



AI AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONTACT CENTER IN 2024



Today's consumers demand omnichannel engagement, immediate answers, and highly personalized interactions. But with contact centers facing pressure to optimize costs and efficiency, how can they meet these mounting customer demands?

The answer is artificial intelligence (AI) and automation. These technologies help contact centers deliver seamless, hyper-personalized experiences at scale – which is likely why an estimated **56% of businesses currently use AI for customer service.**¹ And with **67% of IT leaders planning to integrate AI into some or all of their processes by the end of 2024,**¹ businesses that fail to implement AI now risk falling behind their tech-savvy competitors.

In this white paper, we'll explore how contact centers have evolved, the AI trends shaping contact centers, and how to effectively leverage AI in contact centers.

HOW HAVE CONTACT CENTERS EVOLVED?

In the past, contact centers relied heavily on phone calls. While the phone remains an important channel, today's contact centers support multiple channels like chat, email, social media, and more. Omnichannel contact centers allow customers to switch between these channels seamlessly when interacting with brands.

The uptick in channels has led to an increase in customer inquiries, making automation more important than ever. AI capabilities now play a crucial role in contact centers, with chatbots handling routine inquiries and machine learning improving automated systems and call routing.

By automating repetitive tasks and customer inquiries, AI amplifies human capabilities, allowing agents to focus on building relationships, solving complex issues, and delivering hyper-personalized service.

TOP 8 AI CONTACT CENTER TRENDS FOR 2024

1. Blended AI and Human Support

With the right AI strategy, contact centers can deliver exceptional experiences customers have come to expect – at lower costs and with greater efficiency. Here are the top AI trends shaping contact centers this year:

AI chatbots and virtual assistants can now handle many inquiries that once required a human agent. These automated systems can field routine questions, process simple requests, and direct customers to the right self-service resources.

However, complex issues still demand human expertise, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving skills. Leading contact centers are taking a blended approach by using AI for high-volume repetitive tasks and routing complex conversations to appropriate agents for a consultative service experience.

2. Unified CXM and CCaaS

A 2022 survey found that **60% of customers say it feels like they're communicating with separate departments when seeking assistance from a company.**³ This typically occurs when businesses use multiple, disparate platforms to engage with customers, such as an on-premise phone system and third-party instant messaging service.

Contact center as a service (CCaaS) platforms are replacing on-premise systems with flexible cloud-based environments, providing all the features and channels contact centers need to connect with customers. Meanwhile, customer experience management (CXM) tools unify data from all communication channels into a single view of each customer. Together, CCaaS and CXM provide the foundation for consistent – yet highly personalized – service through all customer touchpoints.

3. Mobile-First Engagement

Mobile apps and messaging platforms are becoming the preferred channels for today's consumers. Contact centers that prioritize mobile communications can engage customers through their preferred channels while providing seamless

user experiences across devices.

AI helps stitch together contextual, personalized journeys that span mobile and web-based interactions. By offering AI-powered mobile service options, customers gain access to support whenever and wherever they need it – and contact center teams have visibility into each customer's interaction history to provide personalized, consistent support.

4. IoT and Proactive Service

The Internet of Things (IoT) enables proactive, predictive customer service, with smart home devices, wearables, connected cars, and more transmitting usage data in real time. By analyzing this data, contact centers can get ahead of problems, such as preemptively notifying customers if a device needs maintenance or automating services like reordering products. As more day-to-day devices interconnect, IoT data will be integral for contact centers to anticipate customers' needs before they even ask.

5. Automation at First Contact

More customers are on board with chatbots, with many preferring automation for simple tasks like **taking an order (41%), checking a status (32%), and changing an order (22%).**⁴

AI-powered chatbots can handle these repetitive low-complexity tasks upon first contact, freeing live agents to focus their specialized skills on addressing more complex issues. Intelligent automation at the first point of contact streamlines operations while routing each inquiry down the best resolution path.

6. Speech Analytics

Sophisticated speech analytics and natural language processing allow AI systems to analyze the intent and sentiment behind customer conversations. Based on the detected intent, these tools can instantly route the interaction – whether it's a call, instant message, or other communication channel – to agents with the right skills and knowledge to assist.

AI can also automatically tag and prioritize high-intent queries for urgent response. With intent tagging and moderation, customers are connected to the right agent from the conversation's outset for more efficient issue resolution.

7. Workflow Automation

AI-powered automation tools can handle tedious, repetitive tasks to increase operational efficiency. AI in software can automatically populate customer databases, process forms, schedule reminders, prepare reports, and more, enabling the contact center to complete routine duties with perfect accuracy 24/7. By running these administrative workflows behind the scenes, AI lets human agents focus on high-value customer-facing activities instead.

8. Real-Time Analytics

AI has opened up new possibilities for understanding customers by processing every interaction in real time. As customer conversations occur, AI can identify trends and emerging issues to enhance agent performance. Contact centers can also continuously improve processes through analytics-driven feedback loops. With real-time analytics, businesses can deliver hyper-personalized experiences fueled by AI-driven insights.

LEVERAGING AI TO FUTURE-PROOF YOUR CONTACT CENTER

Making strategic investments in AI and automation will future-proof the customer experience capabilities of any contact center. Here are four areas to focus on:

Expand Self-Service Capabilities

With 81% of consumers saying they want more self-service options and 95% of businesses reporting a rise in self-service requests,⁵ it's clear that people are ready to solve issues independently. Empower your customers to get quick answers through AI-enabled self-service options like:

- Chatbots for instant responses to common questions

- Community forums for peer knowledge sharing
- Customer portals to simplify account management
- Interactive voice response (IVR) to answer simple inquiries

By aiming to enhance your self-service capabilities so that at least half of all inquiries are resolved through self-service channels, you can cultivate happier customers – and reduce the costs of your contact center.

Implement a Hybrid Work Model

Remote work is set to help contact centers ease modern challenges such as high agent turnover and costly on-premise equipment. By building a flexible hybrid workforce, your business can source talent globally, scale up or down to meet demand, and reduce overhead costs with cloud-based solutions.

AI-powered cloud contact center platforms streamline hybrid work environments by unifying data, voice, digital channels, and administrative systems into one interface. Agents stay connected, engaged, and productive wherever they're located.

Automate Where Possible

Contact centers should seek out manual processes that can be enhanced or eliminated through intelligent automation. Some processes to consider implementing automation solutions include:

- **Administrative Workflows** - Back-office tasks can be automated with tools that replicate human workflows for administrative tasks. With Robotic Process Automation (RPA) software tackling repetitive work around the clock, human agents gain more time to focus on customer service.
- **Agent Assistance** - AI capabilities like contextual recommendations, real-time coaching, and automated next-best actions help agents solve complex issues and deliver personalized service for more impactful customer engagements.

Rethink Security Strategies

The more you can automate using AI and bots, the more efficient and productive your workers can become.

Distributed workforces and cloud adoption have forced contact centers to reevaluate their security strategies and policies. VPNs and multi-factor authentication should be required for all remote access, and training agents on security best practices remains essential.

However, AI can enhance your cyber security posture as well. Anomaly detection algorithms can spot suspicious activity and take automated action to lock down accounts if necessary. Speech analytics can detect sensitive data being shared on calls and trigger alerts. With the right mix of AI, policies, and agent training, contact centers can protect customer data, maintain compliance, and secure remote workers.

FUTURE-PROOF YOUR CONTACT CENTER WITH AI

AI is essential for future-proofing contact centers in 2024 and beyond, enabling agents to deliver personalized, seamless experiences that today's customers expect. But with so many options flooding the market, it can be challenging for business leaders to find AI-powered contact center solutions that will meet their needs now and in the future.

An experienced technology agent can help simplify the process by evaluating your current contact center environment and recommending solutions tailored specifically to your needs. If you're looking to future-proof your contact center with AI and automation technologies, **reach out to us today**. Our team of experts can help you identify opportunities to improve efficiency and recommend leading solutions to drive customer satisfaction.

SOURCES

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