**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 recognise speech and text so they can respond to customer requests. Sounds pretty amazing; the better ones can pass the Turing test.[[1]](#footnote-1)

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?

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.

In: 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 on their computers,** 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 company's size and volume. It even comes with email templates. You’ll just need to ***1*. create three emails to respond** to each of your three common requests, then create a **2. list of keywords** for each request, then ***3.* 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 ***4.* 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 with 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 above language; much of it consists of casual conversation and may contain errors.

**Plan Sheet**

**Purpose static void Statement(String content){}**

I want my reader, who is the CEO of Highway Bytes

To understand the automated email response system

**1. Main Idea Statement**

We can speed up customer response times while lowering staffing costs using an automated email response system,

**2. Context**

AI was considered. However, implementation costs are too high.

60% of our customer support requests are regarding three relatively simple issues. By automating these three support requests in the form of a template email, we can reduce the time it takes for customers to access help while simultaneously freeing up support staff for more technical requests.

Mailchimp was recommended by a professional with experience in similar problems.

**3. Details**

The top three common requests, which consist of nearly 60% we get from customers, are:

1. People don’t read the instructions, so they cannot install the Cycling Computer but does not read instructions.
2. People don’t want to check the batteries or loose wires, which makes the computer crash or malfunction.
3. People are using ancient software that the system cannot support.

AI is not a feasible solution due to its high cost of implementation and maintenance.

Mailchimp is an email autoresponder that searches incoming requests for keywords and replies with an appropriate stock reply. For example, if it found mention of installation or bike handlebars, it would reply with a pre-written email with installation instructions and troubleshooting. While this would not solve all customer requests, it would deal with the most simple and common, freeing up staff to focus on the more involved and technical requests.

Implementing Mailchimp would be quick, easy and cheap. All that is required is a stock email to be written for each of our most common support requests and then a fourth email for all other requests that lets the customer know they will be connected with a real human soon.

**4. Next Step**

**To:** [SamanthaLee@highwaybytes.com](mailto:SamanthaLee@highwaybytes.com)

**From:** [SherryJameel@futureCTO.com](mailto:SherryJameel@futureCTO.com),

**Date:** 9th February, 2024

**Subject:** Using automated systems to lower customer support costs and time

Hi Sam,

After some diligent research and conversations with professionals in the field, I believe an email autoresponder is the perfect solution to our problems of high support costs and response time.

I discovered that 60% of our customer support requests are regarding three simple issues:

* Installation, where customers are having issues with setting the computer up. This can be solved by just consulting the instructions.
* Malfunctions, where the computer crashes or otherwise malfunctions. This can be solved by just replacing the batteries or checking for loose wires.
* Updating, where the computer has issues because it runs an ancient version. This can be solved by just connecting to a computer and downloading updates.

As you can see, these requests are simple to fix, but responding to these requests takes up a lot of our staff’s time. This is where my solution comes in, in the form of the industry standard software: MailChimp.

MailChimp is an email autoresponder that searches incoming requests for keywords and replies with an appropriate stock reply. For example, if it found mention of installation or bike handlebars, it would reply with a pre-written email with installation instructions and troubleshooting. While this would not solve all customer requests, it would deal with the three most common, freeing up staff to focus on the more involved and technical requests.

Implementing Mailchimp would be quick, easy and cheap. All that is required is:

1. Writing a response email to each type of request using MailChimp’s provided templates.
2. Writing a fourth email confirming further customer service contact for requests that cannot be addressed by the automated responses.
3. Creating a list of keywords for each type of customer request
4. Setting up MailChimp to scan each incoming request for keywords and replying with an appropriate email.
5. If any keywords are not found, reply with the fourth email, letting them know they will be connected with a human soon.

By automating these three support requests in the form of stock emails, we can reduce the time it takes for customers to access help while simultaneously freeing up support staff for more technical requests. I would like your permission to get started with implementation right away!

Best Regards,

Sherry Jameel, Daniel Wang, Jiarui Xing

1. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)