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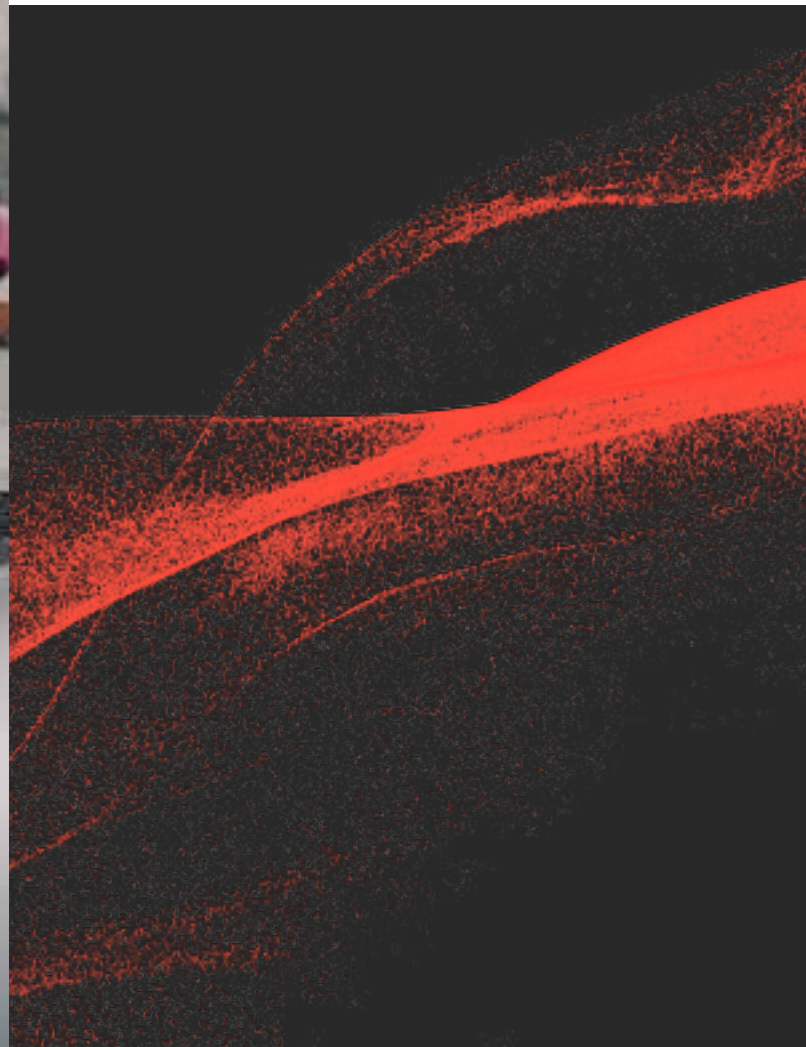
POV

# Why “Talk to a Human” Helps Brands Outcreate Customer Support Experience

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# Table of Contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>From Automation Savings to Customer Fatigue</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Human Touch Returns</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The Magic Lies in the Hybrid Approach</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>What This Means for Brands and Customer Experience</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Meet the author</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>8</b>

## Introduction

The reluctance to talk to a human is a growing trend that I see among Gen Z and even more in Gen A. They are more comfortable talking to a bot or texting than interacting with a human. In fact, strange as it may sound, even while sitting next to each other, they communicate via text messages or emojis instead of talking to each other.

As an adult, I feel the same way. In today's automated world, our tolerance for human mistakes has shrunk, while our patience for sitting endlessly on hold to reach a real person has all but disappeared. This isn't accidental; it's a habit shaped over decades.

For over twenty years, companies, especially in the US, have chased automation and AI in customer support. The goals were clear: cut costs, boost efficiency, reduce errors, and leverage the rise of chatbots and AI. The shift felt inevitable. But in 2026, something unexpected is happening. Speaking to a real human has become a premium experience, and increasingly, a powerful brand differentiator. The opportunity now lies in bringing human insight and intelligent systems together more intentionally, not in choosing one over the other.

Ahead, I've shared how CMOs, CX leaders, and digital transformation heads can rethink their automation strategies to balance efficiency with empathy. This POV explores what's driving the return of human touch in customer support and how brands can Outcreate customer support experiences by keeping people at the heart of every interaction.

## From Automation Savings to Customer Fatigue

According to Gartner, agentic AI will autonomously resolve 80% of common customer service issues without human intervention by 2029.<sup>1</sup> Companies like Meta, Uber, and Verizon leaned heavily into automation. But as the automation curve rose, so did customer frustration.

Gartner also found that 64% of customers would prefer that companies not use artificial intelligence or automation in customer service. The top concern is that AI will make it harder to reach a real person.<sup>2</sup> Poorly designed chatbots may have saved costs, but they often left customers going in circles, lacking context, and unable to resolve nuanced issues.

**Also Read:** [A Paradigm Shift in Customer Service with Generative AI \(GenAI\) – Making 'Intelligent' Chatbots to Enhance Customer Support.](#)





## The Human Touch Returns

The backlash didn't go unnoticed. As customer support moved toward full automation, companies discovered a harsh reality: efficiency without empathy undermines trust. Today, as generative AI reshapes how businesses operate, leading brands reintroduce the human touch, not as a fallback, but as a core part of their experience strategy. Many are making live assistance faster to access, less frustrating, and more meaningful.

Major companies have pivoted to reintegrate human agents, either by default or as an escalation option that's easier to access, without going around in circles.

### **Frontier Airlines Reverses Course to Restore Live Support**

After sustained customer backlash, Frontier Airlines reinstated live phone support in May 2024 for travelers within 24 hours of departure and for elite members at any time. This move explicitly reversed its earlier "no phone" model, signaling a renewed focus on human reassurance in moments of urgency.<sup>3</sup>

### **Uber Redefines Empathy in Real-Time Support**

Once known for its lack of live support, Uber reintroduced in-app human chat and call options across multiple service areas in 2023. CEO Dara Khosrowshahi said it best, "empathy is hard to automate." The company recognized that absolute trust comes from connecting with a person when things go wrong.<sup>4</sup>

### **Klarna Learns That AI Alone can't Carry Customer Care**

After relying heavily on AI for over a year, Klarna began hiring customer service agents again in 2024. CEO Sebastian Siemiatkowski admitted that while automation reduced costs, it also created distance. Customers wanted understanding, not just answers. This course correction shows that speed and empathy must work together to create real loyalty.<sup>5</sup>

### **Bank of America Balances AI Efficiency with Human Escalation**

Even with its AI assistant Erica performing well, Bank of America made it easier for customers to reach human representatives in 2024. The change followed complaints that complex issues, like fraud disputes and loan clarifications, were getting stuck in bot loops. By reintroducing human access, the bank reaffirmed that trust in financial services still depends on personal interaction.<sup>6</sup>

# The Magic Lies in the Hybrid Approach

Some companies have started embracing Business Creativity by blending the AI efficiency of intelligent systems with human insight and empathy in remarkable ways. These brands show that automation doesn't replace people but supports them.

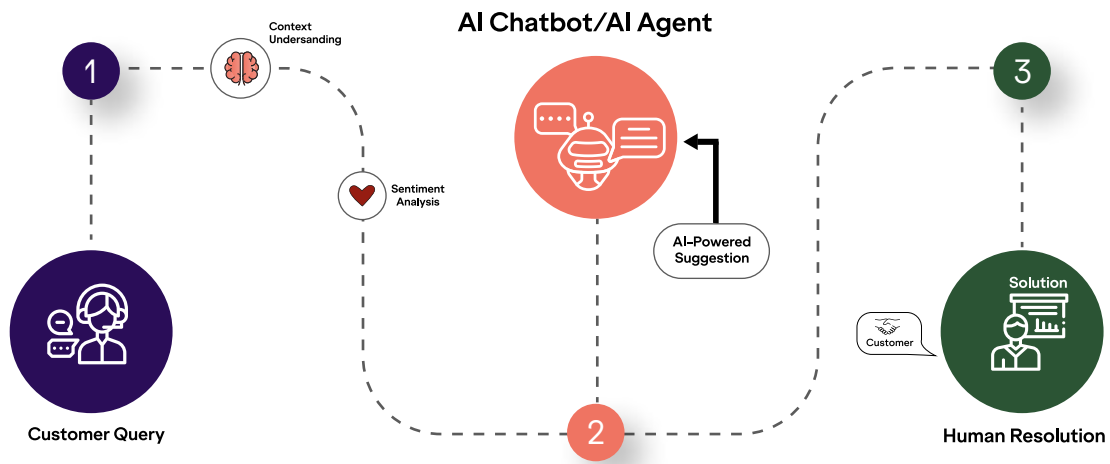


Figure 1: Blending AI precision with human empathy for faster, more meaningful support

## United Airlines Blends AI Efficiency with Human Assurance

Call me biased, but this remains my favorite example. The United app shows what's possible when AI and human support work together. It allows users to plan, book, manage flights, track bags, and get real-time help through chat.

AI handles rebooking or voucher distribution during disruptions, while human agents step in when empathy or judgment is needed. With over 110 million downloads and nearly 100 million monthly sessions, United's balance between automation and human care stands out.

## T-Mobile Redefines Customer Resolution Speed

Another brand I admire deeply is T-Mobile. Every time I've called, my issue has been resolved by the first person who answered. No transfers, no waiting for supervisors.

Their new T-Life app brings all account management, payments, device upgrades, and connected home features under one roof, with access to human support when needed. Projected to cross 40 million downloads this year, it's a strong example of how real people backed by smart systems can deliver frictionless service.<sup>7</sup>

## American Express Combines AI Convenience with Human Expertise

AmEx has a good balance. Its app uses AI to handle basic queries while offering "chat with a representative" with one tap. I've seen how their agents are empowered to act quickly and resolve issues at the first interaction. That confidence and responsiveness create trust, something automation alone can't achieve.

## Apple Maintains Human Touch Across Every Channel

Apple Support moves seamlessly from chatbot triage to a live expert through chat, call, or in-store Genius sessions. I've experienced this personally, and the consistency between digital and in-person support is impressive. It's efficient without feeling robotic. That's one reason my family and I have stayed loyal to Apple for over twenty years.

## Zappos Keeps the Human Connection Alive

Zappos built its brand on empathy and hasn't let technology dilute that. Its representatives are encouraged to take their time and connect with customers beyond transactions. That culture of genuine care continues to define its reputation for outstanding customer service.

The future depends on AI-augmented human support, where technology acts as a helper, such as making processes more efficient, understanding intent, and handling repetitive tasks automatically. This enables humans to concentrate on conversations that require empathy and involve high stakes. Bringing humans back into the process doesn't mean leaving AI behind. It's about recognizing that the real power comes from finding the right balance.

Enough and more discussions are taking place around the "human-in-the-loop" conversation. I have written extensively about it, with my latest article available [here for a quick read](#).



# What this Means for Brands and Customer Experience

According to Gartner, by 2027, half of all organizations that planned to cut their customer service staff will abandon those plans. Many now realize that “agent-less” models often miss the mark. Replacing humans with AI can save costs, but risks eroding empathy and trust, two things automation can’t replicate.<sup>8</sup>

To succeed, brands must clearly define AI’s role, align it with business goals, and determine where human agents add the most value. Human connection is fast becoming a premium experience. Leading brands recognize that not every problem can or should be solved by a bot.

We’re entering a new phase of AI maturity that values balance over automation for its own sake. The best customer service models use AI to strengthen human judgment. Empathy and context remain human in this “human-in-the-loop” model; AI accelerates everything else. For CMOs, this is where bringing human insight and intelligent systems together becomes a practical customer experience strategy.

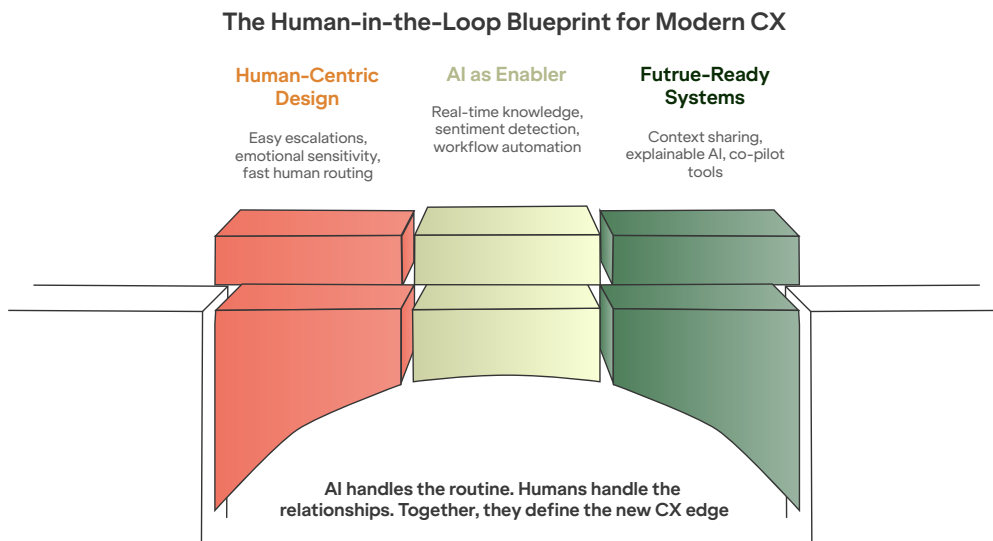


Figure 2: The human-in-the-loop blueprint for future-ready customer experience

## Prioritize Human-Centric Design in CX

Make human escalations fast and intuitive. Use AI to detect tone and frustration in customer messages and route them to human agents when needed. Customers should never struggle to reach a person during urgent or emotional moments. Brands that make “talk to a human” simple earn trust and long-term loyalty.

## Use AI to Empower, Not Replace, Support Teams

Deploy AI for what it does best: real-time knowledge retrieval, after-call work like filling case dispositions, intent analysis, and workflow automation. This will free up human agents to focus on what they do best: showing empathy, solving complex problems, and strengthening relationships.

## Build for a Human-in-the-Loop Future

Technology leaders must design systems that enable human expertise and AI to coexist. That means explainable AI, transparent context sharing, and smart handoffs between bots and agents. Platforms with built-in co-pilots are already defining how service teams operate.

Companies that blend AI speed with human understanding will set new CX benchmarks. The advantage lies in bringing people and intelligent systems together with clarity and intent, so every interaction moves faster without losing empathy, judgment, or trust. That is how brands will Outcreate customer support experience in the years ahead.

**Recommended Read:** [Revolutionizing Customer Service with Cognitive Contact Centers.](#)



## Meet the author

### Anika Sharma

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Anika Sharma is a global digital expert and technology consultant, ranked No. 17 among the Top 50 Global Digital Thought Leaders. With 20 years of experience in CPG, retail, beauty, luxury, and T&H, she leads digital transformation for leading brands. As an Assistant Professor at NYU Stern, she passionately teaches digital strategy and marketing.

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