sprinklr

The Essential Guide to AI for Customer Service

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According to Forrester, digital customer service interactions will increase by 40% in 2021.

Introduction: AI in digital customer service

Customer service and support operations are undergoing a radical shift. Consumers are at the wheel, driving how businesses connect and engage with their customers. The rise of online, digital, and social channels force companies to step back and re-evaluate their business models across people, processes, and technology. A voice-centric approach to customer service is quickly becoming irrelevant to the growing number of customers who have moved their conversations onto digital channels. Your ability to serve these customers requires a new approach.

On the one hand, this consumer-led reality yields significant opportunities. Digital channels break barriers between marketing, sales, and service so you can reimagine the entire customer experience. On the other hand, matching your operations to customer habits, that's a big job… but possible with Artificial Intelligence (AI). Only AI can sift through all the channels of data, then help you prioritize when, where, and how to engage.

In this eBook, we'll examine four areas AI can transition your customer service operations to the new digital era:

1. **AI for listening, case creation, and routing:** AI can process public online data sources to determine when and how to engage your customers.

2. **AI for automation:** Conversational AI automates exchanges with customers using chatbots on social media, private messaging channels, or a website or mobile app.

3. **AI for agents:** AI provides relevant knowledge, responses, and next-best-actions for agents during interactions with customers.

4. **AI for insights and optimization:** AI can measure and continuously improve your operations.

The Evolution of Digital-First CX

PRE 2020

Voice customer service declining

2020

Call volume rises, race to fill the digital gap

2021
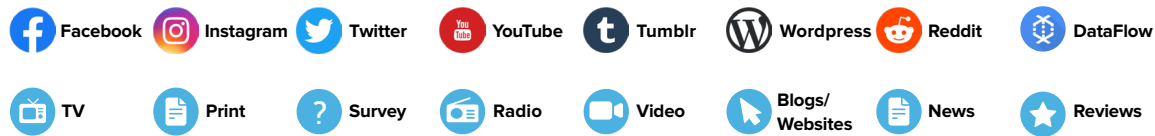
Time to re-imagine service & CX

AI listening, case creation, and routing

You can't help your customers if you can't hear them

Most companies don't consider that if you're waiting for your customers to contact you, you're already a step behind. Your customers use online forums, review sites, and social media to communicate with you. Urgently. But if you're not listening to them in those places, you can't deliver the best experiences. And without AI, you can never process the millions of online sources effectively.

AI listening across online data sources

AI can listen to an endless variety of public data sources such as social media, review sites, forums, websites, and blogs.

Facebook   Instagram   Twitter   YouTube   Tumblr   Wordpress   Reddit   DataFlow

TV   Print   Survey   Radio   Video   Blogs/Websites   News   Reviews

Digital listening requires you to identify keywords and topics relevant to your company. A computer manufacturer might listen for mentions of their brand, specific product names, and standard support issues (i.e., my computer speakers aren't working). The AI processes thousands of conversations but only alerts you to the ones that fit your keywords. The breakdown of categories below is fairly standard. Organizing general themes to specific keywords lets you meet either very broad or very exacting needs.

AI Listening uncovers numerous potential customer engagements. But how do you know which are best suited to live agents?

Enter: AI Routing!

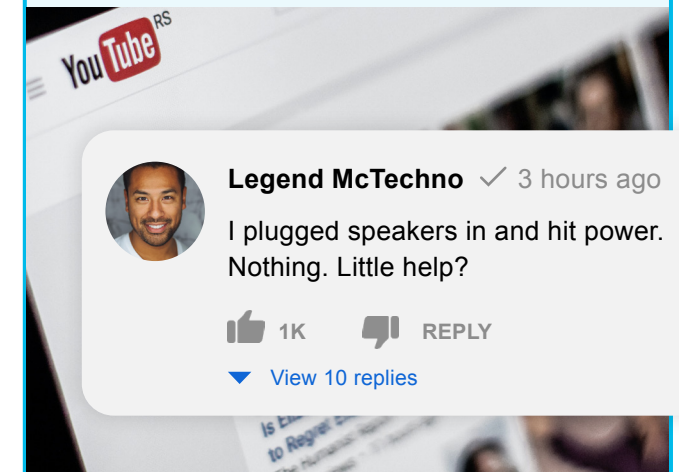| THEMES	TOPICS	KEYWORDS
Computer Speakers	Volume	Too Loud
		Too soft
		Static

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

PROBLEM
Your marketing department posts a product video to YouTube. Customers watch it (Rejoice!). Then they comment (Cheers!), But one comment reveals ... a problem with your product and a request for help. What now?

AI SOLUTION
If you're using AI to listen actively to millions of mentions across hundreds of channels, this cry-for-help triggers an alert. You can now directly engage the customer, open a case, and solve the problem (Huzzah!). Without this proactive process, you're compelled to wait until the customer contacts you. Meanwhile, the customer's plea for service sits on YouTube unanswered (Embarrassing).

Legend McTechno ✓ 3 hours ago

I plugged speakers in and hit power. Nothing. Little help?

👍 1K   👎 REPLY

▼ View 10 replies

AI Routing and case management

Routing uses AI to assign the best guide, whether human or bot, for the best customer experience. AI routing goes beyond agent queues, proficiency, and skill (though it does consider them) and allows you to use criteria such as keywords, issue type, and sentiment. You can also configure rules. These are certain defined conditions. Meet them, and you can open a case, associate that case with a CRM account, or route it by skill or proficiency to an agent or a bot.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

PROBLEM

A computer manufacturer actively listens to social media accounts, in this case, on Twitter. They track the mentions of their brand without incident. But then, an angry customer posts a negative comment regarding a product.

AI SOLUTION

AI can automatically create a case and match it to the company's CRM system. Because the customer is super angry (a negative sentiment), the system can by-pass the standard chatbot (because it's unlikely to have a great outcome). Instead, the case routes straight to an agent with the skills to solve the objection and previous success in calming angry customers.

Problem solved—big sigh of relief.

I opened the box and the laptop is broken. Thanks ABC Computers! So glad you shipped me a BROKEN COMPUTER. I can't believe I have to deal with this.

Mar 25, 2021, 10:50 AM

So sorry that happened. I initiated a new laptop shipment and we'll get it to you overnight.

Mar 25, 2021, 10:54 AM

Wow, that was fast. Thanks so much.

Mar 25, 2021 11:00 AM

AI for automation

Interactive Voice Response (IVR) has come a long way, but the fact remains, it isn't well-liked. Even when it offers good natural language understanding (NLU), most still look for a way out. IVR containment strategies are stop-gap measures designed to reduce live agent call volume, not to give great experiences.

> **"Live channels such as phone, live chat and email cost an average of $8.01 per contact, while self-service channels such as company-run websites and mobile apps cost about $0.10 per contact."**
>
> **Gartner**

Aside from the customer experience issues, agent-assisted exchanges are by far the highest cost for a contact center. Chatbots, driven by conversational AI, give you an IVR alternative. IVR deflection through chatbots can reduce your call volume and consequently shrink your costs.

There are two schools of thought on how bots should be used in this situation:

1 **Full containment** in a bot is the optimal goal, where the bot solves the issue without needing assistance from a live agent.

2 **Bot triage** is a way to gather as much information as possible first, then assist the live agent with the conversation.

The good news is that bots get better at understanding the nuances of intent over time as they take in more and more data, leading to a natural increase in containment rates in the long term. The technology you use to build your conversational dialog will have a significant impact on your future containment strategy.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

A customer calls you. Your IVR offers them a chat-channel to escape the wait for a live agent: "To continue this conversation in What'sApp... Press or say 3."

If the customer accepts, the chatbot either solves the problem if it can (full containment) or gathers information in order to escalate to a live agent (bot triage).

When the bot handles the initial discovery, it passes the information along.

The bot's involvement ensures a productive, non-redundant agent conversation.

Things to look for in conversational AI

Chatbots can vary from vendor to vendor. Some offer basic capabilities--for instance, matching conversation pairs and basic responses to keywords. However, these often deliver clunky customer experiences. Understanding the nuances of conversation (intent, language, slang, dialect, and messaging customs) is essential for a smooth experience.

Here are six key elements that separate the best bots from the rest:

1. **Discovery:** A good bot can detect patterns, intent, sentiment, and keywords using conversation data, social media inquiries, and other data sources.

2. **Message stitching:** Bots need to reconcile intent from multiple sentences. Today's customers often converse by sending various messages on the same topic. Bots and dialog builders must understand this nuance and harmonize intent.

3. **Language switching:** Multilingual customers may naturally switch between different language words and sentences as they converse. A bot should be able to understand and still track one conversation.

4. **Context switching:** This happens during a normal conversation. Customers may have multiple issues and may switch back and forth between topics. Bots should be able to process the switches and offer separate resolutions.

5. **Smooth transitions:** The ability to smoothly transition to a live agent is essential when confidence is low that a positive outcome is possible. The transition should include the full context of the conversation and AI-assisted tools to bring agents up to speed faster.

6. **Performance insights:** Measure the success of your bots. Reports and dashboards that offer KPIs such as bot containment rate, IVR deflection rate, etc., Inform you if your strategy is working.

The end goal of AI-powered automation is to reduce costly live agent calls. By automating routine requests in the channels customers prefer, you can provide a better customer experience and free your agents to work on more meaningful and complex exchanges. Not only do you save money, you increase your customer's lifetime value when you swap waiting on hold for quicker, seamless resolutions.

AI for agents

AI cannot generate human empathy, but it can amplify it. When AI partners with agents to understand customer intent, problems get solved quickly. So magnify human-feeling with AI processing power and serve your growing customer base better.
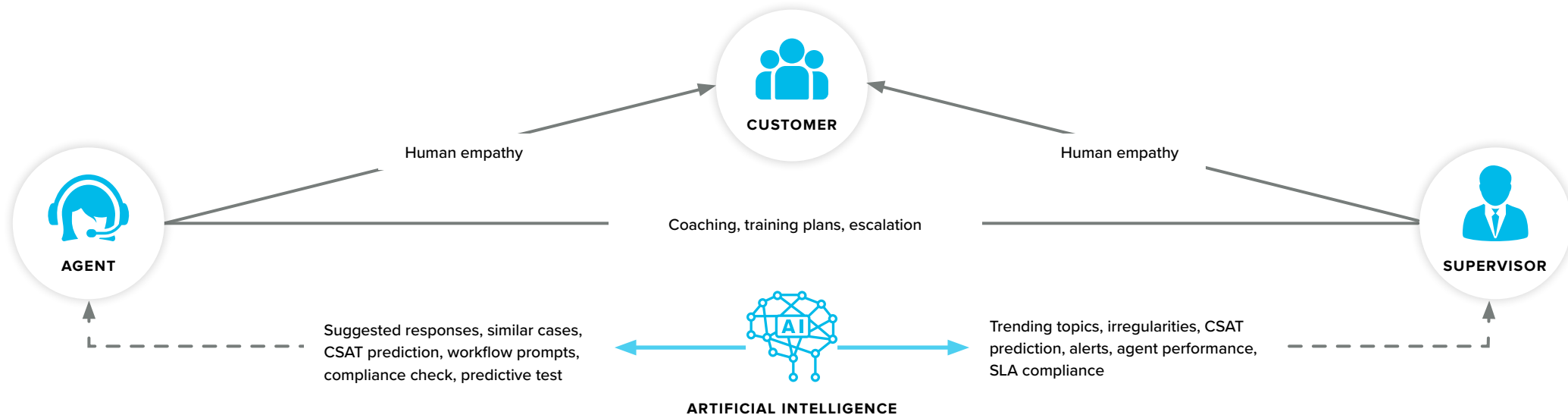
Leverage your history

Many businesses give agents huge quantities of customer history—sales, marketing, and service information. The hope is that all that extra context will personalize exchanges.

But with all that data comes a new problem: It becomes unmanageable for agents when the clock is ticking. Whenever an agent needs to type a search query, scan search results, or read a knowledge article, there's friction in the customer experience and increased pressure on the agent to find and apply a solution fast.

AI catalogs the wins and losses from every interaction and learns what the agent needs to make the customer happier. Because it can detect intent from a conversation in progress, AI makes suggestions in real-time. AI can then serve the agent relevant information at the right time to augment the agent's ability.

AI doesn't replace people. It serves them.

CUSTOMER

Human empathy

Human empathy

AGENT

SUPERVISOR

Coaching, training plans, escalation

Suggested responses, similar cases, CSAT prediction, workflow prompts, compliance check, predictive test

Trending topics, irregularities, CSAT prediction, alerts, agent performance, SLA compliance

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Here are three ways AI helps your agents win.

1

Winning cases:

Another agent in the organization probably solved a case similar to the one your agent is handling now. Use past wins to guide present customer satisfaction. AI surfaces the most relevant case at each moment of the discussion, so the customer gets both a graceful conversation and an impressive resolution.

2

Winning responses:

Some agents are just better with customers. AI can learn the agent responses that create the best customer reactions. Serve the winning lines from your company to all agents when they need them. It saves time, decreases risk, and utilizes your top performers' skills to help agents who are still learning.

3

Winning knowledge articles:

Often, an agent's success depends on the quality of your knowledge base articles. AI can learn which articles solve which customer pain. It also understands where you have knowledge gaps or inconsistencies and gives feedback for continuous improvement. Highlight the best and most relevant article at the right moment for each agent.

AI should make your organization better at pleasing customers at scale with every new resolution.

The best resolved cases, agent responses, and knowledge articles work together to build company-wide competency for making customers happier.
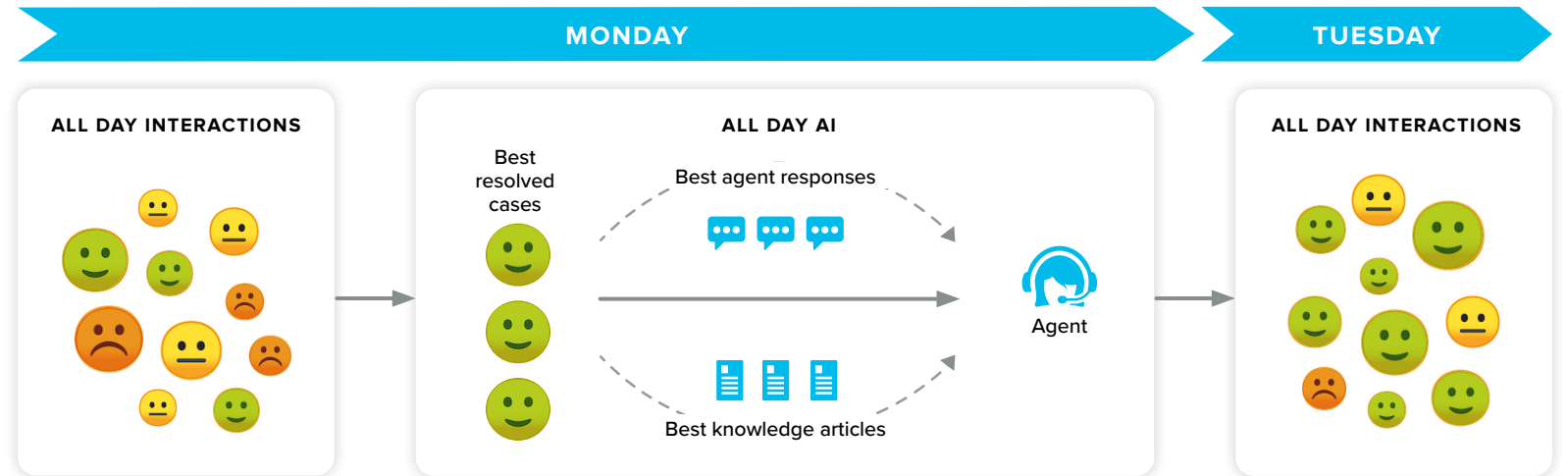
Accelerate response time

An agent's day is full of decisions — what snack to eat, what to type, how best to answer questions, how to comply with brand voice guidelines. All these decisions add stress to agents who already feel burdened to fit their response time within the company's service goals.

It takes training and practice to juggle all those concerns simultaneously, even for the most talented agents. And not everyone learns skills at the same speed. An agent who quickly discovers how to respond with an empathetic tone might be slower at learning best practices for common types of calls.

AI can relieve pressure on agents, reduce decision time, and guide those who are inexperienced. At every level (except snack decisions), AI evaluates interactions and gives real-time direction to help de-stress agents.

There are many ways AI can offer guidance, but here are four areas agents find helpful.

Standard procedures: Your agents probably handle the same types of interactions everyday — product returns, credit verifications, flight changes, etc. AI can spot which practices are most relevant to the conversation and provide the right guided workflow from start to finish. With AI, agents don't have to know everything flawlessly from the start.

Sentence-level composition: Agents don't type at the same speed, which can cause inconsistent response times. AI can predict the next word or phrase as they type. It's similar to the way Google search queries work, and it yields quicker replies. Save agents from having to choose every word when writing a reply.

Frequently asked questions: Bots aren't just for customers. The same technology that answers common questions on your website can answer common questions for your contact center. Equip your internal operations with bots to increase company-wide clarity and efficiency.

Compliance check: All it takes is one rude or tone-deaf response to become infamous on social media. AI can scan agent responses in progress and flag them for violations of company policy regarding discriminatory language, profanity, tonality, and relevance — before anyone clicks "Send." Take every automated precaution possible to protect your brand from unnecessary risks.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

PROBLEM

A customer wants to renew their subscription (that's good) but has a problem with the website (that's bad).

AI SOLUTION

Fortunately, AI detects the problem and initiates a chat with a live agent. Since subscription renewal is a standard transaction, a checklist pops up on the agent's console to lead her through it step by step. As she types, AI predicts subsequent responses and makes suggestions to save time. The AI also warns the agent in the chat window (before she hits send) of any word or phrase in her reply that violates company policy.

The result is an agent who can operate efficiently and with some quality assurance (that's great).

Predict the future

Sometimes an agent interacts digitally and can't hear the tone of the customer's voice. It can be challenging to measure how that customer is feeling. And not everyone processes emotional cues the same way. Few standards for satisfaction are free from human bias, so "success" becomes subjective, and metrics become unreliable. That's where AI can help.

The same AI technology that monitors sentiment on the public web should be hard at work during the agent experience. Throughout a case, AI can collect data to help the agent understand the customer's happiness with each reply — sentiment, intent, emotion, intensity, time of response.

The AI uses this information to give live feedback to the agent. It can also predict what the CSAT score is likely to be at the conversation's end--even if the customer never completes the survey. The AI can also automate alerts when a predicted satisfaction score drops below a certain threshold. It is then up to the supervisors to intervene with either behind-the-scenes coaching or to take over the conversation. Attention like this prizes each customer's happiness.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

PROBLEM

A customer gets frustrated by an agent's failure to solve her problem quickly. After each text exchange, the predicted customer satisfaction score declines.

AI SOLUTION

Finally, AI detects from the conversation's language and intensity that this case will end poorly unless it moves from its current course. It sends the supervisor an alert. Now the supervisor can review the case in progress and take steps to restore the customer's good faith.
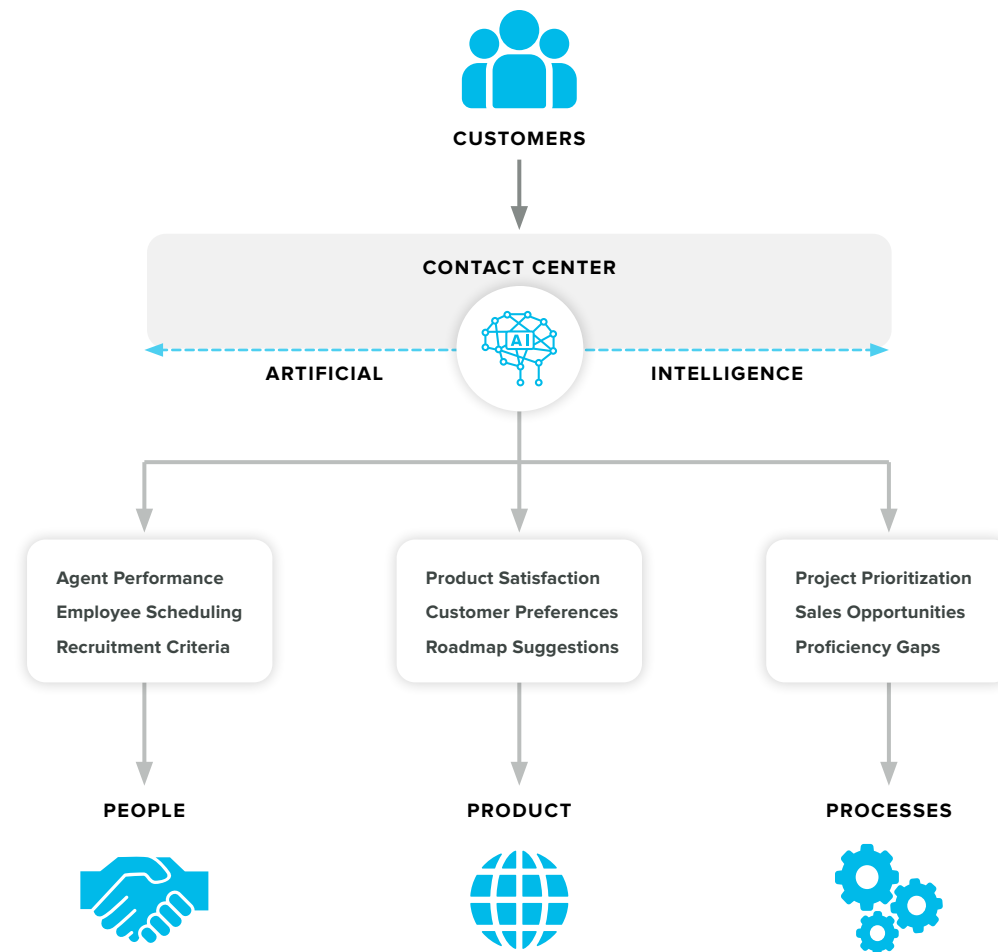
AI for Insights and Optimization

The success of a contact center is dependent on millions of variables. You can't manage the variables with a spreadsheet—no big surprise. The data set is too big for humans to keep track of, and the data changes by the second. No, you need AI to crunch the numbers and deliver insights that drive vigilance and improvement across your business. AI can reveal relevant patterns in contact center conversations so you can make adjustments with confidence.

Measure customer satisfaction

There's a ton of business insight hiding right under your nose--data that AI collects on customer conversion and sentiment history. The trick is to slice and display that data in ways that show where you can make tangible improvements. Context is everything. It's not enough to know that you failed to meet your goals last month; you should know why.

AI is good at counting, detecting deep patterns, and matching them together. When applied across your tech stack, AI gives you a rich, visually engaging view of your customers. It can show you who communicated what, how, and also the resulting outcomes. But AI can also sort information by locations, teams, agents, or response times, or any other collected and cataloged factors. All this pattern analysis can alert you immediately to trends or activity spikes. The ability to juxtapose different views of your data can give you further insights when you need to act fast.

AI extracts powerful, actionable insights from the contact center to improve people, product, and processes.

CUSTOMERS

CONTACT CENTER

AI

ARTIFICIAL   **INTELLIGENCE**

Agent Performance
Employee Scheduling
Recruitment Criteria

Product Satisfaction
Customer Preferences
Roadmap Suggestions

Project Prioritization
Sales Opportunities
Proficiency Gaps

PEOPLE   **PRODUCT**   **PROCESSES**

Measure employee performance

As your business grows, so does your contact center. It's attractive to think that bots can handle 100% of your service contacts, but the reality is that the human presence will always serve a role in quality customer service. That's why training remains crucial so that you can represent your brand with the best possible agents. Well-trained agents with mastery over their tasks are happier in their work. That's good for your company culture. (Pssst, retaining an agent also costs several times less than hiring and training a new one).

Evaluate the human side of your business with AI. It can compile a complete view of agent effectiveness through interaction details, survey results, and agent quality audits. Automated dashboards and alerts keep you honest about agent performance gaps. Don't waste money on one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, prescribe training on an agent-by-agent basis. The point of all this agent data is to give supervisors immediate clarity and expose the root cause of any irregularities.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

As a supervisor monitors SLA dashboards, she notices a decline in one team's ability to meet their response time goals.

She first drills into the data and isolates the problem to a few new team members.

Next, through AI analysis, she detects each new agents' areas for growth.

Finally, she can create individual coaching plans tailored to improve team goals.

Measure business impact

If you embrace AI without finding a way to measure its impact, it can do more harm than good. Horror stories of enterprises who "adopted first and asked questions later" are real, and they end with companies losing big. Nobody wants that. Quantifiable results will retain the faith of your stakeholders.

Fortunately, AI can help you demonstrate the value of AI using key performance indicators (KPIs) at the start of the planning phase.

Here are some possible metrics provable by the tech itself.

TIME

Measure (down to the second) how much time you save from filtering non-engageable messages from your agents.

VALUE

Show how much value you realize from conversational bot deflections.

COST

Enter company-specific benchmarks for agent salary, average handle time, cost per case, etc.

AI can measure these and other processes so you can see return on investment live. Make the effects of AI transparent so your stakeholders can sleep at night and you can feel secure in your strategy.

Conclusion

You can build leaner and more effective customer service operations fit for the digital age with Sprinklr Modern Care. Start care earlier with AI-enabled listening, scale wider with self-service and automation, and use AI to supercharge your call center. A robust digital strategy that's not hidden behind voice can unify marketing, sales, and customer service. Exchange siloed outreach from different departments with a single presence that alerts customers to new deals, informs them of new products, and serves their needs. Only one company combines research, sales, advertising, marketing, and customer service on a unified platform. It's Sprinklr! Schedule a meeting to discover how you can better match customer habits with an AI-enabled, digital-first strategy and make your customers and agents happier.

✺ sprinklr

You can build leaner and more effective customer service operations fit for the digital age with Sprinklr Modern Care.

10 Billion	**750+**	**500+**	**60+**
predictions per day	Standard AI Models	Customer-specific AI models	Verticals in 109 languages