



# Small Business Customer Service Chatbots

By Anita Campbell

Chatbots are computer programs that are able to converse with people online using human-like speech. They're common within messaging apps and live chat features to help businesses answer customer queries, increase sales, and save time. And they're getting more popular by the day. In fact, eighty percent of businesses plan on using chatbots by 2020, according to a study from Oracle.

Not sure how a chatbot could benefit your organization? Here are some of the most popular ways this type of technology is being deployed currently.

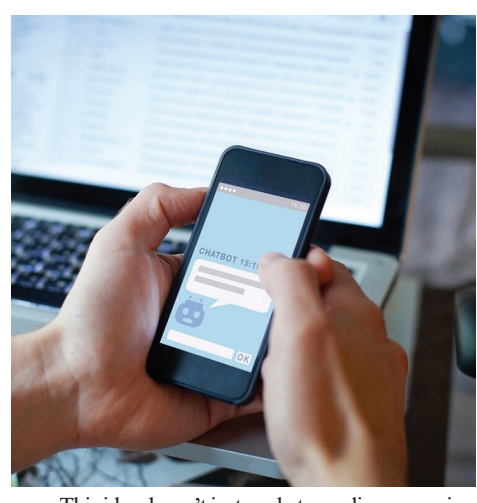
### Answering Frequently Asked Questions

At some point throughout the buying process, customers are likely to have questions. Small businesses don't always have the resources to respond 24/7. And doing so manually isn't very efficient. But chatbots can help you respond quickly and save time on answering the same queries over and over again.

Say you have a software company and potential buyers often want to learn more about how to actually deploy the program before purchasing. You can offer a chat option on your website and have a chatbot recognize when someone is asking about deployment. It can then provide step-by-step instructions in a way people understand. If customers then have further questions that aren't as common, it can direct those customers to an actual customer service agent who will provide more personalized answers. But if ninety percent of the questions you receive are about the same few things, having an automated system for responding can save you a ton of time on customer service.

### Creating a Unique Social Experience

Chatbots don't have to only live on your website. In fact, brands like Quartz are reaching out to customers using chatbots in Facebook Messenger to increase engagement. The economic news site shares snippets from stories or unique facts with customers in a message. Then it engages in a back-and-forth conversation with those who respond, diving even deeper into the topic.



This idea doesn't just apply to media companies. Retailers could use the app to ask customers questions about current fashion trends and then make product recommendations based on that information. Or food products could use it to offer

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Wednesday, February 19, 2020, 6:00 pm–8:00 pm  
Baruch College, 55 Lexington Avenue, Suite 2-140, New York, NY  
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration, Midtown Manhattan SBDC  
Contact: Gernely Almonte, 646-312-4790, [sbdc@baruch.cuny.edu](mailto:sbdc@baruch.cuny.edu)  
Fee: Free; registration required

Having employees is exciting, but there are many ways it can go wrong. Join us to learn: what you shouldn't say in a job ad, employees versus independent contractors, paying hourly or salary, employment contracts and offer letters, providing employee benefits, non-competes and non-solicitation agreements, and more! In addition to "best practices," we will discuss federal and New York specific requirements.

**Understanding Your Financial Statements**  
Tuesday, February 25, 2020, 9:00 am–11:00 am  
Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce, 513 Broadway, Newport, RI  
Main Sponsor(s): Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce  
Contact: Kate Grotteberg, 401-847-1608, [kate@newportchamber.com](mailto:kate@newportchamber.com)  
Fee: Free; registration required

So you own a small business but you aren't an expert in accounting . . . so what? That doesn't mean you should only learn about the financial health of your business when you get your yearly financials from your CPA. Understanding what your financial statements are telling you can help you make stronger, real-time business decisions. It is imperative as a business owner to have at least a basic understanding of the financial side of your business on a regular basis. Join our experts as they guide you through various financial statements and terms, and show you how to become a more savvy business owner.

**How to Become a GSA Federal Supply Schedule Holder and Government Contracting 101**  
Wednesday, March 18, 2020, 10:00 am–1:30 pm  
Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. Federal Building, 10 Causeway Street, 1st Floor, Boston, MA  
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center  
Contact: Stephen Edmonds, 781-801-3036, [sedmonds@umass.edu](mailto:sedmonds@umass.edu)  
Fee: Free; registration required

This free one-day workshop is designed to encourage and support small businesses interested in obtaining a General Services Administration (GSA) Federal Supply Schedule contract to learn more about contracting opportunities, the procurement process, and resources available. Not sure which solicitation applies to your product or service? Refer to GSA's Schedules e-Library website in order to view or download solicitations. Before attending the workshop, please review the GSA Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) Program and the GSA Vendor Tool Box (links available at [vsc.gsa.gov](http://vsc.gsa.gov)). Please direct questions regarding the GSA MAS Program to the GSA MAS Helpdesk by phone at 800-488-3111 or by email at [mashelpdesk@gsa.gov](mailto:mashelpdesk@gsa.gov).