

AI AND MACHINE LEARNING

SHIFTING THE FUTURE OF SALES

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INTRODUCTION

The world of artificial intelligence (AI) conjures up colorful ideas about space-age life: robot assistants, self-driving cars, and now even drone delivery. But for me, one of the most exciting areas of AI advancement is where it meets the customer head-on: sales and marketing. Indeed, you may not even know it, but many of the customer service and sales representatives you “speak” to every day are not people at all. They’re smart bots and AI-powered tools designed to help businesses meet the increasing demands of customers, and to find even more customers to please. And, that’s only the tip of the

iceberg when it comes to AI’s power when combined with machine learning and predictive analytics.

Using AI well, sales teams can do more than save money and man-hours—they can better anticipate their customers’ needs. They can vastly improve sales. They can spend fewer hours responding to customer concerns, and yet answer them even faster. Companies all over the world have already discovered the magic AI can bring to their sales efforts. Those who haven’t? They’re likely to fall behind.



MAKING AI WORK FOR YOU

No matter what industry you're currently working in, there are many ways to use AI and machine learning to your benefit. From qualifying leads to personalizing communications, AI is making it even easier than ever to connect with customers—and close the deal. The following are just a few ways your company could benefit from an AI-powered assistant or sales and marketing platform.

QUALIFIED LEADS

No one likes a cold call. And there's perhaps nothing more daunting in the sales world than working through piles of unqualified leads—only to call them out of the blue with no idea if they're remotely interested in your product. Luckily, AI is here to change that—and despite its intimidating name, using it is easier than you think. According to [Adobe Document Cloud's Future of Work: More than a Machine](#) research, 72% US workers are in-

terested in using intelligent personal assistants for work. Brands are even going as far as creating [AI-powered virtual assistants](#) to manage and respond to some 30,000 inquiries per month for the sales team. These assistants not only answer the inquiries but automatically analyzes them to see which have the most potential, and then routes them to the most relevant representative. Talk about a "smart" investment.



TIP:

Once a lead is vetted and the deal is made, tie in other AI-powered tools like [Adobe's Document Cloud](#), which allows sales teams to quickly and automatically route contracts through the approval and signature process while the deal is still hot.

PRE-SCREENING AND FOLLOW-UP

Some companies struggle with finding leads. Some battle the opposite issue: trying to sort through too many. [Epson America](#), for instance, was getting up to 60,000 leads per year from various promotional fliers and events—but it had no way of knowing which were qualified. In the past, the company would hand them all off to the sales team to follow up for viability. Talk about an overwhelming task! To help, Epson used Con-

versica, mentioned above, in a different way—to reach out, multiple times over, and determine quality before the sales team even gets involved. Knowing it can take six to eight touches to get a response, Epson capitalizes on the fact that AI—unlike sales reps—never get tired or discouraged. The company went from gaining two responses in 100 to 50. They also saw a 75 percent gain in qualified leads.

TIP:

Salesforce partners like Apptus help automate document processes beyond simply routing contracts through multiple approvers. Using machine learning and AI, Apptus also helps trigger steps like invoicing, fulfillment, and on-boarding, helping sales teams focus more on their customers, not just their paperwork.



PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS

Analyzing the past is one thing. Predicting the future is another thing altogether. Thanks to AI, companies are now able to do just that, using the power of big data to determine when and if a new market or product is ready to launch, and what types of services their customers need. For instance, one [Harley-Davidson](#) dealership went from selling just one or two bikes a week to selling 15 bikes in one weekend, thanks to

the power of predictive AI. Using data from existing customers, the AI defined the qualities of a “high-value” customer, created a profile of the ideal potential buyer “lookalike,” and then automatically performed micro-marketing campaigns with personalized message for these targets. Three months into the initiative, leads increased by nearly 3,000 percent—and all the work was done automatically.



TIP:

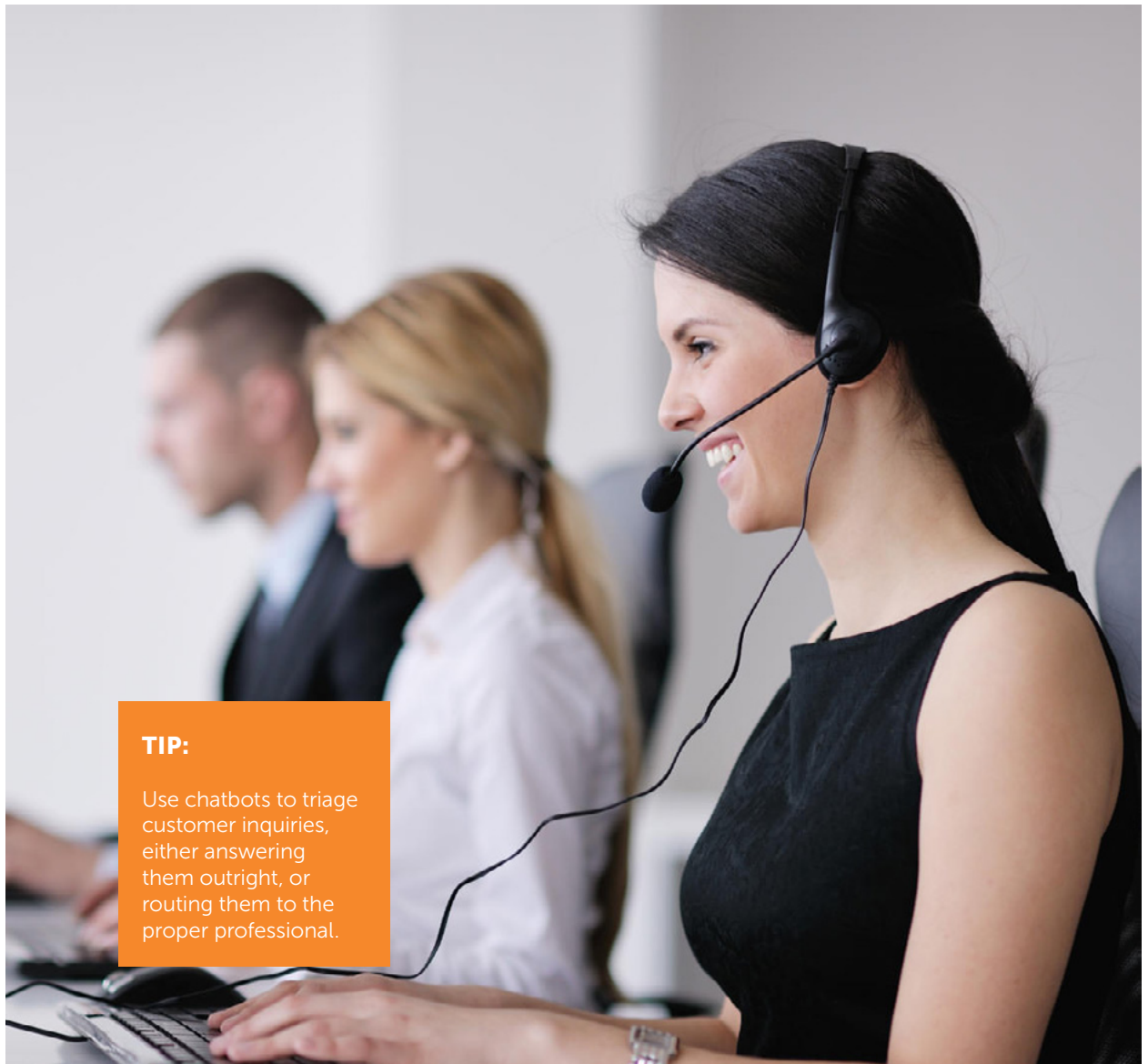
Predictive analytics can expand your qualified customer pool by studying the profiles of past buyers and finding potential new buyers who share those same qualities.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

As digital transformation continues to change customer expectations, it is no longer feasible for companies to rely on humans to be all and end all when it comes to customer service. AI-powered chat bots are proving incredibly valuable in this realm, especially with the continued advancement of [emotionally intelligent](#) AI. In fact, it's estimated that [more than 85 percent of customer interactions](#) will be handled by AI by 2020. AI has the power to learn and analyze more information, answer more questions, and do it more accurately—in less time—than

humans do. That's not just a trend—it's a revolution.

One example: just like real time messaging apps helped bring order to the chaos of managing emails in the business world, AI-powered chat tools help sort customer service inquiries via chat-bot. By asking just a few follow-up questions, chat-bots can either resolve or redirect thousands of inquiries a month. That means more than faster issue resolution—it means even fewer representatives are needed to answer the calls.



TIP:

Use chatbots to triage customer inquiries, either answering them outright, or routing them to the proper professional.

CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING

Digital transformation has brought customer experience to the forefront of every company's sales plan. Customer engagement no longer ends at the point of sale. Today's customers want to be engaged, valued, and communicated with—at all times. One of the best ways to ensure your company is doing that is to create a customer journey map. This allows you to note the touch points—and pain points—your customers experience while engaging with your brand. Is there a point where they lose interest? Abandon their shopping cart? Move

to a new supplier? A customer journey map powered by AI can help you determine the answers to these questions—and so many more. But perhaps more importantly, it can also help you automatically address those issues. For instance, it can send an incentive email to encourage a customer to return to their abandoned shopping cart, or invite a long-time customer you haven't seen in a while back for a free appetizer or beverage. These personal touches show the customer you care—that you're paying attention—and that you value them.



TIP:

Combine your journey mapping with automated AI-powered marketing platforms that allow you to personalize your messages—and instantly change them—based on segment testing and customer response.

UPSELLS AND CROSS-SELLS

Oh, the upsell. We've all experienced it on the customer side, often spending much more than we anticipated once the sales pitch is over. But on the sales side, upsells and cross sells are an important part of sales strategy. Sales teams know that any one customer can lead to numerous purchases if the pitches are paired well. The only problem: without qualified leads, sales agents often waste valuable time pitching up the wrong tree, spending countless minutes explaining features and products that the buyer has no need for. For instance, an agent

might try to sell a family phone package to a someone who is single with no family, or a swanky furniture set to someone with busy—messy—children. Using AI and data regarding past buying behavior, sales teams can better analyze their current and potential customers, sorting and scripting pitches based on their most likely purchases and budgets. Some major merchandisers are even so savvy as to track customer movements through their stores to see which aisles they shop in most, and personalize their sales flyers accordingly. Not a bad way to work.

TIP:

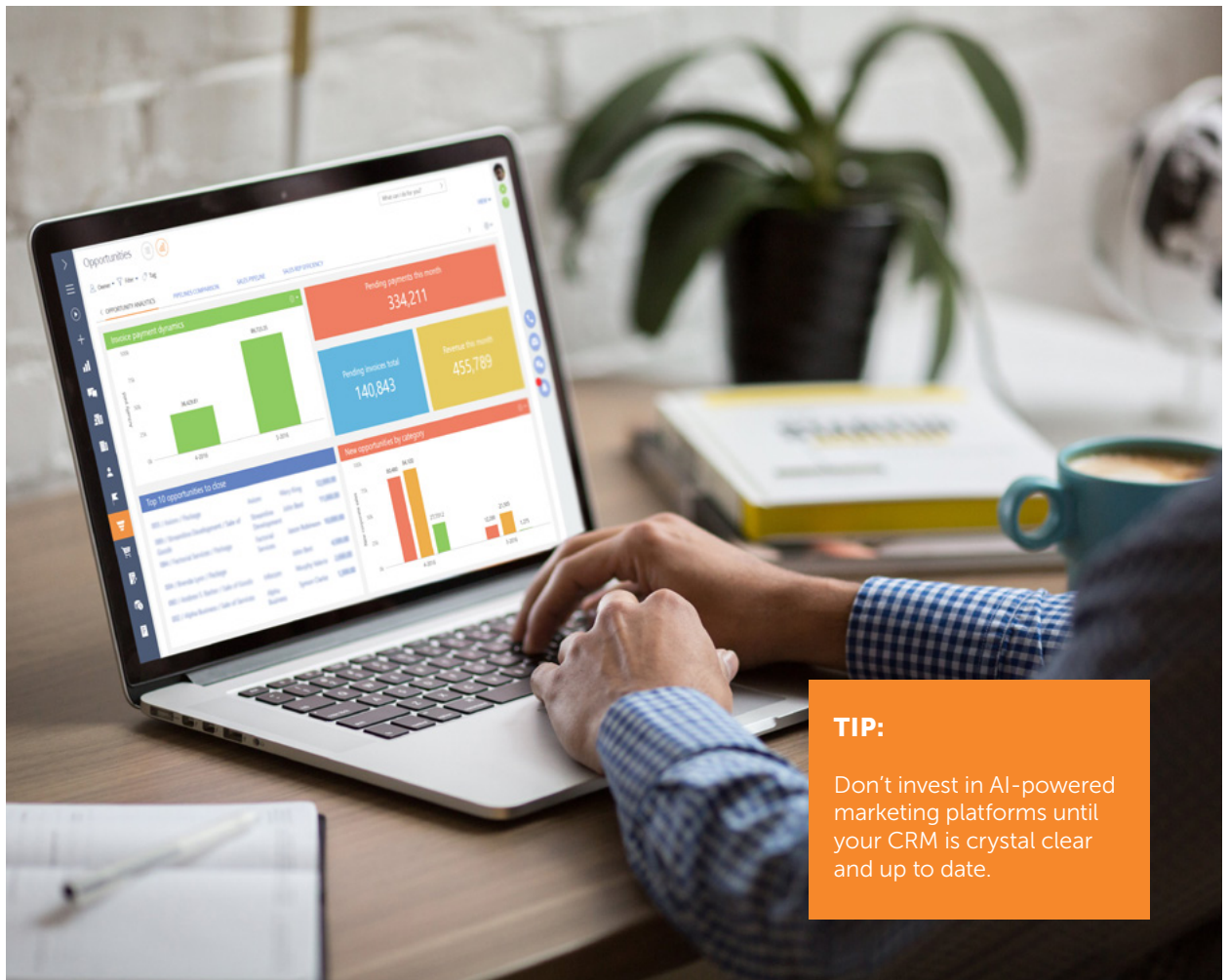
Knowing more about your customer's buying patterns will allow you to better pair and pitch your products, converting even more upsells and cross-sells in your sales strategy.



AUTOMATED CONTACT CAPTURE

Most of us have a bittersweet relationship with our CRM tools. On one hand, we know they're powerful tools for managing relationships with our customers. On the other hand, it's probably no surprise nearly [75 percent of sales teams don't use them correctly](#). That leads to data swamps full of incorrect phone numbers and addresses, inaccurate sales logs, and a lack of documentation of recent touches—all of which are paramount to maintaining positive customer relationships. The problem isn't just frustrating—it means the power of any AI system a company invests in will have very spotty results. Products and services like Adobe Document Cloud, powered by Adobe Sensei, allows sales teams to create searchable, editable, sharable documents, and track changes helping to

cut down on inconsistencies. Additionally, many companies are finding that allowing AI to monitor the information capturing side of their CRM is one of the best ways to ensure consistent and updated information. By automatically requesting certain data sets—and not allowing customers to “pass go” until the forms are filled out—AI helps ensure that all customer records have the same level and quality of information. In fact, some systems are even capable of noting when the information provided by a customer contact is inaccurate—such as an incorrect email address or phone number—and can force them to re-evaluate their entry before their contact form is even submitted, you can even add a signature to the workflow with Adobe Sign. Talk about a time saver for your sales team.



TIP:

Don't invest in AI-powered marketing platforms until your CRM is crystal clear and up to date.

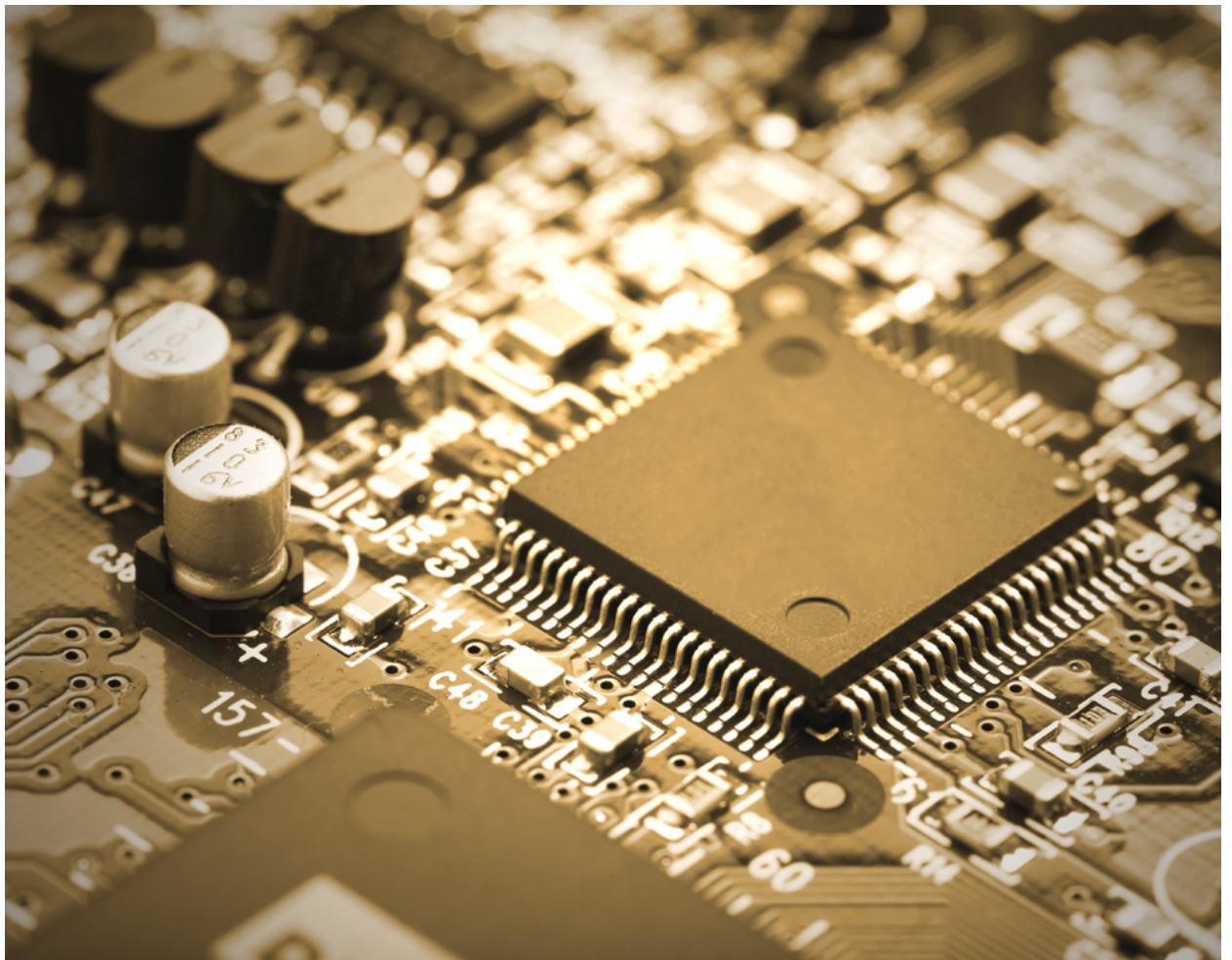
THE RESULTS

It is no secret that poor lead response can damage a sales team's enthusiasm and spirit—not to mention the company's bottom line. In that sense, AI is more than just a sales tool. It's a morale booster—a way to keep your teams engaged, excited, and feeling the fire of producing well for the company.

Still, AI and machine learning are tools producing real results and high-powered business outcomes. Instead of wasting time following up on a sea of dead leads, sales representatives are making human connections with the leads that matter most—the ones most likely to buy, participate, or join in what your company is selling. It likely

goes without saying: more qualified leads turn into higher profits for the company and better businesses all around.

Are AI and machine learning always worth the investment? That depends on your company. Luckily, with the growth of as-a-service (aaS) providers, you don't have to be a major corporation willing and able to invest millions in up-front costs to take advantage of these new technologies. Even the smallest business can find aaS marketing platforms that can dramatically boost their access to quality leads, and help automate their marketing content—all while ensuring a solid ROI.



CONCLUSION

Perhaps no other sector of the digital marketplace has already been impacted by AI and machine learning as much as sales and marketing. Luckily, the impact is a good and powerful one. The tools AI has made possible—qualifying leads, saving time, and automating analysis—are things that once took a tremendous amount of time and money, often with little pay off. Now, sales teams can work even smarter than ever before, spending their energy where it really counts—on current customers—and likely ones. You don't need AI to tell you that's an investment worth making.

This article was brought to you by

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Opinions and thoughts are those of the author.

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