Aspect Software’s 2nd annual agent experience survey examines what factors motivate, encourage and satisfy customer service agents to become more loyal, more engaged and ultimately, provide better customer service experiences.
The objective of this specific study was to investigate, from a variety of different perspectives (age, gender, size of customer support center, levels of engagement) the differing and similar attitudes, preferences and behaviors reps have regarding contact management software, the use of chatbots in customer service, workplace priorities and perceptions.

The macro objective of this specific study was to investigate, from a variety of different perspectives (age, gender, size of customer support center, levels of engagement) the differing and similar attitudes, preferences and behaviors representatives have regarding contact management software, the hot topic of intelligent assistants and chatbots, workplace priorities and perceptions and, new to the study this year, a focus on the developing “gig economy” of independently contracted customer service representatives.

This study took place in March/April 2018.
PROFILE OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENT POPULATION

Over half of current agents have three or more years of experience and most work in medium-sized contact centers.

- **Contact Center Size**: 31% Small, 46% Medium, 23% Large
- **Employment Status**: 57% On-Site Agents, 28% Remote Agents, 16% Gig Agents
- **Years of Service**: 25% 1-3 Years, 21% 3-12 Months, 54% 3+ Years

*Small contact centers: 100 seats or less
Medium contact centers: 100-1,000 seats
Large contact centers: 1,000+ seats*
PROFILE OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENT POPULATION

With two thirds of the agent population feeling unsatisfied in their work and over 40 percent of agents still feeling unempowered, there is work to be done to improve the agent experience.

The number of contact center agents who say they are **satisfied** where they work. Fairly stable, rising 2% from 2017.

The number of contact center agents who say they are **engaged** where they work. Up 4% from 2017.

The number of contact center agents who say they are **empowered** where they work. Up 3% from 2017.

Agent attitudes at work improved slightly from 2017 indicating that there are some good things going on to make contact center agents more positive about what they do. Satisfaction, empowerment and engagement all ticked up.
PROFILE OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENT POPULATION

Still, agents' sense of opportunities for growth in their jobs increased significantly from 2017.

Agents from small contact centers feel they have the greatest most opportunities.

The optimism for opportunities is clear. Agents in all demographics and contact center sizes are more positive about the growth opportunities where they are versus last year.
PROFILE OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENT POPULATION

From the agents’ perspective, contact centers are stepping up in a number of areas.

- 67% of agents say they are getting a competitive wage, up 9% from last year.
- 75% of agents say they are in an environment where they feel respected, up 10% from last year.
- 68% AVG work/life balance, being a valued part of a team, fun work environment, up an average of 6% from last year.

No notable change in degree of autonomy/responsibility or providing a flexible work schedule.
ENGAGED AGENTS

Agent engagement increased 4 points from 2017.

- Females showed greater engagement improvement than males (6 points vs. 1 point) from last year.
- GenX/Boomers experienced greatest engagement gain: 10 points from last year’s survey.
Empowered/engaged customer service agents rate their employers significantly higher than less empowered/less engaged agents in the important factors they say help them do their jobs, stay happy and deliver better customer experiences.

**Q:** How important are the following factors to you when it comes to feeling good about, satisfied with and committed to your work as a customer service representative?
FACTORS AGENTS SAY ARE IMPORTANT TO THEIR ENGAGEMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitive wage</td>
<td>Environment where I am respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment where I am respected</td>
<td>#2 Friendly work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly work environment</td>
<td>#3 Work/life balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/life balance</td>
<td>#4 Valued part of a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valued part of a team</td>
<td>#5 Competitive wage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible work schedule</td>
<td>#6 Ability to move up in organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun working environment</td>
<td>#7 Flexible work schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to move up in organization</td>
<td>#8 Fun working environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most up-to-date software to service customers</td>
<td>#9 Most up-to-date software to service customers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 93% of agents say a respectful work environment is most important workplace factors, at an increase of 8 points, having the ability to move up in the organization was the most significant positive move from 2017. The desire for a competitive wage is the only factor to decline significantly vs. 2017.
## Factors Agents Say Are Important to Their Engagement

### Roadblocks

| Training                                      | +26 pts |
| Simple, easy-to-use software                  | +24 pts |
| Up-to-date software to contact management how they want | +23 pts |
| Competitive salary/hourly rate                | +22 pts |
| Ability to move up in the organization        | +22 pts |
| Feeling like a valued part of the team        | +20 pts |

Large gaps exist between what tools agents say they need and the tools their employers provide them with in order to provide better customer service.
Lack of customer history and personal information needed to provide personalized customer experiences is sorely lacking for agents.

84% of agents say that it’s important for them to have all the necessary customer data to provide personalized customer experiences.

Yet, 27% of agents say they have ALL the information they need to provide a personalized customer experience, quickly and accurately, every time.
FACTORS AGENTS SAY ARE IMPORTANT TO THEIR ENGAGEMENT

Lack of customer history and personal information needed to provide personalized customer experiences is sorely lacking for agents.

80% of agents feel it’s important for them to have intuitive, easy-to-use software to manage customer interactions.

Yet, 35% of agents say that this is fully available to them.
YOUNG MILLENNIALS/GENZ AGENTS (18-24)
FACTORS AGENTS SAY ARE IMPORTANT TO THEIR ENGAGEMENT

Agents feel goals set by management are more effective to help them increase their success meeting objectives vs. gamification.

**GAMIFICATION**

- **ALL AGENTS**: 51%
- **YOUNG MILLENNIAL/GENZ AGENTS**: 61%

**GOALS**

- **ALL AGENTS**: 66%
- **YOUNG MILLENNIAL/GENZ AGENTS**: 72%
### MILLENNIALS
The restless youth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most likely to want to leave the company where they currently work</th>
<th>Most likely to look for a job outside customer service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Young Millennials/GenZ</strong></td>
<td><strong>Older Millennials</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="45%" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="33%" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q:** Which of the following best applies to you: 
- Intend to stay where I’m currently employed
- Looking for another job in another sector

**Job Satisfaction Trend 2017-2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Young Millennials/GenZ</th>
<th>Older Millennials</th>
<th>GenX/Boomers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="+1 pt" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="+6 pts" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="+5 pts" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**YOUNG MILLENNIAL/GEN Z AGENTS (18-24)**

Young Millennial/GenZ agents are the most likely to want to handle *EASY* questions/tasks, least likely to want to handle *MODERATELY COMPLEX* and *COMPLEX* questions/tasks.

- **Desire to handle EASY questions**
  - Young Millennials/GenZ: 40%
  - Older Millennials: 35%
  - GenX/Boomers: 31%

- **Desire to handle MODERATE questions**
  - Young Millennials/GenZ: 50%
  - Older Millennials: 54%
  - GenX/Boomers: 55%

- **Desire to handle COMPLEX questions**
  - Young Millennials/GenZ: 10%
  - Older Millennials: 11%
  - GenX/Boomers: 14%
Young Millennial/GenZ agents are MOST LIKELY to say handling more COMPLEX and MODERATELY COMPLEX questions/tasks gives them an opportunity to shine.

- Young Millennials/GenZ: 73%
- Older Millennials: 70%
- GenX/Boomers: 59%

And most likely to say it makes them feel more satisfied/committed in their jobs when they do.

- GenX/Boomers: 65%
- Older Millennials: 67%
- Young Millennials/GenZ: 73%
AGENTS WANT SELF-SERVICE, TOO

of Young Millennial/GenZ agents say self-service contact with management is just as important than a good salary.

65% prefer self-service contact with management vs. speaking with them directly.

It’s no surprise that agents act like consumers when it comes to interaction preferences. 80% of agents say that being able to communicate with contact center management anyway they want is important to their work engagement.
WORK ENVIRONMENT

Young Millennial/GenZ males want to have more fun than Young Millennial/GenZ females by a nine point margin but ALL females place more value on a friendly work environment.

HAVE FUN AT WORK

- Males: 86%
- Females: 77%

FRIENDLY WORK ENVIRONMENT

- Males: 86%
- Females: 89%
There are some distinct male/female differences in how Young Millennial/GenZ agents rank certain contact center workplace job factors.

NOTABLE GENDER DIFFERENCES
GENDER DIFFERENCES

**SALARY**
Salary is less important for Young Millennial/GenZ female agents than males but becomes more important in older generations.

**RESPECT**
Respect is the most important of the 14 options in the survey question for Young Millennial/GenZ females.

**FUN WORK ENVIRONMENT**
In the contact center, Young Millennial/GenZ males want to have more fun than Young Millennial/GenZ females by a nine point margin.

**FRIENDLY WORK ENVIRONMENT**
2nd highest factor in terms of importance for Young Millennial/GenZ females. This grows in importance in older generations.

**SOFTWARE TOOLS**
Every female demographic places a higher importance on software to manage customer interactions, contact management than males.

**GIG WORK**
Younger males have a slightly (4 points) greater interest in their contact center employer offering on-demand opportunities than do young females.
Importance of Salary Increases

Salary increases the older the agent and the longer they’ve been on the job.

Q: How important is a competitive wage to you when it comes to your workforce engagement?
Desire to have access to key software and smartphone communication tools rose across the board driven by females.

- **Having the most up-to-date software to contact management**
  - Females: 80%  
  - Males: 74%

- **Ability to use simple, easy-to-use software to service customers**
  - Females: 73%  
  - Males: 66%

Females place a higher importance on software to manage customer interactions and contact their management than males.
RESPECT

Respect is the first or second most important factor for females.

Young Millennials/GenZ

1. Environment where I’m respected *
2. Flexible work schedule
3. Work/life balance

Older Millennials

1. Work/life balance
2. Environment where I’m respected
3. Friendly working environment

GenX/Boomers

1. Feeling like a valued part of the team
2. Environment where I’m respected
3. Friendly working environment

* Most important for females age 18-24.
EMERGING TRENDS
THE STATE OF AGENT ENGAGEMENT: AGENTS AND AI

The rise in self-service is changing the question mix. The amount of easy questions received is down 3% from last year while the number of complex questions is up 3%. Good news: significant jump from 2017 in agent desire to handle more complex questions.

**Q:** What percentage of the total number of customer questions and issues you handle in a typical week are easy, moderate and complex?
Agents are even more positive on the impact of handling more complex questions.

- Improves my skills: 81% (+2%)
- I can make a bigger impact in the company: 76% (+4%)
- I’m more satisfied in my job, more committed to the company: 68% (+9%)
- Improves my prospects of moving up: 70% (+13%)

Q: How much do you agree with the following statements about handling more complex customer questions?

* Since 2017
“ON DEMAND” OPPORTUNITIES ARE IN DEMAND

The appeal of making additional income, being in control of schedules and better work/life balance are driving the appeal for on-demand contact center work.

Gig work interest in the contact center driven by younger workers

- Young Millennials/GenZ: 51%
- Older Millennials: 43%
- GenX/Boomers: 37%

The longer agents are in the industry, the less the appeal

- 3 – 12 Months: 51%
- 1 – 3 Years: 48%
- 3 + Years: 37%

Q: Would you rather be a full time customer service representative OR work as an independent contractor working in a variety of customer support or customer service centers?
THE STATE OF AGENT ENGAGEMENT

**PROVIDE SELF-SERVICE MANAGEMENT**

Agents would prefer to have self-service options to manage schedules and time off. In addition to improving their work engagement, 76% of them feel it will improve their customer service delivery.

**CHALLENGE THEM**

All agents note that handling moderately complex or complex questions/tasks will improve their skills and their value to the organization. The Young Millennial/GenZ agent demographic is the group with the highest number of agents to say it gives them an opportunity to shine.
STAY TUNED!

Part II: Customer Service Agents and the Gig Economy – July 11
Part III: Agents and AI – July 25
CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENTS AND THE GIG ECONOMY

Aspect Software, in partnership with Conversion Research, conducted a national study of 500 Active Customer Service Representatives aged 18-55 years old to uncover the attitudes, preferences and behaviors reps have about their jobs.
A labor market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs.

CONTACT CENTER AGENTS IN THE GIG ECONOMY

There are hard, bottom-line and customer experience benefits to gig economy models, including faster response times, lower cost per interaction and access to new – and better educated – talent pools.  

- Ian Jacobs, Principal Analyst, Forrester Research

THE GIG ECONOMY IS ON THE RISE

9.2 MILLION AMERICANS are expected to work in the gig economy by 2021, up from 3.8 million in 2016 *

* According to combined research by Intuit and Emergent Research.

Are customer service agents the next wave of gig economy workers?
THE GIG ECONOMY IS BECOMING MORE DESIRED BY CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENTS

16% Of All Agents currently work in the gig economy as “on-demand” agents

41% Of All Agents said they would be interested in an on-demand job

51% Of Millennial Agents

Customer service agents who work in large contact centers (>1000) are 10 points more likely to want an on-demand job than agents who work in small contact centers (<100).
**WHAT DRIVES WORKERS TO WANT TO BE A PART OF THE GIG ECONOMY?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>A work/life balance that they can have total control over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>The ability to focus on work and not worry about job stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>The ability to have additional income</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Control is the driving factor for on-demand agents vs. traditional agents, leading the way at 86%. Followed by job stability and additional income at 80%.
Millennials are especially interested in these features of the gig economy:

- **Control**: 81%
  - Want the ability to have more control over the work they do.

- **Flexibility**: 88%
  - Want a flexible work schedule that they can determine.

- **Mobility**: 80%
  - Want the ability to pick up additional shifts via an Uber-like app.
On-demand agents rank their employers higher than the average customer service agent when it comes the quality and capabilities of the software they use to service their customers and contact their employers.
On-demand agents seem to be tasked with handling customer interactions on digital channels vs. traditional agents.

**ON-DEMAND AGENTS ARE MORE EXPERIENCED WITH DIGITAL CHANNELS**

- 45% of on-demand agents
- 21% of traditional agents

SAY THEIR COMPANY HAS TRAINED THEM ON TEXT/SMS

- 27% of on-demand agents trained on social media
- 15% of traditional agents trained on social media
ON-DEMAND AGENTS ALSO VALUE USING DIGITAL CHANNELS WITH THEIR EMPLOYERS

68% say that reps should be notified by their employers for work activities (breaks, lunches, open shifts) via push notifications.

63% say that being able to get in touch with their employers via their smartphone is just as important as a competitive salary.

55% say if their employer doesn’t have a smartphone based WFM tool it shows they don’t have the bests interests of their team in mind.

82% of on-demand agents believe getting in touch with management should be as easy as getting in touch with friends.
TAKEAWAYS

‘On-demand’ is becoming a desired path for customer service agents.

Those driven to be ‘on-demand’ agents are attracted to the flexibility, control, and income that comes with it.

Companies that employ ‘on-demand’ agents are investing more in providing agents with an experience they value.

‘On-demand’ agent tends to have more experience and training on more modern customer service channels and desire a more modern experience with their employer.
AGENTS AND AI

Aspect Software, in partnership with Conversion Research, conducted a national study of 500 Active Customer Service Representatives aged 18-55 years old to uncover the attitudes, preferences and behaviors reps have about their jobs.
THERE’S A NEED FOR BETTER WORKFORCE OPTIMIZATION

80% of customer service agents say that easy access to their schedules, requests for new shifts, or time off is important.

But only 52% of agents say this is fully available to them.
58% of Young Millennial/GenZ agents say self-service contact with management is just as important as a good salary. 65% prefer self-service contact with management vs. speaking with them directly.

It’s no surprise that agents act like consumers when it comes to interaction preferences. 80% of agents say that being able to communicate with contact center management anyway they want is important to their work engagement.
INTEREST IN USING CHATBOTS AT WORK IS HIGH, ESPECIALLY FOR FEMALES

See full AI and chatbot integration into any contact with management as a ‘perfect world.’

Like the idea of using “intelligent assistants” or chatbots for all schedule communications.
Agents see new opportunities for themselves to shine
AGENTS SEEK TO GROW THEIR ROLES

83% of agents say the ability to move up is important to them.

However, only 58% of agents feel they can grow their career with their current employers.
THE TIDE IS CHANGING THOUGH

Between 2017 and 2018 a dramatic increase in sense of opportunities for agent advancement occurred.

The percent of agents who feel they have the opportunity to move up at their place of work.

- 2017: 41%
- 2018: 58%

39% increase
Agents think chatbots are the key to moving up

**AGENTS THINK CHATBOTS CAN HELP THEM MOVE UP**

- **2018** 55% **2017** 44%  
  Say they will be applying their intellect

- **2018** 45% **2017** 36%  
  Say they will feel better about and more committed to their jobs

- **2018** 44% **2017** 35%  
  Say it will give them a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility for decision-making

Agents see a lot of opportunities if the customer service center where they work started to use chatbots to help handle the most frequently asked questions.
AGENTS BELIEVE THAT CHATBOTS IN THE CONTACT CENTER WILL MEAN THEY’LL HAVE TO TAKE ON MORE COMPLEX TASKS

- 68% of agents feel better, more satisfied/committed when handling more complex tasks.
- 67% of agents sense an opportunity to shine for management.
- 62% of agents feel it improves their prospects to move up.

*According to the 2016 Aspect Consumer Experience Index*
TAKEAWAYS

Agents are comfortable and more accepting of chatbots today than even just one year ago.

A workforce optimization chatbot can solve the issues agents have with managing their schedules and methods for communicating with management.

Many agents see many opportunities to advance if their contact center uses a customer service chatbot.