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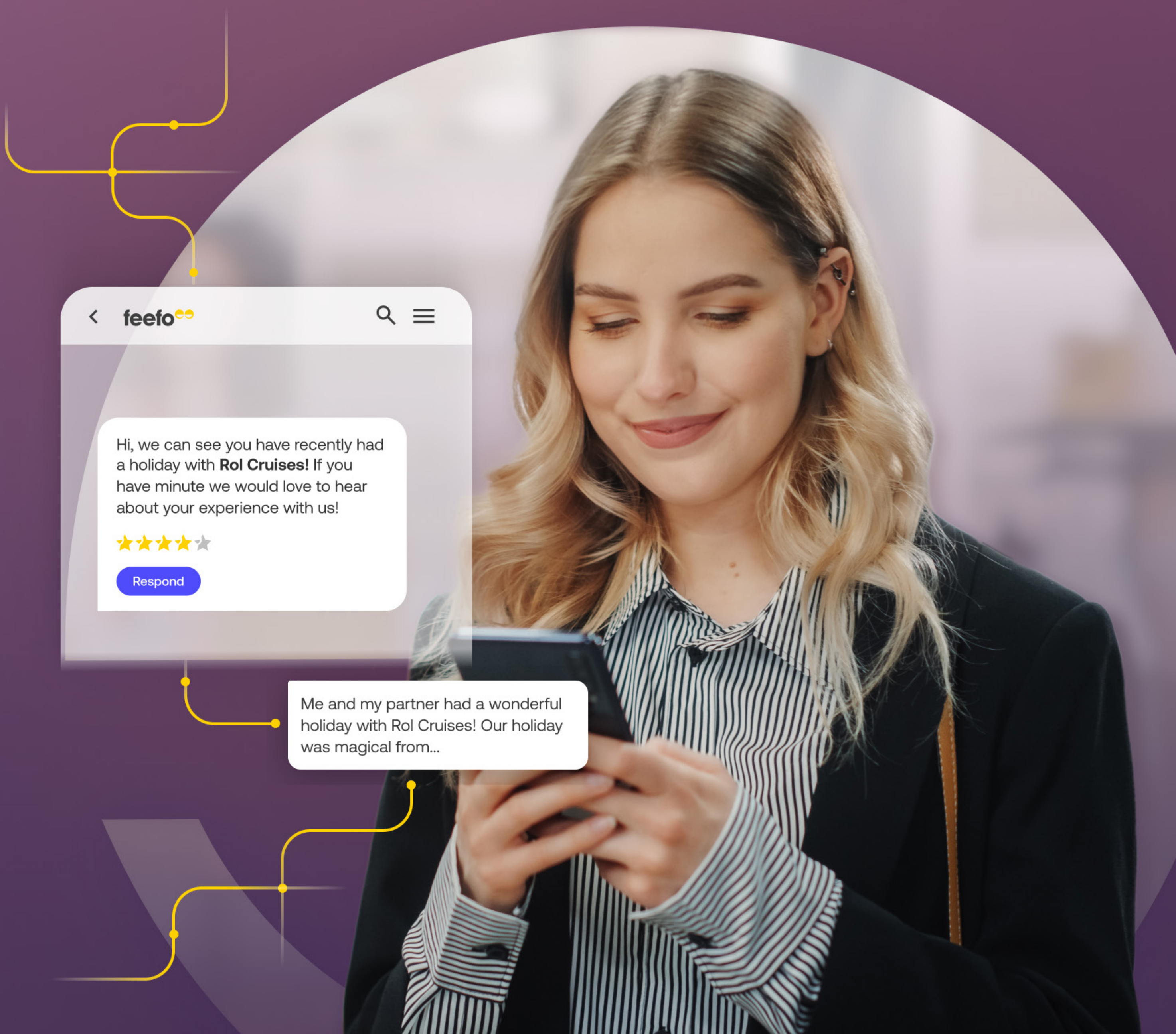
REPORT

Personalisation and privacy

How brands can strike the right balance



A follow-on from the Consumer Benchmark Report

Contents

Methodology

This research was conducted by Censuswide, among a sample of 2,005 nationally representative UK respondents, aged 16+. The data was collected between 21.08.2024 – 23.08.2024.

Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct and ESOMAR principles. Censuswide is also a member of the British Polling Council.

Welcome

Consumers are seeking deeper connections with brands than ever before. They crave more personalisation but expect it to be delivered in a non-invasive way; yet they still trust email more than any other platform.

Our research, leveraging data from Censuswide with a survey of **2000+** UK consumers, delves into consumers' sense of social sovereignty. We identify critical pain points in how consumers want brands to engage with them and when they feel personalisation has gone too far.

What's the story?

Email is Queen

Despite a rise in new methods of communication from brands to consumers, the most trustworthy form of contact is email. Fear of fake accounts or scams plays into receptiveness to social media, SMS and other communications. Click here to read more.

Understanding buyer personas beyond age

Every interaction shapes the customer's experience and in turn, whether they buy again. We tend to assume that younger people mostly shop online, and that older people shop in person – but this isn't exactly true. To help understand how people want to be contacted post-purchase our team have created buyer personas. Click here to read more.

The trust picture

Over half of people surveyed agree with the statement: 'It's hard to tell if marketing texts from brands are legitimate or a scam'. Brands must address this issue if they want to connect with customers via new forms of communication. Click here to read more.

When is personalisation invasive?

People crave a deeper connection with brands and expect more personalisation but find it invasive when their actions trigger communication. How can brands tread the line between a personal experience and their customers feeling watched? Click here to read more.

Editor's Introduction

In an era where consumers are inundated with choices, brands face an increasingly complex challenge: how to build meaningful relationships without overstepping boundaries.

Navigating this fine line between personalisation and privacy is tricky, with no clear definition of where one ends and the other begins. Consumers expect brands to offer tailored experiences, but they also want control over their interactions. This evolving landscape demands that brands recognise customers as individuals, not just data points and respond to their needs with precision and care.

The following piece explores this delicate balance, and the expectations consumers hold as they take ownership of their journeys.

We need to recognise consumers as individuals.

Consumers have more choice than ever before – and they're getting used to it.

They want autonomy and social ownership. They want brands to offer personalised service, but not too much and not too often, but more often than we're giving. With the rise of social shopping, omnichannel buyer journeys, and hyper-personalisation options, it's a tricky landscape for businesses to navigate—we're in the messy middle. Brands and consumers are still figuring out what they like.

Consumers want social sovereignty.

It's no surprise that consumers want to own their customer journey and be in the driver's seat of how brands connect with them.

We, as brands, need to navigate an evolving social landscape. Learning to be resilient to change is nothing new for businesses. What is new is the plethora of choices that consumers have. They're used to having options, and they expect them.

It's important to strike the right balance between personalisation and privacy.

The boundaries between social media and professional communications are blurring. With expectations to connect on every platform and build relationships with customers that transcend transactions - people have high expectations for brands. We're treading a cautious line without the discovery of what that means right now.

Here at Feefo, we offer brands an ear to the ground - so they can listen to customers and set boundaries for their brand. Consumers are individuals, not just data sets - and we, as brands, need to start listening.

Kerry Leighton-Bailey
Chief Client and Marketing Officer

SECTION 1

Buyer personas

We break down three personas that we identified within the respondent base for our research.

Consumer personas:

Looking beyond age

Every interaction shapes the customer's experience and in turn, whether they buy again. Brands need to understand how each customer group wants to interact to maximise the chance of loyalty and retention. By identifying consumer personas, brands can tailor communications to better meet the needs and preferences of their customers.

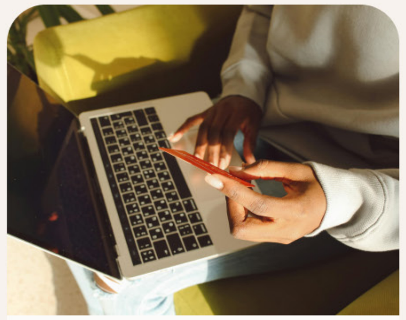
Many of us assume that younger people mostly shop online, and older people shop in person. But this isn't exactly true. Our research has shown that making assumptions about shopper traits based on age would be wrong. While there is some pattern, the picture is more complicated.

Persona 1

The connection-seeking shopper

Persona 2

The value-driven shopper



Persona 3

The transactional shopper

Persona 1: The connection-seeking shopper

Traits:

- Habitual shopper, more so than any other group
- High expectations, demands extra value beyond the transaction, for example, personal and frequent communications
- Typically, digital-first and younger
- Uses a range of social media platforms
- Very trusting of brands with their personal data
- More concerned about connection with brands than benefits or rewards

Concerns:

- They want a deeper relationship with brands, with more communication and personalisation
- Want to be contacted more than any other group, particularly younger people - 50% of people aged 16-24 said once a week or more
- They want to connect with brands on social media
- Desire a human element in their online shopping journey

How to connect:

- Provide an excellent digital experience across the consumer journey
- Present opportunities across a range of social media platforms
- Deliver personalised, targeted communications, frequently

Persona 2: The value-driven shopper

Traits:

- Most likely omnichannel users, shopping both digitally and in-store
- High expectations of value, reliability and transparency
- Spread across age groups
- Values data protection and transparent, ethical practices
- Quite trusting of brands with their personal data
- Cares most about the product and service, followed by reliability and range of products

Concerns:

- Concerned about being scammed, feeling watched or listened to
- Considerate about which brands they shop with
- Would like a relationship with brands beyond the transaction but don't want to feel watched

How to connect:

- Offer an omnichannel shopping experience
- Provide proactive communication, but not too frequent
- Be transparent about use of data and values
- Focus on building trust

Persona 3: The transactional shopper

Traits:

- Expects rewards and discounts
- Less trusting of and less active on social media
- Not driven by loyalty
- Value great products, service and reliability above personal experiences
- Less likely to contact a brand directly
- Doesn't crave connection – happy to not be contacted much after a transaction
- Tends to be in the older age group

Concerns:

- Struggle with trust for brands, especially when it comes to data protection
- Wants the best value for money

How to connect:

- Keep communication and buyer journey simple
- Contact buyers less frequently and focus on easy promotions
- Be transparent about data usage
- Focus on in-person shopping options

SECTION 2

Building connections post-purchase

We discuss how consumers want to connect with brands, how often they want to contact and be contacted by brands.

How do consumers want to be contacted post purchase?

To build deeper connections with your customers, you need to understand how they want to be contacted post-purchase. We asked people how they wanted to be engaged with for various post-purchase queries, including for:

- Rewards
- Joining a loyalty programme
- Thank-you notes
- Product care tips and support (making the most of your purchase)
- General educational content
- Similar products you might like (cross-sell, upsell)
- Social media follow requests
- Feedback (leaving a rating and review)
- Brand’s response to your feedback
- Reminders (e.g., for expiring discounts, to give feedback)

Our research identified that email came out on top in terms of how people want to be contacted about all the above. The top three contact methods, in preference order were:

Email

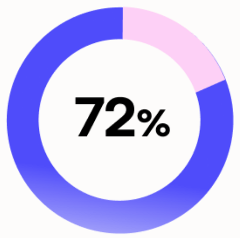
Social media

(all social platforms combined, including WhatsApp)

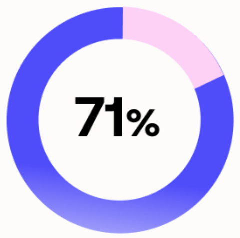
Text message (SMS)

Email was preferred **28.63%** more than social media across the board. As the age group rises, so does the desire to be contacted by email. Preference for email is also consistent regardless of the business size – although the bigger the business, the more people want to be contacted by email.

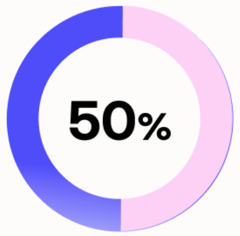
People are keen to be contacted by socials too – but which ones?



Facebook



WhatsApp



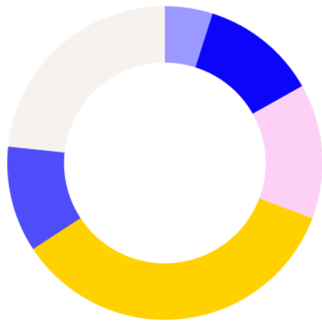
Instagram

Coming out on top are **Facebook**, **WhatsApp** and **Instagram.**

People prefer to be contacted through these socials than any other, regardless of whether the business is big or small, medium or micro.

The micro business anomaly

According to Brits surveyed, the top 5 channels they’d prefer to hear from a micro business (e.g., sole trader like plumber or electrician) are:



Email	33%
Text messages	11%
Facebook	10%
Whatsapp	8%
Instagram	5%
Other	33%

Micro businesses are the anomaly to the trend. Despite email still being the preferred method **(33%)** of contact, SMS is the second preferred method **(11%).** Unlike other sized businesses the channels people want to hear from micro businesses the least on are WhatsApp **(8%)** and Instagram **(5%)**. With many micro businesses delivering a 1:1 service, it makes sense that consumers would accept the most personal method of communication from them.

Essentially, brands need to focus on all channels to keep their customers happy, not just email – although email does remain queen across the board. Brands should have a deep understanding of their customer base and preferred social channels to meet them in the way they prefer.

How often do people want to be contacted by brands?

On average, people surveyed said they preferred to be contacted by brands once a week post-purchase.

A third **(32%)** of people surveyed agree with the statement: 'I would like to hear from my favourite brands more often'.

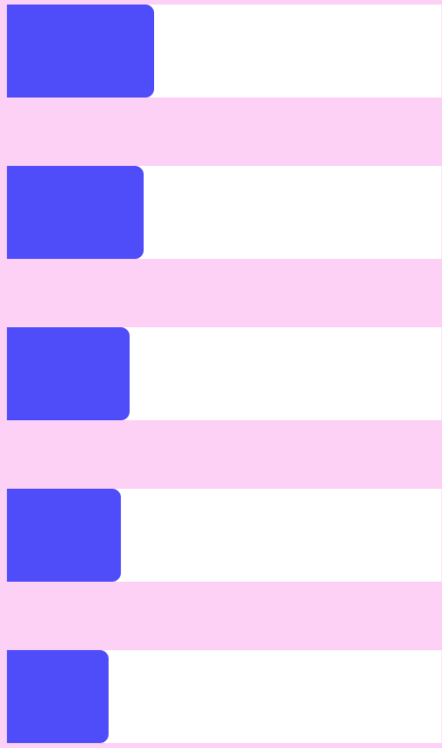
The connection-seeking shopper and the value-driven shopper both expect lots of connection from brands. The transactional shopper on the other hand doesn't want to be contacted as frequently.

How do consumers want to contact brands?

What about when consumers want to contact brands directly? We asked people what would drive them to reach out to a brand after making a purchase.

Why do they want to contact brands?

According to people surveyed, the top five reasons they would most likely interact with a brand after purchase are:



33% Giving positive feedback on a product after purchase

32% Joining a loyalty programme

29% Giving feedback about the customer service they received

26% Asking questions about the product

25% Looking at the brand website for more products

People surveyed aged **55+** are most likely to say they'd interact with a brand after purchase to give positive feedback on a product **(34%)**.

People who shop exclusively online are more likely to contact a brand to give positive feedback post-purchase than those who shop only in-store **(38% vs 22%)**.

What group is most likely to give feedback?

The key age group for giving feedback is **55+** for both in-store and online shoppers.

How do consumers want to contact brands?

As with how they want brands to contact them, their favourite method to reach out to brands themselves is email.

37% of people want to email a brand to share positive feedback after a purchase.

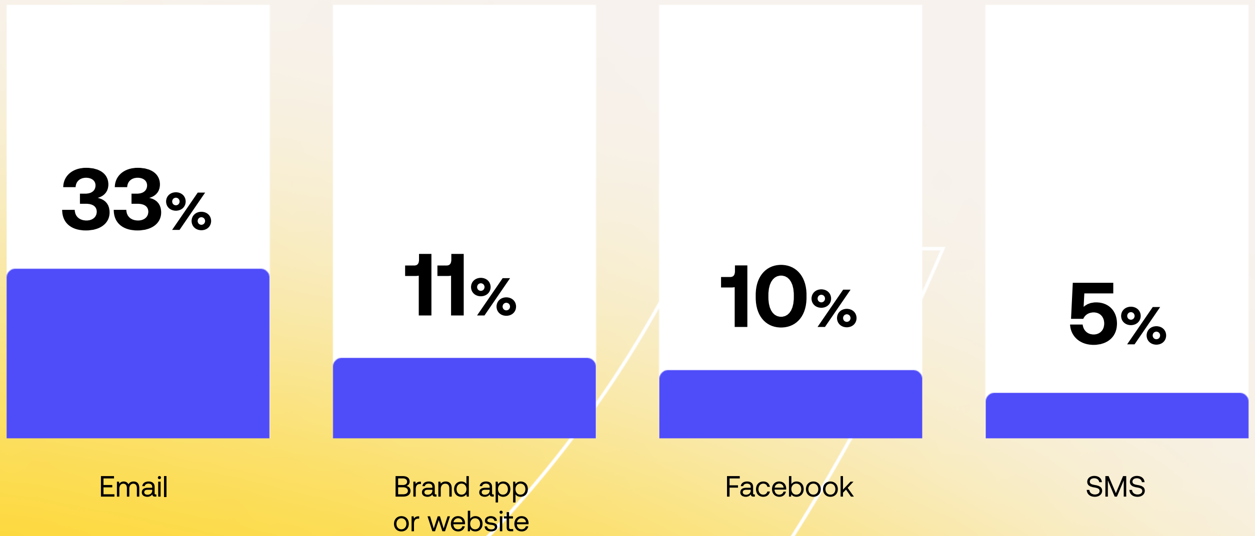
25% of people want to contact brands via social media to share their positive feedback.

18% want to use live chat via a brand app or website.

Which social media platforms do people want to use to contact brands?

What about if they're sharing negative feedback?

The picture is similar whether sharing negative or positive feedback:



Consumers want an easy way to give you feedback, whether by email, social media, or brand app. Customer-centric brands should provide coverage and listen across all platforms.

So why does email keep coming out on top?

Let's look at the trust picture...

SECTION 3

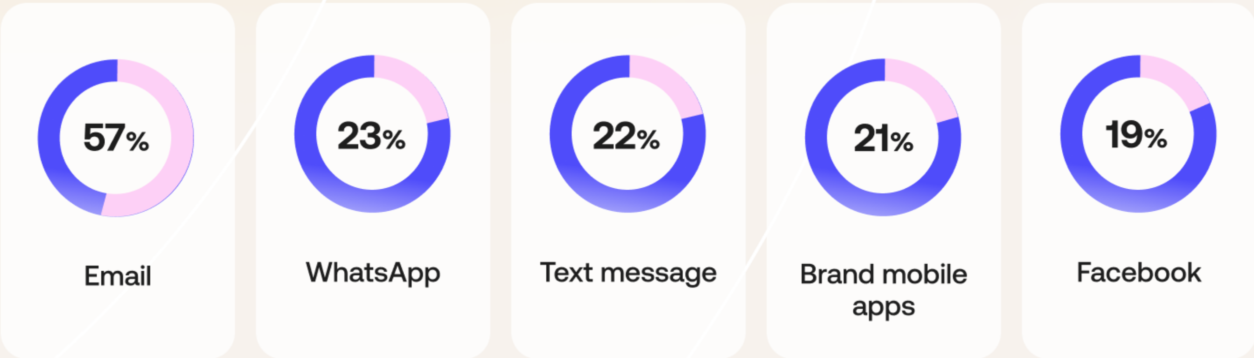
Building trust and connecting with customers

How brands can build trust and deliver personalisation in line with their customer groups desires.

The trust picture

People want to be contacted by email because they trust email the most. When it comes to other platforms, they're scared of fakes, frauds and scams.

People surveyed said the top five methods of communication from a brand they'd most trust to be genuine are:



The methods of communication from brands people surveyed would trust least are:

8%	X.com (formerly Twitter)
8%	Snapchat

Although email is top overall across age groups, brands should still keep in mind the age of their customers when reaching out. Perceptions of email as a trustworthy method of communication is highest in older age groups and lowest in the younger age groups.

Do customers trust email?

62% of people aged **45-54** say they would trust communication from a brand through email to be genuine. That's compared to **46%** of respondents aged **16-24** who trust email from a brand to be legitimate.

People surveyed who shop only online compared to those who shop only in-store said they would trust communication from a brand through email to be genuine **(51% vs 36%)**. Essentially, digital shoppers are most trusting of email communications, and in-store shoppers less so.

Do brands have a trust issue they need to address?

Over half **(53%)** of people surveyed agree with the statement:

'It's hard to tell if marketing texts from brands are legitimate or a scam'.

Over half **(54%)** of People surveyed agree with the statement:

'I worry about being scammed on social media'.

Clearly, scamming remains a huge concern for consumers. People can't tell what is real or fake – so brands need to add trust signals as they venture into alternative methods of communication.

Bigger brands in particular have a trust problem. Over a third **(34%)** of people surveyed agree with the statement:

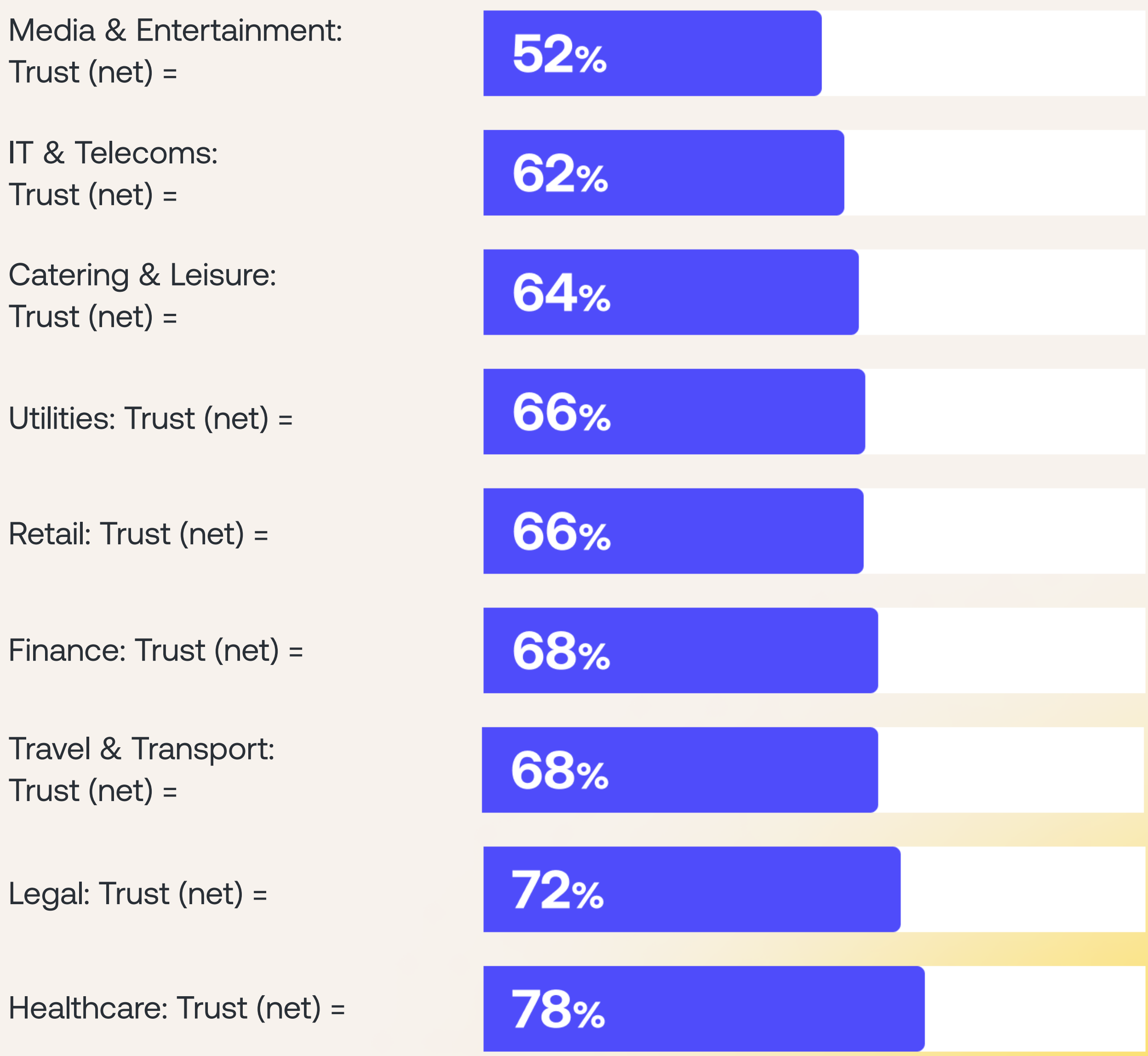
'I trust small businesses more than big international chains.'

This is compared to just under a fifth **(18%)** who disagree with this. There is a clear trust barrier to overcome for the bigger businesses.

Trust across industries

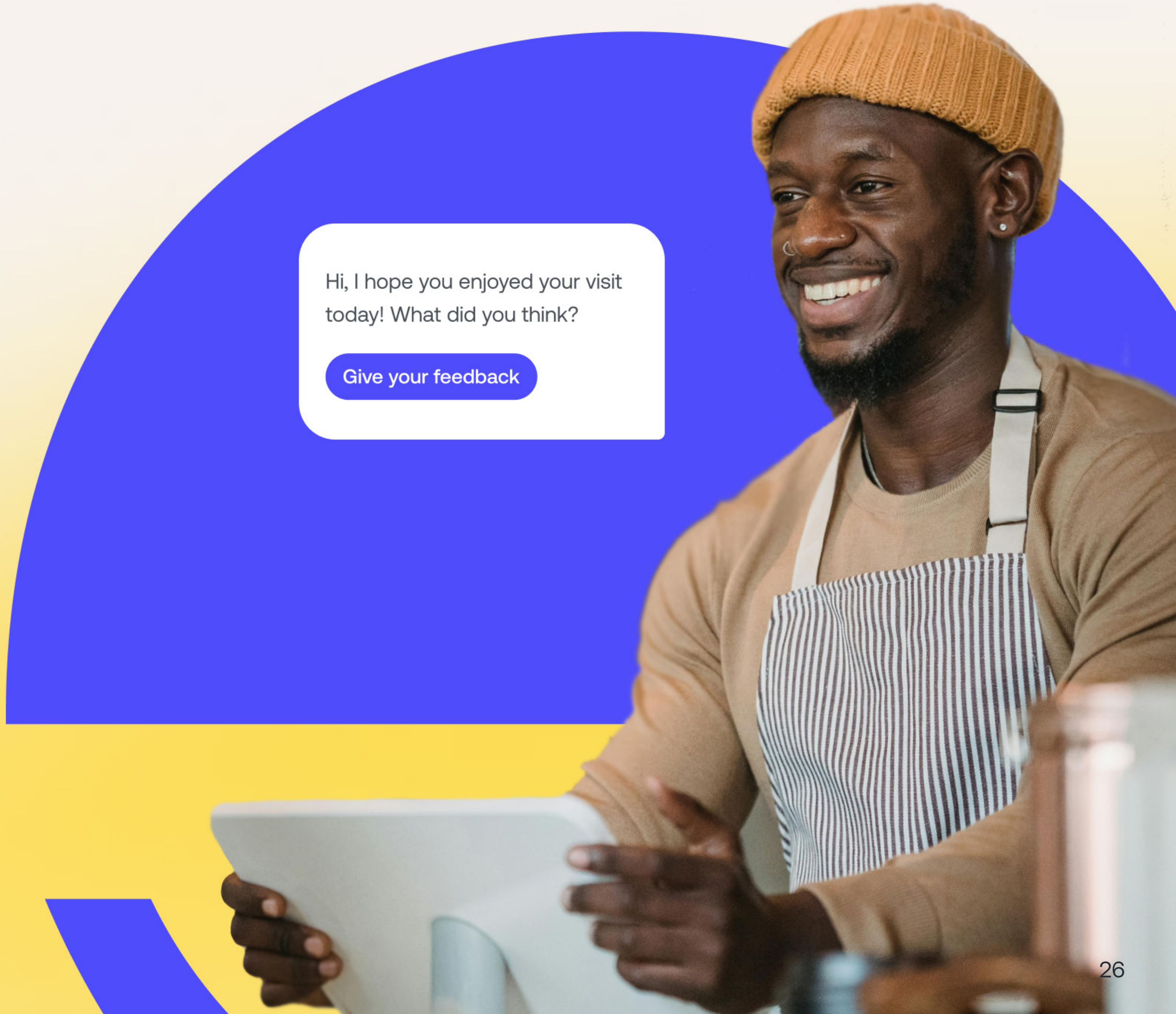
Our research suggests that the issue isn't industry specific – all industries need to focus on building trust.

When asked to what extent, if at all, do you trust the following types of brands with your personal data, our survey participants answered:



It's clear that all industries have an issue with perceptions of trust. Even the healthcare industry, coming out on top at **78%** (net) shows that **22%** of people that don't trust brands in the healthcare industry. That's significant.

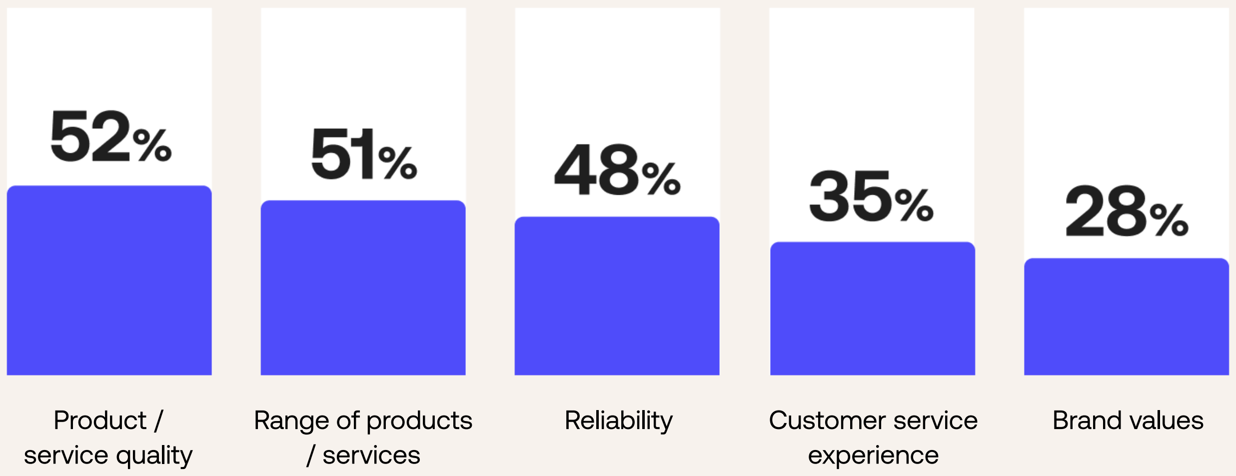
Brands need to focus on building trust and proving that their communications are authentic – especially through alternative methods such as business-related SMS or social media.



The case for personalisation

What drives consumers to choose specific brands?

We asked people why they choose to shop with their favourite brands. According to people surveyed, the top 5 reasons are:



Brands need to focus on these items when driving repeat business.

Interestingly, personalisation of communications doesn't appear in the top five – with only **10%** of voters selecting it. People don't see it as a core reason to shop with or choose their favourite brand. Brands should master the essentials first when it comes to customer satisfaction – great products, service and value.

But personalisation is still desired from customers, and it's important to get it right. Especially from the connection-driven and value-driven personas. How much is too much?

When should brands personalise their communications with customers?

Over **3 in 5** people surveyed like personalisation in communications from brands – such as the use of their name, product recommendations and so on.

When asked about the statement 'My experience with brands is not personalised enough', over **30%** of people aged **16-44** agree (net).

48% of people surveyed agreed with the statement: 'I feel brands know enough about me to offer relevant personalisation'.

It's evident that a lot of people want more personalisation than they're getting. And many feel that brands already have enough information from them to deliver on that personalisation.

People expect more from brands, but especially from small businesses. **45%** of people surveyed agree with the statement: 'The smaller the brand, the more personal I expect my experience to be'. The smaller the business, the more a human touch is desired, or expected.

What should personalisation look like?

How to get it right and deliver what consumers want.

According to people who said they like personalisation in communications, the top five types of personalisation they prefer to receive are:

57%

Special gifts or discounts
(e.g., birthday, anniversary)

43%

Product recommendations
(e.g., 'top picks for you', 'Birthday style ideas')

36%

Personal responses to reviews
(positive or negative)

20%

Tailored educational content
(e.g., personalised travel guide or financial advice)

17%

Geo-targeted event recommendations
(e.g., 'visit our pop-up store near you')

What do consumers really want?

It seems they're looking for great products at a reasonable price, followed by a personal connection to the brand they shop with. This compliments our findings about consumers seeking a deeper connection with brands, as discussed in our **Consumer Benchmark Report.**

Personal connection to consumers can be in the form of targeted event recommendations based on their location (geo-targeting), but does this resonate? With **17%** of people seeking such targeted activity, it suggests that they're seeking to reconnect with the human element – a resurgence to in-person experiences following the eruption in digital culture.

How much is too much?

It's clear people want personalisation; they want to feel connected to a brand as though the business is offering something personal, rather than what they want to sell. Yet, it's evident that brands also have a trust problem, especially when it comes to data protection or communicating through new methods. People feel that their privacy is being invaded, while at the same time craving a curated experience.

Just **9%** of people surveyed said brand communications never feel invasive. That's significant – most people feel that their privacy is being invaded to some degree.

There's clearly a privacy line. But where does it lie for consumers? Are we even able to define the boundary yet, with communication from brands being in its infancy? Perhaps small or micro businesses can experiment more freely with personalisation because consumers expect more of a human touch from them.

Consumers want to feel as though you're curating content and offering up what's best for them – but not watching their every move. When is personalisation too much?

We asked people when they felt brands had crossed the line. Here are the top five circumstances in which people said personalisation feels invasive:

39%

Receiving a message after searching online for a product (e.g., text or social media message)

33%

Receiving a message when passing a brand store (e.g., text or social media)

31%

Seeing a social media advert after discussing a product or brand

30%

Seeing a social media advert after searching online for a product

30%

When communications use my name or other personal details

These moments of invasiveness are all about moments of feeling watched – communications that trigger after a person's actions.

In fact:

Over half **(52%)** of people surveyed agree with the statement:

'I feel like brands are always watching or listening to me'.

Over half **(54%)** of people surveyed agree with the statement:

'I think brands know more about me than I am comfortable with'.

This is consistent across all age groups and persona types.

So, what's the story here?

Trust is eroding; brands should tread carefully with personalisation.

Consumer trust for brands is low, but has it reached its lowest level?

People feel their privacy is invaded, and while they like personalisation, they feel brands are not getting it right. Brands are invading too much, and not delivering value in the right way. So, businesses need to focus on rebuilding trust.

That means treading a careful line when it comes to personalisation. Deliver value, without giving a sense of stalking your customers activity. Be transparent about how you're using their data.

Paired with what we know about peoples suspicions of being scammed, especially via newer channels like SMS and social media, brands need to be transparent when connecting with people personally.

What can brands do to build trust and deliver the personalisation that consumers want?

- Base personalisation on curated recommendations and relevant content.
- Steer away from activity reactive communications e.g. 'we saw you looked at this on our website'.
- Take extra measures to prove your legitimacy and reassure people it's not a scam. Such as using trusted third party platforms to send out review invitations.
- Use third party companies to verify your activity and legitimacy - for example, a platform that collects authentic feedback on your behalf.

SECTION 4

Strategic recommendations

So, what do these findings mean for you as a brand?

How can brands overcome the trust issue, deliver personalisation and build a deeper connection with their customers in the way they desire?

To conclude our research, we've established four focus points to help brands connect with customers after a purchase, in the way they want.

- Deliver an authentic value exchange
- Build trust
- Understand your customers
- Be transparent

Deliver an authentic value exchange

The relationships businesses have with their customers are their most important asset. And today, how customers feel about a company can have a dramatic effect as well.

Especially where consumers are fearful of scams and already feel like they are being watched.

Now is the time to maximise the value you offer your customers in the way they want. **How can you do this?**

In a constantly evolving market, maintaining a competitive edge requires businesses to be agile. This relies on three key pillars:

- Leveraging *customer insights*
- Adopting a top-down *customer-centric approach*
- Making *data-backed investment* decisions

These elements will help to ensure your business remains relevant and responsive to evolving consumer needs.

The Leader's Guide to Customer Experience

Discover how to build a value exchange that sets your business apart

Download

Build trust

Consumers need reassurance that brands are authentic and can be trusted with their data. So, how can brands offer this needed reassurance?

- Focus on communicating clearly
- Be authentic with brand values: it's not about perfection, it's about being honest with where you're at in your brand values journey
- Explore ways to verify your communications and provide protection against fake or fraudulent information

Trust is low across all industries, so brands should focus on activities that communicate their authenticity.

Be transparent

Consumers are clearly craving an authentic connection with brands beyond the transaction. It's more important than ever for brands to offer transparency about how they connect with their customers, both in their communications and their data collection.

For brands to be transparent they must focus on:

- Clear communication with customers and a simplified customer journey
- Informing customers how they're using their data and why; especially when it comes to collecting feedback or reviews
- Offer tailored, timely communications that build connection

Being more transparent and authentic across the board, but particularly with how you're using data, will help build a deeper connection with your customers.

Understand your customers

Understanding your customers in depth can be the difference between delivering a value exchange you think your customers want and the one they actually want.

To gain a deeper understanding of customers brands can:

- Consult their customer base about when and how they want to be contacted
- Use unobtrusive personalisation practices that deliver curated content to the level right for their customer groups
- Collect verified, authentic feedback across all levels of their products and services and embed it in company culture.

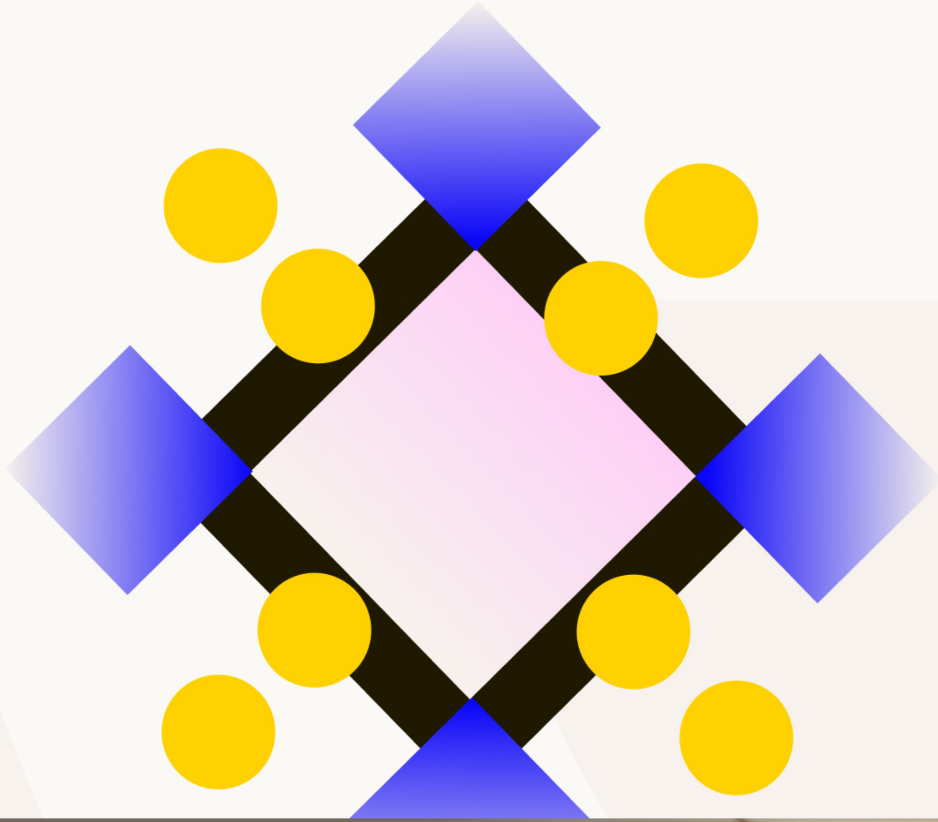
Collecting authentic data from your customers will give you a deeper understanding and insights that allow you to improve how you connect with them and deliver value.

The small business anomaly

Micro businesses can operate slightly differently from small, medium or large businesses. Perhaps it's to do with the intimacy of dealing with someone one to one – the plumbers, the freelancers, the accountants – but people appear to trust micro businesses more than any other business.

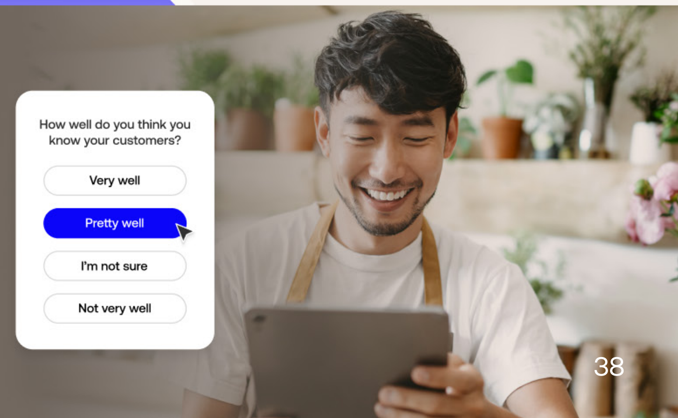
While email remains the preferred method of communication across the board, SMS is a close second. People expect the human touch when it comes to person-led businesses.

For any business, focusing on providing a human element, such as responding to reviews, can help align with this.



Assess how well you're listening to your customers right now:

Take our business questionnaire



Conclusion

Conclusion

This research examines customer behaviour and critical factors driving brand loyalty and satisfaction. Throughout the study, several key insights have emerged, offering brands actionable guidance to strengthen their customer relationships and improve overall performance.

Personalisation is no longer a competitive advantage but a necessity.

Customers expect brands to understand their individual preferences and cater to their needs at every touchpoint. Whether through tailored recommendations, customised offers, or personalised communication, businesses that excel in this area create deeper emotional connections with their audience. There is a fine line, perhaps as yet undefined, where it becomes intrusive and adds to a sense of mistrust.

Transparency and trust are pivotal in building long-lasting relationships.

Today's consumers value authenticity. Brands that embrace honest communication, whether through transparent pricing, ethical business practices, or admitting to mistakes, are more likely to earn customer loyalty. Trust is built over time but can be quickly eroded by inconsistent messaging or actions.

Leverage customer feedback to drive improvement.

Customers expect their voices to be heard, and brands that actively listen, respond, and adapt based on customer input are more likely to succeed. Incorporating real-time feedback mechanisms and continuously improving the customer experience based on these insights is crucial for staying competitive.

Omnichannel engagement is growing significantly.

Customers interact with brands across multiple platforms, online, offline, and through social media; consistency in messaging and experience is essential. Brands that create seamless interactions across all channels will thrive in the modern marketplace.

Brands must prioritise personalisation, transparency, feedback-driven improvement, and omnichannel consistency to remain relevant and competitive.

Ready to implement these recommendations?

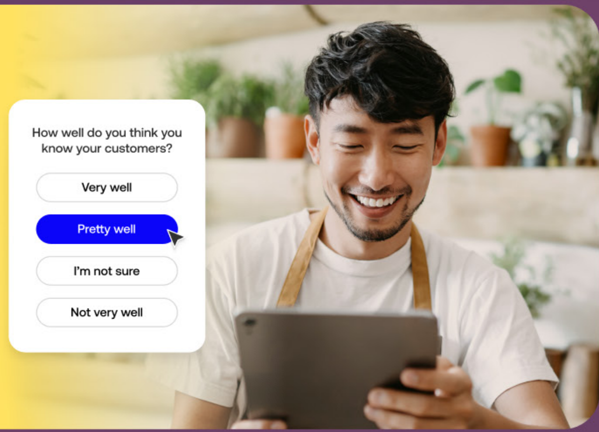
See how Feefo can help you

Speak to an expert

Additional resources:

Assess how well you're listening to your customers right now:

Take our business questionnaire



The Leader's Guide to Customer Experience

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The Consumer Benchmark: From Transactional to Value

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