

# It's good to chat – Webchat and the contact centre

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# 1. Introduction

Webchat as an effective channel to talk to customers is seemingly coming of age. With customers increasingly starting their journey online, it is often easier to hit a chat button than find a phone number and a phone – although some customers may well sit on both channels and wait to see which answers first.

Webchat is also a comfortable bedfellow with its trendier younger cousin, social media. Whilst social interactions are in public, webchat offers the opportunity to draw customers in for a more private dialogue – giving the ability to discuss personal details and specific issues in a one-to-one channel.

In terms of channel preferences for customer contact, webchat is mid-table and rising in BT's 'Autonomous Customer' research <sup>[1 & 2]</sup>. This research reveals that webchat conversations with organisations into the future would be favoured by 27% of customers globally, as opposed to social media which was ranked a whole 10% lower at 17% (the phone is still universally the top future contact preference for customers with a whopping 70%). Webchat is also becoming the default medium of choice for younger customers to communicate – forget email with them; it's "so last year!"

So what are the pros and cons of chat? We decided to conduct some research with contact centres who have already successfully deployed it as a channel and investigate the effects of it on both customers and also on advisors.

The study involved three parts of BT, plus three other large corporates, in contact centres based both the UK and in India. The aim was to uncover the pros and cons of webchat within a predominantly business-to-business (B2B) working environment. The research team conducted semi-structured interviews, work shadowing and ethnographic observations.

The study found that webchat was considered to be an equivalent and often superior method of working compared to calls among the advisors and customers interviewed. Webchat demonstrated it is able to provide an effective stepping stone to move customer contact towards web-based self-service interactions and away from the more traditional phone centric communications channels.

## Key findings include:

- Chat can create a highly positive experience for customers
- It is extremely easy to use for both customers and employees
- Due to the ability to introduce multiple chat sessions and blend it with other channels, it can increase productive use of advisors' time
- Because teams can talk to each other, interactions between team members enhance the potential for employee engagement and knowledge sharing
- Employee satisfaction tends to be higher with webchat than with phone
- Webchat promotes a calmer and quieter working environment than phone contact
- There are fewer issues with regional accents, noise, heavy colds, acoustic shock etc.
- Webchat can provide a clear audit trail of the customer conversation
- Excellent cost benefits (15% increase in efficiency reported in the sites under study, compared with phone contact).

This seems to imply a triple bonus with webchat – both customers and advisors like it and it also leads to cost efficiency savings. These are the reasons why we think that webchat usage is likely to grow as a future channel.

Finally, the study also uncovered numerous practical lessons learned about how to successfully deploy webchat into the contact centre.





## 2. Key findings

### Key finding 1 – Webchat creates a highly positive customer experience

#### Positive customer feedback

It was found that webchat provides a good customer experience, one which was at least as good as phone calls and often viewed to be superior. The feedback from customers surveyed following webchat transactions was highly positive, with 82% of customers rating their webchat interaction positively (from 8220 customer questionnaire responses analysed).

This positive view on customer experience was also confirmed by the contact centre managers and advisors interviewed. Almost three quarters of advisors interviewed agreed that webchat offers a better customer service compared to calls.

“

It works really well and it made an improvement. It reduced the amount of calls and the frustration of the people who were waiting”

Manager

## Faster and easier to connect

With webchat the time to connect was, on average, around 1 minute or less. This has, of course, created a certain expectation of speed amongst regular users.

The ability to connect straight through to an advisor also means that customers can avoid those much loved IVR menus (i.e. “press 1 for x”), the limbo of being on being on-hold and the infamous ‘shunt’. All of these result in a highly positive influence on customer experience.

“

In principle, absolutely something I’d want to do... it just feels like it makes sense because it saves the waiting on phones and there’s no horrible on hold music”

Customer

If the chat option is positioned appropriately on the website it can also ensure that the customer gets through to the person with the right skillset, first time, and with no need for customers to repeat their requirements.

This tends to reduce customer effort – a factor which the majority of time and energy starved customers appreciate. Customers favour brands which cut the effort and time required to interact with organisations – with 78% of global customers (74% in the UK, 82% in the US and 79% in Asia Pacific) saying that they will buy more from organisations that make it easy for them, according to the Autonomous Customer research. <sup>[1 & 2]</sup>

## Advisor engagement

Webchat demonstrated it has potential for strong advisor engagement and customer rapport to be built. One site in the study had developed such a close relationship between the advisors and customers that customers frequently asked for specific advisors by name.

Such customer relationships reap benefits for both parties involved – helping to create advisor engagement and improved morale as well as generate customer satisfaction.

The advisors also relished the opportunity to solve problems and handle issues end to end (true ownership of task), rather than pushing problems along the queue. A few of the advisors interviewed spoke about how they had felt the need to raise their own game and levels of expertise, to meet rising customer expectations.

## Customer buy-in

Some of the B2B customers in the study were so enthusiastic about webchat that they were adapting their own organisation’s internal processes and systems to ensure that webchat worked as well as it possibly could – this included developing their own dashboards and systems to make it easier to report on and monitor issues. This wasn’t just about internal efficiencies. Customers could see real business benefits to their own organisations of utilising webchat rather than using the phone.

## Key finding 2 – Webchat is easy to use

Webchat was considered to be highly usable by both customers and advisors.

“

Very easy to use, so straightforward, very user friendly”

Customer

Specifically:

- Webchat was considered to be highly intuitive to use, quick and easy to pick up (a “no-brainer” according to one advisor), with high memorability. This is aided by the fact the majority of the advisors interviewed were familiar with systems like instant messenger and social media in their personal life and, as a result, were well versed in communicating using webchat
- Efficiency is high. Advisors often make time efficiency gains through copying and pasting from webchat conversations directly into notes fields on jobs/cases/wrap notes resulting in a reduction in re-keying.

“

Overall it is really good. I get more done through [webchat] than with calls because it is a lot quicker”

Advisor

- Copied and pasted canned responses can also be used to improve efficiency in the chat session – but these tended to be used selectively by advisors because they said that there was a danger that the chats could become too depersonalised and robotic (the webchat equivalent of a scripted call)
- Error rate is potentially reduced because advisors can easily return to an original question/request from the customer to ensure they have understood the problem, or to clarify exact customer requirements, should the need arise. This is increasingly useful for more complex issues. Also, because the advisors copy and paste from the webchat directly into notes, accuracy can be increased by avoiding recollection and rekeying errors.

### Key finding 3 - Increased advisor satisfaction

“

I absolutely love it”

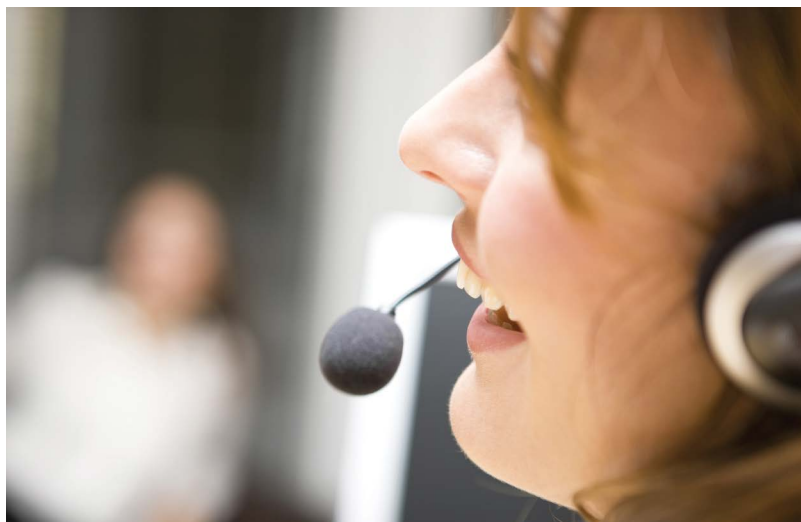
Advisor

The majority of advisors, including 88% of the BT advisors, interviewed during this study liked using webchat. The strength of this positive feeling towards webchat varied, from the disturbingly fanatical to the more common rational view.

There did seem to be a ‘novelty of the new’ factor among some of the recently trained advisors on webchat. However advisors who had been using webchat for longer still spoke of it highly positively.

Managers in one of the centres also said that advisors who weren’t on chat had asked to get involved, highlighting positive word of mouth about it amongst users.

This, and previous experiences with webchat, has shown that giving advisors increased exposure to multiple channels tends to decrease advisor churn, increase engagement and improve satisfaction.



### Key finding 4 - Effective use of advisors’ time via parallel sessions

One of the oft mentioned benefits of webchat is that, assuming there is volume of chats coming in, advisors can be multitasking on a number of parallel sessions. This makes it cheaper to handle than both phone calls and email, where contacts can only be processed one at a time.

In an extreme example in the US from a previous study advisors were observed to be on as many as 10 parallel sessions! However, this is not generally advisable as it was observed in this study that the levels of cognitive load (i.e. the mental effort required to process information) is greatly increased the more sessions that are juggled – especially if the chat sessions are about complex issues. The simpler the interactions, the greater capacity for higher numbers of parallel chat sessions.

Typically, the sites under study were carrying out two parallel sessions with some advisors claiming that they could be running four to five concurrent chats (although this was never actually observed).

However, the other factor to consider with multiple concurrent sessions is that customers often respond negatively if they see significant delays in replies to their conversations because advisors are multitasking.





## Key finding 5 - Enhanced team spirit and employee engagement

One of the most exciting findings which became evident very early in the study was webchat has the potential to enable a different way of working within customer service operations.

For a start, webchat allows co-located advisors to talk amongst themselves in real time while carrying out webchats with customers. This dynamic is in stark contrast to traditional contact centre environments where it is difficult for phone-based advisors to seek help, support and answers without putting the customer on hold - the result being that advisors are often emotionally (if not physically) 'isolated' when on calls.

Webchat also allows team members to easily sanity check responses without the pressure of putting the customer on-hold, which they feel uncomfortable about doing because of the negative image it creates. BT's Autonomous Customer research showed that 85% of customers thought that advisors put them on hold because they don't know what to say and need to check. <sup>[1]</sup>

Within several groups of advisors using webchat, information was observed to be free-flowing and best practice easily shared. This ability to talk also enables a greater sense of "social glue" or team spirit. Better social glue amongst team members demonstrably reduces stress levels, improves engagement and boosts morale.

“

I find it a lot less stressful from a personal level because I know the rest of the team are there straightaway to back me up, rather than waiting for conversations to finish”

Advisor

With webchat there is the potential for team members with more experience and knowledge to provide an informal yet very effective first line of support to less confident and less experienced advisors without the need to “transfer the call”. Teams have the potential to become more self-sufficient and productive because questions are fielded internally, mistakes reduced and only major escalations/concerns are flagged to more senior staff members.



## Key finding 6 – It creates a calmer working environment

Many advisors interviewed reported that webchat facilitates a calmer working environment compared to calls. Advisors reported a reduction in physical symptoms of stress while on webchat - symptoms such as headaches and sore throats have been reduced compared to call-centric work.

“

When I was here taking calls all day I used to go home with a banging headache, I really felt drained, but since [webchat] came in I don't do that...I look forward to coming into work”

Advisor

This is due, in part, to the support system available from team members described in key finding 5. However, traditional phone based call centres can be noisy places to work. In comparison, an office of webchat advisors is a far more peaceful affair. While there will be a small level of background noise, due to employees conversing and 'sanity checking' responses, webchat creates a calmer, more positive working environment.

Advisors also appreciate the fact that they are pre-warned what the customer request is at the point that the chat comes in and can start working while connecting with the customer.

Another factor contributing to 'calm' is because webchat allows advisors breathing space to take a 'step back' and assess the facts before responding. Additionally it gives them time to toggle onto other systems and carry out tasks without the need to make small talk with customers whilst simultaneously attempting to type.

## Key finding 7 – Management and quality assessment is easier because of a clear audit trail

From the perspective of the management interviewed during this study, use of webchat is a positive move. They recognise that webchat has been popular with advisors and helped improve customer experience. They are also finding benefits themselves directly from webchat because the written conversations leave a clear audit trail.

Managers and team leaders are able to easily and quickly to step into a webchat either observed or hidden from the customer. The big advantage is that, unlike calls, the manager can quickly scan through the entire conversation without the need for the customer to repeat themselves. This means that the classic “I want to speak to a manager” escalation process is far less painful from both the customer and manager perspective.

“

Dealing with escalations is not the headache it used to be”

Manager

The other bonus of a written record is that it is very easy for managers to use it in quality reviews. Rather than selecting and listening through a set of call recordings, chat takes a lot less time to review – a 30 minute webchat can take just minutes to scan through. This access to the written word may also encourage managers to quality check longer interactions rather than cherry picking the shorter calls to save time.

Advisors also said that the auditability of webchat gave them a safety net for performance reviews and dispute defences.

“

It is all there in black and white and there is no argument... it is good for you”

Advisor

Most crucially, because of the clear audit trail left by webchat, advisors are able to quickly and easily report abuse. Advisors are protected by the written word and disputes are no longer about “he said, she said” scenarios. The written evidence can be quickly fed directly to the coach/manager, who can intervene and escalate as necessary – with supporting written evidence in cases of extreme abuse. This can occur immediately, with no need to access recordings. This means that these cases can be rapidly resolved and closed. This saves the stress of cases being dragged out over weeks or even months.

## Key finding 8 – Removal of common voice issues

Language and accent issues, noisy environments, laryngitis and mishearing are all issues that are entirely absent in webchats. Of course, the advisor does need to be able to spell and type but a number of common issues with phone communication are eliminated or reduced in webchat. Where there is a misunderstanding, it isn’t dragged out over a period of hours, days or months, as it can be over email.

However, ‘tone of voice’ still can still come across on webchats. Customers and advisors pick-up on tone and a few customers complain about hurried or ‘abruptly’ ended chats and perceived rudeness. This means that advisors need to be trained around the appropriate, branded tone of voice that they should adopt in chats with customers.

Advisors also benefit from the fact that webchat eliminates the need to make small talk. Small talk was surprisingly found to be stressful among some of the advisors interviewed – especially if there were language barriers to be considered. The removal of the need for small talk reduces this pressure and allows the advisor the ability to concentrate more on the task in hand.

“

On [webchat] you can concentrate more because you haven’t got to make small talk, you can concentrate on test running and what you are looking for”

Advisor



### 3. Webchat vs. email

It's the ultimate clash of the titans – how does webchat compare to its older, less dynamic text based counterpart, email?

**Webchat is synchronous whilst email isn't.**

Chat is realms away from the standard auto-response and days or weeks long waiting times commonly associated with email. Webchat requires instant engagement, whereas emails often disappear into the ether, often with no proof of receipt

**Webchat is far quicker – with an ability to resolve issues immediately.**

For more complex issues, emails often breed more emails. With webchat, you are more likely to get the questions, clarifications and reassurances done and dusted in a single session.

**Webchat is about conversations.**

Webchat allows conversations to flow in real time rather than the series of stilted information exchanges which can typify email tennis. The key benefit of a conversation over an exchange of information is that it builds a personalised response, reacting to the needs of the individual and often allowing real rapport to be built between the customer and advisor. The result can be a superior customer experience over and above that of email.



### **Webchat provides continuity of care.**

Because webchat allows such rapid and effective closure of queries in real-time it often allows complete resolution of the query/issue by the same advisor in one seamless interaction. In comparison, email questions and issues will often ping back and forth between customer and business. This may result in different advisors handling the issue – meaning that they have to read the email chain, inwardly digest and give an appropriate reply. This can be extremely unproductive and time consuming for both customer and organisation.

### **Webchat fits a younger demographic of customer (and advisor).**

Instant messenger and chat are often the default way of communication amongst the under 24s – email is so last year! Not only does webchat play well with a younger customer, the (often informal) conversational nature of webchat is highly suited to the skills profile and experience of younger employees. With these natural communication skills, they need very little training on webchat because it is entirely familiar to them. In comparison, email interactions can be more formal and less forgiving, especially of grammatical errors.

### **Webchat provides a fully auditable trail.**

A common misconception with chat is that there is no audit trail. In truth, chat can be recorded and audited as easily as email can – perhaps even more easily as you get the whole conversation rather than a series of email episodes. It can also be passed across to other advisors, experts and managers as a fully formed conversation, meaning customers don't need to keep restating their problem.

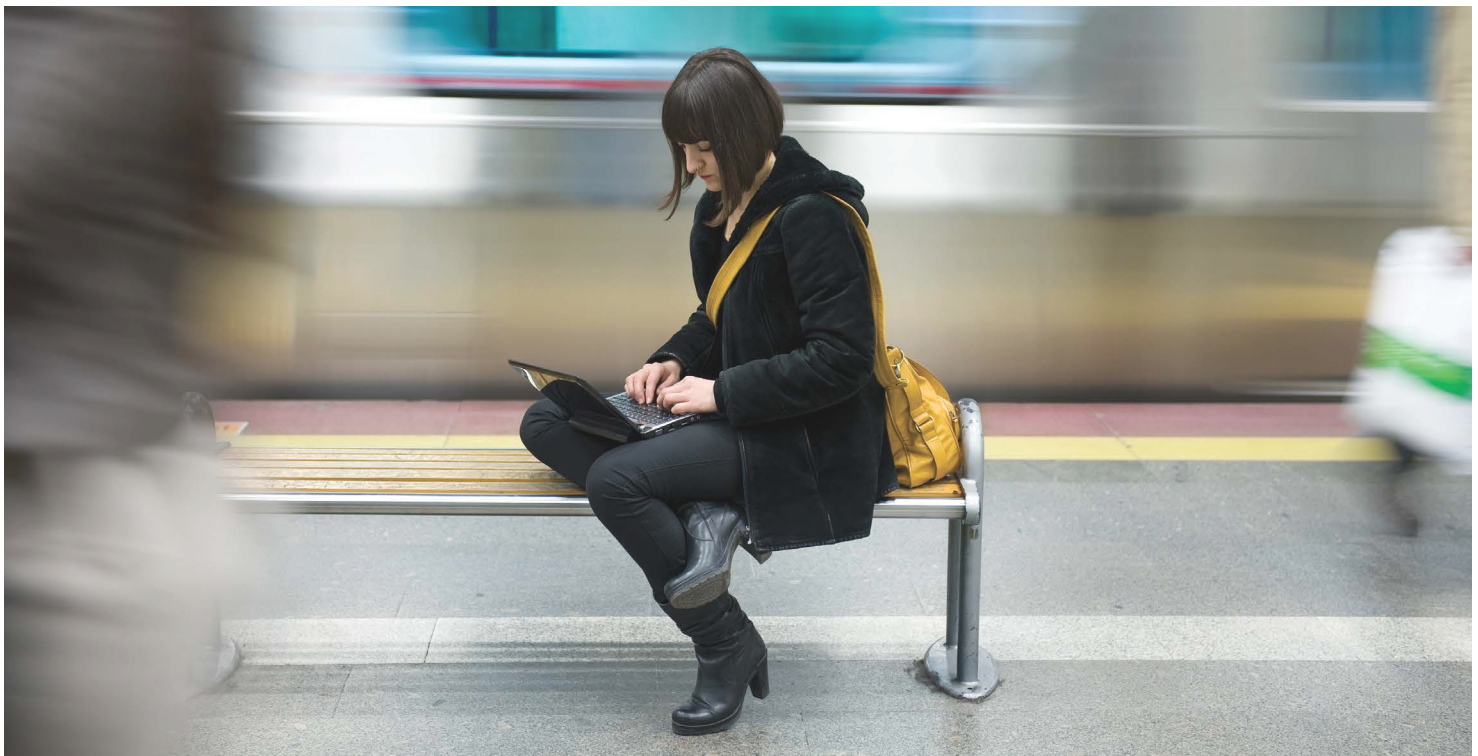


### **Customers like Webchat.**

82% of customers rated webchat positively in this study.

### **And so do employees!**

Webchat was highly popular among the advisors in this study, with early findings showing that 88% of advisors liked using webchat (with a few declaring their undying love for it!) This was attributed to its great usability, effective use of advisor time, enhanced team interactions, potential for employee engagement, heightened knowledge sharing and ability to see things through end-to-end.





## 4. Learning from best practice

Learning lessons, both positive and negative from past implementations, can be the path to future success. This section may not give you the definitive “magic formula” or implementing webchat but it does highlight the experiences of the sites that were part of this study.

### Customer experience

#### **Consider context of use - webchat is not a replacement for traditional channels**

Context of use is key for the successful deployment of webchat. This study showed that in a variety of interactions in both a B2B and B2C context – from providing rapid information updates to customers with simple enquiries through to resolving complicated and complex customer issues – webchat can be a highly effective and efficient medium.

However, phone is still a preferred channel for customers with highly sensitive personal issues, complex queries and when reassurance is required. Webchats can also easily develop into phone conversations if it simply seems to be an easier way to resolve issues.



## Advisor ability is key to customer experience – not the channel

It became quickly apparent during this study that the ability, attitude and expertise of the advisor were the key differentiators between a customer receiving a great customer experience or a less than satisfactory one.

“

It is down to the person behind it – If you have got a great advisor behind it is a great experience. If the person is not that well trained – it gets more difficult”

Advisor

The use of webchat doesn't mean that customers don't pick up on the skills and attitude of advisors. Comments from customers often highlight things such as the advisors willingness to go the extra mile or their technical expertise. In other words, webchat doesn't “dumb down” the advisors' role – quite the opposite in fact!

Additionally, webchat provides a clear record of conversations which can allow managers to clearly identify and correct behaviours that are not suitable among advisors, as well as allowing exemplary advisor behaviour to be recognised, easily shared as best practice and praised accordingly.

## Interactions require the ‘human factor’ – don't over automate

Webchat can successfully bridge the gap between self-service and having to pick up the phone but this doesn't mean that all the standards that are applied to traditional phone based interactions can be dropped.

While webchat can potentially be automated with use of canned responses from a drop down menu, over use of these will destroy this advisor ‘value add’ and, worse, irritate the customer as much as a scripted phone call would. Where canned responses work well are on the more formal parts of the conversation, like greetings and identity verification.



## Advisor experience

### Define necessary advisor skills

The first thing to say about advisors is that attitude, good communication skills and expertise in serving the customer is overridingly the primary skill required for webchat. However, assuming that someone who is good on the phone is also good on webchat might be somewhat flawed. Speaking on the phone is a verbal skill; chatting on webchat is a written one. If an advisor has natural rapport with customers over voice channels and no desire to use webchat, it may not be a great move to lose that key asset.

Some advisors interviewed during this study found communicating with customers through webchat both difficult and unnatural. These may not be the people that you should deploy onto chat because forcing them to use a medium with which they are uncomfortable may prove both detrimental to the customer experience as well as the stress levels of the advisors.

Reasonable typing speed and accuracy is necessary to enable a good speed of response as well as being within the comfort zone of the advisor. Touch typing is not essential but one finger typing might be an inhibitor. Being able to spell, punctuate and structure sentences effectively is also fairly critical (although there will be some forgiveness if things are not entirely spelt accurately or grammatically perfect because webchat is not the same as writing a letter).

However, another desirable attribute is the ability to effectively multitask – especially if there is a requirement to handle multiple chat sessions.





## Caution with parallel sessions

One of the key elements for the business case for webchat is the ability to have one advisor on multiple chat sessions.

However, content of the task is a factor that will dictate the number of sessions that can realistically be handled simultaneously. Cognitive load can run high even in single chat sessions when tasks are especially complex.

The high mental loads observed in this study was largely due to the numerous systems some advisors were having to access and toggle between (some advisors had 10 plus separate systems open simultaneously). This means that the nature of the webchat sessions needs to be carefully considered before multiple simultaneous sessions are implemented. Whether the advisor is addressing complicated or simple and straightforward issues will have a large impact on the manageability of parallel sessions.

It is also worth highlighting that having an advisor managing both call and webchat sessions in parallel is a (literally) mindblowingly bad idea because of the conflicting cognitive demands of complex multitasking between verbal and written channels.

Another big consideration when advisors are handling multiple concurrent webchat sessions is that the customer experience can be somewhat elongated. Customers notice when there is a delay in reply because advisors are juggling another chat session. There is also an increased risk for mistakes and, even worse, the advisor mistakenly sending the wrong response to a customer because they have confused chat sessions. Too many complex parallel sessions has the potential to cause stress and problems prioritising the work for some advisors.

“

If you get a hard question and an easy question it is manageable but if you get two hard questions I definitely couldn't do more”

Advisor

Many advisors dealing with multiple chat sessions felt that 2 parallel chat sessions were the limit, but this will depend on the abilities of the individual and the complexities of the task. At sites dealing with parallel webchats, the use of dual screens was seen to be particularly helpful in enabling advisors to manage multiple sessions. Separate screens allowed them to open up duplicate copies of the common systems used and separate the interactions more successfully.

## Etiquette and rules

Webchat is a much less formal medium than email, so how do companies maintain that personal quality in conversation whilst still remaining suitably corporate? This is all about etiquette and rules.

To start with, a clear and simple list of definite “do’s and don’ts” is crucial. Employees need to have distinct boundaries within which they can have the freedom to act responsibly, empowering them, rather than restricting them (just as you would do for phone interactions).

Key do’s and don’ts for webchat should at least include:

### 1. Guidance for advisors on the length of time it is appropriate to wait for a ‘no response’

The appropriate length of time to wait for a response should be agreed between the advisor and the customer and at least one warning should always be given before the advisor disconnects a session.

The customer, of course, may also disconnect the session. This may be a heightened risk as advisors may be otherwise occupied juggling other conversations, seeking advice or accessing other systems. When an advisor is carrying out more complex investigations a lack of response doesn’t mean nothing is happening or that they are making tea, just that the advisor’s attention is focused elsewhere.

“

Sometimes they [the advisor] are on two [webchats]. While they are dealing with the other one it would be nice to know that so I can carry on with something else otherwise I am just waiting on it”

Customer

### 2. Appropriate behaviours – i.e. don’t rush a chat

Customer feedback reviewed during study revealed they will always pick up on hurried transactions and abrupt advisor behaviour. This can be interpreted as rudeness leading to customer dissatisfaction. Imposing chat handling targets can pressure advisors to rush chats, just as it does with voice calls.

### 3. Agree formality of tone

The formality of tone observed on chat transactions varied widely across all sites (unsurprising given the highly varied nature of transactions and enquiries involved), so it may be helpful to set some baseline rules regarding tone of customer interactions. Reflecting the formality or informality of the customer’s tone is certainly one long held rule of thumb. Another key determiner of the tone of voice is the brand itself – and it is a good idea to train advisors on appropriate brand consistent language.

### 4. Ensure the problem is resolved from the customer perspective

Ensuring that the customer’s issues are fully resolved is essential. This may well be a rather obvious point but customers in this study sometimes felt that webchats were too often closed down as soon as the first issue raised was resolved. However, this was often felt not to be the end of the matter in that sometimes the customer wanted to ask supplementary or clarification questions.

### 5. Agree fair feedback mechanisms for advisors

One of the findings from the study was the need to ensure the managers and agents understood feedback was two way and always needs to be placed in context. Any company collecting customer feedback always needs to judge any comments, especially negative comments, fairly. For example customers can vent and score low on feedback mechanisms for reasons beyond the advisor’s control – such as process issues, systems limitations and lack of information. However, it goes without saying that the reason behind any customer frustration always need to be understood and, if possible, ultimately resolved to avoid unnecessary repeat calls.



## Webchat is not a magic fix for poor morale

This study found that webchat can help raise advisor morale and improve customer satisfaction within customer facing operations. However, webchat by itself is not a cure for poor advisor engagement issues or customer service issues which may already exist in the business. The context and environment and, in particular, the management culture within which it is deployed, needs to be effective at all levels.

## System requirements

### Develop webchat specific measures

It is vital to measure webchat independently against its own business objectives rather than attempting to fit it into the existing traditional measures used for the phone.

One concern and potential barrier uncovered during this study was the current lack of integration between webchat metrics and the existing measures and traditional contact centre management information systems. This inability to compare webchat with calls seemed to be the 'deal breaker' for some (not all) involved in this study.

However, phone and chat are very different media in many ways, so sometimes comparisons are meaningless.

A suitable set of measures needs to be formally and independently established. This will doubtless include (at its simplest level) the average chat time (tricky because of parallel chat sessions and multiple or bulk customer requests) and establishing the effect of webchat on contact volumes through other channels, alongside measures for customer satisfaction and effort.

Other measures, such as employee satisfaction and engagement, first contact resolution and time to resolve can be very appropriately (and powerfully) deployed in the context of webchat.

### Queue integration and work blending

Blending and queuing is vital to ensure that advisors are as productive as they can be. Webchat volumes can ebb and flow so advisors may need to be able to fill their time with other contact media. This requires the ability to integrate the work queue of webchat with other contact work is vital in order to balance productivity and advisor availability. At times where chat volumes are high, it is also possible to dynamically withdraw the chat option from the website until advisors are available (although you may need to explain to customers why the previously available function suddenly disappeared).

However, the difficulty of running numerous webchat sessions concurrently with voice calls raises issues with the practicality of work blending. Individual webchat, emails and calls could be blended via a suitable integrated queue system – yet because multiple concurrent webchats (2 plus) are often being carried out this makes this blending with calls difficult without losing one of the key business benefits of webchat. Practically, blending written channels such as webchat, email, social media and white mail is an easier proposition as only chat is carried out in real time.

### Skills/advisor based routing

Like calls before it, webchat can benefit greatly from skills based routing – whether this is about steering the customer to the same advisor that they had on previous chats or steering based on subject and expertise.

One key benefit of chat is that conversations are clearly tagged with the advisor's name – which makes it easier for customers to remember them and also allows sessions to be steered appropriately. Since customers tend to do business with people rather than faceless organisations, this recognition and potential for consistency was found to significantly improve the customer experience.

Customers felt that a key advantage of returning to the same advisor was to save time, not least because they felt that they didn't have to restate previous problems. (In addition, allowing customers to easily chase advisors if problems or issues hadn't been resolved was seen as an advantage)

“

With [webchat] I would like to be able to go back to the same advisor who provided me with a specific update....it reduces time if it is the same person because they already know about the follow up” ... “It is about taking responsibility end to end for that issue”

Customer

## Continuous improvement

### Continue to monitor the nature of customer interactions

The number of 'non-value' interactions, i.e. an interaction which is not productive for either the customer or the organisation, is often high within all customer channels. By using analytics tools to trawl through the "big data" produced by webchat issues with products, services and procedures can be unearthed (as it can through other channels). The key is to use this data to inform key decision makers so that they can do something about them and effectively design the non-value contacts out.

### Utilise customer feedback easily elicited from webchat

Another thing that webchat can do effectively is to elicit customer feedback after transactions by using it as a short, rapid response multiple choice questionnaire. In one site this was used to field questions such as:

- “Was the advisor able to resolve the query?”
- “Did webchat mean you didn't have to call?”
- “Was the advisor knowledgeable?”
- “How satisfied were you with the service?”

However, the real strength of webchat feedback was also the freeform text which proved to be a valuable channel for 'the voice of the customer'. It helped to answer key issues and identify hot topics such as why the service didn't meet expectations and which advisors may need additional training, as well as recommendations for improvements in products and services.





## 5. Conclusions

Although it can never be claimed that there is anything either new or revolutionary about webchat, its star as a contact channel for customers is rising. Factors contributing to that growth include:

- Positive feedback from increasingly online customers
- Its ability to raise levels of employee engagement and change working practices
- Its relative cost effectiveness against other channels like phone and email
- The capability of it to sit comfortably alongside more trendy channels like social media.

The technical capability to plumb chat into the contact centre has existed for many years now. However, customers are starting to embrace chat more in an increasingly multichannel world and contact centres need to respond outside their telephony comfort zone.

This points towards a change in the way that contact centre advisors are trained, recruited and measured as well as a shift in the way that multiple channels are blended, managed and monitored. Webchat can become a very effective tool for engagement which can benefit both customers and corporate alike – after all, “it’s good to chat!”

### References

- [1] Davies/Hickman (2013), *The Autonomous Customer 2013*, BT/Avaya research.
- [2] Davies/Hickman (2012), *Autonomous Customer Asia Pacific*, BT/Avaya research.



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