



The 2007 Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index™ North America

Aspect Index North America reveals gaps between consumer expectations and satisfaction with contact center interactions.

SUMMARY

Consumer Satisfaction Creeping Upward

Contact centers in North America are still not meeting consumer expectations; however, this year's Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index shows the beginning of a slightly upward trend, with an overall satisfaction grade of 72.4 percent, 2.8 percent higher than the previous Aspect Index. This rise is due both to an increased number of consumers using email and Web chat for simple transactions and inquiries, and a modest improvement in contact center performance relating to these online contact methods. This is a trend to watch over the coming years.

Consumers are generally using the communication method with which they have the most familiarity. And, while the telephone is still the dominant interaction channel, phone usage is down 8.5 percent, email usage is up 34 percent, and chat usage registers a 22 percent increase. The 2007 Aspect Index – North America, which is the result of an independent survey of more than 1,000 consumers who had a typical contact center experience, as well as an additional 250 consumers who recently had an exceptional contact center experience, finds that those who prefer live telephone interactions may be more difficult to migrate to automated technologies, and email users are open to communicating via multiple channels as their moods or needs dictate.

Of the 25 attributes measured in 2007, 12 show increases, 11 remain the same, and two record decreases in consumer satisfaction; no change is more than an increment of a letter grade.

When compared with face-to-face interactions, contact centers are performing on par, with a third of consumers rating their most recent contact center experience as better, more than half grading it about the same, and one in 10 scoring it as worse.

Attributes with Increased Customer Satisfaction in 2007 vs. 2005

Empathy and Advocacy:

- Speaks Clearly / Easy to Understand
- Provides Follow-up
- Friendly and Courteous
- Professional
- Understands Situation
- Flexible and Creative
- Consistent with Company Image

Efficiency:

- Minimize Waiting Time
- Able to Speak with a Person without Long Delay
- Able to Resolve Issue without Being Transferred

Automation:

- Easily Access Person from Automated Menu

Exceptional Contact Center Experiences Score Higher in All Categories

The 250 consumers who claim they recently had an exceptional contact center experience come from diverse backgrounds. They do, however, identify distinct commonalities across their exceptional interactions. These consumers say that they receive quick responses to their inquiries or issues, are given accurate and detailed product or service information, are presented with the necessary facts to help them make informed decisions, and are provided with details about what will transpire after the interaction.

The consumers who have had an exceptional experience score contact centers higher in every category, exceeding the grades given by consumers who have had a typical experience by at least 10 percent. Consumers who have these exceptional experiences rate centers almost 18 percent more efficient and 16 percent more empathic than their typical counterparts, and when it comes to automation, exceptional contact center experiences beat the competition by 11 percent. What's more the consumers who have these exceptional experiences indicate their expectations are higher before they begin the interactions.

Why is there such a significant difference? Consumers who have exceptional experiences perceive that agents are significantly more likely to understand their situations, have the authority to help them, and take responsibility for resolving their issues or providing pertinent information in a timely fashion.

While telephone interactions for consumers in the group who had exceptional experiences are 15 percent more likely to begin with live agents and these consumers are less likely to use automated systems, 27 percent more of those who use automation are very or extremely satisfied. This could be attributed to the fact that consumers who have in that group also indicate that the contact centers with which they conduct business are using automated self service in a more integrated fashion than other centers. This higher satisfaction level is attributed to more intuitive self-service menus, and easier access to live agents via any communication channel – telephone, email, chat, or Web site. In addition, when they reach agents, consumers who report exceptional experiences are less likely to have to repeat the information they previously provided to the automated system.

Prior to conducting the quantitative survey of consumers, 10 in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with consumers about a recent best contact center experience to identify sources of satisfaction. Following are a few high-level consumer quotes:

“They gave me the knowledge they had so that I became comfortable that what they were recommending was going to be a good decision for me.”

“They were very specific about what was going to happen, including dates and costs.”

“Let me have a say in how you're handling my call. Don't just transfer me, ask me if I mind if you transfer me and give me an alternative.”

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Key Finding: A consumer who started with a live person instead of an automated system is two times more likely to conduct future business with the company.

Translating Statistics into Dollars and Sense

It is a well known truth to companies – consumer satisfaction, or lack thereof, significantly impacts the top line. The Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index uncovers several very important statistics that help companies understand how each interaction impacts the amount of business consumers plan on doing with them in the future:

- Consumers who had an exceptional contact center experience are nearly 33 percent as likely to say they will do more business with the company in the future.
- Nearly three quarters of consumers who have had a bad experience say they will do less business with the company; 60 percent of those say they will do much less business.
- One in six consumers is likely to switch companies based on their latest interaction.
- One quarter of consumers who are asked to repeat their information after being transferred to an agent say that they will do less business with the company.

*See *Methodology* section on page 18, for details on grading and scoring.

OVERALL FINDINGS

This year, the overall Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index score increases by an increment of a grade from a D+ to a C-. A small improvement is also registered across each of the three general sets of criteria - Empathy and Advocacy (people), Efficiency (time), and Automation. This upswing, which may be attributed to consumers' greater satisfaction with email and chat channels, is certainly a trend to watch in the coming years. The rise may also be associated slightly with a decrease in the number of measured attributes - down to 25 from 27 qualities in 2005.

Of the 25 attributes measured in 2007, 12 show increases, 11 remain the same, and two record decreases in consumer satisfaction; however, no change is more than an increment of a letter grade. Contact centers continue to perform higher on Empathy and Advocacy-related attributes than on those included in the other two categories.

This year's survey shows a small upturn relating to consumer satisfaction. Five percent more of consumers' interactions exceed expectations, while virtually the same number meets expectations, and four percent fewer fall short. Unfortunately, regardless of how they are communicating with contact centers, consumers across North America continue to have low expectations. (fig. 1)

Key Finding: A consumer who is satisfied overall is four times more likely to conduct future business with the company.

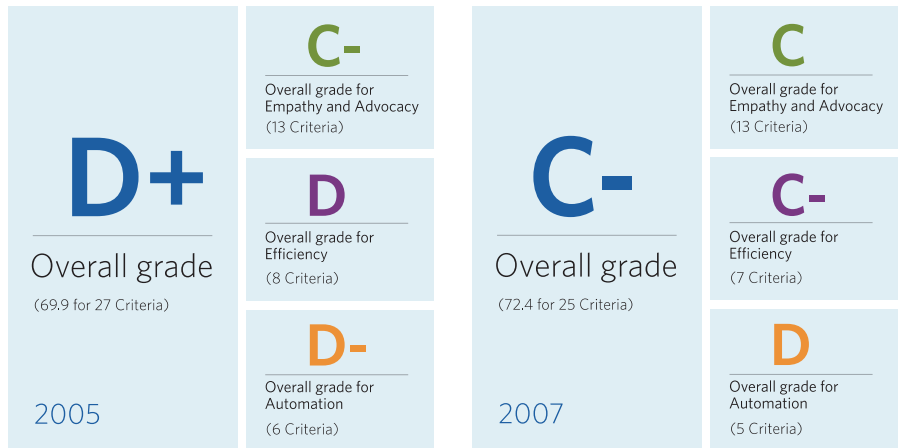
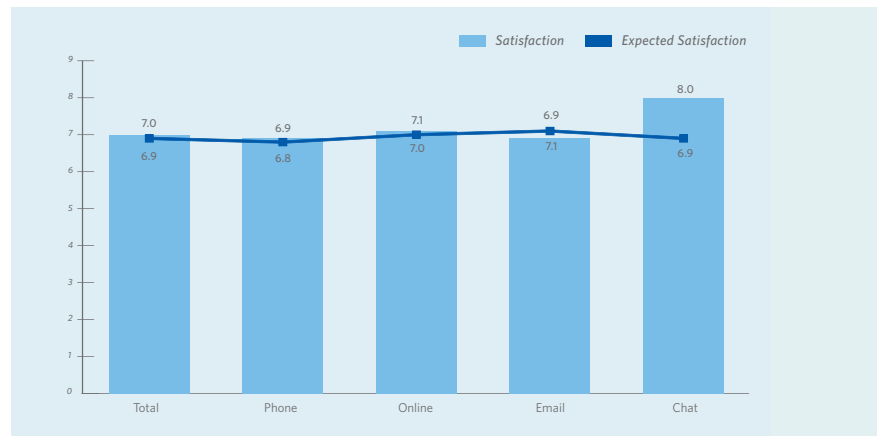


Figure 1

Satisfaction is on Par with Expectations



Consumers were asked: "And before you made the contact with (Company), how satisfied did you expect to be with their service?"

While contact centers are earning an overall score that is just below average, they are actually performing on par with face-to-face interactions. Regardless of communication channel, the majority of consumers say that contact centers are the same as face-to-face communications, while only a small percentage believe they are worse. Fifty-three percent of consumers using chat rate contact centers higher than face-to-face interactions, compared to 32 percent of those who utilize the telephone.* (fig. 2)

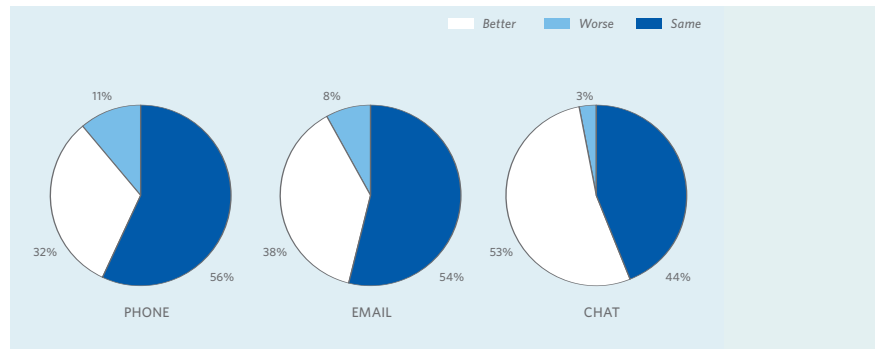
Overall, chat and email users are more pleased than consumers who use the telephone. However, the Aspect Index finds that one third of chat and email consumers use these channels for simple questions, suggesting that consumers are more likely to utilize the telephone to contact companies about complicated issues or problems. And unfortunately, thirty one percent of consumers report that it takes more than one interaction to resolve their issues. (fig. 3)

Nearly three-quarters of all telephone-related consumer experiences begin with automated systems and, once they reach agents, 54 percent of those consumers are required to repeat information they already provided – half are forced to rehash most of the information, while the other half is asked to repeat some. Based on these results, it can be concluded that this duplication is causing consumers to view many self-service systems as a hindrance rather than a help. (fig. 5)

While the majority of all interactions still take place by phone, nearly nine percent fewer consumers are using this mode of communication; email and chat are seeing increases of 34 percent and 22 percent respectively. (fig. 4)

Figure 2

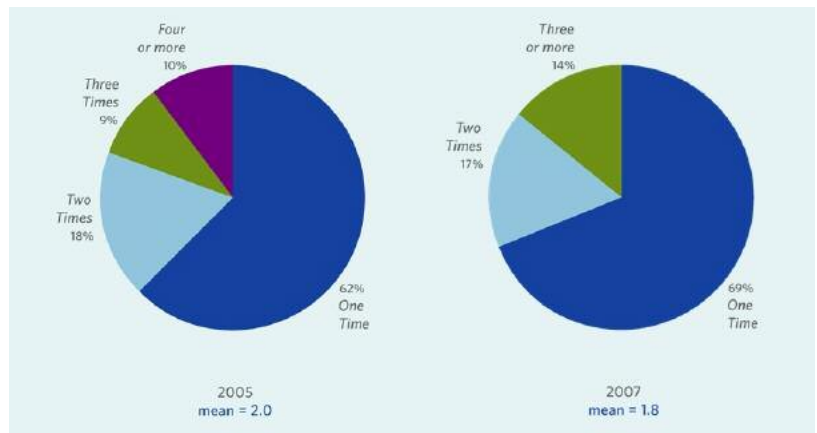
Contact Centers are as Good as Face-to-Face



Consumers were asked: “And, compared to a typical face-to-face interaction with a (company type) company, was this last interaction better, about the same or worse?” Note: small sample size for chat users.

Figure 3

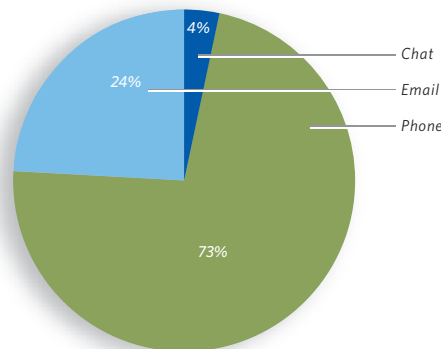
First Call Resolution for the Typical Customer Experience



Consumers were asked: “In total, how many times did you need to contact them to fully resolve your inquiry?” Base: Respondent initiated contact.

Figure 4

Contact Center Interaction Channels



And, the Aspect Index finds that consumers generally use the communication method with which they are most familiar. It should be noted that those who prefer live telephone interactions may be more difficult to migrate to automated technologies, but email users are open to communicating via multiple channels as dictated by their needs. (fig. 6)

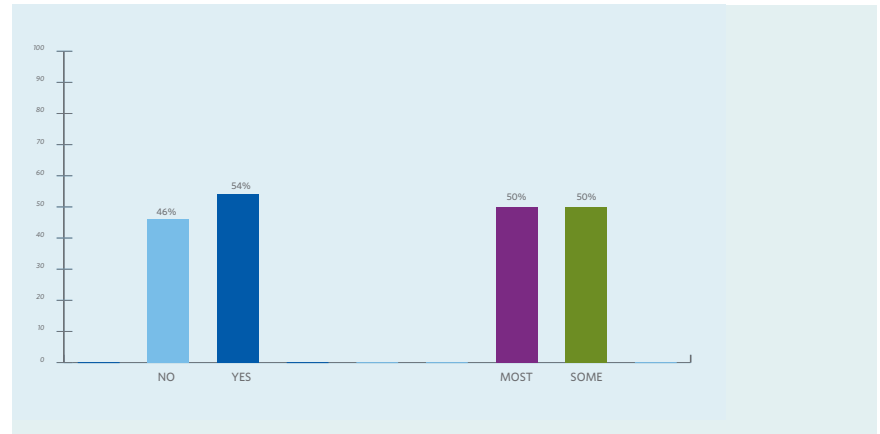
The following sections outline in detail the findings of the 2007 Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index - North America, categorized into three general sets of criteria:

- **Empathy and Advocacy** - the human aspect of customer interactions, such as patience, knowledge, professionalism, and friendliness.
- **Efficiency** - the overall quality and speed of the experience including being able to quickly speak with an agent, authority to resolve issues, and clear connection.
- **Automation** - explores ease-of-use of technologies like automated menus, multiple contact choices, and access of contact information from website.

The sections also provide detailed information that outlines how exceptional and typical contact center experiences differ from one another, and is designed to help companies understand the significant impact their contact centers can have on brand loyalty and consumer retention.

Figure 5

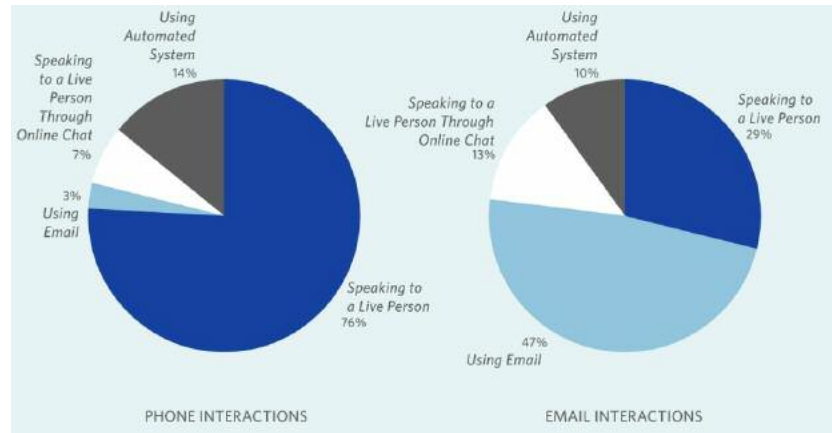
The Typical Customer Experience Requires Repeating Previously Given Information



Consumers were asked: "Once the live operator was on the phone did you have to repeat any of the information you provided earlier during the automated phase of your call? Did you have to repeat most of the information you had previously provided, or just some of the information?"

Figure 6

Consumers Tend to Use Their Preferred Mode



Consumers were asked: "Now, thinking again about your last interaction with (company), which one of the following methods would you have most preferred to use?"

SCORING BY ATTRIBUTE

For the 2005 Aspect Index survey, consumers were asked to list which attributes in each of the three categories were considered to be most important to them when interacting with a company. The 2007 Aspect Index uses the same “importance” data that was gathered in the earlier survey. Based on that, consumers expressed the greatest interest in the human characteristics of customer interactions, characterized as “Empathy and Advocacy”, followed next by “Efficiency”. Consumers thought that “Automation” characteristics were the least important, unless technology was used to enhance interpersonal communications.

Empathy and Advocacy

The Empathy and Advocacy score improves slightly from 2005 to 2007 to a C, rising 1.6 percent. Of the top qualities that consumers rate as “extremely” important, the grades for “Being friendly and courteous” and “Professional” improve slightly to a B-, three attributes remain unchanged, and “A person who speaks clearly and is easy to understand” inches modestly lower to a C.

C

Overall grade for Empathy and Advocacy (13 Criteria)

Key Finding: A consumer who is satisfied with a representative is two-and-a-half times more likely to conduct future business with the company.

Figure 7

Empathy and Advocacy Consumer Satisfaction

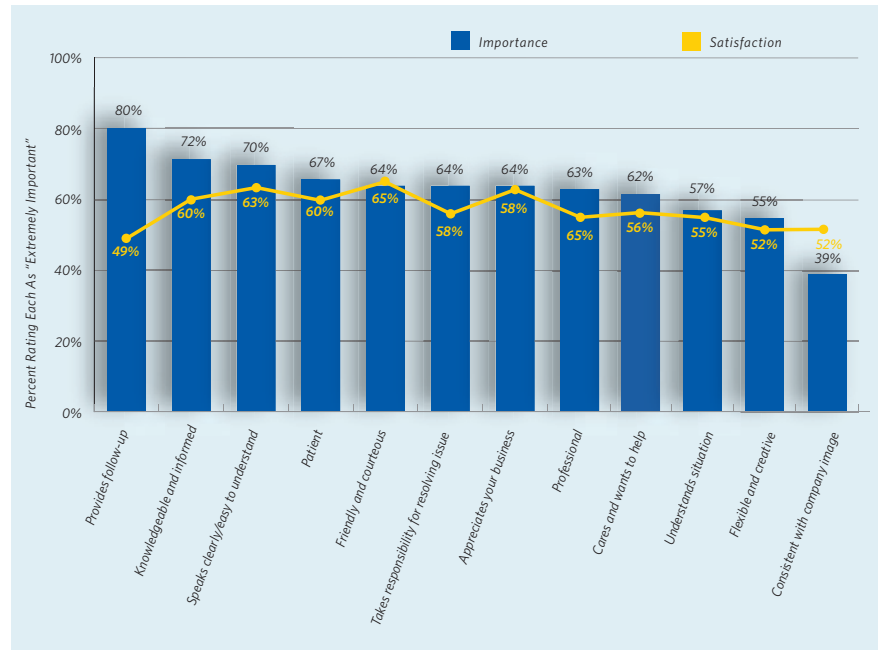


Figure 8

Empathy and Advocacy Report Card

	2005	2007
Knowledgeable and informed	C	C
Speaks clearly/easy to understand	C+	C
Speaks clearly/easy to understand	C	C-
Patient	C+	B-
Friendly and courteous	C	C
Takes responsibility for resolving issue	C	C
Appreciates your business	C+	B-
Professional	C	C
Cares and wants to help	C-	C
Understands situation	C-	C
Flexible and creative	C-	C
Consistent with company image	D	D
Having consistent policies and procedures	D	C+
Provides follow-up		73.5%
Overall		75.1%

Efficiency

Consumers move the overall Efficiency score up an increment of a letter grade to C-, a gain of 3.1 percent. Three of the top five qualities that consumers rank as “extremely important” edge up slightly, including the “Ability to resolve issues in a single interaction,” a “Minimize the time they are asked to wait or are put on hold,” and the “Ability to speak to a person without a long delay.” In order to earn consumer satisfaction, contact centers must continue to focus on improving Efficiency. In particular, contact centers should concentrate on reducing the amount of time consumers spend on hold and waiting to speak with agents.

Figure 9

Efficiency Consumer Satisfaction

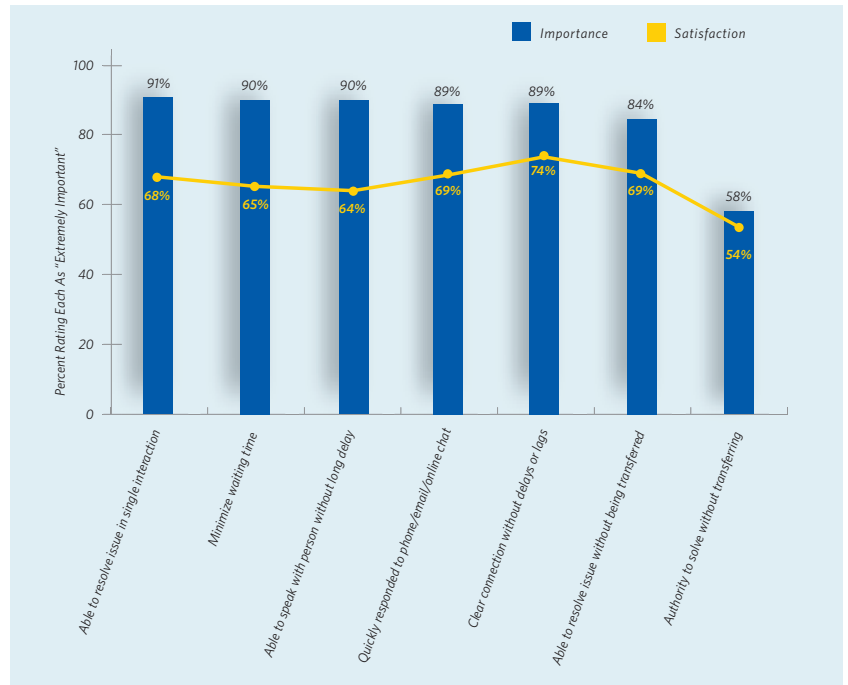


Figure 10

Efficiency Report Card

	2005	2007
Able to resolve issue in single interaction	D	C
Minimize waiting time	D	C-
Able to speak with person without long delay	D	D+
Quickly responded to phone/email/online chat	C-	C-
Clear connection without delays or lags	D+	D+
Able to resolve issue without being transferred	C	C
Authority to solve without transferring		
Overall	68.3%	71.4%

C-

Overall grade for Efficiency
(7 Criteria)

Automation

Contact centers continue to under-deliver in terms of consumer satisfaction relative to Automation attributes. While the associated number score increases nearly four percent, Automation is the only section that includes a failing grade. Consumers give an “Automated system that resolves issues” an F in 2007 as they did in 2005.

When it comes to self service, the Aspect Index reveals that 44 percent more calls begin with automated systems than with live agents. In fact, one out of seven consumers is never even given the option to speak with a live agent at all. And, of those who are transferred to agents, one quarter are asked to repeat non-security related information at some point during the call. One quarter of these consumers say they will do less business with the company in the future.

Figure 11

Automation Consumer Satisfaction

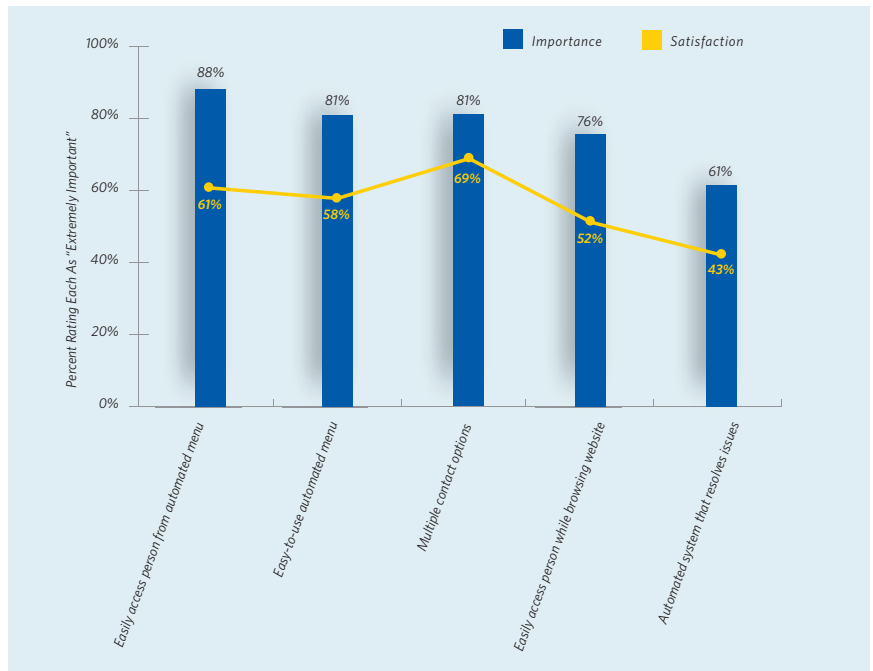


Figure 12

Efficiency Report Card

	2005	2007
Easily access person from automated menu	D-	D
Easy-to-use automated menu	D	D
Multiple contact options	C	C
Easily access person while browsing website	D	D
Automated system that resolves issues	F	F
Overall	62.9%	66.8%

D

Overall grade for Automation
(5 Criteria)

Key Finding: A consumer who did not need to repeat information is two-and-a-half times more likely to conduct future business with the company.

Consumers are open to using automated systems, with 44 percent saying they attempted to partially or fully resolve their situations with menu-driven systems. In fact, consumers who claim to have had an exceptional contact center experience say they are very driven to try to resolve their issue using the self-service applications.

SEPARATING THE LEADERS FROM THE LAGGARDS

Overall, consumers who have exceptional experiences score contact centers 15.8 percent higher than typical consumers giving them an impressive B+, and rating them better on each of the 25 attributes.

While consumers who have exceptional experiences say they have higher expectations before the interaction, they also receive better service, with 97 percent saying that service meets or exceeds their expectations, a 16 percent increase over the typical consumer experience. Eighty-four percent of consumers who have exceptional interactions require only one contact to resolve their issues, beating the typical contact center experience by 15 percent. And, a whopping 99 percent of these consumers say that contact center interactions are the same or better than face-to-face interactions. What's more, 66 percent of

Figure 13

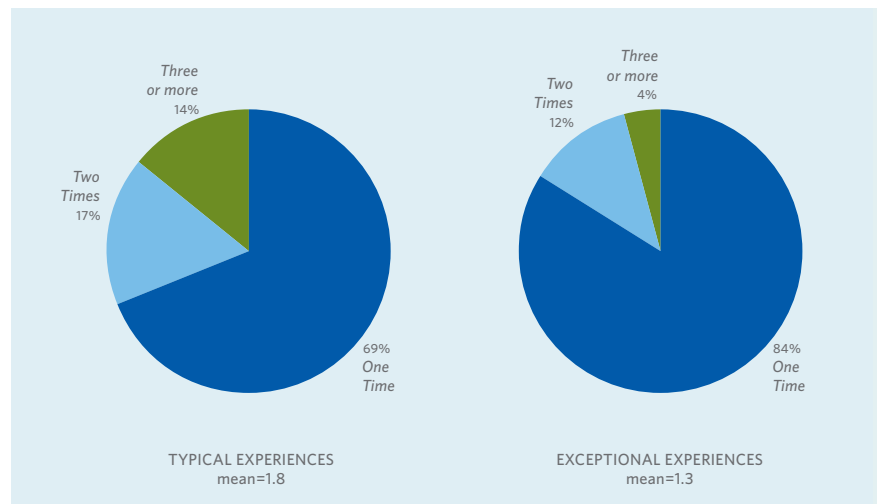
Customers Who had an Exceptional Experience are More Likely to Have had the Interaction Exceed Their Expectations



Consumers were asked: "Did the service you received exceed, fall short, or meet the expectations you had before making contact with the company?"

Figure 14

Customers Who had an Exceptional Experience Resolved Inquiry in Fewer Contacts



Consumers were asked: "In total, how many times did you need to contact them to fully resolve your inquiry?"

HOW DO THE ASPECT INDEX FINDINGS IMPACT BUSINESSES?

Regardless of whether consumers have positive or negative interactions, the 2007 Aspect Index demonstrates that satisfaction and the consumers' contact center experience plays significant roles in how much business they will conduct with companies in the future. The survey also shows that meeting consumer demands can greatly impact a company's top line.

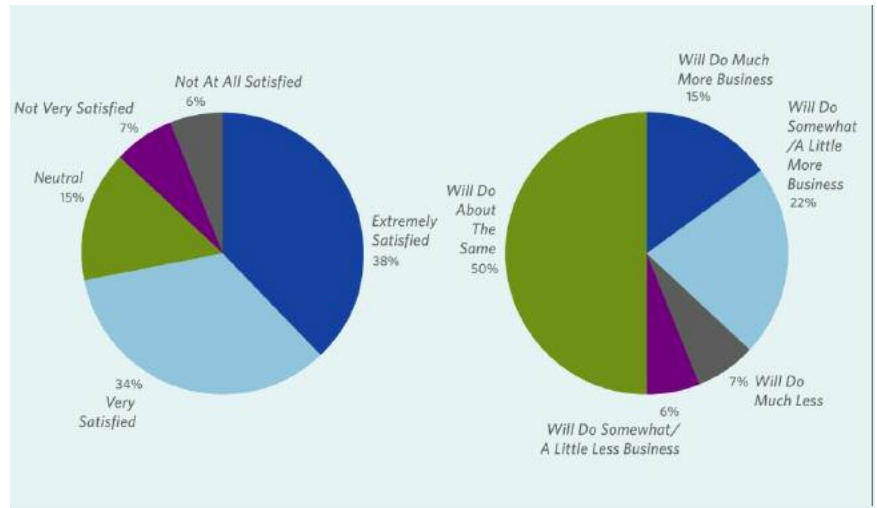
Nearly three quarters of the consumers who have bad experiences will conduct less business with a company, and 60 percent of those say they will do much less business. On the other hand, 50 percent of the consumers who have good interactions will conduct more business. (fig. 18)

The failing grade that consumers give automated systems can easily translate into an increase or decrease in revenue. The Aspect Index finds that six percent more of the consumers who immediately reach automated systems will conduct less business with a company than those who speak directly with live agents. However, a consumer who is satisfied with how an automated system works is two-and-a half times more likely to conduct future business with a company. (fig. 19)

Key Finding: A consumer who is satisfied with how an automated system works is two-and-a half times more likely to conduct future business with the company.

Figure 18

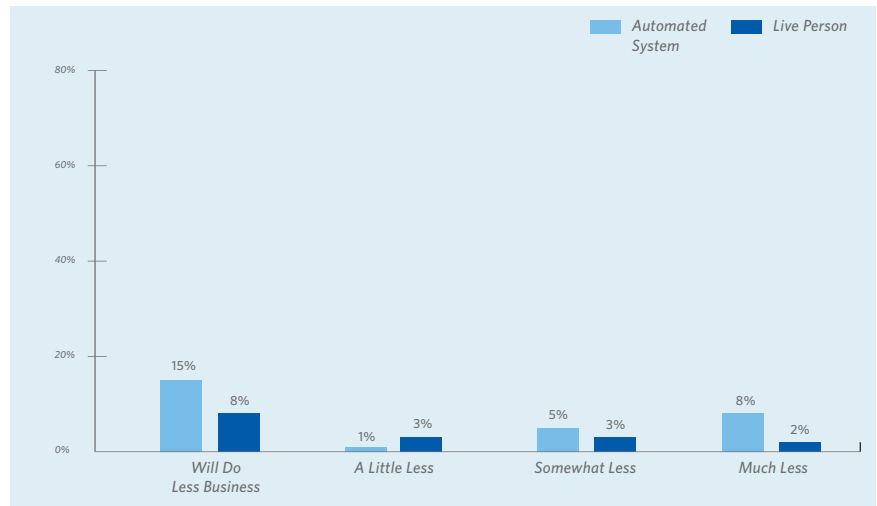
Every Interaction Impacts Your Business



Consumers were asked: "Overall, how did your experience during your last interaction with (company) by phone/email/chat impact the business you will do in the future with (company)?"

Figure 19

Customers Who Reach an Automated System Rather than a Live Person Say they will do Less Business with the Company



Consumers were asked: "Overall, how did your experience during your last interaction with (company) by phone/email/chat impact the business you will do in the future with (company)?"

THE ASPECT SOFTWARE PERSPECTIVE

The findings of the 2007 Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index clearly indicate that consumers still feel there is considerable room for improvement with company interactions; however the news is not all bad. During the past year, more and more companies have been placing greater emphasis on quality management, coaching and training, and this year's Aspect Index shows that this focus is helping to enhance overall customer-company interactions. While the improvement is slight, it is progress.

While consumers are still crying out for change, contact centers seem to be getting the message, as evidenced by the minor increase in grades from 2005 to 2007 in areas like more friendly and courteous agents, increased professionalism and improved ability to resolve inquiries in one interaction. As well, the data gathered around exceptional customer experiences shows that there are clear examples of contact centers that are doing things right to satisfy customers.

However, the reality is that customers are still expecting more than their contact center experiences are delivering. There are countless news stories and blog postings that focus on negative consumer service experiences. There are Web sites designed to help consumers bypass self-service systems so that they can quickly access agents. And, there are public movements dedicated to improving the quality of phone support in the United States. In this electronic age, where one interaction can have an exponential impact, the winners will be the companies that learn how to exceed consumer expectations on a consistent basis.

Achieving Customer Service Excellence

The objective of the Aspect Index is to help companies identify specific areas of contact center that can be improved. And, in a lot of instances, those areas mainly revolve, not around the technology that was implemented, but around the business processes.

Business leaders understand that every time a customer interacts with their organization it is an opportunity to build loyalty and ultimately earn repeat business. It's generally

NORTH AMERICA COMPARED TO EUROPE

Consumers in Europe give contact centers an overall score of "D," which is nearly a full letter grade lower than North American consumers. Ten percent more North American consumers say that contact centers exceed their expectations, while European consumers are seven percent more likely to have their expectations met. Virtually the same number of consumers in each region report contact center experiences that fall short.

American consumers give contact centers higher scores in all three categories, registering a five percent difference for Empathy and Advocacy, just over seven percent for Efficiency, and nearly five percent for Automation.

While consumers in both regions still use the telephone as their primary method of communication, North American consumers are eight percent more likely to use the telephone and European consumers prefer email by nine percent.

understood that if you alienate a customer by not providing them with the information they seek, you're likely to lose some business. The Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index helps to underscore exactly how unhappy customers can impact the top line.

Because the contact center is on the front lines of customer interactions, it is uniquely positioned to impact the gap between consumer expectations and an organization's ability to satisfy them. Much of the feedback provided during the Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index study can be traced back to contact center policies and processes. Taking a good, hard look at how a company does business with its customers can reveal some easy ways to satisfy company needs and eliminate the risk of losing valuable customers.

In practice, most organizations often start a business process analysis or business process reengineering initiative by identifying an area for improvement. For example, the Aspect Index has noted that many consumer inquiries require several interactions with a company to satisfy their needs. If a company identifies this as an area in need of improvement, it may launch an initiative to make changes - revising call flows, listening to call recordings, or analyzing historical and real-time reports. Digging into the depths of the organization to get to the bottom of how business processes are helping or hindering the success of customer strategies is where the company can really begin to see a difference.

Exceeding consumer expectations - optimizing the consumer interaction - requires that contact centers find the balance between meeting their demands and the realities of the bottom line. While it's important to try to give every consumer an exceptional experience, the investment required to do so doesn't always make good business sense. It remains true that agents and their time are the highest cost factor for the contact center, so it's important to use agents' time wisely. In fact, sometimes a customer can be highly satisfied if their basic questions are answered by a self-service application. It's just a matter of making sure the system is intuitive and easy-to-use.

Revising an existing policy and process may yield extremely positive results. Aligning a business, from senior management through to agents on the frontline, is an evolving focus.

In addition, focusing on technology that is designed to help increase flexibility, reduce complexity and provide greater insight into how the contact center is functioning can also make a significant impact. Performance Optimization applications, like workforce management, performance management, quality

monitoring and interaction management provide that knowledge, while unified solutions offer the ability to reduce the overall complexity of contact center integrations and greater flexibility to quickly and easily made adjustments.

The time is now for contact centers to synchronize their people, applications, and processes, and elevate the level of service they are providing to their customers. Turning potential defectors into devotees can help companies achieve long-term viability.

What Consumers Really Want; How Companies Can Deliver

Consumer demands center around three basic categories:

1. *Empathy and Advocacy - Consumers want to work with companies that understand their needs, care about them and their issues, exhibit product knowledge, and follow through on what they say they are going to do.*

Companies can balance consumer demands against the realities of the bottom line in a number of basic ways. They can start by connecting the agents with the most appropriate skills to the right consumers at the right time. This is where the idea of customer segmentation comes into play – getting the customer to the most knowledgeable and informed agent.

Being able to employ agents located anywhere in the country, or anywhere around the world for that matter, can provide a number of unique benefits that can help connect customers with the best agents. Using Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) based Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) allows contact centers to virtualize their pool of qualified staff, whether at home, in branch offices or across multiple contact centers. If a contact center is operating a 24x7x365 support environment, VoIP makes it much easier to have agents with the language skills, in the right time zones, at the right time, all the time. Anecdotal evidence suggests a unique benefit of using VoIP to employ at-home agents is increased agent productivity – they are more productive on a number of measures including quality and timeliness, mainly because there are fewer interruptions during the day.

And by virtualizing the contact center, the company is more likely to connect the customer with an agent that has the skills needed to handle the call, such as specific language skills or experience with an issue that is dictated by specific regional regulations.

Companies can also improve the experience by using predictive dialers to proactively reach out to customers to verify the status of recent orders, confirm payments, or inquire about the quality of service calls. In one case, a credit card company employed this strategy to contact its customers to verify suspicious transactions. In doing so, the company was able to prevent fraud, demonstrate that its security practices worked, and show that it was successfully protecting its customers.

Reinforcement from the top that coaching and training using quality monitoring tools should be emphasized as a key process in the contact center plays a significant role in the experience that consumers will have with the business. Quality management solutions provides the capabilities for recording, reviewing and reporting on customer interactions which can be used to help improve agent performance. These tools can provide insight into how to increase first call resolution, deliver a repeatable, best-in class customer experience.

Plus, by incorporating speech analytics coupled with quality management, contact centers can truly have a comprehensive view of the full customer experience and can make adjustments with complete knowledge on how the contact center is performing, not just based on hunches or incomplete data. By recording all of the calls using the quality monitoring application, contact centers can then run the speech analytics tools on those recorded calls to look for particular patterns or repeated words that customers are using throughout the calls, such as “wished” or “had” or “broken”. The contact center can take that information to help improve first call resolution, identify opportunities for training, or easy fixes to product issues, thereby improving the experience for all subsequent callers.

Lastly, objectives such as revenue growth and productivity improvements can be easily translated into contact center goals, well beyond the traditional measures of service levels or handle times. Performance management tools can easily provide agents with dashboards so they can see how they are performing against corporate objectives, and ensure that they are helping meet customer service goals. And, tying agent compensation to performance can motivate the entire contact center to think and act as one organization that provides consistent and positive customer experiences.

“If they can’t come up with an answer, they should let me know they’ve researched all their resources, or that they will keep looking and will contact me at a specific time in the future to report back to me.”

“It actually makes me want to use my Visa card more because I know it’s the most secure from identity theft.”

2. Agent Efficiency - Consumers want to feel important. They want immediate service, or if they have to wait, they want to know what to expect. They want to talk to one person who can solve their problem in a single interaction. If they must be transferred, consumers only want to be transferred once, to the appropriate resource that can help them. They don't want to have to repeat previously provided information when they get there.

It is clear that every consumer wants to be treated like they're the only customer. They want good service, and they want it fast. To achieve success, contact centers must also learn to increase flexibility by reducing complexity.

Taking a unified approach to the contact center - implementing solutions that offer a "one-stop shop" of capabilities, like automatic call distribution, predictive dialing, voice self-service, workforce management and unified reporting, administration and routing - can help greatly reduce complexity in the contact center. With all customer contact channels being managed on a single platform, administration and reporting becomes simpler. Plus, all rules related to routing, workflow, agent skills and prioritization are managed centrally, so any change or new input is reflected across the entire system in real time. And because the workflows are across a single solution, it's a seamless process to bring a customer into the self-service application, then transfer the call to an agent if needed and at the same time very easily transfer their data with the call, which eliminates the need for the customer to repeat data.

In addition, a unified approach provides managers with a comprehensive view of the contact center and agent performance, and enables centers to generate enterprise-level reports across the business. It can also help improve the overall customer experience by enabling real-time monitoring and recording of each customer contact from call initiation to call completion. Ultimately, all of this means more accurate and consistent treatment of customers - a better overall customer experience.

In addition, contact centers can use applications such as workforce management, quality management, and analytics to ensure that there are enough agents with the right skills to efficiently handle anticipated volumes.

When unexpected contact volumes occur, companies need to let their customers know how long the wait will be. Better yet, contact centers can deploy call back capabilities to enable them to return customers' calls at the times and places that are most convenient for those customers.

"They gave us a number to call if we have any questions and it was a direct dial to the head person. That makes me feel good because I'm not going to have to go through hoops next time I call. And I know I'm one of thousands so it's really nice to have a personal contact. It shows how much they value me."

"They asked me questions throughout and they knew what they were doing because the information they gave me was determined by my answers to their questions. When you can tell they're thinking about you and listening to you and don't just want to get your money, you feel like talking to them more."

Lastly, contact centers should embrace relatively easy-to-implement capabilities, such as providing callers with estimated wait times, offering follow-up calls after interactions, or making consumers acutely aware of other available communication channels, such as email or chat.

3. Automation – Consumers want easy-to-navigate systems that provide them with the capability to easily reach a live agent. They also want multiple communication options – telephone, email, chat, and Web site.

Companies need to give their customers choice and seamless experiences. Easy-to-navigate, well-architected self-service tools can simplify routine transactions or provide privacy.

One way to improve the design of an automated system and make it more user friendly is to offer consumers the most commonly requested information up front, immediately after they have been authenticated. For example, with a credit card company, a customer can be told the balance of their card, the last payment made, the date of the next payment and the amount due at payment. They can then be given a short list of options to select from if their inquiry is not satisfied. This cuts down on the amount of time a customer has to interact with the voice portal and gets the customer the information quicker. Customers should be regularly surveyed to ensure that the information provided in the self-service system is meeting their needs. If it's not, changes should be made.

Not only should these self-service applications be intuitive and easy to use, these systems should also transfer already provided consumer information to an agent in conjunction with their telephone call. Most consumers do not like having to repeat identifying information; they describe this as frustrating and stressful.

Customer segmentation also plays a big role in the automation process. It doesn't always make good financial sense for the company to give each customer an exceptional experience. It may be a matter of identifying the high-value customers and ensuring that they are always receiving exceptional experiences while making sure that the lower-value customers have consistent satisfactory experiences. For example, a contact center may decide that lower-value customers can be satisfied by a self-service application and route them directly to it. Their questions can be answered and it will cost very little to maintain their loyalty. But with the high-value customers, a contact center may decide to:

- Give those customers the highest priority in the queue;
- Have them routed to the most skilled agent group; and,
- Offer those customers the best available agents for their needs.

While for the most part speech self-service is maligned by consumers, there are clearly actual instances of consumers having an exceptional experience and having their inquiries fully satisfied while using a self-service application. One such example is a North American cable company. Research conducted before and after the company implemented a new self-service system, confirms that the cable company's customers are very satisfied with the new services they are receiving. In focus groups, many customers have commented that the new system is "better than most" or the "best they've seen". And, a customer service survey, conducted nine months after implementation asked: Does this cable company offer good self-service features? The company's ratings increased from 35 percent pre-installation to 45 percent. This company is also being recognized by the industry for the excellent customer service it provides to its customers.

Revisiting a company's workflow process to incorporate a new or different segmentation strategy can provide significant impact on the customer experience without requiring new technology investments.

Finally, another benefit of taking a unified or integrated approach to contact center technology is the incorporation of email and chat as additional contact channels. As email and chat continue to grow as viable contact channels, it's important to make certain that these experiences are meeting the demands of consumers. In a unified environment, it is very easy to ensure that the channels are being managed as part of the blended environment, ensuring that customers are receiving the immediate attention that those channels dictate and it is handled using the same workflow established for phone interactions. Plus, because of the integrated workforce management capability the contact center can staff with the appropriate amount of agents to manage the additional contact channels. And through centralized reporting and quality monitoring, the contact center can determine if the customer is having a consistent and satisfactory experience.

Key Finding: A consumer who did not have to use prompts to get to an operator is two times more likely to do future business with the company.

"I feel like it's pointless to enter it if it's never pulled up."

"Makes me feel like I might be dealing with people who don't know what they're doing."

Conclusion

For companies to really differentiate their business from their competitors, it's imperative for contact centers to try to accommodate customer needs whenever it makes good business sense. They must seize this opportunity to enhance the quality of their interactions by ensuring agents have the right skills to satisfy consumers during their first interactions, and improving agent and center performance.

The Aspect Index shows that consumers can be won or lost over the course of a single interaction. The consequences of each negative contact center experience are potentially far too damaging to ignore, while positive contact center experiences can turn a company from a laggard to a leader. The fact is that competition is tough and, in this day and age, the contact center can be a valuable competitive differentiator. Companies that use their centers effectively will increase consumer loyalty, and will ultimately win the race.

WHAT IS THE ASPECT CONTACT CENTER SATISFACTION INDEX?

Established in 2005 by Aspect Software, the Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index provides an indicator to quantify consumer satisfaction with the quality of their telephone and online interactions with companies and their representatives. The Aspect Index is a dynamic model that is adjusted over time to reflect changes and trends in contact center performance, use of various communication channels, and the importance that consumers place on a variety of service attributes.

The 2007 Aspect Index is based upon responses to surveys of more than 1,000 North American consumers, and an additional 250 consumers who recently had excellent or exceptional contact center experiences; representing a cross-section of age groups, incomes, profession and education. It measures gaps between consumer expectations as identified in the 2005 baseline survey, and their level of satisfaction for 25 separate elements of their most recent experience.

While the 2007 Aspect Index largely parallels the initial baseline survey, it includes in-depth information about certain areas that were not included in the 2005 survey, such as:

- Operational-related issues like estimated wait time and number of transfers;
- Specific experiences with self-service applications;
- Differences between exceptional contact center experiences and overall typical consumer experiences; and,
- The impact of the contact center experience on broadly focused marketing issues such as brand loyalty and consumer retention and, of great importance, how that information can affect the bottom line.

The Aspect Index, which is an independent study conducted by Leo J. Shapiro & Associates LLC, is an innovative measure of experience versus expectation related to contact center interactions.

METHODOLOGY

The 2007 Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index research methodology, conducted by independent market research firm Leo J. Shapiro & Associates LLC, included qualitative and quantitative studies with consumers to help gain perspective on consumer satisfaction with contact center performance. It encompassed a staged process, where the first phase refined the approach and scope of quantitative research in the second phase.

Phase I – Qualitative Study with Consumers

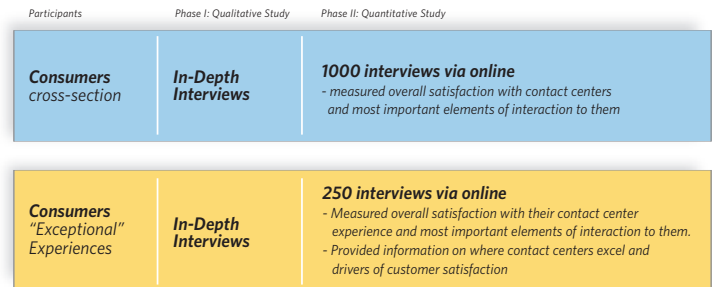
- This phase consisted of qualitative, exploratory research with consumers who have had an exceptional or excellent experience.
- Prior to the quantitative survey, 10 in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with consumers about a recent best contact center experience to identify sources of satisfaction. Findings from this phase were used to refine the quantitative questionnaire.

Phase II – Quantitative Study with Consumers:

- A cross-section of consumers was interviewed using online interviewing methods. Consumers were surveyed about overall satisfaction with their contact center experience, as well as their assessment of the most important elements of their experience with contact centers.
- A total of 1,013 interviews were completed with consumers, producing a survey sample with an overall level of statistical significance of +/-3 percent.
- In addition, Leo J. Shapiro & Associates conducted an additional 251 surveys with consumers who have recently had an exceptional call center experience within the past month or so to provide information about where these contact centers excel and identify drivers of consumer satisfaction.

Figure 20

Methodology



The 2007 Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index references consumer importance ratings from the 2005 baseline survey; this information was not polled in 2007 because it was expected to remain relatively unchanged year over year. Both surveys focus on consumer experiences primarily associated with the following industries: finance/banking/insurance, telecommunications, and retail.

Scoring Methodology

Scores are based on overall possible grades of 100, and computed by satisfaction ratings on 25 measures. Satisfaction ratings are weighted by their “very” or “extreme” importance to consumers, as well as usership of various communication channels. Therefore, more important factors are given more weight, or points, than less important factors. Responses by email, online chat, and phone are weighted by usership. Online channels are a much smaller proportion of respondents, but consumers using these channels are generally more satisfied than consumers engaging in phone interactions. They need to be weighted proportionately. The grade scale is as follows:

A+ 98-100%	B+ 88-89	C+ 78-79	D+ 68-69
A 93-97%	B 83-87	C 73-77	D 63-67
A- 90-92	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 60-62
			F <60

WHY DID ASPECT SOFTWARE COMMISSION THIS RESEARCH?

Aspect Software believes technology deployments must satisfy three basic objectives:

1. To meet or exceed consumer expectations, particularly in those areas that are most important for consumers;
2. To help companies build and enhance consumer relationships; and,
3. To streamline operations.

Unfortunately, in the rush to streamline operations and contain costs, many organizations are forgetting that the contact center is ultimately about human contact. While the contact center industry has invested substantially in sophisticated technologies to improve and optimize consumer interactions, all too often these tools have become a barrier to personal interaction, rather than a facilitator.

As the balance of power continues to shift from businesses to consumers, contact center professionals will benefit from insight on consumer expectations and desires related to their phone and online transactions. Aspect Software believes the Aspect Index provides practical, objective insight that companies can use to close the gap between consumer expectations and experiences.

ABOUT ASPECT SOFTWARE

Aspect Software, Inc. founded the contact center industry and is now the world's largest company solely focused on Internet Protocol (IP) and traditional voice-based products and services for customer service, collections, and sales and telemarketing business processes. Each day, Aspect Software powers more than 125 million customer-company interactions at thousands of in-house and outsourced contact centers around the globe. Its trusted Signature product line offers automatic call distributors (ACDs), dialers, voice portals and computer telephony integration (CTI). The company's leading Contact Center Performance Optimization product line provides workforce management, quality management, performance management and campaign management applications. And, its pioneering Unified IP Contact Center product line delivers a comprehensive, multichannel solution. Headquartered in Chelmsford, Mass., Aspect Software has operations across the Americas, Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia Pacific. For more information, visit www.aspect.com.

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