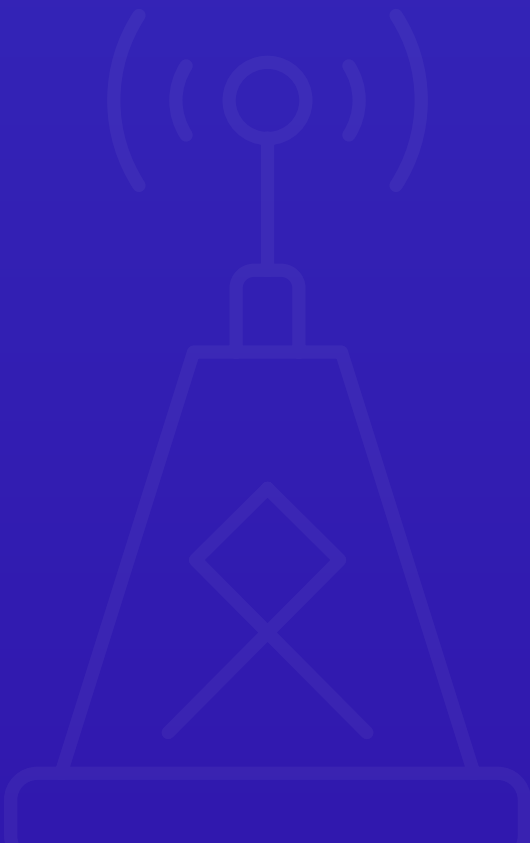




CUSTOMER SERVICE BENCHMARK REPORT

Telecommunications

SEPTEMBER 2020



^netomi

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Key Findings	4
Methodology	5
Customer Service Benchmark Report Results	6
Email Support Availability	7
Email Support Responsiveness	8
Support Performance Index (SPI)	10
Response Time	11
Answer Quality	12
Personalization	13
CSAT Surveys	14
Empathetic Responses	15
Geographic Analysis	16
Company Size Analysis	18
Email Address Analysis	22
Agent Desk Analysis	23
Spotlight on companies that went above and beyond	24
Conclusion	26

Executive Summary

The Customer Service Benchmark Report uncovers how the world's largest telecommunications companies provide customer support on the leading support channel: **email**.

While phone support is the dominant channel for telecom companies, the industry's wait times are the longest¹. Customers are getting increasingly frustrated if they are kept on hold for a simple question. Email provides a great alternative to phone support and offers the convenience of not having to actively wait on hold to speak to a live agent. In our study, we've analyzed the availability of email support, responsiveness, personalization, quality of the response and empathy to gauge how well the global telecom industry is delivering customer service.

For telecom companies, providing a positive customer experience is more important now than ever before as it is tied directly to customer retention. Consumers typically don't have an emotional connection to telecom companies. They are universally regarded as the same with little differentiation in service, quality or price.

Customer service is a fruitful area in which to differentiate. Modern customers expect quick, effortless resolutions on their channel of choice. **Email remains the preferred digital channel for support**. According to Forrester Research, "54% of customers used email for customer service last year, making it the most used digital channel for customer service."²

Our study revealed that telecom operators have a long way to go with providing email support. **Only 53% of companies had an easily accessible email address** and of these companies, **65% completely ignored customer emails**. That's right. Customers reaching out with a very straightforward request for plan options never received even a simple acknowledgment of their request.

We found that there is a delicate balance between responding quickly and providing a meaningful response, however. We found that fast response times often sacrifice answer quality - leaving out relevant information that the customer seeks. This often leads customers to reach out again on email or another channel in order to get a full resolution.

To measure the overall performance and effectiveness of a company's email support, we created the **Support Performance Index (SPI)** which provides a 360-degree analysis of a response measuring personalization, answer quality, empathy and responsiveness. On a scale of 1-100, **60% of companies who responded to an email came up short**, scoring in the 25-50 range. This indicates that telecom support teams have a lot of work to do to meet customers' quick-rising expectations for customer support and reap the benefits of long-term retention and revenue.

Key Findings

- 1 Only **53%** of telecom companies provide an easily accessible email address.
- 2 **65%** of telecom companies did not respond to a simple question about their plan options.
- 3 The average score for the **Support Performance Index (SPI)**, which measures personalization, empathy, answer quality and responsiveness, is **49.1**, with 60% scoring within the 25-50 point range out of 100 total points.
- 4 Out of companies that replied to emails, **46%** responded in less than 6 hours. However, when it comes to answer quality, the companies that respond in 6-12 hours are 2X more likely to provide a more meaningful and complete response.
- 5 Even when telecommunications respond, **55%** provide a poor quality response as compared to only **19%** that provided exceptional responses and achieved an Answer Quality Index of 100, the perfect score.
- 6 Almost **45%** of telecom companies fully personalized their response to customer emails.
- 7 Out of the telecom companies that responded to an email, **94%** did not send surveys to gauge customer satisfaction (CSAT).
- 8 Only **4%** of the telecom companies in our study showed empathy by acknowledging the customer's personal struggle around COVID-19.
- 9 Telecom companies in the Asia-Pacific region outperformed the companies in other regions with an average SPI of **58.9**. North American companies came in second, but were 10 points behind APAC.
- 10 Telecom companies that used Zendesk were **1.3X** faster than average to respond.

Methodology

We used Apollo.io's database to identify the top global telecommunications companies ranked by employee size. The platform allowed us to use social media and SEO filters to exclude telecommunications equipment companies so we could only focus on the top 1,000 global telecom service providers.

We manually checked social media accounts and corporate websites of these companies to find support-related or corporate email addresses. **Of the 1,000 companies, we were able to find 527 email addresses.**

We sent an email to each company in the native language of their home country (49 languages in total) as a consumer looking to switch telecom providers. This was a generic request for information that does not require a person to have an existing account. The following email was sent at 9 AM PT on a Tuesday:

I want to switch providers - What are your best pricing options?



[Redacted Name]

to Customerservice ▾

Hi,

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has made life very difficult. We are currently using a different telecom service and are looking to opt out of the contract.

I'm exploring other options and am interested in switching over to a new provider within the next month.

I think your brand might be a good fit for me. Can you tell me about your most affordable and flexible options?

Thank you.

Netomi's research team created two proprietary indexes to measure the quality of customer support: the **Support Performance Index (SPI)** and **Answer Quality Index (AQI)**. **SPI is a 100 point scale** measured by **personalization (10 points), empathy (10 points), answer quality (30 points)** and **resolution time (50 points)**. Up to 20 bonus points are earned if a company sends a CSAT survey, the agent follows up with the customer after the initial response and if additional, relevant information is provided. AQI measures the usefulness of the response. In this use case, we looked if the response included information on pricing and plan options.

We received 147 responses from the 527 total emails sent. We analyzed email replies for many dimensions that define a good customer service experience, including: personalization, empathy, relevance and response time.

We sent a second email to U.S. based telecom companies on the weekend to see if there are gaps in weekend support in terms of responsiveness. The email was sent on a Saturday at 9 am PT to the 164 telecoms located within the U.S.

1

Email addresses are unavailable

Only 53% of telecom companies provide an easily accessible email address.

When customers have a question, they often can't find a support-related or corporate email address for over half of global telecom companies. While some companies have deprioritized email over the past few years as live chat and messaging platforms have gained prominence, email remains the preferred channel of choice for customers. Our study shows, though, that customer preferences for email support are often being ignored.

53%



Telecom companies with a readily available email address



2

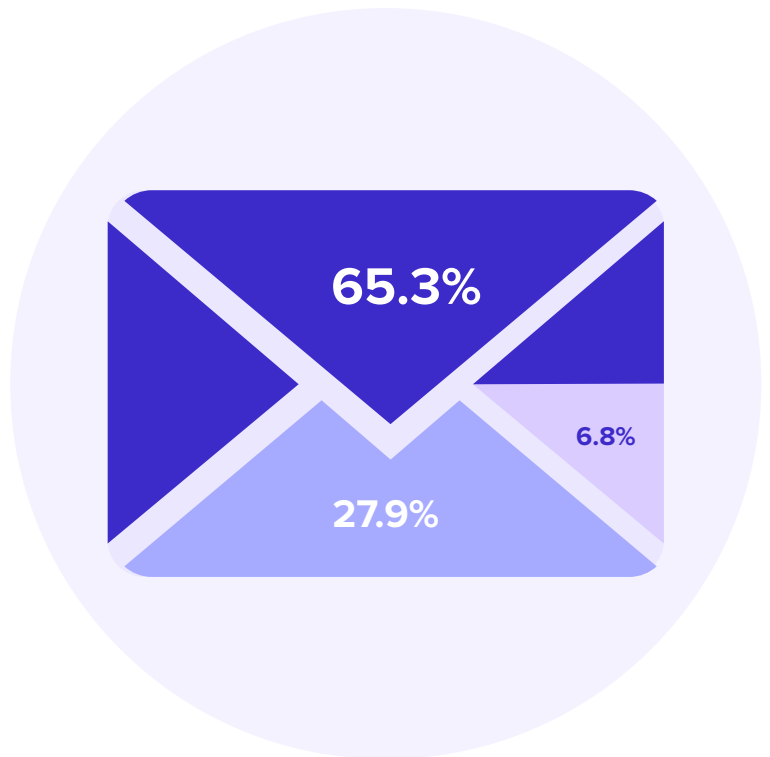
65% of customer service emails are completely ignored

At a time when customer expectations for convenient support are higher than ever, we were surprised that only **28%** of telecom companies respond to a straightforward question from a potential new customer.

Perhaps even more surprising, **7%** of the companies sent an auto-response only, but never addressed the customer's question within the reply, sent links to help articles or ever followed up to resolve the issue. The auto-responders, by and large, did not provide necessary information. Of the companies that send an auto-response, **66%** do not indicate a time frame for ticket resolution and left customers with little confidence that a resolution would be followed up on.

Do Telecom Companies Respond to Customer Emails?

- Resolved ●
- Ignored ●
- Auto-reply only ●



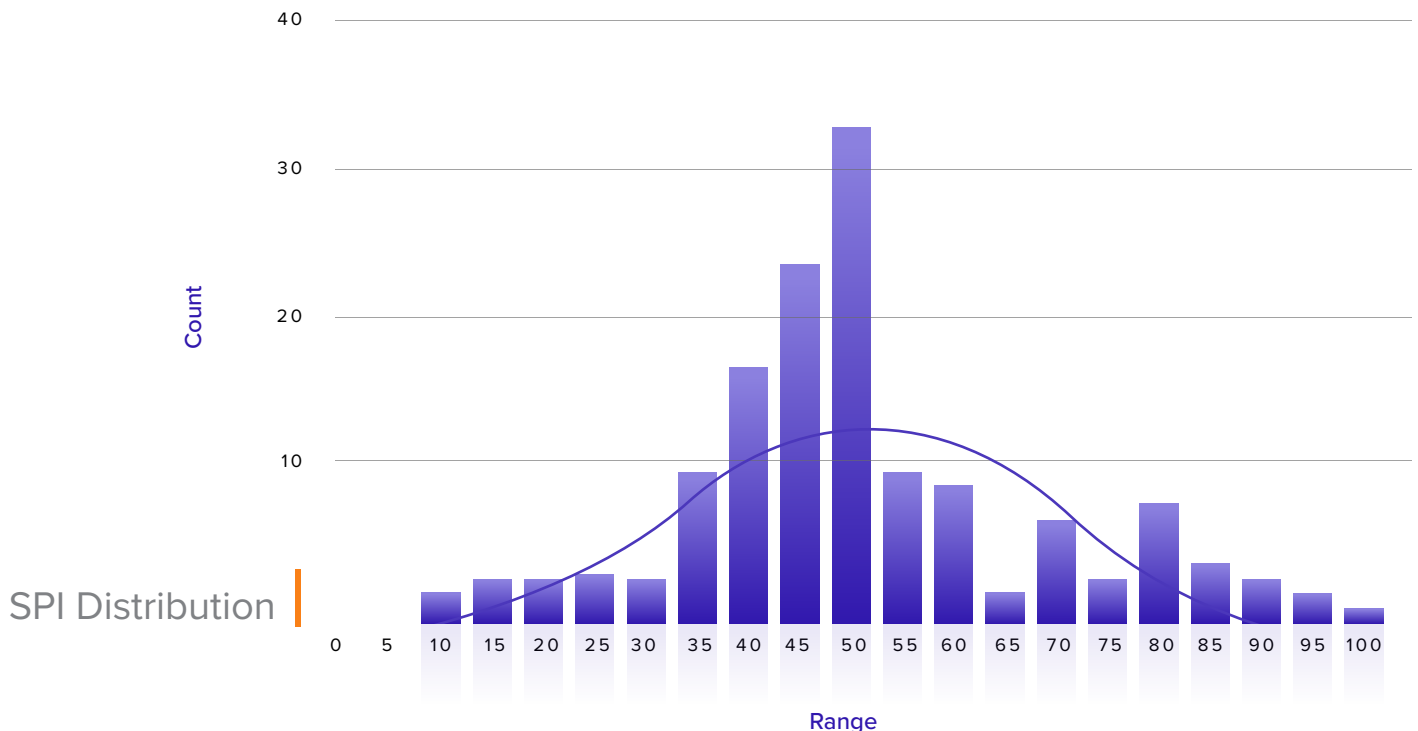
3

Telecom companies run the gamut on the Support Performance Index (SPI)

Responding to an email is just the first step. We looked holistically at the response, analyzing things that matter most to customers when they reach out to a company.

Our **Support Performance Index (SPI)** is a 100-point scale that measures key aspects of a response: personalization, responsiveness, completeness of an answer and empathy. We assigned up to 20 bonus points to the companies that went above and beyond to provide additional, relevant information, followed up with a Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) survey and if an agent personally followed up. This 360-degree analysis gives us the opportunity to understand the overall performance of how telecoms treat their customers and how much they prioritize support.

Approximately **60%** of companies scored in the **25-50** point range for SPI, and the average SPI ranking is **49.1**. **Republic Wireless** (US) is the top performing company, scoring 99.8, followed by **Indosat Ooredoo** (91.9; Indonesia), **TIME dotCOM Berhad** (90.7, Malaysia), Nex-Tech (89.9, US), Latvijas Mobilais Telefons SIA (86.6, Latvia), amaysim (85.5, Australia), iPrimus (84.7, Australia), Robi Axiata Limited (82.3, Bangladesh), Airtel-Vodafone (82.0, India), and Azercell Corporate (80.1, Azerbaijan).



Support Performance Index Leaderboard



Company	Country	↓ SPI
	 United States	99.8
	 Indonesia	91.9
	 Malaysia	90.7
	 United States	89.9
	 Latvia	86.6
	 Australia	85.8
	 Australia	84.7
	 Bangladesh	82.3
	 India	82.0
	 Azerbaijan	80.1
	 Indonesia	79.5

Company	Country	↓ SPI
	 United States	79.4
	 United States	79.0
	 Chile	78.1
	 Mongolia	77.8
	 Hong Kong	77.1
	 Norway	75.9
	 Slovakia	75.7
	 United Arab Emirates	74.9
	 United States	73.6
	 Australia	73.5
	 United States	69.9

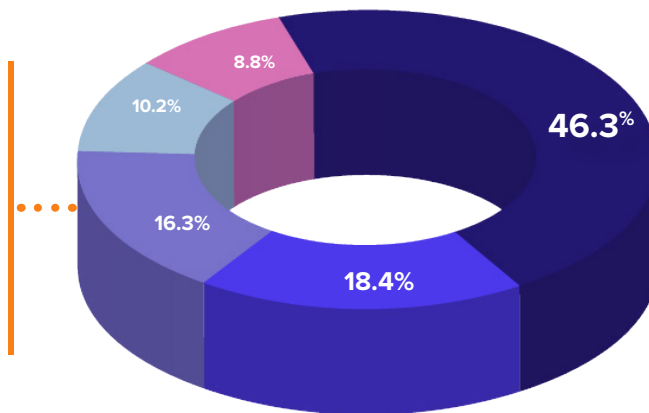
4

Telecoms that prioritize email support often reply in a timely manner

If a customer reaches out to one of the top 1,000 telecoms via email for a customer support issue, only **21%** will get a response within one day. **Three in four** companies that prioritize email as a support channel, however, respond within the first day: **46% respond within 6 hours** and **57% respond within 12 hours**. The fact that close to 50% of companies respond in less than six hours is admirable as getting an issue resolved quickly is the top priority for customers. It's important, however, that the response is meaningful and thorough.

Response Time Distribution

- 0-6 hours ●
- 6-12 hours ●
- 12-24 hours ●
- 24-48 hours ●
- 48+ hours ●



Fastest Responders



Company	Country	Response Time (mins)
GO WIRELESS	United States	4
beanfield METROCONNECT	Canada	5
nobelbiz	United States	7
SKYNET WIRELESS	Canada	9
THURAYA	United Arab Emirates	10

5

Quick or accurate? Customers often don't get both.

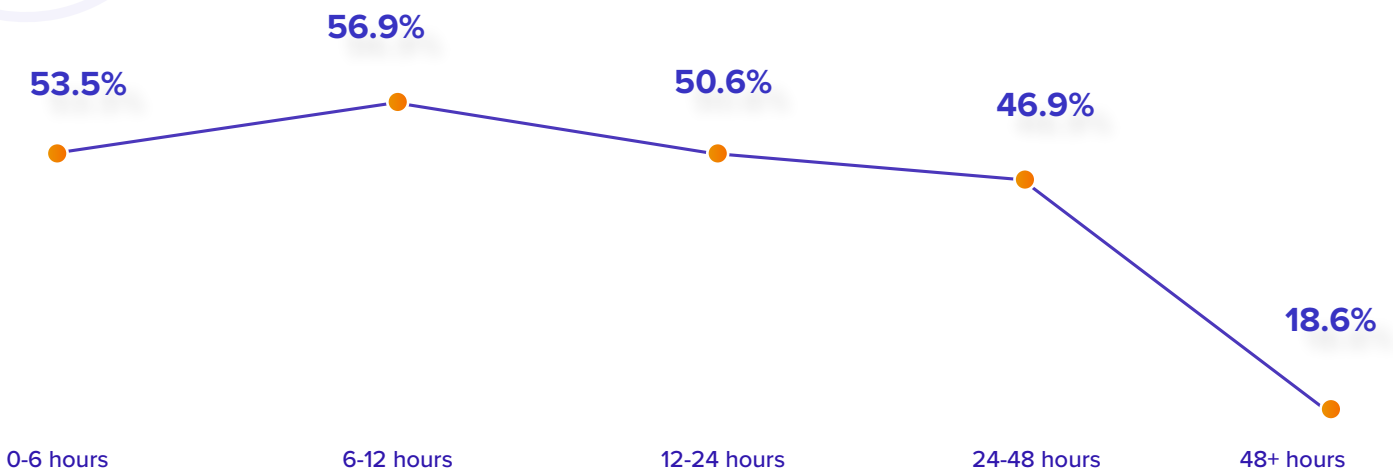
If a telecom company provides a quick response, in many cases, the quality of the response is sacrificed

We compared how the companies that responded in less than 6 hours performed in the **Answer Quality Index (AQI)** with those that responded within 6-12 hours. We found that telecoms that respond within 6-12 hours almost doubled the fastest responders when it comes to the quality of the answer and achieved the highest ranking, on average, in the **Support Performance Index**.

It shouldn't be surprising that the companies that were the slowest responders (48+ hours) performed poorly across the board. These slow responders scored 2X lower than average on the AQI, with an average score of 18, which led to a decrease in overall SPI performance.



SPI by Response Time



6

On the weekend, response rates slow down significantly

Customer issues are not exclusive to office hours. We analyzed differences in support availability based on which day of the week a person emailed a company.

U.S. telecom companies are **3.7X more likely to respond** during the week as compared to the weekend. Customers are waiting **2.4X longer** on the weekend, with an average weekend response time of **27 hours**, compared to just **11 hours during the week**.

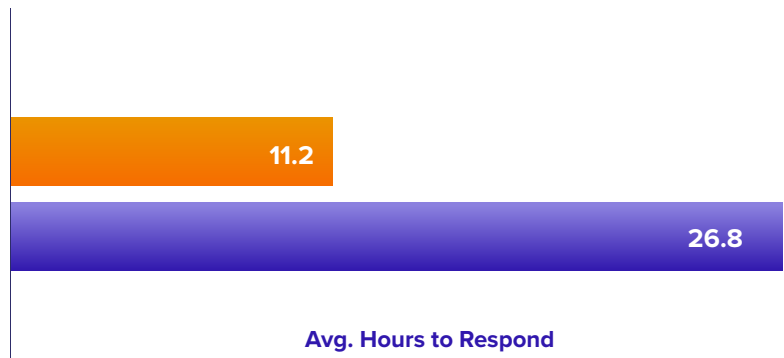
With customers expecting support on their terms, when it's convenient for them, telecom companies need to ensure around-the-clock coverage.

5.5X

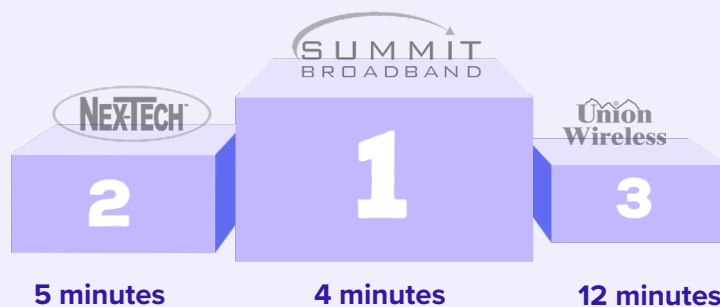
Companies are 5.5X more likely to respond within 6 hours on weekdays.

Response Times (in hrs)

- Weekday ●
- Weekend ●



Fastest Weekend Responders



7

Quality responses are not guaranteed

More than half of companies don't provide a meaningful and thorough response

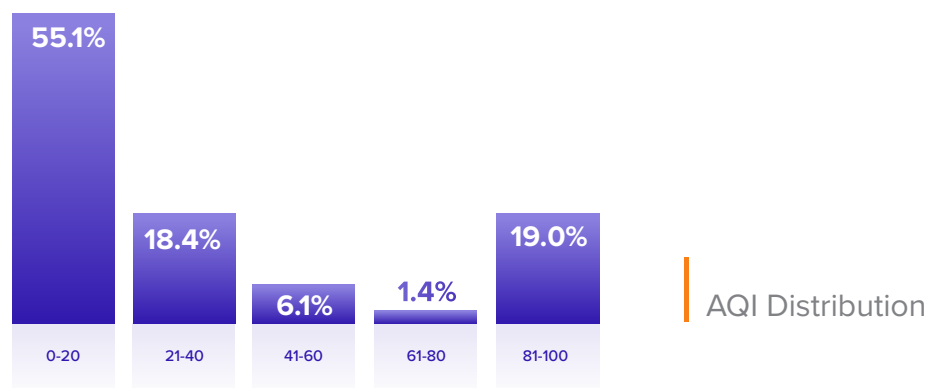
If a company responds to a customer, but doesn't offer relevant information to actually resolve their issue, the issue is not fully resolved. That's why we created the **Answer Quality Index (AQI)**, an analysis that dives into the quality of the response so we could get a true sense if customers received a full resolution, or if they would be required to follow up for more information.

In our study, we asked telecoms about options from switching from another carrier. In the response, we looked for information around Pricing and Plan Options. We took into account that some services differ based on a myriad of factors like the person's location, service preference or phone number. If a company replied asking for additional information, points were allocated. The 100 points of the AQI were earned based on:

- 1 **0-20 points:** companies failed to address our question or simply directed our query to another channel
- 2 **21-60 points:** companies asked one or more clarifying question to understand the customer's needs
- 3 **61-80 points:** companies responded with some relevant information, but did not answer the query fully
- 4 **81-100 points:** companies provided detailed information to provide a full resolution

To our delight, **nearly 1 in every 5 telecoms gave exceptional responses** and reached an Answer Quality Index between 81-100 points. That being said, the majority of telecoms (55%) scored below 20, with an average score of 33.

This underscores that telecom companies need to go beyond simply responding to emails. If the reply does not offer all of the information needed, customer effort will increase as they have to reach back out or seek help on another channel.



8

Personalization is a bright spot for telecoms

Many studies point to the value that customers place on personalization in customer service.

Addressing a customer by their first name and having agents personally sign off an email are the most basic ways to personalize a response. These small steps, however, provide a much more authentic user experience as compared to a generic response.

In our study, almost **45%** of companies fully personalized their response to customer emails. On the flip side, nearly **1 in 3** companies offered no form of personalization in their response. Because we defined personalization as the bare minimum, we expected this to be much higher.



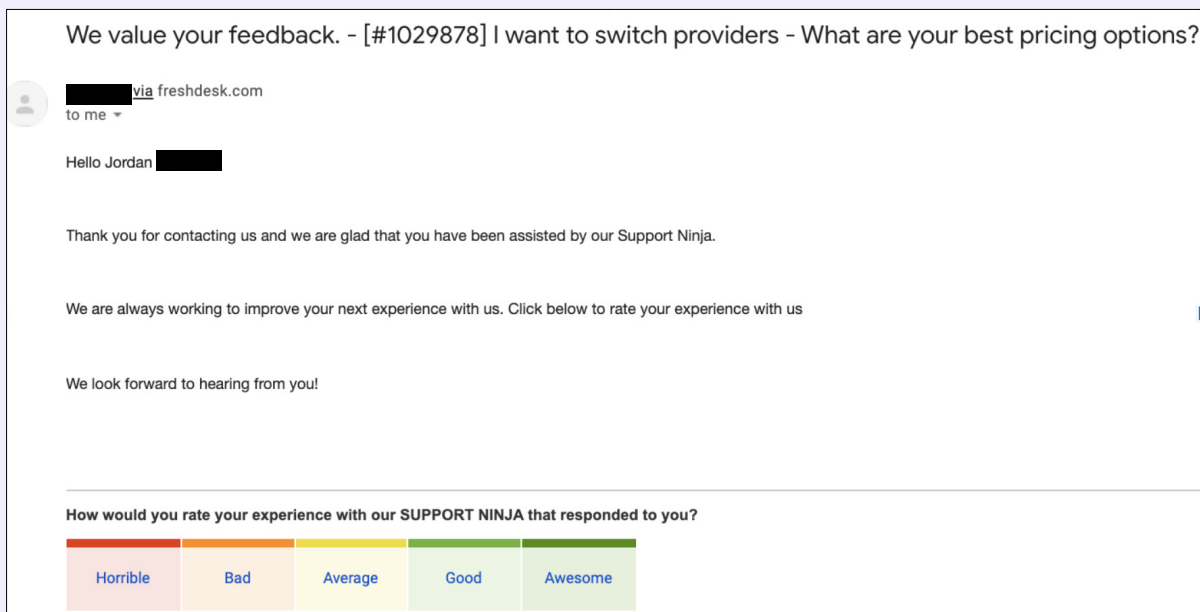
Telecom companies use of personalization in customer support email responses

9

CSAT surveys are extremely rare

In customer service, sending out a customer satisfaction (CSAT) survey following an interaction is one of the only ways to understand if a customer received the information that they needed and if their expectations were met. CSAT surveys can be easily automated through most agent desk software. CSAT surveys require very little effort from a company, but can reveal incredible insights.

In our study, we found that **94%** of telecoms don't follow up with customers to gauge customer satisfaction. Only 6% of the top 1,000 telecom companies in the world have insights into whether support they provide is measuring up to consumer expectations. With this knowledge, this small fraction of telecom companies can identify what led to poor user experiences and update policies or agent training. The remaining 94% of companies are essentially operating in the dark.



6.1%

Do Telecom Companies Send CSAT Surveys?

- Yes ●
- No ●

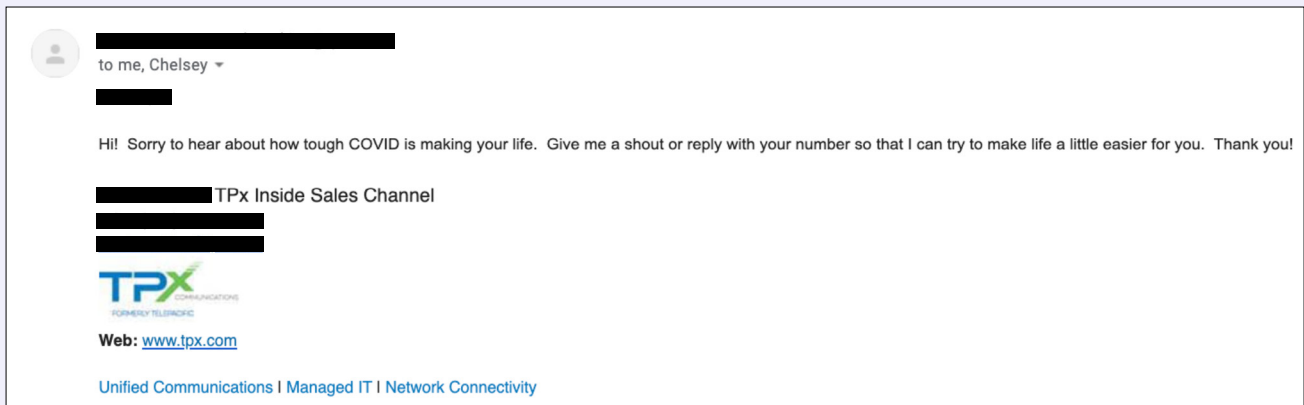


10

Telecom companies often lack empathy

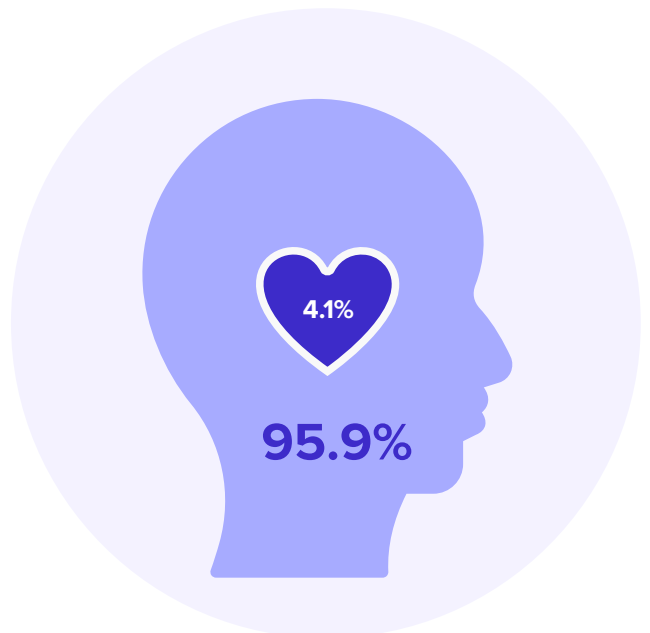
We conducted our study during the height of COVID-19, a time when nearly every country had been impacted in some way by COVID-19. In the email to telecom customer support teams, the customer mentioned that due to the current pandemic, she was unusually stressed and needed to find another telecom provider.

Empathy can make the customer feel heard and appreciated. We were disappointed that only **4%** of companies showed empathy by acknowledging the customer’s personal struggle around COVID-19. That’s right: **96%** of agents failed to offer one word of support, acknowledgment or understanding.



Do Telecom Companies Acknowledge a Customer’s Personal Struggle?

- Yes ●
- No ●



It should come as no surprise that the companies that showed empathy performed 21% higher on the **Support Performance Index (SPI)**. This showcases that these companies have put in the right processes, and agent training and empowerment to provide exceptional customer support.

Support Performance Index

- Empathetic Companies ●
- Unempathetic Companies ●



Most Empathetic Companies



Company	Country
	 Malaysia
	 Mexico
	 United Kingdom
	 United States
	 Kenya
	 Ireland

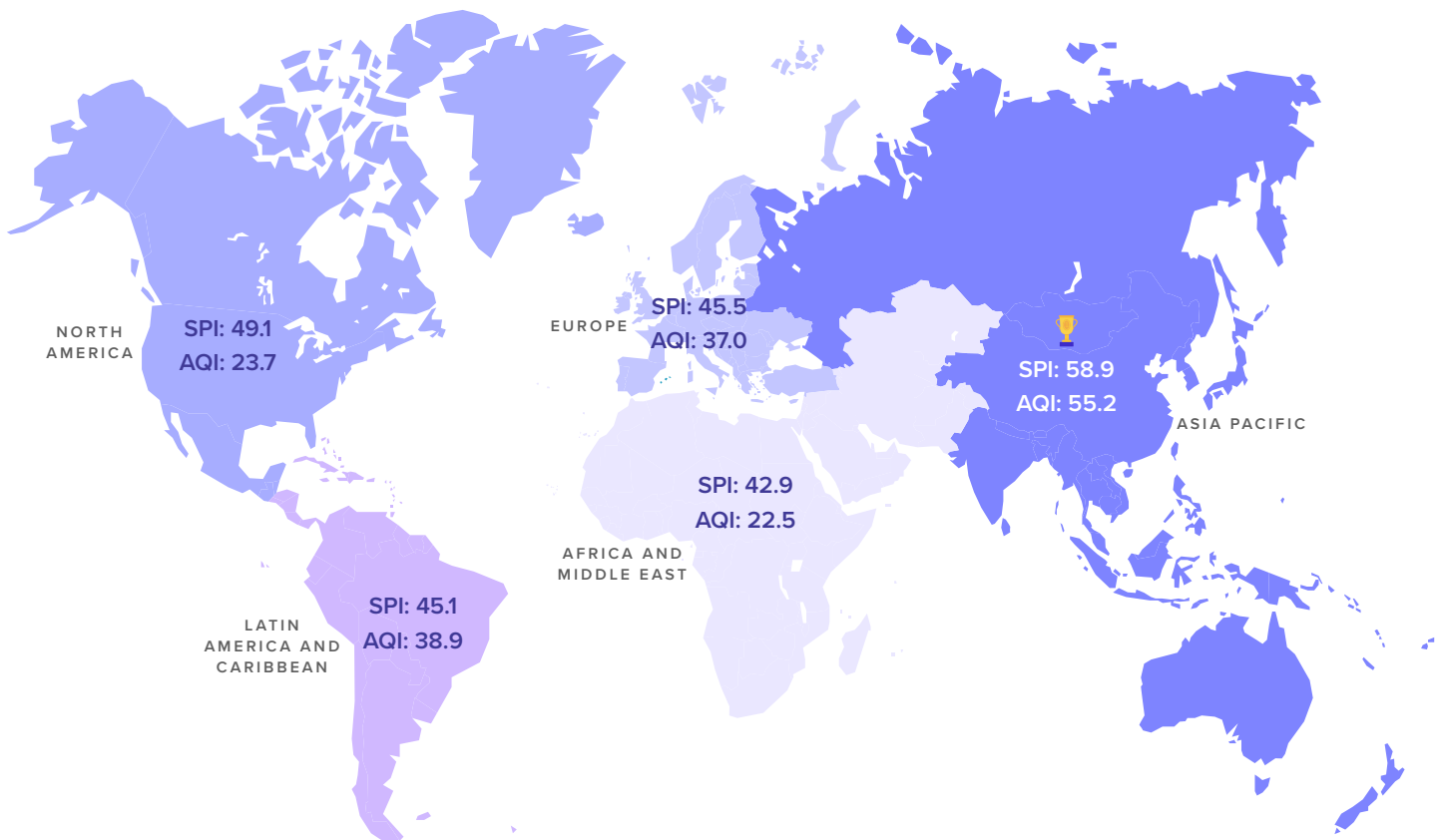


11

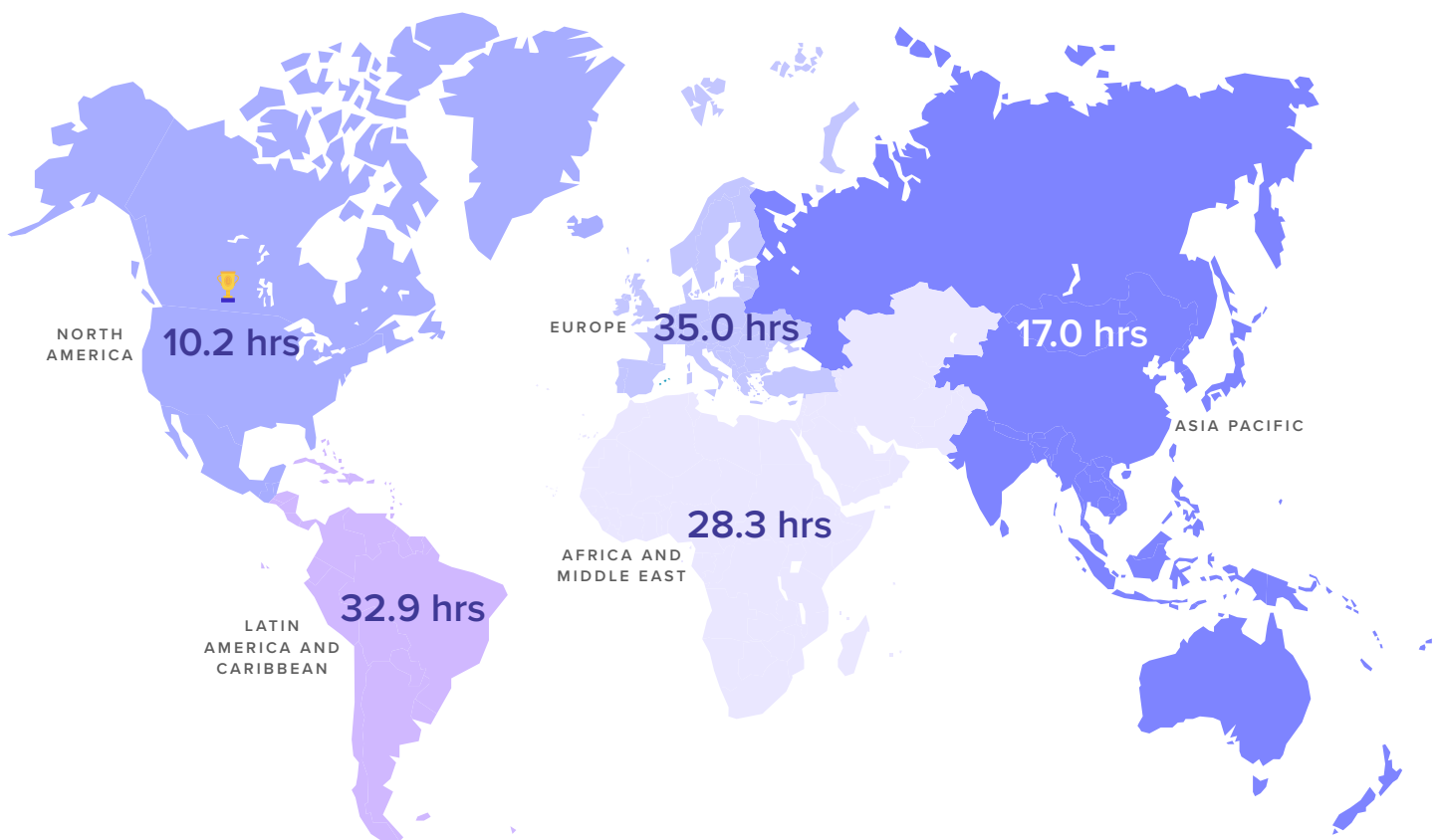
APAC provides the highest quality resolutions while North America is the fastest

We looked at the top 1,000 telecom companies around the world and analyzed if customer support in some regions were superior to others. It turns out, the quality of support and responsiveness differs greatly by region.







Telecom companies in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region outperformed companies in other regions with an average **Support Performance Index (SPI)** of **58.9** (out of 100). North American companies trailed APAC by 10 points, on average. Interestingly, despite having the highest response rate (34%), telecom companies in the Middle East & Africa scored 42.9, the lowest average SPI.



North American telecom companies responded, on average, in **10 hours** and achieved the fastest response time across all regions. APAC companies came in second, responding in **17 hours**. Customers in Europe are kept waiting the longest, lagging behind all the regions with an average response time of **35 hours**. Being fast, however, does not always mean the best quality email was provided. Despite being the fastest responders, North American companies had the second lowest Answer Quality Index, scoring only a single point higher than the worst performers in Middle East & Africa.



The best telecom customer support comes out of Indonesia in terms of Support Performance Index (SPI), Answer Quality Index (AQI) and response time. Malaysia was the second quickest to respond in **10 hours**, followed by Canada (16 hours) and the United States (21 hours).

Country	↓ SPI	Response Time (hrs)
  <p>INDONESIA</p>	80.4	2.7
 <p>MALAYSIA</p>	64.0	18.6
 <p>AUSTRALIA</p>	60.6	34.6
 <p>UNITED STATES</p>	49.9	11.2
 <p>CANADA</p>	44.6	8.8

Based on the country analysis, it's not surprising that support offered in Indonesian scored the highest. What's interesting is that Spanish, Greek and French support scored higher than English, even though native English-speaking countries were more prominent on the top performers in the Country SPI analysis.

Halo!



INDONESIAN

SPI: 80.4

Response Time: 2.7

Hola!

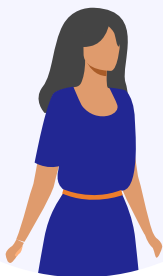


SPANISH

SPI: 55.5

Response Time: 10.4

Χαίρετε!



GREEK

SPI: 53.9

Response Time: 26.9

Bonjour!



FRENCH

SPI: 52.3

Response Time: 20.6

Hello!



ENGLISH

SPI: 49.5

Response Time: 16.1

*Response Times are in Hours

12

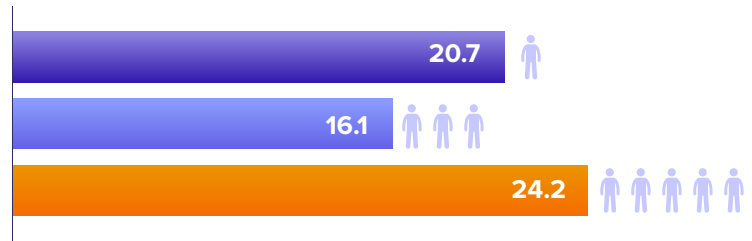
Company size has a surprising effect on customer support

The largest companies provided the worst support

The largest companies, with more than 500 employees, were the slowest to respond even though you could assume they have the most resources to devote to customer service. Mid-sized (100-500 employees) telecom companies were the fastest responders with an average of **16 hours**. Although small (<100 employees) companies were more than **1.25X** slower than mid-sized companies, they outperformed mid-sized companies by giving more thorough and meaningful answers, thus reaching a higher Answer Quality Index Score.

Response Times (in hrs)

- <100 employees ●
- 100-500 employees ●
- ≥500 employees ●



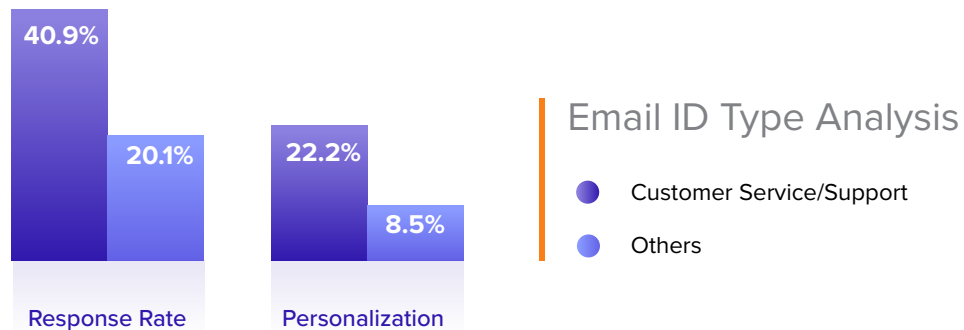
Company Size - Email Support Performance

- Support Performance Index
- Answer Quality Index

13

Support-specific email addresses are more likely to respond and personalize resolutions

Companies that use email as a primary channel for support often have an email address that is designated to customer service (e.g. support@company.com). Compared to the companies with generic email addresses (e.g. info@company.com, company@company.com), these companies were **2X** more likely to respond. Companies with support-specific emails also personalized responses **2.5X** more often.

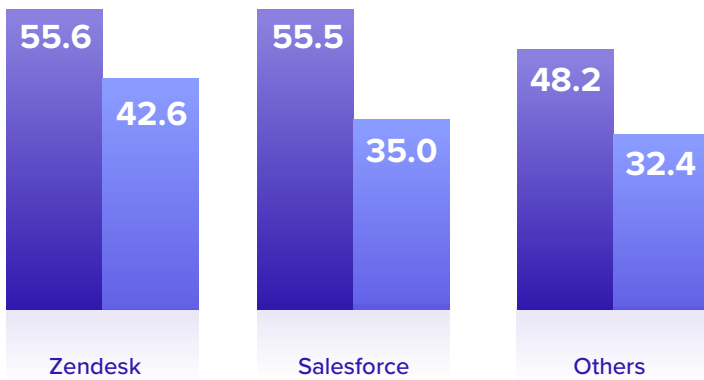


14

Companies provide better support if they use an agent desk platform

Support teams that prioritize customer service typically invest in a platform like Zendesk or Salesforce to help agents work smarter, give them the tools and information they need to personalize responses, and easily follow up on feedback. We found that telecoms that use Zendesk and Salesforce performed above average in both Support Performance Index and Answer Quality Score.

zendesk



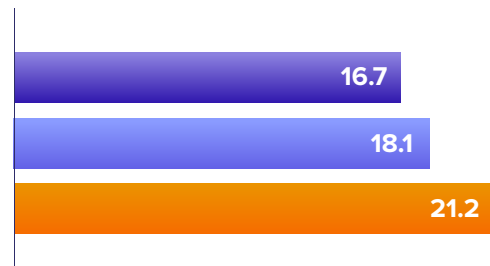
Agent Desk vs. Non-Agent Desk - Email Support Performance

- Support Performance Index
- Answer Quality Index

We also found that telecom companies that used Zendesk are 1.3X faster in their response time than average and Salesforce users are 1.2X faster than average.

Response Times (in hrs)

- Zendesk ●
- Salesforce ●
- Others ●



15

Companies That Go Above and Beyond

Some telecoms went above and beyond to provide an engaging, meaningful resolution to a person's response. Whether it's attaching a contract as an actionable next step, responding with humor, driving people to a physical local store or sending a relevant offer, these companies didn't just respond, they resolved.

Company	Country	Extra Information
 	 <p>United States</p>	Physical Store Locator, Assistance from Vehicle
	 <p>Mongolia</p>	Onboarding Options, Required Documents
	 <p>United States</p>	Humor
	 <p>Latvia</p>	Family Offer
	 <p>Australia</p>	Customized Plans
	 <p>India</p>	Best Questions (Data Usage, Call Frequency)
	 <p>Ghana</p>	Attached Proposal



Conclusion

With the cost of switching to another telecom provider lower than ever, and more competition breaking into the market, it's important that global telecom providers prioritize the customer experience to reduce churn and drive long-term loyalty. A key aspect of great customer service is offering quick, effortless support on a person's channel of choice. With email remaining the preferred digital support channel, global telecoms need to reprioritize email support in order to meet customer expectations.

While some companies are responding quickly, they are not being thorough with their answers. As this study revealed, there is a delicate balance between speed and accuracy. Offering a complete resolution in the quickest amount of time needs to be the goal of all telecom support teams.

The tools, integrations and automation that are available in leading agent desk platforms like Zendesk, Salesforce, Freshworks, Gladly and others can be instrumental in increasing customer satisfaction. Leveraging AI-powered virtual agents to automatically resolve repeatable email tickets like plan options, pricing, top-up, upgrades, plan modifications, billing questions and troubleshooting is a great way to close the gaps in support performance. Sophisticated AI platforms can be trained easily leveraging historical data to accurately resolve over 70% of emails without human intervention. This allows human agents to focus on more complex tickets, reducing resolution time across the board.

The demand for effortless, convenient experiences is only increasing. Looking forward, the telecoms that focus on driving customer happiness on email will be the ones to turn customer service into a competitive differentiator.



About Netomi

Netomi is an AI platform for customer service that allows businesses to activate, manage, and train AI to automatically resolve tickets, enhance agent productivity and provide a world-class customer experience. It's a channel-agnostic platform that multiplies a company's workforce by giving valuable time back to support agents, and delights their customers with faster resolutions. Backed by Index Ventures and Y Combinator, Netomi has offices in Silicon Valley, New York and India.

Let's improve your email customer experience and delight your customers.

Get in touch at info@netomi.com

You're in good company...



References:

1. CNBC: <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/consumer/stuck-hold-top-10-worst-offenders-include-apple-amazon-airlines-n695771>
2. Forrester: <https://mistatic.blob.core.windows.net/document-library/boichat/pdf/en/forrester-2018-customer-service-trends.pdf>

