Dreamforce Week in Review: Technology Still Needs Humanity

By ALLISON WILSON

What a week! Dreamforce 2017 is winding down, and the last three days have been exhausting and energizing in all the best ways.

Our minds and Twitter feeds are overflowing with insights from the 2,700+ sessions, which spanned topics such as artificial intelligence, sustainability, user experience, women in leadership, security, privacy, and so much, much more. But what struck me most was that although Einstein and AI were everywhere at Dreamforce, preaching the possibilities of machine-learning and a bot-filled future, humanitarian messages rang just as loud and clear across the campground.

Let’s download some of the ideas and trends that dominated this year’s Dreamforce with our week in review.

**Design thinking**

Design-thinking, or human-centered design, was a major theme across this year’s conference. Hailed as the future of interactive approaches to product design and systems level management, design-thinking aims to understand and engage with the end-user in the design process. It’s an approach that is proving profitable as well, as design-driven companies have outperformed the S&P Index by 219% over 10 years.

This concept was certainly a driving force behind some of the product updates announced during Marc Benioff’s “We are all Trailblazers” keynote – myTrailhead, myEinstein and myLightening, which all promised “clicks, not code,” more user-friendly, customizable platforms and the democratization of AI.
“At the end of the day, design thinking means taking a huge step back from the boundaries of technology and getting unstuck,” said Renée B. McKaskle, Senior Vice President and CIO at Hitachi Vantara, during a session at the conference. “It means being empathetic, always being connected to your customers and always walking in their shoes.”

Diversity and inclusion

Each day at Dreamforce featured insightful, passionate and necessary conversations about equality and the incredible opportunities - and responsibility - for technology and the tech industry to play a role in driving social justice. Michelle Obama, Taraji P. Henson, will.i.am, Ashton Kutcher and Natalie Portman inspired those lucky enough to get a seat in their sessions with personal stories and philosophies about diversity, disparity, discrimination, poverty and privilege. Their keynotes were some of the most quoted and quotable talks of the week.

But one of the most eye-opening discussions at Dreamforce took place during the Activists Standing up for Equality session during Wednesday’s Equality Summit. We heard from prominent activists such as disability rights advocate Haben Girma, who told the audience that people with disabilities face “a lot of obstacles not because of their disabilities, but because designers don’t think about things being accessible for people who are different.”

During that same session, Dr. Vivienne Ming, founder at Socos & Chair at StartOut, spoke about the “tax of being different,” the extra cost paid by those discriminated against in the workplace – and the resulting tax on our economy. She also reminded us that, “Choice itself is inequitably distributed. People can't choose themselves out of poverty.” These are powerful words – and she shared them with her hope that they would reach people with the power to make real changes.

AI and humans blended throughout the customer journey

The future of customer service is complex because customers are complex. It’s easy to count humans out of a future where AI is making many aspects of customer service faster, cheaper and more efficient. This is especially true when you look at some of the statistics we saw at Dreamforce (the ones below came from Gartner):

- By 2022, 72% of customer interactions will involve an emerging technology such as machine-learning applications, chatbots or mobile messaging, up from 11% in 2017.
- By 2021, 15 percent of all customer service interactions will be completely handled by AI, an increase of 400% from 2017.
- By 2020, AI will disrupt the jobs of one million phone-based customer service agents.

But because of the complexity and emotion involved in customer support, AI still needs a hypothalamus in the driver’s seat. The future is blended interaction, and humans will continue to play a critical role in what Gartner analyst Michael Maoz describes as “AI-guided conversations” and AI-enriched decision making.”

“We want something that can respond dynamically to complicated opportunities that AI can’t respond to currently,” he said during Dreamforce.

NewVoiceMedia couldn’t agree more. Check out this interview with Dennis Fois, our President and COO on the importance of making customer experience adaptable to human conversation.

And while you’re at it, let us know your thoughts on Dreamforce. Tweet us at @NewVoiceMedia and share your favorite moments from the week.
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