

# US banks' call centers and digital tools jockey for customer service dominance

Article

Insider Intelligence [forecasts](#) that call center penetration will remain slightly elevated from 2019 levels (28.7%) through 2024, but only after dropping from a spike in 2020. (Penetration

is defined as the percent of US bank account holders ages 18 and over who call their bank, credit union, credit card, or brokerage institution at least once per year.) The sustainability of the trend will depend on how long the pandemic remains a significant threat and impediment to everyday life. If the US fully reopens bank branches and businesses in the coming months, the shift to more efficient digital customer service tools could accelerate.

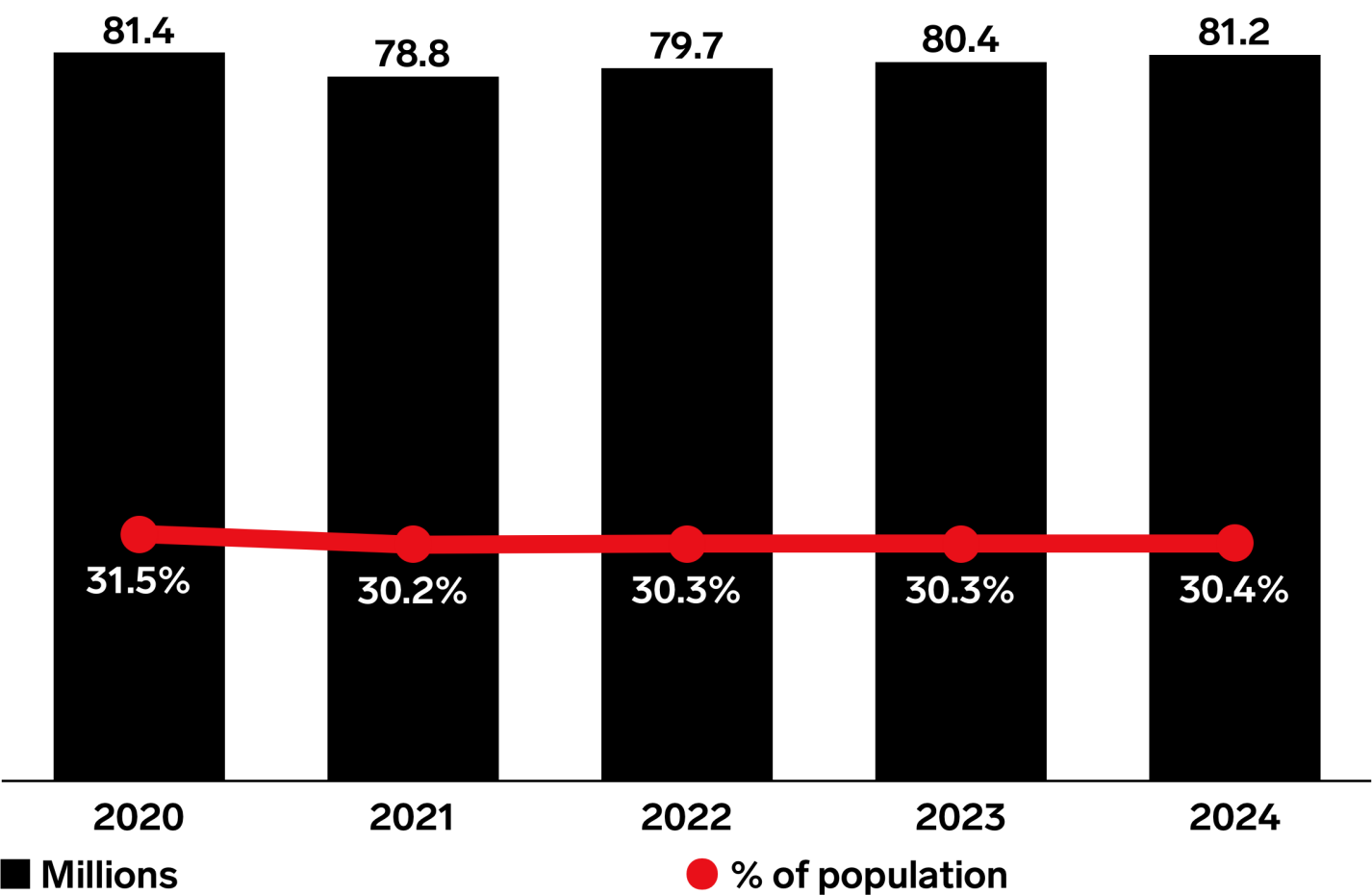
**Better mobile customer service tools will likely eat into call center usage.** Such app-based features include the ability to message with live agents or ask questions of AI assistants in the mobile app. Those features aren't currently widespread, even among the 25 biggest US banks: Only 36% and 40% of those institutions support chatting with humans and AI assistants via mobile app, respectively, [per](#) Insider Intelligence's 2020 US Mobile Banking Competitive Edge (MBCE) Study. And the currently available AI assistants aren't the best equipped to handle more complex inquiries, keeping help lines essential for now. But as banks' mobile offerings evolve, the need to contact a call center will drop.

**Because call centers will remain a vital customer service channel, banks should look to maximize their efficiency and streamline the user experience.** Here are two ways they could achieve this:

- **Investing in the education and training of call center staff.** Better-trained staff will be more likely to handle customer calls without having to hand off the caller to a superior, reducing the potential for added wait time and frustration, [per](#) SilverCloud. For example, Washington Trust Bank made a variety of smartphones and tablets available to call center employees that enabled them to become more familiar with [troubleshooting](#) issues on the most popular devices.
- **Enhancing the call center experience.** In-call customer authentication via mobile app was the second most in-demand customer service feature among respondents in Insider Intelligence's 2020 US MBCE Study—but only slightly more than a third of the 25 banks in the study supported it. Banks could also introduce two-way calling features: A fifth of worldwide consumers [surveyed](#) by KPMG said that video-call appointments would improve their online banking experience. UK-based NatWest seems to be seizing on this interest and [plans](#) to roll out a video feature that allows customers to speak directly to a human banker.

# Call Center Banking Users and Penetration

## US, 2020–2024



*Note: Bank account holders ages 18+ who call their bank, credit union, credit card, or brokerage institution at least once per year*  
*Source: Insider Intelligence, June 2020*  
*Methodology: Estimates are based on the analysis of survey and traffic data from research firms and regulatory agencies, historical trends, country-specific data, and demographic and socioeconomic factors.*