

LET'S GET PERSONAL:

How businesses can use personalised customer service to reboot and rebuild

INSIGHT REPORT - EUROPE



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1

The rebuild starts now

For European economies, 2020 was an unfathomable year.

EU member nations experienced an average GDP contraction of -6.8%. In the worst-hit regions, Spain's economy slumped by -11%, and Greece's -10%. Only Ireland, thanks to its role in medical and pharmaceutical exports, [experienced economic growth](#).

The coronavirus pandemic hit European businesses hard, with 70% [reporting lower revenues](#) in 2020. In a [McKinsey report](#) in October 2020, over half of Europe's small and medium-sized (SME) businesses said they faced bankruptcy in 2021 if revenues failed to pick up.

But whilst the current picture is by no means a rosy one, the positive news is that, even in the gravest of forecasts, European economies are expected to see fairly swift improvement.

The [Winter 2021 Economic Forecast](#) predicts the Euro area economy will grow by 3.8% in both 2021 and 2022. The UK – no longer part of the EU as of December 2020 but still very much a crucial cog in the European economic wheel – is also expected to experience similar growth, at around an average of 3.9% through to 2025.

Whilst many predict economies to return to some form of 'normality' in the coming few years, what isn't likely to return to normal is the manner in which consumers across Europe deal and interact with businesses.

With a large proportion of the European population forced indoors throughout most of 2020, adults' internet use [surged to a record average](#) of 4 hours a day. Twice as many video calls were being made and one in three people were watching online video more than traditional TV. [Purchasing habits](#) shifted exponentially online.

Contact methods changed almost overnight, too. [Research by Sabio](#) found a 25% increase in call volume in 2020, compared to 2019.

Elsewhere, Corinium research highlights a huge shift towards digital interactions. 79% of business leaders interviewed for the research reported that the volume of customer interactions on their websites had increased notably.

Over half (59%) of respondents reported that they'd experienced more customers using their apps, whilst 57% reported receiving more queries through messaging platforms or chatbots.

[Sabio's research](#) found a 600% increase in WhatsApp service queries for European businesses, since last summer, whilst [research](#) also found that consumer preferences for the use of video calling in a customer service setting has increased by 70% across Europe.

Alongside the numerous, sudden and transformative shifts in behaviour, customer expectations have also risen since the pandemic.

A [December 2020 study](#) by CMO Council stated that 65% of consumers felt digital experiences were not exceeding expectations. Crucially, much of the frustration boiled down to human connection, with 50% of respondents declaring a need for greater human involvement in digital engagement.

“When the pandemic hit, consumers were forced to digital channels,” explains Tom Kaneshige, CCO at the CMO Council.

“Unfortunately, lots of companies had only given lip service to digital transformation, which meant their digital experience wasn't where it needed to be.”

Stuart Dorman, chief innovation officer for Sabio, elaborates: “Behaviours have changed in terms of the way we engage with organisations. Digital contact has increased significantly. You've suddenly got a cohort of people across Europe that would never really have engaged in digital channels now doing so.

“Businesses have been caught out, to some degree. Everyone has suddenly needed to make sure that their digital experience is designed to cater for digital novices. That means there needs to be a safety net online and in the form of the contact centre, so as to have a human step in and assist where needed.”



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Getting personal

A crucial component of ensuring digital engagement meets this varying ‘human’ expectation is for service interactions to be personalised.

According to [research from Salesforce](#), 75% of people expect the companies they buy from to provide personalised service, as well as anticipating their individual needs and providing relevant suggestions. [Separate research](#) has also found that 58% of customers feel personalised experiences are important when buying from a company.

Accenture predicts that there is a “\$2.95 trillion prize for companies that integrate a smart digital strategy to personalise customers’ experiences”.

As Erik Lindcrantz et al. aptly explained in a McKinsey report in April 2020:

“Personalisation, once limited mainly to targeted [marketing] offers, now extends to the entire customer experience. This means that customers want personalisation throughout their interactions with a business — with multiple, personalised touchpoints.”

The question for many businesses is – what do we mean by personalised service and how do we deliver it? Thanks largely to online forerunners like Amazon, many consumers have come to expect the businesses they interact with to have an understanding of their requirements when they connect with them; and for the businesses they’ve dealt with previously to have a full picture of their history with them, whenever they interact.

A [survey of 1,000 US adults](#) by Epsilon and GBH Insights found that the vast majority of respondents (80%) saw personalisation as a “hygiene factor”: i.e. customers take it for granted, but if a business gets it wrong, “customers may depart for a competitor”.

But the idea of ‘knowing the customer’ is just one facet of personalised service – especially in the digital domain.

As Dorman explains, personalisation is as much about being able to tailor the method by which a customer interacts with a brand based on their behaviour and ensure the right machine or person is on hand for the right situation at the right moment, to deal with a query:

“Everyone’s Amazon page is slightly different, and everyone’s Netflix page looks slightly different. This is often seen as the standard for personalisation, but actually most organisations don’t have such a broad set of products or services, or they don’t have the AI capabilities to be able to serve up their content in a way that’s personalised to each individual.

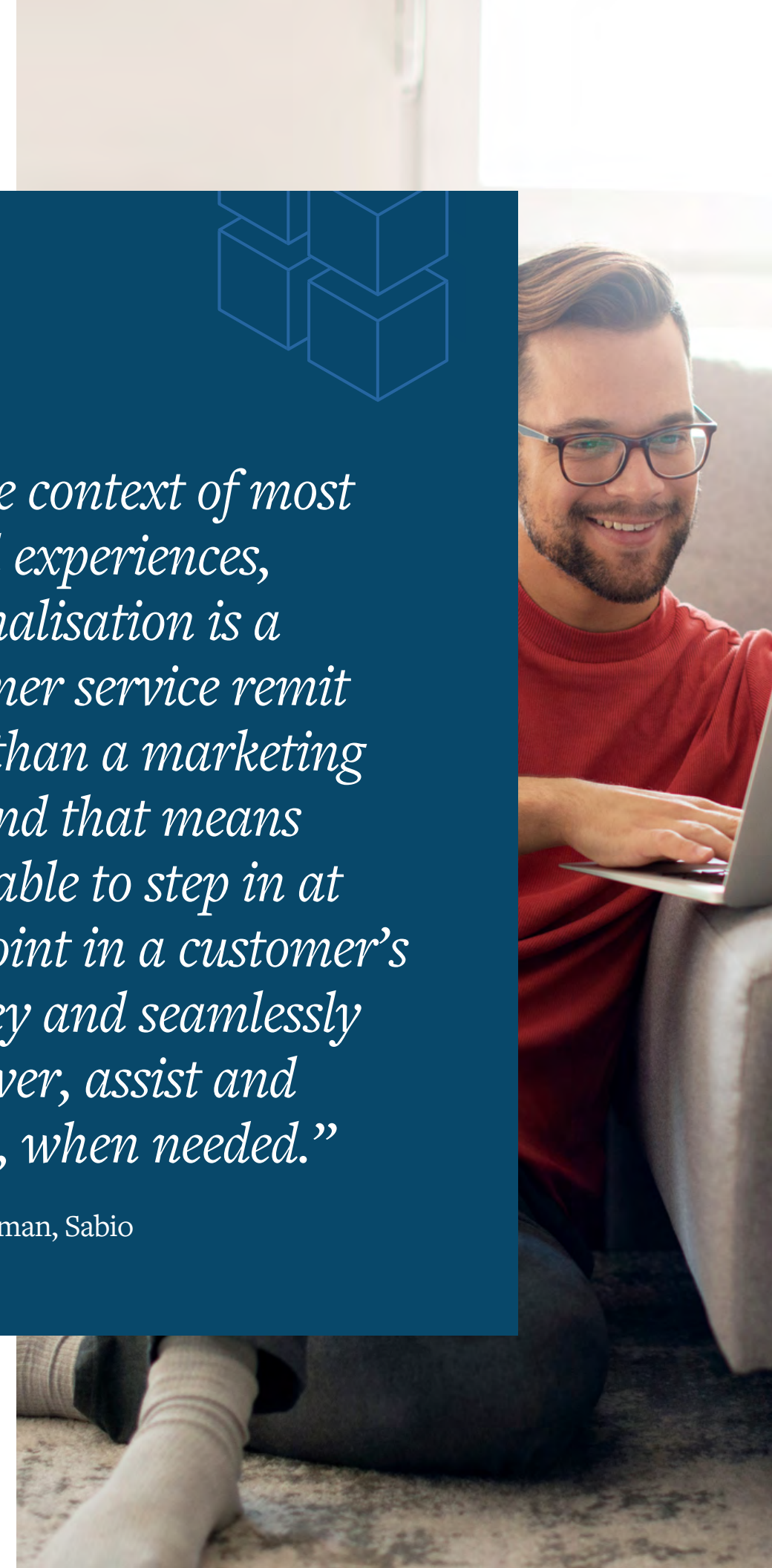
“In the context of most digital experiences, personalisation is a customer service remit more than a marketing one, and that means being able to step in at any point in a customer’s journey and seamlessly take over, assist and advise, when needed.

“That could be through the form of a web chat. It could be through a really simple click-to-dial on a website. Increasingly it could be through a video or a shared channel like Zoom. Yes it can be automated, but crucially, it’s about bringing that human element in at the right time, once again – humanising the digital experience and ensuring it’s tailored to every customer’s individual needs.”



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Personalised at scale

As European businesses look towards rebuilding out of the coronavirus pandemic in the coming years, it is important to understand that many consumer behavioural shifts since January 2020 are likely to now be set in stone.

In the UK, for instance, just [17% of adults](#) expect life to return to its pre-pandemic state. A [Bain & Company](#) study found that many Europeans expected to continue many of the core behaviours they'd fostered as a result of COVID-19, whether it be shopping exclusively online or changing the way they interact with other people.

And as digital becomes more central to everyone's lives, a key part of the rebuild that businesses will need to factor in is how to deliver the personalised service that consumers are increasingly coming to expect – at a grand scale.

[2020 research](#) suggests that delivering personalised service at scale can amount to “a 1-2% lift in total sales” for a business, “typically by driving up loyalty and share-of-wallet among already-loyal customers (for whom data is more abundant and response rates are higher)”.

However, McKinsey senior partner Kai Vollhardt says this is far from a simple exercise and that there are **four common roadblocks** to delivering this type of personalised customer service:

1. Collecting and storing massive amounts of data and making it relevant:

Instead of generating and assembling more and more data, companies should focus on identifying and collecting the right data. Sometimes less data actually put into action is more effective than adding the most sophisticated external data set.

2. Thinking in terms of appropriate triggers rather than seasons or general events:

Triggers are the specific occasions when a particular message will be most valuable to a customer. A customer moving to a new home, for example, is a trigger for an energy company.

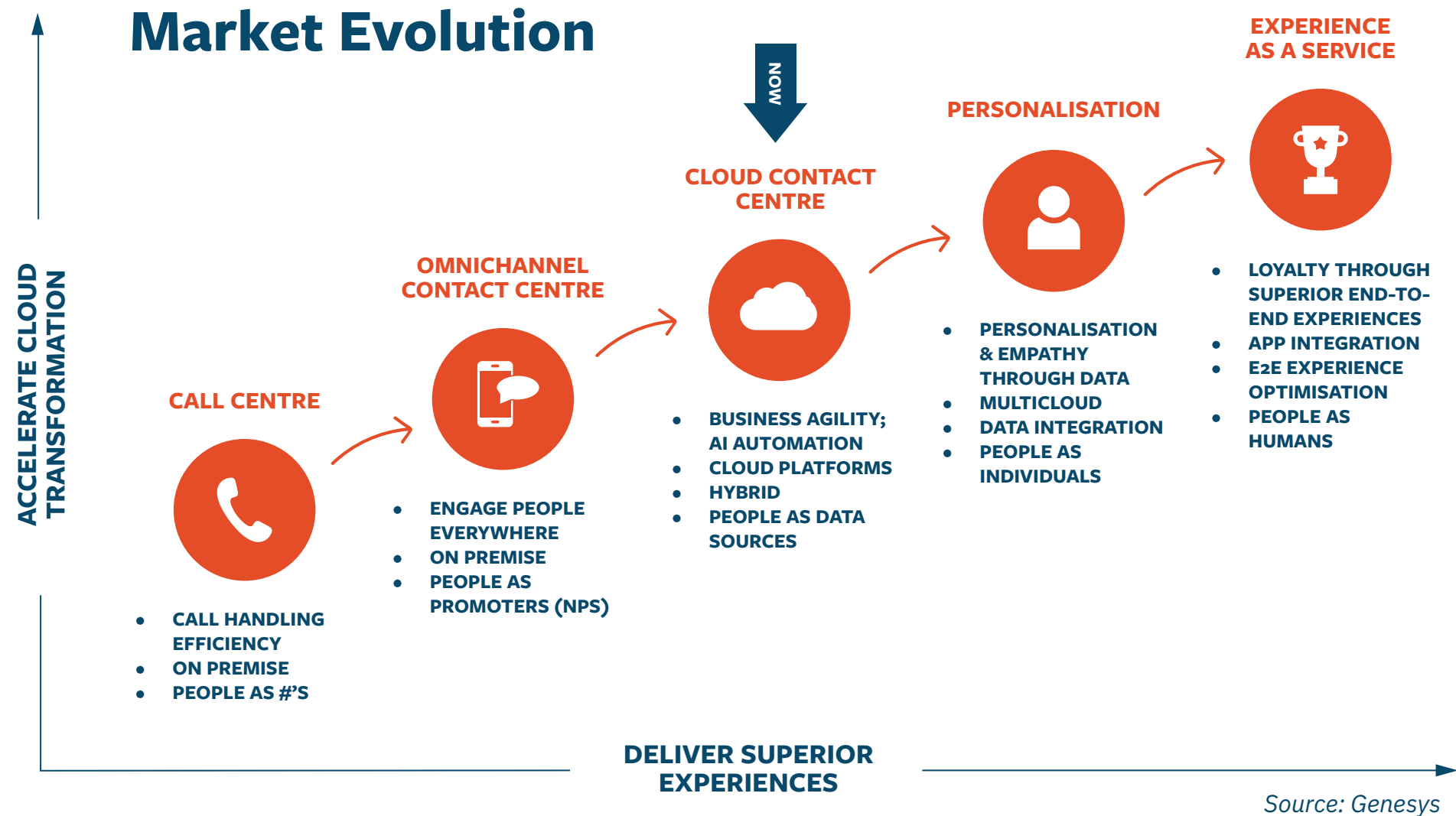
3. Having agile, cross-functional teams:

Running an agile project once is relatively easy, but making it stick and scale is difficult. Those cross-functional teams make it easier to apply a test-and-learn approach, as all relevant experts are in the room and insights can be shared instantly, which is a prerequisite for personalisation at scale.

4. Having the right tech tools and infrastructure: These have to be in place to test successfully on a large scale across the entire customer base, and this can feel overwhelming. However, technology has advanced a lot, and there are simple and powerful solutions available.

Contact centre technology provider Genesys highlights ‘personalisation at scale’ as something akin to the fourth step towards a Holy Grail, of sorts, for businesses: delivering ‘experience as a service’.

But to reach this level of sophistication requires businesses to invest in cloud contact centre technology, in order to provide a platform for the agility and data innovation required.





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Contact Babel’s 2020 [*The Inner Circle Guide to Contact Centre Remote Working Solutions*](#) research found that 60% of all contact centres are now either already relying on the power of cloud-based technology or planning to in the next three months. This figure is 77% among large contact centres.

Remote working has been one driver behind this race to cloud in the last year – 2020 saw a [*47% increase*](#) in demand for remote working amongst contact centre staff and even after the pandemic is over it is likely that hybrid and flexible work will remain the norm, continuing the ongoing shift away from on-premise technology.

But the other, crucial driver is, of course, data. As Dorman further explains:

“Cloud technology gives businesses of all sizes the ability to be able to collect and store data and link data sets together in a way that’s very, very difficult to do when you’ve got lots and lots of different siloed premise-based technologies together.

“So, the first thing about the cloud is the ability to really start to consolidate your data sets together and start linking together the entire customer journey. The second thing about the cloud is then the ability to

start to tap into machine learning and AI capabilities, and to start driving analytics around that data, to be able to unlock meaning from it and spot patterns within the vast and linked data sets many contact centres have at their disposal.”

Dorman outlines the following steps for businesses looking to deliver on the personalised service at scale mandate:

□ Step one – Observe: Start observing customer behaviours where they’re interacting with your brand and then begin thinking about how you might tailor an experience to them based on what you predict they’re looking to do.

□□ Step two – Organise: Are you getting your data in order and being able to understand and track the customer from Google search right the way through to the online journey and then linking that into the contact centre journey? And then off the back of that, being able to have a really accurate understanding around the customer’s sentiment, their intent, the experience that they went through, and their feedback. Finding the means to link those data silos together.

□□□ **Step three – Identify:** Is an individual known to your brand, and can you deliver an experience that’s specific to them or to their profile? The big challenge here, as always is identifying that customer. With websites, you can do that through cookies, although that’s increasingly a challenge due to GDPR and web blocking technologies. But there are still tracking capabilities online, and then when that switches to contact channels, i.e. when they pick the phone up, it’s using either their telephone number or some other active means of identifying them quickly.

□□□□ **Step four – Route:** When your contact channels are machine-led or automated, do you have easy routes to a human being? You need to create a system of smart routing. And then once you’ve done that, applying good smart routing decisions, based on what customers are looking to do to try and get them through to the right person to help them with a query.

□□□□□ **Step five – Inform:** Once a customer is directed through to a human member of staff, it’s about making sure that that individual has the information

at their fingertips to know as much about that customer as possible. Who they are, previous buying activity, previous customer engagements, etc. And then it’s as much about – how do we surface the information in the right way to an advisor that allows them to differentiate the experience? And that’s really where the design of a user experience for an agent and the desktop is so critical.

And Dorman further explains that from the very start of the process business leaders should be thinking about how they can apply machine learning to really unearth and spot patterns within their data sets that allow them to extract something meaningful from it:

“You can then take action either before the customer contacts – i.e. while the customer’s on your website, whilst they’re in a call queue or whilst they’re with an agent – to be able to influence the journey in a way that delivers more personalisation and ultimately delivers a better outcome for you and for the customer.”



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Assisting agents

With artificial intelligence and automation expected to “touch nearly every customer interaction in some respect, in the near future”, the role of the customer service representative is changing dramatically, becoming more vital in the race to deliver personalised service.

Emerging technologies such as [Personality-Based Routing](#), for example, are a clear example of using AI and automation to better personalise the interaction between customer and advisor. They achieve this, as a recent [Sabio blog](#) explains, by “using a number of data sources to profile your customer base – such as IVR choices, context/tone of emails, previous contacts, CRM, demographic profiling or marketing profiles – to help make a match between the personality fit of advisors and your customers (known or new)”.

However, the crucial element to introducing any kind of AI and automation –as with Personality-Based Routing – is to establish how it enables contact centre advisors being able to provide the human touch that customers so evidently desire.

This has been typified by the rise in importance of empathy in the contact centre in the past 12 months. In a [September research study](#) from MyCustomer and Genesys, it was found that customer service interactions that directly empathised and understood emotions led to high levels of customer satisfaction in 63% of cases. 61% of customers reported feeling ‘very dissatisfied’ when the opposite was true.

As a result, empathy has become a core skill requirement for customer service advisors. [Research](#) from recruiters, Blue Arrow found that empathy had moved up from 10th position to become the 6th most sought-after skill in contact centre advisor job adverts in 2020. A recent [Ipsos Mori poll](#), commissioned by PepsiCo, revealed that 86% of consumers say that showing empathy is critical to fostering loyalty.

Technologies such as [sentiment and intent analysis](#), as previously mentioned, as well as user interfaces that surface the right information at the right time for advisors during interactions, will be crucial to meeting customers' empathy and emotional needs, ultimately enhancing the personalised experience for them in the process.

“The ability to empathise with the person they're speaking to and adapt and adjust the way that they communicate based on the needs of that specific individual customer is now a crucial attribute of the modern contact centre advisor,” adds Dorman.

“It can only help if the agent dealing with the customer has information at their fingertips that allows them to very quickly understand the challenges that a customer may have faced in a particular issue without the customer having to explain over and over again.

“If an agent can very quickly pick up and understand that a customer is having some challenges and immediately get on the front foot and recognise that, then immediately it's going to take the sting out of an issue. It will allow the agent to get to the point of resolution much quicker and by empathising with the customer to deliver a better outcome.”



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**Take action
now**

The evidence is clear – customers demand personalised service and will come to expect it more and more in the coming years.

Whilst the coronavirus pandemic has had a hugely negative and disruptive impact on people lives and economies across Europe, the road to recovery is in sight. Businesses must take this as a prompt to review and act upon the consumer demand for improved, human-centred customer service.

“Offering personalised services to the customers sets a business apart from its competitor,” says Kritagya Pandey, for the [Becoming Human blog](#).

“Every company needs a parameter that differentiates it from the crowd and makes it a better service provider. Thus, offering customised solutions to the customers can provide a competitive advantage. Customer-centric strategies, like personal chat support, live agent calls, email support and others, can prove to give businesses an edge.”

Finally, Sabio's Stuart Dorman believes there are two key areas to focus on, for European businesses looking at how to take their first steps towards offering personalised service:

1. Track the demand from online to offline. "What we're seeing from many of our customers at the moment is there are two areas where they're really lacking in data. One is understanding the flow from digital channels into the contact centre. So the first thing you start tracking is that demand from the web into the contact centre. And you can do that by using things like dynamic telephone numbers to allow you to link the web session to the call centre."

2. Understand intent. "Make sure that you front every customer journey into the contact centre with a really simple AI to capture intent and just really simple questions, like 'thanks for calling, how can I help you today?' And then using that information to understand what the customer's intent is, use that to drive the subsequent experience."

"And I think the mistake that people make is we don't use AI just to drive automation. We use it to capture data and to understand more about who the customer is and why they're calling to allow us to make a better decision downstream. And that could be routing through to an individual, to the right team.

"It could be passing that information to the advisor to allow them to be more empathetic about why the customer's calling, or it could be that they are asking really simple questions that we can answer straight away without them having to sit in the queue for ages and speak to somebody. These are the building blocks for delivering personalised service."



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About Sabio

Sabio Group, delivers solutions and services that seamlessly combine digital and human interactions to support outstanding customer experiences. Through its own technology and that of world-

class technology leaders, Sabio Group helps organisations to optimise their customer journeys by making better decisions across their multiple contact channels.

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About Genesys

Every year, Genesys® delivers more than 70 billion remarkable customer experiences for organisations in over 100 countries. Through the power of the cloud and AI, our technology connects every customer moment across marketing, sales and service on any channel, while also improving employee experiences. Genesys pioneered

Experience as a Servicesm so organisations of any size can provide true personalisation at scale, interact with empathy and foster customer trust and loyalty. This is enabled by Genesys Cloud™, an all-in-one solution and the world's leading public cloud contact centre platform, designed for rapid innovation, scalability and flexibility.

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The Sabio logo features the word "sabio" in a lowercase, bold, blue sans-serif font. A small teal dot is positioned above the letter 'i'.The Genesys logo consists of an orange icon on the left, which is a stylized representation of a person or a network node with two circles above it. To the right of the icon, the word "GENESYS" is written in a bold, uppercase, grey sans-serif font, followed by a trademark symbol (™).

About **MY**customer

MyCustomer.com is Europe's leading online resource for customer-focused professionals, with over 100,000 members.

Sharing news, advice and resources on topics ranging from customer engagement to CRM and the contact centre, MyCustomer is a vital hub for business leaders aiming to enhance every facet of the customer experience they deliver.

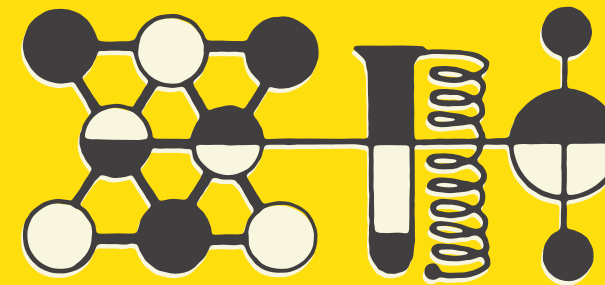
With a network of expert contributors from around the globe and a focus on strategy, technology and in-depth research, members of the MyCustomer community are able to tap into a wealth of knowledge and receive the most comprehensive view of the trends affecting and influencing the world of customer management.

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