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Gold Partner

Create meaningful and memorable customer experiences

AI and automation will drive customer loyalty and improve employee experience

Authored by:

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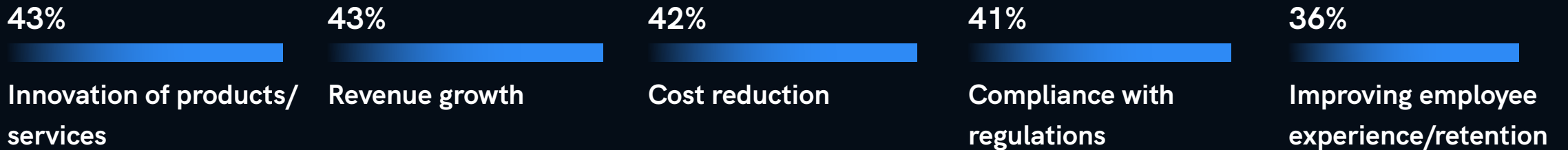**March 2023**

Introduction

> **2023 will be an exciting year for organisations in Australia.**

Despite the projected economic headwinds, leaders are not locking down the battens and preparing for a slowdown. Quite the opposite! Many are taking the opportunity to accelerate their transformation, with the plan to emerge from 2023 as leaner, better, faster, more agile, and focused organisations.

Innovation is top of the priority list in 2023 – customer experience (CX) leaders will explore exciting and innovative ways to deliver value to customers. And with the significant focus on reducing costs, many CX and technology leaders will turn to automation, AI, and intelligent systems to drive their innovation and transformation efforts.

Cautious Optimism is the Theme for 2023

43%	43%	42%	41%	36%
Innovation of products/ services	Revenue growth	Cost reduction	Compliance with regulations	Improving employee experience/retention

Q: What are your organisation's top 3 business priorities over the next 12 months?
Source: Ecosystm Future of CX Study, 2023

Customer Experience is the Only Differentiator in an Increasingly Digital World

Over the past five years, investments in CX teams, platforms, and processes have significantly improved customer outcomes – making organisations more competitive or able to drive better customer experiences. CX investments will now reach the next level to align outcomes across the entire organisation. Ad-hoc CX investments will be unified and aligned with brand values.

Organisations will:

1 **Set CX-related KPIs for and across the entire organisation**

Instead of having channel-specific metrics, or just setting CX metrics for customer-facing employees, senior leaders will make the entire organisation responsible for delivering on CX and brand promises.

2 **Improve customer self-service**

Improving self-service channels and touchpoints has long been a priority. Now organisations will focus on making traditionally complex interactions easy, automating entire processes and extending self-service into more engagements.

Top Mandates of Contact Centres in Australia

44%
Increase customer lifetime value

29%
Impact organisation's financial performance

12%
Reduce unnecessary inbound activities

8%
Support Sales & Marketing

8%
Innovate on customer processes and engagements

Q: What is the primary mandate for your organisation's contact centre?
Source: Ecosystm Future of CX Study, 2023

Finding and Keeping Agents is the First Challenge in Repairing Broken Customer Journeys

> **Despite the rumoured economic headwinds, unemployment remains low in Australia – 3.7% in February 2023.**
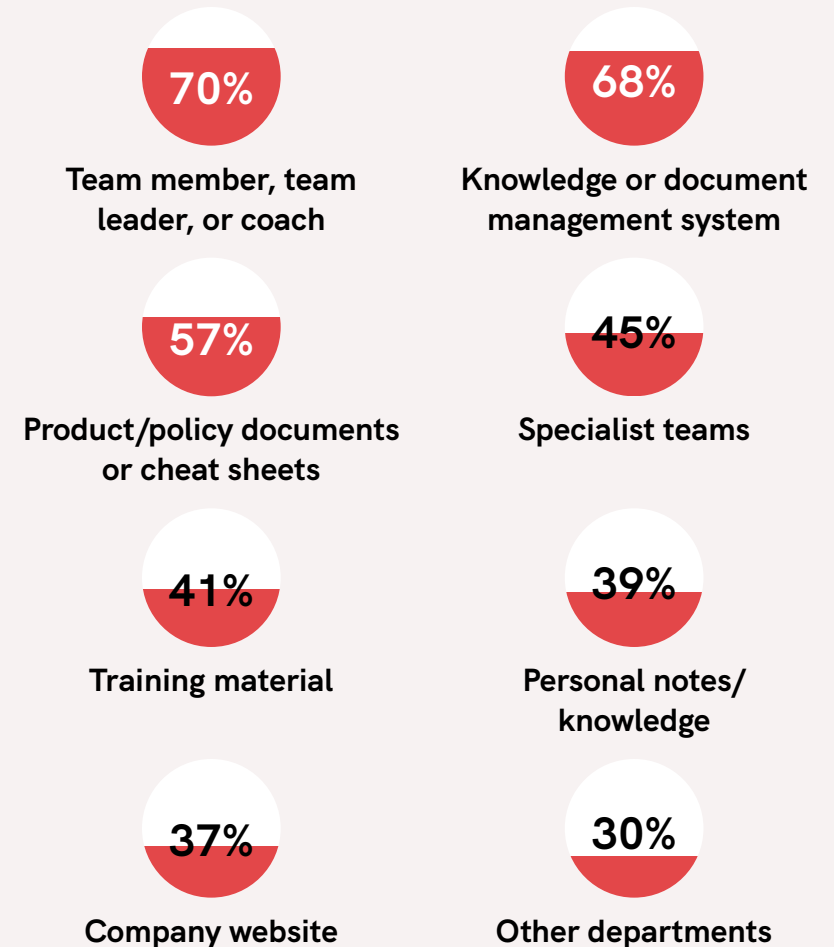
Contact centre leaders continue to report challenges in finding and retaining agents. Training requirements often delay the productivity of agents by weeks or even months.

The pressure to increase agent productivity is real. Regardless of increased investment in digital touchpoints, contact centre volumes continue to increase. For example, an Australian organisation that has implemented a very successful chatbot that manages over 70% of customer interactions, has not seen any decline in their contact centre volumes.

Activities such as helping agents get up to speed at pace; providing the right information at the right time on calls, and automating in-call and post-call activities should be high on the agenda of contact centre and CX leaders.

Better Systems to Handle Customer Queries Required

How Customer Service Agents find answers

70%
Team member, team leader, or coach

68%
Knowledge or document management system

57%
Product/policy documents or cheat sheets

45%
Specialist teams

41%
Training material

39%
Personal notes/ knowledge

37%
Company website

30%
Other departments

Q: What do your Customer Service agents do if they do not know the answer to the customers' questions?
Source: Ecosystm Future of CX Study, 2023

Organisations are Investing in Solutions to Improve Agent Experience

Happy agents ensure happy customers. Organisations that focus on improving the agent experience will inevitably improve the customer experience. Customers will get served faster, more personalised experiences, and faster resolution to issues.

This requires investing in tools, technologies, and platforms to empower agents to focus their energies on what they enjoy doing and what makes a difference – serving customers.

Improving the contact centre solution and platform is number one priority for Australian organisations as they look to improve the agent experience and remove friction from their customer journeys.

> **More organisations are expected to examine the opportunity to embrace modern, cloud-based contact centre platforms that put customer data at the core of all interactions.**

Contact Centres Focus on Agent Empowerment

42%	39%	36%	35%	34%	34%
Improve solutions for greater ease of use	Give real-time customer feedback	Provide access to the right tools	Offer greater flexibility of work	Improve solutions for greater ease of use	Upskill to allow role changes

Q: What are the 3 key measures to improve employee/agent experience in contact centres?
Source: Ecosystm Future of CX Study, 2023

Smart Organisations are Using Data, AI and Automation to Improve Customer and Employee Outcomes

As organisations are faced with emerging economic challenges, they are also exploring opportunities to continue and even accelerate their digital transformation and innovation program.

Many are turning to intelligent applications and automation tools or platforms to drive that change. They want to use AI and automation to deliver better customer and employee experiences and supercharge their innovation activities.

Collecting, integrating, and analysing data is at the core of every good machine learning system – and the ability to deliver the outcomes of the learning with automation systems will make that data-driven change real for employees and customers.

Organisations across Australia no longer talk about being "cloud businesses" but of being "data-driven, intelligent organisations".

Conversational AI Helps Agents Provide an Improved Experience for More Customers

Conversational AI is more than chatbots.

A good conversational AI engine will give organisations the opportunity to create scalable, effective, and memorable customer experiences – across digital and human channels. Contact centres in Australia are already using conversational AI to:

Reduce agent onboarding time by providing prompts and scripts for new agents to follow when customers ask specific questions

Reduce overall agent effort by answering questions as they are asked, and providing prompts on offers or next best steps

Lower average handle times by reducing the amount of time that agents need to search for answers

Increase up-sell and cross-sell opportunities by providing personalised offers based on previous interactions

Improve agent performance and productivity by automating post-call tasks and call close activities
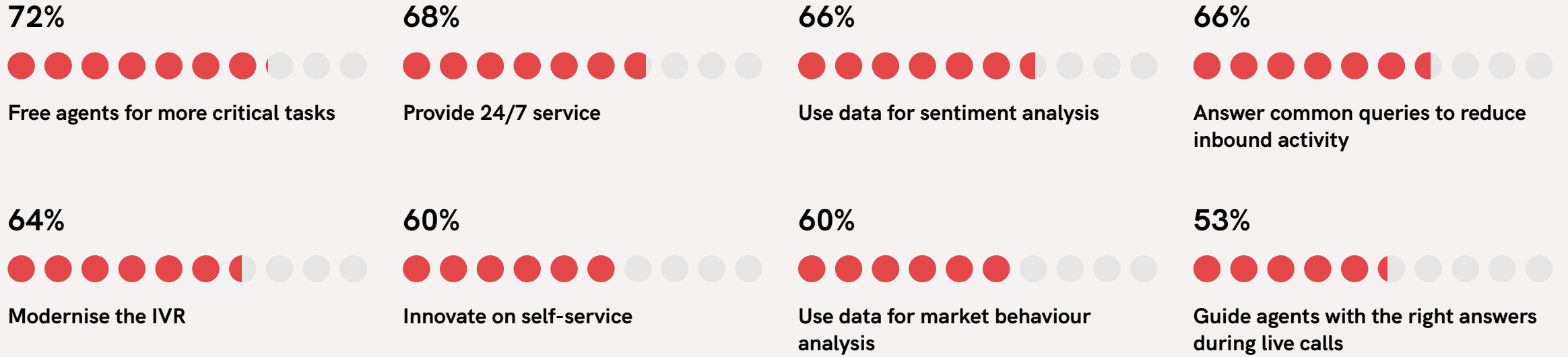
Minimise errors and increase compliance by surfacing scripts and automating recording/stop recording activities

Provide consistently exceptional customer service by allowing the agent to focus on what they do best – help customers!

Australian Organisations Deploy Conversational AI So Agents Can Focus on Doing Their Job

72%

Free agents for more critical tasks

68%

Provide 24/7 service

66%

Use data for sentiment analysis

66%

Answer common queries to reduce inbound activity

64%

Modernise the IVR

60%

Innovate on self-service

60%

Use data for market behaviour analysis

53%

Guide agents with the right answers during live calls

Q What are the main reasons for deploying Conversational AI for the contact centre?
Source: Ecosystm Future of CX Study, 2023

Automation of Post-Call Activities Help Deliver on Customer Commitments

> **The first expectation of AI and Automation investments is that they will improve the experience and productivity of employees.**

There is a significant opportunity to use automation tools to not only allow agents to spend less time on administration and more time speaking to customers, but also to ensure calls are summarised and post-work activity is scheduled – whether it is a follow-up call at a specific time, a discount added to the account, a change of plan, or a product variation. Irrespective of the follow-up required, the simpler it is to deliver, the more productive the agent, and happier the customer.

Smart CX leaders are using AI within their digital and human-centric channels to understand the decisions made by agents or chatbots, and to trigger a process. This process is then fulfilled partly or completely through automation tools. Customers get what they were promised, and customer service agents are more productive.

Main Outcomes Expected from AI/Automation Investments

41%
Improving employee experience/productivity

40%
Improving customer satisfaction/retention

35%
Product/service improvement & innovation

34%
Reduction of operating costs

Q: What are the 3 main outcomes expected of your Data & AI deployments?
Source: Ecosystm Digital Enterprise Study, 2023

# Customers Expect Organisations to Provide an Empowering Self-Service Experience

> **Self-service allows customers to take control of their own experiences, which leads to a greater sense of satisfaction and empowerment.**

By providing easy-to-use tools and resources, organisations can reduce the amount of time customers spend waiting on hold or interacting with customer service agents. Customers are turning to social media and messaging platforms for self-service.

Self-service saves organisations money, as it reduces the need for staff to handle routine inquiries and allows them to focus on more complex issues. But the real benefit comes from the ability to serve more customers, more often – increasing potential spend opportunities and/or customer loyalty. Effective self-service touchpoints also provide agents with the opportunity to spend more time on calls with the customers that need extra time or higher value customers.

Self-service tools must be easy to use and accessible to all customers; maintain accurate and up-to-date information; address security and privacy concerns; and integrate with other customer service channels.

Organisations are Leveraging Multiple Self Service Opportunities

45% Social media & messaging

28% Virtual assistants/chatbots

27% Mobile apps
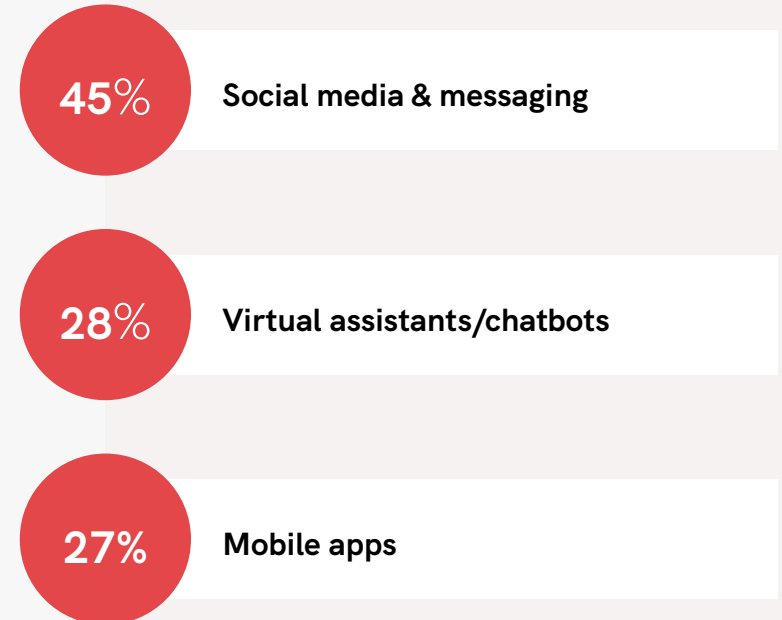
Q: What percentage of the self-service are on these channels ?
Source: Ecosystm Future of CX Study, 2023

Data Will Play a Key Role in Next-Generation Customer Experiences
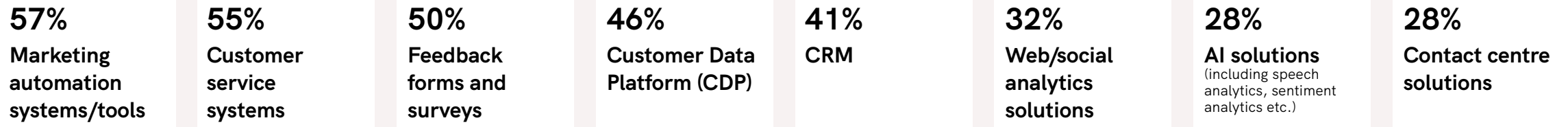
An intelligent experience always starts with great data. Machine learning, AI, and intelligent systems need to learn from historic and current data so that they can predict, direct, recommend and make suggestions.

> **But with the recent cybersecurity incidents in Australia, data doesn't only represent an opportunity – it is also a risk.**

The volume and type of data stored, the number of copies, and the number of people accessing the data impact the attack surface. Clear data management and governance guidelines can reduce risk while at the same time provide the ability to offer better, smarter solutions to customers and employees. Knowing what section of the website or mobile app a customer has recently visited is invaluable for personalising customer service – but might be meaningless in five minutes time. Looking at data through the lens of the customer and the agent ensures that organisations use and protect data to their benefit.

Australian Organisations Draw Their Customer Journey Data from Many Different Platforms and Systems

57% Marketing automation systems/tools	**55%** Customer service systems	**50%** Feedback forms and surveys	**46%** Customer Data Platform (CDP)	**41%** CRM	**32%** Web/social analytics solutions	**28%** AI solutions (including speech analytics, sentiment analytics etc.)	**28%** Contact centre solutions

Q: What are the sources where your Customer Team gets customer data from?
Source: Ecosystm Future of CX Study, 2023

Leveraging Partners for Platform, Integration and Industry Expertise

> **While automation and AI technologies will be central to the ability to continuously transform and evolve customer experiences, staffing challenge is still real.**

Resources are needed to manage and guide the implementation of new technologies and govern them to ensure they deliver the right outcomes for the right people. New resources are expensive and slow to get to full productivity. Luckily, some organisations have already implemented next-generation intelligent and automated CX capabilities.

There are well worn paths and processes that technology partners have already created. A successful Digital Transformation requires integration across multiple different platforms - CX, CRM, ITSM and others. Partners that can add value across advisory, design, delivery, and managed services across all platforms will reduce the time to value and ensure success.

> **74% of Australian organisations use external technology partners when deploying contact centre solutions**

Take the Opportunity to Prepare Your Contact Centre for Intelligent and Automated Customer Experiences

AI is taking over from cloud as the main transformational goal for organisations. The objective is no longer to just be in the cloud – it is to use the cloud securely, to become smarter, more automated, intelligent organisations. The good news is that being an intelligent organisation no longer needs to be a pipe dream. The platforms and tools that can make your contact centre and overall customer experience capability more automated and intelligent exist today. Your peers are investing in agent assist, smart contact centre, and conversational intelligence solutions already. They want customers to wait less, get faster outcomes, and ultimately have easy, effective, meaningful and memorable brand experiences.

> By the end of the year, make sure that your organisation is more automated and intelligent than you were at the beginning of the year.

The Use of Agent Assist Technologies Helps Organisations Serve Customers Better
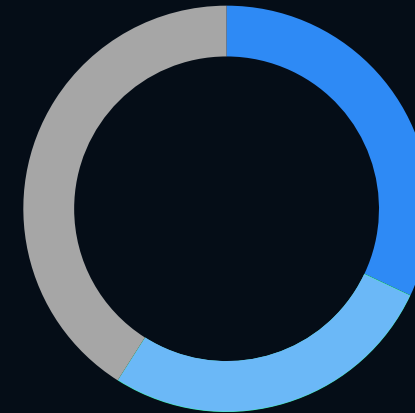
32%
Plan to implement in the next 12 months

27%
Have implemented

Q: What are your plans for Agent Assist and Conversational AI technologies in your contact centre?
Source: Ecosystm Future of CX Study, 2023

Tim Sheedy

Principal Advisor, Ecosystm

Tim brings more than 20 years of experience in designing and implementing Cloud, AI, CX and Automation strategies to the Ecosystm network, to support businesses in their IT decisions.

In his previous role, Tim spent 12 years at Forrester Research, most recently as a Principal Analyst, helping IT leaders improve their digital capabilities. Prior to this, he was Research Director for IT Solutions at IDC in Australia, where he assisted IT vendors in designing solutions to better fit market requirements and IT buyers in improving the effectiveness of their IT functions.

Beyond the office, Tim boasts an international reputation as an entertaining and informative public speaker on the key trends in the IT market. Tim graduated from the University of Technology Sydney with a BA majoring in Marketing and Research. In his free time, Tim enjoys playing football (badly!) and tennis and watching rugby. But while he may enjoy that, he spends most of his time driving his two children to various sporting and social activities.

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Digital consulting and managed services partners can help integrate your data and platforms and use their deep experience to ensure your CX initiatives deliver what your customers demand today and in the future. A trusted partner is not just one who delivers today, but one who stands by the solution to help manage and continually improve it – bringing industry and technology expertise to every engagement.

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