

CASE STUDY

ARTIFICIAL SOLUTIONS ENABLES IKEA TO SELF-SERVE ASK ANNA

FROM A SIMPLE CONCEPT CREATED IN SOUTHERN SWEDEN IN THE LATE 1940S, THE IKEA TRADEMARK NOW REPRESENTS THE WORLD'S LEADING HOME FURNISHINGS BRAND THAT HAS OVER 330 STORES IN 40 COUNTRIES AND NEARLY 154,000 CO-WORKERS.

Renowned for its self-service ethos to keep costs down for both the company and its customers, IKEA has implemented new technology from Artificial Solutions, enabling it to be in total control of the development of Ask Anna, IKEA's virtual assistant.

Ask Anna is one of IKEA's most versatile employees. Developed in conjunction with Artificial Solutions over the last nine years, Ask Anna converses in 21 languages and assists customers on IKEA's website. With over 1 billion website visits in the past year and 20% of visitors asking for Ask Anna's help she is extremely busy, so, like every good employee, Ask Anna needs constant training to remain productive.



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Ask Anna helps IKEA customers around the world.



IKEA desired a level of autonomy over Ask Anna to help facilitate faster updates and lower maintenance costs. At the same time the company also required additional enhancements to Ask Anna to deliver a better customer experience for those visiting the IKEA website, combined with the ability for Ask Anna to provide sales help and advice to customers.

“We needed to create a good basic level for all of our countries to benefit from Anna and take the ownership upon ourselves to drive down the cost of maintenance,” explains Evangelia Koutountzas, Global Customer Relations Manager of IKEA Global Retail. “For us, the idea of ownership was important in order to drive the focus. We also wanted to ensure that we were maximizing our self-service and automation potential to enable us to improve the level of service for our customers. This way they can access the right information as quickly as possible and not have to divert to contacting IKEA through other channels.”

IKEA now maintains Ask Anna using Teneo Studio, the advanced software tool from Artificial Solutions that enables IKEA staff in each individual country to work with complex dialog flows and structures, in a graphical, easy to understand flowchart format. Using Teneo Studio they can make changes, updates and enhancements as frequently as needed.

Multiple users can work on the same projects through powerful access rights and workflows, whilst master-branch structures allow projects to be deployed and managed on a global scale in many different geographies and languages.

In addition, Ask Anna is now connected to all of IKEA’s products, allowing her to answer any questions at a moment’s notice delivering the results in an extended product view. For example, ask Anna about sofas and she will offer a list of options to narrow the choice such as size, color or price, from here thumbnails of all available products will be displayed in a scrollable format, enabling the user to click on any product that catches their eye.

Ask Anna also helps IKEA cross-sell by recommending other complementary items or suggesting alternative products that are similar.

Should customers require help after their purchase such as a query over a missing part or care instructions for an item, Ask Anna can help them too and even order the missing item. “I believe that of all of Anna’s new features, users will appreciate the extended product view window the most. It provides relevant information in a concise visual and allows users to get a quick and appropriate overview of the products they are looking for in a simple way,” continues Evangelia.



With over 1 billion website visits in the past year, Ask Anna is extremely busy

Ask Anna is extremely intelligent; she understands the context of conversations and unlike many virtual assistants has a memory for details. For example, ask Anna for store opening hours and she will ask which store if the information has not yet been provided. Ask about another store and she will remember that you wanted to know about opening hours.

Ask who the manager is and knows which store was being discussed automatically.

With such an international presence, her extensive language capabilities is an important element for IKEA. Using Teneo Studio it is now possible for Ask Anna to be updated locally enabling IKEA employees to adapt Anna's responses to reflect local customs.

It allows all countries, regardless of their market size, the ability to make their Ask Anna the best that she can be providing they invest the time and resources to keep her updated and relevant. Evangelia believes that without Ask Anna's assistance IKEA would be experiencing a larger number of calls, emails and chats being handled by the individual country contact centers leading to an increased pressure on live agents.

Evangelia concludes, "Working with Artificial Solutions has been a positive experience for me. They have always had the interest of IKEA in mind and are willing to listen and work together to innovate and improve the business. They are always honest in their approach and interactions, creating a partnership where both parties have the same end goal in mind; to improve the customer experience.

For other organizations looking to implement a virtual assistant for the first time or wanting to improve their current offering I would suggest being clear with their internal organizations about the associated resource commitment. Then I would recommend working with Artificial Solutions to create a master structure that is consistent even in a multi-country/lingual environment, ensuring that every effort is made to continue to develop its knowledge for consistency's sake."

Get in touch with us for more information.

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