

White Paper

10 Things to Ask Your Next Virtual Assistant

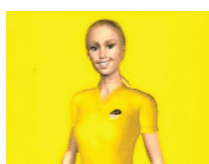
Synopsis

Our websites have become the service channel of choice for an increasing number of our customers and citizens. Studies show that people prefer to visit websites when they need to solve an issue, gather information or make a purchasing decision. Yet, what's missing from the online experience is the personal service that differentiates the web experience and guides the visitor to the information or solution that they are looking for.

Industry analysts have identified that a new generation of Virtual Assistants (intelligent website avatars) can offer this personal touch. Organizations like IKEA, Orange, Credit Suisse and Yello Strom have seen the benefits that Virtual Assistants can bring to their online businesses. In this paper we suggest some questions you need to ask when selecting yours. [READ ON...](#)

Virtual Assistant

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Eve is the avatar of Yello Strom, an energy company.



Customers using Virtual Assistants from Artificial Solutions have realized reductions in inbound calls and email to call centers by 30 to 40%.

Say Hello to Eve

Or more correctly, let's say "guten tag".

Eve is a Virtual Assistant that helps people using the German electricity supplier Yello Strom's website – answering questions and dealing with customer enquiries. Eve is from a good family of online virtual customer service agents from Artificial Solutions that can maintain a dialogue with your visitors, answering questions and assisting in finding information, used by organizations as diverse as IKEA and the Swedish Social Security Agency (Försäkringskassan) to better serve their customers over the web.

Eve is capable of holding 'human-like' intelligent, two-way conversations. She understands questions, responds with meaningful replies and performs related tasks such as navigating to a relevant webpage or helping visitors complete a form. Eve remembers facts, learns from the conversations and can access online information by integrating with enterprise systems.

Powered by Teneo, the award-winning Natural Language Interaction (NLI) engine from Artificial Solutions, Eve is not just a pretty face. She is being able to troubleshoot, answer complex questions, engage in an interactive dialogue and connect to enterprise systems, and these attributes mean that we are proud that Eve could be considered a third generation Virtual Assistant (according to the definition by Forrester Research).

Virtual Assistants like Eve are not just a gimmick either, they deliver incredible value to the organizations they 'work' for – customers using Virtual Assistants from Artificial Solutions have realized reductions in inbound calls and email to call centers by 30 to 40% - a significant cost saving.

So, what are the questions to ask, if you wanted an Eve of your own?

Ten Virtual Assistant interview questions

1. How intelligent are you?

OK, so you might not ask a real interviewee this question, but intelligence will be a key attribute of your Virtual Assistant. Your goal when 'hiring' a Virtual Assistant is to deliver genuine two-way, human-like conversations that engage the customer and if you are going to ask one question and not ten, this is the one.

In order to understand and interpret the meaning and context of customer queries, your Virtual Assistant will need to intelligently apply this knowledge to real customer interactions. Like their human customer service counterparts, without intelligence, the Virtual Assistant will not be effective and the customer experience will be damaged, rather than enhanced. Therefore the ability to build real intelligence into Virtual Assistants is the primary attribute organizations need.

Virtual Assistant

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Imbuing personality into a Virtual Assistant takes a special kind of experience and skill in the psychology of customer service.

Virtual Assistants from Artificial Solutions are built with this intelligent capability to do more than just recognize keywords, but to apply linguistic techniques, learned behavior and industry and business context to the conversation. This advanced interaction engine is then able to resolve queries, answer questions, provide relevant links to information as well as driving an interaction with the back office – solving customer issues and queries effortlessly, efficiently and cost-effectively.

2. What are your qualifications?

If you are going to put someone in the critical path of customer satisfaction, clearly track record and references are a must. How long have they been doing this and what benefits have other organizations, similar to yours, seen from the services of this Virtual Assistant?

Teneo, the intelligence behind Artificial Solutions' Virtual Assistants has great credentials, with references from major organizations around the world, a track record established over a decade of providing natural language intelligence to similar clients and has up picked prestigious industry awards on the way. Award winning? Absolutely!

In 2008 Artificial Solutions won The Loebner Prize in Artificial Intelligence – the first Turing test¹. The test is named after Alan Turing, the British mathematician and accomplished early computer scientist, who in 1950, asked the question: "If a computer could think, how could we tell?" The test is to see if someone can, through conversation, believe that a machine is human and our technology scooped this prestigious award.

3. Will you fit in here?

The Virtual Assistant needs to reflect the culture, language and values of your organization, reinforcing and protecting your brand. When your visitors interact with the Virtual Assistant, it's natural to feel it has a personality and this needs to be tailored to each application and to the audience it is interacting with. For one company, for example a financial organization with a corporate audience concerned about privacy and compliance, the language and appearance of the Virtual Assistant must be very different to a Virtual Assistant serving a teenage audience buying skateboards.

Imbuing personality into a Virtual Assistant takes a special kind of experience and skill in the psychology of customer service, something that the Knowledge Engineers at Artificial Solutions have an established background in. Experience that is built on a decade of artificial intelligence experience building the knowledge base and linguistic rules that breathe this contextualized intelligence into Virtual Assistants to fit the diverse industries and global nature of Artificial Solutions' customers.

¹ www.loebner.net/Prizef/loebner-prize.html



The context of a conversation, the depth of the knowledge base and its intelligent application is a subtle, yet essential science.

4. What do you know about our business?

A standard interview question that applies equally here, it's essential that our Virtual Assistant can be given context and knowledge, both in terms of general knowledge and of course information that is specific to our business or industry that will be useful to the visitor.

An intelligent natural language interaction with a Virtual Assistant must therefore be underpinned by a sophisticated knowledge base that give the Virtual Assistants the context and relevancy needed for a conversation with the visitor. The knowledge that a Virtual Assistant arrives with, the languages it can speak and how you prepare your Virtual Assistant to add value to your visitors is therefore an essential question to ask.

For example to an IKEA customer the word 'Tag' is the product name for a specific door handle, to a German it means day and an English speaker something completely different. So the context of a conversation, the depth of the knowledge base and its intelligent application is a subtle, yet essential science.

An established track record means that Artificial Solutions customers benefit from a library of vertical experience, an established expertise in natural language and a depth of general knowledge that they are able to breathe into each Virtual Assistant – right out of the box.

Although of course each Virtual Assistant needs to find its way around its new surroundings and the unique language, products and services of each organization and its audience. Artificial Solutions have not only engineered their Virtual Assistants to learn, to remember and adapt – but also to make it easy for customers to arm their Virtual Assistants with the specific knowledge they need to add value from day one.

5. Will you work as hard as our website?

Your Virtual Assistant needs to keep pace with that most hardworking customer service representative – your website.

Your website is always on, it can handle the peaks of traffic that are thrown at it – even when Oprah Winfrey mentions your product on her show, a popular celebrity Twitterer tweets about you, or your CEO makes the 6 o'clock news. Your new Virtual Assistant needs to be there.

Right now, all over the globe, Virtual Assistants from Artificial Solutions are having millions of customer conversations – the proven, scalable technology that drives them never rests.



A decade of experience that gives the platform a maturity and an enviable track record in the industry.

6. Sprechen sie Deutsch?

We've talked about Eve who's fluent in German, the critical attribute here is not just a bit of clumsy translation – it's essential that the underlying knowledge based is localized, that the Virtual Assistant is able to adapt the linguistic and grammatical rules of each language.

Artificial Solutions is a truly global company whose folks come from all over. Supporting language and cultural differences is baked into their DNA and that of the Virtual Assistants. Supporting your needs in German isn't an add-on; it's simply what they do.

7. Are you prepared to be flexible?

As pretty as Eve is, implementing Virtual Assistant technology is not just about setting up an avatar. Can your prospective Virtual Assistant pick up the phone, chat on instant messenger, update Facebook or send a text using SMS?

Teneo, the Natural Language Interaction technology that drives the Virtual Assistants from Artificial Solutions can be applied to multiple customer service touch points, from SMS and instant messaging, through understanding and responding to sentiment on social media to using voice integration to handle telephone calls.

8. Will you get along with our other systems?

Once you get your Virtual Assistant talking, the next step is to enable it to help the website visitor to achieve their reason for being there. The visitor arrived on a mission, maybe it was as simple as learning something about your products or services, but perhaps they wanted to complete a transaction, to find out if something was in stock, book an appointment or to get delivery information. For the Virtual Assistant to truly add value to this web experience it needs to simply take care of it, to do more than refer them to a web page, but interact with the back office and seamlessly serve this customer.

Virtual Assistants from Artificial Solutions do exactly this, even joining together a number of interactions with disparate systems into a single, simple customer service experience for the visitor.

9. What do you think we are doing wrong?

Like any great employee, your Virtual Assistant should be able to give you feedback, to suggest where a process might be improved or report back what it is that every customer is asking for.

Virtual Assistants from Artificial Solutions come complete with powerful customer intelligence tools that continually analyze conversations, providing detailed customer feedback such as common concerns, product issues and market

Virtual Assistant

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opportunities. Deploying a Virtual Assistant therefore gives an organization unique analysis (over traditional web analytics) of the voice of the customer, an incredibly useful insight and a business advantage as they refine the way they engage over the web, their products and services.

10. Are you well turned out?

We've discussed that the contextualized language and knowledge of the Virtual Assistant as being essential to engage the site visitor – but equally a key influencer of the quality of that experience is going to be the appearance of the Virtual Assistant.

Virtual Assistants from Artificial Solutions can be easily adapted to fit into the context of your website, your services, your products and the expectation of your audience.

Conclusion

Hiring your own Eve

Hopefully we've given you some high level questions to ask that will get you on track to hiring your very own Eve, a customer service asset that helps and engages your visitors and maintains your brand and service values. Across the ten questions there are three main attributes that contribute to a successful virtual assistant:

- **The underlying natural language interaction intelligence, the capacity to adapt and learn and manage the complexity of a contextualized and relevant conversation in the language of your visitors.**
- **The adaptability of the Virtual Assistant in terms of appearance and industry, business, cultural and language knowledge. The depth of the general and industry knowledge that the Virtual Assistant comes with and the ability to augment this with local knowledge.**
- **The technical requirement to integrate with the back office and to be as reliable and scalable as the web property it supports.**

As with all hiring process, all of these points should be supported by good references and a solid track record in doing this with organizations as demanding as yours.

Teneo Virtual Assistants

The Teneo Virtual Assistant from Artificial Solutions responds to each of these needs, with a decade of experience that gives the platform a maturity and an enviable track record in the industry that was built by award winning leaders in their field.

Virtual Assistant

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Virtual Assistants like Eve add value to the website interaction and to the brand as a whole.

The powerful Teneo natural language interaction engine that drives the Virtual Assistants, was built as a sophisticated multi-language natural language interaction platform from day one and breathes the intelligence into Virtual Assistants like Eve, meaning she's not just a pretty face, but is able to add value to the website interaction and to the brand as a whole.

This industry track record, combined with a decade of research and development, means that Artificial Solutions customers are not reinventing the wheel. Each Virtual Assistant encapsulates that experience and comes with an extensive knowledge base that drives these conversations and enables each implementation to be easily adapted to a new environment and to quickly provide value.

About Artificial Solutions

Artificial Solutions builds the world's most humanlike, intelligent and capable virtual assistants, available on any platform, in any language, anywhere. By delivering advanced intelligent features, the customer experience is improved and significant cost savings can be achieved as complex issues are resolved without the need to revert to a live agent.

With Artificial Solutions' Virtual Assistants customers save time and effort; and organizations save money by streamlining their customer service operation. We achieve this using Teneo, our award-winning, natural language interaction technology that enables people and computers to engage in intelligent conversation, over any digital channel and in numerous languages.

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About Artificial Solutions

Artificial Solutions develops and implements software-as-a-service based virtual assistants that allow intelligent conversations between people and computers to be held in 23 different languages across multiple channels including the web, mobile (smart phone), SMS, email, social networks and live-chat. Utilizing its natural language interaction technology, Artificial Solutions helps organizations improve customer experience and reduce the cost of online queries. With its development centre in Stockholm, its employees represent 30 nationalities in offices in Sweden, Spain, UK, Italy, France, Slovenia, Germany, Denmark, Japan and the Netherlands. For more information, visit www.artificial-solutions.com
