



The State of Messaging in the US

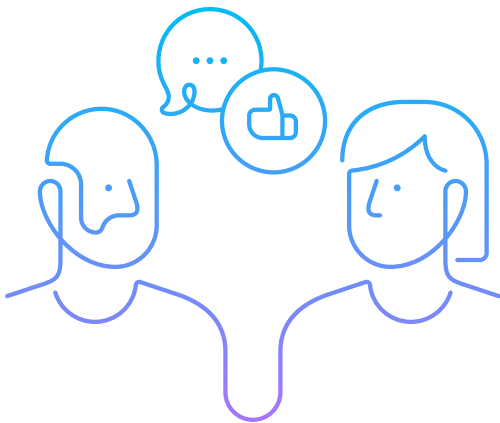
Reclaiming Connection

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It all starts with a conversation

Before cell phones, websites, and apps, customer service was centered around a simple conversation. Dialogue was the star of the show. With the right cues, a shop assistant, call-center agent, nurse, bank teller, or anyone dealing directly with customers would engage, picking up where they left off from past conversations (if any existed).



These conversations weren't a one-way street. The nurse would listen, the shop assistant would match products to the customer's needs, and the bank teller would adapt to their customer's responses. Everyone ensured the customer found exactly what they were seeking.

The demand for human connection is stronger than ever

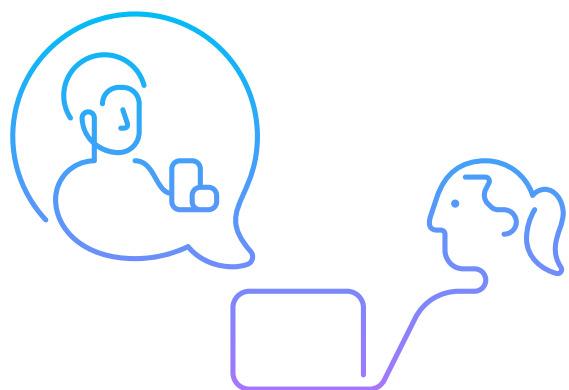
Conversations are woven into our humanity; we intuitively recognize the feeling of a good, mediocre, or terrible conversation. But in today's digitized world, 64% of US consumers feel brands have lost the art of human connection. While customer interactions often start on a digital platform these days, it's no surprise that human customers crave a human (or human-like) connection. Even with the advancements in AI, chatbots, and other digital technologies, 82% of US consumers still want the option of interacting with a real person if they need to.

Master the art of digital conversations

With 87% of the world's smartphone population sending messages, the art of conversation in the digital marketplace could make or break your customer experience. Exceptional digital experiences aren't a luxury; they're a necessity, as customers expect a seamless experience. Conversational customer engagement – the ability to continue conversations with customers within and across the digital channels they choose without starting from scratch – will fortify your customers' trust in your brand while giving them the control and choices they demand.

Humanizing the digital marketplace

In this report, we'll unveil customer insight from new research that sets the rules for connecting with customers in the digital marketplace. By striking a balance between human and humanized digital interactions, we'll guide you to automated digital customer experiences, powered by richer messaging channels all founded on trust, control, and choice. So you can connect with your customers when they need you most and deliver the human connection they're hungry for, while maintaining the ease that digital communication provides.



Bridging the gap between Brand and Customer

Picture this: 75% of US customers declare that customer experience is the steering wheel in their purchasing decisions. However, only half of them (49%) feel that brands deliver a worthwhile experience. Yet, in an ironic twist, brands aren't idle bystanders. Nearly 80% are working hard to enhance customer engagement within the next year.

The question remains: are these strategies hitting the bullseye? The glaring gap between expectation and experience suggests a long road ahead for brands.

Customers want messaging. But they want it done well.

We polled 1,500 customers across the US from different generations, seeking their views about how they think about and use messaging channels. The verdict was loud and clear: customers want to use digital messaging channels. However, if brands don't use them proficiently, if they don't respect and master the conventions of conversation, or if their customer experience doesn't connect and carry context across channels, it becomes a risky game. One that may alienate customers and erode their trust in your brand.

Retail Use Cases

We helped a retail pharmacy establish an active, opted-in database of nearly 1 million customers as part of its loyalty program. For a big-box retailer, we transformed their online order system by enabling curbside pickup services via SMS. Imagine what we could do for you: whether it's building a more comprehensive cross-channel view of your customers, adjusting to rapidly changing consumer behaviors, or promoting new products to achieve higher engagement rates.



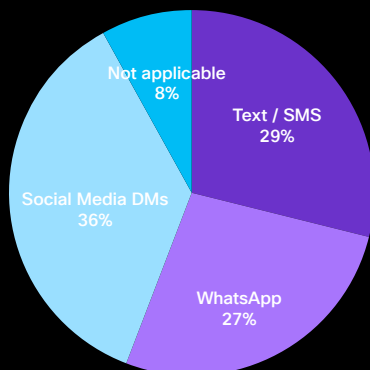
New Research – A Conversation with US Customers

A greenlight... with caveats

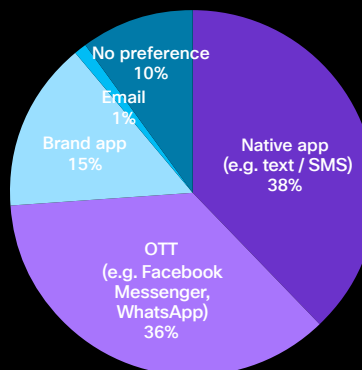
In today's bustling digital marketplace, customers are signalling a resounding 'go' for messaging. They're chatting away digitally in their daily lives: with loved ones, in social groups, and, significantly, with brands.

But this green light isn't an unrestricted pass. Customers have conditions and expectations – a digital conversation etiquette, if you will. The foundations and enthusiasm are there, but to make the most of messaging, customers have some caveats.

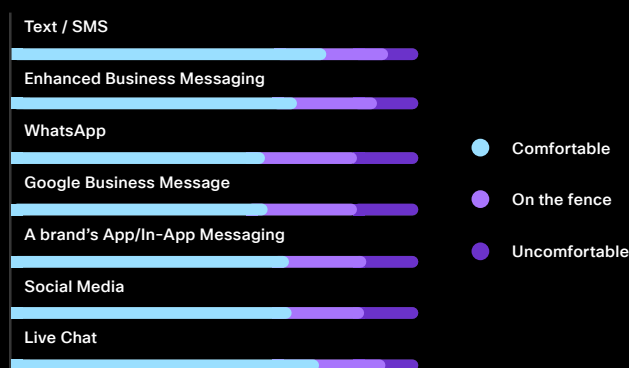
Channels customers use to communicate with friends and family



Customers preferred way to receive messages from brands

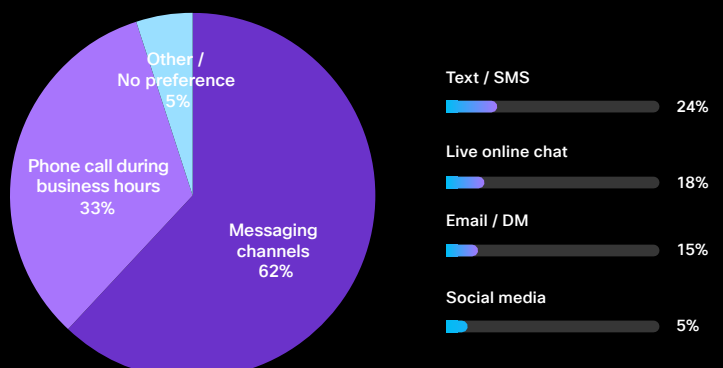


Comfort levels about using messaging channels to interact with businesses



* Google Business Messages has now been discontinued

Customers preferred way to get in touch with a business for help or info





Building Trust: More Than Just A Conversation

Of course, trust is fundamental to any relationship. Conversations, especially, are a central way to bridging that trust. When conversing with brands in the digital marketplace, customers are actively gauging trustworthiness. They're not just chatting; they're evaluating.

Here's what customers told us:

- For 54% of customers, the number one reason they dislike using messages to contact a brand is because they don't trust they're communicating with a real person.
- And yet, they're willing: 72% of customers would be happy to talk to a chatbot if it worked and they got an immediate response.
- An overwhelming 77% of customers wouldn't trust messages from unverified companies: 66% find a verification tick or checkmark in messaging channels most reassuring, closely followed by company branding (57%), and company name (54%).
- 76% of customers feel most reassured when brands have a consistent look and experience across different messaging channels. Only 6% of customers disagree with this.
- Given a choice, 47% of customers would prefer to call during business hours compared to 35% who would prefer to use 24/7 online messaging.

Brands need to connect the human and the digital

This slight, lingering presence of phone calls is likely driven by a perceived or real lack of human connection in some automated journeys. True omnichannel approaches know when to sound and act human through a digital persona that inspires trust through authentic interactions. And when to put real people at the other end of messages – or move customers to a different channel – when a customer needs to speak to someone in that moment, without starting the conversation from scratch. This dynamism prevents your customers from becoming locked or trapped in the journey. Simply put, it keeps your customers from feeling let down.

Brands need to go beyond human connection in the digital marketplace

Digital messaging is also about a sense of security, authenticity, and professionalism. And brands need to convey these through their digital messaging presence. Verification cues native to the digital marketplace can make a brand's digital messaging presence as professional and consistent as their website or shop front. The bottom line: to earn trust, your digital presence must be as professional, consistent, and engaging as your physical one.



Control: Fostering Trust

Trust and control are two sides of the same coin. Greater control leads to greater trust, and this trust can lead to more freely shared data*.

Here's what customers told us:

- 79% of customers feel like businesses are encroaching on their personal space with the amount of communications, alerts, and notifications they receive on their phones.
- More than half (53%) of all customers like using messages to contact brands because they can keep a record of the conversation.
- Notably, 1 out of every 5 customers (21%) who don't currently use messaging channels would be more open to it if they could control opt-outs, channel permissions, and access to the info exchanged over these messages.

Brands need to respect this need for control

It's about giving customers the 'driver's seat' when it comes to their data and interactions. If brands overstep this boundary by bombarding customers with notifications and messages, it can feel like a breach of trust, leading to customers withdrawing from the conversation. And potentially, the brand. Control leads to comfort, comfort fosters trust, and trust can lead to increased data sharing for a personalized customer experience that inspires greater loyalty. The first step to greater customer control is giving them a choice of channels.

* 88% of US consumers say their trust in a company directly corresponds to how much personal information they'd be willing to share with a brand.



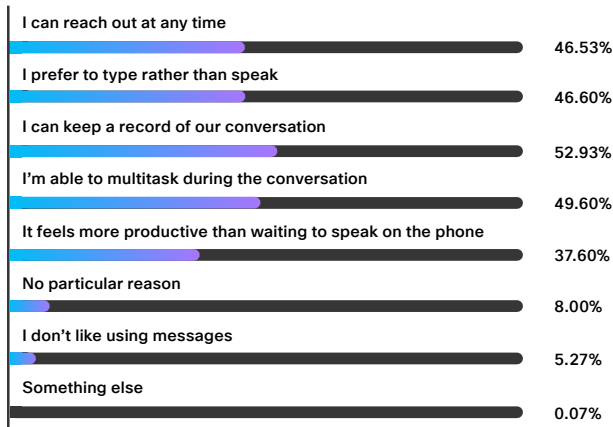
Choice: The Power of Multiple Channels

Different channels for different moments and different moods – customers want a choice of channels that adapt to their needs.

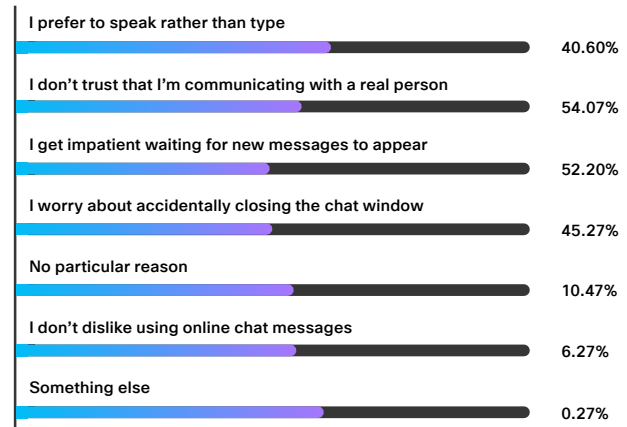
Here's what customers told us:

- 83% of customers prefer to have more than one way to contact a brand; only 4% disagree.
- 77% of customers were offered more than one digital messaging channel in their last interaction. Only half (50%) were offered 3 or more.
- More than half (56%) of customers always or often reply to messages from brands.
- 64% of customers are ok with receiving one-way communication from brands for functional messages like delivery notifications.
- 75% of customers would like to receive proactive communications, so they don't have to call later to clarify.

Why customers like using messages to contact brands



Why customers dislike using messages to contact brands



There's a difference between flexibility and compromise

The flexibility customers enjoy in messaging channels should be intentional – it shouldn't mask a flawed customer experience. Customers telling us they enjoy messaging because it allows them to multitask shouldn't mask slow responses from a brand. Nor should customers need to keep a record of their conversations because they're worried about accidental chat window closures, etc. Offering customers channels reinforced by asynchronous communication means they can interact with your brand on their terms, without the fear of losing all that shared history with your brand. That kind of flexibility and offering customers a choice of channels will inspire loyalty. Compromise will send them packing. In either scenario, customers will talk about your brand.

SMS remains a crowd-favorite in the messaging world. But it can't be a dead end

Maybe it's the nostalgia of the SMS from the pre-smartphone era, or its transition from a novelty to a familiar friend that transcends generations. Whatever the reason, your customers understand that not every interaction has to be an immersive affair. And SMS still has a place in their digital lives.

But an SMS that hits a brick wall undermines both the customer and the platform's potential. Consider a delivery notification: it can inform a customer when to expect their parcel, or it can empower them to decide whether they'll be around, with the flexibility to make changes to the delivery. Similarly, a credit card payment reminder is a helpful nudge. But what if it gave customers the chance to reschedule their payment when money's tight? That's SMS reinforcing the dynamism of digital conversations and living up to its potential. The humble SMS still pulsates at the heart of messaging, but it should never lead to a dead end.

Every interaction counts

Whether it's a straightforward information exchange or a deeper, conversational dialogue, customers understand the need for both. The magic lies in an omnichannel platform's ability to weave these threads together, offering customers the choices and flexibility they crave.

But omnichannel isn't just about connecting channels – it's about transforming experiences. It smooths the customer's journey by eliminating dead-ends in customer touchpoints for a more integrated and seamless interaction landscape.

The Double-Edged Sword of Digital Conversations

There are many moments of truth in any conversation – whether face-to-face, over social media, or a messaging app. And there are rules to follow. Just like the first impression a customer gets when they're greeted on the shop floor, customers use the frequency, style, tone, and human connection they experience in digital conversations to gauge whether they can trust your brand. But that doesn't mean customers expect a real person at the end of every conversation – they welcome the flexibility that comes with a choice of messaging channels. A humanized digital experience is omnichannel, masters the conventions of conversation, and is ready to connect a customer to a real human, the moment they need it.

However, customers also have expectations because the conversation is taking place in the digital marketplace. Sure, they've signed up for convenience and welcome a choice of messaging apps, but they also want to hold the reins.

The pervasiveness of digital messaging channels in our lives makes messaging an intuitive way to have meaningful conversations. An omnichannel messaging strategy can stitch these individual channels together into a seamless, trust-building, control-enhancing, and ultimately choice-empowering customer experience.

This chapter unravelled the intricacies of how customers perceive messaging in the digital world. Trust, control, and choice emerge as central themes. As we move forward, remember: customers have given a 'green light' for messaging. But they have conditions. To make the most of messaging, we need to respect these conditions and meet these needs.

Healthcare Use Cases

For several clients, we improved operational efficiency, cut costs, and boosted patient satisfaction by integrating one and two-way messaging with their preferred scheduling system(s). We also helped a healthcare provider automate appointment scheduling by integrating with their Electronic Health Record (EHR) system. Think about what this could mean for you: fewer no-shows, streamlined appointments, and enhanced patient communication could be just the beginning.



Beyond Channels – Crafting Seamless Experiences

The Evolution of Customer Engagement

The landscape of customer engagement has been overhauled. From the personal connection achieved in face-to-face encounters with customers, we've journeyed into an era of fast-paced, digital communications. Yet, one essential principle remains unchanged: meaningful relationships with customers are built when you meet them where they are.

Today's customers are constantly on the move, and sadly, they're often bombarded by overwhelming communications from brands vying for their attention. The result? Customers are funnelled into transactional, one-size-fits-all experiences. What about customers who discover your brand through organic search or word-of-mouth? Is that one-size-fits-all approach ready to say hello to these customers? The modern customer is smart. And quite frankly, they expect – and deserve – better.

While 59% of US customers would abandon a company or product after several bad experiences, 17% would do so after just one unpleasant encounter.

Personalized Communication: The New Gold Standard

Omnichannel messaging rises to the occasion by connecting customers to the right conversation, and the right type of human connection – digital or real – precisely when they need it. Each touchpoint builds on the last, creating a seamless journey where customers never have to repeat their story. As they switch channels or progress in their journey, the conversation continues uninterrupted.

Frictionless journeys are not just a win for the customers. Brands also gain a holistic view of the customer's history, context, and relevant data that enhances the personalization of the digital experience. That's the kind of experience that sparks greater loyalty.

The Power of the Right Platform

Being philosophically inclined towards providing superior customer experiences is commendable. But without the right omnichannel platform, making these experiences real remains a pipe dream. Omnichannel isn't a distant aspiration; it's your secret weapon for enhancing customer experience in today's digital marketplace. And it's already here.

Make every interaction count with Enterprise CPaaS

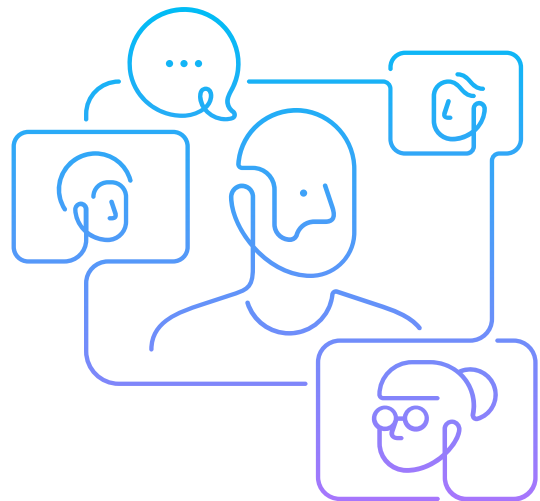
Many companies have embraced Communications Platform as a Service (CPaaS) solutions, allowing their IT teams and developers to integrate communications into their applications. Most CPaaS solutions allow developers to send and receive messages or calls via APIs. However, Enterprise CPaaS takes this up a notch.

Enterprise CPaaS is a cloud-based communication platform providing APIs, SDKs, and a low-code toolset that enables IT teams, developers, and even business users to build, test, optimize, and deploy end-to-end customer journeys across multiple channels – all from a central platform that provides security, scalability, compliance, and controls.

Webex Connect, our Enterprise CPaaS solution, delivers precisely this capability.

Every journey begins somewhere. And there's no 'one-size-fits-all'

Your digital messaging roadmap should be crafted just for you. It could start with auditing your current communication channels or rejuvenating your SMS strategies to eliminate frustrating dead-ends for your customers. Maybe you're focusing on streamlining and automating the more demanding aspects of your customer journey to funnel cost savings into new channel capabilities. Or you could be looking to roll out richer, more personalized messaging experiences. Enterprise CPaaS adapts to your needs and your customer's expectations, no matter where you stand in your digital messaging transformation. And it will enhance your customer experience from the get-go.



Webex Connect

– The Customer Imperative

A customer messages a brand privately on social media and hears crickets. They then call out the brand – publicly.

It's a healthy and very real reminder that we're living in the age of the empowered customer. Where more than 60% of customers are comfortable interacting with brands over social media, WhatsApp, SMS/text, Live Chat, or a brand's messaging app. The expectations for smooth, personalized, and real-time communication have never been higher.

Now, let's flip the script.

A customer using Google to search for a product gets presented with the option to converse with a digital agent to plan their order. This is followed by timely SMS updates on delivery. Having chosen WhatsApp as their preferred, future channel of communication, they use this for any troubleshooting relating to their purchase. This is all achieved while preserving context without any redundancy or information gaps. This isn't some far-off fantasy. It's the reality of Webex Connect.

Unifying Communication Channels for a Seamless Customer Experience

Picture your business, evolving and adapting to a rapidly changing digital landscape. How would a single platform that integrates multiple messaging channels, unlocks seamless interactions, and boosts customer experience transform your operations? Dream about the possibilities as we dive deeper into the benefits of Webex Connect.

Empower Data-Driven Decisions with Real-Time Analytics

Imagine having access to real-time analytics and comprehensive customer data that lets you make informed, data-driven decisions. Consider the big box retailer that, in response to changing consumer behaviors, transitioned from offering only in-store pickup to enabling curbside pickup services via SMS. By integrating Webex Connect with their order management system, they now track customer responses, behavior, and preferences in real-time; now they're making intentional, informed business decisions.

Guarantee Security and Compliance for Trustworthy Interactions

Think about the importance of secure and compliant customer interactions for your brand. Here's an example: A Tier-1 retail bank used Webex Connect to set up proactive, fraud prevention alerts. Customers could instantly respond, verifying or disputing transactions, ensuring their accounts were secure and reducing the bank's fraud investigation workload.

Streamline Operations with Seamless Integration

And what about the operational efficiency that seamless integration of various systems could bring to your brand? Here's a thought: A healthcare provider integrated Webex Connect with their preferred scheduling system, enabling one and two-way messaging for patient appointments. They experienced improved operational efficiency, fewer missed appointments – and a significant reduction in costs.

The Future is Digital

Brands can no longer rely on customers walking through the shop door or ringing their sales team to make that first impression. That happens in the digital marketplace now: 92% of customers prefer either a rich, interactive experience, a simpler text message one, or a combination of both. With the domination of digital interactions on the up and up, brands like yours must adapt or risk being left behind.



With Webex Connect, you're doing more than just adapting. You're innovating – you're rewriting the rules. Transform your customer interactions from disjointed multi-channel exchanges into a unified, personalized, and humanized omnichannel journey. All while boosting efficiency and productivity and cutting costs. You won't just be keeping up – you'll be leading the charge.

Just as the retail pharmacy increased customer loyalty or the bank improved efficiency, the time is ripe for your organization to embark on its own omnichannel journey. Are you ready to evolve every customer interaction into a moment of customer connection and opportunity? Let's do it together.

Financial Services Use Cases

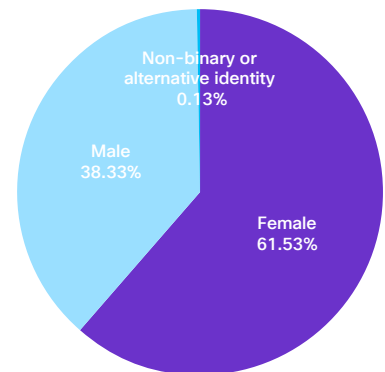
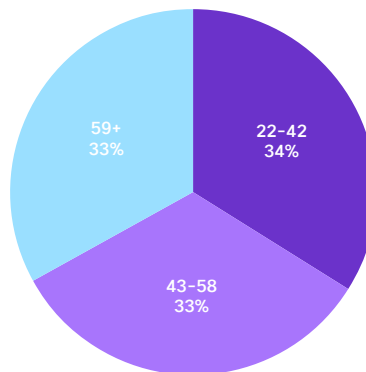
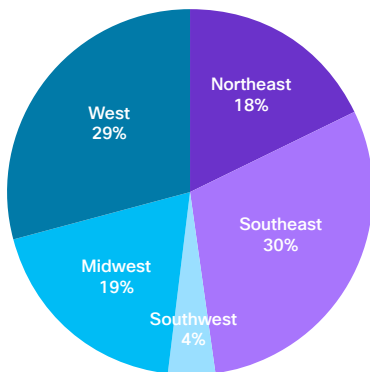
We've assisted a Tier 1 retail bank in reducing fraud investigations workload by setting up proactive, real-time fraud prevention alerts. For another client, we developed interactive workflows and paperless campaigns to improve customer experience and reduce costs. Picture the benefits for your organization: enhancing customer account security, streamlining insurance renewal processes, and improving receivables collection. All these and more could be within your reach with Webex Connect.



About the Research

Research statistics included in this report have been established from a primary research study commissioned by Webex in April 2023. It was an online study with 1,500 consumers across

the US, evenly balanced between three groups: Millennials/Gen Z born between 1981–2000, Gen X born between 1965–1980 and Silents/Baby Boomers born before 1965.



We asked 19 questions that fall into three broad buckets:

1. Frequency and types of contact with brands.

Example: Q1: When, if ever, was the last time you contacted a business about something?

2. Messaging preferences and behaviours

Example: Q4: Imagine you're given a choice between calling a business during their opening hours or messaging them online 24/7. Which would you prefer?

3. And their feelings and attitudes about messaging channels.

Example: Q3B: How much do you agree/disagree: I am/would be happy to talk to a chatbot if it worked and I got an immediate response to my inquiry



For more information

Get in touch with one of our experts today.

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