Why Customers Won’t Take Your Call

How Trusted Call Solutions Drive Better Customer Experiences And Decrease Operational Costs
Executive Summary

The phone rings. For the third time today “unknown caller” pops up on your screen. You are waiting for a call on a prescription refill, but what if this is yet another robocall, like the others so far have been? Do you pick up the phone?

This all too common scenario has shattered consumer trust in the outbound calling channel, with both businesses and customers paying the price. And with threats like robocalls and call spam continuing to grow, organizations will need to find new solutions to protect a critical component of their customer service practice.

In April 2019, Neustar commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate the current state of outbound calling. Forrester conducted an online survey with 319 business and technology decision makers responsible for outbound call experiences at financial services, travel and hospitality, retail/eCommerce, collections, telecommunications, and energy and utilities firms in the US to explore this topic. We found that outbound calling is a crucial channel for high-value customer interactions, but that it is currently under siege from threats like robocalls, spam, and voice fraud. While current technology solutions fail to remedy these challenges, trusted call solutions may hold the key to restoring customer trust in outbound voice and unlocking key business benefits.

KEY FINDINGS

› In the digital age, outbound calling is critical for customer service. Respondents say that outbound calling is more important than email in meeting customer service goals. This is because outbound calling is often used for high-priority customer interactions and provides opportunities to nurture customer relationships.

› Outbound calling challenges loom large and negatively impact customers and businesses alike. Customers are not picking up the phone when organizations call, due to an ecosystem of threats that have degraded customer trust in the voice channel. These threats contribute to a long list of challenges and very real consequences that organizations must solve for both customers and the business. Nearly 50% of businesses experience decreased customer satisfaction and increased operational costs as a result of outbound voice challenges, and nearly 40% suffer lost productivity and revenue and a decreased customer base.

› Trusted call solutions can lead to both customer and operational gains. Seventy-eight percent of survey respondents are interested in a trusted call solution that increases right-party contact rates. Respondents think trusted call solutions will lead to both customer and operational business benefits, and early adopters are already seeing operational gains.

Trusted call solutions will lead to both customer and operational business benefits, and early adopters are already seeing operational gains.
Outbound Calls Play A Critical Role In Connecting Businesses To Customers

Spam callers. Unknown numbers. Robocalls. Fraud. These words can send a chill down a customer’s spine — at best, they represent a major nuisance, and at worst they represent a potential security threat. For businesses, they represent loss of consumer trust in the call channel, which means lost revenue, bad customer experiences, and important communications not being received. The reason these are so devastating for businesses is that the outbound call channel is a critical point of interaction with customers, especially for high-value communications. In surveying 319 business and technology decision makers, we found that:

› **Outbound calling is crucial to achieving top business goals.** The outbound call experience is a critical component of businesses top goals for 2019 (see Figure 1). For instance, survey respondents see an important link between outbound calls and both revenue growth (84% critical/important) and customer experience (81% critical/important).

› **Improving outbound calling is a top customer experience (CX) goal for 2019.** Survey respondents rate improving the outbound call experience as the second-most important customer experience goal for the next 12 months, ahead of channels like digital and mobile (see Figure 2). The outbound call channel is also an important part of other CX goals, such as increasing the frequency of engagement, understanding the customer journey, and improving cross-channel customer experience.

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**Figure 1**

“What are your company's top business goals for the next 12 months? How important is your outbound call experience to achieving each of your company's top goals?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business goal rank</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. 1) Grow revenue</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 2) Improve customer experience</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 3) Improve operational efficiency</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 4) Reduce costs</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 319 business and technology decision makers responsible for outbound call experiences
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Neustar, May 2019

The outbound call channel is a critical point of interaction with customers, especially for high-value communications.
While email may be the most popular channel for outbound customer communication, the voice channel is more important for meeting customers’ service goals.

Outbound calling plays a critical role in customer service.
Businesses use multiple channels to reach out to customers, with the most popular being email (83%), voice (72%), SMS (45%), and chat (42%) (see Figure 3). But while email may be the most popular channel for outbound customer communication, the voice channel is considered by survey respondents to be more important for meeting customers’ service goals — with 63% ranking as critical, almost double that of email.

Outbound calling is used for high-priority customer interactions.
Why do firms consider voice almost twice as critical as email for customer communications? Because the interactions that take place over the channel are more important. They are typically escalation points for complex issues and provide moments to connect with customers and nurture relationships.¹

The No. 1 type of outbound call to customers or prospects is the callback, i.e., where a customer has initiated the interaction through a web portal (see Figure 4). Forrester research shows that customers today prefer to use self-service as an initial point of contact, but they will use voice when they need to escalate the assistance required or cannot find answers on their own. In these cases, customers benefit from being contacted — not being able to connect with them is a great source of frustration for the customer and business alike. Other top use cases for outbound voice are customer notifications (52%) and information verification (42%) — both communications types where again, the customer benefits from the outreach and the failure to connect negatively impacts the customer and the business.
Figure 3
“Which of the following outbound channels are you currently using to connect with consumers?”
(Select all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social channels</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messaging apps</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 319 business and technology decision makers responsible for outbound call experiences
*Base: Variable business and technology decision makers responsible for outbound call experiences
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Neustar, May 2019

Figure 4
“What types of outbound calls does your organization make to customers and prospects?” (Select all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Call</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer callbacks</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer or account notifications</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information verification</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collections</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment reminders</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm calls to prospects</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery services</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey, poll, or data collection</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation services</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appliance repair and handyman services</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription refill reminders</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 319 business and technology decision makers responsible for outbound call experiences
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Neustar, May 2019
Organizations Struggle To Connect And Everyone Pays The Price

Outbound call challenges can be divided into two categories. First, anti-robocalling mitigation efforts, that are put in place to protect consumers also mean that a number of legitimate calls may not even get through. Second, once they do get through, customers are not picking up the phone.

To deal with their top consumer complaint, regulators like the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) are taking aggressive anti-robocalling action. They have pushed the carriers to implement call-blocking services in their network and offer free mobile applications to stave off the tidal wave. Unfortunately, this means:

› **Legitimate business calls will almost certainly be a casualty in the war on robocalls.** There is a greater chance of legitimate calls being stopped as more aggressive call-blocking tools are rolled out. Inaccurate call blocking and spam tagging happen as call number reputation and calling behavior is analyzed by call management systems. In many cases, businesses are not even aware their outbound calls are blocked entirely or being tagged as spam.

› **There is no current, central or standard way to find out which calls are being blocked or tagged as spam.** To help prevent this from happening, businesses can register their outbound calling numbers as verified numbers across the calling ecosystem of carriers and app providers.

The second challenge, of why customers aren’t picking up the phone, is complex, as it consists of a combination of a lack of trust, poor customer data leading to improper contact strategies, and the inability to recognize caller identity and purpose. These challenges cost companies both top- and bottom-line revenue and customer goodwill — making them imperative to solve quickly. Our survey shows:

› **There are many reasons that customers won't pick up the phone.** Companies attribute their inability to connect with customers to a variety of causes, some of which they have direct control over, others less so (see Figure 5). Sixty-four percent say that customers are not picking up because they can’t identify who is calling (the “unknown caller” problem). Related to this, customers are not picking up unknown numbers because of the risk of threats and annoyances, like fraud (50%), call spoofing (48%), and robocalls (35%). And these threats are growing, Americans saw a 47% increase in robocalls in 2018 versus 2017, equaling 26.3 billion robocalls. Close to half of companies (45%) say that they do not have the right strategy for contacting customers — calling too often and creating call fatigue.

› **A laundry list of internal operational improvements is required.** Firms equate these challenges to a long list of important internal changes that need to take place to solve their inability to contact customers over voice. Survey respondents list compliance risks, improper agent scheduling, and spam tagging/mislabeling of calls as the top three internal priorities to address (see Figure 6).

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**Figure 5**

“Why are your customers not answering phone calls from your company?” (Select all that apply)

- **64% Unknown caller**
- **50% Fraud**
- **48% Call spoofing**
- **45% Call fatigue/frequency of contact**
- **35% Robocalls**

Base: 273 business and technology decision makers who experience failure to answer

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Neustar, May 2019

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**94% of respondents experience challenges with their current solution.**
Current calling technology solutions do not have the answers. Ninety-four percent of respondents say that there is a gap in their call center technology solutions today that limits their ability to solve these challenges (see Figure 7). Thirty-seven percent say their solutions are unable to deal with call blocking, spoofing, and spam tagging. Close to a third say their solutions lack critical information needed to correctly contact customers, like the best time of day to call, up-to-date contact information, and notifications when contact information changes. Many of the internal and external challenges that businesses face in contacting customers over voice can be aided by technology, but the solutions being used today come up short.

Figure 6
“How important is it that your organization addresses these challenges in contacting customers over the voice channel?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compliance risks (Do Not Call/TCPA)</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improper agent scheduling (calling at incorrect/inconvenient times)</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spam tagging/mislabeling of calls</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to connect with the correct party</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to answer</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocked calls</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of contact data</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: Variable business and technology decision makers responsible for outbound call experiences
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Neustar, May 2019

Figure 7
“How important is it that your organization addresses these challenges in contacting customers over the voice channel?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call blocking, spoofing, and spam tagging challenges for company numbers</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know the best day and time to reach out to my clients</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of up-to-date and appended contact information for my clients</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of notifications of changes to identity and phone data</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inaccurate caller name information displayed on inbound and outbound calls</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have the best number to call my clients</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No display of company logo on outbound calls</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No notification of compliance risk in contacting a consumer</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No indication of calling purpose for outbound calls</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t experience any of these limitations or missing capabilities</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: Variable business and technology decision makers responsible for outbound call experiences
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Neustar, May 2019
BOTH CUSTOMERS AND BUSINESSES PAY THE PRICE FOR MISSED CALLS

When businesses cannot contact their customers with information or offers that customers actually want to receive or would benefit from, everyone loses: customers become dissatisfied, blocked calls result in increased operational costs and lost productivity, and businesses risk serious penalties for noncompliance with regulations. Our survey shows that nearly half of businesses experience decreased customer satisfaction and increased operational costs as a result of outbound voice challenges, and nearly four in 10 suffer lost productivity and revenue and a decreased customer base (see Figure 8). The bottom line is that this valuable method of connecting with customers is increasingly at risk.

Figure 8
“How do the challenges you face in contacting customers over the voice channel impact your business?”
(Select all that apply)

- 48% Customer frustration/decreased customer satisfaction
- 48% Increased operation costs
- 43% Lost productivity
- 39% Loss of customers/customer churn
- 37% Loss of revenue
- 12% Fines/lawsuits for noncompliance with regulations

Base: 319 business and technology decision makers responsible for outbound call experiences
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Neustar, May 2019
Trusted Call Solutions Can Drive Better CX And Operational Efficiency

The current state of outbound calls hurts both customers and businesses. Technology vendors can be a key partner in solving some of these challenges with solutions that help companies increase their right-party contact rates by displaying accurate information on customer data and preferences, providing protection from call threats like blocking, spoofing, etc. and identifying who is calling and the call purpose. A trusted call solution that can offer these capabilities will engender customer trust and provide a myriad of customer and business benefits. Our survey shows:

› **Businesses see technology vendors as a partner in solving outbound call challenges.** While teams look internally to solve operational issues, many firms are turning to technology partners to help get more customers to pick up the phone. Twenty-eight percent of survey respondents say tech vendors are critical to solving these challenges, while another 39% say they are important (ranking them behind internal contact centers and internal IT in order of importance).

› **Trusted call solutions are highly sought after.** . . . Over three-fourths (78%) of survey respondents say they would be interested in a technology solution that can increase right-party contact rates (see Figure 9).

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**Figure 9: 78% Of Firms Are Interested In Trusted Call Solutions, But Adoption Greatly Lags Interest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adoption of trusted call solutions today</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implemented/expanding</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piloting</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning to implement in the next 12 months</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested, but no plans</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested, no plan/don’t know</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 319 business and technology decision makers responsible for outbound call experiences
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Neustar, May 2019
But adoption is limited today. Just 30% of respondents say their organization is piloting or has adopted trusted call solutions to date. However, with almost 40% saying it is in their road map for the next 12 months, awareness and education about these solutions are on the rise.

THE RIGHT TRUSTED CALL SOLUTIONS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

The right trusted call solution will help customers know who is calling so they can decide to pick up, to protect themselves from fraud and spam, and to provide companies with up-to-date data and intelligence, so that companies can develop better outreach strategies. Survey respondents say the top five most important capabilities of a trusted call solution are:

1. Reliable and accurate information displayed (including company name, organization name, and caller identity) for inbound and outbound calls.
2. Up-to-date and appended client contact information.
3. Intelligence for the best day and time to reach out to clients — determined from behaviors observed on phone use by those clients.
4. Protection of company numbers from call blocking, spoofing, and spam tagging.
5. Intelligence for best number to call.

TRUSTED CALL SOLUTIONS LEAD TO A BALANCED SCORECARD OF IMPROVEMENTS

Respondents believe the adoption of trusted call solutions will directly impact some of their top business and customer service goals. Top expected benefits from these solutions include (see Figure 10):

- **Better customer experience and improved customer retention.** Customers that can receive the communications they want to, without fear of fraud or spam, will be more satisfied, more loyal customers. Intelligence that lets companies know when customers would actually like to be contacted will also drive a better customer experience. Sixty-nine percent of respondents think a trusted call solution will lead to CX gains, and 61% expect to see improved customer retention.

- **Higher answer rates and improved operational efficiencies.** With intelligence around when to call, and updated contact information for the best number to use, respondents see trusted call solutions as a way to improve answer rates, reducing cost and increasing efficiencies. Technology that enables accurate identification of callers to reduce “unknown number” fear should also help to increase answer rates. Sixty-four percent of respondents see trusted call solutions improving answer rates and 50% see them improving operational efficiencies.

- **Increased revenue.** Improving CX and operational efficiencies will drive bottom-line revenue, while increased contact with customers has the potential to drive additional selling opportunities, increasing top-line revenue. Fifty-five percent of respondents see trusted call solutions as a way to increase revenue.
EARLY ADOPTERS ARE SEEING HIGH REVENUE AND OPERATIONAL RETURNS

Companies that are piloting or have implemented trusted call solutions are reporting promising early returns. While adopters are slightly behind on expected CX benefits, they report higher than expected revenue and operational efficiency benefits. Customer trust is easy to lose and difficult to gain. The value of these solutions is proven early on with operational gains. As customers receive more of the calls they want, and less of those they don’t, customer experience gains will come.

Figure 10

“What benefits have you achieved/do you expect to achieve from using trusted call solution?” (Select all that apply)

- 69% Better customer experience/customer satisfaction
- 64% Higher answer rates
- 61% Improved customer retention
- 55% Increased revenues
- 50% Operational efficiencies
- 43% Increased regulatory compliance

Base: 319 business and technology decision makers responsible for outbound call experiences
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Neustar, May 2019
Key Recommendations

Today’s customers hold the power in business relationships. Customers have more choices of brands to engage with, more products to purchase, and more communication channels and touchpoints to interact with than ever before. What they don’t have is more time. They simply want friction-free engagement, delivered in a highly personal way. Companies must meet these customer expectations to garner their satisfaction and long-term loyalty to the brand. Great customer engagement drives customer retention, enrichment, and advocacy — all which have a quantifiable, positive impact to top-line revenue.

Customers increasingly adopt digital and especially self-service channels for inbound interactions, yet they continue to rely on outbound voice calls for callbacks, notifications, and reminders. The voice channel is the most personal and intimate channel that companies can use to connect with customers and nurture ongoing relationships. However, robocalls, spam, and fraud have eroded customer trust in the channel. To regain that trust, companies need to protect their customers from these threats, while delivering a high-quality customer experience that is personal and timely.

Forrester’s in-depth survey of business and technology decision makers that are responsible for the outbound call channel yielded several important recommendations:

**Put the customer at the center of your operations.** The only competitive strategy is one that obsesses with understanding, connecting with, serving, and delighting customers. Customer experience must be a core company strategy, and outbound operations must deliver experiences in line with customer expectations, which requires that firms understand how each individual customer would prefer to receive communications — including a preferred phone number and best time to talk.

**Assess your current outbound strategy to establish a baseline.** Reestablishing trust with your customers will take time so it will be critical to track and monitor progress when implementing trusted calling solutions. Once you have established your outbound calling baseline, select customer and operations-related metrics to track in order to prove the value of your trusted calling solution.

**Give your customers a reason to answer your calls.** Customers expect highly effective, personal experiences along their journey, and across touchpoints and channels. Outbound calling experiences must deliver the same level of knowledge and trust about the caller as digital engagement channels offer.

**Protect your brand identity for your customers.** Look beyond the caller experience to best support your customers. Customers are flooded by nuisance calls and spam. Protect yourself and your customers by managing your company’s identity across carriers so that you can consistently present your enterprise identity to your customers. Also, look for solutions to prevent your brand from being compromised by fraudsters, spoofing, and robocalls.

**Your numbers are part of your brand identity, protect them.** Either build up your own resources to learn the processes, contacts, and tools to manage the whitelisting of your numbers, or outsource this function to organizations that specialize in this aspect of outbound number management.
Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted an online survey of 319 financial services, travel and hospitality, retail/eCommerce, collections, telecommunications, and energy and utilities organizations in the US to evaluate the current state of outbound calling and adoption of trusted call solutions. Survey participants included business and IT decision makers responsible for the outbound call experience at their organizations whose contact centers’ place 5,000 or more calls each month. The study was completed in May 2019.

Appendix B: Demographics/Data

Base: 319 business and technology decision makers
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Neustar, May 2019
Appendix C: Supplemental Material

RELATED FORRESTER RESEARCH


Appendix D: Endnotes


