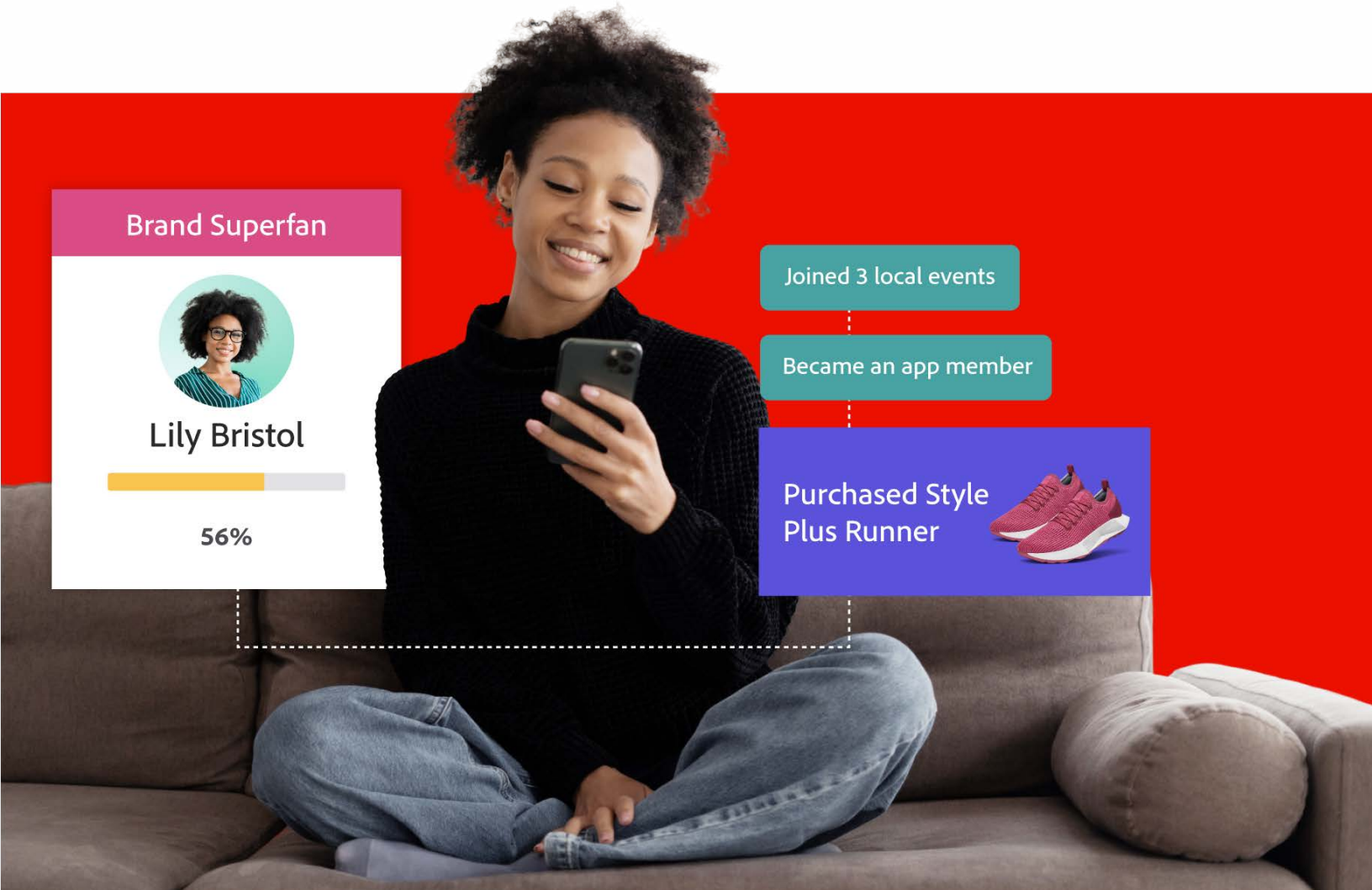
RESEARCH PAPER

Reimagining customer journey management

Connecting with customers on their terms



Are brands delivering customer-centric experiences today?

The landscape of customer engagement constantly evolves, presenting brands with both challenges and opportunities. Marketers strive to connect with consumers in real-time through the channels that most effectively address customer needs. But there's a gap between marketers' strategies and customers' experiences. Closing that gap will be crucial for brands to foster meaningful connections and show that they understand and can meet their customer's needs across the entire lifecycle, which goes well beyond simply delivering a product or service at the time of sale.

With a sea of competitors vying for customer attention, customers must feel connected to your brand even when they aren't directly interacting with it. At Adobe, we're both focused on and dedicated to providing marketers and their brands with the marketing technology solutions they need to create the meaningful and connected experiences that turn customers into loyal superfans.

But we wondered: how do marketers and consumers feel about the experience that takes place between them? We wanted to check in with both groups to find out what they think about the customer experience they were either creating or participating in. We considered a few questions to guide our research:

Do marketers believe they are delivering customer-centric engagement?

Do customers agree with marketers, or do they see things differently?

Could marketers make any changes to enable customer-centric journeys?

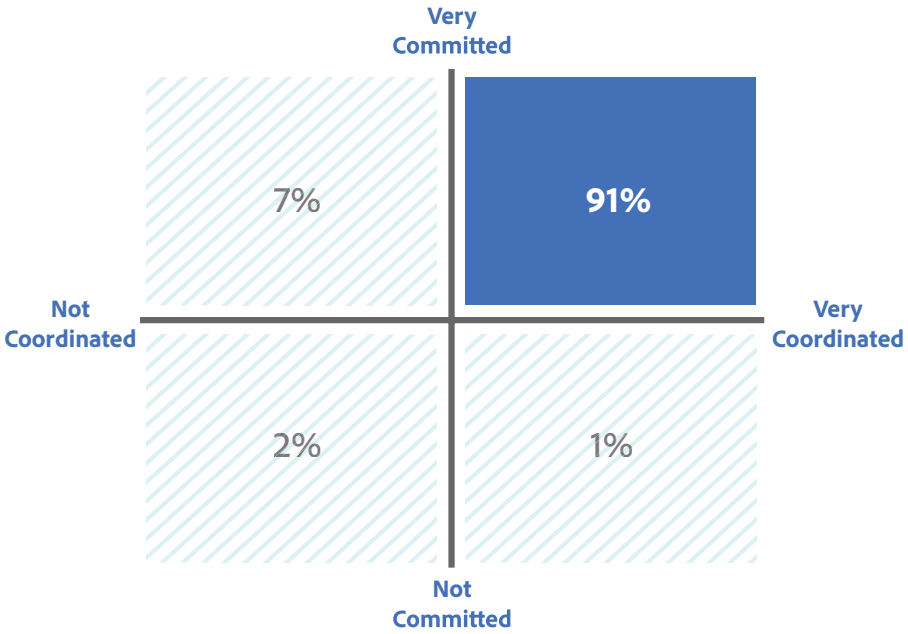
To answer these questions, we partnered with Concentrix to deliver quantitative insights via two surveys. In the first, we surveyed over 300 daily mobile phone users in the U.S. to better understand their behaviors and attitudes regarding their customer experience with brands. We then surveyed 200 marketers at B2C enterprise companies in the U.S. to understand their attitudes, challenges, and opportunities regarding the customer journey.

In this paper, we unpack the results of our research and offer recommendations for brands that want to provide more customer-centric experiences. First, let's review our findings.

Marketers are feeling confident...

At a high level, we learned that marketers are feeling good about their ability to engage their customers and meet their needs. They give themselves and their companies high marks for customer engagement.

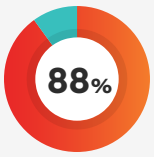
91% of marketers believe their company both prioritizes customer needs and coordinates customer interactions and marketing engagements.



They told us they understand their customers and how to engage them, can communicate with customers during moments that matter, and are increasingly personalizing their communications to their customers.

...but is this confidence based on the right customer signals?

Marketers also told us they understand their customers and are strategic in engaging them. 88% said they have a clear understanding, 76% responded that they are strategic in how they engage customers, 81% said they send timely updates to customers, and 78% communicate with customers on their preferred channels.



of marketers have a clear understanding of who their customers are

Consistent 91% agree

Provides consistent messaging, branding, and service quality across all channels and touchpoints (e.g., web, email, mobile, in person)

Personalized 79% agree

Delivers experiences and communications that are tailored to an individual customer's preferences, behaviors, or needs

Seamless 72% agree

Enables customers to transition seamlessly between channels and devices without experiencing disruptions or inconsistencies

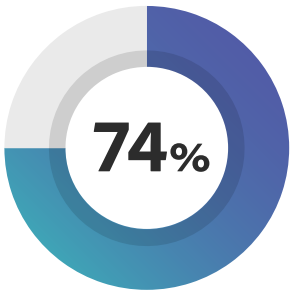
A large majority of marketers (91%) also said they felt their company provides consistent messaging, branding, and service quality across all channels and touchpoints (e.g., web, email, mobile, in-person).

Meanwhile, 79% of marketers felt they delivered personalized experiences and communications that are tailored to an individual customer's preferences, behaviors, or needs, and 72% said they enable customers to transition seamlessly between channels and devices without experiencing disruptions or inconsistencies.

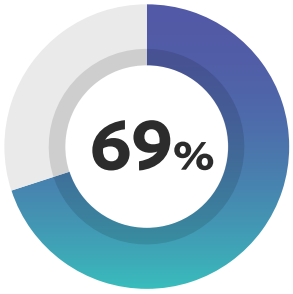
So, to answer the first question we posed — How do marketers feel they're doing regarding their ability to connect with their customers? — the overall answer is that they feel they're doing quite well. Now let's turn to our consumers to see if they agree or see things differently.

Consumers are overwhelmed and swimming in a sea of irrelevant messages

The short answer is that consumers see things differently. In our two surveys, we found a misalignment between how marketers and consumers perceive brand communications. In contrast to the relatively positive perspective marketers shared, consumers had a notably less rosy point of view about the communications they receive from brands. Most marketers (74%) said they feel that they send out the right number of communications to customers. Meanwhile, over two-thirds of consumers (69%) feel that they receive too many messages and notifications from brands.

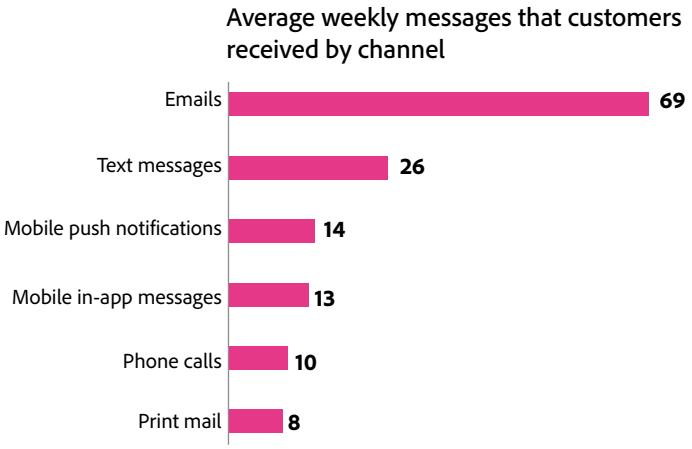


of marketers said they feel that they **send out the right number of communications** to customers



feel that they get **too many messages and notifications** from brands

139
Messages per week

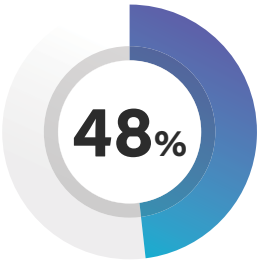


Consumers report receiving 139 messages in a typical week from brands across a range of channels. Email was by far the most prevalent form of communication with an average of 69 message per week, followed by text messages (26 per week), mobile push notifications (14 per week), mobile in-app messages (13 per week), phone calls (10 per week), and print mail (8 per week).

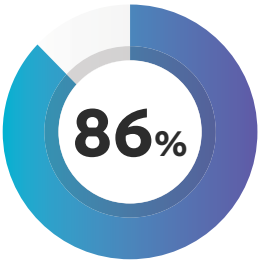
Consumers are turning off and tuning out

To cope with the deluge of messages they receive, consumers are unsubscribing from email lists, turning off notifications, deleting mobile apps, or simply tuning out.

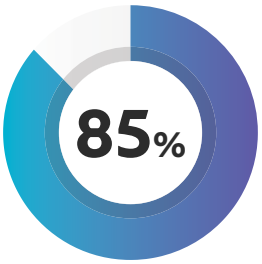
Consumers delete or ignore without reading 48% of all the messages they receive from brands. In addition, 86% of consumers unsubscribe from or turn off notifications if content is not relevant to them, and 85% agree it is important to delete apps they no longer use.



of messages consumers receive from brands are **deleted or ignored without reading**



unsubscribe from or turn off notifications **if content is not relevant** to them

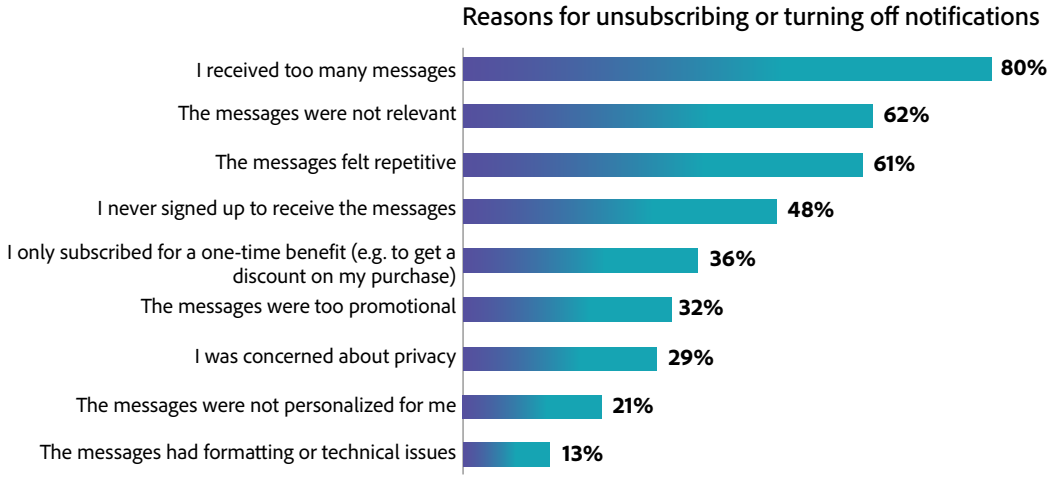


agree it is **important to delete apps they no longer use**

> "All day long I am deleting ads I did not sign up with from businesses that I have never bought from. It's very annoying."

Consumer, Gen X, female

Consumers are turned off by excessive message quantity, irrelevance, and repetitiveness. By far, the number one reason for unsubscribing or turning off notifications was receiving too many messages (80%). This was almost 20 percentage points ahead of the two next most popular reasons, which were messages not being relevant (62%) and messages being repetitive (61%), and more than 30 percentage points ahead of the reason after that — messages consumers say they never signed up for (48%).



The disconnect: Internal challenges prevent many brands from meeting customer expectations

While consumers said their expectations for experiences don't align with how brands engage with them, many marketers said their companies were experiencing internal challenges that may hinder their ability to rise above the noise and connect on a meaningful level with their customers.

82% of marketers reported experiencing at least one internal issue that negatively impacted their company's ability to engage customers, including resource or budget constraints, organizational silos, technology limitations, data fragmentation or data quality, and employee skills gaps. Some also cited issues of a lack of personalization, a lack of a cohesive strategy, and a lack of relevant content.

"We are siloed internally, and it shows."

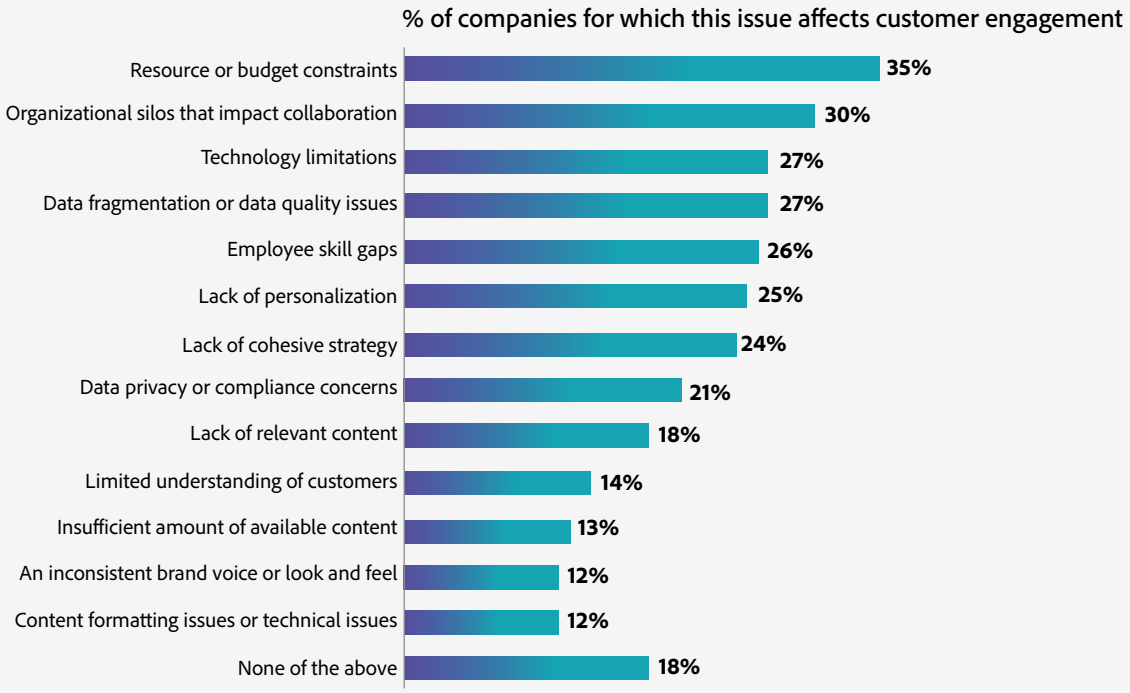
C-Suite or Top Executive, Marketing, Healthcare & Life Sciences

"We have technology limitations [that do] not allow for personalized offers."

Director or Senior Director, Marketing, Retail & Consumer Goods

"Our capacity to maintain market competitiveness may be hampered by a skills shortage in this sector."

Vice President, Marketing, Retail & Consumer Goods



Transform your approach to customer engagement into a customer-centric one

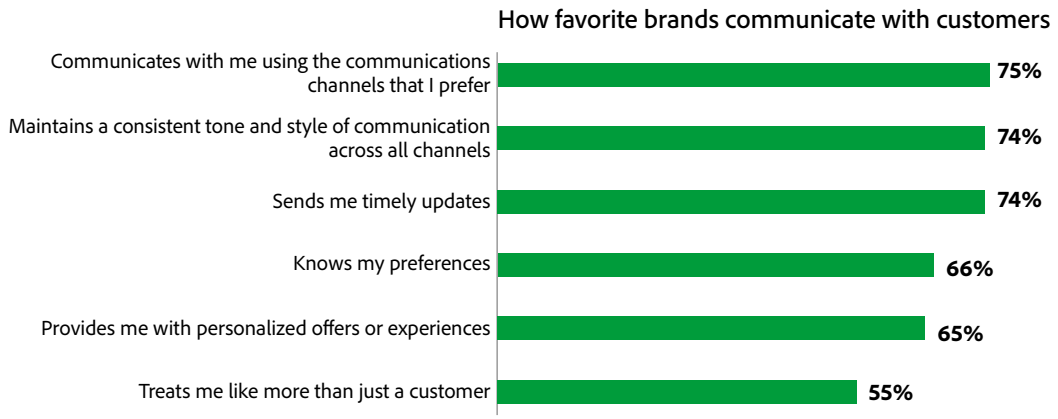
To recap, marketers are feeling confident about their ability to connect with customers, but they may be too confident. By contrast, consumers are feeling overwhelmed by the deluge of messages they receive every day. Brands may feel that they're sending out the right number of messages to their customers, but those messages might be getting lost in the mix given all the messages customers receive from other brands.

So how can brands rise above the noise and create compelling customer experiences for every new visitor or loyal brand advocate? In today's competitive marketing landscape, brands that want to take customer engagement to the next level should focus on enabling **real-time**, **personalized**, and **customer-centric journeys that reach consumers at the right time**, **with the right message**, **on the right channel**. Let's look at what marketers and consumers had to say.

1. Re-imagine your approach to personalization

Consumers told us their favorite brands engage them at the right moments with personalized content. While personalization has been on the radar for marketers for years, consumers we talked to pointed to potential areas of opportunity to explore within personalization, including **personalized offers, personalized timing, and personalization by channel**.

A majority of consumers said their favorite brand communicates with them using communication channels they prefer (75%), sends them timely updates (74%), knows their preferences (66%), and provides them with personalized offers or experiences (65%).

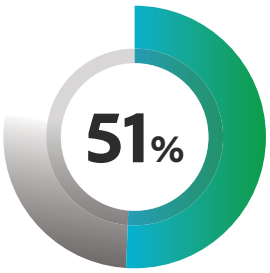


Consumers who receive personalized content are ready for action

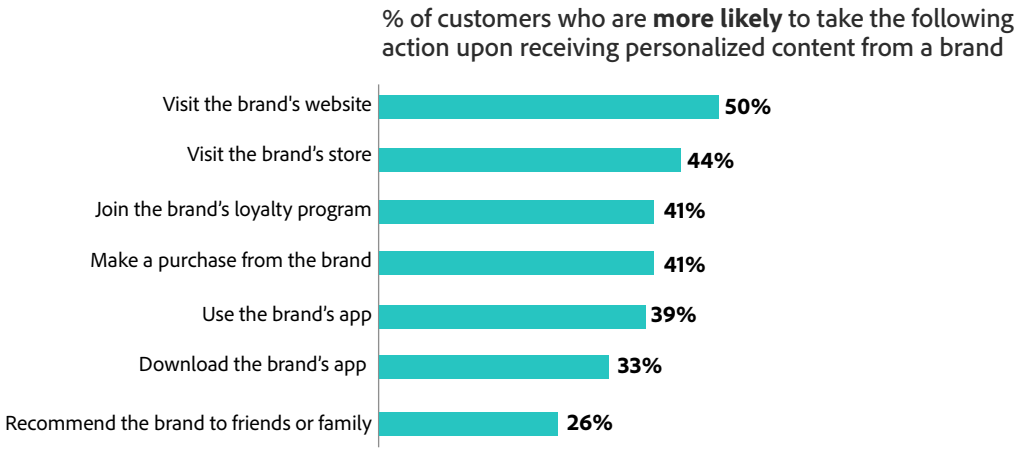
Consumers also told us that brands that invest in personalization benefit from increased consumer engagement.

51% of consumers are more likely to read a message from a company or brand that is personalized. Also, a significant percentage are more likely to take action after receiving personalized content, including visiting a brand's website (51%), visiting a brand's store (44%), joining a brand's loyalty program (41%), and making a purchase from a brand (41%).

Brands pursuing omnichannel personalization may want to take things a step further and think about how to offer a personalized in-store experience, personalized pick-up or delivery, personalized offers at the time of check-out, or even real-time push notifications or in-app messages if a consumer uses the brand's app in-store with their geo-location turned on.

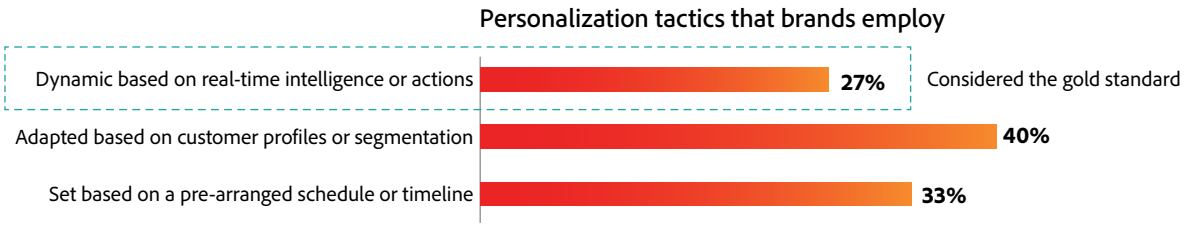


of customers are more likely to read a message from a company or brand that is personalized

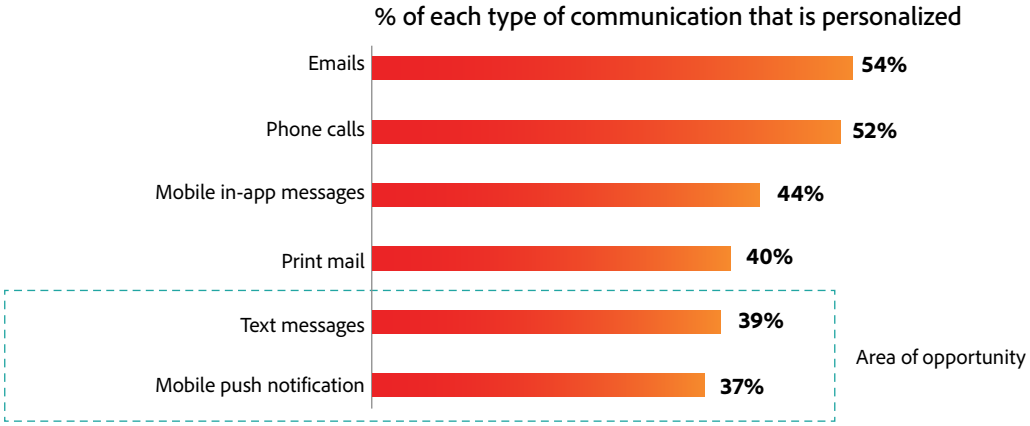


While some level of personalization is the norm for brands, most still have work to do to implement best-in-class personalization across channels.

Survey results revealed that **only one in four brands could adjust the timing or cadence of customer communications based on real-time intelligence or actions**, which is considered the gold standard of personalization.



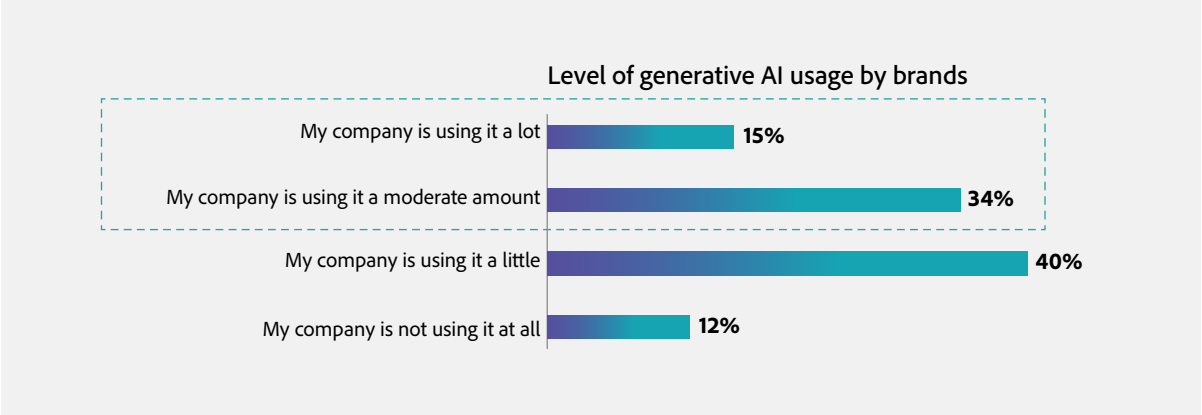
The results also showed that brands do not personalize communications consistently across all channels. While marketers responded that over half of emails and phone calls were personalized, only 39% of SMS text messages and 37% of push notifications were personalized, presenting an area of opportunity for future personalization efforts.



Generative AI is revolutionizing personalization

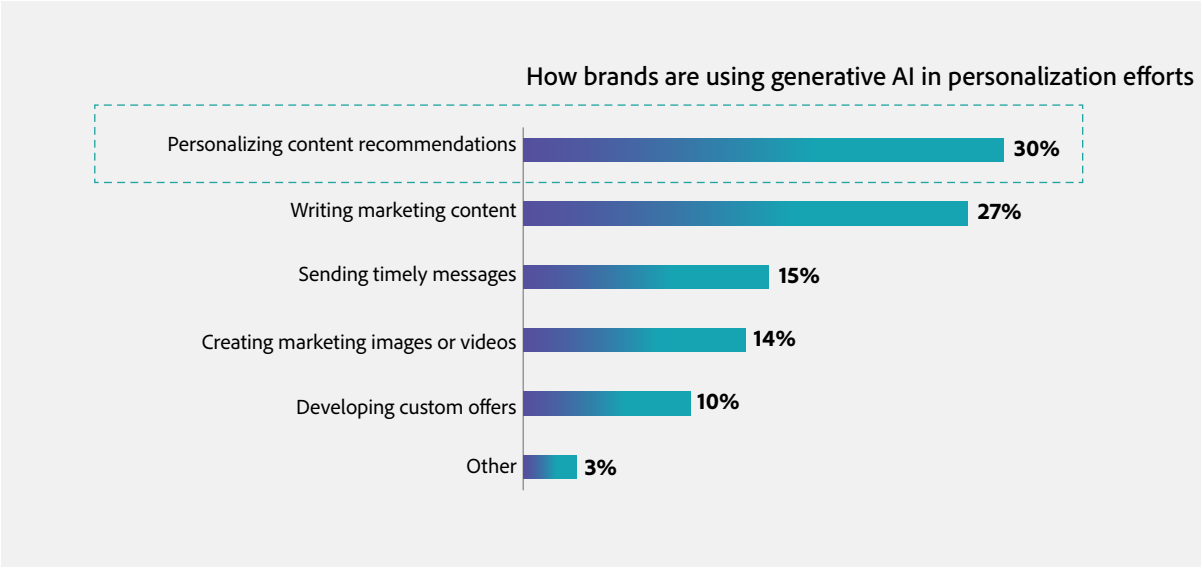
Generative AI is being infused across all areas of business, including customer experience. Traditional customer experience technology infused with generative AI lets marketers work faster, more efficiently, and more creatively.

Most marketers told us their company has started the journey of using generative AI, and many said that personalization is one of its most common uses. 88% of marketers said their companies have at least started using generative AI, with 49% of marketers saying they use it a moderate amount (34%) or a lot (15%) for marketing purposes; 48% expect their company's use of generative AI in this regard to increase in the next 12 months.



Marketers told us that the most common use of generative AI for marketing was for personalization (30%), followed by using it to write marketing content (27%), send timely messages (15%) and develop custom offers (10%).

With widespread adoption of generative AI already underway, brands that want to remain competitive need to be forward-looking in how they leverage it in their personalization efforts



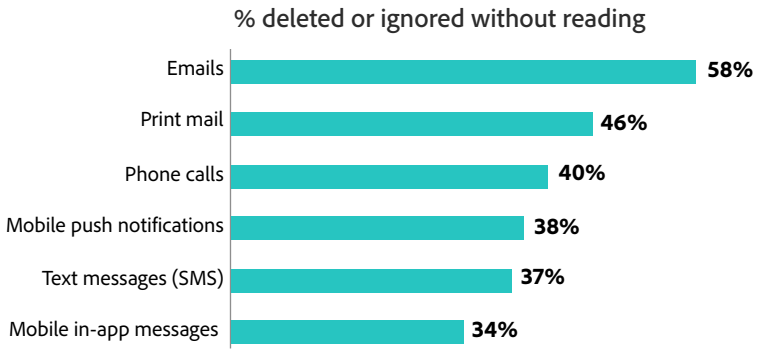
2. Re-imagine email use cases with the context in mind

Yes, email remains most popular, but it's also the most ignored

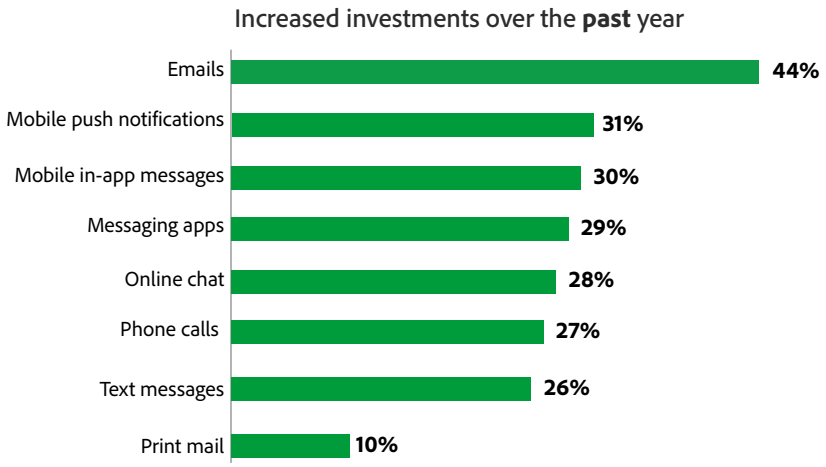
Email continues to be an important channel, and for some types of communication, it remains the best channel to use. However, brands should avoid depending on email too much because consumers ignore a large percentage of these communications.

Consumers told us they receive far more brand messages by email than any other channel, but that they disregard emails far more than any other type of communication.

Over half of emails (58%) are deleted or ignored without consumers reading them. If marketers focus too much on email, they could risk getting lost in consumers' email inbox.

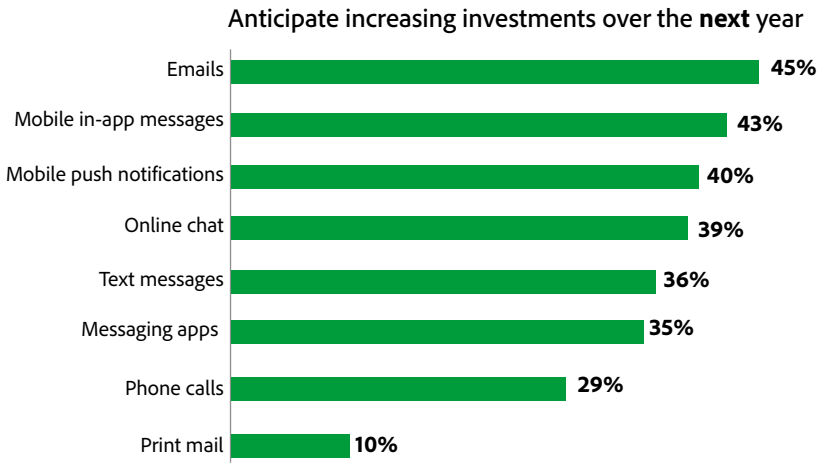


We also found that some marketers may be risking complacency by simply doubling down on what has worked in the past. 78% of marketers use email to engage customers and generally consider it to have the highest ROI of any channel. Compared to any other channel, marketers were also most likely to have invested more in email in the past year and to anticipate increased investments in email over the next year.



> It's on rinse and repeat; our audience is conditioned to expect them and they are older."
>
> Vice President, Product, Financial Services & Insurance

> "Email is not dead. It is easy to utilize and get info out there."
>
> Director, Marketing, Education



Of course, the solution isn't one or the other — email or no email. It's about knowing the customer and engaging them via the right channel and at the right time within the customer journey to make the biggest impact.

3. Re-imagine mobile engagement as the catalyst to fuel customer-centric journeys.

Customers today are on the move — literally. They are not stuck at a desk behind a computer or waiting at home for print mail or a landline call. Mobile devices allow shoppers, travelers, fans, and banking and insurance company customers to stay engaged — anywhere and anytime.

Mobile puts the customer in control, but it also increases their expectations for real-time, personalized engagement. Engaging customers through their mobile devices, via SMS text, push notifications, and in-app messages, is therefore a critical part of a brand's customer journey management strategy.

Since mobile engagement plays such an important role for in-the-moment, contextual communications with prospects and customers, it provides a great opportunity for a brand to activate customer interest or adoption in real-time. Let's look at how our survey results back up the recommendation to focus on mobile, with its higher signal-to-noise ratio, for fueling customer-centric journeys.

Why mobile should be a central part of your omnichannel strategy

A key step brands can take to improve customer journeys and create real-time, customer-centric moments is to increase investments in mobile communication channels. There are several advantages to doing so, and these were reflected in our surveys.

CX professionals rank mobile highly for ROI:

1. Emails
2. Text messages
3. Mobile push notifications
4. Mobile in-app messages
5. Phone calls
6. Online chat
7. Messaging apps
8. Print mail

High ROI: Marketers rank mobile communications highly for ROI, with SMS text messages, push notifications, and in-app messages ranked highest after email.

Indispensable devices: Mobile phones have become an indispensable part of consumers' daily life. 74% of consumers told us they consider their mobile phones to be highly important in their daily lives, while 57% said they could not get through their day without their mobile phone.

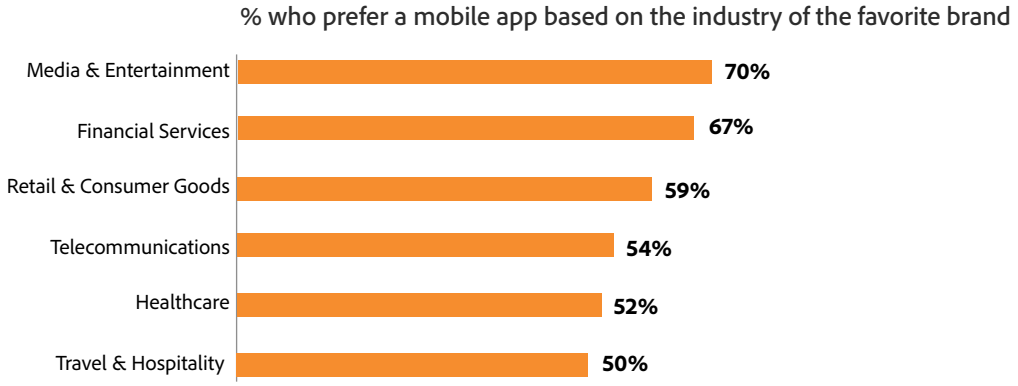
Higher chance of engagement: Mobile communications are more likely to reach customers. In contrast to email, which is deleted or ignored 58% of the time, mobile channels like in-app messages, push notifications, and SMS text messages are deleted or ignored between 34% to 38% of the time. Put another way, mobile communication connects with consumers between 62% and 66% of the time, leading to more consumer activation and increased customer engagement opportunities.

Break down silos: For brands struggling with siloed teams, mobile engagement can bring together product, marketing, engineering, and growth teams to achieve customer-centric engagement.

Consumers love mobile apps (and brands should too)

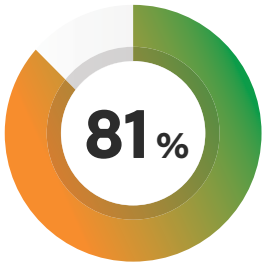
Consumers told us that apps are central to their mobile experiences and brand interactions. They reported having an average of 37 apps on their mobile phones, and 40% said they have more apps now compared to one year ago. Most consumers prefer using the mobile app instead of the mobile website of their favorite brand, and many feel that apps are better optimized for mobile than websites.

63% of consumers prefer to use a mobile app to engage with or access their favorite brand's products and services, with ease of use and convenience among the top reasons for that preference. This consumer preference for mobile apps was strongest for favorite brands in media and entertainment (70%) and financial services (67%).



Want to be a favorite brand? Offer customers exceptional mobile app experiences.

Reinforcing the importance of an increased focus on mobile apps, consumers indicated that having a quality app correlates with "favored brand" status. 81% of consumers agreed that their favorite brand has a useful mobile app.



of customers agree that **their *favorite* brand has a useful smartphone app**

"Things load faster usually on an app, are easier to use."

Gen Z

"[The mobile app] seems easier to navigate [and] track my orders and purchases."

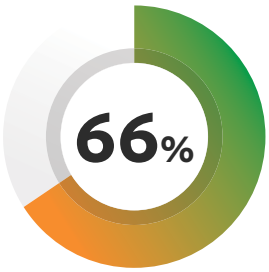
Baby Boomer

"It's easier to open through the mobile app. And the mobile app has your purchase history on it."

Gen X

Marketers agreed about the value of a mobile app as well. 66% of marketers believe that customer lifetime value increases when a customer downloads a brand's app.

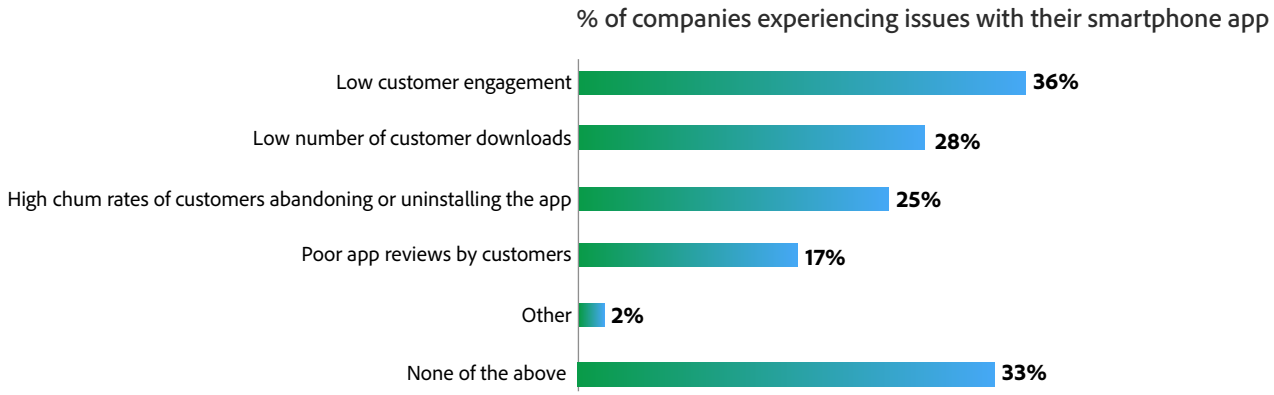
Personalized mobile app engagement can also increase product adoption and prevent app abandonment, ultimately improving CX and customer lifetime value.



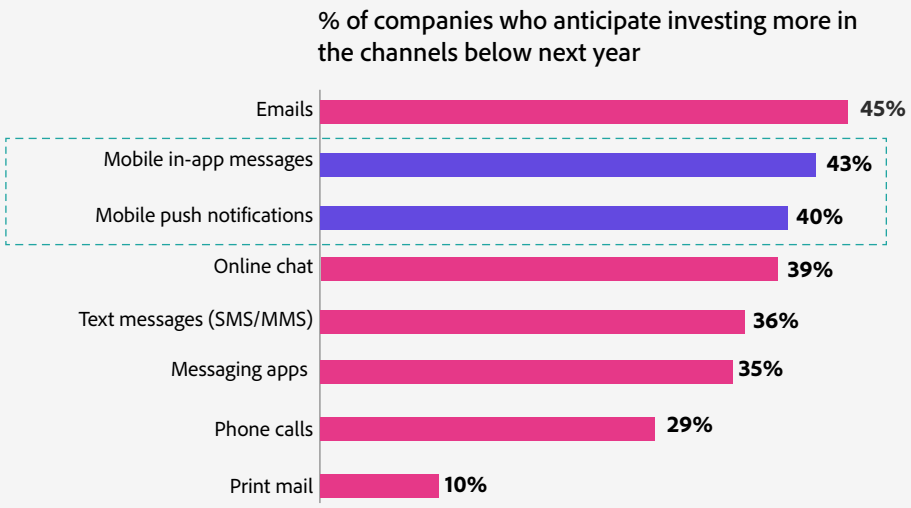
of CX professionals agree that **customer lifetime value increases when a customer downloads a brand's app**

Brands are going big on mobile (and yours should too)

There is plenty of room for improvement on mobile communication, with two-thirds of marketers saying they experience one or more engagement-related issues with their company's mobile app, including low customer engagement, low number of downloads, and high churn rates.



But brands aren't giving up. In fact, they're going big on mobile. Marketers told us their brands were likely to invest more in in-app messages and push notifications in the next year than any other channel except for email. 43% of marketers anticipate their company will invest more in in-app messages and 40% expect to invest more in push notifications. So any company that chooses to invest more in mobile in the coming year will have plenty of company.



Regardless of channel, always lead with a customer-centric approach

For today's demanding, on-the-move consumers, their mobile phone is essential for engaging with brands. And personalization isn't just preferred — it's expected. For brands, more touchpoints along the customer journey mean more opportunities to shine… or stumble.

Many marketers may be feeling confident about their ability to connect with customers, but customers are telling a different story. They're overwhelmed with messages, and they're unsubscribing and deleting their way out. Brands that want to avoid being ignored or deleted, rise above their competitors, and connect with their customers in a meaningful way should focus on providing real-time, customer-centric experiences that connect with consumers at the right time, with the right message, and on the right channel.

Engaging with customers via mobile communication channels and using personalization are two important ways to create the meaningful and connected experiences that turn customers into superfans. But there's so much more a brand can do to build loyal customers, from personalizing in real-time to connecting with customers across channels and tapping into the power of generative AI to create personalized content, optimize message send-times, and more.

Most brands are on their own journeys to transform their customer engagement efforts from complex ones that yield experiences that don't quite hit the mark to orchestrated, real-time personalized communications across channels that resonate with each customer and make a positive impact — on the customer and on the brand's bottom line.

That's where Adobe can help, with Adobe Journey Optimizer.

Unlock real-time omnichannel personalization with Adobe Journey Optimizer

Adobe Journey Optimizer is a single application to orchestrate personalized interactions between a brand and a consumer, from planned campaigns to dynamic customer journeys, across channels of engagement including email, websites + web apps, mobile SMS/MMS + mobile apps, physical spaces, point of sale, et al.

Built natively on the Adobe Experience Platform, Adobe Journey Optimizer manages scheduled cross-channel campaigns and real-time, one-to-one engagement for millions of customers — and the entire journey is optimized with intelligent decisioning and insights.

Adobe Sensei GenAI for Journey Optimizer will help you make smarter, faster work easier.

- Visit business.adobe.com to explore Adobe Journey Optimizer, Adobe Target, and Adobe Campaign.
- Learn how Adobe Journey Optimizer can help you elevate personalization.
- Learn how Coca-Cola uses Adobe solutions to engage with consumers around the globe.

Methodology and approach

Research for this whitepaper was conducted by means of two quantitative surveys exploring consumer and marketer perspectives.

Responses to the consumer study, fielded in December 2023, came from 323 daily mobile phone users in the U.S. Survey starts were representative of the U.S. in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity, household income, and region.

Reponses to the marketer study, fielded between February and March 2024, came from 200 marketing professionals at enterprise-sized B2C companies in the U.S. Respondents had roles spanning marketing (74%), operations (14%), product (11%), and customer experience (3%). Respondents were required to be associate-level or more senior and be knowledgeable about the ways customers interact with their company across various channels and touchpoints.

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