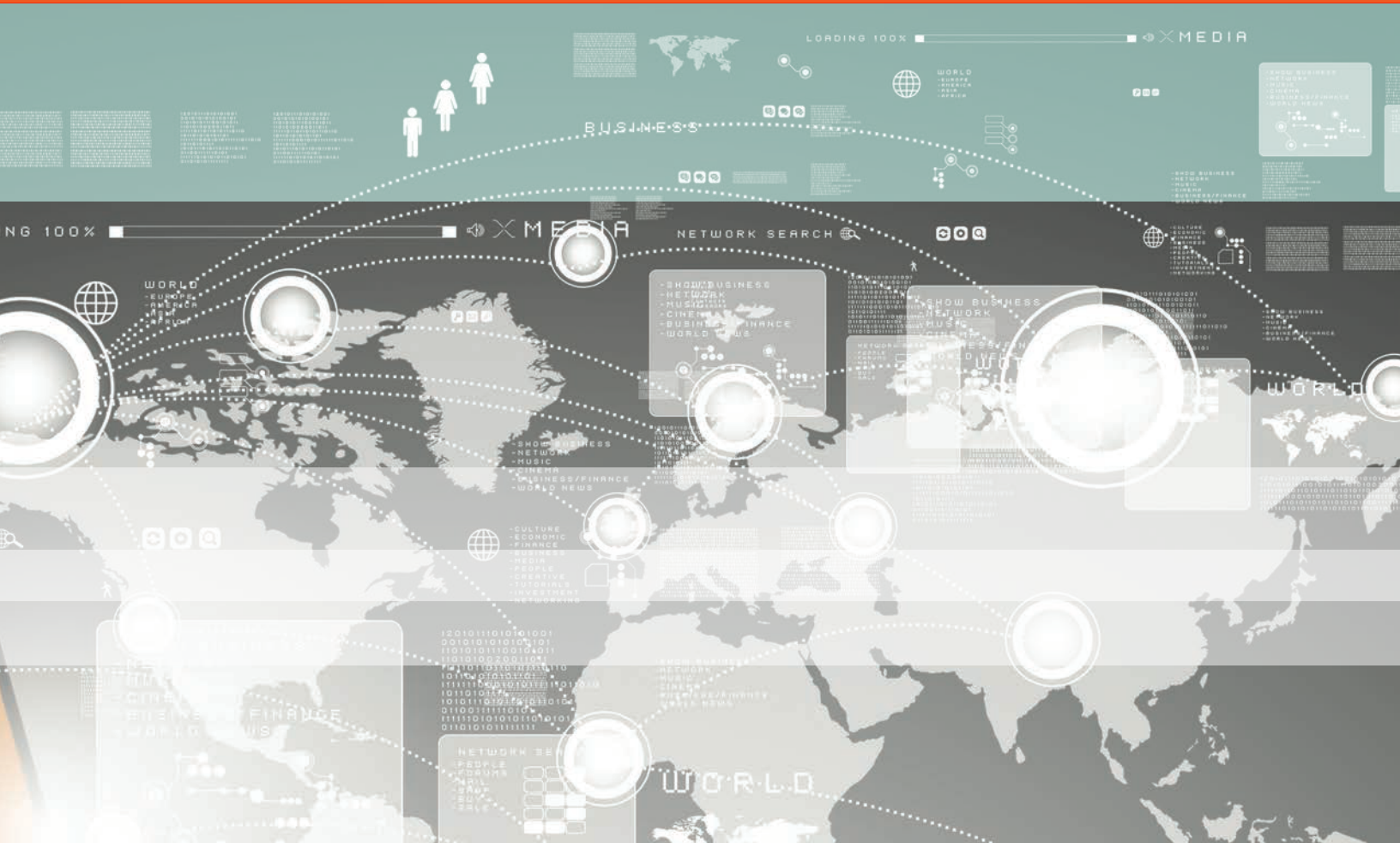


Decision Makers' Guide to Enterprise Intelligent Assistants

(May 2022)



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While it's important to acknowledge we're still in the "early days" in the development and acceptance of Enterprise Intelligent Assistants, the proliferation of chatbots, voicebots and virtual assistants has already reached billions of end users. With a growing audience, the number of use cases will grow as well, and there is no turning back.

Opus Research presents a comprehensive assessment of enterprise-grade Intelligent Assistant solution providers bringing natural language processing, machine learning, AI and analytics to support customer care, self-service, employee assistance, messaging and device control. This report evaluates 21 firms to better understand enabling platforms & technology, integration points & scalability, track record and future vision for enterprise-scale Conversational AI.

In this document, Opus Research evaluates the offering according to criteria that go beyond the immediate impacts on customer satisfaction and loyalty to address long-term value of insights garnered from analysis of conversations and shared among product development teams, marketing departments and human resources.

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Addressing First-Order Concerns for Intelligent Assistants

Customers have spoken! ...or texted or messaged. Millions of people routinely now converse with their favorite brands through “voicebots,” “chatbots,” or dialog boxes in their mobile apps, websites, and messaging channels. To stay competitive, thousands of companies feel compelled to integrate elements of “Conversational AI” into their customer care infrastructures.

Yet, the path is not clearly defined. There are literally thousands of firms or individuals that claim to have the technology and resources to build bots and help companies automate the handling of routine, frequently invoked actions. In this document, Opus Research evaluates the offerings of 21 firms according to criteria that go beyond the immediate impacts on customer satisfaction and loyalty to address long-term value of insights garnered from analysis of conversations and shared among product development teams, marketing departments, and human resources.

Successful Enterprise Intelligent Assistants address the first-order concerns of customers by employing so-called “Conversational AI” to recognize intent expressed in natural language input and respond with consistently correct answers or actions, including the transfer of the conversation to a live customer care agent, when appropriate. From the customer’s perspective, the pay-off is faster resolution of issues like “Where’s my package?,” “Did you receive my payment?” or “How do I cancel my service?.” These conversations are a rich source of insights and correct responses that, with the help of machine learning and human supervision, will continue to improve the quality of responses and, customer satisfaction.

Our evaluation gives higher marks to solution providers that take an approach that employs artificial intelligence to augment human intelligence (and vice versa) when deploying intelligent assistants (IAs).

An “agent assist” or “co-pilot” approach to supporting customer care agents in the course of real-time conversations are also well-regarded. So are solution providers that provide the tools and workflows for agents to serve as subject matter experts (SMEs) that can train “bots” to provide the best possible answers over time.

Other attributes that define successful EIA solution providers include:

- **Focus on CX and UX:** IAs are the natural user interface through which both customers and employees benefit from Conversational AI.
- **Offers for two distinct segments:** Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) and newcomers have contrasting needs with experienced enterprises. This is satisfied by tooling that spans so-called “no-code/low code” as well as “pro-code” approaches.
- **Place emphasis on outcomes:** Positive outcomes, like task completion, greatly improve customer sentiment and satisfaction with a corresponding positive impact on employee morale and retention.

- **Take a cloud-based, multi-vendor approach:** IA solutions leverage all four pillars of the Conversational Cloud: Self-Service, Application integration and Automation; Interaction Processing/Intelligent Routing and Data/Conversational Intelligence.
- **Offering significant “zero-day capabilities” remain a factor:** Premium placed on what works “out of the box,” including pre-configured conversation models, domain expertise, and connectors to backend systems.
- **Pay attention to Orchestration:** To support the training and maintenance of IVAs that carry out asynchronous conversations between companies and their customers and involving access to backend IT systems calls for unprecedented amounts of monitoring and tooling.
- **Build communities:** Successful solutions depend on citizen developers (internal) as well as partnerships with system integrators and business process outsourcers as go-to-market partners.

Selection Criteria Anticipate Mature Intelligent Assistants

Opus Research started to monitor implementations of Enterprise Intelligent Assistants more than seven years ago. At that time, only very large companies with budgets surrounding “digital transformation” were making investments in development, deployment, and maintenance of IAs. They were the proverbial “Early Adopters” seeking a competitive edge from gaining experience with new technologies.

In the first quarter of 2022, Opus Research conducted a survey of 250 firms that offer customers access to customer care and other services through bots. It reflects a new reality where less than one-out-of-five (18%) consider themselves in a “pilot” phase of deployment. The rest have already gone live with their intelligent virtual assistants. Roughly one-third of the total see themselves in early days of live deployment, while the same number (32%) are already handling conversations of “medium complexity.”

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About Opus Research

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