

How to get the most out of AI in the contact centre



Over two-thirds of customers now say that convenience is more important than brand – particularly as people grow accustomed to more personalised and frictionless customer journeys. As consumers, we immediately recognise the benefits of a connected brand experience. However, we're perhaps less aware of just how big of a role Artificial Intelligence (AI) now plays in shaping today's gold standard customer experiences in the contact centre.

In this CCMA Good Practice Guide, we will define the role that AI can play, outline the benefits it can bring in terms of contact centre transformation, and also detail the steps contact centre managers should take in order to optimise any AI investments.

What exactly do we mean by AI?

The term Artificial Intelligence was first coined over 50 years ago and has evolved over time. Gartner now defines AI as 'applying advanced analysis and logic-based techniques, including machine learning, to interpret events, support and automate decisions, and take action'. As a general concept, AI also embraces a range of capabilities including artificial intelligence, machine learning, automation, predictive analytics and prescriptive intelligence.

At its core AI has always been about processing massive amounts of data, interpreting and analysing it, and then learning, predicting and making decisions based on that analysis. Until recently, it required not just massive amounts of IT processing power and storage but also extensive AI software engineering skills – ultimately proving a barrier for many AI initiatives. Now, however, the availability of unlimited cloud infrastructure, digital connectivity and accessible data

and analytics capabilities is making the power and potential of AI available to organisations of all sizes.

How is AI transforming the contact centre?

Handling potentially millions of interactions each year, contact centres create and capture huge volumes of customer information – supplemented by enormous quantities of data generated across end-to-end customer journeys. Where this data is unstructured, for example social media posts, it's almost impossible for CX (customer experience) teams to process manually. AI technology can play a crucial role in transforming contact centre operations, with applications that address a number of key processes and activities:

- Automation – following pre-programmed rules to handle simple and repetitive tasks quickly, with the goal of resolving as many interactions as possible
- Detection and Discovery – helping to surface data patterns in large contact centre bases that can easily remain hidden, leading to actionable discoveries and insights
- Prediction Models – being able to analyse much larger volumes of data helps to make prediction models much more accurate

- Prescription – recognising new patterns and recommending next best actions can empower contact centre advisors with immediate guidance to solve complex issues
- Active alerting – AI can pick up when things don't fit a pattern to identify potential errors in real-time. These can then be actioned before they impact service provision
- Focused recommendations – instead of leaving advisors to find their own resolution to questions, AI engines can save valuable time by flagging up answers
- Ongoing optimisation - AI recommendations can lead directly to the optimisation of key CSAT and NPS metrics that define your contact centre's day-to-day performance
- Assistance – offering practical process support and assistance to reduce manual supervision, freeing supervisors and advisors to spend more time on engagement.

Identifying AI solutions that are applicable for your contact centre operation

A powerful contact centre AI platform will enable you to capture quality data. There is no point just adding a virtual agent or a chatbot capability if you don't have the right contact centre AI technology in place to successfully capture and process that data.

Once you have the right AI infrastructure in place you can start to enhance the customer experience by infusing AI software across your people and operations. This would include providing AI-powered customer information and assistance to advisors, while also supporting supervisors with the main KPIs on advisor performance. Automation, optimisation, outlier detection, routing, marketing automation and virtual agents are all stages of the contact centre operation where AI can help.

Unlocking contact centre benefits through AI

According to research conducted by Forrester into how AI-infused contact centres can optimise the customer experience, key benefits from AI deployment include:

- Increasing self-service and growing the number of advisor-less interactions
- Being able to deliver timely and more contextually-relevant customer experiences to help gain an edge over competitors
- Freeing advisors to focus on more complex interactions helps to ensure more engaged employees and a subsequent increase in revenues

- Improving customer interactions with advisors through both more focused training and coaching, as well as the application of more sophisticated routing to help match the right customers with the right advisors.

Collectively these AI-led benefits combine to enable new levels of operational optimisation across contact centres. Gartner, for example, predicts that 40% of interactions will be fully automated by using AI. However, it's not just about automation. Contact centres also need to take advantage of AI-led operational precision techniques to help deliver the kind of branded customer experience that really cements loyalty and retention.

Five critical steps to successfully embedding AI in your contact centre operations

- 1. Understand your customer journeys and data flows** – start by really getting to know customer journey analytics: how you capture data, where it's stored, how it's handled – only then can you start to map your contact centre's AI journey.
- 2. Enhance IVR performance with Speech Analytics** – using Natural Language Processing and Speech Analytics you can quickly analyse millions of calls to determine why people are calling. Then optimise your IVR approach and customer/advisor interactions.
- 3. Support advisors with Agent assistance technology** – AI can help you to enhance advisor intelligence and overall responsiveness, analysing knowledge bases, CRM systems and conversation transcripts to equip advisors with the most relevant insight for every interaction.
- 4. Implement a Virtual Agent in your contact centre** – virtual agents provide contact centres with a cost-effective and scalable self-service solution that provides human-like services even outside of business hours.
- 5. Operationalise the training of AI models** – train AI models as part of the contact centre's operational workflow, using tools that agents can use to train AI without having to rely on data scientists. Training should be incremental and continuous to keep models up-to-date to accurately serve customers.

Read more about AI and knowledge at
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