

# Charting a course for digital transformation in the passenger transportation industry



# The passenger transportation industry has been slow to modernize its digital infrastructure, resulting in frustrating experiences for crews, support staff, and passengers alike.



To change the narrative, both internally and externally, airlines, cruise lines, and passenger railroads need to prioritize digital transformation.

The problem with the legacy infrastructure that most transportation companies use is that it's not agile. In the face of sudden change—like when Southwest Airlines experienced [the perfect storm of severe weather, staffing shortages, and an outdated computer system](#)—it takes longer to recover and get their systems back online. The result is passengers who are left scrambling to make other arrangements or forced to remain stranded.

Airlines in Canada, the United Kingdom, Singapore, and more have experienced similar issues that [left passengers stranded and waiting days or weeks to recover lost luggage](#). These issues have put the transportation industry on notice, and now is the time to act.

## Digital transformation is long overdue, and CX is a good place to start

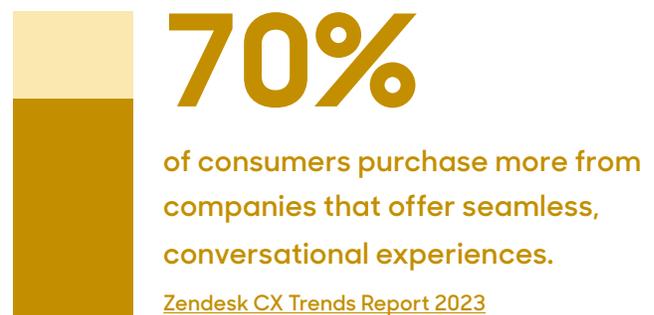
Customer experience (CX) is one of many areas where transportation companies have been slow to modernize. The disparate, outdated systems of the past simply can't keep up with the more innovative tools that have entered the market in the last 10 to 15 years.

The good news is that there's an opportunity to integrate the old with the new and start charting a course toward digital transformation—a journey that will likely take years to complete, but has the potential for a big return on investment (ROI).



Prioritizing CX upgrades can create in-roads with the next generation of travelers and turn them into loyal customers. Younger travelers especially have [high expectations](#). Millennials and Gen Z travel more than other generations and are likely to dominate transportation spending in the coming years—so it's important to make a good impression.

Transportation companies will need to adopt more digital channels and streamline internal tools and processes so they can provide more immediate answers.



This generation is used to having information available at their fingertips. They check their bank accounts on their phones, and find travel inspiration on TikTok. They will expect to be able to navigate your app and find answers independently, and when they do need help, they'll be looking for more conversational experiences.

# Deliver seamless support that meets passengers where they are, and gets them where they want to go

Everyone likes the convenience of a direct flight, and similarly, customers appreciate having a direct line to customer service no matter where they are.

The challenge facing many airlines, cruise lines, and passenger railroads is that they have siloed systems that don't talk to each other. Support agents lack visibility into passenger history and context, and they need to switch between multiple systems just to answer simple questions. This leads to longer wait times and disgruntled passengers who can't get the answers they need in a timely fashion.

## Siloed systems keep CX grounded in the past

But, it doesn't have to be that way. Zendesk allows you to seamlessly integrate with legacy telephony and IVR systems, so you can work toward digital transformation while gradually phasing out older technologies.

With an omnichannel support platform you can bring all your customer conversations, including those happening on phone and IVR systems, into a unified workspace. You can also integrate data from external systems like GDS (e.g. SABRE, Amadeus, Travelport), Polar, Versonix, ecommerce platforms, loyalty programs, and baggage systems into the agent workspace, so your support reps can provide more specific and personalized support.

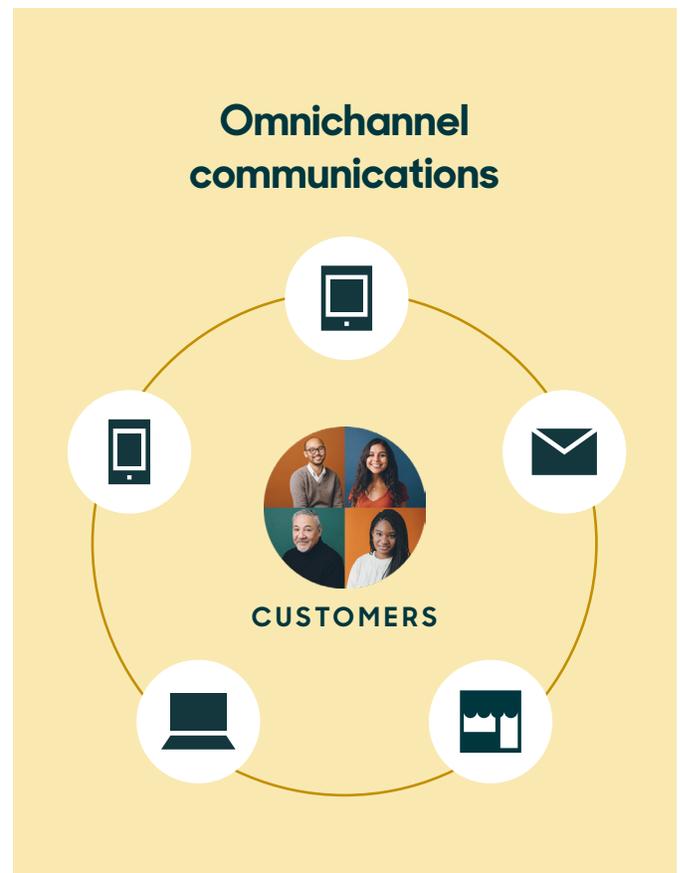
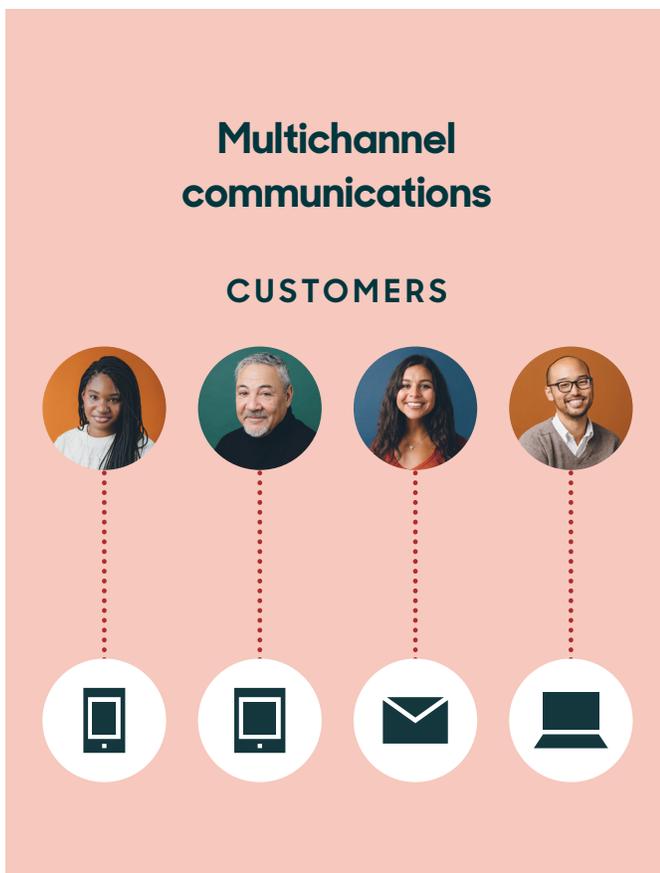


“Many of the larger transportation companies take a siloed approach to their messaging—three different systems sending notifications to customers about three different things—that’s not a unified strategy,” explains Bill Paulsen, RVP of Sunshine Conversations at Zendesk.

“Ideally, you want to be able to consolidate the messages that go out to customers. So, if a call has to be escalated to a live agent, the agent will have context about the conversation from the automation tools that are in place,” says Paulsen.

With passenger history and insights readily accessible to agents, your agents can get to a resolution faster—whether you’re talking on the phone or messaging via WhatsApp.

Consumers are used to having this level of flexibility with retailers. According to Zendesk [research](#), 70% of consumers purchase more from companies that offer seamless, conversational experiences.



## CUSTOMER STORY

# BALEARIA

### Changing times call for a change in strategy

Passenger transportation was one of the industries deeply impacted by the pandemic. But that didn't stop Spanish cruise line Baleària from making a needed change.

Though it happened to coincide with COVID-19, Baleària's omnichannel support launch moved ahead rapidly, with chat being rolled out in two days to enable agents to seamlessly work from home even as ticket volumes surged.

In one month, they received almost the same number of requests that they would typically have in an entire year, says Alessandro Zollino, Director of Customer Experience at Baleària.

**"We would like to highlight that many companies in the tourism sector, faced with similar complicated situations, opted to close some of their customer service channels, but Baleària, faithful to our values, decided to launch a new channel strategy."**

Customers appreciated that decision, and it showed in Baleària's customer satisfaction score, which held steady at 96% in the first weeks of the pandemic



## Modern, conversational service is a gateway to customer loyalty

Omnichannel support opens the door for you to turn isolated interactions into rich, personalized conversations that increase customer satisfaction.



To facilitate these types of conversational experiences, transportation companies need to go beyond traditional email and telephony support channels.

Here are a few ways you can move toward more seamless, conversational support.

### Live chat/messaging

Passengers can connect with an agent via a live chat or messaging app embedded directly on your website, app, and help center using Zendesk Mobile SDKs.

### Social messaging apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Instagram DM, Messenger)

Talk to passengers on the apps they're already using, and build custom app integrations so customers can take action without leaving the app.

### SMS

Enable text support and proactive alerts, so passengers can get real-time updates about itinerary changes and weather delays.

## WhatsApp usage around the world

Social messaging apps have quickly taken over the communication landscape globally. WhatsApp dominates in Latin America, where many carriers still charge for text messages. It's also popular in Singapore, where 98% say it's their main messaging service. It's also worth noting that 72% of Singaporeans said they would make purchases over WhatsApp.

WhatsApp's footprint is growing steadily across Europe, but it has been slower to take hold in the United States, where Meta's Messenger app is more common.

<b>Brazil</b>	<b>98.9%</b>
<b>Singapore</b>	<b>98%</b>
<b>India</b>	<b>97.1%</b>
<b>Argentina</b>	<b>96%</b>
<b>Germany</b>	<b>95.5%</b>
<b>Spain</b>	<b>92.2%</b>
<b>UK</b>	<b>71.3%</b>
<b>US</b>	<b>41.2%</b>
<b>Australia</b>	<b>32.9%</b>

Sources:

[Statista, WhatsApp penetration rate among global messaging users](#)  
[Blackbox, WhatsApp: Still Singapore's preferred communication tool](#)



## CUSTOMER STORY



### WhatsApp conversations fuel revenue growth

The world looks a lot different post-COVID, and one of the key shifts is how customers communicate with businesses. Messaging channels like WhatsApp and Messenger surged during the pandemic, and are likely to dominate CX in the future.

LATAM Airlines, one of the largest airline groups in the world, communicates with customers primarily through WhatsApp. The Chile-based airline ranks as one of the app's top users in the world.

LATAM needed to overhaul their customer service so they could better handle WhatsApp conversations, which they achieved using the Zendesk Platform. Now, these WhatsApp conversations generate revenue for LATAM, as passengers can use it to upgrade their seats and make meal selections and other purchases. They can also proactively address service issues with the app, automatically alerting customers of gate changes or delays.

# Enable self-service solutions that allow passengers to skip the line and find instant help

It seems self-service is finally taking off in the transportation industry. Carriers like LATAM Airlines, Azerbaijan Airlines, Balearia, and more are already seeing value from passenger self-service, and we anticipate that even more will embrace these tools once they realize the potential to cut operational costs and increase revenue.

In the case of Ryanair, a large European carrier with four million monthly help center visitors, 80% were able to find answers on their own without contacting a support agent.

This is good news for airlines, cruise lines, and passenger railroads who have struggled to re-staff their crews to pre-pandemic levels.



Enabling passenger self-service can be transformative because you can deflect a large number of requests—most of those being basic questions about booking and cancellations that are easily answered by a help center article or AI chatbot.

Chatbots take it one step further, allowing customers to skip the line and get instant help for things like upgrading seats, rebooking flights, or forwarding lost luggage.

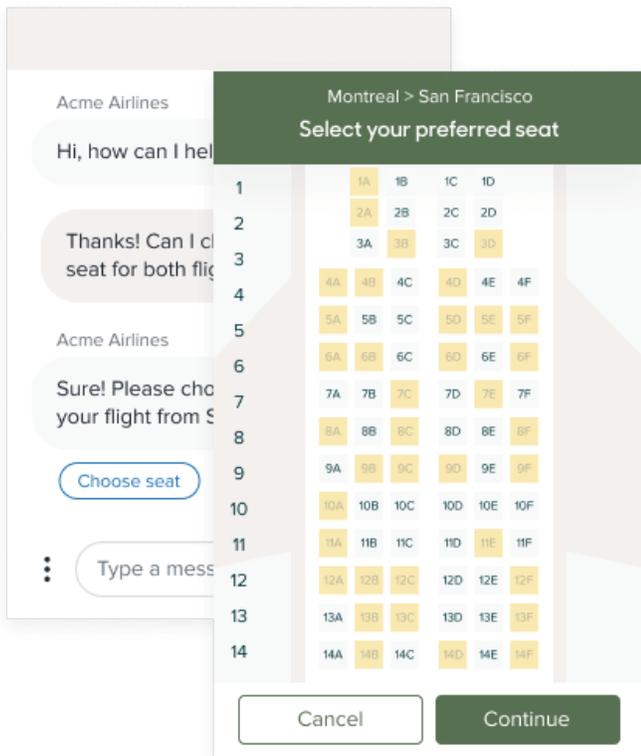
Everyone wins—customers get faster service and you can keep operating costs in check.



# AI chatbots can provide on-demand travel troubleshooting

As passenger travel returns to pre-pandemic levels, and perhaps even increases, companies need to consider how they will scale their customer service to support more passengers.

AI chatbots make that possible. Bots have come a long way, and with interactive app integrations, they can be an effective tool for passengers to manage their reservations—with little or no agent assistance needed. This also cuts down on long queue times, so passengers don't need to wait as long to receive help.



## CUSTOMER STORY



Zendesk worked with Ryanair, one of the largest low-fare airlines in Europe, to build a digital self-service hub that could help them scale to serve 225 million passengers without a drastic rise in costs.

**"By 2026, we aim to have 225 million traveling passengers. We're currently at 169 million," says Tracy Kennedy, Director of Customer Service at Ryanair. "Before Zendesk, we would have had to add 100% more headcount, which would essentially equate to another 800 people."**

"We wanted to put a lot more self-service in the hands of customers and allow them to navigate and do what they want to do themselves," says Kennedy.

Hosting a variety of FAQs and videos, the help center combines a robust search function with a smart chatbot to help customers find information quickly and easily.

They've invested in educating their smart chatbot to answer common queries in several languages, including questions related to complex issues such as COVID-19 requirements across the many countries where the airline provides service.

That investment has paid off, with **52%** of chatbot inquiries received through the help center being resolved without agent intervention.

Zendesk data shows that [consumers want and expect to interact with bots](#), and dissatisfaction numbers continue to drop.

**77%** say AI/bots are helpful for simple issues

**71%** believe AI/bots help get faster replies

**67%** believe bots often provide the correct information

We predict that chatbots will play an increasingly important role on customer service teams in the future, but still work best when they are used in tandem with human agents who can step in to provide more tailored assistance when needed.

Zendesk bots can be customized to match the look and feel of your brand, and you can embed your AI travel assistant on your website, app, and help center—so passengers can find help at every stage of their journey, from booking their trip to laying on the beach.

If the bot can't provide the necessary answers, then Zendesk manages a seamless handoff to live agents while maintaining the complete context of the conversation.



# Next stop: Modern, immersive CX

With more passengers prioritizing travel in the coming years, it's the perfect time to upgrade your CX. There are two things that every transportation company should prioritize as they work toward truly modern, [immersive experiences](#).

- **Create a seamless, single-platform solution** to serve as the digital hub of your customer service operation. And yes—that includes phone and IVR systems too.
- **Scale strategically with self-service** help centers and AI chatbots that empower passengers to solve problems on their own.

Prioritizing CX upgrades will clear the runway to faster growth. Consolidating tools into a single, extensible platform can lower operating costs and lower total cost of ownership (TCO). It also increases agent productivity, so you can keep workforce budgets flat even as you scale to serve more passengers.

## Ready to upgrade to first-class CX?

[See how other transportation companies have reduced TCO and increased ROI through exceptional CX.](#)

[Talk to a sales rep.](#)

