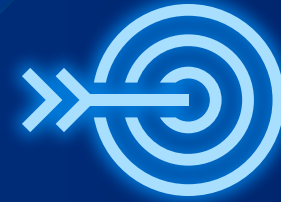
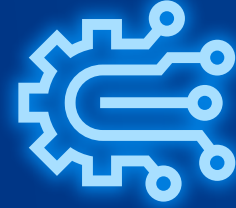


Gartner for Customer Service & Support

State of the Customer

Align GenAI investments with evolving customer behaviors.



The GenAI investment disconnect

Service and support leaders invested a median of 12% of their 2025 functional budgets in AI, the highest allocation across the 10 business functions assessed.

Yet only 24% report positive financial returns from the AI use cases in which they have invested.

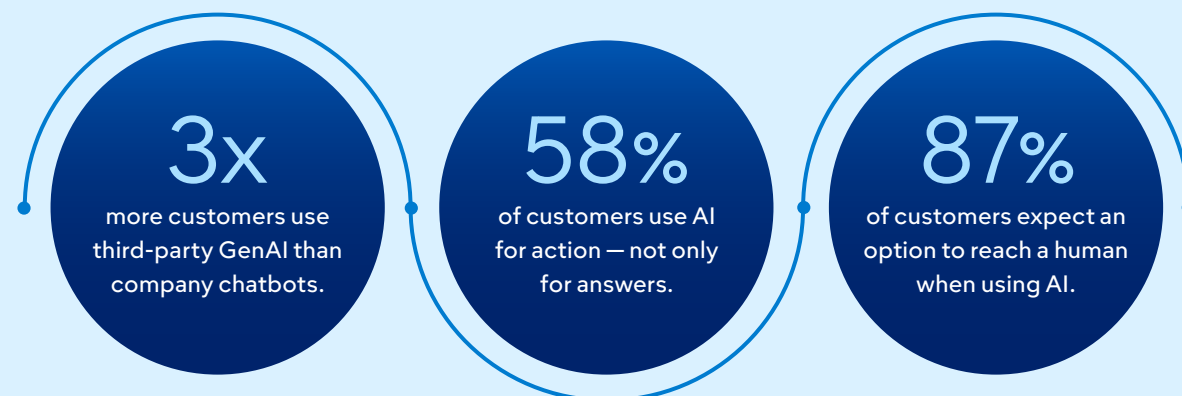
The challenge is not simply the capability of the technology. Customer-facing GenAI underperforms when investments are disconnected from how customers prefer to seek information, complete tasks and interact.

Customer behavior is the missing variable

Customers are revealing their preferences and expectations when using AI in service, and you ignore those preferences/expectations at your own risk.

- They are increasingly turning to unofficial third-party AI tools.
- They expect AI tools to help them act.
- They expect an easy transition to a human when using AI.

Customer use of AI during service and support interactions



Source: Gartner

Misalignment creates 4 enterprise risks

When organizations' AI investments are out of sync with customer expectations and behaviors, they risk:



Low ROI

Only 24% of service and support leaders said they have seen a positive financial return from AI use cases so far — with 24% citing negative returns, 11% breaking even and the rest unsure about the returns.



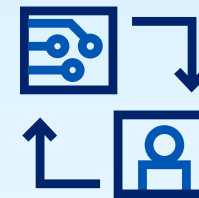
Loyalty and retention

Fifty-three percent of customers say that they would consider switching to a competitor if they learn a company is using AI for customer service, and if companies deliver frustrating AI-led experiences, it will push them over the edge.



Reputation

GenAI that provides incorrect information to customers at scale can lead to costly and embarrassing situations that damage the brand's reputation.



Workforce disruption

Leaders may reduce their human service workforce in anticipation of efficiency that never materializes, resulting in expensive rehiring.

3 evolving behaviors

Based on a survey of more than 3,500 customers regarding their recent service and support interactions, Gartner identified three key findings related to how customers use GenAI in service and support interactions:

1

Customers are using GenAI

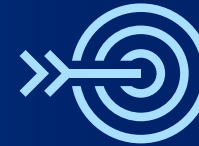
But they're often not using the company's chatbot.



2

Customers expect GenAI to act

They want to complete tasks, not only receive answers.

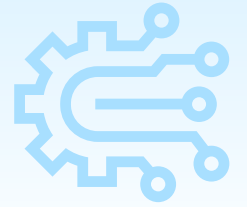


3

Customers want access to people

AI should facilitate human support, not restrict it.





1 Customers are using GenAI, but not yours

Sixty-six percent of customers use GenAI in their personal lives, at work or both. But that familiarity has not translated into increased adoption of company-provided chatbots. Company chatbot use has remained statistically unchanged since 2022.

By contrast, third-party GenAI use for service nearly doubled in the last year alone.

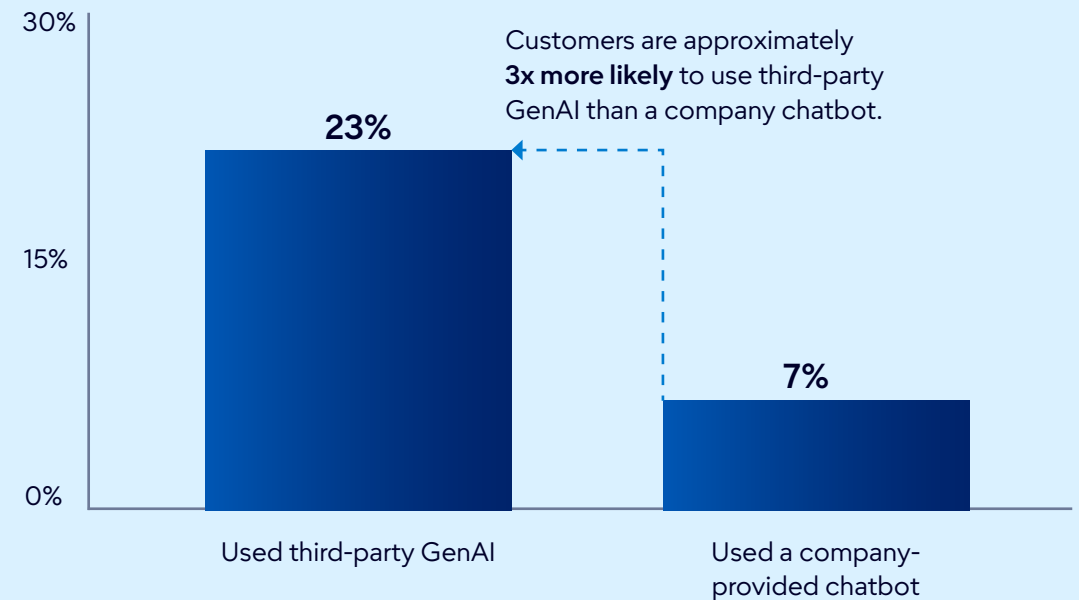
Customers were approximately 3x more likely to use third-party GenAI than a company chatbot.

Recommendations for service leaders:

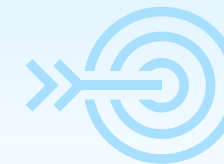
- 1. Design chatbots for long-term adoption, not short-term containment.**
To increase use of chatbots, organizations should design for long-term adoption by targeting the chatbot for issue types that have high success rates and providing seamless transitions to a human, if necessary.
- 2. Balance chatbots with AI investments in the voice channel.** Some customers will skip the chatbot, but organizations can still use AI to capture efficiency through intelligent voice bots and human agent assistant tools that streamline the voice experience.

Customer use of third-party GenAI and company chatbots

Percentage of customers using each option during service interactions



n = 3,566, all respondents
Source: Gartner



2 Customers use GenAI for action, not only answers

Among customers who use GenAI, 58% have used it to complete a task on their behalf, rather than only answer a question.

This behavior is even more pronounced in B2B interactions, where 74% report using AI to complete tasks.

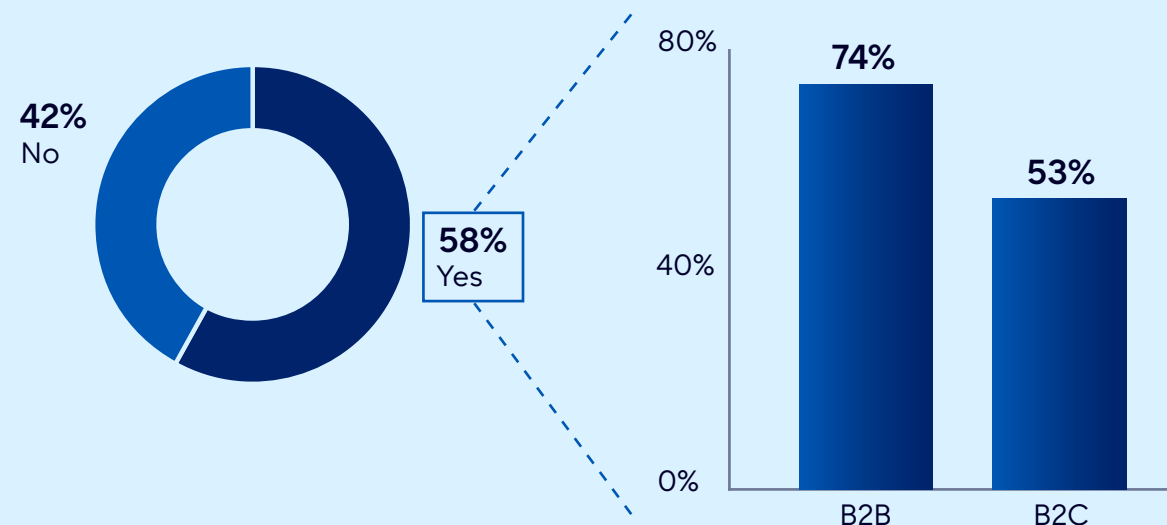
Customers already use GenAI to book appointments, place orders, submit documents and manage subscriptions. The next phase of GenAI will be defined by customers using it to take action, both through company-provided and third-party tools.

Recommendations for service leaders:

1. **Enable customers to take action, rather than only get information, when using company-provided AI tools.** For actions that can be easily executed directly within the conversational GenAI interface, allow customers to do so without navigating to another page or portal.
2. **Make it easier for customers to take action when starting with third-party GenAI tools.** Create a seamless transition from third-party GenAI to company-owned channels where customers can complete transactions.
3. **Prepare to serve bots, not just humans.** Many future service interactions will occur between customer and company AI agents. Begin identifying the issue types customers are most likely to delegate to AI.

Customers use GenAI to complete tasks on their behalf

Percentage of customers among those who have used a GenAI application or tool



n = 2,277 overall; 1,747 B2C; 530 B2B, excludes customers who have not used GenAI
Q: Have you ever used a GenAI assistant to complete a task on your behalf?
Source: Gartner

Example: Connect AI Discovery With Customer Action

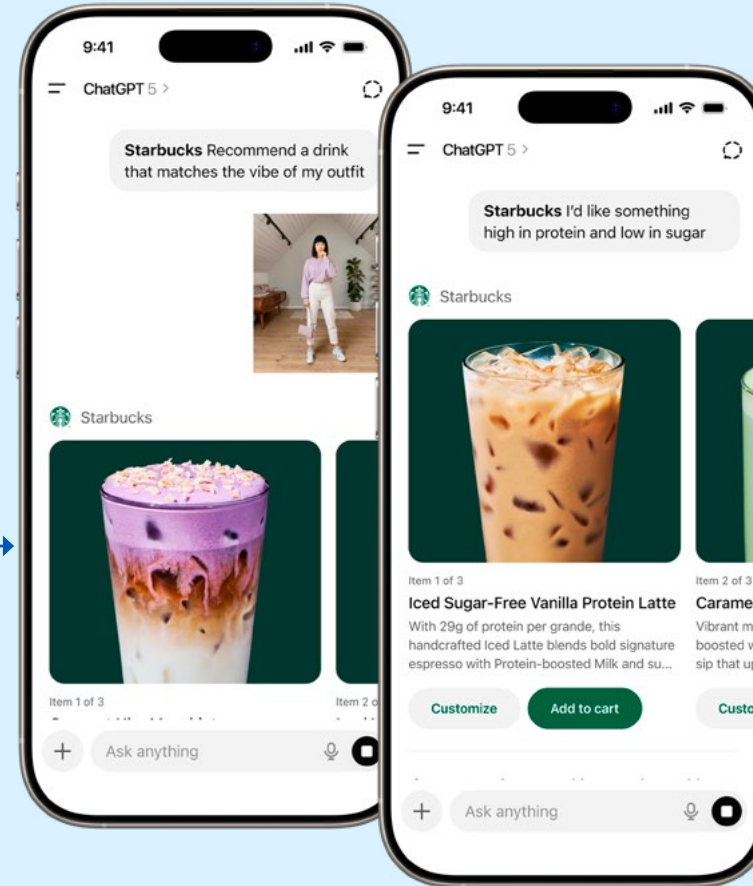
A Starbucks pilot connected GenAI-assisted discovery with an owned transaction environment.

Customers could ask ChatGPT for drink recommendations using written requests or uploaded photos. After selecting and customizing a recommendation, they were directed to the Starbucks app to place the order.

The lesson is not that third-party GenAI must complete every transaction. It's that organizations should create a direct, low-effort path from external AI discovery to action within company-owned channels.

Integration with third-party GenAI tools allows customers to take action

ChatGPT makes Starbucks drink suggestions based on photos or information customers share.



Customers are guided to place the order directly with Starbucks.

Source: Adapted from Starbucks

3 Customers expect AI to be a bridge to a human, not a barrier



Among customers who resist AI, a big reason is they believe it is designed to prevent human contact.

87% say it is essential to provide an option to reach a human agent.

Customers are more willing to begin with GenAI when they know that human support remains available if the issue becomes complex, sensitive or unresolved.

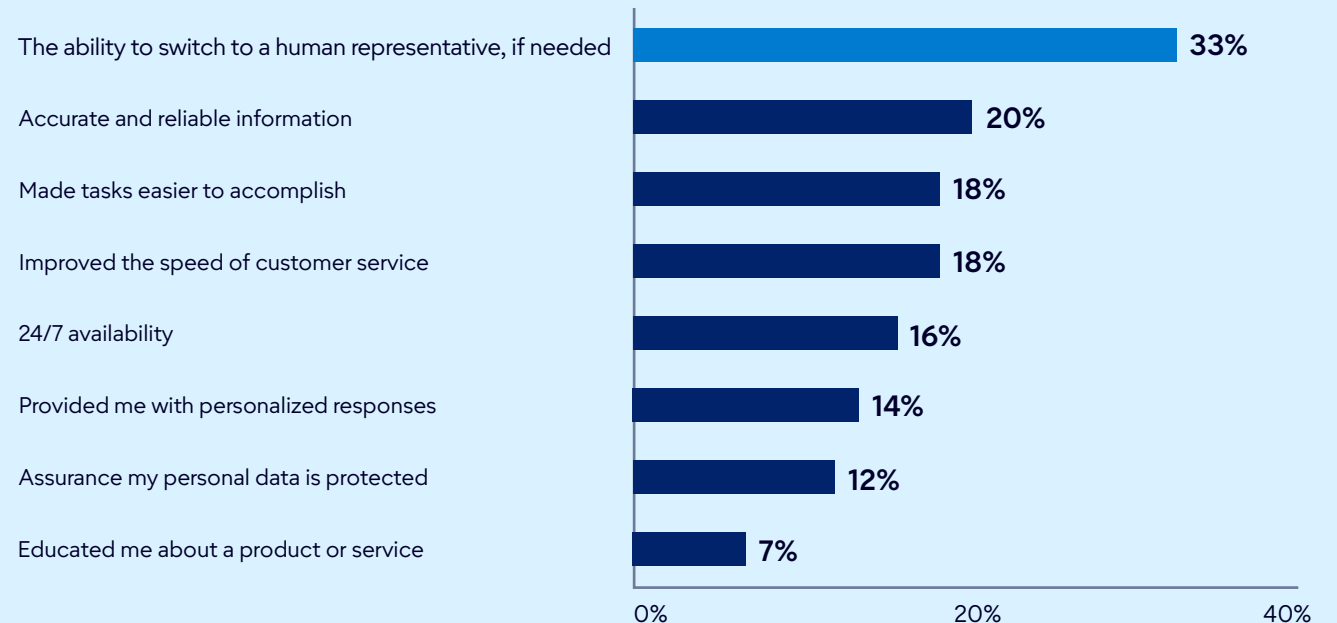
Recommendations for service leaders:

- 1. Position GenAI as the first step in the journey, rather than a barrier to reaching humans.** Use GenAI to understand customer needs while making it clear that human support is available when needed.
- 2. Pass the context and intent of the self-service interaction to the agent.** Transfer the customer's information and troubleshooting history to ensure a seamless transition to human support that streamlines the voice experience.

We asked customers who said they were not willing to use AI in customer service what might change their mind, and this is what they said.

Ability to switch to a human drives willingness to engage with GenAI

Multiple responses



Source: Gartner

Actionable, objective insights

Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools for customer service and support leaders:

 Webinar Reality Check: Customer Behaviors That Impact Your AI and Service Strategy Explore how customer behaviors, trust and GenAI preferences are shaping service journeys and AI strategy. Watch Now	 Guide Maximize AI ROI in Customer Service Learn how customer service and support leaders are accelerating AI value realization at scale with the help of Gartner resources. Learn More	 Report 8 Metrics Every Customer Service Leader Should Care About Discover the customer service metrics that matter most for driving customer loyalty, improving experiences and reducing cost to serve. Access Report	 How We Help Gartner for Customer Service & Support Explore insights, guidance and tools to enable faster, smarter decisions and stronger performance on your mission-critical customer service and support priorities. Explore More
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