

TARKENTON

IDEAS AT WORK

Transforming Customer Care: AI's New Role in Your Business

Takeaways

- AI is most suited to handle rule-based tasks and decisions based on data
- Don't use AI as a roadblock between your customers and service team
- Encourage your staff to see AI as an empowering tool, not a replacement

Some new technologies come along and impact almost everything we do. The internet – and especially search engines like Google – were like that, giving us access to people and information we'd never had. The smartphone was like that, too, putting information right in our hands like never before.

Now, the way AI has skyrocketed in the past 18 months is another of those major changes. It's touching so many things – and businesses are testing the limits to see how much it can do and how far it can go. The customer service world is no exception.

As this article from our Director of Operations points out, right now the greatest benefit from your business is using technology like AI to supercharge your team. Read on!



Jim Robertson

Transforming Customer Care: AI's New Role in Your Business



We've all experienced the frustration of an automated phone tree that doesn't solve your problem, the website that makes it impossible to reach a live person, or the AI chatbot that offers only three choices, none of which is the reason you need help. For many customers, AI has come to represent the opposite of customer service; it sends a signal that the company has prioritized saving money over serving their customers.

But AI is not the Big Bad Wolf of customer service. In fact, used wisely, AI can improve customer satisfaction, motivate your customer service staff, and fuel your company's growth. The key is to reframe how you are thinking about AI. Rather than a replacement for humans, AI is a tool to free your staff from tasks that are either too menial or too time-consuming. By integrating AI strategically, your live customer service reps can become true problem solvers and loyalty builders.

Smart Integration Increases Customer Satisfaction

Here are six areas for strategically integrating AI into the customer service function of your business:

1. Basic, repetitive tasks.

Updating an address or other contact information, getting your company's mailing address or directions, confirming a payment due or payment received...these are functions that can easily be handed by AI.

2. Triage for high call volume.

People don't like automated phone trees, but they also don't like waiting on hold. Using AI, you can design your phone tree to reduce wait times by shunting calls to the right department, the right solution, and even a specific person. A well-designed phone tree will make sure that questions easily answered by a bot are channeled to the job, while more complex questions are sent to a live rep.

3. Analyzing huge quantities of data to identify trends.

You want your customer service team members talking to customers, not poring through reports. AI can distill data from all customer interactions and help your business spot recurring problems as well as opportunities for new sales.

4. More personalized service.

Yes, AI can help deliver more personalized service, such as by instantly matching up a caller with the live rep who has particular expertise in the issue your customer is calling about, or even routing the caller to personnel they have talked to in the past. If a customer has already had a positive experience with a customer representative, AI knows that, and can re-route them to that same person. (AI also knows if a caller had a poor experience, and can avoid sending them to the same rep next time.)

5. Relevant data at your team's fingertips.

Because AI can digest and analyze enormous amounts of data instantly, it can also make sure that a customer's history is immediately on screen when they are linked to a live rep. This equips your reps to be better problem solvers for your customers.

6. Quicker and more personalized follow-up.

Thanks to AI's ability to "take notes" on a call (not just provide a transcript), your customer service team can easily see the highlights of a call and any next steps promised on the call. AI can also compose a follow-up email that goes beyond the generic "thank you for contacting us" and refers specifically to what was discussed on the call.



The Four AI Minefields

When AI is a strategic complement to live customer service, you have the perfect marriage of personalization and efficiency. But used poorly, AI can severely harm your business. Here are four traps to avoid:

1. Don't try and trick your customers into thinking they are talking (or online chatting) to a live person when they are not. Your customer cannot be fooled. They will know when it's AI and they will know when it is a human.

2. Make sure your AI is not a roadblock between your customer and your live reps. Always provide an easy way for customers to opt out of the bot and reach a live person.

3. Language is still very human. For instance, AI can analyze thousands of calls and identify instances when a customer seemed upset or had a negative interaction. However, AI lacks the ability to analyze the tone of voice and nuances of how language is used. For example, some customers may use more “colorful” language regularly, which may get flagged by your AI as a poor interaction even if the client was happy and satisfied.

4. AI messages still need review. While it's a great time-saver for AI to compose a response to your customers after an interaction, it's still important for a human to review that response to make sure AI “got it right.” The good news is, as you review and correct these messages, AI will learn, and over time, you will need fewer edits – allowing your associates to cover more ground.

Getting Your Staff to Love AI

When AI is a strategic complement to live customer service, you have the perfect marriage of personalization and efficiency. But used poorly, AI can severely harm your business. Here are three tips to help you avoid common pitfalls and traps of AI:



1. Reassure your staff.

As the capabilities of AI become more apparent, your team members may become concerned they'll be replaced. This mindset then affects their relationship with your customers. Who can focus on the day-to-day if you think your job is on the line? So be sure to explain your philosophy with your team. AI provides efficiency, but it lacks emotional intelligence. AI cannot match the empathy and compassion a person can provide to a customer in need. It can follow the rules at lightning speed, but it cannot make judgments about when to make an exception to the rules. That's where people come in, where people are essential to make the business thrive.

2. Train your staff.

Train your staff. To optimize integration, you have to teach and empower your team to use the AI tools. Your employees may not know AI can actually help them do their job. Show them how to use AI to help them interact with customers.

3. Challenge your team to find new ways to use AI.

For instance, through an organic interaction, one of your customer representatives might come up with a solution to a common problem that's bothering other customers too. Can that solution be converted into an AI Bot to help future customers more quickly? Your customers win, and your team member feels empowered. Plus, they do not have to answer the same question over-and-over again!

Personalization and efficiency aren't natural partners. But when you use AI wisely, you can achieve both. Doing so will not only strengthen your team, it will help grow your business.



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Anna Grantham serves as a liaison between Tarkenton and our partners for ongoing service, product, and growth initiatives, and manages day-to-day operations within Tarkenton, including the support team. She also leads partner sales and service team trainings, and provides internal team training on new initiatives. Anna joined the Tarkenton team in 2020, after serving as a public school educator for 7 years, and holds a Bachelor's of Science in Biology, as well as a Master's degree in Instructional Technology and Design.