

# Evolving from banking to bAIanking

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Banks are turning to the likes of automation, robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) to respond to customers' demand for an always-on, immediately responsive customer experience.



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Robots are capable of standard customer interactions such as verifying the identity of the customer, responding to basic requirements and providing the appropriate service. However, machine learning means that these bots are likely to grow increasingly responsive and may soon have almost all the capability and cognisance of an actual human being.

## **bAIanking**

AI is integrating itself fully into the financial world, being leveraged to automate services both facing the external and internal customer. Banks are complex enterprises and what we see, as customers, is merely the tip of the iceberg. Within the business, various processes, contracting, internal functions such as IT services, HR and more, are all at play.

AI and robotic process automation (RPA) streamline these tasks, enabling employees to use self-service channels to fulfil their own requirements. This, in turn, helps them to keep their focus entirely on their own function, while creating more room for innovative thinking to yet still improve customer service and drive profitability.

Speaking of profitability, banks are saving significant costs by automating standard services. As AI becomes more intelligent and cognitive, so processes will evolve to become intuitive and virtually eliminate the need for any form of human interaction. Services, both internal and external, could become entirely pre-emptive and proactive.

## **Comfortable, yet?**

Younger generations, accustomed to instant gratification, are likely to already be comfortable with interacting with a bot, provided their service is delivered. Older generations, used to – and often preferring – in-branch or telephonic transacting, may be less comfortable with the idea of dealing with a robotic interface.

However, the lines are blurring between human and bot behaviour, as AI and machine learning accelerate cognition. As we move towards voice interactive bots, “manning” call centres with pre-programmed humanoid voices, the lines between human and bot interaction blur even further.

In fact, the progression of robotics means that customers may not even realise they are interacting with a non-human until the point where emotions come into play. Even then, the hand over to a human element, when the bot realises it is unable to respond, may be so swift that the customer may not register the switch.

## **Why AI?**

AI and robotics are undoubtedly optimising the banking industry, streamlining operations and customer service, and delivering value. Apart from allowing banks to focus on banking, the idea of delivering instant, always-on service helps to attract more business and keep existing customers satisfied.

However, the value extends even further as autonomous, cognitive AI tools reduce room for error. In the financial industry, a single mistake can become exorbitantly costly. As AI applications evolve and adapt to the levels of service required, they inevitably reduce the number of errors that humans are capable of, be it number entry or simply responding to a customer requirement with the correct answer.

## **Where does that leave us?**

Bots and other AI applications are intended to supplement human services, covering the standard, time consuming tasks so that humans can redirect their energies more productively.

There is still a requirement for humans. Bots are, as yet, incapable of empathy or managing the broad spectrum of human emotion. When a customer becomes irate, or empathy and tact are required, humans will need to still step in and respond to the need.

It's ultimately about balance, and striking the right chord between providing instant, available service and supplementing it with human soft skills.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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