

# Customer Experience Management Buyers Guide

Software Provider and Product Assessment

EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY

**\*ISG** Research™



# Customer Experience Management

For many organizations, managing the customer experience (CX) has not been a centralized operation nor the responsibility of one leader who governs and optimizes the CX across every channel of interaction. But organizations are now making use of more integrated software and platforms that tie together customer relationship management (CRM) and contact center activity to processes managed across other parts of the organization. This can include marketing, sales, commerce, field service and locations where customers convene for purchases or services.

This evolution of CX is bringing about a shift in how organizations purchase and deploy technology related to customer activities, and how software providers package their products to meet the needs of the workforce. When the focus is on interaction handling, contact centers typically are the focus of the technology discussion and the defined set of requirements. But when the focus shifts to questions about how an organization should be using customer data, or how to proactively orchestrate interactions and influence customer behavior in any channel or department, broader sets of roles and their specific requirements become essential.

Customer Experience Management (CXM) is a relatively new software category created out of the combination of business applications and tools across departments that impact customer



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outcomes. CXM is definitionally a suite of applications built on a common platform that facilitates an interdepartmental view of customer activity and provides mechanisms for controlling that activity. Some elements come from the contact center, notably interaction handling and engagement optimization. Others are derived from marketing technology, like customer data platforms (CDPs) or journey management tools. The precise mix of applications in a software provider's suite depends on the background expertise of the software provider. Whether a provider originates in marketing technology, contact center, CRM or data management deeply influences the components that are front-and-center for that software provider.

The evolution of CXM addresses the shortcoming of the decades-old CRM software category that has had a more departmental and application-centric approach. Instead, we now see an approach that organizes based

on the customer journey and the interactions a customer may have with the organization across any channel. That breadth of scope and expertise explains why the mix of components, users and use cases has been so diverse across CXM products. The broad outlines are clear: a



CXM suite is a product family composed of applications that are collectively organized to optimize customer interactions, experiences and profitability.

A customer experience suite should be judged based on these criteria:

- How well it facilitates managing and measuring customer behavior across multiple stages of the customer lifecycle.
- How well it serves the needs of both the key purchasing team (e.g., contact center operations) and other relevant stakeholders within the organization (e.g., IT or marketing).
- How well it presents senior leadership with a coherent picture of the customer base that they can use to understand direction and make plans or decisions.
- How open it is to expansion laterally into adjacent software segments related to other CX departments. In other words, if you are judging a marketing automation suite for CX, how well does it serve (or integrate into) contact center applications? Or, if you are judging contact center platforms, how integrable are the marketing, advertising, sales or IT applications?

Because software providers stem from different legacy origin points, it can be difficult for buyers to effectively compare similar or overlapping portfolios from providers that, in many cases, do not directly compete against one another. A toolset that comes from a contact



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center provider might focus on communications; one from a marketing technology provider on audiences and analytics; one from an IT-centric company on service management or integration.

With that in mind, we constructed a working definition of CXM, based on the above criteria, that includes five core areas of functionality across departments. The first is interaction handling, consisting of the traditional voice-centric activities of contact centers, but also including modern digital channels of customer contact. In the context of interaction handling, a CXM suite should also be able to manage the data or context surrounding the interaction. In any customer journey, a contact or touchpoint is intimately influenced by what has happened in the past, either long past (purchase histories) or the recent past (hopping from one channel to another in search of answers or results).

The second core area that a suite can take on is operational resource management. “Resources” include people, as in the contact center agents who respond to customers, or the knowledge workers who supply them with information. However, the resources most in need of management these days are knowledge and data resources and digital content. The



pressure to deploy AI technology is especially urgent in CXM. The specific tools and use cases most directly affected by AI are those built around automating (and anticipating) customer activity, and so are also largely the domain of a CXM suite. So a CXM suite could include elements akin to a CRM or CDP, a digital asset management component, knowledge management and content creation tools.

Third, CXM should control those processes noted above, and should enable users to optimize automation across departments, and the workflows that touch different components of the suite and the teams working with customers. Because CXM is knitting together (and replacing) isolated point solutions, it needs an underlying platform that can integrate its wide spread of tools and users. It needs to be able to function across data silos and create workflow automations that deliver the specific information and work where it is needed at the moment it is needed.

The development of applications based on AI and machine learning fall into this category, including real-time agent guidance assistance and intelligent self-service engines. Other functions dependent on a strong platform include processing transactions, fulfilling service requests, segmenting customers into audiences, developing website offers and tracking customer behavior.

The fourth element to consider is the toolset's capabilities in providing insights and analysis to users across the enterprise, including reporting, visualizations and dashboards, and predictions and planning. A system that collects information about customers, interactions

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and behavior, and then analyzes it, should be able to present its findings in forms relevant to a spectrum of different users. Ground-level workers need awareness of the specifics around particular customers, for example, but executives need overviews of performance, outcomes and revenue. Every department involved in CX has its own set of KPIs and relevant metrics separate from every other. One of the great values of bringing all CX applications and tools into a single platform is that it establishes consistency and continuity around data collection and metrics. It creates the big picture that otherwise would be lost in departmental minutia.

The fifth and last core capability set is customer journey management. This is key to the further development of the entire category of software, as it turns the passive act of responding to service calls into a deliberate, organized effort at optimizing customer experiences, and through that, relationships. When an enterprise can map the journey or lifecycle, it can potentially identify moments of influence that can be used to drive added business or turn customers into advocates. Customer journey



management contains software for orchestrating interactions, personalizing them to individual (or group) preferences, and managing proactive communication efforts by marketing and sales teams.

Put together, these five areas add up to an enterprise software solution of great utility and variety. CXM software is just at the beginning of its development maturity, and it is rare to find a single offering that fits into all five. Many software providers start out with an emphasis on their areas of origin and build out from there. Marketing technology software providers, for example, start with audience building and segmentation, but have little or nothing to do with interaction handling. On the flip side, contact center providers, who excel at the interactions, often have very little capacity to manage journeys, knowledge or advanced analytics. Over time, we expect suites from across the landscape to converge on these five areas through acquisition, partnership and organic development. By 2028, enterprises will replace many CX point solutions with broad, interdepartmental, multifunction suites.

**Customer Experience Management**  
Market Assertion

By 2028, enterprises will replace many CX point solutions with broad, interdepartmental, multifunction suites.

**Keith Dawson**  
Director of Research, Customer Experience

**ISG Research**

This report evaluates software providers on four of the five areas noted above, excluding consideration of the interaction handling capabilities described in the first area. We evaluate the broad sweep of interaction handling tools in a separate set of Buyers Guides covering contact center systems exclusively.

This CXM Buyers Guide evaluates software providers and products based on support for analytics, customer journey management, knowledge management, CRM platform support, operational resource management, and process control and optimization. To be included in this Buyers Guide, products must include capabilities from three of four of the following areas: Resource Management, Automation, Analytics and Customer Journey Management. Separate Buyers Guides on Customer Journey Management and Knowledge Management are available to more specifically examine those software categories.

This report evaluates the following software providers that offer products that deliver Customer Experience Management suites as we define them: Adobe, eGain, Emplifi, Freshworks, Genesys, HubSpot, Microsoft, Nextiva, NICE, Oracle, Qualtrics, Salesforce, SAP, ServiceNow, Sprinklr, SugarCRM, Verint, Zendesk and Zoho.



## Buyers Guide Overview

For over two decades, ISG Research has conducted market research in a spectrum of areas across business applications, tools and technologies. We have designed the Buyers Guide to provide a balanced perspective of software providers and products that is rooted in an understanding of the business requirements in any enterprise. Utilization of our research methodology and decades of experience enables our Buyers Guide to be an effective method



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to assess and select software providers and products. The findings of this research undertaking contribute to our comprehensive approach to rating software providers in a manner that is based on the assessments completed by an enterprise.

This ISG Research Buyers Guide: Customer Experience Management is the distillation of over a year of market and product research efforts. It is an assessment of how well software providers' offerings address enterprises' requirements for customer experience management software. The index is structured to support a request for information (RFI) that could be used in the request for proposal (RFP) process by incorporating all criteria needed to evaluate, select, utilize and maintain relationships with software providers. An effective product and customer experience with a provider can ensure the best long-term relationship and value achieved from a resource and financial investment.

In this Buyers Guide, ISG Research evaluates the software in seven key categories that are weighted to reflect buyers' needs based on our expertise and research. Five are product-experience related: Adaptability, Capability, Manageability, Reliability, and Usability. In addition, we consider two customer-experience categories: Validation, and Total Cost of Ownership/Return on Investment (TCO/ROI). To assess functionality, one of the components of Capability, we applied the ISG Research Value Index methodology and blueprint, which links the personas and processes for customer experience management to an enterprise's requirements.

The structure of the research reflects our understanding that the effective evaluation of software providers and products involves far more than just examining product features, potential revenue or customers generated from a provider's marketing and sales efforts. We believe it is important to take a comprehensive, research-based approach, since making the wrong choice of customer experience management technology can raise the total cost of ownership, lower the return on investment and hamper an enterprise's ability to reach its full performance potential. In addition, this approach can reduce the project's development and



deployment time and eliminate the risk of relying on a short list of software providers that does not represent a best fit for your enterprise.

ISG Research believes that an objective review of software providers and products is a critical business strategy for the adoption and implementation of customer experience management software and applications. An enterprise's review should include a thorough analysis of both what is possible and what is relevant. We urge enterprises to do a thorough job of evaluating customer experience management systems and tools and offer this Buyers Guide as both the results of our in-depth analysis of these providers and as an evaluation methodology.



# How To Use This Buyers Guide

## Evaluating Software Providers: The Process

We recommend using the Buyers Guide to assess and evaluate new or existing software providers for your enterprise. The market research can be used as an evaluation framework to establish a formal request for information from providers on products and customer experience and will shorten the cycle time when creating an RFI. The steps listed below provide a process that can facilitate best possible outcomes.

1. Define the business case and goals.  
Define the mission and business case for investment and the expected outcomes from your organizational and technological efforts.
2. Specify the business needs.  
Defining the business requirements helps identify what specific capabilities are required with respect to people, processes, information and technology.
3. Assess the required roles and responsibilities.  
Identify the individuals required for success at every level of the enterprise from executives to frontline workers and determine the needs of each.
4. Outline the project's critical path.  
What needs to be done, in what order and who will do it? This outline should make clear the prior dependencies at each step of the project plan.
5. Ascertain the technology approach.  
Determine the business and technology approach that most closely aligns to your enterprise's requirements.
6. Establish software provider evaluation criteria.  
Utilize the product experience: Adaptability, Capability, Manageability, Reliability and Usability, and the customer experience in TCO/ROI and Validation.
7. Evaluate and select the technology properly.  
Weight the categories in the technology evaluation criteria to reflect your enterprise's priorities to determine the short list of software providers and products.
8. Establish the business initiative team to start the project.  
Identify who will lead the project and the members of the team needed to plan and execute it with timelines, priorities and resources.





# The Findings

All of the products we evaluated are feature-rich, but not all the capabilities offered by a software provider are equally valuable to types of workers or support everything needed to manage products on a continuous basis. Moreover, the existence of too many capabilities may be a negative factor for an enterprise if it introduces unnecessary complexity. Nonetheless, you may decide that a larger number of features in the product is a plus, especially if some of them match your enterprise’s established practices or support an initiative that is driving the purchase of new software.

Factors beyond features and functions or software provider assessments may become a deciding factor. For example, an enterprise may face budget constraints such that the TCO evaluation can tip the balance to one provider or another. This is where the Value Index methodology and the appropriate category weighting can be applied to determine the best fit of software providers and products to your specific needs.

## Overall Scoring of Software Providers Across Categories

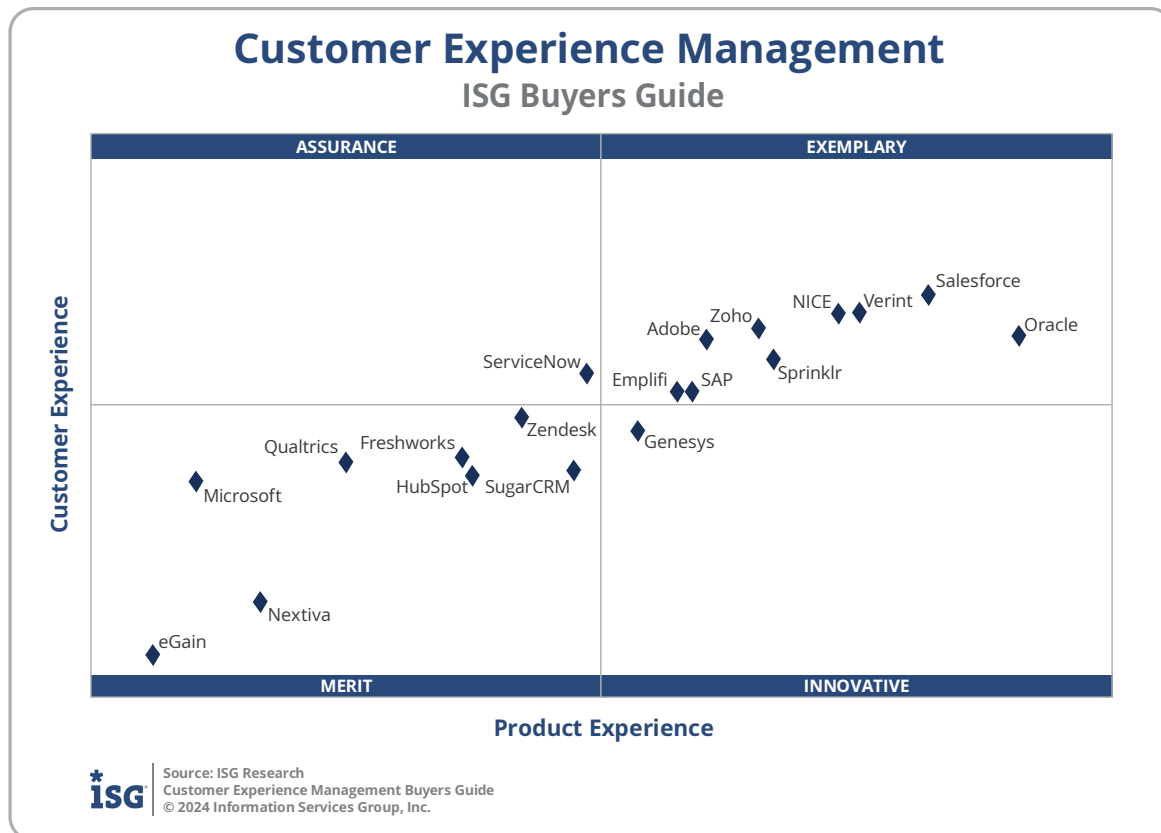
The research finds Oracle atop the list, followed by Salesforce and Verint. Companies that place in the top three of a category earn the designation of Leader. Salesforce has done so in seven categories; Oracle in six; NICE, SAP Verint in two; and Adobe and Zoho in one.

The overall representation of the research below places the rating of the Product Experience and Customer Experience on the x and y axes, respectively, to provide a visual representation and classification of the software providers. Those providers whose Product Experience have a higher weighted performance to the axis in aggregate of the five product categories place farther to the right, while the performance and weighting for the two Customer Experience categories determines placement on the vertical axis. In short, software providers that place closer to the upper-right on this chart performed better than those closer to the lower-left.

The research places software providers into one of four overall categories: Assurance, Exemplary, Merit or Innovative. This representation classifies providers’ overall weighted performance.

Customer Experience Mgmt. Overall			
Providers	Grade	Performance	
Oracle	A-	Leader	83.3%
Salesforce	A-	Leader	81.9%
Verint	B++	Leader	78.7%
NICE	B++		78.1%
Zoho	B++		75.1%
Sprinklr	B+		74.9%
Adobe	B+		73.7%
SAP	B+		71.9%
Emplifi	B+		70.2%
Genesys	B+		69.6%
ServiceNow	B+		69.1%
Zendesk	B		65.5%
SugarCRM	B		65.5%
HubSpot	B-		62.4%
Freshworks	B-		62.1%
Qualtrics	B-		58.9%
Microsoft	C++		55.7%
Nextiva	C++		52.1%
eGain	C+		48.4%

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**Exemplary:** The categorization and placement of software providers in Exemplary (upper right) represent those that performed the best in meeting the overall Product and Customer Experience requirements. The providers rated Exemplary are: Adobe, Emplifi, NICE, Oracle, Salesforce, SAP, Sprinkl, Verint and Zoho.

**Innovative:** The categorization and placement of software providers in Innovative (lower right) represent those that performed the best in meeting the overall Product Experience requirements but did not achieve the highest levels of requirements in Customer Experience. The provider rated Innovative is: Genesys.

**Assurance:** The categorization and placement of software providers in Assurance (upper left) represent those that achieved the highest levels in the overall Customer Experience requirements but did not achieve the highest levels of Product Experience. The provider rated Assurance is: ServiceNow.

**Merit:** The categorization of software providers in Merit (lower left) represents those that did not exceed the median of performance in Customer or Product Experience or surpass the threshold for the other three categories. The providers rated Merit are: eGain, Freshworks, HubSpot, Microsoft, Nextiva, Qualtrics, SugarCRM and Zendesk.



We warn that close provider placement proximity should not be taken to imply that the packages evaluated are functionally identical or equally well suited for use by every enterprise or for a specific process. Although there is a high degree of commonality in how enterprises handle customer experience management, there are many idiosyncrasies and differences in how they do these functions that can make one software provider's offering a better fit than another's for a particular enterprise's needs.

We advise enterprises to assess and evaluate software providers based on organizational requirements and use this research as a supplement to internal evaluation of a provider and products.



## Product Experience

The process of researching products to address an enterprise’s needs should be comprehensive. Our Value Index methodology examines Product Experience and how it aligns with an enterprise’s life cycle of onboarding, configuration, operations, usage and maintenance. Too often, software providers are not evaluated for the entirety of the product; instead, they are evaluated on market execution and vision of the future, which are flawed since they do not represent an enterprise’s requirements but how the provider operates. As more software providers orient to a complete product experience, evaluations will be more robust.

The research results in Product Experience are ranked at 80%, or four-fifths, of the overall rating using the specific underlying weighted category performance. Importance was placed on the categories as follows: Usability (20%), Capability (20%), Reliability (15%), Adaptability (10%) and Manageability (15%). This weighting impacted the resulting overall ratings in this research. Oracle, Salesforce and Verint were designated Product Experience Leaders. While not a Leader, NICE was also found to meet a broad range of enterprise product experience requirements.

Many enterprises will only evaluate capabilities for workers in IT or administration, but the research identified the criticality of Usability (20% weighting) across a broader set of usage personas that should participate in customer experience management.

**Customer Experience Mgmt.**  
Product Experience

Providers	Grade	Performance
Oracle	A-	<b>Leader</b> 67.8%
Salesforce	A-	<b>Leader</b> 64.7%
Verint	B++	<b>Leader</b> 62.4%
NICE	B++	61.6%
Sprinklr	B+	59.3%
Zoho	B+	58.8%
Adobe	B+	57.1%
SAP	B+	56.1%
Emplifi	B+	55.9%
Genesys	B+	54.7%
ServiceNow	B	53.0%
SugarCRM	B	52.4%
Zendesk	B	50.7%
HubSpot	B-	49.0%
Freshworks	B-	48.7%
Qualtrics	B-	44.7%
Nextiva	C++	41.8%
Microsoft	C++	39.5%
eGain	C+	38.1%

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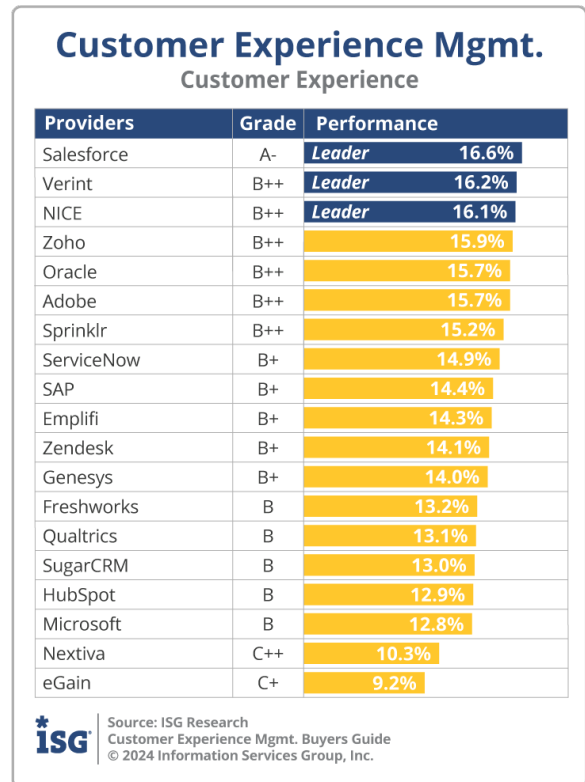
## Customer Experience

The importance of a customer relationship with a software provider is essential to the actual success of the products and technology. The advancement of the Customer Experience and the entire life cycle an enterprise has with its software provider is critical for ensuring satisfaction in working with that provider. Technology providers that have chief customer officers are more likely to have greater investments in the customer relationship and focus more on their success. These leaders also need to take responsibility for ensuring this commitment is made abundantly clear on the website and in the buying process and customer journey.

The research results in Customer Experience are ranked at 20%, or one-fifth, using the specific underlying weighted category performance as it relates to the framework of commitment and value to the software provider-customer relationship. The two evaluation categories are Validation (10%) and TCO/ROI (10%), which are weighted to represent their importance to the overall research.

The software providers that evaluated the highest overall in the aggregated and weighted Customer Experience categories are Salesforce, Verint and NICE. These category leaders best communicate commitment and dedication to customer needs. While not a Leaders, Zoho, Oracle and Adobe were also found to meet a broad range of enterprise customer experience requirements.

Most software providers we evaluated did have sufficient information available through their website and presentations. While many have customer case studies to promote success, a few lack depth in articulating their commitment to customer experience and an enterprise’s customer experience management journey. As the commitment to a software provider is a continuous investment, the importance of supporting customer experience in a holistic evaluation should be included and not underestimated.





## Appendix: Software Provider Inclusion

For inclusion in the ISG Research Customer Experience Management Buyers Guide for 2024, a software provider must be in good standing financially and ethically, have at least \$50 million in annual or projected revenue verified using independent sources, sell products and provide support on at least two continents, and have at least 100 customers. The principal source of the relevant business unit's revenue must be software-related and there must have been at least one major software release in the last 18 months.

The research is designed to be independent of the specifics of software provider packaging and pricing. To represent the real-world environment in which businesses operate, we include providers that offer suites or packages of products that may include relevant individual modules or applications. If a software provider is actively marketing, selling and developing a product for the general market and it is reflected on the provider's website that the product is within the scope of the research, that provider is automatically evaluated for inclusion.

All software providers that offer relevant customer experience management products and meet the inclusion requirements were invited to participate in the evaluation process at no cost to them.

Software providers that meet our inclusion criteria but did not completely participate in our Buyers Guide were assessed solely on publicly available information. As this could have a significant impact on classification and ratings, we recommend additional scrutiny when evaluating those providers.



## Products Evaluated

Provider	Product Names	Version	Release Month/Year
Adobe	Adobe Experience Cloud	n/a	June 2024
eGain	eGain Conversation Hub, Knowledge Hub, Analytics Hub	21.17	May 2024
Emplifi	Emplifi CX Cloud	n/a	July 2024
Freshworks	Customer Service Suite	n/a	June 2024
Genesys	Genesys Cloud CX	n/a	July 2024
HubSpot	Service Hub	n/a	June 2024
Microsoft	Dynamics 365	n/a	June 2024
Nextiva	Customer Conversations Suite, Customer Experience Suite	n/a	June 2024
NICE	CXone	24.2	June 2024
Oracle	Oracle Service Cloud	24B	May 2024
Qualtrics	Qualtrics XM for Customer Experience	n/a	June 2024
Salesforce	Salesforce Customer 360, Service Cloud	Summer '24	June 2024
SAP	SAP Service Cloud	2406	June 2024
ServiceNow	ServiceNow Customer Service Management (CSM)	Washington DC	Jan 2024
Sprinklr	Sprinklr Unified CXM Platform	19.5	May 2024
SugarCRM	Sugar Serve	14	May 2024
Verint	Verint Open Platform	24.4	April 2024
Zendesk	Zendesk Service	n/a	June 2024
Zoho	Zoho One	n/a	Feb 2024



### Providers of Promise

We did not include software providers that, as a result of our research and analysis, did not satisfy the criteria for inclusion in this Buyers Guide. These are listed below as “Providers of Promise.”

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Product</b>	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>&gt;100 Customers</b>	<b>Complete CXM Coverage</b>
ContentSquare	ContentSquare Experience Platform	Yes	Yes	No
CSG	CSG Xponent	Yes	Yes	No
Sprout Social	Sprout Social Enterprise	Yes	Yes	No
Gainsight	Gainsight Platform	Yes	Yes	No





## About ISG Software Research

ISG Software Research provides authoritative market research and coverage on the business and IT aspects of the software industry. We distribute research and insights daily through our community, and we provide a portfolio of consulting, advisory, research and education services for enterprises, software and service providers, and investment firms. Our premier service, ISG Software Research On-Demand, provides structured education and advisory support with subject-matter expertise and experience in the software industry. ISG Research Buyers Guides support the RFI/RFP process and help enterprises assess, evaluate and select software providers through tailored Assessment Services and our Value Index methodology. Visit [www.ventanaresearch.com](http://www.ventanaresearch.com) to sign up for free community membership with access to our research and insights.

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