**RingCentral**®

# Overcoming the Digital Age Disconnect

How disjointed communications technologies are letting customers down — and how to solve it



Customer + Employee

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# Introduction

Sir Richard Branson said, "If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients." Yet according to our global survey of 2,000 customer-facing knowledge workers and customer support employees, businesses are missing the opportunity in these words of wisdom. The fact is that employees are not being set up for success, specifically those on the front lines servicing and supporting customers.

The majority of these employees are frustrated with disjointed communications technologies, which affect their productivity and ultimately hinder their ability to effectively service customers. Not only that, ineffective technology makes employees unhappy, and, more importantly, makes customers miserable and in some cases drives them away.

That's the bad news. The good news is CIOs and leaders from customer support and lines of business have an opportunity to use communications technologies to better engage employees and customers, ultimately increasing customer satisfaction and business profitability. This eBook, based on a study conducted by CITE Research, outlines how.

"If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients."

— Sir Richard Branson

Image Source: Wikimedia Commons

# Executive summary

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**The digital age has raised expectations for customers, but customer-facing employees don't have the tools to meet —much less exceed—them.**

- Customers—96% of them—expect their issues to be resolved (quickly) on the channel of their choice. Yet 74% of agents have to toggle between applications to reach a customer resolution every day, which according to a CITE Research study on app overload wastes up to 60 minutes a day. Hardly what your agents want to be doing when a customer is waiting.

**Complex workflows and disjointed communications frustrate customer-facing employees, affecting their professional and personal lives.**

- 75% of agents and other customer-facing employees say when communications technologies hinder productivity, they get unhappy at work; and half say this makes them more likely to be rude to coworkers, friends, and family.

**This creates a ripple effect. Customers become frustrated when their issue isn't resolved quickly—and the repercussions for businesses are serious.**

- 9 in 10 employees agree disjointed communications technologies negatively affect workflow and job satisfaction—and this in turn impacts customer satisfaction and the bottom line.

- Customers have stopped using a product or service four times, on average, in the past year due to a bad customer service experience.

**IT, customer service, and business leaders need to see the light: There is a direct connection between employee and customer engagement.**

- Companies need to rethink their business and technology strategies to deliver seamless experiences for both employees and customers and drive greater customer satisfaction and business profitability.

- The vast majority of employees (92%) say a seamless communications and collaboration platform would make it easier to keep customers happy, improve customer satisfaction scores, and improve both the employee and customer experience.

# Sky-high customer expectations

It's a simple fact: Customers today expect a lot from brands, and the companies that best meet those expectations are going to thrive in today's digital economy. Those that don't will be left behind. So, what key customer service expectations should you prioritize?

The **No. 1 expectation is, no surprise, issue resolution.** This is a near-unanimous opinion in the global survey; virtually all of those polled said this was the most important function of customer service and the basis for a great experience.

Customers' **second-most important expectation for the service experience relates to speed and the ease with which issues are resolved.** In other words, customers don't want to get frustrated trying to reach the right person who can help them—and this includes figuring out how to contact customer service.

## Customer expectations

**95%** Friendly and knowledgeable agents

**94%** Not have to repeat information across channels

**72%** Reach agents via channel of choice

## Customer-facing employee challenges

**75%** Can't serve customers when coworker collaboration is hard

**74%** Toggle daily between apps to resolve customer issues

**67%** Lack historical customer interaction data

Regarding **technology expectations, customers want to reach out using the channels of their choice.** The days of relying primarily on phone calls and email are over. In the digital age, social media, live chat, in-app messaging, communities, and video conferencing—to name a few—must all function seamlessly as customer support channels.

Brands that want to remain competitive need to provide the access that customers prefer via the channel of their choice. If they don't, companies are in for a rude awakening.
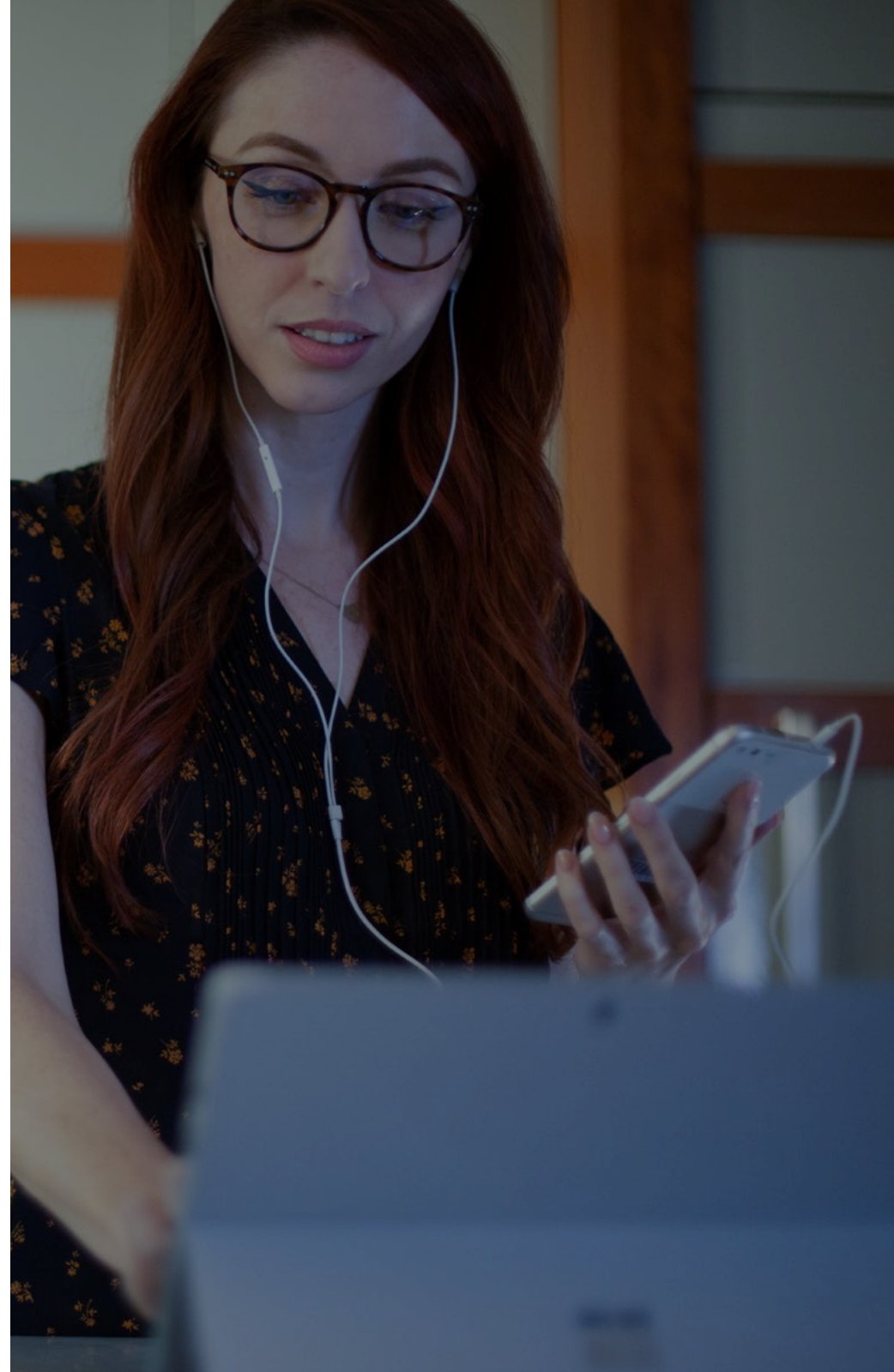
# The gap between expectation & reality

Customers have high expectations for their support experience, the support agent, and the communications technologies used. And brands aren't delivering against these expectations.

The simple reality is: Today brands can't bank on customer loyalty. When customers receive poor service, they won't think twice about moving on. The data shows that customers have **stopped doing business with brands an average of four times in the past year** after a bad customer service experience. Gen Z and millennials cut ties five times in the same 12-month period, revealing the higher expectations companies must meet for younger generations.

## The reality

### 4.1X
Customers dropped brands last year after a bad customer service experience

### 5.2X
Gen Z and millennials have the shortest fuses

### ♂5.1X vs. 2.9X♀
Men get fed up more than women

### 6x 3.6x 3.4x
Australians are the most intolerant of poor service, compared with Brits and Americans

While reasons for leaving a brand vary, **41% cited their dissatisfaction with the need to repeat themselves over and over** as they were passed from one representative to another, and **88% said they hated repeating themselves when interacting through multiple channels.**

Finally, if losing a customer due to a poor experience isn't bad enough, there's also the issue of negative social media and online reviews. One **recent study** shows **92% of dissatisfied customers in today's digital age are more likely to air their grievances in public forums and social networks**, hurting a company's brand and impacting overall market and customer perception.

## Deal breakers

**41**% stopped after...

...having to repeat themselves

...getting passed from rep to rep

**34**% dropped brands after waiting 10+ minutes

# Communications friction impacts employee productivity

In order for companies to provide exceptional customer service, employees need to be empowered with effective communications technologies. Even the most knowledgeable customer-facing employees can't overcome technology issues that don't allow them to quickly access needed customer information that's dispersed across multiple apps.

Today, **74% of customer-facing employees say they have to toggle between different applications to access the information they need to resolve customer issues quickly.** They are faced with having to sort through siloed data and communicate through multiple channels to resolve customer problems.

What's more, these challenges aren't just reserved for customer interactions; they also apply to collaboration with coworkers. For complex issues, agents often need to consult with colleagues. Yet **70% report they have to leave the customer communication app to consult with coworkers** —increasing customer wait times and time to resolution.

## What service agents need

Data at their fingertips so customers don't have to repeat the same information across channels

Help quickly from peers to resolve customer issues

## What they experience

**67%** don't have any historical data about the customer and their previous interactions

**63%** are not aware of customer interactions on other channels

**66%** have difficulty pulling in an internal expert to help resolve a customer issue

**64%** can't seamlessly add a coworker to the customer communication channel

# Engage your employees

When companies think about engaging employees, most think about free lunches and ping pong tables—not technology and whether it supports a productive, effective employee experience. But **technology is an essential part of engaging employees**, and deficiencies in this area affect companies in ways many IT, customer support, and business leaders are not considering.

The **majority of agents—75%—reported being unhappy at work when the tools they use to communicate hinder productivity.** The negative effects of these disjointed workplace communications apps do not simply disappear once agents clock out. Half were self-aware enough to understand that their **work frustrations bled into their professional and personal lives,** often making them short-tempered with coworkers, friends, and family.

The employee experience applies to customer-facing employees of all ages although there are generational differences in the severity of people's reactions, with younger generations tending to have a greater predilection for voicing their opinions.

**Millennials and Gen Z (ages 18-34) are more likely to complain and become cranky about ineffective tools and interrupted workflows.** When Gen X agents (ages 35-44) are unhappy, they are most likely to channel their frustrations into an urge to find new jobs.

## Ruptured relationships



**50%** of employees say they take work frustration home and are more likely to be rude to family and friends

# The customer letdown

It often takes a village to solve customer issues. Collaboration is a crucial ingredient to success, yet when ineffective communications tools do not let agents easily connect with internal experts to find answers, customer service is diminished.

Employees want to support customers, but they don't have the right tools or information to get answers quickly or easily. **Nearly 80% of agents have to put customers on hold every day.** Handcuffed by these technological shortcomings, a similar number of agents**—77%— have to put customers, who expect rapid resolution of their issues, through longer-than-needed service times.**

Everyone is a customer with an issue at some point, so most agents feel it keenly when technology prevents a great customer experience and leads to lost business or complaints on social media. In many cases, more seamless workflows and effective communications technologies could address customer issues.

## Today's communications technology challenges

1  **Lower productivity**
2  **Employee frustration**
3  **Customer churn**

**78**% put customers on hold to query coworkers about issues they can't solve

put their customers through longer-than-needed service times **77**%

**75**% can't effectively serve customers when it's hard to collaborate with coworkers

# Rethink the status quo

Enabling better communications and collaboration for customer-facing employees is a challenge with realistic, workable solutions. The employee experience is increasingly a major focus for many companies, but employers need to see the larger equation.

Giving agents the tools they need to succeed starts with business, IT, and contact center leaders shifting their mindsets and evolving their thinking. Companies are following workplace trends and offering engaging perks, but **75% of employees felt their employers were prioritizing those programs over communications technologies.**

This must change for companies that want to find and keep the best employees and earn long-term customer loyalty. As companies strike a better balance between their digital transformation investments in customer and employee engagement, they will begin to reap the rewards.

## Engage your employees

# 3 in 4

### employees agree

companies prioritize the employee experience with perks — not with communications technologies

### employees agree

digital transformations prioritize the customer experience — not the employee experience

Perks — Communications technology

**PRIORITIZE TECHNOLOGY**

Customer experience — Employee experience

**PRIORITIZE EMPLOYEES, TOO**

# Boost customer satisfaction & the bottom line

Employees may see the benefits of effective technology, but too often business, IT, and contact center leaders don't grasp that ineffective communications tools have a significant impact on workplace satisfaction. Virtually all employees—**88%**—**agree that poor tools make for equally poor workflow,** and on-the-job happiness suffers for it.

The other byproduct of frustrated employees may not be as intuitive, but is equally clear: Low satisfaction in the workplace also harms customer satisfaction. Richard Branson's axiom rings true for **89% of employees, who agree that unhappiness at work is inevitably passed on to customers,** which, in turn, impacts a company's bottom line.

Leaders must understand how current technology investments limit employee productivity, and consequently, harm their business. Investing in employees delivers synergistic benefits that will improve happiness for both employees and customers, driving greater profitability and long-term loyalty.

## Improve workflow and customer engagement
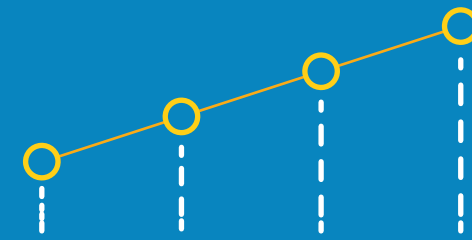
**9 in 10** employees agree

disjointed communications technologies affect workflow and job satisfaction

**IMPROVE WORKFLOW**

employees agree

this impacts customer satisfaction and the bottom line

**IMPROVE BOTTOM LINE**

# The employee & customer engagement equation

Traditionally, businesses think about employee and customer engagement strategies as two separate areas, owned by different stakeholders. This siloed approach creates barriers within the organization that are difficult to tear down. But the status quo isn't sustainable. Businesses need to create a seamless workflow connecting both employees and customers and driving greater engagement.

According to **the overwhelming majority of employees (92%), the solution to these challenges is an integrated communications and collaboration platform** that lets them navigate between all the ways they communicate with coworkers and customers. Such a solution would unlock the ability to solve customer problems swiftly by making it easy to manage customer interactions across all channels and extend customer support across the organization.

It also appeals to the C-suite, who see such technologies as a way to solve one of their biggest challenges with customer-facing employees: Retention. **Over half of CXOs (52%) agree that employees would be happier and stay longer** with access to a seamless communications platform.

Employees and customers have essentially the same expectation: They both want and need a seamless communications experience that meets their needs quickly. Their reasons for wanting that frictionless experience are different, however. Employees want to be as productive as possible in serving customer needs quickly; customers want to be able to get speedy service, on any channel, and not have to repeat information, wait on hold, or be transferred to multiple different agents.

When companies satisfy the communications preferences of both employees and customers, employees are empowered to deliver quality service in real time on customers' channel of choice. And that translates to happier employees and customers, boosting the bottom line.

# Increase the bottom line

## 9 in 10 employees believe

a seamless communications platform that lets them interact with coworkers and customers improves...

Company profitability

Employee experience

Customer experience
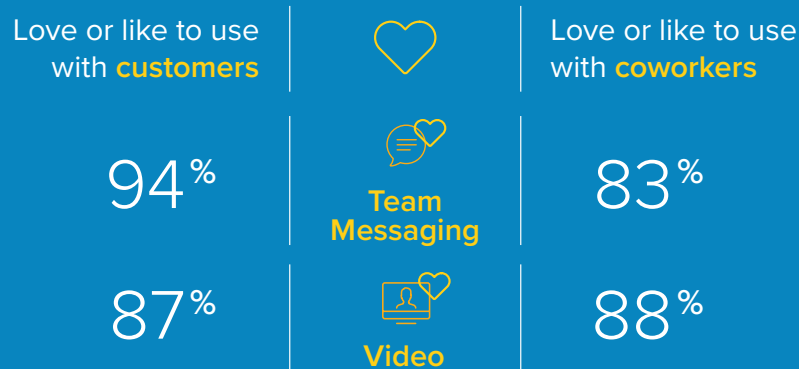
Employee happiness

Customer satisfaction

# Other communications platform necessities

It's clear that communications technology plays a critical role in engaging both employees and customers and leading to higher customer satisfaction and business profitability. Here's what IT and customer service leaders need to prioritize today and in the future.
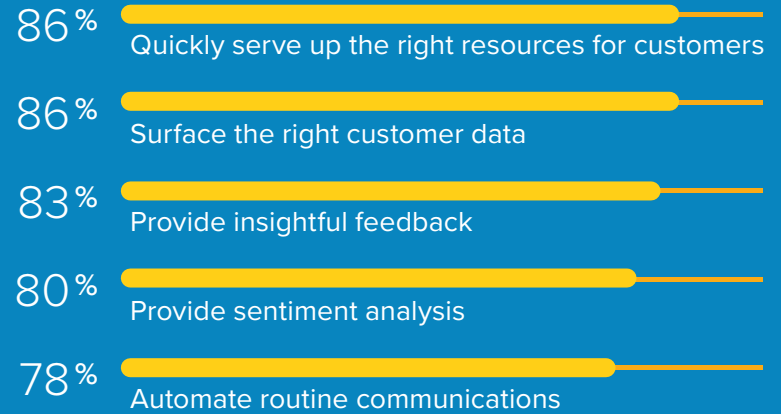
## Tomorrow's wish list
Most requested AI features

**86%** Quickly serve up the right resources for customers

**86%** Surface the right customer data

**83%** Provide insightful feedback

**80%** Provide sentiment analysis

**78%** Automate routine communications

## Today's wish list

The need for integrated team messaging and video conferencing

Love or like to use with **customers**

Love or like to use with **coworkers**

**Team Messaging**
94%    83%

**Video**
87%    88%

## Use vs. effectiveness

The need for integrated team messaging and video conferencing

| TEAM MESSAGING | Use at work | Effectiveness |
|---|---|---|
| Gen Z + Millennials | 29% | 61% |
| Gen X | 22% | 53% |
| Boomers & beyond | 14% | 49% |

| VIDEO | Use at work | Effectiveness |
|---|---|---|
| Gen Z + Millennials | 31% | 63% |
| Gen X | 35% | 58% |
| Boomers & beyond | 29% | 49% |

# About RingCentral

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RingCentral, Inc. (NYSE: RNG) is a leading provider of global enterprise cloud communications, collaboration, and contact center solutions. More flexible and cost-effective than legacy on-premises systems, RingCentral empowers modern mobile and distributed workforces to communicate, collaborate, and connect from any location, on any device, and via any mode. RingCentral provides unified voice, video meetings, team messaging, digital customer engagement, and integrated contact center solutions for enterprises globally. RingCentral's open platform integrates with leading business apps and enables customers to easily customize business workflows. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, and has offices around the world. **ringcentral.com**

## About the research

CITE Research, on behalf of RingCentral, conducted an online survey of 2,000 customer-facing knowledge workers and customer support employees in the US, UK, and Australia. Respondents were screened to work full-time, interact with customers at least 11 hours per week, and work in companies with up to 10,000 and more employees.

## Additional resources

From App Overload to Workplace Zen

Contact Center 2.0: Rise Of The Collaborative Contact Center

Best Self at Work: The Paradoxical State of the American Workforce