

uniphore 

Conversational AI and Automation Are Transforming Customer Service

An Automation Roadmap
for Contact Centers



Introduction

Throughout the pandemic, one of the hardest hit areas of business has been the contact center. Starting with the sudden, wholesale shift from brick-and-mortar to a work-from-home model, contact centers and their agents were faced with enormous challenges to maintaining operations—all while being inundated with calls, texts, chats, emails, and even video interactions. The result was far from stellar for the majority of consumer brands, with many experiencing drops in customer satisfaction.

A Uniphore survey of U.S. consumers completed in November 2020 shows that hold times increased by 50% since March 2020, with more than half (53%) of consumers waiting more than 30 minutes to get a response. Is that truly the best that customer service organizations can do?

A year after the onset of the pandemic, many companies find themselves still stuck in neutral, unable to scale and transform their operations effectively. What they need is a roadmap to the future of customer service, where conversational artificial intelligence (AI) and automation transform the customer and agent experience, enable scalability to handle greater volume, create cost efficiencies, and drive outcomes that fulfill the core purpose of the contact center.

The contact center world is at a critical inflection point in its application of advanced AI technology. Companies and contact centers must begin implementing conversational AI and automation now or risk emerging from the pandemic weakened and unable to compete effectively. This requires a commitment to make these technologies a centerpiece of contact center operations and take bold steps to deploy conversational AI and automation to achieve strategic and transformational outcomes.

This white paper outlines what those bold steps can entail and the business value they can generate.



“Automation, artificial intelligence, and machine learning will have as big of an impact on business and the world as the Internet did.”

John T. Chambers, Founder and CEO of JC2 Ventures, former executive chairman and CEO of Cisco Systems, and a member of Uniphore’s Board of Directors



THE CONTACT CENTER GETS ELEVATED TO PRIMARY REVENUE CHANNEL

For decades, contact centers have tried to make the case for being an important revenue-generating function of the business instead of being viewed as simply another cost center. While some contact centers successfully changed the company mindset in this respect, most didn’t get the recognition or the support from the business that a primary revenue driver deserves.

Times have certainly changed. The pandemic dramatically shifted how customers engage with brands, thrusting the contact center into the role of primary revenue driver.

According to Andrea Ayers, former president and CEO of Convergys Corporation and a member of Uniphore’s board of directors, “The contact center just became the biggest revenue center for many companies. Going into the pandemic, most contact centers were focused on investments in areas such as the network to connect the customer to an agent. Now those contact centers must shift their investment to AI and automation solutions if they want to leverage the opportunity to return to and sustain strong revenue growth.”

In fact, to emerge stronger from the pandemic, contact centers need to move beyond their traditional system of engagement to a system of intelligence that automates, personalizes, and optimizes every conversation for better customer and agent experiences. The best foundation for a system of intelligence is conversational service automation (CSA), which combines conversational AI, robotic process automation (RPA), and workflow automation in a conversation-centric platform.

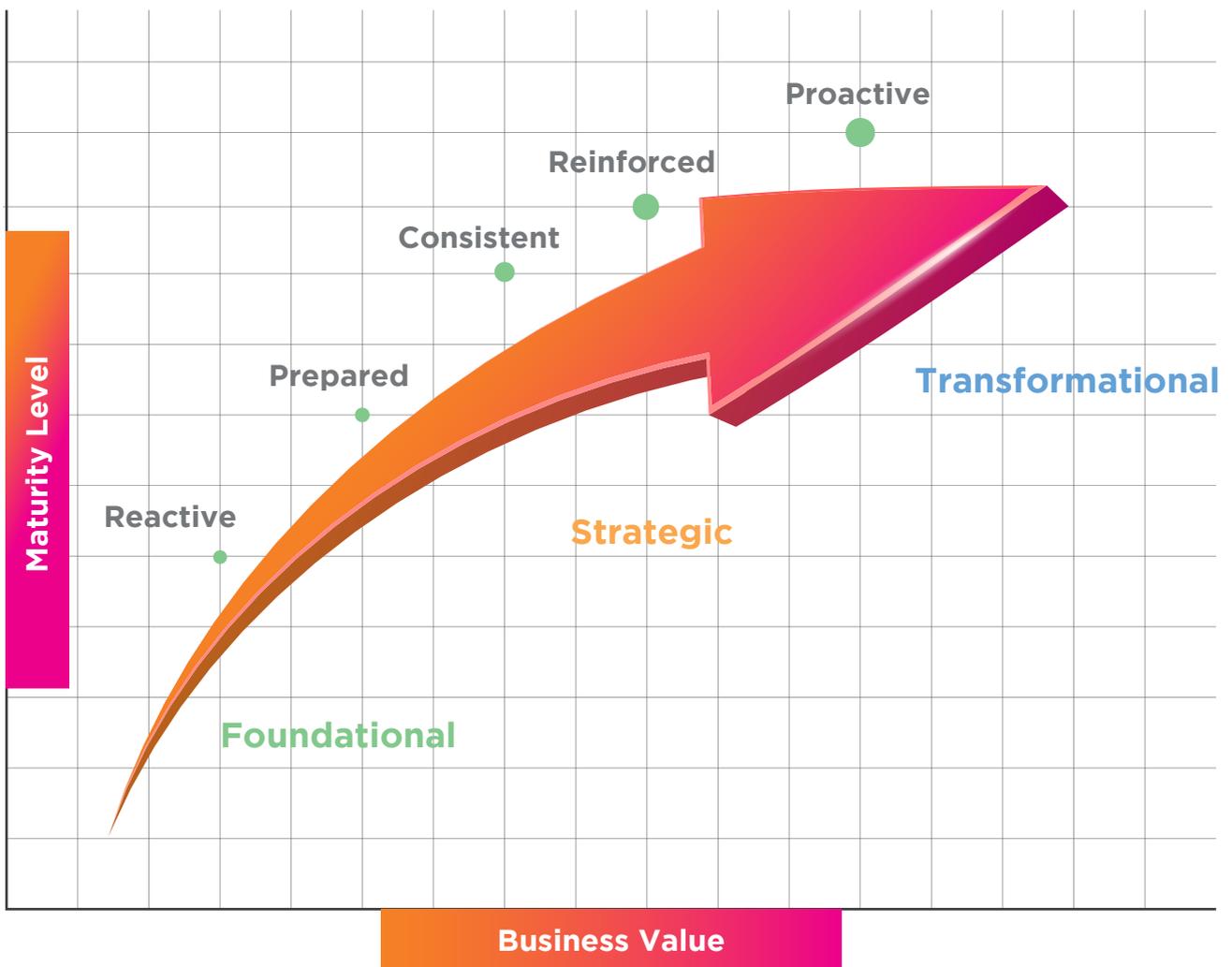
With CSA, contact centers can easily progress through the essential steps of deploying automation, from foundational to strategic to transformational, using cost savings from early projects to fund initiatives that deliver sustainable business value.

AI as a Tool for Generating Value

“A small contingent of respondents coming from a variety of industries attribute 20 percent or more of their organizations’ earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) to AI. These companies plan to invest even more in AI in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its acceleration of all things digital.”

Source: “The State of AI in 2020,” McKinsey & Company, November 2020

Automation Maturity Curve



STARTING WITH FOUNDATIONAL AUTOMATION

In the decade when the Internet first took off, it was viewed primarily as a way to automate repetitive tasks such as order entry instead of entering orders manually. Now it is part of our everyday lives, delivering value in many different ways that we never imagined possible in the early days.

Likewise, companies getting started with conversational AI and automation can start by automating certain, lower-value interactions and customer journeys to improve scalability and agent efficiency while reducing contact center costs.

These types of early projects often involve automating self-service to reduce call volume and average handle time in the contact center. For example, companies can automate customer journeys such as:



Locating the nearest ATM within financial services companies



Paying bills or transferring services in telecommunications businesses



Inquiring about health plan benefits in healthcare organizations

With the right CSA platform, contact centers can achieve measurable and sustainable efficiency and cost savings without negatively impacting the customer experience. That's because CSA understands customer sentiment and intent to drive higher self-service automation rates while passing the context from self-service to agents should customers need assistance. The platform reduces call handling times and creates a frictionless experience for customers and agents alike.

More importantly, unlike point AI solutions, a CSA platform forms the operational backbone necessary for evolving and expanding automation beyond cost control. This capability is essential because contact centers cannot afford to stop at the first stage of automation.

They must continue to apply AI-powered automation throughout the customer journey to achieve more strategic outcomes that drive revenue and customer satisfaction. The savings generated at the foundational level of automation can be used to fund the next step on the roadmap.

Contact Center Automation is a Top Use Case for AI

50% of companies surveyed by McKinsey & Company have adopted AI in at least one business function. Contact center automation was one of the top three use cases that most commonly led to cost reduction.

Source: "The State of AI in 2020," McKinsey & Company, November 2020



MOVING TO STRATEGIC AUTOMATION

The next step is to expand the use of AI and automation to achieve strategic business outcomes such as revenue, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. This requires advanced, conversational AI that can understand the nuances of human language and make sense of intricate human speech patterns to improve the agent and customer experience.

Using the operational backbone of a CSA platform, contact centers can optimize every conversation by enabling agents to be more productive and empathetic while personalizing the experience for customers. With a CSA platform that can understand the customer's real intent, emotions, and implied needs, contact centers can deliver a more conversational experience to improve customer satisfaction and Net Promoter Score (NPS).

Examples of strategic automation include:

Intelligent assistance for agents during the call:

Real-time conversational analysis can assist agents with alerts and guidance for the next-best action. The combination of AI and machine learning improves both the agent and customer experience and drives revenue by understanding the intent and sentiment of customers to ensure their queries are resolved with speed and efficiency.

After-call work automation: Using AI and automation to reduce after-call work shortens average call waiting time while reducing average handle time from 2.5 minutes to 30 seconds thereby delivering dramatic efficiency gains and return on investment. CSA can automatically listen and transcribe calls in real time and then present the call summary after the call is completed for the agent to edit and confirm before automatically updating relevant systems. The customer experience during the call remains conversational, while errors are reduced and less time is required after the call to properly conclude it.

Promises management: A new area of automation is promises management, which reduces repeat calls and agent effort, while improving customer satisfaction. Using RPA within the CSA platform, contact centers can automate promises management to extract, track, and fulfill commitments made during agent and customer conversations, thus integrating and automating the front and back office. The platform tracks promises and commitments made by agents in real time during the call, aligns expectations with customers immediately following the call, and manages fulfillment after the call.

A Uniphore survey of U.S. consumers from November 2020 reveals that more than 84% of people who have interacted with a contact center expect some form of follow up or follow through. Given the volume of calls and the commitments made during each interaction, tracking and fulfilling each of these promises accurately and as timely as possible is a monumental effort when done manually.

Realizing the benefits of automating promises management, 67% of contact centers surveyed by Uniphore in December 2020 stated that a promises management solution would be extremely valuable and a further 31% agreed that it would be somewhat valuable.



Turning Detractors Into Promoters

“In the last few years, contact centers have overfocused on customer satisfaction. They should instead focus on detractors because of their impact on a company’s Net Promoter Score (NPS). One of the things that creates detractors are missed commitments. Automatically making sure commitments are extracted, tracked, and completed takes advantage of the power of RPA to drive down the number of detractors and improve NPS.”

— Tanvir Khan, Executive Vice President, Dynamic Workplace Services & Business Process Outsourcing, NTT Data



ACHIEVING TRANSFORMATIONAL AUTOMATION

The first two phases of automation focused on automating activities and tasks that humans routinely perform within the contact center. The third phase takes automation to a new level: handling things that humans cannot, such as predicting certain behaviors and patterns based on analysis of millions of calls, to drive the core purpose of your contact center, such as driving revenue or reducing churn through improved customer experience.

CSA uses natural language processing (NLP) and conversational AI to analyze 100% of your interactions across phone, email, and text channels, extracting actionable insights on patterns, trends, topics, and more. The applications and use cases for using post-interaction and real-time analysis to transform operations and drive business value include:

Fraud detection in

retail environments: AI can help identify patterns of behaviors and trends associated with internal and external retail fraud, enabling brands to detect fraud earlier with a high rate of accuracy to reduce losses and protect the bottom line.

Prevention of overpayment of claims by

healthcare payers: Conversational AI and NLP can generate a transcript for interactions and then extract the relevant information to create a pseudo health plan and estimated medical claim. The estimated claim can then be compared with actual claims as they come in. Potential overpayments are flagged automatically before they can happen.

Identification of claim denial

patterns in insurance: Based on analysis of interactions with claimants, conversational AI and NLP can identify patterns and trends for claim denials and use that insight to present the best solution proactively to agents to speed resolution while ensuring customer satisfaction.

Insight into reasons for

customer churn in telecom: Using AI and NLP, telecoms can identify why customers are churning and apply that insight to intelligent coaching guidance for agents to help them retain more customers.

Improved sales effectiveness for banking: By identifying patterns and changes to them, such as cash flow trends, AI can alert agents in real time about products and services that would be most relevant and beneficial for specific customers, improving conversions as well as customer satisfaction.

Automation Improves Resilience

According to Bain & Company, “companies that invested more in automation before the pandemic have weathered the crisis better than others.” An automation survey conducted by the management consultancy firm reports those companies generated higher revenues and experienced fewer disruptions to the supply chain, workforce productivity, and demand.

“It’s no longer primarily about lowering costs. Companies are increasingly deploying automation to strengthen business resilience, reduce risk and generate useful business insights more easily.”

Source: “A New Dawn for Automation,” Michael Heric and Purna Doddapaneni, Bain & Company, October 2020

Conclusion

Conversational AI, RPA, NLP, and automation are changing the future of customer service—not because they are replacing agents, but because they augment them to enable a better experience for both customers and agents. Using a CSA platform to achieve transformative automation makes customer service more convenient, faster, responsive, and personal, enabling companies to gain business value in the form of greater revenue, higher customer satisfaction, and increased loyalty.

No matter where you are on your automation journey, Uniphore can help you deliver frictionless customer experiences and transform customer service from under-performing to over-achieving. We bridge the gap between human and machine with our Uniphore Conversational Service Automation platform to disrupt an outdated contact center model and set a new standard for customer service.

Learn more about [*Uniphore's Conversational Service Automation platform*](#)





About Uniphore

Uniphore is the global leader in Conversational Service Automation. The Company's vision is to disrupt an outdated customer service model by bridging the gap between human and machine using voice, AI and automation to ensure that every voice, on every call, is truly heard.

Uniphore enables businesses globally to deliver transformational customer service by providing an automation platform where digital agents take over transactional conversations from humans, coach agents during calls, and accurately predict language, emotion and intent. All in real-time. With Conversational Service Automation, enterprises can now engage their customers to effectively build loyalty, improve customer experience and realize operational efficiencies.

For more information,
please visit www.uniphore.com and connect with us on

