What Is Agentic AI and How Will It Impact Customer Service?

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> Agentic AI presents yet another wave of transformation for customer service, offering the potential to automate interactions and processes, both for service teams and for the customers making requests. Customer service and support leaders must remain informed to stay ahead of this fast-moving trend.

Overview

Impacts

- Customer access to agentic AI will fundamentally reshape the nature of inbound service interactions. Service teams will need to adapt to a future where customers leverage AI agents powered by agentic AI to initiate, manage and negotiate service requests on their behalf.
- Agentic AI will automate a growing number of routine tasks for employees within the customer service function — such as analyzing data, making decisions, and executing actions — leading to more efficient issue resolution and personalized customer interactions.
- The adoption of agentic AI will drive a transformation in service operations, requiring new roles and skills, evolving workforce models and a redefined approach to AI-human collaboration.

Recommendations

- Evaluate vendor claims regarding agentic AI capabilities carefully, hype around this technology is leading to confusing messaging and claims. Assess each capability individually against known use cases and definitions.
- Prioritize organizational readiness by focusing on new roles and skills, data, knowledge development and governance.
- Collaborate closely with IT departments to guide and prioritize investments in agentic AI, ensuring alignment with service transformation goals.
- Monitor industry trends and vendor releases continuously to stay informed about the rapidly evolving landscape of agentic AI in customer service.

Strategic Planning Assumptions

- By 2030, 50% of all service requests will be initiated by machine customers powered by agentic AI systems.
- By 2029, agentic AI will autonomously resolve 80% of common customer service issues without human intervention, leading to a 30% reduction in operational costs.

Introduction

Until now, generative AI (GenAI) models have performed tasks like generating text and summarizing interactions but haven't been able to act on their own. Agentic AI is changing that paradigm. Tools are being developed to give AI systems more agency — the ability to act autonomously, adapt based on context and execute goals in complex environments with minimal supervision.

Agentic AI refers to AI systems that go beyond generating text or analyzing data based on user prompts. These systems can also plan and execute autonomous actions, dynamically adapting their approach based on context and ongoing analysis to achieve a specific goal.

Unlike other approaches to automation, such as robotic process automation (RPA), agentic AI does not rely on scripts or predetermined outputs. Instead, these systems can operate freely, guided by natural language instructions to solve problems independently — prioritizing and delegating actions while navigating systems, channels and UIs.

This greatly enhances AI's potential in a customer service context. Agentic AI tools can play a larger role in resolving issues by conducting research and taking action across systems to fulfill requests. They can support teams in resolving internal tasks, such as cleansing data and updating records. Customers can also use agentic tools, employing AI agents to navigate portals, submit requests and communicate directly with service teams.

The advent of agentic AI may heighten top-down pressure on customer service leaders to reduce service costs via automation, but the impact may go far beyond cost control. To be successful, leaders will need to understand this technology and how it complements the expanding array of AI techniques and capabilities available to service teams (see Note 1 below for a comparison of common AI technologies in customer service).

As agentic AI matures and integrates into consumer and enterprise software, it is expected to profoundly impact service leaders, employees and their customers. This research examines how agentic AI will transform customer service and offers recommendations for service leaders preparing for this shift.

Impacts and Recommendations

Machine Customers Powered by Agentic AI Will Transform Service Volume

The way customers engage with service and support is changing, driven by the rapid adoption of GenAI (see Third-Party GenAI Will Eclipse Your Company's Customer Service). But while today's GenAI tools are limited to assisting users with information, agentic AI will take this further, proactively initiating service requests on behalf of customers. Over time, this will affect the nature of inbound service interactions, requiring teams to support both humans and an increasing number of machine customers powered by agentic AI tools.

For customers employing these tools, the service experience will be significantly different. Instead of merely informing a customer about how to cancel a membership, an AI agent could navigate a provider's website to initiate the cancellation, complete a form or even place a call. Similarly, a business customer seeking optimal shipping rates might assign an AI agent to conduct research and negotiate directly with providers.

In this context, the interaction with the organization is no longer driven by the human customer, but rather by a machine customer powered by an agentic AI system. While the concept of machine-customer-led service interactions is not new, to date the capabilities have been limited by the technology. Agentic AI will advance these capabilities to near full autonomy, opening the door to far greater flexibility in their deployment and use.

Customers are likely to delegate service requests, especially if they perceive it will reduce their own effort. By 2024, 55% of customers had already attempted to use GenAI to resolve a service issue, [1] and 80% claimed they would accept the use of AI in customer service if it made tasks easier to accomplish. [2]

Beyond the tasks that customers actively choose to delegate, agentic AI also offers the potential for proactive issue identification and resolution. Consider an agentic AI system that could passively monitor your inbox or device for changes, proactively raising and resolving issues on your behalf.

As agentic AI becomes more prevalent, service organizations should prepare for a shift in the nature and volume of inbound interactions. Interactions initiated by machine customers powered by agentic AI, at the direction of humans or through automated systems, will become increasingly common. Over time, this may fundamentally shift the relationship between service teams and their customers, impacting opportunities for value delivery and shifting the type of customer data that can be gathered via these interactions.

Recommendations:

- **Prepare for Increased Automation:** Service leaders must anticipate and prepare for an increase in automated service interactions driven by both customer-controlled and company-owned AI agents. This will require investing in scalable infrastructure, optimizing self-service channels, and developing robust systems to monitor and manage inbound bot traffic.
- **Rethink Service Operating Models:** Traditional service operating models may need to be rule-based and redesigned to effectively handle a shift in the nature of service volume. Dynamic routing systems that detect whether the customer represents a human user or an AI agent will be required to identify inbound interactions guiding them to a suitable channel.

- **Establish Clear Policies for AI Agent Interactions:** Organizations will require comprehensive policies and guidelines to govern the interactions led by AI agents (both customer-owned and company-owned). Issues such as data privacy, security protocols and escalation procedures may need to be rethought as human customers become further removed from the equation.
- **Seek Opportunities to Partner With Product Teams:** Service leaders should consider partnering with product development teams to embed agentic AI within company-owned products. This integration can proactively detect and resolve customer issues, reducing the need for external AI agents to escalate requests.

Agentic AI Will Automate a Growing Number of Routine Service Tasks

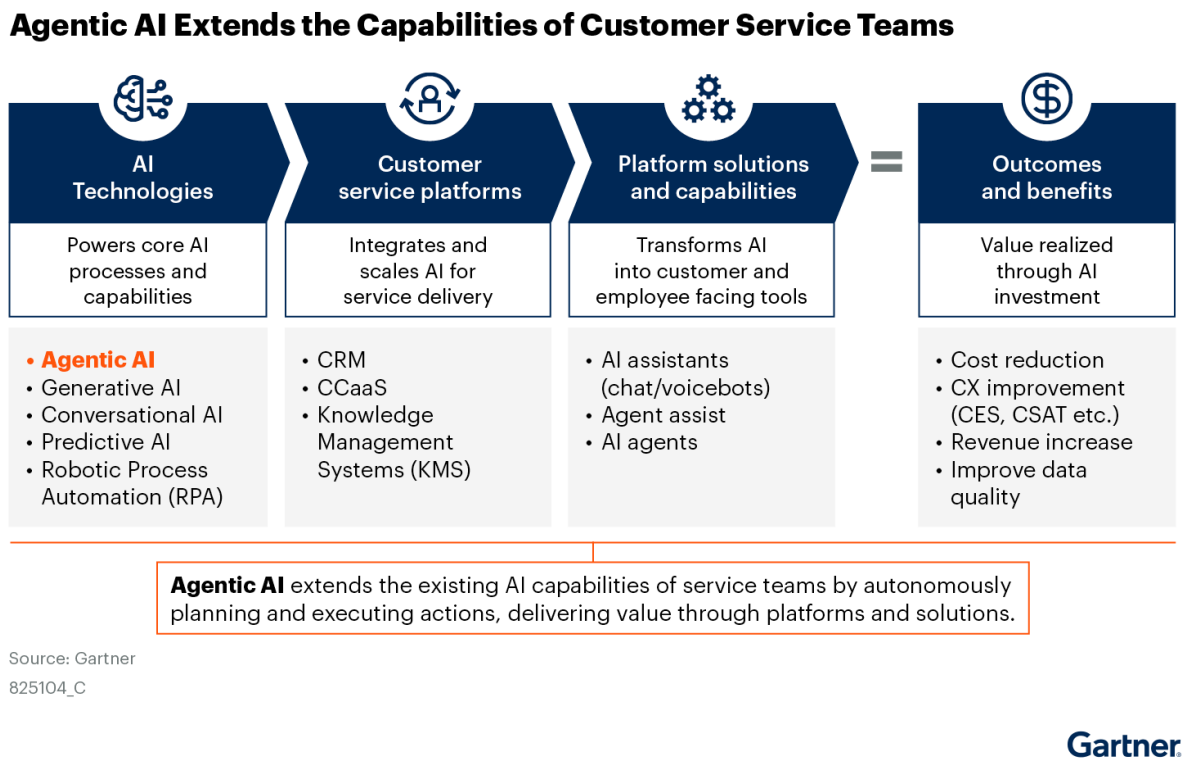
Agentic AI is poised to impact customer service operations by automating complex tasks, such as data analysis, decision making and action taking. These capabilities can enhance the customer experience while reducing operational costs. For example, after a customer makes a purchase, an AI agent could retrieve order and interaction history and set follow-up actions, such as sending a confirmation message or scheduling a follow-up. Simultaneously, the AI agent could manage back-end processes by updating records, notifying fulfillment teams or triggering an inventory check.

What sets agentic AI apart from traditional approaches is its ability to extend automation beyond rule-based workflows. The adaptability of these systems will enable service teams to automate an increasing number of complex tasks — from handling multistep customer transactions to completing back-office processes. By increasing the opportunities for automation across customer-facing and internal processes, agentic AI has the potential to drive significant cost savings through automation and streamlined issue resolution.

For service teams already under pressure to realize cost savings with GenAI, these advancements will only accelerate expectations for transformation — placing greater emphasis on rethinking service roles, optimizing workflows, and, in some cases, reshaping headcount strategies.

As teams explore the transformative potential of agentic AI, it is important to fully understand its capabilities and limitations. Like the generative AI that came before it, agentic AI is not a magic bullet that can solve any problem. Agentic AI is best viewed as a tool whose value is realized when combined with other techniques, platforms and capabilities (see Figure 1). For example, an agentic AI tasked to solve a customer issue may draw on the recommendations provided by a next-best-action engine, access records from a CRM system and converse via a virtual assistant designed to facilitate interactions and routing. For a deeper understanding on how to implement Agentic AI in CRM see How Should You Get Started With Agentic AI for CRM?

Figure 1: Agentic AI Extends the AI Capabilities of Service Teams



Recommendations:

- **Embrace the Potential for Efficiency and Cost Reduction:** Organizations should strategically implement agentic AI to automate low-risk, routine tasks within self-service channels. Additionally, agentic AI can support human agents during complex and value-added interactions by providing recommendations for approval, subsequently executing actions on behalf of the human agent. This approach can result in cost optimization and enhanced operational efficiency.

- **Lay the Groundwork:** While agentic AI may offer a lower complexity path to automation vs. traditional approaches such as RPA, success will still require cross-enterprise coordination and planning, ensuring the necessary maturity with data, systems and knowledge etc. Organizations should prepare now by assessing their readiness for AI (see Tool: Assess Your Readiness for GenAI Use Cases in Customer Service).

- **Address Potential Workforce Impacts:** The automation potential of agentic AI may raise concerns about job security among customer service employees. Service leaders should proactively address these concerns by providing training opportunities, fostering new skill development and emphasizing the evolving nature of service roles.

- **Ensure Trustworthy AI Implementation:** Invest in the necessary skills, practices and technologies to ensure that agentic AI operates reliably, ethically and in accordance with organizational policies and regulatory requirements. Focus on developing and deploying AI agents that are trustworthy and transparent in their decision-making processes. Begin with routine, low-risk interactions and expand to complex and value-added interactions once agent AI is proven successful with the help of human evaluation.

Agentic AI Will Transform Customer Service Organizational Structures

The integration of agentic AI, both in the marketplace and within organizations, will significantly impact the structure of service and support departments. While an effective implementation of agentic AI may boost efficiency and reduce costs, relying solely on cost reduction via headcount reduction would be shortsighted. Companies should leverage AI's ability to collaborate with and complement human agents, enhancing effectiveness and service levels to stay competitive.

By automating routine tasks and providing actionable insights, organizations can allocate more resources to innovation and growth initiatives, ultimately gaining a competitive edge in their respective markets.

This process automation will lead to changes in roles and the creation of entirely new positions within customer service and support. We have identified three potential impacts on the customer service workforce:

- **Increase in AI-Related Positions:** Roles such as AI trainers, data analysts, knowledge managers, and AI system supervisors, which were previously limited to a few IT departments, will become critical for customer service and support.
- **Creation of Entirely New Roles:** New positions may emerge, such as:
  - Efficiency experts, who streamline operations, automate tasks, and optimize resources
  - Personalization specialists, who leverage AI to create real-time, hyperpersonalized customer interactions
  - Exceptional interventionalists, who step in only when AI requires assistance with customers
  - Resolution supervisors, who oversee AI interactions and intervene when errors require human input (see Future Agent Roles in Customer Service Interactions)
- **Shift in the Nature of Customer-Facing Roles:** These roles will need to evolve, focusing more on complex problem-solving, empathy and personalized relationship management.

As the service organization evolves, service leaders may find their own position within the enterprise beginning to shift. The emergence of agentic AI will further accelerate the transformation initiated by GenAI. In this future, the success of the function and the leaders themselves will rely greatly on the strategic application of technology and the use of customer data. Over time, the position of the function within the enterprise and the skills required for successful leadership will change. To be successful, leaders will need to forge strong, lasting partnerships with colleagues in IT and data and analytics departments.

Recommendations:

- **Implement Performance Evaluations and Metrics:** Organizations should measure AI system effectiveness and human-AI collaboration quality and reassess customer satisfaction models in a marketplace where agentic AI interacts with other agentic AI.
- **Conduct Upskilling and Training:** Invest in training programs to enhance AI literacy, data analysis and emotional intelligence. Encourage continuous learning to help employees adapt to new technologies and roles.

- **Encourage a Collaborative Culture Between Human Employees and AI Systems:** Provide training and resources to help your workforce understand and adapt to working alongside AI technologies. Promote cross-functional teams to explore innovative applications of agentic AI and share best practices across departments. By fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous learning, your organization can maximize the benefits of agentic AI and drive ongoing innovation and growth.

Evidence

[1] **2024 Gartner State of the Customer Survey.** This annual survey enables customer service and support leaders to understand trends in customer preference and behavior. The latest survey was fielded in December 2023 and included customers whose service interactions were in various industries. The sample included 5,728 customers in the U.S. (n = 2,796), the U.K. (n = 1,204), Canada (n = 721), Australia (n = 522), New Zealand (n = 229) and Singapore (n = 256). The sample included customers in both B2C (n = 4,928) and B2B (n = 800) customer service interactions. Disclaimer: Results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents surveyed.

[2] **2024 Gartner Managing Customer Service Journeys Survey.** This survey was conducted online from 5 August through 9 September 2024 to understand customer experiences with customer service and support interactions, as well as their attitudes toward the use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) for customer service. In total, 5,459 people participated. Survey participants were from North America (n = 3,346), Asia/Pacific (n = 241), Oceania (n = 720) and Western Europe (n = 1,152). Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

Note 1

Table 1: Comparison of Common AI Technologies in Customer Service

(Enlarged table in Appendix)

AI Technology/Technique	
Term	**Description**
Agentic AI	AI systems capable of autonomous decision making and action, often operating with minimal human oversight
Generative AI	Technique for generating new content (e.g., text, images, conversational responses) based on patterns learned from existing data
Predictive AI	Technique for training models to identify patterns in data, making predictions or forecasts to support decision making
Robotic process automation (RPA)	Technology for automating repetitive, rule-based tasks across software applications. Utilizes rule-based and AI techniques.
Conversational AI	Technology that enables AI-driven natural language interactions, using natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning to simulate human conversation
AI Capability/Solution	
Term	**Description**
Virtual agents	Customer-facing agents (e.g., chatbots, voicebots) that handle inquiries and can provide assistance in real time, using AI or rule-based techniques.
Agent assist	Capability for providing real-time insights or suggestions to human agents during customer interactions (often powered by AI tools)
AI agents	Broad term for AI applications that perform a wide set of tasks (not only managing interactions), often powered by agentic AI systems.
Machine customers	Any nonhuman entity that can act on a customer's behalf (e.g., submit a service request), often powered by AI

Source: Gartner (February 2025)

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