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How Brands Are Using Chatbots Creatively to Connect With Audiences and Engage Them Effectively

Chatbots hold a lot of potential for connecting with customers in cost-effective ways, triaging customer requests or inquiries, addressing customer service issues, and more. Jamie Kennedy, director of digital strategy and customer experience solutions at HGS (a global leader in digital user experience solutions), says, “Chatbot marketing can be used to automate customer communication for basic or complex digital marketing strategies. Using bots to help market a business is efficient, and offers excellent opportunities to optimize and streamline the first point of connection with a customer.”

There are some very practical applications for chatbots across all industries. “Simple chatbot marketing strategies may focus on customer service requests and FAQs, and then develop into lead generation and sales moments,” Kennedy says. “There are also in-app shopping experiences, which are a great way to leverage a seamless chatbot integration. Overall, chatbot integration can add value to digital marketing strategies by increasing website engagement and strengthening a brand’s relationship with its target audiences.” Chatbots also save staff time, which can result in increased productivity and reduced operations costs.

CHATBOTS PAY OFF

Mike Clifton, EVP and chief information and digital officer at Alorica (a digital customer experience solution), shares an example from one of Alorica’s clients that leveraged Alorica’s Virtual Assistant (AVA), a cognitive chatbot that can handle multiple inquiry types to help customers get answers to even very complex questions. One consumer electronics manufacturer, Clifton says, “was able to achieve real-world results, as the chatbots were able to reduce customer service costs by 83%, thanks in large part to chatbot conversations resolving over two-thirds—67%—of customer inquiries.”

Forward-thinking businesses, says Clifton, are successfully employing chatbots to automate high-frequency, low-complexity to mid-complexity interactions at scale with their respective audiences. To do this effectively, he says, “companies need to first

develop a solid knowledge management foundation to derive the highest probability of responses.” From there, “they can either deliver those responses to aid in shorter call or chat times or leverage natural language processing to allow virtual assistants to further refine interactions.” Doing this, Clifton says, can help companies improve service while lowering costs and “enjoying increased customer retention, loyalty, and spend.”

Because chatbots can add measurable value, it’s important to quantify, track, and manage that value. “Chatbots offer unique and novel ways to connect with customers and when done well, [they] can greatly increase customer data performance indicators—an important, if not the most important, way to measure chatbot success,” says Kennedy.

HOW BRANDS ARE USING CHATBOTS

Brands are using chatbots in increasingly more sophisticated and creative ways as technology evolves to make new options and opportunities available. Kennedy points to National Geographic’s *Genius* and Whole Foods’ Facebook Messenger bot as “examples of how bots can curate responses that effectively engage people in natural conversation thanks to AI learning.” Most importantly, she says, “they offer relevant next steps and information to quickly find a solution without pushing sales or irrelevant user options.”

Technology also offers the ability to customize chatbots to tie them more meaningfully to personalized company brands. Remy Cadic, CEO of Acapela Group (a European voice solutions provider), sees opportunities for companies to create unique voices for their brands that could be used to vocalize information when interacting with customers. For instance, Acapela Group has worked with Deutsche Bahn, Germany’s national railway company, to develop a custom voice that is used to inform passengers in real time. Different companies operate in different geographies that have certain vocal elements associated with them. Brands may also have a specific persona that they feel best represents their brand image. One of the things that Acapela is working on,

which holds a great deal of promise, says Cadic, is the creation of diverse voices—voices that represent characters that could be from different cultures, different countries, or different backgrounds. For instance, Acapela recently created two new English-speaking digital voices—Darius, a male African American voice, and Tamira, a female African American voice.

Chatbots also have the potential to improve quality and service in high-stress, highly critical types of organizations, such as those in healthcare. “Hospitals are prioritizing chatbots as an increasingly relevant channel,” says Brian Gresh, president of Loyal (a healthcare-centered provider of end-to-end solutions). “Digital marketers in healthcare recognize that chatbots represent an opportunity to directly engage with patients early in their care journeys and even promote services to encourage healthier actions.”

Gresh explains that LifePoint Health (a community-based healthcare delivery network) rolled out a systemwide Go Red! campaign across its 65 hospitals using Loyal’s AI-enabled chatbot to help patients better understand and manage their risk

during Heart Health Awareness Month. “The Go Red! themed chatbots’ conversation topics included options for website visitors to conduct a brief heart health assessment, register for upcoming heart health events, and access clinical services like calcium score screening and cardiac rehabilitation,” he says. Similar to Clifton, Gresh can cite some specific results from these efforts: “LifePoint conducted nearly 3,700 heart-related conversations in February—more than five times the number conducted during previous months. Of these, 64 led to heart health assessments, and 22 future patients asked for more information about cardiac rehabilitation facilities at LifePoint.”

BEST-PRACTICE ADVICE

Josh Nelson, founder and CEO of Seven Figure Agency (a digital marketing agency), offers some best practices for companies considering the use of chatbots—or wanting to revisit chatbots they may currently be using. Here are a few:

- Add some character to your chatbot. Don’t make it overly official. Making it too formal, says Nelson, “will build a barrier between you and your consumer.” But, he cautions, “avoid making it too familiar.” Taking a too-casual approach could make users feel they’re not being taken seriously.
- Consider who will be using the chatbot before tailoring your content.
- Be sure your chatbot represents your brand’s values and image. The chatbot, Nelson points out, may be the first interaction a customer has with your brand. Chatbots, he says, “should reflect your business image as well as the personality of your brand.”

To make chatbots more user-friendly, Nelson recommends adding some levity, but sparingly. “Emojis, photos, and GIFs are also useful for keeping the conversation lively and genuine,” he says. “If you have a high-end brand, for example, humor may be inappropriate and unprofessional, so bear in mind that your entire brand identity must fit.”

Chatbots hold ample promise in a number of ways. They’re a technology solution to marketing, customer service, and sales needs that are virtually universal (pun intended). It’s likely that in the not-too-distant future, chatbots will become as prevalent as phones and computers have become over the years—a must-have for doing business of any kind.

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