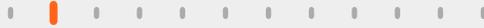


# To text or to talk?

Understanding customer care preferences for voice and digital channels



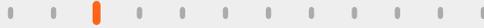


## To text or to talk?

As customer care channels continue to evolve and expand, there's been a lot of debate about which channels customers actually prefer to interact with brands. Many reports say that millennials prefer digital channels—like web chat or texting—while older generations still prefer voice channels. [Previous Interactions research](#) has shown that this isn't necessarily the case, and that the issue of channel choice is often far more complex—depending on factors such as the company consumers are trying to contact, and the complexity of the issue the consumer is trying to resolve.

In a recent survey, Interactions and Harris Poll revisited this question about consumer channel preferences. This time, however, we wanted to delve deeper into the reasons why consumers choose one channel over another, and whether common frustrations with specific channels were driving consumers to pick alternatives.

What we found is that consumers are actually split on the best way to communicate with a company. And that regardless of preference, consumers may be selecting other channels simply because the traditional channels they are used to using are causing too much frustration.



### When it comes to overall preferences, consumers are split

The reality is that when it comes to using voice versus texting or typing, consumers are split on which method they prefer. While 51% prefer texting or typing overall, 49% prefer voice channels when communicating with a company. That's not to say that there aren't differences when it comes to age groups. Millennials, for example, are most likely to prefer texting or typing (67% compared to 55% of Gen Xers and 33% of Baby Boomers).

49% prefer voice (i.e., speaking)



51% prefer texting/typing

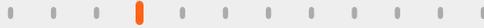


67%  
Millennials

55%  
Gen Xers

33%  
Baby Boomers





### *Talking is easier*

There are, however, a number of reasons why some consumers prefer voice over texting or typing when it comes to interacting with a company. But the most often cited reason is that it's simply easier to have a conversation this way (according to **61%** of respondents).

Other reasons why consumers prefer voice include:

- It enables me to resolve an issue faster (**57%**)
- It's more effective in resolving my issues (**54%**)
- I can better express myself (**52%**)
- It's less likely to create a misunderstanding (**51%**)

### *Text is a work around*

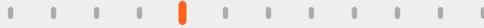
When it comes to texting or typing, on the other hand, the most commonly cited reason for using these kinds of channels was to avoid wait time (according to **39%** of respondents).

Other commonly cited reasons include:

- It creates a record of my conversation (**37%**)
- I typically communicate this way in general (**33%**)
- I can better express myself (**32%**)
- I can resolve an issue faster (**25%**)



prefer voice over texting or typing because it's easier to have a conversation this way



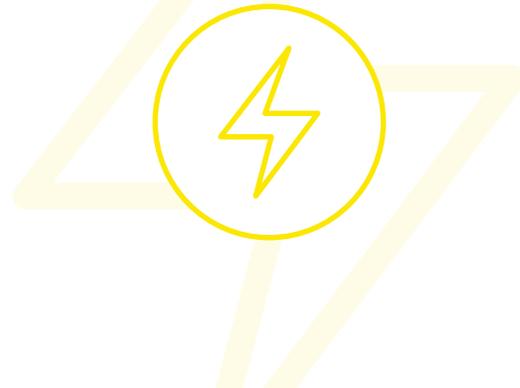
### Voice is always preferred when speed is an issue

Regardless of whether consumers prefer voice or texting, there are certain instances where they agree that voice is always the better or more convenient channel. This is particularly true in situations where consumers believe voice is the quickest way to get a solution to their issue (according to **50%** of respondents).

The severity and complexity of the issue are also critical factors in determining when voice is the preferred channel over texting or typing. For instance, many consumers also cited the following instances where they prefer voice:

- If they have a complex issue that requires multiple steps to resolve (**48%**)
- If they need extra support (**44%**)
- If they are reaching out with an important question or issue (**43%**)

Additionally, voice is preferred over texting or typing for convenience and security reasons. Two in five Americans would prefer voice interactions when communicating with a company if texting or typing is not practical, including while driving in a car, or when personal information—such as account numbers or social security numbers—must be provided (both **40%**).





### Consumers are still frustrated with voice

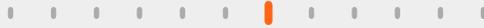
The data shows that nearly half of Americans prefer voice channels regardless of the circumstance. Beyond that, nearly all consumers agree that there are specific instances—like when speed or complexity are big concerns—where voice is always the better channel. So it should follow that companies are implementing quick, efficient voice channels that create frustration-free experiences for their customers.

Unfortunately, that's not the case. The majority of customers are interacting with voice channels that apply outdated technology that is actually meant to deflect or contain conversations, rather than resolve issues.

The result is a very frustrating experience for consumers. Nearly all consumers (**94%**) report having experienced frustration when using voice channels to communicate with a company.



**94%** of consumers have experienced frustration when using voice channels to communicate with a company



## The top reported frustrations include:



Having to repeat themselves **(52%)**



Waiting for a live agent **(49%)**



Not being able to bypass an IVR system to get to a live agent **(47%)**



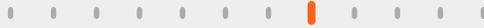
Listening to a list of irrelevant options present by an IVR system **(46%)**



Getting disconnected from a call **(45%)**

Beyond these issues, there were also a significant number of respondents that raised the issue that many voice recognition systems simply don't understand them or the issue they have **(44%)**. And **39%** expressed frustration with not being able to simply state their problems in their own words, instead having to conform to 'robot speak' in order to be understood.

Since so many consumers are reporting having experienced frustrations with automated voice solutions, it's important for companies to consider what makes for a truly effective voice solution. Certain responses may seem obvious—such as the fact that **85%** of consumers think that it is very or somewhat useful when a solution is available 24/7. But others are less so—for example, **79%** of respondents find it somewhat or very useful when the virtual assistant they are interacting with has a human-like voice/personality as opposed to a computer-generated voice.

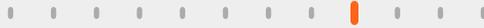


### The difference an effective voice system can make

The benefits of implementing effective automated voice systems cannot be overstated. While consumers may be split about the best method for contacting a company, **52%** would be much more or somewhat more likely to use an AI voice solution that could effectively address an issue without causing frustration. For companies, this means enabling customers to complete more self-service transactions, freeing up agents to handle more complex and time-consuming issues.

Beyond that, **63%** of consumers said that they would be more satisfied with a company that enabled them to interact with an AI voice solution that is consistently effective and quick in answering their questions.



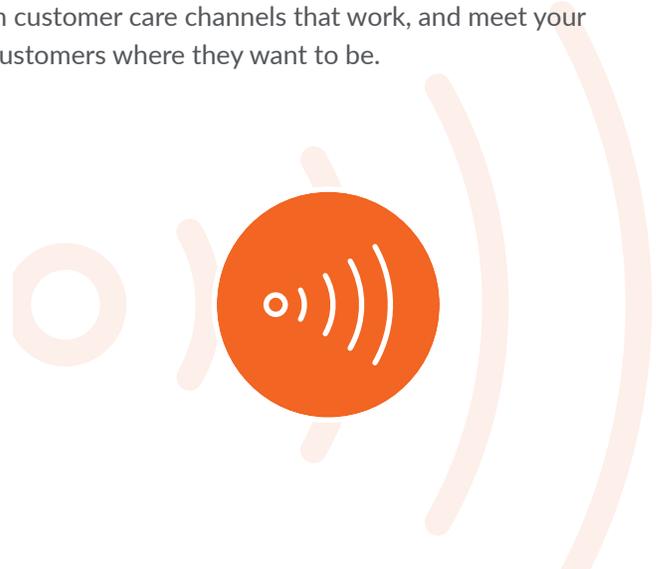


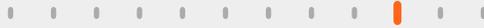
But what's perhaps most important is the fact that consumers are willing to talk about their satisfaction with effective AI customer care solutions. Respondents said that they would be likely to complete each of the following tasks for a company where they interacted with an AI voice solution that is effective:

- Participate in a customer satisfaction survey—**70%**
- Recommend the company to a friend or family member—**69%**
- Increase purchases with the company—**60%**
- Compliment the company on social media (rate them highly, leave positive feedback)—**49%**

### Getting voice right is still a priority

Consumer preferences when it comes to customer care and the channels they use are constantly evolving. As the results of this study show, consumers are mostly still split when it comes to preferring texting or typing compared to voice channels. And as a company, it's important to invest in customer care channels that work, and meet your customers where they want to be.



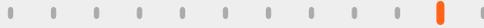


The important takeaway, though, is that while digital channels continue to grow, voice still plays a major role in customer service. For some consumers, it's because they prefer this method. For others, it's a matter of convenience—or at least that's how it starts out. The reality is that the majority of AI voice solutions still cause a great deal of frustration for customers. They force customers to repeat themselves, wait on hold, and learn how to speak like a robot to get their issues resolved.

In an era where voice-based virtual assistants are becoming more and more widespread, companies still need to be concerned about getting voice right. There is a significant amount of investment being put into developing digital channels that are thought to be in response to consumers' desire to text when, in fact, that isn't necessarily the case.

The research shows that consumers are ready and willing to use AI voice solutions, with one minor caveat—they have to work. That means being consistently effective in answering questions and resolving issues. Companies should be focused on fixing broken channels first, and only then deciding which digital channels best complement their consumers' voice interactions.

The benefits of automated voice solutions that work are numerous, from increased customer satisfaction ratings to cost savings through increased automation. That's why it's so important to design your customer care strategy to make sure that all the channels customers use to communicate with you—voice and digital alike—provide easy, frustration-free experiences.



## About Interactions

Interactions provides Intelligent Virtual Assistants that seamlessly combine artificial intelligence and human understanding to enable businesses and consumers to engage in productive conversations. With flexible products and solutions designed to meet the growing demand for unified, omnichannel customer care, Interactions is delivering significant cost savings and unprecedented customer experiences for some of the largest brands in the world. Founded in 2004, Interactions is headquartered in Franklin, Massachusetts with additional offices worldwide.

For more information about Interactions, contact us:

866.637.9049

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