



# The 2005 Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index™

Aspect Index reveals gaps between consumer expectations and satisfaction with contact center interactions.

## Summary

Contact center professionals are failing to meet the expectations of consumers, who give them a D+ satisfaction grade (69%). This is evidenced by gaps between consumer expectations and their satisfaction levels with contact center interactions. The gaps are greatest in some of the areas that we found are most important to consumers, including personal qualities categorized as Empathy and Advocacy in contact center professionals. In particular, consumers want to speak directly with a person, with minimized delays and wait times, and they don't want automation to impede personal interactions. Once connected with an agent, consumers expect to speak with someone who is knowledgeable, patient, and informed and who speaks clearly and intelligibly.

The Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index is the result of an independent survey of more than 1,000 consumers and 150 contact center professionals across North America. The consumers represented a cross-section of age groups, incomes, professions and education levels. Based upon this representative sampling, as you can see in *Figure 1*, the lion's share of consumer interactions with companies are via telephone (79%), but a noteworthy proportion are emails (18%) and online chats (3%).

Overall, contact center professionals think they are performing better than consumers believe them to be. They are underestimating consumer expectations, while also not satisfying them. This creates risk for companies that don't recognize or act upon upon the power shift occurring from companies to consumers, who find it increasingly less difficult to take their business elsewhere when not satisfied. On the more positive side, this creates opportunities for those companies that satisfy their consumers, enabling them to differentiate themselves and strengthen their relationships with them.

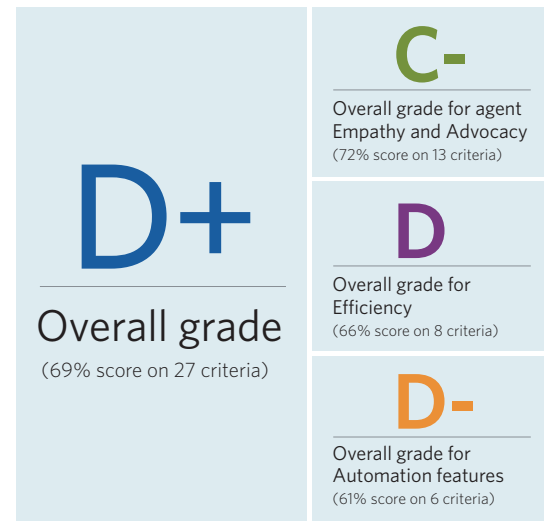
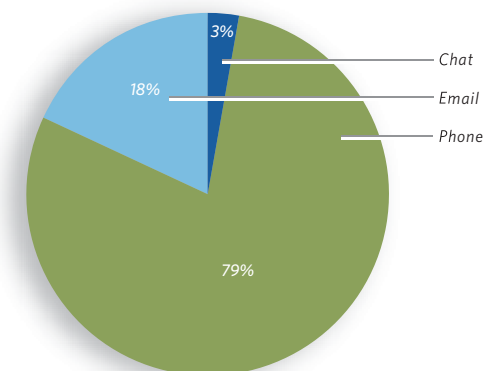


Figure 1

## Contact Center Interaction Channels



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**What is the Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index?**

The Aspect Index™ was established in 2005 by Aspect Software Inc. to provide an indicator, in the form of a letter grade, which quantifies consumer satisfaction with the quality of their telephone and internet-based interactions with companies and their representatives. The Index is a dynamic model for customer satisfaction that adjusts over time to reflect changes and trends in contact center performance, relative use of various communications channels and the changes in the importance that consumers place on various aspects of service.

Specifically, the Aspect Index measures gaps between consumer expectations and the level of satisfaction they receive for 27 separate elements of their experience based upon their most recent interaction with a contact center. The interaction areas covered in the Index include person-to-person communications (consumer and agent), person-to-automation and internet-based interactions (email and chat).

The Aspect Index is based upon the responses to a survey conducted by independent research firm Leo J. Shapiro & Associates LLC. The Aspect Index is the only measure of experience versus expectation related to contact center interactions in North America.

[www.aspectindex.com](http://www.aspectindex.com)

## Consumer Expectations are not Being Met

### Overall Findings

Whether by telephone, email or online chat, customer interactions are consistently failing to meet consumer expectations. Overall, contact centers are getting a D+ grade (69%) from consumers\*. According to our study, less than a third of consumers feel that contact centers surpass their expectations. Less than half, or 46%, give only a passing grade, while a full 23% say their customer interactions fall short of expectations. See *Figure 2*.

The Aspect Index studied perceptions among consumers as well as contact center professionals across 27 measures relating to contact center interactions and related technologies and their applications. The research topics have been organized into three general sets of criteria:

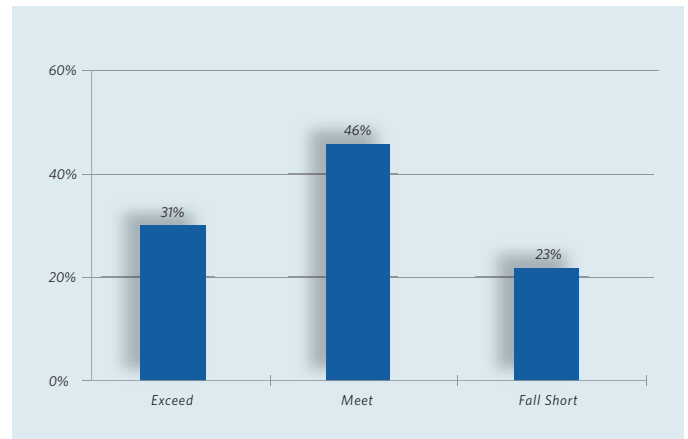
1. Empathy and Advocacy
2. Efficiency
3. Automation

Consumers expressed the greatest interest in the human aspect of customer interactions, characterized here as “Empathy and Advocacy,” followed next by “Efficiency.” They were least interested in technology-related features, or “Automation,” unless technology was used to enhance interpersonal communications. As *Figure 3* illustrates, their satisfaction levels were low across all these areas, giving contact centers a poor overall grade of C- (72%) for Empathy and Advocacy, D (66%) for Efficiency, and D- (61%) for Automation-related criteria.

The following sections provide greater detail on the Aspect Index findings, including the overall report card for each of these three areas of empathy and advocacy, efficiency, and automation.

Figure 2

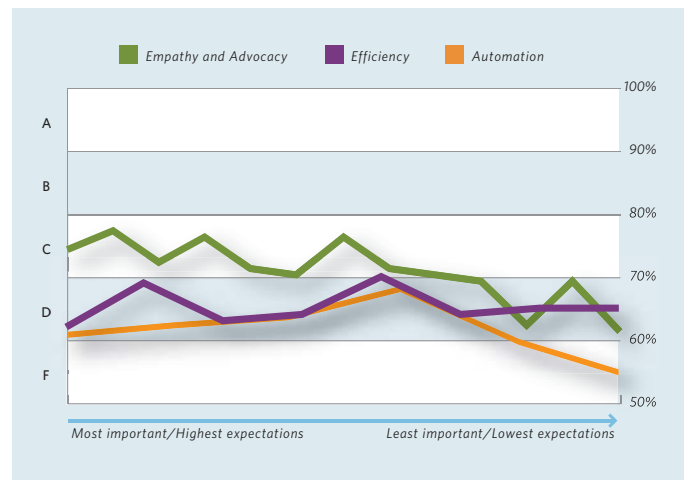
### Consumer Contact Center Interaction Expectations



Consumers were asked: “Did the service you received exceed, meet or fall short of the expectations you had before making contact with the company?”

Figure 3

### Overall Consumer Satisfaction by Category



- D+ overall grade (69% satisfaction score on 27 criteria);
- C- overall grade for agent Empathy and Advocacy (72% satisfaction score on 13 criteria);
- D overall grade for Efficiency (66% satisfaction score on 8 criteria);
- D- overall grade for Automation features (61% satisfaction score on 6 criteria)

\*See *Methodology* section on page 15, for details on grading and scoring.

### Empathy and Advocacy

What are the agent attributes that matter most to consumers? As Figure 4 illustrates, the Aspect Index found consumers placed the following qualities on their Top Five list, rating them as “extremely” important:

1. Knowledgeable and informed
2. Speaks clearly - easy to understand
3. Patient - willing to spend the time to fully resolve the issue
4. Friendly and courteous
5. Takes responsibility for resolving issues

Contact centers receive a poor grade of C- (72%) for consumer satisfaction across the valued people-related measures of Empathy and Advocacy, raising serious questions about how and where contact center agents are hired, trained and deployed. See Figure 5.

Figure 5

### Empathy and Advocacy Consumer Satisfaction

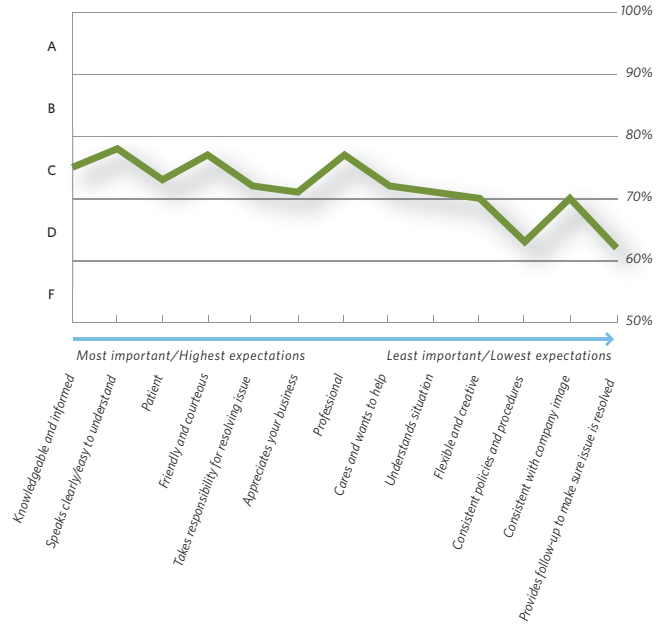


Figure 4

### Empathy and Advocacy Report Card

(In order of importance to consumers)	
Knowledgeable and informed	75%
Speaks clearly/easy to understand	78%
Patient	73%
Friendly and courteous	77%
Takes responsibility for resolving issue	72%
Appreciates your business	71%
Professional	77%
Cares and wants to help	72%
Understands situation	71%
Flexible and creative	70%
Consistent policies and procedures	63%
Consistent with company image	70%
Provides follow-up to make sure issue is resolved	62%

# C-

Overall grade for agent Empathy and Advocacy  
(72% score on 13 criteria)

### Efficiency

Consumers rate their experience with the efficiency of contact centers with an overall D grade (66%). See Figure 6. The Efficiency-related features that consumers value most are extremely telling. They have more to do with people than with technology, as evidenced by the Top Five qualities that consumers ranked as “extremely” important:

1. Ability to speak with a person without a long delay
2. Authority to resolve an issue without transferring the call
3. Ability to resolve an issue in a single interaction
4. Minimize time asked to wait or on hold
5. Clear connection without delays or lags

As Figure 7 shows, consumers are most satisfied with having a clear connection without delays or lags (71%) and dealing with agents who have the authority to resolve their issue (70%). With regards to consumer satisfaction on the quality that matters most important to them – “able to speak with person without long delay” – unfortunately their satisfaction level is only 63%.

Figure 7

### Efficiency Consumer Satisfaction

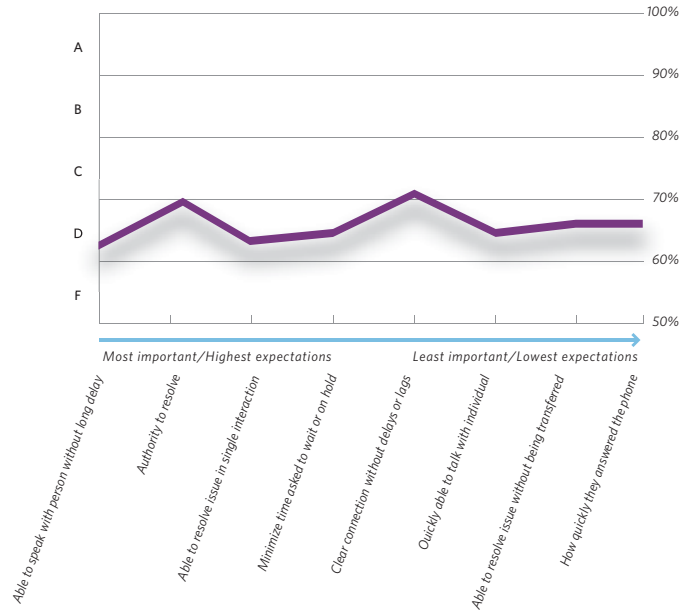


Figure 6

### Efficiency Report Card

(In order of importance to consumers)	
Able to speak with person without long delay	63%
Authority to resolve	70%
Able to resolve issue in single interaction	64%
Minimize time asked to wait or on hold	65%
Clear connection without delays or lags	71%
Quickly able to talk with individual	65%
Able to resolve issue without being transferred	66%
How quickly they answered the phone	66%

# D

Overall grade for Efficiency  
(66% score on 8 criteria)

### Automation

Consumers rate their experience with contact center automation with an overall D- grade (61%), as shown in Figure 8. Regarding technology, consumers voiced a preference for systems that facilitate human access, as evidenced by the features they ranked most important:

1. Easily access a person from an automated menu
2. Person instead of an automated system
3. Easy-to-use automated menu

As Figure 9 indicates, consumers are dissatisfied with Automation features overall, although this dissatisfaction is less pronounced for systems that provide multiple contact options. The strongest disapproval rating goes to an “automated system that resolves issues” – another clear indicator that consumers prefer technology that facilitates or streamlines a connection to a human being, rather than replacing it altogether.

Figure 9

### Automation Consumer Satisfaction

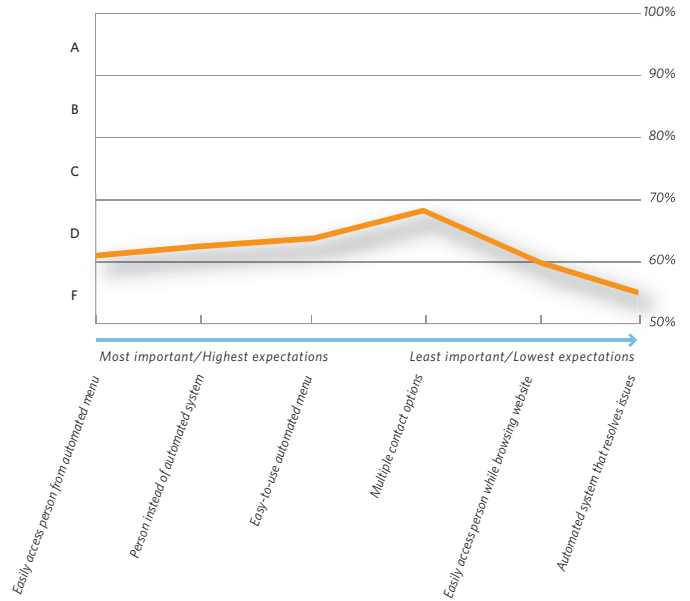


Figure 8

### Automation Report Card

(In order of importance to consumers)	
Easily access person from automated menu	61%
Person instead of automated system	62%
Easy-to-use automated menu	63%
Multiple contact options	68%
Easily access person while browsing website	60%
Automated system that resolves issues	55%

# D-

Overall grade for  
Automation features  
(61% score on 6 criteria)

## The Consumer Divide

### Importance vs. Satisfaction Gaps

Our research also found that many gaps exist between what matters most to consumers in their contact center interactions versus their satisfaction.\* These are detailed below by the categories of Empathy and Advocacy, Efficiency and Automation.

*\*The satisfaction percentages listed in this section are not weighted, and importance is in terms of “extreme” only. These satisfaction percentages, along with consumer importance (very” or “extreme”) and channel usership, are combined to compute the percentages resulting in the satisfaction grades for the previous Findings section.*

### Empathy and Advocacy

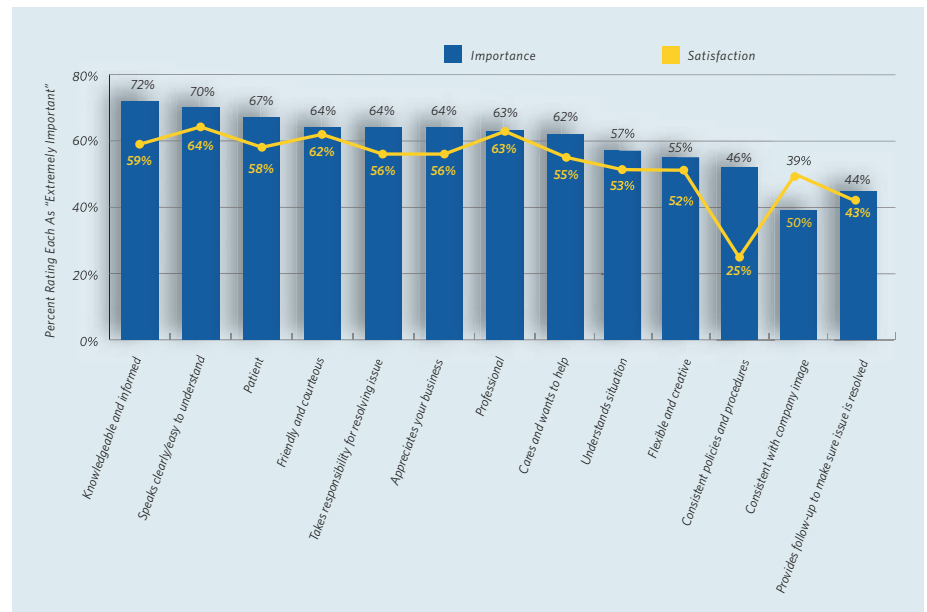
As described in the *Findings* section, consumers are clearly seeking faster routes to human interactions. They want shorter wait times and automated systems that facilitate, rather than impede, human interactions. As *Figure 12* illustrates, there are gaps between what’s important to consumers and their related satisfaction levels. The Top Three gaps are:

1. Consistent policies and procedures (21% gap)
2. Knowledgeable and informed (13% gap)
3. Consistent with company image (11% gap)

Consumers were most satisfied with agents who spoke clearly and were easy to understand. This item

Figure 12

### Empathy and Advocacy - Consumer Importance vs. Satisfaction



*Satisfaction ratings not weighted; only “extreme” importance measured*

was also second most important to them, behind having a knowledgeable and informed agent.

### Efficiency

Larger gaps come to light when we compare consumer satisfaction levels against the Efficiency criteria that are most important to them. See Figure 14. The Top Five gaps are:

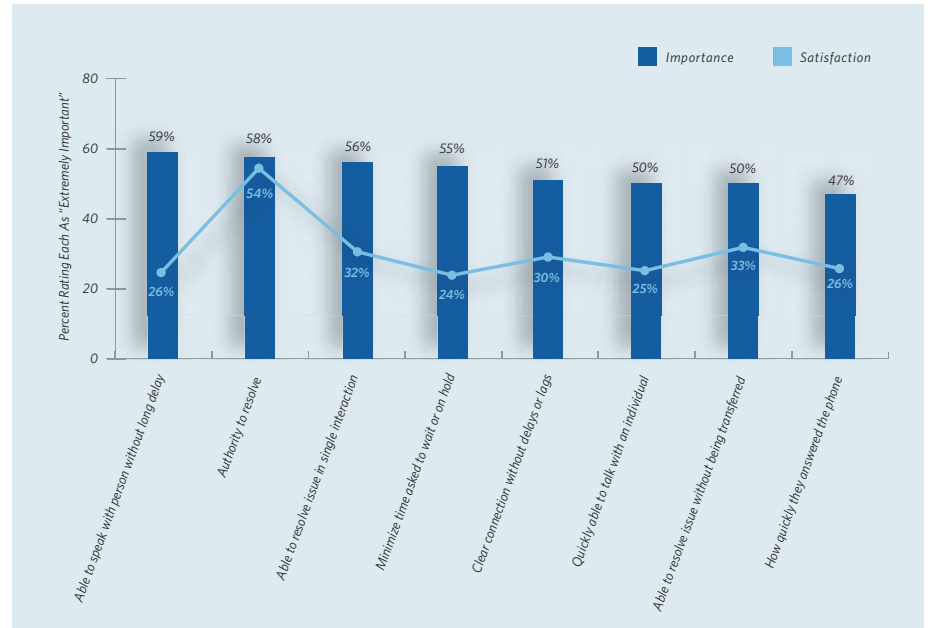
1. Able to speak with person without long delay (33% gap)
2. Minimize time asked to wait or on hold (31% gap)
3. Quickly able to talk with an individual (25% gap)
4. Able to resolve issue in single interaction (24% gap)
5. (tie) Clear connection without delays or lags (21% gap)  
(tie) How quickly they answered the phone (21% gap)

### Automation

When comparing consumer satisfaction levels against the Automation-related criteria that are of highest importance to them, the gaps widen. As Figure 16 reveals, consumers expressed a strong desire that technology facilitates access to a human agent, whether reached from an automated menu or directly, but they are very dissatisfied with contact center technologies that hinder personal interactions.

Figure 14

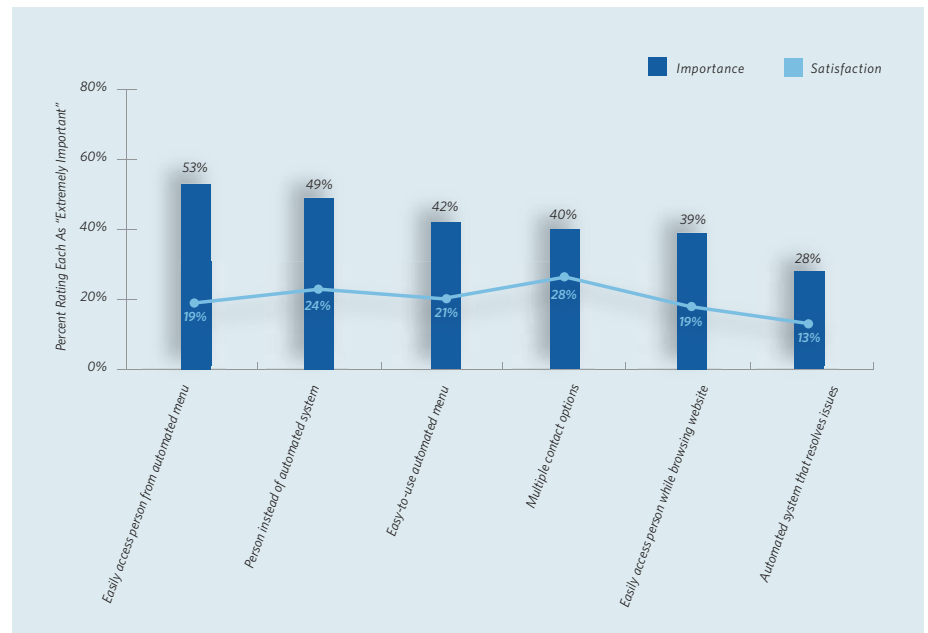
#### Efficiency - Consumer Importance vs. Satisfaction



Satisfaction ratings not weighted; only "extreme" importance measured

Figure 16

#### Automation - Consumer Importance vs. Satisfaction



Satisfaction ratings not weighted; only "extreme" importance measured

## Perception vs. Reality

### Contact Centers Overestimate their Performance

Many gaps exist between consumer perspectives and contact center management perspectives. These disparities include perceptions of the importance of key components of contact center interactions, as well as their corresponding satisfaction levels. See Figure 10.

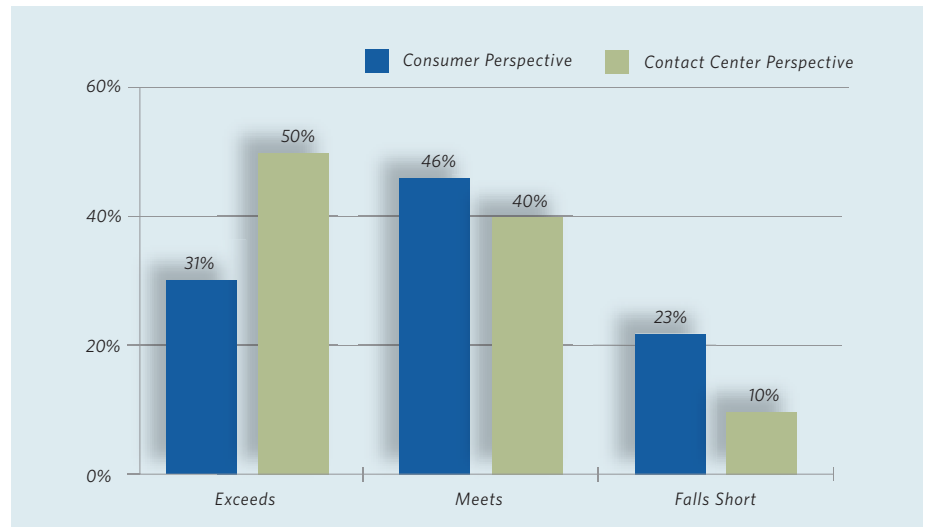
Overall, contact center managers overestimate consumer satisfaction levels with their performance, with 90% believing they meet or exceed consumer expectations. However, only 77% of consumers feel this way. 31% of consumers feel that contact centers exceed their expectations, and less than half, or 46%, say their expectations are met. Additionally, only 10% of contact center managers think they fall short of meeting consumer expectations, which was quite a perception, as the reality was that more than twice that amount, 23%, of consumers report that their expectations fall short.

### Empathy and Advocacy

There are gaps between what consumers value as important and what contact center managers believe they value, in terms of Empathy and Advocacy criteria. On key criteria, including patience as well as the ability to speak clearly and intelligibly, consumers place a much higher value on these qualities than contact centers believe they do, as illustrated in Figure 11.

Figure 10

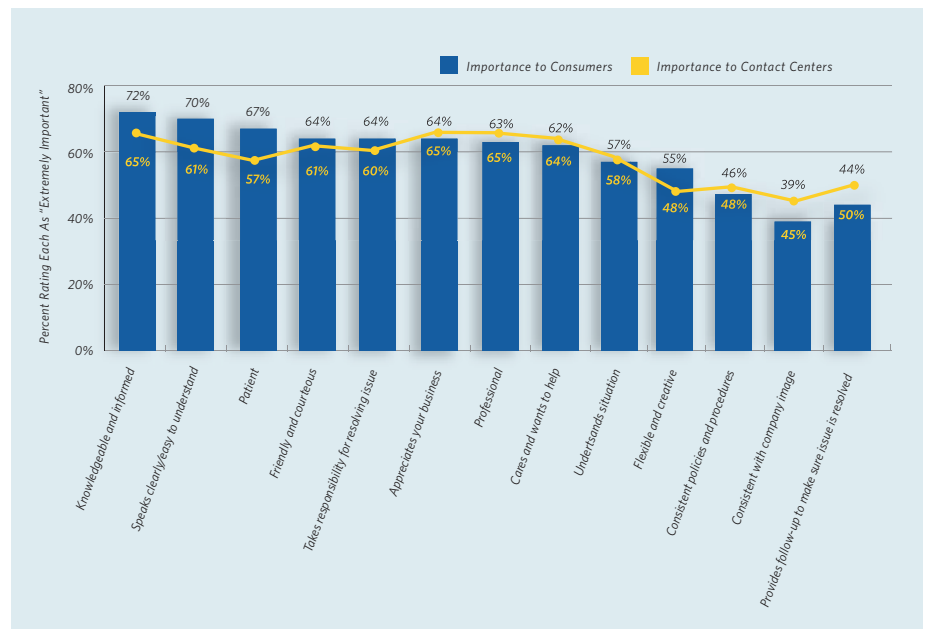
### Consumer vs. Contact Center Expectations



Consumers and contact center professionals were asked: "Did the service you received/Do you think the service your customers receive usually exceed/s, meet/s or fall/s short of the expectations (you/they) had before making contact with (the/your) company?"

Figure 11

### Empathy and Advocacy - Consumer vs. Contact Center Importance



Conversely, contact centers perceive criteria such as consistent company image and providing follow-up to make sure issue is resolved as more important than consumers report.

**Efficiency**

Gaps also exist between what Efficiency-related criteria are important to consumers and what contact centers perceive are important to them. See Figure 13. The Top Three importance gaps are:

1. Clear connection without delays or lags (10% gap)
2. (tie) Able to speak with person without long delay (9% gap)
- (tie) Authority to resolve (9% gap)

**Automation**

Finally, similar importance gaps exist between consumer and contact center perceptions when it relates to Automation. Contact centers underestimate how strongly consumers feel about easily accessing a person from an automated menu, using an easy-to-use automated menu and easily accessing a person while browsing the website. Meanwhile, consumers place a lower value than contact center managers believe they do on automated systems that resolve issues. See Figure 15.

Figure 13

**Efficiency - Consumer vs. Contact Center Importance**

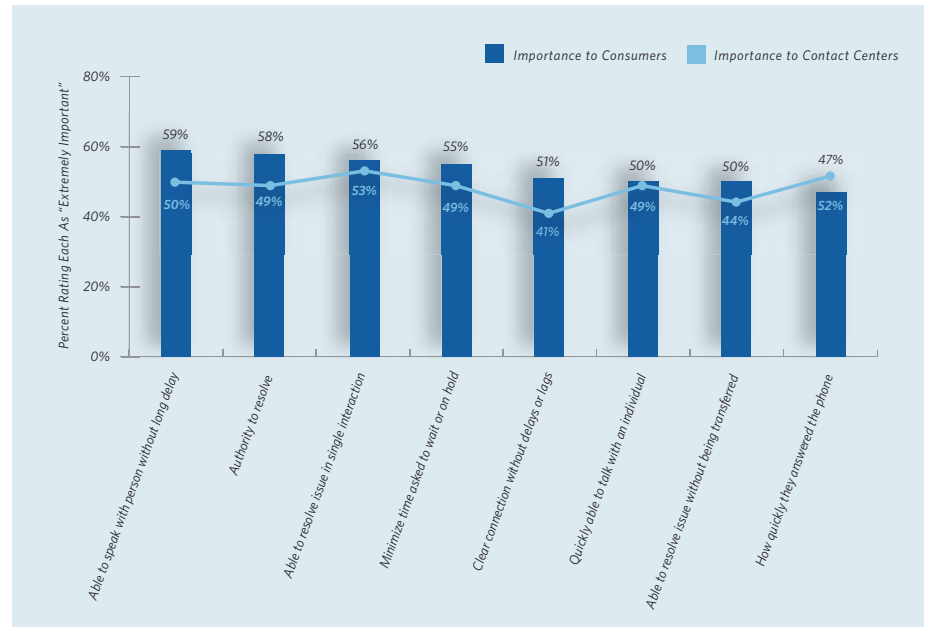
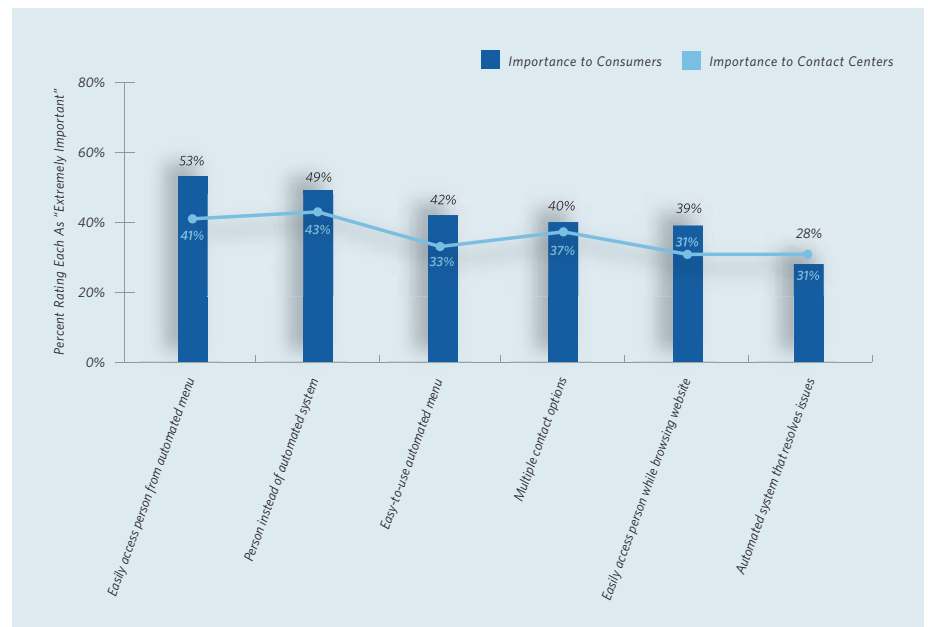


Figure 15

**Automation - Consumer vs. Contact Center Importance**



# Investment in Emerging Capabilities

## Consumer Satisfaction with Emerging Capabilities

Consumer satisfaction with new and emerging technological capabilities ranked high, in the good-to-excellent range, averaging an A- grade (91%). As *Figure 17* illustrates, consumers gave the highest possible satisfaction rankings to these features:

- Email option instead of phone
- Voice-activated rather than touchtone keypad
- Website walk-through
- Online chat option instead of phone

Consumers were only somewhat less satisfied with the criteria of top importance to them. Lowest satisfaction involved:

1. Automatic estimate of wait time
2. Ability to transfer information with the call
3. Having their call history available to the agent
4. Automatic callback

## Exposure to Emerging Capabilities

When we look specifically at consumer experience with new and emerging capabilities, we see very high consumer satisfaction with these capabilities, even when their exposure to these options is low, as seen in *Figure 18* on the next page. Consumers have relatively little experience with such new features as automatic callback, walkthrough on website and online chat. However, consumers who do experience these features give them high satisfaction grades, suggesting strong interest for those capabilities as consumers become increasingly technology savvy.

Figure 17

### Emerging Capabilities Report Card

(In order of importance to consumers)	
Transfer information with call	83%
History of calls available	85%
Automatic estimate of wait time	82%
Automatic callback after researching issue	88%
Automatic callback if wait time is longer than you would like	87%
Email option instead of phone	100%
Voice rather than touchtone keypad	100%
Walk-through on website	100%
Online chat option instead of phone	100%

# A-

Overall grade for  
Emerging Capabilities  
(91% score on 9 criteria)

While consumers give a strong satisfaction grade of A- (91%) to companies' emerging contact center technologies, companies are actually underinvesting in the specific technologies and features that are most important to consumers. The following are the Top Five Emerging Capability technological features that are of most importance to consumers:

1. The ability to transfer customer information with the call, without requiring the customer to re-state information
2. Making the customer's history of calls available
3. Giving the estimated call wait time
4. Having the option of automated callback if the wait time is too long
5. The alternative to communicate via email

Based upon contact center investment plans learned from our research, companies are both underinvesting or investing appropriately in Emerging Capability technologies. See Figure 19.

The most significant examples of underinvestment are in the areas of automated callback and providing estimated call wait time, which consumers are satisfied with when exposed.

On the other hand, companies are more appropriately investing in other Emerging Capability technologies such as email, web and chat. However, they need to monitor this investment, as some are less important to consumers. Put another way, companies' willingness to invest in these capabilities can become disproportionate to consumers' expressed interest in them.

Figure 18

**Emerging Capabilities - Consumer Exposure vs. Satisfaction**

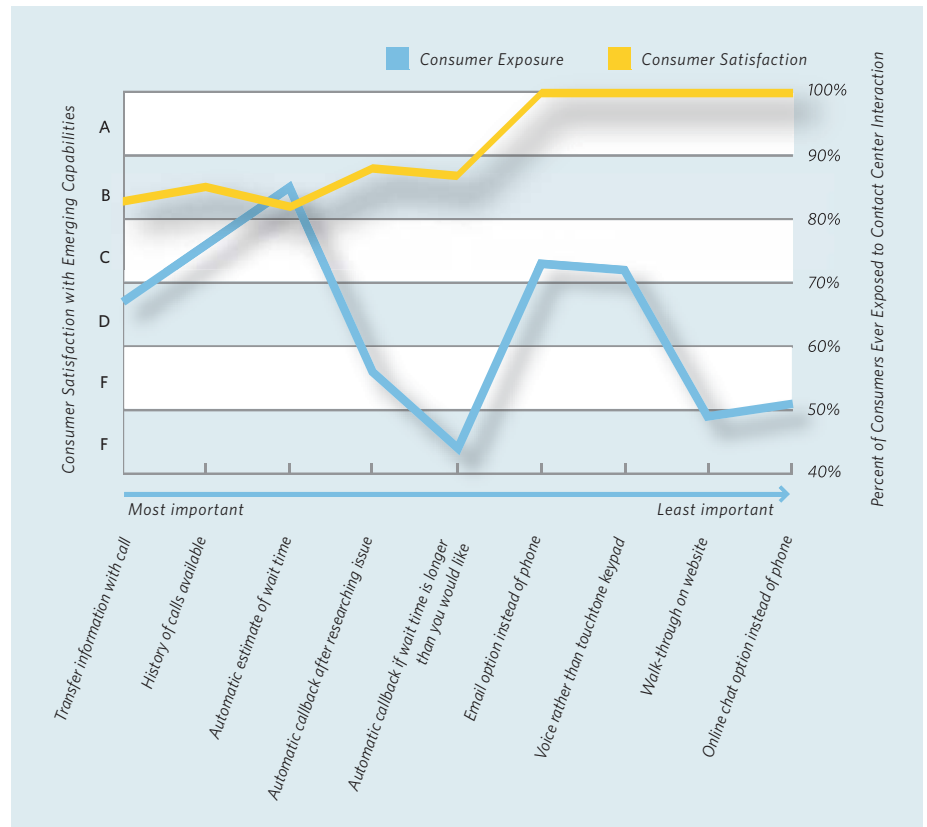
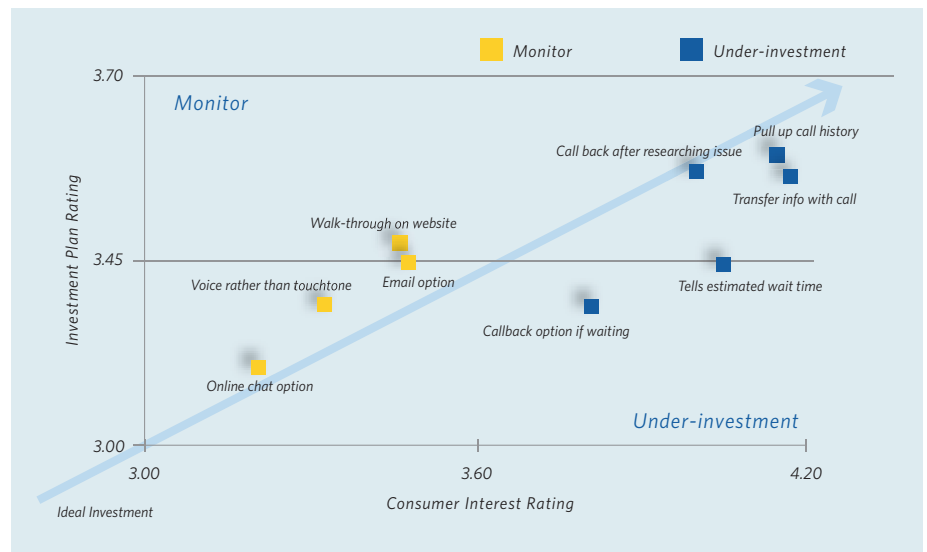


Figure 19

**Emerging Capabilities - Consumer Interest and Contact Center Investment**



## The Aspect Software Perspective

Consumers are tough graders! Still, like the school teacher who is strict but fair, consumers are giving contact center decision makers a clear, stern mandate on how to improve. After all, no organization sets up a contact center to disappoint customers. Instead, companies rightly expect that by creating a focused group of individuals concerned only with consumers' sales, service or billing interactions, their customers should receive the best possible experience. Unfortunately, myriad obstacles conspire against them: poor organizational alignment, lengthy training, agent attrition, misapplied technology, outdated policies and practices, budget cuts and so on. In this morass, it is easy to see why the consumer is sometimes neglected.

The opportunity now is to best understand what consumers want in their interactions and how best to provide it. The Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index offers the insight companies can utilize - strategically and operationally - to close the gap between consumer expectations and companies' delivery against those expectations. Bridging this gap will transform the way businesses interact with their customers, providing the necessary foundation for loyal and lasting customer relationships.

### Opportunities for Operational Managers

Consumers are pleading for higher-quality contact center interactions. Specifically, the Aspect Index points out that they highly value empathetic agents who act as the consumer's advocate within the business. If Empathy and Advocacy grades are to be improved, operational managers must increase their focus on agent staffing, training, measurement, and matching consumer need to agent ability.

Above all other measured criteria, consumers most value a knowledgeable and informed contact center representative who speaks clearly and is easily understood. The contact center manager's challenge is to anticipate the varied consumer demand and staff skilled agents accordingly.

Contact centers that are excelling in this area are taking a multi-faceted approach. Starting with the hiring process, they are targeting skilled employees (and outsourcers), no matter the physical location of the agent. Through the effective use of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), these centers are able to virtualize the pool of qualified staff whether at home, in branch offices, or across multiple contact centers.

For the best centers, training of these agents, often via online training tools, is not a one-time event but a continuous process. Both hard skills (learning about products, services, and billing systems) and soft skills (learning about company priorities and customer service skills) are reinforced to address the criteria consumers rated highly in the Aspect Index. And these centers recognize that, in the short term, training time may reduce productivity, but in the longer term this investment leads to higher customer satisfaction.

Having a virtual pool of agents to address customer inquiries requires employment of the latest forecasting, scheduling, and routing management tools. Best practice contact centers consider not just customer demand, but also their staffs' multiple skills (e.g., language, product expertise, writing ability, etc.) to ensure that the consumer is delivered directly to that knowledgeable and informed agent.

Additionally, the leading contact centers recognize that classic measures of contact center performance, such as maximizing the number and speed of interactions, is often contrary to the goal of providing patient and thorough resolution of the consumer's issues.

The best centers are empowering their agents with the tools necessary to resolve the customer's inquiry and are offering agents timely key indicators that reflect the agent's performance as compared to their peers and the business' goals. The continued implementation of analytics and quality monitoring tools is essential to fine-tune the customer experience and ensure that every interaction is meeting or exceeding customer needs.

## Opportunities for Business Leaders

It is a difficult juggling act for business leaders to address the often competing goals of reducing costs while increasing customer satisfaction. Leading contact centers are successfully balancing cost-cutting measures, like outsourcing and self-service initiatives, against targeted investment in an effort to differentiate from their competition.

According to our research, when asked about outsourcing, almost half of the contact center decision-maker respondents engage or will soon engage an outsourcer for part of their sales or service interactions. What seems to be clear, though, is that contact centers recognize consumers' desire for "agents who speak clearly and are easily understood," as nearly two-thirds of the outsourced interactions occur in a North American center.

In the past, some customer contacts were siphoned off to outsourcers, but the business had very limited visibility to those contacts – often only getting monthly reports. Now, thanks to more flexible deployment options via VoIP, businesses can outsource contact center work, but still maintain the rich routing and reporting capabilities utilized in their own centers.

To do so, leading businesses are asking outsourcers for staff, a voice path, and a browser-based interface only. They then provide the necessary routing intelligence and access to customer data as an extension of their own technologies. Doing so gives the necessary visibility – through real-time and historical reports – and contact routing flexibility to quickly respond to changing business conditions.

Investment dollars are scarce, making it even more vital to choose technologies that will have the biggest payoff. The Aspect Index is a valuable source for business leaders concerned with the customer experience to better understand what capabilities are important to consumers as investments are considered. Even better, some investments might not even cost any money. For example, providing callers an estimated wait time – a common capability for most modern ACDs – may seem like an almost trivial feature, yet those consumers that have been exposed to it give the feature good reviews. Oddly, though, fully a quarter of consumers have never even been exposed to receiving estimated wait time in any of their interactions with contact centers.

The desire for consumer empowerment comes through in all automation-related criteria, too. Whether via better self-service practices by providing IVR and Website "opt out" capabilities or through offering consumers their channel of choice, consumers universally are looking for a better experience. In the same way, consumers who have been exposed to a callback option if queue times are long are very satisfied with the option, but only 40% of all consumers have ever been given the choice. This is just one example where high-grading contact centers understand that it is differentiating for their company to make an investment, sending a clear message that their customer's time is valued and respected.

## Conclusion

For leading companies' business leaders, the contact center has emerged as an area of strategic importance. When it comes to customer service, once viewed strictly as a cost center, the contact center now offers an opportunity for competitive differentiation based on improving the quality of the customer experience.

As the Aspect Index shows, in aggregate, businesses are disappointing their customers at the first point of contact. While this may be an indictment, it is also an opportunity. It is time for the industry to reduce the consumer-to-contact center perception gap and take a sober look at consumer expectations. Aspect Software believes that by doing so, given today's D+ market, the opportunity exists for savvy business leaders to move their companies to the top of the class and become A performers.

## Methodology

The Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index employed quantitative studies with consumers, contact center managers and corporate executives to uncover perspectives on consumer satisfaction with contact center performance. The research methodology conducted by independent research firm Leo J. Shapiro & Associates LLC was developed in two phases: (See *Figure 20*)

### Phase 1. Quantitative Study with Consumers

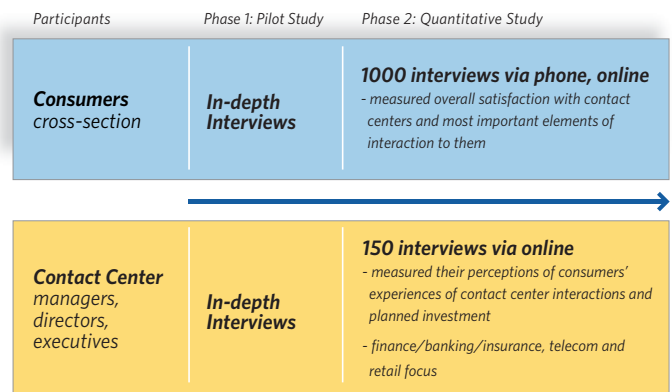
- A cross-section of consumers was interviewed using a combination of telephone and online methods to ensure capturing a wide range of contact center users. Consumers were interviewed about their overall satisfaction with contact centers, as well as their assessment of the various elements of their experience with contact centers.
- 1,000 interviews were completed with consumers, producing a survey sample with an overall level of statistical significance of +/-3%.

### Phase 2. Quantitative Study with Contact Center Managers and Corporate Executives

- A cross-section of professionals involved in contact center management was recruited to take part in this industry study.
- A total of 150 professionals were interviewed using online methods. All of those interviewed were contact center managers, directors or executives.
- The types of contact center functions covered include:
  - Customer Service
  - Inbound Sales
- The types of industries covered a broad range, but focus primarily on the three major ones below:
  - Finance/Banking/Insurance
  - Telecommunications
  - Retail

Figure 20

### Methodology



### Scoring Methodology

The grade is based on an overall possible grade of 100. A 100 would be a perfect grade, an A+. The grade is computed by satisfaction ratings on 27 measures. Satisfaction ratings are weighted by their "very" or "extreme" importance to consumers, as well as usership of various communication channels. Therefore, more important factors are given slightly more weight, i.e., more points, than less important ones. Responses by email, online chat and phone are weighted by usership since "online" channels are a much smaller proportion of respondents, but consumers using these channels are generally more satisfied than consumers using phone interactions, and they need to be weighted proportionately. Of a possible score of 100, the contact center's overall score in terms of consumer satisfaction is 69%.

The grade scale is as follows:

A+	98-100%	B+	88-89	C+	78-79	D+	68-69
A	93-97%	B	83-87	C	73-77	D	63-67
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62
						F	<60

The satisfaction ratings computed for determining gaps in *The Consumer Divide* section are not weighted, and only "extreme" importance is measured.

### Why Did Aspect Software Commission this Research?

Aspect Software believes technology deployments must satisfy three basic objectives:

1. To meet or exceed consumer expectations, particularly in those areas that are most important for consumers
2. To help companies build and enhance customer relationships
3. To streamline operations

Unfortunately, in the rush to streamline operations and contain costs, many organizations are forgetting that the contact center is ultimately about human contact. While the contact center industry has invested substantially in sophisticated technologies to improve and optimize customer interactions, all too often these tools have become a barrier to personal interaction, rather than a facilitator.

As the balance of power is shifting from businesses to consumers, contact center professionals will benefit from insight on consumer expectations and desires related to their phone and online transactions. Aspect Software believes the Aspect Index provides practical, objective insight companies can use to close the gap between consumer experience and expectation. **For more information, visit [www.aspectindex.com](http://www.aspectindex.com).**

### About Aspect Software

Aspect Software, which pioneered the contact center industry, is the only company 100 percent focused on providing proven, innovative products and services that enable key business processes including customer service, collections and sales and telemarketing for in-house and outsourced contact centers. Each day, companies around the globe conduct more than 125 million customer interactions using Aspect Software solutions for automatic call distribution (ACD), predictive dialing, workforce management, analytics, IVR and multi-channel contact. Headquartered in Westford, Mass., Aspect Software has operations across the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia Pacific. **For more information, visit [www.aspect.com](http://www.aspect.com).**

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**Aspect Software**  
Corporate Headquarters  
6 Technology Park Drive  
Westford, MA 01886

978 952 0200  
978 952 0201 fax  
[www.aspect.com](http://www.aspect.com)

