The “SIRI Effect”

How Self-Service Technology is Transforming Customer Service
(And 5 Ways to Get Up to Speed NOW)
Building a Better Online Customer Experience: 5 Priorities for Getting Up to Speed

Consumers have raced into the future with rapid adoption of mobile convenience technologies—and customer service professionals everywhere are clamoring to keep up.

Digital personal assistant technologies such as SIRI, and others like it, have been embraced so fervently by consumers that your current online self-service offering has likely become archaic overnight.

Voracious consumer adoption of technology like digital tablets, mobile phones and all the accompanying apps for communication and convenience is now so mainstream that they’ve become the benchmark against which all online customer experiences are being measured.

It’s up to customer service professionals to respond—and quickly. This report shows you why companies in every industry are taking the ‘personal digital assistant’ revolution so seriously, and the five priorities you need to take action on now.

Why Are Corporations Investing in Their Own Digital Assistants?

Many organizations have already moved quickly in the “digital concierge” direction by deploying “Virtual Agent” technology on their websites to greet and engage in automated conversations with customers. These digital characters, often personified with a brand mascot, help online customers find instant answers to questions and guide online conversations toward purchase considerations.

Gartner Research predicts that by 2015, 50% of online customer self-service search activities will be conducted by virtual agents.

What’s driving all the interest in virtual agents on the corporate side? In addition to making it easier and more enjoyable for people to get answers whenever and wherever they choose, companies who have already deployed virtual agents have realized these major business advantages as well:

1) Cost reduction via deflection of calls and emails to the contact center,
2) Revenue generation through more effective cross-selling and upselling,
3) Customer insight through real-time voice-of-the customer analytics,
4) Enhanced customer loyalty by providing a delightful customer experience online.

Your customers now want online interactions with your organizations to be just as enjoyable and convenient as any other means of communication they can engage in on their mobile devices. Following are five critical first steps as you explore your options for deploying a virtual agent technology that will deliver that helpful, automated assistance experience.
1. Get your act together—FAST

Now that customers are getting used to the personal digital “concierge” approach to living, they will come to expect it everywhere. Customers – in any industry – will not be pleased if they have to step back in time to the dark ages when visiting a company’s website. The days of forcing your customers to hunt through FAQ pages or site search results to find answers and information are over.

Consumers Frustrated By Dark Ages Approach to Self-Service
“Customers today are trained to go online to get answers to their questions by navigating a company’s FAQ list, or by typing in keywords to surface the right piece of content. But at 51%, satisfaction ratings for this channel are the lowest of all the communication channels that Forrester tracks.” – Forrester Research, Inc.

Bottom line: Your first priority is simple—aim to deploy Virtual Agent technology deployed on your main customer-facing website as quickly as possible.

Do you have a question? Or see the top 10 asked.

Ask me a question  Ask Ana

Copa Airlines places their “Ask Ana” Virtual Agent right on their homepage at www.CopaAir.com. Having a pleasant digital persona who invites customers to ask questions makes for a highly engaging and enjoyable customer experience.
2. Take your act on the road with a consistent experience across all channels

Consumers today are online 24/7 and are accessing websites and social channels on smartphones and tablets more than ever before. Today’s consumer does not want to pick up the phone and talk to a customer service agent. What they do want is the ability to get quick, accurate answers from anywhere and on their own whenever they choose to go online.

And today's consumers are simply intolerant of companies that deliver a disappointing mobile experience. Being let down in this way flies in the face of their expectation for consistent, highly accurate, easy-to-navigate experiences in every channel. Any organization that can’t deliver this stands out as a dinosaur in the mind of today’s tech-savvy, ultra-mobile consumer.

It’s a Multi-Channel World
A smart phone has 7 different communication methods, and the phone is only one – mobile applications, text, email, Facebook, Twitter are all examples of communications channels used each and every day by the modern consumer.

Bottom line: Ensure your Virtual Agent technology is capable of delivering a seamless experience across all channels: WEB, MOBILE, SOCIAL and AGENT.

CIBC is a global bank that uses virtual agent technology to deliver a consistent online self-service experience to customers on the iPad (pictured on the left), mobile phone (on the right) and on their customer facing website.
3. Do NOT miss the VOICE interaction revolution

The voice-to-voice interaction revolution, kicked off by iPhone’s SIRI feature in 2011 is firmly underway. Consumers are loving voice as means of communication. Consider these facts:

- 87% of iPhone 4S users use Siri at least once a month
- 26% use SIRI for email every day
- 51% of users consider it “extremely important” for their next phone to offer a service similar to SIRI

And Kate Leggett, Principal Analyst at Forrester Research, Inc., rightly points out that SIRI’s voice capabilities have captured the attention of customer service professionals:

Because of Siri, companies focused on increasing customer satisfaction scores to move the needle on customer loyalty often ask “Why can’t we offer Siri-like experiences on our web or mobile sites to help customers ask questions in their own words?”

Fortunately, with the right Virtual Agent technology vendor, companies now can.

Bottom line: Do NOT become the one company in your industry that didn’t see the VOICE revolution coming. Equip yourself for the future by looking for a Virtual Agent solution that offers voice-to-voice and voice-to-text capabilities.
4. Understand the virtual agent features that can greatly enhance the customer experience

The ability to deliver accurate answers to consumer questions is without question the flagship characteristic of a world-class Virtual Agent deployment. But, on the way to getting answers, there can be many breakdowns that lead to abandonment and escalation.

Here are three virtual agent features that make a massive difference to the customer experience. Insist on putting them in place:

**Understanding Customer Intent:** Your Virtual Agent technology should deliver the single best answer based on the user’s *intent when entering the question* – not simply on the keywords the user might enter. The ability to know the intent behind the question means the Virtual Agent will deliver the right answer for virtually all customers, despite the fact that each customer is likely to phrase the question in one of hundreds of different ways.

**Understanding the Context of the Question:** It also greatly enhances the customer experience when the Virtual Agent understands the context of the questions being asked. For example, when a customer is in the mortgage section of a bank’s website and asks about ‘interest rates’, the context is likely to be mortgage interest rates. Delivering answers within this context delivers a much better experience compared to a standard site search result where context is not recognized.

**Enhanced “Predictive Search”:** Leading Virtual Agent technology can combine the benefits of advanced auto-complete techniques, with the ability to intelligently suggest the best answer as the customer enters their question. Consider the impact on customer experience when, while keying in a question, a handful of possible matches are served to the customer in real time, ordered in priority according to the most likely match. Our measurements of this feature in real-world deployment have shown that this feature alone can match answer accuracy by as much as 20%.

Bottom line: Understand your investment in virtual agent technology by selecting those features that significantly move the needle on the online experience for your customers.
5. Capture actionable customer insight for customer service and marketing

At the moment, most customer service professionals are undergoing a very reactionary approach to changing consumer behavior, by scrambling to pull the online self-service offering out of the dark ages.

But Virtual Agent technology is helping organizations become far more proactive, with enhanced customer insight capabilities. The best virtual agent deployments are ones that are built with the ‘Voice-of-the-Customer’ payoff in mind, by capturing customers’ self-service interactions and harnessing that data.

The key here, is to look for Virtual Agent technology that not only captures the entered questions, but also packages it up in a way that’s highly visual and easily viewable by customer service and marketing leaders. Dashboards, for example, that illustrate customer sentiment, theme clouds and top trends, take raw customer behavioral data and make it easy to understand and act upon.

Bottom line: Leverage your investment by deploying a virtual agent that is purpose-built for voice-of-the-customer insight. Rely on the technology, rather than your own outbound customer research efforts, to paint an accurate, up-to-date picture of what customers really want from your organization.

The top customer concerns for an insurance company, in this example, are automatically presented in this instantly understandable theme cloud.
Next Steps

IntelliResponse is here to help you in your immediate next steps. Having deployed world-class virtual agent technology solutions at more than 150 enterprise organizations worldwide, IntelliResponse has a wealth of expertise to support you as you travel on the path to delivering an online customer service experience that’s right in-step with the expectations of today’s customer.

Contact IntelliResponse to schedule a no-obligation 30-minute assessment of your website’s self-service capabilities.

info@intelliresponse.com  1-866-454-0084

About IntelliResponse Systems
IntelliResponse is the leading provider of virtual agent technology solutions for the enterprise. We create profitable online conversations for our private and public sector customers around the world.

With our patented Enterprise Virtual Agent (EVA) solutions, corporate websites, mobile applications, social media channels and agent desktops can all be transformed by an engaging virtual concierge, empowering customers to ask questions using natural, conversational language and delivering an effective and engaging online experience.

To learn more about taking online self service to the next level for your customers, visit www.IntelliResponse.com.