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???Mark Persaud



The business-to-business (B2B) industry has been known to be a laggard when compared to business-to-consumer (B2C) experiences. But should they even be compared? What really needs to be evaluated and innovated for are the needs of the customers (within a B2B business value chain) and the PEOPLE, yes, you heard me correctly, the PEOPLE within these organizations. Erroneously, when thinking about B2B, the mind removes the people that run the business from the equation. Let's decide, together, to not do that anymore. Value to these people is value to the B2B business.

While we're not comparing B2B to B2C, every company is trying to innovate constantly – to create better products and services, to streamline processes, and to enhance experiences (yes, ease of UX does lead to growth – this is the 21st century, we're beyond just the product or service). Appearing on the innovation radar these days is voice technology. It can sometimes be difficult to see the use cases of a technology within your business (this aligns to the old adage: it's hard to see the forest through the trees) especially if you're intermingled with how things are done today. A fresh pair of eyes can help. My take – **B2B businesses should be investing in voice technology because it**

increases operational, supply chain, and account management efficiencies, which are innovative differentiators for scaling and sustaining growth.

Given the behavioral change of society towards voice adoption – which includes B2B business employees and customers – towards using voice for simple and increasingly more complex use cases, it's being brought into work culture. From dictating notes, reading emails aloud, placing orders, getting business reporting numbers (e.g., "what is our gross margin with Customer X in January?"), to employee FAQ portals, or changing manufacturing lines/molds that have RPA enabled by a simple command – voice holds tremendous potential for employees, enterprises, consumers, and B2B.

In fact, B2B use cases have been readily popping up. Consider these applications:

- **Supply chain management**. Businesses need to move faster to adapt to rapid changes in customer behavior and demand that have occurred time and again during the pandemic. An AI-powered, voice-based dashboard gives managers the means to make supply chains more visible and efficient by making it possible for a manager to ask, literally, "Where's our order?" or "What's the status of delivery to our Topeka warehouse?" Voice creates a more natural and easier way to get answers to those questions faster and more effectively by removing the friction of dashboards and multiple clicks.
- **Customer relationship management**. CRM is fraught with inefficiency. It's still far more difficult than it should be for account teams to call up the precise information about a customer when they need it. Businesses such as Salesforce are starting to address that problem with tools such as Einstein Voice for conversational CRM, which makes it possible for account teams to update CRM records and receive personalized updates faster than before. It's not just the voice interface that matters – it's also supplying real-time account updates thanks to AI. SAP provides similar voice-based functionality with SAP Business by Design.

The two examples above demonstrate an important reality with voice: everyone thinks about voice as either a small add-on or a big platform. **And while the movement and impact are big, the use cases where the capability adds value doesn't have to be**. It is a channel that can live within or atop current applications and digital ecosystems. But most important, is the VALUE this capability provides people: a frictionless way to expedite access and enter information; reduce the amount of time in front of a screen; and reduce the amount of time employees spend on "busy work" to increase focus on what really matters.

And these are just two parts of these bigger business units within a B2B organization.

Overcoming Challenges to Voice

One major challenge that voice faces in the B2B space right now is **lack of awareness** among B2B decision makers. Employees are using voice to manage their jobs better, but how many executives know that? If they understood the way voice is already being used for functions such as collaboration and productivity, they might become more inspired and confident about using voice for more complex needs such as supply chain management.

Another challenge is **overcomplicating voice.** Voice may be a part of a business's overall digital strategy, but getting started isn't complicated (as much as businesses might want to make it seem that way). Look across user group journeys and have a solution ideation session focused on voice

ideas – what shakes out are some amazing possibilities to help B2B business run more smoothly and help your employees and customers readily connect. The 20th century and early 21st century were about buying big platforms with one-size fits all mentalities to solve your IT and process problems, but we're far past that now, and onto human-centric intelligent products and platforms that provide both the depth and breadth to grow. Creating the use case with a team to ensure what you're creating is the right product-market fit for you is where we are today. That is to say, buying some voice thing is not the route to go. Rather, you'll need to design the right voice experience for your business's, customer's, and personnel needs.

How to Get Started in Meaningful Ways

B2B decision makers can use techniques such as **design sprints** to quickly create, test, and learn about user interaction with voice-based applications applied to their organization. With design sprints, a business spends four days developing prototypes for how voice can address different needs in a human-centric way and to create value for the business. This is something we at Moonshot readily do through our FUEL methodology and are happy to work with your team to do so for you and your business. For more information on how to get started, contact us and we'll be happy to speak with you.

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