



**BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL**

# CALL CENTERS TAKE ON A NEW ROLE

COVID-19 presents organizations with new challenges and a unique opportunity. The challenges involve a shift from in-person, face-to-face service to a greater reliance on call centers, staffed by employees in a hybrid model of working-from-home (WFH) and working-in-the-office. The opportunity involves not just meeting, but raising, levels of service during a very difficult time, to strengthen customer relationships, employee loyalty, and your competitive advantage.

In today's new business environment, "business as usual" is no longer the successful strategy it once was.



# BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL

As organizations have lost the ability to deliver in-person service, and customers have endured increasingly stressful and complex personal and work scenarios, customer service representatives (CSRs) are even more critical to helping organizations keep those all-important lines of customer communication open. Against a backdrop of rising, unpredictable demand for call center services, organizations need to maintain a new level of customer satisfaction.

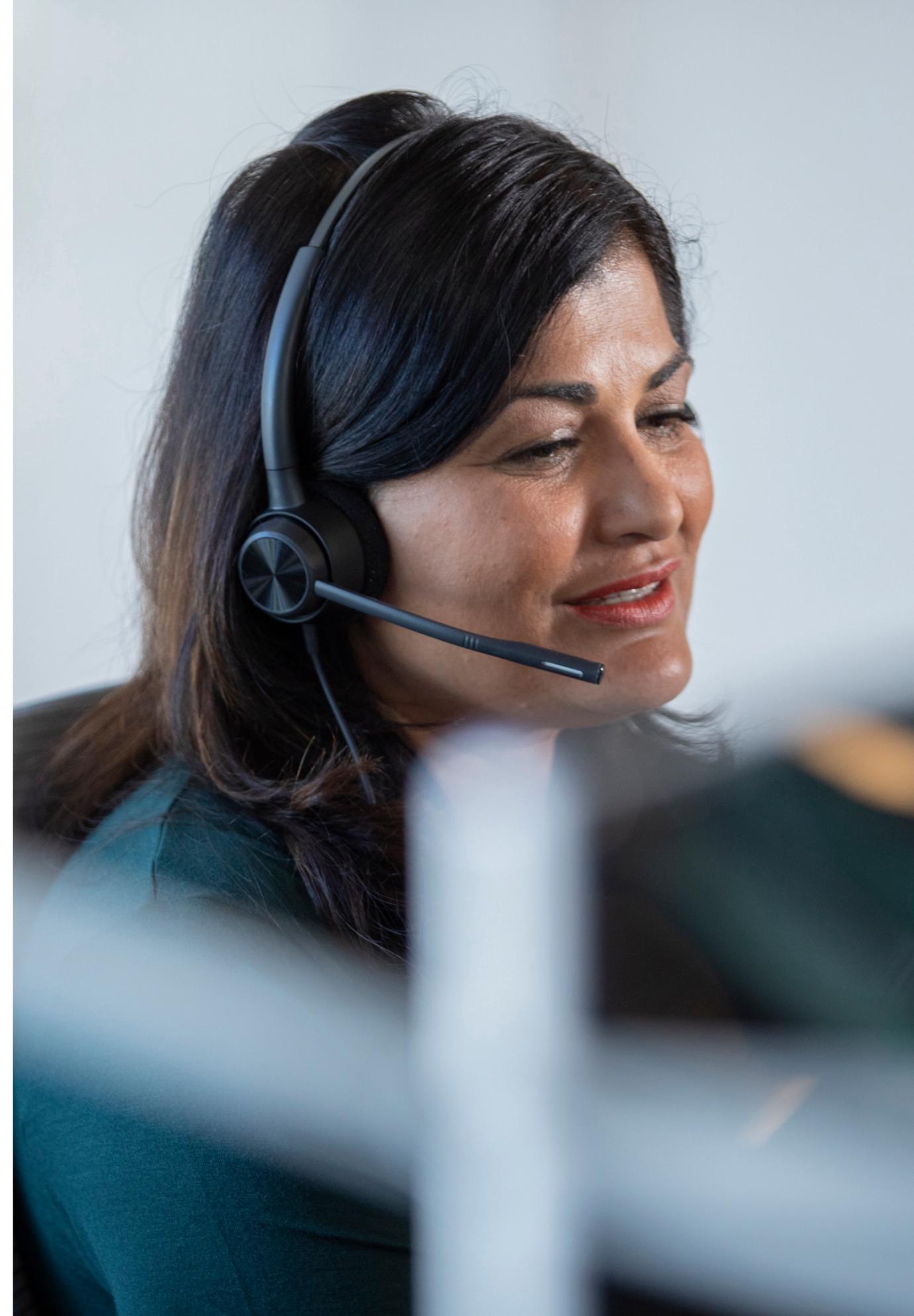
Why do service levels need to increase? Many customers are viewing this time as a proving ground for companies. They will remember which ones stood by them, by providing reassurance and reliable support, in spite of the sudden changes to nearly every business model. This, in turn, inspires increased loyalty to those companies.

Therefore, as the front line for customer interactions, the call center is more important than ever before. Welcome to “business as unusual.”

## IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE AMIDST NEW CHALLENGES

Let’s look at a plan for delivering great service – the type of service that people will remember and come back to again and again. In order to achieve this, we need to address these three key challenges:

- **Make a real connection.** If you’ve newly invested in automated digital systems, and customer satisfaction rates are low, you need to find other ways to improve your Net Promoter Score® (NPS)/customer satisfaction. How do your CSRs create meaningful connections in a digital channel?
- **Maximize your move to cloud.** The move to cloud and working-from-home (WFH) happened very quickly. How do you ensure your distributed team is equipped to deliver great service?
- **Empower your CSRs.** The virus proved that remote working is viable, so your best employees could work for any organization. How do you reward/incentivize them to stay?



# CHALLENGE #1

## MAKING A REAL CONNECTION WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS

Do you track your customer satisfaction by channel? From regular surveys, customers have reported that digital channels do not score high in terms of customer satisfaction – particularly for complex interactions. Only 21% rate the digital experience of large multinational organizations as excellent<sup>1</sup>. As more interactions are pushed to digital to relieve the capacity strain on call centers, your overall NPS and other satisfaction measures will drop.

If you attempt to direct most of your interactions to digital channels in a short timeframe, it is likely that your customers who are new to digital channels, and are less knowledgeable about how to use them, will have a poor experience and lead to increased escalations. So, if you're serious about moving demand to digital channels and still achieving high levels of customer satisfaction, proactively reach out to your customers to guide them through the process.

Voice is the best channel for complex interactions, and right now almost every customer interaction is complex. Business cycles you have known and planned for are all being rewritten. Every payday, loan payment day, bill day, and car lease day will drive additional demand into your call center. Customers want to talk to you more than ever before.

With this rapid growth in voice interactions, it's more critical than ever that CSRs be heard clearly – no matter where they are located. In these uncertain times, consumers need to have a level of trust in the organization, and in the individual employee they are speaking with. An unclear call can easily lead to mistakes due to misunderstandings, longer calls, and a general lack of satisfaction from all participants. You can also lose trust if there are audio problems or background noise because your CSRs are using rogue or unapproved audio devices (or no headset at all).

Getting the audio right and ensuring calls are clear will produce more efficient calls, with fewer mistakes, and better overall customer satisfaction. Clear audio gives your CSRs the best chance of making a real connection with your customers.

Another key learning from the response to COVID-19 is many traditional face-to-face customer interactions can effectively be replaced with audio calls. Ensure the success of these additional opportunities by adding secure video to maintain the same quality relationships with customers that have been built up through face-to-face contact. Make sure to partner with a manufacturer with extensive experience providing a virtual experience that replicates or improves in-person interactions.



**Tip:** You may see digital channels as the way to address unpredictable levels of support calls, and reduced staff availability due to COVID, but in reality, voice will be reinforced as the critical channel to communicate with customers, with the highest Net Promoter Score of 91%

*Source: Zendesk, Customer Satisfaction 2019*



## CHALLENGE #2

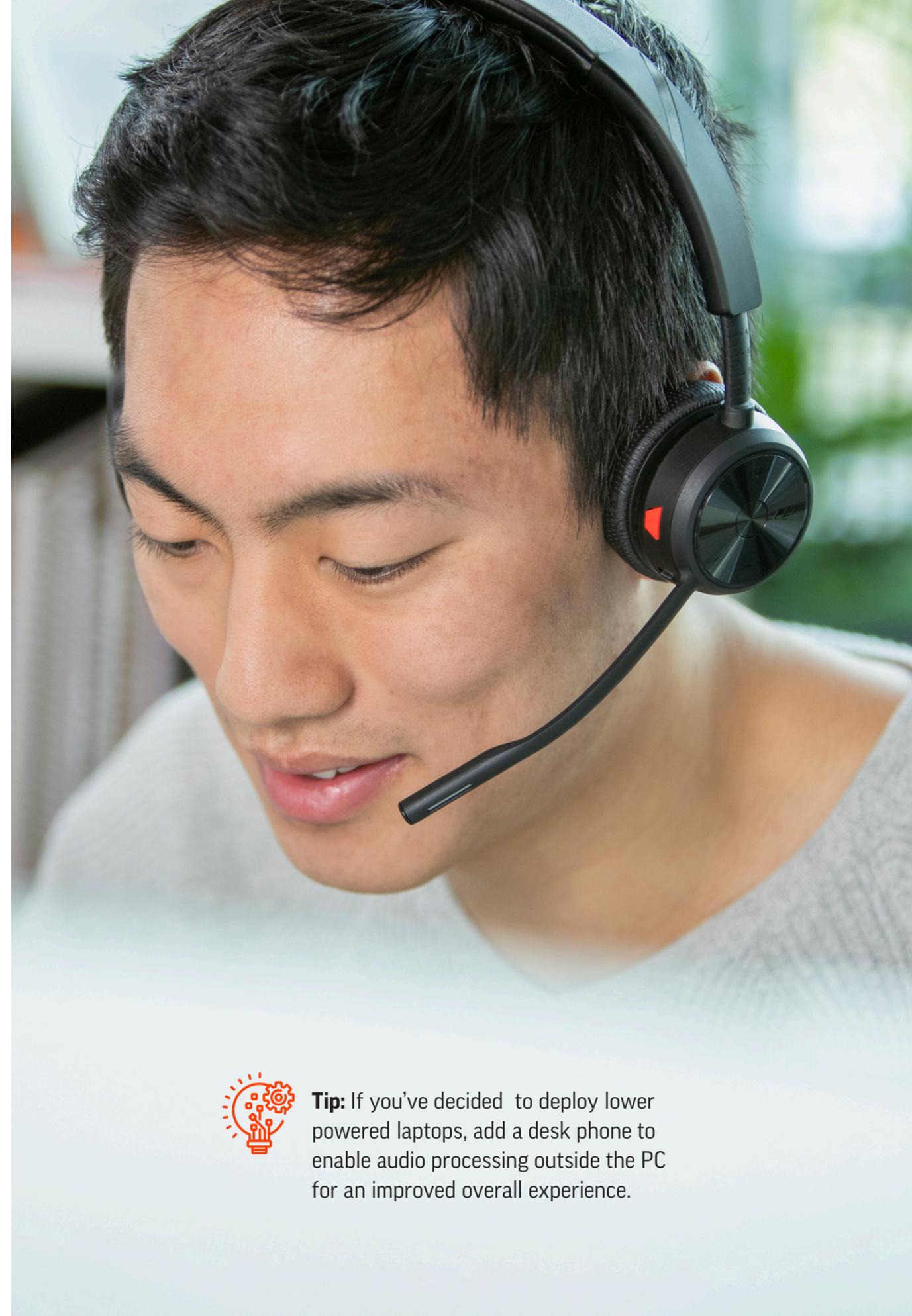
### MAXIMIZE YOUR MOVE TO CLOUD WITH THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT AND TOOLS FOR A HYBRID ENVIRONMENT

With the rapid shift to WFH, you've most likely moved some or all of your interactions to a cloud system to enable your teams to work remotely. With Internet access, a computer, and a professional headset, remote workers are able to function the same as if they were in the office. Most headsets sold today connect through USB ports and are visible to cloud management systems. This means you can audit them. In addition, these headsets can be updated remotely to make sure they are keeping pace with frequent cloud platform updates. This ensures only the right headsets are used, and those headsets always work seamlessly with cloud systems.

As your employees begin returning to the office, it is likely that you will be using a hybrid model of in-office and remote working to maintain social distancing. This may mean using multiple call center platforms. It is important that the devices you choose seamlessly operate across all of these platforms.

Another thing to consider in a hybrid environment is troubleshooting employee problems. While most headset brands are reliable, some do develop faults. Ensure that whoever supports your warranty can deliver directly and quickly to a home address rather than relying on delivery to a distribution center, head office, or branch. This will enable your employees to be supporting customers again quickly and will reduce workload on your IT team.

In addition, look for a device partner that can offer services to make headset maintenance easier. Extended warranty, cleaning services, and replacement parts are examples that can help lower total cost of ownership.



**Tip:** If you've decided to deploy lower powered laptops, add a desk phone to enable audio processing outside the PC for an improved overall experience.

# CHALLENGE #3

## EMPOWER YOUR CSRs AND PREVENT EMPLOYEE ATTRITION

We've just completed the world's largest experiment in working-from-home, and it works. Unfortunately, there is also a potential downside in terms of employee attrition. If WFH worked for everyone, why would employees be limited to jobs only within their town or local area? If you aren't looking after employees or creating a rewarding environment for them, they may be more likely able to leave for jobs elsewhere. Employees in call centers are generally younger and more sociable. You are at risk of losing them if they don't feel a sense of belonging and team camaraderie.

Another challenge is the increasing complexity of customer interactions, which means that teams need to work together to find a resolution quickly and efficiently. This knowledge sharing is also critical to retaining valuable team members and bringing new team members on board quickly. The challenge is how to do this remotely.

The core component of bringing your team together should be video. Personal USB cameras provide a quick and easy way to add video to your team meetings, and they help teams maintain a social connection at a physical distance. Instant messaging or chat solutions can also help teams stay connected and share knowledge.

Another element of retaining employees is to review your working-from-home policy. You've trusted your employees to work from home during this pandemic, why not continue to trust them if they want to continue working remotely? Make sure your WFH policy is aligned with your business objectives and employee preferences rather than used as a reward. For employees who remain at home, identify those who need technical assistance and make sure it is available by proactively engaging with them.

In uncertain times, and with significant new complexity, customers may be emotional and frustrated when they call in. This can result in raised voices or other ways of venting frustration, and these have been documented to have a detrimental effect on employee health. Ensure the headsets you choose feature advanced acoustic shock protection to minimize any heightened sound levels.

It's a simple gesture, but for employees who have spent their career using corded headsets, equipping them with a wireless headset can make a big difference to their morale and engagement.



# CONCLUSION

In normal times, customers remember good service. In today's uncertain times, it is even more important to create great experiences that drive customer loyalty and retention. What we used to call normal won't be coming back for some time, so we need to prepare for business as unusual. Reinvent your call center to deliver better service to customers and gain greater loyalty. Make real connections with your customers and replace what would have been face-to-face interactions with high quality voice and video calls. Make the most of your move to cloud to deliver better, more responsive service. Empower your employees to make them feel trusted and taken care of.

Poly is here to support you. Our award-winning headsets and video solutions are purpose-built for human connections, so you can power exceptional service no matter where your employees are.

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British Telecommunications (BT). "The Autonomous Customer 2020 - Still phoning, still emailing...but ready for AI", 2019, Page 4. <http://www.globalservices.bt.com>