Our Guide to Perfecting the

Art of Conversation

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In the age of digital transformation, are we losing the art of conversation?

In the age of digital transformation, our conversations have become fragmented across a range of communication channels. This causes difficulties and confusion when trying to keep track of what was said, when and on which communication tool.

This isn't just the case in our personal lives, there's a whole host of communication channels available for businesses too. It's therefore becoming increasingly important that we opt for the right channels to suit the professional or social conversations that we're having.

Have we taken to hiding behind emails or instant messages when a phone call or face to face conversation would be the best route to take? Are we reaching people on the channels that they most feel comfortable conversing in?

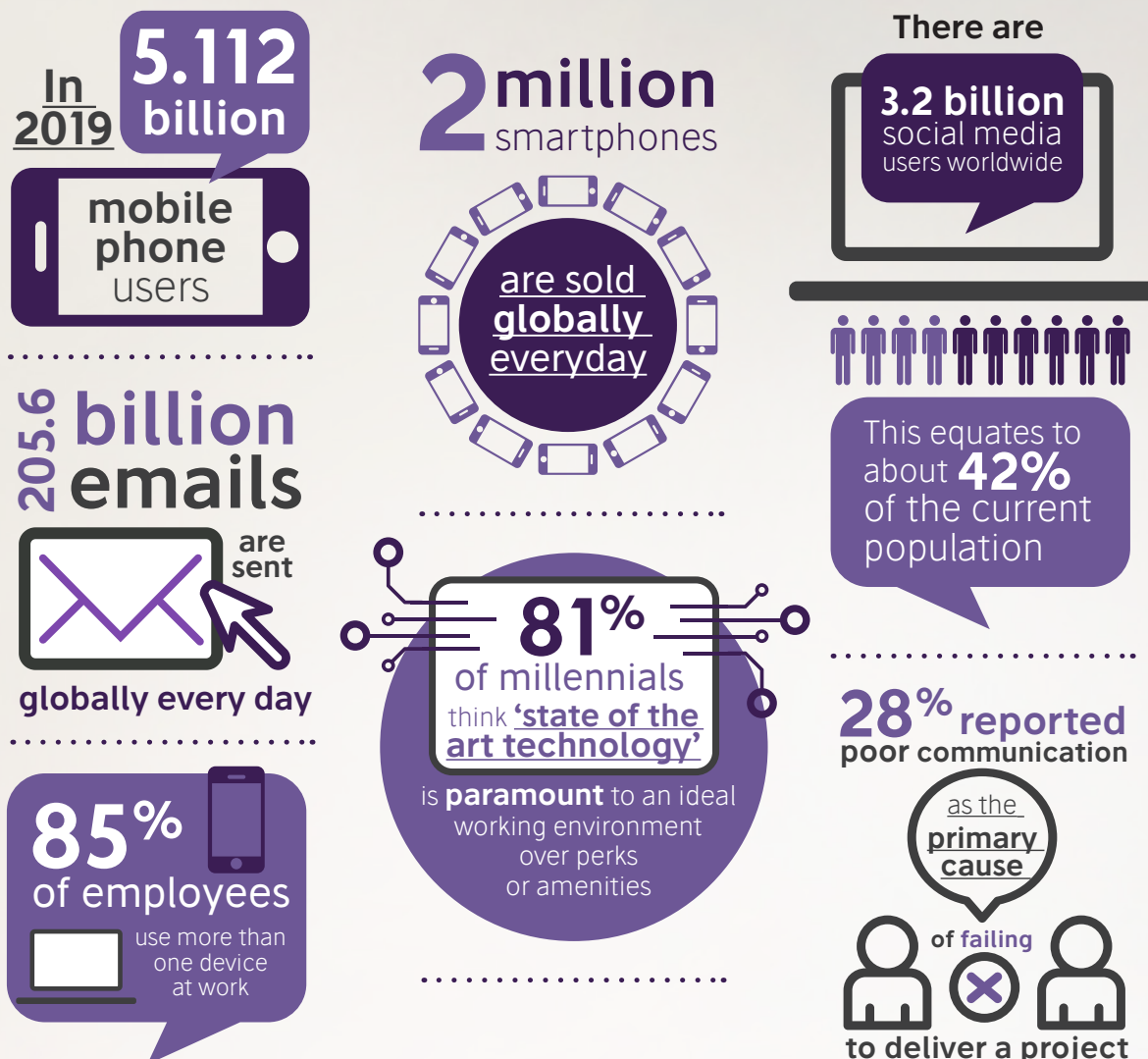These questions set the scene for this guide.

We kick off with a stark overview of the current communication landscape and provide an overview of how people converse across the range of communication channels.

As communication becomes increasingly dispersed, we think it's a good idea to remind ourselves of the fundamentals that make a good, old-fashioned conversation work, so we leave you with some top tips for having a great conversation.

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The Current Communication Landscape

Technology is certainly changing the way we communicate at a steady pace. Let's take a closer look at the current landscape, which offers up eye-opening stats to help us understand why and how the world of communication, and therefore conversation, is becoming so fragmented.

In 2019 **5.112 billion** mobile phone users

205.6 billion emails are sent globally every day

85% of employees use more than one device at work

2 million smartphones are sold globally everyday

81% of millennials think **'state of the art technology'** is **paramount** to an ideal working environment over perks or amenities

There are
3.2 billion social media users worldwide

This equates to about **42%** of the current population

**28%** reported **poor communication** as the primary cause of **failing** to deliver a project

Based on these statistics, it's fair to say that the depth and breadth of communication channels have, and continue to, fragment and change the way we communicate. Technology has made it easier to communicate anywhere and at any time. It has also enabled us to avoid direct conversations altogether if we choose to, which can hinder professional productivity.

It's becoming easier to avoid conversations and this can lead to neglecting face to face conversations with family and friends or avoiding picking up the phone at work and opting for an email instead. Rather than visiting a friend we send a WhatsApp messages or audio and instead of walking through the office to speak to a colleague, we send an instant message.

It's important to remember that different communications channels are suited to different social and professional situations and that while it might seem easier to send a quick SMS or instant message, a conversation would potentially be more suitable and as a result, more productive.

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A closer look:
Seven channels of communication

1 Face to face
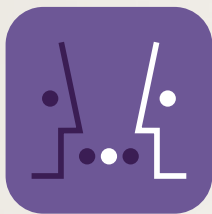
In today's digital age, the importance of face-to-face communication is disappearing, especially when you look at the stats and see that only <u>37% of people would choose to speak face-to-face over other ways of communicating.</u>

It's possible for us to go almost an entire day without interacting with people face-to-face if we choose to. Culturally, we are relying more heavily on convenient channels such as emails, text messages and social media.

It's hard to deny the importance of these platforms and the way that they have transformed communication, but it's also important to recognize where they should be used and that we balance online interactions with face-to-face and voice communication.

Did you know?
Only 27% of millennials make sure they check in with loved ones in person.

When it comes to building rapport with someone, nothing beats having a face-to-face conversation in person. Whether it's networking, meeting a new customer, going on a date or visiting a family member, all these situations require face-to-face contact for them to be positive experiences.

And even though there's only a small proportion of us that choose to speak face-to-face, it's interesting to see that over **<u>60% of us find body language key to how we interpret a conversation,</u>** as well as being a key element of building confidence in our relationships with others.

Top tip: Your body language can convey a lot of things that cannot be said through words. Those things can only be shown when you are there in front of another person.

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2 Phone call

Communicating over the phone is the quickest and easiest way to provide good and effective customer service. It becomes much more powerful in urgent situations, when a customer needs support immediately. According to Google's 'Click to Call' research, 59% of customers prefer to call because they want a quick answer, while 57% call as they want to talk to a real person.

From a business perspective, nothing can replace the personal touch and the reassurance a customer can get from making a phone call. Or the productivity from having a quick conversation to answer a question or gain clarification. Believe it or not, more real business gets done when real conversations happen.

Its important to be genuine when on the phone, its also imperative to be respectful. Use the words, "please," "thank you," "sir," and "madam" when you address customers. Using respectful language during your conversation will make your customers feel as though you value them. Speak slowly and clearly so your customers can hear and understand you. Phone calls should take priority over emails, because people who call are generally people who require an instant response.

Did you know?
When it comes to resolving a complex issue,

40% of consumers want to speak to a real person over the phone (American Express).

Top tip: To make sure a phone call as effective as possible, identify its purpose before you pick up the phone, and keep this in mind while you talk.

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3 SMS

The text message has become such a key part of our modern lives that it's hard to believe that the concept behind it dates back over 31 years.

There was a time where using your mobile phone at work may have gotten you into trouble. But times are changing. As mobile devices have become more prevalent in the workplace and in everyday life, many business teams have begun exploring how they can use these unique tools to their advantage.

'It takes an average person 90 seconds to respond to a text message', with such rapid potential response times, text messages are an effective channel to prompt conversations. Business use cases include; marketing campaigns that inform prospects of time-sensitive offers and events, and text messages that can help to collect customer service feedback and opinions, enabling businesses to enhance their customer service processes.

Did you know?
Text messages have a **98% open rate** and a 209% higher response rate than phone, email, or Facebook.

Top tip: Make sure you tailor text messages specifically to your target market using the correct language.

Industry Focus: Recruitment

Let's focus on the recruitment sector. Unlike active candidates, who are constantly prepared for a recruiter's call, passive candidates are usually in the office working at their current job. Most people cannot take a call from a recruiter during work hours. However, many people check their personal phone frequently throughout the workday.

Enter texting.

Expert recruiters are beating the competition to top talent by adopting texting because most people can answer a text at work. Texting increases the chances of getting a response from a passive candidate, making it easier to answer a question or schedule a call.

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4 Email

Every day, 205.6 billion emails are sent across the globe.
Based on this weighty statistic it's fair to say that in today's business culture, email truly is king, with **86% of professionals naming email as their preferred means of business communication.** Email is also ranked as the third most influential source of information for B2B audiences.

Why do people choose email as a channel for communicating? You can craft and hone your email until you're confident with your response. Sending an email provides time to consider and think things through, if there isn't any urgency to respond. Emails can be sent at anytime, anywhere and multiple people can be part of the conversation.

However, on the flip-side, email can be very blunt if used inappropriately. A reply in the heat of the moment can't be easily retracted. Too often we take the easy and often cowardly option of using email to avoid the discomfort of a real time face to face or phone conversation. An unclear email can cause confusion and problems that lead to a loss of time and productivity. Even worse, it could harm your reputation.

Did you know?
Between 2014 and 2018 the average office worker received about 90 emails a day and sent around 40 business emails daily.

Top tip: Make sure you get the tone of your email right. Far too often people fall out because they misinterpret emails as being rude and abrasive, when the sender is just trying to be succinct.

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5 Instant Messaging

Instant messaging (IM) is a rapid and rising communications medium with 43% of employees using IM tools at work. Originating as an easy peer-to-peer conversation service, IM has grown to be a staple mode of contact for millions of internet users.

When it comes to instant communication, while it increases cost effective collaboration, mishaps are common.

A 'lol' or smiling emoji (or lack of) can leave a message open to interpretation and you're not alone. A staggering **70% of people admit that they've misunderstood messages they've received.**

An online poll by ReportLinker found that one of the biggest drawbacks to using instant messaging can be the pressure that users feel to answer messages immediately. The same poll also found that over half (57%) of its respondents said they had no guarantee that conversations on work chats would remain private.

Did you know?
Communication leads to better collaboration. Teams that have the ability to message each other quickly to get an answer or feedback will have better teamwork than those who need to wait on emails or walk around the building to find someone.

Top tip: Respect a person's time, even when the system shows IM is available. Just because it's instant messenger doesn't mean responses have to be instant.

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6 Social media

There are now 3.484 billion active social media users around the world. Facebook is the largest social media platform in the world with over 2.4 billion users. Other social media platforms including YouTube and WhatsApp also have more than one billion users each.

These numbers are huge – there are 7.7 billion people in the world, with at least 3.5 billion of us online. This means that social media platforms are used by one-in-three people in the world, and more than two-thirds of all internet users.

When it comes to social media conversations, Facebook Messenger is one of the most popular messenger apps with 1.3 billion monthly active users. Millennials are using social media to communicate with each other more than ever and by 2020, **Millennials will make up 35 percent of the global workforce,** helping to drive social media as a key communication channel.

Did you know? The 3.484 billion active social media users around the world mentioned earlier, represents 45% of the world's population and an increase of 280 million since January 2018. This growth rate has continued to grow in 2019.

Top tip: Use your social media conversations to build your online reputation. If people are engaging with you and your business through social media, it can increase your connections and your social ranking on the relevant social media channels.

There's no doubt that social media has changed the world. The rapid and vast adoption of these technologies is changing how we find partners, how we access information from the news, and how we project our personal and business brands. It enables us to stay in touch, access news and find jobs.

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7 Video conferencing

Communications within business is changing. We're in an ever-evolving digital landscape and being able to easily discuss things within a business environment is important.

Information is required immediately; meetings are setup at the drop of a hat and what is being shared must be kept secure.

The video conferencing market over the next three years is going to see some big changes. While video conferencing revenues are flat, if not in decline, amongst the big vendors, video calls are still experiencing exponential growth.

As we enter a brand-new decade, we have more tech at our fingertips than ever before. We need to make sure that communications tools are used in the right situations to help us get the best out of the conversations that we have.

There are lots of reasons why business owners are willing to adopt video conferencing solutions in their company, such as; increased productivity and higher efficiency, reduced travel costs, supporting remote workers and therefore work–life balance.

Did you know? Numbers show that all generations and age groups are video chatting more than they previously have been and more specifically, millennials have had a **175% increase in regular live video usage** in just the last 3 years. In fact, one quarter of today's millennials video chat every day.

Top tip: Check your setup and check it again. Everything depends on the quality of your setup, so check it's in working order ahead of time. **48% of users said that technical difficulties most often detract from video communication experiences.**

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Are we losing track of conversations?

We are constantly entering and exiting conversations interchangeably across channels. It is therefore not surprising that context between interactions can be lost.

As we move from web to mobile and to landline or face-to-face at great speed, when it comes to customers, businesses need to know if the person on the other end of the phone has already emailed, spoken to another colleague or sent an inquiry via self-service. Without this context, agents will struggle to troubleshoot, conversations will break down and your customers' omni-channel experience will fall flat.

> **" Integrating your communication channels with your CRM is critical to your success "**

This is where your CRM comes into play, enabling a rich and connected digital omni-channel experience. Integrating your communication channels with your CRM is critical to your success, as it enables you to have all your communication tools in one place, alongside all of your important customer information. This is a very powerful recipe for success.

What should good conversation feel like?

Having a good conversation sounds straight forward, people are communicating all the time. So, it's easy, right?

Wrong.

As this guide has already highlighted, technology is fragmenting the way in which these conversations take place. These days it's not as straight forward as you think to have the right conversation, with the right person, at the right time, using the right channel. It's a lot to navigate. Leaving the burning question, are we losing the art of conversation?

Let's remind ourselves of what good conversation feels like.

At CloudCall, we pride ourselves on helping our customers have great conversations. We are also constantly having conversations with our customers, prospects and partners, so some of the CloudCall team have shared tips to help us understand what good conversation feels like for them, internally, as well as externally. Here's what we found out...

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Our top five tips for good conversation:

1 Have purpose

Every conversation needs to have a purpose and everyone partaking in the conversation needs to understand that purpose and what's required from them, otherwise there's a danger of not achieving the main objective of the conversation.

2 Listen

Listening takes up a lot of the time we spend communicating, but do people actively listen? Often, the case can be that during a conversation, time can be spent formulating a response while the other person is talking, eager to get a point across as opposed to listening.

3 Ask questions

If you're actively listening, questions come a lot easier and so will a successful outcome. It's also worth validating your understanding of what's being said during the conversation. You can do this by repeating back your understanding of what's being asked of you to ensure everyone is on the same page.

4 Build rapport

Being pleasant and coming across as helpful enables you to establish rapport. Asking how someone's day is going or if they had a good weekend promotes conversation. It's always good for people to feel that they are speaking to someone friendly and willing to help. It's also important to adapt during conversation, for example if you're speaking to an unhappy customer.

5 Know what you're talking about and who you're talking to

Underpinning all conversations, and especially in business is knowing what you're talking about, who you're talking to and having all the information you need at your fingertips. Essentially, decide what you want to say, what you want to get out of the conversation and know what you're talking about.

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Important considerations:

Our Guide to Perfecting the Art of Conversation has taken us on an eye-opening journey of how conversation channels have evolved, and no doubt continue to evolve and fragment. Here are some important considerations to take away.

It's clear that there are a high number of communication channels to choose from in today's digital age and yes, this is certainly causing a disjointed approach to the modern-day conversations.

However, what's important is that we take the time to ensure we choose the right channel for the situation at hand to get the best out of the conversations we're having. Don't just opt for email or SMS because it's easier, pick up the phone or make the effort to have a face-to-face conversation, you might find it's much more rewarding and productive.

It's also important to ensure that we keep track of the conversations we're having as we move from one channel to another, especially when dealing with customers who expect us to have all the information at hand to help support their journey.

Above all, it's important to remember that a conversation is a two-way street so it's always vital to know who we're talking to and the best way to communicate with them to get the best results.

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CloudCall create innovative technology that makes business communications easier, quicker and more powerful. Through providing advanced software that integrates with CRMs, our users can manage their communications in the same space as their data, providing insight that has the power to transform the way they work.

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