

zendesk CXtrends 26

LEADING IN THE AI ERA

Building competitive edge with
contextual intelligence



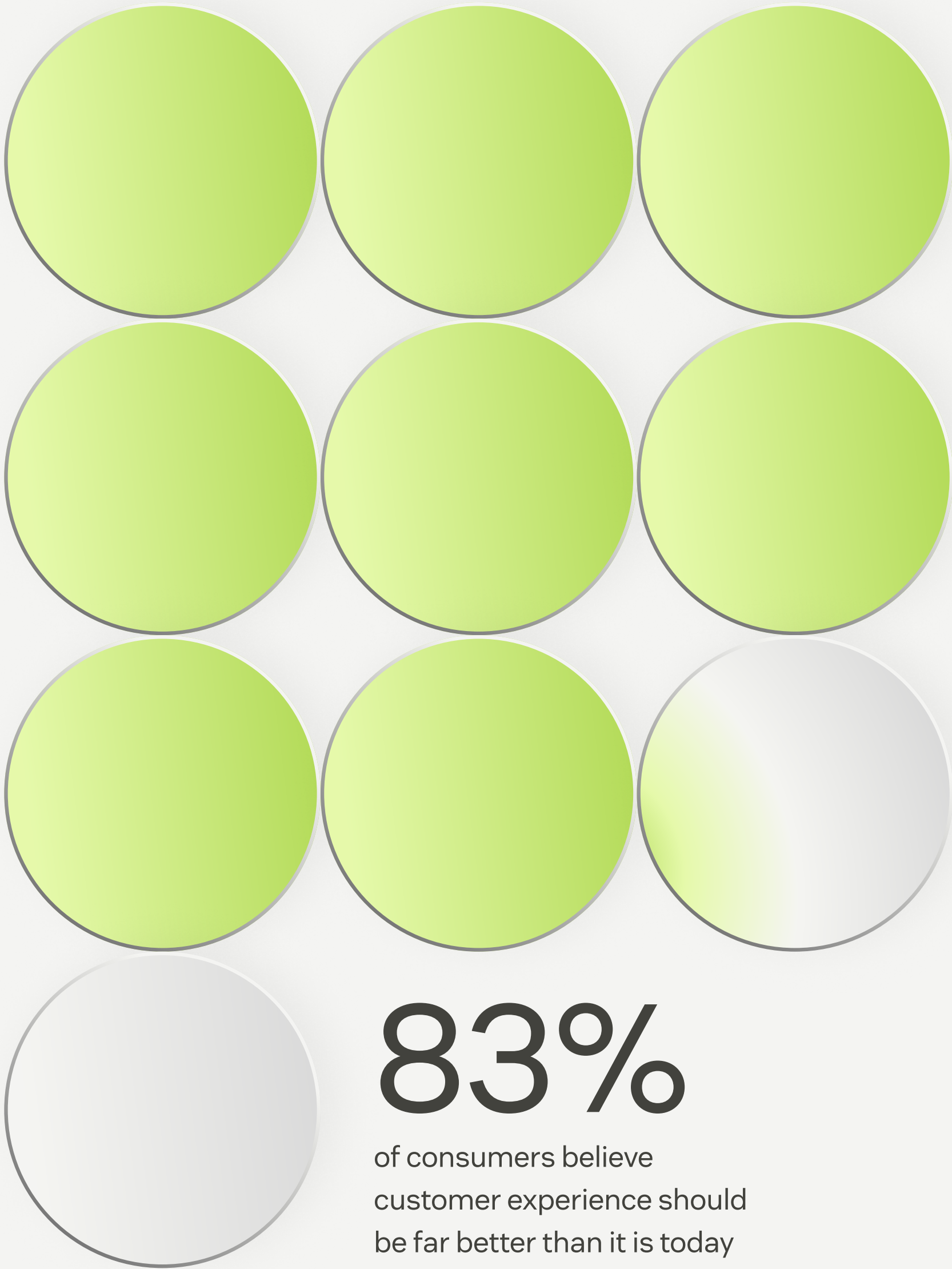
Introduction

**To lead in the AI era,
you have to keep moving.**

Expectations for customer experience are evolving at a breakneck pace. And all that early excitement about AI’s transformational benefits, from hyper-personalization to seamless interactions? Many of those first-movers have struggled to translate the technology’s potential into truly satisfying experiences.

Consumers have noticed, and are frustrated by the gap between AI’s promise and reality. With AI setting a new bar for speed and personalization, people expect experiences to have intelligence built in. But our research indicates the majority of consumers are dissatisfied with the current state of customer experience.

It’s not difficult to see why. When AI first emerged in customer experience, it was limited to automating simple tasks and often fell short of inflated expectations. But the landscape is shifting. Agentic AI—capable of reasoning and making decisions without human intervention—is changing the game. According to 87% of CX leaders, this kind of AI can now dramatically improve the quality of each customer interaction.



The timing couldn't be better. Organizations are grappling with challenging economic headwinds and the need to be more efficient: 85% of CX leaders say their organizations are evolving their customer service strategies to navigate these challenges.

Meanwhile, the stakes are getting higher and higher. One unsolved issue now costs brands a customer for life. CX leaders must continue to rise to the occasion, building deeper, emotionally intelligent relationships with customers at scale.

To truly lead in this AI era, organizations must move beyond basic AI applications to embrace **contextual intelligence**—next-generation agentic AI built on unified, cross-functional knowledge. This approach draws from structured data, historical context, dynamic signals, and the policies guiding customer interactions, enabling brands to build deeper, emotionally intelligent relationships with customers at scale.

Connectivity is key. An integrated knowledge landscape allows **AI to read the room**: not only processing facts, but understanding tone, timing, and intent. It makes every interaction

more relevant and more likely to end in resolution. With timely, connected insights across the business, organizations can better navigate rising customer inquiries, higher operational costs, reduced staffing, and the need for greater cost-efficiency.

We've gathered insights from more than 11,000 people around the world. And the data is clear: contextual intelligence is the future of customer experience—and your competitive edge. Here are the five trends you need to know to deliver high-impact, loyalty-driving experiences without sacrificing speed or consistency.

ZENDESK RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We surveyed more than 6,000 consumers and 5,000 customer service and experience (CX) leaders and agents across 22 countries to understand the challenges and opportunities CX organizations face in the age of AI—and how we can help.

In our 8th annual Zendesk CX Trends report, we've identified five emerging trends that map out a clear path for CX leaders and organizations to elevate their customer experience with AI solutions and drive impactful results—in 2026 and beyond.

The 2026 Trends



TREND 01

CX organizations invest in memory-rich AI to deliver true personalization at scale.

AI with contextual memory is transforming CX—and customer expectations. To meet customer demands, 85% of CX leaders say that memory-rich AI agents will be the key to truly personalized journeys.



TREND 02

AI-powered self-service accelerates consumer demand for instant resolutions.

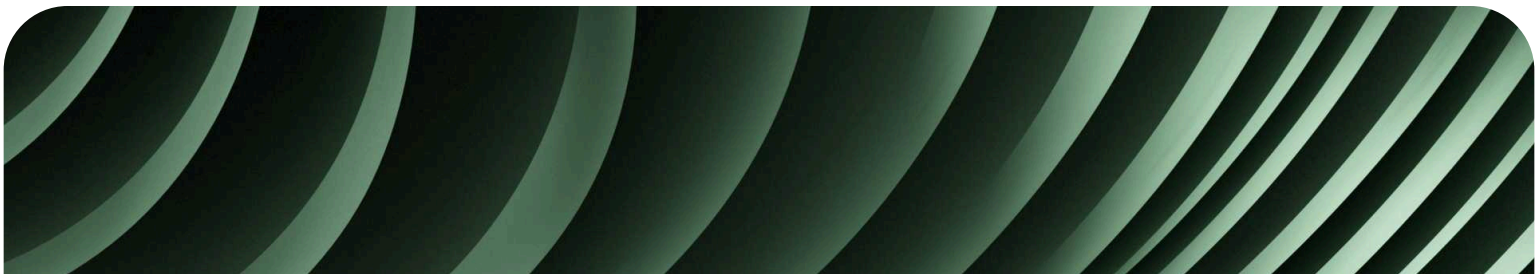
With the proliferation of self-service tools, CX leaders must now meet a new standard for immediate, accurate resolutions every time. The cost of inaction is high: 85% of CX leaders say customers will drop brands over unresolved issues—even on the first contact.



TREND 03

Multimodal support enables seamless interactions across different channels and media.

Leading CX teams are using AI to bridge channels and resolve issues autonomously across formats. Customers are thrilled: 76% say they'd choose a company if they could drop text, images, and video into the same thread without restarting.



TREND 04

CX leaders rely on new AI metrics and access them via prompt-driven analytics.

Real-time decisions require real-time insights. As the next leap in AI-driven intelligence, prompt-first tools are democratizing data. And CX leaders already see the benefit: 81% say giving every employee the ability to ask questions will transform decision-making.



TREND 05

More than ever, consumers demand the *why* behind AI decisions.

As AI usage rises, so does customer scrutiny. Customers want to understand what's behind automated decisions: demands for greater transparency have risen 63% from just last year.

CX organizations invest in memory-rich AI to deliver true personalization at scale

✦ **Organizations powered by contextual intelligence** leverage memory-rich AI to fuel continuously personalized experiences.

Picture this:

A newlywed couple on their way to the Amalfi Coast is stranded on their layover. Every transatlantic flight for the rest of the day is canceled. The groom, who spoke with the hotel concierge just earlier that day, messages their hotel about the delay. It’s midnight local time, so an AI agent responds. Recognizing the customer’s distress—and accessing the full context of the conversation with hotel staff—the agent sees they just upgraded to the honeymoon suite that morning. The agent assures them it will be available. And that, yes, they can also extend their stay.

How is this level of personalization possible? With the power of memory-rich AI.

Memory-rich AI ups the ante on personalization

Contextual memory is transforming personalization: changing CX experiences from one-off interactions to continuous, informed conversations.

These experiences align with what customers value—and expect—in the age of AI: more than two-thirds (67%) believe brands should offer more personalized service now that AI can analyze their interactions.

But it’s more than just high-stakes moments. **People expect personalization and continuity from every service interaction.**

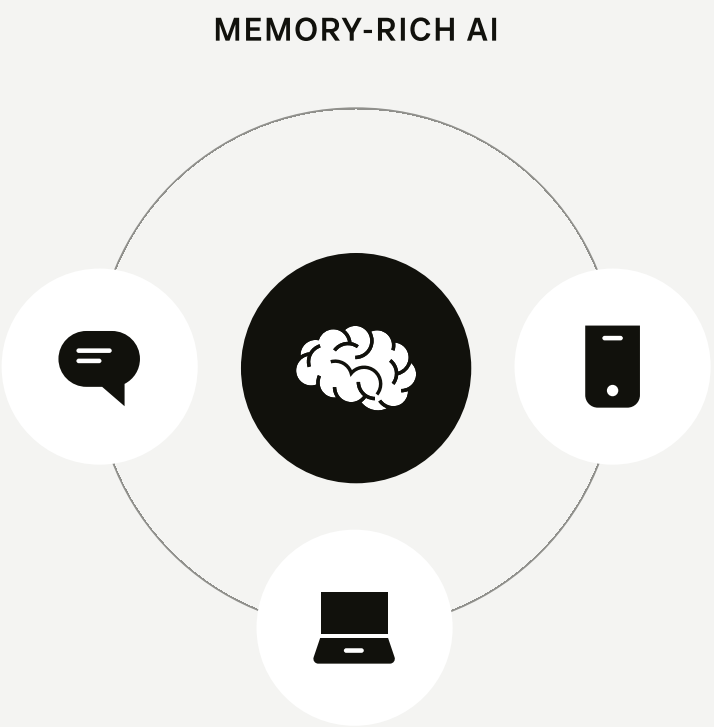
Whether folks chat with an AI agent about confirming a trip with WeRoad, or speak with a human about a discount, they want to pick up where their last conversation left off, regardless of channel or time elapsed. Repeating themselves has been an issue for decades: 74% of consumers find this very frustrating—interpreting it as a sign that the brand doesn’t value their time or their loyalty.

WHAT IS MEMORY-RICH AI?

Memory-rich AI is technology that retains and applies relevant details from every prior interaction across channels, as well as what you’ve learned about your customers over time.

It uses this history to anticipate needs, shape recommendations, and deliver solutions that align with a customer’s unique preferences and circumstances. It can also provide explanations that reflect past experiences, reinforcing a sense of recognition and care.

The result is service that feels consistent, efficient, and highly personal, regardless of when or how someone engages.



WeRoad lands response time, resolving 30% of tickets with AI agents

WeRoad, a tech-driven travel scale-up, delivers consistent, high-quality service with Zendesk AI agents. Their lead AI agent, named Bob, automatically checks specific booking details, such as applicable discounts, cancellation policies, and even the confirmation status of a specific trip—responding accurately without directly involving the human team.

[Learn from WeRoad](#)

Many CX leaders are finally responding in kind, designing memory-rich experiences that reduce customer effort, boost loyalty, and deepen personalization.

Agents understand the value, too: 73% say that seeing historical customer interactions all in one place helps them do their jobs better. Instead of piecing together fragmented details across multiple systems, they're empowered with the context they need to resolve issues faster, avoid repetitive questions, and deliver a more personalized experience.

As for the couple on their honeymoon? They'll remember how their hotel made them feel seen—and special—when it's time to book their next getaway.

High-maturity organizations lead the way on memory-rich AI

According to our research, high-maturity organizations have already started achieving this level of personalization. They've moved beyond basic AI deployments, integrating systems that maintain context across every interaction, regardless of channel or time gap.

CX leaders agree: Memory-rich AI paves the path for lasting loyalty



85%

say that persistent memory lets brands build deeper, longer-lasting relationships with customers



83%

say that remembering context across channels sharply reduces customer effort and frustration



85%

say that memory-rich AI agents are the key to truly personalized journeys

And the payoff is clear: CX teams that have invested in memory-rich AI are seeing significant gains in core metrics, like CSAT.

Meanwhile, experiences that aren't powered by memory-rich AI will feel increasingly impersonal—and irrelevant. And that's a mistake organizations simply can't afford to make: 74% of CX leaders say that, without rapid AI adoption, their organization may struggle to stay competitive in this economy.

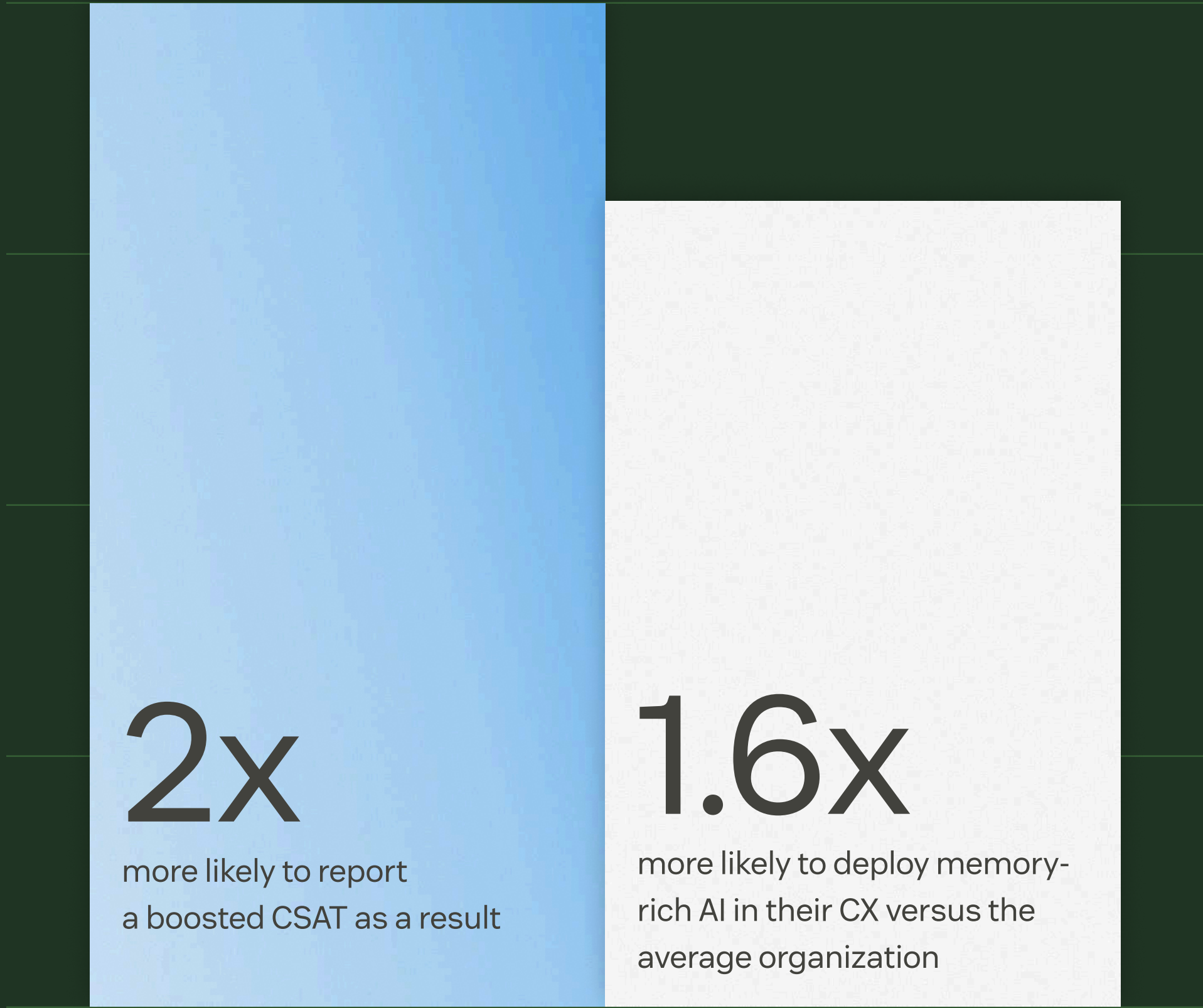
WHAT ARE HIGH-MATURITY ORGANIZATIONS?

Organizations with high AI maturity are the vanguard of customer experience. They no longer treat AI as a bolt-on, but as an essential member of the service team—automating routine work, guiding agents in real time, and informing strategic decisions.

By weaving AI into the fabric of operations, these organizations unlock faster resolutions, richer customer interactions, and a culture that prizes continuous innovation.

EARLY AI ADOPTERS OUTPACE THE COMPETITION

High-maturity organizations are:



HOW TO TAKE ACTION

Don't treat memory-rich AI as an all-or-nothing leap. Start by reducing repetition in conversations – use AI that can remember and reuse details customers share, so they don't have to restate them. Next, connect this memory across follow-up interactions, like when a customer switches channels or returns days later. Over time, build toward a broader foundation of connected knowledge, so every interaction feels continuous, and personal.

AI-powered self-service accelerates consumer demand for instant resolutions



Organizations powered by contextual intelligence deliver real-time service and resolutions.

Customer expectations don't live in a silo. When folks experience faster, more seamless service in one arena, they carry those expectations into every other brand relationship. And with expectations constantly rising, brands can't afford to lag behind.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ Fast, personalized service at a coffee shop
- ✓ Instant service with an insurance company's AI agent
- ✓ Quick, on-demand help from HR at work
- ! **Slow** response from an airline representative

CX leaders and agents alike are feeling the push to deliver faster service, reporting that speed of service has become more important in the last year. What was once considered VIP service (think: instant replies or always-on support) is now the baseline. In fact, nearly three-quarters (74%) of consumers say that, due to AI, they now expect customer service to be available 24/7.

Instant resolutions are the new response time

But people want more than instant responses. They expect their problems to be solved accurately and effectively, too. When an issue drags on or gets bounced around, customers lose patience—and brands risk losing their loyalty.

CX leaders are keenly aware of the risk: 85% say customers will drop brands that cannot resolve issues on first contact, regardless of the channel. That heightened expectation is compounded by the current economic climate: 93% of CX leaders say they've noticed a change in customer behavior as a result of the economy, with the top three changes being:

1. Increased price sensitivity
2. Higher demand for support
3. Longer decision-making processes

FAST RESPONSES AND ACCURATE RESOLUTIONS MAKE OR BREAK CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Percentage of consumers who say:



68%

They expect a quick response time more than they did a year ago



86%

Fast responses and accurate resolutions highly influence whether they purchase a product or service from a brand

In response, brands like END. are increasingly relying on AI to cut first-reply times **and** deliver instant resolutions. Almost all leaders (87%) agree that AI is materially accelerating first-reply and full-resolution speed. Agentic AI agents, for example, are stepping in to help customers around the clock—making decisions and offering instant resolutions (like refunds or returns) without the need for human intervention.

That's good news for agents who are on the frontlines with customers, understand what they value, and have been asking for AI tools to keep pace with their demands. Over the last year, agents perceive that fast resolutions have become 1.3x more important for customers than speaking with a live agent.

Indeed, AI powered by connected knowledge and context is raising the bar. But to achieve real impact, tools must be fully adopted and embedded into daily workflows.

Organizations that invest in training and change management, and support the intentional use of AI—especially by customer service agents—are pulling ahead of those that don't: 96% of high-maturity organizations report that AI materially accelerates first-reply and full-resolution speed. In contrast, only 60% of low-maturity organizations say the same.

END.

END. serves looks and speedy service, garnering 96% increase in zero-touch tickets

When it comes to customer satisfaction, END. knows both speed of service and speed of resolution matter. Facing steep competition, the high-end streetwear and sneaker retailer sets itself apart by continuously innovating its products. With innovation in mind, they worked with Appamondo (a Zendesk Premier Partner) to further optimize their CX—scaling automation and unlocking new AI-driven solutions for efficient service.

[Learn from END](#)

HOW TO TAKE ACTION

Round-the-clock support is now table stakes. Get ahead of customer expectations by deploying AI agents powered by connected knowledge that can retrieve and apply the right information, fast—whether for simple FAQs or more complex, multi-step issues.

Multimodal support enables seamless interactions across different channels and media

- ✦ **Organizations powered by contextual intelligence** offer multimodal support to apply consistent service across all touchpoints.

Omnichannel broke ground on meeting customers where they are—providing consistent (but disparate) support throughout a variety of channels, such as text, email, and phone.

But in 2026, **customers are looking for something more.** They want to communicate in the most effective way and in the best medium for the situation, without losing context or restarting the conversation. That means showing a damaged product, describing a complex issue, and sharing related screenshots—all within the same interaction.

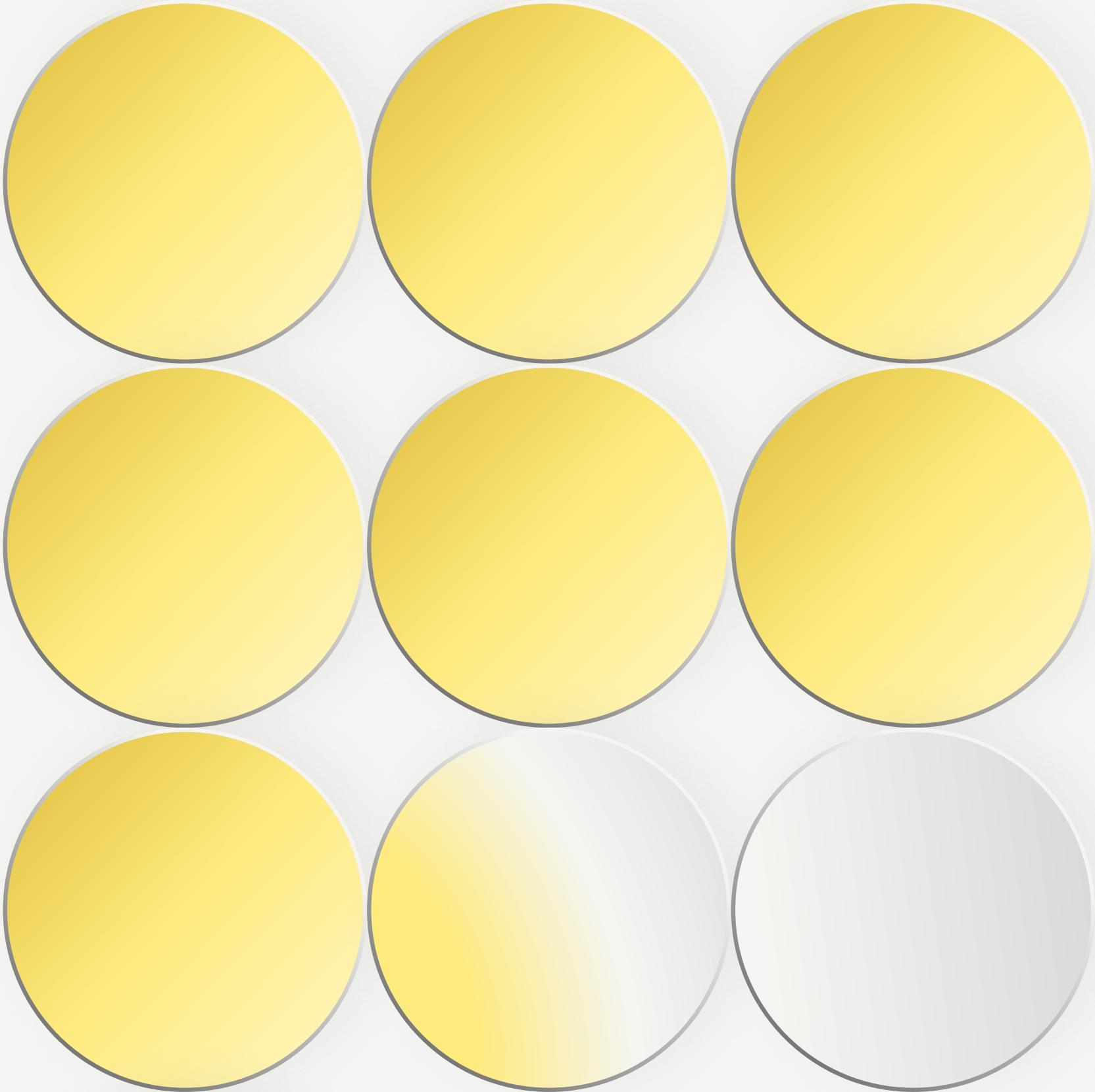
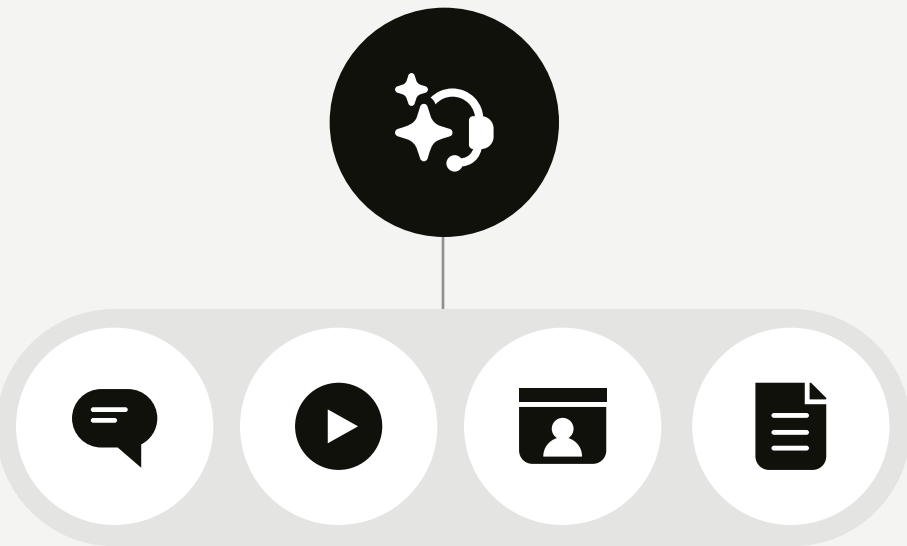
The answer is multimodal support.

Most folks naturally communicate like this already. Think: sending a link to a friend while on a video call, or screensharing while on a chat at work. So it makes sense to interact with a brand this way, too: 79% of consumers say being able to share media makes getting support easier.

WHAT IS MULTIMODAL SUPPORT?

Multimodal support enables customers to communicate using voice, images, video, and text in a single, fluid interaction to help get the right resolution.

Unlike omnichannel support that requires customers to **pick** a channel, multimodal support offers the opportunity to **blend** channels—seamlessly.



76%

of consumers say they’d choose a company if they could drop text, images, and video into the same thread without restarting

Customers gain greater clarity with video and voice support

While text and images dominate digital service interactions, video support is on the rise. Most consumers are willing to open their camera to get help with return verifications (70%), technical glitches (67%), and product assembly (64%). In turn, AI agents can provide support by generating an instructional video or troubleshooting in real time.

Voice is very much in the multimodal mix, too. Customers still turn to voice for complex, high-stakes, or emotionally charged issues where tone, nuance, and quick exchange matter. And with AI now able to process and act on voice inputs in real time—and even pair them with visual or textual context—voice has regained its place as a high-value, high-speed path to resolution.

CX LEADERS LEAN INTO THE MAGIC OF MULTIMODAL SUPPORT



86%

agree that the next wave of AI in service is multimodal agents



85%

say AI that can see, hear, and read will feel almost magical



CX leaders forecast a major shift to multimodal support

In response, CX leaders are turning to AI that can seamlessly switch between listening, reading, and viewing so customers get the fastest, most accurate response, regardless of communication channel or format.

The excitement is palpable. Leaders are already projecting the ROI multimodal support will bring. They expect a major shift in how support interactions are structured, with text-only channels giving way to richer, multimedia inputs.

High-maturity organizations, like Leboncoin, are ahead of this curve: 93% say their AI agents currently handle at least one non-text medium. Just 54% of low-maturity organizations report the same.

Leboncoin

An early adopter of multimodal support, Leboncoin boosts CSAT to 80%

Leboncoin Mobility Pro uses Zendesk AI to maximize its support capabilities—expanding from voice to include video and screen share, as well. Leveraging AI-powered SnapCall in Zendesk, Leboncoin’s agents can summarize conversations and draft responses with just the right tone, freeing them from low-value tasks to focus on customer relationships and more complex interactions.

[Learn from Leboncoin](#)

HOW TO TAKE ACTION

Stay ahead by weaving multimodal into today’s workflows. Start with channels customers already use like text, images, and voice to cut resolution times and improve clarity, while positioning your organization to expand into richer formats like video and screen share as you mature.

CX leaders rely on new AI metrics and access them via prompt-driven analytics.

✦ Organizations powered by contextual intelligence empower teams with promptable analytics and AI-driven metrics.

When it comes to measuring CX performance, our data is clear: 87% of leaders believe AI is already significantly improving data and analytics. At high-maturity organizations, 97% say this.

Building on this momentum, early adopters are focused on what comes next: connecting quality assurance (QA) data to natural-language prompting to do analytics in a new way. This new method, called promptable analytics, will not only democratize data, but redefine CX success.

At the same time, organizations like SeatGeek are expanding their scorecards—layering metrics like automation containment, bot satisfaction, and cost-per-contact on top of traditional measures such as CSAT and FCR.

These new AI-driven performance metrics capture what traditional KPIs can't: 78% of leaders say AI forces a rethink of success metrics. Still, 84% affirm CSAT remains the North Star, reinforcing that new metrics are indeed complementing, not replacing, traditional measures of success.

WHAT ARE PROMPTABLE ANALYTICS?

Promptable analytics pair real-time, natural-language insights with AI performance metrics to give CX organizations on-demand, context-aware analysis.

ADMIN

Show me a country-by- country breakdown of customer service inquiries.

AI AGENT

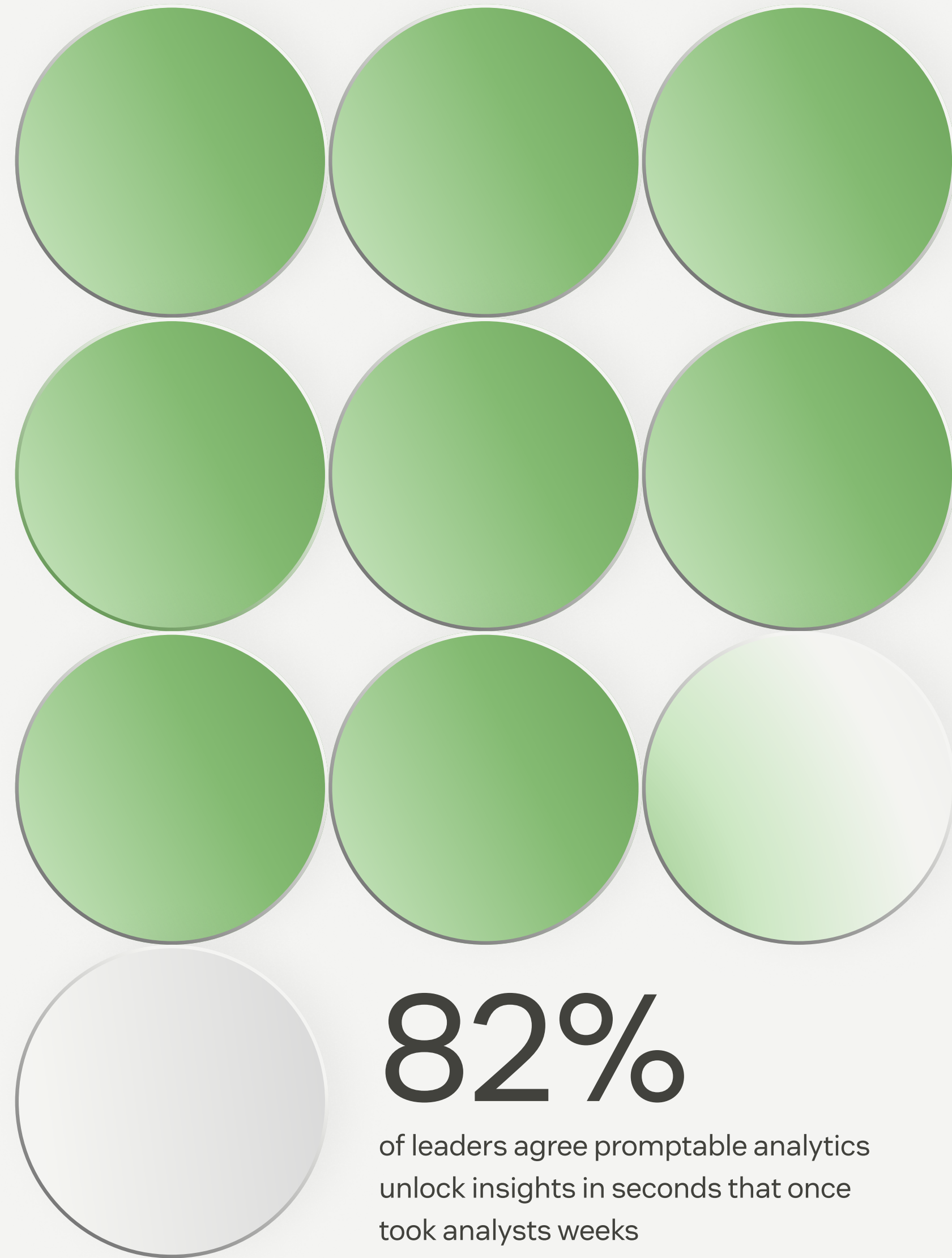
Here's the breakdown:



SeatGeek hits a home run with Zendesk AI, boosting AI agent CSAT 2X

Leveraging Zendesk AI agents to pull accurate, context-specific answers directly from their knowledge base, SeatGeek resolves over half of support conversations with AI agents—no human intervention needed. And that’s just one of the many benefits Zendesk AI has yielded for SeatGeek: their AI agent satisfaction scores increased from 34% to 70%—improving overall customer satisfaction in the process.

[Learn from SeatGeek](#)



CX leaders bet big on prompt-first tools for faster, more accessible insights

Soon, promptable analytics will enable anyone to query operations in plain language and get answers in seconds. CX leaders already see the benefit: 81% say giving every employee the ability to ask questions will transform decision-making.

Admins stand to benefit most from access to these insights, prompting queries about everything from country-level purchases to vendor-specific operations—and much more.

With adoption accelerating, promptable analytics is moving from niche to mainstream—reshaping how organizations define, measure, and act on success.

Today, 44% of organizations have an active prompt-analytics hub. But within the next year, that nearly doubles to 86%. And while just under half (47%) of organizations track AI-specific KPIs today, 86% will within the next 12 to 24 months.

The maturity gap is widening

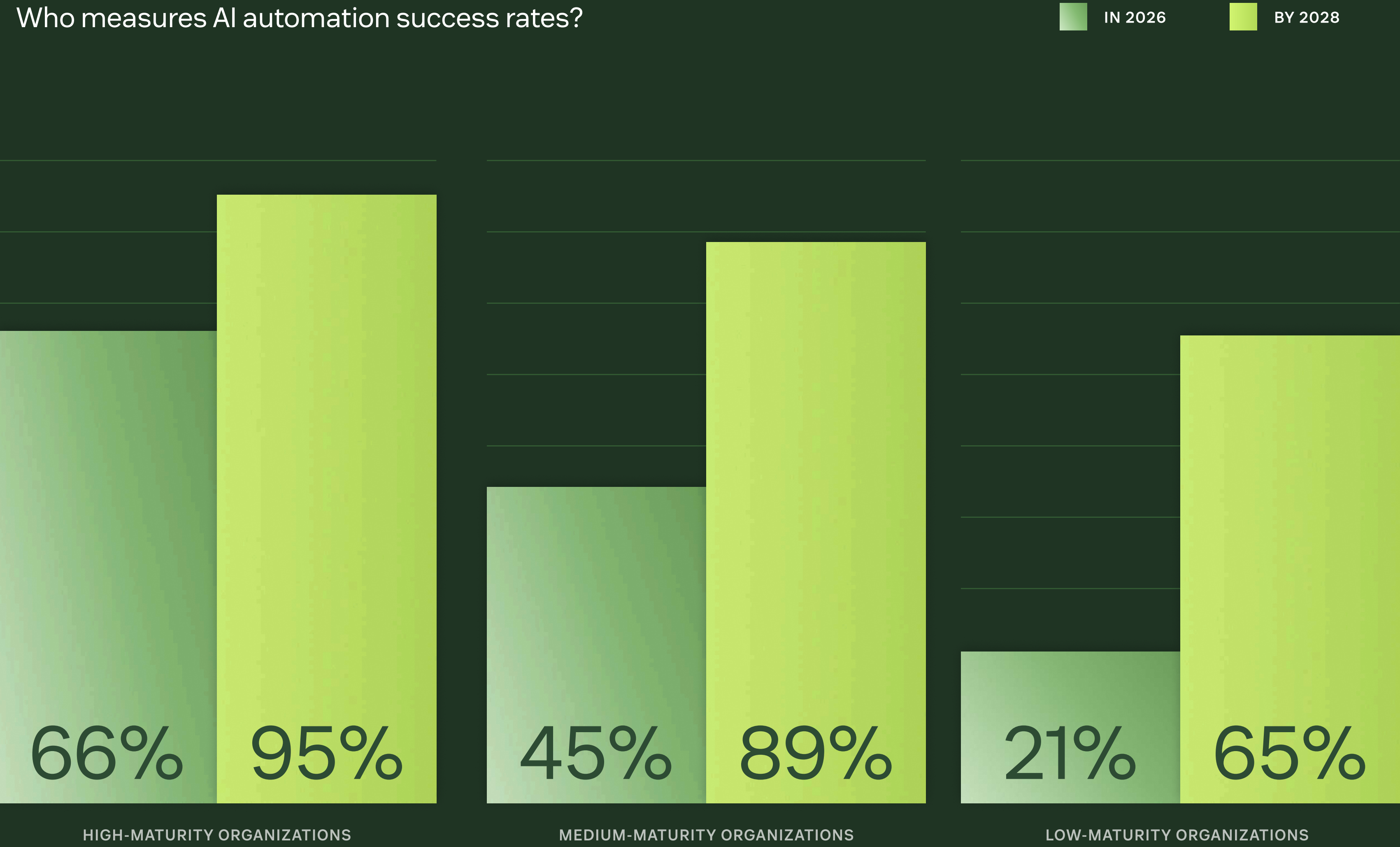
As expected, high-maturity organizations are ahead of the game. In the year ahead, these early adopters expect 97% of their organizations to have access to promptable analytics, compared to just 55% at low-maturity organizations.

High-maturity organizations are also ahead when it comes to already tracking AI metrics. They're doing so at twice the rate of their low-maturity peers.

There's no time to wait. If this gap persists, laggards risk falling further behind in a market that prizes intelligence, transparency, and agility.

HIGH-MATURITY ORGANIZATIONS LEAD ON TRACKING AI METRICS

Who measures AI automation success rates?



HOW TO TAKE ACTION

Move beyond speed and volume metrics. Start tracking resolution as the true currency: was the issue fully fixed the first time? Resolution-based KPIs cut repeat contacts, lower costs, and raise loyalty.

More than ever, consumers demand the *why* behind AI decisions

✦ Organizations powered by contextual intelligence promote AI transparency to earn customers' trust.

Customers are growing increasingly comfortable with AI in CX. According to our research, 79% of consumers say AI has become a part of modern customer service. And nearly two-thirds (64%) say they interact with AI more now than they did a year ago.

But this increase in interactions has heightened expectations. As businesses integrate AI deeper into support operations, visibility becomes essential. It's not enough to know that AI made a decision: nearly all consumers (95%) want to know why AI makes some of the decisions it does—and they expect that explanation to be clear and easy to understand. Demands for greater transparency have risen 63% from just last year.

Transparency and explainability go hand in hand. CX leaders must align AI systems with company's values, policies, and regulatory obligations.

Meanwhile, customer-facing teams are under growing pressure to provide explanations for AI-driven decisions—more than a third of agents said it was one of the biggest challenges they faced last year. And without the right tools, they cannot consistently deliver.

PULL BACK THE CURTAIN ON AUTOMATED DECISIONS

What doesn't work



Customer

Why was I denied a refund?



AI agent

This decision was made by our system.



Customer



What works



Customer

Why was I denied a refund?



AI agent

We couldn't process your refund because you're trying to return an item outside of our 30-day window.



Customer

Got it, thanks for letting me know.

And while CX leaders endorse transparency in principle, our data shows they lag on delivery.

Why the gap? Some organizations still see customer service as a cost center. And CX leaders have other priorities when it comes to AI adoption, namely boosting efficiency, so ensuring transparency isn't high on their list.



80%

of CX leaders agree transparency will be non-negotiable for any customer-facing AI

37%

Yet, only 37% of CX organizations currently offer agents or customers the rationale behind a decision

AI transparency builds trust and boosts loyalty

This is a call to action to CX leaders to implement AI reasoning controls: 86% of high-maturity organizations already have or plan to have them in place.

As demonstrated by Playtomic, successful AI transparency requires integrated knowledge across systems, a clear understanding of policies and documentation, and well-defined logic for what can be shared with customers.

With these foundations in place, organizations can meet rising expectations, strengthen trust, and turn transparency into a competitive advantage.



Playtomic serves satisfaction, resolves 80% of refund inquiries with AI

Playtomic, a marketplace for racket sports players, leverages Zendesk to promote AI transparency. The brand launched a refund API integrated with Zendesk, enabling customers to access their refund history effortlessly. This significantly reduced workload on support agents—and satisfied customers: 77% have expressed satisfaction with the automated responses provided by AI agents.

[Learn from Playtomic](#)

HOW TO TAKE ACTION

Prioritize AI transparency where it matters most: refunds, pricing, and security. Replace vague system decisions with plain-language reasoning that customers can understand. Clear explanations build trust, even when the outcome isn't in their favor.

Set the new standard of excellence in CX

High-maturity organizations are outpacing their peers in every arena—bolstering their CX with contextual intelligence and gaining a competitive edge that attracts and retains customers and boosts their bottom line.

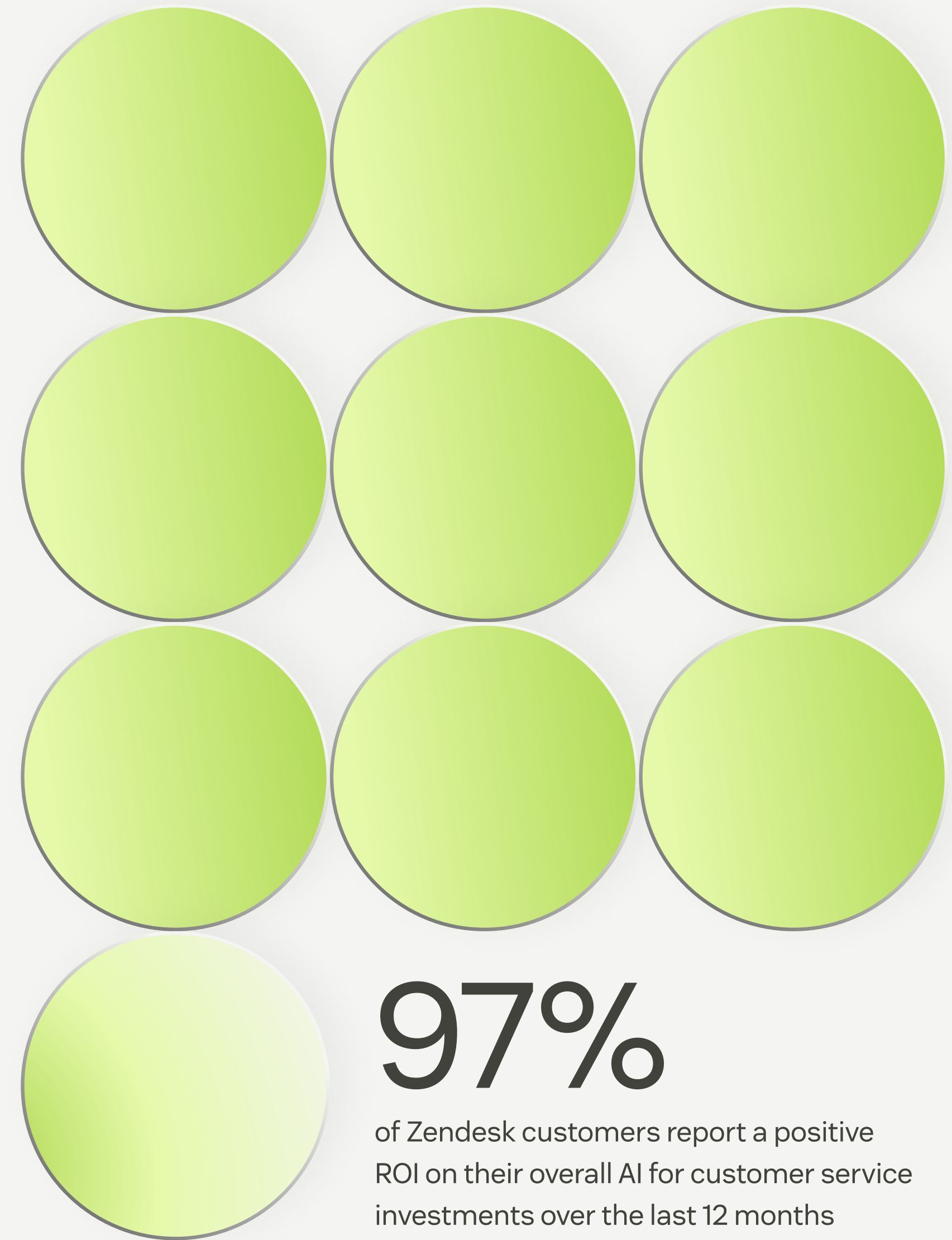
To stay ahead, your organization must align with the leaders in this space who:

- Leverage memory-rich AI to fuel continuously personalized experiences.
- Deliver real-time service and resolutions.
- Offer multimodal support to apply consistent service across all touchpoints.
- Empower teams with promptable analytics and AI-driven metrics.
- Promote AI transparency to earn customers' trust.

Only Zendesk has the deep expertise and right tools to help you deliver smarter CX with contextual intelligence. With the right products, capabilities, and expertise, your organization will lead the pack in this rapidly evolving landscape.

Let's embark on this journey together.

[Discover how Zendesk can help →](#)



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DIGITAL EVENT

Join AI experts and industry leaders as they share the latest CX shifts transforming service, building loyalty, and shaping strategies that win in 2026.

Register now



Advanced methodology

Data in this report comes from two sources: one global survey (22 countries) of 6,182 consumers and a second global survey (22 countries) of 5,115 customer service and experience leaders and agents from organizations ranging from small business to enterprise. Surveys were conducted during June 2025. Results from each survey were weighted to remove bias from the survey samples.

BUSINESS SURVEY COUNTRIES

Australia	3%	Malaysia	1%
Brazil	3%	Mexico	3%
Canada	3%	Netherlands	2%
Chile	1%	Philippines	1%
Colombia	1%	Singapore	1%
Denmark	1%	South Korea	3%
France	5%	Spain	2%
Germany	7%	Sweden	1%
India	5%	Thailand	1%
Italy	3%	United Kingdom	5%
Japan	6%	United States	42%

BUSINESS SURVEY ROLES

Agents	25.6%
Business leaders	74.4%

AI ADOPTION MATURITY SEGMENT

High-maturity organization	23.5%
Medium-maturity organization	56.1%
Low-maturity organization	20.5%

CONSUMER SURVEY COUNTRIES

Australia	1%	Malaysia	2%
Brazil	8%	Mexico	5%
Canada	2%	Netherlands	1%
Chile	1%	Philippines	4%
Colombia	2%	Singapore	1%
Denmark	1%	South Korea	2%
France	4%	Spain	2%
Germany	4%	Sweden	1%
India	28%	Thailand	3%
Italy	2%	United Kingdom	3%
Japan	5%	United States	18%

CONSUMER SURVEY AGE GROUPS

18-24	20.2%
25-39	27.9%
40-54	26.4%
55+	25.5%

CONSUMER CS INTERACTION FREQUENCY GROUPS

Frequent	60.5%
Time to time	24.2%
Occasional	15.3%

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