CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE & CALL CENTER

PERFORMANCE IN 2020

How the pandemic changed customer interactions in ecommerce, Healthcare, Education, Insurance & Real Estate



Ozonetel

INTRODUCTION

This extensive study across 150 million conversations reveal critical data on the state of customer experience in 2020. It captures important learning on how the pandemic affected customer experience and contact center performance in ecommerce, healthcare, education & insurance. It helps you unpack critical customer insights including:

- How impatient are your customers?
- How the pandemic change customer interactions?
- How likely are they to answer calls from your customer service or sales teams?

But, most importantly, it tries to uncover what is the state of CX as businesses emerge from the tumultuous year that 2020 was. Let's plunge into the insights & learning to help plan a stronger, more resilient CX strategies in the years to come.



CALL VOLUMES ACROSS 2020

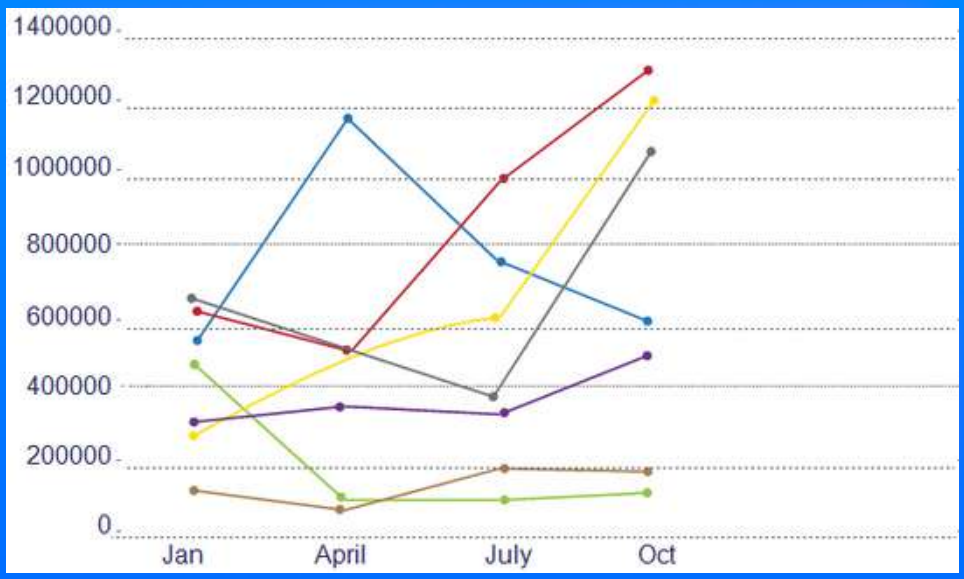
Like most things in 2020, call volumes too followed an unexpected pattern. This study captures how call volumes fluctuated in various verticals this year.

It tries to understand the following:

Were people calling up customer support more within any of these sectors, during the lockdown? How were sales calls affected, especially in sectors such as finance and banking and insurance? How was customer experience affected? How did interactions differ?

Here is what we found.

Call Volume Fluctuations in 2020



- Ecommerce
- Education & Edtech
- Insurance
- Food & Delivery
- Finance & Banking
- Real Estate
- Healthcare & Pharma

*numbers in some verticals have been scaled down for representational purposes.

eCOMMERCE

Like most things in 2020, call volumes too followed an unexpected pattern. This study captures how call volumes fluctuated in various verticals this year.

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Here is what we found.

Results Inbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Average Time In Queue	3 Sec	77 Sec	3 Sec	29 Sec
Average Speed Of Answer	1 Sec	76 Sec	2 Sec	8 Sec
Abandon Rate	2%	54%	1%	4%
Average Agent Talk Times	186 Sec	239 Sec	186 Sec	211 Sec
Average Hold Times	23 Sec	42 Sec	45 Sec	28 Sec
Average Wrap Times	17 Sec	28 Sec	22 Sec	31 Sec

Results Outbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Maximum Outbound Calls Dialled	131	146	155	137
Average Pickup Rates (Outbound)	89%	50%	50%	28%

How Did Customer Experience Change?

How long did callers wait? How impatient were they?

Lockdowns put an unexpected strain on eCommerce. While pre pandemic, callers were barely waiting few seconds before they were attended, during the pandemic, they were waiting more than a minute on an average. This naturally led to higher abandonment rates. This meant callers continued to be more or less as impatient as before and were hanging up instead of waiting for an agent.

Post Pandemic, volumes reduced but remained about 10% higher than pre pandemic times. Abandon Rates and Queue Times are also higher than pre pandemic levels. This means business has marginally improved in the year, but customer experience has suffered.

CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns

- 2X higher Call Volumes
- 26X Higher Queue Times
- 23X Higher Abandon Rates

Post Pandemic

- 10% Higher Call Volumes
- 9.5X Higher Queue Times
- 2X Higher Abandon Rates than pre-pandemic times



How did the customer interactions change?

Interestingly, Average Talk Times increased post-COVID. While soon after the lockdowns in April, average talk times increased by 28%. By the end of the year, the talk times had decreased but were still 13% higher than their Pre pandemic levels. This means customers are requiring longer conversations than before. During lockdowns, not only were customers waiting to be connected to an agent.

When connected, if put on hold, these hold times too were twice as long as pre pandemic. This may have been due to inaccessibility to the CRM data, or not sharing the same floor space as colleagues and supervisors and having to place calls on separate lines to connect with them for clearing doubts. However, in the last quarter of the year, possibly as agents returned to work from the office or set up more streamlined work from home systems, hold times reduced considerably, though they remain marginally higher than pre pandemic times.

CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns



- 28% higher Talk Times
- 2X higher Hold Times

Post Pandemic



- 13% higher Talk Times
- 22% higher Hold Times

What Was The Impact On Outbound Calls?

In the ecommerce sectors, outbound calls remained consistent through the year. However, customers were almost three times less likely to answer the call from their ecommerce vendors.

What Was The Impact On Agent Efficiency?

In the ecommerce sectors, agent efficiency took a hit. Even by the end of the year, wrap times were almost double their pre pandemic levels. This could be affecting agent availability and have an adverse impact on CX metrics such as average queue times.

To resolve the issue, businesses may need to relook at agent training as well as disposition codes. On other metrics, talk times have increased marginally, but if this is associated with high csat, this could be a good thing rather than an indicator of poor agent efficiency. Hold times too returned to pre pandemic levels showing that agent training and CRM integrations are working fine in this area.

Food Delivery

Results Inbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Average Time In Queue	11 Sec	28 Sec	29 Sec	24 Sec
Average Speed Of Answer	11 Sec	19 Sec	26 Sec	29 Sec
Abandon Rate	29%	22%	29%	33%
Average Agent Talk Times	277 Sec	247 Sec	259 Sec	299 Sec
Average Hold Times	41 Sec	8 Sec	4 Sec	18 Sec
Average Wrap Times	5 Sec	5 Sec	5 Sec	6 Sec

Results Outbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Maximum Outbound Calls Dialled	284	581	420	306
Average Pickup Rates (Outbound)	31%	21%	43%	38%

How Did Customer Experience Change?

How long did callers wait? How impatient were they?

As the pandemic hit in quarter 2, call volumes dropped by 80%. The call volumes increased marginally over the next three Quarters, however it is still 78% lower than its pre pandemic levels. Customer experience also took a hit. Queue times increased from 11 seconds to 28 seconds and remain higher than pre pandemic levels at 24 seconds.

Here customer behaviour has shown a change though. Though abandonment rates have increased, they have only increased marginally by 14% , showing that the few consumers who are ordering out are showing a little more patience than before.



CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns

- 80% Lower Call Volumes
- 2X Higher Queue Times
- 7% Lower Abandon rates

Post Pandemic

- 78% Lower Call Volumes
- 2X Higher Queue Times
- 4% Higher Abandon rates han pre-pandemic times

How did the customer interactions change?

Interestingly hold times was a customer experience metric that improved during the pandemic. When customers were put on hold, they waited nearly 56% less than pre pandemic levels. Pre pandemic the average hold times were 41 seconds, as compared to only 18 seconds post pandemic. This is one metric in which performance was better than even Ecommerce businesses. In Food Delivery, talk times did not vary much, Though initially, they decreased by 11%. Later they came back to nearly the pre pandemic levels. (marginally higher 8%). This means that on an average, customers and restaurants were having conversations of around the same length as before.

CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns

- 11% Lower Talk Times
- 56% Lower Hold Times

Post Pandemic

- Same Talk Times
- 2X Lower Hold Times
  than pre-pandemic times

What Was The Impact On Outbound Calls?

In the food delivery segment, outbound calls remained nearly the same with a marginal improvement in pickup rates from 31% pre pandemic to 38% post pandemic. This indicates that customers were slightly more receptive to calls from their food delivery services and restaurants.

What Was The Impact On Agent Efficiency?

While talk times and wrap times have remained consistent, hold times have decreased considerably. This is a positive trend indicating that agents can now access information that customers want faster than before.

Healthcare

Results Inbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Average Time In Queue	73 Sec	25 Sec	31 Sec	33 Sec
Average Speed Of Answer	88 Sec	48 Sec	43 Sec	28 Sec
Abandon Rate	52%	73%	67%	55%
Average Agent Talk Times	268 Sec	222 Sec	213 Sec	203 Sec
Average Hold Times	25 Sec	9 Sec	8 Sec	10 Sec
Average Wrap Times	26 Sec	30 Sec	32 Sec	39 Sec

Results Outbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Maximum Outbound Calls Dialled	416	512	747	745
Average Pickup Rates (Outbound)	82%	49%	49%	68%

How Did Customer Experience Change?

How long did callers wait? How impatient were they?

Call volumes dropped in quarter one, after the lockdowns were announced by 25%. However, these volumes sharply and steadily kept rising through the next two quarters to become 130% higher than the original call volumes.

Customer experience has consistently improved in this sector too. Queue times have decreased by nearly 69% throughout the next few quarters.

Customer behaviour has also changed though. Despite the reduced queue times, abandon rates have increased slightly indicating that customers are more impatient than ever before.

CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns



- 25% Lower Call Volumes
- 3X Lower Queue Times
- 21% Higher Abandon rates

Post Pandemic



- 130% Higher Call Volumes
- 69% Lower Queue Times
- 3% Higher Abandon rates
  than pre-pandemic times

How did the customer interactions change?

In healthcare, where call volumes were high, talk times dropped by 33% and remained 37% lower than pre pandemic levels even in the last quarter. It is likely that due to high call volumes, agents were under pressure to close calls faster. Customer satisfaction rates should be studied to understand

CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns



- 33% Lower Talk Times
- 17% Lower Hold Times

Post Pandemic



- 37% Lower Talk Times
- 2.5X Lower Hold Times
  than pre-pandemic times



What Was The Impact On Outbound Calls?

Healthcare & pharma companies were making 1.7 times more outbound calls than before. These calls could be verification calls, callbacks, or reminders to purchase medications. Average Pickup Rates reduced by 14%

What Was The Impact On Agent Efficiency?

Talk times and hold times have reduced, showing that agents were now far more efficiently handling the high call volumes. Agent wrap times have reduced, showing that after call work was adversely affecting agent availability.

Education & Edtech

Results Inbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Average Time In Queue	45 Sec	37 Sec	24 Sec	65 Sec
Average Speed Of Answer	17 Sec	19 Sec	25 Sec	26 Sec
Abandon Rate	48%	69%	73%	63%
Average Agent Talk Times	259 Sec	295 Sec	315 Sec	247 Sec
Average Hold Times	2 Sec	1 Sec	3 Sec	1 Sec
Average Wrap Times	94 Sec	121 Sec	151 Sec	139 Sec

Results Outbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Maximum Outbound Calls Dialled	2174	1725	1466	764
Average Pickup Rates (Outbound)	8%	13%	16%	31%

How Did Customer Experience Change?

How long did callers wait? How impatient were they?

Call volumes have steadily increased in this sector, with a sharp spike in the last quarter. Currently call volumes are 4.5 times higher than they were in the pre pandemic times. Customer experience has also declined in this sector. Queue times are 44% higher than pre pandemic levels.

Since abandon rates have not increased at the same rate as queue times, we can surmise that customers are showing slightly more patience than before. But with abandon rates more than 20% higher than previously at 63% we can surmise that over half the customers are dissatisfied with their ability to contact education and edtech businesses.

Since these are likely to be prospects calling, it is highly worthwhile for edtech and education businesses to think of increasing the number of agents needed to handle this increased load.

CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns



- 1.8X Higher Call Volumes
- 17% Lower Queue Times
- 20% Higher Abandon rates

Post Pandemic



- 4.5X Higher Call Volumes
- 44% Higher Queue Times
- 20% Higher Abandon rates than pre-pandemic times

How did the customer interactions change?

In education, initially talk times too kept increasing despite the increasing call volumes. In the third quarter, talk times were 22% more than they had been pre COVID However, when the sharp spike in volumes hit this industry, talk times too began to reduce. This is natural as call center agents must have been under pressure to wrap calls faster. As a metric on its own, talk times do not directly reveal customer experience. For instance, sometimes, low talk times are an indication that customers are receiving faster responses. But at other times, it may be that agents are unable to dedicate sufficient time to the customer or are coming across as rushed. In order to fully understand the customer experience, an automated Csat survey via an outbound IVR is recommended.

Education & edtech scored highly on one customer experience metric that is Hold times. Through the year, average hold times remained between 1-3 seconds. This meant that agents either had all information at hand so that they could quickly retrieve data customers needed or were efficiently transferring calls without making customers wait for more than a second.

CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns



- 13% Lower Talk Times
- 2X Lower Hold Times

Post Pandemic



- 4% Lower Talk Times
- 2X Lower Hold Times than pre-pandemic times

What Was The Impact On Outbound Calls?

Outbound calling improved this year within the education sector. Although there was a drop in total outbound calls dialled, it is possible that the industry is getting better data, since pickup rates increased by 4 times o create a slight increase in absolute number of calls answered when agents made outbound calls. This is positive, especially since these calls indicate effective marketing campaigns.

CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns

- 16% Lower Calls Dialed
- 5% Higher Pickup Rates

Post Pandemic

- 2.8X Lower Calls Dialed
- 4X Higher Pickup Rates
  than pre-pandemic times

What Was The Impact On Agent Efficiency?

Agent efficiency in this sector is being impacted by wrap times. After Call Work for agents has increased from 94 seconds to 139 seconds. It is possible that this increased wrap time is the reason agents are unavailable for calls since there is a corresponding increase in agent pickup rates (speed of answer) and queue times. Call centers may need to revise their training, dispositions, or increase their number of agents to tackle this issue.

Insurance

Results Inbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Average Time In Queue	29 Sec	41 Sec	28 Sec	50 Sec
Average Speed Of Answer	19 Sec	19 Sec	22 Sec	32 Sec
Abandon Rate	35%	39%	37%	43%
Average Agent Talk Times	311 Sec	294 Sec	295 Sec	275 Sec
Average Hold Times	14 Sec	8 Sec	9 Sec	9 Sec
Average Wrap Times	64 Sec	61 Sec	71 Sec	72 Sec

Results Outbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Maximum Outbound Calls Dialled	571	734	394	542
Average Pickup Rates (Outbound)	34%	25%	40%	29%

How Did Customer Experience Change?

How long did callers wait? How impatient were they?

Call volumes decreased slightly after the pandemic, in the second and third quarter of the year but spiked sharply in the last quarter to end 66% higher than pre COVID. Customer experience needs to improve in this sector. Average Queue times are nearly double the pre pandemic time. Abandon rates are 22% higher than before showing that customers are unable to connect as fast as they wish. However, since abandon rates have not increased at the same rate as queue times, it could indicate that callers are showing more patience, or more critically wanting to reach insurance businesses than previously

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CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns



- 21% Lower Call Volumes
- 1.4X Higher Queue Times
- 4% Higher Abandon rates

Post Pandemic



- 66% Higher Call Volumes
- 1.6X Lower Queue Times
- 22% Higher Abandon rates
  than pre-pandemic times

How did the customer interactions change?

Talk times reduced marginally for this sector. On an average in the last quarter, agent -customer conversations were only 12% shorter than pre pandemic.

A customer experience metric that Insurance scored well in was hold times. These hold times were 1.7 x lower than pre pandemic times and are currently at a reasonable 9 seconds.

CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns



- 5% Lower Talk Times
- 1.7X Lower Hold Times

Post Pandemic



- 12% Lower Talk Times
- 1.7X Lower Hold Times
  than pre-pandemic times

What Was The Impact On Outbound Calls?

Number of outbound calls has remained consistent, however pickup rats have improved slightly, showing that customers are either more receptive to these calls, or that prospect data being dialled is better.

What Was The Impact On Agent Efficiency?

While hold times show an improvement in agent's ability to retrieve data. However, wrap times have increased by 12%. This means agents are spending approximately 12% more time on disposing calls than before. Since there has been an increase in speed of answer which is adversely affecting queue times, this issue needs to be handle with better systems, training or dispositions in place.



Real Estate

Results Inbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Average Time In Queue	54 Sec	24 Sec	32 Sec	44 Sec
Average Speed Of Answer	18 Sec	18 Sec	23 Sec	23 Sec
Abandon Rate	432%	43%	49%	41%
Average Agent Talk Times	174 Sec	158 Sec	146 Sec	153 Sec
Average Hold Times	3 Sec	2 Sec	2 Sec	4 Sec
Average Wrap Times	56 Sec	95 Sec	103 Sec	110 Sec

Results Outbound

	Pre-pandemic	During Lockdowns	Post Lockdown	New Normal?
Maximum Outbound Calls Dialled	381	281	358	265
Average Pickup Rates (Outbound)	29%	26%	28%	42%

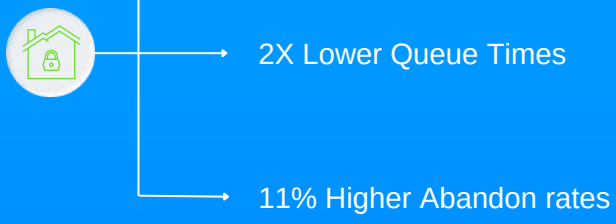
How Did Customer Experience Change?

How long did callers wait? How impatient were they?

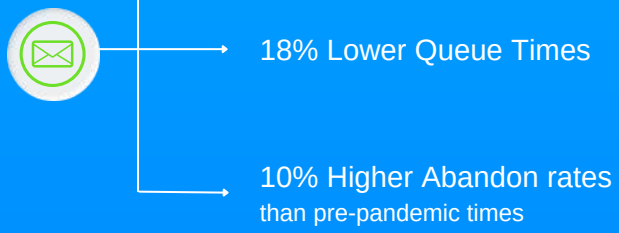
When the pandemic struck and the ensuing lockdowns were enforced, call volumes dropped by nearly half. However, in the next few months, call volumes also increased to 43% higher than their pre pandemic levels. Customer experience has improved slightly however in this sector. In spite of the increased volumes, there has been a marginal decrease in average queue times. Callers are waiting in call queues for around 18% less than before. Queue times are still far higher than in sectors such as eCommerce and healthcare.

CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns



Post Pandemic

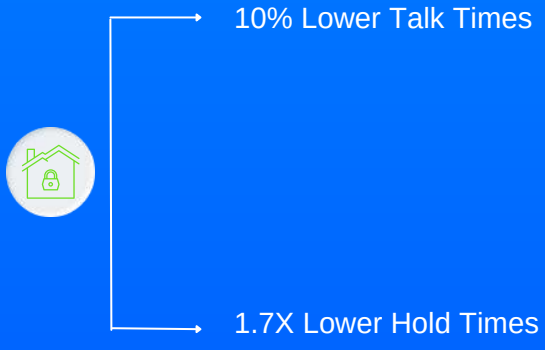


How did the customer interactions change?

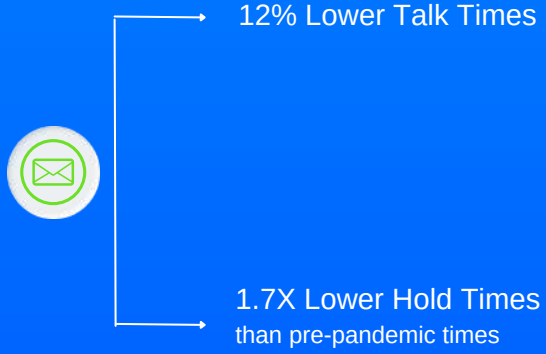
Talk times decreased marginally this year. By the end of the year agents were having conversations that were about 12% shorter than previously. These conversations were approximately 2.6 minutes long.

CX INSIGHTS

During Lockdowns



Post Pandemic



What Was The Impact On Outbound Calls?

Number of outbound calls has remained more or less consistent, however Pickup Rates have dropped considerably post pandemic. It is possible that prospects are busier and unable to answer these calls or are uninterested in these calls for other reasons. Either way to improve pickup rates, real estate needs to experiment with their time of calling, call from familiar phone numbers, or improve their data quality.

What Was The Impact On Agent Efficiency?

Hold times have increased marginally suggesting that agents were able to access information as fast as previously. However, Wrap Times have nearly doubled indicating that agents have nearly double the after call work as pre pandemic.



CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, here are some important facts we uncovered about how 2020 shaped CX

- Increased abandonment rates despite falling queue times indicate that customers are more impatient than ever before
- Increasing talk times indicate that they may require longer voice interactions than previously.
- The state of ACW and hold times shows that CX leaders must urge call center to revaluate these new interactions, and create training & processes to solve with these changes in mind
- Increased outbound calls show a trend toward proactive support and sales. New channels and strategies should be explored to effectively implement these outreach campaigns.

ABOUT US

Ozonetel offers omnichannel contact center solution to help fast growing, customer centric businesses build a better customer experience. We provide one of the worlds most adaptable, flexible, comprehensive contact center suites. But more importantly we pride ourselves on our helpful, personalised consultative approach to ensuring every client can build efficient systems, and a better customer experience.

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