



Live Chat
Benchmark
Report

2020
Covid-19 Edition



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Introduction

For 5 years running, we have been producing annual Live Chat Benchmark Reports to help organizations understand how they stack up against their counterparts within and across a range of industries and team sizes. Customer service teams use this data to evaluate their live chat operations and learn where they are winning and where they need to focus their attention.

With the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, so much has been thrown into question, raising the value of benchmarking even further. The sheer volume of customer service queries sky rocketed (we’ve all heard horror stories like WestJet posting wait times of 2299 minutes back in March), while the nature of customer questions, behavioral trends, and expectations all shifted. On top of all this, the sweeping movement from office to remote working added even more complexity and disruption to customer service operations. In June, 42% of the U.S. labor force was working from home full-time, while 33% weren’t working at all.

To help you understand how Covid-19 has impacted your live chat team, we have analyzed key data points from January to March 2020, before the full effects of the pandemic, and compared them to April to August 2020 when the first wave of impacts across the world were in full swing.

The data comes from over 59 million live chats that passed through the Comm100 platform during this time to reveal the impacts that Covid-19 has had for different team sizes across 14 industries. Did chat volumes significantly increase? Did customer satisfaction take a hit as a result? And were wait times really as high as social media claims?

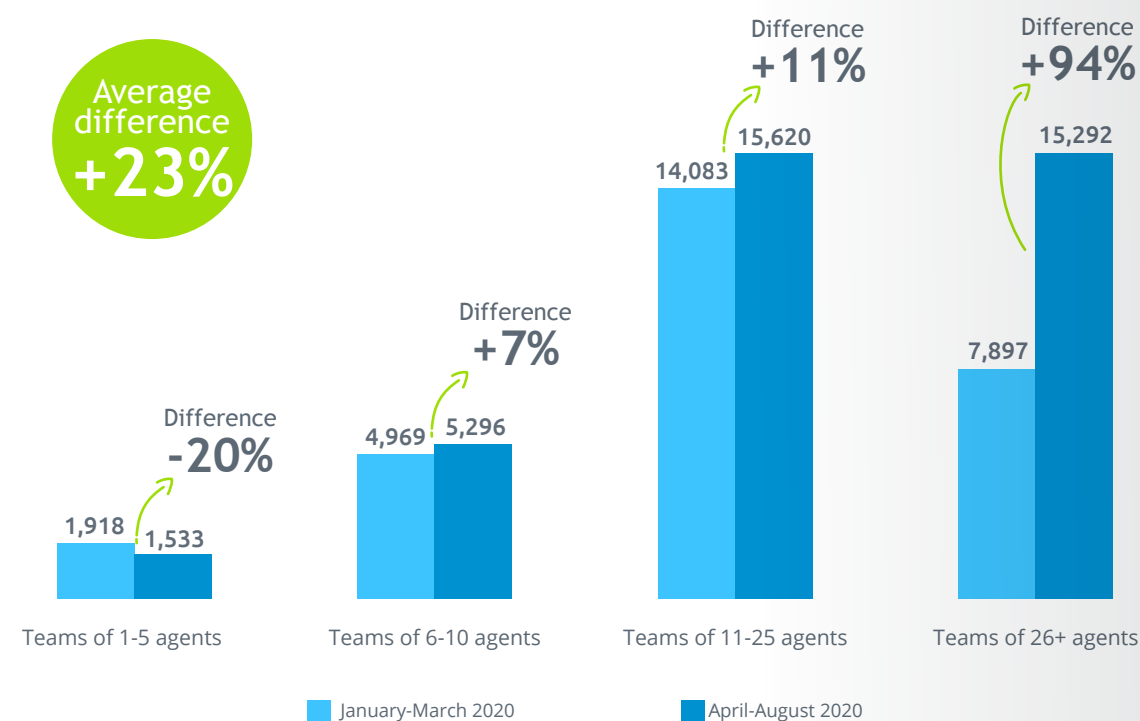
Read on to find the answers to these and other questions.

We hope that you find this Covid-19 benchmark edition revealing, and above all, that these up-to-date benchmarks will help you to better manage, prioritize, and improve your live chat operations during these unpredictable times.”



Kevin Gao
CEO , Comm100 Network Corporation

Chats per month



As most Customer Experience (CX) professionals would have expected, it has been an incredibly busy year for most live chat teams since the emergence of Covid-19. Overall, organizations faced a 23% increase in the average number of chats per month April through August compared to January through March. While a portion of this rise can be attributed to the confusion and question-generating nature of Covid-19, a key cause was a shift away from phone.

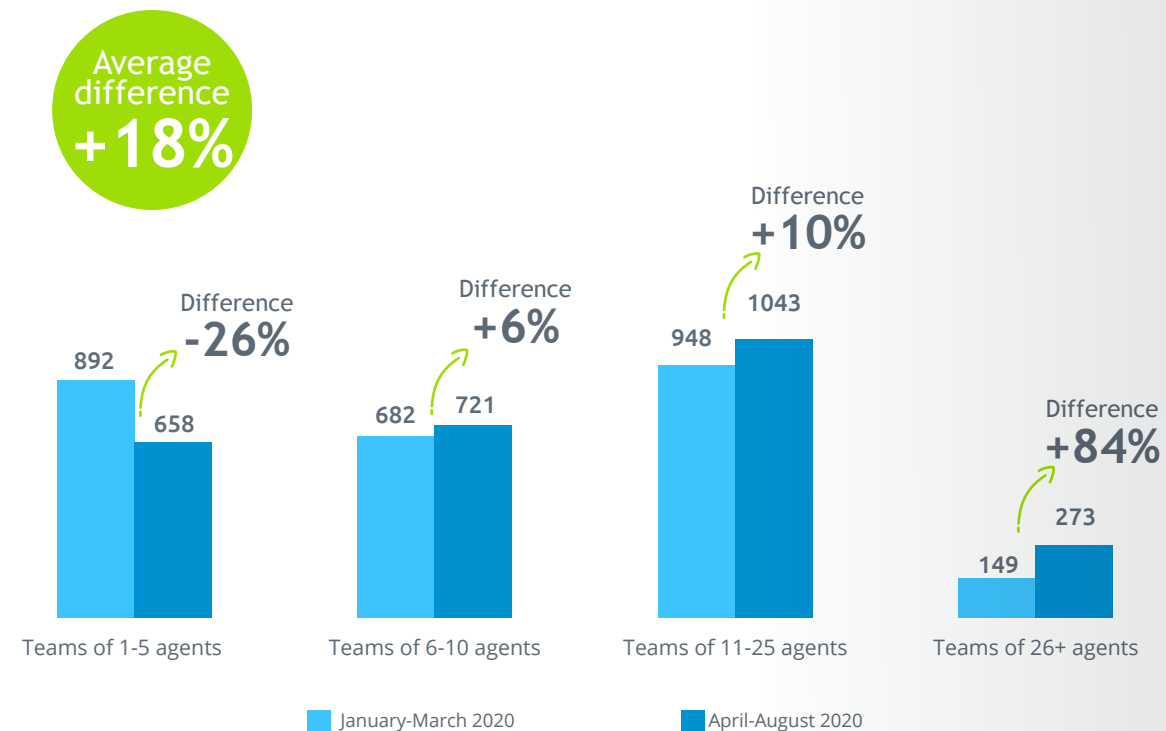
As organizations struggled to cope with an unpredictable and rapid rise in call volumes, many looked toward the scalability and efficiency of live chat to help manage the influx. While only one phone call can be taken at a time, experienced agents can manage several live chats simultaneously. Our customers took advantage of integrated tools like canned messaging, [AI-powered Agent Assist](#), and chatbots to reduce queue length and time to resolution.

When governments began encouraging and even forcing organizations to work from home, this posed challenges for more traditional, centralized contact centers that could not easily transfer to remote working environments. In contrast, web, desktop and mobile apps helped live chat teams to quickly and easily relocate from office to home with nothing more than a computer and internet connection. As a result, many organizations quickly moved in part or entirely from phone to live chat to ensure they could continue providing a high level of customer support.

The most notable increase in average monthly chats occurred in teams of 26+ agents which had to manage a 94% increase. Although we expect this figure to gradually drop across every team size, it still highlights the importance of refining scheduling and staffing decisions to make sure that workload is evenly spread – as much as to care for team morale as to provide fast support to customers.

The only exception to an increase in chat volume can be seen in teams of 1-5 agents whose average monthly chat figures dropped by 20%. This may well reflect the harder impact that Covid-19 had on small businesses that were forced to reduce staff numbers or didn't have the cashflow to stay open at all. [The Washington Post](#) reported that an estimated 100,000 small businesses in the US alone had already closed their doors by May. For smaller organizations that were able to keep their doors open, there was a strong likelihood that they reduced their chat coverage or even turned chat off so they could focus their resources on other parts of their operations.

Chats per agent per month



As expected, the growth in overall volume of chats from January-March to April-August was matched by growth in the number of chats per agent, which rose 18% on average. As teams faced more chat queries, agents were forced to deal with a greater number of chats, which may partly explain why chat duration also dipped (see [Chat Duration](#) for more detail) as agents sped up conversations in order to keep their heads above water and wait times under control.

However, the fact that chats per agent didn't increase at the same percentage as overall chat volume suggests that organizations – in particular the largest segment – were playing a part in keeping chats per agent low. Firstly, companies may have been predicting a sharp increase in chat volume and so hired or trained more agents in response. As a result, these teams were able to handle the uplift in queries without too great of a drop in customer

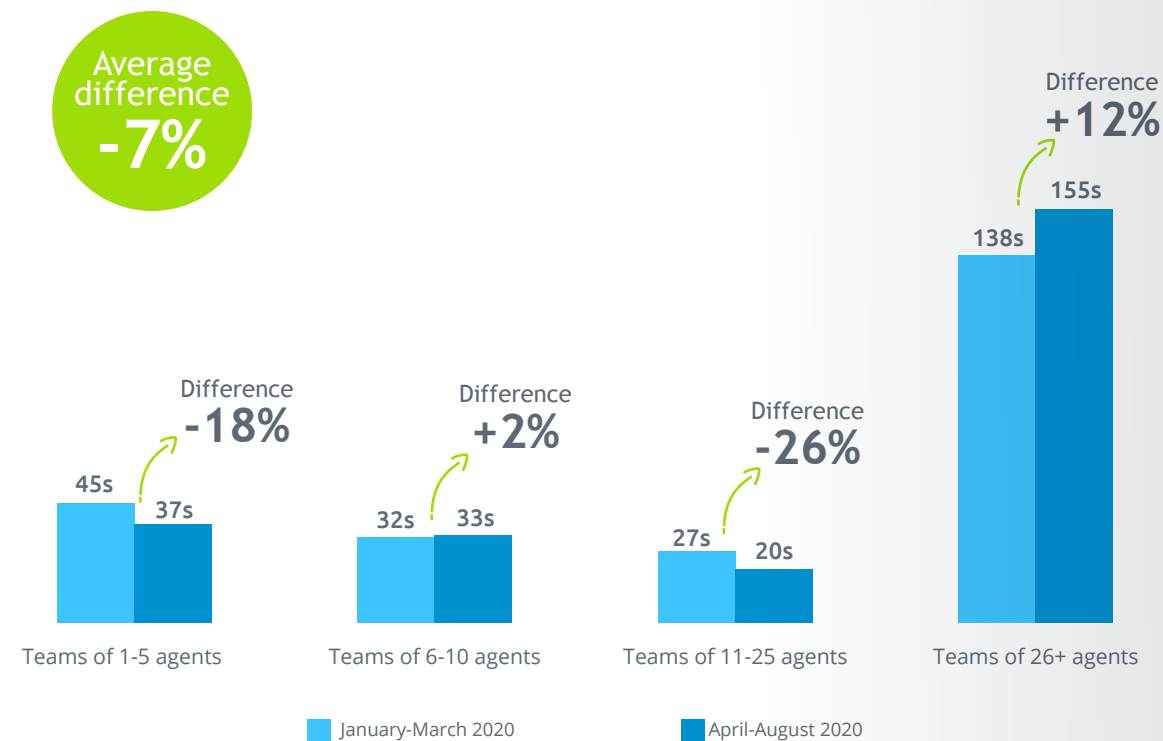
satisfaction (see [Customer Satisfaction](#) for more detail). From April to August, Comm100's customer success team was in regular discussions with companies of all sizes to add more licenses as they looked to expand their teams in response to the uplift in chat volume.

Given the emotionally-fuelled nature of the pandemic, organizations may have also given more care to the agent experience. In doing so they may have been less focused on enforcing chat concurrency and workload, and more on agent well-being. This would have led to a drop in per agent chat volume.

Many customers also launched chatbots during this period, which contributed to the drop in chats per agent. Comm100's AI Chatbot can handle up to 80% of queries without any agent involvement, allowing agents to spend more time on more challenging queries.

The 26+ band experienced by far the greatest rise in chats per agent with an increase of 84%, which closely reflects their overall rise in chats. It is important to note however, that despite this rise, their average chats per agent is still far lower than every other team size; 117% lower than teams of 11 to 25 for example. This strongly disproves the claim that agents of large companies are customer service 'factory workers' ordered to prioritize speed and efficiency over high-quality, helpful support. On the contrary, the low chat volume per agent coupled with the longest chat duration (see [Chat Duration](#) for more detail) suggests that the larger teams are prioritizing customer experience - even during (or because of) the unpredictability caused by Covid-19. And with the highest CSAT scores (see [Customer Satisfaction](#) for more detail) of all team sizes, their strategy seems to be working.

Wait time



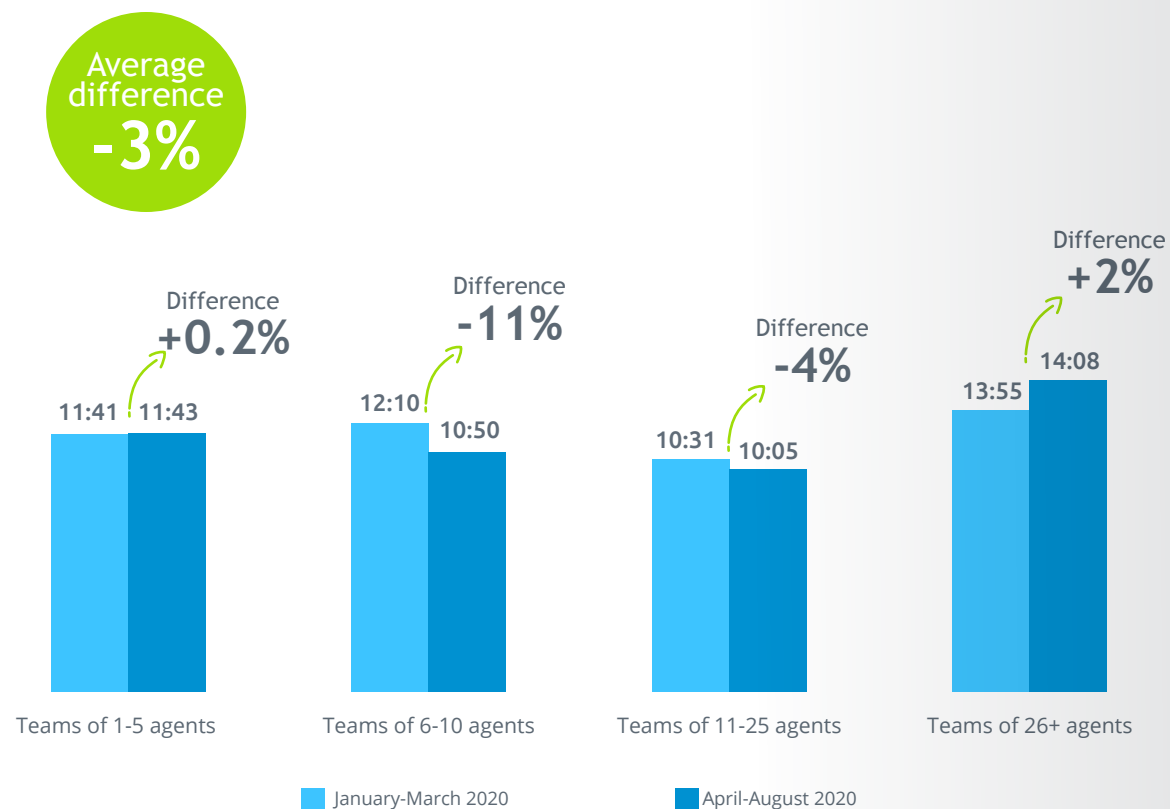
As a result of the overall decrease in chats per agent per month from January-March to April-August, it's perhaps unsurprising that the average wait time also dipped across team sizes as they had more agents to handle the rush of queries.

The notable team exception in this dataset can be seen in the 26+ band whose wait time increased by 12% to 155 seconds. This is explained by the fact that they were also the only team to experience an increase in chats per agent. (See [Chats per Agent](#) or more detail.)

As we discussed in Chats per Month, another cause of this was the shift away from phone and toward live chat as more organizations were forced to work remotely from April onward. Larger teams tend to have traditional call center setups which were unable to function smoothly, or even at all, when offices were closed. As a result, calls were pushed to live chat and wait times surged. This was compounded by the fact that many formerly phone-based agents were new to the software and to live chat so were unlikely to be able to handle several simultaneous chats like experienced live chat agents can.

Another explanation for this long wait time can be seen in its positive correlation to chat duration. While teams of 11-25 have the lowest wait time and chat duration, teams of 26+ have the highest wait time and chat duration. More on this below.

Chat duration



Chat duration was flat or down across every team size except for teams of 26+. On the surface, this drop in chat duration appears to be largely purposeful as managers and agents recognize the need to resolve chats quickly and shorten chat duration in order to manage the increase in chat volume and keep their heads above water.

Chat duration can be significantly decreased using the efficiency tools and features within Comm100 Live Chat. For example, intelligent routing ensures that chats get to the agent best equipped to respond, based on the topic, location, customer profile, and a range of other custom attributes, resulting in faster resolution.

During the conversation, agents can use shortcuts and canned messages (pre-defined replies) to significantly cut down on typing time. Agent Assist, Comm100's AI-powered virtual assistant, also helps agents to respond faster by monitoring inbound messages in real-time and suggesting the most relevant answers to the agent – so they don't need to type the whole response out or spend time searching for the correct information. These tools all help to reduce chat duration and resolve customer queries faster, and as the data implies, they can be used by teams of any size and industry.

Teams of 26+ had the largest increase in chat duration, as well as by far the longest chat duration of any team size, 40% longer than teams of 11-25 for example. This can often be the result of longer wait times (and as we have seen, teams of 26+ have the longest) because agents need to spend more time apologizing to and placating customers who may have become irritated at waiting so long to connect with an agent.

However, it's important to note that this longer chat duration isn't necessarily an issue, and in fact may be a key driver of high CSAT scores. Teams of 26+ have the best CSAT scores for 2020, managing to achieve an 87% positive customer satisfaction rate from April to August. This may well indicate that longer chats are the key to superior CX. More on customer satisfaction in the next section.

Customer satisfaction

▽ **- 3%** CSAT score ▽ **- 3.1%** positive CSAT rate

Customer satisfaction score

Team size by agents	January-March 2020	April-August 2020	Difference
1-5	4.2	4.1	-2%
6-10	4.3	4.1	-5%
11-25	4.4	4.3	-2%
26+	4.5	4.3	-4%
Average	4.3	4.2	-3%

Positive customer satisfaction rate (% of score 3/5 or higher)

Team size by agents	January-March 2020	April-August 2020	Difference
1-5	82.5%	78.7%	-3.8%
6-10	84.3%	81.2%	-3.1%
11-25	86.6%	83.7%	-2.9%
26+	89.9%	87.0%	-2.9%
Average	85.8%	82.7%	-3.1%

Perhaps unsurprisingly, customer satisfaction (CSAT) dropped across the two time periods for every team size, averaging a 3% decrease for CSAT score and 3.1% decrease for positive CSAT rate. Given the confusion and alarm that Covid-19 caused, this is understandable and perhaps inevitable.

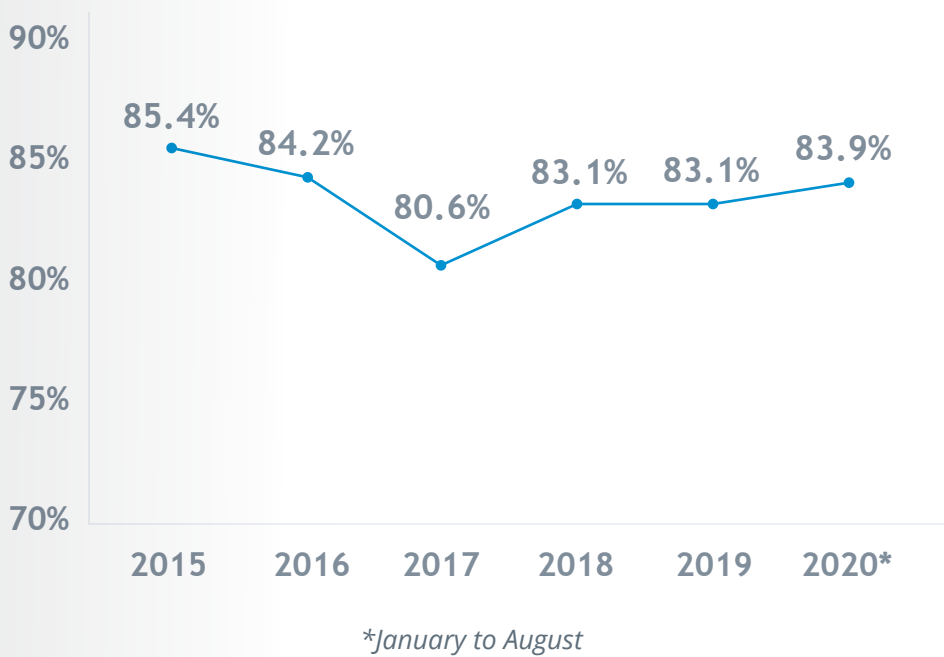
However, **it is important to note that the CSAT rate for January to March reached a new benchmark peak:** An average of 85.8% across every team size. In 2019, it was 2.7 points lower at just 83.1%. (See following graph for year-on-year stats.) Putting this stat into context, an average 82.7% CSAT for April to August is impressively high given the circumstances.

The reasons for this are varied. Given the circumstances created by Covid-19, customers may have simply been more accepting of longer queues and more appreciative of customer service workload than before. Perhaps more importantly, such a high CSAT despite an ongoing pandemic shows that live chat is a popular and effective channel in today's digital world, and it is enabling agents to continue delivering great service even during the most difficult of times.

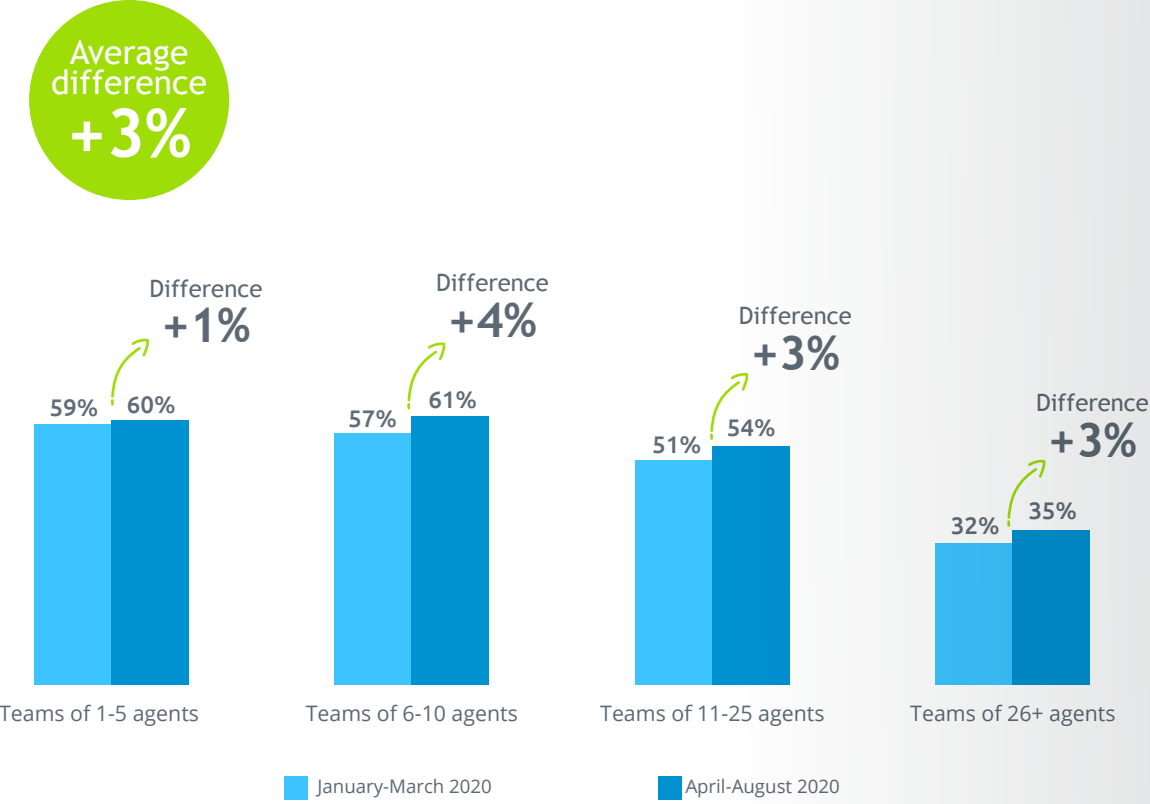
As previously discussed, teams of 26+ agents experienced the longest wait times and chat duration of all bands. While you may assume that this would result in lower CSAT scores, this team size actually achieved an impressive 87.0% average positive CSAT rate. This score not only surpasses every other team size but is also the highest achieved since Comm100 began tracking it back in 2015. This is a significant achievement and proves that prioritizing helpful support over pure efficiency will lead to better CSAT and CX.

The importance of investing in customer experience has been growing steadily in recent years as organizations recognize the impact it can have on their bottom line. These high CSAT scores across team sizes despite the uplift in chat volume could well be attributed to this trend as teams broaden their use of live chat tools to provide more responsive, helpful, and personalized support. These tools include co-browsing, video and audio chat, and intelligent routing to ensure each customer is directed to the most appropriate agent or team – all of which have increased in use since 2019.

Annual Customer Satisfaction Rate, 2015 to 2020

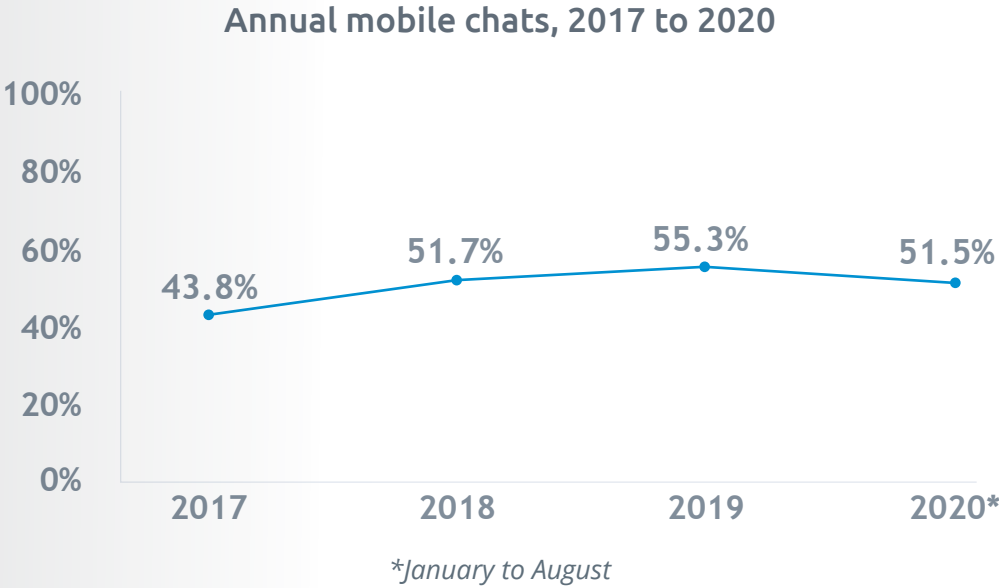


Mobile Chats



Chats on mobile devices grew by 3 percentage points from January-March to April-August. Although this uplift may seem modest, particularly in light of the speed at which mobile chat has grown in the past few years, that mobile chat usage remained at this level at all is testament to the popularity of mobile customer service.

As a result of Covid-19, the average time spent at home shot up as people around the world were forced to leave their offices. With this, access to desktops naturally rose, and reliance on mobile devices decreased. We can see the impact this had by looking at the year-on-year mobile chat usage (see the following graph) as mobile chats dropped by 3.8% from 2019 to 2020.



This slight drop in mobile usage is not a surprise given the greater access to desktop while working from home. However, the fact that mobile chats stayed at such a high level in 2020 despite this significant change shows just how far mobile has come as an essential part of customer service. We expect this figure to soon exceed 2019's record as we emerge from the pandemic, and can't stress enough the need to optimize chat for mobile.

Industry breakdown

Our report includes data from 14 different industries. Here is a comparison of the main live chat metrics broken down per industry, showing the figure for January to March on the first line, April to August on the second line, and the percentage change on the third line.

Industry	Wait time	Average chats per month	Chat duration	Chats on mobile
Business Services	29.6	2425	923	35%
	30.7	1329	850	39%
	+ 4%	- 45%	- 8%	+ 4%
Consumer Products & Services	27.5	1109	605	68%
	71.4	3688	625	63%
	+ 159%	+ 233%	+3%	- 5%
eCommerce	72.8	597	1004	38%
	77.8	805	970	37%
	+ 7%	+ 35%	- 3%	- 1%
Education	36.3	2032	853	32%
	39.9	3243	1035	30%
	+ 10%	+ 60%	+ 21%	- 2%
Banking and Finance	105.4	2890	740	39%
	37.1	1840	754	38%
	- 65%	- 36%	+ 2%	- 1%
Government & Not-for-profit	42.3	928	774	40%
	22.5	1593	715	42%
	- 47%	+ 72%	- 8%	+ 2%

January-March 2020 April-August 2020 Percentage Change

January-March April-August Difference	Wait time	Average chats per month	Chat duration	Chats on mobile
Healthcare	116.8	716	755	41%
	77.8	495	814	47%
	- 33%	- 31%	+ 8%	+ 6%
Manufacturing	86.4	4760	1026	36%
	182.6	343	1242	20%
	+ 111%	- 93%	+ 21%	- 16%
Real Estate	2.7	1884	657	3%
	1.5	1368	711	4%
	- 44%	- 27%	+ 8%	+ 1%
Recreation	17.2	8124	401	82%
	14.2	9753	438	83%
	- 17%	+ 20%	+ 9%	+ 1%
Technology	73.2	3352	1192	29%
	69.4	2474	1089	28%
	- 5%	- 26%	- 9%	- 1%
Telecoms	28.6	1239	765	35%
	34.1	1450	803	40%
	- 19%	+ 17%	+ 5%	+ 5%
Travel	15.4	324	860	45%
	2.5	197	655	61%
	+ 245%	- 39%	- 24%	+ 16%

January-March 2020 April-August 2020 Percentage Change



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