



Hiver's Customer Service Benchmark Report - 2021



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Introduction

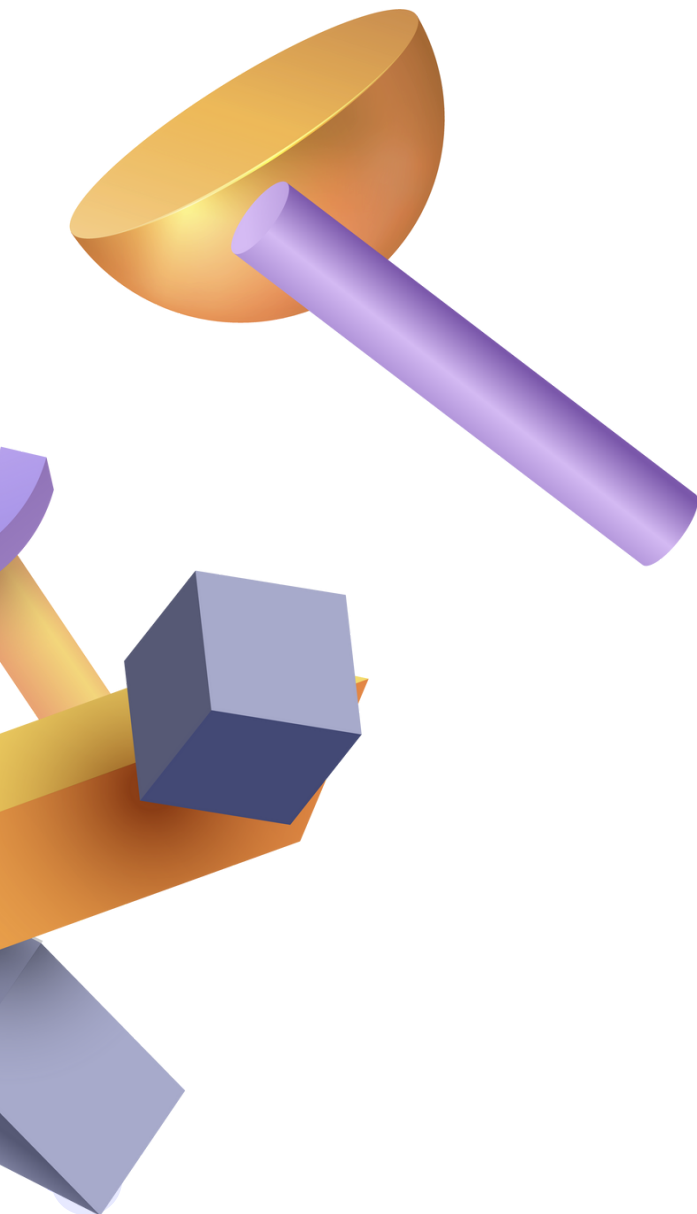
A few decades ago, customer service wasn't considered a priority for a lot of companies. Robotic IVR messages, long wait times and repeated call transfers were commonplace; proactive, personalized and empathic customer service was unheard of. Customers had little choice but to put up with such substandard service quality.

Today, however, with the internet and smartphones having revolutionized the way people communicate, customer expectations have changed. The unprecedented events of the past year and a half have especially led to a monumental shift in how customers connect with brands, and the kind of service they demand.

Companies that want to survive in starkly competitive markets, have to fight tooth and nail for customers' business, and compromising on the customer experience no longer remains an option.

But, what are companies doing differently now? How are they delivering customer service in the digital age? How quickly do they respond to their customers? How do they measure their support quality? Most importantly – what are they doing to go the extra mile to understand their customers and delight them?

In its first ever Customer Service Benchmark Report, Hiver finds out answers to these important questions by surveying customer service representatives on how they deliver support.



Methodology

Hiver surveyed over 500 US-based customer service professionals to understand how their teams handle and deliver support. We've divided their responses under three broad categories:

Customer support processes

Their work models, support availability and key support channels.

Performance benchmarking

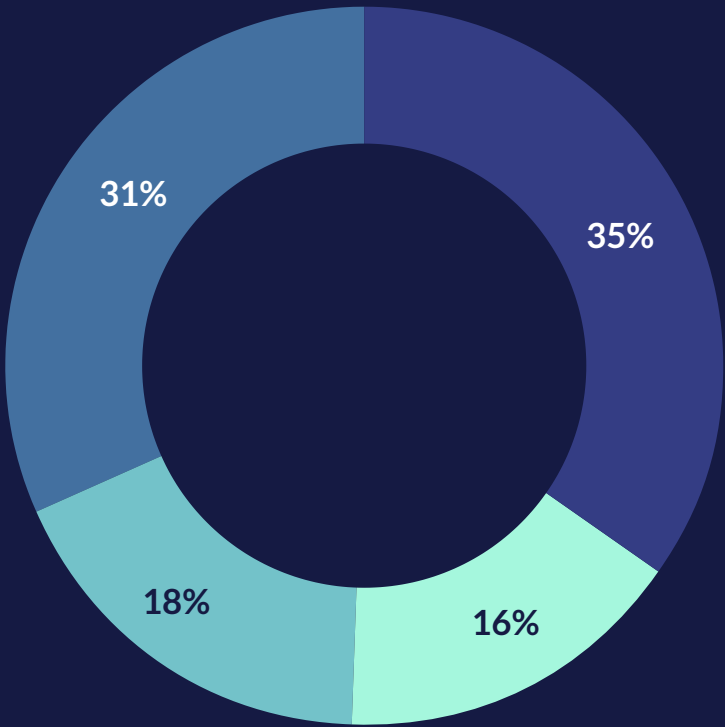
Their SLA policies, average response and resolution times.

Support quality benchmarking

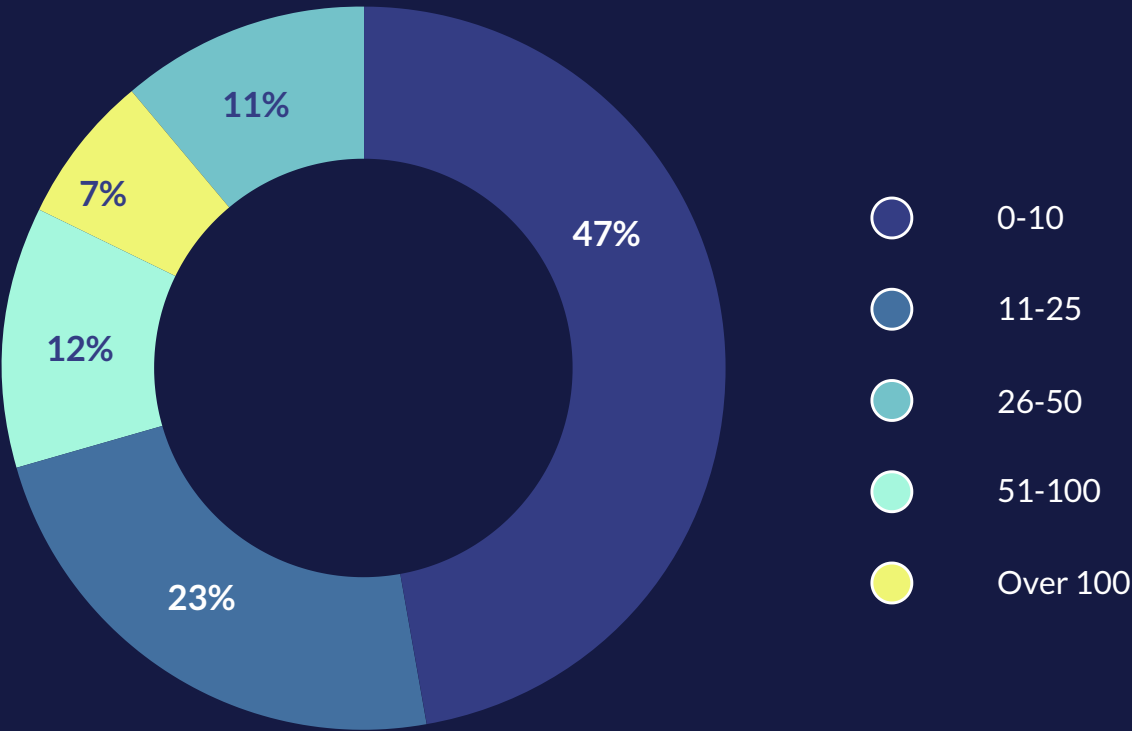
Their most important indicators of support quality, key KPIs and customer feedback channels.

The surveyed professionals were from a mix of small, medium, large and enterprise-level companies.

- Small 0-50
- Medium 51-200
- Large 201-1000
- Enterprise Over 1000



Here's a further breakdown of those surveyed based on the sizes of their support teams.



Key Findings

60%

of customer service teams have some kind of remote work arrangement.



76%

of companies are extending support outside of traditional business hours.



25%

of teams are fully remote.



34%

of customer service teams offer 24x7 customer service.



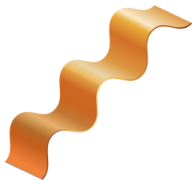
83%

of customer service teams offer tele support.



77%

of teams offer support via email.



60%

of companies deliver support across 3 or more channels.



50%

of customer service teams said phone is their busiest support channel.



34%

of the surveyed support professionals said their First Response Time (FRT) for email queries is less than 1 hour.



50%

of companies promise a resolution time of below 6 hours.



41%

of teams said Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT) is their most important KPI.

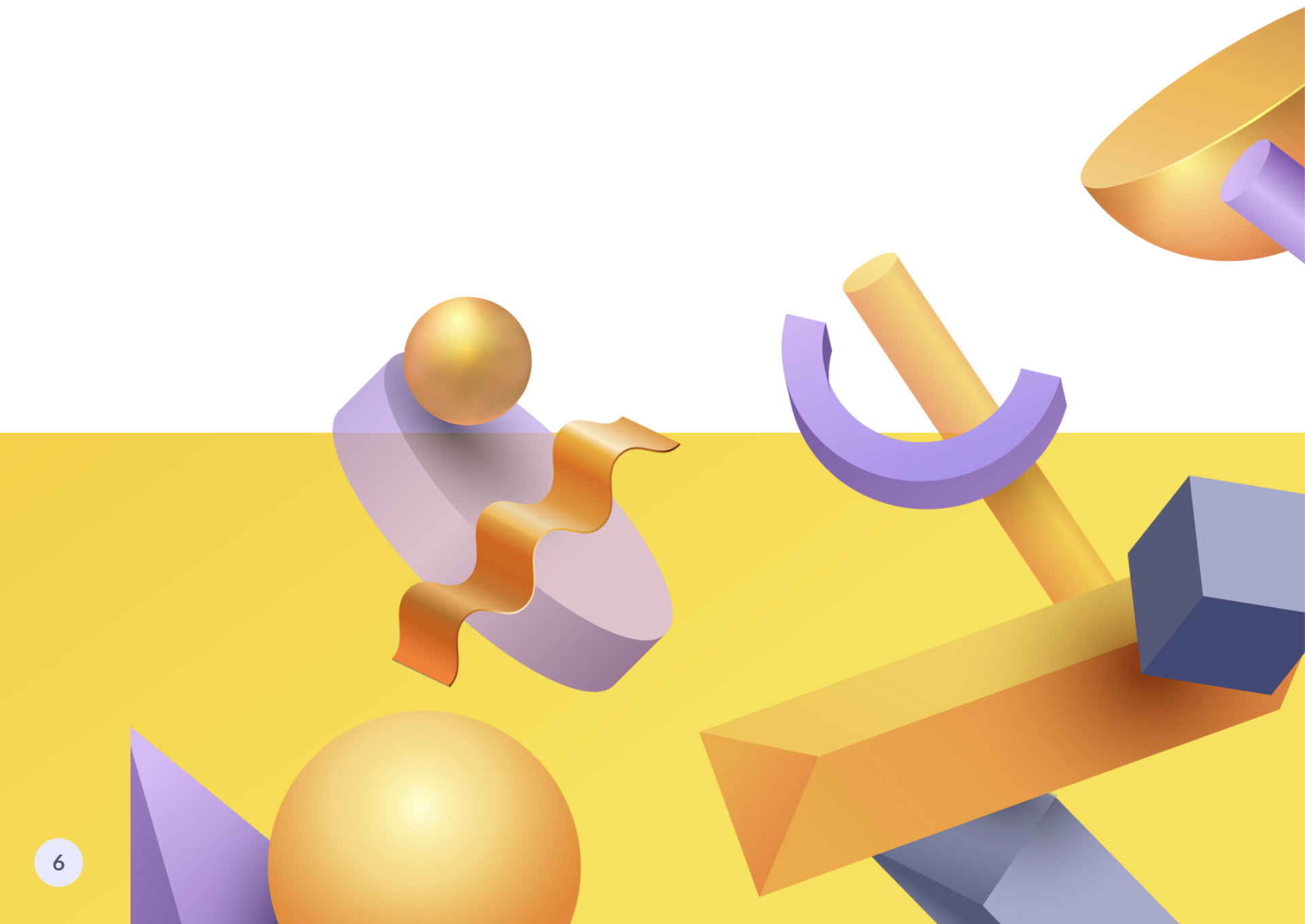


51%

of teams analyze support tickets to infer customer feedback.

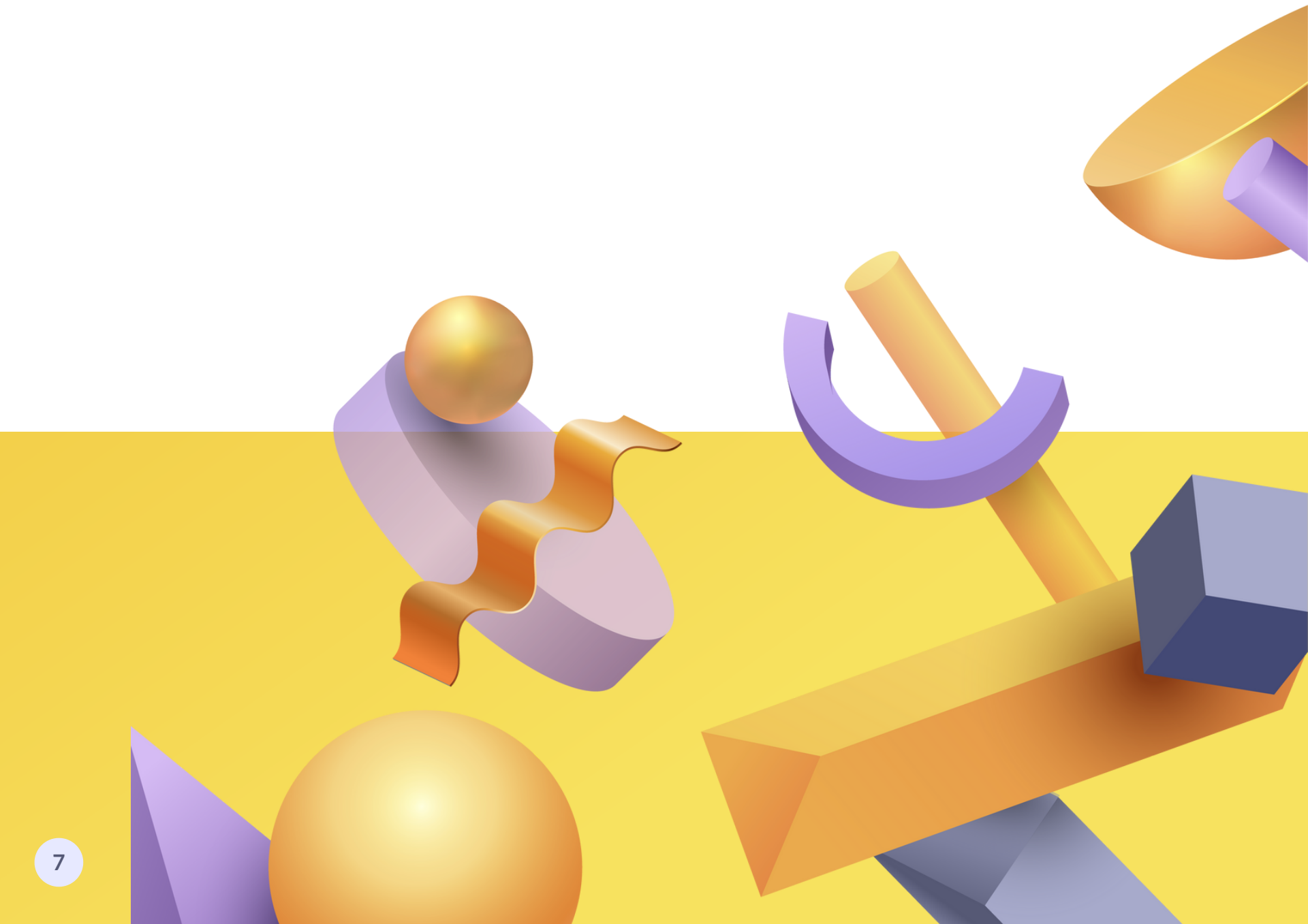


Benchmark Results



Section 1

Customer support processes



1

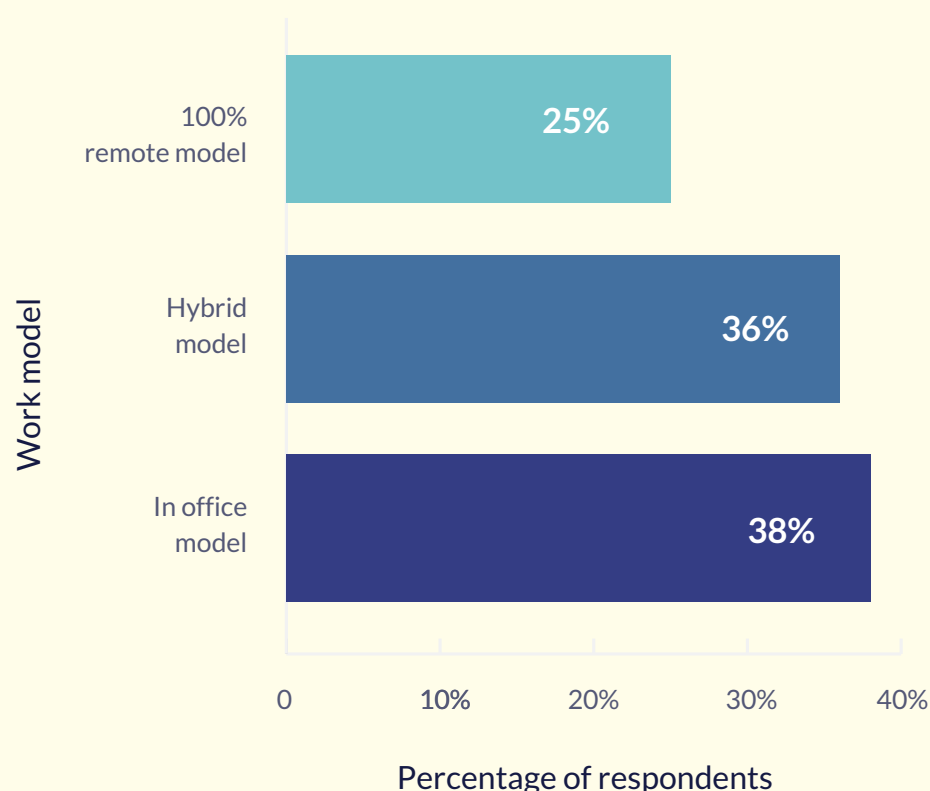
Remote work is here to stay: 61% of teams have some form of remote work arrangement

For a lot of customer service teams, the pandemic-induced shift to remote workplaces seems to have had a lasting impact on their work models.

Despite the global vaccine rollout, our research shows that **61%** of teams now have some remote workers. At least **25%** of these support teams have adopted a fully remote work structure while **36%** have a hybrid work model.

There are still **38%** that work out of an office.

What work model does your customer service team have?



“

The pandemic changed everything, and now customer service teams – like their counterparts in other departments – can be just as effective remotely as they were in the office. This presents a huge opportunity for companies to hire the best of the best, regardless of location, and for employees to work for companies that previously were not accessible to them. It's a win-win for both parties.

”



Dan Gingiss

Chief Experience Officer, The Experience Maker

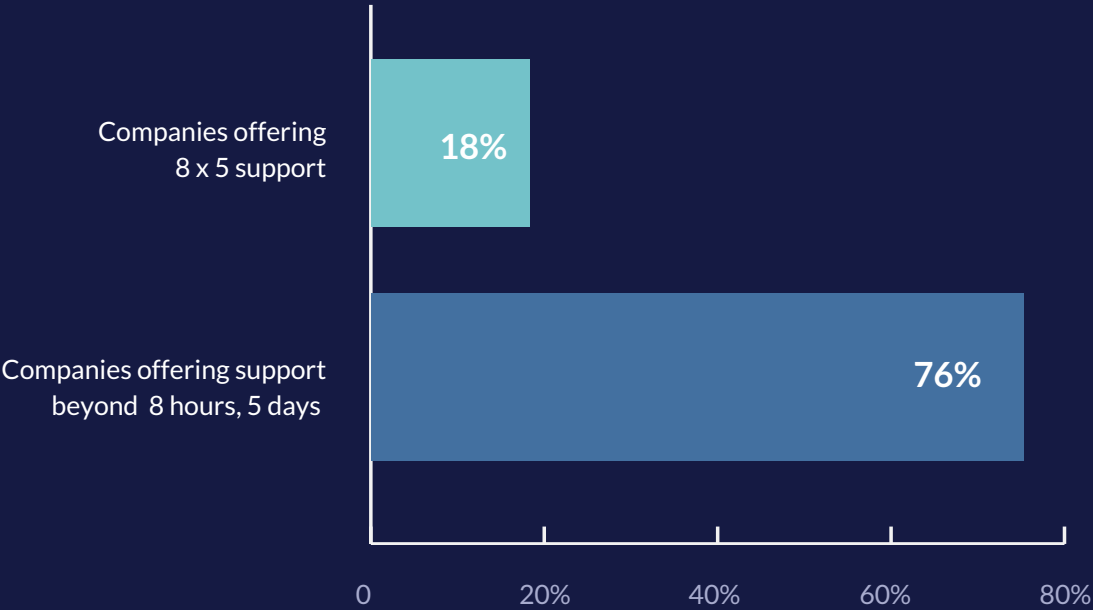
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Companies are going the extra mile: 76% of teams offer support outside of traditional business hours

It's the age of the customer, and brands are leaving no stone unturned to go the extra mile to delight them. The definition of conventional business hours has changed, and businesses are making themselves available beyond 9-5 to support their customers.

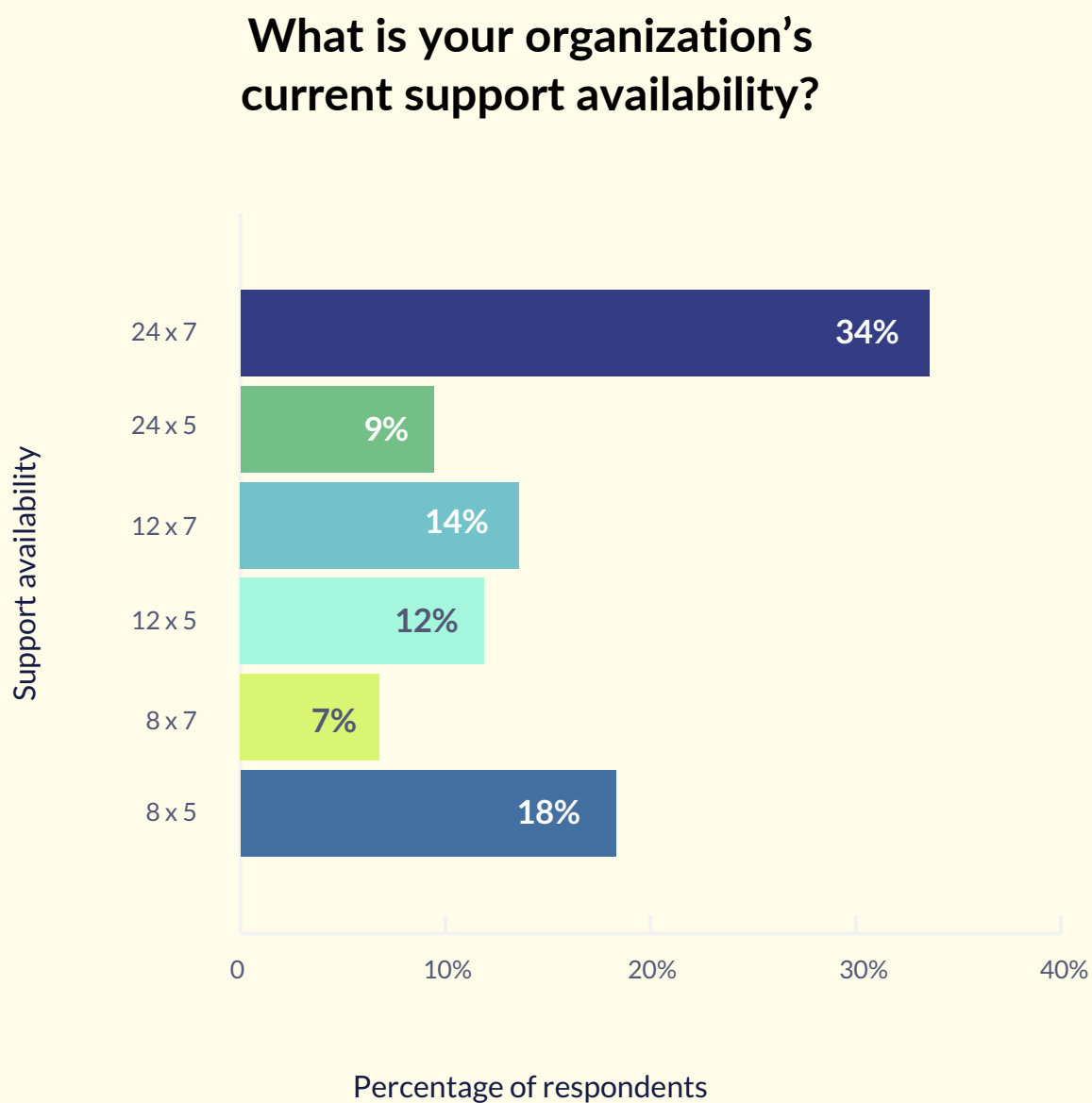
Our survey reveals that close to **76%** of companies are extending support beyond the average 8 hours, 5 days a week.

A majority of companies are offering support beyond the average 8 hours, 5 days



What’s more, the highest fraction of surveyed support professionals – around **34%** of them – are offering customers 24x7 support.

Around **14%** of teams are providing 12x7 support, followed by **12%** teams offering 12x5 support. However, **18%** of teams are still offering their customers 8x5 support.



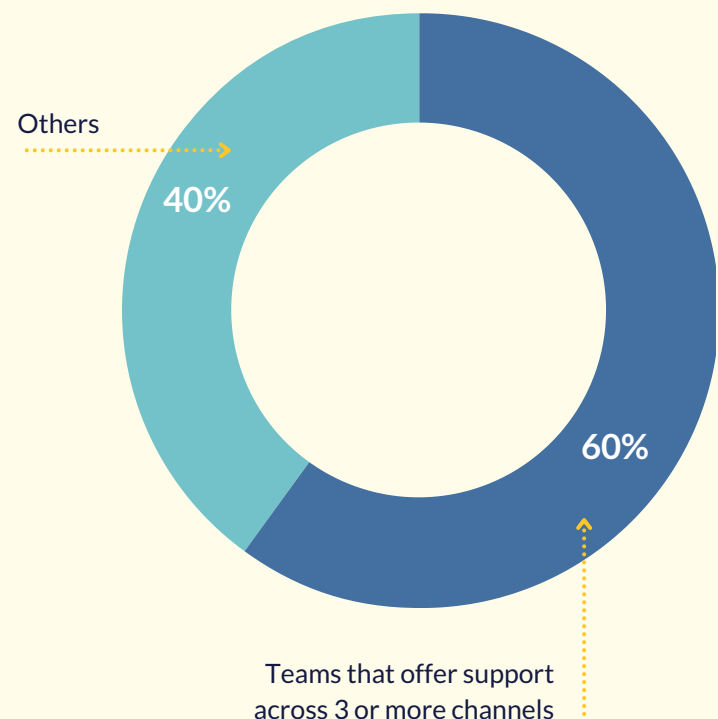
3

Multi-channel support has become the norm: 60% teams offer support across three or more channels

Owing to increasing tech adoption and smartphone usage, customers today have become more demanding than ever before. Naturally, they expect brands to make themselves available not just whenever they want them, but also wherever they want them to be.

Our survey shows that brands are realizing this need: Almost **60%** of respondents offer support across three or more channels.

A majority of teams are offering multi-channel support



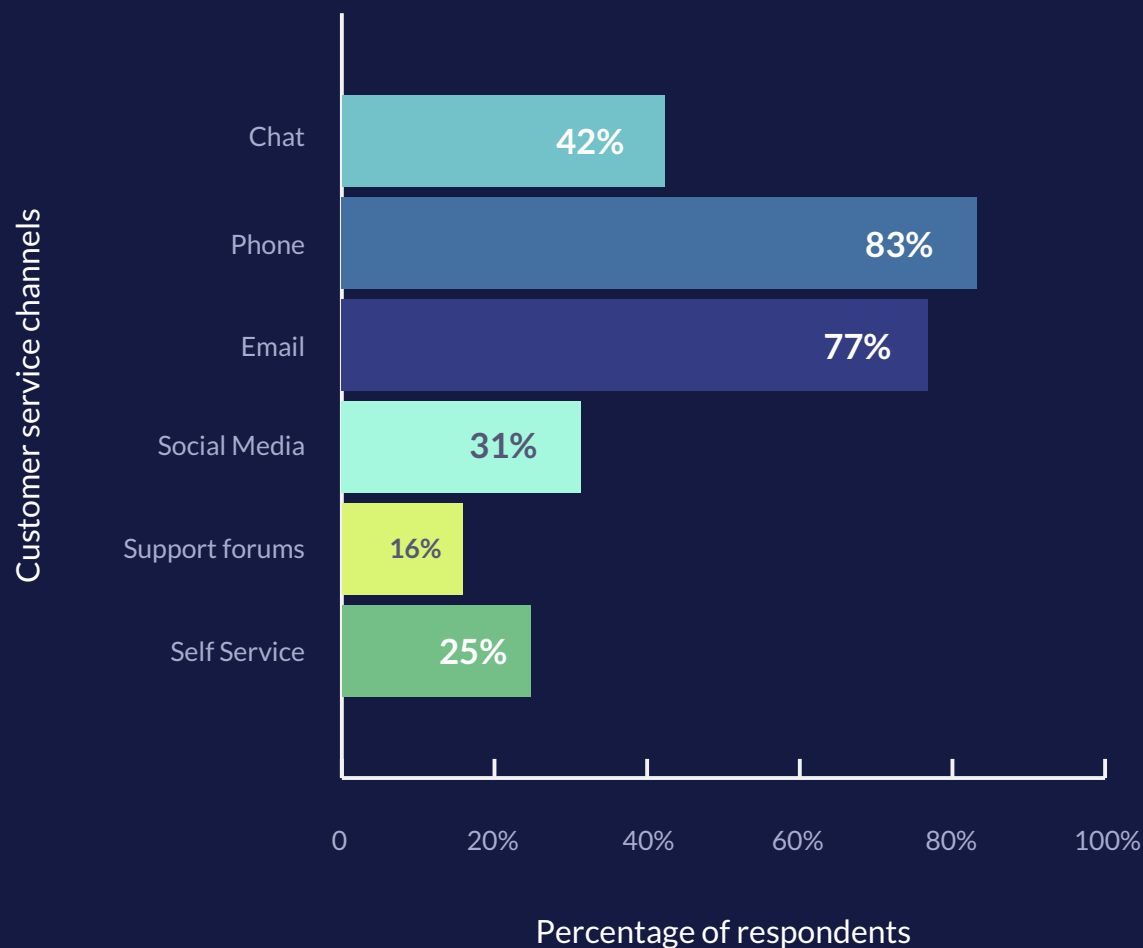
Phone, email and chat are the three most used customer service channels amongst the surveyed teams.

Amongst the above three channels, phone support tops the list with **83%** of teams offering tele-support.

Email comes a close second with approximately **77%** of teams providing email support.

Around **42%** of teams offer chat support.

Which all customer service channels does your team use?



“

Really critical data represented here. I'm amazed how strong phone and email continue to be, acting as a reminder that we must be careful about the assumptions we make when it comes to customer behaviors. As much as we talk about conversational AI, robotic process automation, and enhanced self-service capabilities, we can't allow our guard to slip on the traditional channels. Intelligently 'guiding customers to the best resolution path', as stated in 'The Effortless Experience', is still the name of the game when it comes to channel management.

”



Nate Brown

Chief Experience Officer, Officium Labs

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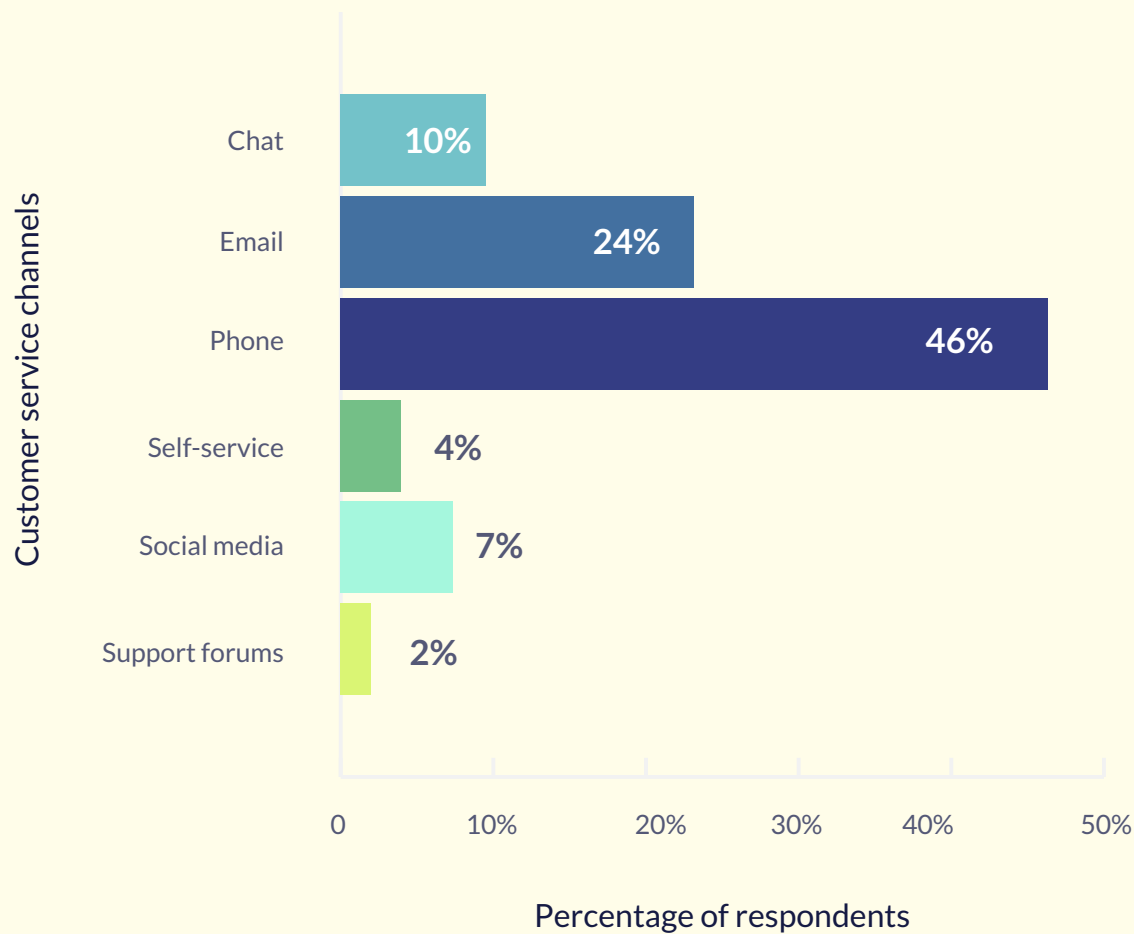
Traditional channels beat modern channels: Almost 50% teams said phone is their busiest channel

In a day and age where support teams are making huge investments in modern and intuitive channels like AI-powered chatbots, our survey has some rather surprising insights.

As many as **46%** of surveyed professionals responded that phone is the busiest channel for their support team.

24% of those surveyed get the maximum number of support requests on email.

Which is your busiest customer service channel?



“

People want self serve until they don't. In a world where consumers take initiative to help themselves, humanity in “non-human” forms is still desired. Be responsive, be real, and really help. When customers want live help, it's critically important for agents to be dependable and act fast . Put your best and brightest in these roles, make it a stop on a leadership path, and watch how your company culture improves and grows.

”



Jeanne Bliss

Founder and President of CustomerBliss

Section 2

Support performance benchmarking



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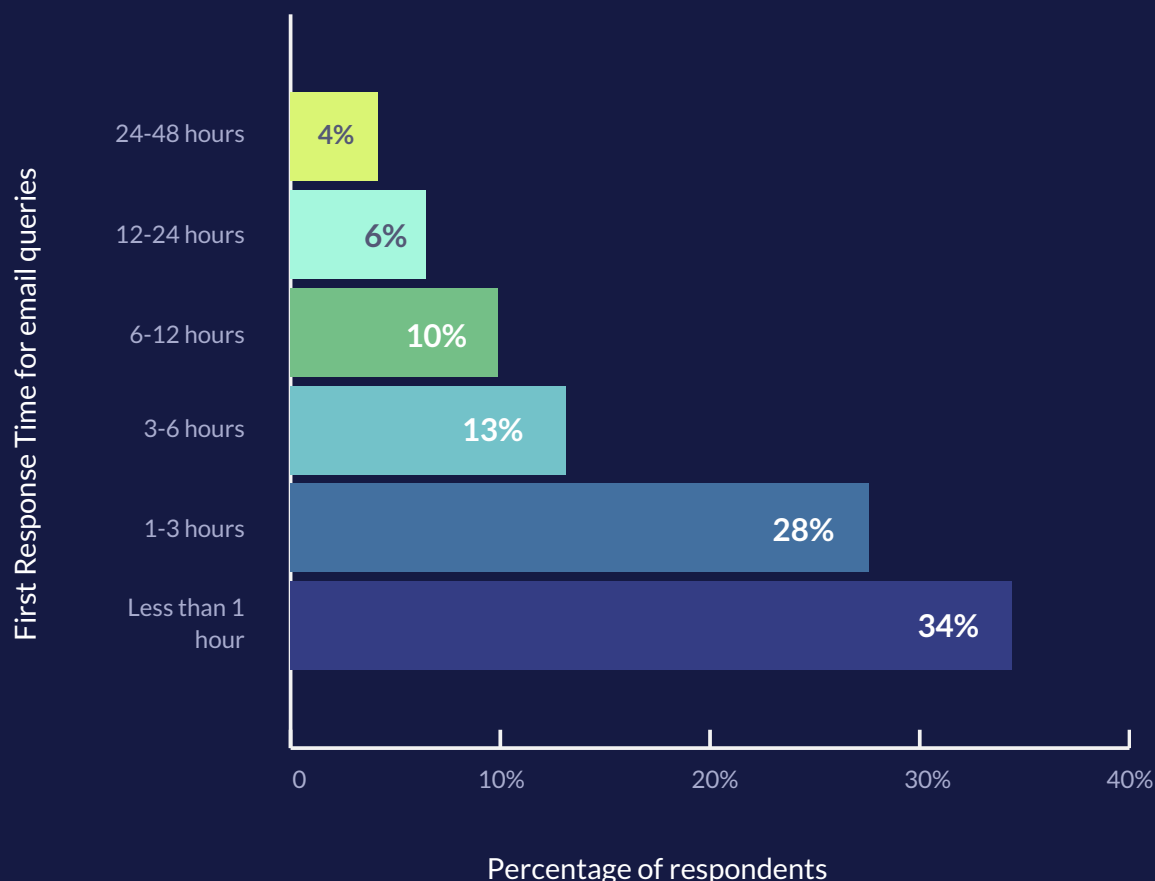
Companies have fast turnaround times: 34% have a First Response Time of less than an hour for email queries

For the longest time, customer service departments at companies have gotten a bad rap for keeping customers waiting, and often, not responding to them at all.

Our survey indicates that a substantial number of teams are challenging this perception. For over **60%** of respondents, the First Response Time (FRT) for customer emails is less than 3 hours.

In fact, about **34%** of those surveyed have a First Response Time (FRT) of less than 60 minutes for email queries. **28%** of teams have an FRT between 1-3 hours.

What's your team's average First Response Time for email support queries?



“

One of the benefits of email support is that information can be gathered efficiently, allowing teams to respond more effectively than is possible through some other channels. As long as these expectations are clearly set - and met - customers are often willing to wait a few hours for their issues to be resolved in a streamlined manner. So while response time is critical, the quality of the response is even more important.

”



Jim Tinch

Founder and Journey Mapper-In-Chief,
Heart of the Customer

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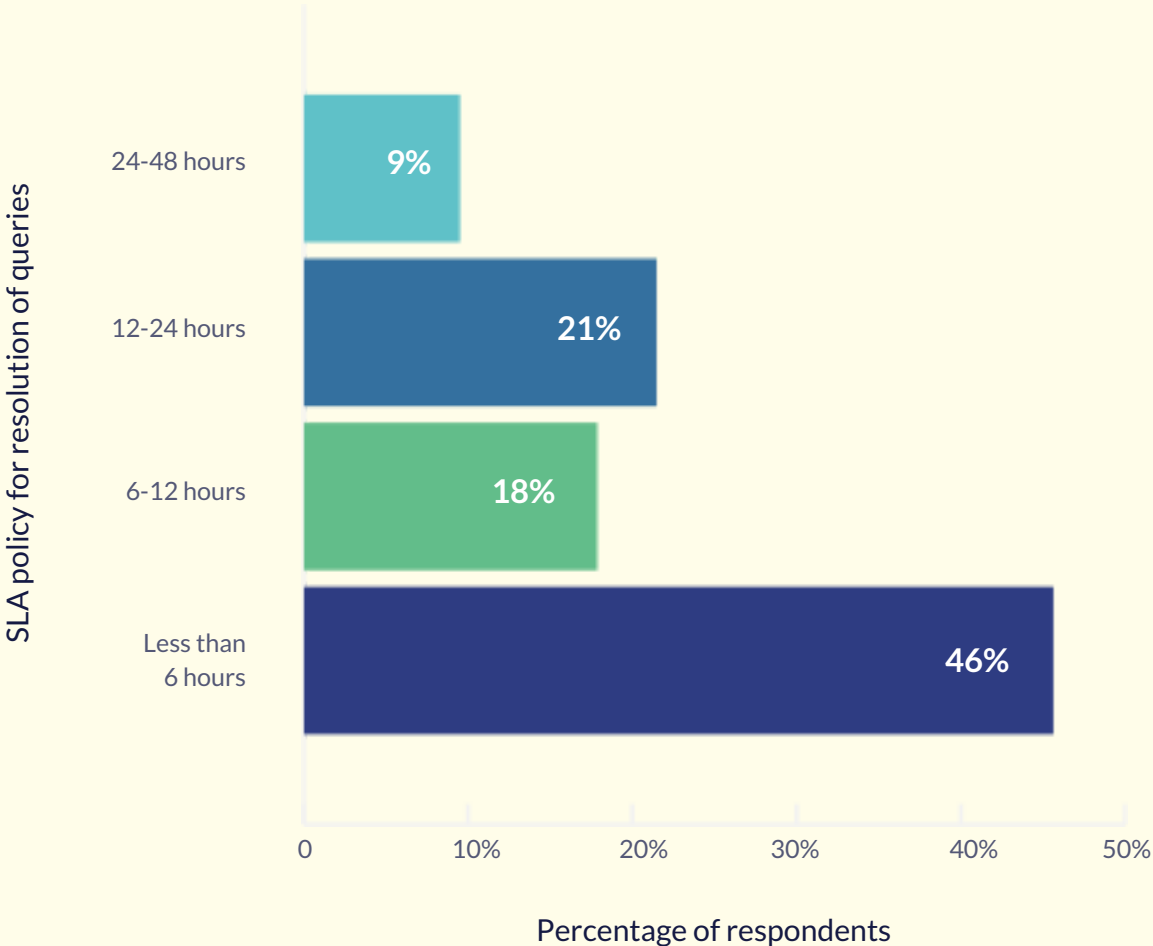
Companies are setting high standards for customer support: Almost 50% teams have SLAs of less than six hours

When it comes to resolving customer queries, support teams have set high standards of performance for themselves.

Results from our survey indicate that a good **46%** teams have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) policy to resolve customer queries in less than six hours.

Impressively, less than **10%** of respondents said their SLAs are between 24-48 hours.

What is your team's SLA policy for resolving customer queries?



7

Small businesses move fast: 40% of small companies have an FRT of less than an hour for email requests

Support teams at big companies have the most advanced help desk software, streamlined processes and quality talent at their disposal. However, even though small companies might not have access to sophisticated resources that larger firms do, they're at par, if not better than them, in terms of speed and agility.

Our research reveals that almost **40%** of customer service teams at small companies have a First Response Time of less than 1 hour for email queries.

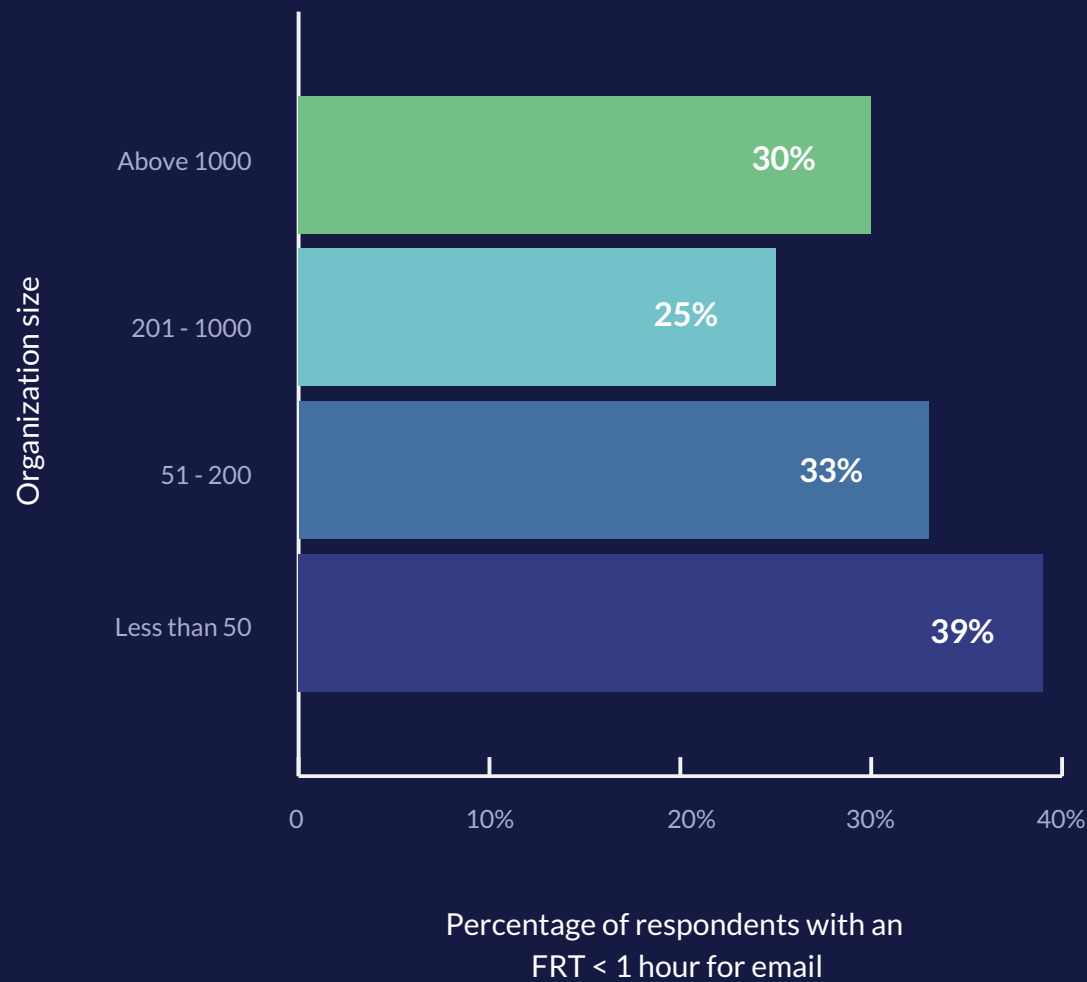
About **33%** of mid-sized companies have an FRT of less than 1 hour for email requests.

In contrast, **30%** of surveyed enterprise-level support teams have an FRT of less than 1 hour for email queries.

Only **25%** of large-sized companies have an FRT of less than an hour for email queries.



Small companies are the fastest with their email responses



Section 3

Support quality benchmarking



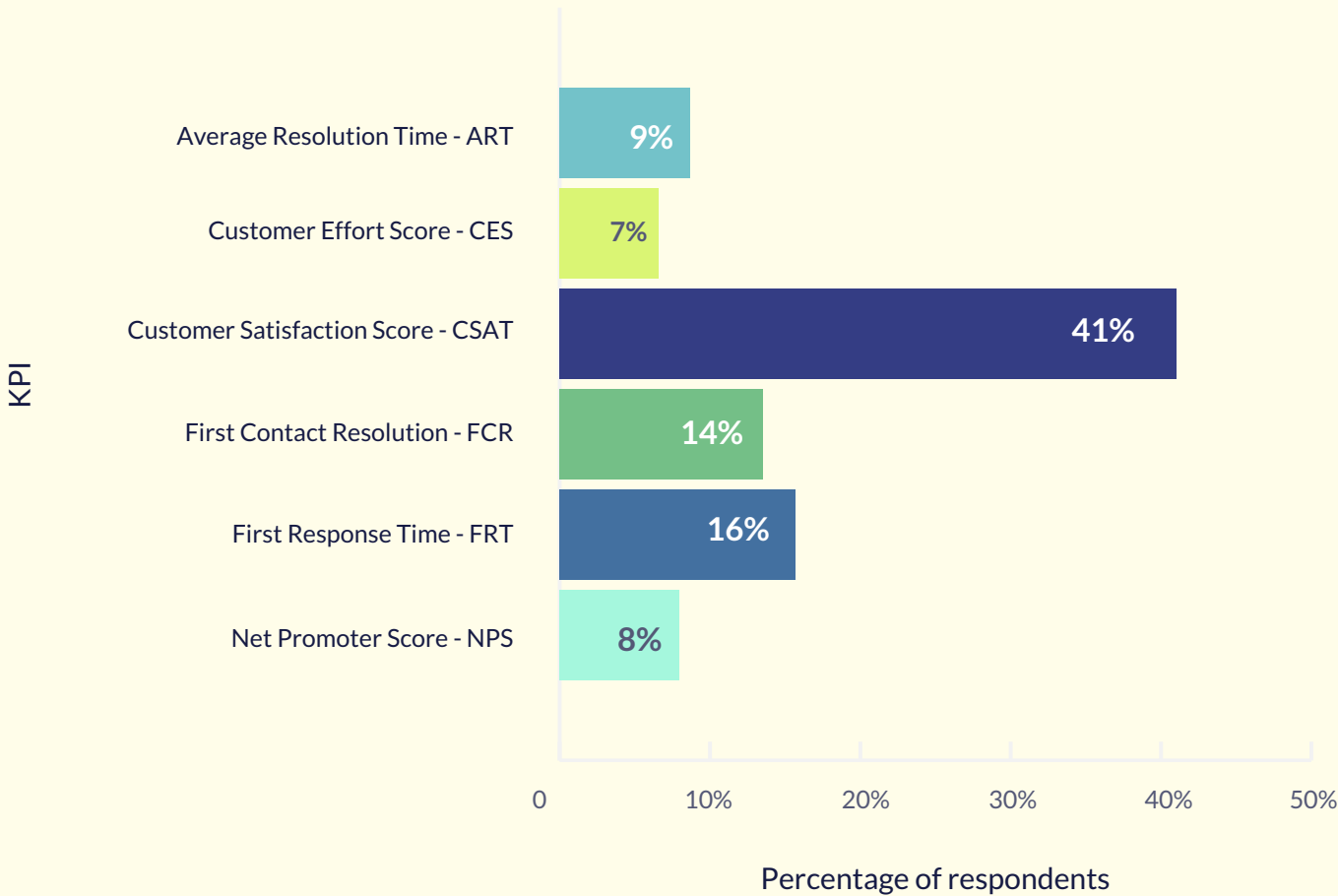
8

Customer satisfaction above all: 41% of respondents said CSAT is the most critical KPI

“You can’t improve what you can’t measure” – this is one of the most important maxims in business. Companies take into account various factors that are unique to their business and strategy when deciding which support metrics to track. Our survey however found that some metrics are important to all support teams regardless of their company size or type of business.

41% of those surveyed said CSAT is the most critical metric for their team.

Which is the most important customer service KPI for your team?



“

CSAT is so popular because it's a solid benchmark metric. You can set goals, track it, and measure results that are easily viewed on a dashboard. That said, organizations need to dig deeper into the why. Data is irrelevant without the color commentary that brings it to life. Why is CSAT going up or down? What do customers love and dislike? The answers to these questions provide context and the ability to quickly understand customer sentiment.

”



Tony Johnson

Founder and Chief Customer Success
Officer, Ignite Your Service

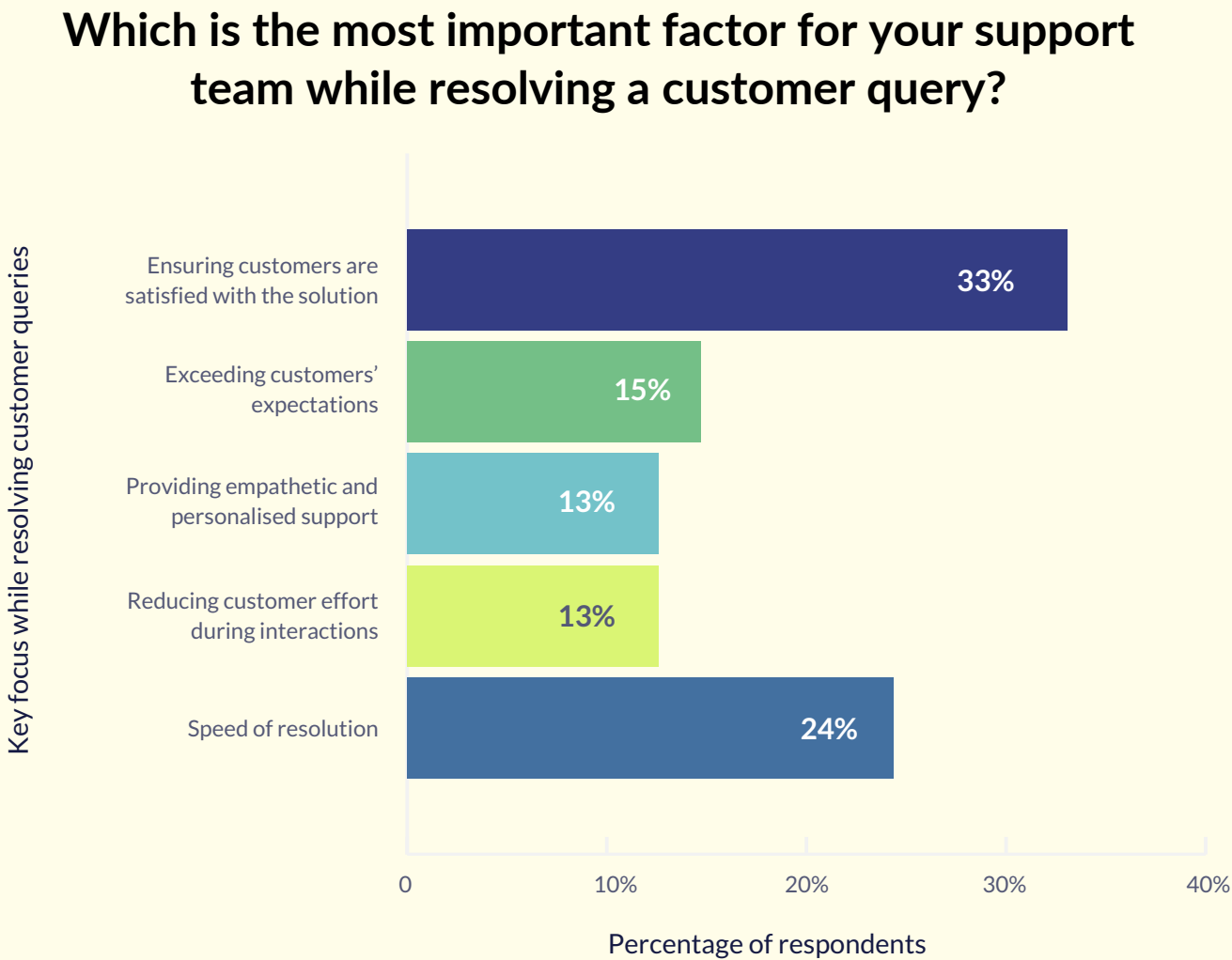
9

Companies want the customer’s seal of approval: 33% are most focused on satisfying customers when resolving tickets

When asked which factor is most important while delivering support, **33%** of respondents said it’s ensuring that customers are satisfied with the resolution they provide.

For **24%** of teams, speed of resolution is the most important factor while resolving customer queries.

Further, only **15%** of professionals said that exceeding customer expectations was the most important factor to their team when resolving customer issues.



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Teams are tracking customer feedback across channels: 51% analyze support tickets to infer customer feedback

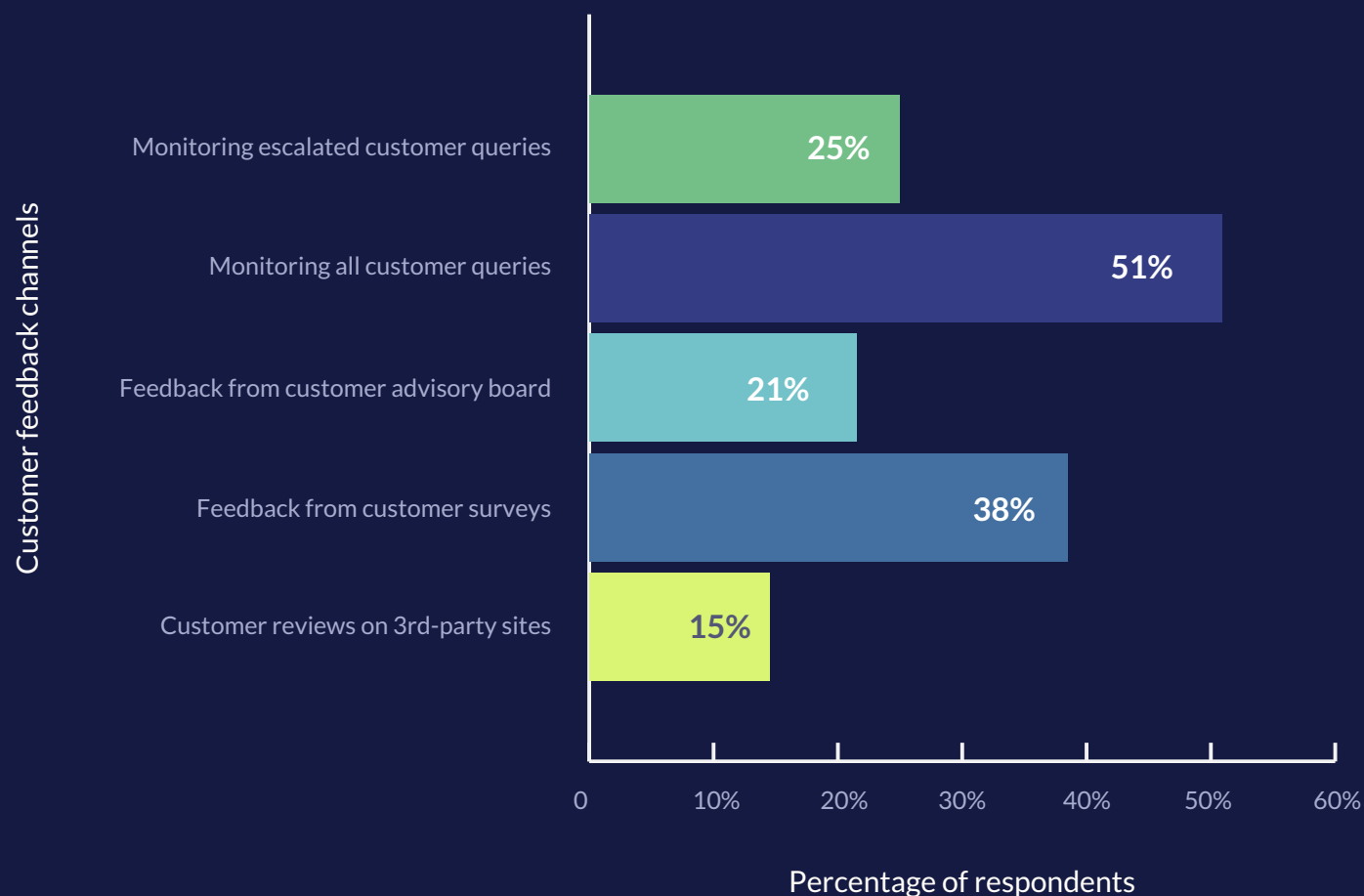
Quality is not a unidimensional concept. Teams that truly want to deliver exceptional support design processes that enable them to consistently deliver high standards of service. One of the most important factors that go into maintaining high support standards is a robust customer feedback loop.

According to the survey, support teams use multiple channels to collect customer feedback.

And the most important channel is actually the simplest. Monitoring everyday support tickets and inferring patterns is the most common way to collect feedback. Over **50%** of customer service teams closely monitor their support tickets to infer customer feedback.

Close to **40%** of those surveyed said they regularly monitor feedback from customer surveys, making it the second most popular feedback collection channel.

Which all customer feedback channels does your team regularly review and track?



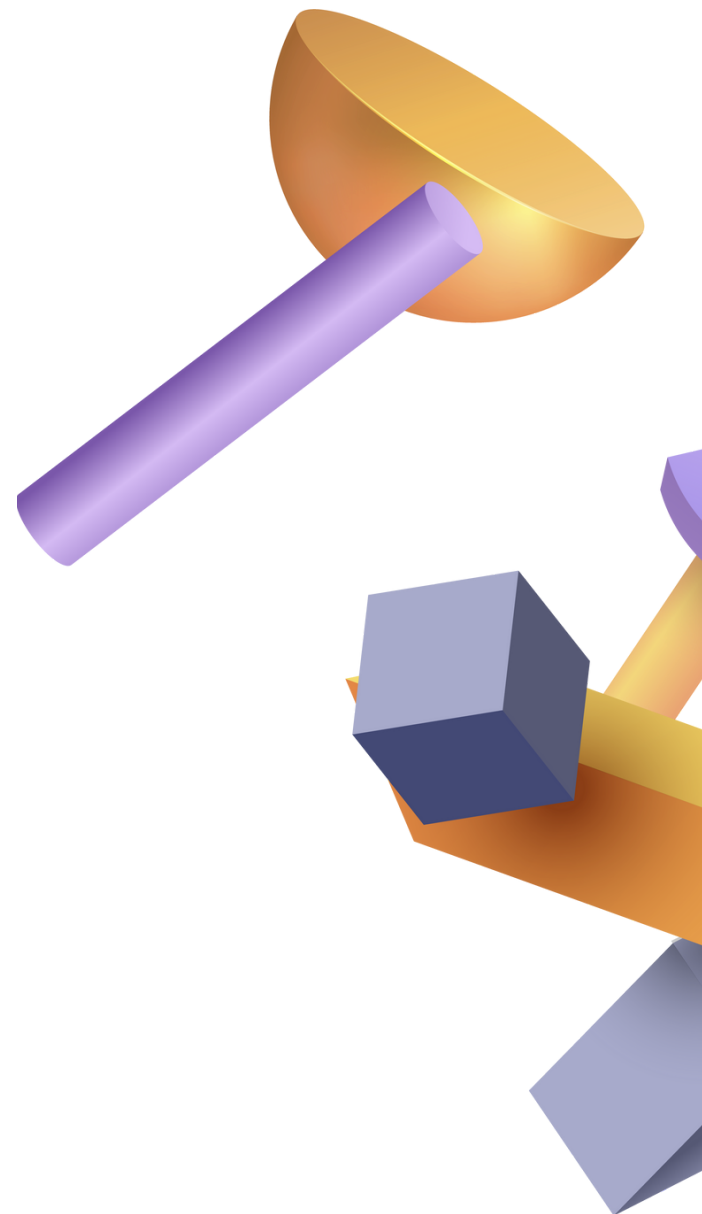
Conclusion

Customer service has today become one of the most important aspects responsible for a business' long-term success. The industry has been undergoing a gradual transformation for years, but the pace of change is now accelerating faster than ever. It's clear that brands need to keep up with the necessities of these tumultuous times and customers' ever-growing expectations.

With that in mind, the results from this report are both reassuring and impressive.

Companies today understand the importance of being available for customers across multiple channels and time zones. They value what customers think about their service quality. And even though the majority of them rely on traditional channels to offer support, the standards against which they measure their support performance and quality aren't archaic. They're agile and data-driven.

What would now be interesting to see is how, in the near future, these companies balance the use of modern technology with the human touch – because in today's day and age, one without the other, just won't cut it anymore.



“

Customers have learned what it is like to experience good customer support. They no longer compare you to your direct competition, but to the best support they have had from any company. The stakes are higher than ever, as evidenced by the key findings in this report. 41% of teams said their customer satisfaction (CSAT) score is their most important KPI. These are the companies and brands that will set the bar for everyone else. They are the leaders and will competitively distance themselves from the laggards who will be struggling to keep up and catch up. So, which group are you in?

”



Shep Hyken

Customer Service and Experience expert
and bestselling author of 'I'll Be Back'

Key Takeaways



Prioritize Quality Before Speed

Response and resolution time are important, but not at the cost of quality. Keep conversations human, meaningful, and add value with every interaction.



Focus on Customer Delight

CSAT scores can offer great insights into your support quality. But don't stop at satisfying customers. Go the extra mile – delight them.



Track Customer Sentiment

In addition to key KPIs, find out the 'why' to 'how' your team is performing by tracking customer sentiment via social listening, conversation analysis, etc.



Choose the Right Tech Stack

Great customer service needs the right team and technology. Your help desk should aid better collaboration, optimize workflows and forge memorable customer experiences.



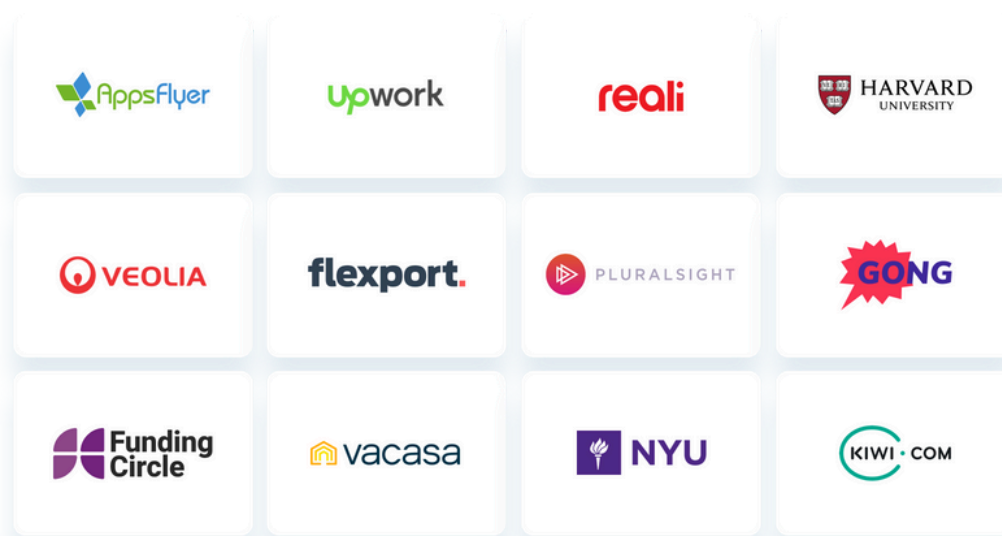
Optimize the Right Channels

Multichannel availability is crucial, but optimizing the wrong channels can cost you. You don't have to be present everywhere as long as you meet your customers where they are.

About Hiver

Hiver is a Gmail-based customer service solution that helps teams across the organization collaborate on shared inboxes like `services@`, `orders@`, and `support@`. It's the most frictionless, natural way for teams to handle customer email communication as it works right inside Gmail.

Hiver helps over 1500 companies including the likes of Oxford Business Group, Harvard University and Lonely Planet deliver memorable customer experiences.



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