



Business challenge

The customer service team at Roman's Pizza was struggling to keep pace with the constant stream of questions being posted to its social media platforms.

Transformation

Overwhelmed by high volumes of customer queries, Roman's Pizza joined with IBM Business Partner Ocular Technologies to launch Levi, a customer support chatbot. The solution, powered by IBM Watson® technology, allows consumers to more easily find the food they crave while helping customer service staff stay a little saner.

Results

> 90% of incoming queries

are answered automatically without human intervention

Responds immediately

to customers, while previous replies took 6 – 8 hours on average

Frees up staff

to focus on more important tasks and establish a healthy work-life balance

Roman's Pizza

Chat your way into delicious food, satisfied employees and happy customers

Roman's Pizza is a restaurant chain that is well known for its two-for-one pizza promotions. Originally founded in 1993 as Little Caesar's, the business rebranded to the Roman's Pizza name in 2002. It is currently headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa and maintains over 230 restaurant locations, spread throughout the country.

“Where it used to take an average six to eight hours to hear back from us, customers now get a response immediately.”

—Matthew Jackson, Head of Digital Media, BPD Advertising



Share this



“It was a bit chaotic”

Pizza is delicious. Round flattened dough, rich tomato sauce, cheese and, depending on your taste, a mixture of meats and vegetables—there are few meals that are as universally appealing. And in South Africa, Roman’s Pizza tries to keep up with the ever-increasing demand for this treat, offering tasty, low-cost pizza through hundreds of restaurants spread across the country.

However, alongside this high demand for its pizzas, the business was also experiencing a high demand of support from its customers.

“We’ve got a fairly small customer support team,” explains Bonnie Cooper, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at Roman’s Pizza. “So we weren’t able to keep up with questions and complaints in a timely fashion. We were getting inbound communications from customers 24x7—long after our stores had closed—meaning some of these questions weren’t answered until the next morning, several hours later.”

These delayed responses, in turn, resulted in lower review scores on social media platforms, weakening the brand. In reaction, the customer support team began working longer hours.

“It was a bit chaotic,” recalls Matthew Jackson, Head of Digital Media at BPD Advertising, the marketing

agency for Roman’s Pizza. “We were seeing all of these queries, and we didn’t have a real system in place to manage, escalate or log them. At one point, we had everyone from the management team involved. Even Bonnie was responding to Facebook questions from her home on the weekends.”

He continues, adding: “But many of these questions didn’t need to be answered by a person. We were having a lot of what we call Tier 1 queries—sort of mundane things. Where is my closest store? What are your specials? Are you open? Things that customers could typically figure out with an online search, but they preferred to ask someone.”

“Tone and sentiment are difficult even for humans. The fact that Watson could identify negative sentiments accurately was a strong selling point.”

—Bonnie Cooper, Chief Executive Officer, Roman’s Pizza

Aware of the recent advances in AI and chatbot technology and after viewing the technology demonstrated at the Lisbon Web Summit, Roman’s Pizza decided that it wanted to deploy a customer-facing communication platform that could resolve the majority of these requests without human intervention. Of

course, the solution would also need to be sophisticated enough to know when a conversation needed to be escalated to human staff—avoiding further frustration for already upset consumers.

I’m Levi, your pizza ambassador

Roman’s Pizza reached out to IBM, which quickly put the firm in touch with IBM Business Partner Ocular. And working together, the businesses developed and launched a lateral conversational interface called “Levi”.

“When we had a look at other bot platforms that were available, they were very linear,” explains Jackson. “Ocular presented a better proposal. They were the only company at the time that believed that they could achieve a lateral conversational interface that came across as natural language as opposed to a button-driven approach.”

Levi now acts as one of the company’s primary touchpoints for customer service, answering the majority of Tier 1 queries and helping customers to more easily get their pizza. The solution is currently available through Roman’s Pizza’s Facebook page, the company’s primary mechanism for communicating with customers, and will soon also be available on the restaurant chain’s website.

“We designed Levi to be anamorphic—in other words, very human-like,” notes Pommie

Lutchman, CEO at Ocular. “It’s colloquial in terms of language. Humorous in terms of personality. Intuitive, meaning it has the ability to understand the tone and sentiment of the customer and respond in a natural manner.”

“I’ve got a love-hate relationship with technology,” adds Cooper. “I love what it can do, but it can be incredibly frustrating when it doesn’t work—I don’t have the patience to deal with poor user experiences. From the beginning, I wanted Levi to come across as a friendly customer support person, not a rigid bot.”

“We’ve even had some funny scenarios where people have thought that Levi was a real person,” Jackson adds. “In one case, we had a customer who thought that there was someone on the other end of the chat window that she could flirt with to get free pizza. Levi created a space where that customer felt very comfortable in who she was talking to—that’s when you know you’ve built a good conversational interface.”

To bring Levi to life, Ocular relies on its own custom-built conversational interface, powered by IBM technology under an IBM Embedded Solutions Agreement (ESA). IBM Watson Assistant serves as the heart of the solution, while IBM Watson Tone Analyzer monitors chat instances, identifying when conversations need to be escalated to human staff. “It tracks the tone,” explains Lutchman. “And when it hits a threshold—swear words, aggression—it will send an

SMS message to the support team that they have someone who needs help.”

In addition, the solution uses IBM API Connect® to integrate Levi with the Facebook Messenger app as well as IBM Cloud®, where the entire Levi infrastructure is hosted.

Trust the bot

On average, the Levi platform resolves over 90% of incoming issues and queries appropriately without human intervention, which dramatically reduces the demands on human staff at Roman's Pizza. “In the past, we'd sit there on our cell phones and our computers and sacrifice family time to try and be as efficient as we can possibly be for our customers,” adds Jackson. “Now, we can give our team a healthier work-life balance, and they can explore the more exciting avenues of their careers.”

“Roman's Pizza's customer service response times have also improved,” notes Jackson. “Where it used to take an average six to eight hours to hear back from us, customers now

“And that's what we enjoy working with the Ocular team. They have been very attentive to our business needs and where we would like to see this project go.”

—Matthew Jackson, Head of Digital Media, BPD Advertising

get a response immediately. And if you have an issue outside of business hours that Levi can't handle, it will log that complaint and notify the team to deal with it first thing in the morning. It addresses consumer's concern up front and gives an expectation on when things can be resolved.”

Roman's Pizza is also impressed with the capabilities of the underlying Watson™ technology that powers the new lateral conversation interface. “It was the tone and sentiment analysis that impressed us,” recalls Cooper. “Tone and sentiment are difficult even for humans. The fact that Watson could identify negative

sentiments accurately was a strong selling point. We also liked the different languages that Watson could communicate in. While Levi is not scripted in multiple languages at this point, we have seen it have conversations with people who spoke other languages—Afrikaans speakers, for instance—and give answers appropriately.”

“I'm a big fan of IBM Cloud,” adds Lutchman. “There are so many services available—that excites us from an application development perspective. We can pull from all of these technologies to create complex solutions, and we do so in a reliable environment.”

“This project is not finished,” continues Jackson. “We are really excited to develop Levi out to its full potential. To put it into more places and to use it to help us solve more problems that we encounter. And that's what we enjoy working with the Ocular team. They have been very attentive to our business needs and where we would like to see this project go.”

Solution components

- IBM API Connect®
- IBM Cloud®
- IBM Watson® Assistant
- IBM Watson Tone Analyzer

Take the next step

To learn more about the IBM solutions featured in this story, please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner.

To learn more about customer engagement solutions and what Ocular Technologies can do for you, please visit: [Ocular Technologies](#)

About Ocular Technologies

Founded in 2003, IBM Business Partner [Ocular](#) is an IT solutions and services company that is headquartered in Sandton, South Africa. Taking advantage of the convergence of voice and data, the business specializes in developing and deploying customer engagement and digital experience solutions.

© Copyright IBM Corporation 2020. IBM Corporation, IBM Watson, New Orchard Road, Armonk, NY 10504. Produced in the United States of America, September 2020. IBM, the IBM logo, ibm.com, IBM API Connect, IBM Cloud, and IBM Watson are trademarks of International Business Machines Corp., registered in many jurisdictions worldwide. Other product and service names might be trademarks of IBM or other companies. A current list of IBM trademarks is available on the web at “Copyright and trademark information” at www.ibm.com/legal/copytrade.shtml. This document is current as of the initial date of publication and may be changed by IBM at any time. Not all offerings are available in every country in which IBM operates. The performance data and client examples cited are presented for illustrative purposes only. Actual performance results may vary depending on specific configurations and operating conditions. THE INFORMATION IN THIS DOCUMENT IS PROVIDED “AS IS” WITHOUT ANY WARRANTY, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING WITHOUT ANY WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY, FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE AND ANY WARRANTY OR CONDITION OF NON-INFRINGEMENT. IBM products are warranted according to the terms and conditions of the agreements under which they are provided.

