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As the first in a four-part series, this research document highlights the importance of mastering fluency of customer experience (CX) interactions to delight clients, grow revenue, and ensure operational efficiency. It recommends activities and technologies that CX leaders must implement as an initial step toward total CX excellence: aligning the channel-mix with customer preferences.

## Align Channel Usage with Customer Preferences

Channel expansion has long been the name of the game for contact center and CX leaders' digital strategy. Often, the assumption has been that adding channels is enough to keep customers happy and engaged. In fact, after surveying 307 businesses, Aberdeen research uncovered that 50% of contact centers use at least nine different channels (e.g., phone, web, email, social media, text message) as part of their channel-mix. However, this approach no longer works. While that may have been true for some businesses for some time, buyers in both business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) industries are now savvier. They don't just want to use *more* channels. Rather, they want to use specific channels they find useful based on their unique preferences. Furthermore, these preferences change based on the complexity of the issue, time of day, etc. As such, total CX excellence today requires firms to move beyond channel expansion and into true alignment of channel utilization with the individual preferences of each client. Enter CX fluency.

### Definition: CX Fluency

"CX Fluency" refers to companies using all the processes and tools in harmony to meet and exceed buyer expectations across all channels and departments.

Traditionally, contact center and CX leaders manage their channel-mix such that they enable customers to use all channels available within the channel-mix while designing client engagement processes based on historical

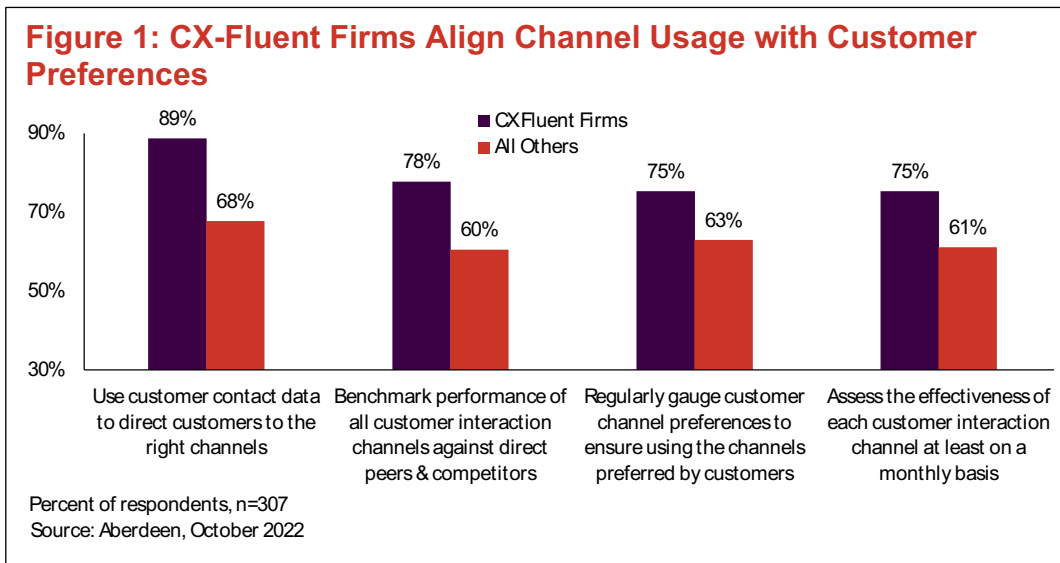
### Best-in-Class Maturity Index

The top 20% of the surveyed respondents were ranked as 'Best-in-Class' — referred to as 'CX-Fluent Firms' within this research. The remaining 80% represent lower performing firms — referred to as 'All Others.' The metrics used to evaluate performance and comparative performance results between CX-Fluent Firms, and All Others are as follows:

- ▶ **Customer Retention Rate:** CX-Fluent Firms: 81% vs. All Others: 63%
- ▶ Year-over-year (YoY) change in customer satisfaction: CX-Fluent Firms: 27.3% vs. All Others: 3.1%
- ▶ YoY improvement in first contact resolution rates: CX-Fluent Firms: 23.9% vs. All Others: 0.4%
- ▶ **YoY improvement in agent productivity:** CX-Fluent Firms: 22.2% vs. All Others: 2.1%
- ▶ YoY improvement (decrease) in average handle time: CX-Fluent Firms: 12.5% vs. All Others: -1.4%

data and gut-feel on which channels are best suited for specific issue types and periodically review and fine-tune. Future-ready contact center and CX business leaders move past that: they are more analytical, real-time, and automated. As depicted in Figure 1, CX-Fluent Firms are 19% more likely to regularly gauge customer channel preferences and optimize channel utilization based on that (75% vs. 63%). This is done by analyzing

interaction data as well as voice of the customer (VoC) program insights to reveal the unique preferences for each client.



However, simply aiming to gauge customer preferences isn't enough. To truly excel, firms must also have a connected view of CX data across all sources and excel in using analytics to analyze data in real-time to update the channels involved in managing individual customer journeys. Indeed, Figure 1 shows that CX-Fluent Firms are 31% more likely to use connected

views of customer data to analyze and determine individual preferences for channel use and leverage this insight to optimize routing activities (89% vs. 68%). Analysis of connected CX insights is done by using business intelligence and predictive analytics. The latter helps predict the best channel(s) to use based on data available on a specific customer (or similar lookalikes). Then, layering in automation capability, firms can streamline the process by adjusting channel usage for each customer at each stage of their journey.

While the activities mentioned in this document enable modern CX and contact center leaders to better align their channel usage with customer preferences, how do they know that their use of channels keeps up with changing client behavior and expectations? That's where performance monitoring and improvement comes in place. Figure 1 shows that CX-Fluent Firms are 23% more likely to assess the contribution of each channel towards their key performance indicators (KPIs) at least monthly (75% vs. 61%) as well as being 30% more likely to benchmark their performance against direct competitors and peers in the same industry (78% vs. 60%). Doing so helps business leaders make sure that they're getting the most out of each channel in terms of their use in managing customer journeys. If certain channels fall behind in KPIs, firms can observe the reasons why and adjust their channel usage while also maintaining use of channels that deliver strong performance results.

## About Aberdeen Strategy & Research

Aberdeen Strategy & Research, a division of Spiceworks Ziff Davis, with over three decades of experience in independent, credible market research, helps **illuminate** market realities and inform business strategies. Our fact-based, unbiased, and outcome-centric research approach provides insights on technology, customer management, and business operations, to **inspire** critical thinking and **ignite** data-driven business actions.

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