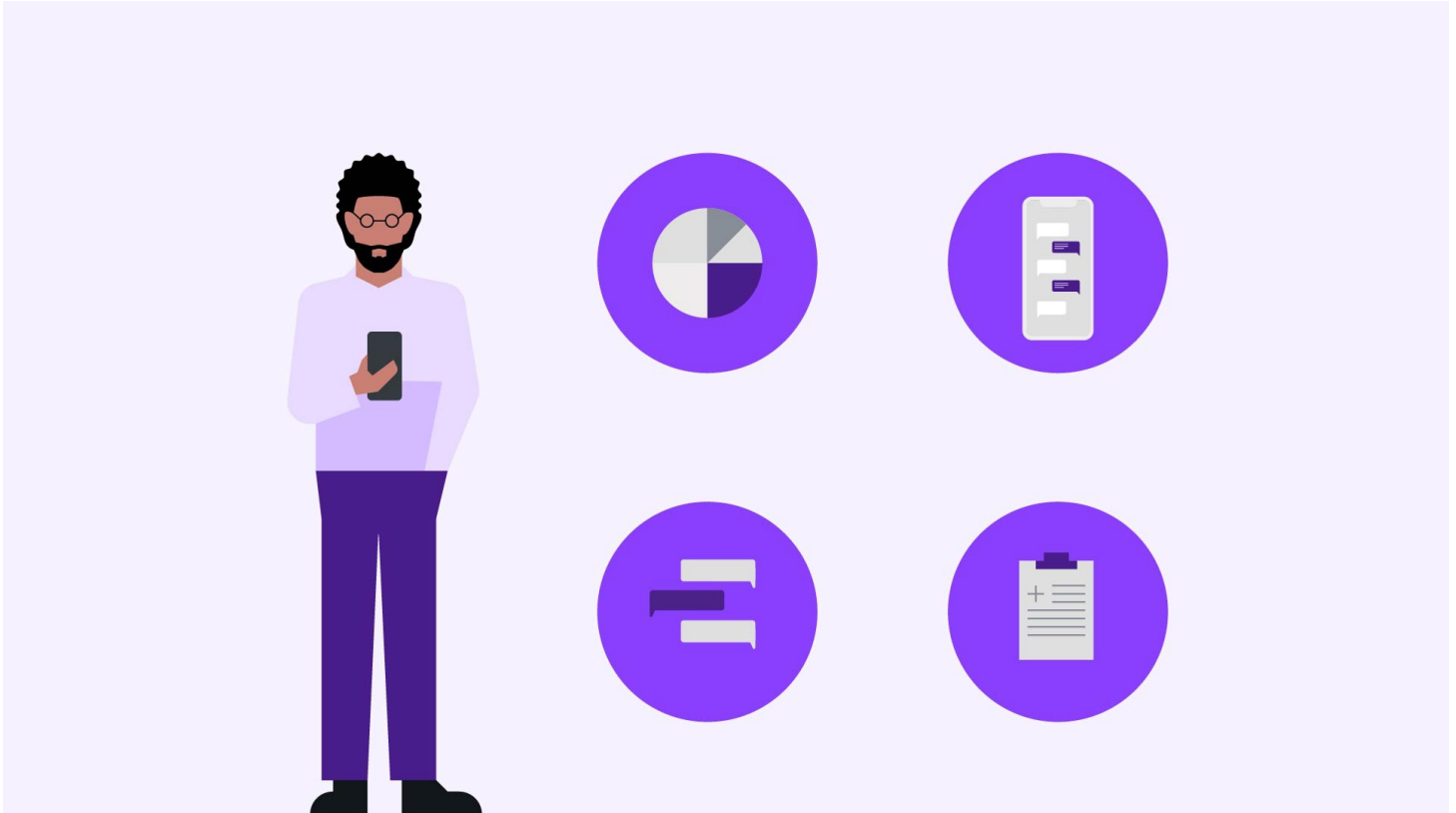## IBM Watson Launches New AI and Automation Features to Help Businesses Transform Customer Service

-- New IBM Watson Assistant features are designed to help businesses more quickly set up a voice agent with IntelePeer and enable more seamless hand-offs to live agents

-- Clients such as the State of Rhode Island turned to IBM Watson Assistant over the last year to address customer problems in the face of rising call volumes


ARMONK, N.Y., Sept. 9, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- IBM (NYSE: IBM) today announced the launch of new AI and automation capabilities in IBM Watson Assistant designed to make it easier for businesses to create enhanced customer service experiences across any channel – phone, web, SMS and any messaging platform. This includes a new collaboration with IntelePeer, a leading Communications Platform-as-a-Service provider, to set up and test a voice agent, and a new agent app designed to enable a seamless hand-off to a live agent while maintaining the conversation's context.

Virtual assistants are gaining popularity due to ongoing improvements in natural language processing (NLP) and automation. According to IBM's 2021 Global AI Adoption Index[1], 52 percent of global IT professionals surveyed report that their company is using or considering NLP solutions to improve customer experiences.

IBM is adding new features in Watson Assistant, the company's intelligent virtual agent, to help businesses leverage AI and NLP to address customer issues on first contact. Watson Assistant is designed to more quickly provide customers with relevant answers over the phone, SMS, web, or any messaging platform, and seamlessly hand-off to a live agent when additional support is needed. The new features include:
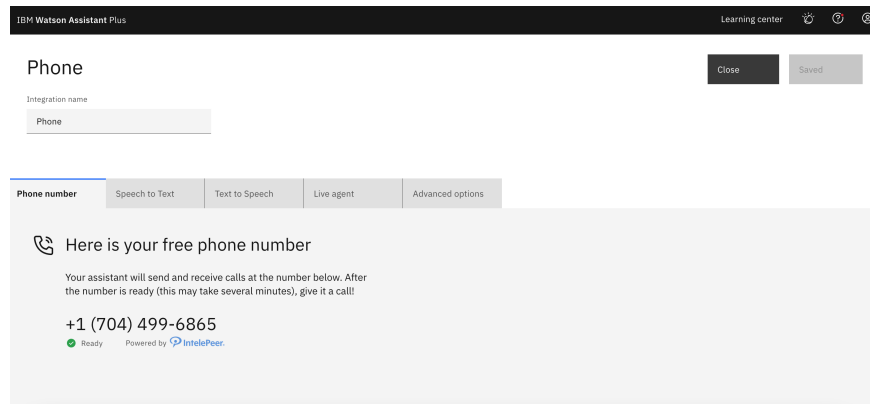
The IntelePeer Atmosphere Communications-Platform-as-a-Service is now available in Watson Assistant so that users can add voice capabilities and set up a new phone number in minutes.
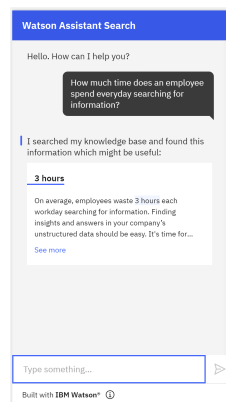
Using new natural language processing capabilities from IBM Research, Watson Assistant Search Skill can help customers resolve issues on first contact.
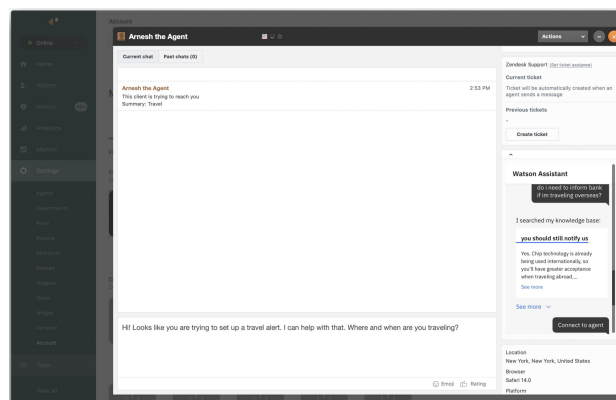
Watson Assistant's new agent app feature is designed to help customer service agents pick up with a customer right where the virtual agent left off.

- **Add voice capabilities to Watson Assistant:** The IntelePeer Atmosphere Communications Platform-as-a-Service is now available as an add-on in Watson Assistant so that users with a Plus or Enterprise plan can set up voice capabilities and a new phone number for a virtual agent quickly. If businesses already have an existing contact center phone system, IntelePeer can also provide the connection between Watson Assistant and the existing phone system using industry standards. Using IntelePeer, Watson Assistant is now designed to connect to nearly every major contact center platform that uses the SIP protocol in as little as half an hour with no coding.

- **Help customers resolve issues on first contact with Watson Assistant Search Skill:** Watson Assistant's Search Skill feature now includes short-answer retrieval, which is based on an innovative question-answering (QA) system from IBM Research. This enables the virtual agent to return an answer — in a few words — from longer sentences or passages and provide the context on where the answer came from. FAQ extraction is also now generally available in Search Skill. FAQ extraction is designed to help administrators keep the virtual agent up to date with broader sources of information, without having to constantly make manual updates.

- **Facilitate a seamless hand-off with the new agent app:** Watson Assistant's new agent app feature is designed to help customer service agents pick up with a customer right where the virtual agent left off. When a customer calls in, IBM's speech detection models, which are designed to provide more accurate transcriptions out-of-the-box, deliver a near real-time transcription of the conversation. When the hand-off occurs, the new agent app provides the customer service agent with the latest transcript right on their screen. This means customers don't have to repeat their questions and agents are empowered to resolve issues even more quickly.

"One critical challenge facing nearly every business today is the need to better communicate with their customers and employees across all channels," said Daniel Hernandez, General Manager of Data and AI, IBM. "We're continuously delivering new innovations in natural language processing, automation and advancing responsible AI, and building a strong, open ecosystem with partners like IntelePeer to help businesses transform customer care with Watson Assistant."

State of Rhode Island Adopted IBM Watson Assistant to Transform its Contact Center
In addition to the new features announced today, IBM also announced that organizations of all sizes have turned to Watson Assistant to help them address customer problems in the face of rising call volumes.

For example, when new COVID-19 cases began to surge last year, the State of Rhode Island realized fielding hundreds of thousands of calls from concerned residents was unsustainable. The State needed to improve its engagement with residents with more efficient processes and timely updates to rapidly changing COVID information.

To address untenable workloads, the State turned to Watson Assistant to address the engagement processes with residents and to improve the support with the contact center. IBM Global Business Services (GBS) and the State of Rhode Island launched a virtual agent, "RHODA," that uses Watson Assistant to answer questions about COVID-19 in both English and Spanish. Since October 2020, RHODA has had more than 100,000 conversations on topics related to test scheduling, test results, travel restrictions, and vaccine eligibility. In addition, IBM GBS integrated Watson Assistant into the IVR for Vaccine Appointment Scheduling to help enable an improved experience for individuals that needed assistance with appointment scheduling.

"The pandemic slammed my team at the State of Rhode Island Department of Health and we quickly realized that our outdated systems and smaller call centers were completely unequipped to handle the influx of phone calls from concerned citizens, forcing us to pull staff from all directions within the department," said Kristine Campagna, COO of COVID Operations, Rhode Island Department of Health. "With IBM's wealth of experience in AI, we were able to work together to seamlessly integrate Watson Assistant into our call centers, helping us provide thousands of citizens in a matter of days with information about COVID-19."

Learn more about Watson Assistant and the new features announced today, by reading the IBM Watson blog,

IntelePeer blog, or visiting: https://www.ibm.com/cloud/watson-assistant/integrations/voice

[1] Morning Consult on behalf of IBM: "Global AI Adoption Index 2021" (May 2021)

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https://newsroom.ibm.com/2021-09-09-IBM-Watson-Launches-New-AI-and-Automation-Features-to-Help-Businesses-Transform-Customer-Service?social_post=5452123200&linkId=130948054%253Flnk%253Dhpv18f2