

Columbia Sportswear Enhances Customer Service, Cuts Costs with Chatbot Technology

Digital transformation automates several hundred thousand interactions per year.

ORGANIZATION



- Columbia Sportswear is a leading innovator in active outdoor lifestyle apparel, footwear, accessories, and equipment.

[24]7.ai PRODUCTS & SERVICES

- [\[24\]7.ai Engagement Cloud™](#)
- [\[24\]7 AIVA platform](#)
- [\[24\]7 Answers™](#)
- [\[24\]7 Assist™](#)

CX ENVIRONMENT

- [24]7.ai Engagement Cloud™ is used by 150 support agents
- Automated chatbots address 8+ customer journeys across 60 to 80 intents
- Messaging is integrated with Google Business Messages and Apple Business Chat

CHALLENGES

- High cost of personalized customer service delivered by locally hired support agents
- Long wait times for live agents
- Difficulty hiring, training, and retaining agents in a limited market

RESULTS

- 460,000+ interactions handled by AI chatbot annually
- CSAT scores consistently over 80%
- Chatbot-enabled revenue: \$951,410

Embracing AI to Boost Self Service

Columbia Sportswear is on a mission to provide highly available, omnichannel support to its very engaged customer base. Gerry Woodbury, Columbia's director of customer care, knew that a customer experience (CX) solution utilizing AI would streamline the company's service operations, reduce contact center costs, and improve customer satisfaction.

Columbia chose to engage with [24]7.ai to streamline its CX digital transformation. In line with its No. 1 goal—enabling more customers to get answers and assistance faster than ever before—the company's first move was to offer an AI-enabled chatbot on its website. Now site visitors are greeted by an automated chatbot that assesses customer intent, handles simple tasks, and quickly dishes off to the appropriate live agent when customer issues exceed its capabilities. Columbia's live support agents continue making use of [24]7.ai technology throughout the customer journey.

The results have been hugely positive for company and customers alike.

Challenge: Too Few Agents, Limited Automation

As any big retailer knows, offering personal customer service is an expensive proposition, especially when it involves agents working in pricey job markets. The practical realities of hiring, training, and retaining agents in the Pacific Northwest strained Columbia's ability to meet its exceptionally high customer service standards.

The company was keenly aware that many customers, if not most, will skip the live-agent queue if they can easily and quickly get answers on their own, especially to straightforward questions about products, returns, warranties, and so on. Columbia hoped to automate the resolution of basic, repetitive inquiries and free up agents to focus on more individualized and complex customer issues—all while providing the same level of personal service its customers insisted on.

Hello! I'll Be Your Virtual Assistant Today

Customers visiting www.columbia.com today are first able to converse with a virtual assistant (VA), served up by [24]7 Answers™. The VA prompts visitors with options such as Shop Now, Returns, Track my Order, and Ask a Question. The VA then guides customers to their destination.

During these journeys, the VA is able to detect customer sentiment. So when appropriate—before the experience becomes frustrating for a customer—the VA brings on a live agent to deftly resolve the interaction.

Furthermore, the chatbot uses machine learning to tune and optimize its responses over time. So now the VA is well-trained to understand and predict a variety of customer intents, enabling it to deflect a significant number of calls that would otherwise go to a live agent.

“[24]7.ai automation has been transformational for our customer service. By empowering customers to self-serve on the website, we are able to take calls out of the contact center and enable customers to get what they want more quickly.”

—GERRY WOODBURY, Director of Customer Care, Columbia Sportswear

460,000+

Annual Chatbot Interactions

80+%
CSAT Rating

And because the VA handles most of the routine questions, it frees agents to focus on the more rewarding, high-value aspects of their job.

Messaging for Lasting Dialogue—and Agent Satisfaction

As part of its omnichannel support strategy, Columbia was one of the first retailers to introduce asynchronous messaging (Columbia’s messaging capabilities are integrated with both Google Business Messages and Apple Business Chat). Now, conversation history is preserved; if a customer stops an exchange and picks it up later, both the company and the customer can see where they left off. The less information that’s repeated, the more efficient and satisfying the exchange.

Messaging has also been good for Columbia’s live agents, who are under less pressure to answer a question immediately, as they would using basic chat functionality. The nature of messaging gives agents a bit more upfront time to review the history, research the issue, and even make personalized shopping recommendations.

Bottom Line: Better Containment, ROI, CSAT

Columbia chat-assisted revenue has increased significantly since the company implemented the [24]7.ai solution.

In 2020, for example, the VA handled over 460,000 interactions. Agents, who also use the chat interface when they’re brought into a conversation, handled more than 165,000 interactions during the same period.

The technology has also been great for customers. CSAT scores consistently over 80% clearly prove customers appreciate the ability to self-serve.

The Partnership Continues ...

In November 2021, [24]7.ai and Columbia teamed up for the first-ever Google’s Business Messages “Build-an-Agent” competition.

The contest would let us show off our skills creating and deploying a real-world agent. And Columbia would get an enhanced chatbot for creating even better customer experiences.

The collaboration paid off (again): Google judged our jointly developed chatbot a winner, awarding it one of only five prizes in the contest’s Tier 2 category.

Read all about it on our [blog](#).

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About [24]7.ai

[24]7.ai is redefining how artificial intelligence, human insight, and deep vertical expertise can produce personalized, satisfying customer experiences across all channels. Our advanced conversational AI platform predicts consumer intent and creates frictionless interactions that help the world’s largest and most recognizable brands to strengthen customer relationships and increase brand loyalty. With more than two decades of contact center operations expertise, [24]7.ai empowers companies to deliver natural, consistent conversations that increase customer satisfaction while lowering costs.

For more information visit: www.247.ai