

# Customer engagement burnout.

How workers in customer-facing roles really feel.





## Ben Booth, CEO MaxContact

It won't be a surprise to anyone working in customer engagement, but we have a growing employee burnout problem.

For those on the phone to customers every day, two years of working alone at the kitchen table, mounting workloads and little interaction with colleagues has taken its toll.

Many of us saw the pandemic as a temporary change in behaviour, and that the extraordinary working practices we had to quickly adopt to survive would be reversed once the world returned to normal. It's clear that this hasn't happened.

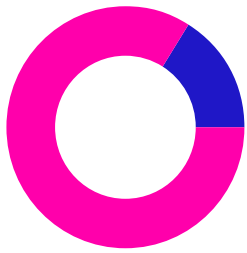
And we can't ignore it any longer. Good people are leaving in their droves, often leaving the industry for good. Many of those left are at breaking point.

We wanted to find out what life is really like for those working in customer-facing roles. Not just those working in contact centres, but anyone whose job regularly involves talking to customers over the phone – box office staff, customer support staff, sales professionals and many more. This group is often ignored by industry studies but represents millions of people all over the country.

We surveyed 750 UK workers working in customer-facing roles, both in contact centres and within companies, and the results make for grim reading. Workers are feeling burnt out, underappreciated and without a clear sense of career progression.

We wanted to listen and understand these problems so that, as an industry, we can take steps to improve the lives of these workers, and ultimately safeguard our future.

# Doing more with less – burnout now an imminent business risk



**84%** say they feel under pressure from management to deliver quantity over quality

Nearly three quarters of workers (72%) say they are burnt out or believe they will be burnt out soon. This figure is even higher for those in contact centres, where 83% are facing burnout.

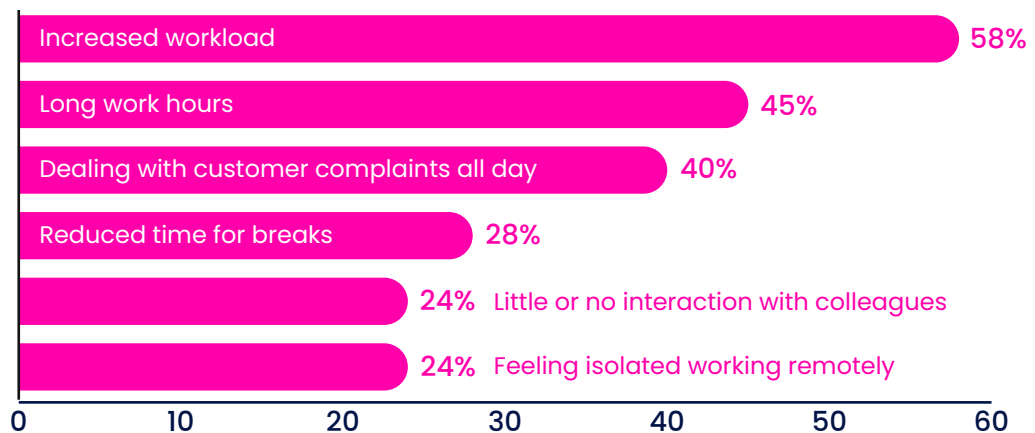
When asked about what’s causing this, staff say their workload has increased dramatically (52%) and that they’re faced with long working hours (43%). Nearly a third (28%) are also getting fewer and shorter breaks. However, despite fears that remote working is fuelling isolation and burnout, this was ranked bottom of all reasons.

In fact, the vast majority (88%) say the responsibilities within their existing role have expanded since the beginning of the pandemic, without a pay rise or promotion. On average, they’re taking on between one and two people’s work in addition to their own, with 10% even stretched to the capacity of three or more people.

This means workers feel like they’re being forced to do more with less time. The vast majority again (84%) say they feel under pressure from management to deliver quantity over quality when it comes to interactions. We know that this kind of work leads to lower job satisfaction and creates a ‘churn and burn’ environment where workers feel de-humanised.

At the same time, as demands on customer-facing staff have increased since the start of the pandemic, many companies have struggled to fill vacant roles to relieve that pressure on staff. This is putting even more pressure on those left behind to do more with less.

## If you are facing burnout now or will be in the near future, what are the main reasons for this?

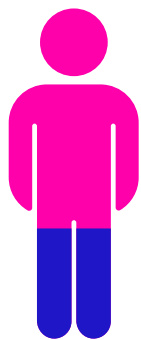


# How much extra work do you estimate you have taken on within your current role since the beginning of the pandemic?



13%

Less than one other person's work



33%

One extra person's work



23%

1.5 people's work



20%

2 people's work



6%

3 people's work



4%

More than 3 people's work

# Burnout will intensify the talent crisis

Nearly half of workers (49%) said they dislike their job and would be looking to move in the near future. This isn't just amongst the youngest workers, but holds true for everyone aged 44 and under. This will continue to cause chaos for an industry already struggling to hire and retain talent.

*This figure is particularly high for those in contact centres, where 62% want to leave, but accounts for just 37% of workers in-house in customer service roles.*

Lack of progression is a key problem. Over half (56%) believe there are little to no career progression opportunities in their current role, rising to 69% of

contact centre workers. This is driving many to want to leave in the near future.

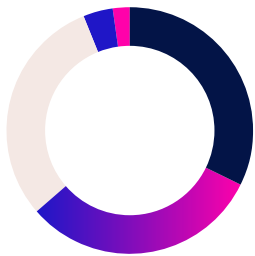
The impact of this could be felt for years if young people who represent the future of the industry don't feel they can build their skills and a long-term career, and choose to leave rather than developing their skillset.

This is contributing to workers feeling underappreciated for the work they do. Nearly two thirds (63%) say their company thinks the end-customer experience is more important than employee wellbeing. Again, this feeling is higher amongst contact centre workers (70%).



# Current solutions don't go far enough

**How often, if at all, do you feel leaders and managers are following any mental health or staff wellbeing policies that your organisation has in place?**



- Always (32%)
- Often (31%)
- Sometimes (30%)
- Never (4%)
- Not sure (2%)

## Mental Health

Workers are reporting that their organisations have HR policies in place to try and help. Just over half (54%) are aware of mental health support initiatives at their workplace, and is slightly more common in larger companies (250+ staff) where more than 60% are aware of policies.

While nearly all workers who know about mental health policies said their leaders and managers follow them, only 32% said this was 'all the time'. This suggests that while policies have been created, more could be done to ensure they are being implemented across the board.

## Technology

Many organisations have also invested in specialist customer engagement technology to help customer-facing workers do their job to a high standard.

More than half (61%) have some kind of software in place. However, this is much more common in contact centres (69%) compared to those in other customer service roles (57%).

This suggests that for those in customer-facing roles outside of contact centres, their companies still aren't giving them all the tools they need to do their job efficiently and effectively. The fact that many workers still feel unsupported despite having some kind of technology in place could mean that it's being used as a sticking plaster over the problem and not being used to its full potential.

## Training

The news is that 83% of workers say they've been given the training they need to do their role effectively. However, 45% said that while the training they'd had was sufficient, there was still more that their company could do to help.

We also can't ignore that one in six (17%) said they either hadn't had the training they needed or had received none at all. In addition, the number of people who'd had sufficient training drops to 72% when you look at those aged 45 and over, suggesting this group needs greater support.

**Does your organisation provide you with specialist customer engagement software to help perform your role to a high standard?\***



**69%**  
Contact centre workers responded 'Yes'.



**57%**  
Customer-facing roles (non-contact centre) responded 'Yes'.

\*This could be any software or system that enables you to talk to customers, for example contact centre software, contact centre engagement platform, call dialler systems etc.

# What can be done?



Workers in customer engagement roles across the board are telling us that they're feeling overworked, under supported and aren't hopeful that things are likely to change. Many are considering leaving their job, and even the industry, altogether.

It's clear that, especially in the struggle for business survival during the pandemic, companies have been used to putting the customer first. But if we don't also balance this with employee needs, we will all suffer.

This isn't just the moral thing to do. Putting employees' mental health, wellbeing and development first means happy customers will follow. After all, you can't have great customer experience without happy and engaged employees.

That's why we're calling for a commitment from industry leaders to make 2022 the year of the agent. We need to make the customer engagement sector an attractive place to work again and avoid a major talent crisis.

This means transforming working practices to put the wellbeing of frontline customer service staff at the heart of everything we do.

No ticking boxes or window dressing. We need sustained commitments through programmes, initiatives, tools and policies that demonstrably support contact centre specialists to do their jobs better, and put their wellbeing first.

We then need to make sure those efforts are followed through and put into action. We need to make sure technology investments are actually helping staff and adding value, such as reducing time spent on menial, repetitive tasks or supercharging their ability to deliver great interactions with customers and feel good about their work.

Those working in customer-facing roles are the hidden backbone of society. From helping us when credit card bills are due to making sure we can get tickets to our favourite shows, staff up and down the country are meeting our every need.

Let's give them the support they deserve.

*To find out more, visit:*  
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