

# Predictions 2019: Customer Service And Sales

## Invest In Humans In 2019, As Chatbot Backlash Will Emerge

by Daniel Hong, Tom Kaneshige, Ian Jacobs, Kate Leggett, and Art Schoeller  
November 8, 2018

### Why Read This Report

The promises of AI have yet to make a material impact in customer service and sales. Companies cannot simply replace employees with AI-driven software, as customers and markets are becoming far more complex. Application development and delivery (AD&D) pros should read this report for Forrester's predictions in the customer service and sales software space, including changes to technology, customer backlash against chatbots, and more. Prepare for a new playing field for customer service and sales in 2019.

### Key Takeaways

#### **The Backlash Against Chatbots Will Begin**

The growing prevalence of unpopular customer service chatbots will drive a movement: to connect consumers to live, human agents again.

#### **Salespeople Will Start Gaming AI**

Metrics breed bad behavior. The injection of AI into sales technologies and processes will result in rogue behavior by some employees as they try to slip under the radar of more intelligent, AI-driven systems.

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## Don't Replace Your Human Service And Sales Teams — Augment Them

In 2019, the inflated expectations of AI in customer service and sales will fall back to reality. The idea that robots will replace humans in these roles will be quickly met with tactful skepticism accompanied by cocked eyebrows and crossed arms. AD&D pros supporting customer service organizations and sales teams will come to realize that cost savings through reduced headcount is not a viable short-term option in a hypercompetitive market.

Companies need to retain human talent in customer service and sales as customer needs become more complex. 2019 is the year for companies to provide their human workforces with the tools to be successful. Technology investments aimed at improving automation and performance in customer service and sales will manifest in a variety of different situations that will cause employee and customer backlash on some fronts but also empower and augment employee capabilities on others.

Specifically, we predict that:

1. **Sixty percent of chatbot deployments will provide poor escalation paths to agents.** Like many traditional interactive voice response (IVR) deployments, a significant percentage of both voice- and text-based chatbot deployments in 2019 will require customers to repeat who they are and what they want.

Organizational and technology silos will continue to impede many companies from doing the full-stream customer journey design and implementation that would bridge self-service escalations to live agents (whether via web chat or voice). This will place additional pressure on agent retention; companies will have to manage frustrated customers who attempt to self-serve first and then escalate issues beyond the scope of their chatbots' abilities.

2. **Customers will lead a community-based revolt against corporate chatbots.** Back in 2005, with dissatisfaction with poorly designed IVRs cresting, tech entrepreneur Paul English created GetHuman, which brought poor phone-based self-service front and center and drove some firms to redesign their IVRs as awareness of poor self-service design diffused across the marketplace.

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GetHuman is an online cheat sheet that helps customers dodge self-service systems like Marshawn Lynch bobs and weaves around defensive linemen. Typical advice runs something like, “Press 0, press 0, say ‘Operator,’ say ‘Operator,’ press 2.”

The growing prevalence of unpopular customer service chatbots will drive a similar online movement with the same goal in mind: educate consumers on horrible chatbot experiences and help them shake off poorly designed self-service systems to connect to a live, human agent. We expect an enterprising, frustrated consumer to spearhead a GetHuman-like communal effort to collect the required phrases to get a chatbot to escalate to a live agent.

3. **A third of companies will modernize agent desktops to augment the human workforce.**

Contact center agents are handling more complex work that requires better insight, analysis, and product expertise. Agent desktops will become the hub of agent work as enterprises look to enrich customer interactions in an era of increasing average handle time in customer service.

New agent desktops in 2019 will use customer and inquiry context to proactively display related cases and insights to the agent. They will use robotic process automation (RPA) to automate 80% of repetitive agent actions, use agent-facing chatbots to support agents in their discovery efforts, integrate collaborative workspaces where experts can collectively troubleshoot issues, and use real-time interaction analytics to better connect emotionally with customers.

4. **AI-embedded sales technology will incentivize salespeople to falsify data regularly.** In the next market correction, a tough sales climate will expose AI’s true master in sales force automation (SFA) — the sales manager. Many sales managers today have a smart tool as part of SFA to analyze a salesperson’s daily activities. While AI embedded in SFA has been billed as a smart assistant that helps field sales reps do their jobs better, sales managers will use AI capabilities to micromanage reps and, in some cases, justify firing underperformers. Consultative sellers will fight back by inputting garbage data to either hide their tracks or game the machine learning system.

Investments in AI to improve sales will require concurrent investments in education and creating and maintaining the right culture among sales teams to prevent backlash.

5. **Sales engagement platforms will empower digital sales teams to take down whales.** Thanks to emerging sales engagement platforms from vendors like Outreach.io, SalesLoft, and, most notably, Salesforce High Velocity Sales, inside sales reps — also called “digital sellers” — will get better at prospecting customers, prioritizing leads, and reaching customers faster. Salesforce plans to infuse Einstein AI into High Velocity Sales to drive automation and insights into every step of the digital sales cadence.

With their newfound success, digital sellers will become more reluctant to hand over deals to field salespeople — also called “consultative sellers” — and sales operations leaders will consider allocating even more resources toward growing digital sales. Next year will mark a tipping point

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in the age of the B2B customer, as B2B buyers become more comfortable going through digital sellers instead of consultative sellers. Armed with new productivity automation tools and customer insights, digital sellers will finally reach, serve, and close big deals.

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