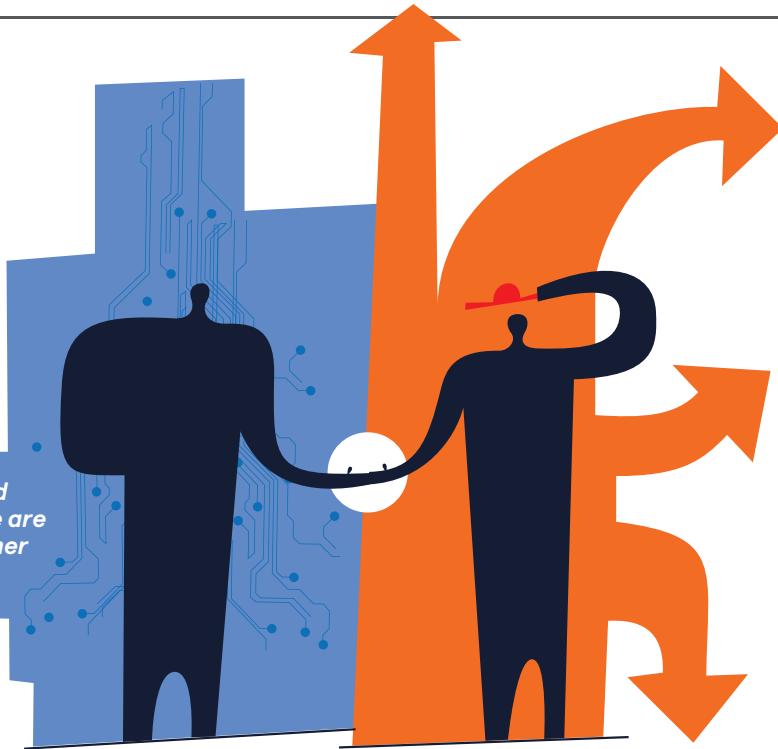


# IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO

Together, human and artificial intelligence are transforming customer conversations



Twenty years after an IBM computer, Deep Blue, shook the world by defeating the world chess champion, the human on the losing end of that match has fully embraced artificial intelligence.

Russian grandmaster Garry Kasparov no longer sees AI as competition. "Humans won't be redundant or replaced; they'll be promoted," said the author of *Deep Thinking: Where Machine Intelligence Ends and Human Creativity Begin* at last year's Train AI conference. "Artificial intelligence will help us to release human creativity. We have no choice but to work with machines and make the best algorithms."

This philosophy, known as augmented intelligence, is shared by a growing number of business leaders who recognize AI as the next industrial revolution. While much of the AI buzz centers around startups disrupting industries, established companies—whose AI builds on years of experience and infrastructure that's ready to scale—have an inherent advantage.

LivePerson, which invented business-to-consumer web chat in the in the 1990s, falls into this camp. In 2016, the company worked with T-Mobile to launch a new way to get support: message customer care, directly from the brand's app.

Robert LoCascio, LivePerson's founder and CEO, saw how rapidly people adopted this more modern alternative to the 800 number, and that AI would be essential to meet demand.

"We made a big bet on a pretty simple concept: that most corporations around the world want to have their own Alexa," says LoCascio.

The idea was that each brand would create its own unique digital assistant — just as it has a unique website — and train it to offer personalized advice and support, and even sell. It would need to fit that brand's style and voice, with a high customer satisfaction score, at an enormous scale, with millions of interactions per year.

LivePerson set out to build exactly this. The \$80 million project required the New York-based company to open a dedicated technology hub in Seattle last year, adding to its tech hubs in Atlanta, Mountain View, Calif., Israel and Germany. The new 40,000-square-foot facility houses hundreds of engineers (led by Amazon Alexa alum Alex Spinelli) who work on blending AI with human intelligence to deliver the best customer experience.

This combination of machines and people allows LivePerson to develop products that offer both the brand voice and industry knowledge required. "We don't want a Citibank to feel like

an Amex, or a T-Mobile to feel like a Verizon," LoCascio explains.

Rather than replacing call center agents, LivePerson works with them to improve bots that interact with consumers. When a customer asks a question that a bot can't answer, a human agent hops on to finish the conversation in real time, delivering a seamless experience for the customer. Afterward, the agent inputs what they've learned from the conversation to make the automated system smarter.

Since the launch with T-Mobile in 2016, the company now delivers automated messaging for more than 200 brands across a variety of platforms, from text and web messaging to Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and Apple Business Chat.

Consumers messaging Amex through its app, ordering beer via text message at a Phillies baseball game or asking a Lowe's sales rep questions online are already using the LivePerson platform. And LoCascio sees no limit to the use cases for what the company calls "conversational commerce."

"We know that we're going to be talking to our cars and our TVs and things are going to change," he says. "All of that's going to need to be powered by platforms like ours." ■