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THE **CHANNEL** CO.[®]

The total package:

How channel leaders can stand out from the crowd with “total experience”

NOVEMBER 2023

Sponsored by

AGILITAS

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PRIORITISING ESG WITH AGILITAS

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- Reducing Carbon Footprint



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Sponsor introduction

Agilitas proudly sponsored this year's CRN On conference, for the sixth consecutive year. The theme this year was one that is quickly becoming more prevalent for businesses across the channel: the Total Experience. Defined as an organisation's ability to break silos and treat all experiences as interconnected, Gartner predicts that by 2024, companies providing a total experience will outperform competitors by 25%.

Adopting a total experience can be a daunting prospect for channel businesses - it requires diverse groups and teams, who may have previously worked in siloes, to collaborate, share knowledge and operate in a coordinated manner.

A total experience can improve employee and customer confidence, satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy over time. When implemented successfully, it can demonstrate and communicate a company's core values and value proposition across all touchpoints. To explore this concept further, we recently launched our

inaugural Channel Trends Report, a barometer for change, measuring the general level of optimism and confidence across several key areas critical to the channel today.

We asked channel leaders to rank the most important factors to their business over the next 12 months. Whilst they are juggling several high-priority strategies, with just a 4% difference in the top 5 focus areas, customer experience and culture topped the list. This highlights that many businesses recognise the opportunity to establish a total experience. By improving experiences for all stakeholders and implementing this transformational strategy, channel leaders can build more resilient business models.

At Agilitas, we practice what we preach. We recently introduced CX Edge, our framework for effectively aligning and delivering customer needs, as well as measuring success. In addition to Inventory Assurance, we have incorporated our Professional Services and Smart Logistics capabilities into

the framework to streamline the customer journey through our systems, as well as measure how we are delivering against our customers' requirements.

Both underpinned by Agilitas' sustainability initiatives, Professional Services acts as an extension to our customer's engineering capabilities to accelerate time to revenue with skills and resources to streamline deployment and with Smart Logistics being centred around how the company optimises warehouse, logistics and circular economy services.

With the introduction of CX Edge, we aim to put our channel customers at the heart of everything we do. The framework allows greater control, forecast and predictability of customer success, ensuring effective management over costs or investments and proactively incorporating trends rising in the channel.

With greater collaboration and an increased focus on all experiences, channel businesses can immediately see a shift within their business, bolstering a stronger strategy and allowing a better experience all around.

Whilst technology is pivotal in building a total experience, at Agilitas, we are now working to adopt a departmental view and manage our teams holistically. As a result, our team, products and services all benefit from journey mapping as we can identify gaps, friction points and frustrations, and take note of links among departments that need to be strengthened.

For those looking to learn more about the total experience, we hope that our new report, '2023 Channel Trends - Unlocking the Power of Total Experience' as well as this research by CRN, will advise them and help them to stay competitive in our rapidly evolving industry. ■

“ A TOTAL EXPERIENCE CAN IMPROVE EMPLOYEE AND CUSTOMER CONFIDENCE, SATISFACTION, LOYALTY, AND ADVOCACY OVER TIME.



Executive summary

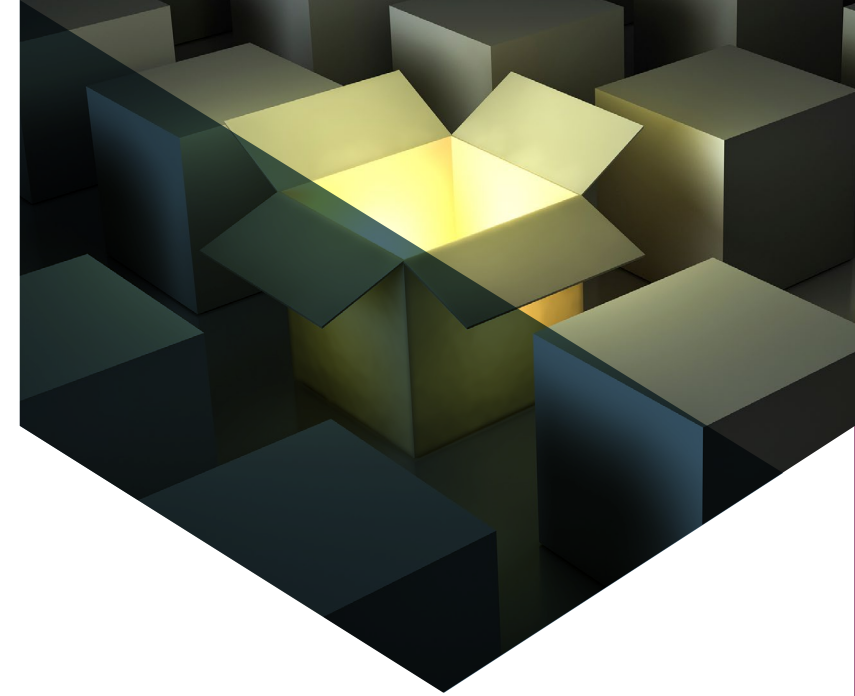
In the context of economic uncertainty, skills shortages, and the need to digitally transform at speed, today's organisation's expect more from their channel partners than ever before. Aside from offering a high-quality product or service, channel partners must now offer the total package to stand out from the competition. They must be on-hand with technical expertise, build strong interpersonal relationships, and demonstrate a commitment to furthering their customers' business objectives.

One way to achieve this is through implementing a "total experience". Rather than being siloed, implementing total experience means customer and employee experience are approached holistically, with a focus on improving the experiences of all stakeholders with the right technology and organisational culture and leadership.

This ensures that organisations are able to attract and retain much-needed talent and that experience strategies are aligned with overall business outcomes.

But how can those in the channel ensure they are not only creating positive experiences within their own organisation, but also passing their learnings onto customers? And how does total experience align with automation and ESG strategies?

This white paper, featuring bespoke research, will answer these questions and more, as well as exploring the advantages of adopting a total experience strategy, the importance of having the right technology to make total experience a reality, and how total experience can help cement your position as a valued channel partner. ■



Customer priorities

Total Experience (TX) is centred on the idea of delivering positive experiences to all stakeholders in an organisation in a holistic and integrated way. It acknowledges that the different experience types are interlinked, and positive experiences for one will result in good outcomes for the other.

For example, if an employee is able to complete tasks in a way that is intuitive, streamlined and supported by the right digital tools, they can pass on these experiences to the customers they serve, improving brand reputation and mindshare. Conversely, if employees

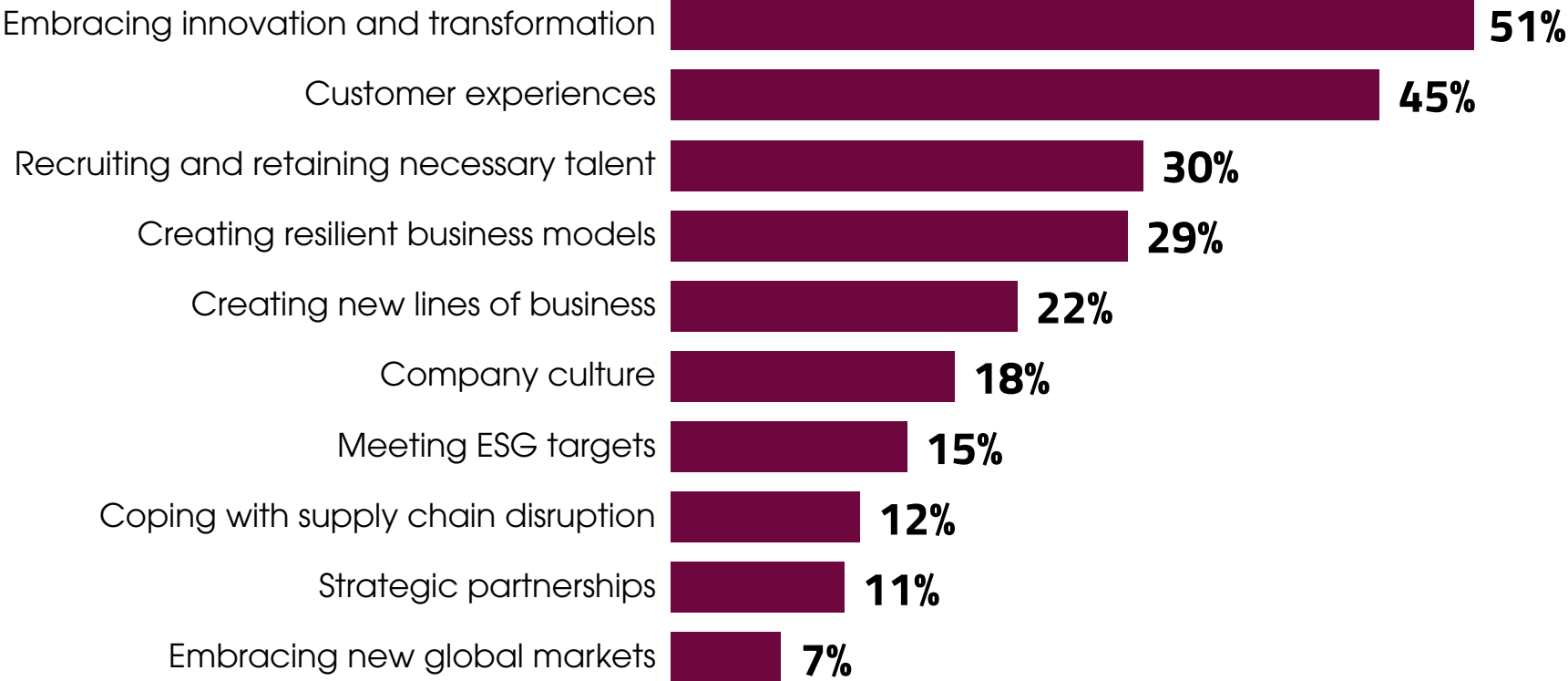
have to contend with clunky, legacy tools, delivering speedy customer service becomes a challenge.

TX is a relatively new concept, and may be one which organisations have limited experience of. This presents an opportunity for channel leaders to demonstrate their value as a partner and deliver positive experiences to those within their ecosystem.

CRN surveyed 121 IT leaders from a range of industries to understand more about their goals and challenges when it comes to their channel partners and total experience. ▶

“ TOTAL EXPERIENCE (TX) IS CENTRED ON THE IDEA OF DELIVERING POSITIVE EXPERIENCES TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN AN ORGANISATION IN A HOLISTIC AND INTEGRATED WAY.

Fig. 1: Which of the following are the biggest priorities for your organisation moving forward?



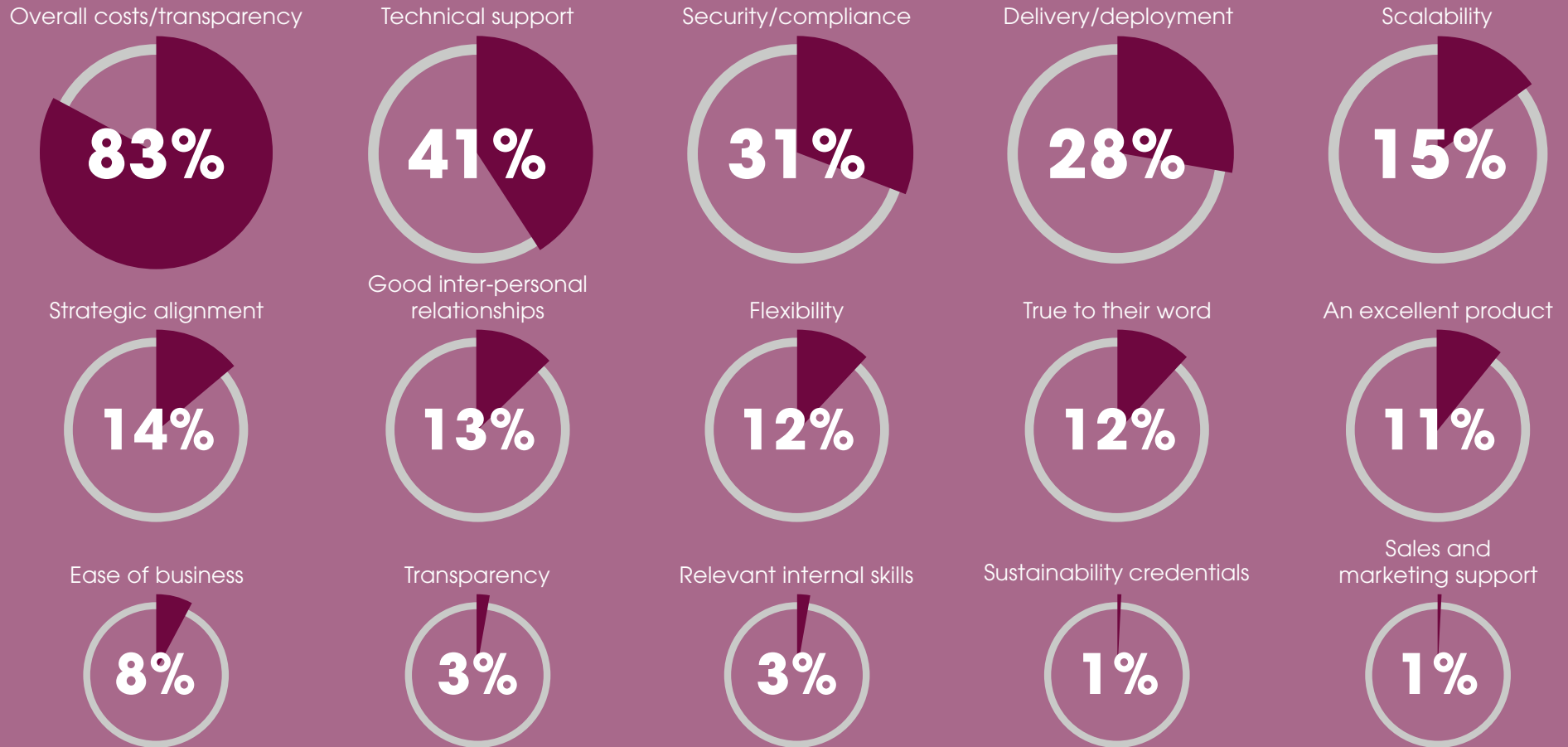
Respondents identified their biggest priorities for their organisation as embracing innovation and transformation, customer experience and recruiting and retaining necessary talent.

Despite facing a challenging economic climate, focus remains clear: organisations are looking to reach customers in new and

innovative ways. However, having the necessary talent to make this possible is a key concern.

Channel leaders must ensure they are responding to their partners' business priorities and be across both long-term and short-term goals. ▶

Fig. 2: Most important areas when choosing a channel partner



When choosing a channel partner, cost is king, chosen by 83 per cent of respondents as a top priority. This comes as no surprise, as organisations increasingly look for value for money in their channel partnerships.

Technical support and security and compliance were the next

highest priorities, with channel partners expected to have not only the technical know-how that their customers may lack internally, but also water-tight security.

Transparency, relevant internal skills, sustainability credentials and sales and marketing support were deemed the lowest priorities. ▀

Fig. 3: Which of the following most closely applies to your organisation?

I am confident my organisation will not meet its ESG targets

1%

I am confident my organisation is meeting its ESG targets

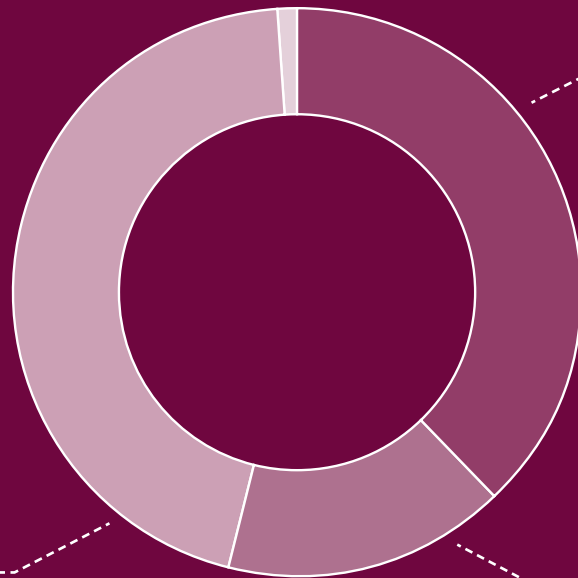
38%

I am unsure whether my organisation will meet its ESG targets

45%

My organisation is not currently meeting its ESG targets

16%



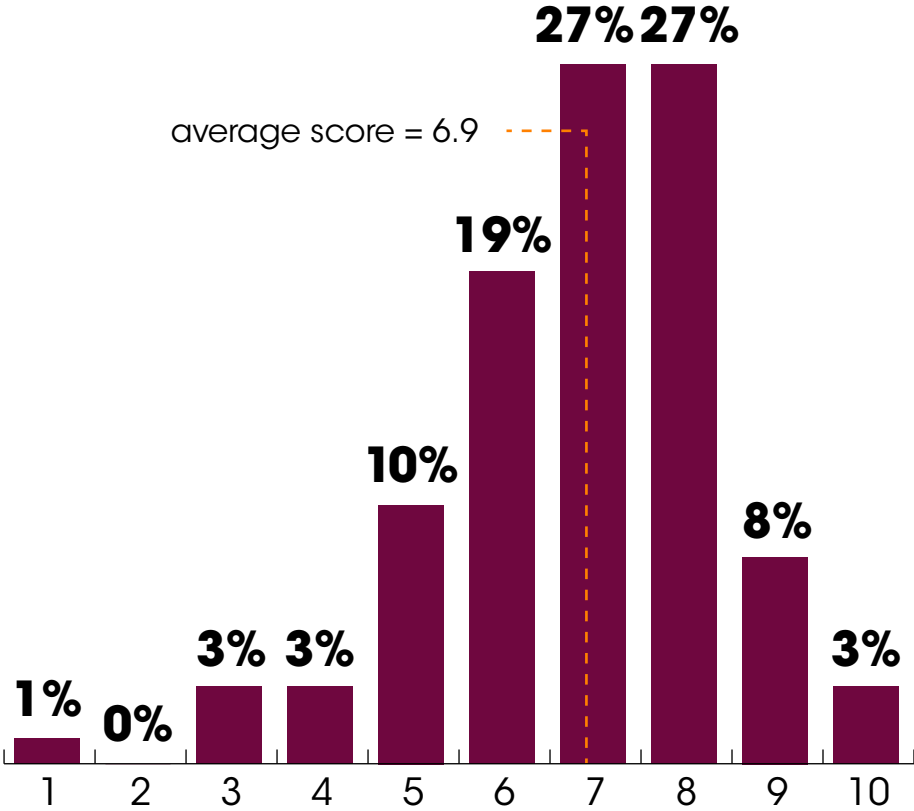
38 per cent are confident they are meeting their ESG targets, with 45 per cent unsure if targets are being met. 16 per cent do not believe they are currently meeting targets. This demonstrates an overall lack of confidence when it comes to ESG.

With investors and regulators putting pressure on organisations to demonstrate a commitment to ESG, those in the channel must be on hand to help their customers tackle ESG targets to future-proof partnerships.

They must have a comprehensive understanding of how their customers are measuring their ESG targets, clear ESG policies during the tender, and the ability to audit the sustainability of organisations in their supply chain. ▶

Fig. 4: On a scale of 1 to 10 how important are your organisation's channel partners when it comes to ESG strategy?

(1=not at all important 10=extremely important)



When asked to rate the importance of channel partners are when it comes to ESG strategy, where 1 was not at all important and 10 was extremely important, the average rating was a 6.9 out of 10. Just 7 per cent rated it as less than a 5 out of 10 and 38 per cent rated it as an 8 or higher. This indicates that partnering with those in the channel that display a commitment to ESG strategies is of moderate importance, but may not be a crucial factor in channel decisions.

While organisations may view sustainability as important, it is eclipsed by other factors when it comes to choosing a channel partner. However, this does not mean that those in the channel can afford to rest on their laurels. ■

“ PARTNERING WITH THOSE IN THE CHANNEL THAT DISPLAY A COMMITMENT TO ESG STRATEGIES IS OF MODERATE IMPORTANCE, BUT MAY NOT BE A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN CHANNEL DECISIONS.

CUSTOMER SUCCESS THROUGH OXEDGE

ALIGN

- Align Business Goals with Customers
- Seamless and Predictable Experience
- Increase Satisfaction and Loyalty

TRANSFORM

- Accelerate Time-to-Service
- Enable Customers to Remain Adaptive
- Become Innovative and Competitive

SCALE

- Ensure Positive Customer Experience
- Deliver High Levels of Service
- Continually Scale and Evolve

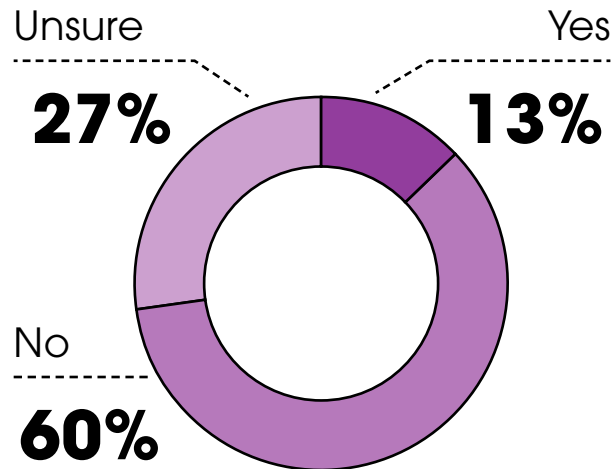
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Our framework for delivering a first-class customer experience is pivotal to Tech Channel organisations.

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Positive experiences

Fig. 5: Has your organisation put into practice “total experience”?



When asked whether their organisation has implemented total experience, just 13 per cent answered “yes”, with 60 per cent having not yet implemented total experience and the rest unsure. This indicates that total experience is not yet widespread, and that there may be an opportunity for channel leaders to explore the impact implementing it could have on their partners.

TX can be difficult to implement as it involves multiple touchpoints within an organisation, coordination from multiple teams, and may involve the implementation of new technology.

However, taking a holistic approach to improving the experience of anyone who engages with an organisation can be beneficial to organisations regardless of industry and size, as it makes it easier for employees to respond to customer needs as multiple aspects of experience are tackled together. ►

Fig. 6: What impact has implementing a total experience strategy had on your organisation?

Somewhat negative impact on my organisation and customers

19%

Significant positive impact on my organisation and customers

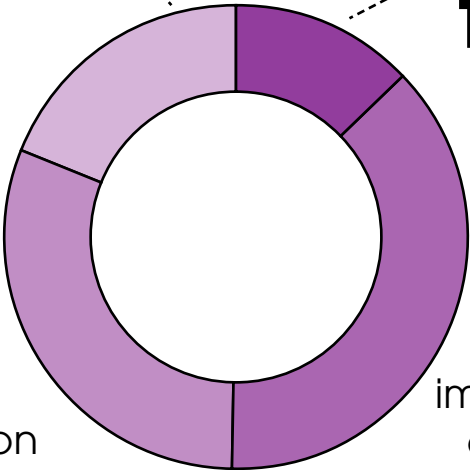
13%

Minimal impact on my organisation and customers

31%

Somewhat positive impact on my organisation and customers

38%



51%

REPORTED A BROADLY POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR ORGANISATION.

Out of those that have implemented total experience, 51 per cent reported a broadly positive impact on their organisation. However, a not insignificant proportion of respondents, 19 per cent, reported a somewhat negative experience.

Respondents that have implemented total experience were asked to describe the use cases they have deployed. A sample of their responses can be seen below. ▶

A woman with short blonde hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue blazer over a white collared shirt, stands on the right side of the frame. She is smiling and pointing towards a whiteboard. In the foreground, the backs of several people's heads and shoulders are visible as they sit in a meeting room, listening to her presentation. The room has large windows in the background, letting in natural light.

Briefly describe the measures your organisation has taken to implement a total experience strategy.

“ Rewriting internal systems.

“ Currently researching 3rd party support.

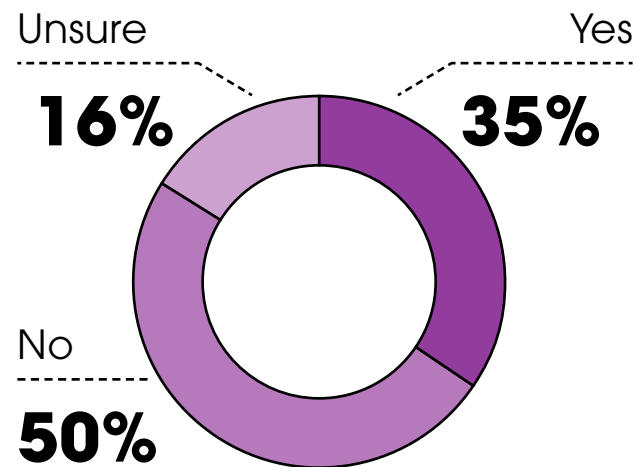
“ Investing in tooling to support including CRM.

“ Appointment of a product manager and assigned resource.

“ Consolidated platform for customer interaction from end to end.

“ Reinvented the respective journeys and used digital technologies to deliver a more focussed platform that allows them to map their own journeys.

Fig. 8: Are your organisation's customer experience, employee experience and user experience tools managed centrally?



Over a third of respondents are currently managing their customer, employee and user experience tools centrally. 60 per cent answered "no".

Organisations that do not have the means of managing the various elements that contribute to good experience from a central platform risk introducing management complexity and siloes. Overworked IT teams preoccupied with the day-to-day management of multiple complex tools will not have the time or resources to implement good user experience across the board.

Channel leaders should therefore be on hand to provide the tools and resources that allow for simple management of employee, user and customer experience. ■

Future-proofing partnerships

Encouragingly, 65 per cent said they have invested in new technology to improve customer experience. How users interact with a website, tool or app is a key component of how a brand is perceived, so investing in user interfaces and multi-channel communication is a must. While technology is not the only factor in ensuring good experiences, with organisational culture of equal importance, users have come to expect intuitive, easy-to-use tools, and will become frustrated if they are slowed down by outdated technology.

Of those that have implemented new technology, examples included CRM systems, customer-facing software, AI, and IoT endpoint monitoring. ▶

Fig. 9: Has your organisation invested in new technology to improve customer/employee experience?

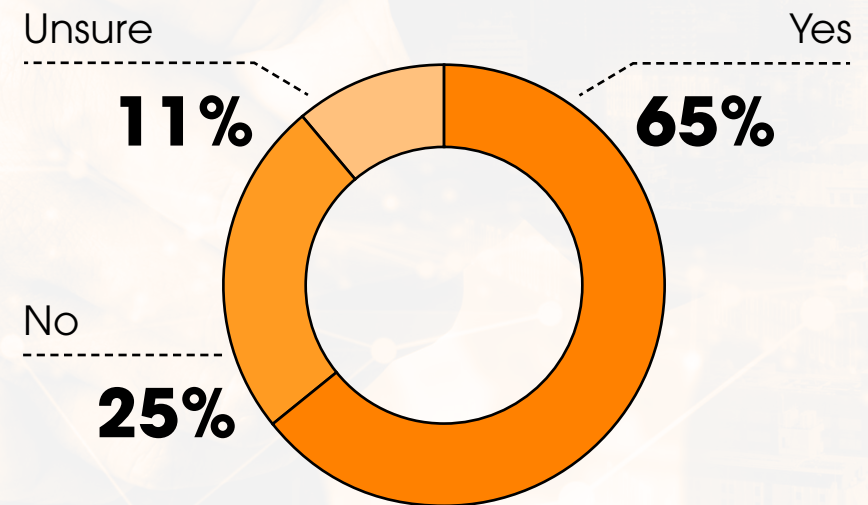
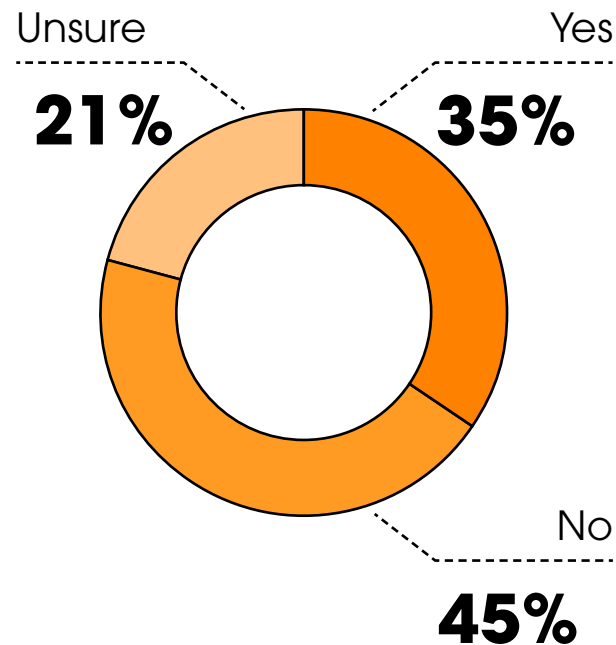




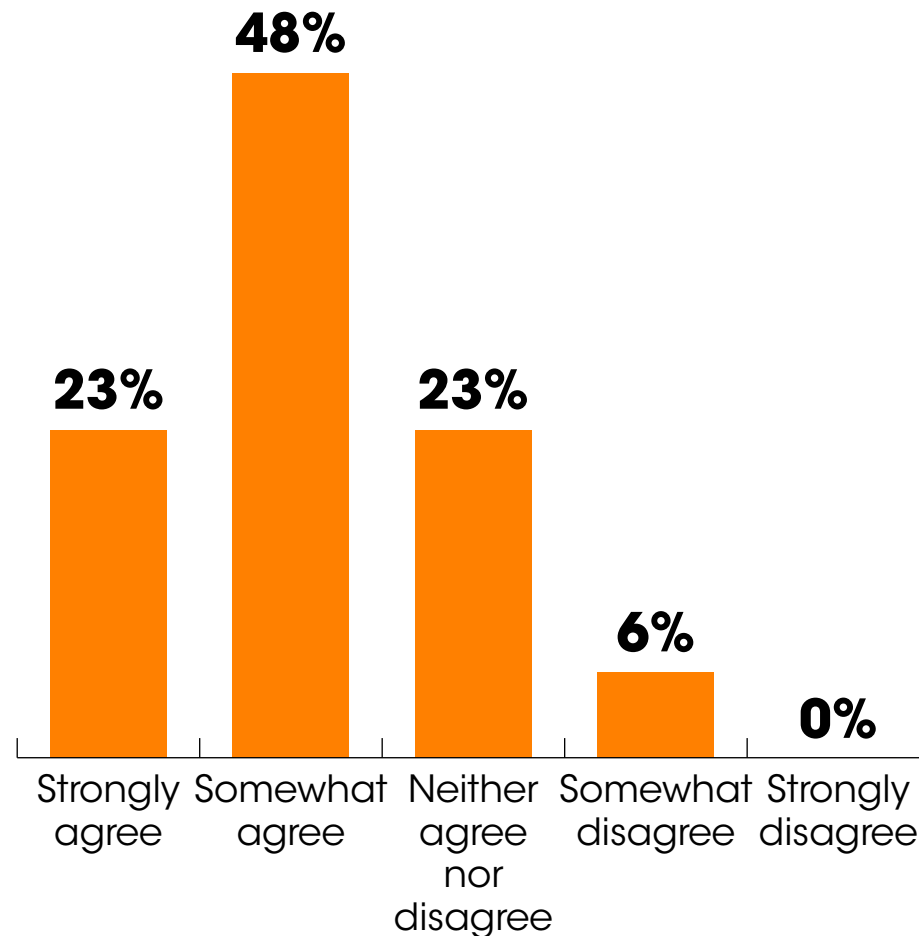
Fig. 10: Has your organisation had assistance from its channel partners in improving user experience?



35 per cent said they have had assistance from channel partners in improving user experience, with 45 per cent answering “no” and 21 per cent unsure. Those in the channel can no longer rely on an excellent product alone, but must ensure their customer base feels valued and that they are working towards a shared goal.

For channel leaders, implementing total experience not only simplifies the way they manage customer interactions but also enables them to pass on internal “wins” to customers. By improving experiences for all stakeholders, channel leaders can build resilient business models and ensure they are maintaining positive relationships with their customers. ▶

Fig. 11: “Customer experience is more of a priority now at my organisation than it was two years ago”



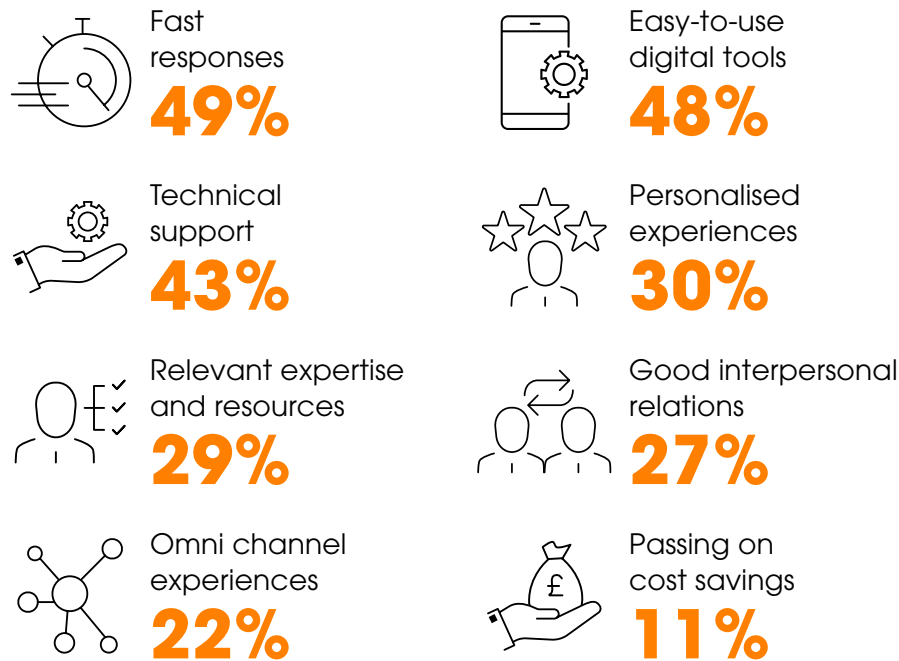
71 per cent of respondents agree that customer experience is more of a priority than it was two years ago. As brands compete for mindshare with customers who have come to expect intuitive, personalised experiences driven by easy-to-use digital tools, it comes as no surprise that customer experience is being prioritised. In tandem with customer expectations rising, respondents also identified that employee expectations are higher than they were two years ago and that this is a key factor in their ability to attract and retain talent.

Total experience enables organisations to tackle these two areas together as having an end-to-end strategy for improving employee satisfaction, workplace culture and development in turn enables organisations to provide better customer support. ►

71%

OF RESPONDENTS AGREE THAT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IS MORE OF A PRIORITY THAN IT WAS TWO YEARS AGO.

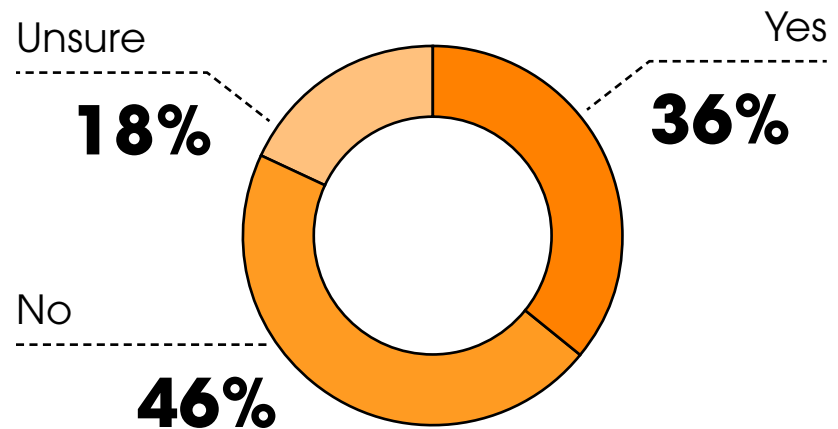
Fig. 12: Which of the following are most important when creating a positive customer experience?



How organisations and their channel partners go about creating good experiences across the board is revealed in the next finding. Fast responses, easy-to-use tools and good technical support were the top priorities for respondents when creating positive customer experiences. Omni channel experiences and passing on cost savings were viewed as less important.

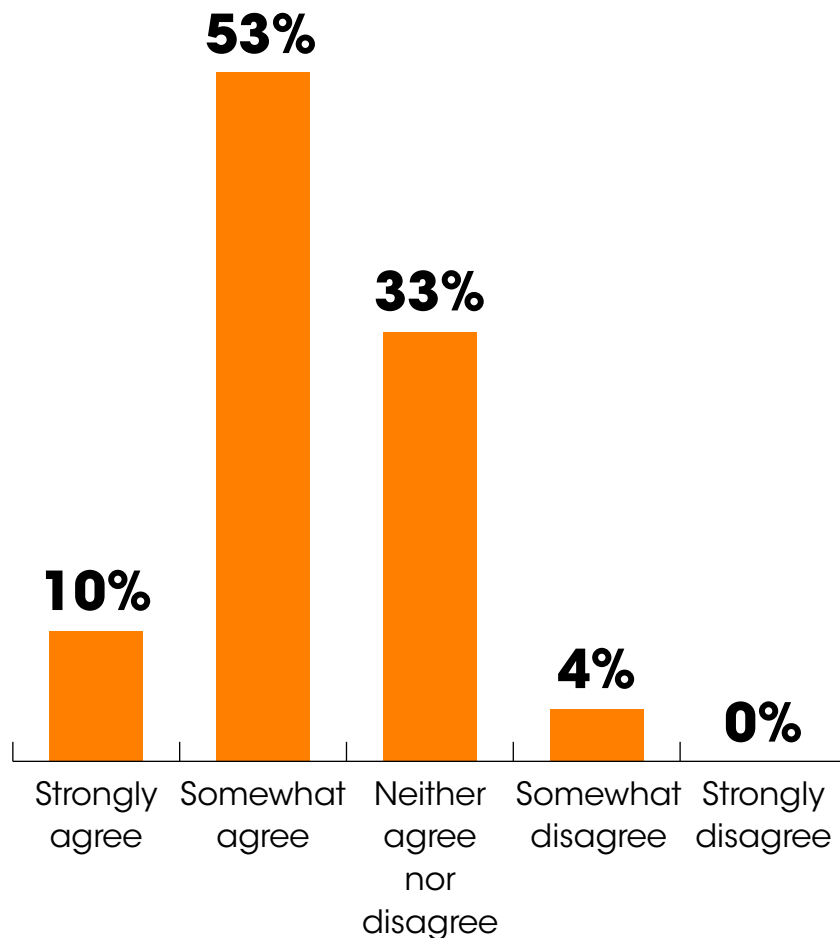
Channel partners must pay attention to these areas when they relate to their own customers, as understanding what makes a good experience is key to ensuring interactions are positive and productive.

Fig. 13: Is your organisation currently using automation to improve user experience?



36 per cent are currently using automation to improve user experiences. When asked to provide examples of how AI is being used, responses included automated responses to support queries such as chatbots, onboarding and offboarding, automated cyber testing, process flow automation and the automation and integration between systems to reduce manual administration and human error. ■

Fig. 14: “My organisation has higher expectations of its channel partners than ever before”



63 per cent agreed that expectations for channel partners are at an all-time high, with just 4 per cent disagreeing. Those in the channel must ensure they are demonstrating their value and standing out from the competition to meet the expectations of their customers.

Respondents also identified the importance of good customer experiences in improving relationships with channel partners. Understanding customer challenges, meeting changing needs, offering technical expertise, and providing the right digital tools and services are all key components of this, and through implementing total experience channel leaders can ensure they are creating positive experiences throughout the customer journey, as well as making it easier for their own employees to manage customer interactions.

From CRN's research, it is clear that channel leaders are in the spotlight when it comes to future-proofing their customer relationships. Customers expect issues to be resolved at speed, to be able to access the latest technology, and for ESG targets to be front and centre, all without introducing additional costs.

Respondents have shown an interest in implementing total experience technology to meet the expectations of their own customers, but the majority are at the early stages of implementation.

By following a total experience strategy at their own organisations, channel leaders ensure they are well positioned to meet customer needs. Seamless, multi-channel communication is valued highly by customers, and is key to building good interpersonal relationships. Having a centralised, AI-driven platform from which employee, customer and user experience can be managed reduces management complexity and ensures nothing falls between the gaps.

By tackling employee, customer and user experience as one, channel leaders can ensure that both employees and customers have the necessary tools, resources, and support to further business objectives. ■



About the sponsor

As the leading provider of customer-driven IT channel services, Agilitas enable their customers to scale and innovate with confidence, delivering sustainable technology solutions that provide the foundations for global customer success and efficiency. As technology hardware specialists, Agilitas support the critical infrastructure of some of the biggest brands in the world through their channel partners, that include value-added resellers, managed service providers, system integrators, born in the cloud firms, vendors and distributors.

With a channel-only approach, Agilitas is the perfect complement to any services portfolio. Its vendor agnostic expertise enables the company to deliver 'as-a-solution' service wraps that are focused purely on a business outcome. Whether that is expanding geographic reach, enhancing service performance, reducing operational overhead, or improving a service proposition.

Agilitas' passionate team of experts, also known as its innovators, pride itself on exceeding expectations and supporting in a way that empowers its channel partners in this digital age.

The Agilitas Sustainability Pledge means the company commits to 'Act with Impact', to create a circular economy that supports a more sustainable and healthy future. This pledge is built around three core pillars – Planet, People and Partners – that drive the company to place the planet at its heart, build a sustainable culture and support partners with solutions and services that reduce environmental impact.

Agilitas IT Solutions Limited is based in Nottingham, UK. ■

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