

# What **B2B** organizations can learn from consumers' service experiences.

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# Introduction

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## Rethinking service experiences for B2B organizations.

Never has it been more critical for organizations to differentiate themselves by service experiences rather than by product features alone. As subscription-based business models continue to gain momentum and products and services across all industries become more commoditized, the quality of the service experience plays an increasingly significant role in whether a customer renews or expands their relationship with a company.

The service experience happens throughout the entire customer lifecycle, before and after the purchase or use of a company's products or services, and across multiple channels and touchpoints. With this, the lines that distinguish selling from servicing are fading, presenting a tremendous opportunity for businesses to leverage service to build loyalty, gain recognition, and flourish.

While this has been exemplified by brands such as Netflix, Apple Music, and Uber in consumer-based markets, business-to-business (B2B) organizations also need to transform the way they think about service to become more competitive. After all, B2B service experiences are, at their core, person-to-person interactions. **So what can B2B companies learn from how consumer-oriented companies operate?**

To answer this question, we surveyed over 5,000 people globally from a wide range of generations, income levels, and amounts of exposure to customer service to gain insight into how customer service is perceived, the ways it impacts a customer's overall experience with a brand, and how these experiences influence the expectations of the people we work with and for. You'll see what is and is not working in service, and why it is so crucial for B2B organizations to rethink the service experiences they deliver and take a close look at what contributes to positive and negative experiences.

**98% of consumers we surveyed agree that a positive experience with an organization results in a greater likelihood to purchase or continue to purchase from them.**



# Key findings

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## **Employees' customer service expectations in the workplace**

**are evolving.** 96% of employees who interact with customer service departments as a part of their job say that interactions they have as a consumer influence what they expect from customer service departments they encounter in the workplace.

**Customer service quality matters.** When deciding to make continued purchases within a particular industry, customer service quality is more important than price.

**Negative service experiences have big consequences.** Nearly two-thirds (62%) of consumers have told others about a bad customer service experience and over half (53%) have reportedly stopped doing business with an organization that delivered a bad experience.

**Customer service agents can make a good experience great.** 78% of US consumers report that helpful customer service agents are the greatest contributor to a positive service experience.

**Great customer service experiences improves the bottom line.** 98% of consumers agree that a positive customer service experience with an organization results in a greater likelihood to purchase or continue to purchase from them.



# 1.0

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## **The impact of service experiences on user expectations**

Service experiences matter.

Given the significance of service interactions during the customer lifecycle, and that these experiences can vary across industry, type of business, and even geographic location, we set out to discover just how much of an impact service experiences have on the way people purchase and interact with brands, their sentiment toward the brands they work with and purchase from, and even their likelihood to continue to purchase from them.

What we found, first and foremost, was that these service experiences matter greatly and that customer service quality bolsters customer satisfaction.

**99% of consumers surveyed report that the quality of customer service that they receive from a business influences their overall impression of that organization to some extent.**

### **Service Across the Customer Lifecycle**

What actually constitutes a customer service experience? Customer service refers to the assistance an organization offers to its customers before or after they buy or use products or services.

Across the customer lifecycle, service experiences—whether self-service, agent-assisted service, or field service—can include actions such as:

- 01  
Looking for information
- 02  
Completing a purchase
- 03  
Completing a task or action
- 04  
Resolving an issue

## 1.1 The impact of service experiences on user expectations

Today's B2B service experiences are held to the same standards as consumer experiences.

Our research indicates that B2B service experiences are held to the same standards as consumer experiences. Why? Because at the core of all service experiences is a human-to-human interaction, and by nature, we humans carry expectations with us from one setting to another.

In fact, **96% of those surveyed who interact with customer service departments as a part of their job say that interactions they have as a consumer influence what they expect from customer service departments that they encounter in the workplace.**

For B2B organizations, there is much to learn from the modern service practices of business-to-consumer brands especially as B2B service experiences involve those same consumers.

76%

**of those surveyed say that when they have a great experience interacting with one industry, it raises their expectations for the customer service they receive across other industries.**

### The Next Generation

This sentiment gets stronger for younger generations: After an exceptional experience with one industry, the expectations of 82% of Gen Z and Millennial groups are raised across other industries. This impact of service experiences across industries requires companies to focus on the human behind the engagement, rather than the business or a generic group.

#### **Top 4 industries with the best customer service.**

1	Travel, hospitality, & entertainment	2	Retail & consumer goods	3	Banking & financial services	4	Consumer electronics & technology
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#### **Setting the precedent.**

Travel, hospitality, and entertainment was ranked as the industry category with the best customer service by consumers. Customer service delivered by this industry sets the precedent for other industries.

## 2.0

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### **What's working in customer service for consumers?**

When asked about their most recent service interaction with a business, 37% of consumers rated this interaction as extremely positive. So what contributes to these positive service interactions? According to respondents, customer service quality is more important than price when it comes to factors that contribute to their decision to continue to make purchases from or work with a business.

#### **Most important factors that contribute to the decision to continue to make purchases from/work with a business:**

- 1 Product or service quality 69%
- 2 Customer service quality 58%
- 3 Price 54%

What matters most?

**When deciding to make a purchase from, or work with a business, customer service quality is more important than price according to consumers.**

When the customer experience is positive, customers walk away from every interaction feeling happy and satisfied.

Positive customer experiences include well-targeted marketing campaigns, easy-to-purchase-from eCommerce sites, simplified buying processes, self-service customer service options, and the ability to connect with company representatives anytime, anywhere, through any device.



## 2.1 What's working in customer service for consumers?

### Speed and efficiency.

The most important aspects of service to consumers are how quickly they are connected to an agent and the amount of effort required to get a resolution, even more so than agent friendliness. Customers expect interactions with businesses to be immediate and effortless.

An effortless experience is critical to adapting to the ever-increasing needs of customers. B2B companies can offer real-time engagement to speed up the process of connecting customers to agents, answering questions, and resolving issues. Real-time engagement is no longer a nice to have, it has become critical to improving the customer experience.

#### **When contacting a business, which of the following is most important to you?**

Speed of getting connected to an agent

**64%**

Limited effort required to achieve resolution

**46%**

Hours of availability

**43%**

Friendliness of agent

**40%**

Speed of receiving on-site/in-person service

**25%**

Tools for self-service

**24%**

Variety of communication methods

**22%**

## 2.2 What's working in customer service for consumers?

### Ease of discovery.

The helpfulness of agents and the ease of finding needed information are the factors that contribute most to a positive experience, according to consumers. Interestingly, consumers rank never having to contact customer service fairly low on this list, indicating that they still expect to have to get in touch with a business every so often, but they want that interaction to be seamless and easy.

#### **Which of the following contributes most to a positive experience with a business or government office?**

Helpful customer service agents/technicians

**65%**

Having the ability to easily find information I need

**62%**

Receiving proactive service to address potential issues that might impact me

**42%**

Never having to contact customer service

**29%**

Knowing who I am when I contact for assistance

**21%**

Personalized messaging and experiences from the business or office

**17%**

#### **Regional Insight**

The top factor that contributes to a positive service experience varies across regions. 78% of US consumers report that helpful customer service agents are the greatest contributor to a positive service experience, significantly more than any other region. (APAC: 59%, Europe: 61%, Latin America: 55%)

Top ranked contributor to a positive service experience:

#### **APAC**

Having the ability to easily find the information I need 61%

#### **Europe**

Helpful customer service agents/technicians 61%

#### **Latin America**

Having the ability to easily find the information I need 61%

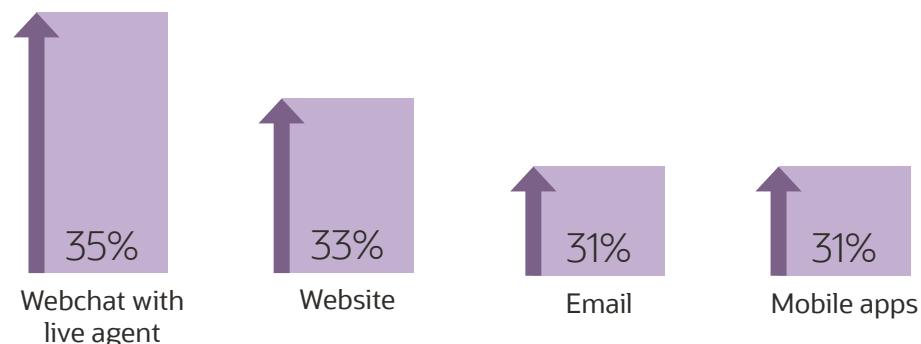
## 2.3 What's working in customer service for consumers?

### Digital adoption continues to grow.

Consumers are indicating a significant increase in the use of digital channels to engage with organizations. Automated chatbot use is on the rise with over one-quarter (28%) of consumers reporting an increase in their usage of automated chatbots in the last two years. When backed by the right data, automated chatbots can be an easy and instantaneous channel, providing a personalized experience that end users feel confident in. Regardless of channel, businesses must ensure that their service strategies enable agents to deliver personalized and positive experiences across every interaction.

#### Methods of contact: Greatest increase

% of respondents reporting an increase in use in the last two years.



### Are businesses still too dependent on the telephone?

As digital adoption increases, B2B service practitioners need to work on the development of digital service channels that are considered the minimum requirements in consumer environments.

We see a significantly greater increase in digital channels over more traditional channels like in-store visits and phone calls. In the last two years, just 16% of survey respondents reported an increase in the use of phone and only 12% reported an increase in their in-store or in-person visits in order to make contact with a business.



## 3.0

### What isn't working in consumer service?

Having to repeat yourself is the #1 contributor to a negative customer service experience according to consumers. One reason for this problem is the technology that companies use. In a connected, data-driven world, there's no excuse for a disconnect between companies and customers.

#### What contributes to a negative experience?

Forcing duplicate efforts. The most negative experiences are created when a consumer is forced to repeat an action such as contacting customer service or explaining their situation multiple times.

#### The power of connected data

Connected data plays a crucial role in a company's ability to provide outstanding customer experiences. To do so, you need to connect any data or customer intelligence garnered across all of your systems, from service to commerce, loyalty, marketing, sales, finance, supply chain, and HR departments. Only then can you deliver a seamless, connected, and personalized customer experience across all marketing, sales, and customer service touchpoints.

#### Which of the following contributes most to a negative interaction with a business or government office?

Having to repeat myself to multiple agent(s)

**56%**

Having to contact customer service multiple times

**52%**

Being unable to reach a live agent

**47%**

The customer service agent/technician is unable to solve my issue

**46%**

Can't find the information I'm looking for

**32%**

The customer service experience was not customized to my needs

**17%**

Having to contact customer service

**15%**

### 3.1 What isn't working in consumer service?

#### Consequences of a negative interaction.

The top-reported action that consumers have taken after experiencing a negative service interaction with a business is telling others about that experience. In a business-to-business setting, this negative word-of-mouth can result in diminished perceived brand value. As employees change roles or even move from one company to another, negative experiences and their opinion of a business they have worked with in the past travel with them.

#### Which of the following have you done after having a negative interaction with a business?



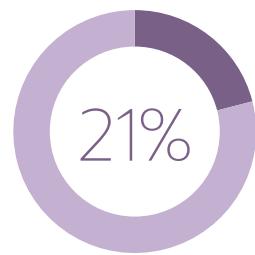
Told others about the experience



Stopped doing business with the organization



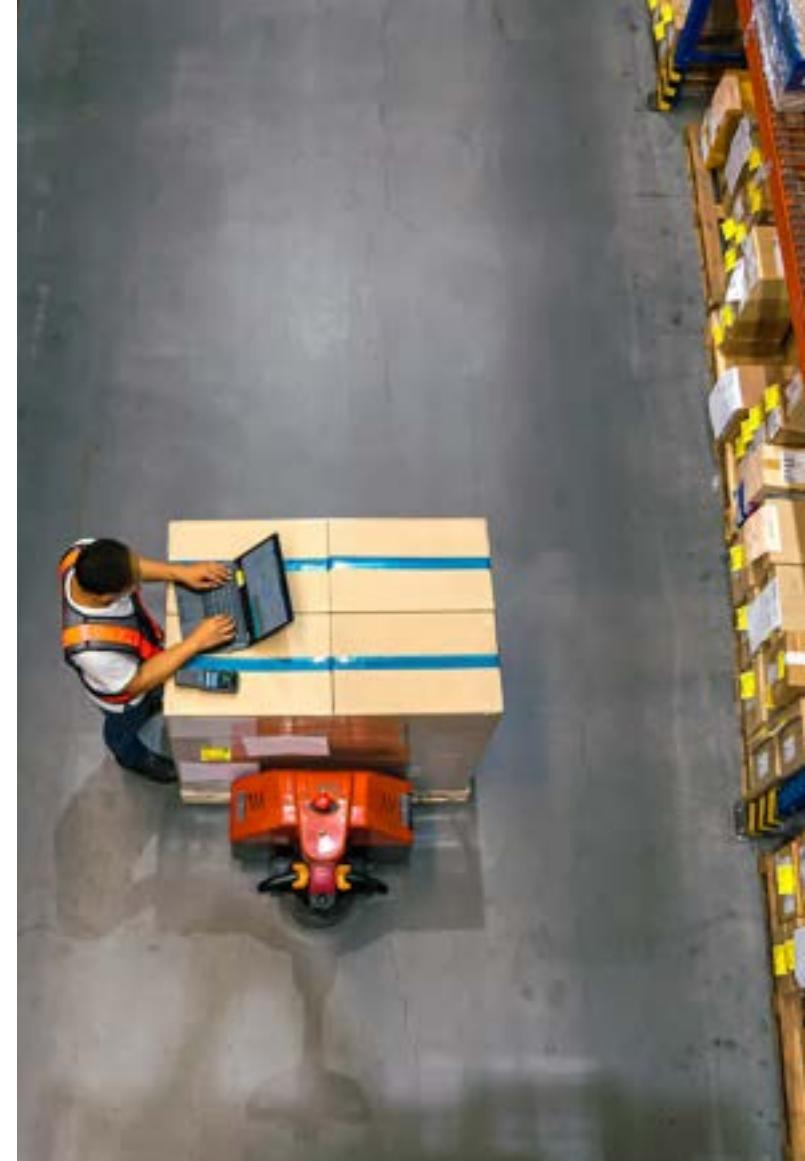
Left a bad review/rating online



Described the incident on social media



Nothing (continued doing business with the organization)



Bad experiences can cost organizations in a big way. **Nearly two-thirds of consumers have told others about a bad customer service experience and over half have reportedly stopped doing business with an organization that delivered a bad experience.**

## What can B2B companies learn from consumer brands when it comes to service?

#1

Service must be digital-first with seamless handoffs to real humans.

Customers say they want quick access to the information they need, wherever and whenever they are looking for it. To strike the perfect balance between a humanized experience and the convenience and efficiency provided by automation and technology, layer the digital service experience with agent-assisted service in a way that is seamless to the customer. This ensures that their needs are met efficiently and effectively, regardless of what their specific journey looks like.

According to our research, methods of contact that involve a human reign supreme, but the value of in-person-only experiences is fading for younger generations who want the convenience and instant gratification enabled by modern technology.

### Generational differences

Gen Z consumers are **3X more likely** to engage with automated chatbots to learn more about a purchase than Baby Boomers. They are also significantly more likely to prefer text and social media methods than older generations.

Older generations are about **2X more likely** than younger generations to prefer in-store or in-person interactions.

56%  
of those surveyed  
say that having to  
repeat themselves  
to multiple agents/  
channels is a top  
contributor to a  
negative service  
experience.

## Turn insight into action

To minimize frustrations and inefficiencies, the hand-off between digital or automated channels to a live agent needs to be seamless. Enable this by establishing a single source of truth and a full view of the customer. Ensure all knowledge about the customer is in one place and can be utilized in both automated environments to deliver personalized messaging as well as live environments to be accessed by all agents (no matter where they sit).



#### 4.1 What can B2B companies learn from consumer brands when it comes to service?

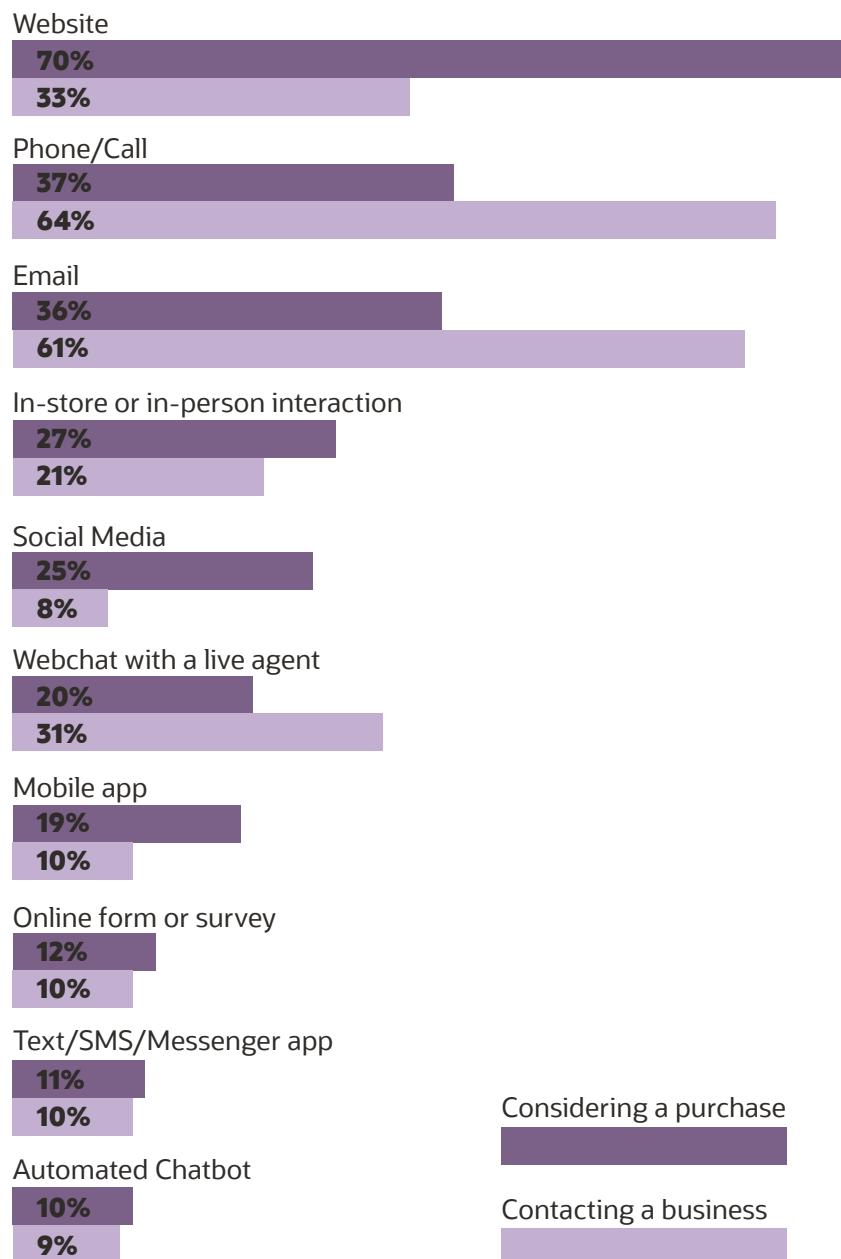
#2

Messaging must be available across all channels and relevant to the customer across all touchpoints.

Customers crave a personal connection with the brands they interact with, and every touchpoint makes an impact on the overall experience, which is why it is essential for businesses to deliver positive, personal experiences throughout the entire customer lifecycle.

The use of certain methods of contact varies greatly for consumers depending on what they are trying to accomplish. When **considering a purchase**, consumers heavily prefer using websites, but when **contacting an organization**, the majority of consumers are using phone and email. The bottom line: Brands need to be everywhere consistently with information relevant to the specific needs of the customer.

#### Preferred methods of contact when considering a purchase vs contacting a business



## Turn insight into action

Channel availability is critical. Encourage customer self-service with automated channels while also providing easy access to knowledgeable human-assisted service.



## 4.2 What can B2B companies learn from consumer brands when it comes to service?

#3

### Service agents should be empowered with the right knowledge and technology.

To deliver positive and effective service interactions, customer data and product knowledge need to be at the agent's fingertips. B2B organizations need to think not only about the customer experience but the employee experience. If the agent is set up to deliver great service, then the customer also wins. Service agents can be empowered to deliver better experiences with the right technology and through access to customer and product knowledge. The less time agents spend trying to gather and organize customer and product information, the more time they can spend focused on addressing the customer's needs.

Accessible and organized knowledge about both the customer and product not only allows service agents to provide the fast and effective experience that service seekers crave, but also enables opportunities for cross-selling, next-best-action recommendations, and more.

Customers are impatient. **Two-thirds of consumers consider the speed of getting connected to an agent to be of utmost importance as they make contact with a business. Once connected, it is a detriment to both the customer experience and the employee experience if an agent is forced to bounce between various apps to find the information they need.**

## Turn insight into action

Service agents need the right tools to give the right experience. The data and technology an organization uses is the middle ground between service providers and service seekers. It both enables service agents to do their job effectively and efficiently and enables service seekers to leave an interaction with what they came for, building brand loyalty and trust.

Customer experience software is a platform for the entire company. Optimizing CX requires having enough data to show you a complete picture of your customer. Since the customer provides that data every time they interact with your company, you need the correct CX software to use that data effectively. This means a complete integrated suite of cloud applications, including marketing automation, eCommerce, customer service, digital experience, CRM, CPQ, and sales force automation (SFA) solutions as well as a customer data platform (CDP) to help unify that data into complete profiles and actionable intelligence.



# Conclusion

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By adapting B2C customer service best practices to their own specific complexities, B2B service teams can learn from consumer-oriented companies.

Consumer brands have long known that customer experience can be more important than the products themselves, and they have capitalized on that. Apple, Chewy, and Starbucks are good examples of companies putting the customer experience first. They realized that others could match or exceed their product offerings, so they chose to differentiate based on providing experiences that customers find appealing. They continue to lead their markets.

B2B companies, such as Varsity Scoreboards (formerly Sportable Scoreboards), Construction Specialties, and Panasonic Business have learned from consumer brands and are implementing new processes supported by modern customer experience software suites to make it easier for customers to do business with them, differentiating themselves with exceptional service experiences.

The commonality between B2B and B2C is the human connection.

A business is nothing without its customers or clients, nor can it function without the people who operate it. Regardless of the industry or target customers, the foundation and very nature of all businesses come down to people interacting with other people.

The service experience that exists between a customer and the companies they do business with can be tied together seamlessly by technology backed by the right data in the right place at the right time.

# Develop your plan to elevate service delivery today

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Where do we go from here? Follow these steps to determine if your current service experience needs an upgrade.

01

Evaluate your current service experience. Does your suite of B2B tools help you create, manage, serve, and nurture lasting customer relationships?

02

Document any friction or less-than-ideal steps of the service lifecycle. Look for areas that are not personalized and interactions that are not timely as problems in the customer experience.

03

Determine what data exists or is needed to elevate the customer experience. Is your data unified and complete, allowing you to provide a seamless experience?

04

Map the answers from 1-3 against their current technological capabilities and determine if new solutions are needed. Make every customer interaction matter by connecting all your business data across advertising, marketing, sales, commerce, and service. Oracle Advertising and Customer Experience (CX) offers a connected suite of applications that goes beyond traditional CRM to help you provide a seamless customer experience.



# Participants & Methodology

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## Geography

Asia-Pacific Region	16%
Europe	32%
US/Canada	34%
Latin America	18%

## Age

18 - 25	7%
26 - 41	39%
42 - 57	30%
58 - 67	15%
68 - 76	8%
Over 76	1%

## Annual Household Income

(Shown in USD, geographic equivalents used)

\$40,000 - \$60,000	33%
\$60,001 - \$80,000	23%
\$80,001 - \$100,000	17%
\$100,001 - \$250,000	22%
Over \$250,000	5%

## Methodology

Ascend2 benchmarks the performance of business strategies and the tactics and technology that drives them. With a custom online questionnaire, we surveyed 5,053 consumers between the ages of 18 and 80 with an annual household income of \$40K or more (or the geographic equivalent) throughout the United States, Canada, Latin America, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions. The consumers self-identified as having had at least one interaction with a business or government office to look for information, complete a task or action, or resolve an issue within the last 9 months. The survey was fielded during the month of August 2022.

# About the Research Partners

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Service

Make every customer interaction matter by connecting all your business data across advertising, marketing, sales, commerce, and service.

[Oracle Advertising and Customer Experience \(CX\)](#) is a connected suite of applications that goes beyond traditional CRM to help you create and nurture lasting customer relationships. Build a complete view of every interaction and every customer, no matter how and when they engage. Empower your entire business to deliver exceptional customer experiences—from acquisition to retention—and everything in between.



Companies partner with Ascend2 to create original research from survey conceptualization through report and content creation to media outreach. Ascend2 helps companies fuel marketing content, generate leads, and engage prospects to drive demand through the middle of the funnel.

Learn more about [Ascend2](#).