

A woman with brown hair, wearing a tan blazer and a white top, is shown in profile from the chest up. She is wearing a black headset with a microphone and has her hand resting on her chin. She is looking at a laptop screen. The background is a blurred office setting.

2021 Customer Experience Trends

The ABCs of the Post Pandemic Contact Center

BRIGHT PATTERN

Introduction

2020. What else can we say that hasn't been said already? The year 2020 should be entered into the dictionary as a noun, a verb and an adjective to mark an era. 2020 describes the action of utter uncertainty and something that is unfathomable.

When we brainstorm our annual CX trends for the upcoming year, we look at the usual KPIs within our industry, then suggest mostly incremental changes that businesses should focus on to keep up with consumer demands. This year, everything has changed. We saw whole industries that were completely shut down with no end in sight. Consumer demands shifted day-by-day, hour-by-hour as firms struggled to deal with the disruption to their supply chains. And with an even greater move to "online", consumers often found contact center personnel overwhelmed by an increase in calls and chats making customer service and business transactions more difficult. A recent 2020 IBM study found that the move to ecommerce was moved forward by 5 years due to the pandemic, and McKinsey noted that the already blazing fast move to digital channels was vaulted forward by 5 years in only 8 weeks due to COVID. While it felt like much of the world and business stood still, trends already underway accelerated forward like never before.

So how did this all affect CX? Well, the dust hasn't completely settled on the numbers, but we know that going forward, CX scores will be the gold standard by which everything else is measured. Another certainty is that on-premise CX platforms are on the way out as cloud contact center technology adoption has only accelerated with COVID. Companies that didn't have cloud-based CX solutions in place (and there were a LOT of them) scrambled to find a patchwork solution, keep the lights on, and deal with the new imperative of remote agents. Over the past year, things have looked pretty murky at times, but one thing is clear: businesses who do not adopt massive changes to their outdated CX strategies will become yet another casualty of 2020. Cloud technology that is nimble, maintains business continuity, and enables, and empowers today's new remote workers are the new table stakes to succeed.

For the 2021 CX Trends, we're going to look past the pandemic into the near (hopefully) future and lay out a step-by-step blueprint of what the contact center should resemble. We'll tackle the obvious changes like remote agents and cloud-based software, but we'll also dig deeper into post-pandemic economics, advanced AI solutions, and why software vendor relationships will be more important than ever. 2020 has been one heck of a roller coaster, so now let's turn to calmer waters as we outline the ABCs of the Post Pandemic Contact Center.

A Any Agent. Anytime. Anywhere.

B Be Prepared

C Clouds Have Clout

D Dedicated to Mobile

E Elevate CX with AI

F Forecasting a Return to "Normal"

G Get Your Business a CX Partner

H Heroic AI "Super-Vision" for QM

I Invest Now in CX

J Jump Into a Flexible Platform

Any Agent. Anytime. Anywhere.

First up on our list is arguably the most important asset to the contact center—the agents. Sometime around mid-March, as COVID-19 spread through the US and eventually the world, contact center agents were given marching orders to head home and continue their work from a more comfortable confine. This abrupt change came with pleasant side effects like a better work/life balance, zero commuting, and less sick days, which in turn can [reduce stress by nearly 80%](#). Additionally, employers benefit from [greatly improved productivity and a whopping 50% drop in attrition rates](#). If you add in the cost savings from the reduction of overhead—rent/lease and on-site equipment—it's a no brainer that the remote workforce is here to stay.

Biggest Work from Home Benefit to Agents?

- Ability to have a flexible schedule
- Flexibility to work from anywhere
- Not having to commute
- Ability to spend time with family
- Ability to work from home
- Other

But turning on remote agents is not an easy process unless a company has the right technology. For example, accessing premise-based systems involves security concerns and phone quality at home may be poor. But with an all-in-one cloud contact center like Bright Pattern, remote agents can be turned on in literally days with built in security and soft phones with built-in quality checks.

However, remote workers often have a sense of needing to work harder than their central office peers, which has led to an [82% burnout rate](#). Furthermore, remote agents may need to deal with their own personal crises like finding child care, homeschooling or caring for ill or elderly family members. Companies that utilize remote agents should prioritize their employees' mental health by keeping work and break schedules consistent, providing a variety of mental health resources, and offering employees off-site company retreats and/or team building exercises.

One other glaring issue facing remote agents is the lack of comradery, [which can lead to loneliness in some agents](#). As humans, we crave contact and relationships with others and seek validation and/or critique for our ideas or performance. In a traditional contact center setting, it is easy to get feedback from peers and supervisors alike and share ideas and tribal knowledge—just walk over to their desk or the coffee area. In the post-pandemic contact center, enabling remote agents to have this same level of communication and sharing is essential. Apps like Microsoft Teams can easily facilitate one-on-one or group communication. And when the contact center platform has built-in integration to teams (like Bright Pattern), the communication benefits of Teams can be used to create an ideal CX platform for remote workers. This allows dispersed contact center agents to communicate with other contact center agents or supervisors for help - or even expert resources anywhere in the company to better help customers. You can literally bring every company employee together to help offer a better customer experience - not just traditional contact center agents.

Also critical is the ability for supervisors to monitor and coach their remote agents. For instance, an agent seat map that shows CSAT by agent allows supervisors the ability to help agents improve their performance. You can also implement scoring, grading, and coaching solutions (like Bright Pattern's Omni QM) to help out remote agents and help them become better knowledge workers.

Be Prepared – Learn from the Scouts

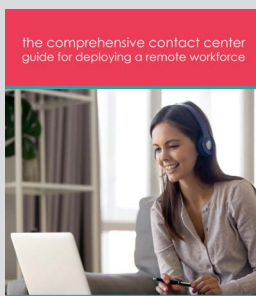
Let's be honest, no one was prepared for a global shut down due to the pandemic. Contact centers that relied on outsourcing calls and other channels overseas—instead of relying on work from home agents—were blindsided when the virus spread like wildfire to other countries. In early spring of 2020, we published a whitepaper called "[The Comprehensive Contact Center Guide to Deploying a Remote Workforce](#)" where we talked about the importance of having a plan in place for the "What ifs..." It should be obvious that in the post pandemic call center, every business needs to have measures for any future local, regional, and/or global events. Here's a few more helpful tips on planning from that whitepaper:

- Start with a solid foundation grounded in the company's resources and needs
- Invest in cloud-based contact center software that is easy to use and can scale quickly (we'll focus on this in a bit)
- Build out emergency response teams and detailed instructions on how to deploy a remote workforce
- Revisit the plan annually and make any changes as necessary

As previously discussed, solutions need to be easily deployed for remote workers. Since many on-premise systems cannot be easily accessed, it's imperative to use cloud-based contact center systems, like Bright Pattern, that can be launched in just days or weeks and doesn't require a VPN or special software. Also, since agents don't typically have complex phone systems or other hardware like headsets in their home, it's important that the software includes a softphone to ensure the highest quality connection for both the agent and the customer.

It's important to note that while contact centers should have a plan for major outages, don't forget about smaller disruptions to service. Earlier this year, we heard reports about spikes in traffic at financial institutions once the stimulus checks were released where premise-based systems were prevalent. Customers had overloaded banking contact centers trying to obtain loans. [Bright Pattern was able to quickly help the second largest US bank turn on 2000 remote agents in only 10 business days, giving the bank the ability to handle over 3 million interactions per month.](#)

These smaller surges in traffic could be handled using a "all hands on deck" approach to CX. One such company, Cabrillo Insurance, bolsters their contact center agents during hurricane season with employees from different functional areas. It's not uncommon to have agents working the phones, emails, chats, and other contact center staff but what if the spike is so severe that more resources are needed? Cabrillo was able to bring not only contact center agents but every employee in the company to help out during the hurricane season, demonstrating a super innovative approach for bringing the entire company together to help improve the customer experience. Talk about scout innovation...



SPECIAL REPORT

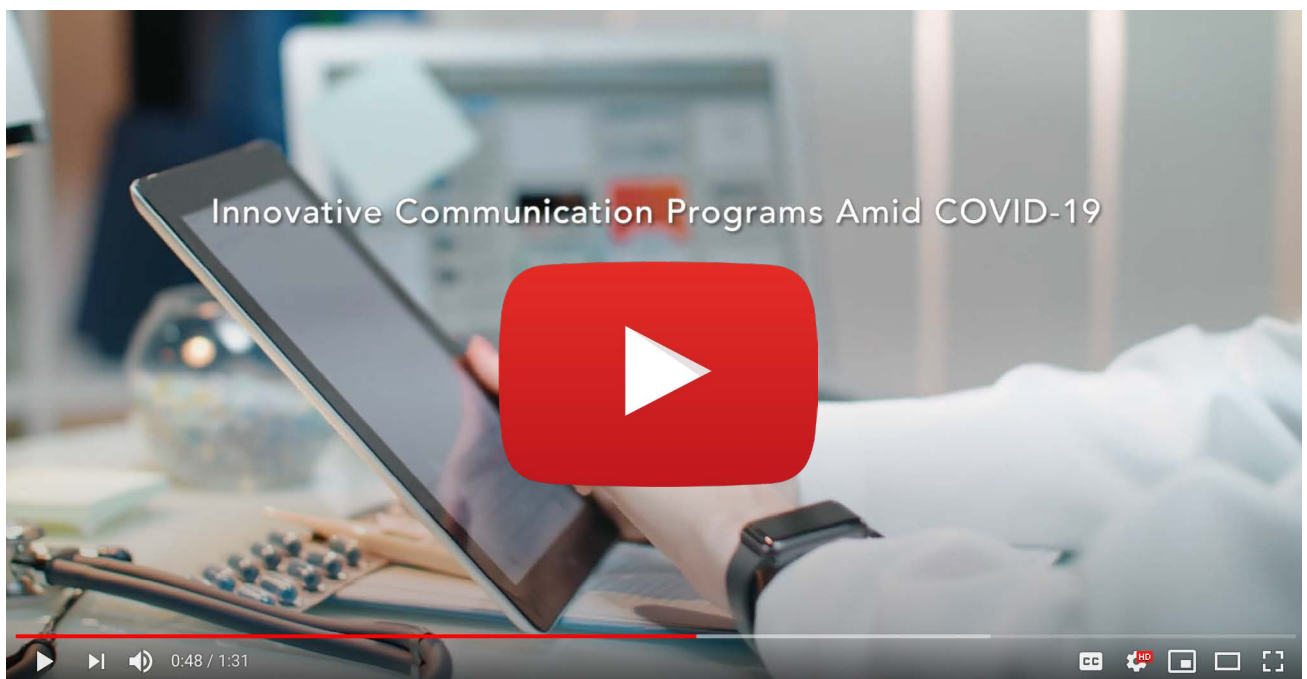
Comprehensive Contact Center Guide for Deploying a Remote Workforce

[Get Report](#)

Clouds Have Clout

We said it before and we'll say it again—on-premise contact center systems are no longer the best approach in the post-pandemic contact center. Ironically enough, cloud contact centers a few years ago were considered more risky and less secure than premise-based systems, but since COVID, cloud contact centers are significantly better for business continuity and employee safety than was previously the case. In the rare occurrence that a company was able to make it through the pandemic unscathed with on-premise contact center software, it is inevitable that as part of their post-pandemic plan they have to consider a cloud-based platform. In a 2018 report by Markets and Research, global spending for cloud-based contact center solutions was expected to triple by 2022. With the events that have taken place in 2020, we expect this number to rise significantly.

Watch How Bright Pattern Helped Companies Go 100% Remote During COVID-19 with Cloud Software with Industry Leading Uptime

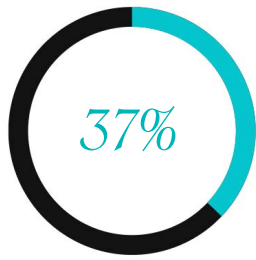


Companies that hang on to legacy platforms might cite a reduction in software capabilities, lack of integrations with ERPs, CRMs, etc., or data security as reasons to keep an on-prem platform vis-à-vis cloud-based. However, this couldn't be further from the truth. Today's cloud contact center solutions are robust powerhouses that offer a full suite of tools to handle even the most demanding customers.

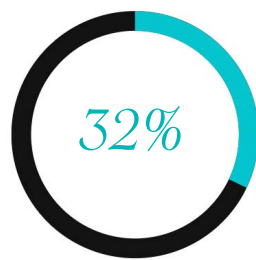
Additionally, certain cloud-based contact center software allows for integration with other platforms and/or databases out of the box. If custom integrations are needed, linking applications via an API is simple and cost effective. When it comes to security, today's contact center platforms follow the highest of standards to comply with various protocols like PCI, HIPAA, GDPR and others. Call and messaging data is typically encrypted and transmitted through secure servers that redact sensitive information. This happens no matter if the agent is sitting in a cubical or their living room couch.

Dedicated to Mobile

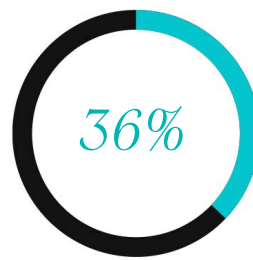
During the pandemic of 2020, mobile phone use was up, way up. [According to one recent survey](#), 39% of participants stated that they were relying more on their phones due to social distancing. That same survey also showed a 23% increase in consumers using apps for shopping. In our 2020 CX Trends, we discussed why companies should prioritize mobile over other channels when it comes to CX. With the expansion of 5G networks, dual-screen devices that promote multitasking, and Google's mobile-first indexing, we don't see this trend slowing down after the pandemic is over.



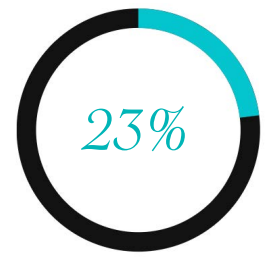
**increase in
text messaging
during COVID**



**increase in
video calling
during COVID**



**increase in
social media
during COVID**



**increase in
mobile app
shopping**

Another trend in CX is the shift to powerful, mobile-based social channels. Google My Business (GMB), Apple Business, and Facebook were initially niche players with early adoption from smaller companies that didn't have the resources or time to set up full-fledged websites or apps. However, GMB, Apple Business, and Facebook have grown exponentially and now offer asynchronous messaging and posts to enhance a company's feedback loop. Additionally, these services work across their respective ecosystems, so whether a customer is using search, maps, or a voice assistant, they can easily interact with a business.

In addition to social media channels, messaging apps like Facebook Messenger, WeChat, WhatsApp, Line, Viber, Telegram, and others should be considered in the post-pandemic contact center. These powerful apps not only allow for asynchronous communication on mobile devices, but also let customers and agents share files, pictures, or videos. This can be an incredibly useful tool when specific instructions or directions are needed like showing how to install a smart home device or sending terms and conditions for an event.



Customers are more mobile, making mobile channels a necessity. Functionality like video chat within mobile channels, sharing of pictures and documents, and in-app capabilities are also becoming table stakes. Some great use cases include sending a picture of a car accident to your insurance provider through the mobile app or receiving PDF notification via SMS or in-app from your bank after making a mobile deposit.

— Ted Hunting, SVP of Marketing at Bright Pattern

Elevate CX with AI

The influx of calls to contact centers during the pandemic was/is staggering. To put some perspective on the impact to people's lives, here's part of a transcript from a 60 Minutes piece looking at how COVID-19 affected unemployment:



“Department of Labor recording: ‘All specialists are busy with other customers. You must call back this week.’

Kaitlyn Reynolds: “I’ve done that 50 times, every day, for two weeks.”

Two weeks ago, Kaitlyn Reynolds was a vice president of a firm that organizes business conferences. She filed for unemployment online but discovered her last step, in New York, is a mandatory phone call.



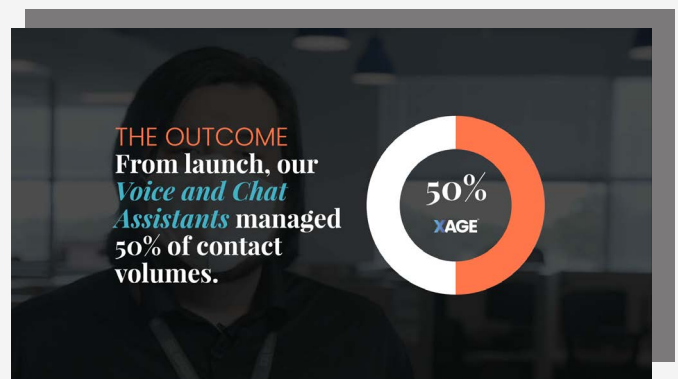
Kaitlyn Reynolds: “Fifty times a day since March 16th to get through to the contact center for unemployment to continue my claim and I have not yet been able to get through.”

Unfortunately, this situation was not unique as millions of Americans struggled during the pandemic to connect with banks, insurance companies, hospitals, and other crucial services. Telling people to call back or sending out a notification that “wait times may be longer than usual” is simply not good enough anymore. Organizations and businesses must turn to new forms of self-service and AI to assist remote agents and elevate CX whether it's during a crisis or after the smoke has cleared.

Last year, we looked at how companies are spending more on [AI but are lacking in strategic uses](#) for this powerful tool. The pandemic has amplified the need for AI as a frontline tool for contact centers to handle large volumes of interactions. One of the largest AI providers, IBM Watson, saw a 40% increase in traffic from February to April 2020. That's because AI tools like chatbots and advanced conversational IVRs are highly sophisticated, yet simple to implement and can quickly search extensive knowledge bases and provide answers to even complex queries. In one such case, Bright Pattern helped a multi-state retail chain triage over 50% of their call volume using a conversational IVR. We foresee major growth of AI and newer forms of self-service in CX, as it will continue to advance over time and reduce workloads for agents well after the pandemic is in the rear view mirror.

Triage 50% of Call Volume with AI

[Watch Video](#)

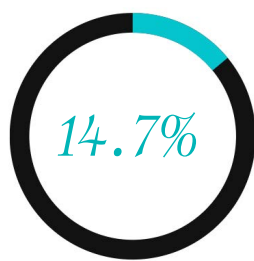


Forecasting the Return to “Normal”

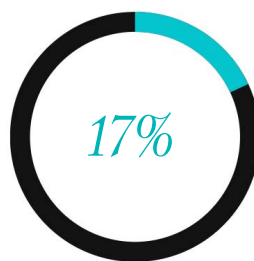
There have been so many buzzwords that describe the economy during the pandemic. Words like uncertain, uncharted, chaotic, and “the new normal,” are floating around, but what does the post-pandemic “normal” look like and how will that affect CX? Let’s start by taking a look at some of the data before COVID-19 landed in the US.

By all accounts, the US economy was booming in the months leading up to the pandemic. Unemployment was at an historically low 3.5% in February. The Dow, S&P, and the Nasdaq were enjoying record highs in addition to highs in consumer spending. So how did this robust economy translate into a company’s customer experience? Zip, zilch, nada. CX scores remained stagnant across all industries. As we noted in our 2020 CX Trends, “there’s simply no excuse for A+ brands to continue getting C- scores.” Part of this lack of CX growth could be attributed to companies churning out decent, inexpensive products and services, which consumers flocked to in record numbers. Business was good, so if CX ain’t broke, why fix it?

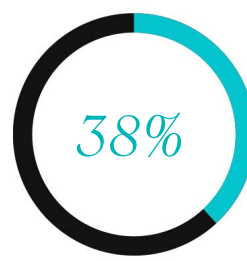
March of 2020 brought forth the great CX equalizer to companies. The economic numbers are indescribable, so here’s a brief look (all figures from the Congressional Budget Office – cob.gov):



The unemployment rate rose to 14.7% in April



Consumer spending went down 17% in April



GDP down nearly 38% versus annual rate



Record 2,997 point drop on the Dow (March 16th)

Yikes. Again, we turn to CX scores to see what impact this economic plunge had on the contact center. Not surprisingly, according to Forrester’s US 2020 Consumer Experience Index, 27% of brands improved their CX scores over the past year. Forrester notes that factors to this increase included “CX professionals...designing experiences that emotionally resonate with customers.” Or if we simplify it, consumers weren’t spending as much, so companies needed to focus on CX to differentiate themselves from the competition.

So what happens after we have a vaccine and it’s back to business as usual? It’s difficult to know for sure because it depends on how consumers react to a wide open economy. Will people shy away from physical stores in favor of e-commerce? How will spending habits change once jobs come back to pre-pandemic levels? We’d like to think that businesses will invest heavily in cloud-based contact center solutions and other technology like AI.

Get Your Business a CX Partner, Not Just a Vendor

It's been said that in business, great care and patience should be given when selecting new hires. Look beyond the candidate's resume and assess their character to determine if they would be a good fit with the current team and add value to the company. The same can be said about finding the right CX tech vendor.

When the pandemic hit in early 2020, many organizations were caught off guard and needed robust solutions quickly to ensure continuity and maintain service levels. According to one survey regarding how companies were affected by the pandemic, only 25% of businesses could deliver an end-to-end digital customer experience. The rest were left to quickly find the best possible solution and implement it in rapid time. Sales of CX software in 2020 will undoubtedly be at record levels, but many organizations may have buyer's remorse once they look past the shiny new UI.

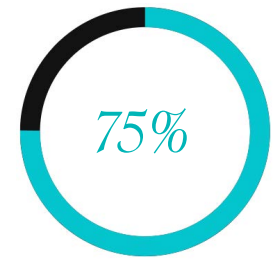
CX software providers should be looked upon as partners and not just another vendor. A partner that will grow alongside their clients, offer new and improved products based on a company's goals, help with training or onboarding new employees, and quickly respond in times of crises. Feature sets are nice to have, but good service is essential.

CX Software Checklist

- How quickly can they be deployed? Nimbleness is key post-COVID
- How easy is it for agents to use the software?
- How quickly will you receive payback on your investment?
- How do their customer's rate the software?
- How does their software integrate with various CRMs?
- Are they compliant with key standards like PCI?
- Do they support the new mobile channels: Facebook & WhatsApp?
- Do they support built-in integration with Microsoft Teams?
- Can business users easily and quickly make configuration changes?

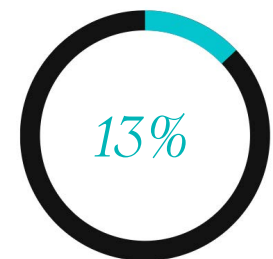
Heroic AI “Super-Vision” for Quality Management

Companies talk about the importance of offering great CX, yet the reality is that most companies don't measure the quality of most interactions. Nearly 75% of companies measure the quality of voice interactions, but most other channels, especially newer ones like messengers, are not measured at all. And most companies that do measure voice only sample a very small percentage of interactions. The norm in this increasingly digital world is that most digital interactions are not monitored for quality and only a small percentage of voice interactions are measured. The bottom line is that the vast majority of all interactions are not measured for quality!



of companies measure the quality of voice interactions

A recent Bright Pattern survey from September 2019 found some interesting stats. [Only 13% of companies review every interaction and most just sample a small percentage of interactions.](#) But with AI embedded in your contact center operations, things like sentiment can be automatically and easily noted for every interaction on every single channel for comprehensive passive monitoring of quality assurance. AI with NLP can measure every voice or IVR interaction and detect sentiment. AI can also measure sentiment on channels such as web chat, email, text message, or bot interactions. Compound this sentiment detection with keyword searches and screen recordings, it's clear that AI empowers supervisors to have super-vision to transform remote agents into super agents.



of companies measure the quality of all interactions

While adoption of this technology has been slow, we predict that in the post-pandemic contact center, AI infused QM will become the norm.

Omnichannel Quality Management Trend Report

[Read Report](#)



Invest Now in CX, But Choose Wisely

We've looked at people, processes, economics, and systems to provide the best customer experience in the post-pandemic contact center. While it may seem counterintuitive to shake things up in the midst of all the chaos in the world, now is the perfect time to invest in CX. In a recent survey by TATA Consultancy Services to determine the impact of COVID-19 on businesses, only 10% of respondents stated they would reduce investments in digital transformation. Additionally, the participants cited increases in "collaborative technologies" and "cloud-native technologies" as two of the top three investments strategies (see figure below).

Why Investing in CX Now Will Pay Dividends Later

- People will remember good CX** – As we highlighted earlier, there have been countless stories of consumers waiting on hold (or not getting through at all) and let's not forget all the instances of price gouging, profiteering, and hoarding (Toilet paper? Really?). Bad CX is like a plague where eventually people just come to accept it as the norm. However, good CX stands alone like a desert oasis and consumers will flock to organizations that treat their customers like gold.
- Battle testing** – There may never be a better time to push CX components to its limits. As of this writing, we may still be in for a second or third wave of COVID-19 before a vaccine is widely available. By investing in CX solutions now, companies will have a chance to utilize any and all features in order to overcome further shutdowns or spikes in traffic.
- Kick the tires** – Many CX software providers are offering low cost trials of their software during the pandemic and promising very short implementation windows, sometimes in as little as a couple weeks. This is the perfect time to test out features that a business may lack or don't have optimized.

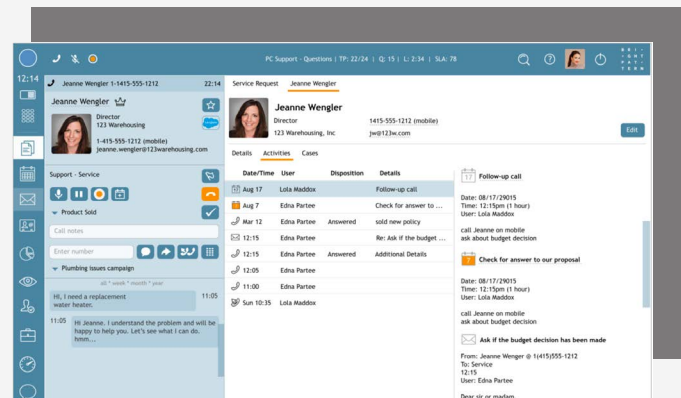
Jump Into a Platform That is Flexible Under Any Circumstance

The future is omnichannel conversations that are seamless and easy for customers. These omnichannel conversations, coupled with omnichannel quality management where every interaction on every channel can be reviewed for quality, provide a glimpse into the future. It's a future that is possible today, powered by Bright Pattern.

The Bright Pattern omnichannel contact center solution gives your organization the ability to seamlessly communicate with clients throughout their entire customer journey. As the name suggests, the omnichannel platform allows representatives to engage with customers across a wide variety of channels (e.g., voice, IVR, SMS, chat, messaging, etc.) and effortlessly switch between them as one seamless conversation with the customer. The Bright Pattern omnichannel contact center platform maintains context and relevant information across all channels as if it were a single conversation, resulting in greater personalization and higher levels of customer satisfaction. Bright Pattern also let's companies use AI to monitor every single interaction on every channel so that quality assurance and a great customer experience can be delivered in a single omnichannel customer experience platform.

Cloud Contact Center Software with #1 ROI

[Request Demo](#)



About Bright Pattern

Bright Pattern provides the simplest and most powerful AI-powered contact center for innovative midsize and enterprise companies. With the purpose of making customer service brighter, easier, and faster than ever before, Bright Pattern offers the only true omnichannel cloud platform with embedded AI that can be deployed quickly and nimbly by business users—without costly professional services. Bright Pattern allows companies to offer an effortless, personal, and seamless customer experience across channels like voice, text, chat, email, video, messengers, and bots. Bright Pattern also allows companies to measure and act on every interaction on every channel via embedded AI omnichannel quality management capability. The company was founded by a team of industry veterans who pioneered the leading contact center solutions and today are delivering architecture for the future with an advanced cloud-first approach. Bright Pattern's cloud contact center solution is used globally in over 26 countries and 12 languages.

BRIGHT PAT•TERN