

Bots, Chats, Scripts, Tests...

Service providers need to go beyond automated scripts by showing up at a customer's premises to ensure a problem is solved.

By Bryan J. Rader / Pavlov Media

I recently had a customer service problem with my local ISP. This nationally recognized, publicly traded company routinely brags about its improved efforts in customer service, all with a lower cost structure.

Shortly before the holidays, our home internet connection wasn't working, our Wi-Fi was intermittent, and our TV screen was blank. So, as the family member who is supposed to know how to handle such situations, I went to work.

First approach – the app on my phone. I found the easy-to-use chat button and began a dialogue with a bot run by artificial intelligence (AI) to solve a reasonably fundamental problem. The good news: There was no reported outage in my area.

What a relief – except my family was sure there was at least one reported outage – in our home!

REMOTE TEST WOES

Though chatting with the AI bot didn't work, I found a way to begin a discussion with what I thought was a real person. Responses to my comments were painfully slow, but at least I was on a path to solving the issue.

The rep said the company would run a remote test to see if it noticed any problems. After a few minutes of delay while I stared at the bouncing dots on the chat line, indicating the rep was typing, I got a good news text that everything was fine with my connection. Passed with flying colors. "Anything else I can help you with today?"

"Yes, my internet connection is still not working." At that point, my family was circling me like birds flying around roadkill. "We need help. Someone should come to visit."

I quickly searched a website to reach a live person. I called the 800 number and got a rep who was genuinely interested in helping us. "Have you tried chatting with customer support yet?" she asked. Ugh ...

She then offered to run remote tests to see if our connection was working properly. Every time, she came back with the same answer: "Your signal is fine on our end." After a 45-minute, back-and-forth discussion, I realized she responded to each question with a scripted answer. How do I get out of this twilight zone?

IN-PERSON RESOLUTIONS

It was time for the Big Ask: "I think you need to send someone to fix this issue." For \$3,600 a year, I didn't think this was a big deal. Diagnose the problem in person, satisfy the customer, and retain a happy account.

But it *was* a big deal. The rep told me that "it might cost you if we find it is your fault" and "we still see nothing wrong with your connection." Fine, will you tell my family?

I took the first appointment available, two days later, between 3 and 5 p.m. Success, right? Nope! For the next two days, we received automated phone calls from the ISP begging us to cancel our appointment. Press 1 to cancel, 2 to cancel, or 3 to cancel. But cancel ... please! It was like kids begging not to have to go to grandma's house.

Finally, the appointment window arrived, and the tech was terrific at solving the problem. He rebuilt the IDF and replaced several original connectors. "There's no question you needed a site visit," he said.

Tell that to the bots, AI, the text line, chat people, and your call center script readers, I thought. It shouldn't be so difficult to get a tech visit accomplished. I know how unhappy property managers feel when their ISP won't solve a problem for them in person.

Just show up. Be visible. Make it smooth for the customer to hit the "easy" button. That's the best way to provide first-class service in 2023.

Best wishes for a great new year! 🍀



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