ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: FRIEND OR FOE?

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How AI is altering the customer experience as we know it.

BY Alyssa Pitura, Execs In The Know

According to 2016 statistics from Excelacom, in an Internet minute there are 701,389 Facebook log-ins, 347,222 tweets, 2.4 million Google searches, 150 million emails sent, and 527,760 photos shared on Snapchat. We live in a digital world and have seen a shift from consumer dependence and preference for traditional care to more interactive and digital channels. This will only continue to deepen and change further with the new developments we're seeing in artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a subfield of computer science focusing on the theory and development of machines (computers) to perform work that, under normal conditions, would require human intelligence. AI has been around for decades, but over the past few years, it has gained momentum and has become increasingly sophisticated.

Apple's personal assistant Siri is just a click (or voice command) away at all times on our iPhones. IBM's super computer Watson used cognitive technology and machine learning to destroy the competition on "Jeopardy" a few years back, and more recently, to help doctors diagnose some of the most rare and complex illnesses.

Unfortunately, the knee-jerk reaction for many when it comes to AI is fear. There is the prediction that 5.1 million jobs could be lost over the next five years in the 15 global leading economies due to further developments with robots and AI (World Economic Forum, January 2016). Even Elon Musk, SolarCity, Tesla and SpaceX founder and CEO, recently predicted that, as more and more jobs are replaced by automated technology, there's a good chance that we'll end up with universal basic income in order to get by (CNBC, November 2016).

Love it or hate it, AI is here—and many of your competitors are already using it or developing it for use in the near future. TrendWatching's Global Trend Briefing *Autonomania!* stated: "As professionals, you don't have months to figure this all out, because technology that grows smarter by the day is *already* reframing YOUR customers' expectations." Apple's Siri claims to have voice recognition now at 95% accuracy and Facebook's DeepFace recognizes faces with a 97% success rate. The longer that you wait to adapt, the further you'll lag behind the competition.

Once we get past the uncertainty that AI creates, it's easy to see that this new wave of advancement truly is magical and exciting. The possibilities really are endless to how AI can be used, especially when it comes to the customer experience.

Inspired by the numerous examples listed in TrendWatching's *Autonomania!*, here are four benefits to working AI into your customer experience strategy.

1 Convenience

Convenience is a big part of customer satisfaction, with low-effort experiences often being the highest rated. There are numerous areas of opportunity to increase convenience in the customer journey of existing products and services, and countless examples in our lives that most wish they could outsource.

Many love to travel, but hate the planning that goes into it. Research from GoodThink in 2013 found that 74% of consumers found the most stressful aspect of travel to be figuring out the details. To reduce the hassle, Google launched Google Trips, a vacation planning app that assists with everything from reservations, to suggested itineraries, maps and more.

Possibly the worst (or most hilarious) example of AI to outsource a task we want to avoid is Ghostbot for Burner—the Burner text-messaging bot that helps you "ghost" away from fleeting relationships without the emotional baggage. Why break up with someone when a robot will do it for you?

2 Speed

These days everyone is busy and time is the new currency. We never seem to have enough of it. Another area of opportunity to use AI to improve the customer experience is to shorten the customer journey or make the overall experience more efficient.

Gone are the days that you have to wait in line or communicate with your insurance broker in person or on the phone. U.S.-based online car insurance company Insurify has created a virtual insurance agent (in beta) called Evia. By texting in a picture of your license plate, Evia can communicate with customers via SMS to send quotes and policy recommendations.

Uber, the on-demand location-based app that allows consumers an alternative to the standard taxi, and which is already all about ensuring that customers' wait times are limited, has taken things one step further. In September, they announced a pilot in Pittsburgh for their new Self-Driving Uber. A statement from Anthony Levandowski, founder and VP of Self-Driving Technology at Uber, said, "We know that self-driving Ubers have enormous potential to further our mission and improve society: reducing the number of traffic accidents, which today kill 1.3 million people a year; freeing up the 20% of space in cities currently used to park the world's billion-plus cars; and cutting congestion, which wastes trillions of hours every year."

3 Utilizing Feedback and Emotional Intelligence

Big data, customer feedback and research are insightful, useful and can give you an edge over the competition to personalize an experience—that is, if you're using them to make improvements or changes.

20th Century Fox recently teamed up with IBM's Watson to create a trailer for their new sci-fi movie "Morgan." Through machine learning, Watson was able to analyze hundreds of trailers to find out what makes audiences react or respond on an emotional level. It was then able to compile the best pieces of the movie for the trailer, and while a human editor still took part in the final stages, it shortened the typical creation process for a trailer to 24 hours, as opposed to 10 to 30 days. Not only shortening the process, but using data to create the most effective piece of work.

IntelligentX Brewing Company launched a beer this year that is literally brewed using artificial intelligence. "The U.K.-based company utilizes an Automated Brewing Intelligence algorithm to develop recipes and collects consumer feedback via a Facebook Messenger bot. Data received is then used by IntelligentX to adjust beer recipes and brewing methods" (TrendWatching *Autonomania!*).

4 Impacts the Bottomline

Unique users of digital virtual assistants are set to rise from 290 million in 2015 to 1.8 billion worldwide by 2021 (Tractica, August 2016). More and more customers are demanding an increase in self-service, automated options to help them solve their issues and answer their questions. Not only is this often more convenient and can save the customer time, but can also save brands money by minimizing the number of live agents required at a given time.

Chatbots are virtual agents that are trained (based on predetermined rules or machine learning) to have human-like interactions with customers. They can be used to solve basic or complex issues, depending on the intended use and creation of the bot. Chatbots can help to free up live agents, allowing them to deal with more complex issues or deal with customers who prefer to communicate in a different channel (e.g., over the phone).

AI can help in making the customer experience more convenient, efficient, personalized and lower overall costs. Most importantly, implementing AI does not have to be a distant dream. Start by analyzing your customer journey. Find areas of opportunity to decrease customer effort or automate mundane tasks for your customers. Putting customer data to good use can help to personalize and enrich the experience with a wealth of information that may not be possible through a human interaction. The upfront investment may be steep, but long-term could be the best investment you ever made.

Technology has shifted greatly before and will continue to do so as time passes and society evolves. We have adapted before and we will again now to embrace this new wave of artificial intelligence. ⊛

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