



Institute of Reading Development and TTEC Digital launch educational interactive chatbot tool

AT A GLANCE

TTEC Digital helped the Institute of Reading Development to:

- Add a new channel for customer education and interaction by implementing Copilot Studio
- Reduce call volume during the busy season by moving some customer inquiries from the phone to the chatbot

PARTNER

Microsoft

INDUSTRY

Education

SERVICE PROVIDED

CRM and Technology Integration
Customer Experience Transformation

SOLUTION USED

Microsoft Copilot Studio

About the client

Founded in 1970, the Institute of Reading Development partners with universities and colleges nationwide to provide reading programs for children aged four through college. The Institute of Reading Development has helped over three million students improve their reading skills and develop a lifelong love of reading.



The challenge

While the Institute of Reading Development (IRD) offers in-person and remote classes year-round, over 90 percent of their students participate in summer programs.

Historically, this has led to a large, seasonal uptick in phone calls from parents looking for program information. To help scale their customer service — and build a more convenient channel for accessing information — they began considering a chatbot.

IRD didn't want a traditional chatbot, however, because of the inflexibility. Traditional chatbots rely on recognizing keywords to provide related information, which can make them too restricted and unspecific to eliminate the need for a follow-up call. "Often, a chatbot is just a repackaged FAQ," said Doug Evans, the CEO and VP of Technology at IRD. "We saw an opportunity for chat to provide a more engaging experience, and for customers to have a more efficient experience learning about our program and getting the support they needed."

The solution

That opportunity came with the onset of large language models and AI-enabled technology. As IRD began building this interactive chatbot with TTEC Digital, they set out with two goals: help customers educate themselves at their own pace and reduce the high volume of administrative customer support calls. "I wanted this bot to be standalone and ensure that if a customer only engaged with it, the bot would have the functionality to provide everything the customer needed to understand their options, make a decision about the program, and complete registration," Evans said.

Director of Technology Nicole Prior shared this vision. "One of the things I love about the bot is that you can do everything in the same window," Prior said. "The bot houses everything and moves with you, so you can watch the video on the page, or learn about the 8th grade program, or check schedules. It allows you to make that journey much more efficiently." Evans agrees.

"I think one of the most universal experiences that customers have on the internet is saying 'I'll come back to this later,' and then not, because life happens," Evans said. "We wanted to provide an experience that was more like what customers get on the phone, something like a concierge or restaurant host, asking you your preferences and then taking you right to it." In addition to building in this flexibility, the TTEC Digital team also helped ensure it would work in tandem with other existing solutions.

As long-time Microsoft customers, IRD chose a Microsoft solution (Copilot Studio) to ensure that it would integrate with their existing technology stack and provide the chatbot with robust functionality. "We didn't want a siloed solution," said Evans. "We wanted to invest in a solution with a long-term return and ability to scale."

The result

By partnering with TTEC Digital to complete the project, Evans estimates that they were able to take it on about a year earlier than they would have been able to in-house or with another provider. “Partnering with TTEC Digital to implement this was critical. We would not have taken on this project this year with anyone else,” said Evans. “Because we knew we were going to get very professional service and responsive support, that gave us the confidence to proceed.”

While results are still new, they are already seeing customers beginning and completing the enrollment process within the chatbot. “Even within our soft launch period, we can see explicitly what percentage of customers are looking to find out how the program works, and what percentage of customers are looking at price and purchase type,” Evans explained. “Instantly, we have a great cross section on what customer motivations are for visiting our website.”

Future plans

As IRD considers future functionality, the customer experience will stay at the center. “One of the features we’re adding is the functionality for parents to actually get a better understanding of where their child is as a reader,” Evans said. “We want parents to feel better positioned to think about their child’s development, so we have a process in the chat that allows them to develop that understanding.”

“From a project perspective, this is just the beginning,” Evans continued. “Things are going to morph and change as customers, students, and participants tell us what they need, how they want it, and to what extent. We needed a solution that could provide that type of flexibility.”

Prior is also looking forward to future projects. “One of the things that enables us to consider these other possible future routes is how this was built,” she said. “We focused on building in the core functions as a foundation. Now, we can continue to remove administrative tasks from our agents, allowing them to focus on their conversations with customers.”

“Now, we can ask: How can we apply this to IT? How can we apply this to teaching? How can we help the customers get what they need as efficiently as possible without having that person on the phone?” Prior continued. “The flexibility is in there right from the beginning because of what this bot can do. It is a brand-new area for us as an organization, which makes it very exciting.”

About TTEC Digital

TTEC Digital is a global leader in customer experience orchestration, combining technology and empathy at the point of conversation. With decades of innovation experience across the world’s leading contact center technology platforms — plus in-house expertise in CX strategy, data and analytics, AI and more — TTEC Digital delivers an unmatched skillset for organizations looking to forge deeper customer relationships and drive better business outcomes. Learn more at ttecdigital.com.