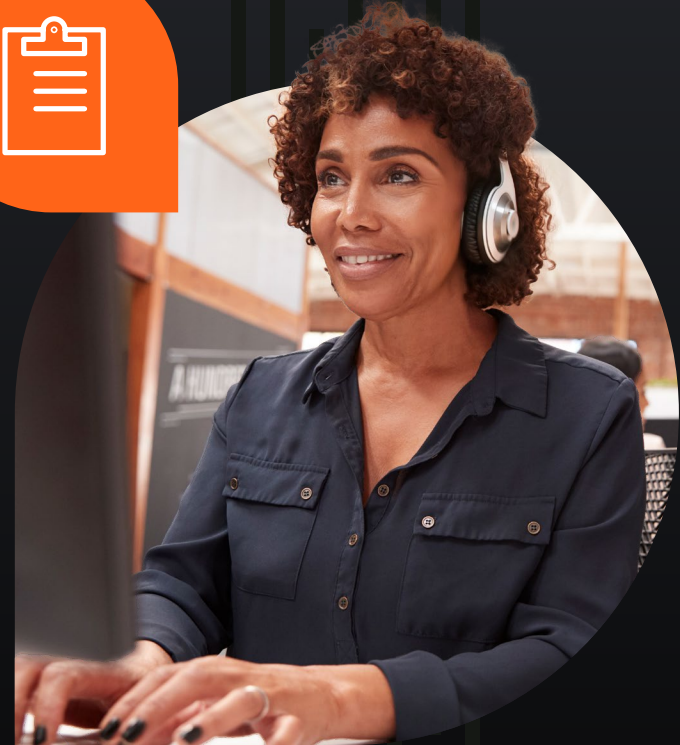# The Best of Both Worlds

Optimize Your Contact Center by Blending Human and AI Capabilities

interactions

Despite years worth of promises from tech companies that artificial intelligence (AI) will be a "silver bullet to solve all of your problems", it's clear that this is false. Instead, optimal contact center operation and world class customer service will come from a seamless blend of humans and AI together.

This eBook explores the role of contact centers in customer experience (CX), the benefits and challenges of incorporating AI technologies, and strategies for successfully blending human agents and AI to provide optimal service.

## Staying Ahead of the Curve

Positive customer experience has become crucial for companies to maintain their competitive edge in today's fast-paced business environment. Customers expect quick, efficient, personalized service and will take their business elsewhere if they do not receive it.

With the need for digital transformation, AI has become an increasingly popular tool in contact centers. Conversational AI technologies like Intelligent Virtual Assistants (IVA) have the potential to automate routine tasks, reduce wait times, and offer quick and satisfying solutions to common customer inquiries.

However, as much help as AI can provide, the human touch remains a vital customer experience component. Companies must ensure the two blend seamlessly – AI helping customers get quick, efficient responses and humans helping customers with personalized support.

In its future of CX report, PwC surveyed 15,000 consumers and found that **1 in 3 customers will leave a brand they love after just one bad experience**. At the same time, 92% would completely abandon a company after 2 or 3 negative interactions.[1]

A report from Aragon Research entitled "Aragon Research Globe™ for Conversational AI in the Intelligent Contact Center (ICC), 2023" explains the AI-human interplay.[3]

Contact centers play a vital role in the customer experience value chain by serving as the primary point of contact where customers encounter the humanity of a company. Not only do contact centers provide customer support, but they also act as a vital source of customer insights, which can help organizations improve their products and services.

The report states that IVAs are now fully capable of handling tier-1 support issues, such as password resets, order lookup, and appointment scheduling, independently without any interaction from a human while passing more complex issues onto agents for investigation and resolution. Moreover, the report adds that AI solutions providers like Interactions are developing IVAs capable of handling far more complex requests, such as questions related to billing and refunds, advanced product and installation inquiries and issues that require troubleshooting.

A 2023 survey run by Interactions found that customer expectations are largely not being met, with **50% of consumers believing that companies are trying to get them off the phone as quickly as possible**.[2]

[1] PricewaterhouseCoopers. "Experience Is Everything: Here's How to Get It Right." https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/library/consumer-intelligence-series/future-of-customer-experience.html

[2] Cx and The Consumer: Pitfalls and Possibilities. https://www.interactions.com/resources/customer-experience/cx-and-the-consumer-research/

[3] The Aragon Research Globe™ for Conversational AI in the Intelligent Contact Center, 2023. https://aragonresearch.com/2023-globe-for-conversational-ai-intelliegent-contact-center/

# Blending Human Expertise with Artificial Intelligence

## THE NEED FOR HIGH TECH, HIGH TOUCH BALANCE IN CX

In his 1982 bestselling book Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives, futurist John Naisbitt forecasted that a high-tech world would demand a high-touch balance. He surmised that as technology becomes more advanced and prevalent, there will be an increasing need for personal human interaction.

Forty years later, with startling developments in autonomous technology in many industries, Naisbitt's prognosis is still valid. Even as companies increasingly rely on automation and advanced technology to aid customers, there is still a need for balance with the personal touch human agents can offer.

**1** AI is reducing cost through automation, and scores of customers are seeing their issues resolved in minutes.

**But, where's the gap?**

**2** The customers with unique needs or non-automated circumstances face hours of waiting as they depend on agents to research their solution or navigate through complex systems.

On the one hand, automation can increase efficiency, reduce costs and handle high inquiry volumes. However, it can also lead to a loss of personalization and the risk of alienating customers.

By balancing automation with human interaction, companies can take advantage of both benefits: increased efficiency and personalized empathetic service.

## EXPLORING THE ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF AI

The first step in balancing AI and human resources is understanding the benefits AI can provide while also understanding the challenges of its use.

**Reduced Operating Costs**

AI can handle routine inquiries and support tasks, freeing human agents to focus on more complex and higher-value interactions.

**Improved Efficiency**

AI automation can respond to customer inquiries and support requests quickly and accurately, without human intervention, leading to improved efficiency and faster resolution times.

**24/7 Customer Support**

Contact centers using AI can provide 24/7 support to customers across various channels, including phone, email, chat, and social media, making sure customers receive timely assistance whenever and wherever needed.

**Limited Personalization**

AI can be limited in its ability to personalize customer interactions without access to CRMs or context from human agents. Further still, only more sophisticated applications can detect emotional context to adjust tone and prompt appropriately – for example, a customer needing to close an account after the death of a loved one.

**Inability to Handle Complex Issues**

AI may not be able to handle complex issues that require more nuanced and human-like decision-making.

**Difficulty Understanding the Human Language**

AI-powered applications are trained via models and algorithms on how to respond to the human language. Humans have a wide vocabulary, especially when considering slang and regionality, meaning it's extremely difficult to train an AI model to recognize every conceivable way a human may make the same request.

## THE IRREPLACEABLE HUMAN TOUCH

Human agents play a vital role in customer experience, as they are often the face of the organization and the primary contact point for customers. Their interactions can significantly impact a customer's overall experience with the business.

Clearly defining the role of human agents determines when agents should be involved in customer interactions versus AI. By outlining an agent's specific responsibilities, businesses are creating human touch-points along the customer journey ensuring customers receive a personalized and empathetic experience.

There are several ways in which human agents contribute to a positive customer experience that presently surpass AI capabilities:

**Personalization**

Human agents can engage with customers personally, something machines are less able to do as effectively at this point. Making customers feel more valued as individuals, not types or segments, inspires greater brand loyalty.

**Empathy**

Customer service agents can listen to and understand a customer's needs and concerns and offer support and assistance empathetically. The Connected Customer Experience Global Report from Genesys[4] states that 59% of consumers prefer an empathetic customer service experience to a speedy resolution.

**Problem-solving**

Solving problems and coming up with creative solutions to customer issues often requires innovation and outside-the-box thinking that is difficult for AI systems to replicate.

**Human Connection**

Many customers simply enjoy the human connection, personal interaction, and individualized attention that comes with speaking with a customer service agent.

[4] The Connected Customer Experience. https://www.genesys.com/report/the-connected-customer-experience

**Social Skills**

Building relationships and maintaining rapport with customers is an essential aspect of customer service and requires strong social skills, such as listening actively, communicating effectively, and building trust.

**Contextual Understanding**

Customer service often requires a deep understanding of the context in which a customer's issue or question arises. AI technologies may be able to gather and analyze data but are unlikely to understand the context fully.

## EMPOWERING AGENTS FOR SUCCESS

According to the Harvard Business Review, employees that want to stay in their current job are highly motivated and remain with the company almost exclusively for reasons associated with the work itself. In other words, the satisfaction of one's job is majorly influenced by the day-to-day tasks that are performed.

The implementation of AI within the contact center, to work alongside a human agent, provides an excellent opportunity to increase job satisfaction. There is the opportunity to both remove mundane tasks from the agent's queue entirely, as well as simultaneously improving the agent experience with tasks that require human input.

Human agents don't need to speak to customers to take payments, provide tracking information or reset a password. AI-powered applications, like an IVA, can handle these tasks instead, empowering customers to self-serve on their own terms (making them happy) and saving your agents for work that needs their expertise. AI-powered automation is good, though it can't resolve interactions that require human input.

This is where agent assist steps in: an approach where AI guides an agent to be more efficient during customer interactions. AI can be programmed to give agents conversation prompts, advice on how to handle a request or even send appropriate knowledge base articles related to the customer's challenges.

These use cases give the agent more support and can increase their efficiency, improving satisfaction in their job.

While agent assist is a solid step forward in improving the agent experience and increasing their efficiency, it still relies on a human doing the bulk of the work by remaining responsible for speaking and listening to every single word in a conversation. What if we could take this human and AI synergy but flip the paradigm, with AI leading the interaction while an agent assists?

**Enter Task Orchestration.**

# Task Orchestration: The Next Generation Agent Assist Solution

Task Orchestration was created with the understanding that, while virtual assistants are the most efficient solution to quickly solve customer problems, they're limited by what they can see, reach and understand. They can only respond to what someone shows them, access what's available to them and understand what they've been trained on. The alternative of transferring calls to a live agent creates wasted time, both for the customer and for the contact center.

Task Orchestration serves as a bridge, allowing human agents to provide information the virtual assistant needs to complete the interaction. A human agent can "help" give direction to the virtual assistant in how to proceed, supply missing information it doesn't have access to and provide authorization to complete a transaction. This approach significantly reduces a contact center's agent minutes and enables agents to serve more customers per work hour. What's more, it empowers customers to self-serve without having to be escalated to an agent, even for those tasks previously thought too complex to be contained.

This sounds all well and good, but how does Task Orchestration handle a real world problem?

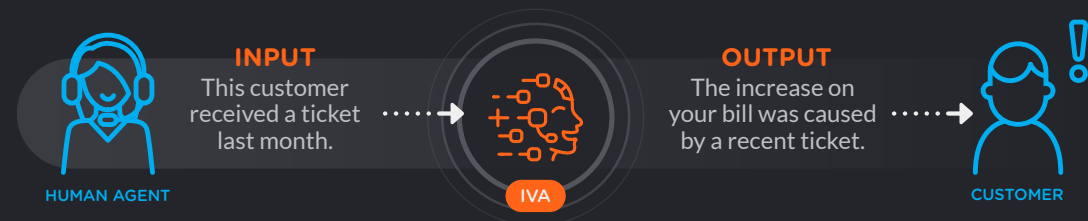## LET'S TAKE A BILL AMOUNT INCREASE AS AN EXAMPLE:

A customer notices that the cost of her car insurance has increased and contacts her insurance company through webchat. The AI-powered technology, an IVA, greets her and recognizes that this is a question it can't handle on its own because it doesn't have access to that data. To assist the agent, the IVA gathers information like the policy number and the billing date an increase was noticed. This triggers a task for a human agent who is working behind-the-scenes. When the agent accepts the inquiry, all the information about the customer's issue is provided. The agent can then view the bill, see that it's changed, and confirm the amount.

Now, here's where self-service usually fails – figuring out the reason for the increase. Looking at the bill, there are many factors that could potentially cause the rate to go up. A human agent can more easily spot the reason. In this case, it's because the customer recently got a ticket. The agent notes this information, and the IVA relays it back to the customer.

This all happens in seconds, with minimal interruption to the customer, while the IVA continues the conversation and keeps the customer engaged by letting the customer know there's a discount available for healthcare workers, active military, first responders, veterans, and teachers. The customer responds that she's a teacher, and the virtual assistant asks her to upload a photo of her school ID to verify.

Because there can be many different types of IDs, verifying the ID is a task better suited for a human agent. A second task is triggered for the agent to verify the ID. The agent verifies the ID, and the IVA lets the customer know she's approved for the discount.

The customer is satisfied, because she got a satisfying resolution quickly, learned about a new benefit associated with her policy, and completed her transaction via self-service with no frustrating waits or transfers. And, it happened with minimal work by human agents.

**HUMAN AGENT**

**INPUT**
This customer received a ticket last month.

**IVA**

**OUTPUT**
The increase on your bill was caused by a recent ticket.

**CUSTOMER**

## Interactions IVA Strikes the Right Balance

Humans continue to play a crucial role in CX, even as automation becomes more prevalent. With the right strategy, companies can successfully blend AI and human agents resources in their contact center operations, enabling them to deliver a superior customer experience while improving efficiency and reducing costs.

Interactions IVA combines the latest Conversational AI technologies and human understanding in real-time to deliver excellent customer engagement and ensure better business outcomes. It sits at the pinnacle of high-tech meets high-touch applications.

**HEAR OUR AI AUTOMATION IN ACTION** ➡

**About Interactions**

Interactions provides Intelligent Virtual Assistants that seamlessly assimilate Conversational AI and human understanding to enable businesses to engage with their customers in highly productive and satisfying conversations. With flexible products and solutions designed to meet the growing demand for unified, omnichannel customer care, Interactions is delivering unprecedented improvements in the customer experience and significant cost savings for some of the largest brands in the world. Founded in 2004, Interactions is headquartered in Franklin, Massachusetts with additional offices worldwide.

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