How to keep your business human in the post-pandemic landscape

We all have a fresh appreciation for the importance of human interaction after the past 18 months. Despite some people openly declaring the lack of social commitment to be the dawn of a bright new era, we are inherently social animals. Human connection is essential in every aspect of our daily lives, and that includes business. That's because, like any relationship, a business relationship is based on trust. Trust has to be earned, but it is built over time through connection.

Temps de lecture : minute

4 August 2021

Whether you're an independent business owner working in a small team or a multinational corporation, that trust is the foundation of your success.

AI is still an important business tool

It seems like every year, AI is touted as the solution to all our customer service needs.

And many companies have already adopted AI into their operations. A 2019 Gartner survey shows 37% of organisations have implemented AI in some form, an increase of 270% in four years.

So have businesses been sold a white elephant? Of course not. AI has its place in business.

54% of business executives say that the adoption of AI within the workplace has _boosted productivity_. It can handle repetitive data input, help streamline your lead qualification process and even help you better manage projects. But putting AI on the frontline to 'interact' with customers is a recipe for stale, impersonal service.

The most human business wins

As Mark Schaefer said in his classic book 'Marketing Rebellion', "The fact is, we cannot love a logo, a jingle, or a piece of branded content. But we can love a person."

Since the dawn of business, the customer has wanted to feel heard. The number one reason customers switch to a new brand is _feeling unappreciated_. By implementing an automated solution to respond to your customers, you're essentially leaving them on voicemail.

The user experience is the foundation of any business. 70% of the customer's journey is based on how the customer _feels they are being treated_.

That's true even for product-led companies where you can use the product without ever talking to an employee (think Netflix, Amazon, Trello). And while the best products don't require much (if any) handholding, customers will always need support. And when that time comes, you need to be ready with real people. There's a reason 62% of customers prefer _human-to-human interactions_ through phone calls than to self-service (14%) or bots (13%) when dealing with issues.

Chatbots still fall short of true

comprehension

Sure; automated solutions like chatbots, voicemail and IVR are constantly improving. The solutions available today come with plenty of options for personalisation, and these will undoubtedly continue to improve.

But chatbots still regularly suffer from _miscommunication issues_. They tend to have a limited range of responses and still rely heavily on users providing questions worded in a specific way. Of course, many communicate through a multiple-choice system. But that only works when the user's question fits within the company's pre-defined parameters.

Chatbots require pre-programmed with multiple options. But adding too many options in your chatbot can actually be counterproductive. Providing too much choice can discourage people from making any choice; what's known as _choice overload_.

AI is supposed to reduce friction. Unfortunately, more often than not, it creates more friction.

The user experience demands connection

We've all interacted with chatbots. But most of us have also ended up requesting to speak with a real person. For the business I'm trying to contact, that's both time and resource-intensive. It adds unnecessary steps to the support process, which doesn't make for a satisfying user experience.

It's not just the diversity of expression that can cause issues. Working in Scotland, I've witnessed first-hand the struggles of trying to interact with AI using voice commands. In fact, a _recent survey_ of over 400 Brits found that 79% of them had ditched their accents to chat to a virtual helper.

When you reach out to a brand - whether by phone or live chat - you want your query resolved quickly and efficiently. AI still struggles to do that because the gulf between human understanding and chatbots will never be fully bridged. Consumers might come away from an interaction with your AI solution feeling like their query was satisfactorily answered. But they won't feel like they've been truly understood.

Keep it human to discover new opportunities

The human brain is truly an incredible thing. Your brain's storage capacity is considered _virtually unlimited_. The human brain consists of about 86 billion neurons, and each neuron forms connections to other neurons, which could add up to 1 quadrillion (1,000 trillion) connections.

You can program an AI chatbot to respond to any number of conversation triggers. But you can't program a chatbot to adapt in the way a human can. And it's in that agility that you discover new opportunities.

It was that ability to adapt that enabled so many companies to pivot to _explore new business opportunities_ at the onset of the pandemic.

Asking for additional clarity on an issue can lead to unexpected topics of interest for your company. Noticing a higher than average number of requests for a specific product you don't stock? Your human receptionists can relay this information back to you.

Of course, you can review saved chatbot conversations and search for recurring phrases or keywords. But that requires you to trawl through conversations, rather than simply have your customer service team relay key points to you.

AI undoubtedly has a future in business. But that place is nowhere near the customer. The limited social contact of the past 18 months has

reconfirmed the value of connecting with real people. Consumers won't accept anything less.

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