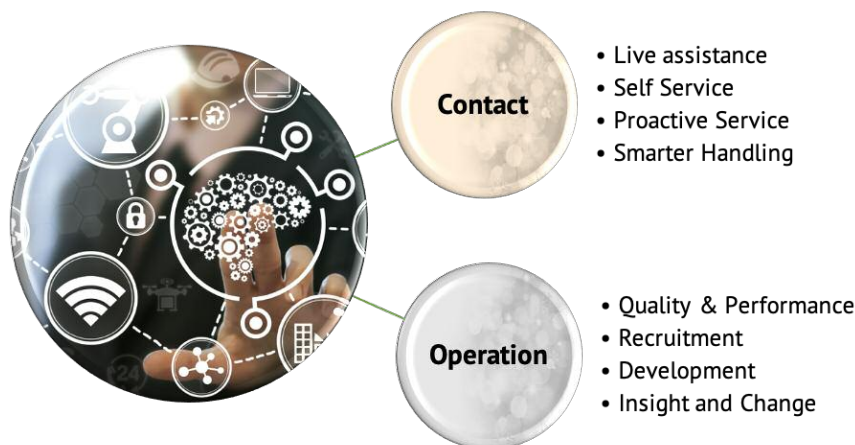


AI & Machine Learning: key applications for teams running customer operations

Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning have captured the imagination of leaders and influencers, but don't think of this as just tomorrow's world. There are already practical applications at work, as David Naylor reveals, and it's our role as analysts to understand the potential.



Artificial Intelligence (AI) has captured the imagination of the media, set boardrooms buzzing and sent stock markets bubbling. 2019 is talked about as the year when ideas give way to results. So, what will that mean in practice, for customer operations?

AI & Machine Learning

AI is a broad term that encapsulates a wide range of analytics models that have been developing over many years. Within AI, models using Machine Learning learn by example or through defined goals. These have become popular, with ready application in today's world, and have helped raise the profile of AI in everyday business. Furthermore, AI is not something you buy and implement like a CRM system. It is an embedded technology that enables certain tasks to be done automatically and more accurately than by 'traditional' tools or, of course, by people.

Key Applications

Within customer operations, we classify AI applications into those that improve live contact handling and those that improve operational management. Key applications are now emerging in both areas. Here's where to start with these in 2019.

Speech and text analytics are areas that have been a major focus area for AI developments recently. Transcription, natural language understanding (NLU) and speech generation took a leap forward as a result – just search 'Google Duplex demo' and take a look. Additionally, the cost of the technology has also tumbled and there are open source standards and low cost hosted frameworks to build your own solutions on, with a little technical know-how of course.

Natural Language

Chatbots – text based virtual assistants that replace or augment webchat – are increasing their 'intelligence' as a result of improvements in NLU. However, speech technology advancements now mean that Voicebots on the phone channel will quickly do the same. Old-style IVR menus can be replaced with truly cost-effective, flexible and capable self-service applications. If you have good conversational-design skills, this can help you address the challenge that many customers still like to call.

These apps give you the ability to generate insight and understand customer contact reasons. For instance, automated scoring for

compliance is now a reality.

Coaching and eLearning tools are using AI to determine the effectiveness of training content to fix performance gaps. Note that the tools will give you better data, but they won't do any real analysis as yet. Also, be wary of claims that AI can understand customer context, needs and emotions. This is not something you'll get today in any robust form.

Predictive analytics

This is another major area for AI. Existing applications are starting to see AI-extensions. For example, Workforce Management providers are embedding AI to support better resource scheduling. Eventually this will extend to improved forecasting. If you have access to your own analyst and sufficient data, then more accurate predictive models for 'next best action' can be built to allow proactive contact or more effective routing decision making. Vendors are beginning to provide these solutions as add-ons, but they are expensive and require an agile, incremental deployment.

This typifies the whole approach required with AI. The solution landscape changes fast so avoid committing to long term deals. Fail fast, learn and move on. The rewards will come.

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