AI VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS AND THE OPPORTUNITIES THEY ENABLE

The next stage in IT service desks: conversational support

The new reality of the work environment

The reality of work has changed entirely since March 2020.

In many workplaces worldwide, the pandemic and its limitations on physical movements have catalyzed increased work flexibility and have ushered in several new possible ways of working. Any previous doubt on the likelihood and efficiency of remote work has been dispelled thanks to the lack of any other realistic, implementable alternatives. For many companies providing non-essential activities virtually overnight, remote working was the only way to ensure that normal business operations could continue and ensure uninterrupted service to customers during a moment of crisis.

The prospect for transformation had been boiling beneath the surface for some time. Some organizations had already plunged in, while others were still hesitant in committing. The onset of the pandemic translated into widespread adoption of digital tools and processes - we have probably witnessed more digital transformation in ten months of 2020 than we have in the previous ten years combined.

As the weeks turned into months, the corporate world has come to accept that going back to the "normal" work environment of pre-COVID times is not a reasonable assumption for the future. Workers have now experienced the flexibility of working from home and are hesitant to return to a routine that requires their physical presence at the office five days per week.

Manpower reports that industries that cannot offer flexibility are struggling the most with talent shortages (74%)

Manpower, Talent Shortage survey, 2021

Furthermore, as Gen Z, a generation raised with digital tools and information at their fingertips enters the workforce, the future of work patterns will undoubtedly need to shift to an even greater extent.

Surveys from Gartner show that the future of work is, to a great extent, hybrid, which means that remote scenarios will, in one form or another, remain very much a part of the day-to-day activity of companies around the world.

Since 2020, technology has played an indispensable role in making the fast changes in work arrangements not only possible but viable and stable enough to allow companies to be efficient and continue to grow.

Technology has also demonstrated that much of the work can be done from home with no losses to productivity. In this period, CIOs and other corporate IT leaders have faced the challenge of managing business continuity and ensuring 100% remote work capabilities. As remote work is here to stay, companies continue to invest in an expanding range of technologies and services to support the new reality of work and the evolving workforce.

By 2023, crowdsourcing, work at home (WAH), telecommuting, and the gig economy will account for 35% of the customer service workforce, up from 5% in 2017, driven by changing labor practices and business continuity planning

Gartner, Running an Effective IT Service Desk During and After a Pandemic, 2021

IT support, a vital element for business continuity

Work from home is the new reality for practically any company where remote work is possible for the foreseeable future. In this context, IT is essential to support day-to-day operations, whether it be through a help desk, which aims to handle solely everyday problems for users (Level 0 requests), or through a service desk, which is a more complex undertaking, handling both simple and more complex requests from across the organization. Remote employees require assistance now, possibly more than ever: they need access to software, apps, and a new technological infrastructure (at home).
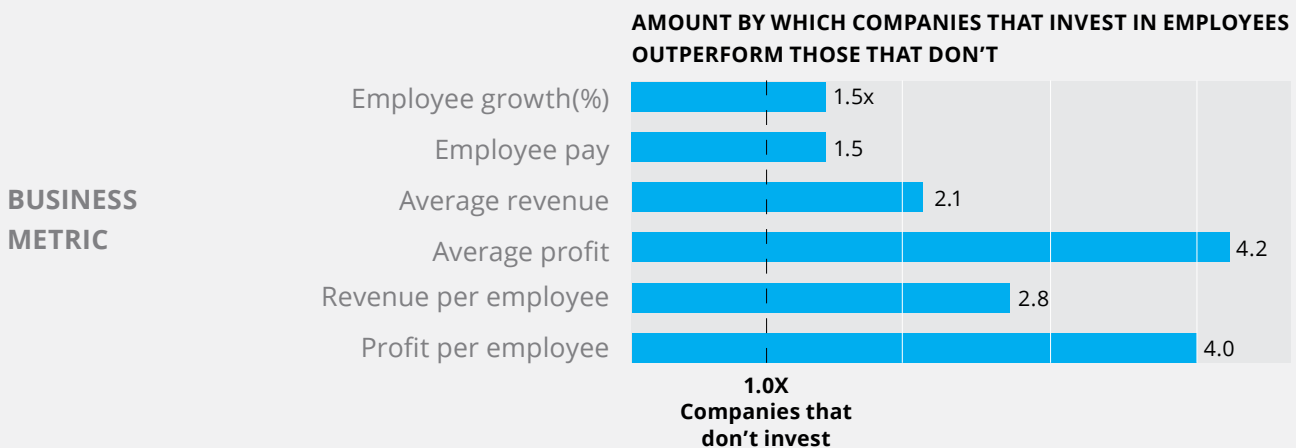
As work becomes ever digital and mobile, it poses new problems for teams collaborating digitally across boundaries and places. Whether a worker is remote, in a physical office, or bouncing between the virtual and physical workplace, they require access to company resources and knowledge bases.

The earlier they can remedy an IT issue they face, the better their experience and productivity. With more employee demands coming directly to the relevant service desk and support operations, the impact is more significant than just a rise in ticket numbers. It is also related to the expectations of employees who require service or assistance – not only does remote working increase their productivity-related needs, but this simultaneously superposes itself to changing expectations shaped by their experience as a consumer in the wider world.

Employee experience has never been more important on the corporate agenda, with recent data showing that more than 69 percent of organizations are currently concerned about talent shortages and trouble hiring. Companies that invest in their employees experience profit four times more than those that do not .

Companies that invest in employee experience outperform those that don't

They are four times as profitable, according to an analysis of 250 organizations

AMOUNT BY WHICH COMPANIES THAT INVEST IN EMPLOYEES OUTPERFORM THOSE THAT DON'T

BUSINESS METRIC

Business Metric	Value
Employee growth(%)	1.5x
Employee pay	1.5
Average revenue	2.1
Average profit	4.2
Revenue per employee	2.8
Profit per employee	4.0

**1.0X
Companies that
don't invest**

Source: The employee experience advantage, by Jacob Morgan

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> **According to Gartner, employee experience is paramount to attaining business objectives, and it has grown increasingly critical to the success of a team or organization. The "employee experience" encompasses everything that people encounter and notice during their time at a company**
>
> Gartner, Identifying and managing moments that matter to employees

The physical, digital, and social environments of employees can either enhance or impede their experience. The IT aspect, related to how seamlessly an employee can do this job, is thus an essential element for a good employee experience.

The IT service desk helps prevent employee downtime and maintain high productivity by handling anything from setting up new employees to dealing with system updates and resolving user-specific difficulties. Even before COVID-19, remote problems were more time-consuming, necessitating more end-user troubleshooting and cooperation. Now that everyone is dispersed, CIOs must reconsider how to deploy their resources.

A well-functioning service desk is critical to the company's overall success from an external point of view as well: customers will first contact the IT support desk if they have a problem with the product or service. The IT department must handle troubleshooting, onboarding or offboarding, signup, installation, and other technical concerns.

IT pressures in the remote work world

The IT service desk is an essential support function for today's businesses, which rely significantly on IT infrastructure and services to allow their employees to operate without interruptions

It is responsible for answering the demands of all employees, managing difficult situations, and providing access to critical resources and expertise. Consequently, it has a considerable impact on overall worker productivity.

At the same time, because of its central position in enabling daily activities, the IT service desk is also under constant pressure. Before the rise in remote work, if an employee experienced a problem with their equipment, they would most likely have sought assistance from a colleague

before contacting the IT support desk. Perhaps the individual sitting next to them used to be very tech-savvy or had faced that same trouble before and could help immediately, saving the employee having to address a question to the IT team. This is no longer the case when most people are working remotely.

Moreover, the introduction of new services and technologies, such as those that enable online communication or web-based versions of previously services available on-site, means

that the amount of requests for support has skyrocketed. Naturally, the demand peaked during the early months of the pandemic. However, many companies have seen it remain relatively high, especially as, with the amount of time that has passed, IT support is now needed for new employees who are unfamiliar with the company's IT environment or policies.

Thus, the IT service desk has evolved into a critical component of corporate operations. With increasing pressure to save costs and a growing need to drive competency, IT workers have struggled to provide real-time quality services to consumers. Delayed responses and extended wait times cause user dissatisfaction and low work efficiency.

In today's digital-first era, companies are under constant pressure to accomplish more with less, assuring increased productivity and ROI with little cost. Growing IT service desk teams to cope with additional demand is a costly and challenging endeavor.

Already in 2019, personnel accounted for 66% of IT service desk costs on average

Gartner, Running an Effective IT Service Desk During and After a Pandemic, 2021

Furthermore, it is now impossible for a company to remain relevant and expand without embracing innovation. As a result, an increasing number of businesses are embracing cutting-edge technologies such as AI, NLP, and RPA to remain ahead of their competitors and provide a great user experience, be it for their employees or their customers. AI chatbots are one such promising technology that can alter how IT service is managed.

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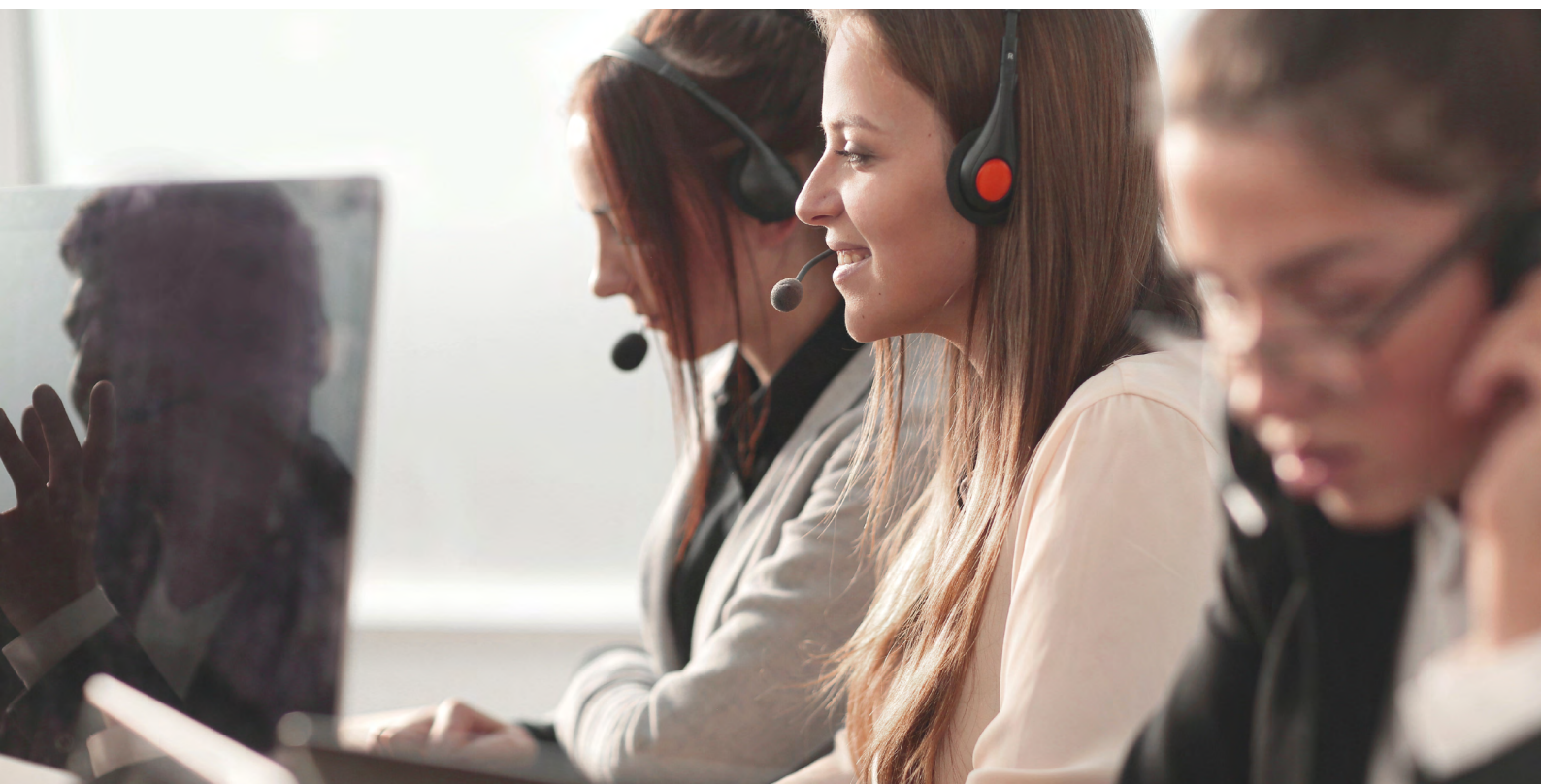
Is automation the path to sustained performance?

Employees at home are confronting greater digital and technical hurdles as remote working continues.

IT service desks face their own challenges as the volume of support requests and issues increases. The introduction of digital business models has increased the demands placed on IT service desks, making it difficult for them to meet these demands in addition to the routine requirements for which they have historically been responsible. To solve these difficulties and transform IT service desks into business productivity teams, many of these firms are looking for effective AI-driven chatbots to automate the process and increase user satisfaction scores with less investment.

One way to quickly reduce demand on Level 1 phone-based contact channels is to introduce asynchronous Level 1 contact methods, and chatbots are an excellent solution in this respect. Conversational virtual assistants are easier to reach remotely than contact center phone queues and can keep phone lines free for essential concerns. Moreover, thanks to NLP, the support experience feels natural and very intuitive to the user.

An intelligent virtual assistant provides a quick self-service alternative for resolving typical employee IT difficulties. The AI chatbot can grasp the intent of an employee's support request and perform the appropriate processes to meet that requirement and resolve their issue, either entirely or partially, using artificial intelligence technologies such as natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning. In this sense, helpdesk chatbots automate repetitive and routine requests and processes, freeing human support agents to focus on more complicated and high-value employee demands.

The automation provided through an AI chatbot saves money while improving staff satisfaction. The chatbot addresses this by providing a single access point and channel through which employees can make their requests. The chatbot responds, gathering additional information required to act on the request. Understanding the goal allows the virtual assistant to fully or partially automate the process and, when necessary, hand the conversation off to a human agent for solutions.

Opportunities for using AI virtual assistants to automate IT service desks

By their nature, IT service desks are plagued by repetitive and manual activities and a wealth of user inquiries.

However, an AI-powered service desk uses essential intelligent automation technologies to optimize ITSM operations and introduce employee self-service, providing employees with accurate answers and resolves in seconds – all without human intervention. The ability to auto-resolve tasks and handle user inquiries frees up IT workers' time to focus on more complicated duties, enhancing overall productivity. AI chatbots can provide support in a variety of forms.

1. FAQ support

When it comes to IT support, many users, be they internal (employees) or external (customers), will likely face the same challenges and, thus, ask the same set of questions. Answering these repetitive questions may not be the most effective use of your IT department's time and could easily lead to delays and wasted time. Even when businesses employ FAQ pages on their support site, there is much friction in searching for and locating the necessary information.

An AI chatbot, instead, thanks to its back-end integration with the relevant databases, can access the needed information almost instantly and return the answer to the employee with zero delays. This can divert much traffic away from the agents, lowering expenses and improving the customer experience. Deploying automation through conversational technology can save IT time since employees no longer have to answer the same set of questions repeatedly. At the same time, you can deliver experiences that thrill the rest of your staff and keep them engaged because their queries can be answered fast.

2. Self-service

In general, IT support workers must resolve many issues simultaneously, which places them under a lot of undue stress. AI-driven chatbots can be helpful in such instances since they can quickly address several tickets and avoid the consumer (or employees) waiting in line for their query to be resolved. In fact, a virtual assistant can automatically recommend the most feasible solution or share relevant resources that can help solve the problem.

This virtual connection with the user inquiring allows for real-time, consistent, and individualized messaging, which improves their satisfaction with the experience. AI chatbots are typically used to answer level 0 and 1 inquiries while moving the more sophisticated issues back to human agents who can better appraise the situation and find appropriate solutions.

Even this context saves a great deal of time for IT customer support. It increases their ability to find answers fast as they can learn about the problem before connecting to the user and use the AI chatbots to search in the databases for relevant information.
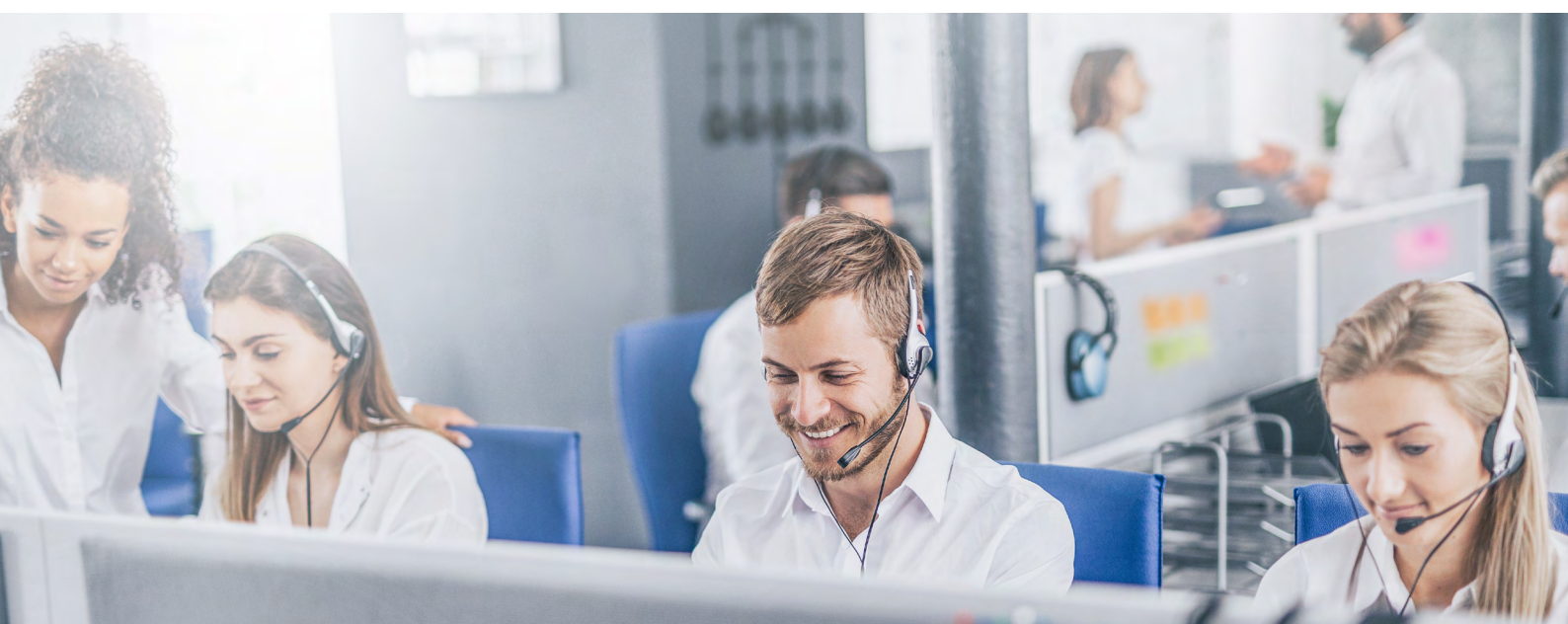
3. Password management

Given the growing amount of online tools used by the ordinary knowledge worker, one of the most common requests to come to the IT service desk refers to lost logins and passwords. Gartner estimates that 40% of all service desk volumes refer to requests for help in password setting. At the same time, Forrester Research noted, in 2019, that large organizations spend up to $1 million every year on staff and infrastructure to handle password resets alone. Rather than contacting the help desk and incurring the time and cost of an agent dealing with something as basic as this, the employee can simply request support directly with an IT service desk chatbot. The chatbot has the ability to authenticate the user and then automatically generate and update the user's login and password. The entire process is carried out automatically by the chatbots, with no assistance from a human agent.

4. Equipment management

Today's worker usually utilizes an arsenal of laptops, printers, mobile devices, and other virtual tools to get their daily job done. For this very reason, the onboarding of any new employees must begin with equipment and software. Existing employees, likewise, want a method to seek new or updated hardware and software updates or access.

Often, a company will offer a catalog of allowed devices from which employees can "shop" and make their selections, subject to approval and policy. Instead of technical support agents wasting time discussing options and placing orders, an IT service desk chatbot can be used to handle the process. Thus, instead of wasting the time of a human member of the IT department, the chatbot can register the request, guide the employee into selecting the suitable device from those available to his position, then submit the request to a manager and, pending approval, initiate the order for the equipment's acquisition.

Along the journey, the chatbot can respond to inquiries about software requirements, corporate policy on devices, delivery schedules, and specifications. The virtual assistant can also recognize the user, their language, and their locality, allowing it to tailor the catalog and responses to geo-specific policies. Moreover, along the process, the worker can stay up to date on the status of equipment deliveries.

5. Knowledge management

On the customer side, knowledge management is critical for improving customer service. Customers, in general, do not have a lot of technical expertise about the products or services they use. A conversational chatbot used within the IT service desk can provide customers with relevant and timely information at every point of their customer journey. Such chatbots can evaluate and research relevant information or articles available in the database or on the internet and send links to such reports to customers whenever they ask or when chatbots detect a knowledge gap based on the tickets raised.

6. Feedback

Your service desk's feedback from those who use it is the most direct, genuine indicator of its performance. Chatbots can ask for a rating on the process right as the interaction is completed to get such feedback quickly and at scale. If the feedback is negative, the chatbot can further inquire about the causes of the dissatisfaction and prompt the user to provide more details, then share them with the relevant stakeholder to improve further interactions. With this feedback, IT can continue to improve their service desk, and assuming they're also receiving positive feedback, it can help them stay interested at work.

A summary of benefits when using AI virtual assistants

There are numerous benefits to utilizing a virtual assistant in addition to human resources in the IT helpdesk.

Real-time support, 24/7

Virtual assistants ensure that they are available to customers and staff 24 hours a day, seven days a week. IT service desk chatbots can handle all the customer's basic questions and re-route the more difficult ones to the appropriate department. By offering round-the-clock availability and support, users may resolve difficulties more quickly, increasing employee and customer satisfaction and freeing up time for service desk personnel to focus on situations that may require direct human involvement.

Time and cost savings

An AI chatbot assists service managers in overcoming the hurdles of responding to employees' demands in a timely and efficient manner while using a single conversational access point by automating many typical requests and activities. Using human resources to react to routine IT inquiries implies inefficient use of expertise and high costs. Time spent waiting for a ticket to be resolved results in less productive employees. An AI chatbot can decrease the number of tickets that the human agents must resolve by up to one-third, allowing for their automatic resolution. This translates into anywhere between 3 and 5 minutes saved per ticket, a significant time-saving at the level of an entire department.

Relieve your IT service representatives of tedious responsibilities

When using an AI chatbot, most level 0 and 1 inquiries are automatically addressed by it, leaving agents exclusively with sophisticated questions. The chatbot does not replace human agents, but it does lower the number of agents needed to handle the activities. At the same time, 30 to 50% of all Level 1 help desk support functions are repetitive in nature.

Not only are these tasks tedious and dull. They are additionally costly from an organizational standpoint. Paying talented IT resources to perform relentless, basic work every day is a misuse of financial resources and ability. Furthermore, when the work isn't significant, the risk of a rising employee churn additionally goes up.

Improve user experience

While rapid resolution is critical for the effectiveness of the IT service desk, the interface is equally essential for delivering an amazing end-user experience. Today, millennials prefer to solve problems on their own and only consult with an agent as a last resort. AI-powered chatbots support this very self-sufficiency. Conversational chatbots use Natural Language Processing to replicate human behavior by contextualizing conversation engagement in order to identify user mood and tone and engage appropriately. Its dynamic user

behavioral intelligence recognizes the user's genuine purpose and sentiment to personalize the most relevant and correct solutions. AI chatbots engage in real-time using natural human-like language and continuously learn from live user contact to spot patterns and acquire knowledge as they function. It also improves the customer's experience. Keeping employees happy makes them more inclined to take actions that delight customers (according to the Harvard Business Review) .

Increase employee productivity

IT professionals can now easily home in on high-value tasks thanks to AI-powered interactions. Organizations, for example, can use AI virtual assistants to resolve level 1 ITSM requests using the self-help option. When you remove this volume of tickets from the agent's plate, they have more time to focus on addressing essential customer concerns. It enables staff to concentrate on more mission-critical and sophisticated tasks. Employees who manage customer or employee issues can devote more time to debugging critical problems that cannot be fixed with an article now that manual work is largely out of the way.

Final thoughts

COVID-19 pushed IT support to the forefront as organizations worldwide shifted to remote workforces, digital workflows, and innovation to meet the demands of a new market.

During this global crisis, IT departments around the world used solutions that would ensure company continuity. As more firms adopt hybrid work models, the IT help desk has become increasingly important in enabling workers to work effectively across several locations. In this context of sustained added pressure.

70% of IT managers say AI is either critical or very important for upgrading and modernizing their service desk capabilities

McKinsey, Driving impact at scale
from automation and AI

We are amidst one of the most significant and exciting technology revolutions in history. The year 2020 witnessed an innovative burst of digital revolution and opened a new era of possibility. During the pandemic, the world has changed: employees are leaving traditional offices to work from home, using remote solutions for IT service desk support. AI-powered service desk solutions are leading the digital transformation boom.

This digital transition was anticipated to happen in the next few decades. If previously, AI initiatives were in the corners of everyone's "to-do" lists, they are now front and center on those same lists. The moment has come for artificial intelligence. Artificially intelligent solutions are advancing in innovation and yielding excellent results for enterprises that use them.

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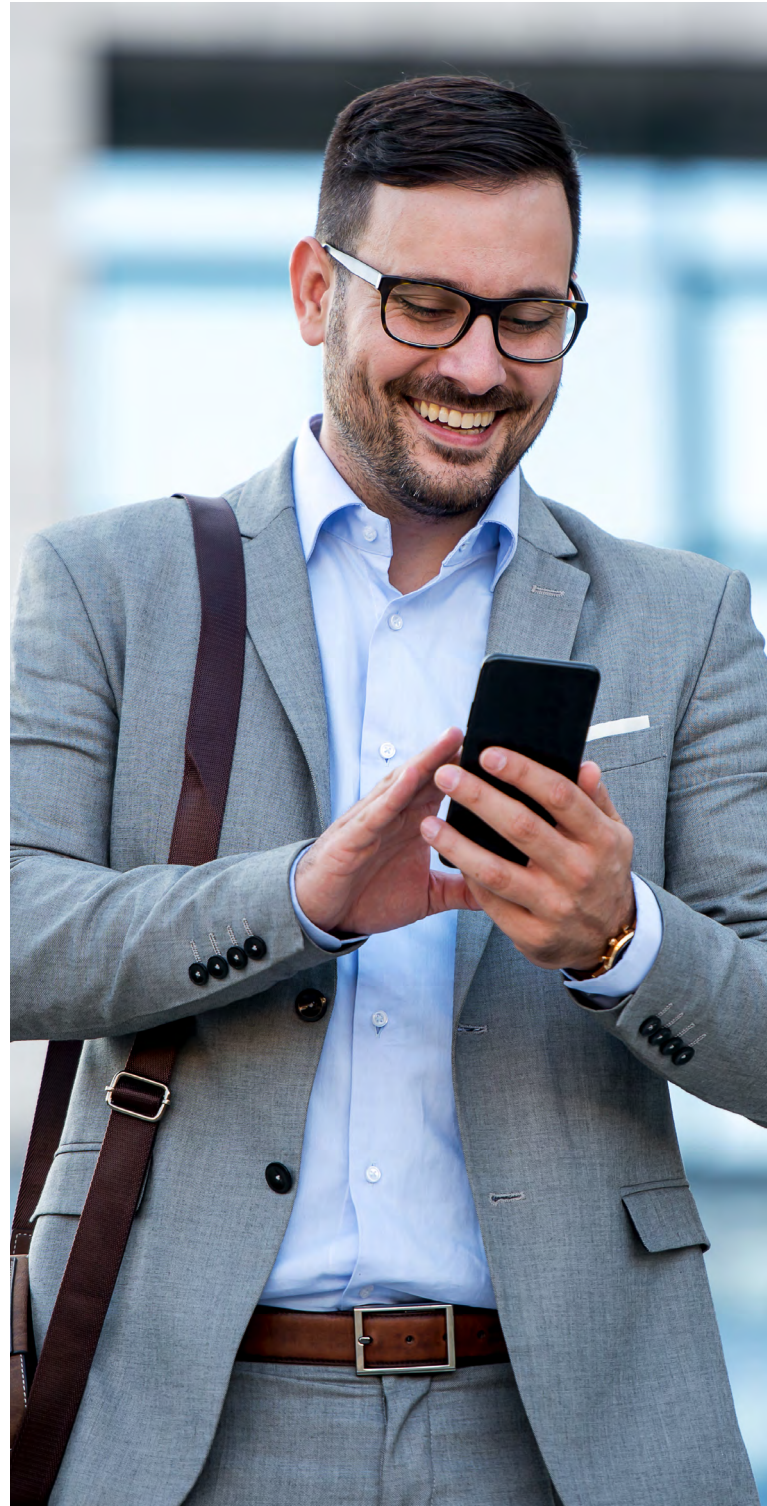
Artificial intelligence solutions provide clear benefits to fundamental business processes in the context of digital transformation, and the path to AI is equally clear.

Employee support was scattered and fragmented before the emergence of automation and artificial intelligence in the employee help desk world, making it difficult for employees to seek assistance. With AI embedded in staff service desks, help has mainly become automated, and users have begun to receive more personalized services. In more ways than one, the AI-powered employee service desk switched the focus from agents to employees in need of assistance.

Conversational AI has taken automated technology to the next level by providing employees with a system to which they can speak. Chatbots and voice assistants are increasingly answering employees' problems and delivering answers in the same way that a support executive would.

The use of conversational AI has grown, allowing organizations to assist their staff in obtaining appropriate support. This is corroborated by reports indicating that the conversational AI market will likely grow from $4.2 billion in 2019 to $15.7 billion by 2024. Exploring and deploying the best AI-powered service desk solution is a critical step in accelerating the AI transition, and the time to act is right now.

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About DRUID

DRUID is an AI conversational technology company that develops intelligent virtual assistants for Enterprise organizations.

Through its native integration with UiPath, DRUID enables complex process automation in which computer systems exchange information with human users in natural language through any digital communication channel.

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The Digital Future of IT Helpdesk.
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