ARTIFICIAL SOLUTIONS

The Future of Customer Engagement and the Role of the Intelligent Digital Assistant
White Paper

Executive summary

Customer self-service is no longer a cost cutting exercise, but a key differentiator that will enable retailers to increase customer engagement. Research by Zendesk found that 91% of customers would use an online resource if it were available and met their needs[1]. This increase is vindicated by the facts that a whopping 90% of consumers expect a brand to offer self-service channels[2]. However, changes in customers' expectations and businesses' desire to continually update product offerings means that simply building an online FAQ is no longer enough.

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The desire to succeed has caused an increase in complexity for businesses, both within the structure of an organization and the products and services that they sell. However 80% of contact centers are already aware that their current systems will not meet future consumer service requirements. From a customer engagement standpoint, this is disastrous, when two-thirds of their customers have already raised their expectations in regards to the service they receive[2] .

In order to meet changing consumer demands have built increasingly complex websites to market and support their offering, but in doing so have obscured the ability for customers to access that information quickly and easily. The end result is customers looking, and possibly purchasing, from another company that is able to meet their needs of instant access to information and resolution.

Given that demand for service via chatbots, social media channels and personal messaging apps is skyrocketing, this points to a clear requirement for enterprises to develop a omnichannel self-service communications strategy.

This White Paper looks at how customer needs are evolving and how intelligent digital assistants can enable enterprises to meet customer service demands now and in the future.

Evolving customer needs

Customers' expectations of how they should be able to interact with businesses have changed dramatically in the last few years. Driven by an increasingly connected world that knows no time constraints, consumers are demanding the same access to a business's service and support operations.

Forrester says that 73% of consumers place valuing their time as the most important thing a company can do in customer service[4].

Whether it's to clarify garment sizing before purchase or to check an item's stock availability, there are three key aspects customers are looking for: speed, 24/7 availability and the right answer – first time. An Economist report on customer service trends for 2020 discovered that speed has become a competitive differentiator. Firms that will be able to help their customers save time will leverage this to stand out from their rivals[5].

90% of people in an independent survey commissioned by Artificial Solutions said they wanted to access information immediately[6]. Whilst call centers are open increasingly longer hours, the cost versus usage of enabling them twenty four hours a day is too much for most organizations to justify. Driving customers online to

resolve their own queries is an obvious solution. In addition, customers who are fed up navigating IVR systems and waiting for an interminable amount of time to talk to someone, only to distrust the answer an advisor gives, are already turning to the internet themselves for information.

In support of this, leading technology analysts Gartner are predicting that by 2018, more than 50% of organizations will redirect their investments to customer experience innovations, which will doubtless include many self-service options[7].

However, this simple solution falls down at the first hurdle as many websites today are so complex that finding information can be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Unfortunately, that leads directly to lost profit, as 62% of global consumers state they will withdraw their custom from a brand or organization if they receive poor customer service[8] - which includes being able to find the information they are seeking.
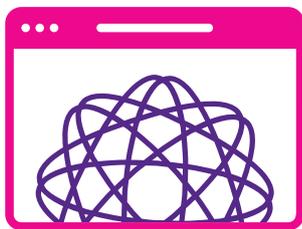
Simplifying website complexity

Customers are typically presented with two choices of finding information on a website, FAQs and or a static search facility. Unfortunately, these static options now rank far below consumers' preferred options of interactive web or mobile self service (including digital assitants), as well as live chat and speech-enabled service channels.

It is self-evident that a lack of knowledge and up to date information renders most FAQs obsolete before they have even had a chance to be indexed by Google. Some companies have tried to overcome this by introducing wikis or forums designed to allow users to help each other, but frequently they just feed the misinformation machine leaving users more frustrated and distrusting of other information they then receive, even from a company official.

That said, despite the fact that some organizations have extensive knowledge bases that are reasonably up to date they can still fail because the search facility relies on the user asking the question in the way that the company expects. Don't use the correct terminology, or place emphasis on the wrong word and suddenly 'result relevance' couldn't be further from the truth.

Digital online assistants enable enterprises to overcome both of these issues. Able to understand and respond using natural language the answer is no longer based on keywords, but a genuine understanding of what the customer is asking. Truly intelligent, digital assistants are even able to recognize when an important piece of information is missing and ask the customer to supply it.

Not only can they resolve queries, answer questions, provide links to information or resources, integrated into legacy systems they can log issues, update customer databases and much more – solving customer issues and queries effortlessly, efficiently and cost-effectively.

An easy to use interface makes updating the information a simple task for business users, removing the reliance on waiting for IT staff or technical experts, ensuring that the digital assistant is always up to date. In addition, advanced analytics and reporting tools make it easy to see where online knowledge is lacking or needs improvement.

Web self-service can have up to an 80% reduction in calls to the call center

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With over a third of survey respondents shockingly claiming that they would rather "clean the toilet" than be forced to phone a call center[8], it's easy to see why organizations want to harness the power of online digital assistants. But it's not just customers that can benefit from a system that delivers easy access to the right answer, fast.

Empowering call center staff
Intelligent digital assistants are increasingly being used by call center staff themselves to answer queries more quickly. Whilst some use the agent publically available on their website, other organizations have purposely built their agent for internal use in order to streamline business processes.

Using BPM techniques in the front office to formalize agent actions in an effort to standardize service delivery, minimize agent training times, ensure regulatory and company policy compliance, and control costs is well-known business tool. It is particularly appropriate in enterprises where there are very high volumes of products needing frequent attention, or where there are large-scale campaigns which have a big impact on the normal level of traffic to the site. An internal digital assistant helps support training and reduces the need for advisors to confer with more experienced employees on simple matters. The end result is that call center staff are able to answer calls faster and see a decrease in second call resolutions. All this leads to increased customer engagement.
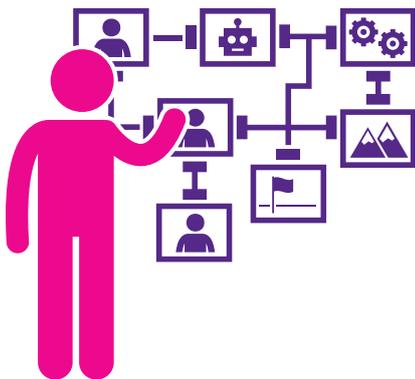
The technological future
Customers are already highly demanding of technology. No longer willing to allow brands to dictate when or where communication takes place, they want to be able to access information morning, noon and night, wherever they are and with whatever device they chose.

Forbes.com's Ten Customer Service and Customer Experience Trends report indicates several increasing areas of technology focus - Artificial Intelligence and intelligent digital assistants are one area specifically mentioned, while in more general terms, personalization and the ability to manipulate and use big data are also noted in their report[9].

Secondly, with the advent of Siri, Alexa, Google Home and the myriad other voice-enabled devices now readily available off the shelf, speech-recognition is finally becoming mainstream. However most of these devices falter at the first sign of a real conversation beyond instructing it to perform a specific task or set a reminder.

In contrast, intelligent digital assistants powered by natural language interaction (NLI) picks up the deficit in speech recognition by utilizing powerful linguistic libraries and applying advanced reasoning rules, including context and dialogue history, to add intelligence to a conversation. The result is a free format, natural language conversation where the mobile device is able to understand and carry out the requests of the user.

In the coming years, NLI and AI-based channels will be at the forefront of customer engagement strategies. The most successful enterprises will adopt an omnichannel, agnostic approach to the channels, devices and operating systems they select to deliver this, leaving them with a clear market advantage over those who falter.

Teneo

The Teneo Platform Solution

We believe Teneo, in the form of a Natural Language Interaction (NLI) powered digital assistant, could help you dramatically improve customer engagement, provide unprecedented levels of customer insight and significantly reduce costs.

Teneo-based applications are humanlike, intelligent and capable, available across combination of any web, mobile, wearable or other smart device and in any language. The Teneo platform presents an opportunity to actively engage with your customer and drive positive changes in their behavior, for example by automatically highlighting new products relevant to their previous browsing or purchases, or supporting the resolution of issues using online channels instead of the call center or email channel.

Powered by the patented Teneo Interaction Engine, and capable of holding humanlike, intelligent, two-way conversations, it ensures an exceptional customer experience, backed up by sophisticated analytics and the ultimate, user-friendly knowledge management tool.

Our capability is unique because we are the only vendor that can offer:
- Enhanced customer support, higher customer satisfaction levels and significantly lowered costs.
- Provision of personal, individualized and expert service to every customer, regardless of channel, time or geography, without the overhead of a live agent.
- A cross-platform, multi-device and multi-lingual service based on one implementation, meaning you can communicate with your customer across any channel or language.
- Access to Teneo Studio, enabling you to quickly and easily build and maintain complex NLI solutions using our ground-breaking visual flowchart-based user interface.
- Immediate coverage for 35 languages out of the box.
- A solution that can be managed in-house, removing any dependency on third party services.
- The advantage of over 15 years' experience and a proven track record of addressing both the technical and psychological challenges of automated dialogue-based interactions.
- The choice of hosted SaaS/cloud deployment or support for on-premise, internally hosted solutions.
- The ability to integrate with back-end systems for full customer service..

Contact us now to discuss how the Teneo Platform can help your organization deliver significantly improved customer engagement.

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5. https://www.eiuperspectives.economist.com/marketing/service-2020
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7. http://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/3072017
8. 2015 Global State of Multichannel Customer Service Report
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About Artificial Solutions

Artificial Solutions® is the leading specialist in Natural Language Interaction (NLI). The company's patented technology enables people to converse with applications and services running on computers, mobiles, wearables and other electronic devices in a humanlike, intelligent manner.

Called Teneo, it is the first complete platform to enable enterprises to rapidly develop and analyze natural language applications that embrace artificial intelligence through the use of machine learning and implicit personalization.

Teneo allows business users and developers to collaborate on creating sophisticated natural language applications in record time that run on any operating system, in 35 languages, without the need for specialist linguistic skills. Teneo also unlocks the knowledge held in immense volumes of natural language conversations, delivering unprecedented levels of big data insight and true 'voice of your customer' understanding.

Artificial Solutions' technology is deployed by hundreds of public and private sector organizations and used by millions of people. For more information visit **www.artificial-solutions.com**