aquant

Beyond Chatbots

11 ways AI elevates service

E-BOOK

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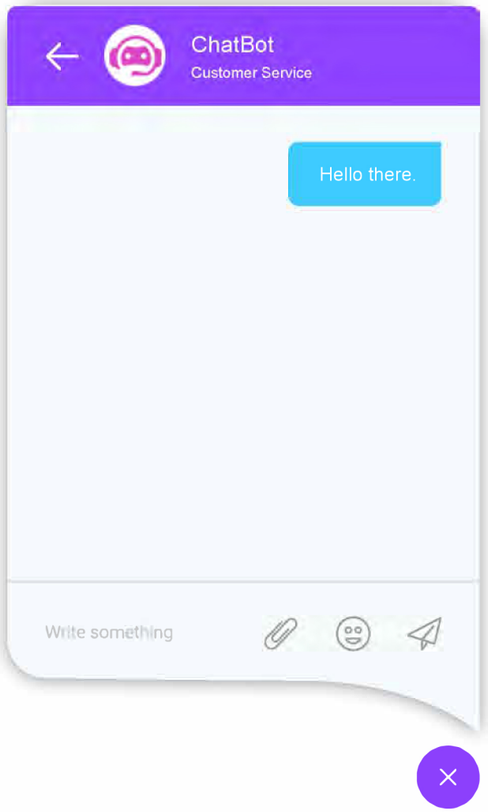
INTRODUCTION

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS TRANSFORMING CUSTOMER SERVICE.



Artificial intelligence is transforming customer service. Many companies have embraced AI and machine learning to automate service functions and drive more efficient resolution of customer issues. Recent research shows that the use of AI by customer service teams is projected to increase by 143 percent through 2020[1] .

Still, current implementations of AI are falling short of the vision. Frustrating interactions with chat bots and voice-assisted technology leave customers longing to connect with real people who can give them the right answers on their first engagement. The problem is that companies are leveraging AI for ad hoc point solutions to automate processes and functions usually owned by humans. They're cutting costs by shaving a few man hours, but creating negative experiences that lead to customer churn. Moreover, they are missing the full potential of machine learning to drive true product and service innovation. When new technologies are leveraged to support, educate and empower—not replace—the workforce, it can inspire foundational changes in the way companies resolve and even prevent customer problems.

As the technology matures, here are the differentiators to look for in an AI solution for maximum positive impact on customer experience.

What you analyze and how you analyze it matter.

In today's data-driven economy, the right information will accelerate business and drive customer loyalty. In fact, most customers expect organizations to use data to better serve their needs. 76% of consumers think companies should understand their expectations[2], and Accenture data shows that in 2018, 33% of consumers who ended their relationship with a company did so because the experience wasn't personalized enough[3]. For access to actionable insights that deliver service that meets these high demands, organizations need to unlock much of their unused data, like customer chats or free text. Here's how to best leverage the info that matters.

1. ANALYZE DATA FROM MANY VALUABLE SOURCES.

Many AI software solutions for customer service only analyze data from one source—for example, records of customer conversations stored in a contact center software solution or CRM. This data is then available for call center agents to leverage for customer calls. This approach has value because it exposes inexperienced agents to the best historical answers to customer challenges. But there is a missed opportunity in only culling data from previous calls, when there is potential to lift call resolution across the entire team through better data. Ideally, AI solutions pull data from multiple sources, like parts inventory, CRMs, training manuals, field reports, and more. This approach helps every agent deliver more relevant answers based on insights that aren't currently accessed by the contact center.

2. MINE UNSTRUCTURED DATA HIDDEN IN CORNERS.

In 2019 Gartner identified AI solutions that provide comprehensive access to all data as one of the top priorities for customer success[4]. Today's AI solutions can analyze structured data, or information that exists across databases and systems that contain predefined fields that are easy to search. But many fall short in their ability to analyze free text, data that isn't included in a predefined set of fields. Unlocking free text data is the key to gaining insights from sources like emails, support tickets, chat sessions, or field technician notes. These sources often tell the real story about the customer's needs and innovative solutions to their challenges. To unlock these insights, look for software that has the ability to analyze free text quickly.

3. GET TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM REGARDLESS OF WORD CHOICE.

Many customer-facing bots aren't smart enough to understand the subtleties in the way multiple people describe the same issue. This is why people curse at interactive voice response (IVR) systems that send them into a loop and ultimately lead most to press #0 for an operator anyway. For example, if you call your bank the automated system likely understands if you ask "what is my balance?" but might send you astray if you ask "how much money do I have?"

The problem is that while these automated systems leverage natural language processing (NLP), they fall short in the execution. All NLP systems seek to understand language in the same way humans speak and write, including variations on common words and phrases and even typos.

But a sophisticated NLP engine goes beyond that to understand your business' unique language—the variations in phrases used to describe your products, parts, and processes. Without this depth of analysis, an NLP product can do little more than answer simple questions phrased in a particular way.

4. EMBRACE AI THAT WORKS TOGETHER WITH EXPERTS.

One of the biggest misconceptions is that the intent of an AI implementation is to reduce the workforce. Most experts agree that success, especially in customer service, depends on AI-human collaboration[5]. But don't expect employees to sit down and dump their knowledge into a database. AI solutions that proactively retrieve information from existing sources and map out and distribute years' worth of knowledge is a more practical solution. Current approaches are largely missing a layer that allows for meaningful expert input. After an initial pull of data from multiple sources, it's important that the team's most valuable resources have a simple way to review, validate or troubleshoot the findings. Then it's important that the system can automatically incorporate their feedback without weeks of reconfiguring the system. This augmented intelligence approach helps deliver value in a way that promotes trust in AI.

Implement solutions that elevate the customer experience.

Twenty-first century customers are in the driver's seat when it comes to purchasing decisions. In most industries, the way to win hearts and retain customers is less about price and more about delivering exceptional experiences. Gartner research found that marketers overwhelmingly expect to be "competing mostly or completely on the basis of CX" in 2019 and beyond[6]. Here's how AI helps to drive a better experience the customer will immediately feel.

5. INSTALL INTELLIGENT SELF-SERVICE SOLUTIONS.

Similar to frustrations with IVR, customers dread a drop-down FAQ that doesn't have the answer they need. In both B2B and B2C relationships, people want to solve what they consider simple problems themselves, but expect self-applications that are easy to use. In fact, Gartner predicts that by 2020 a customer will manage 85% of the relationship with an enterprise without interacting with a human[7]. In order to meet this demand, look for self-service solutions that are interactive and helpful in finding answers.

Smart self-service that combines machine learning and NLP can offer helpful prompts that will walk a customer through questions and answers based on real-world scenarios. While chatbots can handle a single question and answer, many customer challenges require deeper engagement. This is where intelligent AI solutions come in. Their ability to understand multiple questions in the process of diagnosing an issue and understanding the customer's intent leads to more accurate, meaningful resolutions.

6. EMPOWER YOUR ENTIRE TEAM WITH UP-TO-DATE KNOWLEDGE.

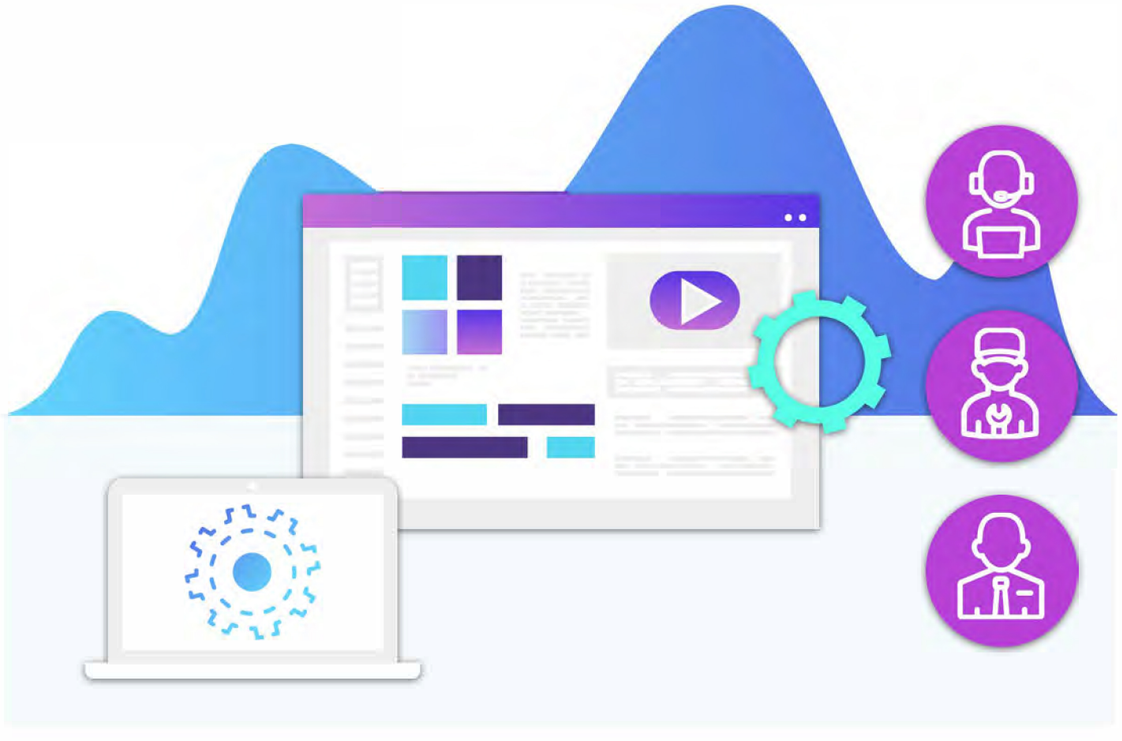
It's not good enough to simply analyze data across the enterprise. The best tools are able to gather, retain and distribute institutional knowledge from employees and systems in dynamic way. Move beyond static documents, and transfer that information to the right people at the right time.

AI tools can enable service agents to quickly triage problems by walking through dynamically generated checklists with customers—checklists created by using smart algorithms that are validated and improved by expert employees. As part of this process, consider a guided workflow that asks pinpointed questions and ranks possible solutions by the likelihood of success—all based on historical data and institutional knowledge. The more information the agent can prompt the customer to provide, the more effective the solution will be, improving customer satisfaction.

7. DIRECT JOBS TO THE RIGHT EMPLOYEES

If you have a robust AI-powered solution that understands the context of the customer's intent and needs, and can analyze that information, combined with historical customer or equipment information, it will be easier to route inquiries and jobs to absolute best service person for the job based on skill and availability. This also ensures work is done in the most cost effective way.

By understanding each agent's strengths, you'll free up even more team time by escalating the most complex cases to your most tenured reps, or technicians with specialized expertise. Simple requests can be handled by automated systems or less experienced team members, leaving top performing experts more time to take deeper dives into complicated issues.



Understand service performance data.

Service organizations, like all teams, perform best when multiple departments are working towards the same goals and communication efforts are synced. To set standard goals and meet customer expectations, collect and analyze service metrics that were previously difficult to track without AI tools.

8. ANALYZE TEAM METRICS.

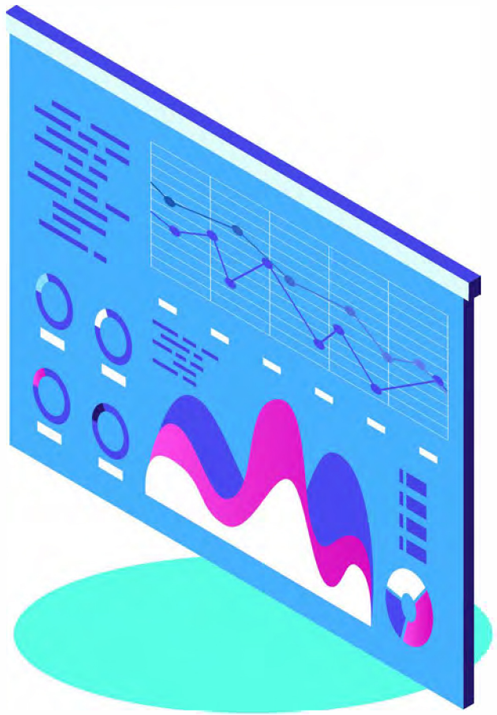
The best way to improve department KPIs is to understand what's working and what needs fixing. Until recently it's been hard to drill down and analyze which team members excel at specific tasks, who could use more training, and persistent issues that hamper broad business and customer goals.

Solutions that analyze customer data should also be able to monitor internal metrics. Get insights on how the team is performing as a whole with snapshots of first-time fix rates or call resolutions and better understand individual performance, too. The caveat is that metrics should be used with training or mentorship (a carrot) rather than punitively for those who are underperforming (a stick). HR experts agree that setting team goals, rewarding top performers, and providing skills training for everyone is the best way to motivate teams and increase productivity.

9. UNDERSTAND THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE ON A DEEPER LEVEL.

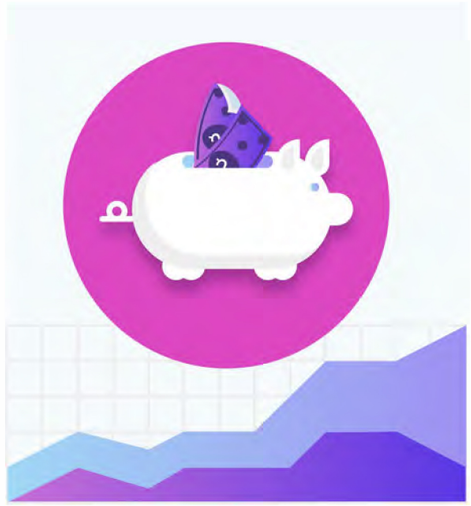
The best way to prevent customer churn is to understand intent and sentiment and act before a customer becomes unhappy. Acquiring a new customer typically costs between five and 25 times as much as it does to retain an existing one[8], making it critical for businesses to take proactive measures.

Implementing an AI solution that understands your historical data, including text information or call center chats, will help you better predict customer behavior (based on past information) and put proactive programs in place that prevent risk of churn and help retain a loyal customer base.



Ease of implementation.

The average time needed for a full-scale enterprise software implementation often exceeds six months. Clunky AI solutions require a large team to sync with other systems then train staff during a lengthy rollout period. Today's cloud-based AI solutions are plug-and-play and intuitive for users in various departments, quickly delivering measurable ROI.



10. LOOK FOR SOLUTIONS THAT ARE ACTIONABLE FOR EVERYONE.

Not all enterprise-grade solutions are created equally, and powerful analytics aren't always easy to leverage. When searching for an AI solution for your customer team, be sure to understand how actionable outputs are achieved. There is technology on the market that can automatically provide employees and even customers with the best answers to questions based on the tool's data analysis alone—there is no need for data scientists to spend months programming desired scenarios and outputs.

11. REAP IMMEDIATE ROI.

Some advanced AI solutions take months, even years, to analyze data, especially the most important kind–unstructured text and other customer information. In addition, there's often a need to bring in an entire data science team to work with clunky systems and ensure that the data in and out is clean and meaningful. You may be purchasing what seems to be the Rolls-Royce of technology, but in the long run, may require far more stakeholder approval, time, and money, and that's when there's a high likelihood that it will never reach full deployment.

Look for a solution that will analyze data and provide actionable and predictive insights in weeks, not months. Technology is available now that will meet the majority of wishlists and can be deployed using few resources, and even fewer data scientists. In the end, think about how end users will actually benefit from the technology, and how you can roll out an intuitive solution that requires minimal training, maximizing your investment and likelihood of success.

SUMMARY

All research points to customer experience as the biggest brand differentiator and key to success in the coming years. Organizations that deliver experiences that can meet and exceed customer demand are the ones who'll have the biggest competitive advantages. AI-driven approaches have the potential to do more than automate processes -- they can elevate the customer experience at every touchpoint.

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About Aquant

Aquant's service intelligence platform transforms how organizations deliver service through augmented intelligence. The platform unlocks prescriptive and actionable insights from scattered data and free text with artificial intelligence and combines them with the collective experience and tribal knowledge of your most trusted experts. It empowers teams to use that intelligence to predict outcomes, optimize service team performance and solve problems to deliver exceptional customer experiences.

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