3 things virtual agents can tell you about your business

By Ryan Falkenberg

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If you're a CEO or even a high-ranking executive, you're probably confident you know everything (or almost everything) about your business. But no matter how much time you spend pouring over reports, making surprise visits to different departments, and engaging with employees and customers, there's a good chance you're missing out on vital information.

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Take your contact centre, for example. Whether it's in-house or outsourced, do you really know what questions are most commonly asked by customers, or how many queries are solved satisfactorily? Of course, you get reports - but they can only tell you so much, especially when it comes to voice calls.

However, you can get incredibly valuable information with the right technology, applied in the right ways. Solutions such as virtual agents (VAs) can be especially valuable if you're after accurate data. Three things stand out for me from my experience within the industry:

1. What your customers are actually struggling with

One of the first things you'll be able to identify if you're using VAs is what queries your customers are actually making, rather than what your employees are reporting. In order to understand why, let's look at how traditional contact centres work.

In many cases, when an agent takes a call they have to categorise the call for reporting purposes. In one contact centre that I spent time in, that involved selecting from a dropdown list of over 35 options. The options bled into each other, so the agents would randomly select one, or select the easiest option to get them to the next screen.

Then, once the call was completed, the agents would be required to type out their own summary of what transpired. Given the volume of calls that a typical contact centre receives, it's easy to see how those reports can end up rushed and lacking detail.

These inaccuracies mean you don't really know what people are really calling about, what information customers are looking for, and what questions they're asking. In turn, that means your analysis of the call centre data you receive is likely to be skewed or even completely incorrect.

Virtual agents, on the other hand, are able to provide these details because they record every question and answer in real time. As a result, you can start making sense of what the customers are actually asking and what the conversation and the detail of conversations really is all about.

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2. What your marketing and product solutions should look like

Those insights can, in turn give you a better idea of what your marketing and technical solutions should look like. Remember, an important part of marketing is understanding what your customer's needs are. You'll get a much more accurate sense of those needs if you can ensure the right questions get asked and the required data gets correctly captured.

That insight can also be incredibly useful for product feedback. Once you know which parts of a product are working and which ones aren't, you can iterate and make improvements to the design, packaging, and features of the product. Technical teams, meanwhile, can achieve similarly valuable insights.

Virtual agents, by dint of the way they work, can help provide those insights. And if that feedback is used to implement change across the organisation, it can help build an improved customer experience.

3. Where to tweak your policies

Another powerful insight that you can get from a VA is where to change your data-driven policies. A bank, for instance, may still be applying an outdated policy rule that a person requires a registered landline in order to qualify for a loan. In the past, a landline showed that you had a registered home address.

This no longer applies, given that many people prefer to be mobile only. Without the data being gathered by the VA in a structured, reportable way, the bank may not pick up that many potential customers are still being turned down due to a single common factor (the lack of a registered landline).

A more complete data set

As one of the most direct interfaces your business has with its customers, the contact centre should be a highly valuable source of customer data and insights. But when you're relying on humans to provide that data, inaccuracies will creep in.

And while artificial intelligence-powered 'listening' tools do help to transcribe voice calls, they still struggle to give you the rich, structured data that you need for this level of insight. That is why many contact centres are embracing virtual agents as a key member of the CX and data gathering team.

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Ryan Falkenberg is co-founder and CEO of software company Clevva.
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