Automation and the Future of Work

Weaving Digital Transformation into the CX Fabric

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From Efficiency to Customer Experience

Automation used to be an internal consideration to boost productivity and ease bottlenecks. It's now a way to future-proof brands for a new generation of customers, who expect nothing less than a seamless customer experience (CX).

In the past, automation was used to streamline the manual work that slows down business processes. Rather than pay staff to carry out repetitive tasks, a smart piece of code could be deployed to handle them automatically, reducing cost and improving efficiency.

Whether it was robotic process automation (RPA), working on a single task, or business process automation, linking tasks to a wider function, the idea was usually the same. By letting computer systems take more of the strain, staff are freed to take on more complex work that adds greater value to their business.

That is still the case, with Gartner predicting that by 2024, organizations deploying hyper-automation across their IT landscapes wherever possible will be able to reduce costs by 30 percent.[1] However, the gains are no longer just focused on cost reduction. Organizations are also using intelligent automation to improve customer engagement, by gathering insight from data to drive growth.

[1] Gartner Press Release, "Gartner Forecasts Worldwide Hyperautomation-Enabling Software Market to Reach Nearly $600 Billion by 2022," April 28, 2021.

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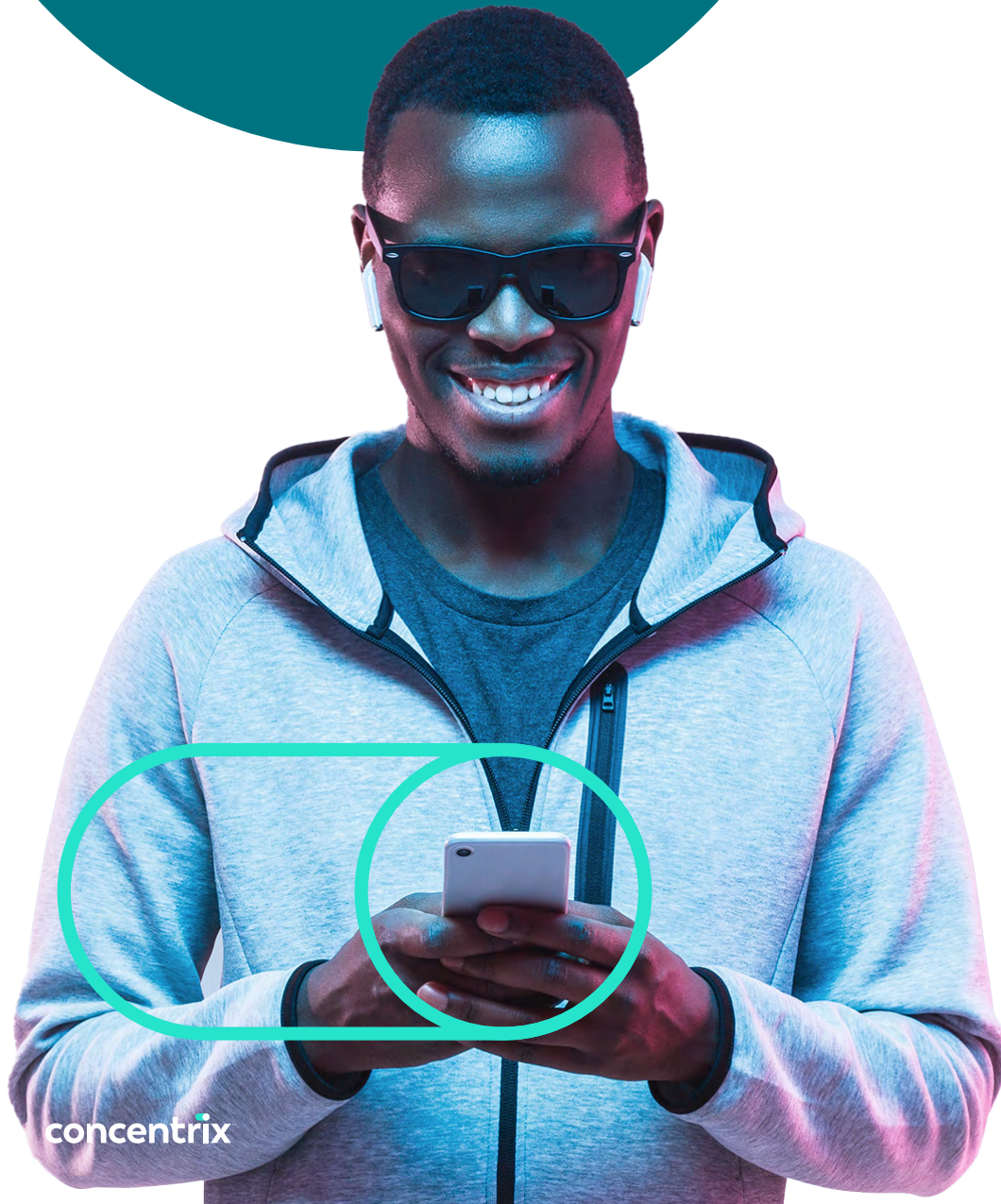
Now that digital and mobile channels are far more prominent in customer journeys, organizations need to rethink customer interaction. Only by better understanding customers and anticipating their changing needs can you provide seamless journeys across a wide variety of touchpoints, including in-person, telephone, app, chatbot, and the internet.

With the need to provide excellent customer experiences across such a wide variety of channels every time, automation must be embedded into the "fabric" of an organization. Rather than operate in isolated incidents, automating and linking multiple processes together enables data to be turned into customer insights in the moment and customer service to be taken to the next level. A person booking a car in for repair at a dealership, for example, would be best served by the company's systems talking to one another. So an appointment is offered when the parts will be in stock, the expert needed to fit them is available, and a courtesy car can be offered to keep the customer on the road.

At the same time, intelligent automation is helping organizations to compete in the battle for talent that has accompanied the Great Resignation. Removing repetitive and tedious administrative tasks allows employees to focus on higher-level job functions, which can help to deliver on brand goals or provide excellent customer service.

This is why Forrester is calling 2022 the Year of the Grand Pivot for customer experience.[2] Organizations are realizing customer service cannot be improved at the cost of employee welfare. The future of work requires businesses to elevate employees with, among other things, more meaningful work.

[2] "CX Predictions 2022: The Year Of The Grand Pivot," Forrester Blog, Forrester Research, Inc., October 27, 2021.

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Conversational AI That Serves Customers

Improvements in technology now enable chatbots to understand the nuance and the intent of the person using them.

Contacting a company shouldn't be an arduous task involving repeating information and periodically being put on hold to listen to elevator music. Nor should it require three calls because departments and partner organizations don't talk to one another.

AI technology can enable a chatbot or advisor to understand the query as the relevant information is automatically placed in front of them and the next steps laid out. Updates on orders or changes to booking can be confirmed, and preferences on next steps discussed. A change to a hotel reservation, for example, can be processed in moments, but the useful part is so too can the accompanying restaurant bookings, spa appointments, and car rental dates. Even the loyalty points balance for each guest can be updated and each person sent the revised itinerary automatically.

Such seamless, useful customer service is so essential to engendering loyalty that 74 percent of organizations are setting to deliver frictionless experiences this year, according to Gartner research.[3] To get there, these leading businesses are clear they need to improve automation and employee training and so technology is set to see a 7.6 percent rise in budget, alongside a 3.4 percent increase in spending on training and staff development.

[3] Gartner, "2022 Customer Service Trends and Priorities," 2022.

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Kathy Juve
Executive Vice President of Global Solutions & Strategic Partnerships

The investment is long overdue for many organizations, according to Kathy Juve, executive vice president of global solutions and strategic partnerships at Concentrix. Too many organizations are using outdated technology, which inhibits their ability to understand the nature of a customer's inquiry, causing service delays and frustration for the customer. Recommendations and links offered by chatbots can be too generic and could have been found online by the customers themselves. Speaking to an automated phone system is often just a waste of time until a human can help.

"Very few companies have yet to really master this because they're using technology that just isn't good enough," says Juve.

"There are too many failed experiences because organizations have not made the right investment. Somebody picks a technology platform and then it dies. There isn't the constant refinement to measure, manage, modify, and upgrade it that's needed to drive the customer experience and cost benefits that were part of the original business case."

When systems are refined and brought up to date with the latest automation technology, Juve believes that most businesses will be able to use chatbots for between 40 and 60 percent of calls. A large proportion of these will be simple inquiries, such as checking a company received a payment or a store's opening times, but many more complex queries can now be handled by technology that understands a customer inquiry and can link into other systems to help them.

A good example would be a customer not simply wanting to check the time of their flight, but perhaps wanting to change the flight to another day with an upgrade or extra baggage. This is possible if the automation system is embedded not just in the customer service side of the business, but also the booking engine and CRM. This means, for example, a hotel linked to the reservation can be amended too and, on the CRM side, loyalty points can be adjusted, and the customer's profile updated with new preferences.

Personalization and Context

The fact that automation can link systems together means customers can receive a one-to-one personalized service, after they have authenticated their identity.

The person who normally flies in coach but now has enough points to fly in business can be offered the upgrade by a chatbot, for example. The bank customer making a payment can be asked if they would like money transferred from a reserve account to prevent their usual account going overdrawn. The list of possibilities is endless.

Automation is not solely focused on serving customers without human interaction. To the contrary, it is there to be context-aware.

Automation technology can allow customers to speak or type their query, and if it is best served by speaking to a staff member, route the inquiry accordingly. The moment the advisor takes over the call or chatbot session, they can have all the necessary information on a screen in front of them because the automation system is smart enough to gather the correct data.

This is all made possible through major advances in conversational AI and natural language processing technology, which can now understand not just what a person is saying or typing, but also their intent. According to Pethachi Pichappan, vice president of global technology solutions and innovation at Concentrix, automation software can now, for example, understand the many ways to say "yes" in Hindi, as well as what a customer wants to achieve from a call or chatbot session.

"Natural language processing has come so far now that it doesn't have to be directed. Customers don't have to repeat a suggested phrase," he says.

"You just need to say something like 'I want to book a ticket from here to there' and the technology can understand that intent. You obviously need to confirm your variables. What are your dates? How many people? On which preferred airline? Once that information is captured, then the processing happens automatically."

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> Vice President of Global Technology Solutions & Innovation

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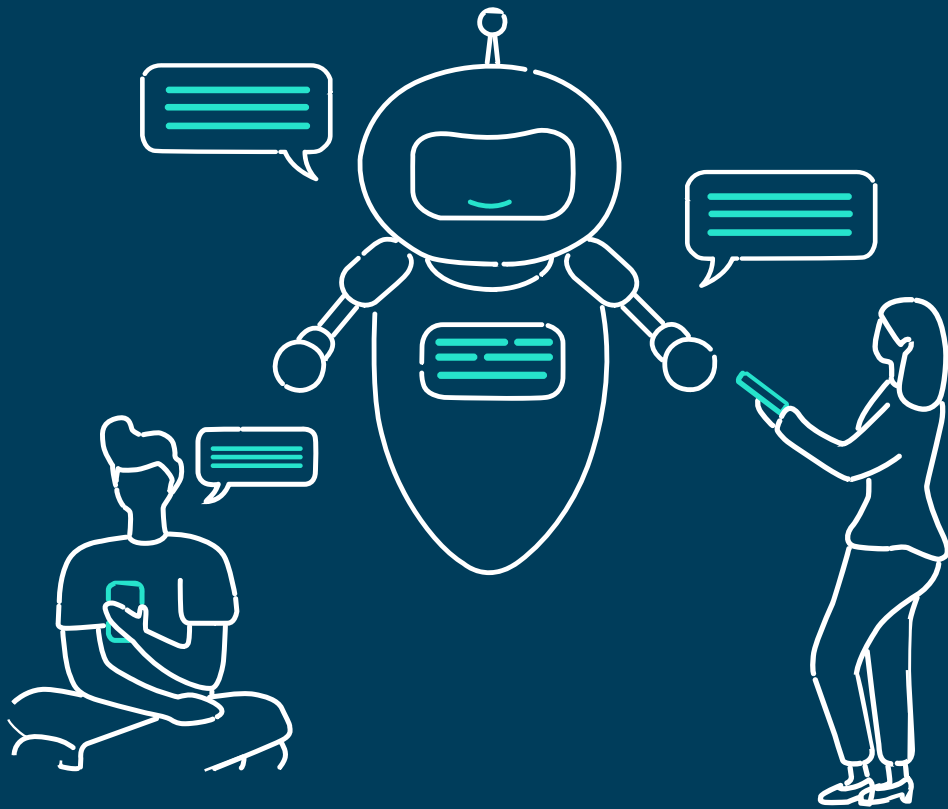
Working Smarter, Learning Faster

Having the context that automation carries through not only helps deliver a great customer experience, it also enables business efficiencies.

The system can pass on information about the customer's inquiry and intent, so the advisor is better prepared to resolve the issue more quickly and seamlessly. And rather than simply confirming receipt of a payment for a utility bill or repeating a loyalty point balance, advisors can focus on solving complex issues for customers and tailoring service recommendations around their needs.

This more valuable level of service provision can be further improved by using automation as a training tool. Using the system which has handled so many calls or chat sessions to bring new staff up to speed makes perfect sense, because it allows trainees to face real-life inquiries. Additionally, their responses and the way they handle an inquiry can also be marked by the automation system, something a human trainer would find difficult to track in real-time during training sessions.

"Before automation, a trainer might run through typical scenarios in a script, saying when you are asked that, you have to say this," says Pichappan. "With automation, we can now have the system run through simulated calls and chatbot inquiries based on real-life examples, and it can then assess and grade the trainees' responses."

Bot Automation Saves Time for Bank

A major full-service bank needed to save its advisors from wasting time wading through emails that were often either spam or repetitive, or only requiring |standard responses.

Concentrix utilized our email bot cognitive assistance tool—backed up by packages offering natural language processing, as well as intent and sentiment analysis—to help sort and prioritize emails.

The system identified where it could answer queries and where they would need to be passed on to an advisor. The email bot took over 25 percent of automatable email, reducing advisor effort in handling repetitive queries by 60-70 percent, and resulting in an expected FTE optimization of 15-20 percent.

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Weaving Automation into the Fabric of an Organization

The twin goals of improving customer service while making employees' jobs more meaningful makes a compelling case for automation. To realize these benefits, investments in technology need to be made throughout the organization.

In the future, intelligent automation will be used to link projects across a company, so automation becomes part of the fabric, or connective tissue, which binds an organization, rather than isolated islands of problem-solving code. Organizations are aware of this, but only a small minority are doing something about it.

Automation is already well established in highly repetitive business processes. However, the future of work is not only about avoiding boring tasks, but also empowering employees to deliver greater value throughout an organization. This can be provided by systems that bring insight to employees gleaned from across the company's technology stack, such

as its enterprise resource planning (ERP) and customer relationship management (CRM) systems. This is starting to happen now that the "low-hanging fruit" has been picked and firms want to delve deeper and integrate departments.

Given that this involves empowering staff to work smarter on more meaningful tasks, it's fitting that he identifies HR as a new leader in investigating automation. The move, he explains, has been prompted by the combination of the pandemic years followed by the Great Resignation and ensuing battle for talent, which is forcing HR to become more efficient.

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You could see it in their supply chain and logistics, but one of the really big new areas was HR. Companies had to sadly let some people go, and they also had to manage people working remotely. Later they had to issue and monitor requests to come back into the office, and look at vaccination cards and so on, so they could reopen. As things improved, they had to handle the Great Resignation as well as onboarding an abnormal volume of new staff. They had to invest in automation or be left behind.

Automation programs are going beyond onboarding and offboarding staff, they can also speed up the labor-intensive process through which staff log-on or clock-in to work with facial recognition either at work or home.

This confirms attendance which can be fed into wage systems so payroll can be automated too. Employees can also self-serve for many functions, such as checking company policies, booking holidays, checking on allowances, or accepting offers to work extra hours to cover a busy period. What would previously have involved lengthy chats with HR and considerable administration effort, can now be handled with a few clicks.

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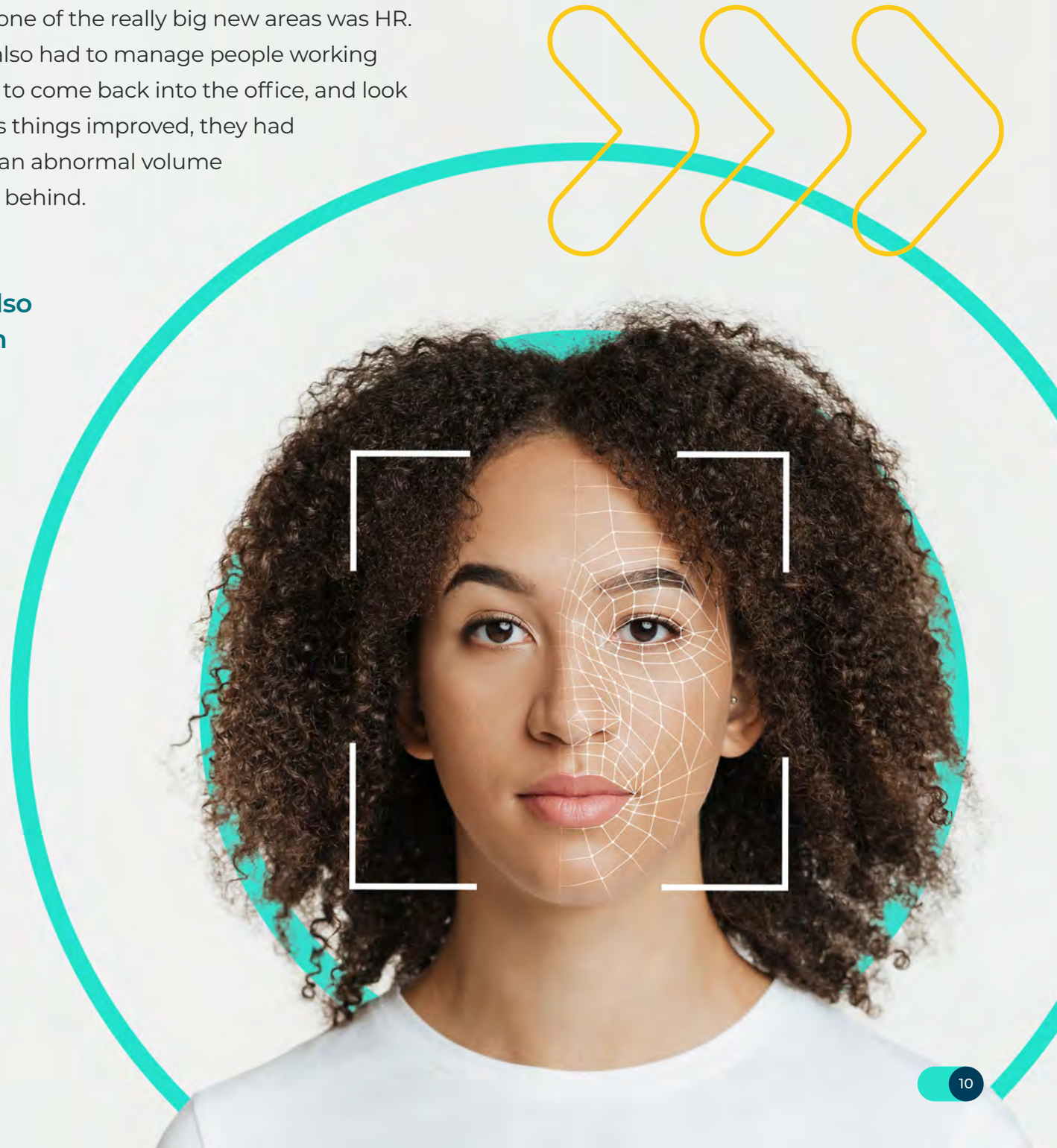
Automation Enables Digital Transformation

The business imperative to automate has been heard and acted on by departments including HR, sales, marketing, and logistics.

Typically, each incidence will have been commissioned by a specific team to reduce its workload and save staff from having to process monotonous tasks, allowing them to focus on improving user experience.

It's a good start, but it can lead to teams inadvertently building up siloes of automation, which can perform well in the individual business unit, but don't "talk" to one another. This siloed approach becomes clear when companies realize that to remain competitive, they must digitally transform so all teams and divisions are linked, allowing real-time data to flow seamlessly throughout the organization.

To drive through transformation programs, or to at least allow business units to work in a better aligned manner, companies need to embed automation across the fabric of their organization. This is a relatively new concept but, as Raja Roy, executive vice

president of engineering, automation, and experience platforms at Concentrix, explains, it is effectively creating the connective tissue across a business so automation installations can be orchestrated to work together.

"The trend now is moving towards automating everything in an organization that can be automated, so you need what is referred to as an automation fabric," he says.

"It's not a product, but rather an amalgamation of tools and technologies coming together to build the experience you're looking to deliver, by weaving together diverse technology to reduce the complexity. Organizations have multiple disconnected systems in the background, so they need something in the middle to act as an enabler to connect them. Bringing those data points together in a cohesive way will allow them to unlock excellent customer experiences."

Roy believes businesses need more than an IT integrator. They need a conductor to build and lead an orchestra by connecting systems to all feed from and into one another, enabling real-time, data-based decisions to be made across the organization.

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> Executive Vice President of Engineering, Automation, and Experience Platforms

CASE STUDY #2:

Driving Engagement in a Competitive Market

The pandemic prompted many companies to accelerate technology initiatives to improve customer service. One technology company Concentrix helped had a common issue: advisor staffing was reduced, but customers still needed the same volume of assistance.

The well-known brand wanted to cut down on long wait times to speak to an advisor, but didn't want to use voice, chat, or email. The solution was to build a messaging bot. Customers calling to speak with an advisor were given the option of addressing their issues via SMS on their cell phones. This allowed issues to be turned into tickets, which advisors could later investigate, messaging the customer to help resolve their problem.

The system was set up in just 10 days and enabled 10 percent of customers to self-serve over SMS. It was later upgraded to identify customer experience gaps, helping the client to improve its NPS score by 14 points.

10 Day
system set-up

10%
of customers enabled to self-serve over SMS

14 Point
increase in NPS score

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Retail Reinvented for the 21st Century

Concentrix recently helped a retailer identify and fix gaps in its customer journey after our analysis tool discovered more than 60 enhancements that would offer a more seamless experience.

In keeping with the notion that automation needs to be delivered one step at a time, so a company can see improvements and savings, the enhancements were delivered in two-week batches, or sprints.

The retailer moved from a menu-based customer service offering to conversational AI, through which customers were empowered to self-serve on everyday queries, such as their orders, discounts, and account management. The work led to a 20 percent reduction in cost per transaction thanks to bots handling 41 percent of messages and 35 percent of calls, leading to a 27 percent reduction in handle time for each call. Overall customer satisfaction levels rose 8 percent (for voice) and 6 percent (for messaging).

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8%
increase in CSAT for voice—and 6% increase for messaging

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First Steps and Next Steps

Organizations need a long-term plan to link automation uses, so they form the fabric of the business rather than islands of problem-solving code.

If turning a collection of automation projects that are all individually playing their own tune into an orchestra is the end goal, how do organizations start out on the journey?

The reasons why businesses commission automation projects, and then later commit to building them into the fabric of their organization, are varied. Quite often the initial roles for automation will be around business processes, which a smart operational team leader realizes can be carried out more efficiently. Without the bottlenecks, costs can be reduced, but the customer experience can also be improved.

Operational teams are often under huge pressure to do more with less, which requires them to ramp up capacity to meet meteoric spikes in demand, such as on Black Friday or Cyber Monday. They may not be able to meet the board's vision for growth when they don't have enough budget, or available talent, to keep committing more and more staff and resources to a process. They may also want to have a specified number of the team focused on higher value work, so need them taken away from the repetitive processes fueling staff churn.

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When organizations are confronted with these tough challenges, many are turning to automation. But automation is far from a cure-all. Concentrix director of digital solutions, Mick McComb, reveals that it's critical for business leaders to work with the right IT partner and deliver impressive results on an initial project. If the argument for automation can be proven within a month with one installation, executives across the business will then typically commit to rolling out automation in their departments.

"More often than not, it's a single strand or project that makes an organization realize they need to modernize, to change platforms and systems to get ready for the future," he says.

"You can't plot that whole thing out and say, 'this is the end point,' because you navigate through that, you learn different things; it has to be very agile. At the end of the process, they will look back and say, 'we used to do this, now we're doing that,' and,

often, particularly in retail, this leads them to continue on the journey and completely change the company's branding and marketing."

Once the early wins have been established, businesses can start to see a major role for intelligent automation in digitally transforming operations to meet and exceed the expectations of digitally-savvy customers. According to McComb, the typical scenario will be a business that knows it has to reimagine itself in the digital era to remain competitive and relevant. This will prompt new, individual customer experience improvements to be rolled out which, when combined across the organization, offer customers a completely new digital experience.

"Companies know they need to reposition themselves, because nobody wants to be mentioned alongside Blockbuster as the brand that didn't move with the digital times," he says.

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> **Mick McComb**
> Director of Digital Solutions

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"So, they use automation to change the way customers value their brand. It can be an app that advises a passenger whether their bag is the right size to take on the plane or one that lets them try on a pair of jeans virtually.

It's all part of getting customers to view a business as modern, and that means when something's ordered, people expect to be kept up to date with useful delivery information. At the same time, the business learns more about customers so that can then change how they are marketed to in the future, based on what they have been buying."

By automating systems to talk to one another in this way, various parts of the business can work together to offer the best service possible. When sales are made, the warehouse team can be aided in right-first-time order picking and packing, logistics can tell a customer when to expect the item, new stock can be ordered, and customer profiles can be updated so marketing can personalize the shopping experience.
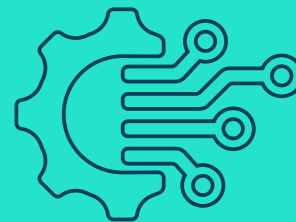
It's only when automation is woven into the fabric of an organization that this continual virtuous circle of excellent customer service and deeper customer insight can continue.

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Conclusion

Prepare Your People, Then Pick a Partner

Businesses need to be very careful when choosing an automation partner. The right one should lay the foundation and guide your growth. Whatever stage of maturity a business is at, here are five steps to ensure automation successfully becomes part of the fabric of the organization.

1 Prepare staff for the future of work

Automation will bring in a leaner, more efficient way of working that frees staff from repetitive processes. This isn't about reducing headcount, but allowing teams to operate smarter and to deliver higher value work to their organization. As such, businesses need to adapt their culture to facilitate a shift to more progressive, higher level strategic thinking.

2 Choose a platform-agnostic partner

Intelligent automation doesn't just happen overnight and often needs to work with a variety of already existing systems. Difficulties can arise if a partner has a pre-formed idea of which systems and vendors work best, with staff trained to deliver only those solutions. At this early stage, they will not know if the prescribed platform is the best.

Businesses should, therefore, seek out an automation partner that is platform agnostic. It's important to pick a partner who can listen to the requirements, scope out the existing automation landscape, and strategize a way forward based on your need rather than which package they are set up to deliver.

3 Insist on results-driven metrics

An automation partner with end-to-end capabilities won't just provide software and integrators. They'll be able to advise on the metrics you can use to understand that their investment has delivered a quantifiable improvement on the bottom line. These will vary depending on objectives and can range from repeat orders, basket size, time from order to delivery, proportion of right-first-time order picking, as well brand metrics, such as customer lifetime value and NPS scores, to name a few, or even internal figures, which can include key performance indicators and staff churn.

4 Never launch and forget

It may be tempting to consider a project completed once it has launched and is shown to work. It may well be successful now, but what about in a few months' time, or a year or two?

Automation will usually rely on several bots performing specified tasks across the organization's IT stack. Launching automation projects and then coordinating different bots within the fabric of an organization requires an automation partner who can monitor and audit a number of bots.

This ensures an organization knows where each bot is, what it is doing, and if it is still working well. Having visibility into bot performance empowers informed decision-making not only for day-to-day operations, but also for executive leaders looking to validate their automation program.

5 Refine, test, repeat

Reflect on those awful telephone or chatbot experiences that prompt organizations to do better through intelligent automation. They were all once considered state of the art. That's why it's imperative to work with an automation partner who will continually refine and test to ensure your automation program is delivering incrementally better customer outcomes.

Technology improvements will always raise customer expectations. To meet them, and exceed them, intelligent automation cannot be considered a destination, but rather an ongoing process of continual improvement.

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About Concentrix

Concentrix is the tech-powered customer experience company, creating game-changing journeys that help brands grow, across the world and into the future. Whether you need a specific solution or the whole end-to-end journey, we've got it covered. We'll help you define the roadmap to achieve your CX vision and evolve it for the long-haul.

Contact us today to see how we can design, build, and run game-changing customer journeys.

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