

# The Synergy of Technology and Empathy in Transforming Customer and Employee Experiences



SPONSORED BY:



Allianz  
Partners



# Uplifting women for a brighter future

As a global leader in travel and specialty insurance, Allianz Partners knows the importance of setting a strong example. For us, that means working to make the travel industry a place where everyone can thrive.

We're a signatory of Women's Empowerment Principles, Edge Workplace Gender Equality certified, and ranked 9th most diverse and inclusive brand by the global FTSE Diversity and Inclusion Index\*. And, in an effort to uplift women's voices in the industry at large, we're a proud sponsor of Women Leading Travel and Hospitality.

→ Learn more at [www.allianzpartners.com](https://www.allianzpartners.com).

*\*Allianz SE, as of 2023*





# The Synergy of Technology and Empathy in Transforming Customer and Employee Experiences

---

Technology trends are far from emergent in the travel and hospitality space. However, the recent rise in popularity among certain artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as ChatGPT, have brought to light an acceleration in both thought and possibilities into “what’s next” and the potential impacts to customers and employees alike.

AI solutions are actively being explored and implemented everywhere from streamlining operations to enhancing customer and employee experiences to finding new ways to drive business growth. From personalized recommendations and dynamic pricing strategies to chatbots and virtual assistants that provide real-time support, AI technologies have already begun to reshape how travelers plan, book and experience their trips. But not all technology is dependent on AI alone. Finding new ways to use tools like predictive analytics, sentiment analysis, and smart room technologies have enabled businesses to anticipate customer needs, optimize resource allocation, and deliver tailored services that exceed expectations.

According to [Adobe Analytics](#), aggregated, anonymized data across a majority of the largest U.S. airlines and hotels showed online traffic to retail sites from generative AI tools has jumped 553 percent year-over-year. This is a leading indicator that consumers are growing more comfortable leveraging conversational interfaces to support their shopping experiences online.

Adobe noted that when booking a service online, the use of generative AI is considered most helpful for hotels (said 53 percent of the 3,000 consumers who responded to the survey), flights (47 percent), a combination of travel options (42 percent), restaurants (42 percent), cars (37 percent), and excursions (35 percent).

By leveraging AI for tasks ranging from demand forecasting and fraud detection to language translation and travel risk management, the travel and hospitality industry has become more efficient, responsive and resilient in adapting to evolving market dynamics and customer preferences.

“AI is the co-pilot helping United improve the flying experience.”

- KATHLEEN KEYES, MANAGING DIRECTOR,  
ANALYTICS AND INNOVATION,  
UNITED AIRLINES



## What This Could Mean for Customer Experience

A frictionless, streamlined customer experience is essential in today's competitive travel and hospitality market. Customers demand fast, easy and intuitive service, and companies seek cost-efficient and streamlined ways to meet customers where they want to be. While technology is one of the keys to innovation, you also have to have the people and experience to get the most out of it.

Certain tasks may always need to be completed by humans, but utilizing tools like AI should augment the things people already do best, especially if it comes to increasing their own productivity.

Other tasks seem primed to be handed to a machine (whether true AI or not), where analysis and recommendations on large data sets and complex equations may yield more efficient results. Some AI tools can be utilized to quickly analyze consumer demographics, behaviors and past interactions; these functions are key areas that can streamline business processes and improve customer experiences.

Take customer-facing services such as a customer service call, for example. The implementation of AI within a call flow can enable the customer to self-service or have their needs otherwise addressed instead of forcing the customer to sit through a long hold time. Alternatively, a customer can be redirected to an intelligent chatbot to move the transaction online. Ultimately, shifts like this can reduce frustration for the customer and normalize staffing requirements for the company – especially during peak times.

For adjacent travel and hospitality industries like insurance, AI tools can also take on the role of “cool problem solver,” Michael Bruch, global head of risk consulting advisory services, Allianz Commercial, said in a recently published [article](#). “AI enables insurers to enhance their value proposition by better predicting and therefore preventing risks. AI depends on having good-quality data. We are constantly evolving and expanding our data quality to train the models we use. This can help us assess and model extreme weather events, for example, gathering data on secondary perils such as floods. Or, by constantly improving the granularity of our location data, we can help corporate customers better identify climate-risk exposures.



GETTY IMAGES / VERTIGO3D

“By enabling us to adopt a more predictive, preventive and proactive approach, AI can shift our perspective from looking in the rear-view mirror to evolving into an organization with a sharper view of the road ahead, supporting clients in preventing and mitigating risk and avoiding losses,” Bruch added. “The power of AI-generated insights can help businesses and societies become more resilient.”

Like in the insurance industry, as technological advances in tools, data and risk intelligence become available, travel organizations may be able to better spot and price for emerging business risks, such as serving impacts from severe weather, staffing shortages, and hyperlocalized economic indicators.

## Evolving Call Centers From High-Touch to High-Tech

As the historical backbone of customer servicing, perhaps no other part of the customer experience value chain has benefited more from the emergence of certain technologies than call centers. Often, customer service agents field the same questions and requests over and over again. Machine learning-based natural language processing (NLP) algorithms are widely used to recognize similar requests and generate desired responses tailored to the inquiry. This can be done in real time, enabling call centers to handle increased call volumes while keeping customers happier with limited wait times.

So why does this matter? According to the [Zendesk CX Trends Report 2024](#), 81 percent of consumers say the quick and accurate resolution of issues or complaints heavily influences their decision to purchase.

But not every call is about efficiency. What about those that need more attention and a bit of human touch and empathy to provide the best customer care? Sometimes customers just want to talk to a real person. Using tools like NLP can free up more time for call quality in those instances.

“AI and automation can handle routine, time-consuming tasks — such as call routing — freeing [call center] agents to focus on more complex and high-value interactions,” the Zendesk [report](#) said. “For example, on average, call center agents spend [10.2 minutes out of one hour](#) (17 percent of their time) working on post-call wrap-up.”



GETTY IMAGES / MASKOT

AI can summarize those calls and create transcripts, allowing humans to focus on less remedial tasks. The technology can also predict future workload volume based on historical data and trends. This assists managers in staffing their call centers and shift scheduling. Other call center uses for AI include assessing agent performance and tracking call center metrics to identify key performance indicators (KPIs).

In one such instance, Allianz Partners, a leading travel insurer, has leveraged techniques for moving more customers to service online for improved accuracy and speedier resolution.



GETTY IMAGES / THOMAS BARWICK

“With certain insurance claims, AI has the potential to help claim examiners ensure all the necessary information was submitted by the customer, in real time, to reduce unnecessary back-and-forth and wasted time,” said Liz Hedge, Allianz Partners’ North American regional director of digital services. “One day, imagine having intelligent chat and real-time document review features while you’re submitting a claim. It can make the whole process guided, simple and easy to submit correctly the first time. And once you’ve submitted a claim, you also shouldn’t have to call for a status update; you should be able to access this information online, anytime. Other AI tools are helping us get claims categorized and prioritized to more quickly expedite the work of our claims’ examiners, and keeping those decisions that need to be made by humans with humans. All of these actions will result in faster resolution and more satisfied customers.”

This is a broader theme of high-tech solutions that Allianz Partners is investing in to expedite helping customers and improve both customer and employee experiences.

“We recognize we need to make it as easy as possible to do business with us and be where customers want to be — whether online, our Allyz® TravelSmart app, phone, or traditional mail,” Hedge said. “This approach allows us to provide customers access to a breadth of self-service options for those that want to move quickly and limit ‘face-to-face’ interaction, while allowing us to better focus our phone agents on providing high-quality interactions for those who call. And even then, AI can help us better plan for staffing to predict and handle large spikes in calls or claims.”

## AI in Action

Leaders from across the travel and hospitality industry are implementing AI in various and innovative ways. Here are some unique and innovative use cases:

“At United, we’re using AI tools in a number of ways to anticipate and address our passengers’ needs,” says Kathleen Keyes, managing director, analytics and innovation at United Airlines. “From assistants that help provide instant customer support and provide relevant travel information to AI-driven natural language processing that enables the airline to analyze customer feedback to improve and tailor services to better meet our customers’ needs, AI is the co-pilot helping United improve the flying experience.”

The Columbus Regional Airport Authority places a high priority on and is constantly looking for ways to enhance the passenger experience, according to Kristen Easterday, director of communications and public affairs.



“In our ongoing journey to explore and implement advanced technology solutions, we’re proud to highlight the deployment of our AI-powered website chatbot as an example of our commitment,” Easterday says. “By adding the chatbot to our online presence, we’re reshaping the conventional paradigms of customer service, making it more interactive and accessible.”

An array of Hilton executives weighed in on how the hotel chain is using AI to improve customer and employee experiences. Jack Talbot, vice president, product; Dorothy Lopez, vice president, software engineering; and Becky Polebaum, vice president, business analytics and customer insights, said customers have indicated they want quick, consistent communication.

“Our messaging capability — available through multiple chat platforms and deployed across every Hilton property by the end of the year — ensures simple questions can be automated while more complex questions are routed to a knowledgeable team member for a personalized interaction,” the team shared.

While chatbots do support some routine requests, such as “what time is checkout” or “can you send me my folio,” most interactions continue to be with on-property or Hilton customer care team members.

Hilton is innovating with AI-driven analytics, analyzing customer feedback to share actionable insights with hotel team members, with specific recommendations about where and when to intervene to delight customers, resolve problems, and deliver the greatest customer experience, the Hilton executives added.

“As a business of people serving people, we believe that tech/AI solutions should help take the friction out of the guest experience and free up our team members to focus on sharing our hospitality with guests,” they said. “Technology often powers the day-to-day, but people provide the reliable, friendly service that makes a stay with us so special.”

President of JetBlue Ventures Amy Burr said the airline is working with each individual business unit to figure out how AI can help it streamline its part of the business.

“Our crewmembers see that the AI tools we are building or partnering with are not intended to replace their critical role but instead are designed to remove the repetitive tasks from their day-to-day,” notes Burr.

These are real-world examples of AI’s ability to not only enhance the customer experience, but also create an ideal employee experience. Both can lead to increased loyalty, resulting in cost savings (employee retention) and revenue gains (customer retention).

“Technology often powers the day-to-day, but people provide the reliable, friendly service that makes a stay with us so special.”

- HILTON TEAM

## AI and the Employee Experience

From marketers to customer service agents, AI can be used to improve job performance. Empowering employees results in a more satisfying work environment leading to higher employee retention rates. Furthermore, leveraging AI for tasks involving analytics, automation and other support systems can enhance productivity and problem solving.

It's important to stress that the use of AI should be viewed as an opportunity for skill enhancement rather than as a risk to job elimination. By providing opportunities for upskilling and reskilling, technology has always been about enabling employees to adapt to evolving job requirements and excel in roles that leverage their strengths. Since many tools can now help us better automate repetitive tasks, strategically considering where workers should focus their time is critical, especially around those tasks that require creativity, empathy and critical thinking.

By considering AI as a tool that complements and enhances human capabilities, rather than a threat to job security, organizations can create an inclusive and empowering work environment that helps level the playing field for everybody.

## Finding Balance With AI

While tools such as AI and machine learning are efficient, human experience and interaction remains critical. This is especially true in travel and hospitality, an industry built upon person-to-person interactions. It's important to ensure empathy and human thought and touch are not lost as automation is pursued.



GETTY IMAGES / JACOBBLUND



“According to a study by Salesforce, 80 percent of customers say the company’s experience is as important as its products and services,” a General Insurance Council [article](#) said. “And one of the critical factors in a positive customer experience is empathy. Customers want to feel understood and know that the person they are talking to cares about their problem. A study by *Harvard Business Review* found that customers who feel emotionally connected to a company are more than twice as valuable as those who are satisfied with the company’s products or services alone.”

Keeping your customers at the heart of what you do and knowing how they feel in every interaction can help guide where and when to implement certain technology solutions.

“Herein lies the opportunity to create exceptional experiences while retaining the hearts of consumers all the while,” the General Insurance Council article added.

In blending human empathy with AI to streamline processes, businesses can create memorable experiences and meaningful interactions. AI can be used to enhance rather than detract from genuine customer-brand connections.

“For us, no matter what challenge we are solving for, it’s in providing friction-free customer care,” Maggie Butler, Allianz Partners’ director of customer experience, said. “Technology can help us to do many things to expedite service for our customers, but we also continue to focus on our core offerings. We continue to invest in making additional travel safety features available for customers and partners alike through our API platform and the Allyz® TravelSmart app. We also include higher-tech, proactive features in a number of our insurance plans as part of our SmartBenefits® suite. Imagine yourself stuck in an airport during a long flight delay and you get a text message on your phone. The text is not informing you of another delay, but instead asking how you would like your \$100 compensation paid to you because your travel insurance proactively monitored your flight. In those challenging moments, it may not solve everything or get the plane moving faster, but it helps make the situation a little bit better. And now you can go enjoy an airport burger on us — friction free.”

“For us, no matter  
what challenge we  
are solving for, it’s in  
providing friction-free  
customer care.”

- MAGGIE BUTLER, DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER  
EXPERIENCE, ALLIANZ PARTNERS

With existing and emerging technologies, businesses can personalize customer experiences, streamline operations, gain a better understanding of customer behavior, enhance job performance, and create a more empowering work environment. Organizations in the travel and hospitality sector must explore AI integration and remember that as it enhances efficiency, it makes room for more empathy.



## Building powerful communities

As a global brand, Allianz Partners believes in the power of diverse perspectives and equal opportunities. Uplifting those who traditionally haven't had a voice brings powerful ideas, increased innovation, and superior service to our business—propelling our organization to new heights.

We don't limit our efforts to our own business, though. We want to see more diversity in the travel industry at large. That's why we're proud to support Women Leading Travel and Hospitality by sponsoring this whitepaper.

→ Learn more at [www.allianzpartners.com](http://www.allianzpartners.com).



# WHO WE ARE



Allianz  
Partners

In the United States, Allianz Partners USA (AGA Service Company) offers Allianz Travel-branded travel protection plans and serves millions of customers each year. In addition to travel protection, the company offers event ticket protection, registration protection for endurance events and unique travel assistance services such as international medical assistance and concierge services. AGA Service Company is doing business as Allianz Global Assistance Insurance Agency in California (License # 0B01400) and Massachusetts. Allianz Partners USA is part of the Allianz Partners group. Allianz Partners is a world leader in B2B2C insurance and assistance, offering global solutions that span international health and life, travel insurance, mobility and assistance. Customer driven, our innovative experts are redefining insurance services by delivering future-ready, high-tech, high-touch products and solutions that go beyond traditional insurance. Present in over 75 countries, our 19,400 employees speak 70 languages, handle over 58 million cases each year, and are motivated to go the extra mile to offer peace of mind to our customers around the world.

SmartBenefits proactive payments and "no receipt" payments available only on certain plans. Terms, conditions, and exclusions apply to all travel insurance plans. [See Details and Disclosures](#)



Women Leading Travel & Hospitality is a membership-based association that connects executive women across all sectors of the travel and hospitality industry. Its mission is to unite, inspire and empower its community of executive women leaders by providing unparalleled resources, support and motivation to achieve personal and professional growth. For more information, visit [womenleadingtravelandhospitality.com](https://womenleadingtravelandhospitality.com).



Parent company of WIRLC and Women Leading Travel & Hospitality, NAPCO Media has been a leading information source in the markets it serves since 1958. NAPCO Media, now part of the PRINTING United Alliance, continues to evolve its product lines and specializes in the creation and cross-channel distribution of exceptional content. Its mission is to build community between its audiences and its clients. For more information, visit [napco.com](https://napco.com).