

# COMM 1116 Email Assignment

(Midterm: 30%, back in the day)

## The midterm scenario

You work as an IT Support Specialist for Highway Bytes, a company which markets a series of small, handlebar-mounted computers for cyclists. These cycling computers do many things, from monitoring speed, distance travelled and calories burned to displaying street maps with voice-controlled GPS navigation. Cyclists love these computers, and your company is growing so fast that you can't keep up with all the customer service requests you receive every day. The CEO of the company, Samantha (Sam) Lee, recently mentioned that the company needs to speed up customer response times while also reducing staffing costs. Sam wants to allow the company's technical experts the time they need to focus on the more difficult customer requests.

You're not sure how to solve this problem, so you call a friend, Ina Polspoel. She's an IT Support Analyst at IBM with a lot of experience dealing with such issues. You ask her to meet you for lunch (your treat!) so you can get the benefit of her expertise on the problem. The conversation is as follows:

You: So, Sam's asked me to solve these competing goals of reducing response times while also reducing costs, and I'm not sure the best way to do it.

Ina: Yeah, that's a tough one. Wow, this saag paneer is really tasty.

You: I've been doing some reading up about chatbots, AI programs that can recognize speech and text so they can respond to customer requests. Sounds pretty amazing; the better ones can pass the Turing test.<sup>1</sup>

Ina: Yeah, but they're probably not the best way to go. Holy moly, guacamole, these veggie samosas are the bomb!

You: Uh, why not? Why aren't chatbots good?

Ina: Oh, they're good, or they can be. IBM's using them, they work well, but they're kind of overkill for what you need. Chatbots can cost lots of cash to develop, test and maintain. Human communication is really complex. Some companies even have in-house chatbot training teams, which definitely wouldn't lower your staff costs.

You: Well that sucks, because that was my best idea so far. So, what do you think we should do?

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<sup>1</sup> The Turing test, originally called the imitation game by Alan Turing in 1950, is a test of a machine's ability to exhibit intelligent behaviour equivalent to, or indistinguishable from, that of a human" (Wikipedia). A machine that passes the Turing test can pass for human in an interaction with a real human.

Ina: You said most requests are coming via email, right?

You: Yep, customers go to our website to make contact, and most just use our email request form.

Ina: What are the most common requests you get? What's your top three?

You: Well, we get a ton of requests about installing the Cycling Computer for the first time, or reinstalling it on a new bike. I mean, it's made to just bolt on the bike with the wheel sensor and cable, but some different bikes require some modifications.

Ina: Doesn't the unit come with instructions?

You: Yeah, but nobody reads them. You know how people are.

Ina: Unfortunately, I do. What other requests do you get?

You: Troubleshooting the computer when it crashes or malfunctions. A whole bunch of these kinds of requests turn out to just be dead batteries, or dying batteries, or loose wires, but people never think to check those things.

Ina: Okay, that's two. What else?

You: Upgrading the software. Some problems happen because people are using old software in their computer, real ancient versions, so we have to tell them how to connect to a laptop and download updates. It ain't rocket science, but they still need hand-holding through it. You know how people are.

Ina: Okay, so those are your top three. What percentage of all requests consist of those three?

You: I dunno, I haven't crunched the numbers. I'd guess about 60%. We get other kinds of requests too, though.

Ina: Yeah, but 60% is pretty big. Have you heard of email autoresponders? Like MailChimp? Other programs like that?

You: Yeah, sure I've heard of them, but they're pretty simple automated systems that search for keywords, then fire off a stock reply. Are they going to be good enough to do the job for us? Like I said, we get other kinds of requests, sometimes really complicated requests as well.

Ina: You don't have to cover all requests. Just buy MailChimp, that's probably the best autoresponder for your size of company and volume. It even comes with email templates. You'll just need to create three emails to respond to each of your three common requests, then create a list of key words for each request, then have MailChimp search incoming requests for those keywords and fire off an appropriate reply.

You: Sounds good, but like I said, we get other requests as well. What you described won't cut it for anything else.

Ina: C'mon, have some faith. I got your back, fam. Create a fourth email with a stock response saying thanks and that a real person will get back to them asap to fix it. That email goes out to everyone who has a request that isn't flagged for the three top responses. Easy, peasy, lemon squeezy.

You: Wow, that's awesome. Thanks so much for your help, when I tell Sam about it, she's going to think I'm a hero. She'll probably make me CTO.

Ina: Don't get ahead of yourself, champ. You've only worked there for two months. You're still a noob.

You: So she could make me Chief IT Support Analyst. That could happen.

Ina: Yeah, that could totally happen. But it won't. I mean, it could. But it won't. And don't forget you're probably going to have to explain some of this stuff to her before she even understands your solution and agrees with it. From what you told me previously, she's more of a business type than a techie.

You: Good point. I'll put all this in an email and make it all clear for her. I'm on this like a cheap suit.

Ina: You keep using that phrase. I don't think that phrase means what you think it means.

You: Be quiet and eat your gulab jamun.

Ina: I'm on it like a cheap suit.

Write the email. Don't copy the language used above; much of it consists of casual conversation and may contain errors.

# Plan Sheet

## **Purpose Statement**

I want my reader, who is my boss / CEO

To hear my idea about automated emails

## **1. Main Idea Statement**

Automate Emails to respond to customers quickly

## **2. Context**

I consulted with an IT Support Analyst at IBM for some advice and solutions regarding our problem of not being able to keep up with customer service requests and wanting to lower staffing costs.

## **3. Details**

Use a service called "mailchimp" that searches keywords from incoming email and responds with a template

Need to set up 4 email templates: how to install, troubleshooting, updating software, and one that

Covers the top 3 concerns only

Flag any non top 3 concerns and send an automatic response that a real person will get back to them to fix it asap

## **4. Next Step**

Ask sam to get back to me with what she thinks of the idea and if she agrees with it

If you require any further explanations please

To: sampleemail@gmail.com

From: jaydentommyevan@gmail.com

Date: 02 / 08 / 2024

Subject: Solution to automate emails to lower customer service response time.

Greetings Sam,

To address the slow customer service response time the company is facing, I've come to the solution of implementing an automated email system that provides solutions to requests.

We've identified that around 60% of our current customer requests are regarding the same 3 issues. These include:

- How to install or reinstall the device onto a new bike.
- Troubleshooting the computer when it crashes or malfunctions.
- Upgrading the software.

We could purchase and implement a system called "Mailchimp". Mailchimp is a system that flags emails based on keywords that we provide. We can have Mailchimp flag emails regarding our common issues. Then for each common request, we create premade emails that Mailchimp will automatically reply with. For requests not flagged as a common issue, Mailchimp will send a premade email stating that a technical expert will respond shortly.

Please, let me know what you think of the idea or have any further questions.

Kind regards,

Jayden, Tommy, Evan  
IT Support Specialist