

Outlook

Can We Have a Chatbot?

At the risk of dating myself as old timer, I can remember when customer-service phone calls to a business were picked up by a real human being instead of an automated system with touch-tone menu choices. Looking back, I think the automated switchboard was the end of an era for good customer service—the era when personalized interactions with a live representative demonstrated a company's commitment to quality service.

Now it is the "Chatbot's" turn to make its mark on customer service. And from what I hear, the same big advantage is once again being touted. Save money! 30%, 40%, even 50% savings compared to a live operator or technical support professional. And since so many customer requests for support and service are essentially for the same "frequently asked question," why not just automate the whole process and eliminate some costly members of the team?

Well, for those of you interested in how we do things at Glenair, here are some reasons we will not be transitioning to any form of automated AI or "Chatbot" in our customer service and support departments.

1. *Lack of Human Touch:* For our money, Chatbots lack the empathy and understanding that only a human customer service representative can provide. We know for a fact our customers treasure the personalized interactions they enjoy with our team and would feel frustrated were we to implement a software program interface to Glenair customer service.
2. *Limited Ability to Understand Accents and Non-Native English:* Our sense is that artificial intelligence still has real limitations in its ability to understand and respond to complex customer queries—especially if the speaker is using heavily-accented or colloquial speech. Talk about a recipe for frustration! What happens if a slight mispronunciation results in an incorrect part number getting ordered, or the wrong Glenair Assembly Procedure being used?
3. *Negative Customer Perception:* If (or when) a Chatbot interaction fails to meet customer expectations, what is the likely outcome? Naturally, it will lead to a negative perception of Glenair's customer service as a whole. The last thing we would ever want is for our customers to believe we are unresponsive, impersonal, or lacking in human support. Saves you money? Yep, at the cost of potentially damaging our brand and impacting customer loyalty.

When automated switchboards became the rage, we stuck to our guns and kept our live operators and customer service pros on the phones. And we have heard time and time again from our customers how much they appreciate the human touch they get from Glenair. As for Chatbots, no thanks. That's a conversation we don't care to have.

Chris Toomey

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Christopher J. Toomey

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Jim Donaldson

Issue Contributors

Robert Johnson

Guido Hunziker

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Distribution

Terry White

To subscribe or unsubscribe,
please contact Terry White:
twhite@glenair.com

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GLENAIR, INC.

1211 AIR WAY
GLENDALE, CA 91201-2497
TEL: 818-247-6000
FAX: 818-500-9912
E-MAIL: sales@glenair.com
www.glenair.com

