



IMPLEMENTING AI IN THE CONTACT CENTRE

5 Key Considerations

AI is set to revolutionise the world of customer engagement. IHS Markit predicts that in 2017 there were already over 4 billion consumer devices with AI-powered digital assistants, set to grow to 7 billion by 2020; meanwhile Gartner predicts that by 2020, 85% of customer interactions will be managed without a human.

Some contact centres and customer engagement estates are already augmenting their voice and digital channels with AI-powered interfaces, such as chatbots and Virtual Assistants, whereas others, particularly in spaces such as utilities and travel, use a combination of data integration with multi-channel automated contact tools to handle routine enquiries. However, despite the overwhelming statistics and forecasts, many organisations are still considering how best to prepare their contact estates for the onset of AI.

How can these capabilities be implemented? What will the costs be? What will the impact on the workforce be? And which customer benefits will actually be realised?

AI offers new possibilities across a wide range of customer contact functions, from delivering mass-personalised service supported by continual cognitive learning, through to automating large volumes of omni-channel contacts. But implementing a long-term strategy to make the most of AI within the contact centre will be a balancing act, revolving around five key considerations:

1

What does the customer want?

2

How do I currently utilise automation?

3

What about the workforce?

4

How do I choose an AI solution, and how do I go about implementing it?

5

Have I planned for the future?

What does the customer want?

Have you researched your customer base and their preferences? Research indicates varying levels of customer interest in AI-based interfaces, in some instances with as few as 12% of people reporting a preference for interactions with AI over humans. While AI can be immediately applicable in certain verticals and business environments, such as quickly connecting customers to information such as travel times, it may not be universally welcomed by your own consumers, at least in the immediate term. For example, more complex enquiries such as insurance or even healthcare, particularly for an older audience, may still be best handled by a human.

How do I currently utilise automation?

Automation has long had a place in many customer contact environments, from simple IVR (Interactive Voice Response) phone interfaces through to digital responses, such as web search and automated email & SMS. Investing in AI for its own sake to replace existing automation technologies which have been proven to be effective is not necessarily the best step forward. Instead, consider how your existing services could be improved – would machine learning behind an automated voice solution help to incrementally optimise customer experience?

What about the workforce?

A persistent concern for staff is the potential for AI to replace thousands of jobs within the next few years. As AI becomes more intelligent and cognitive learning more established, AI-based solutions will continue to transcend routine enquiries such as returning travel information through to more complicated interactions, such as healthcare diagnoses. This can either be seen as a cost-cutting exercise, or alternatively an opportunity to make the most of the unique skills and knowledge of your workforce. Could the web chat function be replaced with an intelligent chatbot, and could the web chat agents use their specialist knowledge on other channels, such as social media or even complex enquiry handling on email or voice? Could AI operate as an increasingly more effective front end, but become adept at passing over enquiries to experienced team members at the most appropriate time in the engagement?

How do I choose an AI solution, and how do I go about implementing it?

There is already a wide range of AI options for various functions, with high-profile examples including Natural Language Processing (NLP) solutions. The best option may be difficult to discern – but you can look to contact centre technology providers experienced in AI, particularly those offering platforms which interface to multiple AI solutions. In this way, you can use a consultative approach to select the best option to deliver the best results for you, rather than proceeding down a path that may not provide the outcomes you need. Contact centre vendors, especially of cloud solutions, which offer integration options can quickly provide a bridge between the functionality you have and the AI capabilities you need, or can deliver an end-to-end AI package through a cloud-based model which is customised to your requirements.

Have I planned for the future?

AI's starring role in the future of customer contact can seem all but an inevitability. But there are numerous nuances to consider when planning for its arrival – while your customer base may be less receptive today, the rapid speed of development of AI means that the technology may be far better able to fulfil your complex needs within just a year or two. Furthermore, as consumers become more accustomed to these sorts of interfaces, so too will their appetites and expectations increase. Long-term planning, whether considering AI now or AI later, should always leave room to bring in new innovations as and when they become ready. To ensure you are prepared to bring in new features, you can again look towards evergreen cloud-based contact centre and integration technology, which inherently has the ability to adapt to new developments and roll out new connectors to third-party systems. Moving to this open technology de-risks your future AI and contact centre planning, giving you the option to introduce functionality as and when you need it, rather than having to react late to a new innovation and losing precious competitive ground.



contentguru.com



sales@contentguru.com



@cgchirp



Content Guru Ltd



+44 (0)1344 852 350



Redwood Technologies Group