Virtual Assistants: 10 Tips to Go From Valet to Wallet

Trick question: Who work 24x7, engage customers and answer questions in a smart and fun way, give website tours, show relevant web pages, and never call in sick?
Answer: Virtual assistants (VAs).

Also called chatbots, avatars, and concierges, VAs help businesses “wow” customers with distinctive self-service, increase brand equity, and cut costs. eGain’s award-winning VAs are even multilingual and, unlike other alternatives, integrate with human-assisted interaction channels for a seamless customer journey! As a pioneer in this domain, eGain has compiled best practices in VA deployment over the years. Here are some popular ones:

1. Get an “anytime, anywhere, anyhow” valet. Deploy the VA not just on your website, but also mobile and social channels. VAs are perfect as personal attendants. They can greet customers, chat with them (good VAs can discuss the weather, too!), show customers around, and answer questions.

2. Don’t bury your VA in the Help section. Lead with the VA (see our next tip). Make the VA available on every page. Better still, make it proactively offer help and tours of your website. On your mobile app, you could even use the VA to start and guide all customer interactions.

3. Make the VA your brand ambassador. VAs are meant to represent your brand. Best-in-class VA solutions include off-the-shelf avatars, letting you choose from cartoon or realistic characters, and static or animated options. You could choose to design your own VA, even model it on your spokesperson if you have one for the brand. Good solutions also let you easily create a conversation style and tone that is unique to your VA.

4. Keep it snappy. One of the main reasons consumers like VAs is their speed. Pick a solution whose infrastructure will allow performance to scale with system load.

5. Be understanding. VAs are capable of understanding natural language queries. Make sure yours is tolerant of bad spelling and grammar. Enable various modes of conversation: modern VAs support text to text, speech to text, text to speech, and speech to speech communication modes.

6. Be polite. In particular, when the VA is unable to understand the question. The following real-life example borders on rudeness: “Please, one idea at a time.” Instead, say, “I’m sorry, but that is a rather complicated request. It will be easier for me to help, if you could break it up into a series of simple questions.”
7. **Show rather than talk.** Keep answers short—this is especially important for mobile and speech interactions. Instead, push relevant pages. Many customers don’t know their way around; in fact, that may be the reason they summoned help!

8. **Be consistent.** The VA should “talk the same talk” as your other agents and self-service options. Make sure your VA does not run off a siloed, inconsistent knowledge base—it should be based on a unified platform for multichannel customer engagement and knowledge management. Provide longer knowledge base articles as links to keep the VA’s answers short.

9. **Be connected.** For complex questions, make sure that the VA “knows its limitations” and can escalate seamlessly to live agents. The customer should not have to repeat context in escalations. The VA should also be able to direct the customer to more advanced self-service methods such as guided help.

10. **Personalize.** Good VAs can remember a detail such as the customer’s name, once it is given to them, and use it through the conversation. In authenticated portions of your website, you could integrate the VA with other systems to provide account information such as details of the customer’s phone plan if you are a telecom company. The next step would be to make targeted offers to the customer through the VA.

A good virtual assistant is like P. G. Wodehouse’s famous butler, Jeeves: Always present yet never in the way. It is knowledgeable, capable of keeping up with the workload, and able to summon additional help when needed. Top-rated VAs provide all this and more, and are an integral part of a unified multichannel customer engagement hub. Isn’t it time your site’s valet added value to the customer experience and your business?

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eGain customer engagement solutions power digital transformation for leading brands. Our top-rated cloud applications for social, mobile, web, and contact centers help clients deliver connected customer journeys in an omnichannel world. To find out more, visit http://www.egain.com.

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