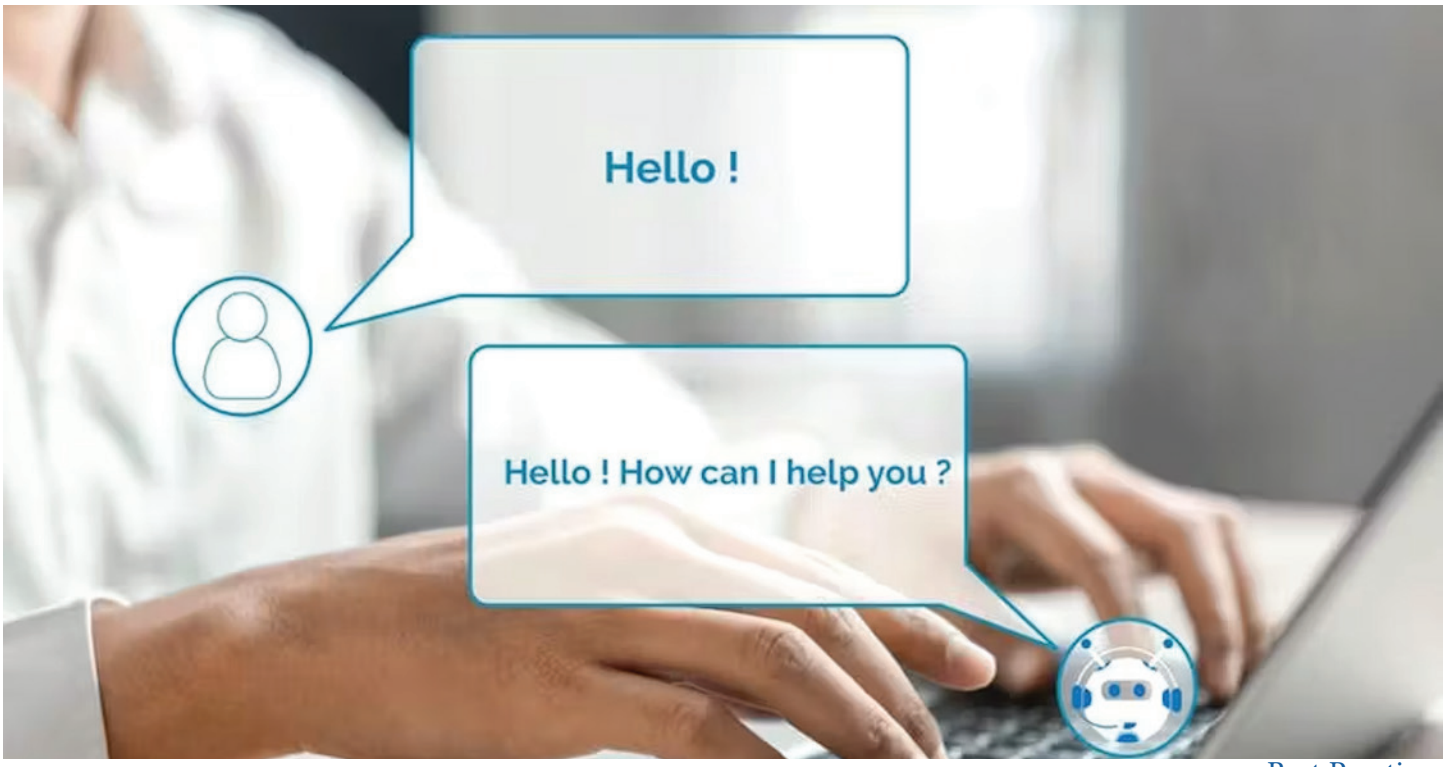


Best Practices

AI or Human CSR? Focus on the Customer Experience

An empathetic experience can still be delivered with the right mix of resources, as long as businesses meet clients wherever and whenever they may be.

Kris Altiere

Key Highlights

- Two-thirds of US companies are adopting AI to enhance operational efficiency, particularly in customer service functions
- Many businesses make it difficult for customers to find contact information, despite a majority preferring phone support
- A blend of AI and human interaction ensures empathetic, relevant, and personalized customer experiences, especially for urgent or sensitive issues

New research surveying over 750 businesses shows approximately two-thirds of US companies are using AI to drive efficiencies in areas like telephone answering, a traditionally human-centric role. Our business model offers us a unique view into the interaction that occurs when customers place that call, giving us insight into how AI is changing the landscape of how home services companies interact with their customers.

For decades, the immediate answer to “how to get in touch” was a 1-800 number, but it eventually defaulted to a website and/or email. This has led to today with increasingly sophisticated and complex intake tools online and invitations to connect via email and social media.

AI or Human CSR? Focus on the Customer Experience

After being on the other end of millions of calls over the last 25 years at those still existent 1-800 numbers, our data lends us even greater understanding of the customer through actual human-to-human conversations on the frontlines.

Make it Easier to Get in Contact

Many companies—counter to the conventional customer service wisdom—make it difficult for customers to get in touch in the hopes of putting off something costly like, for example, canceling a service. This "sludge" can make it hard for customers to feel heard (that is, if they can find a number to call at all).

We researched several Fortune 500 companies, and found 85% did not include a phone contact number on their website home page. Many did feature a phone number elsewhere on their site, but 33% made it either impossible or extremely difficult to find. Some hid it behind six or seven clicks, while 23% had no number anywhere on their website, making phone contact impossible. This is despite the fact that 76% of customers still prefer phone calls for customer support, according to a Claes Fornell International Group Study from 2020 (a time when phone contact saw an explosion in volume that hasn't abated).

In the home services space, customers are often calling in the midst of an emergency or out of frustration from something like a missed appointment. An empathetic experience can still be delivered with the right mix of AI and human resources, as long as businesses meet clients wherever and whenever they may be.

AI as a Force Multiplier

Our research found AI fast becoming a cornerstone of operations, with more than two-thirds (64%) of companies now using or considering it to drive efficiency, enhance decision-making and supercharge growth. It showed AI adoption booming in marketing, analytics, and customer service, where the top two industries for adoption were IT and telecommunication companies.

Among locally operating home services businesses trying to cover the field—from one man shows to larger ones with stretched teams—an extra one or two calls an hour may be manageable. But, with peak times due to weather events, holidays or other impacts like billing due dates, how about 10 or more calls an hour? Keep in mind that many of the people on the other end are often calling when they can during lunch breaks, so certain parts of the day could see even higher influxes. Keep in mind, as much as 15% of calls to businesses are telemarketers, dead air, or automated.

Beyond helping manage customer service, allaying the cost of in-house support (in-house employee training, benefits, salary, office space), extra help on the phones can also create the impression of a larger enterprise. Chatbots and AI can enhance the customer experience, but many people prefer the warmth, understanding, and problem-solving capacity of a friendly human being on the end of a phone line, particularly when their call is urgent or sensitive.

On the other end of the line, for companies not using dedicated phone answering services it costs an estimated 23 minutes for an employee to get back on task after answering a call.

Not every call is a new contact, which we recognize when helping manage the existing relationships home services clients have with their customers. Everything from appointment setting and rescheduling to payment processing can be handed off to very capable hands.

Empathy, Tone and Trust

AI isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. What matters is creating experiences that are personal, relevant, and contextually right. Many businesses benefit because a large portion of their customer interactions are about routine, frequently asked questions, and AI can handle those brilliantly. That frees up real people to focus on the more complex, sensitive or high-value conversations. It's about using the right blend of technology and people to deliver the best possible customer experience.

For new contacts, logical scripting can qualify leads and productively drive the conversation. Does a company only do self-pay and not insurance? Or replace but not repair? Does there being one or two bathrooms change the urgency of a clogged toilet plumbing call? Can an HVAC company get specific equipment details on the first call to prepare a quote for when the customer is called back?

We find the best insights come when we blend metrics with feedback from frontline teams and customer interviews, which allows us to predict and streamline the

buyer journey for that individual business. This blend of quantitative and qualitative insight ensures campaigns are relevant, timely, and customer-first, and ensures empathy, tone, and trust are considered for every client interaction. We built our entire model around this mindful interaction, and learning from it has helped us continue to insightfully innovate.

Kris Altiere, US Head of Marketing for Moneypenny, has over two decades of expertise in marketing and brand development. Possessing a proven ability to drive growth and establish trusted brands, she is an award-winning strategist that connects vision with innovative digital solutions to boost sales, loyalty, and recognition. At Moneypenny, Kris leads efforts to expand the US market presence and solidify the brand's leadership across several industries, including home services. For more information, visit www.moneypenny.com.