

Contact Center AI: Hype vs. Reality

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is everywhere these days. Whether you're working with the technology directly or have simply read about it in the increased media coverage, AI is hard to ignore. And recent advances in **generative AI**, in particular, have ignited new discussions and fears of AI taking over jobs and displacing even the most skilled workers.

Generative AI applications, like ChatGPT, are especially powerful because of their ability to generate a variety of new and original content types, such as text, audio, video, and even code. In fact, according to Goldman Sachs, approximately 300 million global jobs could be exposed to automation, and one-fourth of all work could be **replaced by generative AI**.

Rather than displacing workers altogether, some research suggests that the real value of AI comes in augmenting human tasks that are repetitive or consume an inordinate amount of time. Research from **McKinsey** states current generative AI and other technologies have the potential to automate work that currently absorbs 60% to 70% of employees' time each day. The same report estimates applying generative AI to customer service functions could increase productivity at a value between 30% to 45% of current costs.

Beyond generative AI alone, language-based AI systems like conversation intelligence have been tested in the contact center and other enterprise applications for decades. Conversation intelligence is leveraged for operational efficiency, regulatory compliance, customer experience (CX) and employee experience (EX) improvements, as well as cross-functional business improvements based on analyzing customer feedback at scale.

The operative word for these systems is "scale." Today, scaling human capacity is the ultimate goal of AI-powered technology. Take the contact center as an example, where **some research** indicates the average agent takes approximately 200 calls per day. Unsurprisingly, it's impossible for quality assurance (QA) teams to review and score every single one of those interactions individually, which is why most manual QA processes only cover a small percent of total conversations. Conversation intelligence can scale and automate quality assurance (QA) tasks like call analysis and agent scoring, and detect meaningful customer and employee trends.

Collecting and analyzing this data can improve agent coaching, enabling managers and supervisors to provide more targeted, data-driven feedback based on actual conversations with customers. Data-driven feedback can bolster agent productivity, engagement and performance, and provide career advancement opportunities that improve agents' job satisfaction and retention.

And the benefits don't end in the contact center. The insights generated from AI-powered conversation intelligence systems can be used beyond the contact center to drive CX improvements and cross-departmental strategies for marketing campaigns, product enhancements, not to mention sales effectiveness.

But even though the application of AI in the contact center is widely accepted, emerging technologies are still forcing organizations to ask hard questions about the most beneficial applications and the potential implications for their workforce.

Let's take a look at how AI technology augments humans today, and how to adopt AI responsibly to ensure success in the future.

Full automation vs. augmentation

While your organization might aspire to achieve 100% automation (e.g. in QA), partial automation or augmentation is a more realistic goal, especially when beginning your journey with conversation intelligence technology. Many aspects of customer interactions can be sensitive and require human interpretation, including:

- **Navigating challenging customer conversations**
- **Interpreting emotions and exhibiting empathy**
- **Properly and fairly handling concerns of vulnerable customers**
- **And more.**

Rather than relying on AI alone, AI should be used as a tool in the contact center toolkit to enhance productivity and enlighten team members about important trends, successes, and areas for improvement.

Read more about how to drive business results with automated and hybrid quality assurance.

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Taking a human(e) approach to AI adoption

As organizations continue to invest in AI, the most successful stories are about those that enhance – not eliminate – employees. Most executives agree that predictive analysis driven by AI will augment decisions, creating new levels and roles for humans. Deep learning capabilities drive opportunities to make workdays less mundane, empowering employees to focus on more strategic tasks.

With all of the hype around AI, it's important to consider that customers still crave human interaction. According to [research from PwC](#), 59% of all consumers feel companies have lost touch with the human element of customer experience. This is a big miss, since prioritizing CX pays off in a tangible way – equating to a 16% premium that organizations can charge for products and services, in addition to increased loyalty.

Using the human(e) framework detailed below, it's possible for your organization to reap the benefits of AI, without losing the personal touch that only humans can provide for customers.

Harness	Master	Navigate
Uncover	Analyze	Emote

Harness

AI is only as effective as the data on which it's trained. The large language models used in generative AI are trained using massive volumes of data that's publicly available on the internet. While these models are extremely powerful based on the sheer volume of data, they're [prone to hallucination](#), or making up facts based on what their training data suggests should be the most likely next outcome.

Harnessing the power of AI in your own organization requires training AI models on your own internal company data, including contact center interactions, knowledge bases, and glossaries of industry-specific terminology. This establishes a foundation of contextual accuracy, which can be refined over time with human feedback.

From there, AI models make it possible to intelligently cluster the intent, action, and emotion of customer interactions to uncover conversational meaning. AI can help your agents more effectively prioritize where to place customer service and CX attention. This means empowering customer service and call center agents with actionable guidance derived from behavioral data and insights.

Uncover

Continually correlating conversational context with machine-learned insights reveals unanticipated challenges, and, in turn, opportunities for agents to better support customers. For your organization, uncovering these insights in the contact center may start with overall measurements, such as call scores, which progress toward specific CX improvements.

For example, the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) leveraged conversation intelligence to deliver a world-class patient experience, fostering a culture of commitment, accountability, and service excellence. By analyzing 100% of customer interactions, the team improved quality assurance (QA) efficiency and data-driven agent coaching, driving impressive bottom-line results.

Using insights from call scoring, UPMC's supervisors have better access to data to identify areas of opportunity and success across their teams. The use of conversation intelligence enables them to uncover insightful trends that might have previously gone unnoticed. This includes identifying instances of proactive call handling, which empowers the team to take appropriate action and enhance overall CX.

The team also uses silence times -- combined with transfer reports -- as indicators that agents were transferring calls to the assistance office and remaining on the line, instead of getting on another call. By focusing on behaviors and patterns like this, the analyst team delivers specialized coaching recommendations to managers and addresses these issues before they impact the patient experience.

Master

It's critical to continue to invest in your workforce and use AI to help your agents master their jobs. The more your teams coach and enable employees with data-supported guidance, the better they will perform – leading to stronger customer and employee satisfaction, better agent scores, and higher revenue. AI can also be a major asset for your managers and supervisors who oversee teams of contact center agents, enabling them to master their role in providing targeted feedback that empowers agents to excel at their careers.

For example, **Gant Travel's** initial conversation intelligence goals focused on automating their QA process – that in turn enabled a more effective coaching strategy. The technology uncovered inconsistencies in scoring across their contact center supervisors that the organization did not have visibility into previously. Using the analysis shown through their conversation intelligence dashboards, supervisors could visually see the progress agents were making in key areas. They could easily determine how widespread a problem was, so agents could address it quickly. Agents now have time to review their customer interactions, and supervisors assist alongside their teams in much more effective capacity.

Gant Travel has gained back much of supervisors' time from monitoring random calls, and redirected it toward continuously sharing feedback with agents. As a result, there has been a 400% increase in frequency of feedback, driving a culture of continuous improvement.

Analyze

Successful organizations deploy AI and conversation intelligence to analyze the context of an interaction, and provide both real-time and post-conversation coaching, guidance and insights that result in better outcomes for the brand, customers and employees. These insights can extend far beyond the contact center to your marketing, sales, product and other teams.

One of the UK's largest debt collectors leverages AI to support vulnerable customers in real time and post-interaction. With the **cost of living continuing to rise**, customers often struggle to fully communicate their needs. The company's agents needed to identify when they were interacting with such customers, even when the customer did not make it clear what the issue was.

Using post-interaction conversation intelligence, the company identified acoustic triggers, words and phrases associated with what it termed "vulnerability," so agents could pre-empt and understand the needs of customers in future interactions, even if the individual did not fully disclose the details of their situation.

By combining these post-interaction insights with real-time conversation analysis, vulnerability triggers and agent guidance, agents receive helpful notifications that are highly relevant to a customer's needs and situation. As a result, the debt purchaser has experienced a 60% decrease in calls that failed due to the agent missing a vulnerable customer trigger.

Navigate

In situations where customers call or send messages that do not have an applicable script or answer, AI can suggest the best option based on historical and situational analyses, helping your customer service teams navigate complex requests, quickly solve problems and offer solutions that meet customer needs.

The value of AI to navigate complex customer situations extends far beyond the contact center. For example, AI can also help your marketing team navigate potential crisis situations by detecting early warning signs of a crisis based on customer interactions on social media and in other channels. In addition, AI can help navigate complex product safety and warranty claim issues by analyzing customer interactions related to complaints about products/functionality – pre-empting recalls and ensuring continuous safety and other improvements.

For example, one consumer accessory company uses conversation intelligence to gather product data from 100% of its customer interactions. The team collects valuable, accurate data that the product quality and engineering teams use to inform product improvements, recalls, or other changes. This is particularly valuable when a customer calls in to fulfill a limited lifetime warranty.

The team primarily uses conversation intelligence to quantify how often a specific failure occurs, and communicate the frequency of individual issues with the right teams. Using this data, teams more accurately size the problem, and, in some cases, decide if they need to pull the product off the market and replace it.

The insights are shared broadly across the enterprise, as well. For example, the legal team uses them to determine whether the company is meeting regulatory requirements surrounding recalls and product changes. In addition, the marketing team leverages AI-powered analytics to refine the focus of campaigns, making them more accurate and relevant to consumers.

Emote

One of the biggest concerns about automation is that machines will not understand your customers as well as your people can. However, when executed properly, AI enables employees to become more emotionally intelligent over time by providing feedback that enables them to more appropriately emote and connect with their customers.

One example is by analyzing contact drivers, or a customer's perception of a situation. Many factors influence this perception, and a deeper dive reveals that **emotions and language** play a major role in contact driver analysis. Even though "emotion" and "sentiment" are sometimes used as interchangeable terms, they're not the same. In fact, sentiment analysis only tells you if someone reacts in a positive, negative, or neutral way.

Emotion, however, is far more complex. It drills deeper to go beyond "negative emotion" and puts a name to what a customer is feeling, like anger, disappointment or frustration.

By understanding the emotions contained within contact drivers, your organization can make more informed business decisions. Combining the emotions behind contact drivers with root cause analysis can reveal even deeper insights.

For example, the tech support department of a cable company might get customer calls within the same day about poor performance of their cable TV and internet services. A cable outage might produce emotions, such as dissatisfaction and inconvenience. A lack of internet, on the other hand, may prevent people from doing their jobs and lead to high levels of anger, stress and frustration. As a result, the cable company would decide to tackle the internet problems first based on these emotional revelations.



Is generative AI ready for the enterprise?

While generative AI can produce impressive, human-like responses to questions, it is probably not ready for prime time in customer-facing applications. A few concerns include:

Accuracy

Generative AI is known for making up facts or drawing inaccurate conclusions based on its training data.

Security

Some applications **such as ChatGPT** collect certain user data which may be shared with third parties, heightening security and privacy concerns.

Legal & Ethical

Some of the outputs from generative AI systems **have been shown** to be racist, sexist and offensive – because the training dataset did not reflect enough diverse viewpoints. Legal concerns include **copyright infringement**, source attribution and more.

Before implementing customer-facing applications of systems like generative AI, it's important to test these models internally to fine-tune them for your organization. Humans in the loop can ensure the success of AI and help avoid critical errors that could potentially damage customer relationships. When evaluating enterprise AI technology, look for companies that adopt a **responsible AI framework** throughout their development process.



Conclusion

While the recent advances in AI are significant and will absolutely influence the future of work, there's still a long way to go. It's far more valuable to look at how tested AI systems like conversation intelligence can augment human workflows and improve productivity today.

With the right AI-powered solutions, you can empower your agents to master even the most complex customer interactions with real-time guidance, paired with data-driven coaching post-interaction. In addition, you can gain key insights into what your customers actually think about your products and services, including key drivers of sentiment and emotion. These insights can be leveraged to inspire cross-departmental business improvements, forming the foundation of a truly customer-centric organization.

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About CallMiner

CallMiner is the global leader in conversation intelligence to drive business performance improvement. Powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning, CallMiner delivers the industry's most comprehensive platform to analyze omnichannel customer interactions at scale, allowing organizations to interpret sentiment and identify patterns to reveal deep understanding from every conversation.

By connecting the dots between insights and action, CallMiner enables companies to identify areas of opportunity to drive business improvement, growth and transformational change more effectively than ever before. CallMiner is trusted by the world's leading organizations across retail, financial services, healthcare and insurance, travel and hospitality, and more.



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