



# How to future-proof your contact centre

Trends and advice to ensure your contact centre stays ahead during an era of accelerated change

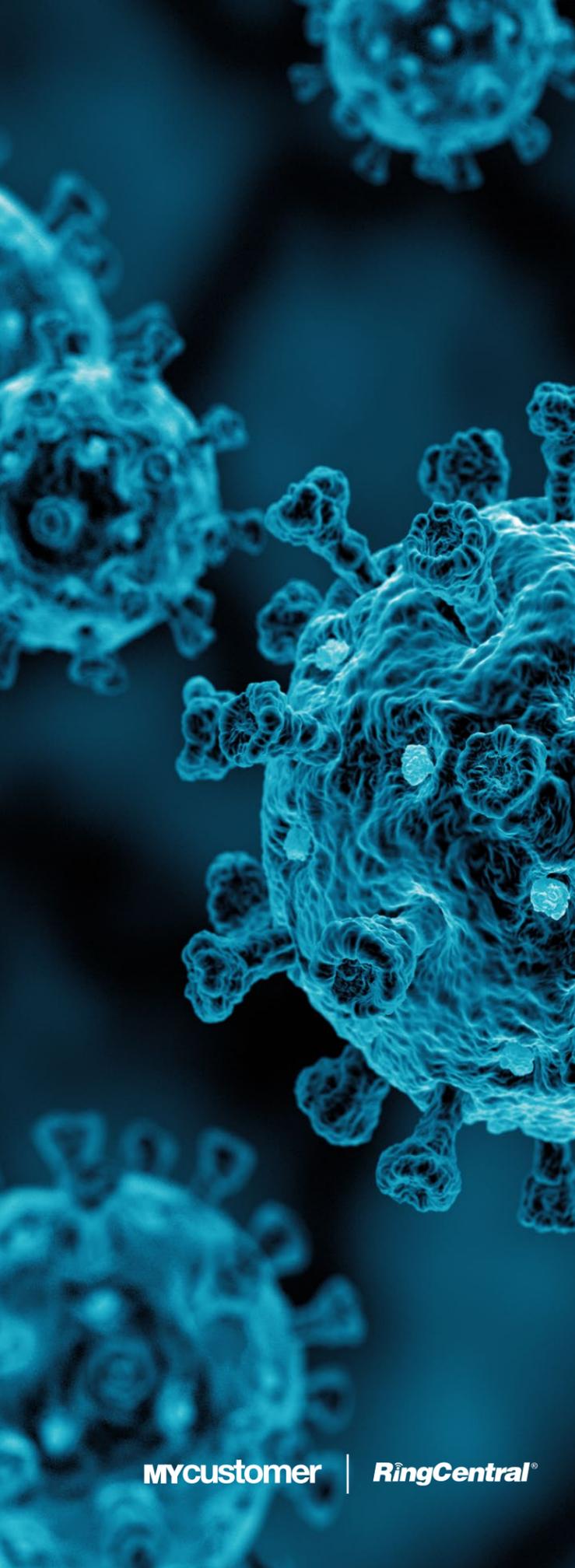
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# How has the contact centre changed since COVID-19?

**The coronavirus crisis has forced organisations into rapid, unprecedented change.**

In a pre-pandemic [Hanover Research survey](#) of over 700 business leaders, 99% reported that they had a digital transformation initiative, yet only 58% had actually started them.

Fast-forward to July 2020 and a high percentage of those organisations stalling on transformation have been forced to accelerate their plans from months and years to weeks.

In the contact centre, a large part of this transformation has come from the remote working requirements presented by COVID-19.

Contact Babel's [The Inner Circle Guide to Contact Centre Remote Working Solutions](#) highlights that only 13% of contact centre agents were working remotely on a permanent basis prior to March 2020. Yet with lockdowns forcing whole populations to stay at home, by mid-April that figure had risen to 71%.

The results of the mass home-working experiment are still to be fully understood, however one key issue many contact centre agents have experienced during the process is in relation to the technology available to them whilst at home. According to a [poll by Censuswide](#) in March, around a third of UK organisations do not have the necessary technology infrastructure in place to support mass remote working on a long-term basis.

Added to this is the fact that consumer behaviour has changed significantly as a result of the pandemic – in particular the channels used to contact customer service departments.

*The Inner Circle Guide to Contact Centre Remote Working Solutions* found that inbound call volume has decreased, overall. In fact, 44% of organisations have experienced a drop in the number of calls they receive. Yet this is sector-specific, with businesses like banks, grocery shops and mobile network providers seeing an increase in calls since March.

*“The coronavirus pandemic put cloud-based contact centres to the test as businesses needed the security, reliability and flexibility promised by the cloud.”*

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Despite this, many organisations have been able to maintain good to average response rates – smaller and larger organisations in particular seeing a drop in average time to answer, ranging from 40%-50%.

In contrast to the fluctuating stats around inbound calls, digital channels have seen marked increases in usage. Support tickets soared in the initial period of lockdown in the UK – the week of 15-22 March saw a [20% jump](#) in the number of service tickets being issued compared with the same period last year.

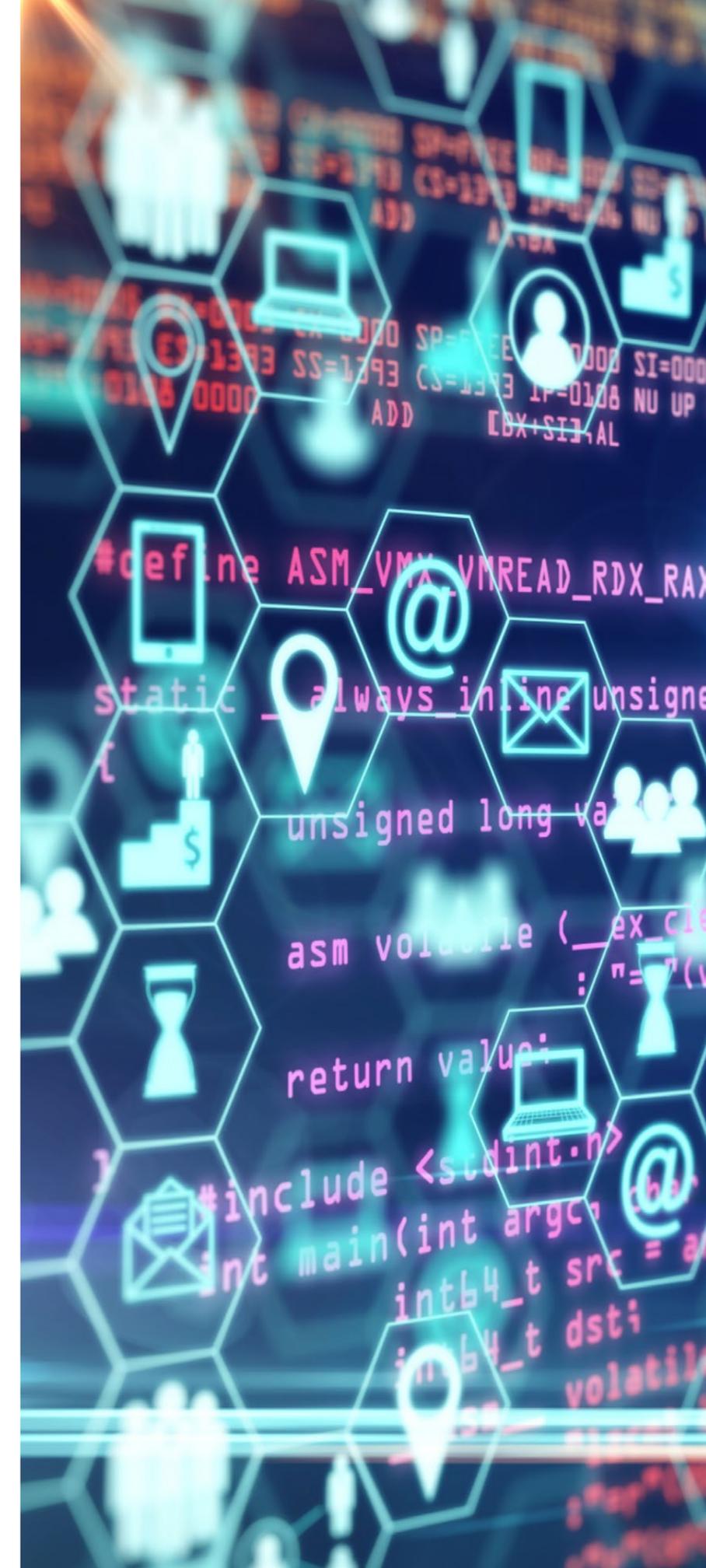
Unsurprisingly, the use of channels such as email and webchat has risen exponentially during the coronavirus crisis. 51% of contact centres report increases in email use, 47% report increases in webchats and 37% report an increase in social media use.

All this has meant that contact centres have needed to turn to the adaptability of cloud-based technology solutions like never before, and are likely to continue to do so in the long-term. Contact Babel’s research has found that 60% of all

contact centres are now either already relying on the power of cloud-based technology, or plan to implement cloud within the next three months. This figure is 77% among large contact centres.

“The coronavirus pandemic put cloud-based contact centres to the test as businesses needed the security, reliability and flexibility promised by the cloud,” says Sunny Dhama, senior director of product marketing for RingCentral.

“A classic example of this is [Arco](#), a leading supplier of PPE to the UK. When the pandemic hit, [Arco was able to send its 200-strong contact centre staff home](#) to maintain customer communications as demand for their services soared. Crucially, cloud-based contact centres allowed businesses to meet the expectations of their customers and maintain their operations throughout such extraordinary circumstances.”





# What the future holds

**Many of the developments experienced since March 2020 are trends that existed before the coronavirus crisis, and have simply been accelerated since. Therefore, the future of the contact centre does not look entirely different from the one that was being predicted prior to March.**

However, what the coronavirus crisis has proven is that rapid transformation is possible, especially from a digital perspective, and that customers and employees alike will now expect certain aspects of contact centre transformation as standard:

## **Continual remote working**

In Dynata's [Global Consumer Trends: COVID-19](#) report, 11,000 people from 11 different countries were interviewed to establish that roughly three-quarters expected a shift to permanent remote working as a result of the virus. Given the upheaval required in many businesses in order to get their contact centre employees working from home during the early stages of COVID-19, there's an expectation that a return to previous working patterns would be regressive and that remote-working agents are here to stay.

## **No excuses with digital channels**

Contact centres must now cater for digital channels in a way that they could be excused for perhaps not always doing, pre-coronavirus. In truth, the expectation was always there, consumers were just more tolerant than they are now. The benefits of being 'omnichannel' are clear, in any case: [UKCSI research](#) found that customers who are able to use their preferred channel for their interaction with an organisation are far more likely to be satisfied with an experience than those who are not.

A [SuperOffice study](#) also found that 40% of consumers now prefer self-service over human contact for simpler tasks, highlighting the need to ensure digital channels are catered for at all costs.

*“Over 60% of consumers report they prefer to self-serve using a website or mobile app for simple tasks.”*

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### **Chatbots’ time to shine**

While the growing popularity of AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants had led Gartner to [forecast that by 2021](#), 15% of all customer service interactions will be handled solely by AI, there has previously been [caution from consumers](#) in relation to chatbots.

However, now, even the World Economic Forum (WEF) [has acknowledged](#) how the COVID-19 pandemic has helped widen global usage for chatbot technology. The World Health Organization (WHO) and Center for Disease Control (CDC) have included chatbots on their websites to provide up-to-date information on the virus and the WEF now predicts the use of chatbots will continue to grow after the pandemic – particularly in industries such as healthcare.

### **Empathy training imperative**

[Research from Chattermill](#) highlighted a huge negative backlash towards customer service and support teams, from consumers, at the start of the pandemic. Further stats suggest that 95% of consumers believe contact centres fall short in providing first contact resolutions across various channels, which places an enhanced emphasis on the importance of empathy training in the contact centre.

With many agents and their managers working from home, the type of training must evolve to meet this development, and the need for more rigorous employee engagement programmes is a must.

### **Right tools for the job**

According to the RingCentral report, [Cutting the Cord](#), 74% of customer-facing contact centre agents recognise the challenge of toggling daily between applications to resolve customer issues. 75% of agents say they can’t serve customers when co-worker collaboration is hard. Integration is a vital component, along with collaborative tools that allow businesses to connect with customers wherever they are to offer the best levels of customer service.

“The breadth of these demands – from hardware all the way to soft skills – demonstrates the rise of customer expectations and the challenge that poses to businesses,” says Sunny Dhami.

“It adds extra pressure on contact centres, which in many cases are already over-stretched and under-resourced. It’s crucial that contact centre staff are supported and enabled to meet customer expectations to keep their businesses thriving.”





# A mobile, flexible, scalable future

**The future needs of the contact centre will place a huge amount of emphasis on greater flexibility, mobility and scalability.**

RingCentral's Cutting the Cord report summarises this best in its assessment that, "today's economy is customer-centric, and customer expectations have never been higher. Businesses need to adopt omnichannel digital engagement tools to empower their agents and connect a global workforce. Traditional on-premises contact centres can't keep up – they lack the scalability and flexibility of cloud-based solutions."

Perceptions about security in the cloud have often inhibited organisations making the leap to cloud-based contact centre solutions. However, with COVID-19 forcing many organisations' hands, fears have been allayed. For instance – [research from McAfee](#) found that 69% of organisations now trust that their data is secure in the cloud.

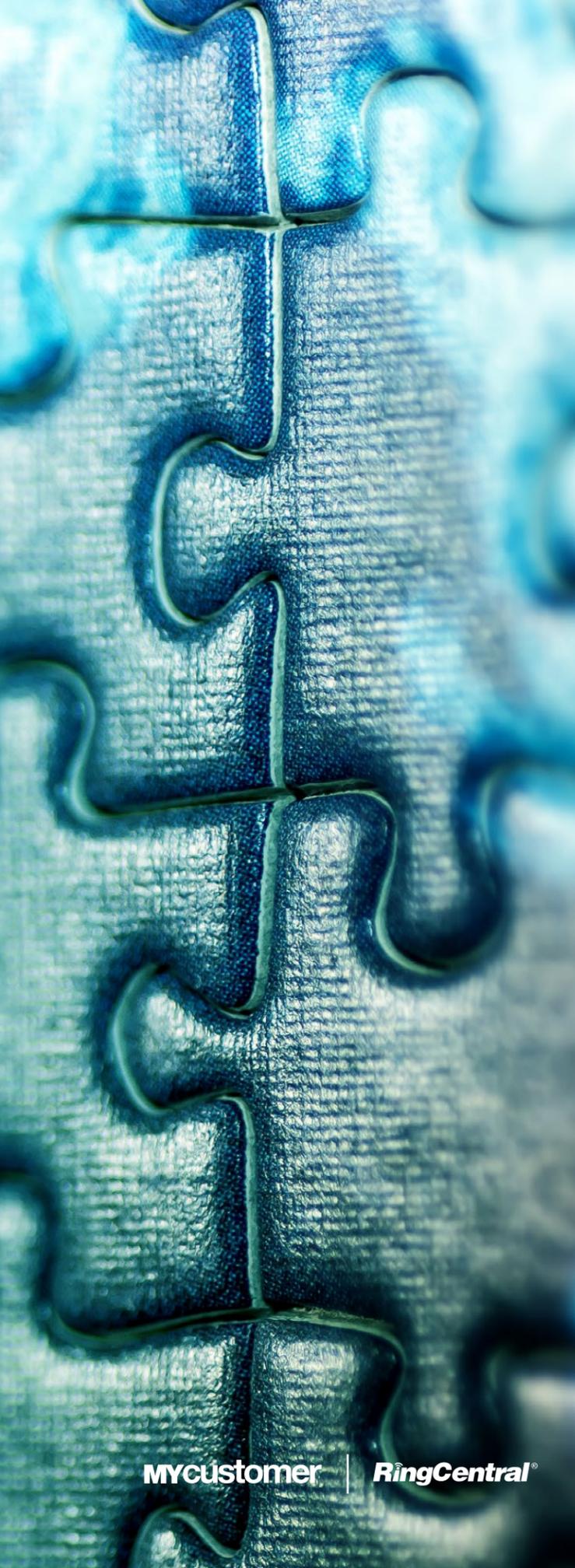
This is a vital development, given that the mobility requirements of the contact centre were also laid bare by the coronavirus crisis.

From a future-proofing perspective, businesses will need to be even more adaptable and able to react to rapid changes in consumer behaviour.

"Ten years ago, businesses' misgivings about cloud security and capacity might have been justified," adds Dhami. "But things have evolved considerably, and cloud services are playing a pivotal role in allowing businesses to remain competitive through ever-demanding market conditions."

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*"Today's economy is customer-centric, and customer expectations have never been higher."*



# Linking the front and back office

**The importance of linking up the front and back office of a contact centre is hardly a new imperative. Current trends indicate that without full integration, it will be almost impossible to deliver on customer expectations as they evolve and new communication channels come in and out of vogue.**

Often, it is the back office – processes that mostly deal with the organisation’s data (such as CRM), IT, logistics, and other clerical tasks – that gets neglected by businesses.

Yet as an increasing number of front office tasks are added to the contact centre’s mandate, a vast amount of data streams through to the back office and that means a greater need for the front and back offices to better communicate.

Today’s contact centres generate incredible amounts of data, with sources ranging from ACD data, CRM systems, call and screen recordings to customer feedback, speech analytics outputs and social media inputs as well as external database content.

The obvious solution is a single platform for front office apps and back office processes. In fact, according to RingCentral’s research report, [\*How App Overload Is Reshaping the Digital Workplace\*](#), contact centre workers are practically demanding the front and back offices be better connected.

66% want a single platform for all of their communications – and the perceived payoffs are significant. Workers believe a unified platform would help them achieve a better workflow (67%), be more productive at work (65%), and help work feel less chaotic (62%).

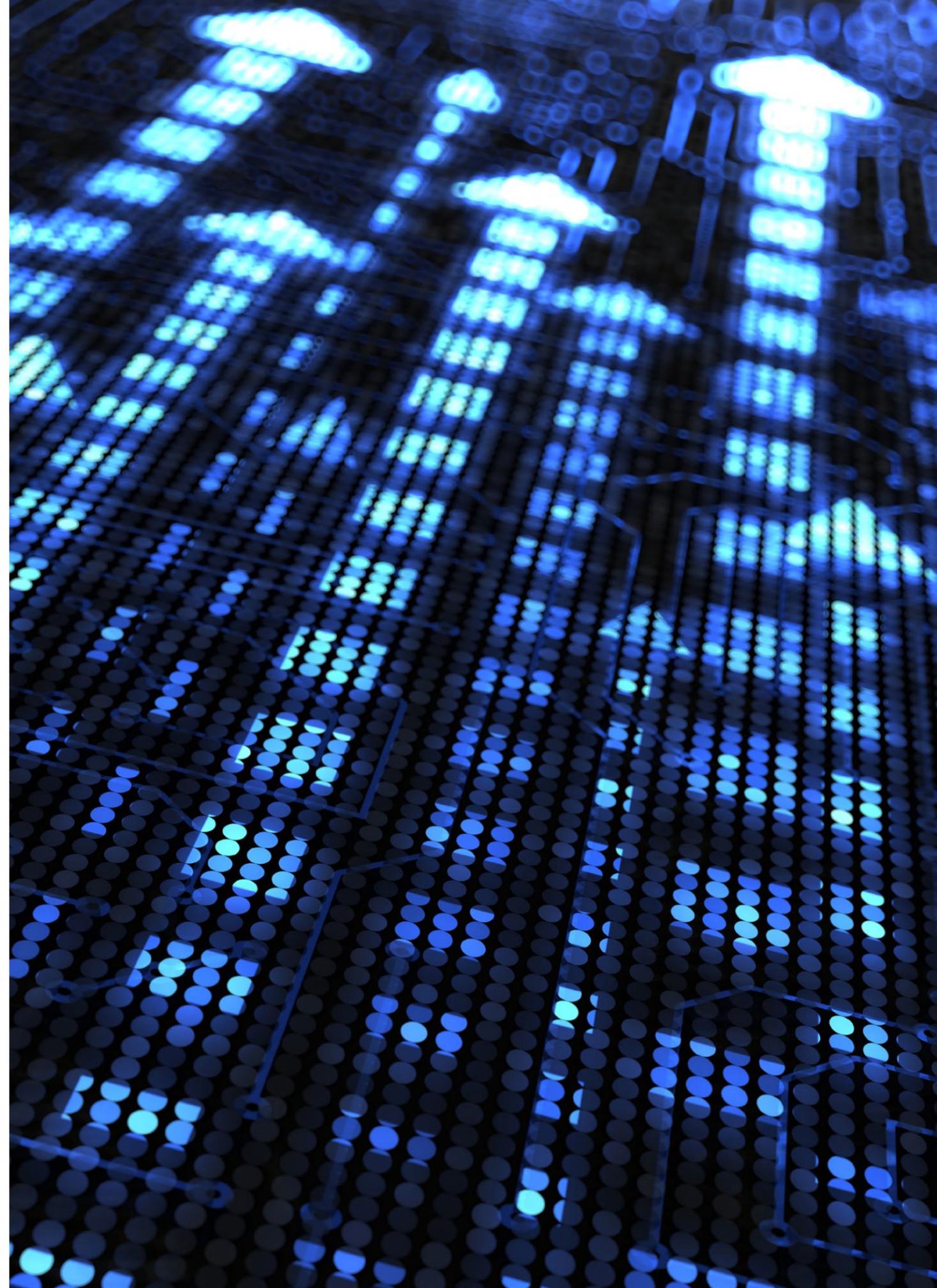
*“Given the pace at which work is conducted in 2020, it’s unrealistic for employers to expect staff to meet today’s demands with last decade’s tools.”*

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56% find searching for information across different applications disruptive, and 31% of workers said it caused them to lose their train of thought.

“There’s no longer any excuse for organisations to not have integrated communications and productivity tools,” reflects Dhimi. “Given the pace at which work is conducted in 2020, it’s unrealistic for employers to expect staff to meet today’s demands with last decade’s tools.

“The rapid obsolescence of digital tools is easily mitigated through cloud service adoption. Contact centre as a service (CCaaS) includes maintenance, updates and upgrades, meaning users constantly have access to the latest versions of their tools.”





# Applying advanced analytics

**Basic analytics tools have been the staple diet of contact centres for many years. However, looking ahead, advanced analytics are likely to be what differentiates the standard of the customer experience they deliver in the near future.**

As [explained by Gartner](#), advanced analytics is “the autonomous or semi-autonomous examination of data to discover deeper insights, make predictions, or generate recommendations” and includes techniques such as “data/text mining, machine learning, pattern matching, forecasting, visualization, semantic analysis, sentiment analysis, network and cluster analysis, multivariate statistics, graph analysis, simulation, complex event processing and neural networks.”

Only 37% of organisations feel they are using advanced analytics to create value, according to [a 2019 study](#) from McKinsey.

With increasing pressure on bottom lines, productivity and employee engagement, McKinsey’s study also heralds advanced analytics for having an impact on each of these

areas, helping to “reduce average handle time by up to 40%, increase self-service containment rates by 5 to 20%, cut employee costs by up to \$5 million, and boost the conversion rate on service-to-sales calls by nearly 50% – all while improving customer satisfaction and employee engagement.”

Dhama adds: “Analytics has been part of the conversation for years now, but many businesses are still not getting the most out of that potential.”

“We often hear horror stories of how legacy contact centre reports take hours or even days to be produced, completely negating any actionability that might have originally been there. Access to real-time data is critical for customer communications teams to be responsive and keep performance high under any circumstances.”



# Tips for being future-proof

**Clearly a fundamental requirement for being ‘future-ready’ in the contact centre is acknowledging that cloud-based technology is likely to be the industry standard for tackling future trends such as those thrown up by the pandemic.**

RingCentral provides five tips for sourcing the correct technology to help future-proof your contact centre.

## **1. Select a reliable solution**

It is crucial to make sure your future provider delivers the services your company requires to operate. When evaluating a solution, look for network redundancy, quality of service monitoring and reporting, as well as disaster recovery. Your business communications system is critical, and any outage could significantly impact your business – your customers, revenue, and reputation. Reliability is about eradicating these risks. A good indicator of a stable and well-managed solution is an uptime above 99.99%.

## **2. Do not compromise on security**

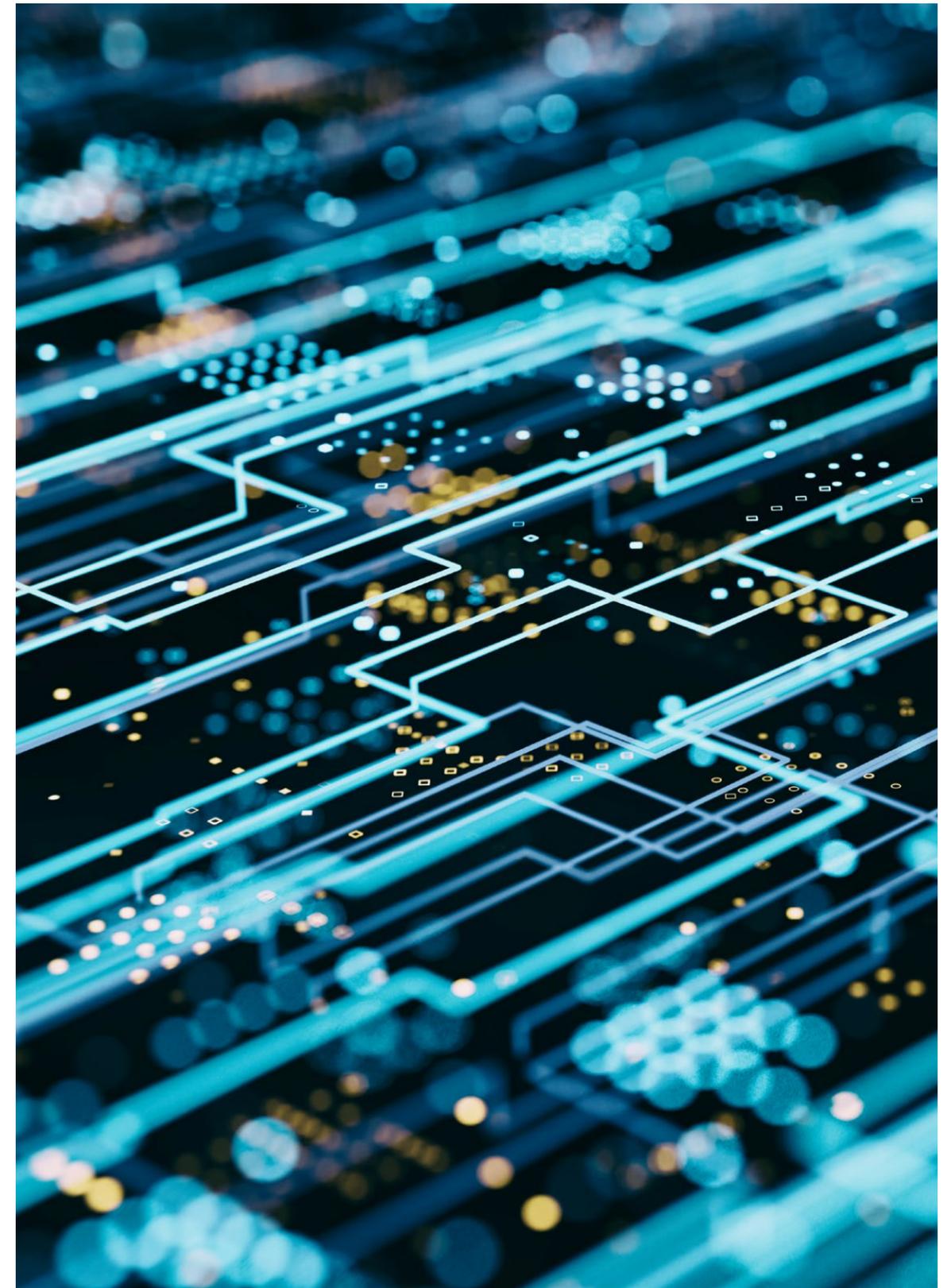
No system is perfect, but a well-staffed cloud provider, with highly trained staff dealing with security daily, is likely to reduce the risk of security breaches compared to an overworked enterprise IT department.

### 3. Demand flexibility

In a rapidly evolving world, enterprises need flexibility in order to cope with globalisation, changing workplaces, and current or future expansions. When planning an expansion, for example, it can be challenging to connect multiple sites and even more so when planning an expansion into new countries. This is becoming the reality of many enterprises with distributed sites and workforces in need of a flexible unified communications solution that can scale globally. Whilst traditional business communications systems might restrict your expansion, bringing obstacles such as high equipment expenditures and long and complex deployment times, cloud solutions help you move forward by removing the complexity and high costs.

### 4. Build an ecosystem

Core business processes supported by SaaS across businesses today include email and collaboration tools, customer relationship management, business intelligence and document management tools, HR services and advanced analytics. In such context, integrations between applications are key and mean adding value to existing products, enabling communications capabilities directly from the interface where users spend much of their workday – boosting business efficiency and productivity. Integrations allow businesses to break down the silos that can hinder communications, enabling employees to work more efficiently and connect more easily with both customers and colleagues.





## 5. Do not compromise on customer and user experience

With businesses using an average of 13 applications, these applications need to be easy to use and to manage. In today's busy world, nobody can afford to waste time learning and re-learning how to use a new business tool. Administrators and end-users both deserve intuitive applications. When choosing a new system, you need the buy-in of end users to ensure successful and rapid adoption with minimum impact on business activities and revenue.

“To risk a cliché, it's true you get out what you put in – and it's well worth investing in a top-quality contact centre system,” explains Sunny Dhami.

“The correlation between employee experience, customer experience and direct revenue is well-known, but fewer businesses realise the very real impact this also has on their share value. Companies that put their customers – whether internal or external – at the centre of their strategy are ultimately those who thrive. CCaaS is a way to achieve this without spending a fortune on hardware and software and incurring a ton of liability in the process.”

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# About RingCentral

**We work with our customers to reimagine the world of business communications and collaboration. This relentless passion to innovate has made us the #1 cloud communications provider worldwide, and we don't plan on stopping there.**

Technology breaks down barriers and unlocks potential, making it easy for people to do their best work together. In today's mobile world, this means giving teams, partners, and customers the ability to communicate, collaborate, and connect the way they want on any device, anywhere, anytime. It's what we call collaborative communications, and it's at the heart of everything we do.

With our flexible, cost-effective cloud communications and collaboration solutions, we've created the ideal workplace, where business can be done more efficiently and effectively. From an all-in-one cloud phone system with team messaging and video conferencing to a complete contact centre and more, we build solutions for every business, no matter how big or small.

[www.ringcentral.co.uk](http://www.ringcentral.co.uk)

The RingCentral logo features the word "Ring" in blue and "Central" in orange, with a registered trademark symbol (®) to the right. A small orange Wi-Fi symbol is positioned above the letter "i" in "Ring".

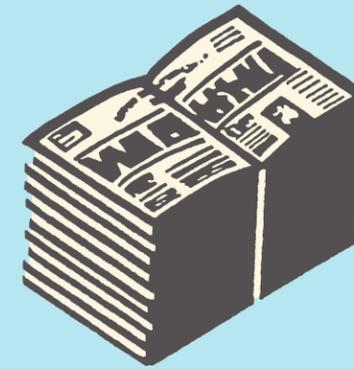
# About **MY**customer

**MyCustomer.com is Europe's leading online resource for customer-focused professionals, with over 100,000 members.**

Sharing news, advice and resources on topics ranging from customer engagement to CRM and the contact centre, MyCustomer is a vital hub for business leaders aiming to enhance every facet of the customer experience they deliver.

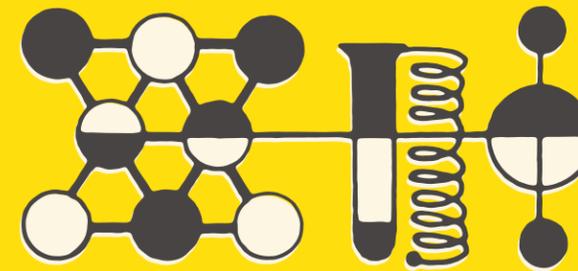
With a network of expert contributors from around the globe and a focus on strategy, technology and in-depth research, members of the MyCustomer community are able to tap into a wealth of knowledge and receive the most comprehensive view of the trends affecting and influencing the world of customer management.

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