
TCN: State of Customer Service 2026, Executive Summary, U.K.

This year's survey contained a multitude of insights; take a look at all the survey questions and answers below to fully understand the state of customer service.

Panel: 1,000 U.K. adults

Q1

- Email (45%) and talking to a live agent by phone (40%) are the top two ways Brits prefer to communicate with a company's customer service department
 - Others prefer an online chat with a live agent (31%), text message (18%) or social media (14%)
 - Those in Yorkshire and the Humber (43%) prefer talking to a live agent by phone, more than any other region
 - Those in the North West prefer online chat with a live agent over talking to a live agent by phone (33% vs 31%) and those in London prefer a live agent by phone or by chat equally (both 31%)

Q2

- Email (41%) and phone call (26%) are the two most likely contact methods that would lead respondents to make a payment on their bill
 - Only 11% would respond to standard mail and 14% could be encouraged to make a payment if they were contacted via text message
 - 19% of those in the Midlands and 18% of those in the South West are likely to make a payment on their bill if contacted by text message, more than the other regions

Q3

- 53% of respondents are more likely to respond to a branded text message (with their company name, logo and a verification badge displayed) from a company instead of a random phone number

Q4

- Most respondents (53%) are more comfortable giving secure information to a company through a live person than an automated phone system (16%)
 - 20% of Brits aren't comfortable giving secure information to either a live person or automated phone system
 - 27% of those in the South East don't feel comfortable giving secure information to either a live person or automated phone system, more than the other regions

Q5

- Incorrect charges or bills (39%), refunds (36%), issues with an item or service (34%), technical support (30%) and complaints or feedback (30%) are the top reasons Brits typically contact a company's customer service department
 - Account issues (28%) and shipping and delivery issues (26%) are also reasons respondents contact customer service
 - Refunds are the No. 1 reason respondents in the East Midlands (41%), West Midlands (41%), South East (43%) and North West (39%) contact customer service
 - One quarter of those in Yorkshire and the Humber (26%), the South West (25%) and London (25%) contact customer service for exchanges and returns, more than the other regions

Q6

- On average, Brits are willing to wait on hold for a little more than 11 minutes (11.4, 11 minutes and 24 seconds) before hanging up
 - 31% of those polled are only willing to wait 5 minutes or less before hanging up
 - Those in London are willing to wait the longest, at an average of just under 13 minutes (12.7, 12 minutes and 42 seconds)
 - Those in the East of England are willing to wait the shortest time, at just over 10 minutes (10.1, 10 minutes and 6 seconds)

Q7

- A little over 27 minutes is the longest time, on average (27.2, 27 minutes and 12 seconds), respondents have ever been on hold with a company's customer service department
 - 10% admit they've waited more than 60 minutes on hold with a customer service department
 - Those in the South West have waited on hold the longest, at the average of 31.5 minutes (31 minutes and 30 seconds)

Q8

- The ability to solve the issue quickly (38%) and the ease of being able to get through to a live agent when calling (36%) are the top two most important qualities to respondents when contacting a customer service department
 - The first person they speak to being able to solve the issue (35%) and being able to speak with a person 24/7 (28%) are also important to respondents
 - Having access to an online live agent is important to 28% of those in London, more than the other regions

Q9

- Cost (51%), quality of the customer service (47%) and past experience with the company (43%) are the top three factors that influence respondents' decision whether to use one company over another
 - Others weigh friend and family recommendations (30%) and online reviews (27%)
 - 31% of those in London and 28% of those in the East Midlands weigh the location/accessibility, more than the other regions
 - 15% of those in London and Yorkshire and the Humber weigh a company's social media content/presence, double the other regions

Q10

- Banks (27%), small businesses (23%), hotels (21%), family doctors and practitioners (14%) and retailers (14%) have the best customer service
 - Utility providers and hospitals (both 14%) followed closely
 - 19% of those in the East Midlands said hospitals have the best customer service, more than the other regions

Q11

- If there's a long wait time when calling a customer service department, respondents are most likely to hang up and try again at another time (28%) or be put in a queue and called back when an agent is available (26%)
 - 20% are likely to continue to wait on hold
 - 18% of those in the North West and 17% of those in the South West are likely to give up, more than the other regions
 - 38% of those in the East of England will hang up and try again at another time, more than the other regions

Q12

- 41% of respondents have left an online review about a poor experience with a customer service department (15% “yes just once” + 26% “yes several times”)
 - Another 29% have thought about leaving an online review about a poor experience and would do so in the future
 - Only 25% haven't and wouldn't leave an online review about a poor experience with a customer service department
 - Nearly one-third of those in the South East (32%) and London (31%) have left several online reviews following poor experience, more than the other regions
 - 31% of those in the East of England haven't and wouldn't leave a review following a poor customer service experience, more than the other regions

Q13

- 41% of respondents have left an online review about a poor experience with a customer service department (15% “yes just once” + 26% “yes several times”)
 - 21% have thought about it and would post an online review about a great customer service experience
 - 22% haven't and wouldn't post an online review about a great customer service experience
 - 27% of those in the South West and 26% of those in East of England haven't and wouldn't post a review following a great experience, more than the other regions
 - Nearly half of those in London (45%) have posted several reviews following a great experience, more than the other regions

Q14

- Waiting on hold for a long time (43%), having to talk to several people/departments to get an issue resolved (41%) and getting disconnected and having to start all over again (40%) are the top three biggest frustrations when calling a company's customer service department
 - Not being able to get a hold of a live agent (37%), not having their issue resolved (36%) and the amount of time it will take to get their issue resolved (28%) were also common frustrations
 - 34% of those in East of England and the West Midlands find dealing with an unpleasant agent is one of their biggest frustrations when calling a customer service department, more than the other regions
 - 36% of those in East of England are most frustrated when they can't find a customer service phone number, more than any other region

Q15 (a)

- After a positive customer service experience, 76% of respondents are likely to make a repeat purchase (45% “very likely” + 31% “somewhat likely”)
 - Only 4% are unlikely to make a repeat purchase following a positive customer service experience
 - 82% of those in the North West and East of England are likely to make a repeat purchase after a positive customer service experience, more than the other regions

Q15 (b)

- After a negative customer service experience, 54% of respondents are unlikely to make a repeat purchase (28% “somewhat unlikely” + 26% “very unlikely”)
 - 22% are likely to make a repeat purchase even after a negative customer service experience (8% “very likely” and 14% “somewhat likely”)
 - Two-thirds (66%) of those in East of England are unlikely to make a repeat purchase after a negative customer service experience, more than any other region
 - 34% of those in Yorkshire and the Humber are likely to make a repeat purchase despite a negative customer service experience, more than the other regions

Q16

- On average, respondents would be willing to pay 39% more (39.1) for a product or service if the brand offered better customer service than the lower-priced option
 - 12% wouldn't pay any more (\$0) for a product or service even if the brand offered better customer service than the lower-priced option
 - Those in Yorkshire and the Humber would be willing to pay an average of 44% more (43.5) at the highest end, while those in East of England fell on the lowest end, willing to pay only an average of 34% more (34.4)

Q17

- When encountering self-service options, 29% aren't willing to try at all and will immediately try to speak to an actual person
 - For those who are willing to try to use the self-service options, they will try an average of 2 times before asking to speak to an actual person
 - 19% will give it 3 tries before asking to speak to a human

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- 40% of those in the East Midlands aren't willing to try self-service options at all, more than any other region
 - 11% of those in the North West will give self service options more than 5 tries, more than the other regions

Q18

- When encountering an online chatbot/AI when trying to resolve a customer service issue, 33% immediately try to get connected with a human being
 - 28% will give the chatbot/AI a chance to resolve the issue
 - 14% will close the chat and try to call
 - 10% will weigh whether or not their issue is even worth the hassle at all
 - 11% of those in Yorkshire and the Humber are excited they don't have to speak to a person when encountering a chatbot, more than the other regions
 - Those in the East Midlands are equally likely to immediately try to get connected with a human (27%) and give the chatbot a chance (28%)
 - Those in the North West are the most likely region to give the chatbot a chance to resolve the issue (41%)

Q19

- When contacting a business, 37% are comfortable engaging with AI systems (10% "very comfortable" + 27% "somewhat comfortable")
 - On the flip side, another 32% are uncomfortable engaging with AI systems (15% "somewhat uncomfortable" + 17% "very uncomfortable")
 - Respondents are more likely to feel "very uncomfortable" engaging with AI systems when contacting a business than they are to feel "very comfortable" (17% vs 10%)
 - Those in the North West are most comfortable engaging with AI systems when contacting a business (48%) (17% "very comfortable" + 31% "somewhat comfortable")
 - Those in East of England are least comfortable engaging with AI systems when contacting a business (43%) (17% "somewhat uncomfortable" + 26% "very uncomfortable")

Q20

- 48% trust providing personal data to an AI agent (9% "a lot" + 39% "a little bit")
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- 53% of respondents don't trust providing personal data to an AI agent (30% "not very much" + 23% "not at all")
 - 30% of those in the South East don't trust providing personal data to an AI agent "at all," more than the other regions and compared to just 13% of those in the North West
 - 12% of those in Yorkshire and the Humber trust providing data to an AI agent "a lot," more than any other region

Q21

- Respondents overwhelmingly prefer to talk to a human agent rather than an AI agent when contacting a business (84% vs 8%)

Q22

- 37% of respondents feel AI is helpful when they contact a business (8% "very helpful" + 29% "somewhat helpful")
 - On the flip side, 29% feel that AI is unhelpful when they contact a business (12% "somewhat unhelpful" + 17% "very unhelpful")
 - 21% of those in the South East feel AI is "very unhelpful" when they contact a business, more than the other regions
 - 15% of those in the North West feel AI is "very helpful" when they contact a business, more than the other regions

Q23

- When contacting a business, respondents would be most comfortable with AI directing them to the correct person/department (35%), providing options for solutions (23%), answering questions about an item or service (22%) and technical support (22%)
 - Only 9% would be comfortable with AI collecting payment information
 - 29% wouldn't be comfortable with AI accomplishing anything when they contact a business
 - 37% of those in the East Midlands wouldn't be comfortable with AI accomplishing anything when they contact a business, more than the other regions
 - 20% of those in the North West would be comfortable with AI handling complaints or feedback, almost double the amount of those in the West Midlands (11%)

Q24

- When contacting a company with an issue, 50% find their issue is frequently resolved during their first contact (10% “always” + 40% “often”)
 - 41% find their issue is “sometimes” resolved during their first contact with a company
 - 17% of those in the North West find their issue is “always” resolved during their first contact with a company, compared to just 4% of those in the South East

Q25 (Financial institutions)

- On average, it takes respondents 2 hours and 4 minutes for their issue to be resolved when contacting a customer service department at financial institutions
 - 37% of those in Yorkshire and The Humber, East Midlands and South East typically have their issue resolved in less than 10 minutes, shorter than the other regions

Q25 (Health care organizations)

- On average, it takes respondents 2 hours, 58 minutes, and 42 seconds for their issue to be resolved when contacting a customer service department at health care organizations
 - 42% of those in the South West typically have their issue solved in less than 10 minutes, shorter than the other regions
 - 20% of those in the North West typically have their issue resolved within 20 to 60 minutes, more than the other regions

Q25 (Retailers)

- On average, it takes respondents 1 hour and 35 minutes and 48 seconds for their issue to be resolved when contacting a customer service department at a retailer
 - 42% of those in the East Midlands and East of England typically have their issue resolved in less than 10 minutes, shorter than the other regions
 - 11% of those in East of England typically have their issue resolved in less than 2 minutes, more than the other regions

Q26

- Urgent or sensitive information (42%), security or privacy concerns (38%), any charges (35%) and issues with any payment, order, service, etc.(33%) should always be delivered by a live person rather than an automated message

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- Follow-up communications after an issue or incident (30%), failed or declined payments (30%) and updates on complaints or escalations (28%) are also preferred to come from a live person rather than an automated message
 - 32% of those in East of England want changes in appointment time or location delivered by a live person and 30% want cancellation info from a live person, more than the other regions
 - While updates on urgent or sensitive information ranked as the No. 1 thing respondents across the board want to be delivered by an actual person, updates on complaints or escalations ranked as No. 2 for those in the South West (43%), more than any other region

Q27

- App/online banking planned outages/maintenance (39%), changes in interest rates (37%) and changes in hours of operation (25%) are the top three most valuable types of proactive communication from financial providers
 - 17% of those polled don't use any financial providers
 - Changes in days of operation (21%), location changes (17%) and mergers and acquisitions (14%) are important to fewer respondents
 - 31% of those in East of England find updates on changes in hours of operation most valuable, compared to 16% of those in the West Midlands

Q28

- Rate increases (36%), planned outage/repair alerts (33%) and emergency repairs or unexpected disruptions (31%) are the most valuable types of proactive communication from utility companies
 - Fraud or suspicious activity on an account (30%) and billing or payment reminders (27%) round out the top five most valuable types of proactive communication
 - Only 10% of those polled don't use any utility companies
 - 18% of those in the West Midlands find proactive communication about new services or updates valuable, compared to just 9% of those in the South West