Customer Conversations
in the Cloud

Scale the Conversation™

SMART
COMMUNICATIONS™

Today, customers are in control. They are no longer content to sit back and wait for companies to interact with them. At their fingertips, they have the ability to reach out and request the information they need – and they expect nearly instant answers to their questions.

While less business is being conducted face-to-face in favor of digital interactions, they still expect an incredibly high level of service and are demanding personalized interactions with the companies they select. They don't want to be communicated to – they want to communicate with, to feel they are having a two-way dialogue. A conversation. To be rewarding, these conversations must occur in a timely manner, be relevant to each customer's specific journey and consistent across multiple channels. Delivering on this expectation is critical. A study from Rapt Media found that 63% of consumers said they'd think more positively of a brand if it gave them content that was more valuable, interesting or relevant.[1] And today, not only must companies be concerned about keeping customers – they must treat these customers as brand ambassadors, ones who have the power to share their opinions readily and publicly about the service they are receiving, all with the tap of a finger.

This continuing evolution of customer expectations, coupled with the never-ending expansion of communication channels, presents a challenge and an opportunity for businesses. Staying ahead of digital transformation requires an increased level of internal efficiency and automation – and the delivery of a more meaningful experience for customers.

More Meaningful Customer Conversations

A customer's interests and needs change as he or she moves through the life cycle with a company. In the beginning, the focus is on gathering information, then eventually on making a decision and, based on that experience, developing a relationship (either positive or negative) with that brand. How the company engages with customers during the relationship will determine whether they repeat their purchases and become loyal customers – possibly even brand ambassadors – or whether they switch to a competitor and start the process all over again. And, if not valued, many of them will. Research shows that only 13% of consumers are loyalists who don't shop around[2] and more than half (54%) of U.S. consumers have switched providers in the past year.[3]

Where the customer is in his or her journey with a brand also impacts the tools and techniques the company uses to manage interactions. During the prospect phase, these interactions are campaign-oriented. Often, these campaigns are based on segment-level data and there may only be one or two related offers or high-value assets. As savvy marketers learn more about each potential customer, these campaigns become more targeted and focused on each individual—perhaps tailored around declared preferences or browsing history. Once the prospect becomes a customer, however, the number of potential messages that can or must be delivered grows exponentially and the need for customization and personalization becomes mandatory vs. just good marketing. It is during this stage of the customer journey that enterprises need to evolve from static, one-way message distribution to dynamic, two-way, multi-channel experiences on-demand. They need to scale the conversation. To accomplish this most efficiently and cost-effectively, more companies are turning to the cloud.

Benefits of Cloud Deployments

As early as 2016, the average organization was using 1,427 cloud services, which was an increase of 23% from over the previous year.[4] And, according to Clutch's second annual Cloud Computing Survey, more than two-thirds (67%) of businesses planned to increase their cloud computing spending in 2017.[5] Moving to the cloud to replace on-premise, legacy technology can save companies time and money. Organizations can save as much as 14% of their annual budgets as an outcome of public cloud adoption.[6] Cloud integration is faster than on-premise and companies that adopt cloud services experience an improvement in time-to-market.
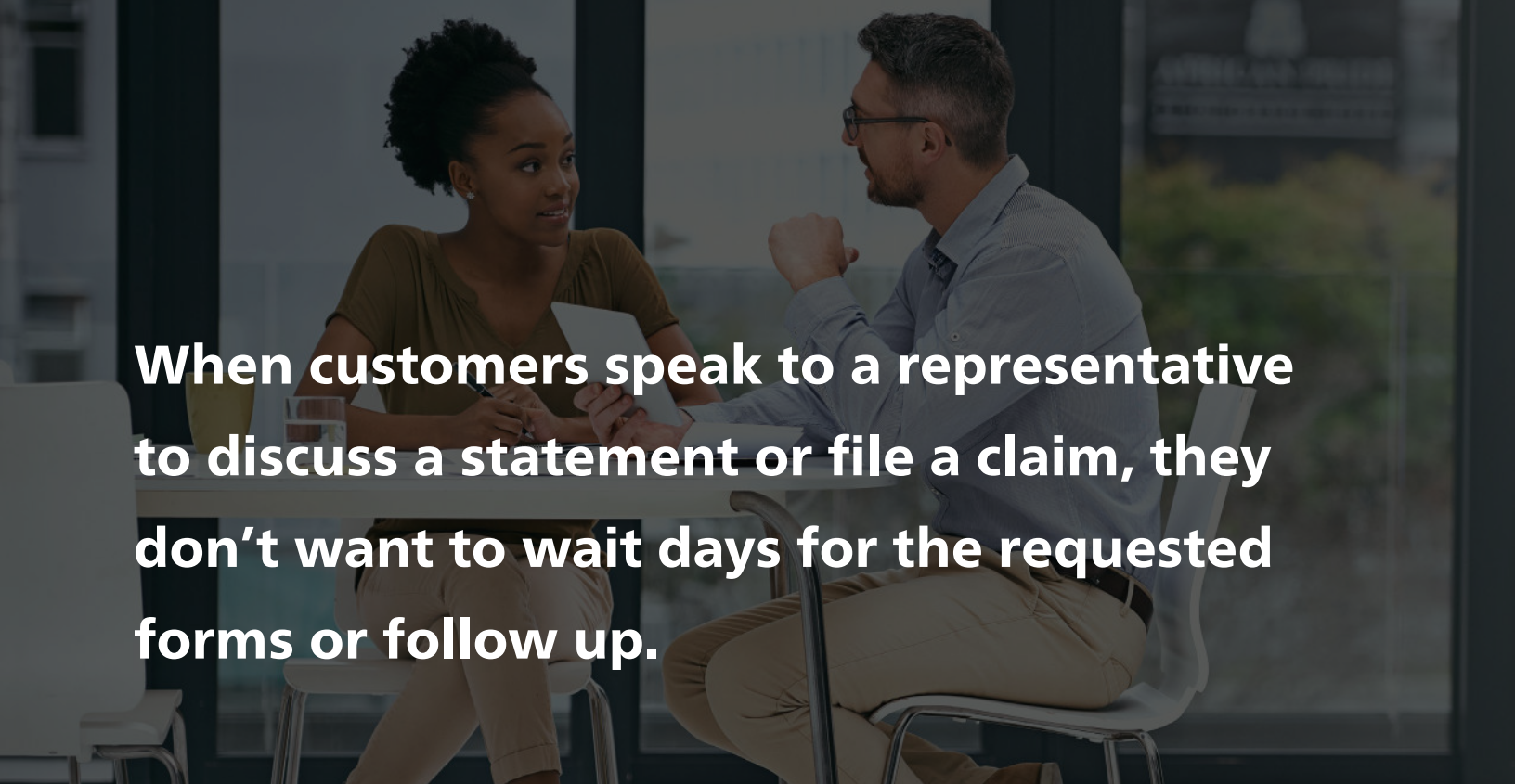
Cloud deployments are largely designed to be very user friendly, starting with implementation. In most cases, these installations and integrations can be led by the business user, without relying on IT. This empowers the business user to take control and manage change, and avoids what can be lengthy bottlenecks.

Customers benefit from faster processes as well. According to Forrester, 73% of consumers say that valuing their time is the most important thing a company can do to provide them with good service.[7]

14%
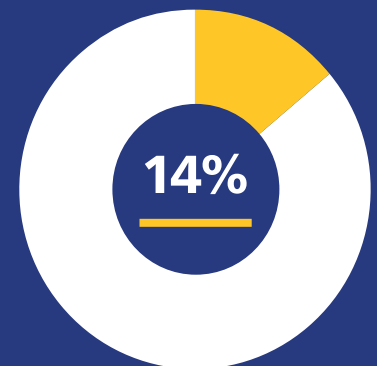
Organizations can save as much as 14% of their annual budgets.

When customers speak to a representative to discuss a statement or file a claim, they don't want to wait days for the requested forms or follow up.

They want resolution in the moment, and more agile and scalable solutions can deliver this—in less time than it takes to compose a tweet.

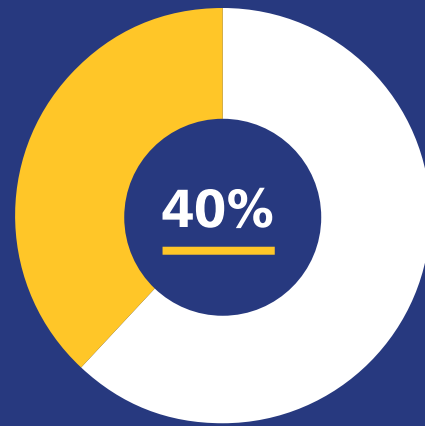Cloud-based, best-in-breed tools focused on customer communications can help:

- Facilitate the shift from paper to digital communications

- Reduce the number of templates

- Increase the speed-to-market for template changes

- Create and ensure consistent branding standards across all customer communications

While concerns about cloud security have dropped to only 25% of IT professionals surveyed by RightScale for its sixth annual State of the Cloud Survey[8], some may still have concerns that cloud-based technologies come with increased risk. In fact, the opposite is true. Given their inherent flexibility, cloud-based solutions can reduce exposure to compliance failures. Modern customer communications tools are built for evolving compliance standards, managed by business users (not IT), connected to risk management, and include automated approval workflows.

Bringing it All Together

There is no shortage of technology vendors – and the number continues to grow. According to a report from Bomgar, the average company's network is accessed by 89 different vendors every week.[9] That report found that three quarters of those polled stated the number of third-party vendors used by their organization has increased in the last two years, and 71 percent believe the numbers will continue to increase in the next two years.[9] Scott Brinker, editor at chiefmartec.com, drives this point home every year with the publication of his annual Marketing Technology Landscape Supergraphic. The 2017 edition revealed that the marketing technology space alone now includes 5,381 solutions—an increase of about 40% over 2016.[10]

40%

**the number of solutions in the marketing technology space has increased by 40%**

Some of these vendors are large technology companies offering comprehensive platforms that can perform multiple functions. However, many more focus on specific touch points along the customer journey. This presents business users with an interesting choice—select one mega-vendor to handle it all, or pick and choose different technologies based on who they consider best able to meet their specific needs. In some cases, this decision may be influenced by the fact that they already have systems in place that are achieving great results and they aren't willing to rip and replace. In these cases, they must leverage seamless integrations and plug-in technology to weave it all together.

By assembling customized ecosystems comprised of best-in-breed technologies that address a company's unique requirements, a tremendous amount of customer data can be collected. Companies can extend their knowledge beyond basic demographics and gather much more valuable data about each individual's interests, habits, communications preferences and channel of choice.

This approach can also increase internal efficiencies by breaking down silos and bringing together multiple groups within a company. In a survey conducted by Celent, half
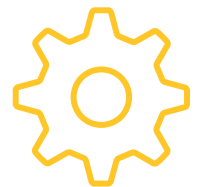
62%

of respondents need to connect customer communications management with marketing campaign systems

of all respondents said that in the next two years, it will be important for their customer communications management technology to offer the ability for additional business units within their organization to easily consume customer communications management services, and even more, (62%), expressed a need to connect with marketing campaign systems specifically.[11] Bringing groups such as marketing, sales, onboarding, services, and support together around a more informed view of the customer, including collected data and a history of the interactions an enterprise has already had with each one, enables companies to close the loop on conversations and deliver the most consistent and personally relevant customer communications possible.

Scaling the Conversation

Effectively scaling the conversation requires renewed focus on the customer experience, a commitment to bring together diverse internal groups around a common view of the customer and a willingness to embrace agile and flexible cloud solutions. The result is win / win—more efficient and cost-effective business processes and more meaningful customer conversations.

About Smart Communications

Smart Communications™ is the only independent company focused 100% on customer conversations for the enterprise, and the only cloud solution ranked as a Leader in Gartner's Magic Quadrant for CCM. More than 350 global brands – many in the world's most highly regulated industries – rely on Smart Communications to make multi-channel customer communications more meaningful, while also helping them simplify their processes and operate more efficiently. This is what it means to scale the conversation.

In 2017, Smart Communications' fall product release included innovative capabilities across key roadmap themes that leading organizations in healthcare, financial services, and insurance have deemed critical to driving a modern customer communications strategy. The company continues to enhance its products' digital capabilities to drive two-way conversations as it extends the boundaries of customer communications management into the Conversation Cloud.

Smart Communications is headquartered in London and New York and serves its customers from offices located across North America, Europe, and Asia Pacific. The company offers a range of solutions including SmartCOMM™, SmartDX™, SmartCORR™ for Salesforce, and SmartCaaS™ for Partners. To learn more, visit smartcommunications.com.

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2.   "The New Battleground for Marketing-Led Growth," McKinsey Research, Feb. 2017

3.   "Seeing Beyond the Loyalty Illusion," Accenture Strategy, 2017

4.   Cloud Adoption & Risk Report Q4 2016, Skyhigh, Q4 2016

5.   "How Businesses Use Cloud Computing, 2017 Survey," Clutch, June 2017

6.   2015 Cloud Adoption Survey, Gartner, 2015

7.   "Trends 2016: The Future of Customer Service," Forrester, 2016

8.   "RightScale 2017 State of the Cloud Report," Rightscale, Feb, 2017

9.   "2016 Vendor Vulnerabilities," Bomgar, 2016

10. Marketing Technology Landscape Supergraphic, chiefmartec.com, May 2017

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