

# How machine learning will impact the customer experience

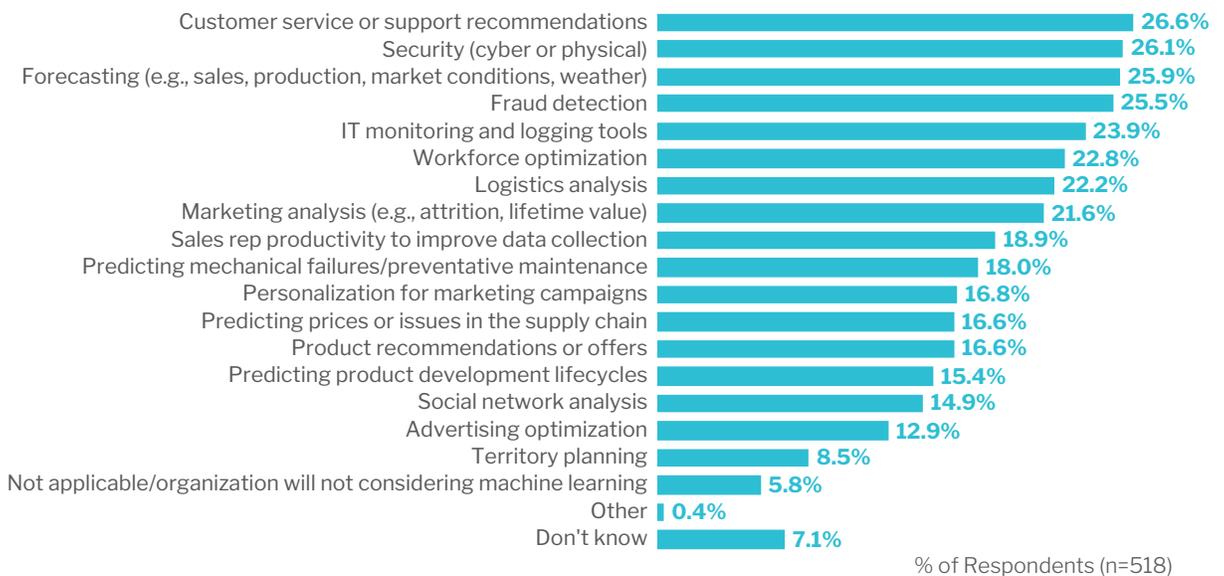
## The 451 Take

Customer experience is poised for an innovation revolution. Delivering relevant, personalized information to precisely the right people at the right time is a challenging project, made more so by the explosion in mobile devices, contact channels and customer demands. Perhaps no technology is more likely to upend the conventional service experience than machine learning (ML), which is the use of self-guiding algorithms to automate routine tasks and deliver predictive insights from large datasets. Machine learning has broad use cases in customer service and has the potential to align service delivery with sales and marketing efforts.

According to 451 Research's 2019 Voice of the Connected User Landscape, customer service and support recommendations is the top use case for potential machine learning deployments, selected by 27% of respondents as potentially of interest to their companies. There are at least four other ML use cases identified in the survey that can directly impact the customer experience, including using it to improve forecasting, to aid marketers in personalizing campaigns and performing analysis, optimizing workforce performance, and delivering relevant product recommendations or offers to customers when they call or visit websites.

### Reasons to Use Machine Learning

Source: 451 Research's 2019 Voice of the Connected User Landscape



ML will eventually branch into every aspect of business. Although we are just at the beginning of the process, and many businesses remain skeptical or unsure where they will benefit, it is clear that ML will, if implemented in the right places, improve productivity and provide a mechanism for streamlining the cumbersome processes that can degrade the customer experience.

The barriers to adoption are collapsing; new low/no-code platforms are emerging that leave the back-end development and operations management to the solution provider, which should make it easier for customer experience teams to implement ML based on the kinds of outcomes they want to pursue. ML is soon going to be embedded in the fabric of the customer experience, and not just be a shiny object.

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## Business Impact

With many possible use cases for ML on the table, the question for many companies is how to apply it where it can provide the strongest benefits with the least disruption. The trick is to determine what business practices can be automated and to pinpoint the most relevant and fruitful options.

The lowest-hanging fruit in a customer service setting is to use ML to analyze specific customer datasets, which could include everything from prior purchases, average spending and lifetime value to purchase intent. Access to this information in real time allows a service rep to assist customers and tailor solutions to meet their exact needs. One of the most effective emerging use cases is to augment knowledge management systems by organizing product information and surfacing insights that give agents awareness of what the next-best action to take might be, or to infer from previous data what a particular interaction might be about.

Another capability of ML is to drive more successful self-service, either by surfacing relevant information or by powering the next generation of virtual digital assistants that customers interact with on websites or mobile apps. And looking more broadly at the customer experience, marketers can leverage ML to orchestrate better interactions before they happen by using it to personalize the browsing or shopping experience to populate web pages and apps with recommendations targeted based on a deeper read of what customers want to see.

Businesses thinking about how ML will affect their futures should keep in mind three core ideas:

**LINE-OF BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS WILL ULTIMATELY SEE THE EFFECTS OF ML** without having to wrestle with the complex details or underlying science. It is most likely to come to market embedded into already existing solutions such as customer experience platforms or mobile analytics tools, so users should be evaluating it based on the outcomes it produces. Vendors are building it into products to augment existing features, making it somewhat easier to identify ROI from positive use cases.

**THE HYPE SURROUNDING ML IS JUSTIFIED** because it has the potential to reshape customer support and marketing business practices. The essential currency of the customer experience is timely and accurate data, which is often hard to find when it is needed. Machine learning applied to customer and corporate data makes the customer interaction process faster, more streamlined and smarter.

**ML DEPLOYMENTS WILL INVOLVE MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS ACROSS THE BUSINESS.** This can sometimes cause friction (when there is limited collaboration), or it can be a boon; much will depend on the approach each company takes. Because today's ML-enhanced applications are being built with low/no-code interfaces, almost anyone can operate the tools. New ML software lends itself to the less-technical user and will be baked into software out of the box. Growing awareness of this is likely behind the very broad array of use cases (cited in the survey above) that people express willingness to explore.

## Looking Ahead

The AI/machine learning revolution is already in full swing; companies that are hesitant to adopt will be unable to compete with the productivity of their contemporaries. The technology is advancing rapidly, moving in a direction that makes it relatively easy for buyers to pursue specific outcomes: deeper analytic insights, smarter process automation, or speedier response to customer questions with or without agent help, for example.

Solution providers across the technological spectrum are working to make ML easier to implement and less daunting to consider by making it as invisible to users as possible. And in the process, we expect that in addition to the use cases already cited, ML will unlock new ones that we cannot yet predict. For example, it will combine parts of the customer journey that are now siloed, pulling self-service, automated conversation, online commerce and live customer support into a more unified customer experience. In effect, it will allow for manipulation of the experience at the very smallest of scales, the individual customer.

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