Customer experience (CX) technology sets a new baseline but still struggles to satisfy many, finds NTT's latest CX research

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- *Percentage of organizations with board-level CX accountability more than doubles in 12 months*
- *38% of consumers say that CX systems improved during the pandemic – but 52% experience CX failures due to limited technology*
- *The share of CX workloads handled via automation is expected to rise from 32% now to 51% in twelve months' time*

London, UK, 23September 2021 – NTT Ltd. today releases the 2021 edition of the Global Customer Experience Benchmarking Report (GCXBR), its highly influential annual survey assessing the global state of play for CX. Now in its 24th year, the latest GCXBR arrives at an important juncture to help organizations calibrate their rapid adoption of CX technology, revealing a significant gap in perceptions between organizations and consumers.

This year, NTT interviewed 1,359 professionals across 34 global markets and 14 different sectors. For the first time, the research also included a voice of the customer (VoC) survey, supplementing evidence from professionals with opinion from a consumer panel of 1,402 respondents.

Resounding positive signs for CX

In the context of a disrupted CX environment, responsibility for CX has been elevated to a significantly more senior level and confidence in CX has followed suit:

- 75% of organizations now have ultimate accountability for CX held at the board level, up from 35% in 2020
- The rate of organizations with 'well advanced' or 'complete' CX strategies has more than doubled to 71%, up from 28% in 2020
- The rate of organizations reporting being 'very satisfied' with their CX has risen to 45%, up from 10% in 2020

Organizations now expect that the majority of CX will be automated in twelve months' time, with workloads handled by AI and robotics rising to 51% from 32% today, and over a fifth of interviewees reported that their use of AI or robotics is delivering beyond expectations.

Keeping track of consumer perception

The positive outlook from the industry was only partially echoed by the new VoC survey, however. Encouragingly, 87% are happy to continue using digital channels at the increased levels triggered by the pandemic, while 38% said that the quality of automated CX systems had improved over the course of the pandemic.

In other areas, the research found warning signs about the amount of progress yet to be made to fully meet consumer expectations:

- 52% of consumers report digital channels failing them due to limited capabilities or services
- 44% experience failures due to digital channels misunderstanding their queries
- Just 35% say they are 'very satisfied' with automated CX solutions

With forecasts for next year showing high rates of organizations expecting to have implemented voice-activated AI assistants (52%), robotic process automation (48%), web-based AI assistants (45%), and other new technologies, these developments hold a lot of potential for businesses to differentiate themselves by more effectively solving customers' challenges.

"The addition of VoC data this year has shone a spotlight on a really interesting situation," comments Rob Allman, Vice President, Customer Experience, NTT Ltd. "It's allowed us to spot a – potentially growing – disparity between how businesses assess their own performance and how consumers perceive CX. The fruition of new technology in the CX space is exciting, but the ultimate focus always needs to be on people."

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The need for the human touch

When asked about human-led support, 94% of CX decision-makers agreed that it remains critical – but less than half agreed that they have the technology in place to fully support remote CX employees. Meanwhile, 38% in the VoC panel stated that their biggest reason for avoiding digital channels is that they would rather speak to a human.

“Of course, technology has always augmented human capabilities”, concludes Allman. “This year, the key message of the GCXBR is to empower customers and employees through the use of data and AI-driven technology. People need to be at the center of any CX strategy, with technology in the service of superior customer and employee experiences that create value.”

Further details of the research, together with an in-depth analysis and recommendations for industry, can be found in the 2021 Global Customer Experience Benchmarking Report.

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