

So You Want To “Automate” Personalized Service? (Part II)

OPPORTUNITY COSTS TO AUTOMATION – Remember the End Game.

Now we get it – while an idyllic scenario, not all businesses can afford to maintain “Raymond’s” level of personalized customer service. (See **So you Want to “Automate” Personalized Service – Part I**) The model may not even make sense for some operations (e.g. public utilities; retail gas stations.) And if you’re a very large operation that’s continuing to scale, automation may become an absolute necessity in order to handle the demand for your products or services. In addition, there are certainly those instances where customers prefer a quick, seamless, non-intrusive, automated transaction instead of a more “cumbersome” human exchange. Bank machines, automated gas pumps, on-demand streaming services, overnight parcel delivery are all examples of automated (self-serve) operations that represent a tremendous value for consumers.

In everything you choose to do with your business, however, you are balancing outcomes against opportunity costs. Automation is compelling for a slew of reasons. It may allow you to:

- Increase the volume and speed of sales transactions (more customers, faster)
- Reduce cost of sales and service
- Improve operational efficiencies
- Deliver faster service

As compelling as these outcomes might appear, you should also ensure you’re keeping a close eye on KPI’s and benchmarks critical to your operation – KPI’s that may reveal you’re actually harming long-term business prospects and customer relations as much as you are improving your overall bottom-line in the short-term:

- Are you churning through more leads than before to accomplish the same volume of sales?
- Has your average deal valuation on a new sale decreased?
- Are you experiencing a higher percentage of customer drop-offs (e.g. for a monthly SaaS service)?
- Is a single “user session,” or your overall customer up-take, increasing or decreasing?
- Are your AI-driven customer recommendation algorithms increasing basket values/purchase frequency?
- Has your renewal rate declined?
- Are you not seeing as high a success rate in upsales?
- Are you receiving fewer customer referrals?
- Are you experiencing an increase in overall customer attrition?
- Is your overall life-time-value of a customer decreasing?
- Are your customer satisfaction ratings on the decline?
- Has your brand seen a greater degree of negative postings on social media platforms?
- Are you not securing as many favourable testimonials and case studies as before?

In short, where you are considering (or have introduced) automation into your operations and service model, you should continue to evaluate whether this move has in fact improved or detracted from the overall customer experience. And remember that your gradual efforts to automate your business may, in fact, be placing you in a vacuum where you no longer have your finger on the pulse of your customers. A growing percentage of your customers could be considering a shift without your knowledge simply because you’ve isolated yourself, and no longer have as many opportunities for a meaningful customer exchange, or a chance to champion the intangibles.

Always Remember the End Game – KEEP YOUR CUSTOMERS HAPPY

WHEN & WHEN NOT TO AUTOMATE – Ask Yourself Some Key Questions

So how do you determine when best to automate aspects of your business operation and customer fulfilment. Start by asking yourself some critical questions about the nature of your business, your sales and service model, and your customers’ expectations first. Look closely at each stage of the customer sales and service life cycle (lead generation, sales call, deal-close, on-boarding, service calls, payment collection, maintenance calls, renewal calls). It will help you choose when and how to automate your processes, and when to maintain a meaningful human exchange:

Potential Opportunities for Automation if the answer is “Yes”

- Does your product, service or solution address a consistent, uniform need in the market?
- Does your market offering have universal appeal regardless of target segment, demographic, region, etc?
- Is your value proposition simple to understand, requiring minimal explanation?
- Can it be unitized? Is it a fixed packaged item?
- Is there little to no opportunity for customization?
- Can a customer begin to use your product or service immediately without detailed instruction?
- Can your customers use your product and service entirely on their own?
- Does your product or service represent a relatively low cost of investment for the customer?
- Is there a minimal likelihood of buyer's remorse or buyer error? Are there guaranteed refunds?
- Would your customer prefer an auto-payment program?
- Can your product or service undergo an upgrade without directly involving the customer?
- Is there little to no maintenance or upkeep required to sustain your product or service offering?
- When problems do arise, are they limited to a few consistent issues?
- Are these problems easy to fix? And can they be fixed by the customer with some simple guidance?

Probable Advantages to Maintaining "Hands On" Personalized Service if the answer is "Yes"

- Does your product, service or solution address a range of needs/challenges that may vary for each customer?
- Does your market offering have varied levels of appeal depending on target segments or individual prospect?
- Is your value proposition more complex and multi-dimensional?
- Does your product or service offering have special packaging requirements based on customer needs?
- Is your product offering something that should be customized for each unique customer?
- Does your offering require a significant amount of training and "on-boarding" to ensure effective adoption?
- Are customers continually reliant on you for some aspect of the end product or service?
- Is your offering a sizable investment for the customer? Are there multiple decision-makers involved?
- Is there a strong probability of buyer's remorse or buyer error if not carefully coached and consulted?
- Are there specifically negotiated payment terms and service clauses for many of your customer accounts?
- Do upgrades/renewals require extensive negotiations? Would a human exchange increase your "stickiness?"
- Does your product or service require hands-on upkeep and regularly scheduled maintenance calls?
- When problems arise, are they often unpredictable, and very specific to a customer's circumstance?
- Are these problems more challenging to address, and require direct intervention from your service team?

These are just a few of the questions that will help you determine where and when it may be possible to automate your business operations, and where it's still wise to maintain a genuinely personalized, human-centric service model.

WHEN THE HUMAN EXCHANGE ALWAYS COUNTS

Regardless of your investment in automation, there will always be an essential need to execute at least periodic, personalized service campaigns. Simply put, there are times when the only way you'll know for certain if you're on the right track is by talking directly to your customers and clients. Examples:

- **Service "Check-Ups" & Maintenance Calls** – Allocate funds towards periodic "check-up" calls. Don't attach an ulterior motive to these campaigns. And do not time the calls in proximity with either renewals or payment collections. Simply allow your customers a chance to share their thoughts. [NOTE – Some of your best testimonials and case-studies may come out of these customer interactions.]
- **Customer Satisfaction Surveys & Focus Groups (Third-Party)** – Human-centric research with open-ended questions often unearths more enlightening information about your strengths and shortcomings.
- **Problem Resolution** – The best way to save a customer is to provide that added human touch. Don't leave them trapped in the call-waiting queue of death. Resolve challenges quickly, courteously, and effectively.
- **Customer Reward Programs** – Even if it's a random sample of customers, or perhaps your most active, acknowledge your dedicated client-base with special rewards that are unique and personalized.

In short, if you want to "automate" any form of personalized customer service, you need to remember what you're trying to accomplish and what you're being compared against. Don't underestimate the staying power and "stickiness" of the human touch. Good luck! And let us know how we can help. Visit www.canadastartup.com for your mission critical needs. info@canadastartup.com. 1-800-611-8081