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Episode 128 - Are You Missing Out on the Messaging Trend for Customer Service?  
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JOSH: The worst possible thing is that you frustrate a customer in messaging. They get annoyed, and then they phone, and then you've got a more expensive case and an annoyed customer.

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INTRO

[Transcription starts at 0:00:39]

TEMA: Today's deep dive is with Joshua March, Co-founder and CEO of Conversocial and the author of the new book *Message Me* about the growing use of messaging tools for customer service.

Companies made a big mistake a few years ago. That's when they became so much faster at responding to customer complaints on public sites like Twitter than they did through normal channels like phone or email that they ended up inadvertently encouraging people to blast them publicly. Now, with the growth of messaging, they finally have a chance to turn that around. According to March, private customer service related messages are now twice the volume of public ones and they represent about 25% of all service volumes.

0:01:27 Before we dig into what he has to say about how you can use messaging effectively for customer service, I want to thank ATB Financial for its support of this podcast and of all the shows in the Alberta Podcast Network. ATB has gone through tremendous change over the past few years. In fact, I've done a few podcast episodes in which we talk about that.

They've gone through this sort of radical change that, in many organizations, would lead to a huge employee backlash. But, instead, ATB has been winning best workplace awards and, this past year, staff gave the company an engagement score of an amazing 91%. As I'm sure you know, engaged employees are key to providing great customer experiences.

0:02:12 I also want to quickly apologize for how long it has taken me to get this episode out. As regular listeners know, I'm on a 16-month round the world customer experience tour. It's been informing some of the recent blog posts at FrankReactions.com and, if you're interested in the more

personal side of the travels, you can find those blog posts at [TemasTravels.com](http://TemasTravels.com).

0:02:38 With a combination of travel and a broken leg has made it, unfortunately, impossible for me to keep up the strict bi-weekly schedule that I know a lot of you would prefer, and I'm sorry for that.

0:02:50 Now, let's get straight to that interview.

[Interview starts at 0:02:56]

JOSH: I'm Joshua March, the founder and CEO of Conversocial. Conversocial is a digital care platform that helps brands deliver customer service via new mobile messaging and social media channels. We work with a lot of big airlines and retailers across the world. I'm also the author of *Message Me*, a book I just released a couple of months ago, which is about the future of customer service in the era of messaging and AI.

0:03:23  
TEMA: Was there any specific event or experience that got you thinking about even developing this sort of service, a messaging-based customer service tool?

0:03:34  
JOSH: Yeah, it was a long time coming. My previous business was a company called iPlatform. We were one of the first ever agencies helping brands to build Facebook apps back in 2007 and 2008, so right at the kind of beginning of social media.

0:03:56 But, as I was doing that business, I was really excited about the impact that social media was having and the ability for businesses to use it to engage with their customers in new ways. And, while I was doing Facebook apps, I kind of came to the realization that Facebook apps were really a bit of a fad.

0:04:13 But, there was this really big, fundamental change that was happening in how people were communicating with each other that was actually bigger than just social media. It was a shift into smartphones, into these new social messaging, all these kinds of asynchronous ways of communicating that were becoming the kind of default ways in every walk of life, right? Not just between individuals, at work, and between businesses and customers.

TEMA: Mm-hmm.

0:04:42

JOSH: I really felt and believed that as that continued to happen -- and right now that has happened -- in 2008, 2009, it hadn't happened yet, but it was just on the verge of it. I really believed it was going to become the dominant way and that, as it became the dominant way that people communicated, it would really transform how businesses would have to communicate with their customers.

TEMA: Yeah.

0:05:07

JOSH: It was that spark that led to a lot of investigation that, a couple years later, led to founding Conversocial.

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TEMA: Hmm. And, have things evolved pretty much as you were expecting, then?

0:05:20

JOSH: There's definitely been a lot of twists and turns.

[Laughter]

JOSH: When we started, we had this very clear vision of all communication and all traditional customer service move into these new channels. What really happened for the first few years, though, was that it was mainly around public social media. In public social media, it was really about complaint escalation. People had a bad experience in other channels and turned to public social media to kind of escalate it up and get heard.

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No brand really wanted to encourage their customers to complain publicly, which meant that, while social media and social customer service had a really massive impact on brand perception and just how people thought about customer service, it only ever accounted or only ever counts today for a few percent of overall service volume. It had a big impact, but not quite the impact that I was originally envisioning or not quite in the same way.

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But, in the last year, year and a half, there's been a huge rise in messaging. We've always done messaging. Like private messaging has always been a big part of Facebook, Twitter, and these kinds of channels, but it was always actually pretty small in volume compared to the public side.

TEMA: Yeah.

0:06:48

JOSH: But, last year, that actually flipped on its head, and the volume of conversations that brands were having, private messaging over to public, quickly accelerated until, by the end of the year, it was twice the volume. The big change here is that, as companies have started to promote messaging as a service channel because it's private, they don't have any issues with it, it's actually pretty quickly eating into traditional channels, replacing email, replacing Web chat, starting to eat into phone calls, and you start to have messaging or social messaging being like 20%, 25%, even more than 50% of all service volume. The rise of messaging is allowing that original vision we had to come true, which is pretty exciting.

0:07:32

TEMA: Hmm. The technologies are changing so quickly, and the tools, even the messaging platforms that people want to use, are changing pretty quickly. How the heck are companies supposed to be agile enough to keep up with that?

0:07:49

JOSH: Yeah, it's certainly not easy. [Laughter] In many ways, that's why and it's a big part of the reason why I wrote the book *Message Me* because I'm kind of living and breathing all of these changes happening, all the different channels coming up, and the rise of social, the rise of messaging, all the bot platforms, all AI. And, as I spoke to execs in the industry and big brands, I realized that there was just a lot to keep track of if you're trying to keep on top of everything and really understand where everything is going.

0:08:22

TEMA: Mm-hmm.

JOSH: I do think it is important, as much as possible, if execs really want to lead their companies or companies really want to be innovative, then you've got to get a good understanding of what's happening in that space and staying on top of all the trends. I think choosing technology partners who obviously show a strong vision and leadership is important as well.

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Obviously, the great thing about software as a service is that the technology can update in real time after a company has bought it. As long as you're working with the right technology partners, they should be able to bring you on that journey. That's certainly what we try and do at Conversocial is, the company gets on with us and we make sure that we keep on top of all of the latest innovations and changes happening in the industry.

0:09:12

TEMA: Yes, that's certainly what one would hope one's partner would do.

[Laughter]

JOSH: Yeah. In principle.

TEMA: Yeah, exactly. So, you mentioned AI, and I was really interested to see because one of my complaints has been that we are all still training their AI bots.

JOSH: Yeah.

0:09:31

TEMA: They really aren't that great yet, and it looked like you acknowledge that but are hopeful that they will be fairly soon, certainly for handling the vast majority of customer queries. How far away from that do you think we are from the point where they really can effectively handle the vast majority of queries?

0:09:55

JOSH: Well, this gets to the heart of why I'm so excited about the combination of messaging specifically with AI and automation.

TEMA: Mm-hmm.

JOSH: Because if you look at a kind of traditional Web chat environment where you're having a live conversation, if you try and put a bot onto that situation, the bot has to be exceptionally good because if the bot can't handle the vast majority of the conversations immediately, and if it can't understand a pretty free-flowing, longtail conversation, which, by the way, no bot can do today, if it can't do that then it's quickly going to frustrate the customer and you're going to have to have a painful handoff to a human agent at some point where the bot will say it can't understand. It'll then make you wait until it hands it over.

TEMA: Mm-hmm.

0:10:45

JOSH: But, with messaging, messaging is asynchronous. It's more like texting a friend, right?

TEMA: Mm-hmm.

JOSH: When you're texting a friend, if 5, 10, or even 15 minutes pass between a text, it's still pretty quick. It's still having a pretty real-time conversation.

The same is definitely true when you're messaging a business or when a business is messaging a customer. That means that you can combine automation and humans in the same conversation in a very, very seamless way, which never frustrates the customer, so, yeah, a message comes in.

0:11:21

TEMA: I'm not sure about that because, I mean, it seems to me, and even just listening to my young adult children who do messaging a lot more than I do, a lot of kids and people get annoyed if somebody takes a long time to respond. So, I'm not as convinced as you are that people will accept messaging as being something where they're happy to wait five or ten minutes before a reply.

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JOSH: That's at least the data we see. I mean we're obviously coming from a place in messaging or on social media where often brands are taking a lot longer than that.

TEMA: Mm-hmm.

0:12:01

JOSH: We've been doing a little bit of research internally looking at the kind of impact of response feeds on CSAT scores. The data is kind of mixed. There's definitely evidence that if you're in an industry like airlines, for example, or people shopping, then responding faster definitely makes a difference. But, even there, like the fastest company in the world who get -- Alaska Airlines is one of our clients. They'll generally respond within a few minutes if you message them on any of these channels. People love that and think that's pretty much the fastest response you can expect.

TEMA: Right.

0:12:46

JOSH: People aren't sitting, waiting for a reply the way they are in a live chat world. They send a message. Then they go on to messaging someone else or they're using an app while the phone is in their pocket and a notification comes in.

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Now, if you can consistently keep that within five minutes, that's ideal. But, even with five minutes, that's time, I think, to mix in an automatic response, one message. If another message comes in and the system isn't sure, it doesn't have to tell the customer, "I don't understand you. I'm going to hand you to a human agent. You've got to sit here and wait." That can happen automatically in the background and, five minutes later,

the human agent can respond and answer the question. As far as the consumer is concerned, they've just got their answer.

TEMA: Right.

0:13:37

JOSH: I think that we're already doing parts of this today in a very basic way in that when someone messages one of our clients, a lot of them have a bot that we've built called Conversocial Navigator. It just sits at the front end of that messaging conversation and instantly welcomes the customer, gives a menu based on what type of problem they may have. They click that, whatever issue. Immediately, there's another message saying, "Okay, you need to provide X, Y, Z details."

TEMA: Mm-hmm.

0:14:07

JOSH: Then, when they provide those details, we then route them to an agent, and then get that response in five minutes. As soon as the agent gets it, they've got all the information they need. It's routed to the right agent, and they can resolve the issue, which ends up being a much faster resolution time than if they are to kind of go back and forward with each of those questions with an agent. Even something super simple like that can easily handle 15%, 20%, 25% of inbound messages compared to just doing it with humans alone.

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We haven't seen any negative impact on CSAT or OPS from customers who've implemented those kinds of solutions. So, I think that we're going to see a lot more people implementing those kinds of things and gradually having more and more AI and more and more intelligence, over time, to automate more and more of the questions coming in.

0:14:56

TEMA: That makes sense. How can they train the AI, then, without frustrating customers? The AI is somehow recording the message exchange between the live rep and the human as well and the person who had sent the query?

0:15:17

JOSH: Exactly. Yeah, the key thing there is to have a system that is constantly being trained by what the human agents are doing. Yeah. Then Digital Genius, one company who works in this space, they're one company that works in this space with KLM, and I know that they have a solution already out in certain situations which allows the system, the AI system, to suggest answers to agents, and the agents are then approving them. Then that A) ensures that only the right answer gets sent but, also, continues

training the system so it gets better and better over time. I think that kind of system -- you know, we're also advancing a similar system as well -- that's the kind of system that's required to do this well because the worst possible thing is that you frustrate a customer in messaging. They get annoyed, and then they phone, and then you've got a more expensive case and an annoyed customer.

0:16:14

TEMA: Yeah. Yeah, and I mean, ideally, hopefully, where AI will help is it'll get to the point where we don't have to go through a whole bunch of decision trees ourselves before we get an answer.

JOSH: Exactly.

TEMA: You're saying that the way it's being used now, they have a couple of automated messages to try and filter a little bit.

JOSH: Yeah.

0:16:34

TEMA: If there's more than one or two of those, I think people will get pissed off.

JOSH: Yeah. You don't want ten menu IVR systems, for sure. The nice thing about, obviously, doing it visually in messaging, though, is that it is very quick. You're not having to sit and wait for the answers. You just kind of press a few buttons, and you're through. But, **you still obviously got to be careful not to put too many barriers.**

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**I think one of the most important elements of messaging is that, in general, it is so convenient and so effortless to consumers.** I'm a huge believer in the kind of research found in *Effortless Experience*. I'm a big fan of her book.

0:17:18

Also, yeah, I think effort is one of the key determinants of customer loyalty, and I think that's one of the most exciting things about messaging is that it is really effortless if you do it in the right way. And so, you obviously don't want to ruin that by putting up ten menu bots in front of dealing with any human.

TEMA: [Laughter] Exactly. Given that the AI bots aren't that great yet, how long do you think it's going to be until they're, generally, truly useful and it's not just a handful of the world's largest companies doing it?

0:17:50



JOSH: I'll differentiate quickly between marketing and service use cases because there are, definitely. In the marketing world, there are some clear successes happening with transactional focused bots doing very simple things like selling flowers or just signing people up for marketing, marketing engagements, in ways that are more interactive than over other channels.

TEMA: Yeah.

0:18:18

JOSH: In the customer service world, it's really got to be human powered, but we are seeing success, like I said ... (indiscernible, 0:18:25) just doing simple automation just at the beginning of a conversation, just collecting information, and we're going to start getting deeper and deeper on that. I think what we're doing, at least, is we're doing baby steps, right? So, say, "Okay, we've now managed to automate data collection. Hey, can we do an integration with your order system so, if someone wants to just check on their delivery status, they can just put their order confirmation number in and get the answer straightaway?" That kind of thing is simple to automate. You can do that as the next baby step, implementing more machine learning into the backend and start suggesting answers.

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I think we're going to see these gradual baby steps come more and more in and be implemented more and more. It's hard to make an exact timeline but, I think, over the next five years, we'll get to a place where most companies can have AI and automation-based solutions that can handle 50% to 70%, say, of inbound messages automatically depending on the brand.

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I think the fact that we've got, for some companies today, 20%, 25% even with very, very simple automation, shows just how much potential there is. Obviously, customer service does have a pretty big longtail of issues that a lot of brands are dealing with, so I think it's going to be a long time until we're at 100%, but I do think we're going to be able to make really big strides in the next five years.

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TEMA: I can see where there are a lot of questions that people may phrase them slightly differently, but they're standard. I mean we used to have, in the early days of the Web, every website had an FAQ page: frequently asked questions.

JOSH: Yeah.

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TEMA: But, those got to the point where they were so big and cumbersome, it was hard to find your answers, and no one wants to look through it. So, I see where AI can really, really help with those, which, for a lot of companies, would be the bulk of the questions.

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JOSH: Hundred percent right. There's just this change that's been happening in how people use the Internet. The old model used to be more of kind of a pull model, right? Which is, I'll go and find the information I want and bring it to me.

TEMA: Mm-hmm.

0:20:40

JOSH: Now, we're in more of a kind of push model, right? It started with the idea of the new see ... (indiscernible, 0:20:44) which is, "Hey, just come to the site and we'll intelligently figure out what you want to look at and interact with, and we'll put it right in front of you."

TEMA: Mm-hmm.

0:20:53

JOSH: I think it's the same with messaging and customer service. People don't want to come and find your website, find your support forum, and troll through and eventually find an answer. They just want to be able to send you a message and get the answer.

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I actually had this experience on Friday night. I was having some problems with my Sonos app. I have Sonos speakers, and they were slightly out of synch.

TEMA: Mm-hmm.

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JOSH: I just googled the answer. I googled the question and ended up with eight different results in the Sonos forum. After reading through three of them that weren't actually quite relevant, I was like, "I'll just tweet them." I just sent them a DM, a private message, on Twitter. Within a few minutes, they responded and told me exactly what I needed to do, which is really a much better experience.

TEMA: Absolutely.

0:21:43

JOSH: That's definitely the future. I think, as you said, especially if you can just find the answer in FAQs that a lot of companies have built up, there's a lot of room for automating that.

TEMA: Yeah. You talked a little bit about ROI and you were suggesting that we need to make some changes to how we do ROI calculations in the area of customer service. Can you elaborate a bit on that?

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JOSH: Yeah. It wasn't so much that overall customer service needs to change because I think that that's difficult, especially when you're looking at just how institutionalized call centers and the phone is. But, one of the big challenges that we've seen in the industry when it comes to social media and messaging is that these new channels came about, and these new channels worked in ways that were quite different to traditional customer service channels.

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If you think about messaging, it's this kind of continuous conversation that never ends. Right? It doesn't easily divide itself into, this is a case, like a phone call does, like a live chat does, or even a particular thread of an email does. It just keeps going forever, and it's this one single track between the brand and the customer, but there could be multiple different cases, multiple different issues.

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Basically, companies took all this social messaging stuff in and said, "Okay, we've got to do customer service over it." But, no one knew exactly how it would fit into traditional systems, so everyone just went, "Well, we'll measure it in its own way. We'll measure engagement, or we'll measure messages instead of cases. We'll do whatever it is."

0:23:24

Everyone started doing this, and then everyone started really quickly butting up into the challenge that if you can't measure it in the same way, if you can't get comparable metrics, it's almost impossible to make an investment case.

TEMA: Yeah.

0:23:38

JOSH: Right? Because if you're trying to justify shifting volume away from the traditional channels into these new channels in large numbers, and if you really start actively promoting it, it will shift it in large numbers. You might be talking about really significant staffing changes.

TEMA: Yeah.

0:23:56

JOSH: If you're a 100-person call center, which is relatively small, and you're trying to switch half your volume into messaging, it's still 50 people. That's a lot of people, a lot of salaries, a lot of money being spent. Obviously, for an even bigger company, it can get really, really big.

0:24:12

To do those kinds of changes, you need to be able to say, "Well, what's the impact going to be? What's the impact going to be on cost per resolution, on customer satisfaction, on average handling time?" If you can't measure those things in a comparable way, you just can't make that case, and so that is this a really big challenge.

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Certainly, we made that mistake when we started, as well. Over the last couple of years, we realized that was an issue and done a lot of work on how to correct it. But, I think that's a general challenge the industry has that needs to change.

0:24:48

TEMA: How difficult would be? I'm just sort of thinking about this. Even if you're using messaging and, yes, there may be a stream where I contact and have a few messages about problem one and then, six months later, I go on to problem two, there's still kind of a point at which you can say, "Have I resolved your problem?" and you know that's the end of the case. And then, could you not go back and just measure how much time the agent spent communicating and researching to get to solve that problem?

0:25:20

JOSH: Yeah, 100%, in principle. In practice, often it's not. If it was a very clear-cut, had a conversation, finished the conversation, no message for six months and start another conversation, that would be great. Often what happens is that the agent thinks it over, and then the person will send another message an hour later saying, "Thank you," or asking a follow-up question. And so, okay, where do you put that hard close?

TEMA:

Mm-hmm.

0:25:53

JOSH: Are you willing to reopen the case? And, if so, how long because you also need a pretty fixed data set if you want to compare it to phone calls, so you can't just have a soft close where the case keeps reopening every time the person messages. What are the different rules for that? And, what happens if the customer sends a message that is about something different, but they send it an hour later? How do you account for that? Do you allow the agent to do a hard close on the first and then kind of reopen another case for the second?

0:26:26 Similarly, what happens if the agent wants to send a follow-up a week later or a few days later just like checking in? Is that part of the same case, or is that a new case? There are a lot of details like that that are kind of gotchas if you don't really think through how to design them properly, and you need to have a pretty good understanding of how people measure cases in a contact center in order to do that.

0:26:51  
TEMA: What are you recommending then is the best way to handle that right now?

0:26:55  
JOSH: It's really just a matter of solving all of those problems, right? We've put a lot of design work into solving those problems at Conversocial, and I think we're in a pretty good place. We actually just implemented a load more improvements to that after getting a load of customer feedback. We're about to release a new version of our case management system towards that.

0:27:17 We also implemented automated CSAT surveys and MPS surveys in line and messaging. I think those things are really key. If you're not using us, I think it's really about pushing for those solutions.

I think it's essential that everyone in the industry moves to that approach where they expect that they should be able to measure these channels in the same way they can measure any customer service channel. There are certainly other vendors who have done other, similar stuff or parts of the solution. I think that's the important thing.

0:27:51  
TEMA: Hmm. So, the ROI calculation challenge is certainly one barrier. Are there other barriers that you see to an effective implementation of messaging based customer service?

0:28:04  
JOSH: Yeah. The biggest barriers we see, and we work primarily with big companies, is really just getting that internal buy-in to make process and site changes. Messaging is only going to have an impact if you're really promoting it. If you're promoting it, that means you're going to deflect volume from other channels. That means potentially you're going to upset other people whose teams are going to get smaller, and agents are going to need to reassign. They're going to need to be trained.

0:28:34 There just needs to be a commitment and buy-in across the organization. You need, often, buy-in from the Web team who are going to implement it, from the rest of the contact center who are going to have to make these changes. And so, often a barrier that we see is just that there's a really innovative person in the company who wants to make it happen and, unless they have executive support for what they're doing, it can be a bit of an uphill struggle to get all of the steps of everything inline. That's probably one of the biggest barriers that we see.

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TEMA: Hmm. Okay. You mentioned, obviously, your clients are fairly large companies. How long do you think it's going to take until these sorts of solutions are realistic options for smaller businesses?

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JOSH: I think that if you deal with a demographic who you know is using messaging or primarily using messaging day-to-day, maybe a younger demographic or actually some new messaging channels, so that's pretty much everyone, but you can, today, just say, "Hey, we're going to turn off the email, and we're going to really invest into messaging as a channel and take a mobile-centric, messaging-first approach."

TEMA: Okay. Turn off email? I'm of the generation that was thrilled by email. What do you mean turn off email? [Laughter]

0:29:50  
JOSH: You know what? Email for customer service is, generally, for most companies, slow. There's an expectation that you can take days before you respond to it, and people treat it like letters. It's kind of long form.

You write this long email addressing multiple different points. The company has to look at that, and the agent has to look at it and write a formal response, which actually takes quite a long time. It's expensive. It's slow. It's not a great experience for customers or for businesses.

0:30:25 Whereas, there's something about just the way that people are used to using messaging that they just kind of send a quick question. You can answer. They'll follow up. It's much more natural. It's much more organic. It's much more convenient. It's just kind of there on the phone. It's the same reason that companies internally have been switching to Slack instead of email.

TEMA: Yeah.

0:30:48

JOSH: It's a more human-centered way of communicating.

TEMA: Again, I wonder if there's a bit of a generational issue here because I don't type with my thumbs all that quickly, so I would rather have a keyboard in front of me when I'm sending something. But, I realize I'm in a shrinking portion of the population there. I guess it is becoming pretty natural.

0:31:11 What about voice and using voice messaging? How is that going to work out because they say that, certainly, things are going more and more towards voice?

0:31:21  
JOSH: Yeah, so here's my kind of overarching vision over the next few years. I think messaging is going to become the dominant communication channel. That could be on a Web like we're doing messenger customer chat, which is like traditional Web chat, but powered by messenger, or it can be on a mobile or both.

0:31:39 AI and automation will handle the kind of first layer. They'll be the tier one agents who are answering simple queries, collecting information. There'll be human agents who will be there as a kind of backup escalation channel. And, if something needs to escalate into voice, you'll probably escalate within the messaging channel to the same agent where you can just switch to a voice conversation.

0:32:02 That's not happening today. All of the messaging channels have the ability to do voice between consumers, but no one has yet implemented it for businesses. But, I think that will be coming. Voice will always exist as an escalation channel.

TEMA: Yeah.

0:32:19  
JOSH: I really think it will decrease as a kind of tier one service channel. I think the initial port of call will be messaging, and voice will just be there as an escalation.

0:32:30  
TEMA: Okay. If there continues to be growth in the Alexa type tools, the Amazon and the other systems, the Google Home, that may; I could certainly see, your dishwasher breaks, I could see people wanting to just voice order that system to call customer service at whatever company.

0:32:54

JOSH: The thing about voice is there's a reason that voice IVRs are so painful, right? Voice is a great UI for giving commands. It's a terrible UI for receiving menu options when navigating. [Laughter]

0:33:14 This is why the new Alexa also has a screen, right? I think that just voice alone is not a great way of going through stuff.

TEMA: Yeah.

0:33:26

JOSH: That maybe is kind of machine learning, like natural language processing gets better over the next kind of five to ten years if you can just say your issue and, without anything else, it will have a complete understanding of what you've asked and be able to get you through to a human instantly or just get the answer to you. Maybe we'll get there.

TEMA: Yeah. That's the holy grail, I think, where we're all hoping it'll get.

0:33:49

JOSH: That's the holy grail. That's the holy grail, but I think we're a way away from that. We're not there yet. The way to think about this is that, in the end, all a voice assistant is doing is translating your voice to text and then asking that question in text to an automated system.

TEMA: Yeah.

0:34:07

JOSH: And so, until we're at the stage where you can just write your question to a bot and the bot will instantly have full understanding of your question and be able to answer you, once a bot can do that, you'll be able to do that in voice. Until that point, voice doesn't offer anything else other than a UI for changing what you're saying into a text question that's being asked somewhere.

0:34:30 I do think there's going to be a combination of these things. Apple Business Chat is gradually opening up at the moment, which I think is going to be super exciting as a messaging channel in the U.S. and, obviously, there's a very close integration with Siri there.

TEMA: Yeah.

0:34:43

JOSH: I think, increasingly, people are just using voice assistants to write messages. I think all of these worlds are kind of colliding and combining over the next few years.



0:34:54  
TEMA: Yeah, it's a very exciting time. Is there anything that I should have asked you and I haven't?

0:34:59  
JOSH: No, I don't think so. In terms of, as I look ahead, I just touched on it with Apple Business Chat, but we've had, over the last year, almost all the growth in messaging has really been Facebook Messenger, and that's been messaging on the phone. Also, as I mentioned earlier, messenger customer chat on the Web.

0:35:17 We're about to be massively supplemented in that by WhatsApp and Apple Business Chat, two huge, huge messaging channels. When I say Apple Business Chat, that's iMessage, which is kind of what everyone uses in the U.S. on their iPhones.

0:35:31 Through Apple Business Chat, businesses will be able to just message people like they're messaging each other on their phones. It's super secure, encrypted, very tight integration with Apple Pay. It's really exciting for that reason. I think a lot of businesses are going to start strategically investing more into Apple Business Chat over the next year, so I think that's going to have a big impact.

0:35:54 Then WhatsApp just started opening up their enterprise accounts like in the last week. They're going to be gradually opening those accounts between now and the end of the year. We're working with some companies on that. And then, they'll be doing a full release Q1, Q2 next year.

0:36:13 WhatsApp is just massive. It's the dominant way that everyone communicates in the U.K., in Europe, in South America, and businesses are clamoring for it. I think there's going to be a tremendous growth in business messaging as they get onto WhatsApp, and I think that's going to be super exciting as we go into next year.

0:36:34  
TEMA: One complication I see for companies too, then, is they're going to have to--kind of like now with social media--be able to deal with inquiries coming from several different messaging apps.

0:36:46  
JOSH: They are. But, actually, one of the great things about messaging as opposed to, say, public social media. Public social media, a tweet is very different from a Facebook post: different form factors, different way of

managing them. As a customer service agent, you really had to know the intricacies of how Twitter works to understand what people are doing with retweeting, hashtags, @ mentions, and the length of a tweet and all this kind of stuff.

TEMA: Mm-hmm.

0:37:14

JOSH: In messaging, all of that kind of really falls away because, for the most part, 80%-plus of what's happening in messaging is it's just a private, one-on-one text conversation between the agent and the customer where people can write messages as long as they want. They can include media. But, it's pretty straightforward.

0:37:35

Yeah, you can easily combine multiple different messaging platforms into a single queue for an agent, and they don't really have to think about it, which makes it pretty easy from an internal management and a training perspective, which is great. That actually makes it much easier for businesses to add on these new channels than what's possible with public social media.

0:37:56

TEMA: Okay. Thank you very much. I appreciate your time, and I will recommend that people pick up a copy of your book. It is definitely worth the read. Good luck to you.

[0:38:10 WRAP-UP]

TEMA: I see a lot of advantages for companies and their customers to using messaging for customer care, and it's something personally that I've been doing more and more often. On the positive side, it does take most of the complaints out of the public eye. But, to keep them out, you still have to meet the incredibly high expectations of today's customers. Their complaint might not start public, but there is screenshotable evidence, which can and will be used against you if you don't handle it well.

0:38:40

Although Josh talked about the benefits of not needing to reply as quickly in a messaging app, I predict that that grace period will shrink to nothing very quickly. The same thing happened with other social platforms. Just a few years ago, it was okay to answer even a Tweet within a day. Then it shrunk to a few hours, and then to a few minutes.

0:39:01

The same thing has happened in every platform. People just won't wait anymore. Patience is just not a strong suit of our era, and you are probably getting impatient for this episode to end, so thank you for hanging in there.

[0:39:15 OUTRO]

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