



# Using Artificial Intelligence Can Help Create More Human Customer Experiences

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Using artificial intelligence (AI) to make customer service experiences more “human” may seem counterintuitive, but it’s not AI alone that will create the level of service that customers demand today. The combination of human intellect and emotional intelligence with machine learning is what will achieve customer service goals on a scale and cost that works.

As leading companies demonstrate, the ability to deliver an extraordinary, highly personalized customer experience is essential to creating a competitive advantage today. Until recently, these Amazon-like capabilities seemed out of reach for most companies; but now, thanks to rapid advances in AI, cloud computing and big data, the timing is right to begin delivering the kind of experience your customers want.

## **Refine your raw data into high-performance fuel.**

To make AI work, companies need massive amounts of data to feed the machine-learning algorithms enough input to allow pattern identification, so you can learn from what emerges and gain insights that you couldn’t see before. If you envision this raw data as the oil that can be refined into high-performance fuel, then the customer service industry is essentially sitting on vast oil reserves in the form of billions of minutes of recorded customer conversations. There’s a rich amount of dialogue in those recordings where customers

are expressing their intent and needs while providing all kinds of feedback on products and services. The value hidden in these reserves remains largely untapped, and the challenge now is to take this unstructured analog data and convert it to digital form. This may require labeling the data to impart human judgement in a machine-readable form for the AI algorithms.

## **Emulate your best performers.**

Once these data reserves are refined and processed, there’s great potential for using machine learning to move beyond a limited view of predefined “best practices”. This will allow a more spontaneous interaction that’s constantly adapting and evolving based on what’s happening with the customer in the moment. Essentially, this is what happens with our best customer service agents: Although there are scripts and procedures, our best performers will go off script and innovate, adapting to the customer’s needs. They use their hundreds of hours of experience to find a more effective way of dealing with this particular customer at this moment, regardless of the interaction design. This results in a “process adaptation” that is actually a better approach for that particular point in time. Here, it’s the human intellect that creates value, but if you try to mechanize that and make it work for everybody, you lose the personalization. With AI, you have the opportunity to develop a “digital coach” based on your best performers that helps all your agents adapt to individual customer conversations in real time.

In this way, companies are moving from “big data” to “big mind.” As Booz Allen machine intelligence experts **Joshua Sullivan** and **Angela Zutavern** write in their book “**The Mathematical Corporation: Where Machine Intelligence and Human Ingenuity Achieve the Impossible**”: Big mind comes from combining the mathematical smarts of machines with your own imaginative human intellect. And this triggers the next leap in organizational performance.”

If this all seems too heady and overwhelming, don't worry. This is going to be a natural evolution that will happen over time. The important thing is to get started now. Here are some steps to begin your company's journey:

- **Work with trusted partners who can help.** “Going it alone” will waste time in this competitive environment. When looking for a partner to help with your overall customer experience, it's important to choose one that is looking deep into agent performance and measuring what's happening behind the scenes. They can help provide insights into process changes and where it's best to apply robotic automation versus where you need a more personalized touch.

- **Develop a strategy to start collecting your digital oil.** Start collecting and labeling data so you can create the big data from your analog customer conversations. That will

involve transcribing and analyzing call recordings — we need a path to go from speech to text in real-time. While that may not be economical now, it will be more affordable in the near future. For now, you can start by simply analyzing your call recordings for experiences, then begin looking at business process monitoring at the agent level. What is the agent's experience with the systems, and what processes must they interact with? Develop a pixelated reality of that back-office activity.

- **Enable your teams to collaborate digitally.** Get more people involved in helping each other, then measure that collaboration and create a way to capture it digitally. You might call this the “digital exhaust.”

- **Start small and experiment.** Begin getting a feel for what's possible by working with partners on experiments and proofs of concept. Then you'll start seeing your strategy emerge.

Initially, you'll likely use what you learn to optimize and automate processes, like using a chatbot to help people with simple transactions such as account inquiries, password resets and other low-hanging fruit. But the ultimate goal will be to deliver extraordinary personalized experiences that will keep your customers coming back for more.



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Dave defines SYKES' technology vision and oversees all IT operations, security and information systems. Dave joined SYKES as Vice President of Engineering in 1997, directing research and development of cutting-edge customer service, web-based support and technical-support systems. In 2000, he became the Vice President of Technology Systems Management, where he managed Global Information Systems and IT Operations for Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region.

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## ABOUT SYKES

Sykes Enterprises, Incorporated is a leading provider of multichannel demand generation and customer engagement services for Global 2000 companies and their end customers. SYKES' differentiated full lifecycle solutions and services — digital marketing, sales expertise, customer service, technical support and more through multichannel delivery platforms — effectively engage customers at every touchpoint of the customer journey. Our complete service offering helps clients acquire, retain and increase the lifetime value of their customer relationships through cost-effective solutions that enhance the customer service experience, promote stronger brand loyalty, and foster high levels of performance and profitability.