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Why Chatbots Suck at Sales and How You Can Fix It

Introduction

Like most artificial intelligence "solutions" on the market today, sales-oriented chatbots are basically hype. Most salespeople know that a chatbot will never replace a competent, professional human when it comes to closing deals, but even as a sidekick to a sales rep, modern chatbots are generally terrible.

Fortunately, you can turn an A.I. agent -- sort of a chatbot on steroids -- into the best sales assistant you ever had. The trick is building a *virtual sales assistant*, not a chatbot that's been asked to do sales.

Why Chatbots Suck at Sales

Chatbots suck at sales because they emphasize a lot of what's wrong with modern sales philosophy, which is a desire by sales managers to turn sales representatives into robots.

Under bad sales management, a sales rep is just a machine for hitting quota. The job of the human salesperson is to recite a script, answer customer questions with an approved objection-response list, document the whole call -- win or lose -- in Salesforce, and then move as quickly as possible onto the next call. At the end of month or quarter or year, you've either hit quota or not, and they "reprogram" your script and your goals for the next cycle. (That, or you're "deleted" from the sales team.) No wonder so many companies think they can replace a salesperson with a chatbot.

What many seem to forget is that the best, most successful part of a sales call is when you go off-script. Good sales reps use the script to start a real conversation and to get the prospect asking and answering questions. That's when they are engaged, and that's when you find out how to position your product *for that prospect*.

Humans don't like having a script recited to them; they want a sales conversation to feel natural. Chatbots can't do that. A good sales call draws out information about the customer, often in ways a sales script can't anticipate. Chatbots can't do that. Potential customers want to connect with the salesperson as a person, not as a deal-closing machine. Chatbots can't do that.

You can't replace a good sales rep with a chatbot, but that doesn't mean something like a chatbot can't help you make sales.

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What A.I. Sales Assistants Are Actually Good For

A good A.I. agent can be a sales rep's best friend -- as long as the agent has been built to be a real sales assistant, and not a fake salesperson. The job of an artificially intelligent virtual sales assistant is to do all the robotic things that get in the way of true, natural sales conversation. An A.I. sales assistant should take out the grunt work that often keeps you from really talking to a prospect.

That means your A.I. sales assistant should be able to answer a sales rep's technical questions quickly and accurately, and should be able to read and write to both your sales documentation and your CRM system. When a human salesperson gets a callback from a prospect, the A.I. sales assistant should be on hand with the prospect's CRM profile, so a cold lead gets warm fast.

When the sales rep successfully gets a customer to ask an engaging question, but the rep doesn't have an immediate and detailed answer, the A.I. sales assistant should be able to step in and display the product specifications, integration guides, or pricing details needed to help out the humans on the call. And if the A.I. sales assistant is doing its job well, it will provide excerpts from those documents that highlight the exact, right answer.

When a rep finishes a sales call, the A.I. sales assistant should be there to help add all the relevant notes to your CRM and booking system, so the sales paperwork goes faster and the rep can move on to the next call.

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What A.I. Sales Assistants Are Actually Good For (cont'd.)

None of this involves a chatbot trying (and failing) to read a brittle sales script that quickly frustrates everyone involved. A good A.I. assistant makes all your sales tools and documentation easier to read, easier to update, and easier to involve in the sales process.

So how do you get a smart A.I. sales assistant rather than an artificially un-intelligent chatbot? You build it from the ground up.

How to Build a "Smart" Sales Assistant

A good A.I. assistant helps salespersons find the info they need faster -- and that means your company's documentation needs to be created with A.I. in mind.

Sales representatives -- both human and virtual -- succeed only when they have accurate, up-to-date, and comprehensive product documentation to work from. Unfortunately, most companies suffer from a documentation deficit. Their product information is incomplete, out of date, or hard to find -- if not all three at once.

Active Content is information and documentation that have been developed specifically to be read by both humans and artificial intelligence software, so that your chatbot isn't reciting a dumb sales script it doesn't understand, but sales reps aren't forced to read machine-optimized Excel spreadsheets to get the product details they need to close a deal.

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How to Build a "Smart" Sales Assistant (cont'd.)

A competent A.I. sales assistant is designed to work with an Active Content knowledge base that formats and annotates content to help out the A.I. sales assistant, and any chatbot or A.I. assistant you use should have a companion knowledge base it's specifically designed to work with. If your A.I. agent can read your knowledge base, it can help maintain your knowledge base and prevent a documentation deficit before it happens.

To keep the documentation process as smooth and seamless as possible, your A.I. sales assistant should work with non-sales staff to keep your knowledge base up to date. If every product but one has a price sheet, the A.I. sales assistant should notice that -- and assign someone to fix it -- before you're caught flat-footed on a sales call. And if a customer asks a technical question that isn't covered in your product guides, that's an acceptable error only once, as the A.I. sales assistant should help you note the problem and work with the product team to get your documentation updated to address the issue.

Moreover, while a great A.I. sales assistant is built to work with and within an Active Content knowledge base, it should also have access to and integration with your chat platforms (like Slack and Microsoft Teams), your CRM suite (like Salesforce), and your file-sharing system (Like Dropbox and Google Drive) so it can find documents, update sales opportunities, and talk to subject matter experts as directly and efficiently as possible. If your A.I. sales assistant isn't built to do that, it isn't built to help you close deals.

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Try Talla's Smart Assistant and Knowledge Base

Talla has built a smart knowledge base and A.I. assistant specifically to help sales and support teams do their jobs better. Talla is the only knowledge base that merges machine learning, automation, and chatbots with the Active Content and information you write about your business. Close more customers, triple the productivity for your sales and support reps, and put the power of your entire organization behind every employee using Talla's knowledge base with built in digital co-workers.

Put simply: Talla has the A.I. sales assistant you've been looking for.

Want to use A.I. to improve sales? Contact sales@talla.com.