The Chatbot Chronicles

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In the past few years, the new digital era has been radically revolutionizing the transportation industry. The way that transport companies provide services to customers—as well as the way the passengers perceive the services while traveling—is constantly evolving.

In addition, customer expectations are quickly adapting to new opportunities onboard. Passengers expect their transport providers to offer the same comforts they have at home or in any public locations, but they also expect the services onboard to be affordable, trustworthy and satisfactory. Innovation is crucial.

The best way to meet these brand-new expectations and to improve services onboard is to work more closely with passengers and fully understand what they need. The customer journey is an incredibly important factor in enhancing the travel experience. The sheer number of passengers doesn't make things easier for transport operators, either. Building a deeper and more trustworthy relationship entails giving customers a reliable free Wi-Fi solution and a sense of control upon their journey through advanced digital platforms onboard.

Being more digital enables multiple opportunities for transport operators. Smart tech solutions allow operators to get to know their passengers in depth, thanks to additional opportunities that efficient 360-degree customer care can eventually offer. Today, data collection becomes easier and comes through a powerful funnel connected to new sources. Data collection ensures not only a fundamental source of information to monitor and comprehend real-time customer behavior but also a contribution to obtain a deeper analysis of the post-journey.

A detailed study of the data can guarantee a predictive analysis to foresee potential problems and eventually intervene before they occur, reduce service interruption, and increase customer satisfaction. Being able to offer complete and customized services to passengers stems from a deep knowledge of their behavior through data collection.

New challenges for transport operators

This new digital era offers opportunities to operators to review and refresh the expectations in a much smarter way. Granting safe trips, providing the best travel experience, improving efficiency, optimizing operating costs, and increasing network capacity have all posed serious challenges.

New technologies like AI, big data and connectivity have impacted their modus operandi and modified the environment, bringing up new expectations and business goals including creating new communication channels, translating in real time into customers' languages, automating customer care, personalizing tips and promotions, and enabling continuous follow-up post-travel.

The most advanced central management systems allow operators to handle numerous tasks and monitor real-time information all at the same time with a single platform, and fully control remotely most of the services so that providers reap the benefits in cost-cutting and time savings.

Digital transformation helps transport operators reach the next milestone in customer care by pursuing the mission of collecting data to enhance the experience and understand customers' behavior onboard through the most advanced and automated (AI-driven) customer care.

The passenger journey

Human interactions have many peculiarities. Over the last few years, customer care has walked hand-in-hand with the latest developments in artificial intelligence. Companies worldwide have competed to develop the most sophisticated chatbots and provide a fully automated experience to customers as well as optimize the way transport operators provide service through all the phases of the passenger journey.

And passenger expectations have changed. Today they include the availability of high-quality Wi-Fi onboard, real-time information, destination planning, onboard services, security, baggage tracking, customer care and automated support before, during and after the journey.

Chatbots are quickly revolutionizing the customer interaction and their experiences onboard. Today, wasting time in unending queues before speaking to a customer care representative is more and more unbearable to customers. Technological advances have contributed to increasing the number of circumstances where an automated, quick and reliable customer service can make the difference against competitors.

How chatbots interact

Can a human being achieve such high efficiency in regular customer service? Customers' needs change constantly, and brands continually try to meet market requirements. This can pose a real challenge. The solution is in new technology combined with advanced artificial intelligence. Unfortunately, what is missing in an ideal world where customer care achieves perfection is human emotion. There are concerns regarding whether a regular chatbot can emulate human emotions or, better, understand human emotions and react consequently.

Imagine a real example of an AI assistant immersed in a conversation with a disappointed and increasingly angry customer who, having purchased the wrong rail ticket online, requires immediate assistance to replace the wrong ticket with a new one. This specific customer needs to reach the destination at an expected time

to meet the CEO of an important client. Time is ticking away and a quick reaction together with an empathic approach is a must.

This may all sound like a sci-fi screenplay, but recent developments have exponentially improved the way chatbots interact with customers. They can increase and optimize emotional analysis, which means that a chatbot can run a sophisticated analysis to detect when a customer is becoming frustrated, indicating that it is time to transfer the case to a contact center representative.

According to a report by Microsoft, 54 percent of survey respondents say that they "have higher customer service expectations now than a year before. Moreover, 72 percent of those interviewed expect customer personnel to know who they are and what they have bought before. As such, your service needs to be fast, personalized, and always available."

An AI-powered chatbot can access any customer's previous calls to support and analyze the historical data via the CRM database. All these records can be used in association with other variables and at this point, after gathering all the information the bot needs, it can instantaneously predict the customer's needs and react accordingly. When this information becomes available to a contact center representative, it makes the whole customer experience smoother and easier.

Consider the potential of an AI-powered travel assistant, which would be capable of providing fully automated customer care with complete support pre-journey, on-board, and post-journey. This would help in nurturing communication channels and, ultimately, relationships with passengers as well as facilitating new business opportunities. It would also enable cost-cutting by providing extensive, automated, real-time customer care and integrating promotion of new services as an always-ready sales representative. It would also assist with communication about safety measures, emergency situations, and enable live connection to a human operator when need be. In addition, integrative functionality with widely used communication apps like

Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, telegram and other apps represents a valuable advantage to transport operators to easily reach any customers, regardless of their devices or preferences. The chatbot could therefore act as a real travel assistant

and be involved in different phases of the journey, from ticket purchasing, through the onboard travel guide to sharing passengers' travel experiences with others.

This innovation is ultimately about the bottom line, too. A [study conducted by Salesforce](#) discovered a direct connection between the increase in sales and purchase recommendations. Using a chatbot to personalize travel experiences results in increased customer loyalty and revenue. The relationships between passengers and transport operators have suddenly entered a completely new world. Clients expect to experience a completely new interaction with companies. They need to build trust and relate to transport operators in the same way they relate with family members, friends or colleagues. Taking advantage of the latest technology, brands can now offer this kind of experience through the most widely used communication channels, including Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, messages, voice or chat.

Today's customer experience has literally revolutionized the way companies develop and organize their customer care. Chatbot technology keeps evolving and improving the customer experience step by step, without setting any limits to its potential. This new world has already had an impact on the way companies and clients interact. The horizon represents a new future where AI can ensure stronger, long-term and trustworthy customer relations.