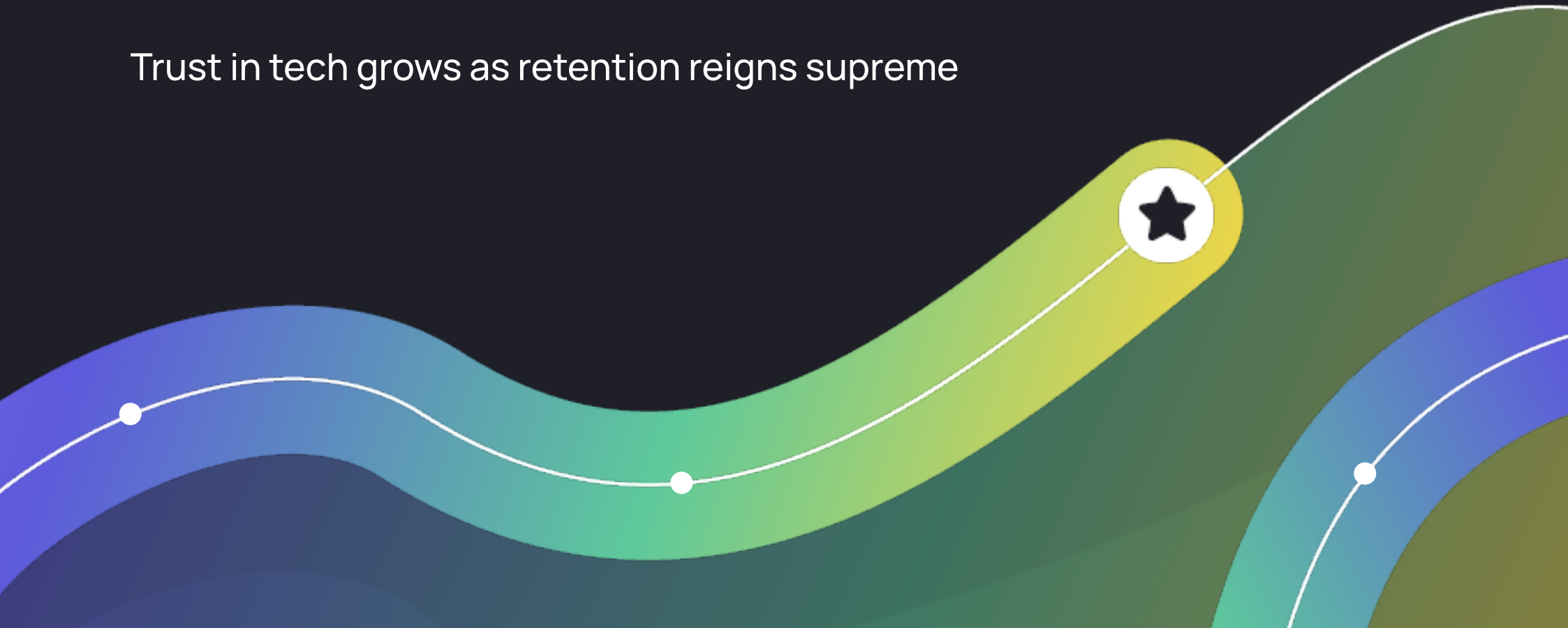









Ultimate.

Customer Service Trends 2023

Trust in tech grows as retention reigns supreme



What's inside

Setting the scene	1	 Trend 4: In AI we trust	15
The Ultimate contributors	2	 Trend 5: Automation use cases are evolving	19
 Trend 1: Customer retention is priority #1	3	 Trend 6: CX powers more rewarding careers	23
 Trend 2: From cost center to value-driver	7	 Trend 7: Work smart, not hard	27
 Trend 3: A growing appetite for async	11	Action items for CX success	31

About us

helphouse.io is a full-service CX consulting firm with solid experience in optimizing digital customer service for some of the largest brands in Europe. We offer holistic solutions that encompass all areas of a successful customer service department. Simply put, we are experts in optimizing digital customer service operations for ambitious brands.

Our house holds many skills. We have consultants, developers, analysts, and more. Whether you need analysis, a specific integration, or training for your team – we can help. Besides our inhouse competencies, we also partner with some of the best solution providers in the world.

The work we do doesn't only make your customers happy, but makes your employees happier too. With a track record of 500+ projects across the world, we're proud to be a Zendesk Premier Partner – and we were the first Zendesk Authorized App Developer in Europe.

We're passionate about elevating CX through tech and expertise. We challenge companies on their set-up, ways of working, and processes. We ensure you don't waste time on ineffective systems and overcomplicated workflows but spend time on what matters: building stronger customer relationships.

Building on our own experiences of bad customer service, we're committed to ending bad CX for good.



Visit us at
helphouse.io

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Introducing the contributors to Customer Service Trends 2023

Leading voices in CX to follow



Jo Causon
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Keith Gait
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Jon Ross
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Shameem Smillie
Founding Member, Women in CX



Tim Sheard
Director, Tech Alliances, Zendesk



Maneesha Bhusal
CX Leader of the Year

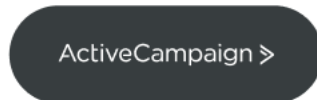


Adrian Swinscoe
Customer Experience Adviser



Brittany Hodak
Keynote Speaker & CX Expert

CX pioneers to learn from



Trend 1

**Customer retention
becomes priority #1 as
the recession looms large**



Customer retention in numbers

#1 change

The majority of business leaders that responded to our annual trends survey say that customer retention is the #1 change they want to implement next year.

Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

5%

A mere 5% increase in customer retention can produce more than a 25% increase in profits.

Bain & Company

82%

of customers say a positive customer service experience makes them more likely to purchase again.

Salesforce

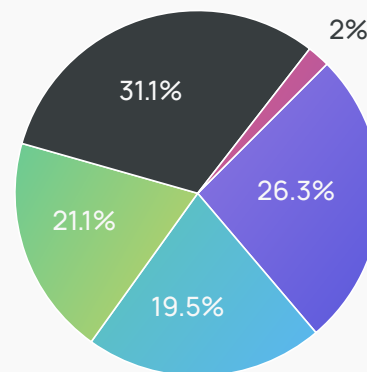
Long-term commitment has never been more en vogue: With a recession on the horizon, businesses are fiercely zoning in on their existing customer base.

Except for the 2008 crisis, economic growth across the globe in 2023 is predicted to be the slowest it's been in 20+ years. Businesses are doing more with less. One of the ways they're doing that is by shifting their focus from aggressive acquisition to recession-proof retention. There are two simple reasons why: It's cheaper and way less riskier than trying to wow new customers from scratch.

"You create customer superfans by creating the kinds of experiences people want to have again and again. The experience your customers have with your brand is the most competitive advantage you have at your disposal."

Brittany Hodak, Author and CX Expert

The perks of familiarity make it easier to personalize customer experiences, anticipate their needs, serve them on the channels they prefer, and provide tailored incentives to stick with your brand for the long haul. That's why 2023 marks the year of customer retention.



What's the #1 thing you're planning to do differently next year and why?

Source: Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

- Focus more on customer retention
- Try AI and automation
- Improve operational efficiency
- Reduce hiring costs
- Other

See the trend in action

The challenge

Dutch green energy company Vandebron wanted to make their CX as smooth as possible in the midst of a 2022 surge in energy prices.

The solution

- A dedicated team to map and optimize the CX for different journeys
- Self service for invoicing issues and changing personal information
- Proactive messaging about government support for increased gas and electricity bills

The strategy

“We’re really approachable, and customers value their personalized journeys with us. For example, when customers can’t pay, we work with them to find a solution before they get into financial trouble. Even though this isn’t a fun topic, we try to make the experience as smooth as possible.”

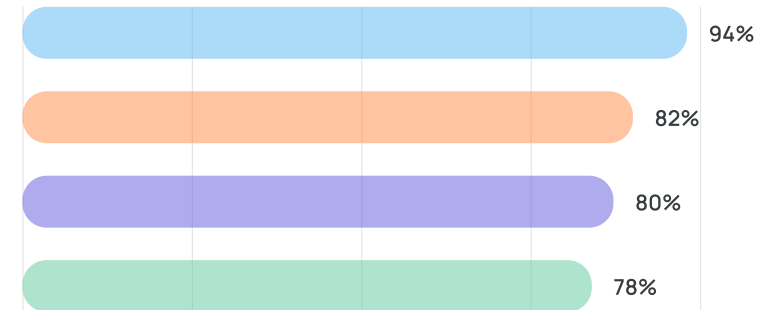
Bob Molenaar, Digital Experience Manager



vandebron

Read more success stories →

State of the Connected Customer




- A positive customer experience makes me more likely to purchase again
- I have recommended a company based on excellent customer service
- I will forgive a company for its mistake after receiving excellent service
- I have made purchase decisions based on the quality of customer service

Source: Salesforce

“Customers that spend more time with your brand also spend more money on your brand.”

Maneesha Bhusal, CX Leader of the Year 2022

 Customer retention becomes priority #1 as the recession looms large

Put the trend into action

Provide personalized experiences

Use the data you collect about your customers to create the best possible service and elevate your brand's CX. Give customers the option to contact you whenever they want, through their channel of choice. In order to provide a smooth, omnichannel experience and greater personalization, implement a CRM system and make sure it's optimized to its full potential.

Keep your employees happy

Your agents are often the first point of contact customers have with your brand. And if you keep agents happy, they'll do the same for your customers. Provide your support team with the right tool set to make their work easier – with all data they need at their fingertips – and give them opportunities to educate themselves and progress their careers.

Gather customer feedback (then use it)

Make your customers feel heard and appreciated by following up with them. Sending a thank you message is a great opportunity to give customers a chance to have their say. Learn more about your customers' needs and get ideas for how to improve your product and services by using tools to easily collect customer feedback. But don't stop there – put their feedback into practice, to stay ahead of customers' expectations.

Trend 2

Customer service departments evolve from cost centers to value centers



The trend in numbers

3.5x

Companies viewing customer service as a value center vs. a cost center achieve 3.5x more revenue growth.

Accenture

36%

of business leaders are seeing direct revenue generation with support automation.

Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

\$14,113

Disengaged reps are 84% more likely to look for a new job than engaged reps, and the average turnover cost for one agent is \$14,113.

Gartner

As businesses are forced to grapple with new and creative ways to drive profit, they're reevaluating the traditionally reactive role of CS. And they're on to something: Thinking about support departments as value centers opens up a world of untapped, revenue-generating potential.

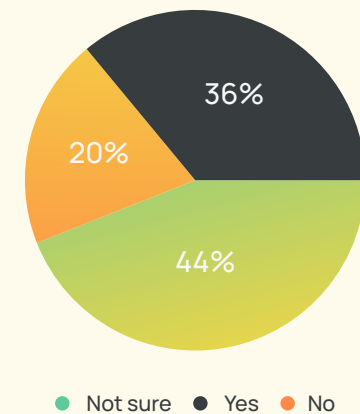
A true value center will do two things: Stop you from wasting money and actively generate more of it. So how do you get your support to start paying for itself? Incentivize your agents, reduce silos between sales and support, and systematically harness your CS team's proximity to customers for insights to better serve them.

"Customer support is not a cost center. It's an investment. In relationships. In engagement. In data."

Adrian Swinscoe, Author and CX Expert

Generating revenue isn't what caused most of the companies we work with to look into automation, but has been an unexpected benefit of freeing up agent time. Virtual agents take care of manual admin tasks, which frees up human support staff in the process. Plus, AI tools can (securely!) analyze support data to tailor offerings to your customers' preferences. And after examining our customer data, we're increasingly seeing evidence of the "value center" mindset starting to bear fruit – and by fruit, we mean hard cash, brought in by support centers.

Has automation generated direct revenue for your business?



Source: Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

See the trend in action

The challenge

Global telco company Telia needed to ensure operational efficiency while generating direct revenue with product suggestions.

The solution

When customers use their chat function, Telia's virtual agent suggests links to additional services that could be relevant to their customers. They then tag these links and follow the revenue they've generated using Google Analytics. For example, when a customer asks to transfer their phone number from a previous provider to Telia in a public chat, the bot provides a link to an online shop where they can check the best offer for their number. Telia monitors and reports on subscriptions from this link.



[Read full case study →](#)



“For 32% of respondents to our trends 2023 survey, return rates drastically increased in 2022. Take that as an opportunity: Your support team can do more than just process those returns. They can suggest items that can be exchanged at equal or higher value.”

Hosam Hassan, Product Marketing Manager, Ultimate

 Customer service departments evolve from cost centers to value centers

Put the trend into action

Break down silos between sales and support

Involve agents both in pre- and post sales conversations to maximize understanding and value along the customer journey. With the right training and incentives, they can use these opportunities to cross- and upsell, letting your customer support pay for itself.

Shift into proactive gear

Use support touch points to suggest products based on your customers' preferences. Automation can help you scale and monitor these efforts while optimizing UX. For example, a CRM that integrates with a virtual agent can let you suggest products based on your customers' past preferences.

Bet on training, skills, and tech – not short-term wins

Let your agents specialize and evolve their skills rather than hiring and firing for low-skilled roles. Automation can instantly take care of the mundane, repetitive tasks that are tying them down and leading to dissatisfaction, stress, and costly employee churn.

Trend 3

Companies & customers show an accelerated appetite for asynchronous support



The trend in numbers

68%

of respondents say asynchronous channels like email and WhatsApp have most rapidly grown in popularity over the past year.

Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

#2

Before the pandemic, messaging was ranked fifth in customer service channel usage. Now, it's second.

Forrester

233%

Adoption of ticket automation has grown 233% YTD among our customers (compared to 36% for chat automation).

The Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

Consumers have had it with phone queues, and businesses are taking note – with social messaging emerging as a breakout star.

Support today happens in spurts – we handle our life admin before work, between meetings, while we're stuck in traffic. The way we communicate digitally supports this shift: Asynchronous messaging, meaning messages we send over hours or days (vs. in real time), is on the rise. Among the most popular async channels: the old bulwark email, which has remained one of the most popular channels in customer support over the past years.

But as of late, an even newer kid has popped up on the block: Social messaging. Over the past year, the growing importance of omnichannel support has led to even more flexible channels, like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, taking center stage.

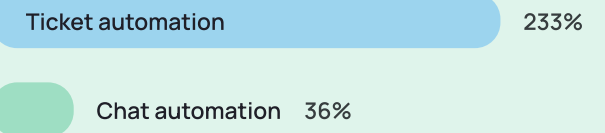
“Businesses need to wake up. Everybody’s expecting to communicate with you asynchronously.”

Tim Sheard, Director of Tech Alliances,
Zendesk

These channels not only serve a broader range of use cases but allow for multiparty messaging, where a business can manage communication between their customers and a third party, like delivery drivers.



Growth in adoption of ticket automation vs. chat automation



Source: Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

See the trend in action

The challenge

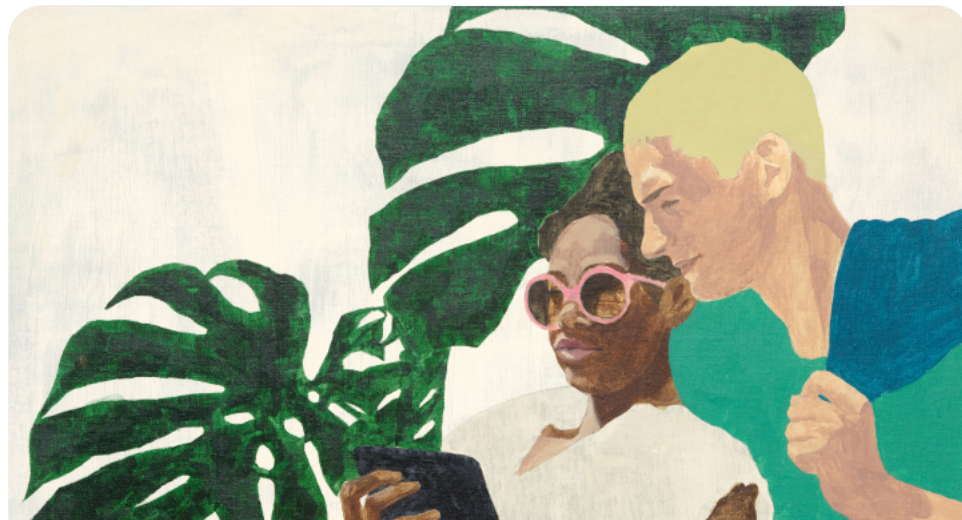
Sustainable banking app Tomorrow needed to make email communication more effective while keeping CSAT (and agent morale) up.

The solution

Ticket automation freed up Tomorrow's agents by automatically triaging and answering emails.

The results

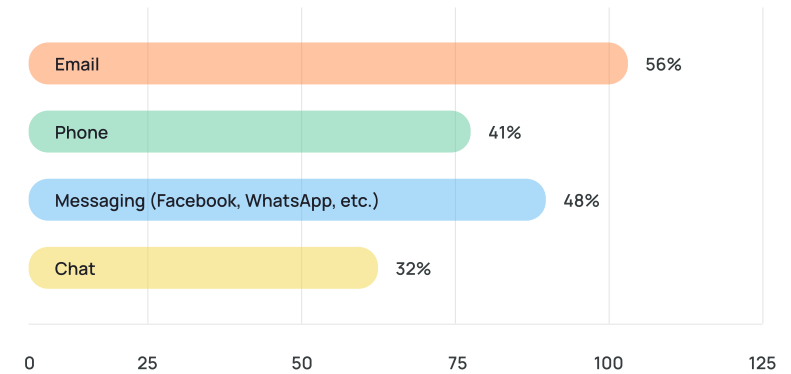
A one-touch resolution rate of 33% leaves their customers satisfied after just one (asynchronous) interaction.



Tomorrow

[Read full case study →](#)

Which channels have been most rapidly growing in popularity with your customers over the last year?



Source: Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

“Customers used to expect instant, session-based communication. But smart CS teams need to get with the times and communicate with their customers whenever and wherever they want.”

Kimberley Wood, VP of Customer Success, Ultimate



Companies & customers show an accelerated appetite for asynchronous support

Put the trend into action

Don't get ahead of yourself

Start opening async channels up slowly to avoid overwhelming your team. Take some time to understand how usage differs from traditional channels, so you can build trust with customers through a flawless implementation.

Adapt your metrics

In the world of async comms, agents will be in and out of conversations, or even run several of them simultaneously. That makes traditional efficiency metrics like AHT less pertinent. Zone in on customer satisfaction metrics and resolution rates instead.

Scale to handle higher volumes

Automation can let you easily open up new channels without overwhelming your team. Look into a one-click CRM integration to let your human and virtual agents view your full support history and manage all channels in one place.

Trend 4

Trust in AI-powered support reaches new heights



AI trust in numbers

92%

of respondents say their trust in AI has increased over the past 12 months.

Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

88%

of business leaders report that customers' attitudes toward automation have improved over the past year.

Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

67%

of customers prefer to self-serve over speaking with a company representative.

Zendesk

Anxiety around AI is becoming a thing of the past – with big players jumping on the bandwagon, support automation has entered the mainstream. And Gartner has run the data to prove it.

We've been praising conversational AI for years, but it wasn't until the arrival of ChatGPT in late 2022 that this branch of artificial intelligence – which allows bots to communicate with people in a natural, human-like way – was catapulted into the cultural mainstream. Today, automation providers can create custom AI models specifically designed for short, informal support messages – and train these on your own historical data.

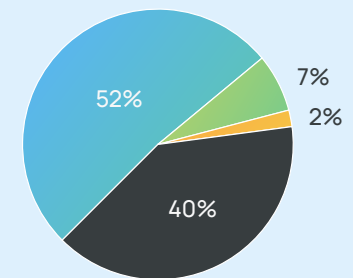
“Thanks to groundbreaking advances in generative AI like ChatGPT, 2023 marks the year where people get excited – and stay excited – about artificial intelligence.”

Reetu Kainulainen, CEO and Co-founder of Ultimate

AI's reputation hasn't just improved with business leaders. In our age of instant gratification, customers expect immediate support. That means consumers today are more willing than ever to engage with brands via automated self-service – if it means they can find the answers they need, whenever they want.

This trend will only accelerate going forward, as the technology matures even further and CS teams become more skilled in designing automated experiences. That means companies need to adapt in order to keep pace with the most CX-obsessed brands.

Has your confidence in AI gone up or down in the last 12 months?



- Somewhat increased
- Significantly increased
- Gotten somewhat worse
- Gotten significantly worse

Source: Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

See the trend in action

The challenge

Finland's largest airline Finnair turned to Ultimate when they decided to start automating – using AI-powered suggested replies to slash response times and provide accurate support. They had just implemented chat automation when the pandemic hit and request volumes skyrocketed by 600-900%.

The solution

The CS team added pandemic-specific messaging to their bot's welcome message and built dedicated support paths to manage cancellations and refunds.

The results

Finnair reached a 50% automation rate at the height of the pandemic and has built a robust contact center that is fully prepared to weather any future storms.



FINNAIR

[Read full case study →](#)



“A few years ago bots had a really bad name. People would try and circumnavigate the bot to get to an agent as quickly as possible. But the world has moved on and customers are recognizing that bots can actually be really helpful, if they’re implemented well.”

Jon Ross, VP of Product, Messaging, Zendesk



Trust in AI-powered support reaches new heights

Now you trust AI, here's how to use it

Train your customers to go digital

Do you ever call an airline to book a flight? Us neither. For consumers today, convenience is queen. So create AI-powered digital experiences that are faster, easier, and more convenient for your customers and they will meet you there. They're ready for it.

Leverage AI to analyze your support

Gain insights into your customers (like the channels they prefer and their most frequently asked questions) by using AI to analyze your historical support conversations. This gives you a data-driven understanding of customers' pain points – and is the first step in shifting from reactive to proactive support.

Build resilience into your CS operations

While no one knows what the future will bring, there are bound to be bumps along the road. Implementing an AI-powered automation solution gives your CS team the flexibility to manage unexpected surges in requests and scale as your company grows. This sets your brand up for future success.

Trend 5

Automation use cases mature as mainstream momentum hits



The trend in numbers

150%

Adoption of AI automation has grown by 26% YTD in ecommerce, by 63% in finserv, and by 150% in SaaS

The Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

79%

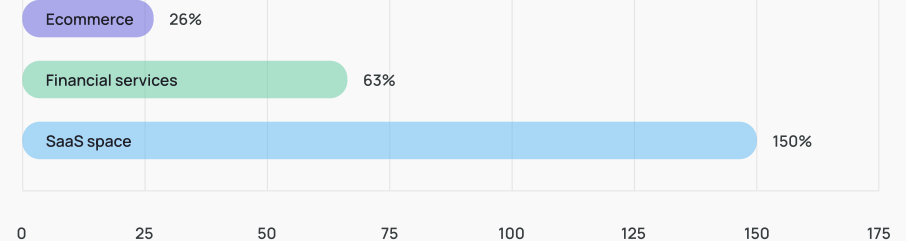
Mobile banking apps will be the dominant channel for IVA-driven customer communications in 2023, accounting for 79% of successful interactions next year.

[Juniper](#)

When most people think of automation, they think chatbots, and when they think chatbots, they think online shopping.

And not without reason: the ecommerce industry has taken exceptionally well to automation because many requests in the field are easily automated end to end. But as AI automation continues to make the case for low costs and high ROI, the range of applicable use cases from all industries is rapidly growing. As mainstream momentum hits, industries like Fintech and SaaS are starting to warm up to automation – and seeing rapid results. Common requests in these industries could sound like this: “How can I start building a stock portfolio?”, or “How can I gather more user-specific analytics?”. Whereas use cases in “traditional” automation industries like ecommerce will revolve primarily around reducing buyer friction, pain points vary widely in other industries:

Adoption of AI automation YTD



Source:
Ultimate Trends
2023 survey

Finserv brands need to ensure immediate support and high trust. SaaS inquiries, on the other hand, tend to be on the technically complex side, requiring particularly efficient internal triaging to reduce unnecessary back and forth.

“As they’re thinking about how to do more with less, more and more companies are seeing automation as a no-brainer. Why spend \$15 of agent time to solve a simple problem when you could be spending \$1 on an automated solution that helps free up those agents for more complex tasks?”

Reetu Kainulainen, CEO and Co-founder, Ultimate

See the trend in action

The challenge

Marketing SaaS platform ActiveCampaign needed to radically reduce routing between their sales and support departments

The solution

The CS team started by automating two customer issues via chat: book a demo (sales) and password reset (support).

The results

- An immediate 75% drop in transfers
- 24/7 support
- \$55,800 saved monthly



[ActiveCampaign >](#)

[SaaS CS Success 101 →](#)



“Automating one frequently asked question saved us the equivalent of one additional headcount.”

Matchett Bradford, Director of Global Enablement,
ActiveCampaign

Put the trend into action

Find the right tech for your use case

Does your support provider do 24/7 support in several languages? Then they could be right for your finserv company. Can they automate email ticket triage? Then you've found your go-to to reduce AHT and cost per ticket in SaaS.

Hear from your peers

Automation isn't a one-size-fits-all solution, especially with more complex use cases. When shopping for automation providers, ask for reference calls with customers in a similar industry.

Make sure you can customize

Look for a provider with a dedicated customer support team to help you build a bespoke solution for your needs. This could include scoping dialogue flows together or building custom API integrations.

Trend 6

CX powers more rewarding & innovative career paths



CX careers in numbers

51%

of business leaders want to hire more agents in 2023 than in the last year

Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

48%

of respondents are creating automation-related roles within their support departments

Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

90%

of organizations have a Chief Experience Officer or Chief Customer Officer

Gartner

As automation creates new pathways for career progression in CX, customer service is becoming an increasingly attractive field to work in.

Many agents treat customer support roles as a stop-gap on their way to better and brighter things – or at least they used to. Automation is now opening up broader, more technical, and strategic roles within customer support. And instead of the narrative that bots are putting agents out work, we've seen most recently with ChatGPT that the future will likely be a hybrid model – where bots execute strategies developed by humans.

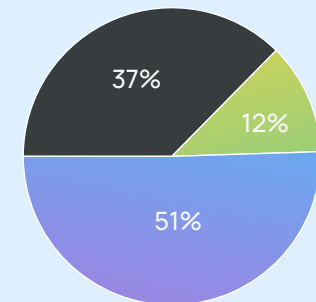
“We’ve seen how automation provides agents with the opportunity to develop new skills and take on more rewarding and strategically focused roles.”

Kimberley Wood, VP of Customer Success, Ultimate

One of the most exciting jobs in this field is conversation design. And it's a role that will become increasingly important as growing numbers of companies introduce automation. Conversation designers are trained in creating human-to-bot interactions that not only feel natural and on-brand, but lead to successful customer resolutions.

As well as creating new roles, companies are hiring for CX positions at every level. Shameem Smillie, a founding member of Women in CX explains: “It’s been a revelation to see the C-suite incorporate CX roles. This means CX is top of mind within senior leadership.” Opportunities in the customer support field will continue to expand, which means we’re going to see more top talent starting careers in CX – and choosing to stay.

How much do you expect to be hiring into your support team next year?



● More than before ● Same Amount
● Less than before

Source: Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

See the trend in action

The challenge

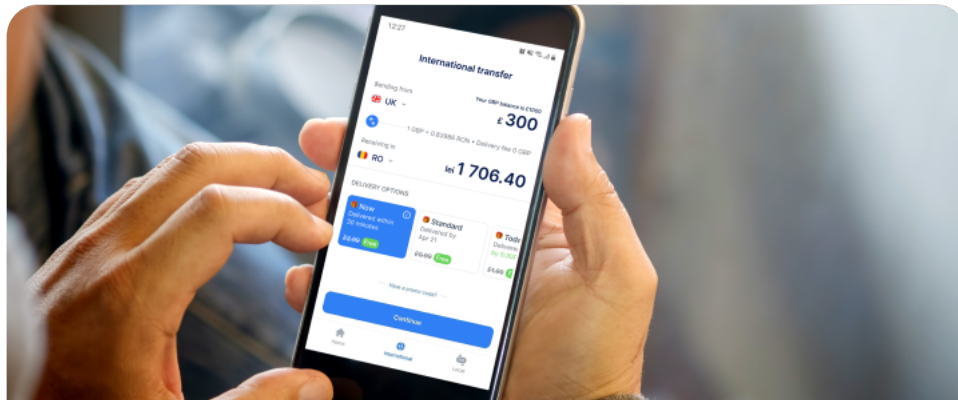
International money transfer provider TransferGo needed to scale their support, while maintaining a brand promise of speed and convenience. Iveta Liaudanskaitė was working as a support agent when she was offered the opportunity to implement TransferGo's very first bot.

The solution

Multilingual chat automation to deliver fast resolutions to their global customer base, 24/7.

The results

Iveta has been promoted to CS Automation Expert and gained the skills to manage complex projects & design advanced dialogue flows.



transferGo

Read full case study →



“Just like you cannot imagine a company without software engineers today, you won't be able to imagine a company without conversation designers five years from now.”

Hans van Dam, CEO & Co-founder, Conversation Design Institute

How to apply this trend

Build fulfilling career paths for agents

Provide your agents with opportunities to develop the skills and experience they need to progress in their careers. This might be learning project management skills or taking on more strategic roles. You'll thank yourself when you see lower churn rates, happier agents – and more satisfied customers.

Hire for senior CX positions

Customer experience is now a key differentiator when it comes to customers' buying decisions: with 86% of consumers willing to pay more for a better experience. Hiring someone within your organization to champion your customers at the C-level will ensure CX stays top of mind and your brand remains competitive.

Open up new roles with automation

As leading brands implement support automation, they're looking for skilled bot builders, automation managers, and conversation designers. Not only does this ensure that these automated experiences are joyful, but it challenges and stimulates agents in the workplace.

Trend 7

**Behind-the-scenes support
now helps businesses work smart,
not hard**



The trend in numbers

223%

The number of our customers using ticket automation is 223% higher year to date, compared with 32% for chat automation.

Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

20%

of business leaders say improving operational efficiency is their top priority for 2023.

Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

75%

of customers expect support within 5 minutes of requesting help.

McKinsey

As the recession starts to bite, the unsung hero of faster, better support is finally taking center stage. Enter: process automation.

Behind-the-scenes support is what keeps your contact center show on the road. Background processes (like searching for customers' details and routing inquiries to the right department) are essential to delivering joyful CX. But when agents have to update information in multiple tools or hunt down siloed data, it's no wonder customers aren't getting the instant support they expect.

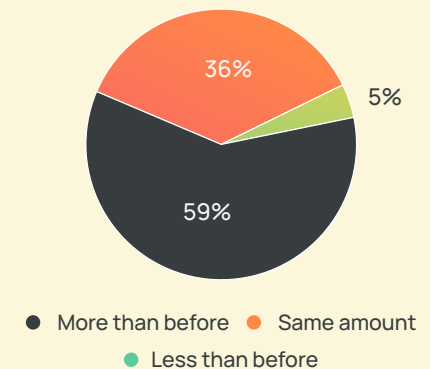
"Brands who have already automated behind-the-scenes processes are reaping the rewards in these challenging economic times. They're seeing efficiency gains, streamlined operations, and faster customer resolutions at lower cost."

Reetu Kainulainen, CEO & Co-founder, Ultimate

Previously, CS automation meant chat automation: software that allows humans to interact with computers in a conversational way. But automation can do so much more than power conversations between brands and their customers. Repetitive, manual admin tasks are ripe for automating.

Not only does this provide customers with faster, better support – it also saves agents time. And as we all know, time is money. So move aside chat: it's process automation's time in the limelight.

How much are you planning to invest in your CS tech (automation, CRM) next year?



Source: Ultimate Trends 2023 survey

See the trend in action

The challenge

Manual tasks – like routing, sorting through duplicate tickets, and processing special shipping requests – were getting in the way of how quickly digital retailer Verkkokauppa could support their customers. They needed to drive down handling times while keeping CSAT up.

The solution

Process automation instantly sends requests to the right department and updates ticket information, giving agents the context they need to solve issues faster, so Verkkokauppa's support team can focus on serving customers.

The results

Verkkokauppa has cut down AHT and is saving 400 agent hours each week. Their virtual agent takes on the workload of 10 full-time employees – that's €330K in annual savings.




Verkkokauppa
TODENNÄKÖISESTI AINA HALVEMPI
.com

Read full case study →



“Companies are looking to do more with the same amount of agents and relieve the pressure on those agents, so they can be more cost effective in managing their support centers.”

Jon Ross, VP of Product, Messaging at Zendesk

 Behind-the-scenes support now helps businesses work smart, not hard

How to apply this trend

Develop a business case for automation

Business leaders are keeping a close eye on the purse strings. If CS teams want the budget to invest in new tools and tech, they have to present a strong case for automation. Once you start measuring the key metrics of support success, you'll see the ROI of automation. It'll be a no-brainer.

Save agents' talent for rewarding tasks

Eliminate manual behind-the-scenes work by streamlining processes with automation. This gives agents more time for high-value (read: revenue-generating) tasks — and to focus on those complex customer cases that require an empathic, human touch.

Integrate your support tech stack

Switching between different tools to search for information is frustrating for agents, slows response times, and can lead to mistakes (we're only human after all) with data entry. That's why it's so important to have a deeply integrated support tech ecosystem — where agents have a 360-degree view of each customer's interactions with your brand.

Action items for CX success

Takeaways for customer centricity

Check in with your customers:

Dedicate resources to collecting customer insights systematically, whether that's through a customer journeys team conducting surveys and interviews, or a tool performing AI-backed analysis of your usage data.

Guide your customers:

Many customers want to self-serve, but they might not always know how. Use the tools above to figure out where they're getting stuck, then train & incentivize them to proactively solve their issues.

Takeaways for business leaders

Retain customers and support agents:

You'll thank yourself when you see lower churn rates, more satisfied customers, and even direct revenue generated by your CS department.

Develop a business case for automation:

Look for providers with the ability to tailor their solution to your business: They must have experience with your industry, they must have the tech to customize for your use case, and they must have processes in place to set it up without disrupting your existing operations.

Takeaways for support leaders

Break down silos between product, sales, and support:

With the right training and incentives, your agents can identify early signs of churn and upskill to upsell both pre- and post sales, letting your customer support pay for itself.

Use AI to help with the above:

An AI-powered automation solution helps you see where your customers are getting stuck at any point in their journey. It can route requests to the right department and help scale revenue-generating activity by saving customer preferences, offering product suggestions, and tracking where and how you're bringing in the most cash.

Put these trends into action and level up your support

Automate with Ultimate

Consult with helphouse.io