

Customer Service Expectations Are Evolving

Consumers are using more channels and fewer traditional methods to contact customer service

ARTICLE |

Krista Garcia

Due to the growing number of channels available and younger consumers reaching adulthood, expectations for customer service have been changing.

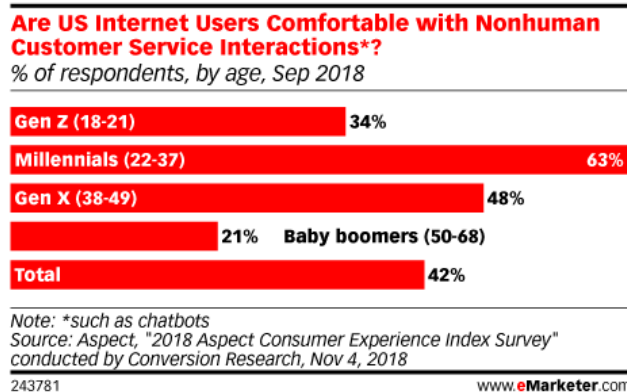
According to an October 2018 survey of US internet users by [Zendesk](#), compared with five years ago, more are looking for answers on their own, expect less complicated interactions, and want more options for contacting customer service. A majority (65%) also expect customer service to be faster now than in the recent past.

In an August 2018 survey by [Aspect Software](#), consumer-reported incidences of customer service contact had declined over the past few years, from 71% in 2015 to 62% in 2018. But it's not as if consumers have fewer questions or issues. This decline can be explained in part because close to half (47%) did not consider self-service interactions to be customer service contact. The definition of customer service is evolving, especially among younger consumers.

When millennials were asked about different customer service scenarios, most thought requesting a callback from a company (76%) and using an interactive voice response system without talking to an agent (66%) counted as customer service. Fewer were in agreement

that using a chatbot for recommendations and basic questions (48%) or getting text reminders (36%) qualifies as customer service.

Despite multiple studies that have shown **consumers aren't fully comfortable using chatbots — at least for complex requests** — 42% of US internet users are comfortable with nonhuman customer service interactions, according to Aspect. Millennials were the age group with the largest number on board with chatbots (63%).



The most used customer service channel is still the phone (34%), while chatting (25%) and messaging apps (10%) are on the rise. In fact, the number of consumers using messaging apps doubled since 2017.

Phone was the most commonly used customer service contact channel in the Zendesk survey as well; 81% had used that method in the past 12 months. And similar to findings from Aspect, alternative methods were growing in popularity. In total, 67% had used live chat, social media and texting to contact customer service. Of all generations, millennials had the highest usage of live chat (62%) and social media (47%).

According to Aspect, millennials are much more likely to interact with AI-powered customer service, like intelligent assistants or chatbots, than the average (74% vs. 56%, respectively). But it's up-and-coming Gen Z that prefers nontraditional channels most, even if figures are low across the board. Twice as many consumers ages 18 to 22 prefer interacting with chatbots than the average (6% vs. 3%), while more also prefer texting (13% vs. 8%) and messaging apps (14% vs. 10%).

This was also the case in Zendesk's findings. Gen Z had the highest preference for using social media channels to connect with customer service for both simple (36%) and complex (26%) queries.

This trend toward using more channels and fewer traditional methods to contact customer service is set to continue as comfort with chatbots grows.