THE RACE TO AN AGENTIC FUTURE:

How agentic AI will transform customer experience

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Contents

3 Foreword

5 Research methodology

6 Introduction: Agentic AI-led customer experience is coming at speed

9 Customer experience has become mission-critical

10 Organizations are already feeling the benefits of AI deployment within customer experience

11 Customers are excited about the potential benefits of Agentic AI

12 A wide range of use cases across the technology lifecycle

13 Human connection will remain a critical component of customer experience

16 Robust governance and ethical practices are non-negotiable in Agentic AI deployment

18 Successful Agentic AI deployment can transform relationships and drive revenue for technology partners

19 Excitement grows about a future where Agentic AI-led customer experience becomes the new standard

20 Agentic AI-led customer experience is now an urgent priority for B2B technology businesses

21 About Cisco Customer Experience (CX)

Foreword

BY LIZ CENTONI, EVP & CHIEF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OFFICER, CISCO

Customer experience is entering a new era with agentic AI as the transformative force leading the way. Agentic AI will fundamentally change the very nature of services, enabling customer experience teams to make every interaction personalized, proactive, and predictive across every customer touchpoint. We can now deliver on our ultimate goal: making every customer feel like they are the only customer!

Imagine a world where no customer needs to restate their issues, where issues are resolved before they are experienced, and where every interaction feels tailored to individual needs, preferences and business outcomes. It's not just a better experience, it's a transformational one, going from frustration to delight.

For Enterprises, the integration of agentic AI into customer experience workflows solves problems we have been circling around for years. Persistent customer pain points, like redundant conversations with contact center agents, network configuration delays, and manual collection of infrastructure requirements and design documentation, become a thing of the past.

It's no surprise then that this research uncovers overwhelming appetite and excitement for agentic AI-led customer experience. What is surprising, is the velocity! Business and technical decision makers are expecting their technology partners to pivot to an agentic future faster than anyone anticipated.

The numbers speak for themselves: customers expect 56% of their interactions to be handled by agentic AI within just 12 months; and a staggering 68% within the next three years.

For many technology businesses, such a rapid shift towards agentic AI presents a monumental challenge. The technical complexity is daunting, and then if you layer on ethical considerations and the cultural transformation required to integrate AI into workflows at scale, it raises the stakes even higher. You have innovation, precision, responsibility, and focus on outcomes that need to come together.

While agentic AI promises unparalleled efficiency, human connection remains irreplaceable. Complex problem solving, ethical judgement and empathy are uniquely human, that no algorithm can replace, at least not any time soon. We are all seeking that balance or harmony between agentic AI's power and the human touch and intelligence that makes customer interactions truly meaningful.

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Foreword

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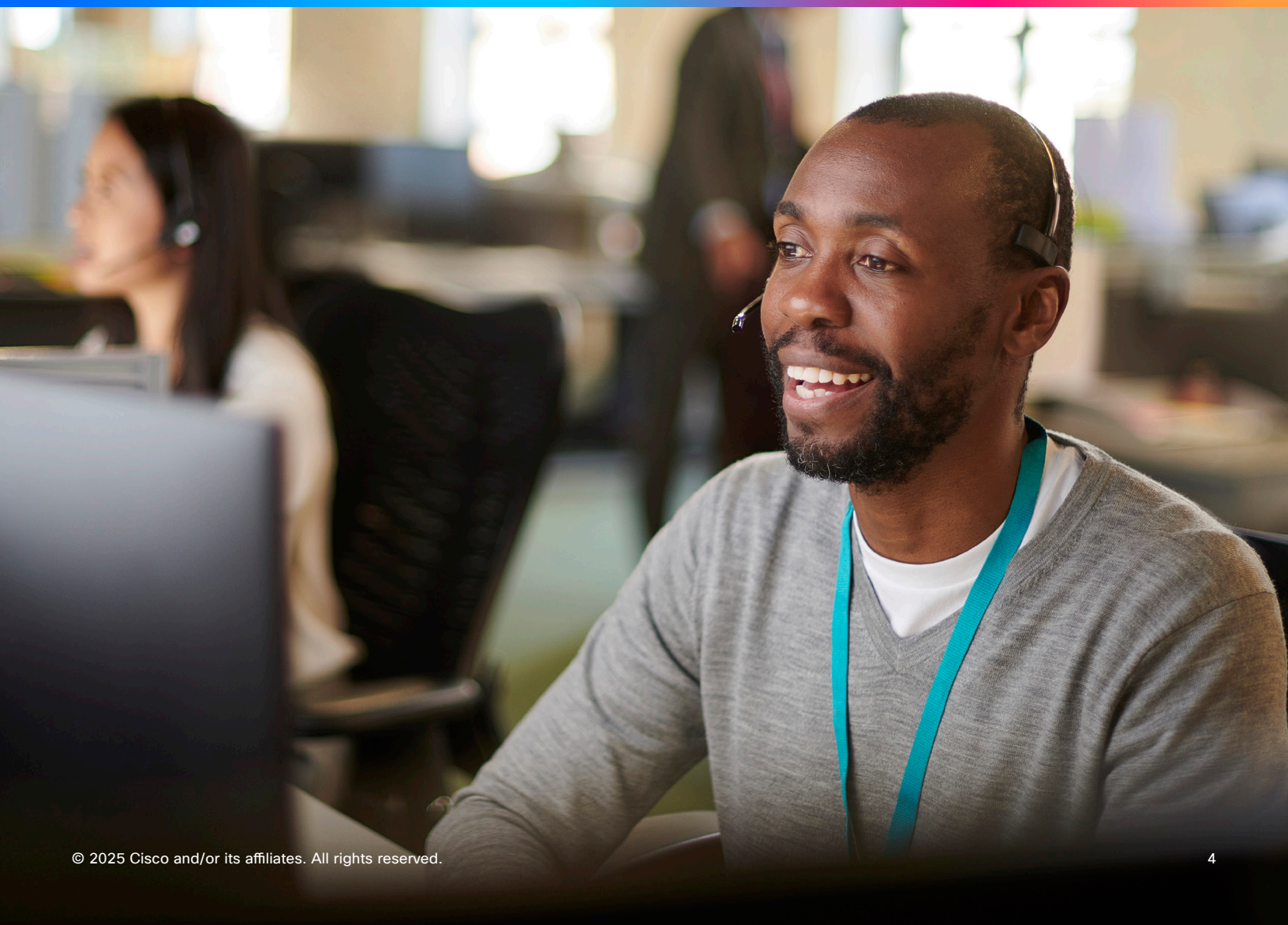
As with any major transformation program, the journey to agentic AI-led customer experience will undoubtedly pose challenges and present risks for vendors. For those companies that embrace this transformation head-on, the payoff is not just improved customer experience metrics, it's in market leadership in the AI era. It will reshape customer experience into a strategic differentiator, creating loyalty at scale.

At Cisco Customer Experience, we are defining this future. By combining cutting-edge agentic AI with Cisco's wealth of data, and four decades of human expertise, we are forging a new standard for customer experience - one that's personalized, proactive, predictive, and profoundly human. The winners will be the ones who balance speed, innovation and trust. We are ready to lead that charge!



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Research methodology

To better understand customer attitudes towards, and appetite for, widespread deployment of agentic AI within customer experience, Cisco has undertaken comprehensive global research, from board-level directors and CIOs, through to senior and mid-level IT management.

This research comprised of:

7,950 businesses

Interviews with 7,950 business and technical decision makers, in organizations with a turnover of at least $10 million. 55% of respondents work in organizations with a turnover of at least $100 million.

Research conducted in April 2025 by Sandpiper Research & Insights.

30 markets

Interviews were conducted in 30 markets - Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Poland, Saudi, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States and Vietnam.

Respondents worked across a range of industries, including IT, manufacturing, financial services, retail, business services, engineering, construction, healthcare, transportation, and media and communications.

All respondents worked within job roles where they are interacting with customer experience services and support provided by B2B technology businesses.

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Agentic AI-led customer experience is coming at speed

Agentic AI is set to be the most transformative technology to impact customer experience in decades, arguably since the beginning of this century and the shift to digital channels.

Its arrival couldn't come at a better time. As levels of IT complexity spiral, companies in every industry are facing an ever-tougher challenge to keep their IT environments and operations resilient and secure; to accelerate their most important strategic digital transformation projects; and to maximize value from their technology investments.

As a result, organizations are leaning on their technology partners more than ever, and customer experience has never been more critical.

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93%

of respondents believe agentic AI will enable B2B technology businesses to deliver more personalized, proactive, and predictive services.

88%

feel confident that agentic AI-led customer experience provided by B2B technology businesses will help their organization achieve its goals.

Agentic AI can provide the platform for B2B technology businesses to respond to evolving customer needs in ways previously unimaginable, helping organizations to overcome their most pressing strategic challenges across the technology lifecycle.

Agentic AI is a category of artificial intelligence that leverages AI Agents and a contextualized interconnection among them. Agentic AI requires agency, meaning the AI Agents are capable of having memory, are task aware and possess the ability to take actions - or choose what actions to take - to achieve a particular outcome through the ability to learn from their environment and reason, with minimal human oversight.

The research paints a clear picture. There is now an overwhelming sense of optimism surrounding agentic AI and its potential to set a new standard for customer experience. Business and technical decision makers around the world recognize how this emerging technology can dramatically enhance the support and services they receive from their technology partners and, in turn, deliver tangible benefits to their own organizations.

Across the technology lifecycle, from strategy and planning, and design and deployment, through to adoption, operations and contract renewals, there is a seemingly endless set of use cases and workflows where agentic AI is expected to increase productivity, drive time and cost savings, and deliver more personalized, proactive and predictive experiences than ever before.

But not only is there great excitement about the potential of agentic AI within customer experience; there is also now a serious sense of urgency. Customers are looking for their technology partners to dramatically accelerate their agentic AI programs, and they're expecting more than half of interactions with partners to be handled by agentic AI within the next 12 months.

This sudden acceleration of appetite may come as a shock to some technology vendors, and for those still in the early stages of thinking about agentic, it represents a major challenge. However, this growing urgency is not something they can ignore.

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As the race to harness the capabilities of agentic AI intensifies, technology businesses must not overlook the need to approach its deployment in a responsible and ethical way. This research highlights respondents' concerns around the technical deployment of agentic AI, and technology businesses need to pay attention. This means putting in place the right governance structures to ensure the security and privacy of sensitive customer data, and to eliminate data bias and avoid unfair or discriminatory outcomes. These structures can also help ensure that there is human oversight where needed, for example, when multiple agents are making decisions that could impact human rights or human safety. The risks for businesses that fail to implement robust governance structures will be catastrophic.

The other important consideration in this pivot to agentic AI-led customer experience is the continuing need for human connection. This research reveals the extent to which customers value the human relationships they have with their technology partners, and the critical moments where they continue to favor human interaction. Technology businesses need to ensure frictionless experiences, where human workers and AI agents are operating effectively and harmoniously alongside each other.

We are entering a new era in customer experience. For B2B technology businesses, this is a defining moment.

Those vendors that succeed in implementing agentic AI-led customer experience in an effective and ethical way, and meet the timelines set by their customers, will drive significant competitive advantage. Enhanced customer loyalty and trust, the ability to scale services at speed, and increased customer spend, are just some of the benefits that technology businesses are set to enjoy.

Ultimately, when deployed strategically, agentic AI has the potential to transform relationships, positioning vendors as essential, strategic partners to their customers for many years to come.

89%

of respondents believe that B2B technology partners must combine human empathy and connection with agentic AI efficiency to optimize customer experience.

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Customer experience has become mission-critical

Organizations are relying on their technology partners more than ever before. As IT complexity skyrockets – driven by accelerated digital transformation, the ongoing shift to cloud and hybrid computing, the race to harness the capabilities of AI-driven technologies, and a rapidly evolving regulatory landscape – respondents report that they are leaning more heavily on partners to help navigate these challenges.

Across the board, customer experience is now regarded as essential, and 72% of respondents describe the support and services provided by vendors as 'very important'.

In today's environment, organizations aren't simply looking for technology partners to help with troubleshooting and maintaining uptime of systems and applications. These partners have a key role to play throughout the whole technology lifecycle, from strategy and planning, and design and deployment, through to adoption, operations, and contract renewals.

Respondents point to a wide range of areas where technology partners can unlock value for their organizations, including maximizing investments in technology, supporting innovation, and delivering tailored solutions which directly align with key business challenges.

92%

of respondents state that the customer experience support and services provided by B2B technology partners are becoming more critical as IT complexity increases within their organizations.

CUSTOMER VIEW

Top six ways in which B2B technology partners can deliver value through customer experience

1. Help to get a deeper understanding of technology
2. Help to maximize investments in technology
3. Provide strategic counsel from experts in each technology domain
4. Reduce downtime, issue resolution time, and improve operational efficiency
5. Deliver personalized solutions tailored to specific needs of the customer
6. Provide updates on the latest technology trends and best practices

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Organizations are already feeling the benefits of AI deployment within customer experience

In response to this growing demand for enhanced customer experience, technology businesses have already started to introduce AI-powered technologies to improve their support and services.

The research reveals not only that customers are aware of this shift, but the extent to which they are already engaging with these AI-driven services and experiencing notable benefits.

More than two thirds (68%) of respondents have used at least one AI-powered customer experience service provided by a B2B technology partner, and at every stage of the technology lifecycle, more than 50% have encountered an AI-powered service.

Most commonly, they are consuming AI-driven insights and analytics, or engaging with chatbots and virtual assistants. More than a third have also used AI-powered workflow automation, automated troubleshooting and diagnostics, and predictive analytics for issue resolution.

Significantly, more than 80% of those respondents that have engaged with AI-powered support and services from their B2B technology partners report that they have had positive experiences; compared with only 4% who have been left feeling disappointed.

Top use cases for AI-powered customer experience to date

1. AI-driven customer insights and analytics
2. Chatbots and virtual assistants for support
3. Chatbots and virtual assistants for customer success
4. Chatbots and virtual assistants for professional services
5. Workflow automation
6. Automated troubleshooting and diagnostics
7. Predictive analytics for issue resolution
8. Automated support ticket / support case systems
9. Documentation generation
10. Recommendations for next best action

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Customers are excited about the potential benefits of agentic AI

On the back of their positive experiences with AI-powered support and services, customers are now eager for their technology partners to drive further improvements in customer experience through wider and more sophisticated deployment of AI technologies.

In particular, they are aware that some technology businesses are now looking to enhance their customer experience offerings through deployment of agentic AI.

Most respondents are already familiar with agentic AI, with 33% reporting that they have a deep understanding of the technology and its applications, and 46% stating that they have a good grasp of the basics.

Business and technical decision makers recognize that agentic AI represents the next wave of innovation within AI, and many will be involved in initiatives to design and deploy agentic AI technologies within their own organizations. As a result, they're easily able to understand its game-changing potential.

Across every region and every industry, respondents believe that agentic AI has the potential to transform customer experience over the coming years.

93%

of respondents believe agentic AI will enable B2B technology vendors to deliver more personalized, proactive, and predictive services.

88%

are confident that agentic AI-led customer experience will help their organization to achieve its goals.

The top perceived benefits for customers of agentic AI-led customer experience

1. Increased IT productivity
2. Cost savings
3. Greater accuracy in support and services
4. More proactive customer experience services and support
5. Increased up-time
6. Time savings
7. Ability to scale customer experience services and support
8. More personalized customer experience services and support

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A wide range of use cases across the technology lifecycle

Respondents believe that agentic AI is set to play a critical role throughout the technology lifecycle, with more than 80% pointing to potential benefits at every stage.

Customer and technical support, technology strategy and planning, and operations are viewed as the greatest opportunities for agentic AI to deliver value, but significant numbers of respondents also see opportunities within design and deployment, contract renewals and adoption.

Looking at a more granular level at deployment of agentic AI at each stage of the technology lifecycle, IT productivity is seen as the number one benefit for customers across the board, followed closely by time savings, and cost savings.

The research also indicates that agentic AI-led support and services can drive wider benefits at specific stages of the technology lifecycle. For instance, greater accuracy is cited as a potential advantage for customers during design and deployment, while in operations, technologists believe that agentic AI can lead to technology partners delivering more proactive support.

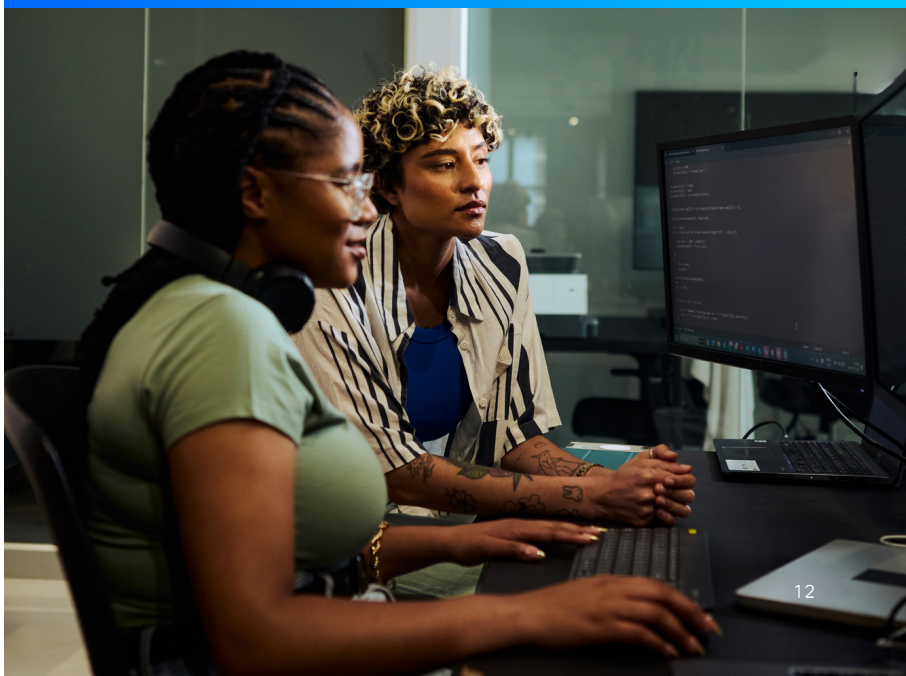
As you would expect with such a generational technology, respondents believe that agentic AI has the potential to deliver transformation for customers across a wide range of use cases and workflows.

Above all else, they point to opportunities to improve data analytics and insights for better decision making; aid troubleshooting and issue resolution; align technology investment with digital transformation goals; and support with adoption and training on the rollout of new technologies.

Top five use cases for agentic AI-led customer experience to deliver value to customers

1. Enhancing data analytics and insights for smarter decision-making
2. Accelerating troubleshooting and issue resolution
3. Aligning technology investment strategy with digital transformation goals
4. Supporting adoption and training for new technology rollouts
5. Optimizing the use of product features

55% **of respondents expect the introduction of agentic AI to significantly improve vendor performance in support ticket / case resolution times.**



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Human connection will remain a critical component of customer experience

Despite their enthusiasm for agentic AI, customers still want to maintain human interaction with their B2B technology partners.

Respondents believe that human relationships are, and will continue to be, hugely important in how their organizations engage with technology partners throughout the technology lifecycle.

They feel that personal relationships are vital for vendors to build trust and demonstrate reliability, drive customer satisfaction, optimize communication, and resolve issues in a timely way.

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96% of respondents consider human relationships to be very important when interacting with their B2B technology partners.

89% state that technology businesses must combine human empathy and connection with agentic AI efficiency to optimize customer experience.

76% believe that agentic AI is currently unable to replicate human empathy in customer experience.

How human relationships with B2B technology vendors deliver value for customers

1. Increased trust and reliability
2. Enhanced customer satisfaction
3. Improved communication
4. Faster resolution of issues
5. A deep understanding of the customer's business needs
6. Strong network and contacts
7. Access to technical expertise
8. Personalized services

The research highlights specific times where there will be a continuing need for human interaction with technology partners. These include complex problem-solving, tasks that require a high level of customization, regulatory compliance oversight, and issues which require serious ethical consideration.

Customers want their technology partners to maximize the many benefits that agentic AI can drive across their support and services, but they don't want this to come at the expense of meaningful and rewarding personal relationships. In their haste to transition to an agentic future, technology vendors must not neglect the critical need to maintain human empathy and engagement.

Interestingly, respondents anticipate that the balance between agentic AI-led support and services, and human engagement, will change over time. 72% predict that the role of human interaction in customer experience will diminish as AI technology advances over the coming years.

This in turn will enable human workers to maximize their impact. Working in concert with AI Agents, customer experience professionals will be able to focus on higher value tasks, utilizing their expertise, experience and unique capabilities to forge deeper, strategic relationships with customers.

Respondents see advantages to this shift, recognizing that agentic AI can address some of the shortcomings that they currently encounter in their everyday interactions with B2B technology businesses.

Most notably, respondents point to frequent personnel churn within customer experience teams as their biggest frustration with vendors. 60% report that they are constantly or often having to deal with this type of churn which can be hugely disruptive, exposing gaps in knowledge amongst new team members and slowing down delivery of projects.in knowledge amongst new team members and slowing down delivery of projects.

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Other challenges within these relationships include miscommunication between parties, customers having limited access to required expertise, and inconsistencies in the quality-of-service delivery.

The need for close cooperation between humans and AI agents is highlighted throughout the research. Respondents stress that AI agents need to be able to work alongside and provide frictionless handovers to human colleagues. And the same applies when people hand off to AI agents.

Respondents have clear ideas about the characteristics and capabilities that AI agents deployed by B2B technology vendors should possess. They want Agents to be able to handle data securely and compliantly, and to proactively identify and solve issues in a timely way. Other key attributes include adapting to new information and changing circumstances, providing personalized responses based on individual customer needs, and communicating in multiple languages.

The biggest challenges in human relationships with B2B technology businesses

1. Personnel churn and having to deal with frequent changes in customer experience teams
2. Miscommunication or misunderstandings
3. Limited access to specific expertise
4. Availability of customer experience team members
5. Knowledge gaps within customer experience teams
6. Inconsistent service quality
7. The need to repeat information due to lack of notetaking

Ten key characteristics for AI Agents within customer experience

1. **Security and privacy:** Ensures data protection and regulatory compliance
2. **Proactive problem-solving:** Identifies and addresses issues before they escalate
3. **Able to work alongside humans:** Seamlessly integrates with human teams to enhance collaboration and efficiency
4. **Provides real-time insights:** Offers immediate data and analytics to inform decision-making
5. **Adaptability:** Learns and evolves based on new information and changing circumstances
6. **Scalability:** Can handle increasing volumes of interactions without compromising quality
7. **Personalization:** Tailors responses and solutions to individual customer needs
8. **Multi-lingual:** Ability to communicate in multiple languages to support diverse customer bases
9. **Summarizes interactions:** Capable of summarizing customer interactions for quick reference and follow-up
10. **Analyzes sentiment:** Detects and interprets customer emotions to improve service and engagement

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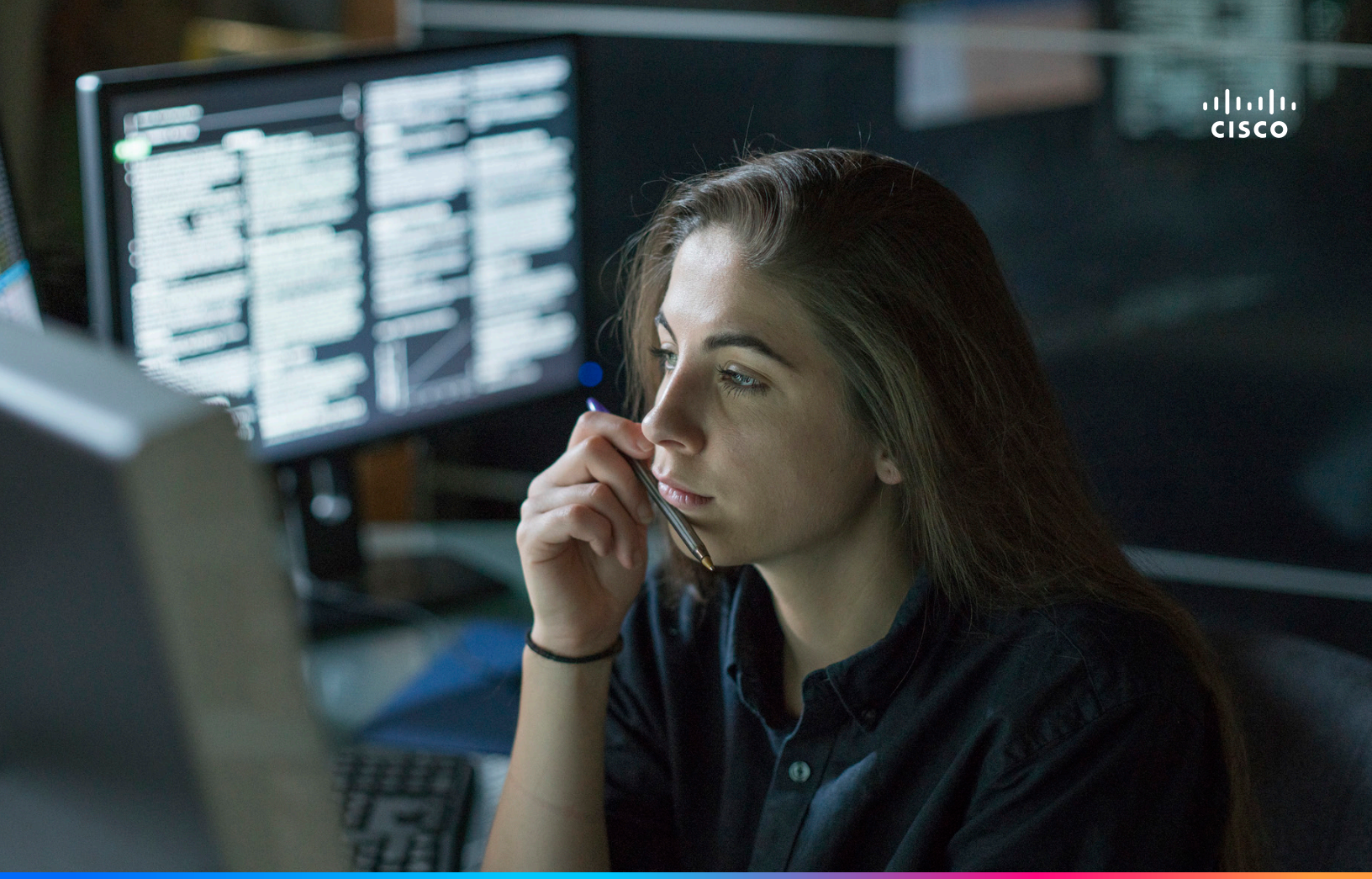

Robust governance and ethical practices are non-negotiable in agentic AI deployment

For all the excitement which surrounds the use of agentic AI, there is of course widespread recognition that AI-powered technologies must be used in a responsible and ethical way.

This is certainly the case when it comes to B2B technology vendors deploying agentic AI within their customer experience functions. The research identifies several concerns that customers have around the technical deployment of agentic AI.

Most of all, customers want to know that their technology partners have the right governance and guardrails in place to ensure the security and privacy of sensitive customer data, and to protect it from unauthorized access or breaches. They also highlight the importance of accuracy within technical agentic AI deployment, so that agents are always delivering precise and relevant responses, solutions, and recommendations.

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Other critical factors that customers want technology partners to address in the future within their AI deployments include the elimination of data bias, to ensure agentic AI does not perpetuate or amplify existing biases in data and lead to unfair or discriminatory outcomes; and the need for trust that agentic AI can be relied upon to make fair decisions.

Almost all respondents (99%) state that it's important for technology partners to demonstrate robust governance arrangements to deliver ethical and fair use of agentic AI. It's not enough for organizations to be doing all the right things when it comes to their deployment of agentic AI; they need to display and communicate what they are doing with complete transparency.

The current sense of optimism and excitement surrounding agentic AI-led customer experience could soon dissipate if customers sense that technology businesses aren't taking a responsible approach.

Indeed, 81% of respondents feel that vendors need to share their vision for AI-led customer experience to bring customers along on the journey, and 79% believe that they should be doing more to communicate this vision.

It's therefore alarming that a quarter (25%) of respondents report that they don't currently have detailed knowledge of how their B2B technology partners plan to use agentic AI to enhance customer experience.

Ten factors for B2B technology businesses to address when deploying agentic AI in customer experience

1. Security and privacy of customer data
2. Advanced AI technology and tools
3. Customer-centric AI design
4. Appropriately skilled staff to program models
5. Continuous improvement and innovation
6. Robust governance arrangements to ensure ethical and fair use of AI
7. Transparent communication and reporting
8. Scalability and flexibility
9. Comprehensive training programs for customers
10. Seamless integration with existing systems

68% **of respondents believe that the development of agentic AI poses ethical or safety concerns.**

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Successful agentic AI deployment can transform relationships and drive revenue for technology partners

Respondents believe that the introduction of agentic AI into customer experience support and services will also deliver game-changing impact for their B2B technology partners.

Technology businesses who successfully and ethically deploy agentic AI across the technology lifecycle will enjoy a range of benefits including access to data-driven insights, improved scalability within their support and services, and greater customer loyalty. The majority (52%) of respondents predict that effective AI deployment will also lead to higher customer spend and increased revenues.

Crucially, the introduction of agentic AI will enable technology businesses to achieve one of their most important long-term objectives, with 86% of respondents stating that agentic AI can help them to become essential partners to - and intrinsic to the ongoing success of - their customers.

On the other hand, vendors who are left behind in their agentic AI deployment, or those who fail to deploy agentic AI in an effective, secure and ethical manner, are likely to encounter negative consequences. Respondents cite missed opportunities to create new revenue streams, a deterioration in customer relationships, reputational damage, and higher levels of customer churn as some of the ways in which vendors will suffer.

74%

of respondents state that customers are more likely to trust B2B technology vendors that use agentic AI to improve their service offerings.

81%

expect vendors that strategically deploy agentic AI to gain a competitive edge.

77%

warn that vendors that do not prioritize customer needs in their agentic AI deployment risk damaging their reputation.

Most likely benefits for technology partners who successfully deploy agentic AI within customer experience

1. Improved operational efficiency within vendor organization
2. Ability to scale up customer experience with ease
3. Access to improved data insights to streamline customer experience
4. Increased customer spend / revenue
5. Higher levels of customer trust as a result of robust security
6. Accelerated time-to-market as agentic AI will streamline contract and onboarding processes
7. Enhanced customer loyalty

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Excitement grows about a future where agentic AI-led customer experience becomes the new standard

Overall, the research paints a hugely optimistic picture, where widescale deployment of agentic AI sets a new standard for customer experience across the technology industry.

Customers predict that agentic AI will play an increasingly prominent role in their interactions with technology vendors over the coming years, and they are hugely upbeat about what this will bring.

Significantly, respondents expect the shift to agentic AI-led customer experience to advance at a rapid rate. They predict that 56% of their customer experience interactions with technology partners will be handled by agentic AI within the next 12 months, and 68% within the next three years.

This means that by 2028, customers are looking for more than two thirds of their engagement with partners to be through agentic AI.

This phenomenal appetite for agentic AI-led customer experience will come as a major shock to many technology vendors who are only just beginning to explore the potential for agentic AI within their support and services.

88%

of respondents feel confident that the agentic AI-led customer experience provided by their technology partners will help their organization achieve its goals.

A timeline for agentic AI-led customer experience

TIMEFRAME	PERCENTAGE OF PARTNER INTERACTIONS EXPECTED TO BE HANDLED BY AGENTIC AI
Within 12 months	56%
Within 3 years	68%
Within 10 years	79%

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Agentic AI-led customer experience is now an urgent priority for B2B tecnology businesses

This research illustrates how the emergence of agentic AI-led customer experience presents a bona fide win-win situation for both technology vendors and their customers. At a time when organizations are relying on the support and services of technology partners more than ever, agentic AI can be the catalyst for a new standard in customer experience.

By deploying agentic AI, technology businesses can provide customers with more personalized, proactive and predictive experiences across the technology lifecycle. And this in turn will lead to faster resolution times, greater IT productivity and significant time and cost savings. Crucially, agentic AI-led customer experience will enable organizations to keep their environments resilient and secure, to accelerate their strategic innovation programs, and to maximize their investments in technology.

The upsides of agentic AI-led customer experience for B2B technology businesses are immense: the ability to scale support and services at speed; access to valuable new data and insights; and most importantly, stickier, more strategic and profitable relationships with customers.

As this research shows, agentic AI is not a 'future' technology; it's here now and already being deployed by forward-thinking B2B technology businesses across their customer experience support and services. Excitement is sky high, but so too are expectations. Customers want more than half of all interactions with their technology partners to be agentic AI-powered within the next 12 months; and more than two thirds by 2028.

81%

of respondents believe that agentic AI will enable B2B technology vendors to transform the way that they support customers.

For technology businesses, the time to act is now. They need to develop strategies for agentic AI-led customer experience which fully harness the capabilities of this groundbreaking technology, while also establishing guardrails to ensure ethical and responsible deployment. Technology partners must also strike the right balance between agentic AI efficiency and human empathy and connection within customer experience.

This is the challenge for the B2B technology industry, and vendors simply cannot afford to fall behind. To succeed in an agentic future, technology businesses need to innovate at speed to build bespoke, world-class solutions for customer experience, and ensure they have the wealth of high-quality data and human expertise to support agentic AI models.

Agentic AI is redefining customer experience, and businesses who lead the way in this transformation will undoubtedly reap the rewards.

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About Cisco Customer Experience (CX)

Cisco is uniquely positioned to deliver the future of customer experience for the AI era. We're combining bespoke, cutting-edge agentic AI innovation, with Cisco's wealth of data and human expertise, to set a new standard in customer experience.

We're building agentic AI from the ground-up, innovating from within to deliver bespoke agentic AI-driven functionality across the technology lifecycle.

Cisco is creating an intelligent, proactive ecosystem where systems auto-repair and optimize for performance and security in real-time, before customers even need to engage. In doing so, we're delivering an agentic future for customer experience - one that's personalized, proactive, predictive, and profoundly human.

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