

# Virtual assistants empower employees to help business bounce back

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During the pandemic, South African businesses put innovation on the backburner and focused on keeping their businesses operational in trying circumstances. Now, however, forward-looking companies are putting strategic growth back on the agenda. One of their priorities will be using technology to reinvent their businesses.



Source: Andriy Popov – [123RF.com](#)

Artificial intelligence (AI) as a means to automate tedious, repetitive tasks and enhance customer experience is likely to feature strongly in their plans. From HR to payroll and finance, businesses will be looking at how they can use virtual assistants to augment human capabilities and increase performance.

## Liberating human creativity

The potential of personal virtual assistants lies in how they can take admin off people's desks and liberate knowledge workers from mundane, repetitive tasks, such as data entry. This is especially important during a time when staff are buried under more admin than ever – with South African businesses losing an average of 3.6% of their time to admin tasks.

For the business, employees will have more time to focus on customer relationships, innovation and strategy. From the employee perspective, virtual assistants can take the stress out of admin. Work-life balance can be prioritised without having a negative impact on the bottom line.

The potential applications are vast. Recent advances in AI and cloud computing are expanding the possibilities. Consider fitness apps installed on peoples' phones. They monitor us throughout the day and make proactive suggestions on how to improve our performance and health. Why not apply these same practices to the workplace?

## Humans and machines: better together

The impact of AI-powered virtual assistants can be transformational, but only if there is a strong foundation of integrated, high-quality data in place. Data is the fuel that feeds AI – for virtual assistants to be truly useful, they have to understand what is happening in the business.

To capitalise on virtual assistants, businesses need their data to be easily accessible from one central location. The solutions can then simply be integrated with this environment for all the data and insight they need. A cloud-based environment is perfect for this as employees and AI solutions are able to access the insight any place and at any time, whether working from home or in the office.

Furthermore, when all systems and workers are connected, the business can better support and develop them. It's estimated that a quarter of people will need to retrain due to the ongoing shift to digital. That's why creating and prioritising connection – through data – is crucial. Important updates, new tools, and learning opportunities can be rolled out regularly to employees through common platforms, enabling them to upskill and perform at their best.

Accessibility is crucial too. To achieve AI's full potential, we need equality in technology. All workers should have access to virtual assistants and the centralised source of insight in the cloud. When these resources are available to only a few within the organisation, the productivity benefits are severely limited. While it's clear that investment in automation and AI will be key to recovery, we'll only see success when these tools are available to all of us.

When a business is unified – through its people, mission and technology – it can achieve things no one thought possible. Rightly so, a lot of attention has been given to AI and virtual assistants, but it must be remembered they only form part of a successful business. Rather than being the focus, they should only be considered as tools to empower the people.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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