



In our seventh issue, we share the findings of some brand new research into consumer confidence in brand communication via the telephone channel. This research reveals how consumers feel about call centres and how much confidence they have in them. The findings also provide an insight to customer's comfort level using the telephone to share personal information. As well as discovering their preference into sharing personal information through alternate channels such as online.

The Objectives

This seventh round of research is focused on understanding consumer confidence in the telephone channel. We asked the following questions with multiple choice answers:

1. Have you ever made or received a call you weren't 100% confident that you were speaking to the intended party?
2. Have you ever been asked to share information on the telephone that made you feel uncomfortable?
3. Do you feel more comfortable sharing personal information online or on the telephone?

Methodology and sample

In order to get a robust, representative spread of respondents; we used a specialist consumer engagement platform, OnePulse. This enables quick market research by sending little bite-size surveys known as 'pulses' to its panel via a mobile app. We sent the 'pulses' to a cross section of individuals from the entire UK based panel to secure a statistically robust and representative sample of the wider population. We stopped the research when we had secured 1,000 respondents providing a margin of error of c. +/- 2.7%. Amazingly, all responses were received within 2 hours and 30 minutes.

Research findings

Question 1: Have you ever made or received a call you weren't 100% confident that you were speaking to the intended party?

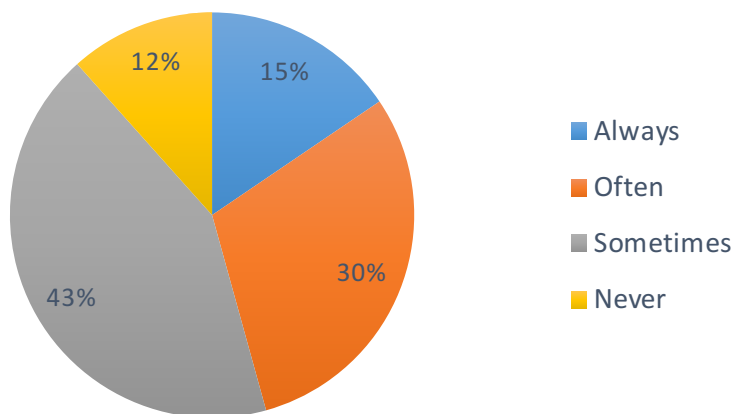
We wanted to uncover how frequently consumers felt they were taking part in a telephone conversation in which they were not entirely confident that the brand they were communicating with was bona fide. We asked this question with the following response options to choose from:

1. Always
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Never

We accepted comments from respondents from this question in order to delve into what made respondents so uncertain into who they were speaking with. One respondent was quoted saying:

“When I receive a call rather than make it, I always ring them back”

This is indicative of the uncertainty that respondents have associated with outbound calls. Indeed 88% of



respondents stated that they are not always 100% confident they're speaking to the intended party and only 15% stating that they were always confident that they were speaking to the intended party. These low levels of confidence are somewhat of a concern for brands who had typically seen proactive customer contact by phone as a positive customer experience.

This research shows that over 1 in 10 people (12%) are indicating that they are never 100% confident that they are speaking to the intended party when receiving an outbound telephone call.

When the results are probed further it is worth noting that men are more confident that the party they believe they are speaking to are the intended party than women, with 34% of men often being 100% confident compared to just 28% of women.

These high levels of uncertainty should clearly concern those influencing customer contact strategy within the brands as well as those managing the customer contact centre supporting the voice channel and delivering the customer experience

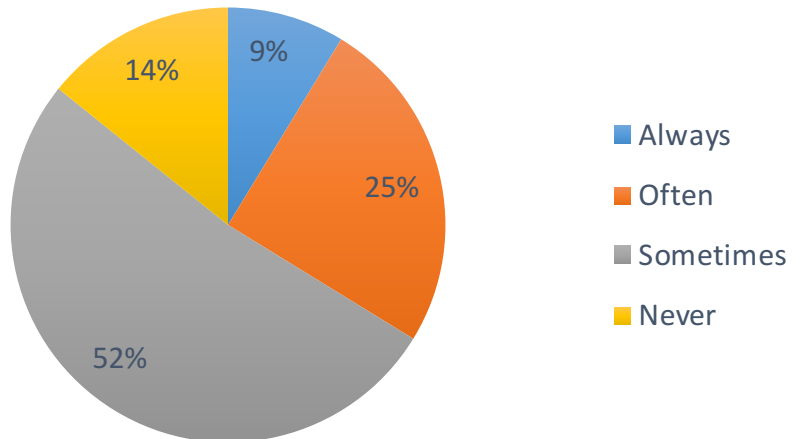
In the UK Telecultures Survey, Henley Business School offers some perspective. Within the UK as a whole, 25% of the public are naturally averse to telephone as a marketing channel and a further 25% don't appreciate its value. This represents a basis from which brands should seek to reassure their customers and prospects about the validity of their calls. Brands should therefore begin to consider how they can authenticate the proactive customer contact. This may mean considering giving customers or prospects advance warning that a call was about to be made.

Question 2: Have you ever been asked to share information on the telephone that made you feel uncomfortable?

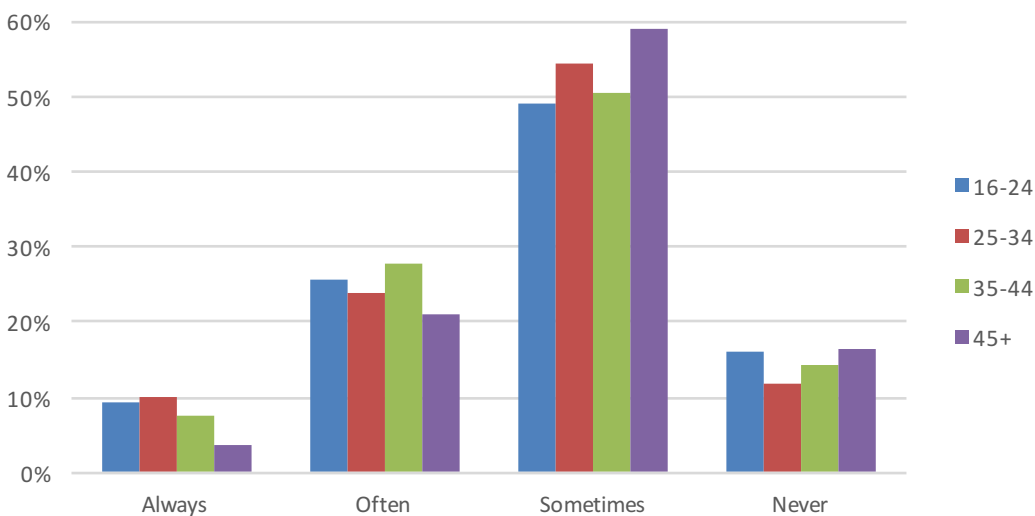
If people feel that their personal information is handled and stored securely, then their comfort levels would undoubtedly increase. We wanted to inquire into our respondent’s comfort levels when sharing information with brands via a voice interaction with their call centre channel. When asking question 2 regarding comfort levels, we offered the same response options as question 1 for continuity, which were as follows:

1. Always
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Never

Whilst the responses to the ‘comfort question’ were generally in line with responses to the ‘confidence question’, we found that an astonishing 86% of people have (at some point) been asked to share information that made them feel uncomfortable when engaging with the brand over the telephone. Over 50% of respondents sometimes feel uncomfortable sharing information over the telephone. Reassuringly however, less than 10% of respondents say that this always happens, with only 3% of those over 45 stating this.



There are small differences in age groups other than the aforementioned difference, with the largest again being within the ‘45+’ age group. Here 59% of over ‘45’s’ believe that they were ‘sometimes’ made to feel uncomfortable compared with an average 52% of other age groups.

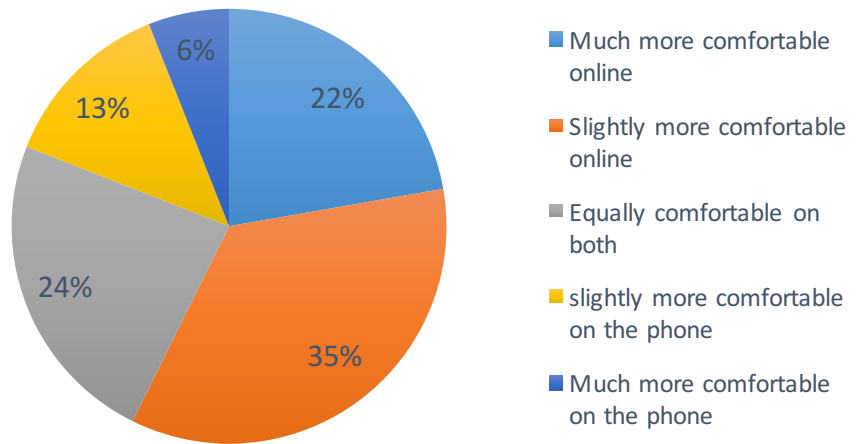


When the data is broken down further it is interesting to note that there is minimal difference between genders responding to this question. The most noticeable difference is that 10% of men, vs 8% of women always feel uncomfortable.

Question 3: Do you feel more comfortable sharing personal information online or on the telephone?

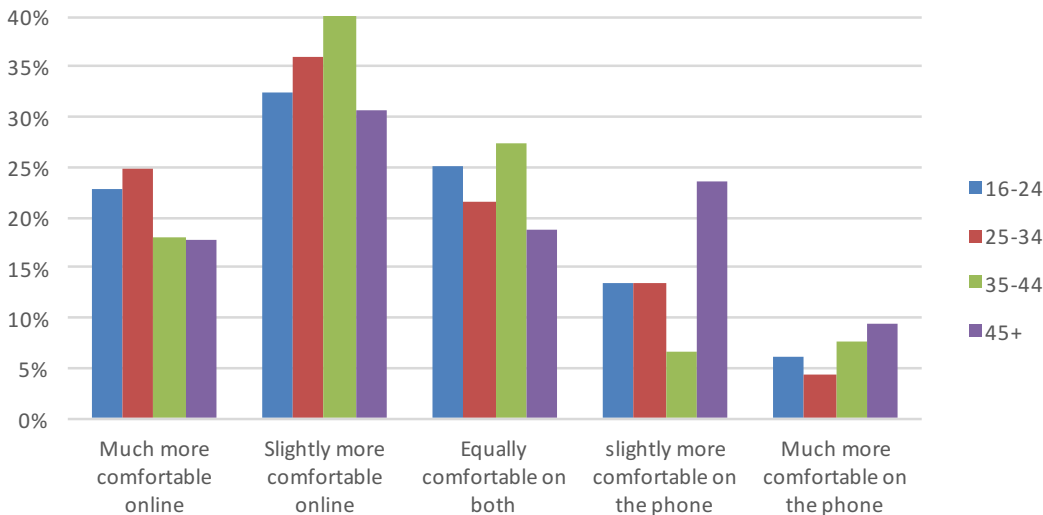
After asking the previous two questions we wanted to discover whether our respondents felt more comfortable sharing personal information over the telephone or online. Again we offered multiple choice answers to determine whether the respondents comfort levels laid closer to sharing information online or over the telephone. The optional responses were as follows:

1. Much more comfortable online
2. Slightly more comfortable online
3. Equally comfortable on both
4. Slightly more comfortable on the phone
5. Much more comfortable on the phone



What immediately stands out is that 57% of respondents were more comfortable sharing personal information online compared with the 37% that stated they felt more comfortable sharing information over the telephone.

It is worth noting that almost 1 in 4 (24%) of respondents were equally comfortable sharing personal information with both online and telephone based communication channels. With those aged between 35 and 44 most likely to feel this way, with 27% of this age group respondents opting for this compared with 19% of those aged over 45.



The most poignant difference when the results are broken down into age groups again is by those aged over 45. When looking at the slightly more comfortable on the phone group 24% of those aged 45+ felt this way compared with 14% of those between 16-34 and 6% of those aged between 35-44.

What are also of particular interest were the comments and concerns that respondents added after completing their answer to the question. These concerns centered on the brands inability to confirm their identity during the voice call. This was in direct contrast to online brands being able to validate their own identity via digital certificates.

Conclusions and implications

In the context of earlier research findings, in Pulse 6, where 56% of respondents would immediately contact a call centre after a data breach, it would appear that whilst consumers look for positive affirmation in a voice call, those positive affirmations can be undermined without identity of the caller being validated.

It appears to us that the overall customer experience may benefit from the brand offering to put themselves through the same multi-stage identity validation process that the brands themselves demand of the customer. Food for thought!

In addition, we believe that the finding that more than 8 out of 10 (88%) customers have felt uncomfortable with what they are being asked to reveal over the telephone, highlights immediate opportunities for consumer brands. We have summarized these as follows:

1. To communicate to consumers how the brand protects sensitive personal data, to what standards of data protection the brand complies.
2. To begin to position data security and compliance certification as a competitive point of difference. Whilst there is no current legislative pressure to disclose personal data compliance within the public domain, this situation will soon change as 25th May 2018 approaches heralding the repeal of the UK data Protection Act and the passing into UK law of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) irrespective of BREXIT. The clock is ticking.
3. To understand why such sensitive data is collected and review those data collection processes in the context of a full impact assessment of the brand implementing GDPR within the timelines across all customer contact points and within all data processing partners. This may well involve the re-engineering of the customer contact strategy to comply with the legal obligations within GDPR but also for the Board to meet their corporate governance obligations to shareholders given the level of fines (up to €20M, 2% or 4% of global turnover (dependent on the nature of the breach) for non-compliance with the new regulationⁱ.

Whilst we can conclude that respondents are generally more comfortable sharing personal information online rather than over the phone, the finding that a significant proportion (24%) of respondents were equally comfortable sharing personal information online and over the telephone is good news for those working on customer contact strategy and those looking to optimize the customer experience.

Further consumer insight and access to earlier research

To get a more detailed understanding of this research or to share access to the raw response data please don't hesitate to get in touch.

For the results of earlier rounds of consumer research, please visit our website

<http://www.compliance3.com/resources/>

ⁱ GDPR requires evidence of compliance, with the burden of proof on the Data Controller and Data Processor. This means that the brand is 'guilty until proven innocent' to the point of evidence being provided to demonstrate compliance. GDPR became best practice for global entities trading with EU citizens on 24th May 2016 and becomes law on 25th May 2018.