

Managing customer needs - Humans vs tech or human and tech?

By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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The pandemic has forced consumers to adopt new technologies, and this has taken them out of their comfort zone. Consumers who never engaged online are now ordering their prescriptions and groceries online, and using payment methods they might not have thought safe before.



Source: ©Andriy Popov - [123RF](#)

Technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, augmented reality, virtual reality, the automation of jobs, have become commonplace as these technologies allow us to understand consumer behaviour and meet our customers where they are – online, while creating better experiences for them.



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But, what about that personal touch? Where does the human element come into this?

I recently moderated a panel, 'Managing the needs of customers: humans vs tech or humans and tech?' at the recent CEM Africa Summit.

The panellists included:

Laurian Venter, director of OneDayOnly, South Africa

Kamohelo Potloane, head of customer experience development, Rand Water, South Africa

George Mienie, CEO, Autotrader, South Africa

Douglas McNeilage, regional director – sales, Verint, South Africa

Vivek Ethiraj, pre-sales head, MEA from Freshworks, UAE

All the panellists agreed that e-commerce has accelerated in South Africa, and that technology was the enabler to this. However, this has only made the human element more important.

Venter said that it is how we use technology with a human touchpoint that ensures we are there for our customers.

Need for radical change

McNeilage emphasised that in today's uncertain economic times, organisations across South Africa are focused on gaining greater customer mindshare and loyalty. Many executives are realising that they need to radically change and adapt their customer engagement strategies to achieve these goals.

The need for change is due to their engagement management processes becoming more complex as communication channels have exploded, and consumers are a click away from the competition. Adding to this is the ever-increasing expectations of customers.



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Mienie adds that in the decade it took them to move Autotrader from a print to online environment, they found that some technology works for them, while others don't – the human element worked better.

The panel agreed that personalisation is key to e-commerce and concluded that it is in fact humans and tech, not tech vs humans, that leads to business success and customer satisfaction.

Bizcommunity was a media partner of [CEM Africa 2021](#), a virtual conference held on 10 and 11 November 2021, hosted by Kinetic Events.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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