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Do What Matters with Virtual Agents

Nine considerations for Power Virtual Agent success

Do What Matters

Power Virtual Agents for
the enterprise

Businesses are accelerating their use of Power Virtual Agents, spurred by their increasing need to cut costs, the growing acceptance of self-service by customers – and by one thing more: the recognition that Power Virtual Agents are a core component of a customer experience (CX) that builds customer satisfaction, loyalty and generates higher revenues.

According to the Gartner Customer Experience Innovation Survey 2019, respondents indicated that they expect virtual customer assistants/chatbots to have the second biggest impact on their organizations customer experience (CX) improvement projects in the next three years, after Artificial Intelligence.[1]

So far, much of the shift in contact centers has been from live chat to Power Virtual Agents. The bigger shift will be from live call agents to Power Virtual Agents. That shift may bring with it opex reductions of about 30%. Power Virtual Agents will respond to customers without long wait times, or any wait times at all.

The human agents freed from handling typical calls will be available for exception handling of the more unusual and difficult calls. The bottom line for customers will be better, faster issue resolution and higher satisfaction.

Another reason for the accelerating use of Power Virtual Agents is demographics: Millennials and, now, centennials, are more apt than previous generations to welcome self-service channels as long as those channels are of high quality.

The impact of COVID-19 on business is a further accelerant. Many health care providers, government entities and corporations have had their contact centers swamped with patient, constituent and customer calls relating directly to COVID-19, or have seen surges as the pandemic leads many people to choose remote channels over in-person service. Many of the business model changes – in health care and elsewhere – spurred by COVID-19 may well remain in place after the pandemic. So Power Virtual Agents have to work as long-term, not temporary, solutions.

The shift to Power Virtual Agents could cut contact center opex by 30%.

[1] Gartner: "Market Guide for Digital Customer Service and Support Technologies," Brian Manusama, Nadine LeBlanc, March 19, 2020 (Gartner subscription required)

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Power Virtual Agents
Fast, easy – and enterprise-grade

Microsoft Power Virtual Agents (PVA) empowers business teams to easily create powerful, scalable AI-driven Power Virtual Agents using a guided, low-code, no-code interface without the need for data scientists or developers.

This eliminates the traditional gap between subject matter experts and development teams in building Power Virtual Agents. It reduces, if not eliminates, the delay between recognizing an issue and updating the Power Virtual Agent to address it. It removes the complexity of exposing teams to the nuances of conversational AI and the need to write complex code.

Additionally, it minimizes the IT effort required to deploy and maintain a custom conversational solution and frees them up for higher-value work for the business. For example, many health care providers during the COVID-19 pandemic, made it a priority to address patients' questions regarding rapidly changing information on tests and treatment.

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Case Study

Regional European government detects COVID-19 cases with Power Virtual Agent

The government's health department needed to help citizens track symptoms and get treatment recommendations for COVID-19. In just five days, Avanade created a trilingual chatbot based on a client-supplied algorithm.

In its first three hours and 4,000 conversations, the Power Virtual Agent detected more than 100 new, severe cases. The Power Virtual Agent enables tracking of viral spread through persistent storage of the information it gathers.

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PVA is ready for prime time.

While PVA is an easier and faster way to create Power Virtual Agents, it's also an enterprise-grade way to do so. PVA places no cap or limit on the number of intents – that is, the reasons why your customers contact you – that you can address. Your Power Virtual Agents can be better prepared for the intents that customers present today, and you can add to them at any time so you're just as prepared tomorrow.

PVA is connected.

PVA's integration functionality is another enterprise-ready capability, one that enables personalized CX that delivers both answers and actions. PVA is the latest member of Microsoft's Power Platform, which also includes Power BI, Power Automate (formerly Flow) and Power Apps.

It shares the same Common Data Service (CDS) foundation and connectivity options – including hundreds of connectors – with its Power Platform siblings. That enables you to create Power Virtual Agents that not only chat with customers, but also use the Power Platform and other apps to act on their behalf – for example, offering upgrades to the last purchases they made, or rescheduling deliveries in response to changing customer availabilities. Integrate PVA with Microsoft Dynamics 365 Sales Insights to sense changes in buyer needs and trends, and with Customer Insights to get a single view of customers' questions and pattern behaviors in real time.

PVA is smart.

Imbued with Microsoft's powerful conversational AI out of the box, PVA enables your customers to have rich, multi-turn conversations that guide them to the right answers, right away. Customer conversations with PVA are more like talking to a human agent; they're "scriptless conversations" in which PVA can understand the connections among several rapid-fire questions and provide an answer that covers them all or ask its own follow-up question, as appropriate. AI algorithms in PVA identify these more effective responses, so you can reduce escalation rates and lower cost while increasing customer satisfaction.
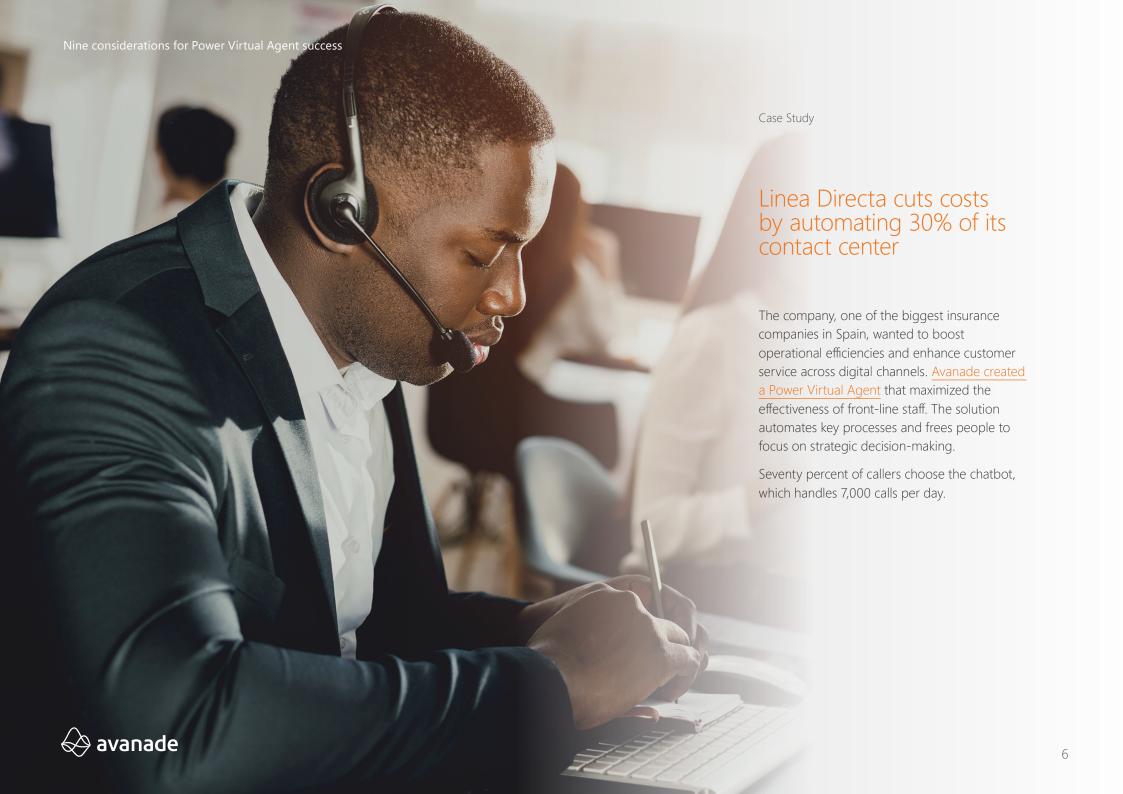
A feedback loop to R&D helps product designers understand how customers use the company's products and services, so they can design them better. And there's no need to retrain AI models; just provide some examples and build the conversation with PVA's graphical editor. PVA automates intent discovery, scrubbing and scanning any structured or unstructured data and using it to suggest customer intents and answers that human agents or managers can accept, reject or edit – and building thousands of intents from a few trigger phrases in mere months.

PVA's intelligence also extends to monitoring and improving its performance. With AI-driven dashboards you can track crucial metrics, easily see which topics are doing well and which should improve, and quickly make adjustments to make your Power Virtual Agent more effective with every iteration.

Top reasons to use PVA

- **Improve customer satisfaction** through faster, more effective issue resolution.

- **Increase employee satisfaction** by freeing human agents from repetitive tasks and answers so they can address more interesting, complex customer questions.

- **Empower your teams** by enabling non-technical citizen developers and subject matter experts to easily build Power Virtual Agents without intermediaries, coding or AI expertise – putting CX experts in control of your CX.

- **Manage your teams** with out-of-the-box dashboards that enable managers to spot opportunities for rewards, training and sharing best practices.

- **Reduce costs** by automating common inquiries with the latest information.

- **Adopt self-service quickly** without infrastructure or heavy configuration.

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Case Study

Linea Directa cuts costs by automating 30% of its contact center

The company, one of the biggest insurance companies in Spain, wanted to boost operational efficiencies and enhance customer service across digital channels. Avanade created a Power Virtual Agent that maximized the effectiveness of front-line staff. The solution automates key processes and frees people to focus on strategic decision-making.

Seventy percent of callers choose the chatbot, which handles 7,000 calls per day.

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9 considerations for Power Virtual Agent success

As companies continue to adopt and expand their use of Power Virtual Agents, they need to ensure that what they build will be a vital contributor to successful CX. The foundations for that success should take the following into account:

1. Higher customer expectations.

Power Virtual Agents that are simply sophisticated search engine interfaces won't do, because customer expectations continue to grow. Today's Power Virtual Agents, let alone tomorrow's, need to take better advantage of AI to understand customer intent, sentiment and discovery – and then to take action based on what they know, such as changing an address or implementing a customer's request to transfer funds.

2. New operational challenges.

Physical contact centers may be a thing of the past, certainly for some organizations and certainly for now. Others operate or will operate in a hybrid mode. Power Virtual Agent solutions need to operate seamlessly in this environment, including informationally completing hand-offs to human agents.

3. Fast, low-code, no-code development solutions.

Time-consuming development cycles aren't acceptable anywhere, but certainly not in today's CX. Emergency or urgent situations require organizations to create or recast Power Virtual Agents quickly to address new customer questions and needs. Think local organizations and weather disasters, health care providers and COVID-19, and financial institutions and the U.S. Paycheck Protection Program's loan application process.

4. Fast adoption technology.

It's not just the development of each Power Virtual Agent that needs to be expedited. So does the adoption of the technology to create them. That's needed to keep costs low and to speed time to benefit. Organizations should look for Power Virtual Agent-building technology that builds on the technologies and skills they already have. As well, they should look for technology that provides an open, viable roadmap to new capabilities as they become available.

5. Actionable insight into CX.

Managers need to know which questions their customers are asking, which ones go unanswered, and which answers leave customers confused rather than satisfied – and then they need to use those insights to improve their CX.

6. Regulatory and ethics concerns.

Other issues arise as organizations have deeper, more personal digital conversations with their external audiences, collect more information from them, and analyze that information more fully.

Health care organizations need to focus on meeting regulations such as HIPAA or new governmental standards for hygiene in COVID-19 times.

All organizations need to address digital ethics concerns, including what information and insights they collect, and how they solicit, use and store it.

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Additional considerations
before you proceed

Getting the most out of PVA depends in part on what you put into it. There's a lot to think about. Now is a good time to begin. Here are some additional points to consider:

7. Business-led approach.

PVA helps you solve a business problem, so start your adoption with a business assessment and use case to understand what you're trying to do and how you will evaluate the results. Automate 40% of your inbound contacts? Reduce escalations to human agents by 20%? And what will the impact of these changes be on customer satisfaction and costs?

8. Your agent may be your customer's first brand interaction.

Maximizing the value of PVA solutions means adopting principles such as human-centered design and processes such as design thinking. A key goal is to identify the optimal persona and conversational tone for your Power Virtual Agent – based on factors including your brand, industry, customer base and geographic markets.

9. Governance.

Empowering subject matter experts and other non-technical citizen developers to create their own Power Virtual Agents is potentially chaotic. You could end up with redundant and orphaned agents, agents that draw on conflicting or incomplete data, agents that inadvertently violate data privacy and security protocols, and agents that aren't integrated with relevant systems or that don't enable seamless handoffs with appropriate information to human agents.

While business users may be in the driver's seat, IT has to provide the "guardrails" – in the form of appropriate guidance, standards and governance – to ensure the business stays on track, uses standard models to build successful conversations and has the support it needs as it repurposes jobs or upskills agents.

Only the start

PVA is only the start of the broader Avanade, Accenture and Microsoft solution for digital CX, called Microsoft Advanced Customer Engagement+ (MSACE+). While PVA is a fast, lightweight SaaS tool for web and text-based chat, MSACE+ is a comprehensive, omnichannel, intelligent contact center solution.

Its AI-powered functionality includes interactive voice response (IVR) along with web, SMS and social media channel capability. It can include PVA as a component – giving organizations a roadmap to expand from one to the other.

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Case Study

India proves the scale of PVA – for 1.3 billion citizens

Perhaps no entity has had a greater potential challenge with Power Virtual Agent scalability than the government of India, which needed its Power Virtual Agent for COVID-19 information to be accessible to its 1.3 billion citizens.

We met that challenge in days with MyGov Saathi. It's a PVA solution that supports 300,000 users per day and up to 20,000 concurrent users per minute. Hosted on the government's website, it reaches Indian citizens where they are, rather than requiring them to adapt to a new platform.

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Ways to move **forward**

Looking to begin your PVA journey? Here are ways Accenture and Avanade can help you move forward.

- Let's chat. A practical discussion (virtual or in-person) to explore your vision and goals. We can discuss how we've approached Power Virtual Agents with other use cases, and how we might help.

- PVA-in-a-Day workshop. A facilitated design thinking workshop (virtual or in person) is a great way to generate ideas and goals. But we don't just leave you thinking; in the one-day workshop, you'll also create a PVA prototype.

- **Design-led hackathons.** Get diverse groups throughout your organization to work together to identify the most important areas for optimal Power Virtual Agents and use PVA to quickly prototype.

- **Governance and Center of Excellence.** We'll help you establish and evolve key measurability standards to help ensure your Power Virtual Agents deliver on the promise of PVA while you continue to meet enterprise standards and goals.

The skills and scale to make PVA a reality for your business

Accenture and Avanade bring an array of strengths to your PVA adoption:

- 4,000+ global data engineering and AI consultants
- 1,000+ AI/machine learning solutions delivered
- Digital Innovation Studios with multidisciplinary teams worldwide
- Unprecedented 15 awards as Microsoft Global Alliance SI Partner of the Year
- 2020 Microsoft Power Platform and Power Automate Partner of the Year Finalist
- 2020 Microsoft Global AI and Machine Learning Partner of the Year
- Unmatched relationship with our founding companies, Microsoft and Accenture
- 2,000+ trained Power Platform professionals

Avanade was a Microsoft Power Platform and Power Automate Partner of the Year Finalist in 2020

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Are you **ready?**

From PVA-in-a-Day workshops to hackathons and more, we can help you kickstart your PVA journey.

[Contact us](#) **today**

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About Avanade

Avanade is the leading provider of innovative digital, cloud and advisory services, industry solutions and design-led experiences across the Microsoft ecosystem. Every day, our 56,000 professionals in 26 countries make a genuine human impact for our clients, their employees and their customers. Avanade was founded in 2000 by Accenture LLP and Microsoft Corporation. Learn more at www.avanade.com.

About Accenture

Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services in strategy and consulting, interactive, technology and operations, with digital capabilities across all these services. We combine unmatched experience and specialized capabilities across more than 40 industries—powered by the world's largest network of Advanced Technology and Intelligent Operations centers. With 505,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture brings continuous innovation to help clients improve their performance and create lasting value across their enterprises. Learn more at www.accenture.com.

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