HOMESERVE UK UTILISES AI & AUTOMATION TO TRANSFORM CUSTOMER JOURNEYS

How HomeServe UK worked with Sabio to deploy one of the most advanced conversational AI implementations to support its core claims processes

HOMESERVE UK – MAKING HOME REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENTS EASY

HomeServe is an international home repairs and improvements business that provides residents with access to tradespeople and technology to help them run their homes more easily. Employing over 7,400 people worldwide, HomeServe has some 8.4m Membership customers across the US, Canada, UK, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Japan through its network of 64,000 skilled trades.

> **Our goal at HomeServe is to get our Customers through their journeys as simply and successfully as possible, and we worked closely with the Sabio team to deliver a conversational AI solution that provides a positive experience.**
>
> Phil Jordan, Head of Contact Channel Automation, HomeServe

A SIMPLER AND QUICKER EXPERIENCE FOR CUSTOMERS

Customers benefit from conversational AI, with typical interactions taking just 60 seconds not the 3.5 minutes it took before

DEMONSTRATING CONVERSATIONAL AI'S ABILITY TO HANDLE INTENSIVE TRANSACTIONAL INTERACTIONS

of those Customers successfully entering the HomeServe UK virtual contact centre, 85% have been able to successfully complete the process – with just 15% opting to speak with a live agent

REAL-TIME INSIGHT INTO INBOUND CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

with conversational AI's ability to categorise over 150 separate Customer intents (up 20x over its previous automated IVR solution), the HomeServe UK CX team is gaining new levels of insight into the issues driving Customer demand

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HomeServe's purpose is to make home repairs and improvements easy, and the company's vision is to be the world's largest and most trusted provider of these services. For HomeServe, the customer is at the heart of everything they do. Customer satisfaction drives retention, and retention drives revenue – so strategy and responsible business are clearly aligned.

In addition to outstanding products and services for homeowners, HomeServe works to achieve customer-centricity by operating systems and processes that support and enhance every customer experience – while also having effective feedback and decision-making to make sure that customer always comes first. A key driver underpinning this is its determination to drive efficiency across all its service operations. To enable this, HomeServe is now deploying one of the most advanced conversational AI implementations to support its core claims processes.

THE CHALLENGE

With HomeServe UK receiving millions of voice contacts each year, the company was keen to unlock potential productivity and efficiency gains. However, it was determined that any operational optimisation programme would not have any negative impact on the Customer Experience. Key guidelines for its automation project included:

- Getting Customers through their journeys as simply as possible
- Ensuring Customer approval
- Always providing Customers with choice around contact options
- Understanding where automation isn't applicable.

THE SOLUTION

Working with Sabio, HomeServe UK has supported Customers with a lifelike conversational AI solution featuring state-of-the-art virtual agents. Sabio took advantage of Google Cloud and Google's Dialogflow solution power, integrating them with technology from Twilio, Looker and its own Sabio Airline. This provides a comprehensive conversational AI solution that enables HomeServe UK to put AI at the heart of its Customer experience. With Sabio developers working alongside the HomeServe UK team, it is now possible to identify areas for improvement quickly and carry out changes within minutes.

THE RESULTS

Since initially deploying conversational AI in its claims operation, HomeServe UK has achieved impressive results, including:

- Providing a simpler and quicker experience for Customers, with typical interactions taking just 60 seconds - not the 3.5 minutes taken before
- Gaining new levels of CX insight, with Sabio's conversational AI solution categorising up to 150 separate Customer intents – 20x more than HomeServe UK's previous automated IVR
- Clearly demonstrating conversational AI's ability to handle intensive transactional interactions, with 85% of customers entering the AI successfully completing the process
- Rapid deployment and the ability to make changes in minutes rather than days should prove an important differentiator for HomeServe UK

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SUPPORTING SIMPLER AND MORE EFFICIENT CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

HomeServe UK receives millions of Customer contacts each year, with around 90% of these involving voice calls into the company's contact centres. With this volume of interactions, there were obviously significant productivity and efficiency benefits to be realised.

However, the business also recognised the critical nature of these interactions – particularly during the initial Contact Channel Automation project that focused on claims management. Efficiency gains without clear Customer satisfaction would not be acceptable.

As an early adopter of speech recognition technology, HomeServe UK has always been committed to its automation journey. However, the company was determined to take things to the next level by focusing on ways that it could deploy advanced AI technology to support simpler and more efficient Customer interactions before they reached the contact centre.

SETTING CLEAR AUTOMATION OBJECTIVES

Before embarking on this project, HomeServe UK's Contact Channel Automation team set itself four key objectives for its AI journey: getting customers through their journeys as simply as possible; ensuring customer approval; always providing the customers with choice; and also recognising and understanding where automation isn't applicable.

While the company's previous generation automated IVR solution worked well for its time, Customer interactions were taking around 3.5 minutes each, and involved a series of 15 questions to reach the end of the journey. Any new conversational AI solution needed to be much simpler. The team faced pressure to ensure Customers would feel that the new conversational AI process was as good as – if not better – than their existing journeys. This was a critical requirement for HomeServe UK, and the Contact Channel Automation team committed to running regular Customer surveys to keep track of this metric.

And while the Contact Channel Automation team was confident that most HomeServe UK Customers would be happy to use the new solution, there still needed to be options for those people who would prefer to speak with a contact centre agent. In setting out its automation agenda, HomeServe UK's team also recognised that calling to make a claim can be a stressful time for Customers. So, it was essential for any solution to be able to spot potentially vulnerable Customers, as well as identify those in an emergency or with extensive damage, so that their interactions could be routed directly to a skilled agent.

CREATING FULLY-AUTOMATED CUSTOMER JOURNEYS AT SCALE

In order to define its self-service strategy, HomeServe UK established a dedicated Contact Channel Automation team focused on creating automation processes that would work for every Customer – in the channel of choice that best supported their transactions. The team worked closely with HomeServe UK's contact centre team, helping to establish key Customer intents for the project, and taking advantage of the real-time business intelligence outputs to support more in-depth analytics.

The Contact Channel Automation team also decided to work with Sabio, Google Cloud's leading contact centre specialist in Europe, to work on the project. Using Google's Contact Centre AI technology, HomeServe UK and Sabio would combine to deliver a solution to help automate voice and messaging interactions and enable the deployment of fully-automated Customer journeys at scale across both voice and messaging channels.

Central to this partnership approach was the creation of a joint Sabio/HomeServe UK development team with four Sabio developers working with HomeServe UK colleagues to deploy an integrated service automation solution. This project team structure provides HomeServe UK with an agile resource that would help keep the Contact Channel Automation solution fine-tuned and adaptive to change.

HomeServe UK took advantage of the power of the Google Cloud platform and Google's specialist Dialogflow solution to support Customers with lifelike conversational AI with state-of-the-art virtual agents. The conversational AI solution was delivered in partnership with Sabio's expert virtual agent development team and HomeServe UK's own Contact Channel Automation and Contact Centre specialists. As a proven CX solutions and services specialist, the Sabio team integrated technology from Google, Twilio, Looker and its own Airline solution to provide a comprehensive conversational AI solution that will enable HomeServe UK to put AI at the heart of its Customer experience.

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UNLOCKING IMPRESSIVE RESULTS WITH CONVERSATIONAL AI

Unlike traditional time-hungry projects, the HomeServe/Sabio team was able to move rapidly. Day 1 saw the team go live with an open question 'How can we help you today?' across HomeServe UK's voice channel. By Day 3 the team had been able to put together a skeleton conversational intent plan, and by Day 5 they had mapped out an operational plan to get interactions to the right place. Being able to operate at this kind of speed will prove an important competitive differentiator for HomeServe UK.

Since initially deploying conversational AI to support Customer non-excess plumbing and drainage claims calls, HomeServe UK has achieved impressive results. Of those Customers that successfully enter the automation journey, 85% successfully complete the process - with the remaining 15% opting to speak to a live agent. This clearly indicates that today's best-of-breed conversational AI technology can handle intensive transactional Customer contacts.

HomeServe UK has also found that the combined conversational AI approach specified by Sabio was able to improve the responsiveness of the system. With the previous automated IVR solution it could take a minimum of four weeks for changes to be made. Now with an integrated HomeServe UK/Sabio team in place, changes can be carried out in just minutes with zero operational downtime.

CUSTOMERS REPORT A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE WHEN USING THE AI-POWERED VIRTUAL CONTACT CENTRE

Given initial caution around Customer satisfaction, the Contact Channel Automation programme has proved very successful with Customers. Current CSAT scores show HomeServe UK Customers rating the conversational AI service 4.3/5 on Trustpilot. The ratings suggest HomeServe UK Customers are very positive about the AI-powered virtual contact centre experience.

Customers benefit from a simpler and quicker experience using the conversational AI solution, now only having to answer three questions instead of 15, and typical interactions taking just 60 seconds rather than the three and a half minutes it took before. And should Customers need to opt out of the AI solution and speak to a contact centre agent, they will find that all the information they have already shared is immediately available to the agent – avoiding frustrating delays – and potentially saving 30 seconds per interaction.

> Our initial conversational AI deployment has clearly demonstrated the potential of AI-enabled technologies within the Customer service world – and how quickly AI solutions are developing

Phil Jordan, Head of Contact Channel Automation, HomeServe

BOTH VIRTUAL AND PHYSICAL CONTACT CENTRES ARE CRITICAL FOR HOMESERVE UK

While taking advantage of the productivity benefits delivered by the conversational AI solution, a key reason for the project's success to date is HomeServe UK's recognition that both virtual and physical contact centres are critical in terms of delivering an excellent experience for Customers. With conversational AI proving able to handle a large proportion of routine claims interactions, HomeServe UK's contact centre agents are free to handle more complex Customer interactions, with an increased opportunity to focus on areas of specialisation. For interactions transferred across from the virtual contact centre, agents now benefit from screen pops and agent whispers at a transaction level – providing them with the information they need to help resolve Customer concerns.

Thanks to the intelligence of the Google-powered Sabio conversational AI solution, the HomeServe UK Contact Channel Automation team has been able to dramatically increase the granularity of the data it gathers from its virtual contact centre. With its previous automated IVR solution, the operations team was only able to define seven Customer intents. This contrasts with the new conversational AI solution where the Contact Channel Automation team is now able to categorise over 150 separate Customer intents.

From an operational perspective, this provides the CX team with an effective real-time view of all the different interactions coming into its virtual and physical contact centres - with this insight opening new opportunities for optimisation.

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CONVERSATIONAL AI PROVES POWERFUL ENOUGH TO SUPPORT CX AT SCALE

The success of HomeServe's Contact Channel Automation conversational AI project illustrates not only the potential of AI-enabled technologies within the Customer service world, but also just how quickly AI solutions are developing. The results achieved to date from HomeServe UK's AI-powered virtual contact centre show that the solution is powerful enough to support major CX operations at scale. This capability enables the deployment of solutions like HomeServe UK's that deliver simplicity and ease-of-use on the surface, but that are underpinned by levels of data granularity and real-time analytics that have rarely been seen in contact centre environments.

With 8% of overall HomeServe UK interactions now already handled successfully by conversational AI, the company is now assessing other automation opportunities – both in terms of function and geography. Opportunities are first assessed to create an automation confidence score, with only those candidates rating 95% or above moving on to the next stage. The team is also looking at supporting HomeServe UK engineers with a conversational AI model. Working with Sabio to extend the conversational AI model to other channels such as text-to-text chatbots and SMS services is also being considered.

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