THE STATE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

IS THE DISRUPTION OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE FUNCTION A CATALYST FOR BUSINESS GROWTH?

JUNE. 2023

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has been a hot conversation across boardrooms for the past three years. Yet, customer service has been an under-represented discussion within the whirlpool of digital change.

With the help of data and analytics, customer service is now a measurable function. This means that business leaders can see how investments impact key business metrics. But customer service is more than it used to be.

It's becoming increasingly clear that customer experience is the critical differentiator in today's market. As a result, customer service is taking on a more prominent role within organisations. They serve as a direct source of information and have the authority to inform cross-functional teams about what customers want, and how, when, and where they want it.

As business leaders look to build a customer-centric culture – service holds the potential to chaperone product teams and business decisions towards designing more empathetic offerings.

The exponential growth of digital channels adds more intimacy to the brand-customer conversation but also more complexity. This is both a challenge and an opportunity – and customer service has a crucial role to play.

When service response systems receive data insights, they add context to conversations. When organisations inject the insights into work and case management, it improves operational efficiency and reduces costs.

Forward-thinking business leaders are starting to see the value beyond the conventional roles of the customer service team. They are looking at the flow and counterflow of data and the elevation of the customer service team to engineer the movement of data within the organisation.

Customer service's ambition is more than just finding a resolution in the case of poor experiences. It is also to eliminate the chance of friction. It aligns with the larger organisational north star – to minimise customer effort, create seamless experiences, inject personalisation in the offerings, empathy in the process and ultimately – inspire trust.
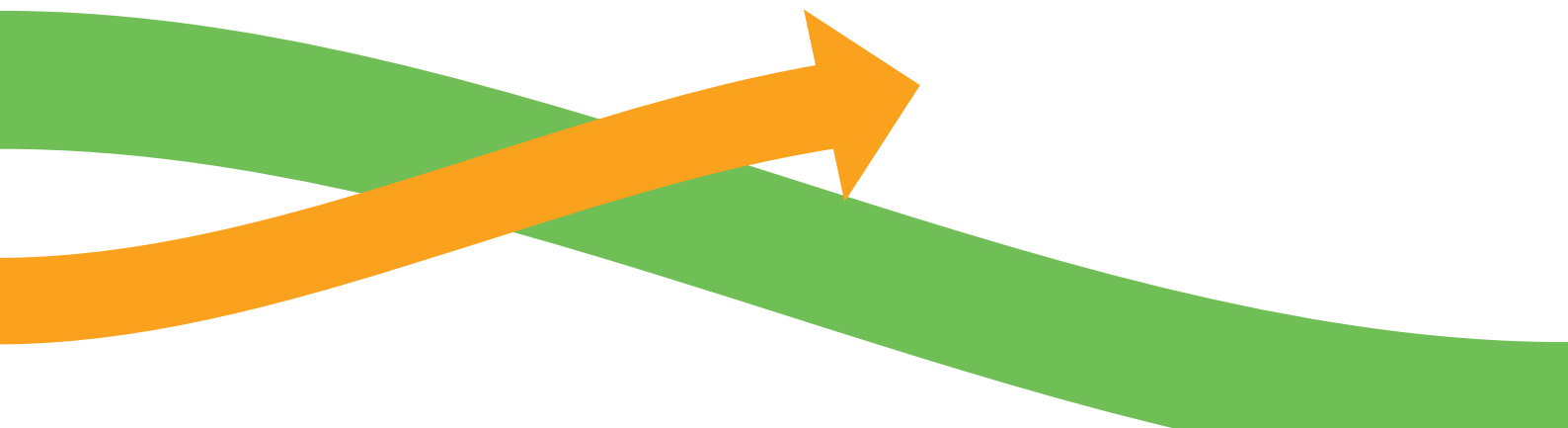
METHODOLOGY

Martechvibe, in partnership with Sprinklr, offers a comprehensive exploration of the evolving customer expectations regarding customer service in the Middle East region and how business leaders are making moves for future growth in an ever-changing landscape. The report also examines the current state of service organisation strategies.

To gather real data-led insights, a survey was conducted with 100 customer service representatives holding various customer services positions, such as Director, C-suite, Heads of Departments, Senior Managers and Marketing Managers. Most respondents have a customer base of over a million. They were chosen from several industries, including BFSI, Retail and Hospitality across the Middle East region. The report also incorporates viewpoints from several customer service specialists from the same industries and regions.

Delving into the state of customer service and the overall customer experience in the Middle East region, the report offers an in-depth understanding of the service challenges, solutions, and how leaders can realign their strategies and perception to prioritise a people-centric approach. Readers stand to gain well-informed insights on organisational behaviour, the use of technological advancements and the consequences of changing customer expectations towards customer service through this report.

MARKETING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
CUSTOMER SERVICE DIGITAL
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION MARKETING
DIGITAL ACTIVATION
SALES GROWTH CRM
DATA AND ANALYTICS

Martechvibe
The Leading Marketing and CX Technology Magazine

sprinklr

4

The State of
Customer Service in
the Middle East

EDITOR'S NOTE

Yolande D'Mello
Editor, Martechvibe

The connected customer has driven the enterprise to a new movement. One that will render previous trends a historical footnote in the way enterprises do business.

Customer experience is undergoing a fundamentally and radically new transition –one that provides benefits to both the business and the customer. What is perhaps most impressive is that this one takes the whole organisation forward together – brought together by the ability to analyse data where every single dot is a meaningful interaction between the brand and customer.
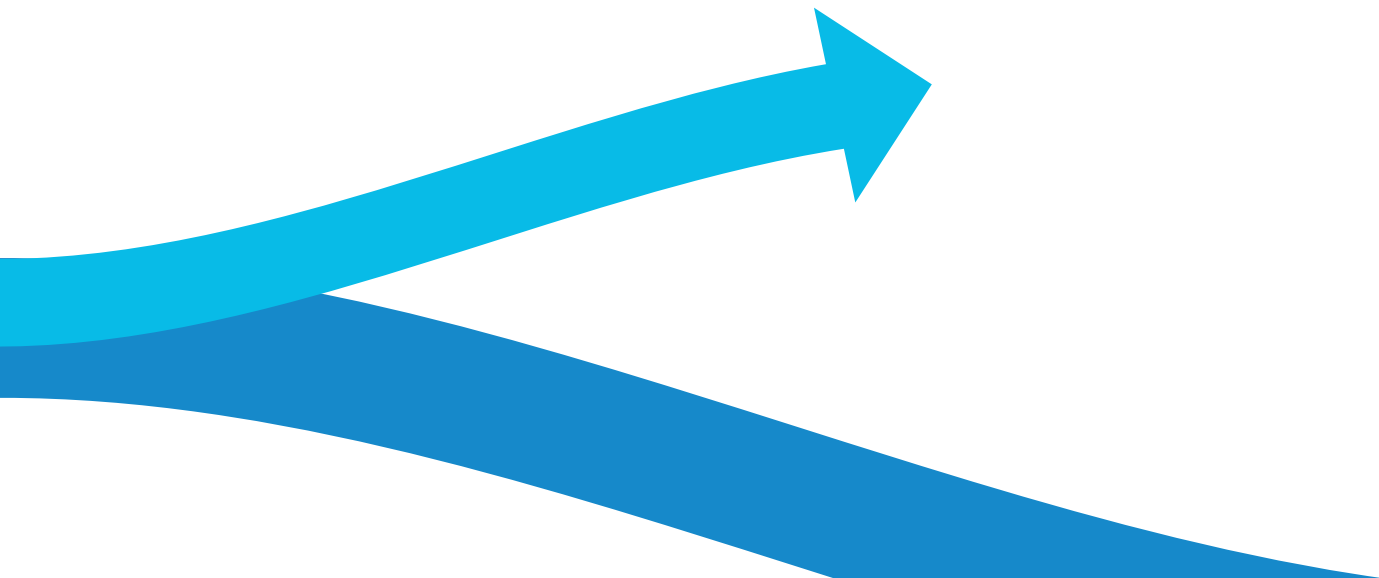
Within these insights lies a trail that throws light on friction points at each touchpoint and the opportunity to create a seamless customer journey.

The customer service function has seen three phases in the evolution; from legacy on-prem systems to the first cloud-based solutions to truly omnichannel solutions today. The changes have been primarily bound at an operational level.

This new approach towards customer service shifts from being reactive to being proactive. Why wait for complaints or even a crisis?
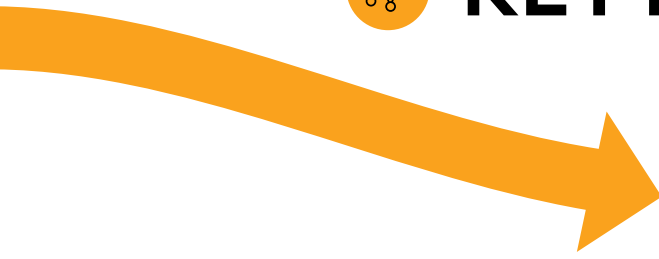
The impact trickles down to a contact centre or agent level. It flips the role of the customer service function when fuelled by and as a source of valuable customer data. Every one-star review can become a prioritised ticket to resolve. Every frustrated tweet is an opportunity to create an advocate. Every outreach becomes an opportunity to up and cross-sell.

Customer service is being moved by the customer-centricity movement but it is moving it with equal force.

Martechvibe
The Leading Marketing and CX Technology Magazine

sprinklr

5

The State of
Customer Service in
the Middle East

KEY FINDINGS

THE IMPACT OF CHANGING CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR

Customers appear to be in control, prompting organisations to strategically shift their focus towards creating a more beneficial customer care system. This shift has led to a reimagination of service function within these organisations.

43% want to re-evaluate their customer service tech stack

64% are developing social monitoring tools to provide real-time intelligence

PRESSING CHALLENGES, UNCERTAIN SOLUTIONS

Amid escalating technological advancements, growing operational costs, and data privacy concerns, the seamless integration of numerous tools across multiple touchpoints is the tip of the iceberg. Service organisations are still struggling to pin down the best-in-class solutions.

24% state that total contact ownership should be the main focus to promote the first contact resolution rate

22% believe providing customer history to agents should do the trick

LEANING ON STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS FOR BEST-OF-CARE

By incorporating cross-functional processes and recognising the multifaceted contributions of technology partners, service organisations strive to measure customer care's effectiveness and elevate the overall customer experience. Emphasising the value of customer feedback, they are actively nurturing long-term customer care processes for sustained improvement.
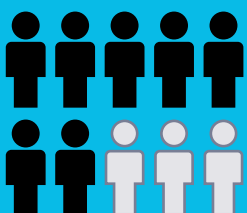
65% are looking for seamless implementation from their technology partners
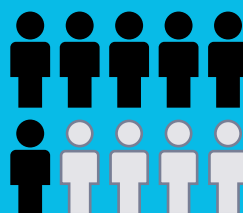
55% said they will introduce a 'you said, we act' communication strategy to increase trust and loyalty

KEY FINDINGS

CARE RE-ALIGNMENT WITH INTELLIGENT TOOLS

In the past, businesses typically viewed contact centres as cost centres. However, with the ever-changing dynamics of customer behaviour and the advancements in intelligent AI technology, a shift in customer care and business perception is underway.
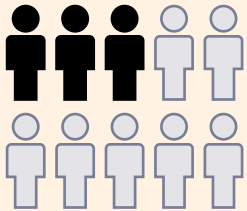
26% consider service organisation as a value centre rather than a cost centre
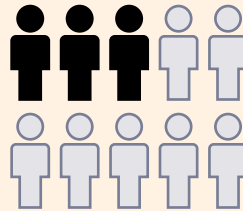
27% said they will improve the discoverability of products and information via self-serve channels

🔵 **CONTENTS**

CHAPTER - 1

The Next Generation of Customer Service is Born
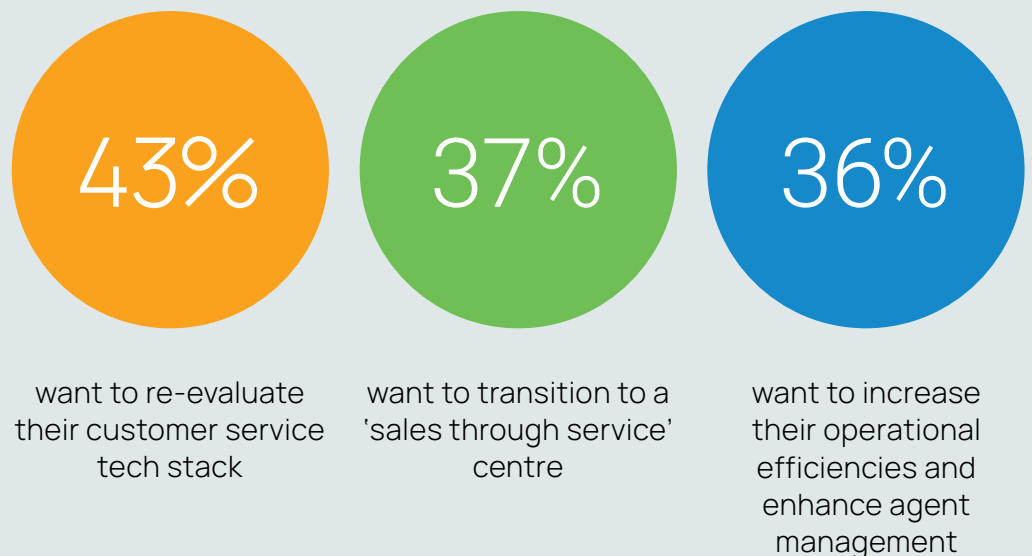
The customer service function is engulfed in a perfect storm. Nudged ahead by the pandemic, the digital transformation accelerated customer adoption of digital channels, and impacted customer expectations. The volume of service requests swelled, along with chats, social mentions, calls and good old-fashioned emails.

With cost pressures rising as quickly as service expectations, the obvious response — adding more well-trained employees to deliver excellent customer service — isn't a viable option. Business leaders are looking to technology to fill the gap.

Is this change in perspective necessary? Yes.

Brands are fast-tracking their technology investments which promises to add scale and speed to cope with these new customer expectations.

TOP CUSTOMER SERVICE PRIORITIES AS PER THE BUSINESS LEADERS

43%
want to re-evaluate their customer service tech stack

37%
want to transition to a 'sales through service' centre

36%
want to increase their operational efficiencies and enhance agent management

Technologies currently powering the customer service function in the Middle East

- Team Inbox
- Integrations and Messenger apps
- Chatbots
- Integrated knowledge base
- API
- Reporting and AI-powered conversational insights
- Live chat
- Proactive messaging

Many service organisations are employing technology to make a strategic shift to facilitate the reinvention of customer service and empower customers to be "in control" of their experiences. A re-purposed tech stack to align new business values and the dynamic changes in customer behaviour might just be the edge service organisations need.

For instance, 48% of respondents believe that adding sentiment analysis tools to the CS tech stack can integrate personalisation effectively, while 48% believe that deploying chatbots on all self-serve channels can help achieve it.

45% use integrated messenger apps to power their customer service.
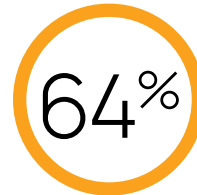
64% are developing social monitoring tools to provide real-time intelligence.

Social channels and other applications have become vital customer service portals across industries. Business leaders recognise that omnichannel service is key, and AI can assist service agents to deliver in real-time.

Putting the customer service tech stack at the centre of the new CS blueprint, there are other advantages on the horizon – new opportunities for upselling, cross-selling, and personalised recommendations through customer service.

WHAT HAPPENS TO BUSINESSES OR BRANDS THAT CAN'T REACT TO CHANGING MODELS OR ENVIRONMENTS?

36% want to increase operational efficiencies and enhance agent management.

In a rush to be ahead in the customer-centric race, service organisations might lose their main support team and their cheerleaders – the employees.

Business leaders in the Middle East are clear on their goals. But implementation of these technologies has left organisations in a quagmire. To maximise the potential and achieve the proper return on investment, they were also responsible for finding the right talent to adapt to new ways of working. Add to this evolving process: a sea of data pouring in, aligning teams to process information, label, categorise and triage so the query reaches the right team to take action and reach a resolution.

Can brands keep up with the modern customer's expectations?

It is affecting all businesses – driven not by the industry but by customers themselves, who are connected and aware. They are interested in having a two-way conversation with brands but intolerant of anything short of stellar service.

Customers are firmly in control of the conversation. They want these conversations to be natural, informed and fluid so they can switch between screens or devices and keep going from where they left off.

AMID THIS PERFECT STORM, AN IDEAL OPPORTUNITY EXISTS TO ESTABLISH A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE THROUGH ENHANCED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.

If customers are showing higher expectations – they are reciprocating it with higher levels of engagement. Businesses meeting these expectations will carve a niche in a new industry order.

"

We are evolving towards a world where this ultimate, zero-effort convenience has become a commodity. Customers today believe that offering ultra-convenient services is the most normal thing in the world. It's like a "basic" need, not a differentiator. And that means that if you are not convenient enough, you will lose customers to the competition which has invested in the matter."

Steven Van Belleghem

CX coach and author of The Marketing Department of the Future

FORWARD-THINKING BUSINESS LEADERS ARE REIMAGINING CONTACT CENTRES AS VALUE CENTRES.

26% consider service organisations as a value centre rather than a cost centre as the most relevant trend to impact service organisations.

The strategic differentiation will be the pivot that will bring a new world order to the customer service ecosystem. The trend will serve as a much-needed advantage for service leaders to be a step ahead of competitors. Experts suggest a top-down approach to bring about this change in mindset.

"

We tend to think of customer service data as all complaints, escalations and issues. But it's not all doom and gloom – 30% of all inquiries coming to customer service are actually upselling opportunities."

Haitham ElKhatib

Senior Vice President Growth Markets at Sprinklr

Start classifying your data to know which opportunities you could be missing on, and then take steps to convert these opportunities. It may need the collective responsibility of the organisation – and that is great news considering the evolving role of customer service teams within the organisation.

A platform that is able to unify this data can bridge the gaps between marketing, customer service and sales – the three pillars of customer communication.

But it's only the beginning – it can also inform product development, influence business decisions, and possibly find new revenue streams.

Can New Solutions Solve Conventional Problems?

I would love to see a customer sacrifice score – one that indicates to what degree a customer (who is free to switch) is willing to sacrifice to continue interacting with a business taking price sensitivity into account."
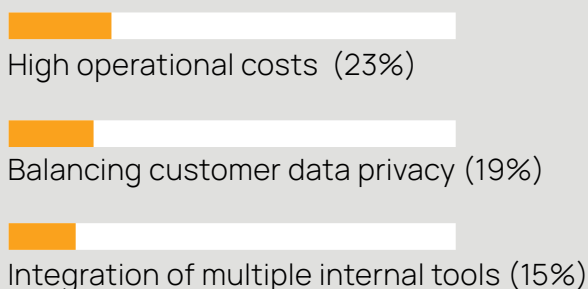
Qaalfa Dibeehi

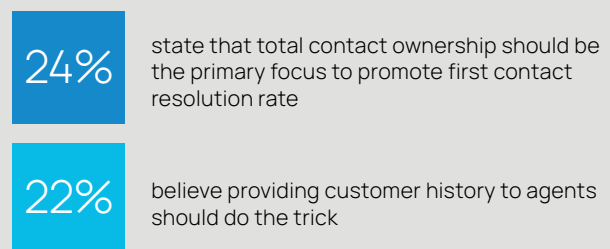Dean of the Customer Experience Leadership Institute at Majid Al Futtaim

Customer service and support leaders share their immediate priorities: automating time-consuming, routine customer service tasks like support ticket assignments and troubleshooting common customer issues with the help of canned responses. This further helps minimise the risk of losing the request in poor handoffs between functions – another common challenge.

Supporting service representatives remains a priority in technology investment. Tools to deliver performance and development support for the customer support function include; workforce management, case management, consolidated desktop agent, internal collaboration tools and unified communications.

Three main challenges are plaguing the customer service function today.

High operational costs (23%)

Balancing customer data privacy (19%)

Integration of multiple internal tools (15%)

There are few answers on how to overcome these challenges.

24% state that total contact ownership should be the primary focus to promote first contact resolution rate

22% believe providing customer history to agents should do the trick

Preserve the context of conversations.

Bring data teams in to share customer service KPIs, say business leaders looking at using analytics to understand how to serve the digital customer. Organisations recognise data as the secret sauce to optimising workforce management, establishing a system of insight, and enabling effective channel orchestration.

Business leaders in the Middle East are on the right track but are far from using data to create connected experiences.

"

There is no place for business decisions based on loose guesses in a highly competitive market. Successful business owners gather and manage distinct kinds of data that help them develop future strategies."

Faisal Parkar

Director of IT at Tim Hortons

On a grassroots level – it begins by giving agents the full context. On a functional level – it helps set benchmarks to define the service level. On a strategic level – it informs on costs for the contact centre, employee satisfaction and revenue.

Poor implementation of customer service technologies can result in negative CX. While the aim is to use solutions for capacity-building and to solve conventional obstacles – misalignment of technology with people and processes can add to the complexity of processes and compound challenges. So, how should leaders measure the success of this transformation in customer service efforts?
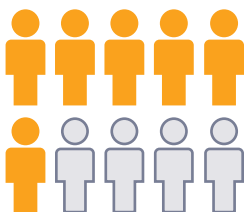
63% said they monitor customer interactions with service chatbots
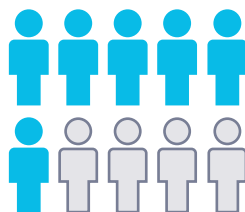
58% said they monitor repeat purchase rate
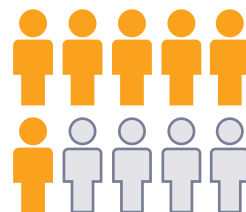
56% said they monitor and optimise the first contact resolution rate

56% said they monitor and analyse the social media sentiments of customers

Here is the bigger picture: While 44% of respondents use chatbots to power their customer service, only 33% want to set up more self-service models.

And 18% believe increased self-serve adoption is a relevant trend.

Currently, the Middle East needs to catch up on onboarding new technologies and their optimisation.

Are these mixed signals a reflection of the transformation maturity of the region?

Develop CX capabilities that offer value before volume.

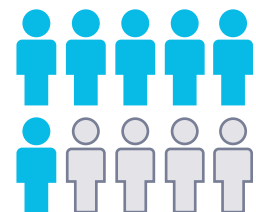Business leaders claim they are waiting for the consumer base to appreciate self-service. The technology must mature to convincingly add empathy and behavioural analytics to the conversation. Till then – human agents are the preferred option.

There is a need for value-capturing change management.

Frontline employees are the first to face the frustration of customers.

It is incumbent upon organisations to shift their focus upstream and proactively tackle the root causes of customer and employee frustration.

22% of business leaders believe that demotivated and untrained customer support agents are what's standing in the way of delivering exceptional customer service
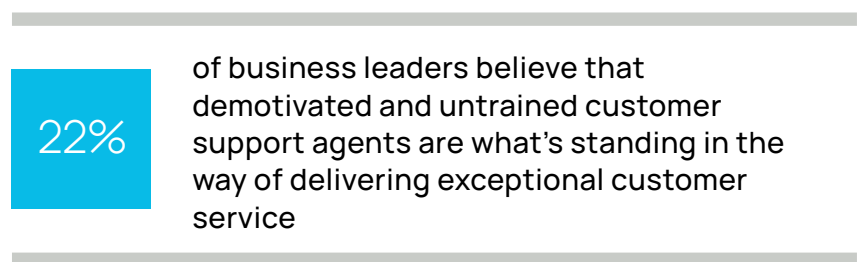
The dichotomy of service innovation is that while all businesses have access to the same technology, the innovation often lies in the non-technological areas and how to grow acceptance and use to find unique solutions to common challenges.

Address your internal capability gap.

Simplify data through **training and access.**

Today, companies measure everything, from every email sent by sales to the mouse clicks and viewing seconds of every website visitor.

Martechvibe
The Leading Marketing and CX Technology Magazine

✿ sprinklr

16

The State of
Customer Service in
the Middle East

60% offer personalised recommendations to increase repeat purchases - a shared goal with marketing teams

What's holding back businesses?

- The wrong metrics create flawed incentives.
- You cannot manage what you cannot measure.

"

With the explosion of data, attention has become the most expensive commodity for any company."

Namita Sharma

Director of Customer Experience and Operations, Mumzworld

A **disconnected customer experience** can be traced back to misaligned teams.

Data and analytics technicians need to align with customer service KPIs. These specialists work in tandem to ask the right questions and keep technical data owners in the loop about larger service objectives. Gatekeeping needs stakeholder buy-in, so it's best to keep business leaders informed about the changing privacy landscape and efforts to adapt across the organisation.

Customer service and support leaders need to ask themselves;

- What are the shared goals with marketing and sales verticals?
- How can the customer service function work in parallel?
- What are the shared solutions, and who is the owner?

Martechvibe
The Leading Marketing and CX Technology Magazine

sprinklr
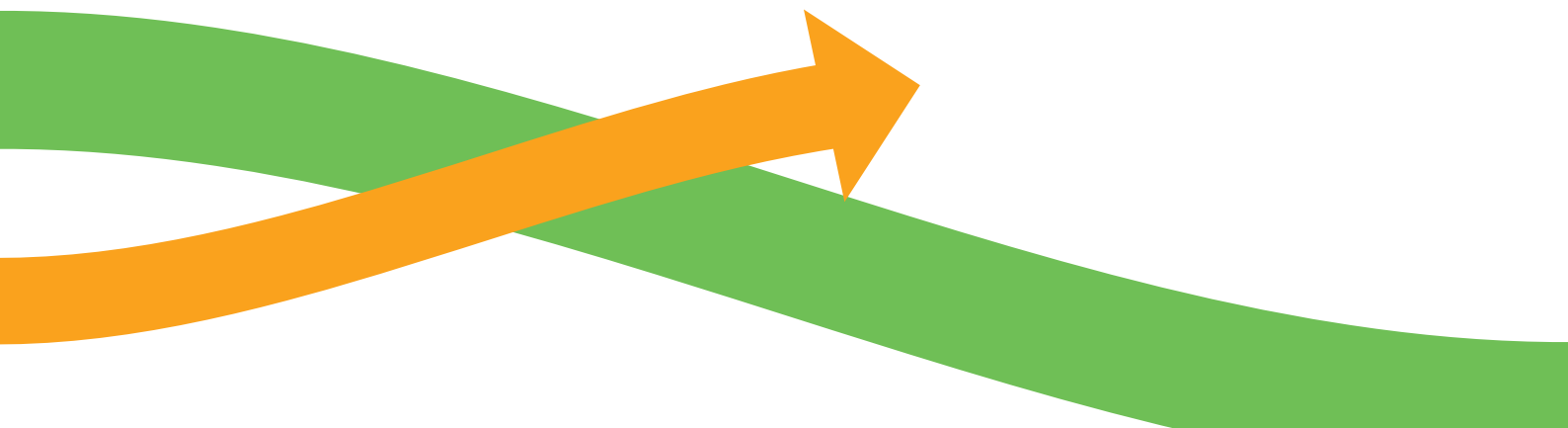
Size of opportunity modelling is the most popular format to decide if the martech solution offers the right technical capabilities to drive business value, is fit for the current stack, and will be easy for teams to adopt. They are keen to predict how it will impact KPI metrics. The long-term objective is to move towards an integrated suite approach.

Agents are the main actors in the "moments that matter" for your brand.

When reps understand how their performance positively impacts customer service's ability to achieve CX and business objectives, they're more likely to repeat positive behaviours.

KEY METRICS THAT BUSINESS LEADERS ARE TRACKING

50%	37%	35%	31%	30%
track Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT) KPI	track First Contact Resolution (FCR)	track Average Handling Time (AHT) and post-call work time	track Net Promoter Score (NPS)	track First Response Time (FRT)
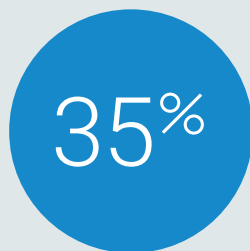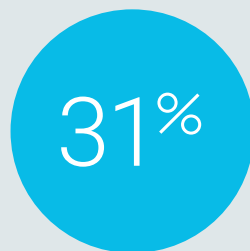
Does customer service need a new metric? The biggest criticism of **CSAT is that happy customers don't necessarily equate to revenue growth.** Customer service leaders question how actionable the insights from NPS scores are in finding root causes of success or failure. There are doubts regarding how the 11-point scale renders in mobile environments, how brands are gaming survey design, and the cognitive bias of customers who are all too familiar with the method.

If digital channels have evolved customer expectations – isn't it time to evolve how businesses measure success?

68% state that cross-analysis of customer feedback and customer service agents' feedback is the best method to measure the effectiveness of their customer service efforts.

Customer and employee criticism contain the hard truths to action growth.

So why is employee experience still taking a backseat?

Only 25% of Middle East business leaders track employee satisfaction scores.

The duplicity of acknowledging the importance of EX yet the need for steps to measure it as a metric depicts a lack of maturity in the service sector in the region.

Agent attrition leads to performance variability.

Therefore, service organisations in the region continue to lack a unified approach, making it difficult for them to see themselves as a value-driven organisation.

Compared to four years ago, the most significant difference is that more data is measurable. But this also creates more noise. Customer service representatives have dealt with the brunt of unhappy customers. Customer service teams can inform on the most important metric – actual quality of service.

CHAPTER - 3

Creating a Virtuous Circle of Better Service

What are the biggest gaps between your self-perception as a business and customer perception of yourself in terms of how you execute your customer value proposition?"

Arthur Zhuravsky

Director of Customer Experience at Tabby

End-to-end process improvement requires a business-wide commitment to change. Digital transformation has affected the way every function within the enterprise operates. Why should customer service lag?

When service transformations occur in silos – it can be a trap towards worsening experience and rising costs.

43% believe that a lack of singular customer view across all channels is limiting customer services' ability to deliver personalisation

Instead of the business unit approach, focus on an organisation-wide approach.

The customer service team is the primary channel for collecting valuable feedback about products and services.

How leaders can approach organisational realignment:

- Specialised Teams
- Tiered Support
- Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing
- Continuous Learning and Development

"

Our Support Centre is well connected to the teams on the ground, as well as all other departments. Based on customer-driven insights, each team defines priorities and works together on elevating our customers' experience."

Usama Nabil

Sr Director of Customer Service at talabat

By tapping into this wealth of first-hand feedback, cross-functional teams stand to gain a deeper understanding of customer needs, identify areas for improvement, and drive innovation.

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK PLAN

55% said they will introduce a 'you said, we act' communication strategy to increase trust and loyalty

54% said they will actively consider unsuccessful customer interactions

52% said they will derive outcomes such as sentiment analysis and CSAT for each call

45% said they will leverage analytics to gain intelligence on all customer conversations

41% said they will leverage social media channels for extended feedback communication

38% said they will introduce feedback surveys across multiple customer touchpoints

"

We have weekly meetings where customer feedback serves as a critical input for decision-making across the organisation. It informs product development, service improvements, marketing strategies, customer experience initiatives, customer retention efforts, operational improvements, and competitive analysis."

Silvia Gomez

Director Of Customer Experience at BitOasis

Enter: Total Experience

The challenge of business unit (BU) walls – and the aim for organisation-wide impact is what stands in the way of cross-functional teams gaining true value from the customer service function.

Total experience establishes a deliberate connection of CX, EX and UX to make way for superior shared experiences for all stakeholders. Leaders show a willingness to reorder organisational structure to accommodate this new approach.

Five steps to align customer service teams with other cross-functional departments:

- Establish Clear Goals
- Foster Communication Channels
- Streamline Processes
- Encourage Cross-Functional Training
- Measure Outcomes

"

Typically, organisations are not particularly great or good at getting their people (especially in HQ) to care enough about CX to change the status quo. The quest we are on is to help leaders recognise that CX practice without a CX mindset is short-lived. CX requires behavioural change deep in the plumbing of the organisation. My goal is to be a better plumber."

Qaalfa Dibeehi

Dean of the Customer Experience Leadership Institute at Majid Al Futtaim

Transformation is a two-way stream.

Upstream integration empowers customer service representatives with comprehensive insights to provide personalised assistance. On the other hand, downstream integration ensures that customer interactions and feedback are effectively communicated across departments, enabling a unified approach to address customer needs.

To achieve this integration, organisations employ collaboration systems that facilitate the exchange of information, streamlining workflows and enhancing cross-functional collaboration. These systems enable real-time communication, task allocation, and knowledge sharing, fostering a cohesive and efficient customer service ecosystem.

Business leaders are optimistic about increasing their investments.

34 % want to offer personalised customer interactions, **33%** of respondents want to be able to use real-time customer data insights, and **33%** of respondents want to set up self-service adoption models.

Yet, brands in the Middle East trail behind others globally when it comes to implementing customer service technologies in their existing stack.

11 % Only 11% of businesses in the region have fully automated time-consuming and routine customer service tasks.

Digital transformation maturity models look different for every industry, organisation and function. Organisations with a higher digital maturity level get better business results, but it's rarely possible to skip the steps in between.

Start with a matrix of design simplicity and controlled expectations for each channel at inception. As the business achieves transformation maturity, this expectation, too, will evolve. It is a process that must consider increasing customer adoption rates and internal processes alignment.

At inception, the design process should involve key owners for each process, promoting collaboration among multi-functional teams. Typically, product experts, contact-centre agents, technology experts, and field technicians play an active role in designing such journeys.

Martechvibe
The Leading Marketing and CX Technology Magazine

sprinklr

23

The State of
Customer Service in
the Middle East

33% are prioritising the set up of self-service channels

The starter kit for **Zero-touch self-service** begins with simplified fee structures, tested self-installation plans, and added transparency in subscription plans.

Basic **automated channel responses** follow a rules-based conversation that follows a pre-decided flow. When this channel is fed by tools that work remotely to measure and report usage, it can offer users personalised responses.
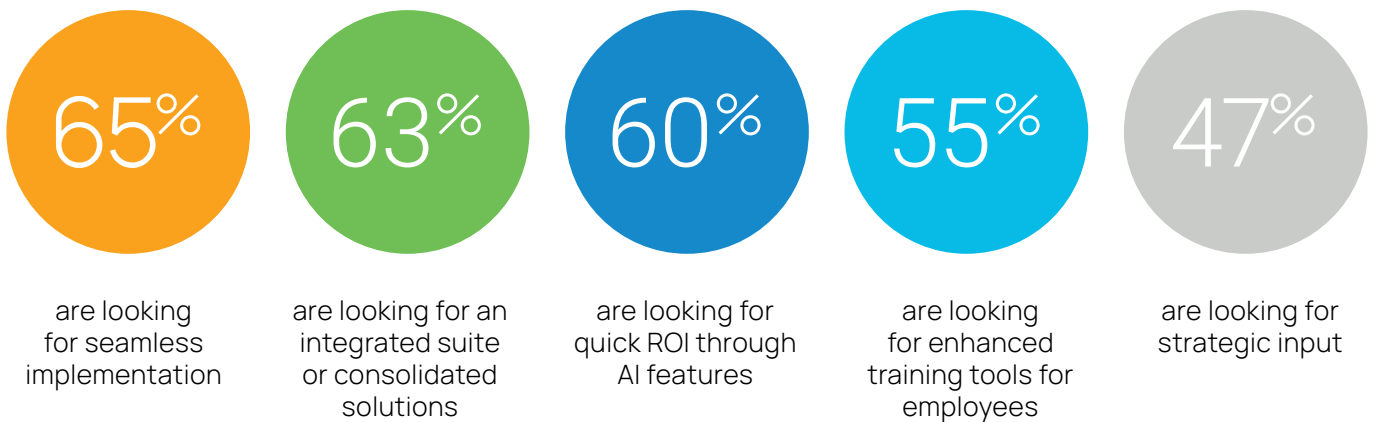
CHAPTER - 4

Maximum Value from Tech Partners

Business leaders are keenly aware of the gap between what technology can do and what it is able to achieve currently.

To counter this challenge – they show a propensity towards elevating solution providers as partners to help align internal processes, train non-technical teams and measure the success of implementation over time.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR FROM YOUR TECHNOLOGY PARTNERS?

65%	63%	60%	55%	47%
are looking for seamless implementation	are looking for an integrated suite or consolidated solutions	are looking for quick ROI through AI features	are looking for enhanced training tools for employees	are looking for strategic input

Brian Habibi, Co-founder and Head of Customer Success at Bayzat shares his approach to aligning tech with teams

CHALLENGE:

How to maximise the flow of data within an organisation?

SOLUTION 1:

A centralised customer support tool:

- Houses all customer support channels

- Offers a data management system to centralise customer-related information.

- Ability to integrate with other software tools to further maximise the data flow in the organisation.

SOLUTION 2:

Cloud-based communications tools such as cloud telephony

- Helps streamline communication channels across all departments.
- Offers features such as smart routing, call queuing, and analytics that improve call centre efficiency and customer experience.

SOLUTION 3:

Create an in-house-built AI bot to assist agents with simple and complex queries

Help centre articles and an array of customer data points collected from previous experiences can be fed to it.

Added Advantage

To improve response times, leverage AI-powered chatbots automation and other technological tools for fast and effective self-service assistance and support.

Is privacy a major customer service concern?

Marketers are looking at adapting future-proof agile strategies in the face of an evolving customer privacy landscape.

Retail leans towards building custom solutions for the nature of their business. **BFSI** prefers to go with best-in-breed options with the additional layer of compliance. Within any industry organisation, trust percolates to the culture that flows towards customers via service, products and marketing. Outside, it drives loyalty.

19% believe they have trouble balancing the data privacy of customers in the evolving privacy landscape

There is a global shift in the philosophy underlying data privacy laws from a "harms-prevention-based" to a "rights-based" approach.

Consumers' brand of choice has a focus on being privacy mature. According to privacy experts, assessing an organisation's privacy maturity involves examining how quickly it can understand and apply policies when new privacy laws enter the business ecosystem. Companies that are mature in their privacy journey can adapt to new regulations with minimal disruption.

"

A lack of trust in an organisation's ability to protect personal data can lead to individuals choosing to give their data to more trustworthy organisations. Trust is the new gold."

Debbie Reynolds

Founder, CEO, and Chief Data Privacy Officer of Debbie Reynolds Consulting

Team leaders are not losing sleep wondering if automation may compromise the human connection that agents have with customers. In fact, business leaders see an opportunity to use technology to offer proactive care.

34%
said their main focus is to focus on the next issue avoidance - anticipate future inquiries based on the issue at hand

19%
said they want to introduce self-serve digital methods to help customers feel unrestricted

14%
said they want to use AI and NLP tools to identify frustration flashpoints

11%
said they want to automate mundane tasks and decrease customer effort

11%
said they want to offer personalised follow-up or check-ins through agents/bots

Customer service teams are willing to put in the work to make their tech investments meaningful. In return, they are hoping to action the vision for a connected customer experience. **They are looking for systems that can deliver – insight and engagement with measurable metrics to prove it.**

They want the ability to maintain data storage for mission-critical business processes. This flexible architecture enables faster time to market for new capabilities and channel orchestration to meet customer expectations along their journey with a common view of prospect and customer data.

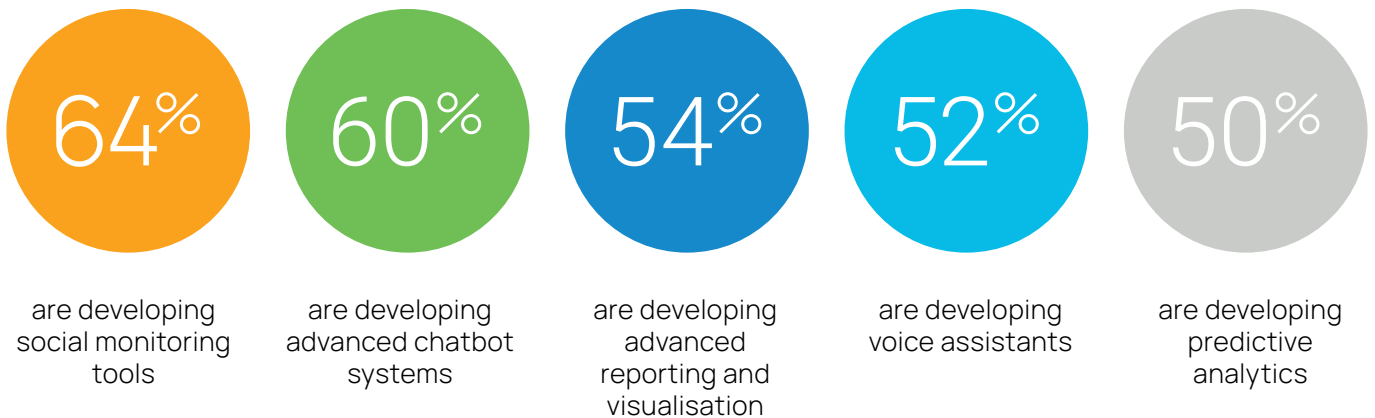Together, business stakeholders seem to have all the answers.

All but one – **Will today's technology investments be relevant to tomorrow's dynamic market changes?**

CHAPTER - 5

# Future-proofing Customer Service Strategies

It's unanimous – the future is AI-driven. Increased customer acceptance of (and even preference for) machine-led conversational AI interactions further validate this fact.

WHICH CAPABILITIES ARE YOU DEVELOPING TO PROVIDE REAL-TIME INTELLIGENCE?

64%	60%	54%	52%	50%
are developing social monitoring tools	are developing advanced chatbot systems	are developing advanced reporting and visualisation	are developing voice assistants	are developing predictive analytics

Business leaders are optimistic, but the Middle East is largely in the consideration phase. A few brands are running pilots.

Chatbots and AI recommendation engines are the starter pack for businesses.

14 % But only 14% of respondents leverage AI-powered smart recommendations.
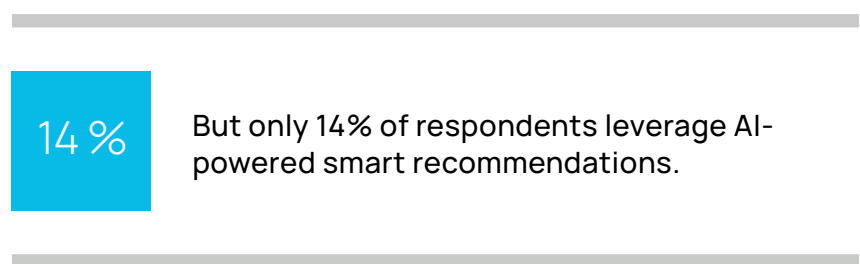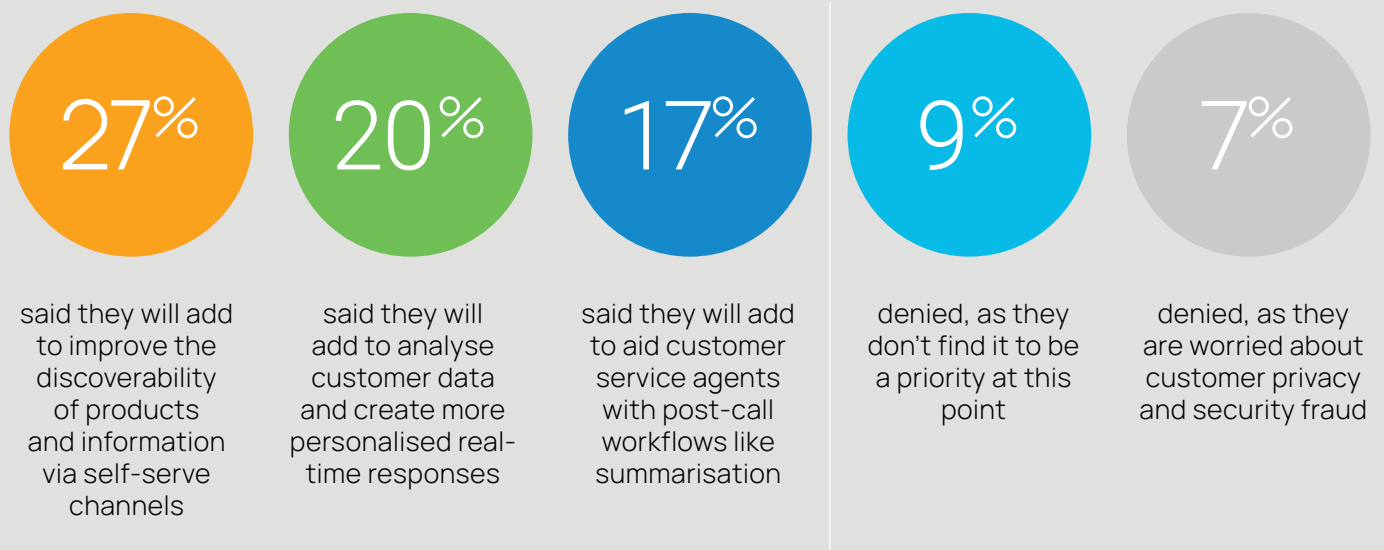
So, what does AI-enabled customer experience transformation look like?

It looks like the chance to offer a truly personalised product experience across jobs to be done and depending on the stage of the journey. It's difficult to say where marketing, customer service, and sales begin and end.

Imagine a customer browsing the product list – the person is offered relevant features based on the user persona, guided through the next steps, unlocks optimised in-app features based on behaviour, preemptively receives an upgrade when they reach the limit of their plan, and such.

HOW KEEN ARE SERVICE ORGANISATIONS ABOUT ADDING GENERATIVE AI INTO THEIR CUSTOMER SERVICE TECH STACK?

27% said they will add to improve the discoverability of products and information via self-serve channels

20% said they will add to analyse customer data and create more personalised real-time responses

17% said they will add to aid customer service agents with post-call workflows like summarisation

9% denied, as they don't find it to be a priority at this point

7% denied, as they are worried about customer privacy and security fraud

Factoring the Human in AI-supported service

Business leaders aren't simply looking for an always-on intelligent assistant to answer customer queries. Rather, they are approaching it as a capability-building initiative for agents where AI can assist employees in real-time to deliver high-quality outcomes or by suggesting next-best-action solutions by anticipating customer needs and generating prompts for the agent.

The only challenge lies in getting end users upskilled and ready to work in tandem with AI tools.

"

What really gets me excited is how customer metrics will evolve with neuroscience, nano-biotechnology and AI. Perhaps, they will merge into the inevitable customer accounting where debits and credits are neuronal excitatory and inhibitory activity processed by AI in real-time."

Qaalfa Dibeehi

Dean of the Customer Experience Leadership Institute at Majid Al Futtaim

What factors should enterprises consider by looking at the technology partner?

Functionality I Scalability and Flexibility I Security and Data Privacy I Integration Capabilities I User-Friendliness I Reliability and Stability I Service Level Agreements (SLAs) I Analytics and Reporting Capabilities I Total Cost of Ownership
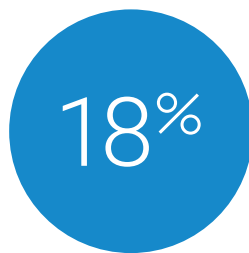
LOOKING AHEAD:
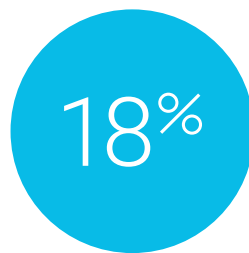## FUTURE TRENDS THAT SERVICE LEADERS ARE PREPARING FOR

26% consider service organisation as a value centre rather than a cost centre

19% say that it is personalisation with privacy

18% say that it is a proactive service and communications

18% say that it is increased self-serve adoption

11% say that it is machine customers to create a lower-effort experience

Martechvibe
The Leading Marketing and CX Technology Magazine

✨ sprinklr

30

The State of
Customer Service in
the Middle East

☰ EPILOGUE

Haitham ElKhatib, Senior Vice President - Growth Markets, at Sprinklr, paints a positive picture: "In the future, when a customer calls a customer service agent, the agent pulls up a profile detailing every interaction of the customer with the company on any channel. And, agents provide product recommendations based on the customer's unique needs."

Within organisations, there is a prevalent trend of building multiple service solutions to tackle specific challenges within the customer experience framework. However, adopting a strategic approach when implementing technology is imperative, with a sharp focus on a value-driven function.

Service organisations should consider the specific value they aim to achieve with customer interaction. This could include reducing friction in the customer service function, enhancing operational efficiency, or even transforming customers into revenue generators.

By establishing a value realisation process within the technology stack and implementation approach, customer service leaders can strategically drive desired outcomes across channels. While Middle East companies have the right attitude and approach, business leaders are encouraged to seek technology partners who align with their vision for growth. Finding partners who share a common vision allows for greater synergy, innovation, and the ability to navigate the evolving landscape of customer service effectively.

Start with understanding the value you need and then walk backwards. Create a value realisation process in your technology stack and your implementation. That's your purpose. It's not just about implementing technology or features and functions. It's about driving value for the organisation, whether it's by increasing revenue or decreasing cost, or just achieving better customer experience. Make sure you work with partners who are really listening. It's all about having 'the end in mind'."
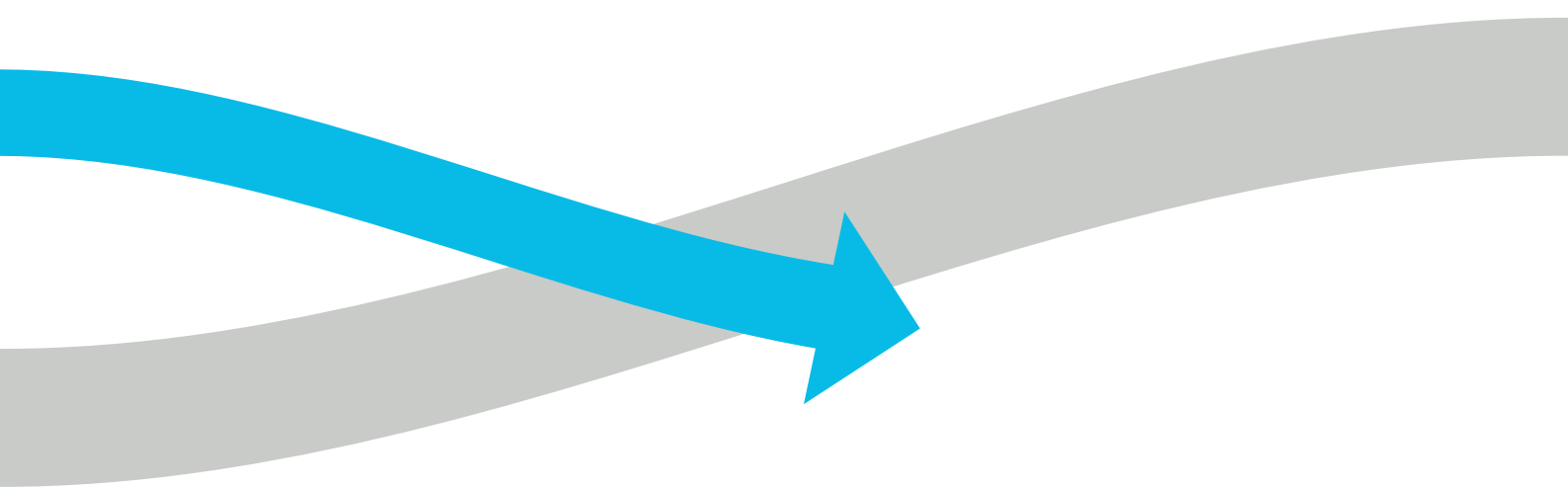
Haitham Elkhatib

Senior Vice President - Growth Markets, at Sprinklr

Looking ahead, it is evident that the future of the customer service function holds tremendous potential with exciting possibilities. With the right mindset, strategic partnerships, and a customer-centric focus, organisations can unlock new levels of success and establish themselves as leaders in delivering exceptional customer service.

Based on the insights from the report, Sprinklr provides a comprehensive checklist for service organisations to kickstart their re-defined customer service function.

- [ ] Gauge new solutions to ensure it meets the specific needs of your customer service operations.
- [ ] Assess whether the technology is modular, can scale with your business growth and accommodate evolving customer service requirements.
- [ ] Determine whether the solution integrates seamlessly with your existing systems.
- [ ] Consider the ease of use and user interface of the technology solution.
- [ ] Assess the technology partner's track record in terms of system reliability, uptime, and stability.
- [ ] Prioritise the security and privacy of customer data.
- [ ] Evaluate the ROI of the technology solution in terms of improved efficiency and customer satisfaction.

Martechvibe
The Leading Marketing and CX Technology Magazine

sprinklr