Survey probes the future of customer service and considers consumer preferences versus contact centre strategies

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** PCI Pal® survey compares opinion between consumers and contact centre professionals in the UK and USA **

Having surveyed 2,600 consumers and contact centre professionals in both the UK and USA, research commissioned by PCI Pal® (https://www.pcipal.com/knowledge-centre/resource/security-in-the-contact-centre/) (LON: PCIP), the global cloud provider of secure payment solutions for business communications, has found that 61% of consumers overall (81% in the UK and 40% in the US) feel that an increased use of technology to handle customer service enquiries, such as chatbots or self-service websites, increases an organisation's security risk.

Yet with 55% of contact centre professionals envisioning that fewer staff will be employed within contact centres within the next five years as a result of technology adoption, reassurances will need to be provided to customers on the security measures that are in place, to ensure trust is maintained.

Specifically, 20% of US contact centre professionals felt that fewer contact centre staff will be needed due to increased reliance on online or self-service technologies, while 21% of UK contact centre professionals believe that less staff will be employed due to greater use of automated solutions or chatbots.

The survey found however that personal service remains king for UK-based consumers, with a collective 59% preferring some form of person-to-person contact if they have an enquiry about a product, prior to purchase.

Specifically, 23% said they like the convenience of talking to a real person via live chat, 18% prefer to talk to someone over the phone, while a further 18% would go into a branch or store to talk to someone.

In the US, 35% of consumers would opt to speak to a customer service representative over the phone, followed by 25% who would prefer to use an online self-service function to answer their own queries, and a further 17% using live chat with a real operative, showing a greater acceptance for technology-based customer support in conjunction with more personalised options.

Geoff Forsyth, CISO at PCI Pal: "It is clear that consumers still value a personalised service, even with all the technology and customer service channels available to them and so organisations need to make sure they are striking the right balance of people versus technology within the contact centre environment.

"While around a third (32%) of contact centre agents believe there will be a greater reliance on digital or automated customer service technology in the future, senior management have an opposing view.

"In fact, 34% of senior management felt there will be an increased focus on person-to-person contact, mindful that a truly personal service will always be valued by customers."

When asked about how contact centres have responded to the pandemic, there was some concern expressed by contact centres staff in relation to security with, overall, 52% believing they were at greater risk of a cyberattack due to agents working remotely from home.

In addition, just over two fifths (22%) of respondents said they are not confident about one or more aspects of the data security within their organisation's contact centre. When asked to explain why, 54% of those based in the US felt that limited or infrequent training was a factor, while 35% suggested that poor leadership or direction on data security rules and processes was a concern.

In the UK, 41% agreed that limited or infrequent training was an issue, while 38% suggested that legacy technology is restrictive.

Conversely, consumer confidence hasn't been affected during the pandemic with 48% of UK-based consumers and 42% of US-based consumers suggesting they are confident with how organisations are handling their personal data and payment information, compared to five years ago – with a further 37% 'feeling about the same', illustrating no heightened concerns amid the pandemic. In fact, when consumers were asked how confident they are in how contact centres are handling their payment information, 6 out of every 10 consumers overall confirmed that they are confident.

Added Forsyth, "What is interesting is that while consumers appear to want to have the option of talking to a dedicated customer service representative when support or guidance is needed, the majority of both UK (48%) and US (59%) consumers stated that they prefer to pay for goods or services using an online link, with most suggesting that they feel it is more secure than other methods.

"It is therefore important that organisations deliver a truly omnichannel service to give consumers choice in how and when they connect and communicate with an organisation, as this is clearly what consumers today expect."

To download the Security in the Contact Centre eBook, which provides a more in-depth view of the research, visit: https://www.pcipal.com/knowledge-centre/resource/security-in-the-contact-centre/.

For more information on PCI Pal visit www.pcipal.com, or call +44 207 030 3770 to arrange a demonstration.

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Notes to Editors:

UK Consumer Research Methodology: An online survey was conducted by Atomik Research among 1001 adults

aged 18+ in the UK. The research fieldwork took place on 7-8 July 2021. Atomik Research is an independent creative market research agency that employs MRS-certified researchers and abides to MRS code.

US Consumer Research Methodology: An online survey was conducted by AYTM among 1000 adults aged 18+ in the USA. The research was fielded in 2021.

Contact Centre Professionals Research Methodology: An online survey was conducted by Arlington Research among 600 contact centre professionals in the UK and USA. The research fieldwork took place 18-23 July 2021. The research complies with the UK Market Research Society's Code of Conduct and ESOMAR standards.

About PCI Pal:
PCI Pal is a leading provider of SaaS solutions that empower companies to take payments securely, adhere to strict industry governance, and remove their business from the significant risks posed by non-compliance and data loss. Its mission is to safeguard reputation and trust by providing customers with secure payment solutions for any business communications environment including voice, chat, social, email, and contact centre. PCI Pal is integrated to, and resold by, some of the worlds' leading business communications vendors, as well as major payment service providers. The entirety of the product-base is available from its global cloud platform hosted in Amazon Web Services ("AWS"), with regional instances across EMEA, North America, and ANZ. PCI Pal products can be used by any size organisation globally, and it is proud to work with some of the largest and most respected brands in the world.

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