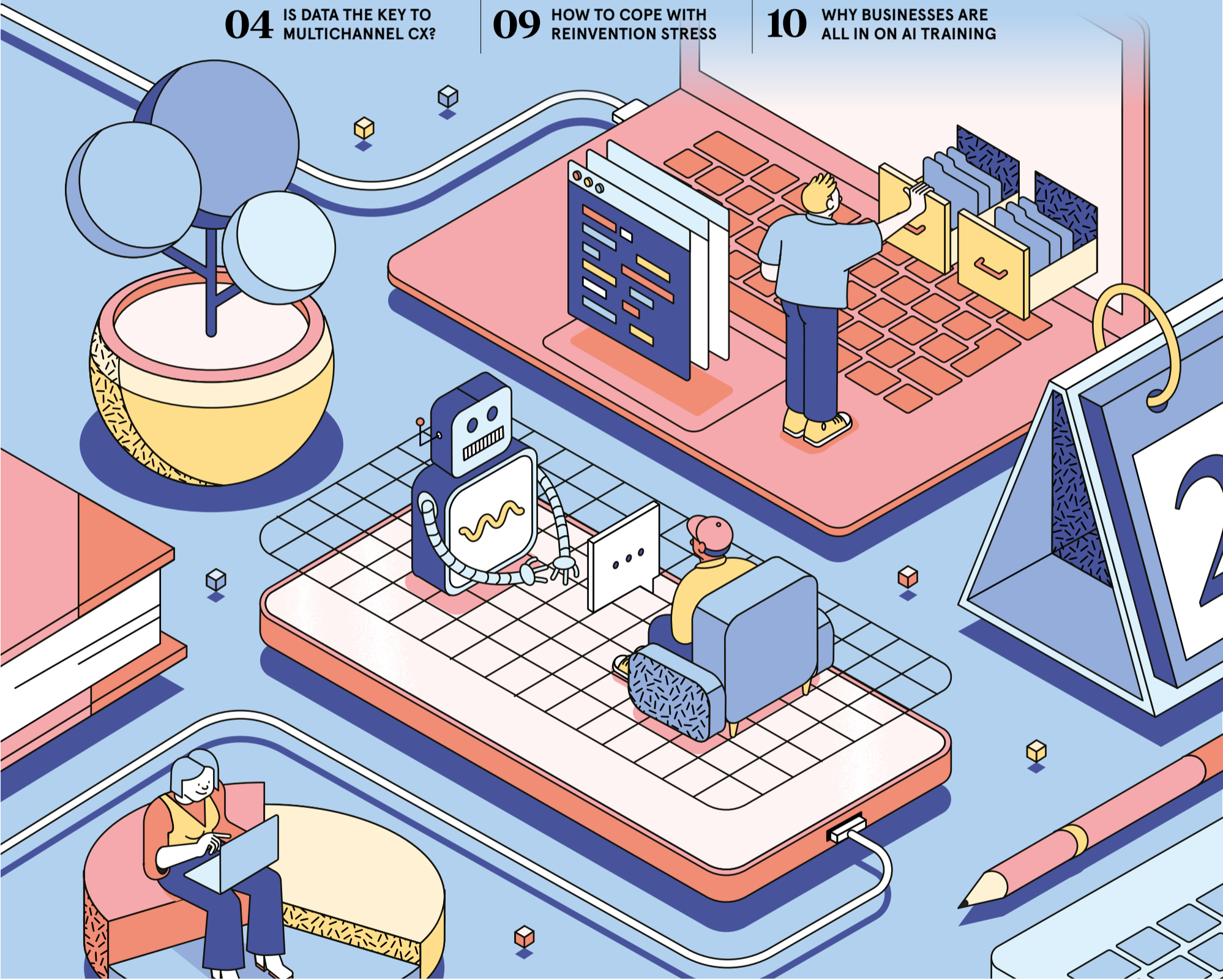


DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Savvy businesses turn to data for a multichannel edge

Companies with clear values that use data effectively can engage with their customers through multiple means, helping to win business and build brand loyalty

Sam Shaw

Every Monday morning, you head to the same coffee shop. You queue, order, pay by debit card and wait patiently to collect your drink.

But what if on one of those Mondays, your phone unexpectedly pings while you're standing in the queue: "Your coffee is on us today, thanks for being a great customer."

The notification isn't from the coffee shop, it's from your bank, which has recognised your spending habit.

Or maybe you're a frequent flyer with a particular airline. As you display your boarding pass, the air steward greets you by name: "Welcome! I understand you're vegetarian and I will make it a priority that your meal preference is honoured."

These are just two examples of how businesses can surprise and delight customers, simply by using data well. By bringing together offline and online, a customer's experience is elevated from an unremarkable everyday occurrence to a 'wow' moment. That's according to Antonia JA Hock, founder and CEO of an eponymous customer experience (CX) consultancy.

It's a common mistake to assume that customers can be wowed only over one channel, says Hock.

"Customers no longer typically start and stop their engagement on

one platform, so holistic design is essential. I might find you on TikTok, start my purchase in your app and decide to come into a physical location to complete. The 'wows' should not depend on the medium of engagement."

Hock's first step when advising on omnichannel strategy is setting 'standards of excellence' – non-negotiables that determine how the company will approach CX, reflective of the firm's values and what they want to be known for.

One client, for instance, selected eight focus areas, with an emphasis on storytelling.

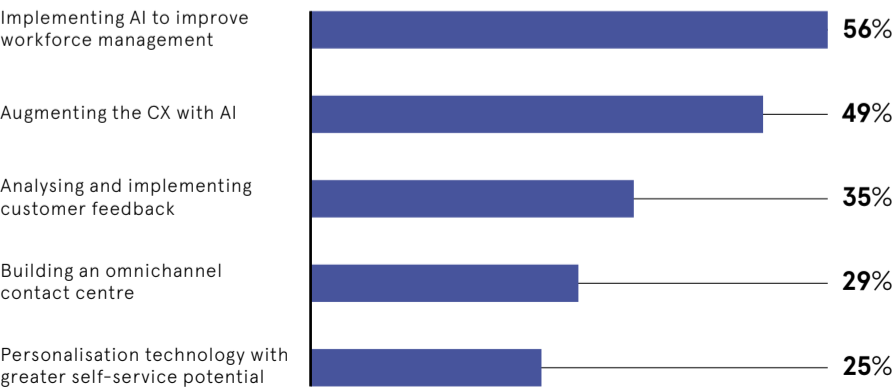
"They have decided that customer storytelling has to be absolutely critical to every experience they deliver: social media, on the app, listening mechanisms or in person. In all of their experiences, this concept of storytelling should be a guiding principle."

Businesses often jump straight into choosing channels, analysing data or implementation design. This approach might lead to a good app, website or bricks-and-mortar experience, but ultimately results in a mismatched CX across channels, Hock explains. "We've all had that experience where the app is great, but we hate going into the store – often the case with banks or

PRIORITISING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Verint, 2024

In-house CX professionals citing the following as having greatest impact on CX strategy in the next 12 months



mladenballinovac via iStock

airlines. Or the in-person experience is great, but the app is terribly lacking – typical of luxury retail."

Another 'standard of excellence' for this client was gratitude, a value built into every way the client engaged with its customers.

These 'standards' or values should be on-brand and reflect efficiency, emotional engagement and capability, Hock says.

"Only then should you start layering in data analysis, feature sets and implementation strategies that are aligned."

There's a reason CX consultancies exist. Companies across sectors are acutely aware of a customer base that is increasingly demanding and less loyal.

According to ServiceNow's *Consumer Voice Report 2024*, 61% of UK consumers are less loyal to brands than two years ago. The decline coincides with the cost-of-living crisis, but isn't just price-led.

The report says consumers are less tolerant of brands that "don't deliver exceptional experiences". Rather than suffer a subpar experience, they're voting with their feet.

Today's customers have complex needs. For instance, consumers appreciate the benefits of AI but don't trust it entirely, so they want the option of a human touch. ServiceNow's research concluded that organisations must "balance high tech with high touch" as consumers demand 24/7 convenience and real-time responses, supported by a friendly face when required.

This is the tailored experience HSBC is striving to deliver – eradicating channel siloes and being more responsive.

For Christopher Dean, managing director, customer channels at HSBC UK, leveraging data to improve customer outcomes is a priority, making them more predictive and personalised.

Holistic design is essential. The 'wows' should not depend on the medium of engagement

Data from a range of sources, such as call or chatbot transcripts or social media posts, can inform those intercepts between cross-channel interactions, enabling them to nudge appropriately, Dean says.

While app-based interactions must be quick, easy and discoverable, he says, they can create a "runway" to other channels. In-app activity can indicate financial needs where phone, video or in-person conversations are more appropriate, such as around savings, debt consolidation or wealth advice.

Irrespective of channel, Dean says the business should have only one scorecard – the customer – because in today's age of instant gratification, customers won't hang about.

In addition to undertaking traditional market research, HSBC launched an ideas hub, which invites customer-facing staff – branch cashiers, colleagues in telephony or software engineers – to raise pain points in the customer experience. The information fed into the hub then informs a transformation roadmap, which covers physical and virtual channels.

It's important that all company tech and digital platforms integrate. After breaking away from Walmart, Asda is undertaking a massive digital transformation focused on omnichannel, loyalty-led, personalised customer experience. Included

in its transformation initiative is the loyalty programme Asda Rewards, which has accrued 6.2 million members in its first two years and now accounts for 52% of total sales.

Under Walmart ownership, Asda's tech was not its own to tinker with. But Mark Baxter, Asda's senior director for loyalty, is very aware of the importance of digital integration in creating a joined-up CX.

"Tech convergence is definitely in our plans," he says. "Having disparate platforms, requiring different logins that don't speak to one another dilutes the ability to understand our customers."

Baxter says a good integrated strategy contains five main stages and sequencing is crucial.

"It starts with setting out your scope and ambition; what do you want to do?"

Next, he says, thinking about the future is vital: "What new tech is coming down the line? How will customers be shopping differently?"

Then comes the rollout: "What are we going to integrate first, who will move first on to which platform and who will follow?"

The final two stages, he says, are about getting it done: "We build a workstream. Plan who is going to do what, by when and which team and resources are needed. You reevaluate at every point."

Finally, he says, it's about deployment and assessment. "Did it work? If not, why not? What do you need to change?"

A seamless, personalised customer experience isn't just for large, listed multinationals. It's a possibility for all businesses: it's just a case of scaling and prioritising accordingly.

Regardless of company size, sector or geography, Hock's approach to CX overhaul focuses on three outcomes. "Unless you're going to drive revenue, retention or referrals, it's probably not a good investment." ●