You can set up your outside lights to go on every night at the same time, order laundry detergent to arrive every month, and do many other important tasks using automation technology. However, in many ways, that makes the human interactions in your personal and business life stand out even more. As much as technology can do for you and your customers, it can't replace a sympathetic expression or knowing a real person cares about your problem. At the same time, the only way to keep your doors open is to keep costs low and service high, two things that seem to counteract each other.

The answer? Strategically combining human and automation technology to provide the highest level of service possible. Here are three scenarios in which the human touch is especially important for a small business:

1. Potential New Customers
Think about how you buy a new product or service. You most likely spend a considerable amount of time doing research online and getting recommendations. Then, you make a few calls, inevitably leave a bunch of voicemails, and wait to see who calls you back. The first company that returns your call and helps you solve your problem at an affordable price is often the one that gets your business.

As a business owner, you don't want prospects leaving voicemails in an inbox that may not be checked until Monday morning. By using a virtual receptionist to greet callers, potential customers can be routed to the specific employee who can best help that exact prospect's needs. And, when your employees are out of the office, the call can be routed to their mobile devices using one business identity. The call gets answered, the customer is happy, and you maintain a consistent business presence and brand experience.

Obviously, there are going to be times when no one is available. Maybe your team is putting together its own Mannequin Challenge attempt and everyone is frozen in place. Enter another automated technology: visual voicemail. With this voicemail transcription, all messages are transcribed to an email format and sent directly to the proper employee. Even when they're off the clock, employees tend to obsessively check their phones, and they'll likely see the email pretty quickly and be able to get right back to the prospective customer if it's urgent.

2. Upset Customers

No matter how fantastic your product or service is, a customer is eventually going to get upset with you at some point. When that happens, the last thing you want is for them to feel like no one cares about their problems. With a cloud-based phone system integrated with a CRM, your employees can access all of their files no matter where they are and get all the information they need to help unhappy customers from whatever devices they happen to be using. This allows employees to know the full story of a customer regardless of where they are taking the call or accessing the information.

You'll also want to know exactly how well your team handles each touchy call. By using a call recording feature either randomly, on specific associates, or on-demand by associates when a customer is upset, you'll have a record of exactly what happened. Since delicate calls often escalate to management and the customer service rep and customer often have very different versions of how the call went down, having a record of the call allows you to hear exactly what happened.

3. Closing Sales

It used to be that most deals were signed in person because contracts had to be in pen and ink. However, technological advancements have now made it possible for two parties to sign without ever seeing each other. If customers need to send your team a signed contract or other paperwork, paperless fax is a great option. It allows customers to send documents directly to your team's email inbox without having to hunt for fax machines.

Despite this, it's sometimes nice to get some face time with the people you're working with by using video calls. After all, when you can put a face to a name and see expressions, it creates a bond that just can't be forged over email and voice. You can better communicate your passion for your customers and your products when they can see it in your eyes, and it's a great way to get a hopefully long-lasting business relationship off to a great start.

Automating processes helps you make the most of your time and resources so your team can focus on making great products and providing great services.

For more information on business communications systems, contact a Vonage Business consultant.