



Shattering the stereotypes of chat

Why taking an omnichannel approach to customer service is key for retail and financial services brands this holiday season



Foreword

As we enter the festive season, traditionally the busiest time of the year for brands, Zendesk was keen to understand the communication channels, tone of voice and service timeframes that consumers will be expecting from their favourite businesses in the run up to this year's holiday break.



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Using a consumer survey and various social listening tools, we spoke to more than 2,000 British shoppers and analysed a range of both legacy and digital-first retail and financial services brand communication channels, to gain a holistic view of the best practice customer experiences that people are looking for. As well as how brands should talk to people, what people complain about and the channels they prefer to communicate through.

The findings fly in the face of many of the stereotypes we so often hear about. Millennials don't just want to reach out via messaging apps and social media, everyone still wants brands to speak to them in a professional way when discussing enquiries and the high street isn't dead – its purpose is just changing. It speaks to the need for brands to take a well rounded approach to building a consistent customer service strategy across channels, considering service as a key part of delivering a competitive customer experience.

We hope you find these insights useful as you prepare for the peak shopping period and beyond.

Key findings

Time is of the essence



British shoppers rated the importance of communication features amongst brands generally. The 3 most popular features were:

Speed of resolution of issues



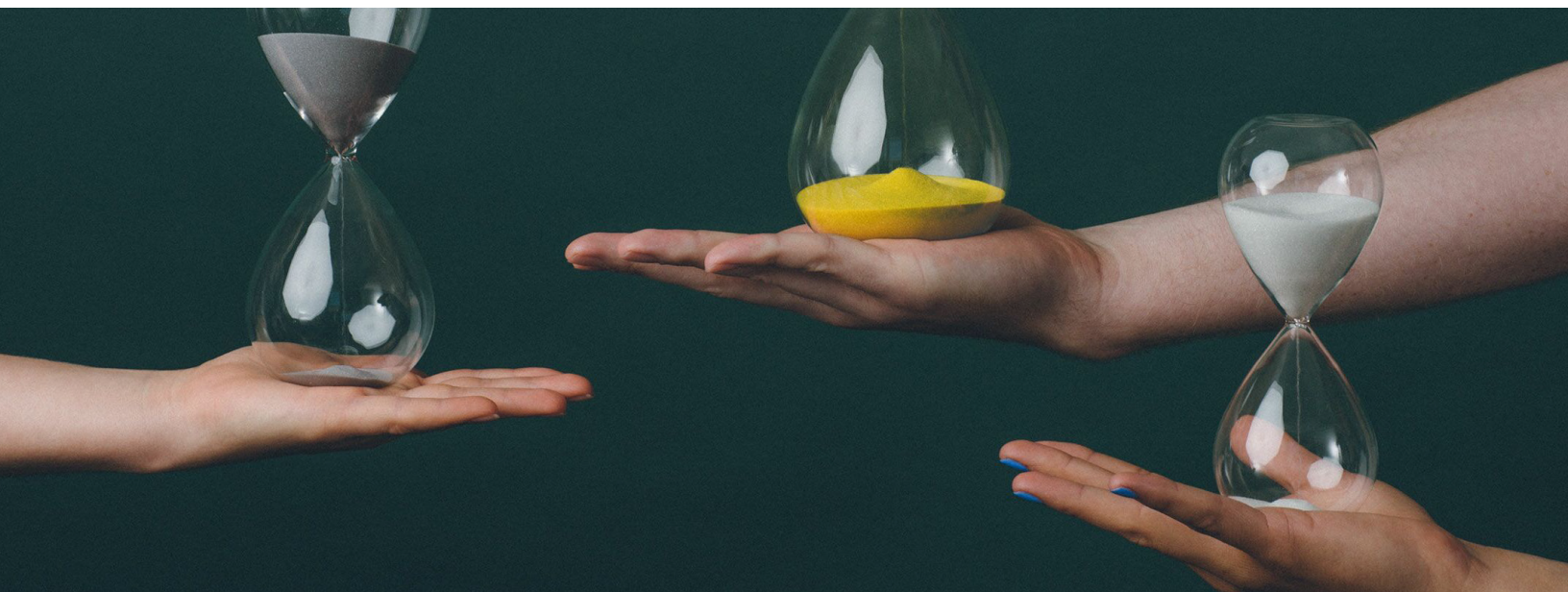
Not having to repeat themselves if they are passed on to another department



How easy it is to get hold of someone



Retail and financial services brands must therefore plan ahead to make sure that during peak periods, customer service standards in these areas don't slip due to the increasing pressure caused by higher ticket volumes.



Age is just a number



Whilst the stereotype may be that **55+ year olds** will go into a store (51%) or phone a brand to speak to them (43%), our research found that **email is the most popular form of communication (57%)** for those keen to get in touch with a legacy retail or financial services brand. In a major shift in behaviour, nearly a quarter of people (22%) in this age bracket are now also using web chat to communicate with legacy brands, so it's important these channels are available to them.



While digital-first brands, built first for online experiences, might assume that **18-24-year olds** would lean heavily on social media private message (26%) or public message (18%) to reach out to them, our survey found that well over a third (**44% opt for email**), and, if communicating with a legacy brand, **39% prefer to go in store**. That private message has overtaken public message as a preferred customer service option among young people demonstrates how important it is for brands to have this service set up. Meanwhile, with so many young adults opting to go in store to discuss their query with a brand, it's clear the high street is transforming to become a vital part of a brand's service centre.



While brands could be forgiven for presuming that their social channels are largely populated by younger consumers, the **average age of people '@' mentioning** one legacy financial services brand on Twitter was **43 years old**, whereas for digital-first brands, it was 29 years old and 35 years old in the retail brands we analysed, and 34 years old and 36 years old in the financial services brands we analysed. And while digital-first brands might have younger Twitter followers, on average, than legacy brands, the difference is less than you might think, at fewer than 10 years. What's more, Twitter users who '@' mention brands tend to be older than the average follower of that brand. So, although younger audiences follow brands, it's a slightly older audience that actually engages with them for customer service.



Who do you think you're talking to?



Despite the fact that many consumers adopt an informal brand voice, when speaking to digital-first retail or financial services brands, **79% of British shoppers** we surveyed say they still want to feel like they are speaking to a professional when communicating with one of these brands. This figure jumps to 87% of people when speaking to a legacy brand. Meanwhile 61% of those talking to digital-first brands via webchat think that it's important to feel like they're speaking to a human, even if they're speaking to a robot.



While consumers who '@' mention brands may use casual language, our research shows they still expect nothing but professionalism when it comes to the way brands handle their customer service enquiry. While consumers messaging brands often use gifs, emojis and humour to get their point across, over a third (**34%**) told us they do not want to feel like they are speaking to a friend when a digital-first brand responds, regardless of whether they're using a messenger app, social media or more formal channel to communicate.

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Top trends

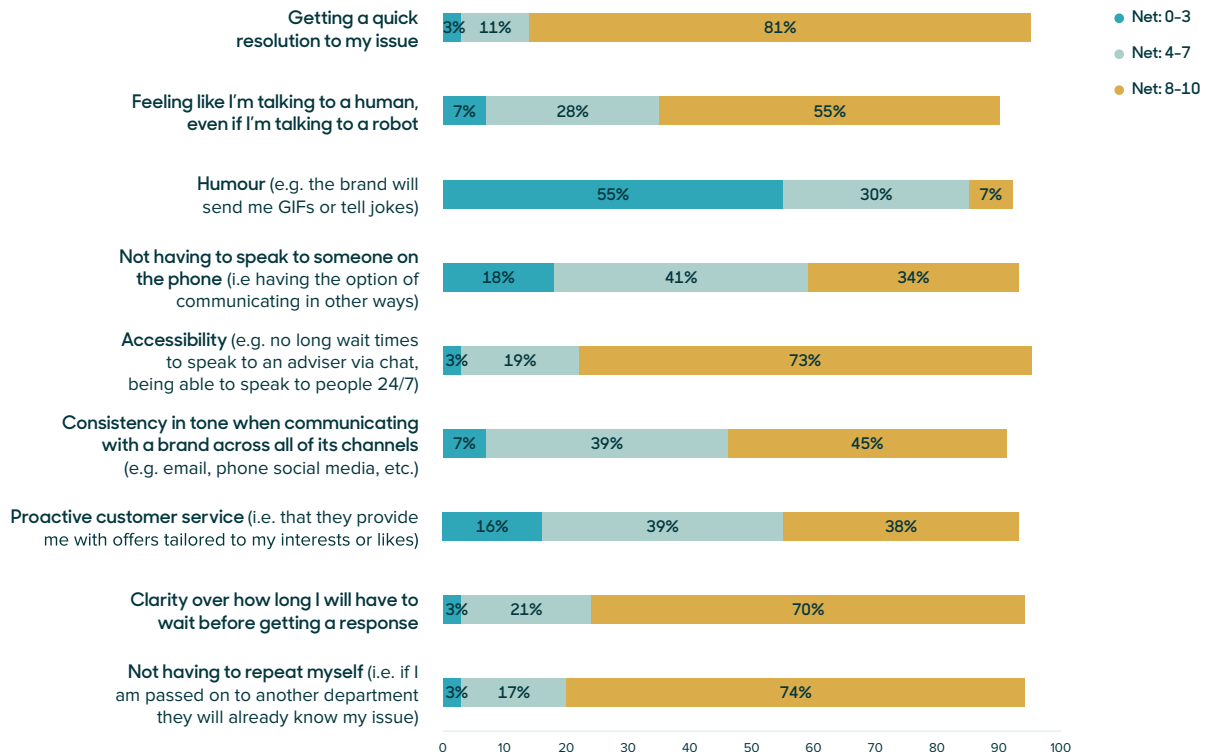
Want to see your customer satisfaction scores go up? Work on your timings.

Our research found that on any occasion where a British shopper communicates with a brand or a brand communicates with them, 70% find it very important that they are told how long they will have to wait before they get a response from the brand, 81% that the brand finds a solution to their problem fast and nearly three quarters (73%) that they don't have to wait around, but can discuss their issue 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. What's more, nearly three quarters (74%) don't want to have to repeat themselves if they are passed on to another department but instead want them to already

know about their issue. These concerns are all a much higher priority for consumers than, for example, 'feeling like I'm talking to a human, even if I'm talking to a robot' (55%).

The importance of having clarity around time of response from a brand was also borne out in our social listening, which found this issue to be the subject of many customer complaints. People either requested updates around responses or complained that response times were too slow.

How important are the following on a scale of 1-10



70% of consumers think it is important to have clarity around the time of response

Social listening shows that this is a theme of complaints amongst consumers.

Many of their requests are for updates around time of response/complaints that responses were too slow.



Jessie
@_unsatisfiedjess

Just really thoroughly disappointed in [redacted] paid for my September [redacted], it never arrived, been reaching out to them since the 22nd of September and absolutely nothing, no response, just want my [redacted] and my money back, not at all how I expected this to go

8:02 PM · Oct 1, 2019 · Twitter for Android



Ben
@_Ben_unsatisfied_customer

[redacted] is your response time generally dreadful? Some guy has spent my money on the other side of the world and I haven't got a response from yourselves in nearly 4 hours.

2:29 PM · Oct 24, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone



Eleni
@_eleni_is_unsatisfied

Replying to [redacted]

Hi I've DM'd you & have had a response! Not sure where you've got that you haven't heard back from me from...although I'm very unsatisfied with the response!

4:52 PM · Oct 11, 2019 · Twitter for Android



Chris
@chrisunsatisfied · Sept 21

Really disappointed with the response time and customer services from [redacted]

1 reply · Retweet · Like · Share



Ashley
@_Ashleyunsatisfied

Replying to @chrisunsatisfied and [redacted]

Is it not working again? [redacted] have changed their contact section of the app and yes it's slowed response time. I remember a year ago it was instant chat.

5:57 PM · Sept 21, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone



Want greater positive engagement? Respond to your customers' queries professionally, no matter which channel you're communicating on.

First and foremost, customers want to feel like they're in safe, capable hands with a brand, whether they're raising an issue via the website or IM'ing with a query. It follows then that whenever they communicate with one, specifically for customer service reasons, the vast majority say they want to feel like they're speaking to a professional (79% for digital first brands, 87% for legacy brands), more than half (55%) say they want to feel like they're speaking to a human, even if they're speaking to a robot, and more than a third (34% for digital-first brands, 36% for legacy brands) say they don't want to feel like they're speaking to a friend.

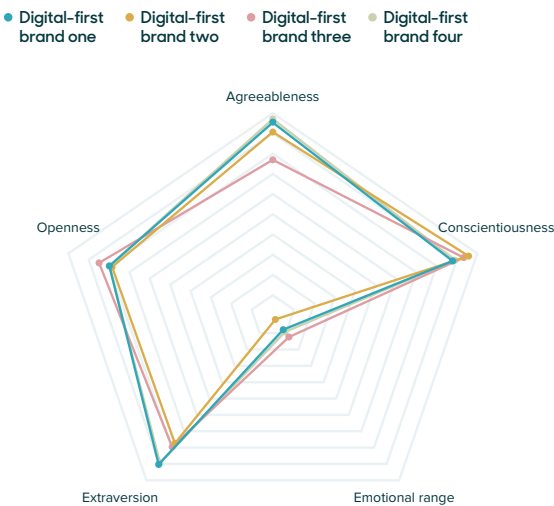
What's more, our online research discovered that whether a retail or financial services brand, legacy or digital-first - all the brand responses to customer queries we analysed shared similar traits in their replies.

The hallmarks of this customer service brand voice were:

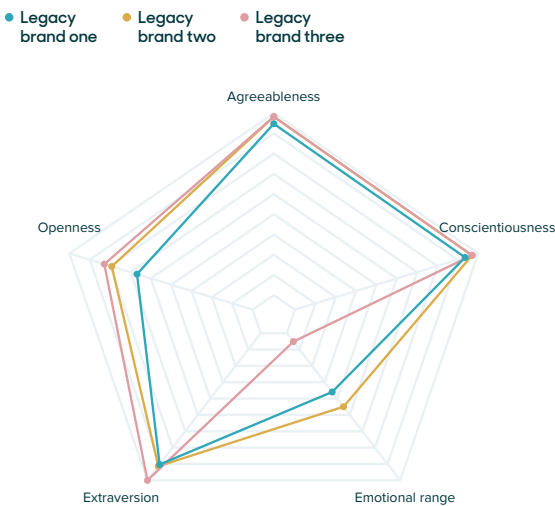
- Agreeable;** meaning helpful, cooperative, modest and sympathetic.
- Extraverted;** meaning energetic, cheerful and friendly
- Open;** meaning emotionally aware and idealistic
- Conscientious;** meaning they come across as informative, dependable and considerate.

Retail brands, however, were more likely to have a higher emotional range – in other words be more excitable and passionate – than financial services brands when speaking with customers, using capital letters or exclamation marks, for example. While, financial services brands sounded calmer.

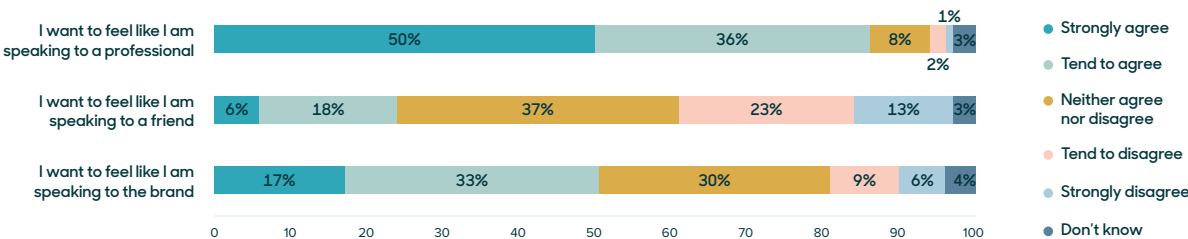
Personality of financial brands (with replies):



Personality of retail brands (with replies):



To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements when speaking to legacy brands?



Key takeaways for financial services and retail brands

Your tone of voice



Identify your brand tone of voice for customer service enquiries and train your customer service teams on this so that each interaction is consistent



Stay professional in your responses to customers, no matter the channel or how they speak to you. Even if your brand personality, or the communications channel is usually quite informal, it's not the time to use acronyms, emojis or gifs



Be consistent with your brand voice across customer service channels, from messenger apps to in store staff

Your communication channels



Don't make assumptions about your customers. Adopt an omnichannel approach to make sure they can communicate with you in whatever way and wherever they want to



If you do have a high street presence, make sure that it's set up to handle customer service enquiries and joined up with your online systems

Timings and resolving customer enquiries



Be clear on response times in your communications with consumers



Plan ahead for peak periods so standards don't slip



Make sure FAQ content, blogs and resource pages are easy to navigate and up to date, so customers who prefer to self-serve can easily find what they're looking for



Bots and app messaging can also help customers to get a speedy response to their queries while taking the pressure of customer service agents



Research methodology

Consumer survey

The consumer survey was conducted online by YouGov, surveying 2,061 adult consumers (1,000 male, 1,061 female) across Great Britain. Fieldwork was conducted 25th-28th October 2019. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

Retail and financial services brand analysis

Digital analysis software was used to map out the locations, occupations, likes, hashtags and media read by the followers of key financial services and retail social media accounts and the people who '@' mention these brands online. AiMEE, a text analyser that uses linguistic analytics to infer a brand's personality, tone of voice and sentiment, as expressed online, was used to compare brand personality and tone of voice, across each of the brand's digital channels (website, blog, social media).