



PoV

Embracing **Bots** During Social Distancing

The recent pandemic has been a real eye-opener for businesses around the world spanning all industries. Due to these unprecedented global events, enterprises have had no option but to shut down their on-premise operations and allow every employee to work from home. Considering this being the largest resettlement of work from office to home, it's fair to say that no organization is equipped with a BCP (**Business Continuity Plan**) that's strong enough to handle this once in a lifetime scenario. The BCP plans that took years to formulate, have unexpectedly been changed and acted upon overnight. The newly conducted Radarview Assessment by Avasant effectively portrays the massive impact of this outbreak.

While all this social distancing is helping us cope with the COVID-19 mess, enterprises are facing tons of challenges while adopting this "new normal" way of working. Right from tackling the logistics of facilitating WFH – procuring laptops, VPNs, providing remote access to files and other office data which translates into supplemental work for the IT team; to onboarding, offboarding of employees in the absence of an actual HR person and many more such difficult scenarios, organizations are doing their best to come to grips with the current circumstances. The only thing we can happily embrace while socially distancing from one another right now is - Intelligent Automation (IA)! At this time, bots are the only ones we can happily embrace while socially distancing from each other!

There are myriad ways in which bots are assisting organizations to ameliorate the current situation. Specially the BPO industry, whose business model is more or less akin to that of a sweatshop, is now forced to reinvent its "work from home" model – a business continuity scenario no one ever could've predicted of this scale and nature.

How Bots are empowering IT/HR Function

With the sudden mandate of working from home, there are countless queries and requests from the amateur remote workers that need to be addressed pronto. IT teams specifically are now dealing with 10s to 100s to 1000s of people who have umpteen number of questions and issue resolution requests to ensure working remotely in the best way possible. The sheer volume of these requests is bound to overwhelm the IT staff and further create panic and confusion. In response to the overall increased support staff demand, many corporations are moving towards AI-driven **Virtual / Digital Assistants** that act as conversational agents for typical queries and issues for remote users, and trigger basic use cases. For example, an **IT Helpdesk Bot** can easily handle queries related to Password Reset, Account Block / Unlock, User Provisioning (Account Creation / Deletion), etc. making life a little easier for the IT staff to focus on resolving the bigger and more critical issues.

Along with IT, Intelligent Automation is empowering organizations to run the other horizontal functions too such as Finance (areas pertaining to Vendor Invoicing, Payroll Processing, Audit Reporting etc.) and HR (Hire to Retire process - employee onboarding, profile screening, interview scheduling etc.) at elevated levels.

RPA bots, AI-enabled Chatbots are enabling enterprises to automate an entire chunk of their work, thereby enhancing productivity and reducing rework by effortlessly handling end-to-end processes and not just a couple of tasks, transforming a business function in its entirety. **Role-based bots** especially, perform an entire role / job description of a human. For example, a **Conversational HR bot** can answer end user queries on different topics (like “where can I find my payslips” or “how do I reopen my timesheet” and so on); use cognitive skills and perform multiple functions under the HR’s job description, complementing or extending the role of an actual HR person.

Operational bots also come in handy to handle specific tasks and though they need to keep the human in the loop, they still make their jobs easier in a time like this. For instance, an **“Interview Scheduling bot”** that schedules interviews based on certain parameters set by the HR (such as minimum work experience, academic qualifications, a specific skillset, availability of interview panel, timeslots for interviews etc.)

Another bot that can prove extremely useful during such difficult situations is the **“Virtual Onboarding Bot”** that’ll imitate how an HR person onboards new employees. Just like the human, this bot will guide the new joiners, ask them for the documents required to start the onboarding process, trigger mails to the IT team to create new employee logins and so on.

Assisting the Finance Function

In the areas of finance, bots relentlessly aid humans in the areas of accounts payable / receivable, payroll, expenses, internal customer support, procurement and many more. **“Procurement Bot”** for example, can scan documents using advanced OCR, help vendors / suppliers fill out forms using speech and text commands saving a lot of time & effort for the human doing this activity physically and manually uploading the same in the system. It can even notify the employee if there’s any price changes amongst the preferred vendors and get the best quote possible while keeping the records up to date.

Can Bots ensure data protection & asset

One of the most critical aspects of working from home right now is **Cybersecurity** and the risks involved therein. Employees accessing the company network outside of the corporate environment pose a significant cybersecurity risk for the organization.

Most of the organizations will put all basic security measures in place; however, the number of vulnerabilities only increases with every remote worker. Organizations should diligently provide these new remote workers with not only the required technical knowledge, but also guidance on the best practices working remotely in the most secure way. Certain steps like making risk-assessments of remote workers’ computing setups, taking inventory of devices attaching to the office network, ensuring device security (multifactor authentications, mandated antivirus etc.), implementing a zero-trust approach will help organizations minimize the threat of cybercriminals taking advantage of a pandemic like COVID-19.

Intelligent Automation can play a vital role here, especially in automating areas where there could be a data breach and data Leakage (by automating tasks around Data Collection, Data Analytics, Automated Reporting, False Positives and many more). IA use cases could also be leveraged to ensure adherence to security regulations and compliance, for instance, monitoring of Remote Login & Logout times to assess employee productivity.

The Intelligent Automation Promise for the Breakaway Enterprise of the Future

COVID-19 has taught all of us a crucial lesson of addressing pandemic scenarios in our business continuity plans. The only silver lining that we see in this billow of dark clouds is that enterprises are now focusing all their energies on instilling intelligent automation in their business delivery models and their day to day work life. Whatever scepticism, constraints and resistance IA faced earlier is now fading. People are slowly opening their minds up and embracing intelligent bots with open arms.

Organizations now understand that bots are their much-needed saviours, credibly helping them to keep their operations running, reducing staff overwhelm and most importantly, keeping their human employees safe. This will pave the way for inculcating more functional and role-based bots that'll work in tandem with the humans, thereby encouraging a Cobot or a Hubot culture within the organization, where bots and humans can coexist, learn from each other, and together metamorphose customer experiences.

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