

Intercom Customer Support Trends Report

Table of Contents



INTRODUCTION

2022: The great customer support tipping point

03

The top 5 trends transforming customer support

TREND 01

THE CUSTOMER EXPECTATION GAP WIDENS

06

TREND 02

SUPPORT TEAM AGILITY IS NO LONGER OPTIONAL

10

TREND 03

THE NEED FOR A CONNECTED TECH STACK ESCALATES

14

TREND 04

SUPPORT LEADERS FIGHT AGAINST TEAM BURNOUT AND ATTRITION

18

TREND 05

CUSTOMER EMPATHY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

22



BONUS

Future-proof your team's success: The checklist

26

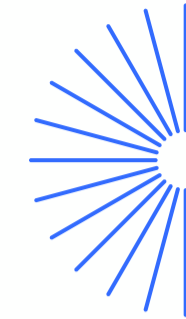


2022: The great customer support tipping point



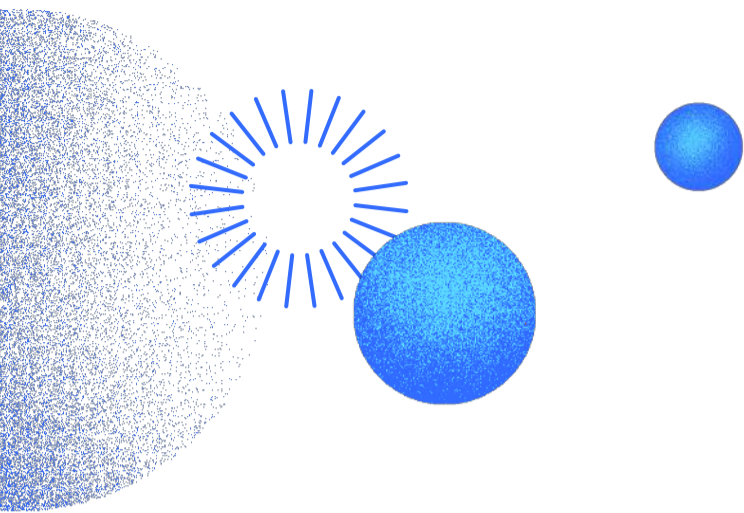
Bobby Stapleton

Director of Customer Support at Intercom



Today, when the majority of a customer's interactions with a brand is online, providing fast, personal customer support is more critical than ever.

In this second edition of *The Intercom Customer Support Trends Report*, we found that the customer support landscape is rapidly evolving, making adapting to change no longer optional for any business. →



A year ago as the world grappled with the global pandemic, customer support teams acted quickly to meet the rising expectations of their customers, paired with the increased inbound conversation volume coming their way. To manage accelerated pressures, forward-thinking businesses adopted conversational support tools – like proactive messaging capabilities and chatbots – empowering them to strike the right balance between keeping their teams efficient and their customers happy.

Fast-forward one year, we're now at a critical tipping point where all businesses need to embrace change – or risk losing valued customers and talented teammates. Our survey* of over 1,200 global support leaders across a range of sectors, such as tech, e-commerce, and finance, reveals that support teams are facing more pressures than ever before, including:

A growing customer expectation gap amplified by the many challenges of the global pandemic, including spikes in inbound queries and budget cuts. Tellingly, 75% of support teams have seen customer expectations increase, but only 34% are confident they can meet those expectations.

Increased team burnout and attrition heightened by reduced headcount, an influx of queries from stressed-out customers, and the dawn of “The Great Resignation.” A significant 64% of support leaders say their team have felt “burned out” in the past 12 months.

Being slowed down by disconnected tech stacks. Almost half (47%) of support teams are slowed down every week because their tools aren't integrated.

Lack of modern technology to provide empathetic support at internet scale. Some 73% of customer support teams say that empathizing with customers is a top priority, but 21% don't feel they have the tools they need to enable appropriate empathy.

With widespread change and increased pressures comes new opportunities to rethink, reassess, and reinvent. The savvy businesses that are embracing change and adapting their customer support tools, technology, processes, and recruitment are thriving. They will continue to do so for the year ahead and beyond.

In this report, we examine the top five trends disrupting the customer support industry and provide tips on how to provide world-class support to both customers and your team in the new support landscape, where so many rules have been rewritten.

Enjoy!
Bobby Stapleton

* Intercom commissioned an independent market research firm to survey a random sample of 1,209 global support managers and leaders. The study's margin of error is +/- 2.8% at the 95% confidence level.

Top 5 trends transforming customer support

Trend 01

The customer expectation gap widens

Trend 02

Support team agility is no longer optional

Trend 03

The need for a connected tech stack escalates

Trend 04

Support leaders fight against team burnout and attrition

Trend 05

Customer empathy is more important than ever

Trend 01

The customer expectation gap widens

Trend 01

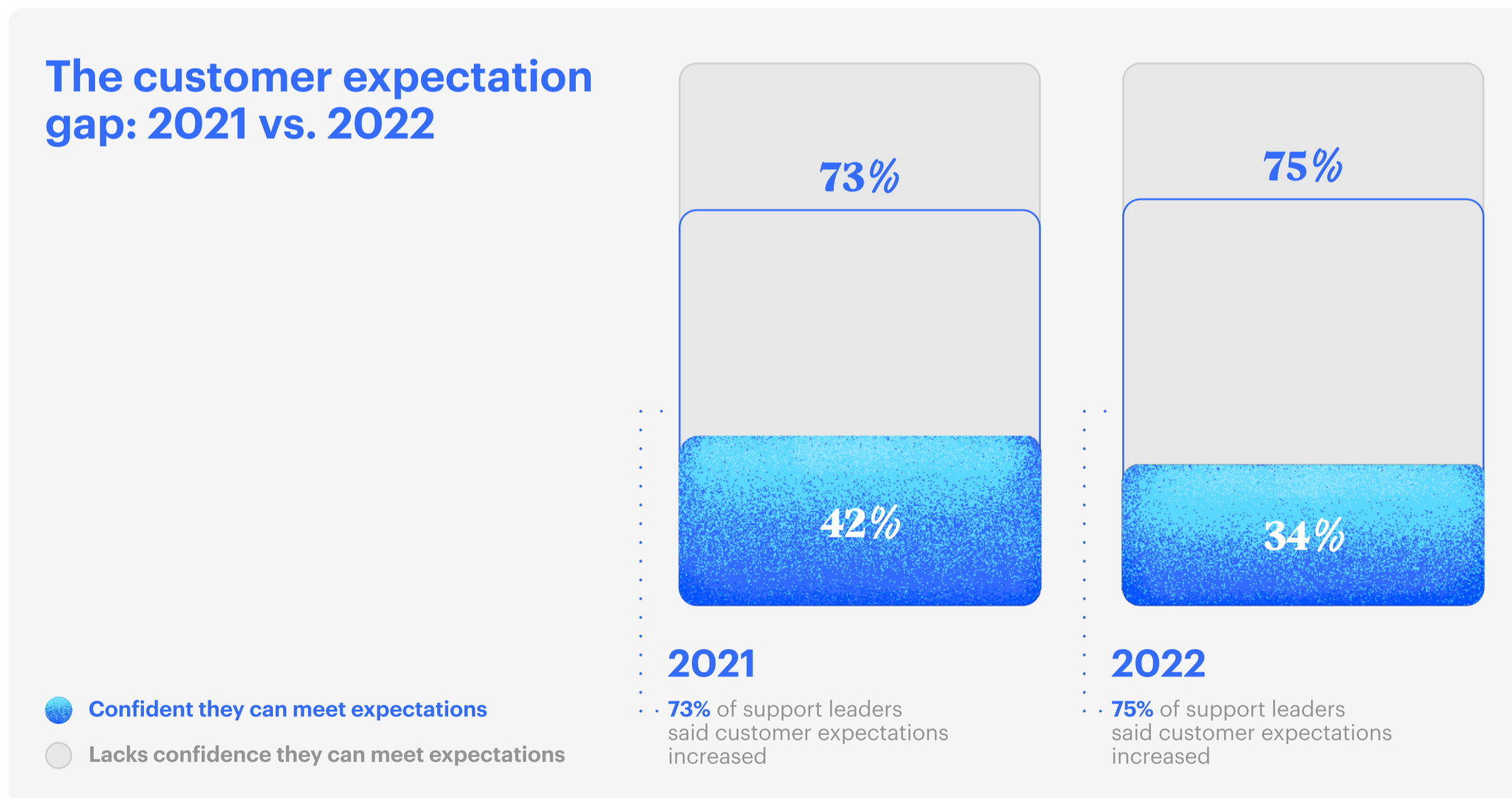
The customer expectation gap widens

The customer satisfaction equation is simple – are you consistently meeting your customers’ expectations over time with the resources you have? Falling short of meeting your customers’ expectations is one of the fastest routes to customer dissatisfaction and churn.

But just because something is simple to grasp, doesn’t make it easy to execute on. Last year’s report shone a spotlight on the growing customer expectation gap, where 73% of support leaders said customer expectations increased but only 42% believed they met those expectations. This year, the gap has expanded further than ever. Not only are more support leaders seeing increased customer expectations (75%), fewer teams are confident they’re meeting those expectations (34%).

So what factors are adding further distance to an already growing gap? Spurred by the global pandemic, numerous pressures have piled up for support teams, including reduced headcount (52% of companies decreased their support headcount due to COVID-19) and an ever-escalating conveyor belt of inbound queries (inbound volume has increased for 59% of companies over the past year). The pandemic has also pushed nearly every business online, forcing customer-centric support teams to throw out their old playbooks, rethink their tools, and embrace new ways of working. A recent [Gartner study](#) revealed that 69% of boards of directors accelerated their digital business initiatives in the wake of COVID-19 disruption.

Meanwhile, what customers want hasn’t changed: they still want to feel understood and get the rapid resolutions they need. What *has* changed is the support landscape support teams are now operating in. In a digital-first world, many support teams simply aren’t equipped with the right technology, processes, and sometimes even talent to satisfy customers’ needs at internet scale. The good news? Businesses who act fast to close the growing customer expectation gap will gain the ultimate competitive advantage – happier, more loyal customers.



3 simple steps to start bridging the customer expectation gap

01 Personalization is key

Nothing says “I don’t value your business” like a canned, generic response. Today, customers want to feel known and understood. In fact, an [Epsilon study](#) found that 80% of consumers are more likely to do business with a company that offers personalized experiences. With modern support tools, like chatbots, your support team can automatically gather rich context about each customer, like which plan they’re on, what company they work for, and whether they’ve been in touch before with a similar issue. Having this data at your fingertips fuels personalized help at every touchpoint – whether that’s through live chat with a support rep, preemptively answering questions at the right moment with proactive messages, or personalized answers from chatbots.

“Creating exceptional customer experiences is central to Guru's mission. One of our core values is to ‘create advocates’ through all of our customer interactions.”

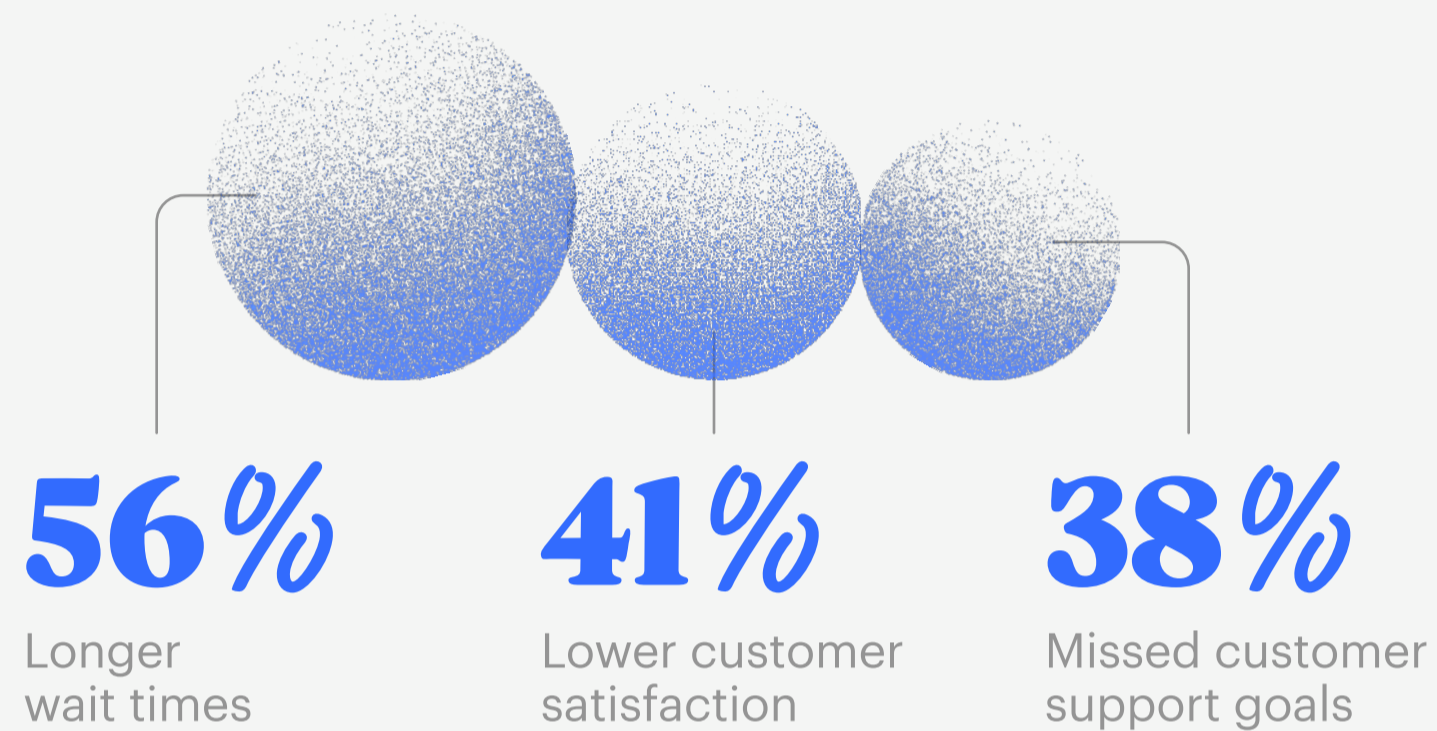


Anne Raimondi

Former Chief Customer Officer at **Guru**

GURU

Top ways support leaders say COVID-19 reductions negatively impacted the customer experience



“Today, what constitutes great customer support hasn’t changed – people still have an innate desire to be treated like the valued customers they are while having their problems resolved in a fast and personal way. What has changed is the underlying technology.”



Shep Hyken

Customer Service and Experience Expert,
New York Times Bestselling Author

02 Speed is of the essence

A significant 56% of support leaders flagged “longer wait times” as the top way support reductions related to COVID-19 negatively impacted their customer experience. Setting up automation to handle simple, recurring tasks and messages really respects your customers’ time and reduces wait times. For example, you can lean on chatbots to automatically answer common questions like, “How do I update my billing details?” And for complex queries, instead of leaving customers hanging for a response, chatbots can instantly set customer expectations for when your team will reply.

03 Invest in hiring and retaining top talent

With automation resolving more queries, your team will handle increasingly complex and VIP queries that have a direct and often measurable impact on your company’s bottom line. The quality of the support you provide is only as good as the team you have. It’s no surprise then that two of the top three ways support leaders are meeting increasing customer expectations are “hiring talented support reps” (a priority for 36% of support leaders) and “providing better training for existing employees” (a key goal for 46% of support leaders). Of course, with the dawn of “The Great Resignation” it’s harder than ever to hire great talent, so it’s really worth investing in helping your existing team upskill and grow.

Trend 02

Support team
agility is no longer
optional

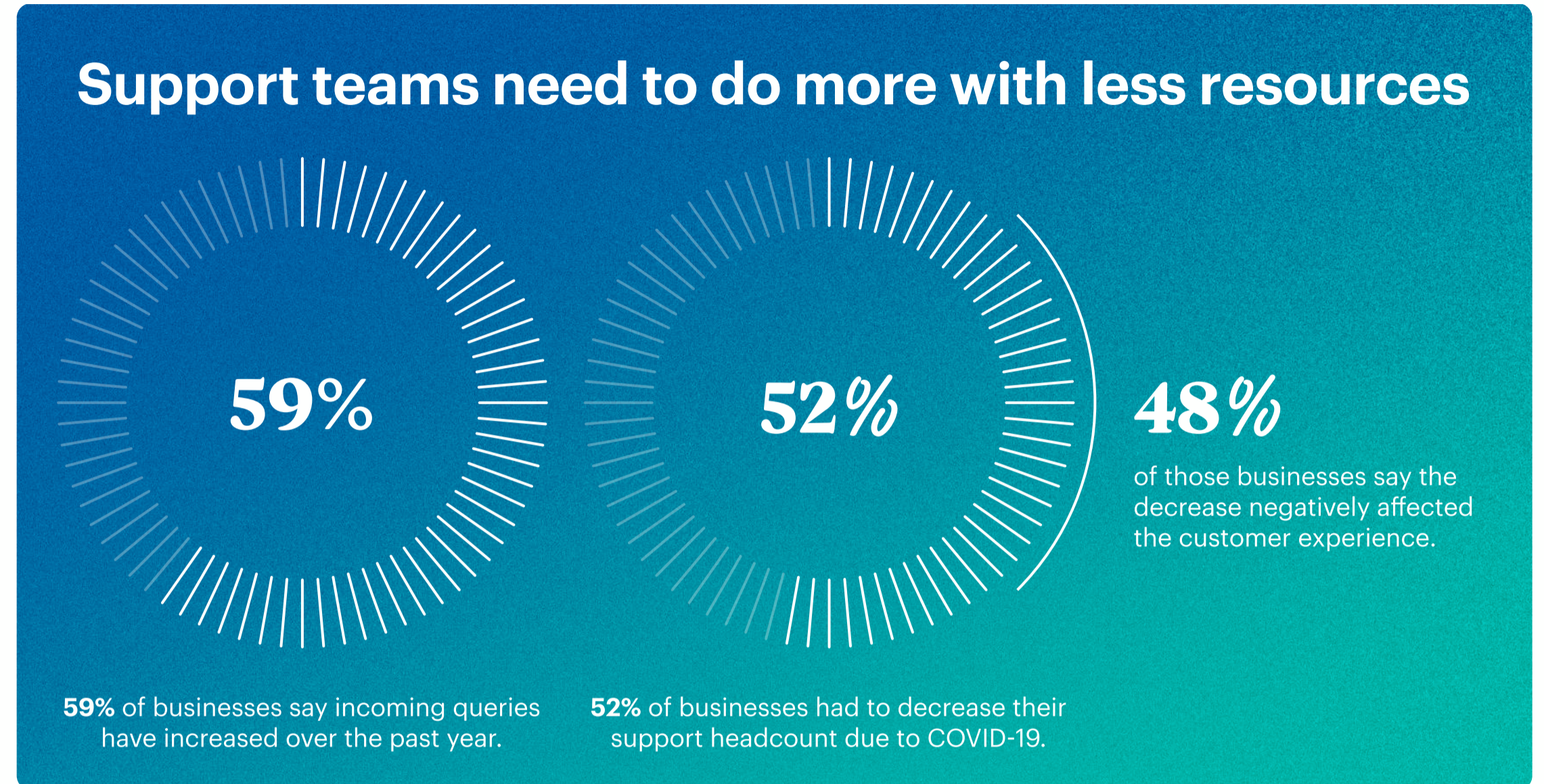
Trend 02

Support team agility is no longer optional

If there's one word that has become synonymous with the last year, it's "change." Today, adaptation is the new normal for support teams. Propelled by the global pandemic, many support teams have been faced with a tricky dilemma: how can they achieve *more with less* resources?

Customers have more questions than ever, driven in large part by a greater number of businesses moving online and global supply chain issues. A sizable 59% of organizations say their incoming support volume has increased over the past 12 months.

Meanwhile, support teams are under more pressure than ever before, facing down the challenges of working from home during the pandemic (which has negatively impacted the performance of 52% of customer support teams), budget cuts, and reduced headcount (52% of organizations had to decrease their customer support headcount due to COVID-19) to name just a few converging factors.



It's not just support teams who are suffering. Support teams being forced to do more with less and adapt to new ways of working has meant customers aren't getting the support they want and need. The survey reveals that the top two ways that support reductions negatively impacted the customer experience were longer wait times (reported by 56% of support leaders) and lower customer satisfaction rates (reported by 41% of support leaders).

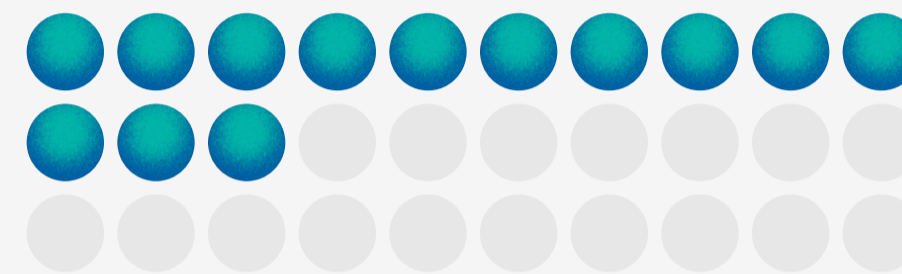
To keep customers happy and help support teams adapt to change, it's more important than ever for support teams to stay agile. That means they need to have the right technology (like automation), processes (like efficient workflows), and people in place. Otherwise they'll risk burning out their teams and losing valued customers. It's the businesses who embrace change and pivot their customer support strategy to meet the "new normal" head-on who will not just survive, but thrive.

3 simple steps to make your support team more agile

01 Increase workflow efficiency

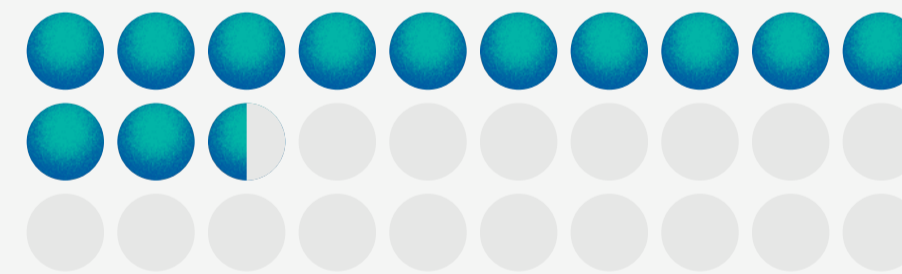
Agility requires strong foundations. One of the best ways to provide strong foundations for your team is to set up seamless workflows. The survey reveals that increasing workflow efficiency is a top priority for many support teams (43%) for the year ahead. It's also the number one way support teams who are meeting customer expectations are doing so. Setting up seamless, automated workflows can help supercharge your team's capabilities so they can support your customers more personally and efficiently no matter how much your conversation volume grows.

Top priorities for customer support teams in 2022



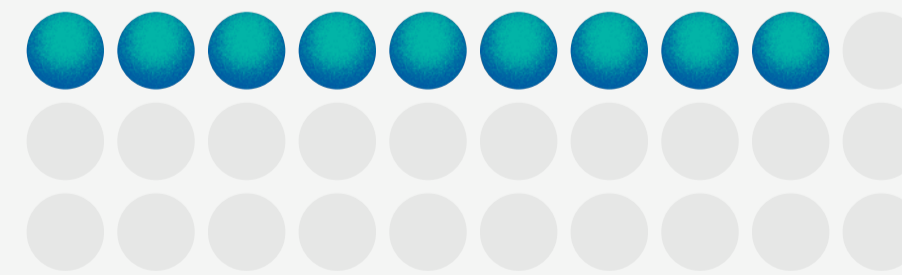
43%

Increasing workflow efficiency



42%

Proactively answering customers' questions with FAQs



30%

Attracting and retaining quality staff

02 Get a virtual hand from automation

With resources getting reduced for a lot of support teams, now is the time to master the art of doing more with less. No wonder “proactively answering customers’ questions with FAQs” is a top priority for 42% of support teams in 2022. We recommend leaning on modern technology – like chatbots, automation, and proactive messaging – to preemptively and contextually resolve simple, repetitive queries and route issues to the right people and teams. This empowers your support team to scale their efforts and provide personal support to thousands, maybe even millions, of customers.

“I think chat should just be there for those more complex queries. If there’s something a customer can do really easily, why not utilize the bot, why not utilize the help center?”



Gill Fisher

Former Head of Customer Experience & Delivery at **SMARTY**

“Our team cares so much about helping our customers and hitting their KPIs. Sometimes you can see it getting on top of them to the point where it feels like it’s the only thing in the world that matters. But their mental health is more important. Encourage them to take a beat and put things in perspective.”



Ruth O'Brien

Senior Manager of Customer Support at **Intercom**

03 Provide the right training and support for your team

As support teams experience so many simultaneous changes and need to adapt to new technology, they need support too. Providing training to help them learn new tools is critical. In fact, 46% of support leaders say that better training will help support reps meet customer expectations. But don’t forget to set up the right emotional support systems too – mental health has taken a huge hit during the pandemic, and COVID-19-related working from home, when it can be harder for support reps to step away from their screens and recuperate after difficult interactions. Supporting your support team is key to keeping them happy and helping boost their resiliency in the face of change.

Trend 03

The need for a connected tech stack escalates

Trend 03

The need for a connected tech stack escalates

As technology evolves, more and more tools and categories are getting added to the support landscape. Today, many support teams are attempting to maintain legacy tools alongside adopting new technologies. This results in disconnected tech stacks and juggling too many siloed tools, eating into support teams' time, causing disjointed data, and increasing wait times for customers.

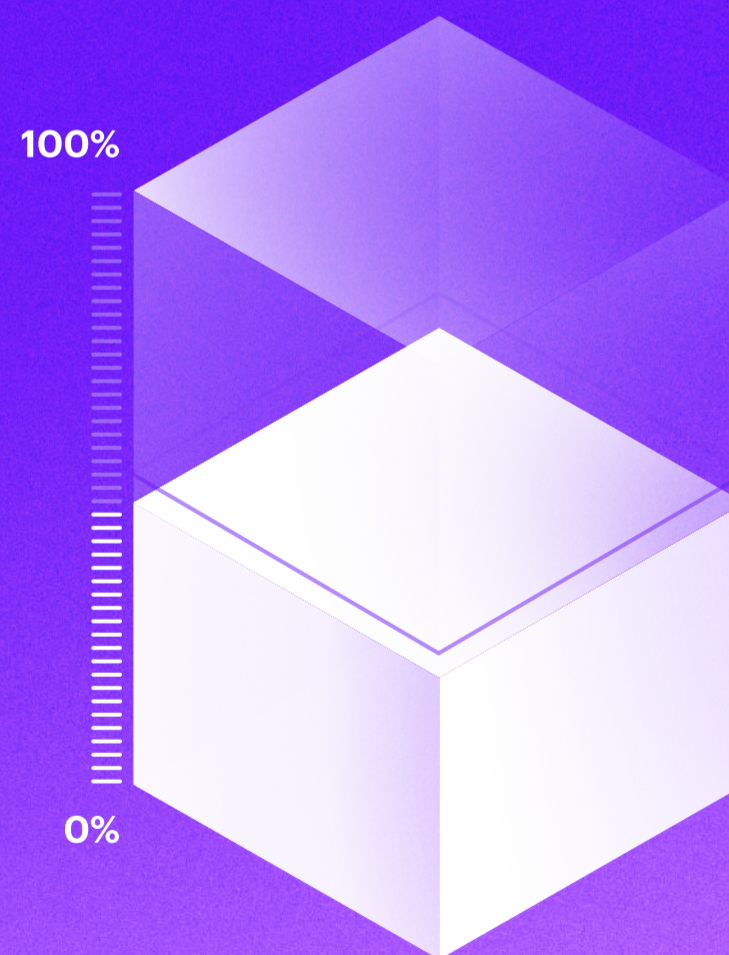
The survey found that almost half of all customer support employees are personally slowed down at least weekly because their customer support tools aren't integrated with each other. It's a recipe for team burnout, customer dissatisfaction, and ultimately, churn.

In 2022, forward-thinking support teams are planning to regain control by connecting the tools they regularly use. Consolidation is a big priority for many, with over half of customer support teams planning to consolidate their customer support tech stack over the next 12 months.

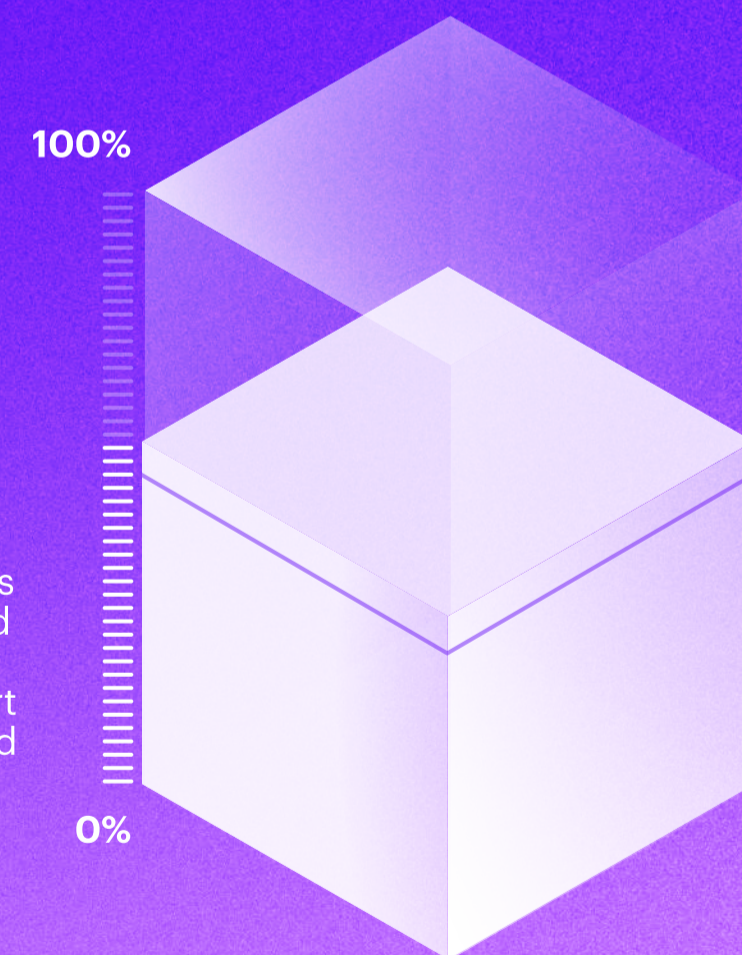
Of course, connecting your tools isn't just about the time your team can save. It's also about having all of the data you need at your fingertips to more personally and efficiently support your customers. The best support teams don't just use support tools in isolation. They work with customer-facing teams like sales, marketing, and product to engage, support, and delight customers.

Connecting all of your customer communications tools under one roof empowers your team to work with key cross-functional teams and have all of the contextual data you need to more efficiently and personally support your customers. Creating a consolidated tech stack will help set the stage for your business to build long-lasting customer relationships in 2022 and beyond.

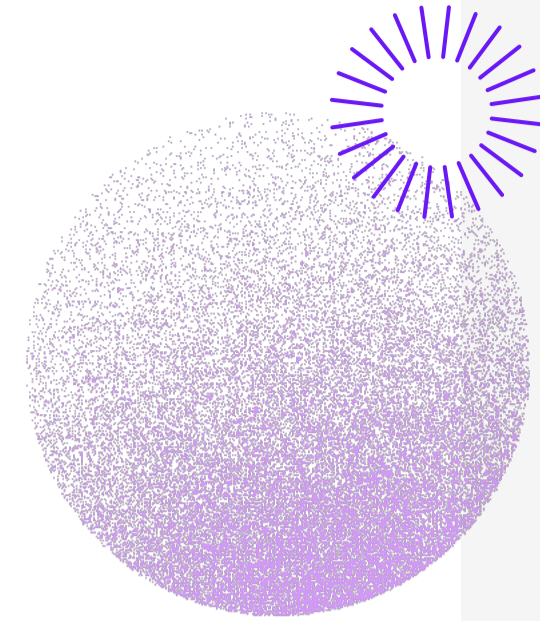
Disconnected tech stacks are no longer good enough



— **47%**
of support employees are personally slowed down at least weekly because their support tools aren't integrated with each other.



— **54%**
of support teams plan to consolidate their support tech stack over the next year.



3 simple steps to create a powerful, connected tech stack

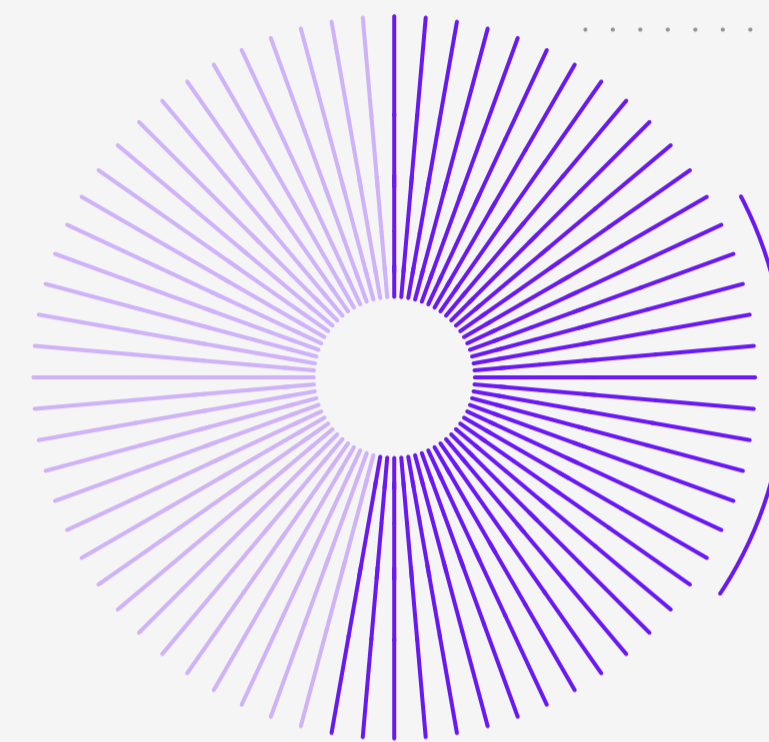
01 Consolidate your tech stack with an all-in-one platform

Switching between siloed tools slows teams down and takes up significant chunks of their time. That's bad news for the 56% of support teams who are using more than five different support tools and for the 17% who are using more than 10 different tools. It's no wonder that "consolidating tools" was hailed as one of the top ways support teams can optimize their tech stacks for the year ahead. Adapting an all-in-one platform, such as a customer communications platform, can help consolidate all of your customer communications' technology under one roof, empowering your team to more personally and efficiently support your customers.

02 Choose flexible tools that grow with your team

As your business grows, your customers' and team's needs will inevitably evolve too. No matter how great your customer support software is, it's unlikely that one tool can help your team achieve everything they need both now and in the future. When searching for a suitable platform, flexibility – like the ability to integrate with new essential tools and build on top of a solid API – is key.

Support teams are juggling too many tools



56% of teams are using
5+ tools

17% of teams are using
10+ tools

"Our sales, support, and e-commerce teams are now on a single platform, greatly improving our overall customer experience and team efficiency."



Pete Franco

VP of E-commerce at Living Spaces

“You should try to keep things as simple as possible and not have your support team logging into 15 different platforms every day and feeling overwhelmed.”



Chris Jewett

Customer Success Manager at Klaus



03 Enhance your capabilities with connected integrations

Our survey reveals that 75% of customer support leaders say the integration of the tech they use is important. Choose interconnectable tools that will plug in and play nicely with other tools in your business’s tech stack, like your CRM, social media channels, and issue management tools. Rather than adding another siloed tool to your tech stack, integrate the tool with your core platform instead. This will help your support team streamline tasks and save time jumping between tools. And you’ll have all of the data you need to better support your customers.

Trend 04

Support leaders fight against team burnout and attrition

Trend 04

Support leaders fight against team burnout and attrition

Customer support has always been a demanding job. But ever since the onset of the global pandemic, dealing with stressed-out customers and staff shortages has made the role more challenging than ever.

A whopping 64% of customer support leaders say members of their teams have felt burned out in the past 12 months. It's not just support reps who are feeling overwhelmed – 55% of support leaders have personally felt burned out in the past year too.

Support teams are trying to manage ever-rising inbound queries – many of them emotionally charged complaints (36% of agents reported dealing with more difficult queries in [Calabrio's recent report](#)) – all with less resources and a lack of relevant tools. Is it any wonder that support team burnout and attrition are increasing at a rapid rate?

Widespread burnout coupled with the dawn of the “Great Resignation” are fueling increased attrition rates across the customer support industry.

64% of customer support leaders say members of their teams have felt “burned out” in the past 12 months.

73% of support leaders believe that technology, such as automated support tools, will help improve employee attrition on their team in 2022.

The red-hot job market puts customer support employees firmly in the driver's seat and talented employees are choosing to leave their jobs in droves. Our recent [Holiday Shopping Experience Report](#) found that 52% of support leaders are considering leaving their jobs.

It's more important – and harder – than ever to keep valued customer support employees happy. As the customer support role evolves – moving from being seen as a “cost center” to a strategic value driver for

businesses – retaining talented employees has never been more business-critical.

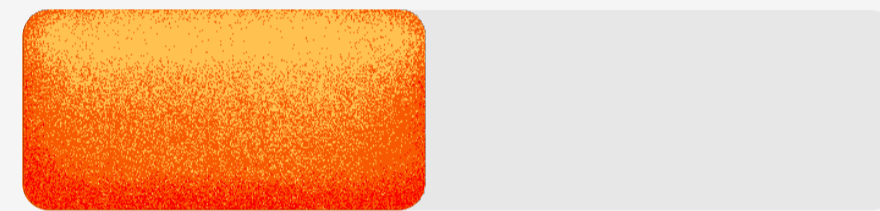
Luckily, there's light at the end of a tiring tunnel: 73% of customer support leaders believe that technology, such as automated support tools, will help improve employee engagement and attrition rates on their support team in 2022. World-class customer support starts with a great team – one that's well rested, happy, and deeply engaged.

3 simple steps to start fighting against team burnout and attrition

01 Provide support systems that promote employee wellbeing

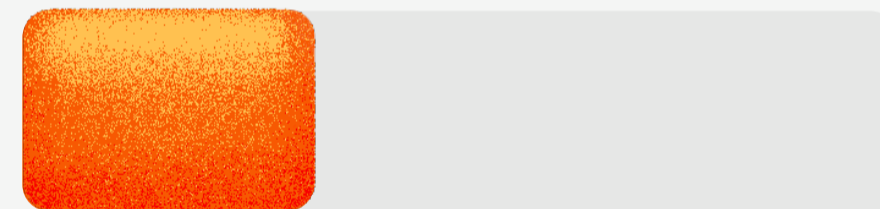
“Focusing on providing or improving employee wellbeing programs” is the number one way organizations are supporting employees and trying to retain them for the year ahead, with 46% of support leaders highlighting it as a top priority. With so many support leaders and reps on the brink of burnout, it’s never been more important to help support teams protect their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Providing structured support systems like employee wellness programs will help equip your team with the resources they need to manage their stress and boost their physical and emotional wellbeing.

Top ways businesses are trying to retain customer support employees in 2022



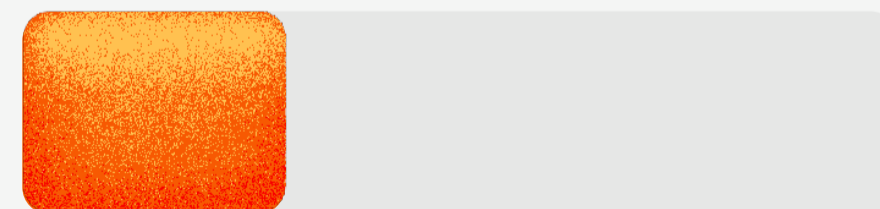
46%

Focusing on an employee wellbeing program



33%

Increasing salaries or benefits



30%

Leveraging technology

“We have over 20,000 help center visits and 36,000 article views every month. Our customers are really focused on trying to find the answer to their question first, or at least explore a solution before trying to reach out to our team.”



Brett Rush

Director of Customer Experience at **Frame.io**

02 Invest in boosting salaries and helping employees progress

“Increasing employee salaries and benefits” is a key focus area for 33% of support leaders when it comes to supporting employees and improving attrition rates in 2022. Modern technology, like automation, saves your team time, which you can then invest back into their career development and salaries. For example, at Intercom, we allocate 10% of each week for team upskilling, where our Support team can attend a technical development or leadership program, or any of our internal training sessions. All of this results in a more satisfied, growth-orientated team. As ambitious teammates get promoted, you can also invest the money you save with technology back into boosting your employees’ salaries and benefits.

03 Leverage technology to reduce pressure in support roles

“Leveraging technology” is also top of mind for support leaders when it comes to supporting and retaining customer support employees, with 30% highlighting it as a top priority. We recommend investing in modern tools – like proactive messaging and chatbots – to help stem the tide of inbound queries while keeping customers happy. With proactive and self-serve support absorbing simple, repetitive questions, your team is free to focus their time and headspace on what they love – solving the most complex problems that have the biggest impact on your company’s bottom line.

Trend 05

Customer empathy
is more important
than ever

Trend 05

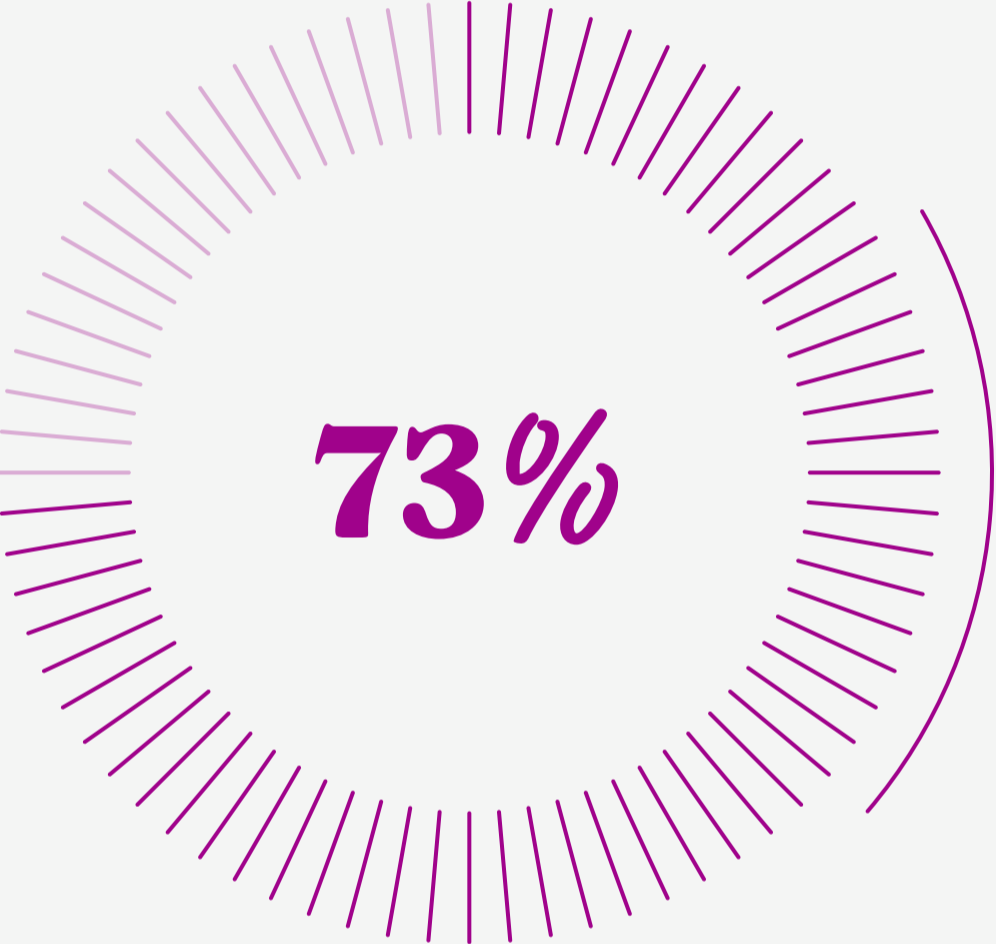
Customer empathy is more important than ever

Of course, empathy has always been a critical skill for providing great customer support. This year, when everyone is facing so much uncharted territory and residual anxiety from the pandemic, customer empathy has become more critical than ever. In fact, 73% of support teams say that empathizing with customers is a top priority.

But here's the thing: it's no longer enough to provide one-on-one empathy. Now that more and more businesses are moving online, support teams need the right tools and strategy to provide one-on-one empathy at scale to thousands – if not millions – of customers. And yet, 21% of teams don't have the tools to enable that kind of empathy.

In today's digital world, empathy has everything to do with understanding your customers' context and creating experiences that accurately anticipate and address their needs in personal ways. It's about empowering customers to answer their queries with speed, ease, and accuracy, at their own convenience.

Empathy in the digital age requires modern tools



73% of support teams say that empathizing with customers is a top priority.

21%

of those teams say they don't have the tools to enable that type of empathy.

The scale at which businesses need to provide empathy has accelerated. Busy, burned-out support teams can't afford to go it alone anymore. They need a virtual hand from chatbots and automation to provide fast, personal, contextual support at scale.

Ultimately, it's the teams who embrace modern technology to truly listen and respond empathetically to customers' issues who will thrive and become the most successful brands in the new digital support era.

3 simple steps for unleashing the power of modern empathy

01 Empathy means respecting your customers' time

Time is our most precious commodity, so empathy begins by respecting everyone's time. According to [Forrester's recent customer service trends report](#), 66% of consumers said that valuing their time is the most important thing a company can do to provide them with a good online customer experience. Setting up personal automation means you're valuing your customers' time by getting them an answer as fast and as accurately as possible. This is where chatbots excel at being personal. They resolve simple, frequent queries like "How do I change my credit card details?" and "What are your US shipping times?" accurately and often instantly.

"Setting up personal automation means you're respecting your customers' time by getting them an answer as fast and as accurately as possible. That's true empathy."



Franka Martinovic

Senior Manager of Customer Support at **Intercom**

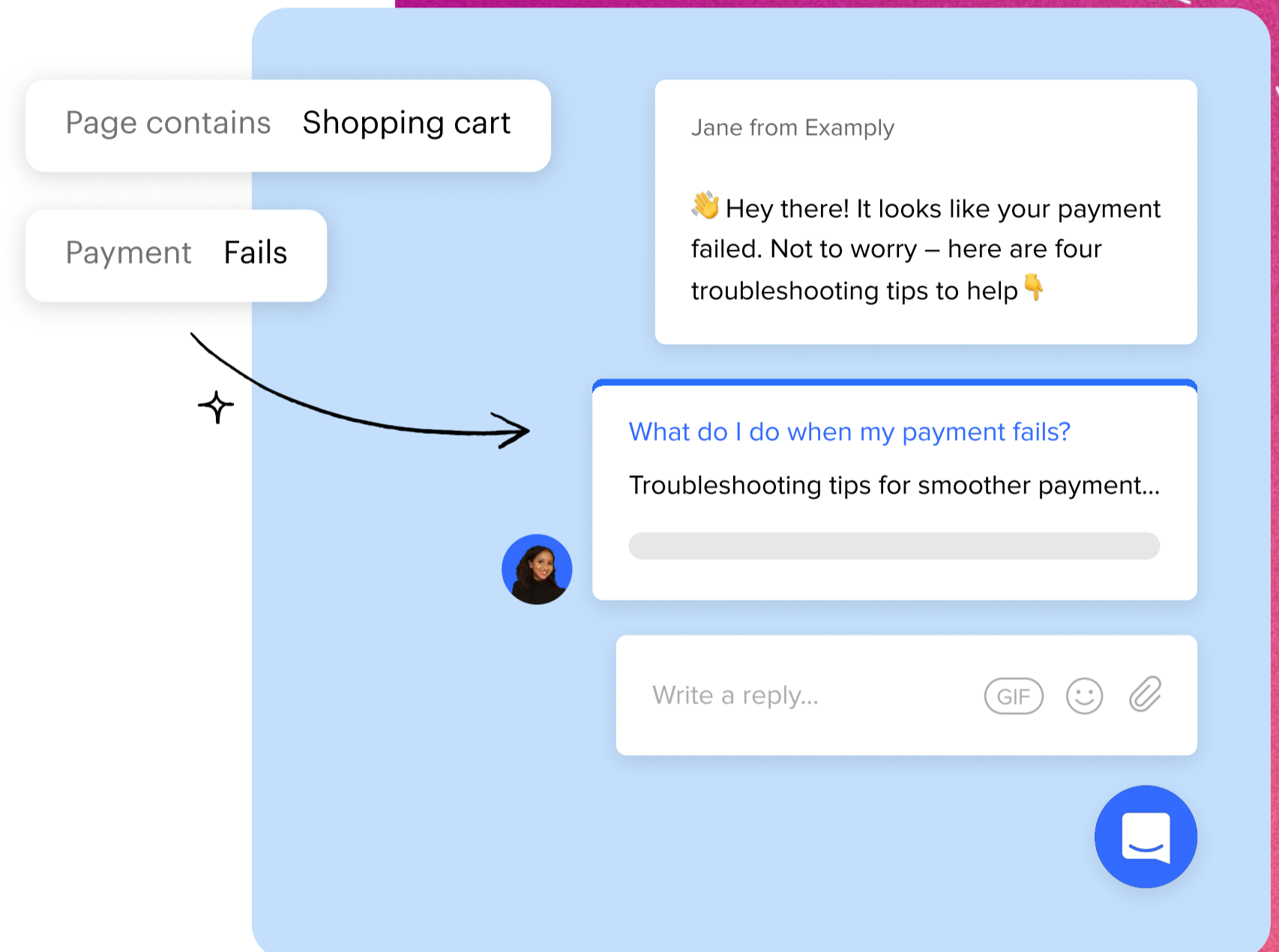


02 Contextual support is empathetic support

We all have a deep need to feel understood and known. Today, one of the most empathetic, personal things you can do is gather contextual data about your customers and serve up relevant answers and contextual help content based on their needs. You can even take contextual support one step further and send proactive messages to customers while they're using your product, guiding them to take specific actions based on who they are and what they need most. For example, if a customer is trying to purchase an item on your e-commerce store, but their payment fails, you can trigger an automated message to pop up at that exact moment, providing helpful troubleshooting tips. Sending these kinds of proactive, contextual messages helps prevent issues from occurring for customers in the first place.

03 Empathy starts with your team

Create a culture of empathy within your team. Hold empathy up as a core value and this will translate to the empathy shown to your customers too. In this digital-first era, it's also essential to be empathetic to your team's fears – for example, remind them that technology is only meant to complement their work, enhance their capabilities, and free them up to focus on the meaningful work they love – the kind that will help them advance their careers.



Future-proof your team's success:






The checklist

The message is clear: now is the time to adapt and future-proof your customer support tools, strategy, and processes to meet and exceed the needs of modern customers, and help your team flourish for the year ahead and beyond.

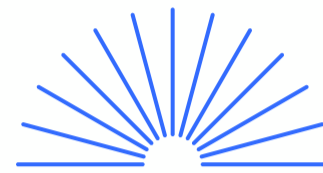
This year's report reveals that the customer support landscape has changed irreversibly. While some pressures will likely settle down in time, others – like the need to provide empathy at scale and consolidate your tech stack – will be permanently embedded in the ways we support customers and work together online.

Ultimately, it's the businesses who embrace change and update their tools, strategy, and mindset who will attract, engage, and retain customers for years to come. Keen to start setting your team up for future success?

This five-step checklist will help.

-  Leverage technology like automated workflows to supercharge your team's efficiency.
-  Lean on targeted chatbots to resolve simple, repetitive queries at scale, freeing your team up for more high-priority, complex issues.
-  Set up automated technology to gather contextual data so you can personalize all of your communications with customers – from live chat conversations to proactive messages.
-  Support and invest in your team, including providing training, clear career development paths, and employee wellness programs.
-  Consolidate your tech stack and embrace an all-in-one platform, like a customer communications platform, as your ultimate customer retention tool.

Get ahead of the curve with Intercom's Customer Communications Platform.



Intercom is a powerful, all-in-one Customer Communications Platform, helping businesses build better customer relationships through personalized, messenger-based experiences.

A mockup of the Intercom chat widget interface. It features a blue header with the Intercom logo and the text 'Welcome! How can we help?'. Below this is a white box titled 'Let's have a conversation' containing three profile pictures, the text 'Our usual time to reply A few minutes', and a blue button that says 'Send us a message'. Underneath is another white box titled 'Find an answer quickly' with a search bar containing the text 'Search our Help Center' and a blue arrow button. At the bottom is a white box for a blog post titled 'Blog post - Learn how to increase sales with live chat' with a thumbnail image and the text 'How to use Examply when engaging'. A white circular close button with a blue 'X' is located at the bottom right of the widget. The entire widget is set against a blue background with abstract geometric shapes.

Get started

Interested in trying Intercom to deliver the fastest, most empathetic support in the business? Go ahead and [chat with us through the Intercom Messenger](#) and we'll provide you with tailored help ASAP – in our signature personal style. 😊

