Leveraging AI and Automation to Navigate a Global Pandemic Crisis

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> Leveraging our Business 4.0™ framework, we continue to help our customers transform into purpose-driven, resilient, and adaptable organizations for a post-COVID-19 world.

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Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) tools can enhance an enterprise's ability to prioritize application delivery and maintain business continuity when resources and staff become decentralized. IDG interviewed two experts to learn their perspectives on leveraging AI and automation to navigate the COVID-19 crisis.

Raman Venkatraman is vice president and global head of the HiTech & Professional Services Business Unit of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), where he also heads the Alliances & Technology Unit. Raman's tenure at TCS spans 27 years, where he has been a part of the executive leadership team in multiple capacities for the last 20 years.

What customer experience advice can you offer in this unprecedented situation?

There are no pandemic templates we can learn from, so our first focus was on our employee safety and supporting our customer business-critical systems. Toward this, we transitioned 95% of our total workforce to a completely new model and defined a new working paradigm called TCS' Secure Borderless Workspaces™ (SBWS™). We have to work closely with our customers in different geographies and understand specific needs in those regions to support them, with the evolving conditions. Our time-tested, customer-centric approach and our ability to sense and respond to our customer situations helped us to ensure that we are able to keep our customers' business-critical systems running, with the help of our strong and motivated workforce across geographies. Staying close to our customers, understanding their changing needs with our deep contextual knowledge, leveraging the latest technologies in tools and collaboration, connecting with a secure infrastructure, and responding with agility are the ways to ensure that we are able to deliver the best customer experience. Our CSAT during the current period is at its highest and is a testimony to our approach.

What's the highest priority in a pandemic, and how can you leverage AI and ML?

The COVID-19 pandemic has varying degrees of impact on different industries. Within our HiTech & Professional Services vertical, the impact has been different, ranging from supply chains in data center equipment and devices companies to eroding subscription revenues from MSMEs for SaaS and cloud companies and rapid unemployment in staffing companies. To respond in the most appropriate way, it is extremely important to leverage AI for example, supplier diversification for hardware components, talent supply chain management in professional services and staffing companies, etc. We see use of AI and ML accelerating as companies build on existing analytics platforms to develop new models using AI to respond faster and emerge stronger.

How do AI and ML already address customer lifetime value?

By helping clients maximize their revenue by identifying patterns and being proactive—for example, finding customers that are coming up for renewals and feeding them content that promotes their value. Also ensuring that smaller customers have the same experience as large customers, such as helping a small staffing firm source the right kind of talent, since demand can shift rapidly. If AI/ML shows that, in six months, there will be demand for some talent, you can begin recruiting or retraining today. It's all about improving the customer experience. If you deliver a good experience, your other products will also do better.

What are the key TCS strengths and offerings that support the recovery?

TCS offers a consulting-led, cognitive-powered, integrated portfolio of business, technology, and engineering services and solutions. This is delivered through our unique Location Independent Agile™ delivery model, recognized as a benchmark of excellence in software development. At TCS, we are in a very unique situation where our customers are in different stages of digital transformation. We are in a position to create ecosystems of different sets of companies to collaborate effectively and deliver value to our customers by creating a set of outcomes with incremental value. Additionally, leveraging our Business 4.0™ framework, we continue to help our customers transform into purpose-driven, resilient, and adaptable organizations for a post-COVID-19 world. Together, we'll get through this and be even stronger for the future.

FLORIAN ROTH
Chief Information Officer,
SAP SE

> "Understanding our customers, by leveraging AI enables real-time decision-making based on deep data analytics."

Florian Roth is Chief Information Officer of SAP SE, where he represents the SAP Intelligent Enterprise Solutions (IES) organization internally and externally. He is responsible for the SAP's IT strategy and execution. Roth has 15 years of leadership experience with SAP, including finance, business operations, and IT.

How is SAP driving superior customer experience during the global pandemic?

This pandemic continues to be a supersized stress test for everyone's disaster preparedness plan, and it may last much longer than initially anticipated. Our customers are in the exact same situation as SAP, and we assist them in managing their SAP-related crisis experience. We've set up solutions for an increased demand of virtual events, leveraging the SAP Virtual Event Platform. We've also expanded SAP's e-commerce offerings, and we are supporting customers through SAP's digital support channels. Our strategy is to deliver the Intelligent Enterprise to our customers, which combines machine and human intelligence across all business functions, automating repetitive tasks and business processes to allow our workforce to focus on high-value work. With that, our workforce is focusing on our customers, which is even more important during a global pandemic.

The 2020 pandemic challenge is extraordinary. Can AI and ML ensure business continuity and long-term positive customer experience?

Absolutely. We are already leveraging AI for internal processes to speed up decision-making via predictive analytics. We also use iAlerting, which is powered by ML to predict anomalies in the SAP HANA database by learning patterns from past data. It can predict an anomaly with lead time if it recognizes similar patterns developing in the future. This, together with automated mitigation, can prevent escalations and unwanted disruptions for our end users. Our Intelligent Hotline AI Phone Bot uses conversational AI to understand end user requests, and with that we can connect customers with the appropriate support. AI- and ML-assisted prevention, mitigation, and automation enable us to remain confident even amidst uncertainty and will hopefully translate into long-term positive customer experience and customer trust.

In what ways are your customers benefitting from AI or ML?

We have advanced AI and ML predominantly on internal systems. But there are a couple of great examples of where both directly touch on the customer experience. We have started the digitization of contract creation, which has reduced our time from offer to contract by 75%. We are also testing ML functions for analyzing contracts regarding clauses and compliance with standards. Furthermore, we are leveraging what we call Voice to Experience, where we are applying automated speech recognition with SAP Leonardo. Here, ML and data intelligence help us to better understand and evaluate the communication with our customers. Thousands of customers are turning to SAP every day, expressing their interest, reporting a problem, or seeking information and assistance. With the help of SAP Leonardo speech recognition technology, we can measure each phone call according to the state of mind of our customers. Each conversation is automatically transcribed and evaluated in a sentiment analysis. Combined with operational data, this helps us to meet the needs and wishes of our customers a lot faster and with greater satisfaction.

Looking beyond the pandemic, how do you see innovation being used to support business recovery?

The pandemic has showed us that access to good data and having the right information at the right time is everything! Understanding our customers by leveraging AI enables real-time decision-making based on deep data analytics. All data sources — streaming, social media, sensors, operational, and experience data — need to be brought together to derive insights. Our tools provide a common data model for all data types and sources to give us new insights, so we can measure and improve the four key areas of the business: customer, employee, product, and brand experience.

Although the global economy has a steep path ahead, it may inspire decisions born of necessity that will accelerate acceptance and implementation of innovative technologies. Especially in the areas of science and medicine, acceleration of good data management will be the key to combat and mitigate the impacts of future pandemics. ■

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1. TCS' HiTech solutions and services, please visit www.tcs.com/hitech.
2. SAP's solutions and services, please visit www.sap.com.