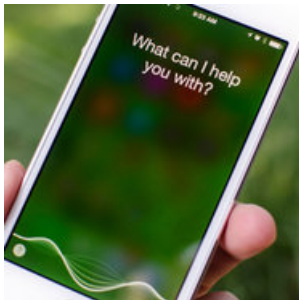


SOFTWARE AND TECHNOLOGY

## Five technologies that will transform customer service in five years: Forrester

July 13, 2016



Apple's Siri

By CHANTAL TODE

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New technologies are creating compelling experiences that have the potential to build loyalty- and revenue-generating opportunities into customer service but, businesses need to start preparing now, according to a new report from Forrester.

The report, Plan Now For Customer Service in 2021, looks at technologies such augmented reality, two-video and messaging applications that are expected to transform customer care in the near future. Customers are increasingly driving new service experiences such as social customer service and SMS customer service and savvy businesses should start exploring now next-generation technologies such as two-way video, augmented and virtual reality, virtual assistants, messaging and connected devices.

"Contact center decision-makers with a focus on driving ever-greater cost efficiencies have been highly risk-averse and slow moving," said Ian Jacobs, an analyst at **Forrester**, and co-author of the report.

"But the change of pace inherent in the age of the customer will no longer allow contact centers to simply take cost out of the business," he said.

"Emerging technologies can drive the types of customer service experiences that better cement customer loyalty as well as advance new revenue-generating opportunities."

### Two-way video

While many organizations are not likely to widely deploy the technologies highlighted by Forrester for several years, the research company urges the to begin now to plan for and test them.

With many consumers now equipped with a HD-video-capable smartphone, Forrester expects two-way video chat to become a workaday feature of customer experience. For businesses, this can help identify which product a consumer is talking about that needs service. In industries where customers have high trust demands, such as banking, two-way video enables customers and agents to look at each other.

### AR and VR

As costs come down on virtual reality and augmented reality technology and consumers experience them more, customer service agents will be able to project their presence into consumers' worlds and be with them in their

moments of need.

Forrester recommends businesses start internal trials of AR and VR. For example, Genesys created a VR demo that enabled users to visualize, analyze and interact with data from five different contact centers in a virtual environment.

From here, businesses can move onto consumer-focused use cases, such as offering a VR- or AR-based introduction to the process of applying for a mortgage.

### **Virtual assistants**

While there are a number of virtual assistants, such as Amazon's Alexa, Apple's Siri, Google Now and Microsoft's Cortana, the technology is currently limited. However, improvements in speech recognition, natural language understanding and machine learning is likely to bring a new class of virtual assistants that will be conversational, enabling a customer to ask a series of questions diving deeper into a topic. They will also be contextual.

Businesses should explore companies such as SoundHound that offer embeddable, speech-based virtual assistant platforms that brands can insert in their apps. Wearables and connected devices could also benefit.

Eventually, businesses could allow virtual assistants to take actions on a user's behalf, such as to open a trouble ticket.

Also, expect vertical-specific virtual assistants to become available and for virtual assistants to easily transfer their interaction to a live agent at the appropriate time.

### **Messaging apps**

Forrester expects that messaging apps such as WhatsApp will become a customer service workhorse by 2021. While these apps have become mainstream with consumers, customer service professionals have just begun experimenting with ways to use these tools. A key benefit is the ability to embed other channels and functions, such as virtual assistants or shipping trackers into messaging.

To take advantage of persistent channels such as messaging, businesses will need to learn how to deal with sessions that can span multiple back and forths over days.

### **Connected devices**

As connected devices continue to grow, consumers are going to start expecting a more preemptive idea of service. Brands may be able to shift to a subscription model by regularly collecting data from connected devices to improve customer service. This information can also help businesses arm contact center agents with tools for more precise troubleshooting.

Businesses should start now to prioritize their investment in these technologies, per Forrester. Companies should also consider a more expansive view of service as these technologies can significantly improve onboarding and post-sales customer service.

"New modes of customer service powered by new technologies require new processes," Mr. Jacobs said.

"Recognize that your business needs to experiment to find the best processes and experiences."

### **1 thought on "Five technologies that will transform customer service in five years: Forrester"**

1. **Damir S.** says:

**July 14, 2016 at 4:23 am**

I believe that AR is greatly going to affect customer experience in offline stores. This will probably increase engagement and decrease the need of real assistants. As for the virtual assistants, speech recognition is still not perfect in order to be widely used. However, looks like technology is slowly replacing human labor. Scary!