

uniphore 

EXPERIENCES & EXPECTATIONS
ON THE MOVE

TRAVEL & HOSPITALITY CX GUIDE





TRAVEL IS BACK.

But it doesn't look the way it used to.

The appetite for travel is soaring—and so are the stakes for travel and hospitality service providers. Hotel bookings are returning to their pre-pandemic levels¹ while flight bookings continue to beat those numbers, with growth as high as 25%.²

However, the recovery has been notably lopsided. While European and North and South American markets lead the revival, other destinations are rebounding at varying paces, with Asia-Pacific travel continuing to face significant headwinds.

In nearly all markets, domestic travel outpaces international travel. But that gap is shrinking. According to Deloitte, roughly 22% of travelers reported holding back on spending in 2021 so they could travel internationally once conditions stabilize.³ That pent-up demand could soon unleash itself upon the world stage—and put added pressure on travel providers across all categories.



¹ [The American Hotel & Lodging Association 2022 State of the Hotel Industry Report](#)

² [Mastercard Economics Report – Travel 2022: Trends & Transitions](#)

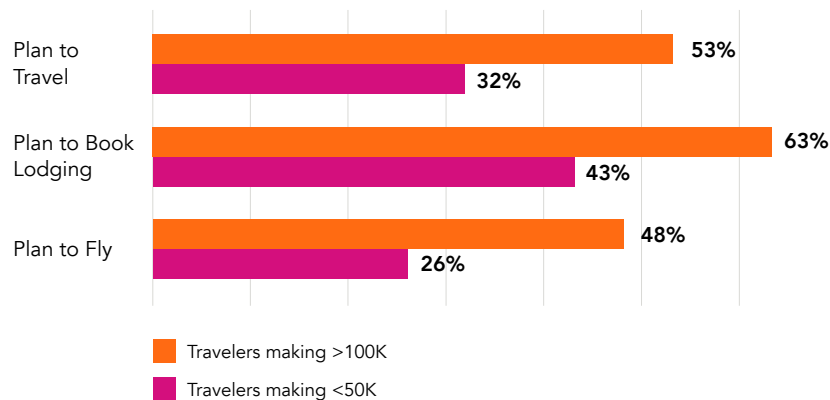
³ [2022 Deloitte Travel Outlook](#)



BUSINESS OR LEISURE?

It's no longer that simple.

With more locations lifting restrictions, it comes as no surprise that booking and spending on leisure travel is higher than ever. It also comes as no surprise that younger and wealthier travelers are leading the charge. In fact, a recent Deloitte holiday travel survey³ revealed the following results:



The birth of “bleisure” travel

As more companies shift toward remote work and/or delay returning to physical offices, traditional business travel remains weak. However, while corporate travel agencies continue to post low numbers, evidence suggests that actual business travel may be higher than reported. Recent spikes in low-cost airline traffic and domestic hotel room occupancy may indicate that more business travelers may be sidestepping traditional agencies and/or mixing business and leisure travel—a trend known as “bleisure travel.”

Bleisure by the Numbers

89%

Of people planned to add vacation time to their business travel⁴

82%

Of bleisure travelers stay at the same hotel for their entire trip⁵

41%

Of American travelers joined Zoom calls while on vacation⁶

25%

Increase in reported interest in bleisure trips in recent years⁷

A new traveler profile emerges

The rise of business-leisure travel poses a challenge to traditional booking and lodging services, which typically offer separate experiences, rewards, etc. for corporate travelers and those traveling exclusively for pleasure. Companies can no longer rely on longstanding customer profiles when attracting and engaging with today's mixed-purpose traveler.

The New Face of Business-Leisure

48%

Of millennials extended a business trip for leisure

33%

Of Gen Xers extended a business trip for leisure

23%

Of Baby Boomers extended a business trip for leisure

⁴ American Hotel & Lodging Association 2022 Global Survey

⁵ [Hotel Tech Report: “What Is Bleisure and Why Is It Important?”](#)

⁶ [Expedia 2022 Vacation Deprivation Report](#)

⁷ [Forbes: “Bleisure Travel Rapidly Increasing At Hotels And Resorts”](#)



TODAY'S TRAVELERS EXPECT THE WORLD.

And they demand it on their own terms.

More customers are booking flights and lodging online than ever before—and they expect the same world-class digital experience they receive from today's leading consumer brands.

However, despite recent gains, travel and hospitality still lags far behind other industries in digitizing its customer experience. Even companies that have implemented digital initiatives, like self-service portals and FAQ chatbots, still largely operate in a siloed or departmental manner. For customers who demand digital convenience above all else, this outmoded experience is frustrating at best—and downright infuriating when travel plans go awry.

The race to digital transformation

It should come as no surprise that today's leading CX initiatives, in one way or another, all deal with digital transformation. According to a survey of travel and hospitality providers by Aberdeen:

42%

Prioritized adapting to changing customer needs with new digital capabilities

30%

Said that enriching employee capabilities by improving digital literacy was a top goal

22%

Saw value in empowering stakeholders with the tools and process to frequently innovate

What does a transformed digital experience look like? It's consistent, seamless and unified across all customer service channels. So, for example, if a traveler needs to change or cancel a booking, they can expect the same ease and high caliber of service whether they engage via self-service or with an agent, and they can expect a smooth transition across channels—without needing to repeat information or restart their journey.

Conversational AI and automation make it possible

Today's leading digital experiences wouldn't be possible without two integrated technological innovations: conversational artificial intelligence (AI) and automation. Conversational AI allows companies to understand, analyze and leverage conversational data from multiple sources (i.e. voice, chat, text and email). At the same time, automation enables companies to complete complex processes quickly and accurately, without the need for human intervention. Together, these innovations create smoother, more natural and more productive interactions—from seamless self-service bookings to more engaging and empathetic live agent assistance.





HOW CAN TRAVEL COMPANIES KEEP UP?

It's all about making smarter digital choices.

Making the digital transformation leap takes more than just the latest technology. It requires companies to reassess and recalibrate every step of their customer journeys to meet the needs of today's digitally minded traveler. For many travel and hospitality companies, this means overcoming three key digital transformation challenges:



Finding a balance between customer demands and business costs

Delivering the seamless end-to-end experience customers have come to expect from other industries can be costly in terms of staff and resources. However, conversational AI and automation can actually help reduce costs by eliminating process pain points and pinpointing customer concerns for faster, more effective resolution. For example, an intelligent virtual assistant (IVA) that detects a customer's intent—beyond a simple FAQ script—can better route their call to the right source. As a result, it can reduce costly holds, average handle times (AHT) and even lengthy after-call work (ACW).



Empowering employees to be better brand stewards

Research by Uniphore shows that empowered—and consequently engaged—employees are better performers, more empathetic

communicators and less likely to leave than their disengaged peers. How do travel and hospitality providers empower their employees to better serve their customers? With the right technology. According to a Calabrio study on the Health of the Contact Center, 60% of agents say they need better tools to handle the rise in complex customer interactions. By automating manual backend tasks and augmenting agent skills with artificial intelligence, CX providers can empower their employees to be more efficient, effective and empathetic.



Underbudgeting for technology needs

Historically, the travel and hospitality industry has spent less on technology compared to other industries. Today, as a result of the global pandemic, the industry has even fewer resources—in budget and personnel—than before. Ironically, it's precisely for this reason that the industry can no longer afford to neglect investing in technology. On the CX side, conversational AI and automation can break down internal siloes, connect and consolidate disparate tech stacks and eliminate redundant backend processes—all of which helps businesses improve operational efficiency and, ultimately, do more with less.



TODAY'S LEADING BRANDS AREN'T ALONE.

More companies are driving better outcomes with AI and automation.

Several leading travel and hospitality brands—from airlines to hotel chains to online travel agencies—are currently using or plan to deploy conversational AI and automation within their contact centers. And it's easy to see why: travel companies need to coordinate with multiple parties to determine the appropriate actions regarding cancellations, refunds and numerous other scenarios due to unforeseen circumstances.

Case Study:

Leveraging Uniphore's U-Assist agent assist platform, this major online travel supplier optimized its customer service operations—delivering positive, personalized customer service at scale while simplifying and streamlining the agent experience.

4.5 million

agent-guided interactions per year

15,000 emails

eliminated through automation

500+ hours

saved per month by reducing after-call work (ACW)

60+ seconds

cut from average handle time (AHT)

Winning on the metrics that matter

Travel companies that leverage conversational AI and automation routinely outperform their underdeveloped peers in several key metrics and business outcomes, including:



Customer Satisfaction & Retention

Customer satisfaction (CSAT) and net promoter scores (NPS) are solid benchmarks for a brand's perception, customer service health and even profitability. Brands that reduce customer effort and resolve customer issues quickly often score highly on CSAT and NPS. Customer retention is another major metric for brand health. Research by Aberdeen found:

10.5%

YOY growth in customer retention for AI and automation users

VS.

3.2%

YOY growth in customer retention for non-users



Cost Reduction & Revenue Growth

By automating time-consuming backend tasks and assisting agents during live calls with conversational intelligence, contact centers can radically reduce the cost of fielding each call. The technology can also help generate revenue. By “training” AI to listen for customer sentiment and intent cues, it can help identify upselling and cross-selling opportunities that an agent might otherwise not hear. And by automating customer outreach and follow-up actions—like sending notifications for optional upgrades or travel insurance—travel and hospitality companies can drive higher conversion rates without bogging down agents or needing to call up additional staff.



GETTING STARTED IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK.

Let's break it down to the basics.

For travel companies considering applying conversational AI and automation to their contact center operations, there are five focus areas that deliver the biggest impact:

Increase resiliency in contact center operations

Contact center traffic is prone to fluctuations based on many different factors. With AI and automation, travel and hospitality companies can better predict and prepare for upswings and downswings in call volumes.

Improve engagement management

AI and automation can also help drive customer engagement—with little to no added effort on behalf of human contact center staff. Using data generated from customer interactions and conversations, AI can create a hyper-personalized experience that automatically engages customers across numerous channels—increasing satisfaction, loyalty and even conversion rates with proven results.

Transition to modern self-service

Many companies today use self-service portals or kiosks to minimize the traffic flowing into contact centers. However, this

deflection-first approach misses the greater value opportunity: to connect and re-engage with customers via self-service channels.

Empower agents to deliver topnotch service

Conversational AI and automation do much more than just simplify processes and eliminate mundane tasks. These twin technologies empower agents with real, actionable insights that have been proven to improve call performance, accelerate training and onboarding and increase agent engagement—a key factor in retaining a skilled workforce.

Build and maintain a connected view of customer insights

According to research by Aberdeen, 78% of contact centers struggle to use their customer data effectively. By connecting and categorizing relevant data with automation, businesses can generate more accurate customer profiles and personas—making each engagement easier and more effective.



THINK AHEAD. FAR AHEAD.

Customer lifetime value is a long-term conversation.

Customer loyalty isn't built on one-and-done interactions. It grows through continual engagement. Conversational AI and automation make it easy to engage and re-engage with customers in a manner and cadence that deliver optimal results and, ultimately, drive lifetime value.

Why customer lifetime value is so precious—and elusive—to the travel industry

Travelers today have more options at their fingertips than ever before. As a result, travel service providers can no longer rely on customer loyalty alone to fuel lifetime value. In today's digital-first marketplace, securing the elusive lifetime customer requires businesses to rethink their digital experience and find new ways to offer differentiated, highly personalized service.

Common pitfalls that undermine customer lifetime value

Travel can be exciting. It can also be incredibly stressful when things don't go as planned. While some circumstances are unpreventable (i.e. if a traveler gets sick), others are completely controllable. How travel companies respond to unforeseen events can make or break their customers' trust—and their likelihood to turnover. Common pitfalls that undermine lifetime value include:

- Improper billing and/or duplicate charges
- Overbookings, "false" vacancies and unexpected cancellations
- Poor confirmation and/or travel change communications
- Difficulty navigating multiple customer service channels
- Prolonged customer service holds and wait times
- Improper billing and/or duplicate charges

Top actions for improving lifetime value today—and tomorrow

To improve customer lifetime value, travel companies need to first look closely at the root causes of customer turnover. Look closely at Voice of the Customer (VOC) survey results for signs of dissatisfaction and comb the customer journey from end to end for any inconsistencies or shortcomings. AI can help here, too. By analyzing interactions for sentiment, intent and emotion, conversational AI can uncover actionable insights that can help you improve your customers' overall experience—and their lifetime value.



Building lifetime value with the right CX partner

Not all AI and automation solutions are created equal, however. Travel companies shopping for a conversational automation vendor should put their business needs first and avoid the lure of flashy one-size-fits-all solutions. The right technology partner should be able to:

- Deliver on your organization's natural roadmap for CX transformation
- Optimize every step of the customer journey—across every channel
- Reveal actionable insights into customer sentiment, intent and emotion
- Help you create seamless, highly personalized travel experiences
- Go beyond problem resolution to building customer engagement
- Focus on business outcomes, not on technological hype

By using AI to capture a fuller picture of each customer and making their journey easier and more enjoyable with automation, travel service providers can quickly become preferred customer destinations in an increasingly competitive landscape.




BUILD A BETTER EXPERIENCE.


Empower your agents and elevate your self-service.


To remain competitive—or even viable—in today’s crowded marketplace, travel companies need to fully understand how their customers interact with their customer experience. Are customers abandoning self-service? Are they experiencing frustratingly long hold times during live assistance? These pain points drag down customer satisfaction and engagement and, consequently, push turnover rates and costs higher. Fortunately, conversational AI and automation can solve these challenges and more—with proven results.


Empower agents and minimize customer effort during assisted service

In terms of agent-assisted customer service, AI-enabled travel companies routinely outperform their non-enabled peers in four key areas:

 **Agent Assistance.** Thanks to advanced conversational AI, companies can now assist agents during live customer interactions—in real-time. Examples of real-time agent assistance include automated next-best action and just-in-time prompts as well as the ability for leaders and/or coaches to intervene when necessary. As a result, agents can focus more closely on customer needs (instead of backend tasks) and simultaneously improve their skills during live calls.

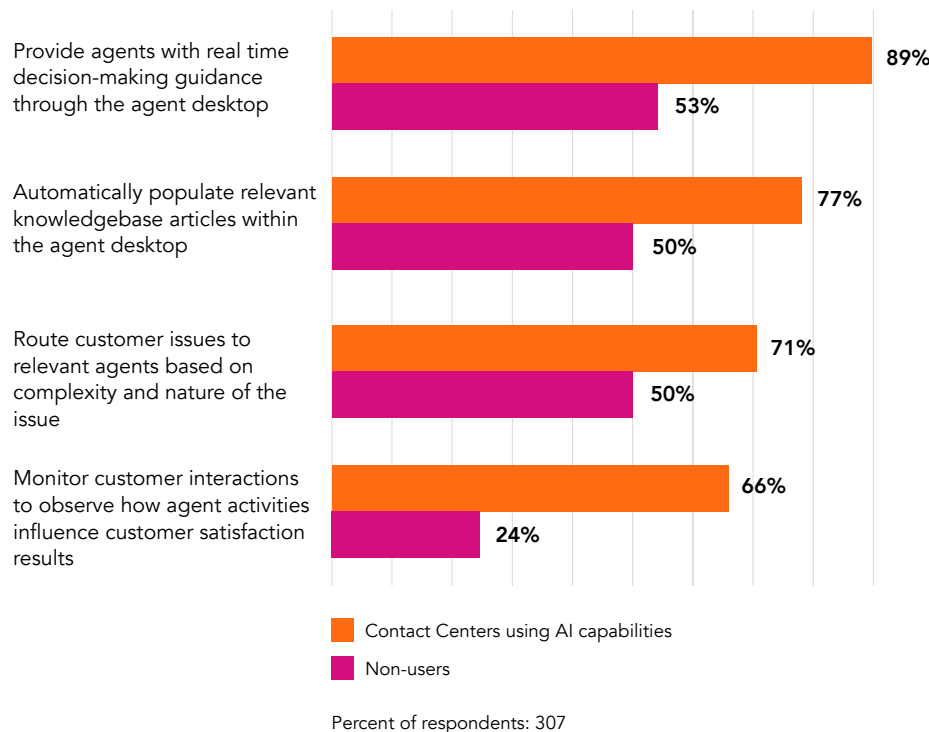
 **Knowledge Management.** Few things drag down Average Handle Time (AHT)—and consequently customer satisfaction—like cumbersome knowledge management systems that require customers to wait while agents hunt down relevant information. By designing AI algorithms to surface relevant articles, workflows and next-best actions, companies can streamline knowledge management and slash costly holds and handle times.

 **Call Routing.** According to Aberdeen, 71% of contact centers using AI report successfully routing calls based on context and complexity, compared to 50% of non-users. By more effectively connecting customers to the right agent for their needs, businesses can drive higher First Contact Resolution (FCR) rates and reduce repeat calls.

 **Interaction Analytics.** Customer interactions are chock full of data. Using AI, companies can easily analyze interactions for actionable insights into customer behaviors and overall satisfaction. Customer service leaders can then use these insights to better train and coach agents. In fact, data by Aberdeen shows that companies utilizing AI-powered interaction analytics were more than twice as likely to identify customer issues that could be resolved through self-service.







Empower agents and minimize customer effort by using AI in assisted service



Leverage AI to deliver truly intelligent self-service

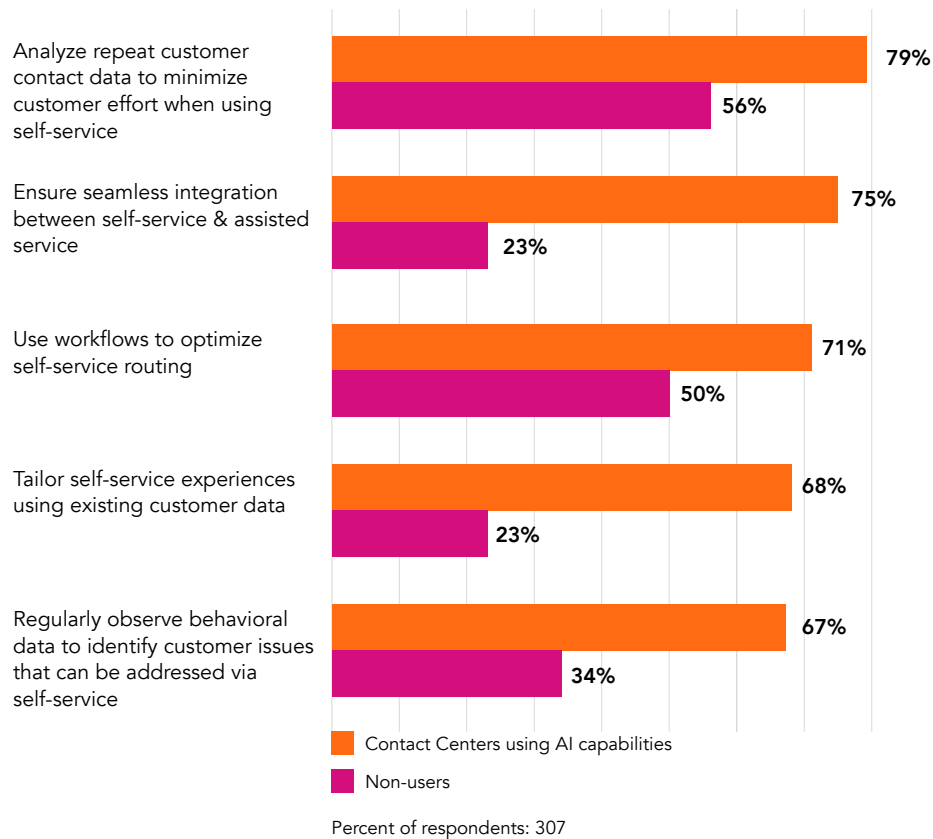
Conversational AI and automation enable self-service platforms to communicate more naturally and dynamically with customers than traditional modes. Companies looking to leverage this technology should focus on five key areas:

-  **Repeat Caller Data.** When customers call back again and again, something isn't working. By analyzing repeat caller data using AI, companies can get to the root of the problem and correct it within the self-service workflow. This minimizes customer effort—and subsequently customer frustration—and increases self-service adoption and success.
-  **Multichannel Integration.** Self-service doesn't exist in a vacuum. To truly be successful, it must integrate fully with other service channels as needed. For example, if a self-service journey escalates to a live agent, the information a customer provided in self-service should transfer to the agent seamlessly.
-  **Workflow Automation.** Just as AI and automation can optimize live service call routing, the same holds true for self-service workflows. Here, the technology can leverage detailed interaction data to better guide workflows and trigger appropriate next-best actions.
-  **Personalized Service.** By using workflow automation and customer data analytics, companies can create hyper-personalized self-service experiences. This is an especially valuable building block for travel and hospitality companies trying to differentiate themselves from their one-size-fits-all peers.



Self-Service Opportunities. Interaction analytics aren't just for calls and live chats. By analyzing data from self-service and live agent interactions, companies can identify new opportunities for self-service engagement and call center deflection.

Leverage AI to Deliver Truly Intelligent Self-Service





UNIPHORE CAN HELP.

Transform your CX with the conversation experts.

Powered by the next generation in conversational AI and automation, our CX solutions allow travel and hospitality leaders to deliver richer customer experiences with better outcomes and operational efficiencies. Only Uniphore offers fully integrative agent assistance and self-service, with:

U-Assist

U-Assist is an intelligent agent guidance solution that reduces onboarding time, minimizes costly error rates and improves operational efficiencies. Leveraging cutting-edge AI and Robotic Process Automation (RPA) this solution drives automation with knowledge-based integration, based on the conversation, to automatically provide agents with all the customer information they need without having to place a valuable customer on hold.



U-Self Serve

U-Self Serve is an intelligent virtual assistant that delivers a human-like experience, simulating human conversations and delivering frictionless experiences in multiple channels, including text, chat and voice. Drive digital adoption by offering a multimodal experience and easily build and optimize the journey with our easy-to-use customer journey designer. Use intuitive flow charts instead of code to design the best experience for your question and get up and running in weeks instead of months.



Ready to get started?

Contact our product experts for more information or to request a demo.

[Contact Us Now](#)