

# The future of conversational chat channels in SA

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Businesses today have access to various technology solutions for personalising customer experiences. While a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is fundamental, not all businesses have a centralised way to manage diverse customer data.



Orediretse Molebaloa, sales engineering chapter lead at Infobip. Image supplied

Companies such as Infobip address this challenge by offering solutions that amalgamate data from various touchpoints, facilitating hyper-personalisation. Beyond traditional CRMs, Infobip provides Customer Data Platforms (CDPs), chatbots, digital contact centre solutions, and an omnichannel strategy framework.

These elements collectively enhance the ability to personalise customer experiences, ensuring seamless communication across preferred channels. So, while CRM systems offer valuable insights such as client names, products, and contact details, the suite expands the horizon, enabling businesses to optimise customer engagement through tailored strategies.

Orediretse Molebaloa, sales engineering chapter lead at Infobip, shares some insights into the future of conversational chat channels in South Africa.

## ■ ***What are the key challenges that South African businesses face in meeting customer expectations for personalised and conversational interactions?***

South African businesses face key challenges in meeting customer expectations. Data privacy and regulation, particularly alignment with the PoPI Act, are critical considerations. Understanding the technological landscape of customers and adopting an omnichannel strategy are also crucial.

Customers today are discerning, and businesses need to optimise the entire customer experience, considering factors such as technology accessibility and preferred communication channels.

Regarding customer discernment, businesses need to optimise their entire customer experience, considering factors such as technology accessibility and preferred communication channels.

While some businesses have robust solutions, their efficacy is dependent on data quality and adherence to regulations. Despite having innovative use cases, businesses must obtain consent from customers to process their data in ways that add value. There are ways to navigate these challenges, but obtaining explicit consent ensures a more personalised and fulfilling experience for customers. Conversely, without consent, customers may only access basic or moderately personalised versions of services or solutions.



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■ ***South African consumers are increasingly looking for more humanised and personalised interactions with businesses. How can businesses make these interactions more comprehensive and natural?***

Addressing the need for personalised and humanised interactions is paramount in today's business landscape, especially with platforms like Infobip.

Firstly, it's crucial to recognise where the clients exist digitally and understand their preferred channels of communication. Whether it's WhatsApp, the website, or other platforms, implementing an omnichannel strategy tailored to their preferences is key.

Secondly, hyper-personalisation is vital. By discerning specific consumer behaviors and preferences, we can tailor their experiences accordingly. This necessitates moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and adopting an omnichannel strategy that caters to individual needs.

A CDP is a tool that aggregates data from various touchpoints, allowing businesses to gain insights into consumer behaviour across channels. With this wealth of information, businesses can craft hyper-personalised experiences tailored to each individual.

■ ***How does GenAI technology, in collaboration with ChatGPT, play a pivotal role in enhancing customer interactions and business results in the South African market?***

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) technology, in collaboration with ChatGPT, plays a crucial role in enhancing customer interactions within the South African market. By consuming business-specific data, AI facilitates tailored responses aligned with the company's products and services. This approach goes beyond generic internet data, providing a more powerful and personalised conversational experience for customers.

Highlighting the symbiotic relationship between GenAI technology and ChatGPT is essential in enhancing customer

interactions within the South African market. Through the integration of business-specific data, the AI ecosystem delivers responses precisely tailored to the company's offerings, enriching the customer experience and driving better business results.

This underscores a fundamental aspect of GenAI technology in conjunction with ChatGPT. While language models are pervasive, their true value emerges when trained on data specific to a business's domain. Incorporating company-specific information enables the AI model to generate responses resonating directly with customers, thereby amplifying the brand's presence and efficacy in the market.

■ ***Please provide some examples of how businesses in South Africa have leveraged ChatGPT-powered experiences to increase sales, save time, or improve customer satisfaction?***

One notable instance involves the DStv self-service platform. Through this service, users can seamlessly self-service on WhatsApp.

Another instance is where customers can now pay for their car license discs using a chatbot, eliminating the need to physically visit a traffic licensing department. This process involves uploading specific documentation related to their vehicle, triggering the AI in the backend to gather the necessary information and provide a prompt response, ensuring a secure transaction.

This exemplifies how businesses can leverage ChatGPT for self-service functionalities, simplifying payment processes and saving customer's valuable time.

In another example, some businesses have implemented ChatGPT in insurance-related use cases. Customers can engage with a chatbot to enquire about insurance options. The AI calculates the applicable rates based on user inputs, generating relevant policies and responses. In this scenario, ChatGPT plays a pivotal role by accessing data and crafting tailored dialogues to facilitate effective communication with the customer.

■ ***In the South African market, what industries or sectors do you see benefiting the most from GenAI and ChatGPT-powered experiences, and why?***

Retail stands out as a key industry benefiting from GenAI and ChatGPT-powered experiences in South Africa. The ability to offer hyperpersonalised experiences based on individual preferences is a significant advantage.

Additionally, banking, finance, and insurance sectors also benefit from self-service capabilities and personalised content delivery, improving overall customer engagement.

■ ***As customer preferences and technology continue to evolve, what is the vision for the future of customer-business interactions in South Africa and how does ChatGPT fit into that vision?***

The vision for the future of customer-business interactions in South Africa is one where conversations become more personalised and humanised. ChatGPT plays a crucial role in realising this vision by strengthening business content to create conversational experiences for clients. Unlike static data found on websites, conversational interactions add a human touch to how businesses engage with customers.

ChatGPT enables businesses to provide a more personalised experience, accelerating the rate at which services are delivered. Instead of merely retrieving information from a knowledge base and presenting it robotically, ChatGPT generates conversational responses that cater to the unique needs of each customer.

Powered by natural language processing, ChatGPT can discern intent and sentiment, enhancing the interaction by responding appropriately to the customer's emotional state. This capability instils conversation with a human-like quality, making it more engaging and effective.

Moreover, ChatGPT goes beyond just providing responses; it can generate various types of content, including images, thereby enriching the overall cognitive experience for customers.

■ ***Can you share any success stories or case studies of South African businesses that have seen tangible improvements in their customer engagement and business outcomes after adopting ChatGPT-powered experiences?***

Numerous success stories illustrate the tangible improvements in customer engagement and business outcomes after adopting ChatGPT.

Retail banks, for example, have created AI assistants tailored to their portfolios, offering conversational experiences for the opening of accounts and issue resolution. The evolution from basic chatbots to sophisticated, conversational AI showcases the positive impact on customer interactions in South African businesses.

■ ***With privacy and data protection being a significant concern for consumers, how do you ensure the security of customer data and maintain compliance with South African regulations in the context of ChatGPT-powered experiences?***

Guaranteeing the security of customer data and adhering to regulations, particularly those in South Africa, are top priorities when implementing ChatGPT-powered experiences.

This is how we are specifically tackling privacy and data protection concerns:

- **Data Encryption:** All customer data, including interactions with ChatGPT, undergoes encryption both in transit and at rest. This ensures sensitive information remains protected from unauthorised access.
- **User Consent and Transparency:** We transparently communicate to users how their data will be utilised and obtain explicit consent before collecting any personal information. Building trust through clear communication is fundamental.
- **Anonymisation and Pseudonymisation:** Where feasible, we utilise anonymised or pseudonymised data to mitigate the risk of identifying individuals, particularly when handling sensitive information.
- **Data Minimisation:** We strictly collect and retain only the necessary data for the intended purpose, reducing the potential impact of a data breach by minimising the volume of stored data.
- **Regular Security Audits:** Conducting routine security audits helps us identify and address potential vulnerabilities, ensuring that our security measures remain current and effective.
- **Compliance with South African Regulations:** We stay abreast of South African data protection regulations, such as the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and implement policies and procedures to align with these standards.
- **Secure Hosting and Storage:** We opt for secure and reputable hosting providers that adhere to industry standards and regulatory requirements. Our data storage solutions employ robust security measures.
- **Employee Training:** Our staff undergoes comprehensive training on data protection best practices and the significance of maintaining privacy. Educating employees helps mitigate the risk of human error leading to security breaches.
- **Access Controls:** We enforce stringent access controls to ensure only authorised personnel have access to customer data. Regular reviews and updates of access permissions based on job roles are conducted.
- **Incident Response Plan:** We have developed a comprehensive incident response plan to effectively address

potential security breaches, including steps for notifying affected parties and regulatory authorities.

- **Regular Updates and Patching:** Keeping all software and systems, including ChatGPT, updated with the latest security patches is a priority. Regular updates and patching help address known vulnerabilities promptly.
- **Independent Security Assessments:** We engage in independent security assessments to further validate the effectiveness of our security measures and identify areas for improvement.

It's essential to work closely with legal and compliance teams to ensure that your practices align with South African regulations and that your approach to data protection is robust and comprehensive.

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