

How chatbots will continue to be an important part of digital marketing

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It sounds a bit like the next post-apocalyptic movie script - and those are all the rage right now, and it goes a little something like this: In a not-to-distant future, there's a stark, bleak, forsaken landscape. Civilisation gone. Communication channels, silent. All humans have fled, terrorised by never-ending notifications and an unrelenting sea of messages. What could have created such desolation? The answer: bad bots.



Sibongile Mbuzwana – Valiant COO | image supplied

Not surprisingly, it's not the first time that brands have abused new technology until people were up to their eyeballs in spam. And it's funny, because it's true.

What we do know is that you've heard the news: bots are the future. And it goes without saying, that if you're wondering whether your business should create a bot, you're asking the wrong question. Bot-powered commerce is our future destiny.

But, before we get ahead of ourselves, let's backtrack a bit. What is a bot, exactly?

If we keep it simple, a bot is a computer program that automates certain tasks, by chatting with a user through a conversational interface.

As the technology develops, bots are becoming more and more advanced. Powered by artificial intelligence, understanding complex requests, creating personalised responses, and improving on interactions over time. But this technology is still in its early stages, so most bots follow a set of rules programmed by individuals via bot-building programs and platforms.

Think about the way e-commerce is heading. You want a new set of kicks from your favourite online fashion store. You could start by a visit to their website, scroll through 50 or so products, check out and complete the online form with your shipping and payment information, and wait for your snazzy new sneakers to arrive.

But, if it had a bot, you'd simply tell it what you want and it'll guide you through the various options and place the order for you. Behind the scenes, the bot is leading you through a series of individual questions to collect all the necessary information to aid it in understanding your purchasing intent, and then deliver the right option to fulfil your request. And that's the power of the bot!

The role they serve

They serve the role of accomplishing tasks, start to finish, in the place where you already spend your time: messaging apps. Whether it's Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, or Viber; bots integrate with these apps and are available for you to chat with whenever, wherever, however. Sounds like a dream, right?

So why exactly have bots gained popularity? It's simple, bots solve the niggly things we disliked about apps in the first place. Never again will you have to download something you won't use. Generally, most people only use five main apps. What are these famous five? You guessed it. messaging apps. Today, messaging apps have over five billion monthly active global users, and for the first time, people are using them way more than social networks.

As people research, they want the information they need as quickly as possible and are increasingly turning to voice search as technology advances. Email inboxes have become more and more cluttered, so buyers have moved to social media to follow the brands they really care about. Ultimately, they now have the control — the ability to opt-out, block, and unfollow any brand that betrays their trust, becoming one of the main factors that contributed to the discontinuation of bots on Twitter.

It goes without saying that in the great bot race, you'll need a differentiator. You need to be able to provide actual value in the places we already spend our time and that changes everything. Everybody wants the most direct line between their problem and a solution.

And that line is a bot. A very good bot, though. A useful bot.

With the help of messaging apps, bots help consumers find solutions no matter where they are or what device they use — no forms, cluttered inboxes, or wasted minutes spent searching and scrolling through content. Communication, service, and transactions intertwine. And unlike the self-serving marketing of the past, bots provide a service.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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