

How Can Chatbots Help the Manufacturing Industry?

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AI-powered chatbots support manufacturing facilities to not only scale, but also improve the employee and customer experience.



Manufacturing facilities rely on chatbots to scale up operations by simplifying processes, improving communication and focusing on data.

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The manufacturing industry felt an immediate impact when the pandemic hit. There was a decline in production, forced shutdowns and major employment dips. While the impact was significant, it also provided an opportunity for the industry to develop better systems with a focus on flexibility. The implementation of chatbots has been one key solution helping manufacturing facilities rebound. Leveraging AI-powered chatbots transformed efforts to scale up operations in three critical ways. They simplified

processes, improved communication with employees and customers, and focused on data.

How chatbots support internal operations

Chatbots can be customized to provide instructions and respond to complex questions or queries in bulk. Deploying such an automated tool has allowed facilities to streamline processes and free up their IT teams to focus on more complex tasks. In fact, chatbots have helped many organizations reduce IT helpdesk requests by 20 to 40 percent.

Chatbots can support operations in many ways:

- **Manage multiple vendor/partner relationships:** Chatbots serve as a quick and interactive platform to communicate internally and externally. They create efficiencies and keep processes moving forward among partners across varied time zones without the need for human intervention. Chatbots can also provide answers to nearly any question. That simplifies or even eliminates the need for extensive vendor website searches.
- **Simplify supply and inventory management:** Chatbots create smooth and transparent engagement with vendors while bridging the gap between workers and management. For example, managers and purchasers can leverage chatbots to track the status of supplies or answer more complex questions such as how much can be produced with the available supplies. Having this early foresight can help teams streamline the supply chain process and proactively place orders to minimize production delays. Some chatbots further simplify inventory management by integrating with vendors to create formal orders in one spot.
- **Track order fulfillment and delivery:** Tracking the order status is critical with current supply chain conditions. Manufacturing facilities no longer need to wait for a human response to monitor outstanding orders and current inventory levels. Chatbots can even respond to delivery details and status.
- **Streamline human resource operations:** Chatbots can help managers set goals and tasks with ease while also aiding the human resources department by pulling performance reports, reviews and more. Having timely access to this level of data can identify process flaws and address them quickly. In addition, it can support recruitment to minimize vacancies and keep manufacturing facilities operating at peak capacity.
- **Support maintenance:** It is important to meet specific environmental conditions to ensure facilities are running efficiently. Some chatbots can synchronize with existing platforms to monitor equipment and report metrics. That enables employees to quickly check and receive data in real-time to ensure everything is operating properly. Teams can react quickly to reduce downtime if something is off.

- **Minimize IT intervention:** IT teams have been stretched thin during the pandemic with some staff working from home and others onsite. Chatbots can handle a majority of the mundane or automated requests, and only pull in manual intervention when necessary.

Beyond internal support, chatbots also optimize the opportunity to attain long-term customer relationships through their round-the-clock availability and consistent communication. Customers can gain answers 24/7 through any device as they work across all channels. Chatbots can assist customers with order placements or tracking items quickly. They can also provide regular updates and send out payment reminders. And an added bonus: Chatbots can be multilingual.

Selecting the right chatbot

Not all chatbot solutions are created equal. It is important to select one that can meet your facility's needs. Key questions to ask when evaluating a chatbot service include:

- Can it provide 24/7 support?
- Does it leverage AI technology to deliver the best solution?
- Can it work seamlessly across multiple digital channels?
- Does it allow access to information in bulk anytime, anywhere?
- Can it improve SLAs?
- How quickly can it be deployed?
- Is it customizable?

Tips for successful implementation

It is important to involve and gain buy-in from the right members of the team to successfully implement a chatbot. That includes the IT team, chief technology officer, finance department and most importantly the staff. Having the right members involved is important, as is dedicating the time for set up. Engage individuals from all parts of the facility, including HR, managers, purchasers, maintenance crew, quality control, and more to identify key questions and provide ample data so the chatbot can provide users with helpful information. Manufacturing facilities should get the team involved and excited about the service once implementation is complete. Encourage employees to leverage the chatbot by asking various questions so they can quickly and easily get a response.

The pandemic presented the manufacturing industry with many new challenges. Yet it also opened the opportunity to seek out new technology. Chatbots have been a key solution for supporting both internal and external digital communication. Making the initial financial and time investments to set up a chatbot can yield long-term time and cost benefits for your manufacturing facility.

About the author:

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