social media can provide rich and valuable opportunities for brand amplification through online engagement, sharing and brand ambassador programs. We recommend implementing basic social media monitoring and establishing a policy for engagement via social media.

Sharing Negative Experiences

The old adage states that satisfied customers tell three friends, while unsatisfied customers tell 3,000 friends. While it's a bit of an exaggeration, this call center survey does bear out that truism of customer behavior: customers are more likely to share a negative experience than a positive one. Additionally, they are more likely to share the negative experience publicly via social media.

While 78% of respondents reported a proclivity to share a positive experience, 91% reported the likelihood of sharing a negative call center experience. As with sharing a positive experience, 97% reported doing so in private, through random conversation. However, we saw an increase in the likelihood of sharing negative experiences via social media in comparison to positive experiences: while 32% of respondents reported they would share

their positive experiences on social channels, a full 50% of respondents reported they would share their negative experiences publicly on social media. The most popular platform for social sharing was Facebook at 25%, followed by blogging/online comments at 12% and Twitter at 10%.

It's notable that when the call center experience was negative rather than positive, the propensity to share publicly through social media channels increased from 32% to 50%. As mentioned above, we recommend implementing a system of social media monitoring, including mentions of your own brand as well as those of your competitors and industry keywords. Likewise, establishing a team to create and implement an engagement policy on targeted social media channels is a key best practice for both taking advantage of positive mentions and addressing negative ones quickly.

Recommended Action Items:

- Track brand mentions, competitor mentions and keywords across social channels
- Establish a response team
- Craft and implement a social media response strategy to acknowledge brand ambassadors and address negative content



PART 3: CUSTOMER CHANNEL PREFERENCES

Takeaway #4: Traditional channels still dominate the call center

With the rise of alternate communication channels, call centers are increasingly expected to participate fully and consistently across all possible channels, including phone, email, chat, web, SMS, mobile apps and social media. Whether it's called omnichannel, multichannel or cross channel, the question remains: which channels do organizations need to engage in? And to add another layer of complexity, "social media" encompasses a plethora of platforms, with the two most popular being Facebook and Twitter, but not to the exclusion of blogs, Google+, Pinterest, Instagram, forums and review sites such as Yelp! and Amazon. And while some organizations have excelled at providing customer service on some of these social platforms, there remains a question as to the portion of resources that should be allotted to each of these channels.

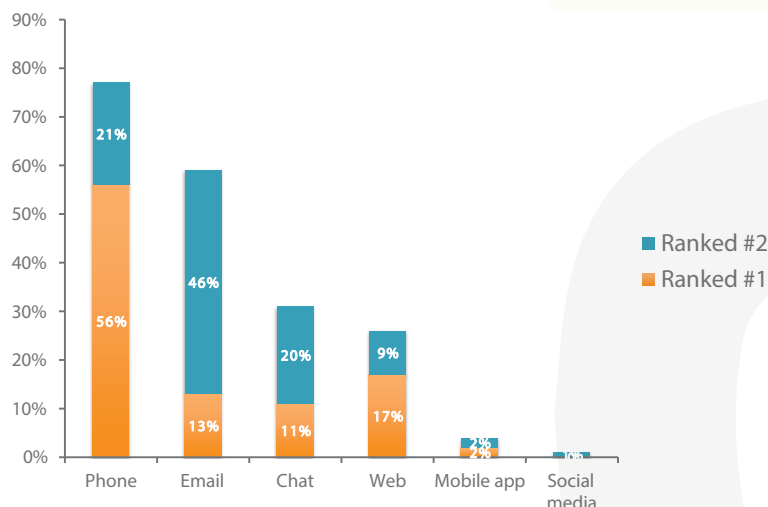
Top Discoveries:

- 77% of customers rank phone as their first or second channel choice
- 59% of customers rank email as their first or second channel choice

Top two channels

The survey asked respondents to rank six channels in order of their preference: phone, email, chat, web, mobile app and social media. As has been reported by a series of other studies, our Spoken 2015 Call Center Survey revealed that the phone still holds the lion's share in terms of customer channel preference, with 77% of respondents ranking it within their top two channel choices (56% ranked first; 21% ranked second). A close second was the email contingency, with 59% ranking in the top two (13% ranked first; 46% ranked second). Chat was a distant third, with 31% ranking it within their top two channel choices, and mobile apps and social media barely registered, at 4% and 1%, respectively.

What is the first channel you prefer to use for customer service? Rank the following.



Phone and email clearly still dominate in terms of customer preference. It's notable that mobile apps and social media, all the rage in customer service webinars, ranked as the top two channels less than 5% of the time. In fact, 49% of respondents ranked the mobile app as their last choice of the six channels, and 37% ranked social media as their channel of last resort.

Therefore, it's important to remember that in a multi-channel call center, not all channels are created equal, nor should they require equal allotment of resources. Since the majority of customers still prefer the phone and email, call centers are wise to allot proportional resources to address phone and email inquiries, while still appropriately maintaining the remaining multiple channel services.

Recommended Action Items:

- Allot resources to ensure full and robust phone and email coverage
- Support additional channels proportionate to their traffic

Takeaway #5: Customer preference dominates first channel choice

Many surveys have indicated that phone is the first choice for call center contact, but there is more to understanding this data point: what are the factors that drive customer channel preference? How do convenience, interaction type (typing vs. talking) and proximity of device (phone vs. smartphone vs. computer) affect channel preferences?

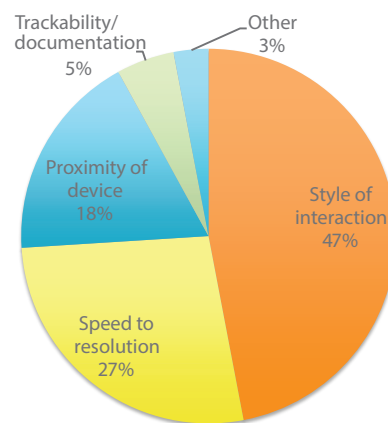
Top Discoveries:

- Personal preference for the style of interaction clearly drives first channel choice
- Proximity of device drives third channel choice
- Users perceive their first and second channel choices as more effective than their third channel choice

Drivers of First Channel Choice

When asked why respondents selected a channel as their first choice, the responses focused heavily on personal preference rather than more practical factors of speed or convenience. In fact, the number one reason given (by 47% of respondents) was that the channel was the customer's preferred style of interaction. At a moderate second place, 27% of respondents cited speed to resolution as the reason for selecting the channel. Interestingly, only 18% mentioned proximity of device as the reason for the channel, which has in the past been given as a reason for using, for example, a mobile app. That is, the logic assumed that since customers are always using their mobile phones, they will naturally be inclined to use a mobile app. Our data doesn't bear that out, citing instead customer channel preference as the key driver of first channel selection.

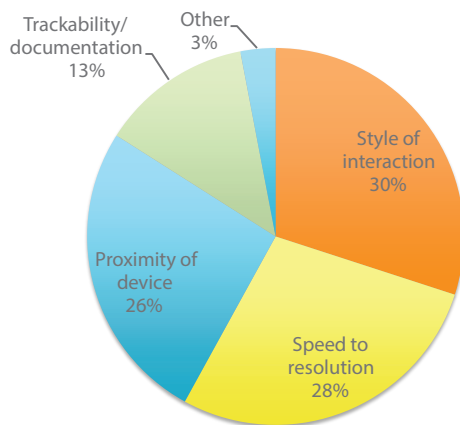
Reason for first choice channel



Drivers of Second Channel Choice

However, when asked specifically about their second channel choice and the reason for preferring it, respondents offered a broader variety of responses. While the first choice channel was strongly guided by customer preference, the second choice channel saw a fairly close tie in terms of motivators: 30% cited the type of interaction as a preference, 28% cited speed to resolution as the motivator, and 26% cited proximity of device.

Reason for second choice channel



When a customer uses a second-choice channel, the motivation isn't as clear as the first-channel preference. Customers might be resorting to email, for example, because they believe it will get a faster response, because they prefer to type their inquiry or because they were already at the computer. Conversely, customers might select phone as a second choice because they believe a live person will get a speedier resolution, because they would rather interrupt their day and get a response right away or because they've already made several calls that day, and adding another seems most effective.

Third Channel Preference

When we get as deep as the third channel, interesting information comes to light. At this point, proximity of device is the clear winner, with 36% of respondents indicating that the closest device will determine the channel they use after depleting their top two choices.

When we drill down to the third channel, responses indicate a correlation between channel choice and perception of the effectiveness that channel offers. With the third channel, only 25% of respondents indicated that that channel was helpful in resolving the issue most of the time.

The conclusion: customers perceive their first and second choice channels as more effective than their third choice channel. It's recommended that call center operators be aware of their customers' channel preferences and provide a consistent experience across all preferred channels.

Recommended Action Items:

- Align your call center resources with top customer channel preferences
- Avoid forcing customers into a channel that isn't their first preference, as they will perceive it as being less effective

Takeaway #6: Channel preference drives brand loyalty

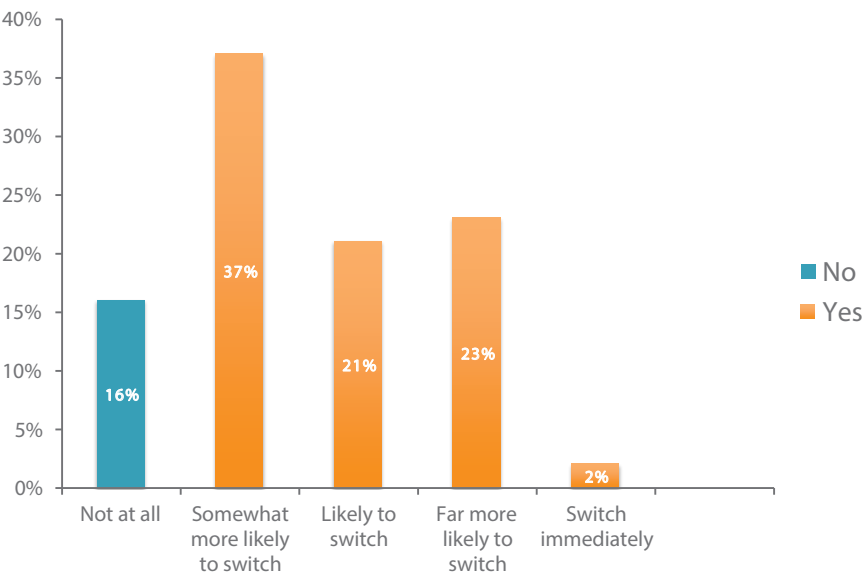
Knowing that the majority of customers prefer phone and email channels and that they select those channels based on personal preference rather than expectation of results or proximity of device, one final input remains. In our Spoken 2015 Call Center Survey, we asked respondents what would happen if an organization didn't fully support their top two preferred channels.

Top Discoveries:

- 83% of customers become more likely to switch service if their preferred channel isn't supported

When asked how loyalty was affected if a company doesn't offer support via one or more of their preferred channels, respondents indicated an increased likelihood of leaving the brand. A full 83% of respondents reported they would switch service immediately or be far more likely, likely or somewhat more likely to switch service to another provider if their preferred channel wasn't supported. The full breakdown: while just 2% reported being far more likely to switch service; 37% reported being somewhat more likely to switch, and 21% reported being likely to switch. Only 16% reported no likelihood of switching service due to lack of support for their channels of preference.

If a company doesn't offer support via one of your preferred channels, how is your loyalty affected?



This data represents a clear link between the availability of customer-preferred channels and customer loyalty. We recommend that call center operators collect data to determine the top three channel preferences of their customers and allocate ample resources to support those channels in order to provide a seamless, consistent experience across channels.

Recommended Action Items:

- Align your call center resources with top customer channel preferences to retain customer loyalty

CONCLUSION

The goal of this report was to provide and analyze data to help organizations prioritize initiatives in order to more closely align the call center's operations with customer expectations. And there is good news for all departments.

Since the key factor for a positive customer experience lies with the agents, extra training can be justified. And since the key factor for a negative customer experience lies with the technology, IT departments can rejoice in justifications for additional funding for IVR and CTI review and improvement initiatives. Since it's more common for customers to share negative experiences publicly, marketing and social media teams have a need for expanded resources to track and engage with customers online. And while multichannel is a growing trend, the vast majority of customers still prefer the good, old-fashioned telephone, so those who have invested heavily in telephony infrastructure can rest easy. That being said, for those customers who don't prefer the telephone, an overwhelming majority will take their loyalty elsewhere if their preferred channels aren't supported, so it's wise to allot resources to at least minimally support the key channels.

About Spoken

Spoken Communications, founded in 2005 and incorporated as Intellisist®, Inc., is a provider of a leading cloud platform for contact center outsourcers. The Spoken platform supports cost productivity, enables big data streams and extends a flexible integration model to replace, extend or integrate with any legacy infrastructure and software. Currently supporting over 40 million contact center minutes per month, Spoken delivers operational efficiency to the contact center and is a proven leader for a superior customer experience. For more information visit www.spoken.com

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