

Re-shaping of customer experience with intelligent automation

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Key takeaways:

- *Digital first approach to customer experience*
- *Data management and analytics to understand customer sentiment and drive improved recommendations*
- *Using automation to bridge gaps between systems, siloed databases, multiple channels of customer interaction*
- *Improve customer interactions through use of intelligent automation technologies such as Natural language processing (NLP)/Natural-language generation (NLG), Chatbots, Voice bots.*

Consumer buying behaviour has taken a quantum leap in the past five years. There is a significant shift in the way customers buy products and services, with more and more people initiating contact on digital platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this shift with digital channels becoming more popular as a safer alternative compared to brick and mortar channels. However, population demographics also play a big role in deciding which channel is preferred by the customer. In the current scenario, businesses are expected to meet their customers' needs equally across all these channels and ensure a seamless customer experience throughout the buying process.

The transformation to a multi-channel mode of selling comes with its own set of challenges. If the customer experience is not universal across all the channels, it creates a negative sentiment among the customer base. A few challenges towards achieving a seamless customer experience include -

- **Maintaining consistency in customer experience**— Create a customer experience strategy that encompasses all touchpoints, both physical and digital, and pays attention on how these touchpoints interact seamlessly with each other in ensuring a smoother experience for the customer
- **Data asymmetry between departments with each department maintaining their own customer databases** – Each department collects information relevant to their part of the business operations. But when this information is not shared across the organisation, it leads to gaps in understanding and creates a disjointed experience for the end customer
- **Large volume of data on customer preferences** – Companies need to ensure that the departmental data collated on their customers preferences over time is made available as a single

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source of truth for the entire organisation so that a meaningful shift in creating customer experience can be triggered. The organisation needs to holistically evaluate how to process this data and derive meaningful insights towards achieving the end goal.

The preceding year has created another set of challenges and opportunities with the COVID-19 pandemic impacting demand in previously unpredictable ways. There was an overnight shift in buying preferences with a large section of the global population moving to digital channels. Companies that had invested early in building out their digital channels were better placed to service their customers' requirements while others had to catch up very quickly to survive. A few of the steps taken by companies successfully in making this shift are -

- Unifying customer databases between different departments using intelligent automation to weed out redundancies, creating easily referenceable data points, reducing silos, ensuring the right information is available to each department as and when required. This helps create a more well-rounded strategy towards a seamless customer experience
- Use of machine learning algorithms on qualitative data collected from customers to improve sentiment analysis and extract better meaning behind the data and answer questions such as – Is the feedback positive? Will the customer recommend the product to others? How to improve customer stickiness to the product/service?
- Embedding intelligent automation solutions in customer interactions for e.g. NLP/ NLG in social media interactions, chatbots, voice bots, automated order fulfilment, etc. has led to decreased friction in the buying process for the customer, and has improved the businesses' ability to serve more customers without significantly increasing their employee strength.

Intelligent automation solutions help companies improve customer satisfaction scores with low time and cost investments. They can be deployed quickly, bringing improvements to the customer experience, ease of use and faster fulfilment. These solutions also help bridge the gap between departmental silos, create data synchronisation and enable actionable intelligence.

Investment in digital technologies to bridge the customer experience between different channels is the need of the hour. Changing demographics means a digital first approach to customer experience will become synonymous with growth. The backend IT infrastructure required to enable this needs focus and involvement from all departments within a company. It should not be seen just as an IT investment, but a business imperative to ensure companies gain new customers and retain existing ones.

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