

Winning with Outsourced Customer Service

The 2026 Trends

How innovative brands are turning uncertainty into competitive advantage.

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Introduction

Customer service outsourcing sits at a crossroads. Economic headwinds are prompting companies to scrutinize every dollar, while customer expectations continue to rise.

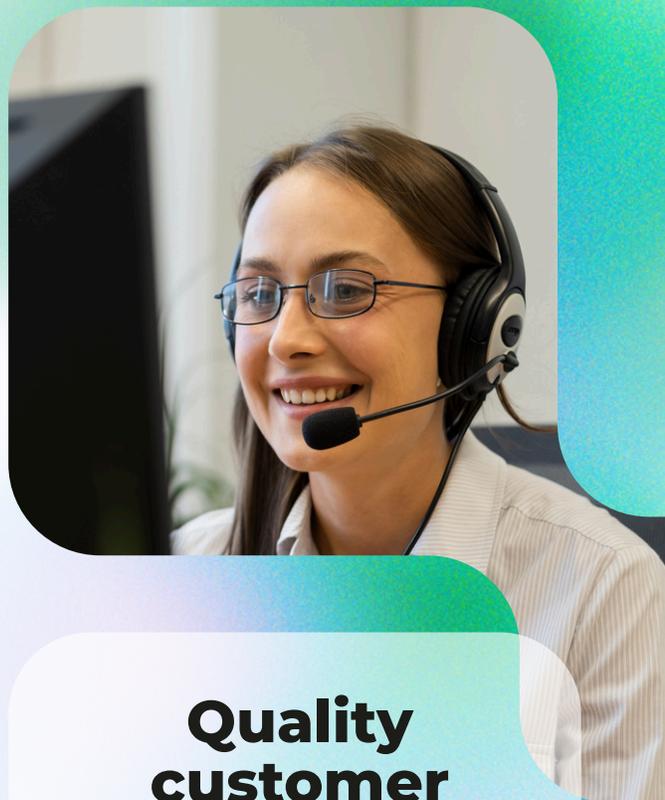
Proposed U.S. legislation, which emphasizes onshore service, threatens to reshape where and how support gets delivered. Businesses could be penalized for using nearshore or offshore providers. Plus artificial intelligence (AI) promises to transform the entire landscape, upending reliance on human workforces in call and contact centers.

Here's what sets 2026 apart: Companies that move decisively now will separate themselves from those still debating strategy. We're witnessing a fundamental shift from outsourcing as a pure cost-cutting measure to outsourcing as a competitive, even profitable, advantage.

The question isn't whether to outsource customer service anymore. It's about doing it right when everything feels uncertain. Remember, quality customer experiences (CX) are the one thing companies can control in a rocky economy. Think of them as being safe harbor.

This report examines **eight key trends** transforming outsourced customer service.

Whether you're evaluating your first outsourcing partnership or rethinking your current approach, these insights will help you navigate 2026's challenges and opportunities.



**Quality
customer
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Economic Pressure Drives Strategic Outsourcing

When budgets tighten, organizations can't overlook customer service. Research from Deloitte shows that 35% of companies cite increasing customer demands as their main reason for third-party outsourcing, overtaking cost reduction for the first time.

The math is persuasive. Companies can save between 40% and 60% by outsourcing customer service, with some studies showing up to a 50% cost savings when including expenses for recruiting, training, technology and management. Strategic leaders, however, understand that outsourcing's actual value is in gaining access to specialized expertise and scalable capacity during unpredictable times.

Consider a recent airline industry crisis. When a major carrier experienced weather-related delays and technological issues, an outsourcing partner mobilized thousands of trained agents within days, not weeks.

This fast-response agility turns customer service from an operational cost into a critical business advantage in a tough spot. Such ever-ready, contact-center capabilities apply to all industries in uncertain times.

35%

**OF COMPANIES NOW
OUTSOURCE TO MEET
RISING CX DEMANDS
(DELOITTE)**

The Strategic Shift

Companies are moving beyond basic cost arbitrage to value-driven outsourcing partnerships that provide operational resilience and improved customer experiences.

The Great Reshoring Debate

Geography Becomes Strategy

Supply chain disruptions and geopolitical concerns are prompting companies to reassess where customer service is delivered. Bain & Company research shows 64% of executives report ongoing investment in reshoring, nearshoring and split-shoring strategies. In comparison, 81% of companies now plan to bring their supply chains closer to the market they serve.

Companies are discovering that proximity to customers often translates to better cultural alignment, more transparent communication and easier collaboration across time zones.

The wage gap that once made offshore outsourcing attractive is narrowing. In many U.S. cities, call-center wages are comparable, while automation decreases the overall labor cost of service delivery.



The New Model

Hybrid approaches that combine onshore, nearshore and selective offshore capabilities based on specific business needs, rather than pure cost considerations.



Legislative Pressure

The Keep Call Centers in America Act Impact

The Keep Call Centers in America Act of 2025, introduced by Senators Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) and Jim Justice (R-WV), could transform the entire outsourcing landscape. While its passage remains uncertain, the bipartisan bill indicates changing political attitudes toward offshore customer service.

Key provisions include mandatory disclosure of agent locations, consumer rights to speak with US-based representatives and financial penalties for companies that relocate significant call center work overseas.

Companies that relocate 30% or more of their call center operations may face public listing, federal funding restrictions and monthly penalties equivalent to 8.3% of total grant payments for existing federal grants and loans.

Even if the bill doesn't pass in its current form, **it's already influencing** corporate strategy.

Industry analysts note that federal contractors and regulated industries are proactively evaluating domestic alternatives to avoid potential compliance issues.

30%

**OFFSHORE
THRESHOLD
TRIGGERS
PENALTIES**

The Response

Companies are developing contingency plans that include domestic-capacity options and enhanced transparency protocols, regardless of the bill's outcome.

AI and Human Agents

The Hybrid Reality

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming customer service, but not in the way many predicted. Instead of replacing human agents, AI is making them dramatically more effective. Gartner predicts organizations will abandon workforce reduction plans and retain human agents to help define the role of AI in their processes.

McKinsey research shows that 78% of organizations now use generative AI in at least one business function, with service operations among the most common areas of adoption. Supporting this shift, a Stanford Digital Economy Lab study found that access to AI assistance increased call center productivity by roughly 14%, driven by faster issue resolution and improved performance among less experienced agents—without replacing human judgment or empathy.

AI REDUCES
HANDLE TIME BY
UP TO

30%

(Bain)

The Hybrid Advantage

Leading outsourcing providers combine AI-powered triage and data analysis with skilled human agents for complex, emotional or high-value interactions.



Strategic-Workforce Optimization: Beyond Traditional Models

Customer service delivery is evolving beyond basic cost-per-agent metrics. Innovative companies are redesigning how they organize and expand their support operations to align with real business needs, rather than adhering to fixed overhead costs.

The shift marks a fundamental change in how organizations approach customer service capacity. Instead of maintaining large permanent teams during slow periods or scrambling to hire during peak seasons, companies are adopting flexible workforce strategies that align resources with real-time customer needs to combat the core challenge of customer service: unpredictable volume.

The Advantage

Companies implementing flexible workforce strategies can maintain service quality while optimizing costs, paying for actual customer interactions rather than idle time, and accessing specialists on demand.

Pay for interaction-**not idle**

**Demand
Spikes**

VS

**Flexible Staffing
Response**

Data Security and Compliance

The New Competitive Advantage

Customer data protection has shifted from a compliance requirement to a strategic business advantage. The regulatory landscape continues to expand beyond General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), with frameworks emerging regularly across multiple jurisdictions. Companies need outsourcing partners that can navigate complex and evolving privacy rules while maintaining operational efficiency.

Current research indicates 96% of organizations report being moderately or extremely concerned about cloud security, with 61% anticipating they'll need to increase their cloud security budgets over the next year.

96%

**OF ORGANIZATIONS
CONCERNED ABOUT
CLOUD SECURITY**

(Fortinet)

Compliance is Your Edge

Leading outsourcing providers now treat data protection as a business advantage—far beyond basic regulatory adherence. With secure cloud infrastructure, advanced encryption protocols and compliance frameworks that exceed requirements, they help brands safeguard operations, earn customer trust and confidently scale across evolving global privacy standards.

Poactive and Predictive Service

Beyond Reactive Support



The future of customer service lies in solving problems before customers are even aware of them. Customers view proactive service favorably, and predictive analytics enable this shift from reactive to anticipatory support.

Savvy outsourcing providers leverage AI and machine learning to analyze customer behavior patterns, predict potential issues and initiate proactive measures. When a customer's usage patterns suggest dissatisfaction or potential churn, trained agents can reach out with solutions or incentives before problems escalate.

This approach transforms the economics of customer service. Instead of measuring success by the number of tickets resolved, organizations track the number of customers retained, issues prevented and satisfaction improved. This change shifts the role from cost center to revenue generator

Retention >
**RESOLUTION AS THE
NEW CX KPI**

The Prediction

Proactive service capabilities will become key differentiators in selecting outsource CX partners, offering measurable business impact beyond traditional metrics.

Predict



Prevent



Retain

Global vs. Domestic Trends

A Tale of Two Markets

While domestic markets focus on reshoring and regulatory compliance, global outsourcing continues to expand. Indicators suggest the worldwide customer service outsourcing market may reach \$130 billion by 2032, growing at a rate of 5.6% annually.



Global Trends

- Emerging markets in Eastern Europe and Latin America gain market share.
- AI adoption accelerates in cost-competitive offshore locations.
- Cultural alignment and language capabilities become premium services.



Domestic Trends

- Nearshore options in Mexico and Canada see increased demand.
- US providers emphasize cultural fit and regulatory compliance.
- Premium pricing justified by quality and risk mitigation.

The divergence creates opportunities for businesses to optimize their outsourcing strategies based on specific requirements, compliance needs and customer expectations.

 **\$130B** global CX outsourcing market by 2032

Your Cx Action Plan

What to do next

Outsourcing is transforming faster than ever. These trends create both challenges and opportunities for forward-thinking companies. Those that succeed view outsourcing as a strategic rather than a tactical approach.

Businesses will partner with providers that offer flexibility, security and innovation rather than only cost savings. They'll embrace hybrid models that combine human expertise with AI capabilities, prioritizing both customer-experience improvements and operational efficiency.

The trends outlined here aren't predictions—they're already shaping how innovative organizations approach customer-service outsourcing. The question is whether you will be among them, leading this transformation or responding to it.

Ready to turn these trends into your competitive edge? Those who act now **will set the standards** others follow.

Talk to a CX Strategist



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2025 BPO of the Year

