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CX Insight

AN EXECS IN THE KNOW PUBLICATION

Embracing the Effect of Being Customer Obsessed

Keeping CX at the core of everything you do.

BRINGING THE CUSTOMER VOICE BACK INTO FOCUS

WHEN IS IT TIME FOR A NEW CALL CENTER
VENDOR? WHERE TO LOOK AND HOW TO
VET THE RIGHT PARTNER

THE PERSONALIZATION PLAYBOOK:
MAKING REAL-TIME PERSONALIZED
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES POSSIBLE

KIA ONLINE COMMUNITY MEMBER
SPOTLIGHT: PANERA BREAD



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in this issue

- 
- 05** **BRINGING THE CUSTOMER VOICE BACK INTO FOCUS**

By staying attuned to customer feedback and preferences, businesses can proactively innovate and develop new products or services that meet the evolving needs of their customers.
 - 10** **WHEN IS IT TIME FOR A NEW CALL CENTER VENDOR? WHERE TO LOOK AND HOW TO VET THE RIGHT PARTNER**

You must pay careful attention to identifying and selecting a vendor partner that best matches your organization’s mission, vision, and values.
 - 15** **THE PERSONALIZATION PLAYBOOK: MAKING REAL-TIME PERSONALIZED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES POSSIBLE**

Customers want experiences uniquely designed to fit their needs and protect their privacy.
 - 20** **THE PERVASIVENESS OF AI IN THE CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPERIENCE**

AI innovations have led to remarkable improvements in tools that assist and enhance both the agent and the customer experience as well as drive business outcomes.
 - 27** **KIA ONLINE COMMUNITY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: PANERA BREAD**

‘Panera Warmth’ is at the heart of everything the brand does.
 - 31** **HOW AI SIMULATION TRAINING FOR CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT DRIVES IMPROVED KPIS**

For the contact center leader, high-performing agents create a unique opportunity for success.
 - 37** **BRAND SPOTLIGHT - STATE EMPLOYEES’ CREDIT UNION**

Discover how this brand is meeting members where they are and where they want to be met.
 - 40** **CHATGPT IN THE LENS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE ... WHAT’S NEXT?**

Understanding ChatGPT's abilities, restrictions, and applications in customer service is essential to comprehend its potential impact on the future of CX.
 - 47** **JOIN YOUR PEERS ON KIA, THE “KNOW IT ALL” ONLINE COMMUNITY**

Learn. Share. Network. Engage to Innovate.

Welcome to the April 2023 edition of *CX Insight* magazine, an Execs In The Know publication.

Being a customer-obsessed organization means keeping CX at the core of everything you do.

Today, experience is everywhere, all of the time. Customer expectations are changing at a breakneck speed. We also see customer habits that are more complex than ever before. Creating truly great experiences requires considering not only the physical or digital spaces they interact with your brand but rather the entire ecosystem of your business and how all the pieces and parts work in harmony to deliver on customer expectations.

Technology is advancing just as fast, bringing exciting possibilities for creating new customer experiences. Innovation is surging, and no one wants to be left behind. There are incredible opportunities for the taking, as long as brands have a clear understanding of the problems they need to solve and the needs of the people they serve.

It's becoming clear that the future of CX is physical, digital, and human experiences that are deeply connected to people's emotions and priorities in their personal journey of life.

In this issue, we drive home the importance of creating impactful relationships powered by insight and technology and why one of the most powerful tools in our toolbox for delivering world-class experiences is exceptional

customer service and support. From staying attuned to customer feedback and preferences and enhancing personalization strategies, the commitment to having a customer-first approach is a responsibility that falls on the entire organization.

We also get a behind-the-scenes look at Panera Bread through an exclusive KIA Online Community Member Spotlight and speak with State Employees' Credit Union's Executive Vice President of Member Experience Transformation on how the brand meets members where they are.

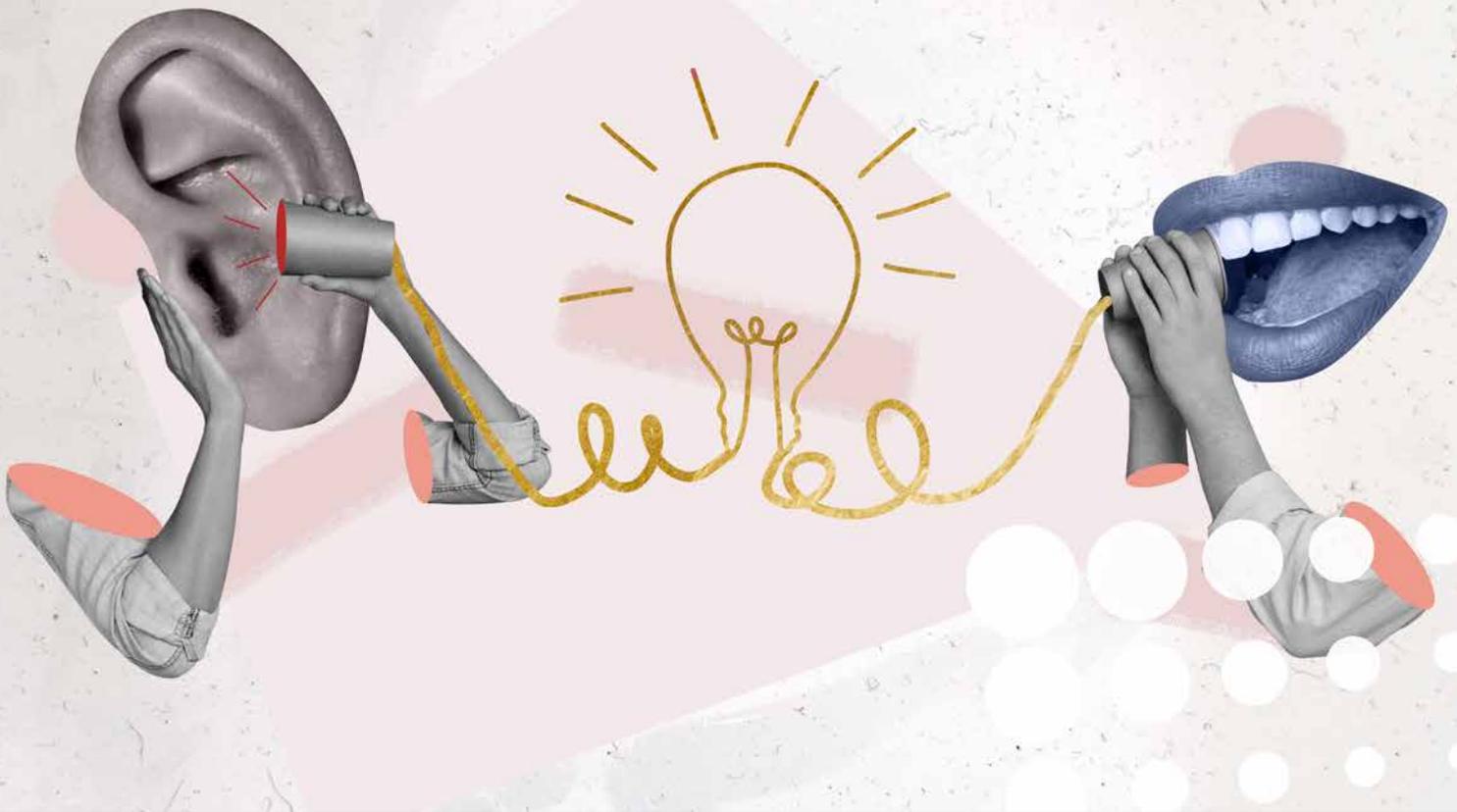
Any way you look at it, 2023 will continue to be a year of massive change and growth for many. It will challenge us, change us, and bring historical transformations in technology and experiences.

As always, we hope that something in this issue enlightens your perspective and provides the spark for new ideas and innovation. ✨

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Bringing the Customer Voice Back into Focus

by Execs In The Know

By staying attuned to customer feedback and preferences, businesses can proactively innovate and develop new products or services that meet the evolving needs of their customers.

Are you truly listening to your customers? In the ever-evolving landscape of customer experience (CX) and modern commerce, understanding the "why" behind a customer's opinions and emotions can make all the difference between success and failure.

In the wake of the pandemic, experiences reign supreme. However, it can be challenging for businesses to ensure they are always meeting the needs and expectations of their customers, across every touchpoint. That's where the voice of the customer (VoC) comes in.

Staying Ahead of the Curve

At its core, the VoC is a collection of feedback, insights, and opinions from customers about their experiences with a particular brand or business. CX leaders understand the importance of tapping into this valuable resource, as it can help them better understand their customers, identify areas for improvement, and drive business growth.

With a VoC program in place, brands can consolidate feedback from various sources such as customer surveys, social media posts,

feedback forms, product pilots and early access programs, CSAT and NPS scores, 1:1 conversations with customer-facing teams and individuals, and support interactions. This ensures that no important input slips through the cracks. VoC programs enable each department to connect, engage, and align on how to meet customer needs throughout the customer journey.

By understanding customer experiences, brands can determine where to improve and provide better customer experiences. In our [CX Leaders Trends & Insights: 2022 Corporate Edition](#)¹ report, 86% of CX leaders said their organizations were meeting the needs and expectations of their customers, which is up two points year-over-year and up ten points since 2019.

Whether it's driving product innovation or bolstering brand awareness, having the right customer context is key to staying ahead of the curve. That's why it comes as no surprise that an increasing number of organizations are turning to VoC programs to supplement traditional surveys. These programs offer a more comprehensive view of the customer experience. Gartner projects that [60% of organizations](#)² will supplement traditional surveys with VoC programs that analyze voice and text exchanges by 2025.

And as competition heats up across industries, businesses that prioritize exceptional customer experiences will undoubtedly come out on top.

Advocating for Customers and Their Experience

By staying attuned to customer feedback and preferences, businesses can proactively innovate and develop new products or services that meet the evolving needs of their customers.

What does true customer closeness look like? One brand that is at the forefront of this



movement is woom bikes, which specializes in designing and manufacturing high-quality bicycles for children. The company was founded by two dads in a garage in Vienna, Austria in 2013 and has since expanded to over 25 countries around the world.

With just 1,400 bikes sold in the first year on U.S. soil, that number skyrocketed to more than 52,000 bikes in 2022. And that number just keeps on growing! According to [Inc. Magazine](#)³, woom bikes is one of the fastest-growing companies in the U.S.

The brand is doing outstanding work to understand its customers and is agile in leveraging customer feedback for continual improvements to its products and services.

"The customer has been at the center of woom since the beginning," explains Christopher Hogan, Head of Voice of the Customer and Continuous Improvement at woom bikes USA. "Woom's founders have always recognized the importance of customer feedback on the brand, the product, and the organization. Today, we prioritize having a strong partnership with leaders within woom, and we show the impact their teams have on the customer experience by quantifying our CX contacts consistent with their terminology and processes."



Building a Customer-Centric Culture

At the heart of the VoC is a commitment to building a customer-centric culture. By making VoC a central component of their CX strategy, businesses can demonstrate to their customers that they value their feedback and are committed to delivering exceptional experiences. This, in turn, can help build customer loyalty and trust in the brand.

"VoC at woom sits on both the Customer Experience and the Employee Experience teams," explains Hogan. "We have found that the more CX feedback we share with the organization and use it to drive action, the more our internal teammates share about their experience as employees because they see the same team using the same tools and same processes to gather their feedback and they know we will take action from what they share to improve our overall employee experience."

The brand has set the bar very high internally. Its target CSAT is >98% and the goal NPS is over 70. At woom, they believe the only way to achieve this is to invest in and prioritize the customer experience. They have built strong relationships with team members from across the business to help best understand their challenges and priorities, and that allows them to connect customer feedback to their expertise and day-to-day operations using a common terminology to maximize the impact they can have on the customer.

"We are in the process of implementing a company-wide process where any team member can submit an issue, topic, or idea. That topic is then assigned ownership to be researched and analyzed by the appropriate team. If necessary, a change or corrective action plan is proposed for approval by representatives across the organization before it is implemented. This drives ownership, visibility, and traceability," added Hogan.

HOW CAN BUSINESSES EFFECTIVELY LEVERAGE VOC? HERE ARE A FEW WAYS.

1. GATHER FEEDBACK FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES

To get a comprehensive view of the VoC, it's important to gather feedback from a variety of sources. This can include customer support interactions, surveys, social media monitoring, online reviews, and more.

"Woom places a high value on the input of our CX team. Many times, numbers don't tell the whole story," says Hogan. "We allow the opportunity for anecdotal feedback to take the same priority as quantifiable results. This further empowers our CX team members to advocate for our customers and their experience."

2. ANALYZE FEEDBACK TO IDENTIFY TRENDS AND PAIN POINTS

Once feedback has been gathered, it's crucial to analyze it to identify trends and pain points. This can help brands prioritize areas for improvement and develop effective solutions. For instance, if customers consistently report issues with a particular feature of a product, businesses can use this feedback to develop a plan for addressing the issue.

3. TAKE ACTION ON FEEDBACK

Ultimately, the most important step in leveraging VoC is acting on feedback. This means developing and implementing solutions to address identified issues and communicating back to customers to let them know how their feedback was incorporated into products or services.

By acting on feedback, businesses can demonstrate to their customers that they are listening and responsive to their needs, which can help build customer loyalty and trust.

"We aim to capture targeted feedback at each point in the customer journey so there is clear ownership and takeaways," Hogan points out. "As we develop a new survey or metric, we ask *Who will own this? What will we do with negative feedback? What will we do with positive feedback?* This type of evaluation before we begin ensures both the feedback and the data we collect are powerful and can be actioned upon."



Benefits Across the Organization

INCREASE CUSTOMER RETENTION

Customer retention is crucial for businesses to ensure their long-term success. One way to increase customer retention is to take customer feedback seriously. When customers believe in a company, they are more likely to remain loyal and continue doing business with them, rather than seeking out alternatives. Therefore, taking customer feedback into account can have a significant impact on customer retention rates.

CREATE CUSTOMER-CENTRIC PRODUCTS

By incorporating customer feedback into product development, the likelihood of a product succeeding in the market increases, while costly mistakes can be avoided. Launching a new product that fails to resonate with customers can prove expensive.

To mitigate this risk, brands can consider sending a prototype of the product to a

customer focus group before rolling it out nationwide. Feedback from the customers can assist the product team in identifying and fixing bugs and making refinements to the product, thus improving its chances of success upon release to the public.

PROVIDE CUSTOMERS WITH BETTER SUPPORT

VoC programs provide businesses with an opportunity to provide customers with better support. In instances where a customer expresses dissatisfaction by sending an angry email or posting a negative comment on social media regarding the support provided by an agent, it is important to not only coach the agent but also contact the customer to acknowledge their concerns and outline the steps being taken to address the issue.

“We have been very intentional to design and implement our systems and processes that provide clear and actionable data and insights with each customer interaction,” says Hogan. “This has been in close partnership with leaders from across the organization to ensure the data we provide in the future is what they need to take action. For example, we quickly share direct customer feedback with our eCommerce and Marketing teams whenever we launch new promotions or programs to optimize the customer experience while also helping to drive revenue.”



IMPROVE BRAND IMAGE

The perception of a brand's image by customers can greatly impact business, as they tend to share their experiences, be they positive or negative. Hence, receiving feedback from them can aid in identifying areas of excellence as well as areas that require improvements. Making positive changes based on such feedback demonstrates a commitment to customers and their satisfaction.

In Conclusion

While many businesses claim to prioritize customer satisfaction, only a handful truly embody this commitment. However, implementing VoC programs can help organizations maintain their customer-centric focus by consistently gathering feedback to inform product, service, and brand development. By quickly capturing customer input and acting on their feedback, brands can effectively keep their customers happy and improve their overall success. Now is the time to bring the customer voice back into focus to drive better insights and outcomes. 🚫

Links:

- 1 <https://execsintheknow.com/knowledge-center/cx-research/cx-leaders-trends-insights/cx-leaders-trends-insights-2022-corporate-edition/>
- 2 <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/gartner-predicts-by-2025--60--of-organizations-with-voice-of-the>
- 3 <https://www.inc.com/profile/woom-bikes-usa>



When Is It Time for a New Call Center Vendor? Where to Look and How to Vet the Right Partner

You must pay careful attention to identifying and selecting a vendor partner that best matches your organization's mission, vision, and values.

by Nick Jiwa, Founder and President, CustomerServ

The right call center or business process outsourcing (BPO) vendor relationships can lead to a great customer experience and sustained growth for both parties. Partner with the wrong vendors, however, and the experience could be quite different. That begs the question: When is the right time to look for call center and BPO vendors?

All BPOs will experience ups and downs in performance, staffing, and other areas. Higher-

quality BPOs are generally proactive and quicker to address problems, but BPOs with deeper organizational issues will consistently struggle.

Searching, selecting, and onboarding new vendors is time-consuming and resource-intensive, so it makes sense to try and fix current relationships. But there comes a time when you must explore your options, not only when vendors disappoint, but for growth, diversification, risk mitigation, cost containment, and other reasons that we will outline in this article.

Reasons to Search for a New Call Center Vendor

These are some of the many scenarios in which a brand should start considering new vendor options:

ONE OR MORE CURRENT VENDORS IS UNDERPERFORMING

Any vendor can miss targets, but a sound organization will cure problem areas and eventually recover. However, if your vendor(s) are consistently underperforming, or there are incurable communication gaps and transparency issues, it might be time to seek more reliable partners.

IN-HOUSE CALL CENTER STAFFING OR PERFORMANCE ISSUES

Several brands we recently helped with vendor selection were previously committed to an in-house call center strategy. But internal staffing challenges and rising costs led them to evaluate outsourcing and ultimately select the right vendor partners.

DIVERSIFY FROM LARGER VENDORS

Size alone does not constitute a safer choice, nor does it guarantee better results. To be fair, service issues can happen at BPOs of all sizes. However, brands often look to diversify when they don't "feel the love" from larger BPOs. If you find yourself in a bureaucratic maze with your BPO, it may be time to look for a partner that offers more customer intimacy.

TIMED RFI/RFP SCHEDULE—CONTRACTS ARE EXPIRING

You may have a set schedule for RFPs when contracts are up for renewal or other reasons. If so, refer to our [article on innovative RFP ideas](#).¹ We prefer a curated approach over casting a wide net with blind RFPs to help ensure partner alignment. It is best to pre-qualify vendors, and only RFP a shortlist with a genuine chance of winning your business.

VOLUME FLUCTUATION AND GROWTH

Growth, volume spikes, seasonality, or even intraday staffing gyrations can overwhelm certain BPO(s) or your internal operations. If current operations cannot

meet staffing requirements despite your best efforts, it may be time to consider new vendors. Don't jeopardize customer relationships with service level issues and long hold times.

BENCHMARK AGAINST CURRENT VENDORS – CHAMPION VS. CHALLENGER

The champion-challenger framework is a good way to create healthy competition. The current vendor(s) hold "champion" status, while the challengers are possible replacements vying for your business. You'd be surprised how often underperforming champions miraculously rise to the occasion when challenged by competitors.

GOING NEARSHORE OR OFFSHORE FOR THE FIRST TIME

With U.S. staffing challenges and rising costs, more companies are launching nearshore or offshore BPOs. Especially appealing are unsaturated and high-growth offshore markets such as Sub-Saharan Africa. And if proximity is a concern, nearshore BPOs may be especially appealing as a starting point due to shared time zones, and cultural similarities.

BRINGING WORK BACK TO DOMESTIC CALL CENTERS

When brands decide to bring work back to the U.S., they might look to their current BPO's onshore operations or seek new vendor relationships. Reshoring back to the U.S. generally carries a lower risk (debatable), but the cost difference will be two to four times more compared to nearshore and offshore.

REDUCE DEPENDENCE ON A SINGLE VENDOR

Single sourcing makes sense if your outsourced headcount is relatively small. Most of our clients with fewer than 50-100 outsourced agents use only one vendor. However, as your headcount increases, it may be good to de-risk and bring in a challenger, especially if you have seasonal volume fluctuations.

Where to Look for the Right Vendor

Before researching vendors, you must first define your business goals and set the right expectations internally. Too often, a vendor selection decision is delayed or abruptly put on the back burner due to a lack of organizational consensus and planning. There are far too many scenarios describing how brands and BPOs end up finding one another.

Here are several common ways that our clients have searched for vendors in the past:



Previous Relationships. Utilizing a "familiar" vendor you have worked with before is a good idea, but only if the vendor aligns perfectly with your current business needs. Vendors change and evolve, so it's wise to ensure the vendor is the best option regardless of past results.



Seek Recommendations. Reaching out for advice from industry peers, experts, and colleagues is one of the best ways to find the right vendor. Regardless of where the recommendation(s) come from, you must still conduct thorough due diligence to ensure alignment.



Peer-to-Peer Networking Groups. You'll have no trouble meeting vendors at the larger industry conferences as many, if not most, attendees are BPOs and other types of suppliers. As an alternative, there are smaller, more intimate micro-conferences and invite-only groups that you can tap into for insights and recommendations.



Google Search. Google may not be the first place you want to look, but it can't hurt to search, if only as a backup. However, if you search the term ["outsourced call center vendors,"](#)² you might be overwhelmed by how

many you find. Your best bet may be to compile a shortlist of providers and use search engines for vetting purposes.



Procurement and Sourcing. If you use procurement, they will most likely have a "file" of vendors. However, this can be tricky. Although vendors often register with sourcing, not all of them will perfectly fit your business requirements. Collaboration between business line leaders and procurement is required to ensure that the right vendors are carefully pre-screened for alignment before inclusion in the RFP.

Qualities to Consider When Selecting a Call Center Outsourcer

- **Range of services and innovation.** Beyond checking off the boxes on table stakes, does the vendor use innovative operational practices? Deep-dive workshops with front-line leaders, site visits, focus groups, and references are good ways to verify the vendor's uniqueness.
- **Reputation.** Does the vendor have a positive track record in the marketplace? Ask around, check references, and research what the vendor's employees say about the organization by looking into the vendor's social media footprint and reviews.
- **People.** Many vendors talk about being people-centric. Verify by evaluating how they attract, train, coach, mentor, and retain talent. What is their employee engagement program? Diversity and Inclusion practices? How do they differentiate themselves as an employer? Do their physical sites need a facelift? What career path opportunities and amenities do they offer?
- **Culture.** Does the BPO partner's culture align with yours? It starts with the BPO's CEO, who should own and drive the company culture.

As part of your vetting, meet the CEO and all key stakeholders. Confirm that their vision is in alignment with the BPO's business practices and with your company.



- **Brand ambassadors.** Does the vendor demonstrate that they will “live” your brand by embracing your values and customer needs? How will the vendor become an extension of your brand, ensuring an effortless customer experience for you and the end customer?
- **Mutual fit.** Remember, the vendor should be vetting you as much as you are vetting them. The right vendors know when to say yes, and when not to. You want this level of honesty so mutual expectations can be set. And the vendor should “want,” not “need,” your business – this might seem counterintuitive, but your business is in better hands with highly selective vendors.
- **Nimble and flexible.** Vendors claim to be flexible, but many are unaware they are not. Ask the vendor's references how they pivot and adapt quickly to change or performed in a time of urgency or crisis. Is the vendor an effective listener, accountable and proactive?
- **Data security and compliance.** Is the vendor compliant with industry- or country-specific standards, such as HIPAA, PCI DSS, TCPA, SSAE, and GDPR? Does the vendor offer staff training in security protocols? How often does the vendor conduct security audits of its systems and protocols?
- **Communication.** Clear, open, and constant communication is vital to prevent misunderstandings from escalating. What is your communication cadence? Do you have unfettered access to the site or frontline leadership? Is the vendor hearing you and

listening, or are you lost in a bureaucratic maze?

- **Pricing.** Cost reduction is one of the benefits of outsourcing, especially nearshore/offshore, but it's best to avoid a narrow focus on obtaining the lowest price or below market rates. Aim for a compensation model at fair market value, mutually equitable, and with shared risk.
- **Vendor size.** As described earlier, some companies begin the selection process with the impression that bigger must be better. Consider a “right-size” approach described in our helper [video](#)³ and pick vendors that value your business regardless of size. You may get de-prioritized if your account isn't large enough for a big BPO. Conversely, a BPO that is too small or “junior” may not have the maturity and infrastructure to support you.
- **Staffing and wage rates.** We must keep reminding ourselves that BPOs will fail us if they cannot pay agents a competitive wage. This rubric applies in the U.S. and every nearshore and offshore market. Many of our

clients are “setting” the wage rate they want the BPO to pay agents based on the skill sets required, understanding the impacts on the client’s all-in price.

- **Financial stability.** Confirm the vendor's financial stability, corporate ownership structure, and access to capital. The last thing you want is a vendor with "hidden" financial woes, incapable of funding resources and investing in growth.
- **Leadership.** Often, the make or break in client-BPO relationships comes down to leadership depth and style. Is your BPO’s leadership team stretched too thin? How many hats do they wear? Are they empowered to make decisions? What is your trust level? Most importantly, what training and experience do they have?
- **Adaptability.** Companies must be agile to stay abreast of fast-evolving customer expectations, technology, and expanding communication channels. Can the vendor flex and adapt to changes and disruptions?

Conclusion

In the end, if all the stakes are on the table and all the other boxes are checked, clients look for vendors who are “easy” to do business with. Clients are seeking seamless and mutually rewarding partnerships.

Timing is everything, along with a well-planned selection and implementation process. You must pay careful attention to identifying and selecting a vendor partner that best matches your organization’s mission, vision, and values.

The call center industry has undergone a profound change during the past two years – emerging into a highly visible touchpoint representing the human face of the brand.

Perhaps we should think of the vendor selection process not as a Request for Proposal but as a Request for People... Passion... or Personality.



Nick Jiwa

Founder and President

Nick is an outsourcing industry veteran of 36 years and the founder of CustomerServ. He advises and guides leaders at

Fortune 500 brands and companies of all sizes maximize “people performance” by outsourcing smarter with better matched BPO partners and more successful outsourcing strategies. Nick is a founding member of the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry, a thought leader, matchmaker, CX champion, and impact sourcing advocate.



CustomerServ is a BPO industry pioneer, thought leader and matchmaking ecosystem that helps brands outsource smarter.

Learn more at [customerserv.com](https://www.customerserv.com)

Links:

- 1 <https://www.customerserv.com/blog/rfp-dos-donts-alternatives>
- 2 <https://www.customerserv.com>
- 3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWI5vD8ATDY>



The Personalization Playbook: Making Real Time Personalized Customer Experience Possible

Customers want experiences uniquely designed to fit their needs and protect their privacy.

Customer expectations are reaching new heights. The impacts of the pandemic and innovative companies have disrupted the way we work, live, play, and transact, increasing what customers expect from brand interactions. These expectations can be summed up in a two-word mandate from customers: know us!

Dissecting that mandate reveals more: Customers expect brands to understand their changing wants and needs. Further, they want

companies to use their data responsibly and ethically to deliver seamless, relevant, and meaningful experiences.

Experiences Designed to Meet Customers' Needs

Companies can meet these expectations through personalization – delivering individualized interactions that enhance the customer experience (CX). These types of

interactions show the customer that the company knows and cares about them. As customers engage across touchpoints, they are increasingly aware of what a brand knows about them and some ways that information is used. Customers want experiences uniquely designed to fit their needs and protect their privacy.

Personalization Is Paved with Data

A great starting point for personalizing interactions is data analytics. Analytics are used to detect behavior patterns and identify correlations to reveal what customers expect, do, and feel. Insights like these should be considered guiding principles for CX design. Since the resulting experiences are based on data-driven decisions and design, they are more relevant and meaningful to customers. Using insights in decision-making is a strong foundation for the success of a personalization strategy.

[Gartner's most recent Customer Service and Support Survey revealed that 71% of B2C and 86% of B2B customers expect companies to be well-informed about their personal information.](#)¹ As more data is gathered and mined across the customer journey, service delivery teams can use these learnings to improve personalization.

For many firms, access to data to identify who the customer is, their expectations, and previous contact experiences is a challenge. Many CX leaders admit their organizations have a number of issues accessing the right data. These obstacles include not collecting enough



customer data, not sharing it across teams, lacking the tools and skills to transform data into insights, and/or having limited ability to act on findings. These roadblocks can prevent brands from providing the kind of personalized experiences customers expect.

The companies that deliver the best personalized experiences are companies that gather an abundance of relevant data and have strong data analytics and insights teams to turn these numbers into actions. Aside from the customer basics – personal information, demographics, and personas – financial, operational/interaction, behavioral, and attitudinal data are critical inputs that help reveal opportunities to increase personalized offerings. Without access and insights to use these important data inputs, brands struggle to design and deliver the personalized journeys that customers crave.

Personalization & Customization

Personalization and customization are often used interchangeably. Although they both individualize customer experiences, there are differences in these two customer engagement strategies. Here are some characteristics of the two to highlight the important distinctions.

PERSONALIZATION	CUSTOMIZATION
Done for the customer.	Done by the customer.
Back-end processes use data to create a specific experience; automated.	Customer-facing options allow input of selections to create a unique experience; manual.
Proactive using customer data and predictive technologies.	Reactive based on inputs from the customer.
<p>Example: Based on a recent purchase, a company's customer service contact proactively asks the customer if they are contacting about that item:</p> <p><i>"Hello Michael, I see you recently bought the latest model of our home assistant and are starting the set-up process. Do you need help setting up your new device?"</i></p>	<p>Example: A company's customer service interaction begins by asking the customer to select the reason for contacting:</p> <p><i>"Hello, and thanks for calling. Press or say 1 if you would like to place an order, press or say 2 if you have questions about an existing order, press or say 3 if you are contacting for another reason."</i></p>

Channel Strategy Across the Customer Journey

Another area that restricts CX leaders from developing and delivering personalized experiences is the complexity of the customer journey. As the digital transformation continues and the lines between physical and digital experiences are blurred, personalizing experiences across multiple touch points become more difficult.

[Recent research from Genesys reveals that 61% of CX professionals polled cannot engage with customers across channels in personalized ways.](#)² These siloed experiences can lead to increased customer frustration and operational

inefficiencies.

As enterprises strive to implement omni- and multi-channel strategies to ease contact burdens for customers and reduce organizational costs, the goal of personalization may be left out of the equation.

A comprehensive channel strategy should include an examination of the holistic experience and consider expectations, including the customer's desire for personalization. Access to preferred service channels and quick and easy resolution are common goals during strategy development and implementation; decreasing cost and contact deflection can also be a focus for many

organizations when doing this work.

However, leaders should ensure that ways to personalize experiences across channels are also a goal of this effort. Not including this goal and associated work will likely hinder an organization's ability to deliver the personalized experiences that customers expect; satisfaction and loyalty metrics may also suffer.

Agent-Facing Tools

For agents to deliver personalized customer experiences, they need to know about the customer they are being asked to serve. They also need context; context-based support helps eliminate the inefficiency of trying to resolve an issue without the relevant background and details. This leads to another potential obstacle to delivering real-time personalized customer journeys: the agent-facing tools that power service delivery, particularly customer relationship management (CRM).

Modern, sophisticated CRMs keep track of and highlight relevant parts of customer history, such as contacts, conversations, issues, and timelines across various channels. Many also give agents access to sentiment data, including previous contact satisfaction data and real-time data like speech analytics.

When integrated with analytics tools, agents can enjoy timely access to insights about the customer's experience as well as the best actions to take to achieve resolution and satisfaction. Agents that have the benefit of knowing the customer history and having real-time help solving issues are the ultimate in personalized customer service interactions.

Delivering What Customers Expect

How can organizations combat the many challenges that prevent them from delivering real-time personalized customer experiences? This work requires organizations to understand the specific gaps and prioritize and focus on initiatives that help customers get what they expect from their interactions.

Personalizing the Employee Experience

Everyone craves experiences that are created for their unique wants and needs. While many organizations are focused on creating personalized interactions for customers, more emphasis needs to be placed on personalizing employee experiences. With so much focus on retention and job satisfaction, efforts to personalize the employee experience can help.

Organizations are using analytics to assess what is known about an employee and compare it with employee knowledge and performance to personalize these experiences. To achieve this, investments are being made in knowledge management systems and learning and development platforms to better support employees based on their unique needs. These platforms can help employees locate content, register for training, or get help from a supervisor or subject matter expert in real time. Personalization factors such as search history, courses taken, interests, tenure, performance, and interactions with supervisors can be used to make employee experiences more personal and meaningful. These capabilities allow organizations to target individual needs to increase operational efficiency and effectiveness. Why have everyone on the team take a class if only a few agents demonstrate the need for a particular training course?

Like CX, personalization can customize the employee experience, leading to higher satisfaction, retention, and operational results. Organizations should consider these opportunities in employee experience programs.

A few actions to consider:

- Build or partner across your company to ensure you have access to a strong insights team that is equipped with the latest analytical tools.**
 This team should guide the collection of the right kind of data, create a powerful analytics plan to crunch the numbers and provide frequent and regular actionable insights that drive continuous improvement in the contact center.
- Map your top customer journeys to reveal gaps in the way these experiences are personalized.** Pay close attention to channel switching, particularly the experience of physical to digital as well as within the digital experience. Consider the learnings from this work in your channel strategy.
- Assess your existing technology stack to see what is missing, going unused, or not yet deployed that can power personalization.** This work is an important step before new technology is added to your tech stack.
- Examine your self-service offerings.** Well-done self-service options put the power of choice in the customer's hands. Design a self-service strategy that ensures you capitalize on the customer insights you have and offers customers options to allow them to do it themselves if they choose.
- Consider proactive support, arguably the most personalized experience a customer can have.** Identifying and implementing ways to get ahead of issues before customers are even aware of them creates interactions that build trust, show the customer you know and care about them, and even increase loyalty.
- Be transparent with your customers about why your company collects the data it collects, what is done with it, and why it benefits them.** Reduce the creepiness factor by explaining what's in it for customers

and give them the opportunity to opt out of this type of data collection and usage.

- Ensure your customers know that their data is safe with you.** Share your data-protection standards and help make them feel comfortable that you are securing their personal information – and that you take that responsibility very seriously.



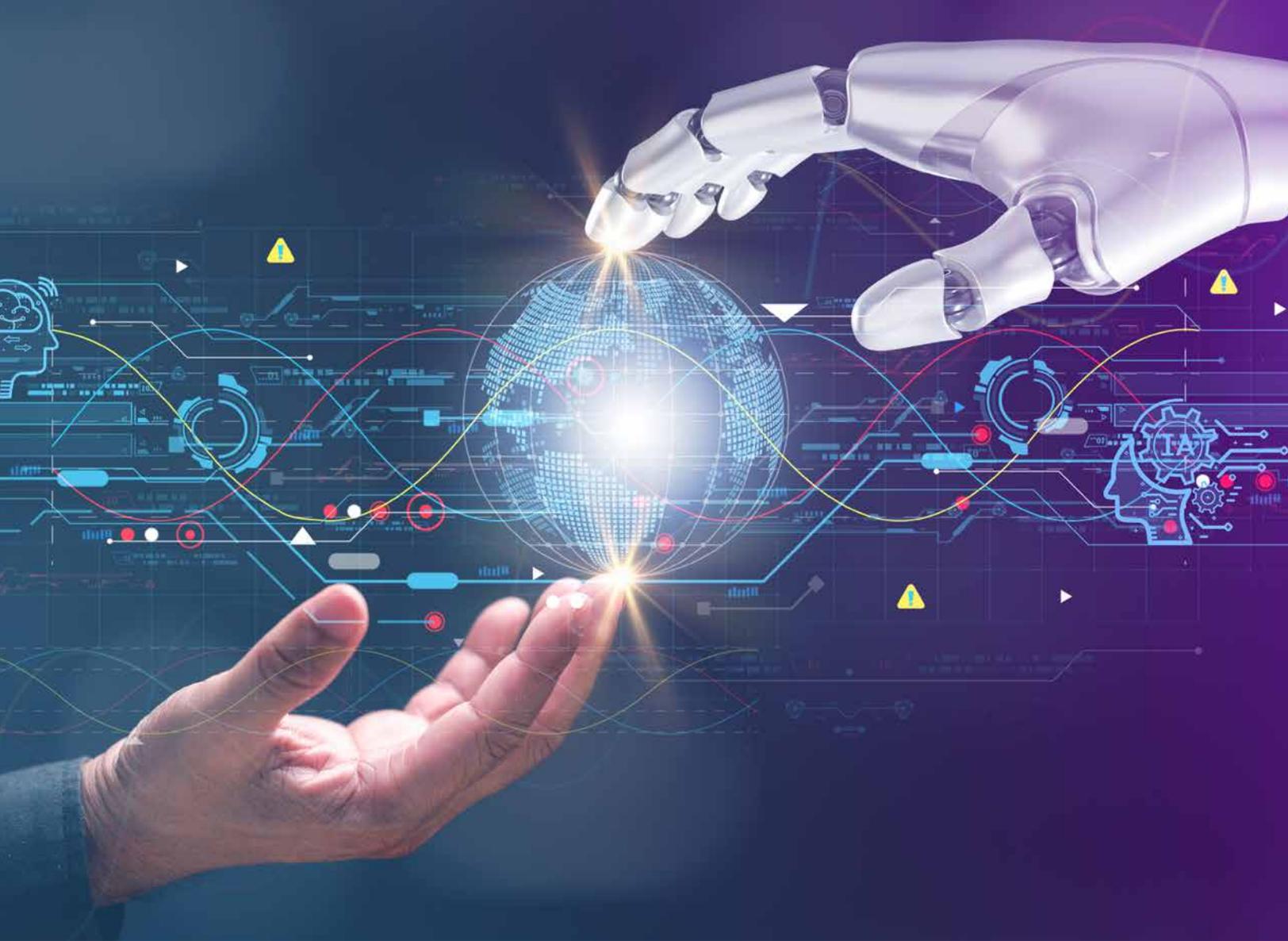
Elevating Organizational Results

The rewards of personalization are rich; in addition to delivering experiences that customers want and expect, making these interactions unique increases your brand's attractiveness to consumers. [According to Qualtrics, 80% of customers are more likely to do business with brands that provide a personalized experience.](#)³

In addition, personalization can increase customer and employee satisfaction and elevate organizational results. As you incorporate that upside into your investment equation, the results will likely strongly support approval of efforts to design, build, and deliver what is needed to implement or enhance your organization's personalization strategy. ✨

Links:

- <https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/how-to-straddle-personalization-and-privacy>
- <https://www.genesys.com/blog/post/3-challenges-in-creating-a-digital-first-customer-experience>
- <https://www.qualtrics.com/experience-management/customer/personalized-customer-experience/>



The Pervasiveness of AI in the Customer Service Experience

AI innovations have led to remarkable improvements in tools that assist and enhance both the agent and the customer experience as well as drive business outcomes.

by Andy Leach, Sr. Account Executive, PTP

Artificial intelligence (AI) has gained such significant ground over the past few years, it is now pervasive in customer experience. Although very recent advances have grabbed the headlines, AI dates back at least to the beginning of the 20th century. The concept garnered enough interest and attention to

be named in the 1950s. During the 1955 Dartmouth Conference, computer scientist John McCarthy coined the term artificial intelligence. At the conference, which was a two-month summer research project to explore the possibility of creating machines that could simulate human intelligence, he defined AI as “the science and engineering of making intelligent machines.”¹

McCarthy and his colleagues were early leaders in predicting that this formidable technology could be as smart as humans. With every development and application, their prediction gets closer to reality. This transformational technology has millions of applications across hundreds of industries and its momentum is skyrocketing. ChatGPT, anyone?

At PTP, we help our clients harness the power of this technology to improve the customer experience. Over the past few years, we've watched in awe as advances in AI supercharge the technology stacks that support customer service interactions. These innovations have led to remarkable improvements in tools that assist and enhance both the agent and the customer experience as well as drive business outcomes.

AI Helps Your Agents

Customer experience is only as good as the teams who design and deliver it, and the most important member of these teams is the frontline agent. These employees, more so than any other, can make or break a customer service interaction. They need the most relevant training, comprehensive support, and cutting-edge tools to consistently deliver stellar service.

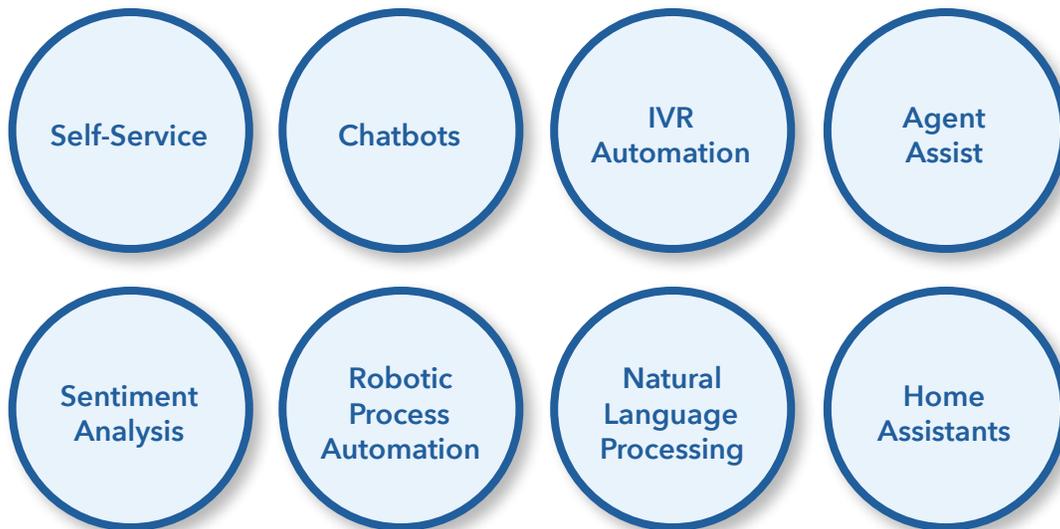
AI to the rescue in the form of agent assist offers real-time support for these teams!

Reducing rote processes and mundane tasks is one of the many ways AI can support agents and free them up to focus on moments that matter with customers or more complex issues.

From authentication to post-contact wrap-up notes, AI can take on simple but necessary tasks



The Most Common Uses of AI in Customer Service



to improve efficiency and accuracy. Consider that on average, [call center agents spend 10.2 minutes of every hour on post-call wrap-up](#);² using AI for this task can give that time back to agents for more productive activities, such as helping another customer.

Imagine the impact of AI taking over post-call wrap-up tasks if call center agents spend more than 10 minutes of every hour on this work.

Another impressive use of agent assist is sentiment analysis, a machine-learning technique that recognizes and interprets natural language to track the emotion of the agent during a contact. (This also applies to customers, but more on that later in the article.) If the emotion is too heightened, the supervisor is alerted and can assist. This AI-powered speech analytics technology can also be used to help an agent during a live interaction by analyzing the conversation and suggesting the

“next best action” for the agent to take based on that analysis. Although this is not widely used currently, the potential for greatly enhancing agent efficiency, increasing consistency in customer handling, and speeding resolution is limitless.

AI also powers targeted and customized agent training and coaching. AI analyzes contact transcripts to identify agent strengths and opportunities in this case. It collects and shares top performers’ best practices, identifies training gaps, and continuously improves to stay relevant, current, and effective. This impressive capability can be applied to individuals, teams, and departments to help organizations level up based on analysis of actual performance. The customization it offers increases the efficiency and effectiveness of the investment in upskilling agents through improved training and coaching.

While there are many use cases for AI to assist agents, agents can also help improve the AI. With AI-powered knowledge bases becoming more prevalent in the contact center, it is important to remember that they are only as



Generative AI in Customer Service

We've all seen the buzz about ChatGPT and Bard, which is applicable today for automating interactions that do not involve a transaction. For example, it cannot make changes to backend systems, but it can make suggestions. How these types of AI can integrate with existing contact center platforms is still to be determined. But, starting slow, starting small, and starting now with the integration of generative AI in your customer service experiences is a must.

good as what they "know" and require time to learn and improve. Who better to train this technology than the agents themselves? Agents using the tool can review, suggest edits, and upvote knowledge base content, acting as a training ground for the AI.

AI can power self-service, the preferred first choice for 80% of customers who need to contact customer service.

Agent involvement can also be used to identify improvements like new articles or missing details that were exposed during the interaction. This benefit doubles when content that is agent-approved is visible to customers. Imagine the operational impact when you consider that the average customer service call lasts six minutes and [75% percent of that time is spent by agents manually looking for the right information.](#)³

AI Helps Your Customers

Overall, agent-facing AI tools dramatically improve operational performance and increase contact-to-contact consistency. What happens when AI is put in front of customers? Let's start with the beginning of a typical interaction: routing. The key to effective routing is swiftly and effectively getting the customer to the right place. AI can interact with a customer in need to simplify intent questions and/or proactively provide information based on customer context and data.

AI uses speech recognition and natural language understanding to gather customer intent and route the caller appropriately. Machine learning is becoming increasingly effective at detecting the nuances of

conversations and helping guide callers to the correct place. When married with customer data, a conversational interactive voice response (IVR) can create the dynamic personalized interactions that customers crave. These AI-powered experiences can reduce the frustration and dissatisfaction of transfers and repeating information, reducing the overall cost to serve.

AI can also help customers with resolution – arguably the most critical part of the journey – in at least two ways: self-service and information sharing with agents during required transfers. Starting with self-service, AI can now easily learn to help customers complete basic tasks like updating billing addresses, changing payment methods, and checking on orders. Intelligent virtual agents (or bots) can handle tasks in various customer-facing channels, including voice, chat, SMS/text, and social media, which is a blessing to [80% of customers who prefer trying self-service options before contacting live support](#).⁴

While AI is getting better and better at handling more complex tasks, plenty of opportunity still exists for it to assist in live support contacts. In cases where AI cannot resolve the customer's issue, it can be used to collect necessary information and route the interaction to the best available agent; that agent is then much better equipped to handle the customer's need faster and more effectively. Authentication is a great example of how AI can support an interaction, making it easier for the customer and the agent that receives the contact. Training AI on the necessary steps to authenticate a contactor cuts down on the customer-agent interaction time and helps that customer get attention and resolution faster.

AI is also a powerful support to customer service teams during interactions as it monitors customer sentiment. Speech analytics technology can detect emotions and sentiments to ensure the customer's issue is being resolved swiftly. These natural language tools can identify when customers are frustrated, upset,



confrontational, or even more stressed than when the interaction began.

Like the way AI supports agents, it also can monitor the customer, notifying a manager to intervene to help the agent or take over to resolve the issue. This real-time capability is ideal for in-the-moment help. However, AI can also be used for recorded contacts, revealing coaching opportunities and process improvements that need to be addressed. These capabilities are applicable to both the bots and agent portions of an interaction.

AI Helps Your Business

As uses for AI continue to expand in customer service experiences, the benefits also increase. AI can be a dream for a contact center leader as it offers improved operational performance. Average handle time, cost per contact, and first contact resolution are three examples of efficiency metrics that can improve with AI.

Effectiveness metrics can also offer improved customer experience as AI surfaces the next best actions and creates consistency as it offers the same actions, talking points, and solutions to all agents. It powers personalization for customers and agents, leading to higher satisfaction, loyalty, and retention among both groups.

Understanding AI starts with the knowledge that it doesn't work well in all instances and takes some effort to train, operationalize, and benefit the CX. Companies may need outside expertise to know when and where to use AI to get business value from its inception. Be aware that consequences exist for companies that have gotten it wrong: agents and customers lose faith quickly and ignore it.

Conversely, when done well, AI gets better and more powerful; the more you use it, the better it gets. Establishing a lab environment for testing and learning is a great first step in

your AI strategy. With a solid understanding of the customer and employee journey, a well-designed strategy, an implementation plan, and a continuous improvement process, the pervasiveness of AI in customer service experiences will continue to flourish.



Andy Leach

Sr. Account Executive, PTP

After 20+ years in the Enterprise Software space, the most personally rewarding achievements come from providing ideas,

solutions, and value that make a significant impact on my client's business. I joined PTP four years ago because they partner with organizations to provide innovative CX solutions that transform customer engagement across marketing, sales, and contact center. Being technology agnostic, PTP brings a unique perspective across people, process, and technology solutions. I'd love to share more about PTP and our experience helping our clients implement AI to improve the CX.



PTP is a professional services firm delivering innovative customer service solutions across contact center infrastructure platforms that cut costs, enhance investments, and improve customer satisfaction.

Learn more at [ptpinc.com](https://www.ptpinc.com)

Links:

- 1 [ChatGPT's response to "what is the history of the term artificial intelligence?"](#)
- 2 <https://www.liveagent.com/research/call-center-benchmarks/>
- 3 <https://www.kmslh.com/blog/what-is-knowledge-base-in-artificial-intelligence/>
- 4 <https://hbr.org/2017/01/kick-ass-customer-service>



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KIA ONLINE COMMUNITY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



CINDY OBERKIRSCH
Director, Guest Care at Panera Bread



Cindy has spent her entire career in the Contact Center industry. Her 30 years of Contact Center experience from Customer Service Representative to Director has enabled her to gain significant

leadership experience and build a track record of driving results. As the Director of Guest Care for Panera Bread, she is focused on building strategic partnerships across the organization to drive operational efficiencies and create better agent and guest experiences alike. Execs In The Know recently caught up with Cindy to talk about her passion for helping customers, why 'Panera Warmth' is at the heart of everything the bakery-café chain does, the elements of customer experience that matter most to guests, and the philosophy and culture of Panera Bread as it applies to CX.

Making Personal Connections and Eliminating Barriers to Exceed Guests' Expectations

'Panera Warmth' is at the heart of everything the brand does.

EXECS IN THE KNOW (EITK): What initially drew you into the Guest Care space, and what keeps you passionate when it comes to helping customers?

CINDY OBERKIRSCH: My first job right out of college was as a customer service representative. I wouldn't have imagined at the

time that 30 years later I would still be working in the contact center space. Throughout my career, I've always found myself coming back to the contact center and/or customer experience roles.

Working in a contact center is not for everyone. Customer Service Representatives have a



tough job and while there is satisfaction in resolving guests' issues, front-line agents handle a lot of guests that can't always be made happy.

I am extremely passionate about removing barriers for our agents and enabling them to provide a warm and positive guest experience that will keep our guests coming back.

In Guest Care, we get to make things right! There's nothing more satisfying than turning a negative guest experience into a positive one and having a happy guest thanking us by the end of the call!

EITK: When creating memorable customer experiences, no detail is too small. In what ways does Panera Bread seek to "wow" its customers?

CINDY: At Panera Bread, we strive to ensure every guest has a great experience.

Warmth For Guests is one of our guiding values

and behaviors which consists of anticipating guests' needs, making personal connections, eliminating barriers to exceed guests' expectations, and when things go wrong, acting urgently to resolve the issue.

'Panera Warmth' is at the heart of everything we do. In the Cafes, we are focused on WARM (Welcoming, Attentive, Relaxing, and Memorable) Hospitality. Guests enjoy frequenting our cafes because of our commitment to WARM hospitality and the family-like atmosphere.

EITK: What elements of the restaurant customer experience matter most to your guests?

CINDY: Panera Bread opened with a belief that sharing great bread is an expression of warmth and generosity, and we extend that WARM hospitality to every guest.

We have many 'regulars' that frequent the same cafes every day, and many that use our cafes as their 'office' for the day so it's important that our guests feel at home when they visit like it's their second home, and that's why we treat them like family.

At Panera, we serve food that is made with responsibly raised proteins and freshly prepared with clean ingredients – it is food that we are proud to serve our own families and one of the many reasons our guests feel good about eating at Panera.

EITK: What can you share about the philosophy and culture of Panera Bread as it applies to CX?

CINDY: It all stems from our Mission and Purpose – 'One Panera for a healthier and happier world,' which entails 'Panera Warmth' and being the Most Guest Responsive.

In Guest Care, our agents are empowered to make things right for our guests. Whether that's adding rewards to their loyalty account, sending an eGift Card, or in some instances offering a refund, our agents are empowered to make those decisions. In a cafe, this might look like an associate adding a free pastry to your order just because, or offering a free cookie to a child. Every small detail matters.

EITK: As a Guest Care leader, what is one of the most important things you've learned over the past year?

CINDY: Customer expectations change and develop year after year. More important than ever, we must be able to meet the customers where they are. It's necessary to stay abreast of new technologies to stay ahead of the curve but it can be challenging to know which direction to go, as multiple vendors are selling very similar products.

One thing is for sure, whatever customer-facing technology is implemented must drive a better customer experience.

EITK: Even the most successful and productive leaders make outside interests and passions a top priority.

How do you prefer to spend your leisure time?

CINDY: My husband and I have committed to getting out of our "bubble." Therefore, we are slowly making our way around St. Louis trying different restaurants. I love a good meal and a good glass of wine! Spending time with friends and family (we have two boys, 18 and 21) is very near and dear to me, as is reading, listening to podcasts, and running. I am registered for a half marathon in October to keep me accountable.

'PANERA WARMTH'
is at the heart of everything we do. In the Cafes, we are focused on WARM (Welcoming, Attentive, Relaxing, and Memorable) Hospitality.



EITK: Since joining the Execs In The Know "KIA" (Know It All) Online Community, what stands out about your experiences so far? Can you share how your involvement in the EITK community translates into value for yourself, your organization, and the community at large?

CINDY: I love knowing that I have access to a large network of people in my same industry at the ready. If I have a question, am looking for

recommendations, need suggestions, a second opinion, or otherwise, I know that the KIA Online Community is a space I can go to for help. The KIA members are always very helpful and insightful. 🙌



Execs In The Know

Thank you to Cindy Oberkirsch, Director, Guest Care at Panera Bread, for her leadership, participation, and insights. To connect with Cindy, or to participate in the wider conversation, consider joining the Execs In The Know "Know It All" (KIA) Community. The KIA Community is a private, online community designed exclusively for CX Leaders at consumer-facing brands. Come learn, share, network, and engage to innovate.

Want to learn more about the KIA online community? [CLICK HERE.....](https://bit.ly/aboutkia)
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Interested in taking part in a future Brand Spotlight feature and sharing your story? [CLICK HERE.....](mailto:info@execsintheknow.com)
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How AI Simulation Training for Customer Engagement Drives Improved KPIs

For the contact center leader, high-performing agents create a unique opportunity for success.

by Casey Denby, Senior Director, Enterprise Sales at Zenarate

The advances in artificial intelligence (AI) for self-service and chatbots at contact centers are quite impressive in shaping the customer experience. But at its core, human interactions still matter most to customers according to multiple industry surveys. While digital self-service certainly helps millions of customers and prospects with simple issues – it is agents who are left with the most complex and difficult interactions.

An agent is often the only human interaction that a customer or prospect has with a brand. And the customer's perception of the brand can depend on that single interaction. According to [Execs In The Know](#),¹ 70% of consumers want companies to focus more on improving their customer care agents rather than creating better self-help solutions. This reiterates the need for better human performance.

For the contact center leader, high-performing agents create a unique opportunity for success. Unlike simple transactional machine interactions,

a human connection has the power to deepen customer loyalty by solving complex problems with care and empathy.

In this article, let's explore how advanced training approaches can improve agent interactions for conversation, screen, and chat. Contact center leaders will discover the latest methods for empowering their agents and transforming their learning capacity by inserting experiential active learning into their training curriculum to improve both employee experiences (EX) and customer experiences (CX).

Why Agent Performance Matters

Companies with confident top-performing agents are leaders in customer engagement. But a common challenge among contact center leaders is finding effective and scalable approaches to train and improve agent performance.

The path to better interactions means equipping agents with best practices and skills to solve complex problems with care and empathy – while accelerating speed to proficiency, reducing agent attrition, and improving critical KPIs such as CSAT, conversion rate, agent NPS, and first call resolution scores.

From the customer and prospect perspective, a positive experience with agents who listen and understand them has a ripple effect, from improving contact center KPIs to securing a return customer. The [2020 Salesforce "State of Service" report](#)² shows that almost 80% of contact center agents say their company views them as customer advocates or brand ambassadors, and 77% of agents reported that their role is more strategic than it was two years ago.

As the agent job becomes more difficult, agents need support to reach and uphold expected levels of performance. Active learning methods like simulation training positively contribute to

the employee experience because it creates top-performing agents who are more likely to be secure and happy in their roles. This is done through real-life practice, which allows agents to learn faster and retain information at a significantly higher rate.

With new advances in technology, contact center leaders can leverage the benefits of simulation training role-play whether the agent works from home or in an office, without the limitations of outdated scripted methods.

Agent Training with AI Simulation Training

The best approach contact center leaders can take to equip their agents for better performance is to ensure they have access to the most effective training methodologies and solutions. Established methods like practice via simulation training set agents up for greater success in their roles.

For years, people have leveraged simulation training to learn new skills. For example, pilots learn to fly planes in flight simulators with zero risk involved to passengers, cargo, or aircraft. Similarly, contact center agents can learn how to speak to customers or prospects with care, empathy, active listening, and more without the risk of losing a customer due to a poor experience. Today, AI has not only transformed self-service customer service solutions, but it can also help contact center agents learn complex new skills through hands-on active learning. The 70-20-10 learning method has proven over countless studies that human beings learn best by doing. In fact, 70% of learning is achieved through hands-on learning.

Contact center leaders can use AI simulation training to prepare new hires well before speaking with their first live customer or prospect. Tenured agents can build new skills and close skill gaps. Companies can more effectively train their entire agent workforce

when launching a new product, service, or way of conducting business vs. antiquated methods such as huddles or relying solely on knowledge articles. By leveraging AI, agents take on a modern approach to practicing high-impact call scenarios in their own words without a script. Contact center leaders can also use AI simulation training for tone, soft skills, and best and required practice feedback. Agents practice, solve problems, make mistakes, and build confidence through simulated life-like scenarios.

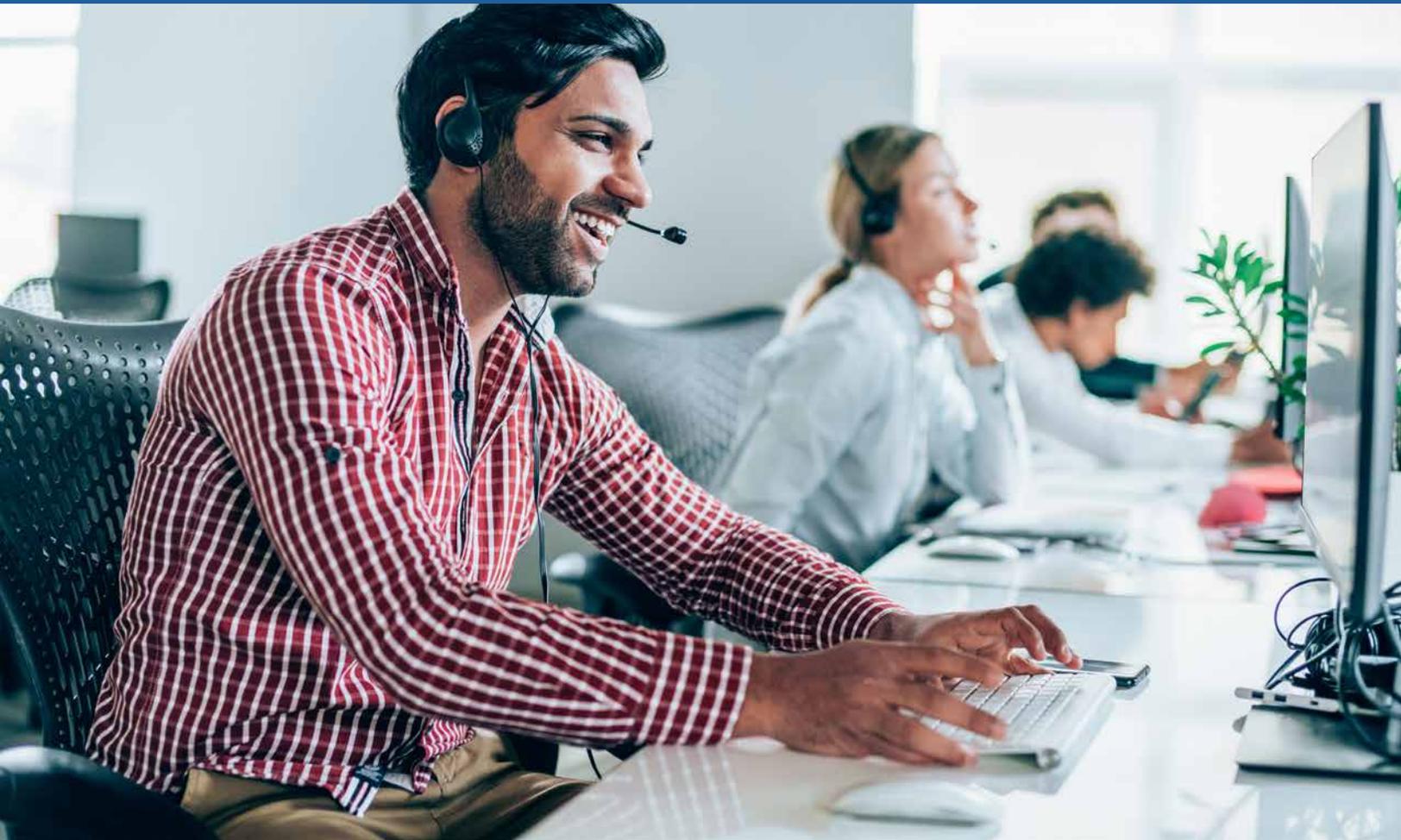
Challenges with Creating a Simulation Training Program

Once a contact center leader decides to use AI simulation training, it may seem overwhelming to build out all the potential scenarios. With so many possibilities, top KPIs can easily get lost in the mix. The 80-20 rule helps leaders stay

on track. This means that on average, 50-75 simulation stories will cover 80% of any call type. Leaders want agents to be amazing at 50-75 stories per use case such as customer service, direct sales, fraud, disputes, collections, or more. On the flip side, it may take a significantly larger number of stories to cover the remaining 20% of potential call types or corner cases with live customers or prospects. When agents can handle the most critical and frequent 80% of call types with superior agility and proficiency, they will often figure out how to handle the remaining 20% for the first time with finesse and confidence.

When it comes to metrics, the top priorities at every contact center vary. Each contact center leader should spend time determining additional key metrics to improve based on the contact center's specific needs. There are





a handful of major metrics that should always be considered when building out any agent training program.

Major Metrics/KPI improvements

- **Speed-to-Proficiency:** Improve how quickly an agent can provide accurate and timely replies to customers according to your quality standards.
- **CSAT Score:** This metric is perhaps the strongest at demonstrating impact on the business. By solving customer inquiries for the first time with personalized empathetic customer experiences, customer satisfaction scores will significantly improve.
- **Drive to Digital:** Save customer time and prevent future calls. Improving the drive-to-digital metric empowers customers to help themselves, saving them time and frustration from waiting to speak with a customer service representative.
- **Agent Attrition:** Losing agents to attrition is a current major concern of contact centers. Many agents are leaving in their first 90 days of employment. A number of agents leave because they don't feel adequately prepared for success in the role.
- **Reduce Average Handle Time (AHT):** Improve service delivery while reducing cost. By focusing on common call types, prioritizing best practices for speed, and providing a superior customer experience, starting on day one in training for new hire agents.
- **Improve First Call Resolution (FCR):** Prevent callbacks and reduce costs. FCR is one of the cornerstone metrics for high-performing contact centers. It provides clear insights

into customer satisfaction, ensures customer problems are solved the first time, and reduces unnecessary repeat customer call-back costs.

Each contact center will differ, but these metrics are typically good indicators of training program effectiveness.

The Value of Improving Soft Skills

Delivering empathetic interactions through conversations, screen, and chat is a key driver of brand perception. [According to Harvard Business Review research from 2015](#),³ "The top 10 companies in the Global Empathy Index 2015 increased in value more than twice as much as the bottom 10 and generated 50% more earnings."

When agents build soft skills, such as acknowledging with empathy, removing isolation, and responding with compassion, they can majorly differentiate the brand. Many agents tend to dive head-first into problem-solving without acknowledging the customer's emotions, frustration, or hardships. While soft skills do not come naturally to all agents, active learning helps improve those important soft skills to ensure that customers and prospects feel heard and understood.

By practicing real-life call scenarios before talking with live customers through AI simulation training, agents can master soft skills and be fully prepared for their first live call. With more empathetic agents, CSAT, and NPS scores rise.

Contact center leaders can leverage AI to empower their agents to master the best and required practices and soft skills. AI simulation training creates role-play scenarios and allows for human feedback – at scale, across massive contact centers. New technologies have transformed the contact center experience, but leaders cannot overlook the importance of confident top-performing agents to drive customer engagement and KPI milestones.



Casey Denby
Senior Director,
Enterprise Sales

Casey is an experienced global leader of Operations and Training organizations with a rich background in contact center operational success. Casey currently leads the Zenarate Sales Team, with a focus on empowering Customer Care organizations around the globe with a smarter coaching approach through AI Simulation Training. Casey has led multiple global Training organizations, including at Western Union and RE/MAX, overseeing training delivery, quality assurance, knowledge documentation, creative & interactive design, and LMS. Casey is passionate about delivering excellence for the customer, with a belief that the customer service agent job can be more desirable by setting up the agent for immediate and long-term success.



Zenarate AI Coach helps leading brands develop confident top-performing agents through AI Simulation Training.

[Learn more at zenarate.com/](https://zenarate.com/)

Links:

- 1 <https://execsintheknow.com/knowledge-center/cx-research/cx-leaders-trends-insights/2022-consumer-edition/>
- 2 https://www.salesforce.com/content/dam/web/en_us/www/documents/research/state-of-service-4th-edition.pdf
- 3 <https://hbr.org/2015/11/2015-empathy-index>



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Michael B.

Vice President, Customer Service & Support
Sweetwater Sound





BRAND SPOTLIGHT

State Employees' Credit Union

Meeting Members Where They Are and Where They Want to Be Met



An interview with Jared Benesh, Executive Vice President, Member Experience Transformation, Member Service Support & Branch Network Operations at State Employees' Credit Union (SECU).

SECU is a financial institution located in North Carolina that serves as a trusted partner for many residents of the state. Over the years, it has grown to become the second-largest credit union in the United States, with over 2.5 million members and 260 branches across the state of North Carolina. In a recent

conversation with Jared, we discussed the key areas that have had the biggest impact on member and employee experience, the ways it seeks to "WOW" its customers, and the KPIs SECU is focused on to stay agile and ensure scalability now and into the future.



State Employees' Credit Union*



JARED BENESH

Executive Vice President, Member Experience Transformation, Member Service Support & Branch Network Operations



Execs In The Know (EITK): In what ways has the North Carolina State Employees' Credit Union bridged the gap between the digital and physical experience for guests? Explain how the brand is reigniting customer experience in a digital-first world.

Jared Benesh: As with most financial institutions, we have an online portal for access and a mobile app, and we've started down a path of modernization across the entire credit union to bring to life more experiences that our members want and need.

EITK: What are the key areas that have the biggest impact on member experience and employee efficiency?

Jared: We need to meet members where they are – and where they want to be met – so we're focused on creating experiences that accomplish that. In today's world, personalization and unified experiences are paramount. I say frequently that we need to make it easy for our employees to deliver the experiences to our members, which means we strive for efficiency by looking at the systems and processes our employees use and exploring opportunities that simplify their roles. On the member side, it's similar – but the greatest impact or improvement we can make is around the unification of the experience across their entire relationship with us and knowing what, when, and where they'll need us.

EITK: In what ways does the State Employees' Credit Union seek to WOW its customers?

Jared: Our philosophy is, "People Helping People®" – and our employees embrace and deliver on this every day. As a long-time veteran in the CX space, I've not encountered this level of focus and commitment before. Our "WOW" moments happen every single day on the phones and in our branches because of our commitment to the people we serve. Our team will spend time with members to balance their checkbooks, call to check on a sick member who hasn't been in for a while, or even go to their home if they need assistance. Our staff is not commission or quota-based in any way – we don't want to create an environment that conflicts with our philosophy and mission. We know our members, we know their families, we know what they need and want – that's our "WOW."

EITK: As a CX leader, what is one of the most important things you've learned over the past year?

Jared: The most important thing I have learned over the past year is that you must not forget about the empty chair – the chair of the customer/member – in all that you do. It's easy to get focused on the initiatives, technology, or transformation and lose focus on why those changes are even happening or were started in the first place. Remember the empty seat at the table.

EITK: Can you talk a bit about personalization, why you feel it's become such a focus, and what the State Employees' Credit Union is doing in this regard to tailor their experiences?

Jared: Personalization has always been important for our members, and we've been doing it in more of an analog way for 85 years. Digital personalization is a new expectation and slightly more complicated with technology, data, and the orchestration of those elements. We are now looking at the analog and heading down a modern and transformative path that creates digital experiences that by and large mirror our past analog success.

EITK: Rising member expectations are driving the need for more advanced self-service technologies. How is your virtual CX strategy fulfilling the current – and future – demands of your members to enhance member loyalty?

Jared: To date, our self-service through digital means has been fairly limited, but as mentioned previously, we're on a journey to modernize and bring more advanced options to our membership. We're starting in the contact center and are excited that a big shift is happening over the next few months as we move to a new Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) platform. New capabilities like ASR and IVA will also give us more insights internally so we can continue to learn and improve our experiences.

EITK: What is the importance of refreshing your organization's KPIs?

Jared: We've not traditionally focused on the broader KPIs that most organizations would be familiar with – so with a refresh in today's world of rising expectations, a refresh was necessary to ensure we're successfully delivering on the expectations of our members and our employees.

EITK: What are those KPIs you're focused on to stay agile and ensure scalability?

Jared: In the contact center, we're focused on five KPIs going forward: AHT, sentiment, satisfaction, FCR, and transfers. On the branch side, we're focused on productivity, satisfaction, community outreach, and non-transactional member time.

EITK: What's your take on AI and the role it's playing in transforming the customer experience?

Jared: AI has had a bit of a controversial past – the overselling of programmatic response chatbots as AI set things back and left a lot of organizations scratching their heads after some quick wins. The idea of AI seven to ten years ago outpaced its capability but we're now converging. Everyone has heard of ChatGPT by now, and it's demonstrating a lot of true AI capability using transformers, large language models, and different learning models. In the future, AI will play a big role in solving some long-lingering issues with true omni CX, but it must be used thoughtfully and intentionally to avoid negative outcomes or disappointment.

EITK: What do you think will be the main focus for customer experience for the rest of 2023 and into the future, either for the industry in general or specifically for the State Employees' Credit Union?

Jared: For the future, I think the big focus that brands or companies need to have is journey orchestration. People have a lot of options and ways to connect and interact for service or to obtain/grow relationships with brands. Coordinating the channels, information, products, and people will become critical to the success of any experience.



Execs In The Know

Execs In The Know partners with brands that are providing outstanding customer service (CX) experiences. The Brand Spotlight Series showcases innovations and solutions to CX challenges faced by today's leading brands.

Thank you to Jared Benesh and the entire team at State Employees' Credit Union for contributing to the Execs In The Know Brand Spotlight.

Interested in taking part in a future Brand Spotlight feature and sharing your story?

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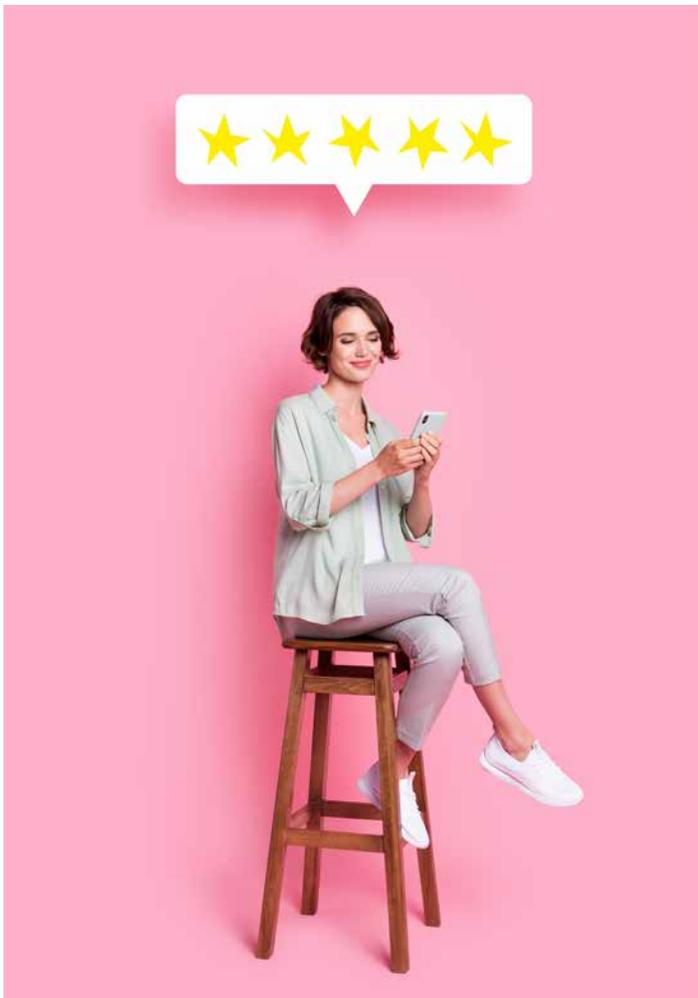
ChatGPT in the Lens of Customer Service... What's Next?

by Execs In The Know

Understanding ChatGPT's abilities, restrictions, and applications in customer service is essential to comprehend its potential impact on the future of CX.

Organizations worldwide are in constant pursuit of enhancing customer experience (CX), and several companies are increasingly relying on cutting-edge Artificial Intelligence (AI) language tools to achieve this goal. Among the latest AI-driven conversational agents making headlines is ChatGPT, launched by OpenAI in November last year. This interactive chatbot harnesses machine learning technology to provide sophisticated and hyper-personalized solutions to users.

While chatbot technology has undergone continuous improvements over the last decade, the release of ChatGPT, a Large Language Model (LLM)-based chatbot, has heralded a new era of highly adaptable and powerful conversational agents. Developed on OpenAI's GPT-3 family of LLMs, ChatGPT represents a significant breakthrough in natural language processing (NLP) by possessing the ability to comprehend intricate natural language queries. The software and other AI-based models are



essentially a step up from the technologies many contact centers have used to support their customer support transactions for years.

The allure of ChatGPT's capabilities has caught the attention of businesses across multiple industries. Already, AI has demonstrated its potential in improving productivity, fostering creativity, and enhancing daily operations for both individuals and organizations. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that companies are keen to leverage ChatGPT's capabilities in revolutionizing customer service. On the other hand, there are also criticisms and risks of ChatGPT in the contact center.

This article will examine what is possible and what is not with ChatGPT. We'll also dive into the potential applications in customer support

that are beyond the hype, and the technology's probable impact on the future of CX.

Optimized for Conversations

What makes ChatGPT special lies in its explicit optimization for facilitating conversations. In sharp contrast to prior iterations of LLMs, ChatGPT exhibits the ability to retain knowledge garnered from previous exchanges, thereby enabling the capacity for seeking clarification and questioning incorrect responses.

Some brands are already figuring out how to harness the technology to improve online chat functions. Meta, Canva, and Shopify, among other companies, are already using the technology in their customer service chatbots. Leveraging the capabilities of LLMs, chatbots have developed amazing competencies to generate human-like responses and to speak in different languages and styles. According to [Juniper Research](#),¹ it's predicted that AI-powered chatbots will handle up to 70% of customer conversations by the end of 2023.

This highlights the growing reliance on AI to enhance CX and streamline interactions to tackle customer service communication that is not straightforward and can benefit from a conversational, powerful, and intelligent bot. As an AI language model, ChatGPT's capabilities in customer service and customer support are quite extensive.

ChatGPT in the Contact Center

Faced with these new technological possibilities, we see CX leaders questioning how to take advantage of this new technology to reimagine the digital customer experience.

Generative AI tools like ChatGPT have the potential to be transformational – likely impacting every aspect of business, especially customer support.

Here are just a few areas where ChatGPT could influence CX.

AUTOMATED CUSTOMER SERVICE

ChatGPT can be trained to identify common customer inquiries and issues such as shipping updates, billing inquiries, and product information. By doing so, it can provide quick responses to customers without the need for human intervention. This can save customers time and reduce the workload of customer service agents.

24/7 AVAILABILITY

Unlike human customer service agents, ChatGPT is available around the clock. Customers can receive assistance anytime they need it, which can improve customer satisfaction and loyalty.

PERSONALIZED SUPPORT

By using customer data, ChatGPT can offer personalized support. For example, if a customer has made previous purchases, ChatGPT can suggest similar products or provide discounts based on their buying history. This level of personalization can make customers feel valued.

MULTILINGUAL SUPPORT

ChatGPT can be trained in multiple languages, enabling brands to offer support to customers globally. This can help brands expand their customer base and improve satisfaction for non-native speakers. ChatGPT can provide a more natural and personalized experience for customers by communicating in their language.

Potential Applications in Contact Centers

One potential use case for advanced language models like ChatGPT is in providing subject matter expertise. With the ability to process large amounts of unstructured data, these

models can generate coherent responses to semi-structured natural language queries, enabling chatbots and IVRs to provide tailored responses to customers.

Another potential application is in agent assist, where the underlying NLP algorithms can aid agents in their interactions with customers. Language models can help agents understand customer intent and suggest relevant response options and knowledge articles based on real-time conversation analysis. Language models can also be used for intelligent routing, leveraging their ability to understand customer needs to match them with an agent with the appropriate skill set. This provides a more accurate and efficient routing process, with the added benefit of providing agents with a summary of the customer's needs.

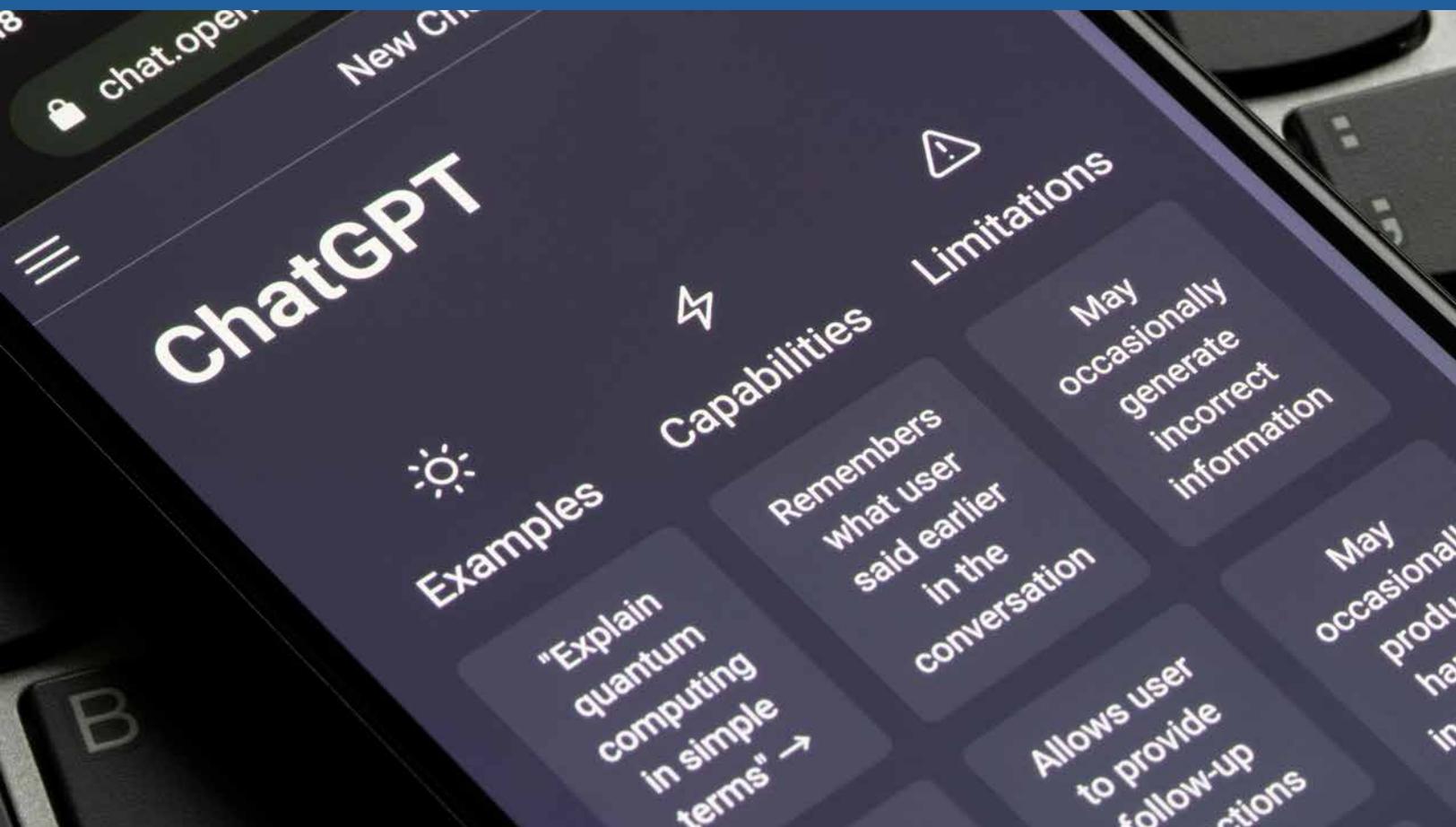
ChatGPT Does Have Its Limitations

Despite the hype, CX leaders may be wary of AI's tendency to get things wrong. The model is strictly based on its trained parameters and the previous words in a conversation. It cannot access any outside information or database to make its predictions, and it doesn't know anything that happened after 2021.

In speaking with Matt Taylor, Chief Product Officer at [Knowbl](#),² we discussed the critical functionalities that could mean the difference between delivering great CX at scale and a frustrated customer. Knowbl is an enterprise-ready virtual concierge platform that leverages on-brand, compliant content.

"The one thing to keep in mind is that Open AI is providing an API and not a platform," says Taylor. "Very few companies have the resources internally to be successful with taking that API and building the necessary functionality around it."

With that said, an overreliance on ChatGPT could lead to brands sharing incorrect information with customers without realizing



it, which is why human judgment needs to be applied to avoid errors or bias.

“ChatGPT is not safe for direct customer service or support (yet),” adds Taylor. “It is extremely helpful for generating content that can be used for customer support such as FAQs, blogs, or articles but there has to be a layer of human review and approval before anything can be customer-facing. The reasoning for this is that Generative AI tends to not only answer questions inaccurately but, in some cases, will completely fabricate an answer that has absolutely no truth or substance behind it. This has commonly been referred to as ‘hallucinating.’ But the AI is not hallucinating. It is using the large mass of data it has been trained on to calculate/generate the most likely token (e.g., word) after the previous token. And these models are black boxes, meaning there is no way to explain why the model decided to answer the way that it did. With no explanation,

there is no clear path to successfully tune the model.”

Moreover, ChatGPT models may not be capable of adding value to customer queries that are repetitive in nature and require consistent answers. Some of the most asked questions might be, “Where’s my package?” “How long will my return and refund take to process?” or “What’s my password?”

Whereas many chatbots are trained to deliver a response of, “I don’t know” to requests they cannot handle, ChatGPT, for example, is more likely to respond with complete confidence – even if the information is incorrect.

“Knowbl leverages the underlying technology of LLMs, but has also created a safe and compliant application for the enterprise by leveraging their content to power the AI. Our model will not “hallucinate” because it will not generate its own response,” explains Taylor. “It will only

pull from the content the AI has ingested from the brand. If content does not exist for the user question, it will not be able to answer, as opposed to generating a completely fabricated response that has no basis. This is what allows us to be directly customer-facing when it comes to service and support.”

Using Technology to Complement Capabilities, Not Substitute Them

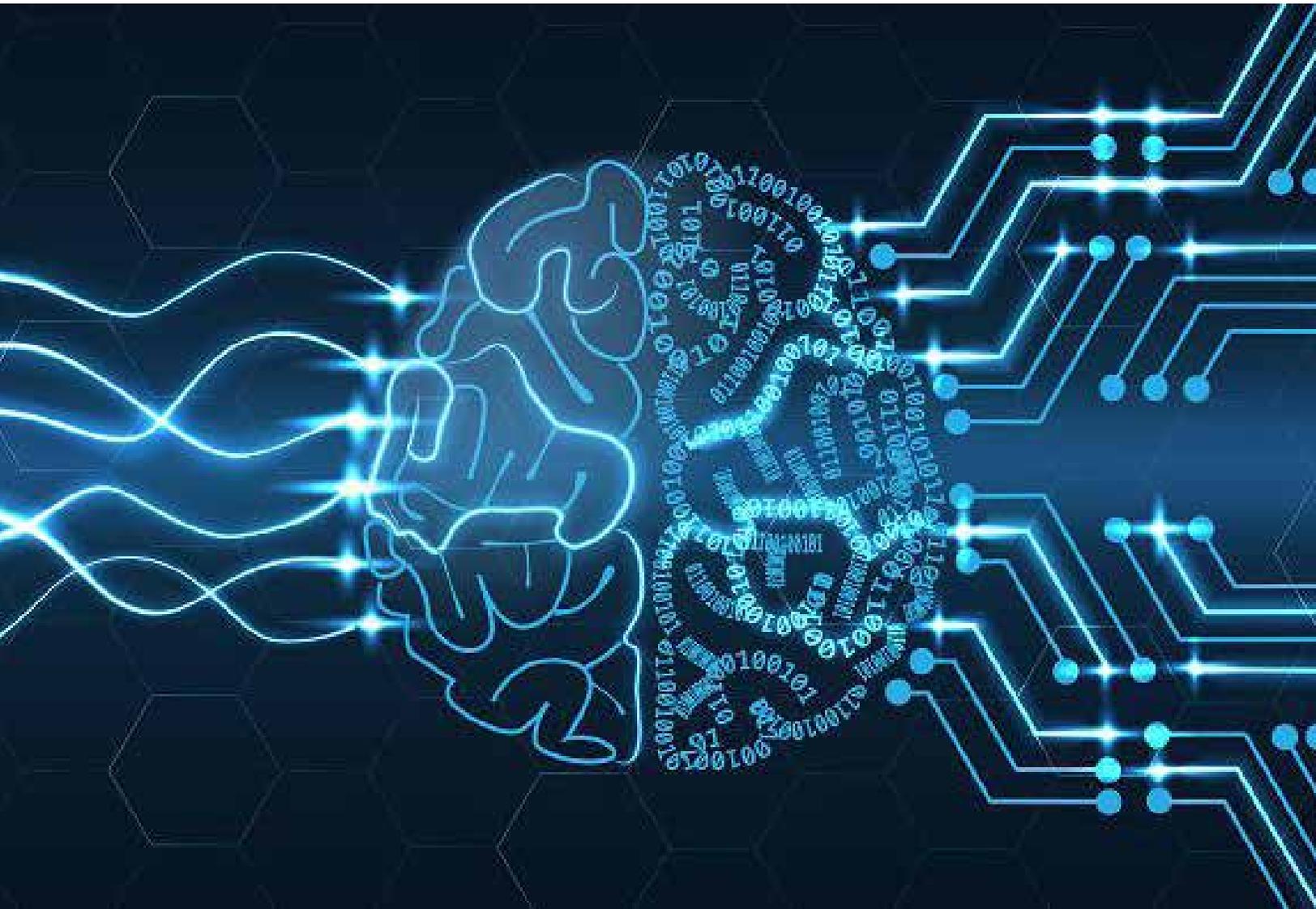
As an AI language model, ChatGPT can work in conjunction with human customer service agents as a productivity-enhancing tool as opposed to a complete replacement for customer support and customer service. According to [Forrester](#),³ the short-term achievements will likely outweigh the long-term success for organizations that are investing in AI

as a solution to simply cut costs and automate tasks in the process.

Here are just a few of ChatGPT’s current limitations.

LIMITED ABILITY TO EMPATHIZE: While it can provide helpful responses to customer inquiries, it lacks the emotional intelligence and empathy of a human customer service agent. As such, it may not be able to fully understand or address the emotional needs of a customer.

DIFFICULTY WITH COMPLEX ISSUES: Although it can handle a wide range of customer inquiries, there may be some complex issues that it’s not equipped to handle. In these cases, it may be necessary to transfer the customer to a human agent who has the expertise to address the issue.



INABILITY TO HANDLE NON-TEXTUAL

COMMUNICATION: As a language model, it can only process and respond to text-based communication. It's unable to handle voice calls or video chats, which may be necessary for certain types of customer support interactions.

LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF CERTAIN SPECIFIC

DOMAINS: ChatGPT's knowledge base is extensive but not exhaustive, and there may be specific domains or industries where it lacks the required expertise to provide accurate and helpful support.

Clearly, ChatGPT still has [many shortcomings](#)⁴ (e.g., hallucinations, biases, and non-transparency), but from the looks of it, the technology is quickly advancing.

A Transformational Shift in CX

In conclusion, there is no question we will see a transformational shift in CX over the next few months and years, with AI and ChatGPT tools driving accelerated change. What we're seeing is that ChatGPT can serve as a tool for brands looking to improve their customer service and support. By combining the strengths of ChatGPT with human customer service to provide automated responses, 24/7 availability, personalized support, and multilingual support, ChatGPT may help brands meet the demands of today's customers and improve their customer satisfaction and loyalty.

However, empathy is critical in any type of CX engagement. Therefore, ChatGPT in its current form could never replace customer service agents. Despite advanced sentiment analysis and NLP, there are some circumstances – even transactional ones – where human connection is the best strategy for long-term customer loyalty.

These tools are profoundly changing the way we work, and how organizations operate.

We're excited to see how brands will continue harnessing the power of AI models to drive transformation. 

Links:

- 1 <https://www.juniperresearch.com/researchstore/operators-providers/chatbots-trends-research-report>
- 2 <https://knowbl.com/>
- 3 <https://go.forrester.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Forrester-Future-of-CX.pdf>
- 4 <https://hbr.org/2023/02/generative-ai-wont-revolutionize-search-yet>



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1. Currently, what are the biggest challenges CX leaders are facing? 1 Recommend

Posted 4 days ago Reply ▼

 Hello KIA community -
This is a pretty broad topic, but it would be great to hear about the biggest challenges my fellow CX leaders are facing at the moment.

Actions ▼ Thank you!

2. RE: Currently, what are the biggest challenges CX leaders are facing? 3 Recommend

Posted 4 days ago Reply ▼

 Hi fellow KIA Member,
That's a great question!
With a greater focus being put on our organization to deliver exceptional experiences, my team has been facing the following two specific challenges:

- 1) Being aligned around understanding and meeting customer expectations across all channels.
- 2) Navigating the talent crisis. We are actively working to address this by evaluating alternative talent sources (e.g., gig workers) as well as improving our employee experience (EX) to retain the talent we hire.

Hope this was helpful! Feel free to reach out directly and we can dive deeper into these challenges. Thanks!

Actions ▼

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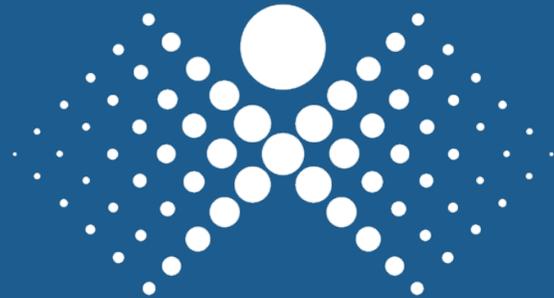
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