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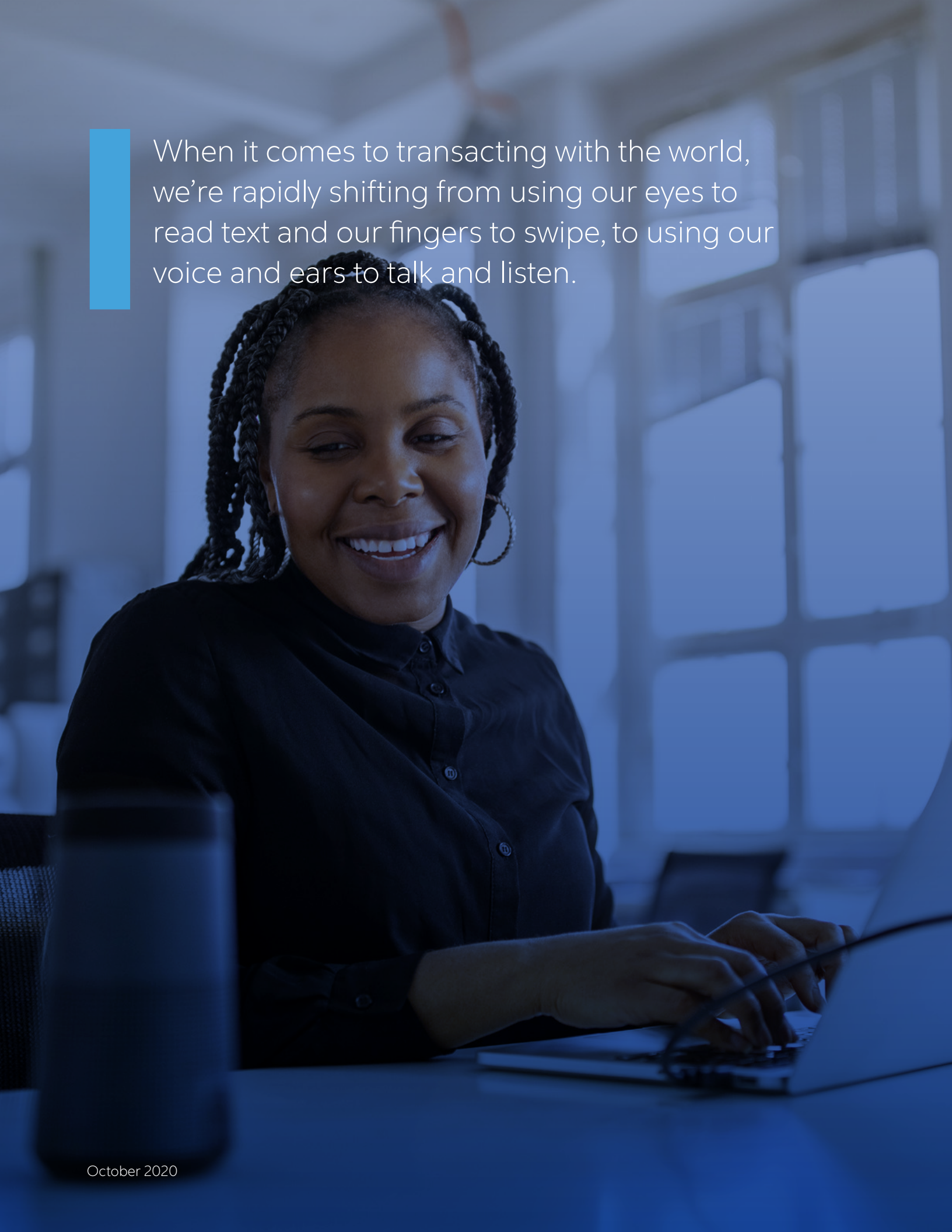
From Eyes to Ears: Getting Your Brand Heard in the New Age of 'Voice'

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted voice strategies into high gear, according to our recent study of Asia-Pac organizations. Through our primary research findings and three-stage maturity model, global decision-makers can prepare for the opportunities and challenges of the future of voice.

Center For
The Future of Work

When it comes to transacting with the world, we're rapidly shifting from using our eyes to read text and our fingers to swipe, to using our voice and ears to talk and listen.

Executive Summary

When we look back on the COVID-19 pandemic, we'll realize that one of the unhailed victims of the devastating virus is the touchscreen. Not only did the virus make us wary of unhygienic surfaces, but the lockdowns and social isolation that followed also spurred renewed interest in interacting with a human-sounding voice. Both realities have served to catalyze the beginning of a large-scale shift toward the voice interface. The use of Alexa Skills was up 65% in the first two months of the lockdown.[1] In South Korea, the number of conversations with voice assistants (requesting songs and math help for children) jumped 193% as families spent more time working and learning from home.[2] Even Twitter recently announced that users can now audio-tweet their inner musings.[3]

When it comes to transacting with the world, we're rapidly shifting from using our eyes to read text and our fingers to swipe, to using our voice and ears to talk and listen. In our recent research, 93% of companies believe the shift toward voice will accelerate in the near future. Future generations will no doubt look back on the virus as a "technology moment" in human history, when voice interfaces moved from "gradual" to "sudden" adoption and triggered a lifetime change in the way we live, work and play.

To learn more about how organizations are preparing for a brand landscape dominated by voice, Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work surveyed 1,400 top marketing and IT executives at leading companies across the Asia Pacific and the Middle East regions (see methodology, page 28). Our objective was to gain insights into the changes companies are making to take advantage of voice technologies, investments they are making and the challenges to overcome. Our findings suggest that soon, voice interfaces will expand beyond smart speakers and be embedded in chatbots, applications, products and services. Whether digital or brick-and-mortar, businesses will have to pivot to voice to be heard by today's and tomorrow's customers.

Through our findings, global decision-makers can catch a glimpse of the future of voice, playing out right now in the Asia Pacific region. By learning from the first-hand experience of leaders in the region, businesses around the world can participate in the enormous opportunities that voice interfaces offer and import the region's successful approaches.

Key findings:

Our research reveals the following important trends, whose impact in some cases will soon ripple around the world:

▌ **COVID-19: An inflection point for "gradual" to "sudden" voice adoption.** The shift toward voice will only accelerate, with the great majority of respondents (93%) believing that voice will gain further momentum, thanks to continued interest in contactless interactions.

▌ **Brands that adopt voice technology quickly will have a first-mover advantage.** A large majority of respondents (74%) view voice as important or extremely important for their business. The scope and scale of voice will be enormous as companies explore new ways of doing business and connecting with customers.

▌ **Voice means money.** On average, companies plan to spend 3% of their revenues on building voice capabilities in the next five years. And they've got high expectations for returns, as they're aiming to drive 6.3% of their revenue through voice during the same period.

▌ **Use cases are primarily focused on customer engagement, but employee applications aren't far behind.** Quicker response time to customers, (65%), personalization (60%) and improving customer service levels (57%) are the top three areas companies plan to pursue with voice. Additionally, half of respondents plan to apply voice to internal, employee-facing applications.

▌ **Getting there won't be easy.** Only 40% of respondents feel confident about their ability to integrate voice into existing business processes. Privacy (89%), creating content for voice (84%) and developing a voice personality (81%) are the top three challenges companies face or anticipate on their voice journey.

Based on our findings, we've developed a three-phase voice maturity model to help traditional businesses systematically move toward the new world of voice: "discovery" by third-party voice assistants, "enhancement" of voice capabilities and "amplification" of the brand through voice-driven revenue opportunities. Based on their current state of maturity, companies can assess how to move up the maturity curve. At the heart of the model is natural language processing (NLP), machine learning and other AI technologies that will make brands' voice strategies truly intelligent.

COVID-19: THE 'TECHNOLOGY MOMENT' FOR VOICE

Voice technology was already on the rise before the pandemic. Personal voice assistants are expected to outnumber the world's population by 2024.[4] In India alone, the voice market is expected to grow 40% in 2020.[5] Xiaomi and Baidu, tech giants in China, experienced over 160% year-on-year growth in their smart speaker sales in Q4 2019.[6]

But the virus — and the subsequent need for both human-injected and contactless experiences — served to increase both its pace and popularity. Soon, consumers will expect to have a voice option at self-checkout counters, ATMs, automobiles, elevators and anywhere else touch is currently needed. XIOLIFT, a China-based elevator manufacturer, is already working to reduce the touch-transmission of germs by experimenting with voice-activated elevators.[7]

This change in consumer habits would otherwise have taken years — and businesses understand that. In our study, 93% of respondents believe the shift from touch to voice will only accelerate further in the future, and 74% view voice as important or extremely important for the future success of their brand (see Figure 1, next page). Although the impact of voice will be felt across industries, it will be particularly game-changing for the banking and financial services (80%), retail (78%), manufacturing (76%) and travel & hospitality (75%) industries. In fact, 70% of our respondents agree that if they don't embrace voice interfaces, they will lose ground to competitors in the next five years. Just like companies needed an internet strategy in the '90s, a search strategy in 2000 and a mobile strategy in 2010, they now need a voice strategy.

Perhaps author and entrepreneur Gary Vaynerchuk summarizes the shift best: "Voice platforms are the equivalent of yet-to-be-discovered Malibu beachfront property, much like Twitter in 2006, Instagram in 2010 and Snapchat in 2012."[8]
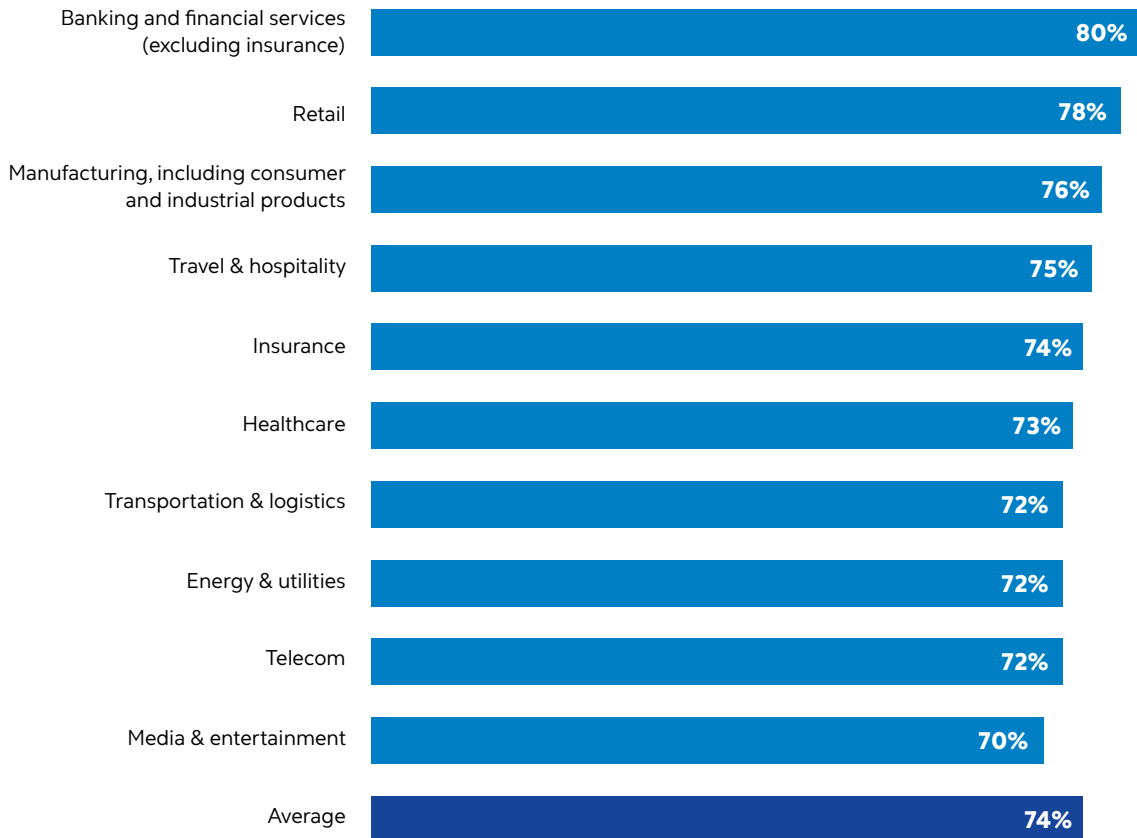
Just like companies needed an internet strategy in the '90s, a search strategy in 2000 and a mobile strategy in 2010, they now need a voice strategy.

COVID-19: the catalyst for voice adoption

93%
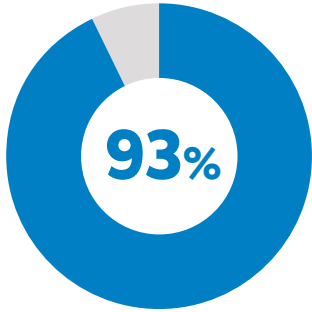
Percent of all respondents who believe the shift from "touch" to "voice" will accelerate because of continued interest in contactless interactions.

Percent of respondents who consider voice interfaces to be important or extremely important to the future success of their brand.

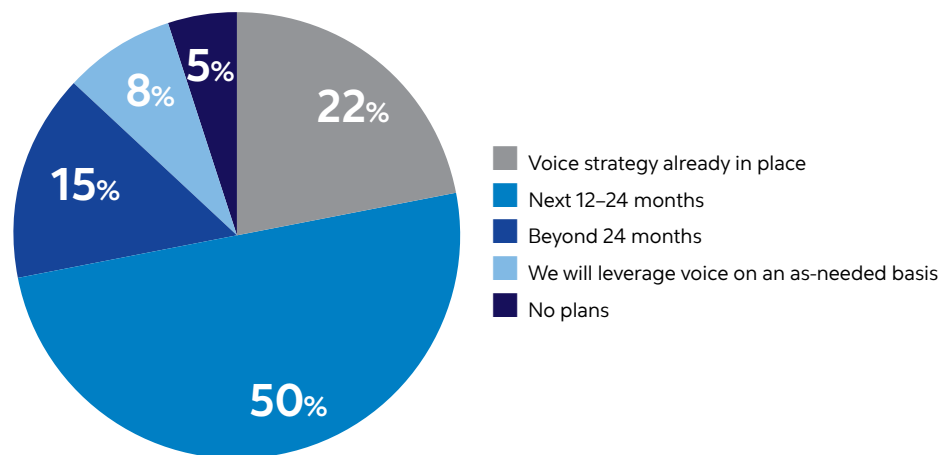| Industry	Percent
Banking and financial services (excluding insurance)	80%
Retail	78%
Manufacturing, including consumer and industrial products	76%
Travel & hospitality	75%
Insurance	74%
Healthcare	73%
Transportation & logistics	72%
Energy & utilities	72%
Telecom	72%
Media & entertainment	70%
Average	74%

Response base: 1,400
Source: Cognizant Center for the Future of Work
Figure 1

In our study, 22% of respondents already have a formal voice strategy in place. But within the next one to two years, another 50% of businesses will join those ranks, and in three years' time, the great majority (87%) will have adopted voice (see Figure 2).

A voice strategy is no longer optional

Percent of respondents adopting a voice strategy in each timeframe.

- Voice strategy already in place
- Next 12–24 months
- Beyond 24 months
- We will leverage voice on an as-needed basis
- No plans

Response base: 1,400
Source: Cognizant Center for the Future of Work
Figure 2

Voice strategies predominantly fall into two categories; brands can adopt either or both of the approaches, depending on their business objectives and specific use cases:

▋ **Building voice capabilities for third-party assistants (Alexa, Siri, Hey Google) to get recognized by them.** Examples include voice search optimization, voice-activating web-based content, and adding a voice capability (an Amazon Skill or a Google Action) to a product or service via an interface to a voice-based assistant. ICICI Prudential Life Insurance in India, for instance, rolled out an AI-powered voice-based chatbot on Google Assistant for customers to execute self-service transactions. Some companies are adopting unconventional approaches: Last year, Australian grocer Woolworths surprised customers by sending free personal voice assistants along with their grocery deliveries so they can add items to their shopping list via voice.[10]

▋ **Creating voice capabilities from the ground up by adding them to existing products and services.** Examples include incorporating a voice-based chatbot to answer customer questions, or adding a voice capability to an existing product, process or application. For instance, Flipkart, an e-commerce company in India, introduced a multilingual AI voice assistant in its grocery store app to assist customers in buying groceries using their voice.[11]

THE SOUND OF MONEY

It used to be the passphrase "Open Sesame" that opened the door to a cave full of treasure. Now, as voice interfaces increasingly connect consumers with brands, the magic words are "Alexa," "Hey Google" and "Hey Siri." In our earlier research, "Algorithms Over Brands," 43% of consumers said they would buy from a company they hadn't heard of but that's recommended by their voice-based personal assistant. As consumers become more comfortable having conversations with their voice-based assistants, their influence on purchase decisions will increase.

Indeed, respondents in our current study aim to drive an average of 6.3% of revenue through voice in the next five years. Banking and financial services organizations were the most bullish about generating revenue through voice in that timeframe (at 8.4% of revenue), followed by retail (8.2%), insurance (7.6%), travel & hospitality (7.2%) and manufacturing (7%) (see Figure 3, next page). This won't happen without significant investment. Respondents also plan to invest 3% of their revenue in building voice capabilities in that timeframe.

Companies that aren't paying attention to voice are already burning a hole in their pocket. In one analysis, major publishers are losing as much as $46,000 per day — $17 million in 2019 — due to popular voice assistants failing to recognize requests by book-buyers and accurately responding to these requests. These losses could balloon to upwards of $50 million by the end of 2020.[12] Soon, other industries will feel the heat if they ignore the power of voice.
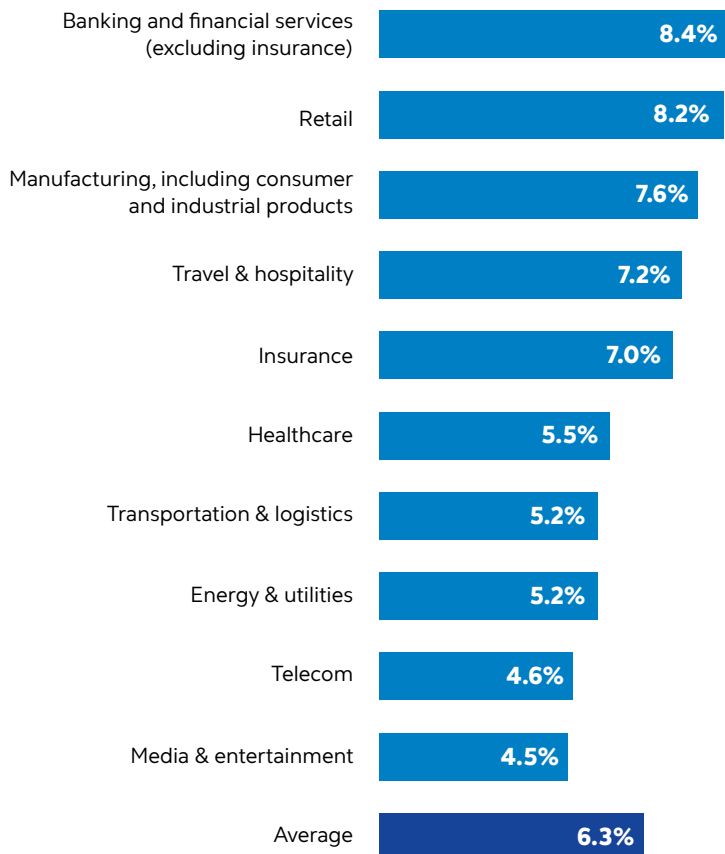
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Voice means money
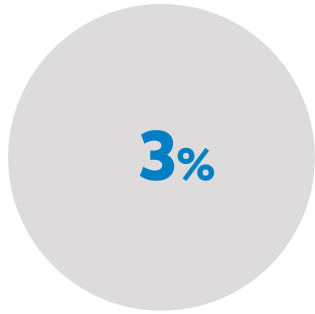
3% Average percentage of revenue companies plan to spend on developing voice capabilities in the next five years.

Percent of revenue respondents expect to generate from voice in the next five years.

Industry	Percent
Banking and financial services (excluding insurance)	8.4%
Retail	8.2%
Manufacturing, including consumer and industrial products	7.6%
Travel & hospitality	7.2%
Insurance	7.0%
Healthcare	5.5%
Transportation & logistics	5.2%
Energy & utilities	5.2%
Telecom	4.6%
Media & entertainment	4.5%
Average	6.3%

Response base: 1,400
Source: Cognizant Center for the Future of Work
Figure 3

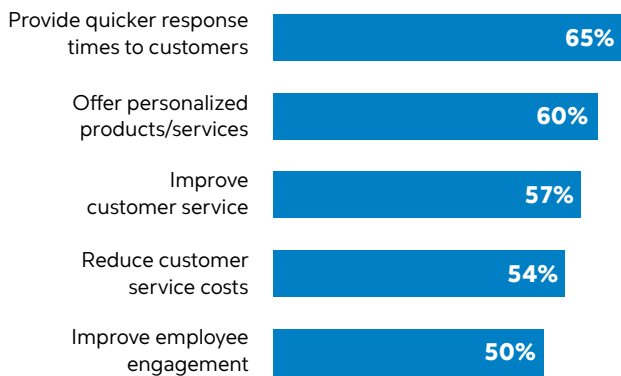### Inside, outside: Voice will impact both customers and employees

The most popular starting point for a voice-enabled business model is customer-facing applications, according to respondents, which corresponds with their ambitious revenue targets. Top business objectives for voice include providing a quicker response to customers (65%), enabling personalized experiences (60%) and elevating customer service levels (57%). To achieve these goals, respondents plan to prioritize voice for providing product/service information to customers as quickly as possible, enabling shopping experiences and making a new purchase (see Figure 4).

Voice will have a maximum impact on sales/marketing/customer service processes (82%). Can you help customers reduce the time they spend finding relevant information on your website? The majority of respondents (78%) plan to make customer service readily available through voice as well as answer customer questions (76%) and provide relevant informationabout their products and services (75%).

Whether companies add a voice element to existing processes or create new experiences built on voice as the primary medium, the success will depend on how seamlessly processes integrate voice for maximum ROI.

Voice strategies primarily aimed at customers

Percent of respondents naming their top five business objectives for voice.

Objective	%
Provide quicker response times to customers	65%
Offer personalized products/services	60%
Improve customer service	57%
Reduce customer service costs	54%
Improve employee engagement	50%

Percent of respondents naming the top 10 actions they're prioritizing or planning for voice.

Action	%
Make customer service easily available	78%
Answer questions	76%
Product/service information	75%
Voice-based shopping	74%
Appointments	72%
Make a new purchase	70%
Advice/tips	60%
Renew/refill orders	55%
Help employees manage work	52%

Response base: 1,400
Source: Cognizant Center for the Future of Work
Figure 4

Successful brands, however, are not only changing the rules of the customer-facing game by delivering vastly improved customer experiences through voice; they're also changing the basis of competition from the inside, leveraging voice to rewire core internal processes. In addition to customer-focused voice initiatives, half of respondents plan to apply voice to improve employee engagement by adding it to internal, employee-facing applications. When voice technology is integrated with intelligent automation, more day-to-day tasks can be done more quickly, resulting in new opportunities for revenue growth, productivity gains, cost savings and talent retention.

Top internal processes that will be impacted by voice include IT (79%), production and operations management (74%) and HR and people management (64%). Voice assistants, for example, could act as an IT help desk, quickly addressing employees' tech concerns. Centre State Food Service, a South Australian wholesale food distributor, is using an Android voice solution to better manage its warehousing and logistics operations. The food provider has radically simplified workflows, increased workload and can better meet spikes in demand.[13]

Tech vendors are also investing in this area. Salesforce has brought voice to its CRM systems through Einstein, a voice assistant that enables employees to enter data, interpret voice memos and even schedule calendar events, among other tasks, via voice.[14] Oracle also added a voice assistant to its enterprise applications. The assistant can understand acronyms and terms used in enterprise tasks by employees. Oracle recently added multilingual natural language understanding and customizable vocabulary capability so its voice assistant can converse with users in their native language.[15] With a focus on both customers and employees, voice will be prevalent, inside and outside the brand.

The most popular starting point for a voice-enabled business model is customer-facing applications, according to respondents, which corresponds with their ambitious revenue targets.

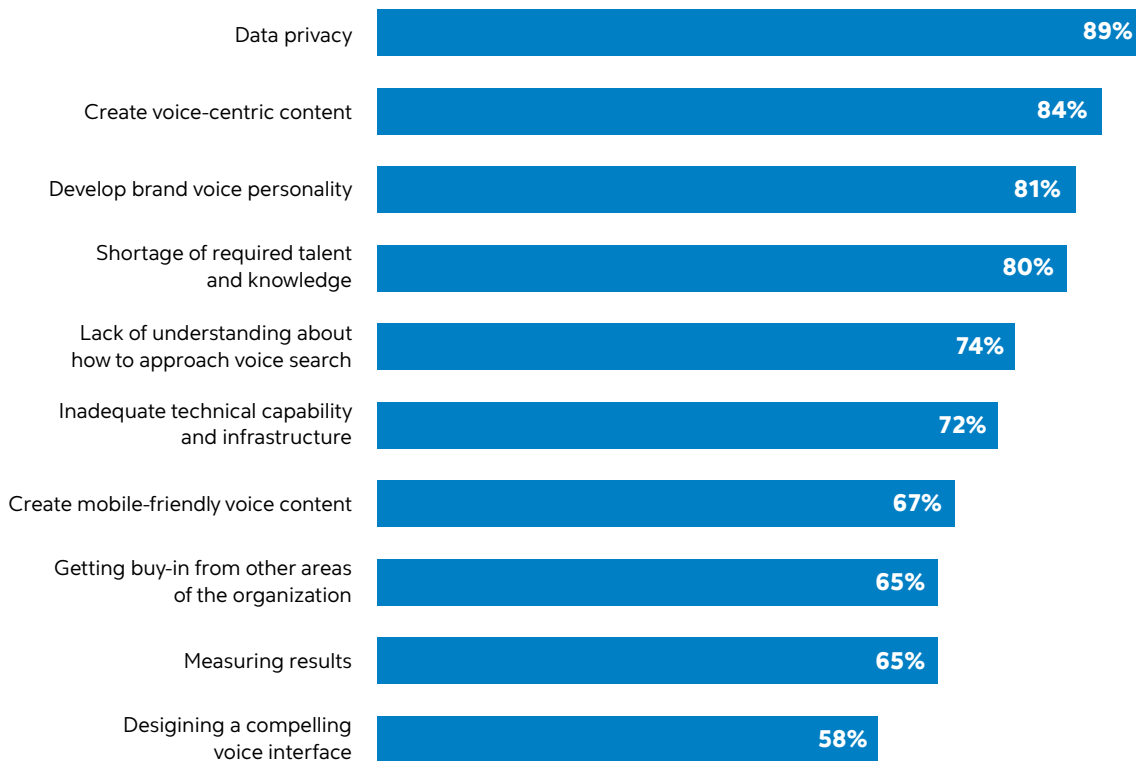# GEARING UP FOR THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

There's a lot of playing field between the reality of today and what lies ahead. Voice technology is still relatively new and lacks precedent across industries. With best practices still evolving, challenges abound for companies interested in implementing it successfully (see Figure 5). In fact, only 40% of respondents are confident about their ability to integrate voice with existing business processes.

Voice: challenges amid opportunity
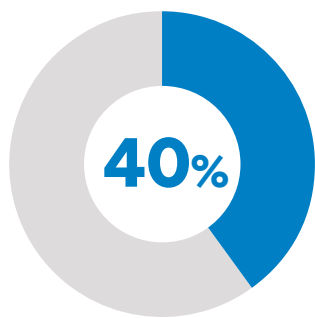
40% Percent of respondents confident about their ability to integrate voice into existing business processes.

Percent of respondents citing the top 10 most significant challenges of executing a voice strategy.

Challenge	Percent
Data privacy	89%
Create voice-centric content	84%
Develop brand voice personality	81%
Shortage of required talent and knowledge	80%
Lack of understanding about how to approach voice search	74%
Inadequate technical capability and infrastructure	72%
Create mobile-friendly voice content	67%
Getting buy-in from other areas of the organization	65%
Measuring results	65%
Designing a compelling voice interface	58%

Response base: 1,400
Source: Cognizant Center for the Future of Work
Figure 5

Privacy is the biggest challenge cited by respondents (89%) in gaining trust with consumers for their voice strategy. Instances of voice assistants automatically switching into "record" mode or devices listening to conversations in the background have dominated media attention in the past,[16] including reports that more than 1,000 phrases can accidentally awaken voice assistants.[17] Although Google, Amazon and Apple have taken steps to address users' privacy concerns, don't expect things to change overnight.[18] Moreover, regulations have yet to be developed for voice, which will slow progress toward establishing standards of voice privacy.

Brands can start to address privacy concerns in two key ways to earn – and keep – consumer trust. First, businesses need to make transparency core to their voice strategy by clearly defining the voice data they will collect from customers and what they will do with it, as well as what customers will get in return. Second, organizations should add features that provide users with a sense of confidence, such as a voice authentication feature that ensures access control to a product or service by limiting whose voice will be recognized. AI voice platform Snips (recently acquired by smart speaker maker Sonos) has addressed privacy concerns by processing voice data on the device itself rather than sending the data to the cloud.[19]

Shortage of talent is another key concern (80%). Developing a compelling voice user interface requires technology, marketing and deep human understanding, which requires expertise from voice designers, search experts, strategists and natural language understanding (NLU) engineers. With limited resources and budgetary concerns, brands are seeking out independent partners with expertise. Over half of respondents (55%) plan to hire specialized agencies to build and execute their voice strategy, while just 15% plan to hire freelancers. Practical approaches like these will help brands tap new innovations and capabilities to continue to refine and scale up their voice initiatives.

Gaining buy-in from other areas of the organization (65%) is another top barrier. It is essential for leaders across the organization to agree on the relevance of voice to the business. For instance, if you plan to add voice technology to your customer service processes, IT, sales and marketing teams need to come on-board and work together. This calls for a robust change management program to ensure the transition to a redefined workflow is as smooth as possible, which will help encourage buy-in from everyone in the company. It will also be essential for businesses to take an iterative, experimental approach to voice and be prepared to fail fast and adapt quickly.

Other prominent challenges include creating voice-centric content (84%) and developing a brand's voice personality (81%). In the next section, we'll examine and explain how to overcome these challenges and thrive in a voice-enabled world.

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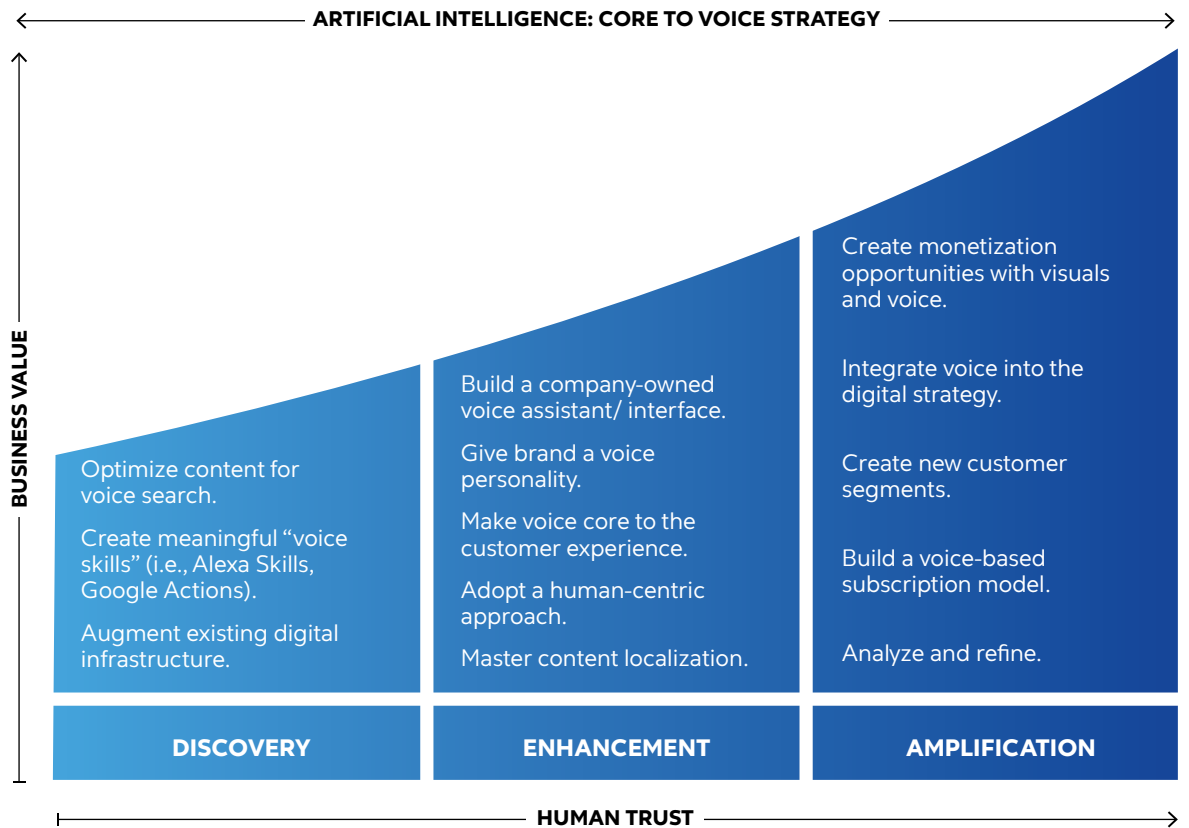
FINDING YOUR BRAND'S NEW VOICE THROUGH DISCOVERY, ENHANCEMENT AND AMPLIFICATION

Based on our study, we've created a three-phased maturity model to help businesses find their brand's voice: discovery, engagement and amplification (see Figure 6). A key tenet of our maturity model is that each stage of maturity increases consumer trust, which also serves to increase business value. At the heart of this maturity model are natural language processing, machine learning and other AI technologies that will imbue the voice solution with intelligence and enable it to improve over time.

The three stages of the model are:

▮ **Discovery:** Optimize content to be found by voice-based search mechanisms while honing your organization's voice skills.

▮ **Enhancement:** Build voice functionalities and add them to mobile apps, websites and products/services.

▮ **Amplification:** Use voice capabilities as a new revenue stream.

Voice maturity model

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: CORE TO VOICE STRATEGY

BUSINESS VALUE

Optimize content for voice search.

Create meaningful "voice skills" (i.e., Alexa Skills, Google Actions).

Augment existing digital infrastructure.

Build a company-owned voice assistant/ interface.

Give brand a voice personality.

Make voice core to the customer experience.

Adopt a human-centric approach.

Master content localization.

Create monetization opportunities with visuals and voice.

Integrate voice into the digital strategy.

Create new customer segments.

Build a voice-based subscription model.

Analyze and refine.

DISCOVERY   **ENHANCEMENT**   **AMPLIFICATION**

HUMAN TRUST

Response base: 1,400
Source: Cognizant Center for the Future of Work
Figure 6

Discovery: Get found by third-party voice assistants (and customers)

About one billion voice searches are made each month, and nearly half of all searches will be voice-based by the end of 2020, with mobile voice searches being three times more likely than text.[20] As smart assistants get even more intelligent, brand visibility will depend on being found by these assistants. That's why 88% of our respondents view third-party voice assistants as critical to their voice strategy, and 91% plan to prioritize voice search not only to ensure customers can find them but also to prevent prospects from finding the competition instead. You either win or you're invisible with voice search.

Here are two action items to take during the "discovery" phase:

▎ **Optimize content (and infrastructure) for voice search.** By the end of 2020, 30% of websites will leverage voice search, meaning that users will browse websites and search the internet using voice-first features.[21] This calls for rethinking existing web content and understanding how it differs from voice-driven content (see Figure 7, next page). The old approach of crafting average-quality content and then building backlinks to improve its ranking by search engines won't work with voice. Instead, content with high levels of social engagement tends to perform well in voice search; the average voice search result has 1,199 Facebook shares and 44 tweets.[22] Voice content is also more natural-sounding than text-based content. According to Google, 70% of search queries done through voice are casual and conversational vs. the keywords you'd type into a search bar.[23]

There are two immediate challenges for companies to address in this phase: First, fine-tune existing content for voice; humans use different language and phrasing when conducting voice searches. Second, consider the algorithms behind voice assistants and how these will change your content optimization strategy. It's not a surprise that only 35% of our participants expressed confidence in integrating voice into their existing content strategy seamlessly.

To win the all-or-nothing game of voice search discovery, your team needs to become familiar with the hundreds of thousands of possible questions, long-tail keywords and queries consumers often make related to your brand. Review your troubleshooting queries to understand consumers' pain points, analyze customer service calls and social media conversations, and collect feedback from sales, marketing and customer service teams on the kinds of conversations they have with customers.

In short, target question-oriented words — such as who, what, when, where, why and how queries — for your product or service. Prepare a comprehensive list of phrases and questions and incorporate them into your website (especially FAQ pages, as these are a preference for voice search) to gain the attention of smart assistants. You can leverage search listening tools, such as Answer the Public, to generate a host of popular keyphrase questions based on broader keywords. Short and simple are key: Amazon recommends that statements scripted for Alexa be manageable in a single breath.[24] Algorithms favor content optimized to be understandable by a high-schooler for a voice search query.

Companies will also have to optimize their digital infrastructure for their brand to be recommended by Alexa or Google Assistant. The average page loads in 4.6 seconds for voice search queries, and sites that rank for voice search results load 52% faster than the average page, indicating how critical site speed is for voice search functionality.[25]

▮ **Build meaningful "voice skills" to get discovered by customers.** The second part of the discovery phase is about building "voice skills" (i.e., Alexa Skills, Google Actions) that enable customers to discover your brand when they issue a verbal command to their voice assistant (i.e., adding an item to a grocery list). In our study, 60% of respondents plan to build a "voice skill" in the next 12 to 24 months. Brands first must figure out the role they want to play through a voice skill: create awareness, sell products, provide information, complete transactions, access services, etc.

The range of options can be seen through early implementations. OCBC Bank in Singapore offers a voice-based virtual assistant that helps customers check their bank and credit card details and make e-payments via Apple's Siri and Google Assistant.[26] Starbucks partnered with Alibaba to launch voice ordering and delivery capabilities in China through Alibaba's voice assistant, Tmall Genie.[27] And Westpac in Australia launched an Alexa Skill for customers to check their accounts and even listen to financial news published by the bank. The bank is now working on integrating Google Assistant and Apple Siri with its mobile banking offer.[28]

Building a voice skill is not a case of "make it and they will come." Building great functionality is only half the battle – the other half is making sure people know about it. While the Alexa Skill Store boasts more than 100,000 voice apps, many are seldom or never used.[29] When a new functionality is rolled out, it's essential to let both consumers and employees know about it. Coca-Cola tapped the Amazon Alexa Skill to personalize the Coke experience for consumers in Australia. As part of the company's brand campaign "Share a Coke," consumers could have a free personalized Coke delivered to them via a voice-

How voice impacts content

It's essential to understand the differing attributes of voice-driven and web-based content.

Key Attribute	Web-based content	Voice-driven content
Interface	Text/visual-based, menu-driven.	Voice-first, highly engaging and intuitive.
Personalization	One-to-many. Content is standard across users.	One-to-one. Content is dynamic and reflects the user's intent.
Structure	Keyword- and hyperlink-centric.	Long-tail-keyword- and phrase-driven, focused on question words (who, what, where, how).
Context	Minimally contextual.	Extremely contextual, based on the individual (who, where and how).
Communication	One-way, informative, slow.	Two-way, conversational and extremely fast.

35%
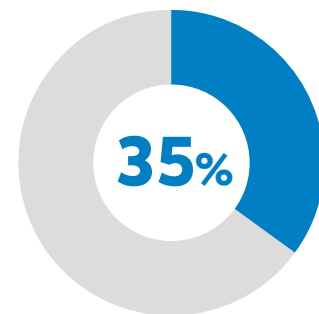
Percent of respondents confident about seamlessly integrating voice into their existing content strategy.

Response base: 1,400
Source: Cognizant Center for the Future of Work
Figure 7

based command. This triggered experiential activations across major Australian cities as thousands of people redeemed their drink.[30]

Enhancement: Boost your brand by building your own voice interfaces

While the discovery phase helps brands figure out their voice strategy for third-party voice assistants, the enhancement phase is about adding a voice capability to boost existing processes, products, applications and services or creating voice-driven new products or services. In short, the enhancement phase enables businesses to take more control over enhancing engagement with users.

In our study, respondents are focused on voice-enabling their mobile apps (81%), websites (80%) and company owned-products and services (75%) (see Figure 8, page 23). Considering that 62% of smartphone users in China, India, Indonesia, Japan and Singapore have used voice-activated technology in the last six months, it makes all the more sense to voice-enable mobile apps.[31]

There is a long list of considerations for enhancing your voice capabilities. Here are some of the most important ones:

▌ **Give your brand a voice personality.** With voice, it's not just about what you say, but also how you say it. While customers don't expect to develop a deep bond with AI (as in the movie *Her*), they do expect a brand's voice to resonate with them. Consumers remember the experience (good or bad) they have with a brand's voice they interact with.

The majority of our respondents (86%) said developing a brand's voice personality is extremely important. Leveraging a celebrity voice is one option; in fact, Alexa just got its first celebrity voice in India.[32] Companies can also explore partnering with Amazon Web Services, which offers a new feature in Amazon Polly called Brand Voice, which enables brands to work with a team of AI research scientists and linguists to build an exclusive, high-quality, neural text-to-speech voice that represents your brand's persona.[33]

▌ **Make voice core to your customer experience strategy.** In a fast-moving, interconnected world, brands that flow with customers' lives are valued most highly. The majority of our respondents (82%) said that voice will become an essential part of their customer experience initiatives. To deliver hyper-personalization through voice, brands must identify hands-free moments for users – at the gym, in the car, in the kitchen – where the effective use of voice-enabled applications can be a game-changer.

To deliver hyper-personalization through voice, brands must identify hands-free moments for users – at the gym, in the car, in the kitchen – where the effective use of voice-enabled applications can be a game-changer.

Honda, for instance, has partnered with Chinese tech giant Tencent to develop the world's first in-car voice-activated shopping system, allowing drivers to place an order and make a payment with their voice without needing to step out of their car.[34] Brands can go a step further by linking their own voice assistant to third-party connected products – smart plugs, connected cars and fitness trackers – to create those memorable moments consumers expect from their brands.

▌ **Create content that you can KISS (keep it simple and straightforward).** While external voice assistants control the content they serve to users, the opposite is true with in-house-built voice-enabled interfaces. Gaining control over content is seen as a compelling idea; in fact, 50% of our respondents said they plan to create a content strategy for voice-enabled interfaces in the next 12 to 24 months, while 20% plan to do so beyond that timeframe. We recommend brands consider content optimization and content creation strategies not as silos but as complementary endeavors. Brands can learn and apply best practices from each to elevate their content for voice.

▌ **Adopt human-centric design thinking for voice interfaces.** To create voice interfaces that consumers can trust, brands have to learn the complex nuances of human communication, particularly the context in which the interaction is occurring. For instance, a doctor's visit can have multiple contexts, ranging from an annual checkup, to care for a chronic illness, to concern over new symptoms. Brands will need to predefine user personas and scenarios related to their products and services to deliver the desired experiences. Considering the talent shortage challenge that respondents cite, many are partnering with specialized agencies to create prototypes of the product or experience.

▌ **Master "content localization" to differentiate your brand.** Beyond translating content for local languages, localization involves adapting content to cultural norms and values in specific regions or markets. In fact, 84% of respondents said localization is important or extremely important for their voice content strategy. Kia Motors, the automotive manufacturer, customized its voice interface for India to understand Indian-English accents.[35]

## Amplification: Creating voice opportunities to monetize your brand

We're in the early days of reaping revenues through voice. The possibilities will only become more apparent as the technology matures and user confidence in voice grows. Rather than serving as just one of the channels for brands to monetize, voice is an enabler to influence the purchase journey for consumers and a path for brands to rise above the noise in the market. When voice monetization comes into full play, only brands that are voice-activated will partake.

Early movers are already monetizing voice technology. Reliance Nippon Life Asset Management is leveraging voice to market mutual fund products across India. The company plans to add 10 new customers for every 100 people with the voice interface and expects 40% of its customers to invest through voice over the next two to three years. The insurer has defined a broader framework and roadmap for voice deployment across its digital assets. For companies that plan to undertake any new digital initiative, make sure that voice is integral to it.[36]

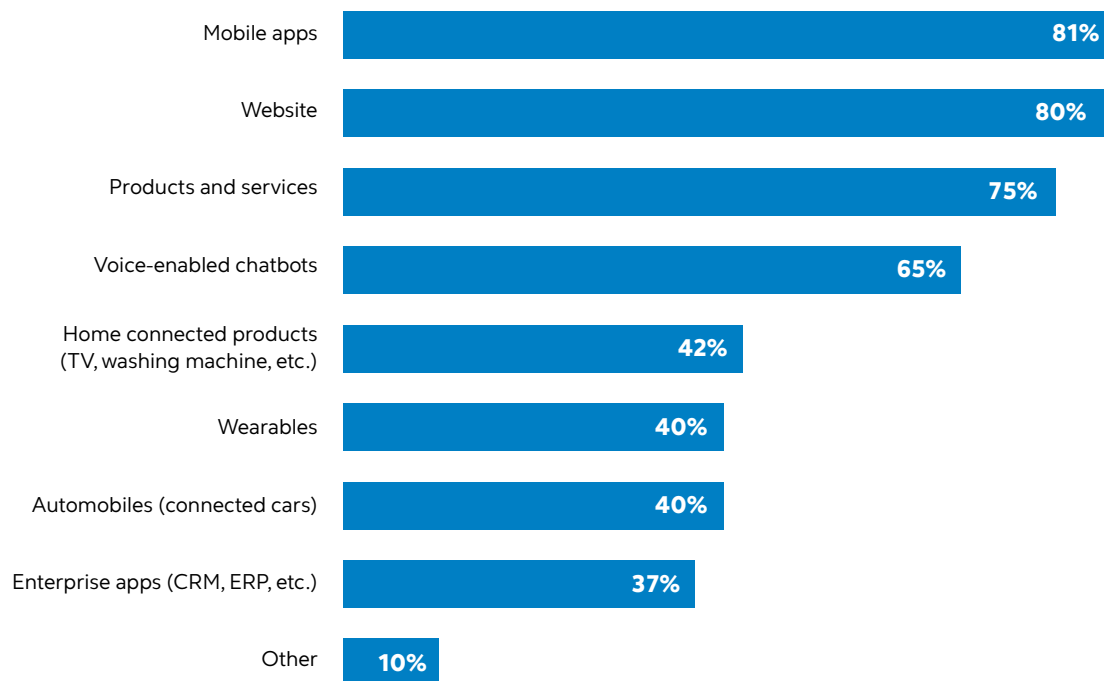## The fundamentals of enhancement in a voice strategy
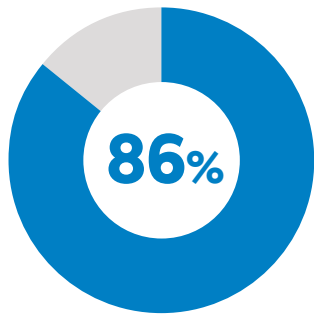
86% Percent of respondents who said developing a brand's voice personality is important or extremely important.
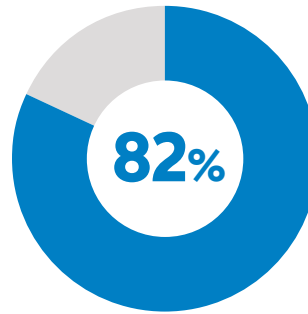
82% Percent of respondents who said voice will become an integral part of the customer experience strategy.

Percent of respondents rating each aspect of their current or future voice strategy as important or extremely important.

Aspect	Percent
Mobile apps	81%
Website	80%
Products and services	75%
Voice-enabled chatbots	65%
Home connected products (TV, washing machine, etc.)	42%
Wearables	40%
Automobiles (connected cars)	40%
Enterprise apps (CRM, ERP, etc.)	37%
Other	10%

Response base: 1,400
Source: Cognizant Center for the Future of Work
Figure 8

Here are some recommended actions companies can take to expand upon what they've built to influence consumers:

I **Add visuals to amplify voice engagement with users.** Would you buy a new dress without being able to see it? With on-screen displays providing additional context, consumers will be better able to engage with brands. While 60% of our respondents plan to take a voice-only approach, 40% will follow a multi-model approach, leveraging both voice and visuals, as part of their voice strategy. With the Echo Show, the addition of Alexa to televisions and Google's connection of Google Home with Chromecast, experiences will increasingly become voice-driven and visually-immersed. Andrew Ng, then chief scientist at Baidu, explained to *MIT Technology Review* that while speech input is three times quicker than typing on mobile devices, "the fastest way for a machine to get information to you is via a screen."[37] Marrying the two will lead to more effective engagement and ultimately better conversion.

I **Tap new customer segments.** Millions of vision-impaired people, people with intellectual disabilities, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds find it challenging to access business and government services online. Voice interfaces strip away the barriers and bring people with difficulties into the mainstream. By becoming an inclusive brand, businesses can tap into millions of new consumers waiting to experience the online world through voice.

I **Build a voice-based subscription model.** In our earlier research "Algorithms Over Brands," we found that 63% of consumers are comfortable with the idea of voice-based personal assistants and smart products automatically ordering, buying and paying on their behalf. Instead of occasionally buying one-off products online, people may switch to automatic subscriptions, which could have tremendous implications for businesses. Consider building your own subscription-based model, perhaps by partnering with brands offering products or services complementary to your own. For instance, automakers can consider partnering with gas stations and restaurants to promote them in voice search results.

I **Analyze, analyze, analyze.** A successful voice-first strategy requires continuous iterations based on how customers are using your newly enhanced products and services. You need to analyze user data, engagement points and friction points, and identify areas of improvement to continue to grow consumer trust. With Adobe Analytics, companies can analyze voice data for all major platforms, including Amazon Alexa, Apple Siri, Google Assistant, Microsoft Cortana and Samsung Bixby.[38]

Quick Take

AI setting the pace of voice strategy

AI is the catalyst behind a successful voice strategy. Our research highlights that 75% of businesses are keen to leverage AI (natural language processing, machine learning and other AI technologies) for their voice strategy.

Whether you are leveraging voice for third-party voice assistants or plan to inject voice into the company's products, services and applications, success will depend on how you leverage AI technologies in making interactions between humans and machines more natural. NLP will make a voice bot intelligent in delivering intelligent services. For instance, HDFC Life, the private life insurance company in India, launched Elsa, an Alexa-based, NLP-driven bot that offers intelligent services like dynamic request handling and insights into policies.[39]

NLP will also be core to brands' content optimization and creation strategies as it can help them automatically extract keywords and information from machine-readable pages to create lists of desired phrases and words much more quickly. A new language model known as GPT-3 from OpenAI will further interest in NLP, as it promises to localize and translate any spoken language.[40]

AI can also extract the intent and sentiment behind conversations that brands can leverage to steer the conversation toward a conversion. Examples include enabling a voice assistant to suggest investment adjustments based on a customer's recent voice queries, recommending new financial products based on customers' life milestones, or sending a budget alert based on spending levels vs. financial goals.

By blending voice with AI, businesses can create unpredictable voice interactions that result in an "aha" moment for users. Hyundai is taking its voice AI to the next level by designing an "intelligent personal agent" to understand user commands, predict drivers' needs and provide useful information proactively (an early reminder of an upcoming meeting, for instance).[41] In another example, Kia Motors added an AI-powered voice interface to a recently launched car in India that allows drivers to control several elements of the vehicle by voice. Instead of asking the assistant to turn on the air conditioning or heat, users can simply say, "I feel hot" or "I feel cold."[42] Companies that make AI a partner-in-work for voice will generate significant opportunities.

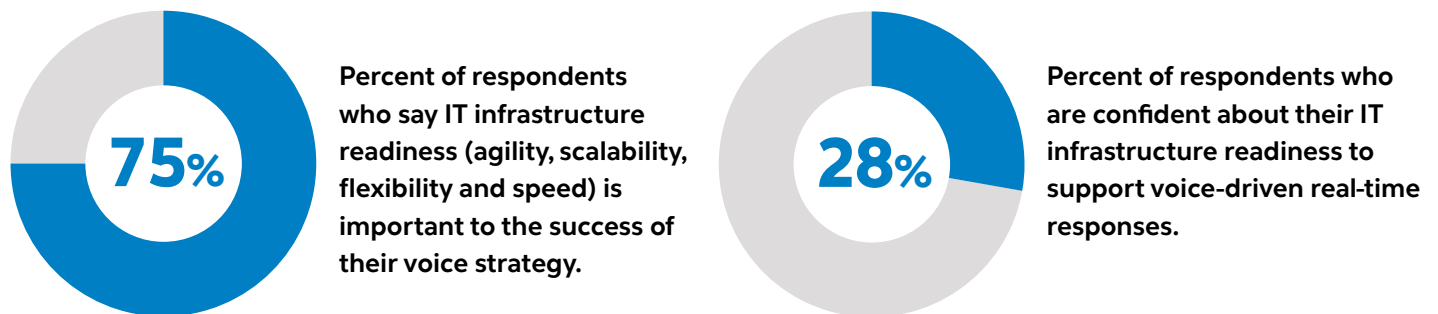## IT infrastructure readiness will make or break the future of voice

While our voice maturity model will help businesses transition to a voice-enabled world, IT infrastructure readiness will determine the pace of the transition. Voice responses and engagement happen in real-time; customers won't wait while your voice assistant seeks relevant information at the back-end. The sudden shift to remote working and customers interacting with brands mainly online has already caught many IT organizations by surprise. And now, the shift toward voice-first will put further pressure on technology infrastructures to process information and get it back to users in real-time.

We found a huge gap between IT infrastructure readiness expectations vs. reality. While 75% of our respondents said IT infrastructure readiness is essential for the success of their voice strategy, only 28% are confident in its readiness (see Figure 9). Banking and financial services and insurance companies (24% each) are most concerned about their IT infrastructure readiness to support real-time voice experiences. Our recommendation is to address IT infrastructure woes first before embarking on the voice journey.

Companies know they have to migrate to a voice future — the problem is that their voice infrastructure will be most likely built on top of old systems. IT infrastructure needs to become agile, responsive, flexible, secure, scalable and simple to manage the transition to a voice-enabled business. We anticipate significant infrastructure modernization investments from companies to scale elastically to handle millions of remote employees and customers. Several IT infrastructure components, including security, networking and storage, will be influenced by the deployment of voice technology. (For more on building a modern IT foundation for the future of work, see our recent report "The Future of IT Infrastructure.")

IT infrastructure readiness: expectation vs. reality

75% Percent of respondents who say IT infrastructure readiness (agility, scalability, flexibility and speed) is important to the success of their voice strategy.

28% Percent of respondents who are confident about their IT infrastructure readiness to support voice-driven real-time responses.

Response base: 1,400
Source: Cognizant Center for the Future of Work
Figure 9

FROM FAD TO FUTURE: ONE STEP CLOSER TO THE VOICE-ENABLED BUSINESS

We are at the dawn of the voice-first era, but this era is evolving at unprecedented speed. The battle lines are still being drawn, and a more intense and wide-ranging impact is in the offing.
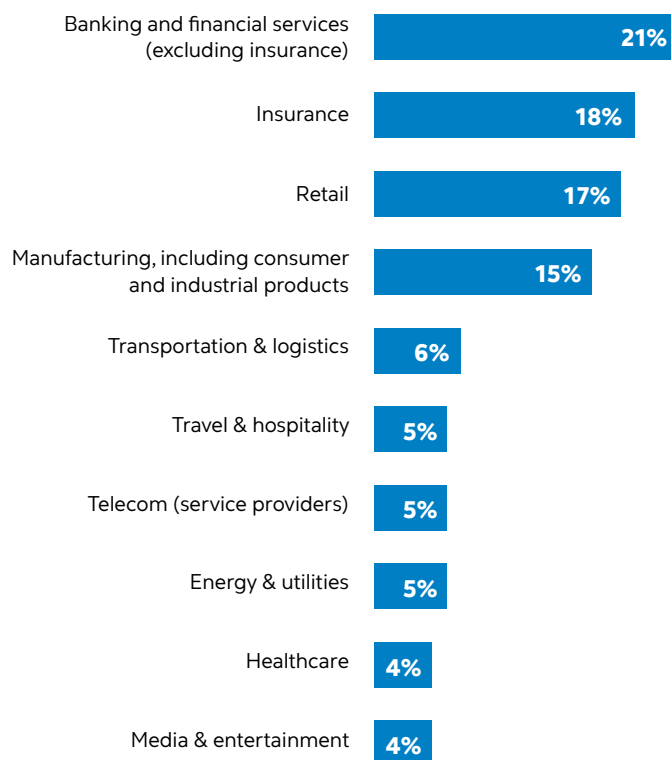
Of course, no single technology is a silver bullet, and voice should rarely be used as a sole marketing and business strategy. The key is to activate your brand voice across the business value chain to write the next chapter of business growth by winning the customer of the future. Adapting to the shift toward voice will level the playing field for companies of all sizes, and our voice maturity model will help you claim your advantage. Don't let your business go unheard.

Methodology

We conducted an online survey between May 2020 and July 2020, with 1,400 senior executives across industries in Asia Pacific and the Middle East. The study was run in 10 countries (China, India, Australia, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Hong Kong, UAE and Saudi Arabia) in English, Japanese and Chinese. Survey respondents were mainly distributed across the financial services, healthcare, insurance, travel & hospitality, telecom, media & entertainment, transportation & logistics, energy & utilities, manufacturing and retail industries.

Demographics

By industry

Industry	%
Banking and financial services (excluding insurance)	21%
Insurance	18%
Retail	17%
Manufacturing, including consumer and industrial products	15%
Transportation & logistics	6%
Travel & hospitality	5%
Telecom (service providers)	5%
Energy & utilities	5%
Healthcare	4%
Media & entertainment	4%

By number of employees

Number of employees	%
2,500 to 4,999	38%
5,000 to 9,999	36%
10,000 to 14,999	14%
15,000 or more	12%
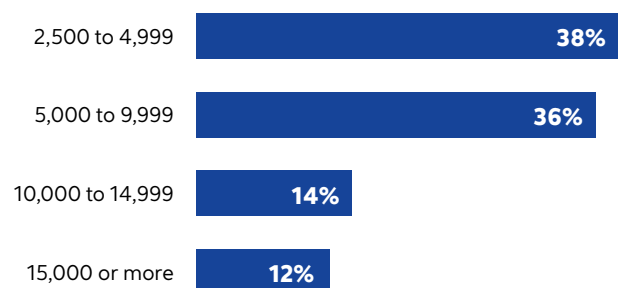
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Manish Bahl is a Cognizant Associate Vice President who leads the company's Center for the Future of Work in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East. A respected speaker and thinker, Manish has guided many Fortune 500 companies into the future of their business with his thought-provoking research and advisory skills. Within Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work, he helps ensure that the unit's original research and analysis jibes with emerging business-technology trends and dynamics in Asia-Pacific, and collaborates with a wide range of leading thinkers to understand and predict how the future of work will take shape. He most recently served as Vice President, Country Manager with Forrester Research in India.

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About the Center for the Future of Work

Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work™ is chartered to examine how work is changing, and will change, in response to the emergence of new technologies, new business practices and new workers. The Center provides original research and analysis of work trends and dynamics, and collaborates with a wide range of business, technology and academic thinkers about what the future of work will look like as technology changes so many aspects of our working lives. For more information, visit Cognizant.com/futureofwork, or contact Ben Pring, Cognizant VP and Managing Director of the Center for the Future of Work, at Benjamin.Pring@cognizant.com.

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