

Incubeta's CEO on e-commerce, automation and entering the metaverse



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Lars Lehne, recently appointed Incubeta Group CEO, shares some insights into the use of chatbots in e-commerce, automation in marketing and entering the metaverse...



Lars Lehne, Group CEO of Incubeta

The uptake of chatbots in e-commerce

"Chatbots could be a real help for e-commerce sites. Especially if the UX of the website is poor and unintuitive," says Lehne.

When users get lost or can't find what they want or need quickly, chatbots can be a big help. They also act as a bridge to help overcome a fear of technology for less literate users. That said, the devil is in the detail as chatbots often raise expectations and, if they end up disappointing users, it can result in a bad experience and even damage the perception of the brand.

Lehne explains that the use of chatbots create an expectation of offering immediate help and can help new and inexperienced users overcome their fear of technology. On the other hand, they can also make static websites interactive, faster, more communicative and, if properly designed, even entertaining. When users are properly supported, the drop-off rates should decrease and completed sales increase.

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What's more, the collection of first-party data should become easier and the overall customer experience should increase. "This is all great in theory, but marketers often underestimate the amount of work and investment that goes into good chatbots - unfortunately, often with very disappointing outcomes," says Lehne.

So far, only a few bots are capable of dealing with human language and nuance, and those that are learning from human interaction are often not receiving the best education.

Automation in marketing

It won't be long before automation makes its way to marketing.

"From marketing operations to one-to-one communication with consumers, there are many examples where automation will have a positive impact on marketing," explains Lehne. "Automation will massively increase efficiency in the operational management and set-up of digital campaigns, even increasing their effectiveness. Automation in communications will help make up for the reduced number of people in call centres."

"In addition, Covid has led to massively reduced investments in customer service, which will most certainly bite back every time a loyal customer interacts with their brand, and solutions will be needed to address this."



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At this point, many organisations are likely wondering if they should factor AI into their future marketing plans.

"The question is not if, but when and how. AI should be factored in, but keep in mind that AI will not be perfect from the beginning. In my previous role, we conducted a survey to find out whether people actually feared or welcomed bots and AI. Surprisingly the majority welcomed bots and AI, but with one very important condition - they should not pretend to be human," notes Lehne.

Brands should let their customers know when they are engaging with machines and should alert them that engagements may not work the way they expect. If they have this information, consumers are way more likely to accept errors and even failure. By adding in some humour, you stand a better chance of acceptance. Companies should learn along the way and

optimise constantly.

Entering the metaverse

As "metaverse" becomes the latest tech buzzword, companies are considering whether to jump on that bandwagon right now - and if so, how?

"Every company should have meta and the metaverse on its radar," Lehne recommends. "Curiosity is one of the most important requirements in the digital age. That said, I would advise you not to blindly jump on the bandwagon. It's time to reflect and check whether your core business is still intact and if the last two years, with all the uncertainties, experiments and fire drills, have damaged your service or product to an extent that it might be dangerous."



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"Working in global business for many years means I am a heavy user of airlines. This industry got hit very hard by the pandemic. As a consequence, the product and service got damaged badly. The current experience is shocking. From communication to website failure to data issues, product, service - no aspect has escaped."

"Before jumping into the metaverse, they need a proper clean-up, some very good AI, automation, clever data usage and a whole rethink or reinvention of the customer experience," explains Lehne.

"But maybe airlines have decided to do their very best in helping to reduce the carbon footprint by offering flights in the metaverse (which, by the way, wouldn't be clean at all) or simply frustrate customers until they don't fly anymore. Of course, I'm exaggerating here, but you get the point. Now is the time for reflection in many sectors. Don't open shops in the metaverse - rather rethink High Street! Otherwise, we will end up in a world that we have blindly built, simply because someone in Silicon Valley told us to."

Regulation of information

With governments seeking to regulate the distribution of personal information, so we should expect the regulation of information in the metaverse. The question now is, what measures should be put in place?

"The strange thing with consumers is that everybody talks about their mindfulness in sharing information and being overly sensitive in accepting T&Cs," says Lehne.

"Well, I don't know a single person that has ever read the T&Cs of any given product or service on the net. If we humans want something or are convinced it will enrich our lives and make it more convenient, we will blindly click on almost anything."

"That said, in a world without cookies, it will all come down to honesty, transparency and good communication. Although we choose to interact with a website, we still want to be appreciated and respected as human beings. That's all that counts. When it comes to the protection of data, I personally tend to trust the big players rather than mom-and-pop shops. But obviously, I'm biased in a professional as well as personal way."

The future of digital

The digital world is rapidly changing and companies cannot simply ignore the impact on our digital ecosystem when cookies disappear. If companies don't get their tech stack in order right now, they will lose out in the medium-term in terms

of addressable first-party data and knowledge of their customers. "No data, no business. It's as simple as that," adds Lehne.

Lehne predicts that the role of martech (marketing technology) will only grow over time.

"It depends on your business or industry, but automation, AI, conversational bots, first-party data and reliable tech stacks are just a few technologies that will dominate in the near future. These technologies may have been around for quite some time - but their impact will be much more noticeable in the immediate future," concludes Lehne.

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