

# The Evolution of Artificial Intelligence and Unified Communications



By **BECKY LAWLOR** - Contributor

The buzz around artificial intelligence (AI) is almost deafening. Every industry is looking at how they can apply the power of AI to enhance productivity or improve decision-making. But despite its recent stardom, AI isn't as new as it may seem. The concept of AI has been around since 1950 when Alan Turing published his paper *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*, which sparked a new way of considering technology's potential for comprehension and thought.



The future looks bright for artificial intelligence and unified communications.

AI, and the relationship between artificial intelligence and unified communications and technologies, however, has had its stops and starts over the years. From 1950 to 1970, a significant amount of funding and research went into developing AI, but when the technology struggled to reach its promise, interest and funding waned. After a ten-year lapse, the 1980s saw another surge in AI research, but by the 1990s, when research goals weren't met, interest once again dropped off.

Today, computers have caught up to the promise of AI, and AI can finally learn at a meaningful level. As a result, AI-based applications are proliferating in business, entertainment, and unified communications. Constellation Research predicts that by 2025, the AI market will surpass \$100 billion.



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## Artificial Intelligence in Unified Communications

AI technology, as well as interrelated technologies such as machine learning, predictive analytics, and natural language processing, have already made a significant impact on unified communications, especially in business. Organizations are tapping into the power of AI to improve collaboration across not only the organization but also the customer experience.

In industries where the use of contact centers and customer service agents is essential, such as in retail, travel, and hospitality, AI-enhanced communication tools can significantly reduce time to resolution. Customer service voicebots, for instance, can answer customers' questions or even provide step-by-step instructions on how to set up a printer or return an item. Voicebots can also connect customers to human agents for more complex questions — streamlining this process by automatically sending the contact center agent an outline of the customer's inquiries. The result is a better experience for the customer and greater operational efficiency for the business, with human agents able to spend a greater amount of their time handling more complex tasks and customer inquiries.

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Applications of AI in business environments are also helping to enhance collaboration and communications. For example, voice assistants can help schedule meetings, make calls, send SMS messages, and even translate voicemails to text. AI-powered collaboration tools can also be used to find relevant documents based on past information and have them ready for meetings, saving employees time and making collaboration easier.

In the healthcare industry, trends in AI can be used to empower patients and improve diagnostics. Through a unified communications solution, for example, patients can access their health information as well as broader health datasets that can enhance diagnosis and overall wellness, and they can do so using the device of their choice, including wearables. These and other examples show how pervasive AI has become.

## What Does the Future Hold?

AI in unified communications is still in the early stages of implementation, but the future looks bright for further innovation and adoption.

As more companies tap into their power to improve operational efficiency and the customer experience, the way people work and communicate will change. The use of voice assistants and chatbots is already growing and will continue to increase. Gartner predicts that by as early as next year, people will have more conversations with chatbots than with their spouses.

Voice assistants and chatbots will increasingly add tasks like scheduling customer appointments and following up on missed appointments to their many duties. And in the healthcare industry, chatbots will even be able to help patients adhere to medication schedules and manage their medical bills. Overall, chatbots will make employees more efficient and enable faster problem-solving.

As the technology evolves, AI's predictive capabilities will likely be applied in new and innovative ways to deliver even greater operational efficiency through unified communications. For instance, in the transportation and logistics industry, AI-powered unified communications could help identify the best routes and predict shipment delays or other issues, and then automatically communicate with drivers to reroute them.

The history of AI is filled with stories of innovation, but the power of AI to change the way we work, communicate, and live is just beginning to become apparent. However AI evolves into the future, it's safe to assume that greater efficiency in how we collaborate and communicate will be one of the biggest benefits.