PolyAI

BUYERS' GUIDE

The definitive buying guide for contact center heroes

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It’s always been a challenge for contact center leaders to hire and retain the right people to ensure every customer call is answered in a timely manner.

This has only been exacerbated by a global staffing shortage, increasing costs and reduced budgets for contact centers.

In an effort to reduce call volume, many companies invested heavily in online help centers, apps and chatbots. While this has reduced call volume to some degree, **73% of customers still call,** either as a first option, or following an unsuccessful digital interaction.

Contact center leaders have turned to voice automation to help, but legacy voice technologies have delivered disappointing experiences. Many customers have developed tricks to bypass conversational IVRs, shouting ‘AGENT’ or mashing their keypads in an attempt to speak directly with an agent.

But times are changing and a new generation of voice assistants is promising higher call containment, better customer experiences and a higher degree of control than ever before.

While the technology has improved drastically, deciding who to work with is harder than ever. With thousands of vendors now touting conversational AI platforms, contact center leaders are tasked with the unenviable job of sorting through various offerings and choosing a solution that will best solve their problems.

It’s a big decision, one that can make or break any contact center leader’s career. Those who don’t implement voice AI now face lagging behind the competition, while those who jump in head first risk investing significantly in something that actively damages brand experience.

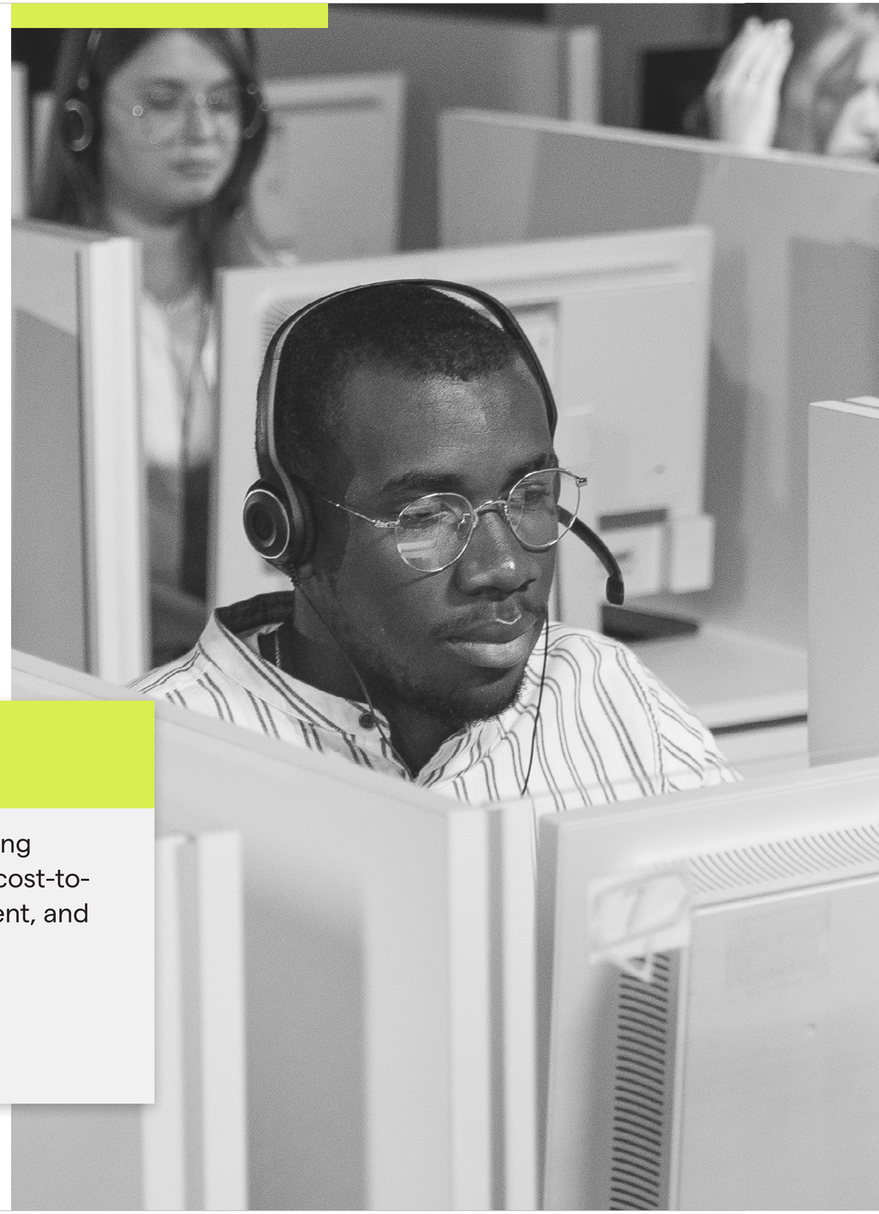
But choosing the right solution eliminates these risks. In this guide, we’ll uncover the different types of voice AI solutions available to contact center leaders, and explain how you can leverage voice technology to become a contact center hero.

1. What are contact center heroes focusing on?

Contact center leaders are often horribly underappreciated. Your team is the interface between brand and customer, the voice of your company and creator of loyal customers, but this is rarely reflected in your budget.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Many contact center leaders are elevating themselves and their teams.

Here's what those contact center heroes are thinking about.



Balancing ROI with CX

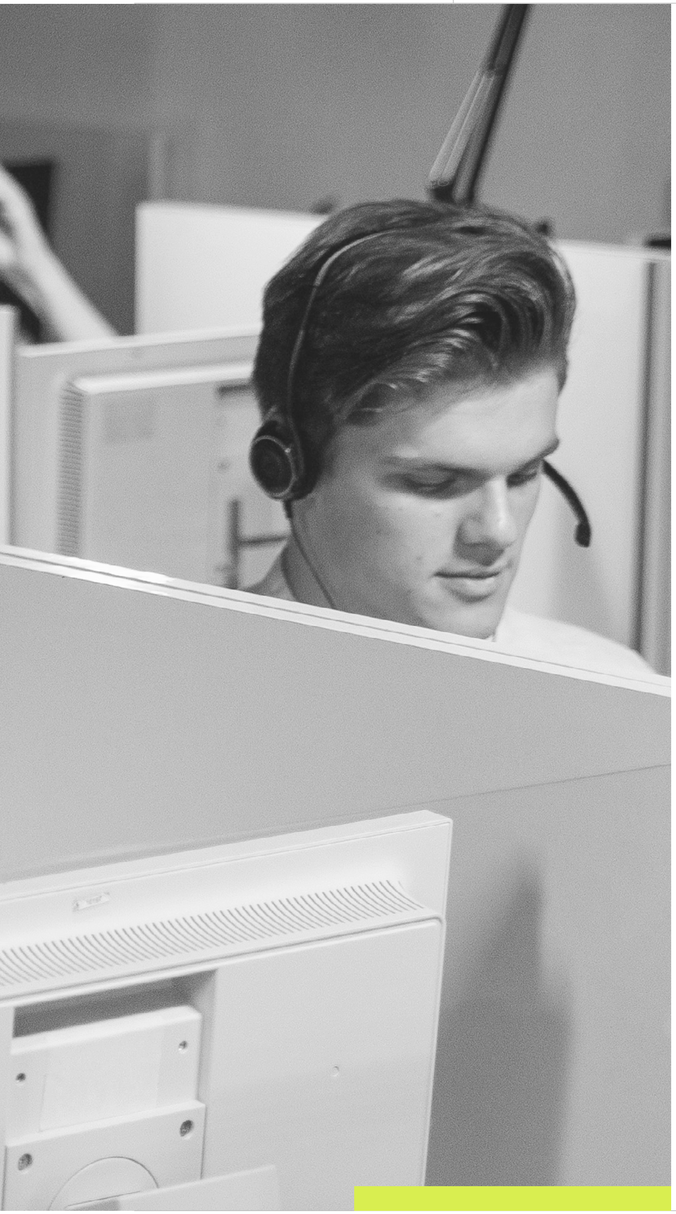
Contact center heroes are challenging the status quo of the contact center as a cost center, using customer service as a channel for building loyalty through great customer experiences.

Data-driven optimization

Contact centers have access to vast amounts of customer data. Contact center heroes are leveraging this data to drive optimization across the whole organization.

AI joins the contact center team

Contact center heroes are using AI to improve CX and reduce cost-to-serve with always-on, consistent, and customer-centric support.



2. How are contact center heroes creating value with voice assistants?

Contact center leaders are thinking about the following value drivers when building a case to buy. Voice assistants can create value in a number of ways by:

Operational excellence
Voice assistants surface actionable insights that drive operational improvements in customer service and the wider business.

Improved CX
Having a voice assistant handle common call types reduces wait times for every customer, and frees up your people to focus on the customers who need them most.

Improved employee experience
Agents are under less pressure to handle high call volumes and can focus on more rewarding calls that make use of their skills - plus they have time to take breaks!

Increased capacity
Voice assistants fully or partially automate calls without the customer needing to speak to an advisor.

Revenue gain
By answering 100% of calls, voice assistants ensure companies don't miss revenue-generating opportunities.

3. What should a voice assistant be capable of?

Authentication
Taking customer information like name, ZIP code, account number, order number, answers to secret questions, to authenticate caller against your database through natural conversations.

Bookings
Taking bookings/reservations/ appointments in the same way a receptionist or front-desk team member would. It can also amend and cancel existing bookings.

Call routing
Understanding the customer's query, asking clarification questions where needed, and routing the call to the best place. The information collected is passed over to the agent to prevent repetition.

FAQs
Answering customers' questions and asking clarifying questions where needed to ensure the best possible response is given.

Account management
Handling common account transactions like updating addresses, password resets, upgrades and so on.

Order management
Tracking orders and enabling callers to reschedule deliveries.

Payments
Taking credit card payments securely.

Troubleshooting
Running callers through troubleshooting and triaging processes to diagnose and fix issues.

Personalization
Connecting with your back end systems to offer personalized service to your customers.

Multilingual support
Speaking different languages to offer accessible and inclusive support to all of your customers.

4. What automation options do contact center heroes have?

With seemingly endless categories of technology – all making similar promises about reducing call volume, improving CX, and cutting costs – it can be difficult to make future-proof technology decisions that translate into both customer and operational benefits.

When it comes to creating voice experiences that keep customers engaged, not all solutions are best placed to meet contact center heroes' needs.

Here, we explore some of the options.

	Keypad IVR	Conversational IVR	Agent assist	Conversational AI platforms	Customer-led voice assistants
Description	Press 1 for this Press 2 for that	"Please tell me in a few words why you're calling"	Listens to the conversation and pulls relevant information up on agent dashboard	Build your own chatbot	An automated system that sounds like your best people
Limitations	Keypad IVRs restricts callers to limited options and are often bypassed because callers feel unable to match their complex queries to simple IVR options	Conversational IVRs sound robotic and force callers to guess which keywords will trigger the appropriate response	Agent assist makes it easier for agents to handle calls, but does nothing to reduce call volume	Conversational AI platforms allow organizations to build voice assistants from scratch, but they are generic, require additional services and deliver poor customer experiences	Customer-led voice assistants are the only solution that allows callers to speak however they like to get the level of support they deserve

5. Customer-led voice assistants: A deep dive

When launching a voice assistant for customer service use cases, experience is critical. If a customer does not feel comfortable engaging with the solution, they will insist on talking to a person, offsetting the benefits of automation.

The most effective voice assistants are customer-led. This means they put callers in the driver's seat.

Speaking to a customer-led voice assistant feels like speaking to a real person. Callers can speak naturally, interrupt, ask questions, and dive in and out of different topics.

Legacy voice technologies have made people wary of engaging with restrictive, keyword-based bots that open with, "Please tell me in a few words why you are calling." Those experiences make callers feel constricted and neglected. Customers are often misunderstood and become increasingly frustrated.

To deliver genuinely helpful support, voice assistants must earn the customer's trust. This means understanding callers, whatever they say, and however they say it.

Customer-led voice assistants give callers the freedom to:

- Tell long stories in their own words
- Ask clarifying questions at any point in the conversation
- Use regional slang, synonyms, and turns of phrase
- Be understood regardless of their accent, the quality of the phone connection, or background noise

Customer-led conversations must also inspire confidence. The caller must feel, at every turn of the conversation, that they are understood and, in return, that they are receiving a genuinely helpful response.

If callers believe they can get a better answer from an agent, why shouldn't they insist on speaking to one?

Listen to some real calls

6. The buying process

Buying a customer-led voice assistant doesn't have to be complicated.

Key areas to consider

What problems are you trying to solve?

Contact center heroes buy voice assistants to tackle a number of different problems. Identifying the key problems you want to address is crucial to shaping the best solution for your business. You should consider:

- **Cost-to-serve:** Are you able to support every customer within budget?
- **Labor management:** Do you have enough people to manage call volume?
- **Service levels:** Are you meeting agreed service levels around call wait times?
- **Demand peaks:** Do you experience expected or unexpected peaks in call volume?
- **Consistency:** Are you able to deliver consistently high-quality service?

What are your technical capabilities/limitations?

Technology limitations often prevent would-be contact center heroes from deploying conversational technologies.

But technical expertise and complex integrations are not always required to automate a significant portion of calls. Call types like FAQs can be handled without API integrations, and call handle time can be cut by using voice assistants to take down details before handing them off to a person to complete a transaction.

Demonstrating success in simple use cases will enable you to get buy-in from other areas of the business, opening up access to technical expertise and additional budget.

Potential pitfalls

The following issues could arise from a rushed or poorly considered buying process

Slow time to value

- Overly complicated DIY projects can turn into expensive science experiments that never get deployed
- Lack of post-deployment support may result in poor performance, impacting ROI

Brand damage

- Poor customer experiences can lead to bad reviews, complaints, and bad press
- Customers may churn as a result of bad experiences

Tech burden

- Maintainance requirements impact performance and cause friction between teams
- Inflexible architecture will require heavy tech lift to implement changes

Operational inefficiencies

- Lack of or inaccurate reporting capabilities may result in poor operational decision-making
- Poor performance may put additional pressure on your people

Who should be involved?

The process should be led by the contact center leader. You know your customers best and know what you need to achieve to hit your goals.

You will work closely with colleagues from customer experience, finance, and technology teams to ensure the solution meets everybody's requirements and can be implemented successfully in your contact center.

What does the contact center team need?

- Proven ROI within similar contact centers
- Complete trust that customers will be understood over noisy phone connections
- A system that fully resolves customer queries
- The ability to update the voice assistant with new information
- A solution that delivers competitive support experiences
- Access to data-driven insights that will inform business decisions

What does the technology team need?

- A smooth and pain-free integration process
- A solution that meets security and compliance regulations
- A solution that requires little technical support to update and maintain

7. Core capabilities and considerations: A contact center leader's definitive checklist

In order for customers to engage with a voice assistant, they need to trust that its capable of understanding them and solving their problems.

As such, your voice assistant needs to be able to understand callers whatever they say and however they say it. It should be able to provide helpful responses at every step of the conversation, in a voice that sounds natural and feels like talking to a real person.

These are the main technical capabilities you should discuss with vendors when appraising voice AI solutions.

Functionality	Capability	Considerations
Understanding what the caller is saying	Automatic speech recognition (ASR)	Relying on out-of-the-box speech recognition solutions will limit your capacity for understanding callers. Look for solutions that offer additional ASR tuning mechanisms and Spoken Language Understanding (SLU) capabilities
	Natural language understanding (NLU)	Large language models (LLMs) developed especially for customer service use cases. Pre-trained LLMs should require less training data, enabling faster time to entity
Identifying callers	Alphanumeric capture	A proven track record of taking alphanumeric strings through over the phone, without requiring keypad input
	Phoneme matching	Where you wish to identify callers by name, look for solutions that can extract names at a phonetic level
Extracting entities	Entity extraction model	Entity extraction models that can: extract entities from long utterances; understand entities even if they are given in non-traditional formats (e.g. 'Me and my wife" = 2 people); "listen out for" and record entities whenever they are given instead of having engineers specify when and where to take down certain pieces of information
Non-linear conversations	Dialogue policy	Solutions that allow callers to truly lead the conversation. This means they can answer a question with a completely unrelated piece of information, and the solution can address that before bringing the conversation back to where it needs to be in order to complete the transaction
Consistent branded voice	Natural-sounding voice	Natural-sounding voices that feel like speaking to real people. This will ensure that callers engage with the system, increasing call containment rates
	Dialogue design	Design support capabilities to ensure scripting and voice direction have maximum impact over the phone

8. Customer-led voice assistants evaluation template

This capabilities checklist will help you choose a customer-led voice assistant solution that will improve customer experience and drive operational efficiencies, turning **you** into a contact center hero.

Considerations	Solution #1	Solution #2	Solution #3	PolyAI
Accurately understand customer intent in natural language				✓
Pre-trained model requires little to no training data				✓
Accurate intent detection regardless of accent				✓
Accurately extract entites from natural conversation				✓
Allow callers to drive non-linear conversations				✓
Access custom dashboards with realtime data & insights				✓
Speak multiple languages				✓
Go live in 6 weeks or less				✓

9. Final considerations

Before making a final decision, it's important to consider whether your chosen provider wants to help you on your journey to becoming a contact center hero.

Hypercare and ongoing improvements

Does the provider offer intensive hypercare post-launch to help you meet your success criteria? Are they available to help you interpret insights to develop a future-facing roadmap for your contact center?

Security and compliance

Does the provider meet all of your security and compliance regulations? How will they ensure that your system learns from your data while remaining compliant?

Customer success and support

Will you have access to goal-oriented customer support that prioritizes your ability to hit your goals?

Innovation

Will the provider work with you in a collaborative partnership to drive true innovation in your contact center?

PolyAI is the inventor of customer-led voice assistants.

To find out more about how PolyAI can help you put your customers in the driver’s seat, improve loyalty and reduce cost-to -serve, schedule a demo with our team.