



Delighting Customers with **Automated Tech Support**

Striking the Balance between Man and Machine
through Tech Support Automation

Point of View

Is automation the future of tech support?

Let us look at three Gartner predictions:¹

- 1 45% of the fastest growing firms will have fewer employees than smart machines by 2018
- 2 By 2020, smart agents will facilitate 40% of mobile interactions, and the post-app era will begin to dominate
- 3 By year-end 2018, customer digital assistant will recognise individuals by face and voice across channels and partners

These three predictions bring in a paradigm shift to tech support. Gartner predictions have a 70% accuracy rate.² In less than two years, machines will take over the role of a human. In another five years, smart agents will be handling almost 50% of all the mobile interactions. If these two predictions do not surprise us, the third prediction surely will. Imagine the terminator handling call requests from customers by both listening and speaking, having the ability to respond to customer queries. That is an exciting thought in itself. Robots, cognitive computing, smart machines, and a new internet of things architecture are only a few of the highly digital shifts that tech support businesses can expect to see in the coming years.

But customers prefer the human touch

Automated tech support resolves issues faster by handling standard customer queries and there by saves time for the support agents. However all customers do not always have standard questions. Some of their complaints may need special attention and a certain level of human intervention. A human being (support agent) apologizing for the inconvenience caused in a genuine tone is always preferred by the customer compared to an automated robot saying a sorry that does not emotionally connect with the customer. Pacifying an irate customer requires human assistance and this is one area where the human support agent has an edge over automated technology.

Then, how does automation help an enterprise?

Even though automation does not build the emotional connect with the customer, the industry predictions indicate that automation will control tech support in the coming years. An automated tech support service software is not bad altogether and can be beneficial for enterprise marketing if it is leveraged properly. Customer information can be stored in a central database and assist the support agents with customer insights through an automated software to drive superior customer experience. Customers can also receive proactive support through automated email alerts about the progress of their concerns.

¹<http://www.information-age.com/it-management/strategy-and-innovation/123460296/gartner-includes-robot-bosses-its-top-10-it-predictions-2020>

²<http://lab.getapp.com/rise-of-the-smart-machines-gartners-top-tech-predictions-for-2016/>

Abstract

Poor customer service is one of the top reasons why people end their relationships with companies. Increasingly, tech support automation software is used by enterprises to serve their customers and to meet their business needs. Automation brings agility and control in customer care and helps the enterprise to save cost. But do customers prefer automated support over human interaction? Will tech support be completely automated in the future? These two questions are analysed in this paper.

Technology can never take the place of support agents; but it can certainly help them to serve customers better. Automated tech support systems are machines with artificial intelligence. All customer concerns cannot be handled by machines and hence an automated tech support system should have the capability to seamlessly transfer calls to support agents when needed. With the right technology and a little bit of strategy, tech support enterprise could automate responses to almost 90% of its incoming customer support requests.

With automated support, service organizations can make their services available to their customers 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, by monitoring alarms, identifying problems at an early stage and resolving issues before they become problems. Tech support enterprises focus on tech support automation for two reasons

1. Reduce operational expenses
2. Deliver exceptional customer experience

1. Reduce operational expenses

The simplest method to reduce operational expense is through call deflections by moving customers from voice support to non-voice support. In the past, Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) incurred heavy costs in offering continued support for their products. The introduction of premium support solutions [services to monetize "out-of-scope" (out of warranty, end of life, cross-sell, and up-sell) contacts by offering customers paid support] helped them to tackle that problem.

User friendly products with an informative website with all the solutions for the issues, delights the customers. Self-help support articles - Knowledge Base (KB) articles also play a major role in call deflection. The customers have to key in the product number in the product website or in the tech support chat option to access the self-help support article to fix issues.

Faster responses through Email and chat support in addition to efficient self-help support will help enterprises to deflect call volumes to non-voice tech support medium. Today, in a non-automated environment, if 100 tech support agents are required to handle tech support calls; automation of tech support process will enable the enterprise to reduce at least 20% in agent head count with significant cost saving.

*If automated tech support agent strength is "A",
non-automated tech support agent strength is "B",
and cost incurred with "A" is "C", then*

$$A = 20\% \text{ of } B$$

and the cost saving "D" with automated tech support agent strength "A" is

$$D = 20\% \text{ of } C$$

A few enterprises have incorporated ambient chat support service in their websites. Any question related to sales or support is answered by a bot (software application that runs automated tasks). The bot responds to queries based on the keywords keyed in by the customer. Tech support automation helps an enterprise to reduce Mean Time To Resolution (MTTR). MTTR measures how long, on average, it takes to restore a system to its operational state after a failure. In addition to reducing MTTR, automation ensures cost savings through task automation and time reduction in resolving issues.

2. Deliver exceptional customer experience

Customers hate being made to wait on the line when they call a tech support agent. The first generation automated phone systems are a typical example where many customers have been made to wait for a long time. Many have even abandoned products because of poor customer experience. Email communication is no more the preferred mode of communication because customers have to wait for 24 hours to get a response.

41% of consumers expect an e-mail response within six hours, Forrester found that only 36% of enterprises surveyed responded that quickly, with 21% taking six to 24 hours, 18% one to two days, 7% two to three days, 4% more than three days and 14% not responding at all.³

Automation of e-mail responses will enable the enterprises to respond within 15 minutes. The automation tool will have artificial intelligence to read the e-mail and respond with necessary information from the KB article. This will ensure customers to use e-mail as a preferred medium for availing support. Enterprises can have significant cost savings with automated e-mail support. If support cost incurred through voice support is USD 3.5 per call, automated e-mail support will enable the enterprise to save at least USD 2.5 per transaction. If this number is multiplied with X number of transactions in a day, the cumulative cost savings will be in millions of USD per year.

$$\text{Annual cost savings with automated email support} = 365 * (\text{Cost savings per call} \times \text{transactions in a day})$$

In cases where the customer has to reach out for support by making a call, an automated process will help the calls to be routed to the right support agent. A bot can perform the initial process checks like checking for serial numbers, identifying if the product is valid for support and connect the call to the support agent in just a few seconds.

Automation enhances the productivity of the support agent. If the agent can handle X calls in a specified time frame, the automated environment will help him in handling 2X calls within the same time frame. The agent's productivity increases by 200%.

$$\text{Number of calls handled in non-automated environment} = X$$

$$\text{Number of calls handled in automated environment} = 2X$$

When analytics is built along with automation, the analytic engine will help the support agent to address the issues effectively by identifying the root cause of the problem and providing with suitable solutions and fixes. This contributes to faster problem resolution and enhanced customer experience. Even though Email and chat have been accepted as customer service methods for quite some time, live video interaction has been explored by a few enterprises to provide superior customer experience.

The trend picked up after Amazon's introduction of the Mayday feature for its Kindle Fire HDX device in September 2013. A single click on the Mayday button connects a user to the company's customer support agent, who can see the customer's tablet screen and provide assistance. However, if that fails, the agent can solve the problem by remotely controlling the tablet. The customer service channel offers face-to-face video assistance 24/7.

³ <https://www.internetretailer.com/2009/06/26/customer-service-takes-on-greater-importance-in-tough-times>

Automate processes and not relationships

The tech support team is the face of any enterprise. The agent- customer interactions should build relationships, cultivate brand loyalty, and provide better customer experiences. Relationships are built over a period of time and they involve emotions. Relationships should not be automated as they can turn off the customers. However processes that involve time and effort in building relationships can be automated. Automation is a shift in thinking, not just a change in technology. If it is just a shift in technology, automation can be a hindrance; but if it is a shift in thinking, it will help the business by fostering relationships and delivering exceptional customer experiences.



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