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Total customer care and the **advantages of virtual assistants / chatbots**



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1. Introduction

“We believe you should be able to send messages to a company in the same way you send a message to a friend.” *Mark Zuckerberg*

The world is in constant motion and technologies are advancing at great speed. It is difficult to keep up with the latest developments and changes are accelerating.

Customer service is a very important area for a brand, it is one of its presentations, and a **key factor** for the purchase and repetition of its products or services. This area is also being **revolutionised** thanks to technological advances that make it possible to automatically generate an effective and rapid response to a large part of the needs of interested parties.

Customers expect to find a business that has an online presence, to resolve their doubts quickly and instantly, at any time of the week or hour, and for a large part of their doubts, without having to pick up the phone. In this new context of a digitalised society, virtual assistants (chatbots) are gaining prominence. In addition, these robots that answer questions have evolved with Artificial Intelligence, achieving a more natural understanding and language, advancing and with functionalities beyond frequently asked questions.

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According to Salesforce surveys conducted in 2019, 57% of people in Spain prefer to use "self-service" to resolve simple questions, 77% expect companies to provide a real-time response and 84% expect companies to use technology to create better experiences [REF-01].

Therefore, leaving aside the more complex issues or questions, virtual assistants provide help that manages to resolve doubts in real time, at any time and in any language, being an important reinforcement for SMEs in their customer service strategies and especially in e-commerce. For SMEs, having this service is a competitive advantage, because it allows them to deal with a large number of requests that would otherwise be impossible.



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2. Changes in customer care

In order to understand what virtual assistants should be like, it is important to first understand the **characteristics of customer service itself and put the user at the centre**: think about what they need, what they expect, what their limitations are and the context in which they move, in order to design a product or service that meets their expectations.

Customer service is a **set of actions that seek to improve the customer experience, resolving their doubts, challenges or problems in an agile and efficient way**, using different communication channels (e-mail, telephone, virtual assistant or chatbot, social networks, on-site assistance...)[REF-02].

Customer service is changing, **seeking greater speed and immediacy, greater ease of use, the possibility of having multiple channels, personalisation, and ultimately, human availability**. Customers need their needs to be met across all channels, in an integrated and personalised way.

Below, we look at the **desired characteristics**:

- **Immediacy**: customers need their needs to be solved at an exact moment.
- **Personalisation**: the user is at the centre of the experience and must feel part of it.
- **Unique attention**: humanise all the interactions that the consumer has with the brand.
- **Multi-channel**: the user wants to choose the channel through which he/she communicates with the brand.

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The great challenge for brands is to **meet any need**, whether commercial, customer service or any other, from all channels, **taking advantage of the knowledge of the customer that data gives us**:

- | | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | Capture new audiences | | Speed / Immediacy (First Contact Resolution) |
| | Customer insight (single customer) | | Simplicity / ease of use |
| | Anticipate customer needs | | Unification of the different channels |
| | Personalisation of impacts | | Personalisation of the service |
| | Customer loyalty | | Human availability |
| | Increase conversion | | Cost efficiency |

One of the changes revolutionising customer service is the incorporation of virtual assistants, or chatbots, as a first channel capable of providing quick responses. In the following, we will explore their significance.

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3. What are chatbots?

Chatbots or virtual assistants are software that **simulate a real conversation with a human**. It is a chat that provides automatic responses. In the first instance, they have meant the evolution of the **FAQ** sections, with a better design and saving time for the user by being able to ask the virtual assistant directly.

However, in more recent years, more progress has been made with the implementation of **generative Artificial Intelligence**, achieving a greater capacity to adapt answers and thus improving the customer experience. AI can even lead to "smart" chatbots that learn as customers interact with them [REF-03].

Therefore, three types can be distinguished:

- 1. Rule-based:** respond based on a **predefined set of programmed responses**. They work well for simple, predictable interactions, but more complex questions require redirection to personal contact.
- 2. Artificial Intelligence-based:** uses machine learning algorithms and natural language processing, based on the keywords entered. They improve with **practice** and the **integration of user input** into the system, have the ability to understand context and provide more complex responses than the previous model. In addition, they can be better adapted to various language styles.
- 3. Total experience model:** a model that **interrelates visual interaction and natural language processing**. Based on the user's profile and needs, it redirects them to the area of the application or website that is of interest to them. This is achieved through "SmartApp and Smartwebs" systems.

There are various levels of chatbot quality, including generative AI. Virtual assistants have several functionalities:

On the one hand, the main one is to deal with **common questions in a flexible way**, providing key information at all times, or to be at least a first filter of help before moving on to a mail or phone. In addition, it can **offer personalised recommendations, manage appointments or make sales**.

On the other hand, thanks to the information provided by users with their questions, data can be collected from them, their interests and doubts, in order to improve the brand itself and customer service.



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4. Main benefits of virtual assistants (chatbots)

The main benefits of having a virtual assistant or chatbot for SMEs are summarised as follows [REF-03]:



1. Continuous customer service (24x7)

The availability of the chatbot **24 hours a day and 7 days a week** is a great help in the attention that an SME can provide, as a complement to human attention, being able to resolve an important part of doubts and problems. Thus, it is an advantage for users, since they get **instant answers at any time**, without losing the option of human communication or redirection to it directly when it is convenient.



2. Reduce workload

Reducing or filtering customer service requests that require human intervention allows these interactions to gain in quality when they occur, because **more time can be spent as the tedious or repetitive workload is reduced**. It enables a focus on higher quality services and actions.



3. Can be personalised communication and multilingual support

With advances in generative Artificial Intelligence, responses can be more personalised. For example, **tailor-made services or products can be recommended**, thanks to information provided previously or from previous purchases. The **language of response can also be adapted**. This possibility of personalisation in turn impacts on the company's profitability by providing better service than a flatter "frequently asked questions".

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4. One more channel (omnichannel strategy)

It is about providing an **extra service**, an **added communication channel**, thus improving the options for users and potential customers, covering more needs in an agile way. The chatbot must be seen as a **complement**, not a replacement for the rest of the channels.



5. Improve opportunity cost and reduce costs

Chatbots provide help simultaneously to any number of people who enter the website or application. The same initial investment has an equal impact on the number of people that can be served indefinitely and can achieve conversion to customers. Likewise, it represents a cost saving for the SME, as it **manages to attend to a large number of requests with the same investment** [REF-04].



6. Image of modernity for SMEs

Being at the forefront of technology and Artificial Intelligence tools such as chatbots provides an **image of innovation and digital transformation** that is very attractive to users, especially young people.



7. Constantly evolving

This is a technology that is constantly evolving, so the **software is being improved**, achieving more complex and personalised conversations [REF-05].

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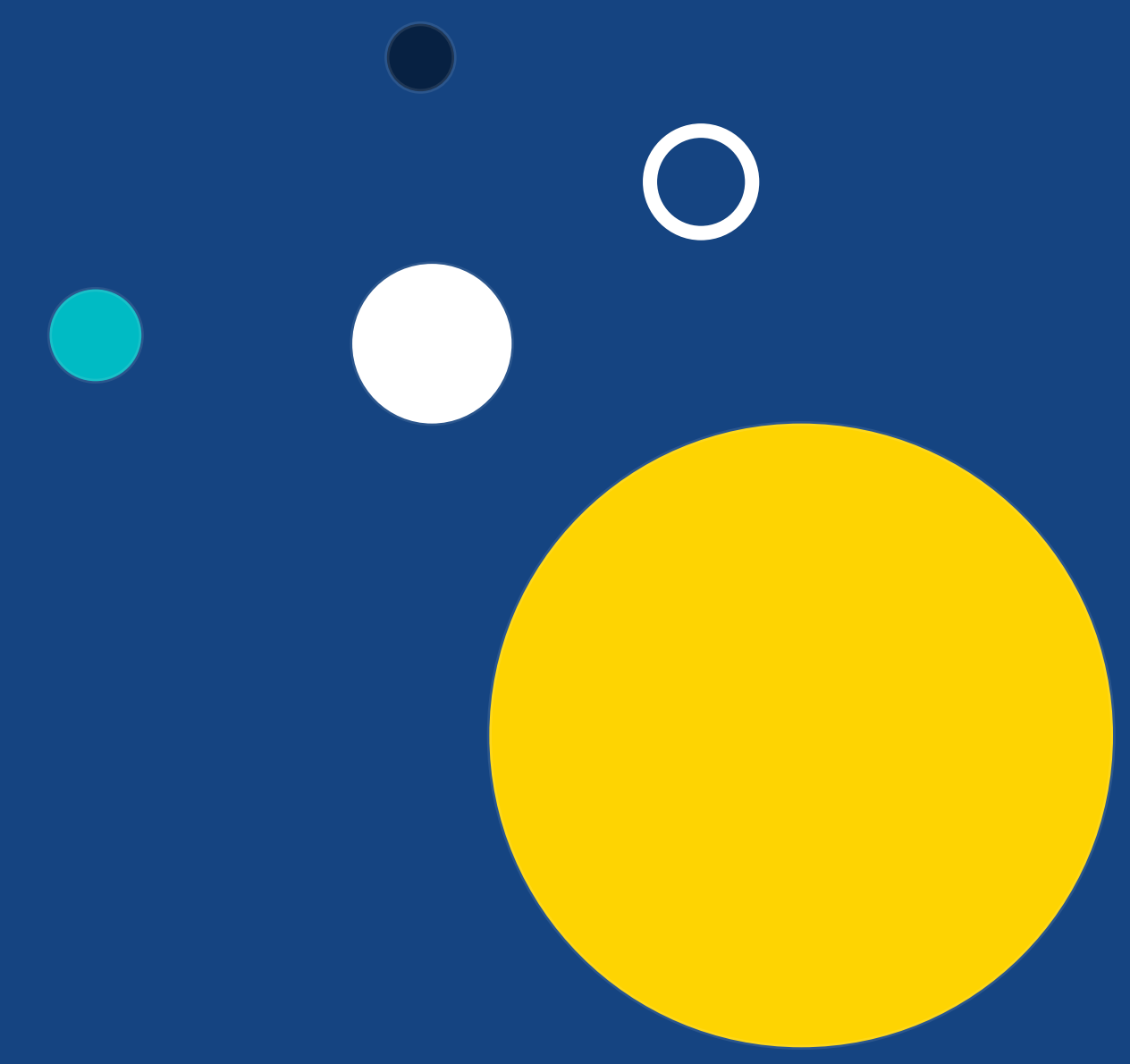


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5. What characteristics should a good virtual assistant have?

On the one hand, the essential characteristics of chatbots are the following:

- A total experience.
- Be inclusive and have a customisable experience.
- A system for analysing KPIs and interpreting data to improve processes and make better decisions.
- Definition of KPIs that allow the chatbot service to be assessed, such as absorption and TNPS.
- Continuous availability, any day, any time.
- They must be identified as chatbots for transparency.
- If they are unable to answer a question clearly, they should provide ways to communicate with customer service for individualised attention.
- They convey the language and tone chosen by the brand thanks to their personalised settings.
- They use natural language, with consistent, clear and concise answers.



Moreover, for a chatbot to have the **greatest impact**, it has to tend towards these **guidelines**:

- **Personalisation:** 360° vision to recognise the customer, personalise messages and content and not require identification or preferences.
- **Real conversations:** Design centred on the user and the context in which the assistant is used.
- **Proactivity:** Anticipate possible calls by proactively initiating management with the customer and anticipating their needs.
- **Accompanying and recommending** to the user what is **most convenient** for him/her: An assistant who takes into account the preferences, tastes and needs of users to make personalised recommendations.
- **Anticipate problems and provide solutions.**
- **Confirm in writing:** (e.g. WhatsApp) to avoid unnecessary re-calls and conversation time.
- Appointment reminders.
- **Omni-channel flows:** (combining voice and whatsapp) for complex responses (e.g. choosing appointment times from more than 3 available options) or sending information with more than 2 fields.
- **Experience work:** do not ask for unnecessary data that you have already obtained and optimise messages.
- **Open models:** to allow early incorporation of new technologies.
- **Contextual manager:** to manage context through contextual and vertical awareness.

6. Software tools to create a chatbot

There are many tools on the market for creating chatbots without the need for web developers, which is an advantage for SMEs [REF-06]. Most of them have a free trial option. The most relevant ones are listed below:



WHATSAPP BUSINESS APPLICATIONS

WhatsApp Business is the creation of company accounts for the social network and is especially useful for SMEs, being this social network very popular among the population, it has the advantage of being an easy connection point and known by the user. There are applications to create chatbots that answer via WhatsApp. There are **free chatbot options with more limited functions**, which can be controlled from a single mobile phone, but it is a good option for businesses that are just starting out. For more consolidated SMEs it is preferable to use the more advanced options, which allow for example not only answering questions but also scheduling future messages. Some of these applications are Aivo or BotsLovers [REF-07].



GPT

It needs no introduction – it has had a massive impact in accelerating the business race for the development of generative artificial intelligence. One of its functionalities is precisely its **business use as a virtual assistant**, with a friendly and natural response capacity to frequently asked questions. In addition, it remembers information from previous interactions, helping to personalise future interactions. To create it, you need to download a **plugin** (a complementary application to install on the company's website) and configure it to suit your brand and specific needs. This use requires a monthly payment [REF-08].

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Eva Conversational AI

It is a platform for creating conversational interactions that combine the capabilities of Artificial Intelligence with a better User Experience.

It allows the creation of **Intelligent Virtual Agents for customers**, collaborators and employers, automating tasks through multi-channel conversations via text or voice. It is a visual and intuitive solution, using low code technology. It is scalable, with the capacity to carry out thousands of conversations in multiple languages, with the option of a lot of personalisation according to the answers provided by the users and with multi-channel adaptation, giving the user a variety of communication options (chat, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Teams...) [REF-09].



Landbot.io

Any company looking to create a **multi-purpose virtual assistant without code** can use the adaptive chatbot development platform known as a land robot. It can be quickly integrated with a website or any **third-party application**, including MailChimp, WhatsApp, Slack, Facebook Messenger, Google Sheets and many others.

This distinguished platform combines automation, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML) and natural language processing (NLP). Without writing a single line of code, it allows all departments, including operations, marketing, sales and customer service, to develop virtual assistants. Its advantage is the simplicity and speed of creating a chatbot thanks to pre-built templates. It also provides statistics on the number of conversions and integrates with a **CRM** (Customer Relationship Management).

It also has a **drag-and-drop visual interface**, a **dashboard** for chatbot metrics, **support** for multiple agents and other features, which provide usability and reduce the need for development work. In addition, **video tutorials** are available to assist if needed [REF-06].

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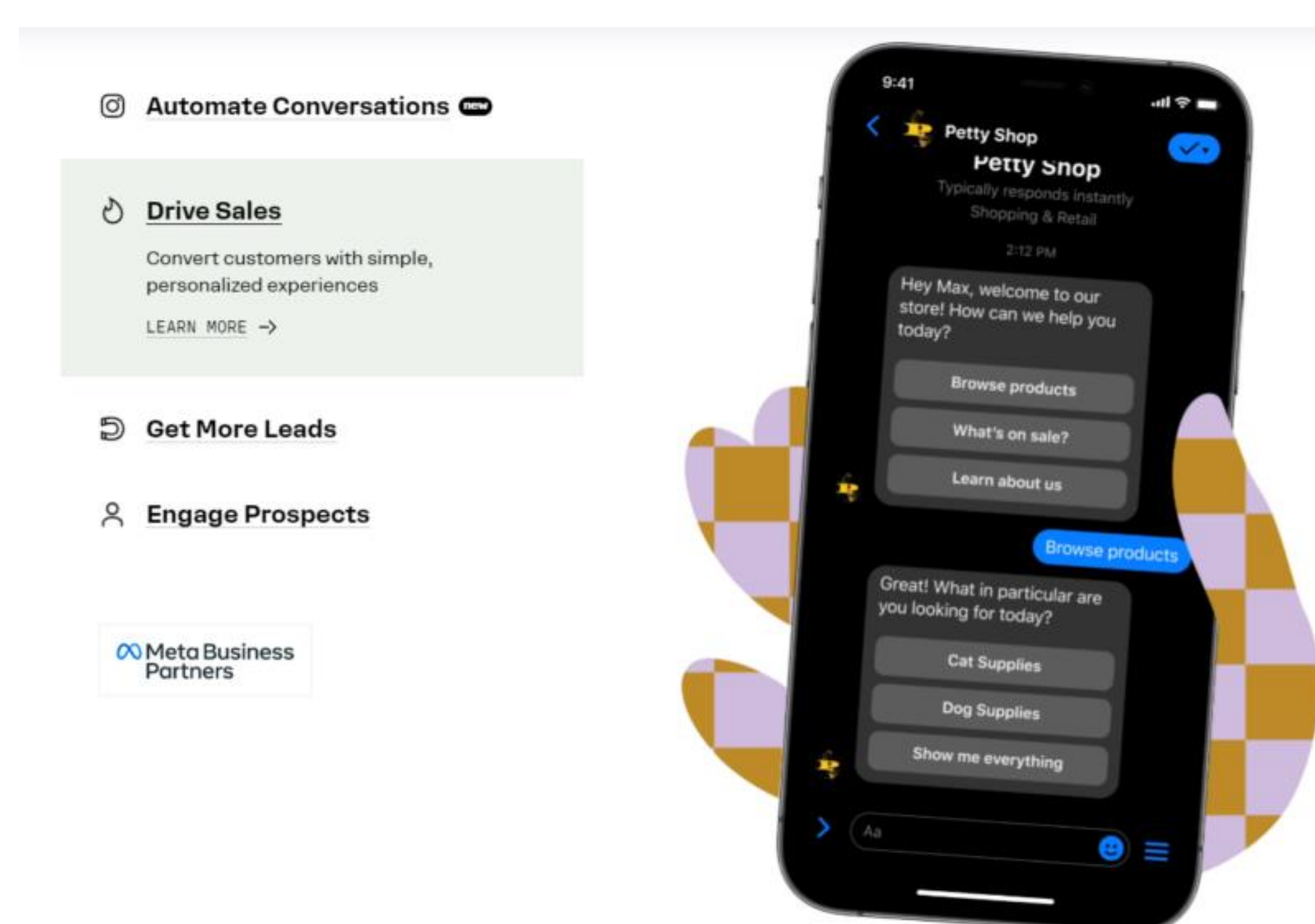
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Manychat

ManyChat

One of the most popular chat marketing tools. Connects with Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook and SMS.

No code development required. ManyChat can be trained to talk to customers, explain the brand's services and products and present products online. Similarly, it can be programmed to send offers or respond to queries automatically, maintaining real-time conversations. Finally, it **integrates with other programs** such as HubSpot or PayPal. It allows a free trial with up to 1000 social network contacts [REF-10].

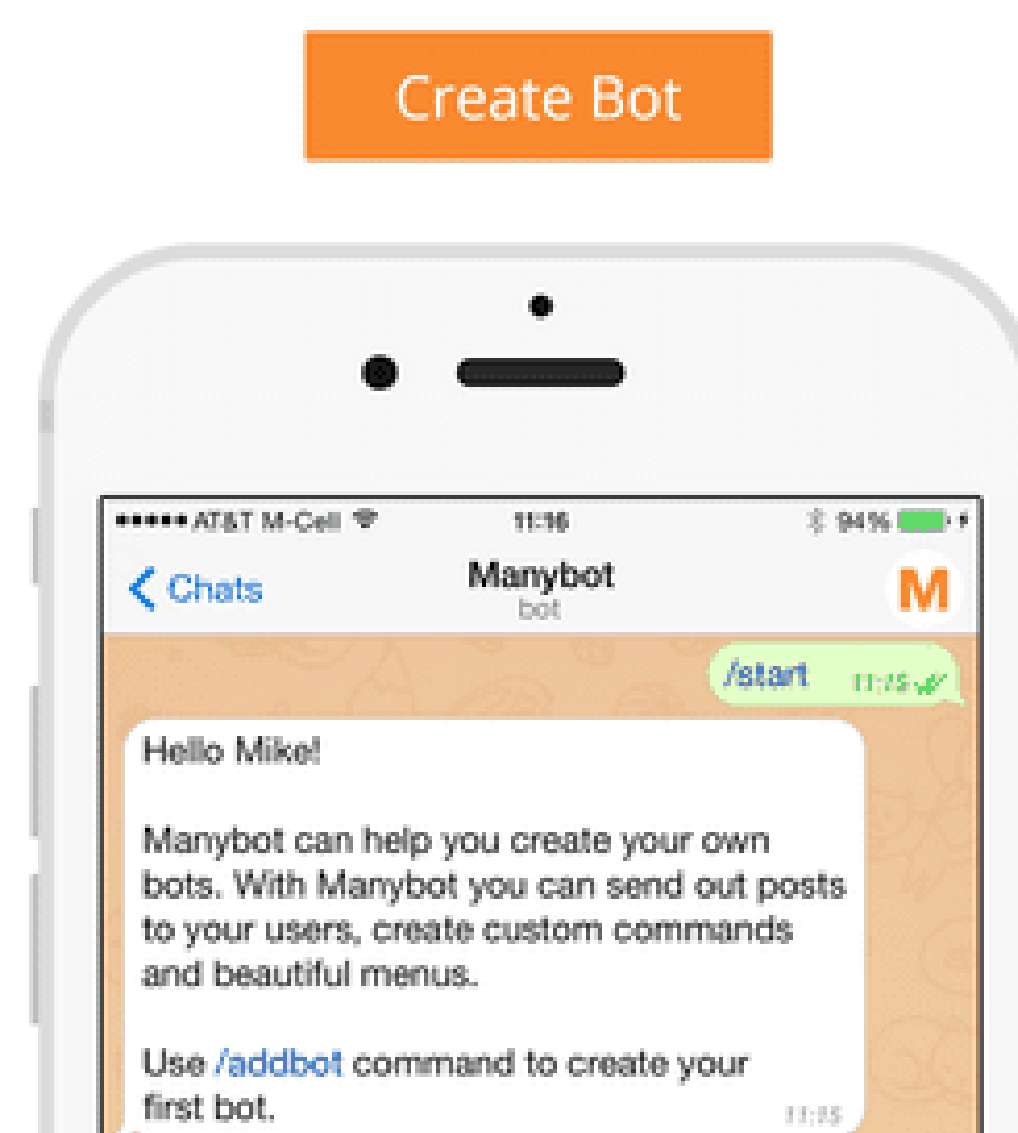


Manybot

Manybot

It is designed for use on Telegram, without using code. You can send text, images, videos to your subscribers [REF-11].

Create a Telegram bot without coding.

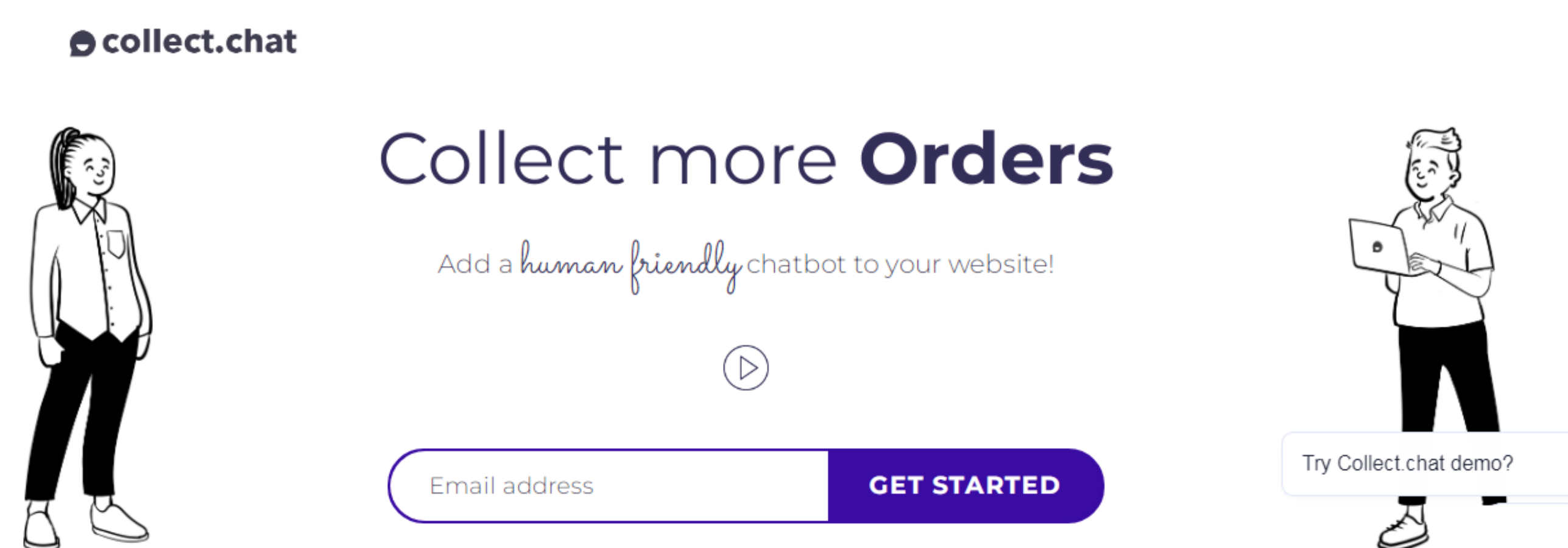


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Collect.chat

A friendly assistant, with a higher level of conversation than others that improves the user experience and works automatically **24/7**. It is easy to maintain. Can be **integrated with 15 other applications**, such as Gmail, WordPress and Dropbox [REF-12].

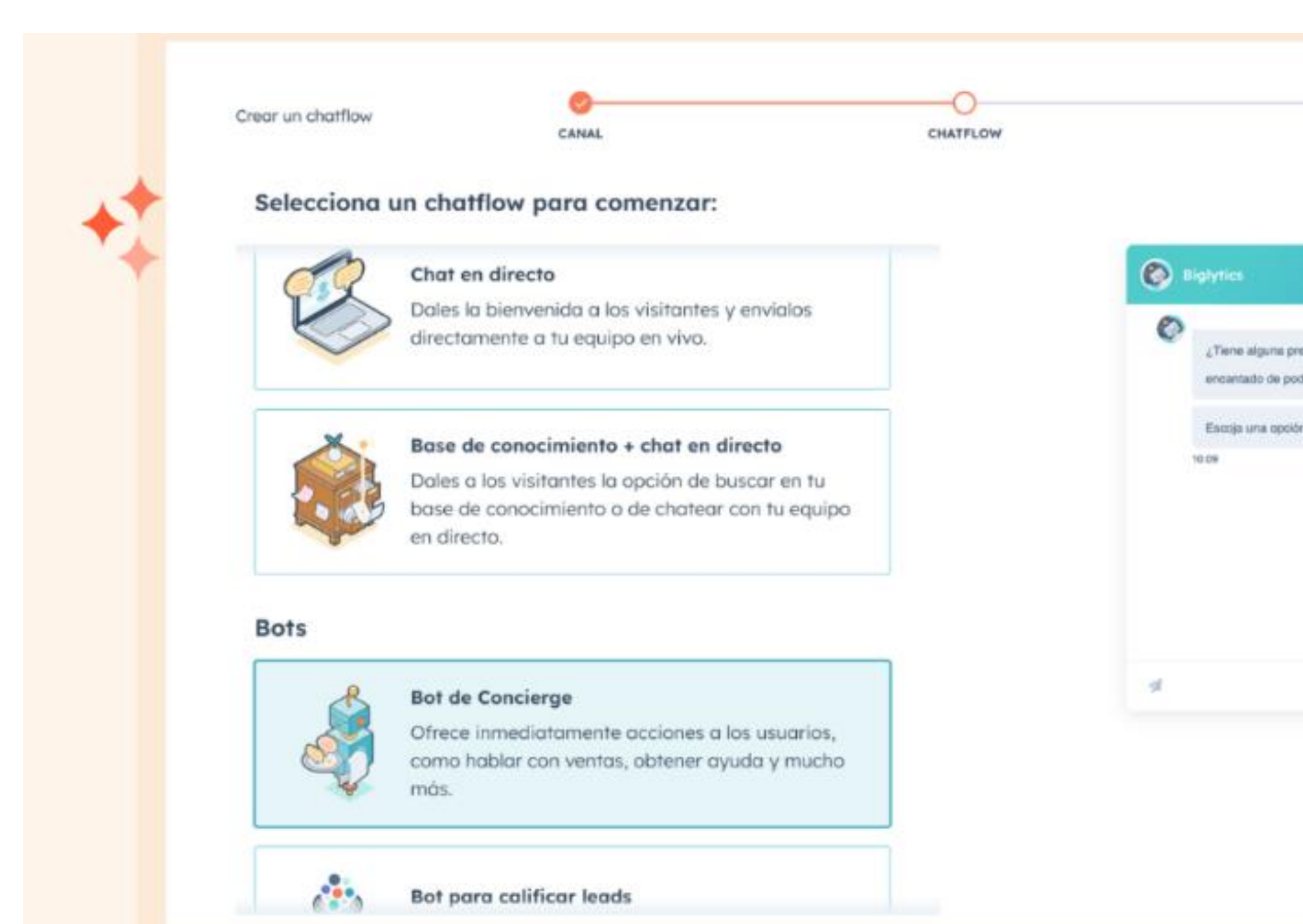


HubSpot

You can have as many **personalised conversations** with customers as you want, all at once, using HubSpot's Chatbot Builder.

The bot can view each customer's past conversation history and give them a human touch by enabling personalised messages for that specific user.

The chatbot is **easily configurable on a website**. It requires selecting a template, modifying the questions, tone and a number of other components to suit the company's needs. In addition, it can also be built from scratch without the use of templates if preferred [REF-13].



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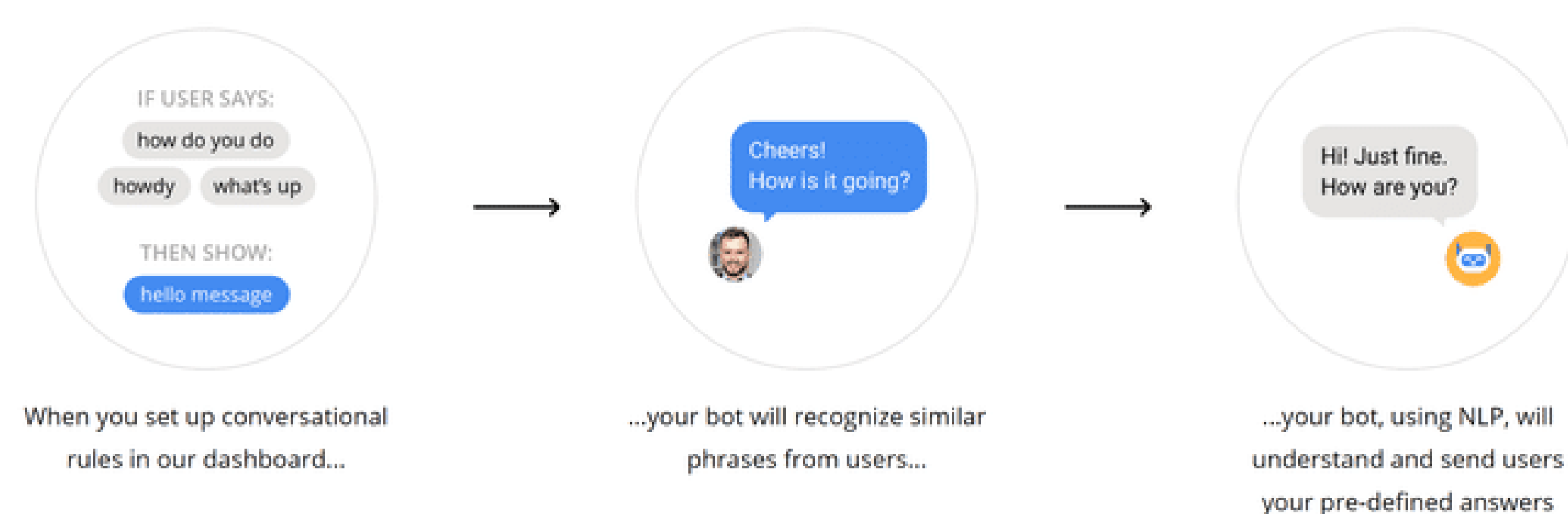
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chatfuel

Chatfuel

Specially designed for **Facebook**, it is the chatbot used by large companies such as **UBER**. It integrates with other apps such as Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, etc. It is **free**, which is a considerable advantage for SMEs [REF-14].

Our AI understands and answers
user requests



SnatchBot

It enables the **creation of several free chatbots in social networks**: Telegram, Facebook Messenger, Line, Skype, Websites and others. It can be used in 135 languages, requires no code development and is easy to use [REF-15].



Botsify

It has a **free option to create a chatbot with up to 100 users per month** and is used especially for Facebook. It allows you to send image, video and audio files [REF-16].



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7. Conclusions

Customer service is a key aspect for the company, it is part of its brand and the ability to provide the necessary information at the right time can be **decisive** when it comes to making a sale.

In a digitalised society, customers expect to be able to **communicate through multiple channels** with a company, from phone calls to social media. Virtual assistants are very practical because they are present on the web **24 hours a day, 7 days a week**, and it is an option that for simple questions is very convenient, effective and **brings customer satisfaction**.

Moreover, virtual assistants have evolved towards **more natural models**, with functionalities that go beyond answers to simple questions, being able to be **proactive** and **proposing personalised choices to the customer**, thanks to the use of generative Artificial Intelligence.

It is a **first channel of communication with the customer**, which can be multilingual, that helps them and provides a better overall experience in their interaction with the company, resolves essential doubts, helps them find what they need, **reducing the workload for the SME for more tedious aspects**. It is not a matter of dispensing with a telephone option that may be necessary and preferable for many issues, but of providing constant extra help, which resolves a large part of doubts directly.

There are **many tools on the market**, many of them with free trial options and without the need for developers, that allow the creation of chatbots for SMEs.

Taking the leap towards innovation is easier than ever, being able to expand the options for customers in their attention and providing them with a new service at their disposal.

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