NiCE

The Agentic AI CX Frontline.

Real leaders. Real results.

Report

AI-first CX made real.

> The last best experience that anyone has anywhere becomes the minimum expectation for the experience they want everywhere.

- Bridget van Kralingen, Senior Vice President, IBM Global Markets

Executive summary.

Early adopters of agentic AI are already realizing measurable business impact, including consistent improvements in cost efficiency and customer experience. Organizations reported double digit reductions in Cost per Contact and see AI containing future labor costs, resetting expectations for operational cost structures. At the same time, Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) and NPS scores regularly see double-digit improvements, proving that automation, when well-executed, can enhance rather than detract from service quality.

This report gathered data from a cross-section of large enterprises across industries in North America and Europe, handling at least one million interactions per year via a mix of use cases, interviews and surveys of both executives and practitioners. It provides empirical evidence that agentic AI is not only production-ready but also safe, scalable and strategically indispensable.

Key outcomes

2

3x

faster deployment accelerates time-to-value.

4

85%

reduction in Cost per Contact drives substantial operational savings.

20%

improvement in CSAT reflects more personalized, efficient and effective interactions.

1

Over 80%

containment and automation rates, reducing attrition, tier one headcount and cost to serve

3

Scope, purpose & methodology.

Agentic AI remains at an early stage, with most enterprises still in exploration or pilot phases and a smaller cohort advancing into scaled production. As a result, outcome metrics are necessarily limited, reflecting time in production measured in months, not years.

This report is directional rather than prescriptive, meant as guidance not gospel. It distills insights from early adopters while recognizing that best practices will continue to evolve. Rather than offering a rigid, step-by-step playbook, the findings are intended to serve as a strategic compass, equipping decision-makers with evidence, benchmarks and lessons learned to inform their own adoption journey.

Like agentic AI itself, this report provides the structure but leaves room for smart decisions. Your decisions.

Featuring additional research from:

Deepgram

opusresearch

CMP CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT PRACTICE RESEARCH

CONTRIBUTORS

JARROD DAVIS

Senior Product Marketing Manager at NiCE Cognigy

Jarrod works at the intersection of agentic AI, enterprise automation and AI-powered contact center transformation. With a background spanning product marketing, competitive intelligence and digital strategy, he brings a practical perspective on how AI is reshaping customer service and regularly speaks at CCW and has written on AI in contact centers for ICMI.

JAMES NEVIN

Senior Director, Brand and Content at NiCE Cognigy

James has a background spanning enterprise software, customer experience transformation and complex buying environments. As a strategic GTM leader at NiCE, he helps teams understand and realize the value of agentic AI in customer service at scale.

FIONA EGAN

Campaign Manager at NiCE Cognigy

Fiona focuses on integrated campaign strategy and community-led marketing in B2B tech. She works closely with cross-functional teams to turn complex ideas into cohesive campaigns, leading content strategy and creation across formats to drive demand, advocacy and meaningful impact.

Introduction.

The early adopters of agentic AI are not experimenting. They are outperforming.

Agentic AI is not a future concept but a current competitive advantage and they are using it not only to improve KPIs but to reinvent how customer service operates.

With results such as ninety percent containment rates, deployments three times faster than before, twenty percent improvements in CSAT and significant reductions in operational costs, the performance gains are already undeniable. Yet the agentic AI CX frontline is not stopping at efficiency. Their success shows that agentic AI is not a future concept but a current competitive advantage and they are using it not only to improve KPIs but to reinvent how customer service operates. To understand why these gains are so different from previous waves of automation, we first need to be clear about what agentic AI actually is.

Agentic AI refers to goal driven systems that can understand what a customer is trying to achieve and can plan and execute the steps required to reach that outcome. Unlike traditional automation or NLU based designs that follow scripted sequences, an agentic agent, or AI agent, evaluates context in real time and determines the best route to resolution using the tools and boundaries provided. It does not invent new goals or act outside its purpose. It works within a defined scope but selects its own method to get there. This represents a foundational change in how service work is structured, how customer experience is delivered and what experiences are even possible.

This shift is happening now because the first wave of AI only added intelligence to isolated steps. It created visible wins but left underlying systems unchanged. The new wave is different. Agentic AI moves from supporting tasks to orchestrating end to end outcomes. It changes roles. It changes workflows. It changes the economics of customer service. And it advances at a pace that legacy architectures cannot keep up with.

Even so, inevitability is not the same as insight and enterprise adoption does not guarantee success. Operational wins alone are not the full story. Legacy systems can still limit what AI can achieve. Fragmented, low-quality data can constrain accuracy and performance. Most of all, organizational structures built around rigid processes and fixed responsibilities do not merely resist change, they actively block it. Companies that are not culturally and technically prepared for an AI first model will feel these pressures immediately. The leaders shaping this future understand this. They are not optimizing what already exists. They are providing AI-first CX right now.

This report draws from research and data from large scale enterprises across North America and Europe, each handling more than one million interactions per year. We spoke to decision makers and practitioners, the people deploying AI rather than debating it. What we found is a blueprint for thriving. The following chapters explore what the boldest teams are doing differently, the roadmap for reaching escape velocity and the future of the contact center.

Part 1

Frontline Intelligence

What the boldest teams are doing differently.

The agentic inflection point.

Agentic AI marks a decisive shift in the foundation of enterprise and CX work. It is not a faster version of old automation, but a re-architecture of how processes are structured, how tasks are orchestrated and how decisions are made. This is not about replacing people or bolting AI onto legacy workflows. It is about designing work natively for a world where AI agents and humans act as coordinated peers, each amplifying the other's strengths.

The evolution toward agentic AI did not happen overnight. The first steps toward meaningful automation began with basic keyword chatbots and Robotic Process Automation. RPA brought speed and efficiency by automating repetitive, rules based tasks, but it was limited to static workflows, predefined logic and user interfaces that did not change. The first generation of chatbots behaved in a similar way, triggering pre-scripted responses based on identified keywords. They laid the groundwork for more intelligent automation, which would later be superseded by conversational AI, generative AI and now agentic AI.

This progression reflects a deepening integration of AI into the fabric of operations. Where RPA scripted rigid processes and generative AI passively waited for prompts, agentic AI initiates action, adapts in real time and dynamically decides what steps to take and in which order, to complete its goal. It marks a clear shift from process automation to solution focused automation.

This shift stems both from the shortcomings of old tech and the convergence and acceleration of trends, including:

- Experience is now the brand battleground
- Customers expect instant, personal, effortless service that just works
- Customer voices carry louder and further via social media
- Labor shortages make human-only support unsustainable
- Conversations are rising and channels are multiplying
- Cost pressure is real as old models fail to keep up
- Improvements in AI language generation, understanding and automation
- The commoditization and mass accessibility of AI technologies to consumers

Traditional automation

- Handles repeat tasks.
- Listens and matches intents.
- Self-service without experience.
- Lacks depth, nuance and adaptability.
- Unable to handle variation in conversation.
- Empathy lost through inflexibility.

VS

New automation

- Agentic bots understand and adapt to customer needs.
- Fully engages with the conversation and able to respond in kind.
- Self-service as a by-product of experience.
- Highly engaged and highly empathetic.

3x faster deployment.

80%+ tier-1 containment.

Days not months to value.

With agentic AI, early adopters are already seeing significantly faster deployment times, often up to three times faster and in some cases merely several of days. Current deployments regularly reach containment rates above eighty percent for tier one inquiries. This massively shortens time to value and accelerates iteration. It has also triggered process and workforce redesign.

People are moving from acting as process executors to process architects and orchestration leads, whether formally or informally as they adopt new tools. Their role is shifting from performing steps to shaping, analyzing and improving the work AI agents perform. The organizations winning today are not automating what they already have. They are inventing what they need next.

Example: Call center performance comparison

Gen AI-enabled

Human manages every step of the workflow, assisted by gen AI tools to help retrieve knowledge-based articles, summarize ticket history and draft responses.

Estimated impact **5-10%**
average reduction in resolution time.

Agent-enabled (optimized)

AI agent automates discrete tasks within existing workflow, such as ticket classification, suggestion of likely root causes and resolution of frequent, low-complexity issues.

Estimated impact **20-40%**
average reduction in resolution time.

Agent-enabled (reinvented)

Process is redesigned around agent autonomy: AI agents proactively detect incidents, diagnose issues and initiate resolutions automatically.

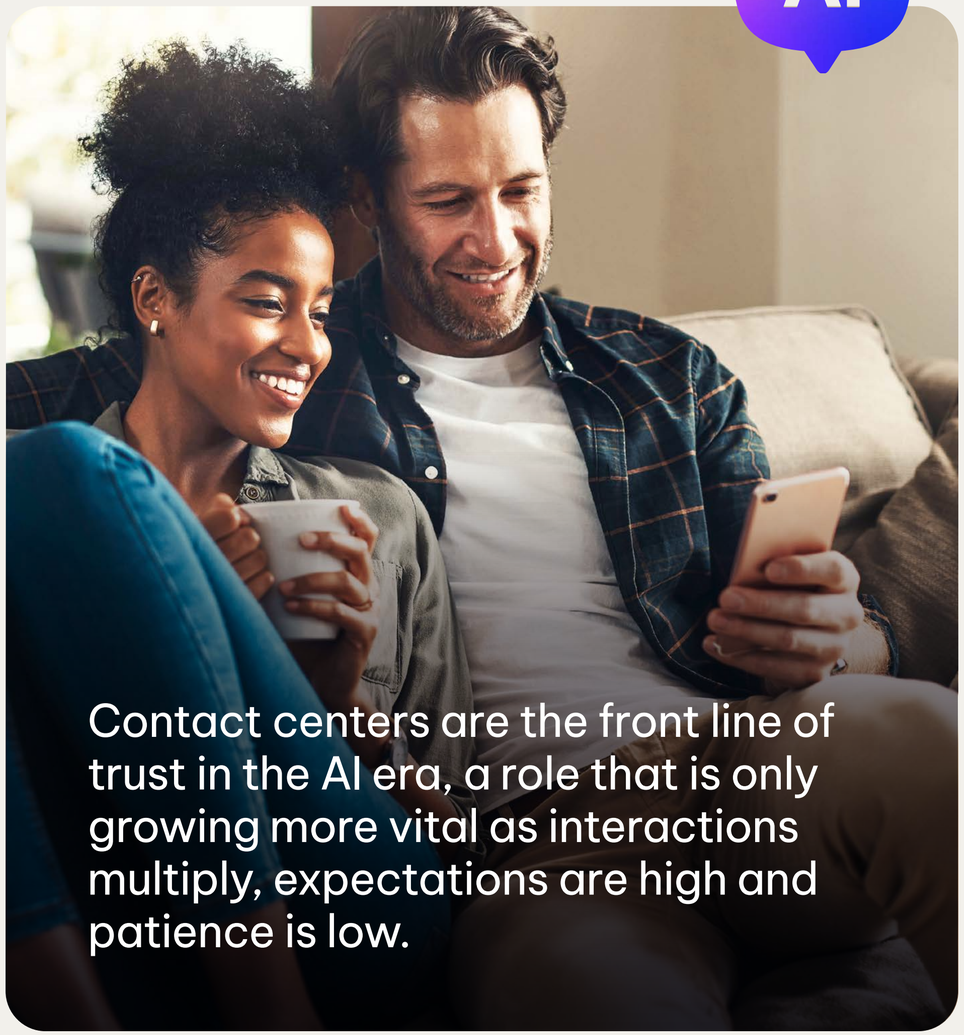
Estimated impact

60-90%
average reduction in resolution time.

80%
of level 1 inquiries resolved automatically.

Case studies:

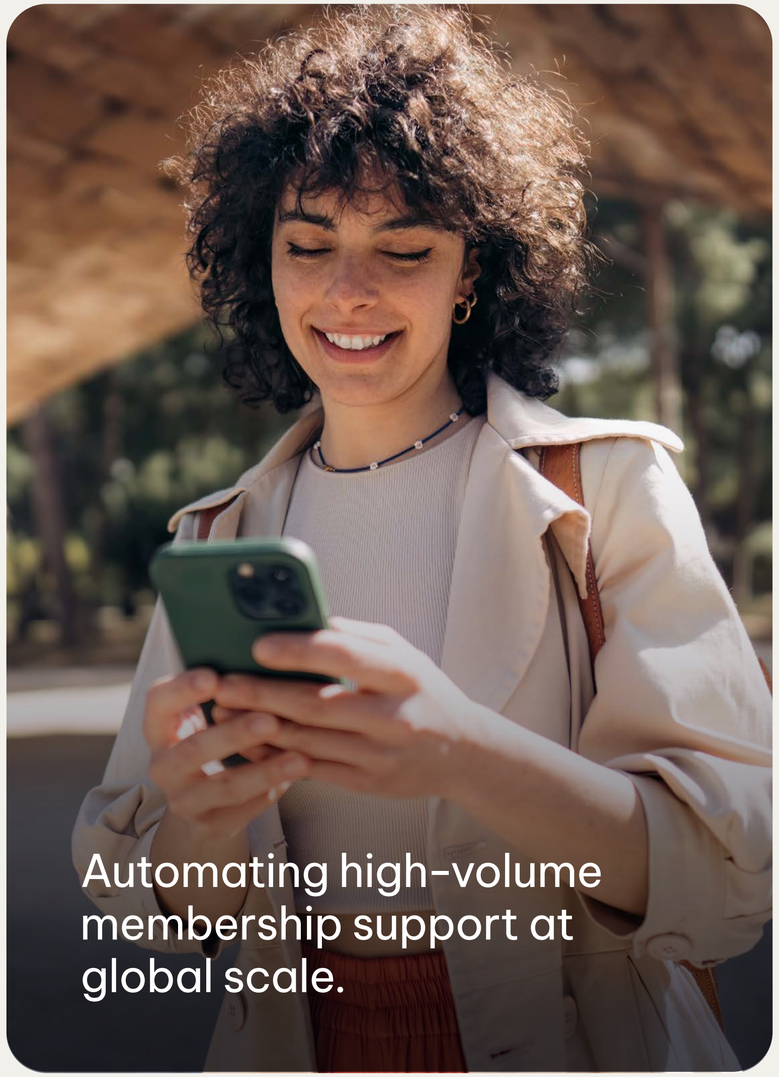
The hard work, not just easy wins.



Trust doesn't automatically involve a human or an AI agent, it means being reliable, it means being there when and where it counts. It may be tempting to take a "if it ain't broke don't fix it" mindset. Even for those who think they are the exception and things are running well: you're lighting your house with candles in an electric world. As former CEO of NiCE Barak Eilam said, "We've reached the end of human faculty."

Legacy CX models are already falling short and while there are many paths into the future, every one of them involves using AI.

Let's examine how two global enterprises are already using agentic AI to modernize their CX operations, achieving transformative gains in speed, scale and trust.



Case 1
International fashion retailer.

Industry: Retail & E-commerce

Headquarters: United States

Global reach: Supports multiple fashion brands with operations in 12 countries and 4 main languages.

Business challenges

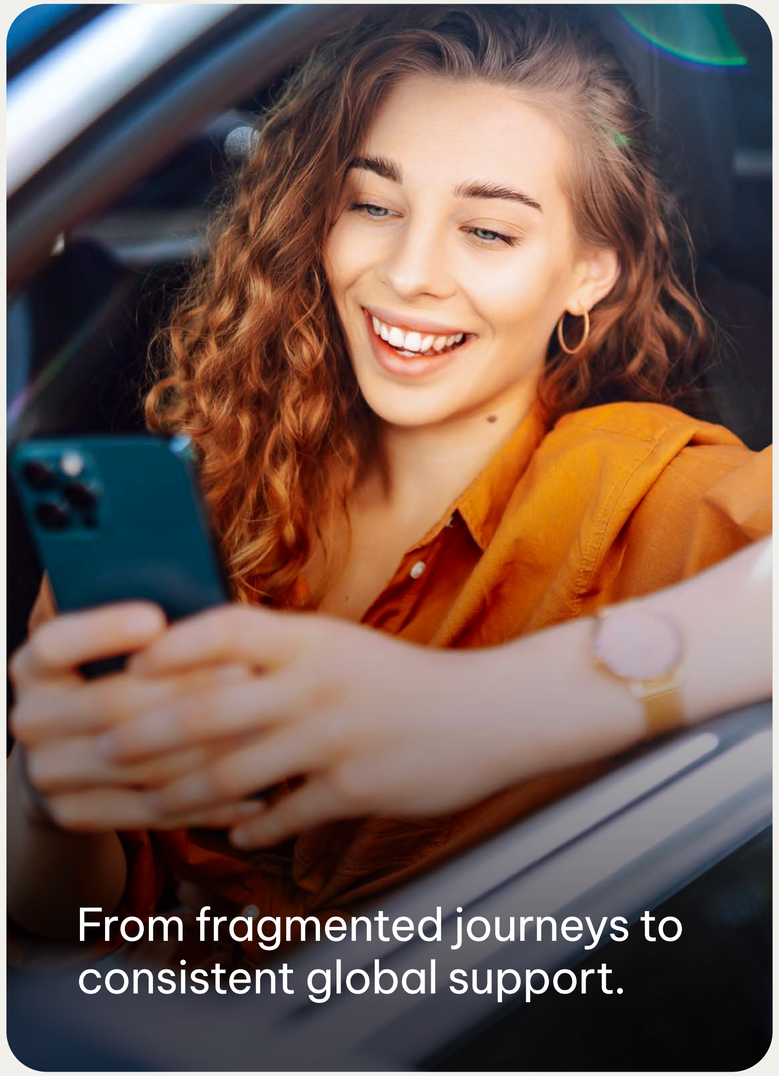
- High average handling and post-contact times.
- Large volume for refunds, WISMO and subscription changes.
- Need for 24/7 multilingual support across multiple brands.
- Operational complexity due to brand-specific systems and policies.

Solutions

- Voice & messaging for ID&V, refund/WISMO handling, retention workflows.
- Agent Copilot for real-time context and escalation support.
- Real-time translation.
- Asynchronous messaging for convenience and WhatsApp/social channel support.

Impact

Metric	Outcome
AI conversations annually	5+ Million
Scalability	EU & US deployments; active across voice and messaging platforms.
Automation (voice & chat)	47% reduction in repeat contacts; WhatsApp and social channel expansion.
Operational benefit	Cost savings (labor, handle time), lower post-contact workload, CX uplift.



Case 2
Mobility services.

Industry: Vehicle rentals

Revenue: >$3 billion

Headquarters: Europe

Global reach: Operates in over 90 countries.

Business challenges

- Fragmented customer journeys across regions.
- High volume of repetitive support inquiries.
- Need for a scalable, tech-agnostic agentic AI platform to support rapid multinational rollouts across core markets in Europe and North America.

Solutions

- Transitioned from NLU to agentic AI pre-launch
- Emphasis on root cause elimination (e.g., gathering pickup info, security deposits)
- Automation of frequent inquiries (e.g., terms and conditions, pickup logistics).
- Deflection support for reservation changes, cancellations and pricing queries.

Impact

Metric	Outcome
Agentic AI	Deployed in 3 markets and languages; improved contextual support handling.
Efficiency gains	2–4 week deployment cycles; increased messaging automation.
Operational benefit	Reduced CSR workload, enhanced customer experience and scalable architecture.

Lessons learned.

Enterprise leaders building with agentic AI are learning fast. Here's what's sticking:

- **Agentic is still complex** – Agentic AI reduces some work and complexity, while adding new layers elsewhere. Think rotary phone vs. iPhone.
- **Hybrid beats "prompt and pray"** – Purely LLM-based agents mean betting the house on on-top guardrails. Enforce policies with deterministic processes while keeping conversations natural, contextual and personalized with LLMs."
- **Vision stuck in the past** – There is a frequent institutional impulse to build solutions that could've shipped a decade ago. The real potential of Agentic AI is still misunderstood and underestimated.
- **Leapfrog the model T phase** - Skip incrementalism and move straight from "horses to Tesla."
- **Friction is a feature** - Real ROI comes from tackling complex, high-value processes. Projects that face no resistance usually haven't challenged entrenched systems or culture.
- **Human adoption matters** – Build for customers and CSRs. Your team from frontline reps to, team leads and execs must all experience benefits.
- **Keep executive sponsorship alive** - Communicate wins frequently. The market moves fast. Pivot strategically, not reactively.
- **Agree on success** – Align early with clear purpose, shared success metrics and consistent messaging. Know what success means before starting.

A global fashion e-commerce brand put it this way:

Cross-functional alignment.

Brought together Ops, CX, Tech and Executive teams around a **shared strategic vision**.

Secure early leadership sponsorship.

Leadership support provided the problem with **resilience and strategic credibility**.

AI as strategic enabler.

Positioned AI not as a cost-cutting tool, but as a means to improve experiences for **both customers and employees**.

Continuous stakeholders engagement.

Set transparent expectations and actively **celebrate quick wins**.

Data-driven approach.

Utilized robust analytics to **navigate hype cycles**, maintain focus and ensure **informed decision-making**.

Build for flexibility.

In the fast-changing world of AI, **agility is a crucial as ambition**.

Voice AI –
The fastest onramp to agentic.

If agentic AI is the new foundation for how work gets done, Voice AI is often the quickest on-ramp and path to impact.
It provides an ideal entry point because it sitting at the intersection of:

High volume + variability.

Contact centers handle millions of spoken interactions per year which are rich in unstructured data, decision points and emotional cues — ideal territory for agents that can interpret, act and adapt in real time.

Direct customer visibility.

Voice is the most immediate customer-facing and high-volume channel. Because voice remains the most preferred channel—and the preferred self-service channel for a majority of consumers—improvements are highly visible to leadership and customers alike. This accelerates buy-in and proves the value of agentic AI early in the journey.

Natural agentic fit.

Conversations are unpredictable. Unlike static menus or keyword bots, AI agents understand intent, reason through context and take multi-step actions, making them the natural showcase for agentic orchestration.

Customer service automation:
The launch pad for voice AI agents.

50%

use traditional voice agents for task/service automation and consider it the most compelling use case for voice AI agents.

Why voice first.

Voice AI agents can be deployed as autonomous frontline solutions for self-service and can demonstrate core agentic capabilities quickly:

Real time orchestration.

Pulling customer history, product details and policy data mid conversation while executing backend actions without human prompts.

Multi step resolution.

Handling authentication, diagnosing the issue, executing the fix and confirming resolution within a single continuous interaction.

Personalization at scale.

Adapting to customer preferences and profiles, often improving CSAT within weeks. CMP Research shows personalization is the biggest driver of CSAT in self-service.

Cross channel continuity.

Starting in voice, then following up via SMS, email or app notifications without losing context.

Voice AI is now foundational.

67%

of organizations consider voice AI core to their product and business strategy.

Deployment advantages.

Voice AI is often the fastest on-ramp because:

Existing infrastructure integration.

Many CCaaS and telephony platforms already support API-level access, enabling rapid embedding of agentic logic.

Rich data feedback loops.

Every call produces structured and unstructured data for training, tuning and refining the agents' reasoning models.

Low barrier to containment wins.

Common inquiries (password resets, shipping updates, balance checks) can often be automated in day as to weeks, delivering measurable cost and time savings before expanding to other use cases.

Racing towards human-like voice AI agents.

15%
of organizations are already actively developing voice AI agents.

98%
of these plan to deploy within 12 months.

How voice projects build trust and visibility.

More than half of enterprises believe customer service and task automation is the most valuable use case for voice technology.

The data shows why. Enterprises see the large volume of work already handled by outdated IVRs and recognize that an intelligent voice agent can do it better, faster and with less friction.

61%

are handing over full transactions or checkout.

59%

are letting agents own FAQs.

48%

have automated appointment scheduling.

The short term win:

Swap the clunky IVR for an intelligent voice agent. This is a low friction, high impact automation that frees your teams almost instantly.

The long term win:

Agentic AI that can handle messy, ambiguous problems and still deliver resolution. This reduces avoidable contacts that rely on higher cost human agents.

Nearly a third of enterprises are already using voice AI to initiate and resolve service requests. For them, the future of CX is not theoretical. It is live in production.

Case study:
International airline.

Business Challenges

A major international airline struggled with delays in identifying and prioritizing urgent passenger inquiries, particularly during flight disruptions. Its traditional queue systems lacked real-time intelligence, leading to long waits and duplicated efforts.

Solutions

By implementing agentic AI with SMS-based identification and real-time urgency detection, the airline was able to intelligently move urgent cases to the front of the queue. The AI system provided customer support agents with verified booking details before live handover, reducing average handling time by 30 seconds per prioritized caller.

Impact

This approach was scaled across multiple hotlines, handling over a million intelligent prioritizations in a single year.

Case study:
International transportation.

Business Challenges

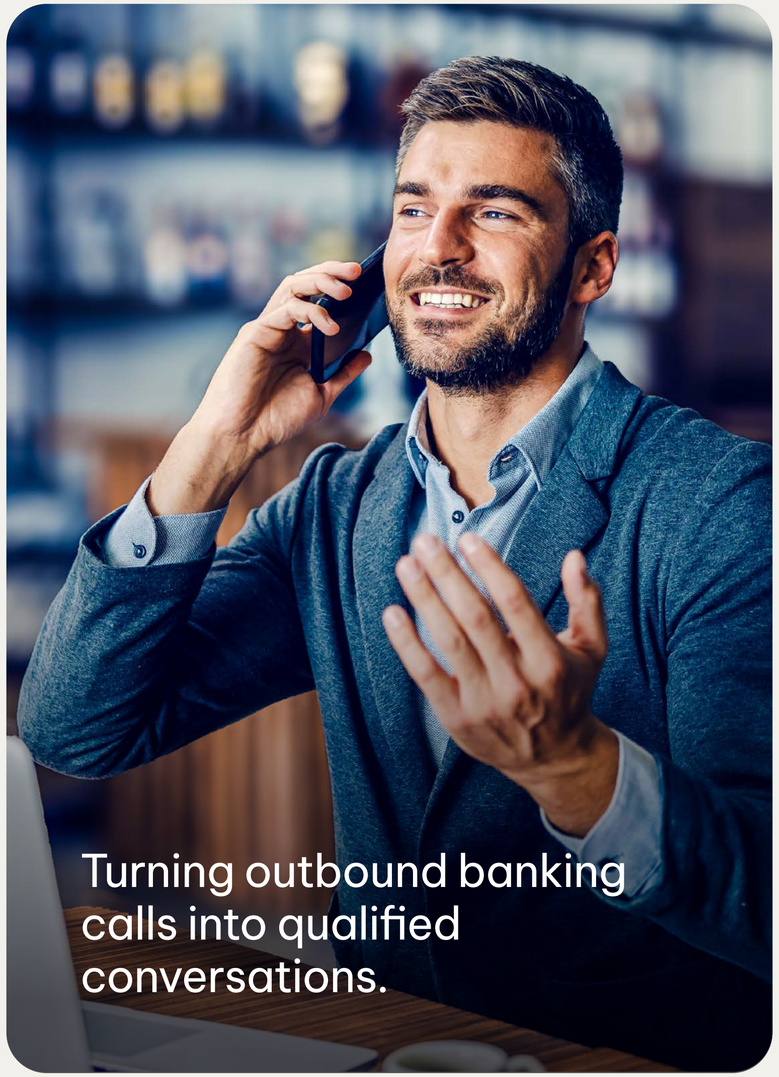
A global transport brand operating across dozens of destinations in North America initially deployed a large-scale chatbot to handle high inquiry volumes but found it lacked personalized, empathetic responses.

Solutions

To address this, they introduced an agentic AI system capable of reasoning through untrained issues, delivering empathetic and human-like answers. The AI autonomously resolved problems using its own reasoning capabilities and maintained performance under firm instructions to reduce errors.

Impact

The first minimum viable product was developed in just three days, achieved 100% message understanding and enjoyed a high acceptance rate among customers.



Case study:
International bank.

Industry: Finance and banking

Headquarters: Europe

Global reach: Over 100 million customers worldwide.

Business challenges

- Manual outbound loan follow-ups yielded low contact rates due to mistimed calls or disinterested recipients.
- High advisor effort with low return, driving up cost per call.
- Growing demand for cost-effective and compliant digital engagement.

Solutions

- Lead identification and verification.
- Automated outbound calling and rescheduling.
- Interest and availability qualification.
- Transfers qualified leads to human loan advisors or books appointments.

Impact

Metric	Outcome
Reach efficiency	85% of unreachable calls filtered by agentic AI.
Qualified handover rate	80% of reached calls transferred to human advisors.
Customer feedback	Largely positive; high acceptance.

From voice AI to full agentic maturity.

Starting with Voice AI creates a **high-visibility, high-impact proving ground** for agentic systems.

Once trust is built in this channel, the same orchestration, reasoning and integration stack can be extended to:

Messaging channels.

(WhatsApp, SMS, in-app chat)

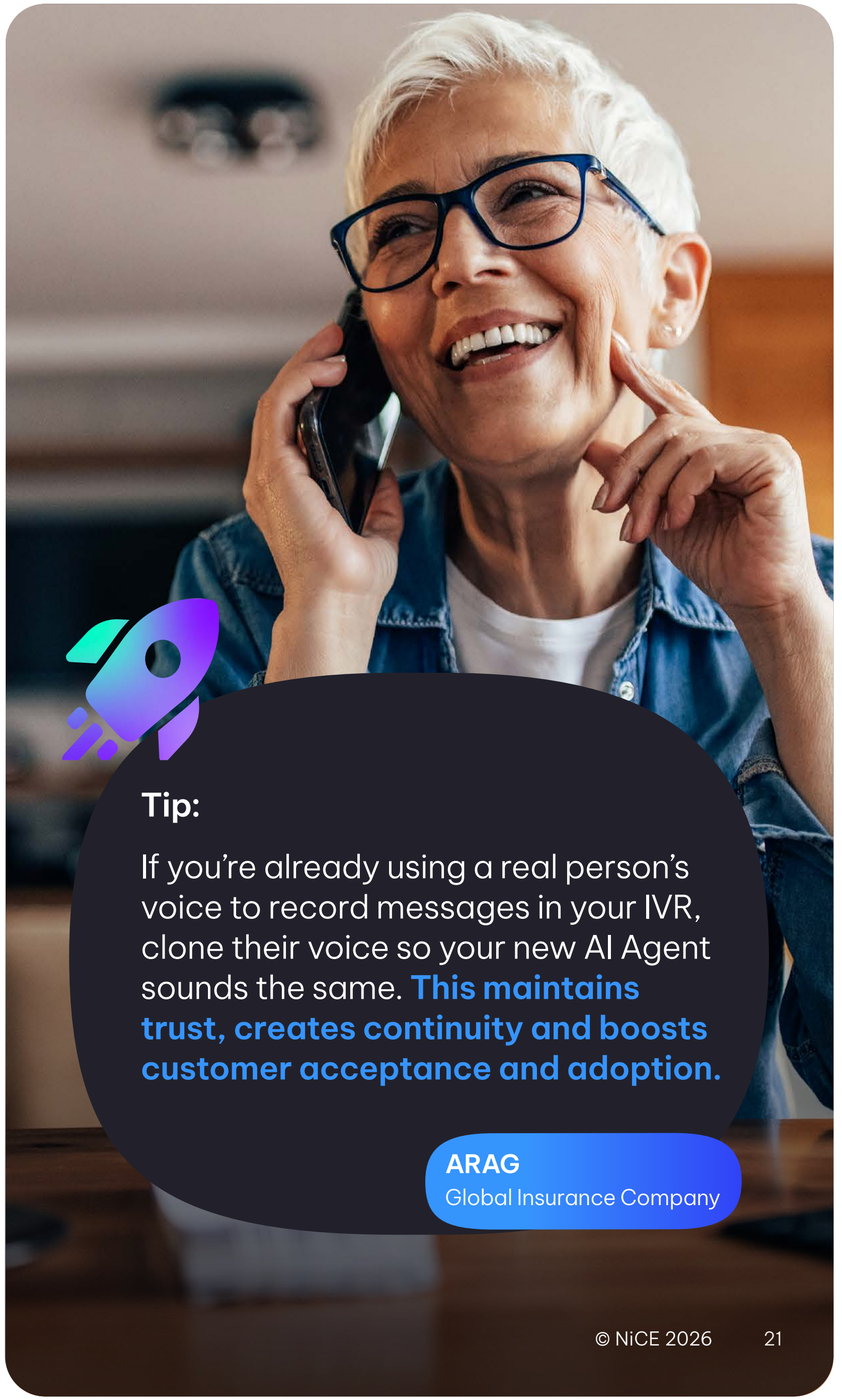
Proactive outbound engagement.

(Alerts, upsells, service recovery)

Cross-functional workflows.

(Sales-to-service handoffs, logistics updates, fraud detection)

In other words, **voice is the ignition point**. It's a fast way to demonstrate the difference between "better automation" and a **new operating foundation** where AI agents and humans co-create seamless customer experiences.



Tip:

If you're already using a real person's voice to record messages in your IVR, clone their voice so your new AI Agent sounds the same. **This maintains trust, creates continuity and boosts customer acceptance and adoption.**

ARAG
Global Insurance Company

The new benchmarks.

Our enterprise customers' experiences so far, which span multiple industries and countries, redefine what good looks like:

With agentic AI	Average	Leader
Tier 1 containment rate	40-50%	>90%
CSAT	+20%	>80% overall
Cost to serve	20% reduction	>30% reduction
Customer service rep. productivity	40% more cases handled per CSR	>50% more cases handled per CSR
AI-handled share of all interactions	>50%	>70%
Average handle time	30% reduction	>60% reduction
First contact resolution	5-10% increase	75% overall
Avg. speed of answer	Digital: <5 seconds Voice: <20 seconds	Digital: 2-5 seconds Voice: <10 seconds

But perhaps the most important benchmark is cultural: organizations that treat AI as a partner in reinvention, not a patch for legacy pain points, are outperforming peers by every meaningful metric.

This is what differentiates the bold from the busy. It is no longer about whether you use AI, but whether you're building systems that scale, learn and differentiate your business. This is what the Agentic AI CX Frontline looks like.

To operationalize this into initial internal targets for an agentic project:

1 Freeze your current KPIs for 3-6 months of baseline.

2 For use cases and customer journeys using agentic AI, set goals like:

- Containment rate increase of 20%, aiming for 40-50% within a year.
- 20-25% reduction in cost per resolution.
- 5 point CSAT increase aiming for mid 80s within one year.
- 20% AHT reduction for CSR handled contacts (using copilot).

3 If you are not within those ranges within 6 months post-deployment, both our data and experience demonstrates the issue is not with agentic AI, but the implementation and workflow design.

Summary:
What bold teams do differently.

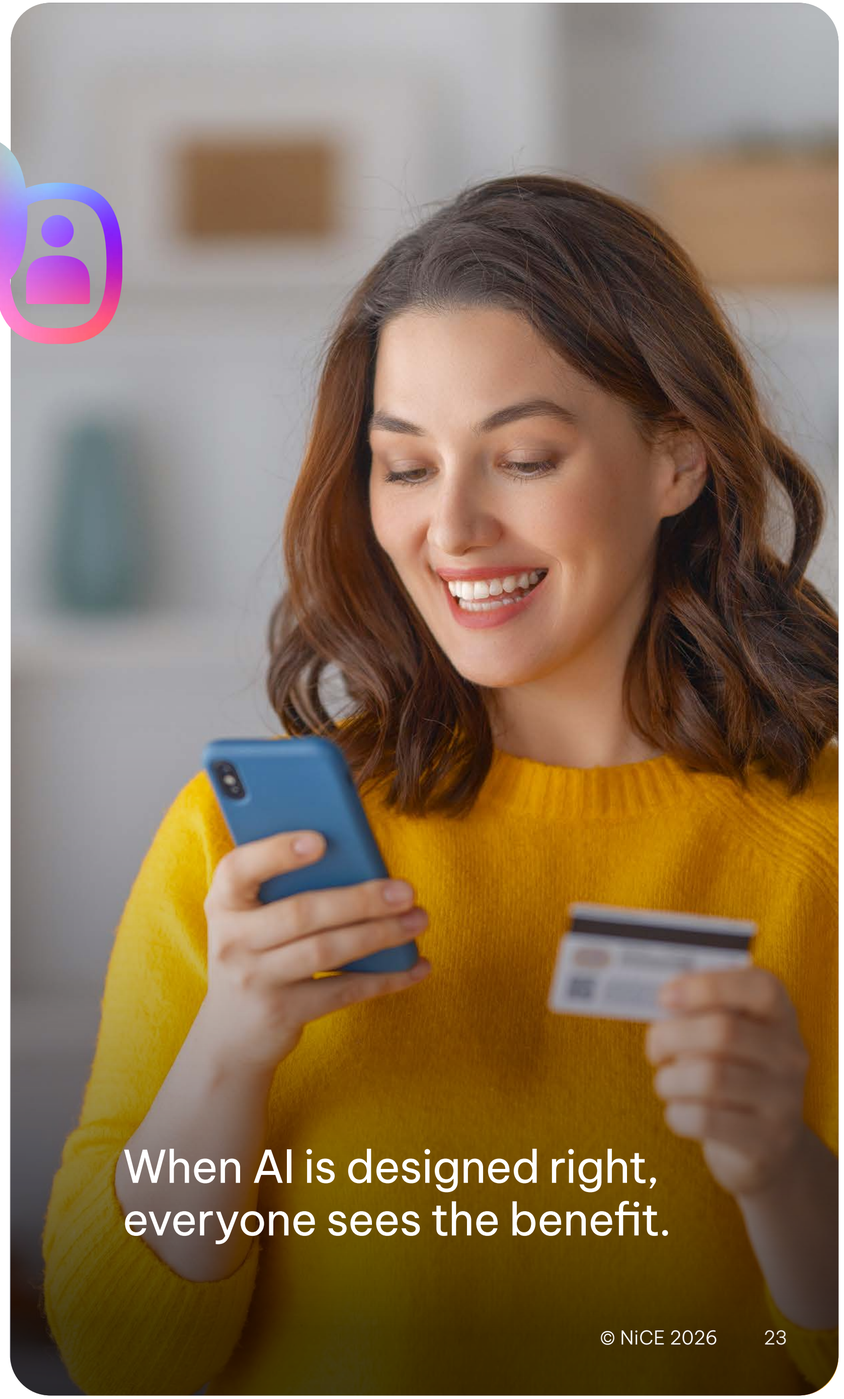
As we've seen in part one, the boldest teams don't treat agentic AI as a chatbot upgrade and recognize it brings new complexity and plan for it. Instead of relying on prompt-only LLMs, they build hybrid setups with structure and tools and the guardrails for compliant, enterprise scale use.

They know **small vision stalls big progress. Basic use cases lead to basic bots**.
The leaders imagine richer journeys and design backward from ambition.

They also embrace friction. Real ROI lives in complex, high-value processes—not in the easy wins. Transformation brings discomfort: new data models, roles and governance. Teams that avoid it stay in pilot mode. Teams that push through scale fast.

And they build for adoption. Customers, agents, execs—everyone sees the benefit. Sponsorship stays active. Metrics stay clear. They lead with purpose and adjust based on results, not hype.

Agentic AI is neither tweak nor trend. It's a new way of working and the boldest teams treat it that way.



Part 2

A Strategic Roadmap.

How to reach escape velocity.

If to look is to look at what is contained within its limitations, to see is to see the limitations themselves.

Each new school of painting is new not because it now contains subject matter ignored in earlier work, but because it sees the limitations previous artists imposed on their subject matter but could not see themselves. The earlier artists worked within the outlines they imagined; the later reworked their imaginations.

– James Carse

How to reach escape velocity.

As we've seen from early adopters, agentic AI is the beginning of a strategic operating model change — a shift from AI as a helper to a full coworker and around which AI-native processes are created, decisions are made and value is created.

In the first rush of generative AI, most projects slotted AI into one or two steps of an existing process which delivered double-digit percentage improvements in various KPIs. While it validated the value of AI, the data on the consistency of such gains across industries, enterprises and use cases reveal something more important: existing CX processes are so inefficient and costly that even limited use of AI can bring significant gains. Even properly built and implemented NLU-based bots led to significant improvements to outdated processes. But that's simply fixing the past.

Thus, the wins were real but they left the bigger picture untouched. The question today changes from "Where can I use AI in this?" to "What happens when AI agents run 60% of this?"

It's not automation – it's redesign.

Redesign processes for AI-human orchestration, redefine roles for judgment-first work and build an adaptive architecture that evolves with the business. As Joanne Wright, SVP of Transformation and Operations at IBM said "Before you apply any new technology, you have to decide what to stop doing and then redesign the workflows. Otherwise, you risk automating bad processes."

This means also requires rethinking existing goals and narratives into AI-addressable and relevant ones.

One brand shared their before and after processes, noting:

> "Before you apply any new technology, you have to decide what to stop doing and then redesign the workflows. Otherwise, you risk automating bad processes."
>
> **Joanne Wright**
> SVP of Transformation and Operations at IBM

"Logic flows are replaced by tools and our entire approach conversational design has been paradigm shifted."

Average Handle Time optimizes for human efficiency, not customer outcomes. Its is rooted in legacy, labor-driven cost models. AI agents operate within an entirely different model.

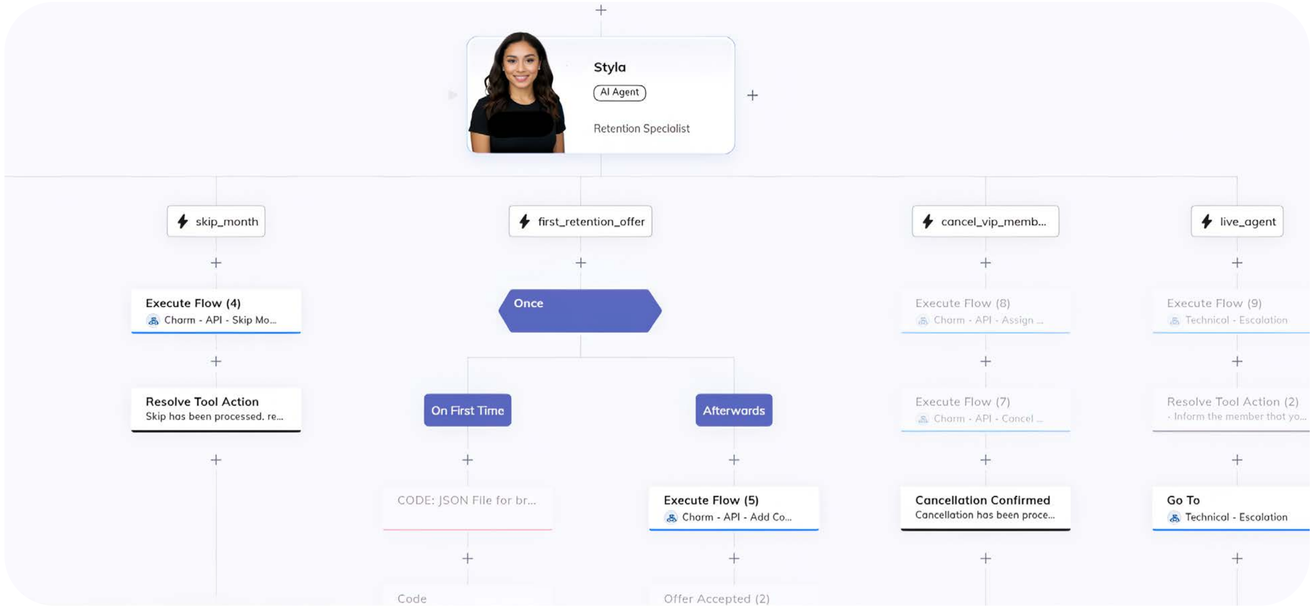
Since additional minutes do not materially increase cost, time-based efficiency metrics have no more purpose. For common inquiries, AHT no longer reflects either economic reality or service performance.

Yet, most customers do not want to invest 20 minutes in an interaction. As CMP Research notes, 72% of consumers want to spend less time with customer service. Experience is for theme parks. People don't want to be wowed, they want low-effort quick resolutions.

Thus, instead of a time value like AHT, look at a ratio of time to problem complexity. Track how quickly level one problems are resolved for example and develop a your own benchmark. Whether that's 2 minutes of 7 minutes, the KPI is directly tied to resolution and CSAT, not cost and efficiency.

Simple cases that took too long could indicate for example Speech-to-Text errors, latency issues that caused a lot of repetition and failed barge-in. Perhaps a key system required for resolution was down, or timing out. Perhaps someone changed an API key. Or perhaps someone was just chatty.

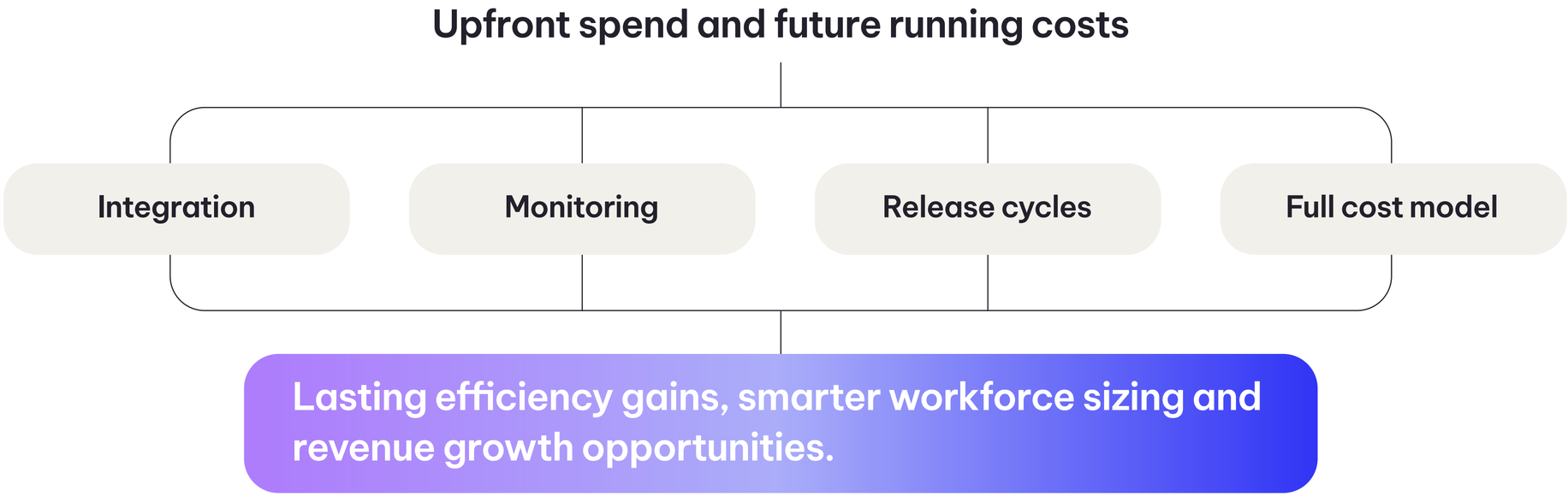
Reaching escape velocity means not just rethinking processes but, like agentic AI itself, focusing on outcomes and measuring what counts for customers, instead of the cost and efficiency of manual labor. CX executives, however, are catching on with CMP Research showing their most important metrics for 2026 and 2027 are CSAT and FCR.



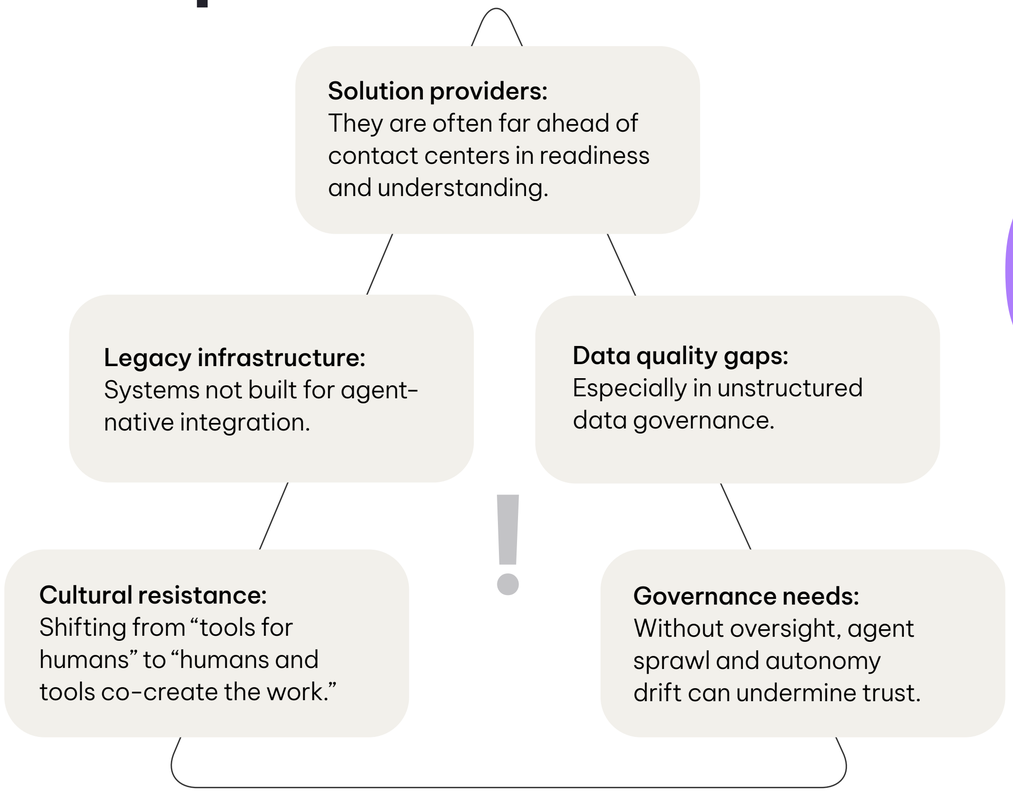
Reaching escape velocity means not just rethinking processes and metrics, but embedding these so deeply that backsliding into legacy becomes impossible.

Successful AI projects start with the cost top of mind.

Organizations need an industrial-scale delivery model with solutions built from day one to scale both technically and financially. That means planning every prerequisite for enterprise rollout: integration, monitoring, release cycles and the full cost model. Agentic AI at scale isn't like traditional IT, where annual costs are a fraction of the build. Here, recurring spend can exceed the initial investment. Scalability demands not just technical strength but economic endurance, especially in high-volume use cases. Done right, the upfront spend and future running costs are far outweighed by lasting efficiency gains, smarter workforce sizing and revenue growth opportunities.



Barriers & blind spots.



VS

Technical readiness checklist.

- Ability to host serverless agent workloads (Lambda, Kubernetes, etc.)
- Ability to expose data to APIs, which would be linked to agents for 2-way data transfer.
- Availability of vector databases for RAG.
- Integration with logging/ monitoring tools.

The agentic success recipe.

New business and process models will succeed by harnessing the power of connections, between applications, data, employees, customers and new technologies.

1 Clear strategic vision linked to measurable business outcomes.

Clarity on where AI adds value, evolving success metrics (e.g., reasoning accuracy, reliability, efficiency) as maturity grows.

2 Process redesign mindset.

Don't simply automate legacy workflows; map processes backward from desired outcomes and re-engineer them for agentic orchestration.

3 Robust data and integration foundation.

Interoperable, observable, governed and reusable data architecture (structured and unstructured), enabling agents to perform reliably.

4 Scalable, future-proof technology architecture.

Built for interoperability across fragmented systems and designed for AI-ready growth.

5 Iterative deployment and refinement.

Release, measure, benchmark (against both human and AI performance) and continuously improve using agile methodologies.

6 Empowered workforce and leadership commitment.

Roles redefined to lead AI-driven processes, with continuous education, aligned incentives and cultural buy-in.

7 Quality assurance as a foundation.

With AI agents making autonomous decisions, testing, benchmarking and governance must be embedded from the start.

8 Measure beyond efficiency.

Evaluate impact across cost, experience, performance improvement over time and resilience against both AI and human error.

Critical dynamics to consider.

Readiness gap:

Solution providers outpace contact centers in maturity and technology while enterprises underestimate the necessity of and lack centralized, accurate and structured agent-ready data.

Leadership:

Often drives adoption to “try what’s new” while CX teams remain conservative about changing customer journeys.

Governance trade-offs:

Cross-functional AI councils may extend procurement cycles but provide more rigorous evaluation and alignment.

Build vs buy:

Falling model costs and open-source availability are intensifying the debate over in-house development versus vendor solutions.

Fit for purpose:

Tailored solutions remain critical for meeting security, performance and adoption requirements.

Strategic divergence:

Executives emphasize cost reduction, while contact center leaders prioritize elevating CX alongside efficiency.

Agentic AI:
Catalyst for reinvention - or trigger for distrust?

The trust gap is the hidden blocker.

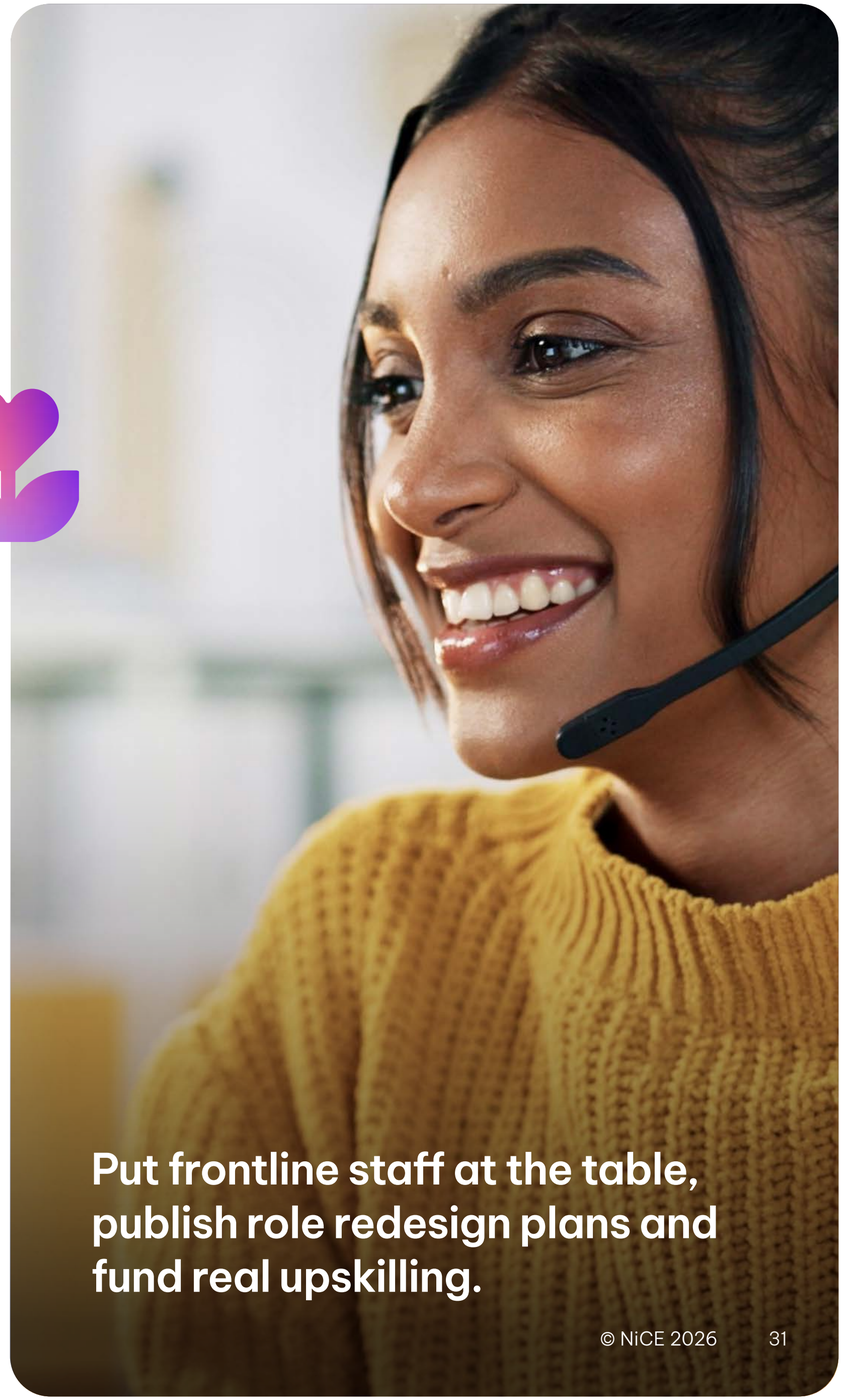
Early data points to a sharp trust gap between employees and leadership on AI. Workers see pilots that look like job cuts in disguise, minimal training and thin explanations of how agents change roles or metrics. The sharpest blocker isn't technical: it's trust.

Recent research from Stanford's Digital Economy Lab shows early-career workers in AI-exposed jobs, like customer service, faced a 13% drop in employment versus peers in less exposed fields.

The report also noted that disruption hits hardest where AI is deployed as outright automation rather than augmentation. Meanwhile, surveys such as AI That Works for Workers surface another warning: a structural trust gap between employees and leadership.

While executives see rapid AI progress, nearly half of employees report no trust in their employer to implement AI in ways that benefit them. If left unaddressed, this distrust translates into resistance and workarounds (and maybe even sabotage).

For organizations aiming to scale agentic AI, trust must be treated as a system requirement, not an afterthought. Put frontline staff at the table, publish role redesign plans and fund real upskilling.



Automation vs. augmentation decides the outcome.

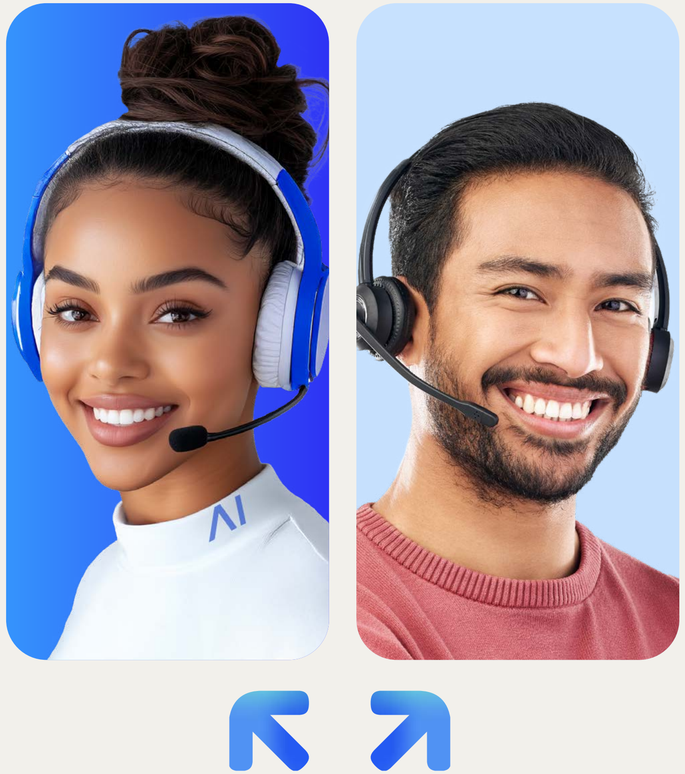
A Stanford study shows the labor market impact is sharpest in entry-level roles where AI replaces humans outright.

Job losses spike when AI substitutes for people (e.g. voice agents replacing call center staff). By contrast, augmentation tools (AI note-takers, copilots) show little negative effect.

The implication is clear: adoption strategies that prioritize augmentation over elimination not only safeguard workforce morale but also compound skills and adaptability over time.

For CX leaders, the challenge is no longer adoption. It is workforce design. Executives already cite managing an AI-augmented workforce as the hardest strategic shift ahead according to CMP research. That makes decisions about task allocation, human judgment, and success metrics critical.

Without clear direction, training, and viable career paths, agentic AI will not drive reinvention. It will create uncertainty, resistance, and loss of trust.



For CX leaders, this means mapping which tasks go to AI agents, which shift to judgment-first human roles.

Handling common internal questions & objections.

Security & privacy CISO/Legal

"How do we ensure sensitive customer data isn't exposed or misused by the AI?"

"Choose vendors with enterprise-grade controls (GDPR, HIPAA, SOC2 compliance) and deploy private/ controlled LLM instances when needed."

Build vs. Buy Engineering/IT

"Why should we buy a platform when we could build in-house using open-source models?"

"Open-source lowers model costs, but integration, governance and scaling are complex. Vendors provide tested infrastructure and faster time-to-value."

Integration complexity IT/Architecture

"Will this integrate with our CRM, telephony and knowledge systems without breaking workflows?"

"Early adopters report smoother deployment when vendors provide pre-built connectors and open APIs, reducing reliance on custom code."

Reliability & hallucinations compliance/QA

“How do we prevent AI from generating inaccurate or non-compliant responses?”

“Enterprises mitigate this with retrieval-augmented generation (RAG), guardrails and continuous monitoring frameworks that ensure responses.”

Cost vs. ROI uncertainty CFO/finance

“What’s the guaranteed payback if we invest in this now?"

“ROI is proven in pilots: cost-per-contact drops up to 85%, deployment is 3× faster and CSAT rises 20%. Value compounds over time.”

Governance & accountability executive sponsor

“Who owns AI oversight? IT, CX, or Operations?”

“Cross-functional AI councils provide balanced governance, ensuring accountability across technical, business and compliance stakeholders.”

Cultural resistance & workforce impact HR/agent

“Won’t this replace jobs and create resistance among frontline staff?”

“Agentic AI offloads routine tasks, letting human agents focus on complex interactions. Companies that position it as augmentation see higher adoption and morale.”

Skill & talent gaps IT/Ops manager

“Do we even have the skills to manage AI agents at scale?”

“Platforms now provide low-code/no-code tooling, training and AIOps support. Enterprises start small and build internal capability iteratively.”

Maturity & proof of value board/exec team

“Is this technology proven enough for us to bet on it now?”

“Analyst data and enterprise case studies show it is already in production, with measurable cost and CX gains. Early adoption creates learning advantages without high risk.”

Vendor lock-in procurement

“What if we get locked into one vendor’s ecosystem?”

“Prioritize platforms with open APIs, modular design and flexible deployment options. This ensures portability and avoids single-vendor dependency.”

Why most pilots fail:
Motion without momentum.

Despite the momentum behind agentic AI, a perceived sobering reality check' came from MIT's "GenAI Divide" report in late summer 2025, which found that a staggering 95% of enterprise AI pilots fail to deliver measurable P&L impact, stalling before they ever scale. The headline stat in this report even caused markets to wobble in late August. But a salient point is missed from a cursory reading of the 95% figure:

Failure isn't about model quality, it's about adaptation.

Without structural adaptation, the agentic advantage dissolves. Most tools don't learn, don't retain feedback and don't align with daily workflows; they devolve into static science projects. Worse still, over half of budgets are siphoned into flashy sales and marketing pilots which are easy to pitch but hard to scale while the significant ROI lies in unsung areas like back-office automation.

Whether the true number is 80% or 95%, the pattern is clear: most pilots fail because they're never designed to scale. Large failure ratios are real and starkly spotlight persistent error of patching new tech onto old systems. It bears repeating, old processes don't deserve automation.

There's a silver lining: the most adaptive experimentation isn't happening inside enterprise IT. It's employees using consumer AI tools like ChatGPT and Claude to patch gaps in workflows. That grassroots adoption shows what enterprises must formalize: AI that adapts, learns and integrates. The lesson: without deeply integrated, adaptive, business-aligned AI, pioneering too fast becomes pioneer alone and the agentic AI promise fades fast.

Agentic AI must be adaptive, deeply embedded, feedback-driven and aligned with workflows. That's how you get into the 5%.

Progress isn't measured by the number of pilots launched. It's measured by the ones that scale.

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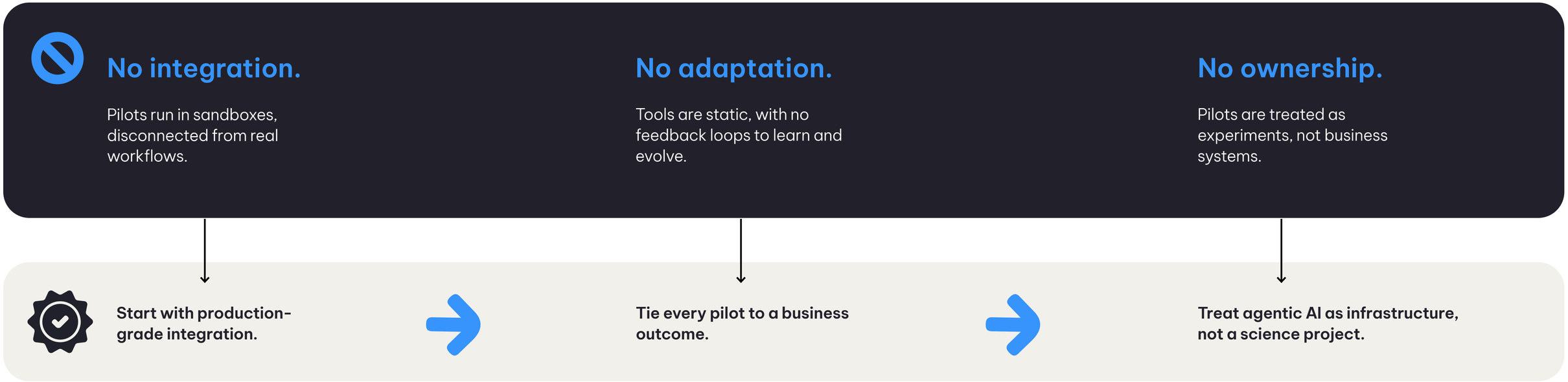
It's measured by the ones that scale.

AI pilots stall not because the models are weak but because the setup is:



Part 3

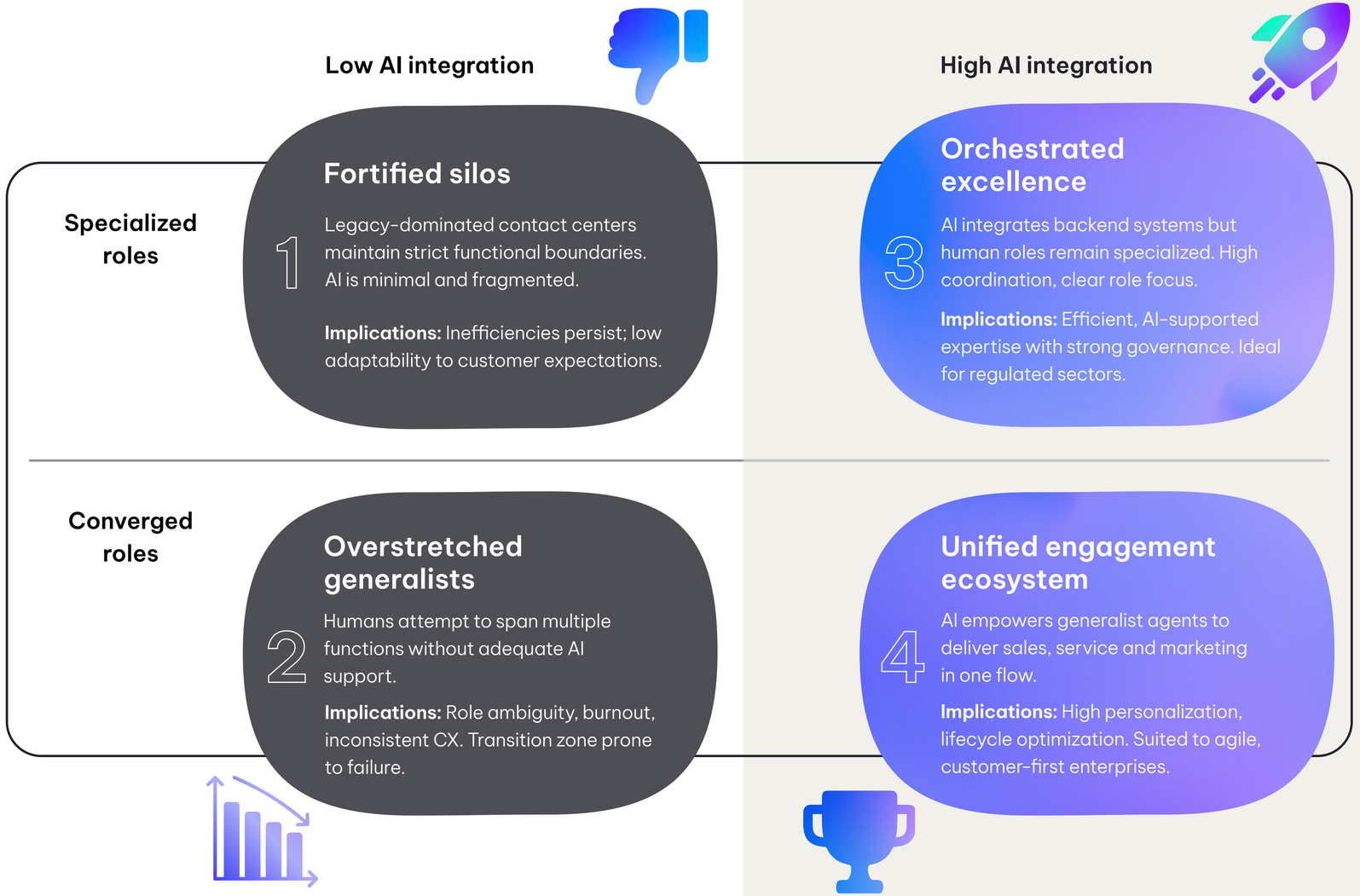
2028: A Day in the Contact Center

“Predictions are hard, especially about the future.”

The shape of customer service is shifting quickly, but not uniformly. As enterprises scale up AI in customer-facing roles, the future of how people and AI work together and how organizations look and operate is neither clear nor inevitable.

In the final part of our report, we will eschew traditional predictions and instead offer the following four vignettes, exploring different directions the contact center could take.

They are built around two variables: how tightly AI is integrated into the organization and how roles are designed. Each scenario comes to life through short, sharp narratives from the frontlines of the future, real voices dealing with different blends of automation, responsibility and cohesion.



SCENARIO 1

Fortified silos.

Low AI, specialized roles.

Maria starts her shift at the telecom contact center just like every day for the past two years, with a queue already stacked with billing disputes, technical issues, plan upgrades and more, but Maria’s scope is limited to support. Early in her shift, a customer calls frustrated that their international roaming charges weren’t waived, despite a recent promotional email suggesting they would be. Of course the company’s self-service bot on Instagram couldn’t help. Maria scans the CRM, which lags before loading a customer profile that shows no trace of the campaign. The suggested responses don’t match the customer’s situation and she apologizes, offering to transfer them to sales for clarification. The customer, now more annoyed, pleads not to be handed off again, but Maria has no authority to resolve promotional disputes or access marketing systems. Her hands are tied.

The tools don’t help. The CRM shows partial history, marketing notes are missing and their AI chatbot had failed to resolve the inquiry, escalating both the customer and their anger, after starting off with a failed self-service attempt.

Worse yet, Maria has learned that asking ChatGPT from her phone can often get her faster, clearer policy summaries than what’s buried in the outdated knowledge base, even if using it violates IT policy. Every workaround feels like a minor rebellion. The company has several internal AI tools across departments, suggested phrases and actions here, a sentiment tool there, but both her tools and the information she needs are scattered between systems.

Coworkers who game the system with intentional call drops post better KPIs, while Maria's empathy tanks her AHT score, meaning she probably won’t last long at the job.

Despite management's claims of “customer obsession” and an “AI-first strategy,” Maria feels it’s really about cost containment. She spends her day firefighting issues with one hand tied behind her back, stuck between customers who expect seamless service and systems that reinforce disconnection. She dreams of cross-training, or at least cross-access to resolve, not reroute. But instead, she’s a cog in a fragmented machine, delivering care one frustrated handoff at a time. Her depth of knowledge grows, yet so does the gap between what she knows and what she’s allowed to do.

On paper, her job continues to be customer service. In reality, it’s just making metrics in Excel look good, customers be damned.

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SCENARIO 2

Overstretched generalists.

Low AI, converged roles.

Michael’s title technically says “CX Strategist,” but most days, he’s a one-man triage unit handling service complaints, half-baked campaign recoveries and surprise sales pushes. This morning, a customer reached out, irritated by a promotional email offering a discount that didn’t apply to their cart. Michael juggled between tabs: opening the loyalty database, tracking down the campaign codes and combing through internal Slack threads for similar issues. After confirming a backend error, he manually credited the discount while apologizing profusely. Sensing the customer might churn, he launches into a save script while messaging a coworker in marketing to flag the mistake.

There’s no comparable AI like what Michael uses privately. Instead, fragmented assistive tools offer autocomplete, suggested replies and actions and automatic summarization, but each within individual apps. He pieces together context from five systems - CRM, ticketing, campaign dashboards, pricing spreadsheets and his notes - just to complete a basic resolution.

Automation handles routine confirmations, but when it comes to gray areas, Michael does the heavy lifting. The customer left somewhat satisfied, but it was the third case this morning and has already left him drained. **The tools made tasks quicker, not easier.**

His managers tout “cross-functional agility” but Michael is stretched thin, performing the jobs of three people without clear authority or unified visibility across systems. Customers sometimes praise the seamlessness of his help, unaware how disjointed things are behind the scenes. After his shift, Michael scrolls Reddit under a pseudonym, venting that “the only thing unified about his company’s support is the burnout.” He truly likes being able to help people and add something positive to people’s days but the alleged AI transformation feels like a budget cut wrapped in buzzwords.

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SCENARIO 3

Orchestrated excellence.

High AI, specialized roles.

Alex works in support for a global electronics company. It used to be called tier two, but since there hasn’t been tier one in several years, it’s just support now. His desktop flashes and a WhatsApp call connects. His AI-enhanced dashboard immediately surfaces the customer’s recent interactions including a purchase made six months ago, a service ticket from last week and a sentiment score trending downwards after a frustrating exchange with their WhatsApp bot. The customer complains they’ve been sent a refurbished replacement instead of a new device under their extended warranty. As Alex listens, the system highlights relevant warranty clauses, confirms the customer’s eligibility for a new replacement and automatically recommends a goodwill gesture. It also discreetly flags a limited-time loyalty offer that matches the customer’s product line and frustration score.

Alex calmly apologizes and explains the situation, confirms the shipping correction and follows with the goodwill offer, all with support from real-time policy retrieval and coaching prompts. Sensing a possible upsell opportunity, the AI pings a sales specialist with a chat summary and intent score. As Alex wraps up his piece of the call, the sales agent picks up in parallel, introducing a promotional upgrade bundle relevant to the customer's previous interests. There’s no awkward handoff and though the customer doesn’t understand why they need to talk to someone else, they’re still happy.

Although Alex doesn’t sell or campaign, he sees the customer’s journey play out across channels and time in emails, app interactions, support history and purchase behavior, all woven together. After the sales agent ends call, the AI drafts a call summary of the entire interaction and adds recommended follow-up actions for the marketing and service teams. By the time the next campaign kicks off, the marketing team knows exactly what was resolved, what was offered and what mattered. It’s not just customer support; it’s a synchronized experience where everyone plays their part without stepping out of tune. It’s customer care without the seams.

It’s not just customer support; it’s a synchronized experience where everyone plays their part without stepping out of tune.

SCENARIO 4

Unified engagement ecosystem.

High AI, converged roles.

Nina interacts with customers across channels whether chat, messaging, voice or video and the interface updates live with sentiment, intent predictions, product fit suggestions and customer milestones. Today, she walked a new user through setup, addressed a billing hiccup and offered a tailored upsell - all in one fluid interaction. She didn’t pitch, she guided. She didn’t follow a script like in the old days, but instead relied on common sense and emotional intelligence combined with context and customer knowledge thanks to her AI assistant. The AI whispered next steps and Nina brought the human touch.

Her team doesn’t think in terms of departments or shuffle customers around, only for a different employee to help them using the exact same systems Nina uses. It doesn’t matter who fixes the issue or makes the sale, because the customer outcome is the focus, not who pressed what button internally.

Besides, shuffling customers around feels archaic, especially as it would create more friction and increase customer effort. Nina is an engagement strategist, backed by an AI orchestration engine that adapts on the fly.

The much smaller sales and marketing departments focus on outbound and new customers. Everything after the first sale lands with her team. Marketing shares insights, service loops in feedback and sales adds the original buyer journey, pain points and persona information.

The customer never notices the handoffs, because there aren’t any. Nina’s work is seamless and so is the experience she helps deliver because it mirrors how customers behave, not how companies organize themselves internally.

The bottom line.

In the future of customer, AI will be everywhere, but success won’t. As communication lines blur and AI gets baked into every touchpoint, the real challenge isn’t adoption. It’s alignment. Will companies move forward with AI-augmented array of parallel departments and channels, served by a rat’s nest of point solutions? Or will it be one living system?

Nina’s work is seamless and so is the experience she helps deliver because it **mirrors how customers behave, not how companies organize themselves internally.**

Closing thoughts.

Agentic AI is now the lever that lets laggards leapfrog and leaders widen the gap. The only alternative is a slow slide into irrelevance.

Today, bad customer service is everywhere. Tomorrow, it will no longer be an accident, but a conscious decision.

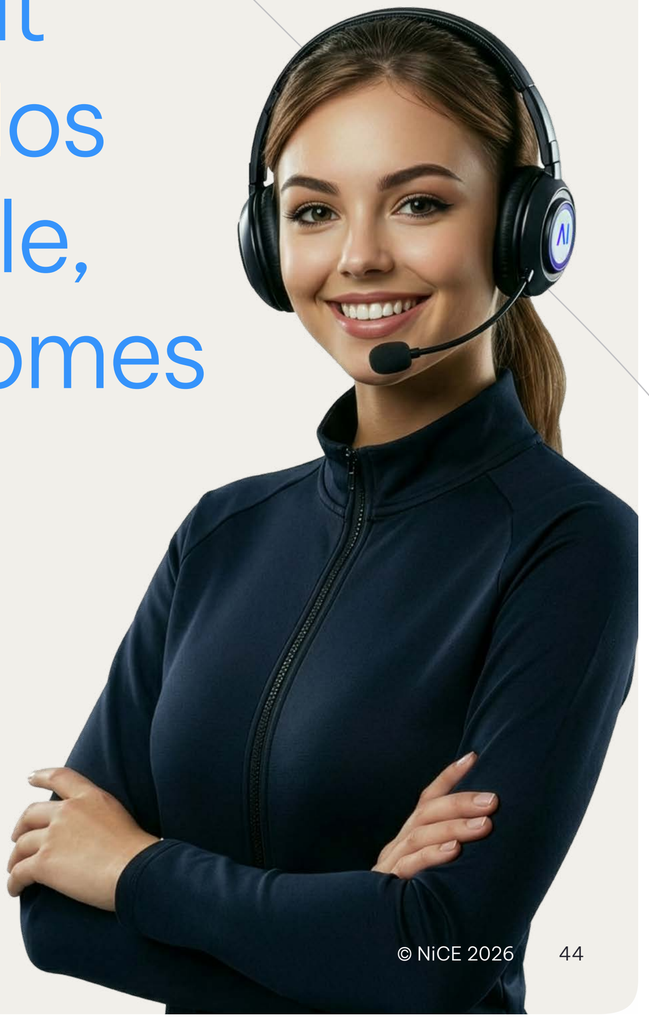
Today, ethical debates revolve around how to use AI. Tomorrow, choosing not to use AI in customer service will look less like caution and more like CX negligence.

The age of AI exploration is ending and the age of AI transformation has already begun.

We have arrived at a moment of strategic divergence, reminiscent of electrification, the rise of the web, or the launch of the iPhone.

Enterprises that stay stuck in silos between people, tech and outcomes will fall behind.

Those that sync it all up? They'll win on loyalty, speed and brand impact.



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Data Sources & Methodology Notes

Enterprise performance data, benchmarks, and deployment metrics cited in this report are derived from:

- Interviews with CX, IT, and Operations leaders at large enterprises in North America and Europe.
- Aggregated, anonymized customer deployment data from NiCE Cognigy enterprise implementations.
- Public analyst research and peer-reviewed academic studies listed above.

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