



PERFORMANCE INDEX

# Transforming the Digital Customer Service Experience within the Enterprise

How Leading B2C Brands Can Scale Economically while Delivering  
a Great CX with Asynchronous Messaging and Automation



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# Welcome

Thank you for downloading the 2019 Q1 Helpshift Performance Index. We're excited to release these insights to the wider market — and on a personal note, it is so validating as a CEO to see our customers setting such a high bar for digital customer service standards. As you'll read about in this report, in the past year since we've released our AI and bot capabilities, some of our largest customers are already achieving greater than 50 percent automation within their service organizations.

**That means 50 percent of inquiries are being handled either in full or partially by automated workflows. Astonishing.**

That level of automation might seem shocking, but we strongly believe (and are betting heavily on the fact) that automation is an inevitability for the enterprise when it comes to the future of customer service.

So how do you get started preparing your support organization for this future? It starts by evaluating where you are today. If you are a customer service professional looking to level up your organization, it's important to know where your team falls on the spectrum.

I hope you find this report useful. We'd love to hear from you about your 2019 goals, and discuss how we can help you achieve them.

Happy reading,

**Linda Crawford**

CEO, Helpshift

*Linda Crawford*



Ready to transform your digital customer service? [Learn how.](#)

# Executive Summary

Customer service innovators understand that B2C brands need to offer a great user experience throughout the customer journey (including post-sale) in order to stand out in the minds of their customers in a positive way.

This can be an expensive endeavor. It might mean hiring scores of new agents so that customers never have to wait on hold. Or it might mean staffing follow-the-sun models to expand business hours.

What our data shows, however, is that brands are using digital customer service in order to circumnavigate some of these costs without compromising their user experience. The key here being that they are solely offering or at least prioritizing digital service.

We parsed our data in order to solidify benchmarks for brands that are already using digital channels. This is intended to measure impact across these digital channels (web forms, email, live chat, asynchronous messaging), and potential KPIs to strive for within each.

# Methodology & Terminology

The Helpshift Performance Index is a biannual benchmarking report using anonymized and aggregated internal data.

## Data Set

Trends and benchmarking insights were formulated based off of an analysis of roughly eight million customer tickets filed within a given 30 day period in 2018, from companies spanning the following industries: gaming, retail, finance, and technology. Companies included in the report have a minimum of 10,000 tickets submitted monthly.

## Top/High Performers

We have identified high performers as the brands that are achieving the highest KPIs within each category.

## Channels

In this report, we explore four primary channels that our customers are using: email, web forms, live chat and asynchronous messaging.

## A Note on Terminology

\*\*It is important to note the difference between live chat and asynchronous messaging in this context. Live chat indicates a window in a web browser where customers have real-time conversations with brands that are session-based. Asynchronous messaging, sometimes referred to as messaging in this report, indicates a mobile in-app or web-based conversation, similar to iMessage or WhatsApp, that may or may not happen in real time. This type of conversation is not session-based and can continue over longer stretches of time without losing the conversation history.

Both live chat and asynchronous messaging have a dynamic, interactive interface (as opposed to an email interface used primarily for one-off communication), but customer expectations and operations vary significantly between chat and messaging.

# Key Insights

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## **Prioritizing a conversational dialogue matters, especially on mobile.**

Brands see higher customer satisfaction ratings for asynchronous messaging-based conversations as opposed to live chat, email or web-form based communication. This reflects an improved customer experience, especially when taking into account lower CSAT for email tickets as opposed to messaging tickets. Within messaging, top performers stand out as the only subset achieving greater than 4.5 star ratings.

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## **Brands can automate significantly with bots without compromising the customer experience.**

Brands that automate customer service operations (>50 percent automation) maintain high CSAT, while also making their operations more efficient.

This is only applicable to messaging and live channels that can utilize bot-based automation (unlike email tickets and web forms.) Additionally, brands that use self-service tools in tandem, such as easy-to-search FAQs, Answer Bot — a bot that suggests relevant knowledge articles — and automated workflows powered by bots achieve the strongest KPIs.

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## **Agent productivity can be improved by bots within live chat and asynchronous messaging.**

Bots significantly reduce the number of average agent-sent messages per interaction within live chat and asynchronous messaging. When bots are used, the initial response time is almost immediate, but the time to resolution is also majorly reduced. This indicates that agents are able to work on more issues within a given period of time signaling an increase in productivity.

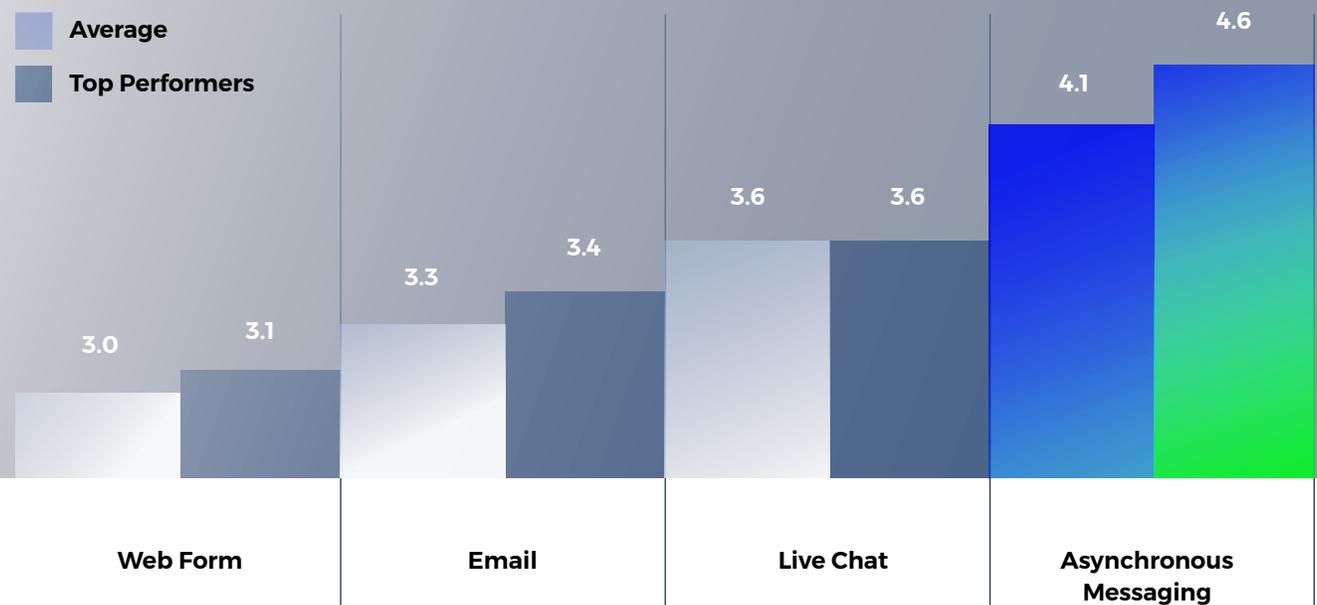
# Benchmarks For B2C Enterprises

## Section 1: CSAT variations across channels

CSAT (1-5 star rating with 5 being the highest)

- The following graph displays the range for CSAT by channel (web form, email, live chat, asynchronous messaging) along with high performers in each.
- Asynchronous messaging has the highest CSAT overall at 4.1, a full point higher (37 percent) than the lowest performing channel: web form.
- Top performers stand out in asynchronous messaging at 4.6, 28 percent higher than the next closest channel: live chat.

Average CSAT



## Section 2: Email vs. Messaging KPIs

Email and messaging are both asynchronous channels in that they do not set an expectation of live support. However, messaging involves an ongoing conversation between the brand and customer, whereas email involves static one-off responses from one party to another. The benchmark data below compares CSAT, time to first response and time to resolve between these two channels to provide insight into these asynchronous interfaces and how they stack up.

### CSAT Rating

- The following graphs display the range of CSAT for asynchronous messaging and email channels, along with high performers in each category.
- Top performers in messaging averaged 35 percent higher CSAT than top performers in email.
- The overall average for CSAT for messaging is significantly higher than email.

#### Asynchronous Messaging:

■ Average top performers: 4.6 stars

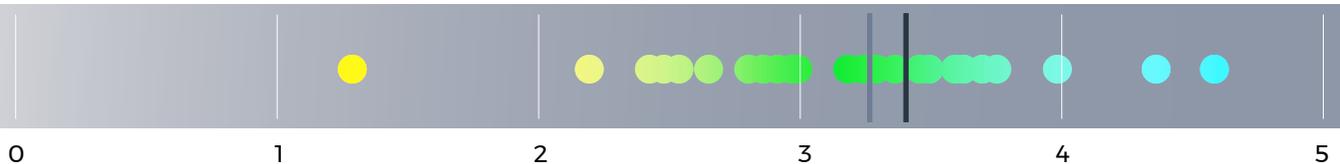
■ Average all: 4.1 stars



#### Email:

■ Average top performers: 3.4 stars

■ Average all: 3.3 stars



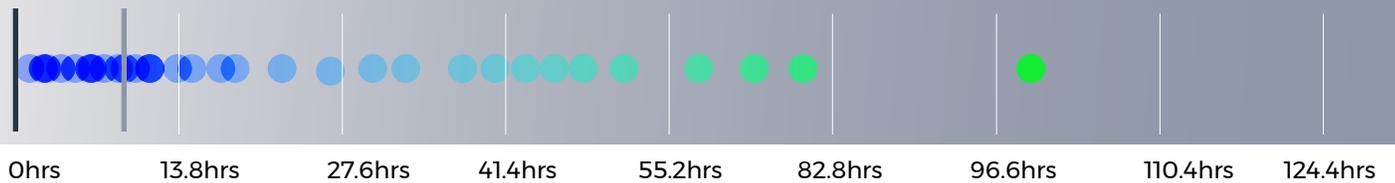
## Time to First Response

- The following graphs display the range of time to first response for asynchronous messaging and email channels, along with high performers in each category.
- High performers in messaging are able to achieve close to immediate response times because they are using bots to collect information instantly.
- The overall median for time to first response for messaging is significantly faster than email.

### Asynchronous Messaging:

■ Median top performers: 30 seconds

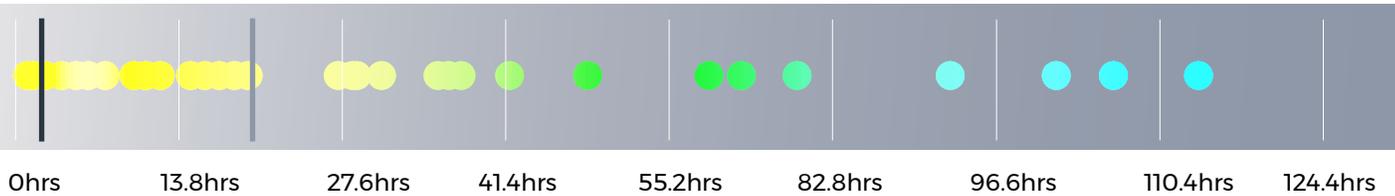
■ Median all: 7.9 hours



### Email:

■ Median top performers: 2.6 hours

■ Median all: 17.8 hours



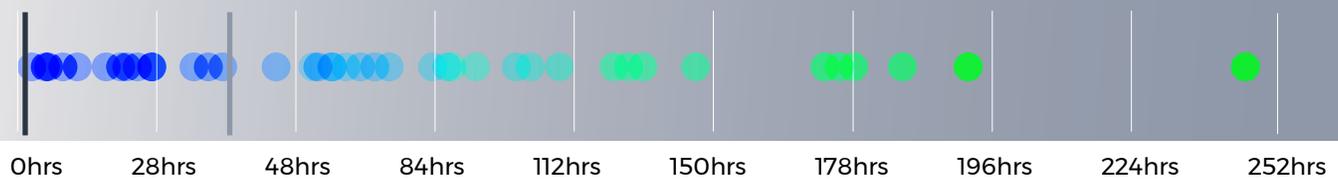
## Time to Resolve

- The following graphs display the range of time to resolve for asynchronous messaging and email channels, along with high performers in each category.
- High performers in messaging use bots to collect information throughout the issue resolution process and are able to resolve issues in under one hour.
- The overall median for time to first response for messaging is significantly faster than email.

### Asynchronous Messaging:

■ Median top performers: 47 minutes

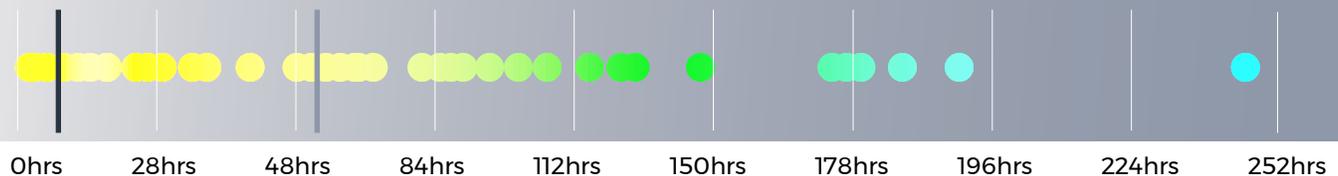
■ Median all: 37 hours



### Email:

■ Median top performers: 9.4 hours

■ Median all: 50.9 hours



## Section 3: When Messaging, Bots and Agents Work Together

We took a closer look at the impact of automation for brands using bots and AI in retail, gaming, and entertainment.

### Brand Characteristics:

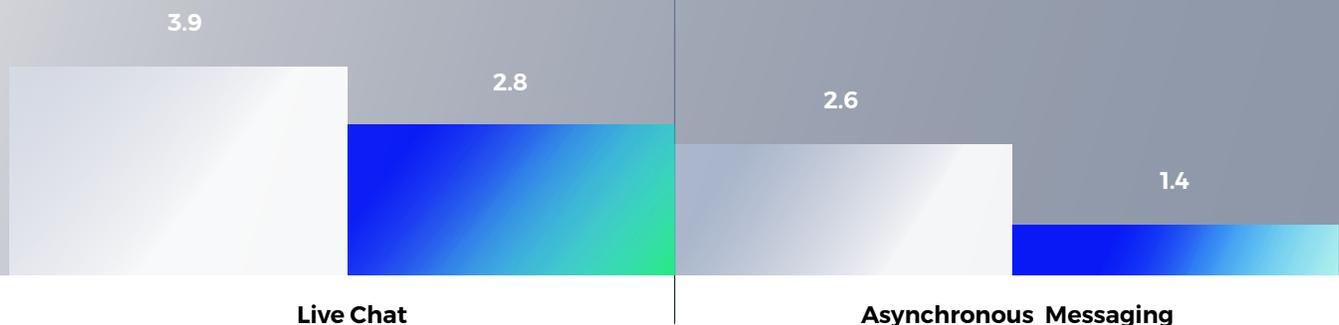
- Bots and AI integrated throughout both backend operations and frontend customer journey.
- Tickets segmented based on urgency and customer profiles.
- Majority of customer service ticket volume directed towards a messaging channel.

### Bot Impact on Agent Workload:

- The following chart shows the average number of outbound agent interactions per ticket.
- Bots reduced the number of average outbound interactions by 47 percent for messaging and by 28 percent for live chat.
- When using bots, agents are able to resolve tickets with 50 percent fewer messages in messaging vs. live chat.

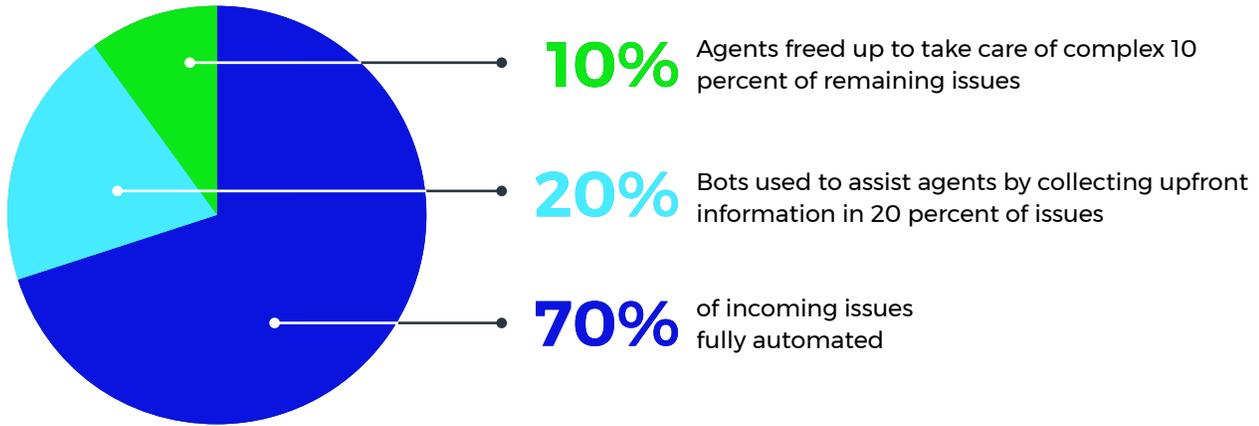
Average Agent Outbound Messages / Case

Without Bot Automations  
With Bot Automations



## Industry Focus: Gaming

### Issue Automation Breakdown



### Results from automation:

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**CSAT** unaffected despite 90 percent tickets automated in some capacity

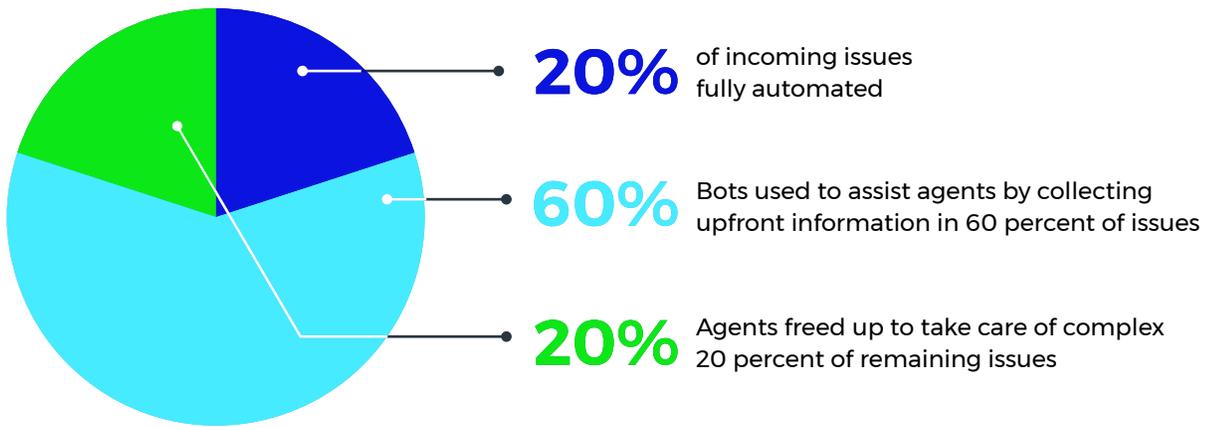
**Time to resolution** for issues involving bots and agents improved by 50 percent

Free players receive an **instant response** from bots instead of waiting up to 10 hours for an agent

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## Industry Focus: Entertainment

### Issue Automation Breakdown



### Results from automation

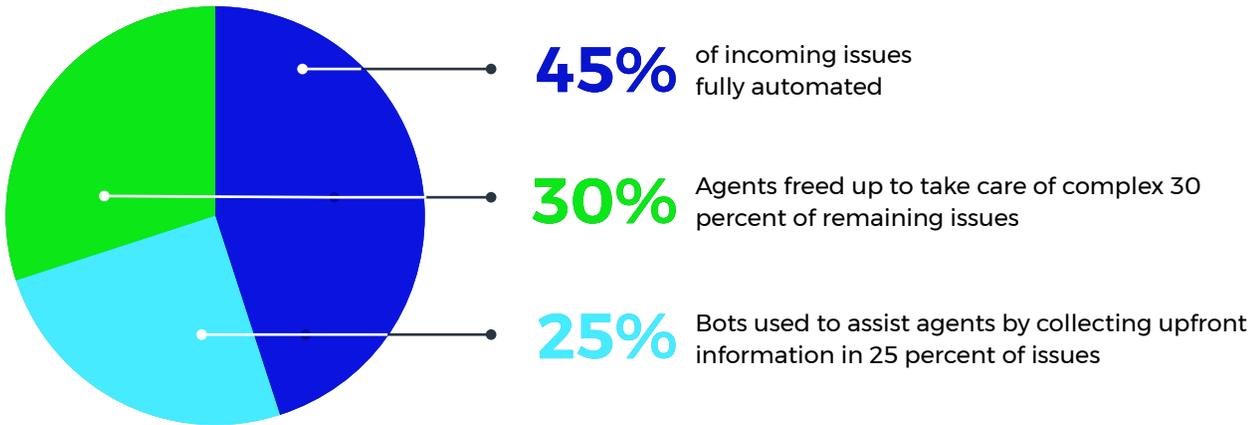
**CSAT** has improved by one point for issues that involve bots and agents

**Time to resolution** for issues that involve bots and agents has been reduced by 25-50 percent

Customers receive an **instant response** from bots instead of waiting 12 minutes for an agent

## Industry Focus: Retail

### Issue Automation Breakdown



### Results they're seeing:

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**CSAT** maintained for issues that involve bots and agents

Agents and bots combined are able to handle twice the amount of tickets within a given time period

Customers receive an **instant response** from bots instead of waiting 18 hours for an agent

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# Big Picture Trends

A holistic view of the customer service landscape today shows that brands need to leverage new automation technologies to strike a balance between service that improves CSAT while also enabling efficient ticket resolution and other positive KPIs. The most efficient channel for achieving both goals is asynchronous messaging.

By using automation bots, and AI-powered routing, customer service teams can improve their experience on the customer-facing side as well as optimize on the backend. With this in mind, these are the top trends that customer service leaders need to pay attention to in 2019:



## 1. Asynchronous Messaging is changing the game

Asynchronous communication describes the ability to have a fluid and ongoing conversation that is not dependent on immediate responses.

Unlike live chat, which sets expectations for instantaneous responses and resolution, messaging allows for more fluid dialogue exchanges. Consumers today are accustomed to using messaging both for synchronous communication (real-time) and asynchronous communication (time-lapsed). Much of our daily communication is asynchronous: we respond to a group text after getting home from work or we answer Slack messages after finishing an important project. Messaging allows consumers to do the same with customer service: they can move fluidly between engaging in real-time, and exiting the conversation until they are pulled back in with a push or email notification. This model follows the same structure as iMessage, WeChat, or any other messaging platform that customers are familiar with using in their daily lives.

Because messaging provides a channel for ongoing communication, customers aren't chained to the chat interface or left hanging if they don't receive an immediate response. Just as you can exit an iMessage conversation for two hours, then come back, read what you missed, and respond, you can do the same with customer service messaging. Conversely, customers can also have real-time interactions, either with bots or with agents via a messaging interface.

By allowing for a fluid transition between live messaging and asynchronous messaging, this interface offers the best of email, phone, and live chat combined – both on the agent side and on the customer side.

## 2. Frustration-free automation is key

Customers have a high degree of acceptance for automation — the caveat being that it shouldn't make them feel *trapped*. This means that any automation must also include escape hatches for customers to interact with an agent. Today's digitally savvy customers typically know if they can self-serve or if they require additional assistance. Customer service interfaces need to allow customers to make this decision themselves.

What does this look like? Well, imagine that a customer commences a conversation via in-app messaging saying "My order never arrived." An AI engine can first distill that this is an order/delivery issue and classify it as such. The issue then can be routed to a bot that picks up the work flow from there, and the bot instantly replies with a request for the customer to choose from or confirm which order they are referring to by entering their order number. Once the customer completes this action, the bot provides a link to UPS tracking for the order. For some customers, this is sufficient and they can go on about their day.

However, there may be some customers that already tracked the order and had additional problems with delivery.

This issue requires more than just an automation bot; the customer needs to interact with an agent. Rather than forcing the customer to spend time circumnavigating the system to reach an agent, the bot can offer an option to interact with an agent and hand off the customer in a timely fashion.

This escape hatch accomplishes two things: it gives the customer a simple route for bypassing the bot, but it also gives the agent some initial information about the customer (description of the issue and order number) so that the agent can dive right into solving the problem. This leads us into the next trend...

### 3. Agent productivity will reach new levels with messaging + automation

One of the most important features of these new digital customer service trends is that agents can now work concurrently on multiple issues at once. By leveraging messaging and intelligent automation, a single agent can work on three or more conversations at once — as compared to the 1-2 conversations that agents can have at one time with live chat.

This is largely because automation and bots allow agents to seamlessly enter conversations and hand them off to bots. For example, in the scenario described above where a customer moved from a bot to an agent for a delivery issue, the conversation could end up moving back to a bot for further information collection, CSAT collection, or a knowledge base article suggestion. Automation allows customer service teams to create their own workflows built around frequently asked questions and common ticket use cases, in order to optimize the time that agents spend actually inside of conversations.

Additionally, as we mentioned previously, messaging does not promote an expectation of immediate responses — particularly if your team chooses to leverage push notifications or a bot that tells customers when they can expect a response. This allows agents to work on multiple conversations at once without the pressure of responding immediately.

# Leveling Up & Redefining Your Digital Strategy

Perhaps you are just starting to build out your digital-first customer service strategy, or you are already beginning to use automation bots and workflows to push your service organizations into the major leagues. No matter where you are today, there is always room to level up.

In a rapidly evolving communication ecosystem, it's important to regularly assess how satisfactory your service is — both for your customers and for your team. Whereas ten years ago, simply having email-based support put one at the forefront of customer service, today's consumers expect messaging-based self-service, asynchronous communication options, and an overall seamless customer journey.

Likewise, service teams face pressure to reduce costs, and they can do so by implementing automation, intelligent routing, and efficient workflows. Here's how to redefine your customer service strategy to meet these needs:

## Step 1: Justifying digital to stakeholders

As previously demonstrated, investing in digital strategies — from frustration-free automation, to asynchronous messaging — can result in a substantial increase in CSAT, and greater operational efficiency overall. Provide these benchmarks as a starting point to justify investment in automation bots and messaging to stakeholders.

One of the most salient results of automation is the ability to scale without drastically adding headcount. By using automation bots to collect information and help customers self-serve, agents have far more capacity to tackle remaining tickets in a timely fashion. By maximizing agent time and capacity, you make the most out of your biggest investment: the people you hire.

After you've justified this initial investment, it's time to put these digital tools to work.

## Step 2: Feature adoption

It should go without saying at this point that if you're still using phone or email as primary your support channels to handle more than 10,000 tickets a month, it's time to move to messaging.

Yet in 2019, making this move to messaging-based support is table stakes only: customer service leaders need to embrace asynchronous messaging augmented by automation to get ahead. That being said, the must-have features to adopt are:

**AI-powered answer bot to supplement a well-fleshed out knowledge base:**

By having a bot suggest relevant knowledge articles, customers receive immediate responses and are often able to self-serve, reducing agent backlog in the process.

**Automation bots to collect information and automate workflows:**

Customizable, decision-tree based bots are able to respond to inquiries immediately, as well as collect and record user and issue information, and even resolve issues in certain categories. This also reduces backlog and allows agents to solve issues with fewer interactions.

**AI-powered issue classification to reduce transfers:**

This feature ensures that bots and agents are only assigned those tickets that are relevant to them. This reduces transferring between agents, and allows customers to be helped more efficiently.

The brands that see the greatest payoff for digital adoption leverage all three of these features to supplement their messaging-based service, thereby improving CSAT and increasing operational efficiency to the greatest degree.

### **Step 3: Workforce modifications**

As customer service leaders begin to implement automation throughout their service organization, they will also need to reconfigure their management processes to reflect this change. That means leveling up agents and adjusting their teams so that they are equipped to handle only complex inquiries, and empowering supervisors to act as automation managers who ensure that the desired customer service experience is still being achieved with bots. Increasingly technical backgrounds will be required for managers in order for them to adeptly supervise increasing levels of automation.

## **Additional Resources**

We want to be your partner in your pursuit of customer service excellence. Check out these additional resources to help get you to where you want to be.

[Cost Savings Calculator](#)

[2019 Customer Service Toolkit](#)

[Getting Started with Asynchronous Communication eBook](#)

[Free Trial with Helpshift](#)

# About Helpshift

Helpshift's next-generation digital customer service software enables B2C brands to scale their support while offering differentiated experiences through web, in-app, email, and messenger app channels. Helpshift's innovative asynchronous messaging model across these channels gives people back their time, keeps conversations in context, and allows humans and automations to work together to solve problems faster. The Helpshift platform embeds knowledge and AI to let customer service organizations best utilize a mix of automated service, self-service, and human-assisted service. Serving over 450 businesses worldwide, including Xfinity Home, Microsoft, Tencent and Supercell, Helpshift is headquartered in San Francisco, CA with offices around the globe.

**To learn more about Helpshift, visit [helpshift.com](https://helpshift.com) and follow @helpshift on Twitter.**