

## Process to Ready the Business for Generative AI



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## Case Study: Ava, Instacart's Generative AI Employee Assistant

### Ava, Instacart's Generative AI Employee Assistant

**Instacart**, a leading grocery and retail delivery service, has delivered on the value potential of Generative AI by developing Ava, a GenAI-enabled assistant for Instacart's employees.

#### Business Challenges and GenAI Application:

- **Information Overload and Silos:** Lost in a mess of siloed knowledge bases and scattered communication channels, Instacart employees struggled to find essential information, hindering collaboration and workflow. Finding crucial information meant navigating a labyrinth of disconnected resources and internal channels like wikis, FAQs, and Slack conversations. This not only wasted valuable time but also hampered collaboration, as teams remained unaware of each other's knowledge and best practices.
- **Repetitive Tasks and Inefficiencies:** Simple inquiries about benefits, payroll, or company policies took up countless hours for internal support teams and individual employees. This repetitive workflow drained valuable time and energy that could have been better spent on strategic initiatives or core projects. The existing system struggled to scale with the company's rapid growth, leaving employees waiting for answers and support.
- **Limited Support Scalability:** As Instacart expanded, its existing support system became a bottleneck. Human agents were overwhelmed by the sheer volume and diversity of employee inquiries, leading to longer wait times, frustrations, and decreased employee satisfaction. Traditional methods of scaling support, like hiring more agents, increasingly proved unsustainable and resource-intensive.

#### Strategic Approach to Using GenAI: Instacart's "Ava" Generative AI Solution

- **Content Recommendation:** Ava leverages advanced natural language processing and machine learning algorithms. Ava analyzes user queries and identifies the most relevant resources within Instacart's extensive knowledge base. This includes internal articles, FAQs, wikis, and historical Slack conversations. Ava then generates a prioritized list of results, ensuring users receive the most accurate and up-to-date information tailored to their specific needs and context. It effectively functions as a real-time, intelligent search engine customized for the organization's internal data.
- **Real-time Assistance:** Ava operates as a readily available and efficient support channel, eliminating the need for traditional email exchanges or extended wait times on phone lines. Through intuitive natural language conversation capabilities within Slack chats and DMs, Ava addresses routine inquiries regarding company policies, employee benefits, procedural guidance, and even basic technical troubleshooting. For more complex matters, Ava seamlessly routes the query to the appropriate human agent, facilitating swift resolution and maximizing efficiency.
- **Multilingual Support:** Recognizing the importance of a diverse workforce, Ava transcends language barriers through real-time translation of both queries and responses. This comprehensive support caters to a global employee base and fosters a more inclusive work environment where all individuals feel empowered to contribute regardless of their native language.
- **Prompt Exchange and Customization:** Ava facilitates user empowerment by enabling individuals to tailor its responses to specific needs and workflows. A curated library of pre-written prompts covering common tasks such as IT support requests or expense report submission is readily available. Additionally, users can search for specific prompts or even create their own, effectively personalizing Ava's behavior to align with their team's unique processes and terminology. This flexibility ensures Ava functions as a dynamic tool that adapts to individual requirements, not the other way around.
- **Slack Integration:** Understanding the ubiquitous nature of Slack in today's digital workplace, Ava seamlessly integrates its functionalities within the existing platform. This eliminates the need for users to learn a new interface or disrupt their established workflow. Ava's capabilities are conveniently accessible through commands within Slack channels and DMs, ensuring maximum adoption and user satisfaction.

#### Implications for Other Organizations:

- **Strategic Alignment and Pain Point Identification:** Before embarking on an AI journey, a thorough analysis of internal operational challenges and workflow bottlenecks is crucial. This deep dive should identify specific areas where AI can deliver impactful solutions, aligning AI initiatives with broader strategic objectives. Instead of a technology-driven approach, organizations should adopt a problem-driven strategy, utilizing AI as a targeted tool to address clearly defined business needs.
- **Embrace User-Centric Design and Foster Adoption:** The success of any AI solution hinges on user acceptance and engagement. A user-centric design approach, prioritizing intuitiveness, transparency, and user control, is paramount. Organizations must consider their employees' existing working styles and preferences when designing AI interfaces and functionalities. Proactive training, readily available support, and ongoing feedback mechanisms are essential for fostering user trust and maximizing adoption rates.
- **Invest in Data Governance and Mitigate Potential Biases:** The quality and integrity of training data directly influence the outputs and outcomes of AI models. Building robust data governance practices and implementing proactive bias mitigation strategies are crucial to ensure fair, ethical, and accurate AI interactions. Organizations must carefully curate diverse and representative training datasets, continuously monitor performance for potential biases, and implement feedback loops to address any issues that may arise.
- **Adopt an Agile and Iterative Approach:** The rapidly evolving nature of AI necessitates an agile and iterative development approach. Instead of large-scale, fixed-scope projects, organizations should favor pilot programs and incremental deployments. This allows for continuous learning, adaptation, and refinement based on user feedback and real-world results. By iteratively improving and optimizing AI models, organizations can ensure continued relevance and effectiveness.
- **Foster a Culture of Continuous Learning and Improvement:** AI is not a static technology; it requires ongoing investment in learning and development. Organizations must cultivate a culture that embraces constant improvement and adaptation. This includes actively soliciting user feedback, analyzing model performance data, and implementing ongoing refinement initiatives. By remaining committed to continuous learning, organizations can ensure their AI solutions evolve alongside their needs and remain at the forefront of technological advancement.

Instacart's experience with Ava demonstrates the potential of generative AI to

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revolutionize internal operations and unlock new levels of efficiency, productivity, and employee satisfaction. I was glad to learn that Instacart emphasizes an agile and iterative approach over monolithic projects with fixed scope; this "start small and scale gradually" approach minimizes risk and waste while allowing for continuous learning and adaptation based on real-world results and user feedback.

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