



The world as we know it is undergoing changes that will impact every facet of our lives -- business, medical, educational, and even our personal existence.

**The Three C's:
Communication, Customer Service, & Chatbots**
By I. Edmondson

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THE THREE C'S

COMMUNICATION,
CUSTOMER SERVICE,
& CHATBOTS

I. EDMONDSON

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This book details the author's personal experiences with and opinions about the changes that according to various reports have and are occurring in communication, customer service, and the use of chatbots in various aspects of the world.

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CHAPTER 1: THE KEYS TO CUSTOMER SERVICE SUCCESS

HOW WINNERS USE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

As it is for almost everything in today's society, artificial intelligence is now playing a part in customer service. Two-thirds of this generation expects—no, demands--real time customer service, and the cost for that service is rising at a rate never before known. For many companies, cost factors make the addition of already well-trained employees a non-option, so companies are now searching for alternative ways to meet that demand.

Many are now turning to “AI” to deliver the personalized service demanded because it can be used to increase the available service while reducing the cost of many aspects of that process. For example, a study conducted by McKinsey & Co. (a global management consulting firm) showed that in global banking, AI technologies were estimated to be able to deliver “up to one trillion dollars of additional services per year and thus revamped customer service accounts

thereby providing a major portion of the services needed.

As amazing as it may sound to those who have been part of the generations used to having their customer service delivered mainly by humans, "AI" may well be able to deliver better personalized service than was ever possible before and do so faster than when only humans were handling the process. Now, that doesn't mean that the personal approach won't be missed, but the speed of the response will, for many, make up for that loss.

A number of areas will need to be revamped in order to make it possible to provide a better level of customer service. The routine questions such as delivery dates, balances owed, and order status are among the frequently posed questions that can now be answered by Chatbots (an artificial intelligence developed to interactively collect or provide information to customers) -- the data needed can then be stored in internal systems for later use. When that is done, the human support staff can handle the more complex questions, and operational costs can be reduced.

True, the overall service will be less personalized, but, for the most part, customers are not as interested in personalization if they are getting their problems solved and their questions

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answered quickly. One of the greatest annoyances for most customers is a “long wait” before the desired service is given or the question is handled.

Also, there are definite financial benefits as far as the involved companies are concerned. When automation is used to update records, provide a proactive outreach to customers, or handle minor questions or problems, it not only improves efficiency but can also reduce costs. In such cases, not only are the customer's needs met more quickly and efficiently, but the companies probably save millions of dollars yearly in time-related costs. None of that can happen, however, unless there is training. Computers are nothing without that training. “We need people thinking about what the computer is going to do,” said Peter Blignaut, manager of pre-sales at SAP South Africa during a keynote address. “Machines don't learn from other machines; people must teach them.”



AI can be used to help in many ways. It can help increase efficiency and consistency and reduce the need for human trainers in some areas. However, it must always be remembered that in those instances where the needs must be clarified or glitches must be handled, machines cannot do the job!

Machine learning, which enables computers to learn from data and thus improve performance is fundamentally a product of human teaching. The decisions made by machines must be able to be understood by humans. Then there will be trust and support for promoting and using AI education to enhance lives while making sure that there is safety and that problems and complications are prevented.

So-called “machine learning” can make jobs easier to handle and, at the same time, it can provide better service for both clients or customers. This can be done because machine-learning can provide support by identifying common questions and providing appropriate responses, and like a well-trained, experienced agent, it can utilize prior results to help customers solve problems through self-service.

One of the most interesting of the new tools is Sentiment Analysis which makes it possible to see

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how a customer feels about the topic being discussed. What is truly amazing is the fact that there are tools that can even recognize when a customer is upset and can then notify someone who can handle the problem. The tools do this by analyzing the text of their messages using natural language processing (NLP) algorithms to identify patterns in the text that suggest that the user is upset; however, nothing is perfect, so the findings are not always verifiable. The goal is to ensure greater customer satisfaction, and the tools developed by companies such as Brandwatch, Hootsuite, NetBase, and Zoho are able to provide the needed analysis systems.

Since more and more companies are utilizing the services of “remote” employees, it was necessary to develop training programs that are a blend of classroom training, self-study programs and processes for appropriate assessment. Not all companies can do this, but those that can are finding that they are able to provide better customer service than they had been providing before. One of the major reasons for this positive outcome is that AI can now test dozens of possible situations and practice appropriate responses for each in order to ensure that the right responses are provided.

The surveys only need to provide a small amount of information in order for the staff to be able to understand how satisfied customers really are. In order for companies to predict what customers want and determine what they will want in the future, there is a need for what is called “predictive and prescriptive data.” Post-interactive data is useful, but it is based on the past, and that can’t be changed whereas when there is a real need, it requires that plans be based on future “expectations.” Then the appropriate adjustments and plans for the future can be made. Many companies are now using “predictive data” to forecast demand for millions of products and services, and they can make global predictions and target customers in seconds and use past purchases and browsing history to recommend products that might be of interest to users.

Andy Traba, the head of marketing for Customer Engagement Analytics at NICE, noted that when one company “raises the bar, expectation transfer” occurs among consumers in general and results in changes throughout the industry. It doesn’t really matter what the industry is, consumers prefer to deal with companies that are up-to-date and deliver the best personalized service – a service that is tailored to an individual customer by meeting his/her unique needs and preferences.

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Outstanding customer service is service that is tailored to the individual customer. At one time, such a service was only expected and delivered by the best companies -- often those were the ones that charged the highest prices. It was not expected from the "one size fits all" companies. However, now such service can and should be given by those companies, too, because AI and its related components can instantly analyze data making it possible to make suggestions based on customer needs and matched to the company or organization's products and services. So, now there is no reason for every customer not to receive service that truly meets his/her specific needs quickly and efficiently.

The related data has always been there, but there was no system that made it possible to analyze that data and plan and then act accordingly. According to Amanda Belamino, an Assistant Professor at William F. Harrah College of Hospitality at the University of Las Vegas, now AI solutions "are holistically built to elevate customer service solutions at every touchpoint."

Dr. Balmino pointed out that "The customers who do call may have complex needs that demand more time." She said that AI can analyze the content of the calls, pinpoint the reason, identify the

needs, and determine what must to be done in order to improve the customer's experience.

Is she right? Definitely! In fact, in 2020, a study was conducted by Aberdeen Research, and it was found that those companies that used AI actually had a 3.5 times greater increase in their customer satisfaction rate than those that didn't. "Today AI can learn from top performers and share information about what makes them so great. As a result, every employee can become a top performer." Of course, success demands that appropriate staff training be provided, that the successful approaches be emulated, that on-going studies be conducted, and the findings utilized. Success isn't the result of magic. It is the outcome of study, analysis, duplication, and application. Realizing this, Forbes compiled a list of twenty companies that provide excellent examples of personalization in customer experience. Five of those companies are Amazon, Apple, Costco, Chick-fil-A, and Trader Joe.

When the proper processes are used, they can provide the information needed to design training programs, set the standards needed for effective customer service, and determine employee and customer needs. According to McKinsey, "75% of online customers expect help within five minutes," and AI tools can be used 24-hours a day, 7 days a

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week to provide real-time help for customers and make it possible for companies to provide the quality of customer service that customers want which is instant and personalized. In light of the fact that one study done in 2019 found that the average American spends “a staggering 13 hours every year on hold, waiting for someone to attend to their queries” if a company sets up a system by which the customer can readily reach a “real” person, that company will probably stand out from most of its competitors and increase its business standing in its field.

Zendesk claims that “72% of the customers blame their bad customer service interaction on having to explain their problem to multiple people.” That situation not only irritates the customers, but since a number of them probably give up and go elsewhere, it probably also results in a loss of customers and revenue for the company involved.

Some companies have been slow to learn the importance of a customer service program that makes it possible to reach a “real” person when there is a need to do so, and according to customers, among such companies are -- United and Frontier Airlines, Bank of America, Wells Fargo. Citibank, Aetna. Humana, and Comcast and AT&T.

If Data by Gartner is right, then “more than two-thirds of companies compete mostly on the basis of customer service”, and there are steps that need to be taken to ensure that the service provided by a given company isn’t just equal to but exceeds the level of service provided by its competitors. Live chat and conversational robots can be available on a 24 x 7 basis and are able to engage in real-time interaction. They can also analyze, generate information, and respond to many of the customer’s requests and needs thereby saving the customer time and avoiding what might otherwise be a situation that is annoying to the customer and results in a loss for the company.

Because Chatbots can help improve a company’s performance by analyzing emails and even having conversations on social media, it is possible to determine what customers want, think, and feel about what the organization has to offer. The company then has the information it needs to make necessary, appropriate, and essential adjustments to that it can improve its service and the customers’ satisfaction. After all, when a company makes its customers happy, the employees are happier, the investors are happier, and, of course, revenues are bound to be higher! Research done by Bain & Company indicated that “Companies that excel in

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customer service grow revenues 4-8% above the market." Who wouldn't like that?

The Statistics Research Department conducted a survey and found that 40% of customers in the U.S. stopped doing business with a company due to poor customer service in 2020. A survey conducted by Qualtrics XM Institute found that more than 53% of the consumers have cut their spending with a company after encountering a bad experience. The same study found that businesses in general stand to lose \$4.7 trillion in customer spending due to poor customer experiences. In addition, in 2018, some 62% of the U.S. respondents stated that they had stopped doing business with a particular brand because of a poor customer experience.

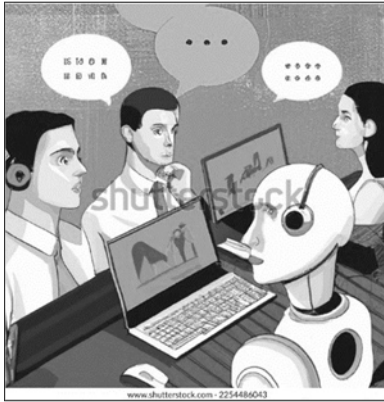
Customers want consistent, instant, and personalized service, and when it is provided, profits increase, and that makes it more likely that the customers will return and will also let others know about exceptional service. According to Forbes, brands that provide superior customer service bring in 5.7 times more revenue than those companies that fail to provide that level of service. Happy customers are every company's best form of advertising. People talk, and what they have to say goes a long way toward promoting company growth or lack thereof.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT ROLE DOES “AI PLAY?”

Studies have been conducted to determine how to effectively use AI to ensure success and outstanding customer service. It was found that when AI is used properly, interaction is more acceptable to customers and easier for staff because it improves the flow of work, handles requests quickly, and anticipates the needs of both the customer and the organization.

In addition, when properly used, AI makes the delivery of customer service better since then it is easier to deal with a customer's requests and provide personalized responses and help. In other words, AI helps streamline the work process and maximize an employee's ability to provide the service wanted. The result is a happy and satisfied customer.

The use of Chatbot's also makes it possible to respond more quickly than would otherwise be possible and that makes it easier to handle a greater number of requests.



Businessmen have always wanted to be able to predict the future and know ahead of time how customers are going to respond to given situations and what their preferences would be in relation to products and services. Companies that are now using AI to identify ahead of time the answers to those questions are able to plan more effectively than ever before.

An increasing number of companies are now using Chatbots to interpret problems and create the steps needed to resolve them. Concerns are then resolved more quickly and more easily than they ever were, and it is now possible to respond to requests more quickly than in the past. In some instances, the response is now on a 24/7 basis, thereby increasing the level of customer satisfaction. In order to be competitive, more and

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more companies are implementing that 24/7 response system, too.

Of course, Chatbots are not able to solve complex problems, but they can be used to solve minor ones. Also, AI can be used to identify situations that need a human to take over and solve the problem or handle the issue. One thing for which those companies making use of Chatbots need to remember is that although there may be an increasing desire to use them in more aspects of business, they are not going to satisfy any customer when more personalized support or help is needed or wanted.

Although it is possible to personalize emails and reduce response times by using Chatbots, there are some instances when they should NOT be used. It is important to remember that by using them, response time to a live chat message can be reduced to just a few seconds, and there are times when that is important to the customer and should definitely be an option that is considered and used when appropriate.

There has been a major shift to on-line shopping and all of the other forms of interactive service, and that means that a large percentage of customer interaction time is now being spent on the phone, sending a fax or a message. That

means that there is a definite need to reduce the interaction time in each instance. Chatbots can provide prompt answers and thereby reduce the time it takes to handle customer calls, and the customer is then provided with answers that are accurate and seem to be provided by a human. According to one expert, 85% of interactions could be handled this way. The problems that require human intervention are those that involve creativity, empathy, and critical thinking whereas those that can be solved by machines are those that involve data analysis and repetitive tasks.



According to a report from IBM, businesses spend “over \$1.3 trillion on 265 billion customer service calls each year.” A number of those calls probably involve questions that are simple to answer, and, since that is the case, a Chatbot might well be an excellent resource for those calling in. Chatbots could reduce costs for the company which could

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still provide the needed service and meet the customers' needs.

Besides, customers judge companies not only on the quality of their products but also on the service provided, and companies like Discount Tire, ThredUp, and Lululemon are considered to be highly responsive to customers and help customers resolve issues as soon as they occur. Companies that do that are the companies that are most likely to have the highest level of customer satisfaction, the best reputation, and the highest level of customer loyalty. All of that probably translates into the highest level of profits.

What some companies are ignoring is costing them dearly, but they don't seem to realize that. The automated answer that stops with a greeting and does not make it possible for the customer to reach a "live person" or even a Chatbot, to handle the issue, problem, or answer a question is not only annoying but costly. Many customers may choose to go elsewhere in cases such as those. In one area of California, the phone company (of all companies) has an automated answering device that doesn't even make it possible to leave a message in hopes of getting a return call. It goes without saying that customers are finding this particularly annoying, but what makes it even worse is that since there is no way to get help,

human or otherwise, it is impossible to pay a bill over the phone. In those instances where that is the only method that can be used (and that is the case for some customers), both parties are left in an untenable position. Then to make matters even worse, there is no way to even report the situation. Automation is only good when it works, and that requires good advance planning and on-going monitoring to ensure that it is working and that both the vendor and the customer are profiting from its existence.



Companies are also judged by the way the staff interacts with customers. The first step is to make certain that there is good internal service. Here are some suggestions on how to ensure that the best service is being provided.

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1. Determine what everyone needs in order to do their jobs better, and then make certain that they have it.
2. Make customer service a company priority.
3. Adopt innovative technology and focused strategies in all areas.
4. Respond quickly to all inquiries even if they don't seem important to you. Remember they are important to the person making them.
5. Listen to customer feedback and act on it. Then, let it be known that you did.
6. After you make changes, check with customers to get their reactions, and then make any other adjustments that are needed.
7. Remember some requests take longer than others and that the time needed should be provided.
8. If you can't meet a request, see if you can find out how to meet it or how it can be met, **AND LET THE CONCERNED PARTY KNOW WHAT IS GOING TO BE DONE!!**

Emails have become an important communication tool, and the way they are handled can have a major impact on a company's reputation. The companies that require that every customer's email be read and responded to are far more likely

to build a better bridge to their customers than those companies that don't do that. The process can be simplified by using AI to augment messaging, tag emails, and thereby ensure that each item is forwarded to the right office and the right person. Time is saved, the focus is right, and staff have the time needed to handle the problems that must be handled by humans.

Many people would prefer to solve problems themselves, and properly trained or programmed AI can play a major role in that process. It can analyze the data provided and recommend the products and services that are best suited to the identified issues and preferences, and even analyze factors such as weather and locale that might be important considerations. In other words, as a result of this analytical process, solutions can be found, and the needed information forwarded directly to the concerned party. It's possible that part of the time all of this can be done without human intervention, but if more information is needed, it's possible to gather the data and move toward a solution without further ado.

Some AIs have been provided with "predictive insight" and can review what they "know" about the products and services provided, the inventory on hand, and how it relates to the customer's identified needs. They can then recommend the

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most appropriate product/s or service/s and help by providing insight into what might happen in the future. Predictive analytics can also be used for risk assessment, fraud detection, and customer retention. In some instances, AI has been given “emotions,” and when that is the case, the customer’s experience is generally far more satisfactory than it otherwise would be.

Because AI is equipped to analyze and respond to questions that streamline the decision-making process, the resolution can frequently be quick. When that isn’t the case, the customer can be “handed over” to a live person who can then handle the issue. In those companies that do not employ “AI,” it is estimated that about 52% of the customers hang up because of the time they are on hold, their failure to get clear directions or helpful answers, or because there was no timely resolution to their problem or answers to their questions.



Those companies that plan ahead, provide the kind of help and the answers needed by their customers, personalize, find solutions, make sound recommendations, and do all of that without long delays, are able to free humans to focus on the complex tasks and provide the service/s that will keep bringing customers back. One of key ways to ensure that customers are satisfied with the service and products provided by your company is to make certain that there is no reason for the most common customer complaints to occur, and by planning ahead you can ensure that the best possible customer service is delivered.

AVOID:

1. Inferior products or service.
2. Delivery issues.
3. Indifferent customer service.
4. Products being out of stock.
5. Broken or defective products.
6. The bouncing of clients from line to line with no resolution provided.
7. Long, hold periods.
8. Multiple transfers before the right party is (if ever) reached.
9. A situation when there is no one who can handle a problem or issue.

ENSURE:

1. That customer service is a key company goal.
2. That good internal customer service is provided.
3. That you provide what every employee needs in order to do the best job possible.
4. That you plan ahead and prevent problems before they start.
5. That the best possible customer service and complaint handling process is used and that you make sure that the call routing process is well planned and well executed.
6. That every customer is greeted warmly in a personalized manner.
7. That inquiries and calls are handled knowledgeably and quickly.
8. That customer feedback is solicited, taken seriously, acted upon, and the customer/s notified of corrections and changes.
9. That you remember your customers and remember their preferences, and provide for them whenever possible.



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