

## **Chatbots Leading the Way in Enterprise Improvement**

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**Renat Zubairov**

The exciting possibilities that chatbots create for business have plenty of marketing departments and customer experience professionals looking at how they can tap into the power of the latest technology trend – or avoid investing in what author Peter Nowak describes as “the latest tech trend that will go nowhere.” While Nowak isn’t [the only skeptic](#) wondering how the artificial intelligence capacities will change business, most companies want to understand how the chatbot can impact their sales and CX. But increasingly, they are also looking to bring what was once a curious customer-facing convenience app [into the enterprise](#), to bring a new level of integration and utility to business-critical processes and enterprise apps such as CRM and ERP.

Businesses envision a seamless and hassle-free experience for customers who want to order flowers or airline tickets while interacting with the AI-enabled bot program instead of working through phone trees to access a human representative. They see their digitally-driven customers choosing the chatbot rather than plugging away at e-commerce through an online browser, or even downloading yet another app. These expectations are based on shifts in usage that are driving more user traffic through Messenger, WhatsApp and similar products. In fact, even Nowak concedes that, according to comScore, two-thirds of smartphone users download no new apps – none – in the course of a month. That leaves a lot of room for companies like Facebook and Microsoft to sell bots instead of apps, offering customers an easy route to access those AI assistants from within a chat that’s no longer dependent on operating systems.

Popular implementations of the chatbot are seen in customer-facing implementations and e-commerce meant to make the order process easier for customers, and some [order management software](#) implementations are already beginning to look at the chatbot as a means to not only take orders, but to resolve problems. But the biggest – although less visible – agenda is in the enterprise space, where corporations are combining chatbot technology with an integration layer to enable better interaction with their B2B customers, and to improve their own internal business processes.

Media and publishing companies are high on the list of industries seeking to tap into the audiences who are migrating to messaging, but they’re by no means the only ones. Some businesses – travel bookings, dining reservations, delivery services come to mind – are a natural fit for chatbots. Others may not be so obvious, but with technological advances may become better candidates for the future of AI interaction. What can’t be overlooked is the degree to which customer service in most industries can be handled by chatbot for initial contacts or questions, which they can either resolve or hand off to the human agents.

Leveraging an [integration Platform-as-a-Service](#) (iPaaS), the chatbot can be incorporated into the enterprise’s own chat app, and can gather information from a wide variety of databases and enterprise APPs, including CRM and ERP, through

standardized or custom APIs. The result is a 360 degree customer view, without having to switch between multiple windows, or having to involve multiple actors. The middleware layer afforded by the iPaaS also lends itself to mobile usage for enterprise apps. Mobile access today goes far beyond simple email, forms, and order taking – more purveyors of enterprise apps are incorporating mobile interfaces as a more mobile-savvy worker demands access to increasingly sophisticated back-end apps via smartphone. With this level of API integration, corporate mobile users can finally move beyond the slow, one-screen-at-a-time approach to connecting with the data and apps that matter most.

The challenge at hand for customer-facing enterprises today is balancing one-size-fits-all automation and cost-savings the C-suite wants, with the personalized experience the customer demands. The goal of a CRM is to close that gap by enabling a 360 degree view of the customer, but a higher level of integration is necessary before that can occur. Customers may still need to be handed off to multiple call agents, or a single agent may still need to toggle back and forth between multiple apps or databases, when a problem requires a sophisticated solution.

The increasing popularity of chatbots and its potential for use in enterprise apps need not put too high of a development burden on the IT department, when an iPaaS incorporates three important factors: A development platform for IT to create connectors, a pre-built selection of connectors to the most common apps, and the means for “citizen integrators” or non-IT power users to integrate apps on their own. Contributing editor John Brandon, writing recently for [Inc. magazine](#), thinks chatbots are the future of customer service, if not already the present in some applications.

The AI assistant has advantages in meeting customer needs at any hour, without subjectivity or emotion, and with, well, the robotic consistency that many companies might see as the goal of all their CX quality assurance initiatives. It’s not that humans won’t be necessary, but their skills and abilities will be directed to more complexity.

There is a natural extension of the data-driven visibility that extends across an enterprise now embodied in the chatbot – itself an intelligent agent, able to connect with customers on the basis of all the information that’s already accessible via the messaging platform rather than making it necessary for customer service or other professionals to separately connect with CRM or other data.

Whatever the chatbot future holds, it’s important for businesses to remember that the AI assistant is still growing and the technology that drives the chatbot continues to evolve. Most analysts point out the high-profile failure of the Microsoft Tay experiment, but that’s not really representative of how the industry is approaching the potential – or the problems – of customer relationships based on AI tech.

Rather, the industry experts are encouraging businesses to explore the potential of chatbots while understanding that the technology continues to evolve. For companies where huge infrastructure and thousands of servers are a reality, creating that automatic chat at the start of an interaction with the customer is a strategy that works because it connects in customer service people as well – all within a loop that has customer data available from the outset of a “call” that now originates from the text-based messaging platform, and is designed for optimal interface with it.

That's where some tech analysts feel that all the hype isn't helping people to understand the underlying and very real value that chatbots can offer them – and that's true for the businesses seeking to reach them. Cutting through all the hype and getting down to the reality, though, is a smart move for connecting with customers where they are and creating the experiences they need.

***About the author:***

*Renat Zubairov is CEO and co-founder of [elastic.io](http://elastic.io), a leading innovator in as-a-service integration.*