

A large background image of a call center. Several employees are seated at desks, wearing headsets and looking at computer monitors. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The call center scene is divided into two main color zones: a blue zone on the right and an orange zone on the left.

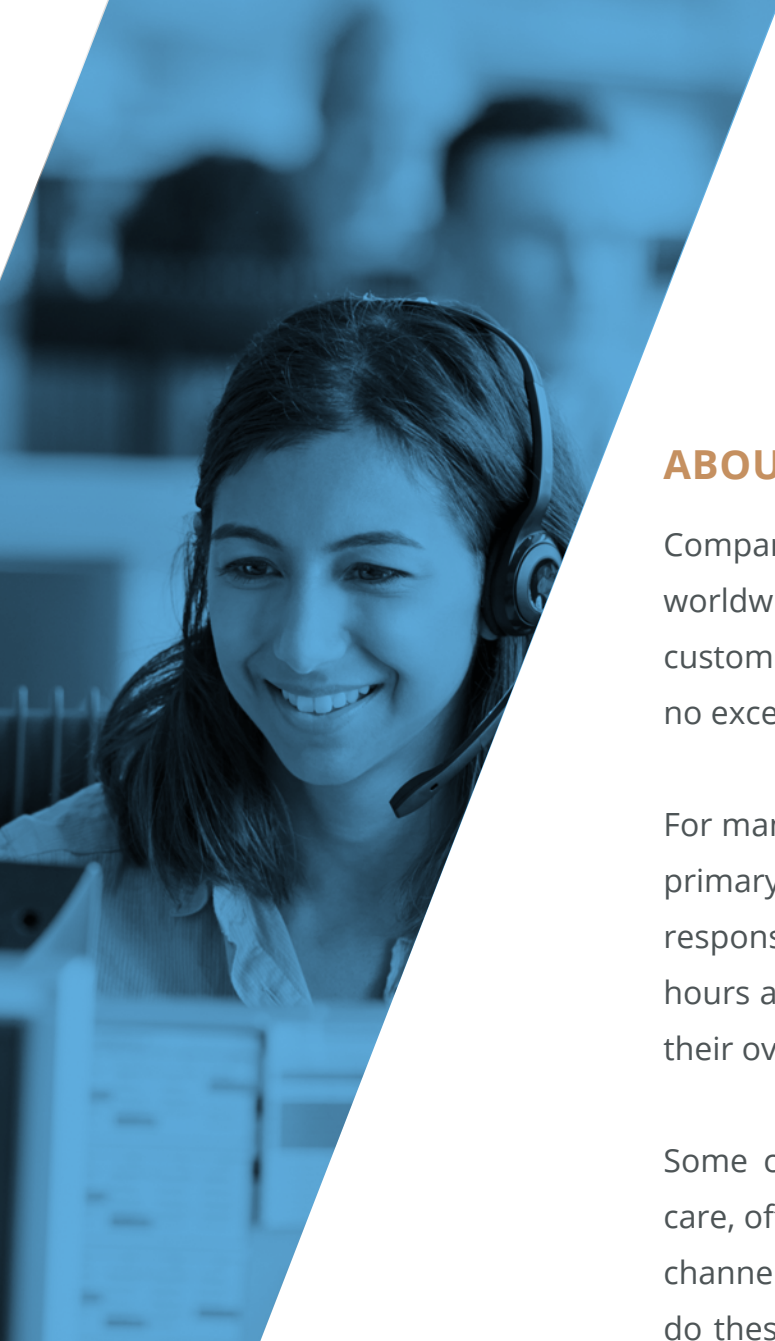
Customer Service Trends in the Supply Chain

Explore new findings about supply chain customer service and discover how to achieve growth and tangible ROI by aligning customer experience and needs.



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ABOUT THE STUDY

Companies are pursuing customer service excellence worldwide and across industries to keep up with rising customer expectations. And those in the supply chain are no exception.

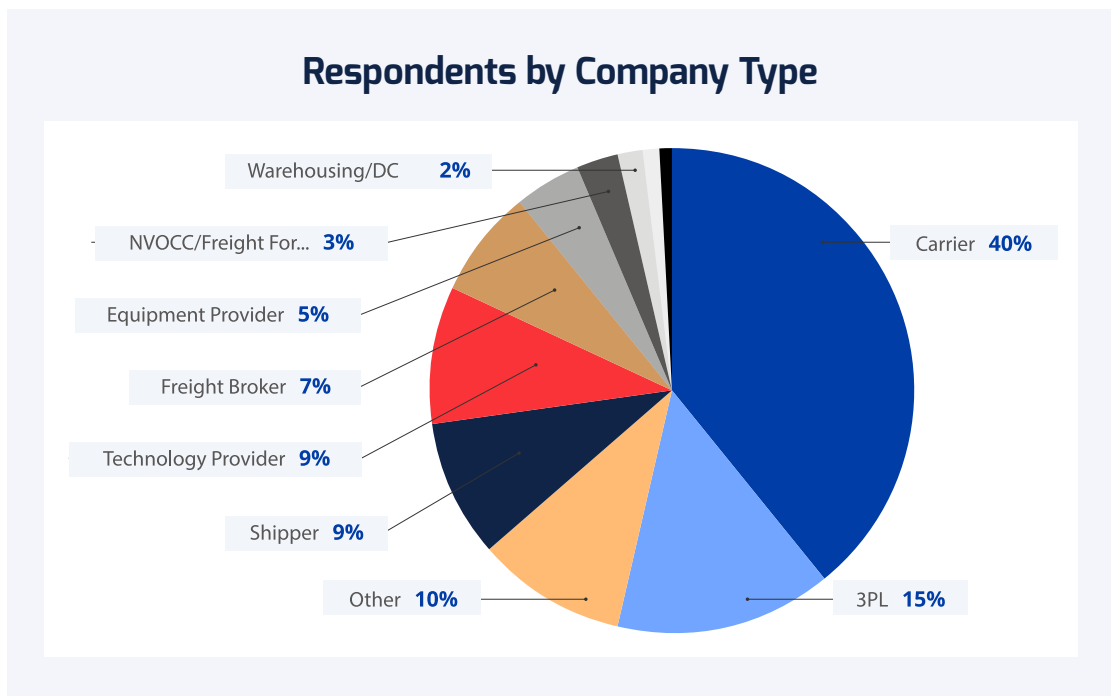
For many customers, your customer service team is their primary touchpoint. They're looking for quick answers, responsive agents, omnichannel support, and convenient hours across the board — and their experience will color their overall impression of your organization.

Some companies are on the cutting edge of customer care, offering 24/7 availability across every support channel, while others are taking a leaner approach. How do these organizations prioritize their customer support operations? Are their efforts driving value? What are the challenges they face?

To investigate these questions and more, we distributed a survey to shippers, carriers, 3PLs, technology providers, warehousing and distribution providers, freight brokers, freight forwarders, and other companies in the industry.

We received responses from industry professionals in various roles and departments, including C-suite executives, customer service managers, and those in other departments collaborating with customer serviceteams.

The survey received responses from the following business types within the supply chain industry:



In this report, we'll discuss the survey results and trends we identified and offer critical takeaways for improving customer service.



KEY SURVEY INSIGHTS

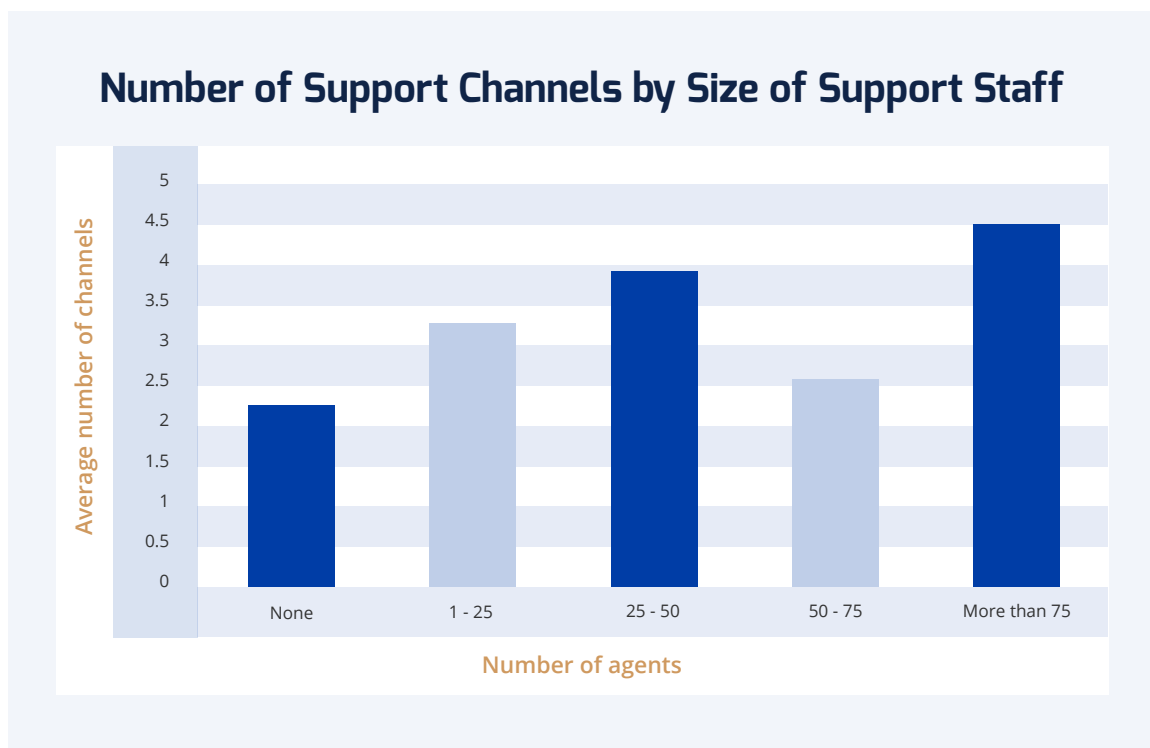
Here are some of the biggest takeaways from our survey results:

The majority of companies provide only two primary support channels.

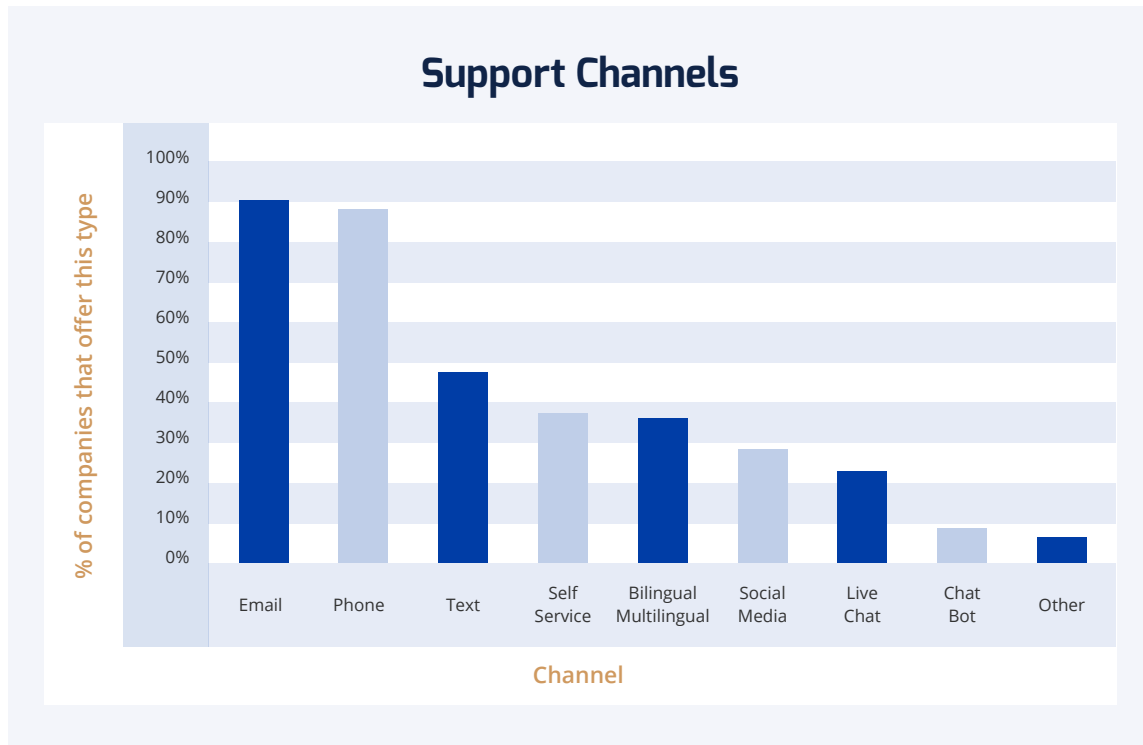
Despite the increasing popularity of live chat, chatbots, self-service portals, and other support options, our survey revealed that phone and email are still the most commonly offered channels.

About 88% of respondent organizations provide phone support, and about 90% provide email support. In contrast, only about 22% and 7% offer live chat and chatbots.

Many modern supply chains are global in scale and require seamless support across continents, time zones, languages, and regulatory frameworks. This can be a hurdle for companies whose customer care teams are on the small side, especially if they're centralized in one location.

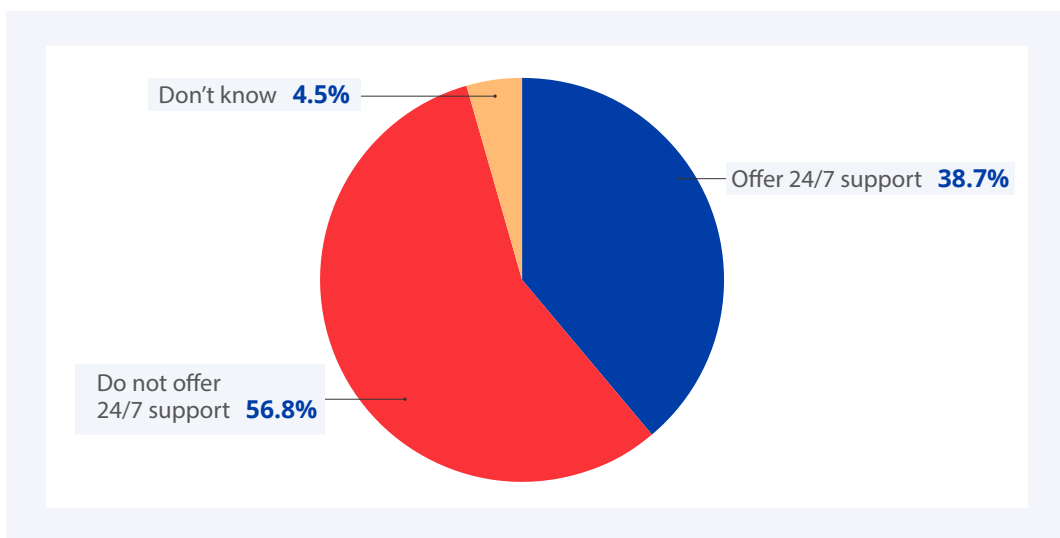


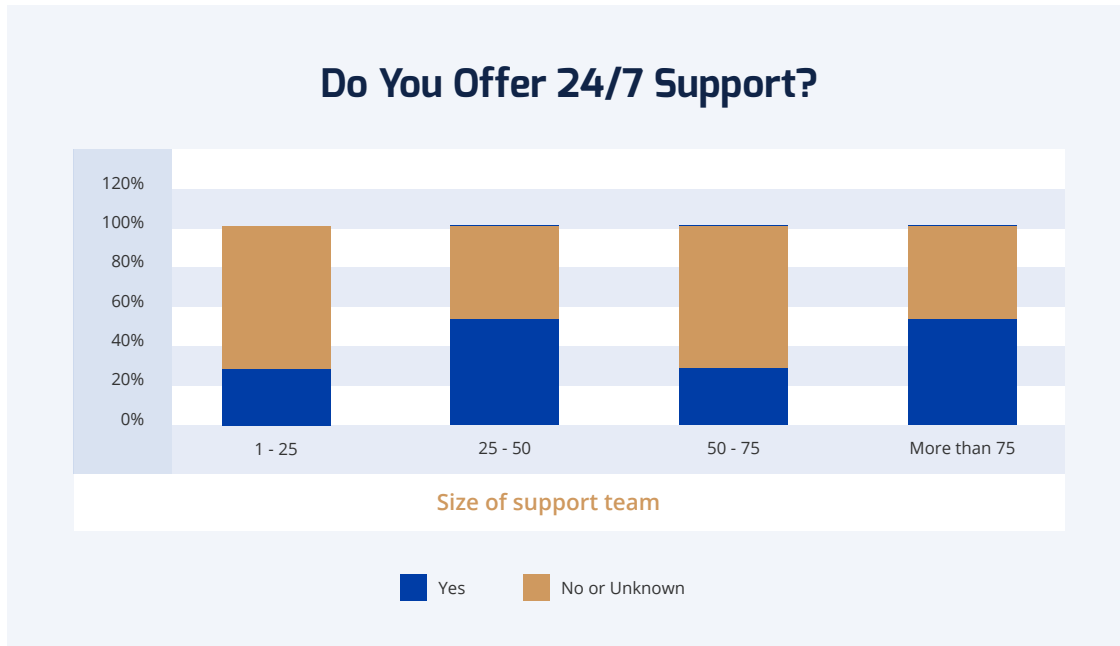
Our survey found that the average number of support channels tends to increase as the size of the customer support staff increases. The average number of channels is about 3, while teams of over 75 agents offer an average of 4.5 channels.



Similarly, larger customer support teams are more likely to offer 24/7 support. About 58% of teams with over 75 agents provide 24/7 support, compared to 29% with 1-25 agents.

While about 57% of teams do not offer 24/7 support.





Unfortunately, over the last few years, staffing has been notoriously difficult. An ongoing shortage of customer service talent is of significant concern to companies that need to scale up.

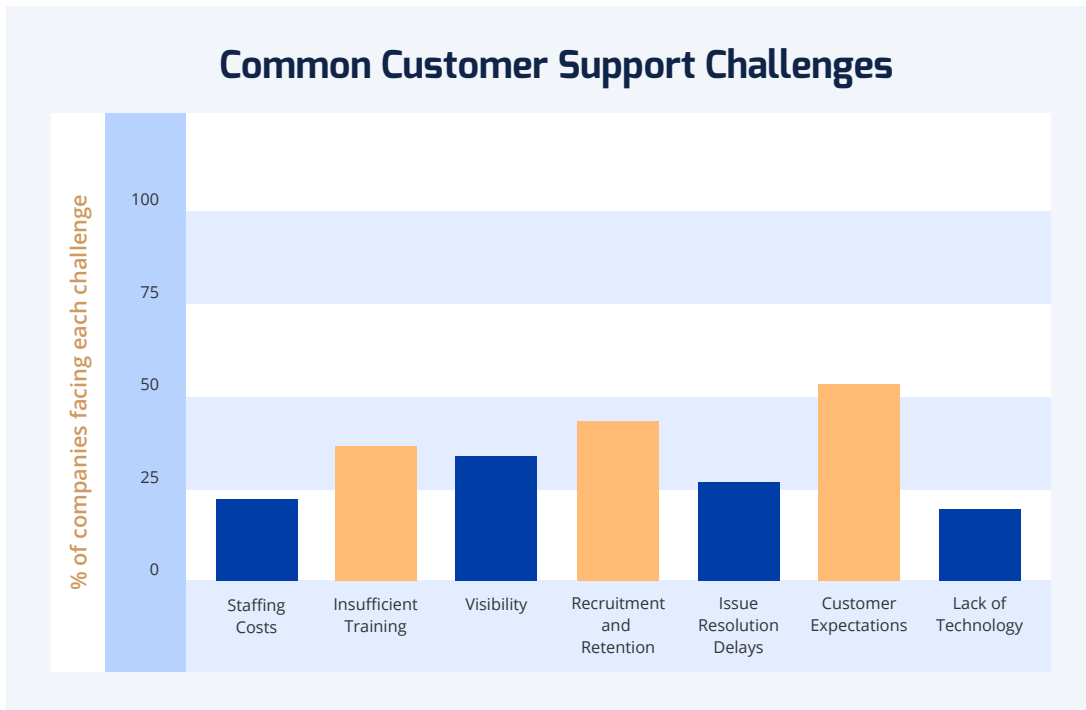
Meeting customer expectations is the most common challenge for supply chain companies.

Customer support expectations were already rising before 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift.

During such a stressful time, customers across industries wanted faster response times, more empathetic interactions, and better visibility. More than half of customers said customer experience was more important in 2021 than in 2020, and 63% of companies prioritized customer experiences more over that same time.

Combined with significant supply chain disruptions, these high expectations forced customer service teams throughout the supply chain to raise the bar for customer care. Even as the pandemic wanes, high expectations remain — providing excellent customer service is vital to a positive brand reputation and customer retention.

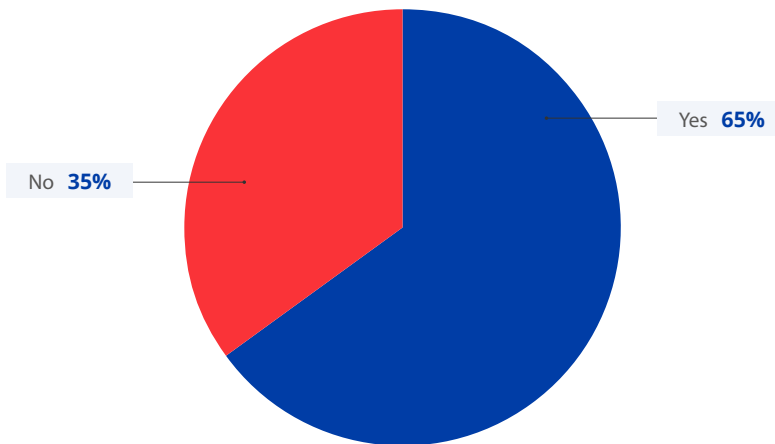
Our survey found that “customer expectations” is the most common customer service problem of 2023, with 55% of respondents reporting it as a challenge for their company. This is not surprising, as several factors (response time, available support channels, time to resolution, etc.) can cause a company to fail to meet customer expectations.



Some companies aren't tracking KPIs — even those they deem important.

One significant customer care gap uncovered by this survey pertains to measuring support performance: 35% of respondents said their companies don't track the quality of their customer support.

Do You Track the Quality of Your Customer Service Experience?



Respondents who indicated that they do not track customer service quality were given the opportunity to say why. Some of the common themes across the open-ended responses were:



Limitations related to technology and/or processes

"Technology has not been instituted to measure this area yet."

- Sales Leader, Carrier

"No tools or methodology in place."

- Operations Management Leader, Shipper

"We just don't have anything set up to do that."

- Customer Service Agent, Carrier

"Unsure on how to best measure."

- IT Team Member, Carrier



Staffing Limitations

"Not enough people."

- Operations Management Team Member, 3PL

"Not enough personal"

- Finance & HR Leader, Warehousing/DC



Don't see a need to track quality over time

"Never thought about it."

- C-Suite Leader, NVOCC/Freight Forwarder

"We handle any situation as it occurs."

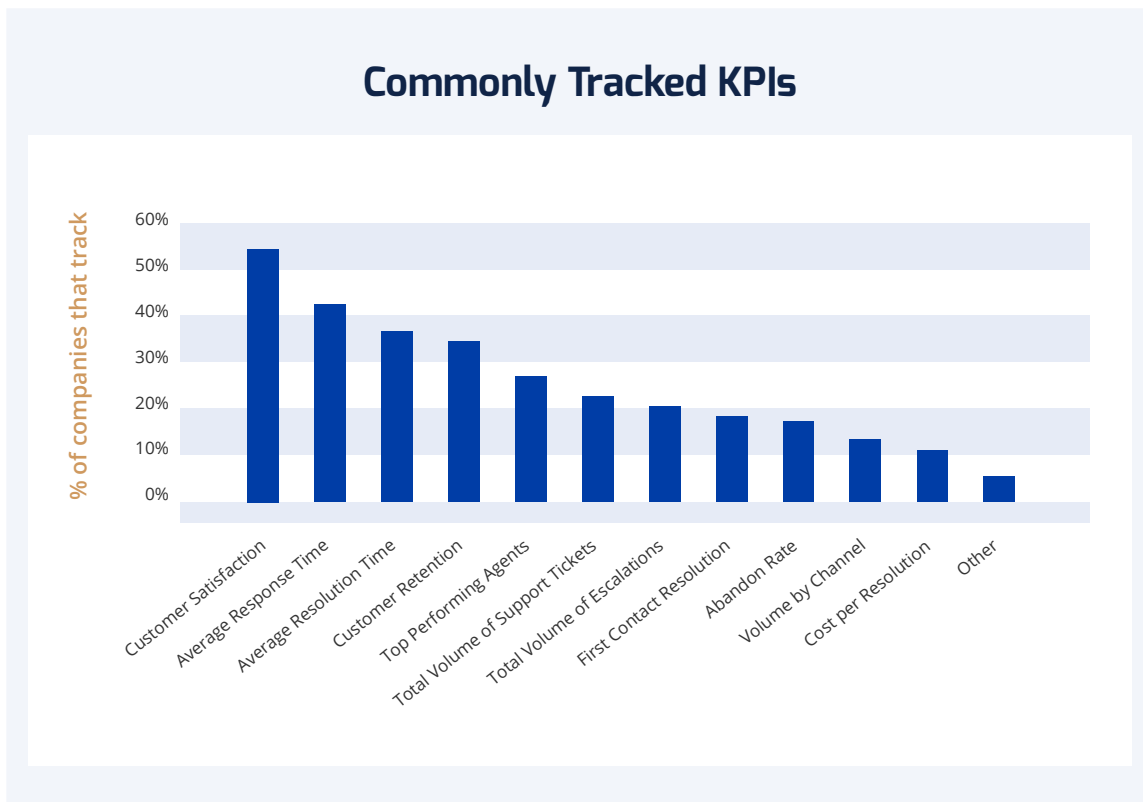
- Operations Management Leader, Carrier

"This is not tracked with documents, but if there is an issue, it is addressed on a case-by-case basis and in a timely manner."

- Customer Service Agent, Carrier

Just as larger teams are more likely to offer 24/7 support and more channel options, they're also more likely to track customer support key performance indicators (KPIs) — more than 80% of companies with 25 or more support agents track the quality of their support.

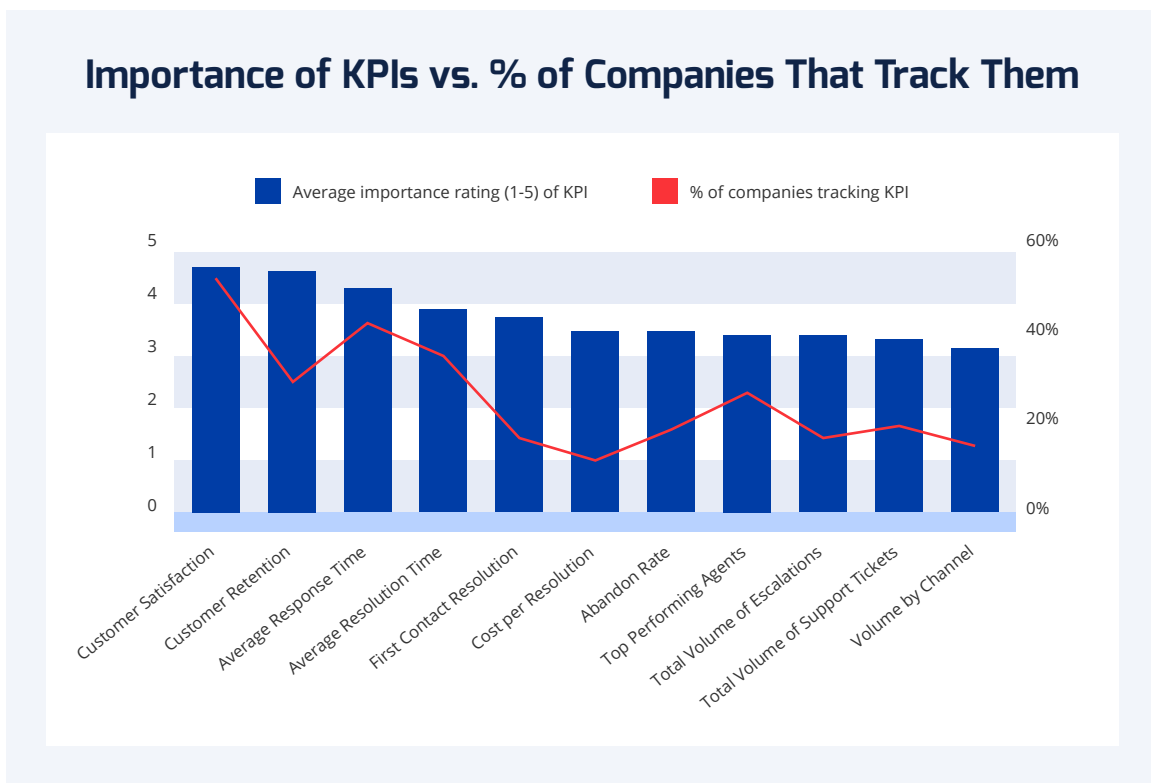
The chart below shows the percentage of respondents whose companies track various KPIs:



Of those companies that track customer support quality, about 29% do not track customer satisfaction specifically.

We asked respondents to quantify the importance of various customer service-related KPIs on a scale of 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). We expected a strong correlation between highly ranked KPIs and the percentage of companies that track them. In reality, there are significant discrepancies between the two.

The chart below shows the average importance rating given to each KPI compared to the percentage of companies which track that KPI:



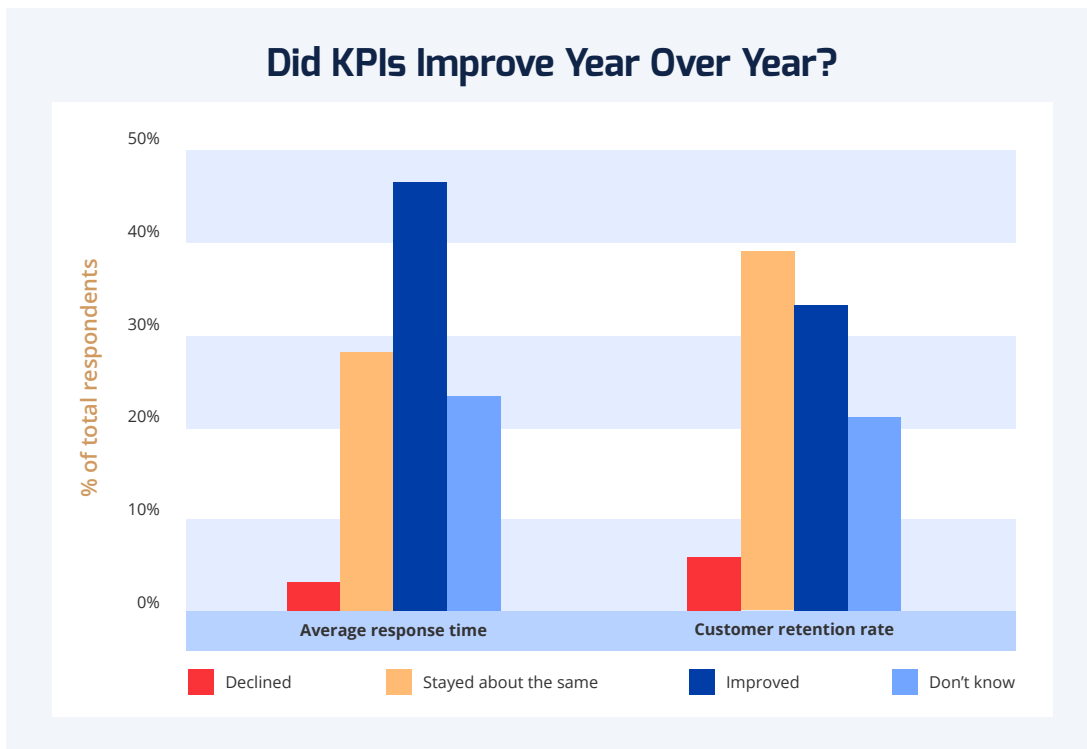
The data shows that some companies are not tracking vital customer service-related KPIs, even when they recognize their importance. The following KPIs had the most significant discrepancies between the percentage of companies tracking them and their perceived importance rating:

Without tracking these KPIs over time, companies will likely struggle to monitor the performance and ROI of their customer service operations — which will, in turn, make it harder to make meaningful improvements.

KPI	Perceived Importance (1-5)	% of Companies tracking
Customer retention	4.5	32.4 %
First contact resolution	3.8	18.9 %
Cost per resolution	3.5	11.7 %

For most companies, customer retention and average response time either improved or stayed the same year over year (YoY).

Very few respondents reported a decline in either average response time or customer retention rate (about 4% and 5%, respectively). 46% of respondents reported a YoY improvement in average response time, and 34% reported an improvement in customer retention.

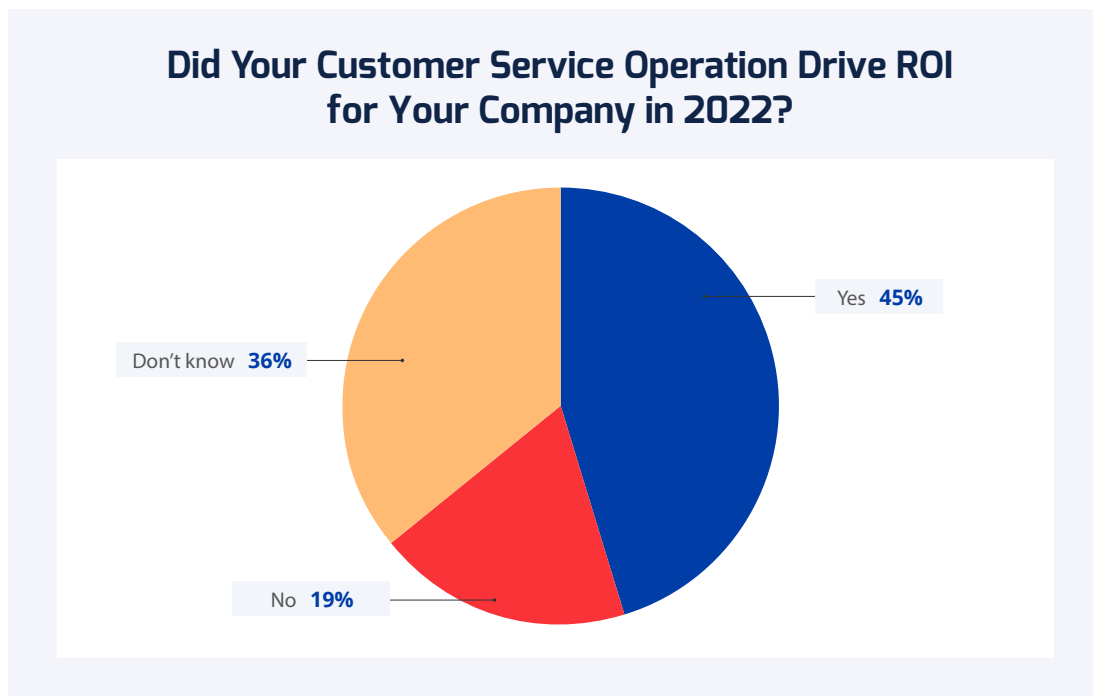


A significant number of respondents needed clarification about YoY KPI changes at their organizations; this may be due to a lack of data visibility or, as previously discussed, because their organizations don't track the KPIs in question at all.

Most companies have yet to reach their potential for customer service ROI.

Customer service can potentially be a profit center for those in the supply chain, as providing a positive experience builds customer trust and contributes to retention. However, our survey results show that this potential is unrealized for most companies.

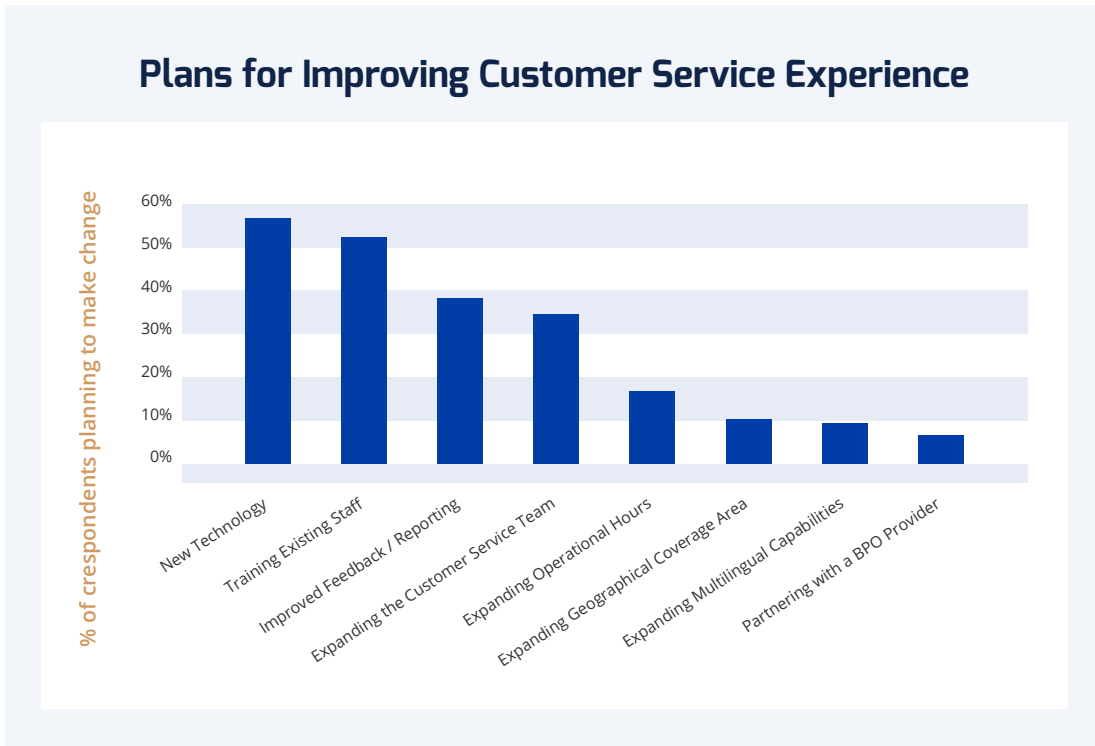
About 36% of respondents were unsure whether their organization's customer service operation drove ROI in 2022, and 19% said it did not. Combined, that's 55% of respondents for whom customer service still needs to provide clear ROI.



This data illustrates that most companies within the supply chain aren't getting the maximum value from their customer service operations and could benefit from improving their offerings and processes.

Improving customer service is a priority for most.

91% of companies plan to make changes to their customer service this year. The top three aspects of customer service in which companies plan to invest are implementing new technology (57%), training existing staff (54%), and improving feedback/reporting (38%).



“We may be in the transportation industry, however, the more we understand people and the ‘why,’ the more success we will all have.”

– Owner-Operator Respondent,
Carrier Organization



STRATEGIES FOR
IMPROVING YOUR
CUSTOMER SERVICE

With over 90% of companies surveyed looking to invest in customer service this year, improving your customer service experience is imperative for staying competitive.

Every company is different, and the combination of strategies that will work best for your organization will depend on your unique goals, resources, and gaps in your existing customer service offerings. That said, here are some steps you can take to improve your customer service experience:

Track and analyze customer support KPIs to find areas for growth

If you need help determining where to start improving your customer support, tracking KPIs can be a great starting point; it can help you identify strengths and weaknesses in your customer experience and allow you to make changes accordingly. It can also help you quantify customer service's impact on other aspects of your business, such as profitability.

For example, to determine whether your customer service operation is driving ROI for your organization, you'll need to measure cost-related KPIs like cost per resolution.

Offer more customer support channels

Customer service expectations are evolving beyond the typical phone and email options. For example, many customers expect to see a live chat option and want their service interactions to be seamless across different channels.

While some issues require live interaction with a person, many customers are happy to skip the wait time and solve problems themselves whenever possible. In addition to keeping phone lines clear for more complex issues, self-service options like AI chatbots, knowledge bases, and FAQ pages can help customers help themselves. In fact, 88% of customers expect brands to have an online self-service portal. Empowering customers to reach out in the most comfortable way makes for a better overall experience and reduces frustration for everyone.

Offer multilingual support and 24/7 availability

Supply chain operations often span multiple countries and regions. If that's the case for your organization, your customer support needs to align with the scale of your operations.

By offering multilingual, 24/7 support, you can offer the best possible customer service to everyone — regardless of location, language, or culture — and open up more global expansion possibilities for your brand.

Even if your service area is relatively small, offering multilingual and/or 24/7 support can still be a significant value-add for your customers and may drive them to choose you over the competition.

Refer to the KPI tracking chart on page 11 to see which KPIs other companies are tracking.

Regularly train your staff

Training staff must be a continuous process, particularly in an industry with constantly shifting regulations, new technology trends, and a need for better efficiency. Exceeding customer expectations requires a highly skilled team that's always up to date on the latest requirements and processes.

Ongoing training is also valuable for employees. Research shows that ample learning and development opportunities correlate with higher employee engagement and retention.

Implement new technology

Incorporating automation and AI into your customer care operation can provide scalable support during staffing shortages and peak-season highs and help you meet growing customer expectations.

It's important to note that the younger, "digital native" generations now make up an increasing percentage of the workforce — millennials currently represent 35% of the workforce, and that number is expected to jump to 75% within the next five years.

As this shift continues, a growing percentage of your customers will be digital natives who want convenient online support and expect particular support technology (e.g. chatbots) to be available. More technology-based customer service options can ensure you're ready for the transition.

Additionally, as previously discussed, many survey respondents cited a lack of technology as a reason for not tracking KPIs. Implementing systems that enable easy tracking can empower your team to take a more data-based approach to improve your customer experience.

Focus on scalability

Support ticket volumes can vary drastically over time due several factors (seasonal capacity fluctuations, economic downturn, supply chain disruptions, new shipping and trade regulations, etc.).

To prevent staff burnout and keep response times low when the demand for support is high, you need to be able to scale up quickly. However, hiring and training in-house can be a long, resource-intensive process that's often not worth the investment for seasonal staff.

One solution for this issue is to work with an outsourcing agency to add experienced customer service agents to your team, whether those agents act as your sole support team or supplement your in-house staff. Going this route allows you to scale up or down without worrying about the quality of your support or needing a long runway for training.

Look for opportunities to improve transparency and visibility

One of the biggest challenges in supply chain customer service is delayed data visibility.

Customer service representatives often receive questions about the location of shipments or products, and in many cases, they only have access to data that's hours old and no longer accurate. This creates a frustrating experience for customers, who often expect up-to-the-minute details.

Streamlining your data collection and processing can have positive ripple effects that reach your customer service team. Consider upgrading your back-office tech stack to cut down on data processing time and improve front-office access to accurate, real-time information.

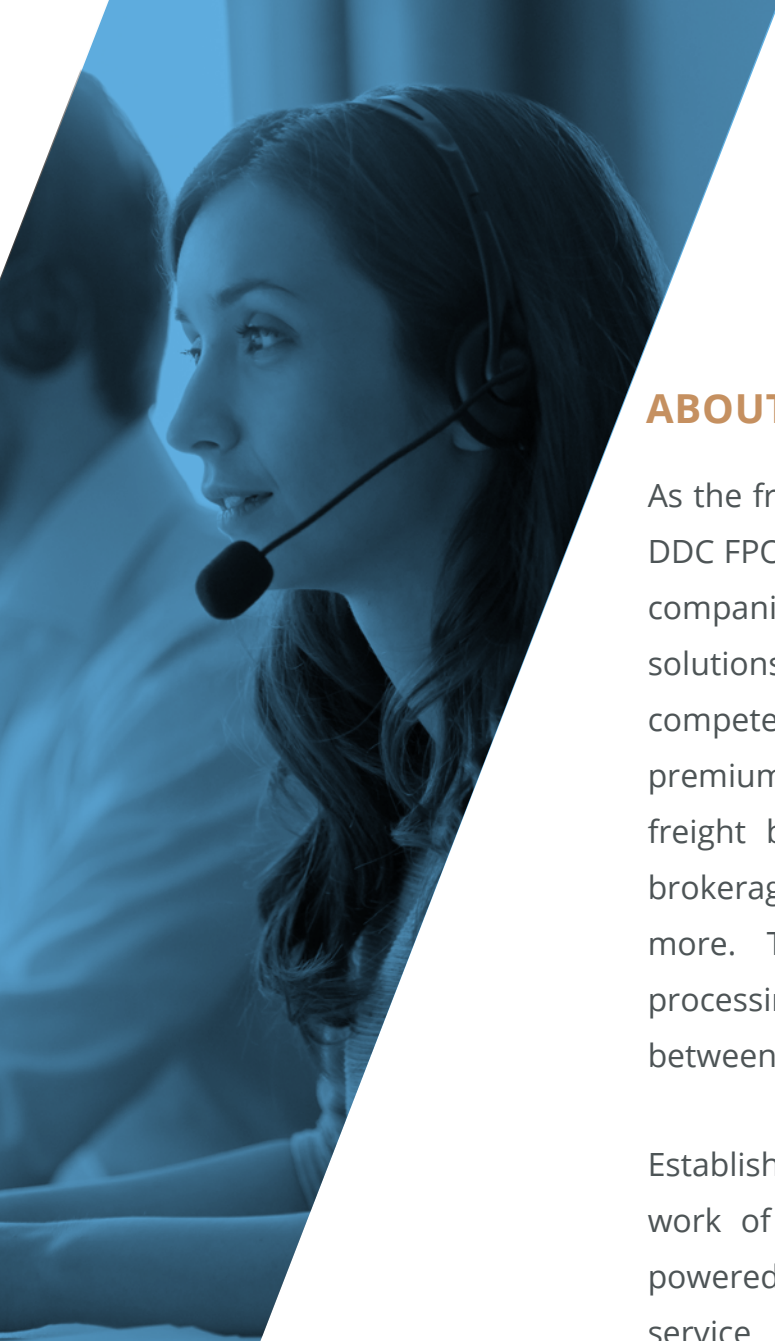


THE FUTURE OF
CUSTOMER SERVICE

In an open-response question, one survey respondent referred to customer service as the “foundation of the industry,” and we couldn’t agree more.

Your customer service team is the first point of contact for customers, and each experience can make or break your brand’s reputation and customer retention. Understanding your customers and being able to foster positive, long-term relationships is what will set you apart from the competition.

Our survey results show that while most companies in the supply chain industry are actively investing in their customer service operations, there are still significant gaps — such as KPI tracking, expanding support channels, and measuring ROI from customer service operations — that need to be addressed. Taking steps like implementing new technology, continuously training staff, and exploring new ways to scale efficiently can help companies fill those gaps, raise the bar for customer service, and turn their customer service operations into profit centers.



ABOUT DDC FPO


As the freight-focused business unit of The DDC Group, DDC FPO is a strategic partner of transport and logistics companies worldwide, committed to delivering solutions that enable clients to focus on core competencies and achieve their goals. The company's premium front and back office solutions include freight billing, customer service, inside sales, customs brokerage processing, mobile OCR data capture, and more. The company is currently responsible for processing over 300,000 shipments per day, moving between 33 countries.

Established in 1989, The DDC Group is a worldwide network of business process outsourcing (BPO) experts powered by a global team of over 5,000 professionals to service clients in over 30 languages. Our hybrid approach leverages innovative technology, proprietary workflows, and subject matter expertise in a customizable framework to equip you with long-term cost containment and uncapped revenue potential.

If you're ready to start improving your customer support services, DDC FPO can help. Our Customer Care suite is designed to turn the average customer lifecycle into a long-term, relationship-building funnel and revenue driver while removing the burdens of recruiting and onboarding staff in-house.

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