

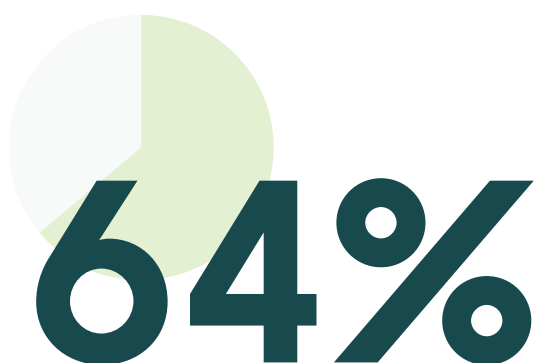
Customer service gets conversational



Messaging support has become a go-to for customers, and 74% of those who messaged with companies for the first time in 2020 plan to keep doing so.



A lot changed in 2020, customer behaviors included. Not only did they reach out to companies in record numbers, but many chose to do so in the very same ways that they communicate in their personal lives—over messaging channels like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger.



of customers tried a new channel in 2020

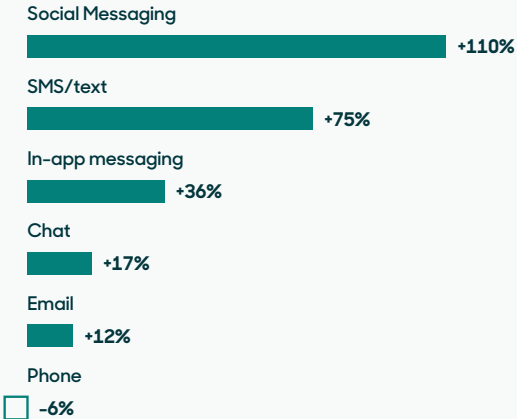
Businesses need to engage over the channels that matter most to their customers. With support that's fast, personal, convenient, and secure, it's no surprise that messaging has seen an upswell of adoption by both customers and businesses. Customers can get answers when they need them, through apps that are already installed on their phones. And conversations don't have to take place in real time, so customers can troubleshoot while they take care of other things like walking the dog or running a Zoom meeting.

With social messaging apps now [forecasted to hit 2.77 billion monthly users worldwide](#), businesses are adopting messaging channels faster than any other, transforming not only how they interact with customers, but also what their customers expect. So what's changed? And what role should messaging play in your larger support strategy?

To better understand the rapid shifts we've seen over the past year, as well as the impact of messaging's rise on how customers and businesses connect, we took a deeper look at the data that informed Zendesk's 2021 Customer Experience Trends Report. This includes surveys of customers, agents, customer service leaders, and technology buyers, as well as product data from more than 90,000 companies across 175 countries that power their support operations with Zendesk.

Messaging rates rise among home-bound customers

Popularity of channels in 2020, compared to 2019



Messaging’s business star is rising, and quickly. Not only did it see the biggest jump in new users last year, but the vast majority plan on sticking around. Nearly a third of customers messaged a company for the first time in 2020.



of customers who messaged with companies in 2020 plan to keep doing so.

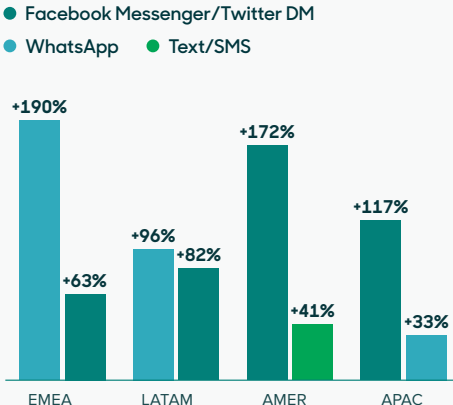
The popularity of social messaging options like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger has taken off—virtually overnight. In fact, social messaging saw the biggest jump, with users saying it’s their preferred channel last year, and it’s especially popular among younger generations. A third of customers under 40 say that social messaging is their go-to when they need support.

What does this mean for companies? Customers want their conversations with support agents to feel a lot like the back and forth they have with their family and friends.

In fact, customers cited convenience and familiarity as the top reasons they’re using messaging apps more. And messaging use has skyrocketed during the pandemic. The volume of support tickets over WhatsApp alone jumped 101 percent in 2020, while those over Facebook Messenger and Twitter direct messages rose 58 percent, followed by SMS/text at 34 percent.

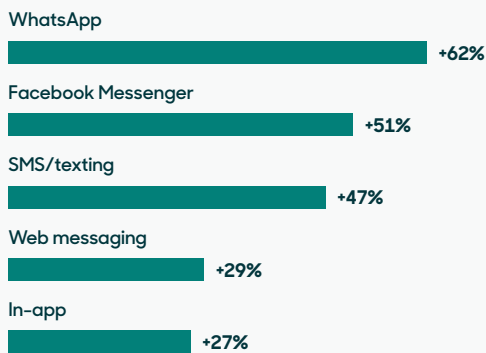
And across regions, it’s a close race between WhatsApp and other social messaging apps like Facebook Messenger for the highest ticket growth. WhatsApp saw the highest increase in volume across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, while Facebook Messenger and Twitter took the top spot in North America and the Asia-Pacific.

What channels are seeing the highest usage growth across regions?



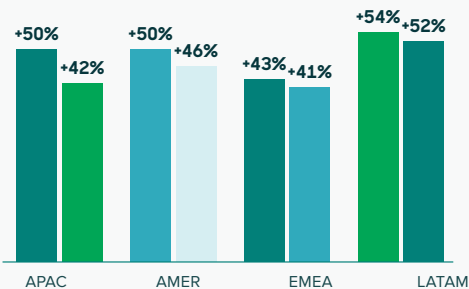
Where customers go, businesses follow

Top messaging channels used by companies



Top reasons for offering messaging across regions

- Faster time to resolution
- More personal interactions
- Can serve multiple customers at one time
- 24 hour support



Customers are turning to messaging when they need support faster than any other channel, and businesses have taken note. 53 percent of companies that rolled out a new channel in 2020 added messaging. And use among support teams is up 20 percent compared to last year.

THE MOST POPULAR CHANNELS GLOBALLY?

WhatsApp, followed by Facebook Messenger, and SMS/texting.

Not only are messaging channels popular with customers, but they also offer a better experience for agents. In fact, agents are 50% more likely to want to message with a customer than use traditional live chat because they can work on multiple tickets at once and return to the conversation at any time.

Other top reasons for adding messaging support? Companies say that it offers customers a faster path to getting their issues resolved with always-on support. This means that they can respond to customers faster when agents are available or use bots when they aren't so a customer always gets an instant response. [Easy to set up and deploy](#), messaging channels also reduced the strain on newly remote agents and other support channels in the early days of the pandemic.

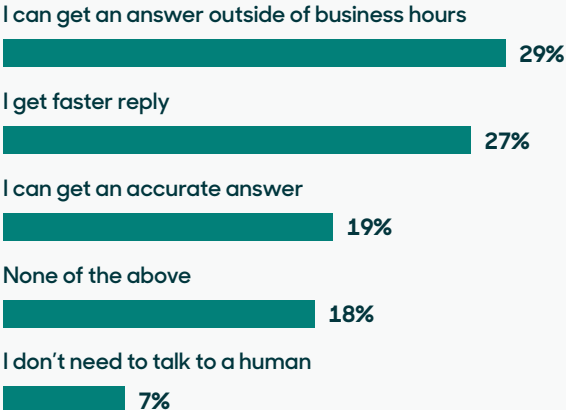
42%

Support teams that have the fastest resolution times and highest CSAT ratings are 42 percent more likely to be messaging with their customers.

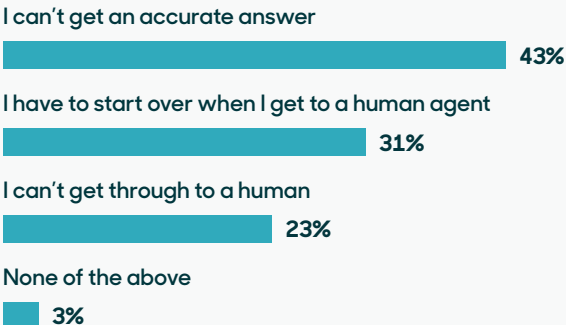
Don't shoot the (automated) messenger

Top things most helpful about chatbots vs. Top things most frustrating about chatbots

HELPFUL



FRUSTRATING



As messaging rates have risen, so too has the use of AI and automated chatbots. Interactions with automated bots jumped 81 percent in 2020, second only to WhatsApp. And if you're wondering why AI matters, this type of automation plays an important role in any messaging strategy and getting it right is critical to meet the growing needs of customers.

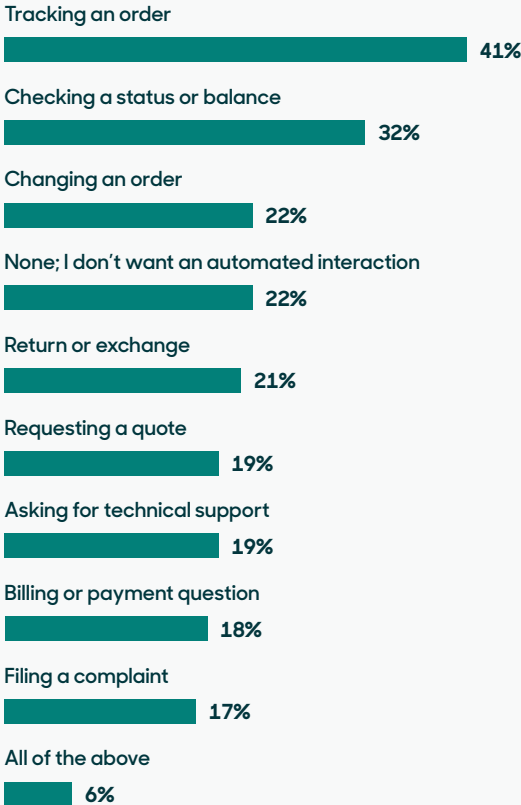
Chatbots won't be able to solve every customer issue, they aren't meant to, but they help to ensure a seamless experience for customers and businesses. Bots make round the clock responses possible, and efficient handoffs between bots and their human counterparts means that customers don't ever have to repeat themselves.

Customers say that chatbots are most helpful when they need quick answers outside of business hours, but when more complex issues arise, these automated responses can frustrate them by giving inaccurate information or providing another hoop to jump through before they can reach a human agent.

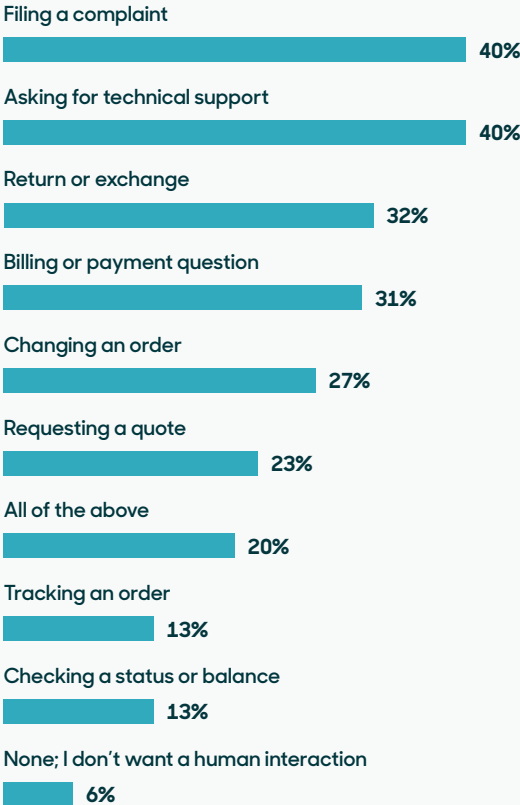
So what do customers want them for? Over 40 percent say they're useful for tracking an order, while nearly a third prefer to use them for checking a status or balance. For more complicated issues like filing a complaint or getting technical support, 40 percent of customers want to connect with an actual human agent.

Preferences for automated interactions vs. preferences for human interactions

AUTOMATED INTERACTIONS



HUMAN INTERACTIONS

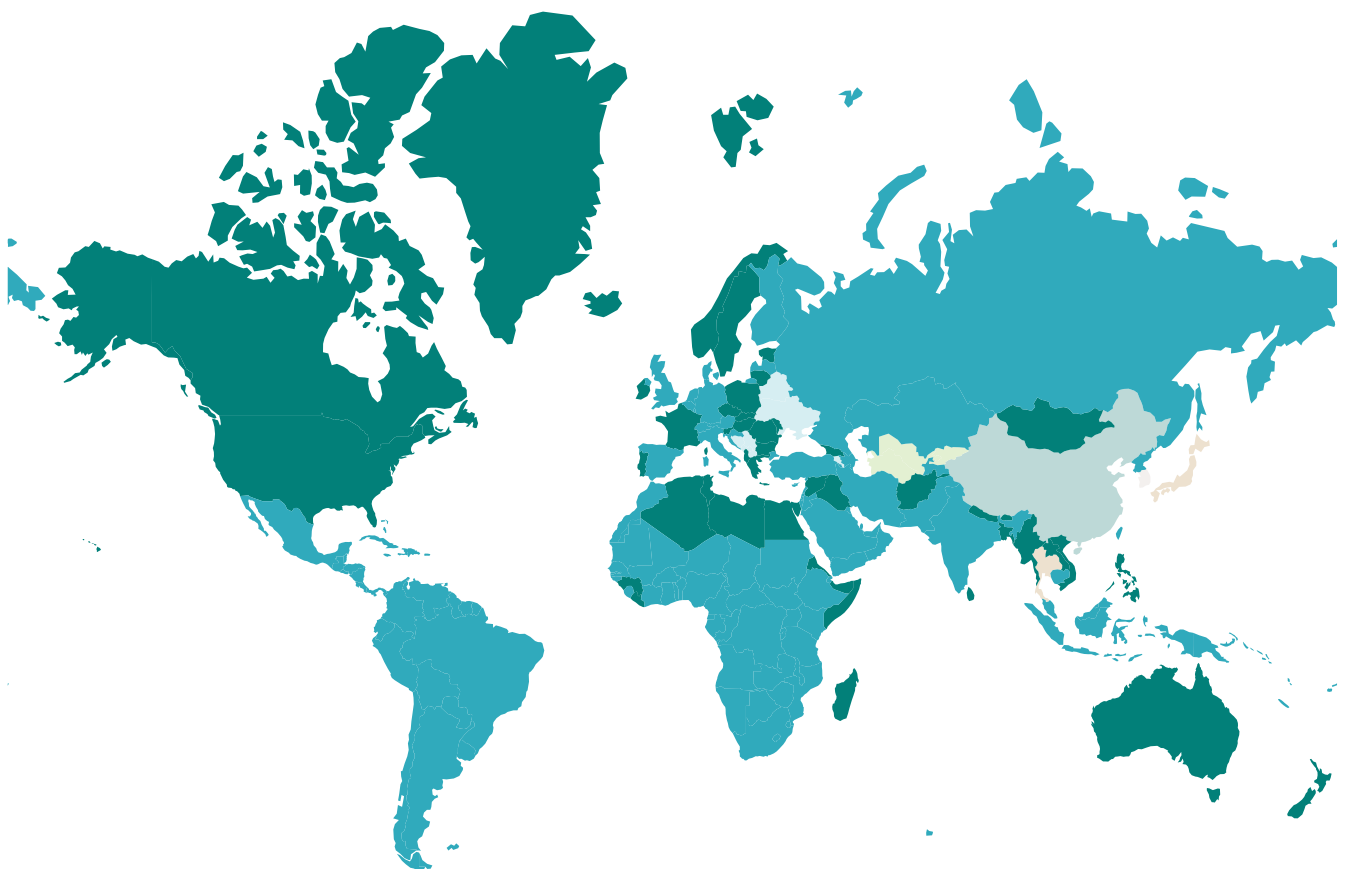


WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger? Depends on your customers.

When it comes to building a messaging strategy, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. With so many messaging apps out there, including newcomers like Apple Business Chat and Google Business Messages, companies will need to consider not only where they operate, but what their customers prefer. Either way, Facebook-owned apps dominate the market: WhatsApp is currently the leading chat app in 112 countries, while Facebook Messenger reigns supreme in 57 (including the U.S.). And regional favorites like WeChat and KakaoTalk dominate their local markets.

Top messaging app by country

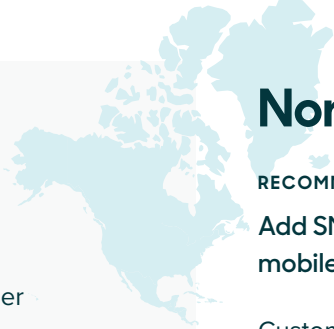
● WhatsApp ● Facebook Messenger ● Viber ● WeChat ● Line ● IMO ● Kakaotalk



Source: [SimilarWeb](#)

Location, location, location

Whether you're building a messaging playbook from scratch or considering what to add next, you should first look at where your customers live:



North America

CUSTOMERS PREFER
SMS/text, native messaging


MOST TICKETS FILED
SMS/text, Facebook Messenger

COMPANIES MOST COMMONLY OFFER
Facebook Messenger, Web Messaging

LARGEST PANDEMIC BOOST
Facebook Messenger

RECOMMENDATION
Add SMS/text and messaging through your website or mobile app, consider adding Facebook Messenger.

Customers in North America prefer to message with companies via SMS/text or directly through their website, though tickets over Facebook Messenger and Twitter direct messages spiked 172 percent here during the pandemic. Currently, half of companies that offer messaging support rely on Facebook Messenger, while 41 percent use web messaging, and a third use SMS/text or mobile messaging.



Asia-Pacific

CUSTOMERS PREFER
Social messaging, SMS/text

MOST TICKETS FILED
Facebook Messenger

COMPANIES MOST COMMONLY OFFER
Facebook Messenger, SMS/text, WhatsApp

LARGEST PANDEMIC BOOST
Facebook Messenger

RECOMMENDATION
Add Facebook Messenger, consider adding WhatsApp, SMS/text, or regional favorites like WeChat (China), Kakao (Korea), or LINE (Japan).

More customers in Asia-Pacific are filing tickets over Facebook Messenger than any other region. Though far fewer tickets are filed via WhatsApp and SMS/text, both channels saw a pandemic boost and customers say they prefer to use social messaging and text when they message with companies. Currently, more than half of companies that offer messaging support rely on Facebook Messenger and SMS/text, while 47 percent use WhatsApp.



Europe, Middle East, and Africa

CUSTOMERS PREFER

Social messaging, SMS/text, native messaging

MOST TICKETS FILED

Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp

COMPANIES MOST COMMONLY OFFER

WhatsApp, SMS/text, Facebook Messenger

LARGEST PANDEMIC BOOST

WhatsApp

RECOMMENDATION

Add Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, consider adding SMS/text, native messaging, or regional favorite Viber (Eastern Europe).

Most customers in this region are filing tickets using Facebook Messenger, though WhatsApp use jumped 190 percent last year. Customers here say that when they reach out to companies over messaging channels, they prefer to use social messaging apps, text, or messaging directly through a website or mobile app. Currently, 67 percent of companies that have adopted messaging rely on WhatsApp, but just under half also use SMS/text (45 percent) and Facebook Messenger (43 percent).



Latin America

CUSTOMERS PREFER

Social messaging, native messaging

MOST TICKETS FILED

WhatsApp

COMPANIES MOST COMMONLY OFFER

WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger

LARGEST PANDEMIC BOOST

WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger

RECOMMENDATION

Add WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, consider adding native messaging, SMS/text and Instagram direct messages.

Customers in Latin America are filing more tickets over WhatsApp than all other regions combined, and the channel saw volume increase 96 percent over the last year. When messaging with companies, customers prefer to use social messaging apps like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, but also don't mind directly messaging a company through its own website or mobile app. Currently, nearly all companies that offer messaging use WhatsApp (91 percent), but 74 percent also turn to Facebook Messenger. Other channels you're more likely to see offered by companies in Latin America? Instagram direct messages (33 percent) and Telegram (28 percent).

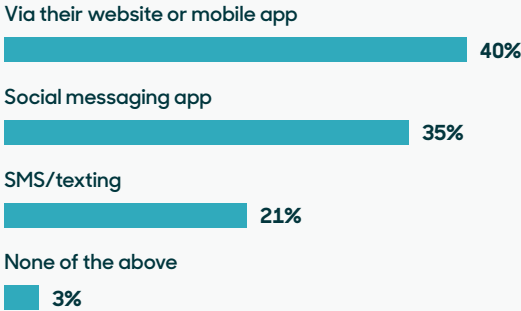
Generational divide

When customers message a business, most still prefer to use a company’s own website or mobile app, regardless of how old they are. This makes sense, given that web and mobile messaging has been around much longer than other forms of messaging support.

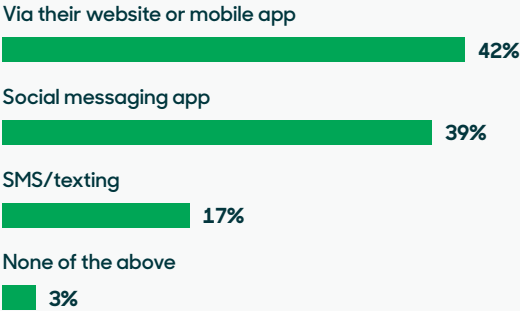
In these early days, many customers and companies are still finding each other over social messaging apps. Even so, GenZers and Millennials are already 40 percent more likely to turn to social messaging than older generations and they increasingly expect that companies will meet them there.

How do you prefer to message a business?

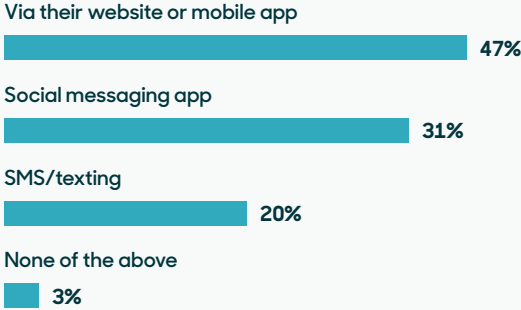
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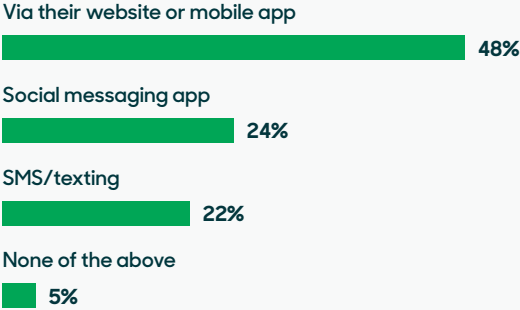
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40-54:



55 AND ABOVE:



Any channel, one conversation

Businesses can and should be wherever their customers are. And no matter what channel they use to reach out now or in the future, these interactions should be seamlessly woven together so that each becomes part of a larger conversation. This ensures that customers never have to repeat themselves, while businesses get the context they need to deliver faster and more personalized experiences.

Learn more about how [Zendesk messaging](#) can help you exceed your customer's expectations for support on any channel.

