

HOW BRITISH AIRWAYS' CUSTOMER SERVICE IS SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS THROUGH DATA-DRIVEN AI INNOVATION

In a groundbreaking transformation that recently earned recognition at the European Contact Centre and Customer Service Awards (ECCCSA), British Airways has demonstrated how artificial intelligence and data analytics can revolutionise customer service in the aviation industry. This acknowledgment in the 'Best Use of Data & Insights' category validates a journey that has redefined how one of the world's leading airlines understands and serves its customers.

ABOUT BRITISH AIRWAYS: A Global Aviation Leader

British Airways stands as the United Kingdom's flagship carrier, embodying British excellence in global aviation. Operating from its hub at London Heathrow, one of the world's busiest airports, BA serves an impressive network of 200 destinations spanning 80 countries.

The complexity of BA's operation is reflected in its customer service infrastructure, which manages approximately 18 million customer interactions annually through seven distinct contact channels. This vast network requires seamless coordination and efficient resource allocation to maintain the high standards expected of a premium global airline.

THE CHALLENGE: Navigating Post-Pandemic Turbulence

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for the aviation industry, and British Airways was no exception. Teresa Restucci, Head of Global Engagement at British Airways, described the situation. She said: "While the return to travel was welcome, it brought with it a surge in customer service demands that threatened to overwhelm our contact centres. We found ourselves facing not just increased call volumes, but also more complex queries as passengers navigated new travel requirements and regulations."

“ We were operating somewhat blind. Despite our regular demand analysis and agent feedback systems, we didn't have a comprehensive understanding of our customers' needs. This made it difficult to allocate resources effectively or implement meaningful improvements to our service delivery.”

Claire Gallagher,
Strategic Operations Lead at British Airways

THE SOLUTION: A Data-Driven Revolution

Recognising the need for transformation, British Airways partnered with Sabio Group to implement a comprehensive data-driven strategy. At the heart of this initiative was an innovative Intent Capture & Analysis (IC&A) project, utilising Sabio's Console Conversational AI and analytics platform.

The solution began with a deep dive into customer interactions, analysing approximately 35,000 calls - representing 10% of BA's total call volume to General Enquiries. This methodical approach provided unprecedented insights into customer behaviour and needs. "What we discovered was eye-opening," revealed Claire. "Seven out of our top ten contact reasons were completely different from what we had anticipated. This discovery fundamentally changed our understanding of customer needs and highlighted areas where we could make immediate improvements."

The initiative expanded beyond simple data collection. By leveraging Twilio and Google Cloud Dialogflow technology within Sabio's Console platform, BA developed sophisticated customer intent mapping and implemented optimised routing strategies. The team identified 120 distinct call intents, providing granular insights that would inform future service improvements.

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The Sabio Specialism: Expertise in Action

With more than two decades of experience in artificial intelligence and automation in the contact centre, Sabio brought unparalleled expertise to British Airways' transformation journey. Kevin McGachy, Head of AI Solutions at Sabio, emphasised the value of this deep experience: "Our partnership with British Airways went far beyond implementing technology. We provided a holistic solution that combined cutting-edge AI capabilities with strategic consulting and process optimisation, built on 20+ years of successful AI implementations across various industries."

This extensive experience proved invaluable for BA. The airline benefited from tried-and-tested methodologies refined over hundreds of implementations, significantly reducing project risk and accelerating time-to-value. Sabio's long-standing expertise in voice automation and natural language processing meant they could anticipate and prevent common pitfalls that often plague AI implementations in complex contact centre environments.

"What set Sabio apart was their deep understanding of both AI technology and contact centre operations," noted Claire. "They didn't just implement a solution; they brought insights from two decades of evolution in AI customer service, helping us avoid common mistakes and accelerate our transformation."

Sabio's expertise was evident in several key areas. The team developed over 60 'faster routes to resolution', implementing intelligent routing systems that could direct customers to the most appropriate service channel. They integrated multiple AI technologies to create a seamless customer experience, while ensuring that complex or high-value interactions could still receive personal attention when needed.

The implementation of global skills-based routing was also particularly successful, drawing on Sabio's extensive experience in global contact centre operations. "We helped BA achieve the perfect balance," Kevin explained. "This kind of precision comes from years of refining AI implementations across various scales and complexities."

Sabio's mature AI practice also meant BA could benefit from established best practices in areas such as intent capture, natural language processing, and automated customer journey design. The team's experience with similar large-scale transformations in other industries helped ensure a smooth implementation despite the complexity of BA's global operation.



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THE RESULTS

Transformative Impact

The results of this transformation have been remarkable across multiple dimensions. Operational efficiency has seen dramatic improvements. Contact centre workload has reduced by 22%, while the system has proven its resilience during critical situations.

Customer experience has been enhanced through multiple innovations. The implementation of 60+ new 'faster routes to resolution' has improved First Contact Resolution rates and reduced wait times. The system now offers a more personalised service delivery, with context-rich routing ensuring customers reach the most appropriate agent or self-service option.

Perhaps most importantly, employee experience has been transformed. Contact centre staff now face reduced pressure during high-volume periods and enjoy more varied, engaging work as routine queries are increasingly automated. The availability of data-driven insights has empowered agents to make more informed decisions and provide better customer service.

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CASE STUDY: British Airways

“ Being recognised at the ECCCSAs validates our commitment to data-driven customer service excellence. Working with Sabio's specialists, we've not just transformed our operations - we've redefined what's possible in airline customer service.”

Teresa Restucci,
Head of Global Engagement at British Airways

The project's success has led to an extended partnership with Sabio, as BA prepares for the next phase of their customer service transformation. With plans to expand these capabilities across their entire contact centre operation, British Airways is well-positioned to continue setting new standards in customer service excellence in the aviation industry.

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