



Bots and Conversational Hospitality



SnatchBot

Using Conversational Hospitality to Achieve Outstanding Experiences



The digital transformation that has been occurring all around us has created real, tangible possibilities for consumers and enterprises alike. Digitization has positively affected nearly every facet of how business is carried out, from manufacturing to sales and marketing to customer service. Those that are early adopters and have taken advantage of these new opportunities are already seeing a rise in customer satisfaction and increased revenue; those that resist the change will undoubtedly find themselves lagging behind and losing market share.

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Studies have shown that a staggering percentage of customers in the hospitality industry feel actively disconnected from the service experience. Modern consumers want to be engaged; they want their experience to feel personal and interactive, but all too often they feel like little more than a number or a statistic.

In addition, technology typically employed in the hospitality sector is admittedly lackluster; non-integrated applications and IVR systems that fail to understand customers' requests plague the industry, lead to frustration and overall impersonal experiences.

The notion of “conversational hospitality” is a shift in the paradigm of how businesses in hospitality interact with their customers. Using bots, guests can have a two-way interaction, and not just a one-way transaction. Bots are automated programs that respond to guests' input and can be deployed to a number of channels; essentially, they put the customer in control, using conversational human language (text or verbal) to transform frustrating, time-consuming experiences into a personalized, humanized conversation.

Bots use AI and machine-learning capabilities to provide hospitality customers with an end-to-end experiences that proactively provides information and answers questions.

Perhaps most importantly, bots can be deployed to the channels that guests tend to use most often—bots can “be where the customers are.”

The Challenges of Digitization

Before we delve any further into what bots and conversational hospitality can achieve, we should first examine the steps that the modern hospitality industry has taken toward digitization, and the results thereof.

One would be hard-pressed to find an industry in which the relationship between consumer and business is more intertwined than hospitality—yet the seemingly simple tasks of arranging travel or transportation, making reservations, or finding recommendations are tedious and disjointed. Consumers must often sift through various web-sites, spend time

on email or phone, research and compare deals, or even visit a live agent just to plan a trip.

Research shows that nearly eighty percent of customer inquiries tend to revolve around similar issues and questions—which means that while some things will require human interaction, a large (and growing) percentage of them can be automated.

One of the things that modern hospitality businesses, like resorts and hotels, have turned to is self-service kiosks and devices. Modern consumers crave a self-service option, a way for them to find their own answers and information. Many hotels are using self-service kiosks for checking in and out, and of those, more than half are using real-time analytics to track guest behaviour, which can be used to augment future guest experiences. And while self-service options are certainly a step toward digitization, they are but a single pace on a long road that has already been paved by the potential of conversational technology.

Perhaps the biggest challenge toward digitization, especially in the hospitality sector, is the integration and managing of various systems. Typically, these systems—which may range from guest checking to catering to property management—are housed independently and do not communicate with each other. Creating that communication between systems is no simple task, but the benefit of doing so, as seen by those early adopters of digitization, is not only a rise in customer satisfaction, but also increased workflow and reduced overhead.

Let's look at a simple, common example: Imagine that a customer is looking for an answer to a question. Typically, the first place they might look is the internet—either a search engine or a particular website. If they can't find their answer on one web page, they'll likely look elsewhere, and each time they must re-enter their request.

Already frustrated, the customer then calls the customer service department and must again state their request to an IVR (interactive voice response) system. If the system is unable to understand their question (which, unfortunately, happens all too often) the customer will eventually be routed to a live agent. There may be a hold time, and when the agent is able to help them, the customer must again state their question, in the hopes that no escalation is required and that the agent can help them.

At that point, the customer—who had only one question—has gone through at least three engagement channels, if not more, and each time had to restate their request. This is, essentially, a blatant disregard for a customer's time, which often manifests in a consumer's mind as a lack of respect.

There is a plethora of data showing that a single poor experience can cause a customer to abandon a brand, even if it has been their preference in the past. Most of those who do so indicate that they would not abandon a brand simply by feeling appreciated as a customer.

As many enterprises are now discovering, the integration of systems and the ability to move between engagement channels without disruption is not only possible, but it's not as difficult as many perceive it to be.

Taking Advantage of Mobile Usage

We are quickly becoming a “mobile” society, if we haven't already; the number of mobile devices in use worldwide is expected to reach six billion within the next couple of years. In developed nations, the percentage of smart-phone owners averages to nearly seventy percent.

Applying this directly to the hospitality industry, more travellers than ever before are researching travel options and booking trips via mobile devices—more than double, in fact, from only two years ago. At the same time, however, there are innumerable sources, like websites and apps, for hospitality services. The process, even by mobile means, can be time-consuming and difficult. The majority of hospitality providers aren't offering their customers a mobile option, and at the same time, consumers aren't satisfied with the level of service they're receiving.

Clearly an alternative is needed. Mobile usage presents a viable opportunity to provide a self-service option for consumers that can be accessed anytime, anywhere. This is where conversational hospitality comes in.

Bots can offer an entirely new customer service model by using NLP (natural language processing) technology and artificial intelligence to transform the traditional approach into something streamlined, personal, and interactive. The typical GUI (graphical user interface) and voice-based IVR fall short of the line; not only do they lack personalization, but they force the user to speak “machine language,” rather than human language, and things frequently get lost in translation.

Bots are changing H2M (human-to-machine) interactions by employing NLP in a meaningful way that uses contextual awareness to converse efficiently and in real time. There is no GUI to learn, no menus or windows to navigate, and only a single system to manage. API (application protocol interfaces) integration allows bots to be deployed to mobile apps and other channels so that the consumer has a choice in how to converse with the bot through text or speech, in human language.

Contextual Awareness

The concept of contextual awareness goes hand-in-hand with another integral factor of conversational hospitality, and that's personalization. Modern consumers want brands to be able to anticipate their needs beforehand; essentially, they want the business to come to them. They want their time to be respected, and they want to be able to get this experience quickly and easily.

This might sound like a monumental undertaking, but this is precisely what companies are already employing bots to do. When guests use bots, there is no GUI to navigate, no need to spend time on hold with a live agent, and no line to wait for staff to be available. A customer simply engages with a bot on the channel of their choice, via text or speech, in a two-way interaction that draws context from their request. The bot identifies the proper channel by which to answer a question or resolve an issue, and replies appropriately.

Bots can take that contextual awareness to the level of personalization by using a guest's preferences and behaviours to anticipate their future needs and make recommendations or send offers based specifically on them. For example, a bot could use a guest's previous dining habits to make recommendations on nearby restaurants and offer reviews of each. If a guest books a hotel, the bot could supply offers on rental cars, inquire if they need an early check-in, or numerous other possibilities. This level of personalization is a strong distinguishing factor between brands, and that gap will only grow as more enterprises turn to digitization.

Building a Bot

Only a few short years ago, apps were the new digital trend. However, apps are typically costly to develop and the process could take months. Bots, however, eliminate the need to develop a graphical user interface, and their ease of access and integration capabilities turn the process from months into days—and for a lot less money.

Our goal at SnatchBot, for example, is to make the process of building your own bot as user-friendly as possible for anyone, regardless of the size of your business, user base, or industry. With our “no coding required” approach, businesses and developers alike can build and test bots quickly and easily, and deploy them to a variety of channels.



Ease of Access

Modern customers want to be able to choose the channel by which they interact with their brands, and hospitality is no different. Multi-channel integration is, historically, a tough problem to surmount—it is a persistent dilemma in customer service that guests often receive conflicting information when crossing engagement channels.

This is a problem that can be overcome with bots, which offer the ability to cross between channels and enjoy the same experience. Bots can also recommend the channel most appropriate for a guest's needs. With SnatchBot, for example, you have the ability to publish your bots easily to all web apps, channels, and chat services, such as Facebook Messenger or Skype, with a single click.

SnatchBot is also the only platform on the market today that allows you to sync across chat channels, which means that a user can start a conversation on Facebook Messenger, continue on a website, and end in SMS with no interruption.

Bots enable a business to choose whether they want their process to be fully automated, or to include human input at any point. For instance, if a bot is unable to resolve a request for some reason, it can divert the customer to a live agent. Not only does this increase workflow, but staff will no longer find themselves inundated by similar requests over and over; the automated nature of bots can handle most service requests, particularly repetitive ones.

Digitization is quickly becoming the way of the future for customer service, and to that end, conversational hospitality provides a seamless, consistent, and personal experience for consumers. Expensive development and non-integrated systems are becoming a thing of the past; simple front-end development and end-to-end integration are the new standard. Hospitality providers that effectively employ bots into their digital strategy will quickly see the advantages in the forms of higher customer engagement and a strong cultivation of loyalty.



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About SnatchBot

SnatchBot's revolutionary platform streamlines business workflows and communications with a single message based interface. With SnatchBot's omni-channel platform, customers can specify the channels through which they'd like to connect. SnatchBot's tools support the entire lifecycle of a bot, from developing and testing to deploying, publishing, hosting, tracking, and monitoring. The platform provides robust administrative features and enterprise-grade security that comply with all regulatory mandates.

For more information about SnatchBot's bot-building platform, please visit our website at <https://snatchbot.me/>
If you don't know how to start building your bot contact us today and we will build your bot for you.
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