THE STATE OF CX TECH 2026

The seven technologies changing CX, as identified by *CX Network*'s research

CX NETWORK

RESEARCH REPORT

INSIDE

- How practitioners are overcoming the obstacles they face when investing in new CX tech
- What organizations need to do to prevent AI from becoming a trust liability
- Real-world case studies from Bosch, Tripadvisor, and Toyota

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Foreword

CX has long been shaped by the tools practitioners use to improve customer outcomes. But in the last three years, *CX Network*'s annual research into the state of CX has seen technology play an increasingly larger role in the work of practitioners. Today's top CX trends are no longer rooted in loyalty, trust, or employee experience but AI agents, conversational interfaces, and data.

In tandem, changing customer behaviors and new consumer technology have placed even greater focus on new CX tools, making the application of AI across business processes non-negotiable. This shift has accelerated in the last 12 months, as the emergence of algorithmic buyers forces organizations to adapt everything from data utilization to operational efficiency, and ensure they are visible, interpretable, and competitive to this new class of customer.

These shifts have forced CX to ask some defining questions: How do we educate customers on data collection and consent? What architecture capabilities do organizations need to build towards to be ready for the next wave of innovation? And, given what we know today, what capabilities will CX likely need in future?

Increasingly, these are not questions of capability alone, but of structure, pointing to a deeper re-evaluation of how CX systems are designed, connected, and operated. To lead in this respect, organizations must operationalize AI across the enterprise, rather than experiment in isolation.

This report features *CX Network*'s research into the state of CX and case studies from Bosch, Tripadvisor, and Toyota that demonstrate how the cutting-edge tools identified by the research can deliver measurable benefits in the real world. The report also features insights from CX and AI specialists from retail, consulting, and academia to contextualize the numbers and explain why the challenge is no longer simply identifying the right technologies but enabling them to operate as part of a cohesive system.

Contents

CX Network Experts

Our interviewees are CX professionals in major organizations. Their analysis in this report draws on their experience at their current organizations and others.

Michele Carlson
director of product marketing
NiCE

Sebastian Glock
director of product marketing for
NiCE Cognigy

Ebrahim Hyder
VP of customer care
Michael Kors

Dawn Kristy JD
AI governance advisor

Bill Staikos
founder and managing partner of
Be Customer Led

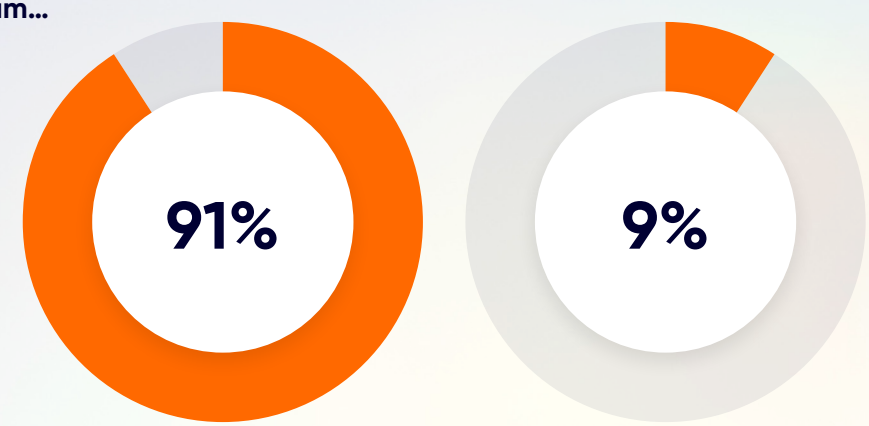
About the respondents

The findings in this report are taken from *CX Network*'s annual survey, conducted in December 2025 and January 2026. This year, the survey was completed by 342 CX practitioners, service leaders, experience designers, analysts, authors, and consultants from around the world. With the response data as a guide, this report establishes the most important CX tech in 2026 and explains how organizations can best adapt, invest, and deploy for success.

To contextualize the findings, this section details the locations, departments, seniority, and job function of the survey respondents. Please note that due to rounding, some figures may not total 100 percent.

Figure 1

I am...



A customer experience, service, insight, digital, data, AI, or marketing practitioner

An industry analyst, researcher, commentator, author/blogger

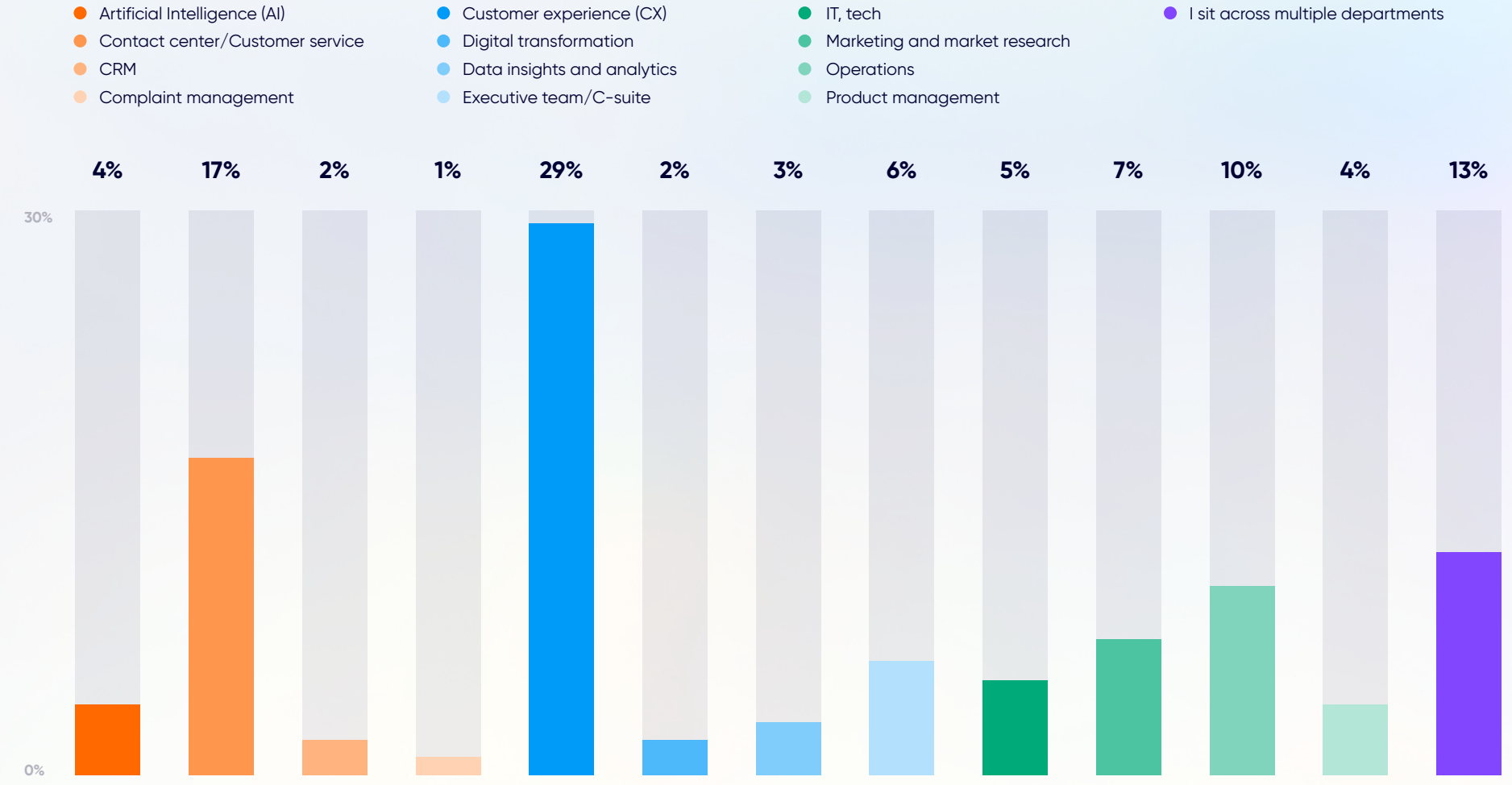
Figure 2

Which title best describes your current role?

Source: *CX Horizons: The State of CX in 2026 survey, completed by 342 network members between December 2025 and January 2026.*

Figure 3

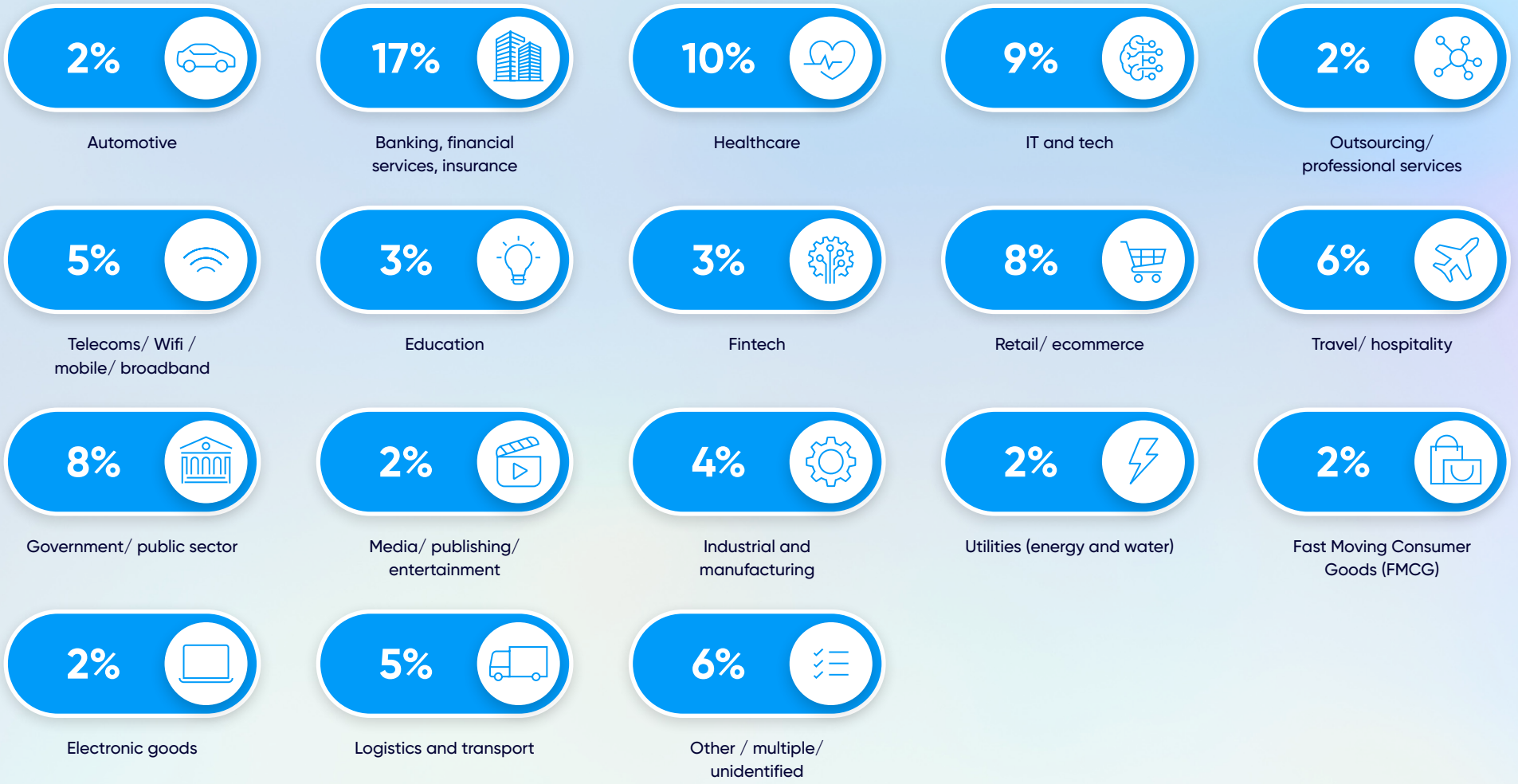
In which functions/departments do you sit?



Source: *CX Horizons: The State of CX in 2026 survey, completed by 342 network members between December 2025 and January 2026.*

Figure 4

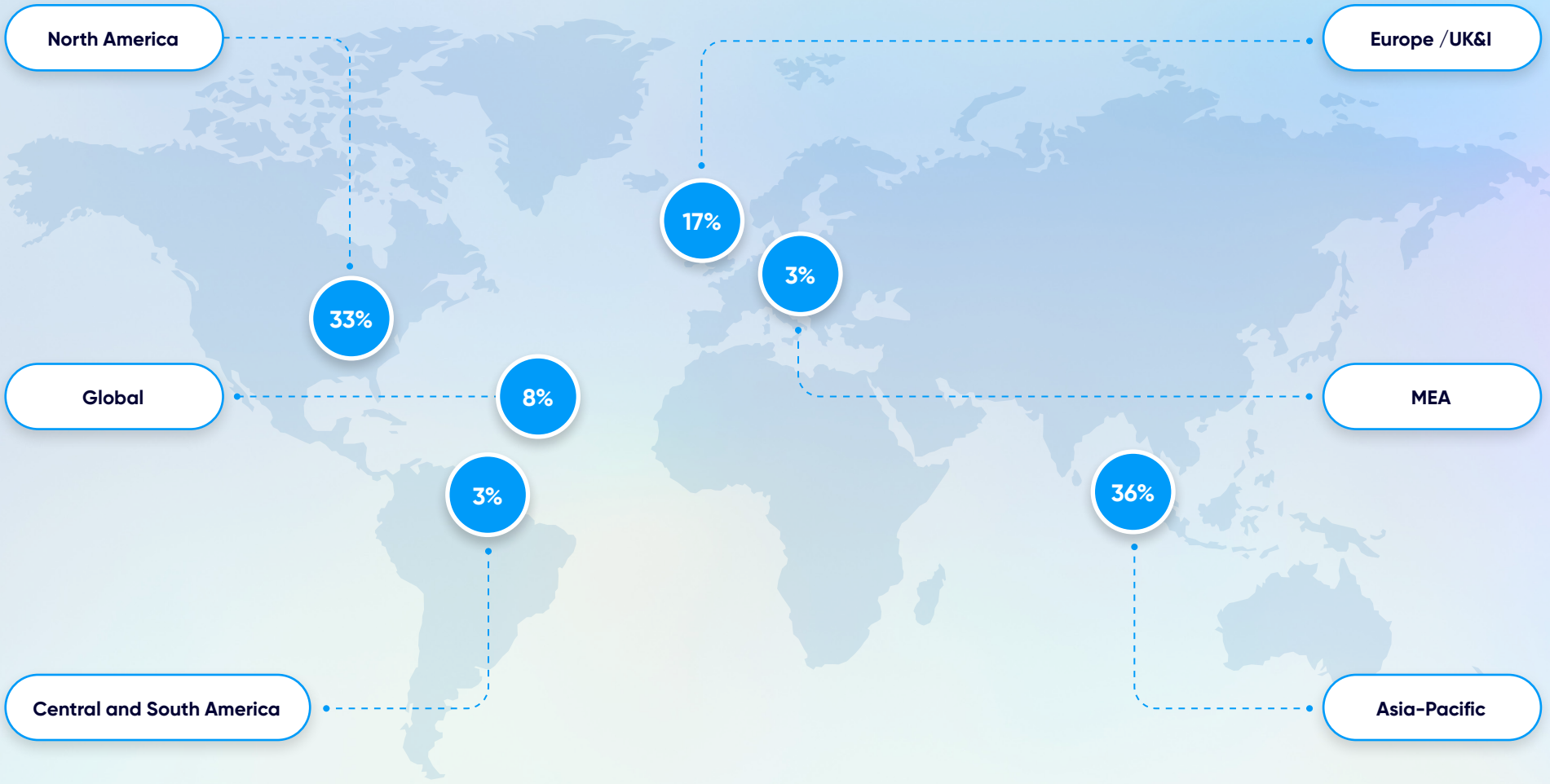
In which industry do you operate?



Source: *CX Horizons: The State of CX in 2026 survey, completed by 342 network members between December 2025 and January 2026.*

Figure 5

Which geographic region are your responsibilities focused on?



Source: *CX Horizons: The State of CX in 2026 survey, completed by 342 network members between December 2025 and January 2026.*

The 7 technologies changing CX

When *CX Network* conducted its annual research into the state of CX in 2026, practitioners were asked two key questions:

- Which three of the listed CX trends do you expect to have the greatest impact on your role to 2030?
- In which areas do you plan to invest in to achieve your strategic goals in 2026?

In response to the first question, the research confirmed that the top CX trends influencing practitioners are heavily focused on artificial intelligence (AI). For the second consecutive year, AI-powered technologies for operations emerged as the top response (selected by 24 percent) and was followed by agentic AI and AI agents (21 percent), AI-first customer journeys/ customers using AI for product research (17 percent), and conversational AI and virtual assistants (16.5 percent, see Figure 6). Elsewhere, the top 10 responses also featured generative AI chatbots and virtual assistants (selected by 12 percent), generative AI for marketing/ hyper-personalization (10 percent), and data analytics and utilization (eight percent).

Reflecting how leaders are acting on these trends, the top areas for investment emerged as agentic AI and AI agents (29 percent), followed by automation of CX and service functions (22 percent), data insights and analytics and conversational AI and virtual assistants (both selected by 15 percent), and cloud services/ migration (11 percent).

This alignment between trends and investment suggests that many organizations are moving in the same direction. The differentiator, therefore, is unlikely to be what is invested in, but how those investments are connected, deployed, and scaled across the enterprise.

However, as organizations invest in these areas, many are finding that deploying individual technologies does not, on its own, translate into better outcomes. Without a unifying approach to how these capabilities operate together, value can remain fragmented and difficult to scale.

Taken together, the crossover between these results highlight there are seven key technology-related trends elevating and transforming CX in 2026:

- Agentic AI and AI agents
- Conversational AI and virtual assistants
- AI/ML for business operations
- Generative AI chatbots
- Automation
- Data insights, analytics
- AI-first customer journeys

Sebastian Glock, director of product marketing for NiCE Cognigy, says that although the technologies listed are often approached as separate capabilities and investments, "their real value emerges when they operate together".

"Agentic AI, conversational interfaces, automation, and analytics are inherently interdependent," Glock explains, and this is where a clear divide is forming. "Organizations relying on disconnected point solutions risk reinforcing fragmentation and limiting impact, while those building toward a unified platform establish the shared context, orchestration, and intelligence required to scale AI effectively and deliver measurable, compounding outcomes," he explains.

The AI-driven organization: Bosch improves CX through operations

AI is no longer a tool businesses choose to adopt — it's the infrastructure they run on. And it's no longer confined to a single function. AI for operations stretches across agentic systems, analytics, and intelligent automation, quietly powering the experiences customers expect as standard.

Figure 6

Trends Vs investment priorities

We asked practitioners to select the three CX trends they believe will have the greatest influence on their work to 2030 from a list of 25 choices. We also asked them to select three CX investment priorities they and their organizations have this year from a list of more than 30 choices. This figure shows the top responses to both questions. Bold formatting highlights responses that repeat year-on-year.

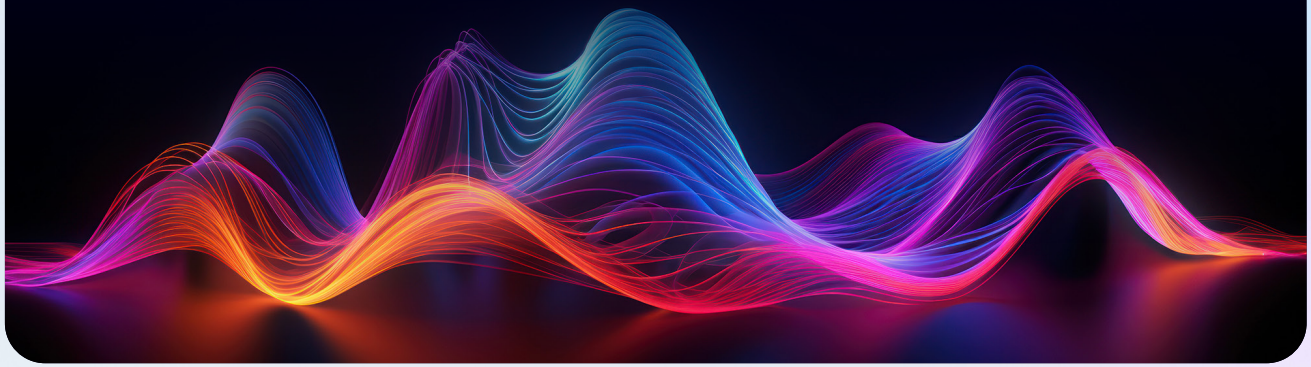
Top CX trends to 2030	Top investment priorities in 2026
AI-powered technologies for operations	**Agentic AI/ AI agents**
Agentic AI and AI agents	Automation of CX and service functions
AI-first customer journeys/ customers using AI for product research	Business continuity
Conversational AI chatbots and virtual assistants	Customer engagement
Automation	**Data insights, analytics**
Generative AI chatbots	**Conversational AI chatbots and virtual assistants**
Customer loyalty and retention	CRM
Generative AI for marketing/ hyper-personalization	**AI/ML for business operations**
Data analytics and utilization	Accessibility and inclusivity of contact channels
Consumer privacy	Cloud services/ migration

Source: *CX Network CX Horizons Survey, conducted December 2025-January 2026 and completed by 342 practitioners.*

In this context, it comes as little surprise that AI for operations emerged as the top CX trend in both 2025 and 2026. Process excellence has become a baseline expectation. However, this is not simply because the next generation of CX tech has raised the bar. It is because the consumer's use of AI has introduced a new class of shopper and all organizations must now be visible – and competitive – to algorithmic buyers that make decisions based on operational reality, rather than the emotive and marketing-driven reasoning that previously influenced sales. Factors such as returns management, customer sentiment, governance frameworks, and effective support now directly influence whether a business is recommended by machine customers.

"While many CX trends point to future direction, AI agents are already driving value today by autonomously executing tasks, resolving requests, and orchestrating workflows in real time."

Sebastian Glock, director of product marketing, NiCE Cognigy



At global engineering and technology firm Bosch, NiCE Cognigy has been rooted in the company's operational processes and applied to more than 90 different use cases, reflecting a shift from isolated deployments to a unified operating model built on platform architecture. Not only has this driven operational excellence across the enterprise, it has also enabled Bosch to accelerate automation and capitalize on the benefits of both conversational and generative AI.

Bosch aimed to move beyond point solutions toward a platform architecture that integrates with existing infrastructure while enabling business units and departments to develop and scale AI agents independently, all without fragmenting the underlying system. Although it experimented with early pilots using point solutions across various regions, none offered the centralized, scalable enterprise solution it was seeking.

One example of this platform approach in action is NiCE Copilot for Agents, which has scaled across business units rather than remaining a standalone deployment. AI agents have been embedded in the contact center to assist human agents by listening in on calls, retrieving relevant knowledge, providing agents with next-best-action suggestions, performing sentiment analysis on the caller, transcribing conversations, and then saving all data in the backend system. They all operate on a shared orchestration layer that ensures knowledge, context, and learning are continuously reused across interactions.

Meanwhile, the HR team deployed an AI agent called ROB to deliver personalized HR support for employees across 25 countries, demonstrating how the same underlying platform can extend beyond customer operations into enterprise-wide functions. Multilingual and intuitive, ROB helps with such tasks as updating bank account details, accessing career development information, or learning about company policies. It also retains context during conversations and adjusts responses based on the user's tone of voice, feeding interaction data back into the platform to continuously improve performance across use cases.

Accessible via platforms like Microsoft Teams, ROB is powered by GPT and built on NiCE Cognigy, and it continuously improves through employee interactions, enhancing the HR experience across Bosch globally.

Bosch's approach illustrates a broader pattern emerging across leading organizations: AI delivers its greatest value when it is embedded directly into operational workflows, not layered on top as a standalone capability. By centralizing development and orchestration while enabling distributed use case deployment, Bosch has created a model where scale does not come at the expense of consistency or control.

Driving transparency and measurable outcomes

The adoption of AI-driven technology in customer experience has coincided with a period of heightened accountability. CX is increasingly under the microscope and investment must deliver quantifiable returns. In fact, among survey respondents, 52 percent said the pressure to prove a return on investment (ROI) is increasing, while 36 percent reported that it has stayed the same, and only three percent said it has decreased.

According to Glock, agentic AI and AI agents like those deployed by Bosch rank as the number one investment priority because "they can translate AI investment into measurable business outcomes, but only when deployed across a connected enterprise system". Looking at the broader CX landscape, he says agentic AI is rising to the top of the investment priorities because of where it operates. "When embedded within core workflows and connected systems, it directly influences execution, compressing processes, reducing friction, and producing quantifiable results. In contrast, when deployed in isolation, its impact remains incremental and difficult to scale."

He adds: "While many CX trends point to future direction, AI agents are already driving value today by autonomously executing tasks, resolving requests, and orchestrating workflows in real time. And with more than half of organizations reporting that expectations to prove ROI are on the rise, the results speak for themselves."

Glock says this takes AI beyond augmentation and into execution, and rather than improving isolated moments, agentic AI is able to compress entire processes. The benefits of this include reduced handoffs and service costs, faster resolutions, and consistent standards when experiences are scaled. All valuable and quantifiable.

"That direct link to efficiency, productivity, and ROI is why it leads investment," Glock says. "But the value depends on where AI agents operate. In fragmented environments, their impact is limited by disconnected data and siloed workflows. What's key is interoperability: a fully connected CX ecosystem where

AI agents can operate with shared context, connect across the entire CX universe, orchestrate workflows, and deliver more consistent, clear, trackable impact across the customer journey."

Glock adds: "This is why investment is accelerating. Companies are not just funding AI use cases but building an enterprise-scale platform where intelligence compounds, execution scales, and CX outcomes continuously improve."

There is another factor at play: customers using AI. This year's research included AI-first journeys as a response option for the first time and the results confirmed that as both a trend and customer behavior, this development is front of mind for practitioners. As outlined in the foreword, this makes the application of AI across business processes non-negotiable. Tools such as Gemini, Perplexity, Claude, and ChatGPT short list and select retailers and service providers based on the strength of their processes, the clarity of accessible information, and customer sentiment.

The new conversational AI

As reflected in the list of top CX technologies, conversational interfaces are now expected as standard – and they have come a long way since the days of rules-based bots designed to deflect support tickets, underscoring the shift from isolated capability to enterprise-wide orchestration.

"For a long time, conversational AI was viewed almost exclusively through a service lens, excelling at deflecting contacts, answering FAQs, and modernizing IVRs," says Ebrahim Hyder, VP of customer care for Michael Kors. "In my experience, that view is far too narrow. Today, conversational AI is increasingly acting as a journey layer, supporting moments that span customers, employees, and operations well beyond traditional support."

Beyond service, there are five key journeys where Hyder says conversational AI is driving value for customers and organizations:

1. **Prepurchase guidance and assisted discovery:** From Macy's AI shopping assistant – which is reported to have driven a 400 percent increase in customer spend – to the Michael Kors Style Assistant, consumers are fully embracing the idea of having a personal AI-powered shopping assistant.

2. **Postpurchase engagement and proactive care:** Hyder says channel fragmentation post-purchase can be addressed with conversational AI that proactively engages customers around order status, delivery changes, returns, or care instructions. "This not only reduces inbound contact volume but also builds trust at moments that matter," he says.

3. **Retention and recovery:** When handled with rigid, scripted flows, cancellations, complaints, or missed deliveries can destroy customer satisfaction and the potential to build loyalty. Instead, Hyder says voice AI can be applied to early-stage problems, "where tone, speed, and empathy matter".

4. **Employee and agent journeys:** In contact centers, voice AI and chat can be used to onboard new agents, simulate customer scenarios, deliver just-in-time coaching, and reinforce brand voice.

5. **AI first, cross-channel orchestration:** As outlined in some of these use cases, conversational AI delivers value when it operates as an orchestration layer connecting systems, channels, and people around customer intent. "In this model, a journey can start in voice, continue in chat, trigger backend actions, and involve a human, without losing context," Hyder says.

Taken together, these use cases point to a broader shift: conversational AI is no longer just a service channel, but an orchestration layer that connects intent, systems, and execution across the entire customer journey.

Hyder adds: "In my opinion, conversational AI is becoming the connective tissue that shapes the entire customer and employee journeys. It excels wherever journeys are intent driven, emotionally nuanced, and dependent on speed and continuity. From retail discovery and post-purchase care to employee training and proactive engagement, it's no longer just about automating service but about reshaping experiences."

NEXT SECTION

The next section of this report looks at the obstacles practitioners face when investing in the leading CX technologies of 2026 and explains how to work with vendors, respect the customer's demand for privacy and data security, and ensure AI is used with accountability and oversight.

The obstacles facing CX tech investment

When survey respondents were asked to select the three obstacles they expect to encounter when investing in CX this year from a list of 15 choices, the most selected responses were demonstrating ROI (selected by 35 percent), finding budget (32 percent), integration with existing tools (26 percent), economic conditions in local or regional markets (23 percent), and a complicated internal sign-off process (23 percent, see Figure 7).

On how to overcome the challenge of integrating new tools with old, Michele Carlson, director of product marketing for NiCE, says that although many organizations successfully link systems at a technical level, they continue to operate with fragmented workflows, siloed ownership, and disconnected decision-making.

"The most common integration failure is assuming connectivity alone creates cohesion," states Carlson. "Many organizations connect systems technically but still operate with fragmented workflows and disconnected decision-making."

Carlson says that that disconnect shows up in the metrics that matter most: slower resolution, inconsistent experiences, and difficulty proving ROI. As organizations adopt agentic AI, this gap becomes more visible.

"AI agents require shared context across systems to act effectively. A unified platform turns integration into an operating model—one that drives faster execution, clearer accountability, and more impactful outcomes."

Working with third-party solution providers

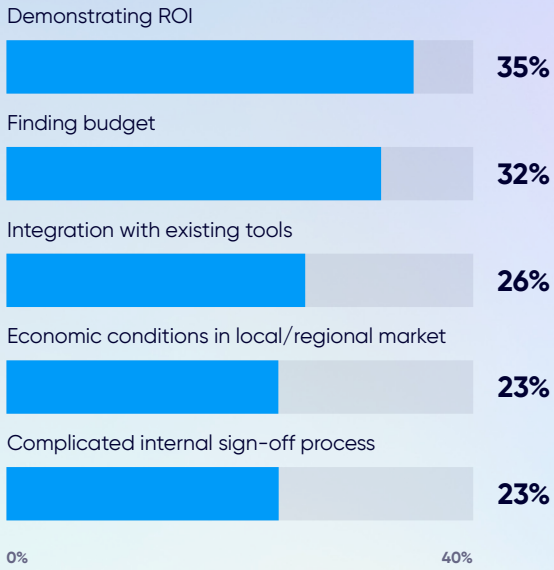
While 32 percent of survey participants build their own solutions in house, as many as 68 percent said they acquire new AI capabilities through third-party vendors. However, a noisy and complex vendor landscape can also signal a deeper issue: many organizations are optimizing vendor selection when the real decision is architectural. When evaluating new CX technology, especially AI solutions, Hyder says the most important advice is "to take your time, do your research, and avoid being swayed by hype or urgency".

With specific reference to the AI vendor landscape, he says the rapid and unprecedented proliferation of solutions and providers has created a crowded market, "where many vendors showcase similar agent-facing capabilities that are largely differentiated by marketing language rather than true technical depth". On the customer-facing side, however, this challenge shifts. Hyder says agentic AI voice and chatbots that can resolve low- to medium-complexity tasks – such as FAQs, order tracking, and returns – represent a major opportunity, "but execution and maturity vary widely across providers".

Figure 7

The top 5 investment obstacles

Next, we asked respondents to select three obstacles they expect to encounter when investing in CX this year. This graphic shows the five most selected responses from a list of 15 choices.



Source: *CX Network CX Horizons Survey, December 2025-January 2026/ Respondents were asked to select three choices and the question was answered by 342 practitioners.*

On how to cut through the noise in either situation, Hyder says: "One of the most effective ways to assess a vendor's readiness is to insist on two types of demos: a customized demo tailored to your brand's tone, policies, and top use cases; and a live demo with an existing customer using the solution in real production scenarios. This dual-demo approach helps you distinguish between polished sales demos and real-world performance, especially important in such an emerging and fast-moving category."

Pricing is another critical area where Hyder says CX leaders must proceed carefully. "Because the AI market is still maturing, pricing models differ drastically even for similar capabilities. During my own agentic AI research, I encountered structures ranging from per-minute billing with added fees when the agentic bot resolves an inquiry, to flat per-resolution pricing, to mandatory annual minimum commitments tied to projected usage. Understanding how each model scales as adoption grows is essential to avoiding surprises."

Finally, Hyder recommends practitioners ask vendors to clearly outline what services are included in their partnership: creation of new automations or use cases, LLM tuning and updates, QA processes, model maintenance, monitoring, and ongoing optimization. "Successful AI implementation depends not just on the technology itself, but on the strength and reliability of the operational partnership that supports it," he says.

Getting customers on board with high-tech CX

With AI now a leading business technology and driver of customer outcomes, it comes as little surprise that customers are increasingly aware of how it works and uses their data. In fact, this emerged as the number one customer behavior trend in 2026, selected by 36 percent of respondents. The rise in AI literacy among consumers was also reflected in the top CX trends, as outlined in Section One, with both AI-first journeys and consumer privacy making the top 10. While these findings are not an obstacle to investment per se, they do raise questions and challenges around customer trust that are imperative to address.

AI governance advisor Dawn Kristy JD, says customers often learn how AI works "through timing changes, queue movement, and escalation paths long before organizations update the language that explains those systems". This means that as customer awareness increases, so too do the expectations for "visibility into how data shapes service outcomes".

"As AI becomes embedded in routing logic, prioritization, and escalation thresholds, trust expectations begin shifting in everyday service interactions," Kristy says. "Customers start to notice when interactions feel guided by automated judgment rather than human decision-making. At that point, they are no longer asking only how their data is collected. They are asking how their data influenced what just occurred during a service interaction."

"Organizations that connect AI transparency to decision-making pathways earlier are already seeing stronger customer confidence as AI adoption expands."

Dawn Kristy JD, AI governance advisor

The responsibility for explaining these changes increasingly falls to CX and service over legal and, because of their lines of contact with customers and proximity to the operational systems where AI is applied, CX leaders are often the first to notice these sentiment shifts.

Hand in hand with new regulations such as the EU AI act, and global standards, such as ISO/IEC 42001:2023, these trends highlight the importance of robust – and machine readable – governance and ethics frameworks. Not just for the human customers who deliberately seek out such information, but the AI assistants that support and execute product and purchasing decisions on behalf of humans.

When asked about AI governance, 57 percent of survey respondents said they have an organization-wide or department-wide approach to AI best practice and governance, but as more use cases are rolled out, organizations must also ensure they have the appropriate consent from customers before utilizing their data in new ways.

"[Human] customers now experience consent through service outcomes, response timing, queue priority, automation behaviour, and escalation pathways rather than through data privacy policy text alone," Kristy says. As a result, she says updating consent policies now requires two adjustments. First, clear and transparent language. Second, alignment between what organizations say about AI use and where AI is actually influencing customer-facing decisions based on their data.

"Organizations that connect AI transparency to decision-making pathways earlier are already seeing stronger customer confidence as AI adoption expands," she says. "Ultimately, organizations are moving toward managing consent inside the service experience itself. As customers increasingly ask how their data influenced what just occurred during the service interaction, this is one of the most important shifts now underway in CX."

Implementing AI accountability and oversight

Governance and ethics are critical for brand reputation, public relations, and customer trust, but they must go hand in hand with accountability and oversight that can scale in tandem with the technology.

According to Carlson: "As AI expands across the customer journey, accountability must scale in parallel with execution. The challenge isn't the volume of AI, but the fragmentation of how it is governed. When AI capabilities are distributed across disconnected systems, oversight becomes inconsistent, ownership becomes unclear, and trust becomes difficult to sustain."

Carlson says leading organizations address this by embedding governance directly into the operating model: rather than treat oversight as a separate layer, AI-driven workflows are designed with clear decision boundaries, standardized escalation paths, and defined points of human intervention.

"This approach creates consistency across both execution and control," adds Carlson. "Every interaction, decision, and outcome is visible within a single system, allowing organizations to monitor performance, enforce policies, and adapt in real time."

As customer awareness of AI and data usage increases, Glock emphasizes that this level of transparency becomes essential. "Trust is no longer established through policy statements alone, but through the ability to demonstrate how decisions are made and how data is used across the experience.

"Organizations that scale successfully will be those that treat accountability as an integral part of orchestration, ensuring that as AI becomes more autonomous, governance becomes more consistent, not less," Glock says.

The role of the unified system

There is one thing the CX technologies identified in this report have in common: a unified and cloud-based system is essential to their successful deployment. However, some organizations remain apprehensive about consolidating or replacing their tech stack and migrating to a unified platform provided by a single partner.

Carlson says this reflects "a history of trade-offs", where practitioners have previously experienced platforms which on one hand simplified the vendor landscape, but on the other introduced new constraints, limiting flexibility, and slowing innovation. The hesitation is less about consolidation and more about whether the platform remains open and extensible. This concern was also reflected in the research results, which confirmed that integration with existing tools was a top three investment obstacle for respondents.

"The hesitation around unified platforms is understandable," adds Carlson. Many organizations have struggled to reconcile consolidation with flexibility. But the bigger challenge today is fragmentation, which is already reflected in integration being a top investment obstacle. Disconnected systems create siloed data, broken handoffs, and inconsistent customer context, limiting both performance and scalability."

As AI becomes central to CX, Carlson explains, this architectural choice becomes decisive. Fragmented environments limit visibility, slow execution, and prevent intelligence from scaling. In contrast, unified platforms enable shared context, real-time orchestration, and continuous learning, creating the conditions for consistent, enterprise-wide performance.

Case study Tripadvisor

How Tripadvisor consolidated its contact center operations

Investment obstacles such as interoperability can pose challenges for digital natives, just as much as legacy organizations. Online booking giant Tripadvisor has grown through a series of acquisitions, which created a heterogeneous technical environment, with a complex patchwork of contact center solutions that prevented contact center systems from sharing context, workflows, and visibility across the enterprise.

With 28 different companies under the Tripadvisor umbrella, it was becoming increasingly difficult to coordinate activities, service-level standards, and employees; a situation that caused inefficiencies in operations and pushed overheads higher than they needed to be. Operational siloes constrained the adoption of new technologies or more efficient processes and it was nearly impossible to share information, experience, and context across a customer's journey with different business units.

The decision was taken to consolidate global customer support and telesales services by migrating contact center activities to the NiCE platform. Integrated with core Tripadvisor systems and its telco network, the solution eliminated silos and enabled consistent handling of interactions worldwide, while giving agents visibility into the full customer experience. With easily shared data, Tripadvisor also obtained new robust insights into customer behavior.

The implementation called for the migration of more than 2,000 agents to the platform, which was completed in 12 months without disrupting business continuity.

Consolidation of call handling simplified the customer's experience with IVR, reducing it from seven to two interactions for a typical brand. The result saw CES consistently score over 70 and the resulting efficiency and consolidation has generated multi-million-dollar savings and increased revenue for Tripadvisor.

NEXT SECTION

The next section of this report focuses on the next wave of innovation in CX and explains how today's top CX technologies are paving the way for tomorrow's advancements.

The next wave of innovation

While focus currently falls on applying AI to improve internal processes, orchestrate systems and experiences, progress journeys through conversational interfaces, and ensure data collection and AI deployment are ethical and responsible, leading organizations are already building toward the next wave of innovation. From anticipatory experiences, to third-party LLMs and guided shopping journeys – the next wave of CX is about solving problems before customers realize they have them.

Regarding the architectural capabilities organizations need to build toward in preparation, Carlson says a shift is required from integrating systems to designing for continuous, enterprise-wide execution.

"The focus is no longer on adding more technology, but on creating an environment where intelligence can operate with context, continuity, and control," Carlson explains.

As such, the first priority should be to establish a shared intelligence layer. She adds: "Systems must retain memory across interactions, channels, and time so that each engagement builds on the last. This continuity enables more accurate decision-making, more relevant personalization, and a transition from reactive service to anticipatory engagement."

The second priority should be real-time orchestration across the enterprise. Carlson says: "Customer intent must trigger coordinated action across front- and back-office workflows, with AI agents and human teams operating as part of the same system. This eliminates delays, reduces handoffs, and ensures that execution moves seamlessly from request to resolution."

The third priority echoes the need to embed governance into the architecture itself. "As AI takes on more autonomous roles, organizations need visibility into how decisions are made, along with the ability to guide, intervene, and improve performance continuously," Carlson adds.

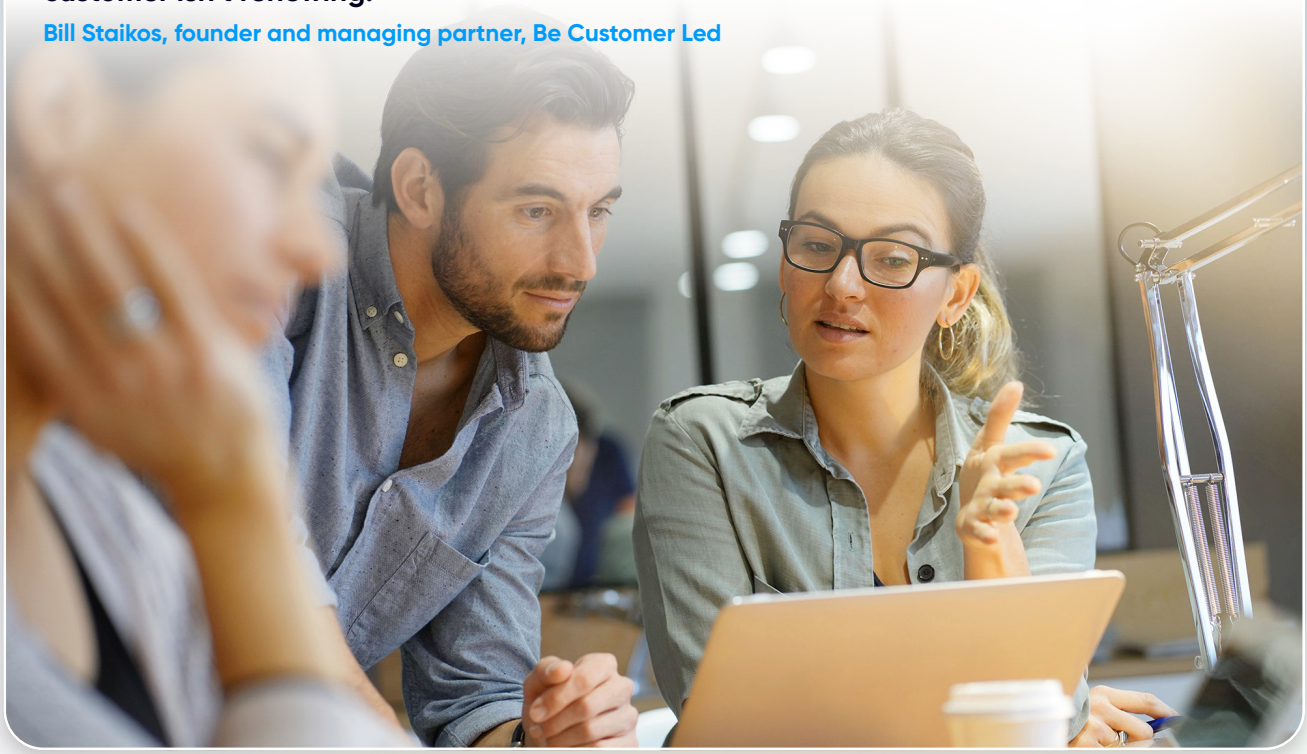
Because these capabilities are interdependent, Carlson says organizations that invest in this foundation aren't building for isolated use cases – they are already operating this way at scale. She says: "Without shared context, orchestration breaks down. Without orchestration, intelligence cannot scale. Without governance, neither can be trusted. They're building a system where every interaction strengthens the next, positioning CX to operate as a proactive, continuously improving driver of business performance".

The innovations CX still needs: Predictive actioning and adaptive flows

As far as CX has come in the last three years, there are still technological capabilities that exist but are not being widely adopted. Bill Staikos, founder and managing partner of Be Customer Led and a former CX practitioner at Apple, BNY, Uber, Bank of America, and JPMorgan Chase & Co, says the most important capability CX must adopt today is predictive and prescriptive actioning.

"If a churn-risk signal with a next-best action sits in a dashboard that everyone has but nobody checks, the next meeting you attend will involve explaining to your CRO why the customer isn't renewing."

Bill Staikos, founder and managing partner, Be Customer Led



"This isn't about predictive analytics alone," he clarifies. "I mean the ability to detect risk, friction, or unmet needs early and then trigger the right prescriptive action inside the systems where the business already operates. This isn't just for frontline teams; and we cannot force people to switch between applications they don't normally use in their day-to-day workflow."

The current approach, where CX identifies customer pain points, names them using the customer's language then reports them to multiple stakeholders, is based on "who listens best, not on who acts most effectively," Staikos says.

"That action has to show up in operational tools like Salesforce, ServiceNow, Microsoft Dynamics, Power BI, or whatever CRM and workflow environment the company runs on every day," Staikos says. "If a churn-risk signal with a next-best action sits in a dashboard that everyone has but nobody checks, the next meeting you attend will involve explaining to your CRO why the customer isn't renewing. If that same signal appeared in Salesforce during an account review, paired with a recommended next step, that's different. Now an account manager can intervene before the customer leaves. Alternatively, a service leader can spot an onboarding delay before it turns into buyer's remorse and lost revenue. When all this is in place, CX starts affecting real business outcomes," he adds.

This is not an off-the-shelf solution. Staikos says predictive actioning "usually isn't a fully formed capability you buy and switch on from a SaaS vendor". While some platforms provide pieces of it, the real value, he says, comes from connecting customer feedback, digital behavior, service patterns, operational signals, and commercial data into a usable decision layer.

"Now, that doesn't mean the CX team must own all the talent required to build it. But CX does need enough analytical and operational fluency to convene the right people across data, digital, ops, and frontline teams. CX will never earn a bigger seat in the business by getting better at reporting the customer pain points. We'll earn it by helping motivate action through predictive and prescriptive capabilities," he adds.

When asked about the top CX capability he would like to see developed further, Staikos highlights adaptive customer flows powered by agentic AI. It's the next iteration of journey orchestration, but "far more dynamic than the rules-based orchestration some companies use today".

"Traditional orchestration relied on defined paths, preset logic, and next-best-action models that were still largely built in advance," he explains. "Agentic AI will change that. It creates the possibility for systems that interpret intent, context, behavior, urgency, and history in real time, then reshape the interaction while it's happening. That's a major step forward because real customer behavior is fluid, while most customer flows are still rigid."

Today, when a customer navigates channels – sometimes over the course of days – Staikos says many systems "struggle with that non-linear journey", forcing the customer into the company's process. "Adaptive customer flows would do the opposite. They would respond to the person as they were in that moment, not as the company expected them to be when the flow was first mapped," he explains and this is where agentic AI "becomes especially important" as it can facilitate a future that will take CX beyond screens and channels.

Staikos explains: "It allows the flow to adjust continuously, not just route the customer down path A or B. Over time, this will extend beyond screens. Hearables, wearables, and other ambient interfaces will enable support, prompts, guidance, and content to shift across audible and visual platforms and capabilities, in real time, and based on context and need."

He adds: "What I find most exciting about the next three to five years is that the future of CX won't be designed once and managed slowly as it was in the past. The experience will adjust in real time as customers interact with the brands they buy from daily and as employees interact within the company walls daily."

Case study TOYOTA

Toyota voicebot proactively calls drivers about engine warnings

As outlined by Staikos, the best CX is predictive. However, while predictive CX to date has been delivered by analyzing past behavior, Toyota has introduced proactive outreach that responds to real-time system signals rather than historical analysis.

To ensure that engine warning lights are not overlooked, Toyota implemented E-Care, which is directly connected to the car's onboard electronics as a closed-loop system. If an engine warning occurs, customers are contacted by phone and can immediately schedule a service appointment through AI, triggering coordinated action across customer and dealership systems.

Simultaneously, the AI agent notifies the dealership, sharing all relevant technical and warning data so preparation begins before the customer arrives, reducing friction on both sides.

The system is enabled by NiCE Cognigy AI, which also supports contact center agents in their day-to-day work on inbound inquiries, reducing wait times and freeing agents from repetitive tasks by providing customers with seamless self-service for multiple scenarios via voice and chat. This level of proactive engagement requires continuous data flow, real-time orchestration, and coordinated decisioning across connected systems.

Glock explains that this is what proactive CX looks like in practice: real-time signals triggering immediate, coordinated action across customers, AI, and dealerships to resolve issues before they escalate and reduce friction at every step of the journey.

"It's how Toyota can deliver a safer, more seamless experience by proactively supporting customers, removing the need to remember service appointments, and reinforcing a sense of care at every step," Glock says.

Conclusion

While the technologies featured in this report have been developed as separate tools they do not stand alone, and the arrival of machine customers makes system-wide integration non-negotiable. As Glock highlighted, agentic AI and AI agents are a leading investment priority because they can translate AI investment into measurable business outcomes, particularly when deployed across a connected enterprise system.

In fact, the customer's use of AI introduces a new level of urgency for organizations that have yet to align their data, processes, and systems, and effectively embed AI across their operations. The organizations that excel in the second half of this decade will be the ones that have the means by which to facilitate machine-to-machine interaction as fluently as they do human-to-human interaction.

Successfully executing on this will demand flawless internal operations that are not only efficient, but cost effective and machine readable. The future of CX is about having a visible and undisputed record for excellence. Achieving excellence requires a new way of thinking about structures and capabilities, and a fresh approach to meeting customer needs – ideally before the customer knows.

As Carlson explained, this calls for a shift from integrating systems to designing for continuous, enterprise-wide execution. "The focus is no longer on adding more technology. But on creating an environment where intelligence can operate with context, continuity, and control."

The challenges that have plagued CX in recent years, however, still need to be addressed. As outlined by Staikos, most customer flows remain rigid despite increasingly fluid customer behavior. Agentic AI changes the game in this respect, by allowing systems to interpret intent, context, behavior, urgency, and history in real time, then reshape interactions in the moment.

The vendor market also presents challenges. The trends outlined in this report are front of mind for practitioners because they are strategically necessary in the face of seismic changes and heightened competition – not because they are buzzwords. This is evident in how the top trends are mirrored in the top investment priorities – practitioners are actioning what they see across their operating environment and motivating their organizations to move with them.

But as Hyder says, there is a level of homogeny in certain areas of the vendor market and billing structures can differ drastically despite the similarity in capabilities. In this environment, Hyder says practitioners should carefully evaluate their options by taking a dual-demo approach and demanding clarity in both claims and quality assurance. In short: avoid being swayed by hype or urgency.

Customer education around AI and data has increased significantly year-on-year and, as this continues, Kristy says organizations need to adapt: communicate, seek and secure consent, and embed transparency and governance with the same enthusiasm with which new technologies are embedded.

The future of CX will be defined by how organizations operate – not what they deploy. With these power shifts and technological advances, CX has an opportunity to evolve from a function breaking down silos, securing budgets, and interpreting data, into an omnipresent force driving excellence across the organization.

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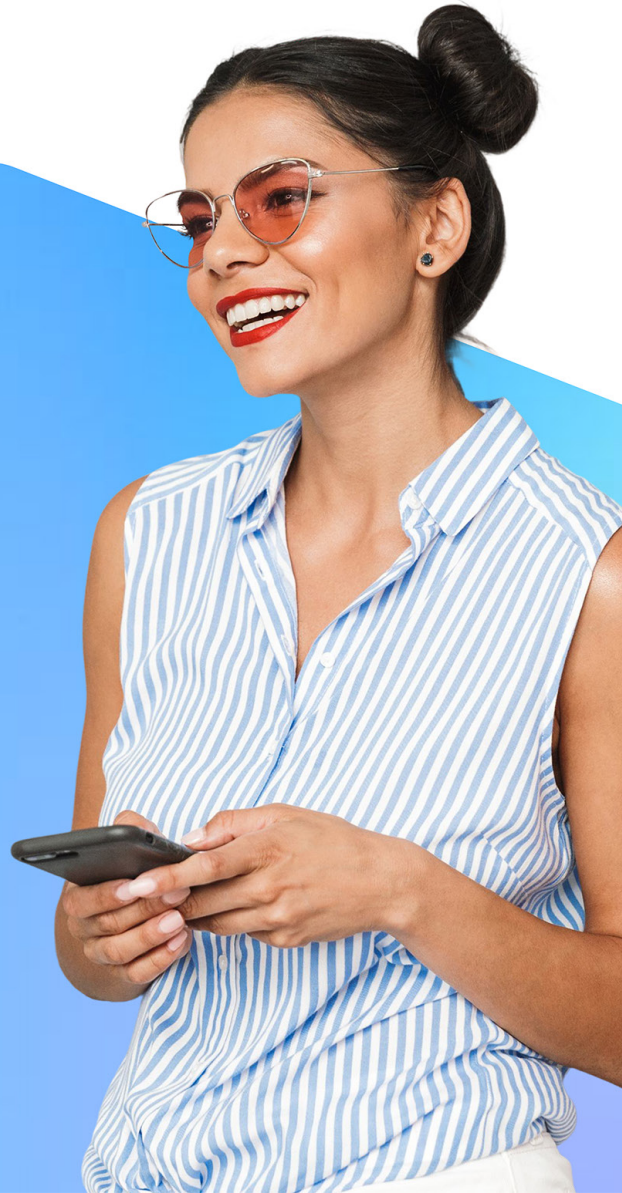

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