



How Your Business Can Use AI to Strengthen Customer Service

These days, customers expect fast and personalized service and support from the businesses they patronize. AI can help you meet their high expectations without overburdening your employees. But as in other contexts, AI in customer service is usually only as effective as how it's trained and used. To improve responsiveness and give employees more time to resolve complex issues, you must use AI properly.

5 potentially productive uses

AI can help your business:

1. Provide immediate answers, 24/7. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can answer common questions, day or night. You might train them to explain return policies, provide store hours, check order status and troubleshoot simple problems. To deliver helpful answers, your AI tool should draw from accurate, regularly updated sources — such as your website and product or service instructions. To reduce the likelihood that AI will provide inaccurate or inappropriate responses, set clear limits on where it may gather information and what it may discuss with customers.

2. Classify and route requests. AI can analyze incoming phone calls, emails, chat messages and support tickets to help determine your customers' needs, issue types and urgency levels. Then, it can route requests to employees who can address their concerns. A billing question, for example, might be routed to accounts receivable. Meanwhile, a technical problem might be assigned to a product specialist. Some AI systems feature sentiment analysis to identify frustrated customers and prioritize their cases.

3. Support customers on social media. Customers often turn to Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms to ask questions, report problems or post complaints. AI tools can monitor direct messages and comments made to your accounts, provide automated greetings, and acknowledge messages. You might also instruct your AI model to draft responses for employee approval. Facebook, for instance, supports automated Messenger greetings. However, you should instruct your AI tools to alert an employee about any sensitive or confidential messages, rather than responding automatically.

4. Empower service staffers. AI doesn't have to communicate directly with customers to be valuable to your business. It can work behind the scenes to summarize a customer's history or locate answers for staffers to convey. During a live customer service interaction, AI may recommend troubleshooting steps or identify appropriate actions. It can also prepare call notes and update records. This support may shorten response times and help employees provide better service.

5. Identify recurring problems. Customer conversations generally contain many different pieces of information about your business's products or services. AI can analyze these interactions to uncover recurring complaints, common questions and emerging trends. AI conclusions can help you take corrective action by improving your offerings, revising product instructions, and updating sales and support training. And AI can analyze which issues consume the most support time, helping you decide where improvements may yield the greatest return.

Understand potential shortcomings

Of course, AI isn't always the best option for customer service. It can misunderstand requests, overlook context and generate confident-sounding but incorrect answers. And customers may become frustrated if they can't reach a live person quickly. In addition, keep close tabs on privacy and security issues, particularly if conversations contain payment, health or other sensitive information.

Finally, your business should regularly test its AI systems, restrict their access to confidential data and establish escalation rules. Employee intervention is especially important if the system can't resolve an issue or a supervisor believes something requires human judgment. Instruct employees to take any AI concerns to their managers immediately.

An extension, not a replacement

Ultimately, AI works best as an extension of — not a replacement for — your customer service team. Its greatest strength is automating routine tasks so employees can focus on nuanced or complicated matters.