

Taking a human-centric approach to bringing AI into the call centre

By [Robert Joubert](#)

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In the domain of customer experience and contact centres, artificial intelligence (AI) and human agents should be viewed not as rivals, but as collaborators. The integration of this emerging technology into contact centres does not signify a disregard for human labour. On the contrary, AI has assisted contact centres in identifying inefficiencies that might have otherwise been overlooked.



Robert Joubert, CEO of Boomerang SA

Interestingly, the rise of AI has inadvertently highlighted the critical role of human connection and empathy in customer service – qualities that AI has yet to convincingly emulate. Thus, why choose between AI and human agents when we can harness the strengths of both?

Embracing efficiency

The concept of “working smarter, not harder” is nothing new. Coined in the 1930s by creator of the work simplification process Allen Morgenstern, technology pioneers have taken this advice to heart.



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While the Council of Europe credits John McCarthy, John Von Neumann, and Alan Turing as the founding fathers of AI, it was the boom in big data and advancements in 2010 that truly brought AI to the forefront.

Today, contact centres have adopted the approach of working smarter and more efficiently, thanks to AI, while still maintaining that crucial human connection.

Asking bold questions

Technology, especially AI, has given businesses the gumption to ask bold questions about what is possible. This empowers them to select the technological innovations that align with their vision and goals.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai highlighted the power of asking bold questions in a recent post. For Google, its commitment to these questions has resulted in products that serve billions of users worldwide.

It's the courage to seek answers and reflect on the outcomes that separates tech-savvy businesses from the rest. In Google's case, success came from staying focused on their mission and the people they serve.

Pichai writes: "We've done this guided by a singular focus on our mission, our belief in applying deep computer science to make people's lives better, and a healthy disregard for the impossible."

What's in it for the contact centre?

When implementing any technology, it's perilous to get caught up in the emotion and hype. AI holds immense potential for the contact centre industry, but it must be integrated intentionally, with a robust focus on people (remember what has worked well between agents and callers).



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According to CCW Digital Europe, companies with high-performing AI applications are more likely to see effective leadership and better year-on-year growth.

South Africa's contact centre industry is already expanding its global footprint, with AI playing an increasingly vital role. This is a tremendous opportunity, especially considering the country's high unemployment rate.

Harnessing the power of the basics

The first contact centres in South Africa appeared in the 1970s, and since the late 1990s, the industry has experienced remarkable growth due to advancements in computer technology and reduced telecommunications costs.

Amid all the recent technologies, it's crucial to keep a level head and an eye on the basics while pursuing innovation, guided by an unobstructed vision. This is why it is vital to recognise and optimise the most valued resource – the people.

Building strong relationships is a fundamental principle for business success. The global boom in outsourcing business processes to developing economies has allowed South African contact centres to form meaningful partnerships worldwide.

By integrating AI with top-performing contact centre teams, these partnerships can be maintained, and new ones can be established.

Striving for extraordinary results

Consistently producing extraordinary results requires an unobstructed vision and the determination to stay the course.

However, in a reframe of the saying ‘what was once magic is now science’, Pichai says: “An essential truth of innovation is that the moment you push the boundary of a technology, it soon goes from extraordinary to ordinary.”

This stands as a caution to rushing in with the hype. By embracing AI and leveraging its capabilities, contact centres can achieve newfound efficiency and success.

However, it is important to remember that true longevity and extraordinary results come from a combination of innovation, a solid foundation built on the basics, human-to-human connection, and a commitment to delivering exceptional customer experiences.

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