

Chatbots as part of an integrated customer service strategy

By Wynand Smit

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You can have all your communication channels lined up and ready to go, your agents trained to help via phone, email, SMS, web chat and via social media, but you could be missing a trick. One that could provide a cost saving to your company and quick resolution of enquiries from your customers: chatbots.



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Although chatbots have received a fair amount of media attention recently, the technology is still in its infancy when it comes to its effective application in South African businesses environments. Intrinsicly chatbots represent automation – self-service within a “human form”. This can offer a wide-range of benefits when it comes to facilitating and resolving customer queries efficiently and without the need of human involvement.

Currently, the most common application of this technology occurs when interactions are relatively simple – freeing up customer service teams to use their knowledge and training to resolve more complex queries.

The business case for chatbots

You may have an extensive contact centre or a smaller team, the fact remains that whenever customer service agents are engaging with customers directly, this takes time and costs money. Conversely, customers don’t always want to deal with a contact centre and the pain points that it can represent (such as being on hold or frequently transferred and having to repeat information), especially if all they want to do is to activate a service or the answers to some relatively simple questions.

It depends on the nature of your business – and, within that the reasons why your customers may interact. In sales or customer service, it can be reassuring to have human interaction, especially for your older customers who are more accustomed to using voice as a medium. On the other hand, younger consumers are adept at finding their way around mobile platforms, preferring the speed and ease with which they can get things done.

How to know if chatbots will be of value to you

To examine whether chatbots are going to be of benefit, examine the kinds of interactions taking place as well as their volume.

Are you dealing with thousands of simple enquiries daily, or are there fewer interactions that are more complex in nature? An example of complex interactions would be those with multiple touch points, including identity verification, confirmation procedures and contract handling, all of which may be governed by regulations or require using and interacting with multiple systems. In that case, agents are more likely to be used to facilitate such processes.

But if you do have huge volumes of simple interactions that could be handled effectively by a chatbot, then it can be integrated into your customer service strategy for ease of communication and to the benefit of your customers.

Efficiency, productivity at the heart of customer service

Efficiency and productivity are at the heart of the customer service department as they are what ensures that your company is maintaining the business-customer relationship and optimising the flow of work in the office. The outcome, when processes are optimised, is that of an enhanced customer experience, something that adds value to your business and contributes towards generating customer loyalty.

It's not a case of jumping on some bandwagon, but rather exploring what will be of benefit most to you and your customers and forging ahead with what best suits your business strategy.

ABOUT WYNAND SMIT

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