

PUTTING THE HUMAN AT THE HEART OF DIGITAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Finding the right mix between automated
and augmented conversations



eptica
MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS

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ABOUT EPTICA

Conversational, cognitive, and collaborative solutions for digital customer experience



THE REAL REVOLUTION

The end of boundaries between the
physical and digital worlds



Foreword by

RÉGINE VANHEEMS

Co-founder The Connected Commerce Observatory,
Professor, University of Lyon 3 Sorbonne

THE REAL REVOLUTION

The end of boundaries between the physical and digital worlds



CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR HAS CHANGED MORE IN 20 YEARS THAN IN THE PREVIOUS 20 CENTURIES!

Thanks to the internet, which empowers them to take control of their lives, consumers have gradually embraced and mastered digital technologies. They are now autonomous and able to buy goods and services anytime, anywhere, through any device.

Is this leading to a revolution and the creation of a new virtual world, parallel to the physical one, where consumers interact with brands and buy products and services?

The answer is no. The actual revolution is being driven by the convergence of the real and virtual worlds. And this is why companies find it so difficult to successfully embrace digital transformation, as this convergence of two worlds means it's not just a matter of "adding some digital into their strategy". That would be simple. Instead, they need to fully understand and anticipate that adding a digital brick into their plans will mean having to rethink their entire house, from the foundations up.

The convergence of these two, interlocked worlds is growing as consumers increasingly move from one to the other depending on their moods, desires and current constraints. For example, they look for information online before buying offline, with this behaviour now the rule rather than the exception. 78% of consumers research on the web before making a purchase in a physical shop.

78% OF CONSUMERS RESEARCH ON THE WEB BEFORE MAKING A PURCHASE IN A PHYSICAL SHOP

At the same time, the opposite is also true, as consumers can walk around and look for information on a product or service in the real world before continuing their shopping experience online.

THE REAL REVOLUTION

The end of boundaries between the physical and digital worlds

THE TWO WORLDS ARE INCREASINGLY INTERLOCKED

Convergence between the two worlds is increasingly strong. Why? Because of the ubiquity of the one object that consumers can no longer do without: smartphones. They are permanently connected thanks to their smartphone, which many consider an extension of themselves. This was highlighted by American researcher Russell Clayton, who introduced the concept of “Nomophobia” (a contraction of “No mobile” and “Phobia”), based on his findings that smartphone deprivation is accompanied by an increase in anxiety levels¹.

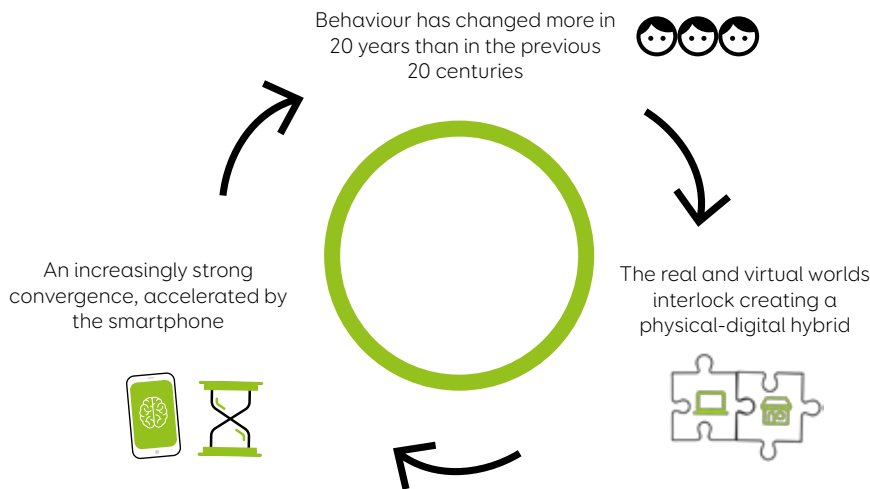
A smartphone therefore goes everywhere and anywhere with its owner. 74% of individuals never leave their house without their mobile phone².

74% OF INDIVIDUALS NEVER LEAVE THEIR HOUSE WITHOUT THEIR MOBILE PHONE

Smartphones allow consumers to continuously keep up with what is happening on the web and social media. These take place throughout the day from the moment people wake up until the time they go to sleep. The typical user touches their device 2,617 times every day.

Phone enable consumers to connect to the internet from anywhere and at any time, and to move from the real world to the virtual world with a mere swipe of the finger. They are subsequently part of a series of micro-experiences occurring between the real, physical world and the virtual or digital world.

WHAT IS THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION?



¹Russell Clayton (2015), Nomophobia or the fear of being without one's mobile phone
Clayton demonstrates that when a person is deprived of their smartphone, their heart rate and blood pressure can increase.

²Google/Ipsos study (2013)

³Dscout (2016)



THE CHALLENGES FOR BRANDS IN A BLENDED PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL WORLD

CHALLENGES FOR BRANDS

In a blended physical and digital world



The convergence of the real and virtual worlds has created new behaviours and paths to purchase, across the customer journey. Terms such as showrooming, click-and-collect, ROPO (Research Online, Purchase Offline), click-to-call, click-to-chat, web-to-store and mobile-to-store have all become mainstream.

These behaviours have been clearly identified, but does that mean brands are capable of understanding them? Why does a consumer move from a company's physical shop to its website or contact customer service before visiting a store? Customers take multiple, different paths between a brand's touchpoints. For example, they may visit and use social networks, click-to-chat, an email and a telephone call before they finally make their purchasing decision in the physical space.

Understanding the new paths to purchase that digital technology has created will therefore pose a major challenge for brands over the coming years.

IT IS ALSO ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTAND WHY AND HOW NEW BEHAVIOURS MODIFY CONSUMER PURCHASING DECISIONS

Brands now need to move beyond describing how consumers behave in the physical-digital world, and start to understand what drives them. They need to study consumer psychology, to find out why they adopt these "new" behaviours and how they experience them.

It is also essential to understand why and how these new behaviours modify consumer purchasing decisions, their state of mind and, above all, the expectations they have of brands. Those companies that are able to meet these two challenges will be the big winners in the new physical-digital world.

CHALLENGE#1 UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY

In this era of omnichannel marketing and connected commerce, understanding the psychology of consumers means understanding their state of mind and their decision-making process, not only at each of the touchpoints along their path, but also across the entire customer journey.

Touchpoints are not interchangeable

When the customer chooses to use a particular touchpoint on their journey, what are they expecting? Touchpoints are not interchangeable in the customer's mind. This means that if a customer calls a contact centre, uses a website's self-service feature, taps click-to-chat or talks to a shop assistant, they don't have the same intention or need.

CHALLENGES FOR BRANDS

In a blended physical and digital world

Each channel has its own specific characteristics and the customer has different expectations depending on the touchpoint they are using. So, a telephone call may be more personal than a chat, a physical meeting may drive a more detailed exchange that provides more technical information, while a website can communicate more complex messages through rich video and audio content. Each touchpoint provides different benefits for the customer. For simplicity, let's break these benefits down into two – automation (and therefore speed) for some and human touch and interaction for others.

Why does a brand need to revise its complete strategy when adding digital aspects to its operations?

After visiting a touchpoint, a consumer's expectations and psychology are transformed, and this affects them and their behaviour when they then move to another channel.

This is why just adding some "digital" to your strategy is not enough to achieve a successful digital transformation. In fact, the added digital dimension is going to transform consumer expectations of existing channels, meaning you need to review how these other touchpoints operate.

For example, salespeople in shops or agents in contact centres now often experience a communication breakdown when talking to customers.

This is because the consumer has already begun their purchasing process via another touchpoint, for example, a website or social network. This profoundly transforms their expectations when they call a customer service representative or meet a salesperson. Starting the process afresh irritates the customer as they will end up repeating themselves. To ensure the conversation is positive, does this mean that staff need to understand where the customer is in their journey, so they can help them move forward? In this case, doesn't it mean that the fundamentals of the interaction and the sale need to be reinvented?

ALL ALONG THEIR OMNICHANNEL JOURNEY

Besides understanding the customer's psychology at each touchpoint, brands and companies need to understand what makes a consumer choose a path made up of multiple channels or touchpoints rather than a single one. In fact when consumers adopt these omnichannel paths it can highlight new attitudes and particular motivations on their part.

For example, some customers may visit a company's website before going to its shop, enabling them to be more efficient when they are there, either through saving time or spending less.

CHALLENGES FOR BRANDS

In a blended physical and digital world

Why is this? Simply that having selected a product online prior coming to the shop, consumers will be less easily influenced by browsing other products, marketing or sales advisors. They have adopted “a tunnel vision approach” - a deliberate strategy that allows them to stay in control of their spending, their situation and themselves in the face of the multiple temptations provided by the shop itself.

By acting in this way, customers feel more positive about themselves, which reinforces their sense of personal efficiency. Other, similar, underlying rationales exist for other paths, and they stretch across all channels and touchpoints.

CUSTOMERS AND THE OMNICHANNEL PATH

- 1 Touchpoints are not interchangeable from the consumer point of view
- 2 Expectations evolve depending on the path already taken through other touchpoints
- 3 There are different expectations of each touchpoint



Understand and meet customer expectations at every touchpoint, and across the entire journey

CHALLENGE#2 DECIPHERING NEW CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS

The internet is more than 20 years old. So, what do customers want from their relationship with brands today? With technology now ubiquitous, which initially weak signals and expectations are becoming stronger?

A BRAND THAT MAKES THEIR LIFE EASIER

Consumers want a brand to be there when they need it and they want it to make their daily lives easier. At the same time, they want the brand to be accessible and to understand their needs without being intrusive.

A survey carried out by Wunderman¹ in 2016 found that brands must “demonstrate their commitment to serving the consumer and exceeding their expectations every day.” 72% of UK respondents to the survey said they’d only consider buying products from brands that show they care and understand their consumers. 61% agreed that the best brands “make their lives easier”, while 84% are loyal to brands that share their values.

So, successful brands have to be part of a consumer’s daily life, helping them rather than constantly trying to sell to them. This means that brand experience has to shift away from the traditional approach of focusing on selling a product or a service, to instead supporting the customer’s life experience, not just their purchasing experience.

¹Wunderman, January 2017 <https://www.wantedness.com/>

CHALLENGES FOR BRANDS

In a blended physical and digital world

Essentially the brand becomes a 'life facilitator', helping and supporting the customer. For example, a baby food brand moves beyond simply selling products to helping parents provide better food to their child on a daily basis.

In order to aid and assist individual consumers, brands can tailor and personalise their offering so as to make their life easier. For example, a travel smartphone app could use information — such as the tourist's location, queues for activities, traffic conditions, weather, previous activities and their declared or inferred preferences — to recommend new things that they might like to do, that fit within their timescales. Even the tourist's emotion can be interpreted and used to suggest new itineraries.

THE SEARCH FOR 'REAL' RELATIONSHIPS

The ubiquity of technology has created a world in which everything is predictable, formatted, identical and cold. Consumers spend their time interacting through screens at work and at home. That means that when they leave their screen, they are looking for something different: an authentic, real and sincere experience with an equally authentic, real and sincere human.

With customers now searching for emotional, social connections and for "real" relationships, the future will be marked by a return to requiring human contact, providing a strategic role for human interaction.

THE MORE WE BECOME DIGITAL THE MORE CONSUMERS SEARCH FOR THE HUMAN

The human touch is what will make all the difference in customer experience; it is what people will remember when everything else is automated, formatted and sanitised. When they want to speak to a human, customers have less and less tolerance for pre-formatted scripts and digital technology that prevents them from interacting with brands on a human level.

Moreover, the more digital technology there is, the more customers seek out human interaction. Take the case of Apple, the epitome of digital brands. Its stores are full of welcoming, helpful and, above all human sales advisors.

A HELPFUL BRAND THAT HAS ELIMINATED IRRITANTS

Consumers expect brands to have a presence in both the virtual and real worlds, meaning that having an omnichannel strategy is now vital to drive customer loyalty. The increasing number of channels, and of touchpoints within them, gives consumers more freedom. It means they can contact the brand or company where they want, when they want and how they want. And they can do so to ask a question, raise a problem, or request further information, for example.

Omnichannel also makes it possible for consumers to buy products or services as they wish, at any time, in the privacy of their own home, while on the move, or in a physical shop. The brand now has to be accessible whenever the individual needs it. However, although omnichannel offers new opportunities for freedom, it also spawns new irritants for consumers.

CHALLENGES FOR BRANDS

In a blended physical and digital world

A brand will be perceived as helpful and concerned for the well-being of its customers if it is able to detect these irritants and, more importantly, eliminate them. By acting in this way, it shows that it really does have the customer's best interests at heart and that it goes beyond marketing, to make life easier for them, allowing consumers to make their purchase with total peace of mind.

The customer is not a ping-pong ball

The first source of irritation is when a customer feels they are being treated like a ping-pong ball, pushed from one part of the business to another when looking for service. This is due to the increasing number of touchpoints leading to a dilution of responsibility when it comes to customer service.

Previously, when there was only a single contact point, that person or department was responsible for providing an answer or finding a solution to the customer's problem.

In the mono-channel era (i.e. before the arrival of the internet), this was therefore generally the duty of customer-facing staff in physical shops.

As there are more touchpoints today, responsibility is becoming diluted, with each touchpoint not necessarily feeling responsible for the customer's question and thus not hesitating to redirect them elsewhere to find a solution to their problem.

However, this game of table tennis, in which the customer plays the role of the ping-pong ball, can also be due to the duties and responsibilities of each touchpoint being poorly defined or a badly planned internal organisation. Regardless of the reasons, there are now far too many situations in which the customer is bounced from one touchpoint to another. This is a particular irritant to customers, who, in the digital era, expect to be in control of the situation.

THE IRRITANTS FOR THE CONSUMERS: WHEN THE BRAND ...



**TREATS THE CUSTOMER LIKE
A PING-PONG BALL**



**DOESN'T LISTEN
TO THE CONSUMER**



**DOESN'T UNDERSTAND
THE CONSUMER**



**MAKES THE CONSUMER
WORK**

CHALLENGES FOR BRANDS

In a blended physical and digital world

The customer journey is a single conversation

Another source of irritation generated by omnichannel is the fact that, due to the increase in the number of touchpoints, brands no longer seem to be listening to their customers or understanding them. In terms of listening, a common, recurring problem is when the customer is forced to re-explain their situation to each member of staff they come into contact with. They have to repeat their problem when they switch channel, whether by telephone, by email or chat, on the brand's social media accounts, or when they meet a sales advisor in a shop. This gives the customer the impression that the brand is not listening to them, and is wasting their time. Naturally, this irritates them - at the very time when they are expecting the brand to make their life easier.

However, even if certain brands and companies do seem to listen to their customers, they still don't seem to understand them. Why not? Because, as previously mentioned, if a consumer has begun their purchasing journey at one touchpoint, their expectations, behaviour and state of mind will be very different when they move to another one.

The challenge for those working on particular touchpoints in a complex journey is to be able to pursue a conversation that has already begun elsewhere and not have to start it all over again. To make this work the customer's expectations need to be identified early in their interaction with the touchpoint, while acknowledging that they have already started their journey elsewhere. If brands fail to understand these new conversational processes, which have appeared with the rise of digital technology, the inevitable result will be inadequate customer service, which generates both dissatisfaction and irritation.

The customer does not want to do the brand's work for them

A final common source of irritation is when a brand asks an individual who has already made some effort to make even more. Understandably, this does not make the consumer want to pursue their relationship with the brand.

For example, a customer using their commute on public transport to look for information about a product or service on their smartphone will have to completely restart the process if they wish to continue on a more comfortable screen once they arrive home. This extra work forced on the consumer is not only tiresome, but also creates the risk that the customer may turn towards another brand when changing touchpoint or channel.

CHALLENGES FOR BRANDS

In a blended physical and digital world

Some brands understand this. For example, Air France sends an email to its customers that enables them to continue their browsing from where they had left off on their previous device.

WHAT DO CONSUMERS EXPECT FROM BRANDS TODAY?



After having given the customer more freedom by enabling them to access the brand in multiple ways, the future challenge for omnichannel is to remove these new barriers: the dilution of responsibility, poor listening to and/or poor understanding of customers, and additional work imposed on the consumer. The goal should be freedom without irritation.

Competitive advantage therefore no longer comes from providing multiple touchpoints (as the majority of brands offer this). Instead, it will come from the company's ability to orchestrate these touchpoints intelligently, while creating value for its customers.

CHALLENGE#3 IDENTIFYING DIFFERENT PATHS TO PURCHASE

THE FLUID CUSTOMER JOURNEY THAT REDUCES CUSTOMER EFFORT

From the customer's point of view, purchase journeys do not all follow the same pattern. For example, for routine purchases (coffee, toner, milk, ink cartridges, etc.) the prevailing logic is to reorder as quickly and simply as possible.

Above all, the customer's goal here is not to run out. These paths therefore need to be as fluid as possible, simplifying and reducing consumer effort at all costs. After all, consumers do not usually derive any pleasure from reordering these goods, even if they are vital for the smooth running of the home. For the brand, it is therefore a matter of simplifying and facilitating a repetitive task, a chore that generates no added value for the consumer.

This is something Amazon is continually working on. In its case it employs Shopping Effort Reduction Analysts, whose job is to analyse the customer's journey and to identify their actions all along that path, in order to then reduce the effort required.

CHALLENGES FOR BRANDS

In a blended physical and digital world

Several companies offer customers new means to facilitate and lighten repetitive restocking tasks. For example, French supermarket Carrefour has launched Pikit, a connected device which lets people shop by scanning the bar code of any product to add it to their shopping list, while Amazon offers connected buttons, Dash Replenishment and its Alexa virtual assistant.

THE ENHANCED JOURNEY OR HOW TO CREATE MEANINGFUL DIGITAL CONVERSATIONS

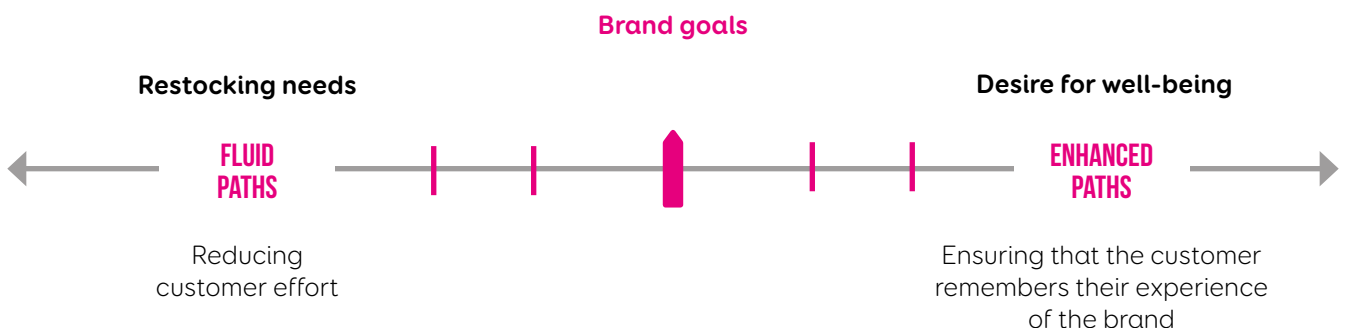
However, there are other types of buying journeys where a customer is not seeking to reduce effort but rather to fully enjoy their experience. Rather than being chore, this type of shopping aims to be relaxing and a source of pleasure.

In this case shopping provides sensorial and emotional stimulation, new discoveries, interaction and an opportunity to socialise, for example.

It also enables consumers to stay abreast of trends and new products and even to learn and increase their skills.

In this case, the brand should not have to try to narrow down the journey, since the act itself is a source of value for the customer. On the contrary, it will have to analyse how to enhance it, looking at how it can generate emotion, pleasure, surprise, authenticity, and value. This is leading many brands to create senior-level customer experience roles. These aim to reconsider the customer experience, and to revitalise it so that the customer finds it pleasurable and memorable. This will then give them a positive relationship with the brand, that they will then share with their friends and family in the online and offline worlds.

BRAND OBJECTIVES, DEPENDING ON THE TYPE OF CUSTOMER PATH





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING A DIGITAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PROJECT USING AI TECHNOLOGIES

2

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING

A digital customer experience project using AI technologies



RECOMMENDATION#1 CREATE A BALANCE BETWEEN AUTOMATED & AUGMENTED CONVERSATIONS

Plotting different interactions on a line that has fluid paths at one end and enhanced paths at the other, enables businesses to better understand the role that artificial intelligence (AI) and humans respectively can play in helping the brand to satisfy its customers and fulfil their expectations.

The more fluid the path (to the left of the illustration), the more helpful it is to deploy AI technologies. This is because automation best meets customer needs and expectations, ensuring the purchase of the product or service happens as easily and quickly as possible with the least possible effort.

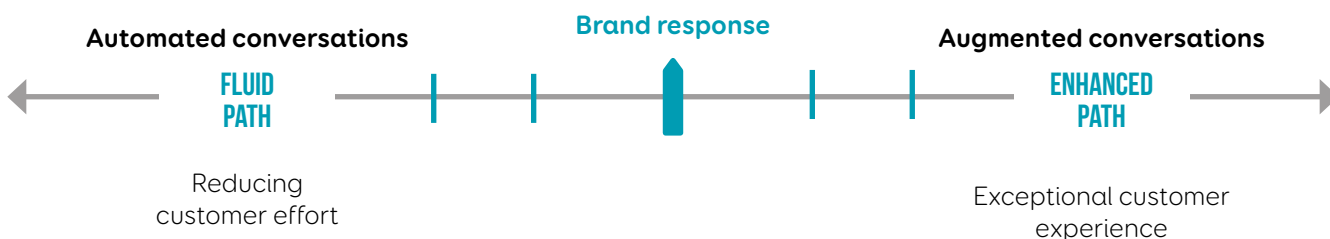
However, the more we move towards an enhanced path, to the right of the line, the more the role of the human or agent will be essential, engaging and meaningful.

AUTOMATED CONVERSATIONS

Chatbots, along with web self-service, sit on the left of the customer interaction line. Essentially the customer wants a quick solution to their problem. The majority of customer queries on digital are simple and are asked time and time again - for example, "What is your product returns policy?" or "How can I change my address?" In these cases, customers expect quick, precise and relevant answers. AI technologies, such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), enable brands to provide automatic answers that do not require human intervention from agents.

Deploying AI not only enables companies to provide automatic answers to simple customer queries, it can also deflect a certain amount of basic queries away from contact centre agents. This allows them to concentrate on conversations where they can add more value, assisting customers looking for something other than a fluid experience. In these cases the focus will move from productivity to interacting with the customer in a more spontaneous and authentic manner without having to follow set scripts.

AI AND HUMANS WORKING TOGETHER



2

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING

A digital customer experience project using AI technologies

AUGMENTED CONVERSATIONS

Moving the cursor towards the right, in the middle of the line you will see a space where AI and humans work together seamlessly to satisfy the customer. So, if a consumer starts the first part of the journey themselves thanks to AI, the human can then come to their assistance by intervening easily at the right moment in a personalised manner.

A good example of this is through channels such, click-to-call, click to call back, click-to-chat or click-to-video. These simplify the customer's life, since they are asked if they want to speak to an agent when necessary, with no extra effort required on their part, as they don't need to look for a telephone number on the website or find their telephone, for example. This initial use of an automated touchpoint, which is then escalated towards an augmented human is therefore a great way to satisfy and reassure the customer, while minimising their effort.

Choosing this approach enables a brand to demonstrate to its customers that it is taking care of them, and that it is there when its customers need it.

The further right we move on the customer interaction line, the more important the human dimension becomes, and the more the role of the employee supported by AI becomes essential. Only the augmented human is capable of creating a unique, memorable experience that is personal to each and every customer. Good examples of this are First Direct, which provides very friendly, yet informed customer service over the telephone and Zappos in the United States, where the employees' mission is to "Make people happy", however long that may take.

INITIAL AUTOMATION, ESCALATING TO AN AUGMENTED HUMAN IS THEREFORE A GREAT WAY TO SATISFY THE CUSTOMER

In the case of augmented human customer service, the job of the employee, assisted by AI, is to fulfil the customer's expectations by having a high quality, meaningful conversation with them, irrespective of the channels chosen by the consumer.

This augmented human concept is the perfect solution for dealing with more complex queries that cannot be handled by AI alone or when the customer is seeking the reassurance that contact with a human provides.

2

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING

A digital customer experience project using AI technologies

So, when the human agent takes control of the conversation with the customer, AI can also help them to better communicate, enriching the conversation and making it meaningful, thus creating a unique, engaging interaction between consumer and brand.

AI provides real advantages for brands looking to make their conversations with their customers meaningful. It improves the speed and accuracy of answers, while increasing the productivity of agents, who have faster access to the information they need to respond. Agents can then focus on the quality of the conversation: personalising responses, understanding the customer's context and showing empathy, for example. This will improve the customer experience, enabling companies to differentiate themselves from their rivals.

RECOMMENDATION#2 WHY CX REQUIRES AI BOTS THAT UNDERSTAND NATURAL LANGUAGE

What is a bot? It's simply an application that performs automated tasks, based on a set of algorithms. Every device we use has integrated bots - for example, smartphone calendar pop-up reminders when a meeting is due to start.

Bots are not new. Eptica has been developing them for many years in the customer experience field, allowing brands to automate a wide range of tasks.

These include providing automatic answers through web self-service systems when a question is asked, or routing an incoming email to the best available person in the company to answer it.

Chatbots are versions of bots that are designed to be conversational. What this means is that they are able to understand a text-based natural language input (such as a chat or social media message), process it and provide an answer as part of a conversation. Chatbots have been moving to the mainstream since Facebook opened its Facebook Messenger platform to them in spring 2016.

BOTS MUST BE "INTELLIGENT", SUPPORTED BY AI TECHNOLOGIES SUCH AS NLP

For chatbots and bots to work well, they have to be able to use artificial intelligence technologies to understand what has been asked of them, provide a relevant answer and forward customer queries to the right person. They must be "intelligent", supported by AI technologies such as Natural Language Processing and have access to a centralised and self-learning knowledge base.

2

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING

A digital customer experience project using AI technologies

NATURAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING

Natural Language Processing (NLP) is based on a deterministic approach, which is how it differs from machine learning. With NLP, you will always obtain the same output from a given starting point, so you will always receive the same answer based on an understanding of the customer's query. As its name suggests, it is based on the study of language (linguistics), applying artificial intelligence to understand inputs (such as an email) and then providing the best possible answer. NLP is built to understand language as naturally as a human would, if they were having a conversation with another person. So it incorporates the context and tone (sad, happy, angry) of the conversation, not just the keywords it detects.

Choosing between machine learning and NLP techniques depends on your goals. As far as customer experience is concerned, NLP is extremely effective. That's because consumer questions are deterministic - i.e. someone asking a specific question should always be provided with the same, consistent answer. NLP understands the question, based on the language the customer is using, and searches its knowledge base to deliver the best response to that specific question. This is why Eptica chose to base its AI technology on NLP, combined with a centralised knowledge base, when it began developing it, over 15 years ago.

Machine learning is more suited to situations which are changing and evolving. Eptica also uses machine learning, but usually for helping agents in their work rather than for the automatic understanding of customer questions.

Thanks to machine learning, the system is able to learn from the choices of agents. For example, if the knowledge base provides them with a selection of answers in response to a particular query, Eptica's solution learns from the choices agents make in order to automatically improve the responses the knowledge base provides, and, ultimately, the quality of future digital conversations.

INTELLIGENT ROUTING & KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Instead of playing ping-pong with the customer, and directing them to an employee who will not be able to answer their query, thereby putting the employee in an uncomfortable position, the solution enables the customer query to be quickly understood and routed directly to the person within the company who is most able to resolve their problem or to the expert capable of answering a technical question.

As an example, at French bank Crédit Agricole Vendée, complex queries received by email are immediately sent to the person with the best skills to respond to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING

A digital customer experience project using AI technologies

Technology also encourages increased collaboration within the company, as each of employee is able to share information and to enrich the knowledge base by the choices they make, across all channels. The knowledge base is strengthened through each new conversation and therefore becomes more intelligent and is always up-to-date.

AUGMENTED AGENT: LISTENING TO, AND UNDERSTANDING, THE CUSTOMER

Whatever the channel, by analysing both the language used, and the tone of the conversation, the agent is able to better understand the customer and therefore help them appropriately.

The bot can also become a prompter, providing solutions and answers to agents based on a real-time analysis of a customer's words. Essentially it is the digital equivalent of a prompter at the theatre that reminds the actor when they are trying to remember their lines.

So, instead of standardising scripts, employees are provided with tools that enable them to better understand customers and thus provide appropriate answers or solutions while maintaining a natural language and relationship. While consumers can normally detect (and dislike) standard scripts, standardising processes through technology, fosters a much more natural and authentic relationship. of processes, made possible internally by technology, fosters a much more natural and authentic relationship.

TECHNOLOGY THAT IS INVISIBLE TO THE CUSTOMER YET SUPPORTS EMPLOYEES IMPROVES THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.

Liberating the employee from having to use set scripts makes the exchange with the customer much more natural, creating an authentic character that is far removed from the automated discourse that customers hate. In a way, the challenge is to shift from the previous model of having front office standardisation (through scripts) to a back office standardisation of tools and processes that are imperceptible to the customer and significantly improve the quality of the relationship.

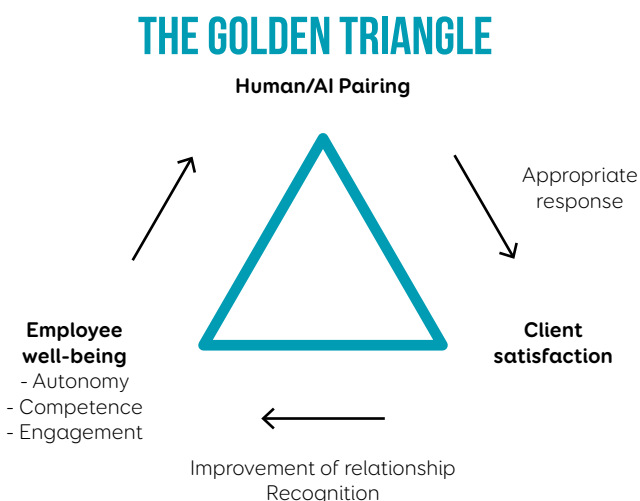
Technology that is invisible to the customer, such as AI, bots and automatic semantic analysis, yet supports employees improves the customer experience. It enables the employee, sometimes described as an "augmented agent", to improve the quality of the conversation with the customer as it allows them to better understand, and therefore better respond to, their query.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING

A digital customer experience project using AI technologies

RECOMMENDATION#3 HAPPY AGENTS EQUAL HAPPY CUSTOMERS

By ensuring the right employee interacts with the customer, and by empowering them with the resources and information they need to respond appropriately to the customer, AI technologies don't just improve the customer's experience, but also the employee's own experience. We can sum this up in what we can call the AI/Human Golden Triangle.



At the top of this triangle, the balance between the amount of AI and human involvement in each interaction will depend on the type of experience and on customer expectations.

As we've said the focus will be on bots or self-service solutions when the aim is speed and efficiency for fluid experiences without added value, and on human intervention, assisted by "invisible" technology, for operations with added value, where the goal is for employees to use empathy

and an understanding of the customer, to drive satisfaction.

DELIVERING A BETTER RESPONSE BY COMBINING AI AND HUMAN AGENTS IMPROVES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Delivering a better response by combining AI and human agents improves customer satisfaction and consequently the relationship between the consumer and the employee. Customers appreciate that they are being listened to and understood, and this makes the conversation more positive. In turn, this increases the agent's satisfaction and happiness. They therefore become more engaged, and move from work as a chore, to seeing it as a source of recognition, social connections and happiness.

Customer-facing staff are crucial to the relationship between the customer and the brand. If they are to bring satisfaction to customers, they must themselves be happy with their job.

By moving away from pre-written, stereotypical scripts, employees have the chance to show their personalities, and can interact naturally with customers, with technology becoming a tool that supports them. In short, technology can be restored to its proper place, serving humans and underpinning human relationships.



4 AREAS TO FOCUS ON TO DELIVER BALANCED AI AND HUMAN CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING A DIGITAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PROJECT

4 areas to focus on



In parallel with these recommendations around balancing AI technology and human-powered customer service brands should also focus on these areas if they are to successfully adopt AI and create a golden triangle that satisfies customers and staff alike:

1 - AUGMENT YOUR AGENTS

Nothing frustrates customers more than speaking to agents who cannot provide precise and consistent answers to their queries, generally because they don't have the right information to hand. Empathy and understanding will not be enough if agents don't have the knowledge they need to respond to customer questions.

Consequently, **brands must find a way of "augmenting" the human traits of agents using AI-based technology.** Agents will then have the support they need to be able **to focus more on customer conversations and solve complex problems.** Systems that automatically analyse online interactions, such as email or social media messages, and suggest relevant responses to agents not only help them deliver faster, more efficient service, but also equip them with the knowledge they need to answer customer queries.

2 - FOCUS ON EMOTION

Understanding what consumers want can be difficult, particularly on digital channels which lack the context of a face-to-face or telephone conversation. Consequently, consumers often complain that agents don't understand their problem and fail to identify or deal with factors such as anger or annoyance.

One of the roles of agents is to provide this human, emotion-based response, and their capabilities here can also be augmented through AI. By using techniques such as Natural Language Processing, conversations can be analysed to determine aspects such as context and emotion, enabling agents to respond accordingly with personalised, empathetic replies. This strengthens loyalty and gives the brand a more human face.

SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING A DIGITAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PROJECT

4 areas to focus on

3 - ENSURE THAT YOUR TEAMS HAVE THE RIGHT SKILLS

The move to **a mixed model pairing humans and technology means that agents will require new skills.** They will have to be more creative and autonomous, and capable of solving complex problems, while also demonstrating understanding and empathy with the customer and their needs. Add to this the ability to work as a team and to master technologies such as video chat and mobile applications and it is clear that the role and status of the agent will develop over time.

4 - MAKE THE CONVERSATIONAL PROCESS SEAMLESS

Customer experience is a conversation, rather than a single interaction. Consumers may want to move to non-automated interactions, because they have more detailed and specific queries or are not satisfied with the response received.

Therefore, it is vital that brands make these transitions between different channels, and between humans and technology, simple and seamless. That means passing on information in order to be able to offer consumers the response and experience they require, without them having to repeat themselves or put in extra effort.

Successfully delivering the best customer experience in the future will require a different approach to that used today. Brands will need to pair human resources and technology, with simple interactions handled automatically by bots, and AI supporting agents when they have more complex conversations with consumers. **Humans will remain at the heart of high-quality customer service - but only by making the best use of their strengths and using artificial intelligence to augment their skills.**



ABOUT EPTICA

Conversational, cognitive, and collaborative solutions for digital customer experience

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Eptica is a leading **European technology company** specialising in **intelligent platforms for digital customer experience**. Eptica provides **conversational and collaborative solutions** powered by AI.

Founded 16 years ago by Olivier Njamfa, Eptica supports brands to make digital **CX the key link in the value chain**, ensuring their customer service delivers value to consumers and across their business.

Globally, more than **450 organisations across all industries** rely on our solutions on all digital channels, including **self-service & knowledge base, email, chat and social media**. **We enable millions of individuals to engage in meaningful conversations with brands improving daily lives for everyone**. Customers include AXA, L'Occitane, Dixons Carphone, Crédit Agricole, Domestic & General, AirAsia, Hastings Direct, TUI, Debenhams, Capita and Ageas Insurance Solutions

Specialising in **Natural Language Processing (NLP)**, Eptica makes **the best use of AI and cognitive technologies for CX**, enabling brands to improve:

1 - Customer satisfaction

2 - Competitiveness:

Equipping organisations with bots that automate simple tasks and provide decision support tools to enhance agents, generating greater productivity and allowing agents to focus on more complex conversations and enabling sales

3 - Customer knowledge:

Generating customer intelligence that guide brands and their operations.

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