



GUIDE

How to reduce call abandonment in your contact center with voice AI



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INTRODUCTION

Customers are more discerning than ever before

As consumers, we've grown used to the instant gratification provided by digital experiences. We can buy whatever products or services we want, when we want, with a few clicks online.

But when customers pick up the phone because they need a company's help, they often face long wait times and pre-recorded messages telling them to go online instead. It's difficult for customers not to take it personally, especially in a world where they can just as easily take their business elsewhere.



A CX problem or an abandonment problem?

Most organizations recognize the importance of customer service in building customer loyalty. As such, many contact center and CX leaders are asking themselves, how can we improve the experience of our customer service?

The answer lies a step earlier than many organizations are thinking. Improving customer experience only makes sense if the customer can have the experience. Creating a great experience for the 30% of callers who get to speak to an agent after only a short wait on hold is likely to be less impactful than offering 100% of callers immediate access to genuinely helpful support.





Is abandonment really a staffing problem?

With enough people answering the phone, abandonment is no longer a problem, but looking at abandonment as purely a staffing problem may be preventing organizations from thinking bigger.

Viewing abandonment as a staffing problem leaves organizations with three options:

- 1. Hire more** – Great in theory, but this requires excessive budgets and a high degree of management and operational support, all exacerbated by notoriously high attrition rates for customer service representatives.
- 2. Make your existing staff more productive** – Using AI technology to streamline calls and automate after-call work means agents can answer more calls. But call center workers are already under extreme pressure to reduce call handle time, and customers know they're being rushed. It's not a great experience for your customers or staff who, by the very nature of their work, are flight risks.
- 3. Outsource to BPOs** - Having outsourced vendors handle calls is often a more cost-effective way to provide phone support than in-house staffing, but BPOs come with a whole other set of compromises. Offshoring can be cheap, but rapidly evolving economies leave many companies chasing affordable talent across the globe. And with customer calls happening in a silo, companies lose all-important customer insights and brand control.

The role of voice AI in reducing call abandonment

With the rapid evolution of generative AI technologies like ChatGPT, it has become clear that the future of customer service involves at least some degree of automation.

By automating simple tasks like call routing, authentication, and FAQs through to more complex transactions like payments, account management, reservations, and troubleshooting, voice AI will empower companies to optimize staffing and focus on delivering personalized experiences at scale, improving customer loyalty and leaving a lasting, positive impression of your brand.



This guide provides a framework for assessing the severity of your abandonment problem and proposes a step-by-step approach to solving call abandonment with voice AI.



STEP 1:

Assess your abandonment problem

To solve the problem of call abandonment, contact center, and CX leaders must first assess the underlying causes.

Use the following template to map out the root causes of call abandonment.

Highlight the solutions you have tried and the real and perceived pros and cons you've experienced with each.








CAUSE

IVR design

IVR is typically the first touchpoint the caller has with your contact center. They are often a friction point for callers who aren’t sure what buttons to press or keywords to use.

Solutions	Pros	Cons
 Touch tone IVR (press 1 for this, press 2 for that)	Automates call routing, reducing wait times. Gathers information before connecting to an agent, speeding up the process.	Overly complicated menus can confuse callers. Customers get stuck in a self-service loop. Can’t accommodate complex customer issues.
 Simple speech recognition IVR (e.g., ‘Tell me in a few words why you’re calling’)	Customers can speak instead of using touch-tone.	Customers can’t speak naturally and have to use keywords. May not effectively understand accents or dialects.
 Simple task automation (e.g., customer authentication or answering FAQs)	Contains simple inquiries, reducing call volume.	Automation rates are low due to over-simplification of common customer tasks.








CAUSE

Staffing

Once the customer has moved through the IVR, they will be routed to a member of staff.
Staffing limitations may result in long hold times.




Solutions	Pros	Cons
 BPO	24/7 support offering. Scalable support for volatile call volume.	Limited control over brand experience. Limited access to customer call data.
 Employee retention programs	Improved employee morale. Enhanced productivity. Reduces recruitment costs.	Costly to implement and maintain. Not always effective in retaining top talent.
 Agent productivity tools	Increased efficiency and productivity. Real-time monitoring and performance tracking.	The cost of implementation is high. Training is required for all agents to use the tools effectively. Increases pressure on agents to handle more calls, more quickly.



CAUSE

Call peaks

Call volume is higher at some times than others. Sometimes this is seasonal and can be planned for. Other times it is the result of unexpected events outside of the company’s control.

Solutions	Pros	Cons
 Temporary hires	<p>Avoids long-term hiring costs and commitments.</p> <p>Can quickly scale up staff to meet increased demand.</p> <p>Helps alleviate the workload for permanent staff.</p>	<p>Lower quality of customer service due to limited and expedited training.</p> <p>The talent pool is limited and unpredictable.</p> <p>Training and hiring costs are high.</p> <p>Contact center licenses are billed annually for temp agents that use them for a few weeks/months.</p>
 BPO	<p>Can be scaled up or down based on your business needs.</p> <p>Lower labor costs, allowing businesses to save money on salaries, benefits, and infrastructure.</p>	<p>Unpredictable charges during peak seasons or emergencies.</p> <p>Lack of brand control may impact customer experience.</p> <p>Limited access to customer call data.</p>
 Recorded message (e.g., ‘We are experiencing higher than usual call volumes’)	<p>Informs callers about the situation.</p> <p>Ensures all callers receive the same message.</p>	<p>Can be impersonal, making customers feel more frustrated in an already stressful situation.</p> <p>Unlikely to reduce call volume or wait times.</p>





STEP 2:

Set goals for an effective solution

Now you’ve identified the root cause of abandonment, it’s time to set some goals for your solution so you can start creating an efficient, engaging, and enjoyable customer experience.



The average person spends **43 days of their life on hold!***
You don’t want your contact center to be a contributor to those numbers.





Here are some of the most common goals companies set when implementing voice AI to reduce call abandonment rate.



Reduce call abandonment rate from X% to Y%.

Decide what an impactful reduction in call abandonment would look like for your company. Be realistic. You can always inflate your expectations when negotiating with vendors, but aligning on clear goals will significantly reduce risk.



Reduce wait times from X seconds to Y seconds.

The most common reason customers abandon calls is long call wait times. Likely, you have a maximum wait time stipulated in your SLA. Getting closer to this number is a good goal to aim for.



Improve self-service rate from X% to Y%.

If you offer any self-service through your IVR, you might want to consider self-service rate a measure of success. Consider how many calls would need to be contained by voice AI in order to free up your people to handle the rest.



Reduce average handle time (AHT) from X seconds to Y seconds.

If reducing AHT is more in line with your strategy, you'll likely want to consider voice AI solutions that automate certain processes like authentication.



STEP 3:

Choose a voice AI partner

Now you know how you'll measure success, you'll need to find the right voice AI provider for your business. Whether you decide to build something from scratch, use a conversational AI platform, or buy a high-quality solution from a dedicated voice AI provider, you'll need to know what's important to your business and your customers.

The following checklist will help you choose a voice AI solution to improve call abandonment and drive operational efficiencies.





Capability	What to look for	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Lifelike voice	When customers hear a robotic voice, they grow wary. Customers are more likely to engage with voice AI that sounds like a real person.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spoken Language Understanding (SLU)	Understanding callers with different accents over the phone requires a specialized SLU stack. Look for a vendor or platform that has a proven track record of deploying voice assistants, not just text-based chatbots.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Free-flowing conversation	There’s nothing worse than getting stuck in an endless self-service loop. Look for technologies and vendors that can accommodate free-flowing conversations that put your customers in the driver’s seat.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Multilinguality	If there’s a possibility that you’ll want to add additional languages in the future, find a vendor or technology that supports those languages now. Otherwise, you may need to start from scratch when your colleagues in other geographies start wanting in on the action	<input type="checkbox"/>
Safety guardrails	As generative AI becomes the norm, ensure your vendors offer rigorous safety guardrails that keep conversations on track, respond only with brand-appropriate language and are resistant to prompt injections.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Call data dashboards	As voice AI enables customers to speak more naturally, your customers will tell you more. Ensure you have access to dashboards that enable you to access insights from customer conversations.	<input type="checkbox"/>





STEP 4:

Implementing your voice AI solution

Now you have a good understanding of why abandonment rates are so high, have set some goals, and have chosen a vendor, you're ready to implement.

How you implement voice AI will depend on your tech stack and partner landscape, but here are 4 stages to implementing voice AI that apply to everybody.



STAGE 1:

Decide how to work with your current IVR

Voice AI can eliminate the need for traditional IVR, answering every call with a simple, open-ended question - How can I help?

But if your current IVR is already infused with some self-service, it may not make sense to rip it out and start again.

In that case, use voice AI to add more self-service capabilities alongside your IVR. You might decide to put Voice AI in front of your IVR and route calls from your voice assistant to your IVR where self-service already exists. Or you might put voice AI behind certain IVR options as a means of starting small and dipping your toes in the water.

STAGE 2:

Design and build your voice assistant

Most companies choose to work with a specialized vendor to design and build a voice assistant.

That's because, regardless of advancements in generative AI, it still takes a vast amount of skill and experience to build a solution that is capable of lifelike conversation.

Your vendor will work with you to understand the nuances of customer interactions to design a voice assistant that's capable of engaging callers and encouraging them to stay in the conversation rather than pressing to speak to an agent. That said, your vendor should also develop a handoff protocol that allows customers to get through to someone when needed.

As your vendor builds out your voice assistant, your IT team will work on any necessary API integrations required to retrieve information from your back end systems.





STAGE 3 :

Integrate your voice assistant

Voice AI projects can feel daunting, but integration is relatively simple if you work with a vendor who understands your architecture.

1. **Connect to your call center:** A simple SIP or PSTN connection is all that's required to route calls between your voice assistant and your team. This is virtually the same for every voice assistant, and will be handled by your IT team with support from your voice AI vendor.
2. **Connect to your back end systems:** Connecting to CRMs, payment providers, booking systems and other back end tools will require an API integration. The fastest and easiest way to get these APIs built is to have your IT team work on them while your voice AI vendor builds out your voice assistant.
3. **Test:** Once your voice assistant is hooked up, it's time to test! Your vendor will run rigorous quality assurance and load tests. They should also give you access to a sandbox environment where you and your team can call in and try it for yourselves.
4. **Go live:** Some companies opt to go live with a percentage of calls before rolling out the voice assistant to everyone. Some take the dive to reap the rewards faster. Whichever way you go about going live, your vendor should have a support team on hand to monitor early calls, make sure everything is running smoothly, and jump in to make amendments if needed.

STAGE 4 :

Learn and iterate

You can expect a drop in call abandonment from day 1, but that doesn't mean you can't do more.

Because of the way voice AI needs to transcribe and categorize caller inputs, you'll get access to a wealth of insights into customer needs.

With detailed data on why exactly customers are calling, and what it takes to resolve their queries, you'll be able to quickly identify other areas where support can be improved.

You might identify extra call types that voice AI could handle. You might find instances where you can improve digital self-service. You might identify areas outside of your usual remit that you can highlight to colleagues to remove friction before customers feel the need to pick up the phone.

However you choose to use it, the data gathered by voice assistants can be a useful lever when it comes to demonstrating the value of your contact center to the rest of the company.





VOICE AI SUCCESS STORIES

Atos reduces call volume by 30% with voice AI

Using a PolyAI voice assistant, Atos was able to automate 30% of calls at 50% of the cost of an FTE.



Read the full story [here](#)



“PolyAI has allowed us to accommodate periods of peak customer activity and to minimize complaints by significantly increasing our ability to answer FAQs through the voice assistant.”

John Murphy

Director of Customer Service at Atos

VOICE AI SUCCESS STORIES

Golden Nugget reduces abandonment by 61% with voice AI

With a voice assistant that routes calls, answers FAQs and takes hotel room reservations, Golden Nugget reduced call abandonment by 61%.



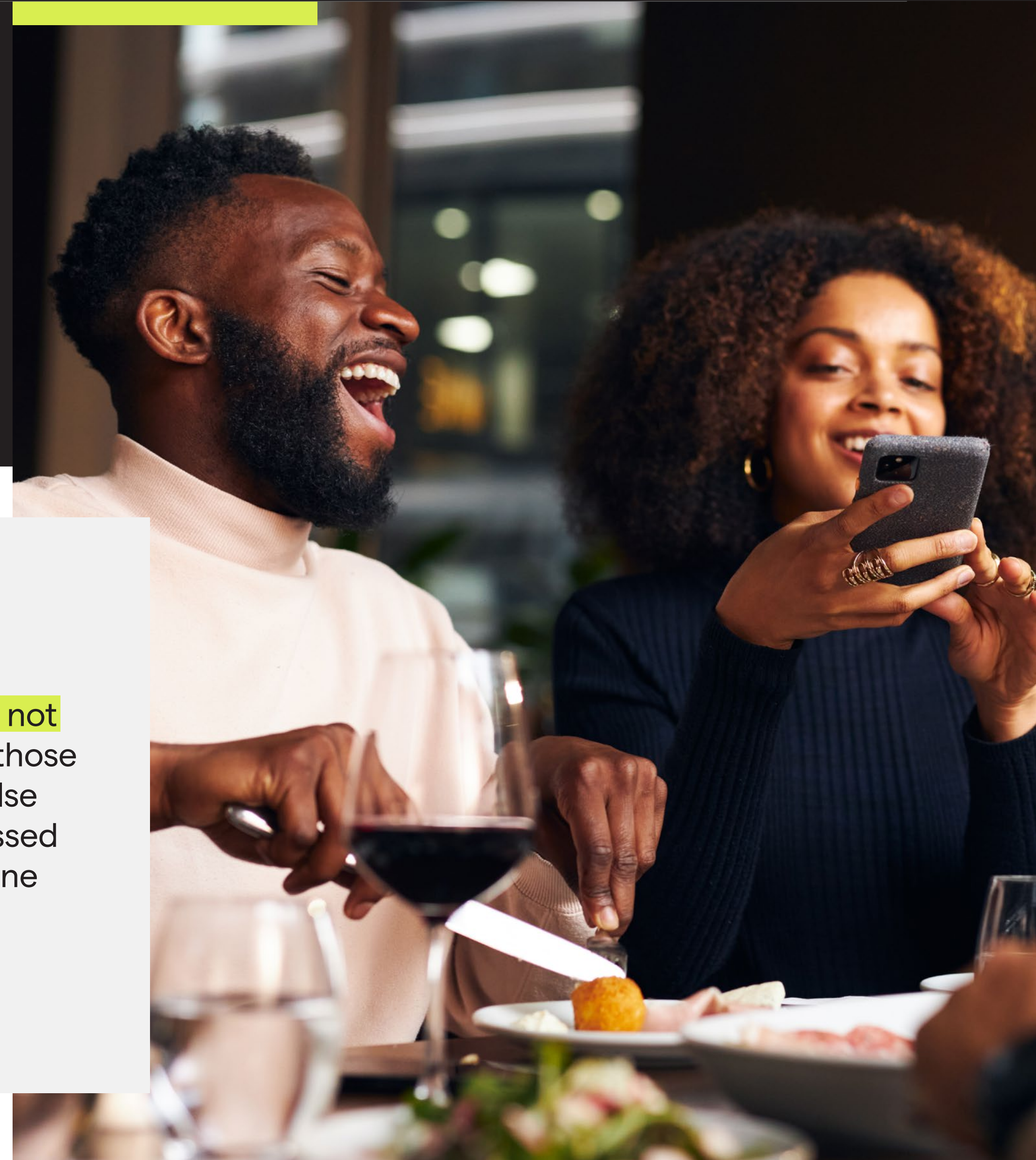
Read the full story [here](#)



“Without the voice assistant, my staff would not have been able to answer all of those calls. If those callers abandoned and went somewhere else (which they do!), I would have potentially missed out on about \$600,000 in revenue in just one month. That’s about \$7.2m a year!”

Brian Jeppesen

Director of Contact Center Operations at Landry’s





VOICE AI SUCCESS STORIES

Simplyhealth automates 25% of phone calls with voice AI

Simplyhealth was able to automate 25% of their total call volume with a voice assistant that answers FAQs and links callers to digital resources



Read the full story [here](#)



“The PolyAI voice assistant is now a part of how we speak to our customers on a day-to-day basis. Our customers love it because it means they save time and effort. They don’t have to wait on the phone to get through to an agent.”

Dan Eddie

Customer Service Director
at Simplyhealth



CONCLUSION

Hold times are for the old times.

Reducing call abandonment goes beyond hiring more staff or outsourcing support. It's about finding a solution that provides instant assistance, cuts wait times and empowers customers to resolve issues efficiently.

Embracing voice AI will enable your organization to address call abandonment, enhance customer experiences, and streamline operations. This approach ensures prompt call answering, reduced call volume, and scalable customer service.

Innovative organizations implementing voice AI will boost satisfaction and loyalty by proactively addressing customer issues and routing calls accurately, while agents benefit from a more manageable and rewarding workload.



PolyAI is the world's most lifelike voice AI.

To find out more about how PolyAI can help you answer every call immediately, improve loyalty, resolve over 50% of calls, and deliver effortless CX at scale. [Sign up for our monthly live demo.](#)

Expect to learn more about:

- The ROI of voice AI
- The best way to design voice experiences for customer engagement
- How other companies have successfully deployed voice AI
- How to begin your voice AI journey

