eXalt Solutions announces AI-enabled 'Knowledge Bots' for B2B sales automation

RAUL CASTANON-MARTINEZ
12 JAN 2018

The company aims to address the complexities in B2B sales by helping organizations automate processes and scale productivity.

451 Research®

B2B sales typically involve high-touch, manual processes that can be tedious and time-consuming. They require a long list of steps involving individuals with different levels and areas of expertise dealing with different suppliers to architect a solution. These complexities are a challenge for automating the B2B sales process and developing a conversational experience. They can be addressed with artificial intelligence (AI) technologies including natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning (ML).

However, the requirements of B2B technology companies are significantly different from those of consumer-interfacing (B2C) applications. This explains why the technologies that are being used to develop B2C conversational experiences will fall short when it comes to B2B. A provider of cloud-based digital transformation services, eXalt Solutions, seeks to help B2B technology companies address this challenge by automating their sales processes and developing a friction-free user experience across all touchpoints in the sales cycle.

THE 451 TAKE

EXalt is addressing a key problem common to most B2B organizations. The company has several things in its favor. Conversational interfaces are becoming increasingly relevant but activity is concentrated mostly on B2C and (to a lesser extent) business-to-employee (B2E) chat bots and applications. When it comes to B2B, there are not many examples and because it involves manual processes with many steps and individuals, this process is ripe for disruption. The company has developed technology that has proven effective to address this challenge and eXalt has several live deployments to serve as proof of concept. Furthermore, the complexities in B2B sales give eXalt a lead in this emerging space. Its main challenges will be articulating its value proposition and creating awareness to effectively execute its go-to-market strategy.

CONTEXT

President and CEO Leslie Swanson founded eXalt Solutions in 2001. It is based in Boston, and as a privately held company, eXalt does not directly disclose revenues or related financial information. It states that owing to a recurring revenue model and offshore R&D, it realizes strong gross margins and is profitable. The company has not required additional equity since an investment by UBM in 2007 representing a 25% equity stake in the company.

Since its early days, eXalt has focused on developing tools to support B2B technology sales. It started out building configuration rule engines for sales reps, combining hardware, software and services from a single vendor. It found that technology vendors provide their own sales tools but customers usually require multivendor approaches. It then shifted to building solutions sales portals to large technology channel sites helping sellers weave together products from different vendors.

In 2016, eXalt launched its Knowledge Work as a Service (KWaaS), a cloud-based offering for automating the B2B sales process. It is now taking the next step in helping organizations transform their sales processes with AI-enabled 'Knowledge Bots,' which further automate the B2B sales process.

The company states that the KWaaS platform has been deployed with large customers involving tens of thousands of users worldwide. It currently has six live KWaaS deployments in enterprise B2B companies; all are paying customers. After successful alpha testing in Q4 2017, it is deploying the new Knowledge Bots with three major customers for beta use in Q1 2018.

PRODUCTS

The KWaaS platform builds on what the company calls 'digital coworkers' to help B2B organizations automate their sales processes. They include digital advisors, digital administrators and digital analysts.

Digital advisors are the front-office coworkers for customer engagement. They provide a self-service experience for multi-vendor solutions. Possible applications include customer interaction management, providing a customized self-service experience that enables customers to make smarter decisions and solve real business problems; sales interaction management, to qualify and sell complete multi-vendor solutions; and technical interaction management, allowing technical teams to drive best practices according to their companies' business rules.

Digital administrators are the back-office coworkers that bring together people, systems and data. Possible applications include partner interaction management to enable collaboration inside and outside the company with people and systems; and digital transaction management to remove the friction inherent in transactions that involve people, documents and data.

The third category of digital coworkers are digital analysts, which provide business insights and offer predictive analysis for shaping demand.

Digital coworkers build on the KWaaS rules blocks. They provide solution rules for combining complementary products –including hardware, software and services – to architect a solution according to business requirements (TCO, ROI, power). They also provide process routing rules for automatically collaborating with the right resource at the right time and profiling rules for predictive analytics.

EXalt's Knowledge Bots are codeless chat bots that enable users to interact with the KWaaS platform via a conversational user experience. They support contextual complex conversations providing a real-time response and can hand off/escalate to endpoints (i.e., live sales representatives) as needed.

COMPETITION

451 Research believes that eXalt plays in an underserved and unique space. The company considers its main competition comes from traditional, non-automated sales tools and methods. B2B companies provide sales tools that typically require human operators. This 'human middleware' relies on homegrown spreadsheets, email queues, screens and tools inside and outside a company, following a complex and cumbersome process.

Workflow tools can address some back-office automation but cannot route effectively because they do not have the content and context of the transactions. Chat bots can handle some of the front office tasks but usually focus on the conversational experience for B2C and business-to-employee (B2E) applications and not on B2B.

Google Cloud's Dialogflow Enterprise Edition and AWS's Alexa for Business are both partners that can be considered indirect competition for eXalt. These frameworks can be used to replicate eXalt's capabilities but would require extensive custom development. Other indirect competitors include communications PaaS providers such as Nexmo (Vonage) and Twilio and bot-building frameworks such as Microsoft Cognitive Services.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS
Key strengths include eXalt's extensive experience in assisting large B2B companies to scale their sales processes and its understanding of how technology can be used for B2B sales automation.

WEAKNESSES
EXalt is a pioneer in B2B sales automation. This requires that the company carefully craft its messaging and value proposition and invest in market education to create awareness.

OPPORTUNITIES
B2B sales typically entail high-touch, manual processes involving many steps and individuals dealing with different suppliers. This is a function ripe for disruption.

THREATS
EXalt has few direct rivals but companies like SAP and Oracle can be considered a potential threat. Both have ML efforts underway and could leverage their expertise in back-office automation by extending their reach into B2B sales automation.