From Call Center to 'Experience' Center

In the contact center of the near future, information will be so readily and intuitively available that constituents can get most questions answered and applications processed without relying on agent-intensive processes. In this Q&A, Nathan Hamrick, principal solution consultant for public sector at Genesys, discusses ways that organizations can use AI and intelligent automation to deliver a modern experience.

What call center opportunities are top of mind for government IT and business leaders?

Self-service and automation are top of mind. A majority of calls that come into contact centers today are people looking for basic information, such as status updates or frequently asked questions. By using self-service and automation as their frontline, contact centers can focus their resources on callers who have issues or concerns that actually do require agent assistance. The overall result is shorter queues and happier customers.

How do AI and ML improve the user experience and streamline processes?

AI — and machine learning automation in particular — can increase the speed at which information is delivered, whether to the agent or customer. In our increasingly instant world, users expect information as soon as they ask for it. Making customers wait longer than necessary is a sure way to ensure a negative experience. By streamlining information — whether through bots on the customer-facing side or agent assistance tools internally — contact centers can present information in a timely fashion to both users and agents.

What technologies simplify the adoption of AI solutions?

Voicebots and chatbots are a great place to start. They're increasingly easy to develop and deploy, and they address the need for self-service. Bots typically utilize AI components like natural language understanding (NLU) and self-learning. NLU is a crucial component to voicebots in particular, because you don't want to frustrate customers by having them constantly repeat themselves to obtain the information they're looking for. With NLU, users simply state what's on their mind or what they need, and they have more of an open-ended conversation instead of being forced into a particular menu, as is typical in legacy interactive voice response applications.

Given employee retirements and high turnover, how are organizations using AI and ML to address gaps in subject matter expertise and institutional knowledge?

Agent assistance is a great example of how AI can improve both the agent experience and the customer experience. An agent assistance solution detects keywords within a spoken or written dialogue, and then uses those keywords to automatically present helpful information to the agent. In the case of new hires or agents who lack subject expertise, this type of solution not only saves time, it provides "training wheels" for the agent until they're up to speed. AI models like agent assistance can also learn from agent feedback. Agents basically agree or disagree with the information that the AI presents, which helps the AI solution continually refine what it provides based on the context.

How can call centers effectively integrate AI as they modernize?

My advice would be to start small. Although AI solutions are more user-friendly today, each has its own complexities. Starting small gives organizations time to learn the ins and outs of utilizing AI and familiarizes them with the benefits and pitfalls. That helps them develop a strategy to scale effectively in the future. FAQs are one example of a small start that can deliver a great impact. By putting FAQs on a chatbot, one of our customers reduced call volume for basic information by 75 percent. Having those FAQs also sets up contact centers for more advanced capabilities like intent monitoring, where the AI analyzes conversations and points out the questions customers might have.

How do you see contact center services evolving?

The better NLU engines get, the more automation we'll see. This ranges from simple self-service to more complex conversational transactions with customers. One major goal is to present an AI dialogue so well that the only way your customers can distinguish between an AI interaction and a human interaction is by the solution's explicit transparency about the nature of the interaction. An important clarification is that AI doesn't necessarily replace human agents. Rather it handles routine or repetitive information so human agents can focus on more nuanced and complex interactions with customers.

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