



A Starring Role for Support Bots - Still a Work in Progress

The next step in customer experience is bots that can pull data from all corners of a company, say experts at Earley Information Science roundtable.

CARLISLE, MA, UNITED STATES, November 13, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Driven by the latest advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, chatbots that support customers in their searches for products and services are upping their game. With stronger language skills, more sophisticated customer analytics and deeper reservoirs of company information to draw from, bots are getting better at guiding buyers on their journeys.

But as good as they have become, bots are often not quite ready to take the center-stage spotlight for long stretches. They can get flummoxed by unfamiliar or complicated questions from customers. And at some companies, those reservoirs of information prove to be shallow or hard to find.

More work remains to be done, and companies – and consumers – need to have realistic expectations about the current state of play, according to a panel of marketing and knowledge management experts at an Executive Roundtable hosted on Oct. 25 by [Earley Information Science](#) (EIS), a leading consulting firm focused on organizing information for business impact. The experts quickly added, however, that more and more companies are recognizing the bots' potential and are on a hiring binge.

They're making the right move, said one of the panelists, Alla Reznik, Director of Customer Contact at Verizon's Products and Services Group. "We probably overestimate what AI can do for us today," she explained, "but we equally and vastly underestimate what it will do for us five years from now."

To that end, it's important to understand that AI's applications are a work in progress, the experts noted. That bots, like humans, not only require training, but retraining as conditions change. And that companies have to up their game, too, said Seth Earley, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of EIS.

The goal is to give customers the information they need to use a product, make a selection, solve a problem and achieve their overall goal in a seamless and positive end-to-end experience. But at most large companies, the training platforms, knowledge bases and support apps have evolved in different ways, often making the journey a pretty bumpy ride, not just for the consumer, but for the bot, too. Thus "the need to harmonize data from different sources" and give the bots the tools to do their job, Earley said.

The roundtable discussion, "Training AI-Driven Support Bots to Deliver the Next Generation of Customer Experience," was led by Earley. In addition to Verizon's Reznik, the panelists were Ian Collins, CEO of Wysdom.AI, whose product is an AI-based customer service solution for large enterprises, and Lisa Michaud, Director of Natural Language Processing at Aspect Software, a customer engagement company.

One key tool in making the customer interactions more seamless is putting the burden of communication more on the bot and less on the human, through a Natural Language Interface.

“Instead of having to learn how to use a computer interface,” Lisa Michaud said, “you express your needs in the language you use in talking to another human.”

The easier the communication with bots, the more customers are gravitating to them, particularly at call centers. “We’re seeing the channels that customers want to communicate on change so fast,” said Ian Collins. “Now it’s Facebook and Twitter, but chatbots are coming on strong,” albeit still a “small portion.” The cognitive technology behind the bots is “enabling fast, effective personalized answers” for consumers. “People are in and out, quickly getting the solutions that they came for.”

New channels are “not only an opportunity but in many cases a necessity,” said Verizon’s Reznik. “Enterprises and public-sector companies sometimes don’t realize how much demand there is for alternate methods of communicating with them.”

Yet because today’s bots still have their limitations, and can get stumped by questions or a lack of information, “you always need to be able to escalate to humans,” Earley said.

At least, for now.

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